

Wolves and Dragons of the Blood

A Spartan's War Chronicles: Book 4

By Michael J. Cropo
Copyright 2014-2015

Visit the Spartan's War Chronicles web site at <https://aspartanswarchronicles.com/>

CHAPTER ONE

USU'OZEIB 7

COMMAND AND POLITICAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE VAMPIRE HIGH COVEN

POPULATION: FOUR HUNDRED THIRTY BILLION

CAPITAL CITY: DWURI

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AND TEN MONTHS SINCE INITIAL KAVALIAN INVASION

It was darker now it seemed.

Darker than usual anyway, at least as far as Yuri was concerned. Not in terms of the weather, for the weather on Usu Ozeib 7 rarely varied. It was always dark in some manner as the sunlight actually only bathed the planet for three hours a day and the rest of the hours were spent in a perpetual gray color. The mood of the people was extremely different now than she remembered, more open than what her father had allowed, but yet more subdued as well. She guessed twenty-five years of sustained warfare punctuated by short lulls would do that to you. The many purebloods and turned vampires who lived here were a more sullen bunch now as they moved about the surface of the planet, going about the daily chores of their lives. Many of the things they had taken for granted for so long were no longer available to them, and hadn't been for some time. While there was no poverty per say, there was definitely an upper and lower caste. Most of them had never and would never experience the horrors of war with the Kavalian animals first hand. That was left to the High Coven Officers, the normal and cloned soldiers and the fleets that viciously guarded their planet and the thousands more throughout the Empire. The High Coven was no longer as large as it had once been, but then the Kavalians had never reached this far into High Coven space, though three attempts had been made throughout the over two decades of on-again, off-again sustained combat.

The initial invasion of the Kavalian and Zalesian forces had taken two hundred and fifty-six High Coven planets in the first five years. The Kavalian Federation Imperium, as they now called themselves though Yuri knew who ruled who in that regard, had poured across the borders of High Coven space in two different locations with just over five thousand ships and nearly twenty million of the savage biogenic Kavalian ground troops. The first years of the war had been nothing but a scramble to survive as more High Coven planets were attacked at one time than they could possibly hold and defend. The actions of her father and then her mother when she had assumed power, which was rightfully hers anyway, had thrown the High Coven into chaos and disarray. Thousands of their men and hundreds of ships had betrayed them and defected to the Federation within the first few months after seeing what was aligned against them. Many of them were now long dead Yuri thought smugly, either killed by the Kavalians themselves for failing to do what was ordered or butchered horribly by High Coven forces in battle over the years when they were discovered or encountered. Traitors were looked down upon as the lowest kind of scum and they were treated as such.

It had not been until almost three quarters of the way through the third year of the war that the newly chosen High Coven Supreme Military Commander had finally been able to make a stand and throw the KFI forces back by force.

The Battle of Diela Luavor had signaled a new day to the High Coven forces, and soon after that they had begun making the KFI troops pay in blood for every single inch of High Coven territory and planet they claimed. The Supreme Commander had shoved backbone and courage back into his forces, and they began fighting as if their very existence depended on it, which it did. Two additional years of war had seen them lose another seventy-three planets, while only regaining nineteen, but then the KFI reached a point where they could not get past. Constant raids behind the enemy lines by Shrouded High Coven Fleets had ravaged their supply lines and two dozen covert missions by Immortals and Elite Shock Troopers of their Cloned Divisions had put fear into the minds of Kavalian leaders who were outside the control of the main forces. The High Coven's own cloning process had been streamlined and improved and they were able to field new troops almost as fast as the KFI. Troops that were better trained and led in many instances, but the Kavalians had superior numbers. The biogenic created Kavalian troops were utterly ruthless, savage and very hard to kill, though surprisingly it had been a misguided attempt by a rogue KFI leader to attack and hold a Lycavorian Union planet in the third year of the war that showed the Supreme Commander what his course of action should be.

Barely five thousand Union Spartans and a hundred of their *Mjolnir's Hand*, led by that dog Leonidas and his lap puppy Daniel Simpson, had turned back over twenty-five thousand Kavalian troops in a matter of weeks butchering them almost to the last man, while Admiral Riall had set about obliterating their space fleet overhead. They had used surprise and superior training and skill to win that battle and the Supreme Military Commander took it to heart. It should have drawn the Lycavorian Union into the war but it hadn't. Many of the VHC officers and her mother had wondered what had held the Union back, and to this day no one knew what the answer to that question was.

The first five years of war were followed by almost five years of random and sporadic combat, but nothing like the initial invasion and subsequent early years. That had changed in the eleventh year when the KFI attacked once more in massive force and numbers. The High Coven fared much better this time because they were prepared, but still they were pushed back and only some reckless, yet brilliant military operations devised by the Supreme Commander saved the High Coven from total defeat after another five years of sustained combat. They had not fought any major engagements since the end of that second five year span, mostly minor but vicious encounters scattered across High Coven space. That was all about to change Yuri knew with the intelligence they had just been able to confirm. The intelligence that was forcing them to do something they had never thought possible.

Her mother was now the High Empress of the Coven, and while she was much more approachable than her father had ever been; her mother was far more vicious and devious when angered. That did not bother Yuri in the least, and she and her much younger sister Narice had no qualms about speaking with their mother in regards to anything. In truth... they held nothing back from her, much as Yuri had once held nothing back from her father. This also allowed their mother to open up further to them, and they now knew she and Admiral Tesand would never part. Yuri hadn't thought it would last in the beginning... but she had underestimated what the Admiral had given to her mother. Something that her father Veldruk had never given her, and while she was still very stern and formal with Tesand in public, at least now she had become comfortable enough to show the man affection in front of family and those that her mother considered loyal. The last years had seen her become so much closer to her mother than ever before, mainly because she was now a mother herself but also because Narice was older and becoming her own woman. Yuri and Narice were close... but not as close as Yuri would have liked. Her sister was very unique and much more introverted in many respects. She kept mainly to herself, studying endlessly from the data pads and history scrolls aboard the remains of the Mindvoice ship even though much of the ship had long ago lost any kind of power to it, as well as training with her dragon Deneth.

Yuri was a mother now and had given birth to four children total, yet she only truly cared about three of them.

Yuri had given her devoted husband Robert Moran three strong children, two tough handsome young men and a stunning daughter who was the youngest. The daughter she bore with the pureblood scum Vavant, who her father Veldruk had chosen for her, was the oldest at twenty-five but Yuri had no love for her and only a grudging respect for the skills she had developed all on her own. In fact Yuri hated her more than anything, mainly because she had taken the cerise colored dragon that had been meant to serve Yuri.

They had discovered the forty-three dragons in The Wilds after a Lycavorian Type I Dragon Transport had been damaged by Unsaar mercenaries out for revenge after that pig Leonidas had destroyed their base of operations within The Wilds for some perceived wrong they had committed. Forty-three of the dragon eggs and very young hatchlings had survived the crash of the ship. A High Coven intelligence operative who had been working on the planet and who had more brains than most had taken it upon himself to insure the eggs and very young hatchlings were spirited back within High Coven space before the Lycavorians could descend upon the planet in an effort to rescue them. The dragon eggs and hatchlings were a combination of breeds and almost immediately the eggs had begun hatching upon being placed in advanced incubators on Nuwaroa. Yuri had chosen the cerise colored male to serve her when it hatched, but those hopes were quickly dashed when the pure Firespitter dragon hatchling had shunned and refused her and then bonded almost immediately with her then eight year old daughter Carisia. It was a bond that no matter how much she tried to interfere with, only grew stronger. Yuri had finally given up and began working with another of the dragons that she favored, while three of the other new hatchlings bonded immediately with her other three children. It was a struggle for Dante at first, but over the years he and his dragon had become better at working together. As young as they were when they hatched, it was easy to control their very limited perceptions and for the most part shape their minds so that

they considered themselves superior to any others, unlike the dragons that called the Lycavorian Union home. Yuri was very pleased now with Vollenh and the progress they had made together... for they were a powerful and cruel pair when together, and Vollenh seemed to feed off of that from within Yuri, for he was very protective of her.

Yuri hated Carisia and that hatred carried over to her actions toward her as well. No matter how much Carisia did to try and win her affection and approval, Yuri put her down and made her feel small and unloved until finally Carisia eventually stopped. She had wanted to abort the pregnancy after the events with her father unfolded, but her mother convinced her to keep the child and secure the loyalty and support of Vavant's family. Once Carisia had been born, Yuri's mother Aikiro had her sent to Nuwaroa to be schooled and trained. When Vavant mysteriously ended up dead in an alley in the capital city only months after her birth, Aikiro had almost immediately dissolved their union and allowed her daughter to marry Robert Moran openly, removing the title of consort from him and giving him the title of husband. It was a day that Yuri relished, and it was also the day their oldest son was conceived.

Her sons Dante and Javier had their father's height while Lucia was slim and shorter like her. Her sons had the build of their father, well muscled and very well defined and they had continued to shape their bodies as they grew and became stronger not only physically but with their Mindvoice powers as well. Lucia trained beside her brothers and was equal in skill and Mindvoice abilities and considered an extremely lethal fighter by her Royal Instructors. All of them carried their father's last name as it was now customary among the younger generations... those born within the last thousand years... to take two names as opposed to one. Many took the name of their father as their last name. It was a human trait from Earth that had made its way here as more and more humans were turned throughout the centuries, and it set them apart from the older generations of vampires. Yuri had been incensed when Robert told her Carisia should carry his name as well after he had killed Vavant, until he had explained it would allow them political capital in the future since many did not know who Carisia was, as hidden away on Nuwaroa as she had been for most of her life.

Yuri had acquiesced finally and now she saw the wisdom of that decision as she and Robert had given Carisia's hand to a much older pureblood. Arranging the Union had been joyous for Yuri as Thast was a swine of a man, vile and foul. He was a cruel and competent officer and commander however and his family was powerful. Knowing that Carisia had to endure his foul touch made shivers of delight sweep through Yuri every time she thought about it.

She...

"Yuri?" The male voice spoke from behind her and Yuri smiled an uncharacteristic smile that caused her cold, emotionless demeanor slip away to allow her real exotic Asian beauty to come through. She turned slowly.

"I truly hate it when you sneak up on me Robert." She spoke gently.

Robert Moran grinned and moved close to her, heedless of the male and female officers and enlisted that crowded the corridors of the High Coven Military Headquarters. He wore the formal uniform that he always detested wearing, yet knew he had to wear in this building. Many rows of High Coven decorations dotted his lean broad chest now and Yuri felt a warmth stir in her belly as she looked at him. He had come so far since he had allowed her to turn him over five hundred years ago. Yuri no longer doubted or questioned the fact that he had in fact *allowed* her to turn him. He was a genome soldier at the time she met him, a creation of super enhanced DNA making him one of the Super Soldiers the government of that time so desired. She may have been a pureblood, but somehow he had known what she was and now Yuri no longer questioned that he could very well have killed her if he had wanted to. He had taken her that first night, taken her roughly, but with a passion she had never tasted before. It was the third night she remembered vividly, and she had been sitting in his lap sweaty and sore after he had practically fucked her senseless. She had stared into his dark blue eyes long and hard and found knowledge within those orbs. Cold calculating knowledge. Robert had returned her gaze without flinching and only nodded his head. When Yuri tasted his blood that night she knew then she would never get enough of him. As more time passed and she lived her false life, she returned many times to see him for she found she craved his attentions to her.

Whatever he had accomplished after returning with her to High Coven space, he had achieved all on his own, to include her undying love and devotion. He had stood beside her through the highs and lows, his love for her never wavering in its intensity or power, and it was that love that had gotten Yuri through the first years of the war. A love she had almost lost by her own actions.

Moran took her hands in his, not going so far as to crush her to him openly, at least not in this setting. If they had been outside this building he would have lifted her into his arms and set her hair on fire with a kiss, as he had done many times before this day. Surprisingly... the war had brought out many such emotions from the populous within the Empire, and her mother allowed it to occur when before Veldruk had forbid open displays of emotion. Perhaps it was because her mother had also discovered Tesand to take her father's place, and he had brought out many things in her mother that Yuri had never seen before but more likely because such displays of emotion gave her mother a certain appeal to the people for allowing it to continue.

"I don't normally accomplish that unless you are deep in thought." He spoke leaning over to kiss her forehead softly. It was a soft kiss of deep feeling and not the passionate ones he usually gave to her simply because of where they were.

Yuri blushed slightly and looked around. "Robert Moran we are in the corridors of the High Coven Supreme Commander's building. Such open displays of affection by the Princess of the Coven should not be for public eyes."

Moran grinned and did not release her hands from his. "Yes I know... but the Supreme Military Commander of High Coven forces seems to think it is just fine between you and me."

Yuri couldn't help but smile at his expression. Perhaps it was because he was turned and not raised among the restrictive moral standards here on Usu'Ozeib 7, but Robert Moran was granted much freedom in his actions because of who he was and what he had accomplished over the last twenty-five years.

"I was thinking of everything that has led us up to this point." Yuri spoke finally as she dismissed protocol all together and slid her arms around his waist and allowed him to draw her close to him.

"Are you having second thoughts now? After so long and what we now know?" He asked.

Yuri drew back her head without releasing him. "About us? Robert Moran never... you know that!" She stammered.

Moran chuckled. "I meant about this plan we are about to undertake." He said touching her perfect skin. Her exotic oriental features had always been able to incite passion within him, and she was just as beautiful to him now as the day he allowed her to make him a vampire.

"What other choice do we have?" She spoke. "Our intelligence is very accurate. Once my mother took a personal interest in the commander of the Intelligence Section, it has never been better."

Moran nodded. "Then we should go inside. The meeting is going to start soon, and your mother, Narice and our children came in ten minutes ago."

Yuri looked at him. "I suppose that wench Carisia is among them?"

"She is your daughter Yuri. And you know how your mother likes her family to at least observe these meetings." Moran spoke.

"Why do you even show her the least amount of sympathy Robert?" Yuri asked. "She is not of your blood. It was you who killed her father. I relish the fact that she must endure that idiot Thast slobbering all over her."

Moran grinned. "No... but she is part of you... and that gives her a step up on most others as far as I'm concerned." He spoke. "I may not like her Yuri... that doesn't mean I have to let it affect how I treat her. She's a superior fighter, and she can do things with her dragon that our children and you can't, at least not yet. We need to respect that... at least for now Yuri. When we get what we want from Leonidas and his ilk, we will be in far better shape to make demands."

"You believe he will help us then?" Yuri asked.

Moran nodded. "Like you said before... it will be in his best interests to help us. If we are defeated by the Kavalians, they will most likely go after the Union."

Yuri met his eyes with a cruel glint. "Then you have made your decision in regards to what we discussed with Carisia as well?"

Moran nodded. "When we get what we want... I'll take her out myself if that is what you wish to rid yourself of that part of your life." He spoke.

Yuri smiled and pressed her head close to his chest once more. "Thank you Robert." She said softly. "I..."

"Supreme Commander?" The voice broke into their moment.

Moran turned his head quickly annoyance in his eyes, but he kept his arms around Yuri. “What is it Lieutenant?”

“Everyone has arrived Admiral Moran.” The young pureblood spoke quickly, his words nervous but clear. No one liked to interrupt Robert Moran for he had a volatile temper when roused.

Moran nodded and looked at Yuri with a smile. “Let’s get this over with so I can take you home tonight and fuck your brains out.” He spoke softly so only she could hear him.

Yuri grinned and squeezed his waist before releasing him. “I do so like the sound of that Supreme Commander of High Coven forces.”

**APO PRIME
MENKLA DISTRICT
CITY OF PALNO
THIRTY-TWO KILOMETERS WEST OF TUYA**

Her jungle green eyes gazed at the rising sun as it filled the balcony doors of her modest sized apartment in Palno City, while her fingers delicately stroked the coral red pendant she had worn for as many years as she could remember.

Sadi loved watching the sun rise over the far horizon, backstopping the majestic Palno Mountain Range only twelve kilometers to the east. She sat on the small cushioned bench just inside the open balcony doors of her small bedroom allowing the morning breeze to caress her flesh. Her apartment wasn’t very large, only one of the three hundred and thirty in her building, but it was all hers. It was comfortably furnished with practical yet elegant furniture and several moderately expensive, yet stylish pieces of framed holo art on the walls. Half a dozen framed holo images also sprinkled the walls and surfaces across the apartment, most of them of her father and two older brothers. Sadi received a generous monthly stipend from her father and that she usually put towards purchasing things for her apartment and some rather expensive clothes that she hardly ever wore, if at all. Her father had paid for the apartment, and was now holding the deed for her until she graduated from the Union Fleet Academy.

The apartment and building had been newly built when she had returned to Apo Prime to attend the Union Fleet Academy and she had fallen in love with it almost immediately upon touring it. Unfortunately when she inquired about purchasing the unit, she had been told all of them were long filled and far outside her range of income as an Academy Cadet to purchase. Disheartened she had begun searching for another place to live, until just a week before she was to enter the Academy, she got a transmission from the building’s manager. He had told her the exact apartment she had toured when she had first seen the units had surprisingly become available. Sadi knew then her father must have purchased it outright, for she had mentioned to him how much she loved it. She had scolded him sternly because of the cost and what he must have done to purchase it, even as well off as they were, but she loved him even more after that day. The small kitchen was fully modern, though her cupboards were only pseudo stocked with food. She spent most of her time transiting from Palno to Apo Prime, either to the University or the Fleet Academy and there was never time for her to fully sit down and eat a complete meal. The only thing she really kept a large supply of was the type of coffee she drank.

Sadi had discovered this brand of coffee while on the Royal Island Palace all those years ago and she was surprised to rediscover it in a small eatery in the elven quarter of Tuya, not far from Fleet Academy headquarters. It was a special blend of four different types of coffee bean that Queen Aricia had made while pregnant with Androcles in Sparta; experimenting and blending certain amounts of each of the four bean blends to extract just the flavor she wanted. No one who had tried it could stop raving about it, and Aricia had begun marketing it in the merchant quarters on Apo Prime and even in Sparta. It was now an exclusive item that only one merchant on Apo Prime had, but it succeeded in bringing customers back for more. When she inquired of the older Lycavorian woman who surprisingly owned and operated the eatery where she had purchased it, the woman just smiled and told her she would purchase extra each week just for her and only charge her the reduced price she got from her supplier.

Unbeknownst to Sadi, that supplier was Queen Aricia herself, and the eatery was one of three owned by the woman on Apo Prime and two she owned on Earth, one in Eden City and one in Sparta. Sadi also didn’t

know that they were the only eating establishments that the members of *Mjolnir's Hand* and the *Durcunusaan* came to exclusively, for the owner was the mother of the Earth Sector Commander, Star Colonel Isra. The eateries were always busy when Sadi went to get her coffee or just stop in to have lunch with her friends. The patrons were very respectful and polite with many young male wolves that frequented the particular eatery she went to. Many of them *Durcunusaan* soldiers. Her friends were always popular among the men there, and they made it known they were available. 'Yet no one had ever approached her' Sadi now thought to herself. None of those young men had ever tried to get her attention and for the first time she began to wonder why. The smell of the coffee now filled her scent glands and drew her thoughts from that as she held the mug tightly between her two hands only inches from her nose.

Sadi wore only the thin, almost transparent white robe of satin like material, which did little to hide her deeply tanned and svelte frame. She stood five foot seven inches tall, and her hundred and sixteen pounds was lean and muscular. Sadi had curves upon curves, from the full and very firm breasts topped by credit chip sized nipples, to the graceful slope of her hips and petite waist. Sadi had worked hard on her body over the past years, even more so since entering the Lycavorian Fleet Academy six years earlier. She was now a skilled hand to hand fighter, very fast and deceptively strong for her size.

Her golden blond hair was long and wavy, cascading elegantly down around her face past her shoulders to the middle of her back, just above her impeccably shaped ass. Her hair framed high cheekbones and full sumptuous lips. Her father had called her wolf nose adorable a few months ago, and she smiled at this description. She was still her father's baby girl even though she was now a hundred and twenty-six years old and well beyond her Coming of Age, though for all her four attempts at relationships, none had ever lasted more than a few months. Not since those few days at the Island Palace. Sadi was looking for something different in a male wolf... something that would stir her in ways others could not. Many young Alphas had tried to get her attention, some of them even starting rumors about her when she rebuffed their attempts at drawing her interest. Sadi wanted more than what they offered and part of her wondered if she would ever find that except in her dreams. When Sadi was in wolf form, she was larger than the average female wolf, a hundred and thirty pounds of muscle and teeth. Unlike many of the females she knew, Sadi enjoyed immensely the time she spent in wolf form running through the timber of her father's estate. The King's return so many years ago had brought their people closer to their base instincts and now there were far more men and women both who would freely run about in wolf form rediscovering what their ancestors once cherished. Sadi was one of these people. Perhaps it was because of those nights and what it had done to her, but Sadi cherished it now.

She was a hundred and twenty-six years old and no doubt the only female on Apo Prime her age to have experienced what she had in her very young life. Sadi did not often think back to that time twenty five years ago, but the events of her life then defined her as a woman and a wolf now.

She had been a tender seventy years of age, still a baby in Lycavorian terms, when the Vampire High Coven had used her step-mother to forcibly recruit her as a low level intelligence operative. Her step-mother had told her if she refused, information would be released on her father that would show him to be a collaborator with the High Coven. He would have been disgraced and banished or worse, executed as a traitor depending on the directives of the Senate. Sadi adored her father, those feelings only increasing after the death of her real mother in a transport accident. She had sworn to her mother's spirit she would always look after him, and in Sadi's mind she had been protecting him then with her actions. Thirty years of enduring the High Coven and her step-mother's directives, acting as a messenger or courier, or worse still being forced to bed with her depraved and disgusting half brother. Sadi shuddered slightly, whether from the memories or the cool morning air it did not matter now.

Thanks to the elven female she had once tried to murder, her life had taken a dramatic turn for the better. Sadi had finally been able to slip off the evil and cruel bonds of High Coven servitude, surviving the battle that had raged for six agonizingly long hours on the Royal Island Palace, and earning the gratitude of not only For'mya, who was now a Queen herself to the King, but also the King's most beloved Queen Aricia as well. Outside of those few who were members of *Mjolnir's Hand* and the *Durcunusaan*, Sadi didn't doubt she was one of only a handful who had fought beside dragons.

She remembered vividly those golden eyes of Elynth, and those incredible azure blue eyes of the boy Prince Androcles. Elynth had told her she was chosen because she could speak easily with the then dragon hatchling at the time. She had discovered some months later what For'mya had told her, that her Mindvoice

skills, while only a Tier Two before the events of those few days, had since been elevated to a very strong beginning Tier Six level. No one had been able to explain it, but because of this fact Sadi was drafted to study in the First Oracle's new School of the Mages, in order to help her better learn to control her new level of Mindvoice abilities. An appointment that was, Sadi learned later, made by the First Oracle herself. Sadi had willingly studied there for three years, throwing herself into her schooling to forget all that had happened, but since she did not want to pursue a life as an Oracle, Sadi had elected to enter into the newly established *Annacdone*. An organization created by Queen Dysea to help others and Sadi had spent the next thirteen years devoting her life to people on under developed worlds in The Wilds.

Sadi had returned only seven years earlier, at the recommendation of a senior LU Fleet officer who had seen her piloting skills, to enroll in the Lycavorian Union Fleet Academy. It was there where she could finish her degree and earn a commission to complete the goal she most wanted to achieve. Sadi truly wanted to see new worlds and while she had worked in the *Annacdone*, Sadi discovered she had a gift with people and how they looked to her almost naturally as a leader, not to mention that she was a superior pilot and loved to fly. She was now a senior cadet and the best pilot in her class, and she was finishing her last year, after which she would receive her official commission and join the United Lycavorian Union Fleet.

Her father had retired as Governor of the Menkla District but due to powerful influence generated by the Royal family and Admiral Riall himself, he had retained his position and status as head of the Menkla District Manufacturing Company. A company that now had an exclusive contract with the Union military to build all of their Star Fighters. Vorilas was a well known and respected man for his duties and long standing policies as Governor of the Menkla District, and the district had seen great prosperity over the years under his care. Now however, he was known for working closely with the likes of Admiral/General Benjamin O'Connor, the Union Commander of Operations or UNCO. The Admiral was in charge of the tactical aspect of every ongoing operation within the Union Fleet and her father worked closely with him, Admiral Riall and others in designing new fighters and small transports, using his extensive engineering skills. Sadi didn't know for sure as she had never seen it, but it was said her father and Admiral O'Connor worked very closely together and often met for meetings and such several times a week. Her step-mother was no longer an issue, with her and her half brothers all rotting in some prison. She and her father were closer than ever, and her real brothers had both moved back home to Apo Prime to be near the family they had once thought lost.

Sadi was content for the first time in her life.

Perhaps not truly happy, that would only come with a man and children she knew, but she was very content with the life she had chosen to lead. A life and a chance given to her by a dragon with golden eyes and an eight month old infant boy with azure blue eyes that even now Sadi could still see as clearly as if they were in front of her. There were nights when she would see those eyes in her deep dreams, glittering azure blue eyes on the beautifully sculpted body of a faceless man, as if somehow they were reaching out to her. They were almost protecting and watching over her even as they caused her to cry out in rapture. Her dreams were very strange at times, the faceless man with the boy prince's eyes, and then the dark haired female with olive colored skin and stunning light blue eyes. In those torrid dreams they were entwined together the three of them, making each other cry out in bliss. They were dreams that Sadi relished... but they were dreams she never spoke of with anyone, as there were times when those dreams became quite vivid and very intimate in nature. Sadi had several close friends, but none close enough to share that cherished information with.

Sadi had seen Elynth and Androcles only three times after the battle on the island, all three times from a distance or on the Netnews Channel. The last time was over twelve years earlier during the small celebration thrown by the Royal family at his departure for Sparta to begin his Agoge training. Each time she had seen them they had both grown in stature and size, Androcles nearly as tall as his father though only thirteen years old at the time she had seen them last. Elynth was already larger in many respects than her mother, her body longer and more muscular. While she would never rival her brother Jeth or her father Torma in size, she had grown into one of the largest dragons among those flown by the riders of *Mjolnir's Hand*. Sadi had caught several glimpses of them on the Netnews during the six year long war with the Evolli Triad, but it had always been very fast and he was never seen without his helmet, those blue eyes like beacons on a dark night.

There had been much talk and ballyhoo of his Shield of Valor decoration, the highest award that the Union could bestow, awarded after the Battle on Alba Tau during the Evolli War. It was said to have been the most hideous battle of the war with the Evolli, claiming the lives of thousands of Spartan Centurions and even

thirteen of the twenty-three members of *Mjolnir's Hand* that had been lost in the entire six year war. He had not returned to Apo Prime since the end of that war except for fast visits, preferring to remain mainly within the city of Sparta, his father's home and what had unofficially become the new base of power within the Union. It was rumored on the Netnews channels that he had taken a mate at one point two years earlier, but that had been proven false quickly, and Sadi couldn't understand the relief she felt at that news. Aside from his LU military record, which was very impressive considering his still young age, nothing else was known about the young prince and heir to the throne of the United Lycavorian Union.

Sadi did know that it was after that battle he was awarded his own *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser, and his actions played prominently in ending the war beside his father. She had tried over the years, always secretly of course, to inquire of him and what he was doing. She had worked beside Queen Dysea and Queen Isabella at one point shortly after they had both given birth to the King's children, but did not have the courage to ask about him or Elynth. Sadi didn't truly understand the draw this young prince had on her, perhaps it was because her actions all those years ago could have cost him his life. Whatever the reason, he invaded her dreams from time to time and they were always the most exquisite dreams.

Sadi wondered what they looked like now and she remembered Elynth's words to her during her time on the island. She had been chosen Elynth had said; chosen to be able to speak with dragons perhaps? Elynth had never elaborated on that... only giving her a name that first night, a name that still brought shudders to Sadi whenever she spoke or thought it. A name she still heard in her dreams.

KertaGai.

Eternal Heart.

Sadi lifted the small coral red pendant from her skin and looked at it once more. Elynth had given this to her before she had left, one half of a Dragon's Heart pendant. Elynth had told her to wear it always and one day all that Sadi desired would be hers. Elynth said Androcles wanted her to have it because of how he felt about her, how he would always feel about her. Sadi didn't know what to make of her words at the time, as Androcles was only an eight month old infant at the time, but Sadi had worn the pendant without question. Looking back, Sadi realized she had not taken the pendant off since that night and she suddenly wondered if he had done the same.

The decidedly male groan from behind her brought Sadi somewhat angrily out of her secret thoughts and she turned to watch the dark haired male Spartan reach across the bed for the warmth of her body. When his arm found nothing he slowly looked up and found her with bloodshot blue eyes from too much alcohol. His skin was a deep bronze color, and tightly stretched over a muscular and extremely well defined body.

"What... what are you doing Sadi?" He croaked out the words his lips smacking together from dryness.

"Watching the sun come up." She answered quickly as she turned and got to her feet. She moved to the side of the bed and looked down at him sipping her coffee. "You need to wake up and leave Malic."

The lean muscular Spartan soldier smiled drunkenly at her as he rolled onto his back on the bed and looked up at her. He reached out to touch the outside of her leg. "Why? I thought we would have another go of it?" He spoke as his hand caressed the outside of her leg through the thin fabric of the robe. When his fingers moved to part the folds of the robe and slip inside to touch her bare skin Sadi dropped her hand and grabbed his wrist firmly, brushing his hand aside as she stepped back quickly.

"I don't think so Malic... that is not a good idea right now." She stated having no desire to be intimate with him ever again.

They had been introduced by mutual friends three months ago. He was an *Enomotarch* within the ranks of the 9th Spartan Expeditionary Division. Aside from his incredible good looks Sadi did not know what she had seen in him. After all these months of having him slobber on her and never once take his time and give her equal pleasure had taken its toll on her. He had an ego that was larger than his ripped body, and he was exceptionally arrogant, always bragging about his skills as a warrior and how he was going to one day fly on a dragon and command a section of the revered *Mjolnir's Hand*. He treated others as if they were beneath him most of the time, always looking out for himself. Sadi knew his father was a senior officer within the Union military but she didn't know in what capacity. His mother worked as a liaison within the Senate and Sadi had found her to be exceptionally pompous the only time she had met her. She treated Malic like a child by talking down to him in many ways and Sadi realized where he got it from. Sadi knew he abhorred the many vampires within the ranks of Spartans, always glaring at them in disgust. Sadi had been lonely at that point in her life and

after only a few times out with him and dismissing his obvious faults she had allowed him to take her to bed. Malic was very well endowed, but he was a brute who thought the size of his cock made up for his lack of technique. Last night had been the final straw. They had returned from a gathering of cadets in Sadi's class who were graduating with her soon, and he had had too much to drink. He had been rougher than he usually was, and without any preliminary foreplay he had proceeded to grunt and groan his way to orgasm without a hint of concern for her. He never treated her like an equal, always like a possession whenever he was around others, especially fellow Spartans. As if she was a trophy of some sort. Sadi had made the decision last night watching him snore away that it was over between them.

"You thought it was a good idea last night Sadi." He spoke with a grin. "How was I? Did I make it good enough for you?"

"You are still drunk to think that Malic. And you really need to leave." Sadi spoke deciding that it probably wouldn't be the smartest thing to tell him that having him maul her breasts while trying to pound her guts into the bed was most definitely not pleasurable for her, and it hadn't been for the last three months. "I have to get ready for class and I need to catch the transport to Apo Prime in forty minutes."

"Skip class today. Stay here with me." He said missing the obvious insult to his love making skills.

Sadi's eyes narrowed. "Skip class? Why would I want to do that?" Sadi reached down and pulled the sheet off his body in an effort to get him up. "And this is my apartment Malic, not yours! I need you to leave Malic. Now!"

He rolled from the bed and came to his feet completely naked and annoyed. "What's the rush?" He exclaimed stepping closer to her, his six foot two frame towering above her. "Do I need to prove to you how good I am once more?"

Sadi placed her palm on his chest resisting the urge to laugh at his flaccid cock dangling between his legs. He was most definitely not the man from her dreams; the man's whose touch alone could set her body on fire. He had not even noticed the tattoo that adorned her most private area and made her so sensitive to touch in the entire three months they had been sharing a bed.

In a totally spontaneous and equally alcohol induced action that her friend Teeria had dared from her while they were working with Queen Dysea, Sadi had gone to a very expensive tattoo artist while in The Wilds and had a tattoo of flaming wings over a red star place just above her bare, smooth pussy. Above the wings was the word 'Crazy' in ancient Lycavorian block lettering. The tattoo made that area of her body extremely sensitive, yet neither Malic nor the three men that had shared her bed since getting the tattoo had ever noticed in the least. The only one to have done that was Teeria, the female friend who had encouraged her to get the tattoo. Teeria had explored that area of Sadi's body for hours and she had eagerly returned the action, surprising herself with her actions. It had been the only time she had shared a bed with a woman, but it was also the only time she had gotten any real pleasure as well. Even though they remained very close friends, they had both decided to never share a bed again after that one time, both of them claiming it had to do with the alcohol and nothing else serious.

"What you need to do is get dressed and leave so I can get ready for class Malic." Sadi spoke calmly.

"We've been seeing each other for three months now and you never let me stay Sadi!" He spoke as he reached down to grab his uniform pants. "Why is that?"

"Does it matter?" She spoke softly. "We have given each other pleasure Malic and that is all." Though the pleasure had always been his. Of the four different men that had shared her bed in the last twenty-five years, none of them had ever once been able to incite her passions and desires enough to make Sadi want more.

"So that's why you don't let me *cado forn*?" He asked fastening his pants.

Sadi's jungle green eyes looked at him in shocked surprise. "Malic we are not a couple." She spoke in a surprised gasp. "We have never been a couple. We have shared each others warmth and company these last three months. There is nothing more than that. Why would I let you scent me?"

"Don't you want a mate Sadi?" He asked as he pulled on his shirt. "A future?"

"I will have these things Malic." She answered confidently. "I'll meet my Soulmate one day. I just don't want them right now. I want to finish the Academy and be assigned to a ship. Now... please Malic I want you to leave."

"Soulmate?" Malic gasped with a chuckle. "You're waiting for a Soulmate? Sadi... I never took you for the type to believe in something like that. That is from the old time... the old ways."

Sadi glared at him. “Just because you choose to dismiss the ancient rituals and ways of our people does not mean I do!” Sadi snapped angrily.

“You will need to make a decision sooner or later. And I will not wait forever for you to make that decision!” He snapped just as harshly. “I’m leaving for Sparta tomorrow to become a member of the *Durcunusaan*, the Wolves of the Blood and then I intend to become a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*. They are still searching for three candidates to fill their ranks. I was hoping you would want to come with me.” He spoke.

“As your mate or your possession Malic?” Sadi spoke quickly shaking her head. “I don’t think so. And you never took the time to get to really know me Malic... so of course you would not know that is how I think. There are many things about me you don’t know Malic.”

“Sadi...?”

“What is my favorite color Malic?” Sadi asked.

“What?”

“It’s blue.” Sadi replied. “What is my favorite scent?” Sadi asked quickly.

“Is this a test?” Malic asked harshly.

“Lavender and pines.” Sadi answered instantly

Malic looked at her and smiled. “You are testing me.”

Sadi shook her head slowly. “It is no test Malic. I’m making a point. All you have ever been concerned with is putting your cock inside me! You don’t know what is in my mind. In my thoughts.”

“I can’t read minds Sadi!” He barked.

“No... but my Soulmate will know what I want.” Sadi spoke softly. “He will be able to read my moods and my body language and my scent. He will know exactly what I want. You might learn that someday Malic, if you meet the female who will teach you. I do not have the desire... because you are not who I desire. I think we should just call it quits now Malic.”

“What?” He snarled.

“Malic... do I need to spell it out for you completely? It’s over Malic... I don’t want to see you again. I’m sure you will have no trouble finding another female to share your bed with. You excel at that.” Sadi spoke. “Now... please leave.”

“That’s it?” He stammered.

Sadi nodded. “Yes... that’s it.” She spoke calmly.

“You will find no one after I am gone.” He snapped as he pulled on the fatigue shirt. “No one will...”

“Are you threatening me Malic?” She asked in a low voice as her eyes narrowed.

“Not at all.” He answered. “I’m just letting you know that I’m the only option available for you right now.” He told her smugly.

“And that I’m sure is because of the rumors you have been spreading? Telling everyone we are a couple when you know we aren’t. Very adult of you by the way. And the men you associate yourself with are not the only men in the Union Malic.” Sadi answered with a smile at the look on his face. “You don’t actually think I’m that stupid do you? Did you think you would force me into becoming your mate?”

“Sadi... I only...”

“Malic... I’m sure you will find someone in the years ahead.” Said spoke more gently now. “I am not that person however. You are far too insensitive and arrogant to suit my tastes.”

“I won’t forget this Sadi.” He snapped his eyes angry. “And I’ll make sure no one else will either!”

“I’m sure you will Malic. I don’t have to show you the way out do I?” She snapped back. Sadi shook her head as he spun around and walked out of the bedroom in a huff carrying parts of his uniform, trying to display his muscular back and shoulders and impress her even as he walked out.

It had no effect on Sadi and she chuckled as she settled her firm bottom onto the foot of the bed sipping her coffee. She waited until she heard the door open and then close and then Sadi looked out the balcony door once more and saw the rising sun reflect off the clouds in the upper atmosphere giving off a beautiful reddish glow. The color reminded her of the pendant she wore and she gasped softly when she realized that the sky matched exactly the color of the pendant and the words Elynth had spoken to her that day came rushing back.

You have been chosen Sadi. He wants you to have this to remember him by. Take it. Elynth had told her.

Sadi had stared at the pendant for a long moment. *Elynth it's... it's beautiful. I can't take this. It is...*

It is a Dragon's Heart Sadi. Androcles's pendant... given to him when he was born by his parents. It was cut from their pendants and forged back together by my mother. I have split it once more at his request to give you half. It is a great honor among my kind and taken from one of my kind who has fallen if that is their wish. So that they may live on in others. My grandmother says the process is long and arduous, but once polished like this it never loses its luster. This one has been cut in two and he wishes you to have one half. Elynth spoke to her.

Sadi met her golden colored eyes. *Elynth... he is only eight months old.*

Elynth stepped closer to Sadi, her golden eyes bright and clear. *Do you truly believe that Sadi? Or has what happened here these last few days not mattered to you at all? You have seen and heard for yourself Sadi.*

You know that is not true Elynth. She answered.

Take it Sadi. Elynth told her. If nothing else... let it remind you of what we have shared here these last days and what he feels for you. What he will always feel for you. He is a child now yes... but Androcles will be a man one day... and who knows what the future holds for all of us. One day... if you truly wish to discover love... you... wear this pendant always Sadi. Never take it off and the love you seek may one day just walk into your life without you ever being aware of it.

Sadi had looked at her and then leaned up slightly to kiss her cool snout scales. *I will treasure it always.* She spoke.

Sadi stared at the pendant now, the last part of their conversation sticking in her head as her fingers caressed the jewel. She did want to discover love and desire and happiness. Sadi wanted a man who would wrap her within his aura and love her so intensely it took her breath away. Perhaps it was time for her to stop denying what she had discovered those nights on the island and just allow her life to travel down the path she was meant for.

If the color of the morning sky was any indication, that path would take her to only one place and Sadi found that no longer frightened her in the least.

**TUYA
CAPTIAL OF APO PRIME
APO PRIME UNIVERSITY
UNION HISTORY CLASS LEVEL 19**

Lady Gorgo looked out over her class of students as they finished up with the instant quiz she had surprised them with. Her dark hair was as long and as shiny as it had been when she was the Queen of Sparta on Earth over three thousand years ago. Gorgo looked no more than forty-five standard earth years old, her figure just as shapely and curvaceous as it had been then, even after giving birth to eight children. Her mate and husband of nearly twenty five hundred years, First Admiral of the Union Fleet Riall, was always commenting her on how beautiful she was, and Gorgo couldn't help but grin as the memories of their torrid love making session just last night came back to her.

It seemed that ever since her son Martin had returned, ever since he had rescued her from the horrors of that prison so long ago, Riall's usually more sedate nature when making love had changed, and he had become different. In the last twenty-five years he had been more intense, more loving and more spontaneous than she had ever known him to be. A small part of it was his lingering guilt that he had slept with a clone of her for fifteen years and never known it, something that Gorgo had never held against him in the least. She had seen first hand the skill of the High Coven cloning process, and in the same position as him, she doubted she would have acted any different. She had thought perhaps after first discovering what he had done that she had lost him. He was despondent and would hardly speak as they traveled to Earth on the City Ship. All he could do as the hours past was slip slowly deeper into a depression that Gorgo didn't know if she could pull him out of. It wasn't until they had arrived at Thermopylae and Gorgo had seen the monument to her former husband that it

had changed. Her son had made Riall swear to never stop loving her as he had done for so many years, and before her eyes Gorgo had seen the veil of depression lift from his face. His eyes had been so clear then and he had crushed her to him wrapping her within his powerful aura as he pulled himself out of the abyss and swore to her son he would do this. Now... now Riall took her as if his very life and existence depended on it, making her scream out his name countless times before they collapsed exhausted and he wrapped her tightly within his arms and his aura. Gorgo had never felt more pleasure and love from him as she had in the last twenty-five years and it had only caused her to return it just as much, even going so far as to act like a giggling school girl at times.

She had lost her beloved Leonidas so long ago, but that day at Thermopylae, before his tomb, her long dead mate Leonidas had given back to her not only their son, but the love she had thought lost with Riall. They had visited the monument often now, every time they were on Earth, and Riall had been with her every moment. It was not a time of sorrow any longer for her, and both of them relished in the time they spent there with each other.

Her son.

Martin Leonidas had given back the instinctive nature to their people with his return that they had lost so long ago. Her son had given back to the Lycavorians their passion for life and the natural direction to follow the instincts that came with that passion. When Gorgo and Riall made love now, it was as if it was all brand new, supremely intense and incredibly passionate no matter how often it happened. They had both decided together long ago to not have any more children. The number of grandchildren they had seemed to increase almost every year now and neither of them wanted to take time away from their grandchildren to raise another child of their own.

Gorgo smiled to herself.

Twenty-eight grandchildren they had now. She had six beautiful children with Riall, three boys and three girls and between them they had fourteen of their twenty-four grandchildren. Her son Martin and his Queens accounted for the rest. Lisisa was the oldest in terms of years of Martin's children, but as far as Lisisa was concerned her life had only begun when her father had rescued her long ago.

The same time he had discovered his mother.

Lisisa was half vampire, daughter to the High Coven Princess Yuri, but everyone had learned quickly that they were never to bring that up with her. Her wolf genes and skills were by far the more dominant and powerful and Lisisa considered herself all wolf. Martin's first born son Androcles Leonidas was next, and he was the one that all of them, including Lisisa looked up to. He was now four months past his twenty-sixth birthday. Eliani Leonidas was her first granddaughter with Anja, born two months after Androcles's first birthday due to the shorter pregnancies common to Hadarians.

Her grandson Resumar came next with Dysea, three weeks after Eliani, followed in quick succession over the next five years by Denali with Aricia, Carina with Isabella, Arrarn with For'mya, Normya with Dysea and finally Zarah with Isabella once more. Gorgo had thought her son and his Queens done, for no more children arrived for eight years, and then almost immediately following each other Aricia and Anja gave birth to twins. Aricia a boy and girl Nara and Deion; and with Anja came another boy and girl, Calyb and Retta; followed quickly by For'mya's second child... a boy they called Bryon.

Two sets of ten year old twins and Bryon was now nine years old, and the loud sounds of children and trumpeting dragon hatchlings filled the Island Palace on Apo Prime once more. The Evolli war was now almost three years behind them, and all of them had been spending months on end together on the island since the war ended. And when they weren't on Apo Prime, they were in Sparta. Gorgo fully expected another burst of grandchildren she thought to herself with some humor. Gorgo leaned back in her chair thinking that perhaps she would have to have a talk with her son and tell him enough was enough. It was well known he adored all his Queens, but the Island Palace was rapidly becoming very crowded. When all of them returned to the Island Palace to be together, which was as often as every other month for all but her older grandchildren, it was near impossible to have a conversation. Gorgo was also amazed at the closeness Martin's children had and maintained, no matter the distance between them. Normya had inherited her mother's devastatingly striking elven beauty with her long platinum blond hair and stunning emerald green eyes, but she was also as stubborn and bull headed as her father even at only twenty-one years of age. Arrarn had inherited his father's handsome looks, but his elven mother's disposition, but there was no denying the fact that he and Normya were now the

premier *STRIKER DT* Flight crews in the Union, behind only For'mya and Endith. It did help that both Arrarn and Normya had been instructed by For'mya and Endith since age ten, and Normya seemed to have inherited her mother's precognition skill within Mindvoice. Though Arrarn, Carina, Normya and Zarah were not bonded to dragons as their brothers and sisters were, the bonds that their siblings shared with their dragons encompassed them as well and made them better individuals.

Normya and Zarah were rarely seen apart, the two sisters born from Dysea and Isabella with only six hours between them, and they called each other twins. They shared an apartment in Gytheio, the Port of Sparta where their brother Androcles and most of their older siblings kept villas as well. Zarah was a touch promiscuous; having inherited her mother Isabella's incredible porcelain like beauty not to mention her incredibly lush figure and she had several young wolves pursuing her. Normya tempered that part of her a great deal as she was rather reserved and shy, while Zarah's openness allowed them to attract quite a bit of attention together. Resumar and Denali had grown in stature, almost matching their brother and father in build and skill while Carina was a beautiful black widow everyone called her because of her lethal abilities.

With the exception of Normya and Zarah, who did not fight in the Evolli war, Martin's other children had fought side by side with him through much of the six year long war. All of them had been baptized in combat, and all of them had come out of that better than when they went in, for they all now knew the full value of life and peace.

Aricia, Anja, Dysea, Isabella and For'mya had decided long ago there would be no distinction made between their children. All of them were considered mothers by all of Martin's children. What came from one mother came from them all, no matter who gave birth to them. They would do anything for their siblings and their mothers. Gorgo surmised that a small part of that might be the inbred instinct among Firespitter dragons in protecting their siblings and family. Isheeni and Aricia had been bonded so deeply and for so long, that the instinctive and natural protectiveness of her breed of dragon could very well have filtered down to her children and by virtue all of their children since they were all so close in not only body but spirit as well. Twenty-six years had passed now since the son she had thought lost had returned to his people and saved her own life.

It still amazed her that she could go just halfway across Tuya and be able to gaze into the face and eyes of the very first man she had ever loved. Martin was the image of his father, of Leonidas the King of Sparta and while she loved Riall now, with all that she was, perhaps even more intensely than her former mate, Leonidas would always have a place in her heart. Having their only surviving son within easy reach kept Gorgo grounded and always aware of the gift of renewed love that she had with Riall. It also served to chase away the memories of the betrayal and hatred she felt at what else they had discovered in those first weeks and months back on Earth.

The utter betrayal of her own flesh and blood.

Gorgo did not often think of that day five months after returning to Earth. When she did it filled her with hatred and anger. That a son of her own blood could betray their people in such a way disgusted her to the extreme. Many knew and had witnessed what occurred that day outside the Senate Acropolis, and even now that colossal battle still brought forth many discussions. Martin had discovered most of how it had come to be with Armetus's help, but he had shared that information with no one but the man he considered his brother, if not by blood then by actions and experiences.

Gorgo let her eyes wander to the timer as the chime for changing classes drew closer and she brought her thoughts back to the present. She would give them another minute she thought as her dark eyes scanned the huge half empty classroom. There were only two hundred and twelve students in this class, mainly because of the advanced nature of the course and because it was made up mostly of cadets from the Union Fleet Academy. Gorgo had taught this class for nearly nine hundred years and it was only in the last decade that it had become a prerequisite for cadets in the Academy. She had taken a much more active role as an instructor for the Union Fleet Academy at Riall's request; he had said the cadets lacked a proper knowledge of history and he could think of no one better suited than her to teach that. Gorgo also knew it was a way for him to remain close to her during their six month stays on Apo Prime, and they met for lunch as often as their schedules allowed. Gorgo's only demands were that she be allowed to teach at the University and not the Fleet school which was very cramped and no where near as modern and that she would not have to wear her reserve Fleet Uniform.

Her dark eyes settled on the stunning young blond woman in the fourth row of seats, for Gorgo knew exactly who Sadi was.

When Sadi had first appeared in her class, Gorgo had made some discrete inquiries as to what she had been doing in the years since that night, and what she found had impressed her. Gorgo had to admit, Sadi was exceptionally intelligent, and unless she stopped coming to class, Sadi would be one of the few that would receive a perfect grade from Gorgo. That action alone would be considered amazing since Lady Gorgo was not known for being an easy grader. In the twelve hundred years she had taught here, only nine students had received a perfect grade in her class, Sadi would make number ten. Sadi was a brilliant student, and from what she had heard from Riall and Benjamin O'Connor, she was going to make a fine officer one day as well as an exceptional pilot. Gorgo also knew Sadi's long and clouded history, and to see how far she had come since then made Gorgo very happy. The only thing that worried her was the alleged fact that Sadi had a rather unsavory reputation as being easy to get into bed. Whether that was true or not remained to be seen for she always seemed the proper young lady in class, reserved, quiet and her uniform in perfect condition. Gorgo was well aware of how young male wolves loved to boast of their conquests, or lack thereof, and personally she didn't believe any of what was said in regards to Sadi.

Gorgo took a deep breath. "Very well... time is up!" She spoke loudly but firmly as she came to her feet. "Please insert your pads into the readers."

Gorgo's keen eyes watched as her students did this. It was force of habit she knew; for it was well known to get caught cheating in Lady Gorgo's class meant immediate and summary expulsion from the Fleet Academy and the University. A black mark that would forever stain their records. "Everyone take a deep breath and release it!" She said with a smile. "It was only a quiz, not the final. That will be exceedingly harder I'm happy to say!" Gorgo heard the gathered students groan together and she smiled.

"Now before you all go and get *bevennorn*, I will remind all Fleet Academy Cadets that the transport for the trip to Sparta departs at 0700 sharp tomorrow morning. I expect all of you accompanying me to be present in at least some manner of sobriety please." Gorgo spoke as laughter drifted among the students. (Stinking drunk)

"What is the Operational Plan Lady Gorgo?" A young male cadet spoke up obviously trying to impress someone.

Gorgo smiled and wagged her hand in the air. "Cadet Demroni, I am not an active part of the military, even though I do have a reserve commission I do not recognize that very often, so if you would use normal language with me I would sincerely appreciate it. I do not spend nearly enough time around my son and grandsons to pick up and understand your military use of words and grammar, thank the gods. My mate Riall knows to speak normally when in my company. It's terrible the way you have tortured simple language. I would much rather speak with his Queens... at least them I can understand. And they are so much more pleasant to be around."

That brought more laughter from the students and Gorgo moved around to sit on the front edge of her large desk.

"It is my understanding of the itinerary as it stands right now, that we will depart Apo Prime tomorrow morning and rendezvous with a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser and its Strike Wing the following evening near Earth Gate Three Nine." She saw the eyes of many of the cadets get much brighter at this news, as the *LEONIDAS II* Strike Cruisers were considered the *crème de la crème* of the fleet's ships, especially if they had the refits over the last five years.

"I do not know exactly which one it will be, so don't ask that question." She said with a smile and raised hand. "I can only assume after talking with my son last week before he left for Earth, that it will either be his ship *MJOLNIR'S HAND* or my grandson's ship the *SCIMITAR*. It seems both of them are currently along the border of The Wilds taking part in some rather boring training exercise if I understand correctly, and they will be closest to Gate Three Nine." She spoke smiling. "We will travel the remaining two days on their ship until we arrive on Earth. I know I don't have to remind you that Admiral O'Connor has already explained to you what not to do and where not to go on these particular ships, so please follow his instructions. The *Durcunusaan* can be quite overprotective at times.

"We will be assigned our own quarters for the duration of our stay in Sparta. There will be several days of classes..." Gorgo smiled once more at the moans. "Then you will have the remainder of the time to go where you wish. I understand that Earth Sector Commander, Star Colonel Isra of *Mjolnir's Hand*, will be giving you one class of instruction Cadets; Admiral Wallace, the Commander of EDEN Base will be giving a class on

tactics for the Cadets and Earth Sector Security Chief General/Colonel Lynwe will be giving a brief demonstration in regards to some of the new weapons systems we have developed over the past few years for the Cadets. Earth is usually the testing ground for these types of things since the population is so widely spread out. It is also my understanding that President Turner and Prime Minister Selene will be covering some brief information for all of you when you first arrive, as well as teaching several lessons on the history of Earth for those of you who are not cadets over the course of our visit. Vice President Aihola and Sparta's Lieutenant governor Tarifa will also be giving instruction on the history of Sparta and Eden City for all those who are interested. This should be all of you by the way." Gorgo stated matter of factly.

"Lady Gorgo... is the rumor that we will be able to participate in a training exercise with *Mjolnir's Hand* true?" Another Cadet asked.

"That I don't know." Gorgo answered quickly. "Colonel Isra will be able to answer that for you when we arrive. It will depend I'm very sure on how many actual members of *Mjolnir's Hand* are present on Earth at the time. I do know however that after the graduation ceremony at Thermopylae on our second day, there is a State dinner that all of you will be expected to attend in full dress uniform. And do please be on your best behavior. The following day the King has already offered to allow those cadets who wish to "take a ride on a dragon" is how he put it, to take part in that. The evening of the sixth day, we will have the unprecedented experience of witnessing the Harmony of Two Hearts Ceremony, the ritual mating ceremony for dragons. I have heard it is quite spectacular and very romantic in a way. The schedule will be very open for adjustments or length of stay depending on what the King decides, but as it stands we will remain on Earth for at least two weeks."

"Will any of the Princes be at the State Dinner Lady Gorgo?" A female Cadet shouted out from further up in her rows.

Gorgo chuckled as all the female cadets laughed and all the males shook their heads. "My grandsons always attend State Dinners if they are available, and since they usually all travel together, I'm sure Androcles, Resumar, Denali and Arrarn will all be there."

The chime signaling the end of class sounded loudly and Gorgo stood up shouting over the noise of moving students. "I will see all of you in the morning! Don't be late!"

Gorgo stood by her desk smiling and exchanging small greetings with her students as they filed out quickly. As Sadi came up even with her, she reached out and touched her arm. "Cadet Sadi... a moment please."

Sadi looked puzzled as she stepped to the side and she followed Gorgo back to her desk. Gorgo waited for the mass of students to leave before looking at the puzzled cadet.

"Sadi... I noticed that your name is not on the list for the trip tomorrow." Gorgo spoke as she sat down.

"No Lady Gorgo. I was going to use the time off from classes to help my father at the plant in our district." Sadi answered.

"When was the last time you spoke to your father child?" Gorgo asked with a smile.

"Yesterday morning. Why?" Sadi answered.

"I happen to know for a fact that your father was invited to attend the dinner in Sparta just this morning, and he will be traveling with Senator L'tian's delegation. He didn't tell you?" Gorgo asked.

Sadi blushed slightly under her tan. "I didn't tell him about the trip Lady Gorgo. And I was running late this morning and haven't talked to him yet as I said."

"This could be an excellent experience for you Sadi." Gorgo said meeting her eyes. "And if I'm not mistaken you have never been to Sparta or Earth before have you?"

"No Milady." She replied.

"May I ask why you don't wish to go? And please don't tell me it's because you choose to work in your father's plant over a trip to Sparta. I can smell a fabrication from ten kilometers away young lady, especially one as weak as that." Gorgo asked.

Sadi shifted on the balls of her feet. "It's rather personal Milady."

"Male trouble I take it?" Gorgo said with a knowing smile as she stood up. "He's going and you are welcome for the break of his constant nagging."

"We've only been seeing each other for three months Lady Gorgo. He is going to Sparta to apply to become a *Durcunusaan*. He hopes to become a member of *Mjolnir's Hand*." Sadi spoke softly. "He wants to

settle down or at least his version of it and he keeps wanting to scent me... and... I ended it this morning. He didn't take it very well."

"You don't wish a relationship at this time." Gorgo said.

"I want a relationship Lady Gorgo. I want a mate... a Soulmate... and many children and the happiness that comes with that. Just not with Malic. He is far too pompous and arrogant for my taste." Sadi said quickly, her hand unconsciously going up to where she wore the pendant around her neck and she squeezed it tightly through her uniform jacket. "He's like a bad dream... he..."

"Keeps coming back?" Gorgo said with a chuckle.

Sadi laughed as she looked at her. "Yes. Malic isn't bad Lady Gorgo... he's handsome and smart... but sometimes his ego gets in the way of how he acts. And he is... he is not the man I want to live the rest of my life with."

Gorgo smiled noticing that she was gripping something under her uniform. "You have no worries Sadi... and you forget who my granddaughter is." She said with a chuckle. "If there is a slang that originated on Earth that Eliani Leonidas doesn't know... it doesn't exist. Much like her mother and father I'm afraid. You should hear the two of them go at it." Gorgo took her hand. "You don't wish to settle down with this male then?"

Sadi shook her head quickly. "I believe he wants to scent me because it would look better on his application for the *Durcunusaan*. He is not who I want to spend my life with as I said."

"Is there someone?" Gorgo asked.

Sadi nodded just as quickly. "Yes... I... I haven't met him yet however. At least I don't think I have."

Gorgo looked at her. "You don't think you have?"

Sadi looked at her shyly. Their people were not shy Sadi knew, in particular the females when they set their minds to something. Lady Gorgo was considered a matriarch of sorts to the Lycavorian people because of her status as the King's mother. She was always warm and open and Sadi felt completely comfortable with her. "Lady Gorgo is it crazy to dream about a man you have never met. To see him... to gaze into his eyes but not see the rest of his face? To almost feel his touch upon you even though you have never been together?"

Gorgo smiled and shook her head. "There is much you will experience that others will not because of whom you are and what you have seen in your life Sadi. I know very well your history and the events of that night Sadi. Your Mindvoice skills will allow you to sense things most would not. Never forget what you have learned child. You have been touched by a dragon ... and that makes you special. In time you will come to see how." Gorgo told her. "As for what you have seen in your dreams... perhaps you know his eyes but do not know what this man looks like now because you have not seen him in so many years?"

Sadi nodded slowly though she stared intently at Gorgo for a long quiet moment. It was almost as if she knew. "Yes... perhaps that is it."

"There is still time to apply for the trip. I will reserve a spot for you on the transport just in case you change your mind. You might be surprised what you find in going to Sparta, and it has grown and I doubt very much the chances of seeing this male all the time are great. It is a wondrous city... with a great deal to do and see. Think about it... you never know what you might discover." Gorgo spoke.

Sadi smiled brilliantly. "I... I will. Thank you Lady Gorgo."

ROYAL ISLAND PALACE

3.2 KILOMETERS FROM SHORELINE OF MAIN PALACE ESTATE

LAKE TUYATA

TUYA

He missed Sparta.

The smell of pines in the morning breeze and the sounds of the great city rising to the sun every morning.

The Royal Island Palace of Apo Prime had itself remained the same, though it had been expanded a great deal over the years. The island was still twenty square kilometers of lush forests and streams that came down from the single ten thousand foot peak that dotted the very northern edge of the island, creating cliffs a

thousand meters down to the surface of the lake below and forming a natural majestic view. It had once been connected to the main land estate to the east by a hundred meter wide, 3.2 kilometer long bridge. After the events of so long ago and the attacks on the island itself, his father had the bridge removed. The only way to approach the island now was either by dragon or water lifter. If an unannounced Air Lifter came within three kilometers of the island it was immediately given one warning. If it did not respond it was shot down. The only ones who rode dragons were members of the Royal family or members of *Mjolnir's Hand*, and they were the only ones the *Durcunusaan* allowed near the island now without question. This was their home when not in Sparta, and his father and his mothers had deemed this their refuge. They spent quite a bit of time at the main land estate working when they were on Apo Prime, but the island was where they went to get away and be with family and friends. He had never once heard any of their people complain of this arrangement, and he had spent much of his younger years before leaving for Sparta within the markets of Tuya listening and observing the thousands that passed through them every day.

Many said he was the mirror image of his father Martin Leonidas, just as he was the image of his father. He was an inch shorter than his father's six foot two, two hundred and thirty-eight pound frame, and he topped the scales at only two hundred and twenty pounds, but there was no denying they both were the poster children for Spartans as Eliani had once called them. The muscle definition in their bodies was as if they had been sculpted from marble itself in its fine detail. His skin was deeply tanned, his hair was raven black and unlike his father's shoulder length hair, he wore his cut very short. He had a mustache and goatee, while his father now sported a very neatly trimmed beard and mustache. Androcles had to admit, they did look like brothers, but he had his mother's eyes and that is what set him apart. The azure blue orbs could be deep and foreboding or they could twinkle in mischief. They could be void of any emotion, or they could almost glow in certain lights with the volume of wisdom and sentiment of what Androcles had experienced in his young life already.

He stood on the balcony of his private apartment along the inner perimeter of the palace's defensive wall wearing only a pair of loose white pants with crimson trim down the legs. His upper body was bare except for the tattoo on his abdomen and the coral red pendant he wore around his neck. He and his older siblings had similar apartments that they occupied when they were here so as not to have the main palace itself overflowing with people and to give them some privacy. Each apartment was within fifty meters of the main palace, and no matter how many of them were on the island at any given time, they always ate together in the main gathering room in the palace. He could now easily hear the echoes of his nickname already from his younger brothers and sisters as they ran through the main palace looking for him.

Androcles Leonidas had grown up hating that name as a boy, but now he had come to covet it. No one referred to him as Androcles except for his grandmothers and his mothers when they were angry with him. He had been born in Sparta, the city of his grandfather but had spent the first thirteen years of his very active life shuttling between Apo Prime and Sparta, studying almost endlessly with his grandmothers Gorgo and Dasha. He had an appetite for knowledge that only Eliani, Carina and Zarah could match. Androcles had been trained from boyhood by his father and uncles to such an extent that when he departed for Earth and Sparta to enter his Agoge at thirteen, the now thirty-six month long course had been child's play. He had however been treated mercilessly as the King's son and Crown Prince, for he was subjected to far more demanding, unyielding, arduous and sometimes violent training than any of the others in the course, and not once had a complaint spilled from his lips. While not the very ancient and exceptionally brutal Agoge of his grandfather's time, Androcles Leonidas had not come away unscathed. He still bore the small scars from training with the *Nehtes* and Shi Viskas and he bore them as his father and his grandfather had before him, with honor and pride. He had wanted to follow in his father's actions and adorn his body with the flame tattoos that he wore, but at his father's suggestion, he now sported only the large flaming bird on his chiseled abdomen.

He had been sixteen the first time he saw combat, the same age as his father had been and only three weeks after completing his Agoge. A small border disruption with a band of Kochab mercenaries hunting on a planet within the Union. That action had lasted only a week, but it was during that week where he and Elynth had fought and killed together for the first time. The night on the island palace had not counted as they were together only in mind and Elynth had fought alongside Sadi and his uncle Andreus. If not for the counseling of his father, Torma and Arzoal through that long period, Androcles was quite sure he would never have lifted a weapon again after his actions during that period as inept as they were. It turned out his actions then were only a prelude to the much larger Evolli War less than two years later. A war that would forever shape him as a man.

The Evolli Triad War had lasted for almost six years, many of the battles taking place on the surface of planets that Androcles had never been to or heard of before. It was here that he and Elynth had their true baptism under fire and they learned what his father and her father Torma had learned long ago.

In order to save life, sometimes you had to take life. And do so quite violently in fact.

The Evolli Consortium politicians were upset about a recent trade contract that his Aunt Deia and his elven mother Dysea had revoked from them, and they had savagely invaded several small planets along the outskirts of Union territory thinking that his father and mothers would allow them this action in some sort of recompense. His father and elven mother had been incensed and almost six years later, with the complete obliteration of their armed forces and fleet, the Evolli learned how wrong they were as they surrendered unconditionally. He had been under the command of General Vengal for the first three years of that war, the elven father of his adopted Aunt Anuk, and one of the most ferocious men, Elves or Lycavorians that Andro had ever met. At the beginning of the fourth year he had been given a small command of his own, and at the tender age of twenty-one Androcles Leonidas had forged a name for himself as someone you did not want to face in combat. Together with Elynth and his sisters Eliani and Lisisa and his two younger brothers Denali and Resumar; they had blazed a path of victories across nine planets, to include a massive space battle a year before the last battle of the war that had earned him the right to have his own *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser. Many thought it was a reward for his actions on Alba Tau... but everyone in the Fleet knew otherwise from published reports of what he had done during that space battle.

Androcles then helped his father to plan and then brilliantly execute to precision, every portion of the battle that ended the war. It was during the last year of that war that his sister Carina joined them in the fighting making a name for herself with a daring raid and his best friend Moneus at her side. Androcles smiled to himself for that night had seen Moneus fall head over heels in love with his sister and she with him. His brother Arrarn had become his *STRIKER DT* pilot and was now known for his amazing skills at flying as well as fighting. Androcles had not returned to Apo Prime for more than a few days at a time since the end of The Evolli War, preferring the much slower pace of Sparta to the hustle and bustle of Apo Prime and the capital of Tuya.

Androcles wore the bridle of a Shi Viska of silver royalty, the emblazoned inverted 'V' painted in crimson on the face of his shield like his father. Unlike his father, who had come to love and become a master of the *Nehtes*, Andro preferred two swords. They had been forged and shaped for him from the very unique and special Dragon Armor and honed to lethal razor sharpness with precision laser treatments by the same elven weapons master who the *Nehtes* was named for in Sparta. It was said that watching him wield those two swords in battle with Elynth beside him was a sight not seen since his father and Torma had waded into battle together on Enurrua to rescue his mother. Together during the final ground battle of the Evolli War, he and Elynth had accounted for over a hundred and eighty-three dead themselves. While his sisters and father had fought beside them, only his father and Torma had come close to that. The swords were lethal extensions of his arms, and they moved with a speed that could not be tracked with the normal eye. Androcles had even named them... *Halize Rie Aellseleum* and *Iphan Rie Aellseleum*. The Hammer and Anvil of Justice. Combined with his ever growing abilities to unleashed staggering psychic bolts from his hands, and his unmatched unarmed combat skills, many did not doubt that one day he would surpass his father in skill and recognition.

This was not something Androcles aspired to in any way however, for while everyone knew and saw one side of his father, Androcles and his brothers and sisters saw the other side of his father. They saw the side that nuzzled and caressed and kissed all of their mothers with love and utter devotion, the side that took time to play with all of them as they grew, never favoring one over the other. The side of his father that taught all of them to honor and love one another as siblings. To never let anything come between them as family, no matter what it was. Androcles and all of his siblings, they did not distinguish who their birth mothers were. It was obvious on most of them, but as far as they were concerned they had five mothers and one father and they loved them all equally just as he and his brothers and sisters were loved equally. What directions came from one, came from them all, so closely bound together that they were as a family. That was the side of his father that many did not see. The side of compassion and honor and trust.

It was that side of his father, and that side of Torma that had reached out somehow and bound him and Elynth together so tightly even before he had been born. Androcles had become aware while still in his mother's womb and fully cognitive of what was going on around him at only five months of age. He was aware

of everything, and Elynth had become his projection of sorts of that awareness. Their minds, like their parents minds, had become one. It was almost as if there was no difference between them or their thoughts. Elynth was not only his Bonded Dragon sister, but more importantly she was also his most cherished and trusted friend, and in some fashion they were almost lovers with the depth of the connection that they shared.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Andro... I am truly touched by such thoughts... but I don't think you could survive a mating session with me. You should remain with your own kind, for I have heard the noises of rapture some of them make in your arms. You will have to be content with our bond my brother.* Elynth's voice echoed playfully in his head, powerfully shielded as they always were when they wanted privacy.

Androcles couldn't help but laugh at her words. [Mindvoice Shielded] *I may have been over thinking that a bit huh?*

Elynth chuckled within their connection from where she was in the Dragon Mountain on the other side of the palace. [Mindvoice Shielded] *I will treasure the thought behind the words however my brother. And know that I do feel the same as you.*

Androcles sipped the strong coffee in the mug and turned back to look into his bedroom just as the twin doors flew open and his five younger brothers and sisters burst in screaming his name in enthusiasm. He smiled as the black haired female in his bed let out her own scream of surprise as she sat up in his bed, clutching the sheet to her naked chest as she watched the three boys and two girls practically tackle their older brother to the ground inside the bedroom, only his strength keeping him from spilling his mug of coffee.

“When did you get home?”

“Why didn't you wake us?”

“Did you fight anyone?”

“Is Elynth with you?”

Androcles laughed at the rapid fire questions. “Whoa... what's with all the questions?” He asked holding Calyb against one leg and his sister Nara curled around his arm while trying not to spill his coffee.

The older girl of the two sets of twins crossed her arms over her chest and tossed her rust colored hair back over a shoulder as he had seen his mother Anja do so often. “You haven't been home in over eight months Andro.” Retta stated formally as if scolding him. “What did you expect?”

“Retta... we did not get in until very late.” Androcles replied smiling at her. “You know that our mother For'mya would have been angry if I woke you then.”

“Not late enough it looks like.” Retta spoke turning to look at the female in the bed.

Androcles heard the female in his bed snort in indignation at her words and he ignored her as he leaned forward and planted a big kiss on Retta's cheek. “I understand that there is no school today because we are leaving for Sparta. Why don't you guys go wake up Eliani, Lisisa and Carina. They are home as well as Denali and Resumar. Arrarn, Normya and Zarah are getting the Dragon Transport ready for departure and meeting grandmother. They will meet us at the base in three hours. Go wake them up for me and we'll have breakfast together before we head to the *SCIMITAR*.”

That got a response as they all tore from the bedroom as Androcles stood back up and looked at the young woman in the bed.

“Do they always burst into your bedroom unannounced?” She asked almost arrogantly. She was the oldest daughter of one of the senior professors at the Apo Prime University, and while very beautiful, she sometimes allowed her arrogance from her schooling to show through as she was doing right now.

Androcles lifted his mug and sipped his coffee. “They are my brothers and sisters.” He spoke. “I do not hide from them, and they come first in my life Ulana, you should know that by now.”

“Even over your privacy?” Ulana asked haughtily.

Androcles chuckled. “Especially over my privacy.” He said moving to the edge of the bed, his hand reaching up to stroke the pendant unconsciously as he had since he was a boy.

“I thought you might delay your trip to Sparta and stay here with me.” Ulana spoke hopefully. “There is a gathering at the University that I wanted you to attend with me.”

Androcles looked at her keenly and finally shook his head. “We come from two different worlds Ulana, and I have no intention of ever changing. I am not a prize that you can parade around to your friends Ulana. I don't even care for many of them to be honest with you. They will never know what true sacrifice is... and while that is not their fault... they will never be like me nor I like them. My father and mothers taught me...

blood before all else. You should find someone who will give you what you want Ulana, for I am not that person.” He said. “My blood burns for only one... and I’m sorry... that is not you.”

Ulana looked surprised as she came to her knees holding the sheet over her. “Are you dismissing me Androcles Leonidas? After what we have shared?”

Androcles shook his head once more. “Not at all. I’m simply giving you an out.” He spoke calmly. “And what we have shared is the warmth and pleasures of each other’s company, nothing more. We are not compatible outside of this bed Ulana... and to be honest... I truly don’t want to be. I will find what I seek in the future. I’m sorry.”

“You still insist on finding that female your sisters keep talking about!” Ulana barked. “What is her name?”

Andro looked at her. “Her name is Sadi. And yes... I will have her one day. She is my *Anome*.”

“Your *Anome*?” Ulana spoke. “Andro... how many people actually find their Soulmate? You can’t believe this woman is her if you have never met her.”

Andro looked at her and smiled. “If only you knew Ulana. If only you knew.” He spoke. “You must be open minded and have faith Ulana. Something you do not have.”

The young woman gathered the sheet tightly around her and pushed off the bed rather quickly. She glared at him with dark eyes. “You know something... for a Crown Prince... you are exceptionally strange! You don’t even act like royalty!”

Androcles smiled. “I’ll take that as a compliment. Thank you.” He got to his feet. “I’ll make sure Bren sees you safely back to your father’s home Ulana.”

Ulana glared at him for a long moment before walking out of the room in a huff. It took her only a few moments to dress and gather her few things. She attempted to find him once more to try and make amends but he was already gone. He had that knack, disappearing almost into thin air. Ulana made her way out of the apartment and glanced towards the palace when she heard the dragon hatchlings trumpet. She shook her head and began the walk towards the Lifter docks. As she turned the corner onto the path that would take her there she stopped when she saw the three females.

Eliani, Lisisa and Carina Leonidas still wore their sleeping clothes, which only amounted to simple shirts for Eliani and Lisisa, Carina wearing an almost see through thin robe. Ulana had been stunned at the openness of the Leonidas family the first time she had spent the night here, her arrogant modesty taking several hits that following morning as not only his sisters, but his mothers and father were very open and free.

Eliani Leonidas was the picture of her mother Anja if only a little taller. She was part Hadarian thanks to her mother’s genes, but no one doubted where her heart was. Eliani had made frequent trips back to Hadaria over the years after her Ascension, some with her mother Anja, and some on her own as she got older. She loved Hadaria but like her mother she hated the fact her mother’s Aunt and Uncle always nagged her to return home and stay. To take a more active part in the Hadarian way of life. They could not seem to understand that Eliani was far more wolf than Hadarian, like her younger brother and sister, and very much like her mother. Some say she was the exact copy of her mother in terms of temperament and the ability to endlessly string the one liner comments together to express her displeasure at things. Eliani, like Androcles and most of her brothers and sisters, preferred Sparta to Apo Prime. The city was beautiful and situated between mountain ranges on three sides. Eliani was a powerful Healer, touched with the same skill as her mother and Aunt Sivana and able to draw on life all around her to aid her power, but she would never be as strong as her mother or Aunt Sivana in that regard.

Eliani liked to fight, she liked the rush of action and the feeling of freedom flying with Tharua gave to her. She had been five years old during one of their six month stays in Sparta, and while visiting the Mindvoice ship and dragon cave there with her mother to heal some sick hatchlings, Eliani had accidentally bumped into the mahogany colored female dragon with copper colored eyes.

Tharua was the second oldest to her sister Syrilth, who had once been bonded to a Lycavorian who had treated her brutally. He had forced her to serve him by threatening the un-hatched eggs that held her brothers and sisters. Eliani’s mother Aricia had finally ended the man’s dominance over her by rescuing all the eggs that were her siblings and Tharua had then watched along with her older sister Syrilth as the King and his dragon had judged that man. The dragon Elder mother Arzoal had bestowed upon Syrilth a position of honor for her actions, and though Syrilth had taken the lives of others while serving that vile man, those sins had been

forgiven as she willingly remained on Earth and established another haven for the dragons of the Union. It was not uncommon now to see dragons flying among the clouds on Earth and with her new found freedom; Tharua had thrown herself with glee into her new role as sister to a Dragon Elder.

Until Eliani came along.

That first touch, accidental though it was, had amazingly activated a true psychic bond between them, and as her mother Anja watched in stunned silence, Eliani and Tharua became one with each other. They had not been apart since. Their temperaments blended so well together that it shocked all who didn't know them.

As for Tharua... from the moment the bond between her and the then child Eliani had activated... Tharua discovered true freedom and love and friendship. All she had been denied for the first five years of her life with the exception of her siblings had become hers that day, and Tharua was viciously protective of Eliani, her bonded sister... and her beloved friend. With a proper psychic bond of love and friendship, Tharua had discovered the true potential of what she could do, and she was now considered one of the strongest pure Firespitters outside of Isheeni, her sister and several others. She had grown into a beautiful female dragon, strong and lean and muscular and was sought after by many male dragons, all of whom she had rebuffed repeatedly. She had her sights set on only one male dragon, and Tharua could only hope the Elder Council of Earth would allow her to mate.

Eliani turned her face towards her sister Lisisa. Her half sister really, for Lisisa also had the blood of a vampire running through her. She was the daughter of her father and the High Coven Princess Yuri, conceived in a time long forgotten. Her father and mother had saved Lisisa long ago, and she had returned to Apo Prime with them and begun a new life. It wasn't easy at first, but the love her father and all her mothers had shown her, and the bond she so cherished with Jeth had given her the strength and determination to go on. Lisisa was over five hundred years old, but as she told everyone now, her life did not begin until their father had saved her, so she considered herself reborn. Her bond with Jeth had grown powerful through the years even as Jeth grew to almost match his father in size. They were now recognized as one of the four or five most powerful Bonded Pairs outside of their father and Andro, who were widely considered the most powerful. She and Eliani were as close as two sisters could be, and were often seen together shopping or flirting with the male wolves together. There were times when they gathered their sisters Carina, Normya and Zarah with them, and then they really shook Tuya with their antics.

To Eliani, Lisisa was the epitome of exotic and sensual beauty with her long black hair, and forest green eyes. They were almost the same height with Lisisa only slightly shorter at five foot three, and had essentially the same luscious curves that attracted the males, though Lisisa breasts were much larger than Eliani's own full breasts. Carina was just down right gorgeous as she had her father's eyes and their mother Isabella's lush dark brown almost black hair. Her figure was lean and firm with medium sized breasts that, though considerably smaller than her sisters, were just as firm and pronounced. Carina was taller than both of them by three inches and her vampire and wolf genes combined made her an exceptionally deadly young woman. She had only fought in the Evolli war during the last year, but the four missions she had been on were anything but simple and easy. They may have been their father's daughters and sons, and he would bluster and shout about protecting them, but he would not hesitate to send them into battle when they were needed.

The physical relationship that their mothers shared with each other had caused Eliani, Carina, Normya, Zarah and Lisisa to accept that to be as natural as anything. As children, Eliani and her sisters had interrupted their mothers on several occasions in the midst of passionate encounters when their father wasn't present, and they hadn't blinked an eye, ushering them back off to bed before returning to their activities. They had slept in the same bed with them as children when they had been frightened, sometimes all of them there including their father.

Eliani shared that intimacy now with another woman, and it was immensely pleasurable for her and not something she shied away from in the least. She had found real love and caring with her pureblood vampire lover and Nyla Sinthe was a ravishing beauty as far as Eliani was concerned. In the four years they had been together, they had made each other scream out in pleasure quite often. Eliani had had men before Nyla had come into her life, and they had brought men into their bed after they were together, but none of those men had reached that part of her and Nyla wanted them to reach. None of those men had been able to touch her and Nyla emotionally as her father touched her mothers. As with most of her sisters, many were simply attempting to get close to their father the King in some way. Those their brothers did not chase off, especially Andro as he was

fiercely protective of all of them, their father took care of quickly. A deep and loving relationship had blossomed quickly between Eliani and Nyla quite out of the blue and neither of them could deny it for long, nor did they want to. Eliani still very much wanted to have children of her own, as did Nyla, but she and Nyla had decided together the man who claimed them had to be unique. They wanted only one man, a strong and proud Spartan who would worship and love them both for they had no intention of ending their love or relationship with each other. He had to be like Eliani's father in that he was not threatened by the love shared between the two of them. They were both content to wait as long as it was necessary to find that one man, for they had each other to explore and play with.

Ulana looked at Androcles three oldest sisters. "Have you come to gloat now that your brother has dismissed me from his life?" She snapped.

Lisisa shook her head slowly. "No Ulana... not at all." She spoke softly. "We came to wish you the best with Nolar."

Ulana's face showed her surprise and her embarrassment. "Nolar?" She spoke. "What... what does he have to do with this?"

"Did you think actually Andro didn't know about Nolar?" Carina asked sweetly. "Our brother is not as big a fool as you think him to be Ulana."

Eliani stepped forward. "We came to say goodbye and good luck Ulana." She spoke evenly. "And to give you a warning."

Ulana glared at her now. "You mean a threat?"

"We don't make threats Ulana." Lisisa spoke moving closer to her, Carina following her lead.

"You are an arrogant and pompous *upaee* Ulana." Eliani spoke bluntly. "We tolerated you because Andro seemed to like your company though I can't fathom why. Now that he has decided that the two of you are not going to work out, we want to make sure you know that returning to your life and spreading rumors about him would not be wise. We would take it personal if something like that were to occur."

"You will never understand our brother Ulana." Carina said evenly. "There is only one woman who holds that distinction, and she will discover it soon enough."

"He is our brother Ulana... and we will protect him." Lisisa spoke softly. "We want to make sure you understand that any malicious lies that might pop up suddenly because he has *dismissed* you as you say will not be tolerated. We know how vindictive you can be. Go back to Nolar and live a good happy life."

"Do the three of you always do this to the women in his life?" Ulana barked.

Eliani chuckled. "You are lucky it's just us here. Elynth didn't care for you in the least, and she is far more protective of him than we are. Just be lucky she didn't come to send you off."

"I have never had any malicious intentions. Your brother is a hero to our people just as your father is. No one would believe me anyway." Ulana defended herself. "I just... I just don't understand what he sees in this Sadi female. She... she can't be like me?"

Lisisa looked at Eliani and rolled her eyes. "No Ulana... she is not like you." Lisisa said finally. "She is far more than you will ever be, and that is not entirely your fault. Do not take it as such... she is just very different."

"At least do me the favor of telling me who she is. The three of you must know." Ulana said.

"At the moment she is a cadet in the Fleet Academy." Carina answered. "That will soon change I imagine."

"Then again maybe not." Eliani said with a smile. "She's very strong willed."

"He would choose a cadet in the fleet over me?" Ulana asked not really believing it.

Lisisa smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "Our brother is unique."

"Well... he can call the three of you off. I have no intention of doing anything nefarious." Ulana spoke.

"That's good." Lisisa spoke. "Make sure it stays that way. Have a nice life Ulana."

Eliani batted her fern green eyes at her and they watched as Ulana politely moved past them to continue to the Lifter dock. She waited until Ulana was out of ear shot. "So... do you think we did a good enough job?" She asked.

I think it was spectacular. Elynth's voice filled their heads and they turned to see the massive obsidian colored female settle to the ground behind them from where she had been circling above.

Elynth had grown slightly larger than her mother Isheeni, larger than most other dragons her age, but she would not come close to the size of her brother Jeth and her father. Elynth was just a tad over fifteen meters long and four and a half meters tall. She weighed in at four and a half metric tons, her body smoothly muscular and for a female dragon exceptionally beautiful. Elynth took after her mother in looks with her elegantly muscled body, but her coloring she inherited from her father. Almost jet black obsidian scales adorned her body, and though it was a slightly different shade than her father, it was essentially the same. Elynth had her father's stunning golden colored eyes, but her mother's uniquely long and wickedly curved talons.

It was well known that she and Androcles had bonded while he was still in his mother's womb, bringing awareness of an adult to a child. The two of them shared the memories of their parents and they shared everything with each other. It was a powerful bond and that bond had only grown stronger through the years. Their fathers were considered the most powerful of the bonded pairs, their mother Aricia and Isheeni a close second, but Androcles and Elynth were rapidly closing that distance in huge strides, and it was widely thought that they would one day surpass even their father's in what they could do together.

The three of them laughed and reached out to stroke her cool scales and Elynth's golden eyes closed in appreciation.

"Let's go get some food before we have to head to the airfield. Grandmother will be incensed when she discovers we have been here all night and did not stop to see her. And I'd much rather have her yell at us on a full stomach." Lisisa spoke taking Eliani's hand and squeezing it. She took Carina's hand as well. "When we get to Sparta we are going to hit the beach in Gytheio and try to pick up men."

"Try?" Carina spoke with a laugh. "Lisisa they fall over you, Nyla and Eliani. I think it has to do with how big your *goldur* are. Zarah and Normya got our mother's figures so they have no trouble with wolves following them along their tongues dragging along." Carina spoke cupping her much smaller but no less firm breasts in her hands. She looked at her sisters. "Do you... do you think Moneus will approve of me?"

Lisisa laughed at her sister's actions. "Moneus is a man!" She declared. "And I believe he has more interest in your *mida* than your *goldur*! Besides... he has been head over heels in love you with for years. It won't matter in the least to him."

Eliani laughed as well. "Too bad Nyla and I can't seem to find one who knows what to do with our *goldur* when presented with them." She spoke. "Do you know how many men we have thrown away because they only have a one track mind?"

Lisisa joined in now as well. "Yes... well there is always a first time." She said.

Elynth shook her huge head. *And they say Zarah is the promiscuous one among the daughters of King Martin.*

TUYA MAIN SPACEPORT

Sadi stood with her friends in the Tuya spaceport as they waited to transfer to the shuttles that would take them to their transport. Sadi had gone straight home after talking with Lady Gorgo and the rest of her classes to see her father. He was packing for the trip and after sharing a small dinner together he had convinced her to go on the trip so they could spend time in Sparta together. Sadi found it very hard to refuse anything her father wanted as much as she loved him and she had agreed in part because of his words, but in part because she knew her life would change if she did this. As she stood waiting with her friends, Sadi found herself looking forward to the trip even though she knew Malic would be on the same transport. The forty odd cadets were gathered in a small waiting area, Gorgo sitting with one of her aides. Lady Gorgo had surprised them all when they arrived, the cadets discovering that she was wearing her own immaculate Reserve Fleet uniform. What stunned those present most of all was that she held the rank of Admiral/Lieutenant.

All of the cadets wore their uniforms; the cadet markings would be removed and replaced with normal fleet markings when they graduated. Sadi was the only one among them that wore flight wings already, mainly because she had grown up flying because of who her father was, and the fact that she had flown with Queen For'mya and Star Colonel Endith while working with Queen Dysea in the *Annacdorne*.

"So whose ship will we meet?" Her friend asked taking her arm. "There is a bet going that it will be *MJOLNIR'S HAND*. I say it will be Prince Androcles's ship the *SCIMITAR*. What do you think Sadi?"

Sadi smiled. "What difference does it make Teeria?" She asked her closest friend and confidant.

"The difference is that the King already has his Queens silly." Palta spoke now. "Prince Androcles is still very much a single male wolf. And so are Prince Resumar, Prince Arrarn and Prince Denali, and they are known to always travel with him."

Sadi shook her head. "You two are so bad." She spoke with a smile.

"We aren't bad." Teeria spoke. "We are just healthy single female wolves who happen to be very much open to mating with one of the Princes."

"Yes... I'm sure." Sadi declared with a grin rolling her eyes.

"I've heard they are all built like gods..." Palta spoke. "Muscles everywhere... and I do mean everywhere."

"Palta!" Sadi exclaimed.

"What? Have you ever seen one of the Queens without a smile on her face? It is said that the King's aura is so powerful they become excited just by being wrapped within it, and there are rumors that he is built like a bull. If his sons are anything like him, gods I would be in blissful heaven." She spoke. "Doesn't Malic do that for you Sadi? Gertia still gushes over him."

Sadi looked at her. "No he doesn't." She replied. "And Malic and I are over."

"Over? What do you mean? You didn't tell us that!" Teeria barked perking up and looking at her dear friend.

Sadi nodded. "Malic has his own path to follow, and I do not wish to be part of that with him."

"So does that mean he's available?" Palta asked with a smirk. "I heard Gertia say he's very well equipped."

Sadi rolled her eyes again and smiled. "Yes... he's well equipped. But he's arrogant and rude and sometimes I think he is trying to make up for some fault. I... I want a man who will worship my body and stimulate my mind and not just try and pound my guts out because he has a big cock and he thinks that is all I need." She said.

"Sometimes you ask for too much Sadi." Palta said jokingly.

Sadi smiled and reached up and rubbed the pendant she wore under her uniform, feeling the bump it made against the fabric. "Perhaps." She said softly.

"Quiet!" Teeria hissed. "Lady Gorgo is coming over... she will..."

"She will hear what you are saying?" Gorgo spoke with a grin as she stepped up to the three females.

The three of them bowed their heads slightly to her. Gorgo was their professor and an officer in the Union Fleet, but she was also King Leonidas's mother, and there was not a person alive within the Lycavorian Union that did not know how much the King adored his mother. It was said in gossip that when all else failed and you wanted something from King Martin Leonidas, send in his mother for she would get what you wanted.

"Forgive me Lady Gorgo." Teeria spoke shyly.

"Don't be like that..." Gorgo announced shaking her head quickly. "I was young once." She said.

"Yes... but you... you have loved a beloved King and now a First Admiral of the Fleet." Teeria said softly.

Gorgo chuckled. "Yes I have... just remember that Cadet Sadi is correct. If a man truly loves and desires you, he will worship you like you are a goddess. If he doesn't... bah... discard him quickly." Gorgo spoke with a wave of her hand.

The three of them laughed like small children at Gorgo's words as the stern looking man walked up to them. He wore the black and crimson body armor and rank of a full *Durcunusaan* Commander, the crimson cape gently sweeping across the floor of the terminal as he walked. They were the famed unit of men and women who guarded their King and Queens and all those they deemed important with something akin to fanatic loyalty. Lady Gorgo herself had at least one *Durcunusaan* bodyguard they were sure, probably one or two more considering how much the King loved his mother, and though they never saw them, Sadi suspected at least one posed as a student in their classes.

Gorgo turned to face this stern looking man as he bowed his head deeply. "Lady Gorgo... it is an honor." He spoke clearly. "I am Star Commander Bren of the *Durcunusaan*... Prince Androcles's Detachment Leader."

Gorgo's face looked puzzled. "Andro?" She asked. "You are a long way from him, are you not Commander?"

The *Durcunusaan* Commander smiled. "We arrived late last night on the *SCIMITAR* Lady Gorgo. The King and Prince Androcles decided it would be best to pick you and your cadets up here as opposed to meeting you halfway. We finished with the training exercise early yesterday morning."

"Wait... Andro... is here?" Gorgo asked surprised. "On Apo Prime?"

Bren nodded with a knowing smile. "He sent me on ahead to arrange transportation for you and your cadets to *Mjolnir's Hand's* base. We will be departing from there on a Type II *DT* and docking with the *SCIMITAR* in orbit. Prince Arrarn and Princesses Normya and Zarah are already at the airfield prepping the ship. The rest will be leaving the island palace shortly with Queen For'mya and their siblings."

"Our transport is..." Gorgo started to speak.

"All of yours and the cadet's belongings were loaded on the *MENKLA III* and already sent up to the *SCIMITAR* Lady Gorgo. I have a Lifter Bus standing by outside for your cadets and the personnel heading for Sparta." Bren spoke.

Gorgo nodded with a smile. The *Durcunusaan* were well known for their efficiency. "Very well Commander. Which direction?"

"The east entrance." He replied motioning with his hand.

Gorgo turned and saw the other military personnel departing with them already heading in that direction. She looked at the cadets who were all facing her. "Cadets... there is a change in plans it seems. I have been informed that the *SCIMITAR* is already in orbit, and we will be riding up to her on a Type II Dragon Transport. There is a Lifter Bus outside that will take us to our departure point at the *Mjolnir's Hand* airfield." She motioned with her hand towards the direction of the east entrance. "Let's start heading towards the east entrance. Commander Bren will lead us."

This news had the cadets buzzing.

Mjolnir's Hand had the only base on the planet that was strictly off limits to the public. It was a huge sprawling base with a massive airfield, and it was where all of *Mjolnir's Hand* came to train with new tactics and weapons that had been devised over the years. The base was also the permanent home to nearly a hundred dragons and members of the famed unit as they were trying to fill the last three slots in their ranks. Twenty-three of *Mjolnir's Hand* had fallen during the Evolli War, and it was a long process for a dragon and rider to be selected for the elite three hundred member unit. Those that were not selected for the actual unit held many various and important roles throughout the Union with their dragons at their side. In all there were less than a thousand bonded pairs now, and when called upon they could all be activated to fight.

Gorgo watched carefully as her cadets began to file out, briefly noticing that Sadi was rubbing something she wore under her uniform. She smiled knowingly. Perhaps their carefully crafted plan would come together after all.

The trip to *Mjolnir's Hand's* base took almost an hour with the lifter traffic by the spaceport. Gorgo sat next to Bren as they passed through the front gate of the base which was guarded by half a dozen heavily armed *Durcunusaan* and two fully grown Hybrid dragons, all of whom alertly and intently watched as their Lifter Bus passed by. They could see the massive Type II *DT* sitting on the airfield as they headed directly for it.

One hundred and fifty meters long and twenty-three meters tall, it was the main transport used by the dragons of the Union. This ship was the Type II *DT*, and while still large, it was not the massive three hundred and fifty meter long Type I that could carry four hundred fully grown dragons. This ship had been designed ten years after dragons had come into the lives of the Union, and it could carry forty fully grown dragons comfortably, as well as over a hundred passengers on an upper level deck. Its reduced size made it easier to be taken into the cavernous landing bays of the *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers. This particular Type II *DT* was assigned to the *SCIMITAR* permanently because of the number of dragons that called the *SCIMITAR* home. When they were all on board, Elynth, Jeth, Tharua, Cemath and Aradace were the dragons bonded to Androcles and his siblings. That did not include the hatchlings and adolescents that had bonded to all of his five younger siblings and often traveled with them as they now would.

As they grew closer, Gorgo couldn't help but smile. Standing near the rear ramp of the ship she could spot her grandson Arrarn and her granddaughters Normya and Zarah easily. Arrarn Leonidas had his father's height, and while he was very muscular, he was not as thickly proportioned as his father or brothers. He was well defined in a lean way, yet his muscles were just as ripped as those of his brothers and father. He was also the most physically handsome of all the Leonidas sons, most likely due to his mother's elven blood. He had dozens of female wolves and even female vampires and elves chasing after him for his attentions. Arrarn was solid and incredibly strong due to his half elf, half wolf blood, which suited him just fine since he had taken after his mother For'mya and become the premier *STRIKER DT* pilot in the Union at only twenty-three years of age. Normya she could spot easily just by the billowing platinum white blond hair she inherited from her mother Dysea, and with Normya, Zarah was never far away. Zarah was Isabella's second daughter with her son and already at twenty-one years of age Zarah had male wolves and vampires alike lining up to try and court her. She and Normya had been born only six hours apart, and though they came from different mothers, they referred to each other as twins.

The driver of the Lifter Bus pulled off to the side still quite a distance away and stopped. Gorgo knew this was because when the ship took off it gave off huge blasts of air that could easily knock nearby vehicles over. They could see perhaps two dozen dragons of all shapes and sizes already within the individual pens along the interior of the ship with another half dozen were filing onto the ship. No doubt they were speaking within Mindvoice to her grandchildren for Gorgo could detect the tremors easily. Bren looked at Gorgo quickly.

"Lady Gorgo... may I?" He asked.

Gorgo looked at him and nodded. "Of course Bren."

The *Durcunusaan* Commander got to his feet and turned around to face the cadets and personnel heading to Sparta. They became silent as he waited patiently.

"There will be a briefing once we reach the *SCIMITAR* on what not to do while you are on board our ship." He spoke firmly. "It is my understanding that either Princess Eliani or Princess Lisisa will give this briefing. We will load through the same ramp as you now see the dragons entering the Type II. There are stairs on either side that will take you to the upper deck of the ship. The lower deck belongs to the dragons, and even though it is only a twenty minute ride up to the *SCIMITAR*, please do not get lost and go down to the lower deck." Bren heard many of those gathered chuckle at his words. "All active military personnel will board from the left and then all cadets from the right. Please form two lines when you exit the lifter. It will be rather loud on board since we will be executing an in-flight recovery of Prince Androcles and his brothers and sisters before we actually head up to the *SCIMITAR*. For those of you who have never witnessed such an event... it is certainly a sight to see. I encourage you to watch, but do not get in the way of the action. I will warn you now... the Bonded Dragons of the Princes and Princess are very closely knit. They are not unfriendly... but they are not as open to people they do not know. Most especially Elynth, Prince Androcles's dragon. Be mindful of your actions and what you say, and do remember they are just as intelligent as you or I. Sometimes even more so." He smiled. "Let's head out."

Gorgo was the first to exit the Lifter bus and she turned as she saw her grandchildren running up to her, Normya's hair whipping about her face. Gorgo smiled as Normya was the first to reach her.

"*Staanial!*" She gasped loudly as Gorgo held open her arms and embraced her tightly. (Grandmother)

Gorgo's eyes closed in joy as she held her and inhaled deeply, filling her lungs with Normya's orange clove scent. "Normya... you rival your mother with your beauty child." She spoke warmly holding out her arm as Zarah approached and stepped into the embrace as well.

"*Staanial.*" She spoke more sedately but with equal love and respect.

Gorgo nuzzled Zarah's cheek, once more inhaling the sweet apple and sage scent of Zarah. She squeezed them tightly. "You both have grown so much in only eight months!" She stated holding them at arm's length as she looked at them. "I will have to talk with your brother about coming to see me more often!" Gorgo looked up as Arrarn approached and she smiled. His elven ears were like Normya's in that they were only two inches high as opposed to the four inches of normal elves. That in no way took away from his handsome features or Normya's beauty. It was common among the children of Lycavorian and elf unions and marriages that their children did not have the distinguishable high pointed ears.

Gorgo hugged Arrarn tightly inhaling his peppermint scent and smiling. She realized it had been almost a year since she had seen most of her older grandchildren, and she made a mental note to contact Jora and her

other children with Riall and invite them to the villa in Sparta. All but two of them had already moved to the city of their mother's birth. Gorgo would tell anyone that it was their way of telling her to return to the home of her roots on a more permanent basis. She stepped back and took hold of Zarah and Normya's hands and pulled them close. "Why didn't one of you call me when you arrived?" She asked.

"It was very late last night *Staania*." Zarah replied holding Gorgo's waist tightly and her face beaming. "Androcles didn't want to wake you and we needed to get the ship ready early for your cadets and the others going to Sparta. We will have three days on the *SCIMITAR* to catch up. Androcles has already planned a dinner for tomorrow night for all of us."

"Where are your brothers and sisters?" Gorgo asked. "Shouldn't they be here as well?"

"They are bringing the little ones." Normya replied with a grin. "You know how mother fawns over them when they fly. She is such a worry wart sometimes."

Gorgo chuckled. "Your mother For'mya knows well the dangers that you older ones laugh in the face of."

Arrarn laughed as well. "Too bad she doesn't take her own advice." He spoke. His keen dark eyes looked out over the expanse of the lake and he nodded. "They are lifting off now!" He turned to where Bren stood directing the cadets and military personnel. "Bren! Inbound!" He shouted.

Bren turned his head from where he was forming the two lines and saw the six dragons lifting off from the island palace far in the distance. He grinned.

"They have their siblings?" He called back.

Arrarn nodded from where he stood. "That they do!"

Bren shook his head as the military personnel and cadets began searching the skies over the lake watching the six dark dots begin to come closer. The stunts the children of the King and Queens pulled were sometimes over the top, but they were like their parents. Every single one of them.

As they grew closer, everyone was able to see the five smaller dots flying along with the six larger dragons, and all of them were moving incredibly fast very near the surface of the water. Firespitters were the fastest of the different breeds of dragons, and with a pure Firespitter mother widely recognized as the fastest among them, and a hybrid father that was the largest and strongest among their kind with only one exception, all the dragons flying at them were moving with near blinding speed. It was only six kilometers across the water to the island from where they stood on the airfield and all of them were silent in awe as the dragons grew closer, barely fifty feet off the surface of the lake.

"Do they have to fly so close to the water?" Gorgo asked exasperated. "I will have words with your brother about this display when he lands!"

Normya laughed. "*Staania* you shouldn't worry so much." She spoke.

"I am your grandmother!" She exclaimed. "It is my right!"

There was no more time for talk as with trumpeting roars five of the six dragons rocketed over the airfield and executed perfect 360 degree rolls so close to the ground that it bought yelps of surprise from the cadets and military personnel who followed them with their eyes as they split into five different directions. Many had even ducked down instinctively as the dragons passed overhead. They all could hear the screams of joy from younger children echo across the ground as the dragons quickly blasted across the landscape into the distance once more, the smaller dragons splitting separately with the larger ones. Then everyone's heads turned as the sapphire scaled muscular dragon swooped down from above and settled to the ground beside the two lines that had formed.

For'mya Leonidas's long golden blond hair extended out well past the bottom of her helmet, the crested plume shimmering in the sunlight and extending past her shoulders to the middle of her back. She wore the lightweight version of the black and crimson body armor, which conformed to her lithe figure like a glove. She had long legs for her five foot seven height and though the helmet hid most of her facial features Gorgo knew well what she looked like. Gorgo had known her from before the Coven had captured her and found For'mya to be pompous and arrogant then. When Martin had returned with her to Apo Prime and she had discovered this new For'mya and all that had taken place to transform her into the woman she now was, Gorgo became fast friends with her.

With Deia's and Gorgo's own support and backing, as well as the full weight of Martin's four reigning and recognized Queens, they had pushed through a new amendment to the Union constitution that allowed

For'mya to officially be recognized as the fifth Queen of the United Lycavorian Union. She was just as loved by Martin and his other Queens, especially Aricia and with their support and backing; the amendment had passed easily with no dissension in the Senate. It was not something For'mya had requested or even wanted, but she was every bit a Queen as the others and it was their way to show her just how much they all loved her.

Six months after returning to Apo Prime, Gorgo had watched as For'mya was crowned as the fifth Queen to her son in a beautiful ceremony on the plains of Sparta.

For'mya had given him two strong sons, one of whom was now perhaps a better pilot than his mother. She was well known for her calm and nurturing presence and not much existed that could rattle her to anger unless it was danger to her children. She had grown powerful over the years, taking part with Aricia and Isabella as her son's military Queens. She and Aricia were almost never apart it seemed, and with few exceptions she always traveled with them, and since Seanna's death Anja had become a fixture with them as well. Gorgo could only be amazed at the love that they all felt for each other. There was no jealousy between the women in her son's life. Aricia was recognized as his Soulmate, the one who would always have a piece of him the others did not, and because of the pureness of her blood she was nearly as powerful as Martin. She was the youngest of his Queens, but she was who they all deferred to when a question arose. That status might have caused a lesser person to be different, but Aricia was the one who was always trying to arrange for them to be together. Gorgo knew they all shared the same bed when together, and they shared each other's attentions as well as Martin's as often as they could. It was this relationship that was their strength as a family.

For'mya was smiling as Aurith settled to the ground and she slid from the saddle quickly and easily with practiced ease. Gorgo watched as For'mya let her hand slide along those smooth sapphire scales before she kissed Aurith's snout softly, the dragon's large head canting towards her and those golden eyes closing in joy and happiness.

Gorgo stepped up to her and they embraced tightly.

"Gorgo... it is so very good to see you." For'mya spoke as she stepped back and reached up to remove her helmet. She handed it to the *Durcunusaan* troop that stepped up quickly and then took Gorgo's hands once more. "You are looking as beautiful as ever."

Gorgo laughed. "You should talk." She spoke. "You came alone?"

For'mya nodded. "I brought a *DT* back that needed new LSD coils." She answered. "Martin Leonidas was up to his elbows in paperwork with Dysea, Bella and Deia, and Aricia and Anja were returning from Hadaria on the *SPIRIT* when I left. I had nothing to do."

Gorgo laughed again and squeezed her hands. "You mean they left you to come collect the children when school got out. You are much better with the transfer paperwork than the others."

For'mya's dark brown eyes twinkled. "Well... I just have more patience for all the red tape." She answered with a grin. "And I wanted to see if..."

Gorgo nodded. "Yes... she is coming."

For'mya smiled and let out a large breath. "Good. Has he seen her yet?"

Gorgo shook her head. "No not yet. And she shields herself with very advanced skills if I do say so myself. Helen taught her exceedingly well."

For'mya nodded slowly. "Yes she did. She has grown more powerful than many of us first thought she would. Helen was shocked at what she could do when she first arrived at the school. We'll have to make sure Commander Bren knows that when we get to the *SCIMITAR*. The *Durcunusaan* insist that all Tier Six Mindvoicers declare themselves when coming onboard, especially with the dragons that accompany us for this trip. I will see to it before we leave Apo Prime."

"I'm surprised he hasn't detected her yet?" Gorgo spoke.

For'mya chuckled. "They are like their fathers. He and Elynth rarely lower their shields far enough to detect anyone not at an advanced Tier Six level. They are so used to their brothers and sisters and those that are close to them that they might not even pick her out until he sees her if she shields so well."

"Well hopefully that will change." Gorgo spoke.

For'mya turned her head as Arrarn, Normya and Zarah came up to them. "Are we all set?" She asked.

Arrarn nodded. "As soon as the cadets and military personnel load, we can take off mother." He answered confidently. "I've already cleared the airspace for the in-flight landing. We'll do it over the island

palace just to play it safe and stay out of everyone's hair. Captain Sa'sur has already cleared our berth on the *SCIMITAR* and we can move right in when we obtain orbit."

"Please tell me they aren't going to do an in-flight landing with the little ones!" Gorgo exclaimed.

"*Staania*... do you actually believe I am *that* insane?" The deep voice spoke from behind them. It was a voice that carried with it a level of confidence and power rarely felt. "My father and mothers would have my head if I attempted such a thing."

Gorgo smiled at For'mya as she turned slowly at the sound of the voice. "Well perhaps if you were more tame in your actions young Androcles, I would not need to worry so much over the safety of my younger grandchildren."

Sadi was gazing at Aurith's elegant long lines and trying to keep herself from busting from the line of cadets to go and greet For'mya. The elven female had been such a rock for her to lean on during that time after she first turned herself in. She had never wavered in her support of Sadi in any way, and Sadi had not been able to thank her for that support.

"I'll be riding one of them someday Sadi." Malic's voice filled her ears and she turned to see him reach out and grasp her arm from the line he stood in to her left. "See what you could have had?"

Sadi pried his fingers from her arm. "No Malic... I don't see that." She hissed softly. "I see a pompous..."

"*Staania*... do you actually believe I am *that* insane?" The deep voice spoke from behind her, causing Sadi to freeze in her place her eyes going wide as his scent drifted to her on the slight breeze. "My father and mothers would have my head if I attempted such a thing."

She watched Gorgo smile as she turned slowly at the sound of the voice. "Well perhaps if you were more tame in your actions young Androcles, I would not need to worry so much over the safety of my younger grandchildren." She said.

Sadi saw Malic's eyes go wide as he looked behind her, and then Teeria and Palta were gripping her arms tightly as Sadi turned slowly.

The first thing she saw was Elynth's huge obsidian head not a meter from her, looking out over the two rows of cadets and military personnel at where Gorgo and For'mya stood. Her four and a half meter height allowed her to easily gaze over the tops of the heads of the men and women gathered; ignoring them as she saw and felt Gorgo and For'mya. Sadi followed the line of her long neck back until she saw him in the saddle between her shoulders and she gasped softly to herself.

The helmet he wore was matte black like the others, sharply angled over his cheeks and extending past his jaw line. There was a small lighter colored shape on top of the helmet which looked incredibly like a golden statue of Elynth herself, her front talons gripping one of the front edges of the helmet and her fangs bared. Yet there was no mistaking the golden color of the dragon's eyes on that helmet, nor the raven black plume that flowed along the back of the dragon and down to well past Androcles's shoulders.

There was also no mistaking those azure blue orbs from behind that helmet. They were the eyes she had seen so many times in her dreams.

Sadi watched as Androcles lifted the younger girl from the saddle in front of him and lowered her to the ground next to Elynth. She also wore a lightweight version of the body armor and a crested and plumed helmet. Her dark green eyes were wide in excitement at the ride she had just had and she raced over to For'mya, the one meter tall brownish dragon hatchling scampering after her flapping its wings madly.

"Mother did you see?" She exclaimed. "Did you see Eli roll over? It was awesome! Mara and I will do that someday!"

For'mya laughed and let Retta hug her leg as the dragon hatchling rubbed up against Retta. "I saw Retta. Yes I did. Now say hello to your *staania* before she breaks into tears at how big you have grown."

Androcles smiled at this show. "Mother... we are running a little behind. Why don't you and grandmother get everyone on board and we'll meet you in the sky."

For'mya nodded. "You could forgo the landing Andro." She spoke hoping to convince him so that he discovered Sadi.

Androcles looked hurt. “And miss a training opportunity for my brothers and sisters?” He announced. “Perish the thought. Father would bust me back to Prince of nothing if I did something like that mother.”

For'mya laughed and waved her hand at him. “Go on! We'll see you among the clouds my son!”

Androcles chuckled and tapped Elynth's side. *Let's go sister.*

Elynth snorted loudly and began turning just as the wind shifted and she felt Androcles stiffen in the saddle above her. Her large head turned quickly and she looked at him.

Andro?

Androcles turned his head towards the row of cadets and military personnel, his azure eyes wide. He had caught the unmistakable scent of sugar plum and spice in the wind, a scent he had smelled before long ago, and a scent he had loved from the first moment it touched his senses. His azure orbs swept the line of men and women keenly as he threw his leg over the saddle and dropped to the tarmac quickly.

Andro my brother? What is wrong? Elynth asked.

Androcles reached up and placed a hand on her thick neck scales. *She's here Elynth! I can smell her!*

KertaGai! Elynth exclaimed twisting her massive body around to face the rows of cadets and military personnel. *We... are you sure Andro? We should have felt her within Mindvoice!*

Not if she is shielding. Andro spoke softly. *Remember that Helen told us that she had grown powerful at shielding her presence. She...*

Andro's eyes came to rest on the golden blond hair and dazzling jungle green eyes as they stared at him without a hint of surprise. He moved without pause and stepped up to stand in front of Sadi, Elynth directly behind him, even as Teeria and Palta and many others stepped back away from her quickly, partly in fear and partly in surprise at this action by the most well known of the Princes.

For'mya and Gorgo stood together with Normya and Zarah watching intently from where they were. They had plotted and schemed for two years with Aricia and Anja for this moment to take place. All of them knew Androcles had eyes for no one but Sadi, as he never removed the Dragon Heart pendant he wore. Even in the hospital recovering from his wounds during the Evolli War he had threatened to kill the doctor who wanted to remove it from around his neck. Four women had shared his bed since he was old enough, none of them lasting more than a few weeks. Like Ulana... they could not tolerate the closeness of the Leonidas family, and they were not the one Andro wanted. For'mya and Aricia knew everything that had happened over the course of those few days on the island, and Gorgo had taken a vested interest in these events ever since discovering who Sadi was.

Andro stared down at Sadi, towering over her five feet seven frame, and allowing the sugar plum and spice scent to sweep through him now. She didn't back away and simply stared at him as the pines and lavender scent she had smelled on the island so long ago simply washed over her. Sadi could feel his aura... so staggering and powerful... and tightly controlled. She had been blasted by many Alpha wolves in the course of her life in their attempts to entice her, yet the aura she felt radiating from Androcles was three times anything she had ever felt before and that was even heavily shielded. It was wild and powerful and so sweet in its freshness.

This was the boy who was now a man.

Sadi watched him, her heart beating madly, slamming into her chest as he reached up and took the sides of his helmet. Her green eyes grew a little wider as he lifted it off his head and she finally saw the face those eyes from her dreams always were attached to. She lifted her hands, bringing them to her mouth in stunned surprise as Sadi found she was gazing intently on the most incredibly handsome young man she had ever seen. Oh... had he grown since she last saw him Sadi thought to herself. Even through the lighter Spartan version of the body armor Sadi could tell he was just as physically sculpted as his father. The muscles were exacting in detail, and though he was no where near as heavily muscled as his father, there was no denying the definition and bulk and his scent was driving her mad.

Andro breathed deeply once more, lowering his head slightly closer to her and inhaling her sweet sugar plum and spice scent, feeling it filter to every corner of his mind and body. She was even more beautiful now than he remembered her. He brought his head back and looked at her, staring deeply into her gorgeous green eyes.

Hello KertaGai. He spoke softly within Mindvoice.

Sadi gasped when his voice caressed her mind, the power and warmth unlike anything she had ever experienced except for that single night when she had heard that voice before. And then Elynth's voice joined his, her large obsidian head brushing up against his shoulder as she pushed forward to gaze at her with those golden colored eyes. Andro's arm wrapped underneath Elynth's head affectionately.

You are even more beautiful than we remember KertaGai! Elynth exclaimed.

Elynth... you... you have gotten so big! Sadi exclaimed within Mindvoice, and she saw them both close their eyes as her musical voice filled their minds.

You are a cadet! Elynth spoke excitedly as her golden orbs reopened quickly and she gazed at Sadi.

Sadi nodded quickly and her friends that stood around them gasped as they realized she was speaking to the dragon within Mindvoice. Even Malic stared at them stunned at this revelation.

I'm a pilot! I'm going to graduate in six months! Sadi answered. *I have asked about you over... over the years! I... didn't know if I should try and contact you. I...* She looked at Andro as she spoke and saw his eyes open and gaze at her. Those azure blue orbs made her shudder inwardly with desire and something more powerful than she had ever felt from any man. His aura was sweeping around her, showering her in warmth and love, but being very respectful in his actions as well. It was a sensation that made Sadi want more. So much more.

Andro stepped closer to her, Sadi not backing away in the least as his scent and aura engulfed her. *There has not been a day that has gone by when you were not in my thoughts KertaGai.* Andro said softly.

Sadi stared at him and inspected the strong square face and jaw, reaching up to trace his cheek without care that anyone saw her. Yes... this was definitely the face from her dreams... of that she had little doubt. Sadi suddenly realized what Elynth had meant all those years ago when she said she had been chosen. He had chosen her all those years ago, and the relationships she had been in since that night were only leading up to what she was going to enter into with this man. What she wanted to enter into with this man, no matter that he was over a hundred years younger than her. She watched Andro reach up and unfasten the top of the body armor, pulling at something until the leather tie with the coral red pendant on it came free and he held it in his hand tightly.

I have worn this... I have worn this since that time on the island Sadi. He spoke gently. *I am not fool enough to...*

Sadi reached up quickly and pulled at the collar of her uniform jacket, reaching under the uniform and quickly pulling the second half of the coral red pendant out dangling from the satin tie. *I've never taken mine off either.* She said quickly.

Neither of them saw For'mya squeeze Gorgo's hand tightly, a wide smile on her face.

Andro looked at her then, squeezing his pendant tightly in his hand. He smiled and Sadi felt her heart leap into her throat. Andro leaned over close to her and inhaled deeply, his cheek just brushing hers in the ancient Lycavorian custom began by his grandfather of expressing interest in a female.

You will be mine Sadi, daughter of Vorilas. Andro stated confidently. *I intend to make you mine and have you scream my name to the moon.*

Sadi stared at him as he drew back, the blood in her body on fire at the sensations he was causing to sweep over her. The same sensations that swept over her in her dreams, but this time they were not dream like in nature. This time, the cause of those sensations was standing right in front of her. Sadi couldn't help but smile at his words. She had never had a male state his intentions to her, and to state them with such confidence and authority. His voice was soothing and warm in her head, and her body was becoming excited at the prospect.

Are you... are you sure you are up to the challenge Prince Androcles? She stammered out. *I am... I'm not an easy catch.* Even though all she wanted to do was throw herself into his arms and have him ravage her body and her senses.

Andro smiled almost crazily and lifted his helmet bringing it back down on his head. "That is a challenge I will win." He stated out loud confidently. He looked at the others who were standing around them, watching intently. "It has been very nice to see you again Cadet Sadi." He spoke. "I hope I can have the pleasure of your company when we reach Sparta."

Elynth moved her head within inches of Sadi's and her golden eyes closed when Sadi reached up without fear and stroked the smooth scales on her snout.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *He has never lost a challenge Sadi.* She spoke with some humor knowing Andro would not break into their shielded conversation.

Sadi chuckled in the shielded connection. [Mindvoice Shielded] *Until... until this very moment I have always wondered what your words to me meant that day Elynth.* She spoke. *I don't anymore. Not after seeing him, and feeling what I do coursing through me. He won't have to work very hard.*

Elynth laughed. [Mindvoice Shielded] *Just don't make it easy on him.* Elynth brushed her snout up against Sadi's cheek gently. *We will see you on the SCIMITAR KertaGai.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *I look forward to that.* Sadi answered.

Andro continued to stare at her as he backed up slightly and climbed back into the saddle on Elynth's back. He turned and looked over to where For'mya and Gorgo stood side by side with large smiles on their faces. [Mindvoice Shielded] *You knew about this?*

For'mya grinned. [Mindvoice Shielded] *Who us?*

Andro growled in his chest and turned to look at Bren who was gazing at him waiting for orders. "Commander... I have delayed us enough. As my sister is fond of saying... let's get this party started!"

Bren grinned. "As you order Milord!"

"Elynth go!" Andro barked. With a deafening trumpet Elynth flexed her powerful legs and propelled them into the sky.

Sadi watched him intently, her hands grasping the pendant tightly in her fist as Teeria and Palta came back up to her. Teeria grasped her arms tightly turning Sadi to look at her.

"Ok... you have a lot of explaining to do!" Teeria exclaimed with a brilliant smile.

Sadi laughed and squeezed her hands as the two files began moving for the Type II.

CEKU TERTIUS SECTOR TWO FOUR LYCAVORIAN BORDER OF THE WILDS

"Moneus, tell me again why we are on this *nubous* insect infested hunk of jungle rock?"

General/Colonel Daniel Simpson asked as he lowered the small macrobinoculars from his deep brown eyes.

Daniel Simpson hadn't changed a bit from the young Navy SEAL on Earth before their worlds had changed so such. He looked no older now than when he did twenty six years ago, the only difference in his appearance being the two inch long scar on his left cheek from the blade of an Evolli. Discovering he was a werewolf, a member of a race called Lycavorians, and that his people weren't even from Earth hadn't caused him to bat an eye. His six foot five, two hundred and sixty pound frame was stretched out on the top of the ridge of the rocky hill a thousand meters high above the expanse of green and brown all around him. The vastness of the huge jungle valley below extended as far as the eye could see, hills and mountains much like the one he was currently on present all across the horizon. His wolf eyes could see for several kilometers without the aide of the binos, and even with them all he could see was green and brown with dozens of breaks in the jungle canopy. That did not make him any happier.

"Officially or unofficially?" The male voice spoke with some humor from beside him.

Danny turned and looked into the dark amber eyes.

His mother's delicious eyes.

Like his older brother Anton, Moneus Simpson was almost an exact duplicate of his father except for Anton's lighter skin shade. Easily six foot four and two hundred and forty-five pounds of rock solid ripped muscle. His dark chocolate colored skin and the two inch long elven ears were due to who his mother was, and like the remainder of his siblings, his ears were much shorter than normal elves because his elven mothers were also part Lycavorian now, due to his father's actions. Unlike his older brother Anton, Moneus chose to keep his head shaved like his father and there was nothing but smooth skin showing under the thin fabric that kept the sweat from pouring into his eyes. His dark brown mustache and goatee were trimmed as well, to precise proportions, though no one had yet figured out why his facial hair was different from the hair on his head if he had allowed it to grow. Danny looked into the eyes of his second born son and could only marvel at what the last twenty-six years had produced. He had never ever pictured himself a father, yet now he had seven healthy

and strong children and his Drow Elven/Lycavorian Mistress and mate was about to give birth to his eighth. Moneus was the second oldest at twenty-four years old, born almost exactly two years to the day after his best friend and fellow Spartan Androcles. Danny couldn't remember a time when he and Martin had ever really been apart for an extended period of time, and now that bond of brotherhood had passed to their children it seemed. At least to their sons.

He turned slightly when the red hair and lush figure of the female elf settled soundlessly to the ground between him and Moneus. Danny drew in a deep breath of her sweet cinnamon scent and smiled, for this and the scent of sweet apples was the only thing in the galaxy that caused him to bat his eyes. Anuk now was even more beautiful to him than when he had first met her, as was his Drow mate Nayeca. Motherhood agreed with them it seemed, and even after four children for Anuk and almost four for Nayeca, they looked just as delicious now as then.

"Officially this is a training exercise." Anuk spoke formally now as she lifted the binos she held.

"Yes... and unofficially we are investigating several reports of Kochab and Evolli pirates using this planet as a base of operation." Moneus finished the statement for her. "We know that entire story mother... I believe father was trying to be sarcastic since Andro left us here."

As with the Leonidas children, Moneus and his brothers and sister drew no distinction between their mothers because of the relationship they shared and continued to share even now.

"When is your father never sarcastic Moneus?" Anuk asked with a small grin.

"I'm not being sarcastic." Danny protested softly. "Marty had me bring my ship all the way out here and he promised me a steak for doing it. Not to mention quality time with this hot red headed female elf! He didn't say we'd be stuck here after Andro left!"

"He never promised you anything like that." Anuk spoke in a stern but playful voice. "He saved you from the boring task of Fleet exercises my love, not to mention writing your fitness reports, which both of you hate infinitely more than this insect infected hunk of jungle rock. And you volunteered to remain behind so Andro could meet his grandmother if I recall. I told you Moneus... your father never takes anything serious."

"That's not true." Danny protested once more. "I take you and Nayeca very serious thank you very much."

Anuk lowered her binos and looked at him with a delightful smile and twinkle in her cerulean blue eyes. "Yes you do. Though our Mistress is quite upset with you at the moment."

"Me? What did I do now?"

"We left her on Earth to come on this mission Daniel." Anuk spoke.

"Baby... she's pregnant." Danny said. "Can you imagine Nayeca trudging through this jungle seven months pregnant? That's scary even though she could probably do it with her eyes closed. She has snarled at the crewmen on *SPARTAN'S SOUL* so much, they avoid whatever deck she is on. Better that she stays in Sparta and be spoiled by my mother and sisters."

"She is having a slim beautiful pregnancy, something you should remind her of when we return. I intend to... just to get back into her good graces." Anuk stated with a smile. "She just didn't plan to have another child so soon after Odara was born."

"Odara is four years old. And that's not what she told me when we..." Danny's words stopped when Anuk leaned over and kissed him. It was a long slow lingering kiss, her cinnamon flavored tongue dancing with his and her cinnamon scent filling his head. After a long moment Anuk finished their kiss by tracing her delicious tongue along his upper lip when she leaned back.

"Husband... we will tell you anything you want to hear when you do that to us. You should know that by now." Anuk stated with a wistful voice.

Danny grinned now. "We do have fun making the little guys huh?"

"Oh yes... we certainly do." Anuk said kissing him softly once more. "Even when we aren't making the little ones. You will have to take our Mistress and I to that place on the coast that you took us before. You certainly entertained us for the entire five days."

Moneus made a soft gagging sound. "Please... could you not do that in front of me? I may become scarred by the sight of my parents making out and planning a romantic rendezvous in the jungle on this *nubous* insect infested hunk of jungle rock."

Anuk didn't turn from staring into her husband's deep brown eyes. Even after twenty-six years of being together, Anuk could not think of a moment when she did *not* want this man. She could still see those days in that tunnel so many years ago as if they had happened yesterday. She could still remember her first days after Danny had turned her. Nayeca could still remember the day she and Anuk became lovers in the traditional Drow fashion and what she thought he would do to her. His reaction had surprised her and even to this day Nayeca could not express what she felt for him in words. Nor what Anuk meant to her once Danny had turned her and made her his mate in the Elven fashion. It was something she and Nayeca talked of often when they were alone. "He has been hanging around Andro too long." Anuk spoke.

"You noticed that too huh?" Dan said with a smile.

Anuk reached out and took hold of the shoulder section of her son's black body armor. "Keep talking Moneus and I will have a little discussion with Carina about your distaste for showing affection to the one you love." She spoke leaning over to her son now.

Moneus's eyes grew a little wider. "You wouldn't dare." He said.

Anuk turned to face him completely and her smiling cerulean colored blue eyes settled on him slowly. "I'm your mother Moneus... of course I would. And don't think for an instant your mother Nayeca will disagree. You should learn from your father how to treat a woman and not just how to kill things efficiently."

She held his wide gaze for a few tortured moments longer and then leaned over to nuzzle her son's half elven ear. The love she shared with Nayeca and Daniel extended easily to all their children. While it was easy to discern who their mother was simply due to their lighter skin tone, their children saw no distinction in the least. Anuk's mother and father spoiled all of them too much as well. Moneus breathed a sigh of relief and couldn't help but smile at the show of affection.

"I will contact Martin and tell him we have nothing to report but his cranky Spartan brother who hates the jungle and his young adopted Spartan nephew who doesn't like to show affection for the female he wishes to one day claim as his own. I'm quite sure the King would be very happy to hear that about his daughter's boyfriend. Especially since we have been here for almost a week and found nothing, and he has been doing paperwork for a week. He will certainly be in a most excellent mood." Anuk chuckled softly and squeezed Moneus's leg as she got up and moved soundlessly back down the ridge.

Moneus looked at his father with wide eyes. *Were they always like that father?* He reached out within Mindvoice.

Danny grinned. *Boy... if it wasn't for your two mothers I wouldn't be the man I am. Is Carina the one for you Moneus?*

Moneus nodded quickly. *Without question father. I can hardly wait until next month to make a claim to Uncle Martin for her hand. I haven't seen her in two years... I guess part of me is worried that she no longer feels the same way as when we last spoke.*

Danny nodded slowly. *When I discovered your mother, it was the same way. Carina is cut from the same mold Moneus. The same as both your mothers and Isabella. If she feels the same for you son, she'll be waiting for you when you land. And if everything I hear is true... she does. When you find a woman like that Moneus my boy... you grab on tight and never let go. You love her with all that you are in and out of your bed. And if she wants to kiss you in public, I don't care who is watching, you lay a lip locker on her that will curl her toes and blister her hair. If she's doing it in public Moneus... it's because she's telling everyone around her that you belong to her. Do her the honor of doing the same. And remember, Carina is half vampire, which means she takes emotion that much more serious. If you don't, not only will I beat you, Martin will get a shot or two in as well.*

Moneus stared at his father for a long moment before nodding with a smile. *I believe I will do as you say father.*

Danny nodded. *That's my boy. Now watch the damn jungle... my eyes are getting tired.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Daniel my love?* Anuk's musical voice spoke.

Danny made no show that Anuk was reaching out to him, though Moneus could undoubtedly feel the tremors in Mindvoice. All of his children with Anuk and Nayeca were exceptionally powerful with Mindvoice, Moneus even becoming a ranking member of the *Durcunusaan* even at such a supremely young age.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *What's up baby?*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *When we get back to Earth my love... I will have to give you something special for that little bit of advice to our son.*

Danny grinned. [Mindvoice Shielded] *Well now... what did you have in that beautiful mind of yours gorgeous?*

Anuk laughed softly. [Mindvoice Shielded] *I'll surprise you husband... but you must bathe first. We both smell terrible.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *I like the sounds of that. We'll bathe together and we'll have to...* Danny saw Moneus turn his bins intently and adjust the setting to zoom in. He dropped them quickly as if not believing what he had seen and then brought them back to his eyes. He felt the even surge in his son's body as adrenalin entered his bloodstream. His son had seen combat before on any number of border skirmishes and missions like this, as well as the last few major conflicts of the Evolli Border War beside Androcles to include the slaughterhouse on Alba Tau. That was a day and night that Danny tried his best to forget.

It seemed there were quite a few out there that didn't like what the Lycavorian Union had. *Anuk... hold off on contacting Marty... I think we may have something here.* Danny leaned closer to his son. "Moneus?" He whispered softly.

"Ten o'clock father." Moneus replied just as softly. "I'm... father... I want to say I'm looking at a dozen High Coven Immortal troops that are moving through the breaks in the high canopy."

"High Coven Immortals!" Danny gasped bringing his bins to his eyes. "We haven't seen or heard from the High Coven in over a decade." Danny brought his bins up. "Where?"

"Four point three kilometers, bearing two nine three degrees." Moneus replied instantly.

Danny focused and adjusted his sights and then the picture of the twelve Immortals burst into view through the next break in the canopy. They were moving almost casually in single file, their weapons slung over their shoulders, the hilts of their ritual swords sticking above the dark gray uniforms they wore. Three pairs of two were carrying large crates between them.

"Well bite me in the ass and call me stupid! This boring little intelligence mission just got a whole lot more interesting." Danny spoke.

Moneus turned his head sharply to the left when the soft chirping noise reached their wolf sensitive ears, looking back down the ridge. *Father! The remote sensors have detected a patrol of Kochab and Evolli moving towards us from the other direction.*

Anuk! Danny called out.

I'm on it! She declared. They both watched as she moved like a phantom across the natural bowl in the terrain where their equipment was and settled fearlessly beside the large ground sensor array. Anuk crawled on her belly to the edge and used her own binoculars now. *He's right. I count probably fifteen. A mix of Kochab and Evolli. All of them armed and carrying some kind of crates between them.*

Moneus turned to his father. "An exchange of some kind?" He asked softly. "It has to be."

"Yeah... question is... an exchange of what?" Danny spoke.

"Father their paths will bring them here." Moneus spoke. "If they stay on the direction they are heading... they'll meet just at the base of this hill. We could..."

Danny nodded and grinned at his son's sense of tactics. The more time he spent around Androcles... the wiser he became.

"Yes they will... and yes we can." He spoke. "How bout we plan a welcoming party. I'll call your grandfather." Danny stretched out on his back and tapped the internal COM unit on his body armor. "Eagle One to Elf One. We have company."

CEKU TERTIUS

"I love it when a plan comes together!" Danny shouted as he toed the corpse of the dead Immortal with his combat boot.

It had come together quite brilliantly in fact.

Danny expected no less when Anuk's father was involved.

General/Colonel Vengal was the second most senior elven officer within the Lycavorian Union now, behind only General/Colonel Tareif of Earth. He was Anuk's father, and over the years had easily come to consider Nayeca just as much a daughter to him as Anuk was. That they were both mated to the one man who held his undying respect and love made it all the better.

Danny's command consisted of the elite troopers and pilots of the Lycavorian Union that were not already assigned to Martin's division. A combination of *Durcunusaan* and regular Spartan Centurions, as well as Vengal's superior half vampire Drow elf scouts and intelligence units. Behind only Martin's 1st Spartan Attack Division, Danny's 2nd Spartan Expeditionary Division was the largest force in the Union military. He drove them, himself included, mercilessly, and the men and women of all species that called the 2nd their home would have it no other way. Like their King, Daniel Simpson could incite almost fanatic loyalty to himself with his style of command, and the 2nd Expeditionary Division was one of the five most sought after postings within the entire Lycavorian military. It was made all the better because the King and their commander were brothers in everything but blood, and no matter what happened, you could rest assured the 2nd SED would be involved.

Vengal had unleashed his Drow vampire scouts on the Immortal column, while a detail of *Durcunusaan* under his grandson had hit the Evolli and Kochab mercenary column. Their broken and bloody bodies were all that remained. The men and women of the Lycavorian Union did not take prisoners unless ordered to do so, and those orders were very rare indeed.

Moneus squatted down beside one of the singed crates the Evolli had been carrying.

"That is what they were carrying Moneus?" Anuk asked as she came up behind her son.

Moneus nodded and slashed down powerfully with his *Nehtes*, the angled tip of the near unbreakable spear slicing through the locking mechanism as if it was butter. "Time to find out what it is they were going to exchange."

Moneus used his boot to kick open the cover and his eyes grew a little wider. He heard his mother gasp.

"Father!" He shouted quickly moving to the next container. It was severely burned beyond recognition, but the butts of several of the weapons still visible. He looked up to see other members of his *Durcunusaan* detachment doing the same as he was, inspecting the bodies and containers. He turned as his father started towards him and retrieved one of the weapons from the crate at his feet.

Danny's eyes grew wider as he approached his son and he caught the weapon when Moneus flipped it to him. "A T19?" He gasped looking at his son.

"Eight of them per crate." Moneus spoke motioning to the remains of the crates the Evolli and Kochab had carried. "Five of the crates have been destroyed... but this one was only singed." Moneus looked up as his grandfather approached his eyes wide at what Moneus held.

All of them had seen the T19 before.

The Evolli had designed the weapon to fight dragons and their riders. Essentially they were advanced small caliber missile launchers fed from a circular drum. Elynth and Torma had both taken full blasts from one of these weapons, the fragments so close that they managed to penetrate their psychic shielding and cut deeply into their flesh, injuring both Martin and Androcles as well as knocking them from the sky. Jeth had been slightly singed by one carrying a plasma type round as well. The Evolli had managed to kill twenty-three dragons and their riders, all members of *Mjolnir's Hand* with this type of weapon, and they injured countless others. It had taken almost three years until Benjamin O'Connor and some enterprising engineers had come up with another use for the incredibly pliable Dragon Armor. That use was a set of actual dragon armor sheets that could be layered across every dragon's neck and back and secured with clasps. The only unprotected portion of their bodies was their wings, but unless shredded completely, their wings were also the most resilient part of their bodies and would heal over time. The layered sets of armor had saved countless more dragon lives and earned Ben O'Conner the eternal gratitude of the Elder Mother Arzoal, and every living dragon. To the members of *Mjolnir's Hand* and the Royal family who fought in the war, Ben and his engineers had become honored members of their small group.

They turned as a *Durcunusaan* dragged the surviving Evolli warrior by his dreadlocks over to where they all stood. The Evolli cradled his useless right arm; his yellowish blood leaking from the *Nehtes* would in his shoulder and the two P190A3 burn marks. His eyes were wide as he stared up from the ground at the two men who were well known among the Evolli. Together with Martin and Androcles, the four of them had combined to kill more Evolli than any others during their war.

“Dark skinned and his vile offspring!” The Evolli hissed. “I should have known! Only you and your foul son would be insane enough to attack through the jungle canopy! Not even the scum you call King would do such a thing.”

Danny and Moneus looked at each other quickly. There were gasps of stunned surprise as Anuk staggered back. The others could only watch in awe as Danny’s *Nehtes* extended in the millisecond blink of an eye and Moneus *Nehtes* flashed in the sunlight. Then the Evolli was screaming in agony at the *Nehtes* that now impaled his opposite shoulder, and the *Nehtes* blade that had driven completely through his already injured shoulder. Only Vengal stood without an expression on his face, for he had seen the speed his daughter’s mate and his grandson could move with, and they had suffered more than any of those present at the hands of the Evolli during the war.

They had almost died that day on Alba Tau, attempting to lead a unit of *Durcunusaan* through the high mountains and deep timber to reach their King and Prince in that valley of death. They had disobeyed orders to do this without blinking an eye. They had come under a vicious ambush themselves; cutting their unit off from those they were trying to rescue and suffering severe casualties. Vengal had toured the sights of both battles two days later, the blood still inches thick on the ground, the imprints of where the dragons had lain, of where Daniel and Moneus had lain injured. It wasn’t until the sun had come up that anyone realized Daniel and Moneus and their unit had made it to within six hundred meters of their dear friends and brothers before being stopped. Vengal knew it was the bloodiest and most savage battle that he had ever heard about or seen the aftermath of and part of him thanked the gods he had not been there to experience it himself.

Danny leaned over twisting his *Nehtes* in the shoulder of the Evolli, his eyes changing to the yellow/gold of the wolf inside him, Moneus eyes taking on a black outline around his dark amber orbs as he too allowed the wolf in him to come to the surface.

“Why are you selling these weapons to the Immortals?” Danny screamed. “Has the High Coven returned? Tell me!”

“I will... I will tell you nothing!” The Evolli howled out as Moneus twisted his own blade viciously.

Danny’s cruel smile was horrific to look at. “Oh no my Evolli friend... you will tell me all I want to know!” He wrenched the *Nehtes* savagely once more before ripping it out of the Evolli’s flesh causing him to scream in even more agony, until a hammer like kick from Moneus to his head dropped him into blackness.

Danny turned as Anuk stepped up to him and pressed her lithe supple frame against his, nuzzling his throat and sending him calming pulses through her aura. Moneus watched his father’s reaction to his mother and saw his anger bleed off quickly as he nuzzled her in return his own eyes closing.

Moneus took a deep breath and then closed and opened his eyes and saw his father take a deep breath. Then his normal colored eyes were back and he turned to Vengal.

“Daniel... you and my grandson here... you have a serious emotional issue with these Evolli scum.” Vengal stated with a straight face. “Maybe the two of you should get counseling or something?”

His words hung out there for a long moment and then Danny was the first one to burst out laughing. It wasn’t what Vengal said, it was the way he had said it and the look on his face. Moneus and Anuk were next to burst out laughing and then everyone was laughing as the adrenalin high of combat began to bleed off for all of them.

“What about ugly here?” Anuk finally spoke still chuckling and toeing the unconscious Evolli mercenary with her boot. None too gently either.

“Fix his ass and take him with us.” Danny spoke with a smile. “We’ll have a nice chat on *SPARTAN’S SOUL*.”

“Just don’t expect me to use pain killers.” Anuk said pulling her bag off her shoulder. “After what this scum and his friends did to you and our son, he’ll be lucky if I don’t let Nayeca skin him alive!”

“Mother... that is not necessary.” Moneus spoke quickly.

Danny chuckled. “You’re getting cruel in your advanced years baby!”

Anuk snorted at him as she knelt next to the Evolli. “I’ll show you advanced years.” She snapped. “Old man!”

Moneus moaned and rolled his eyes.

SCIMITAR
LEONIDAS IIA-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER
COMMAND SHIP FOR PRINCE ANDROCLES
9TH SPARTAN ATTACK DIVISION

The *SCIMITAR* was four thousand three hundred meters long, shaped like a dual spear head and one of the first of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers to come into service. It was several hundred meters longer than the standard ship, with a slightly more advanced engine plant than earlier models, and carrying slightly more firepower but for the most part it was the same ship. Thirty five of this class *LEONIDAS IIA* now served alongside the forty-three original *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers. The increase in length was due to the fact that many of the corridors and rooms were now able to accommodate whatever dragons might be on board, and there were two enormous lifts within the hanger bay that allowed the dragons to make their way to all but the top three decks of the ship. It was equipped with one hundred and thirty of the new MK9C Plasma Beam arrays dotting the superstructure, ten forward TH57 Proton torpedo launchers and eight aft launchers. Adding to that firepower were forty-six of the newest Mark 22B Anti-ship missile launchers, twenty-three per side. The *SCIMITAR* had a Union Fleet standard complement of five squadrons of the T9E *TEMPEST*-Class Fighter Interceptors and four squadrons of M4B *DEVASTATOR*-Class Fighter/Bombers, along with three *STRIKER DTs* and twenty-four *STRIKER ATRs*, the newest *STRIKER* class to begin fleet service as of last year.

The *SCIMITAR* traveled now with only its standard peacetime Strike Wing complement of five *NOVA*-Class Attack Cruisers, five of the newer *ADMIRAL CENEU*-Class Fast Attack Heavy Destroyers and five *AUTUMN MOON TYPE II*-Class Attack Frigates. The other ships and many of the soldiers under Androcles direct command were based on Earth. The 21st Spartan Attack Division, like his father and Uncle's personal commands, was a highly sought after posting. The men and women who served in the 21st almost never opted out of the unit, and many had turned down promotions or advancements to remain with the unit for several more years. Androcles had pushed for his brother Resumar to get his own command like this one, and plans were already in the works for that to happen within the next year. Denali was working to have his own as well, and learning all he could to accomplish this within three more years. They had learned one thing from both their father and their older brother, and that was patience usually paid off in droves, and now they were still in a learning process.

The recovery of Androcles and his brothers and sisters had been an experience that no one would ever forget. The Type II transports were so large they did not need to retract the sides or tops of the ships as the *STRIKER DTs* did, and as everyone stood around on the metal stairs and walkways leading up into the passenger transport section, they could hear the trumpets of nearly forty dragons as they bellowed their approval as first Jeth, then Cemath, Aradace, Tharua and finally Elynth were brought on board with nary a problem. Arrarn and Normya kept the ship rock solid as For'mya watched proudly from the engineer's station, while Gorgo kept covering and uncovering her eyes as each dragon and rider were brought on board.

Sadi had watched with Teeria and Palta as they all landed with exacting skill on the Type II, but the only one she was really concerned with was Androcles and Elynth. She had squeezed Teeria's hand almost painfully as she watched Elynth glide in close to the rear of the hovering ship, her wingspan enormous as her curved talons settled to the non-skid deck plating of the landing ramp as they had hundreds of times before. Sadi watched as Androcles and his siblings then gathered together quickly in a small huddle with their five dragons as the rear doors of the Type II closed and then Arrarn was taking them into orbit to meet with the *SCIMITAR*.

Many of them had never been on board a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser and were glued to the few windows as they entered the cavernous landing bay and saw the ground crews and all manner of fighters and fighter bombers parked neatly.

Gorgo remained on the upper deck with the cadets and military personnel as Andro and his siblings stayed with their dragons. She looked up when the ship lurched slightly and Bren got to his feet.

"Lady Gorgo... on behalf of the *Durcunusaan* and Prince Androcles I welcome you to the *SCIMITAR*." He spoke proudly.

Gorgo smiled and touched the man's shoulder. "Thank you Commander Bren."

“We have arranged for a short briefing and question session in the flight room for your cadets and the arriving personnel by the Princesses as I said on the surface.” Bren told her. “Would you prefer to remain with your cadets or be escorted to your quarters?”

“I’ll stay with the cadets until they get settled in Bren thank you.” Gorgo spoke warmly and squeezing his arm.

Bren nodded. “As you wish Milady. This way.” He spoke motioning with his arm.

Gorgo turned to the Cadets as many of them were already eagerly reaching for their bags. “Cadets... please follow Commander Bren and do not deviate from his direction.”

It went quickly and soon everyone was sitting inside a large briefing center connected to the landing bay, dozens of comfortable chairs all facing the large star chart and podium. Most of the chairs had been filled by many of the regular fleet personnel and Spartan Centurions from the upper deck of the transport and the cadets moved along the aisle and around the back wall.

Gorgo turned quickly when she heard Eliani and Lisisa burst into the room without care of protocol or who saw them. They were attired in the standard dark gray fleet uniform now which consisted of black combat boots, fatigue pants and dark t-shirt with fatigue top. They had removed their body armor quickly once onboard since both of them hated to wear it.

There had been a push some fifteen years ago to relax the restrictions of the younger Lycavorian females within the Union. Many of them were reaching their Coming of Age far sooner than had happened in the past, and it was determined that the size of the Union and the constant interaction with others from different races had slowly altered that hormonal balance in Lycavorian females over the centuries. Many were now reaching their Coming of Age in their late teens and early twenties and the push began to have the laws changed to accommodate that fact. Martin and the Queens had supported it from the outset, the medical information presented was just too solid and accurate to ignore. Anja and Eurin were solidly for it, and when all was said and done and everything was presented to the Senate by Dysea and Deia in language and terms they could understand, the vote had been unanimous.

Eliani was being pursued by several males, both on Apo Prime and Sparta, Gorgo knew. She had no interest in the few males from Hadaria who had shown desire in her. They were too laid back in her opinion, and Eliani wanted passion and excitement in her life. As for the others, Gorgo knew that Eliani and Nyla would never allow a man to come between them, they were far too much in love, and of the ones Gorgo knew of, none would even cause Eliani or Nyla to pause before dismissing them. Eliani and Nyla had been together for four years now, and quite surprisingly they balanced each other quite well. Nyla held her title of *Durcunusaan* Team Leader, but she had become so much more over the past four years that she was now considered a member of their family. While she and Eliani maintained a villa in Gytheio together, their apartment within the villa in Sparta was a combination of both their tastes. It was not at all uncommon to see Nyla with Martin’s *Durcunusaan* detail when he moved about Earth. Martin had never attempted to help Nyla’s career along, though he could have on many occasions for he knew Nyla was proud of her accomplishments, as were her parents. Her parents were frequent visitors to the villa in Sparta, and they were among the few vampires that actually took the time to travel to Thermopylae and visit the memorial there for Martin’s father. An act which had endeared Nyla to all of Eliani’s family. When Nyla and Eliani had become involved and it became serious, all of them couldn’t have been happier.

Lisisa was also quite popular and attracted males wherever she went. That she was part vampire never entered the thoughts of any male, for it was discovered soon after she arrived with her father after her rescue that her wolf genes were far more dominant within her. She was a stunning raven colored female wolf when she shifted, but the vampire genes in her body allowed her to use the skills of a vampire when she was in normal form just as easily. Skills that her mother Isabella had helped her to develop and refine to perfection over the years. There had been no question in Isabella’s eyes when she first saw Lisisa, for she saw a younger version of herself, and with Dysea, Anja, For’mya and Aricia helping her, they had given her all the love Lisisa had never had. Surprisingly... despite her ravishing beauty Gorgo thought, there was not a man in her life.

Malic tore his eyes from where Sadi was standing and ignoring him and watched Eliani and Lisisa enter and his eyes became very interested when they settled on the burgundy haired Princess.

Malic was not a stupid man... in fact he scored very high on all his physical entrance tests for *Durcunusaan* enrollment. Physically... he was a perfect specimen of a Spartan, six foot two and two hundred

and twenty-six pounds of ripped muscle, and he had always been better than those around him. His only problem was not seeing that those around him were for the most part young and inexperienced Centurions. He had a large ego and a bad case of arrogance due to this. His father was a General officer within the fleet and his mother worked for the Senate as a Liaison. He sat up straighter in his chair upon seeing Eliani. While both of them were drop dead beautiful, he instantly decided Eliani's numerous curves and her scent stirred his passion even more for some reason. Looking at them now, Princess Lisisa had larger breasts, but there was something in Eliani's fern green eyes that made Malic desire to see more. A certain wildness in them that appealed to him in a way he had never felt, and the sweetness of her willow and peach scent was tickling his nostrils and senses in a way he had never felt before this day. Perhaps he would... Lady Gorgo stepping into his line of sight caused him to change his thoughts quickly.

Gorgo embraced them both tightly, inhaling deeply once more of her grandchildren. She touched their faces and smiled brilliantly. Eliani and Lisisa had always been very close as Eliani grew, and even more so when they chose to conduct their Agoges together. Even after Eliani had found Nyla, Lisisa was always included in their lives.

"You two grow more beautiful by the day." She spoke softly pulling first Eliani and then Lisisa into her arms once more. She held Eliani's hand and reached up to stroke Lisisa's cheek. "Where is your reckless brother now?"

"He was in the middle of a transmission with grandfather back on Apo Prime. Uncle Daniel contacted grandfather as we were coming up and he wanted him to bring some items to Sparta and had to catch him before he left." Lisisa answered easily, reaching up and squeezing her grandmother's hand. "He'll meet us in the forward lounge for dinner. You are hungry I hope?"

"Starved." Gorgo answered. "Is something wrong?"

Eliani shook her head quickly. "Not at all."

Gorgo looked at her granddaughters and shook her head. "You two have learned how to lie far too well." She spoke with a grin. "I must talk to your parents about this inbred skill that is appearing in all my grandchildren."

Eliani and Lisisa chuckled as Lisisa reached up to pull her long raven colored hair into a tighter pony tail. "I'll give the briefing Eliani. You won the bet." She spoke.

Gorgo looked at them puzzlement in her eyes. "What's this?"

Eliani grinned and squeezed Lisisa's arm. "We bet if she would come or not. I said yes, Lisisa said no. I won. She has to give the briefing now. She's like father and Andro... she hates this sort of stuff."

Gorgo smiled as Lisisa rolled her eyes and moved for the podium. The *Durcunusaan* commander saw this and looked out over the mass of cadets and assorted personnel. "Attention all! Princess Lisisa will be giving you your initial briefing!" Bren snapped.

His words echoed through the briefing room and all of them jumped to their feet, and came to rigid positions of attention, the cadets more so than the fleet personnel. Lisisa stepped up to the podium and leaned close to the *Durcunusaan* commander.

"I hate when you do that Bren." She whispered.

Bren smiled back. "Yes Princess... I know."

Lisisa shook her head slowly and looked over to her sister. *I'll get you for this.* She spoke in Mindvoice.

Eliani grinned at her. *I'm sure... but you lost the bet.*

I always lose the bets. Lisisa complained.

Lisisa turned back to those in the room and waved her hand for them to return to their seats. Her forest green eyes fell across the men and women until they came to rest on Sadi, standing in the back. She had to admit... Sadi was a stunning beauty and Lisisa was also very surprised at the fact she was a very strong Tier Six Mindvoicer if the shields she felt were any indication. Shields that Sadi was holding in place without effort.

Since the First Oracle had returned to their people with her father's actions on Ukwav so many years ago, Mindvoice skills had become more commonly practiced among their people, another move that her father ushered in that brought them closer to their natural instincts. The *Feravomir* had instituted the Tier rating system she had used during her centuries in Sparta, classifying all Mindvoicers on tier levels. Most Lycavorians within the Union never advanced this skill past Tier Four due to the intense training required to be able to use Mindvoice skills properly and safely at higher levels. There were tens of millions who had reached Tier Five

due to their duties and training they had received, but there were perhaps only a few million who had progressed to Tier Six status, the majority of them within the military. Members of *Mjolnir's Hand* and the *Durcunusaan* were all Tier Six Mindvoicers, allowing them to bond more easily with the dragons they rode, creating a powerful bonded pair. The *Durcunusaan*, Wolves of the Blood, had been created by General Vengal and General Vistr as the Royal Guard. Part of their training was to conduct combat actions against dragons if called upon, and this facilitated the need for them to be Tier Six Mindvoicers. Every member of the Royal Family was far above even a Tier Six level due to their blood and their ties to her father and his Queens. Even their grandparents, who had at one time only been strong Tier Fives, were now beyond most Tier Six individuals. Eliani, Lisisa herself and their siblings would be regarded as the very top echelon of perhaps two dozen Tier Six Mindvoicers, while her father, her mother Aricia and her brother Andro could not be measured by any known means.

Sadi appeared to be on a level with her and Eliani even though she shielded it very well. Lisisa didn't doubt that every *Durcunusaan* on the ship had felt her come aboard, as well as their dragons. This was the Sadi that Elynth and Andro talked of so often when they had down time. This was the Sadi that kept her brother from taking a mate. Androcles had had lovers in his life, four of them to be exact, but none of them had been serious relationships because her brother for all intents and purposes had chosen Sadi long ago as the female he wanted above all others. Lisisa had to admit... she was breathtaking.

Lisisa tore her eyes away quickly from Sadi and took a deep breath. "Well... first of all, let me welcome you to the *SCIMITAR*." She began. "This ship is a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser, officially under the command of my brother Androcles. The senior ULU Fleet Officer is Star Captain Sa'sur. She is likely the most unorthodox female elf officer you will ever meet and she can make the *SCIMITAR* dance at her words. My first and only suggestion with her is, don't get on her bad side. You will have free reign to go where you wish for the most part while on the *SCIMITAR*, and I encourage you to explore as much as you want. There are only three places that my brother Androcles has declared strictly off limits to anyone who is not a crew member of the *SCIMITAR*. The first one is the last three sections of deck nine where our personal quarters are located, as well as several Mindvoice meditation chambers. The second and third places are the dragon pens in the main hanger bay that you saw as you were docking and then the entire aft compartment of deck ten beyond section twenty-six. That part of deck ten is used exclusively for our dragon bond mates and those that are coming to Earth with us and the access is severely limited. The dragon pens in the landing bay only because our bond mates have learned to dodge and weave amongst all the activity there and someone who is not familiar with the ship might be injured. The other places are the usual secure stations you will find on any ship."

"Will they... will they accidentally eat someone Milady?" A female cadet blurted out the question a look of concern on her face.

Lisisa and Eliani chuckled loudly at the question and Eliani moved up next to her sister. "No... they will not eat you Cadet." Eliani replied now with a grin. "If you didn't notice as you were approaching, the *SCIMITAR* is several hundred meters longer than the typical *LEONIDAS II*. Almost all of the corridors have been enlarged so that our bond mates can go where they wish. Our quarters on deck nine are directly above the aft section of deck ten so that we can spend as much time with them as possible. Unlike our parent's dragons, Tharua, Jeth and especially our brother's bonded dragon Elynth are rather introverted. They are uncomfortable around people they don't know. Cemath and Aradace are more social, but not by very much. We tell any visitors to the *SCIMITAR* exactly what we are telling you. Now that we have thirty-two dragons that are accompanying us to Earth, we certainly don't want anyone to get stepped on."

"Of course... we don't get many visitors either." Lisisa spoke with a smile. "So we are probably just as excited as all of you."

Eliani nodded. "That's the truth."

Their banter brought a soft round of laughter from everyone gathered before Lisisa continued. Lisisa turned back to them. "You will probably notice that most of us do not wear rank insignia on our uniforms. That is something our brother does purposely so that everyone is treated with the same respect. You never know who you might be insulting with your words or actions, so you are respectful to all around you. I hate these types of briefings... and I'm sorry no... I won't take any questions. I'll leave that to my sister."

Eliani looked at her quickly and Lisisa grinned as she stepped away. *Got you.* Lisisa spoke within Mindvoice.

Oh... that is so not fair! Eliani barked out.

Gorgo turned when she saw and heard Sadi chuckle softly to herself, others turning to look at her strangely. She smiled as Eliani looked at the gathered people.

“Ok... maybe a couple questions.” Eliani spoke watching as several hands shot up, most of them from the group of cadets. Her eyes fell upon and looked at the very handsome Spartan in the fourth row, admiring his looks. He was tall and had deep blue eyes unlike Eliani had ever seen. She let her gaze linger on him for a long moment before she pointed to one young male cadet.

“Yes?”

“Have you seen combat Lady Eliani?” He asked.

Eliani sighed softly at the question. She nodded her head slowly. “We have fought with our bond mates and our brothers Androcles, Resumar and Denali in the Evolli War and several border disputes yes.” She answered. “Our brother Arrarn and our sister Carina joined us in the last year of the war and have been with us since.”

“Is it true the Prince and his dragon killed hundreds of Evolli in that last battle?” Another cadet blurted out.

Eliani maintained her composure easily. “My brother Androcles and Elynth will bear the scars of the Evolli War for the rest of their lives.” She spoke evenly. “It is not something we speak of freely so if you have an opportunity to speak with my brother... it is not a question you should ask him. He harbors a great deal of animosity towards the Evolli for their actions. As do my father and my mother Dysea.”

“Will we see the Princes while we are on board Princess Eliani?” Another female cadet asked.

Eliani smiled. “You may. My brothers are very busy as I’m sure you are aware. Though Captain Sa’sur runs this ship, she and my brother are very close and they share the work load for the most part. If you do see him or the others, they will either be with Elynth or their dragons in the pens or in one of the gyms on deck six working out. They are obsessive about working out every day. And no... before anyone asks, they have not taken mates, nor do they have someone in their lives at the moment. Except for Elynth and their dragons of course. However... that is going to change rather quickly I’m sure.”

“Do you and Princess Lisisa always travel with Prince Androcles?” A female cadet asked this question.

Eliani nodded quickly. “For the most part yes. It is said that Resumar will be getting his own command next year and I imagine Normya and Zarah will transfer with him since Normya flies his *DT*, and Zarah is not only an exceptional fighter, but a very competent engineer as well. Carina will be heading back to Apo Prime next year to enroll at the Advanced Tactics University. When she finishes that I imagine she will return here. She and Andro are usually the ones who put our training schedules together anyway. Right now she is the Tactical Officer for Andro’s section of *Mjolnir’s Hand*.”

“She doesn’t ride a dragon though?” A voice echoed.

Eliani shook her head. “She hasn’t bonded with a dragon... there is a difference. She is quite capable of taking any of our Bond Mates and riding them. They would be limited in what they could do somewhat... but she is a fully qualified rider. All of us have been riding dragons since we were old enough to walk. Something which gave our grandmother fits because she feared something terrible would happen.” Eliani spoke turning to look at Gorgo.

Gorgo shrugged. “It is my right.” She barked.

Eliani and Lisisa laughed. “It is the same for Arrarn, Normya and Zarah. Besides... when we go into battle, Carina prefers to be on the ground. She is much more lethal on the ground.” Eliani said with a smile and twinkle in her eye. That small bit of information was in fact very accurate. “Lisisa, Denali and I will most likely stay with Andro here on the *SCIMITAR*. We make a good team. Androcles is the best big brother anyone could have.”

“Isn’t... isn’t Princess Lisisa much older than the Prince though?” The same female asked.

“My life did not truly begin until our father found me and brought me home.” Lisisa replied softly stepping back to stand next to Eliani. No one but Gorgo saw their fingers clasped together behind the podium in a show of support and she smiled. “Age wise I may be older, but wisdom and experiences and the depth of his bond with Elynth have made our brother far older than I in many ways. In some ways... in some ways it is a burden for him. To know that we all look to him as so many others do. He does not think of it as a burden however... much like our father does not... and that is why we all cherish him so.”

“Princess... doesn’t it... doesn’t it get confusing to have so many you call mother?” A male cadet asked. Bren stepped forward quickly. “That is not a question that concerns you Cadet!” He barked.

Eliani smiled and placed her hand on his shoulder. “It’s ok Bren.” She spoke. “It’s a fair and honest question.” Eliani turned back to the cadet. “I imagine it might be confusing to some who have known only one mother and father in their lifetimes. For me, for Lisisa and Androcles and all of our brothers and sisters, we don’t look at it like that. My mother is Queen Anja, Resumar and Normya’s mother is Queen Dysea, Denali and Andro are from our mother Aricia, Carina and Zarah from our mother Isabella. Arrarn is from our mother For’mya...” Eliani saw many shake their heads in confusion and she laughed. “Yes I know it can be confusing, especially now with our younger siblings getting bigger. As I said we don’t look at it like that. All of us, my brothers and sisters are part of a whole. We don’t distinguish because to us there is nothing to distinguish from. Our parents made it clear to us when we were very small... blood before all else. It is what we have known all of our lives, and it is as natural for us as the act of breathing; so to answer your question no it isn’t confusing for us. They all speak with the same voice.”

Eliani smiled. “Please... feel free to explore the ship... once we pass through the Gate it will be a very smooth ride. Commanders Bren and Famus will show you all where you will be staying.”

“Do you train in the gym as well Princess?” Malic asked quickly coming to his feet as he gazed at her. The questioned sounded stupid after he heard himself ask it, but he remained standing and fought down the embarrassed look so that it didn’t show.

Eliani looked at the Spartan she had admired before. He was tall and muscled she could see that even in his uniform and she smelled his driftwood and ocean scent filter to her. It was a very enticing scent and Eliani felt a small surge of pleasure in her belly at his scent. She smiled at him brightly. “Sometimes.” She replied.

Gorgo stepped forward quickly shaking her head. “Cadets... my granddaughters are very busy so since there are no more questions let me chase them out of here.”

Eliani smiled. “See... she still chases us around even when we are grown.”

Gorgo couldn’t help but smile. “We will turn this back over to Commander Bren before my granddaughters find themselves being chased around the ship by their angry grandmother.”

The *Durcunusaan* commander stepped up bowing his head to Eliani and Lisisa as mostly the females and cadets laughed softly now. “Thank you Princess.” He turned to the gathered men and women stepping around the podium as Eliani and Lisisa made their way out of the briefing room giggling to each other after both of them squeezed Gorgo’s hand. Bren appeared to be looking for someone and his eyes settled on the cadets in the back. “Cadet Sadi?”

Sadi jerked slightly and turned red even under her tan as dozens of eyes went to where she stood. Being singled out by the *Durcunusaan* usually did not mean good things. She moved forward awkwardly, her shoulder bag banging against several people who she attempted to apologize to. She could see Malic’s eyes on her clearly. “I’m... I’m Cadet Sadi Commander.” She spoke quickly thinking he had somehow gotten her in trouble already.

“You are a registered Tier Six Mindvoicer, are you not Cadet?” He barked.

Sadi saw eyes go wider at this. Very few people knew she was a Tier Six Mindvoicer and it was not something she advertised either. She saw Malic’s eyes darken at this information, but not as much as she thought they would. She forced a smile. “Yes... yes Commander.”

Bren held up a small red key like object with a black lanyard attached to it. “You will need this Cadet.” He spoke tossing the object towards her. Sadi caught it quickly and looked at it. “It will allow you access to the Mindvoice chambers on deck nine.”

Sadi looked at him confused. “I... I thought deck nine was restricted?” She asked as murmurs swept through the crowd and more of them looked at her.

“Apparently not for you Cadet. There are five Tier Six Mindvoicers on this ship outside of the Princes and Princesses, none more powerful than Prince Androcles and we all use the chambers.” Bren replied. He tilted his head slightly and everyone saw him nod as if to some unspoken direction. “You also have a visitor outside the briefing room when we are done here Cadet.”

Sadi looked stunned. “A... a visitor? Commander... I don’t know...” She asked.

“Commander I’m sure Elynth can show Cadet Sadi to her quarters when they have finished saying hello to each other again.” Gorgo spoke from the side. “It has been some time since they last saw each other.”

Sadi's jungle green eyes grew wide when Gorgo said that, the eyes of most of the cadets and regular military personal going wide as well. None wider than Malic's however. Sadi moved quickly towards the entrance to the briefing room and not even noticing that Bren nodded and heads were turning quickly. Sadi walked quickly out of the briefing room as the armored steel cover over the landing bay view window lowered and exposed the interior of the landing bay for all those in the briefing room. It also exposed the enormous scaled muscular bulk of the soft obsidian black dragon standing in the corridor. Sadi didn't see any of the cadets and centurions watching with stunned expressions as Elynth stepped right up to her.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Hello again KertaGai.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Elynth?* Sadi asked stepping towards her slowly.

Elynth's soft musical voice echoed in her head. [Mindvoice Shielded] *It has been too long, and I wanted to introduce you to the others.*

Sadi's wide eyes took in the huge head and long neck, not to mention the thick muscular body and wickedly curved talons. Elynth was resting fully on the deck, her golden eyes focused squarely on Sadi.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Elynth... I don't know if the Commander will allow it?*

Elynth snorted and moved closer to the door, her thick neck extending out and her head passing through the hatchway and into the room. Sadi heard the gasps and grunts from many in the room and she couldn't help but smile as those closest to the door scrambled back. Bren didn't bat an eye at this intrusion and turned to the dragon he had worked beside for the last nine years, for they trusted each other completely.

"Elynth?" He asked.

Commander Bren... I will escort Sadi to her quarters if that is acceptable to you. Elynth spoke evenly. *We know each other well, and I would like to introduce her to the others.*

Bren nodded without hesitation. "Very well Elynth. Deck eight, section four. I have her bunked with two others in cabin nineteen."

Thank you Commander. I will make sure she does not get lost.

The gathered cadets and personnel watched as Elynth withdrew her head from the room and turned her massive bulk easily in the corridor. No one except Gorgo had heard Elynth's end of the conversation since Elynth rarely spoke using anything less than Tier Six abilities. She had taken on Androcles trait of being very private. She snatched up Sadi's bags in her tooth filled maw and they began walking down the corridor together. Bren grinned and shook his head.

"Commander Bren?" The male voice asked.

Bren turned and saw the Spartan *Enomotarch* Malic standing in front of him once again. "Yes?"

"Sir... I thought we weren't supposed to mingle with the dragons." Malic spoke his voice carrying a note of smugness to it.

Bren nodded. "You aren't supposed to mingle with them *Enomotarch* Malic." He spoke with humor in his voice. "Unless they consider you a friend, which Elynth apparently does with Cadet Sadi there it seems. And since in the nine years I have served with Elynth and the Prince directly, she has never come to greet visitors... she must know Cadet Sadi from somewhere else."

She was the only elven female commander of a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser in the entire fleet. A fact that Star Captain Sa'sur held with pride and honor. She was nine hundred and six years old and had worked long and hard to get a position like this. She was selected for this command the moment it became known that Prince Androcles would be receiving his own ship. They had worked together before during the Evolli War, and much like Admiral Komirri and the King had a seamless relationship, Sa'sur and Androcles had something much similar. She was tall for a female elf, at nearly six foot, and her dark hair was cut short. It was also streaked with white blond highlights that accented the stunning pale blue of her eyes.

Her husband had been the first to congratulate Sa'sur on her promotion, with a night of fine wine and dinner and then wild passionate sex when they returned home. They saw each other as often as they could, for

his duties as Admiral of the Seventeenth Lycavorian Fleet Group kept him quite busy, but they talked to each other at least every other day.

Sa'sur sat behind the desk in the ready room off the bridge and watched as Androcles stood in front of the view port. He had made it very clear to her when the *SCIMITAR* had been given to him that she was in command. Throughout the course of the last five years he had learned far more than Sa'sur could have imagined, and he had kept his word. This was his ship, but she was in charge. He allowed her to run it as she saw fit, but since they thought so much alike in terms of discipline and work ethic, they rarely ever disagreed on anything. Androcles had a similar sized office connected to her ready room, but they had quickly enlarged the opening and then removed the doors separating the rooms, making it into a very large office with a pseudo divider.

"Are you thinking the High Coven has returned Andro?" Sa'sur asked.

Andro turned from the port holding the mug of his mother's coffee in his hand. Androcles always kept a large supply of her coffee on hand for it was his favorite, and the Senior Chef knew to always keep a pot brewed in the large mess lounge.

"I don't know Sa'sur." He spoke returning to sit in the chair across from her desk. "It's been what... fourteen years since we have seen or heard anything from them?"

"Almost fifteen." Sa'sur corrected. "That little war the Zaleisians and Kavalians started with the High Coven only days after your father rescued your sister didn't turn out so well." She spoke calmly. "What should have been a relatively easy three month conquest considering what they hit the Coven with, turned into a very costly on again off again twenty-five year war."

Andro nodded. "I agree... but the Kavalians had assistance the Coven didn't count on in the Zaleisians and the Kavalian biogenic troops." Andro said. "Assistance neither of us saw coming. It probably is still going on, and we just don't know it."

Sa'sur nodded. "And because of it the Kavalians have their empire back, and it's even larger than before." She leaned across the desk. "You know... these weapons your uncle found. The Evolli designed them to fight you and your dragons. Why buy them from the Evolli? The Coven is more than capable of building something like that. The Kavalians beat them badly... but they didn't press the issue and took only a few hundred or so of their planets in their attacks total. They haven't fought a major engagement in almost ten years. All of the High Coven production planets were far from ever in danger."

Andro nodded. "Which makes me wonder exactly how badly they were beaten? With those very same production facilities they could have rebuilt their fleet in three years, no more than five, yet we haven't seen a High Coven ship since that war began."

"Well... we haven't exactly gone looking either." Sa'sur spoke. "Your father did the right thing by pulling our agents out of Coven space."

"Oh I don't question that." Andro said. "Now however, all we have to rely on is the occasional sensor drone. And those are easy enough to defeat if you truly want to."

Sa'sur nodded. "Perhaps Admiral Riall will have more up to date information when he arrives on Sparta."

"I want you to sit in on that briefing with me Sa'sur." He told her. He held up his hand when he saw her about to protest. "I know it is ostensibly for senior officers, but you are my senior officer, so indulge me ok?"

"You'll owe me a drink afterwards." She said with a grin. "You know I hate associating with anyone higher in rank than me except my mate."

Andro nodded. "That is a deal. One hour before the State Dinner." He said.

Sa'sur sat back in her chair. "Get out of here and go see your grandmother." She spoke. "Let me do my job and get us to Earth and Sparta."

Andro came to his feet and nodded. "As you order Captain." He spoke with a smile and mock bow. "I'm going to go to the gym before I have dinner with grandmother. I'll be there if you need me."

Sa'sur dismissed him with a playful wave of her hand and Androcles turned and exited the ready room.

DRAGON PENS

Sadi didn't move as Tharua and Jeth lowered their heads very close to her and she could hear them sniffing her. Elynth lowered Sadi's bags to the deck, and turned back to see the deck crews who had seen Sadi walking with her still watching. Elynth chuckled and turned back. Tharua lifted her head and looked at Elynth.

This is the one? She asked.

Elynth nodded. *She is.*

She is small sister. He will break her. Jeth spoke.

Tharua's tail whipped around and tagged Jeth in his huge mid-section. The blow cracked loudly but Jeth stood there as if nothing had happened. *Have you no manners boy?* She barked. *Go back to the spray machine! You still stink!*

I was only speaking the truth my dearest Tharua! Jeth declared.

Elynth chuckled and nudged Sadi with her snout. *Ignore my brother KertaGai.* She spoke. *As Tharua has said more than once, the sun has baked his brains.*

More and more each day! I don't know how Lisisa puts up with him. Tharua declared glancing at Jeth quickly, her tail still poised to hit him should he step out of line again, but her copper colored eyes looking at him in another fashion that he did not see. She turned back to Sadi. *I am Tharua Sadi. We have heard so much about you.*

Sadi looked confused and she turned to look at Elynth quickly before looking back to the mahogany colored dragon's copper colored eyes. *You have?* She asked.

Elynth leaned forward. *I have spoken of you often KertaGai. As has Andro.* She said quickly.

You have the distinction of being the only one that... Tharua began.

The only one who is not a member of Mjolnir's Hand or the Durcunusaan who has stood beside dragons in battle. Elynth said quickly.

Tharua looked at her. [Mindvoice Shielded] *She does not know?*

Sadi looked at Tharua and then back to Elynth who also wore a surprised expression on her snout. *Elynth... what don't I know?* Sadi asked surprising Tharua with the strength of her Mindvoice ability.

Tharua stepped forward, even Jeth now quiet, his eyes open in surprise. *Elynth... she heard me even shielded.* She spoke. *Not even the Durcunusaan can hear us when we shield Elynth. Only our bonded ones.*

Elynth looked at her and nodded. *Sadi helped us many years ago Tharua. She has grown powerful within Mindvoice.*

Is she not the one Androcles always talks about? Tharua asked causing Sadi's eyes to go wide.

What? She gasped out. *He... he talks about me?*

Elynth turned her head and looked at Sadi amused. *You saw that yourself today KertaGai. And yes Tharua... this is Sadi. And she does know.*

Sadi grinned as she realized what Elynth was saying. The others must have thought she did not know how Androcles felt about her. She opened her mouth to speak but the male voice interrupted her.

"Cadet Sadi!"

Sadi turned quickly and saw the *Durcunusaan* Commander Famus as he walked up. *Forgive me Elynth... but Captain Sa'sur wanted to speak with all the Cadets before they were shown to their quarters.*

I understand Commander. Elynth replied. She looked at Sadi. [Mindvoice Shielded] *We will talk again soon KertaGai. We are very busy on the ship but I will make it a point to see you as often as possible.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Androcles?*

Elynth's golden eyes twinkled. [Mindvoice Shielded] *You will see Andro Sadi... do not worry about that.*

Sadi smiled brilliantly feeling the joy Elynth passed to her and something else that was coming from her, but not of her doing. A sensation of warmth and... love.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *I look forward to it Elynth.* She replied. She bent down and got her bags, quickly moving over to where the Commander waited.

Tharua and Jeth moved up next to Elynth as they watched her walk away. [Mindvoice Shielded] *She knows doesn't she sister?* Jeth asked now, his voice serious and thoughtful as he saw Elynth nod her head.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *She knows. Jeth... go up to the den and tell the others so that she is not surprised or frightened when Andro brings her there.*

Jeth nodded his massive head. [Mindvoice Shielded] *I'll see to it.*

They watched him move quickly to the elevator lift, maneuvering his massive body with graceful ease. He had grown nearly as large as his father, but like Torma he was exceptionally agile and graceful when he wanted to be. Tharua's eyes lingered on him until he was gone from sight and she turned back to Elynth.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *She is even more beautiful in person Elynth.* Tharua spoke. *And much stronger than you thought.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Yes she is.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *She must be... she must be very special for Andro to have loved her for so long as he has.* Tharua spoke almost wistfully. *I have always wondered what that feels like.*

Elynth looked at her with golden eyes, a mysterious glint in them. [Mindvoice Shielded] *You will know love one day Tharua.*

Tharua chuckled softly. [Mindvoice Shielded] *Eliani has told me the same thing. Elynth I am not so sure.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *And you are beautiful Tharua, many have said so. I have seen the way some males look upon you. You should present yourself for the Harmony of Two hearts this time.* Elynth spoke.

Tharua shook her head slowly. [Mindvoice Shielded] *There is only one that I want, and fate has not allowed me that. I am older than he and there are far more attractive females for him to choose from. Besides... the Senior Elder Council would never approve such a pairing because of Syrilth's past. I may do as you suggest and present myself just so that I may have my own hatchlings to raise and love so they do not have to experience what I have had to in my life.*

Elynth smiled a dragon smile. [Mindvoice Shielded] *We shall see.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Do you think she feels the same Elynth?*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Oh yes. She has allowed others to share her bed in the past, just like Andro... but none for very long. None have been what she is searching for.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *And Androcles is?*

Elynth nodded. [Mindvoice Shielded] *He is... and she has already realized this. She knew the moment she saw him on the planet below.*

[Mindvoice Shielded] *What of his dreams?*

Elynth turned to look at Tharua. [Mindvoice Shielded] *I don't know what they mean.* She spoke. *Perhaps now that they are together once more he will seek the guidance of the Feravomir in helping him to understand it.*

They turned back to watch Sadi walk with the Commander.

Famus was silent for a long moment as they walked, Sadi on his right side. "You should be honored Cadet Sadi." He finally spoke softly.

Sadi looked at him. "Sir?"

"I have served Prince Androcles as a member of his *Durcunusaan* detachment since he was only nine years old. Longer than even Commander Bren." Famus spoke softly looking at her. "In all that time you are the only person who is not a member of the Royal Family that Elynth has *ever* allowed to touch her outside of the Prince's presence. You must be someone of great importance to her and to the Prince for her to consent to such an action."

Sadi was silent as they walked and what he had just said sunk in.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WILDS

1.9 LIGHT YEARS FROM LYCAVORIAN BORDER

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT

INQUISITOR

His curved talons clicked on the floor of the padded deck, his sixteen meter long body lean and muscular, though he was a bit leaner for his age of twenty three years old due to his poor diet. He had never been fed the correct proportions of protein rich food throughout his young life, and his abnormally large size for a Firespitter was only due to his ceaseless hunting forays. He should have weighed several hundred pounds more than his five metric tons. The light reflected off his cerise red colored scales, his magenta tinted eyes large and very alert. He moved with precise confidence and grace common to his kind, nimbly dodging the dozen or so crew members within the landing bay, as he made his way to his large pen. Though the *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class VHC Dreadnought was larger than its predecessor, it was still a ship designed only for combat, with no comforts added for dragons. He entered the pen slowly and found who he knew he would find.

Her diminutive figure sat lotus style in the soft golden hay he slept in, her shiny raven black hair cascading well past her shoulders. She wore the matte black leather like uniform that conformed to her body like a second skin and the black non-skid combat boots. The portions of her exposed skin were tanned and flawless in their supple lines, belying the fact she was a pureblood vampire. She had obviously made it a point to get more sun than the others. Her lips were full and coated with a shiny gloss the same color as cerise colored scales and he watched as her eyes opened and her head lifted to gaze at him as he approached. Those deep Maya blue orbs were filled with a myriad of emotions, intent and feelings and he could spend hours staring into them and just listening to his bonded sister talk to him.

He moved right up to her and settled his massive body to the deck as she uncoiled hers and rose to her feet with the agility of a DeneBoli Striped Puma. She stood perhaps five feet two inches tall, her breasts high and firm and very prominent on her small frame. The leather like material of her skin tight body armor revealed lean sylphlike legs, a tiny waist and an ass that he had heard many of the ship's crewmembers make sordid comments about. She may have carried the title of Princess, but she was not looked at in the same light as her younger sister because of who her father had been. It had taken all of his willpower and control to keep from ripping those men open with his curved talons, especially the man that was her husband. His comments had been far worse as they always were, for he had actually tasted her many physical charms, and he spoke of her now as some sort of prized possession and piece of property. The man chosen as her husband was vile, cruel and nothing more than a disgusting brute and he could only hope that one day he got what he deserved for treating her as he did.

Under his talons would be ideal.

She always came here after having to endure his foul company and his attentions, for their bond always soothed her angry, burning emotions and the feelings of humiliation she felt after he had taken her, often times against her will. Coming here allowed her to find peace. At least the peace that her life so far allowed her to have.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[Carisia?]*

She stepped up to him with a gentle smile and placed her small hands on either side of his large snout. *[I am fine Anthar.]* She spoke softly bringing her forehead to the blunt edge of his snout and touching her warm skin to his cool scales.

[You are not fine Carisia.] He told her. *[Your heart is heavy and you only come here with a heavy heart after that foul fool has had his way with you. Why do you endure his touch upon you?]*

Her Persian blue eyes shimmered in the light and she smiled at him warmly. *[I endure his touch because he is my husband Anthar. It is my place and I must endure if we are to have a chance at succeeding in our goals.]*

[A husband you did not pick! Why did your mother force this upon you?] Anthar barked out.

[Anthar, it is the way of things.]

[She only does it out of spite to hurt you Carisia, you know this. Nothing you do will ever please her Carisia... you must know this by now my Bonded Sister?]

[Perhaps.] She said softly with a smile. *[Anthar... do I detect a sense of jealousy in your voice.]* She asked him.

[Of course you do! I am your Bonded Dragon Brother Carisia. Without you... without you I am nothing.]

[Be careful using those terms here Anthar.] She warned him. *[There are eyes and ears everywhere.]*

Anthar rolled his magenta colored eyes. *[You know as well as I that no one can penetrate the Mindvoice shields we have established.]* He spoke confidently and with a glint in his eyes. *[Not even your grandmother and she persists in trying even to this day. It is what we are, you and I Carisia, not the twisted pairs that the others act as.]*

[That does not mean we should be careless my bonded brother. If she knew...]

[We have trained together for sixteen years of our lives my sister.] Anthar spoke calmly. *[Trained for this very mission and purpose. This has always been our goal. I know everything you know and you know everything I know. I even know of your dreams of them.]*

Carisia looked at him intently. *[What do you mean?]*

[Blue eyes. And the one with golden hair. I have seen your dreams of them Carisia.]

Carisia nodded slowly and rubbed his snout under his eyes gently, this loving movement making his wings twitch. *[As I have seen yours Anthar. She is quite beautiful for a dragon.]*

[Now it is time for us to show what we can do Carisia. It is our time to live. To be free of the oppression. We can only have that...]

[I know Anthar. I know.]

Anthar canted his huge head to the side as he looked at her with keen eyes. *[Do you have second thoughts sister?]*

Carisia looked at him and shook her head immediately. *[Never my brother. I am just frightened Anthar. Frightened of what the future holds for us. Frightened to think if they will even feel the same thing. Frightened of what could happen if they... if they refuse us.]*

[Together we will be fine. You will see.]

[We will have my brothers and sister with us as well Anthar. Marux and Seyra are not like you Anthar. They are cruel like Dante and Lucia. Naruth is not evil, but he is not you. And you know how Vollenth views both of us.]

[Vollenth and your mother harbor ill feelings because we trounced them last year.] Anthar spoke. *[I am not concerned with him.]*

[And what of Deneth and Narice?]

[They are... they are an unknown. We have not seen them very much except in passing. And Princess Narice can shield just as well as we can.]

[That is why we must be mindful of our actions.]

Anthar snorted loudly. *[They and their dragons do not compare to you and I, Carisia my sister. We could defeat them with our eyes closed. They are arrogant and over confident. They will be surprised when we arrive I am thinking. Surprised at how easily they are struck down.]*

A loud chime sounded in the landing bay. "Princess Carisia please report to the forward conference lounge! Princess Carisia please report to the forward conference lounge!"

Carisia shook her head rolling her beautiful eyes. "Another intelligence briefing my brother." She spoke softly now. "My adopted father loves them it seems. This one should not be as long as the others."

[I will be listening.] Anthar spoke.

Carisia leaned forward and kissed Anthar's cool scales tracing her fingers around his magenta colored eyes as she knew he liked so much. *[I will return later and we will discuss what we have seen.]*

"There is not a whole lot of intelligence in regards to his children." Robert Moran spoke as he slid the data pads across the polished surface of the large table to Carisia and the three others who sat on either side of her. They were her younger brothers and sister, Dante, Javier and Lucia, born beginning two years after her and one year apart from each other. They were the products of her mother's marriage to her consort and now husband Robert Moran.

Carisia was nearly twenty-six years old, daughter to Yuri and Vavant, the pureblood son of one of her grandfather's most loyal supporters of that time. Her father was long dead now, murdered by her mother's own hand as far as she knew, of that she had no doubts, though the details of his death were confusing. He had been a pig according to her mother, both sexually and politically, and had chosen the wrong side when the Zaleisian and Kavalians had invaded the High Coven some twenty-five years ago. It was his eyes she had inherited, and if

everything else she had heard about him was true, not much else. And not all of that information came from her mother or within her circle. Her father's own blood could not stand him and called him names. Carisia had no doubts that everything about him was true.

Carisia had been born eight months after the start of the war, and was sequestered away to live with her grandmother's servants on Nuwaroa, while her mother had fought in the war. Almost two years later Dante had joined Carisia, and then Javier a year after that. Lucia had followed within two years. Carisia hated them all, Dante and Javier because they were typical pureblood vampire males, and Lucia because she thought herself superior to Carisia in every way. It was Dante, Javier and Lucia who garnered almost all of her mother's time and effort in training and schooling, and even though Carisia was the oldest, with the exception of several Immortal Guards, she had been left to her own devices in her early years. It was obvious that Yuri hated her, hated the very thought of her because of who her father was amongst other things. Carisia often wondered why she did not just have her killed. It wasn't until Carisia had become bonded to Anthar that she began to matter.

Carisia didn't know where her mother had acquired the dragon eggs, or how she had forced them to hatch. She was returning from a training class when she was only eight years old and heard the roaring of a very pissed off Anthar. The men left to tend him while he grew were cruel and abusive to him, and Carisia had been awestruck with him. She had disobeyed her mother's instructions to not enter the large shelter, and walked right up to Anthar and touched him. The moment that had happened, their whole world had changed. Anthar had been meant for Yuri herself, a fact which caused Yuri to hate her even more, but once Carisia had bonded with him there was nothing she could do. Dante, Javier and Lucia were also bonded to dragons, but no where near as completely as Carisia and Anthar had now become. Their dragons had also developed personalities similar to their riders and they were arrogant and thought themselves to be unbeatable. Anthar had become her only friend, the only one she trusted, and they shared everything with each other. She endured the harsh treatment from her mother and brothers and sister, if only to spend time with her bonded brother. Carisia did everything her mother asked of her, trying to win her favor in any fashion she could. She had tried being ruthless and immoral, killing a dozen Kavalian prisoners with Anthar in an attempt to win Yuri's love. Nothing seemed to work. While Dante, Javier and Lucia were trained by High Coven Royal Weapon Masters, Carisia was instructed by High Coven Immortals who pushed her even more ruthlessly than her half brothers and sister. It almost seemed as if they were pushing her for some reason she did not understand. They tried to break her mentally as well as physically, but Carisia had endured it all. They had even taught her many things she should not have been instructed in, and this was another reason Carisia questioned their purpose. It was not something she would ever discuss or mention, for while they trained her mercilessly, they at least treated her as a person and they showed her the respect she did not receive anywhere else. Carisia was perhaps the most lethally trained hand combatant on the ship, and while Dante, Javier and Lucia were well trained, they did not come close to her skill. They could not wrap the shadows around themselves as flawlessly as Carisia did, they could not blur with such focus and speed.

It wasn't until three years before that Yuri began to open up to her and spend more time with her. At first Carisia had reveled in the attention, basking in the glow of her mother's praise and efforts to instruct her. It was what she had waited for her entire life and it made her sing. Until she realized her mother was only setting her up to the fact that Carisia had to take the disgusting pureblood sitting three chairs down to her right as a husband. Carisia knew without question what her mother's intent was when she was introduced to the much older pureblood. That slobbered and pawed her firm body whenever he had the chance and opportunity now. He was easily four thousand years older than she was, and there were times when he forced her to do things in their bed that were vile and almost made Carisia sick to her stomach, but he was very strong physically and exceptionally cruel.

Carisia watched as Robert Moran moved one of the pads in front of her mother Yuri and her grandmother Aikiro as well as three other officers that sat at the table, noticing that her mother didn't even pick it up.

"Whether that is by design or not, we don't know." Moran continued. "They have always been a very private family... and it appears that has not changed. What you see in front of you is the normal public relations file downloaded from their Netnews channels, and some minor intercepts we have obtained from outside sources. None of which can be accurately confirmed." Moran turned to the female vampire officer along the

wall. "This is Captain Toria Dellion... she is from the Intelligence Division of the *Venorik Elghinn* and she will be taking part in this mission. Captain... I'll let you pick it up from here."

The female officer jumped to her feet. "Thank you Admiral." She spoke moving to the large wall monitor.

The female officer stood in front of the large monitor. She was only five feet six inches tall and perhaps just over a hundred pounds, but no one doubted her abilities once Moran told them where she was from. No member of the *Venorik Elghinn* was given a free ride, and if she worked in the Intelligence Division, she was just as lethal as she was beautiful.

And she was beautiful.

Her chestnut red hair cascaded past her shoulders to curl around her large breasts. Her sky blue eyes were gripping in their intensity and contrasted incredibly with her lightly tanned and freckled skin. The daughter of purebloods loyal to Aikiro and the High Coven, Toria was driven by her parents to excel at everything she had ever done. Her parents pushed her into the intelligence posting and then into the *Venorik Elghinn* as a way to hone her skills, but also as a way to enhance their status with the High Coven hierarchy. Toria had done what they wanted for most of her three hundred and twenty-seven years because they were her parents and she loved them, something Toria was not afraid to admit in her younger years. She had committed herself to the High Coven and was diligent and exacting in her duties. She had killed when needed, ruthlessly in fact, and she had spared life when required to complete her mission. She was experienced and exceptionally intelligent. She was privy to almost every operational mission of the High Coven against the Kavalian Federation. She had been a loyal and proud citizen of the High Coven for all of her life.

At least until she was forced to become the unwillingly plaything for her Empress and Admiral Tesand.

Toria was not shy or unknowledgeable when it came to sex. She had bedded with half a dozen different men in her three hundred years, none of whom she allowed to feed on her blood and none that enticed her enough to want to do that. Tesand had come to her privately about joining him and Aikiro. He had told her the Empress found her very attractive. Toria thought it would be for only one time, and that it would help her career. That had not been the case she soon learned, and while pleasing her Empress sexually was not something she found distasteful, she actually relished the times she had pleased her Empress in that way, however the way they treated her was vile. They used her as a whore for the most part, never giving back to her what she gave to them. She had been forced to sleep with Aikiro's grandsons at her request, and Toria found that to be the most distasteful of everything. Dante and Javier had used her harshly more times than she could remember now, and she was sore for days afterwards. They also were not in the least bit gentle, often times slapping her hard enough to bring tears to her eyes, or yanking on her silky long hair. Toria hated them... and that hatred had only grown in the last year, and had caused her to begin to doubt her faith in the High Coven.

Toria met Aikiro's eyes briefly and took a deep breath. "Since the debacle on Lycavore twenty-five years ago, all intelligence in regards to the United Lycavorian Union has been at a premium. At least for us to obtain. They spent the better part of the next two years purging, and I do mean purging their entire government and all of their commercial industries of even very minor High Coven agents. They were very thorough and their actions deprived us of dozens of assets. With the help of the traitor Vonis they were able to discover and destroy nearly ninety-six percent of our intelligence assets within the Union to include four of our deepest penetration agents after the clone Gorgo. Once they reconfigured their intelligence apparatus, and that dog Armetus took over the entire network, any sort of penetration into their networks has been next to impossible. We do still have some assets however and..."

"That information does not need to be discussed at this time Toria." Moran spoke quickly before Aikiro had the opportunity to open her mouth.

Toria nodded quickly. "Yes sir." She said with a nod. "Over the next twenty-three years they have prospered incredibly, monetarily as well as expansion wise, even while we have fought a very costly war with the Zaleisian/Kavalian Federation Alliance. King Leonidas has pulled every intelligence asset they had in High Coven territory home, something he did almost immediately after our war with the Kavalian scum began. They left in place only those agents in the Wilds, and those agents are so well covered it would be next to impossible to discover their identities." She touched the panel on the wall and the picture changed to nine individual images. "At the Admiral's direction I will dispense with the intelligence profiles we have on Leonidas and his

Queens since all of us are already fully aware of them and what they are capable of, and I will focus this briefing on his oldest children, the Crown Prince most specifically.

“The Lycavorian Union recently fought a war with the Evolli Triad. It lasted for a total of six years and ended with complete and utter victory by the Union three years ago. Apparently the Evolli did not appreciate the elven Queen Dysea pulling some of their trade agreements over minor infractions and they launched a brutal invasion of some smaller Union planets along their border. The war was never really in doubt... the Union forces are just far too well trained and led, however there were several savage and significant battles that give us some insight into his children and their abilities. The oldest seven of his fourteen children fought in this war, the Crown Prince and his half sister Lisisa from the outset, the others joining over the course of the next three years. They were joined by two more in the last year of the war. One as a *STRIKER DT* pilot and the other as a ground combatant.”

“Fourteen children?” Aikiro spat shaking her head and looking at Yuri. “I was right all along... they do breed like animals!”

This comment brought laughter out among the men and women in the room. All except for Carisia who sat silently watching her grandmother intently. Over the years Carisia had discovered just how ruthless her grandmother could be. Anthar was right, there were many times when she had tried to penetrate the Mindvoice shields that she and Anthar had established almost naturally, but even she could not delve her way through the multitude of defensive layers she and Anthar had established over the years. It was something that made her grandmother, a woman more powerful than anyone Carisia had ever seen within Mindvoice, very angry with at times.

“The *STRIKER DT* as you all know is their standard dragon transport.” Toria continued. “They have all the speed and armament of the normal *STRIKER ATs*, which is considerable, but these *STRIKER DTs* are heavily armored with the Dragon Armor Alloy they now employ, and also able to carry up to two dragons. There have been sightings of similar ships that can carry upwards of six from what I understand. They were supposedly designed in a similar fashion as the smaller *DTs*, but allow all of the older children of Leonidas to ride on the same ship. The designation of those ships, if they even exist is unknown to us.”

“That is a tactically unsound move.” Javier spoke up. “Having all of his older children riding on the same ship together? It doesn’t sound like something the Lycavorians would do father.”

“It isn’t confirmed information.” Robert spoke meeting his son’s eyes. “A lot of what we are getting comes from the Netnews intercepts and intelligence reports we have procured from other sources, none of which can be confirmed as I said. Until we actually see it... I would not put much faith in it. And you’re right Javier... putting his six or seven oldest dragon riding children in one ship, does not sound like something they would do.” Moran turned. “You may continue Toria.”

“The Crown Prince is named Androcles...” She touched the monitor and the helmeted face of Androcles became a close up. His azure blue eyes and lips were the only really visible features under his crested helmet, and all of them could make out the strange design of the dragon on his helmet. “If their own reports are accurate, and we have no reason to not believe them at this time, he is the exact duplicate to his father in almost every way. He was awarded the Union’s highest award during the Evolli War, the Shield of Valor, for his actions on the Evolli held world of Alba Tau, as well as nineteen other decorations over that six year span if the Netnews profile is accurate.”

Dante leaned forward in his chair as Carisia studied this Androcles’s eyes, her heart beginning to race. They were his eyes. The eyes from her dreams. “It was my understanding that the Lycavorian Union was very stern and quite harsh when it came to awarding combat decorations.” Dante asked smugly. “How is it that this boy was decorated twenty times during a war that only lasted six years?”

Lucia laughed out loud. “This *boy* is older than you brother.” She spoke casually. “And he is not so bad looking for an animal.”

“Lucia?” Aikiro gasped... but wearing a smile on her face at her granddaughter returning grin.

Lucia laughed and waved her hand. “Grandmother... you don’t honestly believe that I would find this animal attractive do you?”

Aikiro chuckled for a moment as she realized her granddaughter was making a joke. No doubt part of the dry humor she inherited from her father.

“He is a Lycavorian dog!” Dante snapped. “And fighting the Evolli is nothing! Child’s play compared to our sessions with our Royal trainers sister! I could defeat him easily!”

Carisia turned her head ever so slightly to look at him as Lucia laughed again. “Perhaps you could brother... just insure he has a muzzle on when you fight him... in case he decides to bite you instead of fight you.” She spoke. Her words caused Yuri, Aikiro and several others to laugh softly.

“Underestimating your enemy is perhaps the most lethal of practices nephew.” The soft voice spoke now and all eyes went to where Narice sat next to her mother Aikiro on the left.

Narice was almost twenty-seven years old... the last of Aikiro’s children with Veldruk. She had inherited her mother’s exotic and incredibly alluring beauty, as well as the supple and lush figure. Like Yuri... she was intimately skilled and schooled by the finest Masters within the High Coven. She was considered extremely adept at almost everything she did, and methodically driven. Her Mindvoice abilities had reached nearly the level of her mother and sister, and outside of Carisia and Anthar, her bond with her dark green scaled dragon Deneth was the strongest of any within the High Coven. Narice was also the only one to have treated Carisia with anything remotely like friendship or concern, perhaps because they were so close in age. She was very soft spoken, but intelligent enough in most matters that her words were at least listened to by others.

“My idiot father underestimated these Lycavorians on far too many occasions and it ended up costing him his life. Never assume you are superior to your foe Dante, for more often than not you will regret that.” Narice finished her statement.

Aikiro nodded and reached out to squeeze her hand. She had always allowed Yuri and Narice to make their own conclusions about Veldruk, and over the years both of them had come to the conclusion their father was a fool.

“As I reported Prince Dante... the only information we have obtained up until now comes from the Union’s own Netnews reports and the few intercepts we have obtained and they will undoubtedly be bias to some extent.” Toria replied as she continued with her report at a nod from Moran. “As I understand it, this Alba Tau battle accounted for all but nine of the twenty-three dead *Mjolnir’s Hand* members that were killed in this war. The Evolli Triad devised a unique weapon to combat the dragons and their riders and it was very effective for the first three years of the war until the Union engineers began to find ways to defeat it. We have an operation in the works now that will allow us to obtain some of the weapons to develop tactics to use against them. The information we have been able to obtain from the Evolli agents we control and these Netnews reports indicate the Evolli have since cursed this Prince Androcles and his dragon Elynth in their own native language. However... their language translates to something very different when spoken in other languages.”

“If they allowed those amphibian animals to develop weapons that could beat them, then they obviously have no idea how to ride a dragon!” Dante snapped once more as he leaned back in his chair. “The fools *should* have been killed if they allowed the Evolli to defeat them in any battle!”

Toria kept the comment on the tip of her tongue to herself and switched the screen to a picture of the Netnews file on Androcles. “As you can see he fought in every major engagement during the six year war according to this time table. Our analysts say he must have also taken part in several missions that are not listed to have been decorated this many times in a six year span. His two sisters and two brothers closest in age to him are also bonded to dragons as you, Prince Javier and Princess Lucia are... and from all accounts they are quite skilled as well. All five of Leonidas’s youngest children have bonded with dragons as of this latest Netnews report but all of them are well shy in terms of years and being able to actually fight. There are two sets of boy/girl twins, one each from his pureblood Queen and the Hadarian witch as well as the youngest child, a son from his second elven Queen.”

“Their ages?” Aikiro asked.

“The boy and girl from the pureblood... Aricia I believe her name is, they are ten. The twins from the Hadarian witch are just past nine years of age, and the youngest from his second elven Queen For’mya is five, Milady Aikiro.” Toria answered.

“And Lisisa fights with them?” Yuri asked almost casually.

Toria nodded. “Yes Princess Yuri.” She replied. “With the two youngest daughters that have joined them in the last three years, Leonidas’s nine oldest children now serve within the fleet or ground forces in some manner. The female Eliani is said to be almost as powerful as her mother in her healing abilities and very

skilled in other areas. There have been some unconfirmed reports of a pureblood vampire lover that shares her life and home, but those reports can not be confirmed as I said.”

Aikiro snorted and shook her head.

“His sons...” She looked at the pad. “Only this one Denali is pure Lycavorian. The other two are half elf, but reports say they are no less skilled. The half elf son Arrarn Leonidas...” The picture changed to the extremely handsome face of Arrarn Leonidas, his dark brown hair neatly cut and his four day old mustache and goatee clearly evident. “...is now regarded as the premier pilot in their *STRIKER* Fleet, ahead of even his own mother. He is not bonded to a dragon, but from all the reports we have, even the children not actually bonded to dragons are very capable riders.

“His oldest daughter with the traitor Isabella is called Carina. She is highly respected from all reports, and there is not much known on the two youngest daughters. The one with the elf Queen Dysea is said to also be a very skilled pilot. Next to nothing is known on the second daughter with Isabella. It is not easy to get detailed information about the Lycavorian Royal family outside of news intercepts as you can tell. They are furiously private as the Supreme Commander stated before, and the men and women who surround them are almost fanatically loyal. While I and my people do not really believe it, the Netnews has reported that there are very few citizens of the Union who do not adore the Leonidas family. They have even shifted their base of power to Earth, unofficially of course.”

“We saw that coming a long time ago.” Yuri spoke looking at her mother. “Sparta and Eden City have always been his base of power. Earth elected the first human president in nearly six hundred years just five years ago, and Leonidas was the first to be there to congratulate him. It is a political move more than anything.”

“Why?” Carisia asked softly.

All heads turned to her. “What?” Yuri asked sternly.

“Why do we consider it a political move?” Carisia asked.

Yuri was about to snap out a response but Aikiro rested her hand on Yuri’s leg under the table squeezing her thigh tightly as she leaned forward. “You don’t think it is a political move Carisia?” Aikiro asked. “Explain why you think it is otherwise.”

Carisia looked at her for a long moment. “We have always known the Lycavorians are a somewhat spiritual people.” She spoke quickly and calmly. “That has been written about them in all our history texts. If the Netnews reports we have been able to intercept and read are truly accurate, when this King Leonidas returned to the Union all those years ago, he also returned much of the spiritual nature of their people which they apparently lost in some way. They have become steeped even more within the history and culture of this city of Sparta since he returned and took his place as King. Much of what they now practice in terms of religious events and such, much of that has expanded outward from this Sparta to encompass the entire Union, most of it centered on the memory and deeds of his father. If we are expected to believe the reports, we must also take notice that the vast majority of the Union has accepted this. He is not seen as just their King, but also the bearer of the name that means so much to their faith. Is this unofficial move anything more than an attempt to return to their roots so to speak? It does not seem to have gone over very badly in their Netnews reports; it is almost as if the people of the Union have embraced this fact. They revere the King’s father and grandfather as the architects of their initial rebellion, and they see him doing the same things. I have reviewed many of the Netnews intercepts we have gotten over the years, and it seems to me that they are simply rediscovering and maintaining what they had once thought lost. The many people of the Union do not seem to particularly mind that they have done this. They in fact appear to relish it.”

The men and women in the room stared at her for a long moment before Yuri leaned forward again. “A very insightful, if drastically incorrect assessment Carisia.” She spoke. “You give them more credit than they deserve. Martin Leonidas is no fool, and he knows exactly what he is doing by using this religious angle. They have turned Earth into the second most heavily fortified planet aside from Apo Prime, and the majority of their training now takes place on Earth, with their so called graduation ceremonies taking place at the monument of that animal’s father!”

“I did not suggest giving them credit where it is not due mother.” Carisia said evenly. “Only that there is more to it than we are seeing. Or allowing ourselves to see. Twenty-five years have passed since our last true contact with them. If information has become so hard to gather on them, perhaps we should not just dismiss what we don’t understand.”

“Well thank you for your interpretation of the intelligence, but I suggest you allow those who are trained in disseminating and analysis to make those assumptions.” Yuri almost snapped.

“Bah! They are nothing more than children and religious fanatics!” Dante spoke loudly now. He looked at his mother and father. “Why are we doing this again father?”

Yuri shook her head. “We need the resources they can provide Dante. Only they have the ability to train you in such a way with your dragons that will allow us to use them against the Kavalians. Your father and I have told you that before. That is what we need. The machine they use to make their bonds with their dragons so powerful.” She spoke softly. “We will offer them intelligence in exchange for what we want and then we will be gone from their space. We also told you that while they may be animals... you need to respect them.”

“Why?” Javier asked quickly from his seat next to his brother.

Moran looked at his sons. “Because unlike you and your brother... they have been bloodied Javier. All of you are highly skilled... but you must understand, these Leonidas children have all seen combat... and if the Netnews reports are accurate, some pretty violent combat. Your ages have not allowed you to be active in our war with the Kavalians until now. The nine oldest children of Leonidas, with the exception of the two daughters have all seen combat. You have to respect your enemy always, or your enemy will turn around and bite you in your collective ass. That is part of the reason we are in this position to begin with.”

Aikiro nodded in approval at Moran’s words, once more vindicating her own reasons for putting this man in charge of their military. “Your father is correct young Javier. You are superior to them in every respect, of that there is little doubt, but with that superiority you must always respect what they could do.”

Yuri leaned forward. “I made the mistake you seem to be falling towards once my son. You are superbly trained, all of you, as your father has said. Use your heads as well as your skills.”

Moran sat back in his chair. “Listen... we know the Kavalian Federation is massing once more to invade our territory. We have a year, maybe eighteen months before they hit us again. This time they have had nearly ten years to make their clones and train them to fight us. The Lycavorians handed them their asses when they invaded that planet twenty years ago. They are the only ones to have defeated them so soundly, and a large part of that is their ability to fully utilize their dragons and their skills. The Kavalian Federation doesn’t have any interest in the Union outside of espionage it seems.”

“Don’t you find that strange though father?” Javier asked.

Moran shook his head. “Not really. Pusintin is a Lycavorian and their overall military commander in most respects, and he has the ear of the Federation Prefect, and he has been raised as a Kavalian for the better part of three thousand years. We don’t have much in the way of information on him, but his hatred of us runs much deeper than it does for the Union... hence why they have decided to come after us first. We have given them everything they can handle up until now, but we need what the Union can give to us if we are to defeat this next assault we see coming.”

“Listen to me all of you.” Yuri spoke. “We will be within Lycavorian space for at least a week, perhaps more if they give us what we will ask for. We will be watched that entire time. They have no love for us, and make no mistake they will jump at the first chance to embarrass us if they are able. You must be very careful in all that you do and say while carrying out your duties.”

“What makes us believe they will even give us what we desire if they hate us so mother?” Lucia asked.

Yuri met her beautiful face. “Because as I said... Leonidas is no fool. If the Kavalian Federation defeats us, they will come for the Union and he knows that. Helping us is the better way to remain out of the conflict without exposing his people, yet assisting us in our battle. It ultimately helps him in the end.”

“And then when we have defeated the Federation we can turn our sights fully back on the Union scum.” Dante barked harshly.

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.” Moran spoke. “Right now let’s concentrate on the task at hand.”

Carisia detected the almost minute inflection in his voice, but she kept her eyes neutral and without emotion.

“That is really all we have at this time.” He spoke. “If there are no questions, you may all return to your duties. We’ll be arriving in Earth’s Sector in just over three days and then things will get interesting.”

Aikiro gazed down the table at where Carisia sat. “You have no further questions do you Carisia?”

“Just one Grandmother.” Carisia looked at Toria. “The name the Evolli gave to this prince and his dragon. What was it when translated?”

“In Evolli I believe it translates to something along the lines of Soul of Vile Blackness Princess Carisia.” Toria answered. “In most other languages... ours included... it translates to Soul Slayer.”

Yuri looked at her intently now. “Anything else Carisia?”

Carisia looked up from the data pad and met Yuri’s eyes. “No. I have no more questions mother.” She replied quickly.

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Lucia spoke as she got to her feet.

Carisia heard Dante snicker as he got up too. She looked at where her mother and step father and grandmother sat one last time before getting to her feet and heading out of the secure conference lounge with the others, ignoring the looks of vile lust in Thast’s eyes.

SCIMITAR

SIXTY HOURS FROM EARTH

“I don’t suppose you were going to tell us at some point that you know Prince Androcles and his dragon *personally*... or that you were a *Tier Six* Mindvoicer were you Sadi?” Palta spoke as they sat in their shared quarters watching Sadi unpack a few of her clothes. “Did it ever cross your mind to share this with your friends?”

Teeria simply sat in one of the two chairs in the large quarters and watched Sadi. She had known her longer than anyone, for they had shared a blistering night of passion so many years ago and while they both agreed that it was a glorious experience, they also agreed it should not happen anymore. They had remained as close as friends could be over the years, always staying in touch and sharing things with each other that they shared with no one. Now Teeria knew what the red pendant Sadi wore signified. It was something she never took off, even in their sweaty hours together Sadi had never removed it.

Sadi turned from the dresser. “Palta... I haven’t seen him since he was eight months old.” Sadi spoke almost embarrassed by that acknowledgement. “And I don’t advertise I am a Tier Six because I don’t want others to treat me differently. I don’t use my Mindvoice abilities very often.”

“But you are a registered Tier Six.” Palta said. “And the only way to become a registered Tier Six is to study at the First Oracle’s School. You did that?”

Sadi nodded. “For two three-year periods.” She answered immediately.

“The Prince and his dragon obviously know you quite well.” Palta spoke.

“It has something to do with the pendant you are wearing... doesn’t it Sadi?” Teeria asked softly.

Sadi nodded and reached up to touch the pendant under her uniform. “Yes.”

“It’s a Dragon’s Heart pendant isn’t it?” Teeria asked. “And Prince Androcles wears the other half.”

Sadi looked at her and nodded with a small smile. “Yes.”

Palta looked at Teeria. “A Dragon’s Heart pendant?” She asked confused. “What is that Teeria?”

“I read about them once in the brochure they provided on Elear during the tour of the Dragon Island.” Teeria answered. “They are forged from the hearts of dragons that have died but wanted a piece of their bodies to continue on. The process takes years... but when it is complete, it is said a Dragon’s Heart pendant never loses its luster or shine. Especially when it is given in two parts of a whole.”

Palta looked confused. “What?”

“Palta don’t you get it?” Teeria asked. “Our Sadi... she and Prince Androcles... they wear the two parts of a single pendant. They are...”

Palta gasped as realization finally hit her and she came to her feet. “That is why he leaned so close to you on the airfield isn’t it?” She spoke.

Teeria got to her feet with a happy smile. “Palta... next time you really need to study your Lycavorian Culture and The Culture and History of Sparta.” She spoke playfully. “Prince Androcles very clearly and most definitely, in the old fashion Spartan way, stated his intentions to court Sadi and take her as his mate.” Teeria stepped up to her and took Sadi’s hands in hers. “And I am guessing he’s not going to have a very hard time of it is he?”

Sadi chuckled and shook her head. “No.”

“This is the man you have waited for all these years?” Teeria said softly. “The one you have said you were waiting for?”

Sadi nodded. “I didn’t come to fully realize it myself until I was standing in front of him Teeria. His aura was pulsing so powerfully around me Teeria... I thought I was going to...”

Palta shook his head. “His aura? Sadi we were standing right next to you and we felt nothing.” She said.

Teeria grabbed a shirt from Sadi’s hand and threw it at Palta. “He is the King’s son Palta! You know as well as I do that the King has the ability to direct his aura. It would stand to reason that Prince Androcles has this skill as well.” She turned back to Sadi. “Just don’t make it too easy.”

Sadi laughed and kissed her cheek. “That is what Elynth said as well.” She spoke with a chuckle. “I just don’t know how strong I want to be Teeria. I’ve never felt what he made me feel. It made my knees weak and my stomach contract.”

Teeria laughed. “That is your stomach telling you it’s time to feed it!” She said playfully. “I think we should find our way to the dining lounge on this ship and get something to eat.”

Palta nodded quickly. “Then perhaps maybe you could find out if Prince Denali or Prince Resumar is available, preferably Prince Denali.”

“Palta you are such a slut!” Sadi exclaimed with a laugh.

“No I’m not! I’m just a healthy and strong female wolf who wants to find a mate. How often do I have to recite that?” Palta declared. “Preferably one who will curl my toes in my boots from the passion of his aura?”

“Why not Prince Arran?” Teeria asked her with a smile. “I think of all of them he is the most handsome. Sorry Sadi.”

Palta shook her head. “He’s too serious.” Palta spoke.

“Prince Androcles is only a man Palta.” Sadi spoke with a grin at Palta’s answer. “And he is more serious than all of them.”

“Sure he is... that is why you are wet just thinking about him isn’t it?” Palta replied with a knowing grin.

“What about Malic Sadi?” Teeria asked suddenly.

“What about him?” Sadi spoke looking at her. “We are over... I told you that. He knows it as well.”

“He’s not going to be happy you didn’t tell him you were a Tier Six Mindvoicer Sadi.” Teeria said. “And it is going to hurt his ego something fierce when he discovers why it is you didn’t want to settle down with him.”

“He’ll get over it.” Sadi stated evenly.

“C’mon...” Palta exclaimed. “Now that you have mentioned food I’m starving.”

They entered into the corridor on deck eight and could see many crew members and other cadets and personnel in the corridors. The corridors were extra wide and easily high enough to accommodate a fully grown dragon. It seemed like a waste of space to Sadi, but then she could not deny the power and skill being bonded with a dragon brought to a person. They walked in silence, taking the elevator lift to deck six and then following the other cadets who were in front of them.

“This is it.” Teeria spoke as they entered the large mess lounge.

There were dozens of tables set up throughout the massive room, half of them already filled with the *SCIMITAR*’s normal crew. The deck plating under their feet was covered in rich dark blue carpet and the walls were painted not in the dull drab gray color as in ancient holo images of warships, but in several different forest tones giving off a soothing sensation. There was a line along the far wall, the stars streaking by in the view window that ran along behind the massive lay out of food. Men and women were carrying trays and plates and filing through the line in a very orderly and organized fashion. No one appeared rushed and it was overall a very relaxed atmosphere. They could hear no voices as there was soft elegant music coming from the side of the room and Sadi felt a tug on her arm.

“Sadi?” Teeria whispered softly.

Sadi turned quickly. “What Teeria... now I’m very hungry and I want to get in line.”

“It’s him!”

“What?” Sadi looked at her confused.

“Look!” Teeria motioned to the small stage. “In front of the Captain and Lady Gorgo and Queen For’mya!”

Sadi followed her motion and saw the five men and two women on the stage. Androcles sat in the single chair in front of them, playing the angular stringed instrument, the butt of the instrument tucked under his chin and his hand drawing the long rod across the strings. The sound was amazing... almost entrancing in its soft musical notes when combined with the other instruments.

The group of musicians looked out over the six tables that were close to the stage and Sadi noticed that no one at these tables had begun eating yet, but Captain Sa’sur who they had met earlier and half a dozen *Durcunusaan* as well as roughly thirty other men and women sat at the tables along with Lady Gorgo, For’mya and the Princesses Eliani and Lisisa as well as Resumar and Denali. She did not see Andro’s other brother and sisters from the airfield and she assumed they were either still working or eating in another mess lounge.

“*Un reull joa bashe fas jar.*” Androcles spoke softly and exceptionally fluently in the ancient Lycavorian tongue as he lowered the instrument from his chin.

“*Un reull joa bashe fas jar.*” The men and women at the tables repeated in the same almost reverent tone of voice. Almost immediately after they spoke those words they began to talk and eat their food, smiles coming with soft laughter as the men and women from the stage joined them in their own seats.

Teeria looked at Sadi with wide eyes as she spoke the words softly. “To those no longer with us.” Sadi said in almost the same reverent tone.

“Sadi... you speak the ancient language too?” Plata asked shocked.

Sadi shook her head. The words had just come to her, popping into her mind as he had spoken them. “No.” She answered quickly. “It... I must have heard that from somewhere. Lady Gorgo perhaps.”

“Well... it’s more than what I know.” Palta spoke as Teeria looked at Sadi strangely. “I failed that course in my first year. It’s too hard to learn it.”

Teeria grabbed her arm. “Come on... he is going to the line.”

Sadi let them pull her along suddenly feeling something tingling in her head. The First Oracle had once told her she had unnaturally strong Mindvoice shields and Sadi now kept them up very high almost by second nature. Sadi knew that everyone within the Royal Family could speak the ancient language and all of them were considered to be at the very top Tier Six level or above in Mindvoice abilities so she quickly dismissed her feelings as a combination of Lady Gorgo or For’mya and the Prince or Princesses talking within Mindvoice.

[Mindvoice Shielded] [*No KertaGai. It is me saying hello.*] Androcles’s deep soothing voice filled her thoughts. [*I did not want to intrude on your shields so I knocked so to speak.*]

Sadi smiled but didn’t turn to face him as they got into the line for food. [*Do you always invade the thoughts of another person when you wish to say hello Androcles Leonidas?*]

[*Your shields are powerful Sadi, and I would never attempt to invade on your thoughts. I was sensing your surface thoughts; that is all.*]

[*And what are they?*]

[*That you are exceedingly hungry.*] Andro replied with a laugh. [*You should eat more.*]

Sadi chuckled out loud and Teeria and Palta looked at her oddly. She looked at them and shook her head quickly. [*I eat just fine thank you.*]

[*My grandmother has taught me to cook many ancient Greek meals.*] Andro spoke. [*It is the part of Earth where Sparta is. I would be honored if you let me cook one for you.*]

[*Perhaps I will Prince Androcles.*]

Sadi turned and looked at him, saw a smile split his face as he held his tray. [*Oh... I think you will.*] He spoke. [*I’m a very good cook.*]

“What was that you were playing?” Teeria’s voice broke into their connection and Andro shook his head quickly before realizing Teeria was standing in front of him now and had spoken out loud.

“I’m sorry... what?” He stammered and Sadi couldn’t help but chuckle. He had been talking with her so intently he had lost his train of thought when Teeria interrupted him.

“That music. It was beautiful.” Teeria spoke.

Andro smiled then. “It is a tribute of sorts. To those we left behind in the Evolli War. We play it before every meal period when we are able.”

“Where did you learn to play that instrument?” Sadi asked now as she came closer to him his lavender and pines scent drifting to her nose and tickling her senses.

“It is an ancient Earth instrument. A violin. I learned it during my time in Sparta.” Andro answered her, his azure orbs gazing at her with desire, passion and love all wrapped into one. It was a look that was making Sadi light headed with giddiness as her own body was calling out for him. Her blood was singing in her veins like she had never known, and it was singing all for Androcles.

Sadi started to speak but the large figure imposed himself between her and Andro and effectively ruined the very pleasant mood she was in. Sadi blinked quickly as the voice filled her head and she realized who was speaking.

“Sadi... we need to talk!” Malic stated.

“Malic... don’t be so rude! I was talking to someone!” Sadi snapped.

Malic turned to look at Andro quickly. “Forgive me sire. I just need to borrow Cadet Sadi for a moment.”

Sadi knew immediately what was happening. Malic was also an Alpha male, just like Androcles, albeit no where near as powerful. He was attempting to stake his claim to her even in front of the Prince. Sadi couldn’t believe the level of his arrogance. “Malic... I was speaking with the Prince! And you are being a rude *mida!*” Sadi blurted. Her eyes grew wide when the ancient word came easily from her lips.

Malic looked at her confused. “What did you say?”

Andro chuckled softly from behind the large Spartan. “She called you an ass.” He spoke to Malic’s back as he crossed his arms over his broad chest, tucking his tray under one arm.

Malic spun around and looked at Andro. “Milord?”

Andro was just as tall as Malic, his six foot one frame perhaps a half inch different from Malic standing in front of him, and he was equally muscular, but much more defined. He had been facing his father and uncles in sparing matches for the better part of his life. His Uncle Atropos and Uncle Andreus and his adopted Uncle Danny had trained him so thoroughly with his father that when it came time to attend his Agoge; he was more prepared than any teenager could ever be. He could beat most of the instructors when he arrived in Sparta, and they knew this so they made his life a living hell. Androcles had faced down far more imposing figures than Malic’s, and his presence didn’t faze him in the least.

“She called you an ass in the ancient language *Enomotarch* Malic.” Andro spoke.

Malic turned back to Sadi quickly his eyes wide as she glared at him. He turned back to Andro then. “Forgive me Milord... but Cadet Sadi and I have been seeing each other for three months now and we still have things we need to discuss.”

Sadi’s eyes went wide at this as she saw Andro’s body stiffen ever so slightly and her cheeks turned red in embarrassment. “Malic that is not true! We have nothing to discuss! We...”

“The mess lounge is not the place to discuss matters like this.” Andro spoke quickly seeing Sadi look at him with wide eyes. “I suggest one of the more private lounges. You will find them on all the decks.” He stepped closer to Malic and Sadi while placing his empty tray on the metal line to his left. “You disrespect her with your actions *Enomotarch* Malic.” Andro stated softly.

“Milord... we...”

Andro glared at him with those azure colored eyes. “If you wish to discuss something with Cadet Sadi... do so in private Malic. Insure you do not disrespect her or any female ever again. And most especially not in my presence.”

Malic bowed his head quickly. “Milord.” He spoke.

Andro glanced quickly at Sadi before turning and heading for the exit to the mess lounge.

Gorgo, For’mya and the others turned to gape in awe at where Malic stood and at what he had just said and done. Eliani and Lisisa shook their heads quickly while Resumar and Denali started to get to their feet. Gorgo’s hand on Resumar and For’mya’s hand on Denali stopped them both from getting up.

“No Resumar. No Denali.” Gorgo spoke softly.

Resumar Leonidas looked at his grandmother with wide eyes. “Grandmother... he is disrespecting Andro by doing what he is doing. Sadi is to be his...”

Gorgo looked at him. "Is he?" She asked. "Sadi has been seeing that arrogant man for three months. I talked with her briefly about it on Apo Prime. In this regard I do believe we will not need to intervene at all. Sadi's desire for your brother wafts from her pores most deeply."

"But Andro is leaving!" Denali protested.

Gorgo shook her head with a smile on her face. "How long has your brother been in love with Sadi Denali?"

"She is all he has ever talked about." Denali spoke in reply instantly. "For as long as I can remember."

"No matter who shared his bed." For'mya stated.

"She is a stunningly beautiful young wolf." Gorgo spoke as she looked at For'mya and saw her dark brown eyes holding a knowing gaze. "Why do you think she has not taken a mate before now?"

"There have been many who have wanted to as well over the years." For'mya said softly. "You only have to ask her father for that information. She has shunned them all... this Malic included."

"What are you saying mother?" Denali asked.

"What your brother and Sadi share was forged many years ago when he was still just a baby Denali." Gorgo spoke. "She knew even then in her subconscious that she would always be Andro's. It is similar to what your father shares with all your mothers. What you will no doubt experience because of who you are. The complete and utter sense of devotion to another." She looked into Denali's eyes and surprisingly saw understanding in them. Gorgo chuckled. "Malic does not yet know what he has interrupted... though I do believe Sadi is about to let him know. In very pointed terms."

Eliani had remained silent for the entire conversation. "It's a shame really." She spoke now. "He is rather hot looking."

"Eliani you *Pomai!*" Lisisa declared playfully. (Slut)

Eliani crossed her arms over her ample chest. "I'm just saying he is a very handsome wolf who tickles my nose." She spoke. "I'm not speaking to his obvious ego faults."

For'mya chuckled at her children's words. "Quiet... I want to enjoy the show." She spoke.

Sadi watched Andro leave the mess lounge, her anger building as he walked out. Slowly she turned back to gaze at Malic with fire in her jungle green eyes.

Malic reached out and took her arm gently. "We should go somewhere more private." He spoke.

Sadi wrenched her arm free of his grasp and glared at him with death in her eyes. "Malic if you ever lay a hand on me again I will cut your balls off and feed them to you!" Sadi hissed with more venom in her voice than anyone who knew her had ever heard. "I have waited for only one man all of my life Malic... my Soulmate... and you are not him! You will never be him."

"Sadi... you didn't tell me you were a Tier Six Mindvoicer!" Malic snapped well aware that dozens of eyes were on them now.

"I didn't tell you Malic... because your ego could not have handled it!" Sadi barked. She stepped closer to him and jabbed a finger into his chest. "Make no mistake about this Malic... if you have ruined this one opportunity at happiness for me, I will haunt you for the rest of your days."

"Sadi you..."

"No!" Sadi snapped. "I made a mistake allowing you into my life! I have watched you parade me around like a trophy of some sort to your comrades and to my friends! No more! You do not even know how to treat a woman Malic! You are nothing more than an egotistical *celie iastin monsene riad aulved!*" (Cock driven arrogant rock brain)

Malic's brow furrowed at her use of the ancient language again, and he heard many of those present break out with short gasping laughter that they tried to control, to include those at the royal family's table. Malic was no fool, and she obviously just called him some choice words in the ancient language, and he had no idea what they were. And Sadi looked just as surprised as him at what she had said.

"Look out!" A voice called.

Sadi turned toward the door as men and women alike scampered out of the way. Elynth's huge body filled the doorway, her talons digging into the deck as she came around the corner, ducking her neck and head and barely clearing even the extra tall doorway. Malic's eyes went wide, as did many of the cadets and new

personnel that had come here to eat as Elynth moved up directly behind Sadi and settled her massive bulk to the floor. The only one to notice that to his credit Malic did not back up was Eliani.

KertaGai? Is everything alright? I felt a very strong surge from Andro and you and I thought something might be wrong.

Sadi turned her head and looked up at Elynth's huge snout as it was only several inches from her shoulder. "Everything is fine Elynth. I was just going to find Andro." She turned back to look at Malic. "It has been settled... hasn't it Malic?"

Malic glared at her for a moment but one look into Elynth's eyes told him to pursue it would be the biggest mistake of his career, and right now his career meant more to him than anything. He nodded slowly. "Yes."

"Remember my words to you today Malic." Sadi spoke softly. "You don't know me... you have never taken the time to know me. All you have been concerned with is having me in your bed. You certainly don't know what I am capable of Malic, and it is far more than you have seen or witnessed up until now. Pray you never have cause to see that part of me Malic, because as the gods are my witness, it would not be a pretty sight. I truly hope you find what it is you seek... but it is not me."

Go KertaGai! I will remain and make sure others do not follow. Elynth told her.

Sadi didn't question her and turned, breaking into a fast trot heading out of the mess lounge.

"Can you say... down for the count?" Eliani spoke softly with a smile as she looked at Lisisa.

Lisisa's green eyes twinkled and she chuckled and she saw the others with small smiles on their faces. Whatever doubts any of those in the Leonidas family may have had about Sadi were quickly dashed aside with her performance this day.

"She made smoke out of him." Resumar exclaimed with a smile.

Eliani and Lisisa burst out in even louder laughter and Eliani leaned over to kiss her brother on his cheek. "The phrase is she smoked him Res." She spoke to him using the name everyone called him for short.

"*Lon kos.*" Resumar spoke without batting an eye. (That too)

"*Medwan coi cuia kos brey ty.*" Denali spoke with a grin. (Father is going to like her) "She's a little like you Eliani." He said looking at his older sister. "She has *nor!*" (Balls)

Eliani looked at him, her fern green eyes wide. "*Nor!*" She almost shouted.

Denali shrugged his broad shoulders. "Hey... as you are so fond of saying... if the shoe fits!"

Eliani's eyes grew wide. "Denali Leonidas... I am going to *daes terit nor!*" She barked loudly as she stood up to her full five foot five height, heads now turning towards them from all over the mess lounge. (Cook your balls)

Denali laughed. "*Teri spet daes!*" (You can't cook)

The regular crew members and officers of the *SCIMITAR* had seen it far too many times to be surprised. It was actually quite amusing to see the sons and daughters of their King carrying on as any other brother or sister in the Union would. It made them feel much closer to their King to know that he and his family were in fact very normal.

Eliani lifted her mug of coffee just as Denali was coming out of his chair. "There is nothing wrong with my cooking! I'll show you cook you *riad aulved!!*" She shouted.

Denali didn't give his sister a chance and he bolted before she could raise the mug to throw at him. Eliani gave chase immediately even though Denali was taller and had longer legs. Lisisa was glaring at her brother Resumar over the table and he lifted his hands in a sign of peace.

"I didn't do anything!" He protested.

"You probably put him up to that!" Lisisa snapped.

"I did not!" Resumar shouted back but not able to maintain a straight face.

Lisisa came to her feet slowly, her eyes never leaving her brother. "Res... I'm going to make you pay." She growled.

Resumar leaned over quickly and kissed For'mya's cheek. "Mother... I must check on Cemath. He seems to be calling my name! Urgently!" He gasped out before breaking into a run just as Lisisa launched the mug at him, barely missing his head.

Gorgo had sat through it stunned and now she turned to look at Captain Sa'sur. "Does this happen often?" She asked.

The elven captain of the *SCIMITAR* laughed loudly as she brought her mug of coffee to her lips and looked at Commander Bren. She turned back to Gorgo. "Lady Gorgo... this is our entertainment." She exclaimed. "It never ceases to make the entire crew laugh. They will chase each other around the ship for at least an hour until Andro steps in."

"He will step in though?" Gorgo asked hopefully.

Sa'sur nodded. "It depends on what side." She answered seeing the look on Gorgo's face and beginning to laugh even harder.

Sadi slammed her fists against the elevator lift as the doors closed just as she reached them.

"Anse!" She barked out stabbing at the button to call the lift. She had run down the corridor the way she had seen Andro turn, but he was long gone and no where in sight. She thought she caught a glimpse of his short black hair getting on the lift and began running towards it as the doors were beginning to close. Her heart was racing now... feelings of dread running through her at what had just happened.

"Your use of the ancient language is getting better *KertaGai*." His deep soothing voice echoed from nearby.

Sadi spun around and saw him leaning up against the bulkhead next to the lift in the dim light. She hadn't even noticed him as she rushed up to the door. "Andro... I... what..." She stepped up to him now.

Sadi was not able to finish her sentence for she was suddenly scooped up quite easily in Andro's arms, and his lips came down to cover hers in that same instant. Sadi's eyes opened wide for a split second, her arms frozen in motion as he lifted her off the deck and crushed her to him, effectively pinning her against the bulkhead. In that split second, the rush of emotions and sensations cascaded through her like a runaway Lifter. All she had ever wanted... all she had ever desired... and it was right here for her now. All she had to do was surrender to the emotions within her.

Sadi groaned loudly and surrendered completely.

Her arms wrapped around his broad shoulders, and her legs slid up seductively along his hips as she met his kiss with every iota of stored up passion and desire she had been holding in all these years. She may not have known it until only a few hours earlier, she may have tried to deny it over the years, but now it was the only thing that mattered to her. He was what she wanted. What she had wanted from the very first moment she had stared into those azure blue eyes twenty-five years ago. She felt Andro's arms pull her even closer, his tongue exploring and tasting, dancing across her teeth and her own tongue even as his aura washed over her and wrapped her within its embrace. A dance of love that had Sadi's blood boiling in her veins as the warmth of his body and aura surged through every part of her. This was a kiss of passion and want unlike anything she had ever experienced. Every nerve in her body was screaming out its pleasure and her brain threatened to go into overload as it made her melt against him.

Andro had her in his arms, partly holding her up and partly pinned against the bulkhead. He had imagined this for more years than he could remember, having her lithe body in his arms and responding to him as she was. Whatever doubts he may have had about what she would feel were smashed aside the moment he saw that she wore the Dragon's Heart pendant around her neck on the tarmac. He was born fully aware of everything around him, Elynth his only means to express that awareness, and the one thing he had desired since he was eight months old was finally going to be his. The lush warmth of her body, the feel of her lips and her sugar plum and spice scent were combining to drive him to heights he had never been. It wasn't until he had to take a breath or pass out that he finally broke their kiss, using his nose and lips to nuzzle her cheek and throat even as he filled his lungs with her scent and air.

Sadi's wolf eyes were open wide once more, jungle green outlined in black, her wolf fangs fully extended even as her hands were moving up to grasp his head as he nuzzled her throat and sent crushing tingles of fire shooting through her body.

"Cari... *Carians* Andro!" She was finally able to gasp out. (Gods)

Andro was unsure of his own racing heart and he was content to simply nuzzle her warm skin until he could pull away and look at her. His own azure blue orbs were outlined in black as well, a hint of yellowish

color mixed into the cornea area, the dual fangs, identical to his father, and unique only to the line of Leonidas were long and extremely sharp as he looked at her. "*Pen brol sorgur.*" (I am sorry) Andro gasped out.

Sadi shook her head quickly and kissed him again hard, nibbling his bottom lip with her wolf fangs gently. "I'm not." She gasped in reply when she pulled away.

"I have... I have waited for so long to do that." Andro breathed gazing into her green eyes.

Sadi smiled dreamily. "Oh... and it was spectacular." She told him. "Please... please tell me you are going to take me to your quarters Andro. Please tell me you are going to make me yours." She spoke hopefully. Yes she wanted him... and she wanted him now in the worst possible way.

Andro rested his forehead to her chest above her breasts and after a long moment he shook his head. "No." He said finally.

Sadi pulled his head from chest and looked at him stunned. "No?" She asked astonished. "What... what is wrong? Do I... do I smell bad? Don't I... don't you want me?"

Andro smiled and kissed her moist lips gently sending more shivers through Sadi's body. "*KertaGai*... I want you more than I have ever wanted anything in my life." He spoke softly. "My ship however, is not how I wanted our first time together to be."

Sadi couldn't believe she was hearing this and she couldn't help the feeling of unabashed love that swarmed her senses. She brought her hands to his face and stared into his eyes deeply. "You... you are serious?" She said finally.

Andro nodded with a smile. "When I claim you Sadi... it will be upon the satin sheets in my villa in Gytheio, the Port of Sparta. It is a small villa... but it is mine. The moon will be above us, and the breeze from the ocean will be washing through the doors surrounding us. When you scream my name Sadi... I want the entire city to hear your cries."

"You are a cocky *ronnus*." She spoke with the tone of her voice dripping in love. "What makes you think you can make me scream your name?"

"I have faith in my abilities." He replied with a grin.

"Wow... you are a confident *ronnus*!" Sadi exclaimed. Sadi wasn't kidding herself she knew. After the kiss they had just shared, Sadi had no doubts she would happily scream his name at the moon until she was hoarse.

Andro chuckled. "Perhaps... but it will be perfect." He said.

"Isn't it... isn't it usually the females who are concerned about that sort of thing?" Sadi asked him with a loving smile as she traced his jaw with a finger.

"Eliani would say I'm getting in touch with my more feminine side." Andro told her with a grin.

Sadi laughed heartily at that, her tone like music to his ears and he leaned over to nuzzle her throat again hearing her gasp in delight. "And... and just how long will I have to wait for this to happen?" Sadi asked.

Andro laughed as his lips brushed the warm silky skin of her neck. "Not as long as I had originally planned I can tell you that. I intend to worship you for at least three straight days when I claim you *KertaGai*."

Sadi ran her fingers through his soft black hair. It was cut very short but the style fit him perfectly, and it made her fingers want to do nothing but stroke it all night. "Only three?" She asked playfully. "Androcles Leonidas... I am disappointed. That doesn't sound very Spartan like."

Andro laughed softly. "We will have the entire rest of our lives after that *KertaGai*." He spoke. "Do not be disappointed, three days is only the beginning."

Sadi stared at him for a long moment, her fingers lowering to trace his face, his lips, his mustache and goatee and she watched his eyes close in bliss. "Andro... how is... how is this even possible?" She asked softly.

His azure eyes opened and he looked at her. "Does it matter?" He asked.

"But to feel for you what I feel?" Sadi asked softly. "To have felt it for so long. Andro... there was never anything serious between Malic and I. We..."

Andro shook his head. "The past is just that *KertaGai*. It has led us both to this point in our lives. From here we go forward. My father... my father has always told us to never fear the unknown. To embrace it and relish in the new experiences and sensations it can bring us. That is exactly what I intend to do. You know that your Mindvoice abilities have allowed you to see things differently than most. To experience events from a very different perspective. The moment Elynth touched you Sadi, you became different. It is not something I asked her to do, though I am very happy she did. And I intend to make up for lost time very soon."

Sadi smiled and her heart sang at his words. “What exactly do you intend to do now Prince Leonidas?” She asked. “You have me in a rather compromising position at the moment, and I’m not in a mood to protest anything you might suggest.”

Andro smiled. “What I intend is to take you to one of the smaller dining lounges and watch you eat. Arrarn, Normya and Zarah usually eat near the flight deck. They are...” He smiled. “They are possessive of their aircraft and they are the more sedate of my siblings in many ways. Your stomach is still growling... and soon your hungry will override everything else. Join me with them and we can begin planning our future together.”

“I... I hunger for you. Not food.” She gasped.

“No more than I hunger for you Sadi.” He said. “We have waited this long... another few days will only make the anticipation that much more inviting and rewarding.”

Sadi kissed him once more, holding his face in her hands before finally running her moist tongue across his lips. “Then feed me Prince Leonidas.” She said. “Before I decide to disregard all of these carefully laid out plans of yours and throw myself upon you in a sexual frenzy that you will be unable to refuse!”

Andro laughed and lowered her to the deck, his hands never leaving her body. He took her hand in his gently. “Follow me.”

EARTH
CITY OF SPARTA
CO-CAPITAL OF EARTH
POPULATION THREE MILLION SIX HUNDRED
THE KING’S VILLA

As with the Island Palace on Apo Prime, the King’s home and more commonly referred to as the Sparta Estate, had been enlarged dramatically over the years. It now stood at nearly fifty-thousand square feet of living space, all of it a single level. The main portion of the estate remained essentially unchanged with the main living area of the home increased in size three times over the last twenty years. All of the home’s nineteen bedrooms were in a circle around the main living area, separated by a ten meter wide flowered walkway that wrapped around the main living area. Inside the main home was the Great Room, where half a dozen large couches and chairs were arranged around the massive two meter across fireplace. The kitchen was still connected to the Great Room, and it too had been enlarged to accommodate the entire Leonidas clan at the single massive table. The main Dining Room where guests and dignitaries came for dinner was an enormous room nearly ten thousand square feet by itself. The massive polished pine table could seat thirty with ease.

There were several large rooms connected to the main living area, to include a complete communications and security station. Within this room... members of the *Durcunusaan* could monitor the entire four hundred acre Estate with ease. There were several offices, mainly for the King and his Queens, each of them with important duties within the Union that they tended to without fail. While the home was the largest within Sparta’s realm, which once more included Gytheio, it was not furnished with outrageously expensive or exorbitant pieces of furniture. Many of the couches and chairs and tables were hundreds of years old and lovingly maintained by three dozen men and women who worked on the Estate’s grounds daily. All of these men and women had their own large homes actually on the Estate’s grounds. There was a two story barracks style building nestled among hundred year old pines that was home to nearly two hundred *Durcunusaan* soldiers who were responsible for the Estate’s security even when the Leonidas family was not in residence, to include the four acre dragon mountain that had been built almost exactly to the dimensions of the facility on the Island Palace.

While they spent considerable time on Apo Prime, many knew that the King and his entire family preferred the slower pace and country setting of the Sparta Estate to the Island palace. The *Durcunusaan* maintained an almost severe set of guidelines and rules concerning the security of the Sparta Estate, and to this day the *Durcunusaan* could proudly say no one had ever been able to breach the defenses of the Estate. Armetus himself had sent his finest people against the Estate’s security blanket and they had always been caught before breaching the first line. No one but the *Durcunusaan* knew what kind of security measures were in place on the

estate, and no one had ever tried to find out. Though no one had ever breached the Estate's defenses, the *Durcunusaan* never allowed their vigilance to drop or lower. The Sparta Estate was perhaps the most secure facility on Earth outside of the Eden City Command Center, and outside of the Royal family there were very few men and women who were allowed unfettered access to the Estate.

Martin Leonidas opened his dark brown eyes slowly as the slight breeze and the rising morning sun fell across the expanse of the immense bed warming his exposed skin. The aroma of Aricia's special blend of coffee filtered to his nose and he smiled. He felt the two separate weights on his six foot two, two hundred and forty pound body and thought nothing of them. He knew exactly what they were.

Isabella's dark brown almost black silk like hair splayed out across his broad chiseled chest, mingling with Dysea's platinum locks that washed across his abdomen. Isabella was nestled against his left side, her beautiful porcelain like face tucked neatly into the crook of his shoulder, her lips slightly parted as she slept soundly. Dysea's head rested on his powerfully sculpted abdomen, her large firm breasts pressed tightly against his hip. Bella's equally large breasts were stabbing into his ribcage, the coolness of her pierced and studded nipples pressed against his warm skin. Dysea's wildflower scent mixed with Bella's sweet lilac like scent in the morning air, and Martin Leonidas inhaled deeply. Their bed was enormous, meant to fit all six of them with ease, which it did quite well. It was a sight to see really, the tangle of arms and legs in the morning when all of them slept together in the bed. It did not matter where anyone was positioned; they were in physical contact with each other all of the time when they slept. It brought a sensation of love and warmth to the large bed that made all of them happy. Unlike the rumors that floated around the Union, they did not always partake of the physical pleasures of each other when they were in bed together. It was well known that the Queens enjoyed each other as well as Martin, but there were times when they were all simply content to have their bodies touching in some intimate manner as they drifted off to sleep. Last night was one of those nights, as the three of them had worked long into the evening with Deia, Panos and Tarifa on half a dozen new proposals for trade agreements and new petitions by member worlds and even two new requests to enter the Union.

All of them would be together soon enough Martin thought to himself as he allowed the warmth of the sun to caress his exposed body. Aricia and Anja were returning from Hadaria the next day, and For'mya would be arriving with his mother and children the day after that. The sounds of children and laughter would once more fill the Sparta Estate for the next six months at least, and then Martin planned to get down to the business of having his Queens all in the same bed once more.

As far as Martin Leonidas was concerned... this was his home... and the Island Palace on Apo Prime was more their vacation home than anything now. All of his children had been born here in Sparta, and all of his older ones spent more time here than they did on Apo Prime.

Martin turned his head slowly and kissed Bella's forehead softly as he slowly extracted himself from their bodies. As he stood up completely at the foot of the bed he saw Dysea fold herself into Bella's arms to make up for Martin's body heat which was now gone. Her beautiful elven face rested atop Bella's breasts, and they both continued to breathe easily as they slept, Bella's arms naturally wrapping around her fellow Queen and long time lover without an instant of hesitation. It wasn't unusual for one or more of them to leave the bed while the others slept, they had grown accustomed to it as they raised fourteen children within the walls of their home here. They never wore clothes when they slept, even in the winter months. All of them were wolf now with the exception of Isabella, and during the winter months when there was a slight chill in the air, Bella was the one who slept next to Martin while the others spooned around them under the blankets. Her vampire blood did not allow her to stay as warm during the cold months of winter and she was always heavily dressed. It was a curse that she was entirely happy was not passed down to her two daughters, as they were half wolf and their wolf genes seemed to be the more dominant of the two.

Martin rubbed his large hand through his long thick black hair and scratched his beard as he turned and made his way out of their massive bedroom. Dysea and Bella would wake of their own accord he knew, and he was always the early riser of the group. As he stepped fully into the morning sunlight, the scent of wild pines and flowers filled him and he breathed deeply. The mountains that surrounded Sparta on three sides were filled with towering pine trees hundreds of years old, and their smell filled the valley in the early morning. Their bedroom, though enlarged like all the others over the years, was the only bedroom actually connected to the main estate. He had used the patio entrance that opened into the circular path between the large rows of small apartments where their children stayed when they were here. Like those on Apo Prime, the apartments were

complete units that allowed his children their own privacy, but also made it possible for them to eat in the same huge kitchen room as they always did. It was not something that Martin or his Queens required; it was something that his children had done all on their own over the years.

Martin turned and made his way on bare feet towards the patio entrance into the main gathering room of the villa. The kitchen was connected to that room and he could already detect the freshly brewed smell of Aricia's special blend of coffees in the air. He smiled to himself, knowing that Helen must already be awake and here in the villa. Even with her duties as the First Oracle and Director of the School of the Mages on Apo Prime, Helen made it a point to return to Sparta as often as she could. She had her own small, well guarded apartment on the Estate's immense grounds, and was more often than not the one to be found in the kitchen first, preparing some sort of fantastic dish of food. It was a passion for her... to cook for others... and even though she was loved and regarded as the First Oracle of their people, Helen made certain she continued to cook for others.

And that was usually Martin, his Queens and their family.

Martin entered the main gathering room and saw the fire in the marble fireplace burning down from the night before. The *Durcunusaan* had free reign to go anywhere and use anything they wished on the Estate. It was something that Martin insisted upon of those who so willingly would put their lives on hold to protect him and his family. He insisted that they partake of the entertainment and other facilities on the estate and those that had the late shift usually made a roaring fire and conducted their written reports on the couches and chairs within the gathering room. Martin turned right upon entering and went immediately into the huge kitchen, the smell of Aricia's coffee overwhelming. He smiled when he saw Helen in her customary sleeping robe bending over one of the large ovens and putting what appeared to be her biscuits into the oven to cook.

"Will you never stop trying to sneak up on me Martin?" Helen's voice echoed as she stood up closing the oven.

"I wasn't trying to sneak up on you." Martin defended himself as he moved to the ever present coffee dispenser.

Helen turned to face him as he poured himself a mug of coffee. "I understand you have agreed to give the graduation speech at the ceremony in four days." She spoke.

Martin nodded. "I haven't given one in almost fifteen years and I figured it would be time to do it again." He answered as he sipped the coffee and let it flow down his throat and into his stomach. "You know how I hate trying to make speeches for events like that. I don't like people hanging on my every word."

Helen smiled and stepped up to him, reaching up to stroke his face. No matter how many times she looked at him, Helen could not get over the uncanny resemblance he had to his father. "They don't hang on your every word Martin Leonidas. They listen to you because when you speak it is with passion and conviction. Just like your father did. They know when you speak; it comes from your heart. You still haven't figured it out have you?"

Martin met her gaze. "Figured what out? That far too many people seem to look at me like I'm some sort of god? That sometimes I rely too much on the past to direct our future?"

Helen smiled. "Martin... you have brought back to our people the spiritual connection we had to our past. When combined with your intense devotion to Spartan law and culture it may seem to some to be a political or religious movement, but trust me when I tell you no one views you that way. Oftentimes the past is the perfect way to direct the future, and you have the ability to walk that line and not let it become blurred."

"How can you be so sure?" Martin asked.

"You do not let them see you that way." Helen answered as she turned to pour herself her own mug of coffee. "You are the most approachable King in history Martin Leonidas. Anyone's history. People see you... on the streets of Apo Prime... on the streets of Sparta always... they see how you treat your Queens... the jokes you make of yourself. They see how your own children are the most unassuming offspring of royalty that there could ever be. You have a grip on normalcy that you refuse to let go of, and this has endeared the people of the Union to you in a way nothing ever could. Your first thought is always for others, and what is in the best interests for the Union... for everyone in the Union. They see the way you live..." Helen waved her hand around as if encompassing the entire villa. "Your insurances on maintaining this old furniture and this villa even though there are some pieces that are almost as old as you."

"Hey... I like my furniture! And this villa!" Martin protested.

Helen laughed. "Martin... it may seem to you as if they look upon you in some fanatic or religious way... when in reality they look upon you with the eyes and hearts of trust and respect for what you have done. They would follow you to *Vada Lethadori* Martin... without hesitation because they know you would be there with them, and do everything within your power to bring them all home. That is why they follow you. And they see that your children are no different than you." (The Gates of Hades)

"Helen..." He started to say.

Helen shook her head quickly. "No... you just continue to do what you have done all these years. Be yourself. You impress people by just doing that and you don't even know it." She patted his arm. "I will talk with Dysea and Bella when they wake up and decide what we will have for dinner when everyone is here. They already have spoken with the others and we'll work something out. You and your sons are easy, you will eat anything. We have to plan for the women in your family however."

They both turned when the *Durcunusaan* Colonel appeared in the doorway. "Milord?"

Martin turned and looked at him. "Good morning Fache." He spoke.

Colonel Fache had been in command of the Sparta Estate security for the last fourteen years, and for him it was the best duty he could have ever hoped to obtain. His mate simply adored living in Sparta.

"Sire... I have General/Colonel Simpson transmitting from *SPARTAN'S SOUL*." Fache spoke. "He's requesting a secure connection, Security Level Nine."

Martin's eyes perked up and he pushed off from the counter he was leaning against.

"Level Nine?" He asked.

Fache nodded. "I have routed the connection to your office sire."

Martin nodded and leaned over to kiss Helen's cheek. "I'll see you later." He spoke.

Helen nodded. "Go play King." She said with a smile.

Martin headed out of the kitchen area as Fache handed him the two data scrolls as they walked. "Did he say what it was about?"

Fache shook his head quickly. "No Milord."

Martin nodded. "Why don't you sit in Fache... this could be important." He spoke.

"On our way to Earth now Marty." Dan's voice was clear and focused from his quarters on *SPARTAN'S SOUL*. "I wanted to interrogate this scum we took alive before contacting you."

"Immortals?" Martin asked from the comfortable high backed chair in his office. "This is a stupid question Danny... but are you sure?"

Dan nodded. "No doubt." He answered. "The Evolli said they were contacted by a High Coven operative to secure the purchase of the T19s. The Immortals were supposed to make the transfer. This is the same bunch we have been getting reports on from the border colonies boss man. Most of them were holdovers from the war. They didn't take to kindly to surrender it seems. He says they have been surviving on the go in a hodgepodge of ships. These are the same boys that hit the mining colonies on Ouvr, Aleik and Pulolm. He did give us a name and a supplier in The Wilds on Talbor Seven."

"Where are the rest of them?" Martin asked.

Danny shook his head quickly. "We tried to get that out of him... but it appears he and his buddies were dropped off to conduct the transfer and then they would be picked up. He doesn't know where their larger force is, or where they would go when they realize their little party was crashed."

"What's his condition now?" Martin asked.

Danny's face took on a sheepish look and Martin saw Anuk step into the transmission now. His oversized shirt covered her body all the way down to her knees and she held a mug of tea in her hand.

"His metabolism did not agree with the vacuum of space Martin... I'm sorry." Anuk spoke.

Martin looked at her in the transmission. "I take it he acted in a rather vile way then?"

Anuk smiled sweetly and Martin couldn't help but grin. When it came to rather nasty tempers, after twenty-five years of being with Danny, Anuk had almost reached Anja's level of nastiness when pissed off. "You could say that." She answered.

"You got in touch with Andro before he left Apo Prime right?" Martin asked.

Danny nodded with a grin. “He took the news in stride... just like you, though I wasn’t able to tell him much about our now deceased friend. He said he would contact Riall and make sure he brought all the latest intelligence reports when he departed Apo Prime later this evening.”

“Jesus Dan... we haven’t heard anything from the High Coven in fifteen years.” Martin said. “Why suddenly would they risk coming across our borders and conduct black market arms deals in our territory?”

“I thought they were still officially at war with the Kavalian Federation.” Dan said. “Seems kind of silly to do something like this when you already got your hands full with those loose cannons.”

Martin nodded. “Well... they are apparently in another one of their lulls... but we know what happened after the last two. The High Coven got hit and hit hard. Besides... I wouldn’t trust the Kavalian Federation any further than I could throw them.”

“Yeah... I agree with that. Do you think Pleistarchus would try and pull something?” Danny spoke.

“That would get them nothing but pain. He knows that.” Martin answered.

“Well... you do have a knack for pissing people off brother.” Danny spoke.

“Aricia says it’s my charming personality.” Martin spoke.

“Or lack thereof.” Danny replied.

“I’ll have Admiral Joarl start contacting all our border colonies near Ceku Tertius to make sure they are still secure.” Martin spoke. “If they were in the sector... any of them could be at risk with these idiots running around. And once they discover their little plan went awry... I have a feeling they’ll be out for blood. We’ve been after this group for too long to let them slip our grasp now.”

“Good idea.” Danny spoke. “We’ll maintain our current speed and course. If we need to divert somewhere just contact us. Otherwise... I’ll see you in two days.”

“Watch your ass brother.” Martin spoke.

Danny nodded. “And you.”

Martin sat back in his chair as the transmission ended and he sipped his still hot coffee. He looked at where Fache sat in the chair. “Colonel?”

“Immortals sire?” Fache spoke. “After so long a period?”

Martin nodded. “I’m thinking the same thing you are Fache. Raise the status of everyone across the board until we find out what is going on.” Martin said. “Do it quietly so word doesn’t get out before we are ready, but make damn sure all security detachments know. Do it yourself if you would.”

Fache came to his feet. “I will start right now sire.”

Martin watched him leave the office before he got up and moved to the large colonial style window looking out over the city of Sparta in the distance. He lifted his mug and sipped his coffee.

“Back in the game huh Yuri?” He spoke softly. “What do you have in mind this time woman?”

***LEONIDAS IIA*-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* ENROUTE BACK TO EARTH**

The *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* was perhaps the second most well known *LEONIDAS IIA* ship within the United Lycavorian Union Fleet. Over the course of the last twenty-five years, no matter where disaster struck, no matter what disaster befell the species of the Union, the *SPIRIT* was usually the first or second ship to arrive on the scene. There was no mistaking the five foot three inch tall, Persian red haired Queen. Once you were able to meet her... it was next to impossible to forget her. With the senior Hadarian Divine One Eurin and her twin sister Sivana at her side they had practically transformed the entire medical structure of the Lycavorian Union. It was now more streamlined than ever before, with Hadarian Healers by the thousands now mixed in with the troops they would fight beside. Living with them, eating with them, and in some instances becoming husband and wife. The Hadarians had traditionally been a peaceful but secular people, and King Resumar had begun bringing them out of their shell before he had died. The older Healers had allowed their people to fall back into their old ways, but the return of the grandson of Resumar and the daughter of their own King Yelu changed all that.

It was not uncommon now to see Hadarian Healers traveling with the regular fleet ships, conducting training with the Spartans they would stand beside in battle. Most of the younger generation of Hadarians relished this and you would be hard pressed to find any Hadarian under the age of two thousand years old that did not adore their Queen and all she had done. Many of the older Healers and scholars tried to keep the changes from happening, but when Anja set her mind to something, it usually came to be. Eurin may have been one of the dozen or so oldest of their people, but she was also the most forward thinking of them, and she simply adored Anja and Sivana both. In order to appease many of the older Healers, Sivana had chosen to remain on Hadaria with Belen and their three children three months out of every year. It was just another sticking point with the scholars and older members of the Hadarian Parliament, that neither their ruling Queen nor ruling Princess would allow themselves to be corralled into remaining on Hadaria for longer than they wanted.

It also rubbed some of them the wrong way that both the surviving members of their own royal family were now mated to Lycavorians. Many of those men and women had learned over the years they could only push so far before the twin sisters exploded. Anja's fiery temper was well known throughout the Union, and while Sivana had much more patience for things, when she exploded it was wise to not be in the same room with her. They were alike in many ways as sisters, and as Sivana had fallen into her role as Princess with relish and as her life as a slave and smuggler drifted into the past, she found herself taking on more of the traits of her beloved twin. They were fiercely devoted to their mates and their children and each other and everything else came after they did. Once Sivana had been trained and schooled and finally conducted her Ascension Ceremony, it was discovered she was nearly as powerful as her sister in being able to command the healing properties of the nebula that surrounded and, every six months, saturated their homeworld.

Anja Leonidas was considered the premier medical mind in the Union, and almost nothing could escape her realm. She was always studying for new ways to improve medical treatment and develop new medicines that benefited their people. It was Anja that developed the wonder drug that actually made it easier for those with vampire mates to have children. It was something that Isabella had volunteered for first, and when she became pregnant within six months it became a very hot commodity. There were more interspecies marriages now among vampires and Lycavorians, not to mention so many other species within the Union. Working with Eurin and Sivana and two dozen of the finest minds in the medical fields, they had abolished many of the troublesome childhood diseases that affected the Algolian people and the Folcani race, as well as developing treatments for nearly every known disease that still resided within the Union. She had accomplished so much and she never stopped working for more.

It was also well known that while Anja was a Healer first, she was also one of the most lethal combatants within the Union. Her fighting skills were almost as famous as that of the King and Aricia, and there had been many times during the Evolli Triad War that Anja had led battles from the front with Miath her dragon at her side, and then immediately after winning, she would fall into her role as doctor.

Anja stood in front of the fake fireplace that adorned her personal quarters on the *SPIRIT* as she sipped the mug of coffee. The white button down shirt, one of Martin's older dress uniform shirts, did absolutely nothing to hide her large but exceptionally firm breasts or her small waist. Her skin was deeply tanned, and made her Persian red hair stand out even more. Her jade green eyes were always bright and alert. She considered herself muscular, but not in the manner of Dysea and Aricia who were naturally ripped and defined in a way she would never be no matter how much she worked at it. Her body didn't seem to matter to Martin, and he had always told her he adored how she was just the perfect combination of muscles and lush definition.

"Do you miss her Anja?" The soft voice spoke from behind her.

Anja turned and saw Aricia enter the main living room dressed in a very similar shirt, also one of Martin's older uniform shirts. It seemed they wore them more than he did for he hated any kind of dress uniform.

Anja watched Aricia pad into the room with nothing but love and desire in her jade colored eyes.

Aricia Leonidas was the personification of corporeal beauty as far as Anja Leonidas was concerned. Her five foot seven frame was packed with muscle, but defined in such a way that could make you wet just looking at her. Her breasts were full and firm, with a narrow rippled abdomen and waist and long lean legs that she could wrap around you in a heartbeat. Her exceptionally long raven black hair fell to the top of her firm ass cheeks, her skin deeply tanned like Anja's, her high cheekbones and full lips elegant and delicious. What set her

apart were her azure blue eyes. They almost seemed to glow in the right light and they were the reason that Anja knew every male wolf in the Union would give their lives for one night with her. Yet like Anja and the others, only one man could stir Aricia in that way and that was her Soulmate and husband.

They were Martin's Queens and they shared each other willingly and with a great deal of love whenever they were all together, but Aricia and For'mya had been there for her ever since Seanna's death without question or hesitation and that had developed a very powerful bond between the three women. A bond that was much stronger than any they had known before. It was a bond that had translated into them spending as much time together as they could. She and Aricia had shared a unique relationship when they had first met all those years ago, and since Seanna's death that relationship had blossomed once more, only now it included the seductive elf For'mya as well. A fact that Anja relished almost as much as Aricia.

Aricia was the youngest of Martin's Queens, but since the events of Enurrua so many years ago and the monumental growth in her Mindvoice powers, Aricia was now the one all of them turned to. She was the strongest of Martin's Queens in not only physical abilities, but Mindvoice abilities, and after what she had seen and endured, Aricia brought an uncomplicated mentality to many things that seemed complicated but were in actuality very easy to fix.

Anja shook her head slowly. "Not as much as you might think Little Wolf." She replied moving to where Aricia had settled onto the comfortable couch. Anja took a place next to her, their thighs touching and smiled. Anja was the only one who still referred to Aricia using the nickname they had first given her, yet it was used with love and affection and held no other meaning than that. "We... we were beginning to draw apart when she died."

Aricia looked at her surprised. "Anja... we... we didn't know that." She gasped.

Anja shook her head. "I wasn't going to tell anyone. Martin knew... he could sense it and we talked about it. I couldn't keep it from him... you know as well as I that he has an uncanny knack for knowing when one of us is upset about something." She spoke quickly.

Aricia nodded. "Yes he does."

"Seanna had found a male she was interested in on our mission to Lycavore all those years ago. She tried to hide it for a long time, but I knew. She didn't tell me at first... but she let him *cado forn* her and I caught his scent one night. She thought I would be angry... but I wasn't."

Aricia's head canted to the side. "I don't understand? Why were you drawing away then Anja?"

Anja met her gaze. "She told this man what we shared after they had been together quite a few years. Apparently... and I don't know this for sure... a few months after she told him he began to pressure her to get me to... she wanted to share me with her friend. He was... he was a Lycavorian from the Hadarian Security detachment." Anja spoke looking at her. "She wanted me to join them in their bed as she was willing to join us in ours."

"But... Seanna never joined us in our bed Anja." Aricia spoke. "No one certainly ever pressured her. Martin... Martin even said he did not want another to join us after Resumar was born. He has always been more than content with the five of us. This... this is all amazing to me. She... you and she were together for eight years after Eliani was born and this is not something I... any of us expected."

Anja nodded slowly. "I know." She spoke. "I think because she was willing to do it if I asked her that I should be willing as well. I tried to explain to her that was something I would never do... even if Martin allowed it. Which he never would."

"Don't... don't be angry with me Anja... but... did you want to?" Aricia asked softly.

Anja met her eyes and shook her head immediately with a smile. "No Little Wolf. Martin Leonidas is the only man I will ever share a bed with. He is all I have ever needed and all I have ever wanted. What he makes me feel no man could come close to. And not just physically either."

"I was curious that is all." Aricia spoke. "Of all of us... you were apart from him the longest... before you and he discovered who you truly were. It is always something I have been curious about. I have never known another man... that vile pig Joric doesn't count... and to be honest... I have never desired another man."

Anja scooted closer and stretched her legs out, turning and lowering her head to Aricia's thighs as Aricia's warm hand settled to her abdomen. "Well it made her angry. I believe this male pressured her to keep asking me about it. Imagine what he could brag about if he was able to get both of us in his bed. He got to fuck

his Queen. The fool actually thought he could get away with it I suppose. Martin would have skinned him alive and then fed him to Altairan albino leopards.”

Aricia chuckled. “Yes... he is rather possessive of us isn't he? Do you know who this man was?” Aricia asked.

Anja nodded. “I saw him when we gathered for her Final Ascension. He didn't seem particularly happy to see me. We hadn't talked for three months before Seanna was killed. I was able to get to her before she died... I told her I was sorry... and she apologized for being so foolish.”

Aricia brought her hand up and caressed her cheek. “Anja you don't blame yourself do you?”

Anja shook her head quickly. “No. She wanted something I was not prepared to give her. Something I would never be prepared to give her and she knew that. I think after so long together she thought she deserved it, which only tells me she didn't truly understand what Martin and you and the others mean to me.” Anja smiled warmly. “I will always remember the good times we had... but in the end she wanted more than she was entitled to. I just don't like going to see her parents every year. I believe this friend may have turned them against me in some way. They are always so cold now, almost as if they blame me for her death.”

“And you think this friend has some part in how they treat you now?” Aricia asked.

Anja nodded. “He still sees them quite often. I guess it was much more serious than Seanna led me to believe.”

“Then stop going to see them Anja.” Aricia spoke. “After hearing what you have told me... I believe you are just doing it out of some misplaced sense of guilt that you should not have.”

Anja nodded. “I decided before we left that this would be my last trip to see them.” She spoke tilting her head back and looking at her. “What you and I have re-discovered... what we share with For'mya now... I don't want to come between you and For'mya Little Wolf.”

“We don't think that Anja! Never!” Aricia exclaimed. “We have never thought that! What we share... what we share the three of us is beyond what most people can understand. Dysea and Bella understand because they have the same thing. I love For'mya... nothing will ever change that. I love you... I always have. When For'mya joined us she came to understand as well what we share. I told her about our first weeks and months together and what you and I meant to each other. I don't think there is a jealous bone in her body, except when it comes to Martin. She thought it was beautiful actually. We will never deny each other Anja; I relish Dysea and Bella's touch upon me just as much as yours and For'mya. It is no different for you and them I know, but we do gravitate to certain people. For'mya and I gravitate to you, as you do to us. Dysea and Bella to each other. We would never expect each other to change.”

“It helps that we all gravitate to Martin.” Anja said with a smile.

Aricia grinned. “Well... when he can do to us what he can... how could we not? And he does it so well... even after all these years together. He will never tire of us Anja... any of us.” She said with a chuckle. “With everything that has happened in the last years, the separate duties we all have...” Aricia looked at her. “I think it's time we began to rediscover what we all mean to each other.”

Anja nodded. “That sounds wonderful. I want to continue on with my life and what we have together. All of us.”

Aricia laughed suddenly squeezing her hand tightly. “You know they call us the three good witches at the children's center in Sparta.”

Anja laughed now as well. “What? Why?”

Aricia leaned over and kissed her softly. “Whenever we show up there to pick up our children we always hand out little treats. The other children love it.”

“Well... as a doctor I should be saying we shouldn't do that.” She spoke.

“You hand out more than any of us.” Aricia stated.

Anja chuckled. “I know.” Anja sipped her coffee and pushed back gently against Aricia loving the warmth of her body. “Are Andreus and Kmyla coming to Sparta for the dinner?”

Aricia nodded. “As far as I know... and the last time I spoke with Gorgo she told me that they would all be there. Most of her children with Riall have already moved to Earth. Gorgo says it is their way of telling her to return to the home of her roots.”

“Sivana and Belen will be leaving Hadaria tomorrow.” Anja spoke. “You know... this will be the first time since before the war that we will have everyone together.”

Aricia laughed. "If I remember correctly... the last time it took us a week to get the villa back to working order." She spoke sipping her coffee. "Martin and Daniel had to cut down four trees to make room for the waste disposal unit."

Anja nodded. "I remember." She said. "They insisted on doing it the old fashion way and it took them three days to do it with axes. Both of them were sore for two weeks afterwards. We will have to..."

The communications chime sounded and Anja sighed as she rolled off the couch quickly. She padded across the floor and moved to the small table activating the small holo disc. The image of the older Lycavorian man appeared. The same man who had commanded Anja's ship since its inception. "Yes Admiral."

"Lady Anja I am sorry to disturb you and Lady Aricia so early in the morning." The male voice spoke.

Anja chuckled softly. "We were already awake Admiral Omore... and I know if you are contacting us it has to be important."

"It's more strange than important Milady." He spoke. "We received a Standard Secure Fleet update this morning from Sparta, and with it was a secure order from the King upgrading the status of all ships and ground units in half a dozen sectors. The ones we currently will be moving through on our return to Earth as it happens. I have requested a follow on report, but we are without our normal Strike Wing Milady... and I would like your permission to alter course and join with the *SCIMITAR* and her Strike Wing to be on the safe side."

Anja's eyes narrowed as Aricia got up and came over to the holo disc transmission. "Omore... do you fear something from this report that puts a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser at risk without its Strike Wing?" Aricia asked.

"Anything is possible my Queen." He spoke. "And secure transmissions from the King in Sparta upgrading our alert status are not common."

"No they are not." Aricia spoke.

"It's just a precautionary measure my Queens. Prince Androcles's Strike Wing is moving for Earth from Apo Prime as we speak." He spoke. "Besides... I know that Lady Gorgo and Queen For'mya are onboard the *SCIMITAR* as well as all of your children. Prince Androcles left with them early yesterday morning. They apparently finished with their training exercise early and decided to meet them on Apo Prime as opposed to by Gate Three Nine. He is also carrying some thirty dragons for the Harmony Ceremony next month. Since they were already out on a training mission his Strike Wing is the only one currently in this sector of space."

"How long has it been since we've had Gorgo all to ourselves without Martin?" Anja asked mischievously as she looked at Aricia.

Aricia smiled. "Oh... he will hate us if we do that again." She spoke.

Anja nodded. "But think of the enjoyment we'll get out of it. He'll spoil us for weeks, and he is still a male wolf. He'll only hate us until one of us grabs his..."

"I will alter course then my Queens?" Omore interrupted them with a grin even as they plotted. He was well aware of the openness of the Leonidas family, and the games they played on each other. He had been Queen Anja's Strike Wing Commander since taking command of the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*, and he had refused four promotions in the past twenty-five years to remain where he was. He adored the diminutive Persian red haired Queen, and the best times of his career had come watching her interact with others.

Anja and Aricia looked at the holo transmission and laughed. "Yes Omore... you may alter course. How long before we rendezvous with them?" Anja asked.

"I will contact Captain Sa'sur now. If they maintain the heading they had plotted... we should join with them in just less than eight hours." He replied.

"Just in time for dinner." Aricia spoke.

SCIMITAR **THIRTY-SIX HOURS FROM EARTH**

Sadi was sitting in the mess lounge very early, enjoying the steaming mug of coffee. She was an early riser anyway, and she had been up half the night trying to convince Teeria and Palta that nothing had happened the night before when she had disappeared to find Androcles. They had found his brother and sisters right where he said they would and Sadi discovered exactly what he had said to be very true. The three of them were much

lower key and the meal had been splendid. Arrarn was exceptionally intelligent, and Normya and Zarah were refreshing and giddy. They only managed to embarrass Andro three times. She and Andro had shared looks of desire and passion all evening, combined with gentle caresses and touches. It was so perfect... so absolutely right... and Sadi could not help but wonder if it was not all a dream.

“Can we join you?” The female voice asked.

Sadi looked up and saw Lisisa, Eliani and Carina standing to the side with their trays. She almost choked on her coffee and came to her feet quickly. “Princesses!” She exclaimed.

Lisisa shook her head with a gentle smile. “No Sadi... to you we are only Andro’s sisters.” She spoke. “May we?”

Sadi motioned to the table quickly. “Please... it is... it is your ship after all.”

Eliani set her tray down on the table with a smile and shook her head. “No... this is Andro’s ship... we are just along for the ride. He and Sa’sur run the *SCIMITAR* together.”

Sadi dropped back into her chair as Lisisa settled next to her and Eliani and Carina sat across from her. “Please allow me to apologize for yesterday...” She spoke. “It was not something I intended to ever happen.”

Lisisa shook her head. “Then you were lucky to miss our explosion with our brothers.” She said with a grin. “We didn’t subject you to just how insane we can get. We are actually very sedate.”

Sadi couldn’t help but smile. “Yes... I gathered that.” She said.

“Lisisa... I don’t think she’s buying it.” Carina said with a smile.

Eliani shook her head in agreement. “It was a nice try Lisisa. We should have known Andro would have filled her in by now.”

Lisisa looked at Sadi. “No?”

Sadi shook her head. “I’m sorry.”

“*Anse!* I thought we could pull it off!” Lisisa spoke.

Sadi couldn’t help but laugh. “I am not as sedate as I appear.” She told them honestly. “Everything is happening rather quickly, and since I am still a cadet I have been trained to suppress my wildness.” Sadi said with a grin. “At least that is what my flight instructor told has told me to do.”

“We heard you were already a qualified pilot.” Eliani said as she began to chew the muffin.

Sadi nodded proudly. “Eight hundred hours in the *STRIKER* and six hundred hours piloting capital ships. I had quite a bit of a head start really since my father runs the Menkla Manufacturing Plant. I got to test fly most of the ships that came out of there before they went into full production.”

“You flew our mothers around for a while too I understand.” Lisisa said.

Sadi nodded. “That was very informative. Queen For’mya is an exceptional pilot. She and Star Commander Endith are almost instinctive.”

“Mother said you showed exceptional promise with the *STRIKER*.” Eliani spoke causing Sadi’s eyes to grow wide.

“She... she did?” Sadi asked.

Eliani smiled. “Sadi we have known about you since Andro was able to form words. It’s almost as if we know everything about you already.” She grinned at Sadi’s expression. “Don’t worry... that’s only a figure of speech. He’s followed your career very closely over the years. Always making sure you were doing ok.”

Sadi’s brow furrowed slowly. “Doing ok?”

Carina nodded. “He bought the building you live in.” She spoke.

“He bought... he bought the building I live in?” Sadi asked shocked.

Carina nodded. “When they turned you away? When you were first looking for a place to live just before you entered the academy?” She smiled. “I’m pretty sure when he found that out he bought the building and told the manager to give you the one you toured. I think that is so romantic.”

Eliani saw Sadi stiffen as Carina talked and she knew immediately that their attempt to make Sadi see Andro was the one for her was rapidly going into the toilet. “Sadi he only did it to...”

“What else has Androcles Leonidas done to *help* me?” Sadi asked sweetly but her voice was dripping with sarcasm now.

Lisisa knew then the mistake it had been and she reached out to take Sadi’s hand. “Sadi it isn’t what you think.” She said.

Sadi drew her hand back quickly. “Isn’t it? Did he help me get into the Academy? Gave me that extra support that I needed? Did he help me through flight school? Perhaps he made sure the instructors were easy on me? Or he told Commander Endith that I was the one he had chosen? Did he convince your grandmother to give me a perfect grade?”

“Sadi you are wrong.” Eliani spoke.

“Am I? How did I get entrance into the School of the Mages? The First Oracle approved my entrance. The First Oracle is like the King’s second mother. I needed nineteen references to get into the Union Academy! I was only able to obtain seventeen! Who were the last two? Men or women that he put a good word in for me with?” Sadi exclaimed as she got to her feet. “I am not a fool Eliani. He has been protecting me all this time hasn’t he? Watching over me?”

“Is that what you think?” Eliani asked.

Sadi stared at her. “Up until this very moment I thought I had accomplished everything on my own. Apparently that is not the case.”

“Sadi you...” Lisisa began to speak but Sadi turned quickly and walked out of the mess lounge, her anger building to eruption. Lisisa turned back to Eliani and Carina. “Oh boy.” She spoke.

Carina looked more frightened than Eliani and Lisisa and she leaned across the table. “We have to tell Andro.” She said quickly.

“Tell Andro what?” For’mya’s voice spoke from behind them.

The three of them turned to see For’mya and Gorgo standing behind them with their trays.

“Mother... I think we may have just made things infinitely harder for Andro when it comes to Sadi.” Eliani spoke.

Gorgo and For’mya looked at each other then back to them.

“What do you mean?” For’mya asked.

Andro sat in the right command chair on the bridge of the *SCIMITAR*.

The bridge of the *SCIMITAR* was situated just above where the two points of the blade shaped nose came together. Seven hundred meters from the tip and three thousand six hundred meters from the tail end of the ship. It was shaped like a half circle, with two decks along the side holding various stations ranging from operations to life support systems. The main helm control officer sat to the right of the two command chairs that were side by side on the raised pedestal, while the navigation officer was to the left. Since Androcles was a known early riser, he took the early morning shifts whenever he was on the *SCIMITAR*. He held the coffee mug in his hand as he went over the reports from the previous evening.

He had been unable to sleep after escorting Sadi back to the quarters she was sharing with her friends. Her scent was so burned into his mind it kept him awake until only two hours before his shift began, but like his father and most Spartans Andro was able to operate quite well on little sleep.

He looked up from the report from his father on Sparta. “Operations Officer... how long until the *SPIRIT* joins us?”

“Just under an hour sire.” The man called back.

“Very well... have Admiral Omore bring the *SPIRIT* onto our port side and take up station there when she arrives if you would.”

“Yes Milord.”

“Good... and then insure...” Andro heard the doors to the bridge open and he turned in his chair. His azure blue orbs opened a little wider when Sadi marched onto the bridge right past the two *Durcunusaan* officers who stood just inside the door. He came to his feet quickly. “Sadi?”

Sadi walked up to him. “We need to talk.” She spoke softly but firmly.

“What is wrong?” Andro asked immediately detecting her heightened sense of anger and the adrenalin flowing through her blood. He pulled her gently to the side away from the active stations.

“You bought the building I live in Andro?” She asked him.

Andro shook his head quickly as he stopped next to the empty sensor station. “What are you talking about?” He asked quickly in a low voice.

“Andro how long have you been protecting me?” Sadi asked. “How long have you been having people do things for me?”

“Sadi what are you talking about?” He asked.

“The building I live in on Apo Prime?” Sadi hissed. “You own it? My father pays you for me to live there?”

Andro nodded. “Yes... so?” He declared.

“So?” Sadi demanded. “I live in the building Androcles! Me! And my father pays you for me to live there! He pays you quite a large amount too!”

“You didn’t live there when I bought it.” Andro answered.

“No... because you bought it after you found out they turned me away. And then you told the manager to give me an apartment!” Sadi hissed.

Andro looked at her his eyes wide. “Who told you that?”

“What does it matter who told me?” Sadi snapped harshly.

“What is going on Sadi? I’m on duty here.”

“My entrance into the Academy?” She asked. “How many of the people I got references from did you talk to?” She asked quickly. “I was only able to obtain seventeen Andro. I needed nineteen. The two I needed to push me over the top came in on the very last day of acceptance applications!”

“That was good for you.” He spoke. “Sadi what is this all about?”

“Did you have your mother give a good word so that my flight instructors would go easy on me?” Sadi demanded. “Have you talked with your grandmother about my grades and convinced her to give me a perfect grade in her class? I want to know what else I have you to thank for Androcles Leonidas. I want to know all these things before I tell you I want nothing to do with you! I don’t need you looking out for me Androcles Leonidas! I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself! And I will not be a trophy for you as I was for Malic! I don’t care if you are the Crown Prince!”

“Sadi... I have no idea what you are talking about.” He spoke heatedly now. “Who has told you these things?”

“No one!” She spat. “I figured them out for myself!”

Andro’s blue eyes narrowed. “You figured them out for yourself?” He asked. “Where is all this coming from?”

“I don’t need you looking over me and making sure I achieve everything I have ever wanted!” Sadi hissed out. “Unlike you... I have had to work for everything in my life!”

Andro’s face became immediately stoic and without emotion. His eyes narrowed further and he glared at Sadi, stepping closer to her. “I have never suggested you have not worked for what you have achieved Sadi.” He spoke calmly and evenly. “I have not done these things you say I have done.”

“That’s it? I’m supposed to believe that?” She asked crossing her arms over her chest.

Andro glared down at her for only a moment longer before taking a deep breath. “You will believe what you will Sadi. I have never been *given* anything in my life... like you I have worked for everything I have achieved. It is wrong for you to imply that, simply because I hold the title of Crown Prince, I have been raised with a silver spoon in my mouth.” He spoke. “You have to leave the bridge now Sadi, I’m on duty.”

Sadi detected the incoming communications chime but ignored it and continued on. “So you aren’t going to defend yourself?” She demanded.

Andro turned and saw his Operations Officer go to the transmission console and saw his eyes widened. “I have nothing to defend myself with.” He spoke. “Not against what you seem to think I have done. Sadi you need to leave the bridge now! There seems to be...”

“Milord... we are receiving an automated distress signal from Eleyisi Three!” The Operations Officer spoke as he turned quickly. “It is repeating every sixty seconds. Milord... they say they are being attacked by Evolli mercenaries!”

Androcles turned his head and body completely away from her. “Bring the Wing to full alert!” He barked out. “Go to Condition Two! All officers report to their stations! Inform the *SPIRIT* what we are receiving!” Sadi could only watch in stunned shock as she watched Androcles transform right in front of her eyes.

The bridge intercom crackled as alarm claxons began to sound all over the ship.

“Andro what is going on?” Resumar’s voice filled the bridge. It was almost as if his younger brother slept next to the alarm claxon.

“Res we’re receiving a distress call from a nearby mining colony. Their automated signal says they are being attacked by Evolli mercenaries. Have Arrarn, Normya and Zarah prep the *DTs* in case we have to go to ground. Grab Denali and our sisters and get our equipment ready.”

“On it!” Resumar replied instantly.

Andro stabbed down on the arm of his command chair. “Sa’sur to the bridge! Sa’sur to the bridge! Combat stations! This is not a drill! Prepare for LSD operation and combat jump! Prepare for LSD operation and combat jump! Ops... inform the *SPIRIT* of what we are doing! Tell Admiral Omore to shift his course to join with us during the jump!”

Sa’sur strode briskly onto the bridge, Gorgo and For’mya trailing behind her. “Cadets... feel free to spread out around the outer rims of the bridge but do not touch anything, and try not to get in anyone’s way. We have conducted a combat jump and everyone will need their space.” She barked out as she moved to stand in front of the chair on the right of the pedestal next to where Andro already was. She saw Sadi tucked into a corner already and wondered briefly why she was already on the bridge. “Milord... what is happening? You do not call a Condition Two ever Androcles!”

“Ops?” Andro called out.

“We are three minutes from visual range Milord! Sensors are clear! The *SPIRIT* has moved into position on our port side! Queen Anja and Queen Aricia are transferring over in a *STRIKER DT*. The Strike Wing has signaled ready for action and our flanks are covered.” A tall Lycavorian man spoke as he turned from one of the standing stations on the left.

“Weapons? Shields?”

“Shields are on line and weapons are primed and ready!”

“What do we know of this Eleysi Three?” Andro asked as he held out the data pad of the message they had received to Sa’sur and she began to read quickly, her pale blue eyes widening slightly.

“It’s a Class Three mining colony from Earth Milord.” The same man answered turning to face him completely. “Established exactly seventeen years ago by then President Tarifa and Prime Minister Selene for Power Source Research. Some very rich deposits of Duridium Ore were discovered by a surveying team. They established the colony within six months... wow!”

Sa’sur chuckled as she settled into her chair the data pad in her hand. “Yes... I have met Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Prime Minister Selene... those two women are exceptionally efficient, as is Vice President Aihola. Navigator, plot a high polar course over the axis of the planet!”

“Yes ma’am!”

“Have all squadron commanders on standby alert!” Andro called out. “Full Ground Strike Loads on the *DEVASTATORS!*”

Gorgo, For’mya and the cadets could only watched in silence and witness the seamless unity of the crew. Sa’sur and Andro both were barking out orders for one thing or the other, yet the bridge crew of the *SCIMITAR* was operating as smoothly as anything any of them had ever seen. It was like watching an elegant orchestra in process with two conductors who were perfectly attuned to each other.

“Is there anything from the surface?” Andro asked.

“Negative Milord.” The man answered. “The colony covers three square kilometers and has a population of two thousand six hundred men, women and children. They have nothing in the way of defensive armaments except for hand held weapons.”

“Very well... Andro?” Sa’sur asked.

Andro nodded. “Resumar has already started prepping our ground team.”

“Standard approach... and put us in a glacial orbit over...” Sa’sur began.

“Captain! Incoming transmission from the colony!” The communications officer declared now. “Emergency frequency four one nine!”

Sa’sur came to her feet. “Let’s see it!”

The massive holo disc on the floor of the bridge in front of the enormous view window came to life with the image of an older man. His clothes were tattered and blood stained and he held an assault rifle.

“This is William Carson... Reserve LU Commander of Earth Mining Colony Eleyisi Three! Who is this?”

“Commander Carson I am Captain Sa’sur of the *ULU SCIMITAR*! We are two minutes from your location! Can you give me a status report?”

“The *SCIMITAR*? That’s Prince Androcles ship?” The man asked. “Thank the gods!”

“What is happening Commander Carson?” Sa’sur asked again feeling Andro come up next to her.

“They hit us almost four days ago.” Carson stated. “A mix of Kochab and Evolli. Mainly Evolli. We lost three hundred and fifty men and women before the rest were able to get to the defensive bunkers and initiate a lock down. They devastated the main power grid and we are operating only on batteries now.”

“Are they still on the planet?” Androcles voice carried next to Sa’sur.

“I don’t think so. We haven’t been attacked in over two days, but I don’t want to risk my people finding out either. Those Evolli bastards are tricky.” The man spoke quickly his face lighting up now as he realized help was coming. “I have a lot of wounded and we’ve been out of medication now for over a day.”

Sadi’s eyes grew wide once more as she saw Androcles move from the platform with Sa’sur to stand directly in front of the holo image of the man. He looked so physically powerful and commanding. A self-assured and dominant Spartan Alpha male.

What had she done?

She felt Teeria come up next to her and grab her arm. “Sadi... what is going on? We went looking for you and they said you stormed onto the bridge very angry.” Teeria whispered to her.

Sadi nodded quickly unable to speak as she stared at him. They were close enough to them to hear them speaking.

Androcles looked at Sa’sur as his grandmother and mother stepped up to them. “Part of the group your Uncle took out two days ago?” Sa’sur asked from the command platform as she looked at him.

“Possibly.” Andro replied quickly. “They were part of the group that refused to accept the surrender and have been attacking our border installations. They’ve never been this bold before though.”

“What do you mean Andro? What group?” For’mya asked.

“Mother...”

“If you pull that need to know *sibfla* on me Androcles Leonidas, I will turn you over my knee like when you were a boy! Right here in front of everyone!” For’mya snapped loudly. She couldn’t help but hear the soft chortling of several crewmembers at that picture, and while Queen For’mya was known as the most sedate and patient of the Queens along with Queen Dysea, she was also quite capable of making your life miserable as well. “You have inherited your father’s trait of being obsessively secretive and it is extremely annoying, especially at times like this.” She crossed her arms over her chest and glared at him.

Androcles looked at her and couldn’t help but smile. “The training mission we were on wasn’t exactly a training mission mother.” He told her.

“I’ve already deduced that!” For’mya snapped moving forward. “Why don’t you tell me what the hell is going on here? I swear when I get home to Sparta your father and I are going to have words.”

Androcles chuckled at her reaction and watched Gorgo move up next to her. “Father didn’t know about it himself until this morning mother. Vice President Aihola had received some reports while transiting back from Apo Prime two weeks ago. She was returning from an Agricultural Symposium and several of her Drow elf contacts in The Wilds reported to her that mercenaries were using Ceku Tertius as a transfer point of black market arms deals. She discussed it with Tarifa and Selene and because it was so close to Earth and since we were already there for the State Dinner, they told father about it. Uncle Daniel and I took our Strike Wings to Ceku Tertius... ostensibly under a training mission. We remained a week and found nothing and I left just three days ago. Uncle Daniel and Moneus remained with Aunt Anuk for a few extra days. In that time they discovered an exchange of weapons happening between the Evolli and...”

Gorgo’s eyes went wide. “Who were they selling these weapons to?”

“That doesn’t matter right now.” Androcles spoke quickly not wanting to announce that information in front of a bunch of cadets. He looked at For’mya. [Mindvoice Shielded] *It is not for common ears mother. Trust me.* He told her.

[*That bad?*] For'mya asked.

[*It definitely is not good.*]

For'mya nodded. [*You can fill me in later.*]

“Sa'sur how many transports do we have?” Andro asked turning to look at her.

“Including your two *DTs*, the *Type II* and the *MENKLA III*, we have four. Your mothers are coming over on their *DT* that gives us five.” Sa'sur answered gently. “Fifteen smaller ones within the Wing. We're a Strike Wing Androcles... we don't have our full Group. You know that.”

Andro nodded. “Commander Carson... how many of your people remain?” Androcles asked the man turning back to the holo transmission.

“Just over two thousand between the three bunkers.” Carson answered immediately. “I have contact with them. Please tell me you are coming to get us.”

“That we are sir!” Androcles stated. “Inform your people that we will take the wounded first. Prioritize your people accordingly but do not leave or unlock the bunkers until you hear from me or Captain Sa'sur directly. Is that clear?”

“Yes sir!”

Sa'sur turned to another officer. “I want fighters in the sky doing a fly over of the colony before the transports begin to land! Launch the ready flight!” She barked. “Have every ship prepare their single transport for immediate rescue operations. Have them form up on our *DTs* and the *MENKLA* and prepare to descend to the surface.”

Androcles turned to Gorgo. “I'm sorry grandmother... it appears I will be the one making you late for a change and not father.”

“Given the circumstances... I forgive you in advance.” Gorgo spoke waving her hand dismissively.

“Mother... I need Arrarn to fly the *Type II* with Carina. Can you take his *DT*?” Andro asked For'mya

For'mya nodded without question. “I'll need a co-pilot if we're going to do a mid-flight drop.”

“Do any of the cadets accompanying you have flight training or medical training grandmother?” Andro asked.

“Sire...” Sa'sur spoke now stepping forward. “They are still cadets! We should not risk them.”

“They are members of the Union military!” Androcles spoke calmly. “And this is more than likely a rescue operation. The real life experience will be good for them. Besides... we need the extra bodies.”

Gorgo nodded. “I agree. Many of them are medically trained. Some have already passed their flight tests as well. I will get them suited up and to the transports. That many people will require you to have as many medical personnel as possible. I will coordinate with Anja when she arrives. How long?”

“Queen Anja's *DT* is landing right now Lady Gorgo.” The man spoke.

Androcles nodded and looked at Sa'sur. “I need someone to fly with my mother since Arrarn will be handling the *Type II*.”

“I can!” Sadi blurted out without thinking.

Teeria and Palta both looked at her as if she was insane while Sa'sur turned to her. “You are checked out in a *DT* Cadet?” She asked surprised.

Sadi nodded slowly now. “I... yes ma'am. Eight... eight hundred hours.”

“Who initialed your log book Cadet?”

“Star Commander Endith Captain.” Sadi answered more confidently this time and seeing Sa'sur's eyes go a little wider. “I was able to fly with her on many occasions while I was working with the *Annacdone*.”

Sa'sur looked at Androcles and shrugged. “That's more than anyone else we have on board Andro... except for you, Eliani and your mother.”

Androcles stared at Sadi for a long moment before nodding his head quickly. He turned to For'mya who wore a smile on her face. “Mother?”

For'mya nodded without hesitation. “Works for me.”

He turned to an ensign standing nearby. “Get Cadet Sadi a uniform and bring her to the landing bay. My mother will start prepping the ship. Grandmother, gather whatever medical personnel we have and get them loaded onto the *MENKLA* and the *Type II*. And bring Bren's detachment of *Durcunusaan* just to be safe.”

Gorgo nodded. “I'll see to it.”

Androcles looked at Sa'sur. “Watch over us Sa'sur.”

She nodded. "I always do."

"And Sa'sur, please contact my father on Earth if you would and advise him of what is happening. And then contact someone on Earth and find out if they have sent anyone to investigate why they have lost touch with their mining colony. I find it very hard to believe that all three of my adopted Aunts missed this."

Sa'sur nodded. "I'll take care of it."

ELEYSI THREE

A rugged and dusty world of rock and mountains and sand.

At least that is what it appeared like to Sadi as the *STRIKER DT* held course towards the mining colony at twelve thousand feet off the ground. Her pulse was racing like it never had before, her blond hair crammed quickly under the helmet as she had boarded the *DT* with For'mya through the side. This wasn't a training mission however... this was very real and she shifted in her seat trying to get comfortable, the new set of black conforming body armor rubbing her neck gently.

For'mya turned her helmeted head calmly and looked at Sadi with a smile. "Relax Sadi. You are doing an outstanding job."

Sadi turned to look at her, her jungle green eyes wide. "I take it... I take it you do this a lot?"

For'mya nodded with another engaging smile. "This is like a vacation compared to what it usually is like. Half the time we are taking fire when Andro or Martin goes out the back." She replied. "The other half they are unloading at sixty thousand feet or higher."

"Higher?!" Sadi gasped.

For'mya nodded. "He and his father can go out at seventy-five thousand feet. Higher if they have to." She spoke. "Twelve thousand feet is like stepping off a set of stairs for them!" She laughed.

Sadi glanced quickly into the rear of the *DT*, which was now fully open for her to view since they had disengaged the escape hatch system upon entering the atmosphere. She could see the two rows of Spartans sitting along the opposite walls clutching their weapons, Commander Famus walking up and down in front of them. Surprisingly she saw Malic sitting on one of the benches, and he looked more nervous now than she had ever seen him.

Elynth and Tharua rested on the deck of the *DT*; both of them saddled and ready to depart. Androcles stood in front of his sister, inspecting her body armor and other equipment while she did the same for him. Sadi let her green eyes linger on him and she felt her heart beat increase quickly. The black body armor conformed to him like a glove, the ivory hilts of the two swords stuck up over the backs of his shoulders, the P190 in its place down the center of his back. The combat harness he wore carried several small pouches, and she could see his helmet sitting on the deck next to his sister's. As they finished inspecting each other, they moved quickly to their dragons and Sadi watched with keen interest as Androcles studied the saddle as he moved along Elynth's broad side, his gloved hand sliding along her scales as he moved. He adjusted the saddle in the front, and Sadi saw Elynth dip her head to nudge him and Sadi could then feel the Mindvoice tremors of them speaking to one another. Andro moved with such a controlled precision and confidence. His aura, though still mainly shielded, was radiating enough that she could feel it at least. It was focused, wild and pure and so powerful and warm. She had felt a small portion of that aura on the *SCIMITAR* just the night before and now she feared she would never taste it again.

He was so different than what she had expected him to be. That he allowed the cadets to come on the mission without question spoke volumes to her. That he didn't bat an eye when she told them she could help fly a *DT*, even after how she had treated him made Sadi sing inwardly with joy and bring everything she had been thinking into very real doubt. Watching him now as she did, Sadi realized almost instantly that she wanted him. She wanted to be wrapped in his arms. He had said she was more beautiful than he remembered, but to Sadi... to her he was the most beautiful man she had ever seen. And that frightened her.

"Sadi..." For'mya's voice dragged her back and she turned quickly. "Eliani, Lisisa and Carina told me what happened.

"Milady I..." Sadi began to reply.

“Don’t you dare refer to me like that!” For’mya almost barked out. “Not after what we went through that night. And certainly not with the way Andro feels about you.”

“He bought the building I live in For’mya!” Sadi exclaimed though with a lot less forcefulness than she had said the same thing to him. “My father pays him for me to live there! How do I know he didn’t have a hand in everything I thought I accomplished on my own? I don’t want that For’mya! I’ve never wanted that!”

“From the time he was able to speak... the one thing he has loved about you more than anything else is your strength Sadi.” For’mya spoke. “Your drive to reach your goals.”

“He...” Sadi began.

“He told you he was going to court you in the ancient Spartan way didn’t he?” For’mya asked cutting her off.

Sadi nodded. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“In ancient Sparta... after Martin’s father’s time... males would present gifts to the fathers of the females they wanted to take as their mates. Do you know what Martin Leonidas gave to my father when he did this with me? With all of us?” For’mya spoke.

“The King did this?” Sadi asked stunned.

For’mya nodded. “He gave my father, Anja’s grandfather, Dysea’s mother, Aricia’s mother and Deia’s husband a Rilian Diamond. Deia and her mate stood for Isabella.” For’mya spoke seeing Sadi’s eyes go wide.

“Five Rilian Diamonds?” Sadi gasped. “For’mya... Rilian Diamonds can only be gathered in the volcanic tunnels of Semtola. They are the most... they are one of the most precious diamonds in the Universe. Just one is worth... I don’t even know anymore. They are protected by...”

For’mya nodded with a smile. “They are protected by Semtolian Pit Vipers...yes... I know. Sixty-five foot long vipers that can peel the flesh from your bones in twenty seconds with the acid they spit. Their venom rivals that of the *Riad Buku* on the High Coven home world. We must have cursed him in the ancient language for a week for being so foolish to do something like that. I think it was also the most passionate week of sex we have ever had with him.” She spoke with a dazzling smile. “We knew he loved us all... without doubt or hesitation. That he would risk his life as he did for every one of us to do what he did?” For’mya shook her head. “Well... I was still learning about the culture of Sparta when he did this. Needless to say... what he did to show his devotion and love to all of us... what we meant to him? Nothing exists in this universe that could ever come between our love for him. Not even death.”

Sadi sat silently for a moment hearing the whine of the powerful *STRIKER* engines. She shook her head. “But...”

“Androcles is his father’s son Sadi. He bought the building six months before you started living there Sadi. Carina did not know the full details of that. She only assumed he bought it so you could live there... you must remember Sadi... seven years ago Carina was only sixteen.”

“But his sisters... they didn’t try to...”

For’mya smiled. “You didn’t give them the chance Sadi.” For’mya said. “Andro made the decision during a lull in the Evolli War. He flew back to Apo Prime from wherever he was and completed the transaction.”

“He was fighting a war!” Sadi exclaimed.

For’mya nodded. “That should tell you a little of what he feels for you. It was going to be his gift to your father when he asked for his permission to take you as his mate.” Sadi’s jungle green eyes went wide as For’mya held out the data pad to her. “These are the transaction details in case you do not believe me. Aricia actually cautioned him against buying it. It used up two thirds of the trust fund his father had established for him. Gorgo and I actually thought it was an excellent business prospect and it turns out we were right. The building has turned an enormous profit since he bought it eight years ago, and it continues to increase every year. Your father will never have to work another day in his life, though knowing your father he will continue to do so. You know as well as I that there are millions of wealthy men and women in the Union, but there is also no poverty because we all give so much back. I can tell you that Androcles is worth almost as much as his father now because of this single business transaction.” For’mya checked her instruments quickly and turned back to her. “The building itself means nothing to him Sadi. It’s only purpose was so that he could give it to your father when the day came.”

“For’mya... I...” Sadi could only stare at the details on the pad.

“Eight months after the end of the war he disappeared with Elynth for six weeks. No one knew where he had gone except his father and Riall, and they weren’t telling us. We believe he went to do something as equally foolish for you as his father did for us.” For’mya spoke. “They can be so male sometimes you know.” She said with a grin that caused Sadi to smile now.

“The two recommendations you thought you still needed were already in your file Sadi. That is why you did not need the full nineteen to enter the academy.” For’mya spoke. “You petitioned Endith and Tina if I recall, and you never received a response because they had already entered recommendations into your file from your work with them in the *Annacdone*. They didn’t know who you were at that point. Sadi everything you have done has been because of your own hard work, never doubt that. It is one of the reasons Andro has loved you since he was an infant as I said. Gorgo has given out only nine perfect grades in her entire time as a professor at the University. Do you honestly believe she would go against her own values to give you a perfect grade because Andro is her grandson? Sadi... you are far smarter than that.”

“I have ruined everything haven’t I?” Sadi lamented.

For’mya shook her head. “No. The desire you have for each other is so evident that even the densest individual can see it. What you need to do now is let go of the past. You have come so far... and your scent tells me Andro is the one you want. Now is the time for you to take hold of what you want and make it happen. He would never disrespect you in any way Sadi... his father would beat him into the ground if that was the case. Yes... he has watched over you through the years, inquired about you often, but never once has he interfered in anything you have done because he knows you did not need him to even if he wanted to.”

Sadi looked at her. “I have made such a fool out of myself For’mya.” She said.

For’mya laughed. “No more than I have in the past child. No more than I have in the past. When this is over with... allow him to hold you within his embrace. He has told you his intentions... and he will stick to them. However there is no reason you can not enjoy the warmth and love of his aura until the time comes when he makes you his. If that is indeed what you want.”

“Oh For’mya it is!” Sadi spoke. “It...” She heard the soft beeping in her helmet and turned quickly as the COM came alive with the voice of Captain Sa’sur on the *SCIMITAR*. “*JAVELIN ONE*... Andro?”

For’mya touched her COM panel. “Androcles... Captain Sa’sur!”

Andro turned and immediately moved the ninety meters to the cockpit. He looked at Sadi with those azure eyes and a gentle smile before kneeling between her and For’mya as Sa’sur’s face shifted a little then cleared.

“Go ahead *SCIMITAR*.” Andro spoke quickly.

“Andro... our fighters report all clear, but there is an unusual amount of seismic echoing coming from the terrain near the settlement.” Sa’sur spoke.

For’mya looked at him. “Mining tunnels.” She spoke.

Sa’sur nodded. “That’s what we assumed as well. Unfortunately the Duridium in the ground is making sensor scans spotty at best. No ships have been detected on the surface, but I recommend you go in spread four one just to play it safe. Your mothers on the *SPIRIT’S DT* are already moving into position.”

Andro nodded. “I agree.” He spoke.

“Your mothers say they will play overwatch and let you and the others handle the ground situation.”

Sa’sur spoke with a grin. “I also spoke with President Turner and Prime Minister Selene. I knew Prime Minister Selene was efficient Andro. They were already acting on the transmission. They received it this morning right after your father got the message from General/Colonel Simpson. They were on the way to see your father when I interrupted them. President Turner asks that you contact him when we discover what the situation is.”

Andro nodded. “Since we are coming in from opposite poles Sa’sur, inform my mothers we will be on the surface by the time they are over the settlement. They are *NOT* to enter the zone until it is secure. We will establish a perimeter and begin to move the more seriously wounded as soon as the first transports arrive from above and then they can land and they will undoubtedly want to take charge of the evacuation.”

“I’ll let them know.”

Androcles spoke. “Keep them on stand by Sa’sur and I will notify you when it is clear. I already have one mother and grandmother going into the frying pan so to speak. I truly do not want my father screaming at me that I put three of my mothers in harm’s way at the same time.”

Sa’sur nodded as she laughed. “You will have air support standing by... call them if you need them.”

Androcles nodded. “Understood... *JAVELIN ONE* out.” He looked at For’mya. “Two minutes mother. Drop us to ten thousand. We’ll do a full stop release.”

For’mya nodded without hesitation. “Affirmative.”

Androcles turned and looked at Sadi, her green eyes making his heart slam into his chest once more. He smiled at her and reached up to caress her cheek.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *Sadi... I... I...* He told her softly.

Sadi’s eyes grew wide at his touch and she reached up to grab his hand. [*Androcles... I... I love you.*] There... she had said it. And it felt so very right.

Andro lowered his head quickly and nuzzled her cheek while squeezing her shoulder gently with a smile. “Just do what my mother tells you. She’s just as insanely crazy as my brother Arrarn, but that is where he and Normya get it from anyway.”

“Andro...” Sadi began but he turned quickly and moved back into the rear of the *DT* heading directly to where Elynth turned her head waiting for him. She turned to For’mya. “Does he always fly with his sister?” She asked.

For’mya nodded. “Eliani, Denali or Resumar. Elynth and Jeth together are too large for one *DT*. Resumar and Lisisa are with Normya’s *DT* and Denali will act as the straggler in this case from the *Type II*. In a situation like this... it’s safer for Andro and Resumar to fly separate and have Denali bring up the rear so to speak. The bonds between Denali and Aradace and Resumar and Cemath are still developing. Still growing. They did not have the luxury of being bonded to them while still in the womb like Andro. Resumar is a superior warrior but Denali thinks better on his feet and his TK abilities are better than Resumar’s. He and Aradace are better suited to come in as support if need be because he has a knack for being able to adapt much quicker to a changing situation. It is something Resumar and he work on all the time, but they know where their strengths are, and they do not argue. That is their strength and Andro knows how to use it.”

“For’mya... please, you will tell me if I do something wrong?” Sadi pleaded.

For’mya smiled once more. “Give me six degrees on the flaps and reduce power to thirty percent Cadet. We have a drop to make.”

Androcles sat on Elynth’s back holding his helmet in his hands as *JAVELIN ONE’S* ramp began to open and extend. Malic’s eyes were wide as he stared out the back of the *DT* at the open barren land beneath them. He heard the rattle on the floor and saw Eliani’s helmet rattling as the wind began to whip at their altitude and pass into the back of the *DT*. He rose from his seat and went to snatch up the helmet from the deck but Famus’s hand slammed down on his shoulder.

“What are you doing?” He screamed to be heard above the wind.

“The Princess! Her helmet!” Malic exclaimed.

“Sit down fool! She has done this hundreds of times! She does not need your help!” Famus snapped shoving him back into his seat.

Malic’s wide eyes turned to see Eliani’s helmet lift into the air by some unseen hand. The mahogany colored dragon turned her long neck and head back around and her copper colored eyes settled on Malic as that massive armor encased tail lifted up off the deck as if poised to reach out and strike him. He looked up further and saw Eliani staring at him with those fern green eyes as she held her hand out and the helmet moved to settle into her grasp.

Eliani turned back to Androcles as she lowered her helmet onto her head. “I’ll flip ya!” She called out as the ramp fully extended and locked into place.

Androcles lowered his helmet onto his head with a grin. “Age before beauty sister, you know that! Always!”

“Ah... you’re no fun! Lisisa at least flips me for it!” Eliani exclaimed dismissing him with a wave of her hand.

Andro smiled and shifted in his saddle. *Once more Elynth my Bonded Sister!* He barked out within Mindvoice completely unshielded. Famus quickly stood rock solid and slammed his P190 across his chest.

Into the hands of my grandfather’s spirit we commend our souls!

May he guide our actions and thoughts and pick us up if we fall! Elynth spoke and dug her talons into the non skid deck plating and sprinted off the ramp.

Eliani adjusted her legs in her saddle and patted Tharua's thick neck as she saw Elynth's tail clear the ramp and plunge from sight. *I don't have any fancy words Tharua my sister.* She said.

Who needs fancy words Eliani! Let's just fly! Tharua exclaimed with humor in her tone as she too dug her nails into the non skid deck and followed Elynth and Androcles.

Sadi's eyes were wide in disbelief as she watched on the monitor. She and For'mya had heard easily the words Androcles and Elynth had spoken just before they had leaped into oblivion and fell from sight causing her to gasp in shock at the quickness of it. A heartbeat later Eliani and Tharua followed.

"Bonded Pairs are clear!" For'mya spoke into her helmet COM, her eyes focused out the side window of her *DT*.

"Confirmed Lady For'mya!" Famus's voice answered in their helmets. "Closing ramp and doors."

"Roger! Holding position here! Stand by for high speed entry into zone Famus! Just in case!"

"Copy that."

"*JAVELIN TWO?* Heavy Two... Status?" For'mya asked.

"Bonded Pairs are free and clear." Normya's voice replied. "We are holding station for your mark mother."

"Denali is free and clear!" Arrarn's calm controlled voice came next. "He's taking up high orbit and standing by mother."

"Stand by all ships!" For'mya spoke. She turned to Sadi. "Androcles wears a TAP camera on his helmet. Frequency two one two." She spoke. "Pull it up on the monitor between us. We can see everything he does. And patch it into the back so Famus can monitor as well."

Sadi worked the console quickly and the monitor between them came alive with a picture of the ground soaring past at incredible speeds.

"Oh my..." Sadi said.

For'mya chuckled. "She's fast isn't she? Not as fast as her mother or Tharua in a straight run, but she can turn faster than Isheeni and make your stomach leave last week's rations in orbit. I'll monitor the instruments. Just keep your eyes on that monitor. He'll slow down when he gets close to the settlement and then our eyes can help him even from here."

(Insert song Sandstorm here)

Androcles leaned low in the saddle, his head behind Elynth's thick neck and his legs tucked in tightly to her sides under the dragon armor.

This is what they loved.

The speed at which his bonded sister could propel them was tremendous and it made his heart race with adrenalin every time they unleashed themselves. It was the purest form of freedom they could know, and Androcles could not remember the last time he had taken an interplanetary transport on either Earth or Apo Prime. He and Elynth always flew where they were going. The new Dragon Armor saddles were larger and much more comfortable for long flights and sustained combat. They could fit two people easily, and there were streamlined pouches on either side of the saddle that held an assortment of tools and rations. Near his right leg Andro kept a separate pouch that held two generic *Nehtes*, both their pommels extending out several inches for easy access. There was another smaller pouch near his left leg that only he and Elynth knew the contents of. They were not concerned about anyone looking in the pouch as it was considered a heinous crime among *Mjolnir's Hand* to alter fellow rider's equipment.

Andro turned his head and saw Eliani and Tharua in much the same position as he was in, flying fifty meters off Elynth's right wing and easily keeping pace.

Andro... one kilometer! Lisisa's voice boomed out within Mindvoice.

The five of them would talk with each other only within Mindvoice now, at least until the transports were all down safely and no threat had been detected. The five of them had quickly become all business. There were no more humorous or flippant comments. This is what they did and they needed to be sharp all the time.

Lisisa... you and I directly over the center. Resumar... Eliani... break now! Androcles barked. *Denali you are our eyes brother!*

I have you all. Denali answered.

Breaking now! Eliani and Resumar answered instantly.

Andro turned as Tharua dipped her wing as she and Eliani peeled away from him like a speeding projectile. He and Elynth and Lisisa and Jeth had the strongest psychic shields of the quintet, nearly as strong as his father and Torma and they stood the better chance of surviving a surprise attack if one came as they passed over the settlement.

Lisisa... dropping now sister. One hundred on the deck! Speed passes first time! Around for a second right after! Androcles ordered.

Jeth and I are with you! Lisisa answered. *Five degrees left! Coming right on!*

Here we go! Elynth shouted as she lowered her head and dove for the ground.

Famus motioned to Malic as he stood by the chart table in the now still air of the back of the *DT*. Malic moved up to him quickly.

“Time for some remedial training *Enomotarch* Malic.” He barked out. “You wish to be a *Durcunusaan*? Good!” He pointed to the large flat monitor built into the table. “They are in what we call a spread four one formation. Prince Androcles and Princess Lisisa will pass above the settlement at high speed and then turn immediately for a slower speed pass if nothing shoots at them. They all wear TAP cameras in their helmets. This is the feed from Prince Androcles. You switch with this button. Once they make their second pass switch your feed to Princess Eliani. She will execute the final pass with Tharua and Prince Resumar will ride high cover on her at a very slow speed. Once Queen For’mya puts us in position to support, switch to the *DT*’s own camera system.”

Malic looked at him wide eyed. “Why not the Princes sir?” He asked. “Aren’t they the stronger?”

Famus nodded. “Excellent question Malic. You aren’t as dumb as Princess Lisisa thinks you are. Eliani makes the last pass because of Tharua. She is the only pure Firespitter in their group and her flame blast will not only ignite anything it touches but it will cause heavy smoke to rise and give them cover should Eliani begin taking fire. Princess Eliani and Tharua are the fastest and lightest of the group and can move much quicker if they need to. The first rule of the *Durcunusaan* Malic... never judge by outward appearance.”

“Yes sir! But if she starts taking fire she’ll be completely exposed won’t she?” Malic asked.

“All of them have psychic shields that will protect them. Androcles and Lisisa more powerful than Eliani and Resumar. If this is an ambush by intelligent individuals, they will want to take down as many dragons as they can with the initial fire. That means they will go after the Prince and Princess first. Not a single dragon. The Evolli refined this to an art... and if we are facing them here, your eyes will need to be sharp. Eliani can not see in all directions. Once they complete their second pass, Queen For’mya will move us to visual range as I said and you will need to be alert as Eliani passes over. Can you do that *Enomotarch*?”

“Yes sir!”

“Good! Now watch the monitor while I prepare the others. Prince Denali has high cover, but if anything happens he will drop like a *lauk rie sibfla*.” Famus saw Malic’s eyes narrow. “A load of shit!” He exclaimed.

Sadi watched with wide eyes as Elynth and Jeth passed within a meter of each other directly over the center of the settlement traveling at close to two hundred kilometers an hour. She gasped out as they tilted on their sides and passed belly to belly over the top of the settlement, both of them cranking into hair splitting turns in opposite directions. Their voices reached out to her easily.

Nothing Andro! Lisisa exclaimed as she looked back over Jeth’s tail at the tops of the settlement while Jeth rocketed them away.

I saw nothing either! Andro replied.

That doesn't mean they ain't there Andro. Eliani broke in. Keep your eyes open brother.

I intend to. Lisisa... I'm breaking back. Resumar?

I got your back brother. Resumar answered.

Mirroring you now Andro! Jeth take us a little lower this time! Lisisa spoke as Jeth snapped them into another turn.

Lower and slower! Jeth spoke as they cranked around.

Sadi could only watch from Andro's TAP camera but she saw the gut wrenching turn Elynth executed, almost feeling the forces pulling against Androcles's body. The terrain whipping by came into better focus now as Elynth slowed considerably.

The tops of the settlement buildings, mostly domed structures, were passing underneath him and Elynth at a much more sedate speed and Sadi could make out the destroyed remains of several buildings.

Signs of weapons fire. Andro spoke. *I see a few bodies on the ground. They look elven. Part of the colony.*

Lots of broken and disturbed structures here. Lisisa reported. *I'm seeing bodies as well... they... Andro they are children.* Her voice held sorrow and barely contained rage in it. Sadi gasped at this feeling and For'mya looked at her.

"What?"

"They... they see children on the ground." Sadi spoke looking at her. "Dead children."

"The Evolli are not known for their sentiment Sadi. Keep that in mind." For'mya said.

Sadi nodded. "Yes, I will."

"Good! Stand by to give me power to the engines. Once they clear the settlement Andro will order us closer before Eliani goes in for the last pass. *JAVELIN TWO* and Heavy Two this is *ONE*. Moving to impact range!" For'mya spoke. "Give me power Sadi. Keep her even."

"*TWO* confirms. Moving."

"Heavy Two moving." Arrarn's ever calm voice replied.

For'mya took a deep breath. "Ok... hold your breath." She spoke. "Here we go."

Eliani! JAVELINS are in position sister. Andro spoke.

Tharua... that's our cue. Eliani spoke. *Let's do it.*

Good... I was growing bored. Tharua answered as she dipped her wing and they banked towards the settlement.

Tharua flared her wings to their full extension and she began to maneuver slowly back and forth, riding the wind as if she was hunting.

Keep your eyes peeled sister. Eliani spoke softly.

I'm above and slightly left of you Eliani. Stay sharp. Resumar's voice echoed in her head.

Do nothing stupid Tharua! Jeth's voice called out.

Mind yourself Jeth! I'm not as fat as you remember!

Mind yourself Jeth! I'm not as fat as you remember!

Lisisa felt Jeth tense as Tharua began to move over the outskirts of the settlement. Her green eyes didn't leave where her sister and Tharua were moving but she reached down and placed her gloved hand on Jeth's neck.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *She will be fine Jeth.* Lisisa told him softly. *[We have done this many times before brother.]*

[I know.] He answered his usually childlike self now buried deep as the business end of his position in *Mjolnir's Hand* and as Lisisa's Bonded Dragon was paramount. And in these circumstances... Jeth was all business. *[That does not mean I can not worry for her Lisisa. Before I did not want to claim her as my mate... now I do.]*

[That will still happen Jeth.]

[Only if she stops seeing me as a child Lisisa. And I don't know if she ever will.]

[Keep your mind focused Jeth. You can not protect her if you are not focused.]

Lisisa smiled when she felt him nod his massive head and concentrate on watching Eliani and Tharua as they banked lazily along the edges of the settlement.

Malic's eyes were glued to the camera now... his monitor switched to the *DT's* own camera system which could reach ten kilometers out. The picture of Eliani and Tharua was clear as he watched them move slowly back and forth, at times hanging almost motionless in the air. He had always professed how skilled he was... exaggerating his deeds during the one patrol he had been on that had contact with a small Evolli patrol on Thepis Four. He had not even seen the Evolli mercenaries until after the first section of his patrol had slaughtered them, so in truth Malic had never really seen combat. He could not deny this any longer as his heart was pounding near out of control.

Here he was... among five fully combat tested members of the Royal family, and four actual members of *Mjolnir's Hand*, not to mention three Queens of the Union itself and the *Durcunusaan* that always accompanied them. Prince Androcles had been decorated twenty times during that six year span, even earning the coveted Shield of Valor, the highest decoration the Union could award. The details behind that decoration were sketchy at best, but Malic knew it must have been a glorious battle. And he had acted like a pompous fool in front of them all.

In front of Princess Eliani.

Malic hadn't taken real notice of her until he came aboard the *DT*, as angry as he had been with Sadi and her actions. The body armor she wore conformed to her very shapely figure in ways he never thought possible. She had a lean, supple and muscular body, even more so than Sadi and her burgundy colored hair and fern green eyes caused his heart rate to increase when she looked at him.

Sadi.

It was obvious to him and any who witnessed what she meant to the Prince, and apparently what he meant to her. He was the reason Sadi had never wanted more from him. Something very profound must have happened between the two of them for it to still affect her twenty plus years later. It made Malic curious. To know what it was. He did not consider himself a foolish or stupid man, perhaps more arrogant than he should be, but he was proud of his accomplishments so far. He was the only one in his family who was. His father and four brothers were officers within the fleet, his mother a senate liaison. They had been incensed when he failed the exam for the Union Fleet Officer Academy, even more so when he had chosen to take the road as a common Spartan and not fight the decision and ruling. He had always hated school, and when he had failed that exam he knew how much that had hurt him. He took the only road open to him at the time, and his parents had not been happy. He didn't mind the training or long hours and hard work... and it had sculpted his body into what he was now. He...

Malic's eyes narrowed as the dark blotch caught his eye. He moved forward, leaning closer to the large monitor as his hands worked the camera angle switching to the *DT's* own powerful camera zooming system now that they were so close. It panned off of Eliani and Tharua and settled to the top of the five story structure she and her dragon had just passed. He saw a large tarp flap in the wind and then it was thrown back to reveal two Evolli wielding large weapons, one of which was a T19.

A dragon killer.

"AMBUSH!" Malic screamed slamming his hand down on the COM panel. "AMBUSH! T19 behind you Princess! Six o'clock! Behind you Princess!"

"AMBUSH!" The strange male voice echoed in Eliani's helmet. ***"AMBUSH! T19 behind you Princess! Six o'clock! Behind you Princess!"***

Reflexes from years of combat situations and training with her brothers and father had given Eliani and Tharua lightning like movements. Even before the unknown voice was finished screaming in her helmet Eliani

was turning in her saddle, her right hand snatching the P190A3 from its spot on the side of her saddle and bringing it up as Tharua spun in mid air. As she came to fully point behind her, the P190 was up to her shoulder and Eliani was pulling the trigger. Her first sight had been the Evolli closest to her turn. The P190A3 round from her rifle punched through his bulbous left eye socket, blowing his yellowish brain matter on the wall behind him. As Eliani tracked without even seeing if her first target was dead her fern green eyes grew wide as she saw the T19 launching one of its missiles.

“THARUA! Down!” Eliani screamed.

Too late! Tharua screamed out in Mindvoice as she lowered her head and rolled over to her right just as the rocket left the barrel of the weapon. *They have us!*

NO! Jeth’s angry voice announced as his massive blue/black body blotted out the sunlight and any picture of the building. The moment the voice had begun screaming in their helmets; Lisisa had kicked him towards Eliani and Tharua as was their position and station to cover them. *I don’t think so!*

Tharua tried to look up as she rolled away, straining to see what was happening and she felt and heard Jeth unleash a blast of superheated air directly at the Evolli. He was so close and so overwhelmingly powerful that she could feel his rage within Mindvoice at the surprise attack upon her. His trumpet of anger at the attack on her and Eliani pierced Tharua to her core. She didn’t see the blast of superheated breath reach out and incinerate the Evolli in the blink of an eye, as well as igniting the small missile. The explosion wasn’t large, they never were with the T19s, but they were extremely powerful and the concussive force sent Tharua spinning out of control towards the building.

Eliani! Tharua screamed out, flailing her wings madly to regain control. *Jeth!*

Worry about us sister! We’re going to hit!

No... we are not! Tharua barked out viciously, anger fueling her strength. *Hold on my sister!*

Tharua extended her wings suddenly, flaring them completely to the sides as the nearby building blossomed in front of them. Eliani felt them slowing incredibly fast, her eyes wide and then Tharua’s talons were digging into the side of the building, clawing at any kind of foothold. Eliani reached out quickly directing their combined TK power to steady them. As Tharua talons sank in she cocked her rear legs and propelled them back away from the building and back into the sky.

Lisisa! Eliani screamed out, her eyes searching.

“What was that?” Lisisa’s outraged voice echoed in her helmet. “That was a *nubous* tickle you Evolli scum! Shoot my sister in the back will you? You will pay for your folly now!”

Eliani heard Jeth’s trumpeting roar echoing his sentiments and both she and Tharua turned to see Jeth’s massive, muscular body smashing the five story building. His talons were dug into the side of the building and his mace like Heavyhorn tail, layered with invulnerable Dragon Armor, was taking out huge swaths of metal and concrete. He was only half a meter shy of his father’s twenty-one meters, and though he was only twenty-five years old, behind his father, mother and Elynth, he was perhaps the most powerful dragon among their kind. It was the reason he was so sought after by females, even females much older than Tharua as a prospective mate. In the saddle on his back Lisisa sat firmly anchored even at the odd angle, with her P190A3 in her arms, a swath of flame reaching out from the barrel as she pumped burst after burst toward the location of the Evolli missile team. Unseen by everyone and unknown to all but Eliani, Tharua watched Jeth with something more than humor and friendship in her copper colored eyes. They saw three more Evolli running through the interior of the building and then the piercing roar filled the dusty air.

Elynth fell out of the sky and down upon the other end of the building with undisguised rage and identical savagery to her brother. Her Heavyhorn tail, while not as large as Jeth’s, but still encased in the Dragon Armor, impacted the side of the building with enough force to shatter windows and dislodge frames making the Evolli within stagger from the blow. She reared back her head and unleashed a jet of flame tinged superheated air through the smashed building just as Jeth let loose with another blast of his own superheated breath even as Androcles was letting rip with his 190A3.

The combining streams cooked the Evolli inside the building alive, setting the entire building ablaze and melting much of the interior frame work just as Denali brought Aradace down like the four metric tons that she was directly on top of the position where the Evolli missile team had been with a scream and trumpet of rage. His P190A3 was spitting out death with lethal speed and accuracy.

“Never attack my sisters!” Denali roared from his saddle his voice carrying over their helmet COM units.

It was a sight Lisisa watched with adoring eyes.

“Dropping now!” Resumar’s voice screamed out. “More behind us!”

Eliani and Tharua whirled around in midair and Tharua let out a trumpet of rage all her own, her head rearing back and unleashing a stream of flame that engulfed two more Evolli who were still scrambling to target them with T19s. Their screams of agony died quickly as Cemath descended like a three and a half metric ton boulder and squashed both their burning bodies into the roof of the building, chunks of the building beginning to fall as his weight crushed the floor and they fell.

“*Nubou!* They’re all over!” For’mya screamed out. “Famus emergency drop! We’re going in!”

Sadi’s eyes were wide at what she was witnessing and she gripped her console tightly.

“Full flaps!” For’mya screamed out. “I’ll show you what happens when you ambush our children you Evolli *ronnus!* Aricia! Anja! Execute! Execute! We’re going in! We’re going in!”

“We’ll cover and sweep For’mya!” Aricia’s voice replied immediately.

The *DT* surged forward with an incredible burst of raw power.

Aricia adjusted her controls as Anja cranked them into a tight turn and they dropped from high altitude.

“Bring us in from the south Anja!” Aricia barked as her eyes scanned the sensor scope between them.

“We can support better from there! Our children are trained for this my love! We are not equal to them in this type of operation!”

Anja clenched her teeth and nodded. “South it is!”

Aricia looked into the back of the *DT* at the *Durcunusaan* Commander who held tightly to the hand hold on the cockpit door. “We will drop you to the south of the settlement Oneut! Sweep west from there! And order the full *Pentekostyes* to deploy now!”

The man nodded. “Done!” He barked moving back into the rear of the *DT*.

Famus held on as For’mya caused the *DT* to dance in her hands, and he stumbled towards the rear, his hand slamming down on the ramp controls. He regained his footing quickly and lifted his P190A3 and looked at the wide eyed Spartans. Almost all of them were new Spartans heading to Earth for their first assignments. Now however, they would have their baptism under fire.

“Standard offensive grouping!” He yelled. “Malic... you are senior! Take half and break left when we land. I’ll break right. Sweep it all! Kill anything not wearing black and crimson! Work your way to the Prince in the center! Leave none alive!”

Malic gripped his P190A3 tighter, fear racing through him, but he nodded his head with a firm set in his jaw.

“I don’t care what standard operating procedure is!” Gorgo screamed at the *Durcunusaan* officer in Bren’s detachment on *JAVELIN TWO*.

“Lady Gorgo... one of us must remain airborne to cover them! We are the recovery aircraft!” The Spartan tried to be reasonable even though he wanted to have Normya send their *DT* hurtling to the ground and join the battle.

“Fine! I’m pulling rank!” Gorgo snapped. “I’m an Admiral! You are a Lieutenant Commander! Now do as I *nubous* tell you! Normya?”

The platinum blond hair of her granddaughter whipped around from the pilot seat of the *DT*.

“Grandmother?”

“Normya... your brothers and sisters are being ambushed child.” Gorgo stated more calmly than she felt.

“Grandmother it will be decided by the time we land! You know this. Andro will take no prisoners.” She stated calmly.

“Then it won’t matter a bit. Take us in.” Gorgo ordered.

Normya smiled at her. “On our way!” She said happily.

Gorgo turned back to the two dozen cadets in the rear of the *DT* who had the medical training, Teeria and Palta among them. Their eyes were wide and she could smell the fear as Bren stepped up to her and held out the P190A3 for her.

“The Prince will be very unhappy that you have violated his orders Lady Gorgo!” Bren spoke with a small grin.

Gorgo took the P190A3 and looked at Bren with a stern expression. “Tough! He can’t be any worse than his father!”

Bren smiled. “I will put a man in the sniper turret and keep the cadets in the *DT* until the situation is secure. Take my detachment!”

“You are taking all this rather calmly Bren.” Gorgo spoke quickly. “I apologize. You are the *Durcunusaan* Commander and I have usurped your command by yelling at your officer.”

Bren shook his head quickly. “My Lady... I have protected the Prince for nine years. When he has let me that is.” Bren answered with a smile. “The unusual and chaotic is normal for me. By the time we arrive, he, his sisters, Resumar and Denali and their dragons will have killed all the Evolli as Princess Normya has said. None of them particularly care for the amphibian Evolli scum. More so the Prince than the others after Alba Tau. The Evolli will discover this was not a wise move on their part. And I yell at my officers every hour. It is something they are used to.”

The leader of the Evolli ambush team was rapidly figuring that out, very painfully. The twenty members of his Evolli and Kochab ambush team had lost the advantage of surprise in the first four seconds when they failed to take down the mahogany colored dragon. The huge blue/black monstrosity had cut in front of his missile team just as they were launching and his blast of superheated air had caused the missile to explode prematurely. He had watched as the shrapnel danced harmlessly across the huge beast’s psychic shields, and then watched that same gargantuan dragon, nearly as large as the Lycavorian King’s dragon, stop almost instantly in midair and land on the side of the building where his missile teams were. His tail began to smash at the building then, and within seconds the Prince’s own beast had descended out of the sky to attack the other side of the same building. The moment he saw the female’s orange tinged flame burst he knew his teams were dead. They had been told only two Bonded Pairs would come here, and one of them was not supposed to be the obsidian colored beast that had so decimated his men during the war.

The Prince’s dragon had earned a deadly reputation in their war with the Union. A reputation that if she unleashed her fiery superheated breath, she was killing whatever she was aiming at. The Prince and that female devil were responsible for the deaths of many of his warriors; so many that they had given them a name in their own language after the battle of Alba Tau. It was a curse in their native language, but the translation to any other language and that curse turned into a name. A name they had come to hate for it reminded them of the thousand Evolli killed by the Bonded Pair of Elynth and Androcles that single night.

That name was Soul Slayer.

Their situation got even worse when the mahogany colored Firespitter recovered so quickly and the dark green dragon dropped from the sky onto his second missile team. And then the blue scaled beast dropped out of the sky from far above and landed right on top of the building the other two were smashing to ribbons. This was not a battle they could win now... not with five bonded pairs pummeling his troops with glee and certainly not with those damnable *DTs* landing and undoubtedly off loading troops. The settlement center was ablaze now, as all five dragons were tearing at his men’s positions with undisguised delight, roaring as they went. Well... if they were to die he would insure the first born son of the yellow eyed devil would die.

He turned to his ten man personal detachment. “We kill the son of yellow eyes before we die!” He screamed. “Let us go!”

Sadi could do nothing but look on from her seat in unabashed awe as For'mya lowered the *DT* to the ground a hundred meters from the center of the settlement, directly in one of the wide dirt paths. She could clearly see Elynth and Jeth almost side by side, letting loose with blasts of their superheated breath, Lisisa and Androcles firing their P190s from the saddles as they had turned to attack another building. The center of the settlement was a war zone. If it was an enemy... it died.

For'mya's hands were flying over her consoles as the *DTs* engines were cut. "Sadi!" She barked as she yanked at her straps.

"Huh! What?"

"Get the 190 beside you!" For'mya snapped as she was coming out of her seat. "We'll cover from the nose of the *DT!* C'mon!"

Sadi began pulling at her shoulder straps as For'mya snatched her 190 from the rack and moved to the cockpit hatch, punching the control panel and waiting as the side hatch to the cockpit opened. Sadi was just getting to her feet when For'mya let loose with a long burst out the hatchway.

"You don't have a ticket Evolli scum!" She screamed before descending the ladder.

Who were these people; Sadi wondered in amazement as she yanked the 190 from the rack and moved to the hatchway, that they waded into battle without fear and without question.

Sadi winced as smoke and heat hit her in the face. She took a deep breath and plunged down the stairs after For'mya, finding her kneeling by the nose landing gear. She skidded to a stop next to her, fumbling with the 190.

"Famus and Malic have split out the back!" For'mya screamed over the roar of dragons and gunfire. "They are sweeping up the sides!" For'mya looked at her and grinned. "Andro..." Her eyes shifted when she saw the rush of bodies not wearing black and crimson burst from the building in front of her and start running directly at Andro and Elynth.

"Andro! Suicide squad! Behind you!" She screamed into her helmet COM.

Sadi turned her head, her green eyes wide, for she would never forget what she saw in the next twenty seconds.

"Andro! Suicide squad! Behind you!" Androcles heard his mother For'mya's warning in his helmet and turned in his saddle.

His azure blue eyes flared and a cruel grin crossed his face as he allowed the change to come over him. A black band formed around the azure blue corneas of his eyes, flecks of yellow gold mixing in and the long dual incisor fangs unique to the Leonidas line grew from his gums. *Sister... shall we dance?*

Elynth's head whipped around and she too saw the charging Evolli. *Let's my bonded one!* She shouted out in Mindvoice.

Androcles jumped from his saddle to the ground, tossing the P190 aside as projectile rounds bounced harmlessly from his light blue psychic shield and that of Elynth. He extended his arm and with a silver/white flash of light his Shi Viska appeared, the crimson inverted 'V' very prominent. He reached up and withdrew one of the swords from the double scabbard on his back as Elynth's huge head lowered next to his shoulder.

Elynth took a deep breath and let out a trumpeting roar that deafened all the noise around her, causing heads to turn in their direction, and with a howl of rage, he and Elynth followed the one tenet that outnumbered individuals should do.

They charged.

Sadi's green eyes were bright orbs in the smoke and dust and she saw Androcles and Elynth wade into the ten Evolli without fear or conscious thought. The first sweep of her massive, armored mace like tail crushed one Evolli completely into the ground as she brought it down on top of him, a spray of dust and yellowish blood erupting from around the tip of her tail. Her gaping maw descended onto another and she lifted him up, her

wickedly curved front talons grasping the body as she tore the Evolli apart into three sections. As she spit out the bloody body portion from her mouth, she brought her right wing whipping around to crash into another's chest even as his projectile rounds bounced harmlessly from her psychic shield, the sounds of shattering bones audible even in the din of battle. His body sailed some forty meters away before smashing with a sickening crunch into the side of a building.

Androcles brought *Halize Rie Aellseum* down in an overhand slash that completely cleaved an Evolli's head in two. As yellowish blood spurted in all directions, Androcles spun to the side, his shield flashing out, the razors along the edge extended and locked and he drove the edge of his Shi Viska into the chest of a Kochab mercenary. The blow carried enough power to stop the mercenary in his tracks and lift his body clean off the ground, the razors of the shield shredding his chest to a mangled mess. As Androcles ripped his shield away, it brought flesh and blood with it, *Halize Rie Aellseum* moving faster than anything Sadi had ever seen as it came across in a sideways slash and neatly decapitated another mercenary with barely a pause. Androcles cocked his arm then, and threw the sword like a knife, watching as it impaled an Evolli sprinting towards him completely through his chest cavity, lifting him up and slamming him down.

Sadi's eyes grew wider as she saw the shimmering psychic diamond form at his finger tips, and then it launched with the speed of thought, the Kochab mercenary's chest erupting as if hit with an explosives charge, his body thrown back violently. Another formed immediately and that too was sent hurtling away to punch through the body of another Evolli. Androcles reached out once more, snatching the Evolli ambush leader in the grasp of his TK power and tossing him towards Elynth, his orange eyes wide in horror. She unleashed a roar of triumph as her tail slashed forward to crunch into the Evolli's body solidly. Once more the shattering of bones could be heard and Sadi watched as his body was launched over the top of a nearby building, flailing madly like a broken ragdoll. He would be found later, three quarters of the bones in his body shattered.

She turned back to see Androcles wrench his sword from the chest of the mercenary he had impaled, lift his shield toward her without looking and the Shi Viska launched. Sadi watched as it curled easily in the air turning directly for where she knelt. Her eyes grew wider and she screamed as the Shi Viska reached out for her. A hundred things flashed across her mind then, foremost among them was that she would never feel his arms around her. She heard the Shi Viska zip past the left side of her head, directly between the small space separating her and For'mya and the sound of gurgling and the wet noise of explosive wounds struck her. She and For'mya whirled around to see the Evolli body fall to the ground behind them, his head rolling several meters away, blood showering the ground around the headless body as it fell to the hard packed dirt. Sadi's head whipped back around and saw the Shi Viska settling back to Andro's arm and his azure blue eyes shining at her. She saw a smile split his lips and then he and Elynth turned and plunged back into the smoke and fire all around them.

Oh yes... she definitely wanted him.

And then it was over.

"They were definitely waiting for us Sa'sur." Androcles spoke to the monitor in the back of his *DT*. Elynth rested sedately at the bottom of the ramp.

"So it *was* a trap?" She asked from the *SCIMITAR*.

Androcles nodded. "It looks that way. They weren't expecting as many Bonded Pairs as we hit them with. Bren and Famus are just finishing up sweeping the settlement and the *Pentekostyes* my mothers brought are securing the outlying sections. Start the transports down Sa'sur. Have them land on the southeast field. We'll have the wounded brought to them. And tell my mothers they can move from where they are hovering in the south."

Sa'sur nodded. "Your father said your uncle got some interesting intelligence from the scum he caught. He'll fill you in when you return to Earth. And if I'm not mistaken your mothers are already landing."

Androcles nodded with a grin. "No doubt to tell me how reckless I am and that I set a bad example for all my siblings, all the while wishing they had gotten here sooner so they could have fought beside us."

Sa'sur chuckled. "That sounds like your mothers." She spoke.

“Keep our fighters airborne until we are gone from this place Sa’sur. And maintain a constant sensor lock on those tunnels. I estimate at least twelve or sixteen hours on the surface here. We need to secure the settlement before we depart. Anything out of the ordinary... let me know.”

Sa’sur nodded. “Count on it.” She spoke. “*SCIMITAR* Out.”

Androcles turned with the intent to head towards the ramp but he came face to face with Gorgo. “Grandmother?” He said seeing that Sadi and her two friends were trailing along behind her, Sadi running her hand along Elynth’s scales as she followed her into the *DT*.

“What exactly do you call that?” Gorgo demanded.

Androcles looked puzzled and met her eyes. “Call what?”

“Outnumbered ten to one and charging!” Gorgo snapped. “If your father had seen that...”

“My father would have done the exact same thing.” Andro replied evenly. “And I had Elynth with me. We had *them* outnumbered.”

Most assuredly! Elynth’s voice spoke up.

“Androcles Leonidas you are the Crown Prince of the...”

“Lycavorian Union... yes grandmother I know. It seems I am being reminded of that constantly now. However, I am also a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* with a job to do.” He spoke. “My title does not grant me any special status.”

“There are many who disagree... considering the propensity of your father to get into trouble.” Gorgo spoke. “They see you becoming just like him.”

Andro smiled brightly. “Grandmother... that is a wonderful compliment. Thank you!” He leaned over and kissed her cheek.

“You insufferable *mida!*” Gorgo snapped. “You are just as pig headed as your father!”

“Grandmother... we’ve been telling everyone that for years.” Lisisa’s voice echoed as she, Eliani, Resumar and Denali walked up the ramp into the rear of the *DT*, moving around where Sadi and the others stood.

Gorgo spun around and looked at them. “And you two!” She exclaimed. “Having Jeth and then Aradace land on top of that building and start smashing it to bits! What is that called?”

Lisisa grinned. “Flying by the seat of your pants I believe Endith once called it.” She spoke. “Ambush the ambushers.”

Gorgo glared at them, turned to Androcles and then shook her head. “I’m going to go instruct my cadets! At least they listen to me.”

Andro stepped up to his sisters and brothers as their grandmother stormed down the ramp of the *DT*, Sadi and the others following her quickly, Sadi glancing back at him as she walked. He looked at Lisisa. “Jeth, Aradace and Cemath?”

Lisisa nodded. “Nothing penetrated our shield... and Resumar says it was Cemath’s idea to squash them into the roof of the other building. What Denali did was not needed.”

“I was High Cover.” Denali spoke. “I saw the need.”

“Yeah right.” Lisisa said punching him in the arm. “You were just bored.”

Andro chuckled. “Yeah... like I believe that one.”

“Well if it hadn’t been for *Enomotarch* Malic... Eliani’s tight little butt would have been blown clear out of her saddle.” Lisisa spoke elbowing her sister who was blushing slightly.

“Malic?” Androcles gasped.

Lisisa nodded with a grin. “Famus says he is the one who saw them first. Got the warning out to Eliani before they fired.”

“Guess he isn’t so useless after all huh big brother?” Eliani spoke smugly.

Andro looked at her. “You just find him attractive.” Androcles spoke.

Lisisa looked at her as if she was insane. “Him?” She gasped. “Eliani... I thought I taught you better than that!”

“Hey... he’s cute... he’s got a hot body... and with the right training... who knows what could happen.” Eliani declared.

Androcles held up his hand. “I don’t want to hear anymore. I might be sick.” He said.

“Me too.” Lisisa spoke.

Eliani dismissed them and shook her head. "We're setting up a triage area in one of the gathering halls near the southern airfield." She spoke. "I suggest we only bring them out one bunker at a time. Any more and we won't be able to protect them if anything happens."

Andro looked at her. "You suspect something?"

"No... not really. It never hurts to be safe though." She answered.

"I agree." Androcles said. "You remain on top of that Eliani. Mother will be here in a few minutes I imagine. Lisisa... keep everyone in order here and have Bren and Famus continue establishing a solid defensive line. Mother will no doubt bring at least part of the *Pentekostyes* with her here and have them blend those into the main line and pull our troops back to rest. Especially the cadets and new Spartans. This was their first taste of battle and they do not need to sit on the line throughout the night wondering about their actions. Let them sort it out among themselves in small groups. Resumar, Denali and I are going to do a sweep of the surrounding area just in case any stragglers may have gotten away."

Lisisa nodded. "Just be careful and be quick."

Androcles nodded. "We will be. I don't like it here. They were waiting for us..." He said. "That does not bode well."

"If they were waiting for us they had to know we were coming." Lisisa said. "Or at least passing within range of the distress beacon."

Androcles nodded. "Or they were expecting someone else." He said softly looking at Eliani.

Her fern green eyes grew wider. "Our mothers?" She gasped.

Androcles nodded. "Only we got here first." He said.

"Andro... why?" Eliani asked.

"I don't know... but they were unprepared for five Bonded Pairs. There were only two missile teams, and that tells me they were expecting only two pair. When we hit them with five pair it sent whatever plan they may have had right to *sibfla*." He stated calmly. "It is all guess work on my part... and just a hunch."

"I think I'm safe in saying that Lisisa, I and the others trust your hunches more than most people's facts." Resumar said.

"We'll get it figured out." Andro spoke. "Resumar, Denali and I will be back shortly. Try not to let anything fall apart you two." He said before moving quickly down towards the ramp before they could reply.

Eliani was the first to reach them and they shared an embrace of a mother and daughter who had not seen each other in several weeks. Eliani was slightly taller, but there was no denying she was Anja's daughter. The same embrace was shared with Lisisa with equal feeling and emotion and then it was repeated with Aricia as Isheeni and Miath settled to the ground behind them. Anja held Eliani's hands as she stepped back and looked at them both lovingly.

"I see the five of you have been busy." She spoke with her trademark dazzling smile.

Eliani laughed and nodded her head. "A little of this and a little of that." She spoke looking at Lisisa.

"We were only doing what we are trained for." Lisisa said innocently.

Aricia laughed softly and nuzzled Lisisa's cheek as she pulled her close. Lisisa may have been the daughter of a High Coven Princess and her Beloved, but she was every bit a Leonidas as far as Aricia and the rest of them were concerned. They had been angry with Martin when Lisisa's existence first became known to them, acting as any female Alpha wolf would Gorgo had told them. The circumstances behind Lisisa being born however were far more than any of them had ever realized and they could not stay angry with him.

Martin hadn't even known Lisisa existed.

Her birth had come shortly after the passing of the comet on Earth and the single event that had propelled Martin, Anja and Daniel and so many others nearly five hundred years into the future. Martin did not even know who he was at that time, and it was not something they could begin to hold against him. When he had returned with Lisisa so long ago, none of them felt anything but love for her. She was a beautiful young woman who had endured so much and lived to tell of it. She adored her father and her new bond with Jeth had opened her eyes to so much more that she could be. It was this hope and future that Lisisa had grasped onto tightly and not let go of. Lisisa was every bit a daughter to Aricia and the others, and that is how they had always treated her without question.

Aricia kissed Lisisa's cheek at her words and smiled. "Yes I'll bet you were doing exactly what you are trained to." She said with a knowing tone in her voice. "Where are your brothers?"

"They are coming back now. They were doing a larger circuit of the settlement in case any other Evolli were out there." Lisisa answered relishing in her mother's touch and love. "Grandmother is by *JAVELIN TWO*."

"We brought two *Lochi* from the *Pentekostyes*." Aricia spoke. "They are off loading now."

Lisisa nodded. "Andro suspected as much." She said. "I will direct them as they get unloaded."

"Thank you Lisisa. Well... we'd better go over and make sure your grandmother doesn't need our help." Aricia said.

Anja and Aricia ignored the looks of the Cadets and the newer Spartan soldiers from Andro's ship who looked at them with some awe and moved directly to the ramp of *JAVELIN TWO* just as Gorgo and For'mya were coming down talking with Normya.

Gorgo's eyes lit up. "Anja... Aricia... oh thank the gods... help has arrived. Someone who can finally reign in my out of control grandson! For'mya and I are beside ourselves!" Gorgo exclaimed as she embraced Aricia tightly and then repeated the action with Anja.

Anja and Aricia laughed and each of them held one of Gorgo's hands as For'mya stepped between them and nuzzled their necks. "We've been trying that for years." Aricia told her with a blissful look at For'mya's caress. "It hasn't worked so far. He only listens to his father."

Anja's eyes held the same look as she leaned into For'mya's caress. "*When* he listens to his father that is." She spoke.

Gorgo laughed and hugged them both again. "I haven't seen the two of you in three months and you only grow more beautiful each time I do. How do the five of you do it with children who won't listen to common sense?" She said. "Oh wait... the five of you don't listen to common sense either. For'mya dropped her *DT* in the middle of a street with a battle raging!"

For'mya chuckled as Aricia and Anja slid their arms around her slim waist. "Gorgo is a little put out in regards to Andro and his sibling's reckless attitude."

"Reckless?" Gorgo gasped. "It was down right frightening!"

"Why... did they land on the building or something?" Aricia asked with a grin.

Gorgo could only shake her head. "Now I know where they get it." She exclaimed.

"This coming from a woman who led a charge against a heavily fortified Evolli position outnumbered three to one?" Anja asked.

"That was an accident." Gorgo spoke with a grin. "I didn't know they were there."

"Gorgo... you are even more beautiful when you try and lie." For'mya spoke. "I hope we get to that point one day."

Gorgo laughed at her words and stretched her arms around all three of them. In her personal opinion which she never shared with anyone other than Riall, Gorgo thought for sure Anja and Aricia never wore any kind of make up and For'mya, Dysea and Isabella so little you couldn't tell. They all had a natural beauty that was only enhanced to famous proportions when they wore makeup. How many times had the five of them graced the covers of holo books? Images taken from some State affair where they all were dressed in stunning gowns that accented their incredible figures. Not one of them, even after giving her son multiply children, none of them had lost the figures they had when she first met them. Gorgo loved them all dearly.

"How is Riall?" Anja asked.

Gorgo rolled her eyes. "I do not have to tell you what it is like being mated to a military man."

Aricia laughed. "No you don't. Eliani and Lisisa said Andro and his brothers were returning."

"Andro and his brothers have returned already mother." His voice came from behind them. "You can stop worrying now."

They both turned to see Andro walk up alongside Miath and Isheeni, running his hand along Miath's side as he came up to them. Elynth settled to the ground next to her mother Isheeni and they touched their heads together in a loving dragon fashion as Androcles stopped in front of one of two more of the women he called mother, and the mother who had actually brought him into this world. Aricia was giddy as she stepped into his embrace with a huge smile and hugged him tightly, never tiring of having her oldest son holding her in his arms. "You and your brothers are unhurt?" She asked squeezing him tightly. "Resumar? Denali?"

“Res and Deni are putting together a makeshift pen with Arrarn for our bonded ones to spend the night.” Andro replied as he stepped up to the much shorter Anja and crushed her in a warm embrace as well. “I feel so special that you both have come to be with me.” He spoke as he set Anja down. Anja and Aricia both proceeded to punch him in the chest and Androcles laughed as he tried to look hurt.

“We got the transmission the same time you did about upgrading our status.” Aricia told him. “The transmission from this colony only you picked up. They must have been beaming it towards Earth and not inward toward the Union.”

“Andro... what is going on?” Anja asked. “What did Danny find that is sending everyone into a fit on Earth. Your father never has fits Andro.”

Androcles dropped his hands and took her arm motioning with his head to Aricia and his grandmother’s hand in his. “Let’s talk shall we?”

“I’m pretty sure they were only expecting two Bonded Pairs.” Androcles told them as they sat on the end of the ramp. “There were only two T19 missile teams set up, the rest of them were inside the buildings expecting to have to deal with two downed and wounded riders.”

Anja nodded slowly. “Ok... considering the tactics they developed during the war I can see where that would hold up. Why do you think they were after Aricia and me though?” Anja asked.

“Perhaps not you in particular mother.” Andro spoke. “It is well known that after the war we began instituting a Bonded Pair Team deployment. In any unknown situation we will always respond with a minimum of two Bonded Pairs. If they were after the two of you then they would have had to know that you were traveling together and when you were returning from Hadaria. The more likely scenario and the one I hope is correct is they were waiting for the first two pairs to show up.”

Anja nodded as her military mind kicked in. She had been a Navy SEAL as well, so many eons ago, and sometimes it just took a little kick for her incredibly sharp mind to grasp the tactical situation as a soldier and not a doctor. “And since Earth is the closest garrison, they would assume Isra and some other pair would respond.”

Andro nodded. “They did not expect five bonded pairs to descend on them.” He said. “That is why they triggered the ambush late. When Lisisa and I passed over at high speed and then Eliani came in on the tail end of pattern four one, they panicked.”

Aricia leaned forward. “But it is possible they were after Anja and me?” She asked.

Andro met her eyes. “It’s possible.” He spoke as he nodded. “Their attack on the colony here and then the mission that Uncle Daniel busted up does correspond in a rough timetable of sorts, but knowing when you and mother were leaving Hadaria and then expecting you is a little far fetched. I hope.”

“And these are part of the group Daniel and Anuk fought on Ceku Tertius?” Gorgo asked him.

Andro shrugged. “Again it’s possible... but there is really no way to be certain. Father told Captain Sa’sur that they got some interesting information from the lone prisoner Uncle Daniel did take and that he would fill me in on it when I returned to Earth.” He shifted his feet wider on the ground. “I figure we will need to remain through the night.” Androcles spoke. “With the transports and *DTs* you brought, we should be able to get everyone off in the morning with no trouble.”

“Andro... you never told us who these Evolli were selling the T19s to.” Anja asked.

Androcles looked at her evenly, his eyes as void of emotion as she had ever seen Martin’s when something bothered him. “The other group on Ceku Tertius was a patrol of High Coven Immortals mother. Twelve of them” He spoke calmly. “It appears as if the High Coven is now back in business.”

Sadi sat between Teeria and Palta near the good sized fire that had been built. There were several other exhausted cadets sitting around the fire as well, including seven of the Spartan Centurions that had been replaced by the troops Anja had brought with her. Malic rested among those by the fire, more tired than he had ever been in his life, but also feeling very good about his actions. He had been truly under fire this day, and

while it may not have been how he had once pictured his first battle experience, he had not shit in his pants and for that he was very pleased.

All of them were flopped around the fire, eating the combat field rations. Teeria leaned in close to Sadi with a small smile.

“Why does everyone look so glum?” The voice spoke from outside the small circle.

Heads turned and the cadets and Centurions saw Gorgo walk up with Eliani, Lisisa, and Queen Aricia. They all began getting to their feet in a show of respect but Aricia held out her hand.

“No one dare get up.” Aricia spoke quickly. “You have all earned this respite. You performed admirably today from what I understand and you should be proud of yourselves.”

They all watched as Aricia and the others settled to the ground or on the equipment crates around the fire. It was uncomfortably silent for a long moment, and then the loud snort of a dragon caught everyone’s attention. They all turned to see Androcles standing in front of Elynth near the side of the huge *Type II*, her large head bobbing up and down as his hand ran along her neck and behind the two horns protruding from the top of her skull. They saw him laugh as she butted him gently in the chest with her snout. They all watched as he then settled to the ground between her front and back legs and leaned up against her muscular side.

One of the male cadets turned and looked at Eliani. “He won’t sleep in the *DT Princess*?” He asked.

Eliani chuckled. “Andro... sleep in the *DT*? No... he’ll stay with Elynth through the night. Half the time we find him in her pen on the *SCIMITAR* anyway. He doesn’t like his quarters. He says they are too lonely.” Eliani looked directly at Sadi. “Though that might change in the future.”

Sadi blushed in the firelight and Teeria sat up straighter next to her. “Princess Eliani... how did he win the Shield of Valor?” She asked.

“Teeria!” Sadi hissed looking at her.

“What?” She exclaimed. “I was curious that’s all!”

“It’s not something any of us like to talk about Cadet Teeria.” Lisisa said softly.

“They do have a right to know about the man who led them into combat today Lisisa.” Aricia said softly. “They have a right to know what kind of leader he is.”

“Mother I don’t know if Andro would want... even he and father never talk of that night mother. What right do we have to tell others?” Lisisa began speaking.

“You, Resumar, Denali and your sister were there.” Aricia said softly. “And because your father and brothers will not speak of what they saw is precisely the reason others should. So it is never forgotten, and so others know the men leading them into battle know what war is all about... and that is why they hate it so.”

Eliani took Lisisa’s hand in hers. “She’s right Lisi.” She said softly using the nickname Andro had given her when he was growing up.

“I just don’t like... I don’t like reliving that night. And what they experienced, what Res and Deni saw is far more horrific than what we did.” Lisisa spoke.

“I don’t believe anyone does Lisi.” Gorgo spoke softly. “But as Aricia said... it is not something your father or brothers will ever speak of and someone needs to be the teller of the story so it is never forgotten.”

Lisisa looked at her mother Aricia for a long moment then turned to Eliani and nodded. Eliani took a deep breath.

“It was the beginning of fourth year of the war.” She began. “We were on the surface of Alba Tau staging for an attack on the main Evolli encampment there. We received intelligence of a massive arms shipment coming down through a deep valley in a mountain range several hundred kilometers to our west. We knew it was more than likely a trap, but if we didn’t stop the weapons from reaching the main line of Evolli troops, a six day operation could very well have turned into a six month operation, and cost us far more than it did. Andro and our father took their sections of *Mjolnir’s Hand*, Lisisa, Resumar, Denali and I among them, west to this valley. They split their sections, leaving half airborne over the valley to provide cover while they entered from the north and south. Lisisa, Resumar, Denali and I were part of the half providing cover. Eighteen Bonded Pairs went into the valley.

“The Evolli hit them from both ends the moment they leveled off within the valley.” Eliani spoke her words filled with emotion now. “They had set up twenty T19 missile teams on both the southern and northern ends of the valley and they all fired at once. Nine Bonded Pairs fell in the first barrage, most of them blasted right out of the sky. The air was so thick with shrapnel that all of them took hits that penetrated their psychic

shields. A fist size chunk of metal laid open Andro's back from below his shoulder blade to just above his waist. They had no choice but to land... and that was what the Evolli wanted. My father was hit by three separate pieces of shrapnel, two of them that punched right through his legs and broke six of Torma's ribs. As Elynth was landing another rocket exploded off to the side and broke her hind leg in two places. I don't think any of the nine that made it to the ground alive weren't injured in some way. We could hear the rocket fire; see the flame bursts from Elynth and the other three Firespitters in their group as well as their 190s. There was shouting within Mindvoice and on our COM units. My father and Andro were screaming for us to stay away and call for support! The only problem was all of the *STRIKERS* we had assigned for the invasion were still very busy shuttling troops down from the ships in orbit. We couldn't call for support."

Lisisa squeezed Eliani's hand tighter and took a deep breath. "Night came all too quickly for us." Lisisa picked it up. "The Evolli decided they were going to collect the bodies of the Bonded Pairs they had killed. Show them off as trophies." Lisisa shook her head. "My father and brother weren't going to let that happen. While the seven injured Bonded Pairs maintained a perimeter my father and brother spent the next four hours bringing the bodies of nine dead Bonded Pairs into the perimeter they had established. They knew the Evolli were massing for an attack, both of them were seriously injured, Torma could barely breath and Elynth was hobbling on three legs. They wouldn't give up. They moved the bodies of nine... *nine* Bonded Pairs into the perimeter they had made. All of their comrades. Even the bodies of the dead dragons. They could have left... they were hurt, but all of their dragons could still fly. They chose to remain and protect the bodies of their dead.

"The Evolli attacked in waves. Hundreds of them at a time. We could hear the screaming and firing. The trumpeting of the dragons as they fought, their flame bursts were like streaks across the ground. Four more pairs fell during the night. When... when they ran out of ammo they used their *Nehtes* and swords... rocks and branches. Anything they could find. They wouldn't... they wouldn't leave. We screamed for them to let us come down in a support attack or to set the trees on fire in the mountains... my father and Andro ordered us to stay away. Andro said they were waiting for more Bonded Pairs to enter the valley and the Evolli were using them as bait. He... he sounded half crazed... and our father wasn't even replying to our mothers within Mindvoice by now."

Eliani looked up once more breathing deeply. "All through the night we could see and hear what was going on. Most of us were in tears by now as we circled that valley out of range of the T19s, we knew if we tried to go in and help them it would create a larger problem and cost more lives than had already been lost. They stopped answering COM calls and even Mindvoice calls three hours before the sun came up. We would think they were dead and then the Evolli would launch another attack and they would respond.

"Our Uncle Danny... he and Moneus... they disobeyed orders and took two sections of *Durcunusaan* and tried to reach them during the night, but they were ambushed as well and pinned down. All of those with him were hard hit, alive but pinned down and trapped."

"For'mya and I arrived at dawn with a flight of *STRIKERS*." Aricia picked it up now as Gorgo squeezed her shoulders tightly. "We swooped into that valley and blew the Evolli back into the dark ages. Half the valley was on fire by the time we got done, and that's when we went in." Aricia looked over to where Andro was leaning peacefully up against Elynth's side, her head resting on the ground very close to his leg. "What we found... it was like something from a monster's twisted nightmare. The Evolli blood was so thick on the ground our boots were sinking three inches into it. There were bodies stacked sometimes six or seven high all around where they had placed their perimeter. Daniel and Moneus and his team had finally made it to their perimeter after the *STRIKERS* left. Resumar and Denali had to crawl over the dead to even reach the inside of the perimeter. They were the first of the other Bonded Pairs to reach them for they had moved the closest during the night against orders. When we arrived they were on the perimeter of where they had found them, vomiting and weeping, frantically motioning for the others to stay back, not allowing their sisters to see what they had seen. They were holding Eliani and Lisisa back and I alone got past them.

"What they saw... what I saw... it will remain with me forever. There were five of them left, all of them hard hit and facing in different directions. Daniel and Moneus were huddled around them, even though they were all injured as well. Their blood was mixed with that of their Bonded Mates and Evolli blood. My... my Beloved couldn't walk by then; he was holding his broken *Nehtes* ready to throw it at us as he leaned against Torma's chest. His Shi Viska was covered with blood and bits of flesh and bent almost in half. Andro was lying across the top of Elynth's body as if trying to protect her; his Shi Viska was out as well battered and broken.

One of his swords was nothing more than a shattered hilt, and the other blade was so dull by now, he was using it to beat to death the Evolli who made it over the wall of bodies. The wound in his back was puffy and infected and he had taken six more hits in the chest during the night, three of which actually penetrated his armor. Elynth caught a full blast against her psychic shields sometime during the night and she was pretty badly cut up. She could barely lift her head off the ground high enough to spit fire, but she was ready to. Moneus was leaning up against Elynth's rear leg, his 190 shattered in half. Torma had pulled down some gargantuan tree during the night and was using his TK power with it to pummel the Evolli into pulp. There must have been two hundred Evolli bodies that were smashed into pulp around where he and Martin lay. Daniel was trying to treat Martin's legs, all the while bleeding on him from his own injuries. Torma was about to drop that tree on us when we came over the mass of bodies. He could barely breathe because of his ribs. Their eyes... all of them... they looked..."

"They looked feral." Lisisa said softly tears rolling down her cheeks. "But they... they hadn't failed. They hadn't left their Bonded Brothers and Sisters, and they would have died right there making sure every last Evolli scum knew the price they would exact from them if they tried." She got to her feet slowly. "We counted two thousand six hundred and nineteen Evolli dead who had tried to penetrate their perimeter and the perimeter Uncle Daniel and Moneus had set up only six hundred meters away. An equal amount that were slain before they even got that far. We almost lost a father and a brother that night, because they would not leave their comrades. I will never question any of them."

They watched as Lisisa silently made her way to where Jeth was laying on the ground next to Tharua fifty meters away. He lifted his massive head at her approach, his azure eyes bright and happy as she reached out to touch him. The cadets and Spartans watched as first Eliani, and then Aricia got to their feet and followed her.

"Now you know." Gorgo spoke softly as she stood up. "We are going to have a busy day so I suggest you get as much sleep as possible people."

Sadi wasn't watching her as she walked off into the darkness. Her eyes were on where Andro rested and without the slightest hesitation Sadi got to her feet.

Elynth and Androcles both lifted their heads when Sadi walked up to where they were resting.

KertaGai is there something wrong? Elynth asked.

Sadi sank to her knees in front of Andro and looked at him intently. "You knew." She said softly. She turned her head to look at Elynth. "You both knew... even then didn't you?" She spoke looking at Elynth. "That is what you meant that night when you told me I was chosen, isn't it Elynth?"

You ask a question that you already know the answer to KertaGai. Elynth told her with loving warmth in her voice.

Sadi turned her green eyes on Androcles. "How could you have known?"

"I knew the moment I smelled your scent Sadi." He told her. "And I have known every day since. Don't ask me to explain it because I can't. And I stopped trying to explain it when I was fifteen years old. I didn't see the point. I have told you all this already Sadi."

Sadi moved closer to him on her knees and reached out to caress his cheek, still staring into his eyes. She leaned closer still, her sensitive wolf nose detecting his male aura and his delicious lavender and pines scent as close as she was to him. She inhaled deeply as he had done to her on the *SCIMITAR*, tasting his aura ever so gently as it swirled around her like a protective blanket. Tasting it and wanting to feel so much more. Sadi pulled back slowly, insuring her cheek brushed against the softness of his mustache and goatee as he turned his head and nuzzled her jaw line and ear lobe. Sadi drew away until she was looking into his eyes once more, her heart slamming into her chest as loudly as thunder in a stormy sky. Even so heavily shielded as he was, the small portion of his aura that she tasted and felt coursing around her Sadi knew was directed solely and completely at her

"Andro... I am so sorry for..." She spoke quickly, her fingertips tracing his cheeks.

Andro smiled as he looked at her and sat up. "I know that *KertaGai*. I had wanted to surprise you with it... but now you know. Sadi... I have never and will never intrude on what you set as your accomplishments. It is part of what makes you so precious to me." He said.

Sadi blushed and moved closer to him. “What... what do we do now? I said some terrible things to you. I... I would understand if you...” Sadi asked in an almost whisper like voice.

Andro leaned up and kissed her deeply and hard, taking her face in his armored hands. Sadi responded equally, her hands coming up to settle on either side of his face. He drew away after a moment and looked at her with those burning azure orbs. “Understand this Sadi... daughter of Vorilas. I love you with every fiber of my being. Nothing will ever change that, certainly not some misunderstanding.”

We need Sleep! Elynth’s voice echoed in both their heads, interrupting their moment. *I am tired.*

Andro and Sadi turned to look at her and they both smiled. *What would I do without you Elynth?* He asked her.

Oh... that is simple. She replied ever so calmly. *You would do nothing, for you are a man.*

Andro chuckled and looked at Sadi, seeing her green eyes bright and so full of life. *Stay with us. I would like it if you allowed me to hold you Sadi.*

I believe I would like that too. She answered as she scooted closer and settled completely to the ground next to him.

In a moment she was in his arms, her face against the bare skin of his neck above the collar of the armor, her arms snaking around his waist. Androcles closed both his arms around her and Sadi shut her eyes in joy at the feelings that action caused to race through her. His lavender and pines scent filled her mind and coursed through her completely. Andro inhaled just as deeply of her sugar plum and spice scent, rubbing his cheek across her blond locks as her lithe body filled his embrace.

I mean to make you mine KertaGai. He told her within Mindvoice as he stroked her silky hair. *Totally. Completely. Utterly mine.*

Sadi could do nothing but shiver in desire at those words, for she knew he meant it, and she had no doubts he would do exactly as he said. As far as Sadi was concerned... that suited her just fine.

CHAPTER THREE

SCIMITAR

TWENTY-TWO HOURS FROM EARTH

“...landed behind Sadi’s *DT* and then he comes out of the smoke, Elynth next to him, their eyes like beacons on some dark night. He launches his shield and then draws one of those two swords he carries... gods it was like watching some majestic knight come to save you. As he fought... his Shi Viska circled the area he and Elynth were fighting in... it was almost moving of its own accord.” Teeria was speaking animatedly as they sat at the table in the mess lounge. “Sadi was closer where her *DT* was parked with Queen For’mya, but it was the first thing we noticed when Princess Normya landed and we got off the *STRIKER*.”

“I have heard that is how the King’s Shi Viska acts when he launches it. Almost as if it has a mind of its own. Do you know the Mindvoice power required to do something like that?” Another female cadet spoke. “It would be... I don’t think it can be charted.”

Sadi sat between her and Palta, the eight seats closest to them filled with other female Cadets who had not been chosen to go on the short mission. All of them had showered quickly and made their way here for some much needed normal food after returning from the most exciting event of their lives up until this point. None of them would ever know just how easy it had really been.

“Well... we didn’t see the whole fight, but behind him and Elynth were the bodies of ten Evolli. He was carrying one of those swords he has in his hand, his Shi Viska humming on his arm.” Teeria shook her head. “It was almost... surreal.”

“Teeria stop!” Sadi exclaimed almost shyly. “It wasn’t like that! Don’t embellish it into something it wasn’t.”

“Oh no?” Teeria asked looking at her with a smile. “We were there too Sadi. You can’t deny it! And then what Princess Eliani and the others told us of Alba Tau afterwards.” Teeria shook her head. “How he won his Shield of Valor...”

“Wait... they told you that?” A female cadet asked quickly. “The... the details of that battle are... they say it was the most savage and barbaric of the war.”

Palta nodded. “It was.”

“Besides Sadi... you were the one that slept in his arms while Palta and I had to make due with the hard ground. The least you could do is let me tell the story!” Teeria said.

“Sadi you... you slept in his arms?” The blond haired Cadet gasped out looking at her. “Is that all you did?”

Sadi looked at her with a shocked and playful expression. “Rala... we *were* in full view of everyone!” She said. “What could we do?”

“I would have been all over him! He could have taken me in front of everyone and I wouldn’t have cared.” Teeria stated matter-of-factly. “As sculpted as he is... you would have had to pull me off him.”

“Teeria stop!” Sadi gasped with a smile.

“Yep... our girl has got it bad!” Palta spoke with a smile as well as she squeezed Sadi’s arm. “She didn’t tell any of us that Prince Androcles was her secret lover.”

“We are not lovers!” Sadi barked out.

“Not yet.” Teeria said with a knowing glance at her dearest friend. “It’s so obvious Sadi! He is so powerful his aura is leaking through his shields! Every female on this ship can sense it... and that aura is directed only at you!”

“And you aren’t exactly denying it either!” Palta spoke. “We saw the way he kissed you this morning. Girl... I thought your hair was going to catch fire, and you didn’t exactly pull away either. As a matter of fact, you about swallowed his tongue from the looks of it, and for a moment we didn’t think you were going to give it back to him! And your aura reeks of desire for him Sadi.”

Sadi couldn’t stop the uncomfortable smile from splitting her face. Teeria and Palta were right of course. He had helped her to her feet that morning and enveloped her in his arms before covering her lips with his own. She had woken with her face tucked neatly into the crook of his shoulder and neck, breathing deeply of his delicious pines and lavender male scent and it had immediately triggered countless sensations through her body. When he kissed her... those sensations soared in intensity and power. The tighter he pulled her body to his, the more she wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and melded her lush body to his. She would not be able to stand many more of his kisses before she lost what little control she held onto.

“Sadi... you have to tell us!” Teeria exclaimed. “We have never kept things like this from each other.”

“It happened many years ago.” Sadi spoke softly, “Just before the Intelligence Purge. We were at the Island Palace and...” Sadi told them as they listened in rapt attention. She left out her involvement with the High Coven of course, embellishing Amretus’s and For’mya’s roles, but aside from that it took her twenty minutes to give them the very short version. “So now you know.” She finally finished speaking. “I’m sorry... it’s just not something I felt I could share with everyone. I spent so many years trying to forget what happened that night... and now it’s all coming back at once. It’s a little overwhelming.”

“He has loved you since he was eight months old Sadi!” Teeria spoke still stunned as she finally heard the entire story. She knew some of it... small bits and pieces that Sadi had told her over the years, but never the full story. “Gods girl... how much more romantic than that can you get?”

“The first eligible bachelor Prince in the history of the Union, and he’s been in love with you all this time!” Palta spoke. “That is so unfair!” She squeezed Sadi’s arm again tightly and gave her a friendly nudge. “Of course... there are still three others!”

Sadi laughed aloud and squeezed Palta’s hand, rubbing up against her. “You are so bad Palta.” She spoke softly leaning her head close to her friend.

“He’s been in your dreams all this time?” One of the other female Cadets asked more curious than the others.

Sadi nodded slowly and looked at the cadet who had asked the question. “I never had a clear picture of his face, just his eyes behind the helmet.” She spoke softly. “But it has been him yes.”

“That is why your Mindvoice powers became so strong isn’t it?” Palta asked, “Because of his dragon?”

Sadi nodded. “And Androcles. When Elynth touched me that first night.” She explained. “She... she made the connection. After it was all over, The First oracle selected me to study at the School of the Mages. I... I completed three years on Apo Prime and then another three over the following years during months where I

was doing nothing. I..." Sadi stopped and a look of pure passion filtered across her face as she felt him. His aura was so strong and clear and pulsing for her... and he was coming for her she knew.

"Sadi... Sadi what's wrong?" Teeria asked. "You..."

"He's here!" One of the other cadets hissed.

All but Sadi turned to the entrance of the mess lounge behind them. They saw Andro come in with one of the *Durcunusaan* Commanders and they were talking in soft whispers. He nodded and then his azure eyes fell upon Sadi's back. The others watched as he made his way to where she sat and Sadi felt his arm curl slowly around her waist as he squatted behind her and then his face was next to hers, nuzzling her cheek and ear and signaling his intent for all to see. And he didn't care who saw how it appeared, which made Sadi's blood scream out in joy.

"Hello *KertaGai*." He spoke softly into her ear.

"And... Androcles." Sadi spoke in barely a whisper her eyes half open at the delight that was surging through her.

"Have you eaten your dinner *KertaGai*?" Andro asked leaning closer to her and sliding his arm further around her waist as his cheek brushed gently against hers.

"Yes Milord." Sadi replied her eyes completely open now and burning with desire as she felt his aura sweep around her and the heat from his arm around her waist almost burning her skin.

"Good." Andro spoke. He lifted his head suddenly and looked at Sadi's friends almost scaring them with the brightness of his azure eyes as the light in the mess lounge reflected off of them. "If you will excuse me ladies... I'm going to borrow Cadet Sadi here for the next few hours. There are some things I would like to show her."

Sadi gasped in surprised when his arm tightened around her waist and he pulled her from the bench, tossing her legs up into the air and catching them with his opposite arm until she was quite securely held in his grasp, her arms around his neck. Teeria and Palta and the rest of the cadets could only watch with knowing smiles on their faces as Andro turned and headed for the entrance.

"What does that mean?" A Cadet asked, "*Ker... KertaGai*? It's the ancient language isn't it?"

Teeria shook her head. "I don't know what it means... but I do know he's called her that before."

"It means Eternal Heart." The female voice from the next table answered. They turned and saw the female elf Spartan smile. "In the ancient language... it means Eternal Heart."

"A few hours my ass," Palta spoke with a smile as she turned back to her friends. "More like a few millennia!"

Sadi's eyes never left his handsome face as he walked confidently down the corridor of the *SCIMITAR*. He carried her as easily as one would carry a child, without any effort in the least. She could feel his confidence flowing through him. Teeria had been right; his aura was so powerful, it was leaking through his Mindvoice Shields and it caused slow burning fires to ignite in her belly as she realized that aura burned only for her.

"Andro... Andro where are you taking me? Are you forgoing what you told me yourself? That you would conduct yourself in the proper Spartan fashion?" Sadi finally asked him, trying very much to keep control of her own burning need.

"As I told your friends... there are some things I want to show you." Andro replied easily as he looked into her stunning green eyes.

"Andro... I don't know if I am ready..." Sadi tried to force the words out as her mind screamed for her not to not give in so easily, while her heart and body simply craved his touch upon her.

Androcles stopped in the middle of the corridor and looked at her. "Ready for what?" He asked.

"You... you are taking me to... to your quarters aren't you?" Sadi spoke softly, her fingers reaching up to stroke his cheek and goatee. "To... to claim me. I... I don't think... there are some things I would have liked to do before that took place Andro. To... to make myself at least acceptable to you. I haven't fully washed the grime from my body after our little trip to the planet and I... I want to be perfect for you."

"Sadi you are already perfect to me." He said with a smile. "You think I took you from the mess lounge in front of your friends so that I could take you to my quarters and claim you now... on my ship?" He asked surprised. "You think I would do that for all your friends to see? My blood may burn for you hotter than it ever

has *KertaGai*... but I would not disrespect you in such a way. I have told you what my intentions are, and I intend to stick to them, no matter how hard it becomes.” He began walking again.

“Andro... I... I am so much older...” Sadi’s mind tried grasping at the last obstacle that kept her from surrendering to what her heart wanted so badly. Androcles beat her to it.

“What is a hundred years to our people Sadi?” He stopped walking again as a look of worry flashed across his face. “Sadi... am I truly what you desire? Tell me now if you do not wish to be with me. I will understand. I may not like it but I would understand.”

Sadi shook her head so hard she thought she pulled a muscle in her neck. “*Carians*... no Andro!” She gasped as she took his face between her hands and kissed him as passionately as she could considering the position she was in. It was a kiss he eagerly returned right there in the middle of the corridor and those who passed by and saw could only grin. Sadi pulled away quickly and looked at him. “I... I have loved you since those nights on the island Andro. I may have denied it then, denied what I felt was the truth for so long... but being here with you now... it has all become so clear to me. We were meant for each other.”

“I have my father’s memories *KertaGai*. My grandfather’s memories. I have seen all they have done, everywhere they have gone, and everything they knew and now know. I have seen ancient Sparta at its peak; the raging black walls of Thermopylae where my grandfather rests, and the burning deserts of the Middle East on Earth where my father was forged in the fires of combat.” Andro spoke softly. “Yes... I may only be twenty-six years old... but I am so much more, though there are times when I wish others would not look at me as they do. My father and I both. We are not gods... we have our failings. I have loved you since I was eight months old Sadi... not a day has gone by that I have not in some way thought of you. I can’t explain it, I told you that, but if it feels so right... how can it be wrong?”

Sadi shook her head quickly. “It’s... it’s not wrong. NO!” She spoke softly, running her finger across his lips. She would not deny what she felt any longer. She couldn’t deny it even if she wanted to... and she surely did not want to. Not anymore. “No... because it is what I want as well.”

“I have waited all this time *KertaGai*... I can wait a few more days so that it will be just as I have imagined. As it should be with someone of your beauty and intelligence.” Androcles spoke. “And you could have just fallen into a pool of mud and you would still be as beautiful to me as you are now. I would take great pleasure in removing that mud from your body with only my tongue if you asked me.”

Sadi laughed softly at his words and leaned forward, kissing him again deeply, loving the texture of his lips upon hers and relishing in the flavor of his tongue. She pulled away after a moment and gazed at him. “Well... I will attempt to make sure that does not happen. Or at the very least have a bottle of wine next to our bed just in case something of that nature befalls us.”

Andro nuzzled her cheek and neck. “I have something I want to show you.” He spoke. “Just as I told your friends.”

“Then... then where were you taking me when you swept me off my feet?” Sadi asked with a smile of love, desire and passion. “Not that I mind being carried all over your ship mind you.”

Androcles smiled and moved to the elevator lift, pressing the button to call it. It came in seconds and he stepped into the Lift and touched the panel once more. The elevator began to move quickly as he lowered her to the floor but didn’t release her from his grasp. Within a few seconds it stopped and the doors opened into a dimly lit area that was completely wide open. As they stepped from the elevator, Sadi took in the cave like walls and the artificial lighting. She looked at him with a questioning glance.

“Andro! Sadi!” She heard Gorgo’s voice call. “It’s about time! We thought we had lost you as well!”

Sadi’s head snapped around and she saw most of Andro’s family. Gorgo, For’mya, Aricia, Anja, Resumar, Eliani... all of them gathered around the obviously fake rock pit fire. Around all of them sat their dragons, each gnawing on the enormous bones. All around the deck she could see other dragons as well. “Andro... this is...”

Androcles nodded. “Yes. This is the aft portion of deck ten. We call it the Dragon Den. It’s much smaller than what they are used to, and they can’t fly, but at least it gives them some semblance of home. This is where we come to relax when we are out here among the stars. To focus ourselves and think of quieter times. Come... they have my mother’s coffee, and we need to get a mug before they drink it all.”

“Andro I don’t belong...”

“Yes Sadi... you do belong here.” Andro spoke pulling her close to him. “You have always belonged here. Now come...”

Sadi let him pull her towards the small group and as each step passed Sadi grew more confident in what was racing through her. By the time they had reached the sitting men and women, Sadi no longer cared what others might think, or what they would see. This is where she belonged, of that she no longer had any whisper of doubt. She saw For'mya's eyes fall on her as they walked up and she bowed her head slightly with a knowing gaze.

Andro gripped her hand tightly as he settled to the dirt that had been spread out on the deck within the dragon den, and then he pulled Sadi into his lap, nuzzling the back of her neck in a gentle caress that had her eyes half closing and her heart racing.

“Where are Deni and Lisi?” Andro asked finally as his mother handed him two mugs of coffee.

Aricia laughed as she leaned back and sipped her coffee and then leaned against For'mya. “Your brother is chasing the tail of a young female wolf that works in Astrophysics I believe.” She answered.

Resumar chuckled. “He thinks he is going to get lucky tonight.” He spoke.

Eliani punched her brother's arm. “You're such a pig Res!” She berated him with a smile. “And Lisi is on duty on the flight deck. She lost a bet playing Petteia and now she has to work her friend's shift.”

“She loses a lot at Petteia, did anyone notice that.” Anja said with a grin. “Perhaps she should stop playing for a while or at the very least get some lessons.”

“I've told her that mother.” Eliani said with a chuckle. “You know how pig headed she can be. She is far too much like father. We should get Denali to teach her... I don't think I've ever seen him lose at Petteia.”

Aricia laughed out loud again. “As if any of you are any different from your father.” She said with another laugh as she leaned over to nuzzle For'mya's elven ear, causing her elven lover and fellow Queen to shudder inwardly in desire as Aricia made known just what she intended for later.

“Well... they certainly don't get it from us.” Anja spoke with a smile leaning over to nuzzle For'mya's opposite elven ear and doubling the pleasure and desire that For'mya felt surging through her. For'mya smiled to herself. She, Aricia and Anja were going to have a delightful reunion in their quarters, of that she had no doubts. It had been several weeks since she had felt Anja's deliciously long and talented tongue caressing her flesh, not to mention that she hadn't tasted Aricia in nearly as long. Yes... it was going to be a fine night.

Gorgo laughed and shook her head. “Of course not. My son's Queens are the pillar of safe, discrete and intelligent in all of their actions.” Gorgo exclaimed even as she made the motioned of causing herself to vomit.

This caused all her grandchildren and Sadi to burst out laughing at their mother's antics.

Lisisa Leonidas was definitely working hard... but certainly not at what her mothers and siblings thought she was working at. She was currently working at fitting the entire eleven and a half inches of thick, hot pulsing cock into her throat as far as she could without choking herself to death. Her naked body was slick with a fine sheen of sweat and she was stretched out on the bed atop the incredibly muscular form of the man beneath her, the sheets torn from the corners, and her arms stretched upwards. Her hands were spread across the toned, well-developed thighs of the man with her, her fingers curling and un-curling along the flesh of his legs in tiny tremors of pleasure. His hands were gripping her firm ass cheeks securely, his fingers almost bruising her skin as he forced more and more of his pulsing shaft into her throat. His own hands were pulling her hips and dripping pussy down onto his warm tongue and working that wonderful appendage in tireless and frenzied motion over Lisisa's now fully inflamed labia and painfully erect clit. Her watery forest green eyes did not need to see the face of the man she was with as she knew him and his exquisitely chiseled body intimately.

Lisisa was no stranger to men, having bedded nearly a dozen in the time since her father had returned with her to the Union. None of those relationships had lasted for more than a few months because Lisisa was looking for something none of them had and most of them truly only wanted to get close to her father anyway. The ones her father and Andro, when he was old enough, had not run off after seeing the way they treated her, Lisisa had dismissed just as quickly. This man however, this man beneath her was so very different, eagerly devouring her smooth, bald and completely aroused pussy as if it was his last meal.

He was six feet tall and two hundred and fourteen pounds of heavy chiseled muscle and powerful limbs. His body was ripped in the same Spartan definition and manner of her father and Andro and his Alpha male

aura could turn her to putty in his hands unlike that of any male wolf who she had shared a bed with. When he nuzzled her in any way, Lisisa's eyes rolled into the back of her head much the way her mother's eyes did whenever her father nuzzled one of them. This man worshiped her body in ways no man ever had, taking hours to simply and completely explore every millimeter of her flesh so intimately that he could make her quiver in orgasm just from his touch. He had done so their first times together, and this was something he continued to do even now.

He was also the only man that Lisisa had ever wanted to taste the blood of.

Lisisa's wolf genes were the more dominant by far over her vampire genes, but Lisisa could still take blood to heal any injuries as well as shift to wolf form. She still retained the ability to blur as a vampire with their amazing speed but her strength was considerably more due to the wolf DNA in her blood. And in the midst of extreme passion, biting her bed partner and drinking small portions of their blood could send both of them screaming over the edge of the abyss of pleasure. He was the only man who had elicited enough of a reaction from her for her to do this. And it was glorious, no matter how many times she did it, and she had done it quite often over the last three years.

It had been almost three years together with him now... and Lisisa never seemed to tire of his touch upon her. She reveled in the taste of his flesh and his blood, as well as his passion. His juices tasted just as his scent smelled... peppermint and lavender... and there were many nights where Lisisa had been content to stay just as they were now and drink his delicious come down over and over as often as she could. In the process she would explode over his equally talented lips and tongue more times than she could remember. It made Lisisa's heart cry out in bliss every time he reached for her in their bed, for it told her he would never tire of her either. He had told her more times than she could recall she was the most ravishing woman he had ever known, and that no one would ever fill his life as she did. He was constantly whispering soft phrases into her ears as he pummeled her tight body into the bed as hard or as slowly as she wanted him to. He would gaze at her with those deep dark eyes she had come to adore as he held her on his lap while she rode him to the glorious peak of pleasure for them both, or when he simply held her wrapped within the embrace of his powerful arms.

The first time with him had been awkward and unusual but incredibly magnificent in its fulfillment... and it almost never happened again thanks to her.

His undying persistence had paid off however, and Lisisa had finally surrendered to her true feelings for him and all that she was after their fifth time together. As their encounters continued and the months and now years passed by, all the rapes and beatings she had endured in the years of her life before her father had finally rescued her became nothing more than distant memories that slipped into nothing. Now Lisisa could not imagine what it would be like without him.

Lisisa groaned in delight as her lips finally anchored around the base of his hugely thick cock and she felt his hard body tense. It had taken her nearly a year to be able to accept all of him within her throat like this, but she had relished the dozens of attempts prior to her sweet success. Whenever her lips anchored around the base of his beautiful cock, Lisisa knew they were both close to explosion and this time was no different. The sweet peppermint taste of his come flooded the back of her tongue surging across her taste buds like some fine wine and she knew he was just on the edge. His legs went suddenly rigid and Lisisa smiled through tear filled eyes as she felt his large balls swell even bigger. She brought one of her hands back quickly and cupped his warm sack in her palm, and this action was all it took. His lower body lifted off the bed, driving his huge cock even further into her throat, and pushing her lips against the flesh of his groin so tightly her small nose was buried in his warm sack effectively sealing his entire length within her velvety throat. Lisisa felt his huge shaft expand even further in size within the prison of her mouth and throat and his balls tightened in her delicate hand. The veins of his thick cock expanded against the walls of her throat and she could actually feel his hot come racing up the length of his huge, near bursting shaft seconds before it erupted deep into her esophagus and scorched its way into her belly.

Lisisa's eyes went very wide when she felt his large index finger press against her tight asshole and she whimpered loudly against the huge cock engulfed in her throat as his finger slid deeply into her bowels. Her hips quivered upon his face and as soon as his finger seated itself fully in her ass, his powerful tongue stabbed out and his lips sealed around her eraser hard clit sucking hard. There was the briefest moment of delicious pain and then Lisisa was erupting as well, white lights splashed across the insides of her tightly closed eyes. Her hips

convulsed, her stomach contracting in delirious pleasure and Lisisa exploded as his lips then fastened over her entire clenching pussy and he drank down her juices with the same relish as she drank him.

Tears clouded her eyes now, and this time it was not from having his cock lodged so deeply in her throat she thought she would choke. It was not because he was bringing her to a seventh will crushing orgasm just this night alone. It was not because she was drinking down his sweet come with gusto, as his body convulsed half a dozen times filling her mouth and throat with his passion. Small drops of his come were leaking from the corners of her mouth as she swallowed as quickly as she could, wanting to take every wonderful drop. This time the tears were for what she had found in him. This was the fifth time in three hours he had erupted within her in some manner, and the seventh time he had brought her to a shattering orgasm. He could go on for hours Lisisa knew, for one time they had spent two days straight making love with only breaks to feed their hunger and thirst. He did not tire of her, and she could never tire of him. It was perfect what they had found together.

Yet they could never reveal it to anyone.

It took what seemed like several minutes for him to finish erupting into her warm mouth as she slowly brought her lips back up the length of his delicious cock, dragging the tips of her now extended wolf fangs so very gently up the span of his thick shaft and feeling his legs and hips shudder in delight. Lisisa could feel his own tongue, lovingly licking every crevice of her still throbbing pussy as she finally gasped for air, sucking delicately on the large bulbous head before leaving his semi erect cock to slip from her lips and flop back onto his rippled abdomen. Lisisa's head fell to his upper thigh as his tongue and lips drew every last bit of her own juices from her, sending small tingles of devastating pleasure coursing through her as he finished cleaning her body. He was not the largest male she had ever had in her life; that dubious honor would go to the many High Coven Immortals who had raped her so many years ago. His cock however was beautiful perfection in Lisisa's eyes. It reached so far inside her without pain, far enough inside her to touch places she never thought would be touched, and it was thick enough to stretch her almost to the point of pain. Just before she got near that imaginary line however, the pleasure his cock caused when it was seated fully inside her, made ripples of overwhelming gratification begin coursing through her.

Slowly Lisisa lifted her quivering hips from atop his head, his hands and arms dropping to the bed, her whole body alive with ardor and lust and she turned slowly on the sheets to bring her face to his body and begin the wonderful trip back up his abdomen. She turned her body until it was pressed against his warm skin and brought her face to his abdomen, licking every muscle as she went, tracing every delicious contour of his steel hard abdomen, teasing his own hard nipples with her tongue as she reached his chest, until finally his hands grasped her face powerfully and made her heart sing in joy.

Denali Leonidas brought his half sister's lips to his for a crushing kiss filled with heated passion and love and want. Lisisa may have just swallowed everything he had given her, and he could still taste himself upon her lips, but he had proven to her long ago that mattered not to him in the least. As Lisisa stretched her five foot three inch body atop her half brother like a lithe cat, their kiss continued to sizzle with heat and love. Her large breasts, almost as large if not larger than their mother Anja, crushed against Denali's muscled and steel hard chest. His arms lowering to her small waist and then her perfect ass, drawing her closer to him, melding her lush body to his. His semi erect cock nestled between her thighs and pressed against her smooth and still aroused pussy even as her arms slid under his armpits to grasp the back of his shoulders and she pulled him closer. Their tongues continued their dance of passion for several more moments before they finally parted with soft licks and nibbles of their lips, their wolf eyes and fangs now extended. Denali, like his brothers and father, had dual like main incisor fangs that resided next to each other and gave him a ferocious look when he allowed the change to come over him as he did now. His dark brown eyes were almost erased by the thick band of black and yellow that surrounded his corneas when he changed. Lisisa's normally forest green eyes altered only slightly, one eye remaining the same, and one eye becoming almost cobalt blue in color. Her extended fangs were not vampiric in nature as they were the longer and much stronger wolf fangs, another sign that the wolf within her was far stronger.

"Do... do you realize it has been almost two weeks since we have been together?" Denali finally asked her with a grin.

Lisisa smiled and kissed the tip of his nose. "Twelve days and sixteen hours." She told him.

Denali laughed softly. "You keep count exactly?"

“Of course I do silly.” Lisisa told him as her eyes glittered with joy. She could act like a normal female with him, and set aside her title and role as Princess Lisisa Leonidas. With Denali she only needed to be herself.

“Twelve days, sixteen hours and twenty three minutes then.” He spoke.

Lisisa grinned widely and hit him with her female aura as she realized he did the same thing, seeing his eyes close in delight. He smiled as he hit her back with his much stronger aura, Lisisa groaning as it swept around her and throbbed through her. She was well aware that all of the Leonidas males had staggeringly powerful auras; Lisisa had just never imagined she would be on the receiving end of one of them someday. After tasting his aura, Lisisa knew no other male would ever compare to him. As Denali’s aura trembled through every fiber of her being, Lisisa rested her head on his chest and felt him reach up to stroke her damp, raven colored hair. She adored the sensations of his chest against her large breasts and skin as he breathed deeply, the warmth that radiated from his body filtering through her as well.

“You didn’t have to do what you did Deni.” She spoke softly as he stroked her hair.

“I know... I allowed my Alpha pride to come out this time because it has been so long since I had you in my arms.” He answered with a grin. “You are more than capable of handling yourself Lisi. I know that.”

Lisisa smiled “It felt nice that you did though.” She spoke again. “I so want to be able to show that in public. I want you to *cado forn* so I can walk around and profess to all that I am yours. I want to not worry about what our parents will do... what our siblings will do. What others will say.” She lifted her head and watched as he gently pushed her silky hair from her face.

“You recognize I want that as well Lisi?” He spoke seeing her nod her head. “And we will have that some day I promise you. You know as well as I that grandmother and grandfather were uncle and niece, even if no one else does. If they do it is never mentioned. We just have to find a way to make that case to our parents.”

“We are only half brother and sister.” Lisisa spoke softly as she traced his lips with a finger. “Could it be so hard?”

“Lisi... do you want to spend your life with me?” He asked.

“Denali you know that is what I want more than anything. Why do you even ask me a ridiculous question like that?” She asked putting her hands on either side of his handsome face.

“And you are the only female wolf I will ever want or need Lisi.” Denali said firmly. “Never doubt that for even a single moment.”

“You know I don’t.” She answered just as confidently.

Denali nodded. “Then we must proceed slowly. I want nothing more than to scream out to the heavens that you are mine.” He said seeing her smile at his words. “Events are much calmer now that the war is three years past. We can move on what we both want... but we must be smart in how we do it. Personally... I don’t think convincing grandmother will be as hard as you believe... because of her history and grandfather. She is who we need on our side.”

“And our parents?” Lisisa asked.

“I will renounce my title as Prince if it means I can be with you forever.” He spoke without hesitation.

“I would do the same.” Lisisa spoke. “Without question.”

“Then grandmother is who we need to approach first.” He spoke. “If we have her on our side it will be much easier to convince our parents and then to convince the Senate. Many of those who reside on the Senate in Sparta know about what we will seek. They were alive when such things were allowed. There is no law forbidding it... I have already checked. We just need to insure we do this the right way.”

Lisisa looked at him her eyes bright with love. “You checked?”

Denali nodded. “What... did you think I was joking? I want this to happen Lisi, probably more than you. I do not wish to have some other Alpha steal you away from me.”

“That will never take place Deni.” She told him. “You should know that by now.”

“Some have tried Lisisa... I know this to be fact. You have tried to hide it from me, but it became known to me.” He spoke running his fingers along her ear and seeing her smile at his touch.

“And if I haven’t told them to get lost... Andro or Eliani have done it for me.” Lisisa said. “If I had told you Denali, you would have gone and done something totally off the wall to get rid of them, and while that knowledge makes me warm inside, I know it would only put what we have at risk. That is what I won’t do.” She looked at him with those devastatingly beautiful eyes. “I want only you inside me Denali Leonidas. I want

only your arms around me, caressing me, holding me. No other male will ever make me feel what you make me feel. No one but you.” Lisisa leaned forward and kissed him gently.

“Do you ever wonder why this has come to be Lisi?” He asked thoughtfully.

Lisisa nodded. “I have in the past... mostly in the first few months of discovering what we have, but not in the last two years no.” She answered.

“Did you ever come up with an answer?” He asked.

Lisisa shook her head. “No... but I decided to follow one of father’s most noteworthy pieces of advice.”

“What is that?”

“Never fear the unknown and the treasures it could bring to you.” Lisisa answered. “The unknown brought me you. I have not looked back since.”

Denali smiled in a way that Lisisa knew to mean he felt the very same way. She nuzzled his chin again and smiled. “And until we can be together as we want, I will be content with our meetings.” She spoke confidently. “They do bring out a level of passion from us both because of the danger involved if we are caught.” She said with a smile.

Denali laughed. “When do you have to return my danger vixen?”

“I still have another two hours.” She replied. “Do you think you can curl my toes a few more times in that period? It might be several days before we can have each other again.”

Lisisa yelped in surprise when he rolled over bringing her with him in his arms and ending up on top of her. “I believe I am up to the task.” He said shifting between her satiny thighs as she eagerly opened them for him.

Denali stared into her forest green eyes and drank in her alluring beauty once more. Never in his life did he believe he could feel what he felt for this woman. His half sister she may have been, but her maple and wheat scent was like a drug to him now, and there was no denying that Lisisa was every bit a woman. She was a drug he found he could not live without. Their first time together had been totally unscripted, as they had both been drinking heavily, and had returned to his home in Gytheio where all of them kept villas of some size. Denali’s had been closer than Lisisa’s and they had fallen to his bed in a drunken daze only to awaken a hour later holding each other tightly, keenly aware they were both completely naked. Their first kiss had been awkward but sizzling in its intensity and that had led to a remaining six hours of intense passion and blissful sex.

Lisisa had been gone from his home when he had awoken, and she had avoided him for two days afterwards until he finally cornered her in an alley on one of Sparta’s streets. It had not taken him long to pull from Lisisa that she had in fact relished the events of two nights earlier, far more than she should have. She had said it wasn’t right what had happened between them and left it at that... leaving him alone in that alley with a crushed spirit. Lisisa avoided him for almost a week after that and during that entire time Denali had been very unapproachable and inconsolable. He had all but given up hope they would ever be together again when Lisisa finally appeared at his door one evening beside herself, tears in her beautiful eyes and shivering in the cold rain. She told him she couldn’t explain why she felt for him as she did, and no matter how she fought it, she could not deny what had happened between them. She also could not deny she wanted it to happen again and again. What sealed their union forever was the fact that Denali simply took her in his arms that night; wrapped her in a blanket and held her throughout the night in his embrace. When he had awakened the next morning and she was gone once more he had feared the worst. He had sat up on the couch and held his hands in his face wanting nothing more than to cry like a baby. Until Lisisa came out of the shower smelling of maple and wheat and looking deliciously inviting. No words had been spoken and she simply crossed the room to settle into his lap and kiss him with every ounce of passion, desire and love within her small body.

That day had begun their relationship.

A relationship that had grown more and more consuming than anything they had first thought. They had become expert at hiding what they shared, always careful to make their meetings secret and away from prying eyes and ears. They acted as any brother and sister would act with each other in public, furthering strengthening the security of their secret life and love, all the while making it easier for them to be together. Now no one would question why Lisisa might perhaps spend a night or two at her brother’s villa, or he at her apartment while in Sparta or Eden City or Tuya. And for the times that it might look odd, they were connoisseurs of quick excuses that were perfectly plausible. No one suspected what they shared together.

Lisisa felt the engorged head of his renewed throbbing cock press against her opening, already fully hard and ready to plunge into her depths. She wiggled her hips slightly, seating the head of his cock firmly at the entrance to her moist pussy lips. "I believe you are up to the task my Alpha wolf." She spoke seductively, knowing exactly what tone of voice to use to drive him mad with desire. "What did you...?"

Lisisa yelped once more in surprise when he flipped her body almost effortlessly beneath him and he pressed her large breasts into the soft sheets under them. Her eyes were wide as she realized what he was going to do, and she glanced quickly over her shoulder. "Deni... no... you go so... you go so deep this way! I will... I will not be able... able to stop myself from..."

Denali's fangs nibbling gently on the back of her shoulder made her gasp and cut off her sentence. "I know that Lisi, but your howls are what I want to hear." He growled into her ear while he nuzzled the back of her neck firmly sending jolts of delicious pleasure cascading through her body. Andro had started calling her Lisi when he was first forming words and the name had stuck, yet when Denali uttered that nickname to her in the midst of their passionate encounters it never failed to make her shiver in delight. He spoke that name, her name, with such utter devotion and desire when it rolled off his tongue that it made Lisisa want to weep in joy.

Lisisa growled out her own pleasure as she felt him quickly position the head of his cock at her already sopping entrance and reach around under their bodies to grasp her large breasts firmly in his strong hands.

"Yes!" She cried out turning her head once more and looking at him with lust filled eyes. "Do it my love!"

One plunge was all it took.

One soul robbing, breathe stealing glorious eleven and a half inch plunge was all it took for her to explode in the most powerful orgasm of the night while Denali growled out his own pleasure in her ear. His face was buried in the back of her neck, her raven locks flowing around his skin and his teeth clenched tightly as the friction and heat from her spasming pussy almost made him lose control then. His mind quickly shifted to other thoughts as he staved off his own eruption so that he could thrust into her powerfully, driving her crazy with desire, and making certain he was the only male her blood craved. Denali did not need to show her that, for that was already the case as far as Lisisa was concerned and she did the only thing she could think of as he flexed his huge cock inside her, while pulling her tightly to him by her breasts. She sank her fangs into his pillow and howled out her pleasure as one raging orgasm chased another with her brother's cock buried so deeply inside her the twitching head pressed firmly against her womb. When he was this deeply buried within her Lisisa was utterly helpless to the devastating pleasure that rocked her body, and that pleased nearly tripled when all Denali had to do was flex that immense cock inside her and make her howl out even louder. This time was no different than the others and Lisisa would scream out her enchantment for the next twenty minutes until he blasted her full of his scorching hot come and it was spilling from within her like a river.

Sadi rolled over on the bed, stretching her arms out and reaching for the warmth of the body that had held her all night. The scent of wild pines and lavender filled her senses and the other strange smells of where she was alarmed her for a single split second until she recognized Andro's delicious scent in the air. She opened her smiling green eyes slowly, reaching for the pillow Andro had used during the night. She pressed it close to her face and inhaled deeply of his musky lavender and pines masculine scent and she felt the tingles within her body.

They had sat with his mothers, siblings and grandmother for five hours laughing and talking well into the early morning hours, before returning to his quarters. Sadi had found all of her belongings in his quarters and realized they had been moved sometime while she was gone. She definitely would have to ask Teeria and Palta about that when she saw them again, for only they would think to do something so utterly obvious. Androcles had told her to take the bed and he would take the couch in the living area. Sadi had insisted with a seductive grin that he could sleep with her and hold her if he could control his male urges. Sadi should have said if she could control her urges. That had elicited a sheepish smile and a shrug of non-committal indifference, but he had done as she asked even though Sadi knew having her so close was torture to him for it was just as torturous to her. Andro had simply wrapped her within his arms and fallen asleep as fast as he could.

She had worn only the thin night shirt, and Sadi could feel his hard body pressed up against her as he spooned her from behind. Her eyes had gone wide for a moment as she could feel his immense male organ

pressed against her firm asscheeks, and if that was any indication of his actual size, Sadi could only find herself fervently hoping their first time came far sooner than he planned. She had forced her own desires to the back of her mind quickly and nothing sexual came of being so utterly close to him, leaving just two very tired people who reveled in the scents of each other as they drifted off to sleep.

Sadi sat up slowly as she heard voices in the living area of his quarters, and she swung her legs from the bed and stood up. The night shirt she wore was old and worn, and fell to just above her thighs, but it was comfortable and soft against her skin. She ran her fingers through her wild blond hair, and then her nose detected the scent of his mother's coffee. It seemed he drank just as much of it as she did. She moved through the archway from the bedroom into the living area and stopped quickly when she saw him. His personal quarters were large but not outrageously so. She knew he would have preferred much smaller quarters just because of who he was, but the quarters were neat and well kept. There were some decorations around, several holo paintings dotting the walls, mostly of his family and Elynth. Sadi smiled inwardly for she detected the delicate flowers that lined one mantle and realized one of his sisters must have helped him to decorate. She guessed either Eliani or Lisisa for they seemed to be the closest to him. He sat on the large couch wearing only a pair of loose white pants with crimson trim. He was leaning forward, the towel draped around his neck and Sadi saw the scar then.

Or scars.

The long scar was undoubtedly the one he had received during the Evolli War that Queen Aricia had told them of. It was perhaps a one tenth of an inch wide and easily eight inches long. It was almost straight up and down and appeared to be a clean cut but Sadi winced at the imaginary pain it must have caused lancing through his body armor. There were three, quarter inch in diameter scars dotting his upper left back and shoulder, and she had seen the entry wounds from those scars on his chest in the dim light last night before they had drifted to sleep. They appeared to be penetration wounds of some kind from either a projectile weapon like a Spartan 190, or stab wounds from something very long if they had pierced his chest completely.

He told her he had the memories of his grandfather and his father in his mind and Sadi couldn't begin to imagine the battles and wars those two men had fought in their lifetimes. His father still very much alive and a relatively young three thousand and thirty-three years old. She glanced up then and saw that it was his father in the holo image, and he was dressed in a very similar manner to Andro, only black pants trimmed in crimson, and it was very easy to see where Androcles inherited his delicious body from. She turned to go back into the bedroom and give them their privacy.

You don't need to leave KertaGai. Androcles's voice filled her mind clearly as he turned on the couch and looked at her.

Sadi turned back quickly and looked at him, seeing his azure blue eyes on her. *I don't want to interrupt Andro. And I...*

What?

The last time I saw your father I made a complete fool out of myself Andro. Even after the battle at the Island Palace I avoided him whenever I could out of embarrassment. Said told him. *I don't wish to do that again.*

Andro held out his hand. *Sadi... come sit with me. I have my mother's coffee and this is not anything formal as you can tell from our attire.*

Sadi took a deep breath and then walked fully out into the living area of Andro's quarters. The holo disc was the standard military size and as she walked around in front of the couch she came into view on his father's end of the transmission. Andro smiled as she settled to the couch next to him, curling her legs under her bottom as he poured her a mug of coffee. Sadi could almost feel the King's eyes on her and she waited until Andro handed her the mug before she could bring herself to look at the image of his father, and she instinctively scooted closer to Andro's large protective form as she met those eyes.

Martin Leonidas's dark brown eyes were piercing even from within the transmission as he gazed at her very intently. Sadi took in the dark eyes and the flame tattoos that adorned his body. She also noticed the odd tattoo that was almost a brand of some sort placed directly over his heart. His piercing gaze finally turned back to Androcles. "I thought you were going to wait Andro?" He said. "Conduct events in a proper, old fashion Spartan manner?"

Androcles smiled. "I intend to father." He spoke calmly. "That does not mean I can not enjoy the company or warmth of my future mate does it?"

Martin grunted and Sadi heard the very female laughter in the background. She watched as the long, tanned and keenly muscular legs of Dysea came into view and then her lithe figure settled to the couch next to Martin. Queen Dysea was the tallest of his Queens at five foot nine yet her body, while lean, was packed with muscle and very well sculpted even after having two children. She was dressed very similarly to Sadi, in a simple white robe that hugged her lush body and was nearly transparent in nature. The robe however did not hide Dysea's own delicately tattooed frame, though hers were much more feminine in nature and much more colorful.

"That is a polite way of our son saying you don't have his control when it comes to women *Nauta Melme*." Dysea's voice filled the transmission now. "Did you not do the same with me *Nauta Melme*?" Dysea spoke as she handed him the refilled mug of coffee as she settled to the couch very close to him. "I shared the warmth of you, Anja and Aricia in our bed in Eden City before you truly claimed me. Claimed us that night. Leave them alone."

"Thank you mother." Andro spoke with a grin.

"I don't have his control?" Martin asked turning to look at Dysea, his eyes narrowing.

Dysea turned to look into the transmission ignoring Martin and the look in his eye. "Good morning Sadi." She spoke.

"My... my Queen." Sadi stammered.

Dysea shook her head quickly. "No... the future mate of our son does not call me Queen. It makes me sound dreadfully old and I am only a few years older than you. I am simply Dysea to you Sadi."

Martin grinned and leaned over to nuzzle Dysea's throat and elven ear and Sadi saw her eyes close in enchantment, just as hers did when Andro had nuzzled her. "You'll still look tasty even five thousand years from now." He said.

Dysea pushed him away after a moment. "Ignore this brute Sadi." She spoke with a big smile. "He has a one track mind."

"You didn't seem to mind last night." Martin spoke nibbling her shoulder through the material of her robe. "I especially like the sound you made when..."

"Enough you pervert!" Dysea barked out playfully. "Our son's future mate does not need to hear of your sordid actions with me and Bella last night."

"Bella didn't seem to mind about my sordid actions with the two of you last night." Martin spoke with a grin. "And you didn't think to complain at the time if I recall *Melda Min*."

"You are a very bad man *Nauta Melme*." Dysea spoke looking at him with her emerald eyes.

Sadi couldn't help but chuckle at their antics or the love with which they gazed at each other. They certainly did not act as a King and Queen from anyone's history and it was well known that King Leonidas and his Queens were perhaps the most normal royal family anyone had ever met.

"Father... we were discussing the Evolli." Andro spoke shaking his head.

Martin leaned over and kissed Dysea tenderly before turning back to his son. "What about the frog looking bastards?" He snapped sitting back up.

"Did Uncle Daniel get anything from his prisoner? He was just beginning to interrogate him when he contacted me." Andro asked with a grin.

"A name." Martin answered. "A supplier in The Wilds on Talbor Seven."

"Talbor Seven is a resort moon. I have been there myself." Andro spoke. "How would a weapons dealer come to find himself on Talbor Seven?"

Martin nodded as he sipped his coffee. "Apparently this is where our Evolli friends got their shipment of T19s for delivery. They were just the delivery boys Andro. This shipment was arranged at a much higher level by some very influential people. I'm having Armetus checked into it discretely."

"The only reason the High Coven would be buying T19s is because they plan on fighting dragons in the future." Androcles spoke softly... then his eyes came up quickly and they were wide. "Or... they need them to train the dragons they have against them. The dragon eggs and hatchlings they stole all those years ago. They would be old enough now to..."

Martin nodded slowly. “That’s my take on it as well. It jives with the Mindvoice tremors that Arzoal and I have detected over the last few years. Fleeting tremors... some of which were powerful... others that were...”

“Violent.” Andro spoke.

“You and Elynth have felt them too?” His father asked.

Andro nodded. “When we were in The Wilds last year. We passed close to the High Coven border and it woke us both from a sound sleep. They were not like what we normally feel from our dragon brothers and sisters. Some of them were much darker.” He said.

“Arzoal arrived yesterday with the other five Elders from Elear. She wants to convene a meeting of the Elder Council to discuss this and she wants the four of us there.” Martin spoke. “She’s also delayed the Harmony Ceremony for three weeks because of this new information. I tend to agree with her.”

“What does she think is going on *Nauta Melme*?” Dysea asked from next to him.

“Armetus reports that his people in The Wilds have detected an increase in black market purchases of the T19.” Martin told him. “Most done by Kavalian sources. They are buying all of them up it seems. That can only mean one thing... the High Coven has been able to bond with the dragons they took and are pretty close to fielding them as a fighting force. It’s the only explanation.”

“So it’s not directed at us?” Dysea asked.

Martin shook his head. “Armetus doesn’t think so. Not including *Mjolnir’s Hand*, we can field nearly a thousand Bonded Pairs. We destroyed the plans and production facilities for the T19 at the end of the war and we executed the three Evolli responsible for designing and building them. Armetus believes they are buying up any that were left after the war. They bring a tidy sum to any who is selling them.”

“Are we sure father?” Andro asked.

Martin shrugged. “We don’t know anything for sure.” He said. “But unless they have developed their own production plant, the KFI can not field enough of them to fight the Bonded Pairs we could activate if needed. And we know how to defeat them now.”

“What does it all mean?”

“It means, I guess, that the High Coven is back in business. You spoke with your grandfather I understand?” Martin spoke.

Andro nodded. “I caught him just as he was leaving for Sparta. He is bringing all the intelligence we have been able to gather over the last fifteen years. Mainly sensor drone images and intercepts.”

“We’ll go over it at the villa.” Martin said with a nod. “Did you get anything from those who attacked the settlement?”

Andro shook his head quickly. “No. I didn’t leave any alive long enough to question.” He said off handedly. “I didn’t see the point after they tried to shoot Eliani and Tharua in the back. Elynth and I became very upset about that. Jeth and Lisisa as well. And you know as well as I when Denali becomes upset, the *sibfla* must have really hit the fan. He and Aradace dropped onto the Evolli missile position like a load of angry Bentoli Fever Beetles for what they tried to do.” Andro grinned when he heard Sadi chuckle from her seat next to him.

“Is that why I already have two complaints from the company that built the settlement that you and Lisisa ‘used excessive force in subduing the hostile parties,’ I believe is how they worded it. Jeth and Elynth can make short work of any building they decide to bring down with their tails boy.” Martin asked.

“*Nubou* them!” Andro spoke sitting back on the couch and letting his hand and fingers caress Sadi’s exposed knee. “They weren’t there and we were. They can kiss my royal Spartan Crown Prince ass! Lisisa and I acted just as we should have!”

Martin chortled and looked at Dysea. “He’s got Aricia’s disposition you know.” He said.

Dysea snorted in disgust. “Like anyone will believe that.” She spoke. “Everyone knows Aricia is calm and patient and that she simply abhors violence.” Dysea canted her head slightly and Andro and Sadi saw his father begin to laugh. “Irral you are supposed to be on my side.” Dysea said as if to the air.

“What about the prisoner father?” Androcles asked.

Dysea laughed now at that question. “He sort of fell down into an airlock as he was being escorted through the landing bay. It was a horrible thing really. It seems your Uncle Daniel also tripped and couldn’t stop in time to keep himself from hitting the airlock release.”

“Sort of fell down?” Andro asked with a grin.

“It’s Danny’s fault he can’t walk!” Martin exclaimed.

Andro laughed and nodded his head. “I’m sure.” He spoke evenly. “We are twenty-two hours away from our father. I want permission to activate our BIP patrols. Perhaps now is the time to begin taking more notice of things along our border with the High Coven.”

Martin nodded quickly. “Do it.” He said without hesitation. “We’ll talk more when you arrive here Andro. I’m going to get a few more sordid moments in with your mothers before my next meeting.”

Andro shook his head and laughed as the transmission ended with a yelp of surprise from his mother Dysea as she leaped from the couch. He looked at Sadi with a grin. “Little bit more information than we needed.” He said. “I apologize for that.”

Sadi matched his smile. “They are very much in love Andro... and it is said he acts this way with all of them, most especially with *your* mother.” She said softly.

Androcles nodded with a grin. “He does. Sometimes in the most public of places too. They have managed to embarrass all of us at some point with their games.”

“Do... do you have any of these sordid moments prepared for me after you claim me Androcles Leonidas?” Sadi asked with a grin.

Andro leaned over and kissed her shoulder softly. “Perhaps... perhaps not. I can happily arrange them if you like.”

Sadi caressed his face with a smile of her own. “I just might like that you know. I do like surprises.”

“Then I’ll surprise you *KertaGai*.” He said as he nuzzled her neck firmly sending shivers of pleasure through her. “You should get changed. I’m sure your friends will be looking for you.”

It was then Sadi saw the identical tattoo branding on Andro’s chest. She hadn’t noticed it before and it was not very large, but it was the same as the one his father wore. She reached out her hand and touched it, tracing her finger along the outline.

“This is different.” She spoke softly. “When did you get this?”

Andro nodded. “Yes. Five years ago. My father has one as well.”

“Does it signify something?” She asked curiously.

“It’s a dragon symbol. One of their talons. Nothing really.” He replied quickly. “You really should get back to your friends. I don’t want it to seem like I am monopolizing your time.”

“I’ll never live it down you know.” Sadi spoke. “They’ll want to know everything that happened Andro. I’m quite sure it was them who convinced the *Durcunusaan* to bring my things here.”

Andro looked at her. “So tell them. Nothing happened... and I’m waiting to claim you in the proper Spartan fashion.” He answered. “I am not ashamed of what I feel or how I intend to conduct myself in regards to you. Are you?”

“Androcles... no!” Sadi gasped one hand holding her coffee while the other went to the side of his handsome face. “Never!”

He shrugged. “They are your friends Sadi. You are confident and strong and it is one of the reasons I love you as much as I do. I will not ask you to alter your life from the goals you have worked towards because I am Crown Prince. I so hate that title.”

“Yes... I gathered that.” Sadi spoke with a smile.

“You still wish to complete the Academy and become a pilot, yes?” He asked.

Sadi nodded. “Very much so.” She said.

Andro nodded. “And Teeria and Palta are your friends and have been for many years, yes?”

“Since we started at the academy. Teeria more so than Palta. We... we shared something a long time ago that brought us closer than most.” Sadi answered shyly.

Andro looked at her with a little surprise in his eyes but he didn’t question her about it. She would tell him when she was ready. He leaned closer and nuzzled her neck and shoulder again, more firmly this time and causing Sadi to grasp his shoulders tightly. “They are still your friends Sadi my love. Do not change who you are over some silly ideal of who you think I want you to be. Who others want you to be. I love you as you are now. Do not change.”

Sadi met his azure blue eyes and stroked his cheek. “You... you are such a different kind of man.” She said softly.

Andro grinned. “Well hopefully that’s a good thing.” He said.

Sadi leaned over and kissed him now, a slow lingering kiss of intentions to come. She pulled away slowly. "It's a very good thing."

Andro slapped her thigh lightly. "Go! I have some orders to issue so you can use the bathroom first." He spoke.

Sadi smiled as she got to her feet and headed for the small bathroom. Andro's eyes followed her with desire and passion until she went into the bedroom and he turned back to his communications console touching the panel.

"Com officer?"

"Yes Milord." The voice was immediate in its reply as there wasn't a crew member on the *SCIMITAR* who didn't know Andro's voice.

"Put me through to Admiral/Colonel O'Connor at Union Fleet Operations on Apo Prime if you would. Secure priority transmission. Encryption code Androcles nine one four seven nine." He spoke. "Eyes and ears only. If he is not there... find him. I will wait."

"Stand by sire."

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
INQUISITOR
TWO DAYS FROM EARTH LYCAVORIAN BORDER

Aikiro moved along the corridor of the *INQUISITOR* with unhurried paces, her hand holding the data pad tightly. The crewmembers of Robert Moran's Command Ship bowed their heads at her passing and quite unlike herself Aikiro acknowledged their deference to her by returning the bowed heads with a small smile or slight nod of her own. This was her son-in-law's ship after all, and Aikiro knew he was a stickler for obedience and respect to those in power. He was very unorthodox in many ways, and it had taken her several years to see the wisdom of his method of command. He allowed for mistakes among his people... never executing someone for a single mistake or two. He knew that everyone made mistakes, and he would be the first to admit he had made several of his own. He did not however tolerate repeated mistakes of similar nature, and he crushed those who committed them with the speed of a striking Rock Spider.

Aikiro had decided long ago that her daughter had made a good choice in Moran. The man worshiped the ground Yuri walked upon, as it should be in any relationship among purebloods in Aikiro's eyes, though she knew full well Robert was not a pureblood. His skills and power however rivaled even the strongest purebloods and Aikiro could not deny that. Robert would do anything Yuri asked of him, kill anyone who would harm her, but he had backbone. Unlike her own former husband. He knew how to get things done without using Yuri as the mechanism for his actions. He was feared among the fleet and rightfully so, for six men had challenged him in the first four years after taking Yuri officially as his bride. They had challenged him for his position and Yuri's hand, and none of them lived longer than a few hours after making their intentions known. Moran had butchered them himself with no regard of their status. Yuri would have killed them herself for Aikiro knew she had no desire for any hands upon her except her husband. It was one of the few things Aikiro felt she needed to grant Robert Moran, because of his position and what he meant to the High Coven now. In the fifth year of their marriage and after two of their children had been born, Aikiro ordered that Robert Moran would never be supplanted as Supreme High Commander or husband to Yuri. Anyone who made such an attempt she granted full authority for him to kill without question for insulting him and her daughter.

No one challenged him after that.

It was a move that Robert Moran perhaps didn't like, but Aikiro needed her officers alive and not being killed over silly challenges that even the purebloods knew they couldn't win. Moran had grown more powerful than most of them by now, and he never ceased to train himself right to the very edge. It was not uncommon to see him working in the gyms of his ship or in the rooms he had built into their home of Usu'Ozeib 7. It was almost as if the man was a machine, he never stopped, and that is what Aikiro so adored about him. He had only three goals in his life, and one he had accomplished already by becoming Supreme Commander of the High Coven. The other two were very simple. Love her daughter Yuri forever as he had since the first day she had turned him, and insure the High Coven was never erased from existence. He had no wishes for power, no desire

for more than what he had now. Aikiro knew the man had all he wanted already, and his only mission now was to insure that was never placed in danger.

Aikiro trusted him as she trusted only Yuri and Narice. That was the only knowledge Robert Moran needed.

Aikiro entered his small office unannounced and saw him look up from behind the desk. He was always up and moving before anyone else and it was another reason she liked this man so much.

“Empress!” Moran spoke calmly as he got to his feet.

“Robert Moran...” Aikiro spoke as she fully entered his office and allowed the door to close before she continued. “There are not many who I allow to refer to me informally Robert. You are one of them and I would appreciate it if you did as I asked.”

Moran smiled and bowed his head. “My apologies Emp... Aikiro. Old habits die hard... and you are the Empress of the High Coven. I will make an effort to do better. Would you like a glass of Blood Wine? I had the cook prepare a fresh batch just last night.”

Aikiro smiled and nodded her head. She knew he would never really attempt what she asked. He had far too much respect for her to refer to her in informal means and Aikiro could do nothing but respect that. “That sounds wonderful.” She spoke. “Yuri is not with you?”

Moran shook his head as he went to the small bar and poured the dark red liquid into the crystal glass. He turned and held it out to her before replying fully. “She was going to work with Vollenth and the others for a few hours before we met for breakfast.”

“I take it that includes Carisia and Anthar?” Aikiro spoke.

Moran nodded. “Yes.”

“I have told Yuri of my doubts concerning Carisia.” Aikiro spoke. “Her bond with Anthar is more powerful than they make it out to be. I have tried many times over the years to breach their combined Mindvoice Shields and even I have not been successful.”

Moran’s eyebrows went up. “I didn’t know that.” He stated.

Aikiro nodded as she moved to the chair across from his desk. “It may be nothing... but better to be safe than sorry as you are so fond of saying. Her desire to please Yuri in any way to gain her favor may all be an act. I can not say for sure... only that I sense there is far more to my granddaughter than meets the eye. Even after you and Yuri gave her to Thast... she still shows no signs of anger or hatred.”

“Should I be concerned?” Moran asked. “Have her watched perhaps?”

Aikiro shook her head. “She will detect any type of surveillance you may attempt to put on her. She is very powerful as I have said, and she is also quite intelligent. Her comments during the briefing yesterday were thought inducing Robert, spoken with clarity and focus. She measures things before she speaks, and there are times when I think I detect flashes of skills she should not have.”

“What do you mean?” Moran asked.

“Well... her Mindvoice Shields for one.” Aikiro spoke. “They are incredibly powerful as I said, but that makes me wonder what else she is capable of in that regard. I was actually referring to her physical skills however. I believe I may have erred by allowing the Immortals to train her. They seemed to have done too well a job following my orders.”

“Do you think they exceeded your directives?”

Aikiro nodded. “Oh most definitely.” She answered. “However I can do nothing really, for I did not tell them what they could not teach her. After the debacle with Cha’talla we can not afford for me to arbitrarily start killing our Immortals. They are too valuable.”

Moran nodded. “I agree.” He spoke. “I can have Thast accompany us down on the planet. To keep a leash on her.”

Aikiro nodded. “That might be wise. She is not a very large part of this plan of yours, which I might add is quite brilliant. Her only purpose is to learn the skills with her dragon that will help us to defeat the Kavalians.” She placed the data pad on his desk. “I am very impressed by this Robert... this is one of your more ingenious and ambitious plans.”

Moran moved to his chair and sat down. “I know it entails a great deal of risk on our part Aikiro.” He spoke surprising her once again. “However I feel the benefits outweigh the risks to us.”

“As do I Robert.” She spoke. “Yuri and I were speaking last night in regards to the individual missions of your children. You and she are comfortable with the risks they will need to take?”

Moran nodded. “They are our children yes, but they are also members of the High Coven military. Yuri and I both agreed if we needed to use their skills we could not let that fact stop us.”

“I feel as you when it concerns Narice.” Aikiro spoke. “The only thing I don’t understand is why you have brought me on this mission?”

Moran smiled. “That is easy.” He spoke. “The mere fact that you have accompanied us will undoubtedly lend serious credence to what we will present to Leonidas and the Union Senate. Not to mention the only one who truly is capable of going round for round with Leonidas in terms of powers and abilities is you.”

Aikiro looked at him intently. “You don’t believe your wife can face him?” She asked with a little suspicion.

Moran shook his head with a smile. “That is not my intent at all.” He replied sensing her wariness. “I have complete faith in Yuri’s abilities Aikiro. She has grown much in terms of power since bonding with Vollenth. However in terms of abilities, she is still raw in a military sense. I have spoken with her about this and she agrees with me.”

“You have told her this?” Aikiro sounded surprised.

Moran nodded. “There is nothing I keep from Yuri.” He said with a grin. “She knows that Leonidas and the dragons that serve them have formed a unique style of training and a way to increase the Mindvoice powers of those who ride their dragons. That is what she and the others will seek to discover. While you and I work on the other aspect of things.”

Aikiro looked at him impressed. “That dog Leonidas will not be happy that I am within his grasp and he can do nothing.”

“You have done nothing that warrants his anger Aikiro. He knows it was Veldruk who ordered the death of his father and grandfather. The capturing of his mother. Veldruk is dead... and you have led us through twenty five years of war where we have even prospered, albeit on a much smaller scale than the Union. He can not deny your credentials or the fact that you are completely innocent of all Veldruk did. It’s very simple really... we can place the blame on Veldruk for almost everything.”

Aikiro laughed. “Yuri has told me your mind can work in some very devious ways.” She spoke. “Usually within the sheets of your bed according to her, but you can be quite devious when you want to be.”

Moran chuckled. “I will be extremely devious if it keeps Yuri in my bed and allows me to continue to taste her blood.”

Aikiro nodded. “You do not need to worry about that Robert.” Aikiro spoke confidently. “You appear to have a hold on my daughter that few have ever obtained. It makes her stronger you know... the relationship you share. In some ways... in some ways her time on Earth did make her stronger, for she found you.”

“That works both ways Aikiro.” He said.

Aikiro nodded. “No doubt.” She agreed. “Come... walk with me to this lounge where we can enjoy real food and wait for Yuri to join us. I want to hear how you were able to alter what we will show the Lycavorian pigs. It is quite imaginative.”

Moran got up and held out his hand for the door. “I would be delighted.”

SCIMITAR

EIGHTEEN HOURS FROM EARTH

“*Vel'bol xun dos talinth Eliani ussta che?*” The stunning blond woman asked fluently in the ancient vampire language from within the transmission. (What do you think Eliani my love?)

Eliani Leonidas looked at her image and shuddered inwardly at the sound of her voice. Nyla Sinthe had a voice that could melt even the coldest iceberg and Eliani loved listening to her speak, especially when she professed her love.

It had been the beginning of the fifth year of the war with the Evolli, one of the very last ground battles. The Evolli were losing and losing badly and they knew it. They were fighting savagely wherever they were encountered. She was following along behind her father and Andro with her mother and nearly two dozen other

Hadarian Healers as they advanced in the rear. It had been a vicious battle, but a flanking attack led by her Uncle Danny, Resumar and Denali had broken the Evolli lines, but not before they had caused hundreds of injuries to Union troops. All of them were injured as well and nearing the point where they were too exhausted to use their healing powers to save lives. Her mother decided to conduct one more sweep of the smoking battlefield before they pulled back and allowed the second echelon of Hadarian Healers and Union medics to push through with her Aunt Sivana.

Eliani and Tharua had discovered her half buried under several large boulders, the chocolate brown female Firespitter dragon lying beneath her, both of them shredded badly from what appeared to be a T19. Eliani thought she was dead at first until the groan from bloody lips escaped Nyla's mouth. Using her and Tharua's TK power they were able to removed the boulders and discover the dragon was alive as well. Eliani deduced they must have taken a T19 blast full on for them to have plowed into the earth with enough force to dig a furrow in the ground as they had. Eliani quickly saw that she wore the black and crimson body armor of a *Durcunusaan* Lieutenant. Her helmet must have been torn off by the explosion for half her face appeared badly burned and there were several deep gashes. As Eliani rolled her over she saw that Nyla's entire body had been peppered with deep lacerations and she was bleeding out slowly but surely. She screamed for assistance knowing she could not save them both, and as her mother scampered over to her position, Eliani began to send healing pulses from her hands through Nyla's body. She worked as quickly as she could, knowing that without blood the woman would die. The second echelon located with her Aunt Sivana was still too far back to help and they had a fresh supply of cloned blood. Eliani did the only thing she could think of. She looked into the stunning light green eyes of the woman and told her to bite her. The woman refused at first shaking her bloody head, but Eliani insisted, knowing it was the only way. She used one of her laser scalpels to open an incision along her wrist and she placed that incision over the woman's lips allowing the blood to drip into her mouth.

Nyla Sinthe was a pureblood vampire and she reacted instinctively to the taste of Eliani's blood, lifting her head and gripping her arm tightly while she feasted. Eliani gasped at the sensations that had raced through her, as well as the images and feelings that smashed against her Mindvoice shields. As she herself slumped to the ground and pulled the woman's body tighter, their minds came together almost naturally and the psychic link was formed.

Eliani was evacuated with Nyla because of her own injuries and the blood she had given to save Nyla. Over the next six weeks as they healed, they were never very far apart, and neither of them could deny the growing attraction to each other. Whether it was their new link, or the simple fact that neither of them shied away from beautiful women, it didn't matter. They had shared a torrid and passionate night together before both of them deployed back to their units and that single night remained foremost in both their minds for months. Neither of them expected to see each other again, but seven months later, quite by chance they both thought, they were reunited on Apo Prime as the last few battles of the war were being planned out. They did not find out until many months later that Androcles had planned it that way, for he was the only one Eliani had told of Nyla.

Eliani and Nyla had not been apart since.

Nyla Sinthe was nearly a hundred and thirty-three years old, and one of only a dozen pureblood vampires bonded to a dragon within the Union. Her blond hair was golden in color except for the dark roots and her light green eyes were simply stunning to look at. She stood five foot six inches tall and a hundred and eighteen pounds of ripped feminine muscle, very similar to Eliani herself, and Eliani could never get enough of exploring her delicious body whenever she could. In great detail. She and Nyla had spent hours upon hours exploring each other and making each other scream out in passion. When they weren't on duty or separated for some reason they were always together. As the years had passed, Nyla had become a permanent fixture in not only Eliani's life, but her entire family's as well. Their apartment within the Sparta Estate and their villa in Gytheio reflected both their tastes in art and decorations. When they were on Apo Prime, they stayed with Nyla's parents in a suburb of Tuya. Her duties as a *Durcunusaan* Team Leader and Bonded Pair kept Nyla close to Eliani, which suited her just fine since she loved the burgundy haired Princess more than her own life. Something which Eliani had given back to her without hesitation. They were alike in so many ways that sometimes it was hard for people just meeting them to comprehend the depth of the emotion and feeling they had for one another.

They both wanted the same things for their future; peace, happiness, a man and children. They knew they would never be split apart by any man, and their tastes in men were nearly identical. They had brought several different men into their bed with them in the last four years, none lasting more than a few weeks. The men simply could not tolerate the love they shared for each other, and at the first sign of this, Eliani and Nyla showed that man the door. They knew they would need to find a man like Eliani's father, a man confident enough in himself to not be threatened by the love and passion they could share without him. Since they knew no man would ever come between them, they were both very content to wait until that man came into their lives. If he ever did.

Eliani sat on the edge of her bed in her quarters and shook her head. She wore the simple night shirt with nothing underneath, and had Nyla been with her she would be completely naked. "I don't know Nyla." Eliani spoke softly as she drank her coffee. "He is without a doubt the most scrumptious man I have ever seen, exactly as we have imagined the one we want my love. Dark hair... blue eyes that just make your stomach do flips."

"What about...?" Nyla gasped in a humorous fashion.

Eliani rolled her eyes with a loving smile. "Nyla... I didn't jump his bones in front of my grandmother!" She exclaimed.

Nyla laughed. "Well... I didn't know! We did the last time!"

Eliani shook her head. "This one is different." Her voice more serious. "Were you able to find out anything?"

"His records haven't been transferred yet." Nyla replied quickly. "I imagine we'll have them here at the school before you arrive. *Ussta Che*... this man has affected you like no other. If that has happened, then he will undoubtedly have the same affect on me as tightly connected as we are. What is wrong?"

"There's something about him." Eliani spoke. "He's arrogant beyond measure Nyla. He has an ego larger than some mountains I've seen. It's almost as if he is fighting a battle inside himself. Hiding something. And he has a serious chip on his shoulder. But there is something in those eyes Nyla."

"Then knock him down *ussta che*." Nyla spoke confidently. She knew very well the skills of her lover Eliani and not just within the sheets of their bed as they sparred almost daily when they were together. "Knock him down and see if he gets back up. Then we can determine if this one is worthy of having us both." It was not arrogance on Nyla's part; she knew what Eliani and she shared would never be broken; their deep connection had gone far beyond simple physical pleasure. Both of them were confident in themselves as women and what they could do and what they wanted in a man was completely the same. It wasn't arrogance... it was confidence.

Eliani nodded. "I just might do that."

"I miss you *ussta che*." Nyla spoke her voice carrying with it love and passion and desire. "You will not be home soon enough. I am going to have a talk with Andro about leaving like this in the middle of the night, taking you from our bed and not giving me any warning."

Eliani grinned at her image in the transmission. "Don't worry... I have every intention of feasting on you when I get home. For several hours at least."

Nyla smiled seductively. "I will hold you to that."

"I will see you soon my love." Eliani spoke wistfully. Nyla blew her a kiss as the transmission faded and Eliani sipped her coffee. Nyla's words filtered in her head and she smiled. "I think I will do just that." She said to herself before surging off her bed.

Malic spun gracefully to his right, bringing his *Nehtes* training staff across his body in a whipping motion that looked as if it would be quite devastating if it connected on an enemy. He had survived his first real combat test, saved the life of Princess Eliani and now he was very full of himself. He basked in the looks of respect at his skill from those who stood along the edges of the gym and flexed his muscles just enough to make the females wolves gathered swoon at his display. Even though Prince Resumar and several *Durcunusaan* were also training within the same gym, all the females were watching him. He wore only a pair of fleet pants and was shirtless, his abdomen rippled and packed with muscles, his shoulders broad and powerful and the definition exquisite.

"It won't work." The female voice spoke from behind him.

Malic turned quickly his eyes getting larger when he saw Eliani in front of him. She was dressed in something that resembled a training outfit and instantly caused his pulse to race. The black shorts were skin tight and did nothing to hide the perfect shape of her ass and the outline of her mound. The skin of her muscular and definitely female legs was deeply tanned and looked as if weaved from satin itself. The crimson shirt had only two thin straps over her bare shoulders and held in Eliani's large breasts with what could only be described as some difficulty. Her burgundy colored hair was secured with a yellow silk tie in a tight pony tail that fell to just below her shoulder blades and her soft willow and peach scent was so very enticing, almost as if she was excreting just enough of her scent to entice him on purpose.

Malic bowed his head quickly as he got control of his raging male hormones. "Milady." He spoke.

"It won't work." Eliani said again.

"Princess... I don't understand. What won't work?" Malic asked.

"The maneuver you are practicing." Eliani spoke confidently. "You should dismiss it from your repertoire *Enomotarch*."

Malic smiled as his arrogance came out full bore now. "I have been using it for many years Princess. It has not failed me yet."

"A High Coven Immortal would see that move coming from a kilometer away and he would hand you your *Nehtes* back buried in your chest." Eliani spoke confidently. "Then you would be dead and you would no longer need to worry about using it to impress the females who know nothing of fighting, or aren't skilled enough to know the difference."

Malic looked around quickly before settling his eyes back on the much smaller Princess. He had not known she would be so pompous and arrogant, especially after he saved her life. He thought she would be humble and come to him with thanks and praise for his skill. "Forgive me Milady... but if I am not mistaken, you have only fought Evolli warriors. They are a far cry from Immortals."

Eliani's fern green eyes narrowed slightly and she nodded her head, twirling her own *Nehtes* training staff gracefully in the air. "Use it on me." Eliani spoke.

"I'm sorry Princess... what?" Malic asked flabbergasted.

"I said use your maneuver on me *Enomotarch*." Eliani spoke. "I'm just a simple female nothing more."

"Princess... I couldn't do that." He said. "I would not want to injure you if I connected even a small fraction."

Eliani snorted at him and smiled. "*Enomotarch*... you will *not* connect with me... that I can guarantee you." She said matter of factly.

"Princess... I am considerably larger than you... with far greater strength." Malic spoke. "I do not wish..."

Eliani poked Malic in his sweaty chest with the end of her staff and grinned. All of her thoughts about what she and Nyla could do with him in their bed vanished from her mind now. "What is wrong *Enomotarch*? Are you afraid I will beat you?"

"Beat me?" Malic gasped. He laughed as his eyes looked around and he noticed all activity had ceased in the gym and all eyes were on him and the Princess. To include Prince Resumar. He turned back to Eliani. "You think highly of your skills Princess. I have never lost a sparring match."

Eliani grinned once more. "Highly enough that I guarantee you will not connect with me in any way, shape or form." Eliani spoke.

"A prideful boast Princess." Malic spoke as he dropped into a fighting stance. "A boast I will have to make you regret."

"Yeah... yeah." Eliani spoke. "Are you going to fight or talk?"

Famus made to move onto the mat once he saw Malic drop into a fighting stance but Resumar's hand on his arm stopped him.

"Let him go Famus." He said softly with a smile.

"My Prince... he means to dual with Princess Eliani." Famus said. "That... that can not be allowed. Sire... she is a Princess!" Famus declared.

Resumar nodded. "Eliani provoked this and you know as well as I do that Eliani will hand him his *nor* in two... maybe three heartbeats." He spoke. "Who on this ship can beat her?"

Famus looked at him. "Only Androcles and you could do so handily. Princess Lisisa and Denali would have a good chance because they know how she fights and will not rise to her taunting and do something stupid. There is no one else on the *SCIMITAR* that can match her with the *Nehtes*. You, Androcles and your father have seen to that with all your sisters." He said in reply.

Resumar nodded. "Don't forget what our mothers taught us as well." He said.

Famus grinned. "I haven't forgotten sire. If there is a low down dirty trick that your mothers haven't taught all of you, it doesn't exist."

Resumar chuckled but looked at his sister intently. He and Eliani were only a month apart in age, and as with Andro, she was very close to all her siblings and almost never kept things from them. He knew Eliani and Nyla were always on the prowl for a man. A man who would give to them what they could give to him. They wanted a man like their father, something Resumar knew was going to be very hard to find. So far they had been unsuccessful, in part because their standards were so high, but he could tell by the set of her jaw and the glint in her eye that this Malic was about to take the first step in determining if he was that man. "Malic doesn't stand a chance against her and I think I may know why she is doing this. Let's just watch and follow her lead shall we?" He said.

Malic grinned and faked a quick slash towards Eliani's head and immediately went into the maneuver he had been practicing all morning. It looked good... powerful and accurate... but as Eliani had tried to tell him, it meant nothing in a real fight against a skilled opponent. And Eliani was a skilled opponent, far more than he gave her credit for. Eliani didn't bite on the head fake as Malic intended for her to do, instead she simply stood her ground as her father and Uncles had taught her. Eliani may have been one of the four or five most powerful Hadarian healers within the Union, but she was every bit the fiery daughter of a fiery mother. Eliani liked to fight... well she liked to spar in training for no one actually liked having to fight for their lives. While she would never reach the level of skill of her brother Andro or her father and uncles, Eliani was a superb fighter with the *Nehtes* and able to put down most men who thought they could beat her because of her diminutive size. It was a mistake that many had made with her mother Anja, and it never failed to teach a much needed lesson.

Never judge a book by its cover.

As Malic completed his wide swing, bringing the training *Nehtes* forward to clip Eliani's legs out from under her in the powerful sweep, Eliani did what Malic least expected her to do. It was very simple and quite effective.

Eliani jumped half a meter into the air straight up and allowed Malic to sweep the training *Nehtes* under her legs without touching her in the least. As the momentum of his blow spun him around, Malic's eyes widened as he realized what Eliani had just done. He attempted to stop his forward sweep, but was far too late. Eliani's training *Nehtes* snapped up viciously twice in quick succession. The first blow knocked the training *Nehtes* from his hand, shattering it in two places. The second blow rapped him across the back of his knees with enough force to buckle his legs. As he stumbled to regain his lost balance Eliani snapped out with a hard right hand into the side of his head.

Malic was stunned by the power in the blow more than the actual contact. His head snapped around and he could not stop his body from going with it. The blow spun him completely into a full circle and dropped him quite unceremoniously onto his back in a crash of breath. He grunted loudly when Eliani dropped onto his chest with her entire one hundred and fifteen pounds on one knee and what air was left in his lungs escaped in a rush. She stuck the end of her training *Nehtes* to Malic's neck, twisting and forcing the shaft down, watching him grimace from the pressure and pain and then she leaned over to look at him as murmurs filled the training area over what she had just done.

Eliani smiled down at him. "I told you it wouldn't work didn't I?" She spoke evenly, not winded in the least.

"Yes!" Malic rasped out. "Now please get off me Milady."

Eliani stared down into his face inhaling his driftwood and ocean scent deeply and gazing into those dark blue eyes. Only one set of eyes had ever snagged her attention like Malic's now did, and she felt a small

shudder course through her. “How you act is not the man you are inside Malic.” She said softly never breaking eye contact with him. “Why do you act the way you do?”

“What do you mean?” He gasped still unable to move with the way she had the training *Nehtes* jammed into his neck and applying just enough pressure to force his right shoulder and upper body down. She had incredible strength for such a small woman, and her soft willow and peach scent was extremely enticing.

“You look down on others. Like you are superior to them in every way. You walk with an arrogance reserved only for the purebloods of the High Coven.” Eliani spoke. “Are you a vampire in disguise Malic?”

“I am no scum vampire!” Malic hissed trying to use his heavier weight to shift her off his chest.

“No... no.” Eliani spoke just before sitting down completely on his chest and smiling down at him, her legs now straddling his mid-section and her shorts covered pussy pressing against his hard abdomen. She applied a little more pressure to her training *Nehtes* staff for his comment about vampires and saw his face grimace. “I haven’t thanked you for saving my life yet.”

“This is your idea of thanks?” He gasped out the words.

Eliani shook her head, her burgundy colored hair spilling about her face as she pulled the tie from the back. “This is my idea of a lesson from a better trained Spartan to a lesser trained Spartan.” She spoke seeing Malic’s eyes flare in anger for a moment. Eliani looked up and saw everyone returning to their own training. “You see... they have lost interest already. Apparently seeing you dumped on your pompous ass proved to them what they all assumed in the first place.”

“And what is that?” Malic growled.

“That you are not as skilled as your blowhard act makes others think.” Eliani stated. “You just got beat by a woman who has fought *only Evolli warriors*.” Eliani tried to do an imitation of him with the last few words of her sentence and failed miserably. Malic however got the point and his face flushed red even under his dark skin. Skin that Eliani suddenly wanted very much to see more of and feel against her own. His abdomen pressing against her pussy separated by only the thin fabric was causing delicious shivers to shoot through her.

“I... I thank you for the lesson Princess Eliani.” Malic spat clearly embarrassed now and his anger growing.

Eliani smiled. “Getting mad huh? Because I just embarrassed you something fierce in front of all those good looking females wolves and now I’m sitting on your chest gloating?”

“Something along those lines... yes.” Malic answered honestly.

“Typical male response.” Eliani spoke. “The way you treated Sadi was wrong Malic and even now that she and my brother have found each other, she still says you are not a bad man. Why do you act the way you do? Why do you hate vampires so intensely as your tone suggested just a moment ago?”

“Is that what this is about?” He gasped looking at her. “This is about Sadi? And my distaste for vampires?”

Eliani shook her head quickly. “No... not at all.” She spoke. “If Androcles thought for an instant that you stepped over the line with her Malic... we would not be having this long, boring conversation.”

“He would lock me in the brig?” Malic gasped in disbelief. “Over a female? My career would... my career would be over!”

“To answer your question... no... he wouldn’t lock you in the brig.” She told him. “Is that all that concerns you Malic?” Eliani asked. “Your career? Your distrust of vampires is not something shared among the rest of our people.”

“My feelings and distrust of vampires is none of your concern!” He spat. “As for my career... what else is there?” He demanded. “I wish to be a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*. They are the finest Spartan Warriors in the Union. Who would not want to be part of that?”

“You mean what you think the title and status being a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* would bring to you.” Eliani asked. “Fame... wealth... love perhaps?”

“All those things will come to me in time. They will just come easier if I have reached the pinnacle of my career.” Malic spoke.

Eliani looked at him. “Pray my brothers or my father never hear you say that Malic. Your dream of one day riding a dragon would come to a painful and screeching halt. There is far more to being a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* than you seem to think Malic, and from what I have seen so far, you will not make the grade.”

“You are a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*!” He exclaimed his eyes flaring.

Eliani shook her head quickly. “No... not in the way the rest of them are. The bond that exists between dragon and rider within *Mjolnir's Hand* is beyond what Tharua and I will ever achieve. Our bond is deep and strong... but we do not feel the other's emotions as deeply as the members of *Mjolnir's Hand*. They... they can tell you what their bonded mate is thinking at any given moment. Andro, Lisisa, and Denali are the only ones who truly have that ability. Resumar and Cemath have a bond like Tharua and I... powerful... but not emotionally as deep as the others. You on the other hand... you can not even speak the ancient language Malic! That is a major prerequisite. With your attitude... you would not get past the first portion of the selection phase. Andro, my father or one of the other instructors would cut you off at your knees.”

“I will learn!” He hissed.

Eliani looked at him. “Like you learn everything else? I don't think so. You don't learn how to become bonded to a dragon Malic.”

“What... why are you scolding me like I am some child?” He demanded. “Why do you even care what happens to me? You have made a fool out of me now in front of dozens of others! Is this your idea of a Leonidas Royal Family lecture? To make me feel beneath you?”

Eliani smiled and looked at him with desire in her eyes, desire that Malic had not yet recognized. “I like being on top of you.” She spoke quickly and then her face grew serious. “Sadi is Androcles's *Anome* Malic.” Eliani spoke looking at him and seeing his eyes go a little wider. “You know what that word means?”

“It is what... it is what the King and Queen Aricia share.” He spoke softly.

Eliani nodded slowly. “Andro wouldn't have sent you to the brig Malic. He would have killed you in the same amount of time it took you to blink if he thought you disrespected his *Anome* in any way. And with far less effort than I exerted just now putting you on your ass.” Eliani looked at him and quickly pulled the end of her training staff from the side of his neck. She saw the large bruise forming and Malic watched with wide eyes as the palm of her hand glowed a soft white in color and she touched it to his skin. The pain was gone immediately and the bruise only seconds after it. Eliani let her hand linger on his warm skin a moment longer, letting his driftwood and ocean scent fill her head before turning her fern green eyes on him. “There are many female wolves who would find you attractive Malic... if only you allowed the real you to come out.”

“This... this is me.” He spoke sternly.

Eliani shook her head. “The man before me is not the Alpha I smell.” She spoke touching her nose. “And if there is anything I have inherited from my father it is most definitely his sense of smell. You know he once tracked all of my mothers for four weeks across three planets and six hundred kilometers of frozen wasteland and desert because he had done something to make them all angry at him at one time. Knowing him... he probably did something completely bullheaded and it pissed them off. It's not what he did Malic... they had forgiven him after the first few days for what he had done... but they waited to see if he loved them enough to come find them and to fix what was wrong. And according to them... they called him some pretty choice words before they left him in Sparta and they thought there was a good chance he wouldn't come after them.”

Malic watched as Eliani lifted herself from his chest and got to her feet. He regained his feet as well and towered over her small frame. “I assume there is some point to this story.” He asked in a mildly sarcastic tone of voice, though listening to her talk and the passion in her words had affected him. “If it is even true.”

Eliani looked up into his eyes. “Oh... it's true.” She spoke softly. “I came here hoping to discover something I thought I wanted. Now I am not so sure I want it anymore. You are different than I first thought.”

“What?” He asked surprised at her words.

Eliani took a deep breath before meeting his gaze and continuing. “I am part of a package deal Malic.” She spoke.

Malic looked at her confused. “A package deal?” He asked. “What is this package deal? What do you mean?”

Eliani nodded. “You win me... you win Nyla as well. Nyla and I have been together four years Malic and no man will ever come between us. Not now.” Eliani looked at him with clear intent in her fern green eyes. “Do you want to take me to bed Malic?”

Malic shook his head quickly his eyes growing wide, not sure if he had heard her speak correctly. “I'm sorry... what?”

“Do you want to take me to bed?” Eliani asked him again. “Make me sing your name to the heavens? I can see it in your eyes that you do, and you have no idea how much that appeals to me.”

“I... that... I will not answer that question.” He finally blurted stunned that Princess Eliani was saying these things to him, but recognizing her peach and willow scent and how it filled his nostrils letting him know she was very interested.

Eliani smiled now and stepped closer to him so that he would have no choice but to inhale her scent deeply. “Surprised that I am being so forward huh? My mothers taught me to go after what I want Malic. Nyla and I are not like the females you are used to Malic, can’t you see that? That’s ok... I already know the answer to that question; I can see it in your eyes. I will say it anyway Malic... because I can smell your desire for me wafting off you in waves, and I know for a fact you can smell mine for you. I want you Malic.” She saw his eyes go wide.

“This is some sort of joke isn’t it?” He asked looking around. “Did Sadi or her friends put you up to this?”

Eliani smiled and moved closer to him. His driftwood and ocean scent was turning her on something fierce and she could not explain why. “I want the Alpha that is in there.” She poked him in his broad chest directly over his heart. “When you find that Alpha wolf Malic... use your nose to find me. My scent will be entwined with Nyla’s scent. She smells like sweet buttercups in the morning dew. When you find that Alpha wolf Malic... and he truly displays a desire for something besides his career and what fame and wealth can bring him... come find me. I am a package deal Malic... you take me... you take Nyla. And she is far harder to win over than I am.” Eliani paused and looked up into his dark blue eyes. “Nyla is a pureblood vampire Malic.” She spoke softly seeing his eyes go wide. “If you want me... if the Alpha in there wants me... then he will need to come to terms and get past the hatred he apparently has for vampires. Nyla is not your enemy, and neither are the millions that call the Union home. So... if you want me... you must in turn want Nyla. Something I’m not entirely sure you could do. If you can however, all you have to do is go through my brothers to get us.” Eliani stepped even closer to him and looked quickly around making sure no one was paying attention to them. Malic gasped as her hand grasped his flaccid cock in his pants and squeezed gently. Eliani’s eyes grew a little wider and she gazed up at him with even more desire in her green eyes now. “Wow!” She gasped softly.

She hadn’t planned on doing this but he was so damn handsome and his scent was driving her crazy so Eliani leaned up on her tip toes and sealed her full lips over his, kissing him with every ounce of female aura and passion she possessed, which considering she was a Leonidas, was quite a bit even for a female. Eliani smiled inwardly when she felt his body stiffen as she hit him with her aura. Eliani leaned back quickly after a lingering moment however, to gaze into his stunned dark blue eyes. “That was just a taste Spartan. Show us you truly want us Malic... and we’ll show you how to properly use this exceptional gift you have here...” She squeezed his cock once more. “We’ll show you how to use it to make us sing your name for hours.” Eliani stared into his dark blue eyes smiling. “I guarantee you will never wish for another female the rest of your days once you have tasted Nyla and me.”

Eliani released his cock quickly as she felt it begin to thicken in her hand and she leaned up to kiss him hard once more, running her soft moist tongue across his lips teasingly. “*Carians* Malic... you taste good!” She gasped softly. “If I didn’t know what existed between Sadi and my brother I’d call her the biggest fool in the universe for letting you get away.” Eliani nuzzled Malic’s cheek softly. “And thank you for saving my life Malic.” She spoke into his ear in a voice that trembled with lust and desire.

Eliani’s fern green eyes twinkled at him with pleasures and delights that Malic could not comprehend let alone imagine and he watched as she picked up her training *Nehtes* and began to saunter towards the exit. She left him standing there alone and totally without direction or the brain power to do anything but drink in her willow and peach scent and the female aura she had caressed him with.

Malic was speechless for the first time in his life.

TWELVE HOURS FROM EARTH

Sadi stood alone on the steel catwalk that stretched across one side of the Landing Bay on the *SCIMITAR*. It reached far up towards the top of the bulkhead and this was the first time she had been able to

have any time to gather her thoughts about what was happening so quickly. Her green eyes fell far below to the deck of the landing bay and the dragon pens where she could see Andro and his brothers examining and washing their dragons with their much younger brothers Deion, Calyb and Bryon. She had discovered all their names the night before while they had sat and talked about the past and the future. She found Eliani to be almost as quick witted and sharp of tongue as her mother Anja. Carina was beautiful, soft spoken and extremely intelligent and no doubt quite lethal given who her parents were, while Arrarn, Normya and Zarah she had met the night before and liked immediately. Resumar was just as blunt talking and likable as Andro, and he seemed to have a mischievous side to him that he let out often. Most of the time with either Eliani or Lisisa and it ended up with them chasing him all over the ship as she had heard about. She had met Queen Aricia only briefly upon her return from Sparta nearly ten months after the events of the Island Palace. She had made it a point to come and see her and thank her personally for her actions that night. Sadi didn't truly understand why they reacted as they did, for it had been Andro's voice that night, channeled through Elynth that had saved her life and not the other way around.

Sadi would no longer deny what she felt coursing through her. She belonged to Andro in a way that was almost beyond the ability to explain. To finally discover and accept that she had loved him since those nights on the island had shaken her to her core for all of perhaps twenty minutes. After that she no longer cared that it seemed so outrageously insane, for what she felt pulsing through her whenever she was in his arms or even in the same room with him was too powerful to ignore or fight. And she found she certainly did not want to fight what she felt now. It was what she had always desired but something that had remained just out of her grasp.

Looking at him far below, now Sadi knew why.

"He is beautiful isn't he?" The soft voice spoke from beside her. Sadi turned quickly and saw Aricia, Anja and For'mya walk up next to her.

"Of course we are biased." For'mya spoke with a smile.

"My Que..." Sadi started to say and she saw Anja hold up her hand quickly and shake her finger with a smile. Sadi and the others laughed and unlike earlier she became relaxed very quickly now among those who Andro called mother. Sadi nodded her head. "Yes... he is beautiful. At least to my eyes." She said softly.

"Your eyes are all that matter Sadi." For'mya said with a smile. "Just as his father is the most beautiful man to not only the three of us but Dysea and Isabella as well. There could never be another in our lives."

"His father is all we will ever desire or need." Anja spoke.

"Did all of you... did you all conspire with Lady Gorgo to get me to come on this trip?" Sadi asked with an embarrassing smile.

Anja looked shocked. "Us conspire?" She gasped. "We would never do such a thing, that's down right un-Spartan like."

Aricia nuzzled Anja's cheek and chuckled as she pulled her close. "We knew you had never been to Sparta." Aricia spoke. "When Gorgo told us that her class of cadets was coming to Sparta we decided to help things along yes."

"We deduced that if there was nothing between you and Andro that you would still have your studies to keep you busy." For'mya spoke as she took Sadi's hand. "And Sparta is a beautiful city with a great deal to do."

"There are times when the only thing our son fears is his own emotions, much like his father." Aricia spoke softly. "I believe it is something Martin passed down to him and him alone since it appears all of our other children have no problems expressing themselves. And if we did not conspire... as you say..." She told Sadi with a smile. "All of us would be nearing old age before he ever got the nerve to follow what his heart and every sense in his body has been telling him for years. And that was to find you."

Sadi smiled shyly. "He certainly has no trouble expressing to me what he feels." She spoke. "He's done so several times since I came aboard. Quite romantically too."

All of them smiled at that and moved closer to her. "So tell us Sadi... is there some secret you would like to know about our son that we can share with you?" Anja asked.

Sadi glanced far down into the dragon pens and shook her head with a smile. "I believe I will enjoy discovering his secrets all for myself." She spoke.

Anja laughed softly. "I like her... she has guts."

Sadi tilted her head. “There is something... he has a mark on his chest... a brand of some sort. He... he says it is the talon of a dragon and that his father has one as well.” Sadi looked at Aricia. “What does that mean?”

“What did Andro tell you?” Aricia asked.

“He said it was nothing and he changed the subject.” Sadi replied. “It is something isn’t it? Something important if the reactions from the three of you are any indication.”

Aricia looked at Anja and then For’mya before nodding. “There was a ceremony of sorts after the Battle of Alba Tau.” Aricia said softly. “Isheeni’s mother Arzoal... the Dragon Elder Mother... she and the seven remaining Dragon Elders called Martin and Andro before the Elder Council. When word reached Earth and Elear about what they had done on Alba Tau, not surrendering the bodies of the dead dragons to the Evolli as trophies, even though they could probably have left at any time throughout the night sent ripples through the dragons on both worlds. When word spread to Arzoal on Elear of this action, she called a Council of Dragon Elders. Andro and Martin had returned to Sparta to allow their wounds to heal, and the Elders all arrived within an hour of each other.” Aricia turned to face Sadi. “I tell you this only because once you allow Andro to claim you Sadi, you will have a part in what this means. After you are together Sadi, ask him then.” She smiled at her and the light reflected off Aricia’s azure eyes as if often did Andro’s, making it seem like their eyes were glowing. “The Talon is a sign of trustworthiness and respect among the dragons, any dragons, no matter where they reside. It is instinct in them when they see this sign to defer to the wearer. No one but a dragon has ever been branded with a Talon before. Even we were not allowed to attend the ceremony, only Elynth and Torma, for they too were part of what Martin and Andro did that night. Torma and Elynth now bear similar marks as well, under the saddles they usually wear.” Aricia took a deep breath. “Should anything happen to the Dragon Elders, if their guidance can not be sought or received or is in any way lost; only a Talon Guardian can make decisions in their stead. No non-dragon in their history has ever held that distinction, and Arzoal is nearly thirty thousand years old so she would know. It is a position of monumental honor and influence within dragon culture itself and since Alba Tau, Martin and Andro have held these positions. And they will continue to do so until their deaths.”

“You make it sound like it is a bad thing Aricia.” Sadi asked softly. “Why?”

“There is another part to the Talon Guardians that Martin and Andro must now bear on their shoulders alone.” For’mya spoke. “If for any reason a dragon goes astray and becomes an enemy to its people... only Martin and Andro alone have the power to end that dragon’s life. A small part of the Mindvoice power of each Dragon Elder was transferred to Martin, Androcles, Torma and Elynth for this purpose. They could end the life of a dragon in less time than it takes for you and me to take a breath. They are uncomfortable with this role due to the extent and the depth of the bonds they share with Torma and Elynth, and that is why they avoid questions in regards to the Talon brand they both wear.”

Anja took Sadi’s arm. “Wait for him to approach you about it Sadi. We were only joking before, and if Andro is anything like his father, and we all know he is, you will be the only one to have free reign within even his most intimate thoughts. Honor that gift. Treasure it... and protect it for him as we do for Martin.”

Sadi nodded as she took a deep breath. “I will.” She said softly.

“Enough of this.” Aricia spoke quickly. “Gorgo is waiting for us in the forward mess lounge.” She took Sadi’s arm and turned her head as For’mya took her arm while Anja gently took Sadi’s free arm. “Let us enjoy some time the five of us, while our children do their duties. There are advantages to being Queen you know.”

Anja chuckled. “Yep... it usually means we get more free time than most, and that is definitely the best part!”

“Yes it is.” Aricia said. “Come Sadi... there are some things we would like to regal you with as Andro’s mothers. I thoroughly enjoy bragging about our children and knowing that Andro has finally put things in motion, we want to learn about what makes you tick.”

“Wait... how much of this is my father involved in?” Sadi asked.

For’mya smiled. “Only that a discrete tip was given to him that there might be an attempt by a male to ask him for permission to claim you.” She replied. “It is why my father asked him to attend the State Dinner. He doesn’t know who it is.”

“So... your father knows as well?” Sadi asked.

“There are not many within our family circles that do not know of the love Andro holds for you Sadi.” Anja told her as they began to walk. “You might be surprised at how many different lives Androcles has affected since he was a boy.”

“He says that he hates being Crown Prince.” Sadi said softly as they walked. “That he hates the way some people look at him and his father. Like they are gods of some sort.”

“Martin is no different.” Aricia spoke. “That is part of what endears them to so many. But enough of this talk... these are happy times we should be discussing. I would much rather talk to you about what you might like to wear for the actual event.”

Sadi looked at her. “Event?”

Aricia nodded. “He will ask your father in full view of the local Spartan Senate when it is in session. Vorilas has been invited to view the proceedings that day, and as his daughter you may attend with him. It’s all very old fashioned... but Martin did that for all of us within the first three years of being together. I think For’mya told you a little of what he did.”

Sadi nodded. “On the *STRIKER*.” She said.

Anja smiled and reached beneath her uniform collar to pull out the silk tie. At the end of that tie was a securely anchored glimmering white Rilian diamond, glittering in the light of the catwalk they stood on. She watched For’mya and Aricia do the same. “We wanted to kill him for doing what he did.” Anja spoke as her fingers caressed the diamond.

“We almost did.” Aricia said with a grin. “You should have seen the look on Bella’s face when she realized that Deia’s husband was standing in as member of her family. She was pregnant with Carina at the time, and she didn’t stop crying for four hours after Martin asked for permission. And Dysea’s mother Normya... she about stole Martin for herself so impressed that she was at his actions.”

“We know this is happening so very fast for you Sadi.” For’mya spoke gently. “That is why we want you to know that you can come to any of us to ask anything. The only thing we ask is that you are absolutely sure you want to proceed. Your life will change in many ways... and it will stay the same. Are you prepared for that Sadi?”

Sadi smiled and nodded her head. “I have waited and wondered all this time since that night. Never knowing why I could not find the right man. I thought it was me... something I did to make it so hard for me. Now I know why. It was him. And I do have so many questions.”

“Good... then once we meet with Gorgo... you will have your answers.” Aricia smiled. “And in two days you will step into a new world.”

EARTH CITY OF SPARTA MEETING OF THE SPARTAN CITY SENATE

There were times when she was amazed at how life had brought her to this point.

The memory of their very first meeting so many years ago was etched into her brain in granite and if there was one thing she was thankful for most of all, it was the love and support he gave her no matter what they had endured. The last twenty-five years of her life had been the happiest and most active of her hundred and forty one years of life. The last twenty-five years she had discovered so much about herself. The love of a man and woman first and foremost among them. It was a love that burned just as brightly now as it did the day she and Aihola rediscovered Isra after a year apart and what he meant to them and their future. The intense passion and devotion that had brought her and Aihola together in the beginning remained just as powerful now as it had in their first weeks together in Mountain City. Fate had brought them together and tied their minds and hearts as one, and then fate had given them what they desired most in the violet eyed Spartan who worshiped them both in a way that only Martin and several others could truly understand. Fate had given them Roluth and his endless antics and complete devotion, and fate had blessed them with six beautiful children that filled their days.

Tarifa had not changed in the quarter century that had past since those first fateful years. Her raven colored hair and sapphire blue eyes were still among the first thing that men and women of all species noticed,

as well as the four inch pointed ears of her elven nature. The second thing they noticed immediately was the steel this elven female had in her backbone. She had been elected by overwhelming majority to two four year terms as President of Earth, and one four year term as Prime Minister. It was during that last year as Prime Minister with Selene as President that Panos had approached her. It was well known that she was not going to run for any sort of office when her term ended and that she was going to remain home and care for hers and Aihola's four children with Isra at the time. Panos had come to her with an offer that after careful consideration Tarifa could not turn down. With the full support of Aihola and Isra, Tarifa had spent a full year moving their home from Eden City to Sparta and then accepting the position of Lieutenant Governor of the City State of Sparta.

She had been to Sparta often over the years and had grown to love the mountain terrain and scent of towering pines in the air it seemed like all of the time. When Panos had announced he intended to appoint Tarifa as Lieutenant Governor, she had been amazed at the outpouring of support from every facet of the people of Sparta. Over the years Tarifa had come to realize that while Eden City may have been the recognized capital of Earth, Sparta was where the true decisions were made. It was here where the elected leaders of Earth came to hash out their agreements and bills and whatever else they needed to conduct. This offered her the opportunity to see her dear friends very often, and no matter how short their stay might be, Selene, Charles, Lynwe and Layna always seemed to make time to see her and she them. The importance of her role she didn't come to fully realize until half way through her first year in office, but this was not Eden City, and the pace here in Sparta was much more reserved and peaceful which offered far better conditions for the decisions she had to make.

The moment a Leonidas had once more ascended to the throne of Sparta, the city had exploded in not only population but rediscovered history and culture. Martin brought back to Sparta what many had thought lost and that was the history and culture of the former Greek City State. And as with the Lycavorian people as a whole, Martin brought back morals and values to all who resided on Earth now. Though the population of Sparta was made up of more Lycavorians than any other, there was now a substantial elf and human presence within the city and smaller crops of different species that had come to love the slower pace and open air. There was no mistaking whose city this was, for whenever Martin or any of the Royal Family which now included Tarifa by default, were within the expanse of the city itself or the Port of Gytheio only twenty-seven kilometers away, the mood of the people was always upbeat and proud. That mood almost never went away now that the elven female their King called sister sat as Sparta's Lieutenant Governor.

Martin Leonidas consider Tarifa and Aihola sisters if not by blood; then by the actions and experiences they had shared through the years. They were among the few that had total, unfettered access to Martin or his Queens, not to mention they could simply take a Lifter to the villa and the *Durcunusaan* would wave them through without question. This fact alone gave Tarifa political clout unlike any she had ever wielded, and combined with her undeniable role in rebuilding Earth with Selene and Aihola into the fourth largest trading planet within the Union, no one dared questioned her wisdom, intelligence or her experience. Her Mindvoice bond with Aihola and Roluth also gave her and Aihola considerable pull in matters concerning the dragons, who called Earth home. The senior Dragon Elder on Earth, the Firespitter known as Syrilth, would not hesitate to come to her or Aihola for council as it was well known that to talk to one, you might as well have been talking to both, so deep was the bond they shared with each other. And all knew Tarifa would not hesitate to do the same, for Roluth was Syrilth's brother after all and had become one of the largest and strongest dragons on Earth.

In the first portion of her term as Lieutenant Governor she had helped Panos broker agreements with all the surrounding cities that were rapidly rebuilding with the continued reconstruction of Earth. Athens once more prospered not far away, though the hatred and distrust of so many millennia ago was now long forgotten and buried deep. Gytheio had once more become the Port City of Sparta, and now that is where many of Martin's children as well as those who had returned with him so long ago had small villas of their own. It had taken Panos almost no effort to push through a Bill without her knowledge that appointed her as Lieutenant Governor for life in the third year of her first term. She could hold the position as long as she desired, and to this day, Tarifa had no desire to relinquish that position of honor.

"Tarifa?" Dilios's voice broke into her thoughts.

Tarifa shook her head quickly and looked at the portly senior Spartan Senator. Most of the men and women in this chamber were far older than Tarifa, but they treated her as a complete equal in all things, not to mention they deferred to her on most matters because of her closeness to the King and the unnerving ability to

know what he wanted. They met like this once a week in the outdoor Acropolis Senate Chambers that had been used four thousand years ago, except for during the winter months when they would meet in the normal chamber. It had been her idea to do this to honor the role that Spartan Senate of so long ago had played. It was another reason the men and women treated her as they did. This elven female may have been only a hundred and forty odd years old, but she had a sense of honor and history rarely seen and it pleased the older men and women to no end. The Senate had been reduced in size over the years to make it more efficient, and now there were also human and elves who held seats, something that would never have happened before Martin returned to Sparta and assumed his birthright.

“I’m sorry Dilios.” Tarifa exclaimed with a smile. “My mind was wandering there for a moment.”

Tarifa heard the soft laugh from the side. “We do that all the time Tarifa... it is why we rarely get anything done on such a gorgeous day.” Senator Arete spoke from her spot bringing soft laughter from everyone in the chamber.

“Well... we truly only have two issues to discuss.” Dilios reminded them quickly. “The expansion of the Leonidas Memorial and the issue of the former territory known as Chad on the African continent.”

“Chad?” Arete asked. “What is this?”

“Charles contacted me early this morning from Eden City because he knew we would gather.” Tarifa spoke. “Since most of us were already on our way here, I told Dilios to wait until we had all arrived before bringing it up. Apparently sensor sweeps from EDEN Base with their new mineral arrays has pinpointed a rather large deposit of...” Tarifa looked at the data pad in her hand. “Cirimo.”

“Really?” A male senator asked. “How large?”

Tarifa smiled in relief. “Thank you Thomas... at least someone here knows what this is. I certainly do not.”

The human man’s smile was genuine and warm. He had served on the Spartan Senate for three years now and was widely considered to be exceptionally intelligent and handsome. He was a graduate of Charles’s University for Advanced Political Studies, a school that had begun as an afterthought by humans here on Earth, and was now attended by nearly forty thousand students from across the entire Union.

“It is similar to aluminum in how it is used, but much more malleable and considerably stronger. I believe the engineers at our ship building facilities throughout the Union use it to coat the power conduits.” Thomas replied. “It makes them much more tolerable to damage. It is also extremely rare... and quite hard to find.”

Tarifa nodded. “Well... all of Eden City’s Mining teams are on Neptune helping with establishing the permanent colony there. Charles and Selene asked if we would send a team to investigate this discovery.” Tarifa looked at them. “You all know I won’t do anything without the approval of this body... but we do have our own research teams, and they might enjoy the opportunity to get out of Sparta for a time and into the field. It would be an excellent experience for the younger researchers as well. What say all of you?”

Tarifa watched as the men and women nodded their heads and made whisper soft comments to each other. She smiled knowing that at times in Earth’s history debates among political bodies like theirs could go on for days. Here issues were decided within minutes, and if more debate was needed, times for such debates were scheduled and then kept to with strict timetables.

“We all agree then?” Tarifa asked after only one minute. Tarifa watched as each member of the hundred and twenty-three nodded and then pressed their palms to small scanners at each of their seats signifying their positions. The vote was without dissent and it was noted and logged into the computer archives. “I will make Charles and Selene aware of what we have decided then. Thomas... you seem rather interested in this. Would you like to lead this expedition?”

The human Senator nodded quickly. “I was hoping you would ask that question.” He spoke. “And yes I would.”

“Good...” Tarifa said. “I’ll leave you to arrange transport and whatever other materials the team might need. Now... as for the Leonidas Memorial Expansion... I have spoken in depth with Panos and Senior Polemarch Dymas about this. We are all aware how deeply our people hold this memorial site and the significance it has to Martin himself. This is where the remains of his father are interned, as well as the namesake for his son. Our graduation ceremonies for Spartans just completing their Agoges is held there every year. Martin knows how our people view his father, but this sight right now is where he first discovered who he

was and saw the vision of his father. To change it in any way might alter that perception in some way for him.” Tarifa spoke as she rose from her chair and began walking back and forth in front of the gathered Senators as she always did when talking about important issues. “The State Dinner is at the end of the week, which all of us will be attending. My suggestion would be that between now and then we broach the subject with Martin. They have begun settling in for their stay here, and you all know how the first two weeks of that escapade are quite busy for him. There is a dinner planned for the family in two nights and Aihola and I will corner him there and speak with him about it. It is he who should have the final word in what should be done. Before we talk with him... what is the consensus of the Spartan Senate?”

Arete looked around. “He already believes that too many of our people look at him in a higher light than he deserves. Like he is some sort of reverent god. And to be honest many of our people do consider him in this light, as well as the Crown Prince because of what they can do. I was not on this senate during the time of his father, but many of you here were. I believe it is safe to say that King Leonidas would not accept this perception of himself either.” She spoke evenly. “They are the most unassuming men I believe any of us have or ever will encounter. He certainly does not act as a King should at times. Just last week the Netnews took images of him shopping in the Western Market with Dysea and Isabella. No... I would like to see this happen... but it must be presented to him in a manner that all of us support. It is not a religious or spiritual connection, but a way for all of us to honor what King Leonidas did for ancient Sparta. Perhaps an additional memorial somewhere as opposed to expanding the current one at Thermopylae. A museum perhaps.”

Dilios nodded. “That idea I like.” He spoke quickly.

“As do I.” Another older Lycavorian chimed in. “It gives us an opportunity to honor King Martin’s father, and it would be an excellent source of the history of Sparta in the early times. Many of us still have items that we could donate to such a facility, and we all know that museums hold the attention of the youth more so than simple marble or granite facades.” Tarifa saw many of the men and women nod at this idea, and she had to admit it was an idea she liked immensely.

“We should explore this avenue thoroughly.” Another Senator spoke up. “It is an excellent idea and not one that can be seen in a light that the King wants to avoid. The other thing we have to consider... we all know how the Queens shield him from quite a bit... they are viciously protective of him as any she wolf would be of their mate...but I believe this is also something that all the Queens will fully stand behind without reservations. Queen Dysea simply for the educational properties it will obviously bring. We all know her stance on education.”

“Ycer is right.” Another spoke. “We should gather in smaller groups over wine and food the next few days and work out all the details.”

Tarifa nodded. “Two days... for then we can present it to the full Union Senate while Martin is in attendance. It will also help that this will be the day Androcles requests the hand of Vorilas’s daughter Sadi in the old way. Dilios... you have that worked out yes?”

Dilios nodded. “He is arriving with L’tian later this evening, and Androcles will be arriving sometime early this afternoon with the remainder of his siblings as well as Aricia, Anja and For’mya. Lady Gorgo is with them.”

Tarifa nodded. “Yes... Isra, Aihola and I will be greeting them as they arrive and we will go to Thermopylae.”

Dilios nodded. “Vorilas will sit with me for the duration of the session. It is his first trip to Sparta and he will undoubtedly be entranced with how easy we make it all appear.”

This brought laughter to all of them gathered. “I understand this Sadi is quite the vision?” Arete spoke now.

Tarifa nodded with a smile. “Aricia and For’mya have shown me images of her and she is exceptionally beautiful. Andro will present himself in full armor and conduct himself in the way of ancient Sparta from what I understand.”

“Now that will be a sight to see.” Another older Senator spoke. “A Ceremonial Mating Ritual has not been seen in nearly thirty-five hundred years. These are the things they do to endear themselves to the people. And they wonder why people love them so.”

“I suggest we get started on what we want to do.” Tarifa spoke with a smile at the senator’s words. “Thomas if you would, keep me advised on your progress with this Cirimo expedition. I will make sure Panos remains out of your hair.”

Thomas and many others laughed once more as they came to their feet. Panos always tried to have his hand in everything and he now used Tarifa as a buffer of sorts. Many knew that he would recommend Tarifa to succeed him when he chose to end his political career, and he left Tarifa alone to handle the more mundane items on the agenda.

Tarifa looked skyward as she felt the tingle against her Mindvoice shields and her face brightened as she felt love pour through her. She felt Dilios take her arm gently and she looked at him. “Can I give you a ride back to the Senate offices?” He asked.

Tarifa smiled. “Thank you... but no. My ride is already here.” Tarifa looked skyward again. [Mindvoice Shielded] *I have missed you my Mistress.*

Dilios heard the trumpeting roar of a dragon fill the sky around the chamber and he smiled as the carmine red colored Firespitter landed just outside the chamber entrance. He shook his head with a smile and made for his Lifter.

Tarifa walked calmly to the chamber entrance and looked at the diminutive dark skinned female sitting high between Roluth’s broad shoulders. The matte black helmet covered all but her soft pink lips and her amber colored eyes, but there was no mistaking the brilliant white plume crest that decorated her helmet and fell far down between her shoulders.

[Oh... I have missed you more my slave.]

Tarifa smiled broadly as she began walking to where Roluth’s massive body settled fully to the ground, his beautiful rust colored eyes gazing at her with love and devotion.

MENKLA TYPE II-CLASS DRAGON TRANSPORT JAVELIN ONE TWENTY TWO MINUTES FROM EARTH ATMOSPHERIC ENTRY

Teeria and Palta stood with Sadi and the other cadets and new military personnel on the upper deck of the *Type II* as they made their way towards main atmospheric entry into Earth’s gravitational field. She had spent five wonderful hours with three out of the five of Andro’s mothers and she had heard stories about him and his siblings that had her laughing almost uncontrollably. Sadi could not believe how normal they all were. She doubted there was an arrogant bone in any of their bodies and if that was the case with three of them, Sadi had no doubts Queen Dysea and Queen Isabella were no different. She got many strange stares from those who entered or left the mess lounge they were in. Sadi was a cadet... yet she was sitting with three Queens of the Union drinking coffee and laughing as if they were old friends. Sadi had been right when she told them that she had many questions, and almost every one of them was answered.

Sadi had rushed back to Androcles quarters to pack her things, only to find that Andro had already done it for her. Not that she had much to pack for she had not really unpacked. Her bags were sitting on the floor of his quarters with a datapad note on the top of them.

-You could take only what you need and leave the rest *KertaGai*. If you would allow me to take you shopping when you get settled in it would make me very happy. I will leave it up to you, but you will not need much in the way of clothing if my plans work as I hope they will-

-Andro-

Sadi couldn’t help the warm rush that surged through her at his words, even typed onto the data pad as they were. She looked down at her three bags and made her decision instantly. She tore through all three and condensed the things she needed most into one bag and then typed a quick note back to Andro before leaving the data pad on top of the bags just as she had found it.

Now she stood with Teeria and Palta watching as the Leonidas family moved freely about the lower deck, rubbing the scales of their dragons or chasing the small children around the huge bodies. They would hear

an occasional trumpet from one of the dragons underneath the deck where they could not see, but for the most part it was rather sedate. Sadi glanced over to where she saw Malic standing by the protective railing and looking down into the cavernous main deck. She had never seen his face so serious and for a moment she thought he might have gotten into serious trouble for his actions in the gym with Princess Eliani. That incident and the fact that Princess had so completely and utterly embarrassed Malic had made its way quickly around the ship and Sadi had to give him credit for even showing himself as he now did.

“So will you be staying at the Royal villa in Sparta or his villa in Gytheio Sadi?” Teeria asked.

Sadi tore her eyes from Malic and looked at Teeria. “I don’t know.” She answered. “Please forgive me... both of you.”

“Forgive you for what?” Palta demanded. “Sadi... you are our friend. Our dear friend. I’m blissfully happy for you. As long as you invite us to the party after. I understand the Leonidas family can throw some famous celebrations.”

Sadi laughed and hugged her tightly. “That is a promise.” She said. “I will make sure...”

“Cadet Sadi?” The *Durcunusaan* Commander Bren stepped up to the three of them with a bundle under his arm.

They all stiffen and stood up straighter and Bren smiled. “Commander?” Sadi asked formally.

Bren held out the matte black bundle to her. “You need to change.” He spoke.

Sadi looked at him questions in her eyes. “Sir... I’m already in uniform.” She spoke.

Bren nodded. “And immaculate it is Cadet. You will wear it enough on the surface.” He spoke. “For now... for the flight down... you need to wear this.”

“Flight down?” Sadi asked.

Bren smiled warmly which surprised all of them for it took years off his face. “Sadi...” They all detected he no longer used Cadet when referring to her. “Milady... whether you realize it or not, and while Androcles has not yet stood before your father, you are already considered a member of the Leonidas family. No member of the Leonidas family ever lands on the transport when they arrive for their six month exodus here. Even Lady Gorgo flies down. I do not remember the last time Andro actually used interplanetary transportation.” They saw him motion with his head into the area below them. “It is a ritual of sorts for them, and the people of the city plan for it for weeks.”

“Plan for what?” Sadi asked.

Bren held out the bundle. “You will see. The Prince already has your helmet with him, and you can change in the port cabin. Your friends can help you... but be quick about it. We are only seventeen minutes from release.” Sadi took the bundle and looked at Teeria and Palta who had stunned expressions on their faces. “Go!” Bren barked softly.

He watched them hustle off to the side of the upper deck with a smile. Never a dull moment around the Leonidas clan that was for sure. And Bren wouldn’t have it any other way.

“He’s watching you.” Lisisa’s soft voice sounded from behind where Eliani was adjusting Tharua’s saddle.

Eliani nodded but didn’t stop what she was doing. “I know.” She said.

Lisisa leaned up against Tharua’s muscular side and looked at her sister. Eliani turned then and saw all of her sisters as well. She grinned. “Oh boy... should I be worried?” She asked.

Carina reached out and took her hand. “This Malic has affected you differently Eliani.” She spoke.

Eliani nodded. “I know.” She answered. “I don’t know what it is. He’s more than his ego allows him to be... I know he is. I can smell it. Something turned him this way. I asked Sadi... but she doesn’t know. She only says that he is not who he projects to others.”

“He’s not... he doesn’t have a stellar reputation when it comes to females Eliani; treating them the way we should be treated.” Lisisa saw Eliani look at her. “That is just from the few cadets I have heard talking.” Lisisa spoke quickly. “Please don’t be angry.”

“I know.” Eliani spoke softly. “I’ve heard the talking as well.”

“Is he worth the... is he even worth the effort then sister?” Zarah asked.

Eliani smiled. “What have our father and mothers always told us?”

“Nothing worthwhile comes without effort.” The four of them answered immediately almost in the same voice.

Eliani nodded. “Nothing worthwhile comes without effort. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. He’s not what he makes everyone think he is.”

“Do you think Nyla will approve?” Normya asked.

“I talk with her every day. I told her about him. We have always desired and been attracted to the same type of man.” Eliani answered looking at her. “I think that is partly why we are so deeply connected. We’ll see what happens.”

“You know he will need to pass the crucible of our brothers.” Zarah spoke softly. “It seems any man any of us choose will need to do that whether we want them to or not.”

Eliani looked at her. “Better our brothers than father.” She spoke. “Father’s idea of testing them is holding a 190 to their heads and asking what their intentions are.”

They all shared a small laugh for they knew Eliani was correct. Their father was exceedingly protective of them and based on past events most male wolves, and most males in general did not attempt to court any Leonidas daughter unless they were very serious. Moneus was the only one who had passed their father’s scrutiny, and much of the reason behind that was because he was their Uncle Danny’s son, and he had already shown his devotion to Carina. It was something all of them hated, but deep down they knew it most definitely weeded out those who were not serious.

“I don’t know... Andro can be just like him sometimes.” Zarah said. “We should all grab a male while he is occupied with Sadi. It will be too late by the time he realizes it.”

Normya looked at her sister with a fake gaze of surprised disgust. “Zarah you are such a *pomai*!” She exclaimed.

Zarah grinned and nuzzled the sister she considered her twin and closest friend. “Think of the fun though!”

Normya rolled her eyes. “As close as you and I are to our Coming of Age, we need to be careful.”

“That doesn’t mean I can’t tease.” Zarah exclaimed.

“I’m hoping Moneus intends to claim me finally.” Carina said shyly. “He’s beaten around the bush for so long I’m beginning to wonder if he is truly serious.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that.” Lisisa said with a smile. “Moneus has been sniffing you for years Carina. You just might be surprised.”

Carina shrugged. “Well... as long as he doesn’t mind that he is getting the Leonidas daughter with the smallest *goldur*.”

“How many times do we have to tell you don’t worry Carina? He’ll pay more attention to your *mida* than anything else. We’ve told you that. I’ve seen the way he watches you.” Zarah said nudging her sister in the shoulder playfully.

What do you think Tharua? Lisisa asked, running her hand along Tharua’s side.

Tharua turned her huge head and her copper colored eyes glimmered. *I agree with Eliani. He is not the man he projects to everyone else. When he warned us of the ambush... there was something in his voice that did not speak of arrogance.*

Lisisa nodded. *Well I trust you more than Eliani when it comes to that.*

“Thanks a lot!” Eliani snapped.

Lisisa squeezed her arm. “I believe in you sister.”

“As if your luck is any better.” Normya spoke sternly. “You haven’t been with anyone in almost three years. Your average is falling fast.”

Lisisa smiled. “We’ll see.”

They all looked at her with shocked gazes. “Lisi... you *are* seeing someone!” Eliani spoke quickly. “Who? What does he look like?”

“Who said I’m seeing anyone.” Lisisa replied calmly. “I’m not... but there are a few prospects that might turn my head.”

Zarah snorted. “Bah... you’ve been saying that for years.” She stated. “You are probably getting some from somewhere and just won’t tell us.”

Lisisa looked at her with wide eyes pleased that no one suspected of her love and relationship with Denali. “Zarah! I would never...”

“Remember to remain in tight formation.” Andro was speaking to the hatchlings and adolescent dragons that had bonded with his five younger siblings. It had happened rather quickly and close together and in the last two years alone, but all of the bonds seemed to be very strong and growing more powerful by the week. “The wind is not a factor... but your mother and brothers and sisters are much larger and will put off a draft as they fly.”

Aricia smiled and leaned further back against Isheeni as she listened to Andro talk. [Mindvoice Shielded] *Thank you Isheeni my sister.* She spoke turning to look at her azure scaled bonded dragon sister.

Isheeni turned her huge head and looked at Aricia with azure colored eyes similar to hers. [For what?] [For never giving up on me all those years ago.] Aricia replied. [Without you I would not be here. I would not have all these wonderful children... and I would not have my Beloved. Anja, For'mya. None of them.] [I can say the same thing to you sister. When you and Martin came into our lives our entire future changed. I would not have my children to nurture and love. Torma and I would probably be still fighting for our lives everyday. Look at us now... we have the two most beautiful males in the universe and they have given us so many wonderful and beautiful children.]

Aricia nodded. [Yes they have.]

[Our two families Aricia... we will forever be joined together no matter that we are so different in appearances. All we need do is look at the bonds between our children to see that.]

Aricia smiled. [I think I am just missing Martin.] She said. [It seems as if the longer we are together, the more we desire his touch when we are apart.]

Isheeni chuckled. [Then when you return to our home in Sparta... you, Anja and For'mya take Dysea and Bella and lock yourselves within your bedroom until he makes you trumpet in bliss. That is what I intend to do with Torma when we return.]

Aricia looked at her with a twinkle in her eye. [Isheeni... I do believe our relationship has caused you to become somewhat of vixen. You do realize that half the dragons on Earth would give up their ability to fly for one night with you.]

Isheeni laughed. [Let them dream. Only one dragon stirs my passion and desire and we will be together for eternity. He makes my wings twitch in delight with just a simple caress. Much the same as you.]

Aricia nodded. [Indeed.] She looked over to where Anja and For'mya were standing together talking in soft whispers with three of their children. [I discovered what Anja has been vexed by since Seanna's death. I believe she has finally let it go.]

[She is a strong willed woman... and will never give up without a fight.] Isheeni spoke. [All of you are...]

[We are going to talk with Dysea and Bella. We think it is time all of us began spending more time together in Sparta. We have drawn apart in some ways over the years with the war and our duties... but now it is time to rediscover what the five of us share.] Aricia said.

[Was it what Dysea thought?]

Aricia nodded. [In a manner of speaking. I will make some inquires when we reach home. But she has put it behind her now...]

[Good.] Isheeni said. [It is time things became normal again.]

[Well... as normal as they have ever been with our two families.] Aricia said with a grin. [We always seem to find trouble rather easily.]

Sadi could not believe how the matte black body armor conformed to every curve of her body almost as if it had been made specifically for her. This was the newest version of the military body armor, called Mark IV ArmorPly. It was composed of three different alloys with the center layer being an almost transparent layer of Dragon Armor incased in two layers of the newest composite alloy armor. It could stop smaller projectile

rounds easily, and shrapnel would not even penetrate it, but the more damage it took the less protection it was able to provide. Such a thin layer of Dragon Armor began breaking down quickly the more damage it took. It allowed for the most incredible freedom of movement of any type of body armor and almost all of *Mjolnir's Hand* and the *Durcunusaan* had adopted it as standard. She had never worn something like this before, and she was amazed at how much like a second skin it felt. The collar fastened snugly around her slim neck, and extended down to her wrists where it simply became one single top piece that protected the back of her hands and fingers and left their palms bare. She barely realized that Teeria and Palta had also attached the flowing crimson cape to the shoulder fasteners until after they had done it. The cape was trimmed in black and gold and bore the inverted capital V on it which she knew was the symbol of the ancient Spartans. Only the *Durcunusaan*, *Mjolnir's Hand* and members of the Royal Family wore a cloak like this and as Sadi stared at it in the mirror in the medium sized lavatory aboard the *Type II*, it all became so suddenly very real.

As Teeria and Palta walked out of the lavatory with her, Sadi felt very embarrassed at the number of heads and eyes that fell upon her, even though many of them now knew of her relationship with Prince Androcles. She felt Malic's eyes on her and when she looked at his face she surprisingly found acceptance and even support in his dark blue eyes. At the top of the stairs down into the lower deck Sadi stopped and looked at Teeria and Palta.

"I will see you both in Sparta." Sadi told them squeezing her hands. "I will not forsake you because of what I have found."

Teeria smiled. "We know that Sadi. It isn't in your nature. Besides... we still have classes to go to while we are here." Teeria hugged her tightly. "Go... before you make them late."

Sadi smiled and turned to Bren who tapped in the code to release the barrier arm. As it lifted he bowed his head as Sadi took a deep breath and moved past it.

"Milady..." Bren spoke causing Sadi to turn back to face him. "You are not frightened of heights are you?"

"I'm a pilot Commander." Sadi spoke.

"There is a large difference between flying a *STRIKER* and riding a dragon." Bren spoke.

"You have flown on a dragon?" Sadi asked surprised.

Bren nodded. "Many times. Be fearless Milady... and above all else... enjoy the ride. Elynth turns faster than any dragon I have ever seen, even her mother, but it is thrill to be on her back."

Sadi nodded slowly and looked down the stairs. She rested her hand on the guardrail and began her trek down those stairs into a new life. She moved slower as she saw Andro's mothers and sisters move over to greet her, and when she stepped onto the deck fully they were waiting for her.

Anja looked at her approvingly. "*Anse*... he is too much like his father. He got her size perfect. How do they do that?" She said looking at the way Sadi's body armor fit her.

Aricia grinned. "I have always wondered that myself." She said adjusting one of the side straps a little snugger. "Carina... her hair. As you do it for us, which works best?"

Carina nodded and moved behind Sadi reaching up to begin pulling her hair into an extremely tight ponytail. Lisisa removed several strips of the satin ties she wore in her hair and gave them to Carina. All of them refused to ever cut their hair short and Carina had devised a very quick and efficient way to secure their hair in ponytails so as not to come undone while they were flying.

Sadi looked over and saw Andro moving along the cavernous lower deck, Elynth just behind him. He seemed to be talking as he was motioning with his hands but Sadi could not hear anything.

For'mya smiled. "These are all young dragons." She explained.

"I can't... I can't hear him." Sadi spoke.

"None of them are more than a hundred years old." For'mya answered. "A child still in dragon terms and not bonded to any rider. They can not yet speak on an upper Tier Six level. That ability will only come with a rider or time. You are like us in that you rarely lower your shields enough to detect anything less than a Tier Six. The *Feravomir* taught you how?"

Sadi nodded. "Yes."

"Lower your shields and you will hear him." For'mya spoke.

Sadi closed her eyes and slowly brought her Mindvoice Shields down. It was not something she did very often, and it took a little effort for she hadn't done it in quite some time, but then Andro's voice burst into her mind and she smiled at the sound.

...Mass exit. Maintain your spacing when leaving the ship and form into your pairs when you are clear. All of you have been to Earth before, so you are familiar with the wind patterns. Do not trail too close to our main group as we have the hatchlings and adolescents who have only been flying a few weeks. We will exit six kilometers from Sparta. Those of you remaining with us just follow us, those of you breaking for the Mindvoice ship you may split at ten thousand feet. Elder Syrilth will greet you when she returns from Thermopylae. It has been an honor to carry you here my brothers and sisters. I will send out word for those of you returning to Apo Prime and then Elear when it is time to leave.

Sadi watched as dragon heads of all colors and sizes bobbed up and down and many snorted in a show of respect to their King's son and the Talon Guardian they all knew he was. She looked at For'mya and Anja as Aricia continued to adjust her body armor and Carina finished with her hair.

"They... I can feel their reverence for him." Sadi spoke softly.

Anja nodded. "They know of what he and his father did. That act alone causes them to look at him in a different light."

"He is also the Talon Guardian." Aricia spoke as she straightened up. "How does that feel?"

"It's a little tight." Sadi replied honestly.

Lisisa laughed and leaned close to her. "That is because your *goldur* are so big." She whispered with a smile and seeing Sadi chuckle. "Andro probably did that on purpose. Don't let him fool you... he's still a man and a pig." Sadi laughed with all of them this time.

"Wait until you have your own man who worships your body like a temple Lisisa." Anja spoke. "You might speak a different tune then."

Lisisa grinned at her. "I just might mother." She said looking at Sadi. "Don't worry... the armor will stretch to fit better the more you wear it."

Sadi met her eyes and squeezed her hand. "Lisisa I am..."

"Nothing to apologize for." Lisisa cut her off. "Knowing that you make Andro happy is all that matters."

The engines on the *Type II* whined in protest drowning out conversation for a few seconds and then red lights appeared all along the top of the ship. Aricia looked up. "It's about time..." She spoke with a smile. "We have four minutes until we drop. Ready?"

Sadi nodded her head. "I think so." She looked at her. "Are we going to Sparta?"

For'mya nodded as she pulled her helmet on. "We'll fly over Sparta... but we are going to Thermopylae. That is where we'll meet Martin Leonidas and the rest of our family. All of them." She said with a smile.

Sadi's eyes grew a little wider for she knew the size of the extended Leonidas family. "All of them?" She gasped.

Sadi heard Andro's soft laugh and she turned to face him as he came up to her. "Don't worry *KertaGai*. You won't need to meet them all if you don't want to. I'll spirit you away to..."

"You will do no such thing Androcles Leonidas. They are looking forward to meeting her." Aricia stated firmly as she too lowered her helmet onto her head. The raven colored crested plume fell to just above her firm ass. She looked quite fierce in the helmet with only her eyes and lips exposed. Andro stuck his tongue out at her and Aricia placed her hands on her hips. "You do remember what happened the last time you did that don't you?"

"Mother... I was seven." He answered.

"And don't think I won't do it again." Aricia barked with a motherly smile as she turned to go to Isheeni. Andro waited until she had turned her back and went to stick his tongue out again but she stopped. "Do not test me Androcles Leonidas." Aricia spoke without turning around.

"Andro got busted!" Eliani called out as she climbed onto Tharua's back. "Andro got busted!"

Andro couldn't help but smile as he turned back to Sadi. He lifted the matte black helmet up and Sadi's eyes grew wide. It was an exact duplicate of his helmet in every way, though smaller and with a shimmering crested plume of golden blond hair. "This is yours *KertaGai*." He said stepping up to her and lifting it above her

head. “The color might be a shade or two different, but your hair is so unique in its color it was hard to find a horse that matched.”

“You... you made this.” Sadi asked.

Andro nodded. “Eight years ago with the *Feravomir*’s help. She is amazingly skilled on top of being the First Oracle of our people. May I?”

Sadi nodded quickly and Andro lowered the helmet onto her head slowly until it was fully seated and the only thing that showed was her eyes and lips. Andro smiled and leaned close to her. “Now you look even more like a fierce Spartan Princess.” He told her softly taking her hands. Sadi let him lead her to where Elynth was fully settled on the deck.

Hello KertaGai. Elynth piped in happily as she turned her head.

Elynth? Sadi said as Andro lifted her effortlessly and placed her in the saddle. Her heart was racing faster now and she looked at him as he used Elynth’s foreleg as a step and climbed into the saddle behind her. Sadi felt him move close and she watched as he adjusted their legs until they were under the Dragon Armor. As soon as they were anchored, the armored skirt like wind brakes tightened on their thighs and calves, securely holding them in place. *Elynth...*

Elynth turned as she got back to her feet. *Do not fear the unknown KertaGai.* Elynth spoke.

Sadi heard the groaning sound and looked up as the rear section of the *Type II* began to split and open up. Her jungle green eyes went wide as she saw the ground so far below. She turned her head quickly. “Andro... how high are we?” She shouted.

Andro looked at her and smiled shaking his head. “You don’t have to shout Sadi. The helmets are equipped with powerful transmitters and receivers. We are at sixteen thousand feet.” He replied with a smile. “A little drop is all.”

“Little!” Sadi screamed forgetting what he had just told her.

Andro slid his hand under Sadi’s where she gripped the front of the saddle. He waited until she spread her hand out on top of his and her eyes watched as the light blue psychic shield activated and began to encompass her body as well as Andro’s and Elynth. His arm slid around her waist and Sadi breathed a sigh of utter relief as his lips came up to the side of her helmet. “Lean when you feel me lean no matter the direction. I will not let go of you *KertaGai*, but we can not fall out of the saddle. The Dragon Armor holds us in.”

“Andro... Andro I’m scared.” Sadi spoke.

“So was I.” He told her. “Do you trust me Sadi?”

Sadi turned her head and looked into his azure orbs. “Yes!” She exclaimed without hesitation.

“Then you will enjoy the ride my love.” He said.

The lights on the ceiling above them turned yellow and Andro nudged Elynth in her side with his knee making her turn to face the others of his family. Arrarn, Normya, Carina and Zarah were flying down on two dragons who had volunteered to carry them. All four of them were experienced riders though they were not bonded to dragons. Gorgo sat behind Aricia on Isheeni, while For’mya, Anja, Denali, Resumar and Lisisa carried their siblings. This trip only Eliani went without a passenger as she and Tharua carried a large roll on the back of her saddle.

Andro looked at them, Elynth turning to allow him to take in everyone. “We are home once more! All of us!” He shouted. “No matter what stars fill the sky! No matter what moons we see! This is the home of our blood! The home of our hearts! This is where we come to heal all wounds of flesh and mind! This is where we come to be a family!” Andro saw Eliani and Lisisa nod first, followed quickly by Denali and Resumar and then all of them as his words filtered through them. “Let us go home family!” He shouted out. “*Into the hands of our grandfather’s spirit we commend our souls!*”

“*May he guide our actions and thoughts and pick us up if we fall!*” They all responded in unison making Andro smile as he turned back around to face the wide open ramp.

Gorgo leaned close to Aricia’s ear fighting back tears. “*Anse!* I hate when he does that! He’s just like his father!” She spoke. “He could inspire rocks to fight beside him if he needed them to. Now my tears will freeze on the way down!”

Aricia nodded her own head with a smile. “I know.”

The lights lining the ceiling of the *Type II* turned green then and Andro leaned in close to Sadi’s ear.

Welcome to my life KertaGai! Elynth go!

Sadi's eyes were huge as Elynth roared and sprinted off the back of the *Type II* into oblivion.

THERMOPYLAE

He walked among the gathered people with a smile and bright dark brown eyes. Danny strode next to him, having arrived only a few hours before. They had been beside each other since they were small boys, growing, fighting and living their lives together. It was widely known that Martin considered Danny his brother in every sense of the word; however that emotion and feeling was not driven completely home until that day outside the Old Senate Acropolis. It was a day that was rarely spoken of now, but it had forever cemented the relationship these two men had.

"...Should probably send a small team to this Talbor Seven and check things out." Dan was speaking.

Martin nodded, the breeze pulling at the gold trimmed crimson cape he wore. The raven black crested plume of his helmet plunged down between his shoulder blades and shifted in the wind as well.

"You ain't going Dan... so don't ask." Martin spoke with a smile as he looked at Danny's helmeted head. "Nayeca is about to pop and if you and Anuk aren't here for that she'll cook my balls in the traditional Drow manner. And she'll have lots of help!"

Danny chuckled. "I was thinking maybe Anton and Cihera." He answered.

Martin looked at him. "Lynwe and Selene's daughter?"

Dan nodded. "She just completed a four year stint with Armetus's *Krypteria*. She's a qualified language specialist, speaks fourteen of them fluently as a matter of fact."

"Fourteen languages?" Martin gasped. "Damn I have trouble speaking three." Danny smiled knowing full well Martin was fluent in seven languages.

"She's got a Level Seven Clearance, expert with a dozen different weapons, and she's a damn fine pilot too." Dan spoke. "They go in as newlyweds so to speak. Just mated and visiting Talbor Seven for their honeymoon."

Martin looked at him. "I thought Anton and Cihera didn't care for each other."

Danny grinned at him. "No one said they had to like each other. They just have to work together."

"Ok... which one put you up to this?" Martin asked.

"What? What do you mean?"

"Was it Selene or Lynwe?" Martin asked with a grin.

"Shit!" Danny hissed. "Lynwe. She knew you were busy and she didn't..."

Martin pounded Danny on his back. "Don't worry... I was considering them anyway. Armetus already recommended Anton and we were looking for a female elf to send with him. Cihera's got Selene's ears and she hides her vampire skills better than anyone I've ever seen. Cihera just might be the right one as long as they can work together. Tell Lynwe to bring her to the villa in two days when we get together for the High Coven briefing and we'll talk about it."

They stepped up to where Isra stood with Tarifa and Aihola. Aelnala and Roluth rested on the ground behind them and Danny shook hands with Isra as Martin leaned over and squeezed Tarifa and Aihola. Martin had half sisters; three of them in fact from Riall and his mother, but Tarifa, Aihola and in some ways Selene were more like complete sisters to him. They had been through a lot over the years, and while he and Tarifa had shared a smoldering relationship for several weeks soon after they met, it had blossomed into what it was now.

"Your mother has the little ones I take it?" Martin asked as he looked at them holding their hands.

Tarifa nodded. "Are you kidding? She loves it when she has them all to herself."

Aihola smiled. "She spoils them terribly."

Tarifa and Aihola had six children between them, all of them from their beloved mate Isra. The three oldest were split up within the Union fleet, two as *Durcunusaan* troops, the third was a beautiful half Lycavorian, half Drow elf female who was now the senior aide to Deia. The youngest three, all less than ten years of age remained with Palina when both Tarifa and Aihola were gone. Their home was here in Sparta, one of the closest houses to the villa and even though she was Vice President of Earth and worked mainly in Eden City, Aihola returned every evening on a *STRIKER AT* to Sparta. Tareif and Palina had also moved their home

lock, stock and barrel to Sparta for Tareif was a senior officer within the Lycavorian military and also an instructor for the fourth phase of the Agoges.

Tarifa squeezed Martin's hand. "Martin... what is this Panos has told me about the High Coven? They have returned?"

Martin shook his head quickly. "We don't know for sure what is going on." He spoke as Danny and Isra moved closer to them.

"They were on Ceku Tertius? Conducting weapons deals with the Evolli scum?" Aihola asked.

Martin nodded. "Armetus is reaching out to our people in The Wilds. We'll know more in a few days and then we will all sit down and figure out what to do. He and Deia will be here in two days." Martin leaned over and kissed them both on the cheek. "In the mean time... we have a State Dinner to attend, a graduation to watch, and a dinner at Gallais's place tonight. Let's not worry about something we know very little about ok?"

"I have been trying to tell them that for years Martin." Isra spoke with a smile as he moved up between them both and nuzzled their elven ears lovingly.

"I'm guessing it doesn't work huh?" Martin said.

Isra shook his head. "Not even close."

Tarifa and Aihola both poked Isra in his ribs gently, but smiles dotted their beautiful features.

They all turned when they heard the ancient fog horn like sounds begin to fill the air in the distance and Martin smiled. "Finally." He spoke. "I hate standing around for these displays."

Dysea squeezed Isabella's hand where they stood with Nyla when the sounds of the horns going off reached them. The nearest town was only three kilometers away, and from Sparta to here, every town set off their horns when the noise erupted from Sparta. All of them were dressed in the new armor and wearing their helmets and capes. Nyla had refused to wear such things at first, saying she had no right to wear the symbol of royalty because she was not of royal blood. She and Eliani had been together only a year, and even though both of them knew they would never part, Nyla was not yet fully aware of how close the Leonidas family was. It had taken a week long trip with Isabella and Martin to convince her that she held their daughter's heart in her hands, just as Eliani held hers, and she had tasted Eliani's blood on more occasions than she could remember. The King had told her that made her part of his family. Nyla knew to argue with him about something like that was silly; for everyone knew how the King viewed those he called family. They had decided for official functions and gatherings she would wear her crested and plumed helmet and the gold trimmed crimson cape, and for when she was on duty, she would wear her normal uniform and cape. Most everyone within the Union knew of her and her relationship with Eliani so it didn't really matter. If anything, more was expected of her, something which Nyla accepted willingly and without question.

"Have you seen his speech for the graduation?" Dysea asked Isabella.

"No... he won't show it to anyone."

Dysea chuckled. "He hasn't finished it yet." She spoke. "I offered to help him but he refused."

Isabella smiled. "Ten Riyal says he doesn't finish it." She spoke. "He speaks better when it comes from inside him. You watch *ussta* she-elf; he will do something completely off the wall and throw the politicians who have been planning this for weeks into a fit."

Dysea nodded. "Of that I have no doubts."

Nyla looked at them. "He has always hated these types of things hasn't he?" She asked.

Dysea nodded. "I don't believe I've ever seen him look forward to this type of event. I speak of the ceremony... not this greeting of our family. He relishes this."

Nyla turned her head even more and saw her parents standing with Deia and her mate and several other senior politicians making small talk.

"Nyla... you still don't question your position do you child?" Isabella asked.

Nyla looked at her. "No." She replied without hesitation. "My love for Eliani goes far deeper than normal. I compare it to what you and Dysea share."

Dysea smiled. "Well... at least you call us by our names now."

Nyla chuckled softly. "My mother and father are still trying to get used to it." She spoke looking back at them. "I don't think they ever realized that I would fall in love with a woman."

"So you and Eliani have decided to stop seeking a mate?" Bella asked.

“Oh no.” Nyla replied with a grin. “But do you know how hard it is to find a man who isn’t threatened by the love we have for each other? A man like the King? We have discarded so many up until now.”

“Well... *Nauta Melme* is not the only one. Daniel and Isra share the same thing with their mates. There are a few others that I am aware of that have more than one mate. Admiral Joarl for instance. He has been mated to Lynwe, Selene and Layna now for nearly twenty years. Lynwe has a gift that most men would kill for, but to Joarl she is still a woman and her relationship with Layna and Selene is not something that frightens him. It’s all about being confident enough in your own self.” Dysea spoke.

“What do you mean up until now?” Isabella asked.

Nyla smiled. “Eliani has always been better at picking or discovering potential mates for us. That they turn out to be *nubous riad aulveds* is not her fault.”

Dysea and Isabella laughed together and Dysea reached out and pulled Nyla closer with her hand. “Oh Nyla... you are picking up more and more of Eliani’s traits as well as her sharp tongue. It’s hysterical to watch.”

They all turned as Martin and Danny came up to them. Martin looked down at Nyla and smiled as Anuk and Nayeca broke away from where they were speaking with Vengal and Anuk’s mother to stand beside their beloved mate.

“What’s so funny?” Martin asked.

“Dysea and Isabella seem to think I am taking on more of Eliani’s traits.” Nyla spoke looking at him.

It had taken her a long time to feel comfortable around Martin Leonidas. His physical presence alone was intimidating, and when combined with the aura of confidence and power that radiated off of him, it had been down right frightening at first. At least until the first time she had remained with Eliani at her apartment on the Sparta Estate and gone with her to breakfast the following morning. Then Nyla had seen a part of her King that few rarely did, as he carried two of his younger children screaming through the villa while playing tag with the others. He was yelling almost as loud as the smaller children and she couldn’t help but laugh. Now Nyla felt more than comfortable being around him.

“You mean the sharp tongue and quick come back one liners?” Martin asked seeing Nyla’s light green eyes go wide. He laughed at her expression. “Comes with the territory I guess. Share a bed with a Leonidas and eventually you’ll become just as nutty as the rest of us.”

“You don’t have to sleep with one to do that.” Dan spoke from his place next to Martin. “Hell... just hang around the nuttiest of them for enough years and it will rub off on you.”

“You should know husband.” Nayeca spoke as her hand caressed her swollen abdomen. She looked just as radiant and beautiful as she did the first day she had come into the lives of Danny and Anuk. Dan leaned over and nuzzled her elven ear firmly, causing shivers to ripple through her.

Martin chuckled as his eyes began searching the sky to the south. “Man... I hate it when the boy is late. I’m starving.”

SPARTA
LEONIDAS AVENUE
Café Gallais’s Retreat

Isra’s mother moved around the massive table setting for forty insuring all of her finest plates and silver were in just the right order. This place, this café was all hers, one of five that she owned entirely. She now spent most of her time living on Earth shutting between Eden City and Sparta to manage the café in Eden City as well as spend as much time as possible with her three youngest grandchildren. This is where all of *Mjolnir’s Hand* and the *Durcunusaan* came to eat and relax. Her café was open twenty four hours a day, as most of the others across the city were, but it was hers that the Royal Guard and Bonded Pairs came to the most. It was also here that King Leonidas came when the gathering they wanted was too large for the Sparta Estate to handle.

She turned as the older Spartan Demetrius walked in from the rear kitchen. Gallais thanked the gods for many things in the last quarter century of her life. Her rescue from the hell that was Enurrua; the demand for the delicious ancient Lycavorian foods only she could make; the joyful lives her only remaining son and daughter had found; but she thanked the gods far more frequently for this chiseled old Spartan who had swept her off her

feet. Ten years they had been together now, and the moment Demetrius had claimed her as his mate, all she had endured in her three nearly four thousand years of life was washed away. It had started with them purchasing the vacant building next to his rebuilt café and then expanding and combining the two and working together nearly every day for six years to build it into what it now was. She watched him with loving eyes as he came up to her reading from the data pad.

“Andro and the others left the *Type II* just moments ago.” He spoke looking up at her. “They should be over the city in a few minutes.”

Gallais nodded. “Everything is ready for them.” She spoke with a smile.

Demetrius looked at her smile and the natural beauty of this woman took his old breath away as it always did. “What?” He asked as he stopped in of her.

Gallais shook her head and reached up with her hand to stroke his weathered face. “It is nothing... I just... I never thought I would have the happiness I have now Demetrius. You have given that to me.”

Being the typical Spartan that he was, Gallais laughed as he waved his hand dismissively, but she saw the glint of love in his eye that was always there when he looked at her. “I would have been a fool to let another Alpha claim your beauty for his own.” He spoke. “I have been called many things in my three thousand two hundred years... stupid has never been one of them.” He stepped up to her and kissed her deeply. “It was the smartest thing I have ever done.”

Gallais gripped his shoulders. “Yes it was.” She said confidently. “However you forgot to lower the Circle of Horns!”

Demetrius’s eyes flew open and he released her, nearly running over to stand by the long bar and slamming his hand down on the control panel. He and Gallais both moved to the large window and centered their eyes on the clearing only a hundred meters away. The massive flower like object was beginning to lower the huge arms that wrapped around it in a circle. The arms extended to join the three that were already down, each of them with a *Nehtes* buried into the hub of the cork like center.

The millions of citizens within Sparta knew the significance of this object for they were the ones who had requested it be built by overwhelming consensus. They knew their King had a Union to rule, a Union of thousands of planets and trillions of lives, therefore he could not be within the confines of Sparta all the time. Apo Prime was the capital of the Lycavorian Union, and no one wanted that changed. However, once Martin had decided his family would spend six months of every year within Sparta, the idea for this object had sprung up. There were five inner rings, and fourteen outer rings signifying the five Queens of the Union and Sparta and the fourteen children they had bore their king. The center ring belonged to the King. His Royal *Nehtes* was standing up from that center ring, while the *Nehtes* of Isabella and Dysea also were protruding from the cork like center of two of the five inner rings. This told all who saw it that the King and two of his Queens were in Sparta for their six month stay. This day would bring the rest of the Royal *Nehtes* home and then the entire Royal family would be home.

“How soon do you think?” Gallais asked softly as Demetrius took her hand in his.

“Not long. Elynth is leading them and they will be hard pressed to keep up with her.” Demetrius spoke. “Andro loves Sparta and he is bringing his new mate with him as well. He will want time to pass quickly so that he can claim her and feel her warmth next to him as I feel yours.”

Gallais laughed and squeezed her mate’s arm. “You men are so bad.” She spoke.

Demetrius smiled. “Perhaps we are. But we know a good thing when it walks into our lives. And this young Sadi walked into his when he was still an infant. He has waited a long time for this.”

“Yes he has.” Gallais spoke.

Both of them jumped when they heard the powerful whistle from above and then the *Nehtes* slammed into the cork center of the ring next to Dysea’s.

“It is Aricia’s! It’s begun! Come!” Demetrius gripped her hand as the horn sounded throughout the entire city and they moved for the door as hundreds of others began to pile into the streets.

Sadi’s eyes were open wide in the thrill of what she was experiencing. It had been the most exciting ride of her lifetime from the moment they had plunged out of the *Type II*. Her eyes were tightly shut as they plummeted what had to be four thousand feet before leveling out, her hands nearly digging furrows from

Androcles arms, even through his armor. When she opened her eyes, what she saw took her breath away. Bright sunshine, sparse clouds and the green of the ground beneath them.

She felt Andro's hands grip hers.

"You can let go *KertaGai*." He said next to her ear. The rush of the wind was almost muted because of their psychic shield she knew and she could only hear soft whispers as they sped across the landscape beneath them.

Sadi shook her head. "Andro... I..."

"Trust in me Sadi." He spoke.

Sadi had taken a deep breath then and done as he asked. Now she was so very happy she had. The feeling was unlike anything she could have imagined, and she rapidly grew more and more comfortable, knowing that she would not fall with her legs so securely held to the saddle. She felt a moment of fear when Andro's hands dropped from around her waist and rested on his thighs, but that passed almost instantly as the sheer enormity of what she was doing hit her. Sadi was not known as a reserved pilot, many instructors commenting how she could take a ship right to the very edge of her abilities. She was a natural pilot they all said, and now riding on Elynth, Sadi felt freer than ever before. Within moments she was sitting tall in the saddle and like Andro, her hands rested on her thighs. Even when Elynth rolled over several times so that Andro could check the progress of the hatchlings and adolescents, she felt no fear and now she understood what Bren meant by Andro never taking interplanetary transportation. Who would want to when you had Elynth?

Sadi's eyes grew wide when she saw Sparta approach quickly in the distance. Even from their height of ten thousand feet the city was enormous. The helmet implant crackled and she heard Andro's voice in her ear.

"Mothers... would you do the honors first?" He spoke turning to look at where Aricia, Anja and For'mya were flying side by side.

Aricia laughed. "Then let's drop to a three hundred feet and do it my son. Your mothers and I grow impatient to see your father."

"Ain't that the truth?" Anja barked out.

Andro laughed as well. "As you command mother!" He spoke. *Elynth my sister... if you would?*

Elynth roared into bright sky. *Here we go!*

Sadi felt euphoria as they once more plunged down, Andro turning in the saddle to maintain contact with his sibling's smaller adolescent dragons. It took only seconds and then they were at three hundred feet above the ground and rocketing over the tree tops at nearly two hundred kilometers an hour, which was as fast as Andro wanted to go with the smaller dragons following. They were able to keep up mainly by remaining in the wake of their larger siblings and almost being pulled along as they had been trained by their parents.

Sadi watched Andro reach down and pull one of the *Nehtes* from the side of his saddle and fully extend it as they sped over the tops of the edge of Sparta. He looked at her. "It is a ritual of sorts for us." He spoke his voice carrying easily through the comlink. "The people of Sparta came up with the idea. Whenever we return for our six months we all plunge our *Nehtes* into this contraption that was built to signify we are within the city limits or Gytheio." He turned. "Mother would you take the lead! We're coming up on Gallais's Retreat!"

Aricia smiled under her helmet, her *Nehtes* fully extended, and Isheeni pulled ahead of Elynth with Aurith and Miath not far behind. They formed into a single line and Sadi then saw Aricia throw her *Nehtes* downward powerfully until it disappeared from sight. Anja and then For'mya quickly followed suit. She could just barely hear the noise of a horn going off below them as she watched Andro lift his arm and thrust his *Nehtes* downward. Sadi turned her head to see his remaining older siblings doing the same thing, and last was Eliani who immediately after throwing hers towards the ground reached behind her and unraveled the roll behind her. Five much smaller *Nehtes* rolled off the saddle and Sadi watched as Andro, his mothers and Lisisa caught them within their TK grip, pointed them straight down and use their TK power to thrust them downward in rapid succession. Sadi could hear the horns sounding easily now, as well as the roar and clapping of what appeared to be hundreds of people lining the streets below from what she could see. She felt the swell of pride race through her, as well as the one that coursed through Andro's body as well.

Last one to Thermopylae collects the Nehtes! Aricia's voice boomed out within Mindvoice.

Sadi's head turned quickly and she saw the three Queens crouch lower in the saddle and their dragons rocketed away heading north.

Ah let them go! Lisisa called out. *We'll never catch Isheeni!*

Andro laughed and nodded his head. *All of you go! I'll be last. I want to show KertaGai the path grandfather took to Thermopylae from the air before we land.*

Sadi watched as his siblings nodded and changed course quickly moving away with the smaller dragons in tow headed north. She turned her head and looked at him as his arms snaked around her waist and pulled her close against his body.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[Andro?]*

Androcles smiled at her. *[I just wanted to have a few minutes alone before we arrive.]* He spoke.

[You must wait until the Senate gathers before you see each other again KertaGai. It won't be long.]

Elynth said as she lazily turned them northeast and climbed a little higher.

[How long?] Sadi asked relishing in his aura as it swept over her and placing her arms over the top of his.

[Two days.] Andro answered.

[Two days Andro?] She gasped.

[Don't worry... it will pass quickly.] He told her. *[Besides... you have classes you still need to attend. You graduate in six months remember?]*

Sadi took a deep breath and nodded. *[What then Andro? I will be assigned to the fleet.]* She said.

[Then it would depend on you my love.] He said softly. *[Captain Sa'sur has expressed an interest for you to remain with us on the SCIMITAR. I had nothing to do with it, but she contacted Admiral O'Connor herself and asked about you. Apparently what she heard was enough to have her make room for you on our ship in the rotation. It would not disrupt any preset schedules of other ships and fleets. The other option, since my command is based on Earth, you can fill a position either as Arrarn's co-pilot or within the Union Fleet based here.]*

[And what would you want me to do?] She asked.

[I will not lie to you KertaGai. I never want to be apart from you.] He answered. *[This is a decision you need to make. Whatever you feel is best for your career.]*

[You will accept anything I decide?] She asked him, his words filling her with love.

Andro nodded. *[I do not want a puppet Crown Princess Sadi. You know that. My father and mothers are apart frequently, and their love has only grown through the years. Once I claim you as my mate... once you are in my blood... it will not matter. You will be mine then and I will not need to worry about another Alpha making a claim for you.]*

[As if I would let that happen!] Sadi exclaimed.

Andro laughed. *[Hey... you never know.]*

[Andro stop being so male!] Elynth chided him with a chuckle.

[Do I have to decide now?] Sadi asked.

[No. We will be here for six months now. You could finish your requirements here and we could spend as much time together as we like and it will give you time to discover what you want.] He replied.

[I want you Andro.] She said quickly.

[That will happen soon enough.] He said with a grin. *[Let's get through the next few days and the torture of meeting my entire family. After I claim you... they will not see us for three days.]*

Sadi grinned. *[Still holding to that three day thing huh?]*

[I never break a promise KertaGai.] He answered.

[Well... I look forward to seeing and feeling that.] Sadi announced. *[I don't suppose I could sneak away huh? Just to stay with you at night?]*

[That is entirely up to you.] Andro spoke. *[If you are looking for me to say no... it won't happen.]*

[Now that I have found you Andro... I want to spend as much time together as we can.] Sadi said.

[As do I.] Andro replied. *[As do I. Elynth go!]*

Sadi let out a small yelp of surprise as Elynth cranked them into a tight turn and they headed north.

Sadi stared into his face remembering the last time she had seen him. The flames from the burning Island Palace had lit his face and eyes making them appear to glow. He was so overpowering, and Sadi knew without a doubt where Andro got it from. They had landed on Elynth to see Andro's smaller siblings burying their father in a mass of arms and legs as they rolled along the ground. Men and women were in small groups embracing and kissing in greeting. There must have been a hundred men and women and as Andro helped her down from the saddle, Sadi felt her heart slamming into her chest. When his eyes settled on her, he set the little girl she knew as Retta down and watched her scamper towards someone else before moving to stand in front of her.

Martin smiled from under his helmet as he looked at her, and Sadi was amazed at the sense of peace that flowed from him.

"I believe I told you we would see you again." Martin spoke as he took her hands in his.

Sadi's eyes went a little wider as his words to her that night came rushing back. *We will see you in the future Sadi, daughter of Vorilas.* "You... you knew then as well?" She asked.

Martin nodded as he leaned over and placed his cheek next to hers even though they both wore helmets. "Welcome Sadi." He whispered before pulling back and looking at her again. "I understand you have never been to Earth or Sparta before."

Sadi shook her head as Andro's hand slipped into hers and he stepped close to her. "No sire... no I haven't."

"Ok... first thing is first." He spoke holding up his finger. "None of this Milord crap! I get enough of that with everyone else, and my family is not going to call me that."

Andro chuckled. "He's very sensitive." He spoke.

Sadi smiled as she looked at him. "That will take... that will take some getting used to." Sadi told him.

Martin nodded. "Probably... but you'll have a long time to get used to it once you let Andro claim you." He stepped closer. "That is what you want as well isn't it?" He asked. "Please tell me yes so I don't have to listen to him moan about it anymore."

Sadi chuckled and pulled Andro's hand close to her chest. "Yes Milor... yes Martin Leonidas... that is what I want. So very much."

Martin grinned. "Outstanding!" He exclaimed. He looked at Andro with a smile and Sadi stood beside them as father and son embraced. "Damn glad you are home boy." Martin said.

Andro smiled as he squeezed his father. "I am as well." He spoke.

Martin took his arm and Sadi's gently. "Ok... let's get you introduced to everyone and get that painful process over with so we can go eat. You know how cranky I get when you make me late for dinner."

Sadi couldn't help but laugh at the expression on Andro's face at his father's words and as he took her arm and started drawing her towards the multitude of people in front of her, Sadi realized that her life was about to change considerably.

And that did not frighten her in the least.

CHAPTER FOUR

NEOR

KAVALIAN FEDERATION IMPERIUM HEADQUARTERS

They had accomplished so much and he knew more was coming.

Keleru'Puat looked around the large table at the gathered Pride Leaders and could not help but smile to himself. Two hundred and fifty-six High Coven worlds they had conquered in twenty-five years. The Kavalian Empire was once more reborn and it would continue to grow. Combined with the six hundred and fourteen planets of their original empire that they had reestablished control over, and the hundred and thirteen Zaleisian planets they now controlled, the Kavalian Empire was even more powerful than it ever was in the past. They had fleets of powerful warships and millions of ground troops, not to mention that they were in the process of completing major trade agreements with other empires that would make them extremely wealthy. The Prides were growing in population, the Kavalian females becoming fertile and ready to have children without the

threat of starvation or death which had limited their growth over the last centuries. In just the last twenty years alone, nearly four million new children had been birthed, and since it took only three years for those children to obtain adulthood in the eyes of their people, four million more soldiers and leaders to command their biogenic army.

They had swept aside the High Coven defenses in the first five years, capturing more planets than they had ever imagined. They fortified their gains in the five year lull that followed as they produced more of their biogenic clones to replace those lost in battle and those that were being destroyed before they became unstable. Then once more they attacked in force, capturing dozens more planets before they were forced by High Coven tactics to stay their invasion. Now... for the last ten years they had built and prepared. Their Biogenic cloning process had been refined, and now each clone could last for ten years before its mind began to break down and it needed to be put down. During that time, the Prides would continue to grow and finally, they would no longer need the clones to fight their wars for them. The Kavalian people would once more be feared among the stars.

Keleru let his eyes fall upon Pusintin who was engaged in an animated conversation with two of the older Pride Leaders as well as Cukoum, the Pride Leader who had adopted the huge Lycavorian as his son over three thousand years ago. Pusintin still bore the hideous scars of the battle with his younger brother that day twenty-five years ago on Earth. In the city where he had been born. Hundreds if not thousands had watched that savage fight, even Keleru as he stood trapped between two burly Lycavorian Spartans, their weapons jammed into his sides. He had been utterly amazed at the size of the two wolves for while he had seen Pusintin in wolf form before he never imagined there could be another equal in size and strength. As they fought, Keleru came to understand what the others who witnessed the barbaric nature of that battle understood. Their battle had not been over property or wealth or even females.

Their titanic battle that day had been two brothers fighting over blood, honor and above all else betrayal.

Pusintin had once been King of the Union city of Sparta until an attack by High Coven forces against him and his royal guard brought the Kavalian detachment on Earth to the rescue. They had saved the huge man's life that day, the year 458 B.C. as the humans and others referred to it, Cukoum adopting the not yet fifty year old Lycavorian into his family to replace the six sons he had lost in battle with the High Coven. That day had ended one life for the Lycavorian known as Pleistarchus, and began the new life he now had as Pusintin of the Kavalian people. He was a large man, six feet three inches tall and two hundred and forty-five pounds of muscle and dominating power. His muscular definition and strength rivaled and even surpassed that of even the finest Kavalian warriors, and over the years this had earned Pusintin the respect of many of the Pride Leaders and younger warriors. He was fearless, and was not afraid to shift into his wolf form, or battle in his human form to fight any Kavalian warrior who challenged him in the first ten years after he had arrived. This earned him the respect and honor that he had only embraced and made powerful. He had fought beside his new people in their war against the Lycavorian Union, earning many accolades at his actions. He fought like a man possessed and had killed many of his own species. It was a losing war however, the Union far too powerful and large. He had acquitted himself even more in the war against the High Coven, fighting without fear even the Immortal warriors the Coven commanded. Again it had been in a losing cause as the Coven had resorted to weapons of mass destruction targeted against their civilian population to finally turn the tide of the war.

Pusintin's hate for both the Union and the Coven ran deep, but it did not deter the man from fighting with his brains first. He was a masterful leader of men, and a superior tactician, and it was primarily his tactics that had brought them to this point against the High Coven. Keleru knew however he held a festering hate for his brother, the Union King, and for his very own mother who he regarded as having abandoned him. His brother held the position that Pusintin felt he should have had... not to mention nearly killing him in their battle. His brother also had something that belonged to Pusintin, and though Keleru did not know what that was, he knew that fact would always be a thorn in his side and it was something Pusintin had sworn to get back one day, no matter the cost.

Pusintin and Keleru's daughter Jalersi now had four children of their own to raise and to one day command among their people. Keleru had thought Pusintin would return from Sparta with far too much hatred to be useful, and as he had done so many times in the past, Pusintin surprised him with the laconic dismissal of what had happened. Perhaps he had truly put it behind him, for his actions over the last years had not been of a man with hatred in his heart. He was methodic and ruthless with the High Coven, but with others he was calm and controlled and with Keleru's daughter Jalersi; she he treated as if she was a goddess. Their children were

healthy and strong, and while they were stern and often times harsh parents in the Kavalian manner, his three sons and one daughter were proud and so far had acquitted themselves with honor in battle. It had taken them seven years as opposed to the normal three to reach adulthood because of their Lycavorian blood, but that was only an additional four years of education that they had to apply to their lives it seemed. Jalersi insisted they be well schooled, and had spent seven years seeing to that herself.

Keleru trusted Pusintin to such an extent that he had allowed him to break in his youngest daughter, and even now after twenty-five years, Jalersi and Keleru's own mate Gessia had yet to choose a male for Athani to be mated too. They were both leaning towards the lesser of so many evils as they called it... and they knew they could not prolong the mating forever. Life for females in the Kavalian Empire was very harsh, often times extremely brutal. Kavalian males were not known for their gentle practices when mating, and it was the reason the hundreds of Lycavorian females captured during their war had been kept alive. They were the only race outside of the High Coven vampires that could heal the wounds inflicted by a Kavalian male in 'rut'. Athani was still part of their lives, and he knew Pusintin took her often, using only her ass and mouth as Jalersi had told him. His youngest daughter did not like the arrangement and often voiced her discontent to him, but it was the only way to keep her beautiful features unaltered until Gessia and Jalersi found a mate who would not scar her beauty. His two daughters had been altered using biogenics when they were very young. The process removed the fine coat of hair from their bodies that all Kavalians had, and it caused their tails to shrink and fade away. His two daughters looked no different than a Lycavorian female until someone got close enough to them to smell them. That and the fact that Athani had allowed her tail to grow back to its full two meter length, which she could use now as a third arm of sorts. This had been a large point of contention with Keleru and his mate, but Jalersi settled it when she said the continued treatments needed to keep their tails from re-growing made Athani sick as they did with dozens of the thousands that had taken the treatments. As with her... in those cases the females were allowed to re-grow their tails. Most of the Kavalian females chosen for the treatments were like Jalersi and Athani, daughters of high ranking Pride Leaders who were very careful who was chosen for their daughters. While it was true the senior female in the Pride was the one who chose the prospective mates for their daughters or sisters, Keleru and many other Pride Leaders had begun making their voices heard even only a little. He was trying to change the violent ways of his people concerning their females, and while he was having some luck, Kavalian females were still very much inferior in their society.

Pusintin however treated Jalersi almost as an equal in all that they did, and Keleru knew Pusintin was devoted to Jalersi. Mated Kavalian males, especially strong and respected males, could be encouraged by other females to take them as their mates as well, and while several Kavalian females had approached Pusintin about this, he had rebuffed all of them without question. Something that only made Jalersi love him even more.

"Prefect...?" The voice broke into Keleru's thoughts and he looked up.

"What?"

"Pian and Qurot have arrived." Keleru's senior aide Cuatan spoke in a soft whisper as he motioned down the large table and he saw the two most junior Pride Leaders greeting others as they took their places at the table.

The dark gold colored fur of Pian and the darker brown of Qurot were unmistakable. They were the youngest Pride Leaders, the most head strong and the most outspoken. While Keleru knew that many of the older Pride Leaders saw themselves in these two men and their adherence to the old ways, more still saw the need to bring their people forward from a past culture that almost was their undoing. Neither of them cared for Pusintin or the respect he garnered from almost all the older Pride Leaders, mainly because Pian had wanted Jalersi for himself, while Qurot was pestering his mate for Athani's hand.

Keleru sat up straighter in his chair. "I'm happy to see our two youngest Pride Leaders decided to grace this War Council in a timely fashion." He spoke in a stern voice.

Pian looked at Keleru as he sat in his chair. "Apologies Prefect." He spoke with a gruff but respectful voice.

"I was insuring my ships were ready for battle Prefect." Qurot spoke almost offhandedly. He was the more disrespectful of the two, thinking his many victories over the High Coven gave him some sort of status others did not have. He and Pian had led their forces brilliantly so far during the war, never once having lost a battle, but they took risks not needed and they cared not for the lives they expended if it gained them recognition. Qurot was a hardliner Keleru knew, and there would not be much more he or his mate and Jalersi

would be able to do if he kept voicing his desire for Athani's hand as his mate. Qurot commanded quite a bit of loyalty and soon the calls would start coming from the older Pride Leaders for Keleru to allow this and seal Qurot's rise in power and influence. Keleru did not want to see that happen, for he knew without a doubt that Athani would end up scarred for life, and while his youngest daughter was not weak, she did not have Jalersi's inner strength.

"This is a War Council Qurot!" Keleru spoke sternly. "Not a battle preparation meeting. Insure you are not late again Qurot! You as well Pian. I grow tired of having to wait for the two of you to show the proper respect to this council." Pian opened his mouth to speak but Keleru waved him silent. "Heed my words! That is all I will say on it for now!"

One of the senior Pride Leaders, a man with dark brown fur and gray hair just filtering throughout leaned forward at the table. "This is unusual isn't it Prefect?" He asked. "We were not scheduled to meet for another six months."

Keleru nodded to the man. "You are right Liatthi. However... information we have obtained recently dictated a need for this War Council to at least meet and discuss what to do." Keleru looked at Pusintin. "You may begin Pusintin."

Pusintin let his eyes linger on Pian for a moment Keleru saw, perhaps in a show of male dominance and the fact that he was Jalersi's mate, the position Pian had so coveted. It caused Keleru to smile ever so slightly as Pusintin hauled his large frame out of the chair and moved to the star chart. Though not visible from under his uniform, Keleru had seen the wounds when Pusintin went shirtless. The deep puncture marks where his brother's viciously sharp dual fangs had sunk into his flesh at the back of his neck and almost crushed his spinal cord, and the jagged tears on his legs from Leonidas's claws. Jalersi had been beside herself for days when they had returned, hovering over his bed every waking moment while he regained enough strength to shift back to his wolf form and heal the more severe wounds. They did not have the benefit of Hadarian Healers within their ranks, and their medical treatments suffered in some ways in terms of technology and what they were able to do.

Pusintin picked up the data pad and looked at the men gathered. He belonged here he knew. He would never forget the injuries his younger brother gave to him, nor the words spoken to him by Martin and his mother. That hate would always simmer beneath his skin, but he had gotten past that quickly for he had now what he had never had before. Acceptance. He hated his brother and mother with every fiber of his existence and given an opportunity he would easily disembowel both of them without question. Her betrayal by leaving him on Earth to escape with Martin had hurt him deeply and it was a wound he would never forgive. Pusintin was also no fool, and aside from the one incident when one of Qurot's senior Pride officers went rogue and attacked the Lycavorian Union planet, he had not even gone close to that border. He would bide his time patiently.

That folly had cost them twenty-five thousand of the best trained troops they had and two hundred and sixteen ships. Though it was never proven and could not be blamed on him, many of the older Pride Leaders believed Qurot had issued the orders to attack the planet himself in the hopes of taking some Lycavorian females as hostages and slaves. Within two days of taking the planet the Union descended upon the Kavalian forces with brutal and savage efficiency. Qurot's officer had not expected the Union to respond so quickly. Only five thousand of their Lycavorian Spartans had landed, led by the black Spartan Daniel Simpson and the elf General Vengal. His brother had landed with a hundred of their Mjolnir's Hand, the dragon riding Spartans as they were called, while Admiral Riall had jumped directly into the planetary system with an entire fleet group. The surprise had been complete and within a week his brother had annihilated the Kavalian forces to the last man. If not for some very fast back channel talks by Keleru and others, speaking through their Zaleisian counterparts, the Union would have entered the war. Perhaps not on the side of the High Coven, but most certainly against the Kavalian forces. That would have been a battle they could not have won. No military in history, any history, had ever won victory fighting a war on two different fronts.

Pusintin let his eyes linger on Qurot for a long moment before he began speaking. "We have received some disturbing reports from our agents within the High Coven military." He spoke adjusting the controls on the star chart to bring up several images of what appeared to be a deserted installation. "This is the facility outside their capital on Usu Ozeib 7 where they have been training with the beasts they discovered in The Wilds." Pusintin watched as many of the Pride Leaders came forward in their chairs.

“It... it is abandoned.” One Pride Leader spoke.

Pusintin nodded. “Not completely, there are still High Coven personnel working here, but the dragons are gone.”

“Gone where?” Another barked.

Pusintin adjusted the controls again and the image changed to that of three High Coven *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts and a host of smaller warships. “This image was captured from one of our remote spy drones in The Wilds. We’ve identified one of the ships as the *INQUISTOR*, the blood sucker Moran’s personal command ship.”

“Are they massing for an attack somewhere?” Another asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “They only have forty of the beasts, but as we all know, even one of these creatures can turn the tide of the battle. Any battle. We have not been able to reverse engineer the inbred fear our people have of this creature out of our clones. And numbers do not matter as the events on Norala Nine proved.” Pusintin spoke looking directly at Qurot. “Five thousand Spartans and one hundred of these beasts wiped out twenty-five thousand of our finest warriors in only ten days time.”

Qurot’s muzzle twitched and he growled out in a low voice. “You are the overall Military Commander of our forces.” He spat. “Have you lost three dozen of our enemy’s warships now? To include their Supreme Commander and the beasts that we so fear?”

“QUROT!” Keleru bellowed from his chair. “You will show Pusintin the respect he has *earned* or I will whip you into submission myself! It is by his tactics and leadership that we have come this far! That our commanders, yourself included, have been so successful! Do not tempt fate pup, for you are still two thousand years shy of Pusintin’s age and experience! Is that clear?”

Qurot turned to look at Keleru and quickly let his angry eyes drop as he saw and felt the majority of Pride Leaders nodding in agreement with Keleru’s words. He had no desire to anger Keleru’s Puat for not only was he the Kavalian Prefect, he had many of the oldest Pride Leaders firmly behind him. And he still wanted his daughter for a mate. “I beg forgiveness Prefect!” He spoke quickly.

Pusintin smiled at this action. “No... I have not *lost* these ships.” He continued turning back to the star chart. “I know exactly where they are.” He adjusted the screen and an enormous picture of known space came into being. All of them could see the many different sections that represented not only the High Coven and Lycavorian Union, but now the Kavalian Empire and the nearly two dozen other alliances and federations of different planets. He adjusted the screen once more to focus on a sector of space within The Wilds and he brought his finger up to point at one. “They are right here.” He spoke calmly. “Sector twenty-nine of The Wilds, and just over two days from the Lycavorian Union border.”

“The Union border?” Cukoum hissed out. “Have they gone mad? Your brother hates them more than he does our people! Why would they risk entering Union space?”

Pusintin shook his head. “He hates me father.” He corrected his adopted father meeting his eyes evenly. Cukoum’s light blond fur was thick and very well groomed. He was a respected warrior among their people and that was partly the reason he was allowed to take Pusintin as his son and rear him as he had done. “He does not hate species on a whole as the nearly ten million bloodsuckers that call the Union home can attest too. Not to mention the pureblood bloodsucker he calls Queen.” Pusintin looked at Keleru. “Prefect?”

Keleru nodded. “You may tell them now.” He spoke. “And what is about to be spoken does not leave this room for any reason.”

Pusintin tapped on the data pad in his hand and in front of every Pride Leader a small screen rose from within the table. “It appears that we had a double agent within the ranks of the bloodsuckers that fight with us.” Pusintin spoke. “Their greed knows no bounds as we all know. We discovered this agent three weeks ago and slit his throat. However not before he was able to send a coded transmission to his contacts within High Coven space regarding the status of our biogenic cloning procedures and timetables. The High Coven is now aware we are fifteen months away from having sufficient cloned troops to begin our conquest once more. After consulting with Prefect Keleru and others within our intelligence section, we have determined that the High Coven is going to ask the Lycavorian Union for their assistance in some way in fighting us.”

“Impossible!” A Pride Leader spat. “The Union King would never agree to such a partnership!”

“They butchered his father... your father... and held and tortured his mother for over a decade!” Another barked. “He would never help them!”

Pusintin shook his head. "My father sits among us now Pride Leaders." He spoke. "I am a Kavalian... and..."

The Pride Leader who had spoken raised his hand. "My words were only spoken as reference Pusintin." He spoke. "All of us in this room, we do not doubt your loyalties. We never have. And your true father... Cukoum... he has raised you well."

Pusintin nodded. "I thank you for your words Pride Leader Diseno."

"Do we know why they are going there Pusintin?" Another Pride Leader asked. "They are closer now to the Lycavorian border than they have been in twenty-five years. Since we began our campaign against them."

"We can only guess that they will ask for help, especially now that they have this information from their agent." Pusintin answered. "The bigger concern we have is where have their dragon beasts gone?"

"But if by some remote chance they are able to obtain active assistance from the Union...?" Another Pride Leader exclaimed. "It could be disastrous."

Keleru nodded. "That is why we are arranging for a political delegation to enter Union space and begin talks with them to insure they remain out of our conflict. It is also the reason we have pushed to complete our trade agreements with the other active governments within the last three weeks. We have already been recognized by half of the ruling governments within known space. Only those aligned with the Union have balked at such recognition. We are going to attempt to change that."

The Pride Leaders looked at him. Pian was the first to speak up. "That dog of a Union King has barred us from ever entering Union space! He will..."

"He has barred *me* from entering Union space. No one else." Pusintin corrected him as he moved back to his chair. "And this was done not for any sort of political reason. It was a purely personal reason on his part."

Pian looked at him. "We do not need their recognition!" He spat. "Once we finished with the High Coven we can take from the Union all that they have by force! We can make them recognize us!"

Keleru shook his head slowly. "While we fight the High Coven?" He asked. "That is not possible. And even when we finally defeat the bloodsuckers, the Union will not be so easy to conquer. We will never make the Union do anything."

"We outnumber them three to one!" Qurot broke in now.

"Numbers mean nothing so long as they have those dragons." Pusintin spoke softly. "We in this room... and many of our senior officers have learned to deal with the fear these beasts instill in our people naturally. We can still function. However... it is not something we can train the clones to do. It would take too much time... and we would need several dozen of these beasts to do it. Talco failed in that mission at the start of our war with the Coven, and in the process gave the Union valuable information in regards to our clones. Information we believe was somehow passed to the High Coven."

The Pride Leaders looked at him surprised. "You know this as fact?" One asked.

Pusintin shook his head. "No... it is only a guess... but it would explain how the High Coven was able to effectively combat our clone troops once they named Moran as Supreme Commander of their forces. He shares a bed with the bloodsucker witch Yuri, and she would have had access to this information easily. He got it from her and then instituted these changes once he became Supreme Commander."

"What are you proposing Prefect?" Another Pride Leader asked more sedately as he looked at Keleru.

"Nothing what some of you might be thinking?" He said quickly. "We will not make peace with these dogs, nor will we enter into any sort of alliance with them. However... if we open political discussions with them, it will allow us a view into their inner workings. Perhaps a trade agreement of some sort. If we do this... we can petition to have an embassy granted to us on both Apo Prime and Earth. Then... with the right people in place, we may be able to draw some excellent information and intelligence."

"They will see through that as what it is." Qurot barked.

Keleru nodded. "Perhaps. But if they refuse our political openness, it will show they are not the open society they claim to be and it will allow us to put pressure on their allies who support them so."

"No Lycavorian will help us if this was done." Diseno spoke now.

"There is greed even among the Lycavorians." Keleru said with a smile.

Pusintin nodded quickly. "We just need to find the right one. However, we can't do that without establishing some sort of ties with them, even through intermediaries. As the High Coven has learned in the past years, there is no way we will penetrate their Intelligence network now... not with the way it has been reformed

and is run by this Armetus person. The risk to attempt this is far too high. We can however, attempt to convince other Lycavorians to gather the information for us. We will need to act quickly if this is indeed where the High Coven is going?"

"What of their beasts my son?" Cukoum asked looking at him from his chair.

"We have our agents pressing as hard as they are able." Pusintin replied. "It's possible they have simply moved them to another facility in secret to continue their training. Our Evolli contacts have passed the information to us about a weapons deal they were recently trying to conduct. It concerned the High Coven purchasing an order of the T19 Dragon Killers that we have been buying up ever since we discovered they have the beasts. Apparently however, they attempted to make the exchange in Union space and were discovered and destroyed by the black Spartan Simpson. The remaining portion of that group was discovered and destroyed by my nephews and nieces on Eleyisi Three. The fools attacked a Union mining colony and then tried to assassinate two of the Union Queens who they thought would respond to the distress call from the mining colony. They didn't anticipate that any other Union ships would be in the area to get the transmission. They were wrong. The Coven may have moved their beasts to try and develop tactics against the T19s, which they know we have been purchasing in The Wilds."

"We will not be in a position to begin our final push against the Coven for fifteen months at the earliest." Keleru spoke. "We can use this time to insinuate ourselves into the Union's arena and perhaps make some disrupting waves in the process. This can hardly hurt our position."

"Who do we send on this political venture?" Qurot spoke.

Keleru sat back. "Two of our senior diplomats, my daughters Jalersi and Athani since their features will allow them more freedom than most half a dozen of our other females that have been transformed, and Pusintin's oldest son Karun." He spoke looking at Qurot. "And you Qurot."

Qurot's eyes grew wide. "Me? For what purpose?"

"To give the Lycavorian intelligence people a gaze at one of our finest warriors of course. To instill fear in them." Keleru spoke with a smile.

"I have no wish to associate myself with those dogs!" Qurot spoke quickly.

"It is not a request Qurot." Keleru snarled at him. "You will accompany the delegation as military officer and liaison and you will maintain your decorum."

"Who will lead this delegation Prefect?"

Keleru met their eyes for a long moment. "My daughter Jalersi will command the delegation."

The uproar was not as vocal as Keleru expected, only a handful of the thirty odd senior Pride Leaders coming to their feet and only Qurot and Pian openly showing their anger. He let them rant for a moment before lifting his hand for silence. It took several moments before they quieted and took their seats once more.

"I am a Pride Leader!" Qurot hissed harshly even as he returned to his feet. "I will not take orders from a female!"

"You will if you wish to take my daughter Athani as your mate." Keleru replied just as harshly. Qurot's eyes grew wider at this knowledge. "We all know of the sensibilities of the Union dogs! They give their females far more freedom than we do. It stands to reason that if we allow two of our females to make contact with them it will be much easier to convince them. Jalersi and Athani have studied the Union for over a decade now. Their features will allow them to blend in better."

"Athani has allowed her tail to grow Prefect." A Pride Leader spoke now. "Will this not hinder such interaction?"

Keleru shook his head. "We don't believe so. There are many species that interact freely within the borders of the Union. I was upset when she first did this, but now it appears it may work in our favor. Jalersi and Athani will conduct negotiations with our senior diplomats, while the half dozen other females that have undergone the treatments like them will learn as much as they are able in whatever way they can." He held up his hand before the next outburst. "These are females that are not able to sire children, and they have volunteered for this mission with the approval of their fathers and Pride Leaders. They will not be returning to us once the mission is complete. They will remain within an embassy if it is allowed as aides and workers."

"And if an embassy is not granted?" Pian snapped.

Keleru looked at him. "Then they will have served their purpose and will disappear on the return trip."

The Pride Leaders at the table nodded their heads in approval. No one would touch the females after they had been with a Lycavorian or any other species in the course of completing their mission.

“This is an opportunity we can not allow to pass.” Keleru spoke. “While my daughters are doing this... we will discover where they have taken their dragon beasts and continue our preparations to bring down the bloodsuckers.”

“You... you will allow me to take Athani then?” Qurot spoke firmly.

Keleru nodded slowly. “Against my better judgment... but my mate and daughter have made their decision. But understand this Qurot... you will not mark her in any way! She is far more intelligent and useful to us, even as your mate, with her beauty and her mind intact! Is that an issue for you? If it is... tell me now, for my mate and daughter will find a male who will do as they ask. Once you have taken her... if one mark appears on her flesh I will personally rip your innards out and watch you wither and die!”

Qurot looked at Pusintin. “She is pure?”

Pusintin nodded. “As she should be. According to our customs I have had only two of her openings. She has actually grown to like it in this manner and if you stroke the base of her tail she responds actively and with...”

“I will decide how I take her.” Qurot snapped. “Her pleasure is not my concern.”

Pusintin’s eyes darkened for a moment. “She is pure Qurot!” He snapped. “And if you have no wish to have her welcome you in your bed that is your problem. I will not help you make her hate you any less than she already does.”

“She can hate me all she wants as long as she accepts me.” Qurot turned back to Keleru. “And I will do as you ask me.”

Keleru nodded. “Insure that you do.” He spoke. “Let us work out what we will extend to the Union dogs and then we can adjourn for refreshment.”

***BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
INQUISITOR
22 HOURS FROM LYCAVORIAN BORDER***

“Ahhhhhhh... please no... no more!” Toria Dellion gasped out as she felt Dante flex his hard cock deep inside her.

Her red hair was strewn about her shoulders, her naked body covered in a fine sheen of sweat. The nipples on her large breasts were painfully erect and begging for attention that they would not get. She felt Dante’s powerful hands on her ass cheeks holding her hips down on his throbbing shaft. He was sitting on the couch, Toria straddling his lap. This was her punishment. This is what she had to endure for not pleasing her Empress and Tesand enough. The skin of her flawless breasts was adorned with three bite marks and red areas where Dante had sucked too hard or too long on her delicate skin. They had been taking her for three hours now with no reprieve. No pause. They were like rutting animals.

And Toria could not stop them because her body was betraying her in the vilest of ways. And it had been since she had come here.

Toria felt Dante grab both sides of her face roughly. “Look at me!” He barked out.

Toria’s sky blue eyes opened wide at the tone of his voice and she gazed into his dark eyes seeing the small flash of red in those dark orbs. “No... no more... please Prince...” She croaked out the words.

“We are not finished using you yet Toria.” Dante hissed. “You want us to take you more don’t you?”

Toria shook her head slightly as her hands were braced on his broad shoulders and his bruising hands held her hips down on his lap. “I... I don’t... not like... not like this... please...”

Dante laughed and opened his eyes wider. “But you are a pureblood whore Toria!” He barked. “You are our pureblood whore aren’t you?” His dark eyes grew even larger and Toria was mesmerized by the flash of red within them. They were like gazing into the blood red petals of a flower, so beautiful in its color and intensity. She wanted to touch that flower, to feel its satiny surface caress her flesh in so many intimate ways.

“I am... I am...”

Toria sensed him come up behind her but she was powerless to do anything about it staring into Dante's eyes. They gripped her mind and body. She felt his hands spread apart her firm ass cheeks and then the head of Javier's cock pressed firmly against her asshole.

"You are our whore Toria!" Dante growled thrusting his cock upwards and hearing her gasp in surprised delight her nails digging into his skin.

"Wait... not like... not that way!" Toria's body tensed as Javier began to push his cock against her small opening. "Please..."

Dante pulled her face close to his painfully. "You want Javier to have your ass!" He barked his eyes flashing red once more. "You are a whore and you love it don't you Toria! Tell me you love it!"

"No... I... I... ohhhh!" Toria gasped as Javier reached around and grabbed her large breasts roughly pinching her nipples between his fingers painfully.

"Tell me you want us whore!" Dante barked out. "Tell me you are a whore! Our whore! Say it!"

The last of her resistance crumbled when Javier leaned his face close to her neck and sank his fangs into her flesh. Her orgasm burst out almost painfully and her body convulsed as Javier fed on her blood.

"YES!" She screamed in the throes of the powerful orgasm. "Yes! I am your whore! *Vith* me! *Vith* me! Please!"

Javier plowed his hips forward and sank his entire eight inch cock into Toria's bowels in one painful plunge. Her mouth was open in a breathless scream as Dante sank his fangs into her left breast and he too began to feed, even as their cocks sawed back and forth inside her openings. Tears came to Toria's eyes. Tears of humiliation. Tears of pain. Tears of delicious pleasure as another orgasm quaked through her. She felt both their cocks swell in size, Javier's shaft stretching her painfully, not caring in the least that he might be hurting her. Her head dropped lower and she clutched Dante's head to her breasts as their cocks erupted inside her smashing aside everything and causing her to descend into a world of pain and pleasure as she shuddered in the rapid fire orgasms and her mind only knew one thing.

To please the two cocks buried within her body. Which she would do for another three hours with no resistance.

Toria rose from the small couch in her quarters, the glass of Blood Wine in her hand and she moved to the door to answer the buzzing of the chime. She was still weak after six hours of having to endure Dante and Javier. They had pummeled her for that entire time, using both her openings while they fed on her blood. It was not something she was unaccustomed too for it was not the first time she had endured their touch upon her. This is how it had been the last three years now. While she did not find giving her Empress sexual pleasure at all displeasing, she did not care for the moments when Tesand took part. He could be more dominating then she cared for, and if she did not respond in a way they liked, or if she tried to keep Tesand from having her, Aikiro and Tesand would give her to Dante and Javier as a punishment of sorts for not pleasing them enough in their bed, or being resistant to Tesand having her ass.

That was the ultimate insult and degrading act for having Dante and Javier slobbering all over her was even worse. They would bite her breasts and neck countless times, making her even more compliant and accepting of what they did to her. Dante Moran would then use his Mindvoice powers on her to make her do what he wanted, no matter what she desired. He had inherited a much stronger version of that skill from his mother it seemed. While Princess Yuri could alter the perceptions of a person who was weak minded, her son could actually force the person to do something they did not and make them believe it was their idea. Both Dante and Javier were built larger than Tesand with the size of their cocks, not very much so, but enough to leave her sore for days when they acted as they had this night.

It didn't help that every time they bit her and fed on her blood Toria erupted in a crushing orgasm; only fueling their lust that much more and continuing to take her in every conceivable position. This night it had taken her an hour to get the taste of Javier's come out of her mouth with Blood Wine. Only reading and going over what her actions would be when they arrived in Lycavorian space relaxed her enough to try and dismiss this night from her mind as she had the others. Toria was not weak minded, her Mindvoice shields better than most, but no where near the strength of Dante and Javier. They always managed to shred her shields and reach into her mind, yet they were only there for physical gratification and never noticed that one doorway in her

thoughts that was more securely locked than any other. Her training with the *Venorik Elghinn* Division had been thorough, but they only trained her to focus almost all of her shielding ability to guard the secrets in her head. While Dante and Javier could rip through her normal Mindvoice Shields, had they ever attempted to try and breach that single door inside her mind, they would have discovered something far different.

Toria pulled the light robe around her naked body tighter. The steaming shower and Blood Wine had rid her of the majority of what they had done, their come mixed with the sweat upon her body when she left the lounge where they had taken her, though the bite marks would not fade for several more hours. She touched the panel on the door and lifted her sky blue eyes to stare into the exquisitely beautiful face of Princess Narice.

“Princess Narice!” Toria gasped trying to step out of the line of sight of the Immortal that accompanied Narice wherever she went.

Narice detected this reaction instantly and turned to look at the expressionless Immortal. “Fal’Vor... you may return in three hours. I will be done then.”

The huge Immortal nodded and turned to move down the corridor. Narice turned back to look at Toria. “Forgive me... I did not think you would answer your door dressed in such a way.”

Toria couldn’t help the redness in her cheeks and looked down at the floor quickly. “I... I was reading and lost my concentration Princess.” She spoke.

“May I come in?” Narice asked softly.

Toria instantly stepped out of the way. “Forgive me Princess... please come in.”

Narice bent down and picked up the small bag at her feet and stepped into the room, Toria touching the panel and locking the door quickly. She looked around the quarters and saw that Toria Dellion had decorated sparingly, but elegantly with several framed holo images and a few flowered plants.

“I will change into something more appropriate Princess.” Toria stammered. “Excuse me for a moment.”

Narice shook her head. “That won’t be necessary.” She said softly. “This is not anything formal Toria Dellion.”

Toria felt a momentary flash of fear for she had never heard of anyone receiving a visit from the Princess of the High Coven at such an hour. She looked at Narice closely, taking in the long billowing black hair and the beautiful features of her face and fullness of her lips. Since she had been forced to share her Empress’s bed, Toria had found herself gauging other females in a frankly sexual manner, something she had never done before. Apparently her trysts with Narice’s mother and Tesand had unlocked something within her she did not know existed before. If anything, Narice was even more beautiful than her mother and sister in an alluring way.

“What... may I ask what this *is* about Princess?” Toria spoke haltingly.

Narice met her sky blue eyes and smiled. She found the Coven Intelligence officer to be very pleasing on the eyes. Her long red hair was a color she did not see very often for Narice did not go out of her way to associate with others. The color of her eyes was gripping, and the few times she had seen Toria Dellion smile,

it was like a light coming on in the room. She knew of the arrangement her mother and Tesand had with Toria, and she also knew the young intelligence officer had only agreed to it because she thought it would help her career. Having to endure her nephews was something Narice was quite sure Toria would not have done willingly. She had seen her moving back to her quarters only an hour ago, the bite marks evident and the way she carried herself clear signs that her nephews had fed too much on her blood and abused her for too long.

Narice exhaled heavily. “I saw you returning to your quarters earlier. I was returning from Deneth’s pen.” She reached out and took the glass of Blood Wine from her hand. “May I?” Narice brought it to her nose and sniffed delicately making a face of disgust as she pulled it away. “Ewww... I expected my mother would have allowed you to have something better than this barely aged Blood Wine!” Narice moved to the counter while Toria stared at her wide eyed. She moved closer as she saw Narice pour it into the sink.

“Princess... I needed... I needed that!” She gasped. “It... it was my last glass.”

Narice turned to look at her dark eyes smiling as she set the bag she had brought on the counter and withdrew the metal cylinder. She retrieved two more glasses and poured the lighter red liquid into the glasses before turning back to Toria and holding one out to her. “Try this?” She spoke.

Toria kept her eyes on Narice as she brought the glass to her nose and sniffed. The aroma of cherries drifted to her nostrils and she looked at Narice quickly surprise in her sky blue eyes. “This is... this is cloned blood.” She gasped.

Narice nodded as she sipped her glass. “Not just any cloned blood Toria Dellion. It is something that the Hadarian Queen of the Union developed. First for my half sister Isabella... then for all the purebloods and turned of our kind who call the Union home. It is a very sought after item within The Wilds now... and very expensive.”

Toria looked at her. “And per your mother... very illegal within High Coven borders. I know Purebloods who have been imprisoned for possessing this.” She spoke holding the glass back to her. “Thank you... but no.”

Narice smiled. “Toria... I took this from my mother’s personal stash so to speak.” She said. “Tesand keeps a rather large supply hidden here on this ship. He will not miss one or two bottles.”

“I’m sorry Princess Narice... I can’t.” Toria spoke as every alarm in her head was ringing quite loudly.

“You think I am here to test your loyalty?” Narice said softly shaking her head. “My nephews took too much of your blood Toria. They are brutes... with no regard for anyone but themselves. Since you no longer have any Blood Wine...”

“I can get more.” Toria spoke gently still holding the glass out to her.

Narice nodded. “Yes... more than likely. However you would have to leave your quarters for that and I know you don’t want to do that. This... it is called *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* in The Wilds... Fruit of the Blood. It has more far more nutrients and replenishes our bodies much more quickly than Blood Wine. And it tastes like fruit punch! It’s quite delicious.”

“And still very illegal.” Toria spoke.

“Toria... I am not here to test your loyalty.” Narice spoke. “I saw you returning to your quarters in a bad way and I thought I would bring something to help you. Sharing my mother and Tesand’s bed was something you did of your own accord Toria, I believe you accept that... but my mother giving you to my nephews when you don’t please her and Tesand enough or attempt to discourage Tesand from having you... that is wrong. I’m sorry about that.”

“Why should you be sorry?” Toria asked. “It is a situation I got myself into as you have just said.”

“It is still wrong.” Narice spoke plainly. “What my sister’s sons do to you is wrong. I find it... I find it extremely distasteful.”

Toria looked at her strangely, her sky blue eyes darting back and forth as what Dante and Javier had done to her flashed back into her mind. What they had done to her on more than one occasion. “I... it is almost like... I can’t control myself.” She spoke softly. “My... my body betrays me. I fight it as long as I am able but...”

Narice nodded slowly. “It is a rare skill... not easily mastered, but Dante seems to have been able to control it in his own disgusting manner. Yuri has this skill as well but on a much more reduced level. The ability to alter the perceptions of someone. Almost control their minds. Combined with the fact they were feeding on your blood while in heightened sexual state only makes it worse. It makes you do things you would not normally do because it feels so divine.”

Toria looked at her oddly. “You sound as if... forgive me but you sound as if you have experienced something similar before Princess.”

Narice nodded slowly. “Not in a physical manner such as you... but something similar yes.”

“Not physical?” Toria asked.

Narice waved her hand dismissively. “It is not important. This will help you regain what they took from you Toria. I’m not here for any nefarious reasons.”

“Why... why are you here Princess? Why do you tell me this?” She asked.

Narice turned and removed the data pad from her bag and then held it out to her. “It appears we have the same mission... just different objectives.” Narice spoke. “I thought... I thought we might pool what we know so that it is easier for both of us to accomplish our goals. You appear to be the most knowledgeable person on this ship in regards to the Lycavorian Union and the family that rules it and I would like to know more than what my mission pad tells me. I would like to know more because unlike my nephews... there is far more to the men and women that we will interact with than they can comprehend.”

Toria took the pad with her empty hand and looked at it. Her sky blue eyes lifted after a moment and her hand with the glass drew back slowly. “This is why you came?” She asked.

Narice nodded. "Yes. The other reason is because you seem to be the only other woman on this ship outside of my niece Carisia that is as lonely as I am. And since I am not allowed to associate with Carisia for some ridiculous reasons to say the least... I thought... I thought we could become friends."

Toria met her dark eyes for a long moment. She already knew what her intent was going to be... and she already knew that Dante and Javier would never have her again once she left this ship. If having Princess Narice turn her in to her superiors for drinking illegal cloned blood and save her from the humiliation of having her own body betray her, Toria would accept that and kill herself later. However, there was something in Narice's eyes that told her that wasn't the case at all.

She lifted the glass to her lips and drank half of the contents, immediately feeling the cloned blood surge through her body and filling her with energy and strength. She looked at the glass in shock. Narice smiled.

"I told you." She spoke as she sipped from her own glass once more.

SPARTA

SPARTA ESTATE

The scent of pines and flowers tickled her nose and caused her azure eyes to open slowly. The birds chirped happily in the distance and Aricia felt the weight on her abdomen. Martin's powerful mint scent permeated the room and the bed sheets and Aricia inhaled deeply allowing his lingering male aura to flood through her. She smiled as she felt Isabella's head shift on her abdomen and she turned her head to the side where Martin should have been. He was already gone she knew and the memories of the night before came pouring back as her eyes settled on where Anja and For'mya were stretched out on the bed, Anja's face resting atop Dysea's firm full breasts, For'mya curled in a ball with her back pressed against Dysea's side.

"*Carians... coi vin bacj aln?*" Isabella croaked out the ancient Lycavorian words softly. (Gods is he gone yet?)

Aricia heard Anja and Dysea chuckled softly and she grinned as her hands dropped to Bella's naked shoulders and stroked her smooth skin. "*Jainn... pen theena un coi anzen.*" She answered. (Yes I believe it is safe.)

Anja lifted her head slightly from Dysea's breast, the sunlight filtering into the room reflecting off the studded piercing in Dysea's left nipple. "Is anyone else as tired as I am?" She croaked out the words.

"I will let you know when I wake up. I am still too pleasantly sore to move." For'mya groaned.

"Do you think he missed you *Melyanna?*" Dysea asked as she stroked Anja's Persian red hair. "*Nauta Melme* certainly had you howling last night."

Anja lowered her head back down. "You and Bella didn't help matters much." She spoke. "You know I can't refuse anything when she bites me."

"I don't think any of us can." For'mya spoke softly as she turned and snuggled closer to Dysea's warm body.

"Do not blame this on me." Bella spoke as she lifted her head and rested her chin on Aricia's powerful abdomen. "I can not help it if we all were claimed by a man whose stamina knows no bounds."

"Bella... that was no man last night. That was a machine." Anja quipped. "He had all of us at least four times!"

"Five actually." Aricia giggled. "We... we had each other in the shower after the rest of you fell asleep."

"*Upaee!*" For'mya growled as they all chuckled among themselves.

"*Melyanna...* do you truly know of any machine that has a tongue as talented as *Nauta Melme's* was last night?" Dysea asked with a laugh. "Not withstanding yours of course."

"Ok... I'll give him that." Anja said as her hand caressed Dysea's thigh.

"Not to mention the size of his *celie.*" For'mya spoke softly. "It hasn't grown has it? Or is that just me?"

The five of them giggled like school girls now and Aricia and Isabella moved closer to them, pressing their bodies against each others. Aricia pressed her face to the back of For'mya's shoulder and nuzzled her elven ear gently feeling her shudder in desire as Aricia then left a trail of kisses along her shoulder.

"Anja and I spoke of this on our way back from Hadaria." Aricia said softly resting her chin on For'mya's shoulder now. "It is simply amazing that he can still do to us what he does isn't it?"

“You mean turn us to jelly with a simple caress?” Isabella asked with a grin.

“It is not amazing.” Dysea spoke softly her fingers tracing Anja’s bare shoulders. “It is *emeran*. We belong together... all of us. There is always purpose in the paths that fate lays before us. One of those paths brought all of us together with *Nauta Melme* as the center. That is why we are so drawn to each other as well as Martin. That is our destiny... and we build on that every day.” (Fate)

“*Aovi*.” Anja said softly. (Amen)

“Now that... now that the war is over and things have become calmer... I think all of us should spend more time together.” Aricia said softly. “Just the five of us. Like we used to before the war.”

“Without Martin?” Bella asked.

“We have six months here on Earth and in Sparta and Gytheio before we need to return to Apo Prime.” Aricia spoke. “I think in that period we can discover moments where it is only us. I think we need that.”

Dysea smiled. “That sounds divine.” She spoke her eyes bright at the prospect. “What do we do with *Nauta Melme* while we are enjoying ourselves?”

Aricia smiled. “He actually already planned an entire week for us in Gytheio.” She said gently. “Just the five of us without him or any of the Little Ones.”

All of them looked at her. “He did that?” Anja asked.

Aricia nodded. “He told me about it as he was carrying me back to bed after our shower last night.” She told them. “He knows things have been crazy... and you know he will never allow us to lose the closeness we have so easily formed. He is going to remain here in Sparta while we rediscover each other by the sea.”

“That man is just plain scary.” Anja said shaking her head. “How... how could he have known that?”

“Bella and I were thinking the same thing only days ago.” Dysea spoke. “We spoke of it with each other but not to Martin. He... he has sensed this within us.”

“What about the little ones?” For’mya asked. “Do we trust him enough to watch all five of them himself?”

Aricia laughed. “I for one am not going to argue with him.” She said. “When was the last time the five of us were able to be together without something pulling us away? Besides... with Helen and Gorgo here... he won’t have to do a thing and he knows it.”

“The last time we were together just like this was before Deion and Nara were born.” Anja replied instantly.

Isabella’s eyes grew a little wider. “It has been ten years?” She gasped. “I... I didn’t realize.”

“Nor did I.” Dysea said softly. “That long?”

Aricia nodded. “We love Martin with all that we are. We... we love each other just as intensely. But we are also the best of friends and it is time we began acting like that again. Shopping. Dancing. Everything.”

“Oh... that will give the Netnews Channels lots of fodder.” Anja said with a chuckle. “Union Queens tear up Gytheio night life! I can hardly wait!”

“I think it sounds like fun.” For’mya spoke with a laugh. “Besides... many more nights like last night and one or all of us will be pregnant again.”

Dysea chuckled at that and they all looked at her with wide eyes. “Dysea... you are...” Anja gasped.

Dysea shook her head. “*Carians*... no!” She exclaimed. “I just find it funny that all of us come into phase at the same time now and how it affects *Nauta Melme* and Bella. I think it’s the only time we have more endurance than he does.”

Bella smiled with bright hazel/green eyes. “Yes... but it is so much fun! Your blood is so much sweeter when you are in phase. I find it hard to decide who I want to bite first! Usually I just grab whoever is closest that Martin has not already grabbed. He’s such a brute when the four of you hit him with your auras at the same time.”

They all laughed at that and drew closer together. “How soon before he returns?” For’mya asked.

“He and Andro were meeting with Arzoal and the Elder Council today.” Aricia replied as she snuggled and spooned For’mya from behind. “They will be there at least half the day.”

“Good... more sleep for us.” Anja spoke dropping her head back down to Dysea’s abdomen.

“Who said anything about sleep *Melyanna*?” Dysea spoke seductively as her hand traced the line of Anja’s back to her firm ass cheeks. “We can start rediscovering each other right now.”

Anja lifted her head and looked at Dysea with smoldering jade green eyes. “Bella... you have turned her into a vixen.” She spoke softly.

Isabella laughed as she gently pried open Aricia’s thighs. “I know... but she tastes so good.” She answered.

Aricia looked down at Isabella’s beautiful face with wide eyes and her fingers entwined in her long hair. “Bella... what are you... what are you doing?”

Isabella smiled. “Rediscovering.” She answered before lowering her lips to Aricia’s center and hearing her gasp out in surprised pleasure as she dragged her tongue over Aricia’s clit with agonizing slowness. For’mya turned over quickly and her soft lips descended upon Aricia’s in a blistering kiss of want and need muffling Aricia’s whimpers of bliss.

Anja smiled at the actions of her fellow Queens and lovers and extended her four inch long tongue out to lick Dysea’s powerfully ripped abdomen as she gazed up into her glittering emerald eyes. Emerald eyes now filled with desire and passion once more. “Yes she does taste good.” She said before dipping her head lower and hearing Dysea hiss out in joy as her four inch long tongue disappeared into the warm, wet folds of Dysea’s elven pussy.

And the rediscovery began.

EARTH DRAGON ELDER CHAMBER MINDVOICE CITY SHIP 41 DRAGON ISLAND OF SARDINIA

So all four of you have felt them as well? Arzoal asked.

The Dragon Elder Chamber was the second largest room within the Mindvoice ship outside of the main cavern like area which allowed the hatchlings to learn to fly. As the Dragon Elder for Earth, Syrilth sat to Arzoal’s right side, three additional dragons to her right, while four dragons sat to Arzoal’s left. In all there now nine Dragon Elders. Five females and four males. They were the oldest of the living dragons, the youngest being Syrilth at three thousand four hundred years old. No one really knew how old Arzoal was as she never gave anyone a direct answer to that question. Most assumed she was at least twenty-five thousand years old, though Martin and a few others suspected she was far older than that.

Andro and his father sat on the two simple flat boulders that faced the nine dragons, Elynth and Torma to their sides.

Martin nodded slowly. *Just on the edge of our perceptions.* He answered. *But they were there.*

Elynth and I felt them when we were in The Wilds and passing close to the High Coven border. Andro answered.

They are growing closer Martin. Arzoal spoke softly. *Each hour that passes the tremors are stronger. I know.*

Why would they be coming here? Syrilth asked softly. *Surely the High Coven knows what regard we hold them in since they took the hatchlings and eggs.*

They intend to use them in their conflict against the Kavalians don’t they Martin? The light green scaled dragon’s voice was male and it rumbled deeply from his position to Arzoal’s left. He was the most senior after Arzoal, nearly twenty thousand years old.

Martin nodded slowly once more. *I believe they do Daurgo. We know at least nine of the recently born hatchlings survived the crash because their bodies were not among the dead. And then thirty-five of the eggs survived and were missing.* Martin shook his head. *I should have done more to get them back.*

Daurgo shook his large head. *There was nothing more you could have done. We searched for weeks to insure we were right; you yourself spent two months on that planet with Torma. How many times did you fly over the same ground hoping? I believe all of us knew the Coven had taken those that survived. We just did not want to admit it.*

Daurgo is right Martin Leonidas. Arzoal spoke now. *What could you have done? Take a force into High Coven territory in the midst of a war they were fighting and losing? They knew what they had the moment the*

Transport went down. We could very well still be searching for them even now as vast as the High Coven territory is.

That does not explain why they are coming here now? A female voice broke in from Arzoal's right next to Syrilth.

If they were able to force the eggs to hatch... and they have bonded with High Coven men and women... there is only one reason they would come here. Martin spoke.

Arzoal nodded. *To discover how it is Mjolnir's Hand and the other Bonded Pairs are able to do what they do.*

Martin nodded. *As Daurgo said... they probably intend to use them against the Kavalians in their war. We know there is something inbred in the Kavalian species that fears your kind. Something coded into their DNA. Anja has tried to discover it... but it has not been a priority for her over the years and she has not made any progress.*

The vampires of the Coven are not like Lycavorians and Elves Elder Mother. Torma spoke. *Would our benevolent nature not clash dramatically with whoever is able to bond with those dragons?*

Arzoal nodded. *To an extent yes. But if the High Coven has had them since infancy, they have been able to shape their minds without guidance from this Council or other dragons within the Union.*

So it is possible these dragons... they are just as violent as the High Coven soldiers who ride them? Elynth asked.

Anything is possible. Daurgo spoke.

It is also possible their bonds are no stronger than what Syrilth had with Vile Maruad. Arzoal said.

Martin shook his head. *The tremors Torma and I felt were powerful Arzoal. That does not indicate a connection like what Syrilth had. And the only reason she truly allowed it was to protect her brothers and sisters.*

I have contacted the sires of those dragons we know were not on the crashed ship. Arzoal spoke. *They will be arriving on Earth within the week. Do we dare allow them entry into our Union Martin?*

If they are coming here thinking that we will train them... Torma shook his massive head. *That is not something we can do.*

Do we dare not? Andro spoke up now and all heads turned to him.

What are you saying Talon Guardian Androcles? Arzoal asked.

If they come here... and we don't know for sure that is the case... but if they do, do we dare turn them away? Andro said.

You need to make sense son. Martin spoke gently.

Yes father I agree... if they come here it is only for one reason. To learn how we do what we do. Andro spoke. *More than likely... none of them are even attuned enough to realize that we can sense them within Mindvoice already. That is not something we should reveal.*

If we train them... and they defeat the Kavalians in the years to come... we will have to face them in battle one day. We all know there will be no peace between the High Coven and the Union. Not as things stand now. Torma spoke. *Those eggs and hatchlings are not brothers and sisters, and they will mate and produce more offspring. Those offspring will learn what we teach their sires... and they will use it against us. We have rules that we live by. A code that those of us who are bonded follow. The High Coven does not.*

If they do come... if they do ask us to train them... and we refuse... we would be signing the death warrants for over forty of our brothers and sisters without so much as a blink. Do we want that on our heads? Andro said turning his head to look at Elynth.

They will still go into battle against the Kavalians. Elynth spoke now looking at the Dragon Elders seated all around them. *And we know they will face the weapons we all have come to hate so much.*

Andro nodded. *The Kavalians are aware of their existence, otherwise why would they be buying up every T19 that was left from the war with the Evolli? If we don't train them, they will go into battle and they will all die.* Andro spoke. *It took us three years and twenty-three Bonded Pairs of Mjolnir's Hand before we learned to combat the T19 effectively. That does not include the wounded. What chance would they have against a foe that is three times as violent and far better led?*

We would essentially be killing them ourselves. Elynth finished.

Torma let out a deep sigh and nodded his massive head. *Yes... that is true as well.*

The political ramifications could very well be disastrous. Another female dragon spoke from Arzoal's left. We would be seen by everyone as helping the High Coven in their war with the Kavalians. Do we want that on our heads if we do help them? It could very well draw us into the war in some fashion.

Martin looked at Torma. [Mindvoice Shielded] *[Torma my brother?]*

[The decision is ultimately yours Martin but our children speak from their hearts and they are correct. Without training as we provide to our Bonded Pairs... they will not survive for very long in battle. We would essentially be killing them.] Torma spoke.

[I felt Yuri Torma. And her mother.] Martin said.

[You have moved well beyond simple hatred my brother.] Torma spoke lowering his head to look in Martin's eyes as everyone watched. *[You show that everyday in your treatment of Isabella your Queen and your daughters as well as all those vampires who call our Union home.]*

Martin shook his head. *[It is still there.]*

[Yes... but it no longer has a say in what your actions are.] Torma said. *[Do not let their presence change the man you have become.]*

[You're right as usual.] Martin said.

[I may be right... but like you I feel it could very well come around to bite us in our ass.] Torma spoke. *[Isn't that how Anja speaks it?]*

Martin chuckled. *[Almost exactly.]*

Martin turned back to Arzoal and the Elders. *Forgive me.* He said quickly.

You, your son, Torma and Elynth are Talon Guardians Martin Leonidas. Arzoal spoke softly. *You are the Guardians of our people and the King of our Union. You alone are allowed to speak shielded among the Elders of this Council. And to be honest... not even the Elders on this Council could penetrate the shields of you or your son unless you allowed it.*

My son speaks the truth. Martin said looking at Andro. *And I'm sure Elynth agrees with him.*

Elynth nodded her large head. *Andro and I always speak with the same voice regardless of whose words are used.*

Arzoal nodded. *Yes... we have noticed that.* She spoke with some humor. *Perhaps it is because you became bonded while Andro was still within Aricia's womb... but it does not matter. This Council has always known you speak with one voice.* Her massive head turned back to Martin. *What do you suggest Martin?*

Martin looked at Andro. *Andro?*

Let them come. Andro spoke getting to his feet. *Let us see them first before we make a decision. What could that hurt? I am not fool enough to enter into this without knowing what it is we will face. If it can not be done... I will not train any of them. I only assume that the training will fall to Elynth and I and my siblings if we decide to assist them.*

Martin nodded. *If we do it... it will need to be done very quietly.* He turned back to Arzoal. *He's right however. Let us see what it is they have to say.*

Arzoal nodded. *Very well. If they do come here... we will adjourn two days afterwards and discuss any training and support we may provide to them. Is that agreed upon by all Elders and the Talon Guardians?* Arzoal's huge head saw the nods of affirmation from everyone. *So be it. This Council will recess until the Mating Petitions are heard this afternoon.*

Martin turned to look at his son as the dragons began to move out of the large chamber. "You do realize that if we sense them coming the Kavalians will undoubtedly know they are coming here as well. They have just as many spies and drones in The Wilds as we do."

Andro nodded. "Ours are better." He spoke. "And unless there are Kavalians who have suddenly gained Mindvoice abilities strong enough to detect what we can... they will not know what they are here for. Only that they are here."

Martin chuckled. "You are getting downright devious." He spoke.

"I had a good teacher." Andro answered.

Martin smiled. "C'mon... we're meeting your brothers and sisters for lunch at Gallais's Retreat. I'm going to contact your mothers and have them join us. This is something we all need to talk about. Sadi has classes until later this afternoon right?"

Andro nodded. "I intend to pick her up and take her shopping." He said. "And then we are meeting Eliani, Nyla, Carina and Moneus for dinner."

"Getting nervous?" Martin asked him with a grin.

"No." Andro answered shaking his head.

Liar! Yes you are! Elynth exclaimed playfully.

Martin laughed out loud and Torma laughed within Mindvoice at that. Martin put his arms over his son's shoulders. "Let's get going before Elynth blows in more of your secrets." He said.

Andro looked at his father. "Was it like this for you father? Sadi spent the night with her father in Sparta, and even from Gytheio I could still smell her on the wind." He asked. "It's like she has invaded my very being."

Martin smiled. "It was worse. I was being pulled in three different directions and then your mothers Isabella and For'mya entered the picture and added two more directions I was being pulled in."

"How did you act?" Andro asked.

"It will become better once you and she have been together son." Martin spoke. "She will still pull at you... but once you are in each other's blood it will be only as strong as you let it because you will belong to each other then."

Worship her Andro. Torma's voice spoke. *Worship her as your father and I worship our mates and she will give you all that you desire.*

Martin nodded. "Ain't that the truth?" He said.

Just leave her enough room of her own to breathe Andro. We have talked of this before. She is strong willed and confident. She will need space of her own. Elynth said.

Andro nodded. *Don't smother her... yes I will remember.*

Torma's head leaned far over as they walked and he looked at his daughter. *What about you daughter? Are there any prospective suitors for you on the horizon?*

Elynth's golden eyes grew wide. *Father... I will not answer that! You and Jeth would frighten any away even if there were.*

Torma chuckled and nuzzled the top of her head between her two long skull horns. The tips of Elynth's wings twitched in delight from this caress of her father. *I like it that way.*

Elynth snorted. *They would first have to make it past Andro.* She said confidently. *And no one is good enough for me according to him.*

I'm only speaking the truth. Andro replied.

My brother... I like your son even more now. Torma announced as he brushed up against Elynth's shoulder with his snout in a playful nudge.

Elynth snorted once more in indignation. *I will make it a point to insure they meet mother first. Whoever they may be.*

THE WILDS

KRANEK

2.7 LIGHT YEARS FROM LYCAVORIAN BORDER

Twenty-five years.

A full quarter of a century since they had come here and he could not remember ever experiencing the peace, joy and love he felt now at any other time in his nearly seven thousand years of life. In truth he had never experienced or understood these emotions until she had come into his life. He had not fired a weapon in anger in that entire time, only during training and on ritual hunts. They had come to this planet in peace... wanting only to live in peace... and that is how they had conducted themselves the entire time. They were called Akruvian. One of the very first species ever conquered by the High Coven. They were known across the universe by another name however. A name meant to instill fear into the hearts of their foes.

They were known as Immortals.

He himself had been the Immortal Captain of the High Lord Veldruk, a position he had held for over a thousand years. A position wrenched from him violently by the now dead High Lord for attempting to improve

the physical appearance of his people. The AkruXian were not a handsome species to look upon. Their skin was normally a dark gray in color and stretched almost painfully taut over their large bodies. Many of them had sunken eye sockets and large foreheads with small dark eyes. They had almost no hair on their muscular bodies, small bone spikes protruding from the ridges of their hands and wrists and even along their jaw lines in some instances. He had long ago filed down the bone spikes along his jaw, but he kept the ones on his hands to remind him of his past and because she had asked him to. She had not wanted him to change to become something he thought she wanted. She had fallen in love with him for what pumped inside his chest, not for his outward appearance. He was the leader of his tribe... nearly ten thousand strong now... and their numbers grew almost yearly with the births of young ones and those Immortals who had fled in search of them over the years.

They had built a city of sorts in the wild mountains of Kranek, using their strength to forge homes from the rock and build sturdy buildings with the centuries old trees that filled the valley below them. While they lived a simple life, growing their own food and hunting the plentiful animals that lived in the mountains, they had modern amenities as well. The landing pad within their city walls held three Long Range High Coven Runners and two large Limian transports that were used to trade with the three other settlements on Kranek, as well as purchase supplies and tools from within The Wilds. They used their considerable strength to mine the valuable Cretolian Gem Ore from the three surrounding mines which provided them with ample means to pay for whatever they needed. He could hear the laughter of little ones in the morning filtering along the streets of the city they had built. The casual greetings of his people to each other, the words of welcome and encouragement from all of them. Things that they would never have done before now came naturally to them. And he would never have been here to see it if not for the sleeping form in the bed in front of him.

His pureblood vampire wife.

Cha'talla lifted his hand and reached out to stroke the silky smoothness of her exposed leg that the thin sheet did not cover. He could stare at her beauty for hours, content to caress her satiny skin and marvel at the wonders she had brought into his life. The most important being the four strong and healthy children she had given him and the changes her degree in Bio-Engineering had brought forth in his people, himself included. As his hand drifted along her leg he took in the color of his skin now as it no longer resembled the skin of the dead. Her ability to manipulate genetic codes and medical equipment was unlike anything Cha'talla had ever witnessed, and the deep bronze color of his skin was testament to that. It was different for all of his people, and while they still retained their bone spikes and small eyes, almost all of them had seen changes to their skin color. It now appeared healthier and more vibrant. His tribe was no longer a fearsome visage to look upon, and while their physical size alone was enough to intimidate most; they no longer carried that deathly look of the Immortals that still lived within the High Coven.

There had been births among their tribe after Esther was able to alter the genetic code, and the children born after that were the result. While they still retained their AkruXian size and musculature, they looked even more normal as far as Cha'talla was concerned. Their features were elegant and they had different skin tone. This skin tone actually made the bone spikes common to their people almost acceptable in appearance, and many of the younger ones had elected to keep them now since they were no longer as pronounced. Esther's work and her complete devotion to their tribe rapidly saw her gain the respect due her. Not many of his tribe trusted her when they first arrived here; they thought she was a High Coven spy. Almost no one believed a pureblood would willingly stay with an Immortal. Esther had proven them wrong in the first two hours on this planet when she practically assaulted him sexually in front of nearly his entire tribe. Esther loved him shamelessly and their first weeks here they had discovered and explored each other for hours every night. It came as quite the surprise when she announced she was with child, and after the long and painful labor of bringing a large Immortal son from within her petite body and into this world, her standing in his tribe grew beyond measure. He now had four children with Esther, four strong and healthy boys to compliment his fully grown and pure Immortal son Fash'ka.

It had taken Fash'ka some time to become used to having Esther as his new mother, but as soon as his brother Tir'ut entered this world, Fash'ka could not have been prouder. Esther was now looked to as Cha'talla's wife and the senior female among their tribe. She was a teacher and doctor, always pushing to have their tribe schooled in not just the old ways but in ways his people had never thought of before. Areas which the High Coven had told them they were not intelligent enough for and never allowed them to enter. While she schooled

them in areas of study they had never dabbled in before, she remained true to their AkruXian culture and traditions.

Esther had been the catalyst to Cha'talla's life altering future, and he had made a secret vow to only himself the morning after she had given him their third son that he would never allow any harm to come to her, and he would love her as completely as it was possible to love someone. An emotion he never thought he would feel, and now it filled his entire tribe in all that they did. Esther shifted on the bed and brought her delicate hand down to rest on top of his on her thigh. She groaned softly and a smile touched her face as she opened her dark eyes and looked at him.

"Are you just going to touch and admire my Immortal husband?" She asked in a sultry voice. "Or are you going to join me in our bed and actually douse the flames your touch is igniting?"

Cha'talla smiled at her words. "I came to wake you as you asked me my wife." He finally answered. "Tir'ut and Fash'ka have the transport loaded and prepared for travel."

Esther Saira sat up slowly in the bed, not bothering to hold the sheet over her naked body. The Immortal in front of her had long ago memorized every minute detail of her body and he knew her more intimately than anyone in the universe. Even to this day... Esther could not have been more pleased about that. She moved to the edge of the bed and wrapped her arms around Cha'talla's broad shoulders, pressing her large breasts against his chiseled skin as his hands pulled her petite frame closer to him. She covered his thin lips with her own and they shared a sizzling kiss of love and passion that last for several moments before she pulled away. No matter how many years they had been together, or the number of times he had made her scream out his name in passion as he took her body, Esther could never get enough of him. She stroked his beautiful face, at least it was beautiful to her, and smiled as she gazed at him. Her fingers traced the filed down nubs of his facial bone spikes and he smiled because she knew they were a sensitive part of his body.

"And we can't..." Esther asked hopefully.

"Esther... we would delay you leaving by several hours at least." Cha'talla spoke. "You know that is how long it will take me to fully sate your appetite for me."

"Mine?" She gasped. "What about yours for me?"

"That would take infinitely longer." Cha'talla replied with a grin as he brought his hand up to push back strands of her long dark brown almost black hair. "And we have planned this trip for months."

"Two weeks." Esther spoke resting her forehead to his as his hands pulled her hips tighter against him. "We will be gone for two weeks... and then I intend to return here and have you in my bed for at least that long."

Cha'talla chuckled. "That sounds quite promising." He spoke.

Esther pulled her face back and looked into his small dark eyes. "I love you Cha'talla of the Immortals. More completely than I have ever loved anything in my life."

His hands pressed her closer still and he stared back into her eyes. "And I love you Blessed Wife. The moment you entered my world Esther Saira, my future became so much brighter." He kissed her tenderly, brushing his nose against her lips first for he knew she loved that. "But now you must go. And I have to take a work detail to fix the east section of our crops there."

"You are meeting with the settlers there?" Esther asked.

Cha'talla nodded. "We will complete the trench that connects our settlements. And then we will have a celebration to honor that. We are looking forward to that."

"Two weeks my husband." Esther spoke with a smile. "You had better get your rest."

Cha'talla laughed. "I will be working out every day waiting for that." He told her. "And remember to get more of the Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos. Our stores are quite full... but you never know when we will need extra."

Esther nodded as she reluctantly pulled herself from his arms and reached for her clothes. "I will remember." She said looking at him and seeing the glint in his dark eyes. "Are you going to allow me to dress husband?"

"In a moment perhaps. I want to have this picture of you in my mind's eye while you are gone." Cha'talla spoke with a grin.

Esther shoved him in his shoulder, knocking him over from the balls of his feet. "Get out of here!" She exclaimed as he rolled to his feet easily and moved for the door of their bedroom.

“Mother.”

Esther allowed him to lean over and kiss her forehead as their palms touched in the traditional AkruXian custom. She smiled when his soft lips touched her skin. This was her oldest son with her Immortal husband.

Tir’ut stood nearly six feet four inches tall and two hundred and forty-five pounds of muscle and bone. His skin was more caramel colored due to the combination of hers and Cha’talla’s DNA and pigmentation. He had dark hair on his head which was a first for most Immortals, and he kept it cut extremely short. The bones spikes along his jaw line were much smaller than normal, but still easily seen, as were the ones along the ridges of his hands and wrists. His dark brown uniform held a body forged by his brother Fash’ka and his father into chiseled perfection as they had done with all of their sons. All of the children and even the adults were schooled daily, but Esther had been even more merciless when they returned home, adding another three to four hours of every day reading and studying under her watchful gaze. It was a practice Cha’talla encouraged, for he knew that knowledge was the key to their survival, and in the ancient AkruXian way he allowed Esther to do this as wife and mother and senior female in the tribe. He had only stepped in one time when Tir’ut had questioned his mother’s intentions and why they had to learn so much. Cha’talla had torn into his son with a fierceness Tir’ut had never seen before, and he and his two younger brothers at the time never questioned their mother again. As he had grown older, he came to understand why she did what she did, and he had thrown himself into his studies.

Tir’ut now spoke six languages fluently and would have been able to have an engineering degree from any recognized school across the many empires in the galaxy. He allowed his father and brother to mold and shape his body and mind in the old ways, while his mother shaped his mind in the new ways.

“Tir’ut.” Esther spoke softly.

Fash’ka stepped forward with a small smile and repeated the action with Esther. It had taken him many years to be able to comfortably call her mother, but now that word felt so very natural to him. Esther smiled at him and then took both their hands in hers.

“We are ready?” She asked as Cha’talla came up behind them.

Fash’ka nodded. “All is loaded and secure mother.” He spoke.

Esther’s dark eyes flashed brightly at him. “Is Ja’narie coming with us?” She asked.

If an Immortal could blush Fash’ka would have turned bright red. It was well known in their tribe that he favored the first born daughter of another family, and while she was pure AkruXian, the treatments her parents had received when first arriving had allowed her to be born with long flowing hair and much more delicate features.

Tir’ut grinned at his brother’s reaction, baring his vampiric fangs. While they had not started out vampiric in nature, centuries of being pawns of the High Coven had turned the entire population of AkruXian people. Unlike purebloods and turned of other species however, they could not retract their fangs.

“She’s coming mother.” Tir’ut spoke elbowing his brother in the side. “Fash’ka is beside himself.”

Esther laughed as Cha’talla reached them and held out the data pad for her. “The final list from everyone.” He spoke.

Esther took it with a nod and tucked it into the belt of her dark brown outfit. The clothes hugged her lithe five foot seven frame like a second skin, also providing armored protection on the chest and arms. She wore the small but powerful High Coven R14 hand blaster on her belt. It had been reworked many times giving her at least a dozen shots before the power cell was used up. After that... Esther would resort to the dual fighting knives that she was so very lethal with as well as her vampiric abilities to wrap the shadows around her and blur in motion. Esther looked at Cha’talla.

“Two weeks husband.” She spoke in an alluring voice as she pressed her body against his.

Fash’ka and Tir’ut watched as their father pulled Esther into his embrace, lifting her off the ground. She looked so tiny in his arms and that had been a point of laughter over the years for all of them. They watched as their Immortal father and their Pureblood vampire mother shared a kiss of passion, something Fash’ka had never thought his father ever capable of until she had come into his life. Esther had changed him... changed all of their people... and Fash’ka would now willingly sacrifice himself to insure her safety. She treated him no differently than she did any of his half brothers, and that more than anything endeared her to him forever.

“Be prepared Blessed Wife.” Cha’talla growled at her.

Esther laughed and kissed him quickly before he set her down and she looked at her two sons. “Shall we?”

Cha’talla looked at his sons. “Protect your mother and those with you my sons.” He ordered. Fash’ka and Tir’ut nodded. “Always father.” They spoke together.

EARTH GYTHEIO SEA SIDE VILLA OF ELIANI AND NYLA

The air was warm as it blew in from the harbor, bringing with it the smell of the ocean breeze and flowers from across the bay. The villa was two stories high and sat with its front facing the huge bay and harbor. The rear of the villa was backstopped by the mountains with a huge patio and overhang that allowed for privacy and the comings and goings of dragons at odd hours of the night and day. It was one of the larger villas along the bay of Gytheio, but when they had seen it Eliani and Nyla both knew they wanted it. They had sold the villas they owned separately and pooled their Riyal to purchase this one, and then set about decorating just the way they wanted. Tharua and Nyla’s dragon Arydun rested in the back on the open patio under the moon, both of them gnawing on huge bones. They had become like sisters because of whom their bond mates were, and they were completely comfortable with each other. They ignored the soft sounds of rapture coming from the main bedroom upstairs for they had heard it many times before during the last four years.

Nyla’s body dropped back onto the bed, sweat glistening off her deliciously tanned skin, her golden blond hair tossed wildly about and her eyes open wide and changed to cobalt blue. Her chest heaved with exertion, the nipples of her firm, full breasts almost painfully erect in unabashed pleasure and delight. Her limbs trembled from the force of the third mind blowing orgasm she had just experienced rapid fire one after the other. She could only lay there now with her fingers entwined in Eliani’s long burgundy hair as she felt her gloriously long tongue continuing to lap away at the remaining drops of her come that had escaped her lips. Eliani teasingly traced the outside of her still fully engorged labia with gentle licks and butterfly like kisses, sending shivers of delight rippling through Nyla’s taunt powerful body. She and Eliani were proud of their figures, both of them sporting smooth, flat and rippled abdomens, incredibly firm and tight asses and large firm breasts that never failed to turn the heads of any male they came across. Especially when she and Eliani hit the beach in bathing suits that left little to the imagination. Nyla felt Eliani begin the trek up her abdomen as her breathing began to return to normal. She didn’t want to wait however, the desire to taste her lover almost overpowering and all consuming.

Nyla sat up quickly, pulling Eliani’s head up and covering her full lips with her own. Both of them groaned in passion and need as Nyla plunged her tongue between Eliani’s lips to do battle with her own talented appendage. It was a battle that Eliani let Nyla win for she melted against her lover’s body almost immediately.

Nyla pulled her head back and stared into Eliani’s beautiful fern green eyes. “Now... now it’s your turn to ache my love!” She gasped using her vampire speed and strength to roll them over faster than Eliani could respond, her head descending to Eliani’s large breasts and engulfing one of her stiff nipples completely within her lips.

Eliani’s wolf eyes were smiling in love and passion, the black band encircling the fern green cornea and her long wolf fangs extending out. Her hands dropped to Nyla’s head as her lover’s lips and tongue sent tingles shooting through her body. Eliani gripped her head tighter, the need too much.

“Don’t... don’t tease me Nyla!” She almost shouted. “I... I want your lips on me now!”

Nyla smiled as she lifted her head, releasing Eliani’s rock hard nipple a single strand of salvia joining her lips to the hard nub for a few seconds.

“Beg me!” Nyla demanded.

“Please... please my love!” Eliani gasped again. “Don’t...”

“Beg me Eliani!” Nyla snapped with a smile, her vampire fangs exposed and her cobalt eyes bright.

“Yes... damn you!” Eliani barked. “Please... taste me! I want... I want your lips on me...! I’ll... I’ll do anything Nyla my love! Just don’t... don’t make me wait!”

“Anything *Ussta Che*?” Nyla demanded in a husky voice.

“Anything... anything... just... I need to come! Please Nyla...”

Nyla suckled Eliani’s nipple once more. “Then I shall give you what you so desire *Ussta Che*.” Nyla spoke softly.

Eliani’s fingers entwined in her golden hair as Nyla lowered herself to a comfortable position between Eliani’s wide stretched thighs. She stared lovingly at Eliani’s sweet pussy, so wet and fully open like the petals of a flower. The lips of her labia were moist and her clit fully unhooded and standing at attention begging for release. Nyla reached up and with the tip of her index finger she drew her nail up Eliani’s opening ever so slowly until she reached her clit and she flicked her finger lightly against the erogenous zone. Eliani’s ass rose off the bed in startled delight as the rush of pleasure swarmed through her just from that simple touch.

“Oh... oh... you vampire bitch!” Eliani hissed. “Don’t... don’t tease me!”

Nyla chuckled softly.

Never in her hundred and thirty-three years had she ever imagined the pleasures she had experienced with Eliani in this bed and others; never in all that time had she ever imagined she could find such pleasures with another woman. She knew their Mindvoice link was a part of it, but it had grown beyond that so long ago. They could make each other cry out in rapture in ways no man could ever match just with a simple caress. Nyla knew every crevice, knew every contour of her lover’s beautiful body, just as Eliani knew her every intimate curve. They were so much alike it was scary at times, and Nyla knew what they had found together was once in a lifetime, and that was why she had surrendered to it completely. She and Eliani may never find the man they both were looking for, but Nyla knew they would always have each other.

Nyla blew ever so softly across Eliani’s enflamed clit and smiled as her lover’s abdomen undulated. Her orgasm was building rapidly and Nyla knew it. They had remained with her family long into the early morning hours the night before, neither of them wanting to leave the joyous reunion. When they had finally returned to the Sparta Estate they were simply content to cling to each other as sleep took them. This night however, this night they had left Andro and Sadi with Carina and Moneus and flew back to their villa here on Tharua and Arydun. It had taken them all of two minutes to bring each other to breathe stealing orgasms even as they were falling on the bed half clothed. That had begun the last four hours of their night and Nyla was about to end it with a bang.

She brought her lips lower to Eliani’s sweet bald pussy, brushing her lips against the sugary tasting outer labia, as it was saturated with Eliani’s nectar already. She flicked her tongue out to trace the inner folds of her lover’s pussy, pressing her face closer and inhaling the sweet musky aroma of Eliani’s passion. Ever so slowly she moved closer to that hard nub, tasting and teasing, until finally she opened her mouth wide, her vampire fangs extended and she bit down into Eliani’s flesh just above that raging clit just as her tongue stabbed out and battered her stiff clit furiously. As Eliani’s blood splashed across her taste buds Nyla shuddered in her own powerful orgasm, grinding her pussy down into the sheets of their bed even as she drew Eliani’s hips tighter to her face and fastened her lips over her lover’s spasming pussy. She felt Eliani’s pussy clenched powerfully before her belly convulsed and her delicious come erupted from her opening, flooding Nyla’s mouth with nectar almost as sweet as Eliani’s blood. Her lover’s back arched off the bed, driving her humping pussy against Nyla’s lips and tongue, her hands tearing at the bed sheets as her scream echoed off the walls of their room.

And Nyla fed from the most delectable fountain she would ever taste.

As Eliani’s body collapsed back onto the bed shuddering in the aftermath of her orgasm, Nyla quickly withdrew her fangs and used her tongue to lovingly sweep across the two puncture holes sealing them immediately. Her lips remained fastened around Eliani’s still spasming pussy for almost another full minute until the most powerful ripples left her and her hips stopped undulating against her lapping tongue. Nyla left no drop unclaimed and spent several seconds simply lapping up all of Eliani’s juices as she could before lifting her lips reluctantly and slowly kissing her way up Eliani’s heaving abdomen. She dragged her tongue along the deep valley between Eliani’s large breasts before positioning her face over Eliani’s.

“*Yah... dos tyav ssuorr!*” Nyla uttered softly. (God... you taste delicious.)

Eliani’s half open eyes glittered in love and her lips broke into a wide smile as she reached up and brought Nyla’s lips down to hers and they shared a blistering kiss of love, passion and commitment, neither of them caring in the least that they could taste each other on their lips.

“You... you taste better.” Eliani stammered as they broke their kiss and Nyla lowered her body on top of Eliani’s and they pulled each other close.

“This is only a standard personal file *Aur Enyla*.” Eliani spoke as Nyla walked back into their bedroom carrying two glasses. (My Love)

They had slept for nearly six straight hours curled in each other’s arms before waking to the rising sun on their flesh. Nyla had thrown a thin robe on quickly as she went to their kitchen and retrieved a glass of prune juice for herself and a large glass of the special fruit juice her mother Anja had developed after Isabella had joined their lives and their beds so long ago. It was a mixture of four different fruits which would speed the replenishment of the nutrients in Eliani’s blood that Nyla had taken during their loving making.

Nyla nodded as she sat on the bed and held the glass out to her. “I know. That is all I was able to obtain on such short notice *Ussta Che*.” She answered watching and waiting for Eliani to take the first gulp of her juice before drinking herself. “I’m sure his entire package will arrive soon. I have to be careful though, he has applied for a direct appointment into the *Durcunusaan* and then Mjolnir’s Hand. That sort of request will be processed rather quickly. And his actions with Andro on Eleysi Three will only add to his file.”

Eliani lowered the glass, licking her lips of the cherry like flavor. “Wait... that means he will bypass all the academic requirements.” Eliani spoke. “How did he manage that?”

Nyla shook her head. “I’m not sure. His transcripts are readily available however. He was not a very good student... barely passing to be honest. I wonder how he will deal with the academics he must face to become a *Durcunusaan*.” She said. “He excelled physically and that was his specialty.”

Eliani grinned and blushed. “Well... I can attest to the excelling physically part.” She said. “He almost matched Andro when it comes to the definition of his body, not to mention he is exceptionally well equipped.”

Nyla matched Eliani’s smile. “You copped a feel didn’t you?” She asked using one of Eliani’s own terms.

“Oh... *Aur Enyla*... it was wonderful.” Eliani said wistfully.

“Show me!” Nyla spoke quickly moving closer to Eliani and touching her forehead to Eliani’s.

Nyla shivered gently as their minds came together in that instant and then she was experiencing everything Eliani had experienced. It was a side effect of them sharing blood Helen had told them once. Nyla had taken so much of Eliani that day and because of both the strength of their own natural Mindvoice powers, it created a link between them that would never be broken. A link that would allow them to share thoughts and feelings much like Eliani’s adopted Aunts Tarifa and Aihola, though because of their more advanced Mindvoice skills, their connection was stronger and more focused. Nyla was able to see and feel everything that Eliani had that time in the gym with Malic and as she leaned back she looked at her lover.

“I feel what he did to you *Ussta Che*. The way your blood burned.” Nyla spoke. “Oh... my love it was exquisite.”

Eliani nodded slowly. “Yes... and we have never shared a man so gifted as he is.” She spoke.

Nyla smiled seductively. “No we have not.”

“I... I don’t know what it is about this man Nyla.” Eliani said. “I told you he is arrogant beyond measure. And he has distaste for vampires that I have not seen before. I don’t know why... for it is not him. Something has made him like this... I know it. And though part of me says to just let it go... that it is not worth the effort or risk... the larger part of me wants to discover why he is this way. What has caused him to hold back and not let his true self come out. It wants to discover what he could make us feel in our bed Nyla.”

Nyla took her hands. “Then let us pursue that *Ussta Che*.” She said softly. “If whatever has made him like this is something we can change within him, is it not worth the risk and the effort just by what he made you feel? And by virtue of that... made me feel? How many wolves have shared our bed in the last three years and not even tickled our fancy with their clumsy attempts at impressing us.”

Eliani rolled her eyes. “Five... no six. None of them were worth the time we allowed them to have with us. Three of them could not keep up with us to begin with... one of them wanted us to remain home and punch out children for him while he thought to make a name for himself with Andro.”

Nyla laughed. “Oh... I forgot about him. Isn’t he the one that Andro practically threw off the mountain top outside Eden City for his foolish words?”

Eliani nodded with a smile. “That was him. And the last two my father got so scared they ran like wolves with their tails between their legs.”

“*Ussta Che*... if this man does this to us and has come no where close to sharing our bed... isn't that worth some interest?” Nyla asked.

Eliani nodded. “Yes.” She answered immediately.

Nyla nodded. “We must proceed carefully. He does not strike me as the type of man who would appreciate us digging into his past... or his records. And if he feels about my kind as you say I will use added caution.”

“I will try and get grandmother to access his academic records.” Eliani spoke softly. “I will have to tell her why.”

Nyla waved her hand dismissively. “I have full confidence in Lady Gorgo. She will tell no one what it is we ask. And I believe she will help us without question.”

Eliani nodded. “I will speak with her this morning. Andro and father will be attending the briefing on the reports of the High Coven reappearing. Then he will stake his claim for Sadi this afternoon when the Senate convenes. Grandmother will want to be there for that... but I can speak with her before the meeting is over with.”

“I will get dressed and see what I can discover about Malic from Bren and Famus before I try accessing his records.” Nyla said.

Eliani took her hands. “We will do what we can and discover what we can Nyla, but no matter what... if he does not want both of us... he gets neither.”

Nyla looked at her with adoring light green eyes now. “I know that *Ussta Che*. I've always known that.”

Eliani smiled and downed her fruit juice before putting the glass on the table next to the bed. “Good.” She said taking Nyla's hand. “Then let's jump in the shower so that I can wash your body with my tongue before we leave.”

Nyla's eyes glittered. “Well... I won't refuse an offer like that.”

**EARTH OPERATIONAL COMMAND AREA
SECTOR ELEVEN
LYCAVORIAN BORDER OF THE WILDS
1.5 DAYS FROM EARTH
BORDER INTERDICTION PATROL
STRIKE GROUP *TALON*
ULU *LEONIDAS II*-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER
ULU *RAVEN'S WINGS***

The junior Lieutenant paced the huge bridge of *RAVEN'S WING*, reading intently from the data pad as he waited for his relief to come to the bridge. He enjoyed the third shift on the *RAVEN'S WINGS* as it was quiet and usually very uneventful. The *RAVEN'S WINGS* was the Command ship for this entire sector of the Earth Operational Command Area, with not only its own Strike Wing under its direction, but also twenty-one of the new *AUTUMN MOON TYPE II*-Class Attack Frigates. They were one of the largest BIPs in Earth's Operational Command Area, and as a Border Interdiction Patrol group it was their job to respond to any activity along the expanse of the Union border, no matter what it involved. The BIPs operated independently from assigned Fleet groups and First Admiral Riall had chosen all one hundred and thirty-four BIP commanders personally. The commanders were for the most part brash and reckless, yet tempered and calm. It was a rare combination in leaders, especially fleet officers, but the hundred and four men and thirty women who commanded the BIPs were all cut from the same mold.

The lieutenant turned at the sound of the sensor operator's console indicating he had a contact. He watched as the man's hands flew over his controls with precise motions and then his wide eyes turned to look at him.

“Lieutenant! Long range sensors are detecting a High Coven *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought and its accompanying Task Force on an intercept course with the border! They will reach our current location in just under six hours at their present speed!”

“A High Coven Task Force?” The man exclaimed. “Out here? Confirm that!”

“I did sir! Three times!”

“Damn!” The lieutenant spoke moving up to the man’s station. “Bring the BIP to full combat alert! Alpha status!” He stabbed down on the console. “Captain Imror to the bridge! Captain Imror to the bridge!” He looked at the screen. “Show me?”

“Here sir!” The sensor operator spoke. “They are running in a full transit pattern! No shrouds! Almost as if they want to be seen.”

“How many ships?”

“Sensors indicate thirty-nine contacts sir! A mixture of *ORIC*-Class heavy cruisers and *BLOODLETTER* Medium Cruisers. Haven’t detected any frigates yet, but more than likely they are shrouded and on the flanks of the main formation!” The sensor operator answered.

The doors to the bridge opened and Captain Imror strode confidently onto the bridge of his ship. One of his hands was filled with a mug of Queen Aricia’s coffee, while the other held two data pads. He had been on his way to the bridge when the excited call came out. Imror was not one to get excited. A single reckless and totally off the wall mission twenty-five years ago had changed him in a way that had earned him this command at the recommendation of his former commanding officer Captain Daro. He had led a small team of Spartan warriors onto a moving transport on its way to Earth, only to discover the ships were commanded by Kavalians and they were conducting a covert mission to gain the precious dragon eggs. Imror’s actions, as well as Captain Daro had earned both of them career positions that neither of them could refuse. Imror had been part of almost every space battle during the Evolli war earning decorations as well as honor and respect. His actions during that war had earned him *RAVEN’S WINGS* and he had turned down promotion to Admiral to remain in command of Border Interdiction Patrol *Talon*. He had no desire to take command of an entire Fleet Group.

“What do we have Lieutenant?” Imror barked out as he moved to his command chair almost casually.

“Captain! Long range sensors have detected a High Coven Task Force approaching the border without Shrouds.” The man spoke. “A mix of heavy and medium warships centered on a *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought!”

Imror nodded as he sipped his coffee. “The *BLOOD REVERENCE* is their newest command ship.” He spoke calmly. “Interesting. Status of the Strike Wing?”

“All ships have signaled full combat alert status Alpha.” The lieutenant replied. “The *AUTUMN MOON’S* have only just now begun reporting in!”

Imror looked at him. “Calm down Lieutenant.” He spoke with a smile. “If they intended an attack do you think they would be on an intercept course with our border without being shrouded?”

“Ah... no sir.” The Lieutenant answered.

Imror nodded. “They want something... and they want us to know they are coming so we don’t blow them out of the stars.”

“Yes sir!”

“Very well... have the Strike Wing execute BIP Plan Three Nine and maintain their Shrouds.” Imror spoke. “Maintain station right where we are Joche ... and contact Captain Panthu on the *NOMAD*. Pass what information we have so far to him and have him bring the *NOMAD* to our location and form his Strike Wing with ours.”

“Should I contact Earth Captain?” Joche asked. “Advise First Admiral Riall and the King of what is happening?”

Imror shook his head. “We don’t know what is happening Joche.” Imror answered in a calm voice. He took no offense at Joche obviously excited statement. “Admiral Riall and the King will want as much information as we are able to provide them before they make a decision. How soon before we discover the COM channel this Coven task force is using?”

The communications officer turned from her station. “I’ll need another seven minutes sir! They are using a standard Coven code... but the level of encryption is more than normal. Even with the new cipher equipment... seven minutes to be safe.”

Imror nodded easily. The new communications cipher systems allowed them to not only detect and track but also monitor almost any known communications taking place within range of their equipment depending on the level of encryption involved.

“Then let us prepare our ship for whatever may happen. We will monitor their ship to ship transmissions for a few hours and see if they continue to close on the border. If it appears that is their intent, we’ll interrupt them and let them know that is not a wise course of action.” He spoke.

“Aren’t we technically still at war with the High Coven Captain?” Joche asked.

Imror nodded. “Perhaps... however there hasn’t been a cross border incursion or even a small confrontation with the Coven in nearly twenty-five years. We’ll play it cool for now and see what our visitors have in mind. Joche... insure however that our shields and weapons are on line and prepared. We don’t want to be caught unaware.”

“Yes sir!”

**EARTH
LYCAVORIAN UNION MILITARY HQ
SPARTAN COMMAND CENTER
500 METERS BENEATH MOUNT HAGIOS**

Hagios Center.

It had been built in secret over fifteen years.

It was buried five hundred meters beneath the peak of Mount Hagios within the Taygetus Mountain range to Sparta’s west. Ten levels of reinforced steel layered with Dragon Armor and concrete. The Military Command Center for all of Earth’s Operational Command Area and whenever Martin occupied Sparta for their six month long stays. Two thousand Spartans and civilians worked within the four square kilometer underground facility, all of them ostensibly working at the medium sized secure airfield that sat at the juncture of the eastern and northern mountain ranges and was guarded by Durcunusaan troops.

The Bubble Room as they called was similar to the conference room in the Eden City Command Center. It held a massive table, with star charts and communications consoles, as well as several monitors. On the opposite side of the soundproof and very nearly indestructible transparent steel and alloy glass was the actual command and control brain of Hagios Center. Able to communicate, coordinate and control every portion of the Union military from this room, it was identical to the main Command and Control center on Apo Prime.

The table’s two dozen chairs were only half full at the moment, several pitchers of water and carafes of coffee and tea spread across the top of the gleaming polished wood top. The chairs were all black high back chairs and exceptionally comfortable. Data pads were strewn across the top of the table, the men and women present sifting through them frequently. Martin sat at the head of the table, Andro to his right while Dysea sat to his left. Aricia, Anja, Isabella and For’mya were moving about Sparta making last minute preparations for when Andro would claim Sadi this afternoon unbeknownst to their son of course. Riall and Danny were standing near one of the star charts speaking in soft whispers with Armetus while Deia was conversing with Tarifa, Walter, her deputy Prime Minister Laustinos and Panos. Martin made it a point to include Tarifa and Panos in any intelligence briefings no matter what they concerned. Tarifa was considered his sister while he treated Panos as a surrogate father as he had since the day he had arrived in Sparta so long ago. They needed to be aware of everything that took place since Sparta was considered not only the co-capital of Earth, but unofficially had become almost a second capital of the Union itself.

Deia finally turned from Panos and looked at Martin. “*Mandri*... are we sure this is High Coven related? You and Andro... you are sure about what you have felt?” (Nephew)

There were not many who knew the blood relationship between Martin and Deia and it was not spoken of openly. Deia was the sister of Martin’s grandmother and his Great Aunt. They did not speak of it unless among family and friends who knew this connection simply because it allowed Deia more freedom as Prime Minister and it did not appear that Martin was micromanaging everything she did. This would not have been the case regardless since everyone knew Martin hated politics as a general rule.

Martin waited for a moment as everyone returned to their chairs and sat down. “What do you mean *Tenna*?” (Aunt)

“There are many groups of Immortals that have broken from the High Coven in the last two decades for one reason or another. We’ve gotten reports from our agents in The Wilds about them.” Laustinos spoke from his chair next to Deia before she had a chance to answer. “Perhaps this was one of them.”

He had been Deputy Prime Minister for just over a quarter century, working closely with Deia as well as others within the government. He was considered an intelligent and handsome young wolf of eight hundred and nineteen years, but he was also considered slightly arrogant and somewhat of a pacifist. He had been recommended to Deia by Armetus shortly after the events on Enurrua for his intelligence and organizational skills since he had just finished a stint with Armetus’s Intelligence unit.

“That is unlikely.” Armetus spoke from his chair. “Those Immortals who have broken from the Coven are immediately branded traitors and have death sentences put on their heads with bounties that are quite high.” He looked at Martin. “Several of our people have witnessed Immortals being targeted by mercenaries and bounty hunters.”

“The group we whacked on Ceku Tertius was wearing Coven uniforms and they were carrying Coven weapons.” Danny said from his chair.

“Well... perhaps we should not have killed them all before we had an opportunity to question them.” Laustinos spoke firmly.

Danny looked at the man. “They were in Union Space conducting black market weapons deals on a Union planet with known Evolli mercenaries who did not surrender after the war. Evolli mercenaries who have dragged Kochab bounty hunters into their little group and are now hitting our settlements within Union space. Peaceful settlements I might add. And until you’ve gone a couple rounds with just one Immortal friend, don’t sit in that chair and tell me how to fight them! They’d have your skinny ass for an appetizer! These boys weren’t mercenary... they were regular High Coven Immortals with all the bells and whistles. And they ain’t no pushovers.”

“The prisoner Daniel took also said his group was only a smaller part of the larger force we have been hunting since the end of the war.” Riall spoke.

“We took a prisoner?” Laustinos asked his eyes wide. “Why don’t we question him?”

“We did question him.” Danny answered. “He sang like a bird until he fell out of the airlock.”

“You killed him?” Laustinos gasped.

Danny shook his head. “Not at all. I just helped him along on his path to whatever god he prayed too.” He answered with a grin.

“So you did kill him!” Laustinos snapped.

“His group took part in a raid on a Union settlement that killed over three hundred civilians.” Andro spoke now from next to his father.

“He wasn’t part of that attack.” Laustinos said.

“They are part of the same organization.” Martin spoke. “What difference does it make?”

Deia put her hand on Laustinos arm before he could stick his foot further into his mouth. “Mandri... let’s set aside this unfortunate fool who fell out of the airlock.” Deia spoke calmly seeing Danny grin out of the corner of her eye. “Why would High Coven Immortals be inside Union space purchasing T19s?”

Martin pulled his eyes from Laustinos and looked at Deia. “Dragons.” Martin spoke.

“Dragons?” Deia asked surprised. “What do you mean?”

Riall leaned forward now in his chair. “Martin... you don’t think...?”

Martin nodded. “The dragons the High Coven were able to obtain twenty three years ago.” He said. “If they were somehow able to get the eggs to hatch, then the hatchlings and those eggs that hatched are reaching the age when they could fight. Just as Elynth, Jeth, Tharua and the others do now even though they are no more than twenty-five years old. And the tremors are getting closer.”

“That would... that would imply the High Coven has Mindvoicers sufficiently strong enough to establish a bond with these dragons.” Armetus spoke gently. “We know they have purebloods that are equal in power to Thr’won perhaps... they have used them in battle before.”

Martin nodded. “I’ve never assumed they do not have men and women strong enough to bond with dragons.” He spoke softly. “Arzoal and I knew it would happen someday. We have pureblood vampires within our own ranks that have bonded with dragons. Nyla being the strongest among them.”

“That is due to her connection with Eliani isn’t it?” Riall asked.

Andro shook his head. "Nyla and Arydun had a very deep and strong connection with each other before Eliani ever entered their lives. That only became more powerful when she and Eliani found each other. The other vampire purebloods of the Durcunusaan who have bonded with dragons also have deep connections. In some instances they are the strongest of the Bonded Pairs who are not members of Mjolnir's Hand."

"The last few months Andro and I have been feeling tremors within Mindvoice." Martin spoke. "Powerful tremors that Arzoal has sensed as well. All of them from within High Coven space. The dragons they took have bonded with riders, and their combined consciousness within Mindvoice is now evident to us. We don't know how many... and the High Coven is more than likely unaware we can sense them... however the tremors are darker than what we normally feel from our brothers and sisters."

"Darker?" Deia asked. "Darker how?"

"*Tenna...*" Andro said. "The dragons within the Union... from the time they hatch they are taught to honor and respect others. To be benevolent. Violence is a last resort to them. This is what their sires and the Dragon Elders preach... and it is why with the exception of Elynth and those bonded to my siblings, no dragon is allowed to become bonded to a rider until they are at least five hundred years old. By then they have learned patience and wisdom."

"Wait a moment... I have seen Elynth fight." Deia spoke. "I've seen Torma and Isheeni fight. They are devastating. All of the Bonded Pairs are."

Dysea leaned forward now. "When a pair becomes bonded they take on some of the traits of their partner." She spoke softly. "You know that Deia."

Deia nodded. "Yes..."

"When they reach five hundred years of age they are able to blend that wisdom and patience with the more fiery nature of Spartans and Elves and even vampires. The result is a Bonded Pair. They balance each other's nature to the extent that they will always seek a peaceful resolution to any problem first... however when it comes time to fight... they will fight with the same savageness and skill as their Bonded brother or sister and they will hold nothing back."

"The dragons the High Coven was able to steal have not had the benefit of Arzoal and the Dragon Council to guide them." Martin spoke. "Which means those dragons will be different. They will not seek to solve a problem with words first... they will fight first. Just as savagely as their Bonded Rider will fight. And we know how the High Coven trains their troops."

"What does this have to do with the Immortals and T19s?" Laustinos spoke with exasperation. Talk of dragons and Mindvoice abilities always confused him.

"It's possible that they were meeting with the Evolli to purchase T19s in order to help their dragons learn to fight them." Andro replied. "It also means they are almost ready to employ them against the Kavalians in battle."

"Mandri... you said the tremors are getting closer." Deia spoke. "What do you mean by that?"

"Andro, Arzoal and I, as well as the entire Elder Council believe the High Coven is bringing those dragons here to us. They are bringing them here for us to train them." Martin spoke. "Train them to fight the Kavalians."

Deia sat back quickly at this news. "Oh my." She spoke softly.

Martin nodded. "Yes... now you see the quandary. The Evolli scum were only the first level of what is going on. However... I believe their attack on Eleysi Three is an entirely different animal."

Armetus looked at him. "You believe the Queens were the target Milord?" He spoke.

Martin nodded. "I've been playing this over and over in my head and nothing else makes sense. The colony was still relatively new... and they could not have sold the ore being mined on any black market without it being refined first. In order to refine it you need the facilities for that which they don't have access to."

"That we know of Skipper." Danny spoke up.

Martin nodded. "That we know of." He spoke. "But aside from some medical supplies and personal wealth... why attack the settlement? Unless you wanted to draw someone there."

"But Eleysi Three is part of Earth's jurisdiction." Riall spoke. "Once they received word of the attack, Isra would have responded, not Andro and the Queens."

Martin nodded. "Until you factor in the time of the attack and the deal on Ceku Tertius." He said. "These Evolli and Kochab were part of the same group. They..."

“We don’t know that for sure!” Laustinos interrupted quickly. “We...” His words were cut off by Deia’s hand on his arm once more.

“The attack on Eleysi Three was timed perfectly to coincide with the weapons deal on Ceku Tertius.” Martin said again ignoring Laustinos. “I believe they knew exactly how long a message would take to reach Earth...”

Armetus nodded. “The same time the Queens would have been passing through the same sector.” He said as his mind kicked in.

“They only had two T19 missile teams.” Andro said next. “They did not expect five Bonded Pairs to descend on them. They were expecting only two. And with my mothers passing through the same sector at the time of the emergency beacon sending out its automated signal... they would have responded as if it was a rescue mission.”

“Man... that is reaching Marty.” Danny said. “I’m not discounting it... but that’s a stretch even for us to make. Targeting Aricia and Anja? That’s not small potatoes.”

“You have not told *Melyanna* and Aricia about your feelings *Nauta Melme*.” Dysea spoke softly. “Why?”

Martin met her emerald eyes. “I don’t want them to be concerned about it *Melda Min*. Andro did the right thing telling them it was only a possibility... and a slim one at that. Until we know for sure they were *not* the targets... I’m not willing to increase their security regardless of what I think. They’d have my *nor* if I did that and didn’t tell them why. I wanted you to know just in case information comes in and I’m not around.”

Dysea nodded. “I will keep my eyes open when we are together then.” She said softly, resting her hand on his arm.

Though no one would ever speak of it openly, it was rumored that behind Aricia, his first elven Queen Dysea was his most favored Queen. You could not tell with the way he treated all of them in public and private, but many who were close to the King and knew how his mind worked agreed on that one fact. Dysea had been beside him the longest in terms of time together and unbeknownst to all but a few, Dysea was the only one of his Queens besides Aricia that could tolerate the full unshielded force of his alpha wolf aura and not become helpless before him. Martin knew how far he could push each of his Queens with his aura and over the years he had refined that to an art, knowing just how much to use to excite and arouse them just to the edge.

Martin nodded and looked at Danny. “I know it’s a reach Danny. That is why we need Anton and Cihera to go to Talbor Seven... meet with this middle man... and find out who contacted him. Then pursue it as far as that trail will take them.”

Dan nodded. “They are waiting outside with Lynwe.” He spoke.

Martin nodded and looked at Deia. “*Tenna*?”

Deia was silent for a moment and then nodded her head and met his eyes evenly. “I believe this information in regards to the High Coven and their dragons is the more disturbing of the two items we have discussed, however I will not tolerate a threat or an attempt on our Queens in any way.” She spoke. “I assume you are proceeding with this operation under the eye of Armetus?”

Martin nodded. “He’ll be the contact for Anton and Cihera but you know I’ll never leave you out of the loop on any operation we conduct in The Wilds.”

“Shouldn’t we discuss this more?” Laustinos said quickly. “Bring in others to review the information we have and *then* make a decision? If I’m not mistaken the last time we conducted an operation in The Wilds without guidance from this office we angered three different allies with Prince Andro’s ... with his response to what was discovered. Isn’t it... isn’t it just prudent to at least have a contact within the Prime Minister’s office aware of what is going on?”

Martin was about to reply when Armetus nodded. “I will not object to that.” He spoke quickly. “This is a simple intelligence gathering mission sire... and we don’t expect for Anton and Cihera to have any problems.”

Deia nodded as well. “I have too much on my plate to be active with this. If Armetus is fine with it... then Laustinos can be our contact.”

Martin nodded. “That works for me. That is up to you Armetus. If you are good with it... then I have no issues with it.”

Laustinos smiled. “May I meet those who will be going on the mission then?”

Armetus nodded and got to his feet. "I'll even do you one better. You can sit in on the briefing with General Simpson, General Lynwe and I."

Laustinos got to his feet quickly. "Excellent." He turned to Martin and bowed his head quickly. "Milord..." His eyes cut to Dysea and he bowed his head even lower though never breaking eye contact with her as Martin turned to say something to Andro. He stared at her with want and lust in his eyes. "Milady Dysea... if you'll excuse me?"

Dysea nodded her head quickly and turned to Martin, leaning over and nuzzling his cheek. Laustinos tore his eyes from her and headed out of the room following Danny and Armetus.

"*Mandri...*" Deia asked. "Now that Laustinos is gone... and you and Armetus planned and executed that very well by the way. I don't believe he suspects anything at all." She said with a smile.

"That *was* very smooth father." Andro said with a grin.

"He's not a bad sort." Riall spoke moving down several chairs at the table. "He is just young and inexperienced in the way of things. He believes everything needs to be debated and decided by men who have never fired a weapon in anger in their entire lives."

Deia smiled knowingly. "Yes... well now that he is otherwise occupied perhaps you could elaborate on why you believe the High Coven is coming here." Deia spoke.

Martin looked at her. "I don't *believe Tenna.*" He spoke softly.

Dysea looked at her now. "They are almost here Deia." She said finishing Martin's statement and seeing Deia's eyes go wide.

"Are... are you sure?" She gasped.

Martin nodded. "Oh yeah."

EARTH OPERATIONAL COMMAND AREA
SECTOR ELEVEN
LYCAVORIAN BORDER OF THE WILDS
1.5 DAYS FROM EARTH
BORDER INTERDICTION PATROL
STRIKE GROUP TALON
ULU *LEONIDAS II*-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER
ULU *RAVEN'S WINGS*

"Their base course has not changed Captain!" Joche barked out. "Thirty-nine minutes from border crossing."

Imror turned from his chair. "Is the NOMAD and their Wing in position?" He asked.

"Yes sir."

"Status of weapons and shields?"

"Shields are online and reading green!" Joche replied. "Weapons are standing by!"

"The Coven ships?" Imror asked.

"Sensors indicate no weapons are powered up sir, however their shields are up and powered."

Imror nodded. "Yes... well you are lurking about and do not know what is going to hit you that is the wise thing to do." He turned to the opposite side of his bridge. "Weapons... how long before they are in range?"

"They will reach maximum Mark 22B range in six minutes sir!"

"Good. I want two squadrons of T9Es ready to launch to provide fighter cover!" Imror barked. "Have all the M4B *DEVASTATORS* ready to launch with full loads! Relay the same orders to the NOMAD! Our remaining T9Es are to remain on standby for immediate follow on missions!"

"Yes sir!"

"Stand by people! We will find out what they want in seven minutes! Once we have them in kill range."

***BLOOD REVERENCE*-CLASS DREADNOUGHT**

INQUISITOR

“...know we are coming Robert.” Yuri spoke softly to Moran.

Moran looked at her from his command chair, Yuri standing close to the arm of the chair, her hand resting casually on his arm. “Are you sure?”

Yuri nodded. “My mother and I have felt tremors within Mindvoice.” She answered. “Our dragons have not learned to conceal their Mindvoice signature as the dragons within the Union have. Leonidas and his son have undoubtedly felt the tremors. There could be others that are strong enough as well. She has detected at least five on Earth that are powerful enough to sense Vollenh and the others.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing Yuri?” Moran asked.

Yuri smiled and squeezed his arm affectionately. “It means they will be curious enough to find out what we want before they launch an attack against us.”

Moran looked at her for a long moment. “Was it a mistake to come out here with only part of a Strike Group?” He asked. “We only have thirty-nine ships, and the reason we came here is because we know they will be on Earth. That does mean however, they will have at minimum three entire Fleet Groups to bring to bear on us.”

Yuri shook her head. “They will not attack first.” She spoke. “They will be curious as to why we are here no doubt. But they...”

“Admiral!” The communications officer barked as he spun around. “Admiral we are being hailed by a Lycavorian warship on our own secure channel!”

Moran came to his feet quickly. “Shit! They tapped our COMs! Execute random frequency shifts immediately! Go to Level Ten Encryption! Inform all ships!” Moran turned to Yuri. “We had no idea they could tap our communications Yuri!”

“You said yourself that we would be fools to believe they have not developed new tactics and technology. This appears to be one of them.” Yuri spoke calmly but with a smile as she detected her husband’s heightened battle awareness. “We are not here for battle Robert.”

Moran took a deep breath and nodded. “You’re right.” He spoke. “At least not yet.” He turned to his COM officer. “Patch the transmission to the main holo disc here on the bridge. And inform the Empress of what is happening and request her presence on the bridge.”

“Redirecting transmission Admiral.”

The Holo disc in the center of the bridge in front of Moran’s command chair shimmered to life revealing the face of the stern looking Lycavorian Spartan. He looked surprisingly calm and in control, his dark eyes bright.

“...Imror of the United Lycavorian Union warship *RAVEN’S WINGS* to the unknown High Coven Group. You are approaching the Lycavorian Union Border on an unauthorized approach corridor. You will state your intentions immediately or I will order my ships to open fire and destroy you.”

Moran snorted. “You and what army sport.” He spat drawing chuckles from his bridge crew.

Yuri touched his arm. “Do not dismiss his words Robert. I have seen enough tricks by Martin Leonidas to know better. He is not alone.”

Moran smiled and laughed at himself. “I just about fell into the trap we have been telling our sons not too.” He said taking a deep breath. He looked at his COM officer. “Let him see us.”

“Transmission active on both ends sir!”

Moran watched as the Lycavorian officer’s eyes lifted somewhat but his face remained stoic. “Well... Supreme Commander of High Coven Military Forces Admiral Robert Moran.” Imror spoke evenly. “I must say... this is a surprise.”

“Captain Imror... you are...” Moran started.

“I have no time for small talk Admiral Moran.” Imror stated. “Your ships are less than thirty minutes from crossing our border. Please state your intentions to me immediately or I will order my forces to open fire.” He turned to someone out of the transmission field. “Drop the Shroud!”

Moran turned his head slightly as his sensor operator’s eyes grew wide. “*Vith* me! Admiral... a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser has de-shrouded directly ahead! On their side of the border! Admiral... Admiral it matches the *INQUISITOR* in size and if sensors are accurate firepower as well!”

Moran looked at Yuri. "They must have more of them than we thought if one is patrolling the border." He spoke in barely a whisper. "Or it's a Sector Command ship."

Yuri nodded. "Yes... which means there are other ships still out there hidden from our sensors."

"I will not state my request again Admiral Moran. We have detected your sensor sweeps of my ship. Now please comply with my request." Imror spoke once more.

Moran turned back to the transmission. "You do realize I have you outnumbered." He spoke quickly.

Imror tilted his head. "Would you care for me to engrave that on your tombstone Admiral Moran?" He asked.

"You're an insubordinate sonofabitch!" Moran barked out. "Don't they teach respect to superior officers in the Union anymore?"

Imror chuckled within the transmission his gaze unwavering. "You are not my superior officer Admiral Moran. You are the Supreme Commander to High Coven forces, and while we have not fought an engagement in nearly twenty-five years, we are not friends nor allies in any shape or form. You are about to cross the Union border without an invitation... and if that happens I will bring to an end twenty-five years of no conflict between us by blowing you and your task force out of the stars! Am I making myself quite clear enough to your vampire ears?"

"We have made no threatening moves!" Yuri spoke now. "And we have not yet crossed your border Captain! You would do well to remember that."

"You'll forgive me if your words do not provide me any comfort Princess Yuri." Imror spoke.

"You know who I am?" Yuri asked.

"There are few who don't." Imror answered. "I believe the King refers to you as a back stabbing, blood sucking *nubous* black hearted bitch if I'm not mistaken." He said with some amusement. "I believe that is one of the phrases he has uttered over the years in regards to you. Now... I will state my question again only one more time. You will please advise me what your intentions are for I know you are not out here sightseeing. If you do not wish to answer that is also quite acceptable. At that time I will end this transmission, re-shroud my ship and the moment that you so much as fart across our border I will destroy you all."

"That will not be necessary Captain." Aikiro's voice spoke now as she entered the bridge and moved up to stand next to Robert and Yuri. "We are not here to do battle. We are here to talk."

Imror's face showed surprise now and he got to his feet slowly. "Well dip me in *sibfla* and call me stinky." Imror blurted the phrase that Queen Anja had stared during the Evolli War aboard her ship. A phrase that had spread quickly throughout the entire Lycavorian Fleet over the course of the next year. "The Empress of the Vampire High Coven." Imror couldn't help but notice the many turned heads on his bridge at this news. "Now I am impressed."

"You know my face?" Aikiro asked slightly taken aback. That changed quickly. "Ah... my son has told you many things I would imagine."

"Colonel Vonis has told us enough." Imror answered stoically.

"Colonel Vonis?" Aikiro spoke in a softer voice now as surprise showed on her face this time. "Colonel Vonis? How quaint."

"Why are you here?" Imror demanded. "Or are you out enjoying the cold of space just for fun?"

"We demand..." Aikiro began speaking but caught herself quickly. "We wish to have a diplomatic conference with your King Captain Imror. *Ol uriu ulu xun xuil tagnik'zun.*" (It has to do with dragons.) She said switching to the ancient vampire language.

"*udtila ol nin?*" Imror replied watching Aikiro's eyes go wide at his fluency in their vampire tongue. Imror chuckled at her expression. "My mate is a Drow elf Empress. One of those subjected to your daughter's many perverted experiments when she ruled this planet. She has taught me many things, including your language. She is onboard right now... would you like to talk with her? Or your daughter perhaps? I'm sure she would be happy to speak with you." (Does it now?)

"We will not cross the border Captain." Aikiro spoke maintaining her composure. "I ask that you relay our request to your King as quickly as possible. The information we have to share with him concerns the Kavalians and plans to attack the Union. He might find that important enough to grant us an audience."

Imror stared at her within the transmission for a long moment. "We shall see." He spoke. "You will hold position before you cross our border. Understand this... if one centimeter of any of your ships crosses the

border before I contact you back I will blow you and all your ships straight to *Jorbhe!*” Imror hissed. “Is that clear enough for you?” (Hell)

“Quite to the point Captain.” Aikiro spoke calmly.

“Stand by on this channel! *RAVEN’S WINGS* out!”

“Well... that went better than expected.” Aikiro spoke with a small smile.

“Mother we can...” Yuri began speaking.

Aikiro shook her head and reached out to touch Moran’s arm while taking Yuri’s hand in hers. “No... he is quite confident... and what does that tell you Robert?”

Moran smiled and touched the arm of his command chair. “Tesand?” He spoke.

Tesand’s voice answered clearly and immediately. “They’ve definitely improved the quality of their Shrouds Robert.” His voice answered calmly. “Microfraction pulses at less than a quarter of a percent. Phased variance point one three. We can’t lock them completely... but based on the scans we got as that ship de-shrouded... I’d have to estimate at least another forty to fifty ships are out there. All Shrouded... and all of them waiting to pounce.”

Moran turned back to Aikiro and saw her eyes and Yuri’s eyes with surprise in them. “Tesand has over four thousand years of experience operating and detecting shrouded ships. He offered to be the one to operate the sensors from the astrometric bay when we first made contact.” He explained to them with a smile once more. “Can’t get much more accurate than that now can we.”

“Indeed we can’t.” Aikiro spoke.

“I expect we will hear back something within the next hour or so.” Moran said. “Can I interest you ladies in some breakfast while we wait?”

Aikiro couldn’t help but chuckle. “Oh daughter...” She spoke turning and taking Moran’s arm. “The more time I spend around your husband... the more his devious mind impresses me.”

Yuri grinned as she took Robert’s hand. “Yes... he never ceases to impress me.” She spoke as they headed for Moran’s small office off the bridge.

SPARTA

INDOOR SPARTAN SENATE CHAMBERS

Andro looked at himself in the floor length mirror wearing the polished near blinding cuirass bronze armored chest plate and greaves. The gauntlets covered his forearms while leaving his arms bare up to his shoulders. The cuirass chest armor sparkled in the light of the room, and he reached up to allow his fingers to caress several dents in the chest plate. The sandals felt odd on his feet, the short mesh skirt leaving most of his powerful legs bare as well. The scabbard for the ancient Xiphos rested along his right side; while the ancient crimson cloak or Chiton dropped far enough from his shoulders that the edges touched the floor.

Andro turned his head when the door to his left slid open and Panos walked in with his grandmother. Gorgo’s face was beaming as she saw him and her hands came up to cover her mouth, Panos’s eyes were simply filled with pride.

“Now there walks a true Spartan.” He spoke softly with a smile before moving right up to Andro and reaching out to adjust something on his shoulder.

Andro looked at Gorgo as she stepped closer. “This is... this is grandfather’s armor?” He asked with awe in his voice.

Gorgo nodded and her eyes were moist as she reached up to straighten the Chiton. “This is his second set of armor.” She replied. “Panos and the others have kept it... cared for it all these years. Leonidas... your grandfather... he wore it into battle many times. Your father wore this when he presented himself to claim all your mothers.”

Panos stepped back and looked at him. “The Xiphos was retrieved from Thermopylae... and this...” He turned and took the spear from where it leaned against the wall by the mirror. “This was discovered resting on your grandfather’s monument ten years before the Great Comet came. It is his spear. The markings chipped into the shaft indicate how many enemies he brought down with it as was the custom back then. The crimson and gold rings were his mark. Whoever left this at the monument knew what they had... and they cared for it for

centuries.” He held out the spear for Andro to take. “Your father told me the day he brought your namesake home to Sparta he would act in his stead as my son. And he has done that without fail. We may not be related by blood Androcles Leonidas... but you have carried my son’s name all these years... and you have lived up to his legacy without fail. That is something I can never repay you for.”

“You do not need...” Andro began.

“Andro hush!” Gorgo spoke quickly. “Spartan men were not allowed to show emotion back then and this is Panos’s way of acting that out. His words are heartfelt.”

Andro met Panos’s eyes and nodded his head. “I am honored.” He said softly.

Panos stared at him for a long moment and nodded. “You and your father would have made formidable Spartans in my youth young Androcles. Now... in this day... you are both more than formidable. You are a force of nature my boy... never forget that.”

“I won’t.” Andro said.

They turned as the door opened once more and Moneus walked in dressed very similar to Andro with blinding bronze cuirass and helmet. Melancton walked beside him a look of pure happiness on his face.

“We are ready.” Melancton exclaimed. Danny’s father was just as monstrous as his son, towering over them in his own ancient armor that shone in the light. “Twenty-three years I have waited to wear this armor again! Since the day Daniel took Anuk and Nayeca. Now the first of my grandsons will honor me as their father did!”

Panos and Gorgo laughed at the pride spilling from the grizzled Spartan’s face. “Just remember not to drink so much Spartan wine at the celebration afterwards.” Panos spoke elbowing the large man. “Your mate will cut you off at the knees.”

Melancton laughed heartily. “Yes... she has already warned me about that.”

Moneus stepped up to Andro. “Do you believe they actually wore this stuff in battle?” He asked trying to adjust the armor on his shoulder.

Andro chuckled. “Something tells me Carina is not going to be looking at the armor my friend.”

“Do you think she suspects?” Moneus asked.

Gorgo shook her head. “Trust me Moneus... she has no idea. She only thinks you are standing as Andro’s second.”

Moneus’s eyes got bigger. “What... what if she doesn’t...”

Andro hit him in the shoulder with the face of the shield as he picked it up. “Don’t even go there.” He spoke. “She has been waiting for this day just as long as you Moneus. She just doesn’t know it’s going to happen today.”

Gorgo chuckled. “Neither does your father or your mother Isabella. You and your mothers and siblings have done an amazing job of not telling anyone about this all the while acting as normal as can be.” She said. “I am going to treasure the looks on their faces.”

Panos looked at Melancton and nodded. “It’s time.”

“Isn’t it unusual for the entire Royal family to be here L’tian?” Vorilas leaned close to L’tian and asked softly even as his eyes took in the entire group of older Prince and Princesses sitting in a separate gallery next to theirs. The Princes wore their full uniforms while Eliani, Carina, Lisisa, Normya and Zarah wore similar gowns that hugged their bodies in all the right places. Nyla sat next to Eliani, her parents behind them.

The chamber had been enlarged considerably from when Martin first stood here, and now Torma, Isheeni, Iriral, Aurith and Miath rested comfortably on the ground just to the right of the chair of their bonded mates, while Jeth, Tharua, Aradace, Arydun and Cemath sat to the left of the gallery with all the Leonidas children. Mara and the smaller hatchlings were bouncing back and forth between their older sibling’s backs.

For’mya’s father smiled and shook his head. “When they begin their six months stays here, the King and Queens’s demand that all of them attend at least one meeting of the Senate as a family. It just so happens they usually attend the first one so they can get it over with. Young ones will be young ones Vorilas... you know this.”

Vorilas nodded. “Indeed I do.” He said as Sadi poked him in the ribs from her seat next to him.

Sadi was wearing a skin tight white dress that fell to just above her knees. The dress left her shoulders bare and had a choker collar. The dress plunged downward between her full breasts with only a thin satin tie keeping the sides of the dress together in a laced fashion that left little to the imagination. It was tied tightly across her abdomen and then once more became laced together just below her groin and extending to the bottom of the dress. She had only been able to sneak a few hours with Andro over the course of the last two days and her blood was calling out for him in a way that made her shudder in want. He was actually the one who bought this dress for her telling her he was going to enjoy unwrapping his new mate when the time came.

“Papa... behave.” Sadi hissed softly. “It is almost over with.”

Vorilas smiled at her and his eyes fell on where Arrarn sat next to Normya and Zarah and was trading soft whispers with them. He leaned back over to L'tian. “You will not give me an idea of who sent this message to me that he would claim my daughter today L'tian?”

L'tian shrugged. “I don't know Vorilas. I received the same message you did and was asked only to insure that you were present with your daughter.”

Vorilas shook his head slowly. “She has been through much L'tian.” He spoke in a whisper. “I have discovered most of it through the years. What my former mate forced her to do. She deserves happiness in her life. I truly hope this young male wolf that is going to present himself does so quickly. I want to insure he is good enough for my daughter.”

L'tian began to reply but Dilios banging the gavel on the podium brought everyone's attention back to him. “Very well... the Senate has approved with the King's recommendation and blessing the building of a museum at Thermopylae that will chronicle the history of ancient Sparta as well as all of Earth.” Dilios turned to look at Martin. “We thank you for the honor King Leonidas.”

“If I didn't... I would have had five females chewing my ears off for the next six months.” Martin answered with a grin. “That is a battle even I can't win.” Laughter filtered through the galleries as everyone saw both Aricia and Anja stick their elbows in Martin's ribs from either side. Martin met Dilios's eyes. “I'm sure my father would be proud to see a museum built next to where he rests. And when we hold our graduation ceremonies there every year others can see what history Earth has. You honor his memory...” Martin let his eyes wander over the gathered seats of Senators. “All of you honor his memory... and for that I thank you.”

Dilios nodded. “Very well... on to the last point of business we have to view.” He turned to the back of the chamber. “Senior Durcunusaan Commander Bren if you would please allow the Honor Guard to enter now.”

All heads turned to the back of the large chamber as Bren, in full Durcunusaan armor moved to the door and assisted as two other Spartans pulled open the two large and extremely old doors. Everyone could hear the gasps as standing behind those doors were nearly two dozen men outfitted in the ancient armor of Spartan warriors and it shone like beacons off the sunlight entering through the top of the chamber. At the rear of the two files stood Andro and Moneus, Elynth standing beside her bonded brother in glimmering full Dragon Armor. The layers of contoured silver Dragon armor covered all her exposed scales all the way up to the back of her large head which was encased in a glimmering helmet made especially for her. Men and women alike were rising to their feet as the two files marched into the room in perfect unison, their ancient spears banging on the tile and steel floor loudly, only their eyes showing behind those bronze helmets.

Vorilas watched with wide eyes as the Spartans marched directly in front of his gallery and stopped, all of them turning inward in crisp movements as the two other Spartans dressed in the ancient armor moved forward, the huge dragon behind them. He was so enraptured with the display he didn't see his daughter's eyes following only one Spartan with an adoring love very evident in them.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[Be calm both of you!]* Elynth's voice filled both Andro's and Moneus's minds. *[Your hearts are racing faster than your feet are moving.]*

[Thank you for reminding us sister!] Andro barked.

[Yeah... I'm already nervous enough as it is.] Moneus echoed.

Elynth's soothing laughter filled their heads and caused them to relax more as they walked. *[Two of the proudest and finest the Union has... and you are reduced to nervous babies in the face of two females.]*

[Careful sister...] Andro spoke glancing up at her head as they walked. *[I might forget to take your armor off when this is all done.]*

[Andro you wouldn't... you know how I hate wearing this metal skin.] She exclaimed.

[Then please don't make fun of us when we are about to pee in our pants.] Moneus spoke.

Elynth snorted loudly in laughter which caused many of the gathered Senators to grin for they had seen it before.

Vorilas watched as they two Spartans stopped in front of their gallery on the other side of the long file of Spartans. He leaned closer to L'tian. "Who are they?" He asked.

"The one on the right is the second born son of Daniel Simpson. His name is Moneus." L'tian replied. "He is acting as Second today."

"Forgive me L'tian." Vorilas whispered. "I am not as familiar with the ancient Spartan customs as this is only my first trip here. Something which I will rectify as much as possible while I am here however. What do you mean... acting as Second?"

"In ancient Sparta a practice began among just the Lycavorian people who lived here some hundred and fifty years after the death of Martin's father. When a young male wolf wanted to take a female he fancied as his mate and she was in agreement, he would present himself to the young female's father to ask for his blessing on the union and to bestow a gift to her father. In recognition as the one who brought his future mate into this life. That young wolf always had a Second... a true Spartan friend who was not of his blood. A friend who had stood beside him in battle and forged a bond of life and death and a friend who swore to protect over his young mate and bride when he was away at battle." L'tian explained. "Moneus is acting as Second today."

"Second for who?" Vorilas spoke.

L'tian shook his head. "Watch..."

Dilios had stepped down from the podium now and stood in front of Andro and Moneus. "Who presents themselves to the company of this Honored Gathering?" He spoke in a loud voice.

"I am Moneus Simpson! Son of Daniel and Nayeca Simpson! I act as Second on this day!" Moneus barked.

I am Elynth, daughter of Torma and Isheeni, Bonded Sister to Androcles Leonidas.

L'tian leaned closer to Vorilas. "I am Elynth, daughter of Torma and Isheeni, Bonded sister to Androcles Leonidas." He spoke softly knowing that Vorilas could not Mindvoice on such a level.

L'tian smiled when Vorilas's eyes grew wide in shock and he opened his mouth to speak but was drowned out by the next words.

"I am Androcles Leonidas, Crown Prince of our Union, and I wish to make my claim before the eyes of the Spartan Senate as is the custom of our people from long ago!" Androcles bellowed. "In the manner of my father."

Dilios turned. "Does the Senate recognize Crown Prince Androcles?"

"*We do!*" Over a hundred voices chimed in unison.

"You may proceed Prince Androcles!" Dilios spoke.

Vorilas stepped back slightly when the file of Spartans in front of him parted like a door and he was gazing at the tall muscular young man with blazing blue eyes. He glanced back at Sadi who was holding her hands over her mouth with tears streaming down her face. The loud clap brought his head back around quickly as Andro stepped up in front of him and slammed his spear into the floor. Vorilas's eyes grew even wider when Elynth's head appeared directly over Andro's right shoulder, her golden eyes staring at Sadi. L'tian stepped to the side a little and reached for Sadi's hand bringing her down to stand beside her father.

"Governor Vorilas... I am Androcles Leonidas... and I present myself to you." Andro reached up and removed his helmet handing it to Moneus before dropping to one knee in front of Vorilas.

Vorilas shook his head quickly as the prince of The Lycavorian Union knelt before him. He made to usher him back to his feet clearly flustered at such a display from a member of the Royal family but L'tian gently pushed his hands back.

"I... I have loved your daughter since I was eight months old sir." Andro began speaking as his eyes went to Sadi. "I have dreamed of no one but her all of my life. Her scent fills my being and my every waking breath. There is no price to be placed on my love for her or what she makes me feel, so I offer this to you instead, as a show of my respect and thanks to you and her mother, who now resides in the heavens with my grandfather, for bringing her into this world and bringing her to me." Andro stood back up and held out the data pad. "I pass this to you to show you that material items mean nothing to me. Only the hand of your daughter and your blessing in our union."

Vorilas looked at Sadi now, her jungle green eyes gazing at him expectantly. "This is... this is the man you have waited for?" He gasped. "The one you have told me..."

"Yes... yes Papa... this is him." She replied softly.

Vorilas turned back to Andro and looked at the data pad, his eyes nearly exploding out of their sockets. He glanced up quickly. "This is..."

Andro smiled. "Yes sir."

"Milord... do you understand what you are..." Vorilas began speaking. "This..."

"Means nothing to me sir." Andro spoke. He looked at Sadi. "Your daughter is all I care about."

Sadi stepped closer to her father now and poked him in the back causing others who saw this to chuckle. "Papa?"

Vorilas turned to look at her. "Sadi... this is what you want as well?" He asked.

"It is Papa... it is. So very much." Sadi answered without the slightest hesitation in her voice.

Vorilas stared at her for a moment longer and turned back to Androcles. "Then my... my blessing you will have Prince Androcles." He spoke confidently. "I will donate the proceeds from this every year into your mother's fund for the poor in The Wilds... matching what you have shown me this day. And showing you that my daughter's happiness is all that concerns me."

"That has never been in question sir." Andro spoke with a smile. He turned to look at Sadi. "*KertaGai*... there is a rare metal substance known as Rhodium. Mining caused this precious metal to disappear from Earth many hundreds of years ago, which if my knowledge is correct was the only planet it was found on. It was a silvery white in color and used in many practices... one of which was jewelry. It was considered nearly indestructible and was electroplated onto the white gold found here on Earth symbolizing long life and the strength of a commitment to another." Andro turned to Moneus and took the small velvet covered box. He turned back to Sadi. "I searched long and hard for this metal because to me it symbolizes what I feel for you. I finally discovered a small vein of it on Malockti Six." This information caused many heads to turn and people to murmur among themselves. Andro opened the box and with shaking hands he withdrew the glittering white gold metal necklace. It reflected the sunlight no matter what direction he held it and was separated into five different sections held together by Rhodium weaved strands of silver and platinum. Sadi's eyes were wide as she watched him hold it up and step closer to her, fastening it around her slim neck. "Know this Sadi Leonidas, daughter of Vorilas, like Rhodium... my love for you is indestructible and will never fade into oblivion no matter the number of years that pass us by."

Andro stepped back as he finished fastening the necklace and watched as she ran her fingers over the smooth polished surface as it rested in the valley between her breasts.

"Andro... Andro..." Sadi's eyes were filled with tears.

Andro turned and looked at his father and mothers. "Mothers!" He bellowed. "Can I kiss her now?"

Aricia was too choked up to answer as she clung to Martin's side, the rest of them with tears in their eyes and trying very hard not lose it as she had. Martin chuckled as the laughter echoed in the chamber from Andro's question.

"Kiss her boy! And let's get the party started!" Martin shouted causing even more laughter to erupt from the gallery.

Andro looked back at Sadi and saw L'tian moving to open the small thigh high door so that she could leave the gallery. Andro simply stepped forward and lifted Sadi into his arms bringing his lips down on hers as her arms wrapped around his head and cheers erupted from the Senators and visitors in the galleries within the chamber. The trumpeting roars of nine dragons deafened everything else as Andro spun Sadi in circles in his arms until they were back in the center of the chamber and he set her down. He pressed his forehead to hers and wiped the tears from her cheeks.

"This night *KertaGai*." He said softly. "This night I will make you mine. In every way your mind can possibly imagine."

Sadi laughed and squeezed his arms as she pressed her body closer to his. "I... I have a pretty good imagination my love." She spoke.

Andro kissed her softly inhaling of her sugar plume and spice scent. "Stand with me now Sadi Leonidas. I must act as Second for Moneus."

Sadi looked confused for a moment. "Moneus?" She asked.

Andro smiled. "It's time my father was surprised for once. Moneus is going to claim Carina." Sadi's eyes grew wide with surprise and happiness at this news and she smiled brilliantly. He brought her hands down and held them tightly. "Come." He looked at Moneus who held out his helmet to him. "You ready brother?"

"To be honest... I'd rather face another patrol of Immortals than your father." Moneus replied.

Andro grinned as he lowered his helmet back onto his head confusing many who were nearby. "His bark is worse than his bite." Andro said.

Moneus nodded. "Not from where I'm standing and what I've seen." He said. "His bite is actually a lot more painful."

"Moneus... we have talked about this for years." Andro spoke. "Now is time for you to make it happen. Just as I have." He squeezed Sadi's hand and pulled her close to him.

"Ah *nubou* it!" Moneus blurted. "If you're gonna make a fool of yourself in front of the King... at least do it professing your love to his daughter."

Andro laughed and grabbed his arm.

"Who presents themselves to this honored gathering?" Dilios's voice bellowed once more.

Martin turned quickly from where he was smiling and talking with Riall and his eyes fell on Moneus and Androcles once more. This time Moneus stood in Andro's spot, Sadi occupying Andro's right arm and Elynth once more standing behind them.

"I am Androcles Leonidas, Crown Prince of our Union, and I act as Second this day!" Andro shouted out.

I am Elynth, daughter of Torma and Isheeni, Bonded Sister to Androcles Leonidas and dear friend to Moneus Simpson.

"I am Moneus Simpson, *Durcunusaan* Section Leader, and I wish to make my claim before the eyes of the Spartan Senate as is the custom of our people from long ago!" Moneus bellowed. "In the manner of my father!"

Martin's eyes were wide, but none wider than Isabella's who had stepped up next to him quickly. He cut his eyes to Carina who sat with her brothers and sisters, but saw an equally stunned look on her face as well.

Dilios looked around. "Who stands with Moneus Simpson and his Second this day?" He roared.

"I do!" Danny spoke first and moved down to stand behind his son while Anuk and Nayeca were too busy weeping to do anything.

"I do!" Melancton bellowed as he moved down.

"I as well!" Vengal spoke stepping from the gallery.

"We all do!" Denali Leonidas shouted as he got to his feet, followed quickly by Resumar and Arram and they moved down to stand behind Moneus while their sister Carina watched with unabashed shock at her brother's actions.

As do we! Torma's voice announced.

Martin gathered his wits together while watching as Torma, Isheeni, Jeth, Cemath and Aradace maneuvered their huge bodies deftly through the throng of people to stand behind Andro and Moneus. Martin smiled as he was squeezing Isabella's hand. "What do you claim Spartan?" He spoke.

Moneus stepped closer to him and took a deep breath. "Milord! Carina is two years past her Coming of Age! I wish to claim her hand as my mate and wife sire!"

Martin stepped down to stand in front of Moneus, looking at his dark eyes behind his helmet. Danny's son was two inches taller than him, but they stood eye to eye and Moneus was just a little wider in the shoulders.

"What do you offer Spartan?" Martin barked out.

"Martin Leonidas!" Gorgo exclaimed coming forward in a huff of anger her eyes wide at his harsh words.

"Father!" Carina shouted as she too came to her feet and began moving towards where her father stood with the man she had loved since she was only nineteen years old.

Martin held up his hand for silence his eyes never leaving Moneus's face. The partial change came quickly and Martin's eyes became yellow/gold orbs, his dual wolf fangs extending to their full length. Isabella

and the others stood there with wide eyes stunned at how he was acting. Anuk and Nayeca were clinging to each other, shock showing on their faces as they looked back and forth between Danny and Martin unsure of what was happening. Only those who stood behind Moneus showed no emotion as Eliani and Lisisa held Carina's arms as she moved up closer to where her father stood.

"What do you offer Spartan?" Martin asked again.

Moneus allowed the change to come over him, a thick black band surrounding his dark amber colored eyes, turning them into piercing orbs that had frightened more than one Evolli warrior. His long fangs extended and he turned to look at Andro, whose own eyes and fangs were now very visible. His father, his grandfather, all the Leonidas sons. All of them stood behind him without question in their partially changed features.

Moneus turned back to face the man he knew as King and also his adopted Uncle. He had heard stories as a young boy growing up of the closeness and the bond of brotherhood that his father shared with the man in front of him. As well as the trouble they seemed to always get into together. He had called him Uncle Martin until completing his Agoge and becoming a man and Durcunusaan Section Leader. He had seen and fought beside his Uncle and King in battle and the very thought of bringing his wrath down upon him was frightening. He took a deep breath.

"My father... the man you call brother... he has told me to offer anything to you in material form would be an insult to you Milord!" Moneus spoke loudly.

Martin nodded slowly. "My brother would be right Moneus Simpson. You want the hand of my daughter... and Carina... like her mothers is worth far more than any simple material possessions. So what do you offer me for the hand of my daughter Spartan?"

"Father please... stop this..." Carina spoke from the side but Lisisa pulled on her arm gently shaking her head.

Moneus glanced over at where Carina stood, tears streaming down her face, her beautiful dark eyes wide. Her hair was so long and he could remember how it felt within his fingers. The way her scent filled his nostrils. He turned back to the man he called Uncle.

"I offer you my blood, my bones, my flesh, and the brain that controls it all!" Moneus spoke loudly enough for everyone to hear as he met his King's unwavering gaze. Moneus held out his spear for Andro to take and then he reached up to remove his helmet. He brought it down under his arm and continued to meet his King's eyes. "I offer all that I am... everything except my heart. That I can not offer you Milord... for it has already been claimed by your daughter. From the first moment my eyes fell upon her."

Carina bursting into a fresh round of tears was very audible now and Isabella made to move up next to Martin but Aricia and Dysea took her arms and shook their heads as they drew her back. Martin moved closer to Moneus, until their faces were only inches apart.

"Blood..." Martin whispered to him.

"Before all else." Moneus finished the statement.

"That armor is pretty heavy huh?" Martin said.

"It makes me appreciate what my ancestors did even more." Moneus replied. "As if... as if I was living..."

"Their lives." Martin finished with a nod. "Your father and I have done some crazy shit through the years Moneus." He said with a smile small, his fangs even more prominent. "Love Carina... love her as your father does your mothers."

"As you love those I call Aunt. I intend too Uncle Martin." Martin answered confidently. "I intend too."

Martin nodded and stepped back from him. He turned and looked at Carina, holding out his hand and she scampered over to stand beside him, gripping his arm tightly as she couldn't tear her eyes from Moneus's proud and handsome face.

"Carina..."

"Yes." Carina replied instantly.

Martin chuckled and looked at her, leaning over to kiss her forehead softly. He turned back to Moneus and nodded. "Your offer is accepted Spartan Moneus Simpson." He spoke loudly. "Do my Queens have any objection?" He asked turning to look at them standing behind them.

Isabella answered for all of them. "No we do not." She spoke firmly barely holding back her own tears.

Martin nodded. "Then so be it." He turned back to look at Moneus. "You have our blessing Moneus."

Moneus felt as if his heart would explode and he turned quickly to Andro who handed him the object wrapped in amber Drow silk. He turned back to look at Carina. "Carina Leonidas... in the custom of my mothers... Drow and Wood Elves alike, I have fashioned this gift for you to show..." Moneus was unable to finish what he was saying for as he looked up to meet her eyes Carina was throwing herself into his arms.

"Shut up and kiss me Moneus!" She nearly cried.

As the gathered men and women and dragons erupted into laughter the words of his father came back to Moneus.

"You love her with all that you are in and out of your bed. And if she wants to kiss you in public, I don't care who is watching, you lay a lip locker on her that will curl her toes and blister her hair. If she's doing it in public Moneus... it's because she's telling everyone around her that you belong to her. Do her the honor of doing the same."

Moneus simply smiled and he wrapped his powerful arms around Carina and kissed her with every ounce of passion in his body. Carina's own eyes flew wide for a split second at his reaction and then closed dreamily as his arms crushed her to him and he kissed her like he had never kissed her before.

Danny moved around the couple and stepped up next to Martin, his own face beaming in pride. Everyone was watching as the two men embraced tightly and then looked at each other.

"You do realize that you are now stuck with me in your life for the next several millennia right?" Martin spoke with a grin.

"I was going to say the same thing to you." Danny laughed. Martin put his hand behind Danny's head and he followed suit. "Does this mean the party will be bigger?" Danny asked.

Martin nodded. "Oh hell yeah!"

Riall turned as the Colonel came up to him quickly with the data pad in his hand and whispered into his ear. Riall's smile faded quickly and he nodded whispering back to the officer and then moving from beside Gorgo. He threaded his way through the gathered men and women and came right up to Martin and Danny seeing them turn to look at him.

Martin saw his face and his smile faded. "Riall?"

"Martin... you should come with me now." Riall spoke. "We're routing a transmission into your office at the Villa."

"Transmission from whom?" Martin asked.

"Captain Imror on the border." Riall answered. "He's staring down the nose of his ship at a High Coven Task Force carrying not only Moran and Yuri... but the Empress herself. They are requesting to speak with you."

Martin shook his head. "Jesus... they could fuck up a wet dream with their timing." He spoke causing Danny and Riall to smile. He looked at Dan. "Get everyone over to the villa Danny, and then meet me in my office there with a couple of brews. I got a feeling I'm going to need to get really drunk tonight."

Danny nodded. "I got you covered. I bring them to the office and I'll keep some more on ice for you later."

Martin nodded and turned to Riall. "Ok... where's Deia?"

"She'll meet us in your office on the Spartan Estate." Riall spoke.

"Let's do this then." Martin said.

CHAPTER FIVE

KAVALIAN GREATSOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT KARSIANI

Athani'Puat, like her sister Jalersi, was the embodiment of sensual beauty for a Kavalian female. Her blond hair cascaded down past her shoulders to the middle of her back, the wavy motions almost like satin as it was being weaved. Athani had somewhat of an oval shaped face, with elegant and unblemished lines that ended in the rounded point of her jaw. Her lips were not thin and not exceptionally full but somewhere in the middle and coated with a light pink color moisturizer making them appear shiny and fuller than they were. She had

high, almost noble cheekbones that were sculpted faultlessly for her face and a nose that was narrow but delicate and matched her features perfectly. Athani's dazzling blue/green eyes were now gazing intently at the data pad of the information she was reviewing. The dark blue/gray jumpsuit conformed to her tight, shapely figure like a second skin as she walked down the corridor of the ship, the top of the jumpsuit fastening tightly around her slim throat like a high uniform collar. Her full, firm breasts strained against the material of the jumpsuit, the fabric conforming to every contour of her body right down to her black boots. Her position as the youngest daughter to the Kavalian Prefect allowed her much more freedom to dress in a way that pleased her sensibilities and not in the oppressive way of normal Kavalian females. She was excited about this because the females in the Lycavorian Union dressed decidedly more open than in Kavalian culture. Part of that was that it was accepted as completely natural for female wolves to dress provocatively to entice males into finding them interesting; and partly and more importantly because females were treated with the utmost respect throughout the Union. They had the same rights and powers as men, and there were many senior female officers within their military ranks that held positions of great importance, to include the Prime Minister of the Lycavorian Union Deia. Kavalian women were limited in what they could achieve and none had risen above common warriors.

Athani, also like her sister Jalersi, was among the almost seven thousand Kavalian females given biogenic treatments when very young. Biogenic treatments that had caused the fine coat of soft fur common to her species to fade from their skin and bodies. With the exception of their flowing manes of hair, not one follicle of hair remained on their skin and it was all of the very smooth and supple nature it was now. The biogenic treatments had also caused the reversal of the growth of their tails which all Kavalians had, though the males usually cut them off when they were very young so as not to provide a disadvantage during battle. Athani however, she had liked her tail and everything she could do with it. Her two meter long tail was like having an additional third arm, dexterous and nimble and exceptionally strong given that it was no more than an inch and a half wide at its thickest point. Twenty five years ago she had lied and said the ongoing treatments Kavalian females needed to endure to keep their tails from re-growing were making her violently sick. This had allowed her to stop taking the treatments for she found them vile and they railed against her very nature as a feline species.

Athani was exceptionally intelligent, being allowed more opportunity to learn and receive schooling that was normally only given to the males of her species because of her status. Her father was trying to change the degrading and inferior ways their females were treated, but the process was slow and not something that could be done over night she knew. Athani's Puat was very excited for this prospect of going into Lycavorian Union territory and putting the skills she had learned over the years to use. She could speak six languages fluently, and was considered by many to be an excellent pilot. She was also considered an extremely lethal fighter. Kavalian females may have been treated inferior to males in many respects, but all of them were skilled fighters and warriors. They would fight just as savagely, perhaps more so, when called upon to defend their Pride and their home. Athani had spent the last twenty-five years honing those skills and now at nearly sixty-three years of age, she was nearly to the level of her sister when it came to unarmed combat.

Athani wanted more from what her life was meant for however. She wanted to go places and see planets, meet new species and interact with them. She had no desire to be taken by some older Kavalian male as a mate and used only for his pleasure, nor did she desire to become scarred for life either. When Kavalian males were in the Rut Fever, they would extend their claws and use them to viciously scar their mates in some manner. To them it was a sign of dominance and ownership. Athani had no desire to experience that, and it was why she had tolerated being Pusintin's sexual play thing for so many years. Her sister's mate was only allowed to have her in two ways, for she had to remain pure for a potential Kavalian male, but he took great relish in making her feel weak. Whenever Pusintin wrapped that male Lycavorian aura around her, Athani was nearly helpless before him. He could use that aura as a weapon to drive her to physical pleasure whether her mind wanted it or not. While Athani did enjoy some of the times she had been forced to be with him, most of the time she could only curse within the deep reaches of her mind as her body's actions betrayed what her mind was telling her and oftentimes simply overwhelmed her senses.

This was not the way of the males in the Lycavorian Union. They did not use their auras as a weapon against females as Pusintin did; they had purged that part of their history long ago. Lycavorian females, indeed all females of any species within the breadth of the Union, were treated with respect and honor. Something that

was decidedly lacking within her own culture and among the males of her species. Kavalian people were not normally very open in their society, and they considered themselves superior to most other species. She knew her father would not hesitate to use violence in negotiating agreements and he had in fact used aggression and subterfuge on several occasions to achieve some of the trade agreements the Kavalian Federation Imperium now had. He had cajoled and used threats against some of the others to gain their agreements, usually getting the better end of the deal that was struck, simply because whatever species he negotiated with did not want to anger the Kavalian Prefect, not after they had so thoroughly swept aside the High Coven defenses in their ongoing war.

Athani looked up as the door slid open into in the private lounge area of their ship and she spied her sister sitting at the table with two older Kavalian males and one she had hoped not to have to see anytime soon. Qurot had been making noise with her sister and mother for years now about taking her as his mate. Athani wanted nothing to do with the much older Qurot. Yes, he was a warrior unequaled among their people, but he was also a very cruel man who brooked no opposition to his ways. Athani did not want her pureness relinquished to this man. When a man took her in that way, she wanted it to be something to remember. Pusintin's constant degrading acts upon her while he was fucking her ass or forcing his large cock into her mouth had changed Athani in a way she didn't realize.

She wanted so much more than what her station would allow her to have.

Athani glanced quickly at Qurot and his leering gaze before taking the seat next to her sister. "Forgive me for being late Jalersi." She spoke quickly. "I wanted to be sure I understood the complexities of the Lycavorian system and I lost track of time."

Jalersi'Puat merely shook her head and dismissed her statement with a wave. Her white blond hair was nearly as long as Athani's, her stunning blue eyes sharp and alert. Jalersi was almost thirty years her senior, though they only looked a few years apart. She was also a captivating beauty herself. Her figure was lean and taut, her breasts even larger and more firm. She often bragged of the hours that Pusintin her mate would spend exploring her flesh. Her mother had allowed the Lycavorian to make her his almost forty-five years ago, and even though several Kavalian females had approached Pusintin since then, he had rebuffed them all. He was apparently very content with her sister, which made Jalersi very full of herself and supposedly what she could do. She had also given the Lycavorian four children, the oldest of whom now sat quietly against the bulkhead near the view window.

"I had trouble sifting through some of it as well." Jalersi spoke in reply as she smiled at Athani when she sat down. "Athani this is Legislator Jiss from Pride Diwen and Legislator Matuarr from Pride Manixn."

Athani looked at the men and nodded her head. "Gentlemen." She spoke confidently.

The two Legislators simply nodded... not yet comfortable with the idea they would have to take orders from these two women. They knew that the Prefect's daughters were very intelligent and well versed, for the Prefect insisted on it, yet they had never imagined they would be taking orders from a female before this day.

Jalersi noticed this right away and smiled to herself. "Legislator Matuarr... why don't you finish saying what you were telling me when Athani came in." She spoke.

The older of the two men looked at her and nodded. The light brown coat of fur that adorned his body was well groomed and neat. His dark eyes were somewhat sunk into his skull, but he was the senior Legislator among their people.

"Of course..." He answered. "I was saying that Jiss and I have been reviewing incredible amounts of information we have obtained through open sources from within the Union. Almost all of their long term trade agreements are open for public viewing and easily accessed through their Netnews channels." He leaned forward in his chair now. "It may appear to be complex for those who are not used to how the Union does business, but it is actually quite simple. It took Jiss and me nearly three weeks to realize this." He spoke with a smile of humor at himself.

The second Kavalian grinned as well. "That it did." He spoke. "With the exception of their military contracts and alliances, all of their trade agreements are open for viewing as Matuarr has said. They operate in a strictly upfront and truthful practice. They will deal with you fairly, if you deal with them fairly. With very few exceptions the Lycavorian Union is totally self sufficient. It does not need to barter trade agreements for what they need. They either already have access to it, or it is within their territory in some fashion. The internal

trading between planets is unlike anything I have ever seen, and it is something I will recommend to Prefect Keleru when next we meet.”

“Prefect Keleru would never act in the way of the wolf dogs!” Qurot spat contemptuously from his chair.

“If we wish the Kavalian Federation to grow and expand as the Lycavorian Union does every year we will need to adopt some of the practices of others to insure this.” Jiss spoke meeting Qurot’s eyes. “You defeat them militarily Commander... however it is up to people like Matuarr and me to insure what you win in battle stays with us in peace. The more we are able to give our people, the more loyal they will become. Trading among planets within the Federation has already been talked about in some circles, and now we need to institute that completely if we are to remain as strong economically as we are militarily.”

“Bah... we should just conquer them and be done with it!” Qurot snapped.

“Legislator Jiss... if they either have everything they need or access to it, what could we offer them that will allow us to proceed with our plans?” Jalersi asked ignoring Qurot’s outburst.

“Oh there are many avenues we can take.” Jiss answered confidently. “Resources that they get from several different places. Resources that we have in abundance in many cases. We start out small and work our way forward.”

Matuarr nodded. “We believe that your father recently arranged for the largest exporter of Notal Berries to suffer a major set back in their production capabilities. We will happily fill this role with the Union. We step in, offer modest rates and services, and with any luck they will agree. The size of the agreement will be such that it will allow us to request an embassy so that any ongoing agreements in trade can be brokered instantly.”

Jalersi nodded slowly. Notal Berries were the main ingredient in Spartan Wine; a very powerful alcoholic beverage derived from the sweet tasting purple fruit that had become so popular within the Union. Her father had recently deployed two commando teams to the Rurudan Consortium’s homeworld and destroyed a large portion of their Notal Berry crop production facilities in what outwardly appeared to be a naturally occurring flood disaster. While the KFI did not have the production facilities to refine Notal Berries into wine, they had several planets within the KFI that were covered in these crops of fruit and they could ship the fruit to Lycavorian facilities.

“And if they don’t agree?” Qurot growled in a low voice. “Then what?”

“They will agree.” Jiss spoke confidently. “This Spartan Wine they have has become increasingly popular within the Union by any number of species. It is powerful... but does not leave one with the after affects the following morning. Since any type of recreational drug is strictly forbidden within the Union, this Spartan Wine remains for the most part, as their only indulgence.”

“They don’t allow recreational drugs?” Qurot asked his feline features showing their surprise. It was common among Kavalian warriors after a victory to inhale the vapors of the Tazli Root. It was a poisonous plant if ingested, but when the roots were dried and seasoned for many months and then used in pipes, the vapors from these roots was a powerful narcotic.

Matuarr shook his head quickly. “Recreational drugs are practically non-existent within the borders of the Union. Those that traffic in our Tazli Root or the Runnix Smoke Rods for instance, they learned very quickly that illegal drugs and those who deal in them have a very short lifespan within the Union. Something that only grew more intense when the King took power some twenty-six years ago. He and his Queens have a particular distaste for drug use of any kind when not in relation to medical purposes. It is actually one of the main reasons he went into The Wilds after a large organization of Unsaur and Kochab Pirates. They were trafficking Runnix Smoke Rods through Union space and several of their major dealers were caught selling the sticks to very young individuals on several Union worlds.”

“When will we know if they will receive us?” Athani asked the question now.

“Our Zaleisian counterpart has already initiated contact with the Lycavorian Union Trade Ministry. Apparently... the Royal family has just begun their six month exodus to Earth... and much of the Senate and the Prime Minister’s office go to Earth for at least a small portion of that time.” Jiss answered. “We should receive word back from the Union Trade Ministry Office directly within the next day or so.”

“We will be at the border in only thirty-six hours.” Qurot spoke.

“The Zaleisian Ambassador has given them our course and communications channels.” Jiss replied. “From what he was able to glean from the Trade Ministry Office, the Lycavorians surprisingly were not put off

by our offer or the prospect of a trade agreement. I would imagine a Lycavorian transport will meet us at the coordinates to take us the rest of the way to Earth.”

“I am not comfortable without the *KARSIANI* accompanying us.” Qurot spoke looking at Jalersi. “We should not have to leave my ship at the border. We should demand free passage!”

Jalersi shook her head. “No.” She spoke softly.

Qurot glared at her. “We are Kavalians!” He nearly bellowed. “We don’t need their permission to travel in our ships!”

“This is supposed to be a diplomatic and trade mission.” Athani said calmly. “That is how our father ordered it be conducted. Bringing one of our warships across their borders would be interpreted as something far different.”

“Let them think what they will!” Qurot barked.

“They have reason enough to distrust us.” Athani spoke looking at him without fear. “The actions of your junior Pride leader twenty years ago nearly dragged them into our war with the High Coven.”

Qurot cut his eyes to her. “Be mindful of your words Athani.” He snapped. “You do not yet know what you speak of. Or what the future holds.”

“No one knows what the future holds Qurot.” Athani said evenly. “I don’t fear the future or the unknown. I embrace it.”

Qurot’s smile was cruel. “You say that now... but we will see.”

“Athani is correct.” Jalersi ended their confrontation. She knew her younger sister would not back down from Qurot. She had far too much stubbornness in her, and she was quite a bit more intelligent than Qurot. In a war of words Athani would wipe the bulkhead with Qurot. “The *KARSIANI* remains on our side of the border and we will do exactly what my father sent us to do. Nothing more! Is that very clear Qurot?”

“You do not command my ship Jalersi!” He snarled.

“But I do command this mission Qurot!” Jalersi barked at him. “I know my father was very clear to you in that regard! You will do as I say... or you will stay behind with your ship! Is that in any way not clear enough for you Qurot?”

Jiss and Matuarr watched the verbal confrontation with interest. They both knew why Keleru had chosen Jalersi to lead this mission, as well as why Athani was with them. They were exceptionally intelligent for one, both of them. They were stunningly beautiful without the fine coats of white blond and golden hair that would have covered their bodies, and they would blend into the Lycavorian Union much easier. While the two Kavalians were much older and senior members within their respective Prides, they also knew that in order to extend their empire and make it stronger, they needed to change the way they did things. The treatment of their females was among those things that needed to be changed. Jalersi and Athani were going to prove that.

“I will inform your father and the Military Council of this decision Jalersi.” Qurot hissed at her.

“Inform them all you like.” She hissed right back. Jalersi looked at Matuarr. “Isn’t it odd that they would act this way considering what happened twenty-five years ago?” She spoke as she regained her composure. “Our men were caught conducting covert operations within Union territory. On Earth as a matter of fact. Not to mention what happened between Pusintin and their King.”

Jiss shook his head. “I don’t believe so Jalersi. Your father made it very clear when he contacted them as soon as the attack became known to us that whoever was involved was operating without his or Pusintin’s approval.”

“He should have supported our troops with weapons and supplies at the very least.” Qurot spoke softly.

“And draw us into a war with the Lycavorian Union?” Athani spoke shaking her head. “That would have been a bigger mistake.” She held up the data pad. “I have read quite a bit on the Lycavorian Union and much of their leaders and policies. Support of any kind would have been seen as condoning the actions of the men who you say did this without your knowledge. It would have opened a second front and spread our forces far too thin.”

“You do not know what you speak.” Qurot dismissed her.

“I know enough to say that would have been a colossal failure.” Athani spoke confidently and with conviction. “And for someone who knew nothing of this operation, you seem to defend it rather vigorously.”

Qurot met her eyes. “They were my Pride mates!” He snapped. “And they will be your Pride mates in the future Athani. You would do well to remember that!”

Athani's blue-green eyes grew wide at this statement. "You presume far too much Qurot." She spoke.

"Do I?" Qurot replied his eyes going to Jalersi.

Athani cut her eyes to where her sister sat quietly. The look on her face made a knot form in Athani's stomach. "Sister?" She asked in almost a whisper.

Jalersi looked up. "Gentlemen that will be all. We'll meet once more when we know for sure the Union will allow us into their territory."

Qurot chuckled as he got to his feet and stepped up to where Athani sat. He leaned over and sniffed her. "I will enjoy taking you as my mate Athani'Puat." He reached out to caress her cheek but Athani snapped out with her hand and brushed his fingers away.

"Don't touch me." She snarled viciously.

Qurot smiled and stood up straight. "Perhaps not now... but I will. I will." He spoke before turning and leaving the conference room directly behind Jiss and Matuarr.

Athani waited until the door closed before turning angry eyes on her sister. "You and mother chose Qurot?" She almost shouted. "Qurot!"

"Athani..."

"He is a disgusting and violent brute!" Athani barked. "I have more brains and common sense in my left foot than he does in his entire body! Jalersi, how could you and mother allow this?"

"He has been pursuing you for years Athani... and mother and I were out of excuses to dismiss him." Jalersi answered softly.

Athani came to her feet. "Sister... he is over two thousand years older than me!"

"He leads one of the largest and strongest of the Prides Athani... you know this" Jalersi spoke. "And father has already warned him about harming you in any way."

"Jalersi I have no desire to feel his vile touch upon me!" Athani spoke. "I do not want him to be my first! I want someone who cares for me and doesn't see me as a trophy or a repository for his seed! I..."

"The decision has already been made Athani." Jalersi said. "We can't change it now. It would be a huge loss of face for father and our Pride and it would weaken our standing within the Federation."

"This is a political maneuver?" Athani asked aghast. "You and mother chose him for political purposes? Jalersi... you gave me your word you would allow me some say in who you and mother chose for me. You lied to me."

Jalersi nodded slowly. "I'm sorry Athani... truly. In time you may grow to care for Qurot and father's threat if he should harm you will keep him in line. He will not dare mark you in any way."

"I'm supposed to accept this?" She demanded.

Jalersi looked at her. "You have no choice Athani. It is our way... you know this."

"I wish to speak with father about this!" Athani demanded. "I wish..."

Jalersi came to her feet now. "You will do as our culture and laws demand... as well as your station!" She roared angrily. "Just as mother did! Just as I did! You are not special in any Athani!"

"It is wrong!" Athani declared. "You are taking away my choice completely!"

"It has been the way of our people for millennia!" Jalersi barked. "Father is changing it, but it will not take place overnight! And in the meantime we are not above the laws in place and we must still follow them! When this mission is over we will return home and you will conduct the ritual mating ceremony with Qurot."

"I wish to speak with father about...!"

"NO!" Jalersi shouted. "It is already done! Father has no say in this and mother and I have decided. If this is going to affect how you conduct yourself on this mission Athani, tell me now and you can return home. I will not tolerate any misconduct from you in this endeavor. It is too important."

Athani stared at her sister for a long, silent moment, her blue/green eyes burning with hatred, anger and betrayal. "I hate you Jalersi!" Athani finally spoke. "I hate you and mother for allowing this to happen!"

Jalersi nodded slowly. "I assumed you would." She said in a defeatist tone of voice. "I can only hope in time you will come to see it was for the best. Now answer my question Athani? Can you conduct...?"

"My conduct on this mission is not going to be in question!" Athani barked out. "I fully intend to do exactly what is expected of me without question." She stepped up to the table and glared at her sister. "Are we finished here Jalersi?"

“Athani... I...” Jalersi spoke.

“Are we finished sister?” She snarled.

Jalersi was silent for a moment watching her sister’s blue/green eyes flashing in anger and hatred.

“Yes... yes we are done.” Jalersi answered finally.

“Then I will be in my quarters until we receive word either way from the Lycavorian Union.” Athani told her harshly.

Jalersi opened her mouth to speak but Athani spun around and was marching out of the conference room before the words could come out. Jalersi sensed her son rise from the chair and move into the light now and she turned to look at Karun. He looked so much like his father with a very handsome face and features, not to mention the very muscular six foot two, two hundred and twenty pound frame. Karun could shift to the form of a wolf, or extend claws from his fingertips as any Kavalian could. Karun preferred to fight in his normal form however; the violence and sense of combat with his claws as opposed to on four legs made him feel more powerful. His light brown hair he wore short like his father, and while he was half Kavalian, he had not inherited the body covering hair of their species, much to Jalersi’s delight. Karun had definitely inherited his father’s cruelty, not to mention his sense of tactics and battle. He had seen battle with the High Coven almost from the time he was seven years old. Due to his Kavalian blood he had reached maturity and full growth much faster than a normal Lycavorian child and under Pusintin’s tutelage he was a very lethal fighter. As he stepped up to her Jalersi smiled, for she had seen him as he was a growing boy, and she was happy he had inherited his father’s genes when it came to being well equipped not only muscularly but also sexually. Jalersi had no doubts whatsoever that he would provide a female mate with many moments of bliss as Pusintin did her. While her son had a disposition towards being rougher than normal during sex, especially if the information she had obtained from their Pride’s servants was accurate, at least he did not leave any lasting marks on the females. He also treated them with a great deal more respect than normal Kavalian males, something else he had no doubt learned from his father. Pusintin may have been raised Kavalian for the vast majority of his life, but he did not treat Jalersi or any female as most Kavalian men did. A holdover perhaps from his time as King of that city on Earth, but Jalersi was very happy about it in more ways than one.

“Does she concern you mother?” Karun asked.

Jalersi looked at him and shook her head. “No.” She answered immediately. “Athani may bluster and rant, but she is essentially a weak minded individual. She will do as she has been told.”

“Will grandfather keep his word?” Karun asked softly stepping closer to his mother. “If Qurot marks her in any way?”

Jalersi nodded slowly. “Oh yes... I believe he will. However... my father will not see the damage Qurot will do to her.”

Karun tilted his head slightly to the side. “What do you mean mother?”

Jalersi met his dark eyes. “The damage Qurot will do will be inside.” She spoke softly. “I fear that the very laws of our people we must uphold... I fear those same laws have cost me my sister... and my mother a daughter. She will never forgive us Karun.”

Karun reached out and took her hand. “It is the way of our people mother. Athani needs to understand that. You are right in saying grandfather is changing how we do things... and that these changes will not happen overnight... but until they are changed she has to endure for the good of the Pride.”

Jalersi nodded and smiled. “Yes she does.” She said. “Thank you my son.”

Karun shrugged. “I am looking forward to following through with my directives.” He said. “It might prove to be very useful and I will enjoy watching the reactions of so many people.”

Jalersi smiled. “Oh yes... you are your father’s son.” She said with twinkle in her eyes. “You are your father’s son.”

SPARTA

ROYAL SPARTA ESTATE

“...are sure Imror?” Martin asked from the chair behind his desk as he looked at the image of the Lycavorian Commander.

Imror nodded quickly. “Yes sire.” He answered confidently, almost casually. Imror was not afraid of his King for they had worked together many times in the past and had an easy going relationship. While he would never refer to himself as a friend of the King, though Martin considered him such, he was somewhat more laid back when speaking with Martin. “The new Shroud sensors are working unbelievably. This is the first time we have had to test them against any ships but our own. The majority of their Task Force is un-shrouded, but we are detecting half a dozen smaller ships, *DARKBROOD* Frigates for the most part scampering about the fringes of their fleet. None have crossed the border however.”

Martin nodded slowly and lifted the long necked bottle taking a long pull from it. Danny and several others from their old SEAL unit had somehow obtained several cases of five hundred year old beer still sealed within the stores warehouse on EDEN BASE. They had taken one case to one of the Spartan Wine makers and asked if it was possible for him to duplicate the beer. The man had laughed and said it would be ridiculously easy. Now... that one Wine maker produced twelve cases of very powerful beer every year which was used only for special occasions by the King and his family. This was one of those occasions. Martin looked at Imror in the image. This was the officer who had recklessly boarded a transport while his *AUTUMN MOON*-Class Attack Frigate hovered precariously beneath the ship connected by a weak umbilical air lock. It was Imror and his small team who had discovered that the Kavalians were attempting to steal dragon eggs from Earth. This action had earned him eternal gratitude from the Dragon Elder Council, and over the following years they had watched over the man and his career without him even knowing it. Imror was now happily mated to one of the Drow elves that had escaped High Coven servitude with Lynwe so many years ago. The experiments upon her had stolen away her ability to have children, but Imror loved her even more for what she had accomplished. The Battle for Earth had been brutal and costly, and had left many children without their parents. Imror and his mate had adopted seven orphaned elven and Lycavorian children within a year after becoming mates and as far as the big Spartan was concerned, they had all come from his loins. He had turned down several promotions to remain within the Earth Defense Sector, and when a new *LEONIDAS II*-Class command became available, Admiral Joarl had known exactly who to give it to.

Martin nodded with a grin. “Endith and Avi will be happy to hear that.” He spoke. “The communications interceptors worked as well?”

Imror nodded. “Just as Admiral/Colonel O’Connor said they would.”

“And they told you all they want to do is talk?” Martin asked.

Imror nodded once more. “That is what they say Milord.” He answered. “What else could their purpose be? They didn’t bring a large enough Task Force to do any real serious damage to us. Large enough to appear formidable and dissuade mercenaries and Kavalian forces from coming after them... but not large enough for any type of sustained attack against us.”

Martin looked at where Riall sat next to Danny on one of the couches both of them with bottles of the beer in their hands. Deia sat next to Isabella on the other couch both of them with crystal goblets of Spartan Wine while Anja leaned her taut body on the credenza also drinking one of the beers.

“Riall?” He spoke.

“Imror is correct.” He spoke. “The composition of this Task Force would do them no good in any kind of surprise attack against our forces. They wouldn’t make it half a light year across the border before Joarl responded with his entire 11th Fleet Group. Not to mention Andro’s 21st SAD is based on Earth. They would know that at least.”

“Perhaps what you and Andro have thought is actually true *Mandri*.” Deia spoke softly. “In this circumstance I must agree with yours and the Dragon Elder Council’s decision. I am unwilling to sacrifice over forty dragons without at least first seeing what they want.”

“Bella?” Martin asked turning his eyes to his pureblood vampire Queen. The crimson dress hugged her lush body in every way, contrasting deliciously with her long dark hair and the swell of her large breasts. Isabella, along with Aricia and For’mya had become what many referred to as Spartan War Queens. They had battled beside Martin or others, leading major engagements throughout the Evolli War. While no one doubted the lethal skills of Anja or Dysea, the three of them were considered by far to be the most like their King in the way he waged war. “This will be harder on you than any of us.”

Isabella smiled at Martin and his words.

Twenty-five years ago Isabella would have been outraged they were even having this conversation. However, twenty-five years of experiencing the love of both Martin and Dysea, and Aricia, Anja and For'mya whenever they were together, had long ago changed Isabella from the dark and brooding woman she had been. She was a Pureblood vampire yes and not only could Martin Leonidas, a pureblood Lycavorian wolf turn her to putty in his bed, he was also the most calculating and brilliant military mind she had ever come across in her nearly two thousand years of life. Martin Leonidas could make her vampire blood boil in passion; his caress on her body was enough to send flash fires of desire skittering across her flesh. Isabella knew she was roughest of his Queens in their bed, and he could pound her for hours making her scream out in joy the entire time, yet he would also wrap her within his powerful arms and cuddle with her and love her with delicious and mind boggling slowness. She had learned over the years just how much she loved him and the others. While no one would ever replace Dysea in her life, Isabella loved the taste of Anja's blood, and she adored wrapping her lips around both Aricia and For'mya for they tasted so sweet. And Isabella had tasted enough of Martin's blood through the years to know no other man could make her feel what he did.

"I have spent twenty-five years discovering and exploring and thoroughly enjoying this new life I have." Isabella said finally. "While my connection with Iriral will never be as deep as Dysea's is with her, I have learned enough to know that we can not forsake our dragon brothers and sisters. I would die to protect Iriral just as easily as I would *Ussta* she-elf or any of those I love." She sipped her glass of Spartan Wine. "My half sister does not even register on my sensor screen anymore. As for Aikiro... I never met her... but if she is accompanying them here, I believe they are at least serious in their intentions of talk. I would be cautious though... Vonis has said none of them are trustworthy and I believe him when he says they all have hidden agendas. I will need to tell him Martin."

Martin nodded. "I don't have a problem with that." He spoke. "He and Va'nimia came to the party right?"

Isabella nodded. "Yes. I will talk to him when we are finished."

Martin turned his eyes to Anja. "Red?"

Anja shrugged noncommittally. Her Persian red hair and tanned skin gave her an almost surreal look when one took in the crimson dress wrapped around her five foot three body with more curves than a mountain road. "They will need to undergo a full medical scan before setting foot on Earth." She spoke. "I don't want them bringing anything from High Coven space that our people have not been exposed too. It will be quick... I can set up a portable medical sensor array wherever they decide to come in. All they'll have to do is walk through it." She took a pull from her beer. "Other than that... I wouldn't trust them as far as I could throw them and if it wasn't for the dragons I'd tell them to take a long leap off a very tall mountain."

"No... *Melyanna*." Bella spoke using the name Dysea had given Anja so long ago. She found she liked it as well. "Why don't you tell us how you really feel?"

This brought laughter from everyone in the room and Martin turned to look at Danny. "What about you?"

Danny lowered his beer. "Let's just get this over with so we can get back to the fun will ya!"

Martin laughed and nodded his head. "That's what I figured you'd say." He spoke. He turned back to Imror in the transmission. He had heard all of it and wore an amused expression on his face. "Imror... set it up. Let's talk to them."

Imror nodded. "Yes Milord."

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT INQUISITOR

"...realize he is probably enjoying making us wait like this?" Yuri spoke.

They sat in the main officer's lounge of the *INQUISITOR*, now cleared out of any off duty men and women. Aikiro smiled from the table as she sipped a glass of chilled Blood Wine. She looked at Yuri.

"It is something I would do as well." She spoke. "Where is Narice? She should be here with us to..."

The internal communications unit sounded loudly and Moran reached out to touch the panel on the table. "Go ahead." He spoke.

“Supreme Commander... we are receiving a transmission from the Lycavorian ship.” The voice spoke.

“Route the transmission here Lieutenant.” Moran answered.

“Yes sir. Stand by.”

“It’s about damn time!” Yuri hissed as the holo disc in the officer’s lounge came alive with the picture of Imror on the bridge of his ship.

Imror’s eyes met hers coolly. “Patience is a virtue you apparently do not have Princes Yuri.” He spoke.

Yuri looked surprised he had heard her. “It has been four hours Captain!” She barked back. “I don’t appreciate being kept waiting!”

“You’ll forgive me if I don’t particularly care.” Imror replied dismissing her complaint in such ways that it made Yuri’s blood boil. “Stand by for a secondary transmission.”

“What? Wait!” Yuri exclaimed coming to her feet.

The holo image fluttered for several seconds and then refocused as Martin’s image sitting in the chair became clear along with several others in some sort of office. Moran and Aikiro came to their feet slowly as they recognized Deia and Isabella easily.

“Well... well... it’s been a long time Yuri.” Martin’s deep voice spoke.

“Not long enough it seems.” Yuri spoke in a barely repressed voice filled with hate.

Martin chuckled as they watched him get to his feet. “You got that right. What’s the matter Yuri... still smarting from our last meeting? The look on your face was priceless you know.”

“You think too much of your skills Martin Leonidas.” Yuri spoke.

Martin shrugged. “Or you do Yuri.” He said. “You got exactly one minute to tell me what you want and why you are so close to our border. I have a party waiting for me and talking to you is only going to make me lose my appetite.”

“I did not realize that crossing so close to your border was an issue of concern for you Martin.” Yuri spoke confidently. She looked at the image of Isabella in the transmission with a scowl. “Isabella... you are looking positively traitorous sister.”

Isabella smiled from where she sat. “You look like you’ve aged terribly Yuri.” She answered. “The war is not treating you well I take it?”

Yuri’s eyes flashed angrily and Aikiro stepped up to her quickly before her daughter lost her temper. As her calming presence within Mindvoice came closer Aikiro felt Yuri relax. She took Yuri’s hand and turned her head to the transmission. “I am...”

“I know who you are.” Martin spoke quickly. “Aikiro... Empress of the High Coven. I can’t say as that I’m impressed... but that is just me. I’ll repeat my question only one more time. What do you want?”

Aikiro looked at Yuri. “*Usstan kyorl nin ele nindol nesst morfethe dos hasstn.*” She spoke fluently in the ancient vampire tongue. (I see now why this man makes you angry.) “*Uk zhah usstan'sargh ulu l'mar'ius*” (He is arrogant to the extreme.)

They heard Martin laugh and they looked at the transmission. “*Dos zhal'la tlu l'uss ulu telanth.*” He spoke with equal fluency in the language. (You should be the one to talk.)

“You speak our ancient language.” Aikiro said.

Martin grinned. “Just as you speak ours.” He replied. “Are you going to answer my question or can I go back to the party you are keeping me from? You got twenty seconds left.”

“We want to talk.” Aikiro spoke quickly. “We have information that you will find very useful. It concerns the Kavalians.”

Martin shook his head. “You will not draw me or the Union into your conflict with the Kavalians.” He said. “Whatever beef they have with you is not my business. They seem to have done pretty well so far, and you are holding your own for the most part.”

“They have made gains... I will not deny that.” Aikiro spoke. “And we are holding our own as you say. But information has come to us that lead us to believe they will attempt to draw you into the conflict.”

Martin shook his head again. “It won’t happen.” He said. “I won’t allow it.”

“You may not have a choice if what we have to show you is accurate.” Moran spoke now stepping into the transmission line of sight.

Martin looked at him. “Supreme Commander Moran... what a pleasant surprise.” Martin said. “I can smell your foul stench even from there. Don’t you ever bathe?”

“Do you wish to hear and see what it is we have to show you or not?” Aikiro asked.

“Why should I believe anything that comes from you?” Martin snapped.

“Because whatever may have happened in the past Martin Leonidas... it was not of my doing.” Aikiro spoke softly.

“You gave Veldruk the power he wielded!” Martin snapped. “And you stood by as he killed millions! Conquered millions! My people! And people you still enslave to this day!”

Aikiro nodded. “Yes I did.” She spoke. “I will not deny that. However once I determined that he had grown foolish in his actions and he was using the authority I granted him for his own personal gain I acted.”

“You acted because the Kavalians were about to hand you your blood sucking asses!” Martin barked.

“And now Veldruk is dead and we have been fighting the Kavalians for nearly half a century.” Aikiro spoke slowly. “Something which I’m quite sure you have lost no sleep over.”

“Not a wink to be honest.” Martin answered.

“We have information that you will find very interesting.” Aikiro said. “And it will allow you to protect your precious Union. Just as you gave information to Yuri all those years ago. We were able to use that information to our advantage. I should thank you for that. Perhaps you could tell me why?”

“I have my reasons.” Martin spoke as he got to his feet in the transmission. “I’m in an excellent mood today because two of my children have been married and I’m not going to let you spoil that. I will ask one more time Empress Aikiro or whatever you are calling yourself these days... what do you want?”

“As I said... we have information that you will find alarming.” Aikiro answered. “It involves the Kavalians and their actions in trying to draw you into our war with them on their side. I decided that it would be in our better interests to share this information with you rather than demand you remain out of the fight.”

“Like I would have listened to any demand you made.” Martin said.

Aikiro smiled. “Exactly...” She answered.

“And what do you want in exchange for this information, cause I know damn well you aren’t doing it out of the goodness of your heart?” Martin asked.

“I have no wish to enter into a conflict with the Union.” Aikiro answered honestly. “I simply want to sit down and discuss matters important to both our respective governments. The information we have is very sensitive and can not be discussed over even secure channels as this one. I am willing to officially recognize a cease fire Martin Leonidas, even though we have not engaged each other in a quarter century, if that will assure you of our intent.”

“A Cease Fire?” Martin smiled and shook his head. “I don’t know you... but I do know your daughter and Moran. I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could spit when it comes to a cease fire.” Martin was silent for a moment then looked at her. “I’ll give you the benefit of the doubt however. Ok... I’ll agree to meet with you... with two conditions.”

Aikiro nodded. “And they are?”

“Every ship you have is to power down their weapons systems.” Martin spoke. “And I do mean power down. Drain your power cells. No emissions whatsoever.”

“We would be defenseless!” Moran barked with wide eyes. “It would take us hours to restore full power to all the systems!”

Martin ignored him. “You’ll have your shields and you’ll have us to protect you.” He spoke with a grin. “That ain’t enough?”

Aikiro nodded. “Very well.” She answered quickly. “And the second condition?”

Martin’s face hardened. “Everyone who comes to the surface will submit to a medical scan. And no... I will not meet with you in orbit on your ship or any ship for that matter.”

“None of us are sick.” Aikiro said watching as Deia got to her feet and went to the door in the office, opening it slightly, the sounds of revelry in the background as she took the data pad from someone outside.

Martin turned back from watching Deia as well and nodded. “Indulge me.”

Aikiro nodded after a long moment. “It will be as you say Martin Leonidas.”

“Moran?” Martin said looking at him. “Remember Operation Jagged Sword?”

Moran’s eyes narrowed. “I remember.” He replied after a moment.

“One twitch, one sneeze or fart in the wrong direction Moran... and I will have Captain Imror blow you out of the stars. And do not make the mistake of thinking he can't do that Moran.” Martin said. “We'll see you in two days.”

They watched Martin's image fade to be replaced by Captain Imror. “I will contact you when I have sensor confirmation that all of your weapons systems have been powered down completely. Do not delay Admiral Moran.”

Imror's face disappeared as well now and Aikiro smiled. “He knows.” She spoke softly.

Yuri and Moran looked at her. “Mother?”

“He can sense the dragons with us.” She said looking at Yuri. “The tremors of them within Mindvoice.”

Yuri's eyes grew slightly wider. “Is that even possible? Is he even that strong?”

Aikiro nodded. “Oh yes... remember they have had twenty plus years to refine their skills to an art. And Martin Leonidas is far more powerful than Veldruk ever thought he was. Robert you may begin doing as they require.” She said. “The sooner we get their agreement the sooner we can be gone from their world. Robert... what is this Jagged Sword he spoke of?”

Moran met her eyes. “It was an operation back when he was commander of his SEAL Team. An operation into Iran that went sour. The powers that be left him and his team behind. They basically offered them up as cannon fodder to the rag heads back then one the political deal was made.”

“What bearing does this have on our situation?” Aikiro asked.

“It's Martin's way of telling us if we betray him, or try to trick him he will do exactly what he did back then.” Yuri said softly.

Aikiro met her eyes. “And that was?”

“Every politician and military leader that took part in the decision to leave him and his team behind died under mysterious circumstances over the next six months.” Moran replied. “Car accidents... heart attacks... random muggings... what have you. All twenty-three of them. No one could ever connect Leonidas to the deaths, even though almost everyone knew he was behind it in some way.”

Aikiro smiled. “So he is telling us in this fashion that if we betray him he will come for us?” She said shaking his head. “How quaint.” She looked at Yuri. “He has also just told us that they still have people within our ranks with that threat. Have Tesand order a very quiet and subtle investigation into all senior officers. Let us see if we can discover who these traitors are and eliminate that threat to us.”

Yuri nodded. “I have him begin right away.”

Aikiro nodded. “Now... let's talk more of the information we will be giving to him. And what we will ask for in return.”

SPARTA

SPARTAN ROYAL ESTATE

Martin turned from the holo disc and downed the last of his beer. “That went well.” He spoke with a lopsided grin. “This Aikiro... knows that I know why they are coming here. And Yuri has grown in power considerably. She must have bonded with one of the dragons. It's the only way her abilities could have increased in such a manner.”

“You felt all that Martin?” Riall asked. “Even from this great a distance?”

Martin nodded. “Unfortunately yes. And they weren't trying to hide it either which tells me they are confident in their position.” Deia nodded as she came up to him and handed him the data pad. “What's this?”

“A poll of sorts.” Deia replied.

Martin looked at her. “You had a poll conducted *Tenna*? What is that, a joke?” He asked stunned.

Deia scowled at him. “Do not snarl at me *Mandri*!” She scolded. “I had Dilios conduct a small survey of the Spartan and Union Senators here on Earth to see what their reaction would be, knowing the Empress of the High Coven was going to be here.” She replied.

Isabella stood up. “What was the consensus?” She asked curious.

Deia looked at her. “We have not fought a battle with them in a quarter century.” She spoke. “They do not trust them any more than you or I do *Mandri*... but they are willing to see what they have to say. Everyone prefers peace to war... even you Martin Leonidas.” She spoke turning back to look at her nephew.

Martin grinned. “Hell yeah! It leaves more time to explore more pleasurable things.” He said looking first at Anja and then Isabella and wagging his eyebrows.

“God... you are such a pervert!” Anja snapped from her spot as Isabella stepped up to her and took her hand.

“Come Anja.” Bella spoke with a smile. “You and I are not needed here any longer and watching him leer at us in these dresses only makes his ego more swollen.”

“Hey... I can’t help it if you look unbelievable in your underwear.” Martin said.

“You have such a one track mind.” Anja declared with a smile as she turned to leave with Bella.

“I’ll remember you said that tonight.” Martin called after them as they exited the office. He turned back to Deia and the others who were watching him. “What?” He asked innocently.

Deia shook her head slowly with a grin. “I will arrange a meeting place for when they arrive.” She spoke as she moved for the door. “I will leave it to you to decide who goes with you to meet with them.”

Martin watched her walk out of the office and turned back to see Danny and Riall standing from the couch and moving up next to him. “I can’t help it when they dress like that.” Martin told them.

Danny put his arm over Martin’s shoulders. “I do know how you feel brother. I intend to peel the dress Anuk poured herself into off her this evening with exquisite slowness.”

Riall chuckled. “Something I intend as well with your mother.” He spoke.

“Nice move on your part planting the seed of doubt.” Danny said. “Making them think we have agents within their chain of command that could give us this information.”

Martin looked at him with a grin. “Who said we still don’t?” He asked.

Danny laughed. “Oh brother... you are one devious motherfucker you know that?”

Martin nodded. “Of course I am.” He said with a smile. “Riall... when their Task Force gets here... put them on the far side of the moon where Admiral Wallace can keep an eye on them with EDEN BASE’s ground arrays.”

Riall nodded. “I’ll see to it.”

Martin looked at Danny. “Let’s grab another beer and have a good time tonight. I have a feeling our lives will get a whole lot more interesting when our guests arrive.”

“Why are we here again Rener?” Malic asked as he lowered his large mug of Spartan Wine.

He and his friend Rener moved along the flowered garden path of the Sparta Royal Estate. It had been an event filled two days for Malic and this was the first time he had been off of the nearby *Durcunusaan* base.

Immediately after leaving the transport at the spaceport he and several others had been debriefed in minute detail in regards to what had taken place on Eleysi Three. He had been assigned a normal training barracks which was a surprise to him, and then he had discovered that the other three Spartans who had seen action on Eleysi Three with him and were applying for entry into the *Durcunusaan* had been granted probationary status due to their actions and the reports of Prince Androcles and Commander Famus in regards to their conduct. They would still have to fulfill their physical and academic requirements to fully become members of the elite force of *Durcunusaan*, but they had been given the uniforms of the regular *Durcunusaan* members and the privileges that came with being part of the famed Wolves of the Blood unit. Their status as probationary members would end when they met all their requirements in the allotted time frame. The *Durcunusaan* base was situated in the mountains surrounding Hagios Center and the rugged terrain made for some very challenging physical training courses which Malic was looking forward too with relish. He had seen dozens of dragons flying through the skies over the mountain and Sparta and he had learned the population of dragons on Earth had grown to almost five thousand now. Malic didn’t fear the large beasts. He found them to be noble and intelligent creatures. He had spent the first night watching the sky, mesmerized by their flight as they floated lazily over the city and surrounding mountains, riding the currents of the wind as easily as he walked on the ground.

It was much more rigorous physically than Malic had anticipated, not that he was worried in any way, for he excelled at physical challenges. He was not prepared in the least however, for the complete academic load placed on a *Durcunusaan* trooper while attending the schools. The academic load had Malic worried some what, though he had already begun putting out feelers to see who he could bribe into doing his academic work.

“I told you...” Renner answered. “As members of the *Durcunusaan*... we are required to know the grounds of both the Island Palace and this Spartan Estate like our own homes. I figured we could kill two or three birds with one stone. Come to the celebration, check out the layout of the estate and grounds here and learn what we can from those that are on duty, all the while keeping our eyes open for females.”

“I don’t intend to be guarding the Estate of the King.” Malic spoke confidently. “I will be a member of Mjolnir’s Hand.”

Renner nodded with a smile. “Well until that happens we are still *Durcunusaan* Malic.”

Malic lowered his mug of wine as they passed the edge of the row of apartments where the older children of the King and Queens stayed. Malic briefly found himself wondering which one belonged to Princess Eliani.

The sounds of music and laughter filled the night air as they grew closer to where the majority of the guests were. He and Renner could easily pick out the *Durcunusaan* troops dressed in civilian clothes and mingling among the crowds as if they were guests. Malic stopped when he saw the half dozen couples dancing in the large circle and he recognized Sadi immediately. Her face and eyes were bright and she was laughing as Andro spun her around with his hand in tune to the music. He had never seen her dressed in such a formal or enticing way and he had to admit to himself she was a stunning female wolf. He saw the large black *Durcunusaan* soldier and the older daughter of the King and Queen Isabella dancing in the large center of the circle with several other couples and the Prince’s brother Denali and sister Lisisa. His keen eyes moved over the men and women watching until he saw her and then they grew wide.

Eliani Leonidas wore a dress that could only be described as intoxicating. It was royal blue in color and looked to be made completely from satin and it wrapped around her body like a glove. The dress fell to mid thigh and no lower, with horizontal slits of varying size decorating both sides of the dress exposing her richly tanned skin underneath as well as the smaller slits on the sides of her large breasts, exposing the skin there. A one inch wide strip of satin material extended straight up from the edge of the dress directly over the valley between her breasts and formed a one inch wide collar around her slim neck, leaving her shoulders and arms completely bare. It was almost as if she had poured herself into the dress the way it clung to every curve of her body. Malic’s eyes were drawn to the movement next to her and he watched as the breathtaking blond female came up next to her very close and handed her the crystal glass of liquid. This new female wore a dress of similar color, but instead of the many horizontal slits along the sides there was only one vertical slit that extended from just below the edge of the dress under her armpit to just above her narrow waist on both sides of her body. She was taller than Eliani but only by a couple of inches Malic saw, her blond hair flowing gracefully past her shoulders. The swell of her breasts, while not as large as Eliani’s, was very prominent, and Malic could easily tell she was just as muscular as she was feminine. The dress caressed her skin tightly, conforming to the rippled abdomen she sported that was a little more defined than Eliani’s equally flat midsection.

Malic turned to look at Renner quickly. “Who is the woman next to Princess Eliani?” He asked quickly.

Renner’s eyes turned and he took in the two women with an appreciative gaze. He looked at Malic.

“You haven’t looked over your files have you?” Renner spoke with a smile.

“What do you mean?” Malic asked not wanting to admit he hadn’t even glanced at the files on the Royal family. He didn’t feel the need for he did not intend to remain a member of the *Durcunusaan* for long enough to get to know them.

“That’s Nyla Sinthe.” Renner answered. “Princess Eliani’s lover.”

Malic’s eyes grew a little wider at this information as his eyes went back to where they stood. He had thought the Princess was just making fun of his maleness when she told him she had a female lover and she was a vampire and that if he wanted her he would have to accept the other female as well.

“She’s... she’s a vampire.” Malic said softly.

He felt Renner nod and turned to look at him. “She’s a pureblood too.” He spoke. “They are the most beautiful.”

“You find her attractive?” Malic asked trying to keep his distaste from sounding in his voice.

“*Sibfla*... don’t you?” Rener spoke. “Look at her Malic... you’d have to be *malda* not to think so. She’s a *Durcunusaan* Team Leader. The story from what I understand is they found each other in the last year of the Evolli War. It was one of the last ground battles and the Princess found her on the battlefield after the fighting had moved on. She and her dragon were seriously injured by a T19. They...”

“She’s bonded with a dragon?” Malic asked surprised.

Rener nodded. “One of only twelve pureblood vampires with the Mindvoice power to achieve that within the Union to date.” He answered. “Anyway... the Princess found her and word is that she told Nyla to heal herself by feeding on her blood. They’ve been together ever since. A lot of males have tried to get them into bed together. Can you imagine that... those two females wrapped around you?”

Malic turned back to look at Eliani and Nyla seeing that they were pressed close to one another and moving slightly with the music as they watched Eliani’s brothers dance. “Have any succeeded?” Malic asked.

Rener looked at him. “Succeeded in what... getting them together in bed?”

Malic nodded. “Yes.”

Rener shrugged. “Rumor among the *Durcunusaan* has it there have been a few over the last four years.” He spoke sipping his own wine. “None of them lasted more than a couple of weeks though. I heard one of the senior Lochi speaking about it yesterday when they were discussing arrangements for the celebration. They are apparently looking for a different kind of male. No one knows what it is that will entice them together. It is said Prince Andro almost threw one of the idiots from the top of a mountain near Eden City for being foolish enough to brag in detail to his friends that he had bedded the Princess and her lover. Bad idea that was I’d say.”

Malic’s eyes were focused on Eliani and her willow and peach scent. It was easy enough for him to pick out her delicious scent from the multitude of other scents because he had been so very close to her and she had hit him with enough of her aura to leave an impression. What Malic could not figure out was if it had all been a ruse. Why would a Princess of the Union be interested in him? Why would a Princess of the Union with a lover that looked like this Nyla want him? No matter how Malic felt about vampires... he could not deny that Nyla was breathtaking. His father hated vampires, and that hatred bled over to his sons. All through his childhood his father had made it a point to always talk down about those who had defected to the Union. His father had also made it a point to insure that his command was vampire free.

“*There wasn’t a bloodsucking bastard anywhere within his Fleet Group!*” He was very proud to say in the privacy of his own home.

This was one of the things he had pounded into the heads of his seven children, Malic being the youngest. Malic was also the only one who did not have the grades to get into the Officer Academy as his five brothers and one sister had. That had always been a point of contention with both his father and mother. Malic had always hated school, no matter what the subject was. He had never had an issue with attracting females, his physical prowess and handsome looks made that very easy. He had also never wanted to settle down, and now he could admit that taking Sadi as his mate would have only been because it would have made his application for the *Durcunusaan* so much better looking. He realized now that would never have happened no matter how hard he may have tried, not with what Sadi shared with Prince Androcles.

“Buttercups in the morning dew.” Malic spoke in almost a whisper.

Rener looked at him. “What?”

“The vampire... the pureblood... she smells like sweet buttercups in the morning dew.” Malic said as the smell drifted to him more strongly now, mixed intimately with Eliani’s peace and willow scent.

Rener chuckled. “Malic... vampires don’t have scents that we can track.” He spoke. “Everyone knows that... their blood isn’t in their systems deeply enough because they are always ingesting new amounts... cloned or otherwise.”

Malic looked at him and shook his head. “Sorry Rener... it... it must have been someone else.” He spoke quickly. He turned to look once more at Eliani and Nyla and he saw the young Lycavorian/Elf Spartan come up between and pull them close to his muscular body with his arms and they both planted kisses on his cheeks.

Rener chuckled when he saw Malic watching them. “Don’t even think about it Malic. They are so far out of our league it’s not even funny. And to get to them you have to go through Eliani’s brothers. I don’t know about you, but I have no desire to even step into a sparring ring with any of the Princes to prove I’m worthy.”

Malic tore his eyes from them and looked at Rener. “You are right of course.” He said.

“Let’s walk the garden and then head into Sparta for the nightlife.” Rener spoke. “Find out where all the most attractive females hang out.”

Malic stole one last look at where Eliani and Nyla were still in the arms of the young Spartan and then he turned to follow Rener.

Eliani wiped her soft red lipstick from her cousin’s cheek and saw Nyla doing the same. “When did you get back Ronusu?” She asked. He was the oldest of her uncle Andreus’s children and a senior analyst for Armetus’s Krypteria.

“I got in only an hour ago!” The young man spoke with a smile. “My father said if I didn’t show up for this he would have my *nor*.”

“He or Aunt Kmyla would for sure.” Eliani spoke with a smile as he held both her and Nyla close to him.

His bright blue eyes were focused on Andro and Sadi in the center of the circle dancing. “So this is the Sadi we have heard about since we were all children I take it?” He spoke.

Eliani nodded. “That’s her.” She said.

“She’s much better looking than he told us.” Ronusu said. “What exactly does she see in your brother again?”

Eliani and Nyla laughed and both of them slugged him in his chest. “Stop it! I’ll have Res twist you into a pretzel like when we were small.”

“So what about you two?” Ronusu asked. “Any prospects on the horizon?”

Eliani rolled her eyes and Nyla shrugged. “There might be one or two.” She said with a grin.

Ronusu shook his head. “You know... if we weren’t cousins...” He spoke.

Eliani chuckled. “What difference would that make?” She exclaimed. “Love knows no boundaries.”

“No it doesn’t.” Nyla agreed.

“So does that mean I can take the two of you back to my room after the party?” He declared with a grin.

“You wish!” Nyla exclaimed with a laugh.

“Ronusu... you couldn’t handle us.” Eliani boasted. “You’re too tame for our tastes anyway.”

“Ah... you want a man of danger and mystery.” He said as he moved forward between them to watch the dancing. “There are certainly enough of them out there to choose from.”

Eliani caught the scent of driftwood and ocean as the breeze shifted and she turned quickly, her eyes searching the crowd all around them. Nyla noticed this almost immediately and she heard the spike in Eliani’s heartbeat.

“*Ussta Che?*” She asked softly.

“Nyla... he’s here.” Eliani said softly.

Nyla knew immediately who she was talking about and her green eyes also began searching the crowd as she stepped closer to her. “Do you see him? Which direction?”

Eliani motioned with her head. “There! The tall one moving past Deni’s apartment.”

Nyla shifted her eyes and saw who she was referring to. “We can catch him before he leaves the circle! Come!”

Nyla grabbed her hand and they both leaned up quickly to kiss Ronusu’s cheeks. “We have something to do.” Nyla said quickly before she had Eliani began weaving through the throngs of men and women. They cut through the living area of the villa and out the kitchen entrance just as Malic and Rener were passing the entrance.

“Leaving so soon Enomotarch Malic.” Eliani spoke as she and Nyla slowed to a more sedate speed to not look so eager.

Malic and Rener stopped and turned slowly, Rener’s eyes wide. Nyla’s green eyes grew slightly wider as she gazed at the face of the man who had affected Eliani so, and by virtue of that, her as well.

“Princess Eliani!” Rener barked bowing his head quickly. “It is... it is an honor.”

Malic stood there looking at them, his heart beating a little faster. Her willow and peach scent was almost overpowering to him and he realized she was once more releasing just enough of her scent and aura upon him to let him know she was interested in him. Mixed deeply within her scent was the scent of buttercups

and he could tell they must have been together recently. He saw her holding tightly to Nyla's hand, and it was obvious that Renner could not smell what she was doing. She was directing her scent and aura at only him.

Malic took a deep breath. "Princess Eliani." He spoke formally bowing his head.

"You... you are leaving?" Eliani spoke. "The celebration is just getting started."

"We... we only came to inspect the grounds of the estate." Malic answered quickly knowing it was a lie, but hoping he had buried it enough to not be detected. "As part of our *Durcunusaan* requirements."

"I told you I would introduce you to Nyla." Eliani spoke giving no hint if she could smell the lie.

"Nyla... this is Enomotarch Malic. He's the one who saved Tharua and I. Malic this is Nyla Sinthe."

Nyla stepped closer to Malic, looking up into his deep blue eyes. [Mindvoice Shielded] [*Carians Ussta Che... he's beautiful.*] Nyla spoke as she held out her hand.

[*I told you.*] Eliani answered.

Malic's eyes narrowed slightly for he could feel the tremors within Mindvoice. His Mindvoice skills were barely above a Tier Three and he almost never used them but for some reason he could sense the tremors now. They were speaking shielded on a much higher plane that he was even capable of, yet he had never been able to detect the tremors before.

Nyla held out her hand to Malic. "Thank you for what you did." Nyla said evenly. "I would have been very upset with her if she had gotten hurt in some way."

Malic hesitated only for a second and then he took her hand in his. Her skin was soft and warm to the touch, something he had not expected and that showed in his face. "I was... I was only doing my duty." He spoke. He released her hand quickly and could almost feel the way his pulse was racing now.

Eliani took Nyla's hand once more as she stepped back next to her. "So you aren't going to stay?" She asked.

"Well... we were..." Renner began to speak.

"We are meeting two young ladies at one of the cafés in Sparta." Malic answered quickly interrupting him.

[*He's lying.*] Nyla said.

Eliani glanced at her. [*Are you sure my love? I can't smell the normal adrenalin dump into a person's blood when they lie.*]

[*I'm sure my love. His heart rate increased a quarter of a beat per minute just now.*] Nyla answered.

"Oh..." Eliani said casually. "Which one?"

"I believe it is called Gallais's Retreat." Malic answered quickly remembering the name from a conversation with Commander Famus before they had departed.

"An excellent choice." Nyla replied.

"Indeed." Eliani answered knowingly.

[*Do we tell him?*] Nyla asked with a chuckle.

[*Why? He'll discovered it soon enough.*] Eliani replied equally humored.

Malic felt the tremors once more and he could only wonder at what they were saying. He bowed his head once more. "We'll take our leave of you now." He spoke. "If you would, extend my congratulations to Sadi for me Princess Eliani."

Eliani nodded. "I'll do that."

They watched him take Renner's arm and turn quickly and move off down the walkway. Nyla squeezed Eliani's hand the entire time until she was sure he was out of earshot and then she turned to her lover. "Oh... Eliani... he is... he is a god." She spoke quickly stepping close to her.

"Why was he lying about going to meet two females though?" Eliani said thoughtfully. "And he hesitated before taking your hand Nyla."

Nyla nodded. "Perhaps... but he did take it." She said. "That tells me he struggles with his feelings about vampires. Perhaps they are not his feelings at all *Ussta Che*."

"He is beautiful isn't he?" Eliani said with a smile.

"His eyes... they..." Nyla stepped closer to her and pressed her lithe frame against Eliani's seductively. "I just might have to take you home tonight and show you how happy I am that you found him."

Eliani grinned. "Well... I won't complain about that." She said.

Nyla leaned closer. "I didn't think so." She said huskily as their lips came together in a soft kiss.

“Ahem!” The female voice broke into their moment and they turned to see a dazzlingly dressed Gorgo. “*Staanial!*” Eliani exclaimed as they turned.

Gorgo looked at Eliani and Nyla with a grin. “I know that the atmosphere is contagious... but could the two of you wait until you are home before you assault each other?” She said with a grin. Nyla and Eliani couldn’t help the embarrassed looks on their faces as Gorgo stepped closer and held up the data pad. “I had to call in several favors to get this Eliani. And I only did it because the two of you need a man to tame you.” She said reaching up to place her hand on Eliani’s cheek. “Your Malic’s transcripts. He wasn’t a particularly bright student... but that is the teacher in me talking.”

Eliani reached up and took it slowly. “Thank you *Staanial.*” She said softly.

“Is he worth this much effort for the two of you?” Gorgo asked gently. “He does not have the most stellar reputation with women if what I hear is accurate, and both of you are usually quick to discard males who act as he does.”

Nyla held Eliani’s arm as she nodded. “After what we felt tonight... yes... we think so.” She answered. “This one... this one is different Gorgo.”

Gorgo nodded. “Then don’t let him get away.” She spoke stepping closer to them with a smile. “Perhaps what he needs are two strong women to show him the way. Never let it be said Eliani Leonidas and Nyla Sinthe are shy about going after what they want.” She took their hands. “Now come... let’s get as much time with your brother and Sadi as we can before they leave for his villa in Gytheio. According to your mothers... Andro’s plan is to not be seen for at least three days once they leave. I want to enjoy her company a little more before he corrupts her completely.”

The loud trumpeting of a single dragon drew their attention back towards the center of the villa and they saw Elynth lifting off into the night sky, a brief flash of golden blond hair and the sound of female laughter evident before she vanished into the darkness to the cheers and clapping of everyone in the area.

“Anse!” Gorgo swore loudly. “He’s no better than your father!” She declared. “Sweeping her away in the middle of the celebration!”

Eliani and Nyla laughed as they took Gorgo’s arms. “You’ll have to make due with us *Staanial.*” Eliani spoke.

Gorgo smiled and squeezed their arms. “Well... that is most certainly not a bad idea either.” She said. The three of them laughed and they headed back for the celebration.

[Mindvoice Shielded] [*Stop undressing Tharua from her scales Jeth. She’ll catch a cold!*] Lisisa’s voice scolded him in a humorous tone and Jeth turned his huge head from where he sat next to Cemath and Aradace and looked at her with his golden eyes as she walked up to him.

Lisisa’s exposed skin glistened in the light from her dancing with her brothers and sisters and she was drinking the crystal glass of liquid. Jeth knew she did not drink alcoholic beverages and it was probably some sort of fruit juice that matched the color of Spartan Wine.

[*I am not undressing her.*] He answered defensively. [*I am admiring the color and texture of her scales.*]

Lisisa chuckled within Mindvoice as she came up to him and he lowered his head so she could caress the smooth blue/black scales under his jaw and kiss his snout. It was a sight to see really, for Lisisa looked almost miniscule against the backdrop of her bonded brother. They had bonded together on Lycavore when her father had come for her almost twenty-six years ago. Jeth had been a six month old dragon hatchling at the time, already on his way to being close to his father’s size. He had stolen aboard the ship they had used to infiltrate High Coven space and reach Lycavore, knowing almost subconsciously that they were going to meet his bond mate. The moment their psychic shield activated Jeth and Lisisa knew it was meant to be. As the years had passed they had grown in power and abilities, surpassing all but Andro and Denali in what they could do together. They shared almost everything with each other; the only secret Lisisa keeping from even Jeth was her love for Denali. Much the same way as Denali kept it from his bonded sister Aradace. It was not something either of them wanted to share just yet.

[We go before the Elder Council tomorrow Jeth.] Lisisa spoke as her hand stroked his blue/black scales. *[They will hear your petition. They'll give you permission my brother. You must have faith. They have allowed others that were younger to mate.]*

[That was only because the connections to the riders they carried was so deep it caused the female's metabolism to speed up and allow them to carry eggs before it was normal. And all of them were only a few years shy of completing the growth on their own Lisisa.] Jeth replied. *[Tharua is not like that.]*

[Do you know that for sure Jeth?] Lisisa asked. *[Tharua and Eliani's bond is very deep Jeth. Not as deep as you and I, or Andro and Elynth or even Denali and Aradace... but it is a powerful bond.]*

Jeth stared at her with his golden eyes for a long moment. *[I did not think of it in those terms.]* He said finally.

Lisisa pressed close to him and rested her forehead against his cool snout. The picture of her head against his massive skull was almost comical to look at, but no one could deny the power they wielded as a Bonded Pair and behind only her father and Torma and Andro with Elynth they were widely considered the strongest of all Mjolnir's Hand. *[You do know that how she treats you is only a façade Jeth.]* She spoke softly. *[She may be a dragon... but we females tend to act in similar fashion regardless of our species. Go sit with her. Talk with her and show her your true nature Jeth. Not the childish one you display for everyone else. Perhaps that is what she is waiting for.]*

[Do you think?] He asked.

[I can tell you that your mother considers you one of the most intelligent young dragons she has ever known.] Lisisa spoke.

[She is my mother.] Jeth answered with some humor. *[She will always say those things.]*

Lisisa nodded slowly. *[Perhaps... but she did not force your grandmother to agree with her.]*

Jeth's golden eyes grew wider. *[She did?]*

Lisisa stroked the scales under his large eyes. *[Go over there and act as I know you can act Jeth. A proud son of Torma. Win Tharua's heart as your father won your mother's heart so long before she could carry eggs. You just might find she feels the same as you.]*

Jeth inhaled deeply. *[I believe I will do as you say my bonded sister.]* He spoke.

Lisisa smiled. *[Good.]*

[What will you be doing Lisisa?]

Lisisa laughed. *[I'm going to find my brothers and drag them back to dancing so that they are so tired they don't chase any female wolves tonight and get themselves in trouble.]*

Jeth chuckled and nodded his huge head. *[They do seem to get into more trouble when they are together.]*

Lisisa nodded. *[Go my brother. Grab your future by her tail and don't let go.]*

Jeth snorted in reply and pushed his massive body up with grace and began threading his way through the throngs of people. Lisisa smiled as she watched him and then turned her head to find her brothers. Well... one of them at least.

Androcles had told her his villa was small and overlooked the Laconian Gulf.

He hadn't lied about the villa overlooking the Laconian Gulf. It was surrounded by it with the exception of the Lifter Causeway that connected it to the mainland. He hadn't been completely truthful about its size however.

Andro's villa occupied the small island of Cranae. It was the place that Paris of Troy had supposedly spent his first nights together with Helen of Sparta Sadi had discovered that bit of Spartan history from Helen. Andro's villa was easy enough to spot from the air as Elynth swept in low over the town of Gytheio. It occupied nearly one quarter of the island on the north side, opening onto the beach, while the rest of the island was now covered with thick timber except for the strip of beach encircling it. The island itself was perhaps a kilometer long and half a kilometer wide and as Elynth landed lightly on the massive patio to the rear behind the villa and facing the gulf, Sadi's eyes were wide in amazement. She could only stand there in awe, as Andro turned to remove Elynth's saddle, and gaze at the expanse of the villa.

The patio area itself looked as if it could easily hold over a hundred people, opening right onto the white sands of the large beach. There was a huge dark pit near the edge of the stone and tile patio floor that was obviously used for large bonfires and there appeared to even be several apparatuses to use for cooking over that fire. The exterior of the villa was surrounded by a flowered walkway that twisted around the sides out of sight, the soft white glow of the outer lighting causing the yellow and red flowers to glow almost eerily. There were many chairs and several tables on the patio and Sadi knew without question that this must have been a gathering place for Andro and his siblings and family. She knew all of them maintained villas in the mainland town of Gytheio, as well as Gorgo and Riall and the King and Queens. She could see the lights of Gytheio on the horizon less than a kilometer away.

The villa itself appeared to be built in the same style as some of the older parts of Sparta that she had seen. The ancient décor was elegant and graceful and gave a distinguished look to the building. The large double doors were a form of engraved glass as she walked up to them and slowly passed her hand over the side scanner. The doors slid open without pause and once more Sadi realized how much Andro had planned for this. He had entered her bio-signature into the security system of the island no doubt and as she stepped into the main Grand Room of the villa she knew why. The artifacts and paintings on the walls and occupying the room had to be priceless in not only terms of monetary value, but also in historic value. There were several metopes on the walls that bespoke of some time in ancient history, similar to those she had seen on the tomb of Andro's grandfather at Thermopylae. She had made it a point to visit that sacred sight before she and Andro consummated what they had, if only to understand and appreciate much of what he held dear.

Sadi felt him come up behind her and his hands traced delicate lines up her arms to rest on her shoulders.

"Andro... it's... it's beautiful." She spoke softly.

"At the moment... the only beauty I am concerned with is the one standing in front of me that smells of sugar plums and spice." Andro spoke lowering his head and nuzzling the side of her neck and her cheek.

Sadi's eyes closed in euphoric bliss as sensations of delight coursed through her. "You... you aren't going to give me a tour of my new home?" She managed to say with some humor.

"The tour of our home can wait." Andro growled as he scooped her into his arms and gazed at her with those azure blue orbs. "Right now the only tour I am interesting in taking is the one of your body."

Sadi chuckled and traced his jaw. "Have you no control my handsome mate?" Sadi asked with a seductive drawl to her voice.

"Yes... and I have been exercising it ever since you came back into my life." Andro answered as he turned and headed for another set of large double doors. "That control does have its limits however."

Sadi laughed as he maneuvered her in his arms and passed one hand over the scanner and she watched as the doors opened into another huge room. The floor was covered in thick lush dark blue carpet and the bed he guided them too was easily large enough for four people. Several candles burned on the many dressers in the room and the moonlight filled the smaller twin doors that opened onto the stretch of beach right outside the room.

"Is the bed soft?" She asked him pointedly.

Andro smiled. "I don't know. I have not used it since I bought it six years ago. It is our bed... and I have been waiting for this night to make use of it."

"Then where have you slept?" Sadi asked surprised.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. "In one of the four guest rooms or on the patio with Elynth." He answered as he set her down next to the bed.

Sadi's eyes never left his face as he stared at her, his azure colored eyes almost glowing with the combination of moon and candlelight filling the room. She reached up again and stroked his cheek, running her finger along his lips and feeling the desire for him beginning a slow burn in her belly. She could feel his aura pulsing behind his shields, and she could most definitely smell his lavender and pine scent calling out to her. She inhaled deeply of his male scent and felt it rushing to her brain and igniting all the receptors within her mind.

"Andro I..." Sadi gazed into his eyes.

"What *KertaGai*?" He asked softly.

“Andro I burn for you.” She said. “I... I have never felt this way before. And it is not just because of your aura.”

Andro smiled and reached up to run a finger along her cheek, watching as her eyes closed in happiness. “I am going to worship you Sadi Leonidas.” He spoke softly as he leaned his head over and brushed his lips against her ear. His words sent shudders of delight surging through her adding to the already growing fire inside her. “When I am finished it is my hope no other male will even cause you to turn your beautiful eyes.”

Sadi smiled as his fingers caressed her neck and shoulder now. “Andro... that... that is already the case and you know that. It has been like that since that night on the island. You are the reason I never found what it was I was seeking. Because you were what I was seeking all this time.” She said softly. “And now...” She looked up into his face. “Now you are all mine.” She pressed her body up against his and leaned up on her tip toes to nuzzle the hollow of his throat. “As handsome as you look in your uniform, I would much rather have the sensation of your skin against mine Andro.” She looked at him with smoldering jungle green eyes. “Take this off!”

“Is that an order from my mate?” He asked.

Sadi grinned devilishly. “The first of many.” She spoke.

Andro smiled and Sadi could only watch with burning desire as he had himself undressed faster than at any time in his life. Sadi had seen him shirtless before on his ship, the muscles of his shoulders, chest, and abdomen excruciatingly defined. The three entry wounds on the left side of his chest and the Talon Guardian brand directly in the center of his chest. There were several smaller scars dotting his abdomen, but she would discover the cause of them at her leisure as she explored his body. His tanned skin looked so very inviting and as her green eyes dropped lower Sadi felt a rush of sexual warmth and excitement race through her. His thick cock, though not even completely hard yet, was already a size that surpassed anything Sadi had taken inside her body. Imagining what he would feel like sheathed inside her caused moisture to seep to her smooth pussy and she fidgeted on her feet as her eyes came back up to his. He stepped closer to her and reached up to stroke her silky hair with one hand while his other hand deftly went to the silk ties that held her dress together. Sadi breathed in deeply as he pulled on the silk tie, and the dress loosened from around the neck, parting somewhat the entire way down her front as the lacing lost its tension. Andro unlaced the portion of the dress that acted as a collar and once more deftly unsnapped the two snaps that held it in place before removing it from around her neck and letting it dangle in front. Sadi never tore her eyes from his as she felt the dress begin to loosen even more and her excitement grew. She felt him slowly lowering his shields and his aura began to wash around her, wrapping her within its embrace and only serving to excite her further.

Andro dropped to his knees in front of her, his hands pulling the dress down as he went, exposing her firm breasts to the cool night air. Sadi’s nipples grew instantly erect, proudly standing out from the combination of cool ocean air and Andro’s aura coursing through her. Her hands went to the sides of his head as his lips touched her skin just below her breasts and he planted butterfly kisses across the flesh of her abdomen, following in the wake of the dress as he pulled it from her body with deliberate slowness. Sadi braced herself with her hands on his shoulders as she stepped from the dress and he tossed it to the side. Her chest heaved as his hands traced up the backs of her calves and thighs and his lips left burning trails up the front of her taut thighs until his face stopped and he stared at her center, already moist from his aura and what was racing through her unchecked.

Andro was barely holding control of himself, and as he stared at the incredibly detailed tattoo that decorated Sadi’s flesh just above her smooth and very bald pussy, her aroused sugar plum and spice scent hit him full in the face. Her hands gripped his shoulders tightly and he inhaled deeply of her scent letting it filter to every corner of his mind. He felt her stomach contract and she inhaled sharply when his lips brushed the skin of the tattoo and he realized it was very sensitive to touch, especially when she was aroused. Her fingers dug into his skin as his hands slowly curved around the backs of her thighs and moved over her firm perfect ass cheeks. He extended his arms up her back and heard her gasp as he lifted her almost effortlessly and quickly but gently settled her onto her back on the soft sheets of the bed, the cheeks of her ass near the edge. Andro settled back to his knees before her, letting his fingers trace the silky soft outsides of her thighs and legs as he lifted them and draped them over his shoulders.

“An... Andro... you...” Sadi gasped out.

Andro silenced her words by pursing his lips and blowing gently across the tattoo and her exposed pussy. This only served to excite her more and he extended his tongue to slowly lick the outline of her tattoo with the tip of his tongue, tracing every line and bump until he could feel Sadi's thighs quivering on his shoulders. Her fingers grasped his shoulders even tighter, her abdomen undulating and pressing her pussy harder against his exploring lips and tongue.

"Ohhhh... please... please don't tease me my love!" He heard Sadi gasp out lifting her head from the bed and looking down between her thighs.

Andro glanced up at her face with glowing azure eyes and she could almost see him smiling as his hands reached up and took her erect nipples between his fingers, pinching them lightly before tracing small circles around her areolas. Sadi's head fell back with an audible groan of intense pleasure as he extended his warm tongue and probed the engorged lips of her labia ever so gently, licking up one side and down the other, tickling and tasting her moistness. The taste of her flooded his senses, sweet and delicious just as she smelled, and Andro probed more. He avoided her erect clit, now fully unhooded and nearly begging for attention. Her breathing was coming in short gasps, her hands having dropped to the bed now and gripping the satin sheets in her fists tightly. He finished a third torturous lick around the outside of her pussy lips, now open and extended fully in desire and arousal and then he flicked his tongue across her clit quickly, causing her to cry out in want and need. He watched as beads of sweat formed in the valley between her breasts, their fullness and firm nipples begging for his attentions. He had three days... and Andro had every intention of taking his time.

"*Ronnus!*" Sadi panted out. "I need... I need you inside me Andro my love! No... no more... Ahhhhhhhh... *nubou!*"

Andro heard Sadi's scream of bliss fill his head as he wrapped his lips around her stiff clit and battered the nub with his tongue quickly and mercilessly. He had wanted to do this first and foremost. He wanted to show her that he would love her until she could stand it no more. That her wants and needs and pleasure meant more to him than his own painfully erect and throbbing cock. Andro felt the orgasm grip her almost instantly, its power rushing through her abdomen and thighs right down to her toes. Her back arched off the bed, her hips pushing against Andro's assault of her clit, reaching for that peak he wanted her to feel. Her taut muscles threatened to tear through her skin and she fought against it as long as she could and then her mouth opened and Sadi howled into the night air, her hands gripping his head tightly as the dam broke. He would not have been able to pull his head away even if he wanted to, the strength of her grip holding his head almost too powerful to belong to someone so delicate. It was then, as Sadi's sweet come flooded into his thirsty mouth, that he truly realized his new mate and bride was a female wolf who was very capable of taking care of herself. Andro was more than content to drink down her erupting passion with relish.

Sadi couldn't control the white lights that were exploding in her head, nor could she control the power of the orgasm as it ripped through her. It was as if she was erupting like a volcano from within herself with the force of her orgasm. Her lips were open in a breathless scream as her initial howl of rapture had completely stolen the breath from her lungs. It was the most powerful and utterly overwhelming sense of bliss that had gripped her in her entire hundred and twenty-six years of age. Her muscles felt as if they would split open through her skin, her body stretched to the point of breaking, her hands holding tightly to the head of the man who was making her feel these things. She was loathed to allow him to release her from his grasp, though she knew he had no intention of doing such a thing. The strongest orgasm she had ever felt was when Teeria had spent so much time teasing her in a very similar way, yet what Sadi was experiencing at this split second dwarfed that by a hundred times. It shuddered through her in controlling waves, lingering for what seemed like hours, until the humping motions of her hips began to subside. She could feel his potent tongue licking her pussy non-stop, urging her for more of her sweet come, wanting more until finally she collapsed back onto the bed completely spent. She felt as if she had just run for hours without stopping, her arms dropping to the bed before crossing over her breasts as the feelings of contentment swept over her.

Sadi's thighs quivered powerfully in the aftermath as Andro's tongue continued to lick and tease her, gathering every last drop of her juices as if it was the sweetest nectar he had ever tasted.

"*Car... Carians* Andro my love!" She gasped out finally.

Sadi shuddered as he suckled her still erect clit gently before lifting his face from between her smooth thighs. Her head came up and she saw that his lips were coated with her juices, the corners of his mouth moist from what he could not catch quickly enough. His azure eyes were changed now and she saw him smile,

revealing the points of his dual incisor fangs, so very unique to the Leonidas bloodline. She watched him with adoring love in her own changed eyes as he dragged his tongue up along her tattoo and to her belly button, delving into that crevice as he brought his body up onto the bed with her. It took him what seemed like forever to practically tongue the sheen of sweat from her skin as he came higher, serving only to begin another slow burn within Sadi's blood. She groaned in delight when she felt his broad muscled chest brush across her erect nipples, and then his face was looking down on her with devoted passion in his beautiful eyes.

"Andro... that... that was..." Sadi started to speak but his lips claiming hers silenced her words. He tasted of lust. Of passion. Of devoted love. He tasted of her, and Sadi surrendered all that she was to his powerful kiss. As kisses went... it was the most incredibly arousing kiss they had shared yet, and Sadi felt the slow burn in her blood increase to a raging fire in the space of three seconds. She felt his knee press gently against the inside of her thigh and with not a single moment of hesitation, Sadi open her legs for him to slide between. When she felt the engorged head of his huge cock press gently to her moist pussy Sadi tore her lips from his. "Andro... it's so... it's so big! I've never..."

Sadi's eyes opened wide when she felt him push gently and fully four inches of his throbbing twelve inch shaft slid into her velvet warmth. The sensations were inconceivable and undeniable as pleasure receptors in her brain began going into overdrive.

"All... all that you are, is now mine Sadi Leonidas!" Andro spoke between clenched teeth as he stared into her beautiful face. "All... all that I am... all that I am, is now yours."

Sadi looked directly into his eyes as he lowered every mental shield he was still holding up and the full force of his unshielded Alpha male aura wrapped around her. It was as if a nuclear explosion went off within her lithe body as she felt the outpouring of complete and total instinctual devotion embrace her completely. Her whole body ignited, the blood within her veins singing out its delightful happiness. And then Androcles buried the remainder of his thick, pulsing twelve inch cock within her in one soul crushing plunge.

That plunge began what Sadi had expressly dreamed and wished for the last four days, and something Andro had promised her on his ship as he told her what his intentions were going to be. He was going to make her his in every way possible over the next three days, even though she was already his in every way her mind could begin to imagine. This was not something that would ever go away. This was something that had begun the moment she smelled his lavender and pines scent on the island so many years ago. She may not have known what it was at that time, but she certainly knew what it was now.

Sadi Leonidas screamed in absolute love, passion and heavenly ecstasy. A scream that would echo for hours.

SPARTA ESTATE

Tharua could barely contain her racing heart even as her copper colored eyes gazed upon those dancing, among them Eliani and Nyla. Elynth had long ago departed with Andro and Sadi, followed only a hour later by Moneus and Carina, who had slipped away when Carina wrapped the shadows around them both and they vanished into the night. The main cause of her racing heart rested beside her on the ground, his blue/black scales pressed against her mahogany colored ones. Jeth had come over beside her, Arydun and Aradace and almost shyly asked if he could join them. It was obvious to Arydun and Aradace what was happening as the night progressed as she and Jeth had traded friendly barbs between each other and them, even as they inched closer to one another. It had taken almost an hour before their scales were finally touching, and neither of them moved for the longest of moments. Tharua thought perhaps Jeth might pull away from the contact and her heart sang out in joy when he only pressed closer to her. His muscular bulk beside her, touching her as it was, made Tharua feel safer than she had ever felt before in her life. Tharua knew there were older females that were very interested in Jeth, and word among their kind was that he was going before the Elder Council tomorrow to ask for permission to be allowed to mate even though he was so young. Word had it that the Council would let him as well. With the exception of female dragons bonded to riders, females could not carry eggs before they were at least four hundred and fifty years old due to their bodies' own metabolism, however male dragons could impregnate even older females when they reached full maturity at twenty years of age. That was different for bonded females, as their Mindvoice abilities advanced their metabolisms so that many of them could carry eggs

as young as thirty and some even as young as twenty. That Jeth was beside her this night and not searching the skies for willing females told Tharua all she needed to know about his true feelings. Eliani did not openly acknowledge her bonded sister's excitement and joy, but sent her love and happiness to her through their bond.

Tharua had been amazed at the size of Jeth's father when she viewed him that first day here on Earth. He was not just huge in size, but he moved with a muscular and powerful grace that defied logic. She had met Jeth only a short time later, and even though she was nearly six years older than him at the time, his six month old body was already half the size of her fully grown form. Tharua had not seen him again until several weeks after she had bonded with Eliani, and as she watched his then seven year old body glide gracefully to the ground on the Spartan Estate, Lisisa perched proudly between his shoulders, Tharua had been smitten with him. Like Torma his father, Jeth was enormous in size and far larger than the majority of any living dragon, but the grace and agility he commanded was almost unparalleled. She never tired of watching him fly with Lisisa or alone when he was hunting, or watching him maneuver his beautiful muscular body when he walked among their bonded ones. His childlike acting and nature was just that, an act. Tharua had seen the serious side of Jeth, and he spoke with the intelligence and wisdom of someone three times his age, no doubt because of his deep bond with Lisisa and all she had experienced in her life. And the power they commanded was far more than she and Eliani would ever obtain.

Tharua turned her head slightly and looked at Jeth's snout, his blue/black scales smooth and reflecting the moonlight. His golden eyes watched the dancing and she thought for an instant that she saw his head bobbing in tune to the music that was playing.

Jeth? She spoke softly. He turned his massive head to look at her instantly, his golden eyes bright. *I never thanked you for what you did on Eleysi Three. You saved my life and that of my bonded sister. You and Lisisa.*

Jeth stared into her copper colored orbs for a long moment and leaned his head forward to touch his snout to hers. *There is nothing to thank me for. You turned quickly enough once Malic warned Eliani. The blast would have caused you to falter for only a moment. You would have recovered.*

Tharua stared back at him with love in her eyes at his words. *It... it is said you are going before the Elder Council tomorrow. She spoke tentatively. To seek permission to be able to take a mate.*

Jeth nodded his head slowly. *Yes.*

Do you think they will allow you to do this? Tharua asked.

I don't know. It is my hope that they do. Jeth answered.

There... there are many females who have been waiting for that day Jeth. Tharua said. *They will flock to Sparta in search of you if permission is granted. Do you... do you have a female you are interested in?*

Jeth nodded and turned back to look at the celebration. *Yes I do.* He replied. *The most beautiful female I have ever seen with my eyes. She has smooth shiny mahogany colored scales and bright copper colored eyes. Her talons are fiercely sharp and she is far more intelligent than I. I wish to make her mine before another male wins her heart. It is my hope she will... it is my hope she will allow me to be her mate. The females may flock here all they wish because it does not matter. I do not want any other.*

Tharua stared at him and could feel the warmth surging through her at his words. Tharua lifted her tail and ran the tip of it along the side of Jeth's longer and thicker tail. The tip of his tail curled around and brushed along the underside of hers. It was a show of sincere affection by a male dragon for a female and Tharua shuddered in joy, her wing tips fluttering gently. She looked up at his face once more and saw his golden eyes watching her.

She wants no other as well Jeth. Tharua spoke.

MINDVOICE CITYSHIP 41 DRAGON EDLER COUNCIL CHAMBERS

What you ask for has only been granted three times in our history Jeth. Daurgo spoke from his position next to Arzoal. *The last time was with your very parents, but even then they were considerably older than you are now.*

Jeth rested on the floor of the Elder Chamber and nodded his huge head. Jeth's recent actions in saving Eliani and Tharua had spread among the dragons on Earth, only adding to the mystique which the son of Torma and Isheeni already had around him. He and Lisisa were considered one of the top five Bonded Pairs within the Union and not just for their skill and daring and strength. Jeth and Lisisa did not care to fight... in fact they both hated it almost to the extreme. They would and had always sought a peaceful solution to whatever event they confronted. The war with the Evolli had only added to Jeth's long list of accomplishments; already well on his way to surpassing many of the Bonded Pairs who had been together since the inception of Mjolnir's Hand. His strength and intelligence was without question, and his childish nature always was able to ease tension and cause humor even in the darkest hours of the war. Jeth knew however that none of that would matter if the Elder Council did not allow him to choose a mate at so young an age. If they did not allow him to have Tharua. She was five years older than him, and with the looser restrictions now being placed on their kind, once a female dragon reached thirty years of age, they were allowed to mate.

Since being discovered on Enurrua and realizing their full potential with powerful Tier Six Mindvoicers as their riders, the dragons within the Union had evolved far more quickly than in the past. Like the Lycavorian females, due to constant interaction with other species and the increase in their Mindvoice abilities, bonded dragon females were now able to carry eggs as young as twenty years of age as opposed to the usual four hundred and fifty of years past. To offset this fact, Arzoal and the Dragon Council had instituted a policy that no male dragons were allowed in most cases to choose mates until they were over two hundred years old thus allowing the females to become older and wiser themselves before mating and having clutches of eggs. It was instinctual in most cases how male and female dragons chose each other, though many of those bonded to riders now exhibited deeper emotions and had begun being more selective in their choices of mates. As with Lycavorians, once mated in most cases, dragons remained together for the rest of their natural lives unless one of the mates died. Arzoal had maintained strict guidelines during the centuries before they had become part of the Union for the simple reason that she was trying to keep their species from becoming extinct. Now however, she and the Elder Council had to balance instinct and emotion among their kind, something that was not always easy to do. Though their total population was no where near the millions that Arzoal once remembered dragons numbering, each new clutch of eggs brought their species further and further from the brink. Torma was the last male dragon to have been granted permission to take a mate before she was able to produce eggs, and that was because of the devotion and love that he had showed to Isheeni as she grew. Torma was nearly three hundred years older than Isheeni, and their love and devotion to each other was legendary within dragon culture. Isheeni had given Torma three clutches of eggs, three each in the first two clutches and then four in the last clutch. Mara was the third egg from their second clutch but she had not hatched until Retta was born, somehow sensing the second daughter of Martin Leonidas and Anja was to be the one for her. All of their children were bonded to members of the Leonidas family which granted them increased control of their abilities and power because of the blood running not only in their veins, but the veins of their riders. Torma and Isheeni had made a joint decision to not have anymore egg clutches for at least a hundred years so that their children now would all be grown and established within their own lives.

Jeth knew that there were several dragon males older than the two hundred year limit that had shown interest in Tharua, even at her young age. Her mahogany scales and copper colored eyes were very enticing and she had lean muscular lines that to a male dragon were the epitome of perfection in a female. While Tharua had rebuffed all of those interested, they still had the opportunity to pursue her openly now that she was thirty-one years of age. Jeth did not want to let her slip through his grasp, and after last night he was even surer of his feelings and his decision. He had loved Tharua since he was a very young dragon and he knew that would not change. She was in his blood as surely as his mother was in his father's blood and her words to him last night only confirmed what his heart was telling him.

I know this Elder Daurgo. Jeth answered.

Why are your mother and father not beside you Jeth? Daurgo asked. Do they know what it is you are asking of us? Do they agree?

They know Elder Daurgo. Jeth answered gently. *And they do not stand with me because whatever this Council decides, I want it to be based on my actions and deeds. What I tell you. I do not wish this Council to grant me any special recognition because of who my parents are.*

This statement caused several of the Elders to turn and look at each other quickly, a movement that did not go unnoticed by Arzoal, and inwardly she smiled at this.

This is a very unusual request. The light green scaled female dragon spoke from the end of the line of nine Elders. *Your deeds are well known among our kind Jeth, and none on this council can deny that you have the respect of every member of Mjolnir's Hand. But to be very honest, in my opinion, you lack the wisdom of age that an older dragon would have in this instance. You take risks that are not needed young Jeth. You allow emotion to control what it is you do at times. This is well known. And now you come before us asking that you be allowed to take a mate at an age when you should still be learning how to control the power you and your Bonded Sister command.*

I was not aware that letting emotion play into my decision making wasn't allowed Elder Dalah. Jeth answered calmly and intelligently.

It is allowed Jeth. It is allowed and even encouraged. She replied. *The question remains however, are you mature enough to know when to not allow your emotions to factor into your decision making. That is a skill that only comes with age and experience. Something you do not have right now.*

Lisisa stepped forward from where she had been standing along the rear wall of the chamber now. She had encouraged Jeth to come here and make this request many months ago, and she would not let him stand alone especially after he had discovered the night before that Tharua did indeed feel the same for him. Lisisa had extricated herself from Denali's warm embrace and his bed very early this morning and had returned to her own villa in Gytheio to make herself presentable. She wore the standard fleet uniform and boots, her raven colored hair falling well past her shoulders.

Elder Dalah... may I speak? Lisisa spoke now.

Lisisa Leonidas is always welcome in this chamber. And always free to speak what is within her mind. The light green scaled dragon spoke.

Lisisa stepped up next to Jeth and placed her hand on his thick neck. She watched his eyes close in love and caring and she turned to the dragon Elders. *I do not pretend to have the wisdom of the members of this Council. All of you surpass me in years and experience by quite a wide margin, but I still feel I must speak now. You say that my Bonded Brother lacks the experience and age needed to make this decision. I ask you... on what do you base that?*

This question caught Dalah very much by surprise, as well as several other members of the Council.

He... he is only twenty six years old Lisisa Leonidas. Dalah finally answered.

Is he? Lisisa asked. *I have five hundred and six years behind me. When Jeth and I bonded on Lycavore that very first day, he inherited all that I was. Everything I had experienced up until that point became part of who he was. We don't claim to have the depth of the connection that my brother and Elynth have, that my father and Jeth's father share, but our bond is far deeper than most of those Bonded Pairs in the Union.*

That is true Lisisa Leonidas. Daurgo spoke gently. *However, your life before Jeth came into it, before your father brought you out of the darkness you were living, it was for lack of a better word... horrific.*

Lisisa nodded. *Yes it was.* She said softly. *And it has made me who I am today. It has made me stronger. I could have fallen into the abyss of that life but I fought and hung on because I had faith my father would come for me. That is what led me to do what I did. To protect others even though they hated me for what I was. A half breed. I knew my father would come and I never gave up hope. That is what Jeth now has. Yes... he is reckless at times... aren't we all? Yes... he sometimes acts childish... as does my brother and Elynth. As do my father and Jeth's father. Jeth just does it better. He is like a soothing balm to others around him when he acts in such a manner, and it is this nature that has helped to pull many others from despair. I submit to you that as deep as our connection... our bond is... Jeth is wiser than many male dragons three times his age.*

I agree to a great extent. The dark blue scaled dragon next to Daurgo spoke now. *The Bonded Pair of Jeth and Lisisa is well known for trying to solve problems without violence. Even during the war, there are many instances where they asked for surrender and gave our enemies the opportunity to lay down their arms.*

It is understandable that you would stand beside your Bonded Brother and speak as you have today. Dalah spoke in a sterner tone of voice that was laced with could only be described as sarcasm. *However... I do not share your view Lisisa Leonidas and I would imagine there are others on this Council that do not as well... for you are considered bias in your opinion.*

Arzoal's head snapped around and she glared at the light green dragon. *Elder Dalah... you will be very careful in the words you choose to use. Lisisa Leonidas speaks true words and they will not be disrespected. She is also a Princess of our Union and the daughter and sister to two Talon Guardians. The tone of your voice is unacceptable to me!*

Dalah looked at Arzoal and bowed her head. *Forgive me.* She spoke.

Daurgo looked at Jeth who had remained seated during the exchange, his posture one of respect and reverence to the Elders. *Young Jeth... for you to request this now... there must be a female that has taken your fancy. I will tell you that there are several older females who have expressed interest in you since it was discovered this meeting was going to take place and we would hear your petition. It appears the rumors are just as rampant among our species as others within the Union. Who is this female dragon that has emboldened you to come forward this day?*

Jeth looked at him. *The sister of Elder Syrilth.* He answered turning to look at Syrilth. *Tharua.*

Syrilth looked at Jeth with only a small amount of surprise in her eyes. And it was surprise for how he had so confidently announced her sister's name. She had known for some time that Tharua was completely in love with the son of Torma and Isheeni, but the way he had just told the Elder Council this news... with such confidence and calm, that told Syrilth all she needed to know.

Tharua? Dalah spoke now. *She is still a child in her own right.*

She is also bonded to a Leonidas however. Daurgo spoke calmly. *And though not as strong as other bonds among their family, certainly among the stronger bonds of the Pairs in the Union. And their deeds are almost as well known as those of Lisisa and Jeth.*

She is also just as headstrong and reckless as her Bonded Sister Princess Eliani. Dalah spoke evenly, careful to not put any inflection into her voice this time. *And that is common knowledge.*

Arzoal nodded in agreement. *In many ways yes, but Eliani's relationship with Nyla Sinthe has tamed her to a great degree as we all know, and Arydun has also been a calming influence on Tharua as well.* Arzoal looked at Syrilth. *Were you aware of this Syrilth?*

Syrilth nodded her head. *Tharua has told me of her feelings for Jeth.* She answered. *She has had these feelings for several years now, and they have only grown stronger as time has passed. I have done nothing but encourage her to explore her emotions and feelings. Something she has apparently done.*

And in doing so... you have eliminated any choice she may have had. Dalah said.

Syrilth looked at her. *Excuse me?*

By encouraging her to pursue these feelings for Jeth here Syrilth, you have eliminated any chance for another male who might show interest in Tharua. Dalah continued evenly. *There have been several males, my son among them, who knew she was reaching the time when she could be approached for mating. However, because of her duties as a Bonded Pair, and the constant attention of the son of Torma, she will never know what another male could have offered her.*

Jeth's huge head turned to look at Lisisa quickly when he heard this and then he turned back to listen to Dalah.

I did not tell my sister to feel for Jeth what she feels for him Dalah! Syrilth exclaimed. *To suggest such a thing is ridiculous. The feelings for Jeth were there and grew on their own. We all know that those who are bonded to riders have developed far more advanced emotions than normal. They have formed a symbiosis with their riders. I only encouraged Tharua to embrace what she felt and pursue these feelings if that was her wish. And apparently that was her wish.*

You did not caution her to guard her feelings! Dalah complained. *That is what you should have done! To guard her feelings and perhaps wait until she was back among others of her kind that might be interested in her. Is that not what our males do? They strut about and do very odd things trying to impress the females. For some males it may take years to draw the interest of the female they want. And even then, they may not get who it is they pursue. In Tharua's case, Jeth has eliminated that possibility altogether.*

Jeth is not to blame here. Arzoal spoke now. *There is no blame to place. He could no more control his own feelings than Tharua could control hers.*

Couldn't he? Dalah asked. *He is the son of Torma and Isheeni. When combined with the Mindvoice powers of the King and Queen Aricia there are no other Bonded Pairs that compare with the exception of Androcles and Elynth. His bloodline alone indicates that he would have the Mindvoice ability to control his*

urges. *Being bonded with Princess Lisisa only increases that power, for she is exceptionally powerful in her own right. And now... when Tharua has come of age to mate, he comes before us asking for permission to forgo the ancient rules we have put in place and give him our blessing to take a mate. A female that he has not had to work to impress and win over because there has been no competition.*

This is not a game! Daurgo exclaimed loudly. *Jeth's fight to win Tharua's heart has been done on the field of battle! And day after day! Fighting beside her and the other Bonded Pairs! Acting the part of the King's will as all Mjolnir's Hand is destined to do! By his own actions and deeds, as he himself has said!*

The life of a Bonded Pair is not the only life within the Union for a dragon! Dalah barked out.

It is the life that Tharua and I have chosen however. Jeth spoke now. *This is not about me and Tharua is it Elder Dalah?*

You are not old enough to know what you speak of Jeth! Dalah barked out.

Aren't I? Jeth said evenly. *You say I have done these things. That my attentions have kept Tharua from seeing what other males offer her?*

Dalah looked at him. *That is what I am saying.*

Then refuse me. Jeth spoke confidently. *Refuse my petition and I will wait until I am two hundred years old before I return in front of you. Parade as many males as you like in front of Tharua. I do not fear that. She will refuse them all. She will wait for me... as I will wait for her, for that is the depth of our love. Call her before you and ask her yourself if you do not believe me.* The way Jeth spoke those words, with such confidence and strength in his voice, without hesitation or doubt in his tone. That is what sealed the decision of several of the Elders.

You presume much young Jeth. Dalah snapped.

I only speak the truth. Jeth said firmly. *A truth that you can not deny or change no matter what you do.*

Do not be so confident in your words young Jeth. Dalah hissed out.

Enough! Arzoal barked. *I have heard enough! I will excuse myself from this vote because of my connection to Jeth. Syrilth will you do the same?*

Syrilth nodded. *Of course.*

Arzoal looked to either side. *What does the Council say? I believe we already know how Elder Dalah will vote. Daurgo?*

I vote yes.

Elder Lym?

The dark brown female nodded. *I vote yes.*

Elder Vureem?

I too vote yes.

Elder Tratain? Elder Bahr?

Yes. The two males spoke from Daurgo's left.

Elder Ikkan?

The male on the very end next to Dalah nodded his large head. *I was present when your father came before the Elder mother asking for permission to take your mother as his mate even though she could not give him any eggs. I saw the look of devotion in your father's eyes young Jeth. I see that same glare in your eyes. The utter sense of commitment and devotion. There is no doubt in my mind... I also vote yes.*

Arzoal nodded her huge head. *Very well. The vote is six to one in favor of Jeth's petition. I will adjourn this session of the council so that our own emotions can cool. We will reform at mid day to hear the remaining petitions.*

Lisisa stood close next to Jeth's head as the dragon Elders began to break up and head out of the chamber. Syrilth and Arzoal moved up to where they stood along with Daurgo. Jeth looked at his grandmother intently. *Did I... did I do something to bring her wrath down on me grandmother?* He asked almost innocently.

Arzoal shook her head and leaned her snout over to rub the top of Jeth's head. *It is not about you Jeth. Dalah is finding it very hard to come to terms with the changes from the old ways that we are making. She is also one of the females that courted your father's attentions. She has always been put out that he chose to devote himself to your mother instead of her. She has always resented that he chose Isheeni over her. She thought because Isheeni was so much younger than her she should not have the right to mate with Torma.*

This is what you truly want Jeth? Daurgo asked.

Jeth nodded. *Without question.*

Arzoal nodded. *Then as long as Tharua agrees I wish you the best grandson. She will appear before us this afternoon since you have made your petition to us. When the Harmony of Two Hearts Ceremony takes place four months from now... the two of you can make it official. Though it might be better if she wasn't carrying eggs when that occurs.* Arzoal finished with a chuckle.

Elder Mother... there seemed... there seemed to be more to it than just normal jealousy. Lisisa asked. *Her distaste for the Bonded Pairs and Jeth in particular seemed rather extreme.*

Her son Vaeros was one of the first to be tested for Mjolnir's Hand when it was first formed. He did not make the cut for the first selection phase. Daurgo answered.

And this is the same son who has shown interest in Tharua? Jeth asked.

Arzoal nodded. *Apparently. She harbors a great deal of resentment it seems. More so than even I thought her capable of. Your father dismissed her... her son was not selected for Mjolnir's Hand and now you have apparently stolen the heart of the female dragon her son was interested in.*

Lisisa looked at her. *Should we be concerned about that?*

Syrilth chuckled softly. *The war and your father and brother have made you suspicious of everyone* Lisisa Leonidas.

Lisisa shrugged. *Better safe than sorry my father always says.*

Arzoal shook her head. *She is a member of this Elder Council and has been for many decades. She is not an enemy and you will see tomorrow that whatever passion she had for this issue today will be gone. Dalah does not hold grudges.*

We're sure about that? Lisisa asked.

Arzoal chuckled now as well and lowered her head to butt Lisisa in her shoulder gently. *Go now you two. You have the decision you came here for. Worship her Jeth. As your father worships your mother.*

Jeth nodded. *I will grandmother. I will.*

Tharua's appearance this afternoon is nothing more than a formality Jeth. You need not worry of my sister's decision. Syrilth spoke. *I know her well enough to understand the depth of her feelings for you, and nothing Dalah will say will change her mind.*

Jeth nodded. *I know.*

Then go and tell her. Syrilth said with humor in her voice. *I understand she waits in the valley with the hatchlings and Eliani.*

GYTHEIO

Sadi Leonidas was unable to take notice of the sun rising and then falling once more, and if she did notice this fact, it was lost within the cloud of ecstasy that she had been experiencing non stop for more hours than her mind had been able to keep track of. What she had been experiencing and feeling for the last thirty-six hours was nothing short of absolute wondrous heaven.

Sadi rested in Andro's lap now, his huge cock filling her so completely that every movement, no matter how small caused ripples of intense pleasure to course through her lithe body like the waves crashing against the beach of the ocean she had visited with her father on Apo Prime as a child. The pleasure had not stopped from the moment Andro had first plunged into her velvety depths. Sadi never imagined she could feel what she was feeling, and feel it for so long. Part of it she knew was his incredibly powerful Alpha male aura, and the exquisite control he seemed to have over it. He would use it to caress and enflame her body to the point of insanity, and then pull it away to simply wrap around her as she calmed. Then he would do it again, this time with his hands and lips and tongue caressing every millimeter of her body, inciting uncontrollable flaming passions from deep within her belly until she could not deny the explosions that ripped through her. In the last thirty-six hours he had not allowed Sadi to come down from her passionate plane of existence. Even when they were resting and feeding each other from the bowls of fruits and berries, her every sense was alive with indescribable pleasure. His aura had embraced her in those first moments, and he had not released her.

Sadi did not want to be released.

Androcles Leonidas was the largest man she had ever seen not to mention have filling her. His thick cock was a quarter inch more than twelve inches for she had measured it playfully during one of their more restful moments, if you could call them restful as they had stroked each other's bodies only inciting more passion. That first glorious plunge was all it took for Sadi to know that the pleasure she had only dreamed of up until then was going to be hers. And it had been so much more satisfying than the dreams she had experienced. He stretched her, filled her in a way she never thought possible, touching places she never knew existed. She could feel every pulse of the thick vein that adorned the entire length of his cock as it throbbed within her belly. No matter what position he took her in, and there had been so many she could not recall them all, the only thing she felt was a desire for more. It was almost as if he had been made especially for her, to fit her exactly, and there was no denying the pleasure he could elicit from her with just flexing his enormous shaft inside her tight pussy. His hands never stopped moving, stroking her, caressing her until she thought she would scream. Until she did scream. His lips set fire to her body no matter where they touched, and he had spent several hours exploring every crevice and contour of her body with those lips and that oh so talented tongue of his. Sadi was also experiencing the full unshielded power of his Alpha male aura. She had heard stories of how powerful the King's aura was, and what it could do to his Queens. Now Sadi was experiencing it for herself with his son. The man she had loved since he was only eight months old.

His aura was like a blanket that wrapped tightly around her, always touching her, always caressing her in the most intimate of ways. It could keep her in a constant state of arousal, and it had for so many hours, yet Sadi welcomed that for she used her own female aura to continually entice and tease her new mate. She had lowered all her own shields long ago, unleashing her own aura as powerfully as she could create it, surprising herself with the staggering power she could spawn and the response she got from Andro was everything she had ever hoped for. The other men in her life had long ago faded to blank memories as Andro claimed her heart and her soul with every powerful plunge into her depths and every breath stealing kiss he gave her. There was only this man now, this man Androcles Leonidas, who had so completely captured all that Sadi was.

Sadi grasped the sides of Andro's head tightly now and pulled his face from where he was suckling her painfully erect nipples. Sweat glistened on both their bodies in the moonlight above them and she realized he had somehow ripped the mattress from the bed and brought it out onto the patio of his villa.

Their villa.

Sadi lifted her head skyward, her jungle green eyes changed, her fangs extended and she inhaled deeply the scent of her mate and the heady scent of sex and exertion. The smell of the ocean invaded her senses and the cool wind across their skin combined with the moonlight from above triggered something instinctual within Sadi. A need... a burning to act in a singular way. She felt his large hands grip her ass cheeks tighter and pull her closer to him, flexing his massive cock within her depths and sending tiny shivers of delight tearing through her veins. Her blood was hot... burning for the man who held her so tightly within his grasp. She lowered her face back down and saw he too had allowed the change to come over him partially. His azure blue orbs were surrounded by a black band, his dual incisor fangs prominent and exposed just beneath his soft lips.

"Take... I want you to take me Andro!" She gasped her fingers tightening around the sides of his head. "No... don't hold back anymore! I... I want all of you... all of you my love!" Sadi groaned and closed her eyes as she felt him flex his cock within her once more.

Sadi drove her hips downward with all her strength, feeling his huge balls smash against the lips of her bald pussy and hearing him groan and his hands tighten on her ass as she rotated her hips in tight, hard circles impaling herself even more on his cock.

"Here my love!" She groaned loudly. "Here... here under the moon! Take me Andro! Make... make me yours for eternity!"

Andro released an animal like growl, the wolf within him responding to the demands of his mate. He rolled over quickly, pulling Sadi with him until she was beneath him, his cock still trapped within the prison of her warm depths. Sadi glared up at him as her hands gripped his bare shoulders. "Do it my love!" She growled now, her fangs clicking together loudly.

Staring into her beautiful eyes, her sugar plume and spice scent saturating all around him, that same instinctual need and desire gripped him. His changed eyes flared for a moment and he shifted his body slightly, withdrawing his cock until only the large bulbous head remained inside her. Sadi's eyes grew wide at the sensations ripping through her and then Andro rammed himself forward completely. Sadi howled out her

pleasure, her head going back as he began pummeling her tight body into the soft mattress in blistering twelve inch strokes. There was nothing gentle about this. This coupling was all about instinctual need and the desire to reach that one point. This was about the wolves within them both and the desire to consummate what they had found together in the most complete manner they knew how.

Pleasure spiraled out of control for both of them, his dominating strokes into her body causing the orgasms to come crashing upon one another with the force of a hurricane. Sadi withered beneath the man she loved so utterly, her mind awash in otherworldly bliss as her juices spilled from within her erupting body coating his pile driving cock in her sweet nectar. Andro was a blur of motion, his hips pounding down with driving power into Sadi's scorching depths. Her pussy muscles were clamping down on his raging cock, unwilling to release him as his hips moved back and pulling him even deeper as he crashed back into her. He lowered his body onto her completely, feeling her own arms wrap around his back with crushing power of her own and he buried his face into the crook of her shoulder and neck, his arms wrapping under her shoulders to give him better leverage to plume the depths of his devastatingly beautiful mate. Sadi's arms held his shoulders and she gasped out next to his ear.

"Yours... I... I am... I am yours for all time!"

Andro's tightly shut eyes burst open as that need overwhelmed him. It happened without warning... without conscious thought. He opened his mouth, exposing his dual fangs and he bit down into Sadi's shoulder. There was a momentary flash of intense pain in his own shoulder as Sadi's wolf fangs sank deep into his flesh.

As their each other's blood blossomed across their taste buds, Andro felt his cock balloon incredibly in size. The pinnacle was theirs now, and his fangs tore free from Sadi's shoulder and he howled into the moon lit night, his neck straining to the point of breaking as Sadi's howl reverberated in unison with his and the sounds echoed across the surface of the bay around them filling the night air. Sadi felt his searing hot come race up the length of his cock and explode within her as the most crushing orgasm she had experienced yet continued that hurricane of pleasure that was stealing very breath away. As Andro's come flooded into her depths, so too did their minds become one. All that they were individually, blended together in an instant, forever binding them together. As lovers. As friends. As husband and wife.

As Soulmates.

Forever KertaGai! Andro's voice sounded within Sadi's mind as clear as any foghorn as he collapsed on top of her utterly spent and exhausted.

Forever Andro my love!

Sadi couldn't help the tears that sprouted from her eyes as she wrapped her arms tightly around his back, trying to pull him into her physically as completely as he was inside her mind. The pain from his bite was long gone, and what was left in its place took her breath away as she was swimming within the deepest recesses of his mind and seeing all that he was even as he delved into her own secrets. She whimpered as his arms crushed her closer to him and he rolled onto his side, pulling her within his embrace until it was impossible to see where his body ended and hers began. Their bodies were spent even though their spirits were still willing and while sleep claimed their physical bodies their minds continued to dance with each other until they too drifted into a peaceful and contented oblivion.

Sadi's jungle green eyes fluttered open slowly at the sound of female voices and the laughter and scampering feet of running children. She shifted slightly on the bed and turned when she realized Andro was not next to her. She didn't remember when they had returned to the bedroom, or how the bed had been put back into some semblance of order, all that mattered to her now was that Andro was gone. Sadi sat up quickly when the double doors to the bedroom burst open and three of Andro's younger siblings burst in chasing one another, three dragon hatchlings hot on their heels. Sadi held the sheet around her as they came to screeching halts and stared at her wide eyed.

Sadi didn't know what to do so she smiled brightly. "Good morning." She said more calmly than she actually felt.

"She's prettier than the others!" The ten year old boy who Sadi now knew as Calyb spoke.

The small ten year old girl she knew as Retta met her eyes. "Hush Calyb!" She hissed out in a rather commanding voice. "Andro had to leave." She said turning back to Sadi. "Father needed him."

Sadi smiled brightly still. “Yes... I gathered that.” She spoke. “How are you this morning Retta?”
“You remember my name?”

“You are Andro’s sister. Why wouldn’t I remember your name?” Sadi spoke as she pulled the sheet around her tighter and inched closer to the end of the bed.

“She’s nicer too!” Calyb spoke. “She’s not yelling at us like the others on the Island.”

Retta met Sadi’s gaze. “Are you... are you Andro’s mate now?” She asked.

Sadi’s smile grew even wider. “Yes. Yes I am. And this is just as much your home as it now is mine.”

Sadi saw Retta smile and she was about to rise to her feet when the door opened again and Aricia came in dressed very casually in a white sun dress that was practically see through and simple sandals on her feet. Her own azure eyes took in what was happening and her face became sterner.

“Children I told you not in Andro’s room because Sadi was still sleeping.” Aricia scolded them. “Out! Now! All of you... before I take a switch to your bottoms!”

Sadi couldn’t help but smile as they took off out the double doors that led to the beach with fake screams of fear, the dragon hatchlings following them with madly flapping wings. Aricia turned to face her with an embarrassed look.

“I told them not in Andro’s room, but they are so used to having the run of their brother’s home.” Aricia said. “I’m sorry.”

Sadi stood up and wrapped the sheet around her body, tucking the corners of the sheet on the side of her firm breasts. “That won’t change just because I am here.” Sadi spoke. There was a long moment of awkward silence between them before Sadi spoke again. “Milady Aricia... I...”

Aricia stepped closer to her and took her hands. “No. What am I Sadi... eight... ten years older than you? I will not have you referring to me in such a way.”

“You share the King’s mind.” Sadi spoke. “The King’s memories. He is over three thousand years old and by virtue of that you...”

Aricia shook her head. “And you now share my son’s memories... which include those of his father.” She said softly as she stepped even closer and her eyes examined where Andro had bitten her on the shoulder. “You and Andro have conducted the *Gravinolfgreksaan*.”

Sadi blushed and looked almost embarrassed as she nodded shyly. “It happened... it just happened. I don’t know... like it was...”

“Instinct?” Aricia finished her statement.

Sadi nodded. “Yes.”

Aricia smiled and squeezed her hands. “It was the *Assirina Cormunn* last night Sadi.” She said. “Did you know that?”

“The Centennial of the Moon? No.” Sadi answered.

Aricia smiled and nodded. “You and my son are now *Anomes* Sadi, and you don’t know how happy that makes me. He has loved you for so long Sadi and part of me hoped this would happen. Martin told me it would happen, that he knew that night on the island you were meant to be with our son.” Aricia reached up and caressed the fading scars of Andro’s bite. “Though he could have chosen a less conspicuous place to bite you.” She spoke disapprovingly.

Sadi chuckled. “It was a rather intense moment.” She said with a brilliant smile. “I don’t think it was something that crossed his mind at the time. And to be honest... I wouldn’t have cared where he bit me as long as he did.”

Aricia laughed as well. “Yes... I was in that exact same position.” She said. She looked at Sadi with a smile. “Something came up and Martin needed Andro with him. We volunteered to come here and make sure you weren’t alone when you woke.”

“We?” Sadi asked.

Aricia smiled and nodded. “You can come out now! It is safe!” She spoke loudly.

Sadi turned to the doorway and saw Anja and For’mya lean in with tense faces. She couldn’t help but laugh at the expressions on their faces as they came fully into the room.

“We didn’t know how you would react?” For’mya spoke quickly. “We are sometimes very miffed and upset when Martin Leonidas is taken from our bed in the middle of the night or early morning.”

Sadi saw that they too were dressed in simple sun dresses though Anja wore nothing on her feet.

“I told you, sending the little ones in first was the wise tactic.” Anja spoke with a grin as she stepped up to Sadi and reached out with her hand to cover the scars where Andro had bitten her. “Once we saw this on Andro’s shoulder this morning, we didn’t know how you would react knowing his duties had pulled him away. He was rather upset about it to say the least.”

For’mya chuckled. “Upset? I don’t believe I’ve ever heard Androcles curse so long and so well in the ancient language. He spoke some words even we have never heard.”

Sadi saw the small pulse of soft white light from Anja’s hand and the sudden warmth. It lasted only a second and when her hand came away the dull throb was gone from her shoulder and the scars were much fainter. Anja admired her work and nodded. “That is something I know you are proud of and wish to display, but their dual fangs can sometimes leave a nasty scar. At least now it doesn’t mar your beauty.”

Sadi reached up and placed her hand over the bite scars. “I will display it proudly. As often as I can.” She said softly.

Anja smiled widely, her jade green eyes bright. “Well... Aricia can’t because of where our brute of a mate bit her. Sometimes I wonder if all conscious intelligence leaves that man when he goes instinctual on us.”

“But think of the pleasure when he does *Melyanna*.” For’mya spoke with a knowing smile.

Aricia reached up and touched her left breast gently. “If it was allowed I would proudly display it as well.” She spoke firmly.

For’mya took Aricia’s hand. “Yes... well you can continue to display it for us. But no one else is allowed to see.” She spoke. “Come all of you... the coffee is almost done and Aurith and Isheeni are minding the little ones as they run along the beach.”

“Wait!” Sadi spoke. “Where... where is Andro?”

They looked at her and their smiles faded somewhat. “Dysea, Normya and Zarah went to be with Carina since Moneus was needed as well. Martin did not want to tell Andro or Moneus and spoil the time that you would have together. A ship has arrived in orbit. Martin needed Isabella and them to meet with those who are on board.” Anja explained.

“Who is on this ship?” Sadi asked.

Aricia squeezed her hand. “The Empress of the High Coven.” She answered.

SPARTA

MT. HAGIOS *DURCUNUSAAN* LANDING PORT

Isabella stood in the large hanger on one side of the bulky medical scanner that had been set up to span the entire width of the entrance to the hanger. It was similar to those used at the spacious and more public spaceports, but this one was also designed to scan for weapons as well as diseases and unknown bio hazards. Isabella had insisted on being the one to greet the High Coven delegation once Martin had told them of their pending arrival after the celebration. Martin had told them what was going on; leaving no details out as the six of them had lounged in their bed after everyone had left the celebration. And then Martin Leonidas had spent the rest of the evening into the early morning hours making all of them bark out his name in bliss. He had spent considerable time with Isabella wrapped in his arms, driving her up to the edge and over it several times. Isabella knew it was his way of showing her, telling her he had complete and utter faith in her. Isabella had spent the entire day yesterday preparing for this event and she turned to look at Andro as he stepped up next to her. They both wore the standard light body armor with crimson capes, their only weapons the Nehtes strapped to their thighs and the Shi Viskas they wore. Isabella smiled at the tired look on Andro’s face and once more she could only marvel and thank the gods for the life she now had. Twenty-seven years ago if someone had told her that a pure blooded Lycavorian would call her mother, and that she would love that same young man as her very own son, Isabella would have very seriously considered having that person committed.

Isabella Leonidas could not imagine what her life would be like without those she had come to love so dearly. And it had begun with Martin himself, when from across the stars and light years Isabella had been branded with a Shi Viska the moment Martin discovered his true heritage and history. Isabella still bore the distinction of being the only pure blooded vampire in the long history of the Union to ever be branded with a Shi Viska and survive. That had been the most defining moment in her life and set her on the path to what she

now had. She had discovered her love for Dysea first, and the platinum haired elf Queen still brought shivers of exotic delight to her mind and body even after twenty-five years of being together. She would never tire of her *Ussta* she-elf as she called Dysea, for they had developed a love as powerful and stirring as the one she shared with Martin.

Martin Leonidas.

He was without a doubt the most powerful man she had ever been associated with. It had taken two years before Isabella had surrendered to the growing feelings she had for him and now just as with Dysea and the others, she could not imagine life without him. He loved her without question, without hesitation and every time he caressed her or kissed her with affection, it only reaffirmed everything Isabella felt for him. He could curl her toes in their bed; make her scream his name in passionate delight, just as he did the others. He had given her two beautiful daughters and she hoped one day soon she could give him a son just as the others had. To give him a son would complete Isabella in every way. And then there were her fellow Queens. Never in her lifetime had Isabella imagined she would share a man as well as a bed with four other women, and enjoy immensely every mind blowing moment as she had for the last quarter of a century. While she would always choose Dysea first, Isabella could not deny the intense pleasure she felt with each and every one of them whether it be Aricia's incredibly sugary pussy lips, For'mya's wonderfully delicious tongue, or the flavor of Anja's unbelievably sweet tasting blood. She loved each and every one of them with a passion she had never experienced and would die for them in an instant. And while they each had children with Martin Leonidas, they loved all of them as if they were their own children, and all of them called her mother just as they called her fellow Queens mother.

"Your father is not happy he had to pull you away from Sadi Andro. Moneus away from Carina." Isabella spoke as she looked at him. "You know that don't you?"

Andro nodded quickly. "I don't blame him and neither does Moneus. This is important... and I'm happy for the time he was able to give me. Sadi will understand and I'll make it up to her soon."

They both looked up when they heard the roar of four T9E *TEMPEST* Interceptors pass over the hanger and then the heavier, throaty roar of large engines and they watched as the huge transport began to settle to the ground outside roughly two hundred meters from the hanger.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[Do you feel any?]* She asked.

Andro nodded slowly. *[Half a dozen. Maybe more.]* He replied. *[The transport is putting off psychic disruptors to block Mindvoice intrusion. Powerful ones too.]*

[What do you feel son?] Isabella asked.

[The Empress and Yuri. They are not shielding] He answered. *[Several others that are exceptionally strong.]* He tilted his head to the side. *[Six dragons... Elynth's age... a little younger, including one that is openly radiating...]*

[Radiating what?] Isabella asked.

Andro looked at her. *[Anger and hatred. He has Yuri's imprint on him. It is the dragon she is bonded too.]*

Isabella nodded. *[That doesn't surprise me.]* She replied.

She turned as Eliani and Nyla came up to them. "The sensor board is ready mother." Eliani spoke calmly. "If they have any kind of foreign disease or substance in their bodies we'll see it."

Isabella nodded. "Nyla... have your team on stand by to move against the dragons if they do not comply with Moneus's instructions. Eliani and Tharua will cover. Moneus will secure the ship with his section and Andro, Elynth and I will deal with the others. Where are Lisisa and Jeth?"

[Orbiting above you as you requested mother.] Lisisa's voice burst into their heads. *[The ship is smaller than a Type II by perhaps thirty meters. No visible weapons that I could see.]*

[Lisisa... you and Jeth will drop and cover Moneus and Nyla if needed.] Isabella spoke. *[Otherwise remain airborne unless we call for you.]*

[Seeing her does not bother me] Lisisa spoke quickly. *[She is not my mother. I have five mothers who love me. I am not afraid of her.]*

[That is not why I want you to remain airborne Lisisa... you know that. If needed... seeing you and Jeth dropping from the heavens will frighten even the most hardened vampire.] Isabella spoke. *[That is why I want you to remain airborne.]*

[*Understood.*] Lisisa answered and both she and Andro heard the acceptance and the commitment in her voice.

“Mother... we’re talking about the Empress of the High Coven.” Eliani said softly. “Is it wise to have just the three of you? Even I can sense how strong this Yuri is.”

Isabella smiled. “Yuri and her mother would not come here on a suicide mission.” She said. “They are too cowardly to die in such a venture. They would send others to do their dirty work. No... they are here to talk. The question remains... how much they will try to test their welcome.”

Eliani nodded and leaned up to kiss her cheek. She nodded to Andro and headed back to where Tharua stood beside the waist high sensor board that Eliani would monitor. Nyla and Arydun moved to stand just to Eliani’s right and Nyla’s Durcunusaan Team spread out in a standard defensive posture.

Isabella looked at Andro just as Elynth came from behind them and the other set of doors to the hanger that led into the main Durcunusaan base. *Everything is ready.* She spoke as she came up behind them.

She wore her combat saddle and she touched Andro’s shoulder with her snout as she settled to the ground just to his right, but kept her feet under her ready to spring into action, her talons scrapping lightly against the steel floor of the hanger.

Isabella nodded as the whine of the High Coven ship’s engines faded into silence. “Then let’s do this.” She spoke. Isabella reached up and touched the COM unit built into her body armor. “Moneus... you may proceed. And please do not injure yourself so soon after taking my daughter as your mate Moneus Simpson. She would never forgive me.”

They all head Moneus’s deep laughter echo across the open COM. “I’m more concerned about what Carina would do to me than the High Coven.” His voice spoke. “We’re moving now!”

Aikiro stood next to Yuri near the rear of the ramp, Moran and Tesand directly behind them. They could hear the rattle and movement as Narice and the others unsecured their dragons from their travel pens and began moving towards the rear of the High Coven converted long range freighter.

“Isabella waits for us.” Aikiro spoke softly. “And the oldest son. Several others that are exceptionally strong, including your daughter.”

Yuri nodded but didn’t look at her. “That half breed slut is not my daughter.” Yuri spoke in a low voice. “Can you penetrate the Mindvoice shields?” She asked.

Aikiro shook her head slowly. “Not of the son... his shields are... they are very intricate and almost as powerful as his father. The others are strong enough to detect if I try and probe them, and it appears Isabella is equal to you in Mindvoice ability now. I did not expect that.”

“I suspected as much but didn’t say anything.” Yuri answered. She looked at her mother. “I never expected to set foot on this planet again, let alone come to Sparta.”

Aikiro nodded her head. “Nor did I.” She said. She turned as the others gathered behind them and light green scaled dragon with dirty yellow wings moved up beside Yuri. “We will do exactly as they tell us. Do not provoke them in any large way. I’m sure you can all sense what is arrayed against us now that we are on the surface, but we are not here for conflict. Remember we all have a task to perform and we can’t do that if we are not allowed some freedom. Is that clearly understood?” Aikiro saw their heads nod and she turned to look at where Moran had moved to the side of the ramp. “Very well Robert... let us see what we have gotten ourselves into.”

Moran nodded and punched the control for the ramp. He moved back to stand to Yuri’s right between her and Aikiro as the ramp began to lower. They saw the entrance to the hanger as the ramp lowered and then they were looking at two dozen heavily armed soldiers, all of them wearing black body armor and matte black helmets, the large black skinned soldier standing slightly in front of the others his arms clasped behind his back and armed with what appeared to be just one of their Nehtes secured to his right leg. As the ramp locked fully in place Aikiro and Yuri began walking down, the four ton footsteps of Vollenth following along with Moran and Tesand. His small yellow eyes looked back and forth taking in all around him.

Anthar leaned his head close to Carisia’s shoulder. [*Carisia... we...*]

Carisia reached up quickly and rubbed his scales under his jaw. [*Not here Anthar.*] She spoke quickly.

Anthar understood immediately and remained silent as they moved forward behind Narice and Deneth.

Aikiro stepped up in front of the towering young black Spartan and met his dark eyes confidently. "I am Empress Aikiro of the High Coven." She spoke.

Moneus looked at the smaller women and nodded his head. He did not make the mistake of underestimating smaller females, for he had seen Eliani and Carina in action enough times to know that was usually a very painful experience. His keen eyes drifted back among those that stood behind her without acknowledging her and took in the half dozen dragons as well as who he assumed were their riders. Three females and two males. The dragons were a mix of colors and none were larger than Elynth except for the carmine red scaled beast in the back rank. That dragon appeared slightly larger than the others by perhaps half a meter. There were another dozen personnel that exited the ship after the dragons and fell in silently.

Moneus Simpson did not fear dragons. He had been raised among them since he was a child, often times getting into trouble with Andro and Elynth. When he completed his Agoge he made the decision to become part of the Durcunusaan, even though he had the Mindvoice skills to become bonded to a dragon. His path in life had paralleled his father's life almost exactly. He was a superior soldier, and the two dozen members of his section were dedicated to him almost to the extreme. They knew he would not ask them to do anything he was not prepared to do himself. They had fought together during the entire Evolli War, and while all of them had been injured in some fashion of the course of that war, Moneus Simpson was recognized as the only Durcunusaan Section Leader to bring his entire unit back without a death. It was a testament to his leadership really for they had been involved in some of the most savage and vicious fighting of the war, including the nightmare of Alba Tau.

Moneus turned back to look at Aikiro with a stoic face. "You brought more than you told would be allowed." He spoke.

Aikiro nodded slowly. "Yes... but they are aides and officers that will help me to present my case to your King. That is why we are here young man." Aikiro answered confidently. "I'm curious... is this how you greet all visiting dignitaries? With weapons drawn and dozens of soldiers?"

Moneus met her eyes evenly. "Whatever weapons your people may have will be left here." He spoke motioning to the table that was ten meters off to the side with his hand. "They will be physically searched as well as scanned, so it is within your best interests to hand them over now as opposed to us discovering them. And you will remove the saddles from the dragons."

"Do you know how to ask politely?" Yuri spoke now.

Moneus looked at her. "Yes I do." He replied. "I'm not asking however. I'm telling you. Is that a problem?"

"Why do they need to remove their saddles?" Robert Moran asked as he drew open his jacket and removed the hand blaster and knife while others did the same, very conscious of the fact that there were two dozen weapons very close to them. While those weapons were not pointed at them directly, no one was fool enough to think that would not be the case half a breath after the order was given.

"They won't need them." Moneus spoke. "They won't be carrying any riders while you are here."

"They are carrying equipment and baggage." Tesand spoke. "The saddles only make this easier."

"Dragons are not beasts of burden in Sparta... or anywhere on Earth or within this Union." Moneus declared with a touch of disgust in his voice. "The saddles will be removed and you can carry your own bags and equipment. You have two arms and two legs, use them."

"You are the son of Daniel Simpson aren't you?" Yuri asked now. "I remember him well. You have your father's rather abrasive disposition."

"The longer we stand out here discussing what you need to do, the shorter the amount of time you will have with King Leonidas." Moneus spoke looking at her. "If you do not wish to adhere to what I have told you... then you may turn around and carry your collective asses back to your ships and out of Union territory."

Aikiro's eyes flashed angrily for a moment and she took a deep breath. "Did your father raise you to be rude young man?" She asked pointedly.

"My upbringing is none of your concern Lady Aikiro, but if you must know, my mothers raised me to be respectful of those who deserved it. In my opinion you have not yet earned the right to deserve it. And with any luck, you won't be around long enough for it to be a concern of mine." Moneus spoke.

Dante stepped up behind his grandmother. "I believe you need a course in manners!" He spat.

Moneus looked at him and smiled. “Are you offering pureblood?” He asked meeting Dante’s eyes without a hint of fear.

Everyone heard several of the closer Durcunusaan snicker. “It would be your funeral.” One of the closest females spoke softly.

Moneus turned his eyes back to Aikiro. “My instructions were to treat you as the head of a foreign government that is not friendly to the Union. It is you who requested this meeting... and you accepted the conditions for travel to Earth.” Moneus spoke. “If you wish this meeting with King Leonidas to proceed any further... you will accept the conditions I have just laid out to you as a Section Leader of the Durcunusaan.”

Aikiro’s eyes grew a little wider. “Ah... the Spartan Royal Guard. The Wolves of the Blood. I believe that is what your name means in the ancient Lycavorian language isn’t it?”

Moneus looked at her blankly. “I’m waiting.” He spoke.

“We use our dragons not only to fight, but as beasts of burden as you say.” Aikiro spoke. “I request that they be allowed to keep their saddles. I assure you young Moneus... there are no weapons hidden within the folds of their saddles.”

Moneus stared at her for a long moment then reached up and tapped the COM unit on his armor. “Andro... would you and your mother come out here. It seems we have an issue of contention.”

“Crown Prince Androcles and Queen Aricia?” Aikiro spoke. “Well... at least we will not be ushered in under heavy guard and...”

They heard the trumpeting roar and their heads came up as Elynth took to the sky above from behind the large hanger a hundred and fifty meters north of where they stood. They could see two figures on her back as she curved out away from the hanger and then turned back with a graceful extension of her wings, heading directly for where they stood. Her light obsidian scales reflected the rising sun brilliantly. All eyes were on her as she swooped in for a very elegant landing only ten meters behind Moneus, Andro and Isabella in her saddle. As she was touching down as lightly as a feather, Andro threw his leg over her long neck as she lowered herself to the ground facing the High Coven people and he jumped lightly to the tarmac, Isabella following suit.

Aikiro looked confused as Andro and Isabella stepped up on either side of Moneus. Isabella stared at Yuri seeing the hatred in her eyes while Aikiro looked at Andro and then back to Isabella.

“It has been a very long time Isabella.” Aikiro spoke softly. “The last time I saw you... you were only a small child.”

Isabella turned to look at Aikiro, her hazel/green eyes emotionless. “Not long enough it seems.” She spoke calmly.

“He asked for the Crown Prince and his mother.” Yuri spoke harshly. “Not you.”

Isabella smiled brightly. There was no hatred or anger within her any longer. The life she had now had purged that from her completely. She was a different woman entirely and she looked at Andro who stood on the other side of Moneus and he smiled at her. Isabella looked back to Yuri.

“Ah sister... there is so much you don’t know. And so much you will never learn.” She turned to Moneus. “What seems to be the issue Moneus?”

“I asked them to remove the saddles from their dragons.” Moneus spoke. “They wanted to keep them on because the dragons are carrying their equipment and bags. Personally... I’d tell them all to take a flying leap and get back on their ship, but I figured I would find out what you and Andro wanted to do.”

“You do not seem surprised that we have come here with dragons of our own.” Moran spoke.

“You took them when they were still very young hatchlings and eggs. Took them from a Union transport that crashed in The Wilds.” Isabella replied evenly. “We have known for years that you have them. Did you think that we didn’t? The Kavalians fear dragons to the extreme... and we also know why you have brought them here and what you will ask for in exchange for this wondrous information you say you possess.”

Aikiro smiled. “Well... I suppose we have made that very obvious haven’t we?”

Isabella didn’t match her smile. “You will find that we do not fear the dragons you have twisted with your ideology and brutal treatment.”

Vollenth stepped forward now and glared at Isabella and Moneus with evil eyes. He lowered his head close to Yuri’s shoulder. *Let me burn them sister... please!* He exclaimed to Yuri within Mindvoice.

Andro turned to look at the light green scaled dragon, his azure eyes bright and decidedly emotionless as he chuckled at Vollenth's words. This caused Yuri and Aikiro and the others to look at him oddly as he stepped right up in front of Yuri and stared back at Vollenth unfazed by the size of the dragon who glared back at him.

Are you so sure you can dragon? Andro spoke calmly. It is a prideful boast... but one that falls on deaf ears. Those around you have been trained to fight dragons... by dragons. You would only succeed in killing yourself and all those with you.

You would be dead Lycavorian boy! Vollenth snarled.

Yuri's head snapped around. There were times when he bonded dragon was more of a disruption than a help. He was very violent and always trying to incite the other male dragons into fighting him. *Vollenth that is quite enough!* She barked out in Mindvoice.

Andro smiled up at him. *No... Vollenth is it? Unfortunately for you that would not be the case at all... for you would be the very first to die.* He turned to look at Yuri and Aikiro before turning his back to Vollenth.

Vollenth snorted and stepped closer to Andro only to come snout to snout with Elynth whose lips were drawn back in a vicious snarl. Her golden eyes glared at him with barely concealed rage and she snapped her wings out with an almost deafening pop to their full extension causing the others to step back quickly at this reaction. No one saw her right wing tip whip around faster than they could follow and hit Vollenth full in the snout, snapping his head back with incredible force.

One more step fool... and I will lay open your belly and watch you wither and die on this hard ground! Elynth snarled viciously. *You threaten a Talon Guardian boy! One who has the power to end your miserable existence in a single blink!*

Yuri and the others could hear the conversation quite clearly and they turned to look at the other dragons in their group who were suddenly shifting their talon equipped feet in nervousness they had never displayed before. All of them except Anthar and Carisia who actually stood very still and were taking everything in.

You would do well to be silent in the presence of those who are your betters! Elynth barked out. *You are nothing compared to those who surround you! All of you are nothing! And you would all die in the same amount of time it takes us to take six breaths! Look around you!*

Elynth watched as those who had the Mindvoice power to hear her words, Anthar and the other dragons as well turned their heads in different directions. They watched Jeth trumpet in defiance and settle his massive body atop the edge of the hanger, Lisisa perched in his saddle confidently. Nyla and Eliani landed directly behind them some twenty meters away on Arydun and Tharua, while from what had been previously empty hangers on both sides, nearly a dozen members of Mjólnir's Hand appeared.

So you see Vollenth. Andro spoke now and all eyes went back to where he had returned to his spot next to Moneus. *Your boasts and blustering mean nothing to us. Step back behind your bonded one before you are responsible for the deaths of everyone with you. Including yourself. My bonded sister is a Talon Guardian as well... and it only takes one of us to end your miserable life. You choose which one will do so... or do as your rider tells you and step back.*

Vollenth! Yuri hissed out reaching up to grasp his saddle. His head whipped around to look at her. *Now is not the time Vollenth. Step back.*

Vollenth turned his head back to Elynth and saw her snarl at him once more. *There... there will be another time.* He hissed out.

We welcome that time boy! Elynth growled right back.

Vollenth then stepped back at Yuri's urging and they all watched Elynth dismiss him casually and move to Andro's left with graceful movements. As she settled to the ground next to him, her head brushed his shoulder affectionately and Andro reached up to rub her scales under her jaw.

"Mother?" He called back over his shoulder to Isabella, noticing the stunned looks from Aikiro and Yuri and all those who could hear him.

"It is your decision Andro." Isabella said with a small smile of her own at their reaction to Andro's words. "I think we've done an excellent job of showing them where they stand."

Andro nodded and turned back to Aikiro and Yuri. "The saddles come off." He spoke firmly. "We do not treat dragons as pack animals and while you are visiting Sparta and Earth nor will you." Andro stepped to the side and motioned towards the hanger. "You can remove the saddles inside the hanger where it is more comfortable. We will provide an extra vehicle for your use if you are unwilling or unable to carry your

possessions yourselves. Now... if you will follow Moneus and his section please... my father is waiting for you.”

Aikiro’s eyes narrowed and she took Yuri’s hand. “I see the arrogance has passed from father to son.” She spoke.

Andro smiled at her words. “Just as it appears the same has happened with your children Lady Aikiro.” He replied looking at Yuri. “Only in your case the arrogance is a bluff. But that is something I’m sure you will come to discover on your own. Your power is such that you would probably kill me and many of those here with me... but I will die knowing you and those with you will never see the sun rise to mid day, for even as great as your power is... you will not defeat this entire base and the city that surrounds it. There are four thousand nine hundred and sixteen dragons and two other Talon Guardians that call Earth home. Not to mention the three million Spartan troops in and around Sparta alone. You would last perhaps an hour before you joined me in death.”

Aikiro couldn’t help but smile as she looked at him. “I find myself admiring you young man. In spite of myself.”

Andro shrugged. “I’m sure it is only a momentary pause in your demeanor and it will pass quickly I’m sure.” He spoke motioning with his arm again towards the hanger.

Aikiro laughed again and nodded. “You are correct.”

“Do you wish to remain out here and trade insults with us?” Isabella asked with humor in her voice as she stepped up next to Andro. “Or would you prefer to conduct the business you came to conduct and then leave our city and Union so that we can be rid of you? You asked for this meeting Aikiro. If your only intent was to come here and visit, you may get back on your ship and leave. We have no desire to visit with you or those with you.”

Aikiro squeezed Yuri’s hand. “Very well.” She spoke.

They watched as they began moving towards the hanger. Isabella nudged Andro with her elbow. “You enjoyed that.” She whispered.

Andro looked at her. “Maybe just a little.” He whispered back before his eyes lifted and settled on the raven haired pureblood that was walking past them. She glanced up shyly as she passed by them, the reddish scaled dragon beside her. Her Mayan blue eyes were bright and alive and Andro detected just a hint of humor in them. Isabella sensed Andro tense ever so slightly as he looked at the female with long dark hair and she looked at him.

[Andro... what is wrong?] She asked.

Andro shook his head and turned to her. *[I’m sorry... what?]*

[Are you ok?] Isabella asked.

Andro nodded quickly as fleeting images swirled in his head and then faded. *[Yes. I’m fine.]* He spoke.

[You drifted out there for a moment.] Isabella said reaching for his arm.

Andro nodded. *[The feelings I’m getting from these High Coven dragons are confusing.]* He lied. *[They were battering my shields for a moment.]*

[You’re ok now?]

Andro nodded. *[Yes. Now we can take them to father and see what they have to say. I’m sure it will be quite interesting.]*

Isabella turned and watched as they walked into the hanger. *[I don’t know. Something tells me we may have just let the wolf loose in our own hen house.]*

[Perhaps.] Andro spoke. *[We just need to be extra vigilant.]*

Isabella nodded. “Come on... before your sister tells them where to go and how to get there for not listening to her instructions.”

Andro smiled and nodded and they began following the High Coven personnel towards the hanger. “This should be a very interesting visit.” Andro spoke. “How often do we invite our most hated enemy to dinner?”

Isabella looked at him. “Very funny.” She said. “I hope your father knows what he is doing.”

Andro nodded. “So do I.”

SPARTA OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos looked up from his desk when his senior aide, a very attractive female elf, knocked and quickly walked into his office. He saw the look on her face and slowly came to his feet.

“Da’Lira... what is wrong?” He asked.

“Forgive me for bothering you sir... but the Zaleisian Ambassador is here again and he is demanding to speak with someone in authority. Since the Prime Minister is at that meeting, I did not know who to bring this too?” The elf female answered. “The Prime Minister has been avoiding him for some reason and he is very insistent this time.”

“What meeting is Deia at?” Laustinos asked.

“You know sir... the one with the High Coven Empress. They arrived only an hour ago.” Da’Lira spoke.

Laustinos moved around his desk. “I knew they were coming but I did not know they were already here. Where are they meeting?”

“The Durcunusaan base sir.” Da’Lira replied.

Laustinos nodded. “Ah yes.” He spoke softly. He did not have the security clearance to enter that facility without an escort, something that he had been bothering Deia about for many months now. His eyes grew a little wider however as he realized this was his opportunity to shine and he smiled. “Da’Lira, please if you would show the Ambassador in and free up the rest of my day. I will meet with him.”

The female elf nodded and retreated out of his office quickly. Laustinos moved around to the small wet bar he kept in the office and began pouring himself a glass of Spartan Wine. He was doing this when Da’Lira returned with the Zaleisian ambassador in tow.

The man was of medium height, the dark blue clothes covering almost amphibian like skin that looked moist to the touch. His head was oval in shape, with large bulbous eye sockets and dark eyes that did not seem to fit his face and he had no visible hair on his body.

Laustinos turned with a huge smile. “Ambassador Varasa... now this is a pleasure sir.” He stepped over to the surprised man and extended his hand.

The Zaleisian looked somewhat taken aback as the Lycavorian grasped his six fingered webbed hand. “I was... I was under the impression that Prime Minister Deia was avoiding me.” Varasa spoke.

Laustinos shook his head. “My apologies Ambassador... but that is certainly not the case. Prime Minister Deia is usually very busy in the first weeks of our exodus to Earth until things settle down. I have the afternoon free... what can I do for you?” He motioned the chair in front of his desk. “Can I offer you some Spartan Wine? It is freshly made just this week.”

Varasa nodded. “Thank you.” He spoke as he settled into the chair.

Laustinos poured another glass and then took both and returned to his desk handing one to the ambassador. “So... please... what can I do for you today?”

“I have been requesting a meeting with the Prime Minister for three days now.” Varasa spoke. “It concerns an issue of trade.”

Laustinos nodded. “Certainly... many of our trade agreements fall under the jurisdiction of my office anyway.” He said moving back to his chair. “Please... go on.”

“It is my understanding that the Rurudan Consortium has recently had a major natural disaster that has destroyed their crops of Notal Berries. If my understanding is correct they were your largest supplier, and it is Notal Berries that are needed to make this fine Spartan Wine of yours.”

Laustinos nodded. “Yes that is regrettably true.” He spoke. “We are currently searching for other suppliers on the Rurudan homeworld and within other avenues to offset the losses.”

“I have been asked to inform you that the Kavalian Federation is prepared to offer you a long term agreement for Notal Berries at a much reduced rate.” Varasa spoke. “It would be a means of possibly beginning formal negotiations with the KFI to officially recognize their government and put a quarter century of distrust behind you.”

Laustinos leaned back in his chair. He knew full well of the relationship between the Kavalian Empire and the Lycavorian Union. He also knew that the King’s brother, a Lycavorian who now called the KFI his home and people was among the main issues with the King. Laustinos had been there that fateful day and he

had witnessed the savage and barbaric fight between the two brothers. He had seen the brutality his King was capable of... the brutality he had shown in their very brief encounter with the Kavalian rogue forces that had attacked the Union planet twenty years ago. He also saw the brutality of his King during the Evolli War. Laustinos wrongly assumed the Lycavorian Union did not recognize the KFI because of the King's feelings for his brother, and Laustinos knew that personal feelings did not fit among the delicate nature of politics.

He looked at Varasa. "What is it you need Ambassador?" He asked.

"Only permission for a Kavalian delegation to be allowed to cross the border and come here. To present their proposal in person. This is an opportunity for greatness and to bring peace and prosperity to both the KFI and the Union. I can even arrange for one of our own ships to transport them here."

An opportunity for greatness.

Laustinos leaned forward in his chair and nodded. "Very well Ambassador." He spoke. "You may pass on to the Kavalian delegation that I will grant them access to cross the border and come here. Let it not be said we can not be open and friendly as well."

Varasa smiled. "Would you be willing to put that into a transmission yourself Deputy Prime Minister?"

Laustinos nodded. "Of course."

He spoke as visions of his stature climbing several notches swept over him. Not to mention the visions of a chance to finally be taken notice of by one person who Laustinos wanted to shine for. He coveted Deia's job yes... but there was something else he coveted more.

Carisia could not tear her eyes from Androcles where he sat next to his father across the table from them. Even Thast's foul presence next to her could not tame the racing of her heart even as she maintained a stoic and clam demeanor outwardly. He was the image of his father in every way that she had known. Carisia had not expected to feel the sheer magnitude of the power within him as she had this day, nor did she realize the incredible brightness of his eyes. And she had not expected his level of confidence even standing in front of Vollenth and her grandmother. And then when he sat next to his father at the table, the tremors within Mindvoice almost tripled in power. King Leonidas was every bit as powerful as her grandmother... perhaps not as refined and subtle, but the power was within him. And Androcles Leonidas was not far behind at all.

They had been escorted here to this large room in the underground facility under heavy guard. Anthar and the other dragons were left in the comfortable hanger above them with ample food and water, something that Anthar was relishing Carisia could feel with some humor. She sat quietly as her grandmother and King Leonidas gazed at one another while aides from both sides ushered about handing out data pads and other items. Carisia sat next to Narice, and surprisingly she did not feel the same inbred hatred for Lycavorians emanating from her as she did from Dante and Javier, not to mention her mother and Robert Moran. She had been surprised that Isabella was here and now sat to the King's right. She was regarded as a High Traitor and had a death sentence on her head if she ever came into High Coven space. Just as her grandmother's son Vonis did. Carisia knew to even mention either of their names was an act punishable by several days in confinement at the very least. She also sensed it was rubbing her mother and grandmother the wrong way having Isabella present in the room; something that she noticed gave Isabella great joy if the smile on her face was any indication.

Carisia turned her head when the metallic clanging noise sounded from all around them and the older Lycavorian turned from the main door after entering a code.

"We're secure now Milord." Armetus spoke as he moved to the chair near the end of the table.

Martin nodded and sat back in his chair as his eyes remained on Aikiro. "Ok... you asked for this little soiree." He spoke. "Thrill me."

Yuri leaned forward and looked at him across the table. "There is still no diplomat in you whatsoever is there Martin?" She spoke.

Martin shook his head. "Diplomacy is overrated." Martin said. "I prefer straight talk. So now... why don't you tell me why you came all this way to ask me to train the dragons you took from us... so you can use them to fight the Kavalians?"

"Why do you assume this is what we want?" Aikiro asked evenly.

"I may be many things... stupid isn't one of them." Martin spoke in reply. "Your war with the Kavalians is an ongoing affair. You know how they are affected by dragons... and now that those dragons you kidnapped

and stole are old enough to fight... you want to use them against the Kavalians. The only problem with that is you don't know how to employ them against the T19s that the Kavalians have been buying left and right in The Wilds. Without what we can teach your dragons, the first battle they go into will be their last."

"You seem to have it all worked out." Yuri said sarcastically.

"What we have worked out dear sister, is that your Immortals were caught conducting a black market arms deal in Union territory with Evolli mercenaries involving T19s. A weapon which has been banned within Lycavorian Union space ever since the end of the Evolli War." Isabella spoke now. "Have you not wondered why you have not heard from your detachment of Immortals?"

"We assumed they were lost." Aikiro stated evenly in reply though she was surprised the Immortals had chosen to conduct the exchange within Union space. "Your doing I take it?"

Martin met her eyes and shrugged. "Illegal weapons deals are frowned upon within the Union." He said matter of factly. "Maybe you can tell me why Aikiro, after twenty-five years of nothing, you suddenly decide to cross our border and conduct illegal weapons trading within our territory? Wouldn't that be considered an act of war?"

"You eliminated the Immortal detachment." Yuri snapped. "What does it matter now?"

Martin met her eyes. "It matters because I trust you about as far as I could spit!" Martin snarled. "And I can't spit half as far as I used to be able to! Give me a reason why I just don't tell you to go straight to hell and show you the door!"

"Because you seem to care more about the dragons that will go into battle than you do the men and women who will ride them." Aikiro stated.

Martin looked at her. "Well... you got something right at least." He answered. "If... and it's a big if... we agree to train your dragons, you need to show me something a lot more than the fact you're willing to violate Union territory and do illegal weapons deals. That doesn't take a whole lot of brains to do."

"We could have just launched an invasion across your borders." Dante spat from his seat next to Moran.

"Dante!" Yuri hissed. "Silence!" They turned to the sound of Andro's soft laughter and Dante glared at him.

"Do you find something amusing Lycavorian?" Dante asked.

Andro looked at him. "Do you by chance to stand up comedy?" Androcles asked. "Your statement just now was exceedingly funny."

Aikiro's eyes narrowed and she looked at Martin. "You are a very boorish man do you know that." She stated. "And your son seems to have inherited this nature from you."

Andro chuckled again. "Thank you for the compliment." He stated.

Martin snickered at Andro's response. "So I've been told Aikiro. So I've been told. Don't worry though; I don't intend to be swapping spit with you either lady." He stated as he sat far back in his chair and sighed.

"Listen to me. You don't like us... and I for damn sure don't like you. Any of you. However... we have had twenty-five years of relative peace between us. The reasons for that peace do not matter. Each of us has had our own problems to deal with. You more than me." He looked at Aikiro. "I trust the information I gave to Yuri at our last party helped you?"

Aikiro met his eyes. "Once we were able to stand and hold them... yes." Aikiro answered honestly. "Though I have always wondered why you did that. And why you took my son."

"You were going to kill Vonis!" Isabella hissed.

Aikiro nodded immediately. "Yes... more than likely. That however, that was not your concern. I understand he holds the rank of Colonel within your military now?"

Martin nodded. "Yup!" He replied. "He and Va'nimia got four little ones and one big one too." He said with a smile.

"So he took the elf female as his bride then?" Aikiro asked.

Isabella nodded. "They were joined in an elven ceremony six months after he decided to remain here. It was quite elegant actually. Va'nimia looked breathtaking."

"Does he know I am here?" Aikiro asked.

Martin nodded and met her gaze. "Yes... I believe his comment to me when I told him you would be visiting was... *Martin Usstan inbal nau ssinssrin ulu kyorl nindel nalt'chaxxan rathpielch elg'caress rin'ov 'sohna.*" (I have no desire to see that murderous backstabbing bitch ever again.)

Aikiro smiled. "Yes... that does sound like Vonis. And your command of our ancient tongue is excellent."

Martin nodded. "The reasons for my action were not then and are not now your concern." He spoke. "Now... can we cut the bullshit and get to why you have come a hundred odd light years from High Coven space? I know it's not because you enjoy my charming company."

Aikiro sat back in her chair now. "No... it most certainly is not." She spoke with a smile of her own. "May Admiral Moran use your star chart?"

Martin turned to Moran. "Knock yourself out Robby." He spoke.

Moran got to his feet and moved to the large star chart. He took the data pad he extracted from his jacket and plugged it into the slot on the control panel. The holo image shifted to grainy images of a planet thick with jungle and vegetation.

"This is Yoimet." Moran spoke. "It's a Class Two Jungle planet teeming with wildlife and some rather nasty critters. We had a double agent in place among the KFI and..."

"Had?" Armetus interrupted.

Moran nodded. "He was discovered shortly after taking these images and executed." He spoke almost nonchalantly.

"And you made no attempt to retrieve or assist him?" Armetus asked.

"Yoimet is inside Kavalian space now." Moran answered. "It was one of the first planets they took from us due to its strategic placement along the border of The Wilds."

"That does not answer my question." Armetus spoke.

"What relevance does that have?" Aikiro asked.

Armetus looked at Martin and then turned to look at her. "It will help me to evaluate the information you are about to present to us." He answered.

"No!" Moran answered. "No attempt was made to retrieve or assist him. He was aware of the risks his duties could possibly bring down on him."

Armetus nodded his head. "Yes... I'm sure." He spoke. "Forgive me for interrupting you."

Moran turned back to the chart and holo images. "Yoimet was used as one of the primary staging bases for their second assault into High Coven territory, and it is also used as the main training facility for their cloned soldiers. This agent was in place among the High Coven personnel that defected to the KFI at the beginning of the war. He has been feeding us very useful information for the past twenty-two years and we have no reason to doubt the validity of his intelligence."

"No reason to doubt his reports aside from the fact that he is dead." Isabella spoke.

"His death and the information he sent to us... this information... that is the reason we are here!" Moran snapped.

"All I see so far is a lot of green jungle." Martin spoke calmly.

Moran adjusted the screen and the next four images showed the training process the Kavalian clones were undergoing. It was detailed and meticulous with not only weapons training, but also long hours in front of computer monitors studying defensive tactics. Moran moved to the other side of the chart and pointed to the large Kavalian in the background. "This is their Chief Instructor. His name is Girruan'Sitti. He is a survivor of both the conflict against the Lycavorian Union nearly a thousand years ago and their war with the High Coven fifty years later. He holds no love for either of us." The image changed to this Girruan meeting with Keleru and Pusintin on a corridor walkway above the training area. "I'm sure you are all aware of who these two men are. Prefect Keleru and Marshall Pusintin."

"Marshall?" Martin spoke softly. "He promoted himself. Isn't that nice?"

Moran turned and looked at Aikiro and Yuri quickly. Aikiro turned her eyes on Martin from across the table. "You are familiar with him I take it?"

Martin nodded. "All too familiar."

"Forgive me for asking... but there was a great deal of confused reports coming out of Union territory in regards to a battle you fought with this Lycavorian when they came to collect the soldiers you imprisoned." Aikiro said. "Perhaps you could share what significance this man has?"

"He has no significance." Martin spoke firmly. "He's a traitor to his own people who fought against us and you."

“But who is he?” Aikiro asked. “For he is certainly not Kavalian.”

Martin smiled and looked at Yuri from across the table. “He’s my brother Pleistarchus.”

Yuri’s eyes grew huge and she looked at the image on the chart before turning back to Martin. “That’s impossible!” She snapped. “He was killed over three thousand years ago! We confirmed this with DNA scans!”

Martin nodded. “You sure did. The only problem with that is your buddy Maruad was also working for the Kavalians at the time.”

“Maruad?” Yuri exclaimed.

Martin nodded. “While he was killing his own people for you on Earth, he was feeding the Kavalians information about your cloning process and whatever else he could obtain about you. Working both sides of the slice of bread so to speak.”

“Me?” Yuri asked.

Armetus nodded from his chair. “You were the main target of three diverse assassination attempts contracted for by the Kavalians. Maruad was in fact the one who revealed yours and Yuriko’s identity to the Japanese government ten years after you became part of their Genome program. We discovered this information when he was captured along with the Kavalians trying to steal dragon eggs from Earth.”

“Maruad was the one who switched the DNA scans of the unit you sent after Pleistarchus. He switched them before your follow on team showed up.” Martin spoke. “Pretty slick move if you ask me. The Kavalians had a hit team here as well, the same time you sent your people after Pleistarchus in 458 B.C. and instead of carrying out their mission to kill you, they killed your assassination team and made it seem like you completed your goal of killing Pleistarchus. He was injured... but they took him off world and he was adopted by a Kavalian. It seems you did not have as tight a grip on this planet as you thought.”

“Apparently not.” Yuri said.

“Can I infer from the tone of your voice that you and your brother do not see eye to eye?” Aikiro asked.

Martin met her gaze. “You can infer whatever you like.” He spoke. “But we were talking about your information here.”

Aikiro held his gaze for a moment longer and nodded. “Indeed we were.” She said. She looked at Moran. “You may continue Robert.”

Moran nodded and turned back to the images. “This meeting took place three months ago.” He spoke again. “Shortly after this meeting... Kavalian Heavy Transports began shuttling large numbers of their biogenic troops to Uirmeik. If I’m not mistaken Uirmeik is only three light years from your border with the KFI.” Moran shifted the images once more. “These images you see are from Uirmeik.”

The room was silent as everyone stared at the screen. There was no mistaking the varied equipment and troops as well as the hover tanks and other numerous articles of war. Moran lifted the second data pad he held. “We estimate sixteen million ground troops have been moved to Uirmeik. They include several divisions of armor and ground based plasma batteries. These biogenic clones are their latest version and they have a life cycle of ten years. Our information indicates that they are eighty-four percent complete with their preparations for another invasion into High Coven space. They’ve never exceeded twenty million cloned troops because they’ve never had the officers to lead them. Apparently twenty-five years has given them the opportunity to have more children, and since Kavalians go from birth to adulthood in a little more than four years, they now have the officers to lead the cloned troops. So they made more of them.” Moran adjusted the image again and the holographic projection of the computer monitor came up with a list of names. “Our agent was also able to obtain this from their data banks before he was discovered. It is a list of planets and cities within Union Space. We can only assume these will be their targets.” Moran turned to look at Martin. “So you see... it appears their intention is to hit us both at the same time and keep us from helping each other.”

Martin looked at him. “It appears.” He said.

Moran nodded. “This intelligence is available for you to review and authenticate as much as you like.” He spoke. “Our best estimates say we have at least fourteen months before they hit us... more than likely closer to eighteen.” Moran returned to his chair and looked at Martin. “In eighteen months... whether you want to or not, you will be involved in this war.”

Aikiro looked at him now. “Now you know why we have come to you.” She said calmly. “This information will provide you the time to prepare for these animals to come pouring across your borders just as they did ours. In your one battle with them, you defeated a force of twenty-five thousand of these clones with

only five thousand of your Spartans and a hundred dragons from your Mjolnir's Hand. All I am asking is that you give our forty-three dragons the same training you give your forces so that we can use them as effectively as you did. Do whatever it is you do, use whatever machines you use, to increase their Mindvoice capabilities and allow them to do what they do."

Martin looked at her. "Machines?" He spoke. "What machines? You can't increase Mindvoice abilities with a fucking machine! You more than anyone should know that."

"It's possible to transfer small portions of Mindvoice power to others!" Aikiro said. "That is what you have done isn't it?"

"No." Martin replied quickly. "We've accomplished what we've done with training and meditation."

"I know that you have an intact Mindvoice ship on Earth." Aikiro said. "I was under the impression you were using something you discovered in this ship to increase the abilities of your people so that they could bond with dragons."

"Well... your impression would be wrong." Martin spoke sitting back in his chair. "That is not how it works. I want me and my people to go over this information before we go any further."

Aikiro nodded. "Yes... I gathered you would." She spoke. "I assume we will be confined to this base for the duration of our stay?"

Isabella laughed. "We are not like you." She spoke. "Arrangements have been made for you to stay in Sparta at a small establishment. You will not be confined as you say. You will be free to go anywhere tourists are allowed within the city, which is most places."

Yuri looked surprised. "No guards?"

"Do you need them?" Isabella asked with a grin. "Your High Coven uniforms will remain in this facility and you will use civilian clothes. There are many vampires that call Sparta home and you will just be additional tourists here for sight seeing."

"You will let us roam your city freely?" Aikiro asked.

Martin nodded. "Every one of your people will be tracked. You won't know where they are, or who they are, but you will be watched. You will return to the establishment we are allowing you to stay at every evening by midnight. If one of you misses that and happens to wander off somewhere, all of you will be confined to the prison until that person or persons is found and then I will put you all back on your ship and kick your asses out of my Union. The chips will fall where they will after that. Besides... if your people get out of hand or do something to insult someone in this city, more than likely you'll get your asses handed to you."

"And you will of course do nothing about that should it happen?" Aikiro said.

"Why would I?" Martin said getting to his feet.

"Is there anything else?" Aikiro asked.

Martin nodded. "Don't fuck with me Aikiro." He said sternly. "I allowed you to come here knowing you are a back stabbing bitch just like Vonis said. If you fuck with me... you will never leave this planet alive."

CHAPTER SIX

GALLAIS'S LODGE

Tesand lowered the portable sensor device and turned to Aikiro and Yuri who stood by the doors onto the balcony looking through the glass out onto the city of Sparta. "Well... unless they have developed something our instruments can't detect, which based on what we've seen so far is entirely possible, the rooms are clean of anything we can pick up."

Aikiro nodded slowly. "They were able to intercept our communications somehow. And we did not detect their shrouded ships until they wanted us too. They have obviously developed new technology from the Mindvoice ship that we do not have." She spoke calmly. "I suggest we do not underestimate what they are capable of."

Tesand met her eyes. "I agree. I'll set up the psychic dampeners and activate the sensor jammers." He spoke as he headed into the adjoining room.

Yuri watched him for a moment and then turned to look at her mother with a grin. "He is very protective of you mother." She spoke.

Aikiro met her daughter's eyes and nodded slowly with her own smile. "Yes... in twenty-five years Yuri, he has shown me more attention than you father did in over thirteen thousand. I have grown to enjoy his company and his attentions far more than he realizes." Aikiro smirked. "Far more than I have allowed him to see anyway, something I must learn to show to him. Besides... he is far more skilled in our bed and he has tasted my blood many more times than your father ever did. He feasts on me like it is his last meal at times." Aikiro smiled at the memories. "He has encouraged my more suppressed tendencies to come out. Much the same as Robert has with you Yuri. It has allowed me to be more open minded towards many things... and not just sexually."

"That is something that many have noticed mother." Yuri spoke softly. "Though... to be honest, I am surprised you allow that pureblood female in your bed. That is something that I have never understood or expected from you."

Aikiro chuckled softly. "Toria Dellion you mean? Well... never let it be said I am against experimentation and surprisingly she is quite skilled in that regard. That was my idea as well, not Tesand's in case you were wondering. You should try it sometime. I was pleasantly astonished myself."

Yuri shook her head quickly. "Robert is more than I need." She replied. "That has never interested me to be honest."

"It does require a certain taste I suppose." Aikiro spoke.

Yuri nodded and moved to open the balcony doors, the smell of flowers and pine trees filtering into the room. They stepped onto the balcony and looked out over the city, hundreds of men, women and children moving about the streets below, either shopping or sitting at the cafés that dotted the stretch of esplanade they could see.

Yuri shook her head. "Sparta?" She spoke softly. "After all the times through the years that we tried to destroy this city by brute force or subterfuge and still it stands. This cursed place just will not die."

"Much like the bloodline of Leonidas it seems." Aikiro spoke coming up next to her by the railing.

"What do you think of his reaction?" Yuri asked as she looked at her. "Were you able to sense anything from him?"

Aikiro shook her head. "His Mindvoice shields are equal in power to my own, as are those of his son." She replied. "His son will one day equal or surpass him in abilities if what I sensed in him was accurate. He is also very perceptive as well. He knows he can't match me in terms of abilities. At least not now. Like his father, his strength right now lies towards using his Mindvoice skills to augment his physical abilities, which are already very considerable if my judgment is correct. That is why he said what he did on the airfield. He was very correct in reminding me that we would not last more than an hour if we had concealed motives or were to attempt something nefarious. I could have probed Isabella perhaps... but as I said she has become more powerful than we had first anticipated, much like you have daughter. She would not have been able to stop an intrusion... but she would have detected it easily enough."

Yuri nodded slowly. "It seems bonding with a dragon has its disadvantages as well." She said.

"What do you mean?"

"It creates Mindvoice shields that are naturally more potent than normal." Yuri answered. "I believe that is why we can not penetrate Carisia and Anthar's shields. I did not believe Vavant's bloodline had any skill in this regard."

Aikiro nodded. "Yes... singly they were both quite commanding... together however it would be suicide to try such a thing." She answered. "I would need at least a week of total uninterrupted exploration with both of them sedated to figure out a way past the defenses they have in place. I had Vavant's father tested several years after Robert disposed of Vavant. He was unaware of it of course, but the potential in him was there had your father chosen to utilize such things. Of course he did not, and while those we have trained in such ways are more than in the past, their numbers do not equal what is within the Union. Leonidas, his Queens and their First Oracle have been actively training those who show great potential within Mindvoice. Vavant no doubt passed these skills to Carisia within her blood. When coupled with your blood... she is exceedingly more powerful than we first thought, even more so since she bonded with Anthar."

“Thast will keep her on a short leash.” Yuri spoke cruelly. “He is a vile brute... but he is very proficient in making sure she is never very far from him. And I believe she is afraid of him in some fashion.”

“Afraid of him?” Aikiro asked surprised. “She could snap him into pieces before he knew what hit him if it is as I believe. The Immortals who I had train her went far beyond what my original intent was to be. Why would she be afraid of him?”

Yuri shrugged. “Some sort of inbred female intuition perhaps. Something... some inbred weakness from Vavant’s side of the family no doubt. It is no matter... Thast will go wherever she goes and she hates that.”

Aikiro chuckled. “You enjoy torturing her don’t you Yuri?” She looked out over the city. “I admit... I was confused as to why Robert gave her his name as you have with your own children, but then I saw the larger picture when you promised her hand to Thast. It was a shrewd political move on both your parts.”

“That was entirely Robert’s idea.” Yuri replied. “I was livid with him until he explained to me his reasoning.”

Aikiro nodded. “Speaking of which, I don’t want the others going very far.” Aikiro spoke. “They may have given us free reign to go where we will in this city, but that is a ruse. We will be watched yes, but he wants us to do something stupid I believe. That we can not afford.”

“It will look odd if we confine everyone to their rooms and this establishment mother.” Yuri spoke looking at her. “Then it will appear we *are* plotting something. We do not want to draw too much attention to ourselves by remaining locked up. They will assume that our information is false and try even harder to discredit it. We should let the others explore to a degree. They might be able to offhandedly gather important intelligence. You and I are known... they are not.”

Aikiro met her eyes and nodded. “Then they go all together.” She said. “We are among our enemies here and I want no one left to fend for themselves. There are enough places just that we can see from here that will fit all of them. At least for now.”

They turned when the chime on the main door buzzed. Yuri looked at her mother before moving across the expanse of the large room and going to the door. She passed her hand over the scanner and it slid aside to reveal the older Lycavorian woman and a single Spartan soldier holding two small metal cases.

“Yes.” Yuri spoke trying to keep her voice neutral.

Gallais stared at the Yuri for a long moment then motioned with her hand to the single soldier standing next to her. “King Leonidas asked that I make sure you were given some of the brochures of Sparta our city and this.” She said holding out the small stack of credit chips.

Yuri took the stack and looked at her. “What is this?”

Gallais smiled at her. “Ten thousand credit Riyal payment chips.” She spoke allowing her naturally affable nature to come out now. “Everything within Sparta is reasonably priced and those chips should last a few days. My lodge here doesn’t have a restaurant inside, so you will have to move among the streets until you find something you like to eat.”

“This is your establishment?” Aikiro asked from behind Yuri.

Gallais nodded. “Yes. Mine and my mate.”

“We have our own credit chips.” Yuri spoke turning to look at her mother quickly and then back to Gallais.

Gallais nodded slowly. “Yes... I’m sure you do. However High Coven credit chips are practically worthless in the Lycavorian Union, and King Leonidas said this will save possible confrontations that could come about if you begin flashing High Coven credits in Sparta.”

Aikiro stepped forward. “He told us there would be no such issues.” She spoke.

Gallais nodded. “Yes he did... however the King can not be in all places all of the time, as much as he likes to think he can. He can not control young Spartans who have had too much Spartan Wine after a long day of training and who might let their mouths overload their brains. You will find the vast majority of the people in our city are very friendly and open. Just do not advertise you are from the High Coven for there is still bad blood among others.”

“You are protecting us?” Yuri asked.

Gallais shook her head with a smile. “Not at all. I’m protecting my people. I would prefer not to have a friend of mine or a young Spartan soldier and his friends put on trial for killing one of your people in a drunken

fight.” Gallais turned and held out her hand for one of the cases the soldier held. He set it in her arms and opened it and Gallais turned back to Yuri.

Aligned in the case were four cylinders of cloned blood; that much Yuri could tell right away.

“I assume you brought your own.” Gallais spoke. “However... we do not stock supplies of fresh blood in Sparta. This is what we use for our vampire friends and family. Queen Anja developed it originally and it has been improved over the years. It is preferred among those who need it now. It is readily available and if you run out or get low I can provide you with more.” She closed the case and gave it back to the soldier who then placed them on the floor to the right of the door. Gallais turned to back to look at Yuri and Aikiro. “There are two excellent cafés just down the street within walking distance. If you prefer something larger, I own a hefty establishment only two blocks west of here called Gallais’s Retreat. You will find yourselves welcome there and all the food is made fresh and it is of a wide variety. The King’s family is frequent visitors.”

“You speak as if you know King Leonidas quite well madam.” Aikiro asked stepping closer now.

Gallais nodded. “Yes I do. My son is Star Colonel Isra of *Mjolnir’s Hand*.” She replied. “They have had some rather interesting adventures together.”

“Chetak’s son?” Yuri asked.

Gallais met her eyes sternly. “I see you are well prepared when it comes to knowing who your potential enemies are Princess Yuri.” She said. “Yes... Isra is Chetak’s youngest son... however my former mate’s name is now used as one of the vilest curses in our language... I would recommend you do not mention his name in public. You will find you don’t like the reaction you get.”

“I understand your son is mated to Tarifa and Aihola.” Yuri said ignoring her warning. “Your own Netnews channels are very informative.”

Gallais nodded once more. “Yes... I’m sure they are. And yes he is. Please... enjoy your stay in Sparta. If I can be of any service to you don’t hesitate to contact me. My COM channel is on the brochures.”

Gallais turned quickly and exited the room after the soldier and Yuri waited until the door slid shut and locked before turning back to face her mother.

Aikiro smiled. “How convenient that the establishment he reserves for us is owned by the mother of one of his senior dragon riders.” She said. “Everything she told us is the truth. Her shields are rudimentary and I was able to probe her surface thoughts.”

“So she doesn’t work for this Armetus?” Yuri asked.

Aikiro shook her head. “Unlikely. She is a simple woman.”

Yuri lifted the case that held the cloned blood and set it on the table, opening it and removing one of the containers. “I will have this examined before we destroy it.” She spoke. “I would not put it past Martin Leonidas to try to poison us.”

Aikiro nodded and looked at her. “Yuri... Leonidas’s son Androcles... his dragon spoke of something called a Talon Guardian. He referred to himself and his dragon using this term. What is that?”

Yuri turned and looked at her shaking her head. “I don’t know. I’ve never heard the term before.”

“Well it elicited a very profound reaction in our dragons.” Aikiro said. “See if Vollenth or one of the others knows what it means.”

Yuri nodded. “I will contact him now.” She said.

Aikiro shook her head. “No... ask him in person. Tesand may have found nothing our instruments can detect, but like Leonidas... I don’t trust him anymore than he trusts us.”

Yuri nodded. “Of course.” She spoke.

“Once you have done that have everyone meet downstairs and we will decide who will go where and to what establishment. This Gallais’s Retreat is probably not someplace you or I should go, but it might be fine for the younger ones.” Aikiro spoke. “Being on this planet has suddenly made me very hungry.”

Yuri nodded. “It was like that for me as well when I was here. I was told it has something to do with the nitrogen in the atmosphere. How soon do you think he will inform us of his decision?”

Aikiro smiled. “Yuri... his decision has already been made.” She said. “He cares deeply for the dragons and the dragons alone. He has already decided that they will train them. And that is why Vollenth needs to be on his best behavior. No more incidents like when we arrived. Leonidas’s son was right... if things get out of hand we will all die on this planet. I don’t know for sure... but I sense there are far more of these so called

Bonded Pairs here on Earth then we have been lead to believe. We need to tread carefully until we know we will be staying and then we can begin to implement our separate tasks.”

Yuri nodded. “I will let everyone know.” She said. “We’ll meet you downstairs in an hour.”

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[Did you see her Carisia my sister?]* Anthar exclaimed loudly within Mindvoice. *[She was beautiful! Her scales were so smooth and she is so muscular! And the way she handled Vollenth? That was priceless!]*

Carisia chuckled out loud as she moved along Anthar’s own muscled side, slowly using the rough sided brush to run along his sides and back where the saddled covered his scales. The brush removed the dried and dead scales that the harshly made saddles killed whenever he wore it. Anthar, Deneth, Marux, Naruth, Seyra and Vollenth occupied the immense dragon stable in the rear of the lodge they were staying at. It had two dozen separate pens inside the warmth of the building, with fresh hay and an abundance of water from the small man made stream that flowed through the center of the stable. There were several large containers along the sides of the stable that were refrigeration units of sorts and each one of them was stocked to overflowing with large slabs of beef.

[I saw her Anthar!] Carisia answered with a smile. *[Was she just how you pictured her in your dreams?]*

Anthar turned his large head and looked at her diminutive form as she brushed him intently. *[Forgive me Carisia.]*

Carisia stopped brushing his cerise colored scales and met his magenta eyes. *[Forgive you for what?]* *[I have been talking of her for over an hour.]* Anthar replied. He blinked several times. *[Was he how you have pictured him?]*

[Who?] Carisia asked.

[Blue eyes.]

Carisia couldn’t meet her bond mate’s eyes and she lowered her head embarrassed by her reaction as she remembered it. *[His... his eyes were so much brighter Anthar. And he was larger than I imagined. Taller and broader.]*

[He trembled with power Carisia. She did as well.] Anthar spoke. *[And everyone is taller than you sister.]* He replied jokingly as he moved his head back and nudged her in the shoulder gently.

Carisia laughed as she relaxed more. *[Thank you so much for reminding me brother.]*

The stable was empty of people except for Narice with Deneth at the far end. None of the other dragons particularly like Anthar, and they always made it a point to remain away from him whenever they could. Well except for Deneth who was just plain introverted. Anthar had grown to accept it for what it was. Naruth, Seyra and Marux would never be like him and they sat in a small circle with Vollenth. They had grown nearly as twisted as Dante, Javier and Lucia in their actions, and Vollenth was just plain insane as far as Anthar was concerned. Deneth seemed to be the only normal one among the group outside of him, but he was very private and kept to himself. Vollenth had once attempted to assert his dominance over Deneth and they had witnessed just how strong Deneth was then. He had thoroughly beaten Vollenth down, which only served to cause a deep divide between them. It was only made worse when the following year Vollenth had attempted the same thing with Anthar. The result was the same... a vicious fight between two dragons that Anthar won handily due to his strength, size and own Mindvoice abilities. Vollenth was able to dominate Marux and the others easily, to include the rest of the forty-three dragons within their small group, but Deneth and Anthar remained outside of his influence and that had always bothered him greatly.

Dante, Javier and Lucia did not treat their bond mates as Carisia did him. They left it to others to care for their dragons, while Carisia spent hours brushing his scales as she did now, even filing his talons when they became too long. She had no misgivings about checking his teeth and attempting to find ways to maintain his health and even try and get him different kinds of food. He had seen Narice doing many of the same things with Deneth, but because they hardly ever spoke to anyone, Anthar did not know if that signified they were more like him and Carisia or more like Vollenth and Yuri.

Anthar had seen dragons in the sky above them that were too numerous to count as they were coming here. It was a sight he was not used too and he found it awe inspiring. The men and women who called this

place home did not shy away from him and the others as they did on Usu'Ozeib or Nuwaroa, many of them not even pausing in what they were doing as the six dragons passed them by. As they were escorted here, walking among the busy streets, he even saw dozens of dragons moving about the streets. Most of them appeared to be remaining close to certain men or women; obviously their Bonded Pairs but they walked the walkways and paths freely and no one questioned them.

[How long do we wait Carisia?] Anthar asked.

Carisia continued to brush him but looked at where Vollenth and the others sat. *[We will wait until we find out what King Leonidas's decision is.]* She replied. *[If he refuses then we will act before we leave. If he agrees... then we can act when we are being trained. We must be very careful Anthar.]*

[Yes I know.] He answered. *[Do you think they will allow us to go out among the city?]*

[I hope so.] Carisia answered. *[It is so much brighter here. Did you see the people on the streets? Laughing and children playing? It was incredible.]*

[Do not forget the dragons in the sky.] Anthar spoke. *[I never believed I would see so many. So many colors and different breeds.]*

[I know. It's incredible.] Carisia said.

[Carisia... do you think...] Anthar's eyes focused on his bonded sister.

[I don't know Anthar.] Carisia spoke lowering the brush and moving to where he lowered his head close to her. She reached up and stroked his scales along his eye socket as she knew he liked so much. *[If it is possible... we will discover this. I give you my word.]*

[Happiness and peace are not easy to discover are they sister?] He asked.

Carisia shook her head with a smile. *[No they are not.]*

[We will succeed Carisia. We will succeed and we will find what we seek.] Anthar said confidently.

Carisia met his eyes and for the first time since they had hatched their plan she smiled just as confidently. *[Yes we will Anthar. Yes we will. You have to remain here for now, but I will try and bring something back for you.]*

[I understand.] He replied. *[Be cautious out there sister.]*

SPARTAN SECURE SENATE CHAMBERS SPARTA

“Ok... I'm open to comments and ideas.” Martin spoke as he sipped the large mug of Aricia's coffee. “Let's hear them.”

The Secure Senate Chambers, or SSC as it was called by the *Durcunusaan*, was nothing more than a large lounge with an enormous table and perhaps forty chairs at the table and along the walls. It was very similar to the room in Eden City's Command center. Completely secure against electronic and psychic intrusion. The *Durcunusaan* joked that it was so secure only the gods had keys to get into it. In this room Martin expected everyone to be themselves. There was no formality in the least. All rank was left outside and those who were allowed into this room were considered the foremost family and friends of the Royal family as well as the movers and shakers of the Union. A much larger room had been built into the Senate Chambers on Apo Prime and of the trillions of sentient lifeforms that called the Lycavorian Union home, less than a quarter of one percent of that population would ever see the inside of one of these three rooms in the Union.

“Take the dragons they came here with and send the rest of them packing.” The male voice spoke.

The two dozen heads, male and female, turned to look at Vonis where he leaned against the wall.

Star Colonel Vonis, son of the now dead Veldruk and Aikiro and half brother to Isabella. An imposing figure for a pureblood vampire, much larger than his father ever was, and a man who for the last twenty-five years had worked tirelessly in the field of protecting this Union he had come to love and call home. A trained assassin and high level Intelligence Agent of the *Venorik Elghinn*, the High Coven's dreaded intelligence service, Vonis was a man who knew death intimately. A man who had come into the Lycavorian Union those twenty-five years ago bent on killing Isabella and destroying the peace and serenity that every vampire that called the Union home had gained. A man who had taken an elf female to be his sexual plaything while he was

on Elear attempting to complete these missions. A man who had fallen head over heels in love with the dark haired, blue eyed elven female who had given him so much and asked for nothing in return.

Vonis remembered that day as if it was yesterday. Standing next to King Leonidas and turning to see Va'nimia standing by the ramp of a *STRIKER*. Tears clouded her eyes as he was about to be turned over to Yuri and his mother and would no doubt be executed for his actions. Executed for discovering he had a heart and that heart had been possessed by the elven beauty. Vonis remembered the King's words to him that day vividly.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[All you need do is turn and grasp the future Vonis.]* Martin's voice burst into his head and his wide eyes turned back to him in shock. He had brushed aside his Mindvoice Shields as if they weren't even there. *[I have lived my life by one primary rule Vonis. Never fear the unknown, for it could bring wonders you can not imagine. You took the first step when you discovered Va'nimia, now embrace the unknown and move forward. You will not be questioned or harassed in any way. On that you have my word as King. You can have a future with a woman who loves you Vonis. A woman you love as well if only you will allow what I can smell you feel for her to come out.]*

[I will be hunted. I will never be at peace.] Vonis spoke tentatively.

[You let me worry about that. She carries your son you know.] Martin lifted his hand. ***[And she asked me to give you this.]***

Vonis looked down and saw the necklace he had given to her those long weeks ago. He lifted it from Martin's hand as Yuri looked on in confusion. She could feel the tremors within Mindvoice, but the shields guarding that conversation were more powerful than any she had felt except for her mother.

[Your decision right now will not affect just one life, but three lives. Do you love her enough to reach past what you fear? You are Isabella's sister... and she was right when she told me you are not like your father and Yuri. Prove to me Bella is right about that Vonis and I will protect you myself if I have too.]

[And you will want nothing in return?]

Martin smiled at him. ***[I have Isabella's love. Whatever information you have in your head Vonis is not more important to me than that.]***

Vonis had done just that.

He had grabbed at the unknown and held on tight, never once looking back. It had not been easy at first he admitted to himself. Isabella's guidance and support and Va'nimia's unwavering love for him had been all he needed to get past what he had lived nearly fifteen hundred years believing. The birth of their first child had been the catalyst for Vonis slamming that door shut and forever sealing that part of his life away. Never to be reopened again. He loved Va'nimia just as much, if not more now, than he did back then. She had given him five beautiful children over the course of the years, two proud sons and three equally proud and exceptionally beautiful daughters.

Five years after that fateful day, Vonis had walked into Armetus's office and asked for a job. Martin Leonidas had kept his word to him, and never once in that five year period had Vonis been detained or questioned about anything in regard to the High Coven. That had sealed Vonis ultimate loyalty to him and the Union for all time.

Martin chuckled from his chair and leaned back. "Let it rip Vonis." He spoke.

"They can not be trusted in anything they do or say." Vonis pushed off the wall and moved closer to the table. "I know that more than anyone in this room. Take the dragons they have come here with... they were citizens of the Union before being torn from us by my mother and her henchmen. Take them back now and tell my mother and Yuri to go suck a very large Kremchak viper egg!"

That brought laughter from everyone in the room for it was well known the Kremchak Viper was almost as poisonous as a Rock Spider, and the eggs were coated with a viscous fluid that was considered just as lethal.

"As much as I would enjoy doing just what Vonis suggests... that is not something we can do now." Arzoal's soft voice filled the room from the where she was in the Dragon Cave on the island of Sardinia.

It was a unique technological development that Avi, the Mindvoice ship's avatar, had designed and implemented for them on Elear, Earth and Apo Prime. There were dozens of extremely powerful Mindvoice generators scattered all over the City Ship that were sitting idle and unused. These generators when tuned

correctly were actually able to turn Arzoal's thoughts into words and almost exactly match how her voice sounded when she spoke within someone's mind.

Andro nodded from where he sat next to Moneus and Isra. "The Elder Mother is correct. These dragons have bonded to those who ride them. We can't separate them now. It would be like taking a beloved sibling from them."

"They are bonded that deeply with these dragons?" Dilios asked from his chair between Tarifa and Aihola.

Martin nodded. "Arzoal, Andro and I have been feeling the tremors within Mindvoice ever since they arrived. These are not simple and random pairings. They have bonded to the dragons, perhaps not on as large a scale as our own Bonded Pairs, but it is not something that has been forced."

"What about the intelligence they gave us?" Deia asked. She and Vonis had remained out of the initial meeting and monitored the entire affair from a heavily fortified and hidden room within the base in case it had been some sort of elaborate attempt to assassinate Martin and the others. "Armetus... can it be vetted?"

Armetus looked at Martin. "I've already put out word to our people and agents in The Wilds Martin." He answered. "Confirming the movement of these ships should be easy enough. Confirming the actual existence of these Kavalian forces and their intent is another matter. I'm assuming we don't want to contact them and ask them if they plan to invade the Union, so other means need to be employed."

"Which leads me to the next question?" Deia said. "How far do we go to find out if this is true?"

"As far as needed." Riall spoke now. "Let's assume these numbers are accurate for a moment. Sixteen million ground troops and the ships to support them. We have to assume they have learned from fighting us twenty years ago in that one battle, just as we learned from them. They would outnumber us perhaps three or four to one... and while that alone does not frighten me completely, the massive loss of civilian life does. Our forces could stand toe to toe with the Kavalians and win even with those odds, but the cost in innocent life and infrastructure damage would be... it would be..."

"Incalculable." Tarifa answered.

Riall nodded. "An excellent analogy... and completely accurate I'm afraid."

"Assuming this information is accurate," Isra said. "How much do we teach the Coven dragons?"

What choice are we left with? Arzoal spoke. We will need to teach them everything we can in as little time as we can. What has taken you, Martin, Andro and the others years to master Isra, we will need to teach them in months.

Martin turned to Armetus. "Anton and Cihera get off?"

Armetus nodded. "Lynwe and Layna were seeing them to their jump off point and then returning. They'll be back sometime tomorrow evening."

"As soon as she gets back I want to meet with Lynwe and you Aihola." Martin spoke turning to look at her amber eyes. "Danny and I have some ideas we want to run by you, her and Vengal together. If we do this... I need the best small unit operations people I have putting this operation together."

Aihola nodded instantly. "I'll set it up."

"So we are going to help them?" Panos asked.

"Like Arzoal, I don't see as we have any choice." Martin said his eyes sweeping those in the room and seeing no one disagreeing with him. "We can't just dismiss this intelligence." He turned to Vonis. "Can we?"

Vonis shook his head slowly. "As much as I would like to say yes, no we can not. For my mother to come here herself and present it... it is either very real or it is an elaborate hoax to get us into the war on their side because they are frightened of the next KFI invasion."

"They have a right to be frightened if what they have shown us is accurate. The KFI has had ten years to build their forces." Riall said.

"Armetus... I want whatever you can get on the KFI." Martin spoke calmly. "Discretely of course. Unleash your people my friend... but tell them to be subtle."

Armetus chuckled. "My people are always discrete Martin."

"Ok... Tenna what about a reason why they are here?" Martin asked. "We can't keep them locked away at Gallais's Lodge the whole time. And we'll need to move them out of Sparta eventually to someplace less conspicuous."

“We announce officially that after twenty-five years of relative peace we are signing a cease fire with the High Coven.” Deia spoke. “The Senate has already ratified that as you know *Mandri*. And it will cover us in the public forum as well. We make it clear that we are not forming an alliance or anything remotely like that. Only that an official ceasefire signing is long overdue.”

“The Kavalians won’t like it.” Tarifa spoke now. “I’m sure your brother will scream to the heavens about it.” She said looking at Martin.

Martin shrugged. “Let him.”

“Do we announce that we are training their dragons as well?” Deia asked.

That would not be wise at the moment. Arzoal broke in. We can hide their number among those already here on Earth, shield them so to speak. If we announce it publicly it will cause too much attention and ultimately lead us to admitting we are training them to fight the Kavalians. That is not something we want to do is it?

Andro looked at his father. “Give them to me father.” He spoke. “The new base in the southern hemisphere is complete. It is remote... completely secure and has everything we will need.” He said. “It is central to the different environments we will use and King Anotan of the Moon Elves has relocated all of his people from the north to this area of the planet. He even built their largest city only three kilometers from the base. And you know how he fawns over the dragons of Earth.”

I agree. Arzoal said. The training should be conducted by a Talon Guardian since we can not do it openly. You can not be seen doing this Martin for it would certainly mean trouble and political unrest wouldn’t it Deia?

Deia nodded. “Without question.”

Anotan is a dear friend of dragons and will protect us all. Arzoal spoke. It is a sound decision.

Martin nodded. “Ok... I’m game for that. Now the question is... when do we tell them?”

“The State Dinner is tomorrow evening.” Deia spoke. “I suggest we meet with them in later this evening or in the morning. The sooner we give them an answer the more they will think we believe them completely. We can even invite them to the State Dinner to put forth a façade of faith in what they have shown us.”

Vonis laughed from where he stood. “Deia... my mother would be proud. You are nearly as devious as she is.”

Deia grinned. “Well... I haven’t been in politics for three thousand years and learned nothing. And until we can confirm the content of the intelligence they gave us, I’m not willing to trust them any further than Martin can spit, as he is so fond of saying.”

“Martin... two last questions.” Armetus spoke. “What if this information turns out to be completely accurate and true?”

“Ask me that when we know for certain about that.” Martin said in reply. “I don’t know what we will do because I damn sure have no desire to go to war.”

Everyone in the room nodded in agreement and while they all knew that Martin’s public persona was one of toughness and never backing down; he no more wanted war and death than the next person. He would not allow the Union or its people to be harmed in any way, and given the necessity he would never retreat and most certainly never surrender as Spartan law dictated, but he did not go out of his way to seek conflict.

“What’s the second question?” Martin spoke.

“Then what do we do if this is all a big deception as Vonis suggests is a possibility?” Armetus asked.

Martin met his eyes. “Then we will do what Vonis suggested initially.” He answered instantly. “We’ll take the dragons and send Aikiro and those with her packing.”

“And if the dragons and riders refuse?” Armetus asked softly.

We can not allow them to return. Arzoal spoke softly. They would breed, and they do not have the checks and balances we do when it comes to mating. In another three or four century, without proper precautions and education, we would only have to face them again. This time in battle, for I do not trust the High Coven anymore than Martin or Vonis. Arzoal sighed heavily. If they refuse... if they refuse then they must die.

THE WILDS

Esther hated coming here.

Jagaliu was a central hub of trading and commerce in The Wilds, but it also was a haven for those who preyed on the weak. They had been coming here for almost twenty years to trade what they mined for goods and any new technology that had made its way into The Wilds. Many of the merchants knew Esther well, and while she drove a hard bargain and always traveled with Immortals, she negotiated fairly with everyone and both parties went away profiting from the deals she had worked out. The first two or three times she had come here Cha'talla had been with her. Her beauty always attracted the bad apples, and Cha'talla was very possessive of his pureblood wife. He hadn't killed anyone, but there were several men who had paid the price of pain for their unwanted attentions. Esther Saira had taken to dressing as inconspicuously as possible, and most definitely never wearing any kind of makeup or perfume. She knew her looks and figure drew attentions from many species, but she was utterly in love with her Immortal husband and had not even the slightest desire to even look at any other males. She herself had painfully made that very clear for two men who had attempted to force their will upon her. Esther may have been incredibly beautiful, but she was still a pureblood vampire. A pureblood vampire with an Immortal husband who had only added to her already lethal skills. Esther was more than capable of taking care of herself, and Cha'talla had stopped coming on this expeditions because he knew his wife loved only him, and was perhaps one of the most lethal females he had ever known.

Esther smiled at the older Limian female as she came into the large trading business. The Limian husband and wife had come here into The Wilds hoping to strike it rich decades ago, and instead had discovered they had a knack for running this type of business. Now they traded in everything from undergarments to ship parts, and it was with them that Esther did most of their transactions. They were like her in that they were firm but fair in their dealings and they had an excellent reputation throughout The Wilds as the ones to come too when something was truly needed.

Esther motioned to Tir'ut, Fash'ka and Ja'narie as they split up in different directions within the business. It was three levels of merchandise and almost like a warehouse in the way it was set up. Along the far wall of the immense building was a large lounge of sorts that served excellent food and drink and which was always full of traders from every species. The entrance to the lounge exited onto the main street of the trading colony, but Esther was one of the few who the Limian couple allowed to enter and leave through the entrance in the back. There were several others within the business itself, moving among the many rows of items and stacks of crates, while the lounge was practically full. Esther ignored the men and women in the lounge area as she stepped up to the woman and took her hands.

"Lesede... you are looking well!" Esther spoke easily and with a bright smile. She truly liked the company of this woman.

"Esther... how long has it been? Four... five months now? You must come to see us more often child... you brighten our establishment when you walk in the door." The woman answered. Her eyes followed the three figures that had come in with her and she grinned. "Tir'ut and Fash'ka no doubt?"

Esther smiled and nodded. "You know how their father is." She said. "Ja'narie came with us this time. I think she wants to pick out some new clothes."

"Well good for her!" Lesede exclaimed drawing Esther close to her much shorter body. "You have done miracles Esther. Cha'talla could not stop bragging about what you have accomplished the last time he was here." Lesede smiled.

"We have accomplished it together." Esther spoke.

"That Immortal loves the ground you tread upon child, you do know that don't you?" Lesede spoke.

Esther chuckled. "Well... I worship him just as completely." She said easily.

"So I assume you have converted all of what you brought and you are here for what you need?" Lesede spoke knowingly.

Esther nodded. "It is a long list." She replied. "Cha'talla wants to be prepared for another fierce winter if it comes. You know how he likes to be prepared."

Lesede nodded as she took the data pad Esther held out to her. "Indeed I do. Sometimes I wonder if his mind is a machine." She turned to the room behind her. "Golid! Get out here old man!"

Esther couldn't help but smile as she watched the older Limian man exit the room wiping his hands on a towel. His red eyes brightened when he saw Esther. "Well... well... she returns after nearly a year!" He exclaimed as he moved around the large counter.

"Golid it has only been five months you old fool!" Lesede barked at her mate. The Limian man came up to Esther and embraced her tightly.

"I see Cha'talla finally allowed you to start coming back out." Golid said. "He may be an Immortal... but he is still a man who wishes to protect his wife. Especially one as delicious as you."

Esther chuckled as Lesede slapped her husband on the back of his shoulder. "I'll show you delicious tonight fool!" She held out the data pad for him. "Take this and go do some work for a change."

Golid grinned at Esther and took the pad from his mate. He glanced at it briefly, his keen eyes whisking through the content and nodding. "I see you are preparing for another harsh winter?" He spoke. "I have some things I will add to this with your permission. They are items Cha'talla and your engineers might find useful. There won't be any charge for them... they are experimental actually and I want to see if they will work in the colder climates."

Esther nodded. "Of course Golid. You know Cha'talla loves playing with your gadgets."

"Excellent. As for the rest..." He looked at Lesede. "One million." He saw his wife nod.

Esther nodded her own head. "Make it one point three and it's a deal." She told him. "I want to make sure the two of you have plenty to retire on when you decide you are done with this line of work."

"Retire?" Golid declared. "I'll be doing this until I am dead. She works me like an animal you know."

Lesede lifted her hand to hit him again and he dodged her blow and slipped back behind the counter laughing. "I'll get started. About six hours Esther."

Esther smiled and nodded her head. They had been doing this for two decades now, and while she did genuinely feel concern for Lesede and Golid, the extra credits they gave to them on every trade deal was to insure that Lesede and Golid kept their eyes and ears open for anyone who might be too curious. It had worked very well in the past, and twice Lesede had warned them of High Coven agents making inquiries about stray Immortals that might have passed this way. While everyone knew Cha'talla still lived now, with the genetic treatments Esther had allowed him to take, he no longer looked the same as he did. Esther had ceased the genetic treatments for she had fallen in love with Cha'talla the Immortal, and she had no desire to see him alter his features drastically for something he perceived she would approve of. She loved her huge husband just the way he was.

Lesede took Esther's arm. "Come child. We will have some Limian tea and I will tell you of the news floating through The Wilds these days."

"Find a woman brother." Fash'ka spoke as he and Tir'ut stood at the long nearly chest high bar in the lounge area.

Tir'ut looked at his brother as he sipped his glass of Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos and shook his head quickly. "A woman? Why would I want a woman now?"

Fash'ka laughed and pounded his younger brother on the shoulder. Fash'ka, his father Cha'talla and their uncle T'lolt were all that remained of their family twenty-five years ago after the High Lord had ordered the purge of their bloodline. The Lycavorian King had saved the life of his uncle T'lolt, and the woman he called mother had saved his own father. His uncle had taken another mate and now had three strong children and Fash'ka had been present for the births of not only Tir'ut but his three other younger brothers as well. Esther had insisted upon it to maintain the culture of their people. The senior males were always in attendance when their children were born, and while they now stood and waited in the next room as opposed to in the same room as centuries past, it was one of the things that had endeared Esther to their people. He had made it his personal mission to insure that Tir'ut was as well trained an Immortal as he and their father could make him. That wasn't hard to do really.

Tir'ut may have had the Immortal size at six foot four and two hundred and forty odd pounds, but he possessed the speed and agility of his pureblood vampire mother as well. And he had what most Immortals did not. The ability to wrap the shadows around him and vanish into thin air. While not as skilled as what their

mother had, Tir'ut was very well versed in using this ability, and had once remained hidden from him and their father for six hours while in the same room.

"To keep you occupied fool." Fash'ka said with a chuckle.

Tir'ut matched his brother's laugh. "I am occupied in my life right now insuring our tribe continues to prosper and grow. A woman would only make things more complicated."

"Perhaps... but it would be much more enjoyable." Fash'ka said.

"We should be speaking about you and Ja'narie." Tir'ut spoke. "You know her father has given you his blessing to join with her?"

Fash'ka nodded with a proud smile. "Ja'narie and I spoke on the trip here. I believe we have agreed to conduct the Joining Ceremony when we return." He sipped his drink. "Eleven hundred years old I am and she stirs me more than any female I have ever seen. Our mother's insistence that our people be educated further than what we normally have seen is making huge strides among our people. Ja'narie has an insatiable appetite for knowledge Tir'ut. She reads constantly and knows things I would never have imagined."

"Have you learned how to love like father Fash'ka?" Tir'ut asked softly. While emotions were becoming more and more accepted among their people, as well as expressing those emotions, Tir'ut and Fash'ka were still Immortals and sometimes loathed to talk of such things in anything more than whispers. "I know... I know that is one thing that is hard for our people to acknowledge... but more and more it is happening."

Fash'ka nodded with a smile. "If by love you mean do my knees become weak when she enters the room, or if I notice when she wears something that matches her hair, or the way her eyes gleam in the light. Yes... I believe then I have learned how to love. It feels odd... but it feels good."

As if on cue Ja'narie stepped up close to Fash'ka. "Fash'ka, look at this." She spoke softly holding out the pendant to him. "Lesede says this comes from the volcanic mines of Reglar Four."

Tir'ut smiled as his brother turned to look at the pendant and he allowed his eyes to drift over the many different species in the tavern portion of the Limian business. As he lifted his mug of Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos to his lips his dark eyes fell on the single table in the back of the establishment that held seven men. Four Evolli and two Kochab were sitting at the table, all of them watching him and his brother. The seventh man had a cloak and hood drawn up around his head and face. Tir'ut's Immortal trained senses kicked in at that time as he observed the seven men casually, allowing his eyes to pass over them as if he was scanning the entire tavern. He turned back to the bar that he and Fash'ka stood at.

"Fash'ka..." Tir'ut spoke softly.

Fash'ka turned from Ja'narie when he detected the tense tone of his brother's voice. They had trained together enough over the years that they could detect even the slightest inflection in each other's voices or heartbeats. "What is wrong?" Fash'ka spoke.

"There is a table in the back." Tir'ut spoke as he lifted his mug to sip. "Seven men. Four of them I recognize from the assessor's office when we made our ore conversion to credits."

Fash'ka remained calm and pulled Ja'narie closer to him with one arm, surprising her with his action so much that she looked up at him and made to pull away from his forwardness until she saw his eyes and the strength of his grip on her body as he pressed her close to him.

"Fash'ka?" She whispered.

"Please forgive me my actions Ja'narie." He spoke almost embarrassed by his physical closeness to her before they were joined. "Could you casually look behind us at the table along the back wall and tell us what the seven figures are doing?"

"Fash'ka what is going on?" Ja'narie spoke with some surprise in her eyes for she had never seen this part of him, but suddenly feeling her body become very warm from the closeness of his hard muscled body against hers.

"I will never allow harm to come to you Ja'narie. On that you have my solemn oath." Fash'ka said looking into her eyes with a long that spoke volumes. "Your father has trained you in the combat arts I know that."

Ja'narie nodded. "Yes of course."

"We may need them. Now look at the table in the back and tell my brother and I what the men are doing." Fash'ka spoke. "And do so casually if you would, like you are simply looking across the room."

Ja'narie took a deep breath and then she laughed casually like he had just told her a joke, while turning her head to let her eyes flow across the room and the table that Fash'ka was speaking of. She saw three Evolli and one Kochab rising to their feet and moving towards them with the hooded man, while one other Evolli and Kochab were leaving and moving into the warehouse section.

"Two are moving into the warehouse." Ja'narie answered as she turned back to him. "An Evolli and a Kochab."

"They are pirates!" Tir'ut hissed. "They are going after mother."

"The others are coming up behind us." Ja'narie said quickly.

"Mother is more than capable of handling one Evolli and Kochab." Fash'ka spoke. "She will have them outnumbered. We on the other hand... we..."

"I never thought I would see this." The voice spoke from behind them. "The son of the former High Lord's Immortal Captain. How is Cha'talla these days?"

Fash'ka and Tir'ut turned slowly and saw the hooded figure standing in the middle of the four mercenaries. They watched him reach up and pull back the hood exposing his handsome features and dark eyes. He was a pureblood that was without question but Fash'ka could not recall ever meeting him anywhere and he had an excellent memory.

"I'm sorry..." Fash'ka spoke. "Were you referring to me?"

The man smiled. "I would know the son of Cha'talla anywhere." He spoke. "The faces of all his children were plastered all over the COM channels after his supposed death. It is well known he survived because of a pureblood like me. One who he was apparently sharing a bed with. I know you." He said motioning to Fash'ka. "You however... I don't know you but you look very familiar to me." He said looking at Tir'ut. "You look odd for an Immortal... your skin actually has color to it and you have hair. I must say I was surprised when I saw the female here had a full head of hair, and then I see you."

"We do not know you." Fash'ka said evenly.

"Why should you?" The pureblood said.

"Is there something we can do for you Pureblood?" Tir'ut asked warily.

"I saw you come in with that large load of Cretolian Gem Ore." The man spoke. "Very impressive. What did that net you... seven... eight million credits?"

"That is not of your concern." Fash'ka answered evenly.

The Pureblood looked at him and smiled a cruel smile. "It is my concern Immortal." He said. "I saw the woman you came here with you know. The one in the cloak and hood. That was no Immortal female; she had far too many curves for that. Who is she?"

Fash'ka felt Ja'narie press close to his back and at first he thought it was out of fear, until he felt the High Coven R14 blaster in her hand push against his side. Fash'ka grinned inwardly knowing he had chosen well in Ja'narie, and very happy that she felt the same for him. Like all Akruvian females, she was prepared to fight for what was hers. And apparently Ja'narie felt that he belonged to her.

"That matters not to you." Fash'ka answered.

"Oh but you see it does matter to me." The Pureblood answered. "My associates and I intend to take those credits for ourselves. As well as that excellent and well cared for ship you came in on."

"Are you what a High Coven deserter and coward looks like these days?" Tir'ut asked very calmly. "You fear fighting the Kavalian pigs so much that you desert and come into The Wilds to prey on others. You will find we are not such easy targets."

The Pureblood's jaw twitched and his eyes narrowed. "I am no traitor Immortal dog!" He hissed. "Not like this fool's father! Now tell me what I want to know and no one has to get hurt, I give you my word."

"Your word?" Fash'ka hissed. "Your word means nothing to me Pureblood."

"At the moment... that is all you have." He answered. "We have you outnumbered... and I know for a fact The Wilds has dulled the skills of every Immortal that comes here. I have killed many myself over the years. I will give you a moment to make up your minds, and then I will simply kill the two of you and sell the female."

Esther Saira had learned many important things in her three hundred and seven years before Cha'talla came into her life and stole her breath away. She was fluent in nearly a dozen languages now; with her degree in Bio-Engineering and the myriad of medical skills she had taught herself over the years, she was as skilled a physician as any in The Wilds and even in some of the recognized Empires. Her unarmed combat skills had been forged first by High Coven Weapons Masters with training by the few Immortals who had lived on Nuwaroa and acted as Aikiro's personal guard. Those skills had been refined over the last twenty-five years by her Immortal husband to a level that easily surpassed many of those mercenaries and pirates who thought so highly of their skills. When combined with her unique vampiric ability to blur in motion and wrap the shadows around herself, Esther Saira was a woman the Evolli and Kochab mercenaries should not have attempted to attack.

Esther had been aware of their presence for several minutes as they moved closer to where she and Lesede sat. She had detected their elevated heartbeats the moment they entered the warehouse. Cha'talla had repeated to her over and over in their hours of training together to always be aware of what was happening around her. Esther had taken her husband's advice to heart and now she always kept her vampire senses on full alert when they were not among their own kind. She may have been a Pureblood, as they were called, but Esther Saira was every bit the wife of an Immortal and she had embraced that life without a second's hesitation.

They were in the middle of a conversation and the instant Esther saw Lesede's eyes dark widen and shift behind her over her shoulder Esther moved. The Evolli and Kochab mercenaries were not expecting their target to propel themselves straight up in the chair and disappear into the shadows as Esther wrapped them around herself and vanished from plain sight.

The two mercenaries looked at each other stunned. "A Pureblood!" The Evolli hissed.

"Traveling with Immortals! Impossible!" The Kochab snapped.

The Evolli's bulbous yellow eyes grew wide as he saw the flash of shadows and blurred motion from his partner's left. The female appeared once more, only this time without the long cloak. He was riveted in his spot gawking at her delicate beauty and hard cobalt blue eyes even as her closed fist came rocketing forward with the blunt end of the wickedly sharp blade. He heard a dull thump and soft crack as she pummeled the hilt of one of her dual fighting knives into the temple of the Kochab mercenary.

The Evolli was trying to bring up his own weapon even as his partner slumped to the floor of the warehouse like a limp noodle, his eyes open in death. Esther's blow, executed with perfect precision and every bit of her vampire strength, had shatter the Kochab's skull sending lethal shards splintering through his brain and killing him before he knew what hit him. The Evolli got the barrel of his hand blaster up just as Esther stepped to the side and snatched the barrel of the weapon in one hand. She twisted down and away so quickly the Evolli could not get his fingers free of the weapon and he groaned in agony as two of his webbed digits snapped and broke. Esther stepped into the move, sweeping one long legs around behind the Evolli and then tossing him like a ragdoll over her right hip. He smashed to the ground against the wall with enough force to crack several bones, and as he opened his mouth to scream, the sound was cut off as the tip of Esther's gleaming blade pressed to the loose flesh under his jaw.

Esther twisted his arm viciously and he could only moan in agony to keep from having the blade slice his throat. She glared at him with a savage snarl, her cobalt blue vampire eyes decidedly unfriendly to say the least and her long vampire fangs presenting him with the face of an extremely upset pureblood vampire female. And the Evolli mercenary knew from experience that they were some of the most lethal beings to exist.

"Who do you work for scum?" She hissed. "And know if you lie to me I will make your death that much more painful."

"Like you!" The Evolli yelped out. "He's like you! A... a Pureblood!"

Esther twisted his arm even further and heard him gasp against the painful straining of the tendons in his shoulder and elbow joints. Her vampire hearing could detect the sounds of the tendons stretched almost to their snapping point.

"A name!" Esther hissed once more.

"Gareld! His... his name is Gareld!" The Evolli gasped once more.

Esther's eyes grew a little wider. "Gareld?" She spoke. "And why would Gareld be in The Wilds consorting with scum like you Evolli pig?"

“He... he was... he sided with the KFI when... when they attacked!” The mercenary stammered. “He escaped the purge by the Empress! He stole... he stole a large ship and came into The Wilds! He’s been operating for almost twenty... almost twenty years now!”

Esther turned her head and saw Lesede’s calm face directing several of the Limian men and women they employed to remove the body only meters from where she was. She was waiting patiently while Esther questioned the other fool who had attacked her. Lesede and her husband had made their home in The Wilds for two and a half centuries now, and they knew everyone. They were known as fair and honest merchants, but they were also known as two people who you did not want to get on the bad side of. It wouldn’t be the first time a mercenary or pirate disappeared after angering one or both of them. They were viciously protective of each other and their establishment, not to mention those they called friend. In the last twenty years this female vampire Pureblood and the Immortal they knew as her husband had become like family to them.

“You know this Gareld Esther?” Lesede asked as she walked towards them.

Esther met her eyes and nodded quickly. “He’s someone I never thought I would see again.” She spoke turning back to the Evolli who watched her with wide bulbous eyes. “Why did you attack me?”

“We... we saw you make the ore conversion.” The Evolli answered quickly. “We... we are waiting for a contract... we... we wanted the credits.”

Esther’s eyes flared angrily and she hauled the Evolli to his feet and then used her anger fueled strength and lifted him by his throat several inches off the floor pinning him to the wall gagging for air.

“Well you can’t have them scum!” She snarled. “Where are your pathetic friends? Where is Gareld?”

“The... the tavern!” He choked out the words. “He... he is dealing... dealing with your Immortal friends.”

Esther smiled. “Let’s go see him shall we! Gareld was never very smart... and if he plans on facing down my sons... he is in for a very painful surprise.”

The Evolli’s eyes grew wider. “Son... sons!” He gasped.

“So what is it going to be?” Gareld asked calmly. “Give me the credits you received and we will just leave you alone. Refuse... and I will take great pleasure in killing you and selling the female.”

Fash’ka looked at Tir’ut. “Tell me Tir’ut... which done do you want?”

Tir’ut grinned exposing his vampiric fangs. “I will take the fool Pureblood who thinks to take what is not his.”

Fash’ka nodded. “Ja’narie and I will deal with the other four then.”

Gareld laughed. “You can not win against five of us.” He spoke.

“And you were always a fool Gareld!” Esther’s voice echoed.

Gareld whirled around and saw the body of the Evolli he had sent to deal with the female come sailing across the room as Esther used her considerable strength to heave him through the air. His body crushed a large table as he landed and remained still.

“Ja’narie now!” Fash’ka barked as he stepped forward directly at two Evolli, his hand suddenly filling with the non-lethal baton that they all carried. One of his father’s rules was to not take life unless it was absolutely necessary. They did not need the attention or trouble that would cause. The baton was a simple tool and something based on the Lycavorian Nehtes that his uncle still carried to this day. A collapsible metal rod with a weighted end could do significant damage when wielded by someone who knew how to use it.

Fash’ka was such a person.

His first blow came smashing across the Evolli’s face, pummeling one of his bulbous eyes into a pulpy mass. The Evolli’s hands dropped his weapon as he screamed in agony and reached for his face just as Fash’ka sent him crashing across the room with a devastating front kick. The second Evolli had time to bring his weapon up before Fash’ka grabbed the barrel just as he was pulling the trigger. A short burst of projectiles was sent sizzling into the air to impact the ceiling as Fash’ka wrenched the barrel skyward to avoid any innocents getting injured. The others in the tavern were scattering in all directions as the violence erupted. The barrel of the weapon burned Fash’ka’s hand, but he did not pause and used his incredible Immortal strength to slam the rifle butt back into the Evolli’s face three times in rapid succession, his yellow blood splattering on the floor and weapon from his suddenly torn lips and split cheek. Fash’ka stepped forward as he ripped the rifle free and used

it to pivot to his right, bringing his baton across his body in a vicious side blow that crashed into the Evolli's chest with enough force to drive the wind from his three lungs and break two ribs. The force of the blow sent him staggering back, tripping over two abandoned chairs and falling to the floor.

Ja'narie acted almost as quickly as her future husband. The sudden realization that she had found it quite intoxicating to feel Fash'ka's hard body pressed against hers and that these men had interrupted those new sensations fueled her anger. She lifted her R14 the moment Fash'ka's large frame cleared her field of fire and she let fly three shots total. She knew Evolli anatomy well enough to know they had two hearts, and a perfectly placed shot between those two organs would almost certainly incapacitate them for several hours. It was a more violent expression than Cha'talla would have conducted, but Ja'narie didn't think he would care in this instance considering they were going after his Blessed Wife. The first round punched into the Evolli's chest between his two hearts, precisely where Ja'narie had aimed. His body was blasted back from the force of the non-lethal projectile and he staggered across the tavern until falling to the floor curled into a ball. As the Kochab turned to watch his partner being flung across the room he was bringing his own weapon up. His head came back around, his eyes going wide as he saw Ja'narie's baton snap into his arm with the force of hammer falling on him. Ja'narie may have been a female, but she was still the daughter of Immortal parents and she possessed all the natural strength of her Akruvian species. The baton not only caused his arm and shoulder to go numb, it also shattered the bone and drove the splinter ends through the flesh of his arm. As he dropped his rifle to scream Ja'narie hit him with a solid heel palm strike, lifting his body up off the floor and dropping him like a brick.

Gareld turned back to witness this and bring his own weapon to bear when he saw something he was completely unprepared for.

Tir'ut vanished before his eyes as he wrapped the shadows around his body and blurred in motion. He was the son of an Immortal father and Pureblood vampire mother, and he now blessed the hours and days he had spent with his mother learning to master these new skills that no Immortal had. This was what caused Gareld's eyes to flare in disbelief. He could no more stop the blow from landing anymore than he could stop breathing. Tir'ut smashed his hand forward in a heel strike similar to Ja'narie's, only his carried the power of a male Immortal who was blurring in motion. As Gareld felt the pain lance through his chest and his feet lift off the floor his eyes grew wide once more as he saw Tir'ut blur to follow his flailing body. He crashed painfully into the far wall and began slumping to the floor. Tir'ut did not allow him too. His large hand closed around Gareld's throat and he heaved him off the floor as the shadows unwrapped from around his body. Tir'ut's face was a mask of unadulterated rage and he squeezed savagely wanting to kill this man who had threatened his mother and brother.

"Now you will die painfully Pureblood!" Tir'ut snarled viciously and loudly. "For you have assaulted the wrong group of people!"

"Tir'ut no!" Esther's voice echoed like a shot across the room and his head snapped around to stare at his mother.

Gareld's eyes blinked quickly as the vise like grip around his throat stopped squeezing but did not release him. His cobalt blue eyes disappeared as he recognized the woman walking towards him.

"Es... Esther?" He gasped.

Esther walked calmly towards her oldest son with Cha'talla. "Release him Tir'ut. I had to kill one of the fools he sent after me... and that is the only blood I want on our hands this day."

Tir'ut shoved Gareld closer to the wall while his free hand reached forward to search him quickly, taking the hand blaster and knife from within the folds of his clothes. When he was satisfied the man was unarmed he released his grip on Gareld's throat and the pureblood vampire dropped to the floor gasping for life giving air. His hands went to his throat as he sucked in breath after breath and slowly got to his feet. His eyes went immediately to Tir'ut.

"What... what are you?" He gasped.

"*Dosst sslith vith ramoth.*" Tir'ut growled. (Your worst fucking nightmare.)

Gareld stared at him at for a long moment until Esther stepped up next to him and his eyes went to her in shock. "You... you are supposed to be dead!" He stammered. "The... the Empress said... she said Cha'talla would kill you once you left Nuwaroa!"

Esther glared at Gareld. "As you can see... she was wrong." Esther spoke her voice filled with contempt and hatred. "I imagine she has been wrong about quite a few things these last years."

“He is a deserter mother.” Tir’ut spoke and smiling as Gareld’s eyes grew even wider.

Esther looked at him. “You always were a coward Gareld. It does not surprise me that you would side with the Kavalians and then run when you were discovered.” She spoke. “Be thankful I am in a forgiving mood.”

“He called... he called you mother?” Gareld gasped looking between Tir’ut and Esther. “He is... he is an Immortal!”

“I am only half Immortal fool!” Tir’ut barked out. “Or are your eyes as stupid as your brain? My brother is pure Akruvian.”

Gareld saw nearly a dozen armed Limians now gathered around his men and he watched as Fash’ka and Ja’narie came up next to Tir’ut. “You... you *aturr l’veldrin*.” He stammered. (Used the shadows)

Tir’ut grinned at him. “Pretty handy skill. I have my mother to thank for that.” He spoke looking at Esther.

“Mother?” Gareld said as his eyes went to Esther who stood there. The features were so easy to see any fool could see they were related. “He is... he is your son?” He asked astonished. “How... how is that possible?”

Even under the circumstances Esther could not help but laugh at the question, even while Tir’ut and Fash’ka joined in. Ja’narie stepped up and looked at Gareld oddly. “Are you stupid?” She asked. “Do you not know how children are made?”

Gareld opened his mouth to retort but Tir’ut shoved his baton into Gareld’s mid-section roughly and with enough force to make him think about it. “Do not say what you were going to say Pureblood.” Tir’ut spoke. “I would prefer not to carve your tongue out of your head, but I will. Or my brother will.”

Fash’ka stepped forward and glared at him. “With great pleasure.” He snarled.

“Brother?” Gareld gasped. “You... you are the son of Cha’talla. How could...?” Gareld’s eyes snapped back to Esther.

“Tir’ut is our oldest.” Esther announced proudly. She lifted her hand and stroked her son’s cheek lovingly. “Can’t you see the resemblance Gareld? He has Cha’talla’s dark eyes thankfully though.”

“You... you gave birth to an Immortal’s child?” Gareld almost yelled.

“Four actually.” Esther replied calmly. “Tir’ut is the oldest as I said, but all of them are beautiful, proud and strong boys. Just like their brothers here.”

Fash’ka smiled and nodded. “Thank you mother.” He spoke.

Esther smiled at him before turning her eyes back to Gareld. “What are you doing here Gareld?” She asked. “And before you answer me I should warn you... if you lie to me... I will have Tir’ut knock you unconscious and then I will take you back to my husband. Cha’talla would like nothing better than to get his hands on the man who whipped and raped me.” Tir’ut and Fash’ka both turned to look at her with wide eyes.

“This is the man!” Tir’ut shouted his eyes savage as they turned back to Gareld. His hand came up in an instant and closed around Gareld’s throat once more, lifting him off the floor and pinning him to the wall.

Fash’ka leaned in even closer, his dark eyes alive with hatred and rage all his own. It was not common knowledge among their tribe, what their mother had endured, but their father had told him and Tir’ut one night when they were out hunting. They had seen small portions of the very faint scars protruding from under her thin strapped undershirt when she worked the fields with them, but no one ever questioned her about it. It was also that night that Cha’talla had told his sons in great detail just how Esther had claimed his heart and showed him that he could be so much more.

“My father has described in great detail what he intends to do to you if he ever discovers you.” Fash’ka growled. “Mother... let Tir’ut and I take him! Let us exact our father’s honor and vengeance for what he did to you!”

Esther shook her head and placed one hand on Tir’ut’s powerful arm while she took Fash’ka’s large hand in her much smaller one. “No!” She ordered. “Release him Tir’ut.”

“Mother... he violated you!” Tir’ut exclaimed tearing his eyes away from Gareld’s face as he strained against the iron like vise Tir’ut had on his throat. “He whipped you!”

Esther nodded. “Yes... he did.” She spoke calmly even as Ja’narie stared at her with wide eyes. This was a part of her life that Ja’narie had heard rumors of, but never confirmed until now. “And his actions only served to confirm without question my love and devotion for your father. Killing him serves no purpose. He is only a common thief now.” Esther smiled smugly. “Besides... even Gareld and all his friends could not do to

me what your father does to me when I am in his arms.” She turned her head and looked at Tir’ut. “Release him my son.”

Tir’ut loved his mother with all the commitment of a son for a mother, and now looking at her and seeing the strength of her inner self even when face to face with the man who had violated her so, this inspired Tir’ut boundlessly. Now he truly understood why his father so loved her and called her Blessed Wife. His chest swelled with pride and he released Gareld, watching the man slump to the floor once more gasping for air. Esther squatted down in front of Gareld and smiled.

“Hear me Gareld... and hear me well.” Esther spoke. “You will live this day not because I don’t relish the opportunity to gut you like the pig you are, but because I want you to know that you will never be Cha’talla. I want you to know that it is his hands that stroke and explore my body at night; it is his hands that make me whisper professions of love in his ears. I am the Blessed Wife of an Immortal Gareld... Cha’talla’s wife... and from this day forward you will now have to look over your shoulder no matter where you are. Once my husband discovers you are alive and wandering The Wilds with your sick friends here, he will make it his personal mission in life to search for you whenever we leave our home. And you will die by his hand one day, and it will not be a quick or painless death... that I can assure you.”

“I have killed plenty of Immortals since I left the service of Lady Aikiro!” Gareld spat at her as he got to his feet.

Esther stood up as well and met his eyes. “No Gareld... you have never met an Immortal like Cha’talla or the sons of his loins.” She spoke looking at Tir’ut and Fash’ka. She turned back to Gareld. “I will however make sure your words are inscribed on the headstone wherever he ends up burying you.”

“I... I am not afraid of you or your foul children!” Gareld growled. “I am a Pureblood and...”

“You are a fool!” Esther barked. “You have always been a fool! Even when you were raping me you were a fool! Only a fool would attempt to take from Immortals what is not theirs! Did you have a malfunction in conscious thought processing when you decided to attack us?”

“I don’t need your credits!” Gareld hissed. “I have a larger profit to make soon.”

Esther nodded. “And you only thought to take our money and amused yourself until this supposed profit comes about?” She declared with a laugh. “Well I certainly hope this profit you are going to make is easier than what you just attempted. You failed miserably in that.” Esther stepped closer to him. “Take your fool friends and go Gareld! Go before I change my mind and allow my sons to tear you limb from limb and feast on your blood! Go!”

Gareld was many things; foolish was not one of them. He glared at Tir’ut and Fash’ka before moving quickly around Tir’ut’s large bulk and moving to where the Limians were surrounding his men. He pushed and shoved them out of the tavern’s entrance as Lesede and Golid watched with hostile intent.

Tir’ut stood next to his mother and turned to face her as Fash’ka stepped up to them, holding Ja’narie’s hand.

“You should have let us kill him mother.” Tir’ut spoke softly.

“Tir’ut is right.” Fash’ka spoke.

Esther looked at them and nodded. “Perhaps... but it is your father himself who has told you countless times to avoid drawing attention to ourselves. Killing him would have only spread word that our tribe is thriving and about. Letting him go makes it instant news that will fade in a matter of hours.”

“When father discovers...” Fash’ka began speaking.

Esther nodded. “Yes I know.” She spoke. “However... your father will find him and make an example of him very quietly and without fanfare. He is over seven thousand years old and he’s so very good at making unwanted individuals disappear without a trace.” She finished that with a smile. “That is a skill both of you have not yet achieved.”

Fash’ka looked at his brother and grudgingly nodded his head. “Mother speaks the truth.” He said. “And it should be father who finally finds and exacts his justice upon this Gareld fool for what he has done.”

“Fash’ka...” Ja’narie exclaimed as she felt the burn on Fash’ka’s hand now. “You are injured!” She pulled his hand away from his body and began inspecting it.

Esther smiled. “Fash’ka, take Ja’narie and go with Golid to insure our cargo is secured and do not be pig headed and stubborn and let Ja’narie treat your injury. Tir’ut and I will finish our business with Lesede and then we need to go to Aprian Two.”

“Father will order us home immediately once he discovers what has happened here.” Fash’ka said. “You know that.”

Esther chuckled. “I will deal with your father.” She said. “Go... Tir’ut and I will join you in a short while.”

“Du'ased 'ranndi.” Cha’talla’s voice filled the cockpit of their ship and Esther could only smile warmly. He could speak those words in the ancient vampire language with such emotion that it made her shudder in joy. (Blessed Wife)

“We are fine husband.” Esther said finally as she gazed at his face on the monitor. “You would be very proud of your sons this day.”

“I was already very proud of them.” Cha’talla spoke evenly. “I am more concerned for you now.”

“Cha’talla... there is not a male alive in the universe that could steal me away from you.” Esther spoke humorously. “You should know that by now.”

Cha’talla snorted in reply and Tir’ut laughed at his father’s reaction from his seat in the pilot’s chair of their transport. “Nor me from you Esther, but knowing this fool still lives? You should have let our sons dispose of him and be damned with the consequences!”

“Husband... that would put all we have at risk and you know that.” Esther said calmly. “You yourself have always maintained we need to keep a low profile. Killing Gareld would have only brought attention to us that we don’t want. Besides... now that you know he is wandering The Wilds I have no doubts you will find him one day.”

Cha’talla’s dark eyes glimmered. “Indeed I will.” He spoke. “And he will experience pain for every lash of the whip that he fell upon your body my wife. He will experience pain for every time he violated you in those hours.”

Esther nodded solemnly. “I know this husband... and that is why I let him live. His only thought was for our credits Cha’talla. He did not even know it was me until I revealed myself to him. He spoke of some other great venture he was involved with. He was not targeting us for anything other than greed and cowardly rewards.”

“I still think you should come home.” Cha’talla said. “We can send someone else to Aprian Two.”

Esther shook her head. “We are only three days away my love. It would be a wasted trip if we were to come home and then have to send another party to Aprian Two and you know this.”

Cha’talla sighed heavily and nodded his head. “You are right.” He spoke softly.

Esther chuckled. “Don’t worry Cha’talla. I will purchase some of the scented oil that you like so much. Of course you know the stipulation if I wear it.”

Cha’talla grinned now. “Indeed I do. Something I will enjoy immensely.”

“Then do not worry for us. I have Tir’ut and Fash’ka, and combined with the skills Ja’narie has shown, we will not be bothered again.” Esther said. “The agreement with the settlement went well I take it?”

Cha’talla nodded. “The celebration was grand.” He answered confidently. “It will make our two communities stronger together now.”

“Good. Do not worry for us Cha’talla my husband.” Esther said with loving warmth in her voice. “We will be fine.”

“Be safe Du'ased 'ranndi.” He said.

“I love you Immortal.” Esther spoke softly and with great emotion as she looked at the image of her husband.

“I love you as well.” Cha’talla spoke with a smile. “Contact me when you arrived on Aprian Two.”

Esther nodded and touched the screen. “We will.” She smiled longingly as his image faded and she heard Tir’ut laugh softly. “What?” She demanded looking at her son.

Tir’ut shook his head. “It is nothing mother... only that I hope to one day have what you and father share.”

Esther smiled and reached over to touch his cheek. “You will Tir’ut. You will. True devotion and love knows no bounds. And it usually breaks all the rules. Something you are very good at.”

Tir'ut nodded as she laughed. "Something I learned from my two parents who seem to excel at breaking the rules."

"Bite your tongue and fly the ship!" She snapped playfully. "I'm going to check and make sure Ja'narie has not wrapped your brother in bandages for so minor a wound. She is quite smitten with him you know?"

"Yes I noticed that." Tir'ut answered.

Esther squeezed his powerful shoulder. "And try to avoid flying into anymore asteroid fields like when you were smaller."

"Then where is the challenge!" Tir'ut demanded.

Esther laughed as she turned to exit the cockpit.

LYCAVORIAN UNION/KFI BORDER

Qurot stared out from the large view window in the private lounge on the converted LU *NOVA*-Class Attack Cruiser. The ship had obviously been refitted and redone to be used for diplomatic meetings and transfers of high level government people. It had taken nearly four days before this ship had arrived with their answer and Qurot was not in the best of moods to begin with. Having been escorted here by security forces and then told not to leave this lounge had very nearly been the end of his patience. Jalersi, Athani, Matuarr and Jiss sat conversing at one of the tables, while Karun sat with two of the Kavalian females that were accompanying them on this venture. A venture that Qurot did not like or agree with.

Qurot coveted the position that Pusintin held right now. He wanted to walk in the same corridors that Pusintin walked. He wanted to have the ear of the Prefect and he wanted to have the respect and loyalty of his ships and troops that Pusintin commanded. He had used his superior skill and knowledge as well as his inbred violent nature to reach the position he held now. He was a Pride Leader of the fifth largest Pride within the Kavalian Empire. His name brought fear to others for he was known to be ruthless not only with the enemy, but members of his own species as well. He was considered a great leader of men, but one who did not care how many lives he had to expend to complete the goal before him. Though he would deny it until his dying breath, and he had covered his tracks very well, Qurot had indeed ordered the attack on the medium sized Lycavorian Union world. He had wanted to capture several dozen Lycavorian females to use in his personal brothel since they were one of only three species that could heal the wounds inflicted on a Kavalian male in full rut. They would be scarred... but they would be alive.

He had planned the mission meticulously, right down to where to attack and what to do. It had not been carried out according to his plan, and the inferior Spartan forces backed by a hundred dragons and an entire Fleet Group in support had routed his men to the last man. Not one of his men had survived. Among those killed was his youngest brother and Qurot would never forget or forgive that fact.

He turned when the door to the lounge opened and the Lycavorian man in civilian clothes and two Spartan soldiers came into the lounge. Their P190s were slung over their shoulders, but Qurot could tell from their eyes they could unlimber them in two eye blinks if they needed too. His frustration got the better of him and he began speaking before Jalersi was fully to her feet.

"I was under the impression this was a diplomatic mission!" He barked out stepping closer to the man. "Is this how all visiting diplomats are treated within the great Lycavorian Union when they come to conduct negotiations?"

The Lycavorian man looked at him and smiled a politician's smile. "Forgive me for not greeting you sooner." He spoke cordially. "This meeting was a last minute arrangement as you well know."

Jalersi glared at Qurot for only a moment before stepping forward. "We understand... I am Jalersi... my sister Athani and Parliament members Jiss and Matuarr." She motioned to the two large Kavalians. "This is Commander Qurot of the KFI Military Forces... and my son Karun, also of the KFI military."

The man looked at Karun intently as he stepped closer and Athani saw his nose twitch ever so slightly. Athani knew that Lycavorians had a keen sense of smell; far more keen than her own species. It was said that many of them could track someone over hundreds of kilometers just by their scent. While Kavalians also had a strong sense of smell, it was not in the same range as the Lycavorians.

“Forgive me again... I am the First Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos and the Trade Ministry.” He answered. “My name is Stenys.”

“They send a secretary to meet us?” Qurot growled. “What is this?”

Jiss looked at Qurot as he too got to his feet. “First Secretary is a title of some importance within the Union Qurot.” He spoke. “And to Deputy Laustinos... that is impressive indeed.”

Stenys smiled and bowed his head slightly to the Kavalian. “I send Deputy Laustinos’s sincere apologies for not being able to greet you himself... but as I said... this meeting was arranged very quickly. He will look forward to greeting you on Earth when we arrive.”

“Earth?” Jalersi asked her eye brows rising slightly. “I thought we would be going to Apo Prime.” She said.

Stenys smiled and shook his head. “The Royal Family has begun their six month exodus to Sparta on Earth only this past week. The Prime Minister, Deputy Laustinos and many of the senior lawmakers and officials accompany them for the first two months.” He explained with a disarming smile. “Deputy Laustinos is right now preparing for us to be met thirty-six hours from Earth by an official delegation led by whoever among the Royal family is free.”

“The King?” Athani asked quickly her voice almost sounding hopeful and ignoring the look she received from Jalersi for interrupting.

Stenys shook his head quickly. “No. King Leonidas avoids political meetings like the plague unless he has a need to be there. More than likely it will be one of the Queens or one of the Prince or Princesses or perhaps both. The Royal family keeps us on our toes.”

Jalersi turned from where her eyes rested on her sister and she smiled. “Yes... I’m sure they do. Do you have a sense of who that might be?”

Stenys came further into the room. “Well... it appears Queen Isabella and Queen Aricia will be dealing with the High Coven visit so...”

“The High Coven is on Earth?” Qurot nearly shouted in undisguised anger.

Stenys appeared unfazed by his outburst and either he was a very good actor or he was told to expect this type of reaction. Jalersi guessed he had been told to expect it. He folded his hands in front of him. “The High Coven arrived on Earth just yesterday seeking to sign an official Cease Fire agreement. We have not had an engagement with them in nearly twenty-five years and the leaders of our respective people decided it was time to put that into writing.” He answered. “It is a very straightforward deal... but one that needs to be ratified by the Senate and the King. Their numbers are small...” He looked at Qurot. “Will that be a problem for you Commander? Having members of the High Coven on Earth? I assure you, you will not be housed nearby. In fact you and your delegation will be staying at a very new facility built on the edge of Sparta overlooking the Evrotas River. It is a stunning location.”

Jalersi stepped forward quickly. “I assure you First Secretary... this is not an issue. Our continued war with the High Coven is not something that needs to be spoken of with the Lycavorian Union. It does not concern any talks we take part in.” She spoke. “The Kavalian Federation Imperium and Prefect Keleru, my father, only seek a peaceful trade agreement that will benefit both our peoples. It is our hope that a relationship can blossom from there... but we know we need to begin somewhere.”

Stenys nodded. “I completely understand.” He spoke. “As I was saying... Queen Aricia and Queen Isabella will more than likely be handling that situation and two of their children have only recently been married. They will want to remain on Earth I’m sure since it was Prince Androcles and Princess Carina who were mated.”

“The Crown Prince?” Athani asked more sedately now looking at Jalersi before speaking. “The King’s oldest son?”

Stenys nodded with a smile. “His union to Crown Princess Sadi has been expected for sometime now. Princess Carina’s union came as somewhat of a surprise only by its timing. She and Durcunusaan Section Leader Moneus have been sniffing around each other for years.”

“We will be met by a ship then?” Matuarr asked.

Stenys nodded quickly. “*MJOLNIR’S HAND*, *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and *THE SPIRIT OF HADARIA* are all gathered around Earth now. One of them will greet us I’m sure.” He replied.

“They are all *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers correct?” Qurot asked.

Stenys looked at him evenly. “Yes they are. Not as modern as Prince Androcles’s ship the *SCIMITAR*, but they have had refits over the years. I can arrange a tour for you if you like Commander Qurot.”

Qurot nodded quickly. “I would.”

“Deputy Laustinos has asked that I extend every courtesy to you while we transit to Earth.” Stenys spoke. “As well as get the preliminary details of the trade agreement so that we can be prepared when you arrive.”

Jalersi nodded. “Of course.”

Stenys moved closer to them now his eyes unreadable. “Forgive me, but I must make a request now however.”

“And what is that?” Jiss asked noticing the change in tone and posture of the man.

“I must ask that you surrender any weapons you might have on your persons or within your baggage.” Stenys spoke calmly. “You are within the Union with a status as diplomats and regarded as having some diplomatic courtesies. That does not extend to weapons however. We will not search your belongings, but if you are detected with anything that could be construed as a weapon once we transfer to another ship or at any time on Earth, your entire delegation will be stripped of its status and you will be removed from within Union borders.”

“So we are expected to be defenseless!” Qurot snapped.

Athani stepped forward quickly. “I’m quite sure the First Secretary here will arrange for any security that we feel we might need.” She spoke.

Stenys nodded easily. “Of course.” He spoke looking at the young blond haired female Kavalian. “That goes without saying. You will have no security concerns and I expect your visit and the negotiations will be quite productive. It is my understanding that you also wish to petition the Union Senate for the authority to open an Embassy?”

Jalersi stepped forward next to her sister and nodded. “That is the second part of our visit yes.” She answered. “Do you foresee that as being an issue of contention?”

Stenys shook his head. “That is not something I can speak to.” He spoke. “An embassy request must be decided upon by the King, the Prime Minister and the full Senate.”

“Would it be possible to request a meeting with the King?” Jalersi asked. “To present our petition to him personally?”

Stenys nodded. “It is possible. I will make your request known and give it the highest priority.” He replied. “The second part of my request concerns any biogenic compounds you may have among your delegation.” He met Jalersi’s eyes evenly. “Forgive my tone but they will need to be surrendered immediately.”

Qurot began moving forward a snarl on his face but Jalersi and Athani beat him to it. “What makes you think we have such compounds among us?” Jalersi asked.

“While we have not maintained diplomatic relations with the KFI over the years, we are aware of your use of biogenics in your cloning procedures and how you have used it to alter the appearances of selective females and males among your population.” Stenys explained calmly. Athani took note that Qurot’s imposing physical presence and obvious displeasure did not seem to faze the man in the least.

“This is true.” Athani answered quickly.

“Biogenics has been outlawed within the Union for many centuries.” Stenys told her. “No exceptions will be made I’m afraid. Queen Anja is our foremost medical mind, and she would not allow this.”

Jalersi smiled. “I understand.” She spoke.

“You and your assistant are products of this procedure are you not?” Stenys asked.

“Athani is my sister.” Jalersi answered. “And yes you would be correct.”

Stenys nodded his head. “If I may... I’m quite sure you were both very beautiful with such procedures.”

“Our natural forms do not...” Athani looked at him surprise showing on her face. “You do not find the natural form of our species displeasing?”

Stenys smiled. “On the contrary... I find it unique.” He answered. His eyes went to where Karun stood. “However the biogenic procedures seem to have worked quite well. You are not entirely Kavalian.” He said to Karun. “You have Lycavorian blood in you.”

Karun nodded. “My father.” He answered proudly.

Stenys looked back to Jalersi his eyes holding a hint of surprise. “May I assume since he is your son that you are the wife and mate to Pusintin?”

“Marshall Pusintin!” Karun echoed loudly.

Stenys did not turn to look at him from his outburst, his dark eyes remaining on Jalersi as she nodded. “Is that... is that some sort of problem First Secretary?” She asked.

Stenys smiled. “Not at all.” He replied quickly. “Please...” He turned and motioned with his hand towards the door. “I have arranged for refreshments in the dining lounge with a wide selection of food stuffs. Why don’t we move there and relax and talk of things to come while your quarters are prepared.”

“You mean while you install listening devices and spy tools?” Qurot snapped.

“Qurot silence!” Jalersi hissed at him, her eyes burning.

Stenys smiled. “It is quite alright.” He spoke. “It is not a reaction I am unaccustomed too. No Commander... we are not installing listening devices and spy tools within your quarters. If that was the case why would I announce it to you?” He shook his head. “This ship was recently converted to be a diplomatic carrier and it has been fitted with atmospheric sensors to adjust the quarters of each species on board. If I am not mistaken, Kavalians prefer warmer settings than most, even though you do not shy from the colder climates. It will only take a few hours for the sensors to adjust the settings to something you would find acceptable.”

“I see we have much work to do.” Jiss spoke now as he stepped forward confidently. “Let us be the first to move forward and show our trust.”

Stenys nodded. “Please... follow me.”

SPARTA

DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD

“*Nubou!*” Normya Leonidas hissed out from under the large instrument panel of the *TYPE II DT*.

The sound of her voice carried throughout the entire cockpit and caused both Arrarn and Zarah to turn from the stations they were working at and watch as she slid out from under the console, her cheeks smudged with dirt.

At twenty-one years old Normya Leonidas was the image of her mother. Her platinum blond hair fell to well below her shoulders, her flight overalls conforming to every curve of her body. She did not have her mother’s five foot nine height, measuring only five seven when she stretched her head up, but there was no denying she had not only Dysea’s stunningly beautiful looks, but her figure as well. Her breasts were high and full, straining against the overalls. She had long legs for her height, yet she had a small waist and powerfully built abdomen. Her two inch high elven ears poked out from between the luxurious strands of silky hair highlighting high cheekbones and dazzling emerald green eyes.

Normya Leonidas was only two weeks from her Coming of Age, and even though she was half elf, the fever of her maturing fully was starting to burn in her wolf blood. Normya welcomed it in fact, for once her first Phase passed she would be free to begin seeing males that interested her, as well as exploring her sexual side. She was equally as open minded and adventurous as her elven blood mother, and all those she called mother, without question. She knew of several male wolves that had been sniffing around her for almost a year now, and it would be fun to finally be able to accept their interest and tease them as her older sisters did. Normya also knew she would not let any male interfere with her duties and love for flying. Behind only her mother For’mya and her brother Arrarn, she knew she was the finest *STRIKER* pilot within the Union. Inheriting her mother’s unique skill of precognition within Mindvoice played a large role in her abilities Normya knew, but she was also half elf like her brother Arrarn, and elves were know for being the most instinctual pilots of any species in the Union. While she knew in her heart she was a pilot unequalled and would only get better as the years past, Normya was by no means arrogant. She absorbed information from other pilots like a sponge, especially the older pilots who had flown these ships for decades longer than she had been alive.

Normya turned her head and looked up at where Zarah stood leaning against the console next to Arrarn as he moved up next to her. Zarah had been born six hours before her, and no matter that they had different mothers, they considered themselves twins in almost every way. They shared an apartment in both Gytheio and on Apo Prime, and were the best of friends on top of being sisters. Zarah had her trademark smirk on her face as

she looked at her with those dark eyes, and Arrarn simply crossed his arms over his chest with an amused look. The three of them could almost always be found in or near the airfield working on the ships they would fly. Zarah was turning out to be an exceptional engineer as well as a pretty good pilot. She would often times think outside the box when it came to engineering problems and her mind was like a steel trap when it came to astrophysics and Quantum theories. She had inherited Isabella's lush figure and her dark brown hair fell just past her shoulders in a tightly tied pony tail. Her smiling dark eyes gazed at her with sisterly love.

Like Normya, Zarah was only two weeks from her first Phase; her Coming of Age as it was called among their people. The time when their wolf blood fully matured inside them. Though they were only half wolf, their father's blood was the purest known to exist and that meant their wolf blood would be more dominant. Normya could shape shift into a beautiful platinum haired wolf like her mother, while Zarah could shift into a powerful dark haired wolf. She was the more adventurous of the two of them and though they would never admit it to anyone, they balanced each other out quite well. Zarah was more open-minded and willing to try new things, while Normya was more reserved and laid back. They gave each other that a boost in support and love and took the best from each other for themselves. It was why they considered themselves twins, and it was also why everyone who knew them considered them twins.

"Such language sister." Zarah spoke with a smirk and a shake of her head.

"The LSD Coil Inducer has micro fractures in the casing." Normya spat disgusted as she got to her feet.

"Those were replaced six months ago." Arrarn spoke now.

Arrarn Leonidas, half elf and all Spartan. His hair shifted from light brown to blond depending on the light and exposure to sun, but there was no denying he was For'mya's son. He had the elegant lines of his mother's face, but the strong jaw line of his father. And he most certainly had the Spartan physique that all of the Leonidas men possessed. His six foot frame was chiseled muscle and bone. His two hundred and twenty pounds was lean and ripped in the same definition of his brothers and father. He was considered the most handsome of the sons of Martin Leonidas, something that was a constant source of ribbing by his older brothers. He had more female wolves and even vampires chasing for his attentions than all his other brothers combined, though now that Andro had found Sadi he did not doubt the ribbing would get worse.

Arrarn was Androcles's personal *STRIKER* pilot and he would not have it any other way. Though he was not bonded to a dragon, he was closer to Elynth than anyone outside of his brother simply because they were almost always together. Arrarn and Andro could almost read each others thoughts in what they wanted to do, and this had moved into the realm of flying as well, for he could almost predict what his brother wanted and when. Arrarn didn't doubt that if he could get Sadi to become his co-pilot, they could become the foremost flight crew in the Union. He knew right away that Sadi was a natural pilot after her actions with his mother, and her record spoke the same thing. Her instructors had called her instinctive, and that is what Arrarn wanted in his co-pilot. He was pushing hard for her to be his co-pilot and hopefully with the small hints and items he had been dropping without her knowledge that would come about.

Arrarn may have been a pilot, but what most didn't realize is that he was an exceptional fighter on the ground as well. You could not be a son of Leonidas and a Spartan without these skills and Arrarn and his brothers and his sisters as well were all of that and so much more.

Normya got to her feet nodding her head. "I know. They shouldn't have micro fractures after only six months of flying." She held up the circular piece of tubing that she had removed and Zarah took it from her. Zarah lifted the portable scanner and passed it over the object, her eyebrows rising slightly. "We should check the other *TYPE IIs* and all the *STRIKERS*." Normya said as she began wiping her hands.

Zarah turned to the console monitor and brought up some information on the screen. She touched the screen and then shook her head. "That's odd." She spoke turning to look at Normya and Arrarn. "There are no LSD Coil Inducers in the inventory here on Earth."

"That's not like Admiral Joarl to let the inventory lag." Normya spoke moving up next to her sister.

"They appear to be on order." Zarah continued speaking. "The shipment is not scheduled to arrive for another three weeks however."

"I'll fly it back to Apo Prime for repairs." Normya spoke immediately. "We can't let it remain down for no LSD Coil Inducer, and I need the time on a *TYPE II* anyway. I'll only be gone a week at most."

“And which one of us gets to tell mother?” Zarah asked looking at her sister. “I have no desire to tell mother that one of the ships in her Earth Flight Command is broken because someone forgot to make sure there were proper parts in inventory.”

“I’ll take care of that.” Arrarn spoke with a smile. “She won’t yell at me. You need to concentrate on this *TYPE II* and its back up. I have it on good authority that you will be the *STRIKER* Commander on Res’s new ship, and these two *TYPE IIs* will belong to you.”

Normya and Zarah looked at him with wide eyes. “He got it!” Normya exclaimed with excitement.

Arrarn held up his hands. “You didn’t hear this from me and you can’t say anything to him yet!” Arrarn spoke quickly. “Father wants to tell him.”

“The Senate approved the request?” Zarah asked just as excitedly as her sister. All of them had been waiting for the time when Resumar would be given his own command like Andro’s.

Arrarn nodded. “Last week.” He replied with a smile. “The *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser *PILLAR OF FAITH* will be coming out of the ship yards in six months and it will be Resumar’s ship. They’re forming a command similar to Andro’s. That is why Andro and father have been pushing him to take more responsibility and refine his skills.”

“He’s going to go crazy!” Zarah said with a smile.

Arrarn nodded. “No one else knows except for us.” He said with a smile. “You can’t tell anyone and steal father’s thunder. That also means the two of you will have to start taking on more responsibility as well because more than likely you’ll be assigned to his command since you fly his *STRIKER* Normya.” Arrarn pulled a still stunned Normya into a brotherly embrace with one arm and then drew Zarah into his arms as well. “The two of you will need a co-pilot so I suggest you start thinking about that as well. Zarah has pretty much anchored her spot as an engineer, but you still need an extra set of hands.”

Normya looked at her brother, her face suddenly very serious. “Arrarn... that means I will be in charge of others as well.” She said softly.

Arrarn nodded his head. “And don’t think for a moment that knowledge didn’t play into father’s decision. I think it might be part of why he has waited the extra year before giving Res his own command. He wanted you to have more experience under your belt. You and Res make an excellent *STRIKER* combination, and with the right co-pilot I think you and Zarah could one day rival me and my flight crew. As soon as I find one that is.”

Normya and Zarah laughed at the look on his face. Zarah opened her mouth to speak but Arrarn shook his head before any words came out. “I know what you are going to say Zarah.” He said with a smile. “No... father trusts in you just as much as Normya when it comes to that. Regardless of the fact you like to take risks and act nutty sometimes.” He smiled. “We all do. And you know as well as the rest of us that you have a special place in Andro’s heart. I guess there is something to be said for being the very first to hold you after you were born.”

Zarah smiled up at him. Andro and Elynth had been in the room when Zarah was born and at Isabella’s request he had been the very first to hold her, even before her or Martin. It had forged a unique bond with her older brother that had lasted even to this day. No matter what it was, Zarah could go to Andro and tell him absolutely anything. He knew things that were in her heart and mind that even Normya did not, and it was Andro who had encouraged her to embrace her love of machinery and choose the path of an engineer as opposed to an actual fighter like Carina her sister. Andro however, he had made certain Zarah was equally as skilled a fighter as she was an engineer, spending endless hours with her training in all manner of martial arts. He also taught her to embrace her vampire half and to utilize those skills as well. It was part of her he had said, and it only makes you a better person.

“I will start pulling personnel files.” Zarah spoke with some gusto. “We can start going over them tonight.”

Arrarn shook his head. “The State Dinner is tomorrow night. You can leave after that Normya. Use the remaining time today to begin pulling the files you want and Zarah can go through them while you are gone. I want Normya leaving with this *TYPE II* the morning after the Dinner. I’ll file the proper paperwork, so the two of you just enjoy the festivities tomorrow night. And tonight we are all gathering at Gallais’s Retreat for dinner without father and our mothers. This is just for us, as brothers and sisters, to congratulate Andro and Carina.”

“Speaking of which... when are you going to start becoming more serious with one of your lady friends Arrarn?” Zarah asked.

Arrarn laughed and held up his hands. “Not me sister. I have no desire to settle down just yet. Andro and Sadi were the ones destined to be together. I get to play the field until I find the one for me, just like the rest of us.”

Zarah laughed and slapped his hard abdomen as she turned to her sister. “I’ll have a list that we can choose from when you get back Normya.” Zarah said.

Normya looked at her brother. “And you’ll tell mother?”

Arrarn grinned. “Yes... I’ll tell mother.”

SPARTA CENTRAL SHOPPING QUAD

Arcia, Anja and For’mya had left Sadi after enjoying several hours of gossip and playing with the children. As soon as Elynth arrived at the villa, all of them knew it was going to be a long day for their men and they decided to do some shopping themselves. Sadi felt completely comfortable at the villa and she and Elynth had simply wandered along the beach and talked of things that had happened in their lives since that night. She had attempted to study for an hour but found her interest was not fully into it. Sadi finally decided she would go into Sparta and visit with her father before meeting Andro and his siblings for dinner, and perhaps get some shopping done. She showered and changed into casual clothes before settling onto Elynth’s back and relishing the short flight to Sparta.

It was not an uncommon sight to see dragons on the streets walking along with their riders, and as the dragon population grew, so did the number of Bonded Pairs. With few exceptions all of the Bonded Pairs were members of the military, excluding Roluth, Tarifa and Aihola and several Bonded Pairs that had come about completely on their own. Elynth was well known in the city of Sparta and the Union, and seeing her walking the streets with the golden haired female could only mean the new Crown Princess was out among them. Something Sadi discovered right away the moment they landed and they were greeted on almost every corner by men and women offering their blessings and gushing over her. Most of them knew that Prince Andro’s dragon Elynth was very introverted and when she accompanied Andro out onto the streets, which was almost always, no adult would attempt to come near her unless the Prince was right next to her. Children had no fear of Elynth however and she often allowed them to scamper around her and climb over her back and play in her saddle.

Sadi had gone first to the university to pick up her class schedule and found Teeria and Palta wandering about and that sent them out to lunch in the streets, Teeria and Palta wanting nothing more than to have Sadi tell them everything that happened in the last two days and leave nothing out. Since surrendering to her love for Andro it was so very easy for her now to talk of him and what he made her feel. Teeria and Palta listened enraptured as they sat at the outdoor café and Sadi told them what had happened over the course of the last two days. They had been at the celebration, Sadi insisting that they be there with her, and all they wanted to know was if the Prince was as good a lover as he looked. Sadi and Elynth had laughed within Mindvoice together many times as Sadi tried to tell them without revealing too many intimate details. After several hours they parted ways with hugs and kisses and made plans to meet before the classes they all had to take each day while here. Her father was meeting with L’tian so she and Elynth took to the shopping districts of Sparta.

Now Sadi and Elynth were meandering along the streets making their way slowly to Gallais’s Retreat where they would meet Andro and the others for dinner. It pleased Elynth to see that her new status had not changed the person Sadi was inside. She had bought almost nothing the entire day, simply enjoying being out among the people. Sadi had paid for lunch for the three of them, but she had bought nothing for herself even though she knew full well she was now one of the wealthiest young women within the Union.

Sadi looked up at Elynth as they walked now. *Elynth... what... what does Andro like? She asked. We... we are Anomes and I don’t even know what sort of things he likes Elynth. I can see what some of his tastes are from the way he decorated the villa but he is still very much a mystery to mean.*

Elynth chuckled. *He is no more a mystery to you than you are to him KertaGai. All you need do is open your mind to his. You are joined now... and his thoughts are yours, just as yours are his.*

Sadi stopped walking and looked at her. *Are you serious?*

Elynth settled her bulk to the ground and lowered her head to within inches of Sadi. *Sadi you have always had the skill and power within Mindvoice inside you. That night on the island when I first touched you, I did nothing but trigger your own dormant abilities. Your blood is very pure Sadi, and that is the measure of Mindvoice power as you know. You and Andro have become Anome in your ancient custom more by instinct than conscious thought Sadi. You are drawn to each other like moths to a flame. It is why you have loved him for so long and he you.*

Sadi nodded. *I know all that.* She spoke softly.

Then you also know you have only but to drift among the threads of his mind to know who Androcles Leonidas is. Elynth said. *You have done this already; I can sense it in you. Does being bound so tightly to him frighten you Sadi?*

Sadi shook her head quickly. *Never.* She answered without hesitation. *Elynth... what he makes me feel... I...*

Elynth chuckled. *You did cry out in rapture for many hours Kerta Gai.* She said with humor. *I had to leave the villa's island just to clear my thoughts.*

Sadi looked up at her and her cheeks blushed bright red. *I'm sorry about that. I couldn't help it.*

Yes I know. Do not fear the unknown Sadi Leonidas. That is the rule the entire Leonidas family has lived by for years. Embrace what you have found physically and within your mind. Elynth told her. *Helen... the Feravomir has asked that I pass on to you a message. You will be welcome to visit her, no matter the hour, and she will sit with you and help you to understand what your Union with Andro will do to your abilities. She likes you quite a bit you know.*

Will I always have your council Elynth?

Elynth touched her cool snout to Sadi's forehead and closed her golden eyes when Sadi's hands came up and touched the sides of her huge head. *I may be Androcles Bonded sister KertaGai, but you are the one who holds his essence. I could not be happier about that. We will always be together Sadi, and you don't know how happy that makes me feel. There are many things that I share with my sisters and my mother, but I have never had a female friend and knowing that you will always be with Andro gives me that. I am bonded to Andro, just as completely as my father and mother are to the King and Queen, but it will be nice to know I can finally have what my mother has with Aricia. A true friend of the same sex. We may be of different species KertaGai, but we are still female.*

Sadi chuckled and closed her eyes as Elynth's cool scales pressed against her forehead. *Yes we are.* She said.

You can reach out to him at any time KertaGai. Just as you can with me. Elynth spoke. *You and I are the only ones who are free to delve into his mind. Just as he is ours. I know that you want to buy something seductive to wear for him tonight.*

Sadi laughed openly. *Why waste the Riyal when it will only come off when we reach our home. I know I need nothing to make him desire me, for I feel the same for him.* Sadi looked up quickly and met her golden eyes. *I do know he has meant to get some items from the shop that carries items for members of Mjolnir's Hand. An ointment for your scales that you like so much. He thinks that you are the most beautiful female dragon in Sparta, and he wants you to find a mate one day.*

Elynth laughed shyly. *I would say my mother holds that distinction. But I will never refuse the compliments. As for finding a mate... bah... I have yet to meet the male dragon that even tickles my interest.*

Then let us go there and get this ointment and see if we can't change that. Sadi spoke with a chuckle. *We still have time before we meet them.*

Then climb into the saddle KertaGai. I can have us there in four beats of my wings and we can avoid the press of people on the streets. Adalus is the owner of the establishment you seek, and if I am not mistaken Andro has not picked up what he orders every month. Elynth spoke.

Sadi did just that and Elynth propelled them into the skies above.

“Had no right to do this without speaking with me first!” Deia screamed at Laustinos as he sat in the chair across from her desk. “You have exceeded your authority!”

Deia got to her feet; shoving her chair back and hearing it slam into the wall behind her. She moved to the large bay window and looked out over the mountains to the east. This section of the Senate Building was relatively new. When it was discovered that Martin and the Queens intended to stay in Sparta at least six months of every year and that many of the Lycavorian Union Senate and government officials would be working from here, the building was enlarged to accommodate them and their staffs. Deia’s office had been built in recognition that she was the Prime Minister of their Union, Dilios and Panos also insuring that she had a spectacular view because they were among those few who knew she was Martin’s Aunt.

While Martin considered Deia his direct tie to his grandparents Resumar and Eliani, Deia considered Martin the only true family she had left. He was all the bloodline that remained of her beloved sister and the man she loved so completely. She had been impressed with Martin when he had first returned to them a quarter century ago; for he was far more than she had ever realized he could be. Deia was perhaps one of the oldest among their people though she looked no more than sixty years of age, and while only a handful of men and women knew her true ties to Martin, their relationship went far beyond blood. As King and Prime Minister they worked as a seamless pair for they discovered they thought alike on almost every issue. Martin would not hesitate to ask her council on an issue and she would not pause to inquire of him his opinion about something. When it came to political decisions, they were of like mind nearly one hundred percent of the time.

Martin was widely seen as a military King, having no interest whatsoever in any political workings or dealings unless his council was needed. Most assumed that Dysea and Isabella were the political voice of the King and his will. It was them who normally put forth Martin’s views or ideas in words that would be understood by politicians. No one would mistake Martin as politically adept, and Deia knew that is how he liked it. Deia and a handful of people knew otherwise.

“The Trade Ministry falls under my duties as Deputy Prime Minister.” Laustinos spoke trying to keep his voice calm. He hated that he had been summoned here to her office like a lackey. “I thought I was only doing...”

“That’s just it!” Deia roared as she whirled around. “You did not think! You have invited an enemy into our midst Laustinos!”

“We are not at war with them! Deia they followed all the proper channels!” Laustinos spoke. “You were refusing to meet with the Zaleisian Ambassador and he was...”

“The Zaleisians are their lap dogs!” Deia barked. “The ones they use to communicate with the governments that do not recognize their Empire. I was refusing to meet with him on purpose you fool!”

“According to Stenys they only wish to offer this trade agreement and have petitioned to have an embassy established so that they do not have to use these same means again.” Laustinos spoke. “What is so wrong about that?”

“And Stenys has offered to them a meeting with Martin!” Deia snapped. “Did you stop to think about what you were doing? You are bringing them here when the High Coven is on Earth Laustinos! You are putting us in the middle of their war!”

“They know the High Coven is here.” Laustinos said. “Stenys reported to me that this did not seem to trouble them at all.”

“Of course not!” Deia snapped. “Do you not find it convenient that they are coming here now? When the High Coven is here? They are not coming here for trade talks no matter what they say. They are coming here because the Coven is here and they want to make sure we do not enter the war on the side of the High Coven.”

Laustinos shook his head slowly. “Deia... forgive me... but the King’s suspicious nature is beginning to rub off on you. He is not politically knowledgeable. His manner of solving an issue is by the point of a Nehtes. He...”

“You will stop there Laustinos.” Deia spoke in a low angry voice as she returned to her chair. “You do not know Martin Leonidas well enough to judge him on anything.”

“I know... I know what I have seen and what others say.” Laustinos snapped now. “He is not a politician! He is... he is a brute of a man who thinks that violence solves all problems! He can not hold an entire

species of people responsible for his brother being a traitor to his own kind. That is what he is doing! As for everything else, he allows Queen Dysea and others to make the decisions.”

Deia sat back in her chair and let a small smile play across her lips. “Is it?” Deia asked. “Everything Martin Leonidas does has purpose!” She stated evenly. “Every action he conducts or endorses has meaning. Just because you, Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos, just because you do not see it or do not understand the reasoning behind his judgment in no way means that his decision was not well thought out.”

“Deia the Kavalians are offering to replace our entire agreement for Notal berries at a much reduced rate of cost.” Laustinos spoke. “All they ask is for permission to establish an embassy within the Union for the purpose of advancing peaceful relations between our people. Is that not worth overruling the King’s will?”

She paused a moment then got to her feet. “We do not overrule the King’s will in regards to anything Laustinos. You would do well to realize that if you wish your career in this office to advance any further. Martin Leonidas is this Union. Now gather your things Laustinos.” She told him.

Laustinos got up as well. “What? Why?”

Deia smiled at him. “Do you think I am going to tell Martin that you have authorized the Kavalians to be in Union space alone? And on top of that colossal blunder you offered them a meeting with him in regards to establishing an embassy? Do you honestly expect me to tell him all that without you next to me?” She spoke. “You are sorely mistaken Laustinos.

Carisia stared at the saddle where it was perched on the shaped form of what could only be a dragon’s back. They had left the lodge to make their way to this Gallais’s Retreat to eat and wait for whatever it was they were waiting for. Narice had been the one to lead them in here, and now Carisia was so very happy she had. The shop appeared to be designed only for items that cared for and kept dragons healthy. The proprietor of the store was an affable older man who welcomed them with a smile and wave into his store. The shelves were lined with salves and ointments that were applied to a dragon’s scales for a healthy shine. There were food stuffs that possessed proteins and vitamins that Anthar had never received before. Carisia knew her bonded brother was underweight by several hundred pounds and he had been able to maintain his large size only by constantly hunting. As she wandered the store looking at all the items she was amazed at how many things there were for the dragons that lived within the Union.

“It’s the latest saddle.” The male voice spoke and Carisia turned to see the older man come up next to her.

“I’m sorry?” She said softly.

“The saddle?” He spoke with a smile. “This is the latest version. It came out three years ago and now all the Bonded Pairs within the Union have one, some of them have two or three. It’s made from a softer, pliable alloy that Avi designed for the King.”

“Avi?” Carisia asked.

“The Mindvoice ship Avatar.” He spoke as he reached out and ran his hand along the leather like material. “It does not chafe the scales on their backs, and it allows for more conforming of the dragon armor leg braces.”

“You... you seem to know an awful lot about dragons.” Carisia said softly.

“Tsarina and I were injured during the war.” He answered with a nod. “We can no longer fight as we used to. This allows us to keep our pride about us and stay within the Bonded Pair community. They all come here... all of Mjolnir’s Hand... and the others. I am Adalus.”

“Others?” Carisia asked surprised. “I thought... I thought there was only Mjolnir’s Hand. I didn’t realize that there were others.”

The man looked at her keenly, his dark eyes measuring her up. “You are from the High Coven yes?” He spoke.

Carisia’s maya blue eyes grew a little wider and she stepped back from him slightly. “How... how do you know that?” She asked.

The older man smiled. “There are only twelve pureblood vampires within the Lycavorian Union who are bonded to a dragon young lady and I know them all. They come here frequently and you are not one of them. And that could only mean you are from the High Coven. I was also a member of Mjolnir’s Hand, and I can

sense that the bond with your dragon runs very deep. I also know things and I hear things.” He shrugged with a smile. “You are not like the others in your group with the exception of that young woman by the salves there. I can feel the concern and caring the two of you have for your dragons. The others... they do not hold their bonds as sacred as you do.” Carisia saw that he motioned to where Narice stood near the door. “You and they have come here to be trained I take it?”

Carisia met his eyes. “I... I am not allowed to say.” She spoke quickly.

Adalus nodded. “I understand.” He spoke. “He is healthy... your dragon?”

Carisia turned back to look at the saddle. “He is underweight for his size.” She answered honestly. “The choice of food on our planet for Anthar is not as varied as it is here.”

“Anthar...” He spoke softly. “A strong name. He is the cerise colored red male I saw when you arrived at the Gallais’s Lodge isn’t he? I can sense his imprint on you.”

Carisia nodded. “Yes.”

“He’s big for a Firespitter. I’d say just a tad larger than Elynth... about sixteen meters long?” Adalus spoke with a smile.

Carisia felt suddenly uncomfortable talking to the man and she fidgeted on her feet as she saw Dante and Javier looking at her from the corner of the shop and then beginning to move towards them. “How much is this saddle?” She asked.

“The Bonded Pairs are issued one just like this. They can replace it if they need too, but most buy an extra one just to have it as part of their equipment. I sell them for twelve thousand Riyal.” Adalus answered very business like now sensing her unease and watching Dante and Javier move closer with Lucia. He also could sense Thast and another soldier watching from the doorway into his shop.

“You said there is more than just Mjolnir’s Hand?” Narice spoke softly as she moved up next to Carisia.

Adalus looked at her and took in her exotic beauty. He nodded his head slowly knowing there would be no point in lying about it. Her vampire hearing undoubtedly picked up what he had told the shorter woman. “There are.” He spoke.

“How many more?” Javier asked in an emotionless tone of voice.

Adalus smiled. “I believe there were upwards of a thousand Bonded Pairs last time I checked. That has probably changed in the last ten years or so.” He stated proudly. It was information they would discover soon enough if they were here for what he thought they were here for. And it wasn’t exactly secret information.

“Are... are all of them in the military?” Narice asked.

Adalus shook his head quickly. “There are others like myself that were injured in the war with the Evolli and can no longer fight. Just because we can no longer actively fight does not mean we dismiss our bonded brothers or sisters. Tsarina lives with my family and me and cares for the four small hatchlings she has with her mate. We will never be very far apart. Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Vice President Aihola are bonded to a dragon as well. He is not a member of Mjolnir’s Hand or the military. There are others.”

“You do not seem... you do not seem surprised that we are here.” Narice said. “Or that we are vampires.”

Adalus met her intelligent eyes. “There are many vampires who live and fight and call the Union home.”

“Traitors!” Dante hissed.

Adalus looked at him. “Traitors to you perhaps.” He spoke calmly. “We consider them friends and allies and even family in many cases. Simply because they chose to follow another path than the one you and your leaders have followed does not make them bad. At least not to us.” He smiled. “And the only reason any of you would be in this store is if you were bonded to dragons. Which you all are with the exception of those two charming looking men by the door.” He said with a smile as he motioned towards Thast and the other soldier.

Carisia shook her head as she fingered the credit chip in her pocket. “I don’t have enough for that.” She said softly looking at him. “I’m sorry.”

“There is not anything to be sorry for.” Adalus answered. “Please... continue to look around and if you have anymore questions feel free to ask them.”

“Do you recommend anything for dry scales?” Narice asked quickly.

Adalus looked back as the door opened and he saw the flash of golden blond hair and obsidian scales outside. "I recommend the Apricot ointment... it will soak up quickly but you will see an immediate improvement in the chafing of scales." He replied quickly. "If you will please excuse me."

Sadi squeezed by the two men at the door that did not seem to want to move. She glanced at them in annoyance by their rudeness as the older man stepped up to her.

"Princess!" Adalus exclaimed loudly causing heads to turn from the others in the store. No one but Narice saw Carisia's almost imperceptible stiffening.

Sadi turned back to the man and smiled warmly. "Hello." She said as she took the hand Adalus held out.

"I am Adalus." He said in greeting. "Welcome to my establishment. I was wondering when we would finally see you in here. Andro talked you into coming to pick up his normal order I take it."

"Actually I came to pick something out for him." Sadi said in reply as she allowed the burly man to walk her into the shop. "But I will pick up whatever he usually gets I suppose."

"It is nothing much really." Adalus spoke. "A special salve that only the elven healers on Elear make for the dragons there. He orders a batch of it each month. What did you have in mind for him?"

Sadi smiled. "I don't know." She said honestly.

Adalus looked at Sadi and admired her stunning beauty and smiled. "It is still a bit overwhelming I suppose huh?"

Sadi nodded. "You have no idea." She answered.

Adalus nodded. "No doubt. I will tell you that whenever he comes here Andro always goes to the rare art dealer two buildings down. And he always leaves with something."

Sadi looked at him and smiled. "Thank you Adalus." She said.

Adalus nodded and squeezed her arm. "I will get Andro's order and return in a few moments. And I have a special treat for Elynth too."

Sadi watched him walk around the counter and disappear into the rear of the store and she turned to look around. Her eyes immediately fell back to the two men at the door. They were a stern looking pair, definitely vampires if she had to guess. She allowed her eyes to sweep around and then fell on the diminutive raven haired female who stood near where the saddle was on display. Sadi's jungle green eyes grew wider and her heart slammed into her chest.

It was the woman from her dreams.

Sadi's heart began to race and she felt her skin flush as the woman lifted her face to stare at her with those amazing maya blue eyes. Her face was flawless beauty, her raven locks washing around regal cheekbones and cerise colored lips. Her eyes were... they made Sadi shudder almost as powerfully as when Andro gazed at her. Sadi looked away quickly, clearly embarrassed and she turned back to face the counter and instead was looking at the chest of a man.

"Hello there." Dante spoke with arrogant confidence.

Sadi looked at him. "Hello." She spoke softly and backing up just a step at the way his eyes gazed at her with something Sadi did not like. They gazed at her with feral lust.

"My name is Dante." He said.

Sadi tilted her head slightly. "Good for you." She spoke suddenly not liking this man in the least.

"I am new to your city." Dante spoke opening his eyes a little wider. This Lycavorian female looked exceptionally enticing. He admired the way her clothes conformed to her lithe frame and firm breasts and she looked as if she would be a wild one in bed. Dante considered himself a connoisseur of women and he had not yet met a woman he could not get into his bed. "I was wondering if you might be available to perhaps give me a tour."

Sadi detected a strong Mindvoice presence from this man, from all those in the store as a matter of fact and she chided herself for not being more aware of those around her. She was so used to keeping her shields at such a high level that she could not detect those who were at a lower level than her. She could now feel two of the women in the store were exceptionally powerful, including the woman who had affected her so. What she felt from this Dante and the others did not even come close in many respects.

Sadi shook her head quickly. "I'm sorry... there are brochures at all the corners if you need directions somewhere."

Dante stepped closer to her and reached out to take her arm gently. Sadi looked down at where his hand held her arm and then back up into his face clearly surprised that he had been so forward as to touch her. She thought she saw an instant of red color in his eyes and then it was gone.

"Do you make it a habit of touching women you have just met...? Dante is it?" Sadi asked calmly as her anger began to build.

"Only if I wish there to be something more." Dante answered confidently. "Perhaps I could interest you in dinner after you give me a tour of your charming city."

"Remove your hand from me sir." Sadi spoke evenly and meeting his dark eyes without any fear in them whatsoever. "And do so quickly if you wish to continue using that hand for the remainder of your time in this world."

"You would strike me for touching you?" He asked clearly surprised as he looked at her. "I thought Lycavorians were exceptionally open about their sexuality and their desires."

Sadi canted her head slightly as she looked at him. "Your information is incorrect sir." Sadi spoke. "I will not ask for you to remove your hand from me again. I will simply shatter your arm in four places. Release me now."

Dante hesitated for an instant realizing his small burst of mind controlling power had not worked against this female. That was something he had never experienced before and he pulled his hand back and looked at her. "I... I was under the impression Sparta was a friendly city." He spoke finally.

"To those who do not exceed decorum... yes. It is a very friendly city." Sadi told him calmly. "Something it appears that you lack however, sir."

"My name is Dante." He spoke still gazing at her.

"I do not particularly care what your name is or where you come from." Sadi told him sweetly. "May I suggest in the future you keep your hands to yourself? Another female might not think before they act and give it back to you gnawed off at the wrist."

Dante smiled. "I like a woman with spirit." He said. "Is that a challenge you are handing me?"

Sadi laughed at him as Adalus came out of the back, his eyes going to where the young vampire stood far too close to the Crown Princess for his liking. "Dante...?" Sadi saw him nod his head with a smile. She made an obvious show of looking him up and down very intently and then settling her eyes back on his face. "Dante... you do not begin to compare to what I already have. Your arrogance is offensive considering that you aren't even very good looking, and your attempts at charm are woefully inept." Sadi spoke meeting his dark eyes and seeing his jaw clench in anger. "And if you continue on your path... it will only lead to you getting your *mida* handed to you beaten to a pulp."

Adalus stepped up to them now. "Is there a problem Princess Sadi?" He asked quickly.

Sadi turned and looked at him. "Not at all Adalus." She spoke with a bright smile. "I was just giving Dante here some friendly advice." She saw the small package he held. "Is that for me?"

Adalus nodded his eyes never leaving Dante's face as he handed the package to her. "Would you give my regards to *Prince* Androcles when you see him *Princess*? And once more congratulations on your union." He spoke in a firm loud voice, emphasizing choice words as he glared at Dante.

Sadi smiled warmly and leaned up to plant a soft kiss on the older Spartan's cheek. "I will do just that." She spoke.

Adalus watched as Sadi turned and confidently made her way out of the store before turning back to look at Dante who continued to admire the way Sadi filled out her clothes. He watched as those he was with moved closer to him.

"You are from the High Coven." Adalus spoke now watching as Dante turned to look at him. "I do not know how things are within the boundaries of the High Coven, but within the Union and most especially within the boundaries of Sparta you do not act inappropriately with the Crown Princess and mate to Androcles Leonidas!" He finished the sentence with stern anger in his voice. "Not if you wish to continue breathing without assistance."

"She... she is his wife?" Carisia asked softly.

Adalus nodded. "They were joined three days ago." He answered looking at her. He turned his eyes back to Dante. "And if he were here, High Coven or not foolish boy, you would be a pile of cooling flesh on the floor of my store." He looked at Carisia and Narice. "You and the others are welcome to return any time you wish while you remain in Sparta. Do not bring this one with you however." He motioned to Dante. "Now please... I am closing early and you need to leave. I..." Adalus stopped and tilted his head slightly as Sadi's voice filled his mind heavily shielded.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[Adalus?]*

[Princess?]

[The young woman with blue eyes? What was she looking at?] Sadi's voice asked and Adalus could only smile at the power the Crown Princess obviously had. Andro had chosen very well indeed.

[She was looking at the new saddles Milady.] He replied. *[Apparently the High Coven does not care for their bonded brothers and sisters as we do. The one with blue eyes and the more exotic looking of the other two females... they at least care deeply for their dragons.]*

[The saddles do not need to be fitted do they?] Sadi asked.

[They are standard Milady. Only Torma and Jeth need special fitting because of their size. The blue eyed one, I saw her dragon, and he was only slightly larger than Elynth.] Adalus replied. *[Why?]*

[Adalus... make sure she has a saddle before she leaves your establishment please. Both of them. In fact... make sure all of them have the new saddles. I will transfer the Riyal to your account later this afternoon.] Sadi spoke.

[If they are here for what I think they are here for Princess... they will get saddles when their training begins.] Adalus said.

[I understand. However I want to do this.] Sadi told him. *[I can have Andro speak to you if you wish?]*

Adalus turned and looked at Carisia. *[Milady that is by no means necessary. You and Andro speak with one voice. That is how it is with Anomes.]*

[You... you know...] Sadi sounded surprised.

Adalus chuckled within the connection. *[I believe those of us who are bonded have known for as many years as we can recall Milady. Ever since he and Elynth joined our ranks. I will make it so Princess, have no fears.]*

[And Adalus? My name is Sadi. Not Milady or Princess or anything else so silly. Andro hates titles and so do I.] She spoke confidently.

Adalus smiled. *[Consider it done... Sadi. And I hope to see you in the future.]*

Sadi's laughter was like musical tones in his head. *[I have no doubts you will.]*

Adalus smiled as their connection faded and he glanced from Carisia to Narice. These two women cared for their dragons deeply; he could sense that easily enough, vampires though they may have been. His gaze went back to Carisia, for it was this one that Sadi showed the most interest in. "I have been asked to provide you all with saddles and accompaniments for your bonded ones. Your participation is not needed; however please inform your bonded ones that several members of my staff will be coming to the coral where your bonded ones are resting."

"We don't need your..." Dante began to announce but Narice stepped forward quickly and snapped an elbow into her nephew's gut, silencing him.

"Silence!" Narice hissed at him as she stepped in front of Dante and looked at Adalus. "Forgive my nephew Adalus. He has yet to learn humility it seems. I accept your gift on behalf of all of us."

"It is not my gift." Adalus replied. "It is a gift from the Crown Princess. If it was up to me only you and your blue eyed companion here would receive anything. These others are not true Bonded Pairs."

"And what would you know about being bonded to a dragon old man?" Dante quipped loudly.

All of them heard the loud snort and they turned slowly to see the large head of the gray Firespitter push through the window on the side of the building, its bright green eyes wide and glaring at them.

Adalus laughed as he walked over to stand beside the dragon's head. He reached up to stroke the smooth scales of her neck and lower jaw. "Far more than you will ever know boy." Adalus replied. "Far more than you will ever know."

"I thank you Adalus." Narice spoke as she yanked Dante towards the door with considerable strength. "And please... when you see the Princess again, please thank her for me."

CHAPTER SEVEN

SPARTA ROYAL ESTATE

“Why didn’t you tell me it had gotten this bad Anja?” Martin asked as he lowered the pad he was reading and leaned over to kiss Anja’s bare shoulder.

They were sprawled on the massive bear skinned rugs in the main room of the villa. None of them had much on in the way of clothing if any at all; they never did when they were alone in their home and simply lounging around in the evening. Their five younger children were with Andro and the others at Gallais’s Retreat, and it was their time together now. They had come to relish these moments and they attempted to do this as often as they were able. All of them had duties and things they were responsible for, and it was moments like these that had strengthened their love for each other over the past twenty-five years. They would push the large couches and two chairs out of the center of the huge sitting room, and toss down massive feathered pillows onto the bear skin rugs. Whatever reports or intelligence they had to read or go over they would do here, all of them crowded around Martin who was always in the center. They would wear almost nothing at all, for the touch of each other’s flesh was what they all craved so much. Many of these nights had led to mind blowing sexual encounters between all of them, but more often than not it was to insure they never grew apart from each other. They would usually end up falling asleep on the rugs curled into each others arms and their limbs entwined in a tangle of bodies.

Anja turned her head slightly from where she leaned against Martin’s side and smiled dreamily at the feel of his lips. She sat lotus style with the data pad in her hand and the glass of wine in the other, Martin’s old formal dress uniform shirt just barely covering her body and flopped down on one shoulder now. Isabella leaned against Martin’s other side dressed only in a thin white robe identical to the one Dysea wore, his arm stretched across her firm, full breasts. The robe was tied loosely at her waist and Bella made no move to pull it around her, especially not with Dysea’s head and soft mane of platinum blond hair in her lap. The fabric was such that it truly hid nothing of her lush figure, yet those in this room knew her body just as intimately as she did, for they had explored every crevice and contour through the years and there would be no point in hiding from them. For’mya was stretched out on her stomach between Martin’s legs, the data pad she was reading resting on his powerful rippled abdomen. Her upper body covered Martin’s naked lap, his huge cock pressed against her smaller, but no less very firm breasts as Bella’s hand stroked her shoulder. Aricia was lying stretched out on the floor on her back, her head and shoulders propped up against For’mya’s flawless and perfectly shaped ass while her hands and fingers absently stroked Dysea’s powerful satiny legs which were thrown across her tanned and naked limbs.

“What was there to tell?” Anja spoke as she turned her head far enough to look at him now. “That he was turning Seanna’s parents against me? What good would that have done aside from make you angry? He really wasn’t doing anything wrong.” She answered. “You know this was the last year I intended to keep in touch with them anyway.”

“Yes... but hastening that end was not right.” Dysea said softly. “You cared deeply for each other *Melyanna* and it was not until he became a fixture in Seanna’s life that those feelings began to change.”

Anja nodded. “I know. That is when I realized he was slowly turning *her* against me because I wouldn’t share their bed. He was very careful how he did it, and it took him a number of years, but he accomplished that goal.”

“Anja I could...” Martin started to speak.

Anja shook her head quickly and turned to stare into his dark eyes. “No! It is over and done with Marty. Seanna is dead... I’ve moved well beyond that now. It only really shows me that I don’t need anymore than those of you in this room and if he wants to hold on to his feigned hatred of me that is his problem. I did not cause her death... the Evolli did that. Let it stay in the past lover.” She reached up and stroked his handsome face with delicate fingers. “Please.”

“It is for the best Beloved.” Aricia spoke now. “Anja has made her decision and we should not do anything to make it seem we are being vindictive.”

Martin nuzzled Anja's throat and neck gently with his nose letting a small portion of his aura touch all of them. "Are you sure?"

Anja smiled dreamily as his aura surrounded her, surrounded all of them, and she nodded her head. Isabella may not have been able to feel this aura that her fellow Queens and devoted lovers felt, but that mattered not to her. They had devised a method to make sure she knew what they were feeling and that usually entailed one of Martin's arms pulling her closer to him as he did now, even as his aura washed over the rest of them. It allowed Bella to share in the love he felt for all of them.

"Yes... I am sure." Anja answered finally. "Seanna is dead. That part of my life is in the past and that is where I intend it to stay. We have too much going on now to dwell about it. I don't need anything except all of you."

"That is something you will always have *Melyanna*." Dysea said softly.

Isabella nodded. "Without any reservations."

"What do you and Bella think the High Coven is really here for Martin?" For'mya asked as she steered the conversation in another direction. They did not need to dwell on the past or events that had taken place. For'mya had become almost like a Sage for their group, always able to see every side of the situation and her advice was usually the way they chose to go. Her Mindvoice powers had nearly doubled in the last two decades since Martin had turned her to save her life, and like with Dysea's precognition abilities, For'mya seemed to have the latent ability to be so very perceptive about so many things. "If their only intent was for us to train their dragons they would not have come all the way here. They could have asked that question from afar."

Martin set the data pad in his hand aside and took the crystal glass of Spartan wine that Isabella held from her hand. He took a long sip before handing it back to her. "I truly don't know." He answered finally.

"What do you *feel* they want *Nauta Melme*?" Dysea asked now.

"Whatever it is... it isn't good." Martin answered. "And no... I don't believe us training their dragons is the only reason they came here. I believe they brought this information to us because they want us to enter the war yes, but there is something else as well."

"Aikiro has to know we would never sign an Alliance with her." Isabella spoke turning just her head to look at him now.

Martin nodded. "That's true." He said.

"But if we were to enter the war against the Kavalians and open another front..." Aricia spoke softly. "It would take pressure off the High Coven because the Kavalian forces would be split."

Martin nodded once more. "Yes... that is also true."

They all looked at him now, questions in their eyes. He never kept anything from them, not since that one time almost twenty years ago, and that had been only because he wanted to protect them. None of them truly knew why it had angered them so much; Anja had known some of it, but not the entire story and she had tried to lessen the sense of betrayal they all felt. It was a sense of betrayal that they realized was childish and stupid only after the fact. Aricia had discovered it one evening while they were sleeping and she was swimming within his thoughts as he so often let them. She had found a singular and shielded area of his mind and Aricia had slipped past his shields because he was sleeping and she thought it was something concerning Gorgo whose birthday was fast approaching. What she had discovered was not as troubling to them as the fact he had kept the truth from them. They had overreacted they knew, and during the third week of their escape from Earth they had admitted this to each other as well as so much more.

The four of them had called him some very horrible names in their initial anger, none of which they meant, but also nothing they could take back because it had already been spoken. Anja had been stupefied and unable to counter their words and they took her silence as agreeing with them. In their anger they had left Earth to be away from him, to punish him in some fashion. They knew it was a stupid thing to do once they did it, but pride kept them from admitting this for some time. In the beginning of their second week of self exile they found themselves moving to two different planets before finally settling on Ricot Four. An untamed and dangerous planet within The Wilds with only one spaceport and a whole lot of bad people who called it home. Once outside the protective ring of the spaceport and small city, you could only travel by foot or by pack animal due to the very strong radioactive isotopes within the layers of atmosphere that prevented atmospheric travel. They had thought to hide away within this area of the planet, only to come to the false realization that they needed Martin more than he needed them. There were thousands of females; millions of females within the

Lycavorian Union that would jump at the opportunity to have Martin take them as a mate, and after what they had called him they feared he would do just that no matter how many children they had bore him. Looking back on that moment now, it had been a ridiculous notion to even consider.

It was the end of their third week on Ricot Four when they decided to return and try to make amends with the man they all loved so completely. They knew he would never be able to find them here, or if he had even come after them to try and make things right for they had not contacted anyone on Earth for the entire period of their self exile. They did not think it possible even for Martin to track them across nearly six hundred kilometers of desert and ice fields, or even find them after they left their stay on Tangan Prime.

They had lived in a large abandoned lodge for two weeks and as they prepared to make their way back at the end of their third week, the door to the lodge had opened and he was there. His face appeared drawn like he hadn't eaten for several days, his face covered in stubble, and the dust from the sandstorm outside the door covered his body completely. But it was him. They didn't find out until much later upon returning to Earth that he had made certain the children were cared for, he had left Torma and made to come for them only five days after they had left. He had tracked them across the surface of Ricot Four for five complete days on foot, knowing he could follow faster and easier without animals to slow him down. What had followed his appearance was five straight days of unadulterated and blissful sex where he showed them just how devoted to them he truly was, just how sorry he was for not telling them, and why no other women would ever replace any of them. They in turn had shown him what he meant to their world, and in the end Martin Leonidas promised to never keep any secrets from his mates ever again. The one thing they all knew without question about the man they loved so dearly was simple.

Martin Leonidas never broke his promises.

"Beloved?" Aricia asked as they looked at him.

"I think Aikiro is here for whatever information or items she can get from the Mindvoice ship." Martin said softly feeling Isabella turn completely around and sit up.

"*Ele xun dos talinth nindol m'ranndii?*" Isabella asked him softly in the ancient vampire language. (Why do you think this husband?)

Martin shrugged. "A feeling." He said in reply. "My gut instinct. You may have sensed it somewhat Bella but Andro and I could feel it very strongly." He explained. "Aikiro is... she is incredibly powerful within Mindvoice."

"More than you *Nauta Melme?*" Dysea asked sitting up as well.

Martin nodded slowly. "Perhaps not in terms of raw power, but her control is absolute and she has had millennia to refine her skills and use her abilities in ways I have not even begun to harness. I will be the first to admit I have used my powers to augment my physical skills primarily. All of us have with the exception of you and For'mya *Melda Min*, simply because your skills are more latent in ability. I have begun using them in other ways with Helen and Thr'won's tutelage, but Andro is the one who has studied with them more. Why would she come here to deliver a message and a request that Yuri could have done herself as a Princess of the High Coven?"

"I felt something odd yes, but it was beyond my ability to sense completely." Bella answered with a nod. "I also felt it from two of the younger females within their group. Yuri does not concern me. She is stronger than when we last saw her, but so am I. The dragon she has bonded with however, he is another story. He is much darker than the others and I think he is pulling that darkness from Yuri."

Martin nodded. "Andro said as much." He spoke looking at her. "We'll know more when we tell them in the morning, but under no circumstances do I want her or Aikiro anywhere near Avi or the Mindvoice ship." He said quickly. "I put Ben in charge of that department because I know whatever they develop from what we gain in that ship will be for good. We have used the majority of the technological advances we have discovered from the City Ship to make things better for all of our people. If Aikiro were able to get anything from that ship; access the data banks, or even if she discovers it still has power, I have no doubts she will do everything within her ability to get on it somehow."

"And she would not use it for peaceful endeavors." For'mya spoke softly.

Martin shook his head. "Not a chance. We..." The chime from the main door sounded and drew their attention towards the long corridor. All of them knew that there were very few individuals who could get onto the estate property let alone ring the chime on their main door.

Dysea rose to her feet quickly. "I will chase away whoever it is." She spoke pulling the nearly transparent robe tighter around her body. Her nipples pushed against the thin fabric as well as outlining the fullness of her large breasts. The robe clung to her hips and the perfect shape of her muscular ass as well, the tie holding the robe closed but doing nothing to hide her body underneath. She moved down the corridor in confident and graceful strides and quickly passed her hand over the scanner waiting for it to slide open. She opened her mouth to speak but stopped when she saw Deia and her Deputy.

"Deia?" She asked in a surprised voice. "What is wrong?"

"I'm so sorry for interrupting you and the others Dysea." Deia spoke. "I know Andro and Eliani and the others took the smaller ones tonight so you could be together. This can't wait however."

Dysea didn't hesitate and stepped to the side of the door. "Of course Deia." She said motioning her in. "Come in. We are in the main sitting room just lounging around and talking of different things."

Dysea didn't even glance at Laustinos as they moved past her. She secured the door again and then brushed past him once more to lead them into the main room. She didn't see the look on his face as he took in her near naked form under the robe, and she didn't see him quietly inhale quite deeply of her scent as she moved down the corridor into the main sitting room. His eyes watched the curve of her incredible ass as she walked in front of him. Dysea had warned them they had company within Mindvoice and she saw that they had acted quickly and gathered their things off the floor and moved the large table back with the two large couches and single chairs.

Martin sat on the couch now wearing his loose black pants, Aricia on one side of him with her legs tossed over his lap and her back against the arm of the couch. Her robe was similar to Dysea and Isabella's but a light blue in color. Anja occupied the other side of Martin on the couch, For'mya and Isabella pressed up against each other on the floor at Anja's feet. Martin looked up from the pad he was reading as Deia walked in casually. She was one of the few who had seen the King and Queens in this manner and she had been here enough times to know that they had simply been enjoying the company of each other. Many thought that the King and his Queens had sexual encounters every night, how could they not, with the King being so powerful and the Queens so beautiful. Deia knew better. She knew that part of their power as a ruling family and their appeal among the people was that they were so normal. Deia had arrived here at the villa on many occasions to find them simply lounging around with each other, enjoying the company of each other. Deia also knew that the Queens, because of who they were and what they looked like, were the sexual fantasies of many young Spartans and elves. She also knew their devotion to her nephew was absolute and nothing would ever alter that. She saw Martin's eyes move to where Laustinos followed her into the main room and he lowered the pad he was reading.

"Deia?" Martin asked softly seeing the look on her face. "This is unexpected."

"Forgive me for interrupting *Mandri*." Deia spoke as she settled to the couch opposite where he was and watched as Dysea gracefully moved to the couch and positioned herself next to Anja and without conscious thought she draped a long leg over Isabella's shoulder. "This is too important to wait."

Martin glanced at Laustinos and then back to her. "What is too important?"

Deia took a deep breath and stood up handing him the data pad from across the low table before sitting back down. Laustinos stood to the side of the couch watching his King as his eyes began to read. Laustinos was no where near as muscular and defined as the King, but he was in excellent shape and kept himself very fit. He could not understand however why any of the Queens found him so attractive with the myriad of scars dotting his body, some of them quite ugly to gaze upon. He tensed as Martin's head came up.

"This is a joke right?" He asked.

Deia sighed and shook her head. "I'm afraid not." She said.

"*Nauta Melme*... what is it?" Dysea asked as they all felt his aura change drastically from one of peace and calm to one of anger.

Martin handed the pad to Dysea and his eyes went to Laustinos. "Exactly what part of I want no contact with the Kavalians do you not understand?" Martin growled. "It is a clear and precise order. You chose to disregard it?"

Dysea's head came up quickly from where she and Anja were reading the pad. "You granted them passage into Union space?" She gasped her emerald eyes wide. "Why?"

“Did the last LSD jump scatter your common sense Laustinos?” Martin snapped as he eased Aricia’s legs from his lap and got to his feet slowly. He moved around the side of the couch his back to them. “Who authorized you to grant Trade Negotiations with them? And why the hell would you bring them here?”

“Milord... Milord... the Trade Ministry falls under my authority.” Laustinos stammered. “I do have the ability to sanction Trade negotiations sire. Only the final accord is voted upon by the Senate. The Kavalians offered... they have offered to replace our entire allocation of Notal Berries that the Rurudan Consortium can no longer provide because of the mass flooding of the fields on their homeworld.”

“Did you stop to consider they can do that because they conquered the Merfok Imperial Ruling Family when they reclaimed the old planets of the Kavalian Empire? Planets that for the most part have claimed independence and formed democratic alliances themselves. The Merfok Royal Family has been hiding on Hadaria since they lost their planet!” Dysea spoke from the couch looking at Laustinos.

“How do we know that the Kavalians didn’t cause the massive flooding on the Rurudan homeworld so that they could do this?” Aricia asked.

“That is highly unlikely.” Laustinos spoke quickly. “I have their assurances that this Trade delegation is only interested in peaceful ventures.”

“This coming from an Empire that invaded the High Coven with thousands of ships and millions of troops that they built in secret. Then they conquered everything they could.” Isabella spoke now. “Millions of lives were lost fighting them. And I’m not talking about the ranks of the High Coven soldiers either. We allowed over three million refugees into the Union ourselves.”

“Their assurances don’t mean fucking squat!” Anja barked out. “They were on Earth conducting covert operations! Trying to steal dragon eggs and supporting a man that had killed Union citizens for hundreds of years!”

“We can not hold an entire species accountable for one man’s actions Queen Anja, no matter how horrible they may have been.” Laustinos spoke calmly. “No matter whom that man might be.” He said looking at Martin’s back.

“Is that why you think I won’t initiate negotiations with the Kavalians bastards?” Martin asked turning back around to look at Laustinos. “Because of my brother?”

“Sire... I understand what you may feel in regards to Pleistarchus, or Pusintin, whatever he calls himself now. I...” Laustinos tried to reason with a calm tone in his voice.

“Have no idea what you are talking about!” Aricia snapped coming to her feet now. “You dare stand there and say you know how he feels?”

“Queen Aricia... I said I understand how the King feels. Not that I know how he feels. I have not tried to imply I have knowledge in regards to what he has experienced concerning his brother.” Laustinos spoke keeping his voice even. He was on shaky ground here he knew and needed to keep his wits about him, but he felt he was right and no one would change his mind. “There is a woman leading the delegation. Based on what we know of the Kavalians does that not itself say they are in some respects no longer the violent race we have known them to be?”

“Did you miss the part where Stenys says this woman is a product of their experiments with biogenics?” Dysea spoke again, also getting to her feet now. “Or the fact that this female... this Jalersi is also the mate and wife to Pusintin?”

Laustinos’s eyes grew a little wider. “I did not... I did not read the First Secretary’s complete report.” He admitted.

“Yet your foolish initial actions have led them to now request they be allowed to open an embassy here as well as conduct trade talks.” Dysea said. “Not to mention they want to meet with Martin. The *Durcunusaan* would never allow this to happen given what Martin did too this woman’s husband. He also states that Pusintin’s oldest son is among this delegation, not to mention one of their senior military commanders.”

“They have made these requests yes.” Laustinos said trying to keep his voice even. “It should not matter that this Pusintin’s wife and son are among the delegation members. And do we not regularly send military officers on trade negotiations?” He spoke.

“Contact the ship carrying them and tell them to turn their asses around and go home.” Martin barked. “We’ll make due without their berries.”

Laustinos looked horrified but before he could speak Deia shook her head and beat him to it. “We can’t do that now *Mandri*.” She spoke softly. “It would be the highest breach of protocol to conduct ourselves in such a way.”

“Fuck protocol!” Martin snapped. “I don’t want those bastards anywhere near my planet. And certainly not when the High Coven is here! Jesus Christ... did you even think what kind of problems that can cause?” Martin glared at Laustinos.

“Martin... I have already made this very clear to Laustinos.” Deia spoke calmly knowing she had to speak now and keep Laustinos from bearing the full brunt of Martin’s anger. “The fact remains however that we can not refuse them now. We must meet with them.”

“What the hell for?” Martin demanded.

“We must meet with them now because Laustinos has unwittingly opened the door.” Deia said. “If we tell them we have changed our minds then we risk alienating the other governments that have sided with us in ostracizing them.”

“We’re going to do that anyway when those governments find out we have approved a trade delegation to come here.” Dysea spoke. “They’re going to ask why we can do this and they can not? Then they are going to do it themselves.”

“They’re expecting someone from the Royal Family to meet with them.” Deia said. “It is how we always do things Martin. You put that order into place yourself.”

Laustinos looked surprised at this information and his eyes went back and forth between Deia and Martin. “I can handle this King Leonidas. I *have* brokered trade agreements before.” He spoke finally.

“This is not about trade agreements Laustinos.” Dysea said meeting his eyes scornfully. “This is about them gathering intelligence on why the High Coven is here.” She turned to look at Martin as she stood up and began moving around the couch. “I will go and meet with them *Nauta Melme*.”

“*Melda Min*...” Martin said.

“I will go.” For’mya spoke for the first time as she got to her feet, her eyes on Laustinos as she stood up. “I will take Resumar, Cemath and Aurith with me.” For’mya said as she moved around the couch to stand in front of Martin. “Resumar has studied the Kavalians more than any of us. Isabella needs to remain here to help you and Vonis watch the Coven. Aricia and Isheeni will no doubt play a role in helping Andro and Dysea and Anja both have classes they need to teach at the University. It would look very odd if one of them were to miss all of those duties, especially when we do not wish to draw anymore attention to this event then necessary.”

“Milord... I’m sure Queen Dysea and I can conduct this in the way you want it handled.” Laustinos spoke. “We...”

“I don’t remember asking for your input or your council Laustinos!” Martin growled at him. “You’ve done enough already!”

“Milord... may I ask why you refuse to at least open talks with them!” Laustinos spoke quickly and stepping forward. “I do not understand your reasoning behind refusing to at least speak with them.”

Martin looked at him. “I have four hundred and ninety-three reasons not to trust those bastards!” Martin growled. “And that doesn’t include my brother.” He looked at For’mya. “Are you sure *Kinsoaurgai*?”

For’mya smiled and pressed her body tightly against his. She loved it when he used his special name for her. He had begun calling her that long before he had changed her all those years ago. It held a very special meaning for them both and only his other Queens knew the true meaning behind those words. It had been For’mya who had been his anchor during those weeks after Aricia had been taken from him. Without her physical presence to hold onto during that time, her calm and loving mind to grasp within his, Martin Leonidas would have accomplished the goal he had set out with. He would have ended up getting himself killed during the battle on Ukwav over Aricia’s loss. It had been For’mya’s growing love for him that had kept him from completing that task, and her voice that had told him what his heart needed to do. It was her voice that had given him the strength to reclaim his mate of pure blood.

“I am sure.” For’mya answered meeting his dark eyes with her own and smiling up at him.

Laustinos shook his head. “Milord... in my opinion Queen Dysea would be better suited for this mission.” He said quickly. “She...”

“She is what?” Isabella asked getting to her feet now and staring at him.

Laustinos glanced at her quickly. “Queen Dysea is the more recognizable diplomat.” He answered hurriedly. “She is better known among the Union’s Queens in diplomatic matters Lady Isabella.”

[Mindvoice Shielded] [*M’rannidii I’m beginning to not like this fool more and more.*] Isabella spoke.

[*Yes... I second that.*] Martin spoke meeting her hazel green eyes. Martin shook his head after a moment. “For’mya’s right...” He said. “*Melda Min* and Anja will be missed almost immediately by the vultures at the Netnews channels. They have not come near For’mya since the end of the war and the tongue lashing she gave them. It will also send a message to the Kavalians.”

“What message?” Deia asked as she stood up.

“That I don’t intend to dick around with them in regards to anything.” Martin said. “They come here, present their case and we say no and send them packing.”

“May I suggest we wait until we get them here before making that determination?” Deia spoke.

Martin looked at her oddly. “*Tenna... why?*”

[*This might be an intelligence opportunity for us as well Martin.*] Deia spoke shielded knowing Laustinos did not have the skills within Mindvoice capable of detecting their shielded conversation. Deia on the other hand, thanks to her blood ties to Martin and her own training through the years, was a Tier Six Mindvoicer.

[*She is right Nauta Melme.*] Dysea spoke.

[*Laustinos has put us in a corner Mandri yes... but we should also use this opportunity just as the Kavalian dogs will no doubt use it.*] Deia said keenly. [*It may help us with our other problem in some way. Perhaps give us an insight to whether the information the Coven gave to us is actually true.*]

[*Vonis was right Deia.*] Isabella spoke with a small smile. [*You are devious.*]

[*I am not one to miss a prospect of discovering more about those who we have been told want to invade Union space.*] Deia said.

[*Fine... trade talks.*] Martin said. [*An embassy is out of the question. We...*] Martin stopped for a long moment. [*No... I won’t say that now. If this information turns out to be true... we’ll make that decision later.*]

Deia smiled at him. [*You are learning to blend the political and military together very well Mandri. No doubt the influence of your Queens is rubbing off on you.*]

Martin met her smile and shrugged. [*Go figure.*]

[*What about Laustinos Martin?*] Deia asked.

[*It would look odd if we just cut him out of the loop now Nauta Melme.*] Dysea spoke as she stepped close to him and joined For’mya in pressing her body against his. [*Let him go with For’mya. It is something the Kavalians no doubt expect.*]

Martin turned his eyes on For’mya. [*Kinsoargai?*]

For’mya nodded. [*I will control him... do not worry. Besides... he desires Dysea not me. Probably because her goldur are so much larger than mine.*]

Dysea looked at her with mock indignation. [*For’mya...*] She exclaimed.

Martin chuckled and pulled both of them closer and nodded. “Very well...” He spoke looking at Laustinos. “For’mya goes with Res.” His eyes went back to For’mya. “You can take *MJOLNIR’S HAND*. Transfer their party to her and then bring them here. Put them up in the new facility on the edge of the city overlooking the river.”

Deia nodded. “I will make the necessary arrangements.” She spoke. “They should leave in the morning then, to arrive when First Secretary Stenys told them they would.” She took the pad from the table where Anja had placed it and looked at Laustinos.

“Make sure you are on the *Durcunusaan* airfield at seven tomorrow morning Laustinos.” For’mya spoke not turning or removing her arms from Martin’s waist. “If you are late... I’ll leave without you.”

Laustinos nodded his head. “As you wish.”

Deia took his arm. “We will leave you *Mandri*.” She spoke. “We’ll find our own way out.”

Martin looked at Anja and Aricia as Deia ushered Laustinos out of the villa. His arm snaked around For’mya’s waist tighter as they came up to them. “You two didn’t say much.” He said softly.

“Aricia and I don’t trust those bastards.” Anja quipped holding Aricia’s hand tightly in her own. “She fought them directly here on Earth and I examined their clones afterwards. I wouldn’t trust them any more than I trust the Coven.”

“They are brutal and arrogant.” Aricia said. “But that might also be their biggest flaw.” She looked at For’mya. “You must promise to be careful in your dealings with them For’mya.”

“I will be.” She answered.

“And be mindful of that fool Laustinos.” Dysea said.

Isabella nodded. “He is thinking of greatness and glory and nothing more.”

For’mya nodded. “Yes... I noticed that as well. He wants Deia’s job.”

Martin chuckled. “Well he can’t have her job.” He leaned over and nuzzled For’mya’s cheek and the top of her elven ear, feeling her shudder in delight. “Right now... I think we should show you just how much we will miss you.” He lifted her into his arms and before she could utter a sound his lips covered hers and he began walking towards their bedroom.

“So much for a quiet evening.” Anja said with a smile.

Aricia stood behind her and now she leaned forward to nuzzle Anja’s neck. “We could stay out here and read boring intelligence reports Anja.” She spoke huskily.

Isabella and Dysea stepped closer to her as well, their eyes radiating heat and sexual desire. “Yes *Melyanna*...” Dysea spoke softly as she pressed her body tightly to Anja’s. “I’m sure you would much rather do that wouldn’t you?”

Isabella moved behind Anja as well and pressed her front to Anja’s back while leaning over her shoulder and brushing her ear with her lips. “What shall we do Anja?” She asked over Anja’s shoulder in a voice overflowing with desire.

Anja’s body was on fire by now as she felt the female auras of both Dysea and Aricia pulsing through her to compliment Isabella’s desire filled voice. She spun around quickly, snatching Isabella’s hand and pulling her from next to Aricia. “Oh... I have plans for you Bella my love!” She announced as she headed for their bedroom pulling a smiling Isabella with her. For’mya’s cries of rapture were already filling the air from their bedroom and that meant Martin was hitting her with enough of his aura to drive her mad with desire.

Aricia and Dysea chuckled as they moved up next to each other, their arms sliding around each other’s waists. Dysea leaned her head close to Aricia’s, her own desire creeping higher as she felt Aricia’s female aura surround her now as well, and she easily returned the sensations. Aricia and Dysea shared something that For’mya and Anja, as female wolves, had never and probably would never experience. Aricia because she was pure Lycavorian and Dysea because she was the first Martin had turned. Only the two of them could tolerate Martin Leonidas’s full unshielded aura. If exposed to his unshielded aura, Anja or For’mya would want nothing more than to sate the sexual need his aura could ignite within them. Nothing else would matter in that circumstance or in their minds. Aricia and Dysea were able to take his full aura, and while it drove them into a sexual frenzy as equally as it would Anja or For’mya, they were able to retain their ability to think and act.

Martin was able to use his aura to its fullest extent on both Anja and For’mya, touching them with enough of it to increase their pleasure and desire, but never once exceeding what they could tolerate. He could use his aura with maddening precision on all of them, his ability to control that part of his Lycavorian blood nearly unmatched by any male from what Helen had told them. Martin Leonidas... their beloved mate and husband... he wanted them to enjoy their encounters as much as he did and he had no desire to have a woman whose only purpose was to mindlessly please him. It was one of the reasons that they all loved him so. No matter how many times they had been with him through the years, his first thoughts were of them and their pleasure, and they always had been.

“We must have Deia talk to that fool man.” Aricia said softly as she leaned into Dysea as well now. “Martin will not be able to tolerate Laustinos’s obvious shows of desire for you in front of him much longer.”

“I did not think he had noticed?” Dysea asked in an equally soft voice.

“Dysea... you don’t honestly believe that would escape our Beloved’s notice do you?” Aricia asked meeting her beautiful emerald eyes. “Our Beloved is an Alpha Dysea, the most powerful Alpha within the Union. No one that shows even the slightest interest in his mates will escape his notice. Martin has tolerated Laustinos’s coy looks and his pitiful attempts to insure he is alone with you over the years, as he has with other males, but even his patience has limits. He knows he has to tolerate looks of envy from other males at times. He has our devotion and love and others do not, and we desire no one but him. Laustinos is so very indiscrete about his actions now however.”

Dysea looked at her calmly though a little embarrassed. "It is silly of me to think he didn't notice." She said. She reached up and caressed Aricia's cheek with feather like strokes of her finger. "Little Wolf... have you... have you ever desired another man?"

Aricia met her eyes. "No." She said instantly. "Nor has Anja..." She smiled at the look of surprise on Dysea's face. "We had this same conversation returning from Hadaria."

Dysea breathed a sigh of relief and pressed closer to her. "That only proves to me that we are meant for each other... all of us... for I have never desired another either. And neither has Bella... and she is much worldlier than all of us in that regard. What of this man that has caused *Melyanna* so much anguish?"

"I made some inquiries." Aricia answered with a smile. "Discretely of course. He is a former *Durcunusaan* member. One of those that went with Martin and her to Lycavore. General Vengal dismissed him from the *Durcunusaan* a year after they returned. No reason was given in his file and he was then posted to Hadaria as embassy security. He apparently met Seanna on the mission and they began seeing each other in earnest a few months after Eliani was born."

"And he is the one who attempted to get Seanna to convince *Melyanna* to share their bed?" Dysea asked.

"That is what Anja believes." Aricia said. "She doesn't think Seanna would do that on her own. She knew how deeply Anja loves Martin. Seanna stopped asking her about it several months before she was killed. About the same time they stopped speaking to one another."

Dysea shook her head slowly. "Why is it that men can't seem to find their own females?" She asked. "They always desire the mate or wife of another."

Aricia grinned. "Lucky for us our mate doesn't have that problem."

Dysea matched her grin. "No he does not. And why should he? He has more than enough variety with us."

Aricia looked at her elven fellow Queen and took in her elegant four inch elven ears. Whether Dysea's or For'mya's, Aricia adored their ears and not only because it was a major erogenous zone for both of them. She lifted her hand and used her index finger to trace a line between Dysea's full firm breasts. "Our mates are enjoying themselves Dysea my love. What do you think we should do?" She asked in a seductive voice.

Dysea grinned and pulled her closer until their breasts were crushed against each other and she pressed a muscular thigh against Aricia's bare pussy beneath the thin robe. "I think perhaps we should make our way into our room and indulge ourselves of the pleasures we will find there with our mates."

Aricia smiled and kissed Dysea's soft lips reveling in the wildflower taste and scent of her fellow Queen. "I wholeheartedly agree." Aricia stated. "It has been some time since I have tasted you."

"It has only been two days Little Wolf." Dysea said with a smile.

"That's a very long time!" Aricia said pulling her hands tightly into her grasp. "Come Dysea my love... I want you all to myself for a time. Then perhaps we can find ourselves something long, thick and exceptionally hard and delicious to taste, lick and lavish with our attentions. By then Anja might be done torturing Bella and she will allow us to partake of her amazing tongue and lingual talents."

Dysea's emerald eyes closed dreamily and she nodded quickly. "That sounds utterly divine."

Giggling like young girls they held hands as they raced for the bedroom finding exactly what they knew they would find.

GALLAIS'S RETREAT

Gallais's Retreat was full as it always was this time of night. The upper portion of the tavern and eatery was taken up by the single large table where all of the Leonidas children were crowded around the table talking and laughing. It was a sight to see really, fourteen young men and women ranging in age from five hundred plus years to just over nine years of age. This night however they were joined by two new members of their monthly gatherings here, though only Sadi was actually new to the group. Moneus was already considered part of their family because he had grown up with them and their fathers considered themselves brothers. Carina sat next to Moneus now, nibbling his elven ear from time to time, with a look of pure love and satisfaction on her face. Their first night together, after she had wrapped the shadows around them and they disappeared from the party shortly after Andro and Sadi, had been far more than Carina had ever dreamed of.

They had shared deep kisses before that night, but Moneus had never gone further than that because of the respect he held for not only Carina, but her father and tradition as well. He had made up for it these past two glorious days and nights in spades. Carina had not come down from her orgasmic high until earlier this afternoon. Moneus had kept her on the edge of the pleasure abyss for hours on end that first night; simply exploring every portion of her lithe body in ways Carina had not known could exist. He had changed so much in only two short days and Carina could not have been more ecstatic about that. He was no longer the reserved Spartan in public with her that he had always been. They had gone shopping this afternoon together, and Moneus had taken every opportunity to return her nibbles and kisses of love and commitment to her and unlike before, he no longer cared who saw them. The hours in bed had been glorious to Carina for Moneus filled her, stretched her in a way her sisters had never told her it would be like. He had feasted upon her body as if it was his last meal, and Carina had happily returned the favor.

Her mothers had told her the pleasure she could experience by giving her man equal attention with just her lips and tongue, and Carina discovered they had not been wrong about that in the least. She simply could not get enough of stuffing Moneus thick cock into her throat as deeply as she was able and feeling the control she had over him as he withered in pleasure. It was no different than when he did the same to her, and even more so when they performed such an act together. Tasting his spicy blood for the first time had sent jolting electric shocks of utter ecstasy through both of them as Carina had bit deeply into his neck at the peak of their mutual orgasm, nearly tripling the pleasure they had experienced up until then. By the time it was over, Moneus had bite marks all over his neck and shoulders, and he was not at all unhappy about that. Carina knew his elven ears were extremely sensitive and while they were not as much of an erogenous zone for male elves as they were for females, Carina had discovered just what she had to do to make her new husband scream out her name.

Sadi sat next to Andro and was clutching his arm tightly listening to Arrarn relate a story of when they were smaller. Eliani and Nyla sat to her left, Lisisa and Denali to Andro's right. All around the table they sat and not one of them denied attention to their younger brothers and sisters in the least. Sadi was struck by the closeness they all shared, and even though she was very close to her older brothers, this was something completely different. There was closeness between the Leonidas clan that went beyond simple blood ties, and she suspected it had to do with the incredible power all of them had within Mindvoice. Sadi noticed that all of them deferred to Andro in almost all cases, even Lisisa who was so much older than him. They all knew Andro was not far from equaling their father in power and abilities, but they also knew this knowledge had not changed him in all the years.

"...so Andro, Res and Deni come rolling back to the island palace at like oh dark thirty." Arrarn was saying. "They were trying to sneak in without getting caught... only problem was... they didn't realize Uncle Andreus was on duty that night, and he scented them the minute they entered the restricted palace area."

Eliani and Lisisa laughed. "They were so busted!" Eliani exclaimed.

"Hey... I was just following my older brothers! I didn't know we were going into the palace restricted zone and Andro forgot to turn off the sensors!" Deni exclaimed.

Lisisa elbowed him in the gut. "Like we are supposed to believe that?" Lisisa declared. "If I remember correctly, at least Andro and Res fessed up to it. You tried to deny it for weeks afterwards." Lisisa turned back to Sadi. "Andro and Res only got one whipping. Deni got five."

"Four." Denali corrected her. "The one from grandmother doesn't count."

Sadi laughed and squeezed Andro's arm. "So you weren't the proper Prince everyone thinks you were?" She asked.

"Oh hell no!" Andro admitted. "I got into more trouble than the rest of them combined. Most of the time because I was covering for them!"

"Don't you have another sister?" Sadi asked. "How come she isn't here?" She watched Andro's face change to one of somber silence and as she looked around she saw Eliani's face was the same as were the rest of them. "Oh *carians*... what did I say?" She blurted clearly embarrassed.

"Yuriko." Lisisa said softly. "And no Sadi you have said nothing wrong." She said reaching out to touch her hand.

"Right after the Evolli war ended she and father had a falling out." Eliani said gently. "Yuriko... she was... she *is* very headstrong and proud... things were said... terrible things. She checks in with one of us every

few months... but she swore never to return here to Sparta or Earth. As proud as both of them are... it would take a miracle to bring them back together now.”

Lisisa nodded slowly. “The things they said to each other were... they were things neither of them should have uttered.”

Andro squeezed Sadi’s hand. “She is fine. Like Eliani said... one of us speaks to her every few months. She is, and always will be, our sister.”

“Enough!” Denali bellowed as he pushed back his chair and got to his feet. He lifted his glass of Spartan Wine. “I would like to make a toast!”

Lisisa laughed and rolled her eyes. “Oh boy... here we go! Another toast!”

“Hey! I’m getting better!” Deni barked out loudly.

“In whose opinion?” Lisisa asked quickly. “Yours or mine?”

“Your opinion doesn’t count sister.” Deni snapped.

Lisisa stabbed her fingers into his side. “What to bet!” She snarled with a laugh. “It’s my ears you damage.”

“Bah!” Deni said waving his hand at her and causing all of them to laugh.

“Deni... not like the last one ok.” Nyla broke in. “You had us all falling out of our chairs in laughter at the last toast you made.”

Eliani chortled. “Yeah... and I swallowed my noodles down the wrong tube because I was laughing so hard!”

“That’s why we call you noodle nose!” Andro chimed in.

“Are you going to let me toast or not!” He demanded.

“Deni... not so loud this time!” Retta exclaimed from Resumar’s lap. That brought laughter from all of them, causing Denali to blush even under his dark tan.

“Ok Retta.” Denali said softly. “Not so loud this time.” He turned and looked at Andro and Carina. “I know... I know we do this every month... but this one is special. On behalf of all my brothers and sisters I would like to welcome you to our family Sadi. Moneus... you don’t count cause you are already part of the family.”

“Deni!” Carina barked throwing a bread roll at him that Denali ducked and it sailed over the railing of their private area.

“Seriously though... Sadi... Moneus... welcome.” Denali spoke his words softer and spoken with great feeling. He looked directly at Sadi. “We’ve heard about you for years Sadi... and in some respects hearing Andro talk about you, even at the oddest times, it made us all closer to you somehow. Now we can finally talk to you whenever we want... and complain to you since Andro never listens to us anyway!”

“And get all of Andro’s dirty little secrets!” Resumar chimed in as everyone laughed at his words.

Denali turned to Moneus. “Moneus... we’ve fought together... bled together... and I can honestly say I don’t think any of us could have wished for a better man that our sister could have chosen than you.” Denali said. He lifted his glass in salute to them. “Welcome... both of you.”

Sadi’s eyes were moist as she rested her head on Andro’s shoulder and squeezed his arm even tighter. “Thank you Deni.” She said softly.

“Now we want to know if they made you scream their names like proper Spartan wolves should do?” Arrarn asked the question.

“Arrarn!” Nyla blurted out. “That is so rude!”

“I was curious that’s all!” Arrarn defended himself.

Normya slugged her brother in his arm as hard as she could. “*Carians*... you are a sick pervert!” She exclaimed.

Eliani and Lisisa looked at Sadi and Carina with glints in their eyes. “Well?” Lisisa asked.

Sadi was not in the least bit embarrassed because of the company she was in and she looked at Andro with a seductive glint in her jungle green eyes. “Oh yes he did.” She said softly. “I’m actually surprised I didn’t keep Gytheio awake.”

“Lucky he has the island then.” Resumar spoke with a grin.

“Sister?” Zarah asked from across the table and looking at Carina. “And don’t forget Normya and I only live six villas away! We can get the truth from your neighbors!”

Carina tilted her head back and forth with a brilliant smile. “Well we don’t have an island but we did keep our neighbors awake that was for sure.”

Moneus couldn’t help the grin that split his face. “I had to chase the centurions away three times.” He admitted sheepishly.

That brought another round of laughter from those at the table and Andro pulled Sadi close to him and they shared a deep kiss. Denali settled back into his chair with a smile and unseen by everyone Lisisa slipped her hand under the table and squeezed his thigh.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[That was beautiful Deni.]* She told him with love in her forest green eyes. *[Truly.]*

Denali smiled and took her hand under the table squeezing it within his. *[I am going to devour you tonight Lisi. I’m going to explore every crevice of your body and worship you as you should be worshiped.]*

Lisisa smiled and felt a sexual flush run through her at his words. *[Well... I should hope so. That is your last glass of wine though... I want to taste you my love... not the wine in your skin and blood.]*

[Fair enough.] He answered. Deni smiled at her and lifted his glass once more, only Lisisa watched as the crystal glass stopped halfway to his lips and his eyes shifted. She followed his gaze and saw the four men standing behind Andro on the landing just above the stairs. All of them were from the High Coven party they had seen earlier in the day.

“Andro?” Lisisa spoke quickly motioning with her head.

Andro met her eyes and saw where she was looking and he turned in his chair. He saw Dante and Javier standing behind them with the two other High Coven vampire soldiers, one of them an older but no less cruel looking man. Andro turned fully in his chair and looked at them, Sadi turning as well.

“Can I help you?” Andro asked in a calm voice.

Javier held out the bread roll that had hit him in the back of the head. “I believe this belongs to you.” He stated sternly.

Andro looked at the roll and smiled. “Oh yeah... thanks.” He spoke taking it from Javier’s hand and grinning as he placed it on his plate.

“It hit me in the head.” Javier snarled.

“Sorry about that.” Andro told him pleasantly enough. “She was aiming at my brother and missed.”

“Perhaps she should improve her aim.” Javier spoke.

Andro smiled once more. “I’ll have her work on that. Thanks for the advice.”

Dante stepped forward quickly. “Are the children of King Leonidas always so loud and obnoxious when they are out in public?” He asked evenly. “Your actions would not be allowed on our home planet.”

“That’s nice to know.” Lisisa spoke rather harshly looking at him. She knew who he was and who his mother was as well. “We aren’t on your home planet however. We’re on ours and I don’t think we’ll be visiting yours anytime soon.”

Dante met her eyes. “I was wondering when we would finally meet our half breed sister.” He spoke calmly. “You don’t look anywhere near as dangerous as your Netnews channels make you out to be.”

Lisisa snickered. “I can’t say as I have been waiting with baited breath to meet you I’ll tell you that.” She spoke with some distaste in her voice. “And you two High Coven pin heads are not my brothers by any stretch of the imagination so what you seem to think does not matter to me in the least.”

“We saw your dragon this morning. He was very hard to miss as large as he is.” Lucia spoke now as she moved up to stand between her brothers. “He seemed to be rather fat in fact.”

“Jeth is not fat!” Lisisa snapped.

“Ah... so his name is Jeth.” Javier spoke again.

“It sounds like some sort of disease.” Dante spoke with a sarcastic tone looking at his brother and sister as they both began to chuckle.

Lisisa started to rise from her chair but Deni took her arm. “Lisisa... don’t bother.” He spoke softly. “They aren’t worth the effort.”

“And now we hear from Denali Leonidas.” Dante stated with contempt in his cruel voice. “Protecting his half breed sister no less. How quaint. I don’t suppose you would do us the honor of introducing everyone Prince Androcles.”

Andro held up his hand before Denali could answer while never taking his own eyes from Dante's sneering face and then he smiled. "Is there something else you needed...? Dante is it?" Andro asked politely. "We're having a family celebration here, and meaning no disrespect, you are not part of that family. Thank you for returning the bread roll however."

Andro turned his back to Dante and leaned close to Sadi and nuzzled her neck and cheek. This only seemed to infuriate Dante more and he saw Sadi's eyes close in bliss and lean into Andro's nuzzles. Dante stepped closer.

"I take it the tour of Sparta is out of the question then Crown Princess Sadi?" Dante spoke with a grin. "That is your name isn't it? A shame really... to think I was actually looking forward to your personal company and attentions after the interest you seemed to show in me at the store earlier. I thought your actions were how Lycavorian females showed their interest in a male."

Resumar was just lifting the glass of wine to his lips when Dante spoke and now he turned his head quickly to the side, away from where Retta sat on his lap and spit the wine out as he burst out coughing. Eliani turned and looked at Dante with wide eyes, Denali and Lisisa stunned into speechlessness. Normya had her hands across her mouth as she gave out a gasp of surprise and Zarah had practically fallen over backwards out of her chair. Arrarn had moved from the table a few moments ago. All of them looked directly at Andro and Sadi and noticed that they had not moved from looking into each other's eyes and both of them were doing their best to ignore Dante and the others, which only seemed to infuriate them more.

"Pardon me... were you actually born this condescendingly stupid, or did your mother Yuri raise you to be this way?" Eliani barked out finally.

Dante's head snapped around to glare at Eliani with hate in his eyes. It was a look that simply bounced off her. "And we are finally graced with the words of the Leonidas daughter that sleeps with a pureblood traitor... of the same sex no less."

Eliani laughed at him and turned quickly to take Nyla's face in her hands, kissing her deeply. Nyla responded to the kiss just as ardently, pulling Eliani closer to her, and feeling the press of her body against hers. After a long moment they parted. Eliani smiled brightly at Nyla as she ran her four inch long tongue along Nyla's lips ever so slowly. "Hmmm... that was yummy." She said.

Nyla smiled in return, her green eyes bright. "Yes... *ussta che* it was. Can we do it again?"

Eliani turned back to Dante as she leaned into Nyla's embrace and she smiled as Nyla reached around and cupped Eliani's large breasts in her hands. "I do believe we will go home tonight and sleep with each other. Aside from my brothers, we don't see any men nearby that have the balls to handle Nyla and I. And I'm pretty sure whatever it is you got dangling between your scrawny legs will not come close to measuring up to Sadi or my sister's much higher standards. Isn't that right ladies?"

Sadi looked at Andro dreamily and smiled. "Not after what I've had the last two nights." She said confidently her eyes never leaving Andro's face. "And will have for the rest of my life."

Carina's eyes never left Dante's face from where she sat next to Moneus. Her head rested on his shoulder, one arm wrapped around his back the other hidden from view under the table. She smiled and looked at her new husband, his dark amber eyes watching Dante and the others with something akin to contempt. It was a look she had seen before and Carina had experienced first hand what came after those amber eyes gazed upon you in the way he was looking at Dante. "Why would I settle for second best...?" Carina asked. "When I already have the finest man in the universe."

"Like I said..." Eliani spoke with a nod. "Not a man in sight except for my brothers. Why don't you go back to your chair boy! Before you make a bigger fool out of yourself than you already have."

Nyla snickered as she leaned forward nuzzling Eliani's neck and ear causing the wolf in her to groan in desire and need. Then they all heard Retta break out laughing from Resumar's lap.

"Elli... Nyla... that man's face looks like it's going to explode. That would be funny. Can he do that?" Retta exclaimed.

This brought more laughter from the Leonidas children at the table and Dante's face darkened even more.

"Dante!" The female voice hissed, causing his head to snap around behind him. "That is quite enough!" Narice snarled. "Return to your table this instant!"

"They have insulted me Narice!" Dante hissed right back at her.

“You will do as I have directed you or I will return you to your chair myself!” Narice snapped at him. “We were instructed to avoid conflict and you are here attempting to instigate one.”

“And not doing a very good job I might add.” Lisisa spoke from next to Denali, a smile on her face.

Narice moved up onto the elevated portion of the dining area, her exotic features unable to hide her anger at his actions. They saw the raven haired female follow her, as well as the long flame haired High Coven officer, both of them taking up positions along the wall, their hands dropping to their sides. Narice walked up to Dante and sneered at him, her back now facing the table full of Leonidas children.

“We are not here to engage in verbal battles with these people!” Narice hissed at him, her face only inches from Dante’s. “A verbal battle you are losing badly because you are acting like a spoiled child! We...” Narice stopped talking when she felt the staggering presence within Mindvoice behind her and she turned slowly.

Andro stood just behind her, his azure eyes boring into her and she turned fully to face him. “Forgive him... he is still young and...”

“You are Yuri’s sister?” Andro spoke softly.

Narice nodded. “Yes.”

Andro looked at Dante and Javier and Lucia and then his eyes moved over the others and finally settled on Carisia where she stood next to Toria. Sadi was the only one to feel his heart begin to race and she stepped closer to him taking his hand as she too felt the same effect. “And all these charming individuals are Yuri’s kids I’m assuming... with the exception of mister “I have a stern face” back there in the corner?” Andro motioned to Thast.

“You will address my mother as Princess!” Lucia snapped.

Narice silenced her with a quick glare and she nodded her head turning back to face him. “Yes... that is true.” She turned and held out her hand to Carisia who hesitated for several moments before stepping away from the wall. “Carisia is the oldest...” She said holding her hand as Carisia stepped up with no small amount of fear and looked at Andro and Sadi.

Andro felt Sadi squeeze his arm more tightly than she ever had and both of them could only stare at Carisia’s flawless beauty and her stunning maya blue eyes.

“You have met Dante and Javier... and this is Lucia, the youngest of my sister’s children. Toria is a senior aide to my mother and a friend.” Narice finished turning back to Andro. “We are five of those bonded to dragons that have come here hoping you will help us.”

“Aunt Narice! We don’t need to beg for their help!” Lucia snapped.

“We don’t need their help at all!” Dante snarled. “We can fight the Kavalians ourselves!”

Andro looked at him and turned back to the table after a moment. He lifted the glass of Spartan Wine and took a long pull from it before turning back. “Three point seven seconds.” Andro said.

Dante looked at him oddly. “What is that? Do you tell us how long you last during sex?” He laughed out loud. Only Thast, Javier and the other soldier saw any humor in it.

Andro chortled at his words. “Remember that time Dante.” He said with some inflection. “You’ll need it if you are to survive against the Kavalians.” Andro turned and looked at Sadi. “Call Elynth *KertaGai*... we will take the others back to our villa in Gytheio and finish the party there.”

Sadi nodded and turned to see Normya and Zarah already holding the hands of their younger brothers while Resumar stepped up to Sadi with both Retta and Nara in his arms. Sadi abruptly realized as she stood there, that becoming Andro’s wife and his *Anome* had suddenly propelled her into a central position of some higher status within the Leonidas family hierarchy, especially among his brothers and sisters. As she took Nara from Resumar’s grasp, the ten year old girl transferring to her arms with barely a pause, Sadi found she welcomed that new status and silently swore to never betray that vow of trust. Resumar stepped up to the tall red haired vampire Narice had called Toria after setting Retta down. He stared at her stunning blue eyes as he motioned behind her.

“I need that bag.” He spoke motioning to the small bag on the floor behind her.

Toria found it very difficult to tear her eyes from Resumar’s handsome face as she stepped to the side and he bent over to retrieve it. She had not realized this Prince of Lycavore was so very imposing, not to mention incredibly good looking. The images they had of him did not do him credit in the least. Resumar stepped back up to his brother, looking at Toria one last time before meeting Andro’s eyes and picking up Retta

again, their shoulders touching. "I'm going to drop these off at Fleet and then bring Retta out to your place. I'm going to call it quits prematurely though because mother and I are leaving early."

Andro nodded as he met his brother's dark eyes. "Fly safe brother." He spoke. "And watch yourself out there."

Narice and the others watched as Eliani, Nyla, Lisisa and Denali were getting to their feet. "I did not mean for Dante's actions to cause you and your siblings to leave." Narice spoke. "We should be the ones to leave."

Andro shook his head. "You are guests in Sparta." He said calmly. "You should enjoy this night... you won't get many more like them over the next few months."

"Is that a threat?" Thast demanded as he pushed forward from the wall.

Andro chuckled and his azure eyes looked at Thast with hardly any interest in them. "I don't make threats Commander." He spoke knowing that Carisia was staring at him now.

Carisia turned to look at Narice. "They are going to train us." She said quickly.

Narice looked from her to Andro with wide eyes. "Is this true?" She asked softly. "Has your father decided?"

"Three point seven seconds." Andro said once more bowing his head slightly. "I will see all of you very soon."

Narice and Carisia watched as he turned and took Nara from Sadi's arms and then took her hand and began walking out. Nyla led Eliani past them with a smile a mile wide, Eliani holding onto her waist in a very intimate fashion. They watched Lisisa step up in front of them, Denali waiting just five steps away and in a soft shimmer of bluish white light Arrarn Leonidas appeared directly behind Narice as if out of the thin air.

Narice spun around quickly, her eyes wide at not having detected him in any manner, the others backing up quickly from where he now stood. Narice stared into his dark eyes with shock and saw a mischievous glint in them.

Arrarn smiled. "It's a new toy we have developed." He said looking at Narice's shocked expression. "Comes in quite handy actually." They watched him holster the *Nehtes* and brush against Narice as he moved to stand next to Lisisa. As he passed Narice, Arrarn took in a very deep breath and was shocked to discover Narice smelled of ripe pineapples, fresh and ready to be eaten. He turned back to look at her, the expression of stunned shock on her face still there. "I think it's safe Moneus. Carina." He stated casually.

Half a dozen sets of eyes went to where Moneus rose from his chair, his *Nehtes* gripped in his hand and Carina's hand came away from his waist and she sheathed the wicked looking curved blade of the Shakur Fighting knife.

"Three point seven seconds." Arrarn stated before he too turned and followed Moneus and his sister out.

Carisia looked at Lisisa. This woman was her half sister, a half sister that she hoped to one day have a relationship with. "What... what do they mean?" She asked softly. "Three point seven seconds?"

"Four hundred and twenty-nine flechettes. That is what makes up the majority of a T19's warhead. Only two Bonded Pairs have ever survived the full blast of a T19 from point blank range." Lisisa said softly looking at them. "My father and my brother. The only reason they survived is because their psychic shields are more powerful than anything any of you could hope to have." Lisisa spoke looking directly at Dante. "Three point seven seconds is the average time it takes for a T19 from launch to impact. Three point seven seconds before it blows you and your dragon to *nubous* pieces. In those three point seven seconds you have three decisions to make. One... you rotate to face the smallest cone of the missile and hope you get it right and it doesn't shred you to pieces or penetrate your shields. Two... try to outrun it which is next to impossible. Or three... kill the bastard who fired it before you die." Lisisa looked at them, her eyes settling on Carisia and Narice. "Just a little bit of information for you." She said with a smile. "We'll see you tomorrow..." She turned to glare at Javier and Lucia. "And I'll show you just how fat Jeth really is when he swats you from the sky like the amateurs you are."

Denali reached out and took her arm. "Lisi... let's go." He spoke softly.

Lisisa began to turn but stopped and turned back to look at them. "And if you think fat man there..." She motioned to Thast whose eyes darkened at her words. "Or any of you could have stopped Andro or my other brothers from wiping the floor with your vampire asses you would have been painfully mistaken."

Dante opened his mouth to retort but Narice's hand came up with the speed of a striking viper and she slapped him viciously across the face. "You will not speak another word or I will cut your tongue out of your

mouth and I will not care you are my sister's son!" Narice's reaction stunned all of them except Carisia and they remained silent as she turned to look at Lisisa.

"We will heed your words Lisisa Leonidas." She spoke softly. "Thank you."

One of Gallais's managers came rushing over now as he saw that the Leonidas children were leaving far earlier than they usually did.

"Princess Lisisa? Prince Denali? Is something wrong?" The man asked.

Lisisa turned to him. "No Roaban... nothing is wrong." She said gently. "Andro and Sadi want to stay at the villa and we are moving there. You know how newly mated wolves are. Will you make sure that whatever our High Coven guests need or want is provided to them? And you may bill my personal account, or Denali's... whichever is easiest."

The man looked at her oddly. "As you wish Princess." He said.

Lisisa looked at the High Coven party once more. "Leave your arrogance on the tarmac when you come tomorrow. Androcles will not tolerate it... and nor will any other of those he chooses to train you." She said.

"How do you know that?" Lucia snapped.

Lisisa looked at Denali for a moment and saw him smile at her. "Let them discover it for themselves." He spoke. "Let's go Lisisa."

Lisisa looked back one last time. "Be prepared." She said. "Be prepared. Your world is about to change drastically."

Narice and the others could do nothing but stand there and watch Lisisa and Denali move swiftly out of Gallais's Retreat.

GALLAIS'S LODGE

"How dare you strike my son Narice... you had no right!" Yuri snarled at her younger sister.

"I had every right!" Narice snarled right back no fear of her older sister in her demeanor. "We are here for a purpose! That purpose is to have these men and women train us with our bonded dragons! They are all that stands between us and death on the battlefield!" Narice turned and glared at Dante. "Your son decided he was going to attempt to instigate an altercation with Androcles Leonidas! And not only that... he made improper overtures towards Androcles's new bride! His new wife Yuri! If my interpretation of Spartan and Lycavorian culture is correct... actions such as his this night are grounds for Androcles Leonidas to kill him without a second's pause! And make no mistake... that he would have done with considerable ease!"

Aikiro stepped forward now and looked at her daughter. Narice was introverted yes, and she kept her council mainly to herself unless asked directly, but Narice was also exceptionally intelligent and not far from reaching the same level within Mindvoice as Yuri had obtained.

"Narice... you felt something didn't you?" Aikiro asked.

"I felt power mother." Narice answered. "Raw untamed and pure power. And it radiated from Androcles Leonidas and his new wife. This Sadi."

"Sadi?" Robert Moran asked and turned to look at her from where he stood in front of the window. Unlike Yuri he was not in the least bit upset that Narice and assaulted Dante. He knew his son was headstrong and oftentimes acted without thought of consequences. There were times when Dante needed to be put in his place.

Aikiro and Yuri looked at him. "You have heard the name Robert?" Aikiro asked.

Moran nodded. "It sounds familiar somehow." He replied. "I can't place it though. I want to say it was a name I have read in some intelligence report through the years. Old intelligence reports."

"She is at least a hundred years older than Androcles mother, but their emotion... their emotion was such... it was almost as if they are somehow bound within Mindvoice." Narice spoke.

Aikiro nodded quickly. "Ah yes... I know of this. Soulmates... *Anomes* in the ancient Lycavorian language." She said. "In their legend and lore when two souls that have supposedly been destined for one another come together they form a bubble of power within Mindvoice. Resumar and Eliani were *Anomes* from what I understand... as are Martin Leonidas and his mate of pure blood Aricia. When they are together...

connected physically like when they are holding hands or when they merge their minds, their combined Mindvoice powers amalgamate and form a bubble. A bubble of immense power. You felt this from them?"

Narice nodded. "Yes. There was something else as well... but I could not pin point it. It was as if another presence within Mindvoice was drawn to them... being pulled towards them somehow. And they to it. I felt it for only a split second. Then I had to stop Dante from ruining whatever opportunity and plans we may have."

"I could have taken him!" Dante insisted.

Aikiro chuckled softly. "I truly love your determination grandson." She spoke stepping up to him and caressing his cheek. "However... if you persist in veering from the plans and goals we have established Dante... all we seek will be for naught. Spartans as a whole... and the Leonidas family in particular... view their relationships as wholly sacred to them. You are exceedingly lucky he did not kill you Dante. You could not have stood against him in single combat no matter how highly you regard your skills."

"Grandmother I..."

Aikiro shook her head. "Enough of this. Except the truth. Perhaps in the future you could match him... but not now. What else did you learn?"

"They have decided to train us." Carisia spoke up now.

Aikiro's eyes shifted to her as did all of them. "Are you sure?" Aikiro gasped. She looked at Narice.

"Carisia is right." Narice echoed quickly. "Androcles and his brothers and sisters all but admitted this openly."

Aikiro looked at Yuri. "That is why the messenger came to us and told us we have a meeting with the King in the morning." She spoke. "I told you he would not turn us away when it came to the dragons."

"Mother... they do not think very highly of the Kavalians." Narice spoke once more. "Perhaps... perhaps everything else we have planned is not necessary."

"Not necessary?" Aikiro exclaimed. "You don't think the contingency plans we have established will work?"

Narice shook her head. "Isabella's oldest daughter... Carina I believe her name is... she was the one married just recently. Her husband is Moneus Simpson."

"The second oldest son of Daniel Simpson." Tesand spoke from the chair he sat in. "A ranking member of the *Durcunusaan*. One of the heroes of Alb Tau if the reports are accurate."

"If what we saw this night was any indication... that plan would definitely not work." Narice said softly a note of disapproval in her tone.

Aikiro detected the tone of her daughter's voice. "You don't approve of how we decided to conduct that Narice?"

Narice shook her head. "No mother I do not. I think it will only hurt us in the long run if training our bonded pairs to the fullest extent is our ultimate goal."

"You don't seem to agree with quite a bit of what we have planned Narice." Yuri stated coldly.

Narice looked at her sister. "Unlike you sister... I do not have an inbred hatred of these men and women that warps my thinking. I also give them far more credit than you do when it comes to their skills. You seem to be more concerned that I struck your son then you are that he very nearly got himself killed this night. Androcles Leonidas would have erased Dante from this life with hardly any effort at all for his misguided attempts to seduce his woman in front of him. Something that their own laws would have allowed him to do. I... I believe we need to abandon the secondary plans we have put in place and concentrate on the main goal we came here to accomplish."

Aikiro looked at her two daughters and moved between them. "That is quite enough." She spoke calmly. "We certainly do not want the full weight of their *Durcunusaan* brought to bear on us. They are almost as skilled as our own *Venorik Elghinn* forces. Shift your focus to Isabella's younger daughter Dante." Aikiro spoke with almost no hesitation. "What is her name again?"

"Her name is Zarah grandmother." Dante answered.

"Did you see her this evening?" Aikiro asked looking at him.

Dante nodded quickly. "All of the Leonidas children were there grandmother." He replied just as quickly. "Including the younger ones and our half breed sister Lisisa."

"Lisisa was there?" Yuri asked looking at him.

“Yes mother.”

“She certainly was not happy to see us.” Lucia said with a chuckle.

“She will undoubtedly be part of the group that trains our riders.” Yuri spoke quickly. “Their own Netnews Channels state she and her dragon are among the most powerful of their Bonded Pairs.”

“Narice what of this device you say the son Arrarn used?” Aikiro asked.

Narice shook her head. “I don’t know mother. It was some sort of teleporting device. Or a personal Shroud shield perhaps. I think it was attached to his wrist, for I did notice something there... but he left quickly and I was not able to get a good look at it.”

“And you did not detect him?” Tesand asked now getting to his feet.

Narice shook her head. “None of us. Not even the beating of his heart. At least not until he appeared two feet behind me, *Nehtes* in hand. No one... no one has ever been able to sneak up on me like that mother. Not since I was thirteen.”

Aikiro nodded. “Yes... I know.” She said softly. She looked at Yuri. “It appears they have developed quite a bit more than just a way to intercept even our more secure transmissions Yuri. These are not items they could get from a dead ship. And no matter what Leonidas says, the bonds they have established with their dragons are not naturally occurring. They can’t be. They must have some sort of machine that enhances the Mindvoice abilities of the higher ranking members of this Tier system they use.”

Yuri met her gaze. “You think the Mindvoice ship still has power somehow?”

“There is no other explanation.” She said in reply. “Yet... I can not sense even an inkling of its existence anywhere on this planet. The Mindvoice Shields surrounding it must be more powerful than anything I’ve ever encountered, or they have discovered a way to duplicate its power source.”

“I did not think they had scientists that were capable of discovering such things?” Javier said. “They are animals for the most part.”

Aikiro looked at him. “Animals that at the moment are your betters Javier.” She spoke sternly. “Something that you need to learn quickly.” She looked at all of them. “We will need to be far more cautious in our actions than I first thought. No more issues as there were tonight is that understood?” She waited until she got nods from everyone. “Very well... it should be an interesting day tomorrow so everyone return to your quarters and get some sleep. I have much to think about.”

ISLAND OF CRANAE ANDRO AND SADI’S VILLA LACONIAN GULF

“She’s asleep finally.” Sadi spoke as she came into their bed chambers and saw Andro lying on the bed wearing only his white pants.

Andro lowered the data pad he was reading and watched as she dropped the lace robe on the floor and crawled quite seductively onto the bed, her jungle green eyes alive with passion and desire. She was naked except for the light blue lace thong panties she wore. The nipples of her firm breasts were already erect from the cool sea breeze whispering into their room from the open doors. “I would have put her down.” He spoke with a small smile as he watched her.

Sadi shook her head, her golden blond hair spilling across his legs as she lowered her lips to his abdomen and kissed the rippled muscles softly, using her tongue to trace the contours of his stomach and seeing his muscles contract with delight at her touch. Sadi took her time as she once more explored his abdomen and chest, and stretched her lithe frame on top of his until her breasts were crushed against his steel hard chest and she was gazing into his azure eyes. Sadi stared at him for along moment, his lavender and pines scent filling her head and making her senses scream out in happiness. Her head went spinning back to that night on the island when she had first seen him as an eight month old infant. His eyes had caught and held her even then, only now when she looked into them she saw complete love and devotion and the extreme desire for her. That made her shudder inwardly with sensations and feelings she had never experienced until being in his arms. They were sensations and feelings Sadi never wanted to lose.

“I’ve never had a sister and it was very fun just talking to her.” Sadi said with a smile. “She’s got your mother and Eliani’s sharp tongue and quick wit.”

Andro laughed. “That she does.” He said as he reached up to stroke her cheek and ear. “What are you thinking *KertaGai*?”

“Do you want children Andro?” She asked him softly.

“Eventually... yes. Very much so.” He answered.

“I come into phase in four months my love.” She told him. “It will surely happen then... if not before.” Andro’s eyes narrowed slightly. “Do you think I want children right now?”

“Don’t you?” She asked him. “I watched you tonight. They adore you Andro. All of them do... but Retta and the little ones even more. You are very good with children.”

Andro wrapped his arms around her and pulled her closer to him, Sadi pushing herself up onto his body until she was staring down into his face. “Sadi Leonidas... we will have eternity together.” He said. “I know for a fact you wish to finish school and get your commission. You want to fly. I do not expect you to stay home and have my children.”

“I... I want to give you children Andro.” She told him with glittering eyes. “Strong beautiful children.”

“And we *will* have children.” He told her. “That does not mean we have to rush these things. Our Mindvoice skills give us the ability to make sure that does not happen until we are ready. Until *you* are ready. Do you want children now *KertaGai*? Whether now or later I don’t care because I know they will be beautiful like you.”

“And you would wait?” Sadi asked.

“Of course I would wait.” Andro told her. “I will never desire anyone as much or as completely as I do you. Why would I not wait if it makes you happy? If that is what we want?”

Sadi brought her hand up and ran her index finger along his lips. “I spoke with several of my teachers on Apo Prime today very briefly.” She told him. “I have more than enough points to graduate early Andro. Your grandmother agrees. I want to take the position as Arrarn’s co-pilot.”

“Are you sure that is what you want *KertaGai*?” Andro said as his hands moved to her firm ass cheeks and he pulled her closer to him. “You are my *Anome* Sadi... do not do something because you think it will make me happy. I will love you no matter what you do.”

“I know that silly.” Sadi told him nuzzling his cheek and jaw line with her nose. “I spoke with Arrarn tonight before he left. The *STRIKER DTs* are the most advanced ships we have Andro and there are only a handful that are even capable of flying them. I have been blessed with skills that give me that opportunity. I want to use those skills. I have enough hours in one now to rate a co-pilot’s slot and who better to learn from than Arrarn, Normya and your mother. It is only a plus that it keeps us so very close together.”

“You will know all my dirty little secrets as Res said.” Andro told her with a smile.

Sadi laughed. “I already know them my love. Don’t forget... I can see your thoughts and dreams just as you can see mine.”

“Yes you can.” He told her.

Sadi lowered her head to his chest and felt his arms encircle her waist now. “Did you feel it Andro?” She asked. “Tonight at Gallais’s Retreat? It felt like... it felt like a chasm within Mindvoice that suddenly...”

“Filled up?” Andro spoke.

Sadi nodded. “Yes... it was filled for an instant. Then it was empty once more when we left.” She said. She lifted her head and placed her chin on his chest meeting his azure eyes. “And I felt it much more strongly when we left. I still feel it. It is like an empty portion inside me. Do you feel it too?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“What do you think it means?” Sadi asked him. “I have never been happier than I am when I am with you. Knowing that I am yours and you are mine for eternity. Why would I feel a void where one should not be?”

Andro shook his head. “I do not know.” He answered. “I have studied other techniques and such with the *Feravomir* and Thr’won through the years, but nothing that helps me to explain this.”

“Techniques?” Sadi asked. “What techniques? You mean more than the psychic diamond projections that you throw?”

Andro nodded slowly. “Different abilities for the most part. Helen... she did not want to teach them to anyone until she was able to master them. They are techniques that were within Canth’s memories... memories and skills that he passed to her during the *Tuarvomir*.” (Change of the Oracles)

“You have been studying them?” Sadi asked.

Andro nodded. “I started during the last year of the war and I have continued up until just recently. We should talk to her or my grandmother about what we feel. Maybe they could give us a better understanding of it.”

“I truly loved studying under the *Feravomir*.” Sadi said. “Is she here on Earth? Maybe I will go and see her tomorrow while you are dealing with the High Coven.”

Andro nodded. “She will be attending the State Dinner tomorrow night with us. I’m sure she will be on the estate tomorrow.”

“Speaking of State Dinners...” Sadi said. “I have nothing to wear you know.”

“What you have on right now will suffice in my eyes.” Andro said with a grin.

Sadi laugh. “Yes... I’m sure. However I don’t believe I wish to flaunt what only you will taste before the entire Senate and who knows how many foreign dignitaries. Not to mention my father.”

“You will be at the university tomorrow with Teeria and Palta for classes.” Andro spoke. “My father has the graduation to attend and I need to make initial preparations for the High Coven. When you are done with class, take Teeria and Palta shopping and pick out a dress. And get them something as well so they do not have to wear those ridiculous cadet uniforms to the dinner.”

Sadi’s eyes grew wide. “They are invited to the dinner?” She gasped.

Andro laughed. “What... did you think I would leave you to the mercy of the politicians? They are your friends Sadi... and they are always welcome wherever we go. You should go to class... go shopping and then bring them back here. Arrarn will not need you tomorrow. He is attending the graduation with father. I told you I don’t want you changing your life for me *KertaGai* or the title you now hold. My parents would not like it if you did that.”

Sadi stared at him for a long moment. “How is it that I was the one who discovered you Androcles Leonidas, when there are so many other females within the Union?” She asked him in a serious tone of voice.

Andro shrugged. “I have never been one to delve into the mysteries of destiny or fate.” He said in reply. “Perhaps because we were always meant to be together. What does it matter now? I have you Sadi Leonidas... and I intend to never let you go.”

Sadi responded to his kiss as his aura wrapped around her like a blanket of warmth, and she countered that with her own aura, feeling his arms pull her even closer. This was not a kiss of sexual heat or passion or desire, it was a soulful kiss of love and devotion and they relished in the sensations it brought out in them both. It was a long breathless moment later when they finally parted and she stared at him.

Hold me Andro my love. Sadi told him with a small smile. *You will still owe me a night of breathless sex, but tonight I just want to sleep within your embrace.*

It was perhaps the oldest test in the relationship book Sadi knew, and she did not know what compelled her to say it, for her blood burned for her mate as surely as his did for her. Sadi however could not help the feelings of blissful and incontrovertible love that swept through her as Andro’s response was to simply roll onto his side, bringing her with him and pulling her even closer if that was possible. Sadi pressed her head to his chest and in a moment she could feel and hear the rhythmic beating of his heart against her cheek. Wrapped within his powerful arms it was very easy to fall into a deep and peaceful sleep. Something Sadi did very quickly.

Andro’s azure eyes were smiling as he too followed his beloved mate into the sleep of the cherished.

HAGIOS CENTER DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD

“*Stros aina terit Medwaw*.” Martin spoke to Resumar as they stood on the tarmac of the airfield behind the *STRIKER DT*. (Watch over your mother)

Resumar nodded. “*Pen gur Medwan*.” He answered. (I will father)

Martin looked at his son with Dysea and couldn't help but feel proud. Resumar had long ago proven his mettle in battle beside his brother and his father, and it had been Andro pushing for the last two years to get Resumar his own command. He looked more like his mother Martin thought, thanking the gods for that silently. His two inch high elven ears did nothing to take away from the stern Spartan face that Res and Arrarn could drop into place in a blink. They were just as much warriors as Andro was and he knew it. Martin had made it a point to let them know that through the years by allowing them to find their own way and never intruding on their actions unless needed. Resumar's bond with Cemath was strong and firm and they would do anything for each other.

Martin smiled at his second oldest son. "I understand the *PILLAR OF FAITH* comes out of the yards in six months." He stated almost casually seeing Resumar's eyes grow a little bigger. "She's going to be the Command Ship for the 24th Spartan Attack Division. I believe they will need a commander. You up for the job?"

"Father... father you are serious?" Resumar gasped his eyes wide.

"Andro says you're ready. Riall says you're ready and your Uncle Danny says you're ready." Martin spoke putting his hands on his son's shoulders. "I've known for a while you were ready... but I needed Normya and Zarah to get some more time under their belts because they are going with you." He smiled. "She's yours boy. And I expect the 24th will set the standard for all of us."

Resumar couldn't contain himself and he wrapped his arms around his father in a bear hug, lifting him off the tarmac with a whoop of victory. They turned as For'mya walked up in her lightweight Mark IV ArmorPly a smile on her face.

"You told him I take it." She spoke as she pressed up against Martin and slid her arm around his waist.

"You don't think he's happy do you?" Martin asked with a grin.

Resumar stepped forward and hugged For'mya tightly and she laughed. "No... he's not happy at all." She said in reply.

"Go on!" Martin spoke. "Go tell Cemath and make sure he doesn't burn the inside of the *STRIKER*." They watched Resumar turn and race for the *STRIKER* and they chuckled. Martin pulled her close and looked into her dark brown eyes, reaching up to brush some of her golden blond hairs from her beautiful face. He ran the tip of his finger along the ridge of her elven ear and For'mya closed her eyes in delight and squeezed him tighter.

"Last night was utterly divine Martin Leonidas." She spoke in a soft whisper that only he could hear, the memories of what he had made her feel for the majority of the night still fresh in her mind.

Martin smiled and leaned over to kiss her deeply, inhaling her sweet orchid scent. "I can't help it if you taste and smell so darn good." He said. "Can we do that again when you get back?"

For'mya matched his smile. "I'm afraid I must insist upon it." She stated.

Martin kissed her again holding her face in his hands. "I love you *Kinsoargai*. Never doubt that."

For'mya traced his lips with her finger. "That is something I have never and will never question Martin Leonidas." She stated. "Do try not to kill the High Coven riders while I am gone however."

Martin chuckled. "Don't worry. I'm only going to say a few words. Andro is doing the training."

For'mya dark brown eyes focused on his face and she smiled. "I... we all come into our next phase in six more months and I want another child my love. I want to give you a daughter Martin." She said softly. "I just thought you should know that if it doesn't happen before then, Aricia and the others are going to give you to me for two full days and nights. I just want you to be prepared."

Martin chuckled. "I don't think I'll have a problem getting prepared for that For'mya." He told her.

For'mya nodded. "Good... because I intend for it to be very rewarding." She told him with a smile.

"It's always rewarding *Kinsoargai*. Never doubt that." Martin lifted her off the tarmac and hugged her too him tightly. "Just bring yourself back home to me in three days so that we can pick up where we left off last night."

For'mya giggled and made him put her back down. She looked at him with an evil glint in her eye. "At least now I don't have to listen to you rant and cuss because you have to wear your dress uniform for the State Dinner." She said.

"Ha ha... very funny."

For'mya blew him a last kiss and turned to head for the *STRIKER*. She smiled at Resumar as she walked up the ramp and it began to close. "Come Res..." She spoke. "Let's you and I sit together so that I can pick your brain about the Kavalians. You seem to be the resident expert on these people."

Resumar turned from stroking Cemath's snout. "All it is mother is the intelligence we have gathered through the years." He said as he watched her stroke Aurith's scales as she walked by the harness headed for the cockpit.

For'mya nodded. "Yes... something none of us have had the foresight to delve into." She spoke as he fell in beside her. "We will have to change that. And more quickly than we anticipated it seems."

Resumar stopped to hit the ramp switch and he reached out within Mindvoice to his older brother.

Thank you brother.

Resumar heard Andro laughed softly within the connection. *Thank me for what?* Andro asked him. *You are the one who has to control Normya and Zarah now. Besides... you won't be thanking me when we are sitting on my patio doing fitness reports for hours on end.*

You believed in me. Resumar said. *You made father believe in me.*

Res... I have always believed in you. That was never a question. And father is the one who made the decision... no one else. She's a fine ship... and she'll have a fine commander. The entire 24th will. He knows that... and that is why he made the decision. Just get back here quickly... I'll need you to help me train these fool vampires who think they can ride dragons better than we can.

Resumar watched as the ramp closed and locked and he nodded his head. *Count on it.*

HAGIOS CENTER CONFERENCE LOUNGE

"Am I to understand you have decided to train our dragons and riders then?" Aikiro asked from across the table.

Martin looked at her and leaned back in his chair. He wore his full dress uniform now, complete with vertically stacked colorful ribbons that took up the entire left side of his chest. He had been very clear to all who knew him that nothing would go on his uniform that he had not earned and he didn't care if he was King. It took several years and different attempts, but Aricia and Anja had finally gotten his dress uniform to display even the medals he had won as a US Navy SEAL over five hundred years ago. They were now shaped and formed into Union ribbons, but he did not wear a medal he had not earned. Danny stood against the far wall in his dress uniform as both of them were going to the graduation right after this meeting and there was almost nothing that Martin kept from his brother.

Andro sat in the chair next to his father wearing his standard black fatigues and light Mark IV body armor. Aricia and Isabella sat on Martin's right side dressed in a similar fashion as Andro.

"We have some conditions first." Martin said.

"So you believe the intelligence we gave you after conferring with your people?" Aikiro asked.

Martin ignored her and looked at Andro. "Andro?" He said motioning across the table.

Andro leaned forward. "Your dragons and riders will do exactly as I say." He spoke firmly. "There will be no discussion, no debating. There will be..."

"You expect us to take orders from your son?" Yuri demanded looking at Martin from across the table.

Martin looked at her from across the table. "I have neither the desire nor patience to train you or any of those you brought with you." He said. "Andro will be handling the training with those he designates. I can't be seen training you. Andro disappears for weeks on end and it doesn't draw attention. I am not that lucky however. As it stands right now... the High Coven is here to sign a Cease Fire Agreement and nothing more. If it gets out that we are training your dragons to fight the Kavalians I don't need to explain to you what a shit storm that will bring. I will not allow you to drag me into a war I have no part being involved in."

"If you are so concerned about being discovered and drawn into our war with them, then why help us?" Aikiro asked calmly. "You do not believe the intelligence we gave you I take it?"

Martin met her gaze. "I dislike the Kavalians more than I dislike you." He stated flatly. "We're not done evaluating the intelligence you gave us yet so I can't make a determination either way."

“Then why help us?” Narice asked softly leaning forward in her chair and looking at him from across the table.

Martin turned and looked at her for a long moment before looking at Andro and then back to Aricia and Isabella. He turned back to Narice who was waiting for an answer. “We are helping you because no matter what happens... I will not send forty dragons to their deaths because their riders don’t know how to fight with them as one entity. I’m not doing it for you... I’m doing it for them.”

“Because you and your son are Talon Guardians.” Narice said quickly. “As are the dragons you ride. Torma and Elynth. Father and daughter.”

Martin and Andro looked at her as did everyone else in the room.

“Narice?” Aikiro asked clearly surprised at this new information that she had asked Yuri to obtain. “What have you discovered?”

“Carisia and I spoke with Deneth and Anthar at long length last night before we retired.” Narice said. “They told us... they told us what a Talon Guardian is.”

Carisia leaned forward now and looked directly at Andro. “You are Guardians of their species.” She said softly. “Given this title for some act of impossible bravery in defending dragons. No non-dragon has ever held this title before the two of you.”

“Your dragons seem to be very well informed.” Yuri snapped.

“Every dragon knows what a Talon Guardian is Yuri.” Narice spoke looking at her. “It is within their blood. They can sense it in ways we could never detect. They knew what Androcles Leonidas and his dragon Elynth were the moment we stepped off our ship. Some of them resist this idea because their thoughts are clouded.”

“And what if your assistance is discovered?” Moran asked now.

“It won’t be unless one of your people fucks up and spills their guts.” Martin said. “The training will take place at a remote base that is almost brand new. It has members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* there all the time as well as other Bonded Pairs. The elven King Anotan is a good friend and he will be able to cover us for as long as we need him too. Yes... I expect you to take orders from my son. If that is going to be a problem Yuri... I suggest you all carry your asses right now. I know you have a problem with authority.” Martin stuck the jab to her with a smile.

Aikiro covered Yuri’s hand with hers before she retorted. “It will be as you say.” She said. “What else?”

Andro got to his feet and looked at the High Coven personnel in the room, Narice and Carisia among them sitting at the large table. The same sensation he and Sadi had felt last night was coursing through him again as he looked at Carisia for a long moment. The sensation of a void being filled to completeness. He tore his eyes away from her after a moment and saw that Dante wore a dark scowl on his face while his brother and sister remained impassive.

“We will use our equipment.” Andro began speaking. “We will supply each of your pairs a complete set of the very same equipment we carry and use. We will use our *STRIKERS* for training but I will allow you to provide twenty of your best ground support fighter pilots for my brother Arrarn to train. Preferably those who are younger and open to new ways of doing things. Arrarn is much like me... he will tolerate no opposition to how he does things.”

“You will allow?” Aikiro stated looking at him.

Andro met her eyes without fear and nodded his head. “Yes... *I* will allow.” He stated. “The statement I made to you on the airfield when you first arrived still stands Empress Aikiro. You may very well kill me should a battle between us ensue... but you will never leave this planet alive... and I guarantee I will mark you badly before I fall. I am not afraid to die. It is a natural course in life eventually. It is in your best interests to heed that warning and allow me to train your pairs the way they should be trained, as we train our pairs. Unless of course you want to send them into their first battle with the Kavalians and watch them be slaughtered, because without what we provide to them, that is exactly what will happen regardless of what you do.”

Aikiro turned back to Martin. “Your son shares your distain for beating around the bush I see.” She said. “And he definitely has your arrogance.”

Martin shrugged. “Go figure.”

Aikiro turned back to Andro. “Go ahead young man.”

“As I was saying... they will do as I tell them. I want them formed on the tarmac here at fourteen hundred hours today. All of them.” Andro spoke. “The rest of my conditions I will state directly to them.”

“You can not tell me so that I may pass on the information?” Aikiro asked.

Andro met her eyes. “Are you bonded to a dragon Empress?” He said evenly his voice holding no malice in it she noticed.

“No.” Aikiro answered.

“Then you have answered your own question.” Andro replied. “There will be no security except for my security.” Andro turned and looked at Thast. “I will allow you four personnel that are not riders to accompany us. The moment they step out of line or question what I do they are gone. That includes fat man there.”

“Commander Thast is my daughter’s husband.” Yuri stated. “He has a right to be with her. To support her in her endeavors.”

“Until he steps out of line.” Andro spoke. “Then I will kick him to the curb as my sister Eliani says. Your daughter will not need his type of support. She will get enough support from the other pairs she surrounds herself with. He can come if he is among the four... but my directive stands. If he so much as farts into the wind he will be back here. Is that understood?”

Aikiro nodded. “We understand.” She stated.

Andro nodded and started back for his chair. He stopped beside it and looked at Yuri. “One more thing.” He said.

“Another rule?” Yuri snapped.

Andro smiled. “Actually a statement of fact Princess.” He said calmly meeting her eyes. “You dragon... Vollenth I believe his name is... keep him on a short leash. He is a festering sore that will break open one day.” Andro spoke softly, never breaking eye contact with her. “If he breaks the rules I set in place even once, I will not hesitate or delay and as Talon Guardian... I will end his life immediately.”

Yuri leaned back and laughed. “You! Kill a dragon by yourself! You must think I am a fool!”

Andro’s eyes changed then and his dual fangs extended as he smiled at her in a very unfriendly way. “I have warned you once.” He said. “I will warn him once should the need arise. After that... there will be no warnings. You would do well to remember that and so would he.”

Andro sat back down in his chair his eyes never leaving Yuri’s face. He could almost feel Carisia’s eyes boring into his from across the table however, and he thought he saw a small almost imperceptible smile crack her features.

Martin laughed. “Ok! Now that everything is settled... I will leave you in Andro’s capable hands.” He got to his feet with Aricia and Isabella and turned for the door. “Aikiro... why don’t you and your daughters join me.”

Aikiro looked at him oddly. “For what purpose?” She asked.

Martin smiled. “I have some information for you.” He said. He saw Tesand and Moran get to their feet and he shook his head. “Not you or the other guy Robby.” He said sarcastically. “Just them. Trust me... if I wanted to kill any of you... it would already be done.”

Aikiro looked at Tesand quickly and motioned with her hand as she got to her feet with Yuri and Narice. “We shall return shortly.” She said. “Remain here.”

Martin motioned them to the table in the smaller room fifty meters down the corridor. Aricia and Isabella moved to the couch along the wall and Martin leaned against the chair at the head of the table as Aikiro, Yuri and Narice settled into the chairs.

“This is rather odd is it not?” Aikiro asked.

Martin met her eyes. “The Kavalians are arriving here on Earth and in Sparta in two days with a trade delegation.” He stated flatly.

“The Kavalians!” Yuri exclaimed. “You are bringing them here?” She turned to her mother quickly. “I told you this was a bad idea mother! He... he is going to hand us over to those scum.”

Aricia and Isabella laughed at this while Narice remained silent and Aikiro simply stared at Martin.

“For the crimes you have committed upon the people of this planet... if we wanted too... we could have very easily arrested you, tried you and executed you within hours of setting foot in our city.” Aricia spat. “And there would have been nothing you could do about it.”

“Remember that gift I told you of sister.” Isabella said. “Don’t spoil that gift now and leave your children motherless.”

“I will...”

“Yuri please sit down.” Aikiro said softly.

“Mother they will...?”

“They will protect us.” Aikiro spoke the words as she leaned forward. “Won’t you?”

Martin looked at her. “You were right when you said I could not hold you accountable for what Veldruk and your daughter have done in the past.” He said flatly. “Since you assumed power there has not been a battle or even harsh words between us.”

Aikiro smiled. “After the events with your mother and Lisisa I did not foresee us as becoming great friends. And we had other issues to be concerned with. We could not fight you and the Kavalians. I ordered Robert to insure our forces did nothing to encourage a conflict between our forces and not to cross our borders.”

“Except for your Immortal patrol.” Aricia said.

“That was not my doing.” Aikiro spoke quickly. “Yes... we were purchasing the T19s. However the Immortal detachment commander is the one who decided to hold the exchange within the boundaries of Union space. It is not something I would have allowed. Not with us coming here.”

“How long have you been planning this little trip?” Martin asked.

“Since we determined our dragons were old enough to sustain themselves in a battle.” Aikiro replied. “With the exception of Yuri, my daughter Narice and Yuri’s oldest daughter Carisia, the others show much promise but little gain. I determined we needed your help. When we discovered the intelligence everything came into place.”

“You lie better than your daughter and Veldruk.” Martin stated looking at Aikiro.

Aikiro met his gaze. “If you believe me to be lying to you Martin Leonidas... then give us our leave to go.”

“I won’t do that to the dragons in your group.” Martin said. “I do not care about the riders... only the dragons. And it’s them I want to have a fighting chance.”

“Does your son share this view as well?” Narice asked. “Deneth is my bonded brother... Anthar is Carisia’s bonded brother. We would give our lives for them if need be.” She saw their heads come around to look at her for a long moment, to include those of her mother and sister. “Will he treat us as you speak of us? Will he allow us to show him what we are capable of?”

Martin met her gaze. “Andro is better than me actually.” He said. “He’ll treat you as he does everyone else who wishes to become a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*. The treatment of dragons is something he takes very seriously... as you will no doubt see soon enough. It’s like a religion with him.”

“We will do whatever it is he asks of us.” Narice said. “I have no desire to see Deneth killed or myself fall into the hands of the Kavalians. They are not pleasant to those they capture. Especially female vampires.”

Martin let the smile split his face and he nodded. “Let’s hope the others think the same as you... Narice is it?”

Narice nodded her head. “Yes.”

“You brought me in here to tell me that the Kavalians are arriving in a few days.” Aikiro said. “Why?”

Martin turned back to look at her. “I’m extending an invitation to the State Dinner to your entire group for this evening.” He spoke calmly. “It will look much better if we are seen at least attempting to mingle and make this Cease Fire thing actually fly with the Netnews assholes. I hate reporters. I always have.”

Aikiro chuckled softly. “Something we have in common it appears.” She said honestly. “Only I have a firmer hand on what it is they report in the Coven.”

“I want your ships to retreat out of the system.” Martin said. “The less reason they have to see anything High Coven related the better. Sparta is a big city now... and they will be housed in a foreign diplomatic center on the eastern edge of the city. I will give you a choice... a couple of choices actually. You can remain in Sparta for the nine months it will take to train your pairs, you can move to Eden City, or you can return to your home world. I will insure you have an open line of communication with Yuri and whoever else you leave here.”

“Encrypted?” Aikiro asked.

Martin shook his head. “Not a chance.” He replied. “I will make sure Andro sends you weekly reports on their progress.”

“How do I know they will be safe here?” Aikiro asked. “If I decide to return to Usu Ozeib 7.”

“The last person who crossed the fence of a *Mjolnir’s Hand* training facility spent nine hours being interrogated and six months in prison.” Martin said. “The last man to cross my son spent three years going back and forth to the medical clinic for regular treatments until all his bones had fused back together properly. He’s a bastard when it comes to security. I give you my word your people will not be harmed or harassed. As long as they follow the rules Andro sets in place.”

“And if I choose to remain?” Aikiro asked.

Martin smiled once more as he shook his head. “You’ll never see it Aikiro.” He stated. “I may be many things but stupid is not one of them. Bringing your dragons here to be trained is not the only reason you are here. I may not have your experience and years of refinement within Mindvoice... but our power is nearly equal... and I know you are here to get on the Mindvoice ship I took from Lycavore. It won’t happen Aikiro... I promise you.”

“I have just as much right to that ship as you do Martin Leonidas.” Aikiro stated now. “We are both... you and I... we are both directly descended from those ancient travelers. It is something we have passed on to our children... and you to your Queens because of the virus within your blood when you bite someone. I can sense their power within Mindvoice.” She looked at Aricia. “As pure as your blood is Aricia Leonidas... your ancestors must have been descended from Pralors as well. Perhaps not the Chief Pralors as Martin and myself, but still powerful no less. That ship holds our history on it as well. I have a right to it.”

“So that you can use the technology to defeat the Kavalians and then continue your conquest of other peaceful people?” Martin shook his head. “I don’t think so. That ship crashed on Lycavore. The world my people called home. You nearly vaporized it when you conquered them and you didn’t care a wit about the Mindvoice ship then.”

“I did not know it existed.” Aikiro stated. “And Veldruk was a fool for doing what he did to your planet.”

Martin snickered. “Like I’m buying that. You are cold blooded Aikiro... and I would not trust you anymore than I would one of your rock spiders. You can’t sense the ship for a reason and that is the way it will stay.”

“Would you allow me to at least view some of the history cubes?” Aikiro asked. “Just myself... no one else.”

Martin gazed at her for a moment and then turned to look at Aricia and Isabella. They both nodded slowly and he turned back to Aikiro. “I’ll think about that.” He said. “I’ve ordered that your credit chips be increased to twenty thousand each. I don’t know whether you brought clothing to attend an event like tonight. Feel free to use them as you wish. Once Andro meets with your riders this afternoon they’ll be welcome to attend as well.”

Aikiro got to her feet slowly staring at him the entire time. “And what will your son do this afternoon?”

Martin shrugged and looked at her with a grin. “Hell if I know. I haven’t been able to get into that boy’s head since he was sixteen.”

DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD

Twenty-seven men and sixteen women.

Forty-three Vampire High Coven Bonded Pairs. They stood in four ranks facing the large hanger to the north. Yuri stood out in front of the group with Narice at her side. Aikiro, Tesand and Moran stood at the bottom of the ramp of the transport that had landed and brought them all to Earth. A myriad of colors and sizes, with a dozen Heavyhorn Hybrids mixed in with the group and even one Spiketailed Longwing. The dragons were nervous and it showed as talon equipped feet kept lifting from the ground and heads kept looking at the row of dragons resting on the far edge of the tarmac some three hundred meters away, not to mention the

dozens that were circling far above. These dragons had no riders or saddles and almost instinctively the High Coven dragons knew who the dragons on the tarmac were.

Arzoal turned her head to look down the row of Dragon Elders. *Forty-three.* She said softly. *Only one is missing.*

Twenty-one sires are saying they see their children Arzoal. Daurgo spoke quickly his voice filled with happiness. *They are ecstatic Elder Mother.*

Dalah looked skyward. *This is a wonderful day Arzoal.* She echoed.

Indeed it is. However we can not act too quickly. We must let Andro and Martin do this their way. She spoke. *They will not fail. I have seen him and his father in action my friends... you will see. Here they come now.*

Nine dragon heads turned to see the four dark objects lift above the mountain tops and come hurtling towards them at an unbelievable speed. They watched the forty three High Coven dragons turn and watch as well as the four specks dropped to barely twenty meters above the ground and only increase their speed. It was easy enough to see Elynth at the point of the diamond, Tharua and Aradace on the sides as Jeth formed the fourth and final point of the diamond in the rear.

The High Coven dragons and riders looked on with some awe as the four dragons rocketed past them so close to the ground they could feel the waves of air buffet their bodies. There was not a single head that didn't watch, as without warning Tharua and Aradace peeled away to the right and left with hairsplitting turns unlike anything they had ever seen, let alone were able to accomplish so close to the ground. Elynth and Jeth seemed to stop their forward motion in the blink of an eye and were soaring straight up over the tarmac with blistering speed, their large wingspans enabling them to climb faster than most dragons. When they reached ten thousand feet they simply rolled over onto their backs and plummeted back to the earth far below, folding their wings back for maximum speed.

There were gasps among the riders as only fifty meters from the ground, Jeth and Elynth snapped out their wings powerfully, the crack rolling across the ground like a bolt of thunder and they performed an almost ninety degree shift in direction and were once more streaking across the tarmac directly at the High Coven dragons. They watched as Tharua and Aradace executed extreme rolling turns from either side, whipping out from between several hangers and pulling into formation beside them once more. A hundred meters from the High Coven dragons all four of them flared their wings to the sides and their speed dropped to almost nothing in a matter of seconds as they landed on the tarmac only twenty meters away as lightly as feathers.

Eliani pulled her helmet off first and shook her head quickly, her burgundy colored locks flying wildly about her head. "Oh baby! We haven't done that in a long time!" She exclaimed with an animated face.

Andro and Deni were smiling as they removed their helmets as well, watching as their sister jumped from Tharua's back and walked around in front of her. Eliani reached up as Tharua brought her head down and touched her snout to Eliani's forehead.

We are still faster then all of them sister. Tharua stated.

Eliani laughed again. *That we are.*

Lisisa's eyes never left where Lucia stood watching them and she used her legs to nudge Jeth in that direction. Several dragons backed away as the massive muscular form of Jeth came closer, his golden eyes staring right at Lucia's dragon. He was the largest dragon any of them had ever seen, his blue black scales shiny with health and rippling with muscles. His armored scales protected nothing but muscle as there was not one ounce of fat on his near five metric ton body. Quite unlike her pompous self, Lucia swallowed hard as she stared up at Lisisa in Jeth's saddle.

Lisisa reached up and removed her helmet slowly, her forest green eyes glaring first at Yuri and then at Lucia. She rested her helmet in her lap as Jeth extended his huge head out and looked as if he was inspecting Lucia as she sat atop Seyra her dragon. He turned his head to look at Lisisa in the saddle.

This is the one sister? He asked. They all heard the gasps as every rider and dragon heard Jeth's deep voice within Mindvoice.

Lisisa nodded. *That's her.* She answered.

Jeth turned back to Lucia. *So you think I am fat little one.* He spoke with some humor in his voice. *How very interesting. I will remember that when we meet in the skies above.*

They watched as Jeth snorted and dismissed Lucia and Seyra almost as an afterthought and turned to move back to where Elynth stood next to Aradace and Tharua. Andro sat in Elynth's saddle casually as he moved up next to Yuri, who sat on Vollenth's back. Elynth glared at Vollenth with her golden colored eyes, his eyes gazing upon her with much the same distaste and hatred. He shifted slightly, preparing himself for another attack from her.

"This is all of them?" Andro asked Yuri.

Yuri nodded. "Forty-three." She spoke her head turning as several hangers to the sides opened and Lifter vehicles began moving out of them headed directly for where they were, at least a dozen *Durcunusaan* soldiers riding with the vehicles.

Andro nodded and looked at the men and women gathered on the backs of their dragons. "My name is Androcles Leonidas!" He spoke loudly so that his voice could carry. "It has been decided that I will train you to become Bonded Pairs. I have many rules that you will need to follow while I am conducting this task, however there are only three I will not tolerate be broken under any circumstance. The first... from this day forward you will honor your dragon brother or sister as they should be honored. As you would expect them to honor you. They are not pack animals to be used as mules to appease your laziness. If I see this happening... you will be the one to carry the equipment you will need for the remainder of the time you are here. The second... what I say is gospel. There will be no discussions or debate. You will be trained as we train our Bonded Pairs. If this seems beneath you at times... get over it. Quickly. The third and most important rule... you never leave your bonded brother or sister behind. Ever. That shows them you do not care for them... and in that case why should they care what happens to you.

"Everything you have learned up until now... forget it." Andro continued. "We will teach you to think and fight as one mind. To combine and use your talents as a pair to the best of your abilities. Some of you are stronger than the others because the bonds you share come easily. We'll show you ways to strengthen this bond, and for those of you who find it forced in some ways, we'll show you how to ease this into a more natural and relaxed pairing. To many of you I am your enemy... and that's ok. I don't particularly care what you think of me. I don't expect I'll be inviting any of you over for dinner very soon either." Andro was surprised when he heard soft laughter come from the ranks, from who he did not know, but it was there. Yuri heard it as well and her head snapped around to scowl at the gathered dragons and riders.

"Silence!" She spat.

Andro shook his head as Yuri turned back to him her dark eyes focused and determined. "Remain in your saddles for now..." Andro called out. "Your main instructors will be myself, my brothers Denali and Resumar, and my sisters Lisisa and Eliani. Any one of them is a match for four of you right now so do not make fools of yourself on the first day by doing something stupid. The others you see gathering around you are members of the *Durcunusaan* who will also be assisting in your training. For those of you who don't know and wish to test them, I bid you good luck. They have been trained to fight dragons, by dragons. Your lesson will be short and unfortunately for you... very fatal. Listen to what they can tell you for they see things we as riders sometimes do not. You can remain in your files for the moment while we move down the ranks checking the health of your bonded brothers and sisters. We will tell you what they need in the way of medical attention if any... give you the means to care for them... tell you how and then allow you to do it. Lisisa! Eliani! Third and fourth ranks! Denali take the second! I'll take the first."

Andro swung his leg over the saddle and dropped to the tarmac gracefully. He looked over to where Moneus and Nyla now stood and caught the medical glove Moneus tossed to him as he came up to Narice and Deneth. Andro looked at Narice in the saddle as he pulled the glove on and activated its sensor implants. He looked at Deneth with the coal black scales on his upper body and his dull white underbelly. His blue eyes were bright and focused and clear.

[Mindvoice Shielded] [*So you are Deneth?*] Andro spoke looking at the dragon.

Deneth bowed his huge head slightly. [*And you are the Talon Guardian.*] He spoke softly. [*As is your bonded sister.*]

[*Actually... I'm just Andro.*] He spoke lifting up the glove. [*I'm going to pass this over your body. It will give me some information that is all.*]

[*I... I wish to learn all I can Talon Guardian.*] Deneth said firmly. [*So that I may protect by Bonded Sister.*]

[So we can protect each other Deneth.] Narice spoke softly as she reached out and stroked the scales on his upper neck.

Elynth stepped forward coming up behind Andro. *[Are you willing to learn Deneth?]*

[Without knowledge we can not grow.] He replied looking at her. *[With knowledge we can nurture and prosper. And perhaps one day make it so we do not have to fight.]*

Andro moved his right hand over Deneth slowly as the medical scanner built into the glove designed specifically for dragon metabolisms scanned his body. It was not a long process and he stood looking at the scanner after reaching the end of Deneth's tail. He moved up alongside him and looked at Narice. He saw she had equipped Deneth with the saddle that Sadi had purchased for all of them. A quick look down the row and he noticed that only Carisia had done the same. He looked at Narice.

You can get down now. He spoke within Mindvoice.

Narice complied and dropped to the tarmac quickly. *Why do you use this device while I am on his back?* She asked.

Andro showed her the digital readout on the small screen. *It will detect any stress or strained fractures that he might have while carrying additional weight on his back.* He explained. *Aside from dry scales and being slightly underweight...* Andro met her eyes. *Deneth appears to be in excellent health.*

[He is my Bonded Brother. I do what I must to insure he is fit, but you must understand our homeworld is not as lush and fertile as Earth or other planets within the Union.] Narice spoke to him shielded.

[I take it I won't find the others are in the same health?] Andro asked her.

Narice shook her head. *[Aside from Carisia and Anthar... it is doubtful. The others allow technicians and servants care for their dragons. Most of them either are too frightened of them or do not care. Carisia and I...]* Narice took a deep breath and made one of the first decisions that would alter her life forever. *[Carisia and I are the only ones who truly care for our Bonded Ones.]*

Andro nodded slowly and felt the faintest tingles of someone trying to eavesdrop on their shielded conversation. *[Yes... well that will change rather quickly.]* He stated. *[Your mother is trying to hear what we are saying you know.]*

Narice didn't smile knowingly but she nodded her head slightly. *[She has done this for years. She thinks we do not sense her, but Carisia and I have learned how to deflect or block her intrusions completely.]*

Andro nodded more openly now. "He's three hundred and thirty pounds under what weight he should be at for his length and girth." He stated loudly so that others who were listening could hear him. He turned to a *Durcunusaan* soldier that had moved closer to where he stood. "Tanlar... six slabs for this one. Add the usual vitamins and protein tablets and give her two tubes of Apricot salve for Deneth's scales." Andro turned back to her. "I take it I don't have to show you how to apply the salve?"

Narice shook her head. "No."

Andro reset the medical glove and nodded his head, moving to where Yuri sat upon Vollenth. He looked at the hatred in Vollenth's eyes, could feel it pouring from the male Firespitter within Mindvoice, and he turned to Elynth. *[This one is lost already sister.]* He said to her.

Elynth nodded her huge head. *[Yes... I agree.]* She said. *[He will fail the training... and he will fall. Whether he survives or not I do not know.]*

"I'd appreciate it if you spoke so all of us can hear what you are saying." Yuri snapped. "I might begin to think you are talking about me."

Andro looked up at her as he passed the sensor over Vollenth. "I was talking about you." He stated casually. "And what you desire no longer matters to me. As far as I am concerned you are no different than the others."

"I am a Princess of the High Coven!" Yuri barked.

Andro stood back up and looked at the sensor on his hand. He scowled at the readings and looked up at Yuri. "Vollenth is seven hundred pounds underweight... he has multiple healed lacerations from what appear to be beatings *Princess* Yuri. Can you explain those?"

"There have been times when I have had to discipline him as I would any other child." Yuri stated.

Andro's azure eyes darkened somewhat. "That practice will stop immediately." He stated. "If I see you strike him with anything, I will expel you from this training and from Earth. Is that understood?"

Yuri glared at Andro for a long moment. "You try my patience son of Leonidas." She growled.

Andro smiled. "Good. When you feel lucky... let me know... I'll have Lisisa and Jeth give you your test and when you fail you're gone." Martin turned to Tanlar once more as he rolled the small cart in front of Deneth that was piled high with six thick slabs of neatly sliced eighty pound chunks of red meat. Deneth's eyes were wide as he stared at the cart and he could feel his gums begin to water just at the smell of the beef.

"Tanlar... twelve slabs for this one. Usual items. Give Princess Yuri six tubes of salve, two Apricots, two red leaf ointment, and two green flower ointments." Andro spoke turning back to look at her with a smile. "She will have her work cut out for her making sure Vollenth gets all his medicines."

Vollenth turned his large head and looked at Andro. *You are not as powerful as you think you are boy!* He growled causing Andro to look at him. *I will protect her from you. I will protect her from all of you. You are all weak fools.*

Andro reset the glove and stepped up to stare fearlessly into Vollenth's eyes. Dragon eyes that shifted slightly as Elynth stepped up behind Andro and glared back at him.

Then when you are ready boy...! Elynth spat. *You may come find me and we will take to the skies above and I will show you just how insignificant you truly are! I won't need my Bonded Brother's help to make you appear the fool!*

"Vollenth!" Yuri snapped out. "Remember what I said to you!"

Vollenth leaned back slightly. *There will be another time.* He said cruelly.

Andro nodded slowly. *Yes there will. And you will fail.* He stated calmly. *Until that time... at least try and learn some of what we teach you. I would not want your death to be without some meaning.*

Andro turned immediately and moved off to begin inspecting the first complete rank of dragons. Elynth glared at Vollenth for a few seconds more and then followed him. Her eyes softened as they fell on the pair that Andro was approaching and she slowed her gait as she felt the unusual tremors from Andro when his eyes lifted to look at Carisia. She had felt a similar spike from Sadi yesterday when she was inside the store... and then from both of them again last night. She was feeling it again now from him and Elynth was smart enough to know it was emanating from this diminutive vampire female with maya blue eyes. It was now that Elynth also took a long look at the cerise colored dragon before her and she felt an involuntary shudder course through her. His scales glistened in health, perhaps not as brightly as a dragon from within the Union, but far more than any other of the Coven dragons. She could sense the power within him, and she let her golden eyes gaze upon his large muscular form. He was slightly larger than her, perhaps half a meter she estimated, with elegant yet strong lines across his back and limbs. His legs were thick and powerful, and while he looked underweight, Elynth estimated it was no more than a few hundred pounds as with Deneth.

Elynth could also sense the power of his young rider. She looked to be about the same age as Andro, with flowing raven black hair. Though she was very short, she had breasts that were equal or just a little larger than Sadi. Her black uniform conformed to her lithe frame, and she wore coloring of some sort on her lips that matched her dragon's scale color. There was more power and ability in these two than what she felt from even Deneth and Narice she determined. They could be a powerful bonded pair if what she felt was any indication. Elynth also knew that if she felt it, Andro most certainly did as well. As she approached and settled herself to the ground she kept her golden eyes focused on this dragon. What had Narice called him?

Anthar.

Anthar watched Andro intently as he passed the medical sensor over his body slowly; very aware of Carisia's racing heart at having the man from her dreams so close to her. He turned his head slightly and gazed at Elynth where she sat only two meters away. Looking at her beautiful muscular form Anthar knew without a doubt that she was the one for him. Like Carisia's dreams, his dreams were filled with the obsidian beauty in front of him.

"You can get down." Andro's voice echoed and Anthar glanced back quickly.

Andro watched as the cerise colored dragon made himself even smaller on the tarmac without conscious thought, lifting his front foreleg so that Carisia could step down gracefully to the tarmac. He controlled his breathing for he could feel that sensation again. The feelings of completeness that he and Sadi had felt wash over them last night when they were looking at her. Andro did not shield these sensations from Sadi, knowing they were connected in a way that made it next to impossible to hide anything from each other, and he felt her heart begin to race even as she sat in her classroom in Sparta.

[She is there my love?] Sadi's voice burst into his head.

[Yes.] He answered. [It is the same as what we felt last night KertaGai. Completeness. Do you feel it?]

[Oh yes!] Sadi replied. [Andro... she is the cause. She has to be!]

[Yes... but why?] Andro asked. [It's powerful KertaGai. Stronger than it was last night.]

[I feel it too my love. My class is almost done Andro. I'm going to see the Feravomir right after. I will ask her why we are feeling this in her presence and her presence alone.] Sadi told him. [This... this is happening for a reason Andro.]

[Yes I know. The reason why however, that escapes me.] Andro said. [Do not forget you must buy a dress for tonight as well.]

Sadi laughed. [I thought I might go in what I was wearing last night. Like you said.]

Andro growled affectionately within the connection. [I changed my mind. I don't wish to share what you look like with anyone, most definitely not your exquisite tattoo, and most especially not your father or mine.]

[I will see you at our home later today my love.] She told him in a playful voice filled with love and passion.

Andro brought his thoughts back to the present and looked once more at the scanner before lifting his eyes to gaze at Carisia. She was incredibly beautiful he could not deny that and she smelled of... she smelled of sweet rose petals.

"How... how is he?" Carisia asked haltingly looking at Andro towering over her and feeling all sorts of delicious sensations rippling through her. The same sensations she had felt the night before looking at both of them. In those minutes she had committed the sound of their beating hearts to memory and would now be able to pick them out in a crowd of hundreds when she concentrated. The staggering power she felt in Mindvoice was easy enough for her to detect, and Carisia could also sense the lingering presence of his golden haired mate. The young green eyed woman from her dreams.

Andro looked at Anthar for a moment, regaining his train of thought and then looking back to Carisia. "He's two hundred and fifty pounds underweight, but he has excellent muscular definition and like Deneth, he is in excellent health." Andro stepped up to him and ran his hands along Anthar's scales. "You have used the Apricot ointment on his scales since you arrived. You work fast."

"We were not able to obtain these things on our world." Carisia said. "He is my Bonded Brother and my dearest friend. I would do anything for him."

Andro looked at her for a long moment, hearing the commitment and truth in her words in her voice. He looked at Elynth. [She speaks truthfully sister.]

Elynth nodded slowly. [Their bond is very strong Andro.] She replied. [Stronger than many of Mjolnir's Hand. Just as Narice and Deneth.]

Andro nodded and turned back to look at Carisia. [Yes... the question remains however, why have they bonded so completely and the others have not?]

"It is not polite to speak of others when you are standing in front of them." Carisia spoke in a whisper that only Andro could hear.

"Why did you think we were talking about you?" Andro asked.

"We felt the tremors in Mindvoice." Carisia replied. "They... you were speaking about us weren't you?"

Andro looked at her, his eyes going a little wider. He turned to look at Anthar as Elynth moved closer to them, her golden eyes filled with surprise as well. [You as well?] He asked.

Anthar nodded his huge head. [We felt the tremors... but could not hear your words. I have... I have never felt shields as strong as yours. Or your bonded sister. All of your siblings are nearly as powerful. It is amazing to feel such things.]

Andro smiled slightly and turned back to Carisia. [You have schooled him I see?]

[Anthar... he has experienced everything I have since the day we became bonded.] She answered without hesitation. [We keep nothing from each other. Just as you and Elynth keep nothing from each other.] Carisia shifted her eyes and looked at Elynth. [If we may call you by name that is?]

Elynth moved even closer to them and she gazed upon Carisia with new interest. [If we may call you by name.] She replied quickly.

Carisia smiled brightly. [I look forward to what you can teach us.] She stated calmly. [I have looked forward to it since it was made known we would be coming here.]

[We both have.] Anthar spoke. [For many different reasons.]

[Anthar!] Carisia yelled in Mindvoice looking at him.

Andro and Elynth both saw this and only Elynth knew it for what it was. She was a female after all, and while she may have had scales instead of skin, and talons instead of fingers, they all had intelligence and feelings. Sensing what this diminutive vampire female felt for Andro was obvious enough, but the surprising thing was that she felt similar but equally powerful vibrations for Sadi earlier in the day when Andro was no where around. Not to mention that Elynth also felt the interest this Anthar had in her just from the way his eyes gazed at her confidently. She began to reply when Denali's voice boomed over the tarmac.

"Andro over here!"

Andro turned immediately at the tone of his brother's voice and he saw Deni waving at him. *[Welcome to Earth Carisia and Anthar.]* He spoke as he began to walk towards his brother.

It took him only twenty seconds to cover the distance to where Denali stood next to the female hybrid dragon. Her tan scales looked similar to the others in their dryness and she was grossly underweight, that was easy enough to see at first sight, but Andro knew immediately why Deni had called him over for he sensed it within Mindvoice.

"You better look at this." Deni said holding out the medical sensor on his arm. "I sensed them first... the scan only confirmed it."

Andro only glanced at it briefly before looking at the eyes of the female dragon. *[What is your name?]* He asked gently stepping up to her and reaching up to place his hand on her neck as Elynth moved right up to her and reached out to touch her snout to the female's scales.

[Tell us.] Elynth spoke. *[You are in no danger here. We can feel them. Tell us your name sister.]*

[I... I am Viera.] The female replied softly.

"Andro?" Deni spoke motioning to his brother to approach Viera's side. He ran his left hand under the saddle and pulled it back out with splotches of blood on it.

Andro's eyes narrowed and he looked up at the male rider. "Your bonded sister is injured." He stated.

"Puncture wounds." Deni spoke reaching back under the saddle with his hand. "Not real deep... but deep enough to penetrate her scales under the saddle because they are worn."

Andro looked at the positioning of the vampire's feet on the saddle and saw the grooved notches that the heels of his combat boots were firmly entrenched in on the saddle. He looked at the man once more as the Coven dragons nearby began to turn and watch what was unfolding with great interest. "Remove your feet from those grooves." Andro ordered.

"What for?" The vampire snapped at him. "I have done nothing wrong!"

Andro snarled viciously and grabbed the Coven soldier's leg, wrenching it free of the groove and exposing the two inch spikes he wore on his heels. The needle like spikes were covered in blood and not all of it was fresh.

"Get off her!" Andro barked.

Denali turned to where his sister was examining another dragon in the rank behind them. "Elli!" He called out to her. He waved her over to them when she looked up.

"She is my property!" The Coven man snapped as he glared at Andro. "I am bonded to her! She needs discipline and this is how I keep her in line! She has been acting undisciplined these last few months!"

Andro's eyes changed then, and his fangs burst from his gums. The growl he let out was one of savage anger and he moved with a speed that many of the vampire riders had never seen a Lycavorian move with. Andro reached up and grabbed the man's freed leg now and twisted brutally. The sound of the man's bone breaking was clearly audible in the still air, as was his howl of agony.

"She carries eggs *forn nubous ronnus!*" Andro screamed reaching up further as the Coven soldier was bent over now and yanking him from the saddle with little fanfare and far less gentleness, twisting the man in midair and slamming him to the tarmac without regard. Denali was tearing at the straps on the saddle and had gotten the last one unfastened when Andro turned back and they pulled the saddle from Viera's back. Andro didn't pause and turned to throw the heavy duty saddle down upon the withering Coven soldier just as Eliani moved up to them.

"*Sibfla!*" She gasped out upon seeing the puncture wounds and the dried and fresh blood clearly on the tanned scales of the female dragon. Immediately she stepped up to the dragon's side, placing both her hands

over the wound. There was a slight gasp as nearly a dozen Coven riders saw her hands flare a soft white over the top of Viera's scales.

Andro reached down and savagely pulled the soldier's boot from his foot. He lifted it into the air and brought it crashing down on the man's side, the bloody spike plunging into his flesh between two of his ribs. His eyes flew open in agony and he screamed in pain, reaching for his side and curling up in a ball. Andro tossed the boot away with enough strength that it sailed up onto the top of the High Coven transport and out of sight. He glared back down on the man at his feet.

"I should kill you for what you have done to her!" He snarled savagely. "If you were a Lycavorian I would kill you!" He looked up quickly. "All of you! Get off your dragons now! Get off them and pray you do not have the same tools as this one did on his boots! Now *anse* you!"

Many heads turned to look at Aikiro and Yuri for direction. "Do as he says!" Aikiro shouted. "You are in his charge now! Do it!"

The remaining riders scrambled to get out of their saddles as Andro turned back to watch as Eliani finished healing Viera's opposite side. No one was able to miss as the massive flame colored dragon made its way calmly across the tarmac to stand beside Elynth.

Andro? Arzoal's voice erupted from within Mindvoice for all of them able to hear. A voice filled with a power and clarity that the dragons had never experienced before. *What... what is happening?*

Andro glanced at her quickly. *She... she carries eggs Arzoal!* He announced the anger in his voice carrying over even within Mindvoice. *She carries eggs and this fool has been stabbing his spikes into her sides to control her because she was trying to protect them.*

Eggs? Arzoal gasped turning her eyes to look upon the tan female as she stepped closer to her. Arzoal reached out deeper within Mindvoice and her eyes grew a little wider as she felt the presence of new life within the female's abdomen. *You carry eggs child?*

Viera gazed up at the massive dragon in front of her in fear. She was nearly double her size and looked as if she could peel her scales from her bones if she chose. *I... I must... I must remain by my bonded one.*

Arzoal lowered her head closer to Viera. *You have no reason to fear me child. I am the Elder Mother. My name is Arzoal.*

The Elder Mother! Viera gasped bowing her head in reverence. *We... we have heard of you even through the stars. My name... my name is Viera.*

Arzoal lifted her head and looked at Eliani as she came around to the front, her hand dragging gently over Viera's scales. *Eliani... I can sense them... but they are...*

Eliani shook her head sadly. *Two of them are gone.* She spoke softly within Mindvoice. *The other two are very weak. I can just barely feel them even with my abilities. I was able to stabilize them and pass them nourishment with the metaphysical radiation in my body, but it won't sustain them for long.*

They... they passed two weeks ago. Viera told them in a voice filled with shame. *I... I felt them pass but there was nothing I could do. I have been trying to eat enough for my remaining eggs. My bonded one did not know.*

Arzoal turned her massive head to look at Andro. *[Their physical condition is worse than we expected Andro.]* She spoke calmly. There were only a few dozen Mindvoicers within the entire Union who could speak with Arzoal when she chose to shield her conversation at the level she was doing now, almost half of them were the Leonidas family. *[Though not through any conscious decision by their riders. At least not any of the others that I can sense.]*

Andro nodded as he took a deep breath. *[We can fix their physical ailments Arzoal.]* He spoke meeting her gaze. *[I will attempt to fix whatever else I can.]*

Arzoal nodded slowly. *[I will tend to Viera here. I will take her to Dragon Mountain. She will be safe there.]* Arzoal turned her head and looked at Moneus who was standing to the side alertly watching events unfold. *[Moneus Simpson... would you send for a DT please. I do not want her to fly and exert more of her energy.]*

Moneus nodded his head and tapped the COM unit on his armor as he turned away from what was happening.

[Viera... who is the father?] Andro asked gently lowering his shields enough to include her in the conversation. He and Arzoal could detect the frustrated tremors radiating from Aikiro because she could not hear what they were saying.

Viera didn't answer and only looked to where Vollenth was glaring at all of them. Her eyes held no joy in them as she gazed at him. *[He is.]* She spoke.

[This... this was your choice?] Arzoal asked in surprise.

Viera turned her eyes back to Arzoal. *[No Elder Mother... it was not.]*

Arzoal snorted in disgust and surprise and her massive head turned once more to look at Vollenth briefly. She turned back and saw Moneus nod his head to her and point to the south. *[Come Viera... child of dragons.]* She spoke. *[Let me show you how we are meant to live.]*

[The Empress?] Viera gasped. *[My bonded one?]*

Andro shook his head. *[He is no longer your bonded one.]* He spoke. *[Perhaps in the future there may be another... for the bond you have with this one is not a true bond. This one... you will never see him again. I promise you.]*

[I will not... I will not be punished?] Viera asked.

[No Viera my child. You will be pampered and made to rest and eat and care for the eggs you carry.] Arzoal spoke. *[No female that carries eggs, bonded with a rider or not, should ever have to experience the death of their blood before it even enters this world.]* Arzoal turned towards where the STRIKER Dragon Transport was settling to the tarmac several hundred meters away. *[Come with me child. Allow me to show you the gift of freedom.]*

Viera paused for only a moment before looking at Arzoal and nodding her head. When Arzoal began walking towards the DT, Viera fell in beside her.

It was then that Aikiro came through the ranks of dragons and riders, the frustration at not being able to breach the shields of the conversations they were having getting the best of her. "What is going on?" She demanded. "Where is that dragon going Androcles Leonidas?"

Andro turned and looked at her. "That dragon is no longer your concern." He spoke firmly. "She will be taken where she will be cared for and loved by others of her kind and when her eggs hatch they will be loved as well. There will be no more abuse... no more *discipline* of dragons." Andro turned to look around at those who were listening to him. "Hear me well on this all of you Coven riders! The well being of your dragon comes before all else! They will not be mistreated in any way. Physically or verbally! If this is discovered again the dragon will be taken from you and you can go back to whatever ship you came from."

"I did not agree to this!" Aikiro snapped.

Andro whirled on her. "I just added a new rule!" He snapped loudly. "You want me to train them to fight? To survive? This is how we act and treat our dragons! They are not pieces of garbage you can discard after you are finished with them! They are sentient life forms and in many cases far more intelligent than many walking on two legs! I will not tolerate mistreatment of them! Any of them! For any *nubous* purpose! If I discover it... if any of my instructors discover it... this will end! I will order the dragons taken from you and your riders can all go suck eggs for all I care!"

"You presume much Androcles Leonidas!" Aikiro snapped. "What makes you think I would allow that to occur?"

Andro's smile was vicious as his eyes and fangs were still very prominent. "You will not have a choice in the matter Empress! And you will not be able to stop me! Your presence is no longer needed here Empress Aikiro. I ask that you take this piece of shit with you when you depart. Like right now."

"I will have words with your father young Androcles!" Aikiro barked. "This was not among the accords we agreed too!"

Andro nodded. "Fine. I'm sure he will love to hear that a rider was using boot spikes to punish his bonded sister when she carried eggs." He spoke. "That will go over real well with my father. If you think my reaction was harsh... tell him what just happened and see what he says. Just don't mention it in front of Torma... he would more than likely tear your limb from limb for such actions. Good day Empress Aikiro."

Andro spun around and did not give her an opportunity to retort as he cast his eyes over the High Coven riders who were all looking at him by now.

“We will finish the exams under the cover of the hanger to your east!” Andro shouted. “All of you begin moving there now!”

Aikiro could only simmer in anger as the upstart son of Leonidas walked away from her without a second’s pause.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ROYAL SPARTAN ESTATE FERAVOMIR’S RESIDENCE

“So tell me child... how does it feel being Androcles Leonidas’s Soulmate?” Helen asked as she bent over and lifted the small watering can and poured some small amounts of water into the row of incredible blue and purple flowers. “The one who holds his very essence.”

Sadi stood just behind her admiring the rows upon rows of multicolored flowers that adorned the rear of Helen’s villa. Her home was spacious and only one level like the rest of the buildings on the estate, but it was comfortably furnished and it was all hers. The awning covered patio was large and lined with flowers and plants from half a dozen different worlds that Sadi could determine just from first glance.

Helen had refused vehemently when Martin had ordered this villa built just for her only three hundred meters from the main house. Her argument was that he and his Queens needed their peace and solitude at times and having her so close would only intrude upon that. He and his Queens had won out in the end however and now Helen felt the most peace and serenity she had ever felt when she was here among the pines and flowers. She decided Martin had known this was how she would feel and that is why he had this home especially built with her in mind. There were many rooms she almost never used, but he had included a large meditation chamber and equally large kitchen for her to practice and refine her already extensive culinary skills. Skills that Helen loved to explore to escape her role and duties as the First Oracle of their people. She had spent many hours with Gallais here in her kitchen as they developed and created new foods and dishes, as well as improved old ones. All of the items that she had kept hidden in her cave were now displayed for all to see, some of them dating back nearly four thousand years even past the time of Martin’s father. The patio area of her villa was covered with a sturdy wooden awning that was draped with blooming vines of yellow and pink flowers and the myriad scents filled Sadi’s head.

“I think I am still trying to wrap my hands around it.” Sadi answered finally. “It... it all happened so very quickly *Feravomir*. I don’t... I don’t think it’s possible to put it into words really.”

Helen stood back up and turned to look at her. “Did it happen quickly? Or does it just seem that way because you have been waiting so long for this very thing to be. Now that you have it... you don’t know what to do because you have found what you have been searching for all these years.”

“What do you mean?” Sadi asked.

“Sadi, have you ever stopped to consider that perhaps everything that has happened in these last years is preordained somehow?” Helen asked looking at her. “Our people were very spiritual once upon a time. Violent yes... but very spiritual.” She told her with a smile. “We believed there was a purpose to all things happening. The events of your life have brought you full circle Sadi Leonidas. Perhaps the road you walked was laid before you a long time prior to you ever being born.”

“Are you saying that even before I was born... even when I was a small child... that I was meant for Andro somehow?” She asked her face puzzled and confused but inwardly rejoicing at those words.

Helen shrugged noncommittally. “You tell me.” She said. “When you conducted the *Gravinolfgreksaan*... did you and Andro stop to look at the moon and see that it was *Vada Assirina Cormunn*? Or did it happen instinctually... without any conscious thought? As if some instinct was guiding your actions.” She settled to the bench and patted the stone top next to her signaling for Sadi to sit down.

Sadi didn’t hesitate and moved to sit beside her. This woman had been a guiding force in her life after the events on the Island Palace and Sadi had come to look at her as the mother she never had. “It... it just happened *Feravomir*. Something inside me... inside us... that something inside us... that instinct said to do it.”

Helen nodded. “No doubt the same instinct in Andro triggered as well. It was identical for his father and Aricia you know... as it was for King Resumar and Eliani. You do not plan to become Soulmates Sadi... and it only truly happens to those who are meant to be together. I believe the only one outside of the King and Andro to have found their true Soulmate is Daniel Simpson. He and Anuk were meant to be together long before they ever actually met, and probably long before the comet ever came to this planet. Perhaps because of how closely tied together Daniel and Martin are... and the path he has played and continues to play in the future. As well as that of his children. For it to happen, your blood must call out for each other in a way it normally does not. Not everyone finds their Soulmates Sadi. In fact, the majority does not... but that does not mean they do not love those they are with completely.”

“I don’t question that I am Andro’s Soulmate *Feravomir*.” She stated. “I relish it more than I can ever put into words. What he makes me feel... it is beyond anything I could have ever imagined. And when we... when we join our minds, it is indescribable.”

Helen smiled as she looked at her. “That is good... because the scuttlebutt around Sparta among the older generations is that you remind them of Gorgo in your demeanor and how you treat others, excluding your beautiful blond hair of course. That is very high praise considering who I am hearing it from.”

“Being compared to Lady Gorgo is the ultimate compliment and honor I could receive *Feravomir*.” Sadi said with some embarrassment. “Though I don’t believe I will ever come close to accomplishing what she has in her lifetime so far.”

Helen grinned. “You never know.” She said with a glint in her eye. “I knew you were special the moment you came to my school Sadi.” Helen spoke. “And not just because Elynth and Andro had touched you. You already had the ability inside you child because of the pureness of your blood, you were just never guided on how to use it. I had initially hoped you would stay on and perhaps take on the role of an Oracle... but when I saw what was in your heart, I knew you were to walk another path.” Helen laughed. “Forgive me... I am becoming philosophical in my old age.”

Sadi chuckled. “Do I walk that path now *Feravomir*?” She asked after a moment. “Now that I am together with Andro?”

Helen met her eyes. “Do you?” She asked. “You know... Androcles will one day surpass his father in what he can do Sadi, and Martin Leonidas is perhaps the most incredibly powerful Mindvoicer Canth and I have ever had the experience of knowing. And yes... I still speak to Canth even though he is gone. He is as much a part of me now as my own self.” She said with a smile. “Most would consider me crazy for saying that.”

Sadi smiled. “After experiencing what you have in your life *Feravomir*... crazy is not a word I would attribute to you.”

“You know of course that Andro became aware while still in Aricia’s womb?” Helen said taking her hand.

Sadi nodded. “Yes.”

“He knew and understood all that was happening around him and he used Elynth as his conduit.” Helen spoke softly. “He is wise beyond his years, though there are times when he tends to let his father’s passion for things override his own feelings. You were the first and most important step Sadi, the first step in Androcles finding his very own path in this life. He and Elynth will accomplish great things together in the future and you will be beside them in those achievements for you are now part of them.”

Sadi nodded slowly as she looked at her. “I can feel the influence and power of their bond all the time now. I felt it then as well... on the island when he spoke to me as a child. It sweeps through me even now stronger than ever *Feravomir*, encompassing me as well in many cases.”

“I don’t doubt that... you are part of them now. The joy their bond brings them they will naturally share with you. You had enormous potential when you came to me Sadi.” Helen spoke looking at her. “On your own and with the proper schooling, you would have become nearly as powerful as Aricia now is, and she is still growing in many respects for she is not that much older than you. Your skills and abilities will grow quickly now that you and Andro have come together and you must be prepared for that Sadi.”

Sadi nodded. “I have felt my awareness expand *Feravomir*. Far beyond anything I have known up until now. I feel the strength and focus flowing through me like never before.”

Helen’s eyes smiled at her. “And it will continue to grow and expand.” Her dark eyes twinkled in the sunlight that reached through the awning overhead. “Yet you are here now because you and Andro are feeling

as if you are not yet complete somehow. You and Andro are wondering why you have been feeling this way these last two days. Why you are feeling it even now? It stems from this young woman you both have recently met, doesn't it?"

Sadi grinned and shook her head. "I truly hate it that you can do that. You know what others will say or what they want before they do. Even when I studied under you." She said with humor in her voice. "It is so eerie."

Helen laughed and took her hand tighter, squeezing it. "This young woman... Carisia is her name I believe. And Anthar is her dragon. She is what brings you here now?"

Sadi nodded. "Andro..."

"Sadi... you and Andro are *Anomes*. You speak with one voice child. You do not need to refer to him in the third person any longer. When you speak... he speaks. It is no different with Martin and Aricia, and I truly do not want to spend ten years pounding it into your skulls as I had to do with theirs. They were so very obstinate at times."

Sadi looked at her and couldn't help but laugh. She nodded her head after a moment. "She affects us in a way we have never felt. When we are in her presence... separately or together... we *both* feel it. It happened with me yesterday when I saw her in a shop in Sparta... and then last night when we were together at Gallais's Retreat. It happened again today when Andro was with her at the airfield."

"And what does she make you feel?" Helen asked.

Sadi met her eyes evenly. "She makes us feel whole." She answered. "It is... it is so very strange. After... after we conducted the *Gravinolfgreksaan*, the sense of one Andro and I felt just lying in each others arms... it was glorious *Feravomir*."

Helen nodded. "No doubt."

"But with her... with Carisia... it is different. We were so very happy that we had finally found one another that we missed it." Sadi spoke shaking her head. "The void that is still there. We feel potent and more cognizant in her presence. And we can feel the same perceptions coming from her as well. It... it is almost as if we have found a long lost gem that fits into a much larger jewel somehow. Finishing it. Making it whole again." Sadi looked at her. "She fills that void."

"So she completes you both?" Helen asked.

"*Feravomir*... we don't know her." Sadi said softly.

Helen smiled gently. "Your eyes, your heart and your voice tell me different Sadi. You have seen her before. Both of you have."

Sadi nodded slowly. "In our dreams *Feravomir*." She said finally.

"And dreams are the windows to our souls Sadi." Helen spoke. "What you feel... what you both feel... it is not wrong child."

"But Andro and I are *Anomes*." Sadi spoke meeting her eyes. "How could... how could both of us feel the same thing for someone we don't even know? Someone we have never met? And feel it in such a unique way; with such power and clarity? We... should only feel this for each other. Shouldn't we?"

"She has been in your dreams." Helen said calmly. "Tell me... in your dreams... have they been separate? You and she together... her and Andro? Or are the three of you always together?"

Sadi shook her head, not at all put out by the intimate nature of the question, at least not with this woman who she had shared so much over the years. "They may start out that way... but we always end up together. Without fail *Feravomir*. They are..." She said softly, almost as if she was embarrassed to admit something.

"Tell me." Helen said squeezing her hand.

"They are such exquisite dreams *Feravomir*." Sadi said gently with a smile. "It is almost as if I can feel what is happening in the dream. Her touch... her scent. Her scent is like sweet rose petals that have freshly bloomed. And we always end up together."

"Like Soulmates." Helen said softly.

Sadi's jungle green eyes grew wide and she looked at her. "*Feravomir*... how... how could she be our Soulmate. I... I thought it was... that it could only be two. Andro and I have found each other already."

Helen nodded. "Yes you have... but like the pieces of any puzzle... it is not complete until all the pieces are together."

“*Feravomir*... she is a vampire.” Sadi said quickly. “She is a ranking member of the High Coven.”

“Yes she is.” Helen answered evenly. “And so is Bella... so is Nyla... and so many others who have a deep and abiding love for whoever they are with. This fact matters why? Do you see an enemy when you look at her? When you feel her coursing through your being, do you feel an enemy? Does Andro?”

Sadi shook her head quickly. “No.”

Helen met her eyes. “Vampire or wolf or elves, all life Sadi... we all have souls. How we live our lives dictates whom we are inside Sadi, you know that better than most.”

“So... so what do we do?” She asked. “It... it only grows stronger each time we see her *Feravomir*.”

Helen shook her head. “I can not tell you what to do Sadi. You or Andro. I can only guide you and hope I guide you in the correct direction.”

“Then guide us *Feravomir*.” Sadi said quickly. “Do... do we pursue what she makes us feel?”

“That she is a woman does not deter you... or alter your perceptions of her?” Helen asked her. “Based on what you have said... if you pursue this course... you would be sharing her with Androcles. Your *Anome*. Is that something you can handle?”

Sadi shook her head quickly. “I... I have experienced such a relationship before... with Teeria.” She answered. “It was brief but very intense. It is not something I have searched for *Feravomir*... but it is not something I will dismiss out of hand. As for sharing Andro with her... if she is meant to be with us... meant to be part of our lives as you suggest is possible... I can not just dismiss that. Not with the strength of the emotion that apparently is there between us and certainly not if she is meant to complete us. What if she is meant to be both our Soulmates? We can not turn away from that.”

“You would not feel this way if there was not something there Sadi.” Helen spoke looking at her. “I believe... and this is only my opinion, mind you... *I believe* it was meant to be this way long before Andro or you were even born as I said earlier, and that is why what you feel for each other is so very powerful and pure. That does not mean however, that there is not meant to be another in your lives as well. Sharing your lives with you, even as you and Andro share everything now. Do you explore this... or do you let it pass and always wonder why it is you felt these things? Why that void is always there? That is a decision the three of you have to make... but always remember the rule by which the King has lived the vast majority of his life.”

Sadi nodded slowly. “Never fear the unknown or the treasures it could bring you.” Sadi looked at her for a long moment before finally rising to her feet. “Thank you *Feravomir*.” She stated.

Helen got up and took Sadi’s hands in hers. “I am always available to you Sadi Leonidas, no matter the topic. You are a powerful woman Sadi... and now that you and Andro have come together, your abilities will only grow stronger as I have said.” She said with a smile. “I only hope you will take me up on the offer.”

Sadi smiled at her words and finally told her what she had always wanted to tell her. “I have no mother *Feravomir*. You have been the closest thing to a mother for me... more than I have ever known. I will always come to you.” She said with sincere honesty and warmth.

Helen nodded and smiled. “And do drag that strapping young man back with you!” Helen said. “He still has many things to learn and absorb. I can’t teach him if he is off gallivanting across the planet and the stars training members of the High Coven. He needs to make time to be here as well.”

Sadi nodded with her own smile. “He told me about that.” She said.

“I have been trying to pass on different skills to both him and his father.” Helen told her. “They have been using their abilities to augment their already impressive physical skills and it is time they learned to do more. And so should you.”

“I will insure he comes very soon *Feravomir*.” Sadi spoke.

“Good... for now you both will need to come.” Helen said reaching up to touch her soft cheek. “And perhaps one day there will be three of you. This Carisia... she is nearly as strong as you and Andro and there is strength and wisdom in numbers you know. I sense that she knows what it is she wants, yet she has a fear that should not be hers. These are things you will need to help her with if you decide to go down that path.” Helen squeezed her hands tightly and pulled her closer. “If you decide on this Sadi... if it feels right in every way... don’t hesitate... don’t think... grab onto it and never let go. You have far more influence over Andro now than even his father. He is old fashion in many respects and he will resist because he thinks you will want him to resist, no matter what you both feel. Make sure he understands that you do not fear what could happen if you both choose that path.”

Sadi nodded and leaned over to kiss her cheek. "I must return to the villa and prepare for my first State Dinner as Crown Princess." She said with an embarrassed smile. "I don't know whether to be excited or nervous."

Helen laughed. "You will do fine child. Andro hates these things perhaps more than his father. He will shield you from most of the annoying men and women. I will see you there tonight as well." She released Sadi's hands and watched as she made her way back into the house and towards the entrance. She turned slowly and looked at her rows of flowers, taking a long deep breath and exhaling slowly as she calmed herself.

"It is beginning." She said softly.

We knew this day would come eventually. The male voice spoke in reply inside her mind like the whispering of the winds through the pines.

"Will it be enough Canth?" She asked softly.

Only time will tell Dustha. Only time will tell. The male voice filled her head as she looked up into the sky at the bright sunshine. *It is a start however. Androcles is very much like his father and grandfather... but he is more like Resumar than either of them and that is our advantage. He has taken the best of all three and blended them into one person Dustha. We can not hope to stop what is coming... but it will be the defining moment for all of them. Androcles especially. We must trust in what you and his parents have taught him and all their children. What you continue to teach them. You have accomplished far more than even I could have dreamed in teaching both of them Dustha. Trust in that training and be there for them when they come to you for council. And they will come to you Dustha.*

"I thought we would have more time." Helen said.

The first son's existence has changed events. Canth spoke. We must adapt and respond or all will be lost.

"I hope you are right." Helen said. "I hope you are right."

HAIGOS CENTER DURCUNUSAAN TRAINING FACILITY

Malic stepped through the doorway into Star Colonel Isra's office. He wore the standard *Durcunusaan* uniform and had just been summoned from a training class. The hours of the last few days had been crammed with learning new skills and procedures, as well as several tests. Malic detested tests and he knew he was not a good student. He hated any kind of academics and always had, perhaps because he was never very good at retaining what he was taught. His skills had been always oriented to the physical portion of his duties, duties which he excelled at.

Malic looked around the empty office taking in the comfortable but not extravagant furniture that was positioned all around. There were very few who did not know who Colonel Isra was, or what he had accomplished in his career as a Spartan and member of *Mjolnir's Hand*. He was widely considered one of the top five of the Bonded Pairs within the Union and his exploits with his dragon Aelnala in the last twenty-five years were well documented. He and Prince Androcles were the only members of *Mjolnir's Hand* to be awarded the Shield of Valor during the Evolli War, yet it was his political skills that garnered the most attention. Beside his two mates, Colonel Isra had brokered four major trade deals and welcomed two new member planets into the Union. He was the only one of those men and women rescued from Enurrua that had opted to enter the Union military, mainly because the first day he and Aelnala had met and discovered each other, their path was set. He was also well known and utterly respected by all dragons within the Union for the celebration and party he had thrown for his Bonded Sister when she and Queen Anja's dragon Miath had mated. The celebration had lasted for two days and was the talk of Sparta and Tuya for weeks afterwards from what Malic heard. It was said Colonel Isra was almost as happy for Aelnala as she had been for herself. Though an injury prevented Aelnala from carrying eggs, she and Miath were the first to come forward and volunteer to raise the three eggs that Aelnala and Isra had saved the day they met. Those three dragons were now grown and two of them, while not members of *Mjolnir's Hand*, were among the nearly thousand Bonded Pairs that called the Union home.

Malic stepped around to the wall and gazed at the many holo images that Colonel Isra had displayed around the office. Most of them were of his two mates and the six children he had, the rest were images of

Aelnala and Miath as well as the King and Aricia. It was said that Colonel Isra was one of only a handful that could walk onto the Spartan Royal Estate totally uncontested and speak directly with the King.

Malic heard shuffling feet and turned quickly when the diminutive Drow elf female came through the wide double doors across the office on the far wall. Doors that were large enough to fit even the King's dragon Torma if Malic was any judge of size. The Drow female pulled up short when she saw him, her amber colored eyes confused.

Aihola lowered the bundle she held in her arms as she looked at the tall Spartan. Her shimmering white hair tumbled down around her shoulders, framing dark features that were exceptionally exotic to look at. Malic knew right away who she was and he also knew she was half vampire and one of those that his father had spoken of in a derogatory nature over the years. His father considered anyone who was not an officer and member of the Fleet, especially vampires, to be beneath him. He thought all the ground troops were nothing but brutes, and those who flew on dragons to be the worst of them. Vice President of the Union Aihola was nearly as well known as Colonel Isra, and her history and that of the Drow elves within the Union was one of the most sought after history classes among both Fleet Academy students and students from the many universities that dotted the Union.

"Madam Vice President." Malic spoke formally bowing his head in a show of respect to her position.

Aihola smiled at him and set the bundle on the chair as she came further into Isra's office. "Hello... I'm not sure I know you."

Aihola's half vampire and half wolf ears detected Roluth lifting off once more to take Tarifa to the Senate Building and her office. Though twenty-five years had passed since her new life had begun, Aihola blessed the morning sun every day for what fate had brought her. She was the child of a vampire father and the Drow elf Queen; her father turned into a vampire by the hated witch Yuri during her many years of experimentation on the Drow people. Many of the experiments performed on her people were of a sexually deviant nature once it was determined that they were not the soldiers the Coven had been trying to create. It had been Tarifa and Dysea who had set Aihola on the path she currently followed, and without them and Anja she would never have rid herself of her affliction. She would never have discovered the love she and Tarifa shared, and together they would never have found the man who had so claimed their hearts.

Aihola and Tarifa's love for one another and their combined love for the violet eyed Spartan warrior who rode a dragon was the basis for the content of dozens of romance novels written and sold throughout the entire Union. She and Tarifa thought them gaudy and unrealistic while Isra only laughed and loved them even more fiercely than he already did. They had six beautiful and strong children with Isra, and Aihola had long ago accepted the fact that when either she or Tarifa spoke, it was with one voice.

"I am *Enomotarch* Malic Ma'am." He replied quickly meeting the gaze of her eyes, which were absolutely incredible to look at. The light danced in the corneas of her amber eyes and made her seem more animated and alive. Half vampire or not... her long silky like white hair combined with her amber colored eyes and what was obviously an incredibly shapely figure made this elven female exceptionally attractive, even to him.

And that surprised Malic.

"I arrived at the beginning of this week." He finished speaking as he brought his mind back to the present.

"Ah... studying to become a *Durcunusaan* I see." Aihola stated as she walked around Isra's desk as she had done thousands of times in the past years to the low counter behind his chair where she poured herself a steaming mug of tea from the ever present carafe that Isra always had in his office.

"Yes ma'am. And then I intend to ride a dragon as a member of *Mjolnir's Hand*." Malic stated proudly and pulling himself to his full height of six foot two.

Aihola looked at him with a smile as she sipped her mug and turned back to face him. "Very lofty goals *Enomotarch* Malic." Aihola spoke confidently. "I commend you."

"You... you are bonded to a dragon as well, are you not Madam Vice President?" Malic asked stepping closer and finding her voice soothing in some manner.

Aihola nodded. "Tarifa and I both." She answered. "It's been twenty-five years now that we have been bonded to Roluth and the feelings and sensations that fill us everyday have never faded. We ride as often as we can."

Malic's eyes narrowed somewhat. "You... you are bonded to the same dragon?" He asked somewhat taken aback at this knowledge.

Aihola nodded. "Yes."

"I... I did not think that was possible." Malic said.

Aihola chuckled at his confused look for it was something both she and Tarifa had dealt with in the past. "Tarifa and I share a unique bond with each other. We fell in love before the Battle for Earth. During that battle I was injured badly. Tarifa saved me by allowing me to take her blood to heal my wounds. It formed a very powerful Mindvoice bond between us. A bond that only grew in strength when Isra came into our lives. Our love is as strong now as it was when we first discovered each other. Over the years together it has blended our minds and consciousnesses together. We are essentially one person and that allowed us to bond with Roluth together."

Malic allowed himself to breathe deeply and he detected the peach scent wafting from her, as well as the wild cheery blossom scent that was her own. It was very hard to miss the spicy smell of deep timber that permeated her entire being, and Malic knew that scent belonged to Colonel Isra. The three scents were entwined more deeply than he thought they could be considering she was half vampire, but then he detected the smell of the wolf in her blood and realized that some of her elven genes had been turned to that of a wolf.

"You seemed surprised to hear that *Enomotarch*." Aihola spoke moving closer to him.

Malic shuffled his feet. "Forgive me... I have never had the knowledge that two women could be so tightly bound together. It is not something I have experienced... though... I understand that Princess Eliani shares something similar I think. She mentioned something to me about it while transiting here on the *SCIMITAR*."

Malic didn't know why he tossed that out there but he saw Aihola nod and laugh softly. Her voice was still very pleasant and her amber eyes glittered in the light. "Yes they do." Aihola said nodding her head. "So you are the young Spartan that saved Eliani's life. Your deed has not gone unnoticed *Enomotarch*. You are quite the talk of Eden City and to a lesser degree here in Sparta."

Malic's eyes grew a little wider. "I... I am?" He asked.

Aihola nodded. "Yes you are." She stated plainly. "Eliani and Nyla's Mindvoice abilities tie them together more tightly than Tarifa and I in many respects. Eliani saved Nyla's life by sharing her blood with her so that Nyla could heal wounds during the Evolli war; similar to what Tarifa did for me. However... since they were both bonded to dragons when that took place, and Nyla's injuries were more severe than mine, Nyla ended up taking a great deal more of Eliani's blood than either of them expected and it made their connection much more focused and deeper. That single event tied them together and over the next months they discovered each other. They are very much in love now. You are becoming known as the man who saved that love."

Malic's eyes showed his stunned shock at this revelation and he opened his mouth to ask another question about Eliani and Nyla but his eyes shifted as the tall, muscular form of Colonel Isra filled the doorway. He stopped for a moment, his violet eyes falling on Malic briefly, but then he turned to Aihola and stepped up to her, his violet eyes smiling and bright. Aihola set her mug of tea down on the desk as Isra drew her close in his arms and she pressed her body against his tightly.

"I found your spare uniform." She stated with a smile at the man who held hers and Tarifa's hearts in his hands, and had since the moment they first set eyes on him. "Joneu hid it hoping he could wear it to emulate you."

Isra chuckled. "I'll have to have a talk with that boy." He said.

"Don't be too hard on him." Aihola replied. "He simply loves his father and wants to be like him in every way."

They had six children with Isra, three each from both her and Tarifa. The two oldest were boys and the youngest was a boy. Their boys had been given Spartan names, while the girls all bore Elven names. It was something that Tarifa and she had talked of very often when they first discovered their love for each other, and when Isra came into their lives those dreams were quickly discovered as they became pregnant together shortly after Isra returned to Earth and re-entered their lives. Their two oldest sons were also bonded with dragons while their oldest daughter was a senior aide for Deia and rapidly moving up the ranks due to her intelligence and beauty.

“I will pick you and *Sadormacah* up at eighteen hundred hours sharp.” He said pulling her firm Drow body against his. “Martin wants us there a little early to begin greeting the guests as they arrive.”

Aihola nodded. “We’ll be ready.” She spoke brushing something from his broad shoulder and smiling. “I must go... I have a meeting with Panos and Tarifa about this new sight in the desert we discovered. We will see you later tonight my love.”

Isra and Aihola shared a deep, loving kiss and he nuzzled her elven ear before she pushed him away with a soft laugh and headed out of his office. Isra watched her go, admiring the way she always filled out her uniforms and clothes. Like Tarifa... even after three children, Aihola’s body was just as lush and seductive as when he had first met her. Her ebony skinned looked perfect nestled between him and Tarifa in their bed. He smiled to himself and looked at Malic, his smile fading away quickly.

“*Enomotarch* Malic.” Isra spoke as he moved to the counter and poured himself a mug of tea. “Do you know why you are here Malic?” He asked as he turned back to his desk and motioned for Malic to take one of the chairs.

“No... no Colonel. I was told only that you wanted to see me.” Malic answered as he settled into the chair.

Isra moved to his chair and sat down. “I understand you petitioned directly for inclusion into the *Durcunusaan* and then *Mjolnir’s Hand*, bypassing the usual process.” He said. “Your mother’s influence got that petition approved.”

“That is not something I asked her to do Colonel.” Malic spoke quickly.

“Perhaps not... but it was done none the less.” Isra stated. “You were able to skip all of the academic requirements because of this Malic.” He held up the data pad. “I pulled your file when I discovered this information. Do you know what I found *Enomotarch*?” Isra held out the data pad waiting for Malic to take it.

Malic looked at the pad and felt a sinking feeling in his guts. They were the results of the four tests he had taken in the last four days. He looked up quickly. “Colonel Isra I...”

“You failed all four Malic.” Isra spoke cutting him off. “To include basic Lycavorian language skills.” Isra leaned forward. “How is it that you were able to get this far without this being known by others Malic?”

“I... I don’t know sir.” He replied honestly.

“Yes... well I don’t know how things were done on Apo Prime...” Isra stated. “But here at the *Durcunusaan* Training Group we do things a little differently.” Isra told him. “Generals Vengal and Vistr set it up in a certain way for reasons which I’m sure you understand. It has not changed in twenty-five years Malic. And since those of us in *Mjolnir’s Hand* pull directly from the ranks of the *Durcunusaan*... we take quite an interest in those selected to become members of the Wolves of the Blood.”

“Colonel... I am capable!” Malic almost shouted. “No one can beat me with the *Nehtes* sir! I am fit and in perfect shape!”

Isra nodded as he sipped his tea. “No doubt Malic... however there is far more to being a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* than just physical strength. We are not just the King’s Hammer... we are the extension of his will. His entire will... which includes procedures and events that have nothing to do with war. We must be able to talk peace as well as fight Malic. We must interact with others on almost every level within the government and military, with dozens of different species. And do so in a manner that promotes trust and peace.”

“I can learn whatever it is I need to learn Colonel!” Malic spoke. “I am an excellent learner and I pick up things immediately.”

“I truly hope so Malic.” Isra said as he held up the second data pad. “If not for this Malic, you would be on your way back to Apo Prime this afternoon. I don’t think you are cut out for being a member of the *Durcunusaan*... and most definitely not *Mjolnir’s Hand*. Fortunately for you... your actions with Androcles on Eleyi Three have earned you a reprieve.”

Malic’s eyes furrowed as he breathed a sigh of relief not knowing what surprise was on this data pad. “I... I don’t understand sir.”

“You are aware that the High Coven has come to Earth?” Isra said.

Malic’s eyes darkened. “I... I had heard that Colonel, yes. Though I do not know why we would allow that? They are our enemies.”

“In many respects I tend to agree with you Malic.” Isra stated. “However this is different. You know how we view our bonded brothers and sisters within the Union?”

Malic nodded quickly. "Yes sir. They are cherished and honored members of the Union. Without them... there would be no *Mjolnir's Hand* and we would be lesser for it. At least... at least that is how I view them."

Isra nodded his head slowly as he gazed at the young Spartan. Isra's question had caused Malic to act without thinking, and the words he had spoken came from his within his heart Isra noticed, and not from some field manual. Isra also knew of the encounter with Elynth on the *SCIMITAR* from Famus and how Malic had been the only one to not back up in fear as Elynth had approached. That spoke volumes about this man in front of him because Isra had yet to meet a man that did not at least flinch when Elynth approached them.

"Well it appears the High Coven has brought forty-three of their own dragons here to Earth to be trained by us." He spoke slowly. "Dragons that they stole many years ago... but those dragons have now bonded with members of the High Coven and we need to train them. Thirty-six members of the *Durcunusaan* have been chosen by Andro to assist in this endeavor. Your name is on that list Malic, backed up with a solid recommendation from Commander Famus."

Malic looked surprised for the first time. "It is?" He asked.

Isra handed him the data pad. "Those are your orders Malic." He said. "In six months you will return here and be re-tested on these results Malic." Isra held up the first data pad as he took it back from him. "You will be quite busy where you are going so I truly hope you are able to make the time to study and learn what it is you need to learn. If you fail even one of these tests Malic... you will find yourself on the first transport back to your old unit. Is that very clear *Enomotarch* Malic?"

Malic came to his feet quickly. "Perfectly Colonel! I will not fail you!"

Isra stood up as well. "I hope not Malic... you have great potential son. That much I can sense." He told him honestly. "But you need to alter your attitude and perceptions of everything around you. And you need to leave the arrogance behind. No matter what you have faced in the past... or who you have learned it from, it no longer applies now Malic. The sooner you learn that... the better off you will be."

"Yes sir!"

Isra nodded his head. "The transport leaves in three days. I suggest you take the time to gather whatever materials you will need for the journey and to learn what you need to learn and prepare your equipment. You are acting as an Usher for this evening's State Dinner yes?"

Malic nodded. "Yes sir. The South entrance."

"Be sharp Malic... and above all else... be smart." Isra spoke.

"I will be sir!" Malic barked.

"You may return to your duties now." Isra said motioning towards the door.

Malic nodded and made his way quickly to the exit. He did not see the heads of the two dragons extend into the door Aihola had come in from. This entrance led directly to a large and very comfortable pen that Aelnala spent many hours in as Isra's Bonded Sister. Now however, along with her dirty yellow scaled head and honey colored eyes, the dark green scales and bright gray eyes of Miath's large head poked into the office as well.

Aelnala rubbed her head under the thick, powerful neck of her beloved mate in affection as she looked at Isra.

Aelnala had never imagined herself with a mate, knowing that no male dragon would ever take her because of her inability to carry eggs, the result of a very foolish event fighting Chetek's men when she was younger. Aelnala had resigned herself to a life without a mate or children of her own and was more than content to share in the happiness that her bonded brother Isra had found. It had taken him two years after his return from Lycavore for Miath to gain the courage he needed to approach her. Aelnala was much older than him, and he was the Bonded Brother to Queen Anja, and by virtue of that alone he was very sought after by female dragons of mating age. Aelnala had been angry with him at first for telling her he wanted only her. She had scolded him for not wanting to help their species reproduce by mating with a female who could carry eggs and give him children. She had chased him away even though she did find Miath to be nearly irresistible, but had never held out her hopes for a pairing. Aelnala didn't know why she had let Isra and Tarifa talk her into taking part in the Harmony Ceremony that year, for she knew no male would take her. She had done it because Isra had asked her to and Aelnala would do anything for Isra. She had flown among the clouds that night with the rest of the

females, excreting her mating scent as she flew upside down, but knowing in her heart that no male would approach her.

Aelnala had almost given up and was about to roll over and return to the ground when the large dark green blur that was a hybrid dragon plunged from the clouds above her, with confident and dominating power and precise control and speed and all but blotting out the bright moon. It had taken her completely by surprise and before she knew what was happening, Miath had plunged into her female depths and wrapped his large wings around her as they plummeted to the earth below. Aelnala had committed the words he had spoken to her while they fell to memory for they had made her shed tears. As they plunged for the ground below, his huge organ buried within her female depths where no male had ever been before, Miath did not move except to stare into her eyes. The pleasure was gripping her rapidly, and while she may have not been able to carry eggs, she was still very much able to enjoy the complete and utter pleasure of mating.

I do not care that you can not carry eggs Aelnala! I have never cared about that. I want you Aelnala! I want only you! You have invaded my being like no other and I want to go into the future with you as my mate! No other! Tell me you will have me! Tell me Aelnala before we smash into the hard ground below for I do not want to go another day without you by my side!

His words to her had blocked all of the pleasure that was ripping through her from his maleness inside her and Aelnala did what her heart had wanted to do for years.

Yes! Yes! Her words filled Miath's mind and she trumpeted out her pleasure as they fell and she surrendered to the feelings of complete bliss he produced in her.

What followed that initial time together had been nothing short of rapture for Aelnala, and it had not stopped. Miath never grew tired of her, and she could not remember the last time they had not mated for days on end when he returned to Earth with Anja. She knew his duties as Anja's Bonded Brother took him away for weeks, but it was Miath who always made it seem like she had been gone with the attention he lavished on her when he returned. The most blissful and happiest times of her life had come while she was wrapped within the cocoon of his wings and they were mating. When Arzoal suggested to her that she and Miath raise the eggs she and Isra had rescued on Enurrua, both of them had jumped at the chance with undisguised glee.

Aelnala had the family she had always dreamed of now. She had a handsome male dragon completely devoted to her and she to him. They had three beautiful young dragons that called them mother and father, and while they may not have been of their blood, the love they had for them knew no bounds. And Aelnala had the love and bond of Isra, and the knowledge that they were considered one of the most powerful Bonded Pairs within the Union.

Aelnala looked at her Bonded Brother. *I can feel the great potential in him Isra, just as you can.* She spoke softly.

Miath nodded his large head as well. *His abilities are buried however. Buried under falsehoods and ideals he has come to believe, but are not his. This is what prevents him from obtaining that potential.*

Isra nodded as he walked over to them. *I sense it as well.* He spoke. *I don't know what Andro expects from him though. We have no dragons that would suit him even if he were to change. He does not know things that should be second nature to many of our Bonded Pairs. And his academic skills are well below par. It is almost as if he was not taught these things as a child.*

Aelnala looked at him keenly. *It has always been very difficult to look at what Andro has within his mind and see a clear picture. I believe only his father and Elynth can truly see that... though Sadi will no doubt come to see and understand it in the future. Elynth has always been the one to try and explain Andro's actions to others. She is better with words than he is most of the time.*

Miath nodded. *We trust Andro Isra.* He said. *There is always a method to his sometimes seeming madness.*

Isra chuckled at Miath's words. *Yes there is.* He said. *What are you two going to do tonight during the State Dinner?*

Miath laughed within Mindvoice and turned his gray eyes on his cherished mate. *A little of this and a little of that as my Bonded Sister always says.* He replied turning back to Isra. *I thought I might take my lovely yellow scaled mate and view the moon come up from the top of the clouds.* He said looking at Aelnala once more with bright gray eyes.

That sounds very promising. Aelnala said leaning into him.

Isra laughed and reached up to stroke Aelnala's snout. *Just be mindful of the weather you two. The last time you went to look at the moon above the clouds, Miath got singed by a stray lightning bolt.*

That is only because my attention was diverted to something more pleasurable at the time. Miath stated proudly.

Aelnala laughed as well now and rubbed against his side. *We will be more careful this time.* She said.

Go on you two! Get out of here. I can do without the details of your love life. Isra stated with a grin.

Isra turned as he heard their laughter in Mindvoice and went back to his desk. He picked up the results of Malic's tests once more and gazed at the pad. "What are you thinking Andro?" He whispered. "What are you thinking?"

GYTHEIO

OCEANSIDE VILLA OF LADY GORGO AND ADMIRAL RIALL

Gorgo was running a brush through her long dark hair as she moved for the door and its chiming. She was almost ready to depart for the Senate Auditorium and now someone was coming to visit her. It never failed to happen as far as she was concerned. Her classes had run a little longer than usual, and after sharing a very brief lunch with her new granddaughter-in-law Sadi, Gorgo had taken a Lifter home.

She passed her hand over the sensor by the side of the door and began speaking. "I am rather busy... so unless..." Gorgo stopped speaking when she saw Denali and Lisisa in her flowered doorway. Denali looked exceptionally handsome in his formal dress uniform while Lisisa looked absolutely ravishing in the glittering blood red gown that was cut in a way that revealed quite a bit of her tanned skin and hugged her large breasts. While extremely sexy the dress was very elegant and formal and it made Lisisa Leonidas simply beam with beauty. "Deni... Lisi... what is wrong?" She asked.

"There is nothing wrong grandmother." Denali spoke quickly. "Lisisa and I are going to be helping Andro train the High Coven riders and this is the only time where we could break away to speak with you alone."

Gorgo ushered them inside. "Come in... there is your mother's coffee on the burner. Just let me throw on my dress and we can sit for a few moments."

They watched her move towards her bedroom as they walked towards the kitchen area of the villa. Lisisa gripped Denali's hand and waited until his handsome face turned to her.

"Deni... I'm scared." She stated softly. "I'm scared by what she might say. What she might do."

Denali squeezed her hand and slipped his arm around her waist pulling her tightly to him and fighting down the sexual urges that having her firm body pressed against him elicited. "Do you love me Lisisa Leonidas?"

Lisisa rolled her eyes. "What kind of stupid question is that?" She hissed. "You know I do Deni. More than anything."

Deni nodded with a smile. He leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and side of her neck and felt her lean into him as she always did, relishing in the sensations he caused within her. "And I love you. This is the first step we have to take to make sure one day we can openly show that love. Grandmother is the only one who might understand... and we have to start somewhere."

Lisisa stared at him for a long moment and finally smiled. She leaned over and stretched up on her toes to kiss him softly. "And that is something I want more than anything." She stated. "To proclaim to all that I am yours."

Denali nodded. "Good."

Gorgo came into the kitchen area smoothing out the lines of the purple velvet dress and looked at her grandchildren. “Ok... we don’t want to be late... so what’s going on? The two of you do not normally come seeking advice from me. It’s not in either of your natures... so what is going on?”

“Is grandfather Riall here?” Denali asked.

Gorgo looked at him oddly. “No. He left thirty minutes ago to help your father set up the overall security for tonight’s function.” Gorgo replied. “What is going on you two?”

“Grandmother... maybe you had better sit down.” Lisisa told her.

“Why?”

Deni took her arm. “What we are going to tell you might come as a shock of sorts.” He said leading her to the chair and pulling it out for her to sit. He waited for Lisisa to sit before moving to the chair next to her.

“Oh Deni... you didn’t break your father’s *Nehtes* again did you?” Gorgo spoke.

Deni chuckled as he settled into the chair next to Lisisa. “No grandmother.” He spoke. “This... this is something infinitely more serious.”

Gorgo’s eyes narrowed. “Ok... spill it!” She barked using a term she had learned from Anja and Eliani. “What’s this all about? You are never serious Denali Leonidas.”

“Grandmother... Lisisa... Lisisa and I want to ask you a question.” Deni spoke slowly, measuring his words.

“Ok.” Gorgo said. “What might that question be?”

“Grandmother... did you love grandfather Leonidas any less even though he was your uncle?” Lisisa spit out the question.

Gorgo sat back in the chair surprised at the question. It was not what she had expected to hear and confusion reigned supreme on her face. It was not something she had thought of in many years. The love she had shared with Leonidas burned intensely for many hundreds of years even after his death, and only her growing feelings for Riall had finally made her begin to move forward. She rarely thought of her long dead husband now, choosing instead to honor his last words to her and live a long happy life. She had that with Riall now, strong children and a powerful love with the handsome Admiral of the Fleet that rivaled or surpassed the love she had once shared with Leonidas. It was something he wished for her and Gorgo knew without question he would be happy she had gone on with her life. “What... why are you asking?” She said finally.

Denali took it up from there. “I know that interfamily marriages were common back then grandmother.” He said softly. “We want to know if it mattered to you that grandfather Leonidas was your Uncle.”

Gorgo looked at them for a long moment before replying. “I loved your grandfather Leonidas with every fiber of my being.” She answered softly. “He was my entire life... my purpose for life. No... it did not matter that he was my uncle. Half uncle actually... for my father was Leonidas’s half brother.” Gorgo leaned forward in her chair. “True love knows no bounds... no limitations. If two people are meant for each other... nothing changes that. The two of you should know that well. Your father and mother Isabella love each other deeply no matter who they are. Why are you asking me this? What does that have to do with anything?”

Deni glanced at Lisisa quickly and then back to her. “Grandmother... Lisisa and I love each other.” He stated proudly.

Gorgo smiled and sat back. “You are brother and sister... of course you love each other. You...”

“No... grandmother...” Lisisa said reaching out and taking Denali’s arm in her hands and pressing up against his side. “We are *in love* with each other.” She said equally as proud and confident as Denali had just spoken.

Gorgo’s face ran the sudden gambit of surprise, shock, horror and happiness all within ten seconds as she looked at her grandchildren. She saw the way Lisisa, always so proud and determined, clung to Denali’s arm and press against his side like a love struck young female wolf. She saw the way Denali Leonidas, a powerful Alpha male in his own right, sat ram rod straight in his chair unashamed of the admission they had just made. Lisisa’s forest green eyes were alive and bright with love, a love matched in his dark brown eyes.

“Oh... oh my.” Gorgo blurted out finally.

“We... we tried to fight it grandmother.” Lisisa explained quickly. “We just couldn’t. It was too strong. Too overwhelming. And finally... and finally we did not want to fight it any longer and we surrendered to the feelings both of us have for each other.”

Gorgo looked at them. “You have...?”

Lisisa nodded without shame or hesitation. "Yes we have... many times. And each time it is more glorious than the last." She replied. It was out in the open now... someone knew their secret... and Lisisa found she no longer wanted to hide it.

"How long?" Gorgo asked softly.

"Three years now." Denali answered.

Gorgo's eyes flew open. "Three years!" She gasped coming to her feet. She looked at Denali with those wide eyes. "But... all the times you... all the times we thought you were off chasing some female wolves' tail you..."

Denali nodded his head. "Yes... I was meeting with Lisisa in secret." He replied matter of factly.

"Grandmother... we came to you because we... because we thought you would be the one to understand the most." Lisisa spoke softly. "It is not something we planned... it just happened."

Gorgo looked at her seeing not uncertainty and confusion but wisdom and determination and above all else adoring love. "Then this is why you have rebuffed all the men who have...?"

Lisisa nodded and pressed even closer to Denali. "I want no one but Denali." She stated firmly. "Only Denali can make me feel what I do when I am in his arms. It is something I have never felt before and I want it to continue for the rest of my life."

Denali watched his grandmother carefully, seeing the indecision in her eyes and in her expression. He took a deep breath. "Perhaps... perhaps this was a mistake." He stated gently. "Coming to you grandmother and telling you. We thought you... we thought that you would at least understand because of what you shared with grandfather Leonidas. I... I am sorry..." He started to get to his feet.

"Sit down!" Gorgo barked out looking at him. Gorgo waited until he had settled fully back into his chair. "This... this is not some minor issue Denali!" She stated loudly. "Lisisa! You are brother and sister!"

"Half brother and sister." Denali corrected her. "Yes... we know that grandmother. This is not something Lisisa pursued. I was the one to push because I knew she was who I wanted. I..."

"Deni... no." Lisisa spoke reaching up to stroke his cheek. "This was something we both walked into with our eyes wide open. You did not pressure me. How could you have pressured me when I felt the same?" Lisisa watched as he turned to gaze at her, his dark eyes filled with devotion. "You will not take blame for something when there is no blame to place. I won't allow it."

Gorgo looked at them as she settled back into her chair. She saw the emotion coursing between the two of them like fingers of electricity and for a moment Gorgo was flung back in time. She remembered the times she and Martin's father had gazed upon one another. Complete and utter devotion and love. No hesitation and no doubt. It was identical to the way Lisisa and Denali were staring at one another at this very moment.

"Why... why tell me now?" Gorgo finally asked and watched as they both turned to look at her.

"We are not looking for your approval Grandmother." Denali said firmly. "We are not looking for anyone's approval. We... we thought perhaps because of the relationship between you and grandfather Leonidas, him being your uncle... we thought... we thought you would understand what we feel and maybe... maybe help us to tell everyone else over time."

"We don't want to live in secret forever grandmother." Lisisa said. "We want to be able to walk among our family and friends and have them know that Denali and I are mated. And we are mated for all intents and purposes. At least in our eyes. We want to be able to show that we want each other and no one else."

"How have you... how is it that no one has smelled each of you on the other?" Gorgo asked. "Your father... your brother Andro... their sense of smell is beyond anything I have ever seen."

"We are careful... and Deni has not *cado forn* yet." Lisisa spoke in reply. "It also helps that I am half vampire. My blood does not retain the scent of Deni's... of his essence for very long if I consume new blood shortly afterwards."

"This is..." Gorgo shook her head. "This is quite a bit to take in." She said.

"We were hoping you could help us do this grandmother. To help us tell everyone or advise us on *how* to tell everyone. We will understand if you can not. All we can ask now is that you keep our secret until we are ready to announce it to everyone." Lisisa took Denali's hands and began pulling him to his feet. "Come Deni... we should leave."

"No." Gorgo spoke softly. She shook her head slowly and looked at them. "I... I can not and I *will* not condemn you for falling in love... for having essentially the same relationship I had when I was younger. Yes..."

Leonidas was my Uncle... and I loved him without question regardless of that fact. I did not care.” She met their eyes as they slowly sank back into their chairs. “I can see the love you have for each other. It is written all over your faces when you gaze at one another. I am shocked that I did not see it before now. It is the same way your grandfather and I gazed at one another.” Gorgo got up and moved down the table, settling between their chairs and leaning up against the marble top. “Times are different now however.” She spoke softly. “So much is different.”

“I will not give her up grandmother!” Denali spoke sharply. “Not for father. Not even for my title as Prince!”

“Nor will I.” Lisisa echoed. “Nothing could make me do that. Grandmother... for the first time... for the first time since I returned with father I have found true peace and love and total acceptance. Denali gives that to me. He does not look at me and see someone who is half vampire and half wolf. He sees me... inside my heart. He knows what I am thinking even before I do sometimes. It is the same for me when I look at him.”

Gorgo shook her head and reached down to gather their hands within hers. “I’m not asking you to do that. To give each other up.” She said. “*Carians* no! We can no more control whom we fall in love with than we can control the weather.” She grasped their hands tightly within hers. “I will not look upon you differently now, so you may toss that fear to the wind as well. You are still my grandchildren... still my blood and as I said... how could I look down upon you for doing something that I myself did? I will need some time to absorb this before I can decide how best to proceed. You have kept your love hidden for these past years and you must continue to do so for now.”

“You... you will help us?” Lisisa asked.

“Of course I will help you Lisi.” Gorgo answered immediately and with a loving smile. “You have found something very deep and powerful with each other and that is exceedingly obvious in the way you gaze at one another. It is something that many do not find in their lifetimes. Who am I to say it is wrong? I will need to think about things, perhaps do some investigation and research on my own, but yes... know that I am on your side in this regard. This is not news you can just announce to the world and all your family however. It must be approached slowly... and I know you understand that, because you have come to me first and kept it secret for so long.”

“We do.” Denali spoke nodding his head.

Gorgo looked at him. “No one else knows this?” She asked.

They both shook their heads. “We have told no one grandmother. Not even Jeth and Aradace.” Lisisa answered.

“Andro?” She asked. “You both know your brother is far more perceptive than he lets on to others.”

Lisisa and Denali shook their heads slowly. “We don’t think so.” He said finally. “He has never... he has never said or done anything to make us think otherwise.”

“That is not your brother Andro’s way, especially if he has seen what I have seen this day.” Gorgo spoke slowly. “We’ll assume he does not know for now.” Gorgo put her hands on their cheeks and looked at them for a long moment. “We have a State Dinner to attend.” She stated with a smile. “Act as you have always acted and change nothing. Everyone knows the two of you are close, so do nothing differently than you normally do. Tomorrow I will go and speak with Panos and Dilios. Bounce some ideas off of them so to speak. They too will understand, for Dilios’s oldest son is mated to his cousin. This particular issue has touched more people than the two of you might realize. When you... when you meet to be together... insure you do as you always have done.”

“Thank you grandmother.” Deni spoke standing up and kissing her cheek just as Lisisa did the same. “Thank you for... thank you for understanding.”

Gorgo smiled and reveled in the gentle nuzzles her grandchildren gave to her. “Come... you know how your father hates when any of us are late. You two can escort me... but we have to stop and pick up Helen from the Estate.”

“Our Lifter is outside.” Denali spoke with a smile. “I will have you there in no time.”

“Oh no you won’t!” Lisisa hissed playfully as she looked at him and pulled on the sleeve of his jacket. For the first time since she had accepted and rejoiced in her love for Denali, Lisisa felt confident of the future they could have together. “I’ll drive! You almost got us killed on the way here with your driving.”

“I am an excellent driver!” Denali protested.

“In your opinion!” Lisisa stated. “Not in mine! And not in anyone else’s opinion Deni. They all think you are a little crazy when you drive. Why do you think they all elect to fly now when you offer to drive the Lifter?”

Gorgo burst out laughing at this and squeezed their hands tightly. “Yes... it appears the two of you do belong together.” She stated happily.

Tharua executed a crisp roll and her copper colored eyes scanned the expanse of moon lit sky above her. It was a nearly cloudless night, the air calm and the ocean far below reflecting beautifully from the white light that was cast across it.

It was their night.

Tharua’s heart was racing almost out of control for she knew Jeth had received the Elder Council’s permission to take a mate. Her meeting with the Elder Council later that afternoon had been much shorter and very much to the point thanks to Eliani. She adored her Bonded Sister more than she could put into words for in many ways Eliani was very similar to Andro. She got right to the point and made no bones about it. They had only asked her two questions really; did she know what having Jeth take her as his mate would mean, and was she prepared to go into the future with him at her side for all time?

Tharua had responded almost too quickly for she was answering positively and with no hesitation to both questions before the Elder mother even finished speaking. Whether it was due to the strong Mindvoice bonds they had with Eliani and Lisisa, or the simple fact that they had been together now for the better part of ten years, Tharua did not care in the least. She wanted the blue/black monstrosity that was Jeth as her mate, and she had for as many years as she could remember. They had decided to wait for a day or so after the Council’s decision before truly claiming each other, but that had only lasted until now. Neither of them wanted to wait any longer and as soon as the State Dinner began they had taken to the skies above Sparta, moving rapidly for the calm, sweet smelling ocean waters of the Laconian Gulf. This was going to be a special Harmony of Two Hearts Ceremony. Their ceremony with only the moon and ocean as their witnesses.

Syrlith had told her just what to do and as she finished rolling over, exposing her lighter colored underbelly for the male that would be her new mate, she released her very excited female scent into the wind for him to detect. It was something dragons had in common with their Lycavorian brothers and sisters. They had the ability to drive their mates crazy with their scents. Tharua’s sex was swollen and moist with anticipation of what she so badly wanted and as her copper eyes scanned the sky above her she waited in eager readiness. She never realized just thinking of him like this could do these things to her and she could not imagine what it would be like when they actually happened.

Where are you Jeth? She declared in the most seductive voice she could muster. *Please do not tell me you have suddenly changed your mind.*

That will never happen! Jeth’s deep and powerful voice responded in her head and Tharua felt a shudder run through her.

I am waiting for you! Has your desire for me escaped you?

I am... I am admiring you! Jeth answered.

Tharua’s keen eyes picked him up then, streaking above her, his massive wings fully extended as he glided on the thermals. She could not help but admire the incredible musculature of his body. He had truly taken after his father in that regard, and she fully understood why so many older females wanted him. Yet Tharua knew he was going to be hers and hers alone and that knowledge made her even more excited, her scent becoming stronger and more pronounced now as it drifted out on the wind.

Why do you make me wait Jeth? She declared sternly. *We have waited too long already! Do not tease me anymore.*

Tharua... am I who you truly want? Jeth’s serious tone made her blink. *There are many who would kill for you... like in the ancient ways of our kind.*

You have always been who I wanted Jeth. Ever since the first day I saw you. Tharua answered. *I would wait as long as it took, until I could be yours. Now claim me Jeth! I do not want to...*

The loud trumpeting drowned out her words and Tharua cut her eyes as she saw him descending from above her like some great winged god. Her eyes grew wide as she caught a glimpse of his huge organ, fully

aroused thanks to her scent, and then he was upon her. Tharua trumpeted out her own blissful delight as his immense organ rammed home into her depths in a single plunge. Jeth's huge wings engulfed her completely, her own wings folding inward as his talons drew her tighter to him in sexual frenzy. Tharua's copper colored eyes were wide in disbelief as indescribable sensations of intense pleasure gripped her belly. Her front talons sank into Jeth's armor like scales and she withered and held on in rapturous abandon. As the pleasure soon overwhelmed her, Tharua sank her fangs into Jeth's thick neck scales, not deep enough to draw blood, but deep enough to let her new mate know what they were experiencing was total heaven.

As their bodies plummeted for the surface of ocean below Tharua yowled in ecstasy as Jeth plunged into her again and again, his thrusts urgent and awkward at first. This was the first time for both of them and it flashed across her dazed mind that neither of them truly knew what they were doing, but if this foretold of times in the future with experienced gained Tharua knew she would be the most satisfied female among her kind anywhere. She drew him closer as he plunged inward and tried to hold him as he withdrew. This was unlike anything Syrilth had described to her. So much more intense and unbelievably glorious. His massive wings formed a cocoon around them as their bodies thrust against one another, the pleasure almost unbearable as it built to a crescendo. It was the first time for both of them yes, and patience and control was not yet in their vocabulary, and Tharua joined her new mate in roaring out their pleasure as his hot seed erupted into her even as her own orgasm followed seconds later.

Regardless of the pleasure they were experiencing, both of them were still keenly aware of the pressure of the atmosphere and the air around them as they fell and only five hundred feet above the surface of the calm ocean Jeth snapped out his wings and released his tight grip on Tharua's lean muscular body. Tharua whimpered as she rolled to the side, Jeth's organ leaving her body and making her feel suddenly very empty. She too snapped out her wings and righted herself fully, skimming the surface of the water until she snapped back up in a joyful trumpet, corkscrewing her way around and around in happiness as she gained altitude. She could sense Jeth beneath her and she glanced back with adoring love in her copper eyes to see him trailing her easily, his snout only inches from the tip of her tail.

Oh my beloved Jeth! That was amazing! Again! Let's do it again! She exclaimed as she slowed her ascent enough so that he could climb level with her. As they rose through the night sky belly to belly Tharua glanced down and saw his still very hard, rigid cock standing proudly at attention. Her copper eyes glanced at his golden ones. *You... you are ready?* She gasped out with gleeful happiness.

Your scent drives me mad! He exclaimed. *I can't help it!*

Tharua laughed like the love struck dragon she was. *Let's go higher! We will have more time as we fall!*

It took them only moments before they were at nearly thirty thousand feet and Tharua once more rolled upside down until they were flying belly to belly. Jeth inched closer without words and reached for her with his talons. This time was slower and he slipped into her fully with a long slow motion even as Tharua's eyes rolled into the back of her skull. His wings once more folded around them and they plunged for the ground below. They repeated the process a third and fourth time, each experience more divinely rewarding than the last as far as Tharua was concerned. On their fifth rise into the clouds they went higher than before until the air was thin and cold.

Brrr... it's cold my love! Wrap your wings around me and keep me warm! Tharua declared sexily. She was learning quickly.

Jeth needed no further encouragement and as he slid into Tharua's moist and still swollen sex a fifth time, he gazed into her copper eyes as his wings collapsed hers and they began their plunge to the earth.

We will be together always Tharua my mate! My beautiful and precious mate.

Their coupling was even calmer this time as they plunged through the night air, softer and gentler and infinitely more gratifying. Just before they exploded together Tharua's soft voice filled Jeth's mind.

I will be yours always Jeth! Until eternity ends!

SENATE AUDITORIUM

Whatever Aikiro had expected for this evening was rapidly turning out to be the complete opposite of what she had envisioned.

Their table was set out on the elevated platform at the head of the enormous auditorium with two others, one of which held the entire Leonidas family. It was the first time she had seen them all together, and she committed the faces of each of them to memory. She had expected Leonidas to push their table into a corner somewhere and keep their attendance very low profile. That was not to be the case she saw upon entering and seeing where they were being guided. The third table on the platform held many members of the Union Senate as well as numerous visiting dignitaries from the member planets of the Union. Spread out across the massive expanse of the floor around them were dozens of other tables that held the ambassadors and representatives of nearly every species and government within the Lycavorian Union. Never had she seen so many of those the High Coven considered enemies for so long gathered in one place. Leaders of hundreds of planets, and many of the senior representatives of the Lycavorian Union sitting together, talking and laughing.

Aikiro had been taken aback when first the Folcani Ambassador had approached her, bowing his head and telling her how much they welcomed the Cease Fire, and how he hoped for future relations to build between their governments. Almost immediately following him, dozens of other leaders had approached her and told her of their similar wishes, and how they hoped for a more permanent treaty and perhaps even an Alliance going into the future. Aikiro also learned that many of the Union leaders and senior representatives shared their King's distrust and obvious dislike of the Kavalian people. Aikiro wondered if perhaps Martin Leonidas had somehow talked to these men and women personally and gotten them to say these things to her. She quickly dismissed that as unlikely considering he never once looked in their direction or indicated he had a hand in what was going on, and considering his very well known dislike for politics in general, Aikiro decided it was not something he would have put together.

As with all the tables in the hall, theirs was circular in shape and allowed for all of them to sit looking inward. On their table they found several chilled bottles of the cherry tasting cloned blood that apparently was very popular among the vampires within the Union, and outlawed within the High Coven. No one at their table touched the bottles until Aikiro poured herself a crystal and silver glass of the fluid and drank and drank. She had to admit, the Hadarian witch had developed something very special with this cloned blood. It was exceedingly good and provided all the nutrients and flavor of real blood but appeared as just another glass of wine to the casual glance. Aikiro had brought clothing for an occasion such as this at the last minute, and the light blue dress wrapped around her very firm figure like a second skin. Aikiro was not ashamed to flaunt what she had, not any longer and most certainly not after Tesand had opened so many doors in her life in regards to her sexuality. Yuri and the others had gone out and spent lavishly the credits that were given to them and purchased dresses and attire that was not only exceptionally sexy, but very elegant as well. The Coven Riders and military personnel wore appropriate civilian clothes and were scattered among the remaining tables in the hall, all of the remaining riders together at three tables.

Aikiro lifted her glass of cloned blood and let her dark eyes fall on Martin Leonidas at his table as she brought it to her lips. Aikiro had never met his father King Leonidas, but she had seen images of him. She had met Resumar weeks before he was assassinated, and Aikiro had to admit Martin was the spitting image of both those men, wild savages though they may have been. His own son Androcles looked more like Resumar in many ways, but there was no denying the fact they could almost be brothers in how closely they looked. This... this was the man who had killed her son Xerxes. And a quick death it was not according to Yuri. For all his faults, and there had been many, Xerxes was still her son and this man had killed him brutally and in front of thousands of others. And he had facilitated the defection of her other son as well.

Vonis.

Aikiro's eyes shifted to the handsome face of her youngest son at Martin's table, and the dark haired elven beauty that sat on his left side. This was the female that had taken her son's will and forced him to turn against his people. Va'nimia her name was Aikiro had discovered, and as Aikiro watched her now, clinging to the arm of her son at different periods throughout the dinner so far, Aikiro felt the need to rip the woman's throat out. She had learned through discrete questions that the elven female was a teacher and that she had bore Vonis five children through the years. They maintained a large home here in Sparta very close to the Royal Estate and a home on Apo Prime and they were often seen shopping in the markets with their younger children acting as newlyweds according to the people she had heard talking. She had learned that Vonis was very close with Isabella, often times seen leaving the Estate here in Sparta and the Island Palace on Apo Prime, and now he sat to Isabella's left at the King's table.

Aikiro tried to determine if there was a pecking order of sorts by the way they were sitting at the table. Martin's pureblood Queen Aricia sat to his right and Aikiro had learned that was always the case at official functions. The Hadarian Anja sat beside Aricia while the elven Queen Dysea sat to Martin's left next to Isabella. It was the first time she had seen Dysea, and even Aikiro had to admit her platinum hair and emerald eyes were a sight to look at. This was the elven Queen that shared Isabella's heart nearly as deeply as Martin Leonidas. It was well known and easy enough to discern from the talk of the people within the city that the King and Queens all shared the same bed as well as each other in sexual matters and they were not ashamed of this fact in the least. Aikiro herself had just recently discovered her own taste for the pleasures of female flesh, but that taste did not extend to being the one to give the pleasure. Never once had she touched Toria Dellion in such a way, but she had been very clear and dominating to the red haired intelligence officer when it came to insuring Toria pleased her, something Toria did rather well.

Aikiro let her eyes drift to where Yuri sat next to her. Her oldest daughter and the source of Aikiro's greatest trust. She had bought a soft peach colored dress that outlined her ravishing female figure in a way that she knew Robert would appreciate very much. Her long black hair was pulled entirely over one shoulder and the muscular definition and suppleness of her body was easily seen. Two decades of fighting and being trained by High Coven Weapons Masters as well as her husband had forged Yuri into a very desirable woman. A trait she had passed on to her two daughters Carisia and Lucia, both of whom looked devastatingly beautiful this night. While Yuri may have hated Carisia... it was plain to see that Carisia inherited her mother's devastating beauty though her Asian features were much less prominent. In all honesty Carisia looked more like her father Aikiro admitted to herself. The way she filled out her dress was no doubt why that brute of a husband Thast was practically drooling over her and how she looked in the dark blue v cut she wore. It displayed her large firm breasts prominently as well as her tanned skin. Carisia did not appear comfortable at all in the dress, or more than likely she hated Thast's constant groping and no doubt vile comments he was whispering to her, judging from the look on her face.

Narice had chosen a more conservative, but no less enticing dress that was light tan in color and hugged her lush figure like a second skin. Narice had already proven her mettle and willingness to go head to head with her much older sister. Dante had been wrong and Narice had acted as any good commander would have. Aikiro had no illusions as to Narice's purpose. Dante's actions could very well have put them all in danger, and since that time he had been more subdued and calculating in his actions. No doubt the meeting with his father had also played a role in this, not to mention that he had to shift his focus to the younger of Isabella's daughters with Leonidas. Aikiro glanced at where Zarah sat and noticed that she was every bit as beautiful as her older sister; however she appeared more lean and muscular in many ways. They had discovered that the daughter Carina, while a superb fighter, was directing more of her attentions to tactical matters recently. Zarah appeared to be the one who would blossom into the more definitive warrior of the two.

Narice had also been right when she said she did not have past experiences with the Lycavorians clouding her thinking at times, and this gave her an advantage over Yuri. At least while they remained here on Earth. Aikiro knew Yuri still harbored a deep anger and hatred at Martin Leonidas for expelling her from this planet. She cared not that Leonidas had butchered Xerxes, only that he had forced her to abandon her extensive plans for Earth and what she had been attempting to build. Aikiro felt Yuri's eyes on her and she turned casually to look at her daughter.

"You are deep in thought mother." Yuri spoke softly so that only she could hear her.

Aikiro nodded and leaned closer to her. "Did the young woman who your father had planned for Vonis to marry accompany us Yuri?" She asked.

Yuri allowed a small grin to split her face. "I made sure of it mother. I thought you might want to cause waves with Vonis if you were able. She is among the others at one of the tables here."

Aikiro nodded. "Good. I have been trying to determine if there is some order of hidden importance by how they sit at the table." She spoke.

Yuri glanced at the table almost casually and then turned back to her mother. "With the exception of Aricia... I do not believe there is any order." She spoke. "I have reviewed images of past events like this in their Netnews archives and there is no set way they sit except for Aricia. She is his Soulmate... *Anomes* I believe they are called in their ancient language."

"So she is the most favored?" Aikiro asked.

Yuri shrugged. "It would not appear that way from the way he acts with them no." She replied. "However... she is never far from his side, unlike the others who have duties that take them away at times."

"And we can assume from her lack of appearance here that the second Elven Queen For'mya, she is the one who has left to greet the Kavalians?" Aikiro said.

Yuri nodded. "With the son Resumar... yes." Yuri replied. "Androcles revealed to us later, after you had left, that he would be returning in a few days as an instructor."

"Do you think he will be able to train you and the others?" Aikiro asked.

Yuri lifted her glass of cloned blood and nodded as she sipped. "His skills far surpass even those of Narice and Carisia, and though it pains me to admit it, they are the best trained that we have."

Aikiro smiled. "That you admit that now Yuri is a sign you are growing still." She said softly. "You are far too intelligent to let your emotions rule your actions."

Yuri nodded. "I apologized to Narice for acting as I did." She stated. "She was right that Dante's actions could put us all at risk. Robert had words with him as you know."

Aikiro chuckled softly. "Yes... though I would think Robert's lectures lean more to physical means. Dante has been more subdued and in control of his actions since. Their father has a way of reigning them in it seems."

Yuri nodded with a knowing smile. "Yes he does." She set her glass down. "Why do you think he put us here mother. Next to his table at an event such as this?"

Aikiro smiled knowingly. "Though I'm sure it was suggested to him, it seems that Martin Leonidas has a distinct hatred for the Kavalians that we did not know of. Whether it relates directly to his brother Pleistarchus or Pusintin, whatever he calls himself, I don't know. By putting us here, for all to see, it lends a stronger case that we are here only for the signing of a Cease Fire Agreement."

"Mother... did the thought cross your mind that we may very well have to sign such an accord to keep up appearances?" Yuri asked.

Aikiro nodded. "Oh yes." She said.

Yuri looked at her oddly. "You intend to do this?" She asked surprised.

Aikiro nodded slowly. "Yes."

"But why?" Yuri asked.

[Mindvoice Shielded] *[There are many reasons.]* Aikiro stated.

Yuri looked at her wide eyed. *[He... he will hear us mother!]*

[I have found that the same restrictions I have in penetrating the Mindvoice shields of him and his son works both ways.] Aikiro stated with some humor. *[It is frustrating yes... but the more I thought about it the more I came to understand it.]*

[Understand what?]

[Our powers seem to cancel each other's out.] Aikiro explained. *[At least in terms of shielding our conversations when we concentrate. And neither of us drops our focus when it comes to Mindvoicing in regards to anything, so our abilities act as a reflecting tool of sorts. It is why I could not hear his son when he spoke to Narice and Carisia today. It is why he can not hear us now.]*

Yuri turned her head to look at Martin's table and saw that he was carrying on a rather animated conversation with Vonis and Riall and did not seem to take notice. When Yuri's eyes shifted to Isabella however she saw that was not the case. Isabella's hazel/green eyes were watching them intently.

Aikiro saw her daughter's face and chuckled softly. *[You see.]* She said. *[He dismisses our conversation, but he has no doubt informed his Queens we are speaking shielded. That is why Isabella watches us as she does.]*

[They can not penetrate our connection?] Yuri asked turning back to her.

Aikiro shook her head. *[While they are powerful... his Queens do not have the strength within Mindvoice that Leonidas and his son Androcles does. Not even Aricia... who I sense is only a few notches below Leonidas in her abilities.]*

[Could we breach their shields?] Yuri asked.

Aikiro shook her head. *[Unlikely. Reviewing what I have found in the last few hours, what we have found that applies to Carisia and Narice apply to his Queens as well. They have learned quite extensively how to use the power of their bonds with their dragons to assist and complement their own powers. It is the reason I*

could not penetrate Carisia's shields and more than likely why I would not be able to penetrate Narice's shields either. Not without sedation and many hours of exploring. And even then it would be an extremely hazardous undertaking that could very well kill whoever attempted it as I explained before. They have no doubt put in place traps for those who would try such a thing if they were ever captured by the enemy. Namely us, for the Kavalians do not seem to have the ability to Mindvoice. At least that we are aware of.]

Yuri looked at her. [If that is the case... then why sign an actual Cease Fire? If we are unable to try and determine what they have in mind, why take the chance?]

Aikiro looked at her. [This is not a criticism Yuri, but Narice is correct to a degree in her statement. It is improving, but you still allow your hatred for this man to show through in some respects. I do not know why... but it is there.]

Yuri met her eyes for a long moment before nodding her head slowly. [It is because of many things mother, but primarily because I slept with him.]

[This is something that your father forced upon you Yuri. Even I know this daughter.] Aikiro said.

Yuri nodded. [Yes... but... he...]

[You enjoyed your times with him didn't you?] Aikiro asked.

Yuri looked at her and nodded slowly. [He is built like a bull mother and he knew exactly how to use his cock to make me scream. Even as my mind cried out it was wrong, I loved it. I had to keep from feeding on him several times because I was so lost. At least until Robert came into my life. Then it was much easier to tolerate.]

[Because you actually love Robert Moran. Yes... I see where he would provide you the strength to continue.] Aikiro said.

Yuri nodded slowly. [I never told you mother... but during one of my trips to Earth several months before the comet came I received a message that I thought was from Leonidas. It said to meet him at a specific location on the Earth base. When I did... when I arrived, I found half a dozen others waiting for me. One was a Lycavorian of that I was sure. To this day I am sure it was Martin. He must have found out I was meeting with Robert in secret whenever I came to Earth and that was his way of punishing me. The others held me down while he raped me brutally.]

Aikiro looked stunned. [You know it was him?]

[The only other Lycavorians who I knew at that time were Simpson and the woman Julie. The woman whose DNA was among the group we stole while Marcus controlled the EDEN base?] Yuri told her.

[Yes... I saw the reports. We have since cloned her and removed the Lycavorian genes from her body.] Aikiro said. [Something Leonidas will discover eventually. When I am ready. I can't wait to see the look on his face.]

[Who else could it have been?] Yuri spoke. [Knowing it was him and then having to endure his attentions afterwards as if nothing had happened turned my stomach. I discovered I was pregnant with Lisisa just before the comet came. Only a Lycavorian of pure blood like Martin could have gotten me pregnant mother. Even after I turned Robert we took precautions to insure I did not become pregnant. I have hated him ever since.]

Aikiro nodded slowly. [I assume this is why Robert has similar feelings. He knows?]

Yuri nodded. [Yes.]

[You must bury these feelings Yuri. If we are to succeed, you must bury them deep. It is in the past and while you may still hold a hatred for him, and understandably so, no one here is going to side with you if you were to announce he raped you. They would not believe you.] Aikiro stated calmly. [I will sign a Cease Fire agreement for two reasons. It will insure we have at least a dedicated view inside the workings of their military. Once your training fully begins, you will have chance to view many aspects of this. As will Narice and Toria. The second is because, regardless of my distaste for these animals, I would much prefer to have them on our side. We barely hold our own against the Kavalians now... and if they were to enter the war on the Kavalian side... our days would be numbered.]

[I thought you said Leonidas hates the Kavalians more.] Yuri said.

Aikiro nodded. [He does. At least that is the way he makes it appear outwardly. If our plans succeed and we can get them to enter the war on our side... it would drastically change the entire scope of the war. In our favor.]

Yuri's eyes grew slightly wider as realization hit her. *[And no doubt the Kavalians would see the union as the bigger threat because of their dragons and they would target them almost entirely. Weakening them.]*

Aikiro nodded. *[Yes. I noticed some things today while on that airfield. These Wolves of the Blood, the Durcunusaan soldiers, and many of the others I saw, they move with a certain confidence that I have not seen in our clone troops. They are good... and they know it. That attitude does not come from arrogance; that comes from the Spartan way of training that Leonidas has gone back to.]*

Yuri nodded. *[Like when his father was alive. It is why they were able to slaughter so many of Xerxes precious troops.]*

[They are superbly trained.] Aikiro spoke gently. *[Even more so than when we have encountered them in battle over the centuries your father ruled. The Kavalians would attack them... perhaps devote all their attention on them... and they too would be slaughtered in droves even while they destroyed the Union itself in the process, for these men and women would never surrender. Unlike our some of our forces... they would never give up and they would fight to the very last man and woman.]*

[And we would be there to step in afterwards to pick up the pieces.] Yuri stated with a cruel smile.

Aikiro nodded slowly. *[At least in part.]* She said. *[And if I can somehow find my way to that Mindvoice ship, perhaps completely.]*

[So you are going to stay here then?] Yuri said. *[While we train?]*

Aikiro nodded. *[For a time anyway. I can not linger out of Coven space for the entire nine months. We have too many insurgents and greedy power grubbers among our own people for me to remain away for so long. I will need Robert with me when I return however. Can you tolerate his absence?]*

Yuri nodded. *[I assumed as much.]* She replied. *[I... I feel better now that we have talked mother. Even in the lion's den as we are so to speak. I will be fine.]*

Aikiro smiled and took her hand. *[I know you will be. And I know our people will be closely watched with you here. And you must insure all of them remain focused on their goals. Especially Dante and Javier. That will keep Carisia in line if what you say is true in regards to this unexplained fear she has of him. As long as he maintains his volatile temper and does nothing foolish.]*

[And Narice?]

[Your sister is committed to our goals Yuri.] Aikiro said. *[She may approach them in a different manner than you, but she is beyond me questioning her loyalty. Just as I do not question yours. The two of you are not Vonis.]*

Yuri sighed and nodded her head. *[Yes... I must realize that she is not me and will do things differently, but no less completely.]*

Aikiro nodded. *[Good. Now why don't you go find that young woman and let's see if we can't cause some rough waters in the pond that is the Leonidas family? They have begun dancing it seems... why not let her know to pick a partner and begin dancing as well. She has an equal amount of hatred for your brother.]*

Yuri smiled and nodded as she rose to her feet. *[You are quite devious mother. You do know that don't you?]*

Aikiro chuckled. *[Of course I am. I would not be in the position I am now if I wasn't as devious as you say.]*

The Leonidas table was massive and able to hold forty men and women easily. With the exception of For'mya and Resumar, the table was full. Two complete sets of serving pieces and full glasses of Spartan wine marked where they would have sat had they been here. It was a tradition that Aricia had started almost as soon as they had all come together so many years ago, and it was continued to this day. Anyone who was absent, for whatever the reason, had a setting placed for them regardless to show that they were being thought of always.

It was in the vacant spot that Resumar would have sat that Aikiro now appeared, Yuri and the stunning dark haired woman behind her. The myriad of conversations that were going on began to cease as those at Martin's table took notice of her. She stood there patiently, looking first at Androcles and the young blond woman who clung to his arm. She took note of Carina Leonidas and the young ebony skinned Spartan who she sat next to. Carina was turned in her chair and talking in animated whispers to the red haired female elf and the very pregnant Drow female who she sat next to. Eliani and Nyla, his mother Gorgo and Deia and their mates.

The fleeting thought of what one plasma grenade could do to the entire family as it sat at this one table was enough to send shivers of delight down Aikiro's spine, which she rapidly chased away with the thought of what they would do without the help Martin Leonidas and those who followed him could provide. Vonis and Isabella simply glared at her with blank expressions but hateful eyes.

"Empress Aikiro?" Martin finally spoke as he set his glass down on the table and rose to his feet. "Is there something you need?"

Aikiro shook her head quickly. "No... I just wanted to extend my thanks to you and your family for inviting us to this event. It is not something you had to do." Aikiro took note of several Netnews reporters that had begun filming the exchange and she decided quickly this was not the place for a scene. Not if they wanted to maintain at least some semblance of the cover story they were using. While she may have hated to have to play this game, she didn't doubt Leonidas hated it just as much, but if they were to keep the Kavalians from discovering why they were really here, they needed to play these roles to a tee. If the Kavalians discovered the Union was training their dragons to fight them, the political and military maelstrom that would follow could very well devastate the High Coven. The Kavalians she knew would invade immediately, something her forces were not yet fully prepared for, and Leonidas would pull back any support he was willing to give them regardless of his intense dislike of the Kavalian people and its leaders.

"Considering what we will be signing in several days, I thought it best to show you that there do not need to be hostilities between our people." Martin spoke plainly but Aikiro thought she detected something in his voice. Something different that belied his true feelings, or what she perceived his true feelings to be.

"We would like to take you up on your offer of staying on after we sign the Accords." Aikiro said gracefully. "Perhaps to tour Earth and the cities you have rebuilt through the years. If you would allow us of course?"

Deia stood now from her spot and smiled. "I can arrange that." She spoke.

Yuri stepped forward. "Is it possible to arrange for my children and myself to have such a tour as well?" She asked keeping her voice even and calm. Her mother had sent a calming pulse through Mindvoice to her indicating that nothing was to happen now.

Martin looked at Yuri for a long moment, the Netnews reporters catching this on the vid/cameras. "I think we can arrange that Princess Yuri." He spoke finally. "You look exquisite tonight... both of you do if you don't mind me saying so."

Aikiro noticed his complimentary words caused Isabella and several others to flinch almost imperceptibly and she almost smiled at that. She nodded her head to him as Yuri forced out the reply.

"Thank you for the compliment." Yuri answered.

Martin looked at the young woman. "Who is this?" He asked.

The young woman stepped forward before Aikiro or Yuri could reply. She was not Mindvoice adept and neither of them had yet signaled to her that nothing was supposed to take place that would cause a scene.

"Hello Vonis." She spoke directly as her blue eyes fell on Vonis where he sat.

Vonis met the woman's eyes and nodded his head. "Delazana." Vonis answered flatly. "You are looking well."

The young woman snorted in disgust. "No thanks to you." She spat. "Do you know what I went through after you left?"

Va'nimia looked confused and she turned to Vonis gripping his arm tighter in the process. "*Man sina firiel verno?*" She asked speaking in the elven language. (Who is this woman husband?)

Vonis turned to look at her and smiled easing the look of concern on Va'nimia's face considerably. "*Sina na firiel ni le ontaro méra.*" He answered in fluent elven which surprised both Yuri and his mother. (This is the woman I told you my father wanted me to marry.)

Va'nimia's head snapped back around to look at Delazana and her face took on a decidedly darker expression. "*Se si vamma avahaira vanya ve elye squen.*" (She is not as beautiful as you said she was.)

Vonis chuckled as Dysea and several others gasped humorously at Va'nimia's words. He leaned over and nuzzled her four inch long elven ear and her blue eyes closed in delightful sensations. "*Vamma ve le irima Va'nimia.*" (Not like you my lovely Va'nimia.)

"*Zhah nindol l'darthirii ssindossa dos zet uns'aa whol?*" Delazana hissed out the words. (Is this the elf whore you left me for?)

Va'nimia's eyes sprang open then and her blue eyes grew dark with anger. "*Ka dos zhahen natha trantz j'nesst dos orn'la zhaun vel'drav dosst nesst yikssus uk ssinssrinil folbol alur.*" She snarled viciously. (If you were a real woman, you would know when your man wanted something better.)

Isabella almost choked on the glass of wine she was holding and Eliani and Nyla burst out laughing as Delazana's eyes grew wide.

"Yes... I speak your language bitch!" Va'nimia spoke firmly. "My husband..." Va'nimia gripped Vonis's arm tightly. "*My husband* taught me your language so that we could teach *our five children* about both their heritages and cultures." Va'nimia leaned closer to Vonis, relishing in his body pressed against hers and how he made no move to lean away. "He feeds on *my* blood in our bed when we make love... and it is so incredibly divine. It is *my* body he holds close to chase away the chill of the night air. Your angry words will not get him back. You will never get him back for he is mine. If you were smart... you would leave our presence now, before you say something incredibly stupid which will force me to beat you silly in front of everyone here. While it would hardly make me blink, I do know that the King does not enjoy blood while he eats."

Martin had remained silent throughout the exchanged and at the mention of his name he shook his head quickly. "Ah no... no I don't."

Delazana opened her mouth to retort but Aikiro took her arm. "Forgive us." She spoke quickly as she pulled the woman back. "Forgive me Vonis. I only thought to..."

"No mother..." Vonis said meeting her eyes. "You did not think. If you thought to entice me with what I left behind... you will find that what I have here... what I have built here..." Vonis once more leaned over and nuzzled Va'nimia's elven ear. "Far outweighs anything that I left behind in that life."

Aikiro looked at him. "Would... would you at least entertain a few moments of your mother's time while I am here?"

"For what purpose?" Vonis asked.

"So that I may... so that I may see you." Aikiro answered.

Vonis looked at Va'nimia. She smiled brilliantly and kissed him softly. "It is your decision my husband." She said.

Vonis turned back to Aikiro. "I will send you a message tomorrow mother and we'll see what we can arrange."

Aikiro nodded. "Thank you." She spoke. She turned to look at Martin. "Once more King Leonidas... thank you for the opportunity to be here."

Martin nodded slowly. "Sure." He said as Aikiro turned and she moved back to her table. Yuri followed after a last glance at Martin, pulling the young woman with her. Martin leaned back in his chair and blew out a long breath. "Well... that was interesting." He said.

Isabella turned her head and glared at him for a moment. He met her eyes and looked confused. "What?" He asked.

Isabella shook her head and pushed her chair back from the table, getting to her feet and leaving the table.

Martin sipped his wine and set the glass down on the table. "Shit!" He muttered.

Dysea, Anja and Aricia all turned to look at him even as he was already getting to his feet. He lifted his hand at their worried expressions.

"I'll be back." He spoke softly. "This is something I have to do."

Isabella stepped onto the private patio behind the auditorium and let the cool breeze flow across her skin. She moved to the railing that overlooked the Evrotas River two stories below and gazed down at the promenade that ran along the opposite bank. It was filled with men, women and children walking along the wooden boardwalk along the rivers edge as the nearly full moon provided ample light even with the light clouds that dotted the sky. Having Yuri and the High Coven here was affecting her more than she thought, stirring up memories that she had long ago buried. Her super sensitive vampire hearing still worked perfectly even in her charged emotional state and she heard his heart beating calmly and powerfully as he came up behind her moving like a phantom in the night. She could pick his heartbeat and those of her fellow Queens out of a crowd

of thousands easily, so attuned was she to them. His heart never raced, never changed from the strong, calm pulse as it beat within his chest unless they were involved in some very passionate encounters. It was one of the things she so loved about him. How he could remain so very calm and in control even in the most trying circumstances.

“Bella?” Martin spoke softly.

“Exquisite?” Isabella snarled angrily as she whirled around quickly and spat the word. “You said she looked exquisite!” She glared at him with anger in her hazel/green eyes. “What kind of *nubous* compliment was that?”

“What was I supposed to say?” Martin spoke as he stepped up to her even in the midst of her obvious anger. Isabella was almost as tall as Dysea and she could almost look him directly in the eye. “I couldn’t say what I wanted to say.”

“And what was that Martin?” Isabella barked. “What did you want to say to her? That you appreciate she bought that dress... that *we* bought that dress *for* her... so she could flaunt her big tits in your face! Maybe make you think of old times?”

“I prefer your tits.” Martin stated quickly with a smile. “They are much firmer and you taste far better.”

Isabella glared at him. “Oh... that’s so very romantic!” She hissed.

Martin’s face changed then to one of seriousness and he gazed at her intently. Isabella was his pureblood vampire Queen and the one less likely to show intense emotion of all the women he loved and cherished. She was closest to him in terms of thinking and in a very real way she represented the darker side of Martin Leonidas. Isabella was blunt and plain talking and on more than one occasion had angered some of the more sensitive politicians within the Union with either her words or actions. Personality wise, she was more like him in many respects. She was the most respected and well thought of among the military of the Union, for she thought like a military man in most regards, and had led an entire Fleet Group including two Ground Attack Divisions during the Evolli War. She did not often show emotions like this outside of the privacy of their home.

“Bella... what is wrong?” He finally asked softly.

“You are my *m'ranndii!*” She spat. “You don’t know? You should know these things! You should...”

Martin stepped close to her and wrapped his arms around her body, pulling her tightly into his embrace. Isabella tried to push him away for the briefest of moments but then she surrendered to the feelings that swept through her whenever he took her in his arms. She pressed her body against his as his cheek rested against the top of her head and he stroked her long dark hair.

“I know that right now you have a lot of anger surging through you.” He spoke softly. “I know that something has really got you worked up and it has to do with Yuri and the High Coven. I also know that I do not like to see you like this because you are my *'ranndi* and my mate. Now please tell me why you are so agitated, because contrary to popular belief I can not read minds Bella. Even those of the ones I love more than my own life.”

“I... I am angry... I am angry because she got you first!” Isabella spoke. “And whether you see it or not, she will always flaunt that in front of me. It is the only reason she bought a dress like that Martin. If you had not... if you had not said what you did I would have been fine and tolerated her pathetic attempts at... but you...”

“But like I normally do... I stuck my big size eleven in my mouth like a *riad aulved*.” Martin said.

“I know you spoke only for political show but...” Isabella pulled her head away from his chest and looked up into his face.

“I’m sorry Bella.” He said softly.

Isabella shook her head slowly. “It is not your fault. I... even after all these years she is still able to get under my skin. I hate the fact that she met you first. I hate how she used you and...”

Martin took her face in his hands. “Bella... I have wanted you since the first day you came into our lives... my life.” He told her softly. “Yuri may be your half sister... but to be perfectly honest... she does not begin to compare to you. Not in any way. I understand why you feel this way... but the only vampire I want in my bed and my life is you Bella. You are not Yuri; you are far more than Yuri will ever be. More than she could ever hope to obtain. That is why I love you. She did not have me first Bella. She never had me at all.”

“You shared a bed with her for two years Martin.” She spoke.

Martin nodded slowly. "Yes... but she never got what was inside me." He told her lifting his hand to caress her cheek. "You are the only sister who got that Isabella Leonidas. You are the only vampire I have surrendered that too. The only vampire who has ever or will ever taste my blood and I believe that is the biggest sign of partnership among even the High Coven isn't it?"

Isabella nodded slowly. "Yes."

"You are the only vampire who will ever have that Isabella. And you will be the only vampire to have my children. You are not just a vampire to me... you never have been. You are an exceedingly gorgeous woman Bella and my wife." Martin said running a finger along her lips. "As for what Yuri believes... we both know the truth behind that. You know the truth and that should be your strength. *Melda Min* says we were meant to be together, all of us. That it was driven by fate and destiny. Do you believe her when she says that?"

"I... I didn't at first." Bella answered softly. "As the years passed I have come to believe it strongly. Anja... For'mya... they both descend from royalty, as do you and your blood... their blood, it tastes so much sweeter to me because of this. It would to any vampire. *Ussta* she-elf... she is like a fine wine I can not do without, and Aricia... when I feast on her it is like a combination of you and she because you are *Anomes*."

Martin nodded. "I do not even begin to try and understand it." He said gently. "I accept it because it makes me whole... and that is what matters to me. Yuri could be standing naked in front of me Bella... and I could be under the spell of some love potion number nine... and I would still only want you."

Isabella looked at him oddly. "What is this Love Potion Number nine? I have never heard of such a thing."

Martin chuckled softly. "It's something I heard when I was small I think. From a song in Earth's history."

"That is a very strange song *m'ranndii*." She stated.

Martin leaned over and kissed her softly. "Let go of these thoughts that you cling too Bella." He said softly. "They are not you... and they most certainly are not the truth."

Isabella smiled brightly. "I see your time with Helen has given you a more philosophical tone to your words sometimes."

Martin grinned. "As painful as her teachings are I'm surprised I'm not half crazy already with what she makes me read."

"You can not become half crazy Martin, you already are half crazy." Isabella said reaching up to take his face in her hands.

Martin grinned as he pulled her closer, feeling her lush body against his. "So I've been told. And I'm about to do something crazy right now."

"What do you mean?" Isabella asked as she felt his hands begin to stroke her lower back and the curves of her firm ass. She felt her own desire ignite and she looked at him. "Martin Leonidas... what... what are you doing?"

Martin smiled and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek and the side of her neck. "I've suddenly developed a burning need for my breathtakingly beautiful vampire wife." He growled out the words. "A need I intend to quench right now."

"Martin... we can't!" Isabella exclaimed. "We will... people will see us! You..." Her words were lost then as his lips came down on hers in a feverish kiss, his arms pulling her tightly to him and his hands deftly working at the fastenings of the dress she wore. Isabella's own desire surged almost out of control as his tongue probed and teased and tasted. She could feel the burning inside him, his need and desire for her, and Isabella scolded herself for acting as she had.

Isabella groaned against his demanding kiss as his hand pushed aside the lower portion of her two piece dress and she felt the warmth of his hands grasp her firm ass cheeks. The tips of his fingers caressed the edges of her now exceptionally moist pussy, her pierced clit responding to the heat that was rippling through her now. It was a heat that Isabella knew would only grow in intensity until he was inside her. Her hands dropped quickly to the front of his pants, all thoughts of being seen gone from her mind now. She wanted her husband right now, and she would not be denied. She gasped against his powerful kiss as she freed his beautiful cock. Twelve wonderfully thick inches that filled her in a way she had never imagined any man could. Even after twenty-five years being together, he could still do things to her that made her scream out in ecstasy. She felt his hands

tighten on her ass cheeks and he was lifting her off the ground, her groans of delight very audible as he dragged her pussy up along the entire length of his massive cock.

The emerald piercing she wore in the hood of her clitoris was a gift from Dysea many years ago, just as the diamond one Dysea wore was a gift from Isabella. Martin knew just what to do to both of them with their pierced clits to make them barely able to hold onto whatever control they had. Dragging his deliciously long and thick cock, throbbing with life and passion, along their clits was without a doubt the fastest way to make them come. Tonight was no different, and even as he finished and poised the bulbous head of his massive woman pleaser at the now soaked entrance of her engorged pussy, Isabella was groaning in the intensity of the orgasm ripping through her.

Isabella wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and tore her lips from his. "We... we must be quick my love!" She gasped next to his ear. "They... they will notice we are... we are gone! Do... do not hold back!"

"The... the shadows Bella!" Martin's voice was nearly a growl, his cock throbbing so hard it was almost painful. "Wrap... wrap us in the shadows!" He gasped loudly just before he pulled Isabella's hips down.

Her eyes flew open in rapture as she felt every searing hot and incredibly thick length of his cock fill her in one plunge. She retained enough presence of mind to wave her arm quickly, engulfing them within the shadows of the night before she surrendered to him completely.

Isabella could only hold on in blissful wonder as Martin slammed into her again and again, his hips almost a blur. She wrapped her long legs around his waist, locking her ankles at the small of his back as he raised and lowered her hips with dominating power upon his steel hard cock. Every downward pull smashed her swollen and over excited clit against his hard pelvic bone, sending electric currents of pleasure through her entire body. Her pussy sucked hard on his massive tool every time he withdrew. Twenty-five years and even now Isabella was still helpless within this man's grasp. His huge cock filled in ways she had never imagined, stretching her to the point of splitting her apart it seemed. The waves of building pleasure only increased in intensity as he slammed into her harder still, the wet slapping sounds of their hips coming together and their low groans of pleasure able to be heard. Isabella's passion filled eyes could see faces turn to look at the patio from the river bank wondering what was going on, but not able to see anything. This fact only caused her to shudder more, the orgasms riding atop one another like waves crashing onto the rocks. His fingers were bruising her skin with the power of his grip on her hips, but the pain from that was lost in the wash of pleasure ripping through her.

Isabella knew she was not like their other lovers, and there were times when she just needed her husband to pound her senseless with his massive cock. She cared not for the bruises they would give each other in such a coupling, and neither did Martin. Perhaps it was part of her vampire nature, or that of the hard life she had been raised with, but regardless of the reason when she needed Martin to just simply fuck her silly he instinctively knew this and gave her just what she wanted.

This was one of those times now.

Later tonight she knew they would enjoy a gentler loving making, and then she planned to feast on Anja's royal blood while they pleased each of their other mates. Right now however it was just them, and Martin was taking full advantage of this fact. He was adorning her neck and throat with nibbles and kisses, even as he used her body there on the patio. Isabella didn't care... the pleasure screaming through her was undeniable and only he was able to do this to her. Isabella felt his cock beginning to swell within the depths of her pussy.

"Be... Bella!" He croaked out her name even as he continued to hammer his cock into her.

Isabella's eyes grew wide as she clawed at the collar of his uniform to expose his straining neck. Her eyes changed to cobalt blue as she saw his thick vein pulsing beneath his skin. Her eyes nearly disappeared into the back of her head as he slammed into her now, the contentment of his powerful strokes into her pussy nearly overwhelming her considerable control. She felt her own powerful orgasm approaching like some meteor from the stars, and then it was upon her in a flash. Her stomach clenched painfully and she drove her hips down as hard as she could. Martin's arms crushed her lithe body to his and she felt his cock swell impossibly large inside her as his scorching hot come raced up the length. She heard her husband grown loudly just as the first eruption blasted into her velvety depths and Isabella sank her vampire fangs into the vein on his neck.

The pleasure for both of them increased three fold, his explosions more powerful and lasting longer as his come flooded into her clenching belly. Isabella's eyes did roll into the back of her head now as the dual pleasure of feeling his come filling her and drinking the rich spicy flavor of his blood as it flooded her throat nearly made her pass out. His hand came up quickly, holding her head in place against his neck without fear. This was something only Isabella had ever done, and as his words a few moments ago flashed back into her mind and his hand pressed her head closer, she felt tears come to her cobalt blue eyes. He had no fears of her taking too much of his blood. He trusted her completely and knew she would stop as soon as the pleasure ebbed even a little for either one of them. Martin was simply content to ride that wave of incredible pleasure, his own eyes changed and his dual fangs exposed and looking upwards into the sky through the veil of shadows she had wrapped around them. He loved them all with everything that he was, and he would never forsake any of them. Each of them did something different to only make those feelings stronger and more eternal. He would never be the same if any of them were lost to him. He would survive, but he would never be the same.

Martin Leonidas had sworn long ago that none of them would ever be lost to him unless it was completely out of his control to stop.

It was the one promise Martin Leonidas never had any intentions of breaking.

As he felt Bella slow her feeding and slowly withdraw her fangs, the last of his come filling her depths, he smiled. Her warm tongue danced across the two puncture marks on his neck sealing them instantly, and her strong arms wrapped around his shoulders even tighter as she buried her face in his long hair. Martin stepped carefully to the railing and leaned against it. As long as she kept the shadows around them, he would hold her for as long as she wished and simply enjoy the warmth of her body and how she felt within his arms.

The State Dinner could wait. It was not more important to him than his beautiful vampire wife and mate and her needs.

The Dinner had begun with a wondrous meal for dozens of different species and cultures. Almost all known species within the Union were represented somehow, and while conversation continued through several courses, Martin and Isabella returned to their table. No one but her fellow Queens took note of the look of extreme satisfaction and adoring love in her eyes for the man who had escorted her back and they smiled knowingly. Aikiro had remained silent for the most part as she took in everything around them, including the return of Martin and Isabella. The relaxed atmosphere was not something she was used to at events like this, for within the High Coven they were much more formal and guided. Here however, here it appeared that with the exception of when everyone was eating, soft music from the nearby band was filtering through the hall and male and females of every species thought nothing of getting up from their chair and visiting with others. Many even openly approached the Leonidas table and spoke either with Martin, Deia or one of the Queens. While she could easily pick out the Durcunusaan soldiers in civilian clothes scattered throughout the hall, none of them were visibly armed and while they appeared to be very alert, they were mingling with the many people as well. She watched as the Queens and Martin Leonidas sampled food from each other's plates, at times feeding each other morsels and commenting to each other. There was soft laughter from among their children who sat at the table as they talked amongst themselves. Her dark eyes fell upon Androcles Leonidas where he sat. The golden blond hair of his mate shimmered in the light and she leaned against his side affectionately as she spoke with Eliani and her pureblood lover Nyla. The youngest daughter of Leonidas and Isabella, Zarah she now knew her name to go along with her face, sat on the other side of Androcles and they appeared to be heavily involved in a conversation with his half elf sister and brother Normya and Arrarn. They were the pilots in the family.

Aikiro prided herself on her memory and being able to remember things and she had committed the names of the older Leonidas children to memory, but this was the first time she was able to match all their faces to live people and she did this with exceeding detail. She reached out within Mindvoice, letting her perceptions just drift on the air and while she knew the Mindvoice abilities of his children were powerful, she didn't realize just how powerful until now. The most powerful pulses were coming from Martin and his pureblood Queen Aricia, and then Androcles and surprisingly his new mate Sadi. The four of them radiated within Mindvoice like beacons. The drop in power was significant from Androcles to his next sibling, but even still, Lisisa followed by Denali and then Eliani and her lover far outweighed what any of Yuri's children were capable of. What surprised her more than anything was that Narice and Carisia registered very close to Androcles in terms of raw

power being generated. Narice she expected this from, but that it also came from Carisia was something of a surprise. As she allowed herself to drift within the threads of Mindvoice she also noticed that amazingly, the threads that were her granddaughter Carisia were somehow reaching across the distance and entwining with those of Androcles and his mate.

Aikiro cut her eyes to where Carisia sat and watched her as she ate from her plate and exchanged small talk with Toria Dellion. She seemed completely unaware, yet Aikiro knew better. Carisia was far stronger within Mindvoice than she led everyone to believe, and her bond with her dragon Anthar prevented Aikiro from discovering just how much stronger she was. Aikiro hadn't been able to breach Carisia and Anthar's shields for many years now, and that fact alone made her, if not a dangerous factor, then certainly an unknown. Aikiro had no doubts she could breach her shields eventually, but as she had told Yuri, it would require much concentration and they would have to be kept sedated that entire time. That alone troubled Aikiro, for aside from Leonidas, his son and herself; she had never come across Mindvoice shields as intricate and powerful as those of her daughter Narice and of Carisia.

Aikiro turned back to the large Leonidas table at the sound of laughter and saw Isabella leaning into Vonis and laughing loudly as Vonis's elven wife was running her fingers through his hair and joining in the laughter. Vonis appeared embarrassed by something and his arms were crossed over his broad chest, his face playfully sullen.

"Aikiro?" Tesand's soft whisper caused her to turn and look at him. "You seem very distracted."

Aikiro nodded slowly as she studied Tesand's face.

Aikiro had not told Yuri everything in regards to Tesand, for it was better if she did not know everything. Her feelings for the handsome pureblood Admiral had grown stronger through the years, far stronger than she had first expected, and far more powerful than anything she had ever felt for Veldruk. Yuri had been correct in saying he was protective of her, though not overbearing in that protectiveness. He knew what she was capable of, for he had been there when she butchered Veldruk with barely a pause, but this did not deter him from his actions in regards to her. Aikiro welcomed his dominance in their bed, she relished in what he made her feel, but he also knew his place in the greater scheme of things. She had an empire to govern, and his purpose was to support her in that endeavor, something he did unequivocally. Though it was not widely known outside her inner circle of advisors, there was a growing insurgency among the people of the High Coven. Several of them in fact. One group wanted to surrender completely to the Kavalians and end the over two decades of war in the hopes the Kavalians would allow them to live peacefully under their rule. This was not something any sane person would agree to since it was well known the KFI's stated goals were to destroy every vampire alive. The more troublesome of the insurgent groups and the one that had more influence was the one that wanted the High Coven to reach out to others for aide, to put aside their conquering ways and form alliances that would help them grow and shake off the stagnant policies of the past and allow them to finally defeat the Kavalian Empire.

This was the group that had tried to assassinate Aikiro four times in the last two decades, and it was during the last attempt that Aikiro saw Tesand's true feelings for her. He had discovered the plot against her quite by accident and without so much as a warning to others, or help from military forces, Tesand had disappeared for a three week stretch that saw the violent deaths of several prominent High Coven officials. He had come close to the actual leader of this insurgency, closer than ever before, but that leader had eluded him. He had told her afterwards of what he had done, and Aikiro could not help the flush of emotions that had coursed through her then. Emotions she had never allowed herself to feel before that day, and certainly not emotions that Veldruk had ever seen. Aikiro had worshiped him in their bed for days upon his return, doing whatever it was he desired of her to please him. It was her way of showing him what he meant to her, and even though she could never show that publicly, Tesand now knew where he stood within Aikiro's life.

Aikiro nodded slowly. "I'm exploring within Mindvoice." She answered softly knowing he would understand what she meant.

"Anything I should be aware of?" He asked.

Aikiro shook her head. "I'm not entirely sure." She replied. "If you mean threats to us... no... surprisingly I can sense very little in the way of hostile emotions that are directed at our table. More curiosity than anything else."

“I would think that is a good thing.” Tesand spoke softly. “We certainly don’t need to be looking over our shoulders while we are in the middle of enemy territory. At least not anymore than we already are.”

Aikiro nodded. “Yes... I agree.” She said. “Do you concur with Narice that we should put what plans we have in motion on hold Tesand?”

“No.” He answered immediately. “I do think we need to be very careful in how we proceed however. Perhaps more subtly will provide more answers to the questions we have.”

“Then you and Robert have seen nothing outwardly from the soldiers we see walking the streets that indicate major technological advancements?” Aikiro asked.

“Robert and I spent a good portion of the afternoon when we returned from the airfield just drifting from one café to the next, observing the Spartans we saw.” Tesand said. “We saw nothing like what Narice described either in use or on the Spartans. We did however see much advancement in engineering practices and how the newer buildings have been constructed within the city and some of the infrastructure needed. I don’t expect them to flaunt any military advances they have openly.”

“The ability to intercept our ship to ship transmissions doesn’t concern you?” She asked. There were times when Aikiro loved to pick the brains of Tesand and Robert in regards to military matters, for they were perhaps two of the most brilliant tacticians she had ever known.

Tesand shook his head. “Robert and I have already determined how it was done and have issued orders to randomly modulate our communications frequency.” He said. “I don’t believe that is something we can attribute to the Mindvoice ship. I studied the profiles of everyone associated with Leonidas for the last twenty plus years. This Admiral O’Connor... their overall Operations Commander... I would compare him to Pontal with his innovativeness and ability to adept. The man was a genius when he was on Earth... and he is even more of a genius now with the advancements he was handed. I believe their ability to intercept our transmissions was something he came up with and not something that came from the Mindvoice ship. What Narice saw however, that I believe is something they have derived from that ship and learned how to use. Whatever it is.”

“A personal Shroud Shield?” Aikiro asked.

Tesand shook his head. “Narice still should have been able to detect his heartbeat, even faintly.” He answered. “I believe it to be some sort of teleporting device from the way she described it.”

Aikiro turned back to look at Martin. “Now that is something I believe he would use for military purposes.” She said softly.

Tesand nodded. “He would be a fool not too, and I don’t see him being the fool. Most definitely it would give them a great advantage.” He said in agreement. “And combined with the normal training each Spartan receives... if these devices are mass produced they could possibly insert hundreds of these Spartans behind enemy lines and wreak havoc wherever they go.”

“Could this be how they defeated so many Kavalian troops Tesand?” Aikiro asked him, her eyes still on Martin and where he sat nuzzling Aricia’s ear and cheek.

Tesand shrugged. “If that is truly what this device is... yes that would go a long way in explaining how they defeated them so soundly. I don’t see how those agents we have in place within the Kavalian military would not have reported this back to us however Aikiro. Granted some of them are not trustworthy but...”

Aikiro turned back to look at Tesand. “Perhaps because Leonidas and those with him slaughtered the Kavalian dogs to the last man.” She stated plainly. “They left no survivors Tesand. That was reported on their own Netnews channels when it happened. Leonidas gave that information to them and insured they reported it; you can be confident of that. And he gave it to them so the Kavalians would take heed. He sent them a message.”

Tesand nodded slowly. “Yes... there is that to consider. No survivors would mean no information got back to the KFI. Which means the Kavalians are blissfully unaware of this technological advancement as well? You think the Kavalians have avoided the Union because of this single battle at its results?”

Aikiro nodded. “Five-to-one odds against them and Martin Leonidas hands those Kavalians bastards their collective backsides?” She stated with an impressive smile. “If you were Pusintin and Keleru, what would you do?”

“Avoid them at all costs.” Tesand answered immediately.

Aikiro nodded with him. “The question remains however, was Arrarn Leonidas’s use of this device planned to show us that we are not considered as great a threat to them, or did he do it unwittingly, showing off in some manner to our people.”

“He is said to be one of the calmer and reserved members of this family. Considering his position and skills...” Tesand spoke thoughtfully. “I believe he did this to send us a message as well. A message that they perhaps no longer fear us Aikiro.”

Aikiro nodded. “Perhaps... or was it intended as something else?” She said softly.

“I got a very quick scan of the *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser that escorted us here before we were ordered to power down our sensor arrays. The ship is a match for our *BLOOD REVERENCE* Class easily... which means it is an equal match for the Kavalian *GREATSOUL*-Class Dreadnought as well.”

“And?” Aikiro asked.

“Aikiro... they have three hundred and nineteen of these ships that we *know* of. Every single one of them saw combat in the Evolli War.” Tesand said softly. “Leonidas may be many things Aikiro my Empress... but when it comes to making war... the man is methodic. He is planning for something... and us being here, at least in part, tells me that whatever it is he is planning for, it is not against us.”

Aikiro looked at him intently. “You believe this truly?”

Tesand nodded. “There is an old adage that Yuri brought back from Earth with her that I have heard her use a few times over the years. ‘The enemy of our enemy is our friend.’ You have said yourself that he harbors a great deal of hatred for the Kavalians and we do not know why.”

“I have suspicions.” Aikiro spoke. “Nothing to really base them on. Just feelings that I have.”

Tesand nodded. “Suspicions and feelings do not win victories Aikiro my love.” He said softly.

Aikiro’s eyes grew a little wider at his words. “Tesand!” She exclaimed just as softly.

Tesand dropped his eyes from her face. “Forgive me... I...”

Aikiro dropped her hand under the table quickly and took his weathered one in hers. “No Tesand, do not apologize.” She said gently shaking her head. “Your words mean a great deal to me. More than I am allowed to show you unfortunately. More than I am able to show you Tesand. I do not... just know that I want nothing to change between you and I... you have filled a void I once had and while I may never show it... in some ways I don’t know how to show it... know that it is you that have done this. Thank you Tesand.”

He nodded. “For eternity Aikiro... you never need doubt that.” He said.

Aikiro smiled and nodded her head to him acknowledging his words. “Perhaps we should have Dante approach the younger Leonidas daughter in a more reserved way based on what you have told me.” She said as she turned back to look at Martin not releasing Tesand’s hand under the table. “Narice may be right in her thoughts.” She said softly. “Perhaps we will not need to use our secondary plans to their fullest extent. Perhaps another direction is needed.”

“What do you mean?” Tesand asked.

“I will use what we know against him, to help the believability of the intelligence we gave them.” Aikiro said with a smile. “You still have a secure means of communication with our ships correct?”

Tesand nodded. “Always.”

“Contact the Commander of the *Venorik Elghinn*.” Aikiro said. “I want a Kill Order issued.”

“A Kill Order? For... for some member of the Kavalian delegation?” Tesand asked with questions in his eyes.

“I want the order to appear as if it came from the High Coven traitors we know of within the Kavalian military.” Aikiro said. “The ones we know that have openly and unashamedly sided with the Kavalians. We can create havoc among two enemies with one stroke.”

“That could take several weeks to arrange Aikiro.” Tesand spoke.

“Yes I know. We have the time however. I don’t imagine once the Kavalian delegation arrives here they will be leaving anytime soon. Their true purpose will be to find out why we are here.” Aikiro stated. “Leonidas knows that as well and that is why he will shield us as best as he is able. The dragons and riders primarily.”

“I will make it so.” Tesand said with a nod. “Who is to be the target?”

Aikiro looked at him with a smile. “Why Tesand... I am of course.” She stated calmly even as his dark eyes grew wide in stunned shock.

“And avoid the border of The Wilds.” Arrarn was telling Normya as they sat at the table and sipped their mother’s coffee. “Especially the Deltron Cluster. Without LSD coils providing additional power you’ll barely be able to maneuver with the gravity bubbles scatter all over.”

“Arrarn... I know!” Normya shook her head laughing softly. “You are such a worry wart.”

“He knows you can be impetuous at times sister.” Andro’s voice filled her ears from behind and she turned as he squatted next to her chair. “He wants to insure you remain safe. You will be flying a damaged ship Normya.”

Normya nodded. “Yes I know. And Toral has already plotted a course to avoid all the danger zones.” She replied. “He is an excellent co-pilot Andro.”

Andro leaned over and nuzzled her cheek. “He is not our sister.”

Normya giggled like when she was small as she felt Andro’s facial hair scrap her cheek. “I will be calm and in control!” She stated. “I will check in every six hours. Both of you need to stop worrying! It’s not my first solo flight!”

“It is over such a long distance.” Arrarn corrected her. “With your coils it would take you two days combined with the new gates. Without your coils it will take you at least four.”

“And it’s still faster than waiting for a new shipment of parts to arrive from Apo Prime.” Normya declared.

“Did Zarah find out anything about that?” Andro asked sipping his glass of wine. “Why there is such a deficiency?”

Normya shook her head. “It appears to be just an ordering screw up.” She answered. “She’s going to look into it further when you guys get settled at the southern base.”

Andro nodded. “Give our father an extra hug when you leave tonight.” He said.

Normya looked at him oddly. “Why? He knows I’m going.” She said.

She saw both her older brothers nod their heads. “Yes... however he does not know the ship is damaged.” Arrarn told him. “I sort of forgot to tell him and mother. They would never allow it... you know that, not without a full squadron to escort you. At least not yet. We... Andro and I have faith in your abilities however sister... and that is why we did not tell him.”

“Consider this your final exam Normya.” Andro spoke with a smile. “Get the ship and yourself to Apo Prime in one piece, get her repaired and then bring your tail back here with a repaired *TYPE II* and you can step into your role as *STRIKER* Flight Leader on the *PILLAR OF FAITH* with no one having questions about your skills or judgment.”

Normya looked at her older brothers and couldn’t help but beam. They were right in that neither their father nor their mothers would allow her to take a damaged ship so far without an escort. She was still very young and while her skills far surpassed most senior pilots, Normya knew she needed experience and seasoning. She would be the first one to admit that. Now her brothers were giving her that opportunity. She leaned over and hugged Andro tightly, kissing his cheek before doing the same to Arrarn.

“Thank you for believing in me.” She said softly.

Andro chuckled. “It’s not you I’m worried about.” He said. “It’s the pitiful fools who happen to stumble across your path in the future.”

“You do realize she takes after mother in the way she flies?” Arrarn said looking at Andro. “They speak of mother and Endith in reverent whispers about what they can make a *STRIKER* do... and Normya is just as methodic and surreal.”

Andro nodded as he looked at his sister and squeezed her hand. “Yes I know. Let’s just wait until you have a few years under your belt before you start pulling some of the flying stunts that mother and Endy have pulled off through the years. Promise?”

Normya chortled with love and nodded her head. “I promise.”

“I’m sorry for taking Zarah away from you.” Andro said. “I will need her abilities if we are to train these Coven riders well enough to keep from dying the moment they enter battle. Carina is going to be handling the Operations Training Board and Zarah will need to help me instruct them.”

Normya nodded. “She is looking forward to it.” She said. “Just watch out for her Andro. Our Coming of Age is soon and she is very excited about finally being able to test the ‘gene pool’ as she puts it when our First Phase finally passes.”

Andro smiled. “I will don’t worry.” He leaned over again and kissed her cheek as he got to his feet. “Contact Res when you pass Gate Three Nine. He and mother will be heading back here by then and just touch base with him.”

Normya nodded. “I will.” She said. She smiled brilliantly as her brother smiled and turned to head back to where Sadi was sitting with her two cadet friends. She turned back to Arrarn, her emerald eyes taking on a more serious look. “I’m nervous Arrarn.” She said. “I won’t be able to sleep tonight.”

Arrarn grinned at her and rose to his feet as well. “I figured as much.” He said holding out his hand to her. “That’s why I got you, me and Zarah a nice table on top of your *TYPE II*. We are going to go there, take in the sights and smells of the hanger and relax as only we pilots can.”

Normya grinned as she saw Zarah look over and begin getting to her feet. She stood up and took her brother’s hand. “Is this what mother did for you?” She asked.

Arrarn nodded. “The night before my final test flight. It was the most relaxing time I had spent in months and it allowed me to focus enough to pass my final without blowing up my instructor or crashing into any buildings. Since she could not be here, she wanted me and Zarah to make sure we did it for you in her stead. And to make sure you knew she is very proud of you.”

Normya smiled as she stepped up under his powerful arm to hug him and Zarah came up to them. “I got our stuff ready at the south entrance.” She said.

Arrarn put his arm around her waist as well and looked at Normya. “We’ll wait there while you say goodbye to father and our mothers.” He stated. “And hurry up... Andro and I snuck a case of the beer Uncle Daniel has made for special occasions out of his stock with Aunt Anuk’s help, but it won’t stay cold forever!”

Normya grinned and scampered towards where her father sat.

THE WILDS

2.7 LIGHT YEARS FROM TALBOR SEVEN

Anton Simpson let his hands caress the control console of the Limian Manufacturing Company JAL-14 Long Range Leisure Transport as he adjusted their course a fraction and then he sat back in the comfortable chair to sip his mug of tea and watch the stars as they hurtled past. He ran his hand over the thin layer of hair he had allowed to grown in the last three days and grimaced. Like his father, he preferred his head to be completely hairless, but for this mission Cihera had suggested he grow it in. Anton Simpson was the oldest son of Daniel and Anuk Simpson, and perhaps the most unheralded of all his father’s children.

That was something Anton did not mind in the least.

Anton, from the time he was a small boy running through the corridors with Androcles and Moneus of either the Island Palace or on the streets of Sparta, had always had a love for the shadowy world of the Krypteria. He had seen Armetus enough times over the years to become infatuated with the man and how he would come and go through even the heaviest of security with barely a pause. He had thought at first his father would be angry with him for moving to join the Krypteria at the end of his Agoge training as opposed to becoming a member of the Durcunusaan. He couldn’t have been more wrong. His father and both his mothers had praised his decision and fully supported his actions. Even his gruff talking grandfather Melancton had been pleased with his decision. It meant that he would not be seen at many of the more public ceremonies and events with his family, and though part of this bothered him, he made it a point to be watch the moment when his brother spoke up for Carina’s hand as his mate on the vid/cam that Armetus had given him before he and Cihera had left. His family knew and accepted that his chosen life would mean he came and went on a whim and they would sometimes not see him for months on end, or even hear from him, but his skills were without question and whenever he was home they made up for it in spades.

Anton took after his father in size and build, and while he did not have Moneus or his father’s height standing only an even six feet tall, he most certainly had the Spartan build and rippled definition. His light caramel colored skin was due mainly in part to his mother Anuk’s fairer color and thankfully he had not

inherited her rust colored red hair for it would not have looked very good on him they had joked through the years. His two inch high elven ears fit vertically perfect on his head and he blessed that they did not curve as much as his mother's did towards the tips. He had his father's Lycavorian Spartan strength and his mother's incredible elven speed and reflexes. When he shifted to his wolf form, which he did not do very often, he was slightly larger than his brother Moneus. Neither of them came close to their father in size, or anywhere near as large as Andro or the King, but the few times he had shifted due to the need to frighten someone his size and teeth had convinced them he was not to be trifled with.

Armetus had discovered him very early in his Agoge, perhaps because he had made it clear what he had wanted to do when he completed the training, but more than likely because Armetus knew talent when he saw it. At least that is how Anton viewed it. He could speak nine different languages fluently, and get by in half a dozen others. He was an excellent pilot thanks to his elven blood, and his engineering skills would certainly rate him a Chief Engineer's slot on any ship in the Union Fleet. He was a methodical thinker and able to analyze any given situation from every angle within seconds. And Anton Simpson had absolutely no qualms about eliminating any threat to the Union he so loved, and he had done so on nine different occasions without fail. He was no stranger to death or blood, and like his father and mother, he preferred peace above all else. However, he would not allow harm to come to those who he cared for and respected, and he would not let their enemies hurt them if it was within his power to stop.

Anton turned slightly in the chair when he heard the door to the cockpit slide open and his dark eyes fell upon her tall, muscular, but deliciously feminine body as she entered. She looked exquisite in his oversized shirt Anton decided and he lifted his mug to drink his tea as she moved to the dispenser and got herself a large mug of Queen Aricia's coffee that she so loved.

Anton allowed his eyes to wander over the curve of her flawless ass and the muscular definition in her long legs and he felt his groin stir as the wolf inside him saw something he wanted. Looking at her as she gracefully prepared her coffee Anton came to the same conclusion as he did eight months ago when he took her as his mate.

Cihera Simpson was just as lethal as she was incredibly beautiful.

Her head turned as she lifted the mug to her soft lips, her shimmering white hair now replaced by the black dye she had used last night and he had helped massage into her scalp. She had not yet put in her contact lenses and Anton shuddered as she gazed at him with those amber colored orbs he so adored. He inhaled deeply and allowed her walnut scent to fill his head as she stepped up to him and leaned over.

"Good morning." She spoke.

Anton smiled as their lips came together in a soft kiss of deep feeling and commitment and then she deposited herself in the chair across from him, his shirt riding high up on her chocolate colored thighs.

"Sleep well?" Anton asked.

Cihera smiled over the edge of her mug and nodded. "Very much so." She replied. "It's been three months since I have had the pleasure of my husband's body next to mine in our bed and he is not assaulting me in some way."

Anton grinned. "I'm saving that for tonight after we arrive on Talbor Seven."

Cihera chuckled and allowed her amber eyes to scan the cockpit and consoles quickly. "You altered our course?" She said.

"Only three degrees." He answered. "It will bring us in from behind the fourth moon and shield us from anyone who might know we are coming."

Cihera Simpson turned back to look at her husband of less than a year, but the man she had loved for five long years.

Cihera had been born three short months before the Battle for Earth had claimed the lives of both her Drow elf parents. Her parents had been among those who had followed General Lynwe and Commander Tari out from under the thumb of the High Coven and joined those who were building a life in Eden City. Cihera barely remembered what her parents looked like, and over the years their images had faded to distant specks as new images took their place. She had been adopted by Lynwe, Selene and Layna a year after the beautiful Spartan woman had come into the lives of Lynwe and Selene. Two years after that Joarl became a permanent fixture in their lives as well, taking all of them as his mates and officially adopting Cihera and her older sister Tenia with barely any pause in his actions.

Cihera was half elf and half vampire due to the experiments on her parents while they served the High Coven, yet thank to her mother Lynwe and Aihola, Cihera was all Drow in her actions and values. She had an elf's speed and reflexes and a vampire's strength and ability to blur and wrap the shadows around her. Skills that Lynwe and Layna had schooled her on mercilessly through the years as she grew, with her father Joarl giving her hours upon hours of training with weapons of every sort. She needed no other schooling besides what Selene gave to her every day, and she was able to attend a higher university when she was only fifteen years old. Cihera spoke nearly twenty languages fluently; she had two degrees, one in Advanced Medical Sciences and one in Astro Physics. She too had been recruited by Armetus, knowing full well what it was he and those who worked for him did. Like her birth parents Cihera had no question about whether to serve the Union they had died helping to preserve. She had just completed her first successful mission when she met the handsome young Spartan who sat across from her now. She had not know who he was at first for he was quiet and reserved, but she knew when she saw interest in a man's eyes, and she saw interest in Anton's from that first moment.

They had not looked back after their first night together.

No one but Armetus knew they were married and they did this to keep both themselves and their families safe.

Cihera tilted her head slightly to the side and gazed at her husband. "You believe Andro and Armetus then?" She said.

"Until I see something that tells me otherwise yes." He replied with a grin. "Looking at the information gathered by my father and Armetus and the report from Andro, there are too many coincidences involved to not be some sort of plot."

"All the coincidences have legitimate reasons and explanations Anton." Cihera spoke calmly.

Anton nodded. "I know... but that they all happened together within weeks of each other leads me to think it was planned. Perhaps not the weapons transaction... but the raid on the colony exactly when the Queens would be returning from Hadaria."

Cihera nodded. "Ok... but if said person knew the Queens would be going through this area at this particular time, and if said person gave this information to the Evolli mercenaries, what would this said person gain? They would have to know enough about Queen Anja and Queen Aricia to be able to tell them when their ship left Hadaria. If they are that close to them, they would also know that it would be exceedingly foolish to attempt to take them prisoner. Of all the Queens, Aricia and Anja are the most volatile and the most less likely to give up without causing serious death and destruction to those attempting to capture them. Isabella is much more methodical and precise and Dysea has taken after her. Queen For'mya is hardly ever very far from the King since she is part of his flight crew, and whoever attempted to capture her would first need to kill the King."

Anton nodded. "Something many fools have tried over the years. Some not even the Queens know about."

"And none of them have been able to accomplish that task." Cihera spoke. "You would think after the first or second attempt they would realize it is not a very survivable prospect. There is no measuring the idiocy of some people husband."

Anton chuckled. "No there is not." He leaned over and held out the data pad. "The latest from Armetus. He is investigating who had knowledge of their visit to Hadaria." Anton spoke. "We are to find out if the weapons deal is related in any way to the attack on the colony and attempted ambush. He is directing operations from Earth since it appears both the High Coven and the Kavalians decided to come out and play at the same time. We should only contact him if we need something urgent. Otherwise he has given us free reign to discover what we can."

"Are we to act?" Cihera asked. Cihera Simpson was not afraid to kill. She had killed on a number of occasions when the mission called for it and like her beloved husband; they would only kill if it became necessary. Then they would not hesitate.

Anton nodded. "The King has given permission to eliminate any threat as long as we can prove our actions are justified and we have all the information we can possibly acquire."

“The man we are suppose to contact uses Talbor Seven as a base of operations.” Cihera said. “Once we are settled we should use our cover story as newlyweds and take in some of the resorts more entertaining aspects before we initiate a meeting. Perhaps drop ourselves some care packages.”

“There is a play tomorrow evening in their amphitheater.” Anton said.

“I love plays!” Cihera declared.

“That’s why I have already booked us two seats my lovely wife.” He told her with a smile. “And we can take the long path there through the promenade.”

“You do know Anton that our families will be livid with us when we finally tell them we are already married.” Cihera said softly as she sipped her coffee.

“You don’t question that we chose to not tell them do you?” He asked quickly.

Cihera shook her head immediately. “It is safer for them and for us this way. We both have far too many younger siblings that can not protect themselves from assassins or other agents if it was known we are married. Separately is better.”

“I still don’t understand why we had to make them think we hate each other.” Anton spoke. “Isn’t that a little over the top?”

“It’s more believable Anton. You know that.” Cihera spoke.

“Well... we should each choose one parent to tell after this mission. During the briefing when you called me a rock head I almost leaned over and kissed you on the spot.” He said with a grin.

Cihera laughed. “Yes... I saw that twitch.” She said getting to her feet. She stepped up to his chair and felt his arm encircle around the back of her ass, pulling her close and putting his face against her lower abdomen. “I will go get the inventory list and we can decide what to take with us on our reconnaissance.”

Anton nodded and drew back slowly. “I’ll be here.”

CHAPTER NINE

JUMP GATE THREE FIVE LEONIDAS II-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER MJOLNIR’S HAND

The cavernous landing bay of the United Lycavorian Union’s Flagship was a beehive of chaotic activity that many would think to be quite insane. Very neat rows of T9E *TEMPTTEST* Fighter Interceptors and the M4B *DEVASTATOR* Fighter/Bombers lined the bay as the dozens of ground crewmembers went about their duties with barely a pause. They were the *crème de le crème* of the Lycavorian Union Fleet; they knew it and it showed in their work. What appeared like chaos to the uninitiated were in fact the fingers of a master conductor at work. They paid no heed to the two rows of Durcunusaan soldiers that lined both sides of the East Hatchway. They were a regular part of the crew now and had been for over two decades. Many of those who called *MJOLNIR’S HAND* home had been assigned to this ship for at least a minimum of five years. Many chose to leave only when it would hinder them in being promoted or in advancing their careers. Quite a few even returned after doing stints on other ships or postings within the fleet.

The 1st Spartan Fleet Attack Group was the most sought after military posting anywhere within Union territory. It was the King’s unit... his personal hammer and shield. At some point through the years Martin Leonidas had gotten to know all of them here on this ship by name, and he and Admiral Komirri made it a point to insure whenever someone new was assigned they were greeted personally by one or both of them within hours of coming aboard. The King, when he was on board either by himself or with any of the Queens, always ate among the crew in one of the three massive mess lounges. He would often be seen among the half dozen entertainment areas, either talking or reading from some data pad. While many men and people off this ship would never dare approach their King simply because of the imposing figure he presented, the men and women of nearly a dozen and a half different species among the Union that were assigned to *MJOLNIR’S HAND* had no fears about walking right up to their King and including him in a conversation they may have been having, or simply to ask him a question or his opinion of something. That was what endeared him to so many within the military and the Union itself. It was well known that Androcles Leonidas ran his ship the *SCIMITAR* in much

the same fashion, though the dress code was a little less stringent. The new style training King Leonidas had started all those years ago for the Spartan ground forces was extremely well received, mainly because he did not exclude himself from that very same training. He would not order or expect his men and women to do something he had not already done, and even though he did not require it of the much older Spartans, they too willingly volunteered to go through the training once more. Many had said they learned new things that they had not the first time, and none of them regretted going through the training once more.

King Leonidas was normal, and he went out of his way to avoid being anything else but normal.

For'mya Leonidas was also well known on *MJOLNIR'S HAND*, not only as one of their Queens, but also as part of the King's Flight crew. If there was a flying maneuver or stunt that Queen For'mya and Star Commanders Endith and Tina O'Connor had not either attempted or done, it simply did not exist. She and Queen Aricia had become fixtures on the ship, and over the last three years Queen Anja had joined them more and more. They all knew For'mya to be the most patient of the Queens and the one slowest to anger, but many of them had witnessed one of her verbal and physical explosions and all agreed that while Queen Aricia would never lose the title of deadliest of the Queens, For'mya Leonidas was most definitely not to be trifled with. The ground crew in the landing bay could only smile as they past by where she stood with Resumar and they saw her brushing at his crimson cape and smoothing out the edges.

For'mya looked up into Resumar's face as she straightened out the edges of his cape and saw his dark eyes smiling down at her. "What?" She demanded.

Resumar smiled. "Do you know how they feel about you mother?" He asked.

"Resumar Leonidas... I do not need *you* to explain to me how your father and mothers feel about me." She stated sternly but with a motherly tone of love in her voice. "They show that to me every day."

Resumar couldn't help the chuckle that escaped his lips and he shook his head. "That's not what I meant." He stated with a smile.

For'mya met his eyes. "What do you mean then?"

"Andro, me, Arrarn, Deni, Eliani, Lisisa... all of us." He said. "The people all around us. All over the Union."

"Res... you have lost me now." For'mya spoke.

"You are like the most revered of Sages mother." Resumar answered. "When we were children we could hear father and our mothers talking, sometimes when you weren't there. No matter what it was in regards to, they always felt they should see what your opinion was. How you felt something should be. Part of it is because of your abilities I know, but I think, we all think that most of it is because you are you."

For'mya smiled. "Well... I like being me." She said with a small laugh.

Resumar shook his head quickly. "Lisisa once put it in a way that sounds much more profound. We were at Andro's villa last year; I think you and father were with Aunt Deia and grandmother Gorgo on Elear for some conference or something. Lisisa said... she said you were the last, but you are the first. You are what bind all of us together in the end. We all agreed, our mothers, all of us."

For'mya looked at him for a long moment and reached up to place her hand on his cheek. She stared into his dark eyes, so much like Arrarn's eyes. So much like his father's eyes. For'mya realized that with the exception of Andro, all of Martin's sons, all of her sons had his eyes. Arrarn and Byron were the sons of her blood, but in this family, blood was no distinction. They were all blood. In twenty-six years there had never been one instance of disagreement among any of Martin's Queens on how they would raise their children. Resumar was just as much her son, just as much Anja and Aricia's son even though Dysea was the mother of his birth. The five of them... they had doted on each other when they were pregnant... almost as if they were all pregnant at the same time. Yes... the five of them were lovers... and they would not pause when it came to pleasuring each other in any way. It was not something For'mya had seen herself doing just twenty-eight years ago, but now she couldn't imagine her life without all of them. Yet after hearing Resumar's words just now, For'mya realized that Aricia's words to all of them rang so true. They were not only dear lovers but they were also the very best and truest of friends. They always laughed at the rumors that abound about who the King favored most of all, for they all knew that Martin loved each of them just as intensely as the other. And they loved him just as intensely back.

For'mya smiled as she looked at him. "There is nothing I would not do to safeguard those I love Resumar. Just as your father and any of your mothers would do. I would endure a life of solitude and pain to

insure that those I love were safe. We all would and that is where our power as a family lays my son. We have our disagreements and arguments, no family is without them, but in the end... what has your father instilled in all of you... in all of us?"

"Blood before all else." Resumar stated softly.

For'mya nodded slowly. "Blood before all else. No matter the pain that may be caused, no matter the reasons behind it, it is never intentional and must always be forgiven."

"Will I find a love like you share with father?" Resumar asked softly.

For'mya laughed softly. "Your father told me something shortly after we were married in the traditional elven ceremony on Elear. Before he got drunk with my father." She said with a smile remembering that time. "He told me that when a Leonidas loves, they love without shame or regard for what others will think or say. They love unconditionally. He proved this when your mother Isabella finally joined with us. We would do anything... anything at all for each other. Andro and Carina have only continued this. You and your brothers and sisters will as well, as will you when you discover who it is you are to love in this life. Eliani has already discovered half of her heart with Nyla, and I believe both of them will find the second half sooner rather than later."

"Is that a yes?" Resumar asked with a smirk.

For'mya laughed and leaned up to kiss his cheek. "Yes Res... that is a yes." She stated as his arms hugged her closely.

The crew members of *MJOLNIR'S HAND* went about their duties as mother and son embraced and they smiled knowingly. The men and women of this ship also shared another of their King's traits, and that was the extreme distaste for politicians with very few exceptions. Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos was not one of those exceptions and he was avoided at all costs. Something that Laustinos was about to mention to For'mya as he stepped out into the landing bay and saw her embracing Prince Resumar. He frowned as he saw them wearing the standard matte black Mark IV ArmorPly uniforms with the crimson capes dangling from their shoulders. He had expected her to come dressed in proper formal attire and Prince Resumar in full dress uniform. He took a deep breath and watched as Prince Resumar released her and she reached up to adjust something on the Prince's shoulder. Laustinos saw him chuckle softly as she whispered to him. The last thirty-six hours had been nothing short of complete boredom with two meetings with Queen For'mya and her asking him specific questions and insisting he give her very specific answers. Many of the questions did not even pertain to the actual Trade Negotiations, but more towards what he knew about the Kavalian people, which was not very much and how they had contacted the Union leaders to arrange this meeting. It almost seemed as if she had been testing him in some manner and it was something he did not appreciate.

Laustinos stepped up behind them and took a deep breath. "My Queen. Prince Resumar." He stated.

Resumar grunted at his greeting as For'mya turned slightly to look at him a small smile on her face from Resumar's actions. "Deputy Laustinos." She stated calmly. "It appears that the captain of the *NOVA*-Class Envoy ship was under the impression he was in a hurry. We seem to be meeting with our guests a full day earlier. I wonder where he got that information."

"Yes... I was just made aware of it my Queen." Laustinos spoke quickly.

"I'm sure." For'mya said turning her attention back to Resumar's crimson cape.

"My Queen... I noticed that you... you shifted the entire Kavalian delegation to a totally different section of the ship than what I had directed the crew to do." Laustinos spoke.

For'mya nodded. "Yes I did." She said smoothing out the crimson cape on Resumar's shoulder one last time before turning to look at him fully. "You assigned them quarters on deck twelve Laustinos."

"Yes my Queen." Laustinos said. "So?"

Resumar looked at Laustinos with his dark eyes now. "You don't know much about the *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers do you Deputy Prime Minister?" He asked.

"No. I have never been on one before this trip. What difference does that make? Deck twelve is central to the ship." Laustinos said quickly. "They are our guests Prince Resumar and we should treat them that way."

Resumar shook his head. "The port section of deck twelve holds the secondary weapons magazines for the aft Mark 22B Launchers Deputy Prime Minister." Res told the man. "Deck twelve also houses redundant power system controls for a full third of the ship. Why exactly would we put them there? Yes... I understand

they are our guests Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos. However, giving our *guests* access to sensitive and secure areas of this ship is just plain stupid.”

“What my son is trying to say Laustinos is that due to your unfamiliarity with this class ship we simply made adjustments to your sleeping arrangements.” For’mya spoke with a smile. Resumar had about as much patience for arrogant politicians as his father and brothers did it seemed. Andro and Arrarn both had already had major confrontations with senior politicians who thought to impress someone or other while they traveled on the *SCIMITAR*. Neither of those confrontations ended well for the politician. When they had complained to Sa’sur about this she had laughed at them in their faces.

“The Kavalian delegation is now on deck six, closer to the mess lounge on the port side and the observation rooms as well. We will meet with them there once they are settled into their quarters.” For’mya spoke.

“We are trying to manage Trade Talks my Queen.” Laustinos spoke looking at the data pad he held in his hand and using it to run through a schematic of the ship. “You have... you have put them on the same deck as the *Durcunusaan* barracks!” He said looking at her.

“Did I?” For’mya asked as her dark eyes narrowed and she folded her hands behind her back. “Oh my... I wonder why I would do that.”

Laustinos’s eyes narrowed. “My Queen you...”

“Res... why don’t you go see what is keeping Cemath and Aurith. They should be here with us. I swear those two argue more than any brother and sister I have ever known.” For’mya said turning to look at him. Resumar smiled and nodded, then took a last look at Laustinos and grunted before heading for the large lift along the wall.

“My Queen... you are... you are bringing your dragons down here?” He asked aghast at this development.

For’mya nodded as she turned back to him, Resumar’s words filling her with warmth and love. “Prince Resumar and I are bonded to dragons Laustinos. They go where we go. You know this just as well as I do.” She stated taking a couple of steps closer to him. “Is that going to be a problem?”

“My Queen... Lady For’mya it is well known that the Kavalians fear dragons.” He stated quickly. “Why... why would we greet them with dragons beside us? I would think we want to make them as comfortable as possible.”

Since being turned For’mya had developed a unique and powerful skill within Mindvoice that very few people knew about. Thr’won and Helen called it Clairsentience. It was a unique ability to be able to sense things from simply reaching out and feeling everything around her. It worked sometimes with physical touch as well, but often times she simply had to feel a shift or difference in the essence of life around her to know what was happening. She had always been a good judge of character and people and when Martin had changed her, those perceptions and abilities to read people increased nearly a thousand fold. She couldn’t read a person’s mind, but she could almost always tell when someone was lying, even without using her wolf senses to detect the adrenalin dump into their system. It was similar to Dysea’s skill of precognition, and while Dysea had no real control over her ability or premonitions, For’mya at least could direct her abilities in a reasonable fashion of sorts.

At the moment she could feel Laustinos trying very hard to save face and salvage what he considered to be his moment to impress Dysea.

“And we will make them as comfortable as possible.” For’mya answered very calmly. “However, we will not change who we are because we do not wish to offend a species that launched an unprovoked attack against this Union. A species that is also currently at war with the Vampire High Coven, and a species that is recognized as having no greater love for us than they do the vampires of the High Coven.”

“My Queen... you...”

“It won’t work you know.” For’mya said softly.

“What won’t work my Queen?”

“I came on this mission for two reasons.” For’mya stated. “The first was to insure that Union interests are met above all else. Approving this Trade Delegation with the Kavalians was a colossal mistake Laustinos. Whatever the reason they are coming here... it is not to sell us berries for our wine. If you had thought to inquire of others before granting them what they wanted you might know this. You were led unwittingly into

their trap and played right into their hands. And this happened because of the second reason I am here. You were thinking with your *cutius* and not your brain.” For’mya saw his eyes widen just a little bit.

“My Queen... I...”

For’mya shook her head. “No... you will listen to me. You make it painfully obvious to even the dullest individual that you desire Dysea in the worst way. It shows in your mannerisms and the way you act around her. We are the wives and mates of the most powerful Alpha male wolf in the entire Lycavorian Union Laustinos. We do not want nor do we need the attentions of another male, for none of them will ever compare to what we now have. Your attempts at trying to get Dysea alone for talks and meetings and such... you didn’t actually think this has not been noticed did you? And then you go off hitting Dysea with your pitiful male aura while Martin Leonidas sat at the same table?” For’mya shook her head slowly. “Did common sense suddenly leave you Laustinos? If Martin Leonidas was any less a man you would be dead right now for such an action, you do realize that don’t you?”

“My Queen... that is not...” Laustinos stammered and a wave of For’mya’s hand cut him off.

“No... do not attempt to deny it or push it aside.” For’mya spoke. “I came on this mission because if Dysea or any of the others had come, they would have dressed you down thoroughly and made you look the fool. And they would have done so in much harsher tones and would not have cared who they did it in front of. I came on this mission to try and explain to you what we all see happening. Deia... Deia seems to think that you have great potential Laustinos... but this infatuation you appear to have with Dysea must end. She is the first Martin Leonidas turned, and she has been with him longer than any of us and that includes Aricia, who is his *Anome* as you well know. There is nothing in this universe, living or dead, nothing... which could ever pull her away from him. Nothing that could ever pull any of us from him. Certainly not you, no matter what you think you may have accomplished or how much of a ladies man you consider yourself to be. You will not have her Laustinos. Ever. She does not desire you, she never has and she most certainly never will. Fantasizing about your King’s mate is one thing Laustinos, but actively pursuing her is quite another.” For’mya could sense the indecision and anger within him easily and she stepped back. “Take my words to heart Laustinos. They will save you a large amount of embarrassment and possibly pain in the future if you insist on continuing down this road you are on. You thought to impress Dysea by approving this Trade Delegation for the Kavalians and showing what an accomplished politician you are; you thought to make a name for yourself and by doing so you allowed an enemy into our midst and put Deia and the King in a very bad situation. Not to mention now Dysea thinks you are a complete idiot for even doing something like this. We may be elves Laustinos... but even as elves our patience is not totally boundless. Dysea’s patience with you is just about gone. I will allow you to remain on the forefront of these talks for now...”

“You will allow...” Laustinos started to speak with anger in his voice. “My Queen I am the...”

For’mya nodded. “Yes Laustinos... *I* will allow. Do not forget that I am also Queen. I speak with five voices now Laustinos, those of myself and my fellow Queens and unlike Martin Leonidas *we* will no longer give you any more chances. *We* will no longer tolerate your foolish attempts to win something that is not yours, never was and never will be. You will either change your ways or *we* will see to it that you find yourself on the most remote outpost we have. There you can play politician with whatever creatures may inhabit that particular *nubous* settlement!” For’mya hissed angrily, even while her face was unchanged. “Am I making myself very clear Deputy Laustinos?”

Laustinos nodded his head slowly, his face hardening. “Yes my Queen.”

“You may conduct these talks as you see fit... and I will only intervene when I feel it is necessary, if I feel the security interests of the Union are in question. You will promise them nothing until we have returned to Earth and Deia and other senior officials can participate in the talks as well. Is that clear?” For’mya said.

Laustinos glared at her doing his best to hide his shame and anger. Not for what he had been doing... but that he had gotten caught doing it. “As you order Queen For’mya.” He stated in a neutral voice.

For’mya nodded and caught the hand motion of the *Durcunusaan* Officer signaling her that the transport was inbound into the landing bay. “Good... we will greet them as we greet all visiting *guests* to the Union. We will hold preliminary talks in the conference lounge on deck six after they have been shown to their quarters and allowed to freshen up, and we will include First Secretary Stenys as well. He will be accompanying them and he has some knowledge of the Kavalians that I wish to pick his brain about.”

Laustinos looked at her. “He is only a First Secretary Lady For’mya.” Laustinos spoke quickly. “He has not sat in on Trade talks in the past.”

“Yes... I know. There is a first time for everything however, and he has shown an interest in taking more of a role in Trade talks as a whole.” For’mya glared at him. “And he is not trying to get into the pants of my fellow Queen.” She snarled.

For’mya turned slowly, away from Laustinos’s stunned face, as an alarm claxon began to sound indicating a ship was approaching the landing bay. She had no doubts that no matter what she had just told the man, none of what she had conveyed to him had or would sink in. For’mya had given it her best shot however and now she would let the chips fall where they would. If she or one of her lovers and fellow Queens did not act then For’mya had no doubts that Martin most certainly would inform him of the folly of his actions, in very blunt and painful terms he would remember the rest of his life. If he even survived. For’mya had witnessed first hand on more than one occasion just how very possessive Martin Leonidas was of all of them. How Laustinos ever thought that Dysea... or any of them for that matter... how they could be even remotely interested in another male after having tasted Martin Leonidas was beyond her. Perhaps it was a male ego thing. Regardless... For’mya knew that Laustinos would do something that would cost him not only his job, but quite a bit of pain as well if she was any judge of character.

Jalersi never took her blue eyes off For’mya as they exited the small transport craft and followed Stenys towards the hatchway lined with who she knew just from their uniforms were the famed Lycavorian Union *Durcunusaan* soldiers. The Wolves of the Blood as they were sometimes called. The elite forces of the Union. No one knew exactly how many of them there were, but they were constant shadows wherever any of the Royal family went. It was rumored that they were mentally conditioned to eliminate at least twenty of their enemies before they fell in battle. They were the one group that Pusintin told her to avoid at all costs because too little was known of what they could actually do and they conversed mainly in the ancient Lycavorian language which no Kavalian had the linguistic skills for, and Pusintin had never bothered to learn.

The blond haired elf female stood perfectly still, her hands clasped in front of her, the light weight black body armor conforming to every curve of her elven figure. Her firm breasts were not large Jalersi saw, not like the other Queens of the Union who all appeared to be rather healthy in that regard at least in the images she had seen. Her legs were long for her height however which Jalersi estimated as five foot seven or eight. Her golden blond hair shimmered in the lighting of the landing bay and cascaded well past her shoulders. The crimson cape she wore was trimmed in gold and dropped from the tops of her shoulders and brushed lightly on the deck of the landing bay. This was the second Elven Queen For’mya. Known for her abilities as a pilot and often times as a mediator as well. Slow to anger, but when her breaking point was reached, she was a hellcat to say the least.

Jiss and Matuarr walked slightly behind her, Athani walking beside Matuarr. Athani had not spoken to her sister except for one or two words sentences since discovering she had been given to Qurot when this operation was complete. She had in fact avoided almost all contact with her, remaining in the quarters they had been given and only coming out to eat. This did not really sadden Jalersi because she had done so much to keep her sister out of Qurot’s hands for so long. Having Pusintin take her for the last years allowed Jalersi and her mother to see if any other suitors would come forward. While Pusintin thoroughly enjoyed having her sister’s ass and mouth, he did it less frequently than Jalersi would have liked. Pusintin said Athani was different, and while she might have cried out in sexual abandon during their times, she still fought the sensations within her that his aura generated. Pusintin said he preferred his wife and mate for she actually enjoyed their sessions together. Pusintin’s words had inwardly made Jalersi sing in joy. He could have taken another female if he so chose, it was not uncommon within their culture for a superior male to do this. That he had not done this only made Jalersi love him even more.

Athani chose to wear a teal blue jumpsuit that hugged her body like a second skin. Her blond hair was flowing around her face and shoulders, her blue/green eyes void of any emotion. She kept her two meter long tail free, a special slot in the fabric of her clothes cut for it, but the thin member was wrapped around her leg three times to keep from being too widely noticed. Jalersi had chosen to wear a yellow dress that was cut up one tanned leg and gave quite a view of her large breasts. She wore a necklace given to her by Pusintin after ten years of being together and dangling earrings he gave to her after the birth of their oldest son Karun. Their son

walked proudly and confidently just behind and to Jalersi's left, both he and Qurot choosing to wear their military uniforms. Karun was tall and proud just like his father, and incredibly handsome Jalersi had to admit. She looked forward in seeing how many Lycavorian females he could swoon with his good looks and charm.

Stenys slowed to a stop directly in front of For'mya and bowed his head slightly in a show of respect to her position.

"Queen For'mya... it is a distinct pleasure to meet you once more." He stated seeing Laustinos's eyes grow a little wider at this knowledge as For'mya reached out to take his offered hand.

For'mya smiled. "It has been six years Stenys. I see you have worked on your tan in that time."

Stenys's laugh was genuine and nodded his head. "Indeed Milady." He straightened back up and motioned quickly to Jalersi. "I present the Emissaries from Prefect Keleru'Puata and the KFI to you. This is Jalersi'Puata, oldest daughter to the Prefect and leader of this distinguished delegation."

Jalersi stepped up to her quickly and bowed her head in greeting. "It is a pleasure to meet you Lady For'mya. I hope our visit has not confused anything that may have been otherwise planned already." She spoke holding out her hand in what she knew was the universal gesture of greeting. She noticed For'mya didn't hesitate and took her offered hand immediately.

"I welcome you to the Lycavorian Union." For'mya spoke calmly, her face beaming and a smile decorating her features. "And no... your visit has confused nothing. We were a bit surprised by your request... but we welcome the opportunity to conduct talks and possibly form a more open relationship."

Jalersi met her smile and waved her hand behind her. "Allow me to introduce Senior Legislatures Jiss and Matuarr from the Kavalian Imperium Parliament. And my younger sister Athani'Puata."

For'mya nodded to the two Kavalian men and turned her eyes upon Athani who had stepped up next to her sister. "A pleasure to meet you." She said holding out her hand.

Athani took For'mya's offered hand with a bright smile. "It is an honor to meet you Lady For'mya." She stated quickly. "Your exploits during the Evolli War are well documented and known."

For'mya looked surprised at this and she smiled. "Thank you. How did..."

Athani almost blushed under her lightly tanned skin. "Many of our border settlements are able to pick up your Netnews channels due to their proximity to the border. I was able to review many reports that were recorded." She explained.

For'mya didn't let the smile fade from her face. She sensed there was more to this young woman than met the eye and it was not just the fact that she had let her tail grow to its full adult size even while the biogenic treatments removed all the hair on her body with the exception of her shiny blond tresses. It was well known that the Kavalians had used their extensive biogenics capabilities to change the appearance of many of their females. Armetus was sure it was so that they could blend in better with different species and be used as intelligence gatherers with their obvious female charms. Those Kavalian females who had undergone the biogenic treatments were all of distinguished beauty if the reports from Armetus were correct. Looking at Athani and Jalersi, For'mya saw that they were indeed very accurate. Kavalian women were also very similar to Lycavorian females, and they could be affected by the aura of a Lycavorian male For'mya had discovered, as well as affect him in a similar manner though with considerable less control. Aside from this information, there was very little they knew about actual Kavalian society and most of the information they had was centuries old. Athani's blue/green eyes were bright and held great intelligence in them, as well as something that For'mya could not quite place.

"I also present my oldest son Karun." Jalersi said after giving her sister a small glare motioning to where Karun stepped forward slightly and nodded his head to her. "As well as Senior Commander Qurot of the Kavalian Federation Imperium Military Forces."

Qurot stepped forward quickly, right up to For'mya, brushing past Athani and figuring his size and appearance would make the elf female back up in fear. He was slightly surprised when For'mya simply stood there and gazed at him with her dark brown eyes, no fear in them whatsoever. Qurot saw several of the Durcunusaan soldiers along the wall push away slightly and then stop. He took note of this and stopped his forward motion instantly while Jalersi stared at him with anger in her blue eyes.

"You have an impressive ship here!" He bellowed in an overbearing voice. "The security seems to be somewhat lax however."

For'mya smiled as she looked at him. The long, thick hair covering his face hid most of his expression but it was easy to see his eyes held nothing but cruelty in them. "What makes you say that Senior Commander?" She asked politely.

"You greet us with only a few handfuls of your soldiers." Qurot spoke looking at her. "I thought we were your vile enemies? I could attempt to kill you at this moment and your vaunted troops would be able to do nothing because they are so far away!"

"Qurot!" Jalersi hissed incredulous at his actions. "Qurot that is quite enough!" Jalersi barked stepping forward. "Lady For'mya, please forgive me. Qurot is not accustomed to being part of political negotiations. He..." She stated quickly.

"You think highly of your skills Senior Commander." For'mya spoke calmly, her hands still clasped in front of her. "This is King Martin Leonidas's ship. My mate and husband's ship. The security may seem lax to you... however I assure you it is not. We do not feel the need to have bodyguards everywhere we go. This is supposed to be a meeting of political delegations, and greeting you with a full complement of troops is not conducive to political gatherings. As for killing me..." For'mya's eyes grew just a little darker and narrow and she smiled. "That would not have happened. The *Durcunusaan* soldiers you see against the wall will not need to move from where they are for they know as I do, the next step you took towards me would have seen you incinerated where you stood."

Qurot froze instantly when he heard the low rumbling growl slightly behind his head and he saw Jalersi's eyes grow wide in fear as she stumbled back in terror. He turned his head very slowly making no sudden moves and then he saw the broad sapphire scales of a dragon snout, only inches from him, piercing golden eyes glaring at him like he was its next meal. The dragon was huge and he turned fully, moving very slowly as breath from the dragons nostrils passed over him, the warm air across his fur sending shivers of terror down his spine. Qurot, as with all senior officers within the KFI, had received extensive training in order to be able to tame the inbred fear his people had of these beasts. At this very moment, that training was escaping him however. His dark eyes could detect everyone within their party backing away slowly; real fear in their eyes with the exception of Karun who had instinctively snatched his mother's arm as well as Athani's and was shielding them with his body. Athani had stumbled and dropped to the deck of the ship in surprise at Karun's move.

The soft laughter from behind them caused Athani to whirl quickly, Jalersi and Karun matching her movement and they too froze in their spots as their eyes fell upon the dark green scaled beast behind them, his yellow/gray eyes staring at them. Athani's eyes grew wider, but not because of the enormous beast in front of her. Her eyes grew wide when she saw the young man casually leaning up against the front foreleg of the green scaled dragon. He wore similar body armor to the elven Queen For'mya, as well as the crimson cape. His tall muscular form was evident even under the conforming body armor.

"Aurith... why don't you give Senior Commander Qurot enough space to take a breath." Resumar spoke as he folded his muscular arms across his chest. "He is only feeling the waters so to speak. Isn't that what Eliani says?"

I believe she says it's testing the waters. Cemath's voice spoke as he canted his huge head to look at his bonded brother.

Resumar looked up at his bonded brother's head. "Yeah... testing the waters. That's it." He said. "Thanks Cemath."

A pleasure Res.

Qurot watched as Aurith glared at him for a few moments longer before blinking and drawing her head back and then deftly maneuvering her huge body around him to cross the short distance to where For'mya still stood. Qurot turned slowly once more as Jalersi and the others watched the sapphire scaled beast move past the elven Queen, who reached out and let her fingers caress Aurith's well-developed mid-section as she turned around behind For'mya and settled to the deck. Aurith stuck her head and neck out far enough that it was only a meter from For'mya's shoulder. No one had heard the massive beasts approach them from behind, and the members of the Kavalian delegation stood rigidly still unable to move.

"I found them mother." Resumar spoke from where he stood. "They were arguing over the last Behemoth bone in the dragon den. We left pretty quickly and the stewards hadn't had a chance to restock."

For'mya turned and looked at Aurith with a smile meant to scold her. It was something For'mya had never been able to pull off with her Bonded Sister. "Aurith?"

I had it first For'mya! Aurith exclaimed pulling her eyes from the Kavalian and meeting For'mya's gaze.

I called dibs on it when we came aboard! Cemath snapped from where he too was resting on the deck, his limbs cocked under him ready to spring into action.

Called dibs! What is that? Now you sound like Eliani and Tharua! Only they say that! Aurith barked out. *I had it first!*

For'mya couldn't help but chuckle at their antics and she shook her head as she turned back around and looked at Jalersi. Laustinos had a look of utter horror on his face at what had just happened and Stenys wore a smile grin as he helped several of the other Kavalian females to their feet in the rear of the party.

"Please... forgive them." For'mya said moving several steps and reaching for Jalersi and taking her hands. "They are brother and sister... and they tend to disagree over some of the silliest things."

Jalersi, Karun and Athani watched as Resumar moved from where he was leaning up against Cemath to stand next to Qurot. Athani watched him more carefully still as he moved, the confident and graceful proportions of his body, and the way he carried himself. He was the equal to Qurot in height, though Qurot had him in thickness. Athani however did not want to judge him by his size for she knew better. Qurot was larger than Pusintin as well, yet Jalersi's mate had destroyed Qurot in a sparing match many years ago. This new man looked to be in superb physical condition, no doubt a product of the Spartan training.

Mother? He had called For'mya mother Athani realized. This was Prince Resumar! This was the King's second oldest son. Athani Puat had done far more research into the Lycavorian Union than anyone she knew of outside of the military. She absorbed information about the Union like a sponge, taking in all the reports from civilian settlements along their borders that had been taken from the Union's own Netnews channels. She was well aware of the freedom that the females within the Union had, and how they could aspire to anything they wanted. Athani had been planning her actions for years now, ever since that confrontation with her sister before the Coven war began. She wanted more from her life, as so many Kavalian females did, as so many of their people did on a whole she knew. She had studied the dossiers of the entire Leonidas clan, and while a great deal of information was not available due to the privacy they appeared to covet so much, Athani had discovered all she really wanted to know. She knew that regardless of who had birthed them, the children of King Leonidas called all five of his Queens mother. They made no distinction between them. Prince Resumar was almost as well known as his older brother who was Crown Prince. He had fought with much distinction during their war with the Evolli and had earned several decorations for bravery and courage. The Union Netnews channels never spoke of a female or prospective females when they spoke of him, and Athani was looking at her ticket to more than she had ever dreamed. And it helped quite a bit that he was so very delicious looking.

Resumar waited until Qurot turned his head and looked at him. "You still with us big guy?" Res asked with some humor in his voice.

Qurot snarled dangerously. "I am fine." He spat. "The beast... the beast caught me by surprise."

Resumar laughed softly. "Yeah... I gathered that."

For'mya squeezed Jalersi's hands within hers making her meet For'mya's gaze. "We... we did not know there would be dragons here." Jalersi almost gasped.

"My apologies. Resumar and I are bonded to Aurith and Cemath. They accompany us wherever we go. I should have warned you... or you should have been told prior to arriving onboard." For'mya stated turning quickly to where Laustinos stood. She turned back to Jalersi. "You are in no danger truly."

Jalersi looked at her and took a deep breath, pulling her slim hands away from the elven Queen's grasp. "Thank you... I'm fine."

Karun made no move to help Athani to her feet as he stayed very close to his mother. Resumar had stepped away from Qurot and turned seeing her still on the deck. With barely a second thought he moved right up to her and held out his hand to her. Athani looked up into his face and felt a myriad of very strong emotions sweeping through her. She placed her hand in his, the warmth of his skin sending electric tingles through her as he helped her to her feet. She looked up into his face as he towered over her, his dark eyes almost mesmerizing.

"Thank... thank you." She said softly.

Resumar Leonidas stared at this Kavalian female for a long moment and inhaled deeply. He knew of how the Kavalians treated their females and he had no desire to cause any more issues with these people, but as Athani's tangerine like scent wafted into his nostrils he couldn't help but stare at her for a few seconds longer than he should have. Athani, for her part, was also feeling new and exciting sensations race through her. Sensations she had not expected.

"You're welcome." He spoke finally.

Cemath had felt the jump in his Bonded Brother's heartbeat and pulse and he stepped forward slowly. *[Res?]* He asked. *[Are you ok?]*

Resumar turned and looked at him. *[I'm fine.]* He replied nodding his head.

Athani watched as Resumar turned his head to the green scaled dragon beast and nodded quickly. She felt something, the feather like caress of a trembling in her head and she gasped out loud and saw his face turn back to her. "You... you speak to him with your mind? You... you understand each other?" She breathed softly, her voice a soft whisper that only those nearby heard, yet no one comprehended.

Resumar smiled and nodded. "Dragons are just as intelligent as you or I." He replied quickly in a similar whisper. "They simply have evolved to the point where they communicate with each other and with us using their minds. We call it Mindvoicing."

"They... they understand us... us speaking?" Athani asked still somewhat amazed at this revelation. Her people had always thought that the dragons within the Union were nothing more than beasts of war. No one among the higher command had ever discussed the possibility that they might actually be intelligent lifeforms. "They truly understand?"

Resumar nodded quickly. "Oh yes. Cemath and Aurith are brother and sister. They argue over the same things that any brother and sister would."

Her eyes are unique brother. Cemath spoke extending his head out closer to Resumar's shoulder to peer at Athani.

Resumar smiled. "Cemath says... he says you have unique eyes."

Athani's blue/green eyes grew a little wider and she looked over Resumar's shoulder and stared at the huge head of the dark green Cemath. "Thank... thank you. I... I think."

Resumar heard Cemath chuckle within Mindvoice. "Don't worry he..."

"Athani!" Jalersi's voice barked from where she stood with For'mya. "Get away from him sister!"

Athani turned quickly looking at her and she paused only a second to look back at Resumar before moving promptly to stand beside her sister.

"I think all of us have had enough excitement." For'mya was saying. "Allow me to show you to your quarters and after you have freshened up we can meet in a lounge that we have reserved for your use and begin preliminary talks."

Jalersi had quickly regained her composure. "I apologize for Qurot's actions." She said. "They were uncalled for and..."

For'mya shook her head. "An apology is not needed. This is as new to us as it is to you." She said. She motioned to the large hatchway. "Please... First Secretary Stenys transmitted the requirements on how you prefer your quarters to be and I have made sure they are just as you like them."

Resumar reached up over his head and scratched Cemath's powerful lower jaw and his eyes followed Athani as she left the landing bay behind her sister. She glanced back quickly and saw him doing this before she disappeared into the hatchway as well.

Wow! Res spoke.

She... she had a tail brother. Cemath spoke.

Tail or no tail... did you see the backside that tail is attached too? Resumar spoke. *She would be hot even with the hair that usually covers their bodies.*

You are such a pervert Resumar! Aurith's voice echoed as she moved her large body over to settle to the deck beside her younger brother, their midsections touching just a little bit. Cemath had come from Torma and Isheeni's second clutch of eggs, as had Aradace. Aurith and Elynth had watched them come into this world and even helped them to shed their egg shells. It had been Aurith who had cleaned Cemath's scales for the first time while their mother washed Aradace and Elynth cleaned Renoli. Cemath, Aradace and their brother Renoli, who was now bonded to Andreus's oldest son as a *Durcunusaan* member, were very close and they endlessly stuck

the needle to each other. Aurith however, she was very protective of Cemath and him of her because of all the time they spent together and by default they were protective of Resumar and Denali as well.

I just call them like I see them. Resumar spoke with a smile. *And she was certainly more beautiful than I expected their females to be. Her sister too.*

I certainly scared that man didn't I? Aurith spoke with humor.

Cemath chuckled within Mindvoice. *I thought he was going to void in his pants sister.*

Resumar stepped up between them with a smile. His thoughts raced for a few moments then he looked at them. *That he even attempted something like that is the first sign they are not here for what they say they are here for.*

I concur. Aurith spoke. *We should tell the Durcunusaan Commander onboard to watch them closely.*

Resumar shook his head. *No... that would only lead to more problems and unwanted encounters. We'll stick with the security plan that father gave to me. Mother is aware of it and she will adjust it accordingly as she sees fit. I'm more interested in this Qurot fellow. And the one she called Karun.*

He is half Lycavorian brother. Cemath stated.

Res nodded slowly. *Yeah... and that means he's my Uncle's son. It also means we are cousins. And that the woman in charge of this little group is my Uncle's mate. I don't know if father knew who was going to be coming, but I don't think he had any idea it would be his blood.*

You don't think he will care about this do you Resumar? Aurith asked. *This Karun? His actions indicate he is more Kavalian than Lycavorian. He did not attempt to help the female up from where he pushed her down.*

Res shook his head. *Not in the least it would appear.* He pushed off from Cemath's front leg again. *Let's get up to the conference lounge and make sure everything is set up.*

GYTHEIO

CRANAE ISLAND

ANDRO AND SADI'S VILLA

Sadi was very much lost in her own realm of otherworldly delights as she ground her hips and drenched pussy down on the rumpled sheets of their bed. Andro had promised to ravage her and fulfill his pledge of three days of exquisite carnal pleasures this night, and he had more than lived up to his promise. They were barely in the door of their villa after returning from the State Dinner before he was tearing her dress from her and ramming his massive cock deep inside her willing body. Even as he carried her to their bed, each step causing immensely delicious ripples of pleasure to course through her, Sadi was already lost to the sensations the incredible size of his cock and the power of his aura caused within her. Nearly four straight hours upon returning to their home and he had licked, nibbled, caressed and pounded her utterly senseless. This was not the same as what Malic had done on so many occasions, and the memories of those nights had been smashed aside forever on Sadi's very first night together with her handsome new mate. Androcles Leonidas did not simply thrust his huge cock into her reaching for his own gratification, he used his hands and lips and tongue to drive her nearly insane, even as his cock slammed into her with dominating power and control. Yes, he fucked her senseless, but he did it with such skill that it left Sadi craving more and more.

Now she was happily having her revenge upon her husband.

Sadi's right hand grasped the base of Andro's hugely thick cock, her left hand cupping and manipulating his large balls, as she was stuffing as much of his beautiful cock into her soft mouth as she could. She could taste herself on his substantial shaft, the veins throbbing and protruding under the skin. The searing heat of his cock only served to ignite her passions even more as her lips flew up and down his length, her warm tongue whipping back and forth, battering the thick vein that adorned the bottom of his entire length. She could not take him entirely into her throat no matter how much she tried, but she had many years in the future to practice and finally accomplish that goal. She didn't think Andro minded, as she was able to accommodate three quarters of his huge cock into her tight mouth. The straining of his neck muscles and the clenching of his abdomen, these were the signs that told Sadi she was doing just fine.

Sadi plunged her head down once more until her lips touched the top of her fist, which was wrapped tightly around the base of his cock, holding his thick shaft straight up for better access. Fully three quarters of

Andro's twelve and a quarter inch cock became prisoner within her mouth and throat, and Sadi lifted her tear filled jungle green eyes to gaze up the expanse of his chiseled abdomen. She groaned in her own delight seeing the look of utter ecstasy on her mate's face. His changed eyes were open wide, his dual fangs fully extended, the veins in his neck bulging outward as his hands tore at the sheets of their bed. Sadi groaned in delicious pleasure as another shivering orgasm trembled through her body. Seeing the control she had over her beloved mate, how he responded to her ministrations, these things only served to prove to her even more that what they had was destined from the beginning of time. Exactly as the *Feravomir* had suggested. Seeing the absolute pleasure he was experiencing because of her, knowing that he felt the same things when giving her pleasure, this made Sadi's own passions and desire nearly double in intensity as she shuddered in her own orgasm. She could actually feel the pleasure she was giving him in her own mind, she could feel it just as surely as if she was experiencing it for herself. It was no different than when he tasted her and drove her to heights of rapture with his tongue. They felt each other's pleasure as if it was their own, and it only served to deepen the bond they had as *Anomes*.

A guttural groan escaped Andro's throat and Sadi knew then he was just on the edge. She prepared herself for what she knew was coming, what she so wanted and then she felt his huge cock swell even larger within the confines of her velvety throat. The muscles in his legs went rigid and his hips lifted off the surface of the bed. Sadi wanted to scream out her own delight as she felt his scorching hot come race up the length of his throbbing shaft and the first jet like eruption blasted into the back of her throat. His powerful orgasm, the sweet taste of his come on her tongue, this combined to send Sadi rocketing off into her own heavenly orgasm, the third she had experienced just in the twenty minutes she had spent feasting on Andro's beautiful cock. She held his exploding shaft at the thick base while her left arm wrapped underneath his powerful ass to hold him tightly in his current position. She had no intention of letting him escape her grasp for she wanted to drink every drop of his essence. She had to swallow quickly to keep up with the incredible amount of come he produced, but as it had been since the first time she had done this, not a drop got away from her skillful lips and tongue.

It was several moments before his muscular body collapsed back onto the bed, a light sheen of sweat covering his tanned skin, his breathing coming in great heaving gasps. Sadi kept him inside her mouth, lavishing attention on his shaft and the bulbous head, as she slowly dragged her lips up the entire length until just the head remained. Her attentions kept him from getting soft but as she released the head of his cock from within her lips she gasped for air and dropped her forehead to his lower abdomen. He was ready for more, and incredibly her body told her she was as well, but she felt Andro's hands grasp her shoulders gently and urge her upwards. This Sadi did, pausing only to lick the skin of his chest in a teasing manner, tickling his nipples and tasting the saltiness of his sweat. As she lifted her beautiful face to look at him, her cheeks still slightly red from exertion, Andro's lips covered hers and he rolled over, pulling her with him until he was on top of her and he deepened his kiss.

Sadi groaned in blissful heaven, meeting his kiss with every ounce of feeling and passion and desire for him within her. She knew he could taste himself on her lips and this fact hadn't made him pause in his actions. As kisses went, it was pretty much volcanic in nature, and she felt her passion inflame once more regardless of how tired and delightfully sore she was. Andro sensed this within her as well Sadi knew, and with exquisite slowness, he drew back from their kiss dipping his head enough to firmly nuzzle her cheek and ear and the side of her neck. Sadi gasped as his aura washed over her like a warm, comforting blanket, wrapping her within his embrace, even as he pulled her body closer to his. Sadi responded in kind, letting every portion of her female aura release and respond to her mate's attention. She felt him draw back slowly; lifting his face to gaze at her even as he pulled her body closer, and she slid her long legs up along his hips seductively.

"You... you are incredible." He gasped softly.

Sadi bit her bottom lip in delight and reached up to caress his cheek. "And you taste very yummy." She said.

Andro laughed softly. "Yummy?" He declared. "You've been hanging around my sister too much already."

Sadi laughed softly as well. "I do not find the prospect of spending as much time with your family as I can, daunting at all." Sadi spoke with a small smile as she reached up to trace the ridges of his eyes. "I was talking with them tonight. Eliani and Nyla. I think... I think they truly desire Malic Andro." She said. "They were talking about him tonight you know. He was at the South Entrance acting as an usher."

Andro nodded. "I know."

"He... he is not a bad man my love." Sadi said quickly. "Not inside. Do not hold what you saw with me against him."

"Oh I don't." Andro answered immediately. "If I did I would not have selected him to be part of our security force that will train the Coven riders. And if there is anyone who can make the real Malic step forward, it is Eliani and Nyla." He said.

Sadi looked at him keenly tilting her head slightly. "There is something else about him you see isn't there? I can feel that you think this."

"Perhaps." Andro answered with a shrug. "Only time will reveal that to be true or not. You are tired *KertaGai*."

Sadi shook her head as her fingers caressed his broad shoulders and down his arms now. "Not really. Not physically anyway. So much has happened in the last few days, my awareness of things has grown so much Andro, and I am just a little drained. And we need to talk about what the *Feravomir* told me today my love."

Andro reached up and put a finger to her soft lips. "Yes... I know." He said. "But first let me make you some tea. It is a special blend of natural herbs that my mother Dysea makes and you will feel rejuvenated after only one mug. Then we can sit and talk." Andro tightened his grip on her and rolled to the side until he put his feet on the floor. Sadi laughed as she wrapped her arms and legs around his body and he got to his feet.

"Do you not wish me to wear clothes?" Sadi asked humorously.

Andro grinned. "What for? No one will come here at this hour. If they do I will shield you from view with my own body."

Sadi grinned. "Then who will shield you from view. I don't wish for anyone to see you in all your glory." Sadi kissed him. "Well... almost anyone. And that is what we need to talk about my love."

"I know." Andro said as he turned and headed for the door. "And we will. First we have the tea."

"She said we should pursue that?" Andro exclaimed.

They were lounging on one of the couches in the main living area, both of them still naked. Andro's back was up against the arm of the couch and Sadi rested between his legs, her back leaning up against his chest. One of her tanned legs was draped over his and she held the mug of still steaming tea in her hands. Andro had been right and after only several sips she felt more relaxed and calm and rejuvenated.

"She said we should not be afraid to pursue that if it feels right." Sadi told him. "She said the joy of us finding each other was more than likely why we did not sense it before. But now... now that she is here and we both have seen her, it is becoming more pronounced. She said it will only grow stronger."

"I have only just found you *KertaGai*." Andro spoke. "I... I do not want to explore what could or could not be there. I have you. That is enough for me."

Sadi nodded and shifted her body so that she was lying on her side and she looked at him. "It is more than enough for me as well my love... never doubt that. But what if the *Feravomir* is right?"

"What do you mean?"

"What if what we feel is part of something more. Something greater Andro." Sadi asked softly. "I know you are drawn to her. I can see it in your mind my love. I know you are drawn to her because I am drawn to her just as strongly. We felt the pull she had for us at Gallais's that night. She... she is the one from our dreams Andro. Can we just dismiss that? As our dreams finally brought us together again, as they sustained our love until that happened, do we just dismiss them now because they involve her as well?" Sadi leaned her head forward and nuzzled her mate's cheek with her nose. "You know as well as I do that she has shared those dreams my love. All of them. For me as well as you. How do we know she has not had similar dreams of us?"

"Sadi... we did not meet her until two days ago." Andro stated. "How could..."

"The same way we have been in each others dreams all this time Andro." Sadi spoke softly. "She has been there with us as well. Do you deny what I know you feel?"

Andro shook his head slowly. "No."

"I feel it too Andro. That void, that emptiness inside. Now that we have discovered each other and come together I can feel it so much stronger." Sadi spoke. "Far more than I ever have in the past. I know you have seen my thoughts, my memories, you know Teeria and I shared something long ago?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"This is different Andro... the desire for her is so much more vivid and powerful. Far beyond what I felt for Teeria that night." Sadi said. "My dreams of you and her, of us when we were together, it was almost as if it was actually happening. It feels like..."

"Like a piece is missing." Andro said. "And we have found it."

Sadi nodded quickly. "Yes. She is to be that piece Andro. I know it. I can feel it. Hers is the loneliness and pain that we feel just under the surface. It is not ours... so it has to be hers. And if we can feel her emotions so strongly, how can we just discharge that as if it does not mean something?"

"We can't." Andro spoke. "I felt our awareness increase at Gallais's when she was there. And tonight at the dinner."

Sadi nodded. "It was like a fog lifting wasn't it?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"I never believed in fate or destiny until after that night on the island Andro." Sadi told him. "But as I studied under the *Feravomir* I came to see that sometimes our paths are laid before us for reasons we can not explain. The *Feravomir* said as much today. Yet even then..." Sadi looked at him and reached up to stroke his cheek. "Even then I did not truly believe it until that day I saw you on the airfield. You never questioned it my love, but until that day... until that day I saw you... that is when I truly believed." Sadi rested her head against his chest. "The *Feravomir* told me that when you and Elynth touched me that night on the island it not only opened my mind, but it triggered my own Mindvoice abilities that up until then had been lying dormant. Ever since... ever since that day Andro I have felt you and Elynth within me. Perhaps I denied it at first... but not anymore. I feel her too Andro. She is part of us. She is meant to be part of us for some reason I can't explained. Just as we are meant for each other... she is meant for us as well."

"And the fact that she is part of the High Coven? That does not bother you?" He asked.

Sadi lifted her head and looked at him. "Is she part of the High Coven my love?" Sadi asked. "Or has she always been a part of us?"

Andro stared into her green eyes for a long moment. "She is married Sadi."

"To that fat pig *ronnus*?" Sadi exclaimed. "You don't believe she chose him do you? Did you see the way he groped her at dinner for all to see? I wanted to rip his throat out for the way he treated her!"

"It does not change the fact she has a husband." Andro spoke softly. "They are here for us to train them and their dragons. No matter... no matter how much I may want to..."

"Then you do desire her? Just as strongly as I do?" Sadi said. "And choose your words carefully my mate; we are *Anomes* and I will know if you are lying." She said with a smile.

Andro smiled. "Yes *KertaGai*. I do desire her. Just as strongly as I desire you. However unlike with you..." He leaned over and nuzzled her cheek and neck. "I can not simply claim her as my own no matter what I may feel. She is a vampire and they follow different customs and rules. Not to mention the political fallout if it is discovered the Crown Prince and Princess are having an affair with a Princess of the High Coven, who just happens to be married as well."

Sadi leaned back and looked at him oddly. "You don't actually believe all that *nubous* drivel you just exhaled do you?"

Andro chuckled. "No. It sounded good though."

Sadi slapped his powerful abdomen hard and leaned over to bit his shoulder. "*Mida!*" She spat playfully. She set the mug of tea on the table next to the couch and lowered her head to his chest feeling his arms encircle her. "What do we do?"

"We wait and see where things lead *KertaGai*." Andro said softly. "We can not be seen pursuing her Sadi, no matter what either of us feel. She... she needs to come to us. Then it will be different."

"And when she does Andro? She *will* come to us my love; you can feel that as surely as I can. When she does... then what do we do?" Sadi asked.

Andro tightened his grip on her. "Then we will act as wolves should when it comes to protecting what is ours. We will kill anyone who tries to take her away from us."

"Then I hope she comes to us soon, for I do not know how long I will tolerate that pig touching her as he does before I do rip his face off." Sadi growled.

"Yes... I do know the feeling *KertaGai*." Andro spoke.

“Helen said you would try to deny what you felt.” Sadi said softly. “Deny it because you thought I would be angry.”

Andro smiled. “*KertaGai*... I will never keep anything from you. I do not wish to fall under your wrath.”

Sadi chuckled. “Good. You just remember that and everything will be just fine.” She lifted her head and looked at him. “And while you are at it... I think you should do a little more body worshiping before we have to sleep. A few more hours should do. At least.”

Andro smiled at her. “At least a few hours.” He rose quickly with Sadi in his arms and waited until she had once more wrapped her arms and legs around him.

“So where do you plan on fulfilling your last few hours of pleasuring me Androcles Leonidas.” Sadi asked as calmly as she could given the fact she felt his cock already pressing against her opening at full mast.

Andro grinned. “I thought I would start in the kitchen...” His hands tightened on Sadi’s hips and he pulled her down, watching as her eyes rolled into the back of her head as he slammed home in one powerful lunge within her depths. “And... and then... see where we go from there.” He gasped out.

Sadi could only nod her head, lost in the exquisite feelings of being so completely filled.

MJOLNIR’S HAND

“...our proposal is very generous as it stands now,” Jalersi was speaking. “But feel free to ask any questions you may have in regards to it.”

For’mya sat at the head of the table, Laustinos and Stenys to her left, while Jalersi, Jiss, Matuarr and Athani occupied the seats to her right. As with all the newer *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers and the older models that had been extensively refitted; many of the rooms and corridors on *MJOLNIR’S HAND* were now accessible to dragons even of Torma’s size. Since only he, Jeth and Arzoal came close to that enormous size, Cemath and Aurith occupied one end of the conference room furthest from the table with little difficulty. Resumar stood in front of the huge view window, his back to the table as he gazed at the stars that were streaking by. The Kavalian delegation had all chosen to sit at the far end of the table closest to the door which kept them further away from the dragons. Cemath and Aurith thought this action extremely humorous. Athani was the only one to keep looking at them, while also continually looking very discretely at where Resumar stood.

Athani had not expected what she felt surging through her. She had made her decision long ago, and discovering that she was to be given to Qurot only made her advance her plans. She did not however, expect one of the Princes to be on the ship, and she most certainly did not expect to find herself so physically attracted to him. He hadn’t paused for a second to reach down and help her to her feet after Karun had shoved her aside, and his dark eyes were bright and captivating to say the least. He was easily six feet tall, perhaps a shade over that, and the black uniform and body armor that he wore conformed to what she could easily discern was a sculpted and muscular body. He acted like he was ignoring what was going on, but she had seen his head turn ever so slightly to look at the two dragons at different points during Jalersi’s presentation of their portion of the trade agreement. It also came as quite the shock that they were able to communicate with the dragons with their minds. Her father and Pusintin, all the military leaders in fact, none of them had this information. It was something she should have brought to her sister’s attention as soon as they were escorted to their quarters, something had stopped her however. Neither Jalersi nor any of the others in their party had taken note of her brief conversation with the Prince in regards to the dragons, and Athani found that feeling of knowing something no one else among her people did empowering.

The Prince had called the elven Queen mother, yet Athani saw no resemblance in features whatsoever. He in fact looked more like the images of the second elven Queen Dysea and it was easy to see who his father was with the strong jaw and stern features. This only enforced what Athani had gotten from the many Netnews reports and files she had read over the last years. The children of the Lycavorian King did not themselves make any distinction between who was their birth mother. They referred to all of them as mother.

For'mya nodded as she set the data pad Jalersi had given her down on the table. She reached forward to the metal container and poured herself a mug of Aricia's coffee. "May I offer you some coffee or tea?" She asked looking to Jalersi and then Athani.

"Tea would be very nice." Jalersi answered.

"Yes it would." Athani stated in reply turning to look at her.

For'mya smiled as she poured two mugs of the cinnamon smelling tea. She slid one across to Jalersi and held out the second mug for Resumar as he turned from the view window. "Gentlemen... please help yourselves." For'mya finished as she took her mug in her hands.

Jiss and Matuarr did not hesitate at this and began helping themselves to both coffee and tea. Qurot however reached out and held his hand in front of the mug Resumar was placing in front of Athani.

"In our culture... the man is served first." He snapped.

"Qurot!" Jalersi snapped softly.

Resumar looked at Qurot. "That's nice." He said evenly. "We do things differently here." He brushed Qurot's hand aside and placed the mug in front of Athani. He glanced at her face and saw her blue/green eyes gazing up at him for a brief instant before she looked down and took the mug in her hands.

"Thank you Prince Resumar." She said softly.

"Is it habit among the Union representatives to dismiss the cultures and traditions of a visiting delegation?" Qurot spoke his eyes going to For'mya.

"We respect the cultures and traditions of every species within the Union Commander." For'mya answered calmly. "It is a Spartan custom among the Union that the head of a visiting delegation is rendered service first, followed then by any females among their party. As I am sure you would expect us to honor your traditions within the bounds of your borders, you must honor ours while you are here. We do not begrudge you your beliefs Senior Commander, but we treat our females differently within the boundaries of the Union, and that is how we will treat them."

Qurot stared at her for several moments before nodding his head. "As you say." He finally spoke.

"Everything in regards to the trade details seems very much in order." For'mya stated. "I'm sure the minor details of the trade contract will be worked out by the individuals whose job it is to do such things among both our peoples. I am far more interested however, in the Kavalian request to open an embassy."

Jalersi met her eyes. "Is that not normal practice?" She asked.

For'mya nodded. "In most cases yes. However our two governments have had no contact in nearly twenty years. Not since your incursion into Union space and..."

"That was not a sanctioned operation by my father or the KFI. That was the work of a rogue officer within our military ranks." Jalersi spoke quickly. "We have apologized for that and attempted to make reparations. All of which were rebuffed."

"Yes... that was made very clear when it happened." For'mya spoke. "However that does not change the fact that it did indeed happen, sanctioned or not. Three thousand four hundred and thirty-five Union civilians lost their lives and..."

"Your King butchered twenty-five thousand of our troops in retaliation! He left no one alive! None!" Qurot exclaimed. "Is that not fair enough of a trade? You want more? What nonsense is this?"

"Qurot you will be silent!" Jalersi snapped.

"I will not! I..."

"Your troops..." Resumar spoke loudly causing everyone in the room to look at him as he walked around the table to stand so he could look at Qurot. "Your troops murdered seven hundred and nineteen men; women and children. Innocent civilians that were massacred when they refused to surrender their belongings to your troops or leave their homes. Your troops then used the civilian population that they did not kill and that remained as slave labor to build bunkers around civilian buildings you wrongly assumed my father would not attack. The colony had no strategic value in the least Senior Commander. None! There were no valuable resources to take or acquire. It had no defense fortifications except for rudimentary bunkers that could not have supported the entire population in case of an attack regardless. There are several thousand surviving witnesses who can tell you their stories if you like Commander. If this operation was unsanctioned as you suggest Commander Qurot, why do you appear to be defending those who perpetrated this crime so diligently? And make no mistake... it was a crime."

Athani sat in her chair trying to keep the look of astonishment from her face. These were facts she had never heard before regarding that attack. The only release of information put out by her father was that the Lycavorian Union had slaughtered their troops for blundering into their territory and attacking what they thought was a High Coven planet. Even though they knew the Kavalian Commander had gone rogue, this is what they told their people. The other thing that impressed her was that this Lycavorian Prince was actually speaking to Qurot in a manner that made it very clear he was not afraid of the man.

“Prince Resumar... I believe we all know what happened on the colony. We do not need to bring that distasteful event back into the present. It was unsanctioned as the Commander stated and...” Laustinos spoke up quickly getting to his feet.

Resumar shot Laustinos a glaring look. “I don’t recall including you in this conversation Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos!” He barked. “Sit your *mida* down!”

“Res!” For’mya’s soft voice echoed in the room and he turned his eyes quickly to where she sat. “*Niob coi ter vada daanth.*” (Now is not the time.)

Resumar took a deep breath and nodded his head slowly. “I apologize mother.” He spoke softly.

Athani saw him exhale evenly and move back around the table slowly. She did not know what his mother had told him for she had spoke in the ancient Lycavorian tongue, but whatever it had been the effect was immediate and calming.

For’mya leaned forward in her chair once more and looked at Jalersi. “As you can see, my son is very passionate about what he believes, as I’m sure all of you are as well. A request to open an embassy is not a trade agreement, and as I’m sure First Secretary Stenys has no doubt explained to you, that sort of request must be voted on by the entire Union Senate as well as be approved by the Prime Minister and the King.”

“Will King Leonidas allow an audience so that I can present our proposition to him personally Lady For’mya?” Jalersi said.

“I’m sure that could be arranged.” Laustinos began speaking. “He is...”

“Martin Leonidas is a busy man!” For’mya spoke up her dark eyes turning to look at Laustinos. His words died in his throat when he saw her glare. “I will make it known this is what you wish, but I can not guarantee what he will do. Officially or unofficially.” For’mya continued turning back to Jalersi. “I will speak to him on your behalf... I give you my word.”

“You are his Queen.” Athani spoke up now tearing her eyes from where Resumar stood. “Do you not have some sway over him?”

For’mya smiled. “Yes... however I and my fellow Queens have tried to convince him of many things through the years. Some of them worked... many more did not. Martin is very much anchored in his morals and values, and he will not bend them to accommodate something he does not believe personally. That is one of the reasons why we love him so.”

Jalersi nodded her head. “There has been much mistrust between our two peoples and my father is hoping this delegation can lead to the opening of more doors. So do I.”

For’mya smiled and got to her feet. “We have thirty-six hours to put aside politics and simply enjoy each others company and learn what we can before we reach Earth. I will make a secure communications array available for your use and I invite you to dinner tonight.”

“Here?” Jalersi asked.

“Oh no... we eat in one of the mess lounges with the crew.” For’mya spoke.

“You eat with underlings?” Karun gasped now.

“They are fellow crewmates and in many cases friends.” Resumar stated looking at his cousin. “They are not underlings. Their lives are no less important than ours.”

For’mya smiled. “Please... I’m sure Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos will be happy to see your back to your quarters. Dinner is served at nineteen hundred hours. I hope you will see fit to join us.”

Jalersi bowed her head slightly and then made to follow Laustinos out of the conference room. Athani glanced almost shyly at Resumar as she too made her way past him. She did not notice him inhale deeply of her scent as she passed. Qurot glared at him as he walked by and Resumar simply smiled at him.

For’mya watched as they filed out and Stenys stepped up to her as the door slid shut. She turned to face one of Armetus’s most senior political agents. “Talk to me Stenys.” She spoke.

“It is hard to fathom what their purpose is Lady For’mya.” He spoke in reply. “I can tell you this trade delegation is not their purpose for coming forward now. As I’m sure you and the King have already deduced this is simply a way for them to ascertain why the High Coven is on Earth.”

“So they’re lying through their teeth.” Resumar said as he came up to them.

Stenys chuckled. “Essentially Milord... yes I believe they are.” He said looking at Resumar. “It’s not very easy to pick out the adrenalin dump into their bodies if they should lie.” Stenys said. “Their scents are pungent and pure, but it’s almost as if they can now control such indications. I was thinking that perhaps Pusintin may have given them instruction in how to thwart our sense of smell in some respects. Perhaps to mask the adrenalin spikes in their bodies when they are lying.”

For’mya nodded. “No doubt.”

“I noticed the younger sister seemed surprised by the information you stated in regards to the settlement attack Prince Resumar.” Stenys spoke. “That would go along with the few reports we got out of Kavalian space right after it happened. The KFI shifted the entire blame to us for overreacting in many respects.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Res answered. “Qurot is trouble. His hatred for us is almost a palpable thing.”

Stenys nodded. “Yes. I would hazard a guess and say he was sent along to somehow tell us or show us the caliber of their soldiers and leaders now. I can think of no other reason for his presence here other than a means of intimidation. Something which he does not accomplish I might add.”

“We must stay vigilant.” For’mya spoke softly as she looked at them. “But we must also be courteous and respectful.”

“Do you think father will meet with them mother?” Resumar asked.

For’mya looked at him. “I don’t know. And I’m curious to know why she is so insistent upon that happening.” For’mya shook her head. “Let’s find out as much as we can in the next few hours and over dinner and then I will contact your father and see what he says. Though I hardly think he will be happy to know that his nephew and his brother’s mate are part of the delegation and that they want to meet with him.”

SPARTA

DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD

Andro looked at the forty-two remaining High Coven riders as they occupied chairs set up just inside the edge of the hanger. The sky outside was clear, the sun beating down on the tarmac brilliantly. The positioning of the chairs did not go unnoticed by many of the forty-two Coven riders. While all of them were purebloods and could still function and act even in direct sunlight, it was not something they went out of their way to expose themselves too. The sun could still kill them if they were left unprotected and without blood to replenish themselves. It was how the Kavalians had tortured and killed many of their kind during the war. Chaining them to the ground in a desert setting and watching as the direct sunlight cooked the flesh from their bones over a period of hours and days. To a vampire it was the most horribly painful way to die outside of the Blood Fever.

Andro took note that all of them had been fitted and now wore the standard black Mark IV ArmorPly body armor that all of Mjolnir’s Hand and the nearly one thousand Bonded Pairs and many of the *Durcunusaan* wore. It provided the best protection and the most freedom of movement while not being excessively heavy.

Andro turned slightly as Deni and Eliani walked up with Lisisa and Nyla.

“Their dragons are practically eating us out of house and home.” Lisisa said with a grin. “Almost all of them have reached the weight they should be at for their sizes. Elder Daurgo and Arzoal are making sure of it.”

Andro nodded. “Good. Mother sent a brief message this morning. The Kavalians will be here earlier than we initially expected so we will be leaving tomorrow for the Southern base. Deni, you and Lisisa leave later this afternoon to make sure everything is prepared. Carina and Moneus have already left to make initial training plans and to insure security will remain tight. Eliani, Nyla and I will follow on with Arrarn, Sadi and Zarah and the others later tomorrow afternoon in the TYPE II.”

“So Sadi has decided to become Andro’s co-pilot then?” Eliani asked.

Andro nodded. "She is finishing the paperwork today with grandmother and Zarah to enable her to graduate early. When she is done with that, Zarah will take her to the Ministry of Defense and complete her security clearances and such."

"And no doubt talk her ear off." Nyla said with a smile.

"Andro... why is Vincix coming with us?" Eliani asked. "He is Dalah's son. He wanted Tharua for himself. That is bound to cause problems with Jeth and Tharua."

Andro shook his head. "I have already talked with Jeth and Tharua. They have told you they sealed their bonding last night?"

Lisisa smiled. "Oh yes... in far greater detail than I needed to know too."

Eliani elbowed her sister and chuckled. "At least you didn't have to listen to Tharua rant about it all morning. She practically had me, Nyla and Arydun pulling our hair and scales out."

"And wanting to jump each other's bones." Nyla spoke playfully.

"Well... that too." Eliani stated looking at her seductively.

"Lisisa is just pissed because she ain't getting any for herself." Deni chipped in with a smirk.

Lisisa snapped out with a hard punch to Deni's arm. "You should be the one to talk!" She growled. "Word is getting around that you are nothing more than a playboy prince!"

"Hey! Whatever works?" Deni declared.

They all laughed softly while Lisisa shook her head in mock disgust. Whether it was because their grandmother had understood and agreed to help them in their endeavors, or simply because they desired each other more and more as the days past, she and Deni had shared a sizzling night of passionate sex at his villa, followed by some of the gentlest cuddling so far yet in their relationship. Lisisa still quivered this morning at the memory of his touch on her skin and how his fingers caressed her limbs so lovingly.

Andro shook his head at their antics. "Nothing will come between Jeth and Tharua now, you both know that. Vincix has spoken with them as well and wished them all the best. He is the most knowledgeable Dragon Scholar after those on the Elder Council. When he failed to make the grade for Mjolnir's Hand he devoted his time to learning and teaching."

"He failed for a physical deficiency didn't he Andro?" Deni spoke. "His hind legs were not able to build enough muscle to land and take off with a rider?"

Andro nodded. "Yes. He has since taken on the role of schooling the hatchlings and adolescents. And he is a bear when it comes to teaching them. I watched one of his gatherings and he frightened *me*. That is what we need with the Coven dragons. Someone to teach them and not be afraid to put them in their place or tell them they are being stupid. Our bonded ones can't do that because they will be doing the training. When they swat someone in the snout for doing something stupid, Vincix will be there to reaffirm that discipline, but also explain why it was done."

Lisisa tilted her head slightly as if hearing something no one else could, though she knew they could feel it as well. "Father and mother are here." She stated.

As if on cue, Torma's massive obsidian form streaked by the opening of the warehouse, Isheeni's azure blue scaled body a tail's length in front of him. The massive gust of wind swept through the opening of the hanger, buffeting those in the front row as all their heads snapped around to watch the two dragons rocket over the tarmac stretched out in front of them and then execute mind boggling vertical maneuvers that sent them hurtling skyward once again. Andro and his siblings stepped away from the side of the hanger with smiles on their faces as they watched their parents put on the display.

The hanger was designed for *TYPE II* Dragon Transports, and the entire front of it was completely open, allowing the Coven riders to watch easily as Torma and Isheeni twisted and turned, rolled and cart wheeled in an aerial display of flying that none of them had ever seen before. Their heads turned quickly to the side as Iriral landed lightly off to the side, Dysea and Isabella in the saddle on her back, and then went back to the two dragons that were coming straight at them from across the airfield at a blistering speed. The azure scaled dragon was by far the fastest of the pair, far faster than the Coven riders had ever seen. The massive obsidian beast was only able to keep pace because of his massive wing span and the muscles to propel him at the speeds he was traveling. They were dumbfounded at the maneuvers he had executed even as large as he was as he stayed right on the tail of the azure scaled dragon.

"Trust!" Andro shouted loudly.

His booming voice echoed in the hanger startling all of the riders to include Yuri. Their eyes went to where he stood as Torma and Isheeni settled to the ground several hundred meters away.

“It begins with trust!” Andro stated as Elynth appeared from the side of the hanger, already saddled and moved up just behind him. “If you do not trust your Bonded Brother or Sister, they will not trust you. Without trust... there can be no bond. Without trust there will be no Bonded Pair. It starts with trust.”

The Coven riders watched as Arrarn Leonidas appeared with a large monitor, three *Durcunusaan* soldiers quickly setting up a table and hooking up the monitor to a portable power supply. Eliani picked Andro’s helmet from the saddle on Elynth’s back and casually tossed it to him as Torma and Isheeni approached the hanger. Martin and Aricia had huge smiles on their faces and Isheeni kept bumping her tail into Torma’s side in a show of affection. They settled to the ground next to Iriral and Martin jumped off Torma’s back landing like a cat.

I didn’t think the two of you were going to come down. Dysea Mindvoiced unshielded. This did not go unnoticed or unheard among the Coven riders, as they heard her words as well. Even Yuri wore a surprised expression.

Do you know how long it’s been since we have done that? Aricia exclaimed as she dropped to the ground light footed and stepped quickly up next to Martin, pressing her body against his.

Far too long. Isheeni’s voice echoed loudly. *You have put on weight my beloved husband.* She turned to look at Torma with her azure eyes bright and glowing with love and adoration.

They had decided to Mindvoice unshielded before coming to the airfield to show the Coven riders the closeness among rider and dragon. And there were no dragons or riders closer than those who were members of the Leonidas family anywhere within the Union. Torma and Isheeni had shared in every birth of a Leonidas child, every event throughout their lives. Martin and his Queens had shared the hatching of every egg that Isheeni produced. It was a common sight to see a dragon accompanying his or her rider even on the streets of Sparta and Eden City, but it was a very rare occurrence indeed when a dragon bonded to a Leonidas was not with them wherever they went, no matter how unimportant the task.

Torma snorted loudly. *I am exactly as I was when Martin and I became bonded.* Torma answered. *A lean, mean dragon machine, as Anja would say.*

The laughter that followed was genuine and Isheeni extended her head out to rub the scales under Torma’s thick neck in happiness. *Yes... and you are all mine.*

Martin turned as Andro walked up with a grin on his face, his dark eyes taking in the smiles among the Coven riders as they watched.

“All set?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “I was just telling them of trust.” He spoke.

Martin nodded. “Don’t go too high this time.” He spoke. “Your mothers hate it when you do that.”

“Yes we do.” Dysea spoke with a grin.

Martin looked at Elynth as she walked up and brushed against her mother and father in affection. “Elynth... make sure he doesn’t go splat ok?”

Elynth turned her golden eyes on Martin and she snorted as well. *Splat? I would never allow Andro to go splat King Martin. Perhaps bounce once or twice... but never splat.*

Martin and the others laughed and Andro stepped up to Elynth.

Thank you sister. He spoke.

Elynth turned her head and flashed him her gold eyes with what would amount to a dragon smile as her fangs were barred. *Let’s go my brother! The sky calls us!*

Andro smiled and brought his helmet down onto his head before using her foreleg as a step and hoisting himself into the saddle. His head turned quickly to where Carisia sat in the first row with Narice watching him intently.

“Elynth go!” Andro barked.

Elynth trumpeted and with a powerful thrust of her legs she propelled them into the sky. Martin turned to look at the riders and walked slowly in front of them.

“As my son was saying... trust.” Martin spoke so that his voice would carry. The Coven riders all turned to look at him.

Martin Leonidas... the King of the Lycavorian Union... and who all of them had thought was their mortal enemy. Many of them had been schooled as children that the only thing they needed to fear more than the Blood Fever was the wrath of a Lycavorian wolf of pure blood. Standing before them, not ten feet from the first row of chairs, was the Lycavorian wolf with the purest blood of all. They all knew who this man was, and it was easy enough to discern the power radiating from him. The power that radiated from the three Queens that stood to the side as well, not to mention the children. They were in the proverbial lion's den.

Or were they?

"There are one thousand ninety-four Bonded Pairs within the Union as of today." Martin told them seeing the surprised looks of astonishment on many of their faces. None more so than on Yuri's features. Martin took great joy in that. At one point in his life he had thought he felt something for Yuri. Martin had not been able to explain it then, and it wasn't until after he had discovered who and what he truly was that he came to realize what he had felt. He had thought it might be love, but now Martin Leonidas knew it was wariness and caution. She knew who he was and was using him, biding her time until she found a moment to kill him and still be able to escape. Whatever moments they had spent together Martin quickly deduced were nothing more than acting. It wasn't until Dysea came into his life that Martin felt true love. That love grew as first Anja, then Aricia and finally For'mya and Isabella cemented their places within his heart. Yuri did not even rate a third or fourth look, and if there was someone besides his brother that Martin truly disliked... it was Yuri.

"All of those Bonded Pairs have a level of trust that, with only two exceptions, you and your dragons have not achieved. That is not necessarily a bad thing; you just have not had the right interaction. Some of your bonds are more forced than others but that does not mean you can not achieve the level of trust needed to make a Bonded Pair." Martin turned to look at Arrarn who looked up from the monitor and nodded.

"You have probably heard, either while you have been here or from sources that do not know any better," Martin glanced at Yuri quickly. "You have probably heard that I share the most powerful bond among the Bonded Pairs within the Union with Torma, my brother." Martin motioned to where Torma sat and he watched as almost all eyes went to the obsidian monster that dwarfed all the others. "While it is a common misconception, even among our own people because we have been together for so long, it is not true. My son Androcles was bonded with Elynth before he was even born. While he was still within his mother's womb they were communicating with each other and it is they who have the most powerful bond. That is why he is training you and not me. Aside from the other reasons of course, which some of you may or may not already know."

Martin looked at them, allowing his eyes to sweep over the assembled men and women. "I have told your Empress Aikiro I would do this and some of you are probably asking why. The reason is actually very simple. You are at war with the Kavalians and your leaders want to use the bonds you have developed with these dragons, now that they are grown, to fight the Kavalians. Your leaders saw fit to basically kidnap these dragons from a Union transport that crashed many years ago, and unfortunately because you have bonded with them, I can not separate you from them without ill effects. If I could... I would do just that without a moment's pause. And none of you could stop me. I can't do that however... and I will not send your dragons into battle against the Kavalians with riders who either don't care about them, or can't fight worth a shit from their backs. And yes... I don't particularly care for the Kavalians in case you haven't noticed." Martin saw several of the men and women smile and laugh softly.

"If you are not going to take this seriously, then I suggest you step forward now. You've already seen and witnessed how my son views those who do not care for their bonded partners. If you do not put forth one hundred percent of your effort in this, he will stomp your asses into the ground I guarantee that. If you are worried about what will happen to you should you decide this is not what you want, I give you my word as King of the Union, you will be granted asylum here within our borders if you feel your life is threatened in any manner by those above you."

Martin saw many heads turn to where Yuri sat but she remained silent. She could not say or do anything for her mother had already agreed to this. Better to have a dozen dragons that could fight, than three dozen where half were nothing more than cannon fodder her mother had said. Martin was certain when he made this announcement that at least one or two of the Coven riders would take his offer. He was pleasantly surprised when none rose from their chairs and simply looked back at him with determination in their eyes, most especially the two young women in the front row. Martin nodded his head slowly.

“Very well. All of you have proven me wrong.” Martin spoke. “The offer will remain open for the entire time you are here training.” Martin pointed to the table. “Who can tell me what that is?”

“It’s a portable GBR.” Narice spoke up quickly. “Ground Based Radar. It is used mostly by small units to determine altitude of enemy air targets. We have something very similar.”

Martin nodded. “Andro is wearing a transmitter on his uniform that will tell us how high he is. Elynth wears a similar transmitter in her saddle. The height at which you can exit an aircraft will depend on the closeness of your bond with your dragon and how strong your physic shield is as a pair. Since dragons and riders can not be picked up on any known sensor array, the higher you can go out, the better off you are.”

“How... how high have you gone out King Leonidas?” A male vampire asked quickly from the second row. “From one of your *STRIKERS*?”

Martin shrugged. “I don’t know to be honest with you.” He answered.

“Eighty-three thousand feet.” Lisisa declared proudly from behind him. “During the attack on Peklar Seven.”

Martin turned and looked at his daughter with a smile and turned back. “There you go. Eighty-three thousand feet.” He couldn’t help but notice the looks of stunned shock at this information evident on all their faces.

“That’s... that’s not possible!” Yuri exclaimed now as she stood up and looked at him. “Not even for you!”

Martin turned to look at her. “You don’t think?” He stated evenly. “Perhaps not for you and Vollenth but then again Yuri, if you spent more time in bonding with Vollenth and less time in instilling hatred and anger in him, you might be surprised at what you can accomplish.”

Isabella wisely kept her face neutral, but inwardly she was singing with joy at Martin’s words. It was as if his statement to Yuri was the icing on the cake from their previous night of blistering passion. They had gotten almost no sleep after the State Dinner for Martin had taken her again within moments of arriving back at the villa, and that had only led to several hours of wanton pleasure with all of them in their bed. All of Isabella’s fears; all of her doubts, Martin’s simple statement to Yuri just now and the way he delivered it to her with complete derision, it was vindication for Isabella. Never again would she doubt she was better than Yuri in every way. Isabella felt Dysea press closer to her and slip her hand into hers squeezing it tightly. This caused Isabella to smile inwardly and focus her eyes on the emerald orbs of her elven lover and fellow Queen.

[Now do you see Bella my love?] Dysea spoke. [This wench Yuri is naught but an insect to our Nauta Melme when held against his love for you and for us. Doubt that no longer.]

[I won’t.] Isabella answered. [Not ever again.]

Martin shook his head as Yuri’s anger at him surged from her entire being. He truly did not know where it came from, and at this juncture in his life he really didn’t care. “As I was saying...” Martin turned back to face the Coven Riders. “The strength of your bond comes partly from the trust you have in your dragon. The trust they have in you. It will allow you to do things you never would have thought of. You must put your lives in each others hands and work as one entity. Without conscious thought, without hesitation, because when you hesitate... you die. Plain and simple.”

“We got the feed father.” Arrarn called.

“I want to show you the level of trust my son and Elynth have with each other.” Martin said. “This was his idea... not mine. He wanted to imprint upon you what you could accomplish if you go into the training with an open mind.” He turned to Arrarn. “Fire it up.”

Arrarn activated the monitor. “We’re hot!”

The numbers beside the large monitor sprang to life and were reading nearly forty thousand feet and they were continuing to climb. The near cloudless sky was whipping by, the tips of Elynth’s wings just visible as she continued to propel them straight up. Aricia and the others stepped closer to the monitor even as everyone’s attention became riveted to the climbing numbers and the small blue dot on the GBR, as well as the picture from the TAP camera in Andro’s helmet.

“As you can see... Andro has a TAP camera in his helmet.” Martin saw their faces look confused. “Transparent Aluminum Photocell... essentially an invisible but very powerful camera.”

“What... what is he doing?” Carisia asked now. “He is over... over fifty thousand feet up!”

Had Yuri not been so angry, the hatred washing through her completely, she would have noticed the note of concern in Carisia's voice as she asked the question. As it was... only a woman would know what that note of concern sounded like, and the only two women to take notice of Carisia's tone of voice were Narice and Aricia.

Martin looked at her and grinned. "Yes... yes he is." Martin stepped forward and touched the small control console on the table. "Andro... would you be kind enough to show our High Coven guests what we mean when we say trust."

"It would be a pleasure father." Andro's voice boomed out from the small speaker. "I shall see you in a few moments."

Andro looked at the altimeter on his wrist and smiled. *Sixty-four thousand feet sister!* He announced. *We've done this from higher Andro!* Elynth declared joyfully. She was happiest when her bonded brother was upon her back and they were soaring through the sky.

They too were speaking unshielded allowing the Coven riders far below them to hear their words.

Yes we have... though now that you have announced it unshielded to everyone; I don't think my mothers will allow us to do it anymore. Andro spoke with a grin. *And neither will KertaGai!*

If you are about to do what I think you are about to do... you would be so correct! Aricia's voice boomed out in their minds.

Andro... Elynth... are you insane? Sadi's voice joined in from where she sat in her classroom in Sparta. Elynth leveled off easily and turned her head back to look at him. *Oops! I forgot.*

Andro laughed. *So if this is to be our last time, let's make it worth it sister! Father... we will see you in four minutes!*

Andro... please... Sadi's voice echoed again. *Be careful.*

I will meet you at five hundred feet sister! Andro barked out just as Elynth rolled inverted and he released the dragon armor holding his legs and plummeted towards the earth far below.

Elynth rolled back over and watched him for a few seconds, her golden eyes gleaming in joy. *I will be there my brother!*

Elynth counted off ten seconds in her head and then she folded her wings tightly against her body, rolled to her right and she too plunged for the ground far below.

Aricia stepped up next to Martin in the hanger as they watched the two dots separate from each other, each of them beginning blistering descents towards the ground.

"Higher?" Aricia exclaimed. "They've done this from higher?"

Martin looked at her, seeing Dysea and Isabella come up behind her as well, stern looks on their faces.

"Hey... it wasn't my idea!" He defended himself.

"You have known he and Elynth do these things *Nauta Melme*?" Dysea spoke. "You allowed it?"

"I haven't been able to control him since he was sixteen and you all know that." Martin said.

Aricia turned her head to look at Isheeni. *Isheeni... did you know they do these things?*

I did not... and I certainly do not approve. Isheeni announced turning to look at her mate. *Torma?*

Torma did his best to not meet the azure eyes of his mate and remained silent. *Torma you knew as well? How could you allow this?* Isheeni declared.

Torma turned his head to look at her. *She is as headstrong and willful as you are!* Torma spoke evenly. *You know as well as I that she would never allow harm to come to Andro. And she has never missed. Not even when we did it together.*

Together? Isheeni hissed in stunned surprised. Her azure scaled head turned to where Martin stood sheepishly and then back to her dragon husband. *You and Martin have done this as well?*

Torma nodded. *Many times.*

Aricia and the others were glaring at Martin now. He shrugged his broad shoulders. "It's fun."

"Fun!" Isabella almost shouted. "Martin Leonidas... you are certifiably insane!"

The Coven riders were still in some shock at what was taking place and the conversation going on. Many of them were watching the monitor as the two blue dots grew further apart, but continued to fall. All of them had begun to crowd closer to the table and monitor, seeing the few wisps of clouds whipping past Andro's helmet camera as he plummeted straight down.

"She won't catch him!" Dante's voice spoke softly. "He's falling too fast and she's too far away."

"Silence Dante!" Narice hissed standing next to Carisia and detecting the rapid beating of her heart. Her heart was racing not from excitement, but from fear. Fear for Androcles Leonidas and she was allowing her shields to slowly come down enough for others to detect this. Narice stepped up close to her in the press of bodies and grasped her hand tightly. Carisia's head whipped around to stare at her.

[Your shields Carisia.] Narice reached out to her shielded. *[No matter your concern for Androcles, you must keep your feelings hidden. Your shields are slipping.]* Narice felt Carisia's shields slam back in place in a single blink and she nodded.

[Narice... I...]

Narice shook her head almost imperceptibly. *[You do not need to explain anything to me Carisia. We will talk when we have time. Guard your feelings well, for your mother and my mother would not be happy to know that you are in deeply love with Androcles Leonidas and his woman. And they with you.]*

Carisia's eyes were wide as she stared at Narice in shock. *[How... how...?]*

[We will talk as I said. For now... let us watch the show. And do not fear for him. Elynth will be there just as she is supposed to be, for they trust each other implicitly. Just as we trust our bonded brothers with our lives. Though I dare say... their bond is far greater than what we share with our bond mates. That will change however. You will see.] Narice smiled.

"Look!" One of the Coven riders called out. "He's passing through thirty thousand feet! She's four kilometers away!"

Andro's voice boomed out of the speakers once more. "Father... would you tell Eliani and Nyla to insure we have ample medical supplies and several of mother's best medics to accompany us when we depart tomorrow." No one could believe the tone of his voice as it was as calm and controlled as if he was sitting on a beach drinking a glass of wine.

Martin grinned but that grin quickly vanished when Aricia glared at him. "I don't think your mothers appreciate your humor Andro." He spoke at the transmitter.

"It's a beautiful day!" Andro announced as the camera in his helmet shifted and suddenly it was pointed back skyward at the clouds and blue sky. "And I am too large for her to spank me anymore!"

"You want to bet!" Aricia barked.

Andro laughed and they saw the picture turn once more as the ground became visible again. "You and Isheeni should try this mother. It's truly breathtaking."

"Androcles Leonidas... you are so in trouble when you get back on the ground!" Aricia spat.

"She's gone!" A voice shouted. The blue dot that was signifying Elynth's position had faded from the screen. "She's off the GBR!"

"Did she crash?"

"Where did she go?"

"She'll never catch him in time!"

Elynth executed a smooth turn back towards the *Durcunusaan* base only three hundred feet from the ground. She could feel Andro's sense of calm and it filled her as well. They had always been able to sense each other's emotions far more deeply than other Bonded Pairs, far more deeply than even their parents could. This bond was what allowed them to do so much. She could not imagine what it would be like not having Andro's consciousness connected with hers, not being able to feel him as she did. As he felt her. They knew each other's most intimate secrets and desires. The joy and love that he and Sadi shared filled her just as completely as it did them. The desire and love they both felt for the maya eyed female vampire. Elynth's own desire for the dragon that carried her. They were all of one mind... and Elynth knew it would never be the same without them filling her thoughts and providing her with strength and faith, just as she did for them.

[Nor would it be for us sister.] Andro's voice filled her thoughts.

[You do realize that your mothers will be livid with us now that they have discovered we have been doing this for years.] Elynth answered with a small amount of humor.

[Yes... well we'll just have to be more careful in the future.] Andro answered. *[I will see you in twenty seconds sister.]*

[Yes you will Andro my brother!] Elynth declared.

Elynth's golden eyes narrowed to slits and she began to pump her wings harder and faster, propelling her along over the tree tops at a blistering speed headed directly over the city of Sparta. She rose slightly in altitude to clear the highest buildings her mind focused on only one thing. She didn't notice the heads of hundreds of people look skyward as she rocketed over city streets and buildings with enough speed to be nothing more than a speeding projectile.

"There!" The Coven rider shouted as the blue dot that was Elynth suddenly rose back onto the GBR moving at incredible speed.

"How did... look at her speed!" Another announced.

"By the gods!" Dysea muttered softly as she gripped Aricia's shoulders from behind.

Aricia's azure blue eyes turned to look at Martin and she saw then the complete pride and confidence in his dark orbs. Pride and confidence in their son.

Martin smiled gently. "Never doubt their faith and trust in each other *Saaurano*." He said softly.

"They are truly one. Far more than you and I with Torma and Isheeni. They are so much more."

"It's too late!" A voice shouted. "He's under a thousand feet! She'll never...!"

"Look!" Narice yelled as her eyes caught sight of Elynth speeding across the tarmac now straight for them and beginning to rise.

There was a mad scramble as the coven riders pushed and shoved to get outside the hanger heedless of the sunlight. Their eyes reached skyward and they saw the black dot that was Andro's falling form.

Andro brake! Elynth's voice sounded like a shot as it erupted into the minds of all the coven riders just as she sharply altered her course and rose more steeply straight at his falling body.

They saw Andro snap out his arms and legs in a spread eagle shape instantly.

"She's going to hit him!" A voice yelled.

Aricia continued to stare at Martin's unwavering gaze. Dark eyes she had come to love more with each passing hour and day. A small smile came across her face as she felt the unfettered love and faith Andro and Elynth felt for one another sweep through her. It was them she knew, they were letting her know just what each of them meant to the other, and as she turned her head she saw Isheeni and Torma soaking in the same effects. Torma no different than Martin, his golden eyes displaying pride and confidence, while like Aricia, Isheeni was feeling the completeness of the bond Andro and Elynth shared for the first time.

Martin lifted his head just as Elynth snapped out her wings to their fullest extension, turned and rolled over back towards the earth in a single blink. Exactly where she should have been, exactly as they had done so many times in the past. Andro's spread eagle position slowed him just enough for her to turn and meet his downward speed and she felt the heavy thump of his body hitting the saddle just as it should have, his legs slamming home under the dragon armor and securing him fast.

Elynth let out a trumpet of joyous success and immediately went into a series of tight corkscrewing rolls with her bonded brother securely back where he belonged. She swept over the hanger and the Coven riders as she did, hearing her parents and Iriral echoing her trumpet, while Andro's brothers and sisters screamed in abandon. She turned sharply and banked over the airfield.

The eastern pad sister. Andro spoke as he reached forward and stroked the smooth light obsidian scales of her muscular neck.

Elynth nodded and flared her wings as they came in over the pad and she settled lightly to the ground. Andro was leaving the saddle the moment her talons touched down and he ran along beside her for a few steps until she came to a complete stop. Elynth lowered herself to the tarmac immediately as he walked around in

front of her taking off his helmet. Andro dropped his helmet to the ground as she lowered her head to within inches of his and he reached up to grasp either side of her huge snout as his forehead touched her snout.

[We are as one Elynth my sister.] He spoke the words softly.

Elynth closed her golden eyes. *[In mind and heart Andro my brother. Until we join our ancestors.]*

[Until we join our ancestors.]

Andro drew back and looked at her with a smile. *You were off by six inches.*

Elynth's eyes flew open wide. *I was not!* She exclaimed. *You did not adjust properly when you shifted position.*

Andro shook his head. *No... I'm sure of it.* He said as he bent to pick up his helmet.

Bah! The wind whipping by your head must have clouded your eyesight! Elynth stated as they began to walk back towards the hanger.

Six inches sister. Andro said.

Elynth leaned over and butted him in the shoulder with her snout, causing him to stumble forward. *I will show you six inches!*

Aricia couldn't help but laugh as she saw Elynth knock Andro forward, everyone hearing their unshielded conversation. It was easy enough to see that they were joking with one another, simply by the tone of their voices and their actions. They saw Andro shove back against her neck after she pushed him with her snout, though even he could not move her near four tons of muscle. Aricia turned to look at her Beloved and saw his eyes gazing at the Coven riders. As she shifted her own eyes she saw what he saw. Looks of stunned disbelief at what they had just witnessed, and looks of new determination and purpose. In all their eyes except for Yuri and her son Dante. Her other three children, including the one she had sensed something far more from, were looking on in similar fashion. The one called Carisia... Aricia saw something far more in her eyes and that interested her.

Aricia turned back as with a squeal of delight Eliani launched herself into Andro's arms and hugged her brother tightly.

"That was the best drop yet!" She shouted as Andro smiled. She turned to Elynth. "You looked beautiful Elli!"

Denali pounded his brother on the back, a huge grin on his face. "That was quite the show." He spoke leaning close to him. "Think it will matter Andro?" He whispered.

Andro looked at him. "It's up to us to make sure it does Deni." He whispered back.

Deni nodded. "I got your back." He said in acknowledgement.

Andro nodded and turned as his mother appeared in front of him. He smiled as he met her azure blue eyes.

"That is without a doubt the most incredibly stupid and reckless thing I have ever seen you do Androcles." Aricia spoke sternly.

"Perhaps mother... but it was... it was..." Andro turned to Eliani his face confused as he struggled to find the word he wanted. "Eliani... help me out here."

"Rush. It was a rush." Eliani spoke.

Andro nodded quickly and turned back to Aricia. "Yes! It was a rush!"

Aricia burst into a fit of laughing at the looks on his and Eliani's face and she embraced her son and hugged him tightly. "Sadi is going to give you a piece of her mind when she sees you." Aricia said into his ear as he hugged her back.

Andro grinned and nodded. "Yes... I'm preparing myself for that."

He stepped away from his mother and moved up next to his father in front of the Coven riders, Elynth standing just behind him. Andro reached up without looking and placed his palm flat under her jaw against her scales.

"Trust!" Andro spoke as they looked at him. "It begins with trust. Your bonded brothers and sisters have spent the last day and a half eating and resting. The lack of proper food within the Coven territory is not your fault and I can not hold you accountable for that. However it is not lacking on Earth, and I will hold you accountable for their health and well being now. I will attempt to teach you what you can do as a Bonded Pair;

but ultimately, it is you who must decide to truly allow yourselves to experience what you can feel. You will have the rest of today and this evening to do as you will. I suggest you explore as much of Sparta as you want for we will not be back for several months at least. My father has given permission to break from the restrictions placed on you when you arrived. You no longer answer to the Empress or to Princess Yuri. You answer to me. Do not think to cause problems or conflicts with the citizens of Sparta if that is what you seek. They will not tolerate it. You..."

"My mother and I did not approve this!" Yuri spat as she stepped forward. "Who do you think you are?"

Andro met her eyes evenly. "I'm the one who will teach you to survive." He stated calmly. "If that is not something that interests you Princess Yuri, then by all means do what you will."

"I have *survived* a lot longer than you have been lived Androcles Leonidas!" Yuri hissed at him. "You think too highly of your skills!"

Andro shrugged. "Then when you ride Vollenth into battle against the Kavalians, your mother will be less one daughter, for you will die Princess Yuri. And your actions will get others killed as well... that is something I will not allow. You will either adhere to my rules and directions or you and Vollenth will be excluded from this training." He stated flatly. He turned back to the riders. "You will be rejoined with your dragons when you leave here. Heed my words to you and begin to establish that trust by spending time with them. Learning of them. Sparta is the place to do it; for there are many places you can go and be assured the peace you need. That is my direction to you until we leave tomorrow."

"My mother will..." Yuri began to speak.

"Your mother already agreed to it." Martin snapped out now. "If you don't believe me... check with her yourself. My son's orders stand. End of story."

Andro let his eyes sweep across the stunned faces of the riders and they settled on Carisia and Narice. "Princess Narice... Princess Carisia... you will be section leaders for the duration of the training. When you rejoin with Deneth and Anthar after we are done here, please make your way south to Gytheio. I'm having a meeting at my villa to determine schedules and the training requirements as well as whatever else you and your people might need. The meeting will most likely extend into the late evening or early morning so come prepared to stay the night so that you do not have to fly back to Sparta."

"That is not acceptable to me!" Yuri snapped. "If you think for a moment I will allow you to have two members of royal blood within your grasp you are sorely mistaken!"

Andro looked at her and laughed. "You are joking right?" He spoke. "If we had planned anything nefarious, there is nothing you could do to stop it. And if we were not going to honor our commitment to your dragons we would have already killed you for taking them in the first place. I may be considerably younger than you Princess Yuri... but do not think to insult me by assuming I am less intelligent than you. Not only would you be incorrect... you would look the fool. Send one person with them if this makes you feel better. Just not that fat slob Commander Thast."

"He is my daughter's husband!" Yuri snapped.

"Yes... I know. He is also extremely arrogant and exceptionally rude. He has no tact... no honor and no regard for anyone but himself. I do not want him drooling all over my brand new tile floor." Andro replied with a grin.

"That is not acceptable to me." Yuri said.

"What is acceptable to you does not concern me." Andro spoke firmly. "The Mindvoice bonds that Princess Narice and Princess Carisia share with their dragons are the strongest among your riders. They will be able to assist in the training by helping your dragon riders to learn what they have taught themselves to enhance their bonds through the years. They did this with no guidance or knowledge of what we will teach them. The Empress has already agreed to this as well. Now... if you will all excuse me... I have some things to attend to before the meeting begins."

Narice stepped forward. "Wait! How will we know which villa is yours?"

Lisisa smiled as she stepped up next to Andro. "It is the only island in the Laconian Gulf and it will be the one with all the dragons on it." She stated.

They watched as Andro turned and began walking across the tarmac with his father and mother beside him. The rest of the Leonidas family fell in behind them speaking with whispers and laughter. The eyes of the

Coven riders turned as Torma's massive body suddenly blocked their view, Isheeni standing next to her beloved mate proudly. He let his golden eyes sweep across the men and women.

Heed well what he will teach you riders of the High Coven. Torma spoke unshielded so that they could hear him. Allow him to show you that you could be so much more than you are now. You only need look past what you have known to be true these past years. Look past that and grasp the unknown... for that is where the treasure truly lies.

They watched as Torma turned slowly and began following the rest of their family, for they were as much a part of the Leonidas family as any who walked on two legs. Isheeni brushed up against her mate gently as they walked.

[Do you think they will take note of your words my husband?] She asked.

[If they do not... Andro, Elynth and the others will show them the folly of their ways.] Torma answered.

[Pretty good.] Martin told his son as they walked across the tarmac.

[Pretty good?] Eliani exclaimed. *[That was pretty incredible! Did you see the look on her face?]*

[Why are you provoking her Andro?] Aricia asked. *[And why are you allowing him too Beloved?]*

[Yes... I would like to know this as well.] Isabella spoke as she walked alongside Dysea holding her hand.

[I think we all would.] Dysea said.

[They are not just here for us to train them.] Martin spoke looking at Aricia. *[We have talked of this before.]*

Dysea nodded. *[Yes... we assumed as much Nauta Melme. Aikiro wants to get on the Mindvoice ship. We know that... and she has made it painfully obvious.]*

Martin turned as they walked and looked at her. *[There is more to it than just that Melda Min. I sense there is more to it but I can't put my finger on it. Yuri has very big issues with me. Some of them I understand... some I don't.]*

[Yes... well you have kicked her ass whenever you have confronted each other.] Bella spoke with a grin.

Martin chuckled and nodded his head. *[Yes... besides that though. And now those issues seem to be carrying over to Andro because he is my oldest. I don't think she even considers Lisisa... and we all know why that is. She also has never learned to fully control her temper. The bond she has with Vollenh is tentative at best. She has turned him into something dark and evil. Her son Dante is almost no better.]*

[However... she is very powerful within Mindvoice Nauta Melme.] Dysea said. *[We can all sense it. Not on the same level as you or the Empress no... but she is very powerful. At least equal to Andro in many respects, though she does not seem to have the control and ability that he does in many respects.]*

Andro smiled. *[Thank you mother.]*

Martin nodded with a smile. *[And that is her weakness. She knows she is powerful and it pisses her off to no end that she can not use that power against Andro. Against all of us. You have seen how she reacts when she can't penetrate our Mindvoice shields. How she must always be the one in charge. Andro is going to use that against her. Sooner or later she will explode... and perhaps we'll discover what else the High Coven has in store for us.]*

[Forewarned is forearmed.] Andro spoke softly.

Martin nodded. *[Pleistarchus knows what I will do if they attempt to invade the Union.]* He spoke. *[My brother may be many things... but he is not a fool. At least I don't think so. This intelligence... coming here with their dragons for us to train? Aikiro is trying to drag me into this war for a reason. I just haven't discovered why yet.]*

Aricia looked at him. *[You don't believe the intelligence is real?]*

Martin shook his head. *[No... I didn't say that. It may very well be real and very solid intelligence. The question remains... how did they get it if it's accurate... and why bring it to us? Aikiro doesn't care about these dragons or what happens to their riders. They are nothing more than a means to an end for her. We just have to discover what her end is and what she is truly after.]*

[And provoking her anger in this manner will accomplish that?] Dysea asked looking at him.

[Maybe... maybe not.] He answered with a grin.

Andro chuckled. *[It will undoubtedly be entertaining though.]*

Isabella burst out laughing and waggled her finger between father and son. *[We will have to start keeping the two of you apart from each other.]* She stated. *[You devise some positively vile plans when you put your minds together.]*

“Yes I agreed to it.” Aikiro stated while pouring herself a crystal glass of the cloned blood.

Yuri looked at her astonished. “Mother... why?” Yuri had come directly here after they had left the airfield, only to discover that her mother and Tesand had just finished with what could only be described as an intense sexual encounter. The two small puncture wounds on Aikiro’s neck were fading quickly, and Yuri could detect slight bruising around the base of her neck that the light robe did little to hide. As with her and Robert, apparently there were times when her mother enjoyed being taken by Tesand in a very demanding way. Aikiro sipped the sweet tasting cloned blood and stepped closer to her daughter, Yuri’s eyes on her satisfied face. Yes... it was very obvious what had been happening when Yuri arrived, as the robe her mother was wearing was tied loosely around her body, she was undoubtedly very naked underneath, and her cheeks were still slightly flush. Yuri also noticed her mother made no move to try and hide the bite marks Tesand had left. Another indicator to Yuri at least that her mother had all but publicly allowed Tesand to stake his claim to her in the most intimate of fashions by any vampire.

Aikiro drew Yuri’s arm tighter. “Androcles Leonidas is correct in his statement that the bonds Narice and Carisia have with their beasts are stronger than even yours is with Vollenth. It is the reason why I have never been able to penetrate their Mindvoice shields. We must bend a little in our endeavor Yuri. Narice and Carisia are not aware of our ultimate goal, only what you and I have allowed them to see.”

“But sending them off alone to...” Yuri began.

Aikiro smiled slightly. “Narice has already informed me she will be taking Toria Dellion with them. They have developed something of a friendship it seems.” She spoke. “Our interests will not be compromised with her there. She is a former operative of the *Venorik Elghinn* and completely loyal to me. In more ways than one.” Aikiro said in a knowing fashion as she drew her to the couch and they sat down. Apparently having Toria Dellion sharing hers and Tesand’s bed whenever they demanded her gave them certain power over the red haired vampire intelligence officer Yuri observed.

“I understand what we are trying to accomplish and obtain mother.” Yuri spoke softly. “Do we need to surrender so much of ourselves to these animals to do that however?”

“In order to obtain what we want yes. At least for now.” Aikiro said softly. “Without it... our war with the Kavalians could very well continue for decades to come. I have no wish for that when we could be directing our resources to other areas. Only the four of us know the true purpose of why we are here Yuri, and make no mistake... do not believe for an instant that Martin Leonidas does not sense that there is more to what is going on than we are allowing him to see.”

“You don’t think he suspects our true purpose do you?” Yuri asked quickly. “Or perhaps he has...”

Aikiro shook her head. “No!” She said quickly. “If he did... he would never have allowed us to come here.” She stated. “You are playing your own part very well Yuri... the arrogant and volatile High Coven Princess. Your inbred hatred for this man gives you that convincing air about you. Do not overdo it however. They expect you to act in such a way because of your history with this man. Indeed... they are hoping for it. That is why we must insure Dante proceeds with his part of the plan with far more subtly than he usually exercises. I have complete faith in Narice... she may be less than willing to exercise more persuasive means to accomplish our goals, but like Toria she is absolutely loyal Yuri. It is also the reason why when Leonidas’s son asked me who I think should lead this new unit of ours, I determined Narice and Carisia would be the ones to guide them. Your bond with Vollenth is strong yes, but I will not risk you in open warfare against the Kavalians. If Carisia falls in battle... it is of no great consequence. We have already planned her demise regardless.”

“And Narice?” Yuri asked.

“Do not mistake my coldness for something it is not.” Aikiro spoke. “I love your sister Yuri, but ultimately she is not you. Only you have the strength and conviction to make the hard decisions should anything happen to me. Narice will assist in whatever way she can, but she has already shown distaste for politics and the

intricacies involved. She is rather plain in that regard. She has no great interest it seems in acquiring power and control.”

“I do not fear the Kavalians mother.” Yuri stated.

Aikiro nodded. “I know you do not and you have proven that countless times in the past. However... you are the only one that I trust with the complete knowledge of what we intend. Narice... it appears ever since becoming bonded to Deneth, Narice sees her role as more of a military one. She will begin to see what it is she needs to do in order to safeguard our Coven in that role. Narice and Carisia have parts to play... but only you, Robert, Tesand and I know what our ultimate goal is. When we achieve our goal, and if you still desire to, Carisia’s life is yours if she is not already dead. Now however, now we have to allow the Lycavorians to think we are grudgingly going along with everything they dictate to us. With the appropriate amount of discontent and distrust of course.” Aikiro said with a smile. “If Androcles Leonidas is anything like his father, and everything we have seen so far indicates he is a mirror image of him, then our unit of dragons and riders will become quite proficient in killing Kavalians and anyone else we deem fit to set them upon.”

Yuri smiled. “There is that to consider.” She said. “You do realize that they will try to take our dragons from us at some point.”

Aikiro nodded. “Of course they will.” She stated. “However... they will not accomplish this. Our dragons have bonded with our people and as Martin Leonidas well knows that bond will not be easily severed now. If at all.” She took a deep breath and nodded. “There is nothing that could come between them now.”

“The Kavalians are arriving tomorrow mother.” Yuri said. “Are you going to stay here in Sparta or return to Usu Ozeib 7?”

“I will remain for a time. We will sign the Cease Fire Accords in two weeks.” She replied casually. “We must make it seem like we are working out details and such to an event like that. Like Leonidas... I must play a part as well. I have no doubts the Kavalians will discover our dragons are here eventually... though I’m quite sure it will not be because of anything the Lycavorians or those of us here do. It will come out because it is not something that can stay hidden forever. Leonidas knows this and they will attempt to teach us what they can before it does become known.”

“Then what?” Yuri asked.

Aikiro shook her head. “That will be up to the Lycavorians.” She said. “Even they have fools among their politicians, and that is why the Kavalians are coming here in the first place. A fool who thought to make an impression of himself. I wouldn’t be surprised if this man or woman is now dust somewhere. Leonidas has a hatred for the Kavalians that nearly equals our own. Part of it has to do with the fact that they are sadistic savages, but there is something else as well. Something that I can not place my finger on. And it relates to his brother.”

“I truly never thought we would come to them for any kind of help.” Yuri spoke. “Nor did I believe they would give us this help.”

“They may be animals Yuri... but they are not fools.” Aikiro said. “Your father thought them to be beneath us, and in many ways they are. His mistake was in believing that they would amount to nothing and never pose a threat. Look at them now. Leonidas is not just a leader to them... he is a symbol. While he or any of his bloodline lives, they as a people will never give up hope.”

“Is that a good thing or a bad thing?” Yuri asked her.

“At the moment... it is a very good thing for us.” Aikiro replied with a smile. “In the future... we will see.”

“I apologize for interrupting you mother.” Yuri spoke somewhat sheepishly.

Aikiro grinned and shook her head. “It is nothing. Tesand is very thorough when it comes to making sure I am still quivering from his touch when he leaves for his duties. You were very correct though, about the air on this planet? It is revitalizing in many ways. You and Robert should enjoy this evening before you need to leave. Leonidas will not allow Robert anywhere near where you will be training.”

Yuri met her grin with one of her own. “Yes... we have already planned to do just that.” She said. “I toyed with the idea of going to Thermopylae. Having Robert take me in front of the monument to his father. Can you imagine having his father’s spirit watching as we fuck our brains out under the shadow of his tomb?”

Aikiro laughed. “Oh Yuri... that is positively vile!” She laughed. “I love it!”

Yuri chuckled. "We thought it was an excellent idea as well. We will only need to insure that there is no security around when we do this. I don't think Leonidas would appreciate it."

Aikiro shook her head. "No he would not! Do be careful! I want to hear about it if you succeed as well."
Yuri nodded. "Oh we will be." She said. "I have no desire to spend my days in one of their prison cells."

At the moment the only thing Toria Dellion was occupied with was trying to remain calm, even as Deneth streaked across the sky moving south. She had never flown on a dragon before this day; she had in truth never had much contact with the Coven dragons. Toria had no fears of flying; however this kind of flying was something completely new to her and her heart was racing almost out of control. The moment Narice and Deneth's psychic shield had engulfed her Toria knew what she was about to experience was going to be terrifying. As they reached a thousand feet above the land below, Toria found herself with her arms wrapped securely around Narice's waist as if her very life depended on it. She was pressed tightly against Narice's back, their legs secured under the dragon armor of the new saddles that the Coven riders now had. She too now wore the standard matte black Mark IV ArmorPly that the Lycavorians wore, and she had to admit that when she first put it on that it felt amazing. She had enough presence of mind to keep her helmeted head from digging into the back of Narice's shoulders, but that was the only thing that was not pressed against the vampire Princess's lithe body. A position that Toria found she did not mind in the least.

Toria Dellion had never imagined herself in the position she was in. Toria knew she was skilled in many facets, her instructors for the *Venorik Elghinn* had commented many times on her unique ability to adapt quickly to almost any given situation. They had commended her on her intelligence and overall skills, and praises such as that coming from the *Venorik Elghinn* were very rare indeed. Toria was advancing rapidly through the ranks of the High Coven Intelligence Service because of her operational skills, but all that came to an end when Admiral Tesand approached her. He had said the Empress found her intriguing and that she wanted to explore her own sexuality. Toria knew that to refuse would have put her in a very bad situation, for Admiral Tesand and the Empress were not well known for being understanding. She had agreed to become their plaything, hoping that in the end it would only enhance her position and allow her more opportunities in the future. Toria had never imagined she would actually come to enjoy her times with the Empress quite a bit. She was demanding yes, but the times Toria had shared her bed without Tesand present had been extremely pleasurable. She found she enjoyed giving pleasure to her Empress. Her body was firm and quite pleasing even though she was over eighteen thousand years old and Toria had come to relish the times when she could simply explore her Empress's body, taking her time to touch and taste. Aikiro did not seem to mind in the least.

It was different with Tesand.

Aikiro acted far differently when the Admiral was present, and at times she was even harsh. Toria knew she had made a terrible mistake when she refused Tesand's attentions the first time, and she ended up having to tolerate Dante and Javier and their disgusting touch upon her. They were neither gentle nor caring, concerned only with filling her as many times as they could, in whatever position and opening she had. After the sixth time they had given her to them for not pleasing them enough, Toria came to realize that the Empress did not really care for her in the least. What else Toria had discovered in the last two years as their sexual plaything had surprised even her.

Her actions with the Empress had opened a doorway into another part of her that she had not known existed. A part that could look at another woman and measure her up, imagining what she tasted like, or looked like without clothes. When Narice had appeared at her door that night on the ship, Toria had found herself doing just that with the Princess. Narice was even more exotic looking and seductive than her mother in Toria's eyes, and her body was even more firm and delicious to look at. Since that night, Toria had caught herself on several occasions imagining what Narice would taste like, and she wondered if the second oldest High Coven Princess had ever thought of such things. A large part of her wished that was very much the case, but Toria held no illusions about that. There were many Pureblood males who were doing their best to court Narice, and she could not imagine Narice even thought of her in that manner.

Narice smiled under her helmet as she saw Anthar come swooping down in front of them, Carisia firmly seated in her saddle with her hands on her thighs, as Anthar dove and twisted and turned with incredible speed and maneuverability. Like herself, Carisia had no fear of flying on Anthar this way. Now that they had the

dragon armor, which was forged and built directly into the saddles and held them securely, Carisia flew on Anthar's back without bothering to grip the spikes protruding from his shoulders. They were both stunned at how vigorous Deneth and Anthar appeared when they joined with them only an hour ago after leaving the airfield. Their scales shone with newfound moisture and health, both of them filling out completely after only two days of resting and eating the protein rich food given to them by the Lycavorians. Their muscles rippled under their scales and they appeared eager to take the skies above and show their bonded sisters what they could do. The moment they had lifted off, Carisia and Anthar had gone right into a series of intricate and stylish maneuvers so that Anthar could show his sister what he could do with his new muscles and the energy he felt. Deneth was no different, but he flew more sedately because Toria rode with them, and he too felt his bonded sister's interest in the red haired female. Narice also knew Deneth was like her in many respects, more reserved and not one to easily show emotion, even though he may have been feeling exactly what Anthar was feeling.

Narice, quite surprisingly for her part, found the press of Toria's firm body against her back strangely exciting and intimate. They had talked for a number of hours in Toria's quarters on the way to Earth, becoming more relaxed with each other in that time period, and Narice found herself wanting to stomp her nephews into the bulkhead for their treatment of Toria. It was a strange feeling, yet now as she felt Toria's arms grasping tightly to her waist, Narice discovered she rather enjoyed the sensations those arms caused within her. She knew Toria shared her mother's bed, though not always so willingly when Tesand was added to the mix. Oddly enough, Narice found this to be very erotic. Unlike Yuri, Narice did not care for Tesand and knowing Toria had to endure his depraved attentions as well, caused Narice to feel anger and resentment towards him. Even more than she already did. These feelings surprised Narice a great deal, but they felt very right.

"It is amazing Narice!" Carisia's gleeful voice echoed in the receivers of their helmets. "Two days! Only two days and Anthar is stronger and quicker! The medicines and foods he has received are wonderful!"

Narice nodded from her saddle as her dark eyes gazed at where they flew slightly in front and to the left of them now. She could feel Carisia's happiness within Mindvoice, and it equaled her own when it came to their dragons. Narice also suspected that Carisia was exceptionally happy to be away from Thast and his vile pawing and slobbering of her body. Narice also knew that Carisia was very happy that they were going to be with Androcles Leonidas and his new wife and mate Sadi. Narice had been only slightly astounded when she felt Carisia's emotions on the airfield today. She had always known that Carisia was different. Carisia's power and abilities within Mindvoice were potentially far greater than even she could aspire to. Narice believed Carisia was following a path set before her, not by Yuri or her mother, but by someone or something far greater in scope. She had felt the briefest moment of intense desire and overwhelming adoration escape through Carisia's shields today. Love and desire for not only Androcles Leonidas, but his young bride as well. The intensity of it had shocked her, for Narice had never felt something so powerful or natural.

Narice knew Yuri had no love for her oldest daughter, which Yuri had made painfully obvious through the years. Part of it was the fact that Yuri had always hated Carisia's father, and as soon as they could get away with it, Robert Moran had butchered Vavant without so much as a second's pause. Carisia held no anger over this however, and Narice didn't doubt she knew exactly what had really happened that night. Vavant was an arrogant and foul man and a sorry excuse for a pureblood, but he was still Carisia's father. While Carisia may have discovered and held in contempt what her father was really like, Yuri and Robert taking away the opportunity for Carisia to know her father was wrong. And her mother allowing them to do this was just as wrong.

Narice was Carisia's aunt yes, but they were kindred spirits really. Only a few years separated them in age, and both of them held intense love and devotion for their dragons. The same devotion that the riders of the Union felt for their bonded partners. Narice let her mind drift back quickly to that night at Gallais's Retreat and the dark haired Leonidas son Arrarn. He had appeared so effortlessly behind her, and Narice had been correct in saying no one had ever succeeded in sneaking up on her like that. Not since she was thirteen years old. The thing Narice found interesting is she was actually more concerned with how he filled out his clothes than how he had almost magically appeared out of thin air. Even in the few seconds before he had turned and left with his brothers and sisters, Narice had committed the contours of his face to memory. Narice found herself hoping that he was going to be at this meeting they were going to and that in and of itself shocked her right down to her core. She hated the purebloods that were lined up to court her, and thankfully her mother had made no move to pressure her into choosing one for a husband. The majority of them were pompous and egotistical and she well

knew they would want her to remain on their homeworld and have children. They most certainly would not want her and Deneth fighting the Kavalians.

She and Carisia were speaking openly using the internal helmet COMs because Toria was not capable of using Mindvoice, at least not that they were aware of, and Narice found herself wanting to make Toria as comfortable as possible in her company.

“Yes.” Narice replied quickly with a bright smile. “I agree. I can feel the new power that is surging through his muscles. Deneth told me he and Anthar brought down three huge stags last night east of Sparta. He says the timber is teeming with animals that run wild on this planet. What do you think Toria?” Narice asked turning her head slightly.

“I have not opened my eyes long enough to view anything and think about it Narice!” Toria gasped out in reply to her question. “I will allow your descriptions to suffice and believe what you say.”

Narice chuckled and placed one of her hands over the top of Toria’s on her abdomen. “You are safe Toria.” She stated. “I will not allow you to fall.”

Narice felt warm excitement surge through her as she felt Toria’s arms tighten around her waist. “I will certainly hold you to that Narice.” She stated quickly.

Narice smiled under her helmet. She had made it very clear on the ship coming here that she did not want Toria referring to her by anything other than her name. It had taken several hours for this to finally sink in, but knowing that Toria now accepted that made Narice feel very good inside.

“Do not worry.” Narice spoke.

[Narice?] Deneth’s voice filled her head and Narice focused quickly and turned to look at the back of his huge head.

[Deneth?] She spoke in reply.

[Narice... you know what they are going to do don't you? Carisia and Anthar?] Deneth said.

Narice nodded slightly. *[I have a pretty good idea, yes.]*

[You have no intention of telling anyone, do you sister?] Deneth asked.

[Yuri has treated her as an inferior person for so many years my brother.] Narice spoke. *[And you did not feel what I felt this afternoon. Her shields did not come down very far Deneth, but far enough to allow me a brief glimpse into her mind. What I saw there... what I saw there my brother, no one has the right to deny her. She has... she has dreamed of them for years Deneth. And they of her. Who am I to deny her something like that after what my sister has put her through?]*

[I was hoping you would be of that mind my sister.] Deneth spoke.

[If the tiny glimpse I was able to sense is any indication Deneth, as soon as they decide she is already part of their lives, I doubt very much Androcles Leonidas and his young bride will be giving her up.] Narice spoke. *[And his wife, this Sadi, I can sense the power growing within her by leaps and bounds. I doubt my mother, Yuri or Thast will be able to do a damn thing. I have a feeling that Prince Leonidas and his woman will viciously guard what they consider to be theirs. They are wolves after all... and I believe they already think Carisia is theirs. And they hers.]*

[Why do you think this is? They had never met until we came here to Earth Narice.] He asked.

[That is a question I do not know the answer to.] Narice spoke. *[It is beyond my level of comprehension Deneth. Perhaps... perhaps if we spend more time around them, we will come to understand. It is certainly nothing that I intend to try and stop. Not with the power of the draw I felt in that brief second.]*

[Narice... these plans that your mother and sister have laid...] Deneth said. *[Do we really need to use such tactics?]*

[I don't believe so... no.] Narice answered immediately. *[The devotion they have for their dragons here would not have allowed them to turn us away. I believe they would have helped us no matter what. King Leonidas is not who my mother and sister see. When I look at him... I do not see a war mongering animal without brains. I see a methodic and exceptionally intelligent man. A leader... a leader who would much prefer to command his people during peace rather than during war. But a man who will not back down from anyone.]*

[What they have set in motion could very well destroy everything for us Narice.] Deneth spoke softly.

[That is why we will need to be ever vigilant and insure that we hinder those plans as best as we are able Deneth.] Narice spoke quickly. *[There is much more to my mother’s plans than she has told us or led us to*

believe. And that, in part, is what we need to discover. In the meantime we must insure that they do not ruin the opportunity that fate and destiny has given us my brother.]

MJOLNIR'S HAND

As wolves who were men, Lycavorian people did not need as much sleep as other species within the Union. Because of this, Resumar Leonidas could always be assured of having the gym to himself in the very early morning hours, and this day was no different. He spent a full hour stretching and then using the assorted machines to keep his sculpted frame ripped before picking up the training *Nehtes* and beginning his personal training regime. Cemath rested quite comfortably on one side of the training room, gnawing on the large bone, occasionally looking up to watch his bonded brother. He had witnessed it for years, the routine almost never varying, and it was one of the reasons that Resumar Leonidas, second oldest of the King's sons, was considered one of the foremost combatants with a *Nehtes* within the Union.

The heat and humidity in the gym was high, and this was why Athani was able to stand on the balcony overlooking the gym and not be detected. Her scent did not carry down into the gym proper itself, at least the Lycavorian Prince had made no signs that it had, and she had stood here for nearly an hour just watching him. Athani's Puat was no fool, and no one gave her the credit she deserved. Of course not many knew who she really was. Even as she withered in sexual abandon engulfed by Pusintin's aura, Athani was planning for her moment of escape. Her father had thought to give his daughters more freedom to explore and perhaps be the bearers of the future for their people, the future that would see their females become more important parts in the Kavalian culture. Athani knew better.

The old ways were engrained in the senior Pack leaders and elders of the Kavalian people and Athani knew nothing would change. It might get better perhaps, but no where what it should be like and certainly nothing compared to what the Lycavorian Union was like. Here, Athani knew, females were treasured and treated with the utmost respect. They were looked on as the mothers of their future, and were allowed to do everything any male could do. Just in her seemingly mindless walk along the decks she had seen females giving direction to males, and this was taken in stride without question. She saw many female officers by the looks of their uniforms, of every species within the Union. Even among the vaunted *Durcunusaan* Athani had seen several females. And if the way they moved was any indication, Qurot or Karun would be hard pressed in a battle with any of them. That is what Athani craved. She craved the freedom to explore what her limits were. She craved the feel of a man's arms around her, not for sexual relief, but because he loved her.

Athani knew she was as intelligent and skilled as any female within the Union. Most of what she knew she had taught herself by incredible amounts of reading and visiting the lone Kavalian female who was the oldest among their people. She may have been female, but her age afforded her an enormous amount of leeway in what she did, and many of the males would go to her for interpretation of something they had seen in one of their drugged induced states. She had schooled Athani mercilessly, pushing her to points that Athani had never been, and Athani had basked in the knowledge. Her fighting skills had been taught to her by her father and brothers and were without question. All Kavalians, even the females, would be called on to fight for land and home if need be. Her feline genes gave her almost unmatched speed and reflexes, easily on a par with the elves of the Union, and since she had let her tail re-grow and return to its full length, it provided her with a balance and agility nearly unmatched.

Athani also knew that she was considered extremely beautiful. The biogenic treatments had only enhanced that by removing the fine coat of hair from her lithe body and allowing the soft skin beneath to flourish and grow healthy. She had an exceptionally body, firm full breasts and a small waist. Combined with her taut legs and the incredible shape of her tight ass, Athani knew she would be considered beautiful. Through the years having to endure Pusintin's truly unwanted attentions, she had expertly learned how to squeeze the inner muscles of her ass so that he would not last long inside her, as well as being able to manipulate his cock with her tongue in a similar fashion for a similar result. She was still pure however... and Athani had no intentions of allowing Qurot to take that from her. It would be a man of her choosing... that she desired... and looking at Resumar Leonidas as she had for the last hour, Athani was rapidly beginning to feel that he was that man strangely enough. Twice he had met her eyes without fear and both times she had seen not only the normal

lust and desire for a woman of her beauty, but there had been something else in those eyes as well. He did not hesitate when it came to treating her as an equal, even brushing aside Qurot's attempts to do otherwise. Not to mention that when she did announce her intentions to defect, she would be far safer with him than any other person. The image of her in his arms and crying out in ecstasy also helped quite a bit as well she mused to herself.

"Are you lost?" The male voice asked.

Athani nearly jumped out of her skin as she spun around more quickly than she intended and dropped into a fighting stance, her long tail poised to lash out with lightning speed. Since letting her tail return to its full length and strength, Athani had practiced many hours on using it as an extension of her will. She could actually use it to suspend herself in the mid air for short periods of time if needed. Now however, the tip of her tail was curled around the pommel of the very thin razor sharp blade that she had pulled from the back of her collar as she spun around. Her blue/green eyes flew open when she saw Resumar Leonidas standing in front of her leaning up against the door frame. She glanced back into the gym proper as if not believing he was really in front of her, then turned back to face him quickly.

"How... you... how did you get up here?" Athani stammered scolding herself for losing herself in her thoughts and not being aware of everything around her.

Resumar smiled. "I'll answer that if you promise not to stab me." He spoke.

Athani gasped when she saw his eyes focused on the thin blade held by her tail and she turned a slight shade of red as she took the blade in her hand. "Oh... I'm... this will not force you to expel us from your territory will it?" She stuttered. "It... I'm sorry... please forgive me. I know this... Jalersi will be very upset with me if she finds this out. I..." She held the blade out to him. "Here." She said finally.

Resumar waved his hand slightly. "Keep it." Resumar spoke confidently. "You are not a threat to me."

Athani tilted her head to the side as she drew the knife back. "Are... are all of your people as arrogant as you?" She asked quickly, instantly regretting the question.

Resumar chuckled. "That's not what I meant." He said with a delicious glint in his eyes as far as Athani was concerned. "My mothers have always told me I have a hard time putting my thoughts into words. I guess they were right." He spoke. "I'm quite sure you are very skilled with that knife as well as many other weapons. What I meant is that you are not a threat in the sense of what is happening around us."

Athani looked at him as she slid the knife back into its sheath on the inside of her collar. "I'm not sure I understand." She spoke haltingly.

"I think you do." Resumar said as he moved onto the balcony with her and looked down into the gym below. [*Cemath... it is ok brother.*] He reached out.

Resumar didn't see Athani shake her head quickly as the strange buzzing filled her mind and he watched Cemath moved from under the balcony outcropping, his eyes looking upwards.

[*Shall I call for security Res?*] Cemath asked.

Resumar shook his head. [*No. It's alright. I'll meet you in the landing bay in an hour for your bath.*]

Cemath snorted. [*Do not be late!*] He announced. [*My scales itch!*]

[*Your scales always itch!*] Res spoke. [*Go on!*]

Resumar was smiling as he watched him make his way toward the exit before turning back to look at Athani. Her blue/green eyes fell on him. "You were speaking to him again?" She asked.

Resumar nodded. "You are very perceptive." He said. "And you don't seem to have the same fear of dragons that the rest of your people do. At least not on the same level as say Qurot or your sister. Why is that?"

"They... they do not mean any harm." Athani spoke softly. "They are benevolent by nature, are they not?"

Res nodded. "For the most part yes." He answered. "You asked how I got up here. Part of the bond with a dragon encompasses a certain amount of psychic ability. We can do things that would for the most part be impossible without the bond. Move things; lift myself up here... things like that."

Athani stepped closer to this tall young man, her eyes wide in interest. Her nose tickled slightly at the strong musky smell of his workout, but it was not at all unpleasant to her and she knew the Kavalian sense of smell was much less than that of a Lycavorian. Athani found herself suddenly wondering what she smelled like to him. "You... you can use these abilities to move objects and such?" She asked both very surprised and very intrigued.

Res nodded as her tangerine scent engulfed him and he felt a wave of warmth surround him as well, tingling and causing him to become aroused in a small manner. Resumar realized then that Kavalian females must have had something similar to Lycavorian females in the aura they could project to entice males and their mates. "Yes." He said with a smile as he easily fought back the urges. Obviously it was no where near as powerful as Lycavorian females and he was able to push it to the back of his mind.

"That is incredible!" Athani spoke. "Tell me more!"

Resumar smiled. "I think before I do that we should get back to what I said earlier. About why you are here."

Athani looked at him once more fearing that her female essence had not had the effect she had hoped for. "I... I am part of the trade delegation." She answered quickly backing away from him slightly.

"Are you?" Resumar said. "Why do you think I have such a hard time believing that?"

"I... I don't know." Athani said more quickly and realizing he most likely could smell the lie easily. "I should return to my quarters." She turned and made to walk away from him, suddenly very afraid of him.

Resumar reached out and took her arm gently. "Wait." He said softly.

Athani stopped and looked at him as his fingers closed around her arm. His grip was not demanding and not forceful. It was more concerned and caring and as she felt the warmth of his fingers through her arm, Athani shivered slightly. "I... I must go." She said in almost a whisper.

"I've known you less than two days... and for some reason I get the feeling you are not like the rest of your people." Resumar stated evenly. "That you have another agenda. One that does not include anyone but yourself. Why is that Athani Puat?"

Athani turned and met his sparkling dark eyes. Beautiful eyes. "You... you do not seem less interested in me because of my tail." She spoke. "Why?" She asked directly.

"On the contrary... I find your tail fascinating." Resumar answered. "It is part of you... and you are... you are exceptionally beautiful if you don't mind me saying so."

Athani turned to face him more now. "Then... then you felt it?" She asked. "My... my calling out to you?"

"If you mean what we would call your aura... yes." He answered. "I felt it. The better question is why did you do that?"

"It did affect you then?" Athani asked even more interested now.

"I don't know how your people would react to that, but to us it is a sign that a female is very interested in... very interested in having a relationship with a male." He stammered out. "Fortunately... I have enough control and respect to not act on my instincts alone. Now... why did you do that? Something tells me your sister or Commander Qurot would not be happy you did."

"Qurot is a pig!" Athani hissed. "He always has been a pig and he always will be!"

"Ok... now that we've deduced that... perhaps you could explain to me what is going on?" Resumar asked. "You are not here for trade talks are you?"

Athani made her decision then.

She released all of what he had called her aura as strongly as she knew how and she jumped into his arms covering his lips with her own.

Resumar Leonidas was the son of a man who had taught him and his siblings from the time they were old enough to understand to trust in their instincts. Given the fact that Athani was hitting him with a reasonably powerful female aura, and the taste of her lips on his was sending electric jolts through his body, Resumar trusted his instincts. With a low growl he wrapped his arms around the smaller Kavalian female and pinned her to the bulkhead as he took control of their kiss and deepened it while hitting her with a small portion of his own aura.

Athani's eyes grew wide for an instant as she felt his aura envelope her. Her claws extended from her fingertips and she prepared to strike him when she realized this was not Pusintin's aura surrounding her. This aura... this warmth... it was wrapping her in a protective embrace, just fluttering across her senses and making her body begin to react. It was not the overpowering aura that Pusintin hit her with. It was so much more controlled and precise. And respectful. She heard Resumar growl low in his chest, felt him pin her body against his and the bulkhead and press firmly against her as his kiss set fire to every nerve ending in her body. She realized in that instant that he was controlling his aura, letting her know that he found her just as attractive as

she did him. Even though she could feel the heat building in her body, Athani still retained her ability to think and act clearly. His aura was not controlling her actions or her mind, and above all else this made her even more excited. When Athani grasped the sides of his face, her claws were retracted and she responded to the kiss with everything that she was, her eyes closing in new feelings and sensations she had never experienced before. It also helped that she had never been kissed before, and if his kiss foretold of things yet to come, Athani wanted to experience every part of it.

Resumar drew back from the kiss, even as Athani fought to continue it. His dark eyes were wide as he finally drew his face away from hers and looked at her face. The feel of her succulent body pressed against his was heaven, unlike any female he had ever held, and he was no stranger to women. He stared at her relaxed face, her lips slightly parted as her dazzling eyes opened slowly. Almost dreamily. He could still feel her aura spinning around him and he made no move to pull back his own as he leaned forward and firmly nuzzled her throat and chin with his nose, hearing her gasp softly in delight as luscious shivers of bliss coursed through her. Vibrations unlike any she had ever felt before rippled through her frame and Athani reveled in them.

Athani grasped his face in her hands once more and looked into his dark eyes. "Take me!" She gasped out, nearly out of control with passion and desire all her own. "Take me now! Right here!"

Resumar may have been a Leonidas... but he was also a wolf. An Alpha wolf that was very strong in his own right. And he was also a man who had an incredibly stunning woman in his arms that wanted him just as badly as he wanted her. Resumar tossed caution to the wind and began to follow his instincts and what they were screaming for him to do. His hands came up and he began to pull at Athani's clothes, struggling to expose her lush body to his hungry gaze. Athani began helping him, trying to get her jumpsuit unzipped for she burned to feel his lips on her skin.

They had succeeded in getting the front of her jumpsuit open and as his warm lips descended to the valley between her breasts in heated frenzy; her long tail twitching madly in delight, the COM panel on the side of the wall erupted into existence and shattered the moment they were having.

"Prince Resumar to the bridge! Prince Resumar to the bridge!" The voice boomed out.

Resumar exhaled heavily and for a fleeting moment he now knew how his father must have felt when he was interrupted enjoying the company of his mothers. With his head still resting against the flesh of her still partially covered breasts Resumar punched the panel behind Athani's shoulder.

"What is it?" He demanded.

"Milord... I did not want to wake your mother as it is still very early. We are picking up a signal from a Union *MENKLA* transport that says they are transporting a dozen more Kavalian delegates to *MJOLNIR'S HAND* and would like permission to be taken into our landing bay." The duty officer spoke.

Resumar lifted his head and looked at Athani. "Do you know of this?" He asked softly.

Athani shook her head quickly just as puzzled. "No. Everyone came with us. We know nothing of further delegates. At least I do not."

Resumar touched the panel again. "Find out their embarkation point and who they have on board." He stated. "And then wake my mother and the remaining members of the Kavalian delegation."

"Do we let them continue on their course Milord?" The duty officer asked. "They will intercept us in less than ten minutes."

"They waited this long to contact us?" Res asked as alarms began to sound in his head.

"I asked them that sire... and they said they were having difficulties with their long range transmitter. I did check their transponder codes and the ship is a registered Diplomatic carrier."

Athani noted that he had slowly lowered her back to the floor but made no move to push her away. She could feel his hard body pressed tightly against hers even as she looked up into his face. Athani had all sorts of emotions racing through her, none stronger than the fact she wanted this Lycavorian Prince in the worst possible way. This was the man she would surrender her purity to.

"Very well. Give them permission." Resumar stated. "Athani'Puat has joined me for coffee in the starboard mess lounge. We will make our way from here and inform my mothers and the others we will meet them in the starboard landing bay."

"Understood sire." The voice replied.

Resumar turned his eyes upon her and Athani felt her heart jump at the brightness of his dark eyes. "It is my hope that we can... that we can continue this at another time." He said.

Athani smiled brilliantly. "Oh... I would like that very much." She said quickly. "Very much indeed."
"We must go now to insure there are no questions." He stated. "I have no wish for either of us to get into trouble."

"Wait!" Athani said. "What... what will it be like?" She asked shyly.

Resumar leaned over and kissed her possessively. "Athani'Puat... I intend to love you senseless." He spoke confidently.

Athani could only gaze back at him and smile. Love her senseless. Not fuck her senseless. She felt the warmth inside her grow at his words and could hardly wait for that moment to come.

CHAPTER TEN

GYTHEIO

CRANAE ISLAND

ANDRO AND SADI'S VILLA

It was definitely awkward.

Anthar and Deneth stood behind Narice, Carisia and Toria warily watching as the three of them stared at Lisisa and Eliani Leonidas. Not far behind them rested the five dragons they had seen from the air, including Elynth's obsidian scales and the blue/black scaled monstrosity they had seen the first day they had arrived. That male was Lisisa Leonidas's dragon, Jeth, and the mahogany colored female they knew as Tharua was sitting next to him; her tail absently stroking Jeth's much longer and thicker one. Aradace's dark blue scales and Arydun's ochre brown scales contrasted quite a bit from where they sat next to each other and all of them were now looking in their direction and studying Anthar and Deneth keenly.

Eliani, as well as Lisisa were not dressed in a manner Narice had expected for a meeting either. Both of them were dressed in very tight black shorts and different colored bikini tops that proudly displayed their ample sized chests and left almost nothing to the imagination. This was without a doubt the Lycavorian sense of casual wear Narice thought to herself. Her mother had always told her that Lycavorians were far more open about their sexuality and displaying the beauty of their bodies than any within the High Coven. Apparently she had been right about that at least.

"I... I did not know if we should... if we should have Mindvoiced to tell you we were arriving." Narice spoke after a long moment.

Eliani's face changed then and she smiled brilliantly as she stepped forward. Always the first to reach out was Eliani Leonidas. "We wouldn't have been able to hear you anyway." She said stepping forward and holding out her hand. "The psychic dampeners that Androcles has surrounding the island are active. Anything over a hundred feet above us can not penetrate the dampeners."

"I thought psychic dampeners were not full proof." Narice said keeping her voice calm and neutral.

Eliani smiled and glanced at Lisisa quickly. "These are. They are special." She stated. "Since we have not been formally introduced... I am Eliani."

Narice smiled at Eliani's openness and the welcoming voice as she took her hand. This was not something she had expected either and while it took her slightly off guard, it was also a sign to her that perhaps they were not thought of as harshly as her mother and Yuri said they would be. "I am Narice... this is Toria Dellion and..."

"Hello sister." Lisisa spoke now... her voice soft and her dark forest green eyes focused directly on Carisia.

Narice and Toria watched as Lisisa stepped up to Carisia, their height only an inch apart. That they looked alike was easy enough to see with the raven colored hair and incredibly firm bodies. Their physical forms were nearly identical with their large breasts, narrow waists and lean muscular legs and flawless asses. Their facial features were incredibly similar as well with Carisia's skin tone just a shade or so lighter in color, but with the same elegant lines and shape of their lips. The Asian features for both of them were much less pronounced than with Dante, Javier and Lucia, giving both of them an extremely exotic look that would and

could turn heads. They had obviously taken more from the genes of their respective fathers when it came to facial features.

Carisia stared at Lisisa wide eyed, taken aback at what Lisisa had said to her. "At... at the Retreat... you said..." She stammered.

"I said that fool Dante and *his* brother and sister were not *my* brothers and sister." Lisisa spoke with a smile as she looked at Carisia. A young woman who it seemed was just as hated by their mother as she was. "You however... my statement did not include you. I am so very happy to meet you sister."

Eliani was smiling as they watched Lisisa pull Carisia into her arms and embrace her tightly. All of them noticed that Carisia hesitated for only a moment, unsure of how to react, before she surrendered to the feelings within her and hugged Lisisa back, moistness coming to her eyes as new feelings flooded her being. This was one of the things she had always imagined happening. That she would finally be able to meet and talk with the sister who her mother had abandoned and then tried to kill so many years ago. It seemed they had quite a bit in common for Carisia knew without a doubt their mother planned a similar fate for her as well when the time came where she outlived her usefulness. Carisia had also come to realize that giving her to Thast was also a way to keep tabs on everything she did. Carisia did not know why Thast frightened her so. She knew without a doubt she could kill the man if she truly wanted, but something inside her made her cower from him almost as if it was somehow preordained. She didn't understand it, didn't like the feelings it gave it to, and she most certainly did not like his rutting and grunting body atop hers as he slobbered his way to his own gratification.

"Ok... enough already... they just got here Lisi. And I don't want to cry!" Eliani barked out with a smile.

Lisisa backed away, her own eyes moist and she looked at Carisia with a smile. "We have much to talk about you and I. Over the course of the next few months, I hope we can do just that."

Carisia's smile was just as wide as she nodded her head. "I so look forward to that." She replied.

"Good." Lisisa spoke. "Andro, Denali and Arrarn are out on the sea patio with Nyla and Zarah. Sadi and Elynth just returned from Sparta and she will join us soon. Come." She said turning.

"Anthar? Deneth?" Carisia spoke reaching back to touch the snout of her cerise colored brother whose huge head was hovering very close to her shoulder. Eliani and Lisisa noticed that Carisia hadn't even turned around and she knew right where his head was positioned so she could touch him. It was something they had seen Andro do so many times in the past years, almost as if he knew right where Elynth was going to be. They glanced at each other quickly before Elynth saved them.

They are most welcome to join us Lisisa. Elynth's voice spoke to them openly as she guided her obsidian colored body gracefully up behind Lisisa. *It will even the odds somewhat, since Jeth always feels left out among the many females here.* She spoke with some humor in her voice.

I ignore all of you except one anyway. Jeth announced clearly.

As well you should! Especially now! Tharua spoke affectionately.

Elynth allowed her golden eyes to settle on Anthar and she gazed at him intently. *Come... sit with us Anthar and Deneth. We will join our bonded ones later on the beach. And we have an ample supply of behemoth bones.*

Bones? Deneth spoke quickly, suddenly very interested. He had eaten better in the two days here on Earth than he had throughout his life so far. In just that two day period, he discovered he had a lusting for the massive bones they were provided. *Large bones I hope?*

Elynth smiled. *Very large.*

Anthar lowered his magenta eyes to Carisia. *Sister?* He asked softly.

Carisia nodded feeling his nervousness within their connection. *We are safe here Anthar.* She spoke immediately. *Go. I will see you later.*

They watched as Anthar and Deneth guided themselves around the five females and Elynth led them over to where the others dragons sat and waited until they had settled to the ground. They didn't take note, however, of how close Elynth sat to Anthar on the hard packed dirt, or the way her golden eyes gazed at him even as he looked at Jeth's enormous body with some awe.

Lisisa motioned to the doorway into the house. "We have to go through the house to get to the sea patio." Lisisa spoke. "You can change if you like."

“We... we only brought one change of clothes for sleeping.” Toria stammered. “At least... at least that is all I brought.”

“That is all any of us brought. We did not think Prince Androcles and yourselves would be dressed so... so...” Narice stuttered.

“So informally?” Eliani finished her statement with a grin. “Trust me... Andro will be the first one to tell you when you are able to toss the uniform, toss it. As far away as possible.” Her fern green eyes were bright and friendly. “We all keep clothes at each other’s villas. It makes it easier when we get together like this. We can find something for you to wear if you’d like. Now that Sadi has moved in and all of her clothes have arrived from Apo Prime, I’m sure she has something that will fit both you and Toria. Is that correct... your name I mean?”

Toria nodded. “Yes... Toria Dellion.”

“Sadi is about the same size as both you and Narice.” Eliani said looking at her again and smiling once more. “I can call you Narice, can’t I?”

“I’m guessing that when you are together you do not use titles. It would be foolish as close as all of you seem to be as brothers and sisters.” Narice spoke feeling very at ease due to Eliani’s actions and what had happened between Lisisa and Carisia. “Narice is just fine then. Toria’s posting is Intelligence but she...” Eliani and Lisisa stiffened slightly Narice saw.

“Intelligence?” Lisisa asked her voice even but touched with suspicion now.

“I will be assigned as one of the pilots for our unit.” Toria stated quickly seeing the way both Leonidas daughters reacted. “But like Narice and Carisia... I truly wish to see this training work out.”

Whether it was the sincere tone of her voice or what she had said, it caused even Narice to look at her with new questions in her eyes. New questions yes, but the sudden doubts and suspicion that had occupied their faces a second ago were now gone. Apparently being bonded so deeply to dragons as Eliani and Lisisa Leonidas were gave them a larger sense of people and their motives and purpose than even Narice and Deneth shared. Something that Narice had every intention of changing over the next few months.

“Come inside...” Lisisa spoke finally. “If we are to put aside the mistrust that has always clouded the air between our people, then let it start with us. I think we can all agree that we do not need to regard each other as enemies with the Kavalians hating both our peoples.”

Narice nodded at that comment. “No. No... we do not.” She stated in agreement.

Eliani smiled as well. “She’s much prettier with words than I am.” She stated reaching out and taking Narice and Toria’s hands gently. “Come on... let’s talk with Sadi and find you some proper beach attire.”

Lisisa looked at Carisia as Eliani led Narice and Toria inside and took her hand. “Come sister... let me show you the life I have come to embrace and cherish. The life you will have one day I hope.”

Carisia looked at her surprised. “Why... why do you say that?” She asked. “How... how could you know that?”

Lisisa smiled gently. “I think you will find that no matter what you have experienced in your past... the future will change the moment you walk through these doors. Your bond with Anthar is strong... almost as strong as mine with Jeth. I sense it will grow even stronger if you embrace what Andro will teach you. And possibly open your eyes to many new and wonderful things. As my bond with Jeth did for me. And hopefully it will allow us to grow closer as well.” Lisisa squeezed Carisia’s hand. “I have many sisters who I love without question... but I only have one who is truly of my blood. That is you.”

Carisia stared at her for a long moment and then took a deep breath. This is what she had waited for. The opportunity for her and Anthar to turn their lives around and become truly free. It was within her grasp now, and Carisia was not about to let it slip away.

Carisia smiled a genuine and heartfelt smile for the first time in her life outside of her time spent with Anthar. “I look forward to that... sister.” She said squeezing Lisisa’s hand as well.

“Good... I have something that will fit you perfectly and I can give you a tour of Andro’s home while we are inside.” Lisisa said. “He does not decorate too badly for a man.”

The inside of Androcles’s home was not what Carisia had envisioned in the least. In her dreams with them they had always been on an island yes, but that island had a three story palace structure on it that was

elegant looking but not overly extravagant. This villa was a single story structure of granite and metal all around, widely spacious and very tastefully decorated. It was very bright in some areas from the sun pouring into the large windows. Since it was on an island, much of the view was of the surrounding gulf with its blue green waters. Looking out the north end of the villa, Carisia saw towering pines and timber. The villa occupied one end of the island they had seen from the air; the rest covered in timber except for a hundred meter stretch of sand and pebbles all along the edges. There were many paintings and metope carvings on the walls; one section of the main living area wall dedicated to what appeared to be ancient Spartan armor and weapons.

There were large crates and shipping containers near one door she noticed which took away from the soft and pleasant feeling of the villa but not very much. Lisisa saw this and smiled.

“Sadi’s things began arriving a few days ago.” Lisisa explained. “Even she didn’t realize what she had accumulated over the years. She must have directed our people to take everything from within her apartment on Apo Prime. Even the plants.”

Carisia began to smile as the voice echoed from behind them. “That was not me.” Carisia spun around very quickly and felt her heart leap into her throat as she saw her approach. “That was my father.” Sadi finished. “I think he purchased more than I had in my entire apartment and sent it all here.”

Carisia watched as Sadi stopped in front of them and Lisisa leaned over to her casually. They shared a soft kiss on each other’s cheek without hesitation. It was something that Sadi had discovered was very common among Andro’s family and she found herself doing the same thing almost like second nature. Sadi wore a plain white bikini top and bottom that contrasted incredibly with her deeply tanned skin and long blond hair which flowed around her face well past her shoulders. The see-through beach cover fell to the tops of her thighs, but did nothing to hide the fullness of her breasts or the way the bikini panties formed around her mound. Her jungle green eyes were so very bright and full of intelligence and it was all Carisia could do to not wrap herself around this woman. Until these last three days she had only seen Sadi in her dreams and from afar... never really close enough to touch... always just out of reach. While Carisia had never been with a woman before, having to endure Thast’s putrid hands on her, she had always wondered what it would be like with Sadi. This woman who had haunted her dreams for so long with Androcles Leonidas. There had never been another woman, only Sadi had ever filled her dreams, and Carisia found herself wanting to explore her curves and figure just as powerfully as she wanted to explore Androcles. Sadi and Androcles Leonidas. The two who she was meant for.

“Sadi this is...” Lisisa started.

“Carisia.” Sadi spoke softly, her eyes never leaving Carisia’s beautiful face. “Yes... I know.” She said.

Sadi’s own heart was racing nearly out of control, matching the thumping of Carisia’s in almost every way and this was easy enough for Carisia to detect with her sensitive vampire hearing. “Wel... welcome.” Sadi managed to stammer out. She held out her hand for Carisia, who did not hesitate for an instant in taking it.

Lisisa heard male laughter coming from the sea patio and turned her head away just as their hands came in contact. She did not see the physical reaction from just their fingers touching, the almost imperceptible jerk from both of them as the physical contact sent shivers jolting through them and for a fleeting instant their minds mingled and became one with a third. Lisisa did hear the soft gasp from both of them however and she turned back quickly to see their eyes close and open quickly.

“Sadi... Carisia?” She asked quickly. “What is wrong?”

Carisia held Sadi’s hand for a moment longer relishing in the sensations of the brief touch their minds had made, and the feel of Sadi’s warm skin on hers. Even in that instant, their minds had touched and joined with Androcles. Carisia felt the staggering power they wielded, though it was as yet fully untapped. It sent shivers of delight rushing through her when Sadi made no move to release her hand until Lisisa turned back around. Then reluctantly, their hands drew apart and Sadi looked at Lisisa.

“Nothing Lisi.” Sadi said quickly her mind racing for something to explain their reactions to each other. “Elynth... Elynth was...”

I was reacting to a rather crude comment from my brother! Elynth’s voice broke into their thoughts. She had sensed the reaction as well in both Andro and Sadi. *KertaGai felt my reaction.*

Lisisa laughed out loud. *Jeth... are you misbehaving?* She exclaimed.

I am not! Jeth replied.

Carisia was stunned that they would speak unshielded and this showed on her face. Not to mention the fact that the Prince's dragon had instantly reacted and covered for Sadi and hers response to touching each other for the first time. "You... you speak unshielded?" She asked quickly.

Lisisa looked at her with a nod. "The dampeners surrounding the island are powerful enough to block even my father and your grandmother." Lisisa explained to her. "All of our individual villas are set up like this, including the main villa in Sparta. It allows us to converse freely with each other and our bonded ones. Speaking shielded does tend to put a strain on your mind as well you know."

"Yes... it does." Carisia agreed. "But... my... my grandmother... my mother... they..." Carisia stated.

"The Empress would not be able to breach the dampeners protecting this island even on her best day." Andro's deep voice sounded from behind them. "Your mother would have even less success in doing this. They are identical to the psychic dampeners that once occupied the Mindvoice ship and rendered Mindvoicing impossible in certain areas for purposes of study and reflection on events."

Carisia turned far more quickly than Lisisa and she let out an involuntary gasp at what she saw. Androcles Leonidas wore only his loose fitting white pants, the crimson trim down the outside of his pant legs. Aside from that, he was barefoot, without a shirt and exposed for Carisia's maya blue eyes to drink in every portion of his chiseled frame and upper body. She saw the rippled cut of his chest and abdomen, the trio of scars that dotted the upper left portion of his chest, as well as the Talon Guardian brand just above his heart. The thickness and definition of his arms and the broadness of his shoulders made Carisia almost weak kneed, not to mention that his presence within Mindvoice was almost overwhelming. He was not shielding as he had the times on the airfield or at the State Dinner when she tried to probe him. She dare not reach out to him now, for it would not do to lose herself.

Andro stepped up to Sadi quickly and looked at her. "*KertaGai*?" He asked softly.

Sadi nodded quickly with a smile knowing that he had felt the spike in her emotions and the mingling of hers and Carisia's minds with his, however brief it may have been. She pressed up against him and slipped her arms around his waist. "How soon before we eat?" She asked quickly. "I'm starving!"

"That depends." Andro replied with a smile.

"On what?"

"On whether you checked the *Stifado* like I asked." Andro said with a grin. **(Greek cuisine; Venison stew with pearl onions, red wine and cinnamon.)**

Sadi's eyes grew wide. "*Sibfla!*" She exclaimed releasing her grasp of him and bolting off towards where the kitchen was.

Andro turned and looked at Carisia, towering over her petite but lush five foot two frame. He inhaled deeply and let her scent fill his head. The smell of freshly bloomed rose petals filled his senses, and just as Sadi's sugarplum and spice scent made him light headed, Carisia's scent was doing the same thing to him. "Welcome Carisia... I am very... I am very happy you arrived safely." Andro caught his words quickly but not before hearing Sadi laugh within his mind.

[See... I'm not the only one she affects so Androcles Leonidas!] She declared to him in the heavily shielded connection, knowing no one among his family or on the planet for that matter could penetrate their shields with the exception of perhaps Elynth. [You felt it too Andro... I know you did. It is like... it is like she is already ours my love! Has always been ours! How can we fight it Andro? You feel the pull to her, I know you do. We desire her just as intensely as we desire each other.]

[I can't deny it.] Andro spoke. [I won't deny it KertaGai. It is just very complicated.]

[It is only as complicated as we make it my love.] Sadi answered. [I know your blood burns for her... just as mine does. I do not want to fight it... no matter what we talked of.]

Carisia's eyes were wide now as well for she had heard every word they had just spoken even though the conversation was heavily shielded. She expanded her own awareness and suddenly realized she was within their shielded thoughts.

[I am yours.] She stated firmly seeing Andro's azure eyes grow larger and hearing Sadi gasp within their connection. [I... I have always been yours. And you have always been mine. I do not... I do not want to lose that.]

Lisisa stood watching as they stared at one another. She could feel the tremors within Mindvoice and she knew they were talking, though of what she did not know. Lisisa knew not even their father could breach

Andro's Mindvoice shields when he did not want him to. She wrongly thought it had something to do with Carisia being Yuri's daughter and her sister. She reached out and softly squeezed Andro's arm.

"Andro... is everything ok?" She asked with some trepidation in her voice.

Andro tore his eyes from Carisia and looked at Lisisa, hiding the shock on his face that he and Sadi had included Carisia within their shielded conversation almost like second nature. His face changed almost immediately and he smiled and nodded his head quickly. "Yes Lisi." He replied in an even tone. "Everything is fine. You were going to try and find something for Carisia to wear and I need to make sure Sadi did not burn our dinner."

Lisisa felt relief wash over her and she smiled. "You're sure?" She asked.

Andro nodded and looked back to Carisia. "Yes... I'm sure." He said. "And be mindful of the fact that Carisia may not be as free spirited as you in her taste of clothes." He stated with a little humor.

"*Ronnus!*" Lisisa exclaimed as she punched him lightly in the arm. Lisisa took Carisia's hand once more and pulled her gently. "This way Carisia." Lisisa said as she guided her away. "Let's get you changed and I will introduce you to my other brothers who are lounging outside like the loafers they always are."

Carisia had to consciously tear her eyes from Androcles's face, not understanding what she had seen in his stunned expression. She felt a momentary flash of worry and pain thinking that perhaps what she had feared all along was actually taking place. That they would reject her out of hand because they had found one another already. This sensation was quickly smashed aside as she felt a warmth flood her mind that nearly overwhelmed her senses. It was the most exquisite feeling she had ever experienced and it could only be coming from Sadi and Andro. It was so very powerful and complete and it washed over her senses like a gentle wave of ocean water.

[Never fear that Carisia!] Sadi's voice told her with absolute certainty. Carisia could sense Androcles's presence in the Mindvoice connection very faintly, almost as if he was just hovering on the edge and she realized that Sadi had thrown up incredibly powerful shields around just the two of them. A shield that he was making no attempt to penetrate and in fact was helping to reinforce. *[We will never reject you.]*

[I can feel him so vividly. I can feel you! I want... I want you both. More than I have ever wanted anything in my life.] Carisia exclaimed. *[You have been in my dreams for so long. In my mind. How... how did this happen?]*

[Does it matter how?] Sadi answered quickly. *[You are right... we are yours. And you are ours. We will need to talk of this thing we have discovered Carisia. But know that... know that we do feel the same.]*

[When?] Carisia asked quickly. *[Why did he react so?]*

[As soon as we are able. That you were... that we included you in our thoughts without thinking surprised us. That is all Carisia.] Sadi replied. *[It is only another sign that we were meant for each other. The Feravomir was right.]*

[Your first Oracle?] Carisia asked quickly. *[What...what did she say? Tell me... you must tell me please.]*

[Andro and I have already talked of this thing we have found with you. We have felt it for so long and did not fully come to realize what it was until you came here. Andro wishes it to be just as much as we do Carisia. He is a man however and I am discovering there are many facets to him. I... we will discover them together. Now... now that we have found you... we will not let you go.]

Lisisa couldn't understand the small smile of happiness that dotted Carisia's face as she led her into one of the spare rooms in the villa. She would discover it in time, and it would only reinforce for her what she had come to accept many years ago. The bloodlines of her father and mother would forever be intertwined by history, fate and...

And destiny.

CABELIR
OLD KAVALIAN EMPIRE HOMEWORLD
POPULATION: 785 MILLION

Pusintin looked out over the calm waters of the lake that the back of his home opened onto and found his thoughts drifting back in time as they so often did when Jalersi was not here. His Kavalian mate had a unique way of keeping him focused in the here and now. She was so different than the Lycavorian woman he had married when he was King of Sparta. That he could not even recall her name did not bother him at all. She was a weak female, even for a Spartan, and he never questioned leaving her or his son behind when he left Earth. Jalersi however, she had given him three strong sons and a willful and intelligent daughter, and she was equally as strong as he was. She was intelligent and utterly gorgeous, not to mention she was a wildcat in their bed, often times even testing his limits of endurance. He by far preferred Jalersi to her sister Athani or any other female he had seen in through the years. Jalersi could tolerate his unshielded Lycavorian aura because of her incredibly strong persona and the biogenic treatments she had to tolerate every month to keep her tail from re-growing as Athani's had allowed hers to do. Athani became nothing more than a whimpering slut against his aura, and while taking her tight ass was pleasant, he much preferred his mate.

Pusintin slowly moved his head around in a circle on his shoulders to work out the stiffness in the back of his neck. He reached up to massaged the area just under his shoulder length hair and felt the scars that his dirty blond hair hid. His fingers touching the bumpy scars where his brother's teeth had sunk deeply into the flesh at the back of his neck preparing to shatter his spine and kill him instantly. Their mother's eyes gazing at him had stayed his actions that day, forever ripping from Pusintin his past and severing all ties he may have had to the Union or the bloodline of Leonidas. Losing the fight Pusintin could tolerate well enough, his brother was equal in size to him when in wolf form, which was something he had not expected. They were of equal strength and reflexes, however he had not expected his brother could fight as well as he could in their wolf forms. It was a mistake that had very nearly cost him his life if not for Martin's pitiful sense of morality and value. Losing the fight with his brother was nothing to him. Having his mother spit on him... denounce him as her son as he lay helpless on the ground... *that* had been the ultimate act of betrayal his twisted mind could comprehend. The hate he felt for his mother and brother did not often surface now; Jalersi and his children with her had been like a soothing balm over that wound, but there were times when he allowed it to come to the surface. If only a little bit.

"My son?" The male voice spoke from behind him.

Pusintin turned quickly and looked at the only man he had known as a father.

Cukoum'Harop held two glasses of dark colored ale in his hand and he held out one to him. He had been a member of the Kavalian unit that had taken him from Earth, and when he saw the determination and fierceness in those eyes, he had chosen to spare Pusintin's life and raise him as his own. He had lost his sons in the wars with the Lycavorians and the High Coven, and he had treated him as any father would. It was by his grace alone that Pusintin even lived at all.

"You are lost in your thoughts again." Cukoum spoke as he watched Pusintin take a long pull of the strong ale.

"I miss my mate's attentions." Pusintin stated with a smile. "Jalersi has a way of making me forget things that are unpleasant."

Cukoum chuckled. "Yes... I can think of two ways right off the top of my head."

Pusintin joined his father in laughter. "I will be fine father." He spoke.

"Good. They are arriving." Cukoum spoke.

"Yes... I saw their Lifter." Pusintin spoke as they began walking into the large estate and through the rooms. "Did Keleru say what it was he wanted? We were not scheduled to meet for another two days."

Cukoum shook his head. "Only that it was important and very informal. He knows how you are in regards to Jalersi. Perhaps he worries that you will go after her to see that she is not corrupted by the Union dogs."

"Jalersi, corrupted by *them*?" Pusintin laughed. "I fear she will corrupt them. Even as she shows them their place."

They walked through the home to where the servant girl was showing Keleru and a man he did not know into the foyer of their home. Pusintin smiled as Keleru met his eyes.

"Prefect... this is a surprise!" He stated formally for he did not know who the new Kavalian was.

Keleru smiled baring his sharp teeth for a moment. "Forgive the intrusion... but I have come across some new information that might be of interest to you. I felt you should be made aware."

Pusintin nodded as Keleru stepped up to him and gripped his shoulders tightly. “You are tolerating Jalersi’s absence well I hope?”

Pusintin grinned. “As well as can be expected.” He answered.

“Your devotion to my daughter makes me proud Pusintin.” Keleru spoke honestly.

“Well... I rather like having my equipment functioning.” Pusintin answered. “If I was not devoted, she would insure I was not able to use it any longer.”

Keleru roared with laughter and nodded his head. “Yes... she is headstrong in that way, isn’t she?”

Pusintin looked at the new Kavalian, noting that his dark fur was heavily laced with gray hair along his face and neck. “Who is this Prefect?” He asked.

“Bah! Enough with this Prefect name!” Keleru declared. “I am here informally visiting the mate of my daughter. You need not worry about Ogat. He is a friend of many decades.”

“Ogat?” Cukoum spoke slightly stunned. “The Senior Scholar Ogat’Gyars?”

The older Kavalian nodded his head. “It is truly an honor to be in the presence of you and your father Cukoum’Harop, Marshall Pusintin. An honor indeed. I have enjoyed the many entries I have made into our history with your deeds over the last few years. You have helped our people reclaim their rightful place in the universe. We are feared once more and we have the power to destroy our enemies. Something you have been doing quite well.”

Pusintin nodded slowly. “To be in the company of such wisdom is humbling.” He spoke. “And I intend to keep you busy over the course of the next years as we push to wipe out the bloodsuckers.”

The older Kavalian chuckled. “Keleru said you were incredibly respectful of your elders. That you treat your father as royalty and never question the rule of law. And that you were very confident in your abilities.”

“Oh... I question the rule of law.” Pusintin spoke. “I am not foolish enough to attempt to change it unless the Pride Leaders all agree however. I have confidence in my abilities because of those I surround myself with who execute my plans with such vigor and precision.”

Ogat chuckled once more and nudged Keleru in the back of his shoulder. “I see why you like this man’s company so much.” He spoke.

Keleru nodded. “Indeed.” He saw the surprised looks on their faces at the familiarity between this Ogat and Keleru, and the ease with which the older Kavalian acted around him. He smiled. “Ogat and I have been friends for nearly five centuries. I trust and honor him implicitly. He has been working on something in private for me, and he has discovered some things that may alter our actions somewhat in the future. If you approve of them that is.” Keleru said looking at Pusintin.

Pusintin looked surprised. “Me?”

Keleru nodded. “You are the Military Commander for our forces and these things he has discovered concern you. We will not act upon them unless you deem them to be feasible and able to be accomplished.”

Pusintin nodded slowly. “Please... the air is pleasant enough... let us move to the main veranda. Bring more Csinga Wine Weos! Quickly now!” He spoke to the young female who waited just out of reach. He watched her scamper off before turning to look at them. “Jalersi doesn’t allow anything stronger than Csinga Wine in our home, but it is three hundred years old and the finest we could find.”

“Excellent!” Keleru spoke. “I haven’t had a good glass of Csinga Wine in months. Not since the last time I was here.” He took Pusintin’s arm. “I think you may find what Ogat has found to be very interesting.” He spoke as they headed for the outdoor veranda while Cukoum and Ogat fell in behind them.

“...dispatched Pian with the new directives to Jalersi and Athani.” Keleru spoke as he sipped the wine at the small table on the veranda. “He last reported he had arranged transport from Qurot’s ship on a Union Diplomatic Carrier that would take him to your brother’s ship. They had one stop to make and they should be intercepting this *MJOLNIR’S HAND* within the hour. Jalersi contacted me from this ship but the transmission was brief. I let her know someone was coming but she did not give me time to tell her who. They were having a meeting with this Queen For’mya right away. She said she would contact me tomorrow after Karun had insured the transmissions were not being monitored. A strange name for a ship, isn’t it Pusintin? The same as the name of their unit of dragons.”

“It is the name of the mythical weapon of an ancient Earth God. A hammer carried by Thor, the God of Thunder.” Pusintin answered thoughtfully. “He is said to be the most powerful of all the gods worshiped by the humans from ancient times on Earth. Fools if you ask me. We were the real gods, and we lived among them and they never knew it.”

“Well... he will meet with this ship within the hour and pass on my information to Jalersi.” Keleru spoke.

“You sent Pian?” Pusintin asked as he lowered the glass of ale.

Keleru waved his hand. “I ordered him to leave with additional females when Jalersi reported they were waiting for a Union Envoy to arrive. I thought perhaps making our offer more enticing would make them act more quickly. And if the request for an embassy was granted, they would have the personnel on hand to open it right away. The Union representative arrived at Qurot’s ship before Pian got there and left with Jalersi and our delegation... so he simply asked for assistance from the Union and continued on his own. He says the Union dogs were very accommodating and had a ship to him in a matter of a few hours.”

“Why Pian?” Pusintin asked quickly. “He is not a diplomat.”

“I had initially done this because Jalersi reported to me that Qurot was not going to be very corporative.” Keleru spoke. “He was challenging her authority. After her report last night, I am glad I did. He made a minor suggestion in regards to killing the second elven Queen when they arrived on the Union ship and nearly got his ass burned alive by one of their dragons! And then Leonidas’s second oldest son made him look the fool when talk turned to his ill-fated attempt to conquer that Union planet. Their intelligence is much better than we first thought it seems.”

“Wait... I thought that debacle was conducted by a rogue officer?” Ogat asked.

Keleru shook his head. “It was Qurot’s doing.” He saw Pusintin’s surprised expression and smiled. “Ogat is aware of most of what we do Pusintin. He holds my complete confidence, much like you do.”

Pusintin nodded in understanding. If Keleru trusted the man, than it was safe to assume he could as well. “We never had enough information tying him to the actual orders to act upon.” Pusintin spoke. “He was very careful in how he made it look... but he was the one who gave the order of that we are sure.”

Ogat looked aghast. “He sent twenty-five thousand of our finest to the slaughter!” He gasped.

Keleru nodded. “In order to avoid conflict amongst the Prides, we went along with his version of events and then proclaimed that Union forces overreacted. Much of the details of what happened we have kept out of the public eyes.”

“With good reason.” Cukoum snapped. “He would have been flayed and stripped of his title for ordering such an event and almost drawing the Union into the war against us.”

Keleru nodded. “I would have flayed him myself had that occurred.” He stated. “I am sending Pian because he still has an infatuation with Jalersi and she will be able to control him better.” He looked at Pusintin. “You do not have an issue with this, do you?”

Pusintin snorted in disgust. “Pian?” He laughed softly. “Jalersi is *my* mate. *My* wife. She has no more interest in Pian than I do in taking another female. She thinks of him as a fool. Try as he might... Jalersi will put him in his place I’m quite sure.”

Keleru nodded. “I thought you might react that way.” He said turning to Ogat. “I told you Ogat my friend... most of our males would have been livid at this. That is the devotion and trust he has in my daughter, and she in him.”

Ogat nodded. “Yes... I see. Will it extend to what we tell him however?”

Pusintin looked at him intently, and then cut his eyes to Keleru. “What is going on Keleru?” He asked.

“Ogat has been working on something private for me these last years as I said.” Keleru spoke.

“In what way?” Pusintin asked.

“I mused about it for several years after our return from Earth, for I did not know how you would react or if it was even possible.” Keleru continued as if he hadn’t heard him. “Only after I saw how you struck forward with your life here with us, with Jalersi, not with self pity or remorse but with determination and intent. Then I knew how you would react. Then I had Ogat begin his search.”

“His search for what?” Cukoum asked now.

Ogat leaned forward at the table and placed three data pads on the marble surface that he produced from within his velvet clothing. “The information on these pads is known by only a handful of people, most of whom

are now dead.” He saw the looks on Pusintin and Cukoum’s faces and smiled. “Yes... I eliminated them. Well... almost all of them. Two still live because they were too far out of my reach and far too prominent within the Union to remove and one Leonidas himself condemned to eternal death.”

Pusintin leaned forward now. “You have my attention Ogat.” He spoke.

“They contain a combination of information that was stolen from High Coven data cores when those vampires who fought with us deserted their masters. They hold the complete files of our dealings with Maruad throughout the years. He was banished to some forsaken planet by Leonidas and has not been seen since. It also has the complete files from that fool who thought himself a god on Elear. The elven Queen Dysea did us a favor when she removed him from this existence, but the information he had gathered was very compelling. There are several entries from two members of the largest insurgent group within the High Coven. They were captured several years ago and tortured until we had every bit of information in them. There are also entries from the wives of two members of Leonidas’ inner circle.”

Pusintin’s eyes darted to Keleru. “We have people within the Union?” He gasped. “Those close to him?”

Keleru shook his head. “Not in the manner you might think. Getting anyone close to him would be next to impossible as you well know. They are ruthlessly vetted by this Armetus character before they are allowed anywhere near Leonidas’ inner circle.” He answered. “However... we have many Lycavorians who are unwittingly in our employ. Most of them believe they are working for a group within the Union itself that desires peace above all else. No matter the cost. It is a small group, barely registering on anyone’s level that could be construed as a threat. In fact, most of them are complete idiots who would not last an hour in any type of life threatening situation. They have a dream of utopia within the Union. They do not understand that for peace to be real and binding in any way, there must be those willing to lay down their lives to fight for it. Any realistic male or female knows this. They believe they are gathering information for their group to eventually change the Union into this utopia. They are wide spread within the Union for their numbers are small. We employ several Lycavorian mercenaries that we pay very well to act as fronts for this organization. They maintain facilities within The Wilds at different locations. We don’t trust them... but we pay them well enough to keep their loyalty and they are watched. They in turn control these ridiculous individuals within different aspects of life in the Union. They gather the information given to them, attempt to confirm it as best they are able since they can move about freely within the Union, and then they send it to us. Some of the information on these pads was gleaned from listening to the mates of those relatively close to Leonidas as they met for lunches in Sparta over a period of several years.”

“How long have you been doing this?” Pusintin asked Ogat.

“I gathered and formed the information over the course of twelve years and spent the last two putting it all together into something that was coherent and presentable. There is extensive information on all five of the Queens, most notably the only two with true royal blood in their veins, the Hadarian witch and the second elven queen who I believe Jalersi is meeting with now. There is information on Leonidas himself... some of which is not common knowledge, though most of his history is known already. There is information from High Coven archives, as well as library archives on Elear, Hadaria and within Sparta herself.” Ogat replied.

“How did you manage that?” Pusintin asked. “Information from the archives on Sparta would not be easily obtainable.”

“They would be if you are patient.” Ogat replied with a smile. “And I wanted it to be at least feasible when I presented it to Keleru.”

“Presented what?” Pusintin asked.

“It would not be easy.” Keleru spoke now. “And it would require careful planning and to insure that only a handful of us knew about it, which is why I asked that only your father be present today. It is not something I want the other Pride Leaders to discover. At least not yet. They would not understand my actions for they would only see short term and not the end result. It very well may be impossible to execute given the changing circumstances and the unknown factor his children play into the equation. The risks may be too great for us. However I felt we should bring it to your attention.”

Pusintin shook his head quickly. “Keleru... I hate it when you do not come to the point!” He spoke. “What exactly are we talking about here?”

“You have always thought there is no way for you to reclaim your birthright.” Keleru spoke. “As the oldest son of Leonidas. The right you have to the throne of Sparta and the Union?”

Pusintin shook his head. "I forfeited that birthright when I swore my allegiance to my new family and people." He said confidently. "I have no regrets about that Keleru, not in the least. You know that."

Keleru nodded. "Yes. Something you have proven countless times throughout your years among us. However, what if it was possible for you to wield this power again? What if you could control the Union as their King?"

Pusintin shook his head once more. "Never." He spoke. "It would never happen. There is far too much diversity within the Union. I am a pariah within their borders now. Everyone knows I am still alive and they know what I have done. The ruling Lycavorian Senate would never allow me to take power in any way, shape or form even if I did wish to challenge my brother. Which I don't. Any attempt by me to act in such a way would be scorned and dismissed without so much as a glance and we would make far more enemies within the Union than we already have."

"If it was possible however, we would eliminate the Union as a threat to us." Ogat spoke. "And we could use their considerable military might as we saw fit to crush the High Coven into oblivion. We would essentially defeat our two most hated enemies with a single fell stroke."

"It's not possible." Pusintin said leaning back. "I've thought about this myself I admit that to you now. I've even gone through it with Jalersi." He shook his head. "It can't be done. For it to be even a feasible operation that might work, my brother would have to be dead. His sons would have to be dead, even the young ones. There is no way to eliminate the entire royal family. He has five Queens, all of whom have given him several children, all of whom would be accepted without question as leaders if anything untold were to happen to my brother. Even that vampire witch Isabella is adored by many, especially those within their military. There is no possible way to kill them all."

"What if I said we don't have to?" Keleru spoke softly. "What if I told you we would only have to kill Leonidas himself? Perhaps the oldest son as well. After that... after that with what Ogat has discovered... the others would have no choice but to follow the rule of their very own laws."

Pusintin looked at them. "Just how would we manage to get close enough to my brother to kill him? Or his oldest son for that matter? You know as well as I, just from the intercepts of their Netnews channels that they have a power I do not. A power I will never have. The Coven has tried to kill Martin Leonidas for years and they were never successful. When his first born son became old enough, they even went after him several times. Half of the attempts they do not even know about. The *Durcunusaan*... these Wolves of the Blood... they took care of them before they became a threat. We learned that much from the Coven traitors who fight with us now. It is the reason I told Jalersi to avoid contact with these *Durcunusaan* no matter what. They are an unknown to us Keleru. We don't know how many of them there are outside of those assigned to protect my brother and his family, or what they are capable of." He said. "Not to mention there is no way for me to make a legitimate claim to the throne of Sparta and the Union. Not now. Not after what I have done. Hell... I don't want to."

"Would you believe me if I told you there is a legitimate way for you to reclaim your throne of Sparta and the Union?" Keleru said. "And once that is done, we can combine our two empires into a single entity and destroy the High Coven for all time. We would rule the universe Pusintin my friend."

"However tempting it may be... I don't see how it is possible." Pusintin said shaking his head again. "I have no blood claim to the throne any longer."

"You would not be making the claim per say." Keleru spoke with a smile. "Though the blood of a son of Leonidas would be."

Pusintin's eyes grew a little wider. "Karun?" He gasped.

Keleru smiled and shook his head. "Let me show you how we would do this Pusintin. This will not work without your agreement... but it could very well put you back on the throne you lost millennia ago. The throne that is rightfully yours anyway. And who knows... you might actually take some pleasure from it."

Pusintin looked at his father for a moment. Cukoum shrugged. "It might be interesting to hear." He spoke.

Pusintin turned back to Keleru. "Ok... let's hear what you have."

THE WILDS

Anton watched as Cihera cut her way smoothly through the blue green waters of the enclosed lagoon. He never tired of watching his mate or looking into her beautiful amber eyes when she wasn't wearing false lenses. They had arrived with nary a problem, entering the main resort like gushing newlyweds. It was an easy enough role to play since they had never had such an experience after becoming joined. The resort's employees could only smile at the almost childish way they acted with each other, not enough to draw undue attention to themselves, but enough to dispel any suspicions from those who may or may not have been monitoring the resort. The first night and days they had spent enjoying the many facilities the resort offered, even attending the play as Anton had told her they would. Upon returning from the play they had enjoyed a night of loud, blistering sex; something that neither of them had to fake in the least. Anton was the largest man Cihera had ever been with, and she was unable to keep her cries of passion from escaping her lips as they made love. They did not need to act in that regard.

Now they sat on the main promenade around the enclosed lagoon, the sun beating down brightly on the several hundred men and women of all species that lounged around the lagoon. Anton got to his feet with a towel in hand as Cihera pulled herself from the lagoon. He stepped up to her and draped the towel around her shoulders as he dropped a soft kiss to her shoulder as any loving husband would.

"You look delicious as always." He stated softly.

"You aren't so bad yourself you know." Cihera said as she turned to look at him and he pulled her close to him heedless of her wet body.

"Our target has arrived." He said keeping his face locked in an expression of unfettered love.

Cihera didn't acknowledge his soft comment immediately and instead slipped her arms over his shoulders pressing even closer to him. Her face also was locked into an expression of passion and desire, something she did not have to fake when it concerned her husband. "Location?" She asked.

"Across the lagoon." Anton answered as he hugged her. "Third table from the door. Just as the Evolli had described. A fat Kochab."

Cihera laughed as if he was whispering something seductive in her ear. "No one has ever accused them of being smart Anton." She spoke.

Anton began to guide them back to their two chairs. "How true. No security that I can see, but that does not mean he doesn't have it somewhere."

Cihera nodded as she settled into her chair. "Seeing that he is based on a resort moon, I would think any security he has would stick out quite glaringly." She stated.

"I agree." Anton spoke.

"Perhaps we should have a look into the resort's computer system tonight." Cihera stated. "This may be The Wilds... but flight plans and embarkation points still need to be logged. Talbor Seven is used by many prominent officials from the Union and they would need to keep everything as legal as they possible could or incur the wrath of our King."

Anton nodded as he held out the large crystal glass to her. "Yes... and we both know that to incur his wrath is not healthy in the least."

Cihera chuckled. "My mothers have told me of those who have tasted the full brunt of his anger. They said it wasn't pretty in the least."

"My father has told me the same thing." He stated. "We should proceed cautiously however. This Kochab has been an unknown until now. That can only be because he has just recently risen to his position, or he is very careful about whom he does business with."

"Considering how fat he is I would think it is the latter." Cihera chipped as she sipped her drink. "Though why he would expose himself by entertaining anything from the Evolli is beyond me."

"And I would tend to agree. The Evolli do not exactly inspire trust and reliability in me." Anton answered with a grin. "A soft probe tonight. Nothing more just yet. We don't want to spook him."

Cihera nodded in agreement. "Yes... if we spook him, his heart might give out because he is so fat." She said with dark humor. "We wouldn't want that until we get the information we want."

Anton chuckled. "You are positively Drow in nature my beautiful wife." He stated.

Cihera looked at him with love in her eyes. "You just remember that and everything will be fine."

**GYTHEIO
CRANAE ISLAND
ANDRO AND SADI'S VILLA**

“...Eliani will insure there are ample amounts of both real and cloned blood available for the riders back at the main base. I assume you more than likely have something similar to what our vampire troops have with their injection system?” Andro was speaking as he looked at Narice, Toria and Carisia from across the large waist high table set up on the huge sea patio of the villa. The large awning stretched over the top of the table and half a dozen chairs which they had pushed out of the way so they could crowd around the table. On the table was an exact miniature duplicate of the base they were going to in the morning as well as the nearby elven city.

Narice nodded her head. “Shatter and crush proof cases... yes.” She answered. “Three small injectors per case. Enough to survive most major wounds.”

Narice watched as he nodded his head. To say the last four hours had been an amazing experience would be the understatement of any century that she might live through of that Narice was very sure.

For years they had been led to believe Lycavorians were nothing more than animals in men's form. From her mother on down to many of her instructors, all of them had said these men and women had no manners, no honor and especially no breeding. They were inferior in every way to the members of the High Coven and most especially to any pureblood vampire. It made Narice wonder why they would say these things when purebloods and all vampires in general were also taught from a very young age that they should fear nothing more than a pureblood Lycavorian wolf.

Narice now wore a light blue bikini that conformed to her lush figure like it had been painted on. Toria sported a black bikini that was very similar, while Carisia wore a bright yellow bikini. None of them had worn clothes of this type before, most certainly not openly, yet among these men and women, it felt like the most natural thing to all of them. Narice and Carisia had slightly darker skin tone than Toria because of their Asian genes, but all three of them relished in the feel of the sun's warmth upon their skin. They were cautious to not remain in the direct sunlight for too long, and they took notice of how Nyla Sinthe moved so easily in and out of the villa yet did not seem to be mindful of the sun on her skin. This action they took however, was not something that Androcles or his brothers and sister took notice of in the least. Narice had taken notice of how Arrarn Leonidas had moved chairs for Toria and herself further into the shade of the awning covered patio, even while still carrying on a conversation with his brothers about air currents over the base in the south. Like it was the most natural thing in the world for him to do. Androcles's brothers did not make sly comments or look upon them in any other manner except respect. It took only a few moments for Narice to realize that they were considered fellow riders, and they would be afforded the respect and status of such until they proved otherwise. Narice also found herself looking at Toria in an entirely different way now, and the thoughts racing through her head were thoughts she had never had before. The black bikini that encased her body was cut in such a way that it left little to the imagination, and Narice not only found herself wanting to see what the fabric covered, but to taste it as well.

And then there was Arrarn Leonidas.

Narice had never seen a more beautiful man in all her life. His six foot one frame was almost as heavily muscled as his brothers Androcles and Denali, and he shared the incredible muscular definition of them both. The rippled lines of his abdomen and chest had Narice's heart doing small flips whenever she would steal a glance at him. This was not something she had ever experienced before. Many of the purebloods who wanted to court her were handsome men, some would say even beautiful. They were lean and muscular and all of them were excellent soldiers. Arrarn Leonidas however... he had what all of those men lacked... and that was an aura of confidence, command and respect. It showed in his actions with herself and Toria, pulling out their chairs so they could sit, insuring their glasses were always full and even offering suggestions of what to eat in a humorous manner, usually joking with whichever of his siblings made the selected food. It seemed that even though he was a pilot by trade, he kept his body Spartan fit. His deep tan and dark blond hair was riveting to look at, as were his dark brown eyes and the two inch high elven ears. He had an almost constant smile on his

face and whether consciously or not, his actions were more often than not directed at making sure she and Toria had everything they wanted. Toria as well noticed this attention, and at one point she had brushed up against her with a knowing smile, causing delightful quivers to course through Narice. For the first time in her life, Narice found herself almost overpoweringly attracted to a man. And not just any man, but a son of King Leonidas. A werewolf. She also found herself equally fascinated by the woman who shared her mother's bed. All of this combined for many racing thoughts within her head, many of which Narice had never once considered.

Shortly after arriving and changing into the skimpy bikinis, all of them had sat down to an incredible meal of at least eight different dishes of food. All of the dishes were food from the time of ancient Greece Androcles had told them, and four of them he had prepared himself while Lisisa and his younger sister Zarah had made the other four. Eliani and Nyla Sinthe, she discovered, had brought the fresh fruit and greens for both the fruit salad and green salad that was served. It appeared that all of the Leonidas children were well schooled in cooking these incredible dishes and Narice realized it had to be because of the *Feravomir* of their people. Their First Oracle had been alive in those times of ancient Greece and she discovered listening to Eliani and Zarah talk that she had instructed all of them to cook throughout the years. This was another misconception of her mother and sister that was quickly shattered. It was reported and told to all of them that the First Oracle rarely left the main villa by the King's home, and that she had long since stopped teaching at the new School of the Oracles on Apo Prime. It was reported that she hardly ever saw visitors of any kind. Listening to the Leonidas children talk of what their First Oracle had taught them, they referred to her as Helen Narice now knew, it was apparent that the First Oracle was much more of a fixture in the lives of the Royal family and the Lycavorian people than their intelligence had ever assumed. She was still very much active in the School of the Oracles as well as other things. What Narice also discovered is that whenever the Leonidas family made their exodus to Earth each year, the *Feravomir* of their people accompanied them as well.

Narice found Zarah Leonidas to be witty and incredibly bright and intelligent. She was a very beautiful young woman, with a firm, lean body and long dark hair and eyes. She sat next to Androcles for most of the dinner, she and her brother sharing looks throughout the dinner at odd times, almost as if they were communicating within Mindvoice, but Narice felt no tremors to indicate such a conversation. She simply dismissed it as knowing glances between siblings.

All three of them found the food to be exceptionally delicious, especially Carisia, who sampled all of the dishes several times. Since none of the Leonidas children were in the least bit shy about eating, they too helped themselves to portions of all of it, Nyla Sinthe even feeding Eliani fruit playfully at different times during the meal. They kept glancing out onto the large open portion of the patio that had a massive metal contraption that was smoking. The smell of cooking meat was plainly obvious and Narice wondered how they were supposed to eat more when so much food was already present. Her answer came when halfway through their meal, Androcles and his brothers got up just as Elynth and Tharua led the six dragons around to the sea patio side of the villa. Narice ran over in her head what had occurred for they had all heard the conversation in its entirety.

Narice turned quickly to Eliani and Lisisa. "What are they doing?" She asked as she watched the three brothers' move towards the obvious cooking machine.

"It's a special recipe Andro and father discovered from ancient texts on Elear." Lisisa replied.

"Recipe for what?" Carisia asked with great interest.

"A special mixture of herbs and spices that we saturate the meat in." Eliani answered. "It's a delicacy among dragons... but they don't eat it often since the fat content is enormous. Whenever we get together like this, Andro makes two or three slabs. More if Torma is here. He and Jeth can put away the stuff like its candy."

"You... you cook specifically for your dragons?" Narice asked very surprised. "I did not think they liked cooked meat."

"They are just as much part of our family as any of us." Lisisa replied with a soft voice. "And like Eliani said, this is a rare delicacy for them."

They watched as Arrarn and Denali pulled a massive tarp out of a small in-ground storage bunker and quickly spread it out on the granite stone closest to the beach. Andro was using a small control panel to lift the cover of the huge metal cooker. With a billow of smoke and the smell of mint and cinnamon spices, the massive slabs of meat were revealed.

It smells delicious Andro my brother. *Elynth's voice filled their heads. As always.*

I have been waiting all day for this! *Jeth declared.*

You will allow our guests to have first choice Jeth. *Elynth scolded.*

Jeth turned his eyes on her in mock indignation. I do have some modicum of common sense sister! He snapped. And it only gets better now that I have Tharua to correct me.

Thank the gods for that. *Arydun spoke with humor as she rounded the patio with Tharua and nudged Jeth in the side with her head. She has her work cut out for her.*

Tharua leaned heavily against her new mate and affectionately brushed her snout under his thick neck scales. Not as much as you might think. She said lovingly.

All of them watched as Andro, Arrarn and Denali used long poles to stab the slabs of meat from over the fire, their muscles straining as they lifted the three hundred pound slabs and transferred them over to the tarp. They did it quickly and efficiently and then the dragons were staring at three slabs of the thick cooked meat.

Andro stabbed his pole into the ground as Arrarn and Denali headed back to the table and he looked at Elynth. Make sure no one gets sick sister. He stated.

Elynth nodded even as her golden eyes looked at the meat with greedy intent. Anthar... Deneth... please... as our guests I offer you first choice.

It smells incredible. *Anthar spoke moving his snout closer to one of the slabs.*

Elynth leaned closer to him, her eyes focused on his thick neck muscles and the lines of his jaw. It is a special treat for us since we do not very often eat meat that is cooked. She told him. This is something that Andro and his father discovered. It is very high in fat content, so we do not have it often, but it is utterly delicious.

Anthar turned his magenta colored eyes on her. Do you... do you like it? He asked.

Elynth nodded quickly. Very much so. She replied.

Then I offer my first choice to you Elynth. *He told her.*

Andro smiled and turned away to walk back to the table even as Elynth's eyes smiled in glee at Anthar's actions. To offer your first choice to another was a sign of respect and honor for a dragon. To offer your first choice to a female dragon could very well be construed as a message of interest and intent.

It wasn't long after that where Narice felt herself becoming very comfortable here. They were not treated as oddities or pariahs as her mother and sister said they would be. It almost seemed as if they were being treated as friends and equals. The conversation was open and friendly, mostly centering on their dragons and the things they had experienced together. There was not much she and Carisia had done that even came close to these men and women. All of them had ridden their dragons into battle. Arrarn supporting them from the air in his *STRIKER*, while Carina provided valuable ground recon and support. It appeared as if Zarah Leonidas had quickly surpassed her older sister Carina in terms of abilities, though she had yet to be tested in battle. Carina Leonidas had already begun directing more of her focused attentions to tactics and operations for it seemed she had an incredible gift in that area.

Once it appeared as if everyone had finished all they were going to eat, they rose from the table and Andro had directed them to the miniature of the base and the table. He held the glass of Spartan wine in his hand, all of them bringing over their drinks. As they crowded around the table Narice was very conscious of the press of Arrarn Leonidas on one side of her and Toria on the other. It made for some luscious sensations that she had never felt before.

Narice brought her thoughts back to the present fully.

Andro nodded as Narice answered him. "Nyla?" He asked.

"We carry the same." She spoke. "I'll make sure all of them have a med kit similar to mine once the training starts. It's got five full vials of blood and a smaller injector system like their portable ones. The chances for us sustaining larger injuries from the back of a dragon are slightly higher than normal ground troops. All the riders carry a similar kit in case one of us happens to be among those called to service."

Narice looked at her. "There are... there are more of you correct?" She asked. "Pureblood vampires that have bonded with dragons like us?"

Nyla nodded with a smile. "Twelve of us." She answered easily. "Six more are in training right now on Apo Prime and Elear."

"Nyla was the first however." Eliani said with a great deal of bias in her voice as she looked at her lover.

"Only by two months *ussta-che*." Nyla replied with a smile. "Any later than that and I would not have met you."

Eliani shrugged as she leaned up against her and looked into her green eyes. "We would have found each other eventually." She spoke kissing her.

Nyla responded to Eliani's soft kiss with equal feeling. "Yes we would have *ussta-che*." She said. "Yes we would have."

At least the intelligence reports about that were accurate Narice thought. Though she doubted the extent of the feeling and love between these two women would hardly have been described truthfully if what she saw was accurate.

"Are you two done?" Andro asked with a humorous tone looking at them with a smile.

"Hey!" Eliani barked. "Piss off big brother!" She snapped picking up a small piece of the miniature model and throwing it at him as Nyla gave him a shove in the shoulder.

Toria Dellion watched this exchange with great interest and she noticed that Narice did as well. Toria had been stealing glances at Narice all day, not to mention Arrarn Leonidas. She had come to the conclusion after first seeing Narice in the skimpy bikini Sadi Leonidas had given her that she was far more desirable than her mother Aikiro. That she found Arrarn Leonidas so handsome also told Toria that the times having to endure Tesand as well as Dante and Javier had not completely stolen her interest in men. Toria had caught herself twice this day already daydreaming of the three of them in a bed together. It sent delightful feelings through her at this.

Andro and the others laughed as Eliani leaned even closer to Nyla and nibbled on her arm in affection.

Sadi came out of the villa carrying a tray with several glasses on it, which she set down on the table near the edge. She lifted one of the glasses to Nyla who took it immediately, then held out one for Narice and Toria.

"What is this?" Narice asked softly as she looked at the yellow/orange liquid in the clear glass.

Eliani smiled as Nyla drank down the glass without question. "The food you ate today has many more spices and proteins than what you will find in High Coven territory. Our mother Isabella and those that came with her discovered this right away. Over the years they have discovered that a glass of this neutralizes many of the acids and will not make you break out in hives."

Carisia accepted the glass from Sadi with a bright smile as she leaned close to her side opposite Lisisa. "What is it?" She asked.

"Orange juice." Eliani replied with a chuckle.

Carisia didn't hesitate as she lifted the glass to her lips and drank it down completely. Her eyes were wide as she lowered the glass. "Narice... it's... it's delicious!" She gasped with wide eyes.

Narice looked at the glass for a moment longer; feeling Toria's own apprehension and then felt Arrarn lean over close to her shoulder. "You two are far too beautiful to poison." He whispered to her and Toria. "It would be a complete waste of considerable beauty and brains. And since Toria Dellion will be joining me and Sadi as part of a flight crew, it would be exceptionally counterproductive to injure one of my flight crew don't you think?"

Narice stepped back slightly from Arrarn Leonidas and the closeness to her that he had achieved, her dark eyes wary. He was far more forward than she was used to, for no pureblood vampire male would have ever dared gotten so close to her without fearing repercussions of some kind because of her mother or her station as Princess of the High Coven. Narice fell into her defensive mode almost immediately and without conscious thought. The same mode she used to dismiss those vampire purebloods who were courting her. "You assume much Prince Arrarn Leonidas." She stated with her cold professional voice. "Perhaps far too much if what I have heard of your interaction with females of your own species is correct."

Arrarn's face changed from interested smile and warmth to one of frigid emotionless in the blink of an eye she saw, and almost as quickly Narice regretted speaking her words. Arrarn stepped back in the next instant and nodded his head. "Message received." He said softly.

Andro jumped in quickly before anything else was said for he had detected Arrarn's intense interest in Narice from the moment he saw her step onto the sea patio. He glanced quickly at Eliani and Nyla who

shrugged slightly. “Narice... I’m putting your sister in your section. I doubt very much she would take directions from Carisia.”

Narice had to pull her eyes from Arrarn’s suddenly quite emotionless face while she silently derided herself for her actions. She turned and looked at Androcles. “Yes... I assumed as much.” She replied glancing at Arrarn once more before she downed the glass of orange juice in several gulps. She kept her face neutral even though it did taste incredible as it slid down her throat just as Carisia had said. She saw Toria doing the same thing out of the corner of her eye. “I suggest doing the same with my nieces and nephews.” She spoke as she lowered the glass to the table. “There will be no conflict this way.”

Andro nodded slowly. “That can be arranged.” He spoke. His azure eyes fell on Carisia. “The others will follow your orders?”

Carisia nodded. “Yes.”

“The first few days will be nothing more than light training to assess the strengths of your bonds and the skills of you as pairs.” Andro continued after looking swiftly at Arrarn. “Zarah will be handling most of the hand-to-hand training. Denali, Eliani and Lisisa will conduct the majority of the second phase which will entail flying maneuvers and landing and exiting the *STRIKERS* and *TYPE IIs* we will be using.” He motioned to Arrarn. “Arrarn and Sadi will have your pilots to train. I’m sure you are already aware of Arrarn’s qualifications... and Sadi has the most time in a *STRIKER* outside of the normal combat pilots. She has completed her academy requirements and taken an early commission as Arrarn’s normal co-pilot. Since this is supposed to be very low key and under the radar tasking so to speak, we can’t pull active pilots from their *STRIKERS* without questions being asked somewhere along the chain of command.” Andro looked at Arrarn. “Arrarn?”

“We’ll allow your people to choose their bunk mates.” Arrarn picked it up in a very professional tone of voice as he stepped away from Narice fully now and moved around to point at the model on the table. “The pilots and riders can intermingle in the barracks here, and the other base facilities, but no one will be allowed off the base property and into the nearby city without permission from one of us or a senior *Durcunusaan* officer. Nyla and Moneus Simpson, who you met the first day, will be the senior *Durcunusaan* officers present on the base for the duration of the training.”

“You don’t trust us?” Toria asked in a neutral tone of voice.

Arrarn shook his head. “No that is not it... we just don’t make assumptions based on information that may or may not be true.” He stated quickly looking directly at Narice. “King Anotan of the Moon Elf Clan is a die hard supporter of dragons and would do anything for them. He will protect your identities with his life if need be. We will allow access into the city later in the training if we deem it feasible... but we also will not take unnecessary risks in exposing what we are doing to the overall public.”

“There are many vampires that call the Union home.” Carisia spoke. “Many live right here on Earth. Why... why must we hide?”

Lisisa nodded at her statement. “Yes sister... however... they do not ride dragons.” She answered. “This is as much for your protection as it is ours. Especially with this false Kavalian delegation that will be arriving tomorrow. They will undoubtedly attempt to learn why all of you are here, and that is something we can not allow.”

Narice looked at Andro now. “Your father... your mothers... even you to an extent. You do not care for the Kavalians very much. Why is that?”

Andro nodded. “No we do not.” He answered. “The why is slightly more complicated in explaining and you’ll forgive me if I keep that to myself for now.”

Narice noticed that even his own brothers and sisters looked at him rather oddly when he said that.

“We are at war with them.” Toria spoke with a neutral voice once more. “I would think that would make you pleased to some extent. The High Coven has always been an enemy of the Union.”

Andro met her eyes and smiled somewhat. “As my father has said, we have not engaged the Coven in battle for twenty-five years. Regardless of the reasons why, the tensions between our peoples has eased a great deal through those years. Or did you not notice this on the streets of Sparta while you have been here?”

“The man in the store.” Carisia spoke softly looking quickly at Narice and then back to Andro. “He did not look upon us differently.”

Andro nodded slowly. “You might be surprised Narice, that what you have been told and what you actually find to be true in most respects, it is no where close to being accurate. In regards to any of us.” He told her. Andro saw her dark eyes cut to where Arrarn stood beside him quickly and then back to his face. “As my sister told you when you first arrived... if there is to be trust among us... it can start with us. Or did you think I invited you into my home because I had no where else to hold a meeting like this?”

Narice could not help the light blush that came to her face at his words. She dropped her eyes quickly. “Your father... your father said he would just as easily take our dragons from us as he would train us.” She said looking back up to him. “Do you feel the same way about us Androcles Leonidas?”

Though he would not come to realize it for many weeks... Andro’s next words forever set him on a path of his own making. Whether for good or ill, he had begun his own trek into the unknown on this day.

“I may look like my father... act like him to some degree... even think like him in large part.” Andro spoke evenly. “I am not my father however. You are *here*... in *my* home. I will act as I see fit. I have not fought you or your people Narice... and with my grandfather’s blessing and continued guiding hand, I will never have to. I do not harbor the same misgivings that my parents do in many respects towards the High Coven. Towards you and your people. I think you will find none of us do. That is kind of hard to do when some of your siblings are half vampire. It’s hard to do when many of your friends and fellow Spartans are either pureblood vampires or those who have been turned. It’s very hard to do when your sister has a pureblood vampire that shares not only her life but her heart.” Narice’s eyes went to where Eliani pressed her body against Nyla’s in a very possessive way, Nyla returning the gesture without pause. “Nyla is a member of this family... our family. She is not looked at differently because she is a pureblood. And only someone with blinders over their eyes would not see the love she and my sister share for each other.

“I invited you here to try and express to you that no matter what has happened in the past, there can be a future.” Andro’s azure eyes went to where Sadi and Carisia stood close to one another. “A future for all of us.” He turned back to Narice. “If I have failed in that... or you feel you do not wish to attempt to improve what our parents have *not* tried to improve... then by all means, you and Deneth may leave. I have told your mother and you that I will train you and your riders to the best of my ability. I will not attempt to separate a pair unless I see that there is no trust and caring between them. It has been a pleasure sharing your company Narice, however you are free to leave whenever you wish and there will be no repercussions in the least. You will still be a section leader like Carisia and I will keep you informed of everything I intend when it comes to the training of your riders.”

Narice stared at him for a long moment. No one that stood around the table spoke a word as they let what Andro had just said sink in completely. “You certainly do not mince words, do you Androcles Leonidas?” Narice finally said.

Andro shrugged. “What would be the point?”

Narice found herself looking at Arrarn quickly before answering. “I believe I will stay... if that is alright?”

Andro smiled. “And you would be very welcome.” He replied sincerely. “Now why don’t we finish this little round of details and then we can go relax on the beach by the water while the moon comes up? We are going to have a busy few months.”

MJOLNIR’S HAND

Athani was amazed at how quickly he thought on his feet. Even as they were moving down the corridor, Resumar ducked into one entrance of the mess lounge as they passed it by and came out the other entrance with a mug of coffee and one of tea. He smiled as he held it out to her.

“Just to be safe.” He had said as they walked.

They covered the distance to the landing bay easily enough and were entering from one door just as For’mya was entering through the hatchway closest to the dragon pens. Jalersi was with her as was Qurot and Karun, Resumar saw as he and Athani closed the distance to them even as the alarm claxon began to sound indicating a ship was approaching. Jalersi was not the only one glaring at Athani as they approached.

“Athani... where were you!” Jalersi demanded. “I checked your quarters immediately after Queen For’mya contacted me!”

“I woke early sister.” Athani almost snarled back knowing she needed to maintain the distance that had come between them in the last few days. She would not risk losing what could well be her future by doing something stupid or acting differently. “I could not return to sleep so I began walking the ship where we are allowed. I found my way to the mess lounge and saw Prince Resumar there. He invited me to sit with him for coffee. I chose tea instead.” She held out the mug. “We had just begun talking when the bridge or someone contacted him over the COM system.”

“I rise early to use the gym and training rooms before they become crowded.” Resumar added. “Do you know a Senior Commander Pian?” He asked.

“Pian?” Jalersi gasped. “Why... why would he be the one my father sent here?”

Resumar handed the data pad to For’mya. “The Admiral sent this to my pad as we were coming here mother.” He turned to look at Jalersi. “He was picked up from your ship sixteen hours after you were by one of our Diplomatic Envoy ships. They have been trying to catch us ever since. They made one brief stop on Beklan Two to deliver diplomatic pouches and then continued on to meet us.”

For’mya looked at Jalersi. “This is rather odd, isn’t it?” She asked. “You were aware of this?”

Jalersi nodded almost sheepishly. “Forgive me Queen For’mya. Just before our meeting yesterday, my father told me he was sending additional personnel in case the request for an embassy was granted. I failed to inform you of this during our meeting or dinner because I thought things were progressing rather well. My sincere apologies. I can order them to return, if you like?”

For’mya gazed at her for several moments. “Komirri checked their flight plan Res?” She asked.

Resumar nodded. “Yes mother.”

“Very well... allow them to continue.” For’mya answered. “I won’t let it be said that we were the ones who allowed a missed communication to interfere with what we have begun here with these talks. I do wish we had more warning however, I’m not much of a morning person.”

Jalersi almost found herself laughing at the joke For’mya made but reined that in and only smiled.

“Thank you Lady For’mya. The additional personnel will not be a trouble, will they?”

For’mya shook her head quickly. “We are used to carrying passengers on *MJOLNIR’S HAND*. We will find quarters for them.” The sounds of the landing bay’s massive doors opening drew their attention.

MENLKA TRANSPORT ARRIVING! MENKLA TRANSPORT ARRIVING!

The female voice filled the entire landing bay and drew everyone’s attention as they *MENLKA*-Envoy Class transport made its way slowly through the landing bay doors and the atmospheric force field. The single powerful tractor beam operating from the ceiling of the bay gripped the ship the moment the exterior beam released and began guiding it slowly to the open pad near where For’mya and her party were gathered. Athani glanced at her sister quickly while sipping her tea, noting that she was watching the ship being guided in, Karun standing beside her. As Athani’s eyes swept across where Qurot stood, she saw him glaring at her with cruel intent but she ignored him. Cemath had already been in the landing bay within the pens and he now made his way closer to where his bonded brother stood. Aurith was still coming down from the dragon cave on deck ten and this early in the morning there was hardly any crew members down near the receiving end of the bay.

Res? He asked as he approached confidently.

More quests. Resumar answered sarcastically as he turned to look at him coming across the landing bay deck.

Res... not now. For’mya spoke softly. *I... something is not right.*

Resumar turned to look at her, detecting the different tone of her voice as the tractor beam slowly lowered the ship to the deck. They all heard the hiss of sealed air as the ramp of the ship began to come down. *Mother... what is it?*

For’mya met his eyes. *I feel death.* She stated quickly looking at him. *And it’s coming from that ship!*

Resumar spun back around instantly tossing away his mug of coffee. *Cemath!* He shouted out as he activated their psychic shield with barely a thought.

Athani, Jalersi and Qurot could only gaze in stunned shock as the light blue psychic shield suddenly encompassed Resumar Leonidas entirely and then faded quickly from view. As the ramp of the transport touched the metal deck plating Resumar was already moving as he heard his mother call for Aurith and activate her psychic shield as well and step toward where Jalersi stood with blinding elven and wolf reflexes.

Resumar's wolf eyes detected the moving shadows even before they had cleared the ramp and he was stepping in front of Athani just as a dozen vampires unwrapped the shadows from around their bodies just as they opened fired with their weapons.

The landing bay echoed with the sounds of weapons fire as the vampire commando unit laid down an impressive field of concentrated projectile fire at their intended targets. Resumar had scooped Athani into his arms, shielding her body with his own even as the psychic shield encompassing him surrounded her as well. For'mya had used her momentum to push Jalersi to the deck; Qurot stumbling down as well as her psychic shield surrounded Jalersi. As Qurot fell to the deck from the force of For'mya's shove, he felt the sizzling in the air above him of several projectiles passing over his head and knew they would have hit him had he still been standing. Karun had thrown himself down behind several nearby crates the moment he saw the shadows moving.

Resumar kept Athani securely wrapped in his embrace until Cemath's huge body arrived and interposed itself between them and the transport. They could both feel the striking of the projectiles off their psychic shields as Resumar turned to look at his bonded brother.

"Protect her Cemath!" He snapped over the din of weapons fire. "At all costs! Burn anyone who comes close to her brother!"

Athani's eyes were wide at this as he positioned her between Cemath's front and back legs and Cemath's huge wing came down over the top of her like a bubble.

Consider it done! Cemath announced sensing the concern from his bonded brother for this Kavalian female.

Resumar vaulted over the back of Cemath and landed on the deck facing the two rows of vampire commandos. His eyes had changed now, black rimmed orbs as his dual fangs extended and he began walking towards the vampire commandos.

"You picked the wrong ship to pull this stunt on!" He screamed over their weapons fire and he broke into a sprint directly at the commandos.

"Dragon!" The commando screamed as he held back the trigger on his weapon. "They have a dragon!"

"*Vith* the dragon! Kill the Kavalian dogs!" The commando leader screamed.

The twelve commandos were pouring weapons fire at the small group of men and women to no avail. It had been easy enough to hijack the transport and kill all but the flight crew. They wanted no problems with the Lycavorian Union and their orders had been specific... kill the Kavalian delegation but do not harm to any Union personnel. The back of the transport had grown ripe with the bodies of eleven raped and murdered Kavalian females and the large Kavalian male they had beaten to death. They knew this would be a suicide mission from the start, for there was no way they would ever escape from the Union Fleet's flagship. They hadn't known what ship would meet the Kavalian delegation until it had arrived, but they were already far too committed to cancel the mission once it was discovered it would be *MJOLNIR'S HAND* they were assaulting.

Three seconds sooner was all the time they would have needed. Three seconds faster with lowering the ramp and the Kavalians would be dead. Now... now they would all die as the dark green scaled dragon imposed its huge body in front of their intended targets, its psychic shield dancing all along its length with the multiple impacts of their projectile rounds as they bounced harmlessly away.

Two things happened that announced to all of them that their mission was not going to meet success in any way.

The Lycavorian male with elven ears leaped over the back of the green scaled dragon protecting the Kavalians; his wolf fangs clearly bared in anger and the livid trumpeting bellow of the sapphire scaled dragon that was barreling towards them at a dead run from what appeared to be some sort of elevator.

"Kill as many as possible!" The commando leader screamed out just as he turned back to see the half elf half Lycavorian and entirely pissed off Spartan descend upon them.

“I don’t think so!” Resumar screamed before waving his arm in front of him like a club and sending the four hundred pound crate hurtling into the first row of vampire commandos from the side, crushing three of them instantly.

For’mya! Aurith shouted within Mindvoice as she ran towards where Resumar had just crushed three of the commandos with a massive transport crate.

Cemath is protecting the Kavalians! For’mya screamed out. *Aurith help Resumar!*

The nearby hatchway suddenly filled with *Durcunusaan* soldiers as if out of thin air, the door not even opening to allow them entry into the landing bay. This was something that no one but Karun noticed even in his dazed state. He began scrambling towards where the elven queen was on top of his mother.

“Mother!” He yelled crawling along the deck as rapidly as he could.

For’mya looked up at him just as half a dozen *Durcunusaan* nearly buried her with their bulk. “No!” She screamed. “Get them out of here!”

“My Queen... we don’t know how many of them there are!” The *Durcunusaan* troop screamed.

For’mya tore his *Nehtes* from his thigh holster and then snatched one from another of the troops. “You will get them out of this bay and lock down the entire section!” She barked the order. She turned almost as an afterthought and heaved the *Nehtes* into the air towards the transport. *Resumar... incoming!* She screamed within Mindvoice as she extended the second one and looked at the *Durcunusaan* officer. “You have your orders!” She snapped. “Get them into the adjoining corridor and protect them!”

The *Durcunusaan* soldier nodded quickly. “As you order my Queen.”

“My sister!” Jalersi screamed out.

For’mya shook her head. “She is safer where she is! Now go!”

The *Durcunusaan* troops scooped Jalersi and Qurot up with barely a pause, one of them grabbing Karun by the back of his collar as he attempted to get to his feet. For’mya’s eyes had changed by now and her wolf fangs were fully extended as she sprinted directly for Cemath and used his hind leg as a spring board to vault over his powerful back.

The Commandos had scattered the moment that crate smashed into their ranks. The commando leader had seen where they stuffed one of the Kavalian whores under the wing of the green scaled beast and he wrapped the shadows around himself in a mad sprint to at least attempt to accomplish part of their mission. Resumar had heard his mother easily and extended his hand without hesitation calling the *Nehtes* to him. He was extending it as he brought it down and sent it plunging through the chest of the vampire commando directly in front of him. As he was wrenching it free he saw his mother dart in from the side, her *Nehtes* extended as well. Her first thrust was directly through the throat of one commando, and she did not pause as she spun in the same motion, wrenching the *Nehtes* free, blood showering the area around her and slashing it viciously across the chest of another commando.

One commando was lifting his rifle to take aim and fire on For’mya. He dismissed the growl to his right as his finger tightened on the trigger. There was a flash of sapphire scales and then his arm and his weapon was gone. His cobalt blue eyes grew wide as he looked at the stump of what used to be his arm, blood spurting in an arc from the cleanly severed limb, his eyes turning to see Aurith spit his bloody hand and arm from her maw. She let out a bellow of rage, the commando saw a tuft of blue air from her snout and then the superheated breath of the hybrid dragon melted him into cinders with uncanny precision.

For’mya slashed her way to stand beside her son.

“They’ve wrapped the shadows around them!” She barked.

“Switch to grayscale mother!” Resumar shouted back.

For’mya nodded and with nothing but a simple blink of her dark brown eyes she shifted her visual color scale to gray. It was something that Martin and Daniel Simpson had discovered during the Battle for Earth. Vampires were easily seen using grayscale vision, even when they were wrapped in the shadows. It was

information that was not well known outside of the life of someone in the military for there was no real use for grayscale vision in normal day to day life. Now it would pay dividends.

“I have two!” For’mya announced.

“As do I.”

“They must not get loose on the ship Res!” For’mya snapped. “I have locked the bay down!”

“Then let’s go hunting mother!” He spoke slapping the COM badge on his wrist. “This is Resumar. Admiral... the lights and power in the starboard landing bay! Cut it!”

The reply was instantaneous. “Done!” Komirri’s voice answered.

Three seconds later the entire landing bay was dropped into blackness as everything lost power.

“Good hunting.” Komirri’s voice sounded. He had been around the King and Queens for twenty-five years, he had seen the children of the King grow and become superior warriors; even his daughters were far more skilled than the scum who had snuck aboard their ship. Now the vampire assassins would know what it was like to be hunted.

“Now the odds are even mother.” Res spoke softly.

“You go right. I’ll take left.” For’mya spoke in a whisper. “Try to take one of them alive Resumar. I would like to know how they got this close and why exactly they came on board your father’s ship on a suicide mission.”

“No promises mother.” He spoke before slipping off into the darkness. “But I will see what I can do.”

Athani finally was able to push the front of Cemath’s wing out far enough to squeeze her lithe frame out from under the surprisingly soft membranes of his wings. When she managed to get all the way out, everything was completely black and her eyes immediately shifted into their vertical slits to allow as much light as possible in. Cemath’s head whipped around upon feeling her squeeze out and he gazed at her with his gray eyes. Unable to form words he began turning towards her and did the only thing he knew how.

YOU MUST STAY! He shouted out within Mindvoice.

Athani winced painfully and grabbed for her head as she heard the deep male voice in her mind boom out its command. So staggering was the force of the command that she immediately went to her knees, her ears ringing and her eyes tightly shut.

“STOP!” She screamed out heedless of the danger her voice would attract.

Cemath blinked in complete and utter shock. *You... you heard me?* He gasped out much more gently.

Athani’s eyes were wide now as well. The searing pain was gone, and in its place was only a dull throbbing of her temples. Her blue/green eyes, more than capable of seeing in the darkness easily, looked up at huge head of the dragon now very wide eyed in equally stunned surprised.

You hear my words to you? Cemath spoke once more, moving his head closer to her and gazing at her with a combination of shock and puzzlement.

Athani nodded slowly, still not believing what was happening to her and the ease with which she was hearing this Cemath’s voice. Her head was throbbing still, but there was no longer any pain. “How... how is this possible? How...”

Resumar has cut power to the landing bay. The vampires have wrapped themselves in the shadows. He ordered me to protect you at all costs. You must remain close by. Cemath quickly explained to her.

“My sister... my...”

With your mind Athani of the Kavalian people. Think your thoughts and I will hear you. Cemath told her. *Quickly... we must shift our position before one of the remaining assassins targets us from your voice. Climb onto my back Little One and we will move to a more defensible location.*

Athani looked up at him. *I could... I couldn’t do...* Athani shook her head stunned at the ease with which she just projected her thoughts outward.

You need not fear me Athani’Puat. Cemath told her. *My bonded one has charged me with your protection.*

I... I have fought vampires before! Athani snapped almost too harshly. *I am not a pitiful helpless female!*

Cemath chuckled. *Then think of the damage you can do from high on my back Little One. We must move quickly. Do not fear me. Embrace what you do not know and let it fill you with strength.*

Athani looked at him and even in the pitch blackness of the landing bay she saw him shift his massive bulk around with the grace of a Naltharian Puma. His gray eyes were bright to her keen feline vision and he gazed at her expectantly, and in those eyes she briefly saw a part of her future. Athani'Puath didn't hesitate and in that moment, she became the only Kavalian in the history of her people to actually ride a dragon in battle. The fact that this battle was taking place in the landing bay of a Lycavorian ship did not matter to her in the least.

For'mya was a pilot with few equals. Endith, Tina and she had put their *STRIKER* into more hot zones and places that should have been impossible than any other flight crew in Union history. Her piloting skills were unmatched. It was her other skills that most either did not think she had, or wrongly assumed she was poorly adequate at.

You do not become a mate and wife to Martin Leonidas and not have him take many hours insuring the women he loved more than his own life could defend themselves better than anyone they would ever face in battle. For'mya could not recall the number of hours she and her fellow Queens had spent studying under perhaps the most lethal man alive anywhere in the Union, and perhaps even the universe. The vampire commandos wrongly assumed they had the advantage when the power and lights to the landing bay were cut. The bloody spearhead of the *Nehtes* protruding from the commando's chest rapidly proved him wrong. As his mouth opened and closed in silent gasps, For'mya lowered him to the deck, collapsing the *Nehtes* with a feather light touch on the button. The spear shaft made no sound except the wet squish of her yanking the head from between his shoulder blades and that sound did not carry more than a meter. She squatted over the rapidly cooling body, her dark brown eyes adjusted to grayscale as she searched the expanse of the landing bay in front of her.

Res? She reached out within Mindvoice. I have eliminated the two I went after. West end of the bay near the TEMPEST rows.

I'm sorry mother... Resumar's voice held exertion in it for a split second and then it returned to normal. My second target proved rather elusive.

Neutralized I take it?

She didn't see Resumar look at the body of the commando as he slumped slowly to the floor, his blood staining the bulkhead behind him from Resumar's downward slash of the *Nehtes* spearhead.

You could say that. He answered.

There is still one more Res. She spoke.

I do believe he is after me. Cemath's voice cut into their conversation.

Brother? Where are you? Where is Athani? Resumar questioned rapid fire.

I have moved to the pens Res. Cemath answered. Athani'Puath is with me. She can hear us brother. I have touched her thoughts.

The last one is after you? Resumar gasped.

We meant to move to a position to give me a better defensive angle. He must have assumed this is what I would do and he got here first. Cemath replied. I see well enough in the dark brother... but even I can not see him if he is wrapped in the shadows in this darkness.

You won't until he attacks! For'mya snapped. I'm moving towards you down the west side Cemath. Aurith where are you sister?

Ten meters north of Resumar's position. Aurith replied instantly. I will move about and draw his attention Cemath my brother. Can you make for the elevator?

If I do he will be upon us. I have lowered our psychic shield so he can not detect the shimmer from the emergency lighting.

Where is Athani? Resumar demanded.

She is on my back maintaining a very low posture. Her eyes are unique brother... she sees better in the dark than we do.

Athani's head turned slightly when she heard Resumar chuckle quite clearly in her head. She did not speak out for fear of actually talking out loud, wanting to snap back with a reply that she was very capable of defending herself. Resumar's next words made her so very happy she did not.

Do not discount her skills Cemath my brother. She has fought vampires far longer and with considerable more frequency than we have. Resumar spoke. Use her eyes... but tell her to do nothing to get herself killed. That would not make me happy in the least. I am moving towards you on the east side. Aurith... can you see the pens from where you are?

Yes.

When you see me reach the entrance, start banging into some crates and barrels as if you are the clumsiest creature in creation. Resumar told her.

That will not be hard for her. Cemath interjected.

I will show you clumsy when this is over my fool brother! Aurith barked out.

Mother? Res asked.

Half way there. For'mya answered. I want him alive Resumar. Cemath... if what you say is true and this Athani can hear us within Mindvoice, make sure she knows I want him alive. If she gets to him before we do, she can injure him as much as she wants but he is no good to us dead.

Cemath slowly turned his head to look at Athani stretched out nimbly on his back and saw her nod her head slowly. It is understood mother For'mya.

Sixty seconds brother!

Cemath felt Athani's body tense upon the scales on his back. I don't think we have that long brother.

Nubous! Resumar barked out as he surged to his feet and began to run.

Athani saw the vampire commando step around the edge of the entrance to the pen with excruciating slowness. Whatever the reason, he had unwrapped the shadows from around his body as he made his way into the massive dragon pen. Athani may not have been able to see him in the darkness while he used the shadows, but she most certainly could see him right now. His cobalt blue vampire eyes were staring at the back of Cemath's massive body, unable to comprehend the odd shape upon the dragon's back. Athani's body heat was contrasting with Cemath's much cooler scaled body, but still not a distinct heat shape for him to act upon. He truly did not want to begin shooting into the rear of this dragon and only succeed in hitting that armor like scaled skin. Some of his rounds might penetrate that thick hide, but he knew the majority would not. He moved with deliberate slowness, every step measured and even. He was superbly trained; his body coiled like springs to leap out of the way or to wrap the shadows around him once more. He knew he was a dead man. There was no way he was leaving this ship alive. He cursed his luck that it was the elven Queen and second oldest son who had come to greet the Kavalian dogs. There was almost nothing known about the second elven Queen, but the second son was said to be nearly as skilled as his brother and father when it came to combat. It was just bad luck that they had chosen this time to execute their attack.

He knew his men lay dead or dying, and he didn't doubt they would take the implanted poison were they only injured. They knew better than to be taken alive. If there was one thing their leader had made very clear to them it was not to get caught alive, for no matter how strong they were, the Empress would get the information she so required out of them. Then they would be responsible for the deaths of every member of their insurgent group, including the most vital and important member. Their leader would not be happy in the least to know that this mission had not been approved by them personally, but the risks at the time of the decision were taken into consideration and reviewed and it was decided to proceed.

As he took his next step toward the green scaled beast the silence shattering sound of crates hitting the floor reached his ears from behind and to the left of him. His head turned quickly to try and determine if this was a threat. Instantly he knew what it was and as he turned back to begin bringing up his weapon, his peripheral vision picked up the movement. Whatever had been resting upon the dragon's back was now coming through the air at him with blinding speed.

Athani'Puat was no stranger to combat, no stranger to death. As she leaped through the air from Cemath's back with all the speed and grace of her feline genes her eyes saw the commando bringing his weapon up. She twisted in mid air and sent her right foot snapping out with incredible power and speed. It slammed into the barrel of the weapon with enough force to rip it free of the vampire's grasp. Athani twisted once more in mid air and landed on the balls of her feet, her tail snatching the blade from her collar as she squatted behind the

commando and hissed in anger. He turned quickly and gazed at this female, while pulling the long bladed knife from his leg.

“At least I will have the pleasuring of killing you like those whores on the ship!” He snarled out his voice echoing in the bay.

I don't think so! Cemath's voice erupted in Athani's mind.

She watched wide eyed as his massive tail came from the darkness beside the commando, connecting with the vampire's midsection with a resounding thud and crack of breaking bones. One instant he was in front of her, the next his body was being tossed through the air like a ragdoll. Athani was nearly blinded as the lights and power came back on in that instant. Just in time to see the commando's body slam heavily into the unyielding bulkhead forty meters away with the sound of more cracking and shattering bones. Athani turned when she saw Resumar's bulk closing on her from the side. He scooped her into his arms and practically tossed her back onto Cemath's back.

“Don't move from there!” He ordered her.

Athani knew a protective order and tone of voice when she heard one and she quickly nodded her head. Resumar dashed towards the fallen commando just as his mother was reaching him and the landing bay was being flooded with every *Durcumusaan* soldier stationed on *MJOLNIR'S HAND*.

For'mya knelt in front of the commando. That his jaw was broken was obvious, his legs twisted under his body at odd directions. Blood leaked heavily from his mouth and nose but his cobalt blue eyes were still open. For'mya could see the life fading from him fast and she looked at Resumar as he knelt next to her.

“Poison.” She stated. “He either bit down on a capsule intentionally or from the impact.”

Resumar reached out and careful to avoid the bubbly foam from between his lips pried open the closing eye lids. “Fast acting too.” He stated. “Faster than anything I've ever seen.”

For'mya looked up as the senior *Durcumusaan* officer approached. “My Queen?” He asked quickly.

“Check the others Monid.” For'mya stated as she got to her feet. “I would imagine they are the same as this one... but let's make sure.”

The man nodded his head and motioned to his detachment that quickly began to disperse throughout the landing bay. He had been protecting For'mya as part of his regular duties for over a decade now, a Spartan who had fought the High Coven both on Earth and before discovering their King was alive. He knelt next to the body and examined it expertly knowing she would want his input later.

“ATHANI!” Jalersi's voice echoed across the bay as she skidded to a stop, her eyes open in horror upon seeing her sister on the back of the dragon. Karun half shielded her body with his own.

Qurot rushed forward angrily, forgetting himself and intending to snatch her from the dragon's back. Cemath's head whipping around and the snap of his huge jaws coming together stopped Qurot in his tracks, his own eyes now filling with fear as well as he staggered back. His own head whipped around when he felt the trembling of the deck plates from Aurith's weight as she suddenly appeared to his side, her eyes looking none too friendly.

“It is over!” For'mya barked out as she moved towards Jalersi. “Everyone relax!”

“Athani get down!” Jalersi snapped. “Get away from him sister!”

Athani'Puat drew some deep set glee from seeing the terror in her sister's eyes. “I am fine Jalersi!” She declared proudly. “Cemath would not hurt me.” She stated confidently as she tossed her leg over his back and began sliding off his back. Resumar reached her quickly and his hands gripped her waist as she dropped the entire way to the deck. Knowing there were eyes on them, he removed his hands quickly but he saw the flash of desire in Athani's blue/green eyes. Desire which he returned in his own gaze. He stepped out of the way as Athani began moving around him.

Resumar looked at Cemath. *[Thank you brother.]* He spoke.

Cemath nodded his large head. *[She affects you Res.]* He stated. *[More strongly than I have seen a female affect you before.]*

Resumar nodded. *[Yes she does. There is quite a bit more to her than meets the eye.]*

[Proceed carefully brother. Something tells me the others of her people would not be happy if they discovered she is just as interested in you as you are in her.] Cemath spoke.

Resumar nodded. *[I will.]*

Jalersi scooped Athani into her arms, running her hands over her body as if looking for injuries. Athani endured this silently before speaking. "I am unhurt Jalersi." She stated coldly. "As if that really concerns you sister."

Jalersi snapped her eyes up and glared at her younger sister. "We will speak of this later!" She barked.

Athani shook her head. "No... we are done speaking of it. You and mother have made your decisions knowing that is not what I wanted. There is nothing more to speak of." Athani pulled her sister's hands from her arms and stepped back. "I believe we owe Lady For'mya and her son a great debt for saving our lives."

Jalersi turned as For'mya walked up to them her dark brown eyes unreadable. "Queen For'mya... I can not thank you enough for..."

For'mya shook her head quickly. "I am far less concerned with your thanks than I am with why you have brought your war with the High Coven into our borders, and onto my mate's ship. Martin Leonidas is not going to be happy about this in the least I assure you."

"Milady... we..."

"Prince Resumar!" The voice shouted from near the transport. "We have a live one here!"

Res turned immediately and ran for where the *Durcunusaan* troops were gently moving the body of a Kavalian male from inside the transport. The two Union pilots were unconscious near the ramp but appeared otherwise unhurt. Res came to a stop as they lowered him to the deck. His body was saturated with blood from dozens of lacerations, his fur caked with grime from the transport's deck.

"Pian!" Jalersi gasped as they came up and she moved right up to where he was lying unconscious on the deck.

"Medical team!" For'mya barked quickly as Monid stepped up to her.

"The two pilots have been knocked out." He spoke softly. "Probably when the tractor beams took control. They are unhurt otherwise. Eleven females inside... altered females just like the ones already here. All of them are dead. My Queen... they... they were raped and beaten brutally from first glance."

For'mya stared at him. "Find out who they were Monid." She whispered.

"I can tell you that they are not regular High Coven troops." He spoke quickly taking her arm and drawing her gently away from the gathering of people.

"What do you mean?" For'mya asked.

"Their uniforms. Weapons. None of it is front line Coven equipment." He stated.

"That makes sense if they were commandos Monid." For'mya spoke.

"They are all clones my Queen." He stated shaking his head. "I only checked four of the bodies but all of them have a barcode branded into their arms. All of them have tried to burn it off. I will check the others, but I'm certain I will find the same."

For'mya met his eyes. "Coven Insurgents?" She gasped softly.

Monid nodded. "That would be my guess." He spoke. "Though why they would attempt such an attack in Union territory is beyond me. They must have known they would not succeed when they realized what ship they were coming to. The Kavalian delegation was the target no doubt."

"I am more concerned with how they accomplished it." For'mya spoke. "This ship stopped at Beklan Two before continuing to intercept with us. Contact Armetus and have him send a team there. I want to know who on Beklan Two is supporting High Coven Insurgents."

Monid nodded quickly. "The Kavalians?" He asked.

For'mya looked at where Jalersi was kneeling next to the inert body of this man her father had sent. "No changes as of yet." She stated. "I want to find out more of what is going on."

"Permission to at least increase security on the family deck Milady. And the dragon cave? For the remainder of our trip back to Earth?"

For'mya nodded. "Of course." She replied. "Whatever you feel is necessary Monid. However let's keep it as low key as possible."

Monid nodded. "Of course my Queen. Low key."

For'mya smiled at him. "Go." Monid began to turn away but her voice stopped him. "Monid?"

He turned back to face her. "Milady?"

“The bodies. I want the bodies moved to a secure location. The leader appeared to have some poison in his mouth that he used. Very powerful and very fast acting.” For’mya spoke. “I want to make sure we discover what it was.”

Monid nodded. “As you order. May I suggest we...”

The grunt of a powerful blow sounded and they turned quickly as Qurot’s body was seen rolling across the deck away from several of the dead commandos that had been crushed by the crate Resumar had tossed on them.

“Step back!” Resumar snarled at him.

Qurot quickly gathered his feet under him, anger flashing in his eyes. “You dare strike me child!” He screamed. He stepped toward Resumar with harmful intent blazing in his eyes but froze after three steps with the metallic sound of the *Nehtes* extending in Resumar’s hand and the bloody head of the spear pressing to his broad chest.

Karun stepped away from his mother to assist but he too froze when Resumar’s left arm came up and with a brilliant flare of silver/white light, the Shi Viska appeared humming on his arm.

“I wouldn’t if I were you cousin!” Resumar spoke harshly to Karun though his eyes never left Qurot. “Not if you want to keep your head attached to your shoulders.”

“Res!” For’mya shouted stepping around Karun and glaring at her son. “What are you doing?”

“We do not desecrate the bodies of the dead Kavalian!” Resumar growled ignoring his mother. “Not even those of our enemies and most certainly not on my father’s ship!”

For’mya turned her eyes to Qurot as Jalersi got to her feet. “What...”

“His left hand mother.” Resumar spoke calmly. “And know that if you make one gesture of defiance or harm towards my mother Senior Commander Qurot, I will run you through without a second’s pause.”

For’mya stepped forward quickly and held out her hand. “Give it to me.” She demanded.

“He is dead!” Qurot barked. “He will have no need of it! And we can use the information on this to discover who they are!”

“I will not ask again Commander.” For’mya spoke. “You are in Union space on board the Union flagship. Do as I tell you... or I will order my son to plunge his *Nehtes* through your chest and we will let the chips fall where they may. You however will be quite dead. And do not think for an instant that I will not give that order.”

“Do it Qurot! Damn you! Or I will kill you myself!” Jalersi hissed viciously from where she knelt beside Pian’s inert form.

Qurot held out the small data pad, his eyes glaring at both her and Resumar. For’mya took the pad and held it out to Monid who lowered his P190A3 from where it was leveled at Karun’s head and retrieved the pad from her hand. For’mya looked at Jalersi. “I must insist that the members of your delegation take into account that our laws are very different than yours Jalersi.” She stated. “Another altercation such as this will bring this delegation and the hopes of trade talks to a screeching end. That much I guarantee you.”

Jalersi nodded. “I will see to it myself Lady For’mya.” She barked firmly.

For’mya turned and met Resumar’s eyes for a brief second. “I need to contact Martin Leonidas and inform him of what has happened.” She stated. She looked at Jalersi. “I suggest everyone return to their quarters and regain control of their emotions. We can gather for lunch to discuss what has happened and why.”

Jalersi nodded her head. “Of course.”

For’mya nodded and then headed for the hatchway, Monid and Aurith falling in on either side of her. Resumar brought his left arm back, his Shi Viska quickly disappearing in another flash. He pulled the *Nehtes* back with a slower pace as Qurot glared at him.

“We will... we will come to blows one day son of Leonidas.” Qurot stated. “Then we will see how good you are with your toys.”

Resumar smiled. “I look forward to that day Qurot. It just might come sooner than you think.” He spoke in reply.

Jalersi stepped forward and pulled on Qurot’s arm, drawing him away from Resumar. “We will do as Queen For’mya has asked us.” She stated. “We will return to our quarters until our emotions have cooled. And we need to check on Pian’s condition. Come Qurot.”

Resumar watched him as he allowed Jalersi to pull him towards the hatchway, Karun following all the while keeping his eyes on Resumar and pulling Athani by her arm. Resumar glanced quickly at Athani as Karun drew her away, saw her blue/green eyes smiling at him and then he turned to the *Durcunusaan* troopers still milling about.

“I want the bodies secured under guard.” He ordered. “Get the flight crew to medical and let’s get this mess cleaned up. We still have a ship to run.”

Resumar did not see the small smiles of the *Durcunusaan* troops and the crewmembers or the nods that passed between them.

Yes... Resumar Leonidas was going to make a fine Commander.

SPARTA

ROYAL SPARTAN ESTATE

“...eleven dead Kavalian females. They appeared to have been raped repeatedly and then murdered Martin.” For’mya told him from the holo disc on the floor of his office in the villa. “The male survived, though he was gravely injured. I do not know how he got them to believe he was dead in order to keep them from beating him.”

“The attackers were High Coven commandos For’mya?” Isabella asked from where she was perched on the edge of Martin’s desk. The light robe hid her naked body underneath even as Martin wore only pants.

For’mya shook her head. “No. Monid does not believe they were regular Coven troops Bella.” She spoke. “He discovered clone brands on all of them Martin Leonidas.”

“What does he think they were *Kinsoaurgai*?” Martin asked leaning forward in his chair.

“He seems to believe they are insurgents of some kind.” For’mya answered evenly. “The brands... the lack of correlating uniforms and weapons. Their training was superb however and they moved very well. A few seconds earlier and they would have caught all of us in the open. I had the bodies locked in a cold storage for Anja to examine when we return. They took some kind of poison that worked insidiously fast and was extremely deadly. Whoever they were... they had to know this was a suicide mission Martin.”

“Beklan Two is very near the border of The Wilds Martin.” Isabella spoke. “But still within Union space.”

“I had Monid contact Armetus to have a team sent there.” For’mya spoke. “They had to have boarded the Envoy ship there.”

“You are on your way back now?” Martin asked getting to his feet.

For’mya nodded. “Komirri is not wasting any time. He does not wish anymore surprises to happen while we are out here without our Strike Wing.”

“The Kavalian delegation?” Martin asked.

“I got them out of the landing bay once Cemath blocked the attacker’s line of sight. Res and I dealt with them.” For’mya spoke. “I wasn’t going to mention this until we got back but the delegation leader is your brother’s mate Martin Leonidas. His oldest son with this woman is also among them. Both she and her sister are the daughters of this Prefect Keleru.”

“Pleistarchus’s mate?” Martin gasped looking at the holo image. “Are you sure?”

For’mya nodded. “Oh yes. She has made no attempt to hide that fact. And she is very determined to have a meeting with you, though her reasons escape me. Their purpose for coming here has nothing to do with trading their berries, Stenys and I both agree. They are pushing to establish an embassy for the very reason we thought they would.”

“So they can watch what is taking place with the Coven.” Bella spoke. “Do they think we are fools?”

“I don’t believe they care what we think.” For’mya said. “This Senior Commander Qurot is a loose cannon as Anja says so much and his actions so far to date indicate they do not care for us in any way, no matter what this Jalersi says. He is arrogant and pompous in his perceived superiority. As is your nephew. The only one who seems remotely normal is the younger one Athani, but there is something about her as well.”

“In what way?” Bella asked.

For'mya shook her head. "Not anything directed at us. I sense she is here for purposes that are entirely her own and they have nothing to do with what her sister or this Qurot character want. She was caught further away when the attack began... Res gave her to Cemath to protect. Martin... she is able to Mindvoice. She and Cemath were talking with each other during the attack. He apparently made contact with her when she tried to break from his protection. He convinced her otherwise. She actually rode on his back without fear Martin. Res... Resumar seems quite protective of her for some reason."

"Resumar is protective of everyone." Bella spoke. "It is the part of his nature that he gets from *ussta* she-elf."

For'mya nodded. "Yes."

"Have they given any indication that they know the Coven brought their dragons here?" Martin asked.

For'mya shook her head. "No. I am reasonably sure they are only trying to discover why, after so long, we have decided to sign a Cease Fire with them. The Trade Delegation was their only means to have a conduit into the Union, but Deia as we know was avoiding them."

"And Laustinos walked blindly into their net." Martin spoke shaking his head.

For'mya nodded. "It would appear so."

"For'mya did you..." Isabella began.

"Oh yes Bella. In very strong terms." For'mya answered with a smile. "Whether it makes a difference only time will tell."

"*Ol inbalus alur... whol ukt zai'th.*" Bella muttered in the ancient vampire language. (It had better... for his sake.)

For'mya chuckled. "*Siyu... Usstan qua'l.*" She replied in the same tongue. (Yes... I agree.)

Martin looked at them. "What is that about?" He asked.

Bella looked at him. "It's a woman thing." She stated. "Not something you need to worry about."

Martin shrugged as he stepped closer to the holo image. "Ok." He looked at For'mya. "You've told me what you've seen... now tell me what you sense *Kinsoaurgai.*"

For'mya met his eyes. "They have a hidden agenda Martin Leonidas." She said evenly. "That is without question. Whether all of them are part of it I can't say. This Athani... I don't believe so. As I said... she seems to have something entirely different in her mind. I sensed indecision in her when she first arrived onboard, but something has changed. In the landing bay... she seemed more confident. Almost as if she had found the answers to something she had been seeking. Jalersi... I sense quite a bit of simmering hatred inside her... as well as her son. It is hidden deep... but it is there. There is some fear... of what they are doing... if they will succeed and a lingering sense of indecision in them as well, but not for the same reasons as Athani. The females they brought with them have all undergone this biogenic treatment that it appears Jalersi and Athani have."

"The better to blend in naturally." Martin said.

For'mya nodded. "Yes. Commander Qurot is simply a brute. More than likely they sent him along as some sort of visual reference to their military prowess. He is not as important a part as he is portraying himself to be. She has asked that she be allowed to contact her father in regards to what happen Martin Leonidas."

Martin shook his head. "She can contact him when you are back here." He stated. "Not before. I want no more surprises *Kinsoaurgai*... not for you or Resumar. This is far more than we bargained for to begin with. The Kavalian delegation is one thing, but a commando strike against my ship to kill this delegation and conducted by vampires?" Martin shook his head. "I don't like it."

"We will arrive in seventeen hours my love." For'mya spoke. "Perhaps then we will have a better idea of what is happening. This Qurot fool tried to remove a data pad from one of the dead commandos. Resumar stopped him. Monid is going through it now and trying to decipher the encryption."

"I'll have Anja standing by to examine the bodies when you arrive." Martin said.

"And this Athani?" Bella asked quickly. "Kavalians are not supposed to have the ability to Mindvoice *m'ranndii.*"

Martin nodded. "*Siyu... Usstan zhaun.*" He said softly. (Yes... I know.) "*Kinsoaurgai?*"

For'mya shook her head slowly. "It is another reason I believe her purpose is directed at something other than us Martin. To my knowledge... she made no effort to inform her sister or the others that this ability was suddenly available to her. And her interaction with her sister says there is something else going on as well concerning her. Something not related to the talks or us. I believe it has something to do with this Qurot."

Bella looked at Martin quickly. “Kavalians are not known for their stellar treatment of their females’ rights *m’rannidii*. It has never been part of their history. Perhaps this Athani wants more than what she has with her people.”

Martin shook his head. “No way. I sympathize with her if that is the case... but allowing her to defect or seek political asylum is opening ourselves to another whole box of worms. I want these talks to go quickly... and smoothly. No more curve balls. I’ve talked with Deia, Tarifa and Selene in regards to an embassy. If it allows us to keep better tabs on them... then yes I will allow it as much as it burns my ass to do. I trust them less than I do Aikiro and the Coven.” He looked up. “Speaking of which... I believe it’s high time I discover what Aikiro has been keeping from me. If the Coven has insurgent groups inside their ranks who are willing to board my ship on a suicide mission to kill a Kavalian delegation... what else are they prepared to do here on Earth?”

“The Union pilots were not injured Martin.” For’mya was quick to point out. “It appears they were knocked unconscious as soon as the tractor beams on *MJOLNIR’S HAND* secured the *MENKLA* transport... but they were not harmed in any way.”

“Ok... so they went out of their way to not hurt our people.” Martin said. “Why? And will that happen again? Just bring yourselves home For’mya.”

For’mya nodded. “We will see you soon my love.”

Martin turned to look at Isabella as the holo image faded. “Outside of For’mya... who is best at reading people Bella?”

“I would have to say Dysea.” She replied immediately.

Martin shook his head. “No... I want *Melda Min* and Anja to remain as far outside of what is happening with the Coven as possible. I have too many of my family intertwined with them now as it is. You, me and Andro I’m not concerned with. You and I because we are of one mind when it comes to the Coven. Andro because he has spent more time with Selene and Lynwe than any of our children, and his closeness with Zarah... it...”

Isabella nodded. “Yes... it gives him a better sense of what vampires will do.” She stated as she stood up and moved closer to her husband. “Then I would have to say Aihola, Tarifa or Charles Turner. What is wrong Martin?” She asked tracing her long finger down his cheek. “You are troubled by something and I don’t need to probe your thoughts to see that.”

He met her hazel/green eyes. “I just can’t shake the feeling that the shit is about to hit the proverbial fan Bella. And there isn’t a damn thing I can do to stop it.”

CRANAE ISLAND

Andro had made no move to chase Lisisa and Denali away and send them to the southern base. He knew that Lisisa had waited for this moment for a long time and he had no intention of cutting short the first hours she would have with her sister. Zarah had told him this during a brief shielded conversation after dinner. She had said it was Lisisa’s time with Carisia and she wanted her to have it. She had volunteered to go to the southern base early in Lisisa’s and Deni’s place. Zarah may have been free-spirited and reckless, but she was also exceptionally intelligent and very perceptive for one who was only twenty-one. He and Zarah shared a special bond that no one among their family knew of and if they had any say in it, no one ever would. That bond gave them a closeness Andro and Zarah did not share with their other siblings. They could communicate in ways that no one else could, developing a unique coded language all their own. They knew why they shared this bond, but Zarah knew no matter what, she and Andro would always be closer than most.

They had moved to the beach and spread out several large blankets on the white sand. Elynth and the other dragons were fully occupied only a few meters away gnawing on large bones and speaking with each other within Mindvoice. Andro was stretched out on his side, Sadi sitting lotus style in front of him and leaning against his body. Nyla was sitting with her long legs curled underneath her, Eliani’s head resting in her lap, as their hands stroked each other’s skin without conscious thought. Arrarn sat next to Deni while Carisia sat beside Lisisa. Toria and Narice sat to Carisia’s left. Sadi could sense Andro’s eyes gazing on Carisia throughout the evening at different times, just as hers were. They watched how she laughed and smiled, the sound of her voice

and her unique rose petal scent; a scent that both of them had already burned deeply into their memories. Lisisa was regaling them of deeds they had done completely unrelated to war and fighting. She spoke of her time watching Andro and her siblings growing up and the trouble they always found themselves in.

Andro glanced at his brother, noticing that Arrarn had remained quiet for most of the evening, which was unlike him. He watched him for several moments seeing his dark eyes dart back and forth between Toria and Narice several times. He watched him chuckle at what Lisisa was saying as she finished the story she was telling Carisia and the others.

“...so what does Arrarn do?” Lisisa spoke. “He and Deni find some thick straps made from some material I have no idea where they found. Normya is piloting the *DT* as they come swooping in over the mountain hanging from this contraption they had made. They are several thousand feet up mind you, traveling in the blistering cold of the high mountains. Normya brings the *DT* in over our camp and these two bone heads leap from this netting thing they had made, wrap Jeth in it and we ride all the way back to Tuya hanging from this netting under a *DT*.”

“Hey... it worked didn't it?” Denali stated.

“Our father ranted at them for over an hour for doing something so crazy.” Eliani said from where she was.

“So you rode hanging from this netting?” Carisia asked stunned. “With your dragon? *Under* the Dragon Transport?”

Lisisa nodded. “A ninety minute flight.” She answered. “By the time we got back, I think we all spent several hours in hot pools because we were damn near frozen through.”

“I had icicles in my nostrils.” Arrarn laughed. “I was pulling flakes of crystallized ice out of my hair for two days. I'll never go to another cold weather climate as long as I live. And I won't listen to anymore of Deni's insane ideas.”

Deni looked at him. “The net was your idea.”

“The operation was your idea!” Arrarn quipped back. “It's all that pure blood you have in you. Andro too. Makes you both certifiably nuts at times.” He said. “Now me and Eliani... we have Elven and Hadarian blood in us. Makes us much calmer and in control of our emotions.”

“*Sibfla!*” Andro barked with a grin. “It wasn't Deni or I who flew our *DT* into a Class Nine Ion storm to rescue a family we didn't know. That was you brother! All you! Certifiable. That's what you are!”

“A Class Nine Ion storm?” Toria gasped. “How did you keep control?”

Arrarn grinned. “It's all in the touch.” He said.

“Touch my ass!” Eliani blurted. “You about crapped in your uniform shorts!”

“And he found true love!” Lisisa stated with a glint in her eye. “The daughter of the family fell in love with him and his cute elven ears the moment he set down on the plateau. He stole her heart.” She said giving him a shove as he looked on embarrassed. “And he fell in love with her too.”

“My ears are not cute!” Arrarn snapped playfully. “They are distinguished. That is what Taleena saw in them.”

“Yeah... distinguished full of *sibfla* ears!” Deni popped.

“Do you often break the hearts of females who fall in love with you?” Narice asked the question.

Arrarn looked at her across the blanket his dark eyes unreadable. His jaw twitched in anger and it was obvious he was holding back a rather vile retort to Narice's blunt and unfeeling question. “That's me. Love them and leave them Leonidas.” He stated coldly getting to his feet. “I'm going to go for a run.”

“Arrarn...” Andro called as he started to get up. There was a soft flash of white/blue light and the large dark blond wolf was suddenly in front of them. The dark eyes were the same, yet in front of them now was a muscular male wolf easily two hundred pounds of coiled muscle and bone. His dark eyes stared at Narice for a moment longer before turning and sprinting off into the darkness. “*Anse!*” Andro stated as he came to his feet. “*KertaGai?*”

Sadi looked up at him. “Go!”

Carisia, Toria and Narice all gasped at the same time as with another flash of soft white/blue light the immense raven black wolf stood in front of them. Natural instincts caused Narice and Toria to lean back quickly in fear, only Carisia staring with wonder at the huge black apparition. Staring with both love and desire in her maya blue eyes. In his natural wolf form Androcles Leonidas was nearly three and a half feet tall at the

shoulders and just less than three hundred pounds of muscle and teeth. His black fur was thick and shiny, but there was no mistaking the rippling steel muscles under that fur. His azure eyes were almost mystical to look at surrounded by the night black of his fur as they were. He was only slightly smaller than his father in size, and they watched as his large muzzle leaned close to Sadi's face and licked her cheek eliciting a giggled and a smile, before he too sprinted off into the night.

Lisisa turned to Denali. "Deni... go." She stated.

A third and final white/blue flash and the dark brown haired wolf was there and turning to follow his brothers. Denali and Andro were almost the same size in wolf form, larger than their brothers Arrarn and Resumar only because of their pure Lycavorian blood. He stood just a tad over three feet high at the shoulder and two hundred and eighty pounds of similar muscle and teeth. As large as they were, even though Arrarn and Resumar were not pure Lycavorian, they were still larger than most wolves in the Union. No one saw the utter passion and desire in Lisisa's eyes as she watched Denali sprint after his brothers.

Carisia turned finally and looked at her Aunt. "That was not called for Narice." She snapped harshly.

"I only asked a question!" Narice found herself defending what she had said, though not with very much heart in her actions. The moment her statement escaped her lips she regretted it. Narice was not acting like herself around this Arrarn Leonidas; his presence was making her feel strange to say the least. It had all day. She was reacting defensively to him and she did not understand why. "The intelligence reports... they said..."

"Intelligence reports?" Lisisa asked keeping her voice calm and even.

Narice nodded quickly. "Yes. We assumed them to be accurate since most of them were taken directly from your own Netnews intercepts and channels."

Eliani sat up fully now. "This is why Andro brought us here tonight." She said softly. "To begin to learn of each other ourselves and not what others say. Narice... Taleena was five years old when Arrarn rescued her and her family. That was only two years ago. Her older brother was killed as they tried to get to the plateau where he finally found them. Arrarn took it upon himself to fulfill the role of her brother because he could not get to them in time to save him. He has felt guilty about that ever since. He has acted in her brother's stead since that day."

Narice, Princess of the High Coven, supremely skilled and highly intelligent, suddenly found herself in a very unfamiliar position. She suddenly felt miniscule in size and completely ashamed of herself. She had prided herself on always looking beyond what was told to her... yet for some reason with Arrarn Leonidas she did not do this. She wanted to believe what the intelligence reports said about him. Narice felt Toria's hand squeeze her arm as she leaned forward.

"He did this freely?" Toria asked.

Eliani and Lisisa nodded. "That is who our brother is." Eliani answered. "Not the ridiculous way they portray him on the Netnews."

"The reports we gathered from the Union Netnews... they made your brother out to be... well..." Toria stopped.

"A ladies man?" Lisisa said.

Toria met her eyes. "Well... yes."

Lisisa smiled. "Yes... I thought as much. Arrarn does have a way of attracting females wherever he goes." She said. "I can see where it would be easy to assume that from just the Netnews."

"It's been like that for years." Eliani said. "Ever since he finished his Agoge."

Narice turned her head and looked at Eliani surprised. "He is a pilot." She said. "I did not think they were required to go through your ritual training."

"Every Leonidas male is expected to go through the training." Nyla spoke now. "I don't think any of them would shirk from that duty. To them it would be like smearing the name of their grandfather... and that is something none of them would ever do, even upon pain of death. Arrarn Leonidas is just as lethal with a *Nehtes* as he is behind the controls of a *STRIKER DT*. Even Deion is already talking of his Agoge and he is only ten."

"Arrarn is considered the best looking of our father's sons..." Eliani said with a smile. "The most beautiful if you will."

Sadi, who had remained silent until now, chortled. "I beg to differ on that." She barked.

Lisisa laughed and reached over to push her gently. "Your opinion does not count. You and Andro have essentially been a couple since he was eight months old."

Eliani laughed as well and looked at Narice. "Arrarn is most definitely not a ladies man." She stated. "He's had only three..."

"Two." Lisisa stated quickly. "Arianna does not count. She was a *upaee* and only wanted to be with him to flaunt him to all her high class friends. Similar to what Ulana wanted with Andro."

"Ulana?" Sadi asked quickly even though she already knew the answer to her own question. Andro had hidden nothing from her, and she had spent hours roaming the halls of his mind since they had been together. She knew exactly who Ulana was. "Who is this Ulana?"

Eliani chuckled. "Oh I'm sure you'll meet her some day." She said. "She's just stupid enough to try and steal Andro back from you, as if that will ever happen. He already told her she was a pompous bitch wench... but she won't listen."

"Bitch wench *Ussta-che*?" Nyla asked with a smile. "That is a new one."

"Do I get to rip her eyes out if she tries?" Sadi asked with a wicked glint in her jungle green eyes.

"Just wait until we are there to see it." Lisisa stated. "That will be priceless."

"Anyway... Arrarn's only had two relationships." Eliani said. "Neither of them lasted very long and they parted as friends. It takes a special woman to win the heart of one of our brothers. Andro has found Sadi... Arrarn, Res and Deni... well, they are still looking."

Lisisa felt a warm flush through her skin that was hidden in the moonlight for she knew that Deni had already found that woman in her. As he showed her every time they were alone together. And it also told her they were doing an excellent job of hiding their love for one another until the time when they could reveal it.

"I'm... I'm afraid I am guilty of doing exactly what I told myself I would not do." Narice spoke softly. "I said I would come here with an open mind... and I did not do that. I... I am sorry."

Eliani waved her hand. "Arrarn is like Andro and father. He has thick skin. By morning he'll be back to his old self... you'll see."

"I should apologize to him." Narice said quickly.

Lisisa shook her head. "No. Never apologize to a Spartan male for being a woman. And most definitely never to a Leonidas. To them, it would be an insult. Our father has instilled in our brothers that while we are women and fellow warriors, we are also treasured pieces of our own future. We are to be treated with equal respect and honor as well as devotion. It is the way he treats our mothers, and he made sure all of our brothers knew it. If it was seen by any of our brothers, and I dare say any Spartan man, the striking of a woman by a man, that man would soon learn what pain is like." She said. "We are what we are... and that is why they love and desire us so!" She said with a brilliant smile.

Eliani burst out laughing and fell back on Nyla's laughing form as Sadi couldn't contain her own loud giggling. "Oh... oh that is a good one Lisi!" Eliani exclaimed.

The laughter was infectious and soon all of them were laughing, though Narice's dark eyes were staring off into the darkness where the dark blond wolf had disappeared, and very much wondering if Arrarn Leonidas desired her.

Arrarn didn't budge from where he had shifted back and now sat on the beach on the far side of the island. He felt his brothers end their sprint and move up on either side of him before shifting back into their human forms and settling to the sand beside him.

"I don't want to hear it." Arrarn spoke.

"Hear what?" Andro asked.

"What you are going to tell me."

"What makes you think I'm going to say anything?" Andro said with a smile.

Arrarn smiled and looked at him. "You've always got something to say. You are too much like father sometimes. I can hear him now... 'Are you crazy boy? The daughter of the High Coven Empress? Have you lost your mind? An intelligence officer from the *Venorik Elghinn*? They aren't your mother and sisters! They are High Coven!'" He stated trying to impersonate his father's voice.

"He's got a point about that Andro." Deni spoke with a grin. He elbowed his brother. "Not a bad impression of father either."

"Just let me wallow in self pity for a while." Arrarn spoke.

Andro chuckled. "You got it bad brother." He said looking at Arrarn as he lay back on the sand. "Both of them?"

"Why is it that vampires think they don't have unique scents?" Arrarn demanded to the star filled sky. "I have had nothing but the smell of fresh pineapples and cherries in my *nubous* head all day and night!"

"Which one is which?" Deni asked with a grin.

"You expect me to say that it is wrong Arrarn." Andro spoke softly.

"That is what father would say." Arrarn retorted. "They are supposed to be our enemies you know."

"I am not father Arrarn." Andro spoke. "And they are not my enemies until they prove otherwise to me. And I will not scorn you for feeling the exact same thing I feel for Carisia."

Arrarn sat up quickly and joined Denali in looking at him wide eyed. "What?" Arrarn gasped.

"I knew I smelled it today." Deni spoke. "From Sadi too. For her."

"That's what that was coming from her as well?" Arrarn asked.

Andro nodded. "Sadi and I have been having dreams of her for a long time." He said. "Individually and together."

"How long?" Deni asked.

Andro chuckled. "A long time." He told them. "Today after she first arrived... Sadi and I were talking in Mindvoice. Shielded. We included her in the connection without as much as a passing thought. Like it was the most natural thing in the world for us to do."

"Anse!" Arrarn said. "Does father know?"

Andro shook his head with a smile. "No."

"Andro... you can't just dismiss that." Arrarn spoke. "You and Sadi... you were... you were chosen for each other. We all know that. But if this... if Carisia... if she affects you both in this way... to that extent. You can't just let it go."

Andro nodded. "We don't intend to." He stated. He looked at Arrarn and Deni. "They may be from the High Coven... but they are not our enemies. The Empress, Yuri... some others that I have seen yes, but not these women here tonight. And not their dragons. With the exception of Yuri and her idiot son Dante and that fool riding the female who carried eggs, I sense nothing but concern from these men and women for their dragons. Believe me... I have tried to find something else too. They just not have been able to express it as they should. Yuri's other two children... Javier and Lucia... they are wavering on the edge but I don't think I care to catch them to be honest. Not unless they show me something else."

"The history between our people is..." Deni began.

"It is not our history Denali." Andro said. "It is father's history. Our mother's history... though I dare say they would be more open to the future if not for his feelings. We make our own history brother. Just as grandfather Leonidas did. Just as grandfather Resumar did. Just as father has the past years... but that is not our history. We make our own history by the paths we choose to take."

Denali shifted on the sand to look at him fully. "What are you saying Andro?"

"We have an opportunity right now to make our own history and with that, our future." Andro spoke. Andro shook his head slowly. "The High Coven as our father knows it will... it will not survive the future. They are not the threat we should be concerned with."

"The Kavalians?" Arrarn stated.

Andro nodded. "The Kavalians are worse than the Coven ever thought of being, and with our uncle helping them, it makes them that much more dangerous to the Union. I'm not saying the High Coven is innocent in their past actions or even their future actions... but I know you both saw today that Narice, Toria and Carisia are not like Yuri and Aikiro. Father is right in that they are here for something other than us to train their dragons and riders."

Arrarn nodded slowly. "Yes."

"That's obvious in the way they have acted." Deni said.

Andro settled and shifted on the sand. "The question is... are their ulterior motives the same or different from Aikiro and Yuri? And how many of them feel the same way?"

"You think they are different?" Denali asked.

"Have either of you smelled a lie coming from them today?" Andro asked. Arrarn and Denali shook their heads quickly. "They are just as curious about us as we are about them. Deni I know your sense of smell is

almost as good as mine and father's noses. Arrarn... you may be half elf... but your nose is better than some purebloods. Are you going to tell me you didn't smell the interest Narice has in Toria? Or the interest Toria has in Narice? This is all as new to them as it is us. And not just concerning us. They have been under the thumb of Yuri and Aikiro for years... and I'm guessing this is the first time any of them have interacted with us or each other out of very controlled circumstances."

"Well... their intelligence about us really sucks." Deni said. "Armetus has made it very difficult to operate intelligence agents within the Union. At least those that can do us harm. Wherever they got theirs... well they need to discard that source."

Andro nodded. "Yes he has. I believe they got most of their information from our own Netnews channels."

Deni rolled his eyes. "Well that would explain a lot. Those idiots couldn't find their *midas* with both hands, their noses and a searchlight."

Andro nodded as he chuckled. "That's not to say they don't still have some sources... but for the most part they came here blind." He looked at them intently. "You are my brothers... blood before all else... you know I follow that phrase more closely than most. I would never do anything that puts any of you in danger. Ever! I believe however, I believe this is our chance to change the future. That is why I am not going to fight what Sadi and I feel for Carisia. And that is why Arrarn... I'm not going to tell you to fight what you seem to feel for Narice and Toria. They are both beautiful beyond measure. If that is what you wish, then I say go for it. No... this time... this time I'm going to follow what *my* gut tells me. Not father's instincts. I'm going to trust in my instincts... and my instincts tell me this is our time."

"And if you're wrong Andro? Then what?" Denali asked.

"Then I will take every single one of their dragons from them." Andro replied. "Those that do not leave peacefully I will bury."

Arrarn and Denali looked at their brother for a long moment in silence with nothing but the breeze whispering across the sand and the sounds of the Laconian Gulf splashing gently against the shore.

"You know brother... you *nubous* scare me sometimes." Arrarn finally blurted out.

"Man you ain't kidding." Deni agreed. "You been hanging around Helen too much."

Andro laughed gently. "I scare myself sometimes." He said.

Arrarn smiled. "You know... I've never chased the tails of pureblood vampires." He said. "That might be kind of fun. They don't seem too impressed that I am a Prince and that makes it even more challenging."

"Well... from what I saw today... you won't find much finer looking tails than those anywhere in Sparta." Deni spoke with a grin.

"Man... ain't that the truth!" Arrarn said.

"You just have to work past the part where they are interested in each other as well as you." Andro spoke.

Arrarn looked at him eyes wide. "You smelled that in them?"

Andro stood up. "C'mon... let's go back and work on some things I have floating in my head to speed the training. When Res gets back, we can really throw the training into high gear."

Arrarn and Denali got to their feet as well. "Wait a minute... you have to tell me if you smelled that Andro. You can't leave me hanging." Arrarn complained.

Androcles and Denali laughed and three sons of Leonidas began walking back down the beach the way they had come.

MJOLNIR'S HAND

Resumar had not wanted to leave a meeting so badly as he did the one with Qurot and the other Kavalians right now. He had spent the five hours prior to the meeting in the landing bay with the crew of *MJOLNIR'S HAND* helping to put everything back together as well as conduct some sort of preliminary investigation. The bodies had all been taken to a secure storage room near engineering; none of the vampire commandos had any sort of identifiable markings except for the clone brand on their arms. All of them were healthy and well groomed and they could just as well be any vampire walking within the Union borders right

now. The computer cores were downloaded and secured, and the last thing he had done was interview the two pilots before going to the meeting. Resumar was no stranger to the adrenalin rush of combat and the after affects, yet the reason his thoughts kept drifting was not the battle, but the tangerine scent of Athani'Puat who sat three chairs from him. What had taken place with her had stunned him and Cemath, and even as they moved about the landing bay talking of this, they were trying to discover how she had suddenly developed the ability to Mindvoice. He also could not shake the very real feeling that he had undoubtedly enjoyed having her supple body in his arms. The crush of her breasts against his chest, the feel of her arms around his shoulders and the taste of her lips; these were the things that occupied Resumar's mind right now.

"Res?" For'mya's voice broke into his thoughts.

Resumar looked up. "Huh? I'm... I'm sorry mother. What did you say?" He asked quickly. He saw Qurot roll his eyes in disgust even as Karun snickered softly.

"The bodies?" For'mya asked again.

Resumar nodded. "The bodies... yes." He said. He held up the data pad and gently slid it across the surface of the table to where Jalersi sat. She ignored it and looked at him. "All of them are clones." He stated. "They all had the same clone brand on their arm. Aside from being well fed and in excellent physical condition, there's nothing discernible as far as where they came from or how they got to Balkan Two. I agree with Monid however, they are definitely not regular High Coven troops."

"What do you mean?" Jalersi demanded. "How would you know that?"

Resumar turned to her. "Your people do not have the corner on doing battle with the High Coven Lady Jalersi." He stated calmly surprising her with the respect in her voice. "You have been at war with them for twenty-five years... before that, not for a thousand years. My people, with the exception of these last twenty-five years, have battled the High Coven for centuries. We do know something of what they are capable of. One of our senior *Durcunusaan* officers believes these men are insurgents of some kind."

"Insurgents?" Jalersi asked.

"Yes."

"What of their weapons?" Karun asked from where he stood.

"A mix of older High Coven projectile rifles... Limian hand toasters and Kavalian Mark Three assault rifles." Resumar spoke looking at him.

"Kavalian weapons?" Karun asked as he stepped closer to his mother and reached for the pad she had not picked up.

"I have spoken with Martin Leonidas. For'mya spoke now. Based on what has recently occurred, we are making straight for Earth with no other stops or delays. Jalersi... considering this commando team was undoubtedly after you and your delegation, until we are in more secure surroundings within Sparta, Martin has refused your request to contact your father Keleru'Puat. He does not want any transmission you might send to be intercepted. He said he will make a secure transmitter available to you when we arrived on Earth."

"That is not acceptable!" Qurot spat leaning forward in his chair.

For'mya turned her dark brown eyes on him. "Senior Commander Qurot... what you find acceptable does not concern me in the least." She stated calmly. "This was supposed to be a Trade Delegation. The Union has taken no part and no sides in your ongoing conflict with the High Coven. Now however, now a vampire commando team has boarded my mate's ship and attempted to assassinate your delegation. That they did this within Union space; that they knew what ship they were boarding, and that they knew they would never leave this ship alive does not bode well for continued relations between us. Your issues with the High Coven, whether real or perceived, do not concern us, and Martin Leonidas will not allow us to be drawn into your conflict, nor will he allow your war to spill over into our borders."

"Lady For'mya..." Jalersi began.

For'mya turned her eyes on her. "He has agreed to meet with you Jalersi, as you have requested. And he has agreed to entertain the thought of an embassy. Beyond that I can say no more. Our investigation will continue and if it is found that the High Coven is behind this attack we *will* deal with them I assure you. Since we are now on a direct routing to Earth, we will arrive in just under fourteen hours. I suggest we try and put this incident behind us and move forward. I will insure you are kept abreast of what we find Jalersi. I give you my word. Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos and First Secretary Stenys will see to whatever it is you may need until

we arrive on Earth.” For’mya motioned to Laustinos and Stenys as she got to her feet quickly. “We are done here.”

For’mya turned quickly and walked out of the lounge followed quickly by Resumar.

Jalersi held up her hand before Qurot could speak. “Your words have made this mission infinitely harder Qurot... you will remain silent from now on.” She stated. “If you find yourself unable to comply with that directive because I am a woman, please let me know and I will have my son insure you are incapable of speaking any longer.” She got to her feet. “I must check on Pian’s condition.” She spoke softly.

Athani looked at her sister as she turned and headed for the exit. Her blue/green eyes narrowed somewhat at the tone of voice Jalersi had used in reference to Pian. She began to think quickly about why this was so... but her thoughts were interrupted by the voice of Resumar Leonidas in her head.

[Athani’Puat?]

Athani turned her head back and forth as if to insure no one else heard his voice. Qurot and Karun were speaking in hushed whispers with Jiss and Matuarr. *[Resumar Leonidas?]* She answered tentatively.

She heard him chuckle in her mind. *[No one can hear us Athani.]* He spoke. *[I have put up Mindvoice shields to keep our conversation private. Shields that no one can crack. It is something my brother taught me.]*

[Where... where are you?]

[Waiting for you.] He stated plainly. *[I can’t seem to get you out of my head Athani’Puat. As much as I know it isn’t right... I find myself wanting to get to know you very well. I find myself wanting to continue what we started. If that is your wish as well.]*

Athani fought to hide the flush in her skin at his words, or the desire that skipped across her senses at his confident tone of voice and the pleasures it promised. Her reply was that of a woman who desired a man, and not of someone looking for an escape of the life she was being forced to live. *[Oh... it is. So very much.]* She spoke honestly.

[I will meet you in the corridor outside your quarters. Five minutes.] Resumar told her.

[We will be seen.] Athani said quickly.

Resumar laughed again and Athani found herself loving the sound of his deep voice and the baritones when he laughed. *[My brothers and sisters and I used to run all over this ship when we were small. We know every square millimeter of it. Trust me... no one will see us. Four minutes now.]*

Athani hid her smile as she got to her feet, calmly stating she was returning to her quarters. She ignored the men, as they ignored her and she walked into the corridor. Every step she took brought Athani closer to what she wanted, as well as closer to something she did not think she would ever find.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

GYTHEIO

CRANAE ISLAND

Narice’s eyes fluttered open slowly as she felt the warmth of the sunlight on her face. It had been a very long night, the seven of them sitting on the beach until the early morning hours talking of this and that. She had sensed Arram Leonidas’s heartbeat almost from the moment he re-entered the villa from the opposite side, but the three brothers had gone directly into a large room and had not returned to the beach. She could tell Toria had registered his heartbeat as well for she kept turning to look into the villa, perhaps hoping he would return to the beach with them. It was a hope that Narice found was filling her as well. They could hear the laughter sometimes from the brothers from within the villa and this always caused their heads to turn, something that did not go unnoticed by the others. She and Toria were given one of the large guest rooms together, and by the time they had made their way to this room, both of them were far more tired than either of them had been in a very long time. Due to their fatigue, it was not debated who would get the single large bed in the room, both of them changing into their night clothes and collapsing onto the soft sheets. Their night clothes amounted to simple oversized shirts that they both wore after stripping out of the borrowed bikinis, though neither of them took notice of the fact they were completely naked under the shirts at the time. Within minutes of laying their heads on the large soft pillows, both of them were asleep.

Narice lay in the bed unmoving now, mainly to get her bearings and thoughtfully reflect on the previous night. She, Toria and Carisia had experienced a small glimpse into the lives and history of perhaps their most ancient enemy. As her mind replayed the events from last night Narice incredibly recognized the fact that Lycavorians as a whole were no longer considered the most hated enemy among her people, not after what the Kavalians had done in the last twenty-five years. That was a sudden realization to Narice as she laid in the bed, for no matter how brutal and savage the battles between the High Coven and the Lycavorian Union had been, never in their history had the Union resorted to the base tactics and horrific acts the Kavalians had committed on her kind, even as her father ordered it done to them. Her mind was thrown back several years to the day she had sat hidden in the military tavern not far from High Coven headquarters and listened to half a dozen senior officers discuss in whispers the Union victory over the Kavalians many years before. Their words did not carry the usually hatred and contempt that she heard so much from her sister and mother growing up. Their whispered words contained respect for what they had accomplished. And as she lay on the bed now... she realized their words had contained awe as well.

Narice doubted very much that anyone within the High Coven had ever been so close to so many Leonidas family members for so long a period of time. In just the few hours they had spent with them, they had learned far more than twenty-five years of what she now knew to be false and fabricated intelligence reports had given them. Androcles Leonidas and his father were far more powerful than they had first suspected. Together with his new bride Sadi, Androcles radiated within Mindvoice like two points of bright light. When combined with her niece Carisia, those two points quickly became three and were absolutely blinding. She didn't know what it meant, but Narice knew with almost complete certainty that sooner rather than later Carisia would become part of their lives in a very permanent way. And there would be nothing her mother or sister, or that fat slob Thast could do to stop that. Their connection was almost a flagrant thing really, at least within Mindvoice, and since none of them had anything but rudimentary shields up for the majority of the night, it was impossible to not notice. Narice also took note of the fact that throughout the evening, Carisia and Sadi Leonidas had grown closer and closer together on the blanket. When they finally decided to retire for the evening, Narice had seen them release each other's hands discretely from behind their backs. She had never seen Carisia so animated and relaxed. Her face had become radiant even in the moonlight, her maya blue eyes bright and alert.

Martin Leonidas may not have been as refined as her mother in what he could do or his control, but if what she felt radiating against his shields was any indication, he was nearly an equal in the power he could wield and Aricia Leonidas was far more than she had yet shown to any of them. They masked their true abilities far better than Narice had ever seen, and she knew with almost complete certainty that while Yuri could probably hold her own quite well against one of his other Queens, she was no match for Aricia Leonidas.

Narice did not know what to make of the feelings and actions she had exhibited the previous evening. Upon first seeing Toria Dellion in the skimpy black bikini Narice had felt her stomach contract in what she knew without question was desire. Narice was no stranger to desire and pleasure. She had taken two lovers into her bed in her twenty-eight years, and neither of them ever shared her bed again. She had wanted to experience the feelings of physical contact in the form of sex, and she had not been impressed with either of her partners regardless of their boasting. They had been more concerned with their own gratification and both of them had wanted to feed on her blood, bonding them to her as her husband. That had been something Narice was in no way willingly to allow. She had given herself pleasure through the years in a variety of different ways and had been content with that. Her reaction to Toria's presence and her extreme beauty shocked Narice to a large extent, for she had never considered sharing a bed with another woman. It was just not something that had ever entered her mind until that first night on the ship in Toria's quarters. The young woman's strength of will even after having to endure so many hours with her perverted nephews was amazing, and it was then that Narice realized there was far more to Toria Dellion than she knew. She had strength of purpose that Narice found beguiling, for it almost seemed as if Toria Dellion knew something that no one else did and it made her confident and pure. And Narice found herself wanting to discover that part of Toria with increasing need.

And then there was Arrarn Leonidas.

From the moment she had been introduced to Arrarn Leonidas there had been something about him that strummed within her entire body. She admitted now that he was without a doubt the most physically striking man she had ever laid her eyes on. His incredible good looks and the exquisite definition of his muscular body had actually caused Narice to flush and become moist at her center, something that had never happened before,

even with the two lovers that had shared her bed. His dark eyes were intoxicating to gaze into, and his voice was deep and even, flittering across her nerves like a soft musical concerto. As the hours passed however, she discovered there was far more to him than just his looks, and she had made a complete fool out of herself with her actions because she realized now she desired him in the worst possible way.

Narice's eyes grew a little wider as she admitted that to herself. She actually wanted to feel his arms around her, to feel his naked flesh against hers, and subconsciously last night she had realized this fact and struck out in the only way she knew how, trying to convince herself that was not the case. She acted harshly and without regard for her words or the pain they might cause. What had stunned her even more were the images that flashed in her mind of both her and Toria intertwined within his embrace. It was a picture she could not chase from her mind for the latter portion of the evening after he had run off into the darkness, and Narice found it was an image that she did not want to lose. Narice knew she was nothing like her sister Yuri. She did not have Yuri's cruelty within her, and she knew it was because of Deneth. From the day she had bonded with him, she had been different. She thought differently, acted and talked differently, and remained as far away from her sister as well as her mother as she could in terms of how they thought and moved to accomplish goals. It was also the reason why she had decided to...

Narice felt the gentle sigh and the warm breath on the back of her neck and froze. She felt the burning touch of warm flesh against her back even through the shirt she wore and for the first time since she had woken she realized that something was gripping her left breast tightly. Narice almost groaned as she felt Toria shift slightly, her long leg pressing between Narice's thighs and her knee pushing firmly against Narice's bald pussy, even as Toria's delicate hand tightened around her breast resolutely and pulled her closer in response to whatever dream she was having. She felt Toria's face now, buried in the long raven colored locks of hair that fell along Narice's shoulders and neck, as well as her soft warm breath on her skin. Narice froze... unsure of what to do, and undecided if she wanted to do anything at all. The sensations racing through her supple body were unlike anything she had felt before, tiny slivers of excruciating delight shooting through her belly and communicating directly with the pleasure receptors in her brain. Narice felt her nipples harden instantly, the hardening nub of her left breast pressing into Toria's palm firmly as her hand gripped Narice's full breast almost possessively. This was not something Narice had expected and her mind raced back to the feelings she had of Toria's equally luscious body pressed up tightly against her back as they flew here on Deneth. The feel of her large breasts pushed against her even through the new body armor was enough to cause lovely sensations of delight.

Narice was aware Toria shared her mother's bed, albeit rather unwillingly now since Tesand was almost never far from her side. She had heard her mother comment to Yuri how skilled Toria had become in pleasing her in that fashion, and also how much she seemed to enjoy their trysts. At least until Tesand became involved. Then if she protested in any way, as she had done on the ship coming here to Earth, they would give her to Dante and Javier as punishment. Narice always wondered why Toria would allow that. She was a strong woman, very skilled and exceptionally intelligent, as well as being trained by the *Venorik Elghinn*. Why she would allow herself to be given to her perverted nephews was not something Narice understood and this made her angry. Angry that Toria had to endure that, angry that her mother treated Toria as nothing more than a common whore and angry that it was not her delving into and enjoying Toria's obvious delights. That is what shocked Narice the most as the awareness hit her of what had just crossed her mind.

Narice wanted Toria Dellion for herself.

Almost imperceptibly Narice detected the shift in Toria's heartbeat and breathing. Her breaths changed from the shallow, even intakes of sleep to slow deep breaths that were trying to calm her racing heart.

Toria Dellion was awake... and her heartbeat gave away the fear coursing through her as she realized who she was next to on the bed and how intimately she was grasping the Princess of the High Coven. Not until Narice had come to her quarters that day had Toria ever truly looked upon her in the way she now did. She may have resisted what her Empress wanted her to do initially, but over time Toria had come to enjoy pleasuring her Empress a great deal. While she learned quickly that Aikiro would never return such attention upon her, Toria had devised ways to stimulate herself even as she used her tongue and lips and fingers on her Empress. After that night on the ship when Narice had come to her, Toria found herself looking at her in another way. Narice was far more beautiful than her mother as far as Toria was concerned. Her lithe body was so much more firm and muscular, with larger breasts and fuller lips. Seeing Narice in that blue bikini for most of the day and

evening had driven her mad, imagining what she looked like underneath the fabric. What her passion tasted like, and even what her blood tasted like. Combined with the very powerful attraction she had for Arrarn Leonidas... it had made for a frustrating night.

She did not know when she had gripped Narice in such a way, but the feel of her breast in her hand and the warmth and slight moistness against her thigh was unmistakable and almost overpowering. That she had done this excited Toria to no end, but it also frightened her immeasurably. She did not know how Narice would react to such blatant actions, and in the little time she had spent with her, Toria found she wanted to very much be friends with her, as well as lovers. The Empress had showed Toria a different side to herself that she had never known existed, and while it may have been forced upon her at the start, Toria now embraced the fact that she found other women attractive and would size them up as she would any man. This however... this was not how she had wanted to express herself to Narice.

Using all the patience and force of will the *Venorik Elghinn* had trained her with, Toria began to remove her hand ever so slowly from where it was and inch her legs and hips away from Narice.

Narice for her part was having difficulty maintaining her composure as she felt Toria begin to withdraw herself. She could feel Toria's horror at what she had done by the beating of her heart and the sudden taste of fear in the air. She could sense tremors within Mindvoice that were coming from Toria, as well as very powerful shields that were now radiating at their full power in her fear and she did not even realize it. How was it possible that she was this strong within Mindvoice and her mother had not known? Surely her mother had sensed her abilities easily. Or was it that Toria was just far more than what she appeared. That had to be it Narice decided. Her mother was the most powerful Mindvoicer alive, and if she did not detect Toria's presence within Mindvoice as Narice now did, Toria Dellion was hiding something. It was a fact that surprisingly did not make Narice react as she should have. Toria's reaction was not one of concern or bemused intent at her position right now, her reaction upon waking was one of horror and embarrassment and fear. And as her hand and body withdrew Narice quickly found she did not like the feelings of emptiness that were filling her. It was a very easy decision to make, and later Narice would joke at how right it felt.

Narice's right hand came up as quickly as a striking rock spider and she grasped Toria's hand pressing it back to her breast, while her left hand whipped back to clamp firmly on Toria's ass cheek to keep her from moving. Her next words began her down a path she had not foreseen in her future, but one that she would not dismiss because of what it made her feel.

"No Toria." She spoke softly. "I... I don't want you to move."

Toria's sky blue eyes were wide as she realized that Narice was awake. Had been awake this whole time. "Princess... Princess I can not..." Toria gasped as Narice rolled over quickly; turning to face her even as she stretched her lush body splendidly against hers and Toria felt the flash fires of desire increase even more. She gazed at Narice's face, drinking in her dark eyes and exotic features. "Princess... forgive... forgive me... I..."

Narice stared at Toria's striking sky blue eyes and only lifted her finger, placing it on Toria's soft lips silencing her apology. "You have no fears with me Toria Dellion." Narice said softly yet with far more confidence than her racing heart belied. "I am not my mother."

"Narice... I... I did not intend for you to... to awake with me groping your body." Toria stated quickly. "I was... I was dreaming and..."

"Were you dreaming of me Toria?" Narice asked turning her head slightly and gazing at her face. Narice allowed herself to gaze at Toria, truly gaze at her for the first time. Something she was quite sure her mother had never done. The gentle slope of her nose and the way her eyes glittered in the sunlight. The shape of her eyebrows and the smooth texture of her skin and the light tan coloring. And then there was the soft pink color of her full lips, lips that at this very moment Narice wanted to taste in the worst possible way.

"I think... I think that is painfully obvious Narice." Toria stated as she regained control of some of her composure. "If... if your mother or sister finds out what I have done they will..."

"Do nothing." Narice said confidently. "They will not find out for I have no intention of allowing them to find out. About this... or anything else we share."

Toria's eyes met hers. "What... what do you mean?"

"Do... do you desire me Toria Dellion?" Narice asked.

"Narice I..."

“It is a simple question Toria.” Narice spoke.

“It is not a simple question.” Toria answered. “My... my relationship with your mother may have... it may have expanded my horizons in this fashion. In such a way that I find you almost irresistible... but I... Narice I do not wish to trade being a pet for your mother and Tesand to... only to become one for you. Though you have no idea how much that appeals to me.”

“I am not like my mother Toria Dellion.” Narice said softly. “Though I do understand why you would think in such a way.”

“Narice... I...”

Narice shook her head rapidly. “No. I am not angry in the least at your words. After what you have experienced I would speak similar words I imagine.” She looked up quickly at the window in their room. “It is the air on this planet. It is so pure and clean. The people here so carefree and passionate about life... about everything.” She turned back to look at Toria slowly. “In just the few days we have been here I find myself entertaining thoughts of things I would never have considered before now. It is these people... this family... it is... it is Arrarn Leonidas. It is you Toria.”

Toria’s eyes grew wider. “You... you desire him don’t you Narice? That is why you treated him as you did. Those... those feelings frightened you.”

Narice nodded her head. “Oh yes. More strongly than I have ever desired a man in my short life. I can not explain it. I am... I am drawn to him in a way that... it does frighten me. It frightens me because of whom he is... what he is... and what I fear he could make me feel in his arms. You... you are so much older than I Toria... is it supposed to feel so odd? The tightness in your stomach... watching his every move... how his eyes sweep across the horizon? His breathing... his heartbeat?”

“I don’t know Narice. I may be three hundred and seven years old but I have never felt these things. Until now.” Toria answered.

Narice looked at her once more. “For him?” She asked quickly.

Toria nodded. She was already set on her path and nothing would change that now, not even her admission to feeling as she did for Narice. “For Arrarn Leonidas yes... and... and for you Narice.”

Narice gazed at her longingly and she finally smiled gently. “For me?” She asked.

“Do you wish me to lie about that?” Toria asked. “After waking up with you in my arms I would make a fool of myself if I attempted to deny what I feel coursing through me for you. For him.”

“You are no fool Toria Dellion.” Narice said reaching up to stroke her cheek with her fingers now.

“I want to taste you Narice.” Toria admitted. “I want to taste your passion... your blood... your desire. I want to explore every part of you... but I don’t want to surrender myself to you and then have to endure your mother and Tesand. And Dante and Javier when I don’t please them enough or do what they say. That would be too much.”

“And if I told you I would not allow this?” Narice spoke inching her face closer to Toria’s. “If I told you I want this to happen just as much as you and I will not share you with anyone.”

“You are a Princess of the High Coven Narice but even you can not override an order from your mother.” Toria spoke. “Even you can’t...”

Narice lowered her lips to Toria’s and kissed her silencing her words. The two pureblood lovers Narice had taken into her bed were not interesting in kissing her. They had shared brief kisses, almost painful in nature as they wanted only to plunge their shriveled cocks into her. The moment Narice’s lips came together with Toria’s it was different. They were softer, tender and tasted faintly of the juice they had drunk last night. What surprised her was the groan of desire that escaped Toria’s throat, and her hands wrapping around her back to grasp Narice’s ass cheeks pulling her tighter. New sensations rippled through her as Toria crushed her body against hers, deepening their kiss and plunging her sweet tongue into Narice’s mouth. It danced across her teeth, and the insides of her mouth, playfully wrestling with Narice’s tongue but easily overpowering her more inexperienced one. Narice was lost in these new feelings, Toria’s fingers burning her skin where they gripped her ass tightly, their breasts crushed against one another even through the fabric of the shirts they wore. She relaxed her body as Toria drew her tighter, drawing her long bare leg up alongside Narice’s hip and sending desire skittering across her exposed flesh.

It all came to a rather abrupt end with the screaming sound of powerful engines sweeping in over the top of the villa.

Their lips tore away from each other at the sound and both of them scrambled from the bed and moved to the window. They saw the *STRIKER DT* sweep in over the edge of the villa slowly, its engines causing some of the taller trees to sway madly. As their eyes fell closer to the villa they saw Arrarn Leonidas standing on the front patio wearing a standard flight suit with the same additional body armor coverings as those they wore as riders. A combat vest carried an assortment of items, while Narice's keen eyes detected a dual holster which held the newer model of the Lycavorian Union's K12A Kinetic Magnum strapped to his right leg. It was a very powerful and accurate weapon modeled after the semi automatic handgun of Earth's ancient past Narice knew. It fired a Kinetic energy round that could punch through six inches of solid Vanadium armor and it had become the standard sidearm for Union troops. Strapped to his left leg was a Spartan *Nehtes* with intricately carved shaft handle which had writing on it that she could not make out from where she was. He looked very imposing and businesslike, and so very handsome. He held the small portable computer console in his hands and was obviously directing the DT in via remote control because he kept looking up to check the position of the ship as it swept in low over the beach, its landing gear extending just before it came to rest in the sand of the sea patio beach.

Narice looked at Toria, pulling her close in her arms. "We will continue this Toria Dellion." She spoke.

Toria met her eyes and smiled. "You may find something you can't live without Narice." She said confidently.

Narice leaned over and kissed her softly. "I sincerely hope so." She said.

They both turned quickly when the door to their room slid open and Carisia appeared already dressed in her black body armor, her long black hair tied into a tight pony tail. She paused briefly seeing the physical closeness of Narice and Toria, but a flash of recognition filled her eyes and then it was gone just as quickly as it had appeared. Narice thought she almost saw a tiny smile purse Carisia's lips as well.

"Narice... come quickly." Carisia stated then. "Something has happened. Andro wants you and I to accompany him to Sparta while Arrarn and Sadi take everyone else to the new training base."

Narice did not miss the almost casual way Carisia had spoken Androcles's name or the names of the others but she stepped towards her dismissing that for now. "What is it? What is wrong?"

"There has been an attack on the Kavalian delegation while they transited here Narice. An attack executed onboard his father's ship." Carisia spoke quickly.

Narice stepped even closer and took her hands. "How do you know this Carisia?" She demanded. "Who would attack the flagship of the Lycavorian Union? That is madness!"

"Andro told me. I was having coffee with Sadi and Lisi when his father contacted him." Carisia answered and again Narice noticed the familiarity of the way she spoke the names. "That is why he sent me to get you."

"He revealed this to you." Toria asked coming forward.

"Yes. The attack failed Narice... but it was conducted by... Narice it was conducted by vampires." Carisia explained. "Cloned vampires."

MJOLNIR'S HAND

Athani'Puat was in no way concerned about cloned vampires in the least, nor was she even remotely thinking about the attack against them only six short hours ago by those same cloned troops. She was far more concerned with the raging firestorm of wonderful vibrations that was rapidly consuming her entire body from a simple kiss.

Resumar had indeed met Athani outside her quarters, and then he took her hand and they disappeared into a myriad of dark corners and tunnels and hatches until they appeared outside his quarters. He had the door open in seconds and even as it was closing behind them, he had lifted her into his arms once more and covered her lips with his own. Athani could sense the simmering want and desire in the aura he was projecting to her, wrapping around her, yet as before he was only hitting her with enough to delight her senses, exciting her and leaving her in complete command of her actions. Athani's actions had been simple really. She surrendered to his kiss with blistering want and desire of her own, releasing what small amount of a female aura Kavalian females could project, and directing it solely at him. Resumar Leonidas hadn't pinned her to a bulkhead this

time as his lips consumed her being. With her legs locked securely around his waist he proceeded across the large quarters he occupied, twice bumping into furniture as his hands pulled at her jumpsuit fervently, and exposing her satiny skin to his warm lips and tongue. Athani gasped loudly as his lips engulfed the nipple of her left breast, suckling on it gently, teasing it with his tongue as he walked. She was not inactive however, her hands pulling at his clothes with equal urgency, nearly tearing the fatigue top off his shoulders before yanking the lightweight black t-shirt over his head. As his lips and tongue sent pleasure zipping through her nerves, Athani allowed her hands to explore his broad shoulders and incredibly muscular chest, marveling in the definition of what she was beholding. She felt him finally pull the top of her jumpsuit from her shoulders and yank it gently down exposing her entire upper body for his eyes to see, and she could not help but grasp his head and watch as his eyes drank in her nakedness.

He did not gaze at her flesh for long and a small disappointment flashed through her at this. Until he crushed her to him, her firm conical breasts smashed against his iron like chest and he kissed her once more. Athani could do nothing but groan out her delight at this, the feel of his skin against hers almost too much for her to take, even as his tongue plundered and dueled with her own. His hands were everywhere, stroking her shoulders and arms and back. When his hands and fingers dropped to her lower back and his fingers grazed the sensitive portion of her skin where her tail entered her spine Athani groaned loudly and her hips ground against his in unabashed bliss. This did not escape Resumar's notice and he brought his fingers back up over the same portion of her skin ever so gently, Athani's reaction the same as he did this. A groan of delight and pressing of her hips tighter against his. Her tangerine scent was driving him mad as he finally entered his bedroom and his booted feet banged against the solid frame of the bed. Though not as powerful as that of a Lycavorian female, Athani's female aura was hitting him with everything she had. It really wasn't needed, for her scent was enough to energize his entire body. Discovering the sensitive area at the small of her back was an added bonus so early in his seduction. Resumar wanted her to feel more pleasure than her mind could take and any advantage he could get would only allow him to complete his promise to love her senseless.

Athani was already beyond the point of trying to figure out how he had discovered her sensitive area so quickly. Twice he had caressed that portion of her body, causing the most delicious pleasure to ripple through her, and causing her to ground her hips against his enabling her to feel his thickening cock even through his pants. The second time she had felt his cock, her eyes had opened wide in the midst of their kiss. He was easily equal to or larger than Pusintin and she had not even seen him without his pants. This only caused her body to grow hotter and when he banged into the bed she released her legs from his waist and dropped the few inches to the bed, frantically trying to get the rest of her jumpsuit off even as he was pulling at the remainder of his own clothes. When Athani finally succeeded in kicking the last of her clothes to the floor and she looked up at him beside the bed she gasped in absolute ecstasy. His six foot one body looked as if it had been sculpted from clay by a master artist. His skin was deeply tanned, every muscle in his arms, chest and abdomen pulsing with life. As her stunning blue/green eyes fell upon what he offered her, standing proudly at attention, Athani could not help but feel wetness seep from her center. He *was* larger than Pusintin, and so much thicker, his cock throbbing with life and desire and want. Athani licked her lips and moved closer to him on the bed, her tail twitching madly off to the side as she lifted her eyes back to his face. She saw his eyes then, his wolf eyes. Dark brown and rimmed in the deepest black she had ever seen. She saw the tips of his dual fangs protruding from his lips. Lips that had set her lithe body on fire. Athani pressed closer to him, her stiff nipples brushing across his chest as her hands came up to grasp his thick cock. She felt his body tense when she wrapped her small hands around his shaft, feeling the heat his cock was producing, almost as if it was pulsing with a life all its own.

"Turn around Athani." Resumar's voice spoke with a deep tremble.

Athani met his eyes then, the seductive smile slowly leaving her face, and her hands stopping their stroking of his enormous cock. "What... what are you...?"

Resumar leaned over faster than she could follow and his nose and lips were firmly nuzzling her neck and cheek then. She was not Lycavorian, and this kind of contact should not have affected her in such a way, but she could not deny the intense swell of pleasure that shuddered through her. "Turn around Athani." He said again in a more commanding tone.

Disappointment coursed through Athani as she turned and faced away from him, stretching out on the bed and suddenly regretting her decision to come here. He was going to take her just like Pusintin. Use her for his own pleasure and she would be no closer to her goal. She felt his weight climb onto the bed with her and she

closed her eyes, not wanting to surrender to the feelings and sensations his aura was producing from her, but now too far gone to stop herself. She felt a small tear spring from the corner of her eye as she lowered her head to the bed to accept him, resigning herself to the fact that all men were the same. Her mind was still her own she knew, but his aura had ignited fires inside her that she now needed to quench. She would need to...

Athani gasped loudly when his lips descended to the small of her back where her tail extended from her spine. His fingers had caused shivers to jolt her when he had been holding her and he did this, but his warm soft lips right now were causing waves to crash through her. Waves of incredible pleasure as he gently nuzzled and kissed the supremely sensitive part of her body. She turned her head quickly, her eyes wide and saw him nuzzling that spot, even as his fingers stroked the backs of her thighs and up across her firm ass cheeks. His face moved lower now and his lips gently caressed the flesh of her ass, nuzzling her skin even as he settled butterfly kisses across both her firm cheeks, working his way even lower.

"Res... Resumar... what... what are you doing?" She gasped out the words even as the heat from her pussy began to rise anew.

Res lifted his face from her skin and looked at her with those eyes. "I told you I was going to love you senseless Athani'Puat. And I'm going to do just that."

Athani yelped as his hands grasped her hips and effortlessly flipped her over on the bed. Before she could react he had stretched out his body on the bed, his head between her thighs and his powerful hands gripping her hips. Athani looked down between her legs over the top of her heaving abdomen.

"Resumar... you... I... what... what are you going to do?"

Resumar only smiled at her, his eyes glittering and he lowered his lips to her incredibly aroused pussy. Athani'Puat hissed out her stunned surprise and her eyes flew open as the most enrapturing feelings immediately enveloped her when she felt his tongue drag gloriously across her entire engorged center, reaching the now exposed and painfully hard bud that was her clit. The muscles in her neck strained outward, her mouth open in a breathless scream and the most powerful orgasm she had ever experienced in all her fifty plus years of life raged unchecked through her body. A kaleidoscope of colors exploded in her eyes as her hips rose off the bed, serving only to drive his warm tongue completely inside her spasming pussy.

Athani'Puat descended into a world of ecstasy that she would not come out of for several hours.

SPARTA

DURCUNUSAAN BASE CONFERENCE LOUNGE

"Bullshit!" Martin snapped as he whirled around and glared at Aikiro and Yuri, his voice echoing in the small room.

Aikiro and Yuri sat at the table; Moran, Tesand behind them while Thast stood behind Carisia's chair. Narice and Carisia sat to Aikiro's right. Andro sat between Isabella and Aricia at the other end of the table, Deia sitting in the chair next to Aricia with Aihola immediately next to her.

"You expect me to believe you don't know about them!" Martin barked.

"You asked if I had something to do with this... which I did not. You did not ask if I knew about them." Aikiro replied calmly. "Which I do."

"What the fuck is the difference?" Martin snarled.

"King Leonidas!" Deia spoke quickly knowing she had to harness in her nephew's famous temper if they were going to discover anything useful. "We should allow Empress Aikiro to speak."

"You didn't think it prudent to inform us that there are insurgent groups within the High Coven operating out of Union space and willing to attack the flagship of our fleet on a suicide mission?" Aricia asked in an equally calm voice now. "All to kill a few Kavalians."

"As you have just told me... these were not *just* a few Kavalians." Aikiro spoke. "The two daughters to the KFI Prefect and several of their senior military officers. I would say that is a very high profile target. As for informing you of insurgent groups within the High Coven, that is honestly not your concern."

"Not my concern?" Martin demanded fighting to keep his temper in check. "It most certainly is my concern when this group of soldiers boarded my ship and attacked the Kavalian delegation with my mate and son onboard."

Aikiro nodded. "Yes Martin Leonidas... not your concern." Aikiro stated plainly. "They are not the reason *we* are here, and they most certainly do not represent me or my government. The majority of them are groups of men and women who believe we should surrender to the Kavalians to end the war. They want us... me... to allow the Kavalian to govern us! To rule us! They can't seem to get it through their heads that the Kavalians want us all dead. That is their ultimate goal."

"The majority of them?" Isabella spoke.

Aikiro nodded slowly. "The largest one... the largest group wishes to usurp me and take control of the Coven."

"To surrender?" Isabella asked.

Aikiro shook her head. "Their goal is to begin prosecuting our war differently by actively seeking assistance and changing how we govern those we rule."

"You mean give back freedom to the people you have conquered in the hopes they will actively help you in your fight." Deia said.

"If that is how you wish to interpret it yes." Aikiro answered. "This has no bearing on why we have come here!"

"These groups are poorly funded and ill-equipped. They are no match for the vaunted Lycavorian Union." Yuri spat.

Aihola slid the data pad across the table at her never taking her amber eyes from Yuri's face. She knew well who Yuri was for Aihola was a product of one of Yuri's experiments in trying to breed better clones. When that experiment did not meet with her approval she allowed sexually deviant experiments to be performed on those she deemed failures. If not for the skill and knowledge of Anja Leonidas, Aihola would still be afflicted by that experiment. Aihola, as Lynwe and all the remaining Drow within Union space, they had no love for the High Coven in general, and Yuri in particular. Martin had asked her to attend this meeting in the hopes that she might be able to read more out of what the Coven wanted than what they were actually telling them. Over the years Aihola had developed into an exceptional judge of character, and as her strength within Mindvoice grew so did this talent. She had finished tops in the class of those attending Charles Turner's Political Academy. It was a school meant to form and train those with skills in politics, but unlike the schools of the past, this one also taught its students how to become incredibly accurate in reading body language and voices and actions. When combined with Aihola's Mindvoice abilities, it made a very potent combination. She was not as skilled as For'mya by any means... but her Drow and vampire skills, as well as the wolf blood within her thanks to Isra her mate, it all made her quite skilled in this regard.

"Excellent weapons and equipment. Superior physical condition and exceedingly well trained according to Resumar Leonidas and Queen For'mya's Captain. Not exactly ill-funded and ill-equipped if you ask me." Aihola spoke staring directly at Yuri.

"They did not hurt your flight crew." Yuri snapped meeting her eyes. She knew exactly who Aihola was and was angry that she was even here in the same room. It rubbed Yuri the wrong way to know that those she had ordered experimented on held such high positions within the Union government.

"Is that supposed to be some sort of consolation?" Aihola asked.

"They raped and butchered eleven Kavalian females on a Union ship in Union space!" Deia snarled. "Then they conducted a covert operation against a Union warship putting a Union Queen and Prince Resumar in danger! What exactly does the High Coven call that?"

This news made Narice and Carisia look up quickly.

"Luck." Moran answered sarcastically.

"Why does it seem like you feel for these Kavalians that were killed?" Aikiro asked softly. "I was under the impression you do not care for them anymore than we do. Has this position changed recently?"

Martin looked at her. "You know damn well why I'm pissed off Aikiro." He barked. "Do not take me for a fool. This attack happened on my ship within Union space. What's to keep the Kavalians from trying to hit back? Your people attacked them... they'll come after you. Only problem with that is when they try to attack you it will be while you are here! In my city! And my people could very well die! The Kavalians aren't real worried about collateral damage if you get my drift."

“My people did not do this.” Aikiro spoke. “Why would I attempt to draw you into this war when I am trying to obtain your assistance in training the dragons we have so that my people will finally have an advantage in this war?”

“Why don’t you tell me Aikiro?” Martin spoke crossing his arms over his chest. “Cause if I don’t hear something really good... you can pack your bags and go home now.”

“You would just forsake these forty-two dragons?” Aikiro said. “I thought you said that was something you would not do.”

“I will not let you or the Kavalians drag the Union into your war!” Martin snapped. “And if I have to sacrifice forty-two dragons to save ten times that I will not hesitate.”

“What do you want of me Martin Leonidas?” Aikiro asked. “This attack was not of my doing. In any way whatsoever. Your people have the ability to tell when someone is lying... am I lying to you now?”

“When the person being asked the question is such an accomplished liar to begin with... it is infinitely harder to detect a lie.” Aricia spoke softly. “Something which you are very aware of Empress Aikiro.”

Aikiro lost her temper then and she came to her feet surprising Yuri and almost everyone in the room. Her eyes changed immediately to cobalt blue, and her fangs burst forth as she glared at him from across the table.

“You arrogant animal!” She snarled loudly. “Do not play with me Martin Leonidas! You are still a child when compared to me. You have no idea what I am capable of!”

“Are you so sure about that Aikiro that you want to bet your future on it.” Martin asked standing there unfazed by her outburst. “If you are so confident in your abilities, there is the door.” Martin motioned to the side of the room. “Andro?”

Aikiro watched Androcles get to his feet. “I’ll make arrangements to have a *TYPE II* return their dragons to their flagship.” He said as he began moving for the door.

“Thast!” Moran snapped.

Thast moved for Andro with near blinding speed as he blurred in motion. He may have been quite heavy, but he was still a pureblood and possessing all the skills of a pureblood. Though his realm was usually on the bridge of a ship, he was a competent and skilled warrior. Something he thought he was going to prove to the younger son.

He could not have been more wrong.

Thast was still blurring when Andro moved with a combination of speed and power that no member of the High Coven had ever seen from a Lycavorian before. Even Aricia and Isabella were stunned while Deia and Aihola sat back quickly in their chairs. Andro’s large hand snapped out like a pit viper and snatched Thast around the throat before he had even slowed from his motion. Andro’s hand however brought him to a screaming halt and with his azure colored eyes now changed and his dual fangs fully extended Andro heaved Thast into the air bringing his body over the top of his head and ramming him down onto the top of the massive marble and granite table that filled the conference room directly in front of Carisia and Narice. The sound of his thick body slamming into the table and the air leaving his lungs in a massive rush filled the conference room.

Andro lowered his face to within inches of Thast’s throat his lips drawn back and his vicious looking fangs fully exposed. “I grow tiresome of you fat man!” Andro snarled.

“ENOUGH!” Aikiro bellowed. She glared at Martin incensed now and saw that his eyes had changed and his fangs protruded from his lips. “You are the most arrogant and despicable man I have ever known Leonidas! I hate you and all of your kind! It is beneath me to even be among you! You killed one of my sons! You stole the other from me! If I could I would strike you down right now and not care that I would not survive!”

Martin’s face was unreadable to everyone in the room, but all eyes were on him and they saw the small smile begin to break across his face.

“Finally.” He spoke softly. “Finally we get a little truth.” Martin reached out and placed his hand on Andro’s shoulder. “Let him up son.”

Andro glared at Thast’s hate filled eyes for a moment longer. “We will have a reckoning one day soon Commander.” Andro spoke with a whisper. His voice was loud enough for everyone to hear though only Aricia knew what it was truly for, her azure eyes going to where Carisia sat looking on with adoration in her eyes. “And on that day I will make you pay for everything you have done.”

Andro released his throat quickly and stepped back next to his father, watching as Thast pushed himself off the table and regained his feet. Martin gazed at his son for a moment before turning back to Aikiro. She had regained her composure, though her eyes were still changed.

[I do not know where your hatred of me or my people comes from.] Martin spoke to her. Aikiro's vampire eyes went a little wider when she realized that he was speaking only to her. She could see the looks of surprises from everyone in the room because they could not breach the shields he had erected. *[I have studied our scrolls dating back to the time of my grandfather and I have found no purpose for it. Would you care to enlighten me Aikiro?]*

[No I would not.] Aikiro spat.

[And that is part of our problem. Before you began your conquest of Lycavore we did not even know you existed. At least not to my knowledge. Now... after all this time and you are not willing to share why you hate my people so, or what drove you to do what you did. Fine... then I do not care. It is what it is. The vampires living in the Union... my love for Isabella... that should show you we have grown as a people while you have remained the same. I killed Xerxes... yes. Your son was a demented pig who took my father from me. That same day I let go of the hatred for your kind that is inbred in our species and I gave you back your daughter.] Martin spoke seeing her eyes grow a little wider. *[Vonis made his own decision. I did not steal him from you regardless of what you think or have been told. I will help you now because the Kavalians are the bigger threat. To both of us. I am not so dense that I can't see that. If I get pulled into this war... it will be because of my actions and decisions, not those of others.]* Martin stepped closer to her ignoring the looks of Yuri and Moran and everyone in the room. *[You are not here just for me to train your dragons Aikiro. I know that. You know that. Yuri might even know that... though where her hatred of me comes from I have no idea.]*

[You expect me to believe you do not know.] Aikiro demanded.

[I don't have a fucking clue.] Martin answered. *[And I don't care. I will train your dragons Aikiro but it will be by my son's rules. And I will find out what your real intent is in coming here.]*

[You assume I have some ulterior motive Leonidas.] She snapped.

[I don't assume... I know you do. I can smell it.] Martin spoke. *[Do what you have to do Aikiro... but if another one of these insurgent groups of yours attacks within the borders of the Union...]*

Aikiro met his gaze. *[I give you my word I had nothing to do with that. There are five insurgent groups... we know who most of them are and only one is able to mount this type of attack. It is the largest group and the only one with access to weapons and training. It is also the only one that we can not discover who the leader is. And believe me we have tried. They are well funded, primarily from within The Wilds. Whatever ulterior motives you think I may have... this attack was not my doing.]*

Martin stared at her for a long moment. *[You realize the Kavalians will attempt to hit back? And this supposed Cease Fire Accord we are supposed to be signing would be the perfect time for that?]*

Aikiro nodded. *[Yes.]*

[Yuri and the others will be safe where they are going. I will not limit your ability to move around Sparta or Earth but from now on you will have a Spartan Guard Force wherever you go.] Martin told her. *[If that is not agreeable to you then I suggest you leave before they arrive.]*

[You would protect me?] She asked. *[Why?]*

[Helping you in the end helps me.] Martin said. *[Regardless of what you might think... I will honor the Cease Fire we will sign. I will honor it until the time you break it... and then all bets will be off.]*

[Tell me why you hate them so.] Aikiro spoke quickly. *[We have a reason... but you... what is your reason for doing what you are doing? If they discover you are training the dragons we have... they will act.]*

[What does it matter to you? You are getting what you came here for.] Martin said.

[The Intelligence we gave you?] Aikiro asked.

[We're still confirming the validity of it.] Martin answered.

Aikiro stared at him for a long moment. *[You have known all along that they would do something like this haven't you? You have been expecting it. You are comparing what we have given you to what you have discovered yourself. You are using the Coven as a shield Martin Leonidas, and I do not like that.]* Aikiro stated.

[And you are using me for whatever other purpose you hope to gain while you are here. As well as putting me smack in the middle of your little war.] He answered quickly. *[That makes us even. I want whatever information you have on this insurgent group. They are within my borders now... I will deal with them.]*

[So you can use them against us? I think not.] Aikiro said shaking her head. [I may have come to you for aide... that does not mean I trust you in the least.]

[Fair enough. We'll find them ourselves.] Martin stated. Martin stepped back from her and looked at Andro. "Load them out Andro. I'll be down in a few days with the Empress to see how everyone has settled in."

Andro nodded. "Understood." He spoke looking at Carisia and Narice and motioning to the door. He turned to look at Yuri. "Princess?"

Yuri looked at her mother. "Mother?" She asked as she got to her feet.

Aikiro nodded and looked at her. "Go Yuri." She said. "King Leonidas and I have come to an understanding."

Martin smiled. "Just a little one." He stated looking at Yuri with a smirk.

Yuri glared at him for a moment before turning to head for the door. Martin watched her for a moment then looked back to Aikiro. "Remember what I said." He told her.

"I will."

Martin motioned to the door. "Feel free to see them off." He said.

Aikiro met his gaze for a few moments longer and then she turned and headed out of the room followed by Moran, Tesand and Thast. Martin waited until the door slid shut before turning to look at those still seated at the table.

"Little Drow?" Martin spoke looking at Aihola as he settled into the chair next to her.

"Whatever her purpose here... it isn't for us to train their dragons." Aihola answered looking at him. "While we probably already knew that... their body language only confirmed it. Especially Moran's. Did you notice that only this Narice and Carisia reacted when Andro got up and headed for the door? The Empress... Yuri... the others... none of them even blinked. The dragons are secondary to whatever else they have in mind."

Martin nodded his head. "There is something about those two... but whatever it is... their commitment to their dragons is pure."

"What did you speak about Beloved?" Aricia asked.

"I tried getting some answers... but I'm only left with more questions." He answered as he leaned forward. "Bella... when we are done here head over to Armetus's office. She said there is only one insurgent group with the resources to pull off a stunt like on *MJOLNIR'S HAND*. I want to find them."

"Are they insurgents *M'ranndii*? Or are they resistance fighters." Bella asked.

Martin met her eyes. "That's what I want you and Armetus to find out." He said. "She said they know almost all the others and their members... but this one group they have no clue. And they can't determine who the leader is either. Let's see if we can."

Isabella nodded. "Very well."

"*Tenna*... you need to concentrate on these Kavalians." Martin spoke. "Pull whatever resources you need... but I want to know when they take a dump and what color it is the entire time they are here. Keep Stenys involved as well."

"And Laustinos *Mandri*?" Deia asked. "He *is* skilled... setting aside his obvious stupidity and behavior."

Martin nodded slowly. "If you feel he can help... but keep him away from me. I can tolerate quite a bit *Tenna*... but if he so much as blinks at *Melda Min* again I will remove his eyeballs from their sockets and feed them to him. If she doesn't do it first."

Deia smiled knowingly. "Don't worry... I have just the task for Laustinos." She told him as Aricia and Isabella glanced at one another with twinkles in their eyes.

[He is so very possessive of us Aricia?] Bella spoke to her.

[Yes he is... and it makes my hormones giddy.] Aricia answered.

[Mine as well. We will have to reward him tonight.] Bella said.

"Will you meet with the Kavalians as they have requested *Mandri*?" Deia asked.

Martin met her eyes. "Yes. I want to see if I can sense what it is they are really after. Pleistarchus would not send his mate and son here without a reason. Aside from discovering why the Coven is here that is. They go no where near my mother!" He turned to Aihola. "Little Drow... I want you, Lynwe, Vengal and me to have another meeting. When can you fit that in?"

Aihola looked at him. "I have defense meetings the next two days. If I miss them it will be noticed. I can get us all together by the end of the week."

Martin nodded. "Good enough." He got to his feet. "I'm hungry. Let's go find some food."

MJOLNIR'S HAND

Resumar Leonidas knew.

He knew the moment her sweet juices had flooded his throat the first time that she was the one. Athani tasted just as she smelled, like sweet tangerines and whether it was due to her own natural scent or the biogenics treatments she had undergone, Resumar did not care in the least. Her scent was driving him mad. He had been with women before, but this was so very different. Athani's body was like a temple that he wanted to explore over and over again, and for the last two hours that is what he had done. He did not grow tired of caressing her skin or allowing his hands to roam freely over her supple flesh, exploring every crevice to its fullest extent. His father had once told him that when he found the one he desired above all others, it would not matter how intimately he knew her body, for every time would be better than the last and there was always something new to discover. Resumar was discovering that to be very true.

The skin of her abdomen was soft and like satin, the velvety folds of her pussy so hot and incredibly enticing and delicious. Her breasts were superbly firm and her nipples sweet nubs that he had teased and nibbled endlessly. The silk like skin where her tail extended from her spine was tremendously sensitive and he had spent quite a bit of time watching and feeling her shudder as he stroked and kissed that portion of her body. His wolf senses were more alive and acute now than at any other time that he could remember in his life. Athani was like a drug that had gripped his very being completely. Her powerful thighs had remained locked around his head, unwilling to release him even as he was unwilling to release the grip his lips had of her mouth-watering pussy. He had told her he was going to love her senseless, and he had meant every word. Twice she had begged him to stop with her words, but refused to release him with her legs. Her orgasms were incredibly powerful, causing her whole body to surge off his bed and make her scream out in blissful abandon, even as he thanked the gods the rooms were soundproof and he feasted on her essence as it spilled from her in waves. His eleven inch cock was painfully hard, throbbing with surprising heat but Resumar had refused to surrender to his overpowering desire to take her until he could no longer stand it. He knew he was large and he had no intention of allowing his size to alter this experience for either Athani or himself.

Now was that time however.

As the sweat glistened from her body and she drew in deep gasps of air, he began his trek up her unbelievable body, stopping as often as he could to nibble on her flesh or use his tongue to trace her skin. Her nipples were like hard points, topping her firm globes and begging his lips for attention, which he eagerly gave to them. He held his upper body above hers, just brushing his hard chest against her nipples and seeing her react to this. And then he was holding himself above her and he simply stared into her beautiful face watching the contours of her lips and how her eyes kept blinking as if trying to focus.

"Athani?" He whispered her name and saw her stunning blue/green eyes instantly adjust and meet his wolf eyes.

Whatever preconceived plans and intentions Athani'Puat had made before this day had been tossed to the wayside the moment that first orgasm had crashed through her body. As her muscles threatened to tear through her skin, her teeth clenched and his lips securely fastened over her erupting pussy, Athani'Puat knew she had found her future. His wolf aura swirled around her, never ceasing to keep her senses stimulated and so very aroused. It was so unlike Pusintin's domination of her with his aura. Where Pusintin unleashed his full male aura on her, forcing her body to react to him even as her mind screamed not too, Resumar Leonidas was using just enough of his aura to keep her on the edge of the pleasure abyss. Her mind and heart was still very much her own, and since that first will shattering orgasm, both her mind and heart had done nothing but scream for this Lycavorian Prince to have her. Four times he had driven her to the edge with exasperating precision, his soft lips and warm tongue working in seamless conjunction with his maddeningly tantalizing caresses. He had discovered so early the most sensitive area of her body outside of her drenched pussy, and his fingers and lips had attacked that area of her body with breath stealing exactness. Athani had been concerned that he would be

put out by her twitching tail, instead he had gently wrapped her third appendage around his body in ways she had never imagined and showed her tail just as much gentle attention as he did the rest of her body.

Her entire being called for this man in a way she had never imagined it could and as she focused on his wolf eyes, dark brown and outlined in black, Athani knew he would claim not only her pureness this night... but her very being. She had thought to use this man... this Prince of Wolves... and instead she found herself utterly vexed by him. He held himself above her easily now, the muscles in his arms and shoulders not in the least bit strained at the position he was in. Twice she had attempted to urge him upward so that she could exercise her own talents on him and both times he had refused, instead continuing his unbridled torturing of her pleasure receptors.

“Res... Resumar.” She said breathlessly.

“I’m... I’m going to love you senseless now Athani’Puat.” He stated confidently.

Athani’s eyes grew a little larger and she looked down between their bodies, saw his huge cock throbbing with need, and she felt desire surge in her again. She looked back into his eyes and nodded quickly beginning to roll slowly onto her belly instinctually. It was the usual position for males to take females. This was how Kavalian males showed their domination over females, and it was how Pusintin had always taken her. Resumar however leaned over quickly, nuzzling her neck as she began to turn and sending electric jolts of pleasure through her. Resumar knew what she was doing and he would have no part of it. He lifted his head and grazed his lips across hers as she looked at him.

“No Athani’Puat, I want to see your breathtaking face when I make you mine.” Resumar whispered softly.

“But you... you are...”

Athani’s words were silenced when Resumar covered her lips with his and filled her with one soul robbing plunge into her depths. Athani’s eyes flew open; her head falling back onto the bed, tearing away from his fervent kiss as she felt every searing hot inch of his tremendous cock impale her completely. Never had a man taken her in this way, Pusintin was only allowed to have her ass and mouth, and the pleasure ripping through her now was without description. The times with Pusintin were quickly shattered into billions of tiny pieces and then cast away as Resumar Leonidas’s huge cock plunged deeply into her velvety warm pussy with barely any resistance. He had made her come so hard and so many times before this moment that having his cock fill her so easily left her to experience nothing but cataclysmic bliss. As her arms wrapped around his broad shoulders, her slim ankles locking at the small of his back and her tail madly convulsing, Athani’Puat howled in devastating pleasure until he bottomed out inside her and she felt the press of his large balls against her asscheeks. She had heard Jalersi talk of how Pusintin filled her so completely, yet her descriptions did not begin to express what Athani had sizzling through her veins now.

And then Athani’Puat surrendered to what was scorching her mind and body. Her arms slapped down on the bed, her back arching upwards and his hand slipping quickly to the small of her back to tickle that spot. Athani screamed as her hips undulated, driving his enormous cock even deeper into her depths if that was possible and she came. She came with the force of a meteor tearing through the atmosphere of a planet, destroying everything in its path and reshaping everything it left behind. And then he began to move within her, making conscious thought impossible as he pulled her head up and claimed her lips once more. He lifted her body onto his as he sat back, piercing Athani even more completely on his massive cock, hearing her groan against his kiss unwilling to release his lips, her arms wrapping tightly around his head.

Resumar knew he would not last long the moment he felt the extreme tightness and heat of Athani’s depths surround his eleven inches of throbbing cock. The heat was unlike anything he had ever experienced, and her pussy wrapped his cock tightly within a scorching embrace that milked his shaft agonizingly. The pleasure was far too much for him and he dropped his hand to her tail once more, caressing the small of her back and gripping her tail tightly as he felt his cock swell and explode deep in her belly. Athani gasped out against his lips, gripping his head tightly, her eyes wide as she felt each eruption of his cock inside her. She felt the veins of his thick shaft stretch her and then his searing hot come was filling her... once, twice, three times. Four times and finally a fifth. Each eruption longer and more powerful than the last until finally she felt his arms crush her to him and he fell onto the bed on his back, clutching her smaller frame to his chest.

They lay there for several minutes, their skin slick with sweat and pressed tightly together while their hearts began to slow. Her breasts were pressed tightly to his chest, her still hard nipples burning points against

his skin. Her arms were laced under his armpits, and after several moments of simply resting her head on his shoulder inhaling his male aroma Athani lifted her head. Her tail was still twitching madly, seemingly with a mind of its own as it slapped against his legs. She gazed into his handsome face for a long moment, his eyes closed. She smiled dreamily and began to lift her hips from his, groaning as she felt his still hard cock throb within her.

Resumar's eyes opened quickly and his hands snapped around to cover her ass and he pressed her back down on his length causing her to groan louder in delight. "Where... where are you going?" He asked.

Athani looked at him. "I must... I must get towels. To... to clean you." She stammered still very much aroused and out of breath.

"Clean me?" Res spoke with a smile and a small chuckle. "I'm not dirty. A little sweaty is all."

Athani looked at him oddly. "You... you wish to stay like this?" She asked clearly very surprised.

"Our... our males... they do not consider this... I have made a mess of you and the bed."

"I like it just fine. And I think both of us are guilty of messing the bed. I don't want you to move." Res answered with a smile as he reached up to push some of her sweat soaked hair from her cheek. "Even if your tail is still twitching and hitting my legs." Athani started to reach behind her to grasp her tail and stop its movements but his hand on her wrist stopped her. "Athani'Puat... it is part of you. A very fascinating and erotic part if I do say so myself. It doesn't bother me in the least."

Athani looked into his eyes which had returned to their normal dark brown. "You... you are very different Resumar Leonidas."

"Well... I hope that is a good thing."

"Oh yes. A very good thing." Athani answered with a bright smile. She reached up and traced his lips with her finger. "You... you are my first Resumar. My... my purity is yours."

Resumar looked at her and brought his hands up to take her face on either side. He stroked her cheeks softly with his thumbs. "Athani... you will always be pure to me." He spoke before kissing her softly. "What just happen between us? It was... it was..."

"It was wondrous... yes I know." Athani said with an adoring smile and a purr of contentment.

"It was unbelievably incredible!" Resumar exclaimed. He kissed her hard, holding her face in his hands until finally he withdrew.

Athani looked at him with her blue/green orbs relishing in the feelings his kiss sent hurtling through her. "Can... can we do it again?" She asked shifting her hips slightly and feeling him still pulsing with life within her. "I... I would like that very much Resumar."

Resumar's eyes were bright and he rolled over quickly. "I thought you would never ask." He said before lowering his lips to hers once more.

It was the most exquisite and complete feeling Athani'Puat had ever experienced as his lips claimed hers and she knew instantly and without fail that whatever future lay before her, it would be in the arms of this man.

***TYPE II* DRAGON TRANSPORT OLD SOUTH AMERICAN CONTINENT**

"...we arrive everyone will need to secure your personal equipment from the cargo hold below. From there we'll go to the dragon pens and get our bonded ones settled in for the night!" Narice was standing in front of the forty-two High Coven riders as they were insuring their saddles flying equipment were properly secured. She had to speak louder than normal to be heard over the roar of the engines and the forty-five dragons who occasionally trumpeted. Though only slotted for forty dragons, each *TYPE II* could hold an additional ten if needed by stripping seats from along the walls. This had been done so that all the Coven dragons could occupy one *TYPE II*, as well as accommodate Elynth, Jeth and Aradace. Denali and Lisisa had remained behind at Andro's request as Eliani and Nyla flew down with Arrarn and Sadi and all of their equipment. Andro stood near the ramp of the *TYPE II* which was locked in a half open position, remaining out of Narice and Carisia's way as they moved among the riders, doing what it was that section leaders did. Denali and Lisisa sat at the very end of the webbed seating also remaining out of the way and talking to each other softly.

Andro watched intently taking everything in. No one appeared to give Carisia any trouble in the least. She was a Princess after all. Narice on the other hand had heated comments with both her older sister and her nephew Dante. Javier and Lucia stood by simply watching and not participating but making no move to follow their aunt's instructions. He felt Elynth lower her head until her snout was almost touching his shoulder, and he reached up without looking to place his hand flat against the bottom of her jaw.

[They will cause issues for Narice the entire time Andro.] Elynth spoke softly. *[It will detract from the training of the other riders. He has kept it harnessed these last days, but Vollenth's hatred and anger simmers just beneath the surface. As does Yuri's.]*

Andro nodded as he turned back around and looked into her golden eyes before crossing his arms over his chest and staring off into the open ramp. *[Yes... I know.]* He replied. *[We will need to deal with them sooner rather than later.]*

[Andro...] She said softly.

Andro turned and looked at her sensing her indecision and confusion. Though dragons did not have expressions that one could tell emotions from, Androcles and Elynth were so closely bonded that they knew each others emotions and they had shared this as long as both of them could remember.

[He is a fine young dragon sister.] Andro spoke.

[I know why you felt anxiousness and fear on your joining day with Sadi.] Elynth said. *[I do not... I do not wish to give of myself if our time together will be so short Andro. Even if it is destiny and fate that has brought us together. To know that he is out there fighting and I will not know what happens to him. I don't know if I can endure that.]*

[I don't think you will have to Elynth.] He answered.

[What do you mean?]

Andro met her eyes. *[I don't believe Carisia and Anthar have any intention of leaving with the others.]* He said. *[And I can't tell you how happy that makes Sadi and me.]*

[You believe... you believe they intend to defect? To remain here with us?] Elynth asked.

[The pull between the three of us is growing stronger by the day sister. I know you have felt it.] Andro said. *[Just as the pull between you and Anthar.]*

Elynth nodded her massive head. *[Yes.]*

[I came within a hair's breath of tearing that fat slob Thast's head from his shoulders in the meeting this morning for what he has forced her to endure.] Andro spoke returning his gaze to the open ramp. *[I want to tear him limb from limb knowing that he touches her. When she and Sadi touched at the villa... it triggered a much deeper connection than any of us thought. That's why you intervened as you did. That is what you felt. She has been in our minds ever since sister. We include her in our thoughts as if it is the most natural thing in the world. And we do it without regard. I have to remember to throw up shields if I wish to talk privately with someone other than you.]*

[Do you not trust her?]

Andro shook his head quickly. *[No... that is not it. Sadi and I have seen inside her heart Elynth. She is no more a threat to KertaGai or me than you are. And neither is Anthar. They have been planning this for a very long time.]*

[Then why do you hold back?] Elynth asked him.

[For the very same reason you do.] He told her.

Elynth blinked several times and then nudged him in the shoulder. *[Perhaps brother... perhaps it is time we take the same advice that you gave Deni and Arrarn last night.]* She stated. *[This is our time... and we are not our parents. Perhaps we should grasp what fate and destiny has in store for us and not look back.]*

Andro smiled at her and stepped closer leaning up against her thick muscular side. *[Perhaps you are very right sister.]* He said.

The claxon sounded and the lights in the rear of the *TYPE II* turned red causing heads to turn all around. Andro smiled as he pushed off Elynth's side. "Finally." He spoke.

I itch to spread my wings. Elynth exclaimed.

Andro turned and saw Denali and Lisisa getting to their feet with smiles on their faces. He glanced up onto the passenger level and saw half the contingent of *Durcunusaan* and the High Coven pilots that had been chosen for Arrarn to train. Among them Toria Dellion. Malic stood close to the railing looking down into the

lower deck intently and his eyes came to settle on Andro. Malic stood a little straighter then and he nodded his head sharply to Andro in acknowledgment. It was a gesture that Andro returned to him without hesitation. His eyes narrowed when they fell upon Thast but he quickly averted them as Carisia, Narice and Yuri walked up to him.

“Is there something wrong with the ship Androcles Leonidas?” Yuri asked smugly.

Andro grinned at her. “Not at all. We’re three minutes out.”

“Three minutes out from what?” Narice asked.

Their attention was drawn to Denali who had slammed his hand down on the ramp controls and their eyes watched as the ramp began to retract further into the belly of the *TYPE II* while the rear doors slid to either side. In seconds there was a gaping maw of nothing but blue sky in front of them. Even Yuri stepped back a few steps.

Andro was still grinning as he turned and climbed onto Elynth’s back seeing Denali and Lisisa doing the same. All of the Coven riders were watching them with wide eyes as Andro lowered his helmet onto his head.

“Time to see how much trust you have in each other!” Andro barked out as he looked at them. “We are twenty-two thousand feet up! In another ninety seconds this ship will stop moving and you will exit! It will not begin moving once more until all of you have left the lower deck! If after thirty minutes any of you are left on board... the ramp will close and you will be expelled from further training. Trust in each other. We have not even got to the part that requires exiting while we are moving.” Andro looked down at Narice and Carisia from the saddle. “I will see you on the ground! Elynth!” He barked.

Elynth let loose with a trumpet of happiness and sprinted off the end of the ramp without further pause, followed quickly by Jeth and Aradace.

MJOLNIR’S HAND

Athani couldn’t contain the sound of her purring as she felt Resumar’s lips drag along her exposed ass and hip. She snapped her tail out and struck him lightly in the shoulder when his lips made to kiss that spot at the small of her back. He had made love to her for three straight hours and still he wanted more she mused. Never had she been so utterly fulfilled and content and divinely sore.

“No!” She gasped as she felt his hand grip her tail and wrap it gently around his arm in loving fashion. “I am worn out! You are a brute!” She told him playfully.

She basked in the feel of his arms pulling her closer to his chest and his nose nuzzling the back of her neck and ear as he settled to the bed behind her. As he released her tail from his arm, Athani wrapped it around his powerful leg when he draped it over her thigh.

“You have to go soon.” He whispered into her ear and the disappointment in his voice made Athani’s blood sing out in joy. “I want to get you back before you are missed. It would raise too many questions and cause far too many problems.”

Athani nodded as she crossed her arms over his and drew him tighter. “I... I am not like my people Resumar.” She spoke softly. “I don’t wish to rule the universe. I only wish to be happy. And free.”

“I knew that the minute I smelled you in the gym Athani’Puat.” He told her with a whisper.

“I don’t want to return with my people.” She stated turning in his arms to look at him. “I want to remain here with you. I would be forced to become Qurot’s mate if I went back. That is truly something I do not want. And once it was discovered I have given my purity to you, my sister and father would be incensed. If I return I will be whipped and beaten and turned into a whore for our troops no matter my father’s station as Prefect. I will...”

Resumar put a finger to her lips stopping her words. “Stop Athani.” He said softly.

“Resumar I... I did not enter into this situation with you... my intent was to find a way to remain on Earth Resumar. I was willing to give myself to you to accomplish that goal.” She reached up quickly and placed her hand on his cheek. “What you have done to me. What you have made me feel... I...”

“Shhh.” He stated gently. “It is not going to be easy... you must know that. Your people are trusted even less than the High Coven by my father and many of my people.”

“Because of the attack?”

Resumar nodded. "I think that is a large part of it yes, but my people are very accepting Athani. You just have to be patient and show them that you are as sincere as you are expressing to me now. There is more to it where my father is concerned... but your people aren't exactly the most open and friendly in the universe."

Athani rolled her eyes. "That is not something you need to remind me of." She said. "My father says he tries to change things... but the more he supposedly tries... the more they stay the same."

"It will not be easy as I said. We won't be able to be seen together at first." Resumar spoke. "At least not during the day."

"Even... even after I told you what I intended? You still... you still wish to help me?" She asked him stunned.

"Do you still feel that way?" He asked simply.

Athani shook her head instantly. "No. I... after what you have made me feel... it would be beneath me to try and trick you so. It would disrespect you because you are... you are being so honest with me right now."

Res leaned forward and kissed her deeply, pulling her even tighter into his embrace and feeling her mold against him perfectly. He pulled away slowly and watched as her eyes opened dreamily. "Make no mistake Athani'Puat... now that I have found you... I have no intention of letting you escape me. If I have to pursue you and fight any male that shows interest in you I will do just that. I will show you that I am the one for you and that you will never need anyone but me. I want to explore what we have discovered here Athani. I want to explore and discover who you are. And I want you to see who I am." Resumar told her.

"Where... where did you learn... to say such things?" She asked him.

Resumar laughed. "I may be a Spartan... but my father has told me and all of my brothers that when we find the one we want... never be ashamed to express to them what we feel."

"And... I... I am the one you want?" Athani asked softly.

Resumar smiled and nuzzled her cheek. "From the very first moment I set my eyes upon you."

Athani's eyes glowed brightly as she looked at him, his words filling her with hope and love for the future.

Love.

Athani did not even know what love felt like... but if it was anything like what Resumar Leonidas made her feel right now than it was surely going to be glorious to love him completely and have him love her back just as equally.

"You have no idea how your words make me feel." She said softly. "If what I feel coursing through me now is any indication... you will never have to fight for me Resumar Leonidas."

Resumar smiled at her words. "Come... you have to wash and get my scent off of you. And I promise not to assault you in the shower." He spoke prodding her gently. "Then I need to get you back to your quarters unseen."

Athani moved with all the speed born of her feline race and she was upon him in a single blink, covering his lips with her own, her tail madly flailing in the air in unabashed delight. She felt his arms crush her to his frame once more and her whole body hummed at his touch as he lifted her and began walking towards the large bathing room.

EARTH SOUTHERN DRAGON BASE

Completed only two years earlier, the Southern Dragon Base, affectionately known by those among Mjolnir's Hand as SODRAG, occupied two hundred square miles of mountains and rainforest carved out of the middle of what used to be the country of Brazil. It had become the main training and station base for members of Mjolnir's Hand away from Apo Prime. The base was home to any number of Durcunusaan soldiers at one time. Though General's Vistr and Vengal had originally trained only three hundred of these elite troops, they quickly saw the advantages to having a unique and exceptionally skilled unit that could respond quickly anywhere within the Union. The exact number of Durcunusaan soldiers was known only to a handful of senior military officers, and that is the way Vengal and Vistr liked it.

The base was broken into several sections, with several thousand elves and humans working on the base at the many administration buildings and fulfilling roles within the infrastructure needed to keep the base running. Those who worked on the base lived on the base with their families and the majority of them held the highest security clearances handed out to civilians. Since the majority of them were elves and humans who had come to this part of the planet to start over with the Moon Elf clan, they had a vested interest in seeing the base succeed and remain stable. They were all extremely protective of the dragons and the men and women who rode those dragons and called the base home. It was the largest reason that Martin had allowed the base to be built so far from Sparta and Eden City. The barracks were built almost like bungalows, semi-private with towering trees surrounding and even masking the buildings in some ways. They were comfortable without being extravagant with each bungalow having separate sleeping rooms for three and a small common kitchen.

The dragon pens were behind the bungalows only a hundred meters distance, and to the dragons of the High Coven it was the most lavish accommodations any of them had ever seen. Each pen was shaped and formed like a small cave on the outside built right into the natural landscape, with huge amounts of fresh hay and a small drinking pool inside. The openings were wide enough even for Torma to fit through easily, and now that Jeth and Tharua were mated; they were given an extra large dragon cave for themselves. Each pen was situated closest to each individual pair so they would not be far apart. The dragons could come and go as they pleased during the evening, flying high above the base to hunt or even to explore the jungles and mountains all around.

There were several large bungalows that acted as mess halls for any soldiers at the base, the menus always full of different selections of foods for whatever tastes. Andro had made sure that Narice had given him a list of foods and ingredients that the Coven riders would be used too, and these were added to the menu as well. It was here that the Coven riders had come after insuring that their dragons were settled. They sat mainly together, not avoiding the other soldiers who were present but not going out of their way to interact with them either Andro saw. He watched all this from the door behind the kitchen, out of sight as the mess hall was filled with animated talk among the riders as they spoke of their first challenge. All of them had chosen to follow Carisia and Narice out of the *TYPE II* within moments of it coming to a complete halt, and while several stumbled out due to being unfamiliar with the ship, most made clean exits and were soon soaring above the base watching as Andro, Lisisa and Denali swept gracefully along several thousand feet below them. All of them had received instructions upon landing to take care of their bonded brothers or sisters and then make their way here after dropping their gear off in the bungalows they had been assigned.

Andro turned slightly when he felt Moneus come up behind him and squeeze his huge frame into the doorway. Andro looked at him. "You and Carina really got this place set up in record time Moneus." He spoke.

Moneus grinned. "It wasn't me." He spoke. "This was all your sister's doing. She told me what to do... and that's what I did. She's a task master."

Andro chuckled. "And I suppose you positively hated the two nights you had her all to yourself." He spoke.

Moneus shrugged. "I don't know... is she still smiling?" He asked glancing into the mess hall.

"She hasn't stopped smiling since you claimed her Moneus." Andro spoke. "You have made her very happy my friend."

Moneus nodded. "Well... she has made *me* very happy." He spoke. "Happier than I ever thought possible."

Andro looked back into the hall. "They all made it down ok." He said. "A couple of stumbles... but they all got out. None of them hesitated. That's an excellent start."

"You think we can do this Andro?" Moneus asked.

Andro nodded. "It damn sure isn't going to be easy... but yes. As soon as they begin to trust each other completely... then we can really have at it." He answered. "I will turn you and Resumar loose on them and we'll see what they are really made of. Right now... at least for the next few weeks... baby steps. Do me a favor though?"

Moneus nodded. "Name it." He spoke without hesitation.

"Enomotarch Malic. Watch him for me will you Moneus?" Andro asked.

"May I ask why?" Moneus spoke moving closer.

“He could turn out to be completely different than what everyone says he is.” Andro said softly. “KertaGai has said it... Eliani and Nyla too. He is not the man he projects to everyone. That could be a huge plus for us my friend. Famus told me his actions on Eleyisi Three were not from any training he has received.”

“What do you mean?”

“It was almost as if he knew what surrounded him completely. He was aware of everything. Where everything was. Where the Evolli were.” Andro spoke. “It was instinctual Famus said. He directed his detachment to bring the most firepower on the enemy and he didn’t even have to think twice. And his Mindvoice powers are far more developed than even he knows or realizes.”

“What are you thinking Andro?” Moneus said.

“He’s different. And I want to find out just how different.” Andro said.

Moneus nodded and slung his arm over Andro’s shoulder. “Consider it done. Now c’mon... let’s go get some food and join the others.”

It took them only a few minutes to grab trays piled with food and move to the table where the Leonidas family sat. Andro leaned over and kissed both Carina and Zarah on their cheeks as he settled to the table next to Sadi. He leaned over and nuzzled the side of her neck and cheek and Sadi’s eyes closed in bliss. Arrarn reached out and slapped him in the shoulder.

“Where you been hiding this woman Andro?” He demanded. “I let her take the controls over the Med and next thing I know I wake up here!”

Lisisa laughed. “That’s unusual for you how exactly?” She exclaimed.

Andro looked at Sadi with adoring eyes. “I take it he fell asleep on you.” He said as the others were laughing.

Sadi chuckled as she plucked a piece of meat from Andro’s tray and leaned into him. “Yes... but it was closer to the Atlantic when he actually fell asleep.” She said.

“It was definitely a smoother ride.” Denali announced.

“Hey... you complaining about my flying brother?” Arrarn demanded.

“No... just your inability thereof.” Eliani chimed in from next to Nyla.

Andro smiled as he gazed into Sadi’s jungle green eyes. *[Have you spoken with her KertaGai?]* He asked.

Sadi shook her head quickly. *[Not since this morning. We decided to keep our shields very high. I believe she trusts Narice for the most part... but she does not know Toria Dellion very well. She is being very careful.]*

Andro nodded. *[That is probably wise.]*

Sadi looked at him as he began to eat. She slid her hands under the table to grasp his thigh. *[Andro... Andro my love are you having second thoughts about her? About the three of us?]*

Andro looked at her quickly. *[No!]* He declared. *[No. You were right Sadi... this is not something I... we... it’s not something we can just dismissed. I don’t want too KertaGai. Don’t think that. Arrarn... Denali and I... we talked last night. I told them we make our own future and that whatever has happened in the past is our parent’s past and not ours. I will not allow my father’s feelings to dissuade me from pursuing what I know to be right. What feels so right?]*

Sadi leaned further against him and smiled brightly. *[A simple yes or no would have sufficed my love.]*

Andro shook his head and pressed his forehead to hers kissing her softly. *[We need to be careful KertaGai. I will not risk Carisia becoming injured or put her in harms way because we wanted her so badly that we got careless in our actions. At least until the time is right. I almost ripped Thast to shreds this morning because now that she is within our minds I have seen all he has done to her.]*

Sadi nodded slowly. *[I know. So have I. And it burns my blood Andro. She will not have to endure him here will she?]*

Andro shook his head quickly. *[No. I had Carina change the living arrangements. We need to keep her away from him... he affects her somehow... takes away her strength of will. And I don’t know how. I need to talk with mother, for she is vampire and I believe she will know. I’m just hesitant to approach her just yet.]*

[Does Carina... does Carina know?] Sadi asked.

[We know each other well KertaGai... my brothers and sisters and I.] Andro said. *[We also do not tell our parents everything we have done or will ever do. She knows. Or at least suspects. And I told Lisisa. Carisia is her sister... and that is not something I want to keep from her.]*

[She doesn't hate me does she?] Sadi asked.

Andro chuckled. *[Hate you? Lisisa was thrilled! She thought I did not care for Carisia because Yuri is her mother and that she was Lisisa's blood sister. When I told her what was building between us... the three of us... her face lit up like an illumination globe. They have much in common Lisisa and Carisia... and our feelings for Carisia will only help Lisisa to discover that much more about her sister.]*

Sadi looked at him oddly. *[How so?]*

Andro grinned and popped a large chunk of steak into his mouth. *[I'm very possessive of what I consider to be mine.]* He spoke.

Sadi's eyes twinkled and she nuzzled his neck. *[Well I should certainly hope so.]*

"Andro! Sadi!" Denali's voice broke into their moment and Andro turned to his brother to see him motion with his head.

Andro looked up and saw Thast approaching their table, holding tightly to Carisia's arm with Yuri on the other side of him. Carisia did not look in the least bit happy about the situation.

[Oh... this ought to be fun.] He spoke to Sadi as he lifted his mug of coffee. He looked up as they stopped next to their table. "Princess Yuri, Princess Carisia... and Commander Thast. What can I do for you?"

Thast tossed the two security key cards onto the table. "The sleeping arrangements need to be altered." He spat.

Andro looked at the cards as he picked them up between his fingers. "What exactly is wrong with the sleeping arrangements Commander?"

"Commander Thast and Carisia are husband and wife." Yuri spoke. "You have Carisia occupying a bungalow with Narice and Toria Dellion, while the Commander is staying with the other three individuals of the security detachment we brought."

Andro looked at her and shook his head. "And this is an issue why?"

"As I said... Carisia is Commander Thast's wife." Yuri spoke once more.

Andro shook his head once more. "Not here she isn't." He stated evenly. "Here she is a section leader and a rider, not the commander's plaything to chase away his boredom. She will need to be focused and concentrate on her duties. I don't need her tripping over the commander at every turn. My sister Carina assigned her to the bungalow with Narice for a reason. As section leaders it will allow them to better share what they learn. They will become better leaders without distractions they don't need."

"Your wife is with you!" Thast snapped.

Andro looked at him. "I'm not the one going through the training Commander." Andro answered as he looked at Yuri. "Is this going to be a problem?"

"Tell him!" Thast barked pulling on Carisia's arm.

Carisia's eyes pleaded with Andro when she looked at him but her words were different. "I... I ask that you allow me to stay with my... with my husband." She stammered out.

"And I demand it." Yuri spoke.

The mess hall had become silent now as everyone was looking at their table. The High Coven riders saw several of the older *Durcunusaan* troops at other tables shake their heads with sad smiles. They saw similar looks pass between Eliani and the other Leonidas children. All of them present knew without question that Androcles Leonidas was very much like his father in that he did not respond well to arrogance.

Andro leaned back in his chair, his eyes on Yuri and then moving to Thast. "I'm not particularly fond of demands Princess Yuri. At least those that do not come from my mate. This..." Andro waved his hand around the mess hall as he got to his feet. "This is my realm... my world. You are in my world now. You do not make demands here. As far as I am concerned you are no different that the rest of your riders here to be trained. I have allowed you to have your own bungalow because of who you are... but that is the limit to which my generosity will extend."

"I am a Princess of the High Coven!" Yuri snapped.

"Here you are not a Princess. You are a rider." Andro spoke still very calm. "I will treat you as such. Unless of course you feel I can teach you nothing... in which case I give you two choices. You may challenge

me right now and show me that you can effectively fight from Vollenth's back as your mother wants all of you to be able to do. When Elynth and I swat your tight ass from the sky... which I warn you, we could do blindfolded... you will still have the other option. You can return to Sparta and stay with your mother while I train those who want to learn. Vollenth of course will remain here and I will attempt to purge the hatred and anger you have instilled in him. Or at least attempt to anyway. The choice is yours... but I will not change the way the quarters have been established just so that you can think you are in charge or so fat man here can satisfy his overactive libido."

"Why you Lycavorian dog!" Thast snarled. "I will..."

The growl that came from Androcles Leonidas was a supremely menacing sound that sent shivers rippling down the spines of everyone present who heard it, including his brothers and sisters. He turned on Thast, his eyes fully changed and his dual fangs bursting forth, even as his left hand closed once more around Thast's throat. His right hand came up in a blink, the psychic knife exploding from his clenched fist with a silvery glow. Thast's eyes grew wide, Carisia and Yuri staggered back stunned and Sadi leaned back in her chair with a smug smile.

Andro brought the tip of that shimmering psychic knife to within a hair's thickness of Thast's wide right eye. "Twice this day you have tempted fate Commander Thast. My patience is not infinite and with you, it is nearly gone. Speak the words on your lips little man and I guarantee you... half a second after they have left your mouth I will fry what little you have for a brain when I plunge this into your eye socket." Andro looked at the psychic knife with a fearsome smile. "Beautiful isn't it." He said turning back to look at him. "You won't feel it Thast... for the moment it enters your fool brain I will pour every ounce of my power through it and burn out your pain receptors. One second after that you will lose all motor functions... another second later your bladder will void and you will piss and shit your pants. And when I do this..." The psychic knife flared briefly, almost like a living thing that hungered for his flesh and Thast's eyes suddenly filled with real palpable fear. "You will be quite dead."

"Princess Yuri will not save you Thast... your Empress will not save you... those you think to be comrades will not save you. I will not hesitate... I will not pause... and your miniscule life will be over. This is my father's base... and since he is not here, it is mine in his stead. Things will be done my way! Not yours Commander... and not according to Princess Yuri. The faster you learn that... the longer you will live. I told you we would have a reckoning Thast... do not hasten your death any sooner than it needs to come. You will not defeat me now... and you will not defeat me then."

Andro released him instantly... stepping back and plunging the psychic knife into the metal table. The quarter inch diameter psychic projection sizzled, burning completely through the two inch thick metal table as if it was melting butter.

"The sleeping arrangements remain as they are." Andro stated bringing his fist back up as the knife shimmered and faded into nothing. He turned back to Thast his eyes now back to normal and his fangs gone. "My brothers and sisters and I will train your riders to the very best of our abilities. They will come first... the training they and their dragons will receive. I don't care for your status or your comfort Yuri. In my eyes you are no different than any of the others in this room. Now... is there anything else Commander... Princess Yuri... or may I go back to my meal?" Neither Thast nor Yuri had anything to say and Andro smiled. "Excellent... enjoy your meals."

As Andro sat back down, Sadi grasped his arm with unabashed adoration in her eyes, his brothers and sisters quickly went back to the conversations they had been having before and Carisia Moran felt the desire and want for both Androcles and Sadi increase ten fold as she made her way back to her table.

And no one saw the thoughts that filtered through the heads of all the other Coven riders with the exception of only three as they went back to their food and drink.

Perhaps the Lycavorian people were not the terrible creatures their leaders had made them out to be.

MJOLNIR'S HAND

"I don't know." Pian stated from the medical bed. "They unwrapped the shadows from around themselves about an hour into the flight. It all happened so quickly I was unable to act."

For'mya sat back away from the bed as Jalersi and Karun stood on either side. Pian's injuries had healed for the most part due to the more advanced medical facilities on *MJOLNIR'S HAND*. Kavalian medical clinics were no where near advanced and capable, and For'mya took note that Karun seemed to be visualizing everything he saw as they made their way through the Med Bay into this small section.

"And they waited until the flight crew made their first transmission to Apo Prime Control?" For'mya asked.

"I heard them talking." Pian spoke. "They thought I was dead and had stopped beating me. They were adamant about not killing the flight crew or they would not have been able to board your ship. And they did not want to anger the Union."

Jalersi noticed that Pian was much more subdued than usual, his words more measured and controlled. Apparently as close to death as he had come seemed to have affected him somehow. Jalersi knew that neither Pian nor Qurot had ever come close to being defeated in a battle, and having your enemy beat you into oblivion would definitely make you more subdued in how you acted.

For'mya got to her feet slowly. "That agrees with what our flight crew has reported." She said calmly. "Why exactly were you coming here Commander?"

"Prefect Keleru ordered me to join with Jalersi's delegation to give her additional points that we would be willing to negotiate, as well as provide more staff members for the embassy if it was granted. So that we may open it right away." Pian asked. He looked at Jalersi. "The females?"

Jalersi shook her head. "None of them survived." She stated almost offhandedly.

"What has the Prefect ordered?" Pian asked.

Jalersi looked at For'mya quickly. "We are not being allowed to contact my father with the news of what has happened until we reach Earth. Another hour if I understand correctly."

For'mya nodded. "A security precaution." For'mya spoke. "Nothing more. You will be able to contact your father when you have settled into your quarters in Sparta."

"He will... he will demand he be allowed to send security of our own!" Pian stated quickly.

For'mya nodded. "Yes... I'm quite sure he will. However... that is a decision Martin Leonidas will make."

"You would deny us our own security?" Pian demanded.

"If ultimately it means we have no more incidents while you are on Earth... yes." For'mya replied. "You will be going down in a *STRIKER AT* Commander. Directly to Sparta's main hospital. Anja Leonidas will then examine you and you will be released at her directive."

"No woman will examine me!" Pian exclaimed.

For'mya smiled. "Anja Leonidas is the Union's Chief Medical Officer Commander. I'm sure she can accommodate your desires for a male technician to conduct the examination... but you will not be released from the hospital without her order. There is nothing I or anyone can do about it. She has the power to overrule even Martin in terms of medical concerns. And Martin has never gone against her will when it involves medical decisions, not in the entire time we have been together."

"A woman!" Pian spat shaking his head.

For'mya smiled. "Yes... well I'm sure we will see you in the future Commander Pian." She spoke looking at Jalersi. "Our transport leaves in forty minutes. I suggest you gather your party and I will have a Durcunusaan detail escort you to the landing bay."

Jalersi nodded. "As you wish Lady For'mya." She said.

"I will see you on the transport." For'mya spoke before turning and heading out of the medical bay.

Jalersi waited until she was gone before turning to look at Pian. "Why did my father send you here Pian?" She asked.

"After your report about Qurot... he was concerned he would become a larger issue. I was to replace him and Qurot was to go back." Pian answered. "The rest is what I told the Union Queen."

Jalersi shook her head. "Talk to him Pian." She spoke softly. "He could ruin everything my father has planned. Leonidas's second son already beat him down once for trying to take a pad from the bodies of the bloodsuckers. Were you able to determine anything before you lost consciousness?"

Pian shook his head. "You and the others were the target... that is all I was able to hear." He answered. "They obviously knew who I was for they did not say anything while they beat me."

Jalersi turned to her son who had remained quiet so far. “Karun... gather Athani and the Legislators. I will meet you in the landing bay.”

Karun nodded his head. “As you wish mother.” He spoke.

Jalersi waited until he too had left before turning back to Pain and meeting his gaze. “My father should not have sent you Pian.” She spoke.

“He didn’t send me.” Pian spoke. “When I discovered he was going to do this I offered to come. I told him it would enhance my political skills.” He focused his dark eyes on her beautiful face. “You know why I have come Jalersi.”

“Pian... it was one night two decades ago.” Jalersi stated quickly. “And while it was glorious... it will not happen again. Ever. I am Pusintin’s mate and that will not change. I love him.”

“You do not sound very convincing when you say that.” Pian spoke. “I could let it slip about what happen between us.”

Jalersi glared at him. “Who do you think anyone will believe Pian?” She snarled. “Do not threaten me... Pusintin would tear you limb from limb for even suggesting something like that. He would never believe you! And neither would anyone else!”

“I... I love you Jalersi.” Pian said softly.

“Love?” She barked softly. “You do not even know the definition of the word Pian. Our males are incapable of feeling love! At least my sister and I agree on that fact. We are just attempting to change things in a different manner. Things are not happening quickly enough for Athani, while I understand it will take many years to change the core of our people. You and other males are so concerned with dominating us and proving that you are superior in every way... there is no place for love in your hearts! I do not blame you for that Pian... it is simply how it is. At least my sons will know what it is to respect a woman. They may regard them as beneath them in some ways... but they will not injure them or treat them with disdain.”

“Jalersi...”

“No Pian... this conversation is over!” She snapped softly. “What happened between us can... will never happen again.” She drew away from the bed. “I will see you when you are released from the hospital.”

Pian watched her turn and leave the medical bay. He leaned back in his bed. “We shall see.” He spoke in a whisper. “We shall see.”

SODRAG

“Yes mother I am settling in fine.” Malic spoke to the monitor. “Why have you called me here?”

Malic was very surprised to find upon arriving that due to his rank, he was authorized his own bungalow. He had quickly come here after the events in the mess hall to unpack his things. The main room of the bungalow was large with two couches and several small tables. The large window facing the south overlooked the dark green jungle as the sun was beginning to set. These quarters were much better than those on the Durcunusaan base, with a small kitchen and decent sized bedroom. His bed was not a typical bunk like in the barracks, but rather a larger and softer bed similar to what he had in his apartment on Apo Prime.

He was shirtless now... unpacking his personal bag as he spoke to his mother on the monitor. The bungalows did not have the larger holo discs common in civilian apartments, but Malic had no reason for one.

“Malic... your father is still angry with you.” Calemia spoke.

Malic’s face turned into a tight, bitter smile. “When is father not angry with me?” He spoke as he pulled out the assortment of datapads from his bag.

“He could have gotten you a posting within his fleet son.” She stated. “You did not have to do this.”

“Mother... being an Enomotarch in father’s fleet is no better than a common laborer.” Malic spoke. “He hates any kind of ground troops. He treats them as if they are beneath him. He is a fleet officer... and he will never respect ground troops.”

“You know how he feels about the Durcunusaan Malic.” Calemia said. “Even more so the unit the King formed. This Mjólnir’s Hand.”

Malic nodded. “Yes. The Durcunusaan are too secretive. They do not dress properly... they are arrogant... their hair is longer. I have heard it all before mother.” He said looking at the monitor. “They are the

best however. The finest ground troops in the entire Union mother. No one can match them. The only ones who are better are the riders of Mjolnir's Hand. Father hates that the men and women of Mjolnir's Hand rely on their bonded ones more than anything. He hates that they command so much respect among our people. Do you understand what that means to me mother? Of all the millions of troops and soldiers we have... they are considered the elite. And I am here now! Among them! Part of them."

"I thought you said that there were academic requirements that you had to meet first. And more training." Calemia spoke.

Malic nodded slowly. "Yes."

"Your father could have called a favor or two in again Malic." Calemia stated. "You could have gone back to the Academy."

"And flunk out as I did the last time?" He answered. "I am the only one of father's son to have shamed him so. Why would I attempt that again? Even my own brothers avoid speaking of me. Father brags of them all the time mother... but of me he says nothing. I have reached the rank of Enomotarch faster than anyone in the history of the Union if I am correct. He could not even come to my promotion ceremony. None of you could."

"He had duties Malic. You know that." Calemia said.

Malic laughed harshly. "Yes... I know. Duties. The same duties that pulled him away whenever I needed him as a child. I was weak as a child... I know this mother. I was not as healthy and strong as my brothers. This embarrassed both of you... don't you think I know that? That is different now mother... I am larger and stronger than my brothers... I am just not as intelligent as them and he is ashamed of me. When I saw father's face the day he discovered I had failed the Academy I knew. When I saw your face I knew. You are both ashamed of me. When I told you I was coming here mother... all either of you could do was complain that I was throwing away my life. That I would amount to nothing."

"Malic you..."

"No mother... I have chosen this life... for it suits me. And I *will* become a member of Mjolnir's Hand one day... for that is what calls to me." Malic shook his head.

"You... you will stand beside... fight beside vampires Malic." Calemia spoke.

Malic nodded. "Yes I will mother. I have listened to father's words for so long that I actually began to believe them myself. No more. Do you know what I have seen in just the week I have been here mother? Pride and honor and respect... not just from our kind... but from vampires who wear this uniform as well."

"They... they killed your grandparents Malic." Calemia snapped. "Their kind can not be trusted. No matter what the King says. No matter what they do now."

"I will make sure I tell that to the King when I am in his presence again mother." Malic said. "I'm sure Queen Isabella would be most honored to hear your words. Or the two daughters she has bore the King. Daughters who I might add are even more Spartan in their actions and words than two of my own three sisters in many ways."

"Don't say that!" Calemia spat angrily. "Don't you dare say that Malic. You insult your sisters in this way!"

"Do I insult them... or do I insult fathers and your arrogance mother." Malic stated plainly. "My brother's arrogance. Why do you think Adriana stays away mother? She hates how you and father act when she is there. You treat her as an inferior simply because she teaches children mother. Vampire children."

"Malic... you know I will tell your father what you have said!" Calemia barked. "He will be livid! He will... he will remove you from the apartment on Apo Prime and you will have access to no more of your inheritance!"

"I am outside of his reach now mother." Malic spoke. "From now forward I will make my own way. You and father may sell the apartment on Apo Prime mother. I will not be returning there. My future is here... as a Durcunusaan... and one day as a member of Mjolnir's Hand."

"Malic you..."

"I will always love you and father... never doubt that. But now I will make my own way in this world." Malic stated.

"Malic I demand...!"

"Goodbye mother." Malic spoke before reaching forward and cutting off the transmission his mother's face disappearing. He thought briefly and then keyed in another code.

“SODRAG COM Center. Lieutenant Renlar.” The face of the young Spartan came onto the monitor.

“Lieutenant Renlar... I am Enomotarch Malic sir. I no longer wish to receive any type of communications from my mother or father.” Malic spoke. “Is that possible sir?”

“All COMs come through here anyway Enomotarch.” Renlar answered. “I will have to enter it in the log Durcunusaan Malic. Your father is an Admiral. But if that is your wish I’ll make it happen.”

Malic nodded. “You... you know my father sir?”

Renlar shook his head quickly. “Not personally no. Part of our duties here is to know the background of anyone occupying SODRAG Enomotarch. Your file is flagged because of your father’s rank.”

“I would appreciate it sir.” Malic spoke.

Renlar nodded. “Already done.” He replied.

“Sir... is it possible for us to have family members come here?” Malic asked.

“Your father won’t get within a hundred kilometers of this base Enomotarch.” Renlar spoke with a grin. “He may be an Admiral... but his clearance is no where near high enough to allow access to a Durcunusaan or Mjolnir’s Hand facility.”

“No sir... I meant perhaps my sister Adriana.” Malic said. “She is a teacher... and I know her schedule permits her some freedom. I haven’t seen her in some time and I thought perhaps it might be possible. Though I wouldn’t want anyone knowing who she was for obvious reasons.”

“I’ll have to order a background check on her and clear it with Prince Androcles.” Renlar said. “We don’t usually let civilians near the base Enomotarch.”

Malic nodded. “I understand sir. I would appreciate it if you could find our for me sir. That would be even better.”

“I’ll let you know Enomotarch Malic. Good luck.”

“Thank you sir.” Malic said as he sat back on the couch.

The first fingers of a new day were beginning to dawn on him and he found he liked the feelings they gave him. Now he just had to make it happen. He lifted the first data pad he had pulled out of his bag and looked at it.

“Application of Aeronautical Elements to Dragon Flight.” Malic read the title out loud. He took a deep breath and leaned forward on the couch. “I am not stupid! I can learn what I need to learn!” He spat as he stabbed down on the pad to bring up the first page of the lessons and skills.

So engrossed as he was in the data pad, Malic did not hear or see Moneus Simpson push away from the front of the railing near his door with a smile and begin walking back towards his and Carina’s bungalow.

CABELIR OLD KAVALIAN EMPIRE HOMEWORLD

The vampire Colonel came to his feet when the door of his small office opened and Pusintin walked in. He had joined with the Kavalians at the very beginning; knowing that there was no way the Coven would be able to withstand their assault. He was branded a traitor for his actions... but after fighting with these Kavalians for so many years he had come to respect them a great deal. Yes they were brutal and very savage... but they were also practical as well. He knew he was always watched even now after so many years. He had proven an excellent commander and led his forces well. Many had been with him from the start... and they were among the few that still remained.

“Marshall Pusintin!” He declared coming to his feet. “This is a surprise sir!”

Pusintin looked at the man as he entered. He was one of the few vampire officers that actually pulled his weight and remained with them. And he had killed far more of his own kind than Pusintin had.

“Colonel Drtev.” Pusintin spoke.

“Sir... can I offer you something?” Drtev stammered.

“Information.” Pusintin spoke settling into the chair across from the small desk. “Sit down Colonel.” Drtev eased himself back into his chair, his eyes darting this way and that. Pusintin saw this and smiled. “Rest easy Colonel.” He spoke. “You are not one of the officers that we continue to monitor. Your actions since

coming over to our side have moved you past that. You have gained some trust among the Kavalians... but always remember it is never enough.”

Drtev nodded. “Yes sir!”

“As I said... I need information.” Pusintin spoke.

“Of course Marshall... whatever I can provide.”

“I was reading the transcripts of your interview when you initially defected.” Pusintin spoke. “You mentioned something to the interviewer of Immortals who had broken away from the High Coven.”

Drtev nodded. “Yes sir. The former High Lord’s Immortal Captain Cha’talla survived the attempt on his life and escaped into The Wilds with his entire tribe. No one knows where they went.”

Pusintin nodded. “Yes... I’m more interested in those you said turned to a mercenary lifestyle.” He said.

“Yes sir. Several hundred deserted within the first few months before I left.” He stated. “The last I heard of them was when I was passing through The Wilds last year returning here.”

“And what did you hear?” Pusintin asked.

“They apparently have established their own smuggling and black market operations.” Drtev answered. “It is very profitable from what I was told.”

“Do you know how to arrange a meeting with them?” Pusintin asked.

Drtev looked at him wide eyed. “Sir... I am a pureblood. They originally defected because of their hatred for purebloods. Why would they want to meet with me?”

Pusintin held out the data pad to him. “I want to hire them.” He said. “I need something they can provide.”

“Marshall... what could they possibly provide that we can not get easily?” Drtev asked as he began reading the pad. His eyes grew a little wider and he looked up. “I... I don’t understand sir.”

“I want you to take a transport into The Wilds and meet with them. Take whomever you deem necessary Colonel, the fewer the better, but this mission does not exist. If you are killed then you will be dead. If you survive and complete this task... I will insure you have whatever you desire.” Pusintin spoke. “Arrange a meeting with them and then contact me. Give them these details of what I am interested in. Once that is arrange and they have the sample I want to see... I will travel to The Wilds and meet with you and them to insure they can do what I require of them.”

“Marshall... this... if they meet with me... they will want an enormous amount of credits to do what this says.” Drtev spoke.

“Whatever they want... give it to them.” Pusintin spoke as he came to his feet. “When you have succeeded and they have what I want to see contact me on this channel.” He held out the small COM unit. “That is coded to me and me alone. Speak with no one about this if you wish to continue living Colonel Drtev. Succeed... and you will have everything.”

Drtev sprang to his feet. “I will not fail Marshall.”

Pusintin nodded. “Good. I expect you to be leaving as soon as this afternoon.” Pusintin turned and walked out of the small office. As he moved down the corridor he lifted his wrist and activated the small COM unit there. “It is done.” He spoke.

“Will he succeed?” Keleru’s voice asked.

“If he doesn’t he will be dead and we will try something else.” Pusintin spoke. “We have six months Keleru if the reports are accurate.”

“I trust Ogat Pusintin.” Keleru spoke calmly. “The reports are accurate. I’ve chosen the men for the two assault teams.” Keleru spoke. “Meet me at my estate this evening and I will introduce you to the two leaders.”

Pusintin nodded. “I’ll be there.” He said. “Have you heard from Pian or Jalersi?”

“Not as of yet.” He answered. “They should be arriving on Earth as we speak and it is strange she did not contact me when Pian joined with them to complain of his presence. I expect to hear from her shortly though.”

“Have her contact me.” Pusintin said. “Her voice soothes me and I want to see her face. I did not think her absence would affect me as much as it has.”

“Of course.” Keleru replied with a knowing laugh. “No doubt the same as when I am away from my mate. I will see you this evening.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

SPARTA SOUTHERN SPACEPORT

The ride down to Earth on *MJOLNIR'S HAND'S* single *MENKLA* Transport was many things to the many different individuals on board.

To Athani'Puat it was the beginning of a new life.

Athani was far more interested in what Earth and Sparta looked like, for she alone knew the path to her future lay here with Resumar Leonidas. He had been true to his word and while they had showered together he had simply washed her body thoroughly with gentle strokes and loving caresses, occasionally dropping light kisses on her shoulders and neck under the hot spray. Though there was nothing sexual about it, just his touch was enough to send feelings of bliss skittering across her flesh. He had gotten her back to her quarters unseen easily enough and he left her with a short but emotion filled kiss that left her body trembling for more and her mind with no doubts as to his intentions. What he had made her feel was beyond her scope of comprehension right now, but Athani knew she wanted to experience it over and over again. And she knew without question it wasn't just the divine physical pleasure he had reaped upon her, it was something far deeper and while that should have frightened her, Athani found herself basking in the sensations it caused her to feel within.

Athani'Puat's past was rapidly crumbling away from around her and she knew it and she was going to embrace it as quickly as she could.

She had been waiting nearly a quarter century for the right moment to come when she could break away from the life she had been born into. She had endured Pusintin's touch upon her for too long and the moment Resumar had filled her the first time with his essence it was as if he had purged her very soul. It had never been her intention to fall in love with him. She had only wanted to use him to escape the life she was bound too. That first kiss however, that kiss had caused her to fall very hard and so very quickly for the handsome half elf, half wolf Prince. His actions and the heavenly feeling of being wrapped within his arms had been far more than she had ever hoped or dreamed that she would find. His words to her were enough to ignite fires of desire within her belly, fires that he had just as quickly satiated with his touch. Until he had held her in his arms Athani had never known what love felt like. She may have been older than him by some quarter century or possibly more she didn't really know, but if what she felt coursing through her now was any indication; she would never desire anyone else. She wanted to know everything about Resumar Leonidas, his likes and his dislikes. And since he had not let her exercise the skills she had acquired over the years due to having to suffer Pusintin's touch, Athani wanted to give him back the pleasure he had so willingly given to her. Now Athani'Puat thanked each and every star she saw that it was Resumar Leonidas who had been on that ship. She could still smell him on her, if even so very faintly, and the mint like wildflower smell tickled her nostrils and filled her with warmth.

Resumar and Queen For'mya had accompanied them on the transport and while they sat closer to the cockpit of the transport, she could still catch glimpses of him as he moved about in the front speaking with his mother. Athani knew they had to be exceptionally careful, even around his own people and his family. He had taught her very quickly between their trysts how to shield her mind in a way that would not allow anyone to touch her as he and Cemath had done.

“My father and mothers are very strong within Mindvoice. All of my family... but my father and older brother most of all.” He had told her as they lay in his bed, their breathing returning to normal even as his fingers traced the skin of her shoulders and neck causing swells of delight to cascade through her. He found her tail fascinating Athani discovered, and this was only another sign to her that he was the one. ***“I'm quite sure that you are the only recorded one of your people to show signs of being able to Mindvoice. Part of that is because Cemath touched you... and then me. Let me show you what my brother Andro showed me on how to shield your thoughts even when you are not aware of it. You must practice as often as you can to strengthen this ability. It will make it safer for you until we are ready to reveal what we want to reveal. Cemath will help you Athani just as I will... all you need do is reach out to him. To me. We are bonded... and I don't keep***

anything from him. He knows about us... and my feelings for you. He will help you. I know how your people are and I truly do not want anything to happen to you before we can be together so we must be careful."

"Will they attempt to read my thoughts?" She had asked as she snuggled in his arms.

"No!" He answered immediately shaking his head. *"That is not something any of us would do. It is considered a huge lack of protocol and incredible disrespect. And in some cases it is considered a crime. Besides... with what I teach you if someone tried to breach your mind in that way I would detect it and so would Cemath. And we would respond instantly."*

"Will I be able to see your thoughts?" She asked.

Resumar grinned at her and waggled his eyebrows. *"What thoughts would you like to see?"*

"Not those!" She exclaimed pushing up against him and using her tail to slap his ass cheek lightly. *"I have felt those thoughts!"*

Resumar chuckled. *"As you grow stronger yes... if you want too, I can show you my thoughts. If things work out as I hope they will... you will have free reign within my thoughts."* He told her.

"How do you want them to work out?" Athani asked softly.

"As strange as it may sound because we have known each other for only two days... I want you to be mine Athani. Now... tomorrow... next week... next year. I can't explain it to you, but that is what I feel pounding in my blood." He replied.

"Why are you doing this Resumar Leonidas?" She asked. *"Knowing what... what my intentions were and knowing what I sought before coming here. Knowing that I only wanted too... why would you still do this for me?"*

Resumar met her beautiful blue/green eyes. *"My people... Lycavorians... and elves... we are very open about many things... to include our desires and wants. But when we decide we have found the one we want to spend our lives with, our instincts take over... and we pursue them until we have won those we want or we are dismissed. I have the blood of both in my veins, and it makes that instinct far stronger."*

"And I... I am this person for you?" She asked softly.

"As crazy as it sounds... I knew the first minute I saw you in the landing bay that you were who I wanted." Res replied.

"It is not crazy..." She spoke softly. *"For a part of me realized it too when you helped me to my feet. I have never felt these emotions within me Resumar... and they feel so wonderful."*

"Well good." Res spoke. He moved closer until his forehead was touching hers. *"Now relax and let me show you what I mean. After that I'm going to steal your breath away again."*

Since returning to her quarters she had practiced raising and lowering the walls around her mind as he had shown her. The more she concentrated, the stronger they became but he had told her that it would become second nature to her very quickly, and until that time he and Cemath would augment her shields as much as possible.

Athani had been enthralled with the blue/green color of the planet and when they had finally entered the atmosphere and broke out of the clouds she gasped as she saw the huge swatches of green fertile land and the huge expanses of timber and mountains. She saw many cities from high up but as they drew closer to the ground following a certain course she began to see a larger city take shape. It appeared to be surrounded by towering mountains on three sides and fit neatly in a lush valley with a large river. The river actually cut through the center of the city and as the transport swept around and began to descend to the spaceport Athani could make out the lofty buildings in the distance. They were not like the towering structures of steel and glass she had seen on other planets. These buildings appeared made from a combination of granite and steel that impugned incredible workmanship. She could see Lifters darting back and forth between the higher buildings but nothing on or near the street level which was filled with hundreds if not thousands of men and women walking the streets and footpaths. Many of the taller buildings even had greenery reaching up along the sides and decorating the outsides of their structures. There were Lifter platforms high up that connected to some of the taller buildings and the pedestrian bridges that connected them to others. Almost all of the very tall buildings were within two blocks she saw, the rest gradually decreasing in height as they moved outward. All along the outside edge of the city she could see the Lifter lanes and the traffic was heavy but moving quickly to different parts of the city.

“Lifter traffic is not allowed below thirty stories or within the city proper. There is actually no structure over fifty stories high to be honest. Many of the citizens of Sparta have lived here for thousands of years, and you will find they try to remain true to their history and culture. Part of that culture is the lack of truly modern looking buildings. They have a unique combination of construction as you can see.” For’mya’s voice spoke and Athani looked up and saw the others turning away from the view windows to look at her as she came down the short staircase into the main portion of the transport. “The streets of Sparta are free of clutter for the citizens to walk and mingle. There are several hundred different types of cafés and restaurants spread throughout the city, many of them established by an assortment of the species within the Union. Eden City is the actual capital of Earth now and much larger in size in many respects, but the basic design construction and infrastructure you see from your windows is the same all over Earth. We decided to copy what was here in Sparta for the most part. Eden City is more modern looking with significantly more buildings, but it has changed very little since Martin Leonidas and Dysea began building it. There are now seventy-three major cities spread across the planet, with ten times that number of smaller settlements and urban areas.”

“Eden City is the first city he built isn’t it?” Athani asked.

For’mya looked at her with a smile. “Yes it is. Martin and Dysea began building it before he discovered who he really was. It was very nearly destroyed in The Battle for Earth, but it has been rebuilt and enlarged to many degrees even better than it was before.”

“Will we see this Eden City?” Jalersi asked.

“You will be staying in a newer facility in the Northeast Quadrant of Sparta. It is closest to those parts of the city that remain in some fashion from millennia ago.” For’mya continued. “It is an apartment complex of sorts for visiting dignitaries with every comfort and easy access to the nearby River Promenade with shops and cafés and such. It is actually quite beautiful. A trip to Eden City can be arranged however if that is something you would like.”

“You will allow us to go within your city? Within Sparta?” Jalersi asked somewhat surprised at this information.

“You are not prisoners here. You are the members of a Diplomatic Envoy taking part in Trade Negotiations.” For’mya spoke.

“And what of your people?” Qurot spoke now. “How will they treat us?”

“You will find the people of Sparta very tolerant of others no matter their past as long as they are treated in the same fashion they treat you.” For’mya answered. “Regardless of what you may think the citizens of the Union are very friendly and open. The people who call Sparta home even more so. Whatever preconceived notions you may have will probably not turn out to be true.”

“Will we see the other children of the King?” Karun asked the question.

For’mya looked at him for a moment. She shrugged finally. “You may or you may not. They are all members of the military with duties and tasks all their own. Androcles commands his own Fleet Group which is based here on Earth. Resumar will begin putting together his own staff when we return for he will receive his own Fleet Group at the end of this year.” Athani’s eyes perked up at this information. “We have found it very hard over the years to keep track of our older children so we have stopped trying. Since this is the beginning of our annual exodus to Earth they are all here, but they go and do as they please. Most of our older children are taking part in additional training maneuvers for *Mjolnir’s Hand*. The younger ones come and go from the villa to their activities during the day as any of the younger ones in Sparta do.”

“Don’t they stay here in Sparta?” Karun continued. “The older children of the King I mean?”

“They each have apartments on the main estate; however all of them also maintain their own villas in the city of Gytheio several kilometers south. It was Sparta’s port city in ancient times and it has become so again.” For’mya explained. “The waters of the Laconian Gulf are quite beautiful and exceptionally warm this time of year.”

“So they do not stay at the Royal Palace?” Karun asked.

For’mya stepped closer to him. “The main estate is no palace.” She said with a smile and shake of her head. “It is unchanged in many respects from when Martin Leonidas discovered who he was. It is a single story villa, though it has been enlarged quite a bit over the years.” She looked at him. “Why such an interest in my other children Karun?” She asked.

“Your children?” He asked surprised looking at his mother and then back to her.

“You will find...” Resumar spoke now as he came down the short flight of steps into the main area. “You will find that my brothers and sisters and I do not distinguish who our birth mothers are.” He stated matter of factly. “As far as we are concerned, they are all our mothers. And that is how we treat them.” They watched as Resumar leaned over For’mya’s shoulder and dropped an affectionate kiss on her cheek as if to emphasize his words and he held out the pad to her as he did this. “A message from Uncle Andreus mother.” He said.

For’mya looked at the pad briefly and nodded. “Excellent. The King’s *Durcunusaan* Captain has informed me that the secure transmitter is now active and set up in the quarters reserved for you Jalersi. You may contact your father as soon as you arrive there and please inform him we will entertain any requests that he might make as long as they are within reason. We will be meeting Prime Minister Deia to...”

“What do you consider within reason?” Jalersi asked. “I’m sure he will demand we be allowed our own security force after the events on the ship.”

For’mya nodded slowly. “No doubt.” She said. “Martin Leonidas will allow a small detachment that much I can tell you.”

“What do you consider small?” Jalersi asked.

“I would think six is an appropriate number. You will not have need for more.” For’mya answered.

“And what of the High Coven members already on Earth?” Jiss asked now. “Can you guarantee our safety from them?”

“The members of the High Coven party are being kept on the opposite side of the city in a facility similar to yours.” For’mya replied. “They will have no need to cross the whole of Sparta to come into the area that you will be occupying. There is much to do and see throughout the entire city, and they also have our security forces with them. They will not allow any type of confrontation. You will more than likely not even see them while you are here.”

“What about the rest of us?” Qurot barked out quickly. “Do we get secure transmitters as well?”

“Jalersi is the head of your Trade delegation.” For’mya spoke calmly even at his rude interruption. “Is there a particular reason that *you* need a secure transmitter Commander?”

“No there is not.” Jalersi stated before Qurot could answer.

“Good. As I was saying... I will introduce you to the Prime Minister and then I have to depart until later this evening when we gather for dinner.” For’mya spoke.

“Will the King be joining us then?” Jalersi asked a hopeful tone in her voice.

For’mya shook her head. “No... not this evening.” She said. “Martin Leonidas is very busy. He has made time to honor your request Jalersi... however I won’t know when that will be until I see him and talk with him.”

“When will you see him?” Jalersi asked quickly.

For’mya smiled warmly. “As soon as we exit the ship I would imagine.” She answered. “He is my mate... and we have missed each other. I will be able to tell you when he will meet with you this evening at dinner.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you Representative Jalersi’Puat.” Deia spoke in her most politically correct and inviting voice as she extended her hand in greeting. “I welcome you to Earth and to Sparta.”

Jalersi was somewhat taken aback by Deia’s greeting, but she took the offered hand. “Thank you Prime Minister Deia.” She stammered quickly. “We... we have heard much about you.”

Deia laughed as For’mya chuckled from where she stood next to Jalersi. “Yes... well I’m sure not all of it was good.” She stated with a disarming smile.

“Deia... I present Jalersi’s younger sister Athani’Puat.” For’mya spoke now as she motioned Athani forward. “And Senior Legislators Jiss and Matuarr. Beside them are Jalersi’s oldest son and an officer in their military Karun. Then there is Commander Qurot.” She turned back to Deia as she finished shaking hands with the Kavalian Jiss and faced Qurot. It was Athani who noticed that the Prime Minister didn’t so much as bat an eye at Qurot’s obvious attempt to make his appearance more intimidating than he was. “Commander... a pleasure.” She spoke bowing her head slightly. Deia didn’t smile as Qurot grunted at her, dismissing her almost casually. She turned back to Jalersi who was giving Qurot an evil glare for his actions.

“I must apologize for what happened on *MJOLNIR’S HAND*.” Deia spoke. “We are very pleased no one among your party was hurt, and I assure you we will find out who it is that was responsible.”

Jalersi nodded. “I thank you for your words Prime Minister.” She spoke. “The High Coven is friend to neither of our peoples and I’m quite sure you will do your best to discover what happened. I am curious however, why are you signing a Cease Fire Agreement with them now, after so long? And will this recent event make you rethink your position in this regard. They *are* responsible for the attack.”

Deia was prepared for just this sort of question and she smiled. “We have not fought an engagement with the High Coven in nearly twenty-five years.” She stated quickly. “Your people have kept them quite occupied.” She said acting as if this was impressive. “Signing this agreement was actually my idea when they made it known this is what they wanted. It shows them we will not involve ourselves in the war currently going on between them and your people. In a manner it also shows your people we have no intention of entering the war in any way. It is something we can speak more about if you like. You will be here for several days... and if your request for an embassy is approved by the King and the Senate perhaps even longer. As for recent events, we are still investigating the incident.”

“It was quite a bit more than an incident.” Jiss stated now. “They made an attempt to assassinate the daughters of our Prefect. He will not look kindly on that.”

Deia nodded. “Nor should he.” She said. “However, the attack occurred within Union borders and on the Union flagship. It also appears those who conducted the attack were part of some insurgent group and are not tied directly to the Empress or the High Coven. At least that is what we have been able to determine so far. We are still investigating as I said.”

“And if it is determined the High Coven was behind this attack?” Jalersi asked.

“Then I’m sure the King will review what we know.” Deia spoke. “If we are to establish a more permanent channel between our governments, I suggest we worry about what we can do and let King Leonidas concern himself with the military aspects of discovering what happened. He will get to the bottom of it I assure you. He does not take kindly to having his son and one of his beloved mates put in danger.” Deia smiled. “As I said... now that this door has been open... I suggest we do all we can to keep it open.”

Jalersi nodded. “I believe to better understand how your government works I would like that.” She stated.

“Good. We can...”

The deep throated trumpet that rolled across the expanse of the tarmac caused the heads of everyone to turn and Deia heard several gasps from the Kavalians as they watched the colossal, obsidian scaled dragon swoop down from the blue cloudless sky above and settle gracefully to the tarmac several hundred meters away. The figure of the large man sitting causally in the saddle was very evident. Beside that massive dragon was settling an azure scaled beast barely half the size with a more diminutive figure in the saddle.

“By the gods!” Jalersi gasped taking a step back even from this distance.

Deia smiled. “King Leonidas... and Queen Aricia.” She spoke softly as Jalersi turned to look at her. “Torma has that effect on everyone due to his size. He is close to twenty-one meters long now... but thankfully he has stopped growing.”

For’mya stepped closer to them quickly feeling her blood calling for her mates. “Jalersi... I will see you and the others this evening for dinner.” She stated.

Jalersi nodded quickly, her eyes turning back to look as Torma flared his massive wings several times even as he settled completely to the ground, his legs cocked underneath him. “Of... of course.” She said watching as For’mya and Resumar both began to walk quickly towards where the two dragons had landed.

“The King and his family rarely, if ever, use interplanetary transportation.” Deia said explaining to them. “Their bonded brothers and sisters would be insulted if they did I think.” Deia said. “You have no fears truly.”

“Are all of his children bonded to these beasts?” Karun asked quickly.

Deia shook her head. “Not all of them no. All of them can ride quite well... most of them learned to do that before they could even walk actually... I believe Androcles was riding by the time he was three... but not all of them are bonded to dragons. And they are not beasts to us young man.” Deia spoke keeping her voice calm and without emotion. “The dragons that carry the King and Queens and their family are all from the same family bloodline of dragons. The two dragons you see there are Torma and Isheeni... they are the parents to all

but one of the dragons that a Leonidas rides. Dragons are friends and family to many within the Union... not beasts.”

Karun bowed his head slightly. “My apologies.” He spoke.

Deia shook her head. “It is of no consequence really. Just do not call them beasts when you are in their presence for they are just as intelligent as you and I and it would be offensive to them.”

“I won’t.” He spoke.

“Please... this is my senior aide Lieutenant Ardis... and she will escort you to the Diplomatic Apartments and show you where you will be staying.” Deia motioned to the figure behind her who stepped forward now.

The figure was wearing the matte black body armor that they had seen on For’mya and Resumar on the ship. They also noticed that the figure wore a similar crimson cape with gold trimmed edges as well. As the hands came up and tossed back the hood they were surprised when they saw not the stern face of a man, but the exquisitely beautiful face of the young elven woman. Or half elf they saw, as her elven ears were not the four inch high elegantly curved ears they knew full blooded elves had. Her shimmering black tresses fell well past her shoulders, the black body armor doing nothing to hide the fact that she had a firm, supple body with high breasts and very long legs. She appeared to be nearing five feet eight inches tall though her legs appeared even longer for her height. Karun was the most affected by her, for he was half Lycavorian himself and while not as sensitive as a pureblood Lycavorian, his sense of smell was excellent. He sniffed the air gently, detecting the faint scent of peaches and wild timber wafting from her pores. Her face was perfection in every manner, from the high cheekbones to her full lips which bore no color except the natural blush of soft pink. It was her eyes that grabbed everyone’s attention. Her right eye was a bright sapphire color, while the left was an equally bright violet hued orb. They also detected the holster on her right thigh that bore the K12A Kinetic Magnum and the long slim holster on her left thigh that held the intricately carved pommel of the *Nehtes*. Her black hair was pulled over one shoulder and tied with fine white Drow silk.

Jalersi looked at Deia quickly. “She wears the colors of the Royal family?” She said. “This is one of the King’s children?”

Deia smiled and shook her head quickly. “This is Lieutenant Ardis... daughter of Sparta’s Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Star Colonel Isra of *Mjollnir’s Hand*.” She answered. “She is King Leonidas’s oldest niece.”

“My mother and Uncle Martin are very close.” Ardis said. “She was the very first he discovered upon returning to Earth so many years ago and discovering his past and heritage. They have been like brother and sister ever since. More so that many who are related by blood.” Ardis spoke. Her voice was soft like wind chimes and bespoke great intelligence.

“You wear the uniform of...” Jalersi began speaking.

“A *Durcunusaan*... yes.” Ardis finished her statement. “I was accepted into their ranks immediately upon completing my Agoge. I spent three years with them... but I have been Prime Minister Deia’s senior aide for the last year.”

“You are a rider then?” Jiss asked. “Like the others?”

Ardis shook her head. “No. I have ridden dragons since I was a small girl; it is hard not to do this when your father and mothers are bonded to them, not to mention most of your extended family. I am not bonded to a single dragon however.”

“Your father has two mates?” Qurot demanded in his harsh voice.

“My second mother is a Drow elf. Vice President of Earth Aihola. My father and mothers have been together for twenty-five years now.” Ardis answered with a great deal of pride and respect in her voice. “I am twenty-two years old and the third oldest of their six children. My older brothers are bonded with dragons. My younger siblings have not yet showed signs of this though it is still possible.”

Qurot laughed. “I like this place!” He stated looking around. “It appears everyone has more than one woman!”

“Qurot!” Jalersi snapped.

Ardis stepped forward, her sapphire and violet eyes on Qurot. “My Drow mother is half vampire Commander Qurot.” She stated plainly seeing the look on his face change to shock and then disgust. “And to my knowledge there are less than a hundred and twenty male Lycavorians within the entire Union that have

more than one mate. All of them... to include my father; my Uncle Martin and my adoptive Uncle Daniel Simpson are exceptional Spartans... for they love their mates equally. To presume something else is not only incorrect... it is entirely foolish.”

Qurot’s eyes narrowed. “You call me foolish?” He spat.

“I don’t know Commander. Your assumptions would make it appear so.” Ardis answered politely not fazed in the least by his harsh and overbearing demeanor. “Are you?”

Deia smiled as she took Ardis’s arm and squeezed lightly. “Lieutenant Ardis will show you to the Diplomatic Apartments and then escort you to the Conference Building where we can begin our schedule of talks.”

Ardis motioned to several multi-seat Lifters parked a short distance away. “Please... this way.”

Athani risked a very quick glance back across the tarmac and her keen feline like eyes detected Resumar embracing the raven haired woman. She turned back to follow her sister to the Lifters.

[Tonight Athani’Puat.] Resumar’s voice filtered into her head and she smiled inwardly. *[I will see you tonight and show you a little of Sparta from the air if that pleases you.]*

[I believe I would like that Resumar Leonidas.] She answered.

[Tonight then.]

[I will be waiting.] Athani spoke.

DURCUNUSAAN HOSPITAL QUARANTINE LEVEL

Anja gripped For’mya’s hands tightly as they shared a brief but passionate kiss while Martin and Aricia stood next to Resumar looking through the large glass view window at the medical technicians who were handling the bodies of the commandos gingerly.

“You had us worried for a moment.” Anja spoke gently to her.

For’mya sighed as Anja nuzzled her elfin ear. “Resumar and I had it completely under control.” She stated confidently.

“So much under control that you couldn’t grab one of them still alive?” Martin asked with a grin as he looked back at them.

“Ignore him.” Anja said quickly.

“I intend too.” For’mya stated as they turned to look at him.

“So what’s the word Red?” Martin asked.

Anja stepped closer to the view window as Martin pulled For’mya to him tightly. “Well... three had their upper bodies pretty well crushed.” Anja stated.

Resumar shrugged sheepishly. “Sorry mother...” He said with a smile. “It was the closest thing Cemath and I could snatch. I didn’t stop to see if it was full.”

Anja chuckled and shook her head. “Just like your father. Always the direct approach. No subtly in you whatsoever.” She said. “The rest were killed by an assortment of *Nehtes* strikes, very precise For’mya, excellent form.” For’mya smiled as Martin squeezed her tighter.

“It must be all the instruction I have received from Aricia.” For’mya said with a grin.

Martin looked at her as Aricia chuckled. “Ha ha... very funny.”

Anja grinned as well. “Aurith melted one into nothing, Resumar displayed a rare bout of anger in his thrusts and the one who was supposedly the leader died from a massive dose of poison.”

Martin looked at her now. “Poison?”

Anja nodded. “The most concentrated does of neutron radiation that I have ever seen.” She said. “All of them had these capsules imbedded in small pouches inside their cheeks. Bite the capsule... death follows in under thirty seconds and there isn’t a damn thing that will save them.” Anja turned her jade green eyes on Martin.

“Viper Team?” He said softly.

Anja nodded slowly. “A Viper Team. Or at least the closest thing to one that we know of. Why else carry the poison?”

Aricia, For'mya and Resumar looked between the two of them quickly. "What is this Viper Team Beloved? I have never heard of such a thing." Aricia asked finally.

"It's something Anja and I had experience with before the comet came." He answered. "A Viper Team was essentially a suicide squad. The odds of them completing their mission and getting away alive was almost zero. They were thrill junkies. Most of them were loose cannons that had a death wish to begin with anyway. We avoided them at all costs. They carried similar tools and all of them had a capsule of poison they would take if it appeared they were going to be captured. They are similar in many respects to our Zero Teams... but these Viper Teams didn't care that most of the missions they went on were one way tickets to becoming very dead."

"You think this is what they were father?" Resumar asked.

Martin shook his head slowly. "No. I think they carried these capsules in case they were captured by the High Coven. Kill themselves and they take whatever they know to the grave. Numbers. Places. Leaders."

"Names." For'mya said softly.

Martin nodded. "Yep. Aikiro said there was one group that they could not discover the name of the leader." He said. "Now we know why."

"To die to protect their leader and their numbers signifies a much greater purpose and intent." Aricia stated. "They are not simply a rag tag bunch of malcontents as Aikiro would have us believe."

"Nope." Martin said. "Bella is working with Armetus to see what they can find out about this group and who on Beklan is helping them. I damn sure don't need High Coven insurgents operating out of Union space. Especially not those dedicated enough to try a suicide mission on my ship to kill Kavalians."

Aricia looked at him. "Have you told Vonis?" She asked.

Martin shook his head. "No... not yet. Just the five of us, Deia and Armetus know what is going on completely. And those on *MJOLNIR'S HAND*... but they are my crew and they won't say boo about what happen."

"I think perhaps I should join Bella and then visit Vonis Martin. He has extensive knowledge of The Wilds and perhaps of any insurgent groups that might be active. He did work in the shadows for quite some time." Aricia spoke.

Martin nodded. "I'll let you and Bella work that end." He said knowing she and Isabella were more than capable. "For'mya can you stay in front with these Kavalians? Help Deia?"

For'mya nodded quickly. "Of course. I believe they are expecting me too as well. It would look odd if I did not continue. They would know something is not right."

"Give them as much freedom as possible... but they are not to leave the city." Martin spoke.

"You know of course that Keleru will want to send his own security for them after what happened." For'mya asked.

Martin nodded. "And if I refuse they will know something is up. Allow it... but no more than half a dozen." He answered. "I don't want anymore than that cruising my city looking for trouble."

For'mya nodded. "That is what I told Jalersi." She said leaning up on her tip toes to reach his lips where she kissed him quite passionately. "You made me a promise before I left Martin Leonidas." She said softly with a seductive glint in her dark brown eyes. "I expect you to honor that promise."

Martin leaned over quickly and firmly nuzzled her four inch high elven ear causing her to lean against him in delight as his aura pulsed through her being. "And I very much intend to *Kinsoargai*. Do not stay at the dinner too long. I might fall asleep."

For'mya met his eyes. "Then I will wake you up Martin Leonidas. In the special way you so enjoy."

Martin kissed her hard and they both heard Resumar coughing loudly. They turned and looked at him.

"Hey... little more information than I needed!" He stated. "You are my parents after all! I won't be able to get that picture out of my head the rest of the day!"

Aricia and Anja both burst out laughing as Martin gave his son a shove. "You leave in the morning to help your brother!" He spoke loudly. "That's all you'll need to think about."

Resumar smiled as he nodded his head. "I'd like to return every night though father. I'll stay in Gytheio. In case mother needs my help. I might be able to assist if anything comes up since they have seen me and know who I am."

Martin looked at For'mya and she shrugged. "He's right. The more familiar faces they see... the less they will suspect." She said. "Can Andro do without him for a few weeks Martin? Having him here, even to be seen at different times, that will lend credence that everything is normal."

Martin nodded. "I don't have a problem with it. And Andro doesn't begin Close Quarters Combat Flying for at least several weeks. I'll let him know. It will give you a chance to begin to put together a Command Crew for PILLAR OF FAITH. And don't you and Cemath crash any *STRIKERS* going back and forth to the station like you did last time."

"That was a faulty Plasma converter!" Resumar protested. "That was not our fault!"

Martin laughed and nodded. "That's not what I heard." He said.

Resumar waved his hand at his parents. "Bah! You can't even keep a *STRIKER* on a straight course father. You are not one to talk." He turned and headed down the corridor muttering to himself.

Aricia stepped up and leaned into Martin's opposite side, also stretching up to kiss him deeply. "I will see all of you tonight after Bella and I have picked up Dysea." She said. "And you will be very good to For'mya tonight Beloved. If you aren't... we will punish you."

For'mya kissed his cheek as she pushed away with a chuckle. "See... we stick together." She said as Aricia took her hand and they headed down the corridor.

Martin turned and looked at Anja. "You in on that too?" He asked.

Anja's jade green eyes twinkled. "What do you think?" She asked with a smile as she stepped up to him now. "We'll never get enough of you lover. I would think after twenty-five years of being together with us you'd have realized that by now."

Martin pulled her close. "I believe I can say the same thing." He spoke leaning over to nuzzle her cheek and feeling her press closer to him in delight.

Anja gripped the front of his uniform tightly as his aura swirled around her gently and she looked up into his face. "I need to show you something." She spoke in a more serious tone.

Martin waggled his eyebrows. "Really? Down here?" He asked coyly. "Anja... you little minx!"

"*Carians*... you *are* a pig!" She gasped playfully. She squeezed his uniform. "This is important lover... and you need to keep that famous temper of yours in check when you see it."

Martin's eyes narrowed. "Ok... why do I get the feeling I'm not going to like what you are going to show me?"

"You aren't." Anja spoke taking his arm. "But you need to see it. Come with me." She led him through the sealed door into the quarantine room where her technicians were working on the bodies of the commandos. Anja pulled him into a much smaller room where there was a single body on the table covered in a plain white sheet. Anja released his arm as she moved up next to the table.

"What's this?" He asked worry filling his face and his words.

"Martin... do you remember Petty Officer Wolcott?" Anja asked.

Martin nodded quickly. "I remember all my people Red... you know that. He died in the attack on Mountain City. Anja what is this..."

Anja reached up slowly and drew back the sheet from the features of the dead vampire commando. The exceptionally pale face of the dead young man stared back at his wide eyes and Martin moved closer reaching out to pull the sheet further out of the way. The cheeks were sunken in and the cobalt blue vampire eyes very evident open in death as they were. Martin turned his head to look at her.

"What the fuck is this?" He said the rage building within his chest.

"He's a clone Martin." Anja said softly. "A vampire clone."

"Vampire... how is that even possible?" Martin gasped. "Danny changed him... I watched him bite Wolcott Red. He became like us!"

Anja shook her head. "I ran two different tests lover. There is no trace of Lycavorian DNA in his body." She stated softly. "He was one of the original Genomes... and that means someone... probably Yuri... somehow they got the DNA source code for him and we can probably assume the others as well. And if she was able to get it for them..." Anja looked at him. "There is a possibility that..."

Martin looked at her. "No way!" He stammered.

“It is a possibility that we have to consider Martin.” Anja said. “As distasteful and vile as it sounds... they have the cloning capability to do it. Especially now that we know they have been using the remnants of the Mindvoice ship on Nuwaroa. It’s how their cloning procedures were so advanced to begin with.”

Martin took her hand gently in his. “Then let’s find out right now.” He said.

APO PRIME MAIN MILITARY SHIPYARDS POLAR ORBIT

“Another twelve hours Princess.” The Lycavorian engineer told her. The sounds of the engineer bay filled the surrounding area and they were walking along one of the more sedate areas. They only had to talk loudly here.

Normya Leonidas looked at him oddly. “Twelve hours? To replace a Coil Inducer?” She asked.

“It’s not just the Coil Inducer anymore. The Gate travel caused the fissures to extend into the housing and power couplings. Those need to be replaced as well. We’re short staffed Princess. You know that when the Royal family goes to Earth everyone puts in for their leaves.” The engineer answered.

Normya nodded her head quickly at his words as she was very frustrated. She wanted to get back to Earth and begin putting together the files for her and Zarah to select the remaining member of their flight crew. Not to mention the fact that she could feel the fever from her Coming of Age beginning to burn slowly within her blood. It made her irritable and she did not want to snap at the senior engineer. Her mothers and sisters had told her this was how it would be. It would begin slowly and continue to build over the course of a week’s time until it reached its peak. At that time her scent would be saturating the very air around her and she did not doubt it was becoming more pronounced even now, especially to the older Lycavorian males. Only they would be able to smell it on her, for elves and others within the Union did not have the same incredibly sensitive smell of their Lycavorian brothers. It would not be as powerful as pureblood Lycavorian females, but because of pureness of her father’s blood it would be more than normal half breed young females would experience.

Combined with the fact that she missed Zarah and Arrarn, Normya was not in the best of moods. She had not been away from either of them for this long a period of time before, and she realized now just how much she depended on her brother and sister. The three of them were like peas in a pod, and while Zarah shared a closeness with Andro that her other siblings did not, she rarely left hers or Arrarn’s side. They thought alike on almost everything... their personalities so similar it was scary sometimes. While they all loved each other as siblings, it was not uncommon for them to gravitate towards different siblings. Eliani, Carina, Denali and Lisisa were closer to Andro than most of them for they had spent so much time together during the war that it was natural to spend equal time together when they were off duty. While Resumar had fought beside Andro and the others during the war, he preferred the more laid back and relaxed atmosphere that permeated Arrarn, Normya and Zarah when they were together. It was the natural way of things the *Feravomir* had once told her, and no one should take it to mean anything more than what it was. They were brothers and sisters yes, but all of them were different in many ways.

Several of the elven fighter pilots she knew were aware that she was entering her Coming of Age and were beginning to pursue her more openly now. One had even greeted her when she had arrived six hours ago. While Normya found him attractive in many ways, and thanks to the influence of her more outgoing sister she had fantasized about him several times, Normya had no desire to enter into anything serious with him or anyone. Like Zarah she wanted to explore and experience her sexuality to its fullest extent before she finally decided to allow males to court her for mating. When that day came, Normya already knew that she wanted a large man who would cuddle with her in his arms and nuzzle her elven ears. She wanted a man like her father... a powerful wolf who would worship her in every way as she knew her father did her mothers. She knew it wasn’t going to be easy for both Eliani and Lisisa were still very much single, but like her older sisters, Normya was content to wait until that man came into her life.

Normya turned to the engineer and nodded. “Very well.” She spoke. “I will be at the Island Palace.” She said. “Contact me the moment the repairs are done for I want to leave within an hour of them being completed.”

The engineer looked at her oddly. “You don’t wish to do a test of the new parts first?” He asked.

Normya shook her head. "I trust in your skill. I need to return this ship to Earth for a training series we are doing with dragons."

"I thought the next cycle of training for *Mjolnir's Hand* didn't start until next month Princess?" He said. "That is when the other TYPE IIs will be shifted to Earth."

Normya nodded quickly realizing she had just given out information she should not have. "Yes... this is... this is special training session that my brother is conducting with a few select members of *Mjolnir's Hand* already on Earth."

The engineer nodded though not completely convinced. "I will contact you immediately Princess." He said.

Normya nodded. "Thank you Chief Engineer." She stated before turning and heading toward the main entrance to the work bay.

The Lycavorian watched her until she had left and then made his way to his small office. He reached behind his desk and pulled out the portable transmitter making sure the shaded portions of his view windows were activated before entering in a code and activating the transmitter. He could not use the holo transmitter in his office for that could be traced so he had been given this unit to use by the hooded man who almost immediately appeared on the monitor in the very clear transmission.

"Yes." The voice spoke.

"It is done." He spoke.

"You are sure?"

The Engineer nodded. "The LSD Coil Inducer will fracture completely when they exit from the first jump they make. She is in a hurry to get back and I have seen the flight pattern she has filed to return to Earth. It will take them within a parsec of the Torana Cluster as they make for Gate Two Four."

"The Torana Cluster." The man spoke. "Excellent... that puts them only two light years from the border to The Wilds. And it is just her and the co-pilot? Her sister did not accompany her?"

The Chief Engineer shook his head. "No." He stated.

"I will inform my contacts. You have done well." He said.

"There is something else."

"What?"

"She mentioned something about a special training course for dragons on Earth. That is why she is in a hurry to get back." The Chief Engineer spoke. "I know from experience and the scheduling boards that the next class of *Mjolnir's Hand* candidates does not begin until next month. The Prince is doing something else. Without full knowledge of others it seems."

"Interesting." The man said softly. "I will look into this. You have done well... I thank you."

"She took from you what was yours and refused your advances." The Chief Engineer said. "And we have been friends for many years. You know of course the original plan was defeated by the arrival of Androcles and his siblings."

"Yes. The Evolli were fools to think they could complete the task in such a way." The man replied. "They did not listen to my instruction and allowed their greed to override their common sense. I will be more careful the next time in choosing who I put my trust in. Thankfully the Prince left no one alive to question. I may not be able to target the daughter she bore our fool King... but I can certainly make sure she feels the same pain I felt when I kill others she considers children."

"The others we are trying to convert to our cause?"

"They will come around." The man answered. "They have been at odds with her since her return. Even more because of the relationships she shares with the King's other whores. I will convince them. I have begun to instill doubt in her leadership and role in my mate's death among others who do not care for how she conducts herself. They will be making themselves known soon enough."

"I will inform you when she departs my friend." The Chief Engineer told him.

"I will be waiting."

The transmission faded and the Chief Engineer closed the portable unit and once more secured it behind his desk. His task was almost done.

SPARTA OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR OF SPARTA

“Gorgo!” Panos spoke warmly as he embraced her tightly within his arms. “It is so very good to see you.”

Gorgo smiled as she returned the embrace. Panos she remembered fondly from her time as Queen of Sparta and he, along with Dilios and a few others had been ever supportive of her upon her return. It had been decided that her capture and subsequent imprisonment by the High Coven, while a clone lived her life for fifteen years, was not something that needed to be made public knowledge. Only Panos and Dilios knew what had really happened. That was the way her son had wanted it... and that was how it had become.

“You are looking well Panos.” Gorgo spoke with cheerful tone as he led her into his large office.

“Ahh!” Panos exclaimed. “Your son is keeping me on my toes with so many potential enemies lurking about our city!” He told her with a huge grin. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Gorgo laughed. “I should think not.” She stated.

Panos waved her to the chair. “You are aware of whom the Kavalians have sent with this false Trade Delegation I assume? That is why you asked for this meeting?” He asked.

Gorgo shook her head as she sat down and watched him as he moved to pour them both steaming mugs of Aricia’s special coffee. “No. I haven’t spoken with my son since the State Dinner. I was helping Sadi to finish out her academic requirements and then I had two full days of classes that I told Selene I would help Dysea teach at the Eden City Graduate University. I only returned last night. She returns late this afternoon.”

Panos looked at her suddenly apprehensive as he carried the mug over to her. “Then you don’t know?”

“Know what?” Gorgo asked.

“Perhaps I should let the King...” Panos spoke as he moved to his chair.

“Panos... we have been friends for far too long.” Gorgo spoke. “Stop beating around the topic old friend.”

Panos nodded. “Yes... and I know Martin keeps nothing from you.” He said. “He only just found out himself yesterday.”

“Found out what?” Gorgo asked.

“Pleistarchus has sent his Kavalian mate and oldest son on this delegation.” Panos blurted out.

Gorgo stopped in the motion of lifting the mug to her lips for only a brief moment before continuing and taking a fulfilling sip of the strong but deeply rich and delicious coffee. “My son and I both knew that there would come a day when something like this occurred. We have talked about it at length through the years.” Gorgo met his eyes. “It is not something that needs to be whispered about when we are present. My son... Martin’s brother... he died that day on the road from Athens. That is how we have chosen to move forward with our lives. Pleistarchus has no claim to his bloodline anymore. That ceased the day he turned betrayer to his people. You know that as well as I. And Martin would never allow him such a claim. When I see how Martin has blended so seamlessly the honor and courage and laconic nature of we who grew up as Spartans with the nature of all those who call the Union home? There are times when I believe he actually lived in our Sparta of old.” Gorgo said. “It comes to him so naturally. The love of this city. Our people. His mates.”

Panos nodded. “As it did his father.” He said.

Gorgo shook her head. “He is so much more Panos. I have read much of Resumar and his deeds. He has taken the best of both his father and grandfather and made it his own. And now Androcles is doing it.”

Panos sat back and smiled. “My son’s namesake has made my mate and I very proud. My other children think of Andro as a younger brother. Especially Dymas.”

“I haven’t seen Dymas in many weeks.” Gorgo spoke. “Where is he?”

“His duties as Senior Polemarch have kept him very busy.” Panos replied with a smile. “He will be returning to Sparta in two weeks. He is finishing a sweep of the outer garrisons with General Vistr.”

“It will be good to see him again.” Gorgo said with a smile. “And no... this Pusintin as he calls himself now... he is nothing to me. Nor are those he calls mate or child.”

Panos looked at her. “So why have you asked for this meeting?” He asked as he leaned forward once more. “If it is not about the Kavalians or Martin... what is it about?”

“You are more intimately familiar with the ancient Spartan law and customs put into place after I left.” Gorgo spoke.

Panos laughed. “Not according to my mate! She is the expert! According to her anyway.” He laughed.

Gorgo smiled. “Well... far more than I am. I was approached recently by a young couple very much in love Panos. It was easy to see in the way they looked at one another and spoke to each other. The way they touched each other. They came to me seeking help.”

“Help about what?” Panos asked confused.

“This is a matter of law I believe.” Gorgo spoke. “They are related Panos... half brother and sister. They want to reveal their love for each other in the proper Spartan way... but they do not know if this will be accepted. I was hoping you could tell me.”

Panos sat back. “This was commonplace in ancient Sparta as you yourself know. King Leonidas was your half uncle.” He said. “Dilios’s oldest son is mated to his first cousin and has been for four hundred years now. They have four strong and very healthy children and are pillars of their neighborhood community. I believe Reva is even pregnant with their fifth as we speak. I would have to conduct a review our history scrolls but there is no law against it to my knowledge. It would depend on the parents really.” Panos sat forward once more and met her eyes evenly. “You are speaking of Denali and Lisisa aren’t you?”

Gorgo’s eyes flew open wide as she nearly spilled her coffee. She stammered for a moment so as not to spit out what was in her mouth but then she looked at him. “You know?” She gasped. “How?”

Panos smiled. “I told you my son’s namesake has made me very proud.” He stated. “Andro came to me two years ago in private asking these very same questions. There is nothing he would not do to protect his brothers and sisters Gorgo. Nothing. You of all people should know this.”

“Androcles knows?” Gorgo gasped once more.

“I would hazard a guess and say there are many things that Andro knows that he keeps to himself. Some that not even his father is aware of. Including this secret. The only one who will discover them now is Sadi, for she is his *Anome*.” Panos spoke with a smile. “He came to me two years ago as I said, to insure that there were no written laws against this. He has kept their secret locked within that vault he calls a head. He has even gone so far as to make it easier for them to be together and nurture what they have found. At least until they are ready to reveal it to everyone.”

“They do not think anyone knows.” Gorgo spoke quickly her mind racing. “He has never given any indication he knows.”

Panos shook his head. “And he won’t. That is not his way. He protects their secret viciously. It is also one of the reasons he has kept them on the SCIMITAR with him. It gives them time to explore what they have and discover each other in a place they both feel very comfortable and safe from discovery.”

Gorgo looked at him. “Then there is no written laws forbidding this that you know of?” She asked.

Panos shook his head once more. “Not in Spartan law. I have not explored it extensively within the framework of Union law... but nothing I have found indicates it is considered taboo enough to outlaw it. I’m guessing because it is not an everyday occurrence. It is part of our Spartan history and culture Gorgo. Perhaps the *Feravomir* may know of something that I have not discovered... something from the ancient ways of our people... but I do not.”

“You sound like you approve Panos.” Gorgo asked.

Panos shrugged. “You would not be here if you did not as well. Denali Leonidas is a powerful Alpha cut from the same mold as his father and older brothers. Lisisa... while she may be half vampire... she adheres to Spartan custom and law like it is second nature to her. She is also a strong Alpha female... and her wolf genes are far more active than her vampire ones. We have known that for sometime. I have seen them at gatherings since Andro came to me... and while they never make it obvious... because I knew I could tell. I have never seen them show interest in any other male or female. Not even a passing one. Not an awkward glance or even a sniff. That is why I know they are fully committed to one another in every way.”

“How... how do you think Martin will react to this Panos?” Gorgo asked.

“That I do not know.” He replied honestly. “And I would not want to guess either. I don’t believe Martin will be the one we need to convince.”

Gorgo looked at him. “What do you mean?”

“Aricia will be the harder of the two of them to accept this.” He said. “At least that is what I believe... but I could be wrong. She has changed much since I knew her as a young female wolf. Ultimately we won’t know until they choose to reveal themselves. When they do... let them know I will stand with them as their brother has stood with them and protected them these last two years. I suggest speaking with the *Feravomir* however. She would know about the ancient laws among our people... though I find it hard to believe she has not already sensed what they share.”

Gorgo nodded slowly. “Yes... if anyone would discover that without assistance it would be Dustha.”

“Talk with her. If she says there is nothing... let Denali and Lisisa know. Then they can make the decision when to tell those they love.” Panos spoke.

“I believe I will do just that.” She spoke.

“How many Aikiro?” Martin asked calmly as he sat across from her and Tesand at the small table in Gallais’s Retreat. A three member *Durcunusaan* Detachment was spread out within the establishment as her security. Martin had chosen them personally, and spent an hour briefing them on why they needed to protect the leader of their ancient enemy. Because he had taken the time to do that, the two men and one woman then did not look on their duty as a form of punishment any longer.

“We are spending so much time together Martin Leonidas.” Aikiro spoke with a smile from across the table. “It could almost be said you enjoy my company. And you have brought your Hadarian mate as well. I’m touched.”

Martin looked at Anja who sat next to him and then back to Aikiro. “Don’t flatter yourself Aikiro.” He replied quickly. “Now answer my question? How many of my men did you clone?”

Aikiro lowered the glass of fruit juice she was drinking and looked at Tesand before turning back to him. “One hundred of each DNA source code in the databanks on EDEN.” She stated.

“And Yuri was the one who stole them?” Martin asked.

Aikiro nodded. “Yes. If it is any consolation... we did not begin using them until after our war with the Kavalians began.” She stated plainly.

“That isn’t any consolation.” Martin growled.

“We needed established leaders to command our cloned troops. Leaders with excellent tactical skills and the ability to adapt... which all of the genomes had, even before you turned them Martin. We used an accelerated growth hormone and their base template so that we could begin using them within the fourth year. They truly made a difference for us in those last battles.”

“Wait!” Anja declared. “You said she took a sample of each DNA source code from EDEN.”

Aikiro nodded. “She beamed it off the station via a small transmitter to one of our bases on the ground. It was then forwarded in a coded transmission to a science ship that was passing through the system. It was one of her last tasks when she began to suspect who you really were. She didn’t know for sure up until she discovered she was pregnant with your child.” Aikiro did not take note of the look that past between Martin and Anja. “Once the comet came and altered everything, that same science ship returned to Earth to assist her and the transmission was forgotten until our war with the Kavalians began.” Aikiro saw the look on Anja’s face and she smiled. “Oh... I see now what you are concerned about.” She stated with a small laugh. “Do not worry Queen of the Hadarians... we did not clone your precious Martin Leonidas. That is quite impossible to do.”

“So you say.” Anja popped right back. “You’ve done nothing but lie to us since you came here. Why should we believe you now?”

“I have lied about nothing!” Aikiro hissed right back. “And you should know better than most that his blood and the blood of Daniel Simpson is far too pure to clone.” Aikiro spoke turning to look at Martin. “I will not lie to you... for there is no point in that. There is nothing you can do about it anyway... besides the templates for the genomes were destroyed in an explosion six years after they were fielded. A fool researcher mixed the wrong chemicals in his lab and took out most of the building and all of the data cores. I will admit we have tried on numerous occasions to clone pureblood Lycavorians. Your mother was the closest Veldruk came to success... and her blood while pure... is far less so than your own.”

Anja rested her hand on Martin’s arm before he could speak and she leaned forward in the chair. “You said Martin and Danny’s blood is too pure to clone. Julie was also a pureblood.” She said softly.

Aikiro smiled once more. "Ah well... only to a point." She stated.

"What do you mean?" Martin growled in a low voice.

"Her mother was a pureblood yes. Her father was an anomaly shall we say. His blood was pure yes... but very diluted for some unknown reason. It gave us an opportunity to reconfigure the DNA code." Aikiro spoke. "It was a simple matter to adjust the corresponding source code to delete the Lycavorian genes completely and establish what we wanted instead."

Martin's eyes grew wider. "Wait, are you telling me there are clones of Julie out there!" He gasped.

"She was one of our greatest cloning successes." Aikiro said proudly. "Even more so than your mother of course."

Martin glared at her. "You are one cold hearted bitch." He hissed at her.

Tesand leaned forward in his chair. "You..."

Martin turned his eyes on him. "If you wish to continue to be able to talk and breathe I wouldn't say what I know you are going to say Admiral Tesand." Martin spat. "If you do... Aikiro will need to find another man to play with in her bed."

Aikiro also reached across and rested her hand on Tesand's arm. Something that Martin did not take notice of... but something Anja did. "I could say the very same about you Martin Leonidas... about being cold hearted. You are not as sinless as you would like others to believe." Aikiro spoke.

Martin's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about?" He asked.

"Oh... I believe you know." Aikiro stated calmly. "Did you think my daughter would not eventually tell me?"

"I don't particularly care what Yuri has told you." Martin snapped angrily. "As far as I'm concerned she's three cans shy of a six pack anyway and therefore useless. Now... how many Julie clones still exist?" Martin demanded.

"Why should I tell you that?" Aikiro asked.

"Because you vampire bitch... she was my friend!" Martin viciously replied. "She was the only daughter of her parents and I don't want them to see twenty or thirty or a hundred of your fucking creations of her walking around Sparta!"

"Yes... I could see where that might be a problem." Aikiro stated with a smirk. She looked at Anja. "She was also your lover if the reports I received from Yuri in her time here on Earth are accurate."

"That is really none of your business." Anja spoke barely keeping her own anger in check.

Aikiro kept her smile in place. "Do not fear Martin Leonidas, only one of her clones still remains. She is a senior officer on Robert's ship, one of our finest commando leaders if I do say so myself. Her name now is Juliana One." Aikiro stated. "And there is not a DNA strand of Lycavorian foulness in her entire body. We removed it. She is now the most perfectly created vampire clone anywhere in the High Coven. Our scientists are quite proud of her. She holds the rank of Major... and we are using her template to create more just like her. Though you can rest assured they will not look like her."

"So you made her clone into a vampire?" Anja spat now. "What gives you the right to play god? What you have done to her is no better than what your daughter did to the Drow. It is demented and cruel!"

"She is a clone." Aikiro stated without feeling. "Engineered to follow orders. Nothing more... nothing less. And she has done just that for nearly thirteen years."

"I don't want her coming anywhere near Sparta!" Martin growled. "For any reason! Is that clear?"

Aikiro nodded. "If that is your wish." She stated.

"What about the others?" Martin asked now.

"Most of them were killed through the years leading their troops." Aikiro answered easily and with a trace of satisfaction in her voice. "That is what we bred them for after all. When the rest of them became unstable we eliminated them."

"Unstable how?" Martin asked.

"They began to exhibit the same signs of why the other genomes on Earth went insane." Aikiro replied. "As Dymas was never able to determine why this happened, neither were we. When it was determined they would not last we eliminated them. Just as the humans decided to do. Only your Julie survived. Mainly because she was the only one we made into a vampire."

"But we have..." Martin began.

“I’ve heard enough!” Anja snapped getting to her feet and squeezing Martin’s arm. He looked at her as she glared at Aikiro. “I don’t want to hear anymore! You are a twisted bitch you know that?”

Aikiro smiled up at her. “So I have been told.”

Anja pulled Martin away from the table, a puzzled sort of look on his face until he saw her eyes. Anja lifted her hand slightly and in an almost causal afterthought of motion she swept her hand across her cheek, extending two fingers. Martin recognized the old SEAL sign for we need to talk and he blinked three times acknowledging the message.

“Enjoy your meal Aikiro.” Martin snapped. “I truly hope you choke on the potatoes.” He took Anja’s arm and they began to walk out of the Retreat. Once out of ear shot and after they had exited the building onto the street Martin pulled her close to him.

“Speak Red.” He spoke softly next to her ear as if hugging her as they walked.

“She doesn’t know Marty.” Anja said. “She doesn’t know one of the commandos who attacked the Kavalians is one of the genome clones they created. And she certainly doesn’t know he has been changed into a vampire.”

“So! What does that have to do with anything?” Martin almost snapped. “They cloned Julie! They made her a vampire! Man... Danny is gonna have a fucking fit!”

Anja stopped walking and pulled him close to her. “It is not Julie Martin... you and Danny must remember that. Don’t you see lover? She said only the clone of Julie was made into a vampire. That means someone saw what was happening in their genome clones and changed them. She says they are all dead and that only Julie remains. She obviously doesn’t know that at least one is... was part of the insurgency fighting her sadistic rule.”

Martin’s eyes grew a little wider as what Anja was saying hit him. “And if there is one...”

Anja nodded. “There could be more.” She stated. “Maybe they didn’t just start to snap as before lover. The Coven cloning process is light years ahead of anything I have ever seen. It is vile to us... to those within the Union... but she is right when she says it is almost perfect. When Veldruk made the clone of your mother they obviously didn’t have the same procedures in place as they do now. I’m guessing that Aikiro didn’t release all the information she was able to obtain from the remnants of the Mindvoice ship that crashed in Coven space. Only after Veldruk was taken out and the Kavalians attacked did she release the information that allowed them to refine their process in such a way. And only because they needed troops.”

“And what if my men...” Martin spoke softly.

Anja nodded. “Maybe they started to see the Coven for what it really was. The Coven would not have been able to give them memories, no matter how powerful Aikiro is... and if they took the source code as she says, that was before you took command of Team Twelve. But the genomes were all engineered to be superior military tacticians, because that is how Walter made them. That was encoded into their DNA. They would still be advanced soldiers; they would still be the exact same soldiers that you took command of when you first got Team Twelve lover. And if they used the base template as she says then all of them would be able to determine right from wrong.”

“How exactly would Yuri have missed that Red? Let alone Aikiro?” Martin said. “You don’t just suddenly become a vampire. Someone must have turned them. Someone within the insurgency, or Aikiro would have had all of them killed. So it had to have happened after she thought they were all dead.”

Anja nodded. “Or someone made her think they were all dead. She said the templates we destroyed in an explosion.”

“That’s a reach even for me to make Anja.” Martin spoke.

Anja nodded. “Yes... but that is what we need Armetus and Bella to find out. How large is this insurgency group. We already know what they are capable of. And you and I both know lover... more so than anyone else... insurgent groups do not go into a mission knowing they will die. It’s not how they think or operate. At least none that I have ever worked with.”

Martin nodded. “Me either.”

“They want to fight until the end and succeed to see the fruits of their labor come about. We need to discover how large this group is and what resources they do have. That is what we need to find out.” Anja said taking his large hand in hers and beginning to walk towards where Torma and Miath were settled on the cobblestone path.

HOME OF VONIS AND VA'NIMIA WESTERN QUARTER OF OLD SPARTA

"...so you don't trust her?" Va'nimia asked as she settled into the chair next to Vonis after setting the two mugs of coffee in front of Aricia and Isabella.

Isabella and Aricia both laughed softly at that. "Not in the least." Bella answered.

"We know she is here for some other reason than for us to train their dragons." Aricia spoke. "We don't know what that is just yet... but that is why we are hoping you can help us." She settled her azure eyes on Vonis who had so far sat quietly.

"Anja and Martin just advised us that there may be much more to this insurgent group that conducted the attack on *MJOLNIR'S HAND* than we first thought. They just left a meeting with Aikiro." Isabella said.

Vonis chuckled then. "Sister... that ability you have there... you and the others... it's down right frightening at times."

Isabella looked at him with a small smile. "You have it as well Vonis." She spoke.

Vonis shook his head. "Oh no... not like Martin, you and the others." He said. "And to be honest... I don't want it either." He leaned forward. "Tell me this... is there any danger to Va'nimia or our children from my mother?"

"Has she contacted you for a meeting?" Aricia asked quickly.

Vonis nodded. "Yes. I haven't responded to her yet... but I am not fool enough to think she does not still wish to do me harm. That I can handle... but I will not put Va'nimia or our children at risk. I have taught her how to defend herself quite well through the years and our older children can defend themselves, but I will not risk harm to them."

"Vonis... you know we would never do that." Isabella spoke.

"I was not referring to you sister." Vonis spoke warmly. "My mother is devious and exceptionally smart. It would be just like her to draw me into some meeting with her under the pretense of reconciliation while she targets my family. I do not care for myself... only them."

"Well I care for you fool!" Va'nimia barked shoving him in the shoulder. "Our children care!"

Isabella nodded with a smile at Va'nimia's actions. "Yes we do. We have grown close over these last twenty plus years have we not brother?"

Vonis met her eyes. "Closer than I would have ever thought." He replied immediately. "And that makes me happier than I can ever describe to you."

"Do you trust me?" Isabella asked.

"That is not something that you will ever have a need to question sister." Vonis answered instantly.

"This is not something Martin will order you to do because of who Aikiro is. He wants you to help us discover everything we can about this insurgent group." Isabella spoke. "It would entail you having to reopen the door into your past before we came together on Elear. Martin will not..."

"Stop." Vonis spoke. "I am a member of the Union military. A Colonel of Intelligence. The moment that I accepted I was different than my father and sister and I allowed my love for Va'nimia to come out, my life truly began. I will allow no harm to come to this Union if it is within my power to stop Bella... you know that. Without you... without Va'nimia and our children, I would be nothing. Of course I will help in any way I can."

"Aikiro has a *Durcumusaan* detachment wherever she goes now." Aricia spoke. "It is for her protection and ours. We do not need her killed by insurgents or Kavalians while here on Earth. Martin has told you in the past Vonis... you are part of our family. You, Va'nimia and your children. We have... we have established a place of sanctuary for our own children if something were to go terribly wrong. You are aware of this sanctuary?"

Vonis nodded. "Yes."

"Then I want you to make arrangements for your younger children to be taken there should anything happen." Aricia spoke plainly. "Martin does not trust the High Coven or their intentions, but like our son he is also a Talon Guardian and to dismiss the lives of forty-two dragons is not something he can do."

Vonis nodded. “Understandably so.” He spoke. “And in his position I would do the same thing.” He looked at Va’nimia. “*Ussta ‘ranndi?*” (My wife)

“What? You expect me to just dismiss this?” Va’nimia asked. “You are my husband Vonis. My life. I am not defenseless anymore husband. You have seen to that. We must do this... for the good of us all.”

Vonis smiled at her and turned back to Isabella and Aricia. “We should meet with Armetus.” He said. “I will need access to substantial funds and secure communications that are not monitored by our forces. I don’t know if any of my contacts will still be active... but that is the first step in finding out about these insurgents. They are obviously based at least in part in The Wilds... and that is where we must begin.”

Isabella smiled. “You will have what you need.” She said. “Armetus is already putting it together.”

Vonis smiled. “You knew I would help you didn’t you?”

Isabella shrugged. “You are my brother... and both of us have found something here that we would die to protect and keep from harm. I trusted my instincts in that regard.”

Vonis chuckled. “We will need to work outside normal channels. Martin will not be opposed to this will he?”

Aricia and Isabella laughed as they got to their feet. “Come with me brother... I think it’s time we showed you just how *opposed* to these things Martin really is.” Isabella spoke.

THE WILDS

MIRUB 5

DUUL’S SOM’S LAR BASE

“...gave no such order!” The cloaked figure hissed angrily from within the transmission. His voice was electronically altered to avoid discovery if the transmission was intercepted, but the transmitters and receivers they were using had been stolen from a facility using salvaged parts of the secret Mindvoice ship to build new equipment for the High Coven. Parts of that new equipment were these new communications devices which were untraceable and impossible to decipher. At least so far.

The four men and two women stood around the small table of their command center buried deeply in the mountain. The *Duul’s som’s Lar* or Freedom’s Call Insurgent group was the largest by far of all the groups that had sprouted up in the last two decades while fighting the Kavalians. They were also the most well funded and well equipped of all the insurgent groups for many different reasons. Almost all of their members were former High Coven troops and clones that had decided how they were fighting the war now would ultimately bring about the destruction of the High Coven. They were of the mind that they could not adhere to the same barbaric tactics and measures the High Coven had in the past, and that they had to change how they dealt with others and actively seek help outside the High Coven ranks. It was the reason their leader had decided to secretly extend the hand of friendship to several governments out of High Coven territory, and why they now received aide and supplies from half a dozen sources that insured they were able to do the things they were able to do.

They were a rag tagged ensemble of fighters and former politicians before their current leader had gathered them all together into a cohesive force. They had been successful for the last ten years now, conducting raids of their own against the Kavalians as well as the High Coven fools in power. That their leader was in such a position as they were and able to supply them with information and other resources as well as protect their identities was a major coup for them. They were patient... had always been patient... for they knew ultimately they would either succeed in their goals or die in the process of trying.

“It was decided by the sector commanders General.” The senior man spoke quickly. “They deemed it too good an opportunity to pass up. You yourself gave them this authority.”

“And they succeeded in doing nothing but getting twelve of our finest trained operatives killed!” The figure snarled. “I gave them the authority to conduct operations that were deemed efficient and low risk. They took over a Union transport Iasen! Not a Coven transport... a Union transport! Then they killed and raped the Kavalian females on that transport!” He growled. “I care not that they beat the male to death... but they could not even do that correctly for he still lives. And when have I ever authorized the killing of innocents! These females may have been Kavalians... but they were not soldiers! We are not animals... and I expect you to pass

along to our forces that if an incident like this ever happens again... I will personally slit their throats like the dogs they are!”

“I will do as you say General.” Iasen replied quickly.

“We have come too far my friends to begin acting like the Empress and her forces.” He spoke. “Our actions in hijacking the Union transport and attacking the Kavalians on the flagship of King Leonidas have succeeded in doing only one thing. Now it will make him turn loose his *Krypteria* Intelligence forces in an attempt to find us.”

“Are you sure General?” The female officer asked with wide eyes.

The cloaked figure nodded. “He did not openly say this but all of you are aware of how he will react. We talked of this when we decided to make a safe house within Lycavorian Union territory. The leader of this *Krypteria* is the foremost covert operative in their history. He has people everywhere... they watch almost everything. It is why Leonidas has not entered the war before now. He has been able to keep track of what was happening and make decisions based on that. Inform the safehouse on Beklan that they are to be ready to move at a moment’s notice. If they detect even the slightest sign of surveillance they are to desert the safehouse with all speed. We can not allow them to be captured by the *Krypteria*. Not until we are ready to present ourselves to Leonidas and openly request his aide.”

“That is still our goal isn’t it General?” One of the men asked.

The figure nodded. “Yes. I have not altered my goal in regards to that. Especially not after what I have seen these last days. The purpose for the Empress going to Earth is not simply to have Leonidas train their dragons. She is trying to drag the Union into the war but there is something driving that... another purpose of which I am still trying to discover.”

“Are you secure General?” Iasen asked quickly.

The cloaked figure nodded quickly. “My location now is quite secure.” He answered. “We do not know if the Union can detect these transmissions but with the advancements I have seen it is possible so our contacts must be brief.”

“Orders sir?”

“Continue with our operations against the High Coven and the one to find the Immortal Cha’talla and his people.” The figure spoke. “Suspend all operations against the Kavalians until further notice. If anyone attacks the Kavalians again within Union space I want to be sure I can tell King Leonidas it was not our doing. We must not draw attention to ourselves my friends. We have come too far in this to begin to do stupid things and fail as I said earlier.”

“I will issue the orders immediately General.” Iasen spoke.

“Iasen... begin using our contacts to filter the word out to our people throughout the High Coven. Standard practices and security. Let’s not alter how we have done things until now... it may be noticed.” The figure spoke. “We will succeed my friends... but we must maintain the patience we have had these last years or all will be for naught. Are we agreed?” The men and women around the table nodded their heads. “I will contact you in one week’s time at this same hour. Move silently my friends.”

“And you General.” Iasen spoke.

SPARTA

DIPLOMATIC ENVOY APARTMENTS

“...are fine father.” Jalersi stated once more.

“Forgive me daughter... I did not think that the Coven animals would attempt such a thing within Union space.” Keleru stated the anger and worry plainly evident on his face and in his voice.

Jalersi shook her head. “Neither did Pusintin father. However Athani and I are unhurt... and Pian is recovering well. Why did you send him father?”

“I knew Qurot would be more trouble than I intended once we talked last.” Keleru replied. “I felt Pian would be able to defer to you more easily and you could send Qurot back.”

“I can handle Qurot father. Pian coming here was not needed.” Jalersi spoke. “This Queen For’mya has informed me that if you wish to send a six member security detail here to Earth that would be acceptable to King Leonidas. No more than six... and make sure they understand it is my orders they will follow.”

Keleru nodded. “I will have them leaving from Qurot’s ship within the hour.” He stated. “The Union has had a transport standing by nearby in case passengers needed to be ferried. You can not send him back now daughter... you know this.”

Jalersi nodded. “It would be a mark against his honor... yes I know.” She stated with no small amount of disgust in her voice. “I can handle Qurot as I said... as long as I know I have your backing.”

“That is without question Jalersi... you know that.” Keleru answered. “Your husband is coming from his office... he will be here in a few moments.”

Jalersi shook her head. “We are meeting for preliminary talks soon. Tell him I will contact him this evening at our home. Give him my love and devotion father.”

Keleru nodded. “I will. Now tell me of the attackers.”

“They were vampires... but the Lycavorians do not believe they are members of the High Coven.” Jalersi spoke. “I am inclined to believe them as well.”

“What do you mean?”

“I have been targeted before father. You and my mate as well.” Jalersi spoke. “Those attacks were conducted by soldiers. Cloned vampire troops as part of a mission. When they saw they could not complete their mission they withdrew. The ones who attacked us on Leonidas’s ship knew the moment they exited the transport they were going to die. Yet still they came after us. After the elven Queen ordered us removed from the landing bay, they went after Athani even protected as she was by the Prince’s dragon.”

Keleru’s eyes went wide. “What?”

Jalersi nodded. “Prince Resumar’s dragon protected her during the attack.” She spoke. “When we allowed back into the landing bay after the attack, she was sitting on this dragon’s back with no fear in her whatsoever. I was... I was flabbergasted to say the least.”

“She... she showed no sign of being afraid of this beast?” Keleru asked.

Jalersi shook her head. “None father.”

“How can that be?” He spoke leaning forward. “Even after all the training we have been through to silence this fear of those beasts in our people we have not been successful.”

“Well... apparently it was successful for Athani.” Jalersi spoke.

“Have you questioned her about it?” Keleru asked.

Jalersi shook her head slowly. “She is... she is not speaking to me father. Qurot let it slip, on purpose no doubt, that she was to be his after this mission. This happened as we were enroute to meet the Lycavorian Envoy ship. When she confronted me about it after he had left I told her the truth. She was... she was incensed to say the least. She has not spoken ten words to me since if it was not necessary.”

“Damn Qurot!” Keleru barked as he came to his feet. “That fool is becoming more of a problem than an asset!”

“On that much we agree.” Jalersi spoke. “Athani knows our ways father. She may be angry now... but she will come to accept them as all of us have. She is proud and independent just as you have let us become... but she is also Kavalian. In the end she will do what she must.”

“This transmission is secure yes?” Keleru spoke. “The Lycavorians aren’t listening?”

Jalersi shook her head. “I had Karun check the signal with our instruments.” She replied. “We are staying at a Diplomatic Envoy Apartment Complex. There are several other parties here, and they know they can not tap our communications without causing a major incident.”

“The Coven?” Keleru asked.

“They occupy a similar facility on the other side of Sparta.” Jalersi answered. “I asked Prime Minister Deia why they are proceeding with this Cease Fire signing after the events on the King’s ship and she gave a standard politician answer. They have been open about their presence and in many ways that could mean one of two things.”

“Yes... I am aware of that political move. I’m listening daughter... what are you feelings telling you?” Keleru asked.

Jalersi shook her head. "That is hard to say father. At least right now. We are meeting with the Prime Minister again, and then having dinner with Queen For'mya. I will be able to give you more of a sense after those two meetings."

"What do your instincts tell you daughter?" Keleru asked.

"My instincts tell me the Lycavorians know why we are here." Jalersi spoke. "They are not fooled by our trade delegation in the least. However... from what I have heard and seen so far, I believe the High Coven is here to insure Leonidas does not enter into this war on our side. Just as we do not want him to enter the war on the side of the Coven. Father I suggest we begin a new file on the Lycavorians and use what we discover now as a basis. It seems that much of what we had originally thought is not turning out to be true."

Keleru nodded. "I will order this done immediately." He answered. "Will they allow an embassy Jalersi?" Keleru asked quickly.

Jalersi nodded. "Surprisingly I believe they will. If nothing else... it provides them a window into the KFI that they do not have right now."

"Indeed." Keleru said. "Something I am still hesitant to give them." He spoke. "Pusintin still works to discover where they have taken their dragons. He believes they have moved them to one of three planets near Usu Ozeib 7. If it is possible while you are there daughter, discover what you are able about these beasts. Anything at all will be more than we have right now."

Jalersi nodded. "I will do my best father."

"Talk to your sister Jalersi." Keleru spoke. "Find out why she does not fear these beasts. There must be a reason for it. And if there is... we can pull her off the planet and bring her home to find out what that is."

"The bodies of the females that were killed father?" Jalersi asked. "I am certain the Queen or Prime Minister will question me about it."

Keleru nodded. "They were marked from the moment they left with Pian Jalersi... you know this. They were part of the group unable to bear children. Their Prides will not want their remains back. Have the Union do with them what they will."

Jalersi stared at the image of her father for a long moment before nodding. "As you wish." She spoke finally. She heard the soft beep indicating someone at the door of her apartment. "They are here to escort us to the meeting father. I will contact you later this evening when I have spoken with Pusintin as well."

"You are within the Lion's Den now Jalersi." Keleru spoke softly. "Be alert to everything around you daughter."

Jalersi nodded. "I will be father."

"I will speak with you later." Keleru spoke.

Jalersi watched him reach down and touch the controls on his end and his image faded from the holo disc in the floor. She sat back on the couch for a moment, her mind racing until the insistent buzzing of the door chime made her rise to her feet. She crossed the semi large room to the door and touched the panel. The door slid open to reveal the face of the half elf Ardis.

"The Prime Minister asked that I escort you to the Senate Arboretum Lady Jalersi." Ardis spoke with a small smile. "The initial talks will be held there."

Jalersi nodded. "Just one moment." She said.

Ardis bowed her head slightly. "Of course." Jalersi turned to walk back to the couch to gather her data pads as Ardis stepped into the apartment. "Do you find your quarters to your liking ma'am?" She asked.

Jalersi turned as she was putting the pads into a metal case. "They are very nice." She answered. "So you are the Prime Minister's bodyguard Ardis?"

"That is part of my duty yes." She answered with a smile.

"Do all negotiations take place here in Sparta?" Jalersi asked.

"When the Royal family begins their six month exodus here to Earth, yes." She answered gently. "When they are not here, all talks take place in Eden City under Prime Minister of Earth Selene or my Drow mother."

Jalersi looked at her quickly. "They will..."

Ardis shook her head. "No Lady Jalersi... neither of them will be present. Considering you are at war with the High Coven, having vampires take part in Trade talks with the KFI representatives would be very disrespectful, regardless whether we call them friend and family."

"You seem to be very observant Ardis." Jalersi spoke.

Ardis's violet and sapphire eyes glittered in reply. "I noticed the same of your son Lady Jalersi." She spoke softly. "He does not speak much... but his eyes take in everything around him."

Jalersi smiled at her. "You *are* very observant." She stated. Jalersi nodded her head then. "Karun speaks when he feels it is necessary for his voice to be heard." She answered. "Will you be guarding us the entire time we are here?"

Ardis shook her head quickly. "Oh no." She replied. "My duties with the Prime Minister take up the majority of my time. I am only escorting you today until you have a feel for the city and routes to the different locations. Everything is very much within walking distance and there are many vendor stands between here and the Arboretum that sell food and drink."

Jalersi looked at her. "You... you will not surround us with security?" She asked clearly surprised.

"I was under the impression you did not want that Lady Jalersi." Ardis spoke. "At least until your own security forces arrived. Queen For'mya and the Prime Minister have pulled all security from your delegation. They agreed it would warrant too much attention and perhaps give you the impression we were attempting to limit your movements. Which we are not. You will find the people of Sparta to be very welcoming to those who are welcoming themselves, just as you will find in any other city across Earth. I'm sure they will cover it with you in more detail but this is the old part of the city and it holds much history for those who are interested. There really is no need to move to other quadrants of the city... but if it is a tour of something that you wish... we can certainly accommodate your request."

Jalersi met her eyes briefly and then nodded. "Very well... I believe I am ready."

Ardis nodded and motioned Jalersi out of the door into the hallway. "It is only a short walk and I can show you some points of interest to those in your delegation while we travel over to the Arboretum."

HADARIA CAPITAL CITY OF UNOPA PALACE OF THE ROYAL FAMILY

Sivana stood on the balcony overlooking the eastern portion of Unopa watching as the sun began to rise. She inhaled deeply, allowing her wolf senses to absorb all that they could of the scents and sounds of the surrounding area. Anja had been gone a little more than a week now and already she missed her twin sister.

Sivana had changed quite a bit in the last twenty-five years... all of it for the better as far as she was concerned.

She was slightly taller than Anja's five foot three frame, but they had essentially the same build in the lean suppleness of their bodies and the size of their breasts. She and Anja joked often about Martin and Belen and how much attention they paid to their large breasts. They loved needling their mates and husbands about that whenever they were together, but they secretly knew they adored the attention. It was twenty-five years ago when her sister discovered her playing the role of pirate and smuggler. Sivana's life up until then had been nothing short of misery and pain and she had accepted that it would be like that for the rest of her days. She firmly believed that she would be killed by some other mercenary and never be able to live out a full life. When Anja and Belen had entered her fractured soul all those years ago, they had not only opened a door for her into a new world, they had smashed it right off the hinges.

Sivana discovered she was not only just a Hadarian... but a Princess of the Royal House of Hadaria. Anja was Queen only because she had been born twenty-seven minutes sooner than her, but Anja had made it known enough times through the years that simply because she was Queen in no way took away from the authority and power Sivana wielded. Sivana had quickly discovered she and her sister were so much alike it was frightening. They both hated the pompous and sometimes arrogant attitude of the Elder Healers with the exception of Eurin. Over the years the twin sisters had exploded on several occasions, and whether it was Anja or Sivana, that explosion did not end well for whoever was on the receiving end. Sivana was blunt and straightforward just like her sister, and that is how she wanted to be addressed. She abhorred any type of royal pampering, some would say even more than Anja did. While they were twins, and therefore almost identical in how they thought, they were still very different and that is why they loved each other so.

Sivana was more patient; Anja more restless. Anja was the more experienced Healer, while Sivana had turned out to be the more reflective one. Once she had Ascended, Sivana became nearly as powerful as Anja in being able to draw from life all around her to power her healing abilities. Both of them could go for far longer than even the next most powerful Healer between Ascensions and still be able to use their power. While Anja had kept her long Persian red hair, Sivana had darkened her hair to almost black in color, though both of them still had incredible jade green colored eyes. It was something Sivana did not discover until she had Ascended, but she and Anja shared the same fascinating eye color, which set them apart from all of their most experienced Healers. She had fought in the Evolli War alongside her sister without question, another fact that had the Elder Healers screaming in protest. What made them inseparable to all who knew them well was their unwavering love and devotion to their mates and the fact that they were both part wolf now.

In Belen Sivana had found something she had never once imagined she would have. A rock of support and unquestioning love from a man. Belen worshiped the ground she walked upon and Sivana felt the very same thing for her handsome Spartan mate. She and Anja had each given their mates three beautiful children. Two daughters and a son. And if she and Anja had anything to say about it, more would follow in the years to come since they would live far longer than the normal Hadarian. Her duties as Queen of the Union required Anja to be away from Hadaria far more than the Elder Healers liked and Sivana had agreed to remain on Hadaria for three additional months of every year to offset this issue. Sivana knew they hated that the only remaining members of their Royal family much preferred to stay in Sparta on Earth. Sivana embraced completely the culture and lifestyle of Sparta and quickly found she was a hit among Belen's mother and even his stern father Atropos. The day Belen had bitten her and made Sivana his was a day she blessed every morning she woke.

Sivana's eyes cut downward and she sighed heavily as she saw the figure of her Aunt Umbra leaving the Lifter and heading for the front of the palace with another older female. She completely ignored the *Durcunusaan* soldiers that stood by the front entrance into the palace as she always did. These last years had seen her Aunt become increasingly hostile towards the Spartans who guarded Sivana and Anja even when they were here on Hadaria. Like her sister, Sivana did not care for her Aunt's superior attitude or the pompous nature about her. Their grandfather had told them once it had always been points of contention between their father and his sister that Umbra let her status as royalty go to her head. Apparently their father's distaste for that had carried over to his twin daughters as well. Sivana shook her head as she turned to go back into their bed chambers, while she sipped the steaming mug of Hadarian tea. She drew the thin robe tighter around her lithe body, knowing that it would incense her Aunt knowing Sivana never wore undergarments under the robe. Like her sister once more, Sivana detested the ornate robes and clothing of traditional Hadarian females. She and Anja were both wolf now and they needed the freedom less formal clothing brought, as well as the fact that neither of them were in the least bit shy about their bodies. Perhaps it came from being part Lycavorian, but Sivana adored the sensations of feeling her mate's powerful Alpha male aura sweep over her, and the way it ignited her body, and she never failed to touch him as often as she could just to feel his skin upon hers.

Sivana made her way out of their bed chambers and headed down the wide landing to the stairs. She saw one of the junior Hadarian Healers scampering off to get her Aunt something to drink and Sivana shook her head again. She hated that the Elder Healers insisted on several of the junior Healers acting as servants to their Queen and Princess, but it was something not even Eurin could change and they had to accept it. Those female Healers that worked in the palace knew the situation however, and while they acted one way when there were guests present, they quickly set that aside when it was just Sivana or her sister in the palace. They would do what needed to be done to insure Umbra left as quickly as possible.

Her Aunt came into the main foyer as Sivana reached the bottom of the stairwell and Umbra's eyes fell upon Sivana with obvious disdain for her choice of clothes. It passed quickly but Sivana smiled inwardly knowing her robe had provoked the desired action. More so than her sister, Sivana liked to irritate her Aunt.

"Aunt Umbra." Sivana spoke warmly as she stepped up to her and kissed her cheek quickly knowing Umbra did not care for open shows of affection. It was another reason why both Anja and Sivana never failed to kiss their mates as often as possible in front of her. "This is a surprise... what can I do for you this beautiful morning?"

"Is... where is you...?" Umbra stammered stopping herself twice from calling him what she truly wanted to call him.

Sivana chuckled. "His name is Belen Aunt Umbra. You know that full well, you just can't bring yourself to say his name."

"Is he here?" Umbra snapped softly.

Sivana looked at her evenly. "If he was I would not be down here greeting you." She snapped right back. "I would still be wrapped in his arms. Now why are you here Aunt Umbra? It is still very early and Siara is not even awake yet."

"I have not come to see my Niece." Umbra spoke. "I have come to see you on a very important matter."

Sivana smiled. "Ah... another important matter." She spoke.

Umbra's dark green eyes held no humor in them as she motioned to the woman next to her. "This is the Mage Warrior Seanna's mother Pcillany." Umbra spoke. "She..."

"Yes... I know who she is." Sivana answered. "We met at Seanna's Final Ascension."

"She has some information for us." Umbra said quickly. "Information that you need to hear. About your sister."

Sivana's eyes narrowed slightly and she tilted her head slightly as she looked at her Aunt. She exhaled heavily and motioned to the sitting room. "Very well." She spoke.

Umbra looked at her. "Are you not going to change into more appropriate clothes?" She demanded.

Sivana smiled and shook her head. "What is wrong with what I am wearing? I woke only a short time ago and if this is so important that you come here to Belen and mine's home at this early hour..."

"This is not that man's home." Umbra snapped.

"Aunt Umbra... this is as much Belen's home as it is mine." Sivana spoke. "It has been twenty-five years since my mate turned me... twenty-four since we conducted the traditional Hadarian marriage rights. We have three beautiful children and want to have more. We are not going to separate no matter how much you would love for that to happen. Belen is a Lycavorian and a Spartan. We mate for life."

"You are not...!" Umbra began to hiss.

Sivana held up her hand stopping Umbra's words. "Don't go there Aunt Umbra." She spoke quickly. "The moment Belen turned me I became Lycavorian as well as Hadarian. It doesn't matter to you in the least that he saved my life does it?"

"Your life would not have been in danger if your sister had not taken you on that fool mission to begin with!" Umbra snapped. "The moment we discovered you were still alive you should have been brought here where it was safe!"

"I was safer with my sister." Sivana stated flatly. "She was who I needed... not to be exposed to everything here."

Umbra dismissed that with a slight wave. "Belen... he used your confusion to... to possess you at a time when you were weak of mind and unable to think clearly."

Sivana smiled and giggled at that. "Well... I wasn't thinking clearly, that much is true. I was having far too much fun enjoying what he was doing and making me feel to think clearly." Umbra opened her mouth to retort but Sivana stopped her. "Please... let's go into the sitting room." She stated firmly. "If I am going to be lectured I would much rather be sitting down and be bored than standing up."

Sivana headed into the large room with several couches and chairs arranged in a half circle. The sun was beginning to shine through the large windows brightly and Sivana settled to one of the large couches, pulling her legs underneath her. She was going to miss her morning run today that was for sure. She and Belen would always go running in the morning, and most times they would take Siara with them since she was at an age now where she was fascinated with her wolf form. It was one of the things Sivana thoroughly loved now that she was wolf. It was something that Anja had showed her, and like her twin she had come to love running in her wolf form. She and Belen's mother Lilika would go running through the mountains of Sparta every morning when they were on Earth.

"You should take more care about what you wear openly Sivana." Umbra spoke as she sat down on the couch opposite her. "There are soldiers all around and Siara is too young to be... to be exposed to such things."

Sivana looked at her oddly. "What things are you referring to Aunt Umbra?" She asked.

"You know full well what I am saying." Umbra said. "You and Anja insist on dismissing the customs of our people in your manner of dress and how you conduct yourselves. Those men could... they will see you dressed as you are and they might... and they might take it as an invitation to approach you inappropriately."

Sivana couldn't contain her laughter at that and she shook her head. "Oh Aunt Umbra... that is outrageous! Do these things actually occupy your mind daily?"

"Do not dismiss what I tell you!" Umbra barked. "I am your Aunt and your elder!"

Sivana glared at her. "The Durcunusaan soldiers that protect me and my children do so willingly!" She snapped. "Do not disrespect them by alleging they would do something like what you are suggesting! I am Belen's mate... his scent is all over me Aunt Umbra... and whether you wish to believe it or not, Lycavorians hold their mates more sacred than anything. Especially those who were raised in Sparta as Belen was. The only men I need to worry about doing something as foolish as what you are implying Aunt Umbra are Hadarian men. What you are suggesting is an insult not only to me... but to Belen... and I will not allow you to do that." She leaned forward on the couch. "Now why don't you tell me what it is you are here for before I lose my temper and end this little gathering just as unexpectedly as it began."

Umbra glared at Sivana for a long moment before motioning to Pcillany next to her on the couch. "Seanna's mother was kind enough to come to me first and inform me of what she is going to do before it became public knowledge."

"And what is that?" Sivana spoke harshly.

The woman with graying dark hair and light green eyes met Sivana's gaze evenly. "I intend to seek an audience before the Hadarian Elder Healers and ask that they begin an internal investigation into the many circumstances surrounding Seanna's death."

"What circumstances?" Sivana asked. "She was seriously injured during an Evolli attack upon one of our medical trauma units on Folta. Her wounds were too grievous and numerous to be healed. Anja tried for over an hour when she got to her and it was no use."

"I... I believe that Queen Anja did not do enough to save her." Pcillany spoke. "I believe she let her die because of the issues that had come up between them. I believe she had a hand in Seanna's death."

Sivana's eyes grew wide at this and she stared at the woman. "You... you are serious?" She gasped finally.

"If my daughter Seanna was of the right frame of mind and not corrupted by Queen Anja and her considerable influence, I believe she would be alive today." Pcillany spoke.

"Corrupted by Anja's influence?" Sivana said. "What exactly does that nonsense mean?"

"It is not nonsense!" Umbra spoke.

Sivana looked at her. "You are going along with this drivel!" Sivana barked as she came to her feet.

"Princess... I understand she is your sister and our Queen." Pcillany spoke. "However... from the moment Queen Anja came into her life Seanna changed. She... she entered into what I believe was an unhealthy relationship with Queen Anja and through the years that took a toll on her mentally. Rinard agrees with me."

"Rinard!" Sivana spat. "Rinard has hated Anja ever since she told him to go *nubous* himself because she would not sleep with him and Seanna!"

"Sivana!" Umbra snapped her eyes wide. "How dare you!"

"Don't 'how dare I'!" Sivana spat. "The man is a pig! He wanted Anja to sleep with him and Seanna and you know that Aunt Umbra! You are going to sit there and actually agree with what she is saying? That Anja somehow let Seanna die on purpose?"

"The relationship she shares with the other Queens is not normal." Pcillany spoke quickly. "She introduced my daughter into this lifestyle and corrupted her. She..."

"Never forced Seanna to do anything she did not want to do!" Sivana snarled. "The relationship my sister shares with the other Queens is one of love and devotion. Do not attempt to make it something sinister. Anja loved Seanna... and part of her will always love Seanna. That does not mean Seanna had the right to demand Anja sleep with her and her sick boyfriend so Rinard could strut around saying he got to fuck his Queen! Anja never forced Seanna into anything... and she certainly never forced her to join her and Martin and the others in their bed!"

"Yet Seanna was willing to do this if Queen Anja asked her too." Pcillany said.

"What kind of sick logic is that?" Sivana demanded. "Seanna never shared the warmth of their bed for anything other than sleep!" She stabbed her finger at Umbra as she started to reply. "And don't you dare say anything Aunt Umbra. Anja is my twin... my sister... and everything that has happened in her life she has

shared with me either verbally or within Mindvoice! That is what twins do! You have no idea who she is! None! You never tried to learn anything about her because she did not conform to your ridiculous ideals of how a Queen should act! Just as you have never tried to learn anything about me! Seanna died over four years ago and you are going to do this now? You are actually going to support this?"

"I am only doing what I feel is best for our people." Umbra spoke calmly. "I believe the King's influence has altered Anja's perceptions regarding many things. I believe her intimate relationship with the other Queens has corrupted her as well. And in the process... she is also corrupting her children. Retta and Calyb know nothing of their Hadarian culture or heritage and she has made no move to change this. She puts them at risk everyday by allowing them to become bonded with those dragons. I could not intervene with Eliani... but I believe it is my duty as a member of her family to do so with my younger niece and nephew."

Sivana looked at her as if she was insane. "You must be joking!" Sivana said with a small laugh. "You... you don't honestly think you will challenge Martin Leonidas and Anja for their children do you?"

"They are my blood as well!" Umbra barked. "I deserve equal time with them!"

"Are you even listening to how completely stupid you sound!" Sivana snapped. "Martin and Anja are their parents! What gives you any right to see them? I can't honestly believe you are so ignorant and pompous that you would consider this. Supporting this fool attempt to besmirch Anja's name is not something I put past you Umbra... but actually attempting to take Anja's children? Martin's children? Are you truly that vindictive as to try something as completely stupid as that?"

"This has nothing to do with me!" Umbra barked. "I..."

"This has everything to do with you!" Sivana growled as her anger came forth and her eyes changed. Her wolf fangs burst forth and she glared at Umbra. "This is nothing more than you making an attempt at power! You think because you were our father's sister that you are due something more than what you have! I know exactly what this is! And it makes me sick!"

Pcillany came to her feet. "My decision to pursue this was not something that Lady Umbra had any part in." She spoke. "I understand your desire to protect and believe your sister Princess Sivana... but in this case you will find that your support is misguided. I believe you should truly look into this matter yourself before..."

"You should leave now." Sivana spoke sternly.

"We are not finished discussing this." Umbra barked.

"Yes we are." Sivana said.

"I came here to give you the option of supporting us in our endeavors or..." Umbra said.

"Or what?" Sivana almost shouted.

"I will include you in the investigation." Pcillany spoke in reply as she stood up. "As supporting your sister in whatever suspicious circumstances that led to my daughter's death."

Umbra got to her feet now as well. "And I will petition the Hadarian courts to have Siara removed from your care during the time frame of that investigation. She is a member of the Hadarian Royal Family and it is time someone showed her what that meant."

Sivana's smile was not welcoming or comforting in any manner. "Then by all means ladies... proceed with your plans. They will not succeed."

"Sivana you..." Umbra began.

"You are no longer welcome here Aunt Umbra. Remove yourself from these grounds before I have the Durcunusaan do it for you." Sivana growled. "Do not return and make no attempt to see Siara. I can guarantee you will never see Retta and Calyb ever again."

Umbra drew herself up haughtily. "We shall see."

Sivana smiled. "Yes we will." Sivana watched as both women turned and exited the Sitting Room. She took several deep breathes and then turned as one of the junior Healers came rushing into the room.

"Lady Sivana!" She gasped.

"Taelle please open a secure communications channel with my sister in Sparta." Sivana spoke turning to face her.

The young woman nodded. "At once Lady Sivana!" She looked at one of the women she hoped to emulate one day. "Milady... do you wish me to activate Lady Anja's alternate plans?"

Sivana shook her head. “No... not yet Taelle.” She said. “Let us see how this plays out first. Insure however that my Aunt comes nowhere near Siara as she goes about her schooling and activities. You have my authorization to remind her painfully if need be that she is not to come near my daughter.”

Taelle nodded. “As you order Lady Sivana.” She stated. “I will open the channel immediately.”

Sivana watched her exit the Sitting Room quickly and she lifted the mug of tea as her eyes returned to normal and her fangs faded. “What are you doing Umbra?” She asked softly. “What are you doing?”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CENTRAL DISTRICT/SPARTA KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL ANJA LEONIDAS’S OFFICE

“Vana... are you serious?” Anja gasped as she sat in the high backed chair behind her desk.

Anja’s office was on the thirty-second floor of the hospital named in honor of her father and dedicated nine years ago just before the start of the Evolli War. King Yelu had been the most powerful Hadarian Healer to have ever lived, more powerful than even their mother who was widely recognized as the finest Mage Warrior to have existed for centuries. It was a feat unprecedented in the annals of Hadarian history since the females were usually the ones who held this distinction. It was said their parents could go nearly two years without having to Ascend. They were remembered as being both exceptionally compassionate and wise and they were both revered on Hadaria, not only for their passion and wisdom but for their love of each other. There were several monuments erected across the planet in their honor among the many cities there, and over the years Anja and Sivana had been to all of them on numerous occasions. Neither Anja nor Sivana knew it, but many of the Hadarian people saw the King and Queen when they looked at the twin sisters. Anja’s was the more fiery and passionate like their mother, while Sivana carried herself with their father’s almost surreal calm. King Yelu’s legacy now carried on in his twin daughters and it was something Anja and Sivana took very serious. Anja lifted the mug of Aricia’s coffee and sipped it slowly as she stared at her fraternal twin sister’s projection in the holo imager.

The exceptionally clear image of Sivana, clear enough to be mistaken for being in the same room even, nodded as she smiled at Anja’s use of the nickname Eliani had given her as she first learned to speak. Eliani had been unable to form the first part of Sivana’s name and resorted to calling her simply Vana. The name had stuck.

“They left only a few moments ago Anja.” Sivana answered as she moved around the large desk in her own office on Hadaria. “Not exactly the most pleasant of ways to begin your morning I assure you. Thankfully Belen was not here or it would not have been pretty.”

“That is why they have been so cold to me the last few times I have gone to see them.” Anja spoke reflectively in a soft voice. “Pcillany must have been planning to do this for a while now.”

Sivana nodded. “It certainly seems that way.” She spoke. “Rinard is involved as well, though I don’t know to what extent. He is a Lycavorian and he can not request something like this from the Elder Healers.”

“No... but I guarantee he had a say in prodding Pcillany to go forward with this.” Anja answered quickly. “Aunt Umbra’s actions in supporting Pcillany do not surprise me either Vana. She has acted this way since I first returned with Martin. You should have heard her rant when we returned after rescuing Lisisa and she discovered Belen had not only claimed you but turned you as well. Even grandfather could not believe the words she uttered that day.”

“You never told me that sister.” Sivana spoke.

Anja waved her hand. “It wasn’t important.” She replied. “I was not about to let our Aunt or anyone take you from what you had discovered and accepted so freely with Belen. She wanted you in her clutches so that she could warp your view of things and make you think and act how she felt you should be. Something that she was never able to accomplish with me. When I denied her that in regards to you... her dislike of me only grew more.”

“Grandfather has told me it was always an issue between father and her.” Sivana spoke. “Aunt Umbra’s insistence on acting superior to everyone around her simply because she was of royal blood. Like she felt she was owed something more because of who her brother was.”

Anja nodded slowly. “Grandfather said our father hated that about her.” She said in agreement. “And when he took a Mage Warrior as his Queen, Aunt Umbra about had a cow.”

Sivana laughed gently. “I must spend more time around you and my niece sister.” She said. “The two of you can produce such vivid visual descriptions using several different languages. It is quite humorous actually.”

Anja chuckled. “So Martin and the others have told me.” She said. “Does Eurin know about this Vana?”

Sivana shook her head quickly. “I wanted to inform you first.” Sivana spoke. “I have already forbid Aunt Umbra from seeing Siara again under any circumstances. Taelle knows what she is to do if Umbra makes an attempt. She also complained that you allowed Retta and Calyb to bond with dragons and that you have not allowed them to experience their Hadarian culture more. She is also quite upset that you have let Eliani make her own way without her guidance.”

Anja nodded. “That wasn’t me. Eliani made her own decisions about Aunt Umbra when she was ten and decided to conduct her Agoge and not attend The School of the Healers. Not to mention that Eliani almost always brings Nyla with her to Hadaria when she Ascends and makes it a point to show as much affection in public with her as she can. It’s her way of sticking it to Aunt Umbra.”

Sivana chuckled. “Something she does quite well. Sort of like you.”

“Aunt Umbra can piss and holler all day at the Hadarian Elders about that if she wants.” Anja spoke. “They are our children not hers. Martin and I and the others agreed a long time ago that they do not need to be exposed to her pompous idiocy and twisted ideals of what Hadarian royalty... any royalty is supposed to be. And the Elder Healers are not fools enough to grant her any rights she may think or perceive she has to our children Vana. Martin and Belen would make them see the folly in that within hours of discovering what Umbra is doing.”

Sivana nodded. “That is why I recommend we do not tell them just yet Anja.” She spoke. “They are Spartans sister... and neither of them is very subtle about dealing with something that they might perceive as a threat to us or their children.”

Anja chuckled once more. “Subtly to Martin Leonidas is plunging his *Nehtes* through your chest as he tells you that was a very bad idea.”

Sivana laughed as well and nodded her head. “Yes... much like Belen. You have to admit though; it does stir your wolf blood knowing they will act in this way.”

Anja grinned at Sivana’s words. “Sets my blood on fire is more like it!” She stated. “But you’re right... this is not something they need to know about right now. Martin already has too much on his plate as it is with the High Coven and the Kavalians here in Sparta at the same time, not to mention the attack on *MJOLNIR’S HAND*.” Anja looked up at her in the holo image transmission. “Belen is still dealing with the Embassy transition right?”

Sivana nodded. “It should be complete within two weeks... but this is the largest turnover they have conducted in sometime. Everyone is scrambling to keep up with the demands of time and space.”

Anja nodded. “Everyone seems to have a secret agenda and all we want to do is live in peace.”

“I will make some discrete inquiries here in regards to what Pcellany is doing.” Sivana spoke. “I do not know when she planned to go before the Elders, but if she came to me this morning with this information, I would imagine it will be soon. She and Umbra both wanted me to side with them against you Anja. When I refused to do this; that is when Umbra made her veiled threat to petition the Healers to grant her custody of Siara. She apparently thinks neither of us is a very good mother.”

“Ah... *nubous* her and the horse she rode in on!” Anja popped. “I still can’t believe this Rinard fool would go this far Vana.” Anja spoke. “Seanna never slept with Martin or the others. She stayed in our bed at times, but only to sleep. Why would he do all this simply because I told Seanna that I would not allow him to bed both of us together? Is his ego so big as to think he could have somehow stolen me away from Martin?”

“Perhaps it was the way you told him sister.” Sivana spoke with a smile. “I don’t think he appreciated you telling him to go fuck himself with his little dick when he refused to believe what you had told Seanna in regards to his request.”

“Then he shouldn’t have acted like such an ass when he came to our home that day.” Anja hissed out. “He is lucky Martin wasn’t there or we would not be having this discussion because he would be dead.”

Sivana nodded. “True. Perhaps I will remind him of this.”

Anja shook her head. “Don’t bother wasting your time. If he has been pushing Pcillany to go this far, talking with him will only make it worse. Inform Eurin and Zaniai of what took place this morning and allow them to handle it for now. Eurin knows what Rinard tried to do and she doesn’t care for the man. Zaniai has far more contacts within the Elders than Pcillany could ever hope to gain, and he is not particularly fond of Aunt Umbra to begin with.”

“Taelle asked if we should activate the alternate plans you have put in place.” Sivana spoke.

Anja looked at her sister in the holo imager. “Do you feel that is necessary Vana?” She asked.

Sivana shook her head quickly. “No... but I would like your permission to act on your behalf should the need arise.”

“Vana... you never have to ask me that.” Anja spoke. “You know that.”

Sivana nodded with a smile. “Yes I know... but I like hearing you say it. It tells me just how close we really are.”

Anja chuckled. “If we were any closer in how we thought sister we’d be sharing the same body. Something I don’t think our mates would appreciate.”

Sivana laughed heartily now. “No they would not.” She stated. “I will handle things here Anja, have no worries. Now tell me sister... I have read the report Belen received from Atropos before that distasteful business this morning. You believe the High Coven has improved their cloning technology significantly?”

Anja nodded. “Very much so.” She stated. “I was going to contact you later today and have you begin running some tests of the samples I will send you. I don’t want to do them here for security purposes. Most are from the clones who conducted the attack on Martin’s ship, but half a dozen are samples we obtained from the Kavalian females who have undergone biogenic treatments and are now here on Earth as part of this Trade Delegation.”

“And how did you obtain them sister?” Sivana asked with a sly grin. “I doubt very much they would have given them freely given the distrust the Kavalians seem to have of anyone not of their species.”

Anja feigned a stunned and hurt expression. “Sister... are you suggesting I did something unethical by obtaining these samples through deceit? Even I would never stoop so low as to use the hidden bio scanners on the *MENKLA* transport?”

Sivana grinned in the transmission. “No, of course not sister. I would never suggest you would resort to something so sneaky and devious. That is not in your nature.”

“I should think not!” Anja declared with a smile. “Run the standard tests Vana and then anything else you can think of that might be useful.”

Sivana nodded. “I will see to it.” She said. “I will contact you when I have the results. Sometime tomorrow I would think.”

“Give Siara a hug and a kiss for me. And tell her I still owe her a ride on Miath.” Anja spoke.

“Be safe sister.” Sivana spoke.

Anja nodded. “And you Vana.”

The transmission ended and Anja sat back in her chair slowly bringing the mug to her lips. She had smelled him easily when he had come silently into the room minutes before but remaining in the shadows and staying quiet. The one man she trusted with everything outside of Martin Leonidas.

“You don’t approve?” She asked softly.

Atropos stepped into the light of her office and moved to the chair in front of her desk where he settled his bulk. He had been Anja’s *Durcunusaan* Captain since the day she became Queen and he would willingly throw his life away for the diminutive Persian haired woman across from him. She had made him a part of her life without question. She had allowed his son to love her sister shamelessly, and she was the High Guardian to both of his daughters, one of whom was turning out to be an exceptional doctor.

“You should have let me kill him long ago for doing what he did Anja. I would have been well within my rights as your Captain and you know this.” Atropos spoke using her first name as he always did when they were alone.

Anja bobbed her head back and forth. "Perhaps." She said. "We don't know if that would have prevented this issue we seem to have now Atropos. Rinard is not the one driving my Aunt to do what she is doing. I can't believe she is actually going to petition the Elder Healers to take our children from us. Who in their right mind would go after the Spartan children of the King? That is her own greed and grasping for power she does not deserve clouding her judgment."

Atropos nodded. "True." He spoke. "But Seanna's mother would not have the fortitude to do this without someone pushing her to do it and feeding her lies. And that could only be that fool Rinard." Atropos said thoughtfully. "Pcillany cared for you when you and Seanna were together, and now after so many years to have turned against you in such a way? That tells me outside influence is involved... and it comes from this Spartan Rinard."

"There is more to him than he wants us to know Atropos." Anja spoke softly. "I can not believe he would go to these lengths in an attempt to hurt me just because I would not sleep with him. If he is behind this... and I believe he is..." She continued quickly and lifting her hand seeing Atropos about to speak. "There is something else going on... something else driving this and I want to know what it is."

"What do you want me to do?" Atropos asked.

"Speak with General Vengal." Anja said getting to her feet. "Find out from him why he was transferred out of the *Durcunusaan* when we returned from Lycavore. There had to be a reason and I want to know what it is. I want to know what he has been doing all these years as well. Especially since Seanna's death. I want to know who he has seen... who he has spoken with... everything. Targeting me is one thing... but bringing my children and Vana's children into this was not the most intelligent thing for him to do."

Atropos stood up as well and stepped closer to the Queen he had served for a quarter century. "Targeting you is not exactly the sign of someone in their right mind either. You are far from being an easy target."

Anja nodded. "There is that to consider as well."

"You do realize Aricia has her own small investigation ongoing of this Rinard and what he is all about. Should I speak with her?"

Anja smiled. "God I love your sister Atropos." Anja said. "She is almost as possessive of us as Martin is."

Atropos nodded. "She was born a Spartan woman and will always be a Spartan woman no matter if we are wolf. She loves without conditions or regrets Anja, and like Martin she will protect those she loves."

Anja nodded. "I know. Speak with her first. Find out who she has poking around and then coordinate your efforts. I will talk with her and the others tonight about this."

"Limitations Anja?" He asked.

Anja shook her head. "Not in this case Atropos." She replied quickly. "Allow Vengal to know what is happening and why you want these answers... but no one else. Not yet. And most especially not Martin."

Atropos nodded. "Yes... the King would not take kindly to this bit of information. In fact I believe he would take it very personal."

Anja shook her head. "Yes he would." She said. "And we need to find out what is driving this Atropos. I love him with all that I am... but sometimes Martin can be rather predictable in his actions when it concerns us or his children just as Sivana said."

Atropos chuckled softly. "I can think of many words to describe the King." He said with a smile. "Predictable is not one of them. You have been with him Anja... you have loved him for so long... that you, Aricia and the others are beginning to think you know what he will do in almost every instance."

"Well... he does have his moments I suppose." Anja spoke turning to face him with a grin. "And we are his mates Atropos... we *should* know him."

Atropos nodded. "Yes... but I have discovered through the years that trying to predict what he will do is often times foolhardy." Atropos said. "No one predicted he would take only five thousand Spartans and a hundred dragons and destroy five times their number of these Kavalians on Beklan Nine. The Evolli did not predict he and Andro would never leave their dead comrades on Alba Tau and they lost nearly five thousand of their men in discovering this. They did not predict he would order the shattering of the crust of their homeworld's closest moon to destabilize the sector and make them unable to use the LSD drives for at least two decades." Atropos reached up and rested his hand on Anja's shoulder. "There are times my Queen when you and the others do not give the King enough credit for what swirls within his mind. He may act uneducated and

unlearned, but that is only an act and you know that. When you are in his arms again look into his eyes Anja... look past where you normally go and you will see what I am talking about. And then you will see that same thing in the eyes of the son and daughter my beloved sister and you bore him.”

Anja stared at her Captain for a long moment and then reached up to place her hand on his broad chest. “Thank you Atropos.” She said softly. “I think I will take you up on your advice.”

Atropos nodded. “I will go and see General Vengal.” He spoke. “I will advise you of what I discover as soon as I am able.”

Anja nodded as he turned and left her office. She stood there for a long silent moment, turning to gaze out her window at the streets of Sparta far below as she contemplated Atropos’s words to her. She had known Martin longer than anyone but Danny, but had she and her fellow Queens let themselves grow so accustomed to his carefree attitude and loving nature with them and their children that she had forgotten just how truly lethal and exceedingly intelligent Martin Leonidas really was?

And their children?

SENATE ARBORETUM ANTI-ROOM

Martin turned his head from where he was watching the gigantic wall sized monitor of the trade proceedings in the main room as the door to the anti-room slid open. Deia, Laustinos, Stenys and For’mya sat across the massive table from Jalersi, Athani, Jiss and Matuarr. There were data pads scattered across the table, along with pitchers of refreshing water and also coffee and tea. Ardis sat with several other aides along the wall behind Deia, while Karun and Qurot sat behind Jalersi.

Martin smiled brightly when he saw Tarifa enter the room with Dilios and Lynwe and he got to his feet quickly and scooped Tarifa into his arms tightly hugging her. Tarifa’s smile was just as wide as she wrapped her arms around his shoulders and hugged him back. Martin was the big brother that Tarifa never had and she relished in how he could make her laugh and put her at ease.

“Bout time you got here.” Martin muttered into her elven ear as he kissed her cheek.

Tarifa squeezed his arms. “It is a full time job keeping Panos from worrying about every little thing that goes on within Sparta. You are giving him fits by bringing all these new and exciting people here for visits.”

Martin chuckled. “I bet he’s called me some choice names huh?”

Tarifa’s sapphire eyes gleamed in the light of the room. “You have no idea.” She said.

Martin laughed and turned to Dilios, taking his hand firmly. “Thank you for coming Dilios.” He said.

“I’m just glad Tarifa saw fit to drag me away from the Senate.” He spoke.

Martin looked at Lynwe and smiled. The six foot tall Drow female was one of his closest friends and a superior warrior no matter how you cut it. He stepped forward and embraced her as well without hesitation. “You are looking well Lynwe.” He said.

Lynwe tossed back her flowing white hair her amber colored eyes bright. “As if I have a choice in that.” She stated. “If Selene and Layna are not fawning over me... it is Joarl.”

Martin chuckled. “And this is a problem why?”

Lynwe smiled. “I never said it was a problem.” She spoke.

“Joarl is due back in a few days isn’t he?” Martin asked.

Lynwe nodded. “Yes... and if you send him away for three weeks again Martin Leonidas then Selene, Layna and I will have words with you.”

It had been the talk of Eden City for nearly a year when the news broke that the stern faced Admiral Joarl had claimed not only Selene and Layna as his mates, but Lynwe as well. Lynwe may have had equipment that the majority of men would kill for dangling between her legs, but she was a stunningly beautiful woman as well. It had taken her nearly three years to come to grips with the fact that Joarl loved her for who she was and not for what she had between her legs. He had acted like any old wolf would act, patient and calm. He had courted the three of them for three years, never once asking for something that was not offered. One night in that third year, and one sizzling kiss had swept aside all of Lynwe’s doubts as to what his intentions were. Selene and Layna would never have accepted him without Lynwe’s approval, for while they found him attractive in a rugged sort of way, both of them were very content with the life they had built with Lynwe.

Lynwe never thought she could love a man. She never imagined she would discover a man who would not look upon her in disgust when he realized what the High Coven's demented experiments had done to her. Joarl not only knew what had been done to her, it did not bother him in the least and he showed Lynwe and them that very thing the first time he had shared their bed. Until Joarl came into their lives, Lynwe had never been taken by a man. Up until this Spartan warrior had entered their world no man had been brave enough to approach her. Lynwe had howled out her pleasure for hours that first night as Joarl took her and Selene and Layna in more ways than they could have ever thought of themselves. That had begun a relationship that was to this day just as solid and devoted as the one Martin shared with his Queens. Joarl had given Selene and Layna four children, their children and Lynwe and Selene had adopted Cihera shortly after Teeria turned ten. Their home in Eden City was large and always full of happiness and love no matter who was there.

Martin laughed at Lynwe's words and squeezed her hand. "Don't worry... last thing I want to do is have the three of you mad at me." He spoke. "Have you heard from Cihera and Anton?"

Lynwe nodded. "They reported in last night to Armetus." She replied. "They did a recon of the resort's computer database but it did not provide them much in the way of information. The Kochab was there and I believe Cihera said they were going to pay him a visit soon." She said with a smile.

"That ought to be an interesting visit." Martin spoke with a smile.

Tarifa laughed herself. "Yes... Cihera is not terribly fond of the Kochab species." She said.

Dilios looked at the monitor now and stepped closer to the wall sized screen. "So these are our guests." He spoke.

Martin turned still holding Lynwe's hand and nodded. "This is them." He stated. "The talks seem to be proceeding rather boringly."

Tarifa chortled. "Anything involving diplomacy is boring to you Martin." She spoke as she came up next to Dilios. "So these are the biogenic clone daughters of the Kavalian Prefect Keleru?"

"Not clones." Martin spoke as Lynwe moved up next to Tarifa. He lifted the data pad from the table and held it out to her. "They underwent biogenic treatments to remove the coat of hair from their bodies and to make their tails recede." He said looking up from the pad. "Makes them more presentable to other people apparently. Though from what I can see... the younger one has obviously re-grown her tail."

Tarifa nodded. "It does not detract from her beauty." She spoke. "They are both quite stunning."

"The two in the back?" Lynwe asked.

"One Pride Commander Qurot and Pride Lieutenant Karun." Martin answered. "The woman in the center on the left is Jalersi' Puat. The one with the tail is Athani' Puat. Jalersi is Pleistarchus's mate and this Karun is his oldest son with her."

All three of them turned to look at him with wide eyes. "Your brother's..." Dilios exclaimed.

Martin nodded. "Yeah. He's been with the Kavalian people for the better part of three thousand years Dilios... it stands to reason he would take one of their females as his wife. It doesn't surprise me though that he was pretentious enough to wait until they had advanced their cloning techniques to the point where they could make their females look like that."

"Martin..." Tarifa began to speak turning to face him.

He shook his head. "My brother died the day he abandoned his people and left Earth with the Kavalians. Over a hundred Spartans died attempting to protect him as King and he just up and let them die. You know what happen that day, I don't have to tell you. No... Pleistarchus may be of my blood... but the only brother I have is Danny. This woman and his son by her mean nothing to me."

"Why did you want us here Martin?" Lynwe asked.

"You sat in on the negotiations with the Zaleisians twenty-five years ago Tarifa." Martin spoke. "Lynwe you interrogated Talco once he was exposed. I wanted you to observe them and see if they are similar in any way to this Talco. Dilios... you are just flat out scary when it comes to political maneuvering and that is why you are here."

"You don't trust Deia?" Dilios asked surprised.

Martin grinned. "Having you here was Deia's idea."

"Then my first question would be; why is Laustinos in there?" Dilios spoke. "He is the reason we had to accept this ridiculous delegation to begin with."

Tarifa and Lynwe looked at Martin as they all settled to the table. "What is this?" Tarifa asked. I didn't know that."

Martin shrugged. "Laustinos thought with the wrong head when he agreed to meet with them... and let's just leave it at that." Tarifa glanced at Lynwe quickly when Martin said this but she kept her thoughts to herself. "The man doesn't rate real high on my list of people I'd invite to dinner for a number of different reasons."

"Well... there aren't many on that list anyway." Tarifa stated with a grin.

"That's true." Martin agreed. "Anyway... we are pretty sure they are here to find out what is going on with the High Coven. This Trade Delegation is only a cover for that goal. So far For'mya seems to think the Cease Fire story we are using is holding up. All of you know of course why Aikiro and her ilk are really here?"

They all nodded. "Andro is training the dragons they stole from us." Tarifa spoke in reply. "Roluth felt them the moment they arrived in orbit and told *Nya Istel* and I. Aelnala confirmed it for us. Isra beat around the bush because he did not think you wanted us to know."

Martin nodded. "We didn't announce it publicly... but we knew anyone bonded to a dragon would sense them sooner or later. And we know none of them would run around yelling to the heavens."

Tarifa nodded quickly. "Of course not! If the Kavalians knew we were doing this they would automatically assume we were going to enter the war on the side of the Coven and act."

"That's why Andro has them at a very secure location far away from Sparta." Martin said. "Anja was able to discretely conduct bio scans of all of them as they made their way here and she and Sivana will know more in a couple days I would imagine."

Dilios looked at Martin. "You know of course Deia would not approve of that."

Martin nodded. "That's why she doesn't know." He said. "I love my Aunt... but there are times when we need to use Spartan ingenuity and not diplomacy. I will tell her when Anja gets the results of the scans."

"You think these scans will reveal something Martin?" Lynwe asked.

"We know that Kavalians have a very real and distinct fear of dragons." Martin spoke. "However... during the attack the younger daughter... Athani, she was able to Mindvoice back and forth with Cemath. She actually rode on his back within the landing bay. This is not information we had up until now and it's one of the two reasons I had Anja do the scans."

Tarifa turned back to the monitor. "Those are the tremors I feel then." She said softly. "So very faint and weak... almost indiscernible... but they are there. Roluth detected them as well when we landed outside."

Martin nodded. "We need to discover if this is something that is just now making itself known among the Kavalian people as a whole, or if it is an isolated incident. Either way... at the rate I sense her abilities are growing... within a week she'll be able to detect the dragons at least faintly. Helen and I are meeting later today to discuss it."

"Andro is prepared to move the High Coven dragons if that is the case yes?" Dilios asked.

Martin nodded. "Yes... but if this is the beginning of Mindvoice abilities as a whole within the Kavalian people we will need to drastically change our combat tactics. Lynwe that is why you are here. With Walter and Joarl off world for the moment... you and Tareif are the resident Kavalian experts. This Qurot is part of their military... and I want him watched. The second officer is Pian who is in the hospital at the moment. Learn all you can about them. How they move... what they might be thinking. What they look at when they go out among the streets. Everything. Use whatever assets you feel you need too, including your Drow scouts, but make sure they do not get a hint they are being watched."

Lynwe nodded. "Consider it done." She spoke confidently.

"You don't want the son watched Martin?" Tarifa asked.

"Athani'Puat is the bigger question mark right now." He replied. "However... this Karun is not here for the same reasons as the others. His purpose is different."

"What do you mean?" Dilios asked leaning forward at the table. "How do you know that?"

Martin reached forward slowly and slid the three data pads across the table, one to each of them. "Because my brother is doing exactly what I would do if the situation were reversed." He said. "What you are about to read is known by only seven individuals outside this room. The five women who share my life... because this is the reason we had that small hiccup a while back."

“Hiccup?” Tarifa spoke. “I would say having the King and Queens of the Lycavorian Union disappear for more than a month and no one knew where you were a little more than a hiccup. All of us could sense their anger even from Eden City.”

Martin nodded. “With good reason I suppose. Danny knows because his sense of smell is almost as keen as mine and he is my brother. I rarely keep anything from him. Helen knows because she is the *Feravomir* of our people. I do not want any of you to be surprised and though I have a feeling it will become common knowledge soon enough, no matter how much I wish it would stay buried, please keep this to yourselves until that time.”

“Martin you don’t need to reveal...” Tarifa started to speak.

Martin shook his head. “Read my elven sister.” He said softly. “Then you will understand and we will talk.”

GALLIAS’S LODGE

Aikiro opened her eyes at the sound of the door chime and took a deep breath. She rose gracefully from where she sat in the single chair and moved across the large room to the door. She waved her hand in front of the sensor and watched as it slid aside to reveal Robert Moran. Aikiro’s eyes flared briefly and she stepped back.

“Robert?” She spoke.

Moran looked at her seeing her distracted state. “I’m sorry Aikiro... did I come at a bad time?”

Aikiro gave a soft smile. “No Robert. Tesand is off trying to discover as much as he is able about the layout of the city and where the Kavalians are staying. Please come in.” She stepped out of the way.

“I’m sorry... you appeared distracted.” Moran spoke as he entered the apartment.

Aikiro nodded. “I was reaching out within Mindvoice and trying to determine if I could detect Yuri and Narice as well as where the Mindvoice ship is on this planet.”

Moran looked at her as the door closed. “Any luck?”

Aikiro shook her head as she moved to the small counter bar and poured them both glasses of the cloned blood. “No... whatever he has shielding the ship and the location of Yuri and the others must be derived from the Mindvoice technology similar to what we discovered on the Mindvoice ship buried in the mountain on Nuwaroa. It creates a void within Mindvoice that makes it impossible to communicate outwardly or inwardly or sense anything beyond the void itself.”

“Can’t you determine where these voids are and just narrow your search?” Moran asked.

Aikiro nodded. “I have tried this... however Leonidas is no fool. He has set these voids up all over the planet. At last count I had detected over a hundred of them, some nearby, some quite a distance away. There is no way for me to determine which is which.” She turned and held out the glass to him. “Some of them permit Mindvoicing within their radius, which is mostly likely where Yuri and the others have gone... but there are twenty-six such areas large enough on the planet to permit training of dragons and allow Mindvoicing. We don’t know which one they are at.”

“Can’t Yuri contact you?” Moran asked as he took the glass.

Aikiro shook her head. “As I said... Mindvoicing within this void is possible but reaching in or out is not.”

Moran shook his head. “Forgive me... I can use this skill to some extent... but I’m no where near as powerful as Yuri or yourself. It all gives me a big headache.”

Aikiro chuckled. “It is rather complicated in many respects. Leonidas and I will be going to this place later this week to observe how the training has begun.” Aikiro spoke. “I may be able to establish something while we are there so that Yuri and I can communicate... but that does not help us to locate the Mindvoice ship... no. The other locations across the planet vary in size from half a kilometer in radius to over ten kilometers in size. Any one of those could be hiding the Mindvoice ship given its ability to alter its size and configuration.”

“Are we sure it’s even here on Earth Aikiro?” Moran asked.

Aikiro nodded. “It’s here.” She said confidently.

“Isn’t Leonidas able to detect you are doing this?” Moran asked as they moved into the main room and took seats on the comfortable couches.

Aikiro nodded. “Oh I’m sure he is.” She said with a smile. “We have the ability to reduce our Mindvoice presence to miniscule levels, effectively making the tremors we create and ourselves invisible within Mindvoice to all but the most powerful. The Tier Six individuals as the Lycavorians rate them. There is a handful here on Earth who can detect what I am doing... Leonidas himself... his son, their First Oracle and one or two others. His pureblood Queen Aricia as well... for her blood is exceptionally pure judging by her power. If I had to guess she is most likely descended from the Pralors in some fashion as well. Leonidas has grown far more powerful than even I first thought as I said and his son is rapidly approaching this same level. He is confident in how he has set things up and he knows this will thwart my attempts. He is correct so far. He will do nothing as long as I am unable to find the ship. At the moment... I can’t.”

“What about probing the dragons we see on the streets?” Moran asked.

Aikiro shook her head. “I thought of that too.” She replied. “I have discovered that if we see a dragon here on the streets of Sparta it is almost always bonded to a member of their *Durcunusaan*. This effectively increases their own abilities by a factor of ten. They are able to block even the strongest of my soft probes, and I can’t use anything stronger because it would be considered an assault.”

“He shouldn’t have revealed that information to us.” Moran spoke. “Telling us they had over a thousand Bonded Pairs. That was foolish.”

“He did it on purpose... don’t doubt that.” Aikiro said. “We don’t know how many Bonded Pairs are here on Earth. I can detect individual Pairs... but they come and go from within these void areas so often and they can shield so well I can not determine accurately how many of them there are and I have given up.”

“Aikiro... why does it seem like... we only gave them two days notice before we arrived.” Moran spoke. “Why does it seem like he had all of this set up already? The Mindvoice shielded areas across the planet... the level of their individual shields? It seems... it almost seems like he was expecting us.”

Aikiro nodded. “I believe he was.” She answered. “Since the day we were able to obtain the dragons from that crash I believe Leonidas has prepared for this day when we would come to him. Only the Lycavorians have perfected the art of fighting with dragons and it is due to the close relationship they have with them. It also helps that the dragon elders... their ruling council if you will... they are all solidly behind Leonidas.”

“How do you know that?” Moran asked.

“Do not discount the intelligence of dragons Robert.” Aikiro said. “While they may look like beasts with claws and teeth, they are supremely intelligent, and they have communicated for thousands of years only within Mindvoice. Their abilities are far greater than what we have seen with our dragons.” Aikiro leaned back on the couch. “I also believe Leonidas is planning for when we leave and our dragons mate with each other and produce more. He also fears we will discover a way to clone them I believe, though I don’t know if he has shared that fear with anyone just yet.”

Moran looked at her with wide eyes. “Have we?” He asked.

Aikiro smiled. “What do you think?”

“I think when you want to accomplish something you succeed.” Moran answered.

Aikiro sipped her glass of cloned blood with a knowing smile. “Thank you for the compliment Robert. It is a goal I have... but as of yet... it has not come to fruition. Now tell me... why are you here? I thought you were staying on your ship now that Yuri has gone.”

Moran nodded. “I was. My face is still remembered from my time here with Yuri and I didn’t care for the looks I was receiving. I’ve been going over old intelligence reports and I think I have discovered where I heard the name of Androcles’s new wife before.”

Aikiro leaned forward. “Really?”

Moran nodded and removed the data pad from his jacket. “If I am correct... and I’m pretty sure I am... she was a low level operative for the *Arryadyveluat* that Veldruk established some four thousand years ago. Her step-mother was the actual controlling agent, and it was she who forced this Sadi into working with the *Arryadyveluat* to protect her father Vorilas. He was Governor of the Menkla District on Apo Prime at the time. This Sadi disappeared off the grid a week before the attacks on the Island Palace on Apo Prime. As we know... that attack began the purge of all our assets in the Union.”

“The Menkla District?” Aikiro said. “Isn’t that where their main transport is made... not to mention the majority of their fighters?”

Moran nodded. “Yep.”

Aikiro got to her feet. “That doesn’t make sense.” She spoke. “I felt this young woman at the State Dinner. Her Mindvoice power and her potential were exceptional. It was one of the reasons she was able to dismiss Dante’s fool attempt at controlling her mind so easily.”

“Yuri told you about that I take it?” Moran asked.

Aikiro turned to him. “There is precious little my daughter keeps from me Robert... you should know this.”

“Oh... I’m not upset about it. I was pissed off at him for doing something so stupid.” Moran stated. “Sometimes I think he considers himself as powerful as his mother in that regard.”

“You should be proud of him. He is stronger than most purebloods with this ability and with Yuri’s continued tutelage he will grow more refined at using his skills.” Aikiro said. “He has reinforced Yuri’s control of Carisia in regards to Thast so far without outside assistance from me or his mother.”

“I am proud of him. He just needs to stop thinking with his dick.” Moran said.

Aikiro laughed at this and returned to his chair. “He is young Robert... and he will learn. As long as he doesn’t attempt this with her again. If there is one thing I have learned in my years is that Lycavorians hold their relationships, especially those they call *Anomes*, to be sacred to the extreme. Androcles Leonidas would make short work of Dante if he discovered this I’m afraid. In many respects he is very different than his father, more methodical and slow to anger, but if tipped in that direction I believe he would be far more violent in his response. You saw his reaction with Thast?”

Moran nodded. “It almost seemed personal. And I’ve never seen a werewolf able to track us when we blur.”

Aikiro nodded. “Something he learned from his father no doubt. It does surprise me that Veldruk, fool that he was, that he did not sense this within this Sadi.”

“Would he have even had need to meet with her?” Robert asked.

Aikiro nodded. “Perhaps not... you think she had a hand in revealing our assets to Union officials don’t you?”

“She disappears completely a week before the purge began... then twenty-five years later she reappears as the wife of Androcles Leonidas.” Moran stated. “It seems pretty convenient to me. I want to do some discrete checking with your permission.”

“About her?” Aikiro asked. “Wait... isn’t she the one who purchased the dragon saddles for Carisia and Narice and the others.”

Moran nodded. “Yes. According to Dante and Lucia she was giving Carisia some strange looks in the shop as well. Given who she now is... I didn’t want to start asking questions about her without getting the ok from you first.”

“That is very interesting. Now that you mention this to me I remember she gave Carisia several glances at the State Dinner that did not seem entirely normal in many respects.”

“What do you mean by normal?” Moran asked.

Aikiro shrugged. “They appeared to be more affectionate than what you would usually bestow on someone who is supposed to be your enemy. And if what you have told me about her past is indeed true, it makes it that much stranger. She is easily a hundred years older than Androcles Leonidas yet they act as if they have been together for decades.”

“He was less than a year old when the attacks on the Island Palace took place.” Moran spoke. “I can’t believe they would have allowed her anywhere near him given who they had to know she was.”

“It is very strange... but with the Mindvoice ability and potential I sense in both of them together who can say. Do you think we can use her past against Leonidas in some way?” Aikiro asked now.

Moran shrugged. “It’s possible I suppose.” He said evenly. “It wouldn’t be easy given how popular she appears to be among the people here in Sparta. I heard Gallais talking about it downstairs with her husband shortly after we arrived.”

Aikiro nodded slowly. "Go ahead... but as you say... be very discrete. She is the wife and Crown Princess of Androcles Leonidas now. Until we get what we want... we do not need to make more waves than necessary."

Moran nodded. "I'll be careful." He said.

"I know it is probably too soon... but have our people been able to discover anything in regards to this insurgent group that attacked the Kavalians?" Aikiro asked.

Moran shook his head. "I checked before I came here." He answered. "We are positive it was the Duul'ssom's Lar group even without Leonidas allowing us to view the bodies. Only they have the means to pull something like that off."

Aikiro nodded. "It is odd that their leader would allow such an attack. He has never been known to let his rebels act in such a way. Butchering innocents like they did. Even Kavalian ones."

"They had to know it was a suicide mission so perhaps they figured what the hell?" Moran spoke. "Why didn't you allow Leonidas to go after them Aikiro? Given his history in how he views attacks on his family, we might have been better off letting him take them out."

Aikiro shook his head. "Don't let his outward demeanor fool you Robert Moran." She said quickly. "He may act the part of a reckless brute and do so very well... but Martin Leonidas is one of the most cruelly calculating minds I have ever come across. If he were to discover the identity of the leader of the Duul'ssom's Lar he certainly would not tell us. And I believe he would actively support them in their attacks against us. As long as he thought it in his best interests. Outside of the vampires who live within the Union including the Drow scum, his Queen Isabella and the pureblood whore Nyla who shares his daughter's bed, I don't believe he completely trusts any vampire. He has too much of his father in him for that."

"You think he will turn loose his own people to find them?" Moran asked.

Aikiro nodded. "Oh yes." She stated. "Order our people in The Wilds to keep their eyes and ears open so to speak. At the first hint of something that appears odd in any way have them contact you or Tesand."

Moran nodded as he stood up. "I'll make it happen." He said.

"Tesand briefed you on what I asked him to do?" Aikiro asked as she stood up.

Moran nodded as he came to his feet as well. "It's risky Aikiro." He said. "Very risky. And it could cost us assets within the Kavalian military structure."

Aikiro nodded. "Yes... but it will sow confusion... and until we succeed in what our primary goal is... confusion is what we need. I also want you to send Juliana One down to me here. Assign her as my personal guard or something of that nature."

"I thought Tesand said Leonidas ordered you to keep her out of Sparta." Moran asked.

Aikiro smiled. "He did." She answered. "That does not mean I am going to listen to him in any way. I will have her remain in the shadows for the most part."

Moran smiled and nodded slowly as he held up the data pad. "I'll get to work on this." He said. "What are you going to do?"

Aikiro smiled. "I thought I might go out and walk among the masses." She stated. "I would like to see just how truly hated I really am."

LYCAVORIAN BORDER

SECTOR THREE ONE

ULU *EIRANS TRYN*

It was one hundred and forty-three meters long and one of only six in existence.

It was not a warship per say, though it did have armaments equivalent to its ship class. The ULU *EIRANS TRYN*, or Omen One in the ancient language, was perhaps the most secret of all Lycavorian Union developments in history. It was the fastest ship in the entire fleet by a very wide margin, and packed to the outer bulkheads with the most advanced sensors and listening equipment ever devised. Most of the equipment had been developed with the assistance of the Mindvoice ship avatar Avi, installed and calibrated to such exactness; the sensors could detect a single life form on a planet fifty light years away, and within twenty light years the sensors could tell you what that person's body temperature was as well as give their location within a hundred

meters. The outer hulls of the ships were layered with three coats of near invulnerable Dragon Armor combined with a new design Polyphasic cohesive metal, allowing them to absorb incredible punishment from almost any weapon, while remaining able to withstand extreme levels of heat and even high doses of every known type of radiation. The crews were all hand picked from the finest within the Union. Lycavorian, elves, and Algolian to name a few, and the process took three years to complete for all six ships. There were one hundred and eighty-seven crew members of the *EIRANS TRYN*, and all of them were what Armetus referred to as Super Patriots.

All six of these ships were under the operational command and direction of Armetus and the Krypteria.

Ten years now the *EIRANS TRYN* and her sister ships had patrolled the stars, returning to their classified staging area only six times in that span. They collected information and intelligence on nearly every known species and three of them were committed solely to the purpose of monitoring the war between the High Coven and the Kavalian Federation. Three days ago the *EIRANS TRYN* had received new orders, and they were about to begin a mission that could decide the fate of the Union they all so loved.

The Captain of the *EIRANS TRYN* strode onto the cramped bridge of the ship he had commanded for the last decade, a mug of steaming Elven herbal tea in his hand. There was not much in the way of comfort on his ship, at least not outside of the quarters the crew had. Due to their mission and how much time they would spend away from home, it had been decided that each crew member would have their own quarters, albeit very small. It was their sanctuary and place to call their own when not on duty. The Captain was tall for an elf nearing six feet, and while not hugely muscular; his body was all lean power. He was still single, as were all of those assigned to the Omen Squadron as they called themselves, though at only three hundred and forty-two years of age he still had plenty of time to find a good woman and have children.

Captain Tinnuar moved to his command chair in the right side of the bridge and settled into it being careful not to spill his tea. "Let me have it!" He announced.

The Tactical Officer turned from his seat on the opposite side of the bridge. "The border is one hundred and twenty seconds away Captain!"

"Ah... we made excellent time even with that Ion storm we had to dodge." Tinnuar spoke with a small smile. "Good work people."

The nine member bridge crew smiled as they looked among themselves. Tinnuar was very free with the compliments he gave to his crew, and he was just as free with the curses and anger if you screwed up. It was very uncharacteristic for an elf to show so much emotion, especially a male elf, but it showed the crew that he was every bit as fallible as the rest of them. There wasn't a male or female on the *EIRANS TRYN* that wouldn't die for Tinnuar in an instant. He took care of them in every way, even when they were surface bound, and they did the same for him.

"Tactical Officer, insure the Shroud is operating at peak efficiency and start bringing the long range YA9 Sensor Arrays on line." Tinnuar spoke. "The moment we cross the border I want to pick up the fart from a Wallite Worm Fly at ten light years distance."

"Yes sir! Beginning start up of the YA9s! Shroud Generator operating at point four one hundred." The TO answered with a grin.

Tinnuar looked at him. "I see Chief Engineer Gorak has been busy?"

The TO smiled. "He thought you might want that little extra sir."

Tinnuar smiled. "Helm... you keep us on a cross Z axis lateral course. Maintain the usual evasive maneuvers... no sense in getting stupid now. Uirmeik is only three light years away... four days at most. Let us not risk our asses by doing something stupid." Tinnuar spoke.

"Helm confirms!" The young woman answered as her hands flew over the three consoles that surrounded her chair.

"Give me a channel to the ship." Tinnuar said.

"Channel open Captain." The reply was almost immediate.

"Stand to men and women of *EIRANS TRYN*. We are about to step into the lion's den. Be sharp and be prepared for our actions and what we discover may well mean dramatic shifts in our future. We are King Leonidas's eyes and ears now, and it is we who must provide him what he needs to decide our course." Tinnuar said. "The moment we cross the border we shift to combat mode. We've had a relative peaceful last three months tooling around the Union... now it is time for us to earn our pay once more. That is all."

Tinnuar lifted his mug and sipped the warm tea relishing in the smooth flavor. It was something his mother sent to him in every care package she shipped and he had enough to last him for several weeks right now.

“Very well my friends.” He said looking up. “Let us do this and get back home in one piece. Helm... take us across the border.”

SPARTA

For'mya could smell his arousal and feel his aura calling to her the moment Aurith landed on the Spartan Estate Dragon pad and it only served to deepen the burning for him that was already surging through her blood. The Trade talks had progressed without incident, but as their dinner moved along For'mya only became more distracted and longed to feel Martin's arms around her. She had maintained her elven composure well enough to escape the dinner without making a fool of herself, but the moment she climbed onto Aurith's back, her dragon sister took to the skies with barely a pause. Aurith knew her well enough to know what was happening and she had streaked through the night sky with all possible speed to bring her home. Even twenty-five years of experiencing what he could do to her, to all of them, it never ceased to amaze For'mya. She had loved him dearly before he had changed her, but when she was finally wolf, that love increased a hundred fold. Only after he had changed her could she feel how he affected Aricia, Dysea and Anja. The burning in their blood for him, the need to feel his aura wrap itself around them. It was no different for Isabella, and though she could not feel the wolf aura he projected to her, she had often said the look in his eyes and the touch of his hands upon her flesh more than made up for it. She had tried to explain it once to her mother, how Martin Leonidas made her feel, but to someone who was not pure Lycavorian or someone who had not been turned it was so very difficult to understand.

For'mya even now kept her elven composure as she quickly made to remove Aurith's saddle. Her bonded sister could only look on in amusement as she went through the motions with barely a thought to what she was doing. Finally Aurith nudged her in the shoulder with her huge head and blinked her beautiful eyes.

Go sister! I may not be wolf... but even I can see the strength of his call to you tonight. Go! Aurith exclaimed in Mindvoice.

For'mya looked at her somewhat embarrassed, but leaned up to kiss her snout gently before turning and moving into the main villa. She heard soft female laughter and found Anja and Aricia sharing coffee and sweet biscuits with Helen at the large kitchen table. They both got up quickly and came over to her.

Aricia drew back from their kiss with a knowing smile. “He didn't think you were ever going to come home.” She said softly with a smile.

For'mya gripped their hands tightly. “Where... where are Dysea and Bella?”

Anja smiled. “They apparently missed each other quite a bit.” She said with a twinkle in her jade colored eyes. “And since Martin burns only for you tonight... they decided to go to bed early.”

Aricia chuckled. “Anja and I intend to join them rather soon too.” She said.

“That we do.” Anja chimed in. “And much fun will be had by all!”

“The Little Ones?” For'mya asked.

“All tucked in and sleeping. Helen made them an extra special batch of sweet biscuits and with some warm milk they were out like lights.” Anja said. “Why are you still here?”

Aricia smiled and pressed her body close to For'mya. “Let your elven control go tonight *Kinsoaurgai*.” She whispered. “He burns for you just as brightly as you do for him. Go.”

“Where?” For'mya asked.

Anja leaned over and kissed her softly. “Where does he always take us when he wants us to scream his name to the moon and stars?” She said gently. “Now go!”

For'mya grinned and looked at Helen. She began to speak but Helen held up her hand. “Not another word.” She barked sternly. “Go to him! Before he comes back here looking for you and wakes the children.”

For'mya smiled and kissed Aricia before turning and moving out of the double wide patio doors. Anja took Aricia's hand as they moved back to the kitchen table. “We really need to talk to that girl about just letting go.” She said with a smile.

Helen chuckled from her chair. “Unlike you and Dysea who are also turned... For’mya did not have the opportunity to know Martin before he discovered his true self. She has always been the reserved and controlled elven officer and it will take many more years I think before she surrenders completely to how he makes her blood burn so strongly with desire. Then I will need to purchase ear plugs... for all of you will be howling at the same time.”

Aricia looked at her shocked. “*Feravomir*... are you suggesting we are too loud when our mate possesses us.” She asked in mock horror.

Anja leaned into her. “Well... you do have a tendency to be rather noisy Little Wolf.” Anja said with an affectionate bump of her hip.

“Actually Anja...” Helen spoke. “It is you who howl the loudest.”

Anja looked at her wide eyed as Aricia burst out laughing. “Me?”

“You are the smallest among his Queens in physical stature and yet you sing louder than any of them. You have woken the Estate Guard at times.” Helen said. “Many of them have taken to wearing hearing protection when they smell the passion in the night sky.”

Anja’s tanned face took on a slight tinge of reddish embarrassment and Helen chuckled as Aricia nuzzled Anja’s neck. “I have told you this for years Anja... you just never believed me.”

Helen’s face became more serious and she looked at Anja. “Now perhaps you will share what is happening on Hadaria and why your fool Aunt is threatening to take the King’s children?”

Anja looked at her. “How?”

“You forget Eurin and I are very close. The moment Sivana contacted her and told her what is happening she burst me a transmission and we talked for more than an hour.”

“I can take care of what is happening on Hadaria.” Anja said confidently.

Helen shook her head. “I have no doubts about that.” She said in reply. “I just want to know how many bodies you will leave in your wake if this ignorant plan actually comes up for a vote in the Hadarian Elder Council.”

Anja took her mug in her hands and smiled as she sipped the coffee. “I can think of half a dozen right off the top of my head.” She replied. “Would you like to know who they are?”

For’mya stood on the edge of the patio and quickly stripped out of her boots and uniform jumpsuit, letting them fall to the ground as the cool evening breeze caressed her tanned flesh. She felt goose bumps form on the skin of her arms and legs but she ignored them. For’mya had never had large breasts for her five foot eight height, but they were perfectly conical in shape and incredibly firm. Her nipples were small but hard nubs that even now were stiffening due to the breeze and her ever increasing desire. While she had the smallest breasts of any of her fellow Queens and lovers, none of them had ever done anything but lavish them with attention. And Martin Leonidas simply adored playing with her breasts for hours since they fit perfectly in his large hands. For’mya concentrated and in the blink of an eye and in a soft pop of iridescent silver/white light the elf female who was For’mya was gone and in her place was the female wolf with golden blond fur.

Kmyla had been right when she first told her that she would be larger and stronger in her wolf form. Her normally lean, hundred and eighteen pound svelte figure gave way to a hundred and thirty-five pounds in another form of beauty. Her fur was shiny and healthy and For’mya wasted no time in digging her paws into the ground and propelling herself forward with startling speed. She saw everything with her wolf eyes in a bluish gray light and as she raced into the timber she caught his male scent easily. His mint scent and aura washed over her as the towering pine trees closed in about her and For’mya felt her blood begin to churn even more. This had happened before through the years. There were times when Martin Leonidas wanted only one... when his blood called for only one of his Queens. He never knew which one it would be, or when the time would hit, but it would build over a period of days until it was upon him full force. It most often happened with Aricia, but all of them had felt it many times through the years, and none of them could disagree with the passionate encounters it always led up to. They had found through the years that it had something to do with his mood and Helen surmised that because of his Mindvoice abilities it was considerably more pronounced than in normal Lycavorian men. When he was like this none of them could deny him, none of them wanted to deny him, for it would leak through his shields no matter how he tried to mask it and set their blood ablaze as well.

For'mya felt so very free when she ran, the muscles under her fur rippling with precision not unlike a finely tuned machine. She had long ago learned the nuances of running in her wolf form, and it came to her without even thinking. She knew where she was going for it was the place they had all been too many times with Martin. Surrounded by newly planted pine trees and several lilac trees, it rested on a plateau in the mountains not far from the villa. From this perch they could see all of Sparta in the distance and on a clear night it was the most incredible thing.

For'mya felt the ground tremble beneath her paws and she shivered in delight knowing what it was. She turned her head to the side and saw his massive black shape keeping pace with her easily through the trees perhaps five meters away. She loved watching him run, seeing the corded muscles like tightly wound steel flow beneath his midnight black coat of fur. He was larger than her by more than half, yet for all his power and speed he was the most graceful man or wolf she had ever seen.

It took you long enough. His deep voice sprang into her mind with passion filled humor.

For'mya yipped out a bark as she increased her speed. *I wanted to insure your interest.* She replied happily.

Martin let out a low growl as he matched her gallop, his yellow/gold orbs falling on her and taking her breath away with the intensity of their brightness. *I will show you my interest Kinsoaurgai. Follow me!*

For'mya watched him make an eye popping right turn and disappear into the shadows of the pines all around them. She snapped her tail around and executed a similar turn to follow, his scent flowing through her making it easy to follow him.

Where are we going Martin Leonidas? She asked as she increased her speed enough to see his huge hind quarters darting among the trees in front of her with the deftness of a wolf a third of his size.

I have found a new place. I think you will like it. His reply came.

For'mya felt the ground beneath her begin to rise more steeply and she dug her paws in deeper.

Martin... we are leaving the Estate.

For'mya heard Martin's soft chuckle. *Are you afraid I intend to ravage your senses Kinsoaurgai?*

Actually... I was hoping for just that. For'mya answered quickly no longer feeling the need to control herself. She was wolf after all... a female wolf that smoldered for her mate as much as he did for her.

Then stay close to me. He told her.

For'mya did just that, using a burst of speed to close the distance between them and then remaining within a few feet of him as he led her on a twisting, turning climb up what she realized were the western mountains surrounding Sparta. She was content to watch him as they moved with incredible speed, careful to follow his paw prints almost exactly. It was something Aricia had taught her long ago; follow in the prints of the wolf in front of you so that you could mask your true number. So intent on doing this as she was For'mya broke into the small clearing and came up short, her paws digging into the soft dirt for Martin was no longer in front of her. Her head snapped around looking for him, taking in the small fire burning in the pit with rocks surrounding it. Next to the fire was a double large bear skin rug spread out neatly with soft pillows. Beside that was an old style metal bucket with a chilled bottle of Spartan Wine and two glasses. For'mya shifted immediately, a smile forming on her face as the shimmer faded. A thin layer of sweat gleamed on her naked flesh in the light of the fire as she moved closer.

Martin Leonidas? She spoke softly. His scent permeated the air around this place and For'mya knew then he must have been here for several hours preparing what she saw.

Here. His voice answered and she turned her head past the fire and felt her body flush with excitement. He was naked as well; a luster of sweat sparkling on his divinely muscular and rippled body. He was squatting not far away and For'mya moved towards him, feeling his aura trembling against his shields, calling for only her.

As she approached him For'mya's eyes grew wide at what she saw spread out past the ledge in front of him. The sparkling stars were a multitude of colors in the night sky since the moon was only a quarter high. Green, red, yellow and blue filtered across her wolf vision lighting up the mountains further in the distance and spreading across the sky like the fingers of a god. She felt him rise to his feet as she came up beside him.

I know how much you like the Northern Lights in the mountains and how they dance across the sky. He said softly.

For'mya looked at him, tears forming in her eyes at what he had done. "You... you found this... this spot just for me?" She asked.

Martin nodded slowly, his shoulder length black hair wild and ruffled, his eyes still the yellow/gold of the wolf within him. Staring at him, For'mya felt her arousal and desire increase to maddening levels. He had found this place just for her and that knowledge quickly put her in the mood. He had done untold things over the years to show her, to show each of them just how deeply he loved them all, but this was by far the most telling of anything he had done with her. They had seen the Northern Lights some twenty-three years ago and For'mya had mentioned how incredibly beautiful they were. She had forgotten that statement the next day, but apparently Martin Leonidas had not.

For'mya stepped up to him quickly and wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders before covering his lips with her own and easily lifting herself into his arms. She whimpered in need and burning ardor when his powerful arms encircled her waist and pulled her to him. Their tongues danced a delicious tango, ever reaching for more, demanding more. For'mya felt him then, so hot and huge nestled between her thighs. His twelve inches throbbed almost madly, alive with his own lust and want. For'mya had no doubts she would never tire of having him fill her as only he could. She tore her lips away from his, groaning loudly as they descended immediately to firmly nuzzle her cheek and the outer lobe of her elven ear, enflaming her own desire to new heights.

"Take me my love!" She nearly shouted. "I don't care how... just take me in whatever way you desire!"

For'mya lifted her hips slightly, feeling his searing cock slide delightfully slow across her incredibly aroused pussy and near bursting clit. Her juices were already soaking their legs as she lowered herself down slowly, her eyes rolling into the back of her head as once more his long thick cock brushed firmly along the expanse of her now soaked pussy. She brought her head forward then, wrapping her arms around his shoulders and lifting her hips once more. She reached down with one hand between their bodies and grasped his huge cock, gasping as she felt the familiar heat. She maneuvered the flared head to her entrance, already spread like a blooming flower and she impaled herself on the first six inches of his throbbing shaft with barely any hesitation. She heard his sharp intake of breath and the way his hands tightened on her hips and she smiled knowingly in delirious passion. This night, right now, she would take what she wanted. Staring into his beautiful wolf eyes For'mya groaned as she raised and lowered her hips several times, allowing just those first six inches of steel hardness fill her and thoroughly coating the remainder of his thick shaft with her juices. She was more excited right now than she had been in some time and it felt wondrously divine.

No matter how many times Martin had her; it was always like that first time on his ship. He stretched her in a way no man ever had or ever would now. She watched as the veins in his neck pulsed, his hands tightening on her firm ass cheeks as he fought with all that he was to keep from plunging into her completely. She locked her hands and fingers behind his neck, lifted her hips once more and then plunged herself back down. For'mya threw her head back and screamed as his entire lava hot cock speared her completely and she came. She heard him growl in her pleasure clouded mind, his hands pulling her hips against his powerfully and then his cock swelled within her pussy's vice like embrace. His howl quickly joined hers as she felt the head of his cock balloon within her depths and then his essence was erupting into her. For'mya's head came forward, banging into his broad chest as blast after blast of his hot come filled her again and again. Multiple jets of his hot come spilling into her and warming her insides. It was over far too quickly as she felt his arms wrap around her tightly and he staggered slightly from the aftermath of his own orgasm, but she knew their night had only just begun. Her chest heaved in exertion and she lifted her head slowly to gaze into his eyes. For'mya knew just by looking into his eyes that she was right and they were far from done. When Martin was like this he could go on for what seemed like hours and never lose his hardness. Even now she felt his shaft within her, twitching as the last of his cum flooded into her belly and leaked out around the base of his cock.

"Do... do you intend... intend for us to remain standing this whole night?" She finally stammered out the words.

Martin looked at her with a grin, pulled her closer to him and began to walk towards the bear skin rug. For'mya gasped softly as each footstep sent a small, quivering orgasm slicing through her abdomen. She held to him tightly, her hips moving of their own accord, milking his dominating shaft with each stride. It took forever for him to reach the bear skin and For'mya knew he had done it on purpose. As he slowly dropped to his knees on the plush rug, he lowered her shuddering body to the luxurious black fur skin rug, her back arching as

another orgasm quickened through her. Their lower bodies were saturated in her sweet come, and she could smell her aroused scent pungently, knowing it must have been driving him mad. She opened her dark brown eyes slowly, her arms lifting so she could place her palms flat against his chest and feel the beating of his heart.

“Bastard!” She hissed softly. “You... you planned that little trek didn’t you?”

Martin smiled in the firelight and his face looked so handsome and alive as he gazed at her.

“*Kinsoargai*... why would I want you trembling in continuous orgasms? I am not that cruel.”

“Yes... yes you are.” She replied with a loving smile. “My scent is driving you mad... and you only wanted me to saturate the entire plateau with my smell.”

Martin leaned over quickly, causing her to gasp in delight as his cock shifted inside her. His lips dropped to the valley between her firm breasts and he licked the sweat from her skin, dragging his tongue with agonizing slowness up to her throat. He lifted his face then and stared at her. “And you do smell so incredibly tasty.” He said softly, his voice trembling with desire.

For’mya reached up and caressed his face. “I meant... I meant what I said Martin Leonidas. Tonight I want you to take... take me in whatever way pleases you my love.” She spoke softly. “Even... even from behind if that is what you desire.”

Martin met her gaze. “*Kinsoargai*... why would I take you from behind, no matter how strongly my blood calls for you, when you do not care for this way?”

“Because you are my Alpha.” For’mya replied. “My mate and husband and I love you. With every breath I take I love you. Our... our loves seem to find it exceptionally pleasurable. They say you reach so deeply inside them when you dominate them in that fashion.”

Martin shook his head with a smile. “For’mya... you are not Aricia or Anja or Dysea or Bella. You are *Kinsoargai*. The Voice of my Heart. Since that first day above Ukwav when it was your words that saved me. Without you... I would not be here For’mya. I will never make love to you in a way you find so submissive and helpless. I know why you feel this way, for only I know what you endured in your captivity. No... there are many other ways for me to make you scream my name to the stars *Kinsoargai*. I don’t need to do that.” He finished with a smile.

For’mya stared at him, her hands holding his face, as his words echoed in her soul. She had never been raped by the Immortals who had captured her, but they had beaten her, as had the High Coven regular troops. They had fed on her blood countless times as if she was an animal. She had never felt as helpless in her life as she had in those weeks. Martin had never made love to her from behind, for in this position she felt helpless. He had never questioned it, never attempted it since that one time on his ship when even in her pleasure he could feel the helplessness coursing through her. She had always preferred being able to see his face and kiss his lips.

“Then take me... take me right to the edge my love!” She gasped finally. “Make me feel what only Aricia and Dysea can feel... if only a small portion. Just as you have done so many times with *Melyanna*.”

Martin needed no words to respond to that and he instantly lowered the barriers around his aura until they were almost gone. He knew that only Aricia and Dysea could take his unshielded aura, but he knew just how much Anja and For’mya could tolerate. Right now... he brought them down even lower, though not completely, and the reaction in For’mya was predictable and immediate.

Her dark brown eyes flew open and the blood in her veins instantly burned hotter than it ever had before. Her nipples became almost painfully erect, her skin sensitive to even the cool night breeze that flowed across them. The most telling was feeling his huge cock still buried inside her. Suddenly each throb and pulse of life his cock put forth ripped through her with the power of a tidal wave. Her clit, jammed against the base of his massive shaft as it was, began quivering in nonstop rapturous bliss. She took a deep breath, which only served to enflame her already over aroused body.

“Mar... Martin... I...” For’mya could barely form words clouded as her mind was with what she was feeling. His aura penetrated her, swept through her, around her and it never stopped caressing her body and mind. She could still think... still form words... but she found herself wanting to surrender to what she was feeling.

When Martin withdrew the entire twelve inch length of his searing hot cock from her depths, For’mya’s brain exploded in white lights and incandescent colors at the pleasure ripping through her. Her come gushed from her lithe body like a river and hit Martin full force in the face. His intake of breath was nearly as loud when by instinct alone For’mya hit him with every ounce of her female wolf aura in that single instant. With a

growl from low in his chest Martin leaned forward, gripped For'mya's wonderfully firm ass cheeks in his hand and he began pile driving his beautiful elven mate with his cock.

For'mya screamed then. Louder and longer than she had ever screamed before, her arms wrapping around his shoulders as his massive cock plumed her velvety depths with power and desire he had never shown her. She had never felt his aura permeate her as completely as it did now, and if this was only a small portion of what Aricia and Dysea felt she knew without question she would be helpless to refuse him anything. It was pure unadulterated pleasure... her orgasms coming hard and fast, her belly clenching almost painfully as they crashed upon her one after the other with no pause. Her come flooded from around his driving cock, soaking the bear skin rug in a matter of seconds, and still he drove into her.

For'mya wanted this. She needed this. With each downward thrust of his hugely thick cock For'mya used all her wolf and elf strength to drive her hips up to meet his hammering thrusts. She would be sore tomorrow of that she had no doubts, but right now she had only one care and that was to feel her alpha mate blasting her full of his come until it spilled from her in rivers.

"Har... harder!" For'mya screeched into the night air, smashing her hips upwards with even more force. "Ahhhhhhh... more! *Nubou lae! Nubou lae!*" (Fuck me)

Martin Leonidas was not one to ignore the command of one of his mates and he tucked his face into the crook of her neck and shoulder, palmed her firm ass cheeks even more and did what For'mya commanded of him. He felt her ankles lock around the backs of his thighs, her firm breasts smashed against his chest, and the searing heat of the depths of her clutching pussy as he began to pound his elven queen with all that he was.

"*Sarad... sarad nagan!*" Martin gasped between clenched teeth. (So tight)

He would not last long this time he knew... he never could within the heated depths of any of his Queens. The first and second orgasms for him were quick and powerful, and then he would be able to remain hard for hours. Martin didn't fight the pleasure ripping through his own blood, nor did he deny For'mya's sweet orchid scent from swirling within his mind as it filled his senses. He felt his large balls contract painfully and he slammed into her fully once more as his cock expanded and he felt his come race up its length and explode within her belly. He could barely hear For'mya's own scream of unabashed delight or the way her arms crushed his head to her shoulder, but he could feel her quivering form in his arms and he smiled to himself.

They had the entire evening left and he planned to make his she-wolf elven queen howl for a large portion of that.

SPARTA

Athani stood on the balcony of her small Diplomatic apartment, her blue/green eyes searching the streets below for any sign of Resumar. She was barely able to contain herself during the end of the dinner, and she had to consciously remind herself to not do anything stupid that would jeopardize what she had found. She discovered she liked Queen For'mya quite a bit. She was open and friendly and genuinely pleasant to be around. The beginning of the Trade talks went smoothly, more smoothly than she would have thought given what had transpired over the course of the last few days. Prime Minister Deia was forthright and upfront about the actual Trade agreement, as well as the opportunity for opening an Embassy. She had basically ignored Qurot's many idiotic remarks and comments, which only seemed to anger him more. She had even noticed Karun roll his eyes once at Qurot's actions. He was out of his element and he knew it. He had leered at her several times during dinner, no doubt imagining what he thought bedding her would be like when they returned to Cabelir. Athani could hardly wait to see the look on his disgusting face when she revealed that Resumar Leonidas had taken her purity, many times over, and that she would be defecting and remaining on Earth with him to start the life she was meant for.

Of course she had to be with him to do that, and she had been waiting for an hour for him to appear and sweep her away as he had promised. Slowly she brought down the shields he had instructed her how to use and she reached out gently. She could feel tremors of so many minds and for a moment she panicked thinking she would be discovered.

Resumar! She reached out unshielded and more powerfully than she had intended and instantly she slammed her shields back up as she felt several minds reach for her in confusion. Athani felt fear sweep through her as suddenly she wondered if he would be coming at all.

[You need never fear that Aryschanne.] Resumar Leonidas's warm soothing voice filled her mind.

[Resumar! Where are you? I have been waiting for so long!]

[I wanted to insure those in your party were safely tucked away before I came for you Aryschanne. It would not due to have one of them see me take you from you balcony.] His voice said with some humor.

[What... what is that? What you called me?] Athani asked as her eyes swept across the ground looking for him.

[It is the Lycavorian ancient language. Aryschanne means cat woman. You are my beautiful aryschanne.]

[It... it is beautiful.] She said as warmth flooded through her.

[Just like you.] He answered. *[Are you afraid of heights Aryschanne?]*

[Would I be on this balcony five stories up waiting for you if I was?] She answered with some humor.

Resumar chuckled within her mind. *[I would hope I am who you are waiting for.]* He said. *[I would be crushed if that was not the case.]*

[Stop playing games with me Prince of the Lycavorians!] She snapped playfully. *[Where are you? I want... I want to feel your arms around me again Resumar.]*

[Then close your eyes Aryschanne and do not scream out when you feel yourself lift from the balcony.] He answered.

[What? What are you...]

Athani bit her tongue hard to keep from screaming out in surprise when she was suddenly lifted from the balcony and shooting straight up. Her eyes were wide as she saw the four additional floors of the Diplomatic Envoy building flash past her view as she was lifted and then she was above the building and looking down on the roof. She saw Resumar standing next to Cemath, his hand held out as if he was guiding her himself. Athani suddenly realized it *was* him who was lifting and guiding her as he lowered her quickly to the rooftop only a few steps from where he and Cemath stood. He stepped up to her quickly and Athani felt what she now knew to be his aura sweep around her as his arms gathered her up and his lips came down on hers. She whimpered in his arms, responding to his kiss as her tail curled around his thigh seductively.

[Quickly brother.] Cemath's voice echoed in their heads. *[Before the Lifter patrol returns again.]*

Resumar broke their kiss instantly but still held her in his arms suspended in the air. *[You were on Cemath's back on my father's ship when he was on the surface. Do you trust him and I enough to ride him as he flies?]*

Athani looked at him her blue/green eyes wide. She glanced at Cemath quickly and heard him chuckle within Mindvoice. *[We will not let anything happen to you Athani'Puat.]* He said.

[Where... where will you take me?] She asked.

Resumar smiled and pulled her towards Cemath, lifting her easily until she was in the saddle. He quickly followed up and settled in behind her, the dragon armor closing over their legs securely. *[My villa in Gytheio.]* He answered. *[Outside of my brother Andro, who has the entire island of Cranae, my villa is the most isolated and it sits in the hills overlooking the Laconian Gulf. I think you will like it.]*

[If I am with you... it will not matter where you take me.] Athani answered.

[Then we are off!] Cemath announced just before cocking his powerful legs beneath him and propelling them into the night sky.

SODRAG

“...officially is a Nodon Engineering Systems *FRT STRIKER Dragon Transport*.” Arrarn spoke as he led the twenty-two High Coven pilots into the rear of the DT. “Or *STRIKER DT* for short... or *DT* if you are too tired to say any of it.” Arrarn was backing up the ramp as he talked and he saw that several of the pilots chuckled softly.

The twenty-two pilots were normally High Coven fighter pilots who had been selected for their skill and sometimes brash maneuvers. Arrarn had read the profiles on all of them the last two days, to include Toria Dellion. She moved along with the other pilots in front, her stunning blue eyes never leaving his face.

“It is my understanding that all of you were chosen because you have displayed, shall we say questionable recklessness when flying your fighters.” Arrarn spoke and seeing some of them react with looks of scorn. “You’ll be happy to know... short of smashing this baby into the side of a mountain, it is next to impossible to hurt them. A *DT* pilot must be calm and in control, but also reckless at times. You have to know what your ship will do, and how it will respond in almost any given weather or combat condition. Your primary purpose and goal will be the transport and protection of whatever Bonded Pairs are assigned to your *DT*. It is my understanding that when you leave here, my father has agreed in principle to give you twenty-five stripped down *DT*s. They will have the same engines and cores as those you will fly in training here, but they will not have the additional Dragon Armor layers that protect our own ships or the active weapons systems.”

“Why?” A young man asked from the second rank.

Arrarn met his eyes. “We have agreed to train you, not give you our military secrets.” He answered. “And while we are on that topic I will say this now and with luck I’ll never have to speak of it again. While you are training you will be using our normal *DT*s that do have the Dragon Armor enhancements. Any attempt by one of you, no matter who does or does not know about it, to obtain samples of the enhancements so that you may pass them onto your leaders will be arrested, tried and then summarily executed for espionage. The remainder of you, as well as the riders will be expelled from Earth and Union space. I just want to be clear on that so I don’t have to mention it again. I hate violence.” He let his eyes pass over them and nodded. “Ok... so on to the good stuff!” Arrarn saw Sadi walk up the ramp and come around behind the group wearing the standard Union flight suit as the rest of them. “Oh... and this is Sadi Leonidas for those of you who don’t know, which is probably most of you. She is my co-pilot and holds the rank of Lieutenant Commander in the Lycavorian Union Fleet military effective yesterday.”

“Leonidas?” A female pilot asked now. “She is your... your wife?”

Arrarn laughed and shook his head. “Oh no... I’m not that lucky. This lovely young creature...” Arrarn pulled Sadi over beside him with a grin. “Somehow she seems to think my brother Androcles is who she prefers over me. She is his mate... though I did try to talk her out of it several times. I really don’t know what she sees in him.”

Sadi gave him an elbow in the side. “And you never will.” She stated.

“So you are the Crown Princess of the Union?” Another male pilot asked.

“That is my official title now yes.” Sadi answered. “However I much prefer Lieutenant Commander... or just Sadi.”

Arrarn grinned wider. “Sadi has nearly a thousand hours in a *DT*, and just recently became one of only six *STRIKER* pilots still active within the Union who have flown into combat with my mother.” He said.

“How much combat have you seen?” A pilot asked him with a touch of sarcasm in his voice. “Just so we know the credentials of the man who is supposed to be training us.”

Arrarn shrugged. “It’s not something I keep track of.” He stated offhandedly.

“That doesn’t answer the question.” The same pilot continued. “Most of us have seen combat on and off for over twenty years.”

“Prince Arrarn Leonidas holds the rank of Junior Colonel within the Lycavorian Union Fleet Forces.” Toria stated loud enough for all of them to hear her. Arrarn’s eyes cut to where she was standing in surprise. “He graduated second in his Agoge Initiation Training Class at age fifteen. He turns twenty-four in three months. He graduated from the Union Fleet Academy at the age of seventeen. Two years after entering the Academy and three years earlier than normal students. The Evolli War was two years old by then and he assumed command of Prince Androcles’s *STRIKER DT* immediately upon his graduation. During the course of the next four years he joined his brother on eighty-five combat missions usually carrying Elynth, his sister Eliani and her dragon Tharua. Just to give you an idea... there were ninety-seven combat missions during that same time frame that included Bonded Pairs of Mjolnir’s Hand. On those eighty-five missions, only six of them took place where he did not take ground fire of some kind. He is the only recorded *STRIKER DT* pilot in Union history to have actually shot down thirteen Evolli *PENETRATOR*-Class fighters...” She turned to look at the gathered pilots. “He has been decorated nine times for bravery under fire and along with his brother Denali and

three others they are the only five members of the Union military to be awarded The Elven Cross of Gallantry. Outside of his mother Queen For'mya and Star Colonel Endith, he is the premier *STRIKER DT* pilot within the Union right now. I suggest we all take heed on what he will teach us." Toria finished and turned back around to look at him. She blushed slightly at the looks on his and Sadi's faces. "I read your Union profile quite thoroughly." She said softly.

Arrarn swallowed hard. "So I see." He said. "It said all that huh?"

Toria smiled at the expression on his face. "Yes."

"Well it was only eleven Evolli fighters." Arrarn spoke in an embarrassed manner. "Two of them sort of limped out of the AO after I tagged them. They were still flying though."

Sadi had a large smile on her face as she looked from Toria back to Arrarn. She was a woman and she knew interest when she saw it. "Don't argue with her Arrarn." Sadi chipped.

"It was only eleven." Arrarn protested looking at her.

"Eleven then." Toria said still with that smile on her face.

Arrarn looked back at her and took a deep breath. "Ok... anyway... you can see the pen here in the back for the dragons you will carry." Arrarn began moving towards the side. "The entire front section of the *STRIKER* detaches from the rear and basically becomes an escape pod for the crew and anyone else that can cram into it."

"What about the dragons and riders." A Coven pilot asked.

Arrarn looked at him. "They will bail out the rear ramp if a crash is imminent." He spoke. "Their psychic shields should be strong enough to protect them from most elements. At least for a time. Hopefully long enough for another *DT* to pick them up."

"And if not?" Another asked.

Arrarn looked at Sadi quickly and she stepped forward. "You must understand why your role is so important." She said. "Even I did not know this until I became Andro's mate and wife. No Bonded Pair... not Lycavorian, elf, vampire nor dragon... they will never leave the other behind. If they die... they will die together."

"Why?" Toria asked softly.

Arrarn looked at her. "So neither of them has to die alone." He said softly.

The course was six kilometers long, with a myriad of suspended bars and Lifter platforms spread out along the course to test flying skill and Mindvoice ability. It was an obstacle course for Bonded Pairs essentially, testing their turning radius and maneuvering ability as a pair. There were several sections where you had to fly between fake buildings very low to the ground to stab floating balloon objects. The last five hundred meters of the course was a close combat setting, where individual targets would pop up singly or in small groups and cause you to react instantly. All along this course Durcunusaan soldiers were set up to monitor and record the Pairs as they flew through the course, ready to spring to action if a Bonded Pair happened to slam into the ground or an obstacle itself. Andro, Denali and Lisisa had flown the course countless times already this morning, watching the High Coven Pairs move through. Eliani and Nyla remained on the perimeter in case they were needed, or flew along while one of the others broke for a different part of the course. It was a course design made specifically by Carina, and she was quite proud of it since every member of Mjolnir's Hand and the Bonded Pairs in the Union had been through it and done nothing but praise it for its ingenuity and difficulty level.

Now Andro paced back and forth in front of the forty-two Coven riders and their dragons, Elynth resting on the ground behind him. All of the High Coven riders either knelt on the hard ground their heads hung low, or they leaned against their bonded dragons heavily. They had been awakened at dawn, the sun not even above the trees yet, only to be thrust into a series of drills and then a ten kilometer run at a blistering pace set by Androcles himself. Then it was returning to the bungalows, only to be told to grab their equipment and meet him on the field with their dragons. Then they flew here and were told to proceed through the obstacle course at full speed.

None of them had made it through unscathed.

Twelve of their number had been knocked from their saddles for not ducking in time and having their dragon armor too loose. Two of them had smashed head long into one of the fake buildings during the high speed pass so close to the ground. None of them had been able to make the sharp turns and rolls that the course required. Carisia and Narice had come closest, but even they had taken their lumps. Yuri and Vollenth were one of the pairs that had collided with the building, while her children made it through without injuring themselves, but at three times the normal time for the course.

Andro wore the Mark IV ArmorPly as they all did, his helmet on his head, his swords strapped across his back. He wore one of the K12A KMs on his right thigh in its holster in order to appease Sadi's worry that Thast might try to attack him from ambush at some point in the future. Andro had laughed at this but had done what she asked of him because he loved her. The horse hair crested plume on top of his helmet moved slightly in the breeze, the shiny golden blond hair first in the line, followed by the shimmering raven colored hair similar to his own. Only Sadi knew the true significance behind the mixed colors for she was the one who had spent nearly two hours of the previous night in a transmission with the *Feravomir* having her tell her exactly how to add the feather soft fine hair.

Andro stopped pacing in front of them and reached up to remove his helmet just as Lisisa landed not far away with Jeth and Zarah behind her. He watched as Zarah dropped gracefully from behind Lisisa and move quickly to where he was standing. She reached up and removed her own crested helmet as she held out the data pad.

"That's everything." She spoke softly. "Deni and the others are already headed back."

[What did you see?] He asked his younger sister.

Zarah tossed back her long dark brown hair and looked at him. *[I'm not a rider Andro.]* She said.

[No... but you are my sister and a member of the Durcunusaan.] He told her. *[And you are an accomplished rider Zarah, regardless of what you may think of your skills.]*

Zarah looked into his azure blue eyes and smiled. She may have been five years younger than him, but because of what they had shared so long ago, Andro would always treat her as an equal no matter what. Only he knew her most intimate secret, a secret that not even Normya or her mother knew, and that he had never once even spoken of it in all the years since that day had only endeared her brother to her like nothing ever could.

[They need work.] Zarah answered. *[They have not had the benefit of the closeness our Bonded Pairs have Andro. They are by no means hopeless... but I think they need more time to bring themselves closer with their dragons. With the exception of Narice and Lisi's sister many of them are still fighting the bonds, not surrendering themselves to it as they should.]*

Andro nodded. *[Yes... I felt that as well.]* He smiled at her. *[Do you have your training regime all worked out?]*

Zarah beamed. *[What do you think?]* She exclaimed. *[You give them to me in two days and I'll give them back to you in three weeks able to take down a squad of Immortals without even breathing heavy. Most of them are already skilled, they just don't know how to unleash that and combine it with their bonds.]*

Andro grinned and leaned over to kiss her cheek. *[Mother was right. For someone so young... you are decidedly more dangerous than I will ever be.]*

Zarah laughed. *[Like anyone will believe that.]*

Andro nodded with a smile. *[I'll see you at dinner tonight.]*

Zarah nodded and turned to run back to where Lisisa waited. He watched as Zarah got back in the saddle behind her sister and then Jeth launched them into the air once more headed back to the main base. He was right... Zarah had taken to the fighting arts as if it was all second nature to her. No *Durcunusaan* instructor would even attempt to challenge her anymore, and it was one of the reasons she had been accepted into their ranks so young. While she was a lethal fighter, she was also an incredibly skilled engineer and while she acted reckless and carefree, she was equally as reflective and intelligent.

He turned to look back at the High Coven Riders. "You are probably feeling sorry for yourselves right about now." He began speaking seeing their heads come up and look at him. "That was some of the most pitiful Close Quarters Flying I have ever seen. *Nubous* dreadful to be honest." Andro saw Yuri's face twist into a scowl and she opened her mouth to speak but Andro held up his hand and shook his head. "Do not attempt to make excuses Princess Yuri, for there are none."

"I suppose you can do better!" Dante snapped from where he knelt by Marux's front foreleg.

Andro stepped closer to him. “Would you care to challenge us and find out Dante?” He asked coldly. “Or you Marux? Any of you?”

Dante turned quickly and looked at Marux. His head hovered only inches from his shoulder, his light yellow eyes focused on Andro even as Elynth moved up slowly behind him. His dark gray scales looked much healthier than when he had arrived on Earth, but Dante’s arrogant attitude still permeated his being. Andro reached up above his head without looking and placed his hand on the underside of Elynth’s jaw.

“Listen to me all of you.” Andro spoke. “Many of you still consider me your enemy. I know this... I can feel it radiating from you. Using the names given to us from Earth’s own ancient history, I am a werewolf... you are vampires and never the twain shall meet. You need to forget all you have been taught and let go of the perceived hatreds you have for my people. If you do not... we will be able to teach you nothing and when you and your bonded brother or sister go into combat against the Kavalians they will butcher you without regard. Then they will hold up your corpses as a sign that they no longer fear you or dragons.” Andro lowered his hand and moved closer to them. “Alba Tau taught us that we must surrender all that we are to our bonds. You must fight as one. Think as one. You must become each other. That is the only way you will survive. Then... then the Kavalians will fear you.”

“What do you know of the Kavalians?” Yuri snapped. “You have never fought them!”

Andro met her eyes and nodded. “No I have not.” He stated simply. “What does that matter? Kavalian, Evolli, Kochab... what difference does it make what species they are when they are behind the sights of a T19 waiting to blow you and your dragon from the sky Princess Yuri?” He spoke. “Their only intent is to kill you and your bonded one. As Talon Guardians... that is something Elynth and I will do our best to prevent... because since Alba Tau that is the path we have chosen. But in order to do that... you must be willing to learn what we can teach you. Otherwise... we are just wasting our time here.”

“You keep speaking of this Alba Tau.” A rider spoke up from the back. “Is that a battle or something?”

Andro nodded. “Or something. I don’t know if you could actually categorize it as a battle, but it was a turning point so to speak in Elynth’s and my life. In Moneus Simpson’s life. My father and uncle. Everyone who took part in it actually.”

“So are you going to tell us the story?” The same man asked.

Andro lifted his eyes to look at him. “Story?” He said softly. “I’m... I’m sure there is security footage of what happened somewhere, we documented the entire Evolli War in great detail. Will I tell you about it? No. It is not a story to me.”

They watched as Andro turned and replaced his helmet on his head and nimbly leaped up onto Elynth’s back. She rose to her legs, her yellow/gold eyes scanning the riders and dragons in front of her.

It is not a story to us. Her voice filled their minds. It has been and will always be a nightmare.

Andro looked at them again. “You have two days until the hand to hand training begins. Use this time to study the manuals we have given you and discover more deeply the bonds you have with your dragons. In the end... that is what will save you. I’m sure you can all find your way back from here. It is only twenty kilometers back to the main base. See to your bonded ones and their needs and then the time is yours. Prepare yourselves riders of the High Coven. In two days your training will truly begin.”

Elynth trumpeted her agreement and then propelled them into the sky.

SPARTA

WESTERN MOUNTAIN RANGE

For’mya pushed back against Martin’s form further, snuggling deeper into his embrace as she sipped the glass of wine and let her eyes take in the colorful dancing of the stars in the night sky. She was wonderfully sore but slightly disappointed. She was strong enough now within Mindvoice to know the moment she became pregnant, and part of her had hoped it would be this night as brightly as her blood had burned. Martin had not disappointed her with the intensity and passion with which he took her, his aura driving her to heights she had not yet experienced with him. He had taken her right to the very edge of her maintaining control of her mind and body, and it had been utterly glorious. Even now, an hour after he had filled her for the sixth undeniably blissful time, the fingers of his aura were still tightly corded around her senses keeping her body humming in

harmony for him. Not that she needed any help in doing that. She was only slightly disappointed because she knew he would take her like this always now, and when she came into phase in just under six months she would most definitely become pregnant again. It would be a girl she somehow knew, and that knowledge made her giddy.

They were still very much naked, sitting on the edge of the bear skin that was not saturated with their combined juices. She closed her eyes in enchantment as he leaned forward from adding more wine to his glass and firmly nuzzled the back of her elven ear and her neck. She could feel the steady and powerful strumming of his heart against her back, his broad chest pressed tightly to her silky skin, and it soothed her like nothing ever could. He pulled aside the long blond hair, tucking it behind her four inch high ear and his lips settled a kiss on the very outer ridge making her shudder.

For'mya opened her eyes and leaned into his nibbling of her ear lobe with a smile. "Are you going to tease me the rest of the night or would you like to know about the talks and my dinner with the Kavalians." She said softly with a smile.

Martin chuckled softly. "I thought I might tease you until morning. The Kavalians are not a priority for me right now." He said whispered. "Your ears taste especially good tonight you know."

For'mya grinned. "Martin Leonidas... you have had me six times this night. Is that not enough?"

"It's never enough." He stated softly next to her ear. "Not with you... not with any of you. It will never be enough. You possess my being."

"Well that is good... because you possess ours as well." For'mya said. "And we expect you to do this to us for at least three or four millennia. I suggest you conserve your strength my love. You are over three thousand years old."

Martin grinned. "Remember *Kinsoaurgai*... I spent the first twenty-five hundred years of that in suspended animation. I have a lot of catching up to do."

For'mya laughed now as well. "And you are doing a superb job of it." She said.

Martin's arm slid around in front of her and For'mya used her free hand to pull it tightly to her chest. "Ok... if we must talk about them... but I will warn you... with the way you smell and taste tonight I might lose interest in talking about the Kavalians very quickly." He sighed.

For'mya chuckled. "The talks went smoothly... standard negotiations really. Deia did most of the talking herself. I don't believe she trusts Laustinos now anymore than we do."

"I will talk with her." He stated. "I don't think trust is an issue with him. I just think he is letting his hormones rule his brain, what little of it there is anyway. He's been sniffing after *Melda Min* for years and..."

For'mya turned slightly in his arms and looked at him. "You have known this?" She asked surprised. "You have known this and done nothing. Martin Leonidas... you surprise me with your control."

Martin smiled. "*Kinsoaurgai*... I have the five most delicious and beautiful women in the universe. It doesn't surprise me that other men desire them. I can't kill all of them... no matter how much my instincts clamor for me to do just that."

For'mya's eyes grew a little wider. "There... there have been more?" She gasped.

"You don't honestly think that you and my other Queens are the only ones who detect these things do you?" Martin said with a grin. "Those two or three you and the others have chased away through the years are only the ones I let you chase away. Most of them never even got that far."

"Martin... how... how many have there been?" She asked.

"Four after Aricia... three after Anja... three after Dysea... two after Isabella... and four after you." He replied easily.

"You... you jest with me!" She exclaimed. "Don't you?"

Martin shook his head. "No." He said with a grin. "Most of them were Alphas or Betas that remained from Chetak's rule. They are solid citizens... but they thought we still followed the old ways in that regard and that they could challenge me for you and the others. This all took place in the first ten years of us being together. With the exception of Laustinos and a couple others that my Queens quickly set straight, not since that time."

"Were they fools? Couldn't they see all of us want only you?" For'mya asked. "You didn't... Martin Leonidas you didn't..."

Martin laughed again. “No... I didn’t kill them.” He chortled. “That wouldn’t go over real well as King of the Union if I started whacking every man that ever desired or fantasized about one of my Queens. I fantasize about the five of you all the time.” For’mya lashed out and slapped his shoulder gently with her hand as he smiled. “I calmly informed them they needed to find their own female and move on with their lives. Laustinos I knew my Queens could handle, just like the others.”

“We... we never knew this Martin. You never told us this.” She said finally.

“Why would you? It wasn’t important enough to tell you. I dismissed it as soon as I took care of it.” He stated simply. “Now what else did you learn *Kinsoaurgai*? Do you sense a threat from any of them?”

For’mya shook her head quickly. “Qurot is an overbearing fool.” She said in reply. “He feels that we as females are beneath him. I know he is not happy that Jalersi is in a position of authority over him. It comes out in his demeanor and his words. If there is a threat from any of their delegation it will be from him.”

Martin nodded. “From what I understand the Kavalian people as a whole do not give their females a whole lot of freedom.” He said. “They are taught to fight and will defend what is theirs, but they have no voice in the greater scheme of things. And if what Armetus tells me is accurate, their females are taught to be submissive to the males. What you are saying lends a great deal of weight to that information.”

For’mya nodded. “The two male Legislatures are agreeable enough. They are intelligent and forthcoming to an extent, but I believe they allow Jalersi to take the lead in most everything to gain favor with her father. She listens to them on many things and they are very adept at negotiations.” For’mya looked at him. “She shows a great deal of interest in you Martin. She seems very excited to meet with you tomorrow evening.”

“The question remains as to why.” Martin said. “I can’t be very high on the Kavalian’s list of most loved people and my brother’s mate wanting to meet with me is odd don’t you think?”

For’mya nodded. “Yes... in a manner of sorts.”

“And you don’t sense anything nefarious from her?” Martin asked.

For’mya shook her head. “It is harder to determine someone’s emotions when they have training to control them, you know that. Helen has shown me ways around that in many regards, but no... if she is masking some darker purpose I have not sensed it. Where it concerns you I can only feel anxiety and interest.”

“To what end?” Martin said softly.

“Are you sure you wish to have them come to the villa?” For’mya asked. “Expose the Little ones to them?”

Martin nodded. “It is what we would do for any political leader or delegation.” He answered. “Deia told me I must maintain the status quo. I don’t see any reason to deviate from that rule. Deia wouldn’t let me even if I wanted too. If we are to maintain appearances that there is nothing else going on with the Coven then we need to keep things as normal as possible. I’ve already had Fache increase security around the grounds and Tarifa, Aihola and Isra have agreed to have the Little Ones stay with them for the evening. My mother and Riall will be joining us along with Deia and her mate. I invited Helen... but she is flying down to SODRAG in the morning at Andro’s request to observe and assist with the training for a few days.”

For’mya nodded slowly and sipped her wine. “It is a good plan.” She said. “Jalersi’s sister Athani and your brother’s son Karun are the enigmas” She stated. “When she came to our ship I sensed indecision and fear in Athani. A sense of hopelessness. It is completely different now. After the insurgent attack, coming down from orbit, the talks today. Now I sense only incredible happiness. And her Mindvoice shields are far stronger than they should be for someone who just discovered this skill my love.”

“Did you probe her?” Martin asked.

For’mya shook her head. “Not beyond her surface thoughts Martin Leonidas. You know we look down on that.”

Martin nodded. “With good reason... it’s a violation of a person’s privacy.” He answered her quickly. “What were her surface thoughts?”

“A mixture of many things. Nothing relevant really. Almost as if she was thinking many different things as a form of camouflage.” For’mya replied. “I did not want to press further... but it was easy enough to ascertain her abilities are growing by the day.”

Martin nodded. “I sensed that from the anti-room as well.”

“I can tell you with the utmost certainty that whatever her agenda is Martin... it has nothing at all to do with the trade talks and everything to do with herself.” For’mya said. “She seemed almost bored today during

the initial discussions.” She turned her head. “The more that I am in her presence... the more I believe she is waiting for the right moment to ask us for political asylum.”

Martin shook his head. “*Kinsoaurgai*... you know I can’t grant that.” He said. “We have remained out of their war with the Coven up until now by being careful. Granting her asylum would be one of the fastest ways to a conflict with them. Her father is the Prefect of the KFI! He would never allow us to grant her asylum.”

“What if she is just seeking an escape Martin Leonidas?” For’mya asked looking at him. “From a life she does not want? A life that is being forced on her? Will you just dismiss the values you yourself hold dear? I know you Martin Leonidas, we as your mates and wives know you. You do not hate anyone arbitrarily my love. Your complete acceptance of your love for Bella and all those vampires that call the Union home is the perfect example. There is a reason you feel the way you do and it stems from your brother. What is it?”

Martin stared at her for a long silent moment. “I hate him *Kinsoaurgai*.” He said softly. “I hate him with every fiber of my being. He... he was able to touch our father, actually see him... feel his hands upon him. Look upon the flesh of his face and body. I... I never had that... all I have are images of who he is... who he was. My dreams and then his spirit that came to me that night at Thermopylae. To know that Pleistarchus had something I never will... to know that he dishonors that willfully and spits on our father’s memory by his actions. To know how our father died and why... and then to desert his people and our father’s memories as he did?” Martin shook his head slowly. “I will never forgive him for that. I can’t... and Pleistarchus sending his son by this woman is only another way for him to continue to torture me.”

For’mya’s eyes grew wider as she turned fully in his arms to look at him. “You don’t think he will...”

Martin nodded. “Yes... that is exactly what I think.” He said softly. “And I am dreading that day like I have dreaded nothing ever before.”

GYTHEIO RESUMAR’S VILLA

The only thing Resumar was dreading at the moment was an early end to the muscle stretching pleasure that Athani’Puat’s lips and tongue were providing him.

The ride to his villa had been maddening as her tangerine scent assailed his nostrils. Feeling her warm body pressed tightly into his arms, even as she gazed with wonder at the ground below them, was very nearly too much. Her feline eyes even picking out several other dragons that flew in the night sky a few kilometers away. He had intended to bring her here to his home and seduce her properly, spending more hours simply exploring her lush body and making her quiver in desire for him. Athani captivated him in a way he had never experienced before, but he failed to take into account that Athani felt equally enthralled by him and had plans of her own.

The moment they were inside his hillside villa, she pounced on him, her own desire far outweighing any sense of decorum. As he stumbled slightly into the main room of his villa, their lips locked in a sizzling kiss, he directed them towards the large couch. It was Athani who broke their kiss and pushed him back onto the couch, seeing his eyes go a little wider at her boldness. She lowered herself onto his body and kissed him once more as her hands undressed him slowly. Resumar could smell her desire easily enough and her need and he was content to let her take what she wanted. He wanted the same thing. He was half undressed when she reached up and in one fluid motion she pulled the top she was wearing from her body. She wore no undergarments, not that she needed them with the firmness of her breasts, and she leaned forward again pressing her full breasts against his bare chest as she kissed him once more. She rubbed her breasts across the hard flesh of his chest, her hard nipples dragging across his skin, inflaming not only his passion but hers as well.

Athani’s hands dropped between their bodies as they kissed and her fingers deftly worked the fastenings on his pants, pulling them open until her hands could reach the prize she so wanted. She felt his body stiffen and he groaned softly against her lips as her hands engulfed his straining eleven inch cock, wrapping her fingers around the shaft and beginning to stroke him with torturous slowness. Athani wasted no more time and slid her body off of his to settle before him on her knees. She pressed a hand to his muscular chest as he began to protest and her blue/green eyes glittered at him.

“Athani... you don’t...”

Athani smiled as she wrapped her small hand around the base of his cock possessively. “Oh but I want too.” She gasped. “More than anything.”

Athani pushed him back onto the couch with her hand before settling comfortably once more between his wide spread legs. She brought her other hand down to encircle the base of his thick cock and she stared at his throbbing eleven inch spear with wanton desire. Oh yes... he was so much larger and thicker than Pusintin, and she had taken all of him within her body without one iota of pain and only mind blowing pleasure. She used her hands to stroke his thick shaft slowly, feeling the veins pulsing with life and she leaned her face close to his cock. She pressed his length to her cheek lovingly, feeling the heat radiating from the organ. She could barely get Pusintin’s whole cock into her mouth, and often times he would simply grab her blond hair and ram himself fully into her throat, making her gag violently as he blasted his come into her belly. Her throat would be sore for days after he did this, but she tolerated it for enduring him was far better than enduring anyone else. Staring at Resumar’s cock now, she knew this would not be an issue and she did not fear it. He would never do something like that and Athani silently vowed that she would teach herself how to fully engulf his huge cock completely over the coming months and years. Now she would simply lavish him with attention and take as much as she was able.

Athani extended her tongue and felt Resumar’s thighs tighten as she began to lick his length as if she was cleaning him. She held his cock straight up in one hand while dragging her tongue up the side of his shaft, stopping to swirl around the flared head twice before dragging her tongue back down his length once more. She did this half a dozen times, each time her tongue battering the sensitive head of his cock, until she once more licked back downwards. Athani opened her mouth wide on her next upward lick and engulfed the pulsing head of his cock within her lips. Her eyes flew open when she felt his aura reach for her and surround her, setting her own body on fire, even as his hands grasped her head. She stopped with just the head of his throbbing cock in her mouth, thinking he was going to ram his huge pole into her throat. She hummed out her delight around Resumar’s cock when all he did was wrap his fingers in her long silky hair. That was all the incentive Athani needed to continue. It was all the information she needed to finally realize that this man was unlike any other she had ever known. Grasping his heated shaft in one hand at the base Athani took a deep breath and plunged her head down the steel hard pole until she felt herself begin to gag; quickly bringing her head back up until only the hot, bulbous head was still within her lips. She battered the head of his cock without mercy, before plunging her head down once again. She felt his hands tighten on her head, his fingers curling within her hair, but he made no move to force her to take more of him. She could feel the muscles in his thighs straining, his rippled abdomen contracting. He wasn’t going to last long she knew, and her pussy began to leak her own excitement at this knowledge.

Athani sped up her plunges, each time going further down his thick shaft and then retreating to swirl her tongue around the head. She tasted him then, and the moment his come touched her tongue Athani groaned in delight as a small but powerful orgasm coursed through her. Her juices poured from her, soaking the pants she was wearing and Athani not caring in the least. She heard him groan as her scent touched him, enveloped him and she felt his cock swell within her lips. Athani plunged her head back down quickly, reaching further and further until her soft lips touched the outside of her hand wrapped around the three inches at the base of his pulsing cock. She brought her other hand down and cupped his large balls, feeling his legs go rigid. She had eight inches of his beautiful cock within her mouth and part of her throat and it felt divine. The heat of his shaft sizzled along her tongue and she could feel every beat of his heart easily pulsing along the veins.

“*Sibfla!*” Resumar nearly shouted as his head whipped back, his eyes changed and his wolf fangs fully extending. “Athani... I... ughhhhh!”

Athani felt the first blast of his come rocket up the length of his shaft and erupt into her waiting gullet. She closed her eyes in glee as she drank down his come with no hesitation in the least. With Pusintin she resisted this action, yet with Resumar Leonidas she felt a powerful need to taste him, to swallow all that he gave her. Athani didn’t pause and as each following eruption came she drank down his essence with relish. His hips had come off the couch slightly; his entire body tensed so tightly it seemed as if his muscles would rip from his flesh. Athani knew from experience that he could come quite a bit, and she kept up her sucking motion, intent on not letting a single drop escape her lips, which were securely sealed around his spasming cock shaft.

It was several moments before his last eruption came and then his body collapsed back onto the couch. His cock was still incredibly hard, something that made Athani even more excited, and as the last remnants of

his come leaked from the head she began to release his cock from the prison of her lips. She pulled back until just the head remained, once more lavishing the bulbous portion with delicate licks and soft nibbles. She felt his hands drop from her head and move to her shoulders and quickly she released his cock with her hands and stripped her pants from her hips, knowing what was coming and wiggling her hips until the pants dangled around her ankles. Resumar grasped her under her armpits and pulled her upwards, her mouth tearing away from his cock with a gasp and wide eyes as he pulled her into his lap. She felt the searing heat from his thick cock as it brushed firmly against her drenched pussy and she gasped when his lips covered hers. Her body was singing out for him more loudly than it had on his father's ship, and Athani knew what she wanted more than anything. She pulled her head away from his, grinning as he fought this action, nibbling on her bottom lip. She took his head in her hands and stared into his eyes, taking in the contours of his face, his eyebrows, his lips. All of him, and burning it into her memory.

"Make... make me yours... Resumar Leonidas!" She gasped softly. "I... I wish for nothing more in my life than that!"

Resumar leaned forward and nuzzled the hollow of her throat firmly, feeling her fingers trace the ridge of his elven ears. They may have been shorter because he was only half elf, but they were no less sensitive and Athani had discovered this on his father's ship in the midst of their pleasure that night.

"Now that I... I have found you." Res spoke lifting his face to stare into her eyes. "Now that I have found you Athani'Puat... I have no intention of ever letting you go." His hands dropped to her ass cheeks and he lifted her hips slightly. Her blue/green eyes were wide in desire and need as she felt the head of his still rock hard cock press against her drenched opening. "You are mine Athani'Puat!" He gasped loudly. "And no one... no one else but me will ever have you again!"

Athani's head flew back as he impaled her completely in one breath stealing plunge and she screamed out her joy. This man... this night... it firmly set her on a path into the unknown but Athani knew somehow that with this man beside her, nothing was out of her grasp. As she descended once more into a world of passion and pleasure, Athani'Puat felt the tears flood her eyes and she surrendered all that she was to him without fear or reservations.

LYCAVORIAN SPACE JUMP GATE 24 TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Normya scrambled into the cockpit of the *TYPE II* as the vibration throughout the entire ship was growing worse. She glared at Toral as she settled into her seat. Her Coming of Age fever was upon her now in full force and it was all Normya could do to fight it and not snap at everyone as she had the Chief Engineer when they had picked up the ship.

"What did you do?" She demanded harshly and immediately regretted her words.

Toral only glanced at her, knowing what she was going through and having seen it in other turned elves. He had been Normya's co-pilot for four years now, and he knew this was not her normal self. Her words barely glanced off his skin.

"The vibrations are increasing!" He told her. "LSD drive coils are reaching unstable levels!"

"They fixed the LSD coils!" Normya snapped as she strapped in and began to scan her instruments.

"Not good enough it seems!" Toral announced as his hands moved across his consoles. "We need to come out of LSD operation Normya."

"Where are we?" She asked.

"Sector Seventeen. Three minutes from exiting Gate 24." He saw her eyes go wide at this information.

"I know the fever is on you pretty bad and I figured I would let you sleep as much as possible."

"Can we make the Gate?" She demanded.

Toral shook his head. "It's possible... but the increased in vibration is rattling the power manifolds badly. *Anse!* It almost like the engineers did more bad than good. It's worse now than when we got to Apo Prime."

“I have control!” She spoke quickly as her hands poised over her console. “See if you can route additional power to the inertia dampeners through the secondary relays. We have to get the manifold vibration controlled or it will make the coils shatter!”

Toral drew his hands back. “Control is yours.” He stated as he began pulling at his own straps. “Damn space dock engineers!” He spat as he pulled himself from his seat. “They were supposed to fix this!”

Normya’s emerald green eyes scanned her instruments with a trained eye. “We’re losing containment in the primary core Toral. I’m compensating with external batteries!”

Toral was at the engineering station now, tearing the large panel from its housing and exposing a myriad of conduits and cables. He worked quickly pulling at several connectors and altering their connection and then plugging them back in. “Secondary relays active! Pulling power from sub light engines!”

Normya checked her display and shook her head. “It’s not working!”

“Hold on! I’ll jack the power ten percent!”

She saw the yellow caution lights begin to turn back to green as the manifold dampeners absorbed the extra power and stabilized. She could feel the vibration lessen considerably.

“That did it!” She barked.

“That won’t hold for long!” Toral shouted his head and shoulders almost buried within the engineering panel.

“Ninety seconds to the Gate!” Normya called out.

Toral ignored her as his elf eyes detected something that was not normal to this engineering work panel. He stretched out his body down the work area and reached for the small device on the main LSD power conduit. He and Normya were both skilled engineers and they knew their ship backwards and frontward. This device was not part of this section. He lifted his hand to touch the device and froze as his eyes went wide.

“Normya!” He screamed. “Don’t exit the Gate! Drop from the LSD corridor now!” Toral was scrambling backwards trying to pull himself out of the work section.

“What!” He heard Normya question.

“No!” He screamed again, banging his head hard against the inside of the conduit. “No!”

“Ten seconds!” Normya called. “Hold on!”

Toral pushed himself back as hard as he could. “Normya no! Drop now! Don’t exit the Gate! There’s a fused explosive on the main LSD conduit! Gate operation will cause it to overheat and trigger!”

Normya’s eyes were wide as she stared at him for a single instant. She needed no further direction and using all of her elven and wolf reflexes, her hands flew across her controls.

Her emerald eyes looked up knowing she was not going to be fast enough. “Oh *sibfla*!” She exclaimed softly.

The exit threshold of Jump Gate 24 was upon them and they could only watch as the Gate triggered in a silvery burst of light. They saw a flash of stars beyond the Gate itself and then the explosion from under the engineering station sent Toral careening into the back of his co-pilot’s chair as the *TYPE II* impacted the edge of the actual Gate braces. The faulty exit and collision caused the Gate Power core to rupture and explode just as Normya’s *TYPE II* cleared the actual Gate threshold. The resulting explosion smashed into the rear of the *TYPE II* and sent it spinning wildly out of control. The Gate’s destruction lit up the surrounding stars and then there was nothing but the darkness of space.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE WILDS

1.8 LIGHT YEARS FROM APRIAN TWO

“...on our way back husband.” Esther spoke as she sat in the engineer’s station behind Tir’ut who was piloting the Limian Transport.

The ship was a heavily modified Limian *VANGRA 9*-Class Tactical Transport. It was a common enough ship throughout The Wilds since the Limians were not particular about whom they sold their ships to. This ship however was quite different that most of those like it found in The Wilds. It was much more meticulously cared

for considering it had more powerful engines, and quite an assortment of offensive as well as defensive armaments. All enhancements that Cha'talla had added to the ship's seventy meter length over the years. Cha'talla the Immortal was not one to skimp when it came to the protection and safety of his Blessed Wife or any of his tribe. As with the heavily modified G9 Long Range High Coven Runners they had in their small fleet, this *VANGRA 9 TT* was easily able to haul freight and personnel as well as defend itself from the many pirates and mercenaries that called The Wilds home.

Cha'talla's face appeared confused. "And just how did you manage that Esther? We were not expecting you for another six days at least."

Esther smiled. "I did not care to run into Gareld again my husband. Lesede informed us before we left Jagaliu of the ship he commands. It is an older model Bontawillian Frigate... but it could still be a threat to us. His ship was just departing orbit when we left and I had Tir'ut take us through Gate Nine to leave him behind quickly."

Cha'talla's eyes grew a little wider. "Esther... the Overseer Jump Gates in The Wilds are notoriously unstable. You took a risk doing that."

Esther nodded. "It was a risk I thought necessary Cha'talla. We definitely don't need Gareld following us back to our home on Kranek my love. At least not until you are ready to receive him in proper Immortal fashion." Esther heard Tir'ut chuckle from his seat behind the transport's controls.

Cha'talla shook his head slowly with a smile, exposing the tips of his vampiric fangs. "I wonder sometimes *Du'ased 'ranndi*, if you should not have been born Akruvian." (Blessed Wife)

Esther matched his smile and her dark eyes glittered with adoring love for him. "I was able to obtain everything on our list for once. The merchants on Aprian Two must have just received an influx of material from their sources."

Cha'talla nodded. "Good... the astrometric specialist from the Kortanie settlement also predicts another fierce winter as I suspected. We will be well prepared and able to help them if they should need something."

Esther leaned closer to the screen. "I was also able to obtain that certain scented oil you like so much *Du'ased m'ranndii*. I intend to make use of it the first night we return. I hope you are up to the task." She spoke in a soft whisper.

"I will certainly look forward to that." Cha'talla answered with a grin. "And I will most definitely be up to the task my wife."

"Tir'ut has plotted us a course between the Torana Gas Cluster and the Protonic Nebula." Esther said sitting back in the chair. "We should be home in just under three days husband."

"Make sure our son knows not to attempt his superior flying skills in the transport." Cha'talla spoke. "It is not an G9 and would not hold up well under the strain."

Esther chuckled. "I will insure this." She answered. "We..."

"Whoa!" Tir'ut's voice exclaimed loudly from his seat and Esther turned her head to look at him quickly.

"Tir'ut! What is it?" She asked.

"Mother pull up grid 57896 point three!" Tir'ut spoke excitedly. "Hurry!"

Esther adjusted a monitor adjoining the one she was using to speak with Cha'talla and punched in the coordinates Tir'ut had given her. The screen came alive with the remnants of a massive white flash and her eyes grew larger as she leaned forward. "Tir'ut... what is that?" She asked.

"Long range sensors are detecting massive Polarion particles saturating that sector of space and small amounts of isotopic radiation!" He replied instantly. "If I had to guess... I'd say a Jump Gate just exploded."

"That's inside Union territory!" Esther spoke. "Their Gates are perfectly maintained all of the time! The only way one of their Gates would explode is if something hit it, or someone destroyed it!"

"Esther... what is it?" Cha'talla asked.

"Stand by husband." Esther replied quickly. "Tir'ut... increase power to the lateral sensor array. Are there any signs of ships in the area of the explosion or nearby?"

"Mother... the lateral sensor array will be detected if I increase the power." Tir'ut spoke from his seat.

"Pulse a five second burst!" She ordered. "No one will be able to track that back to us."

"Five second burst coming up." Tir'ut stated adjusting his controls. "Pulse away!"

Esther's screen flickered for a couple of seconds and then cleared once more. "Tir'ut!"

“I see it! Can’t get a complete picture... but if the readings are accurate, it appears to be a Nodon Engineering Systems *TYPE II*.” Tir’ut said.

“One of their Dragon ships.” Esther spoke softly.

“We can’t tell much from here... but the power readings are fluctuating and it looks like they have lost one of their engine nacelles.” Tir’ut told her. “It’s adrift and heading right for the border.”

“Esther... what is happening?” Cha’talla asked once more.

“Cha’talla... one of the Union *TYPE II* dragon ships apparently struck their Jump Gate upon exit!” Esther spoke. “They are adrift and heading for the border with heavy damage.”

Cha’talla’s dark eyes narrowed now. “Their dragon ships are piloted exclusively by elves Esther.” He spoke. “An elf pilot would not strike a Jump Gate upon exit.”

“I know.” Esther said.

“Esther... it is not our concern.” Cha’talla stated. “The Union is more than capable of taking care of their own. They will send a recovery ship. One is probably already on its way.”

“Cha’talla we have always talked of when we would reveal ourselves to the Union.” Esther spoke. “This could be our chance husband.”

Cha’talla shook his head quickly. “No.” He ordered. “We have accomplished much my wife, but my people are responsible for the death of King Leonidas’s father and many others. He is not a forgiving soul Esther... you know this.”

“We don’t know that for sure Cha’talla.” Esther said. “Millions of purebloods and turned vampires alike live within the Union. Think of what we could gain if we were able to trade with the many Union planets along the border. We would want for nothing and our future would be so much brighter than it is even now.”

“Esther... I agree with you... but it is still too soon.” Cha’talla spoke. “Perhaps another decade or two when we have fully left that past behind us.”

“We have left it behind us husband.” Esther said forcefully. “And it is time now to start building even more than what we have already built.”

“Esther...” He began speaking.

Esther sighed heavily. “I will do as you say husband.” She stated quickly. “And we will talk of this when I return. You and T’lolt and the others have come so far and you do not give yourselves enough credit! We will see you in three days!” Esther stabbed her finger down on the panel before he could respond, ending the transmission. She immediately got out of her seat and moved forward to settle into the navigator and co-pilot’s seat beside her son.

“Mother?” Tir’ut asked looking at her.

“How soon before that *TYPE II* drifts across the border?” Esther asked.

“At its current rate of drift, perhaps nine hours.” He answered. “Why?”

“Lifesigns?”

“We are too far away to determine that.” Tir’ut answered. “And the neutrino particles in the Torana Gas Cluster will prevent getting a clearer picture than what we have now.”

“Unless we were closer.” Esther said.

Tir’ut nodded. “Yes... unless we were...” He turned to look at his mother.

“Alter our course Tir’ut.” Esther spoke turning to look at him. “Alter our course and then increase speed. Take us to the far side of the cluster closet to the Union border. How long?”

“Mother... father said...”

“I know what your father said.” Esther spoke. “He said not to get involved... he did not say we could not watch. Now... how long?”

“I can have us there in seven hours if I use the auxiliary thruster engines.” Tir’ut replied.

Esther nodded. “Then use them.” She spoke.

Tir’ut smiled and turned back to his controls. “Using them mother.” He stated.

Cha'talla turned from the monitor slowly and looked around the small command center at the five other Immortals who occupied it. All of them turned away quickly so as not to meet his gaze. The door to the center opened and T'lolt walked in casually, stopping several feet inside the center when he felt the tenseness of the personnel and his brother. He moved up slowly to where Cha'talla stood.

"Brother... I was coming to get the daily reports on the perimeter fences." T'lolt said. "Why does it seem like there is a problem?"

Cha'talla looked at him. "Bring up the charts of the sector our transport is in and put them on the plot!" He barked out. "T'lolt." He said motioning to the plot board.

They moved to the large waist high plot board and watched as the area of space Esther was in came up quickly. Cha'talla's eyes scanned it quickly. "Overlay any known Union Jump Gates along the border in the accompanying sectors!" He shouted.

"Stand by!"

"Cha'talla what is wrong?" T'lolt asked.

"Overlaying Captain!"

Cha'talla watched as seven points appeared on the chart, all of them inside the Union border. "Esther and Tir'ut reported a Union Jump Gate exploded just across the border here." He stabbed his finger down on the chart. "Union Gate Two Four. It is the only one they would be able to detect from their location."

T'lolt looked at him. "Cha'talla... Union Jump Gates don't just explode."

Cha'talla nodded. "I know. They also detected a Nodon Engineering *TYPE II* dragon transport adrift and heading for the border." He said. "Elves fly all of their STRIKERS and their dragon ships. No elf pilot will collide with a Jump Gate T'lolt. They would exit the Jump Gate corridor before they allowed that to happen. No matter where they were."

T'lolt nodded. "I agree."

"I know my pureblood wife T'lolt." Cha'talla spoke. "She will not listen to me. She is too inquisitive... too stubborn and too dedicated to insuring our tribe grows and prospers."

"That is why she is considered the Matriarch of our tribe now brother." T'lolt said. "It has been this way for years. Everything she does is for our benefit."

Cha'talla nodded. "That is why she will not listen to me. She will go and investigate this incident. Even after I instructed her not to."

T'lolt smiled. "She is stubborn brother as you said... more stubborn than you. That is why you love her so. If she did not look as she does... she could have been born an Akruxian in how she acts and thinks."

Cha'talla nodded slowly. "That is what I told her. And that is why she will investigate this incident."

"The Union will no doubt be aware of this already brother." T'lolt said. "All of their Gates are linked by an early warning system as well as a usage meter. And if it is one of their dragon ships, you can be assured help is already on the way."

Cha'talla looked at him, his dark eyes filled with questions. "T'lolt... in the years since the Union has been using these dragons and helping them to repopulate their species... when have you known these dragon ships to be piloted by anyone other than an elf?"

T'lolt shook his head. "Never."

"And in all our years fighting the Union... when have you ever known an elf pilot to collide with anything they did not intentionally want to collide with?" Cha'talla asked.

T'lolt looked at him. "You don't believe this is an accident do you?" He said softly.

"Take our G9s brother. All three of them. Fully armed and loaded with a complete squad of our finest in each ship. This is no accident... and I believe my Blessed Wife and sons are about to step into a Fever Wasp's nest." Cha'talla spoke. "If they are injured in any way... I will act in the same fashion as King Leonidas and I will slaughter any who are involved in hurting them."

T'lolt nodded. "We'll leave within the hour." He stated as his hand dropped to where he kept the Lycavorian Nehtes strapped to his right leg.

It was a memento of a life altering change of direction in his almost five thousand years of living. An opportunity given to him by a man he once considered a mortal enemy. A man who had treated him with respect and honor. A man who had insured the bodies of his sons would not be taken by the animals until he could properly intern their remains. T'lolt had embraced change after that day, and he had started over. He had a

new wife who he had learned to adore, and he had three young children that he doted on in a very unlike Akruvian fashion. Yes he had changed.

And it was a change that he, like his brother and his tribe, had welcomed with open arms.

SPARTA DIPLOMATIC ENVOY APARTMENTS

Athani'Puat stepped from the shower in her apartment exquisitely sore and her lithe body still alive with the sensations from her hours in Resumar's bed. Their lovemaking had been more intense this time, both of them holding almost nothing back as they explored and delved and pleased each other until they could stand it no more. He had returned her only thirty minutes before, just as the sun was beginning to climb above the horizon, but everything was still dark. He had nuzzled her cheek and neck firmly, sending delightful tremors skittering across her flesh, as he kissed her passionately. He had given her special soaps and scented oils to wash with so that his scent was very nearly erased from her body in order to protect her. Her people he was not concerned with as much as his own people, and her nephew Karun. He was half Lycavorian and would be able to detect Resumar's scent on her if she wasn't careful. The hot water had helped in soothing her sore muscles, but it was a soreness that Athani relished in. She retrieved the towel from the rack with her tail and wrapped it tightly around her body as she walked into the main room of the apartment. So engrossed in her memories and feelings of the previous night she did not notice her sister sitting at the small table reviewing a data pad and sipping a mug of steaming liquid until she entered the main room.

Athani came up short. "Jalersi!" She snapped genuinely surprised. "How did you get in here?"

"You did not answer your door Athani, so I had the Spartan sentry open it for me." Jalersi replied.

"I was in the shower in case you didn't notice." Athani spoke harshly. "Do not do such a thing again!"

"I am your sister." Jalersi said.

"That does not give you the right to enter my quarters unannounced!" Athani spat. "No matter where they may be!"

"You were in the shower for quite some time sister." Jalersi stated.

Athani's blue/green eyes glared at her. "I did not know there was a time limit on the showers I take!" She snapped. "We have been aboard ship for nearly two weeks and I wanted to experience a hot shower for longer than is usually allowed on a ship. Is that a crime Jalersi?"

Jalersi met her glaring eyes. "No... it is not. Forgive me sister."

"What do you want?" Athani demanded as she moved for the small bed chambers in the room silently thanking herself for messing up the previously unused bed to make it appear it had been slept in.

Jalersi rose from the table and followed her sister with the data pad in hand. "I was able to speak with father yesterday." She said as her eyes fell on the rumpled sheets of the bed.

Athani dropped the towel from around her still damp body, her tail twitching in agitation at her sister for interrupting her thoughts. She silently thanked that Resumar had left no telltale signs of their lovemaking on her body. "So! You are the head of this delegation... why should that concern me. You have already shown me where my place will be."

Jalersi sighed. "Athani... mother and I only did what our laws and traditions dictated." She said.

Athani turned to look at her. "That is so much rubbish!" She snapped. "You and mother are giving me to Qurot for political purposes only! After you both promised me I would have a say in which male you chose for me! You lied to me Jalersi! You both did!"

"Qurot is a powerful Pride..."

"Qurot is a disgusting pig!" Athani barked. "You know that as well as I do! He has had two mates in the last two thousand years! Both of whom he killed in a Tazli Root induced rage!"

"Father has ordered him to treat you differently Athani." Jalersi spoke.

"And will father be there to insure when Qurot inhales the Tazli vapor again that he does not kill me in a similar fit of rage Jalersi?" Athani asked. "Will you be there? I think not!"

"You are quite capable of defending yourself from Qurot Athani." Jalersi said.

“Oh yes... and when I injure or kill him for attempting to force himself upon me will you or father support me against his Pride in the archaic system we call law?” Athani spat as she pulled on the light blue jumpsuit.

“Athani I have protected you all these years... you...”

“Allowing Pusintin to rape my ass and force me to suck his cock whenever he desired is not protecting me Jalersi.” Athani stated.

“Would you have preferred I do nothing and allow Qurot to take you twenty-five years ago?” Jalersi snapped back.

Athani looked at her. “That might have been better Jalersi. He would have certainly killed me by now and then it would not matter.”

“Stop it!” Jalersi demanded. “You are acting like a spoiled child! This is our way! The sooner you accept that the better it will be for you!”

“What do you want Jalersi?” Athani asked softly. “The talks do not begin for another hour.”

Jalersi tossed the data pad onto the rumpled bed. “Father wants to know about your ability to speak with this dragon. Why you were not afraid of him as the rest of our people are.”

Athani turned and picked up the pad letting her eyes read the first portion of it. “First of all... I can not speak with this dragon.” She stated plainly. “Our people do not have the ability to communicate in such a way. And secondly... I did not have much of a choice when it came to being placed on this dragon’s back. Prince Resumar put me there for my own protection. It is most definitely not something I would have chosen to do. And for your information I was terrified of this beast. However... I was more terrified of the vampire assassin who was trying to kill me.”

“It... it did not appear that way Athani.” Jalersi said.

“How it appeared to you does not matter to me.” Athani answered. “I was just as scared as you were Jalersi, even more so because I was the one next to this creature.” She held out the data pad to her. “I do not have some previously unrecorded ability sister. Those creatures make my blood go cold just as they do yours. That is what you can tell our father.”

“And if I don’t believe you?” Jalersi stated.

Athani shrugged. “Then send me home.” She said simply. “At least there I will not have to endure Qurot’s gloating or associate myself with these Lycavorians and their stench any longer than necessary. At least there I can have some peace before I am given to Qurot as a political prize because of all his glorious victories against the High Coven.”

“Athani...”

“Are we done sister?” Athani stated. “If we are... I would like to enjoy my breakfast before the talks begin.”

Jalersi stared at her for a long moment and then nodded. “Very well Athani.” She said. “I will leave you alone. We are meeting in the foyer in forty-five minutes. Do not be late.”

Athani watched as Jalersi turned and walked out of the bedroom area and to the main door of the apartment. She waited until the door had closed behind her before exhaling deeply.

[Stench?] Resumar’s voice erupted into her head.

[Creature?] Cemath’s voice followed.

Athani couldn’t help but smile at the playful tone of their voices as she crossed to the balcony. *[Stop it you two!]* She demanded. *[I had to think of something! I love how you smell Resumar... you know that. And you are very handsome for a dragon Cemath. At least I think you are... you are the only one I know at the moment.]*

Resumar’s voice took on a more serious tone. *[Is this something I need to worry about Aryschanne?]* He asked. *[I can advance my plans if I have too.]*

Athani felt warmth rush through her at his words and the name he called her. He had told her a little of his plans earlier, only saying that it was best if he kept the majority of it from her to protect her. *[I can handle my sister Resumar. As long as I know that I have your love.]*

[That is not something you have to question Aryschanne. I promise you.] Resumar answered.

[When will we be alone again?] She asked quickly.

[We will see each other tonight at the Royal Villa. You are coming for dinner remember.] He said.

[And you will be there?] She asked.

[I wouldn't miss it Athani.] He replied quickly. *[I intend to see you wearing the dress I am buying for you.]*

[Dress?] Athani asked. *[You are buying me... you are buying me a dress?]*

Resumar chuckled. *[What... don't you think I can?]*

[No... no one has ever bought me a dress Resumar.] She said.

[Then I will be the first? Good. I will make sure it is exceptional.] He replied. *[I will have it delivered to your apartment while you are conducting the talks today. You can say you saw it in the window of one of the shops when you break for lunch and you ordered it delivered to your room.]*

[I miss you already Resumar.] She said.

[All you need do is reach out to me and I will answer.] He told her. *[Just make sure you are in a semi private place and shielded or others of my people will detect you. Especially my mother or the Prime Minister. With the shields we have helped you to establish no one who is below a Tier Five will detect the tremors of us talking. However my mother and the Prime Minister are some of the most powerful Tier Six Mindvoicers in the Union. They will undoubtedly feel the tremors if they are nearby.]*

[I will make sure.] Athani said. *[What... what color is it?]*

Athani didn't see Resumar smile, but she could almost feel it. *[It will be a surprise... but it will match your eyes.]* He answered. *[I must go Aryschanne. Reach out to me if you feel the need. I will see you tonight.]*

[Resumar?]

[Yes?]

[Resumar Leonidas... I... I do believe I may be very much in love with you.] Athani spoke softly.

She heard him chuckle softly. *[You don't know how much hearing you say that means to me Aryschanne. It matches what I feel for you. I will see you tonight.]*

BONTAWILLIAN FRIGATE EDGE OF THE TORANA GAS CLUSTER THE WILDS

“... how long?” Gareld asked from his chair on the bridge of his ship.

“The ship will clear the Defensive minefield in just under three hours.” The Kochab officer turned from the console he was in front of. “Another three hours to the border and then they will be ours.”

“Make sure our boarding craft are ready.” Gareld spoke. “The minute they cross the border I want to be on them. The Lycavorian King's half elf daughter will bring a pretty price from the Kavalian detachment based on Jivrr. I understand she is almost a twin to her mother when it comes to looks. And the elf Queen is quite the looker.”

“The Kavalians? I thought we were supposed to kill her Gareld.” The Kochab spoke. “That is what our contract called for.”

“Yes I know Sandur. I accepted another contract as well. The Kavalians have been looking for an opportunity to capture one of the Lycavorian pig's children for over a decade. When I received this contract I contacted them on Nefoa where they maintain a small detachment. They were most pleased and they have already paid us for her. All we need do is deliver her.”

Sandur smiled. “So that is where the additional fifty million credits came from.” He stated.

Gareld nodded. “We make twenty from the fool who wants her dead. And fifty from the Kavalians. They both get what they want. The Kavalians will no doubt kill her... after they fuck her until she goes insane.” He laughed. “And we come away very rich.”

“And then?”

Gareld smiled. “Then we make some improvements to our ship... and we find where Esther and her Immortal dog have gone. When we do... we kill the Immortals... and I will make her my slave. After I whip her within an inch of her life that is. She will submit to me willingly I assure you.”

“As long as you let me watch.” Sandur spoke. “I've never seen you break a pureblood before.”

Gareld laughed. "You should have heard her squeal my friend. When I got done with her she was slinging her tight pussy on any cock I put in front of her to make the pain stop." He said. "Twenty of us took her that night. It was fantastic."

"I look forward to that Gareld." He answered.

Gareld got to his feet. "Contact the Lycavorian and put it through to my office." He said. "I want to make sure he transfers the rest of our credits."

"...so she is dead?" The cloaked figure asked.

Gareld turned toward the holo image holding the glass of Blood Wine. "She will be as soon as her ship drifts across the border. We can not enter Lycavorian space without activating the automated defensive field as you know. As long as you have kept to your part of the bargain and no Lycavorian help arrives we will accomplish your task."

"You need not worry about that." The figure spoke. "The device used to disable their ship will not be discovered once you vaporize it, and my people will make it so the destruction of the Gate is not noticed for at least thirty-six hours."

Gareld nodded. "Plenty of time." He stated.

"If she is not already dead make sure she suffers." The man spoke.

"This seems to be rather personal with you my friend. Not a good thing in this line of work." Gareld spoke.

"We are not now and never will be friends!" The cloaked figure hissed. "Simply because I use your services does not translate to something more. You came highly recommended and that is why I chose you. The Evolli fools who were also recommended failed in their task and that is why I had you as a back up."

Gareld nodded. "Whatever." He spoke quickly. "I want the rest of our funds transferred now."

"The task is not yet done." The man spoke.

"In nine hours it will be." Gareld said. "And thirty minutes after that I want to be on my way as far from the Union border as I can get. Which means I want the rest of our agreed upon contract transferred now. When word reaches that Lycavorian dog of a King that his precious half elf daughter is dead he will fly into a rage. I want to be long gone by then. With my credits! You can deal with him... and I hope for your sake you have a place you can go to hide."

The figure did not answer for a long moment and then finally nodded his head. "I will make it so within the hour." He said. "Contact me when it is fully done."

"Of course." Gareld spoke.

TYPE II DRAGON TRANSPORT

Normya Leonidas groaned and pushed her body back off of her center control console and into her seat. As her head touched the headrest she winced and groaned even louder as pain lanced through her temples. She reached up quickly and gasped when she touched the side of her head and her fingers came away coated in blood.

"Toral!" She croaked out. She turned her head slowly, but that still brought forth a wave of nausea and pain. She closed her emerald eyes tightly and fought to breathe deeply making the wave of nausea pass slowly. When she opened them again she turned her head even more slowly. "Toral?"

Normya spied her elven co-pilot's lower body stuffed behind his co-pilot's seat and her eyes grew wide. She reached up quickly, fighting back another wave of nausea, and released her seat straps. Slowly and with pain wracking her body she pulled herself from her seat and moved back between the seats. Toral's arm was twisted at an odd angle and he had blood leaking down his forehead from where he had collided with the back of his seat. An instant of fear coursed through her as she realized he might be dead. She knelt next to him and placed her hand on his chest.

"Toral!" She nearly shouted.

Normya almost burst into tears when he groaned loudly and his eyes opened. “You do not have to yell!” He snapped. “The ringing in my ears from the explosion is quite sufficient thank you!”

“I thought you were dead!” She snapped right back laughing as she did so.

Toral shifted slightly on the deck and groaned as he tried to move his arm. “No such luck!” He stated as he pushed himself up slowly, Normya reaching out to help him. “Uhhhh! My shoulder! It’s dislocated!”

Normya held his wrist and looked at him. “I have to pop it back in.” She said quickly.

Toral nodded his head. “Be quick!” He said reaching up to grip her shoulder with his other hand.

Normya eased his injured arm away from his body before twisting down and away quickly. Toral hissed in agony but did not yell out as he banged his head against her shoulder. “I’m sorry Toral!” She said softly.

“Medical kit!” He gasped. “Get me some Odexal!”

Normya pushed herself painfully to her feet and moved to the side of the cockpit, yanking the large metal container from the brackets on the wall. She brought it back quickly, entering the code to open it. She quickly rummaged through the contents until she found the yellow hexagonal pills. She popped open the container and dropped two into her palm. “Here!” She stated. “I can’t give you anymore! We need to find out how badly we are hurt!”

Toral nodded as he flipped the two pills into his mouth and swallowed. “It’s enough.” He stated.

“Toral... what happened?” She asked.

“Fused explosive.” He answered quickly looking up to see her face. “You are hurt!” He almost shouted reaching up to touch the head wound.

Normya drew her head back to keep him from touching it and causing more pain than there already was and she shook her head slowly. “I cracked my skull on the center console. I’m fine. I have my father’s hard head as you so often remind me. The bleeding has stopped as well. Toral... a fused explosive?”

Toral nodded as he shifted his body slightly on the deck rising into a sitting position. “Directly over the main LSD conduit. The Jump Gate activating and heating the coils caused it to trigger the explosion.”

“Sabotage?” She gasped.

Toral nodded. “It didn’t get there by itself. Someone knew right where to put it and what it would do when we exited the Gate.”

“Why?” She asked her mind racing through the possibilities. “We aren’t carrying any dragons. Why would someone do that?”

Toral looked at her. “I can think of only one reason. She has platinum hair and emerald eyes like her mother.”

Normya’s eyes flew open. “Me?”

“No one wants me Normya. I’m just a fun loving elf who happens to be your co-pilot.” Toral spoke trying to interject humor into the moment.

“Who the hell wants to hurt me?” She exclaimed.

“Well whoever it was knew what it would take to disable our ship and nearly kill us.” Toral said.

Normya looked at him. “The Chief Engineer?”

Toral nodded. “That would be my best guess. What did you say to him to make him try to kill us?”

“Toral... I may be in the midst of my Coming of Age fever... but I have been extra careful not to snap at anyone. And I certainly didn’t do anything to make him want to kill me.” Normya declared. She scrambled to her feet ignoring the pain as anger surged through her. “Oh... I will rip his eyes from his thick skull when we get back!” She snarled. “And then I will see to it the next ship he works on is a Lifter racer on Nortali!”

Toral chuckled. “Now that is the daughter of Leonidas talking. You will have to keep your father and brothers from killing him though.” He said with a smile.

Normya turned back to him. “We need to find out how bad the damage is and get a message off. Can you move?” Toral nodded and took her outstretched hand. Normya helped pull him to his feet gingerly and he looked at her with a grin. “What?” She demanded.

“I told you before we left to find someone to curb that fever.” He said with a smirk. “You obviously didn’t listen to me and now you have seriously pissed someone off with your fever induced tongue.”

Normya glared at him but knew what he was doing and she finally smiled. “You just wanted in my pants yourself!” She snapped.

Toral grinned wider. "It would have cured the fever." He said. "And we would not be in this position right now. We could have made beautiful children together!"

Normya shook her head with a smile. "I'll run a diagnostic of the systems. Check the engineering station mister comedian."

"... starboard LSD nacelle is gone!" Toral spoke from the engineering console. Half of the monitors were nothing but blackness and the lights in the cockpit were flickering on and off with the emergency power. "That is what must have hit the Gate ring and sent us spinning just before the Gate exploded."

"That probably saved our lives." Normya called. "The spinning kept any of the major sections from hitting us full on. I have hull breaches in three different sections, but nothing very large. Power conduits between sections seven and nine are severed. Life Support is at thirty-nine percent and holding."

"Atmospheric force fields are holding where the nacelle tore free." Toral spoke slowly as he traced his finger over the diagram on the monitor. "Communications are dead! Sensors are dead! Main engines as well as the sub lights are off line! *Carians*... we are in bad shape."

"We're alive!" Normya barked.

"Well... I guess that's something." He said. "There is power to the navigational shields, so at least we won't get pulverized by space rocks."

"ULU Command must have detected the Gate exploding by now." She said. "There is probably a ship already on the way here."

"The question is... will emergency power hold until they get here?" Toral spoke.

"The sub lights are intact?" Normya asked.

"Diagnostic shows minor stress fractures... but nothing that would prevent operation." Toral spoke. "Problem is... the conduits between G4 and G7 are severed. How do we get power to the sub lights?"

The massive clanging noise caused both of them to turn their heads upwards at the metallic sound as it dragged across the bulkhead.

"Ah... Toral... please tell me that wasn't what I think it was." Normya stated.

Toral moved from the engineering chair and went to the side of the cockpit touching the control panel. He waited while the metal covering over the small view window came down. "Unfortunately I can't say that." He said finally as he watched the disc shaped object pass by the view window.

Normya was leaning forward in her seat as far as she was able and peering out into the darkness of space through the pilot's view window. Her eyes grew wider when she saw the three meter diameter metal disc shaped object only a few meters from where she sat. Not far from that her elven eyes picked up several more.

"*Nubou* me!" She barked.

"Considering what we have surrounding us at the moment I will pass on that offer until a later time Princess!" Toral barked. "D12 mines! We're drifting Normya! Right into the DBZ!" (Defensive Border Zone)

"The mines aren't responding!" She snapped quickly. "Our IFF transponder must still be broadcasting!"

"So our own mines won't kill us!" Toral barked out. "Well that's somewhat of a relief I guess!"

Normya turned to look at him. "Toral... we need to get power to the sub lights. If we are drifting into the DBZ... then we're drifting *towards* the border and not away from it like we first thought!"

"Oh that isn't good!" Toral said turning to face her fully now. "We'll drift right into the Torana Gas Cluster and without power the atmospheric force fields will come down and we will die a very agonizing death."

"Pretty much!" Normya stated.

"How long?"

Normya did some fast figuring in her head. "Well we've been awake for ninety minutes now... and if we are already at the DBZ then we had to be out of it for at least ninety minutes. I'd say we have about three hours before we hit the border... and another three before we enter the cluster."

"Six hours?" Toral spoke softly. "How brushed up are you on your H44 Nodon Sub Light Engineering Skills Normya?"

Normya got out of her pilot's seat. "I think we both just became experts."

Toral nodded. "Indeed." He said. "I'll take the port side... grab the Hand kits and let's get to work."

“Your shoulder?” Normya spoke stepping closer to him.

Toral grinned. “Our impending death has a way of alleviating any pain I may be feeling at the moment.” He told her. “I’ll take the primary conduit. You work your way to the sublight conduit and we’ll figure something out.”

Normya nodded. “We don’t have much of a choice.” She said turning to grab the tool kit behind her pilot seat.

SODRAG BASE RECREATION CENTER

The Recreation Building was located in the center of all the bungalows as well as they barracks buildings nearby. It was the largest of the buildings on this end of the base, larger still than the huge Dining Facility. The Center was broken up into five distinct portions, with soundproof walls separating the sections. One was an enormous library with row upon row of data pads as well as written volumes of books. Spread out among the many dozens of ceiling high shelves was comfortable couches and chairs and even several large tables. The soundproof walls kept this library very quiet, and there was simply some very soft melody music playing in the background.

There was a main gathering section that held a medium sized bar of sorts, surrounded by much smaller tables and chairs. Many of these were filled with High Coven Riders who were talking quietly amongst themselves about the events of the day and the obstacle course. There were several large monitors in each of the corners near the bar which were tuned to the Netnews channels broadcasting different types of programming, one of which happened to be a sports channel which was currently showing Lifter races from the main course on Apo Prime. They were reminiscent of the stock car races of Earth’s ancient past and had quickly become the most popular attraction on Earth. Adjoined to that yet not divided by a soundproof wall were more comfortable couches and chairs in an area that allowed for the less raucous crowd to sit and talk among each other without having to shout or whisper. There was a small food counter here in this section and this is where most of the base security came to grab food when they were on duty. The sun had gone down only an hour ago, and while the heat and humidity outside was unchanged, the air conditioning units inside the Rec Center kept it at a very comfortable setting. Almost no one wore their uniforms in here, though it was easy enough to tell who was who since most of the High Coven Riders and personnel had very little in the way of civilian clothing and it showed in the rather drag outfits many of them wore. Surprisingly many of the Coven Riders had brought their data manuals and they appeared to be discussing items from within these manuals among each other.

Yuri however, was not one of those individuals and she sat with Dante, Javier and Lucia at the small table near the rear of the building sipping glasses of the cloned blood that tasted like fruit juice. Thast and two of the other security personnel they had brought with them had pulled chairs over to the table and were also sitting with them. As she let her eyes wander over the men and women in the center she saw Narice and Carisia sitting on a couch discussing something from one of the manuals while Toria Dellion and three other pilots that had been chosen were obviously talking animatedly about their first day working with Arram Leonidas and the Nodon Engineering *STRIKER DTs*.

“Thast?” Yuri asked softly as she turned back to them. “What did your recon last night determine?”

“There is not much in the way of security around the bungalows themselves.” Thast answered in a low voice. “We were able to move about quite freely wrapped in the shadows.”

“The entrances?” Yuri asked.

“One three kilometers west of us and another, that according to the signs, is some ten kilometers south. The entrance closest to us has a standard guard force of four Spartans and two fully grown dragons. There appear to be permanent Bonded Pairs assigned to this base that man all the security checkpoints.” Thast answered. “Getting inside the actual main operations center would be impossible in my opinion. There is an outer ring of security sensors and overlapping sentries to include at least three more dragons. Whether they are bonded to Spartans I can not say Princess. Ground and motion sensors and possibly even air current sensors as well. I will try and get a better idea tonight when we go out.”

“Were you able to determine how high up the Mindvoice shield goes?” Javier asked.

Thast shook his head. "That is also not among my abilities Prince Javier. Forgive me... but my Mindvoice abilities are not as strong as yours."

"I estimate at least five kilometers." Yuri spoke. "Vollenth and I reached almost twenty thousand feet above the base on our way back this morning and were unable to penetrate the shield. It is some kind of void. It allows us to Mindvoice within the void... but does not allow Mindvoicing out. I would suggest the same applies for anything attempting to project inward."

"So grandmother can't reach us inside?" Lucia asked.

Yuri shook her head. "No. And whatever it is... it also blocks the connection your father and I established many years ago."

"Grandmother was right then." Dante spoke. "They are using equipment they salvaged from the Mindvoice ship."

Yuri nodded. "It would appear so... but considering they are able to power all of it could also mean that the Mindvoice ship is not a derelict like the one on Nuwaroa."

"It still has power mother?" Lucia asked.

"When it rose from Lycavore it was fully intact and operating." Yuri said. "The people Leonidas had with him obviously learned how to fly it. And it stands to reason they did not simply just crash it on the surface when they brought it here."

"Mother... my control of Carisia is slipping." Dante said.

Yuri turned to look at him. "What do you mean?"

Dante shook his head. "Ever since we arrived on this planet she has been fighting it more and more. I have to expend far more effort to keep the subconscious commands in place. Her shields are growing more powerful and she is resisting harder. The entranceway we opened into her subconscious is closing and I can't stop it."

"What's this?" Thast asked.

"Do not worry Thast." Yuri said with a smile. "I will insure she remains in your bed. She has given you no signs has she?"

Thast shook his head quickly. "I thought that scum Leonidas changed our sleeping quarters because he may have detected it."

Yuri shook her head. "No. It is unlikely even with his abilities he would detect it. And it was done in such a way that would not be easily discovered even by a skilled telepath. He has his own whore and he seems much more interested in her."

"Is it even still necessary Princess?" Thast asked. "She is my wife by our law."

Yuri nodded. "None of which she will care about if Dante and I don't condition her Thast." She answered. "You are very skilled Thast... but do not doubt for an instant that Carisia could kill you easily if she chose too."

"She... she has responded to me in our bed recently." Thast stated. "I had hoped to continue that."

Yuri shrugged. "Believe what you will Commander. We will continue to do what we have been doing until I see a need to stop it. Enjoy it Thast... there are not many who look like you and can say they are bedding a Princess of the High Coven that looks like Carisia."

Thast nodded his head with a smile. "There is that to consider." He said.

"Dante... the younger daughter of Isabella?" Yuri asked.

Dante nodded. "You and grandmother insisted I be subtle mother." He said. "During our hand to hand training I will insinuate a suggestion to her very mildly. It will get things started."

Yuri nodded. "Good. We..." Yuri stopped when the door to the center opened and Sadi came in with Eliani and Nyla. Sadi wore lightweight shoes and an extremely tight pair of white pants that highlighted the curve of her ass and her pussy. The matching white shirt was loosely worn and tied under her large breasts leaving her abdomen bare. Eliani and Nyla had changed into loose fitting fatigues and they were chatting and smiling together. They broke apart as Sadi made her way to the food counter after sharing cheek kisses with both Eliani and Nyla. She was carrying the data pad as she came in and they all watched her move to the food counter where the elf male handed her the mug of coffee and she began to read from the pad as she headed for the smaller table along the wall.

“I would certainly like to tag that.” One of the security guards next to Thast blurted. He was a former member of the High Coven’s elite *Vlos D’dro* division and had only been assigned to their group right before leaving to come here. He had no idea who Sadi was. “Wolf or no wolf.” Yuri turned to look at him and his face frowned. “Forgive me Princess.” (Blood of Life)

Yuri smiled. “Not at all.” She said. “Feel free to try. I don’t believe Prince Leonidas has set any rules against mingling our forces together and trying to become more than friendly.”

The man’s eyes grew a little wider. “Princess?” He asked even as Thast opened his mouth to speak.

Yuri held up her hand to Thast. “Hold that thought Commander.” She said quickly. She turned back to the Security officer. “What is your name?”

“Walonn Princess. Junior Commander. Formerly of the *Vlos D’dro* Division.” He stated proudly.

Yuri nodded. “Well Walonn... since it appears Prince Androcles intends for us to mingle amongst ourselves... please feel free to indulge your desires. I understand she is quite available and has been willing to entertain several of our men. She even propositioned Dante here, but he had more self control than to accept her offers.”

Dante nodded. “Yes... I have heard she is quite the *zhas uss* in bed. She likes to be touched and controlled is what I heard.” (wild one)

Walonn looked back and forth between them and then got slowly to his feet. “I believe I will then.” He said.

They watched him begin to walk over towards where Sadi was now sitting. Thast leaned closer. “Princess... that is...”

Yuri nodded. “Yes... Androcles’s wife. Walonn does not know that however.” She said. “And I want to see how strong she truly is without her husband here to protect her. Robert thought he knew her somehow... her name... and now we will see if she is more than just a simple woman.”

Sadi lifted her green eyes from the edge of the coffee mug as the shadow of the figure stopped in front of her table. She gazed at the High Coven soldier, his dark blond hair neatly groomed and his blue eyes bright. He was of medium height and appeared to be in excellent shape.

“May I sit down?” Walonn asked as he placed his glass of cloned blood on the table and took the chair opposite of her before she answered him.

Sadi’s eyes grew a little wider at this and she lowered her mug. Since becoming Andro’s *Anome* Sadi discovered she no longer cared for the looks of desire or interest she received from other men. It hadn’t bothered her before Andro had come back into her life, and many times she had returned the coy looks especially if they were attractive males, though discounting Malic Sadi had never had a desire for any of them. Her relationship with Malic she now knew was only the final part of the path that had brought Andro back into her life. She knew well that no Lycavorian would ever show these things to her now, for if they did not know who she was already they would smell Andro’s powerful Alpha scent all over her. Like his father, Andro’s alpha scent would easily overwhelm another male’s interest in seconds. She had only gotten looks from those vampires and elves who called Sparta home, and while they could not smell Andro’s scent upon her, they were respectful towards her nonetheless. They were certainly nothing like the lustful gaze she saw in this vampire’s eyes. She had always kept her Mindvoice shields very high, and since becoming Andro’s *Anome*, her abilities had only increased. She maintained her control and kept her shields level for she knew either Andro or Elynth would come if they detected even a small amount of fear or anxiety within her. Sadi was a Leonidas now, and just that simple word on the end of her first name imbued her with confidence and strength.

“It appears you have already decided for me.” Sadi spoke calmly.

“Junior Commander Walonn!” He spoke as he removed the data pad from her grasp and lifted her hand to drop a soft kiss on her knuckles. “And I must say... you are a light in this distance and dark place.”

Sadi pulled her hand back quickly and picked up the pad again. “Really. May I suggest then that you purchase some additional illumination globes Commander? The base commissary has a wide selection I’m sure.”

“Please... call me Walonn.” He said with a smile. “And your light is already chasing away the darkness.”

“Is it?” Sadi asked evenly. “Is there something you wanted Commander? If not... I am rather busy.”

“Please... I insist you call me Walonn.” He stated. He took the data pad from her once more causing Sadi’s eyes to narrow and turned it in his hand to look at it. “Electro-magnetic Flow Currents of Light Speed Drive Coil Operation?” He looked at her. “You are an Engineer? That’s incredible!”

Sadi snatched the pad from him again. “I’m a pilot actually.” She stated. “I will ask once more... is there something you wanted Commander?”

“You.” He spoke plainly.

Sadi’s eyes flew open in stunned surprise and she sat back in her chair. “Excuse me!” She gasped.

“I want you.” Walonn said again. “This place is lonely and since we are both unattached I thought we could keep each other company. I would truly love to get to know you much better. You are a ravishing young woman.”

“You are joking of course.” Sadi said.

“Not at all.” Walonn said. “I would take great pleasure in exploring every crevice of your body. And right at the peak... I would bite you and send you over the edge. You’d never want to leave me after that.”

“Do... do you make it a habit of coming up to strange woman you don’t know and acting like this.” Sadi demanded.

Walonn reached out and took her hand in his again, stroking the back of her knuckles. “I was told you were as lonely as I am, and that you like it for a man to take control.”

“Were you?” Sadi gasped her green eyes darting to where Yuri sat with an evil grin on her face. She felt Walon begin to slide his fingers up her arm and she turned back to him. “Walonn... that is your name?”

He smiled. “That sounds delightful rolling off your tongue.” He said.

Sadi’s smile held no mirth in it. “I’m sorry but do all pureblood males of your species think so much of your skills that you take it upon yourselves to fondle whatever woman strikes your fancy?”

“Only when we see something that we want.” Walonn spoke.

“I know many pureblood vampires Junior Commander Walonn and none of them act as arrogantly as you are acting right now.” Sadi hissed. “I have said this to another male of your species in recent days... and I grow tired of repeating myself. Remove your hand from me Commander... and do so immediately.”

Walonn looked at her confused now as he released her hand. “I was under the impression you were available.” He spoke quickly.

“Yes... I’m sure that is what you were told.” Sadi spoke. “However... that is not the case. And even if it was... you would not interest me in the least!” She picked up her data pad and got to her feet. “I prefer men Commander... not boys who do not have the sense to know when a woman is not in the least bit interested in them!” She spat before heading for the door.

Walonn surged out of his chair his eyes angry and he blurred in motion to catch Sadi and grab her arm. He spun her around quickly, causing her data pad and coffee to spill from her grasp. “Are all Lycavorian females like you *elg’caress*? Or do I just need to *vith* you until you scream?” He snarled. (bitch)

This action caused almost everyone in the center to stop what they were doing and come to their feet. The High Coven Riders were unsure of what to do, while Eliani and Nyla simply stood by the drink bar leaning against each other with smiles on their faces. Narice rose and began moving towards him even as Yuri remained in her seat with a small smile on her face. Carisia reached out quickly and took her hand causing Narice to turn back and look at her. She shook her head quickly.

Sadi’s face was impassive as she stared at him. “Do you have a death wish Commander?” Sadi spoke. “Because if you do not remove your hands from my body I will kill you where you stand and not blink in the least.”

Walonn looked at her and smiled. “You? Kill me?” He stated confidently. “I think perhaps you overestimate your skills.”

“I did warn you Commander. “She said coldly. “And yes... I can be an *elg’caress* at times. But only to those who try to take what only belongs to my mates!”

Sadi snapped downward with the knife edge of her hand. The blow landed directly on the bone of Walonn’s wrist and his eyes went wide as pain lanced up his arm and his hand went numb. He looked down grasping his arm with his opposite hand as it dropped like a limp noodle to the side of his body. When he looked back up he was staring into the jungle green wolf eyes of a very pissed off Sadi Leonidas. She bared her

wolf fangs in a vicious snarl and whipped her arm out to strike him. Walonn felt his body lift from the floor and rocket across the expanse of the center before slamming painfully hard into the far wall. He struck the wall hard enough to leave an imprint in the steel structure before he slumped to the floor on his butt and in obvious pain from the tremendous impact.

Sadi looked down at her hand in stunned surprise at what she had just done her wolf eyes wide. She had felt the surge of Mindvoice power within her and did not know enough of what it was to stop it before it exploded away from her. Walonn actually was very lucky her Mindvoice ability manifested itself physically at this moment. Sadi's intent had been to hit the fool with a heel strike, not sending him flying across the recreation center. The heel strike would have killed him instantly.

Sadi quickly gained control of her emotions and turned to retrieve her pad and spilled mug from the floor. She needed to find Andro and figure out what had just happened. She turned and moved quickly towards the door as it began to open and she saw the familiar bulk of the man beginning to enter.

"I'm not done with you wolf bitch!" The voice screamed.

Sadi whirled around instantly to see Walonn blurring towards her with a feral look on his face of anger and hate. Her eyes went wide as he stopped blurring only a few feet from her and she saw the knife in his hand held ready to strike. The larger shadow stepped in front of her and Walonn was lifted into the air by his throat by the much larger man even as the knife he was bringing down imbedded itself into the upper arm of the muscular Spartan.

"Malic!" Eliani and Nyla screamed at once dropping their drinks and rushing forward.

Malic's six foot three frame towered over many of those in the room and his head and eyes turned from where the knife was sticking from his upper arm holding Walonn a good six inches off the floor. He had felt the blade penetrate even through his body armor, but it only sank in an inch or so because Walonn was thrown off balance by Malic's large hand grabbing him and lifting him into the air. His dark blue eyes changed then and his own wolf fangs burst forth as he squeezed Walonn's throat tighter. His Spartan and wolf instincts detected the movement and in a single blink the K12A KM was out of his thigh holster and leveled at the table where Thast and Yuri were coming to their feet. Eliani and Nyla skidded to stops at this motion.

"You may blur if you wish." Malic growled savagely. "You may even get to where I stand... but you will die when you do fat man! And then who will your precious Princess call on to help her before she falls! Sit back down!"

Yuri and Thast saw two more Spartans move forward from where they were standing, their hands on the butts of their K12s and Nehtes, and slowly they sank back into their chairs. Malic turned back to look at Walonn's face which was turning red as he struggled for air. Vampire he may have been, but even he needed to be able to breathe. He was trying to pry Malic's fingers from around his throat with little success.

"My Prince has told us we are here to forge new territory vampire." Malic spoke. "To begin something that may possibly extend into the future. Do not let it be said that I was the one to destroy that. At any other time or place I would spill your blood without pause for assaulting the Crown Princess of the Union vermin!" He barked viciously.

Walonn's eyes grew wide and he glanced at Sadi who stood beside Malic her eyes still wide at what had just taken place. "I... I didn't... I didn't know!" He gasped out raggedly.

"And that is the only reason you still live fool!" Malic snarled. He turned his head and looked at Sadi. "What would you have me do with him Sadi?" He asked in a much gentler tone.

Sadi's eyes smiled at him as reached up and place her hand on his shoulder and she nodded. "Let him go Malic." She said. "He has learned his lesson I should think."

Malic turned back to Walonn. "Be thankful she is more forgiving than me fool. Like my Prince... I would have carved you into small pieces for assaulting my mate. You are lucky he is not here... for he would do just that." Malic turned and looked at the knife in his upper arm. "Take your blade vampire... you did not even have enough strength to complete a killing blow so it should be easy for you to pull it out."

Walonn reached up slowly and wrapped his fingers around the handle of the blade. He stopped, his eyes widening when he felt the barrel of the K12 press tightly to his left temple. He cut his eyes and saw Nyla's face twisted into an angry glare, her cobalt blue vampire eyes very prominent.

"Do it very slowly bunjiro." Nyla hissed. "Malic may have spared you... but I will not if that blade moves a fraction in the wrong direction." (asshole)

Walonn pulled the knife from Malic's upper arm slowly, Eliani wincing at the squishy sound it made and the blood that flowed forth from the slice in the body armor. Malic lowered Walonn to the floor then, Nyla's K12 still pressed tightly to his head. As she pulled it back slowly Eliani stepped into the vicious punch to the side of his head and sent Walonn spinning away to fall to the floor.

"*Forn nubous geldus-van!*" She hissed savagely her eyes changed and her own fangs protruding. (You fucking piece of garbage)

Had Malic more experience with women, aside of his arrogant treatment of them through his life, he would have known that Eliani Leonidas and Nyla Sinthe had just staked their claim to him in front of every woman in the room. And done so in a very convincing manner.

Sadi slid her hand down on Malic's injured arm and stopped it just above the wound. "Malic?" She said softly.

Malic's eyes turned to look at her quickly. "I never said I was sorry for how I treated you Sadi. I am sorry... and know that in Androcles's absence I will always defend you."

Sadi smiled and leaned up to kiss his cheek. "I know Malic." She said. "Thank you."

"Go now... before he comes and more blood is spilled this day because of this idiot's fool actions towards you." Malic said.

"Too late for that." Andro's voice filled the room.

Every head in the place lifted or turned and saw Andro's bulk fill the doorway now. He had not yet changed out of his body armor, and the hilt's of his swords still protruded over his shoulders. His azure eyes were changed and the tips of his dual fangs protruded from under his lips. Against the background of the open door and the darkening night sky he made a very menacing figure.

"*KertaGai?*" He spoke looking at her first.

"Malic and I took care of it Andro." Sadi spoke quickly and confidently.

A small smile split his lips. "So I see." He said. "And a fine job it was." He stepped up next to Malic and looked at the wound in his upper arm. "*Enomotarch?*"

"A scratch Milord." Malic answered.

"Scratch my ass!" Eliani spat now. "Get your armor off... you're bleeding all over the *anse* floor!"

"Where is Bren?" Andro spoke turning his head.

"I'm here sire." The voice spoke from near the back of the center and they watched the older *Durcunusaan* Spartan step around the throng of men and women, lowering the 190A3 that was clutched in his hands tightly from its firing position. If not for Malic, Bren would have shot Walonn dead before he reached Sadi and everyone now knew that.

"Bren please take this idiot to the infirmary..." He turned to his sister who was helping Nyla pull Malic's upper body armor off. "Eliani?"

"Fuck him!" She spat as she was directing Malic to a nearby chair. "Have one of my medics treat his sorry ass! If he is still here in an hour I'll put him out of his misery myself."

Andro grinned. "Bren... see to his injuries and then put him on a transport out of here." Andro spoke.

"As your order Milord." Bren spoke coming forward to grab Walonn's arm and hauling him to his feet. "On your feet boy!"

"You are sending him away for a misunderstanding?" Yuri stated getting to her feet.

Andro took a deep breath and turned to face her. "You continue to test me Princess Yuri." He said. "And as with my father it is becoming tedious and irritating. He joined your party just before we left Sparta so he would not have had knowledge of who Sadi was. Yet you were here, and you know who Sadi is and still you allowed him to conduct himself in this manner. You probably even encouraged him to test my mate in some ridiculous fashion."

"Everyone else here knows who she is as well!" Yuri snapped.

Andro nodded. "Yes... this is true. But unlike you... it appears everyone else was busy studying what I asked you to study and not paying attention to your soldier making a fool of himself. You should be thankful *Enomotarch* Malic stepped in when he did, for if Sadi had not killed him for his actions, Commander Bren surely would have."

"Over a joke?" Dante spoke now.

Andro glared at him. "If you want to see how much I consider another man touching my mate a joke Dante... please feel free to try it at any time. I will send the pieces of your body back to your mother in a box!" Andro snapped viciously as he stepped closer to him. Sadi and every Lycavorian in the room feeling the trembling rage underneath his demeanor. "My people consider our mates and wives sacred ground young Dante Moran. I believe your people act in much the same fashion in most regards. Or does your father let other men grope your mother?"

"Certainly not!" Lucia spat from where she stood.

Andro nodded. "My patience is not infinite as others of your party have already learned." He said softly. He turned to look at Yuri. "Continue to press me Princess and you will find you do not like the reaction you get."

"You do not frighten me Androcles Leonidas!" Yuri snapped at him. "And I will not allow you to threaten my children!"

"Then by all means Princess, tell me you and they wish to depart and I will have your asses on the next transport out of SODRAG so fast it will make your head spin. And I will fly the transport myself!" Andro spoke.

"You know I won't do that!" Yuri said.

"Then if you can not control the security personnel you brought with you... I will do it for you." Andro spoke turning his head slightly. "Bren?"

"Milord?" Bren spoke holding onto Walonn's arm.

"As of tonight... the three remaining security personnel that Princess Yuri brought with her will take an active part in patrolling the western sector of the base." Andro spoke. "Have them assigned to perimeter guard with the roving patrol. They can move to the barracks there when we are done here. They will be able to return at their leisure when they are off duty."

Bren smiled. "As you order Milord."

"I forbid it!" Yuri barked.

"Then I will put them on a transport with this piece of *sibfla* and they can all go back tonight. They should arrive just in time for your mother to wonder upon waking to a new day why her security force was thrown out." Andro stated jerking his thumb at Walonn. "Remember my directives to you Princess. I run this base... you have no say over anything. What is it going to be?"

Yuri glared at Andro for a long moment. "Commander Thast... you will do as he says." She snapped.

"Princess... you..."

"Do it Thast!" She almost shouted.

Andro then turned back to Dante and smiled. "I'm happy to see you like humor Dante." He said grinning. "I see everyone else here seems to have their manuals with them and they were spending this down time studying them. All but you and your mother." Andro nodded as he stepped even closer to Dante. "That's good... and since you are so well prepared, I will let you and your mother step into the ring with my sister Zarah first when the hand-to-hand starts. It will be quite humorous for all of us when she drops you on your arrogant ass!"

"I don't think so!" Yuri spat.

"We'll see." Andro said with a nod. "We'll see." He turned and took Sadi's hand. "Come *KertaGai*... before you take it upon yourself to injure more of our guests."

No one moved until Andro had left with Sadi clinging to his arm and then they all began to return to what they were doing. Narice settled back onto the couch next to Carisia and saw her maya blue eyes were brighter now than she had ever seen them.

Narice smiled. *[Be mindful of your actions with Thast gone Carisia. She will be watching you more now.]*

Carisia looked at Narice and nodded slowly. *[Narice... why... why have you told no one about what you felt on the airfield?]*

Narice met her eyes evenly. *[I haven't told anyone because you and I are discovering many things about ourselves that we did not know before.]* Narice answered turning her eyes briefly to where Toria was sitting. *[And so far I like what I have discovered. Now... we were talking about the calculations for variant wind patterns.]*

Eliani directed Malic to the nearby chair. "Sit down Malic. You are too tall for your own good."

Malic looked at Eliani as her willow and peach scent filled his senses. "It is nothing." He spoke quickly, very nearly overwhelmed by her scent as he had been on her brother's ship. When combined with the softer scent of buttercups that he knew wafted from Nyla, Malic was very close to the edge. "And I need to return to my duties."

Nyla smiled as she took his arm and squeezed tightly. "I have found it is better not to argue with her Malic." She stated.

Eliani looked up into his blue eyes. "Park your ass *Enomotarch* before I have you removed from duty for the rest of the day." She said with a brilliant smile.

"You... you would do that? Over a scratch?" He gasped.

Eliani batted her fern green eyes at him. "You bet." She said. "You have an annoying habit of getting injured when I am around and if I have to appoint myself your protector I will. Now sit your tight *mida* down!" She said pushing him into the chair.

[Ussta che... do you think Andro will mind if we simply take him right here in front of everyone and let him possess us?] Nyla asked her.

[I'm trying very hard to not do that very thing regardless of what Andro says.] Eliani answered with a smile that Malic did not understand.

He looked at both of them oddly, feeling the Mindvoice tremors strongly but unable to determine what they were saying. They were making fun of him he could tell. Malic surged off the chair quickly surprising both of them. The simple touch of their hands upon his skin was maddening and he suddenly no longer cared that Nyla was a vampire or that Eliani was a princess. He was obviously not good enough for them and they both knew that and were making fun of him within Mindvoice.

"I will report to the infirmary and let them treat my scratch!" Malic barked harshly. "Thank you for the concern Princess."

Eliani and Nyla stood there shocked as he gathered his body armor and moved around them for the exit. They turned to look at each other.

"*Ussta Che?*" Nyla asked.

"What did we do?" Eliani finished her statement.

VANGRA 9 TACTICAL TRANSPORT EDGE OF THE TORANA CLUSTER

"...anything Tir'ut?" Esther asked her son as she scanned the two sensor screens in front of her.

They had arrived less than an hour before and had been scanning the entire area with their passive sensors. Tir'ut had parked them just outside the edge of the Torana Cluster, the fringes of the Gas Nebula just touching them.

Tir'ut shook his head. "No. They are still drifting towards the border. Minor power fluctuations... probably some sort of emergency power cells. Heavy damage from what I can tell. Hull breaches in three locations... they don't appear large and force fields are active, but the structural integrity of the ship is most definitely compromised."

"Their starboard nacelle is gone." Esther spoke. "That must be what hit the Gate as they were exiting."

Tir'ut nodded. "From the stress fractures I'm seeing they attempted to decelerate very quickly and exit the Gate corridor prematurely."

"How do you know that?" Esther spoke.

Tir'ut pointed the screen between their seats. "The micro cracks here and here." He answered. "It's indicative of a full power emergency deceleration. Exiting a Gate corridor while in transit is no small feat mother and whoever attempted this knew exactly what they were doing."

"An elf pilot?" She said looking at him.

Tir'ut nodded his head. "Only they have the skill and reflexes to do the calculations and manipulate the drive coils in the fashion needed to produce this sort of deceleration."

"Why would an elf pilot want out of a Gate corridor prematurely Tir'ut?" Esther asked.

Tir'ut shrugged his broad shoulders. "Any of number of reasons mother... none of them very good." He answered.

Esther turned in her seat. "Fash'ka? Ja'narie? Anything?"

Ja'narie turned from where she sat in the engineering seat monitoring the lateral sensor array. "Without a full power scan I can not determine if there is anyone alive on board." She spoke. "And that is not something we want to do this close to the Lycavorian border."

Esther nodded. "No it's not."

"Spectral scans of the ship Ja'narie?" Tir'ut asked turning his head.

"The gases in the Nebula prevent such a scan from being accurate Tir'ut." She answered. "Even here on the edge of the cloud as we are it is still affecting the instruments enough to garble our readings."

Fash'ka pointed to the monitor that held the three dimensional image of the ship. The red areas were hull breaches while the yellow areas were heavily damaged portions of the ship. His finger touched the small blue point that was blinking just behind the cockpit view window. "Ja'narie... what is this blinking light? What does it mean?"

"That is in the location of the engineering station on this class ship." She replied.

"How do you know that Ja'narie?" Esther asked.

"The schematics for this ship are easily available Esther. I discovered them in Lesede's library several years ago." She said. "They are generic in nature and certainly the Union has improved them over the years... propulsion, weapons and such, but for the most part the general layout has remained the same. There would be no need to change it."

"Can you tell me what this area is then?" Fash'ka asked.

Ja'narie nodded and touched her console quickly. "The cockpit engineering access panel. It allows the pilot and co-pilot to access most major engineering functions without having to go below into the belly of the ship."

"And the blinking light?" Fash'ka asked.

Ja'narie shook her head. "It indicates an unknown substance." She said. "I will try and run a flurospatial scan. It will at least give us a list of compounds from this portion of the ship." She adjusted her controls and several seconds later a small readout appeared. Ja'narie nodded her head. "All standard composites in coil material and LSD construction. Ummm... what is this?"

"What?" Fash'ka asked.

"JB-19." Ja'narie said.

Tir'ut's head snapped around from his seat, Esther looking at him oddly because of his reaction. "Fash'ka?" He snapped.

"Ja'narie are you sure?" Fash'ka asked gently placing his hand on her shoulder.

Ja'narie nodded as she looked up at him. "Yes... the flurospatial scan is very precise." She answered. "What is this JB-19 compound Fash'ka?"

Fash'ka turned and looked at his younger brother. "I will power the missile tubes and plasma arrays!" He said quickly turning to leave the cockpit.

"Fash'ka wait!" Esther barked but he didn't stop. She turned back to Tir'ut. "Tir'ut... what is going on?"

"JB-19 is an explosive compound mother." He answered her. "Most often used in fused explosive charges. If placed over the main LSD coil... upon exiting a Jump Gate it will heat to six thousand degrees and trigger the JB-19. The resulting explosion will fracture the LSD coil and possibly caused a chain reaction destroying the entire ship or at the very least crippling it extensively."

"What are you saying?" Esther said. "This was no accident?"

Tir'ut shook his head. "That is exactly what I am saying. They must have discovered the charge just before exiting the Gate. It is the only reason they would have tried to decelerate so quickly. They knew what it was and what it would do."

"Then why didn't the ship explode like you say Tir'ut?" Ja'narie asked from her station turning her chair to face them.

"Whoever was flying this ship had decelerated enough by the time they exited to cause a minor variance in their trajectory. It can't be helped with the power they directed to the deceleration process. When they

exited... they impacted the Gate ring and tore the Starboard nacelle free. The chain reaction would have stopped with the nacelle gone.”

“That’s what caused the Gate to explode?” Esther asked.

Tir’ut nodded. “The combined JB-19 compound and the nacelle’s own Phased Plasma Converters would have caused an explosion equal to a full missile volley from a *REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought. It obliterated the Gate completely.”

“Tir’ut how do you know this?” Esther asked.

Tir’ut met his mother’s eyes. “It is how Fash’ka and I rid our tribe of the scum who father exiled four years ago.” He answered.

“Dek’za and his ilk?” Esther asked. “They died in a Gate...” Her eyes grew wide. “They died in a Gate explosion when they jumped back into High Coven space!”

Tir’ut nodded slowly. “Father knew they would return to the High Coven and ask to be reinstated. He could not allow them to reveal where we had gone.”

“Tir’ut... how many men have you killed?” Ja’narie asked suddenly surprising them with the directness of the question.

Tir’ut looked at her from his seat. “It is not important now.” He spoke.

“It is to me *xsa o!*” Esther snapped glaring at him. “Answer her question!” (damn it)

Tir’ut looked at his mother then. “Twenty-three.” He replied softly.

“Twenty-three?” Esther gasped. “Tir’ut... Dek’za... he had only twelve who went with him.”

Tir’ut nodded slowly. “Yes. I know.”

“Your father’s directive?” Esther said. “No violence when we leave Kranek for any reason!”

“You and father are more alike than you know mother. You strive for the same thing in different ways.” Tir’ut spoke. “Like you... he will never allow anything or anyone to harm you or our tribe. There have been times when it was necessary however to use means that all of us find distasteful. We are just better at it than those who would do us harm. And it was only after he exhausted all other means.”

Esther took a deep breath and closed her eyes nodding her head. “I... I believe part of me has known. And I understand why your father did these things. He just should have told me Tir’ut.”

The soft alarm began chirping and Tir’ut turned his head to his sensors. “Contacts!” He barked. “Two of them! Bearing six three four one point three!”

“Ja’narie!” Esther barked her eyes springing back open.

Ja’narie turned back to her station and adjusted her console controls. “I have them! Two Bontawillian assault pods! They are tracking the *TYPE III!*”

“Assault pods? Out here?” Esther snapped.

Tir’ut looked at her quickly. “Mother... didn’t Lesede tell us this Gareld had an older Bontawillian Frigate.”

Her head turned instantly. “Ja’narie! Three second pulse on the lateral array!” Esther snapped. “Just fast enough to tell us what is out here and not reveal ourselves!”

“Pulsing!” Ja’narie barked as Fash’ka re-entered the cockpit. “New contact! Bearing five eight four three point two. It’s a Bontawillian Low Gravity Assault Frigate!”

Esther turned back and looked out the view window. “Gareld!” She hissed.

Tir’ut nodded. “And he’s going after the *TYPE II.*”

NORMYA’S *TYPE II*

Normya rested on her back in the two meter wide conduit, several circuit boards and wiring spread across her chest. Her head wound had stopped bleeding quickly enough due to her elven and wolf metabolism and now it just left a dried blood stain in her normally silky platinum colored hair. She had pulled her flight suit down to her waist and tied it tightly and now all she wore was the dark gray tank top that was partially soaked with sweat and pressing quite seductively to her firm breasts. Since Normya, like her five mothers, hardly ever wore undergarments, her nipples were hard nubs due to the chilly air in the conduit as well as the fever still coursing through her body. They protruded proudly against her damp shirt.

Normya held the circuit board in one hand and was plugging the bare ends of cables into the many different slots on the board. With a deep breath she dropped the board to her chest.

“Toral... I’ve bypassed life support and main engine auxiliary propulsion control through conduits G3 and G6, bypassing G4 and G7.” She stated.

“Normya... forgive me... but we no longer have main engines. Or did you miss the fact the starboard nacelle is gone.” Toral’s voice replied with a chuckle. “I swear woman... that fever of yours is out of control.”

“We can still use the auxiliary control units to power sensors and computers you *riad aulved!*” She barked.

“I suppose that is true. Do I dare ask how you managed to override the safety protocols?” Toral said.

“Ah... no.” She answered. “I didn’t exactly override them. I simply tore them out.”

“Yes... typical daughter of King Leonidas response. If it doesn’t work... break it some more.” Toral said with a laugh. “What about sublight control?”

“I routed that through thruster access valve nine delta.” Normya replied. She heard Toral laughing in her ear implant and she grinned. “What?”

“I can’t wait to see the engineering team that enters this ship when we return.” He said. “They will not believe the modifications we have done. I have rerouted all the power couplings from the starboard nacelle into the sublight manifold through sections three and seven. I also severed the connections from both aft Hadron Reflector Arrays and transferred them to the forward ones using...”

“Using what?” Normya asked.

“Using isolinear circuitry I borrowed from the starboard Plasma turret.” Toral finished sheepishly.

“You are running four million terra watts through the isolinear circuitry?” She gasped. “What did you coat the interior of the injector couplings with?”

“You don’t want to know.” Toral replied. “It should work well enough. As long as we do not try to break any speed records. I think that does it Normya... let’s see if our more than unusual field modifications work shall we?”

Normya turned and looked at the control panel next to her. “Here goes nothing.” She said.

“Look at it this way. If it doesn’t work... we can always find something more pleasurable to entertain ourselves until we die.” Toral spoke. “At the very least... it will cure the fever for you.”

“Toral... you are such a pervert!” Normya blurted as she stabbed her finger down on the panel.

The lighting in the *TYPE II* surged strongly and Normya felt the steady vibration of the sublight manifold start back up as the dead ship came back to life. The repair conduit she was in began to power up completely and she banged her fists against the interior of the conduit.

“Yes!” Normya screamed as she began to scramble back towards the cockpit. It took her only a minute to reach the end of the conduit and she was thrusting herself out of the opening just as Toral’s legs were clearing the opening of the conduit on the opposite side of the cockpit.

As he stood up completely Normya leaped into his arms and hugged him tightly. Toral grinned as he hugged her back.

“Does this mean we are an item now?” He asked with a laugh.

Normya kissed his cheek and smiled at him her emerald green eyes bright. “Don’t ever give up Toral.” She told him. “You never know what might happen.”

“Well... since you put it that way... shall we get this hunk of junk turned around and find out what we still have power too?” He spoke with a large grin.

Normya nodded and he released her as they moved towards their seats. She practically jumped into her seat just as they heard the metallic clanking above and to their rear. They both turned their heads to the sound.

“What was that?” Normya asked.

Toral shook his head. “We are out of the DBZ. There shouldn’t be anything banging against our hull. Or what’s left of it anyway.” He moved to the entrance to the cockpit and looked out past the passenger level peering into the far rear of the *TYPE II*. He saw several sparks shoot from the ceiling as his eyes past over that location and they darted back as the sparks became more pronounced. His eyes grew wide and he turned back to her. “Normya... we’re being boarded!” He gasped.

“What?” She exclaimed.

“Check the aft cameras! Someone is cutting through the outer hull above the dragon section!” Toral barked as he went to the side of the cockpit and punched in a code on the wall. The small panel slid down to reveal three K12 KMs and three Nehtes. He quickly pulled two of each from the panel and turned back to her.

“Toral! There’s some sort of assault pod attached to the hull!” She almost shouted. She turned back to look at him. “Pirates?”

“They wouldn’t dare cross the border. THE DBZ sensors would detect it right away!” He stated as he charged his K12. “Check our position! Hurry!”

Normya turned back to her controls, her hands flying across the three consoles. Toral heard her gasp and he looked at her. “What?”

“Toral... we crossed the border thirteen minutes ago!” She stated taking the weapons he held out to her and getting to her feet.

“*Nubou!*” Toral cursed. “They must have been waiting for us to drift across the border!” He hissed moving to the cockpit door. “Could you tell what kind of pod it was?”

Normya shook her head. “Not clearly. One of the cameras is gone. It looked like a Bontawillian assault pod though.”

“Begin bringing the sublights online Normya.” He said. “I will cover...”

They both turned as the sparks became more pronounced and suddenly a three meter wide section of the top of the ship fell inward and slammed onto the deck below with a thunderous crash. They watched as half a dozen Kochab and Evolli pirates began dropping in through the hole in their ship.

“Too late!” Normya shouted bringing up her K12.

BONTAWILLIAN FRIGATE

“What?” Gareld demanded as he came to his feet.

“Sensors are detecting increasing power levels from the *TYPE III*!” Sandur spoke as he turned from his console. “Penktol reports both pilots are still very much alive!”

“Where is the second assault pod?” Gareld asked.

“They are attaching to the lower hull as we speak!”

“Tell them to hurry up! And I want the elf female alive!” He turned to his helmsman. “Bring us out of the nebula! Close to within five thousand kilometers of the *TYPE II* and prepare a tractor beam!”

VANGRA 9 TT

“...power!” Ja’narie exclaimed. “I’m reading increasing power levels on the *TYPE II* Esther! The sublight drive is powering up!”

Esther turned to Tir’ut her eyes wide. “They survived!” She gasped.

“They must have been working on repairing the ship this whole time!” Fash’ka spoke as he came up between their seats.

“Never underestimate the skills of an elf brother.” Tir’ut spoke.

“Esther! Gareld’s assault pods have attached. Sensors are detecting the signature of Kochab burn weapons and Kinetic Magnums!” Ja’narie announced.

Tir’ut turned when the soft chirping began again. “Mother... Gareld’s ship is moving out of the edge of the nebula! They are on a direct course to the *TYPE III*!”

“Weapons on the Bontawillian Frigate?” She asked quickly.

“Forward and aft plasma arrays!” Tir’ut answered. “Four missile tubes aligned on top facing forward! They can not pivot them!”

“Underneath?” Esther asked.

Tir’ut shook his head. “Nothing!”

Esther turned to look at her sons. One of her blood who was half her blood and half Cha'talla's blood. And one that had accepted her completely as his mother though no blood relation existed between them. "Consensus?" She asked.

"We should not get involved." Tir'ut spoke quickly.

"I agree." Fash'ka spoke. "Though it is an older frigate... it still has us outgunned mother. I would like to help... truly I would. For the very reasons you want to help. If we had the G9s here I would not hesitate... but..."

Esther nodded her head. "I know." She spoke softly.

Ja'narie's head jerked up as she heard the voice. "Quiet!" She demanded. "I'm detecting a communications!"

"Source?" Esther asked.

Ja'narie looked at her instruments and then turned to look at her eyes wide. "The *TYPE II* Esther."

"Put it on speakers!" Esther snapped. "Quickly!"

Ja'narie stabbed her console and the sounds of weapons fire filled the cockpit of the VANGRA 9 causing all of them to wince.

"...Union *TYPE II DT!*" The female voice shouted. "Our ship was sabotaged and we struck Jump Gate 24 upon exit! We have restored sublight engines and minor systems but we are under attack by a combined Kochab and Evolli boarding party! There is a Bontawillian Frigate closing on us as well! Any Union ship, please respond!" The voice stopped and they heard a male voice shouting in the background. "I say again this is Princess Normya Leonidas! I am piloting a Union *TYPE II DT!* We are being boarded by..." There was a heavy barrage of weapons fire and then the communications stopped.

"Princess Leonidas!" Tir'ut gasped. "The half elf daughter!"

Fash'ka looked at Esther his eyes wide. "This was no random act of sabotage mother!" He spoke. "They were targeting her all along."

"Gareld!" Esther said. "He said they were waiting for a larger profit."

"Targeting the daughter of King Leonidas's first Elven Queen is the surest way to sign your own death warrant mother." Tir'ut spoke. "Is Gareld that big of a fool?"

"It would appear so." Esther said.

"Did you hear the strength in her voice even fighting as she was?" Ja'narie spoke with a tinge of awe in her voice.

Tir'ut looked at her. "Yes." He spoke.

"Ja'narie... did Gareld pick up her transmission?" Esther asked.

"Unlikely... I don't think she realized she was broadcasting on a low band frequency." Ja'narie replied. "Range is only a few kilometers. We are much closer to her position than Gareld's ship."

"There's no way we can get to her before Gareld locks on with a tractor beam." Fash'ka spoke. "And even with her sublights operational... there is too much structural damage for her to outrun Gareld."

Tir'ut's eyes widened. "She doesn't have to outrun him. At least not for more than six minutes."

"What do you mean Tir'ut?" Esther asked.

"Fash'ka... our first hunt." Tir'ut said. "Remember where you took me brother?"

Fash'ka nodded. "Of course... Yocetu. It was..." Fash'ka matched his younger brother's expression. "Of course! All she would need to do is get inside the Cluster and make straight for Yocetu! We can pick them up there!"

Esther looked at them. "How do you propose we give her these six minutes?" She questioned. "You have said yourself we can not match Gareld's ship in firepower."

Fash'ka smiled. "That is where what you have taught us comes in mother." Fash'ka spoke with a smile leaning over to kiss her cheek. "Tir'ut! Tube four! I will make the modifications! Stand ready!" He spoke as he moved out of the cockpit once more.

Esther looked at Tir'ut. "Would you care to fill your mother in on what you and your brother are planning?"

Tir'ut smiled as he worked the controls on his console. "An Ionized Concussion Missile." He stated. "The Bontawillian frigate is an older model mother and it has no armaments underneath. We will sneak in; fire

an ICM missile into its shields and it will short out every system on the ship. This model ship does not have the compensators needed to absorb the ion surge.”

“Of course!” Ja’narie said. “It will take them at least six minutes before they can restore function to their sensors and drive units.” Ja’narie smiled brightly. “Oh... Matriarch Esther... I am going to enjoy becoming Fash’ka’s wife. Events are never dull around your family.”

Esther looked at her and laughed. “Well... it will be an honor to have you Ja’narie.” She said. “If we live through this that is.”

Tir’ut looked at her. “No problem mother.” He said confidently.

“I was speaking about the wrath of your father when he discovers we disobeyed him.” Esther said.

Tir’ut looked at her. “Oh.” He said softly. “There is that to consider.”

“Yes.” Esther said.

“We can not do anything and just watch Gareld take her mother.” Tir’ut said.

“Something tells me that action does not appeal to you my son.” Esther spoke softly looking at him intently.

“Ja’narie was right mother.” Tir’ut said meeting her eyes. “There was strength in her voice even facing down the enemy as she was. She does not deserve to fall into the hands of someone like Gareld. Not with that spirit.”

Esther nodded. “I agree.” She said immediately. “I will deal with your father. Just make sure we are alive to do such a thing.”

TYPE II

Toral sealed the cockpit door behind him with a grimace. “There are still five out there Normya!” He hissed turning to see her jumping back into her seat. “What are you doing?”

“I’m going to vent the hold!” She snapped.

“Normya that could very well undo all the repairs we have done!” Toral gasped.

“Would you rather let them keep shooting at us and do it?” Normya barked. “Those are Kochab and Evolli out there Toral. I have no desire to fall into their hands!”

Toral nodded after only a moment. “Point taken.” He said in reply moving to his own seat. “I will try to reinforce the structural field as much as possible to compensate for the vacuum and decompression!”

Normya reached out and placed her hand over the panel as she looked at him. “Ready?”

Toral nodded. “Do it!”

Normya slammed her hand down on the panel and the rush of air was loud enough even within the cockpit as the cold vacuum of space thundered through the rear section of the TYPE II.

Nothing survived.

BONTAWILLIAN FRIGATE

“Massive decompression in the rear compartment!” Sandur shouted as he whirled around. “The elf bitch just vented our men into space!”

Gareld snarled at this information and turned. “How soon before we are in tractor range!” He screamed.

“Ninety seconds!”

“Prepare to engage the tractor beam and ready a Harpoon Boarding Grapppler! Pump the ship full of enough Golian Gas so that when that half elf whore wakes up she is being gang banged!” Gareld snapped. “And while we are fucking her... she can watch us kill her elf co-pilot!”

“The Kavalians?” Sandur asked.

“They have already paid for her!” Gareld snapped. “They did not care what condition she was in!”

TYPE II

“Forty-five seconds until sublights are online!” Toral announced. “Structural integrity is holding at fifty-seven percent!”

“I’m tracking a Bontawillian Low Gravity Frigate on approach!” Normya spat loudly. “No markings or IFF transponder! It’s most definitely not friendly!”

“Yes... I believed we determined that when they boarded our ship with their weapons blazing.” Toral barked.

“Damn!” Normya swore.

Toral’s head whipped around to look at her. “What?”

“I tried to get off a message!” She exclaimed. “The transmitter must be damaged! It only broadcast at short range and low freq!”

“That is the least of our concerns at the moment!” Toral snapped. “The residual Polarion particles from the destroyed gate will undoubtedly bring any ship in the area that can detect them... but they will also effectively mask our presence as well!”

“Oh you are just full of good news!” Normya barked.

“We are in The Wilds Normya.” Toral spoke. “We must get back across the border and to the safety of the DBZ.”

Normya nodded. “I know!”

“We can’t outrun the frigate Normya! Not in our current condition!” Toral said.

“Then we’ll have to out fly them!” Normya snapped.

Toral nodded. “If we first do not come apart at the bulkhead seams.” He stated.

“Is there any way to knock those pods off of our hull?” Normya asked. “We...”

“Union *TYPE II*... this is VANGRA 9 Limian Tactical Transport! Respond immediately to this message!” The female voice burst over their internal speakers.

Normya and Toral looked at each other. “The Frigate?” She asked.

Toral shrugged as his eyes scanned their sensors. “I’m not detecting any other ships in the area.”

“Daughter of King Leonidas... if you wish to survive you must respond to this message! We are attempting to help you but we will need to coordinate our actions! Respond or we will have choice but to leave you to your fate!”

Normya made a snap decision and stabbed her finger down on her panel. A decision that would forever change her life into the future. “Who is this?” She demanded.

“Who we are does not matter at the moment!” The female voice answered. “You must be aware of the Bontawillian Frigate closing on your position. It is under the command of a rather insidious pureblood vampire who fancies himself quite the leader. His name is Gareld. We have determined roughly what took place up until this point and...”

“How do you know that?” Normya snapped.

“Because we are not stupid!” The male voice snapped. “Now shut up and listen woman!”

Normya turned to Toral as she heard the woman’s voice again. “Tir’ut... not now!” There was a pause and then she continued. “We are trailing along just inside the edge of the Torana Cluster slightly behind Gareld’s ship. Our sensors indicate you are less than thirty seconds from sublight power being restored. We will fire an Ionized Concussion Missile at the frigate the moment your engines come back online. It will render the frigate unable to act for several minutes. When we do this... you must follow us into the Cluster!”

“Into the cluster!” Normya exclaimed. “Why can’t I just turn back for the border?”

“The disruption will only last for several minutes Normya Leonidas.” The woman’s voice spoke again. She had a slight accent to her tone, but surprisingly it was very friendly. “When his systems are restored he will catch you before you reach your border. This is your only chance. You do not want to be captured by this man Normya Leonidas. Trust me... I was in his clutches once. He will not be in a very receiving mood now, especially not after you have vented his fool accomplices into space. You must trust me.”

“I will not be able to maneuver very well.” Normya stated. “The pods will drag me down and I can’t push my ship too hard. The repairs we made are not exactly foolproof.”

“We will cover for you Normya. My son is an excellent pilot and we know this area of space quite well.” The woman’s voice answered. “But you must do exactly what we say. I do not wish to harm you child... and we are taking a great risk in helping you to begin with.”

“Ten seconds Normya!” Toral announced.

“Alright!” Normya stated quickly.

“Good! When the missile explodes you will see us break for the cluster! Follow us in! And keep this channel open.”

Normya looked at Toral who nodded his head, his hand poised over the engine controls. “We’re ready.”

“Tir’ut break now!” The woman’s voice barked.

They looked out of their main view window and could see the huge bulk of the frigate closing in on them. Toral’s elf eyes picked it up first. “There! Low port quarter!”

Normya saw it then, the sleek lines of the Limian Tactical Transport as it came tearing out of the cluster in a burst of speed Normya knew it should not have had. They watched as it swept gracefully under the long rear extension of the frigate and the missile launcher extended from the top of the ship.

“Interesting!” Toral spoke. “I bet the Limians never thought of that.”

The VANGRA 9 fired one missile which streaked away and locked immediately on the frigate. The explosion was not bright or brilliant in color, but they both saw the sparkling of ionized particles ripple along the length of the ship and the result was almost instantaneous. The frigate began to roll to the right and all electrical power began to flicker and go out.

“Now child!” The woman’s voice erupted from the speakers, just as they saw the VANGRA 9 execute a gut rolling turn and head back into the Cluster.

“Toral! Full power to the sublights!” Normya shouted.

Toral was way ahead of her as his hand came down on the panel. “We have full power!”

Normya shoved her throttles to full and the *TYPE II* leaped forward on its own power.

BONTAWILLIAN FRIGATE

“Emergency lights!” Gareld screamed. “What the hell was that?”

“Ionized Concussion Missile!” Sandur barked. “It struck the aft extension and spread across the shield grid! We’ve lost main power!”

“Get it back!” Gareld barked as he grabbed the side of the console.

“It will take at least six minutes for the surge to pass!” Sandur yelled. “Until then... all we have is emergency power!”

“Where did it come from? How did it penetrate our shields?”

“Where it came from is unknown!” Sandur replied as he came up next to him. “At least until we get main power back! This is an older model ship! We only have standard grid shields Gareld. It used our own grid generators to travel and then shorted them out along with everything else.”

“Damn!” Gareld snapped.

EARTH SODRAG

Toria walked out of her sleeping room into the main room of the bungalow with her nose buried in the data pad. The day had passed far too fast for her with the wealth of information that Arrarn Leonidas and Sadi had given to her and the other pilots. The capabilities of the *STRIKER DT* were amazing to her trained pilot’s eye. And she had no reason to doubt whether the ship would actually do what Arrarn told them it would do. He had covered navigation in this day’s training and then had taken them up in his personal *DT*. Toria and the others had been astonished at how nimble the seventy-two meter long ship was. Part of that was the power and reliability of the engines installed on the ship they knew, but mainly it was the skill and grace of Arrarn

Leonidas's touch upon the controls and the almost seamless way Sadi seemed to know just when to adjust power levels to compensate for some maneuver he was attempting.

They had taken turns sitting with them in the cockpit and during her time there she admired how he moved in his pilot's seat. No wasteful motions in the least, his hands dancing across his controls with the grace of a surgeon. As Toria walked towards the bathroom portion of the bungalow she found her mind wondering what his hands would feel like caressing her body in the same fashion as he flew his ship. Such gentle and graceful precision was not something she had ever experienced in a bed partner and she wondered if he was as skilled a lover as he was a pilot. These were the thoughts that were going through her mind, quite the opposite of what she as an intelligence officer should have been thinking. It was these thoughts that were racing through her mind and therefore she did not notice that the shower in the large combined bathroom was just turning off. She did however notice the sliding door open and she came to an abrupt halt when Narice stepped from the shower in all her glorious nakedness. Toria gasped softly causing Narice to look up in stunned surprise, her own eyes going wide as well.

"Toria!" Narice hissed softly.

"Narice! Oh... I'm..." Toria stammered as she watched Narice snatch the large towel from the rack and wrap it around her body quickly. "I'm so sorry... I wasn't paying attention!" Toria wore only the simple shirt over her own form and she felt a decidedly delicious tingle caress her skin at the picture of Narice's incredibly firm and succulent body and her nipples hardened almost immediately. She turned quickly to face away from her and get her suddenly racing heart under control. "Forgive... forgive me Princess. I was distracted reading this manual and..."

Narice stared at Toria's back for a long moment and found herself admiring the way her glossy rust colored red hair fell down her back. The simple light blue shirt fell only to just below her ass, leaving her long tanned legs in plain sight as well as her extraordinarily shaped ass. After their sizzling kiss the other morning and waking up with Toria's hands on her so intimately, Narice found those feelings and vibrations were something that she could not push to the back of her mind. They were something she wanted to experience so much more of.

"Toria?" She spoke in almost a whisper as she looked down. "I..." Narice lifted her head and saw Toria Dellion in front of her only millimeters away. Her eyes grew wide and she opened her mouth to speak when Toria's full lips descended upon hers and kissed her.

Narice then did something she had never done in her young life and she surrendered to the passion that was raging through her. She groaned loudly as Toria's hands pulled her body tightly against hers and her sweet tasting tongue plunged between her soft lips. She felt Toria pull her tight and then she was blurring, pulling Narice along with her. The main room flashed by in an instant and then they were on Toria's bed, the vibrations from their bodies flopping onto the soft mattress the only movement as Toria deepened her kiss and began to frantically pull at the towel covering Narice's body.

Their kiss broke apart as Toria pulled open the towel and pushed the ends to the side Narice gasping for air as fire raged throughout her body. Toria's knee was pressed firmly between her thighs and gently but very resolutely stimulating the smooth sensitive skin of her pussy. Toria stared down into her face as she brought her hand up to caress Narice's large firm breasts, her long fingers delicately tracing the outside of her nipples, turning them into hardened nubs screaming for attention.

"Tor... Toria..." Narice gasped as her body reacted quite enthusiastically to Toria's manipulations.

Toria lowered her lips to Narice's neck, her soft rust colored red hair brushing against Narice's shoulder. "I... I am going to feast on you Narice." Toria gasped as she brought her lips to Narice's ear and used her tongue to trace her ear lobe.

Narice's hands clamped onto Toria's incredible ass and she pulled her tighter in a rush of sexual want and need. "Oh... ohhhh... yes!" Narice gasped.

Toria dropped her head to the hollow of Narice's throat and set about her task with superior determination and drive. Her lips danced across Narice's throat and down between the valley of her large breasts. She brought her hands up to either side of each wonderfully shaped globe and let them fill the palms of her hands. She dragged her tongue along the inside of Narice's left breast, leaving a wet trail up the firm tanned skin until it tickled Narice's erect nipple. She heard her gasp as her warm lips engulfed the nub and she suckled hard, battering the nipple with her tongue. Toria repeated the same process with her right breasts, torturing

Narice by pressing her knee tightly against her moist slit. As she sucked hard on her right nipple she felt Narice's hips undulate, effectively rubbing her pussy against Toria's leg firmly and drawing an even louder gasp of delight.

Toria continued her discovery, leaving Narice's nipples to be teased and twisted and rubbed by her hands and fingers as her head dipped lower. Once again her warm tongue left a trail of saliva down Narice's skin, feeling her vampire princess's chest heaving with newly revealed passion and desire. She delved deeply into the dark crevice of Narice's belly button before moving even lower, shifting her body downward on the bed as she neared the prize she so wanted to taste. She continued to tantalize Narice's nipples, rolling them between her finger tips. Her own supple figure was aflame with a fervor and intensity she had never felt before, and it was surging through her like a wave, causing her own pussy to become incredibly wet and aroused. As she planted soft kisses and licks across Narice's lower abdomen she could smell the heat of Narice's excitement and barely able to control herself she sank lower still, gently pushing Narice's thighs apart. As her sky blue eyes came to rest on what she so craved, Toria felt a tiny orgasm course through her and she squeezed Narice's nipples harder, causing her to whimper out in a mixture of pain and newborn pleasure. She stared at the dark folds of Narice's pussy, already soaked with her juices and open to her like the wings of a butterfly. She could see Narice's powerfully sculpted abdomen heaving in anticipation of what was to come. Toria dropped her right hand from Narice's breast, drawing the backs of her nails slowly across her beautifully tanned skin, now glistening with a fine sheen of sweat. She moved her lips closer to Narice's center while drawing her finger down along the outer labia and hearing Narice cry out softly at the feather like caress.

Narice felt Toria slowly draw her finger across her swollen pussy lips and she almost lost all control right then. The sensations ripping through her were unlike anything she had ever felt and she found she welcomed them completely. Her hands came up from gripping the bed sheets in her fist to clamp onto Toria's hand that still tortured her nipple with pinches and rolls. How could she be feeling these things? How could another woman make her experience such incredible pleasure? Narice lifted her head, her black hair damp from the shower and newly formed sweat and her wide dark eyes saw Toria's face snuggled between her thighs. So close... so very close to her pussy. This wasn't possible. It couldn't be possible.

"Toria... Toria..." Narice rasped out... her eyes wide and her heart hammering in her chest. "Toria we..."

Narice's eyes flew open at the almost electric feeling of Toria's wonderfully talented tongue as it touched the bottom of her pussy and dragged gloriously upward, bathing her slit in saliva. Her head fell back onto the bed, her back arching and causing her hips to push tighter against Toria's beautiful face. Her mouth opened in a breathless scream as Toria's hands grabbed her firm tight ass and she plunged that amazing tongue as deeply into her spasming pussy as she could. The orgasm shattered whatever resistance still remained in Narice's clouded mind and she reached down to grasp Toria's head firmly. Her head tossed from side to side as the immense pleasure swept across her like some unseen blanket and stars exploded into her eyes. She felt Toria's soft lips fasten completely over her clenching pussy and accept all that Narice offered her. The explosions came almost on top of each other, each one causing her hips to convulse as more of her come flooded into Toria's mouth. And then her eyes flew open at the dual pin pricks of pain as Toria's fangs sank into her spasming flesh just above her clit. Pain that just as quickly was washed away by the devastating and uncontrollable waves of churning rapturous bliss.

And in the midst of the first will crushing orgasm of her young life, Narice, Princess of the Vampire High Coven screamed out her passion for Toria Dellion and what she was making her feel.

How could her mother not wish this?

How could she not wish to experience this incredible, unexplainable pleasure?

How could she prefer that fool Tesand over the delicious creature lying before her now?

These were the thoughts that raced through her mind as Narice withdrew her vampiric fangs from the flesh just above Toria's still painfully erect clit. Her face was saturated with Toria's sweet tasting come as she lovingly drew her tongue across the two puncture marks closing them instantly, and then proceeding to lap away at the remnants of Toria's last body tingling orgasm.

Toria's bed was nothing more than a mass of soaked sheets now. Sheets soaked in the combined juices and sweat of both women. The perfectly trimmed line of curly rust colored red hair above Toria's clit had long been soaked through with Narice's saliva and Toria's come that had escaped her eager lips. Twice more Toria had feasted on her still throbbing pussy and when she had Narice teetering at the edge, she would then send her plummeting over. And at the very peak of those muscle stretching orgasms that followed, Toria would bite her and feed on her blood intensifying the orgasms Narice experienced by ten fold. Her body still hummed with the vibrations of what Toria had made her feel, what Narice wanted to feel over and over. And it made her wonder if Arrarn Leonidas could make her feel these things as well.

She had not the first inkling of what to do when she lowered herself quite willingly in between Toria's beautiful soft thighs. All she knew was that she wanted to taste her and return the pleasure Toria had given so willingly. She had explored Toria's pussy with her lips and tongue and fingers, all the while watching as she twisted, threshed and writhed in obvious delight. Narice had been surprised at the taste and texture of her come, and she had drunk it down like a starved kitten. She had explored Toria's body in much the same fashion as her red haired lover had done with her.

Narice lifted her face between Toria's thighs as that word resounded in her mind.

Lover.

She watched Toria's large breasts rise and fall evenly with her breaths as she fought to regain control of her flush and stimulated body. Her gorgeous blue eyes were fluttering open and closed as if she was trying to focus. Narice let her own cobalt blue vampire eyes gaze upon Toria's body, from her long leanly muscular legs to her still quivering but flat abdomen. They had shared blood in a way and moment reserved for those purebloods committed to each other in every way. In a way that meant they would go into the future together. And even as these thoughts rushed through her mind, she still saw Arrarn Leonidas together with both of them. Their bodies entwined around his powerful form. Incredibly this picture in her mind did not affect her in the way she thought it would. It was almost as if events were drawing them together somehow, pushing them collectively down the same path. And Narice found herself liking the way the path was leading.

And it had begun with this woman whose bed she shared.

Narice place a last lingering kiss on Toria's still swollen pussy, delicately drawing her tongue up and sucking in whatever drops of her delicious come remained. She was tired now, her body stretched and sore in a supremely divine fashion. She shifted on the bed and began her journey back up Toria's body, stopping often to place lingering kisses on parts of her flesh, to include her equally large and firm breasts. Soon she rested her lithe frame on top of Toria's, their breasts crushed against each others and Narice's thigh resting gently against the heat of Toria's pussy. Her eyes were still closed, her full lips pouty and moist.

"Toria?" Narice spoke softly as she drew a finger across her cheek.

Toria's eyes fluttered opened and met her gaze with a stunning brightness to them. A brightness that matched the smile she now wore. "Oh... Oh Narice." She stammered.

"I... I take it my initial performance was satisfactory?" Narice asked with a shy grin of her own.

"*Gi dumo l'phraktos Narice siyo.*" Toria gasped. "Yes!" (Oh bless the gods yes)

Narice lowered her lips to hers and they kissed passionately, their tongues teasing and tasting and exploring. It was a kiss filled with more passion than either of them had ever felt. Narice pulled away after a long moment.

"Narice... I did not mean to..." Toria began.

Narice shook her head with a smile "Oh no Toria Dellion." She spoke. "You had every intention of feeding on my blood... just as I had every intention of feeding on yours." Narice kissed her softly. "You taste wonderful by the way."

"As do you." Toria said.

"That is good... because I intend to continue what we have discovered this night." Narice spoke confidently. "Well into whatever the future may hold for us. We have to explore what this night has given to us." Narice spoke softly. "We have shared blood Toria Dellion and after what you have made me feel I do not care that you are a woman."

"Your mother Narice!" Toria said quickly. "She will..."

Narice shook her head. “She will never have you again Toria.” She said. “I told you that you would never endure Tesand or my demented nephews again and I meant it. You are mine now. And I do not like to share.”

Toria looked at her with stunned shock. She brought her hands up and clutched Narice’s perfect ass in her hands, pulling her tighter. “I like this side of you Narice.” She spoke.

Narice chuckled. “So do I.” She said. “So do I.” She looked at Toria. “There is more to you inside Toria. Much more... and I want to discover all of it.”

“I could say the same about you Narice.” Toria spoke.

“Perhaps.”

“I will enjoy discovering it.” Toria spoke.

Narice smiled. “And so will I.”

TORANA CLUSTER

TYPE II

Toral settled back into his chair even as Normya lifted her face to him. “Well?” She asked in barely a whisper. The COM channel was still open to the strange VANGRA 9 transport and she did not want them to know what was happening. Normya did not yet know if she could trust them.

Toral shook his head. “The Sublight containment seals are failing. They are deteriorating rapidly.” He stated in the same fashion. “If we were not within the Cluster they would have lasted longer... but not by much.”

“*Sibfla!*” Normya cursed loudly. More loudly than she had intended.

“What is wrong?” The female voice echoed in the cockpit.

“Nothing!” Normya snapped.

“Young lady... I have raised four children and I have become quite good at telling when they are lying to me. I also speak your ancient language quite fluently.” She stated. “Something is wrong. You need to tell me so that we can help you. I think we’ve already proven we are not your enemy.”

“That is still open for debate.” Normya said.

They heard the woman laugh softly. “Fair enough.” She said. “My name is Esther Saira Princess. I am a Pureblood who left the High Coven many years ago with my Blessed Husband and our people. We have been living peacefully for the last quarter century and were returning from a trade run to Aprian Two when we detected your Jump Gate explode.”

“You are a vampire?” Normya asked.

“A Pureblood... yes.” Esther spoke. “Though considering who one of the women you call mother is... I would think that does not matter to you.”

“You... you know of my mothers?” Normya asked somewhat surprised.

“We do receive your Netnews channels here in The Wilds Normya.” Esther answered. “And there are few who do not know King Leonidas. His exploits and those of your brother are still talked about in some areas within The Wilds.”

“Your ship is not a standard VANGRA 9.” Toral spoke now. “Not if you were able to detect the Gate exploding from such a distance. And most certainly not with the weapons you obviously have it fitted with.”

“My husband likes to be prepared.” Esther answered. “Do you have visual?”

“No... our holo emitters are burned out.” Normya answered.

“There is a planet nearby. Yocetu. We use it for hunting large game.” Esther answered. “On it we have established several hunting camps. That is where we are leading you.” She told them. “You have a decision to make. I will give you’re the coordinates one our hunting camps on the surface and you can make your way to one. There you can attempt to survive with what you have remaining on your ship. However... Gareld will no doubt deduce where we have gone and that we helped you. He has little reason to like me. He will come to Yocetu looking for you since your LSD drive is trailing minute traces of biogel coolant that even the idiots he has working for him will detect. I do not know why he wants you Normya Leonidas... or what he intends to do with you. I do know your young male companion will not survive and Gareld will capture you.”

“My other option?” Normya asked.

“You can trust us.” Esther spoke. “We can land in one of the many large clearings on Yocetu and bring you onto our ship. Then we return to our home. At least there you will be safe and you can contact your father to arrange a place to meet so that we can see you safely back to him.”

Normya looked at Toral who shrugged his shoulders. “What choice do we have?” He asked. “And she sounds much nicer than this Gareld fellow.”

“Our Sublight containment seals are deteriorating.” Normya spoke making her decision.

“How quickly?” The male voice asked now.

“Complete failure in ninety-four minutes.” Toral replied.

“We don’t have the extra power to extend our sensors out past five hundred thousand kilometers.” Normya spoke. “How far are we from this Yocetu?”

“Another hour and twenty-two minutes.” The male voice replied.

“That’s cutting it very close.” Normya spoke.

“As your friend has said... what other choice do you have Normya Leonidas?” Esther asked now.

“I will drop in directly above you.” The male spoke once more. “I can reduce the drag of the assault pods attached to your hull with our ship’s mass. It will extend the life of your seals by several minutes.”

“Can you fly that close to us for that long?” Normya asked. “We have twice your length and four times your mass.”

“Elves are not the only pilots in the universe who are proficient in flying!” The man snapped.

“I’m only half elf!” Normya barked. “And if I didn’t have a broke ship I could fly circles around you blindfolded! Whoever you are!”

She heard the man laughing. “We shall see she-wolf elf! We shall see!”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SODRAG

“You did that on purpose.” Sadi spoke as she stopped in front of the couch where Andro sat holding a plate of food and a mug of his mother’s special coffee. She wore a thin, soft crème colored robe that fell to the floor. The front of it was loosely tied and it was obvious she was naked under it as the robe displayed the valley between her firm breasts along with her tanned skin.

Andro lowered the data pad he was reading and reached up to take the mug from her hand as she placed her knees on either side of his hips and settled herself onto his lap squirming slightly to get comfortable. He wore only his trademark white cloth pants with crimson trim down the legs, his upper body bare.

“*KertaGai*... are you suggesting I sent Thast and the other High Coven thugs away for some ulterior motive.” He spoke with a grin as he lifted the coffee to his lips.

Sadi used the fork to stab a piece of the hickory smoked meat on the plate and held it out for him. He snatched it off the fork and she smiled as he began chewing. “I certainly am.” She stated.

Andro’s azure eyes grew a little wider as the flavor flooded his taste buds. “Sadi... this is fantastic!” He spoke as he chewed the meat and sat up a little straighter looking at the food on the plate.

Sadi grinned triumphantly. “Aricia gave me the recipe before we left. I had the meat marinating all day. Your mothers are going to turn me into a very good cook!” She said as she popped a piece into her own mouth.

“Thast was watching her like a hawk. Even after she went to sleep last night he used the shadows to blur past her bungalow three times.” Andro spoke looking into her eyes. “He also thinks he and his fellow security troops went unnoticed when they conducted their little recon last night.”

“So when can we have her come here Andro?” Sadi asked bluntly. “Both of us grow tired of only being able to talk within Mindvoice.”

“With Thast gone it will be easier.” He answered. “But we will still have to contend with Yuri. It will not be as difficult... but we will still need to keep our guard up. For Carisia’s sake as well as our own. We have had this discussion before *KertaGai*.”

“I know... it just grows harder by the day as close as she is now.” Sadi spoke.

“For me as well.” Andro said.

Sadi fed him another piece of the meat. “What about Narice and Toria?”

Andro shook his head as he chewed. “There is something about both of them that is a mystery.” He said. “Narice’s bond with Deneth is almost as powerful as Carisia’s is with Anthar. She is far more capable than even her mother realizes I think. And she hides it from everyone for some reason. Carisia told me she believes Narice is well aware of how she feels for us. And we in turn for her.”

“You spoke with her?” Sadi asked her eyes going wide. “Directly? You are not afraid of doing that anymore?”

Andro nodded as he sipped the coffee. “I was never afraid *KertaGai*. Confused perhaps... part of me still is confused, but never afraid. I reached out to her briefly as she was returning to the base after the obstacle course. Carisia does not believe Narice will do or say anything to reveal her feelings. If that was the case she would have done this already. She believes, as I do, that there is more to Narice than we know. You and Arrarn had already begun instructing the Coven pilots and I did not want to distract you. As for Toria Dellion... well... I think I will leave that up to you and my brother to discover since she will be with you most of the time. She is certainly more than a pilot and intelligence officer, and vampire or not, her desire for Arrarn permeates the air around her.”

Sadi nodded with a smile. “Yes... I smelled it today as well.” She said. “Arrarn is so intent on training them that he failed to take notice of it.”

“I believe he is still very gun shy after what happen at the villa with Narice, even though her desire for Arrarn wafts from her pores as well. She just hides it better due to her strength.” Andro spoke.

“Our feelings for Carisia are growing stronger Andro... and she was beginning to batter my shields today. Especially after what happened at The Center. Not intentionally, but she is so much a part of us now that it happens often. I don’t want to shield from her my love. She is a part of us now... inside our minds and hearts. However it has happened... it has happened and we can not hide from that as the *Feravomir* has said.”

Andro shook his head quickly. “I don’t intend to hide from it *KertaGai*.” He stated plainly. “However we need to be careful as I said. I want to hold her just as strongly as I do you Sadi. I want to touch her and taste her... just as you do. You are not making this any easier for me.”

“Why should we? We want the same thing with you Andro. Don’t discount the pull you have on us my love.” She was quick to point out. “We are *Anomes*... all of us together. That much I have come to realize. Carisia is the final part that will complete all of us.”

Andro nodded slowly. “Yes... I’m coming to grips with that fact as well.” He stated. “How it has come to be does not matter. It is what it is... and I will not deny that.” He met Sadi’s eyes. “She is also Yuri’s daughter... and my father is not going to be happy when we finally reveal our feelings to him.”

“But he loves your mother Isabella just as much as his other Queens.” Sadi said. “She is a Pureblood... just like Carisia.”

Andro nodded. “Yes... that is very true. However... my father and Yuri have a long history... from even before he discovered who he is. The majority of that has been filled with hate and anger and violence. My father is not infallible *KertaGai*. He has his faults... and one of them just happens to be he is not a forgiving person. I believe he holds Yuri just as much at fault for the death of grandfather as he did Xerxes. I fear that unforgiving nature will transfer to Carisia because she is Yuri’s daughter.”

“Carisia is not like her mother!” Sadi snapped.

“No she is not... but initially I don’t believe my father will see it that way.” Andro said. “That is why we must be careful. At least until we are ready to reveal to everyone what the three of us share.”

“You know of course she and Anthar have no intention of leaving Earth when the High Coven departs.” Sadi said.

Andro nodded. “And that is another of the reasons we need to be mindful of our actions.” He said. “If that was discovered in some way, Aikiro would yank her from Earth so fast there would be nothing we could do to stop her.”

“And we would go after her!” Sadi said.

“Yes we would.” Andro said instantly. “However... that is not something I want to contemplate right now. I want to avoid it completely as a matter of fact. I do not wish to start a war between the Union and The High Coven.”

Sadi stared at him for a long moment. “But you would... wouldn’t you?” She said softly.

Andro looked at her. “If you or Carisia are taken from me Sadi... I would rain destruction and death down upon any who stood in my way of getting you back. If that meant I had to start a war? Yes... without a single hesitation.”

Sadi felt a shudder of desire course through her at his words. They were *Anomes* yes, devoted to one another for eternity now, but to hear him say he would come for her or Carisia no matter the cost made it all seem so dreamlike. He said the words, made the pledge as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do, so devoted to her... and now Carisia as he was. Sadi lowered the plate to the couch and then reached up and placed her hands on either side of his face gazing into his azure eyes. “How exactly did I become the luckiest female wolf in the universe in finding you?” She asked softly. “Not only do you leave me breathless in our bed... your words alone can make my heart sing to the stars.”

Andro grinned. “Wait until I make you angry with me.” He said. “You might speak a different tune.”

Sadi laughed. “Maybe. But not right now.”

Andro smiled. “Helen will be here tomorrow with Arzoal, ostensibly to review the bonds between the Coven’s Bonded Pairs. I intend to ask if she will exam Carisia in private. I want her to establish a private connection between the three of us. We could no doubt do it... but since your abilities seem to be manifesting themselves now considering your little display today... I thought it better if she be the one. I am also going to ask her to delve a little deeper with Carisia, with her permission. There is something about the way she acts around Thast that does not fit who she is.”

Sadi blinked. “You suspect something?”

“I’m not entirely sure.” Andro said. “I’ll know more tomorrow and I will tell you. You however, you need to speak with Helen at length about today. And whatever else you may feel inside you *KertaGai*.”

“I... that came as quite a surprise to me Andro.” She said. “I didn’t know my abilities would... would grow so blatant so quickly. It was... it was frightening.”

“No doubt. This Walonn fellow was very lucky. Bren told me afterwards that had you connected with the blow you were going to use... he would be very dead.” Andro spoke. “I must make it a point to never anger you *KertaGai*.”

“Well... your hands upon my body will never elicit that type of reaction.” Sadi said with a smile. “So you have no worries there.”

Andro’s hands slipped inside her robe and cupped her firm ass, pulling her closer to him as he released his aura and let it swarm around Sadi. He watched as her green eyes closed in enchantment and he leaned forward to nuzzle the valley between her breasts. “What kind of reaction will my hands upon your body elicit *KertaGai*?” He asked in a low growl.

Sadi smiled seductively. “Oh no!” She said quickly pushing his head back and reaching down to pick up the plate again. “You did this to me last night and I was starving for the better part of the entire day!”

“I thought we had fun?” He spoke with a smile.

“We had enormous fun.” Sadi agreed. “But we still need to eat Andro.” She held out the fork with a large piece of meat on it. “Don’t worry... you can have me for desert.”

“I will hold you to that *KertaGai*.” He said.

Sadi smiled. “And if you eat everything... I might even find some sweet caramel topping that you can pour on my body and then lick off.”

Andro’s eyes grew a little wider at this. “Now that sounds like it would be delicious.” He said.

“Then eat.” Sadi spoke pushing the meat into his mouth. “No deserts until you eat.”

“Now you sound like my mothers.” He groused as he chewed.

Sadi leaned forward and extended her tongue to lick the edge of his ear with the tip while she ground her hips down on his, pressing her warm mound hard against his rapidly thickening cock. “Your mothers can not do to you what I do my love.” She whispered seductively in his ear.

Andro trembled as her female aura swirled around him. “Give me the plate!” He barked as Sadi chuckled.

ROYAL VILLA

Dysea stepped onto the patio in her customary robe and holding the mug of coffee in both her hands. Her platinum blond hair was still somewhat ruffled as it fell over her shoulders down her back. The sun was already rising above the trees and she guessed the time around mid-morning. She always prided herself on being able to tell the time by the position of the sun, and it was something she had grown extremely good at over the years.

Something had woken her this morning however. A sense of something that was wrong. Isabella and Aricia had already risen to meet with Vonis, and Dysea had extracted herself from For'mya's arms on the bed, Anja spooned up against For'mya's back, her arms wrapped around her. She had smiled at the look of pure, blissful satisfaction on For'mya's face as she rose to her feet. It was the same look that she and the others wore the next morning after *Nauta Melme* took them with such intensity and passion that it made them scream. She had pulled on her robe and made her way to the kitchen for a mug of Aricia's coffee and then walked out here, unable to shake the feeling that something was wrong. As the wind shifted she smelled him easily and turned.

Martin was still wearing only his black pants and sitting in one of the large lounge chairs on the patio, the mug of coffee in his hand. Dysea turned to move to him, her emerald green eyes gazing upon his powerful tattooed body and feeling her own desire for him rising. Only she and Martin had tattoos on their bodies in any large number. Bella and several small ones that she had talked her into getting over the years, but nothing like what she and Martin had. She watched his dark brown eyes turn to look at her as she walked up and without a word he made room for her in the chair between his legs. Dysea settled there, sitting lotus style and she leaned back against his hard chest.

"You could not sleep either *Nauta Melme*?" She spoke softly.

Martin shook his head. "I been awake since a few hours after *Kinsoaurgai* and I returned to the villa." He said.

"Something woke you?" Dysea asked.

Martin nodded. "A feeling really *Melda Min*. Like something was wrong."

Dysea nodded. "That is what woke me as well." She said.

Martin leaned forward and nuzzled her elven ear gently. Dysea smiled and pushed back against him even more. "You have seen nothing *Melda Min*?" He asked.

Dysea shook her head. "I have not had a vision in several months." She answered. "This feeling... it is not about something on Earth I can say that. It is too distant... too faint."

Martin nodded. "It is the same for me. Just on the edge. It does not concern our children. Only Normya is off world and that is the first thing I checked. I contacted Apo Prime Center when I woke and they said she left nearly twenty hours ago. She and Toral were going to return via Gate 24. It was a longer route around the Dzorina Cluster and Asteroid Belt, but it is much less traveled. They wouldn't have to wait at the Jump Gates for commercial traffic to pass. You know how impatient she is sometimes."

Dysea smiled. "Yes I do."

"I had them check Gate Usage Control and she hadn't gone through Gate 24 yet, but Toral more than likely got her to travel at a more sedate speed and she knows Arrarn and Sadi won't need her for a least a few days." Martin said. "I expect we'll hear from her within twenty hours or so once they clear the Gate and are on their last leg. Of all our children... fever or not... Normya is the one less likely to get into trouble and I don't worry about her as much because of that. She has your calm about her."

"She is somewhat embarrassed *Nauta Melme*." Dysea said.

"About what?" Martin asked confused.

"Her Coming of Age fever." Dysea answered. "It was stronger than she was letting others see. She was fighting very hard to keep from snapping at people. I believe she welcomed this opportunity to remain away from everyone so as not to embarrass them or herself. She thinks Zarah was handling it much better than her and she does not want to disappoint you."

"Disappoint me?" Martin gasped. "*Melda Min*... I will be the first one to say that I have no desire to experience that part of what you and the others go through. I would go crazy. You, Aricia... all of you... you are far stronger in that regard than I am. She has nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about."

“She is young my love.” Dysea spoke. “I think she is taking her time as she returns to allow the strongest parts of the fever to pass. Toral is a fine young elf male and he cares for her a great deal. He will not be affected in the least by her mood. I think he often wishes there was more between them.”

Martin nodded. “He’s a stand up young man. I wouldn’t blink if something developed between them.”

Dysea turned her head and settled her eyes upon him. “She thinks you would rather see her with a Lycavorian male. Someone like you.”

Martin chuckled. “Thank god there is only one of me then. I darn sure wouldn’t want her to mate with someone like me.” He said. “And I would never tell her who she can enter into a relationship with. That is one thing we all agreed on. We would let our children find their own way. We have done that... and that hasn’t worked out so bad.”

“I have told Normya that as well.” Dysea said with a smile. “She is just as stubborn as you however.”

“Yeah... well I seem to have passed that trait on to all my children.” He said with a grin. “Sometimes it’s downright annoying when they hit me with it.”

Dysea laughed now as well. “They are forging their own lives *Nauta Melme*. They are our future. The future of the Union. We must always let them find their own path no matter what we may think. No matter what we may feel. Our past is not their past and we must not hold them to that.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “I know.” He said softly.

Dysea sipped her coffee slowly enjoying the feel of his body against hers and how he wrapped his aura around her. “This dinner tonight troubles you doesn’t it?”

Martin shrugged. “Not really.” He answered.

“*Nauta Melme*... fool Deia and Panos if you must... but you can not fool us.” Dysea said. “Having the Kavalians here troubles you.”

“There are too many unknowns.” Martin said. “Too many questions.”

“Martin... do you wish me to sit in on the talks with For’mya and Deia?” She asked softly. “Perhaps having both *Kinsoaurgai* and I there will give us a better understanding and picture of what they are really seeking. Our inherent skills tend to compliment each other very well.”

Martin shook his head quickly. “No. Dinner here is one thing... but I want you and Anja to remain out of the loop where it concerns the Coven and Kavalians. I don’t like having three of my Queens so uncovered with two races that have shown no love for us in the past. I won’t expose you or Anja if it is not needed.”

“Then Lynwe and Vengal asked if I would join them with Aihola in Delmah and help them to plan what you want her to do concerning the Kavalians.” Dysea said. “I won’t do that if it troubles you.”

“That is fine *Melda Min*. You and Vengal were raised on small unit operations... just like Danny and I. Just like the Drow. Better to have our best people planning and executing that.” He answered. “And it keeps you out of direct contact with them as much as possible.”

Dysea nodded. “Irial and I will fly over later today then. I will return in time for the dinner.” She said.

Martin nodded. “I had Riall schedule a full military readiness briefing for two days from now. That is where I want you and Anja with me. We can pass the details to the others later.”

“I will contact GUC and have them inform me when Normya exits Gate 24.” She said. “From there she should return within twenty hours as you said.”

Martin nodded. “Then why doesn’t that feeling go away.” He said softly.

VANGRA 9 TT

“Ja’narie?” Esther asked turning in her chair to look at her.

Ja’narie was monitoring the two sensor screens at her station intently, using low power passive scans to sweep the area in front of them. They were stopped just inside the edge of the Cluster and looking out on the brownish red planet before them. She shook her head slowly. “I can detect nothing.” She said softly.

“Could he have given up?” Normya’s voice filled their cockpit.

Esther’s laugh held no humor in it. “I sincerely doubt it.” She spoke. “Targeting you is no small affair Normya Leonidas. And considering the way it happened, I would hazard a guess and say he had help among your own people. He did not just randomly appear by that section of the border. He knew you were coming.”

“The Chief Engineer who supposedly fixed my ship?” Normya asked in disbelief.

“Or someone with similar access to your ship yes.” Esther agreed.

“But why?” Normya asked the question to no one in particular.

“You said this Gareld mentioned something when you saw him on Jagaliu.” Toral’s voice spoke now.

“Not directly.” Esther answered as her eyes swept the stars in front of them. “Only that he had a much larger profit to make. If that profit however, if it was somehow related to capturing you... he would not give up I assure you.”

“That’s a big if Esther.” Normya spoke.

“Perhaps... but the fused explosive on your main LSD Drive Coil did not get there by itself now did it?” Esther spoke.

“Point taken.” Normya said.

“My son tells me that you must have discovered it. The explosives charge I mean.” Esther said. “That is why you were conducting a power deceleration just before hitting the Gate.”

“We brought the ship back from Earth to be fixed. It had micro fissures in the LSD Drive Coil Manifold.” Normya said. “During transit to Gate 24 we discovered they had not been fixed like we thought and that is when Toral discovered the charge. Your... your son Esther... he is very knowledgeable.”

Esther chuckled. “Tir’ut has been flying our ships since he was five years old.”

“I have crashed a couple of them too.” Tir’ut’s voice exclaimed. They heard Normya laugh softly.

“Striking the Gate probably saved your lives then.” Esther said.

“What do you mean?”

“Tir’ut says when your starboard nacelle collided with the Gate and was torn off; the chain reaction created by the JB-19 compound in the explosive charge was stopped. It did not continue and destroy the rest of your engine core. It did however react to the compounds of the Gate when your impact damaged it and that is why the Gate was obliterated in the ensuing explosion.” Esther said.

“Your son seems to know an awful lot about explosives too.” Normya said.

“You can thank his father and older brother for that knowledge.” Esther replied the note of disapproval very evident in her voice. “Something I will be speaking with his father about when we return home.”

“He is a Pureblood too? Like you.” Normya asked.

Esther turned to look at Tir’ut who met her eyes. “Yes.” Esther replied. “Pure of heart as well.”

Tir’ut rolled his eyes with a smile and turned to look at the console to his left. “How much longer before your seals fail?” He asked.

“Nineteen minutes.” Normya answered immediately.

“Mother... we can not wait any longer.” Tir’ut said turning to look at her. “If Gareld is out there... he is within the Cluster just as we are and we will not detect him until he attacks. At least if we surge forward now, we can cover her as best we are able and she will still be able to maneuver somewhat.”

Esther nodded. “Which camp?” She asked.

“Have her make for the Northern continent mother.” Fash’ka spoke now. “The camp is three hundred and twelve kilometers from the northern coast on a bearing of 5723.9. It has the largest pad clearing and the most modern facilities.”

“Normya Leonidas?” Esther spoke.

“5723.9 from the northern coast.” She replied. “I got it.”

“Whatever you do...” Tir’ut spoke. “Stop for nothing. If Gareld is out there... and it is likely... we will draw him away from you. Head straight for the planet. Do not attempt to help us. Land at the facility... you will find the security code for the barracks under the largest Oklan tree as you come up the path. Take whatever supplies and weapons you can carry and head for the mountains. There are transmitters powerful enough to reach your Union. Contact them and call for aide. Gareld will be looking for you so do not stop for very long in one place. Travel only by day and make sure you are well hidden and secure at night. The creatures on Yocetu are not exactly tame and friendly.”

“Wait!” Normya called out quickly. “I thought we were going to transfer to your ship and then leave.”

“And we will...” Esther said. “That is what you must do if we do not make it Normya Leonidas.”

“Why... why are you helping us like this?” Normya asked suddenly. “Risking your lives?”

“If you die out here in The Wilds Normya Leonidas... it will bring your father out of Union territory on a mission of vengeance and death.” Esther spoke. “He will sweep through The Wilds like a supernova until he has found Gareld and all those responsible and slaughtered them. Many others will be swept up in that torrent. Protecting you now... that ultimately protects us and what we have built.”

“Why would my father care what you have built in The Wilds?” Normya asked. “He does not even know you exist. Whoever you are. Why would he have a quarrel with you?”

“That is a story for another time perhaps.” Esther said.

“What do you mean? Do you know my father? Does he know you?” Normya asked the questions.

“Enough talk.” Tir’ut’s voice echoed. “I’m heading out in ten seconds. Stay right on my tail unless I have to break away! Remember what I told you *il kal’daka darthirii*. Do not hesitate and do not pause.”

“I won’t.”

Tir’ut nodded. “Then here we go!”

Tir’ut fed full power to his engines and the VANGRA 9 leaped from the edge of the Torana Cluster, the *TYPE II* directly behind them. “Fash’ka... weapons brother?”

“I am ready.” Fash’ka spoke from the smaller seat in the next compartment behind the cockpit.

“She’s with us.” Esther called out.

Tir’ut nodded. “She is a superior pilot to have kept her ship together this long.” He spoke as his own eyes swept the stars all around them as they hurtled for the planet.

Esther looked at him oddly hearing something in his voice. The loud beeping made her head snap around fully however.

“Contact!” Ja’narie screamed. “Contact! Bontawillian Frigate bearing three five seven nine point two! Breaking from inside the Cluster! Shields at full power!”

“Range Ja’narie!” Fash’ka shouted calmly.

“Three million kilometers and closing fast!” Ja’narie barked in reply.

“Mother... the next time Fash’ka and I suggest you let us kill someone... please allow us to do so.” Tir’ut snapped. “It could very well save us from circumstances like this.”

“I agree!” Fash’ka echoed.

“I’m beginning to see where that possibly would have been the best course of action now my sons!” Esther popped as she adjusted her controls. “Auxiliary power to engines Tir’ut!”

“*Il kal’daka darthirii* break now!” Tir’ut barked as he yanked the VANGRA 9 over in a gut wrenching ninety degree turn and headed straight for the much larger ship.

Normya slammed the *TYPE II* into as hard a left turn as she was able considering the damage they had and pointed the nose of her ship directly at the northern continent on the planet in front of her.

“What did he call you?” Toral yelled as he fed power to their sublight engines.

“It’s the vampire ancient language!” Normya barked out. “It means She-Wolf Elf!”

“Not very original!” Toral said.

Normya grinned as she fought with her controls. “I sort of like it.” She said.

“Bah! There’s no telling about some people’s taste!” Toral barked.

BONTAWILLIAN FRIGATE

“The VANGRA 9 is breaking right for us!” Sandur yelled. “The *TYPE II* is continuing on course towards Yocetu!”

“The markings indicate it is the same VANGRA 9 that left Jagaliu when we did!” An Evolli spoke from the side of the bridge.

“It’s Esther!” Gareld snapped. “It has to be!”

“The Pureblood from Jagaliu?”

Gareld nodded as he rose from his seat. “Yes.”

“Why would she be helping the half breed daughter of Leonidas?” Sandur asked.

“I don’t know!” Gareld growled. “We’ll find out after we capture the elf bitch! Come to course three one nine mark six! Target two TR9 missiles on the VANGRA 9! Two more on the *TYPE III*! Disable both ships! Once we collect our prize, we’ll return to get Esther!”

“Missiles ready!”

“Fire!”

VANGRA 9

“They are firing!” Ja’narie screamed. “Two missiles on us! Two at the *TYPE III*!”

“What kind of missiles Ja’narie?” Esther barked.

“TR9s!” She replied instantly.

“He wants to capture me.” Esther spoke softly. “Well he will find I do not capture easily. Fash’ka!”

“I have them!” Fash’ka’s calm voice replied. He was no stranger to ship combat and there was not much that fazed him anymore. Unless of course you included the dark haired Immortal female sitting only meters away from him. “Firing Anti-Missile Interceptors!” All of them heard the distinct hum of the missile launcher extending and then the swoosh of the six ripple fired missiles as they left the launcher. “AMIs away!” He yelled. “Reloading with Z-load Impact Warheads!”

“Fash’ka I’m adjusting five degrees!” Tir’ut called. “We need to cover the *TYPE III*!”

“Understood! Targeting engines and shields!”

“Don’t miss brother!” Tir’ut snapped.

GARELD’S SHIP

“Missiles!” Gareld shouted.

“Six AMIs! Targeting our TR9s!” Sandur replied.

“VANGRA 9’s are not armed!” Gareld protested turning to look at Sandur.

“This one is! Launcher extended from the top of the ship!” Sandur barked. “They are adjusting course! They are trying to protect the *TYPE III*!”

“Match their course and increase speed!” Gareld bellowed. “Time to impact on the TR9s!”

Sandur shook his head. “They got three of them!” He snarled. “The last one is targeting the *TYPE III*! Time to impact twelve seconds! It will hit in the atmosphere!”

“*Carians* that vampire can fly!” Normya gasped as they looked at the lone sensor that worked between their seats. They had watched as the VANGRA 9 dipped and turned and swatted the missiles from the stars with a volley of their own.

“Entering the atmosphere!” Toral called. “Four minutes on the seals!”

Normya brought her head up and looked at her instruments. “Rout power to the inertia dampeners!” Normya barked. “The smoother the ride the longer they will last!”

The *TYPE II* began to vibrate badly, the entire ship shaking and rattling like they were in the middle of a hurricane.

“Toral!” Normya screamed as she fought with the controls.

“Atmospheric force fields have failed in all sections! Bulkhead stress is rapidly reaching critical!” Toral shouted shaking his head. “We’re on fire Normya!” Additional alarms began blaring and he turned his head to the side console. “*Sibfla!*” He gasped.

“What now!”

“Missile! Port side! Impact in five seconds!”

“Missile!” Normya screamed.

“Turn Normya! Turn!”

Normya threw the *TYPE II* into a vicious full power turn, the damaged bulkheads of the ship groaning loudly in protest over the abuse. “Come on! Come on!”

The TR9 missile was meant to incapacitate a ship’s power supply when it struck. The small explosive charge would detonate the larger amount of Mettrionic particles which would in turn effectively release an electro-pulse that would shut down the drive of smaller ships. It was not meant to be used in atmospheric conditions however, and the effect was very telling. The small warhead exploded directly over the top of the *TYPE II*, the brute force of the small but powerful explosion slamming down on the rear portion of the ship, adding more stress to the already overworked bulkheads. As the force of the missile drove the ship down and the thermal layers in the atmosphere pushed the ship upwards, the hull of the *TYPE II* cracked open like an eggshell even as Normya tried to recover control and yanked the ship this way and that.

The stressed bulkhead tiers holding the port nacelle to the ship snapped like twigs and the *TYPE II* went into a brutal, out of control spin from which no one could recover.

VANGRA 9

“No!” Tir’ut screamed.

Esther’s eyes were wide as well, even as the swoosh of more missiles leaving the launcher filled the cockpit. “Tir’ut!” She gasped.

“I can’t tell!” He shouted as he turned the VANGRA 9 over. “I can’t see anything beyond the damn clouds!”

“The ship broke in half Tir’ut!” Ja’narie spoke from her chair. “Could... could they survive that?”

“Tir’ut... follow them in!” Esther shouted now. “Gareld can not follow with anything more than Assault Pods! We must get to the crash site first!”

“Hits!” Fash’ka shouted joyfully. “I have hits!”

Ja’narie turned back to her screen. “The frigate has lost engine power! Fash’ka you did it!” She exclaimed. “Their main engines took a direct hit! Their shields are holding but down to fifty-three percent! They are stopping!”

“Not for long! Gareld didn’t expect us to be armed! He’ll send out pods! Tir’ut go! Go now!” Esther barked. “We must find them first!”

Tir’ut turned the VANGRA 9 into the atmosphere of Yocetu and quickly disappeared from view.

EARTH SODRAG

“Deni... ohhhh... wait! Ahhhhhhh! Denaliiiii!”

Lisisa shuddered almost violently, the orgasm ripping through her and her hands grasping at his powerful calves for support, as Denali squatted above her and sank every thick wonderful inch of his eleven inch cock into her spasming pussy. She was on all fours on the bed, her face and chest pressed into the soft mattress and her smooth perfect ass and hips angled upwards for maximum penetration. Denali squatted over her easily, his large, strong hands pulling her hips upwards even as he drove his huge cock down into her. She felt his powerful aura embrace her, setting her body and nerves on fire, and just as his entire cock bottomed out within her depths her orgasm hit.

They had been making love for three hours now, Denali almost tireless in his actions, his aura keeping her very wet, very willing and oh so happily engaged. Fear of not being caught by anyone always increased their desire for each other. Here at SODRAG they knew no one would discover them as their bungalows were on the far end of the area quad, quite a long walk from the main courtyard in the center of the bungalow quad. Combined with the new knowledge that their grandmother had passed to them just this afternoon, this played a role in their increased craving for each other. Though Denali had been pretty sure there were no laws

prohibiting them from being together, hearing that same news from Gorgo had sent both of them in to a sexual frenzy upon returning to their adjoining bungalows. Denali had long ago cut a large section out of the wall between their bungalows, and then moving the furniture around in both rooms to hide the open entrance with the large wall lockers. He made it so they were easy enough to roll to the side and give them access into each other's rooms. The moment either of them returned to the bungalows they slid aside the wall locker.

Denali clenched his teeth and lowered his head to the back of Lisisa's shoulder, gripping her tightly as her orgasm ripped through her. He remained still above her thinking of anything but the incredible tightness and warmth of her clenching pussy to stave off his own eruption. Lisisa was clenching and unclenching her fists on his calves, her raven hair askew in every direction, her eyes tightly shut. Her maple and wheat scent filled his senses to overflowing and he basked in the caress of her female aura as it swarmed around him possessively. He felt the shudders in her lush body reduce only a small fraction as the strongest part of her orgasm began to subside and then he began to move inside her. He smiled as Lisisa's eyes flew open as she felt him withdraw almost his entire thick cock, for she knew what he intended. He wrapped his arms under her shoulders grabbing her large firm breasts and pulled her upper body off the bed, clutching her to him. Lisisa released his calves and grabbed his powerful arms in anticipation of what he was going to do.

"Deenniiii!" Lisisa cried out as he rammed his entire length into her once more with total and devastating power. Her eyes almost rolled into the back of her head as he began to stroke into her with powerful and utterly dominating eleven inch strokes. The bulbous head of his cock would strike deep inside her when he bottomed out within her depths, sending electric jolts of heavenly bliss ripping through her. He filled her so completely in this way... stretching the walls of her pussy until she was quivering in continuous satisfaction. "Ohhh... ohhhh... *carians... nubou lae mathaa aur enyla! Nubou lae mathaa!*"

Denali smiled and felt his chest swell with pride and commitment. When Lisisa began crying out to him in the ancient language he knew he had possessed her. He sped up his thrusts into her tight body just as she asked him, his large balls slapping against her firm, tanned ass cheeks. Their auras entwined and wrapped around each other, their different scents filling their nostrils, the smell of both their excitement and sex saturating the room. They did not care in the least.

Lisisa gripped his powerful arm tighter, pressing her face to his large bicep as she held on for dear life, whimpering in delight every time his controlling cock crashed deeply into her. Pleasure unlike anything they had shared until now was coursing through her and she knew it was because of what they had discovered. They were so much closer to their goal of being able to announce their love for each other. She clenched her teeth, shoving back with her hips on his downward drives, wanting to feel him even deeper. She heard his breathing increase next to her ear and she smiled inwardly, knowing he was close to filling her. No matter what else happened in her life from now forward, as long as she had Denali, nothing else would matter to her. He filled her senses, both her wolf and vampire senses, unlike anything she had ever experienced.

"Lisi..." His voice gasped. "Lisi... I'm close!"

Lisisa's eyes grew wide and she turned her head even as he continued to pile drive his beautiful cock into her. "Deni... Deni... *Usstan ssinsrrin ulu tyav dos ussta ssinsrrigg!*" She rasped out the words as she pressed her lips to his cheek. "*Usstan ssinsrrin ulu tyav dos vel'drav dos doer wu'suul uns'aa ussta ssinsrrigg!*" (I want to taste you when you come inside me my love)

Denali's head lifted suddenly, pulling away and she felt his strong hands grasp her legs. Lisisa cried out softly as he pressed her down to the bed, barely missing a stroke into her drenched pussy, and he began to rotate her body slowly. It was a long, slow torturous rotation for Lisisa as she was shuddering almost violently in continuous orgasms. Denali held one of her legs as he turned her, stopping only to lick her calf as he brought her leg around in front of him. Then she was facing him and his upper body came down on hers without hesitation, crushing her large breasts to his steel hard chest. He slid his hands under her firm ass cheeks, tucked his face into the hollow of her throat and began pile driving her with all the power at his command. Lisisa's arms flew around his broad shoulders and she sobbed loudly in joyous abandon. She locked her ankles at the small of his back, his strength such that he was able to keep pounding her much smaller frame with all that he was.

"Lisi... Lisi..." He cried out against the side of her neck. "Lisi... you... you are mine!" He gasped.

Lisisa felt his cock expand in size within her as he rammed home one final time. She felt every thick inch of his shaft swell; the veins spreading the walls of her clutching pussy in belly contracting delirium. His

large balls tightened against her upturned ass, the head of his huge cock ballooned against the bottom of her womb and her forest green eyes went wide as the first jet of his searing hot cum blasted into her belly.

Lisisa's fangs burst forth then, and with no hesitation in the least she sank those fangs into Denali's thick neck. His spicy tasting blood, the most delicious nectar she had ever tasted, splashed across her taste buds and triggered her own staggering orgasm. His arms crushed her to him, his own orgasm's intensity nearly triple in greatness as his cum roared from his cock into her depths. Denali Leonidas had barely felt the brief pain of her fangs piercing his skin, he had long ago grown accustomed to that, and he welcomed it now with all that he was. He didn't see Lisisa's eyes close in unearthly bliss as her orgasm stampeded through her out of control with all the power of an erupting volcano. He didn't see the look of dreamlike worship spread across her beautiful face as she fed on the blood of the only man she would ever truly love even as he filled her to overflowing with his essence.

"...is your sister by blood!" Denali spoke from the bed. He was sitting with his back against the headboard, watching as Lisisa padded across the room towards him with two glasses. They had moved to Lisisa's bungalow now as they basked in the feelings after their lovemaking. Deni or she would change the sheets of his bed in the morning before he went on duty. "Now that Andro has gotten rid of that idiot That you should spend more time with her."

Lisisa looked at him on the bed, the sheet barely covering his now flaccid cock, and leaving the rest of his delicious body for her eyes to take in. She wore one of his oversized dark tank top shirts that fell just below her thighs. She climbed back onto the bed and settled between his legs holding out the glass of juice to him. He had refused the juice the first time she had taken his blood, but the next morning he found himself weaker than normal and he had not hesitated to drink it since. The two small puncture marks on his neck were almost gone and would fade by morning easily. Lisisa's body hummed in delight as she pressed back against his chest and his hand came up to stroke her shoulder.

"I know." Lisisa spoke softly. "I don't want to make it any more awkward between her and Yuri however."

Denali chuckled. "How awkward do you think it will be when she reveals to everyone that she is Andro and Sadi's mate?"

Lisisa turned to look at him. "They have..."

Deni shook his head quickly as he sipped the juice. "No... not yet. But I know you can sense it whenever she is with either of them. The desire is almost a palpable thing."

Lisisa nodded. "Yes."

"Andro and Sadi will have to curb that desire soon, or even those who are not wolf will sense it." Deni spoke with a grin.

Lisisa slapped his bare knee. "Pig." She retorted.

"It will happen soon enough I think. Does that upset you Lisi?" He asked after a moment. "What Andro and Sadi feel for her? What Carisia obviously feels for them?"

Lisisa shook her head instantly. "No!" She sipped her own glass of cloned blood. "It makes me very happy to know that she will be loved in a way only a Leonidas can love." She turned her face to look at him. "Like you love me."

Deni kissed her then. A kiss filled with passion and want. "Like I will always love you." He said softly.

Lisisa smiled dreamily looking into his eyes. "There is something far stronger between them than we understand. Something that no one will ever come between."

"Then what holds you back from being her sister?" Deni asked.

"I don't wish Yuri to pull her from the training because she gets close to me." Lisisa said. "I can still feel the hatred that woman has for me. Because father saved me and her plans to use me to kill him were never successful. I can feel it every time I look at her."

Deni shook his head. "Andro won't let that happen." He said confidently. "Carisia's bond with Anthar is powerful... almost on a par with you and Jeth and Aradace and I. With continued training she will surpass even us and that does not include what she will gain from Andro and Sadi. You saw that Sadi's abilities are beginning to manifest themselves now?"

Lisisa nodded with a smile. “It surprised her.” She said softly. “I’ve never felt the level of power that is within Sadi from someone who is not bonded to a dragon.”

Deni downed the rest of his juice and placed the glass on the table. He wrapped his arms around Lisisa’s waist and pulled her tight, nuzzling her ear and neck. “I have thought much about what our brother said to Arrarn and I on the beach that night.” He said. “He is right you know...”

Lisisa turned her head slightly to look at him. He had told her everything they had talked about. He never held back from her, just as she never kept anything from him. “That this is our time?”

Deni nodded slowly. “What we do now could well alter the future Lisi. We should not let father’s issues with Yuri affect what we do. Andro certainly is not and more than any of us he is more like father.”

Lisisa nodded. “He is beginning to come out from under father’s shadow I think.” She said.

“What has father told all of us for all of our lives?” Deni asked her.

“Blood before all else.” Lisisa said instantly.

Deni nodded. “Blood before all else. Carisia is your blood Lisi. And while she will have Andro and Sadi soon enough I think; she will always need you. For only you have experienced what she goes through now. And that is where she will need your help. To break away as you did. To become her own woman.”

“When did you become such a skilled *halludvigius*?” Lisisa asked him with a smile. (Psychologist)

Deni grinned and shrugged his broad shoulders. “It must be all my sisters and mothers rubbing off on me.” He answered with a grin. “Not to mention the *Feravomir* and grandmother Gorgo. With so many women around it’s hard not to learn some of these things. You should hear Andro talk.”

Lisisa downed the last of her cloned blood and pressed back further against his bulk relishing in his aura as it filled her senses. The warmth of his body made her tingle and she smiled dreamily. “Never in all my years before father rescued me did I ever imagine I would love someone as much as I love you Denali. You had not even been born yet, but that didn’t stop me from dreaming you would come one day. Hold me *aur enyla*. I want to fall asleep with your arms around me.”

Deni took her glass from her hand and placed it next to his on the table before turning back and wrapping his arms around her. “That is something you will never have to ask me to do twice.” He said.

Lisisa smiled and wrapped her arms around his as she closed her eyes enjoying the feel of his body and the steady breathing of his lungs.

Yes... this is what she so enjoyed, even more than their lovemaking. Falling asleep in the arms of the man who was just as devoted to her as she was to him.

YOCETU THE WILDS

“Fash’ka you and Ja’narie stay with the ship!” Esther ordered as she and Tir’ut moved quickly into the back of the VANGRA 9.

“Mother we...” Fash’ka began to protest.

“Tir’ut and I can blur as well as use the shadows Fash’ka.” Esther turned and explained to him. “These are skills you and Ja’narie do not have. We can move and cover more ground quickly and remain undetected. And I would much rather have the two of you covering us than any others.”

Fash’ka sighed and nodded his head. “You are right mother.” He stated gently.

“Take the ship to the camp.” Esther spoke. “Activate its defenses and wait for us. We have a general idea of the crash site. We will join with you in several hours. If we call... come to us immediately.”

Ja’narie held out the data pad. “I have plotted where both sections went down Esther.” She spoke. “They are several kilometers apart, but we are closest to the portion that held the cockpit. I suggest beginning your search there.”

“And if you don’t find her?” Fash’ka spoke.

“We *will* find her!” Tir’ut snapped as he pulled the SA80 AR from the rack on the wall and charged the weapon. He turned and held it out to his mother as Fash’ka looked at him. Esther took it and Tir’ut pulled down another and did the same thing before turning to look at his older brother.

“*Jous nau ka'lith dalninuk. Fridj 'zil ilharn keer udossa.*” Fash’ka spoke holding out his arm. (Show no mercy brother. Just as father taught us.)

Tir’ut grasped his brother’s forearm tightly. “*Usstan xuat inth ulu dalninuk.*” (I don’t intend to brother.) That had been an hour ago and now Tir’ut was not so sure.

The forward section of the *TYPE II* was buried in the soft dirt almost covering the entire cockpit view window. It had slammed into the ground nearly half a kilometer back, digging a long furrow in the hard ground, ripping trees from their perches effortlessly. Smoke still rose from the wreckage, several small fires burning along the outside as well as in the shattered remains of the interior. Nothing had come away unscathed, the bulkhead breached and shredded in dozens of places. The rear third of the ship was long gone several kilometers away, while this forward section had broken into two parts upon impact, but remained attached by the hundreds of cables and struts even as it plowed through the ground to its resting point here.

Tir’ut worked his way around the jagged edges of the torn ship and peered into the smoky interior. His long cape and cowl was billowing around him from the coolness of the breeze, the hood drawn up to protect against any liquid that might be dripping from torn lines of the many fluids that helped to power the ship and make everything work. It was also the best way to hide his true nature from others but still allow him the ability to move freely. His dark eyes were wide and all of his senses alert as he trained his SA80 AR in front of him. It was the standard assault rifle of his people, much improved upon from those his father and brother had brought with them when they first settled on Kranek. He sensed his mother come around the opposite side and move up next to him, her cloak and hood also pulled up.

“Tir’ut?” She asked softly.

“The cockpit is up there.” He said softly motioning with his SA80. “Do you smell the blood mother?”

Esther nodded. “Kochab and Evolli blood. Those they killed and were trapped on the ship when she vented the remainder of them into space.”

“The stair ways are crushed beneath the upper deck. We will have to climb up to reach it.” Tir’ut said.

“Let us be quick then my son.” Esther spoke. “Gareld will find the site just as easily as we have.”

Tir’ut nodded and moved with speed and grace that belied his Immortal size. It was something that had always amazed Cha’talla about his sons with Esther. All of them possessed uncanny grace and could move far faster than any normal Immortal even when they weren’t blurring. His many hours and days training with his father had honed Tir’ut’s skills to that of a finely tuned precision machine. Esther followed him into the shattered remains of the rear of the ship and directly over to where the upper deck had collapsed into the lower deck. The dragon pens were bent and twisted almost beyond recognition. Tir’ut grasped a piece of cable and hauled himself up onto the upper deck which was now canted at a steep sixty degree angle. He used the cable to steady himself and then he held out his hand to her. Esther didn’t pause and grasped his hand. Using his immense strength Tir’ut lifted her easily and half tossed her up onto the level portion of the upper deck. She landed cat like and turned to reach out to him. Once they were both on the upper deck, Tir’ut hefted his SA80 once more and moved quickly to the entrance of the cockpit.

Esther followed him in, her own SA80 held out in front of her as Cha’talla had trained her ruthlessly on and her eyes went as wide as Tir’ut’s. The upper bulkhead of the cockpit above the pilot and co-pilot seats was open to the sun pouring in from the gaping hole. All of the instrument panels were destroyed beyond use, many of them dangling from their cables and hardpoints.

And both pilot seats were gone.

Tir’ut lowered his SA80 in confusion and moved forward while Esther looked around. “Where are the seats?” She asked looking up into the open top of the cockpit once more. “Something did not just reach down and rip them out while leaving the rest of the bulkhead intact.” She stated.

Tir’ut knelt between the two vacant areas where the seats would have been and looked at the deck. He saw the blackened marks on both sides and he reached down to run his fingers across the deck. He brought it back up and sniffed it. “I believe that is exactly what happened mother.” He said.

“What do you mean?” Esther asked.

Tir’ut looked up at the opening above them. “Look at the precision of the opening mother.” He said pointing to the edges. “They are not jagged as if it was torn open. It was a shaped charge... meant to blow an opening in the surface of the hull.”

“What? Why?” Esther asked.

Tir'ut stood back up and held up his fingers. "Explosive compound." He spoke. "MX Nine by the smell of it. A powerful Union explosive."

"Why would they put explosives under their own seats Tir'ut?" Esther asked. "They..." Her eyes went wide. "An ejection system?" She gasped.

Tir'ut nodded. "Similar to an escape pod... but meant for the pilots alone." He replied. "Just enough to blow open a hole above them and launch their seats clear of the ship."

"Who would be insane enough to develop something like that?" Esther exclaimed. "Let alone use it."

Tir'ut smiled. "You forget mother... the head of Union Operations is a human who came with the Lycavorian King from the past. It is said he was an exceptional pilot. This was something standard on all the human flying craft of that time."

"How do you know that?" Esther asked.

Tir'ut grinned. "You insisted we know as much about history as we could when we were growing mother." He answered. "Part of the history you gave to us was human history and that of the Lycavorian King."

"Oh." Esther spoke with a sheepish grin. "How do you suggest we find these seats then Tir'ut? We have no idea when they might have exited the ship as it was reentering the atmosphere."

"They would have waited until the atmosphere was breathable." Tir'ut said. He held up his wrist and tapped the metal band he wore there. "Fash'ka?"

"I am here brother." Fash'ka answered immediately. "We are secure and the camp defenses have been activated. You and mother need to start heading back Tir'ut. Darkness is coming and you know what comes out on this world at night."

"We will Fash'ka." Tir'ut answered. "Have Ja'narie run a spectral scan Fash'ka. She is looking for traces of MX Nine. They had some sort of Ejection system in their ship brother. They would have punched out somewhere after the air became breathable. I estimate within ten kilometers of the ship itself."

"Stand by." Fash'ka spoke.

Esther looked at him. "What comes out at night Tir'ut?" She asked.

"This planet has many predators mother." He answered. "It is why we come here to conduct our ritual hunts."

"Yes... I'm well aware of that." She said. "What comes out at night though that makes your brother's voice tremble?"

"Tir'ut! You are right brother!" Fash'ka answered.

"Where are they?" Tir'ut demanded.

"The closest one is one kilometer west of your current location Tir'ut." Ja'narie answered from the background. "Half a kilometer more past that is the second. Tir'ut... both of them are suspended in the air."

Tir'ut nodded. "Very well. We are moving to the first site."

"Be quick brother." Fash'ka spoke. "You do not want to be caught outside the camp when the sun goes down. Leave that for Gareld and his fools."

"We're leaving now." Tir'ut said.

"Tir'ut... what comes out at night?" Esther asked.

"Come mother... we must move quickly." Tir'ut spoke turning to exit the cockpit.

Esther shook her head as she made to follow. "*Uk zhah fridj 'zil veirus norrs 'zil ukt ilharn.*" She muttered. (He's just as closed mouth as his father.)

The whipping air and roar of explosives.

Toral shouting at her.

The flashes of her father and mothers and siblings that she would never see again.

Her beloved sister Zarah alone and weeping.

All these thoughts and so many more had whipped through her mind as they spun out of control, unable to stop the mad roll and plunge the *TYPE II* was in. Then the single flash of white light, the sound of more explosives and then her seat leaving the cockpit of her crippled ship behind. She remembered watching her ship spin out of control beneath her and then the enormous opening shock of the parachute above her snapped her head up with enough force and pain to cause her to scream out and then blackness washed over her.

As her eyes fluttered open now, these were the thoughts that rushed upon her.

And then the pain hit.

Normya Leonidas's emerald green eyes flew open and she screamed in pure agony as unimaginable pain coursed through her the likes of which she had never felt before. Sharp, gut wrenching pain that pierced through her brain as her eyes changed and her wolf fangs burst forth instinctually. She shook her head back and forth as she clamped her mouth shut, her fangs clicking together loudly, her emerald wolf eyes tightly shut by rapidly filling with moisture and then flooding with salty tasting liquid that poured down her cheeks. After a long moment and a dozen deep breaths her eyes opened and she looked down slowly and saw the source of her agony.

Her right leg was skewered by a branch of some sort, easily two inches in diameter, and her blood soaking the ground some five meters below. The branch had snapped off during her plummet through the thick trees, leaving only the large piece sticking from her flesh. Normya groaned and lost whatever was in her stomach, vomiting into the air in front of her, the smell of her own bile adding to her misery. She hung her head limply, the straps from the parachute far above biting into her shoulders painfully. With a willful surge of strength she reached up and jerked the Hador fighting knife from its inverted sheath. The blade gleamed in the little light that was penetrating the canopy above her and with her rapidly fading strength she slashed at the shoulder strap on her right. The blade sliced through the reinforced strap easily and she groaned as she swung free and dangled from only one strap now, increasing the pressure and pain on the one shoulder. Switching the knife into her left hand she lifted the blade and placed it against the strap.

Normya took a deep breath and slashed downward.

Had she been uninjured, the fifteen foot drop would have been nothing to her. Now it was as if she fell hundreds of feet before her legs impacted the ground beneath her. Terrible pain ripped through her leg once more and before she even had time to scream once more, the pain overloaded her brain and she passed out.

Tir'ut lowered the body of the male elf to the ground as gently as he could; Esther guiding his actions carefully from the earth and laying out the limp form on the soft, moss covered dirt. Tir'ut had climbed the tree to get above the limp body and then cut through the straps easy enough and he lowered Toral's broken elf body the three meters to the ground. Once he was fully down on the surface, Tir'ut righted himself and dropped easily to the jungle floor. He moved up next to his mother who knelt next to Toral examining his body with soft probes of her fingers.

"Mother?" He asked softly hoping for a miracle perhaps.

Esther shook her head slowly. "His neck is broken." She said gently. "Whether from the plunge through the trees or the ejection I don't know. Considering the bruising... I'd say his back and both his arms as well."

Tir'ut looked up into the thick canopy above them, seeing the small opening his fall had made in the greenery above. "The Oklan trees are unyielding mother." He said softly. "I hope he was not alive when he came through them."

Esther got to her feet slowly and looked at her son. "He would have felt nothing the moment his back was broken Tir'ut. Whatever he hit on his descent snapped his spine in two cleanly. It had to have happened in the first seconds coming into the canopy. I am guessing that when his parachute finally snagged on the trees, it jerked him back so viciously it broke his neck as well."

Tir'ut looked down at Toral's form. "*Dos malaruth lu'tois xuil bel'la dalninuk darthirii.*" (You fought and died with honor brother elf.)

"*Fre'sla xuil dosst phraktos nin wun gre'as'anto.*" Esther echoed softly. (Stand with your gods now in peace.)

The piercing scream caused both their heads to whip around. It was a scream of pure unadulterated terror and it was definitely female. Tir'ut... son of the Immortal Cha'talla did not hesitate. Esther's dark eyes went wide as her oldest son blurred in motion. He she could not track him and he was gone, disappearing into the jungle around them.

"Tir'ut wait!" She screamed before following.

Normya's emerald eyes were wide in terror, as they had been from the moment she regained consciousness.

Her impaled leg was twisted beneath her, her whole body throbbing with pain, yet the only thing that occupied her attention right now was the tooth filled maw of the dark brown, leathery skinned creature that was looking upon her as it's next meal.

The reptilian creature was easily two and a half meters long and a meter tall. Part of that length was the tail that lashed about wildly behind its muscular body, thin needle like black spikes protruding from a good portion of that same tail. It's blazing brown eyes were sizing her up, it's jaws wide and exposing flesh tearing teeth easily four inches long. Teeth that would shred her body without regard. Her wolf nose could detect the creature's foul breath and only her fear kept Normya from vomiting at the stench of decay. Her Coming of Age fever was long forgotten, the pain lancing through her body an afterthought as Normya stared at her death. All she could do was pray it would be quick for she had not the strength to fight such a creature.

As the creature drew back its large head, opening its life ending jaws, Normya blinked at the blur of motion to her right. Her eyes grew wider as the creature roared in pain from the eight inch long blade that now tore through its lower jaw, piercing its mouth and tongue and ramming through the top of its long snout. Normya blinked once more and then the huge figure was standing next to the creature, pulling the long, ornately carved sword from a scabbard on his back. His face and body were covered with the long cloak and cowl, and she watched as if in slow motion the figure drew back the sword and plunged it through the neck of the creature completely, the bloody blade bursting from the other side of its flesh. With a bellow of rage it drew back its huge head, lifting the figure out of view.

Esther's eyes were wide as she skidded to a stop next to Normya on the ground on her butt. Her hands gripped Normya's shoulders as she witnessed the monster that Tir'ut was battling with. She had never been to this planet on the hunts. It was the one thing that Cha'talla and the other men had been adamant about. This was a male ritual of manhood and it would not do for females to accompany them. Esther was witnessing first hand why they had chosen this planet to begin with.

"Tir'ut!" She screamed in abject horror.

Tir'ut ignored her cry as he felt himself lifted off the ground. The Bancorik was one of the more prevalent hunters on this planet, the young ones even more deadly than the adults. They were not terribly bright... but they were lethal when there was more than one. "Take her and go mother!" Tir'ut screamed the command. "Now!"

"Tir'ut no!"

"Go now damn it!" Tir'ut screamed as he felt the Bancorik's tail spikes graze his lower back and the stab of pain coursed through him.

Normya's wide eyes looked at the beautiful face of Esther. "Esther?" She gasped. "How?"

Esther had happily been the wife of an Immortal for a quarter century now, and she knew well the voice of command, as well as the sound of an Immortal killing rage. She grabbed Normya's shoulders tightly. "Come child! We must go! Quickly!"

"My leg!" Normya shouted as Esther tried to pull her up and pain filled her senses once more.

"You must get up Normya! You..." Esther blinked as the huge figure flew past her and she looked up to see Fash'ka leap upon the creature now, burying his own sword deeply into the Bancorik's chest and underbelly and ripping upwards with all of his own Immortal strength. He dodged left as the creature swiped at him with lethal talons on its front legs even as its innards began to stain the ground beneath its body.

The Bancorik's roar of agony cut through the darkening sky even as Tir'ut ripped his sword free, spinning it elegantly as he lifted it high above his head and then drove it downward with all of his combined Immortal and vampire strength directly through its skull. The ritual Immortal sword, a weapon all of them carried as a reward after their first hunt, pierced all the way through the Bancorik's huge head, slicing completely through the small brain of the creature and killing it instantly. Fash'ka tore his blade free just as Tir'ut did the same and they both leaped clear of the falling predator, Tir'ut landing lightly next to his brother as the body of the beast crashed to the ground with a massive thud and rush of air. A small cloud of dirt and vegetation leaped into the air around the creature as it came to its final resting spot.

“Are you insane brother?” Fash’ka exclaimed looking at Tir’ut. “Attacking an adolescent Bancorik by yourself? Have you truly gone mad now?”

Tir’ut reached down to yank his knife from the creature’s jaw. “I had no choice.” He replied turning to face his brother as he wiped the blade clean on his leg. “It was about to make a meal of *il kal’daka darthirii*.”

“There is always choice brother.” Fash’ka retorted. “Do you know what father would have done to me if that creature made a meal of you as well as your *il kal’daka darthirii*?”

Tir’ut looked at him and grinned under his cowl, his vampiric teeth gleaming in the gathering darkness. “We succeeded.” He said. “It is done!”

They turned when the high pitched roar filled the surrounding area.

“Uh oh.” Fash’ka spoke softly, spinning his sword around expertly. “I believe it’s time to go.”

“Indeed.” Tir’ut agreed turning to where Esther held the female elf in her arms. He paused for a moment at the brightness of her platinum blond hair and emerald eyes, his breath catching in his throat. Another screech filled the night air and compelled him forward this time. He crossed the distance to them in three strides and tossed back his cowl as he squatted in front of them.

Normya’s eyes grew wide with fear when she saw his features. The very noticeable bone spurs protruding from his jaw line, though they were not as pronounced as the images she had seen of different Immortals. The semi sunken eye sockets were not as prominent either. His skin was different, more bronze in color than the gray she knew Immortals to have and he was simply huge. Easily as tall as her Uncle Danny and if she was any judge, extremely muscular. Yet there was no mistaking he was an Immortal.

He had blurred in motion. Immortals could not move like a vampire Normya knew... yet the one kneeling in front of her had done just that. Normya knew well the features of what she saw and she felt the cold fear grip her as she tried to scramble back away from him. Immortals had held her mother For’mya for weeks before her father rescued her. Part of her pilot training had been about never allowing yourself to be captured by High Coven Immortals. They were known to rape elven females simply because the elven female body was one of only a few female species that were able to accept their bullish sized male organs without injury. Unfortunately when that happened, it was usually a sentence of eternal servitude and addiction to the Immortal who broke them.

Elven females, no matter their training, would quickly become addicted to the chemical compounds in an Immortal’s semen. When those chemicals reacted with the elven females own chemical compounds in her body it created a powerful drug. It caused their bodies to crave what the Immortals could give them in their semen. It essentially turned them into willing sex slaves for all time; for there was no cure to how the chemicals reacted together and without continuous doses of that combined chemical the elven females would go completely insane within weeks. They would become mindless shells of their former selves and eventually they would be tossed aside and left to die. The only way to have those continued doses of the combined chemical was to become the slaves of Immortals.

“Immortal! No! Get away!” She hissed in terror. Her eyes darted to where Fash’ka drew back his cowl as well, exposing his pure, unaltered Immortal features. They were much more like the images Normya had seen of the Immortals growing up and her emerald eyes grew even wider.

Esther saw what was happening immediately and she grabbed Normya’s shoulders once more, turning her body to look at her. “Normya Leonidas... I am not an Immortal and we will not hurt you! We are here to save you!” Esther snapped.

“They are Immortals!” Normya hissed again, real terror in her eyes.

“Mother we have to go.” Fash’ka spoke looking off into the darkness.

“And quickly mother.” Tir’ut echoed.

As if to punctuate his words, more roars filled the air around them. Esther looked at him. “More of these creatures?” She asked quickly.

Fash’ka shook his head as he came up to them. “No. Worse.” He stated.

“Worse?” Esther gasped.

Tir’ut nodded as he leaned forward and gathered a supremely terrified Normya into his arms and he lifted her as gently and easily as he could. She hissed softly at the pain lancing through her leg but her eyes never left Tir’ut’s face and she could only stare at him in silence, the fear very easy to see. She was frozen with fear, unable to even put up a fight of any kind, not that the pain in her leg would allow her even that. His dark,

almost black eyes gazed at her as he situated her small frame in his arms and then he spoke. Normya's eyes grew even wider when she heard the voice from the transport.

"I will not hurt you *il kal'daka darthirii*." He said softly. "I will protect you with my dying breath if need be, but we need to go unless you wish to greet this creatures' family and friends."

Normya shook her head quickly unable to speak, but her mind telling her she in no way wanted to deal with anymore of these creatures.

"Tir'ut what could be worse than that thing?" Esther asked gathering her SA80 from the ground and getting to her own feet. She looked at Fash'ka when Tir'ut did not immediately answer. "Fash'ka?"

Fash'ka looked at Tir'ut and then to his pureblood mother. "It's older brothers and sisters more than likely. And they will not be happy that my brother has killed their youngling." He said almost causally. "Ja'narie has already gathered the other pilot. We need to move now. Gareld's ships were landing when I came to find you mother and they will undoubtedly be spreading out. Let them deal with the creatures of the night... trust me... we do not want too."

Whether it was the blood loss or the shock of everything that had happened, no matter the cause, Normya Leonidas did the only thing available to her at the time.

She passed out.

TALBOR SEVEN SUITE 3897

His name was Gravork.

An oddity of his Kochab species because of his obesity. He had been a minor player in the black market arms trade within The Wilds for many years until a single deal he brokered got him noticed by some powerful people. It concerned T19s and how to obtain and use them. He had many Evolli friends who had been able to supply him with leftover stocks of the weapons after their failed war with the Lycavorian Union, and within a year of the war ending he had become the premier T19 weapons dealer in The Wilds. Many people wanted the weapon known as the Dragon Killer, but very few could afford them, fewer still could use them effectively. And Gravork failed to inform his many potential buyers that the Union's dragons and riders had learned how to adapt and defeat the weapons quite well, especially after the slaughterhouse that was Alba Tau.

Gravork was careful in his dealings, always insuring that his clients were not only well organized and well funded, but that they also were not the type of individuals who would expose his operations. What little if it they saw anyway. He had made a tidy profit in his last two deals alone and had decided to come here, his usual place to relax and enjoy his new found wealth. One of the deals had been almost too easy, bringing two parties together for a simple meeting, which earned him nearly ten million credits alone. And then the weapons deal with the High Coven middle man for the purchase of T19s netted him close to fifty million credits. He had thought to come here and spend his days lounging beside the waters of the many lagoons and pools and his evenings eating fine food and enjoying the company of scantily clad females of all species. When Gravork stepped off the elevator lift into his suite with the two stunningly beautiful elf females he had purchased for the night, he knew something was wrong right away.

His two longtime Kochab body guards lay in the center of the main room of his suite. One was draped over the expensive and lush couch his eyes open in death, the other laying askew on the floor near the patio that opened into the balcony, half of his head gone. Gravork began to sweat immediately and he stopped his forward motion, pushing the female elves in front of him. They were among the finest of the slaves on Talbor Seven, their beauty justifying their enormous price as well as the fact they were sisters. The blond haired female had the bluest eyes and large firm breasts, while the dark haired female elf had an incredibly well developed ass for an elf. He had purchased them for his two men to entertain themselves with, though they had not been aware of that when their owner had agreed to the purchase of their services. Gravork would have returned them in the morning, perhaps a little battered and bruised, but alive. He simply liked to watch his men take the female elves in every position and hole they had.

Now he had no qualms about using their bodies for protection and he guided them in front of him as they chatted and giggled thinking they were going to have an easy night of it with the fat man here. As they

turned their heads and saw the bodies, they too froze in their tracks, and that is when Gravork felt the cold barrel of the weapon press to the back of his head.

“Doing something awkward at this moment will only result in your death.” The female voice spoke calmly. “I do encourage you to remain still.”

The two female elves turned at the sound of the voice and their eyes grew wide when they saw the tall, dark skinned elf behind Gravork, holding the very lethal looking weapon and dressed in a form fitting black bodysuit with thin plates of additional armor on her full chest.

“Ladies... if you would so kind as to come forward please. Do not mind the bodies... they will not harm you.” The male voice spoke now causing them to whirl around once more and look at the dark skinned male elf. The first thing that they noticed was that he was not completely elf due to the size of his ears, and the second thing they noticed was that he was very tall, and incredibly muscular under the tight black shirt and body suit that he wore similar to the female. Anton held the weapon in his hand, but his arm was hanging loosely at his side, ready to spring up in a blink if he needed. He motioned forward with his opposite hand and directed them to the opposite couch.

Clutching each other tightly they did as they were instructed.

“Now you obese one.” Cihera spoke. “And pray you don’t trip over your layers of fat. Your two men have already angered my associate and I enough this night.”

“You... you killed them?” Gravork gasped as he moved forward.

“They made the mistake of thinking my beautiful female companion was going to entertain them this night as you had planned for these young ladies no doubt.” Anton spoke with a smile as he saw the looks of the two female elves as their eyes went wide. “A rather painful assumption. And quite fatal I’m afraid.”

“You told us it was only going to be you!” The blond haired elf snapped glaring at Gravork.

Anton chuckled. “Yes... I’m quite sure he did not tell you about his two acquaintances here.”

Cihera pushed Gravork forward towards the couch. “Sit down Gravork. We have some questions for you.”

“Who are you?” Gravork demanded as he settled his bulk onto the couch.

“Who we are is not important.” Anton spoke as he moved behind the couch where the two elf females sat. “The questions we ask you will determine whether you survive this night however. Or your answers to them that is.” Anton pressed the barrel of his K12 KM to the back of the blond haired females’ head and saw her freeze instantly. “First however... if you would so kind to tell us who you are she-elf. You and your companion here.”

“We... we are slaves! My... my name is Las’elh and this is my sister He’liin!” The female gasped. “He bought us for the night! We know nothing! Please... you can’t hurt us!”

Anton extended his hand between their heads and opened his palm. One set of ocean blue eyes grew a little wider as they saw the small medallion he held in his palm, while the dark eyes looked puzzled and confused.

“The Krypteria!” The blond elf Las’elh hissed as she pushed off the couch. “Do you realize what you have done?” Las’elh exclaimed while the dark haired female sat there still stunned.

“Elven Intelligence.” Anton spoke looking at Cihera.

Cihera rolled her eyes as she kept her K12 leveled at Gravork and settled to the arm of the couch.

“You have just ruined an investigation I have been conducting for three years!” Las’elh snarled. “Who are you and why is the Krypteria interested in this fat fool!” She demanded.

“And why exactly would Elven Intelligence be investigating Gravork here?” Cihera asked from her perch, her eyes never leaving the Kochab’s face.

“His name kept popping up in local investigations being conducted of elven females who have disappeared through the years.” Las’elh spoke quickly. “I have been working here for the last fourteen months trying to discover what he knew. I finally got him to choose me for this night and now you have ruined that!”

“I take it she is not your sister then?” Anton spoke as he motioned to the dark haired elf female.

Las’elh shook her head quickly. “I only met her two nights ago.” She said. “She is no one!”

The female now got to her feet. “No one!” She snapped. “I have kept you warm for the last two nights in your bed! I’d say that makes me someone!”

Anton and Cihera watched as Las'elh stepped into a vicious palm strike to the woman's jaw. Her head snapped around and she dropped to the couch unconscious. Las'elh stood over her. "You were a means to an end!" She snarled to the unconscious form. "And you were not even that good in my bed!"

Anton brought the K12 and leveled it at her. "Please... take a seat once more." He spoke.

Las'elh glared at him. "I do not have to listen to you!" She barked.

Anton's smile held no humor. "If you wish to live... yes you do." He spoke. "And please do not think I won't shoot you simply because you say you are Elven Intelligence. We have not confirmed that... and your actions so far do not do much to validate your claim." Anton motioned with the K12. "Sit down. Quickly."

Las'elh glared at Anton with evil blue eyes. A look that bounced off his thick Spartan skin. She finally moved the three steps back to the couch and sat back down. Anton looked at Cihera. "Cihera." He said.

Cihera looked at Gravork. "Now... Gravork... I am not particularly fond of your species in case you haven't noticed. I will ask you several questions... and I expect you to answer them quickly and accurately. Are we understood?"

"Who are you?" Gravork snapped. "Do you know who I am?"

"We know exactly who you are." Cihera spoke. "Now tell me about the weapons deal with the Evolli and the High Coven?"

"What are you talking about?" Gravork snapped.

Cihera shifted her K12 and fired once. The Kinetic Magnum round punched into the floor between Gravork's feet causing him to almost leap from the couch, even as his bladder voided. Cihera curled her nose at the smell of urine and shook her head. "The next one will go through your right leg." Cihera spoke. "If that doesn't work... I will give you to my husband here. He is a Spartan mind you... and after what your two associates attempted to do with me, he is not in a very forgiving mood. He will get the information we want... you however... you will be very much a vegetable when he is done."

Gravork wasn't the only one who looked at Anton quickly. Las'elh stared at Anton her blue eyes wide as she saw Anton shrug nonchalantly. "A trait I inherited from my father." He spoke. "He is rather possessive of my mothers and has killed more than one fool who attempted to hurt them."

"Your... your father?" Las'elh asked softly.

Anton nodded with a smile. "Yes... General/Colonel Daniel Simpson."

Las'elh took another breath and suddenly realized she was in far over her head here. She knew well who General/Colonel Daniel Simpson was. There were not many within the Union who did not know that name. Beloved brother to the King, if not by blood, then by deed. One of the heroes of Alba Tau and the Kavalian Incursion on Gamji. A man who held almost as much respect and awe as did the King.

Las'elh had been a member of Elven Intelligence for nearly two hundred of her four hundred and nineteen years. A respected agent, extremely intelligent and very skilled, she had lost all of that the day her youngest sister had disappeared four years ago. Na'lia was only a hundred and nine years old when she disappeared, still naïve to the ways of the universe. She and Na'lia had been very close and Las'elh had not believed the report that the ship she was on hit an asteroid and was destroyed. Las'elh had spent the last three years tracking whatever clues she could discover. More than one clue led her here to Talbor Seven and the fat Kochab who now sat across from her. She had been so close to her answers... and now she would never get them. If the Krypteria were involved... Gravork was involved in far more nefarious activities. Las'elh was no fool either. She had no desire to cross the Krypteria in any way. She could not find her sister if she was dead, and she had no doubts this Spartan and his dark skinned elven wife would do just that if she got in their way. She was different somehow... not a normal elf even though her ears were of normal height.

Gravork also knew who Daniel Simpson was, and though his species did not normally panic... small beads of perspiration broke out on his forehead.

"The Coven approached me through a middle man!" He began nearly yelling his answer. "All I was told was to arrange for the transport and delivery of two dozen T19s. I did as I always do and contacted the smugglers I use the most."

"The Evolli who were killed along with the Immortals when they tried to complete this deal?" Anton asked as he moved casually around the side of the couch and settled his frame on the opposite end from where Las'elh was sitting.

Gravork looked at him. "Killed?" He asked.

“Oh yes. The Evolli attempted to make the exchange within Union space.” Cihera spoke now. “They were discovered and killed along with the Immortals who were there to pick up the illegal weapons you sold them.”

“T19s are not illegal in The Wilds!” Gravork barked.

“No... but they are illegal within Union territory.” Cihera said. “You supplied the Evolli with these weapons... that makes you culpable.”

“You can not charge me with a crime that took place in your borders!” Gravork snapped. “I do know a little of Galactic Commerce Law.”

“Who said anything about charging you?” Anton spoke.

“I’m telling you all I know!” Gravork snapped real fear in his voice now. “I did not know the High Coven middle man. We communicated on a secure Coven channel with holo images only. I never met him and I insured he transferred my fee before I gave the weapons to the Evolli for delivery!”

“Tell us about the Evolli.” Cihera asked now.

“What about them?” Gravork spoke turning to look at her. “They are an exceptionally competent and organized group. Some of my own kind mixed in with them as well.”

“Did you give them the job to attack the Union colony on Eleysi Three?” Anton asked.

“What? No! Why would I do that? I don’t have a death wish!” Gravork spat.

“Then who did?”

“How should I know?” Gravork exclaimed quickly. “Maybe it was that Lycavorian who contacted me several months ago!”

Anton leaned forward as he looked at Cihera. “Lycavorian?”

Gravork nodded. “Yes... he contacted me directly which was unusual in itself. He always wore one of those damn Spartan helmets so I never got a good look at him. And the image was always fuzzy... like it was being filtered somehow.”

“Then how do you know it was a Lycavorian?” Anton asked.

“I am not a fool!” Gravork almost shouted. “I do know what they look like! You are half Lycavorian yourself!”

Anton looked at Cihera. “What did this Lycavorian want?” Cihera asked.

“Names and contacts willing to target Union assets and people.” Gravork answered. “All I was to do was put him in contact with them. He would do the rest!”

“And what did you do?” Anton asked.

“I gave him the contact to my Evolli friends. They have no love for the Union after you destroyed them in your war!” Gravork replied. “He paid very well for the contact. Almost ten million credits!”

“And what would this contact’s name be?” Anton asked.

“Are you insane? The Evolli will kill me if I tell you that!” Gravork protested. “He’s violent, cruel and completely insane!”

Cihera pressed the barrel of her K12 against Gravork’s head. “And I will kill you if you don’t.” She stated coldly.

“I... I have no quarrel with the Union!” Gravork exclaimed. “Why are you doing this to me?”

“You are party to the deaths of over three hundred Union civilians in the attack on the Eleysi Three colony.” Cihera spoke calmly. “That is more than enough for me to vent your cranium of its contents but you are also party to much worse.”

“Worse?” Gravork gasped.

“You are party to the targeting and attempted assassination of a Queen of the Lycavorian Union.” Anton spoke getting to his feet. “You really should tell us what we want to know... for if you don’t... you will return to with us to Earth and we will give you to my Uncle Martin. Trust me when I tell you Kochab... you do not want that. My uncle is very protective of his Queens... and trying to kill one of them is certainly not the best way to get on his dinner list.”

Gravork’s eyes were wide. “I... I had nothing to do with any of that!” He screamed.

“Then give us the name.” Cihera spoke.

“I only have a location!” Gravork yelled. “He’s on Nebonese! He’s on Nebonese!”

Cihera turned to Anton. “Husband?”

Anton nodded. "Very possible. Nebonese is large... two major spaceports, half a dozen smaller ones that cater to those who don't want to be found. Four major cities and a number of smaller communities. Mostly refugees from the Coven War with the Kavalians and our own war with the Evolli. A very large population of Evolli. Pretty lawless compared to what we are used too. Slavery. Smuggling. You name it."

"Can you reach this Evolli?" Cihera asked.

"Of course I can reach him!" Gravork stated. "I have a preset meeting place on Nebonese if I need to contact him for any reason!"

"We don't actually have to bring fat man do we?" Anton asked.

Cihera smiled. "Unfortunately yes."

"He sleeps on the deck then!" Anton announced.

Las'elh came to her feet. "And what about me?" She asked quickly. "If you take him... I will never find my sister. He is the only link I have to her."

Anton looked at her. "Considering everything you just heard you will come with us and do exactly as we say... or you will disappear. Permanently. Your choice."

It was not a choice at all for Las'elh. "I will come with you." She stated.

Cihera grabbed Gravork's arm. "Then let us leave this place and contact Armetus." She spoke. "We'll let him decide what to do with you when we are done Gravork. I grow tired of your stench already."

Las'elh's eyes were wide once more. "Armetus?" She gasped. "The... the head of the Krypteria? You... you know him?"

Anton looked at her as he bent over the body of the dead guard. "We know him quite well." He said. "We work for him."

"Wait... I am in Elven Intelligence." Las'elh said. "Even I know that the only ones who work directly for him are..."

Cihera looked at her and smiled. "Yes." She said. "Shall we go?"

YOCETU

Gareld threw down the piece of wreckage from the crashed *TYPE II* and looked at Sandur as he walked up.

"I have pulled the men into a condensed perimeter." He spoke. "Heavy weapons are established and the creatures on this world should not trouble us through the evening."

"How many men did we lose?" Gareld asked.

"Seventeen killed within an hour of landing... another five near where we found the remains of the sail they used to escape their ship. We found a dead lizard like creature nearby, a pool of blood under the hanging straps." Sandur spoke.

"She is injured then... but obviously alive." Gareld spat. "And that Pureblood bitch and her abomination of a son are helping her."

Sandur nodded slowly. "It would appear that way." He answered. "The men... they are frightened Gareld. They do not want to move beyond the perimeter we have established here. Some of the creatures that attacked our men... even I have never seen them before. Large arachnid like beasts with armored skin and piercing fangs."

Gareld nodded. "We will not move before first light." He spoke. "The ship has detected no one leaving the surface so that means they are hiding just as we are. Waiting until daybreak. I hope they are in a place as filthy and open as we are!"

Sandur nodded. "I will tell the men." He spoke.

"Sandur... make sure we maintain a constant watch this night." Gareld spoke. "We do not need one or more of the creatures that inhabit the night here getting through our perimeter."

Sandur nodded once more. "I agree."

Gareld watched him turn and move away and he looked up into the star filled sky. "I hope you are as uncomfortable as you have made me Esther! When I find you... you will pay for everything you have put me through." He muttered.

IMMORTAL HUNTING CAMP

Unlike Gareld and his men, Esther and the others were very safe and comfortable. The Immortal camp, one of six spread across the surface of the planet, was built into the side of the mountain behind them. The main entrance was reinforced High Coven Vandium steel layered within a meter of solid granite. No creature that lived on Yocetu could penetrate the main entrance. The inside of the camp was broken into several rooms leading off of the large main room. Inexpensive or homemade furniture was scattered about the main room, along with several food dispensers and a communications panel. There were two small barrack like rooms off one side of the main room, each capable of holding ten Immortals. A small but well stocked medical clinic branched off the main room, and then an armory and cold storage area for the trophies they would store here until returning to Kranek.

Esther finished spreading the brownish colored ointment over the large hole in Normya's leg and then dropped the self adhering patch over the wound. Thankfully she had not been awake when Esther had removed the branch. Normya hissed softly as the nanofilaments dug into the skin of her leg and sealed the bandage to her flesh. She looked up as she rested her hand on Normya's leg.

"You've been through quite a lot young lady." She spoke with that soothing lilt in her voice. "I recommend waiting until the morning before you shift to fully heal the wound. You are drained... and you lost a lot of blood. Luckily it did not break your bone."

Normya's eyes drifted to the body lying in the medical clinic. The bed was easy to see from where she sat on one of the long couches. The body on the medical bed was wrapped tightly in pure white cloth which could be seen through the thick plastic covering. "Toral?" She said softly as fresh tears came to her eyes. "How did he die? Not one of those..."

Esther turned back and looked at the body of the male elf. She had been surprised when Tir'ut and Fash'ka had conducted a brief but formal Akruxian farewell ceremony, reverently wrapping the elf's body in the sheet with his hands crossed over his chest. They had cleaned his body of blood and gore and Esther thought he looked quite peaceful when they finally covered his face. "No." Esther replied. "As he was falling through the trees he must have struck a large limb. It broke his back cleanly on impact. When his parachute snagged and yanked him back up it snapped his neck. He felt nothing Normya Leonidas." Esther turned back to look at her. "He... he was special to you?"

Normya's moist eyes turned back to her. "He was my co-pilot since I graduated the Academy." She answered. "I think he... I *knew* he wanted there to be something else. There wasn't... but he was a good friend."

Esther looked at her. "You have never lost someone close to you have you?" She asked softly.

Normya shook her head slowly. "I was too young to fight in the Evolli War." She answered.

Esther nodded her head. "Be thankful for that child. I understand there were parts of that war that were especially hideous. At least that is the information we got out here in The Wilds. The Evolli are not nice individuals."

Normya's emerald eyes shifted to where the two Immortal men came into the room from what appeared to be an armory of some sort and talking in soft whispers. Her eyes went back to Esther once more filled with fear. "They are... they are..."

Esther nodded with a smile. "Yes Normya Leonidas... you can say the word. They are not ashamed of what they are. They are Immortals. Akruxian."

"You... he... he is your son?" Normya gasped. "How?"

Esther nodded again, her smile even brighter and filled with a small amount of humor. "Child... you are old enough to know where children come from. Tir'ut is my oldest with his father yes. That is why his skin tone is different and his bone spurs not as pronounced."

"He can... he can blur!" Normya stated.

Esther smiled brightly. "And use the shadows." She stated proudly as any mother would. "Quite well in fact."

"I thought... I thought Immortals served purebloods like yourself." Normya asked.

Esther nodded. "They still do within the High Coven. We however are not part of the High Coven." She replied. "Tir'ut's father and I broke his tribe away from the High Coven twenty-five years ago. Just before their war with the Kavalians started. Tir'ut was born fourteen months later. I have three more sons with Cha'talla... but Tir'ut is the oldest as I said."

"Cha'talla!" Normya gasped again her eyes wide. "Your... your mate is... Cha'talla is dead!"

Esther saw the recognition in Normya's eyes. "You know my husband's name I see." She spoke with a smile.

"There are not... there are not many among my people who do not." Normya spoke. "We... we thought he was killed by..."

"By Veldruk... yes... we let that story stand for good reason." Esther spoke softly. "The Cha'talla everyone knew and feared died that day. He is not the Cha'talla everyone remembers. He has not been for over two decades. I was the one who found him the day Veldruk thought he killed him. I nursed him back to health and I fell in love with him. The High Lord ordered all of his children and family killed for actions which were meant only to help Cha'talla's people. He is still an Immortal... though his features are altered somewhat... but he is also very different inside. He is not the man he was twenty-five years ago. Most of his tribe escaped to follow him and we settled on Kranek. We have been there ever since."

"You... you have four children with him?" Normya asked.

Esther nodded quickly. "All fine young men." She stated again with that motherly pride. "When we settled on Kranek we numbered just under ten thousand. We have grown through the years and now our tribe has nearly doubled in size. Many Immortals who left the Coven when the war with the Kavalians began sought us out. Most stayed behind after seeing what we were building and hearing Cha'talla tell them they could be so much more. Some chose not too." She explained. "We have developed solid relationships with the two settlements nearest to ours on Kranek... one of Amarian settlers and the other of a mixture of races from within The Wilds."

"The other one... he is pure Immortal." Normya said. "He calls you mother. And the... the female... she has hair... her features are..."

"Softer?" Esther said. "Yes. Fash'ka is Cha'talla's son as well. He survived the purge of Cha'talla's family and came with us. His mother was Akruixian... and now he calls me mother. Ja'narie is pure Immortal... but her parents underwent some genetic enhancements before she was born. I am a Bio-Genetic Scientist. I was able to develop a serum of sorts that softens the features of an Immortal. Not everyone has chosen to use it... but many did. It has allowed their children to look like Ja'narie. Have hair... softer features."

"Biogenics?" Normya asked.

Esther shook her head quickly. "No... never!" She said with force. "What I did was to alter a series of genetic sequencers and produce a serum that could initiate these changes. I would never dabble in biogenics. It disgusts me."

"But not Tir'ut?" Normya asked.

Esther shook her head. "Cha'talla altered his features somewhat as I said... but not before Tir'ut was born. I wouldn't let Cha'talla change himself from the man he was simply to become more pleasing to the eye. I fell in love with an Immortal and I am not ashamed of that. Tir'ut is simply a combination of both mine and Cha'talla's genes. This is what helped me to make the serum. He has the Immortal size and strength, and he also has vampire strength and the ability to blur and wrap the shadows around himself. In essence I suppose you could say he is the first of a new breed of Immortal."

"There are more like him?" Normya gasped.

Esther chuckled. "Child... our tribe has grown because others live with us willingly and they have children. There are other purebloods that left the High Coven and have mated with Immortals when they began looking at them in the same way I do. They found their way to us through the years the same as the other Immortals. There are some Amarians among us, a few Bontawillian, a dozen or so elven females and males..."

"Elven!" Normya gasped. "As slaves!" She hissed. "Sex slaves?"

Esther's eyes darkened somewhat and she leaned back slightly. "I do understand where your reaction comes from Normya Leonidas... you are half elf and it is only natural." She spoke her voice tinged with anger. "However... while your perceptions may be accurate on a much larger scale... you need to understand that not

everything is as it seems and you can not lump everyone into the same category as those you have established within your precious Union child. You..."

"Mother!" Fash'ka's voice barked. "Quickly!"

Esther got to her feet looking at Normya. "My son risked his life for you today." Esther spoke. "We have risked our lives for you to prevent a wrong. A little bit of thanks from you Normya Leonidas, would go a long way in justifying that risk." She turned and began moving to where Fash'ka was angling Tir'ut to a chair. Esther's eyes went a little wider. "Tir'ut! What is wrong?"

"It is nothing!" Tir'ut spoke as he sat down.

"Show her you *mal'ai!*" Fash'ka snapped. (Idiot)

Esther looked at her son as she stopped in front of him. "Show me what Tir'ut?"

Tir'ut sighed heavily and looked at Fash'ka. "Thank you brother." He stated. "I could have taken care of it. Now she will fawn over me for days."

"Just show her! It must be checked for poisons! And you are too stupid to do that!" Fash'ka snapped. "Your actions in attacking an adolescent Bancorik by yourself prove that!"

"Tir'ut!" Esther snapped. "What is your brother speaking of?"

Tir'ut looked at her and pulled aside the cloak he was still wearing. Esther's eyes dropped down and then they went wide in horror when she saw the three, needle like spikes from the tail of the Bancorik protruding from Tir'ut's lower abdomen near his waist.

"*Gi ussta yah* Tir'ut!" Esther exclaimed. (Oh my god) Tir'ut watched her as she pulled the cloak off his shoulders with barely a pause and saw that the spikes protruded from the back as well.

"I was going to pull them out later mother and then just take a vial of blood to heal." Tir'ut spoke almost nonchalantly.

Esther leaned over close to his side and examined the wounds reaching up to touch one of the spikes. They were coated with Tir'ut's blood, but there were no fresh drops coming from either the entry or exit wounds. She stood back up and glared at him. "You fool! You should have told me about this right away!"

"Mother it is not all that bad." Tir'ut spoke.

"You have three spikes impaling your side clean through Tir'ut, son of Cha'talla!" Esther snapped. "Do not tell me this is not bad!"

Fash'ka grinned. "See... now she is angry with you!" He said as he crossed his arms over his chest. "Whenever she starts calling us the sons of our father she is angry with one of us and that usually means she will be angry with all of us."

"*P'wal dos ph'jal fridj 'zil go'h karliik 'zil dosst ilharn!*" Esther snapped. (Because you are all just as pig headed as your father) "Fash'ka... *sil a uns'aa l'o 'Goth russus!*" (Bring me the medical kit)

Normya watched as the huge pure Immortal she now knew as Fashka turned with a chuckle and moved into the other room. Her emerald eyes went back to where Tir'ut sat in the chair, Esther kneeling next to his side now and Normya saw then the cruel looking spikes protruding from the front and back of his side. She winced slightly at the sight and watched as Tir'ut lifted his arm so that Esther could cut away the shirt he wore. He tossed the blood stained fabric to the floor and Normya took in the immense physical proportions of the man who had saved her life. His broad chest and abdomen were nearly as sculpted as she had witnessed on her father and brothers. He was heavily muscled, the definition easily seen, yet it obviously did not affect his speed or movement. He...

"He took a great risk in saving you." The soft female voice spoke from beside her.

Normya turned her head quickly and saw the female Immortal standing beside the couch she was on. Close up her features were even softer than Normya first thought, the bone spikes just barely poking above her deeply tanned skin. She watched as Ja'narie squatted next to the couch and looked at her. Her dark eyes were bright and full of intelligence, her long dark brown hair silky and looking very soft.

"You were set upon by an adolescent Bancorik daughter of King Leonidas." Ja'narie said softly. "Not a baby by any means, but not yet fully grown either. The adolescents are far more dangerous because they usually travel in packs and they are exceptionally more vicious and hard to kill. Our projectile weapons will not penetrate their hides when they reach adolescence, so we must use swords and blades to kill them." Ja'narie turned to look at where Esther was working on Tir'ut. "The adolescent Bancorik Tir'ut attacked defending you... if what Fash'ka says is true... it was within a year of reaching maturity and adulthood. These are they

most dangerous of the adolescents because they live only to kill and feed. Even when the men come here for our ritual hunts they avoid Bancoriks of this age and they most certainly do not attempt to kill them with anything less than four of our kind attacking at the same time and working in concert.” Ja’narie turned back to look at her. “Tir’ut knew this... and still he attacked it anyway, to protect you.” Ja’narie’s smile was soft and friendly even though it caused her vampiric fangs to show. “Our Matriarch Mother... Esther... everything she has told you is true. Our tribe is not like the Immortals you know and have learned about Princess Leonidas. Cha’talla is not as he once was.”

“She said... she said you have elves where you live.” Normya spoke. “Immortals... they keep elves... they keep elves as slaves.”

Ja’narie shook her head. “Not in our tribe.” She spoke firmly. “That is not something Cha’talla or Esther would ever allow. The elves Esther speaks of... seven females and four males... they are honored members of our tribe. The females are the Blessed Wives of seven Immortals from our tribe... just as Esther is to Cha’talla and they have many happy children together. They were rescued from a pirate ship over a decade ago. There were more... but the rest chose to return to their homes after swearing never to reveal we existed. Those that stayed with us had lost everything to the pirates and had nothing to return too. The male elves are older and they are honored teachers among my people now. As Esther told you... not everything is as it seems or has been taught to you.” Ja’narie turned back and looked at Tir’ut. “Tir’ut... he has been taken with you since first hearing your voice in your distress call. He said there was strength in your voice even in the midst of combat and fear. At the very least... when you are able... you should thank him for saving your life.”

“Who... who are you?” Normya asked.

Ja’narie smiled. “My name is Ja’narie... and in several weeks I will be Fash’ka’s Blessed Wife. And it is a day I have waited many years for. Set aside what you have learned up until now daughter of Leonidas. You will see it is nothing like what you have been taught.”

Normya watched her stand back up and move over to Esther’s side as she slowly pulled the second spike out of Tir’ut’s abdomen. Fash’ka was standing in front of him, Tir’ut’s hand gripping his brother’s shoulder as he clenched his teeth while his mother slowly withdrew the spikes. Normya’s eyes grew slightly wider when his head came up and she saw vampire cobalt blue in his eyes as he settled them upon her.

The brightest cobalt blue she had ever seen in her life.

LIMIAN JAL-14 ON COURSE FOR NEBONESE

“Nebonese? I haven’t been there in over five hundred years” Armetus spoke from within the holo transmission. “That fits though... it has a large Evolli population and it would be relatively easy for them to hide. Your accommodations have been made. Two suites on the eightieth floor in Sangtal. Same cover as before. I’m having some additional items sent to you when you arrive. Any additional information on this Lycavorian?”

Anton shook his head. “That is what we hope to obtain from the Evolli, but Cihera is questioning Gravork anyway. He is sticking to his story for the most part. The Lycavorian contacted him, he was wearing his helmet and the holo transmission was not very clear. He wanted to know of people willing to go after Lycavorian assets and targets. He seems much calmer now that we got him off Talbor Seven. Almost as if he feels safer with us than on the planet.”

“That is interesting.” Armetus spoke.

“You think it was the King’s brother, don’t you Armetus?” Anton asked.

Armetus nodded. “That would be the most likely hypothesis right now.” He replied. “It would also explain what the King and Andro think may have been an attack on Anja and Aricia as they were returning from Hadaria. The attack on the Eleysi Three colony was only to cover their real purpose. I wish Andro would have left one of two of the scum alive to question.”

Anton chuckled. “After Alba Tau... and attempting to shoot Eliani and Tharua in the back? You ask too much of him Armetus.”

Armetus nodded. “Yes.”

“If it was Uncle Martin’s brother... you would think he would be more discrete in his actions.” Anton spoke. “Actively seeking to support terrorist acts within our borders would be paramount to war itself. Especially using this Gravork as the initial contact. Since he became known as the one selling T19s, he has become very popular. Almost too popular.”

“Yes... well I want to say that war is not something these Kavalians would shy away from.” Armetus spoke softly lifting the mug of tea. “Though why they would do these things when they are supposedly beginning their final preparations to invade the High Coven again is not something I am able to understand. I would think they want to keep us out of the war and that is why this delegation is here on Earth now. To make sure we don’t enter the war for any reason and keep an eye on the High Coven. Did you secure this Gravork pig’s records as well Anton?”

Anton nodded. “Cihera and I were going to start going through them after speaking with you or sometime in the morning. Surprisingly... he kept very thorough records.”

“And you say he seems happy that he is with you?” Armetus said.

“Yes.”

“That is odd and it sticks in my head for some reason. Be mindful of everything on Nebonese boy.” Armetus spoke. “We have a small detachment of Drow who live there, so having Cihera move around without her disguise would probably be best. They own a small shop in Sangtal. I’ll send the details to you with your packet.”

“And what of this Las’elh?” Anton asked.

“I spoke with Colonel Su’ave, the head of Elven Intelligence. This Las’elh... she is rogue Anton.” Armetus spoke. “She’s been rogue for almost four years now. Her younger sister supposedly died in a transport accident, but Las’elh never believed the official results of the investigation. She’s been conducting her own inquiry since then. She was vetted out of EI because she refused to stop what she was doing and never believed the reports. She’s wanted by Elven authorities for breaking several laws as well as injuring a senior member of their legislative body.”

“Why didn’t she believe them?” Anton asked.

“Su’ave said it was over some small irregularities within the internal analysis itself.” Armetus replied. “Irregularities that Las’elh said proved her sister and the others on the ship did not die.”

“Did her sister die in an accident Armetus?” Anton asked.

Armetus looked at him in the communication. “You know we don’t get involved in the internal politics of member worlds Anton.” He spoke.

“That wasn’t the question I asked Armetus?” Anton spoke.

“I looked over the reports briefly after speaking with Su’ave.” Armetus replied with a sigh. “There were some *inconsistencies* in the reporting and investigation itself that lend some small credence to what she was saying.”

“And what was she saying?” Anton asked.

“Anton...”

“Armetus... we have her on our ship.” Anton spoke calmly. “I can ask her... but I would much rather ask you since she has not garnered a whole lot of trust so far in her actions.”

“She believes the disappearance or *death* of her sister is related to the disappearance and similar *death* of almost a hundred elf females over the past fifteen years.” Armetus spoke. “All of them disappeared or *died* under suspicious circumstances from what I saw. All of them were young... under two hundred years of age. The inquiries were closed due to lack of information by local authorities. Su’ave said there was not enough supporting information to have EI open their own investigation, so this Las’elh went rogue and started doing it on her own. She and her sister were very close it seems.”

“Does Colonel Su’ave know we have her with us?” Anton asked.

Armetus shook his head. “No... I said that a couple of agents ran into her on Talbor Seven during transit. He was going to dispatch an EI Recovery Team to pick her up.”

Anton’s eyes narrowed now. “Really? Why not just let her rant and rave if there is no evidence to support what she claims.”

“Anton it is against our charter to get involved with internal politics. You know this.” Armetus spoke. “If we could... I would. There are too many things that don’t add up in regards to her. We can’t however. Not

without a direct approval from Dysea of For'mya. You can leave her with the Drow detachment on Nebonese if it makes you feel better. Send her back here and I will see what I can do for her. Su'ave would not lie to me... but EI also does not have the resources we do. They do not fully believe in our line of work, and they do not have the trained personnel to do what we do."

Anton nodded his head from the pilot's seat of the JAL-14 Leisure Transport. "Very well Armetus. I'll contact you as soon as we get settled into our suite in Sangtal and relay to you any new information Gravork has given us."

"Nebonese is a lot more lawless Anton." Armetus said. "Especially the outskirts of the cities. Both of you watch yourselves. I do not want to have to explain to your parents why our two best agents got caught with their guard down."

"We know." Anton said with a smile. "We will be cautious Armetus."

Armetus nodded. "I'll look for your contact in three days." He said.

Anton got up from his chair and moved to the door, passing his hand over the small panel and then stepping into the large main area of the JAL-14. His eyes took in Las'elh as she sat on one of the comfortable couches and looked up at him as he left the cockpit. The door to the next compartment opened and Cihera stepped through, her shimmering white hair still damp from the shower and the contacts gone from her eyes revealing her normal and radiant amber colored eyes. Anton smiled and felt a surge of desire sweep through him for his Drow mate. Las'elh came to her feet quickly, her eyes wide as she watched Cihera step up to Anton and share a deep kiss of passion with him.

Anton grinned as his mate pulled her lips back from him. "I see you were happy to get the coloring out of your hair." He said.

Cihera smiled. "*Carians*... I hate how it makes my real hair so greasy."

Las'elh watched them with wide eyes. She had never met a Drow elf in person before as she had never had cause to go to Earth where the majority of them lived and worked. She only knew what the reports she had read told them. Many of them had been tortured horribly by the High Coven when they controlled Earth, but they had survived and even built their own city not far from the capital of Earth. The half vampire Drow scouts were renowned throughout the Union for their actions with the King on Ukway as well as Alba Tau and other planets during the war. They were said to possess all the skills of a vampire but none of the usual needs such as having to drink blood. Even the children that had been born since still retained many of these vampiric skills. They were said to be deeply devoted to their Drow Queen who was herself Vice President of Earth and their loyalty to King Leonidas was completely unequivocal. Las'elh had also heard the Drow had an almost surreal beauty to them with their amber eyes, pure white hair and dark skin tones. Looking at Cihera now... Las'elh suddenly did not doubt that in the least.

In many instances Las'elh knew they would be the spearhead of any military operation the Union conducted. And it was rumored that Armetus had almost a dozen Drow working directly for him, and no one doubted the skills of the leader of the Krypteria. If this man and woman worked directly for Armetus... their skills would far surpass anything Las'elh could call upon.

"Where is Gravork?" Anton asked as he went to the dispenser and got them both a mug of coffee.

"I slipped him a sedative before I went to shower." Cihera spoke with a smile. "He will sleep the majority of our trip to Nebonese thank the gods. I had absolutely no desire to listen to his whininess for the entire trip. Did you speak with Armetus?"

Las'elh's eyes grew wider as Anton nodded and he held out the mug to his mate. "Yes. He will have things prepared for us when we get there."

Cihera nodded as she sipped the coffee. "Good."

"You... you spoke with Armetus himself?" She gasped in disbelief.

Anton looked at her and smiled. "Yes. I told you we work directly for him." He said as he moved to the table and sat down. Cihera pulled her chair even closer to him and settled into it, draping one long leg over her husband's. "I discovered some very interesting information about you."

"Me?" Las'elh exclaimed.

Cihera smiled. "We are Krypteria Las'elh." She spoke. "When we ask for information... we tend to get it. One way or the other."

“Sit down Las’elh.” Anton spoke motioning to the third chair at the table. “Sit down and explain to us why you went rogue over this incident involving your sister and why, as we speak, there is an EI Recovery Team on its way to Talbor Seven to arrest you?”

“Why should I tell you anything?” Las’elh spoke as she remained standing.

“Why indeed?” Cihera asked looking at Anton puzzled. “What exactly did Armetus tell you my husband?”

“Right now you are wanted for breaking several laws on Elear... including the assault of a member of your parliament.” Anton spoke calmly. “And if there is an EI Recovery Team involved in your apprehension... you have done something that officials in your government do not want others to know. You have a choice here... you can tell us what we want to know... or when we reach Nebonese we will hand you over to the Drow detachment there for return to Earth where you will be questioned by Armetus and then returned to Elear.”

“You can’t!” Las’elh barked. “Please... if you do that... if you do that I will never find out where my sister is.”

“Your sister is supposed to have died in a transport accident.” Anton spoke.

“My sister did not die!” Las’elh snapped. “She is not dead! I would know if she was dead!”

“And what leads you to this conclusion? It appears that all the information that your own Elven authorities’ discovered in their investigation reveals that she did indeed die in that accident.” Anton spoke.

“It was no accident!” Las’elh spat. “Their transport was hijacked and the young women taken!”

“Taken by who?” Cihera asked.

“That is what I was on Talbor Seven for! That pig Gravork knows! He is the one who sold the information on the transport’s flight path. That much I know for sure!” Las’elh spoke.

“And why would you know this is what happened?” Cihera asked.

“Because the daughter of that Parliamentary member was on the same transport as my sister Na’lia.” Las’elh spat. “She is now safely back home with her family. They say she was the only one to reach the escape pods. That the others malfunctioned in some manner. One or two I can see malfunctioning! The transport had thirty-three escape pods however. More than enough for all one hundred and nineteen passengers!”

Anton looked at Cihera for a long moment and finally she nodded slightly. He then turned back to Las’elh. “Please take a seat Las’elh.” He said.

Frustration brewed within her and she yanked the chair out in anger and plopped herself into the seat, her blue eyes burning in rage. She watched Anton slide his hand across the table to the small panel and enter a code. The small panel rose from the flat surface of the table causing Las’elh’s eyes to grow a little wider.

“Spartan Seven Dash One. Code 569812. Authorize Simpson, Anton Star Commander Krypteria Three one.”

-Authorization confirmed. Simpson, Anton Star Commander. Krypteria Three One. Please state communications request?-

Las’elh looked surprised at the computer’s voice request and she looked up at Cihera who only wore a small smile.

“Spartan Three or Spartan Five. Direct link. Level Nine Encryption. Full filters. No trace.”

-Spartan Five location is Sparta. Spartan Five is Code 344. Spartan Five is unable to respond. Spartan Three location is Delmah. Code 691. Spartan Three is active.-

“Affirmative.” Anton spoke. “Connect Spartan Three then please. Level Nine Encryption and no trace.”

-Stand by-

“What are you doing?” Las’elh demanded. “Who are you contacting?”

-Connection complete. Communication accepted. Routing-

“Anton? Cihera? What is wrong?” Dysea’s voice filled the small room and her image burst into existence from the large holo emitter on the floor of the ship. Las’elh’s eyes nearly bugged out of her head as the image of the Elven Queen of Elear and the First Elven Queen of the Union shimmered slightly and then became crystal clear. Las’elh could see several Drow moving around in the background of what appeared to be a military briefing room of some sort.

“Aunt Dysea.” Anton spoke with genuine warmth in his voice as he got to his feet. “You look positively ravishing as always.”

Dysea’s head tilted slightly in the transmission. “Anton Simpson... do not try and sweet talk me. It does not work for your father and it will not work for you. What is wrong? Where is Cihera?”

“Simpson... if my daughter is...” The new voice began and Las’elh saw the extremely tall Drow warrior she knew as General/Colonel Lynwe step into the transmission.

“I am fine mother.” Cihera spoke with a smile now causing Las’elh’s eyes to go even wider.

“Cihera... why are you contacting Dysea on her private channel?” Lynwe asked. “What is going on?”

“I will let Anton explain mother. He knows most of it since he talked to Armetus.” Cihera replied.

“Anton?” Dysea spoke.

“Something has come up in the course of our investigation Aunt Dysea.” He spoke.

“Something that you do not want Armetus to know?” Dysea asked.

“Not at the moment. It concerns a member of the elven parliament and some missing elven females.”

Anton spoke.

Las’elh saw Dysea’s eyes narrow. “Missing females? Missing from where?”

“There are at least a hundred, possibly more. Taken from different spots within the Union and The Wilds from what I understand. All of them listed as dying in accidents and such.” Anton spoke. “We have it on good authority that these young women did not die... and indeed were abducted by unknown parties.”

“Abducted? By who? For what?” Dysea snapped.

“That is information we don’t have at the moment.” Anton spoke. “We were hoping you could help us obtain it.”

“Where did you get this information Anton?” Dysea asked.

“I gave it to them my Queen!” Las’elh spoke now as she stood up from the table.

“And you are?” Dysea spoke.

“I am... I was a Commander in EI Milady.” Las’elh spoke quickly. “One of the missing elf females was my younger sister.”

“You speak in the past tense when concerning your status Commander.” Dysea spoke. “Why is that?”

“I was... I was vetted out because I did not believe the official report of what happened. I began my own investigation and discovered all was not as it seemed. I was vetted out to keep my silence.” Las’elh said.

“Las’elh? You... you are the young woman who assaulted Minister Cunlaut several years ago!” Dysea said.

Las’elh lowered her head. “Yes Milady... that is true.”

Dysea’s eyes turned in the transmission. “Anton?”

“You know what Cihera and I are investigating Aunt Dysea?” He spoke.

Dysea nodded. “Yes.”

“The contact we have made concerning our situation also appears to be involved in these so called disappearances of elven females. It appears he may be involved in both these events.” Anton spoke.

“What do you mean?” Dysea asked.

“It is possible... however unlikely... but it is possible what we are investigating is somehow linked with these disappearances.” Anton spoke. “This Kochab Gravork seems to be involved in quite a bit more than weapons deals.”

“Does Cihera share this feeling Anton?” Dysea asked.

“I do Dysea.” Cihera spoke.

“There is an EI Recovery Team going to Talbor Seven to arrest Las’elh here.” Anton spoke. “That by itself warrants something is not right.”

Dysea looked at Las'elh in the transmission. "You are not on Talbor Seven I take it?" Dysea asked. She held up her hand quickly as she saw Anton begin to speak. "Don't answer that! And no... an EI Recovery Team being sent to arrest her implies there is much more going on. *Kinsoaurgai* and I have given specific orders on the use of Recovery Teams, and this was not one of them. I assume you have documentation on everything you have discovered Commander?"

Las'elh nodded quickly. "Yes Milady!"

"Give it to Anton and Cihera. They will send it to me and I will review it." Dysea spoke. "Lynwe and I need to finish what we are doing now... but I will review it with For'mya tonight after our dinner with the Kavalians."

"Yes my Queen!" Las'elh spoke with new found hope in her words.

"Keep her with you and Cihera for now *Mandri*." Dysea said. "Either For'mya or I will contact you sometime tomorrow."

Anton nodded. "Is everything alright *Tenna*? You seem distracted." He said genuinely concerned.

Dysea shook her head. "I am fine. Commander Las'elh?"

"My Queen." Las'elh spoke instantly.

"You travel with the son of my *Nauta Melme*'s brother and the daughter of two of my dearest friends." Dysea spoke. "If I discover there is something to what you say Commander... I will pursue it to the fullest. If however... you are making this all up over the loss of your sister and harm comes to one of them... the EI Recovery Team will be the least of your concerns. I will find you and bury you myself. Is that clear?"

"Yes my Queen."

"Good. Anton... I will be waiting for your transmission." Dysea spoke. "Cihera... say goodbye to your mother and then we must go."

Lynwe came into the transmission again and Cihera smiled. "*Xuil udossta dumoas dos helothannin dalharil*." (With our blessing you travel daughter)

"*Dosst dumoas Usstan mir wun ussta xukuth ilhar*." Cihera replied. (Your blessing I hold in my heart mother)

"Be mindful of him Cihera." Lynwe stated sternly looking at Anton. "He is just as wild as his father."

Cihera laughed. "I will mother."

"The spirit of the King's grandfather watch over you both. Until next time." Lynwe said as the transmission faded.

Anton chuckled as he returned to the table. "We must really tell them we are married soon Cihera." He said. "Lynwe doesn't seem to like me very much."

Cihera laughed and kissed his cheek. "We will." She said. "We will."

"You... you have the private channel for Queen Dysea?" Las'elh asked them still in shock. "Who else are you able to contact?"

"There are advantages to being my father's son." Anton spoke. "Namely... we do not have to wait around for permission or intelligence. We go straight to the source. You heard her Las'elh. Give me what you have and we will go from there."

Cihera nodded. "If Dysea says she will review it... you can rest assured she will. And all of us need to get some sleep." She said coming to her feet. "Commander... the couch there is yours since I doubt you want to sleep in the same bed as Gravork. Everything on our ship is coded to us alone. You will not be able to do anything should you think up some crazy scheme. We may have decided to help you up to this point... but that does not mean we trust you."

"If Gravork... if the Kochab has the only sleeping quarters... where will the two of you sleep?" Las'elh asked.

Anton got up and went to the wall panel. He touched several buttons on the panel and the wall opposite the table came down revealing a large bed. He began stripping out of his clothes as he made his way to the bed. Las'elh watched him with wide eyes and turned to look at Cihera who was also stripping out of the clothes she wore. Las'elh couldn't help but watch as she uncovered her soft, satin like dark skin.

"We sleep there." Cihera spoke. "As we always do. I suggest you get some sleep Commander. We are going to have some very long conversations tomorrow while we sort all of this out."

Las'elh watched her turn and walk over to the bed. That she was completed naked in front of a stranger did not seem to faze her in the least. Las'elh admired her long legs and flawless ass while she lowered herself into the bed next to Anton. Cihera looked at her, her firm breast jutting outward as Anton gathered her into his arms.

“Get some sleep Commander. We'll see you in the morning.” Anton spoke before reaching up and turning the lights down.

SPARTA ROYAL VILLA

He was not what she had expected.

Jalersi had found her heart rate and pulse increasing the closer they drew to the Royal villa. Since discovering this was Pusintin's brother Jalersi had done nothing but wonder what he would be like. What kind of man could so utterly defeat her mate that he would be sullen and withdrawn for nearly two years upon his return to her? What kind of man could inflict the damage done to her husband in the form of the injuries to his body? She had seen Pusintin fight on many occasions, and she had seen him train. He was very nearly without equal among her people, yet this man had beaten him down in a way nothing ever had.

Jalersi had worn her finest dress this evening, something she had ordered made for her by Kavalian tailors out of High Coven silken fabric. It was royal blue in color and fell almost to her ankles. Her abdomen was bare with a single asymmetrical shoulder strap that accented her large breasts, and a front slit that came almost all the way up to her crotch. She wore her shiny, platinum blond hair very long and flowing over one shoulder. She knew that women within the Union were much more open about their style of dress, and they were allowed enormous freedom in the styles of clothes they wore. She knew from the Lycavorian Netnews reports that for gatherings such as this, the Queens would always dress elegantly and quite provocatively as well. She wanted to insure she was dressed in a similar manner. Jalersi had been surprised at the dress that Athani appeared in the lobby wearing and she could barely contain her outburst of laughter at the look of disbelief on Qurot's face when he viewed her. It was a dress Athani had chosen to purchase during their lunch recess this very day. She had apparently seen it and couldn't resist buying it when the store's owner had said she could have it to her for this evening with little problem. It was also a floor length gown, blue green in color which matched Athani's eyes. The dress left her shoulders bare, wrapping tightly around Athani's own firm breasts and then splitting open to reveal her abdomen before coming back together just above her navel. It was slit up her right leg to the outside of her tanned thigh, and then both sides of the dress were cut into two openings which exposed the skin of her hips and very trim waist. Even Jalersi had to admit it looked as if she had been poured into the dress. Athani was most certainly going to take advantage of her time here on Earth to experience the freedom given to females within the Union, regardless of what her future mate thought or did. And there was very little Qurot could do to stop her and he knew that.

Qurot, Pian and Karun had all opted to wear their uniforms, Pian rejoining them after being released from the hospital. Unlike Qurot's wild and tangled coat of fur, Pian's light brown coat of hair was impeccably groomed and trimmed. He actually looked very handsome to Jalersi and she silently chastised herself for such thoughts. Pusintin's depression in the first years after returning had pushed her away and right into Pian's arms for a single night of blistering, hot and sweaty sex. Jalersi did not know why it had happened, but it had, and Pian had fucked her senseless that night. She barely had the presence of mind to keep him from fully seating his huge cock inside her, pulling her down around the thick bulb at the base of his shaft and locking them together for hours. She would certainly have become pregnant with his child had he done that, but something had kept him from doing that very thing, even without her plea that he don't. It would have gotten both of them killed when it was discovered and apparently he valued his life and career more than his pleasure and her. This had angered Jalersi to some extent. It angered her that he did not care enough for her to lock them together as he filled her with his cum; even after so many years of saying he wanted her and no one else. Soon after this night Pusintin began to come out of his self imposed depression and Jalersi had devoted herself to him. She had forgotten that night, swearing to herself it would never happen again, even as every time she saw him the memories would come flooding back.

Karun had been very quiet on the trip to the Royal Villa, and that had Jalersi wondering as well. Her oldest son was always reserved and quiet, never giving council unless asked for it specifically, but tonight he seemed more distracted than Jalersi had ever seen him. Jiss and Matuarr wore their formal Legislative Vestments and were content to talk with each other and Jalersi on the trip to the Royal Villa. It was not a long ride in the extended Lifter, but it was exceptionally beautiful. The towering pine trees and mountains in the distance truly made for a magnificent backdrop to the Royal Villa.

They had been greeted by the Prime Minister and her mate, a tall, well built Spartan male as well as Queen For'mya outside the main entrance to the Villa. For'mya was dressed in a stunning dress similar to Athani's in many respects, but a light crème in color. They were led into the Villa and all of them were struck at the simple elegance in how the interior was decorated. There was nothing extravagant in the least, the furniture appearing to very old but cared for meticulously. For'mya directed them through the main room with the large fireplace, and they caught only a small glimpse of two *Durcunusaan* soldiers as they walked the perimeter in the distance. On the patio Jalersi discovered that the Governor of Sparta had joined them for dinner, and it was here she was introduced to him and her husband's mother.

Gorgo.

Pusintin had not spoken of her very often after that day, only to say she had betrayed him in the vilest of ways. Abandoned him to fate and left him to die. Gorgo stood next to Riall, who wore his formal dress uniform as well, the medals and ribbons decorating his chest signifying many centuries of fighting the High Coven. Her dress was a very elegant wrap, a rich dark green in color and worn to highlight her still very attractive figure. Gorgo smiled at her when they were introduced, shook her hand warmly, but her eyes were cold and emotionless. Those same eyes softened somewhat when they fell upon Karun, but not by much Jalersi saw. Karun for his part gave no sign that she was his grandmother, and Jalersi knew that Pusintin would be happy about that.

And then For'mya took her hand and motioned back towards the house and introduced him.

Martin Leonidas.

Aricia Leonidas occupied his right arm, the Persian red haired Queen Anja his left. The second of his two elven Queens walked next to Anja, hand in hand with the dark haired pureblood vampire Isabella. All of them wore breathtaking dresses that accented their incredible figures and she even found herself admiring how stunning his vampire Queen was. Jalersi also noticed that all of them had exceptionally long hair. Martin Leonidas apparently liked his Queens with long hair. He stood just over two meters in height, perhaps an inch shorter than Pusintin's six foot three Jalersi calculated. He wore a formal dress uniform as well, eight rows of ribbons decorating his chest with the crimson shoulder boards of royalty clearly displayed. He was thickly muscled, slightly more so than Pusintin. His black hair was also long, falling almost to his shoulders but tied in a neat ponytail at the back of his head. Jalersi couldn't pull her blue eyes away from the dark brown orbs that gazed upon her as if they were measuring up their next kill. She knew from the Lycavorian's own Netnews channels that he was a physically imposing figure, but after more than thirty years with her mate Pusintin, she didn't think that could faze her. Standing in front of him however, Jalersi found herself almost frightened of the man.

He had greeted her warmly enough though, taking her hand gently when he shook it and smiling openly. It was no different when he greeted the others, though he stopped for a moment when he greeted Athani and looked at her a bit longer for some reason. He made no sign that he even noticed her tail as it rested in a relaxed position along the outside of her dress. There was something else he detected in her it seemed. He shook hands firmly with Jiss and Matuarr, Almost greeting Pian in a friendly manner and nod of mutual respect. Qurot however, his face turned to stone when he greeted Qurot, apparently deciding he didn't like him right away. No doubt from the information given to him by his Queen. Jalersi watched carefully when he greeted Karun... and as with his mother, he smiled and shook his hand cordially, but there was no sign of acknowledgment in his eyes of who Karun was. Jalersi found this very odd in a way, but she let it pass. Perhaps it had to do with the conversation Karun had had with his father before leaving. Neither he nor his father had shared with her what they talked about, Karun only saying that he looked forward to his role and the reaction he would get.

He introduced all his Queens to them, and Jalersi watched intently as Isabella was greeted by the men in her party. Karun she knew would be respectful and hold in his feelings, as would Jiss and Matuarr due to their positions. She was more concerned with Qurot and Pian however and once more this night Pian surprised her by

greeting Isabella with a handshake and nod of his head. Qurot simply glared at Isabella for a moment, his eyes hard. The look bounced off the vampire Queen and she dismissed Qurot with barely a thought. This only seemed to infuriate him more. Jalersi knew he had not received the respect and deference he expected and received from females within the Kavalian Empire and this angered him. Only the fact that he was within enemy territory kept him from reacting how his upbringing had conditioned him to react.

Martin Leonidas directed them into the large dining room where his half elf son Resumar appeared now, also wearing his dress uniform. Jalersi did not notice the look of pure delight from Athani when she saw Resumar, and she did not understand the look he gave her when greeting her. They waited while he greeted everyone, and then they all took seats at the large table. Jalersi next to For'mya, who sat to Aricia's right. Athani was to Resumar's left on the opposite side of the table, as he sat next to his birth mother Dysea. Anja sat to Martin's left, Isabella next to her. Qurot managed to procure the seat next to Athani before Jiss did and everyone else settled to their seats.

The meal was a mixture of ancient Greek dishes from Sparta's history, and then several more modern selections. Jalersi noticed that there were several Kavalian foods among those on the table, and she realized that the cooking staff must have gone out of their way to obtain them. Small talk was exchanged between everyone as they began to eat, and Jalersi had to admit to herself, the Kavalian dishes were exquisitely prepared. She also noticed that Resumar Leonidas sampled all of them and appeared to prefer the Vremchek Beef Spice Rolls more than anything else which delighted her sister since she was the one who told him to sample the food. As the dinner began to wind down Prime Minister Deia was the one to angle the conversation towards what Jalersi had hoped.

"The negotiations are nearly complete Milord." Deia spoke. "With final approval from you and the Senate... I believe we will have an ample supply of Notal Berries for several years to come."

Martin nodded and sat back in his chair and lifted his wine to his lips. "The application for an embassy?" He asked.

"I was hoping to present that to you tonight King Leonidas." Jalersi spoke now. "After we had the chance to show you that an embassy could go a long way to bringing our two peoples closer together."

"It has actually left me with more questions than answers." Martin spoke.

"I will answer whatever questions you ask to the best of my abilities." Jalersi spoke.

"Why now?" Martin asked simply.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Why now?" He asked again. "Why come forward now and request these things? We have had no contact with your government in nearly twenty years. What drew you out of KFI space now?"

"If I am correct Milord... we have requested negotiations in the past." Jalersi said. "Many times... and they were refused."

"And why were they refused?" Aricia asked now.

Jiss leaned forward. "Jalersi... may I?" Jalersi turned to him and nodded. "Fourteen years ago we asked for similar negotiations in regards to Tratonic Ore. The Union has the largest concentration of Tratonic Ore known to exist. We offered substantial compensation for a trade agreement. It was refused." He spoke. "Nine years ago we came forward on a proposal for Talracian Ore. That was denied."

"Talracian Ore is a strategic asset to the Union." Deia spoke. "We do not trade Strategic Assets Legislature Jiss."

"This very planet has the largest deposits anywhere in the known universe now." Jiss spoke. "Surely the Union could part with a small amount of it?"

Deia shook her head. "No."

"And our request for a Free Rights Passage four years ago... that too was refused." Jiss spoke.

"At the time we were currently involved in our war with the Evolli Triad." Isabella spoke now. "Having KFI warships crossing Union space would not have been wise."

"And now?" Jiss asked. "Many of our merchant ships have to detour almost all the way through KFI space to reach The Wilds where we do most of our trading. You do not allow us to trade with worlds that are members of the Union."

"Member worlds chose who they trade with... not the King." Deia spoke.

“Then why did the Hadarian Council of Elders refused our request for a contingent of their Healers?” Jiss asked. “Our medical facilities and training is far inferior to yours... we openly admit that. Surely you would allow us to partake of their skills.”

“I am the Queen of Hadaria.” Anja said in a heated voice. “And my people are not a commodity to be bargained for Legislature Jiss!”

“So you deny us proper medical treatment for our people. New and improved medicines that could save thousands of lives?” Jiss spoke.

“Legislature Jiss... ninety-two percent of Hadarian Healers are female.” Anja spoke. “Why exactly would I allow them to enter KFI space and be subject to the same laws that govern your own females?”

“Now you question our laws!” Matuarr spoke coming forward in his chair.

“Why do you treat your women the way you do?” Anja asked.

“That has always been our way!”

“Yet Jalersi and Athani are here now!” Dysea spoke. “Leading this delegation. Or is that only for show?”

“They are the daughters to Prefect Keleru.” Jiss spoke. “They were chosen for this delegation because of their knowledge of the Union and your ways. When we return to KFI space, Athani will become the mate to Commander Qurot. She follows the old ways in this regard... as the daughter of the Prefect should!”

Qurot laughed. “And I do so look forward to that day.” He spoke cruelly reaching out to touch Athani’s hair. His face turned darker when she slapped his hand away.

“Don’t touch me Qurot!” She hissed softly.

Qurot leaned even closer. “I will enjoy making you my mate Athani. And I will enjoy taking your purity. And when I do... I will have you resume taking your treatments and rid yourself of the tail you have allowed to grow back.”

Athani turned to look at him with savage anger in her eyes. “My purity is something you will never have!” She snarled at him.

“Qurot that is quite enough.” Jalersi barked from across the table.

Athani was sitting close to the table, her legs well hidden and out of sight. She felt the powerful hand of Resumar extend under the table and rest gently on her thigh. Her hand dropped quickly and squeezed his fingers tightly as she regained her composure and took a deep breath.

“Our laws are not the concern of the Union.” Jiss spoke showing displeasure none of them had seen before now.

“No they are not.” Martin said. “However... like you... we can chose who we wish to do business with. The items and details you have requested in the past were not acceptable to us. As Anja has told you, her people are not a commodity to be traded back and forth. The Hadarian Council of Elders refused your request. Not me.”

“And the Union Senate’s decisions to not allow us to offer compensation for what happen on Gamji?” Jiss asked. “That is what the last twenty years have stemmed from isn’t it? That one incident?”

Martin looked at him. “The Union Senate voted to authorize that.” He said. “I refused to allow it to go any further.”

“May I ask why?” Matuarr spoke. “That was the result of one rogue officer among our millions of men at arms. And if I am correct... he had faulty intelligence telling him Gamji was a staging area for an upcoming attack. He...”

“I don’t put a price on life Legislature Matuarr.” Martin spoke. “You can not compensate for the innocent lives that were taken on Gamji.”

“And our men who you slaughtered?” Qurot demanded. “You killed all of them! You left none of them alive. Not even those who were not clones!”

“They were shown far more honor in death than you showed our people in life.” Riall spoke for the first time.

“Bah... what do you know of war?” Qurot barked.

“I know more of war than you will ever know Kavalian!” Riall spat. “I was fighting the High Coven a thousand years before you were ever born. I was fighting Immortals while you were still wearing diapers... or

whatever your people call them! Do not presume to know all there is to know about a person Commander. More often than not... that tactic will get you very dead.”

“Is that why you will now sign a Cease Fire Accord with the High Coven?” Jiss asked as Gorgo rested her hand on Riall’s arm to calm him. “An enemy you have fought for more years than we have. Now... after so long you will sign a Peace Agreement with them? After all they have cost your people?”

“It is a Cease Fire Accord.” Martin spoke calmly. “Nothing more. We have not fought an engagement with the High Coven in twenty-five years. This is just a way for me to show them I have no intention of getting involved in their war with you. Would you care to sign something similar? Would Prefect Keleru be open to that? I’d be more than happy to sign something like that.”

“That is not what we are here to discuss.” Jalersi spoke now trying to regain control of the conversation.

“Why not?” Deia asked. “We are all here. The men and women in this room make up the majority of who will decide on such a proposal. Why can’t we talk about it?”

“I do not have my father’s authority to speak of such things.” Jalersi said. “We are here only to work out the details of the trade pact and request an embassy.”

“Why should we grant an embassy if you are not willing to talk peace?” Panos asked from the end of the table next to Karun. “Or do you not want peace?”

“The Union has many things they will not share with others.” Matuarr spoke once more. “Peace is always preferable to war... but the Union must be willing to share what they have in order to gain that peace.”

“We are always willing to talk peace.” For’mya spoke softly. “We are just not willing to sacrifice our values or what we hold dear to obtain that peace.”

“So you are willing to die for what you hold so dear and do not share with others?” Qurot demanded.

“Why? Are you planning to attack us Commander?” Martin asked casually.

“Certainly not Milord!” Jalersi almost shouted as she came to her feet now. “Please... Milord... I can not speak on my father’s behalf in regards to what you propose. Only in regards to what we were sent here for.” She said. “I would be happy to speak with him in regards to this and what you suggest.”

Martin looked at Jalersi now and leaned back in his chair. He nodded his head slowly. “Your request for an Embassy will be ratified by the Union Senate by the end of the week.” He said. “I intend to approve that. Perhaps then maybe we can see how far your father wishes to extend this tenuous friendship.”

Jalersi nodded her head. “Thank you Milord. He will be most happy to hear that. We...”

“King Leonidas!” Karun’s voice echoed from the end of the table drawing everyone’s attention. He had waited long enough, heard enough. He looked across the expanse of the table at his uncle.

“Yes?” Martin asked.

“Milord... I would like to meet my sister.” Karun spoke.

The reaction of everyone at the table with the exception of Martin and his Queens was predictable. Jalersi’s eyes went wider than he had ever seen his mother look. “Karun... what... what are you talking about?” She gasped. “Your sister is on Cabelir.”

Karun didn’t take his eyes from Martin. “King Leonidas knows what I speak of. Don’t you sire?” He said.

“Karun... you will stop this nonsense!” Jalersi snapped.

Gorgo’s eyes were nearly as wide as Jalersi’s and she looked back and forth between her son and Karun. Even Deia and Panos wore stunned expressions.

“Martin... Martin... what is this fool boy saying?” Gorgo finally blurted turning to look at him. Martin sat in silence staring at Karun, while Aricia and Isabella’s eyes were closed, Anja simply glared at Karun and Dysea and For’mya were looking at each other.

Karun stood up straight. “I want to meet my sister.” Karun said again. “I want to meet the sister of my father’s blood. I want to meet Lisisa.”

The gasps that followed that pronouncement could not have been louder than if a bomb had gone off in the room.

SODRAG

Andro stood on the tarmac as the *STRIKER DT*'s engine noise began to recede and the ramp began to lower. Elynth stood next to him; her powerful legs draw up underneath her body, both of them agitated and filled with anxiety from what they felt within Mindvoice coming from Sparta. As the ramp lowered they saw the massive figure of Arzoal begin to take shape waiting to move down the ramp. Her giant head was turned downward as if she was speaking with someone. As the ramp came fully down, that turned out to indeed be the case as they both spied Helen standing beside the largest of all the living dragons. Torma was only half a meter shy of Arzoal's length, and much more muscular, but the Elder Mother had thousands of years of experience on Elynth's father. When Arzoal spoke, everyone took notice of what she said.

Andro and Elynth started forward as the two females of two radically different species began moving down the ramp of the *STRIKER* into the coming dawn sky. Recognized without question as two of the wisest individuals in the Lycavorian Union, they were venerated by all no matter the species or member. They met about a hundred feet from the rear of the *STRIKER* and Arzoal lowered her head to run her snout along the back of Elynth's neck in affection. The most powerful and reserved of her grandchildren, Elynth held a special place in Arzoal's heart, for of all Isheeni's children Elynth reminded Arzoal most of herself.

Grandmother. Elynth spoke softly even as her wings fluttered gently in joy from Arzoal's loving touch.

You are looking beautiful as always Elynth. Arzoal answered.

They both turned their large heads to see Andro embrace Helen tightly and then hold her much smaller frame at arm's length.

"What is happening *Feravomir*?" Andro asked. "We can feel them even here."

Helen squeezed his arms and looked at Arzoal quickly before turning back to him. "Truth is happening my boy." Helen said. "A truth many of us, myself included, have tried to deny these last years. It appears we can no longer do that now, and what makes it worse is the dreadful hour we are arriving here! Tell me Androcles... are the jungle insects even awake yet?"

"Most of them never sleep. Now... what truth?" Andro asked with a smile. "What is going on? Even my mother has blocked me. My mother never blocks my probes *Feravomir*."

"I will tell you when we get out of this infernal heat." Helen spoke with a gentle smile. "I will leave it for you to tell your brothers and sisters. You need to send Lisisa and Denali back to Sparta on our ship however. Your father will be calling for her soon enough. Better that she already be on her way back."

Andro's eyes went wide. "Father... father found out?" He gasped.

Helen shook her head quickly. "No... it's not that. Though I fear we will need to address that sooner than we had hoped." She said. "I have spoken with your grandmother Gorgo in regards to that and we were going to approach your mothers next week. I don't think we will have that time now."

"Feravomir... what is going on?" Andro asked once more.

Helen patted his arms. "Things are beginning to happen that will shape our future young Androcles... and you must be prepared to make difficult decisions. Decisions that will not be popular with your father and some of your siblings. Can you do that?"

"Me?" Andro asked turning to look at Elynth and then back to Helen. "What decisions?"

Feravomir... now you are beginning to frighten us. Elynth spoke.

Helen smiled and looked at her before shaking her head. "Now is not the time for fear." She said. "That will come I assure you. Now... now we must conduct ourselves as we have planned." She turned back to Andro. "They are all gathered in one area?"

Andro nodded slowly even more questions filling his eyes. "Yes."

Helen nodded. "Arzoal and I could feel them once we crossed the void." She said. "They are committed and strong. They are beginning to come out from under the fog that Aikiro and the others have created. More so than we first thought. Raw I believe is a word your father would use. And you have done this in only three... four days."

We both agree however that Yuri and Vollenth will pose a problem. Arzoal spoke now. *Her children less so... but still. We have a plan to address that if you will allow me to explain it to Elynth and then she can discuss it with you.*

Elder Mother... are you and the others plotting? Andro asked with a grin.

Dragon Elders do not plot young Androcles Leonidas. Arzoal barked out with smug humor. *We plan wisely.*

Yes... it seems I have heard that before. Andro said with a smile. *Elynth and I have one voice... you know this. Of course.*

Good. I think you both will like it. Arzoal said.

“You know of course that they failed the obstacle course miserably.” Andro said.

Arzoal chuckled within Mindvoice. *Something I believe you and Elynth failed yourselves once Carina had finished it. Twice if I am not mistaken.*

Elynth brought her tail around and tapped Andro in the shoulder gently. *Something I reminded my bonded one of as we flew back.* She said.

She devised something that is a marvel of engineering your sister did. Arzoal spoke. *Most of Mjolnir’s Hand failed it the first or second time.*

Helen chuckled and began pulling him towards the Lifter. “We have much to do, and Arzoal needs to inspect the dragons. Our *STRIKER* will wait for Lisisa and Deni... but they need to go back.”

“If father doesn’t know... why send Denali back?” Andro asked turning back to look at her. “Won’t that just make more questions?”

Helen looked at him. “Lisisa will need him.” Helen said as they walked. “I will tell you what is happening Androcles... do not worry. You need to know what is happening, for it will help you in the decisions you make in the future.”

“I truly hate it when you speak to me like the First Oracle of our people.” Andro said. “It always makes my gut twist up in fear.”

Mine as well. Elynth said.

Helen laughed. “Arzoal... are you listening to this. The most powerful Bonded Pair in the Union behind only your fathers and you are frightened of little old me?”

Then our fathers are too proud and have not told you that you scare them as well. Elynth said. *Andro and I do not have that problem.*

Helen squeezed Andro’s arm as they reached the Lifter. “Do not worry. As long as you remain true to each other... you can face anything. Now go Elynth! Take Arzoal to meet these dragons and I will speak with Andro. He will fill you in when you are together again.” Helen leaned forward and sniffed Andro lightly. She looked up at him and her eyes narrowed. “And you young man... you need to leave your young bride alone for a few days or you will wear her out! What is it with you and your father that makes it so you can’t keep your hands off your mates for more than a few hours? Is it some defect in your genes?”

Elynth laughed within Mindvoice as she turned with Arzoal. *I have been telling him that for a week Feravomir.* She said just before she lifted into the air with her grandmother right beside her.

Andro grinned sheepishly and looked at Helen. “I can’t help it.” He said.

“Bah... typical alpha response!” Helen spoke as she moved around and began getting into the Lifter. “Only you and your father. You are trying to repopulate our species all by yourselves!”

Andro glanced upward as he saw Elynth and Arzoal heading east. *[I will talk with you later Elynth my sister.]* He said.

[And I with you Andro my brother.] Her voice came back to him.

Andro ducked his head and got into the Lifter. Helen was looking at him oddly as he settled next to her.

“You and Elynth are still keeping secrets from everyone I see.” She said with a sly grin. “I thought I told you about secrets.”

Andro smiled. “You did *Feravomir*. You are the one who taught us how to keep them.” He turned forward and looked at the *Durcunusaan* driver. “The Rec Center.” He said. “And contact Bren and have him tell Lisi and Deni they need to return to Sparta immediately. There is a *STRIKER* waiting for them here on Pad Four.”

“Yes Milord.” The man spoke before turning around and charging the Lifters engines.

Andro turned back to Helen. “Now *Feravomir*. Tell me what has happened.”

“...did this happen?” Gorgo exclaimed. “Martin is what that boy says true?”

The dinner had ended abruptly after Karun's demand with Martin rising to his feet and marching out of the room. Aricia and the others followed him without question and now they all sat in main room of the villa. Karun and the Kavalians had been escorted out politely but very quickly. Martin had spoken briefly with Colonel Fache who only nodded and went to do his King's bidding.

Martin stood facing the patio doors now, allowing the breeze to blow over his face as the moon crept higher. He wanted to run. He wanted to shift and run until all of this went away. He knew that was not going to happen however and he turned as Aricia stepped up to him and pressed against his side.

[We knew this day would come Beloved.] She said softly.

[I was hoping maybe not.] He answered with a nod.

[Our children are probing us Martin. Especially Andro. We have to tell them something. They can all feel our anxiety and worry.] Anja spoke from the couch where she sat between For'mya and Dysea.

[Helen just arrived in SODRAG.] Isabella spoke moving closer to Martin. *[She will tell Andro and he will tell the others. Coming from her will be as if one of us told him.]*

[Bella is right Martin Leonidas.] For'mya said. *[We need to address this issue now and let Helen tell Andro. She is the First Oracle to our people yes... but she is also a surrogate mother to them as well.]*

[This is no mistake.] Dysea said now. *[Your brother knew exactly what he was doing when he sent this Karun boy here.]*

"Martin Leonidas!" Gorgo snapped loudly causing him to turn to face him. "You and the others stop doing that right now! We may not be strong enough to know what you are saying, but everyone in this room can feel the tremors within Mindvoice. Tell us what is going on!"

Martin turned to face all of them. "Listen to me... we..."

"The truth Martin!" Gorgo barked.

Martin's eyes flared as he looked at his mother. "The truth!" He snapped. "The truth is that Lisisa is my daughter! Perhaps not by blood..." He saw Gorgo's eyes go wide. "...but I have loved her! I have done what my *nubous* brother should have done and I don't regret one single minute of that! Do not bark at me about the truth mother!"

Deia stepped forward and placed her hands on Gorgo's arms. "*Mandri...* we are all confused and upset... we..."

Gorgo brushed Deia's hands from her arms and stepped right up to her son and embraced him tightly tears coming to her eyes. "What is going on Martin?" She asked softly.

Martin sighed heavily, placing his cheek against the top of her head and rubbing her long hair. His mother's scent filled him and instantly calmed in. He hugged her tightly before pulling his face back. "Sit down... all of you." He said softly. He released Gorgo and turned to look at Resumar who had so far remained quiet against the wall. "Resumar?"

Resumar pushed off the wall and moved to the couch next to his mother without question. He looked at his father, his dark eyes steady. "She is my sister." He said firmly. "She has been my sister all of these years and nothing will change that father. Nothing! I don't care what this Karun says or who her real father is or may be. Even if it is true... for twenty-five years it has been this way. None of us will stop thinking like that."

Martin nodded. "For me either son. For any of us." He said.

Resumar settled next to Dysea and she took his hand in hers. Martin pulled one of the table chairs over and dropped it in front of them.

"I discovered it when Anja had to remove that thing Yuri had fused to her rib." Martin said. "On the Mindvoice ship as we were returning from Lycavore to Apo Prime. I smelled it in her blood. It was then I suspected that Pleistarchus might still be alive."

Gorgo gasped. "You... you knew then?"

"Martin... your sense of smell is that keen?" Riall asked in shock. "I knew it was very sensitive... but to detect that in Lisisa's blood after so long? How?"

Martin shrugged. "I felt something within me recognize it. Deep in the back of my head really. Some subconscious part of my brain told me what I smelled was somehow familiar. I dismissed it at first... but it wouldn't go away."

"How did you discover for sure?" Deia asked.

"I ran a Fractal DNA Splicing Sequencer Scan." Anja answered.

Deia shook her head. “A What?”

Anja smiled gently. “It’s essentially a scan that breaks down DNA strands right down to their core sequencers and what made them form. A normal DNA scan would not detect it because Martin’s blood is so pure and dominant, it normally overrides anything else. When I saw and felt his reaction I knew something was wrong so I ran the scan. Martin and Pleistarchus may be many years apart in age, but because their father’s blood was so pure, their blood is almost identical.”

Martin nodded slowly. “Anja confirmed it even more a little later as she said. I didn’t want to believe it... not after all we had been through to get her back. And then finding you mother... I didn’t want to believe it. I did the only thing I could think of, the only thing I knew would get me the truth. I had Armetus dig through all the pads and files we had in the archives here in Sparta and those we took from the Coven’s base. And then he went through anything left that Tarifa and Aihola had gathered from the base’s we knew Yuri was at just before the comet came.” Martin took a deep breath. “We discovered that Pleistarchus had been to earth six weeks prior to the comet arriving. He and his Kavalian pals were doing another recon mission for a hit on Yuri. She had apparently been meeting with Robert Moran the whole time she was supposedly with me. Every time she came back to Earth they would get together. She must have turned him at some point during that period but it was also during one of these times when Pleistarchus got to her. He thought it would be fun I guess, rape the woman you are here to whack before you kill her. He wore a SEAL Team Twelve uniform and while a bunch of others from the Air Force security team held her down, he raped Yuri for several hours.”

“Wait... how do you know all this Martin?” Panos asked.

“Armetus discovered security tapes that weren’t destroyed. They were grainy and barely useable because of their age but leave it to Armetus to find a way to restore them. They showed Pleistarchus entering the secure floor of the hospital Yuri and Moran were supposed to meet at. She thinks she got a message from me to meet her there... but it was really from my brother. He set her up.” Martin replied. “November 12th 2068. Eight weeks before the comet came. Eight weeks before Walter told her she was pregnant. In her twisted mind this only confirmed to her that it was me, because only a pureblood Lycavorian could have gotten her pregnant at the time. She had no idea that Pleistarchus was still alive.”

“But Moran is... he has fathered three children with her.” For’mya said.

Isabella nodded. “As with those who are turned among Lycavorians... it takes time for the change to fully complete itself down to the molecular level.” She spoke softly. “That is why Tina and Ben did not have any children for two years once I turned them. The changes weren’t complete inside either of them.”

“Let’s not go there.” Martin spoke looking at her.

“It was their decision *m’randii*.” Bella spoke softly. You know Endith would have far outlived them and the love they have for each other is just as powerful as ours. It would have killed Endith to lose them in such a way. Slowly... as they aged.”

Martin nodded. “I know... I just wish you would have told me first.”

“And that is why she has hated you so much all these years?” Deia asked now. “She believes...”

Martin nodded turning to look at her. “She thinks I am the one who raped her. When I made such a big stink about finding Lisisa afterwards, it only cemented in her twisted mind that it was me.”

“Pleistarchus knew?” Gorgo asked.

Martin shrugged. “He knew about Lisisa when he came here that day. He wanted her back... or so he said.” He replied shaking his head. “I don’t know exactly how long he knew before that and I don’t care. I was not going to allow that to happen.”

“Martin... you knew all this.” Riall asked softly. “You knew all this even when he came here and yet you never told anyone? Why?”

“Anja knew. Not everything about it... all the details... but she knew Lisisa was not my daughter. I kept it from Aricia and the others until they discovered it on their own four years later.” He said evenly. “They weren’t happy with me to say the least.”

Gorgo and Deia turned to Aricia and the others who by now all sat together on the large couch. “That... that is what happened during those six weeks isn’t it? When you all just up and disappeared? You were angry with him for not telling you?” Deia asked.

For’mya nodded slowly. “It was foolish of us we know that now. We didn’t realize that at the time however, not until after we left Earth so abruptly. But by then we had already called him some very bad

names.” She looked at Martin. “Names we could not take back. We wrongly assumed... quite stupidly mind you... that if he hid this from us... what else was he hiding? We were ashamed of ourselves because none of us thought of Lisisa and what she had come to mean to all of us. We thought only of our own pride as Martin’s mates.”

Martin grinned at them from his chair as they looked on embarrassed. “Well... they were very creative names *Kinsoaurgai*.” He said.

Gorgo looked at him aghast. “Martin how... how can you joke at a time like this?” She stammered. “What are we going to do?”

Martin turned his head and met her eyes. “What do you want me to do mother?” He asked. “Would you rather I throw myself from Torma’s back at twenty thousand feet and allow myself to smash into the earth? Shit... with the way my luck is going lately I’d probably survive that.”

“I am being serious!” She snapped.

Martin got to his feet. “So am I mother. The moment Yuriko told me that Lisisa existed... she became my daughter. The instant I set foot on Lycavore she became my daughter! I was meant to find her that day! I was meant to find her... because she was part of the ones Canth told me I needed to find. And in finding her... she led me to you! For twenty-five years I have considered her nothing but my daughter! She is a Leonidas! Period! She is just as much my daughter as Eliani or Carina or Normya or Zarah, Retta or Nara. You... you did not sense the happiness in her when I found her mother. You did not feel the freedom that bonding to Jeth granted her. I could feel it. The sense of peace and utter completeness after almost five hundred years of running and slavery and being treated like she was something lower than dirt! I had no intention of taking that from her. None! My dear brother Pleistarchus and Yuri can go right straight to hell if they think I’m going to let it happen now!”

“*Aovi*.” Aricia muttered softly.

“Spoken like a true Spartan father!” Panos muttered softly with pride in his eyes.

“Well it is obvious Pleistarchus’s own mate did not know this.” Deia spoke. “Not with her reaction and the look on her face when Karun revealed this to us.”

“But why do this now? In the middle of their trade talks and desires for an embassy?” Riall asked. “What purpose does it serve?”

“Well... if we needed any more proof that they are not here for peace, I believe we got it tonight.” Deia said. “Whether it was intentional or not, they revealed to us that they are far more concerned as to why the Coven is here and what we have. Things that we won’t give them.”

“*Sibfla*!” Anja spat. “We already knew that. I can’t begin to imagine what they would do to several hundred of my Healers if they went into Kavalian space. It turns my blood cold just to think about it.”

“I think it also showed that this Jalersi... that she is not the one pulling the strings.” Panos spoke. “Her father may have put her in charge of this delegation, but those other two... Jiss and Matuarr... they are getting their instructions from someone else.”

“Yes... the question remains from whom?” Deia said. “This Keleru is shrewd... we have seen that in how he dealt with the remnants of their old empire, not to mention the deals he has brokered with the Simian people as well as how he dealt with the Zaleisians.”

“Do not forget his Mutual Protection Treaty with The Icalro Alliance and The U’zolut Consortium.” Dysea spoke up.

“As if we want anything from those fools. Privateers and Warlords is what they are.” Riall snapped turning to look at Martin. He stood behind Gorgo, his hand on her shoulder affectionately. “I wouldn’t be surprised if this Commander Qurot character is getting his instructions from someone else as well Martin.” Riall said.

“We refuse them the embassy then.” Isabella said now.

Deia shook her head. “We can’t. Martin has already told them it we be ratified by the end of the week. If we back out now they will scream to the heavens.”

“Let them scream!” Resumar snapped.

“If only we could Res.” Dysea said squeezing his hand. “If we go back on the deal now... they will only take it to the public forum. They will draw in our allies and those governments that support us but are not part

of the Union and demand to know why. We can't tell them we are refusing them because of Lisisa. And we most certainly can not tell them we are training the Coven's dragons."

"We'll catch some backlash with this Martin. They'll hold it over our heads. Try to get more concessions out of us." Deia spoke.

Aricia leaned forward. "Let them try." She said. "Lisisa and Eliani are almost as loved as their brother Andro among our people. Across the entire Union. Lisisa has forged her reputation on her own merits with her own actions. Hers and Jeth's. She and Jeth are widely recognized as the strongest Bonded Pair behind Martin and Torma and Andro and Elynth, even among those of *Mjolnir's Hand*."

"Aricia is right." For'mya spoke. "Our people accepted her without question as Martin's daughter. They saw what he went through to get her back safely. They know she is half vampire as two others of our children are. They do not care about this. As Lisisa has so often said... her life did not begin until she came to be with us. That is how our people see her. Nothing this Karun or his fool father attempt to do will ever change that perception of her."

"But even when they discover she is Pleistarchus's daughter and not Martin's?" Riall asked.

"They will see a Lycavorian Union and Spartan King who acted on the information that she was his daughter." For'mya continued. "And when he discovered that she was in fact the daughter of his brother, who we all thought dead and who is a traitor to his people as well as a bad father, they will see Martin took it upon himself to step in as the father she never had... and do this without question. They will see that Martin was the one to show Lisisa her true path. They certainly will not hold it against her. She had no say in whom her parents were, and she is most certainly not to blame for one of them trying to kill her for nearly five hundred years of her life. They will not see Lisisa acting as her real father has done. They will see her acting as the man she now calls father, as a true Spartan warrior and woman. And they will see who we call daughter without indecision or misgiving."

"Are you going to let him see her Martin?" Riall asked now. The question that all of them dreaded. "For all we know this could just be a ploy to get intelligence. As Aricia just said... if they know this about her and Jeth, their status among *Mjolnir's Hand*, perhaps it is a way for them to learn to defeat the fear of dragons so ingrained in their people."

Martin met his eyes. "That is not my decision to make. We agreed a long time ago to never impress our will on our children. I don't intend to start now. This will be strictly Lisisa's decision, but she would never put Jeth, our people or the dragons at risk. She should be on her way back here as we speak on Helen's *STRIKER*."

"Who is going to tell her Martin?" Gorgo asked now in a much softer tone of voice.

"I will tell her." He said softly. "It should be me. I'll give her the rest of the night once she arrives and tell her in the morning."

"And... and what if she decides she wants to meet him?" Gorgo spoke. "What if she wants to meet this Karun?"

"I can't stop her mother." Martin spoke.

"And what if she decides she wants to meet her real father? What if she wants to meet Pleistarchus Martin? Not that I believe she will... but what if she does? What will you do then my son?"

Martin met his mother's eyes. "I guess we'll cross that bridge when we come to it now won't we mother." He answered.

Gorgo gazed at him for a long moment. "I truly hate it when you say that." She spoke finally.

Martin nodded. "Yeah... me too."

HADARIA
CAPITAL OF UNOPA
MINISTRY OF MEDICINE AND RESEARCH
OFFICE OF PRINCESS SIVANA

"You are sure of the results Imaoi?" Sivana asked.

The face of the blond woman in the transmission nodded quickly. "I ran the test three times Sivana." She answered confidently. "The results were the same; within point two spatial sets of the metaphase chromatin."

“The others Imaoi?” Sivana asked. Like her sister Anja, Princess Sivana insisted that her staff and research teams refer to her by name. They worked together nearly every day, spending hours upon hours with each other, and it was silly to stand on such formality. This one thing, more than anything, endeared the twin sisters to those close to them like nothing else.

“All of them at point seven or higher.”

Sivana leaned back in her chair. “And can you determine how long this has been taking place?”

“I can’t be precisely accurate... but it appears based on cell regeneration and epigenetic mechanics I’d say at least twenty years. Probably closer to twenty-five.” Imaoi answered.

“And her levels have held at point two spatial sets?” Sivana said softly.

Imaoi nodded. “Yes... and her Tryptophan levels are nearly off the charts and this is what allowed the reversal of the biogenic compounds they were using. That and...”

Sivana looked at her. “What?”

“We know they were using a combination of spliced DNA Sivana. Anja and the Divine one discovered it was mainly from Elves and Lycavorian hosts. That is what Queen Dysea found was happening on Elear.” Imaoi spoke.

“Yes.” Sivana said.

“It was done in very small amounts mind you, but over the years those L-stereoisomer strands, which we all know Lycavorian blood is flooded with, that L-stereoisomer bonded at the molecular level with her core DNA strands. It essentially created a minutely smaller reaction in her core cells.”

Sivana nodded thoughtfully. “Almost as if she had been bitten and her blood flooded with the actual Lycavorian virus itself?”

Imaoi nodded. “Yes. That L-stereoisomer allowed her Tryptophan levels to rise well above normal for Kavalians. Five times normal to be precise. It is also probably why she stopped taking the follow on treatments that the others seem to rely on to keep their Tryptophan levels so low. They were making her sick.”

“And once the treatments stopped, her tail regenerated and the levels remained at such a high point stage they prevented further degradation.” Sivana spoke. “That is why she has not reverted back to her natural state.”

Imaoi nodded once more. “Yes. It’s unlikely the Kavalians have the equipment or the advanced genetic knowledge that we do to even detect this. Even if they did... it would be impossible to reverse it now.”

Sivana looked at her. “Not if they reduced the L-stereoisomer amino acid once more. That would lower her Tryptophan levels down again.”

Imaoi nodded her head. “That would have been the case a few days ago yes. But not now, not anymore.”

“Why?”

“There has been a massive influx of L-stereoisomer and Tryptophan levels into her blood within the last seventy-two hours.” Imaoi said.

“How massive?”

“Point two three.” Imaoi replied. “Elven core DNA strands were detected as well. They are already beginning to assert themselves into her core DNA molecules. Whatever she looks like now Sivana... she will look like for the rest of her life.”

“Imaoi... the levels you are describing to me would mean that she has either been bitten by someone with a combination of Lycavorian and Elven blood or slept with someone with this concentration.” Sivana spoke. “It is the only way to receive the levels you are referring too.”

Imaoi nodded. “Yes.”

“Purity Concentration Coefficient using the variables established by the Feravomir?” Sivana asked immediately.

“One hundred forty-eight point nine.” Imaoi answered.

“Imaoi... what is Martin Leonidas’s PCC?” Sivana asked.

“Two hundred ninety-three.”

“Aricia, Anja and For’mya?”

“Two hundred and fifty-four, one hundred eighty-one and one hundred seventy-six respectively.”

“And Dysea’s now that she is fully wolf?”

“One hundred and eighty-five.”

“Divide by the usual variables that the First Oracle and Eurin established a decade ago and please and tell me what the PCC would be to a child of Martin and Dysea?” Sivana spoke.

“Give or take point three in variance... one hundred forty-three to one hundred forty-nine PCC.” Imaoi replied. “I ran the numbers before contacting you Sivana.”

Sivana nodded with a smile. “You have come to know me well my friend.”

Imaoi smiled. “As much time as you spend with us... how could we not? Based on this information I’d say she was having a relationship with someone on *Mjolnir’s Hand* before they arrived on Earth. The only ones with the PCC levels we’re talking about that were on the King’s ship at that time were Queen For’mya and Prince Resumar. I think it’s safe to assume it wasn’t the Queen.”

“In that I would agree.” Sivana spoke. “Imaoi... thank you for your tireless work. Now please erase all the data you have compiled on this, as well as any backups we might have made up to this point.” Sivana ordered.

Imaoi nodded with question. “As you order.”

“May I ask what you are having deleted?” The male voice spoke from the doorway into her office. Sivana turned her head and saw the two men and one woman enter her office and the frantic shaking of her senior aide’s head.

Sivana kept the smile on her face and turned back to her monitor. “Imaoi... you have your instructions.”

“Yes Princess.”

“Thank you.” Sivana told her before ending the transmission and rising gracefully to her feet. She walked over to the counter along the wall and poured herself a mug of coffee. “Well... this is a surprise.” She spoke as she turned to look at the three new guests. “Elder Okein, Elder Voehls and Elder Buonau. Not one or two... but three Elder Healers have graced me with their presence today. I am overwhelmed.”

Sivana’s aide moved around them and looked at her. “Forgive me Princess... they would not take no for an answer. I told them you were busy.”

Sivana smiled. “It’s quite alright Yahri. I was just finishing up anyway.” She said moving to the chair in front of the large window that overlooked Unopa. She wore a casual outfit of dark gray pants that hugged her long legs and wrapped around her firm ass outlining every curve of her cheeks and the mound between her thighs. The white shirt was looser fitting but did nothing to hide her full breasts and the slim collar wrapped elegantly around her slim neck. Sivana had long ago dispensed with wearing undergarments as she found them restrictive and uncomfortable. Belen hated them as well, and more often than not, he simply shredded them when he removed them from her body. Sivana made it a point to stand for a few extra seconds so that they could see how she was dressed and then she began to sit with a small smile at the look in their eyes.

“So to what do I owe the honor of this visit?” She asked as she settled fully into the chair gracefully, pulling her legs up under her bottom and motioning them to the couch across from the small table in front of her.

The short brown haired woman gave her a disapproving look as she moved around first and sat down. Elder Buonau and she had a long history of dislike and Sivana made it a point to stick the needle to her whenever she could. The woman was a relic from the past, always wrapped in more layers of clothing that she and Anja would often joke about how long it took her to undress for bed in the evening. Her husband was a portly man, jovial and always polite, except when he was around his wife. She was the one who obviously wore the pants in the family. They had three daughters together, all of them no better than their mother in their arrogance. All of Buonau’s daughters were very resentful of Eliani because of her accomplishments in almost every way, and even Sivana’s oldest son and daughter Menelou and Riley were now feeling that same resentment directed at them. Of course... like her cousin... Riley was also half wolf, a more powerful healer, and considerably more attractive than any of Buonau’s daughters. Menelou was also an exceptionally skilled healer and had returned from completing his Spartan Agoge only the year earlier. Even at eighteen years of age he was just as tall as his father and his incredible good looks had far too many Hadarian females fawning over him.

Elder Okein she had dealt with before as well and Sivana found him just as pompous and arrogant as Anja did. Elder Voehls was less arrogant... and far more subtle in his distaste for what Anja and she had accomplished through the years. Sivana also knew that these three in front of her were the most vocal opponents and had caused the most fuss upon Anja’s return and discovering she was now wolf. They had also created quite

the stir upon Sivana's return from the mission to Lycavore only to discover Belen had not only turned her, but claimed her as his mate. These were the men and women who led most of the other older Elders in opposing many of the things Anja and she had done through the years.

"What is it you ordered your aide to delete?" Buonau asked.

Sivana smiled. "Confidential medical research." She answered her. "Something entirely unimportant and not your concern."

"Have you spoken with the Queen recently?" Okein asked.

"I speak with Anja almost every day Elder Okein... you are well aware of that." Sivana spoke.

"Will she be returning then?" Buonau spoke.

"I wasn't aware she needed to return." Sivana said. "They have only just started their exodus to Earth and the little ones are settling into their schools."

"She will not return to address these charges that Seanna's mother Pcillany is going to level against her?" Buonau asked surprised.

"Has the Elder Council heard these charges yet?" Sivana asked.

"Well... no." Buonau replied.

"Pcillany is appearing before us in three days." Voehls told her.

"So if you have not heard these alleged charges that Seanna's mother intends to bring forth why is there a need for Anja to return here?" Sivana said. "She and Martin and their mates are involved with many things happening on Earth right now that concern the entire Union."

"So she does not intend to refute these accusations?" Okein stated.

"You just said yourself that Pcillany has not come before you yet." Sivana spoke. "To what accusations are you referring?"

"We... we have seen a preliminary draft of Pcillany's testimony and the accusations she will make." Okein spoke now. "We thought it prudent for the Queen to return and address them."

"Why would she give weight to something that is not true and has no basis in fact by addressing it as if it does?" Sivana asked.

"It has not been determined by the full Elder Council if these accusations are true or not." Voehls said. "Based on what we have already seen... the evidence is... it is substantial. We thought out of respect for the Queen and yourself that we would give her the opportunity to come before us and explain this before it is presented to the full Council."

Sivana tilted her head slightly. "Really? I was not aware Anja had to explain anything in regards to her personal life to the Hadarian Elder Council."

"She is the Queen of Hadaria!" Buonau snapped. "Her personal life is our business! As is yours!"

"Is it now?" Sivana spoke calmly. "What exactly brought you to that conclusion Elder Buonau?"

"Your parents were not like this!" Okein interjected now. "Their lives were an open book for all to review!"

"And judge no doubt. Or so it seems." Sivana said. "Anja and I are not our parents... as much as you would like us to be."

"They would never do what you and your sister have done!" Voehls said.

"And what exactly have Anja and I done that is so damning to your precious sensibilities Elder Voehls?" Sivana asked. "Not that we care mind you." She finished that with a smile.

"There... that very thing you just did!" Okein said quickly. "You dismiss the Elders and our opinions and wishes as if we do not matter!"

"In many cases your wishes and opinions do not matter. The Elder Council has no say in matters of governing Hadaria. Only in spiritual matters." Sivana told him. "Anja is Queen... I am Princess... it is we who decide what is best for our people and in what direction we will take them. Or has the Hadarian Constitutional Order of Bloodline Ascension been altered in some way and we were not notified?"

"You both have taken non-Hadarian husbands. Lycavorians... and you have allowed them to transform you. No member of the Hadarian Royal family in our history has ever married outside of our own species." Buonau hissed.

Sivana smiled. "So we were the first?" She spoke sardonically. "Using a phrase I learned from my sister and niece... That's way cool!"

“That is another point of contention.” Okein said. “Your insistence on refusing to adhere to our customs where it concerns your children. They should have been made to remain here on Hadaria and be schooled in our institutions. In the ways of our people!”

“You mean in the ways of my Aunt.” Sivana spoke calmly. “As she has raised her sons and daughters?”

“Umbra’s children know well our history and their responsibility as members of the Royal Family!” Voehls stated.

“Yes... I’m sure they have had it drilled into their brains since birth.” Sivana spoke rolling her eyes. “No wonder they are all so dull. No choice. Do this. Do that. It makes my brain hurt just thinking about it.”

“You and your sister do not act as your parents acted!” Buonau snapped. “Your mother would never have dressed in the fashion the two of you do.”

Sivana made a show of looking down at her clothes. “What’s wrong with the way I am dressed?”

“Our females should be reserved and demur!” Buonau spoke. “We should not put on display what we are as you and your sister do. As Eliani does even more! And she is next in line for the throne should anything happen to you or your sister. And your mother most certainly would not have taken another woman into her bed. Let alone four. Did you know that is a topic of discussion among our younger female generation? That the Queen of Hadaria openly admits to sharing the same bed with four other women! And now her daughter has gone and done the same thing by taking this vampire into her bed. And even flaunting her when she is on Hadaria! There are many who find that offensive!”

Sivana laughed openly now. “Come now Elder Buonau... this has never entered your mind?”

“Certainly not!” Buonau snapped. “And you disrespect me by even suggesting it!”

“Do I?” Sivana said her eyes narrowing. “But it is not disrespectful of you and the other Elders to speak openly of it and condemn it so vehemently because you don’t like it! Is that it?”

Sivana got to her feet and moved back to the counter. “I have been with Eliani and Nyla on many occasions when they are here and have gone out to shop or whatever it is that young single women do. I have never seen this reaction to them.” She turned after refilling her mug. “This is less to do with these ridiculous charges that Pcillany intends to bring before you and far more to do with what you and the other Elders deem to be appropriate in regards to Anja and me?”

“What do you mean?” Okein demanded.

Sivana turned back to him. “We don’t think and act as you feel we should.” She said. “And using another term I learned from my sister and niece... that just flat out pisses you off doesn’t it?”

“And you dismiss Hadarian customs and traditions!” Okein exclaimed. “In your manner of dress... in how you act in public. And in how you raise and educate our children.”

Sivana blinked. “Excuse me... *our* children?” She said. “You mean mine and Anja’s children don’t you? You certainly did not give birth to them. And you have not raised them as far as I know.”

“Your children are within the Royal bloodline and therefore they are just as much our charges as the Hadarian Elders of our people as they are yours!” Voehls spoke.

“You and your sister put them at risk!” Buonau said now. “Your sister by allowing Retta and Calyb to form a bond with those beasts. Those dragons. And you... by allowing Rileyya and Menelou to conduct that brutal Agoge practice.”

“Anja and I have let our children find their own way.” Sivana spoke. “It was Rileyya’s and Menelou’s decision to conduct their Agoge training. They did that to honor their father. As for Retta and Calyb... there is no way to predict if a bond will form between rider and dragon. In their case it did.”

“Seeing who their father and brother are... do you expect us to believe that the Queen hoped a bond would not form for the twins?” Okein snapped. “She knew well the possibilities of that happening and she allowed it. Had they been here on Hadaria... where they belong... such a thing would not have occurred!”

“So our children are expected to remain here on Hadaria. Locked away and shielded from all the universe has to offer and show them?” Sivana spoke.

“If it means they learn what they should learn as members of the Royal blood line... yes!” Buonau said.

“You mean what you deem is appropriate for them to learn.” Sivana said with a knowing smile.

“We were not able to act in a fashion that would have protected Eliani and now she has become just like her mother.” Voehls stated. “We were not able to act to protect Rileyya and Menelou though they may yet be

saved. However... we can and will act in regards to Retta and Calyb and even Siara if you and the Queen refuse to do so.”

Sivana looked at them her eyes narrowing. “What exactly are you trying to say Elder Voehls?” She asked.

“When Pcillany appears before us in three days to present these allegations about the Queen’s actions the Elder Council will also hear a petition from Umbra to have the youngest of your children remanded to her custody for upbringing until such time as you and the Queen see fit to raise your children in the proper Hadarian manner.” Voehls said. “There is a majority on the Council of Elders that takes our side in this regard and I must warn you, the petition will pass from our Council with approval.”

Sivana looked at them for a long moment. “Truly.” She said.

“Unless you and the Queen agree to have them returned to Hadaria and be schooled properly yes. The dragons will not be allowed to accompany Retta and Calyb, and they, with Siara must attend the Hadarian Elder Ministry. As did your Aunt’s children.”

“And why exactly would we subject our children to that archaic foolishness?” Sivana asked.

“It is not foolishness!” Buonau shouted coming to her feet. “It is our history. Our tradition!”

“It is foolishness!” Sivana barked right back at her. “What is taught there is so out of date and useless off of our own planet we may as well be putting signs on our people that say kick me for I am stupid!”

“How dare you!” Okein roared coming to his feet.

“I dare alright!” Sivana snapped. “Have you never wondered why the Universities not influenced by the Hadarian Elder Ministry are so overcrowded and packed with students willing to learn? The only ones who seem to think it is useful anymore or those of you who cling to an archaic set of rules and values and some false sense of power that you hope will one day return. Thank the gods you have no say in the government any longer!”

“Outbursts like that do nothing to further our indulgence of you and your sister!” Voehls barked.

Sivana met his eyes with a smile and held up her hand. “Give me one moment please.” She said. She moved around the corner of her desk and activated her communications panel with three quick touches of her fingers. Buonau, Okein and Voehls watched as the image of the *Durcumusaan* soldier appeared.

“Lady Sivana?” The man seemed surprised to hear from her.

“Lieutenant Viusen what is your current location please?” Sivana asked.

“Little Siara has just gone into her Music Class Milady.” He answered with a smile. “She was very excited.”

“Lieutenant, please pull Siara from class and take her to the Spaceport.” Sivana spoke seeing the three Elders jerk in reaction to her words and step closer. “The *RELIANT HEALER* is in orbit correct?” The *RELIANT HEALER* was one of the recent *AUTUMN MOON*-Class Attack Frigates and was permanently assigned as Sivana’s ship.

The man nodded. “Always Princess. Milady Sivana... what is going on? Should I contact Belen?”

“I will take care of that Viusen. Tell Siara she is going to spend some extra time with Retta and Mara. She will be thrilled about that. Take her to the *RELIANT HEALER* and then you may depart for Earth and Sparta.” Sivana spoke.

“You will do no such thing!” Okein barked now moving up to the desk. “You will not listen to her Lieutenant Viusen! If you follow her orders I will have you expelled from Hadaria permanently!”

The *Durcumusaan* Spartan shifted his eyes to Okein and snorted. “As if that will hurt my feelings.” He growled. “This place is too tame for my tastes anyway. I do not follow your orders Elder Okein... only the orders of Lady Sivana and Star Commander Belen.”

“You are a member of the Union military Lieutenant!” Okein barked.

“I am a member of the *Durcumusaan* Elder Okein. The Wolves of the Blood. We do not fall under the purview of the regular military. Or you for that matter.” Viusen spoke. “Orders Lady Sivana?”

“You may operate under the *Inveluiner* protocols Lieutenant.” Sivana spoke calmly. “Do not stop until you have Siara safely with her cousins in Sparta. I will insure Lilika greets you when you arrive.”

Viusen nodded. “*Aen forn rota.*” He stated and the transmission ended.

Sivana stood back up and looked at them. “I’m sorry... you were saying something?”

“I will have the Hadarian militia stop them at the spaceport!” Voehls snapped.

“I wouldn’t if I were you.” The new voice spoke from behind them. They all turned and saw Eurin slowly walk into Sivana’s office. “The *Inveluiner*... the Crimson Storm protocols... they authorize use of force in protecting *Durcunusaan* charges. You will not drag the Hadarian Militia into this Okein. None of you will. I forbid it. Most of them would not follow your directives anyway.” Eurin walked fully into the office and stopped by the side of Sivana’s desk.

“Divine One we are only doing what we feel is best for the sake of the Royal Bloodline.” Buonau spoke. “We...”

“Spare me your preposterous drivel Buonau!” Eurin snapped. “The *Inveluiner* protocols mean that Lieutenant Viusen will get Siara safely off Hadaria and he won’t care who he has to hurt in order to accomplish that.”

“We will have the full support of the Elder Council Divine One.” Voehls stated. “The children need to be returned here to Hadaria to be raised in a safe and proper environment.”

“Then by all means Voehls.” Eurin spoke her voice dripping with contempt. “When the full Council does pass that resolution you may send your Council Guard to Earth and Sparta to try and collect Siara and King Leonidas’s children. I’m quite sure they will be welcomed most warmly.”

“We will do just that!” Okein barked. He cut his eyes to Sivana. “You will be presented with the official demand that you and Queen Anja surrender your children to the custody of your Aunt Umbra three days hence. We will also inform you of our decision in regards to the accusations brought against the Queen by Seanna’s mother.”

Sivana smiled sweetly. “Of course. Now if you will excuse the Divine One and I? We actually have work to perform that does not involve stealing other people’s children. I can have my *Durcunusaan* officer show you out if you like?”

“It would be better if you cooperated with us Princess.” Buonau spoke.

“You mean betray my sister!” Sivana snarled and her face twisted into an angry glare. “Betray my sister... the woman who saved me from the blackness I was living? Who showed me the life I could have? You want me to betray that woman?” Sivana stepped up to her. “Since Belen claimed me as his mate, I have discovered that I have developed a rather foul disposition when it comes to those who think to use me for their own nefarious purposes.”

“You... you would allow this man that protects Siara to injure your own people just to spite us?” Buonau gasped.

Sivana smiled. “If you think that is bad, wait until you try and take Anja’s children.”

“Milady...” The male voice said. They turned to look at the tall Spartan who now stood just inside the door. “You called for me Lady Sivana?”

“Yes Trius.” Sivana spoke. “Would you insure the Elders here do not get lost as they leave the building. I’d hate for them to trip over something and injure themselves.”

The *Durcunusaan* soldier grinned. “Of course.” He spoke.

“You... you summoned him?” Voehls spoke. “To escort us out!”

Sivana tapped her temple lightly. “Don’t you just love the ability to Mindvoice? I know I do. Good day Elders! We are quite finished here.”

No more words were spoken as the three of them turned and made their way to the door in a huff. The *Durcunusaan* officer smiled at Sivana and turned to follow them.

Sivana moved to the window and took a deep breath. “Eurin?” She said softly.

Eurin stepped up next to her. “Zaniai contacted me only a short while ago. He was told by an aide that the Elder Council was going to act on your Aunt’s petition even though she had not formally presented it. He wanted me to come and tell you before they did.”

“Eurin... do the Elders hate Anja and I that much.” Sivana asked.

“Anja and you have changed so much in the last two decades Sivana. And done so very quickly. The Elders fear they will lose what little influence they have.” Eurin said. “Even I did not see this coming. They think they can force you and Anja to do things their way.”

“So they have been planning this for some time and only used Umbra’s petition and these trumped up allegations against Anja as a catalyst for their own purposes?” Sivana spoke.

“Whatever is driving Pcillany and your Aunt to do this yes.” Eurin said. “However with these allegations against Anja... now the Elders actually have a point to begin their own power play.”

“They have no actual power Eurin.” Sivana spoke. “They can change nothing that Anja and I have instituted up until now. Can they?”

“No... but their voice does carry weight within the Ruling Ministry.” Eurin spoke. “If they can present their position in a convincing enough manner and sway enough of the Ministry that they are right... that would be a problem. We do not yet know what this supposed evidence is.”

“And we are stuck reacting to their actions for right now.” Sivana said.

Eurin nodded. “We won’t know the full scope of what they intend until they present the evidence that Pcillany supposedly will show them.”

“Why do I get the feeling their decision has already been made Eurin?” Sivana asked looking at her. “Even before Pcillany appears before them.”

Eurin met her gaze. “It is not just you Sivana. I have that same feeling.”

G9 HIGH COVEN LRR TWO HOURS FROM YOCETU THE WILDS

“...not going to be happy with you Esther.” T’lolt spoke with a smile from the right seat of the G9 High Coven Long Range Runner. “Where have you and Tir’ut gotten yourselves to now?”

Esther’s smile was bright but filled with embarrassment. “You have no idea T’lolt.” She spoke. “Part of me is glad it is you coming and not my Blessed Husband.”

T’lolt chuckled even louder. “What have you done now my brother’s wife?” He asked. “And where are you? You are not in the VANGRA that much I can tell.”

“No T’lolt... we are on Yocetu.” Esther said.

“Yocetu? Why would you be on Yocetu?” T’lolt leaned forward. “Esther... what is wrong?”

“We trailed close to the Union border after detecting the Jump Gate explosion.” Esther spoke.

T’lolt nodded. “I was with Cha’talla in the Command Center. There was something about a *TYPE II* Union dragon ship. He knew you would ignore him and go to investigate and that is why he sent me. Now tell me something I am not already aware of.”

“We rescued the elf pilots T’lolt.” Esther spoke quickly. “Gareld was...”

“Gareld!” T’lolt exclaimed. “The same one that...”

Esther nodded. “Yes.” She replied. “We have deduced that he had a hand in sabotaging the ship these pilots were on so that he could capture them.” Esther explained. “We sort of got in the way. The pilots were able to repair their ship enough and we led them here to Yocetu. Gareld attacked once more and the *TYPE II* crashed. The co-pilot was killed but we managed to save the pilot.”

“Why is Gareld after the pilots of the *TYPE II*?” Gareld asked. “Why not just take the ship. It would be worth more in The Wilds, if he doesn’t mind that he will now be hunted for the rest of his life for his actions. The Union will certainly hunt him if he has injured their dragons. If Cha’talla does not reach him first.”

“The *TYPE II* had no dragons on it. Only the two pilots T’lolt. They were returning to Earth.” Esther spoke. “The pilot is a female... an elf of some importance within the Union. Gareld would stand to make a substantial sum of credits if he was able to sell her to his buyers, whoever they may be.”

“Esther... we will reveal ourselves to the Union when Cha’talla feels the time is right.” T’lolt said. “I may not agree with him on this course... I agree with you in regards to that... but he is our leader and he knows best. He has kept us safe for all these years with his actions.”

“I know T’lolt... now however... now we may have no choice.” Esther said.

T’lolt’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”

“We are in the camp bunker on the northern continent T’lolt. Gareld’s men are still here and will no doubt attempt to breach the bunker.”

“Still there?” T’lolt exclaimed. “Why would they be still there? Who have you saved Esther?”

“There is a Bontawillian Low Gravity Frigate in orbit above us. Our VANGRA sustained engine damage on the descent in. Tir’ut says it is very fixable... just not with the parts we have here.” Esther spoke. “Please tell me you are nearby.”

“Two hours.” T’lolt nodded. “How many men on the surface?”

“We don’t know.” Esther replied. “I would think at least thirty to forty. Tir’ut killed an adolescent Bancorik just before nightfall that was about to eat our elf pilot and...”

“What?” T’lolt gasped his small dark eyes wide. “He attacked an adolescent Bancorik by himself? Why in the heavens would he do that? Was he mad? Where is Fash’ka? Is he injured?”

“Tir’ut was injured protecting the elf pilot. He is fine. Three spikes penetrated cleanly through his side. I removed them... he is healed. We...” Esther spoke.

“No elf pilot is worth fighting an adolescent Bancorik alone Esther.” T’lolt said sternly.

“Yes... something that Fash’ka made very clear to him after he helped him to kill it.” Esther spoke. “Somehow... I don’t think it mattered to him. He would have done it anyway. The point is... Fash’ka says the animals, these Bancorik... they are still in a very agitated state and are milling about above us just outside the perimeter fences. We are safe from Gareld’s men... but unable to reach our ship. We would not be able to outrun the frigate regardless. If Gareld is able to chase these creatures away he will begin an assault against the bunker’s main door and then the door to the interior here.”

T’lolt turned to the pilot in the G9. “Increase speed to Point Four.” He ordered. “Inform the others to execute as well. Attack pattern Theta Omicron when we enter the system. We must chase the frigate away and then land!”

“T’lolt... they more than likely have been monitoring our transmission. The Bunker’s COM unit is not secure.” Esther spoke.

“Good... then they can monitor this!” T’lolt snarled. “You have attacked and attempted to bring harm to the Blessed Wife of the Immortal Cha’talla. My brother. When we arrive in...” He turned to the pilot.

“Sixty-eight minutes!”

“When we arrive in sixty-eight minutes mercenary scum... we will blow your ship from the stars and then we will land. The men you leave on the surface we will capture. We will skin them alive while they scream for mercy. Then we will feed them to the predators of that world you are on and watch them die!”

BONTAWILLIAN FRIGATE ORBITING YOCETU

“...anything?” The frigate’s second officer, a Limian mercenary asked.

The Evolli turned from the sensor display. “Nothing. Long range sensors are clear.”

“Then they are shrouded.” The Limian spoke. “And we do not know what type of ship or ships they may have.”

“Can they do what they say?” The Evolli asked.

“This tub is over a hundred years old!” The Limian replied. “We could not stand in a sustained fight against the VANGRA those on the surface were flying! They were able to out fly us and their ship is armed, which we did not expect. We are still conducting repairs from just the three missiles that hit us. Missiles that ship should not have had.”

“They are Immortals...” The Amarian helmsmen turned from his station. “If what that voice said is true and we have attacked this Cha’talla’s Blessed Wife as he said... I have no wish to do battle with them. You know who Cha’talla is?”

“I thought Gareld said he was dead.” The Evolli spoke.

“That is what he told us. He also told us this operation would be easy. Already we have lost two boarding parties and over twenty men on the surface.” The Limian complained.

“This pureblood female that Gareld so desires. If she is Cha’talla’s Blessed Wife as that voice said...” The Amarian began.

“Yes... and I have no wish to die. Contact Sandur and inform him of what we just intercepted. Gareld will listen to him.”

“We hope.” The Evolli spoke.

YOCETU

“When we arrive in sixty-eight minutes mercenary scum... we will blow your ship from the stars and then we will land. The men you leave on the surface we will capture. We will skin them alive while they scream for mercy. Then we will feed them to the predators of that world you are on and watch them die!”

Esther laughed softly as she turned from the communications console and looked at Ja’narie, T’lolt’s voice softly echoing away within the walls. “I do so love T’lolt and his directness.” She spoke.

Ja’narie grinned and nodded her head. “My father jokes that he is even more *ushdui* than Cha’talla at times.” (Crazy)

Esther turned and saw Normya sitting with her back against the pillows on the couch and looking at her with wide eyes. “You have questions and doubts in your eyes Normya Leonidas.” Esther said. “Do not be afraid to voice them.”

“What... what he said?” Normya spoke softly. “He wouldn’t...”

Esther smiled as she moved over to squat next to the couch. “This bunker does not have secure communications yet.” She said. “I was not lying about that. T’lolt was merely attempting to frighten those above us who were undoubtedly monitoring our transmission. We have been lucky so far... perhaps our luck will hold.”

“You did not tell him who I was?” Normya said. “Why?”

“On an open transmission?” Ja’narie spoke now but with that ever present smile on her face. “We may be Immortals... but we are not that crazy. If we would have announced to the sector who you were, every mercenary and pirate scum would have converged on this planet like a pestilence.” Ja’narie looked at her and patted her shoulder. “Tir’ut can not kill them all... no matter how much he would try.”

Esther pulled aside the pant leg and inspected Normya’s wound. She reached up and yanked the depleted patch from her skin and ran her fingers around the edges of where the branch had impaled her thigh. “It is healing nicely.” She said. “Do you have the strength to shift?”

Normya shook her head quickly. “I’m hot.” She spoke.

Esther turned and took a small rectangular device from the table and activated it, running it over Normya’s head and down her body. “You have a slight infection that is producing a mild fever Normya.” She spoke. “A reaction to having a two inch diameter piece of Oklan tree stuck in your leg no doubt. It is not high, but it is sapping your strength.” She removed the red pill from the small pouch on her belt and held it up to her. “Nalufem... it will kill the contamination within twelve hours and curb the fever. At least the fever the infection has caused. Your Coming of Age fever I’m afraid I can’t help with.”

“You know... you know about that?” Normya gasped.

Esther chuckled. “I may be a bio-genetic scientist by schooling... but I’m fairly well versed in the anatomy of many other species. Yes... I know about your Coming of Age fever. I could smell it in your blood last night. It appears you have weathered the worst of it though. How much longer do you have to endure it as it recedes?”

“Another week. Maybe two.” Normya answered. “If my father’s blood wasn’t so pure it would be behind me by now!” She snapped.

“If your father’s blood was not so pure Normya Leonidas... you could very well be dead.” Esther said.

“Yes... well I guess there is that to consider.” She said with a playful smile.

“Take the pill child.” Esther spoke.

Normya took the pill without hesitation and popped it into her mouth. Esther held out the small container of water which she accepted and chased the sour tasting pill down. “Esther... I’m... I’m sorry for reacting the way...”

Esther placed her hand on Normya’s arm. “You need not apologize Normya Leonidas.” She said. “In your position... I probably would have done the same thing. It is forgotten.”

“Where will we go?” Normya asked.

“We’ll take you to Kranek.” Esther told her. “It is our home now. We have built quite a sizeable settlement. Modern yet plain. There you will be able to contact your father and we can arrange for a point to meet him so that you can return to your people.”

Normya looked at her. “Not on Kranek?” She asked.

Esther shook her head with a smile. “No... I’m afraid that is out of the question.” She spoke. “We are still building our settlement Normya. We have remained peaceful to all those who are understanding and realize we mean them no harm. It is why we have been able to build such a strong relationship with the surrounding settlements. While I do not agree with my husband that it is not the right time to reveal ourselves to your father and the Union, I will not go against him. He has almost seven thousand years of life behind him... T’lolt just over half that. They both fought your grandfather on Earth millennia ago Normya. While they detested what Xerxes did in every way... they were Immortals and that is who they were told to fight. Cha’talla does not believe he has done enough to show your father that we are past that part of our history. It is well known that your father is not the most forgiving of individuals, especially when it comes to those who have harmed or attempted to harm those he loves. The Evolli war was the perfect example. As was the Kavalian attack on Gamji.”

Normya nodded. “He is very pig headed and stubborn.” She said with a small smile. “But he is not a bad man Esther.”

Esther shook her head quickly. “Oh no... I don’t believe he is. He is just very protective of what he cares for. And so are we. I’m sure we can arrange a more neutral meeting place away from Kranek to protect ourselves as well as your people.”

“The... the High Coven is on Earth right now.” Normya told her seeing her face come up. “The Empress herself. Yuri. Moran. All of them.”

Esther’s eyes were wide. “What? Why?”

“I take it you don’t have much contact with the Kavalians?” Normya asked.

“*Vith no!*” She exclaimed. “They are savage brutes interested only in conquering and killing. We have avoided them at all costs. Even here in The Wilds they will no doubt assume we are part of Aikiro’s forces and attack us. We don’t need that kind of attention.”

“The Coven brought their dragons to Earth for my brother to train.” Normya blurted.

Esther looked at her. “So the rumors we heard many years ago were true. That they had succeeded in taking several dozen of your beasts from a crashed ship.”

Normya nodded. “Yes. They...” Normya stopped as she realized what she was saying and her eyes flew open wide.

Esther laughed and took her hand. “You need not worry Normya. I will tell no one... and we certainly will not run out and tell the first Kavalians we see. They would just as soon shoot us on sight as listen to us anyway. Cha’talla hates them.”

“I’m sorry.” Normya spoke.

Esther shook her head. “Don’t be. Tell me of yourself.”

“Me?” Normya asked.

“Yes... how did you come to speak our language so fluently?” Esther asked.

“One of my mothers is a pureblood.” Normya said. “Just like you. Two of my sisters are half vampire. All of us speak the ancient vampire language. It comes as easily as our own does.”

“You speak of Isabella?” Esther said.

Normya nodded. “You know her?”

“Oh no! I know of her... not much... but enough to know that Aikiro hates her.” Esther said. “And towards then end, after she defected, so did Veldruk.” Esther looked at her. “One of your mothers? How many mothers do you have child?”

Normya chuckled. “My father has five mates.” She said. “All of us... myself... my brothers and sisters... we do not distinguish who our birth mother is. They are all our mothers as far as we are concerned. And they all speak with a similar voice. Especially when they punished us as children.”

“And your father... he... he loves them all equally?” Esther asked stunned.

Normya nodded. “Oh yes... without hesitation.” She replied.

“I would one day like to meet your father Normya Leonidas.” Esther said. “And your mothers. It would be very interesting to see them...”

The dull echo of an explosion reached their ears and they both looked up as the ground around them shuddered. Esther came to her feet instantly and lifted her wrist.

“Tir’ut! Fash’ka! What is going on?” She demanded as she moved towards the main entrance of the bunker which was three hundred meters further down the tunnel into the mountain. She lifted her dark eyes and could see a large dust cloud rising from the entrance to the bunker that led into the clearing and the landing pad. Esther turned as Ja’narie ran up to her, SA80 in her hands. “Tir’ut!” Esther spat again.

“We... we are occupied mother!” Tir’ut’s voice erupted from the COM link on her wrist, the background noise of SA80 fire easily discernable. “Fash’ka! Left thirty!” There was a pause and then they heard the heavy throated roar of the SA80. “Back to me Fash’ka! I will cover for you!” Tir’ut’s voice echoed once more. “Leave them for the Bancorik brother!”

“Tir’ut! What is happening damn it!” Esther barked again.

“They are breaking through Tir’ut!” Fash’ka’s voice echoed. “I don’t believe they like us very much!”

“Back to the bunker brother! Go! I will cover you! Go now!” Tir’ut’s voice shouted over the roar of weapons fire and the unmistakable sound of the roars they had heard last night.

Esther and Ja’narie looked up and down the corridor as they saw Fash’ka burst from the dust cloud running as if the hounds of Hades were after him. Large though they may have been, Immortals could move very quickly when they wanted too. Right now Fash’ka wanted too.

“Mother! Prepare to close the bunker doors!” Tir’ut’s voice blasted out of the COM at her.

“Tir’ut!” Esther called out.

They watched as Fash’ka skidded to a halt slamming hard into the door, nearly knocking Ja’narie over as he stopped. He turned towards Esther. “The fools!” He hissed. “They used missile cores to penetrate the outer door but they didn’t kill the Bancorik in the surrounding treeline. The moment the dust cleared they rushed the perimeter fence!”

“They are in the tunnel!” Esther almost shouted in disbelief.

Fash’ka scooped both Esther and Ja’narie into his arms when he caught the blurring motion out of the corner of his eye. He pulled them both into the main bunker just as Tir’ut blurred to a halt, skidding along the floor as he fell and slamming into the small table in front of Normya as Fash’ka slammed his hand down on the door controls. Esther turned quickly when the roar pierced her senses and she saw the tooth filled maw rushing down the corridor at breakneck speed. The last sight Esther saw was the door slamming and then the dull thud as the Bancorik slammed it’s head into the combined steel and granite door.

They turned quickly at the banging noise behind them and saw Tir’ut lying on the floor, his head just beneath where Normya still lay on the couch. His slide had taken out two of the table legs and it now rested on his chest as pieces of decorative statues rolled down to the end of the table and fell onto his chest. Fash’ka burst out laughing at the sight and slumped to the floor in a sitting position. It was infectious as first Ja’narie and then Esther began laughing as well. Tir’ut looked up with his dark eyes at Normya’s surprised upside down face as she gazed at him from the couch.

“Forgive me *il kal'daka darthirii*, I am... I am usually much more controlled in my slides across floors.” Tir’ut spoke. “I... I did not mean to disturb you.”

Normya Leonidas gazed down at Tir’ut’s face and could not deny the almost uncanny way his actions just now so reminded her of her father. His laconic attitude and his embarrassed face as he lay there looking up at her. Her emerald eyes took in his features with measured slowness and she found herself strangely drawn to his bronze skin and the small bone spurs that lined his jaw. Normya shook her head quickly, pushing those thoughts from her mind horrified that she had even thought of them.

“Will they be able to breach this door Tir’ut?” Esther asked.

Normya leaned back as Tir’ut shoved the table from his chest and got to his feet slowly, brushing off the dust and dirt. “No mother. It will hold.” He answered.

“Gareld and his men?” Ja’narie asked.

Fash’ka laughed. “They were running away so fast even the Bancorik were confused.” He spoke as he too got to his feet. “I don’t believe I have ever seen a pureblood *shu* his pants before. I thought his cheeks were going to explode when that Bancorik stepped up behind him.” (Shit)

Tir'ut couldn't help laughing at the picture in his head. "Well let's hope he is still running when *ilninuk* T'loft gets here. This trip has been far more exciting than we bargained for." He spoke. "And we ran out of refreshments on the first leg of the journey!"

Normya Leonidas could only sit on that couch and be amazed. None of her training, from her Agoge to Flight School and the Academy. None of that training had ever covered the part where she would be in the company of Immortals.

Immortals who were actually making jokes and laughing like normal men and women.

Normya knew she had entered an entirely different world here, and despite all that had happen so far; the explosion, the attack, the creatures and even Toral's death, even after all that Normya felt completely safe here with these men and women. Almost as if she was among family.

And that frightened her.

SPARTA

DIPLOMATIC ENVOY APARTMENTS

Karun staggered under the third slap from his mother. This one connected solidly enough and with sufficient anger fueled strength to drive him backwards several steps. He did not defend himself, did not react with his own anger at being slapped in front of everyone. Part of him knew he was wrong to have done this in this way... and the other part was stunned that his mother did not know what he had announced. Nor it seemed did anyone else in the room with them now.

"How long?" Jalersi hissed with savage anger. "How long have you known this?"

Karun lifted his head slowly to look at her. He had seen his mother this angry at him only one other time in his life and that had been after he had lied to her about forcing a female to submit to him. He had been sixteen years old, and that had cost him ten lashes from the whip she used to discipline them as they grew.

"Father... father drew me aside the day before we left mother." He replied timidly. "He swore me to secrecy and told me only to announce it when and if we had an audience with the King. I... I thought you knew."

Jalersi spun away from him, her anger seething through her unchecked. "Does your grandfather know?" She demanded. She whirled back around. "Does he know?" She shouted.

"I do not know mother." Karun answered.

Qurot laughed from where he stood. "I guess he is not the man you thought him to be eh?" He barked out.

"Qurot... you are an idiot and a pig!" Jalersi snarled at him. "Open your mouth again and I will cut your foul tongue from between your lips and pin it to your ears!"

Qurot surged forward towards her, his face darkening in anger. "Do not talk to me..."

Karun stepped in front of his mother, a cruel look on his own face now. Only Athani noticed that Pian also moved forward between them, but did so in a much more measured and dangerous way. "One more step Qurot... one more word... and I will end your life this night!"

Qurot glared at him stepping close to him. "Are you so sure boy?" He growled.

"Do you wish to find out?" Karun growled back.

"Enough of this!" Jiss barked stepping forward from the wall. "Step back Commander! Considering her age Jalersi... it's obvious this is something that happened long before Pusintin took you as his mate. Long before you were born."

"He should have told me!" Jalersi barked.

"He did not!" Jiss stated simply. "Creating an issue where there isn't one is foolish. He is under no obligation by our laws to tell you of any children he might have fathered before taking you as his Pridemate. Or any that he might have fathered from other females while he has been mated to you for that matter. You know our laws well enough to understand that."

Jalersi jerked Karun around to face her and he prepared himself for another blow, but instead she reached up and ran her fingers across his cheek affectionately.

"I did not know mother." He said softly looking into her blue eyes.

Jalersi nodded slowly and pulled his head to her chest, embracing him tightly. "I am sorry Karun. I should not be angry with you."

"According to our laws you should not be angry with anyone." Jiss stated evenly.

"Do not preach our laws to me Jiss!" Jalersi barked. "Not now! You and Matuarr may have cost us the opportunity for an embassy here! And a means of intelligence for my father. You openly threatened them... you almost told them we would invade if they do not share what they have."

"It was a risk I'll grant you that... but it worked." Jiss spoke.

"It worked?" Athani asked from the chair she sat in. "Just how do you come to that conclusion?"

"They will not refuse an embassy now." Jiss spoke. "Not after what Karun has revealed. It actually worked out rather well."

"Who are your instructions coming from?" Jalersi demanded. "My father?"

"I don't understand." Jiss said. "What do you mean?"

"My father put me in charge of this delegation Jiss. Not you. I gave you no signal or authorization before hand to act in the manner you did tonight." Jalersi stated. "That tells me you are either in touch with someone now, which is highly unlikely since the Lycavorians monitor every transmission that leaves this planet, or you had different instructions before we left. Now which is it?"

"Jalersi you..."

"Which is it Jiss?" She spat.

"I was told to insure that Kavalian interests were not compromised and if the opportunity arose that I should put added pressure on them. More than what you were authorized to use." Jalersi spoke. "Matuarr and I both received this same instruction."

"From my father?" Jalersi asked.

Jiss shook his head. "The who is not important right now." He stated. "Only the result. They can not deny us an embassy after telling us it would be ratified by the end of the week. It would be a purely vindictive move and leave us with far too much bargaining power. If the King does not know that, his advisors will tell him."

"Karun what were your instructions from your father in regards to this Lisisa?" Matuarr asked now.

"Get close to her. Get as much information about dragons as I could from her. And try to turn her against the King in some manner." Karun replied turning to look at him.

Jiss nodded. "This could very well work much better than we had hoped." He said. "You all saw the look from his mother. From the Prime Minister. Neither of them were aware of this information... and it stands to reason neither were his Queens. We can use that against them."

Athani snorted loudly. "You will try to turn the Queens and his mother against him?" She chortled. "I thought you were one of the wisest of our Legislatures Jiss? What kind of fool plan is that?"

"Be silent woman!" Qurot barked.

"Shut up Qurot!" Jalersi snapped. "What do you mean Athani?"

"We... you will never turn the Queens or his mother against him." Athani spoke getting to her feet. "They have been through too much already together. This... information that Karun has revealed... it will only serve to cause mild confusion at first. Did none of you notice the look on King Leonidas's face when Karun spoke? He knew. He knew this would happen. No doubt he and his Queens have already planned for it in some fashion."

Jiss looked at her. "You seem to be much more attuned to these dogs than the rest of us Athani'Puat. Why is that?"

Athani met his eyes evenly. "Because I have listened and I have watched. Something no one else in this room apparently has done. And you have played right into their hands by your actions and words tonight! Whatever trust and cooperation we have managed to build in the last few days, you have just tossed aside. You have only shown them what they already suspected. That we are not here for trade."

"Bah! You know not what you speak!" Jiss dismissed her. "Matuarr and I have been doing this far longer than you woman! Do not stand there and think to tell us what we have done or not done! You may be the Prefect's daughter... but you are not outside our laws."

"Enough!" Jalersi barked. "Athani step back... he is right."

Athani looked at her, blue/green eyes alive with anger. "Jalersi... we..."

“Please Athani.” Jalersi spoke.

Athani huffed and stepped back. “Fine. Since it is obvious my council is neither wanted nor needed I will retire to my room. All of you apparently have a different agenda you wish to follow.”

“I will escort you.” Qurot spoke.

“I don’t need your escort Qurot!” Athani snapped.

“But you will get it nonetheless.” He snarled.

Athani shook her head in disgust and moved for the door.

“What do we do now Jiss?” Jalersi asked.

Jiss turned to face her. “We wait and see what they do.” He replied. “If they are wise... they will finish the deal we have brokered tomorrow as expected. Then it is just two more days until they ratify the embassy. Once that is done... we can move into our new facility whether it be here in Sparta or Eden City the capital. It does not matter.”

“And then?”

“The security force your father is sending should arrive tomorrow sometime.” Matuarr spoke now. “Once the embassy deal is ratified we can turn them loose to discover intelligence on the High Coven.”

“They will not be allowed anywhere near where the High Coven is staying.” Karun spoke. “And their appearance will be noticed. Our species does tend to stick out.”

Jiss smiled. “Your father is sending six of our clone officers.” He spoke. “They are the oldest of the new clones. Superbly trained and normal in appearance. They will blend in just fine.”

“And once the embassy is ratified... we can begin making waves about Karun’s sister.” Matuarr spoke.

“What do you mean?” Jalersi asked.

“She is Pusintin’s daughter. Karun’s sister. By that virtue alone she is a citizen of the Kavalian Empire.” Matuarr spoke. “And if we act in the proper manner... she will be subject to Kavalian law as well. And as a female of the KFI, anything she possesses will become subject to Kavalian law and custom. Including the dragon she rides.” Matuarr smiled. “Yes... this may have worked out very well in our favor after all.”

“That is if she will even agree to meet with me.” Karun stated.

“She will meet with you.” Jiss spoke evenly. “Even if we have to force her to meet with you. With your permission Jalersi... I would like to use the secure transmitter to confirm what I am relatively sure we would be able to do. And with you father’s permission we will use the Union’s own laws against them.”

Jalersi nodded slowly. “I will speak with him when you are finished.” She stated waving her hand toward the small communications room. “And then I wish to be alone with my son.”

“I will enjoy taking you Athani.” Qurot hissed as he followed her into the apartment. Athani ignored him as she reached out within Mindvoice trying to feel for Resumar. She wanted to tell him she knew nothing of what had happened this night. She had not felt him at all after leaving the Royal Villa and that frightened her. She did not realize he was still there until he snatched her arm and spun her around. “Did you hear me woman!”

Athani tried to push back away from him but he held her arms tightly and squeezed even harder. “You escorted me Qurot! Now you will leave!” She demanded.

“Why do you resist me?” He spoke with a humorous chuckle. “Your father has given you to me. I could take you now if I wanted... as long as I did not mark you.”

“Release me Qurot!” Athani hissed. “You are drunk on Spartan Wine!”

“And excellent stuff it was! Being among our enemies has filled me with vigor!” Qurot growled. “Tell me... are you trying to tease me? Why else would you have purchased such clothing! To tease your future mate perhaps!”

“You are not my mate!” Athani snapped. “You will never be my mate! I don’t care what the laws of our people say! You disgust me!”

Qurot laughed cruelly. “You don’t need to like me Athani!” He sneered at her. “You just need to submit to me whenever I demand it! And once I rid you of that tail... I can assure you... you will spend long periods of time feeling me within you and locked together at our groins! Perhaps I will take a taste of your charms now. I would be well within my rights as long as I don’t mark you! I wouldn’t want to anger your father now!”

Athani's blue/green eyes flared and she brought tail whipping around her shoulder. Though it didn't look like much, appearing thin and cumbersome, Athani's tail was extremely strong and dexterous. She had spent hours and days training with it, making it stronger and using it as an extension of her will. The smooth, tapered end slapped into the side of Qurot's head with the force of a club. His head snapped back and he released her arms as he seized his head in pain and tottered back several steps. Athani knew she could not fight him effectively dressed as she was but she would die before allowing anyone but Resumar to touch her now. She dropped into as balanced a defensive form as she could, her tail poised to strike out again as Qurot looked up at her a thin trickle of blood running down the side of his furry face. The end of her tail had struck with such force it had actually broken the skin beneath the protective layer of fur and that surprised Athani.

Qurot reached up and touched the side of his head with his fingers and pulled them back looking at his blood. He looked at her wide eyed and he smiled. "Well at least you won't surrender to me without a fight!" He laughed. "I like that!"

"I won't surrender to you at all!" Athani hissed.

"QUROT!" The voice bellowed.

They both turned to see Pian standing in the doorway of Athani's apartment still in his uniform. Qurot looked at him and grinned. "Pian! Good! This female struck me! She has been promised to me by her father and she struck me! Drew blood too!"

Pian stepped into the apartment fully now. He held up the small bag that Athani had carried through the evening. "Jalersi asked that I return this to you Athani." He stated. "And Jiss has asked that you join us downstairs Qurot."

"What for?" Qurot asked.

"I did not ask him." Pian replied. "We should go."

Qurot looked at him but found that Pian was not going to leave without him. He had no desire to press this further in Pian's presence and he turned back to Athani. "We will continue this later my mate!" He barked. "I suggest you prepare yourself."

Athani waited until the door closed behind him and then she insured it was securely locked with a new entry code she had devised, stabbing the code into the panel, her heart racing in fear and anger.

[Resumar!] Athani blurted within Mindvoice. [Please answer me! I... I need to hear your voice! I...]

"I'm right here." His voice spoke gently but very much out loud and Athani turned quickly to face the balcony as he stepped into the apartment from the opened aired patio. Athani felt the tremors from Cemath as he lifted away once more and she crossed the room to him without hesitation.

Athani stopped when she saw the look of concern and worry on his face. "You were not answering me." She spoke softly. "I didn't know what was..."

"Just tell me you did not know about this Athani." He spoke looking at her as he moved closer. Athani didn't back away from him as he stopped inches from her looking down into her face. "Tell me what you make me feel is real and not some mistake. Tell me this is not all some game that we should stop right now."

"It is as real as what you make me feel." She said without hesitation. "Tell me what you want me to do to prove this to you. I will do anything you ask of me Resumar. I will..." His arms lifted her up and his lips came down on hers and Athani surrendered to his kiss with a whimper of delight. Her arms went around his broad shoulders and her tail curled around his waist as she returned his fiery kiss with all that she was. It was the most incredible kiss he had given her up until this point and as his aura surrounded her Athani felt her nerves and body come alive with indescribable feelings and sensations.

Athani's eyes opened languorously when she felt his lips slowly pull away from hers, pausing to nibble gently on her bottom lip. She brought her hand up and placed it against his cheek, feeling the scuff of his facial hair and his strong jaw. She bit her bottom lip as she trailed her long index finger down the ridge of his elven ear, watching as his dark eyes closed and an imperceptible shudder went through him, feeling his powerful arms pull her tighter.

"Resumar... I knew nothing about what Karun was going to do! Please believe me! None of us did! You must..." She said softly watching as his eyes opened and he gazed at her.

"No." He spoke interrupting her words. "You do not need to explain anything to me."

"Resumar... Resumar tell me we can make this work." Athani said tightening her grip on him suspended in his arms as she was.

“Is it what you desire *Aryschanne*?” He asked her.

Athani nodded instantly. “More than anything.”

“Then we will make this work.” He answered calmly. “I need one more day to arrange everything *Aryschanne*. One more day and we will not need to be apart after that.”

“And tonight?” She asked with a seductive tone in her voice.

Resumar looked at her. “Tonight I just want to hold you in my arms.” He said. “If that is acceptable to you?”

Athani’s blue/green eyes were bright and beautiful and she kissed him deeply as she nodded her head.

“That... that is very acceptable to me Resumar Leonidas.” She said finally. “Very acceptable to me indeed.”

SODRAG

“...her brother?” Eliani stated incredulously.

“Andro... is that... is that like a joke?” Arrarn gasped. “If it is... it ain’t *nubous* funny brother.”

They were in the small, secure briefing room, Andro standing at one end of the table and looking at his brothers and sisters as well as Moneus and Nyla.

Andro shook his head slowly, looking to where Sadi sat at the table directly to his left. “It’s no joke.” He said softly. “I wish it was.”

“Andro... how?” Eliani asked as Nyla grasped her hand tightly.

“Father has known since they rescued her from Lycavore.” Andro spoke settling into the chair. “Our mothers a few years less.”

“And he never told her?” Eliani gasped.

“Tell her what Eliani?” Carina spoke now. “That her father is a traitor to his own people? That he has killed hundreds if not thousands of his people? That he almost killed grandmother that day in Sparta? After nearly five hundred years of being a slave and plaything for the High Coven and thinking all that time the man who came for her was her father. Our father.”

“That would have broken her.” Zarah spoke softly.

“Regardless of his reasons... father did not tell her.” Andro said. “I for one agree with him. Mother contacted me very briefly as I was coming here to meet with you. Lisisa and Deni will be landing in about an hour. It’s late in Sparta so father intends to tell her in the morning.”

“How did this happen?” Nyla asked now.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “I don’t know the whole story... I don’t really care to be honest. Lisisa is our sister... and that will not change for me. It appears Pusintin... or Pleistarchus, whatever you want to call him... he was on Earth roughly two months before the comet came. He raped Yuri and she thought it was father. When she became pregnant with Lisisa it only confirmed to her that it was father. She still believed they had killed Pleistarchus many years before.”

Eliani nodded slowly. “There would be no way to tell without a Fractal DNA Splicing Sequencer Scan.” She said. “Father’s blood is too pure... and apparently so is our uncle’s. A normal DNA test would not have revealed it.”

“And this is why Yuri has hated your father for so long my love?” Sadi asked leaning forward.

Andro nodded. “At least one of the major reasons.” He leaned back in the chair shaking his head. “She and Aikiro think they have a time bomb waiting to drop with that tidbit of information. They are in for a surprise I think.”

“Wait! You think they were going to use that against Uncle Martin somehow?” Moneus asked.

“It fits their pattern.” Arrarn spoke with a nod. “Sow confusion within the enemy ranks. The first lesson during our Agoge Training Moneus.”

“But no one would believe Uncle Martin raped Yuri.” Moneus spat.

“No... but it would still draw attention from what they are really here for.” Arrarn spoke. “And I think we all know that to be true.”

“Aikiro and Yuri... her children... perhaps.” Andro spoke. “Not the riders and dragons. Not now. Their bonds have changed them. Changed them before they even came here. The majority of them anyway. I know all

of you can sense the desire to learn in them. They have been here three days and already they are beginning to open up and accept that they could be more. And many of them are beginning to see we are not the enemy any longer. Arrarn... *KertaGai*... what about the pilots?"

Arrarn met his eyes evenly. "Rough around the edges... but very teachable." He said immediately. "All of them have the desire to be the best. Some aren't too happy they will be flying a DT; they think they belong in a fighter. That will change when we begin to fly I think. Sadi?"

Sadi nodded. "I agree. Once they see what one can do, they'll change their tune very quickly I think."

"Andro... do you think this is some sort of play by the Kavalians?" Zarah asked. "To get a dragon maybe?"

Andro looked at her wide eyed. "Zarah... I... I never thought of that!" He gasped.

"Lisisa and Jeth are second only to you and father Andro." Zarah continued. "If this is some sort of ploy to get her to come over to their side. Turn her against us."

"No!" Carina stated. "A ploy to gain knowledge on dragons I believe, but they could never turn Lisisa against us! She is *our* sister! I don't care what this idiot Karun says. She has been our sister since all of us were born! She has been there for us... do any of you actually believe she would turn on us in some way? No... I agree with Andro."

"I didn't say it was something she would do Carina. Lisisa would never betray any of us, and I too believe as Andro and you." Zarah spoke. "But what if that is what the Kavalians are hoping to accomplish in some fashion. We all know how they treat females of their own species."

Eliani laughed. "Let them try some *sibfla* like that with Lisisa!" She stated. "She'll drop the first one to even blink at her funny."

"There is something else you all should know." Andro spoke leaning forward. "It will come out eventually now, probably sooner rather than later. But it is something you need to know now."

"Why do I get the feeling you are about to drop a big old bomb on us big brother?" Zarah asked.

"Bigger than this last one?" Arrarn spoke. "No way!"

"Denali and Lisisa have been together for the last three years." Andro spoke seeing their faces run the myriad of emotions to what he just said and then end up just showing their stunned shock.

"Wait... when you say together..." Eliani spoke finally leaning forward. "You mean together... together. As in..."

Andro nodded. "Yes. They are very much in love."

"Well dip me in *sibfla* and call me stinky!" Arrarn exclaimed from his chair.

"This is not some random act or matter of exploration on either of their parts. It is the reason that neither of them has ever been seen with someone else. They have not wanted or needed someone else." Andro spoke. "Helen and I have known for the last two years... and it is part of the reason I have kept them together on the *SCIMITAR*. So that they could fully cultivate what they have and it has only grown stronger. They told grandmother Gorgo the day of the State Dinner, and were planning on revealing it to everyone soon. They did not know how any of you would act or how you would think of them. Or how our parents will deal with this knowledge. It has been a cause of some concern of theirs since they discovered what they have is not just a passing fancy."

"Damn Andro... when you say you got something important to tell us... you don't jerk around do you?" Moneus declared.

Eliani shook her head. "I knew it!" She spoke. "I *should* have known it!" She corrected herself getting to her feet. "When she began asking for a larger supply of cloned blood to be kept on the *SCIMITAR*. And then when I found the three bottles in Deni's refrigerator. I thought he was seeing that pureblood from Engineering and all along it's been Lisisa. She was taking the blood to hide Deni's scent after they were together."

"That is why their quarters and apartments are next to each other. Why Lisisa sold her villa and bought one closer to Deni's in Gytheio. Why they took the bungalows furthest away from the Quad." Carina gasped. "So they could be close to each other."

Zarah smiled from her chair next to Moneus. "That's very romantic." She stated softly. "I think they make the perfect couple."

Andro nodded. "They were worried how all of us would think." He said looking at his brothers and sisters.

“Andro... this was commonplace in old Sparta.” Nyla spoke now. “In some respects it still is today. Dilios’s son is mated to his first cousin. I know of several other instances here on Earth. Your own grandparents were related. In many respects... your father and mothers... all of us... we have remained true to the culture of old Sparta even now. Because of that... this information does not shock us as much as others might think.”

“That is why they finally went to grandmother Gorgo.” Andro said. “She knew what they were experiencing and she would understand.”

“I don’t know how they do it?” Arrarn spoke. “When I look at Eliani...” Arrarn shuddered. “Eewwww!”

Eliani rolled her eyes at him. “Well you don’t actually get my blood to simmering either brother.” She snapped.

“Now... Carina on the other hand... I look at her and think yummy!” Arrarn said leaning towards her and batting his eyes!

Carina shoved him away. “Pervert!” She exclaimed with a laugh. “Get away you pervert!”

Andro smiled at his siblings antics and shook his head. “I take it this knowledge does not upset any of you.” He said.

Arrarn winked at Carina before leaning forward. “Listen... I am not going to look at her any differently because she and Deni are in love. And certainly not because of whom her parents are. Am I surprised? Yes... I’m floored. Does it change anything about how I feel about her and Deni? Hell no! She is still my sister as Carina said. She is still our sister, and that will not change. The same blood flows in all of us Andro. We have to accept that our uncle is a backstabbing bastard and traitor to his own people... but that does not mean that Lisisa shares those traits because she is of his blood. And Lisisa has said more than once her life did not begin until father found her. Well... this is her life. We are her life.”

“*Aovi*.” Eliani spoke looking at Andro. “Once in a while he does make some sense. Not often mind you... but once in a while.”

“We should increase our perimeter security Andro.” Moneus spoke. “If what Zarah says is even a remote possibility then we should plan for it.”

Andro nodded. “Agreed. Father has routed all Priority COMS to me here for the next twenty-four hours until he and our mothers can get a handle on things in Sparta. We knew the Kavalians were here for more than this ridiculous trade thing, and apparently they said some things during the dinner that only confirmed that. The *Feravomir* and Elder Mother will be here for the remainder of the day and probably into the evening as well observing the riders and dragons. Zarah... you ready to begin tomorrow?”

Zarah nodded. “All set.” She said.

“I think it’s safe to assume they have had extensive hand-to-hand training, so skip the basic skills and move right to the advanced.” Andro said seeing Zarah nod. “Carina and I will be in OPS going over training and covering any COMS that come in.”

“Nyla and I have our shift on Staff Duty beginning in an hour.” Eliani spoke. “We’ll be in the Command Center.”

“Arrarn... I’ll leave you and Sadi to continue your training of the pilots.” Andro spoke. “I don’t know when Lisisa and Denali will return but let’s plan for them to be gone for at least a couple days and adjust. I will contact Uncle Isra and see if he can fill in for Deni, at least short term.”

“Andro... what about when they come back?” Carina asked.

Andro met her eyes. “Considering how we all feel... I would think we act as if nothing has changed. Which in our opinions it hasn’t. Is that the general consensus?” He saw them nod their heads quickly. “That is our answer then.” He spoke getting to his feet. “Let’s get to work.”

YOCETU

They heard the explosions within the tunnel, as well as the roars of the Bancorik, dulled as they were through the thick metal and concrete.

“What’s going on?” Esther asked.

Fash’ka shook his head as he leveled the SA80 at the door. “The Bancorik destroyed the cameras in the tunnels mother.” He stated. “There is no way for us to know.”

“*Xsa!*” Esther spat as she hefted the SA80. “I thought T’lolt would be here by now!” (Damn)

Normya sat up on the couch just as Tir’ut appeared next to her like a shadow. He held out her K12 KM. “Your weapon *Il kal’daka darthirii.*” He spoke. “It is not damaged and I cleaned it for you. If it is Bancorik outside the door, do not waste your ammunition. I will protect you as much as I am able... even your KM rounds will not penetrate their skin. Wait as long as you can but if I fall... then use it on yourself. You do not wish to be eaten by one of these creatures I assure you.”

“We... we can’t run?” Normya gasped as she took the K12.

Tir’ut shook his head. “We did not make these bunkers with alternate exits. They were never intended to be used for defense. Only shelter at night against the predators of this planet.” He spoke softly gazing at her beautiful face.

There was a soft clicking sound and Fash’ka turned his head. “Someone is accessing the controls on the other side!” He snapped backing away from the door slightly.

Tir’ut turned quickly and lifted his SA80. “Gareld’s men!” He barked dropping to one knee in front of Normya, his bulk effectively shielding her. “Stand ready! Them we can fight!”

The seconds ticked by and then the seals on the door hissed. Esther dropped behind a flimsy table she had flipped over, while Ja’narie stood slightly behind her, half shielded by the doorway. Fash’ka was closest to the massive door as it opened, in the doorway of the small medical room. His dark eyes fell upon the bodies of at least three Adolescent Bancoriks littering the tunnel. Two of them looked as if they had eaten plasma grenades, as their midsections were completely blown open and shredded. A smile spread across his face then. It was the first and most effective way he and his tribe had learned to kill these beasts. Get them to ingest grenades pushed into huge chunks of meat. As the door opened completely Fash’ka’s face became very animated as he saw his uncle standing in the center of the tunnel, tall and proud. A dozen other Immortals of their tribe were spread out covering the tunnel in all directions.

“T’lolt!” Esther almost screamed, dropping the SA80 and letting it dangle on the quick release straps as she moved forward and threw herself into the Immortal’s arms.

The Immortals kneeling around T’lolt could only smile and shake their heads. All of them had long ago grown used to their matriarch tribe mother and her outbursts of emotion. T’lolt hugged his brother’s Blessed Wife quickly and then set her down on the floor of the tunnel.

“*Du’ased dalniril...* I see now why my brother has sleepless nights!” T’lolt spoke with a grin that exposed his vampiric fangs. (Blessed sister)

Esther kissed his rough cheek with a smile. “Gareld’s ship in orbit?” She asked quickly.

“Retreating quickly as we approached.” T’lolt answered. “One G9 they could have handled, but when all three of us de-shrouded they ran like *tahta dalharen.*” (Scared children)

“He’ll be back!” Esther stated.

T’lolt nodded. “This is why I suggest we leave quickly.” He said.

Esther nodded. “There is a body in the medical room. We must take that with us.” She ordered.

T’lolt motioned to two of his men and they moved forward even as Ja’narie came out of the bunker slinging several bags over her shoulders and handing two to Fash’ka. He turned back to Esther, still holding one of her hands. “Now tell me why you could not leave this elf pilot behind Esther.” He spoke. “The risks you have taken will...” He looked up when he saw the huge bulk of his nephew fill the doorway to the bunker. His eyes grew even wider when he saw the long, platinum blond hair and emerald green eyes of the petite elven female in Tir’ut’s arms. Emerald eyes that were bright and full of defiance, even as her hand clutched the K12 in her lap, her other arm draped over Tir’ut’s broad shoulders, her fingers hooked within the cloth of the shirt he wore.

“*Xal l’athiyks d’l’phraktos lor phor udossa.*” T’lolt muttered as he stepped around Esther to stand in front of Tir’ut. (May the spirits of the gods preserve us.)

“Yes... we said the same thing.” Esther spoke.

T’lolt’s eyes went from Normya to Tir’ut’s face. “This is...”

Tir’ut nodded. “*Il kal’daka darthirii...* this is my *ilninuk* T’lolt. My father’s *dalninuk.*” (Uncle. Brother)

Normya nodded her head slightly at T’lolt. “*Vendui.*” (Hello)

T’lolt’s eyes grew even wider. “*Il telanth udossta xanalress!*” He said in surprise. (She speaks our language)

“Yes I do.” Normya snapped. “Quite well in fact!”

T'lolt laughed. "Oh... she is spirited!" He spoke. "I would expect no less from a *dalharil* of Leonidas!" He turned and looked at Esther. "Now... now I understand why you did not let that *vith'rell nadorhuan* Gareld have her!" (Fucking Coward) He turned back to look at Normya, his eyes drifting down to Tir'ut's side where he saw the blood stains. "Vil'thm... take her... Tir'ut is injured."

Normya's grip on Tir'ut's shoulder tightened considerably. "No!" She barked causing T'lolt's eyes to narrow somewhat..

"I am fine *ilninuk*." Tir'ut said quickly. "I will carry *Il kal'daka darthirii*."

T'lolt looked at Normya's face and the set of her jaw. He also noticed how tightly she held to Tir'ut's shirt as well as the K12 in her small hand. He stepped closer and his face softened if that was possible for an Immortal. Normya watched him reach down and pull something from his leg. Her eyes grew wide when he lifted the *Nehtes* into view and T'lolt extended the spear in a single blink with his thumb. He turned his face back up and saw the look in Normya's emerald eyes.

"A man saved my life many years ago. A Lycavorian. He told me he did not hate my people. Only what we stood for. He gave me blood to heal my wounds. He sprayed his scent around the bodies of my dead sons to keep animals from their remains. He gave me the time to heal and honor my fallen sons Normya Leonidas." T'lolt spoke.

"How... how do you know my first name?" Normya gasped.

T'lolt smiled. "That man was your father." He spoke softly. "He left this for me in a survival pack since I was weaponless. I have carried this very weapon since that day... I have carried it in the hopes that one day I would be able to return the favor and the life he granted me that day." T'lolt collapsed the *Nehtes*. "I have lived... we have lived with the honor your father showed me that day Normya Leonidas. And now the gods have granted me the opportunity to return that gift to your father." He looked quickly at Tir'ut and then back to her. "It appears my nephew has already *yvalm uktan wun xukuth* to you, daughter of Leonidas and I will do the same." Normya's head turned and she looked at Tir'ut's face, which remained impassive. She turned quickly back to T'lolt. "While I live... no harm will come to you she-wolf elf and daughter to Martin Leonidas. If by chance they manage to get past your *Quortek S'argt* here then they will face me and my clan. And if they face my clan... they face our tribe and my brother Cha'talla." (Bound himself in heart)(Soul Guardian)

T'lolt saw his men bringing the wrapped body on the makeshift stretcher between them. He looked at Esther and nodded.

"The *Il kal'daka darthirii* remains with Tir'ut!" He barked. "She is to be protected at the cost of our lives!" Normya saw the Immortals nod their heads without hesitation. T'lolt turned back to her and smiled. "Now I suggest we leave this place before those who would do us harm return."

"Yes please!" Fash'ka snapped. "Before my brother decides to kill anymore Bancorik by himself."

T'lolt laughed heartily. "Yes... that will take a bit of explaining to your father boy." He spoke. He looked at Normya for a long moment then at Esther. "Though I believe he will understand completely. You and your father share..."

Esther grabbed T'lolt's arm. "Let us go T'lolt!" She spoke quickly before he finished his sentence.

T'lolt grinned ever wider and nodded. "I wish to be there when Cha'talla sees what we have brought him." He spoke beginning to walk. "I do believe my brother will surprised."

Ja'narie chuckled as she passed Tir'ut and Normya. "Surprised is not a word I would use." She said.

"Nor would I." Tir'ut said softly as he followed.

SODRAG

The Command Center for the Southern Dragon Base was a large two level room, a glass star chart wall separating the upper level from the lower level. The upper level held four offices along the ring, with a large conference table and tables outside the offices. There were two entrances to the conference room, on either end. The lower portion held three rows of techs and other Union personnel that monitored all activity for the southern hemisphere of the planet as well as serve as an alternate command center for the main one in Sparta. They received the same reports and transmissions and like now, there were times when everything was routed

through them. There was always a senior officer present in the CC, and when any members of *Mjolnir's Hand* or the *Durcunusaan* were present in significant number, they all took shifts in the Center.

Eliani and Nyla were sitting at the large table in the upper level, both of them working on reports and going through files. Nyla still commanded a *Durcunusaan* Team, and they deployed with her whenever she accompanied Eliani. Her eleven member team had been with her for two years now, and they relished the opportunity to travel, no matter where it took them. All of them were aware of their commander's relationship with Princess Eliani, and this usually saw them go to many different places and planets which suited them just fine since all of them were single and hated being in one spot for too long. Nyla still had fitness reports to do, and that is what she was occupying herself with while Eliani looked over medical files of all the Coven Riders and *Durcunusaan* that were attached to helping them conduct the training.

Nyla looked up when she saw Eliani sit up in her chair quickly and reach across the table for another data pad. She watched as she put the pads side-by-side and her fern green eyes narrowed.

"*Ussta Che*? What is it?" Nyla asked.

Eliani looked at her. "Malic." She said softly.

Nyla looked around quickly, her own light green eyes searching for the man they both so wanted. "Where?"

"No... Nyla." Eliani spoke sliding her chair closer to her. "Look." She held out the first data pad. "These are his medical records since entering his Agoge. In all areas since he began his Agoge... Category Sevens. Heart rate. Pulse rate. Cardiovascular. Vital functions. All Category Seven."

Nyla nodded. "Yes... so you picked the perfect specimen of a man for us *Ussta Che*. I'm not seeing the problem here." She said with a smile.

"He barely felt it when that Coven idiot stabbed him." Eliani said. "The blade penetrated three centimeters into his upper arm Nyla. I saw his face... he almost didn't register that. It didn't sit well with me so I requested his medical records from Apo Prime, from when he was born."

Nyla looked at her. "*Ussta Che*... medical records are sealed by the parents once they enter their Agoge training."

Eliani nodded. "I know. I... I sort of called in a favor."

"Eliani... if your mother finds out you did this she will be furious!" Nyla said.

"She won't find out!" Eliani said quickly and held out the second pad. "Nyla... he was born with Nomatel Syndrome."

Nyla took the pad. "Nomatel Syndrome? Impossible. Look at him Eliani... he's over six feet tall... he has muscles everywhere. Exquisitely defined muscles I might add. Not to mention what you felt when you..." Nyla turned her eyes to the pad and stopped talking as she read.

"He was born with Nomatel Syndrome." Eliani spoke as she got to her feet. "Two point three pounds when he was born. Faulty lung function, two bad valves in his heart and his kidneys were not fully developed."

Nyla was by no means a doctor, an excellent field medic perhaps, but no where near the skill of Eliani or her mother or Anuk who she spent the most time around. The last four years sharing Eliani's life and bed had given her an insight into medical matters that not many people who were not within the field had however.

"*Ussta Che*... Nomatel Syndrome... even if he survived the first year... there is no way he could have grown into what he is now."

Eliani nodded. "All the known treatments we have would have stunted his growth to the extreme." She said.

"Then how?"

"There's only one way that I know of... and its use was outlawed four hundred years ago." Eliani said. "Before Malic was born."

Nyla looked at her. "I didn't realize there was a treatment." She said.

Eliani nodded. "It was experimental at the time it was developed. Peteracal. Basically it was similar to a compound known as a steroid in the early 21st century here on earth. It attacked the Nomatel compounds in the host and destroyed them while increasing the normal growth hormones and bodily functions by a factor of three. Eurin finally had it outlawed when it was discovered it was responsible for decreased brain function with extended use. It would kill the outlying nerves in the hosts body and degenerate higher brain functions."

Nyla leaned back in her chair. “Malic is not stupid *Ussta Che*.” She stated. “He may have gotten this far on his physical merits yes... but you can not be stupid or have some sort of brain dysfunction and make it to the rank of Enomotarch.”

Eliani shook her head. “I know that aur enyla.” She said.

“Then how?” Nyla asked.

“If they stopped giving him Peteracal after say three or four years. It would have reversed the effects of the Nomatel Syndrome completely by then and it would have begun his body on the superior level of growth that he has reached now. You saw his grades in school and during his time at the academy Nyla.” Eliani said.

“He flunked out of the academy *Ussta Che*.” Nyla spoke. “He was not able to pass Astromechanics and...” Nyla stopped talking once more. “Advanced classes.” She said softly. “He could pass none of his advanced classes.”

Eliani nodded. “Classic signs of Peteracal use.” She said. “Not to mention the fact that he practically didn’t feel the blade stab him. I would also hazard a guess and say that is why he has had no luck with women.”

“What do you mean?”

“As large as we think he is... he should have had a mate a long time ago Nyla.” Eliani spoke. “He doesn’t because he can’t feel. Because he can’t feel... he exerts more force. Then he only ends up turning his partner off because they think he’s only out for himself... or because he hurts them. I doubt he is even aware of it.”

“His father is an Admiral Eliani.” Nyla said. “He wouldn’t risk his career over...”

“He wasn’t an Admiral when Malic was born.” Eliani stated. “All of his older brothers are fleet officers with exemplary records. All of them finished tops in their class at the fleet academy.” Eliani said. “Two of his three sisters are professors at the Tuya University. The third is a teacher... but I don’t know of what. There is not much known about her in his file. His father finished in the top three of his academy class and his mother is a senior liaison with the Apo Prime Senate”

“What are you saying?” Nyla asked.

“I’m saying that... I think his parents knew exactly what they were doing Nyla.” Eliani spoke. “Given what I have discovered... I think they were ashamed of Malic. Their other children were all exceptionally intelligent and supremely healthy when they were born. They fit in with the class of people they associated themselves with. I think they allowed him to have the Peteracal treatments so he would not embarrass them.”

Nyla looked at her. “That is a big reach *Ussta Che*.” She spoke. “We don’t know what kind of relationship Malic has with his parents and siblings. We...”

They both looked up when the clear glass door opened and the Senior Lieutenant stepped slowly into the room. “Pardon me Princess... Commander...”

Nyla looked at him and shook her head. “It is no problem Lieutenant.” She spoke. “What is it?”

“I have a situation I think. I have an Admiral Megdar of the 32nd Expeditionary Fleet Group on the COM. He is demanding to speak with his son, but his son has refused further communications from him or his mother. He had that entered into the log and everything.” He spoke coming forward.

“Who are we talking about Lieutenant?” Eliani asked. “Is he here on the base now?”

The lieutenant nodded and placed the pad on the table. “Enomotarch Malic Princess.” He answered. “He took a communications from his mother the first night here and right after that he contacted the Duty Officer and had it entered into the Duty Log that he no longer wanted to receive COMs from them. This Admiral Megdar isn’t happy about that and is demanding to speak with the senior officer on duty.”

“Did you contact Enomotarch Malic?” Eliani asked.

The man nodded. “He said he has no desire to interrupt his duties to speak to anyone not within his chain of command.” He replied. “After what happened yesterday Princess... in the REC center I mean... there aren’t many of us who want to make this young man angry.” He said sheepishly.

Nyla looked at Eliani for a brief moment her eyes wide. “*Ussta Che*?” She asked finally. Eliani nodded quickly. Nyla turned back to the man. “Patch it in here Lieutenant.” Nyla spoke quickly. “We’ll handle it.”

The lieutenant nodded quickly and moved back into the main room signaling someone with his arm. Eliani stepped out of the way of the holo disc and Nyla nodded at the unspoken movement. They both watched as the holo image of the tall, muscular and slightly graying man appeared dressed in an impeccably tailored Fleet uniform. His hair was well within regulations, and it appeared as if his very uniform was as stiff as the

way he was standing. His eyes quickly found Nyla as she sat at the table and she and Eliani both realized where Malic got his incredible blue eyes. They were the same as his father's it appeared.

"Well it's about time!" The man nearly shouted. "I've been waiting for nearly ten minutes! I don't like to wait!"

"I'm sorry for the delay Admiral Megdar." Nyla spoke. "I am *Durcunusaan* Star Commander Nyla Sinthe. What can I do for you?"

"I want to speak to my son!" Megdar exclaimed hotly. "That is what I have been telling the Lieutenant all along!"

"And who would your son be sir?" Nyla asked sweetly.

"Are all of you *Durcunusaan* as incompetent as that Lieutenant?" He snapped. "I told him my son's name! Enomotarch Malic! You need to train your personnel better Commander!"

"Thank you for the observation Admiral. It is my understanding sir that Enomotarch Malic has refused any further communications from you and your wife sir." Nyla spoke. "His request has been logged and acted on. He is currently on duty right now and can not be pulled away, nor does he wish to communicate with you sir."

"Do you know who I am Commander?" Megdar growled.

"Of course sir." Nyla spoke.

"I was attempting to contact my son to inform him I have spoken with the Personnel Assignment Office and gotten him assigned to my Fleet Group!" Megdar snapped. "He is to be ready to depart Earth when I arrive there in three days."

Nyla's eyes narrowed slightly. "Really. That is interesting sir. I wasn't aware that the Personnel Assignment Office has authority to transfer members of the *Durcunusaan* without permission. In fact... I know that to be the case."

"I am an Admiral/Lieutenant in the Union Fleet Commander!" Megdar barked. "I have full authority to act in this regard. If I want to transfer my son... I will!"

"It's Star Commander Admiral... and forgive me... but you do not have authority over *Durcunusaan* personnel sir." Nyla spoke calmly.

"He is not a member of your rogue unit yet Commander!" Megdar popped making sure to emphasize the commander portion. "And if I have anything to say about it... he won't be! I will not allow my son to walk the same paths as the rest of you. Undisciplined and without regard for rules and superior officers. And I most certainly will not allow him to become a member of that dragon unit."

"I'm sorry Admiral..." Nyla spoke keeping her patience as only a vampire could. "As I said... you have no authority over members of the *Durcunusaan* or those in their candidacy for entry into the *Durcunusaan*." Nyla spoke. "Enomotarch Malic is currently involved in training and he has requested no further transmissions from you or your mate be allowed to reach him. We will honor that request. Your orders will not be acted on sir... in fact... as soon as we get done here I will insure they are canceled completely."

"Who is your superior officer? I want to speak to them right now!" Megdar spoke.

"I work directly from Crown Prince Androcles sir. At the moment he is quite busy and will not be able to speak with you." Nyla said. "I will however leave him a message indicating your displeasure. It will not be a priority for him I'm afraid and it may be some time before he gets back to you."

"I will be on Earth in three days!" Megdar announced. "I want my son to meet me at the facility where he is and he will leave with me."

"Admiral... you do not possess the necessary security clearances to enter a *Durcunusaan* facility. I'm sorry." Nyla told him.

"I am an Admiral/Lieutenant! I have the highest security clearance there is!" Megdar spat.

"No sir... you do not." Nyla spoke firmly. "I'm sorry Admiral, I will inform Malic of your transmission however, I need to return to my duties. If there is nothing else?"

Megdar glared at her unable to comprehend that a junior officer to him had just dismissed him so casually. "I will have your rank Commander!" He snapped.

Nyla laughed. "Yes sir... I have heard that before too. Good day sir!" Nyla ended the transmission before the words Megdar were forming could come out and she turned to look at Eliani. "That... that is Malic's father?" She gasped. "The man is a pretentious, egotistical, self centered *dalharuk d' elg'caress!*" (Sonofabitch)

Eliani laughed softly as she stepped up to her. “Boy... he got you worked up.” She said.

Nyla looked at her. “You have discovered the one man who makes both of us burn for him in a way no other ever has *ussta che*. I do not have any intention of letting that go.”

Eliani nodded. “Neither do I.” She stated.

“Is there anything you can do to reverse the effects of using this Peteracal drug?” Nyla asked.

Eliani nodded. “Oh yes! The only problem will be getting Malic to agree to it.” She stated.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

SODRAG

Carisia knew who the woman sitting in front of her was. There was never any question in that knowledge, even though she had never seen her before today. The power radiating from her within Mindvoice equaled that of her grandmother in many respects, and even what she had felt briefly from King Leonidas himself. Carisia knew that she was different. How quickly she had bonded with Anthar was the first sign of that. Having Androcles and Sadi in her dreams for so many years was another. Her being able to deflect her grandmother’s Mindvoice probes was another and then coming here and with just a simple touch become so completely woven within the fabric of two other minds. It told her she was meant for other things than what her mother and grandmother intended. Better things. Carisia also knew there was something wrong with her when it came to Thast. She was not a weak person, and she knew without question she would never submit to the fat pig willingly. Yet she had submitted to him, more times than she cared to recall.

Most of the Coven riders had gathered in the REC center for the duration of the day, spending the additional hours of downtime reading through the manuals they had been given. Even Lucia, Javier and Dante had come to the REC center and were now sitting quietly at a table in the far corner. Only Yuri had remained locked away in her private bungalow. They were not allowed off the base yet, so this was really the only place they could come, yet Carisia noticed this morning when she entered that it was beginning to have the effect Andro had desired. It was bringing the Riders closer together, something they had not had before coming to Earth.

Carisia had noticed immediately the vivacious mood Narice was in when they gathered to eat, and that mood had continued into the late morning as they sat in the REC center going over certain flying formations and exit pointers. Her face and eyes seemed so much more relaxed and vibrating with new life and discovery.

And then she had felt Androcles call for her.

His Mindvoice presence within her psyche, while still heavily shielded, provided her an increased sense of things and an overwhelming sagacity of calm and peace. She and Sadi had spoken as often as possible over the course of the last few days, and both of them trembled to be with each other, as well as Androcles. Carisia couldn’t explain it, and like Sadi and Andro, she had stopped trying to figure it out almost as soon as she had come to Earth. They were meant for each other and it filtered through her body like the strumming of a fine musical instrument. She had left the REC center as if intently reading from the manual and made her way to the small mess lounge. Once inside she blurred out the back of the building, remaining within the shadows of the many structures, until she came to the small office building where she felt him. Inside she could barely tear her eyes from his tall, muscular form and it was then that she was introduced to the Lycavorian First Oracle.

Carisia had been surprised at first at the diminutive size of the woman in front of her, until she remembered that this woman held the memories and power of the original First Oracle of the Lycavorian people. The Oracle that her grandfather so feared that he refused to kill the man because he had wanted the power Canth wielded. Unlike her mother and brothers and sister, Carisia had spent hours delving into the intercepted Netnews reports and whatever history she could find on the Lycavorian Union and its history. Androcles didn’t say a word, only nodded his head as he turned and left. Helen motioned to the chair in front of her and Carisia had not hesitated in sitting down.

Now she was so very happy she had.

Almost two hours their minds had been joined and Carisia had seen things; places, events, people. It was like a trip through a time warp, as every barrier she had put in place over the years was brought down. Slowly,

inexorably and with precise control, her shields came down and were rebuilt one by one, even more powerfully than they had been before. She and Anthar rejoiced in the clarity and expansiveness that now filled them, and Carisia almost broke out crying when she felt the love pouring from him for her. Yes... the Lycavorian First Oracle tore down those walls and rebuilt them, reshaped them into something far more.

Helen drew back her hands slowly and opened her eyes. "Well... that wasn't so bad now was it?" She said.

Carisia shook her head slowly. "No *Feravomir*." She answered with a smile.

"You are a powerful young woman Carisia." Helen spoke. "Your natural shields match those of Sadi you know... and outside of Martin Leonidas and Androcles... I have felt none stronger."

"I feel... I feel so much more aware. So much more alive and powerful." Carisia said softly.

Helen nodded. "Guard it well child." She spoke. "Your grandmother the Empress will detect your increase in abilities the moment you lower your shields below what they are now. You have Sadi and Andro to draw on now. I have strengthened that connection... well more finely tuned it is the better explanation. The three of you formed that connection yourselves and an extremely powerful bond it is. Do not hesitate to draw on it. Sadi will show you how."

"You... you don't seem surprised that I... that I have this connection to them." Carisia said. "Why is that?"

Helen chuckled. "Child... I have spent the last twenty-five years walking among some of the most powerful Mindvoicers I have ever felt in the Leonidas family. More powerful than even Canth felt in his time. I have come to learn to expect the unexpected with them. You were meant to be with Andro and Sadi by a much higher power Carisia. They know that now... and so do you. That is why you have called for each other across the stars for so long. Embrace that."

"I have *Feravomir*." Carisia said. "I don't question it."

"And neither do Andro and Sadi." Helen spoke with a smile. "Though you and Sadi may have to nudge him a little to stop being so obstinate. His blood calls for you both equally... as his father's blood calls for his mates. Sadi is also just discovering the manifestation of the more physical aspects of Mindvoice abilities. You saw the first sign of this yesterday."

Carisia nodded. "Yes."

Helen nodded. "She will need you and Andro to help her learn to control it. Focus it. She has not had the years you and Andro have in using this ability since she is not bonded to a dragon. The connection between the three of you is established... but I must warn you... once the three of you open it completely, you will not be able to close it. You will not have to speak shielded within your private connection; you will be open to each other's minds and thoughts. Perhaps even sense each other's emotions as well... but once open child... it will stay open."

"I understand." Carisia spoke softly. "I do not fear that *Feravomir*."

Helen nodded. "Pass on to Anthar what you have learned for he is just as much a part of you as Elynth is Andro."

Carisia looked at her with bright, maya colored blue eyes. "*Feravomir*... what about..."

"Tell me what you feel first." Helen spoke.

"I do not desire that fat pig's touch upon me!" Carisia exclaimed quickly. "I never have *Feravomir*! Now that... now that I have found them... I want no one else's touch on me! Please... you must believe..."

Helen held up her hand. "It is not a matter of me believing you Carisia." She said. "That you desire Sadi and Andro is clear enough to me. Now... tell me what you feel?"

Carisia shook her head. "It is like I have no control of myself." She spoke softly. "I despise him to the extreme... but I can't refuse him no matter how much I want to. How much I fight it. It frightens me."

Helen nodded slowly. "Well... it will not be an issue of concern any longer, so remove that fear from your mind." She stated flatly. "Someone very powerful implanted a subconscious command within your subconscious to make you submit to this man. They buried it very deep, for they did not want it to be found. They left a trap door so to speak so that another could reinforce this command from time to time and it appears that has been done for a few years at least."

Carisia looked at her evenly. "My mother?" She stated coldly.

Helen nodded. "That would be my first guess." She answered. "She has the ability to do this... we've known that the ability to alter perceptions and control ones actions to a degree has been part of her abilities for some time." Helen watched those beautiful blue eyes become hard points of rage. "I understand now that Moran is not your real father even though you carry his name."

Carisia shook her head. "My mother killed my father... or Robert did... I'm not really sure. He was a pureblood... a despicable man from everything I have heard... but the son of one of my grandfather's most loyal supporters. She had to give him a child to seal the pact of honor between my father's family and the High Lord. I was that child. He was butchered when my grandmother came to power."

Helen shook her head. "I will never understand the Coven's need for power and to have loyal subjects use barbaric acts to show ones support and loyalty. It is beyond me."

"My mother... she has never treated me as she does the others." Carisia spoke looking at her.

"I take it this Thast is from a powerful family?" Helen spoke.

Carisia nodded. "One of the first that swore loyalty to my grandmother."

"You and Lisisa... your paths are frighteningly parallel." Helen said.

"Where is she?" Carisia asked quickly.

"She has returned to Sparta for the moment." Helen replied. She placed her hands on Carisia's cheeks. "I have removed this command from your mind Carisia." She said. "Your mind is once more your own."

Carisia looked at her. "Won't... won't my mother notice this?"

Helen nodded. "Probably. There is nothing she can do about it now."

"Why remove it?" Carisia asked. "Now that I know it was there I could have fought it. If she discovers it is gone..."

Helen shook her head. "You would not have been able to fight it child. It was buried in your subconscious. You would have acted on it whether you wanted to or not. And whoever has been reinforcing this command is moderately skilled as well in controlling one's actions or perceptions. They will not be able to detect it now that I have established the connection with Sadi and Andro. You will naturally draw off of their ability to shield so tightly, and it will enhance your own abilities. The only way your mother will realize it is gone is if she conducts a deep probe of your thoughts. You are considerably more powerful at shielding than she is Carisia. You can deflect her probes easily. Make her see what she wants to see. If by chance she is able to breach your shields, she will not like the reception she will get I assure you."

"What do you mean?"

"The connection you now have with Sadi and Andro will allow them to know the instant an intrusion is made into your mind. Just as you will be able to detect it from them. Trust me if your mother or grandmother or whoever for that matter, were ever able to break through your shields, their mind would be shredded within seconds."

"But why do this?" Carisia spoke. "It puts at risk everything I..." She stopped talking and looked at Helen her eyes wide.

Helen chuckled softly. "Do you think we didn't know that was yours and Anthar's intent all along?" She said gently. "Andro and Elynth sensed this first, and then Sadi. I did this for two reasons Carisia. The first is to help you concentrate better on what you will learn while you are here. It will allow you to focus and expand what you already have. The second... the second reason was to protect you."

"Protect me?" Carisia asked.

Helen nodded. "You must understand child... you were meant for Sadi and Andro, and they for you. It is a destiny that others will try to halt or interrupt. That is what you can not allow. Androcles and Sadi are wolves... pureblood Lycavorians with some of the purest blood within the Union. Even Sadi did not realize how pure her blood was, not until after Androcles came back into her life. Because they are wolves... they are very possessive of what they consider to be theirs. I did this so that one or both of them does not do something drastic, say tearing Thast to pieces, if they felt you having to endure him. And to keep you from having to endure him and kill him yourself."

"They... they are possessive of me?" Carisia asked shyly.

"Yes." Sadi's voice echoed in the room. Carisia whirled around quickly as Helen smiled and got to her feet. Sadi stopped just inside the doorway, letting the door to the outer room slid shut behind her and she looked at Carisia. "We are very possessive of you."

Carisia's heart beat rapidly as Sadi stepped up to her and took her hands tightly. She was taller than her by five inches and she looked down into Carisia's eyes with intense desire and need. Sadi leaned over quickly and inhaled deeply of Carisia's rose petal scent, closing her eyes in bliss as it filtered through her being. She drew back slowly and dragged her full lips across Carisia's cheek slowly moving to allow them to come to rest on Carisia's own sweet, soft lips and she kissed her. It was a sensuous kiss of deep feeling and commitment, Sadi's body on fire as she probed tentatively with the tip of her tongue against Carisia's lips. Her mind called out in joy when Carisia's lips parted and her own delicious tasting tongue darted out and met hers.

"Ahem!"

They pulled apart quickly and both of them turned to look at Helen with embarrassed gazes.

"*Feravomir!*" Sadi spoke quickly. "Forgive us."

Helen smiled and stepped up to them. "I'm just glad Andro was not here." She said. "I shudder to think of what..."

"Of what I would have done?" Andro's voice spoke now as he came into the room.

Helen turned quickly startled by his sudden appearance. "*Carians!*" She gasped. "Will you and your father never learn to announce yourselves to this old woman before you enter a room? You will frighten me into having an attack!"

Andro stepped up to her and leaned over to nuzzle the top of her head. "If we did that... who would keep you on your toes *Feravomir?*" He said affectionately.

Helen slapped his broad chest. "Ahh... it is done." She said looking at him. "Cherish what the three of you have, but be mindful of your actions until you are ready to reveal it to everyone."

"Thank you Helen." Andro said.

Helen shook her head. "Do not thank me. This is part of what was pre-ordained young Androcles. Many thousands of years before either of us were born. It is all starting to take shape now. Be careful as I said... it is too soon for you to allow everyone to know what it is you share."

"We will be." Sadi spoke.

Helen looked at Carisia and took her hands. "Welcome Carisia." She said. "Welcome into the chaotic and often times utterly insane world of the Leonidas family." Helen kissed her forehead gently. "Do not keep her here long, she will be missed soon."

Andro shook his head. "*KertaGai...* you and Carisia can head back to the REC center. It will not look odd if you are together. The *Feravomir* and I need to discuss some things."

Sadi nodded and stretched up to kiss him softly. Carisia looked at Andro for a long moment and then suddenly she was in his arms, lifted off the floor and his lips were upon hers. Carisia's eyes flew wide as his powerful arms crushed her to his body and new sensations ripped through her. She surrendered to his kiss without hesitation and whimpered against his lips, heedless that Helen watched with a grin and shaking her head. Her eyes closed slowly as her arms tightened around his broad shoulders, his tongue searching, exploring and tasting. Carisia savored the faint pines flavor on his tongue, and she pressed her lush body against his tighter, the nerve endings in her body singing out in delight. His kiss ignited her body in ways she had never felt and she hoped it was a preview of what was to come. She wanted him... she wanted Sadi... both of them in the worse possible way, that much Carisia knew without question. She had always dreamed out what it would be like lying between their naked bodies, exploring each of them until she was bursting, and now her dream was within reach. That Sadi was a woman did not even cause her to blink. When their time together came, she was going to savor every delicious portion of her body as well as Andro's.

It was over far sooner than she would have liked and he set her down on the floor once more. "Soon." He said reaching up to stroke her cheek. "Soon you will be ours in every way."

Carisia smiled as she bit her bottom lip and Sadi took her hand. "Oh... I do look forward to that." She stated almost breathlessly.

"Come Carisia." Sadi said pulling her away from him with a smile. "Before you are missed."

Carisia found it difficult to tear her gaze from his azure eyes, but she allowed Sadi to pull her gently towards the doorway and then through it. She turned to look at her quickly. "Sadi... he..."

Sadi grinned as they walked towards the outer door that would take them outside. "Yes... I know." She said. "He can certainly kiss can't he? Wait until we have you in our bed and you see what else he can do." Sadi looked at her seductively. "What we both can do, for I intend to feast on you every bit as much as Andro does."

“As long as I get to return the attention.” Carisia said confidently.

Andro turned to look at Helen as he heard Sadi and Carisia giggling like school girls as they left the building.

“Now *Feravomir*... tell me more about this plan of yours and Arzoal’s.” He spoke. “Elynth passed a little of it to me... and I liked it. I liked it a lot.”

Helen took his hand. “Yes... we thought you might.” She said. “Walk with me to the Command Center and I will fill you in.”

CABELIR

HOME OF PREFECT KELERU

“...take it she was not happy with you?” Keleru spoke as he handed the glass of wine to Pusintin.

Pusintin shook his head. “I don’t believe I have ever seen her so angry with me.” He spoke taking the glass from him. “All because of some stupid, half breed, bastard child! I was sharp with her and told her to deal with it. I regret that.”

Keleru shook his head quickly. “No. Never regret it.” He spoke. “Jalersi knows our laws better than most. She has always known you could take another mate if you desired. That this took place before she was even born should not make it an issue for her.”

“She hates that I didn’t tell her.” Pusintin spoke.

“She is a female and will never know all that we know. That is the law. She must face that.” Keleru spoke. He shook his head. “Now I sound like I am speaking of Athani. This is a child by the vampire bitch! It is not something she should be upset about.”

“I truly hate that I even discovered that she existed.” Pusintin spoke.

Keleru settled onto the couch across from him. “How did you discover that... you never told me?”

“One of the High Coven traitors that was in place before our invasion began. He sent me a burst transmission saying that my brother was on Lycavore rescuing the daughter he had with Yuri.” Pusintin answered. “I found that odd and did some checking and realized that her age corresponded perfectly with the time I was on Earth just before the comet arrived. The same time I spent several hours raping her and listening to her howl for more.”

“More?” Keleru asked with a smile.

Pusintin grinned and nodded his head. “She was a little vampire slut Keleru. Aren’t they all?” He stated. “Nice and tight too.”

Keleru laughed. “I will insure I do not pass that along to my daughter.” He spoke with a shake of his head. “Somehow I don’t think she would appreciate that.”

Pusintin grinned. “No I don’t think so. And I have been careful since then as well.”

“Ah... so you have stepped outside your marriage bed?” Keleru spoke with a knowing smile.

“There have only been a few instances.” Pusintin answered honestly. “All done per our laws.”

Keleru shook his head quickly. “I do not judge you Pusintin. I myself have done the same thing. You provide for and protect my daughter... that is all a father could ask for. And your children make my Pride stronger.” He said.

Pusintin nodded. “Sini’s is a bit more head strong than our females should be, but I attribute that to her mother’s own stubbornness and the fact she is still very young.” He spoke referring to his nineteen year old daughter. Ditja and Maliab are following in their brother’s footsteps and will bring our Pride honor and victory.”

“Yes... others have commented on that as well. You have spent more time with them than you did when Karun was born.” Keleru spoke.

“That was because of the war.” Pusintin spoke. “He did not turn out so bad though. I’m proud of him even though he remains rather protective of his mother at times. That may be an inbred trait of my people showing through. It will disappear with time I’m sure.”

Keleru nodded. "I do recommend we do not tell Jalersi of our future plans until they have been acted upon however. The less risk of discovery the better, and something tells me she would not approve in the least, regardless that she has no say in it."

Pusintin nodded. "Agreed." He said quickly. "Now what about this half breed bitch who is my daughter? What did Jiss say?"

"He believes we can use the fact that she is your daughter to our favor." Keleru said. "Since the vampire witch has made no claim to her... and since she is your daughter by blood... technically she is a citizen of the KFI, not the Union. Therefore... according to the Union's own laws against tampering with internal politics of member states... as a female citizen of the KFI everything in her possession is property of the KFI, including the dragon she commands. And she is subject to our laws, not the Union's laws."

Pusintin looked at him. "You don't actually believe my brother and his cronies will allow that do you?" He said. "Or... what's her name anyway?"

"Lisisa." Keleru said.

"Or that this Lisisa will allow it." Pusintin finished.

Keleru shrugged. "Jiss believes he can make it stick in an open forum. And she will have no choice in the matter. As I said... technically she is a citizen of the KFI. The Union are such sticklers for their precious laws when it suits them... they wouldn't dream of breaking them when Jiss uses those same laws against the Union. If needed he will present it to the Union's own Galactic Laws Council."

Pusintin shook his head. "She'll never go along with it." He said.

Keleru nodded his head. "That is why I have taken extra steps to insure that she does." He said.

"Such as?"

"The leader of the security detachment I sent to Earth is Yoazat's son Timur. Since he has undergone the biogenic treatments these last years, he is perfect. All of his team will blend in perfectly." Keleru spoke calmly. "Your daughter is single Pusintin... and over five hundred years old. By Kavalian law our females are mated well before that age. Timur is virtually flawless in every way. He is an ideal physical specimen. He should be quite pleasing to her eyes. With Karun's help... we will see if Timur can't entice her."

Pusintin nodded. "Excellent idea... but what happens if she is not interested? Or there is someone else?"

Keleru shrugged. "Then we have him lay claim to her as if you gave him her hand many years ago. He will take her and once he has locked groins with her, he will make her with child. If there is someone else... they will not matter. She is a Kavalian citizen." He stated almost nonchalantly.

"That doesn't always work for those who are not pure Kavalian Keleru." Pusintin said. "Even when our females are in heat. You know that. Nine times out of ten it is successful with our females... but the times we have tried it with Lycavorian and elven females the odds drop to like two out of ten. And she's half vampire too."

Keleru nodded. "Yes... I'm aware of that. Timur will do whatever needs to be done however. She is a Kavalian citizen... and subject to our laws. As her father you are well within your rights to do this." Keleru sipped his wine. "Jiss is one of our senior Legislatures and he believes he can make this work. Matuarr agrees with him. If we are able to secure one of these dragons and a rider... it would be a major coup. Especially if it is done without violence and all according to law. And one who is as skilled as your daughter is supposed to be would be an exceptional result. I recommend we let Jiss and Matuarr handle that while Jalersi sets up the Embassy."

"So you are the one who gave Jiss and Matuarr their alternate instructions then?" Pusintin spoke.

Keleru nodded. "Yes. My daughters they may be... but they are still female and unable to do a male's business. I sent them because they would be pleasing to the Lycavorian dogs and their sensibilities. Once the embassy is open and running, I will order them both back and give the position to those who know how to run things."

"Something else you had better not tell Jalersi." Pusintin spoke.

Keleru chuckled and nodded. "Yes." He sipped his wine more downing the brownish liquid and reaching for the bottle to pour more. "Our other plans are proceeding well?"

Pusintin nodded. "He will make contact with the Immortal mercenary group probably late today or early tomorrow and then we will hear something. I'm having our teams train for all four locations. Obviously we would prefer a surface assault. I've also chosen all biogenic troops to conduct the missions. The latest batches.

They will be able to move around freely for the most part and not draw attention to themselves. Given another two months we can insert them into the Union to move to the assault positions and to complete preparations. Escape and egress routes, establish safe houses and such. The papers we have for them were done by the best forgery expert in The Wilds. They are perfect.”

Keleru looked at him. “You found such a man in so small a time frame?”

Pusintin shrugged. “We’ve done business with him before indirectly. I liked his work. Once he has completed what we need... he’ll disappear.”

Keleru nodded slowly. “Good. You don’t wish to conduct a ship bound assault?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “They wouldn’t stand a chance in such small quarters and the information we have now or could possibly obtain won’t give us the schematics of their *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers.” He replied. “Once it became known they were on board there would be no way they would be allowed off, no matter what they had. At least on the surface of a planet they have many different avenues of approach and execution they can plan to use if need be.”

Keleru nodded. “And we can be successful?” He asked.

“Given accurate intelligence and positioning... and a little bit of luck? Yes... we can pull it off. With the proper timing we can complete the first phase before they even recover enough to react. It will take them a minimum of a week to plan and execute any sort of operation. By then it will be too late because I will have already done what needs to be done.” Pusintin answered.

“So you agree with Ogat’s plan to insure cooperation?” Keleru said.

Pusintin nodded. “That’s where the mercenaries come in.” He said with a smile. “Once it’s done... what they do with their prize after that is not our concern. The package will be worthless except to them after they are finished. You do realize of course any team targeted at my brother or nephew will be sacrificed. Getting close to them is one thing, actually killing them and getting away is another. It won’t happen. We know where my brother is almost all of the time... but the son is turning out to be more difficult to lock down. We’ll find him though.”

Keleru nodded slowly. “Yes... there will be casualties I know. It can not be helped however.” He said. “However with both of them out of the picture... it falls to the half elf son or the younger pureblood. Our plan will work then according to the laws they have in place.”

“Only if the first phase succeeds.” Pusintin said. “There are only two ways to go in the first phase and I haven’t decided which would be the easier. Or which I prefer for that matter. Both options are very attractive. We have time. Both options will be open if the schedule we received is accurate.”

Keleru nodded. “It is accurate.” He said. “Ogat is very thorough.”

Pusintin nodded. “Then we continue forward with confidence.”

“What of this report that our T19 contact in The Wilds has disappeared from Talbor Seven?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin looked at him. “I hadn’t heard that one. I haven’t reviewed all my intel reports for the day.”

Keleru nodded. “This Kochab Gravork... he was last seen on Talbor Seven nearly fourteen hours ago. His suite is empty and his bodyguards are missing.”

“This is a concern for us?” Pusintin asked.

“A minor one.” Keleru spoke. “Only because we have done business with him in the past.”

“Keleru it is no secret we have been buying T19s.” Pusintin said.

“I know... however it would not due for others to discover the contacts he has had with our detachment on Nefoa.” Keleru spoke. “Specifically the one where we paid fifty million credits on the off chance that pureblood idiot Gareld could actually obtain Leonidas’s half elf daughter. It was a long shot... Gareld has a contract to kill her for some reason... and I was only going to turn her into a whore for our men there.”

“We covered our bases on that didn’t we?” Pusintin asked.

“Oh yes. The funds and transfer were all done through intermediaries, as were the actual contacts but even in The Wilds there are trails.” Keleru said.

“Do we know if this Gareld succeeded?” Pusintin asked.

Keleru shook his head. “No... but I would imagine if he had it would be all over the Netnews by now.” He spoke.

“So it was credits wasted?” Pusintin said.

Keleru shrugged. "We have a thousand times that amount in our coffers should we need to access it. The credits do not concern me as much as the exposure if this Gareld fool is caught. I will make contact with the detachment commander later today and discover the progress."

Pusintin looked at him as he got to his feet. "I will be in my office all day going over status reports. My sons and father are joining me for dinner, would you care to join us as well?"

Keleru nodded quickly. "Yes. That would be very relaxing."

"I'll see you tonight then." Pusintin spoke as he turned and headed for the door.

SODRAG

He was five hundred and thirty-two years old.

A child in the lifespan of his kind.

His silvery/purple scales shone with health, the muscles rippling beneath his broad chest and powerful wings. His front forelegs were slightly longer than most dragons, and ended with four, razor like black talons. He was just over fifteen and a half meters long and faintly more than three tons of muscle and bone. His neck was long and elegant, his head large and his mouth full of flesh shredding teeth. What caught your attention upon first looking at him were his eyes. They were the most unbelievable deep amethyst color and they were bright with incredible intelligence and calm. His movements were graceful and controlled, every limb precisely tuned to his body. He was considered the foremost dragon scholar outside of the Dragon Elders themselves, and one of the strongest Mindvoicers among their kind. Many of the adolescents and hatchlings came to him for instruction. His teaching method, while stern, was impeccable and no adolescent or hatchling to move forward ever regretted the instruction and lessons he bestowed upon him.

His name was Vincix, and while he truly enjoyed teaching, he would never achieve the one thing in his life that he knew he was meant for.

He would never be a member of Mjolnir's Hand.

He had been one of the first dragons to be tested for entry into the now famed and revered unit of dragon and rider. Four years after they were formed a DT crash had taken three of their number and his mother had pressed him to submit himself for testing. As a Dragon Elder, her voice carried quite a bit of weight and Vincix was tested. He was tested and he failed. Twice in a three year span. Though large and powerful, and very maneuverable in the air while flying, Vincix did not have the muscular development in his hind legs to support the weight of a rider on his back when he was landing. The dozens of times he attempted it, his rear legs always collapsed onto themselves and spilled the rider from the saddle. The one time he attempted to land aboard a DT that wasn't even moving, he had nearly killed the elf female putting him through his paces. It was discovered that for some reason the main muscles in his rear legs could not support the additional weight and violence of landing because they had not developed enough when he was young. After that incident Vincix withdrew his name from consideration willingly, against the wishes of his mother Dalah. He wanted to be a member of Mjolnir's Hand, not be responsible for killing his rider. After that he dedicated himself to being a teacher, and for the last twenty years that is exactly what he had done.

He was well known on Elear and Apo Prime where he traveled often to help train and school the Bonded Pairs. Whenever a new skill was learned within Mindvoice, Vincix was the first to master it and then he would move across the Union passing on this knowledge to the Bonded Pairs. He had accepted his role willingly, though a part of him would always desire the one thing he could not have.

When Prince Androcles approached him to help in training the High Coven dragons, Vincix had jumped at the chance. To train dragons that were not raised among the laws and rules of their kind was a challenge he could not deny. And it kept him close to the one thing he still hoped to obtain. His mother had thought him interested in Tharua, when in actuality he desired Arydun more than anything. He knew many females found him suitable material for a mate, but they hesitated because of his muscular development and worried that he would pass this on to any hatchlings he might sire. It was this reason that kept him from approaching Arydun. At least being close to Arydun made him feel better.

The Coven dragons were an unruly bunch just four days ago when he first met them. Their failure at the obstacle course had changed all that. Like his Prince, Vincix could detect a new sense of purpose in how they

arrived here the last two mornings and absorbed the teachings of history and flight and combat. The only three dragons to still be an issue were Vollenth, Marux and Naruth, though it appeared as if Naruth did indeed want to learn. The others just kept him from paying attention.

Vincix stretched up his head from the front of the four ranks of dragons and focused his eyes on Vollenth.

Vollenth... would you care to give us the variables for adjusting to wind patterns and a 1.5G coefficient.

Vollenth's head snapped around and he glared at Vincix. *I don't know.* He snapped.

You don't know or don't care? Vincix asked calmly as he moved around the side of the ranks of dragons towards Vollenth.

Take your pick. Vollenth answered. *Wherever it is I will fight. And win.*

Vincix chuckled. *Will you now. Have you ever flown in 1.5G gravity? It is heavier than Earth's, so you must use more effort to fly. You will not be able to turn as quickly as you do here. When you spit fire it will not be as long a stream for it is harder to catch a deeper breath.*

These are all things that we teach our adolescents and hatchlings Vollenth.

Vollenth stepped forward slightly, his eyes unwavering as he stared at Vincix. *Are you saying I am a child?* He snarled.

In terms of education... yes. Vincix answered immediately. *You... all of you... you lack the education that the hatchlings and adolescents here within the Union receive. We are not simply beasts here. The Elder Mother sits on the Union Senate. We are treated as equals in everything. We choose to bond with a rider and take up this life in defense of the Union and what it stands for.*

Are you saying we are less Vincix? A light blue female asked turning to look at him.

Vincix shook his large head instantly. *Never. You have not had the same opportunity as the rest of us. That is why Androcles wanted me here. To begin to show you how we live. What we learn.*

Dragons are not considered simple tools then? As we were taught. Another asked. *I mean... since coming here my rider Crelishan... he has actually made sure I was comfortable before he retired for the night. He has helped me to wash in the machines they have here. He has sat with me for hours and we have talked of his past and what the future brings.*

Vincix nodded. *No dragon bonded to a rider in the Union is a tool. The men and women and elves that bond with our kind treat their bonded brother or sister as a member of their family. You have all seen how Prince Androcles acts with Elynth. How Princess Lisisa and Princess Eliani, all of them, how they act with Jeth and Tharua and their bond mates. They go practically everywhere together. Dragons freely walk the streets of Sparta and Eden City here on Earth. They walk the streets on Apo Prime and Elear and a half dozen other planets that we have spread out to. We are citizens of this Union. We are not dismissed, not looked down upon as animals. In many cases we are far wiser and older than many, and we are treated with respect and dignity. And we return it willingly to those who treat us this way. When King Leonidas and the Elder mother brought us out of the darkness on Enurrua, our future began. And now you have a chance to be a part of that future. All of you.*

Our riders are members of the High Coven! Vollenth snapped. *We are enemies! We may be here to receive training from you... but we will fight you one day.*

Vincix looked at Vollenth. *And is that something you look forward too* Vollenth? *That you will fight your own kind?*

I fight who my rider tells me to fight! Vollenth barked. *Besides... I like to fight.*

Vincix shook his head. *And that is why you will never be more than you are now.* He spoke softly.

What do you know! You are not bonded to a rider! Vollenth hissed.

If my rider is like Yuri Vollenth... then that makes me very happy. Vincix answered. *She will be your undoing. The hatred she carries passes to you... and with that hatred will be your death.*

Are you threatening me? Vollenth spat.

Vincix growled low in his chest and moved closer to him. *I may not be bonded to a rider* Vollenth... *but do not make the mistake of thinking I can not defend myself.* He spoke. *It would be a very painful lesson for you to learn.*

You do not frighten me. Vollenth growled back.

Vincix nodded. *And your lack of fear and respect will also contribute to your demise. Prince Andro, Prince Denali and Princess Lisisa... they are members of Mjolnir's Hand Vollenth. Any one of them could slap you from the sky as an afterthought. Any member of Mjolnir's Hand could do this in the time it took you to form the thought. They have reached the pinnacle of what we can become with our bonded ones. You are naught but an insect to them.*

The others Vincix? Another coven dragon asked.

Vincix turned. *All of them Bonded Pairs, most part of the Durcunusaan. And still more than a match more any of you. At least right now. Members of Mjolnir's Hand you will never be, and it is they you should fear and respect more than any enemy you may ever face.* He turned back to Vollenth. *However if you wish a shorter life... please do challenge one of them. It will be amusing to watch.* He turned quickly once more. *I want all of you to finish with the instructions I passed to you. Study the tables and do not hesitate to confer with each other. Your bonded pairs begin hand-to-hand training tomorrow. You will begin advanced flight skills under Elynth and Tharua.*

Females? Naruth asked surprised.

Elynth holds the distinction of being the most maneuverable dragon within the ranks of Mjolnir's Hand. Tharua is recognized as the fastest dragon in the Union behind only Isheeni. Vincix replied. *You will find a wealth of information and tricks you can use by listening to them. They have flown in perhaps some of the worst possible weather known to exist, and you might actually have some fun. In the afternoon you will return here with me and we will go over and discuss everything you have done. I wish you good luck tomorrow and you know all you have to do is reach out to me and I will answer.*

Vollenth stared at him, his eyes angry and embarrassed. Marux and Naruth moved closer to him.

[I will kill that fool Vincix.] Vollenth stated softly. *[And I will enjoy watching him die.]*

Marux and Naruth turned to look at each other quickly before watching the silvery/purple scales of Vincix moved confidently across the tarmac.

SPARTA

The huge crash ushered them into motion.

They came running around the side of the patio where they had been drinking coffee and waiting, watching as the sun was coming up, only to see a flash of blue/black scales and then Jeth was lifting into the air carrying Lisisa with him. Aricia was the first one through the shattered remains of the patio door into the main room, small pieces of glass speckled across the outside of the door and to some extent on the interior. Her azure eyes swept across the room and she saw Martin pulling himself out of what was once the wall bookcase. The seven hundred year old case was now nothing more than rubble as his two hundred and forty pounds of muscle and bone had smashed it into little pieces.

“Beloved!” Aricia gasped.

“Martin!” Anja echoed darting around her as the others filed in looks of astonishment on their faces.

Aricia and Anja helped Martin to his feet, Anja quickly healing the small scratches on the back on his shoulders that had sliced through his thin shirt.

“I... I don't think she took it well.” Martin said softly all of them detecting the pain and hurt in his voice. And it wasn't from being tossed into the bookcase.

“Lisi did this?” Bella gasped.

“I've been telling you guys she is stronger than everyone thinks.” Martin said as he bent over to brush his pants off. “She just proved it.”

The main door to the villa opened and they turned as Gorgo came rushing in her eyes wide. She had elected to remain here the previous night in the hopes of being some sort of support for Lisisa or her son. It appeared she would not get the chance to do that for either of them.

“Martin! What... what happen?” Gorgo gasped. “I saw... I saw Jeth carrying Lisisa away faster than I have ever seen him move. You told me you were going to wait!”

Martin looked at his mother. “She came here early. She wanted to get back to SODRAG to help her brother train the Coven riders. I couldn't *not* tell her mother.” He said.

“Oh my... I fear... I fear she did not take it well?” Gorgo said.

“What do you think?” Martin said.

“She didn’t take what well?” Denali’s voice entered the room now. They all turned to see Aradace just outside on the patio grounds. “Where is Lisi?”

“Denali Leonidas... you know the courtyard patio is not for dragons to land on!” Aricia barked.

“Spank me later mother!” Denali spoke moving further into the room. “What didn’t Lisi take well? And where is she?”

Gorgo stepped up to him quickly. “Denali... we... we discovered last night that Lisisa is...”

“That Lisisa is what?” Denali barked.

“Lisisa is not your sister.” Gorgo explained.

Denali’s face broke into a grin and he laughed. “That’s funny grandmother.” He spoke his eyes moving around to look at his father and mothers. When he saw they were not smiling, his grin slowly disappeared.

“What... what is going on?”

“It is why I asked Helen to send her back.” Martin said moving up to stand in front of his son. “You should have remained to help your brother.”

“Why did you want her to come back father?” Deni asked him. “You had dinner with the Kavalians last night. What could you have possibly learned that would make her act like this?”

“Sit down Deni.” Martin spoke.

“I don’t want to sit down! I want to know what made my Lisisa toss you across the room and then tear out of here and not answer me when I called for her!” Denali barked out his dark eyes narrowing.

Gorgo saw Aricia and the others look at each other quickly at the words and tone in Denali’s voice, but it went completely over her son’s head.

Martin took a deep breath. “Your grandmother is right.” He said softly. “Lisisa is not your sister. She is your cousin. Your first cousin.”

Deni shook his head. “What kind of *nubous* nonsense is that?” He spat.

“Denali Leonidas you will watch your tone of voice!” Aricia snapped.

“I will not!” Denali barked back. “Someone tell me why my Lisisa left as she did? Tell me why I can feel her pain and anguish! Someone tell me that! And do so quickly before I get angry!”

Aricia’s eyes were wide as she stepped closer looking at her son. “Deni... you...”

“Tell him Martin!” Gorgo snapped. “Before this gets out of hand!”

“Lisisa is not my daughter!” Martin barked. “She’s the daughter of my brother! Ok! There! She Pleistarchus’s daughter by blood... and if I ever see him in front of me I will rip his *nubous* entrails out of his body through his fucking nose!” Martin spun around and lifted the two hundred pound table in the center of the room within the grasp of his TK power like it was a toy and sent it hurtling out of the already smashed doorway to shatter on the granite outdoor patio. “*Pen gur flana forn tyrn jur fervon!*” Martin snarled viciously. “I will kill you and watch you wither and die for all the pain you have brought our family.”

Denali stood there looking at his father with wide eyes and a stunned expression. His head turned quickly when Gorgo took his arm. “It is true Deni.” She spoke. “We only discovered this last night. Now you know... and now you need to find her and be with her.”

“She said she didn’t want anyone bothering her!” Martin snapped as he turned back around. “That she wanted to be alone. I tried to comfort her... she wouldn’t let me! That is when she threw me across the room. I don’t know where she will have gone by now. She’s blocking me and Jeth is helping her. She thinks I have been using her all these years!”

“She will not throw Denali across the room.” Gorgo spoke softly meeting Deni’s eyes. “Deni is who she needs right now.”

“I... I know where she will go.” He said softly, disbelief still evident in his eyes. “I will find her.”

“She needs you now Denali Leonidas. Be strong for her.” Gorgo spoke squeezing his arms.

Deni nodded his head. “I will.”

“You won’t find her Deni!” Anja spoke. “She’s blocking all of us.”

Denali looked at her. “She is not blocking me.” He spoke quietly.

Martin looked at him. “What? Why isn’t she blocking you?” He asked.

Aricia Leonidas stepped up to stand next to Martin her eyes wide as she stared at her son. “Denali... you...”

“Yes mother.” Deni spoke as he looked up at her. “We are.”

Martin heard Dysea and For’mya gasp and he looked at them as Aricia reached out to grab his arm. “What’s wrong?”

“I will bring her back.” Denali spoke. He didn’t hesitate and turned. His strides were confident and strong as he shoved the remains of the shattered table out of his way with his own TK power and sprinted to where Aradace rested. She waited for him to settle and immediately flexed her legs and propelled them into the brightening sky.

Martin looked at Gorgo, at Aricia, and Dysea and For’mya. All of them with the exception of his mother had stunned expressions on their faces. “Would someone mind telling me why Lisisa would block me and her mothers but not block her brother?” Martin snapped. “Someone want to explain that to me?”

Gorgo stepped up to her son looking into Aricia’s eyes as she did so.

“Gorgo?” Aricia asked softly.

“They came to me the day of the State Dinner and told me.” Gorgo spoke.

“How long?” Isabella asked as the rest of them moved closer.

“Three years now.” Gorgo answered with a smile. “Three very happy and wonderful years for them.”

“Hey!” Martin barked. “I’m standing here too! Told you what?”

Gorgo looked at her son. “Lisisa will block you. She will block her mothers. She will even block Androcles. She will not block the man she loves however. The man who loves her back just as intensely as she loves him.”

Martin’s eyes grew wider as he realized what his mother was saying. “Are... are you saying...?”

Gorgo nodded. “Yes. Denali and Lisisa have been together for three years now. Their love is as strong for each other as yours is for any of your mates. And right now... the only thing that she needs is to feel Denali’s arms around her giving her strength. Not those of the man she has called father, or the arms of those she has called mother... but the arms of the man who will be her mate, who already is her mate for all intents and purposes to be honest. You will see Martin. He will bring her back. And then you must decide what you will do.” Gorgo took his hands. “And remember that your father was my half uncle Martin Leonidas... and our love burned just as brightly regardless of that fact.”

Martin’s eyes were wide as he moved to the couch and slumped into it heavily. “Wow! This has got to be the worst day of my fucking life. Could it get any worse already?”

Colonel Fache walked into the main room then, looked around at all the destruction, shook his head and turned to Anja.

“Anja... your sister and Eurin are standing by in a secure transmission in your office.” He spoke.

“Not now Fache!” Anja barked.

“Milady... you probably want to take this.” He spoke.

Martin looked at her and waved his hand. “Go on Red... I’m just going to sit here and try to absorb everything. I don’t know how long that will take.” He leaned forward and dropped his head into his hands. “If that is even possible.”

Lisisa stood in front of the monument to her grandfather, her forest green eyes red with the tears she had shed in the last hour. Everything she had believed. Everything she had worked for. All of it was gone now. Smashed aside with the knowledge of what she had been told today. She had already run the gambit of emotions, betrayal, loss, hate, anger... it was too much. This was the only place that she had found peace through the years and she had come here often just to sit and at the very least be in the presence of his spirit. She knew well the story that he had appeared to her father so long ago... and Lisisa had hoped one day he would appear to her.

Her father.

The man who she had dreamed of. The man who had come and taken her from her life of horror and darkness. The man who had brought Jeth into her world. The man who had given her so much. And now even that was gone. The man who she had called father for twenty-five years now and even that wasn’t true. Her

mother hated her... tried to kill her. Her true father was a betrayer of his own people and a murderer of thousands. What had she done to deserve this? What could she have possibly done that was so horrible as to never have peace? Never have hope? Never have love?

You do have love. The voice whispered in her head. *You have me.*

Lisisa closed her eyes as she felt his aura wrap itself tightly around her and she felt fresh tears come. She could smell him then, peppermint and lavender, hear the thumping of his strong heart. She turned slowly to watch him walk towards her, his hand running along the side of Jeth's scales as he passed him. God he was beautiful to her.

Lisisa shook her head slowly. "I... I am not... I am not who you think I am." She choked out the words as he stopped in front of her.

Denali looked down into her tear stained face and felt her pain fill him. "You are the woman I love." Deni spoke. "What more do I need to know?"

"Deni... Deni I'm not... I'm not your sister." Lisisa said.

"Yes... I know." Deni spoke. "As I was coming here it crossed my mind that I can *cado forn* now and profess to the world that you are mine."

Lisisa lifted her face and looked at him. Her eyes darkened somewhat. "You knew!" She gasped. "You knew and did not tell me!"

"Lisisa... you..."

Lisisa's hand struck with the speed of a viper, lashing out and smashing across his face with enough power to rock his head back. "You bastard! You fucking bastard! You knew! Just like he knew! You... you used me... you... you have used me all this time!"

Deni looked at her his eyes wide in shock. "Lisisa... what are you talking about?"

"What you just said!" Lisisa screamed. "Now you can *cado forn* me! Is that all that occupies your sick mind? You knew Denali! How could you do this to me? After what we have shared?"

"I found out twenty minutes after you Lisisa!" He exclaimed.

"You lie!" Lisisa screamed. "You knew! Why else would you say you love me? I was convenient for you is that it! You get to fuck me whenever you want and not have to actually work at finding a woman for yourself! Leave me alone! Leave me alone you bastard!"

"Lisisa you..."

"Get the fuck out of my life Denali!" Lisisa roared.

"I won't leave you." Denali proclaimed. "I love you and I won't leave you."

"Bastard!" Lisisa screamed slapping him savagely once more.

Denali did not move. He didn't twitch a muscle. He had no intention of leaving this very spot no matter what she did.

"You bastard!" She slammed her fists against his broad chest, hurting her hands more than him and that only fueled her anger.

Lisisa! Jeth exclaimed in Mindvoice.

Stay out of this Jeth! Lisisa barked back at him. She turned back on Deni and slapped him viciously once more, this time raking her nails down his jaw and neck hard enough to draw blood. Still he didn't move.

"Tell me you knew!" She snapped. "Who else knew Deni? Who else knows about this game you are playing? Three years I have given myself to you! Three years Denali! All because I thought you loved me!" Another slap this time, even stronger and it bloodied his lips, and still Denali did not move. "My life is a lie! My whole life is a lie! Nothing is true! Nothing is..."

"I love you Lisisa." Denali spoke firmly. "More now than when we first discovered each other!"

"Liar!" Lisisa screamed slapping him once more. "Liar!"

"It is not a lie." Denali continued. "Not one bit of what we have shared in these last three years is a lie! Not one second!"

"Liar!" Lisisa's voice cracked this time and her slap was not as powerful.

"I don't care if you are my sister, or some purple skinned alien from the Amarian Nebula Lisisa. I love you." Denali said.

Lisisa shook her head. "No!"

Denali moved closer to her, towering over her shuddering five foot three frame. “I don’t care if you are my sister or my cousin or my aunt four times removed Lisisa Leonidas.” He spoke. “You are who I love. Not anyone else.”

“I... I’m not... I’m not a Leonidas!” Lisisa spoke softly as the sobs came.

Denali reached up then and took her face in his large hands. “You are and always have been a Leonidas.” He spoke tilting her face up to look into her eyes which were closed. “Open your eyes Lisi.” He said waiting until she complied and her tear filled orbs were looking at him. “I want you to see my face when I tell you I love you with every bit of my existence. I want you to see my face when I tell you that not one minute of any day, whether it is this day, yesterday, or tomorrow, not one minute goes by where I do not think of you in some manner. The feel of your hair in my hands. Your scent filtering through my head. The way your eyes glitter in the light. The sound of your laughter in my ears. The feel of your breath on my skin.”

“Den... Denali...”

“Your life is not a lie!” Denali barked. “Your life began the day our father brought you home! The day he brought you here!”

“He... he is not my father.” Lisisa sobbed even more. “He... is not who... I dreamed he was.”

“He is your father!” Deni snapped. “Fate brought him to you Lisisa! Fate brought him there. He heard you calling to him and he answered. It was he who risked all that he was to come for you! And even... even when he discovered the truth he did not hesitate! He has never... he has never treated you any different than any of us! He may not have had a part of bringing you into this world, but *son vada carians* he has loved you just as he has loved any of us. What more can you ask of a father? None of that is a lie Lisisa! It is as real as it gets!” Deni lowered his head until his lips were touching her forehead. “Just as my love for you is without question, without hesitation and without limit.”

“Deni... I...”

“I will not let this destroy you!” He snapped. “After all you have been through! All you have endured! I will not allow this to destroy who you have become! You are the daughter of King Leonidas! You are the woman I love and who I want to take as my mate and wife! And you are stronger than this! Draw on that strength now Lisi... take from me whatever you need. I have never held back anything from you! All that I am belongs to you! That is what you have now. That is what we have to build for our future. Don’t let it slip away over this *rensibfla*! That would be the ultimate betrayal and travesty. Let this make you stronger as everything else in your past has made you stronger. Let this make *us* stronger. I do not want to go on without you Lisisa. I can’t go on without you.”

That is what broke through the cloud that filled her mind and emotions. That voice and those six words were what sliced through the obscurity like a beam of sunlight cutting through the early morning darkness and stretching across the sky. Lisisa wrapped her arms around his head and she sobbed in happiness when his arms closed around her without hesitation and lifted her up. Then she kissed him. It was a kiss of promise and renewal, and when he kissed her back with even more intensity his words slammed home within her confused mind and set her free. He was right. Just as he had been right three years ago when he told her their love was meant to be and they had begun this journey together. She may have been almost five hundred years older than this man, but it was he who she had been meant for.

Lisisa pulled back slowly, feeling his teeth gently bite her upper lip, pulling on it like he did when he was being playful. Like he knew she loved. She saw the marks she had inflicted upon him, and struggled for breath at what she had done. She drew her fingers across his neck and cheek, the blood staining the tips of her long fingers.

“Denali... my... my love.” She whispered. “Look... look at what I have done to you.” She wept. “Deni... I am...”

“I will heal.” Deni answered cutting off her words and looking at her with those dark eyes that could make her heart and stomach do small flips whenever she gazed into them. “My only concern right now is for you Lisi. Tell me what you want me to do. Anything... I will do anything for you.”

“Take me home Denali.” Lisisa said softly as she pressed her head against his cheek and felt his arms pull her even tighter. Lisisa snaked her arms around his broad shoulders letting his power and strength filter through her. “Take me home my love. I want to feel your skin against mine and be within your arms. That is what I want right now. That is all I want to feel right now.”

“Home it is.” Deni said turning but still holding her six inches off the ground, unwilling to let her go. “Our home Lisisa, for I have a surprise for you.”

Lisisa drew back her head slightly and looked at him. “No. No more surprises Denali. I can’t take anymore surprises.”

Deni grinned. “You will like this one Lisi. It is one that we both made last year.”

Lisisa’s eyes grew wider. “The villa?” She gasped. “You... you bought it?”

“Gallais and Demetrious finalized the transaction for me while we were in SODRAG.” He told her. “I was... I was going to surprise you with it. Now however... now I am going to take you to our new home Lisisa. I am going to *cado forn* in more ways than you can imagine and then everyone will know you are mine. No more hiding. No more sneaking. It is over.” He looked at her. “If you... if you want that as well.”

New tears burst from her eyes, but these were tears of love and life. She nodded her head slowly, wrapping her legs around his waist and burying her face into the side of his neck drawing deeply of his peppermint and lavender scent. “Yes.” She whispered. “Yes.”

Aradace stepped up to her older brother Jeth and nudged him in the side with her large head.

He will heal her now brother. Aradace spoke.

Jeth nodded his head without pause. *I know. For a moment... for a moment I thought she was lost to me Aradace.*

Not while Denali lives Jeth. Not while Denali lives.

SPARTA

“...apologize for what happen last night.” Jalersi spoke evenly. “I think it took everyone by surprise.”

Deia and For’mya looked across the table at Jalersi silently. Thankfully most of the details had been worked out already and only the actually drafting of the Trade Agreement was needed. Jalersi looked a bit haggard this morning, as if she had been up late and not gotten a whole lot of sleep. This had been the case for all of them really, as For’mya and the others had done nothing but cuddle around Martin’s warm body for most of the evening, drifting in and out of sleep as their mate’s emotions and theirs as well assailed them. For’mya made it a point to thank Tarifa and Aihola personally for taking the little ones, for she didn’t know how good they would have been last night. Jiss and Matuarr appeared very well rested, though that could have just been that any expressions they made were hidden by their coat of fur. Athani also looked well rested, but she remained silent as if her thoughts were far off somewhere. Karun sat behind his mother, and the lack of sleep showed on his face, though not to the extent as on his mother. Qurot and Pian simply sat there like big tree logs as far as For’mya could tell.

Deia finally nodded her head. “Yes... I would say that is quite the understatement.” She spoke. She slid the data pad across the table. “A first draft copy of the Trade rights. I think you will find everything is in order.”

Jalersi took the pad slowly and handed it to Jiss. “You... you didn’t know?” She asked.

For’mya met her eyes. “I and the other Queens have known for quite some time.” She stated. “Deia and Gorgo were not aware.”

Jalersi looked at her. “He... he told you?” She asked somewhat surprised.

“There is very little our mate does not tell us.” For’mya answered. “What Karun did was unnecessary and disrespectful. He should have waited for or requested a more private meeting with Martin Leonidas.”

“You expect us to believe he would have honored such a request?” Matuarr spoke now.

“Honor it or not... it would have been the proper course of action.” Deia said. “The embassy will be ratified as the King said. You will be able to begin moving into your new facility later today once your additional personnel arrive.”

“Secure communications?” Jiss asked.

Deia looked at him. “As with all diplomatic embassies... you will be allowed one secure transmitter within the embassy. The KFI will provide for funding and upkeep of the facility and it will be sovereign KFI territory. Your personnel will have free passage within Sparta and on Earth. Like the other political embassies you will be allowed one ship in orbit that will be able to dock at the station in an assigned slot. Once more... the KFI will be responsible for the upkeep of that slot. This ship must adhere to established military protocols while

in orbit, which includes no active scans of any city or military facility on the surface. If this is violated even once, the ship will be impounded immediately and the crew detained. This will also be the case for the facility on Apo Prime since the King and Royal family split time between there and here on Earth. These are the same rules that apply to all embassies and their staff, so do not say we are being sterner with the KFI.”

“You do not grant much in the leeway Prime Minister.” Qurot spoke from his chair.

“It takes two people Commander Qurot. Two people in the transition from passive sensor scans to active sensor scans. One to give the order and one to align and adjust the sensor arrays. That is not an accident Commander. That is a purposeful decision to disregard an order or rule.” Deia spoke. “In which case we will act. If this is not acceptable to your delegation or to Prefect Keleru, then by all means, we have enjoyed your company, we will cancel the embassy ratification and the trade agreement and you can return to Kavalian space.”

“It is more than acceptable to us.” Jalersi spoke.

“And what of security?” Jiss asked.

“You will need to provide your own security.” Deia spoke. “We do not post checkpoints at the embassy locations. There is no need too.”

“What about crime?” Matuarr asked quickly. “Petty thieves and murderers?”

Deia looked at For’mya quickly and then back to Matuarr. “The crime rate in Sparta is point zero two five Legislature Matuarr. It doesn’t exist. The crimes you are referring do not happen here.”

“Number of embassy personnel?” Jalersi asked.

“I believe that since you are just establishing the embassy, forty is a reasonable number to start.” Deia answered. “Anything exceeding that will need approval. And just so you are aware of this, outside the grounds of your embassy compound, your personnel are subject to Union law and there is no immunity from prosecution. If your people break our laws, they will be punished by our courts.”

“We will cause no problems Prime Minister.” Jalersi spoke. “That is not why we are here. We are here only to further the relationship we have established.”

Deia nodded. “As do we.” She said. “I will leave you with this copy and should you feel the need to change anything, feel free to contact Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos directly. He and First Secretary Stenys will be your points of contact now. If there is nothing else I have another meeting to attend.”

“I still wish to see my sister!” Karun snapped coming to his feet. “You can not deny me that!”

Deia looked at him as she got to her feet. “I am not denying you anything young man.” She told him

For’mya looked at Karun as she too got to her feet. “It is not up to us.” She spoke evenly. “Martin Leonidas told Lisisa this morning. It will be she who decides what she wants to do when she has had time to process the information.”

“I’m afraid I must insist.” Jiss said as he stood up.

Deia looked at him. “Insist what?” She asked.

“That this Lisisa be brought before us.” Jiss continued. “She is the daughter of Marshall Pusintin. She has a right... and an obligation to know who her real brothers and sister are. Karun will be her initial contact.”

“That’s very nice.” Deia spoke. “As Queen For’mya has told you... that will be Lisisa’s decision.”

“You don’t understand.” Jiss said with a smug smile. “As Marshall Pusintin’s daughter... not King Leonidas’s daughter... she carries Kavalian citizenship. She is therefore subject to our law. Kavalian law. As a Kavalian female she can not refuse her brother’s request.”

Deia looked at For’mya quickly once more and then back to Jiss. “What nonsense is that?” She demanded.

Jiss held out the data pad. “It is not nonsense Prime Minister.” He replied. “It is Kavalian law. And as part of the Lycavorian Union’s own Galactic Laws Council states, you are not allowed to interfere or intervene in the internal laws of other governments.”

Deia snatched the pad from his hand and dropped her eyes to it reading swiftly. For’mya looked at Jiss stepping closer to Deia. “Tell me Legislature Jiss... did you spend all night putting this together?”

“I am thorough Queen For’mya.” He stated in reply. Quite sarcastically in For’mya’s opinion. “And it only took me a few hours.”

Deia looked up then and held out the pad to Ardis, who stepped forward from the wall and took it quickly. "I will review this at a later time." She spoke. "But Kavalian law does not extend to Union territory. Nor will it be allowed too. Lisisa Leonidas will decide what she wants to do Legislature Jiss. Not you."

"Our demand remains the same." Jiss spoke urgently. "She must agree to meet with her brother. She can not refuse. It is our law. I will file a formal Petition of Acceptance to submit to your own judges if I need too, following exactly the process Union Law dictates." For'mya chuckled as their eyes went to her. "You find something humorous Queen For'mya?" He stated.

"I find you quite humorous." For'mya spoke. "The rest I will leave for you to find out yourself. Where Lisisa is concerned I would tread very carefully. You will find she is unlike any woman you have ever dealt with." For'mya twisted around to Jalersi, quickly meeting her blue eyes before turning and brushing past Deia out of the room.

Deia chuckled and turned her head to Jiss. "And she is the most patient and tolerant of Martin's Queens." She said with a smile. "File whatever petitions you wish Legislature Jiss." Deia continued. "Until then... enjoy your time here in Sparta."

Deia spun around and headed for the door with confident strides. Ardis paused for only a moment, her stunning eyes falling on where Karun stood. She gazed at him for a long moment before turning and following her Prime Minister.

Jalersi whirled angrily when the door slid shut on Ardis. "You are pushing them too much Jiss!" She snapped.

Jiss shook his head. "They understand force." He spoke. "Your father left this for me to take care of. He left establishing the embassy to you and Athani. We will succeed here because we will not let up on pressuring them until they surrender her and all of her belongings. Including the dragon."

"Have you stopped to consider that they dragons they may be bonded to are not some type of property?" Athani spoke. "That they are just as intelligent as you and I? Perhaps they will not want to become property of the Kavalian people."

Jiss, Matuarr and Qurot laughed openly at that suggestion. "It is a beast! Nothing more! And her beast will be ours." Jiss spoke. "Just as everything that belongs to her will be ours. I am working on discovering what property she may own here on Earth and Apo Prime. Think of the treasures we could obtain due to her duties within the Union military. Once approved through their own courts, we will send our people directly to whatever she may call hers and secure it as property of the Kavalian Empire."

"And you truly think the King will allow this?" Athani asked.

"He will not go against his own laws!" Matuarr barked. "Jiss is right. He has no choice! He is trapped by the very laws he proclaims to uphold so dearly."

"We should proceed carefully at first." Jalersi spoke.

Athani's eyes darted to her sister. "Jalersi... you aren't actually going along with this are you?"

"It is what our father wants." Jalersi stated.

Qurot stepped up to her, taking her arm in his large hand. "Why do you question your father's wishes woman?" He growled in a low voice.

Athani yanked her arm from his grasp. "Don't touch me Qurot." She snapped.

"You have been acting odd ever since we were on their ship coming here Athani, why is that?" Qurot asked.

"I've acted no differently than I always act Qurot!" She snapped. "But since I am not allowed to speak with father... all I see is Jiss and Matuarr and my sister with a different agenda than what my father sent us here with."

"Your father is the one who gave us this agenda." Jiss spoke. "It is his direction we follow. Jalersi knows this after speaking with him last night. It is best you keep that in mind Athani'Puat. You are not above our laws simply because you are the Prefect's daughter."

Athani glared at him. "Are you threatening me Legislature Jiss?" She hissed.

"I am merely stating to you what your place is in the grander scheme of things." Jiss answered. He looked at Jalersi. "Perhaps it might be better if Athani remained in her quarters Jalersi. At least until we have moved to the embassy we will be occupying. Then she can move freely within the compound."

"I concur." Matuarr spoke.

Athani huffed and gathered the two data pads from the table. “That suits me just fine.” She snapped. “I truly can not wait to return home and be rid of all of you.”

Qurot chuckled. “All but me Athani.” He said. “All but me.”

Athani very nearly spat in his face, but she felt Resumar’s warm aura surround her then, soothing her from wherever he was within Sparta. It truly amazed her how he affected her in such a way. It was as if he could sense her emotions and the turmoil within her. Athani kept the look of delight at feeling Resumar from her face and she made a show of indignation at being dismissed in such a way before marching for the door.

He had told her to be prepared tonight. Prepared for him to possess her in every way she could imagine. He was professing to do more than what he had done already and just the thought of feeling his hands stroking her body and making her feel more than what he already had, that made Athani hum with anticipation.

G9 HIGH COVEN RUNNER

“...nothing.” T’lolt said as his dark eyes turned to look at Normya as he came from the cockpit. “We have been monitoring all of the Netnews channels we are able to pick up and nothing has been announced. We also monitor many of your unsecured military channels, and there has been no indication that you are missing. No increased chatter... no new code phrases.”

“That’s... that’s not possible.” Normya spoke holding the mug of very rich Akruvian Black Tea in her hands. The flavor was almost as smooth as her mother’s coffee and equally as strong. It filled her with warmth and almost seemed to energize her from the first sip after Tir’ut had given it to her. “The Gate exploded and we were lost over two days ago. All of our Jump Gates are on an early warning system and monitored constantly. There’s no way it would not go unnoticed.”

“*Il kal'daka darthirii...*” Tir’ut spoke as he knelt in front of her. “You spoke of a Chief Engineer that worked on your ship?”

Normya nodded. “Yes?”

“Could he have the ability to do this?” Tir’ut asked.

“Do what?” Normya asked.

“Conceal that this happened.” Esther asked now.

“I don’t think so.” Normya replied. “He has been working out of the main shipyards for years. He’s worked on all of our ships. I thought maybe I had snapped at him because of the fever and made him angry but...”

“Fever?” T’lolt asked. “Are you sick?”

Esther touched his arm. “She is not sick and it will pass in a few more days.” She said. “*Ol zhah natha jalil kal'daka klez T'lolt. Natha doerin d'kyikh d's'enaren, whol nindyn xuil kal'daka vlos.*” (It is a female wolf thing. A coming of age of sorts for those females with wolf blood.)

T’lolt nodded. “*Saph vel'drav udossta jalilen ul'plyr ranndilin kyikh.*” (Like when our females reach mating age?)

Esther smiled as Normya’s tanned face blushed slightly and she placed her hand on Normya’s leg affectionately. “Yes T’lolt. And it burns in her stronger because of who her father is. Now this embarrasses her... so we will talk of it no more.” She stated sternly.

Tir’ut shook his head. “To attempt to kill you because you may have barked at him does not make sense.” He spoke seeing her emerald eyes turn to look at him. “You are the daughter to the King. Your... your condition... it is common?”

“Tir’ut!” Esther demanded.

Normya nodded quickly. Esther’s eyes grew a little wider when Normya looked at Tir’ut and answered his question without pause. “All females with wolf blood, pureblood or not, all of us go through it when we reach... when we...”

Tir’ut nodded and placed his hand on her arm indicating she need say no more. “That is enough information *Il kal'daka darthirii.*” He spoke. “Enough for him to recognize and identify your condition as not something you can control.” Tir’ut said with greater supremacy over his own raging emotions and hormones, even though he desperately wanted to ask his mother what this condition his *Il kal'daka darthirii* had was, and

why he felt as he did when he looked at Normya Leonidas. And why he could detect the smell of orange cloves with a touch of mint and wildflowers. “Therefore not something he could get angry over. And the Fused Explosive charge... where you said your pilot friend found it? That is not something installed easily or quickly.”

T’lolt nodded. “A minimum of four hours time to make sure it works properly and test all the connectors.” He said.

“He had... he had my ship for almost eighteen hours.” Normya said feeling the warmth of Tir’ut’s hand even through her shirt and it was sending electric ripples through her body that she had never felt before. Electric ripples that felt so very good. She looked down at his large hand, the bronze color of his skin and the less pronounced bone spurs along the outside ridge of his palm and wrist. Normya almost groaned aloud in disappointment when he removed his hand and she made no move to shift away from him when he sat on the small couch next to her and pulled aside the torn edges of her pants to inspect her wound.

“That is sufficient.” T’lolt spoke.

“That is more than sufficient to plant the charge yes... but would he have access to what would be needed to hide the Gate being destroyed?” Tir’ut spoke looking up from her leg wound and into her eyes.

Normya shook her head quickly unable to tear her own eyes from his dark orbs. They were not as sunken in as T’lolt’s or Fash’ka, and though they were smaller than most people she knew, the size and shape of his eyes fit his head and skin color perfectly. Next to her father’s eyes they were the most beautiful dark eyes she had ever looked into. So deep and expressive that she could lose herself in them easily. “Impossible.” She spoke finally. “GUC is completely separate from the shipyards. And the civilians that work there are all thoroughly vetted.”

“Then he had someone helping him.” Esther said. “Or someone was directing him in his actions. Someone from this GUC perhaps?”

“It means Gate Usage Control. Where all of our Gates are monitored.” Normya answered turning to look at Esther. “And why would someone want to kill me?” Normya asked. “You are talking about...”

“Gareld did not just appear by chance so close to your border *Il kal'daka darthirii*.” Tir’ut spoke once more as he replaced the used MED COM patch with another and then refastened the torn cloth back over the wound to cover her bare skin. Esther noticed that her son did this with exacting slowness, almost possessively in nature. “He was there because he knew you would be there and what was going to happen. He was there to insure you were dead... or to capture you.”

T’lolt snorted. “Listen to him Normya Leonidas.” He said. “He is far too much like his father in that regard. Military operations... Force Potential Odds... intelligence aspects and ratios. He read all these books and more when he was growing. It gives me a *karliik jiv'undus*. Just point me at the enemy and tell me who to fight.” (Headache)

Normya found herself smiling in spite of herself and her training.

“Normya... is it possible to loop the feed from the monitoring station of this particular Gate?” Esther asked. “Make it seem as if it is still there even when it isn’t?”

“I suppose.” She answered quickly. “If you had access to the GUC monitoring stations and sensors. Why would you want to?”

“To give whoever wanted you dead or captured the time to insure that this task was completed and then make his or her escape perhaps.” Esther said. “That is why it is not being announced on your Union Netnews, and why your father remains on Earth. No one knows yet.”

“Mother... that would imply a much more far reaching aspect.” Tir’ut said evenly. “And a much more sinister reason behind the action.”

Esther nodded. “If Gareld is involved you can almost guarantee it is something sinister.” She said. “He said it was a profit he was going to make, which means he was only the one who was contracted to carry out the mission. Or part of it anyway. He did not come up with it.”

“What do you mean?” Normya said.

“Gareld wanted you alive Normya Leonidas.” Esther said. “If he was contracted to kill you, he would have simply destroyed your ship the moment it crossed the border, before you were able to make repairs. He is not smart enough to have arranged this for himself.”

“You... you said you knew who he was.” Normya spoke softly.

Esther nodded. "Yes. He was the Pureblood who whipped me with neutron radiation laced poisoned barbs and then laughed as I was gang raped by him and his friends. That was my punishment for falling in love with Cha'talla. If Cha'talla had not discovered the radiation in my wounds I would have died."

"Esther you..." T'lolt said in almost a whisper.

Esther shook her head. "No. He does not frighten me any longer T'lolt. Your brother's love for me purged every foul thing he ever did to me from my memory many years ago. Gareld is a coward and a fool. And I wish to be there the day Cha'talla finally catches up to him and fulfills his *Iglata d'Vlos*, for then he will know the meaning of fear."

T'lolt nodded slowly. "Yes he will." He looked at Normya and saw the look on her face. Confusion and anxiety and some fear. "When we followed my brother from the abyss the High Coven was leading our people into Normya Leonidas... many things changed for us. One of the first was how we view those we take as *Du'ased 'Ranndi*. It is an ancient Akruxian term that we now use in the vampire language. The Coven purged our native tongue from our heads many thousands of years ago so we adopted the vampire tongue as our own. It is very much like how your people, elves and Lycavorians view your chosen mates. They are more sacred to us now that we have been free of the Coven's influence for so long. And any who would do them harm will suffer an *Iglata d'Vlos*. A Promise of Blood if harm is brought to them. Cha'talla... my brother has sworn this very thing against Gareld for what he did to Esther. It will only end with Gareld's death... or Cha'talla's."

Normya looked at him for a long moment. "This... this is all so strange." She said finally. "I have been trained to... to fear Immortals. Yet... you... you have risked so much to save me. You are... you are not like we have made you out to be."

T'lolt smiled exposing his vampiric fangs. "I understand your trepidation daughter of Leonidas." He said. "Perhaps when you reach our home you will come to see we are very much different than the other scum Immortals that roam the universe as pirates and mercenaries. There are other elven females who honor our tribe with their wisdom and guile. They are the *Du'ased 'Ranndi* of eight Immortals. Young bucks as I used to be, and they would savage a path across the stars if anyone brought harm to their elven wives." T'lolt said with another grin. "You will see for yourself."

"I still don't understand why someone would come after me though." Normya said. "I'm just a pilot."

"You are daughter to the King of the Lycavorian Union." Esther said. "It is no secret how your father views his family. Or the lengths to which he will go to insure their safety. It is also no secret that your father has many enemies."

"Enemies that are too cowardly to come forward like *nesstren!*" Tir'ut hissed viciously. (Men)

"Yes... and that makes them more dangerous." Esther said looking at her son. "It has been forty-eight hours since the Gate's destruction. How much longer could they hide that you are missing and the Gate destroyed?"

Normya looked up, her emerald eyes bright. "If what you believe is happening is in fact taking place, perhaps another day, maybe two at most." Normya announced. "Every five days a pulse is sent through all of the Gates. To take Polarion Particle Readings and make sure they are within balance. If they have been hiding that the Gate is gone somehow, they won't be able to continue that once that pulse is sent. It's started at the GUC command center and bounced back from every Gate within the Union."

"And once it is determined that the Gate is gone and you are missing, your father will surge out of Union territory as a typhoon surges when it is hitting the edges of a continent." Esther said softly.

"But I'm not missing." Normya said. "I am with you."

Esther chuckled. "Yes well that might translate to the same thing for your father Normya. He is not aware of what we have built on Kranek. And without his presence to actually see we have changed, there is little that will stop him from acting."

"I won't tell my father where you are living." Normya said. "I will need to tell him what happened. I won't be able to lie to him Esther. Perhaps not all of it... because there is much more going on than when I left Earth and he is very anxious."

"How do you know this *Il kal'daka darthirii?*" Tir'ut asked.

"Because I can feel the spikes in his emotions even at this distance." Normya answered.

"You can touch your father from here child?" Esther gasped.

Normya shook her head quickly. “No. The distance is too great even for him. We can feel faint tremors of each other though. It’s almost like a pond... my family is a pond. Even over massive distances, though we can’t communicate directly within Mindvoice, we are still able to sense the other’s presence within the pond that we occupy by the ripples across the surface of the water. My father and mothers easily, my brother Andro easily, my other siblings less so, but not by much.”

“Cha’talla and I have this ability because we have shared each other’s blood. But not on so grand a scale.” Esther spoke.

Normya chuckled. “Trust me... there are times when it is down right annoying.” She stated. She looked up. “If you won’t let my father come to get me...”

“Normya... it is not a matter of what we want child.” Esther said. “We have come to cherish what we have built, and though our ultimate goal is to one day show your father we have changed... we still fear what he will do.”

“Will you allow my mother to come to Kranek then?” Normya asked.

“For what purpose?” Esther said.

“My mothers have a great deal of influence over my father.” Normya spoke with a small smile.

T’lolt chuckled. “That sounds familiar.” He said knowingly. “Not just for your father either.”

Esther slapped T’lolt’s chest with a stern look. “Quiet T’lolt!” She hissed but with a smile.

“They can control him for the most part.” Normya said smiling at T’lolt’s comment. “And my mother is not directly involved with either the High Coven or the Kavalians. She would not be missed if she left Earth. At least I don’t believe so. If what you tell me is true about what you have done... what you have accomplished on Kranek... and I believe it is. If this is true... then my mother is the one you want to see it first. She can come on one of our DTs so as not to draw attention.”

“And then you would reveal what really happened when she arrived on Kranek?” Esther asked.

Normya nodded. “Yes. Esther it is the only way to keep my father out of The Wilds in force.”

“Which of your mothers do you speak of Normya? You told me that you draw no distinction between them.” Esther said.

Normya nodded. “My birth mother.” She answered.

“Queen Dysea.” T’lolt spoke softly.

“Yes.” Normya said.

Esther looked at T’lolt now. “T’lolt? What do you think?” She asked.

“Cha’talla won’t be happy... but I believe he would agree without question.” He replied. “Ultimately it protects everyone. And if this is as big as you and Tir’ut suspect, then we have just dipped our hand in something far larger than you ever intended.” He looked at Esther. “You and I may be right after all Esther. It may be time to reveal to the Union we are here. We may need their help.”

“How do we contact him without using the repeater stations along the border?” Esther spoke. “Our transmission would be intercepted by everyone within two light years of every station. We’d have half the system looking for us.”

“Do you have secure capability on this Runner?” Normya asked.

T’lolt nodded. “Very secure.” He answered with a grin. “These are not standard G9 LRRs you know.”

Normya smiled. “Yes... I gathered that from the increased engine core design I saw as we came aboard. As well as the Phased couplers you have routed to the LSD coils.”

T’lolt’s face beamed and he laughed loudly. “Oh yes... I do like her Esther!” He growled looking at Esther. “She reminds me of you! Yes indeed... you will keep your *Quortek S’argt* on his toes, of this I have no doubt!”

“T’lolt, stop it!” Esther spoke with a smile. She looked at Normya. “Come child... I will show you where you can contact your father. You know of course all secure channels will be monitored.”

Normya shook her head. “Not the one I will use.” She replied. “It’s reserved for members of my family and a few others and only we have the codes.”

Esther nodded. “That is better... we don’t want some head strong young officer wishing to make a name for himself by rescuing you coming to visit us. The resulting confrontation would not be pretty for him I’m afraid.” She held out her hand and helped Normya to her feet. “This way.”

SPARTA ROYAL ESTATE

“...must have been some party.” Tesand whispered to Aikiro as they were led around the outside of the villa and past the shattered glass doors. Two techs from the Durcunusaan base were in the process of repairing and replacing the doors.

Aikiro smiled as Fache led them around to another single door and into the villa. “It would appear that way.” She spoke. “They met with the Kavalians dogs last night for dinner. It must not have gone well.”

“They invite them here and not us?” Tesand said. “Do you not find that odd?”

Aikiro shook her head. “No. Remember they are trying to maintain that we are only here for the signing of the Cease Fire. They followed diplomatic protocol in having them here for dinner. It would have been strange if they did not.”

Fache stopped by the door and turned to look at her as he passed his hand over the sensor. “King Leonidas is inside with the others Empress.” He said in a neutral tone of voice.

Aikiro nodded somewhat taken aback by the neutral tone of Fache’s voice. No matter where she went within Sparta, she detected no hostility from the men and women who she chose to stop and speak with. Indifference and interest... but no hostility. She and Tesand moved through the door and into what appeared to be a smaller version of the main room they had passed through. Two couches and several chairs were situated around the table, while bookcases lined one entire wall and were filled within ancient written texts that appeared to be hundreds if not thousands of years old. There were no windows in the room, but it was brightly lit and the dark colored pine walls gave off a polished feel and ambiance. There was a large desk at one end of the room and this is where they saw Martin Leonidas sitting, the elven Queen Dysea perched on the edge of his desk while they spoke to his mother in the communications holo disc.

“...found her as I knew he would. As only her mate could.” Gorgo was speaking. “He has taken her back to the new villa he purchased for them in Gytheio.”

“He bought a new villa?” Martin asked surprised.

Gorgo nodded. “Gallais and her mate completed the transaction for him while they were gone.” She answered. “He meant it to be his gift to her when they...”

“Mother...” Martin began.

“She needs him now my son. More than anything. Denali has given her what she never thought she would have Martin, outside of you and her mother’s love. He has been a constant pillar of devotion to her for three years now. Love such as you could not give to her. And she has blossomed even more in these last three years.” Gorgo spoke. “You must...”

Martin held up his hand. “I have no intention of doing what you are thinking.” He spoke. “I wouldn’t have even before all of this came out. Not with what I have felt between them now.” He said softly.

“I am going to meet with Gallais and arrange for her things to be moved. For’mya and I have already agreed to meet them there later this afternoon to check on them.” Gorgo spoke. “Aricia and Isabella will join us later. They need time alone right now... and we will give them that. Where is Anja?”

“She is dealing with that idiot Elder Council on Hadaria.” Dysea spoke now. “They have said they will attempt to take Siara, Retta and Calyb from Anja and Sivana to be schooled in the proper Hadarian manner.”

Gorgo rolled her eyes in the transmission. “Well... I’m quite sure Anja will tell that where they can put that idea.”

Martin nodded with a grin. “No doubt.” He said. “*Melda Min*, Anja and I will join you early this evening.” He said. “Tell them... tell them I love them mother.”

“You can tell them yourself when you arrive.” Gorgo said with a smile.

Martin nodded. “We have to go mother. We’ll see you this evening.”

Gorgo nodded. “Until later.” She spoke before ending the transmission.

Martin looked at Dysea as he got to his feet, taking her hand in his and squeezing it. “To have hidden it from us for so long *Nauta Melme*... that can only mean a level of devotion to each other rarely seen.” Dysea said.

Martin nodded. "I know." His eyes shifted to where Aikiro and Tesand stood by the door and he moved away from his desk. "Good morning." He said to them.

Aikiro's eyes narrowed at the subdued tone of his voice and she looked briefly at Tesand then back to Martin. "Your Colonel said you had some information for me." She spoke.

Martin motioned to the couch. "Sit down." He said.

Aikiro smiled as she moved to the couch. "Are you going to make this a habit Martin Leonidas? Inviting us over to your home after what appears to be a particularly interesting party you had with the Kavalians last night." She spoke as she settled onto the couch. Tesand moved behind where she sat and simply stood there. "Are you going to become best of friends with the Kavalian dogs now? Perhaps side with them against us?"

"Why would you say that?" Dysea asked as she sat in one of the chairs.

"I did not get an invitation to your home for dinner." Aikiro spoke in reply. "I'm rather hurt by that actually." She said with a small smile.

"Having them here was a political necessity and you know it." Dysea spoke. "If we are to continue training your dragons... we must make it appear nothing outside of the Cease Fire Accords is happening."

Aikiro gave her a smug look. "Do not explain to me what you are doing child!" She snapped softly. "I have been doing it far longer than you have been alive."

"*Melda Min...*" Martin's voice stopped her retort. "It's not worth it."

"Why did you bring me here?" Aikiro asked. "We were not supposed to go to wherever it is you sent my people until the end of the week. That isn't for two more days."

"You can tell your daughter she can stop hating me for something I never did." Martin spoke.

Aikiro smiled. "Whatever do you mean Martin?"

"Yuri thinks I raped her." Martin spoke plainly causing Aikiro to look at him. "You don't think I know that's why she hates me as she does."

"Are you admitting to that vile act?" Aikiro asked. "Or asking me for forgiveness?"

"Neither." Martin stated. "Because it didn't happen."

"I am supposed to believe you over my own daughter?" Aikiro asked with a shake of her head. "I don't think so."

Martin tossed the data pad into her lap before she could act. "Believe the medical information then. I've known since the day we got Lisisa off Lycavore. I tried to tell Yuri discretely and I even gave her the date, but as she always does, she dismissed anything I told her that day we met with Vonis. She has hated me all these years for something I never did. Over five hundred years Aikiro. That's a lot of hate to hold inside."

As Aikiro read the data pad her eyes first grew wider and then they narrowed. She looked at him quickly. "This is a lie!" She said.

"Is it?" Martin asked.

"All this medical data was compiled by one of your mates! By the Hadarian witch Anja!" Aikiro snapped. "Why should I believe any of it?"

"This is exactly why you should believe it." Dysea said. "As much as we love Martin, do you not think we would try to hide this to the best of our abilities as his mates if it was true? Why would we come to you like this? Pleistarchus raped your daughter Aikiro. He raped her and Lisisa is the result. Why do you think we are missing a door?"

Aikiro looked at her. "The Kavalians?"

"Lisisa." Dysea answered shaking her head. "When Martin told her the truth this morning."

"She didn't know!" Aikiro gasped.

"There wasn't a need for her to know. We didn't think it would ever rear its ugly head." Martin answered. "Now that it has... no doubt the Netnews worms will be all over it once the story breaks into the public. The Kavalians are going to announce it sometime soon I would think, just so they can rub our noses in it."

"I have no cares for this Lisisa! And neither does Yuri!" Aikiro snapped. "You granted them an embassy! You deal with it!"

"I granted them an embassy so we could watch the fools they have here to watch you Aikiro, you ungrateful bitch!" Martin barked. "I was put into the position of dealing with them and you know that! I want to deal with them less than I want to deal with you Aikiro!" He pointed at the pad. "What is on that pad is a major

malfunction that Yuri has with me... and it's not even fucking true! Her hatred for me is unfounded... and it is affecting the training of your other riders as well. That is the first thing that my son told me a day after they arrived."

"Yuri needs to come back here to Sparta for the time being!" Dysea stated. "Without Vollenth."

Aikiro looked at her. "For what purpose?" She snapped.

"Do the Kavalians know she is bonded to a dragon?" Martin barked out.

"More than likely yes." Aikiro answered. "Why..."

"Queen Dysea is right Aikiro." Tesand spoke dropping his hand to her shoulder. "It is known that Yuri was here with us in Sparta. The Kavalian spies we have within our ranks also know she is bonded to a dragon. She was never seen on the streets with Vollenth... while the others were seen with their dragons. Narice and the others they can hide within their own ranks of dragon riders, especially here on Earth, but not Yuri. She is too well known."

"Do the Kavalians know where you trained your dragons on Usu Ozeib 7?" Martin asked him.

Tesand nodded. "Undoubtedly."

"Then they will know your dragons are gone from there." Martin said. "They know Yuri is here with you... if she shows up here in Sparta with Vollenth, the cat will be out of the bag. If she doesn't appear with you at all, they'll know something is wrong right away and begin focusing their attention here on Earth. You don't want that... and I damn sure don't want that. If they see her here with you without her dragon they will have no reason to believe the others are here as well. At least that is my hope. She needs to come back and stay with you at least for a few weeks, or until we get the Cease Fire Accord thing done. She can return when that is signed. You will then have to either leave Earth or move to Eden City. It's much larger than Sparta and it won't be difficult to hide you among the many vampires that live there. I doubt the Kavalians will even want to go there considering that is where most of the vampire population on Earth is located. Give me a reason Aikiro! Give me a reason and I'll yank those dragons from you and kick you off Earth so fast it will make your fucking head spin! I'm trying to help you here... I don't trust you one *nubous* second but I'm still trying to help you and you are giving me *sibfla*!"

The door to the room opened and Colonel Fache stepped in quickly. "Milord! Milady!"

"In a moment Colonel." Dysea spoke calmly.

"This can not wait my Queen!" Fache retorted.

"What?!" Martin shouted turning to face him.

"Sire... it is Normya." He spoke. "She is on Spartan Nine Alpha."

Martin and Dysea immediately lost all interest in Aikiro. Martin bolted for his desk and his finger slammed down on the console panel as Dysea moved up to the desk her emerald eyes full of questions and fear. Some of that fear was alleviated when the image of Normya appeared in the holo disc projection and she appeared unharmed. She saw her daughter smile brilliantly.

"*Amille*." She spoke in elven with a soft wistful tone as she saw her mother.

"Normya!" Dysea gasped. Normya almost never referred to her in the elven language. Not since she was a child. "Normya... what is wrong?"

"Where is *Medwan*... mother?" Normya asked.

Martin stepped up next to Dysea who gripped his arm tightly, digging her nails into his forearm. "I'm right here *Fenneennum*."

"Something... something has happened and you must promise me something father." Normya spoke.

"Normya what..."

"Promise me *Medwan*!" She insisted. "Promise that you will listen to me!"

Martin's eyes narrowed slightly. "I promise." He said slowly.

"There was an accident." Normya spoke. "Toral and I struck the Jump Gate on exit. The Gate was destroyed and our TYPE II heavily damaged. We drifted across the border..."

"Normya!" Dysea almost shouted.

"Mother I am fine!" Normya spoke quickly. Her face changed and became sad. "Toral... Toral did not survive mother. We... we were boarded by pirates and mercenaries when we crossed the border and he was killed. It happened very fast and he felt nothing."

"Where are you Normya? I will come for you!" Martin did yell.

“No!” Normya barked. “You can not *Medwan!*”

“Normya... what is... are you being held hostage?” Dysea gasped.

“No!” Normya declared quickly. “Tir’ut and his mother rescued me! They saved me. I am with them right now!”

“Who is Tir’ut?” Martin demanded. “Where are you? I don’t recognize the ship you are on.”

They watched as Normya turned to her left and nodded and she moved slightly to the side to allow the stunning dark haired woman into the transmission. That she was a pureblood vampire was clearly evident to Martin and Dysea.

“King Leonidas... Queen Dysea... I am Esther Saira.” Esther spoke. “Your daughter is quite safe at the moment. She was wounded but I am a doctor and she is well on her way to recovering fully. She is a very strong woman.”

“Esther!” Aikiro gasped out from behind them causing Martin and Dysea to turn and look at Aikiro as she approached them staring at the transmission. “I... I thought for sure he would kill you within a day of leaving the Nuwaroa.”

“Aikiro...” Esther spoke her voice tinged with hate. “I can’t say it is a pleasure to see you. I had hoped the Kavalians would kill you. I guess my prayers were not answered.”

“Who is this?” Dysea demanded looking at Aikiro.

“She was a former servant of mine.” Aikiro replied. “Quite brilliant in fact. I had high hopes for her. Until she gave herself to an Immortal dog willingly. Tell me Esther...” Aikiro stepped closer. “Did he sell you to slavers or mercenaries and leave you to your fate?”

Esther’s smile was genuine. “Actually Empress... he made me his *Du’ased ‘Ranndi.*” She answered seeing Aikiro’s eyes go wide. “We rejoined with his tribe... all of them Aikiro. And we have built a wonderful settlement outside of the reach of the High Coven and your fool ways.”

“He made you his wife?” Aikiro gasped. “Oh Esther... you have fallen so far as to actually share a bed with an Immortal. That is truly a pity.”

“An Immortal!” Martin growled looking at Aikiro. “Who are you?” Martin demanded turning back to Esther. “Where are you? If you hurt my daughter... trace this transmission Fache!” Martin barked.

“*Medwan...* you can’t trace it.” Normya spoke quickly now. “I have used a rotating encryption algorithm.”

“Who is this Aikiro?” Martin demanded once more.

“She is just who she says she is. Her name is Esther Saira... and apparently she is now the wife of the former Immortal Captain to my late husband. Cha’talla.” Aikiro answered.

“Cha’talla!” Martin snapped. “He was killed by Veldruk! I know that for a fact!” He turned back to the transmission. “I swear by every star in the night sky, if you hurt my daughter in any way I will hunt you down to the pits of whatever hell you believe in and make you die in more pain than you could possibly imagine!”

“Father!” Normya exclaimed. “Esther and the others saved my life!”

They saw the large hand enter the transmission and rest on Esther’s shoulder. She looked up and nodded before moving over even more. Dysea gasped as if in pain when T’lolt’s face appeared and the image of the pure Immortal became clear. “*Nauta Melme...*no!” She cried.

Martin knew that face however and he stepped closer to the image. His mind was swept back twenty-five years to a lonely grass plain on a world that he had tried hard to forget over the years.

“T’lolt!” He said in disbelief.

All of them saw T’lolt smile, exposing his fangs and nod his head. “I am truly honored you remember.” He spoke. “I of course remember you Martin Leonidas.”

“*Nauta Melme...* you know this Immortal?” Dysea gasped gripping his arm.

“Whatever issue you have with me T’lolt, it does not concern my daughter!” Martin spoke instantly.

T’lolt shook his head. “You misunderstand the tone of my words Martin Leonidas.” He spoke calmly. “Do you remember my question to you that day on Lycavore?”

Martin nodded slowly. “I remember you asked me why?”

T’lolt nodded. “And do you remember your answer?”

“Honor.” Martin spoke just as quickly. “It was you wasn’t it? You wiped out the crew of that APC.”

T'lolt nodded and held up the *Nehtes*. "With the weapon you left for me. I have carried it since that day in the hopes that one day I would be able to return the honor you showed me that day. As I have told your daughter Normya... destiny and fate has finally answered my wish. We have changed Martin Leonidas. My brother Cha'talla has changed, as has our entire tribe. We have tried to live with the same honor and conviction you showed so easily that day for me. And I believe we have succeeded."

"Do not believe a word they say!" Aikiro snapped. "She consorts with Immortals! She is a traitor and a whore! Your daughter is in great danger Leonidas! Esther is nothing more than a traitorous wench who beds with..."

"Be silent you *l'puul sanguine elg'caress!*" The second extremely large figure moved into the transmission now between Esther and Normya and they saw Tir'ut's dark eyes ablaze with anger and hate, his lips curled back over his own vampiric fangs. That he was an Immortal was easy enough to see, but he was also very different. They also noticed, at least Dysea did anyway that his arm snaked around Normya's waist to keep from knocking her over as he squeezed into the transmission. And her daughter did not shrink away from his touch, but only looked at his face with bright eyes. "You will not besmirch my mother's honor *dos vithin al'vur!*" (Foul vampire bitch)(You fucking cow)

"Why you insolent..." Aikiro started.

"You do not know what *bel'la* is! I will protect *ussta Il kal'daka darthirii* with my dying breath! What do you know of...?" (Honor)(My She-wolf elf)

Esther placed her hand on Tir'ut's wide shoulder and shake her head gently and his loud diatribe ceased immediately.

"My nephew does not care for you Empress." T'lolt spoke with a smile once more. "He is Cha'talla and Esther's first born, and he more than his three younger brothers knows well what you are responsible for."

"Firstborn?" Aikiro gasped. "You actually birthed a child for that monster?"

Esther smiled in the transmission. "Four actually just as T'lolt said." She answered as proudly as any mother would. "All of them with the power and strength of an Immortal and the skills of a Pureblood vampire. They are quite handsome don't you think."

"Mother..." Tir'ut hissed almost as if he was embarrassed.

Esther smiled. "A new breed of Immortal if you will Aikiro. Cha'talla and I hope to have a girl soon. Now removed your pathetic carcass from this transmission for we are not talking to you bitch!" She finished with a snarl.

"Martin Leonidas you..."

"Shut the *nubou* up!" Dysea screamed at her.

T'lolt chuckled and Dysea's head turned back to the image and she looked at him. "I see now where your daughter gets her spirit from. She is a superior pilot Queen Dysea, and a fine warrior."

"What... what do you want?" Dysea asked softly.

"My nephew is correct in his words Martin Leonidas." T'lolt spoke calmly. "He and I have proclaimed a *Iglata d'Vlos*. A Promise of Blood. We will protect and shield your daughter from any that would do her harm. That is my debt of honor to you. And I will see it fulfilled."

"Where are you taking her?" Martin asked.

"We are returning to our settlement." Esther spoke now. "We are shrouded at the moment to keep unwanted eyes and sensors from discovering us. The mercenaries who attacked your daughter will not give up easily for they knew who she was. We also... we also do not wish to fall victim to your quite famous temper King Leonidas. Especially where it concerns those you love." She continued. "It is why Normya has made it so you can not trace this transmission. And it is just as well since you seem to have dubious company at the moment. The Empress would not hesitate to order a full scale assault against our settlement in an effort to complete what she failed to do so long ago."

"Normya..." Dysea said.

"It's true mother." She spoke. "I am not afraid. Tir'ut almost died protecting me from something that wanted to eat me when we crashed. They risked their lives to save me father. And they have treated Toral's remains with the utmost honor. Mother... do you remember where you took me on Iriral when I was five? The mountain on Elear?"

"Yes." Dysea answered quickly.

“Reverse the letters and change the position of the first two mother. That is where I will be. We will get there in another twenty-four hours. Come in a DT.” Normya spoke. “Please father... only mother. I have told them I would help to protect their settlement and having you show up with an entire Fleet Group would not do that. I am not in danger. *Son vada saar aur terit ano.*”

Martin stepped closer to the transmission when Normya used the code word phrase they had developed long ago to indicate they were not in danger and among friends.

“*Wen forn inniel?*” Martin asked.

Normya smiled brightly again. “*Jainn Medwan.*”

“*Melda Min?*” He asked turning to her.

“I will leave within the hour.” Dysea answered immediately.

“We know you always travel with your *Durcunusaan* and your dragon Queen Dysea.” Esther spoke. “They are never far from your sides. I will not tell you to come alone, as that would only make you think we have ulterior motives. Which we do not. Please insure that they are made aware we are not the enemy however. If this is to be our first meeting, I would rather it be friendly so that we can build from there.”

Dysea was impressed with the woman’s calm and intelligent demeanor and she nodded her head. “You have my word. May I bring... do you need supplies? Medicines?”

Esther chuckled. “Well... if you could spare one of your wonderful Teraphasic Medical Sensors...” She shook her head. “No... thank you, we are actually very self sufficient.”

Martin looked at T’lolt. “What do you want in return?” He asked.

T’lolt smiled. “A case of that Spartan Wine your people make so well. It is a rare find here in The Wilds. And far too expensive.”

“What else?”

T’lolt snapped up the *Nehtes* in a horizontal motion and gripped it tightly. “Your trust King Leonidas. And in time... perhaps your friendship.” He stated firmly.

Martin drew his *Nehtes* instantly and snapped it up into the same position. The intricately designed and dragon armor forged *Nehtes* glittering in the light. “Return my daughter to me unharmed T’lolt of the Immortals... and you and your brother will have earned that trust. A hundred fold.”

T’lolt nodded. “*Talinth ol xunor.*” (Consider it done)

Martin turned as the transmission faded and looked at Dysea. “*Melda Min...* you don’t have to go.”

Dysea shook her head quickly. “She is our daughter *Nauta Melme*. She gave us the code phrase, but to contact us on the secure channel tells me there is something else going on. I am not afraid.”

“Immortals can not be trusted.” Aikiro spoke once more. “You know how they enslave elves. Your daughter is probably already lost to them. Sending your Queen among them too is rash and stupid! You should just launch a full strike against their base and take her back by force.”

Dysea whirled on her quickly, emerald eyes flashing in anger. “Does it not bother you that you move through life with blinders over your eyes? That you see only enemies and those you can conquer?” She hissed.

Aikiro shook her head. “No... it has kept me alive all these years.” She stated.

Dysea huffed loudly and turned back to Martin. She leaned into him and he drew her close for a deep kiss. As they parted Dysea ran her long fingers down his bearded face. “I will return with her. Do not worry.” She said softly.

“Take Danny and Anuk with you.” Martin stated.

Dysea shook her head. “Nayeca is only days from giving birth. I will not take them away from her now. Iriral and I will go and I will bring a standard detachment of five. I gave them my word... and I will keep it.”

“Take two engineers Melda Min. Just in case.” Martin said quickly.

[*Give my love to Lisisa and Denali Nauta Melme.*] She spoke switching to Mindvoice.

Martin nodded. [*I will.*]

Dysea kissed him once more and then turned to leave the room quickly. Martin looked at Aikiro and Tesand for a long moment and then spoke. “We are going tomorrow Aikiro. Yuri comes back with us. No more questions or problems. Even you have to admit things are happening with far too much frequency ever since you arrived here.”

Aikiro nodded her head slowly at that for she agreed with him. “Yes. In that you are correct.”

“Have your Spartan detachment bring you to the airfield at oh nine hundred tomorrow morning.” Martin said. “And be prepared to tell Yuri she needs to leave Vollenh where he is until things settle with the Kavalians. I ain’t playing games anymore.”

Aikiro watched him march out of the room and she looked at Tesand slowly. “Yes. Well neither am I.” She said softly.

GYTHEIO

Lisisa stretched luxuriantly on the soft, cool sheets, her body oh so pleasantly sore.

Her wolf nose twitched and the scent of peppermint and lavender filled her head. And it was coming from deep within her blood and her body. Lisisa’s mind rejoiced at this like never before. Denali had kept his promise to her. He had brought her back here to the new home he had bought for them and made love to her with a passion and intensity he had never displayed. She hadn’t even had time to look around the villa both of them had seen last year and fallen in love with. Denali had carried her right into the large bedroom, the only piece of furniture a large bed with fresh sheets on it. He had scented her half a dozen times, releasing his powerful male pheromones within his juices as he filled her and each time Lisisa received it and welcomed it with ecstasy and glee at what he brought to her. Four of those times she had fed on his delicious blood, making their explosions so much more powerful. No amount of cloned blood would remove his scent from her now that she had willingly allowed the wolf portion of her body to absorb him so deeply. And more than anything that knowledge made her body sing out in delight. Her felt familiar fingers tracing up the outside of her thigh and she turned her head with a smile.

“Hey.” Denali’s voice whispered.

Lisisa saw him sitting on the bed next to her wearing only a pair of shorts, leaving his chest and shoulders wonderfully bare. She sat up quickly, dismissing the sheet as it dropped from around her large breasts, and she wrapped her arms around his waist and kissed him. Lisisa whimpered in delight when his arms crushed her to him and he deepened their kiss, his hands stroking her bare back and her raven colored hair which was wildly strewn about her skin. They broke apart after a moment, Lisisa snagging his bottom lip gently within her teeth and pulling on it.

“Denali.” She whispered bringing her hands up to stroke his cheeks. “I love you Denali Leonidas.” She said softly. “So very much.”

Deni smiled. “And I love you Lisisa Leonidas.” He stated. He reached up and touched her jaw. “How are you doing?”

Lisisa nodded immediately. “I will... I will be fine.” She said. “You were right. He was the one who came for me. He was the one who made me his daughter even though he knew the truth. He is the one who has loved me as my father. He is the only father I have... and the only one I want. I will not let this destroy who I have become, or what I have discovered with you. I won’t.”

Denali chuckled. “How does it feel to be the mate of a man over four hundred years you junior? Some would say you are robbing the cradle.”

Lisisa laughed then, and it felt so very good. “Well... if they knew what a wonderful gift you have they would probably want to rob the cradle too.” She said seductively, her hand sliding down between them and brushing against his flaccid cock.

“My gift is for you only.” He stated taking her hand from his groin. “However... now would not be a good time. Everyone is here.”

Lisisa’s eyes grew wide. “Here? Who?”

“Father. Our mothers. Aunt Deia, grandmother Gorgo.” He replied. “They love you and they are worried about you.” He said. “And if I have to deflect one more inquiry from our brothers and siblings I will go insane. They have been probing me for the last nine hours asking about you.”

Lisisa looked at him. “They know?” She gasped.

Denali nodded. “Andro has known for two years.” He said.

Lisisa’s eyes went wide. “Two years!” She stammered. “But he... he...”

“Yes... he is the one that denied my transfer to the *EPIC MYTH* last year.” Denali spoke. “So that we could stay together on the *SCIMITAR*. He has kept us together so that our love could grow and be strong. Strong enough to defeat something like this.”

“Denali... my love forgive me.” Lisisa spoke taking his face in her hands. “What I said to you...”

“Was not you.” Deni finished with a smile to her. “You did not say those things Lisi. And I have already forgotten them. Now... now you must get dressed. They are waiting.” He got to his feet and held out his hand for her. Lisisa reached up and let the sheet drop fully away from her body as she stood up on the bed. She looked at him with a smile as she was now taller than him. “What?” He asked looking up into her face.

“You brought me here Denali. Yet you forgot to bring me any clothes. You shredded my uniform. What exactly do you think I was going to wear?” Lisisa said.

Denali grinned and pulled her close to him, his arms sliding around her firm ass and his face tucked into her flat powerful abdomen. “What is wrong with what you have on?” He said inhaling her maple and wheat scent deeply. “I have no problems with it.”

“I have no problems with moving about our home naked for your eyes to drink in.” Lisisa spoke. “I will not however give everyone else a free show. And most certainly not our father!”

Denali tore the sheet from the bed with one pull and wrapped it tightly around her lithe figure. Lisisa took it from his hands quickly wrapping it around herself like a dress as she shook her head at his antics. “A member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* you may be Denali Leonidas... but you really need to learn to tie a knot.”

“Knots make it harder to take off.” Denali spoke as he lifted her up and set her on the floor, towering over her five foot three frame. “Of course that is part of the fun.”

Lisisa pushed him away playfully and let him take her hand. She took a deep breath and nodded. “I am ready.” She said.

It had been like this many times in the past twenty-five years, but now Lisisa felt it a thousand times more. His strong arms around her, his bearded face pressed to her forehead, and her arms wrapped around his waist. Martin stroked her head gently, his eyes closed as he inhaled of her scent, now detecting Denali’s scent deeply embedded in her blood. So deeply that it would announce to all that Lisisa was his mate now.

“I am sorry father.” She said. “About this morning.” She whispered against his chest.

Martin shook his head. “I should have told you from the outset.” He whispered.

Lisisa shook her head now and pulled away to look at him. “No.” She stated. “I am your daughter. There is nothing to tell me. I don’t care what blood tests or DNA say. I am your daughter and I will always be your daughter. I just... I just lost my sense of balance for a moment.”

“And Denali gives this to you.” Martin asked her softly as he pulled her head away from his chest to look at her.

Lisisa’s eyes were bright and alive as she nodded. “And so very much more.” She said. “Please... please do not be angry with us father. We did not...”

Martin put a finger to her lips and stopped her words. “Does he make you happy Lisi?”

Lisisa smiled radiantly and nodded her head. “Oh yes... very happy. Almost as happy as they day you came for me.”

Martin nodded. “Then that’s good enough for me. I know he loves you... with every waking moment he breathes.”

Lisisa turned and looked over to where Denali sat between their mother Aricia and Gorgo on the couch. “And I him.” She said softly.

“Then let’s put our heads together and figure out what we are going to do.” Martin said holding her hand as he drew her back towards where the others sat.

Aricia was the one to look up when they approached. Panos had said Aricia might be the one to resist the union, but as Gorgo watched, she quickly made room for Lisisa on the couch next to her. Lisisa smiled as she settled next to Denali and Aricia took her hands and leaned over to nuzzle Lisisa’s cheek and neck affectionately.

Martin settled to the arm of the chair where Isabella sat. “Ok... our next move.” He spoke.

Deia looked up. “They will undoubtedly demand she meet with Karun.” She spoke. “They have already stated as much.”

Martin shook his head. “No way.” He spoke. “They can kiss my big Spartan ass! I won’t allow it!”

“Lover... you ass is many things... big is not one of them.” Anja quipped from where she sat next to For’mya on the other couch. “Incredibly firm and tight and...”

“Anja!” Gorgo almost shouted.

“I must agree with *Melyanna* about your ass Martin Leonidas. But we do understand the characterization of your feelings on the matter.” For’mya stated with a smile.

Gorgo shook her head. “It is a defect in his genes.” She muttered. “It has to be. And he has passed it on to his sons and infected his mates. *Vada carians* preserve us.”

“Details!” Denali barked. “We don’t need the details!”

Lisisa elbowed Denali in the side. “I rather like your ass as well Denali my love.” She stated matter-of-factly.

“Whoa! Stop!” Martin exclaimed. “Details! We don’t need the details!”

This broke the ice and tension in the room and all of them laughed heartily. Deia shook her head as she got to her feet holding her coffee. “So what do we tell them?”

“We don’t tell them anything.” Lisisa spoke looking up. “I tell them. I tell them I have a father and five mothers who love me and who I love with all that I am. I tell them I don’t recognize this Pleistarchus as my father. I will meet with this Karun... but they should not expect anything after the first meeting. I would much rather cultivate the relationship with the sister I have just recently discovered than any brother or sister who is half Kavalian.” Lisisa looked at them. “That is what I tell them.”

Deia looked at her. “And what if that is not acceptable to them *Mandra*?” She asked.

Lisisa looked at Martin with bright forest green eyes and a beautiful smile. “*Then* I tell them to kiss father’s big Spartan ass!”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SODRAG

“Argggghh!” Dante Moran screamed out as he landed on his back, the air leaving his lungs in a rush and pain shooting through the lower portion of his hips as he impacted the hard surface of the indoor mat.

Zarah Leonidas continued in her wickedly fast motion, twisting his arm and rotating her body over the top of his, all the while holding his thumb and palm in a savagely painful and distorted grip. Though only twenty-one years old, twenty-two as soon as her Coming of Age passed as she was always so pleased to tell everyone, Zarah Leonidas was perhaps one of the most lethal hand-to-hand instructors in the Union military. She had taken to the martial arts when only five years old and quickly advanced at a rate her own instructors could not believe. By the time she was eleven she could defeat all of her Agoge Instructors with ease. She had an exquisitely smooth combination of vampire and wolf strength and endurance, and the ability to blur and wrap the shadows around her with consummate skill. Her five foot five body was a picture of slim muscle and very feminine curves with long legs for her height and an ass that could turn the eye of a wolf or vampire hundreds of years older than her. She had her mother Isabella’s chest with full, firm and prominent breasts, something she had only just started to dress to accent. Her body drew the most attention obviously, with most young wolves and vampires drooling over the prospect of bedding her, until they came to their senses and realized who she was. She was daughter to King Leonidas, and sister to Androcles Leonidas, two males who had shown a very protective nature towards the females in their family. Often times that nature caused pain for the fool males who thought to make a play for a Leonidas daughter and were not sincere in their actions.

Those who took the time to get past her obvious physical delights discovered a ravenous seeker of new knowledge and experiences. Zarah Leonidas was well on her way to becoming an incredibly skilled engineer like her sister Carina, and she loved to tinker with machines and computers. When males saw this level of intelligence and insightfulness in her, they quickly decided Zarah was out of their league. Combined with who her father was, it made it next to impossible for her to find any male who was interested in her.

She wore the standard Mark IV ArmorPly armor as they all did, and the gathered High Coven riders watched with some awe as she dropped onto Dante's chest with all of her weight, another rush of air leaving his lungs and emptying them completely. She popped up quickly and released his arm, watching as he rolled to his side holding his arm tightly to his side. Zarah brushed her dark brown hair from her face as she watched Dante, the rest of her shoulder length locks pulled into a pony tailed and tied with Drow silk all the way to the tip. She looked to where Yuri was sitting on her sore butt from being dropped by Zarah in even less time. Her face was locked in a scowl as she nursed her twisted arm and leg.

"Anyone else?" Zarah popped out as she turned her dark eyes to the other riders. Like her mother's eyes, they were lightly shaded with green, but her father's dark eyes were definitely the more dominant.

Narice and Carisia looked at each other quickly with equally wide eyes and then back to Zarah. "You... my sister and Dante were the most skilled among us in hand-to-hand fighting." Narice spoke softly.

Zarah turned back as Dante began to get to his feet. "Less attitude more concentration next time." She spoke to him as she tried to help him to his feet.

Dante yanked his arm away from her. "You surprised me!" He snapped.

"No... you thought because you are a big bad vampire male that you could stomp my little female wolf ass." Zarah stated with a grin.

"You are not wolf!" Dante barked. "You are a half breed!"

Zarah smiled brightly at him, his sarcastic comment bouncing off her. "Actually... my father's genes are more dominant so that makes me more wolf than vampire, but if the best you can come up with is half breed... I guess it will do. I'm a half breed that just beat your ass!" She spoke. "Never judge a book by its cover. You've never heard that expression?"

Dante looked at her. "No!"

"Well now you have." She stated.

"You should not have been able to defeat us so easily." Yuri spoke now as she stood up and moved closer. "We are bonded to dragons! Our abilities are increased, enhanced by these bonds!"

Zarah nodded. "Only if you know how to call on them and use them." She spoke calmly. "Which you can't."

"What do you know child!" Yuri snapped. "You are not bonded to a dragon!" Yuri heard soft chuckling and she turned her head to see the two older *Durcunusaan* Spartans standing to the rear of the gather pilots.

"Are you so sure Princess?" Zarah asked lifting her hand. All them were stunned when the light blue psychic shield appeared and engulfed her hand up to her wrist. She lifted her other hand and another light blue psychic shield engulfed that hand as well. "That would be a painful mistake to make don't you think?"

Narice stepped forward a little. "You are bonded... you are bonded to a dragon?" She asked. "Our... our intelligence did not reveal this!"

Zarah looked at her and smiled. She liked Narice. She was even tempered and no where near as arrogant as her older sister. She was open to new things and did not treat those around her as if they were inferior. She was a little perturbed at how she had treated Arrarn the night on Andro's island, her arrogance showing through then but that had disappeared the moment she smelled the interest Narice had in her brother, as well as the red head Toria. Zarah quickly chalked it up to jealousy and fear and not arrogance.

"I would imagine there is a lot your intelligence did not reveal to you." Zarah said with a smile. "But no... I'm not bonded to a dragon."

"Then how...?"

Zarah shrugged. "No one really knows for sure... but I have the ability to draw from the psychic presence of any dragon or Mindvoicer in the vicinity of where I am. The stronger that person or persons, the stronger the shield I can project. I've learned how to channel that Mindvoice power into my physical blows and in how I fight. I use it to enhance my ability to blur and also regulate the power of my strikes." She looked at the riders. "It is a skill all of you have... you just have not tapped into yet and that is what you have to learn how to do. That's what I will teach you."

"And what will you teach us child!" Yuri snapped once more. "You have never fought Kavalians! Their clone soldiers are savage and large. As large as your brothers for the most part. They are fast, utterly ruthless and exceptionally strong. You would not last a second or two in single combat with them! I have barely escaped single combat with them."

“And I beat you down pretty effectively.” Zarah said.

“You... you caught us by surprise with you skills.” Yuri barked. “It was not a fair test of our abilities!”

“We can go a second time if you don’t think it was fair test Princess.” Zarah said. “The result will be the same.”

“Your arrogance will be your undoing child.” Yuri growled.

“I’m not arrogant Princess Yuri.” Zarah spoke calmly. “I know what I can do and I’m confident in my abilities. I have abilities you as riders have, but do not know how to use.” She explained. “I have read every report and studied every bit of intelligence on the Kavalians and the capabilities of the biogenic clones. We are not stupid, contrary to what you continue to believe.” Zarah turned back to the other riders. “I can teach you to focus and channel your psychic abilities to enhance the power and speed of your physical blows. You just need to amp up your connection with your dragon. Let it flow through you more. It must become second nature for you, just as it is for the riders of *Mjolnir’s Hand*.”

“I grow tired of hearing of *Mjolnir’s Hand*.” Yuri snarled more forcibly now. “You and the others speak of them as some sort of gods. They are riders, just as we are. No different!”

Zarah looked at her evenly and shook her head. “Not gods... just men and women who have taken the bonds with their dragons to the next level. Something you will never achieve because you choose to look at Vollenth as a tool rather than an equal. Any one of *Mjolnir’s Hand* could erase you in the time it would take for them to blink because you don’t believe.”

“Believe what?” Yuri snapped.

“That you can be more.” Zarah answered immediately.

“Are there any here on the base now?” A male rider asked from the ranks. “Members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* I mean?”

Zarah shook her head as she turned to look at him. “Just Andro, Deni and Lisisa.” She answered. “The members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* wear essentially the same uniform as we do, but their shoulders are painted in crimson. My brothers and sister don’t wear their *Mjolnir’s Hand* uniforms. They won’t start wearing them again until their ranks are filled once more. They are still missing one Bonded Pair, and until they find that pair the search will continue.”

“Wait... isn’t Princess Eliani and Prince Resumar... they are bonded to dragons as well.” A female rider spoke now.

Zarah nodded in agreement. “Yes... but they are not true members of *Mjolnir’s Hand*. Including my father there are only four in my family that are active members of their unit. Our younger siblings, maybe one day since they have all discovered their bonds early, but we won’t know for several years at least.” Zarah smiled. “You never know... no one really knows when they get together as a unit. They usually operate in ones and twos so it’s hard to get them all together.”

“Will they come here?”

Zarah shrugged. “Aside from my Uncle Isra... you might see one or two during your time here. No one really knows when they come and go as I said. They only have two people they answer too really. My father and Andro.”

“Aren’t many of them older than him by several centuries? Even their dragons.” Narice asked now. “I understand he is Crown Prince of the Union... but doesn’t that cause... doesn’t it cause friction between them, having to take orders from someone so much younger?”

Zarah shook her head quickly. “Never. Andro was bonded with Elynth when he was still within my mother’s womb... I think you have been told that before. In some ways their bond is stronger than my father’s and Torma, in some ways it’s not. And after Alba Tau... no one will ever question my brother because of his age. Besides... the members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* do not look upon each other as subordinates or officers. They view themselves as brothers and sisters with each other as well as their dragons. That is what makes them so very powerful. And that is why there are only three hundred of them at any given time. As a rider you must be one with your dragon in a way that goes beyond most Bonded Pairs. You must think and act with one mind, one breath and one heart.” Zarah looked at Narice. “You and Carisia have almost reached that point with Deneth and Anthar. You know what I am talking about.”

Narice glanced quickly to where Yuri stood looking at them and then back to Zarah. “Perhaps not as much as you might think.” She said.

Zarah may have been young but she was far from stupid and without even turning she could sense Yuri looking at Narice and Carisia. She shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe I was wrong then." She said quickly. She clapped her hands together. "Ok... let's get to the first lesson shall we."

"Immortals!" Arrarn gasped.

Andro nodded as he handed Arrarn the data pad. "She's with them now. Mother is on the way in a *DT* to meet with them and get her back."

"Wait a minute!" Moneus declared. "Get her back? Why isn't Uncle Martin sending a full Fleet Group to get her? They are Immortals Andro! Why would they... why would they just give her up?"

"You remember the Immortal that our fathers saved on Lycavore?" Andro asked him as he moved to the table in the Command Center. "His name was T'lolt."

Moneus nodded. "Father told me a little about him. It was Uncle Martin who saved him really. They seem to think that it was him who took out the APC that was assaulting their flank."

"It was him. Father talked to him." Andro stated. "And now he and his nephew have sworn an *Iglata d'Vlos* to protect Normya."

"His nephew?" Arrarn asked looking up from the pad.

"The son of the Immortal Captain Cha'talla and his pureblood vampire wife... this Esther Suira." Andro spoke.

They both looked at him. "Cha'talla?" Moneus exclaimed. "Andro we were told he was dead!"

"Well... apparently the reports of his death were exaggerated somewhat." Andro said as he looked at him.

"Andro... a Jump Gate exploding... that should be all over the Netnews!" Arrarn said leaning forward in his chair. "Especially seeing that it was Normya that was flying the *TYPE II* that hit it."

"Yes I know." Andro replied. "It appears the mercenaries that attacked her ship while she and Toral were trying to repair it had help within our ranks. That is why it hasn't been reported yet. Aside from those of us in this room, father and our mothers, no one else knows. At least not yet. Father decided to wait until just before the pulse to give mother time to get as close as possible before they announce it. We don't know who or what or why right now, and we won't until mother gets to Normya and talks to her and finds out."

"Uncle Martin trusts this Immortal Andro?" Moneus asked softly. "Isn't that a huge *nubous* risk? Immortals... they enslave elves, not help them. And forgive me for saying so, and don't tell Carina, but Normya is one smoking hot elf female. Immortals... they turn them into sex slaves and..."

"Yes we know." Andro said softly. "They spoke with him, and in this we need to trust father and mother's judgment. They were there and talked with this T'lolt. The only reason he told me was because he knew I had Arrarn checking why Normya hadn't even reported her position in, and he doesn't want it revealed just yet. Whoever set her up doesn't know she survived yet. We need to get as close as we can to finding the person or persons that helped these mercenaries before it is announced she is alive and safe. This mercenary scum was after Normya specifically. They knew where she was going to be, so it does not leave this room, and most certainly do not tell Zarah. She would be worried sick and demand to go after her."

"Someone at the GUC had to be helping them." Arrarn spoke. "They must have looped the feed somehow."

Andro nodded. "That is what Uncle Andreus is moving to check even now." He said. He looked at Moneus. "How are Thast and the others doing?"

Moneus grinned wickedly. "They don't like it... that's for sure." He said. "They are returning today after their shift... but the Security Commander is keeping them busy."

"No recons since they left?" Andro asked.

Moneus shook his head. "None that we've detected." He replied. "That's not to say they haven't developed something to mask themselves while wrapped in the shadows though."

"They would have used it by now." Andro acknowledged. "Keep the security around Operations and the Command Center here tight. Let Nyla know as well Moneus."

Moneus got to his feet and nodded. Andro was his best friend and he knew by the tone of his voice that he was keeping him out of the loop specifically to protect him. "I'll go over and tell her right now. She and her team are drilling by the east quad."

Andro nodded as he watched his friend leave. As soon as the door closed and sealed he turned to Arrarn. "You still have your contacts at the GUC Command Base on Apo Prime?"

Arrarn nodded. "Raloua's brother just got promoted. Why?"

"Contact him Arrarn. See what he can find out. We sent Normya off by herself... and now Toral is dead and our sister is in the hands of Immortals who say they are friendly and will protect her. Whether that is true or not remains to be seen, but I want to know who set our sister up. And when we find out, you and I are going to have a talk with them."

Arrarn nodded his dark eyes matching the anger in his brother's azure blue ones. "I'll take care of it." He spoke. "What's going on Andro?"

Andro shook his head as he got back to his feet. "The *Feravomir* said something to me yesterday." He said softly. "The Coven and Kavalians here on Earth, the issues mother and Aunt Sivana are having on Hadaria. This lash up with Lisisa. And now this deal with Normya. If I didn't know any better brother... I'd say they were all tied together somehow and it is being directed by some master conductor."

"Because they all seem to be happening at the same time?" Arrarn asked.

"It's odd don't you think?" Andro spoke.

Arrarn got up as well. "It may seem that way because you are trying to find something that may or may not be there Andro." He spoke. "That is a gift you and Elynth have, but sometimes it is not always right."

Andro looked at him. "Perhaps." He said. "How are the pilots coming?"

"You mean from when you asked me two days ago?" Arrarn said with a smile. "Sadi and I start taking them up today."

"And the other thing? Are you still going to pursue that?" Andro asked.

"After the other night?" Arrarn exclaimed. "I don't know Andro... they both tickle my nose for sure, Narice more so because of who she is I think, but she is just so *anse* uptight. Part of me says go for it... part of me says it ain't worth it."

"When have you ever backed down from a challenge Arrarn?" Andro asked.

"What about father?" Arrarn said. "You know he will have a fit."

"Does your blood burn for her?" Andro asked him. "For them... because now that they have found each other I have a feeling they'll be a package deal just like Eliani and Nyla."

Arrarn shook his head. "As much as I would like it to happen... it won't." He answered. "I'm not that lucky... and I think they may be more interested in each other. I can smell Narice all over her. Similar to how Nyla's scent saturates Eliani like you said. And there is something about both of them that is different somehow."

"Don't give up hope just yet." Andro said with a grin. "Stranger things have happened to the members of our family."

"Why do you... why does it seem like you want it to come about Andro?" Arrarn asked.

"Because you have never been this attracted to a woman before Arrarn. Let alone two. You are half wolf and you know when you mark their scents brother, you are hooked. And you have never marked the scent of a female before now." Andro said with a smile. "Sadi tells me she can see it in your eyes... and she also says Toria is making no bones about her interest in you."

Arrarn waved his hand. "Ah... she's seeing things." He stated. "Besides... I don't have the stamina for both of them to be biting me at the same time." He said with a grin. "I wouldn't know who to bite back."

Andro laughed at that. "Just hang in there. And find out what you can about the personnel in the GUC."

Arrarn nodded. "Will do." He said moving for the door.

Andro turned and moved to the small window in the command center briefing room and looked out across the tarmac.

[You are worried Andro.] Elynth's voice filled his head.

[Should I be sister? Is Arrarn right? Am I reading too much into what is happening all over?]

[We can not control everything ourselves brother. Only what is within our realm of influence. That is something our fathers told us long ago..] Elynth answered. *[And our fathers have many more years of knowledge and experience than us.]*

[I know. I'm just wondering if maybe they are keeping the same feelings we are having buried just as deeply as we are.] Andro spoke.

[If he needs us he will call.] Elynth spoke. *[Now we have our own important mission to achieve. We are agreed with the Feravomir and Elder Mother about their plan?]*

[Oh yes.] Andro said. *[It eliminates one issue and potentially two. And it will go a long way to bringing them closer together.]*

[I agree as well.] Elynth answered. She paused for a long moment. *[Andro... I was going... I was going to ask Anthar to hunt with us tonight.]*

[And you need my permission for this why sister?] Andro asked with some humor in his voice.

[I am not asking for your permission my riad aulved brother!] She barked out with some indignation causing Andro to chuckle. *[I... I do not know how to act.]* She replied.

[You act as you always act sister. Do not change who you are. Anthar is no fool and he wishes it just as much as you. Do not rush things if you are uncomfortable. I do not believe he will mind.] He answered.

[You are right.] She said.

[Of course I'm right sister.] Andro said. *[I am a male. I know these things.]*

[He has been in my thoughts much these last few days.] Elynth spoke. *[I do not know if father will approve of him.]*

[Then we are in the same position sister.] Andro told her. *[As you have told me when it concerns Carisia. Do we ignore what we feel for them and allow it to pass from our lives and always wonder. Or do we act on what we feel for them and perhaps find happiness and so much more? They have been in both our dreams sister. And we agreed it was time for both of us to begin making our own path into the future.]*

[Yes we did.] Elynth said.

[Then follow what your heart tells you my Bonded Sister.] Andro said.

[What you felt between them Androcles my brother.] She said. *[I was passing him today and I felt it as well. In both of them.]*

Andro nodded slowly. *[I'm going to cultivate that as much as possible. And they will discover each other soon enough I think. Possibly sooner than even we think. Something is pushing them together Elynth, and once they do come together even without the training the others have had, they will be among the most powerful among us. It is almost as if they are two pieces that are about to be put back together in perfect harmony.]*

[We must be ready to tell your uncle Isra and your uncle Andreus if it happens.] Elynth spoke. *[We must welcome them in our way. All of them must be present for that. As well as the Elders. It is the way our fathers have always done it.]*

[And so shall we.] Andro spoke. *[I've already spoken with Uncle Andreus and he has already sent word to the others to move within one or two jumps of Earth and be on stand by. I will talk to Uncle Isra tonight and fill him in.]*

[When will you have Carisia over to your bungalow?] Elynth asked her voice more relaxed and filled with humor now. *[All of you must sate that burning... or we will never get anything accomplished.]*

Andro laughed softly to himself. *[When Yuri leaves I think.]* He said. *[Then we will be able to be together... and then we can really begin to train them. We can make them powerful Bonded Pairs sister. All we need is time.]*

[I agree.] Elynth replied. *[The question remains... will we get that time.]*

JAL-14 LIMIAN LESIURE TRANSPORT

“...did your sister do?” Cihera asked her.

Las'elh looked at her intently from across the small table. Cihera was taller than her by a good four or five inch margin, almost as tall as her husband who Las'elh put at just over two meters in height. Her shimmering white hair fell loosely about her shoulders, still somewhat wild. Her skin was a dark chocolate

color and incredibly smooth and soft looking, even more so than what she noticed the evening before. The light blue half jumpsuit hugged her lean, muscular frame tightly, wrapping around her body in all the right places as far as Las'elh was concerned. In her time since being vetted out of the EI, Las'elh had resorted to many things to find the truth about her sister, and that included bedding with other species and even females. She had also discovered she rather enjoyed the feel of another woman's body against her own, and the pleasure that could bring. The elven female they had left on Talbor Seven was quite adept at giving Las'elh pleasure in that way though she turned out to be rather empty between her elven ears.

Las'elh had awakened to the soft sounds of their love making and she had laid on the couch just listening, and becoming rather excited in the process despite everything that had happened in the last few hours. The sounds Cihera made were gentle whimpers of unabashed delight, and Las'elh could hear her soft professions of love. She had chanced a look in their direction and had to suppress a startled cry of her own. The darkness did nothing to hinder her elven vision and she had seen Cihera atop Anton's muscled body, her face contorted in blissful pleasure as she rode the largest cock Las'elh had ever seen on a male before. Las'elh watched for several seconds, the thick shaft disappearing again and again into Cihera's depths, before tearing her own eyes away and stifling a groan as her fingers danced across her bare mound under her pants and she squeezed her thighs together to keep from cumming herself.

They had awakened several hours later completely unaware that Las'elh had been witness to their lovemaking. Anton showered and dressed quickly, and since there was little privacy in the JAL-14 even though it was a leisure transport, Las'elh had to consciously keep her eyes from his flaccid cock as he dressed. She had, however, stolen several glances at Cihera as she dressed and couldn't help but admire her body. Anton had taken a tray of food to Gravork and then questioned him for several hours while Cihera studied the data pads Las'elh had given them to pass to Queen Dysea.

Cihera looked up from the pad and gazed at Las'elh with those amber colored orbs. "Las'elh?"

Las'elh shook her head quickly. "Huh... what? I'm sorry... what was your question?"

"Your sister?" Cihera asked again. "What did she do?"

"She was a student. She was completing her last year in school." Las'elh answered admonishing herself for letting her mind wander. "She was studying at The Genecor University on Apo Prime. She was returning to Elear for a week long break between final exams when she was abducted."

"Genetics?" Cihera asked.

Las'elh nodded. "She was to complete her finals and then transfer to Hadaria and study with the Divine One Eurin. It had already all been arranged. She was so happy she was chosen to study with Eurin. Not many students who are not Hadarian study directly with her."

"Yes... I understand that is somewhat of a distinguished honor if you are not Hadarian." Cihera answered.

They turned as Anton came out of the rear compartment and they caught a glimpse of Gravork sitting on the couch shoveling food into his face. The door slid shut and Anton moved to the table where he took the chair next to Cihera.

"I've asked him several different ways and the answer is still the same." He spoke. "All he did was to arrange a meeting between this Lycavorian and the Evolli. He was paid well and then cut out of the loop. It is how he conducts these sorts of transactions."

"So then we have to confront the Evolli?" Cihera said.

Anton nodded. "It looks that way."

"I was hoping to avoid that." Cihera said softly.

"Yes... so was I." He agreed pouring himself a mug of coffee.

"Did you ask him about my sister?" Las'elh asked quickly.

"Not directly." Anton replied quickly. "However, it does appear he made several contacts with unknown individuals that were requesting the flight schedules and plans of up to a dozen transports between Apo Prime, Hadaria and Elear. These individuals were quite specific in what they wanted, mostly elven females as Las'elh has said."

Cihera looked at him. "And?"

"He contacted this Lycavorian we are searching for." Anton replied. "It appears they have been working together far longer than Gravork wanted to admit at first. Upwards of twelve or thirteen years, perhaps even

before that. He would not answer directly how long. Contacts were always made in the same fashion however; garbled secure holo transmissions and the Lycavorian always wore a helmet. He was never able to get a clear image of his face, and the Lycavorian had a scrambler on his end to prevent tracing the transmission. This Lycavorian provided him with the information which he then passed on to those who wanted it.”

“What about these unknown individuals?” Las’elh asked quickly.

Anton shook his head. “The only thing he could tell me was that they were large, they always wore heavy cloaks and cowls and that they moved like soldiers. Very well trained soldiers.”

“Immortals?” Las’elh gasped.

Anton shook his head. “He was reasonably certain they were not Immortals.” He replied knowing Las’elh’s fear in that. “He knows of the large Immortals mercenary group that operates here in The Wilds, but they are not shy about hiding their faces or what they are. No... these soldiers were someone else.”

“Can we trust what he is telling us?” Las’elh spoke quickly.

Anton looked at her as he sipped his mug. “Our drugs are quite effective.”

“Drugs?” Las’elh gasped.

Anton nodded. “A mixture of Lorpec and Vorelen. When combined they make for a very effective interrogation drug. It has no long term effects, and simply makes the person more susceptible to suggestion and answering questions. It is why we can’t allow you to question him Las’elh... no matter how much you think you would get out of him. It must be done in a way Cihera and I are trained in.”

“I thought interrogation by drugs was illegal within the Union.” Las’elh spoke. “It is not allowed or practiced.”

Cihera nodded. “Yes it is illegal within Union borders. However, we are not in The Wilds and this is a matter of the highest security. As Anton has said... the drugs have no lasting effects and it is much easier and far more accurate in terms of the reliability of the information we get. Torture does not work very well.” She stated with a smile.

“Does... does the Krypteria always operate in this way?” Las’elh asked.

“We act in whatever manner we need to act to keep the Union safe from harm.” Anton spoke. “And it would appear Gravork is involved in more than just T19 weapons sales, which lends more support to your theory about what is going on Las’elh.”

Cihera looked at him. “This might explain why he is so happy to be in our company.” She said. “If he somehow managed to anger one of his buyers in some way. Perhaps he was becoming worried for his safety.”

“Dealing with Kavalians doesn’t translate to a long life span.” Anton agreed. “According to him he has had thirty-three sales to the Kavalians of T19s and other assorted equipment over the last five years. When we destroyed the Evolli manufacturing plant for the T19 in the last year of the war, the Kavalians began asking him to supply them with more.”

“How many dragons did the Coven bring to Earth?” Cihera asked.

“Dragons?” Las’elh spoke. “The High Coven brought dragons to earth?”

Anton looked at her ignoring Las’elh. “Forty-three.”

“And how many T19s have the Kavalians purchased in the last five years?” Cihera asked.

“According to Gravork... over ten thousand.” Anton answered. “Not all of them were useable or operational mind you... but far more than what you would need to fight forty odd dragons. And more than enough to supply their forward units with them.”

Cihera nodded. “By quite a large margin.” She said.

“Well... it would appear that this Lycavorian, who we are pretty sure is Pusintin, we are positive he is involved in ordering the attempt on Aunt Anja and Aunt Aricia.” Anton spoke. “He obviously has access to information that is not day to day chatter if he was able to discover the exact time they were leaving Hadaria. Whether he is involved in the weapons deal with the Immortals we’ll have to ask the Evolli when we see him.”

“If it is Pusintin... then he has people embedded within the Union.” Cihera spoke. “High enough to get the flight plan for the Queens. And he obviously does not care that his actions risk open war with us.”

Anton shook his head. “Access to a secure terminal and the command codes is all they would need.” He spoke matter-of-factly. “Hadarian security is not as rigid as it is on Earth or Apo Prime. Or even Elear for that matter.”

“True.” Cihera spoke.

“As for risking war... I think we agree that the Kavalians would not be shy in attacking us if they knew they could get away with it. Sometimes I wonder if their leaders are even able to carry on an intelligent conversation without using threats and violence.” Anton said.

“What about my sister!” Las’elh demanded.

Anton and Cihera both looked at her then. Cihera leaned forward. “Understand something Commander Las’elh. Our priority is to the Union. Anton and I understand why you are doing what you are doing. I too am an Elf... Anton half elf. We will assist you in your endeavors as much as we are able, but our duty is to the Union first. If that is not something that is acceptable to you, we will give you credits, supplies and weapons and when we reach Nebonese you can go where you wish.”

Las’elh’s eyes grew a little bigger. “You would... you would just let me go?” She asked.

Cihera looked at Anton quickly and then back to her. “Personally... with your attitude... I believe you would be dead within a month now that Gravork’s friends appear to be looking for him. They do not know about us; however they know you saw him last on Talbor Seven. It seems our paths have crossed for a reason Commander... and your search for your sister is somehow tied to what is happening within the Union. Yes... we would just let you go.” She stated. “And you would be back to square one. Or you could remain with us... and help us to help you. Anton and I believe it is all tied together... and the sooner you learn to trust someone besides yourself, the longer you will stay alive. As our Aunt Dysea told you... she will do whatever she is able if she finds a need. That we have not heard back from her tells me that she just may very well have discovered what we sent her to be more than it is. But do not make the mistake of thinking she, or Anton or myself will not erase you from existence if you threaten to jeopardize our mission, for it concerns far more than just one elf female.”

“I... I just want to find my sister.” Las’elh spoke softly. “I swore to my mother I would find her. She is... she is the youngest of our family. The light. So young and vibrant and full of life. The only one of my parent’s children to not find a path within the Union military. She was going to be a researcher so that she could help others.”

Cihera nodded slowly. “Then work with us and not against us.” She said. “Believe me... having us as your friends, and by virtue of that most of the King’s family, your odds have greatly increased.”

Las’elh stared at her amber eyes, suppressing the shiver that ran through her from those incredible orbs. And it wasn’t a shiver of fear. She nodded slowly her blue eyes locked squarely with Cihera’s amber orbs. “If it... if it helps me to find Na’lia, I will do whatever you ask of me.”

Anton nodded and got to his feet. He leaned over and kissed Cihera’s head gently. “I will check our course and time to Nebonese.”

Cihera nodded as she reached up to squeeze his hand before he moved away. She turned back to Las’elh. “Now tell me about your sister.” She spoke. “I want to know everything about her.”

“Everything is in the data pads.” Las’elh said.

Cihera shook her head. “Tell me what is not in them Las’elh.” She said evenly. “Tell me about her friends... any males she may have been seeing. Her interests outside of school. All of it Las’elh.”

Las’elh nodded as she met Cihera’s eyes.

G9 HIGH COVEN LRR

Normya flipped on the bench once more trying to get comfortable and not succeeding very well. The G9 was not meant for creature comforts, and apparently the Immortals preferred the temperature to be a few degrees lower than what she was used too. She was trying to get a handle on everything that had happened in the last few days; the explosion and impact with the Gate; the mercenaries led by this Gareld trying to capture her; Toral’s death and the events on Yocetu. And then the huge Immortal who had anointed himself her protector.

Normya played it over in her head again and again what would have happened if Tir’ut had not appeared out of nowhere to attack that creature. And done so with such ferocity as she had never seen before in her life. And then to discover that he had attacked the creature alone, a creature that his own people would not dare hunt without at least four in their number. Normya didn’t know what to make of that. Nor did she know what to

make of the feelings that just being around him elicited from her. At first Normya had thought it was because of her Coming of Age Fever. One of the strongest symptoms of the fever was that it made the females gripped in it very sensitive to any male who showed interest in them. Their senses and hormones were at such a peak that even a male of another species could draw their interest. In Normya's case however, her fever was slowly burning off and leaving nothing but mature woman in its wake.

Normya didn't see a monster when she looked at Tir'ut. She didn't see an Immortal either and part of her was frightened by that.

His dark eyes were filled with an animated life, his smile was infectious, and he and the others acted in a manner that mirrored her own brothers and sisters and their people. Their humor was almost laconic in nature, and Tir'ut had laughed at himself easily when he was looking up at her from the floor of that bunker. That was a trait all of her instructors had said no Immortal possessed, yet she had seen it for herself, and not just with Tir'ut. His brother acted in a similar fashion, as well as having showed obvious affection for the female Ja'narie. She glanced over to where his brother Fash'ka sat on the opposite bench. His pure Immortal features were relaxed and almost peaceful, Ja'narie leaning affectionately up against his side, both of them sleeping for the first time in several days without having to worry for their safety. That Tir'ut worshiped his mother was also plainly evident in his actions when the Empress began to call her names.

"Our blood is thicker." Tir'ut's voice spoke softly from next to her.

Normya turned quickly and saw him kneeling on the deck plates next to the bench. The burnt bronze color of his skin was very easy to look at, the smaller bone spurs along his jaw line giving him a fearsome visage to some extent, but surprisingly Normya felt no fear when she looked at him. His face was relaxed like his brother's, and then she could see the part of him that was his mother in his face. The smoothness of his skin and the narrow nose, his full lips, unlike those of the other Immortals, and then his eyes. Normya shuddered inwardly as she pushed herself up looking at those eyes and she didn't know if it was from the cold or the way those eyes gazed upon her. Not with lust or possessiveness, but intelligence and respect and desire.

"What?" She finally managed to stammer.

She watched him pull the large fatigue like jacket from his upper body. "Our blood is thicker." He said again. "That is why the cold does not bother us as much." He held out the jacket top to her. "It is... it is very big... but it will chase the chill from your body."

Normya looked at him for a moment before taking the jacket from his hands and putting her arms into the sleeves and pulling it on. She extended her arms out and couldn't help but laugh as the tips of her fingers ended about two and a half inches from the cuff of the sleeves. Tir'ut chuckled as well and reached up, his parted lips revealing the just tips of his fangs. She watched his face as he began to roll the sleeves up on the jacket.

"Your... your fangs..." She asked softly. "I thought..."

Tir'ut shook his head with a grin. "I am only half Immortal *Il kal'daka darthirii*." He said. "I can retract my fangs entirely, just like my mother. I simply choose not to most of the time."

"I'm... I'm sorry..." She stumbled out with the words.

Tir'ut looked at her. "Sorry for what?" He asked. "For asking a question you did not know the answer too? That is not something to be sorry for."

"You... you need to feed like..."

Tir'ut nodded. "Not as often as my mother or father. The combination of their DNA in my body made me less reliant on blood for some reason. It has something to do with my pure Akruxian genes. My mother tried to explain it to me once..." Tir'ut shook his head with a smile. "I was sorry I asked. When she goes off on a DNA related rant it is nearly impossible to understand what she is saying. To heal and such, blood speeds the process... but I usually do not take blood to heal."

"You were going to on Yocetu." Normya stated.

"Yes. To insure I was in condition to protect you." He answered. He looked at her as he finished rolling the sleeves for her. "I frighten you don't I *Il kal'daka darthirii*?"

Normya shook her head quickly. "No!" She stated. "It's just..." She saw him looking at her with those eyes. "Yes... a little I guess." She continued.

Tir'ut nodded his head slowly. "I do understand." He spoke. "My people do not have a stellar reputation for our past actions. Especially with elves. And many of them still serve the High Coven, something my father and uncle hope to one day change. Just know that we are not like them."

"I'm beginning to realize that." Normya said looking at him. "Why did you do it?" She asked.

Tir'ut tilted his head slightly and looked at her oddly. "Do what?"

"Attack that monster by yourself." Normya asked. "Your brother... your uncle... even your mother... I've heard them talking. Even those Immortal soldiers who came with your uncle look at you in a strange way. They say you were *malda* to do such a thing alone. That no one has ever done that."

"*Malda*? What is this word?" He asked with a smile.

"In the Lycavorian language it means crazy." Normya said.

Tir'ut chuckled. "Yes well... I have been called that many times. The Bancorik... it was going to make a meal out of you." He said. "I could not let that happen *Il kal'daka darthirii*."

"Why?" Normya persisted.

"It... it does not matter." Tir'ut spoke softly after a long moment. "You are safe and that is what matters."

"Tir'ut!" The voice called.

They turned and saw two of the pure Immortals who had come with his uncle waving him down to their location.

Tir'ut got to his feet slowly and looked at Normya. "You should try to get some sleep now *Il kal'daka darthirii*. We will arrive on Kranek in nine hours." He said. He tilted his head a little looking at her and then turned to move down to where the two Immortals were. Normya watched him as he moved, using the bar of the ladder to half leap and half slide down into the lower level of the LRR with ease. He moved with such confident grace and agility. Normya pulled the jacket he had given her closer around her shoulders and it was then her wolf nose detected the scent. His scent. A musky ginger smell that rushed through her head and tickled her nose like no man she had ever smelled before. She pulled the jacket tighter still, inhaling deeper and feeling that scent reach to every portion of her body and make her tingle all over.

"Normya?" Esther's voice filled her ears and she turned quickly to see her settle to the bench next to her. "Are you alright child?"

Normya glanced quickly back to where Tir'ut stood and then returned her eyes to Esther. "Yes... I'm fine." She said. "He gave me... he gave me his jacket."

"Immortal blood is much thicker than elven blood or even Lycavorian blood." Esther answered easily. "They do not get cold very often."

"He is very... he is very shy isn't he?" Normya said.

Esther's eyes widened. "Tir'ut shy?" She exclaimed with a small laugh. "Tir'ut is his father's son... and like his father he is blunt and straightforward. Much like Aikiro found out earlier. The little ones of our settlement think he is their personal plaything. He spends most of his days when he is not hunting or training with his father at the school entertaining them."

Normya chuckled now. "He did call her some rather inventive things didn't he?" She said.

Ether nodded. "Yes he did." She agreed. "I have spoken with Cha'talla." She said looking at her.

Normya's face took on a worried expression. "Esther..."

"You have nothing to be afraid of Normya Leonidas." Esther said quickly. "Once I explained to my husband everything that happened he agreed completely with our actions. In our stead he would have acted no differently. As I said... protecting you protects us as well." She said with a smile. "Besides... it has been nearly two weeks since I have felt his arms around me and when I told him I would make it up to him for disobeying him to remain away from the border, he came around rather quickly. He may be an Immortal... but he is still a man. And as his wife I know what buttons to push!" She said with a grin. "Your mother... she will have no trouble finding us, even coded as our location was that you gave her?"

Normya shook her head. "She will know right away." Normya answered deciding that she very much liked this Esther. "If Aikiro had not been there I would not have used code."

"So your father knows where this mountain is as well?" Esther asked.

Normya nodded. "He promised me Esther. My father has never broken a promise he makes in all the years I have been alive. And if what my Uncle Danny says is true... not in all the time he has been alive."

“I had heard that about your father.” Esther spoke.

They heard the laughter and turned to see Tir’ut and the two other Immortals sharing a laugh over the data pad one held in his hand. Esther chuckled. “What Tir’ut called Aikiro will rapidly make the rounds of our settlement when we return.” She said. “Do you need to shift to heal your leg completely?”

Normya shook her head. “I don’t think so.” She said. “It will be sore for a few days... but as you said nothing was broken.”

“Make sure you have Tir’ut carry you from the Runner.” She said. “It will protect you from being trampled by the young ones when we return and re-injuring your leg.”

“He doesn’t have too.” Normya said. “One of the others can...”

Esther shook her head. “No Normya Leonidas... none of the others will touch you.” She said. “At least not the males.” She smiled and squeezed her arm. “Get some sleep child. You still need the rest.”

Normya watched her wondering what her words just now meant.

None of the others will touch you. At least not the males.

HADARIA CITY OF NALUSS MERCHANT DISTRICT

The fifth largest city on Hadaria and where most of the import and export shipping took place. It had three large spaceports to accommodate this, and the Merchant District was filled with vendor stores and warehouses. It was also the city on Hadaria where most of those non-Hadarians lived and worked by choice. The Hadarians were a reserved people for the most part, though having Anja and Sivana as their Queen and Princess was changing that across the entire planet slowly. Their influence, combined with Eliani’s popularity and being tied so closely to the Lycavorians now was causing the people to be more open and less tame in their pursuits, more free thinking and restless in their natures. At least among the vast majority of the younger population and a good portion of the older generations.

The tavern was well kept and reasonably quiet. It was filled with dozens of freighter captains from dozens of different species, soft music playing in the background and loud talk between the many occupants. They sat in the rear of the tavern, on the raised level near one of the view windows that overlooked the thriving spaceport nearby. The sun was just going down and the lights of the spaceport cast beautiful scenery across the horizon. It also cast many shadows through the window adding to the dim nature of the upper level and making it even harder to see. They were just four nameless faces among the hundreds that came in and out of the tavern on a daily basis. The two females had scarves drawn up over their heads, covering their hair and the sides of their faces. One would have to be directly in front of them to see what they looked like. They sat with their backs to the stairways leading to the upper level where they were sitting at the table, the lone Lycavorian in their group leaning up against the wall in his chair. The single Hadarian male sat facing the Lycavorian. Dressed as he was in plain clothes and not the robes of the Hadarian Elders and since the Elders were almost never seen outside their sprawling compound, no one would recognize Elder Okein. It was the same for Buonau who sat to Okein’s left. The second female remained quiet and staring at the table for the most part in an almost subservient way.

“You are certain this will work Rinard?” Okein asked. “We are taking a massive risk in going forward with this plan.”

Rinard leaned forward in his chair. His face was clean shaven and very smooth, his lips thin but his nose wide at the end indicating it had been broken several times over the course of the years. He did not look his age of six hundred and fourteen, but then most Lycavorians never looked their real age, as was the case with vampires and elves as well. His muscular definition was massive however, with thick arms almost ready to burst from the shirt he wore, his chest wide and his shoulders broad. His six foot two body was nothing more than muscle, and exceptionally well defined. He was even larger in some respects than King Leonidas, who Okein had met on two separate occasions. His dark hair was cut very short as was the manner of the Lycavorians on Hadaria, mainly because of the rules put in place by Star Commander Belen, the overall commander of *Durcunusaan* and Union forces on the planet. This command position was usually filled by an

Admiral, but since Belen was a member of the *Durcunusaan* as well as Princess Sivana's husband, he was given this combined task four years ago. Rinard's eyes were hard points of dark brown, and Okein regretted for a brief instant that the Elders had ever gotten involved with this hard nosed and obviously cruel and angry young man. It lasted only an instant however, for like him, the other Elders were fearful of losing what little power and reverence they still held among their people. The Queen and her sister were rapidly pulling their people forward out of their more reserved and religious nature and setting them on a path of decadence and openness unparalleled in their history. And the Hadarian Elders held no part in that future in the Queen's view.

"Do not speak to me of risks Okein." Rinard spoke his voice low. "You stand to lose only what little face you retain among your people... I however will lose my life if we fail."

Buonau leaned forward. "We do not mean to imply there is no danger to you Rinard." She said. "Elder Okein was only asking if our plans are without error."

Rinard nodded. "They are perfect." He answered. "As long as the Elders pass and affirm the petition, we will be on our way to having what we want."

Buonau nodded. "We have more than enough votes to affirm Pcellany's petition." She spoke. "Taking it to the Ruling Council is another matter. You said you would supply us with what we need to convince them. That is why you needed my daughter's Duewa's help."

Rinard smiled. "And wonderful help it was." He stated looking at the young woman who had been silent so far.

"I do not wish to know what it is you had her do." Buonau spoke. "Once we pass the petition we will seek an audience with the Ruling Council. That will force Queen Anja to return to Hadaria. Even she can not dismiss the Ruling Council. We will need this information from you to give to the Council or all will be for naught."

Rinard reached down to his belt and removed the slim data disc. "Present this to your Ruling Council." He spoke. "When they see this... they will have no choice but to act."

Buonau looked at him as she took it. "What is on it?" Okein asked.

"Things that you were not willing to do to accomplish your goals." Rinard spoke. "I am not limited by your ridiculous sense of morality and high handedness, and neither it appears is Buonau here. Do not look at it before you present it to the Ruling Council."

Buonau looked at the disc and then lifted her eyes to gaze at Rinard. They shifted to where her oldest daughter sat for a brief moment as well. Buonau alone, among all the other Elders, only she knew the majority of Rinard's plan for she is the one who approached him about this undertaking. She hated Anja and Sivana with something bordering on obsessive behavior, and she would see the sisters brought down no matter what she had to do. She would not allow them to take away what she had spent seven hundred and eighty-five years building. "The subject who helped you to make this?" She asked finally.

Rinard grinned. "Already taken care of." He answered. "It was frighteningly gratifying to some extent."

"I'm sure." Buonau spoke. "The rest?"

"I received it back only today." Rinard spoke evenly. "It is complete and it is quite damning. One part is enough... but the others will help if any of the Elders or Ruling Council balk."

Buonau nodded and tucked the disc into the folds of her robes. "We have also held up our end of the bargain and plan as well where it concerns the children." She spoke. "We are in this together Rinard... so we must protect each other."

"We shall see." He spoke. "I have heard that before."

"You know of course he will never allow them to return here." Okein said now. "We are prepared to send the Hadarian Militia to Earth if need be... but it will end up being a very long court and hearing process."

Rinard nodded. "It will sow confusion and distrust among him and his Queen. That is what we want. That is what we need for this to work. I have waited many years for this... and I intend to see it through. His children are of no consequence to me, I only want to see her life destroyed and then I want to kill her myself and watch as the light leaves her eyes."

"The children are of consequence to us however and that is why I have an alternate plan in place." Buonau said. "The King is a brute. He lacks tact and intelligence and thinks only with what is between his legs. He will be easy enough to control once Duewa is entrenched within his life."

Rinard chuckled. "Yes... I know I was."

“You are disgusting!” Duewa snapped. “Just as he will be! I only do this because it must be done!”

“You didn’t seem to mind when I was pummeling your tight body into the mattress!” Rinard said with a grin.

“By the gods you are a vile man!” Duewa hissed.

“Enough!” Buonau barked softly. “We will succeed Rinard. You must have faith in our goals.” Buonau spoke.

“I hope you are right.” Rinard said.

“I suggest we do not meet like this again.” Buonau said. “Once events begin... we will all be watched closely I’m quite sure?”

Rinard nodded in agreement. “I agree. Though it will be a pity to not have your daughter Duewa’s attentions anymore.” He reached out to stroke Duewa’s cheek and he laughed when she reached up and slapped his hand away. “You must allow your daughter more freedom Elder Buonau... she has many repressed emotions bottled up inside her waiting to be released.”

“Shut up you pig!” Duewa hissed softly as Rinard got to his feet.

“My daughter’s emotions are none of your concern.” Buonau spoke softly. “We will contact you on the normal channel if we need to meet for some reason.”

Rinard nodded. “Don’t worry... I’m not going anywhere.” He spoke. He turned and moved off away from the table and was soon blending into the crowd and gone.

Okein looked at Buonau. “We need to be very careful with him.” He spoke softly and leaning forward. “Something tells me he is working from his own agenda. And much of that does not include us.”

Buonau nodded slowly. “Yes... unfortunately we do not know what that full agenda is.” She said. “However we do need to trust him for now, it is his contacts and access to funds that has gotten us this far.” She looked at the disc turning it over in her fingers. “This is what will bring down our pompous Queen and her arrogant sister. This is what we need to take back the control of our people and return them to the old ways. And then we can branch out and begin our plans against the King.”

“The cost could still be great Buonau.” Okein spoke softly causing Duewa to turn her head and look at him revealing her stunningly bright green eyes. Her face was narrow with high cheekbones and a thin delicate nose. The edges of her deep auburn red hair poked out from underneath the covering she wore, her full lips painted a soft pink in color. Her five foot seven height gave her a supple, yet leanly muscular frame, attesting to her almost hundred and twenty years as a Hadarian Mage Warrior before entering the service of the Elders. She was allowed to marry then, a man who was chosen for her by the Elders because of his status among their people. He was a man Duewa had not loved or cared for in the least, but she adored the two sons he had given her. When he was killed three years earlier in a transport accident, Duewa had not lamented his loss and only devoted more of her time to her sons. Tinrell and Tinyn were nine and ten now and growing almost faster than she could keep up with them. They were her purpose now. She instructed them daily just as she was raised by her mother, almost too sternly in fact. She allowed nothing of the events happening off Hadaria to influence them; just as her mother had never allowed the events to influence her brothers and sisters as they grew. She was also the oldest of her mother’s daughters at two hundred and twenty-eight years old. Duewa had been involved in this plan almost from the very beginning for her own reasons.

She hated Eliani Leonidas.

The Queen’s daughter was far more powerful than Duewa could ever hope to be, and she had not endured the many years of sometimes ruthless training and instruction that Duewa had to undergo under her mother’s tutelage. Eliani had more independence to do what she wished than Duewa had ever hoped to have, and she looked upon the Elders as beneath her in numerous respects, never passing up a chance to exhibit herself in front of them or disregard their spoken word. Not to mention she flaunted her vampire lover openly whenever they walked on Hadaria. Eliani Leonidas had been free to choose her own path even though as a member of the Hadarian Royal Family she should have been required to endure the same things as Duewa had. And in her mind Eliani treated her as inferior in many ways as well.

She had agreed to help her mother so that they could return power and influence back to the Hadarian Elders. She had not expected her mother to tell her she must tolerate Rinard’s vile touch upon her body however, but she had done so because she was committed to their goal. He was a cruel man, and built like a bull, and if not for her ability to heal she would have been left with dozens of bruises and injuries that would

have been very noticeable. It was the Elder's way of keeping the man happy while they moved ahead with their plans.

Duewa had never met King Leonidas personally, only seen him at a distance with Anja. Her mother called him a brute and always spoke of him in a derogatory way, especially of his intelligence level and his propensity for violence to solve his problems. None of the Elders cared for him very much, though Duewa knew they all feared him in many ways. This constant belittling had rubbed off on her and now she hated the man as well as her Queen. Duewa didn't know what was on the disc her mother held, but she hoped it was enough to finally rid them of the Queen and her influence.

"What do you mean Elder Okein?" Duewa asked. "What cost?"

Okein looked at her. "The Union has adopted many of the more brutal laws from the ways of the King's father on Earth. Spartan laws as they are called. If what we are doing is discovered, we will face those laws regardless of our positions."

"We have known that since the beginning." Buonau snapped softly. "And still we have pressed forward. Part of our reasoning is to have many of these laws rescinded Okein... you know that."

Okein nodded. "Oh I don't doubt our commitment or cause Buonau..." He spoke. "The vast majority of the members worlds of the Union, ninety-six percent of them, they welcomed these laws however. They are the minds we will need to change. That will be a much bigger task."

Buonau waved her hand dismissively. "The Hadarian Elders have always held great sway and status among the species of the Union. Once we do this and expose the Queen for what she really is, I believe they will begin to doubt the leadership of the King as well. His past is by no means pleasant, and if need be, there are many who are willing to lie and bring him down. He has angered many people across the Union, and though they are few in number, they are powerful men and women. And the Lycavorians own sense of sexual openness and freedom will only help in bringing him down if he chooses to go against us."

"And the Prime Minister mother?" Duewa asked. "What of her? She and the King almost never disagree on a course of action. It is almost as if they are of one mind in many ways."

Buonau smiled. "If it comes to that, I have information that will benefit us... don't worry. You however, you must be prepared to go into the heart of the decadence and the uneducated daughter. A large portion of our plans hinge on you."

Duewa nodded. "I am ready mother." She spoke. "You need not worry about that."

Buonau nodded getting to her feet. "Good... then I suggest we make our way back to the Compound before we are missed. I despise being in this city... it already reeks of disease and debauchery."

GYTHEIO RESUMAR'S VILLA

Athani'Puat stood on the balcony of Resumar's bedroom overlooking the mountain city of Gytheio far below. She was nearly naked, the thin satin sheet wrapped around her body, held in place only by her armpit. Her long blond hair was askew and wild, her tail twitching slightly as it flipped back and forth behind her attuned to her mood, which was one of completeness and joy. His villa was far above the city below and she could see his brother's island stretching into the gulf. Athani looked down at her hand, her fingers twirling the round band of glittering gold and silver that wrapped snugly around her thumb. It had been something she had never heard of before, let alone taken part in, but that one hour long ceremony had bound her quite happily to Resumar Leonidas in a way nothing ever could. This is what her people lacked. A sense of commitment and love to one another that she was rapidly discovering was an attitude widely held outside of the borders of the KFI. She was well past committed now. She hadn't planned it this way, never even imagined it could happen this way, but it had happened. And it had swept her off her feet completely. She had never felt the devotion to someone that she felt at this moment for Resumar. A devotion that only grew more pronounced as the hours went by.

Yes... she was committed on her path now and she had no intention of altering what this future held for her no matter what it might be.

Athani sighed in delight as his powerful arms slid around her waist and pulled her close to the front of his body.

“What are you thinking *Aryschanne?*” He asked softly his lips brushing her ear.

“That I have never been happier in my life than I am at this very moment.” Athani spoke as she wrapped her arms around his and snaked her tail around his waist.

“That’s a good thing.” Resumar said. “I will undoubtedly drive you insane, badger you constantly and overall, just annoy you to no end.”

Athani chuckled. “It you love me as you do right now I will not care.” She said.

“I will remind you in a hundred years that you said that.” He spoke nuzzling the side of her neck and wrapping his aura around her tightly.

“It... it was a beautiful ceremony Resumar.” She whispered as she turned in his arms to face him.

“You... you did all that for me?”

“For us.” He told her holding up his hand and displaying an identical gold and silver band on his thumb.

“Claiming you as my mate was not enough Athani. It makes you mine yes...” He told her. “But the Elven Marriage Ceremony is what binds us together completely.”

Athani slid her arms around his shoulders and neck and lifted herself up easily so she could kiss him. And a sizzling kiss it was. Her legs curled up alongside his hips and her tail tightened around his waist as he held her securely and turned to carry her back into the bedroom. Athani pulled her lips away quickly.

“Food!” She exclaimed. “You must feed me first my... my husband!” She said the word she had spoken almost a hundred times in the last three hours, a word that she loved hearing herself say. “I will never refuse you... but we do have to eat!”

Resumar chuckled and altered his course across the room. “Food it is!” He spoke as he carried her out of the bedroom and headed down the hall to the stairs. “How does a thick Greek steak and vegetables sound my beautiful wife Athani Leonidas?”

“The food sounds wonderful.” She replied. “I like the name even more.”

Resumar smiled as he reached the bottom of the stairs and turned for the kitchen. “So do I.” He said softly. “So do I.”

“I can cook if you...” Athani began.

“Woman... I am a Spartan!” Resumar exclaimed. “If there is one thing my mothers taught me to do as I was growing up it was to cook!” He pushed open the door to the kitchen and walked in. “I will make you the juiciest...” He stopped his dark eyes going wide as he looked over Athani’s shoulder.

Her face became alarmed as she looked at him. “Resumar? My love what is...?” Athani felt her heart slam into her chest as if she had just been crushed against a steel wall as she turned to see where he was looking.

Anja and Isabella sat at the waist high counter, while Gorgo was making her way back from the dispenser with a mug of coffee. All of them turned and looked at him as he stopped and lowered Athani to the floor slowly, easing his way out in front of her protectively.

“We wondered where our son was when he did not come to Deni and Lisi’s new villa.” Isabella spoke calmly as she turned in the stool to face him.

“And then when he didn’t answer us... and was blocking us... we figured we come and see if he was alright.” Anja spoke. “We suspected something was not right since Resumar Leonidas tends to be the more reserved of his brothers.” Anja held up the data pad. “This only confirmed it.” Anja flipped him the pad.

“Mothers... grandmother... I can explain.” Resumar said quickly as he caught the pad.

“*Damall un jar idie vada fenneennum rie vada Kavaalii Nabhe coi shidony tis terit maleja?*” Isabella stated from her seat next to Anja. (Explain to us why the daughter of the Kavalian Prefect is naked in your home?)

“*Jainn... lon caoira tur alda.*” Anja said. (Yes... that should be good.) “*Mithisoth vada shahle cingola forn neval jar idie forn wen shidony una?*” (Especially the part where you tell us why you are naked too.)

“*Neweni.*” Gorgo spoke as she sipped her coffee. (Indeed.)

Athani looked between the three women and Resumar, still not able to understand more than a few words in the ancient Lycavorian tongue. Her Mindvoice abilities were increasing by the day, but that was not something she had begun to absorb so easily.

“Resumar...” She said softly. “Husband... what is going on?”

Resumar saw the looks on the faces of his mothers and grandmother when Athani spoke that term and he drew himself up to his full six foot one height.

“*Huor?*” Anja gasped as she glanced at Isabella. (Husband)

Resumar nodded. “As of three hours ago... yes.” He stated proudly. “And Athani is my *valiath*. We were married in an elven ceremony tonight.”

“Res... have you fully lost your mind?” Anja exclaimed coming off the stool. “She is the daughter of the Kavalian Prefect!”

“I know who she is mother.” Resumar replied.

Athani’s hands still resided in the region of Resumar’s waist, her tail curled protectively around his thigh. “Does... does that automatically make me a bad person Lady Anja?” She asked softly.

“What? Yes... no!” Anja snapped.

“I love her mother.” Resumar spoke firmly. “Since the moment she came aboard father’s ship I have known that. She came here with the intent to defect anyway and...”

“And you don’t find that in the least bit convenient?” Isabella asked.

Athani’s face darkened. “I came here to defect!” She snapped. “I did not come here with the intent to fall in love with your son! That... that evolved on its own!”

“So you say!” Anja snapped.

“Does... does father know?” Resumar asked.

“No!” Isabella replied quickly. “Aricia and For’mya are keeping him occupied at the moment. You do know what your father will do?”

“There’s nothing he can do!” Resumar spoke. “We’ve already been married in the Elven Ceremony. That can’t be changed. And I will not give her up. Not for you, not for father, not even for her people!”

“And I will not allow it!” Athani barked now.

“How did you find out?” Resumar asked. “I was... I was very careful in my actions.”

Anja snatched the pad from his hand. “This is how I found out!” She hissed. “A bio metric scan and its results. Do you know what is on here?”

“You scanned them without their knowledge?” Resumar asked.

“You had no right to do that!” Athani popped.

“I had every right sister!” Anja barked right back at her. “How many others among your people that have undergone the biogenic treatments are like you?”

Athani’s brow furrowed now. “Like... like me? What do you mean?” She asked.

Gorgo stepped from behind the counter, her eyes filled with realization. “*Via pinnoc pera.*” She said softly. (She does not know.)

“Know what?” Resumar barked.

Anja’s eyes grew a little wider now as well and Isabella came off her stool to step up next to her.

“*Melyanna...* is that possible?” She spoke softly. “Can she not know?”

“Is what possible?” Resumar demanded. “Someone tell me what the hell is going on?”

Anja looked at Isabella. “It’s possible.” She said softly turning back to look at Athani. “It’s possible if the Kavalian people are in some way related to Lycavorians somewhere along the gene code.”

Athani looked at her oddly. “What... what do you mean?”

“Your treatments.” Anja spoke. “When did you stop taking them?”

“Why?”

“Just answer the question please.” Anja spoke more subdued now.

Athani looked at Resumar who could only shrug his shoulders. She turned back to Anja. “Twenty-five years ago... almost twenty-six. Why? What... what don’t I know?”

Anja held up the data pad and looked at her, stepping closer. “Did you know that the treatments you were taking had Lycavorian and Elven core DNA strands in them?”

Athani shook her head slowly. “All we were told is that the serum would remove the hair from our bodies and our tails would recede. That we would look like normal people. It was done to improve our chances of infiltrating the High Coven. This happened over a period of years... from when we were small.”

“And the clones received the same treatments?” Anja asked.

“I assumed so... only in much larger concentrations.” She replied. “Why? What don’t I know? What is happening to me?” Her eyes were filled with very real fear now and all of them noticed how she gripped Resumar even more tightly.

“Why did you stop taking the treatments?” Anja asked.

“I... at first I lied about why.” Athani said. “I liked my tail and I wanted it back. I did it to rebel against my father and sister. When I tried to resume them... I became violently sick and I stopped taking them altogether.”

“And this happened with others?” Anja asked.

Athani nodded quickly. “Yes... many hundreds of those who were given the treatments. Why?”

“And they stopped taking them as well?” Anja asked.

Athani nodded once more. “Yes. Like me... they did not revert back to their normal forms. I... at times I have wondered why this is but our scientists could never determine why.” Athani looked at Resumar quickly. “Please... please tell me I am not sick!” She gasped turning back to Anja. “I have... I have only just found everything I have desired in this world and I could not bear to lose that now.”

“Mother?” Res asked the worry very evident in his voice now.

Anja looked at him and then turned to Isabella. “It would explain a great deal.” Isabella spoke. She looked at Athani. “Can you feel Resumar when he projects his aura upon you?”

Athani nodded quickly. “Yes. I did not think that was possible, but even that pig bastard Pusintin was able to affect me with his aura.”

“And your sister?” Isabella asked.

Athani shook her head. “I don’t think so. At least not on as large a scale as he could warp my senses. Why?”

“The sudden emergence of her Mindvoice abilities.” Gorgo spoke moving closer and stopping in front of Athani. “Her ability to sense and feel Res’s aura. Hers are the shields we felt at the dinner. That is why they seemed so familiar. Resumar instructed you how to shield didn’t he? And he and Cemath were helping to reinforce those shields.”

Athani nodded. “Yes.”

“Yes it would explain a lot.” Anja said moving closer to her as well.

“Explain what?” Resumar barked pulling Athani closer to him in a protective manner.

“You are not sick Athani’Puat... you...”

“Leonidas!” Athani stated firmly. “My name is not Athani’Puat! Not anymore! It is Athani Leonidas!”

Anja looked at Gorgo quickly her eyes wide. Gorgo couldn’t help but chuckle and shake her head. “She appears to have the same disposition as any female that has been claimed by a Leonidas.” She said.

“She most certainly does.” Isabella spoke moving up next to Anja.

“What is... what is wrong with me?” Athani asked.

“There is nothing wrong with you child.” Gorgo spoke with a warm soothing voice.

“Your treatments...” Anja told her. “When you were given the initial DNA sequencers as a child, you were injected with Elven and Lycavorian core DNA samples. Within Lycavorian core DNA samples are what we call L-stereoisomer cells, these cells are what makes a Lycavorian what he or she is. In those L-stereoisomer cells is a protein called Tryptophan. This protein is what makes the virus in our blood able to change others. The treatments you were taking were intended to keep the Tryptophan levels well below what Kavalians normally have. In you... and apparently within many others, the L-stereoisomer cells merged and bonded with your core Kavalian DNA. When this happened... the treatments began making you sick. The Lycavorian DNA had rewritten your own core DNA to an extent that your body was rejecting the treatment to keep your Tryptophan levels down. By the time you stopped taking the treatments, the L-stereoisomer cells were so abundant they were making their own Tryptophan. Far more than the treatments you were receiving could account for. That is why you did not revert back to your natural state when you stopped the treatments.”

“I... I am reverting back now?” Athani gasped. “Is that what you are saying?”

Anja shook her head. “No. Your relationship with Resumar has eliminated that possibility from ever happening. How you are now... that is how you will be for the rest of your years... not to mention you now have the Lycavorian longevity and a smaller portion of our healing ability.”

Athani's face suddenly became brighter and she looked at Resumar quickly, taking his hand in hers and pulling it tightly to her chest. "I... I have become more like Resumar?" She asked.

Anja nodded looking between her and Resumar. "Essentially yes." Anja said. "I would imagine the same principle exists with the others who have stopped taking the treatments. And if that is the case... then it implies that somewhere along the genetic stream of life, Kavalians and Lycavorians were one and the same."

Resumar's eyes grew a little wider as what his mother was saying hit him. "We are related to them?" He asked.

Anja nodded. "In a genetic sense yes." She replied. "Athani's Mindvoice abilities are growing in power. I doubt she will reach the level we have obtained because of your father's blood, but certainly a low level Tier Six."

"She already shows signs of this if she is able to communicate so easily with Cemath." Isabella said looking at her. "As well as hold back the inbred instinct of her people to attack and kill vampires. Which you are doing quite well by the way."

Athani met Isabella's eyes without fear. "I do not consider you my enemy." Athani stated plainly. "You... you are one of Resumar's mothers. And unlike the rest of my people I don't consider all vampires my enemy. Just those that want to kill me."

Isabella smiled. "Well... I'm glad that is the case."

"Does father know all this?" Resumar asked.

Anja shook her head quickly. "No. Are you kidding? He would fly off the handle! And he can't find out about you and Athani right now. There is far too much going on with Dysea meeting with Immortals and the High Coven here on Earth."

"Immortals?" Resumar declared becoming more alert. "What is that about? Mother is an elf... why would she be meeting with Immortals? What is going on? Where is she?" He barked out, worry for his mother very evident in his voice.

"It involves Normya." Isabella spoke.

"Normya?" Resumar said quickly. "What about Normya? What is happening?"

"Perhaps we should fill you in since you have been preoccupied these last few days it seems." She looked at Athani as she spoke. "Normya's TYPE II hit a Jump Gate near the border. She and Toral were set upon by mercenaries and Toral was killed. Normya was rescued by Immortals. They are among the tribe of the Immortal your father saved on Lycavore more than two decades ago. They have declared an *Iglata d'Vlos* to protect Normya. *Ussta* she-elf is moving to meet with them now."

"How could father trust Immortals?" Resumar gasped.

"An *Iglata d'Vlos* is sacred to Immortals." Isabella spoke. "It is a vow none of them have ever broken in their entire history. At least to my knowledge. This Immortal that your father saved... they spoke together and Dysea agreed to meet with them and recover Normya. They do not appear hostile to the Union and seemed very genuine in their manner. I trust your father and Dysea in this matter. They spoke with this Immortal directly. Besides... your mother is more than capable, and should the need arise help will not be very far away. Once they left, your father dispatched an entire Fleet Group to the area of the border. They will detect any signal for help that Dysea might send."

"It is a concern..." Anja said. "But not more so than you and your... your new wife. At least not right now."

"Mother it will come out about Athani and I eventually. Probably sooner rather than later." Resumar said. "Athani has been promised by her father to Qurot. He is becoming bolder in his actions in how he treats her because of this. I will not allow him to lay his hands on her anymore. She is my mate... my wife."

Gorgo stepped closer and took Athani's hand. "Then I suggest we put our heads together and figure out what we are going to do. And quickly." She smiled at Athani. "Come child... you may have not been welcomed to our family in the proper way, but I will not allow you to wander around your new home without clothes. Regardless of how much your husband desires it."

Resumar turned away from his grandmother and one could say he was almost blushing as Gorgo led Athani out of the kitchen. He turned back to look at his mothers in front of him and his small smile vanished quickly.

“Has it ever once occurred to you and your siblings to do something the easy way?” Anja asked in a serious voice. “To not cause tidal waves when you make a statement or complete an action? She’s the youngest daughter of the Kavalian Prefect Res.”

“I know who she is mother.” Resumar stated. “Do you honestly think I’m doing this for some wicked reason? She... she affected me the moment I laid eyes on her. I don’t know how to explain it... or how...”

“Resumar... do you love her?” Isabella asked. “Truly love her?”

“Without a moment’s hesitation.” He answered immediately.

Isabella looked at Anja and they both reached forward to take his hands. “Then let’s find a way to make sure this does not start a war.” Anja said softly. “And you need to put clothes on. Having you walk around half naked stopped being cute and funny when you turned ten.”

Resumar leaned over and nuzzled his mother’s cheek, and then did the same with Isabella. “Thank you mothers.” He said.

“I think you will owe us... what is it you say *Melyanna*... big time... when this is over.” Isabella spoke.

Anja shook her head. “That’s about as large an understatement as I have ever heard Bella.” She said.

“Yes... well... I had to say something.” Isabella answered with a grin.

SODRAG

Zarah sat in the comfortable chair holding the data pad and reviewing the training for the day. She was impressed with herself, but knew there were ways to improve on what she had done. It was the first time she had given instruction to such a large group and even with the assistance of the two older *Durcunusaan* Spartans, she had been hard pressed to keep up with the questions from the Coven riders. She had started them out with basic moves and quickly discovered that Narice had been right. Yuri and Dante were exceptionally skilled, and while Yuri put her sparing partner down efficiently and quickly, Dante seemed to enjoy dragging it out. He was showing off she knew, and that had not changed until the hulking *Durcunusaan* Spartan had lined up against him.

Zarah knew he was her DC, or Detachment Commander, and while she hardly ever noticed him he was always around whenever she was off duty or someplace that was deemed sensitive. His name was Rotan, and she had never really taken notice of him until today because of his duties. She definitely took notice when he took off his fatigue top and stepped across from Dante. He was easily six foot tall, the dark gray t-shirt conforming to the bulging muscles and washboard flat abdomen. He was handsome in a rugged sort of way, and he certainly didn’t carry himself as the six hundred and ninety-seven year old Spartan which Zarah knew him to be. She felt herself flush somewhat as she kept glancing at where he stood near the counter talking with another *Durcunusaan* soldier. Her hazel eyes were admiring the way he filled out all of his uniform, especially how the pants held what appeared to be a very promising package. Zarah shook her head quickly, feeling the fever in her blood rising as she gazed at him, and tried to push those thoughts from her head. As handsome as he was to her, she wanted someone far younger the first time. Someone close to her age who would not already be set in his ways. She took a deep breath and knocked back the remainder of her cool water and got to her feet.

She rose directly into Dante Moran’s path and he came up short before running into her reaching out to make it appear he was going to steady her. Zarah was far more coordinated than that and simply stepped back a half step.

“Excuse me.” Dante spoke in a gentle voice as he looked at her. His dark eyes flared for an instant and Zarah thought she saw a flash of red within them, but then it was gone. “I wasn’t looking at where I was going.”

Zarah looked at him and felt the fever within her amp up a notch. He was very handsome she decided, and not at all out of shape as his own muscles and hard abdomen attested to. She felt a strange tingling fill her head and she shook it quickly to clear her thoughts, feeling the fever begin to recede.

“No harm done.” Zarah spoke quickly looking at him. “You did very well today Dante Moran.”

Dante smiled warmly. “Thank you.” He replied. “You are far more skilled than I would have imagined. You must have been training since you were very young.”

Zarah nodded quickly. “Since I was five.” She replied.

Dante's smile broadened and she thought she saw that flash of red again as he gazed at her. "I as well!" He exclaimed.

Zarah smiled warmly then herself. "Kind of makes you wonder what else our two peoples have in common." She said.

Dante nodded. "Or just you and I." He said.

Zarah cocked her head to the side slightly. "Could be." She stated almost shyly.

"I don't suppose we would be allowed off the base yet?" He asked.

Zarah shook her head quickly. "No... I'm sorry."

"You are allowed off the base however." Dante spoke.

Zarah smiled and nodded. "Yes... but I'm not the one training."

Dante's smile was almost too perfect, but Zarah did not pick up on it as inexperienced as she was with men. "I was only thinking that I would like to buy you dinner and make up for acting like an ass with you this morning. You beat me soundly. I should not have gotten upset."

"Everyone loses once in a while." Zarah spoke. "It's the nature of things."

"Have you ever lost?" Dante asked.

Zarah shook her head. "Not yet." She said.

"Perhaps I will be the first." He said.

Zarah grinned. "There's a first time for everything." She said turning slightly as Rotan's bulk appeared next to them.

"Everything alright Princess?" He asked in a very calm and controlled voice.

Zarah nodded quickly. "Yes... we are good Commander." She answered looking at him. Viewing him close up right now was almost more than she could bear. The fever surged once more because she could feel his male aura banging against his Mindvoice shields and with a monumental show of will power Zarah took a deep breath. She could easily detect Rotan's almost irresistible amaretto like scent, and it tickled her nose deeply. She could also smell the much less prominent yuzu scent of Dante. It reminded her of the fruit of the same name that was sold in the western quarter that she thoroughly enjoyed. "If you will excuse me." She stammered before the combination of the two scents overwhelmed her completely and she jumped someone's bones. She turned quickly and made her way toward the door while Dante looked at Rotan.

"You got lucky today big man." Dante hissed.

Rotan smiled. "Let me know when you feel lucky again boy." He chimed back. "I can always use a good workout. And keep your distance from Princess Zarah."

Dante chuckled. "I wasn't aware there was a rule about speaking with the Princess." He spoke.

"There is my rule." Rotan spoke without humor. "And when it considers Zarah Leonidas, my rules are all that counts."

Dante tilted his head and looked at him. "Ah... you find her attractive." He stated.

"I am her Detachment Commander!" Rotan snapped. "It is my duty to protect her from the likes of you. Vampire or Lycavorian!"

"And you do such a good job of it!" Dante said. "Until next time Commander."

Rotan watched Dante turn quickly and march back toward the table where his brother and sister sat. He cut his eyes just as the Princess exited the building and the setting sun provided an incredible backdrop, outlining her incredible figure in its entire splendor. Rotan shook his head quickly, chasing those inappropriate thoughts from his head. He had guarded Zarah Leonidas since she was thirteen, watching as she grew into the woman she now was. She was almost like the daughter he never had, for his duties prior to acceptance into the *Durcunusaan* twenty years ago had kept him from finding a mate. It was something of a sticking point between him and his mother that he had not yet settled down and taken a mate, but Rotan was having entirely too much fun doing what he was doing now. Now however... seeing the beauty Zarah had become had made him start looking at her in a different light. And Rotan felt shame at that knowledge, but he did not know how to stop it.

He turned as his fellow *Durcunusaan* member stepped up to him. "Everything alright Ro?" He asked using his nickname.

Rotan glanced over at Dante quickly and nodded his head. "Yes."

"Let's get back to what we were talking about." The man spoke. "I'm telling you the sniper rifle they have just come out with is accurate to four kilometers and..."

Malic's dark blue eyes searched for her among the small crowd of personnel off loading from the *STRIKER* at SODRAG's main base Spaceport. Later in the afternoon as it was now and it was very quiet as most of the men and women who shuttled back and forth to SODRAG had already left. He spotted her easily enough, her slight figure standing out among the few techs and *Durcunusaan* soldiers that remained. She looked very out of place. She wore a simple tan jumpsuit and Malic's eyes grew a little wider when he saw her abdomen swollen with pregnancy. He had only been informed minutes ago that she was arriving, and Malic had rushed to the Spaceport. It had happened so fast, and he really hadn't even talked to her about coming here. As he raced across the base he wondered who could have gotten her arrival cleared so quickly. She was a civilian and a teacher, and not even senior military officials found it easy to gain entry to a *Durcunusaan* base. Yet there she was. She was the youngest and most outspoken of his parent's daughters, and as far as Malic was concerned the only one who really treated him as an equal. He threaded his way closer to her until he was just behind her and then he saw her nose scrunch up as she detected his scent among the many new and odd ones assailing her wolf senses. She turned quickly and her dark blue eyes flew open wide upon seeing him.

"Mal?" She gasped

Malic grinned quite uncharacteristically. "Hello Adriana." He said softly. Though easily eight inches shorter than her older brother Adriana jumped up and threw her arms around his neck as he hugged her to him, careful not to squeeze too hard due to her abdomen. He inhaled her wintry fresh scent and smiled even wider.

Adriana pulled back slowly gripping his shoulders. "Mal... what is wrong?" She asked quickly. "I had a pair of *Durcunusaan Hippeis Sedla* show up at my door telling me I had to come with them. They said you needed me for something. They escorted me all the way here from Hunlar Five. I've... Mal I've never even seen a *Durcunusaan Hippeis Sedla* before they came to my house."

Malic looked at her oddly. "*Durcunusaan Hippeis Sedla*?" He questioned. "I only asked four days ago if you would be allowed to come here. This is a *Durcunusaan* base, but I did... I did not think they would treat it as an emergency. And certainly not enough to send the *Hippeis Sedla*. There are few enough of them as it is."

Adriana looked at him, her eyes growing a little wider. "This is... this is a *Durcunusaan* base?" She asked softly. "You... you are here! Malic did you..."

Malic smiled slowly and nodded his head looking at her. "I have been selected for a candidacy into the *Durcunusaan*. I have come here to conduct my training and assist with some other things."

Adriana's face was bright and full of the pride that Malic never saw in the eyes of his parents or other siblings. "Malic... oh Mal that is wonderful!" She said hugging him again. "That is what you have always wanted."

Malic nodded slowly. "Part of it yes." He said.

Adriana pushed him back at arms length and looked at him. "My big brother... a member of the *Durcunusaan*. Oh Mal... I am so proud of you!"

Malic reached out and touched her swollen abdomen gently. "What... what is this?" He asked.

Adriana slapped his shoulder. "What do you think it is fool?" She barked playfully.

Malic looked at her. "Tovar's child?" He asked speaking of Adriana's pureblood vampire husband.

"Who else's child would it be?" She exclaimed. "He is my husband and mate."

"And so he is." Malic spoke softly.

Adriana looked at her brother carefully. He looked different than when she had last seen him. More calm and almost at peace with himself. She squeezed his hands tightly. "You... you do not show the distaste you normally do for Tovar Malic." She said. "Why?"

"I have been here... I have been here only a short time Adriana... here on Earth among these men and women and I have seen things I never thought I would. Small things really... but when you add them all together... everything father and mother pounded into our heads as children is..."

"Wrong." Adriana said simply.

Malic looked at her. "Yes. Wrong." He said firmly. "I have begun to look at... to see that vampires are not what father and mother always told us they were."

Adriana smiled as her eyes became moist. "Oh Malic you don't know how happy hearing you say that makes me." She said.

“I did not... I did not know if Tuvar would accept me after what I have said to him in the past.” Malic spoke even as shame filled his face and eyes. “That is why I did not think to ask if he could accompany you. I also did not know you would be allowed to come here so quickly. Security screening can take weeks and months to complete fully, especially the ones conducted for anyone associated with the *Durcunusaan*.”

“Why have you asked me to come here Mal?” Adriana asked. “I am a civilian. A teacher. I know nothing of fighting and war.”

Malic looked at her evenly. “I will need you to teach *me* Adriana.” He said. “I will need you to teach me what I need to learn in order to succeed.”

“Mal... I teach small children.” Adriana said with a smile. “You are not a child Malic.”

Malic nodded. “I know... but that is how I must start. I know that now. I have never been as smart as you or our siblings and...”

“Mal that is not true!” She snapped softly.

“But it is true.” He said quickly. “I will admit that now Adriana. I... coming here and seeing what I have seen. Just being among these men and women, it has made me accept who I am. I know what mother and father did when I was a baby. I may not understand all of it, but I know what they did. It is why I am the way I am. I am not as smart as you and the others. I want to change that sister.”

Adriana stared at her brother for a long moment. “You have changed Malic.” She said softly. “You have changed so much from the man you were only six months ago. Why has this happened?” She reached up and placed her hand on his cheek. “What has caused you to desire this now?”

“I have found my calling Adriana.” Malic answered softly. “I have found three things which I desire more than anything I have ever wanted. And it is here... among these men and women. Here among the dragons. And one day I hope to count myself among their number. Two of these things I will never have... but the third is within my reach. In order to do that... there is much I must learn. The ancient language to begin with.” He said. “My rank grants me a larger than usual bungalow... you can stay with me. Teach me at night and have the days to yourself. I will do whatever you think I need to do. I have my normal duties but I will study whatever you think I should at night. I can see about you being allowed into the nearby city and...”

Adriana reached up and put her other hand to his cheek now. “Yes Malic.” She said softly.

Malic’s blue eyes smiled and he looked around quickly before leaning over to nuzzle the top of her head. “Thank you sister.” He said softly. He scooped up her two bags in his hands. “Come... I will show you the dragons as we return to the bungalows. You have never seen one up close have you?”

Adriana shook her head quickly. “No never! You don’t fear them?”

Malic shook his head. “They are the most honor bound species I have ever come across.” He stated. “And they are... they are special.” He smiled. “Come!”

Adriana held his arm as he led her out of the spaceport.

Adriana’s eyes were wide as they fell upon the forty odd dragons near the hanger and Malic slowed the open aired Lifter. They were milling about half inside and half outside the hanger. Dragons of all colors and size Adriana saw. She took Malic’s arm as he helped her out of the Lifter with a grin, her eyes focused on the mystical creatures that were so revered in the Union. They were less than a hundred meters away and Adriana could not believe their size and the grace with which they moved. Malic could feel the Mindvoice tremors within his head and knew they were speaking to each other. He had grown accustomed to the tremors now, many times allowing them to fill him completely even though he could not hear what was being spoken.

Adriana held his arm tighter as they moved closer. “They... they are so massive!” She gasped out softly.

Malic nodded. “They have completed their training for the day and gather here to go over what they have learned with the Dragon Scholar who accompanied us from Sparta to teach them.” He said. “He is probably inside with the others. He is the one I want you to see. His scales are a silvery purple color Adriana. He is proud and strong.”

Adriana gripped his arm tighter as they walked closer, the heads of many of the dragons turning to look at them. She was taken aback by the intelligence she saw in their eyes. “They understand our spoken words, don’t they Mal?” She asked.

Malic nodded. "Yes. I can feel the tremors of their conversations within Mindvoice, but I do not have the strength to hear their voices."

Adriana looked at him strangely. "That is new." She said. "You never were a very strong Mindvoicer."

Malic nodded. "I know. It started on the Prince's ship when we were coming here." He said. "It has only continued to grow stronger the more time I spend here." Malic pointed. "There he is."

Adriana turned and looked to where he was pointing at the massive dragon. He did indeed have silvery/purple scales she saw, with a long neck and tail. She gripped Malic's arm tighter as they moved closer. She watched as the silvery colored dragon turned towards them, those amethyst colored eyes making her gasp softly in surprise. It crossed to them in three strides and suddenly it was in front of her and lowering its massive head.

"Mal... Malic?" She panted almost breathlessly, gripping his arm even tighter.

Malic smiled. "It is ok sister." He spoke softly looking at her. "His name is Vincix I believe. He is the dragon teacher that was brought to school the others. He will not hurt you. None of them will. He is just looking at you."

"Then why are his eyes focused on you?" Adriana spoke turning quickly to look at him.

"What?" Malic's head turned and even he was startled to see Vincix's amethyst eyes focused on him intently, his huge snout only inches away from his face. Then Malic felt it... the tremors within Mindvoice, and far more powerful than anything he had felt until this moment. His own dark blue eyes grew a little wider as Vincix's snout moved closer still.

Vincix stared at this tall Lycavorian, unable to comprehend what he felt pouring from the man. He was very tall and muscular, his dark blue eyes nearly unreadable as they gazed at him in confusion. He felt an enormous Mindvoice presence from the man, and it somehow seemed so very familiar to him. He had seen him several times over the past few days, always from a distance though while he worked.

Vincix had felt something different in the past two weeks. A presence of some sort that filled him like an echo in his mind. It was not something he had ever felt before, yet as the days passed these last two weeks the echo had become louder and clearer. It was not something he had told his mother or anyone else, for he himself had never experienced something like this before and did not know how to describe it. Yet now... standing in front of this man... the echo was no longer an echo. It was a shouting and hammering in his head that was causing his heart to race and his tail to twitch. He inched his snout closer to the man, his ocean driftwood scent filling even his senses, and seeing that the Lycavorian did not pull back. There was something about this large Lycavorian Vincix knew. Something that was reaching out to him in a way he'd never felt before.

And that something saved his life.

Time to show you what I learned today oh mighty Vincix! The cruel voice erupted within Mindvoice.

Vincix's head snapped around to his left and his amethyst colored eyes went wide when he saw the end of the large tail whipping directly for his head. The blow caught him unprepared and snapped his head around on his neck with such force his entire body was propelled across the floor of the hanger.

Malic's eyes flew open when the snout of the dragon disappeared from in front of him and he watched as his body was sent hurtling across the hanger floor, toppling two other Coven dragons to their sides until he rammed into the wall of the concrete hanger with enough force to crack and shatter the wall. Several large pieces broke free and fell on the body of the dragon he knew as Vincix, further adding to the stunned silver scaled dragon's predicament. He watched as the green and yellow scaled body of Vollenth moved past him quickly, Yuri's dragon appearing intent on doing more harm to the dazed Vincix, even as he struggled to get his feet back under him. Malic felt pain wrack his body, stabbing pain in his head, causing him to nearly double over in agony.

Adriana looked at her brother reaching for his shoulders stunned at what she had just witnessed. "Malic! What is happening?" She screamed.

Malic's eyes sprang open wide, and he staggered slightly, Adriana trying to steady him. "No!" He hissed. "No!"

"Malic... what is wrong? Malic!"

Malic's head snapped around and his eyes saw Vincix finally gather his feet under him, just as Vollenth slammed him in the side with his tail once more, Vincix's body smashing into the concrete wall of the hanger and slumping to the floor.

"NO!" Malic screamed, his voice carrying over the inside of the hanger like a clap of thunder rolling across the plains. It caused the head of every dragon in the hanger, each of them stunned by the sudden viciousness of the attack, to snap around and look at the near crazed look in Malic's eyes. "NO! YOU WILL NOT HURT MY BROTHER!"

Adriana would never forget what she saw next and it would remain with her for the rest of her life as the catalyst to the defining moment that changed her brother's path in life forever. Her own blue eyes grew wide as Malic's Shi Viska burst into existence and his eyes changed, his wolf fangs bursting forth. Malic sprinted toward the green and yellow scaled dragon with a speed she had never observed from any male Lycavorian before, and she could only watch in horror as that green scaled beast's tail came whipping around once more.

Vincix's amethyst eyes grew large as he saw the Lycavorian he had been looking at intently skid to a stop in front of him, his Shi Viska out and humming on his arm. He could only watch as if in slow motion as Vollenth's tail came whipping around with savage speed, intent on smashing into Vincix's body once more. The tail smashed into the Lycavorian man instead, impacting directly on the now exposed shield and Vincix watched as his body was sent hurtling backwards towards him. Vincix groaned when Malic's two hundred and thirty pound body rammed into his side with unbelievable velocity. The scream that followed deafened all within the hanger except for the trumpeting bellow that echoed the shriek in almost perfect harmony.

A scream and trumpet not of pain or shock, but the scream and trumpet of two minds becoming one.

It was a scream and trumpet that echoed through the endless chasm that was Mindvoice. It did not touch all those who were able to use this skill, for the power involved would have made many of them go instantly insane. Across the vastness of Earth and space five hundred and ninety eight minds came instantaneously alert and reached across the void from wherever they were to touch the final two that would complete their circle. Five of those minds right here on Earth.

They reached out and wrapped around the final two minds, passing to them all that they were, all that they knew. The many battles, the endless hours of training, the many tricks they had picked up through the years. They took from the two minds as well, blending within themselves the vast wealth of knowledge from one and the utter commitment and force of will to succeed from the other. They took it and made it part of themselves. Many of them were of the original group formed by the King. Twenty-five years and several conflicts had seen them lose twenty-three of their number. Twenty-three hearts and minds that they worked to replace through the years. Two of the final three positions had been filled only within the last two years since they were already Bonded Pairs within the ranks of the *Durcunusaan*, and they had thought it would be some time before the last position was filled. This sudden shock and the immense power of what they felt announced that their search was over and they were finally whole once more.

Two hundred and ninety-nine Bonded Pairs reached across the enormity of stars and planets and sent one message with one voice.

WE ARE COMING BROTHERS!

The Sacred Circle of *Mjолnir's Hand* was complete once more.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

LEONIDAS II-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER

ULU SCIMITAR

ORBITING EARTH

"Bastard!" She spat her hand coming forward and slapping the male Lycavorian's face hard enough to rock his head back. "I trusted you! I... I loved you!"

The male simply stood there, holding part of the sheet over his lower body while the blond female elf held another sheet over her naked body on the bed behind him. He turned back to look at her, opening his mouth several times to work out the sting of the slap she had just landed.

"Seven months!" He finally hissed at her. "We have been together seven months and not once have you allowed me to cado forn! Why is that Ne'Veha?"

"I wasn't ready!" She barked angrily.

"Wasn't ready?" He snapped. "What kind of answer is that? You are either ready or not!"

"You know how my parents feel about Lycavorians!" She exclaimed. "I was waiting until I could..."

"Until you could what?!" He snapped at her once more. "Find the courage to tell them we were a couple? For someone with as much confidence and strength of will as you say you always possess, you can't even tell your parents we have been seeing each other."

"So you go and find some slut who will allow you to do these things that I would not let you do?" She screamed at him. "You... you told me you loved me Tarren!"

"I do." He stated simply. "I love you both!"

She looked at him, her dark brown eyes flashing wide. "What?"

"Join us!" He said. "I have enough for both of you and you might discover you like the arrangement."

"You mean share a bed with you and that... that whore you just picked up off some street!" She shouted.

"I am no whore upae!" The blond snapped back at her. "I am just a little more open to things you are not!"

"Hy'la and I have been seeing each other for four months now." Tarren spoke calmly. "We were hoping you would be open to sharing our lives with us."

"What's the matter Tarren?" She barked. "I'm not enough for you?"

His dark eyes centered on her face. "To be frank... no." He answered bluntly. "You are too timid for my tastes. I was hoping you would come around... but so far you haven't."

Ne'Veha looked at him as if he'd suddenly lost his mind. "Timid?" She exclaimed in disbelief. "Simply because I won't share a bed with you and another woman, that means I'm too timid? Because I won't let you fuck me in my ass... that means I'm too timid?"

He nodded slowly. "Among other things?" He replied. "I'm only being honest with you Ne'Veha."

She glared at him for a long moment then. "We are finished Tarren! Done! I forgave you the first time! Not now!" She screamed.

He laughed arrogantly. "I need children... and if you won't give them to me I will find a woman who will." He stated. "I would prefer that you and Hy'la be the ones..."

"Stop right there!" She spat.

He stepped closer to her. "Where will you go? I am in your blood now. I may not have scented you... but no male will come near you now Ne'Veha. At least not here on Elear. Unless you leave... you will be alone. And we both know you won't leave your precious family behind and go out into the real fleet."

"Then I will leave!" She stammered. "You have only proven to me that my parents were right!" She spoke softly. "You have only validated their dislike of the Lycavorian men by your actions."

"You won't leave Ne'Veha." He stated confidently. "For all of your bluster and skill and arrogance... you are too afraid to leave Elear."

"We shall see!" She screamed out.

That had been six months ago, and twenty-five year old Commander Ne'Veha had left her home planet two weeks later. Born and raised on Elear, she had joined the Union military at the tender age of nineteen and as with all elves, rapidly displayed extraordinary skills in piloting. When she finally graduated from the Union Fleet Academy five years later, she was touted as the next coming of Queen For'mya with her flying abilities. Ne'Veha's most preferred flying craft was the newest Menkla Manufacturing M5 *Devastator* Heavy Fighter/Bomber and her ability to make this craft do things it was not designed for was famous throughout the Elear Central Command. She was well known within that circle of Four Fleet Groups, but she had never once served outside of that Command.

Until now.

She had requested a posting to the finest Elven Fleet Group outside of the Elear Central Command, assuming her skills would allow her to get posted anywhere she desired. She wanted to go to the Apo Prime Command Group so that she could remain close enough to Elear to return home and see her family as often as she wished. The Apo Prime Command Group also had an entirely elven squadron that needed a commander. The powers that be had other plans and Ne'Veha found herself posted to the 9th Spartan Combined Fleet Attack Group. She had protested the posting at first; not wanting to be part of a Fleet based Command, or have to endure being so far from her family. She also thought she was due a command slot because of her skills and she made her disappointment very clear to her superiors. She was told by the Lycavorian officer at Fleet Operations that they did not assign pilots by preference, but by need. Ne'Veha had always found Lycavorians to be arrogant and pompous. She had fallen in love with Tarren because he had seemed to be the exception to the rule at first. Her parents forbid any of their four daughters to be involved with Lycavorians. They wanted to keep their elven bloodline pure. They had Lycavorians friends and associates, but none of them were very close. Tarren's actions had only served to reinforce her parent's pseudo mindset when it came to Lycavorians, especially the males, and therefore Ne'Veha's distrust of them had only grown after Tarren had cheated on her again.

Ne'Veha had never met King Leonidas or the Queens directly, and she had only heard about Crown Princess Androcles through the Netnews. She did know that outside of the King's own 1st SCFAG and General/Colonel Simpson's 2nd SCFAG, Prince Androcles's command was one of the most sought after postings within the entire Union fleet. However the 9th was based on Earth and in her opinion too far away for her to return and see her family as often as she wanted. Ne'Veha had already made plans to speak with Captain Sa'sur, the *SCIMITAR*'s elven commanding officer and request she be transferred back to Elear.

Ne'Veha stood only five foot three inches tall and barely a hundred and ten pounds when she was dripping wet. Her dark brown hair fell to the middle of her back, yet whenever she was on duty it was always tied in a single long bundle of soft, shiny locks. She had a typical elven body, with long legs for her height, and firm breasts that while not large by any standard were still proudly high and full. Her legs ended at her exceptionally firm and impeccably shaped ass. Her features were again typically elven, with four inch high ears that curved elegantly upwards and close to her head, full lips and completely unblemished skin. Since leaving Elear Ne'Veha had been approached by many males as well as several females who had shown interest in her, including Lycavorians who were attracted by her beauty alone. She had dismissed them all rather bluntly, though she was secretly surprised and pleased that she was found desirable by even females. It only fueled her ego and her mindset that Tarren had made a very big mistake in cheating on her. Tarren had tried to contact her several times in the last six months, but she had never answered him back. As far as she was concerned they were finished forever.

"Ne'Veha!" The male voice of her elven Weapons Control Officer finally penetrated her thoughts and she saw him staring down at her from where he stood.

He was motioning frantically for her to get up and Ne'Veha saw that everyone else was also standing. Her dark eyes went a little wider and she sprang to her feet just as the tall female elf strode into the pilot's briefing room. Her dark hair was streaked with white blond highlights, her uniform meticulously tailored but bearing no rank, which Ne'Veha found very odd. She moved directly to the podium and turned to look at the pilots. Her pale blue eyes were bright and held an air of confidence and experience.

Sa'sur let her eyes drift over the twenty-seven new pilots to the *SCIMITAR*, eighteen of them *DEVASTATOR* crews flying the new M5. These crews would complete the change over to the new ship Fighter/Bombers.

"Good evening and let me welcome you to the *SCIMITAR*." Sa'sur spoke confidently. "I am Captain Sa'sur for those of you who don't already know. The ULU *SCIMITAR* is the overall Command ship for the 9th Spartan Combined Fleet Attack Group and Crown Prince Androcles. Our home base is Earth, and many of our crew has established homes within Sparta or Eden City. We have just started the Royal families' six month exodus to Sparta; so much of our fleet training and maneuvers will take place within Earth's operational sector. When the royal family shifts back to Apo Prime we usually assume a lateral, nine sector border patrol along The Wilds and the former border with the High Coven. As you all know, the Coven has retreated from that area of the border due to their war with the KFI, leaving it mainly free of their influence, and it is now considered part of The Wilds. You will find life within the 9th to be very exciting and structured much of the time. Prince

Androcles and I like to keep everyone on their toes so we will often issue training alerts and readiness drills outside of the norm.” Sa’sur moved around from the back of the podium and down in front of the large briefing room chairs. “Please... everyone take a seat.” She stated waiting as they all did. “The *SCIMITAR* is also home to at a minimum four dragons and I imagine now that Prince Resumar will be getting his very own combined FG to command, that number will remain at that level on a regular basis. For those of you who have never served on a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser, which is most of you after looking at your records, our ship is designed in such a way that the dragons have complete freedom to roam wherever they wish. There are only four areas that they can not reach because of their size, one of those areas being the main bridge unfortunately, but there was no way to make it large enough to fit even one of them. Prince Androcles is bonded to Elynth and Princess Lisisa to Jeth, both of them larger than usual adult dragons. The *SCIMITAR* is also considered the main transporter of dragons who are returning to Earth for the Harmony Ceremony. We can carry fifty dragons with ease, and the entire aft portion of deck ten is what we called the Dragon Den. Access to the Dragon Den and the aft portion of deck nine is restricted to senior crew and officers and it is one of the rules we adhere to rigidly here on the *SCIMITAR*.

“Life on the *SCIMITAR* will be unlike what many of you are coming from on the planet based commands. The ship is large yes... but everyone is treated as an equal. Standing orders from the Prince is that no rank will be worn on your uniforms. This promotes respect to all members of the crew whether your duties are pilot or second class tech hand. Many of the crew of the *SCIMITAR* has chosen to speak only the ancient Lycavorian language while on board ship, and I recommend if you do not speak it, you at least make an attempt to learn it. I will not sit here and give you the entire run down of operations, I will leave that to your flight squadron leaders, and they will also tell you where your quarters will be. My door is always open... as is the Prince’s... however make sure you bring your issue to your immediate superior first. I will take a few questions now.”

“Will we be allowed to come and go from the surface Captain?” A male pilot asked.

Sa’sur smiled. “This is not a prison ship Lieutenant.” She stated with some humor in her voice. “There are hourly shuttles to the surface and you can remain on the surface the entire time if that is your wish, as long as you are here for your duty shift. There are many historical places to see within Sparta, and I do recommend visiting the Memorial at Thermopylae for the King’s father and all those who perished there. It is quite beautiful.”

“Does the Prince stay on the ship ma’am?”

Sa’sur shook her head. “No. He has an apartment at the Royal Estate Villa but his main home is in Gytheio. He has just recently taken a mate, Crown Princess Sadi, and you will probably see her before you see Androcles. She is now the co-pilot of his *STRIKER DT* and she and Arrarn Leonidas will be using the landing bays off and on to train some new pilots in DT flight operations. He does sometimes pull a duty shift here on the *SCIMITAR* while we are on Earth, but his other duties normally keep him on the surface while we are here.”

“Other duties?” The voice blurted out.

Sa’sur cut her eyes and saw the female elf who had spoken. She was a stunning young female and Sa’sur knew who she was immediately.

“Commander Ne’Veha.” Sa’sur spoke seeing the look of surprise on her face that she knew her name. “You have a question?”

“He has duties that are more important than being on his ship Captain?” Ne’Veha forged ahead. The tone of her voice was easy to imply she did not approve of this.

“Crown Prince Androcles Commands two Ground Divisions based on Earth, as well as the eight Strike Wings that make up the 9th CSAFG. He also leads a section of seventy-five members of Mjolnir’s Hand. Is there something you don’t approve of about his workload Commander, because I assure you, he puts in far more hours than you will?” Sa’sur spoke.

Ne’Veha looked around quickly somewhat embarrassed at being put on the spot. “I just assumed he would... that he would spend more time here Captain Sa’sur.” She said finally, her eyes settling back on Sa’sur.

“Assuming anything in regards to any of the Royal family will usually turn out to be wrong, especially in the case of the King and Androcles. They are two peas in a pod for the most part, and that will sometimes make you insane with their unorthodox approach to things.” Sa’sur spoke with a smile. “I command this ship... that is how it has always been, that is how it will always be until I am told otherwise. Androcles and I have been

together going on six years now, and he made it very clear to me when he assumed command of the 9th that the *SCIMITAR* is my ship to run. Since we agree on almost everything, there is really no difference between him and I when it comes to operations of this ship. Does that satisfy your question?"

"Yes sir!" Ne'Veha answered quickly.

"Good." Sa'sur answered. "Your squadron commanders will give you your assignments and a brief tour of the ship and landing bays. Commander Ne'Veha please hold a moment."

Ne'Veha sighed slightly as the three squadron commanders stepped forward and began ushering the pilots out of the briefing room. Sa'sur motioned her down closer to the first row and Ne'Veha grabbed her bags and complied.

"Captain?" She spoke as she moved up to her.

Sa'sur towered over her in height and this intimidated Ne'Veha slightly. "Sit down Commander." She spoke.

"I prefer to stand sir." Ne'Veha replied.

Sa'sur met her eyes and shrugged. "I understand you did not want to be assigned here Commander. Why is that?"

"I requested a planet based command Captain." Ne'Veha answered quickly. "The Elven Squadron on Apo Prime to be specific."

"Yes I know." Sa'sur said as she leaned against the podium. "I also know that your father tried to get some strings pulled for you as a member of the Elven Lower Parliament. That didn't work either. I've read your fitness reports Commander. All of them are excellent. Admiral Po'Tal thinks very highly of you."

"Thank you Captain." Ne'Veha spoke smugly, the arrogance in her voice dripping out even though she wasn't aware of it.

"Do you have an issue with Lycavorians Commander?" Sa'sur asked.

"Excuse me sir?" Ne'Veha spoke.

"You specifically asked for assignment to the Elven Squadron on Apo Prime." Sa'sur said. "Short of that, every other combat unit among your requests is commanded by elves. I'll ask again. Do you have an issue with Lycavorians Commander? It is well known that your parents do."

"I... no sir." Ne'Veha replied. "I don't believe I do. I do not care for many of their... of their practices... but no I do not have an issue with them as a whole."

Sa'sur shook her head slowly. "Your face tells me you are lying Commander, but I can't do anything about that. I don't know what has happened in your past to make you feel this way but that sort of attitude will not cut it on this ship. Almost all the squadron commanders on the *SCIMITAR* are Lycavorian, and the elf pilots we have follow them without question. I certainly hope you do not make waves."

"That is not my intention Captain." Ne'Veha spoke. "I am only here until other orders come through."

Sa'sur nodded. "Ah... about those other orders." She said with a smile. "None will be coming Commander Ne'Veha. You have been assigned to the *SCIMITAR* permanently. There will be no follow on orders. The powers that be decided that they needed your skills within a working fleet and not based from a planetary command. Nothing your father does will change that."

Ne'Veha's eyes went wide. "Captain... I was told this was only an interim posting." She stated. "Until something opened up within the elven squadron on Apo Prime."

Sa'sur nodded. "Yes I know. However... the Commander of that squadron does not want you posted to them. She made that known while you were enroute here. Your orders are final."

"May... May I ask why?" Ne'Veha spoke.

Sa'sur grinned. "She said you were a superior pilot... but she doesn't want a pilot with the baggage you seem to have when it concerns the Lycavorians. That squadron provides first response to the defense of Apo Prime Commander. She doesn't want a pilot who will stop and think about protecting a species she doesn't appear to like very much."

"Captain... that is not true!" Ne'Veha exclaimed.

Sa'sur held up her hand. "I don't want to hear about it." She stated. "I have a feeling on why you believe the way you do Commander but what you fail to realize, and something your parents apparently did not feel the need to pass on to you, is that whatever issues you have with Lycavorian males is not the norm. My husband is a Lycavorian and we have been mated for nearly four hundred years. He has never taken another mate, nor has

he ever gone outside our marriage. We as a species owe our very existence to King Resumar and what he started. His grandson continues that tradition as does his great grandson. We are bound to them in a way the Hadarians and Algolians are not. And they to us. Do not let a few bad apples in your life sour your entire outlook of a species Commander.”

“With all due respect Captain... my private life is just that. Private... and not for anyone else’s knowledge. Why I feel the way I do is my business Captain.” Ne’Veha spoke firmly.

Sa’sur nodded. “Yes it is... I’m just letting you know don’t let it interfere with your duties Commander.” She stated. “Nearly half the crew on this ship is Lycavorian and all of us have been with Prince Androcles since he took command of the 9th. We have fought with him, eaten with him and wept with him over dead comrades. With every Lycavorian on this ship. Just be mindful of anything stupid that might blurt its way out of your mouth.”

“You don’t seem to care for me sir. If that is the case... why did you agree to have me assigned here?” Ne’Veha asked.

“Admiral Po’Tal is a friend and he said you needed guidance.” Sa’sur replied.

“I don’t intend to let my feelings interfere with my duties sir!” Ne’Veha stated. “You have my word on that.”

Sa’sur nodded. “We’ll see. Dismissed Commander.”

SODRAG

Background music: *Never let go*, Guardian Soundtrack

It was not something normally witnessed by others.

However, at this particular time, forty-two dragons watched as a rare bonding took place. Even Vollenth stood transfixed as the Lycavorian male slammed into Vincix’s exposed side and his shield disappeared completely. The roar of both of them was louder than any they had heard before, and they could only watch in fascination as Vincix withered on the ground, his rear legs twitching madly and his tail whipping back and forth. It smashed into the wall of the hanger several times, each time dropping more debris and dust down on top of him and Malic. Debris that wasn’t noticed by either of them. Malic also withered in what appeared to be supreme agony, whether from the pain of the blow from Vollenth’s tail or something else none of them knew. They could only watch as he turned slowly on top of Vincix’s body his limbs quivering noticeably, his deep blue eyes locked open in a position of what appeared to be horror, Vincix’s amethyst colored orbs matching that look in every way.

Images flashed through their minds, voices, places and events that neither of them had been too or seen ever before. They saw so much, they felt it filling every portion of their minds, as inexorably their combined awareness was expanding and intertwining and becoming one. They heard and felt so many new things on a level that was almost too much to comprehend. Their eyes blinked repeatedly and then focused on one another as Malic saw Vincix’s desire to become a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*, yet how he was never able to because of his muscular deficiency. Vincix saw Malic’s desire, only to see it dashed aside by his lack of education and ability to understand higher functions and equations. They took from each other the sum total of their lives, sharing more of each other than they had ever shared with anyone before.

Then they gave back to each other in droves.

Into Malic poured Vincix’s knowledge of things, his blue eyes wide as equations and calculations raced through his mind. Things he never understood before passed to him and comprehension became his brother’s gift to him. Into Vincix poured the indomitable will and strength of body that Malic possessed, and even as they lay there touching, Vincix could feel the muscles on his hind legs grow and expand and strengthen to what they never had been before. They felt power sweeping through them, the power to right wrongs and defend what they so cared for in their lives. The Union, their brother and sister dragons and riders, and all those they considered family. As that power swept through them, the light blue psychic shield activated. Malic lifted one hand from where it rested on Vincix’s scaled side and he watched amazed as the shield extended and spread up his arm, tingling as it lifted to surround his shoulder and slowly move down his back. He looked down and

watched as the psychic shield extended over Vincix's long muscular body, encompassing first his front legs and talons and spreading across his hind quarters and tail.

Malic lifted his eyes to Vincix's amethyst orbs and tilted his head slightly. *My... my bonded... my bonded brother Vincix.* His voice filled Vincix's head in almost a whisper.

My bonded... my bonded brother Malic. Vincix's voice burst into Malic's head with a whisper, but for Malic it was like the first sound he had heard after being deaf for so many years. Whatever pain Malic may have been experiencing vanished with those four words. All the shame he had felt growing up, all the empty words of love spoken to him by his parents and siblings, all of that simply disappeared into the mist that was their combined pasts.

Enough of this! Vollenth's voice shouted out within Mindvoice. Let's finish this Vincix! I'm not done showing you what I have learned!

One set of amethyst colored eyes and one set of deep ocean blue eyes slowly turned and looked upon Vollenth. In those eyes were the combined experiences and knowledge of three hundred bonded pairs. The combined commitment and shared faithfulness of six hundred minds and hearts.

Vollenth never really stood a chance.

Malic's Shi Viska flared into existence once more and was launching before it had fully formed, something he had never been able to accomplish before. No blades extended on the shield, but it rammed into Vollenth's armored scales directly over the bone connecting his front right foreleg to his shoulder with power of a point blank cannon shot. Malic slowed the velocity a millisecond before impact and Vollenth bellowed in agony as the edge of the shield impacted on the nerve bundle there. All feeling in his right leg disappeared immediately and he staggered forward, unable to support his weight. As he toppled forward, the silvery purple tail lashed out with wicked swiftness, far faster than Vollenth could follow. The near solid purple tip slapped into the side of his snout with a crack that echoed across the hanger. Vollenth's body was hurtling through the air then, flailing wildly until he too slammed into the side of the hanger wall. The grunt of pain that erupted from his snout was easy enough to ascertain as pieces of the wall dropped on him, granite powder showering his yellow green scales.

You have learned nothing fool! Vincix bellowed within Mindvoice as he rose to his feet now, moving up to stand behind Malic just as his shield returned to his arm. *Come Vollenth! My bonded brother and I await you!*

Vollenth roared in savage fury and came off the ground like a shot. He gave a mighty beat of his wings and was upon them in a flash. Just as he came within range to snag Malic's unmoving form with his talons, Vincix's left wing cracked forward with blinding speed and smashed into his muzzle with absurd force. Vollenth felt the skin along the lips of his mouth split painfully just as Malic lifted his shield, facing the frontage towards him. There was a fleeting flash of TK power and then the immense wave of shared Mindvoice TK power from both Malic and Vincix erupted from the front of his Shi Viska. The TK power wave took out Vollenth's front legs before he had a chance to recover and his collective forward momentum and the force of Vincix's blow sent him careening sideways, his neck and snout coming down with brutal force and impacting the hard packed dirt floor of the hanger.

The cloud of dust and dirt rose into the air directly towards where Adriana stood frozen in shock and unthinkable horror at what she was witnessing. Malic's eyes grew wide as he realized this and he began to move forward with no thought except to save his sister. He needn't have bothered as Anthar and Deneth appeared from the dust cloud, imposing their huge bodies between her and Vollenth's skidding form. Adriana blinked twice as the cerise red scales and the black and white scales of the two dragons blocked her view, and provided a wall of armored scales that Vollenth would not penetrate. His head and neck slammed into Anthar and Deneth's front forelegs and that is where he stopped as their combined seven tons ceased his body's forward motion as if he had impacted a wall.

Cease this Vollenth! Anthar demanded.

You can not win! Do you not understand what you face now! Deneth barked out.

Vollenth staggered as he came to his feet, shaking his head back and forth trying to clear his mind. *He can not beat me alone!* Vollenth screamed out.

He does not fight alone you fool! Not anymore! Anthar screamed out.

What do you speak? Vollenth snarled as he gathered his legs under him, his blood dripping on the ground beneath him.

He means that a Bonded Pair of Mjolnir's Hand never fights alone! The new voice joined them. If you fight one of us... you fight all of us!

All of them turned to see Androcles and Elynth move into the hanger from the wide open hanger door. The power radiating from them was a brilliant beacon and it rippled with barely controlled domination, the setting sun in the background only adding to the image the Coven dragons saw.

Anthar snapped his head around and looked at Adriana with his magenta eyes. *Climb onto my back now little one!* He screamed out as loud as he could within Mindvoice hoping that she was strong enough to understand him.

Adriana winced at the power of the command and without hesitation she stepped up onto his front foreleg and climbed onto his back as he and Deneth quickly backed up out of the way. Adriana was considered only a Tier Four Mindvoicer, but the dragon's voice had filled her head almost as if someone was shouting in her ear, and she knew well the voice of command. *What is happening to my brother?* She screamed out to the strange dragon.

Deneth brought his head forward and saw her blue eyes turn to look at him with stunned surprise as his soothing voice filled her head. *Your brother and Vincix have bonded little one.* He spoke gently. *They have become one... in more complete a way than any of us have ever experienced.*

Adriana turned back to where Malic stood proudly, his Shi Viska poised and humming on his arm, the huge head and silvery/purple scales of the dragon he had called Vincix hovering inches from his left shoulder as she watched who she knew was Prince Androcles step up beside her brother, the obsidian black dragon just to his right side. Her eyes were wide as she watched what was transpiring. *They... they have become bonded?* She gasped.

Andro looked at Vollenth as he stood only five meters away. *I warned you Vollenth! I warned you! You have attacked a member of Mjolnir's Hand!* His voice was angry and all of them knew it. *Yuri's hate has warped you Vollenth! You are not meant for her! You are meant for someone else! And that festering bond she has forced upon you ends right now!*

Elynth let out a trumpet of anger that echoed within the hanger and she moved without hesitation. She launched herself into a spin that none of the Coven dragons had ever witnessed one of their kind execute before, swinging her near four metric tons around with the grace of a ballet dancer. Her smaller but no less deadly mace like Heavyhorn tail cracked into Vollenth's muzzle before he knew he was under attack. As his head and neck snapped around with vicious force, Vincix was moving and sweeping his tail forward, crashing into both of Vollenth's right legs. Malic unleashed another staggering TK push that toppled Vollenth over onto his side, kicking and trumpeting in surprise and pain even as Andro was already moving.

He sprinted directly at Elynth, leaped against her tail just as she was bringing it forward again and pushed off with his powerful legs in a leap directly at Vollenth's struggling form. The psychic knife extended nearly eight inches from his right hand as he sailed through the air and landed on Vollenth's neck just as he was raising his head. Andro wrapped his arms and legs around Vollenth's thick neck, unable to fully embrace his muscular neck but digging the heels of his boots into whatever he could. He looked into Vollenth's dazed and very confused eyes for a just a single split second.

I'm sorry brother. Andro spoke the words before plunging the psychic knife into the base of Vollenth's huge skull.

Vollenth's yellow eyes opened wide in agony and he made to lift his foreleg to shred Androcles from his neck. He never got his talons off the ground as Elynth's front legs came down on his and pinned them to the floor of the hanger.

Andro leaned his head close to Vollenth's muzzle, unafraid of the flesh shredding teeth, twisting his fist and plunging the psychic knife deeper into Vollenth's large brain. *Be at peace Vollenth.* He spoke softly. *I will free you this day to find your true path brother. You were meant for someone else Vollenth. You were always meant for someone else. The Dragon Elders have felt this and I will free you to find that rider Vollenth. The one who will be your true brother or sister. And then you will know calm and happiness.*

Andro clenched his teeth and twisted his hand forcefully. Vollenth's final wail filled the hanger before his head dropped to the dirt and he was still. His yellow eyes fluttered for a few seconds before they closed slowly and he was quiet. Andro waited a few moments, closing his own eyes and channeling his and Elynth's combined power as Talon Guardians, searching for that link within Vollenth's mind. They found it easy

enough, a dark sickly looking thread of Mindvoice power twisted with hate and evil, and Andro didn't hesitate. Like a skilled surgeon Andro used his psychic knife to sever that connection completely, effectively terminating the bond Yuri had forced on Vollenth, while throwing up incredibly powerful Mindvoice shields to protect him from Yuri trying to re-establish the bond.

Andro opened his eyes once more and as he gradually withdrew the psychic knife from Vollenth's head, the Coven dragons gasping collectively within Mindvoice. There was no blood, no wound, yet Vollenth lay as still as death itself. The only sign that he still lived was the slow rise and fall of his massive chest as he breathed. Andro got to his feet slowly, stepping away from Vollenth's inert form even as the Coven dragons closed in increasingly around them. All of them saw the psychic knife flare briefly and then disappear altogether.

Elynth moved close to Androcles, brushing her snout against his shoulder affectionately. *It had to be done my brother.* Her gentle voice filled his head even as his anger surged within him and then began to recede.

He looked up as Adriana dropped from Anthar's back and raced into Malic's arms. He crushed his sister to him as Vincix moved closer to his newly bonded brother. Andro turned and saw the Coven dragons closing in around them. *He is your brother.* Andro said softly looking at them. *He is still one of you and he was forced onto this path. All of your bonds were allowed to begin naturally and grow, while Princess Yuri forced hers onto Vollenth. I have cut their bond. It no longer exists. A ship is coming to take him where he can heal and know peace. You must protect him until that happens. Shield him from Yuri trying to re-establish their bond. Only you can do this. All of you must stand watch over him.*

You said... you said he was meant for someone else Androcles Leonidas. Deneth spoke softly as he moved forward.

Andro nodded slowly and looked at him. *The Elders suspected as much. That is why Yuri's bond was twisting him so much, and it is the only reason why Elynth and I were able to render the connection. It is not something done to those such as us, those who have developed these bonds freely.*

Who is... who is he meant for? Anthar asked.

Andro looked at him and shook his head. *That is not known. Only time will answer that question. He is still your brother dragon, and no matter his past actions, now he needs your protection. These years and what Yuri has done to him have not been kind. He will be able to feel all of you watching over him, and that is what he needs right now. To know that no matter the past, all of you still stand with him. We have a plan to protect and guide him... but we need you to help in that plan.*

Elynth's golden eyes filled with passion and desire as she watched Anthar settle to the ground first, placing his front foreleg on Vollenth's rear leg gently, his talons looking as if they could open his scales easily.

I will stay with you brother. He spoke softly.

Deneth was next as he settled to the ground. *As will I.*

They watched as the remaining dragons gathered closer and began settling to the ground around Vollenth's inert form. Andro nodded his head slowly and turned to look at Malic, who was still hugging his sister tightly. He and Elynth stepped away from where the Coven dragons were slowly surrounding Vollenth's form. Even Marux, Naruth and Seyra were not questioning what was happening and Andro could not detect them attempting to advise Yuri's children of what had taken place. They were joining in the powerful wall of Mindvoice power that was slowly wrapping around Vollenth in a protective embrace, shielding his mind from the outside world and all who would do him harm.

Malic turned as Andro moved up to them. He pushed his sister back slightly, but kept one arm around her waist.

"Milord... I..." He stammered.

Andro shook his head. "Do not thank me Malic." He spoke. "This was meant to be. You and Vincix were meant to be."

You... you knew sire. Vincix spoke now moving closer. *That is why you bade me to come here with you.*

"I suspected yes. Elynth and the Elder Mother agreed." Andro spoke nodding his head. He looked at Malic. "There will be a ceremony of sorts in three days Malic. You brought your sister here to help you learn what you needed to learn. Now you have two teachers. You are relieved of your duties until three days from now. Take this time to learn of each other, and conduct whatever teachings your sister can pass on to you. You will still need to take your exams Malic... but now you will have the same chance as the rest of us did. She can

remain here as long as you need her too. After the ceremony I will expect you to resume your normal duties and continue to build your bond with Vincix.”

“Milord... sire... am I...” Malic hesitated unable to ask the question.

Elynth stepped forward now, her golden eyes bright as she pressed her snout to the top of Malic’s head. *Yes. Welcome to our Sacred Circle brother Malic and brother Vincix, for you are now members of Mjolnir’s Hand. She spoke the words. And our circle is complete once more.*

Malic knew Elynth almost never spoke below a Tier Six level, and hearing her voice fill his mind so easily and with such clarity was all the proof that Malic needed to tell him this was no dream.

“I will not fail you Milord!” Malic spoke with determination as he drew himself up to his full height, small tears forming in his eyes.

Nor will I. Vincix echoed.

Andro nodded. “I never doubted that you would.” He took a deep breath. “I must go deal with Yuri... but there is a secluded waterfall twenty-two kilometers from here due east. Elynth and I go there often to think clearly and be alone. It will be a good place for you to begin to know each other. Remain off the base during the day, at least until after the ceremony and Yuri has left, as you will not need the distractions. It will also avoid confrontations and unneeded questions until after what has happened here is revealed to everyone. My Uncle Isra will join you there tomorrow, for I feel he will prepare to leave Sparta and come here to be with you even now.”

Malic nodded. “As you order sire.”

Andro looked at Adriana who clung to her brother’s arm and he smiled. “I apologize for all the excitement.” He spoke. “Our days here are not usually filled with so much invigorating action.”

Adriana chuckled as she squeezed Malic’s arm. “I think I am used to it now, considering who my brother is.” She said looking at him with blue eyes filled with pride.

Andro nodded and stepped up close to Malic. “Welcome to our world Malic.” He said softly looking at him.

Malic looked into those azure blue eyes. “Milord... sire... when did you...?”

Andro smiled. “The moment you came onto my ship.” He answered. “And I expect you to use this as the stepping stone to achieve what else you want Malic.”

Malic’s eyes looked puzzled. “Sire?”

Andro chuckled and tapped his shoulder lightly. “You will figure it out sooner or later.” He answered. “Just know... I approve.”

[I certainly hope this works Arzoal.] Andro spoke softly to Arzoal as he crossed the quad moving for the REC center. The sun was just below the trees now and the shadows danced across the ground he covered in long, confident strides. *[My father will not be happy that we went about it this way, you do realize that? Especially if we can’t pull it off.]*

[Your father is a Talon Guardian just as you are Androcles Leonidas.] Arzoal’s voice filled his mind from the *TYPE II* that was currently sitting on the airfield by the hanger. Her eyes were mindful of everything as Vollenth’s inert form was gently loaded on the hover platform and was being ushered up the ramp, under the ever watchful eyes of the Coven dragons. *[As King he may not approve of our actions, but as a Talon Guardian he will no doubt agree. It needed to be done.]*

[I know.] Andro replied as he slowed his pace. *[Can you and the other elders heal him?]*

[You and my granddaughter severed the connection cleanly.] Arzoal replied. *[We can feel the corrupting threads within Mindvoice even now shriveling up. Her hold on him was tenuous at best. He was fighting it Androcles, because a part of his mind knew he was meant for someone else, and that is why he appeared so violent to others. When he wakes, he will have around him those who had given up hope and now feel reborn. That is your gift to Vollenth Androcles. The gift you and my granddaughter have given him.]*

[Do you know who is he meant for Arzoal?] Andro asked.

[Even we do not possess that skill young Androcles.] She replied. *[The only reason you were able to detect the potential in Malic was because it was buried falsely due to the actions of his parents and it was fighting to find its way out. As with Vincix, that power can not long be contained if it really is meant to be. With*

Vincix and Malic... it was destiny they come together in the grand scheme of things. For Vollenth... all we know is that the one he is meant for is already alive. They will find each other when fate and destiny decrees it.]

[Have you told Dalah?] He questioned.

[No. She will be beside herself and want to come here immediately. They must have the three days they need to fully come together as a Bonded Pair.] Arzoal chuckled softly within the connection. [When your father and I first formed Mjolnir's Hand, we had no idea the strength and influence that would grow within the three hundred Pairs Andro. The bond that all of you share is far beyond anything we ever envisioned and that is why the members of Mjolnir's Hand are the strongest of all the Bonded Pairs, and why they are able to do so much more. Malic and Vincix were meant to be part of that, and I surmise that Vincix only failed before because he had not yet found Malic.]

[She will undoubtedly attempt to re-establish the connection when she discovers what we have done.] Andro spoke. [Make sure you take him directly to Dragon Mountain and get him under cover of the shields there. We only have to pull this off for perhaps twenty-four hours. Can he do it?]

[That she has not appeared already tells me the bond was not natural and forced upon him.] Arzoal spoke. [Otherwise she would have come running the moment you began to do battle with him. He can do it. All of them have agreed to assist if need be. Even Marux and Naruth. They have not left his side with Anthar and Deneth.]

[Good. They may be bonded to riders they do not care for, but at least they are strong enough to resist the natural tendency to take on each other's traits.] Andro answered. [Can Elder Daurgo assume Vincix's role until after the ceremony?]

[He is already boarding his DT to come to your location.] Arzoal answered.

Andro nodded. [Father already intends to make Yuri return with him and the Empress to insure the Kavalians do not become suspicious. Without the distraction Vollenth and Yuri provided they can concentrate more on what they are here to learn.] He said. [It will be easier for them to absorb and focus on their tasks. And it will give Vollenth a little of the time he needs to heal from her abuse of him.]

[We will care for and heal Vollenth.] Arzoal spoke. [I will send Elynth back when we have finished loading his platform. You can deal with Yuri yes?]

[Considering the shields we have thrown up and her forced bond with Vollenth, I doubt she is even aware of what has happened.] Andro answered. [As long as Visio can pull it off... we will be alright.]

[He knows the risks and he is ready.] Arzoal answered. [They have longed for this day Androcles Leonidas, a day they never thought would come to pass. The remaining Elders are ready if you and Elynth feel the need to draw power from them.] Arzoal said.

[We'll be ok.] Andro spoke stopping just outside the entrance to the REC center. [Once she is gone tomorrow... we'll be good.]

[I will see you again in three days then. We are securing the ramp. I carry the thanks and blessings of seven souls to you and Elynth Androcles Leonidas.] Arzoal said. [Your actions this day will not be forgotten. You have spared when you could have taken as a Talon Guardian and that is a debt that can never be repaid.]

[There is no debt to pay.] Andro answered. [Dragons are just as much my brothers and sisters as my own blood. That is one of the things my bond with Elynth has taught me. Go with the gods Elder Mother.]

[And you son of our King.]

Andro looked at the door and took a deep breath. "Here we go." He said softly.

Yuri looked up from the table she sat at with her three children in the REC center, a small smile on her face from something Lucia had said. Many of the riders and other personnel had already moved to the mess lounge for dinner. Yuri looked up right into Androcles's bright blue azure colored eyes.

"There is something you want I take it." She spoke formally but the distaste for him in her tone easy enough to hear and feel.

"I have received word from my father and your mother." Andro spoke. "They will be here tomorrow to inspect and observe how things are progressing. You will need to return with your mother to Sparta when they depart. Vollenth must remain here however."

Yuri's eyes narrowed. "What? For what purpose?"

“It is my understanding the KFI knows where you have been training your dragons on Usu Ozeib 7.” Andro stated. “They are also aware that you are now here on Earth. It would be very hard to explain to them why you are here with your dragon Princess Yuri. My father and your mother agree it is better if you return and be seen with her going through the process of the Cease Fire Accords. If you do not they will suspect something. If you return and go back with Vollenth they will become suspicious as well and that will only lead them to one conclusion. That the rest of your dragons are here as well.”

“If you think I will leave Vollenth here among you and the others you are strongly mistaken Androcles Leonidas.” Yuri snapped.

Andro stepped forward closer, looking at her intently. “Vollenth will continue to learn with the others Princess Yuri. And do not think for an instant to fool me with your false concern for Vollenth.” He stated harshly. “Your bond with him is a forced thing... not natural like the others. That you are sitting here and not with him right now as he is being treated tells me that more than anything.”

Yuri’s eyes narrowed. “What do you mean treated?” She asked getting to her feet.

“He picked a fight with Vincix, the dragon instructor, and he was soundly defeated.” Andro spoke. “Eliani is treating him as we speak. His ego is bruised but he is not talking to anyone at the moment. That you did not sense this in him is all the information I need to know about your ‘bond’ with Vollenth Princess.”

“You do not need to know anything son of Leonidas!” Yuri hissed.

“Why is it you feel the need to turn him into someone as twisted as you?” Andro asked softly. “Why is it you hate my father so much? Hate my people so much?”

“Your father is not as innocent as you believe him to be!” Yuri barked. “He is no better than the rest of your barbaric animal race.”

Andro tilted his head. “I imagine you are referring to the belief that my father raped you many years ago.” He spoke pulling the small data pad from his belt.

“It is no belief!” Yuri snarled. “It is a fact! Your precious father committed one of the vilest crimes among your people! And now he sits as King!”

Andro held up the pad. “From your mother.” He spoke tossing the pad onto the table. “I think you should read it Princess. It will undoubtedly enlighten you more than you already are. My father didn’t rape you Princess Yuri... Pleistarchus did. Lisisa is not my father’s daughter... she is his brother’s daughter.”

Yuri laughed heartily. “Oh that’s a good one.” She barked out. “As if I would actually believe that. Blame his brother... how quaint!”

“Your mother has seen the medical data.” Andro spoke. “Perhaps you should look at it as well. Not to mention that the Kavalians are demanding to see Lisisa, who they apparently deem a Kavalian citizen now because of who her father is.”

“I don’t need to look at some forged medical data by the Hadarian witch you call mother! I was the one who was raped! I know who raped me!” Yuri snarled. “My mother would not believe anything that you or anyone connected to your father presented to her! And I hold the Kavalians in even worse regard than I do you and your people!”

Andro tilted his head to the side as he looked at her. “Yet you are here now.”

“This trip was not my idea!” Yuri told him.

“Does your attitude imply that we should not believe anything you present to us as well?” He asked. “To include the intelligence you gave to us when you first arrived?”

“That is... that is different!” Yuri snapped knowing she had come very close to outright saying they had ulterior motives for coming here. “The Kavalians are the bigger threat to both of us!”

“Yes... so you and your mother said when you first arrived.” Andro spoke. “Believe what you will Princess. Your mother will tell you herself when she arrives tomorrow no doubt.”

“Mother...” Lucia spoke looking up from the table and holding the pad. “Mother... this has grandmother’s personal code on it.” She stated.

Yuri turned to look at her holding out her hand. “Impossible.” She said as Lucia placed the data pad in her hand. She lifted it and began reading, her eyes growing wider as she did.

Andro smiled. “Enlightening don’t you think?” He said. “I suggest you say your goodbyes to Vollenth tonight Princess. They will only be here a few hours tomorrow and per your mother’s own directives, you are

returning with her. When you return in three or four weeks after the Accord is signed, he will be here. Better trained and no doubt basking in the hatred you have bestowed upon him.”

Yuri’s eyes came up quickly from the pad and glared at him. “Do not press me too hard Androcles Leonidas! You think too highly of your skills. We may be equal in terms of power... but I have far more years of experience than you do.”

Andro smiled. “You are entitled to believe what you wish Yuri.” He spoke confidently, not using her title of Princess for the first time since she had arrived here. “I would not be so quick to anoint yourself the replacement for your mother just yet however.”

“You are an idealistic child!” Yuri snapped. “And in the end no match for what I could bring to bear. Do you think your little parlor tricks scare me as they scare Thast and the others?”

Andro chuckled softly. “To be honest Princess... part of your problem is that you don’t believe in anything besides your own false sense of superiority. Like your mother you believe you are always right. That attitude, more often than not, leads to incorrect assumptions and orders that get others killed. What exactly does that make you Yuri?” He asked.

[Andro my brother... what are you doing?] Elynth’s voice filled his head. [Why are you making her angry?]

[If it keeps her from discovering what we have done for a while longer than we had planned... having her angry is good.] Andro said with some small humor. *[My father always said she had anger issues. Apparently he was right.]*

[Do we want her anger directed at you though?] Elynth asked.

[Better me than someone else sister.] Andro answered. *[At least until she leaves. Once she is gone from SODRAG we can proceed with the rest of the plan and insure she does not return.]*

“You have no idea of what you are speaking about!” Yuri snapped.

“Don’t I?” Andro asked.

“Where is Vollenh?” Yuri demanded after a moment.

Andro motioned towards the door. “Eliani just finished treating him. He should be back at his pen by now. That is where I instructed him to go.”

Yuri tossed the pad back at him. “All of this could be faked.” She snapped. “And I will believe nothing from you until I am able to speak with my mother. I do not trust you any more than I trust your pig father!”

Andro shrugged. “As you wish.” He stated as Yuri pushed past him, followed rapidly by Dante, and Lucia. Dante glared at him with evil intent as he moved past but said nothing. Andro chuckled and turned, following them to the door and stepping outside the entrance. He watched as they made their way towards the Bungalows and dragon pens.

[Prepare yourself Visio. She is coming.] He spoke.

[I am ready.] Was the immediate answer.

[Can you do this Visio?]

[You and Elynth have given me back my brother. You have given our parents back the son they lost so long ago. I will do this!]

[Draw whatever you need from Elynth and I Visio. And good luck.]

KRANEK

Normya’s emerald green eyes watched with some surprise as the huge burnt bronze skinned Immortal lifted Esther into his arms as if she was a feather and they shared a kiss of simmering passion similar to what she had seen her father and mothers share. Normya now saw where Tir’ut got his height and build from. Cha’talla was easily six and a half feet tall and even wider than her father in terms of muscular definition. Though he had no hair, all of his skin was an even color and quite unlike the grayish pallor of purebloods like T’lolt and Fash’ka. The bone spikes were filed down to nubs, but still very noticeable, his eyes still small and somewhat sunken, but beyond that he was no different than some of the other strange species she had seen growing up.

Except for the fact he was an Immortal.

And not just any simple Immortal, but the once feared personal Captain to the now dead Vampire High Lord Veldruk. He was believed to have killed well over a thousand Lycavorians alone, his combat skills nearly unmatched even among the many instructors Normya had been under at the academy. It was also rumored that he had fought her grandfather on Earth over three thousand years ago at Thermopylae. Yet what she saw before her right now was not a feared Immortal Captain... but a very happy husband who held his pureblood vampire wife tightly.

Esther broke their heated kiss reluctantly and rubbed her cheek against Cha'talla's, while her hands held his head. "Oh I have missed you husband." She said softly in his ear.

Cha'talla's dark eyes smiled and he met her eyes. "We must talk about these trading trips you take." He stated softly. "Our bed is unusually large and empty when you are not in it. I often times end up sleeping in the main room."

Esther grinned at him. "Well I am home now. No more main room for you my husband."

Cha'talla lowered her to the ground gently, pressing his forehead to the top of her head and squeezing her lithe body against his. "Welcome home Blessed Wife." He said softly.

Esther smiled at his arms around her and placed her hands on his arms. "Cha'talla... may I present Princess Normya Leonidas." She spoke turning to motion to Normya who rested quite comfortably in Tir'ut's arms.

Cha'talla stepped up to stand in front of his son, his dark eyes on Normya. He saw her arm tighten almost imperceptibly around Tir'ut's neck and shoulders, and he allowed the smile to split his face, revealing his vampiric fangs. "To say that it is an honor to meet you would be an understatement I think daughter to King Leonidas." He spoke finally. "But know that in this particular circumstance, I am very happy my wife and son disobeyed my directives to not get involved." He held out his right hand to her with his palm held upwards. "I am Cha'talla."

Normya looked at his hand for a moment before reaching forward and placing her much smaller hand against his open palm. "Hello." She said softly unable to think of anything else to say.

Cha'talla covered her hand with his left one and lowered his forehead to touch their joined hands. "I understand my son and brother have declared an *Iglata d'Vlos* in regards to your protection. Something I will gladly take up now as well. Are you injured?"

"*Il kal'daka darthirii's* leg is almost healed father." Tir'ut answered. "I carried her to keep the little ones from toppling her in case they came to meet us as well."

Cha'talla looked at his son for a moment when he spoke and then he nodded his head and turned back to Normya. "A good thing too... they are waiting outside the port entrance." He spoke with a grin, once more surprising Normya. "I have been in contact with your mother Normya Leonidas. Her ship will arrive here in just under 36 hours. It appears your *DTs* are much faster than many people think."

Normya nodded slowly. "Just a little." She said.

Cha'talla looked at her and saw the indecision and fear in her emerald eyes. It was not as prominent as he first thought it might be, but neither did he expect her to cling to his son so tightly. "I know what is spoken of me and my people Normya Leonidas." He told her softly. "And while that may still apply to those who serve the cursed High Coven and Empress Aikiro, it does not extend to my people here. We have fully broken from the old ways and we have begun something new here on Kranek. You need not fear for yourself while you are here child. Technically, because my son has sworn a Promise of Blood towards you, you are now part of our tribe and my clan. If a threat does somehow manage to get past Tir'ut here... they will face all of us as well." He stepped closer to her and noticed she did not push back against Tir'ut as much as he thought she might. That showed Cha'talla she was a brave and strong willed young woman. "Would you allow me to show you as I will show your mother when she arrives. I am very proud of what we have built. I think... I think your father would approve. At least that is my wish."

Normya nodded unable to find the right words to use and she saw Cha'talla smile once more. "Ok." She said finally.

Cha'talla motioned for the dual doors near the hanger entrance. "This way." He spoke.

Normya was silent as Tir'ut carried her behind his father and Esther. When they reached the doors, they slid open automatically and bright sunlight bathed them as they stepped onto the large grated catwalk. Normya lifted her hand to shield her eyes quickly only to feel her heart rate increase at what she saw. Stretched before

her eyes was a massive settlement, parts of it soaring tall above the surrounding tress. Most of the buildings were circular in construction, and she realized they were quite high up above the majority of the settlement. She could see towering mountain peaks and lush green forests all around them. Pedestrian bridges spanned between many of the buildings at different levels, and she could see Immortals and several other species walking the hard packed earth of the ground far below and along those same bridges. Children were racing back and forth on the ground below, and she could hear animals baying and barking in the distance.

She looked at Cha'talla then and the stunned look in her eyes made him very happy. He motioned to half a dozen men and women who stood to the side of the large platform and Normya's eyes grew even larger when she saw the male and female elf.

"This is our small ruling council." Cha'talla spoke. "I brought our School Master and the Blessed Wife of..."

Normya watched as the dark haired female elf's eyes grew wider when the dual doors to the port opened once more and a dozen of T'lolt's men exited. She let out a happy squeal and darted from where she stood to throw herself into the arms of the huge pure Immortal soldier. Normya watched them stunned as they shared a similar kiss to what Esther and Cha'talla had shared, the Immortal spinning her around several times as he held her in his arms.

"Forgive Erli'ra's reaction." The male voice said. Normya turned her head quickly and saw it was the distinguished looking male elf who spoke. "It is the first trip away for Na'Thu since the birth of his and Erli'ra's daughter six weeks ago. She has missed him." He held out his hand to her. "I am Illiad... the settlement's School Master as Cha'talla has said. Welcome."

"You... you and she are elves." Normya said softly taking his offered hand.

The man laughed softly. "Indeed we are. Two of almost a dozen that call this settlement our home. That does not include the children mind you." He replied. "Erli'ra sits on our council as Cha'talla has said... though you wouldn't know it from her actions right now!" He spoke sternly. "She still acts as she did the first days after they were married!"

Normya turned and watched The Immortal set the young elf down. She clung to his thick arm as she turned to look at them. "Hush papa!" She admonished as she pulled Na'Thu towards him. Normya watched as Illiad and this Na'Thu embraced in the same affectionate manner as she had seen her father and grandfather L'tian do so very often.

"It is good to see you return safely Na'Thu." Illiad spoke with warmth in his voice.

"It is good to be home *darthirii ilharn*." He answered. (Elf father)

Erli'ra looked at Normya. "It is an honor to meet you Princess." She stated. "I welcome you to our settlement."

Normya looked at the woman, estimating her age at four to five hundred years old by her scent. "I am... I am..."

Erli'ra laughed gently. "Lost for words it seems." She said. "Tir'ut... put her down by the gods; we can barely see her face because you inherited your father's height."

"I did not want to little ones knocking into her legs." Tir'ut spoke quickly.

Erli'ra looked at him oddly for a moment and then her blue eyes twinkled. "They want to tackle and climb on you Tir'ut... you are the oversized bear among us... not this child. Now put her down. We won't injure her."

They watched as reluctantly Tir'ut lowered Normya to the steel grate deck on the catwalk and almost everyone saw the reluctant way in which Normya unfurled her arm from around his neck and shoulders. She looked up at him over her shoulder for a moment, marveling at his size and how he towered over her, yet handled her with gentleness and grace. She turned back to Erli'ra and Illiad and found she was face to face with them now. They also found she still wore the fatigue jacket Tir'ut had given her, securing it even more around her waist with a length of leather she had found on the G9.

"There... that is much better." Erli'ra spoke as she took Normya's hands in hers. "Gods child... you are the mirror image of your mother."

"You know my mother?" Normya gasped.

Erli'ra shook her head. "Not personally no... but I have seen enough of her images and broadcasts to know that you look exactly like her."

“Erli’ra... there is an open apartment in the west quad yes?” Esther asked.

“There certainly is.” Erli’ra replied brightly. “Not two doors down from my own.”

“Why don’t we get Normya settled in there and then we can gather at the main dining hall and talk some more.” Esther said stepped up and taking Normya’s hand. “I’m sure there are some things she can tell about what has taken place on Elear since you left.”

“An excellent idea.” Erli’ra spoke taking Normya’s other hand. “It isn’t far... are you up to walking?”

Normya nodded. “Yes. I’ve rested for far too long.”

“Oh I like her.” Erli’ra said. “Busting to go and do things... just like your mother.” She drew her in tightly next to her between Esther and herself and they began to walk. “I will tell you some stories you wouldn’t believe child. And it will be very good to see our elven Queen when she arrives.”

Cha’talla stepped up to his son as Illiad moved closer as well. They turned as T’lolt left the inside of the port now and walked up to their small group. “Gareld my son?” Cha’talla asked.

Tir’ut looked at him. “He ran like a coward the moment uncle T’lolt de-shrouded in orbit.” He answered.

“Once we entered the atmosphere we lost our track on him.” T’lolt spoke. “His ship is a Bontawillian Low Gravity Frigate. Shouldn’t be too hard to find an old bucket like that even in The Wilds.”

Cha’talla nodded. “You say he was waiting for her?”

Tir’ut nodded. “Yes father. Just inside the nebula. The moment her damaged ship crossed the border he moved in. Two of his boarding craft attached but *Il kal'daka darthirii* and her co-pilot fought them off. She vented the rest of them into space.”

Cha’talla’s eyes grew a little wider at this and he nodded. “Excellent. I like this young woman more and more as the minutes pass.”

“She is half wolf we must remember.” Illiad spoke. “She will no doubt have that killer instinct within her as she displayed with Gareld’s men. I will put out word to our contacts Cha’talla and try to discover if this ship has appeared anywhere in the last few days.”

Cha’talla nodded. “Even though you were able to shroud... he will eventually figure out where we have gone.” He said. “There are not many habitable planets within range of our G9s from Yocetu. He will come here to Kranek sooner or later.”

“Then we should make sure we are ready when he does.” Illiad spoke. He looked at Cha’talla. “And give him a proper tribal welcome.”

He was a two thousand year old elf male that had seen much in his life. When they had been rescued from the slavers by Cha’talla and his men, it had been too late to save his wife of a thousand years, but they were able to save Erli’ra his daughter along with him. Illiad had elected to remain with Cha’talla and his tribe, partly to escape the sorrow of losing his wife, and partly because these Immortals had risked death and injury to save him and the others with no thought of reward. Within a year of coming here he found them to be completely unlike any Immortals he had ever heard about, and when Erli’ra announced she was in love and going to marry an Immortal, Illiad had barely blinked an eye. They had chosen to remain here freely and had been accepted by all the Immortals on Kranek. When Cha’talla had asked him to become School Master Illiad had jumped at the chance and never looked back.

Cha’talla grinned at Illiad. He had leaned heavily on this man in the past decade, and discovered a fast and faithful friend and tribe member. “Indeed.” He said. “Tir’ut... she is your *Il kal'daka darthirii*. Insure your gear is stowed and then make sure she has everything she needs. Your mother will insure this no doubt... but it is our way.”

Tir’ut nodded. “Yes father.”

“Iliad... T’lolt... let’s meet in the control bunker and insure our defenses and sensors are operating at peak efficiency.” Cha’talla spoke. “No sense in getting caught off guard now. Especially not with the daughter of King Leonidas among us and her mother to follow shortly.”

“It was the right decision Cha’talla.” T’lolt spoke. “Tir’ut and Esther made the right choice.”

Cha’talla nodded. “The more time that passes... the more I come to realize that.” He spoke. “That is why we will be ready.”

“Ready for what?” Illiad asked.

“You once said that wherever a Leonidas tread, trouble usually followed.” Cha’talla spoke.

Illiad nodded slowly. "I did say that didn't I?" He spoke with a smile. "And it's very true apparently."

Cha'talla nodded. "Considering that we will have his first elven wife and half elven daughter both among us shortly, I do not plan on anything happening to them while they are in our charge." He said. "As T'lolt has reminded me... it is a matter of honor now. And honor is not something we will dismiss."

GYTHEIO

"You do not have to do this Lisi." Martin spoke looking at her as she finished buckling her harness and holster around her slim waist.

Lisisa looked at him as she secured the Velcro fastener around her thigh, holding her K12 KM to her right thigh and her *Nehtes* to her left. Her Mark IV ArmorPly, like her father and Denali's now sported the crimson painted shoulders signifying to all that she was a member of *Mjolnir's Hand* and their number had once more reached three hundred. Her raven hair was pulled into a loose pony tail as was usually the case and draped over one shoulder. Lisisa let her eyes linger on him for a long moment as the last two days flashed across her memories. Taking a deep breath she could smell Denali's scent deeply embedded in her blood, proclaiming to any wolf within five kilometers who she belonged too, and that more than anything filled Lisisa with a deep sense of love and commitment. To Denali and what their future held for them. The man in front of her had been her father for far longer than just the twenty-five years she had been with him. He had been the father in her dreams and mind, always filling her with hope and the desire to never surrender to despair. He was the only man she had ever called father, and no one would ever replace him.

Lisisa stepped up to him and wrapped her arms around his waist hugging him tightly and inhaling his mint scent. It filled her with love and support as his aura washed over her as only a father's aura could without hesitation. "I know who I am father." She said softly. "Nothing will ever change that. I am your daughter and I will always be your daughter."

Martin nuzzled the top of her head. "I know that Lisi." He said. "I am not worried about that. I don't want you to have to go through this if you don't want too."

Lisisa pulled her head back and looked at him. "I am not afraid of the Kavalians father." She stated. "And even they are not fool enough to try something within Sparta. I will meet with this Karun and hear what he has to say. At the very least it will help to keep the Kavalians from becoming suspicious about what we are doing with Andro. I will also tell the Kavalian leaders they can stick their demands up their collective ass. I am not a citizen of the KFI and I certainly do not recognize their ridiculous laws."

"You realize they will try to use our own laws against us in regards to you." Martin said.

Lisisa nodded. "Then it is good that Deni bought this villa for us and most of my things have been moved here already." She said with a grin. "It is almost as if somehow he knew what was going to happen and it drove him to act in the way he did."

"The two of you are not members of *Mjolnir's Hand* because you are fools." Martin said. "Both of you are just as perceptive as your brother and I, and your bonds with Jeth and Aradace grant you greater insight into things. Considering how things have played out, you may be right that something drove Deni to act as he did." Martin reached up and stroked her cheek. "And I couldn't approve more of the man you have chosen as your mate and husband."

Lisisa grinned. "I'm glad." She said. "Though it would not have mattered if you did or not."

"Yeah... I'm beginning to realize that." He said.

They turned as Denali walked into the room with the small pack over his shoulder and the data pad in his hand punching commands into it. "I've activated the villa's security system." He spoke as he entered. "Once the pressure sensors feel us leave it will engage. You don't think they will actually try and break in here do you father?"

"Deia tells me the law grants them a great deal of leeway." Martin spoke. "Lisisa may denounce them and her pseudo citizenship of convenience, but they will press as hard as they are able. I would not put it past them to come here and try and gain access to her old villa. They aren't aware you are mated now and I'll let you two tell them that." He said with a smile. "It may make them rethink some things but I doubt it. I have a feeling

they want you and Jeth more than anything, and they will stop at nothing to convince you of this.” He finished looking at Lisisa as Denali came up next to her.

“Well they can’t have us.” Lisisa spoke as she allowed Deni to draw her close to him, her arms wrapping around his waist in a much more intimate fashion. “I’m quite spoken for and beyond happy if that is even possible... as is Jeth. If they don’t like that they can line up and kiss my *mida*!”

“They can not!” Deni protested.

Martin laughed and stepped forward to kiss her forehead slightly. “Just try and be more diplomatic than that.” He spoke. “I have to go to the briefing in an hour, Anja is coming with me. Your mothers Aricia and Isabella are still working with Vonis and Armetus. Meet with the Kavalians, set up what you feel will keep them happy, and then return to SODRAG. I will see you there later today.”

“You’re bringing Yuri back with you right?” Deni asked.

Martin nodded. “She has to be seen with Aikiro here in Sparta, at least until after this Cease Fire Accord is signed. And not with Vollenth by her side either. They know she is here on Earth by our own admission, and she will need to be visible to them. Vollenth was never seen with her and that is a plus for us. Those who do know the Coven riders are here won’t say anything, and if they do, for all they know it is a new batch of vampire riders from Apo Prime. That is the story we are going to leak with the Netnews in a couple days anyway. Now that they have their embassy, I’m quite sure they’ll have all sorts of their biogenic clones staffing the building and they’ll be able to blend in rather well.”

“Father... what about mother and Normya?” Lisisa asked.

“I spoke with her first thing this morning.” Martin replied. “She’ll meet up with them on Kranek in about thirty hours.”

“You trust them father?” Denali asked. “These Immortals?”

Martin nodded. “Surprisingly I do son.” He spoke. “They damn sure did not have to let Normya contact us. They could have just taken her and disappeared into The Wilds. And I heard something in T’lolt’s voice... something that made me believe every word he said.”

“What?” Lisisa asked softly.

Martin looked at her. “Compassion.” He replied softly. “I have an entire Fleet Group on standby regardless. But your mothers and I agree... we think these Immortals are the real deal. Even if it is this Cha’talla leading them.”

“Having someone try to kill you and almost succeed could change your outlook on life very quickly father.” Lisisa said. “I know it did mine.”

Martin nodded. “And that is one of the reasons why I think they are legit. I’ll keep you up to date. Besides... in three days we meet back at SODRAG anyway to welcome Malic and Vincix.”

Lisisa shook her head. “I knew there was something about him the minute I saw him on the *SCIMITAR*.” She said. “I honestly did not think this was it though.”

“Neither did I.” Denali spoke.

“Well... you both have felt them join us and that is something we can’t deny.” Martin said. “And it wouldn’t be the first time only one or two of us felt the potential within someone. Andro is very attune to that... much more so than I am. How long before you are airborne for SODRAG?”

“Gear up in two hours and thirty-three minutes.” Denali spoke.

Martin nodded. “Then I will let you go and I’ll see you this afternoon.” He looked at Denali. “And do not think for an instant that you are getting out of making Lisisa your mate in the proper Spartan fashion boy!” He stated sternly.

Deni looked at Lisisa and then back to him with a bright smile. “That had never crossed my mind father.” He stated. “I look forward to that day.”

“Good! I have a feeling we’ll need all the parties we can get the way things are going.” Martin spoke.

SPARTA

“...told you they would not follow through on what they told us!” Jiss commented to Jalersi and the others as they sat and stood around the immense oak table at one end of the Great Meeting Room connected to

the Spartan Senate Building. The vast great room had a single, one meter wide row of lush valley dirt and thick, medium sized pine trees and flower planters lining the walls in a rectangular shape, limiting the view from the other side. It also sported a colossal retractable glass ceiling which was now fully open allowing the smell of the mountains to filter into the room.

“They have a few more minutes to present her to us.” Jalersi spoke realizing she wanted to meet this young woman now.

“We should petition their courts immediately whether they bring her to us or not.” Matuarr spoke. “I have learned she had an apartment on the Royal villa as well as her own villa in a city not far from here called Gytheio. There could be a wealth of intelligence in either of these locations.”

Karun looked up from the table where he sat. “You don’t honestly believe they will allow us to search and confiscate her belongings from the apartment on the Royal Estate do you?” He asked with a sarcastic tone. “You think far too much of your ability to influence their laws Legislature Matuarr.”

“If they do not... we can use it against them.” Matuarr exclaimed.

“Use what against them?” The new voice spoke now.

They turned to see the tall, heavily muscled Kavalian approach the table. His name was Timur and he wore impeccably turned out and pressed dark gray pants and button down shirt that highlighted his extremely well defined upper body. His blond hair was almost the color of freshly grown wheat, and his blue eyes were alert and clear. Timur had spent years undergoing the biogenic treatments and now all that was going to pay off it seemed. The Prefect himself had asked him to take on this mission for the benefit of their people. He had read all of the intelligence they had on the daughter of Marshall Pusintin, and to say he looked forward to locking groins with her and making her his was too mild an expression. Timur stood six feet two and two hundred and twenty pounds of chiseled muscle. He was only thirty-six years old, but he was in superb physical condition and a veteran of dozens of battles with the High Coven vampire scum. He himself had raped and murdered several of their females, listening to them squeal in pain when he brutally locked groins with them after beating them half to death. The bulbs at the base of a Kavalian cock could cause extreme pain and injury if they were allowed to swell before entering into the tunnels of whatever female they were with. Timur had done this very thing on purpose when interrogating female prisoners and then listened to them beg for their lives before he executed them by locking them in dark rooms without the benefit of being able to feed. He was an officer within the KFI now, not because of who his father was, but because of his skills and tactical knowledge as well as his somewhat sadistic nature in dealing with prisoners. The only one among the group right now that truly cared for him was Qurot, for they had much in common.

Timur stepped forward to the table now, exposing himself from the shadows near the wall, his arms crossed over his broad chest and the rest of his detachment spread out within the room expertly.

Matuarr looked at him. “If they refuse us entry into her apartment on the Royal Estate we can take it to their Netnews Channels.” He spoke.

“And you honestly believe the people within the Union will care that their King has told us he will not allow us to enter his Royal Estate, his home, to search this female’s apartment?” Timur said looking at him. “A female many have viewed as his daughter for a quarter of a century?”

“She is not his daughter!” Jiss snapped.

“And you think this will somehow matter to them?” Timur asked shaking his blond head. “Gentlemen, as Karun has said, you think too highly of your skills.”

“It will give us more leverage within their courts.” Matuarr said in reply. “So yes... it will help us. You are young and inexperienced in matters of policy and diplomacy Timur. I suggest you let Jiss and I handle this. The King has backed his own people into a corner by adhering to their laws so stringently. It is all very black and white to this man. If he does not follow his own laws it appears he is making exceptions to the rules for himself and those close to him. He will not do this. You will get what you ultimately came here for. All of us will.”

“You still believe they will give us this dragon as property?” Jalersi said. “Athani has said they are considered sentient beings within the Union. Not property.”

“Your sister has little knowledge of dragons Jalersi. Certainly no more than any of us.” Jiss spoke in reply. “How exactly would she know something like this? They are beasts of burden. War tools. No more.”

“We should take care to...”

The sound of the dragons trumpeting was so close it could have been on top of them. And as they saw in seconds it was on top of them. All of them sprang to their feet as Jeth's enormous blue/black form dropped through the open ceiling to land with flared wings and a dull thump not ten meters away. His razor like black talons clicked on the granite floor of the center of the Great Room. He was quickly followed by Aradace's Brandeis blue scaled muscular bulk as she landed gracefully only two meters from her older brother also with flared wings.

Karun had moved in front of his mother instinctively, half blocking her body with his, Jiss, Matuarr, Qurot and Pian scrambling to the other side of the table with less than subtle movements. Timur moved with less urgency, and even though he had undergone the biogenic treatments to change his appearance, he was still pure blooded Kavalian. As he gazed at Jeth and Aradace, that inbred fear of dragons tugged at his lower gut, even as he fought to control it. They watched the massive blue/black dragon shift his position and fold his wings, lowering himself to the floor of the Great Room broadside to them. They saw the diminutive figure in the saddle, hands on her thighs, the matte black helmet with crimson streaks hiding the majority of the face and wearing the black body armor with crimson splashed shoulders. The nasal guard extended just past the tip of her nose and the elongated cheek guards hid all but her full lips. Lisisa hardly ever wore makeup, Denali telling her it took away from her natural beauty which was considerable, so her lips were naturally lavender pink in color. They watched as she swung her right leg over the saddle and dropped cat like to the floor, running her hand along Jeth's smooth scales. His massive head turned and brushed up against her shoulder affectionately.

Do not hurt them Lisisa my sister. He spoke to her with humor in his voice. *It would cause far too much paperwork as your father says. And you know how much you hate to do paperwork.*

Lisisa smiled at him and reached up to remove her helmet, gently dropping a soft kiss to the tip of his snout. *Do not worry brother.* She said tucking her helmet under her arm. *This will be rather quick I think.*

Good! We could still make it back to SODRAG to go hunting with Elynth and the others. Aradace broke in.

Denali chuckled as he sat in the saddle, one leg cocked up across the saddle. *Do you think of nothing but food sister?* He asked.

Bah! The hunting down there has much more variety. Aradace spoke.

Lisisa turned and looked at Denali. *Deni...*

I will be right here Lisi my love. He answered immediately.

Lisisa took a deep breath and nodded. She turned and strode confidently toward where the Kavalians were regaining their composure. As she approached she knew instantly who her brother was just by his scent. She may have been half vampire, but she had an extremely well developed sense of smell, much better than most that were of combined blood. She stopped a meter from the table and looked at them.

"Which one of you is Karun?" She spoke confidently even though she already knew the answer to her question.

Karun looked at his mother who nodded her head quickly and then he stepped forward. "I am Karun." He said moving closer to her. "I am Karun. You are..."

"I'm your sister Lisisa." Lisisa spoke as she watched him. The resemblance was there without a doubt and something besides his scent, something inside her told Lisisa that this was indeed her brother. She felt a small ache in her heart for a part of her had still hoped it wasn't true, but that passed quickly enough. She was who she was today because of the man who she knew to be her father. The father of her heart and soul. The father who had risked everything he was to come for her. The man who was, even to this day, unwavering in his love and support for her and all that she did.

Karun had not expected her to be so beautiful, the holo images his father had shown him not doing her justice in the least. He stopped only a few feet from her and looked down into her proud and unwavering forest green eyes. He watched her carefully, seeing the similarities in her face, most notably the shape of her nose and jaw. It seemed they both inherited that from their father.

"It is... it is a pleasure to finally meet you." Karun spoke carefully.

Lisisa looked at him tilting her head slightly. "Is it?" She asked softly. "I only came here for one reason actually. I have learned from the only father I recognize that you do not abandon your blood for any reason. That you..."

“Your father is Marshall Pusintin of the Kavalian Federation Imperium! You are his daughter and therefore a citizen of the Kavalian Empire.” Jiss spoke firmly stepping forward to stand next to Karun.

Karun turned his head quickly. “Jiss... shut up!” He snapped.

“I will not shut up!” Jiss barked right back. “She needs to know who she is and where she belongs!”

Lisisa looked at Jiss now. “I know who I am. I am Princess Lisisa Leonidas” She stated plainly. “And I already am where I belong... whoever you are.”

“I am Legislature Jiss!” He continued. “I am acting with your father and the Kavalian Prefect’s direct authority. You are the daughter of Marshall Pusintin and a citizen of the KFI, therefore you can leave here whenever you desire.”

“Leave here?” Lisisa asked him with a smile. “What would possess me to leave the only world and family I have ever known? Why would I even want to do something as ridiculous as that?”

“Your father of course.” Matuarr said stepping forward now. “And these men and women are not your family.”

“My father... the only father I recognize... my father is Martin Leonidas.” Lisisa said calmly. “And you would be wise to not tell me who my family is or isn’t, whatever your name is *igord!*”

“My name is Matuarr!” He spoke glaring at her. “I am a senior Legislature within the Kavalian Federation, just as Jiss is.”

Lisisa shrugged her shoulders. “This means absolutely nothing to me.” She spoke. “I don’t know who this Marshall Pusintin is... and I have no desire to know him. He means nothing to me as well.”

“He is your father!” Jiss snapped.

“He is not my father! He is a man who I have no desire to know or meet or even speak with!” Lisisa barked. “That has not changed simply because I have discovered I have a brother from him.”

“Three brothers actually.” Karun told her seeing her turn to look at him once more. “And a sister. I am the oldest. Well... you are the oldest really.”

Lisisa looked at him intently. “Why have you requested to meet with me? After all these years knowing who I am.” She asked. “An order from your father perhaps? He has known since that day here in Sparta when he fought his brother... the man I call father and will always call father.”

“He is your father as well.” Karun said. “And I did not know you existed until just before leaving to come here, just over two weeks ago. That is when he told me you lived.”

Lisisa shook her head. “No. He was never my father... and he will never be my father.” She said softly. “I won’t allow it.”

“You have no choice.” Timur said stepping up to stand next to Karun.

Lisisa cut her eyes and looked at him. “And you are?”

“My name is Commander Timur.” He stated.

Lisisa looked at him for a long moment, taking in his extreme good looks and well defined body. Had she met him before Denali had come into her life, Lisisa might have actually found him desirable, but the moment Deni entered her heart and soul in the way he had Lisisa knew no man would ever compare to him, no matter how attractive he was. She had decided long ago that Denali and her were meant to be together.

“Well Commander... this is the Lycavorian Union not the Kavalian Federation.” Lisisa spoke. “And choice is a big thing here see. That he waited to tell you I existed until just before you left leads me to believe his motives have nothing to do with discovering a lost child and more to do with intelligence gathering and taking what does not belong to him.” She said softly turning to look at Karun once more. She pulled the data pad from the pouch at the small of her back. “This is a written and signed statement from me, willingly renouncing whatever you seem to think I might be happy in having with the Kavalian Federation.” She held it up and tossed it at Jiss casually and watched him fumble with it before catching it solidly. “That includes this citizenship you seem to be so intent and focused on.”

“Kavalian citizens are not allowed to renounce their citizenship!” Matuarr spoke heatedly unprepared for the dismissive way Lisisa was speaking to them.

“Well I just did friend. There’s a first time for everything I guess.” Lisisa told him. “I like being first.”

“You really should watch the tone of voice you use.” Timur spoke. “Our woman are not allowed as much freedom as you seem to have here. Your father said I might discover this when he promised me you to me.”

Lisisa looked at him and chuckled softly. “He promised me to you did he? How nice of him.” She asked. Timur nodded. “As my mate.” He spoke. “As soon as the embassy is established we will return to Cabelir and you will become my woman. It is a day I look forward too.”

Lisisa couldn't help but laugh at his smug expression and she shook his head. “I hate to burst your obvious ego fueled bubble big guy, but I already have a husband and mate. And you don't compare to him in the least.”

“What is this?” Matuarr barked moving closer.

“That is unacceptable!” Jiss spat. “Who is this man?”

Lisisa smiled and turned her head back to look at Denali who sat on Aradace with a wide smile on his face. He lifted his hand and waved at them.

“That would be me.” He stated plainly.

“Is this a joke?” Jiss demanded. “That is... that is one of his sons!”

Lisisa smiled and nodded as she looked at him. “Yeah I know... kind of kinky huh? That whole forbidden love thing. We have some of the most intense sex you could imagine because of that fact!” She said. “Makes me want to jump Denali's bones right now just thinking about it to be honest.”

Timur grabbed her right arm tightly. “You are a Kavalian citizen!” He barked. “You are promised to me by your father! You will be mindful of how you speak and act to men who are your superior! You are...”

Lisisa swung her arm up and over his hand, clamping it in her armpit as she brought her left hand forward with vampire speed, smashing stiffened fingers upwards into Timur's throat with wolf strength. His eyes bugged out of his head and he released her arm, clutching his throat as he gasped for air. Karun and the others could only watch as Timur staggered back and Lisisa hit him again in the chest, enhancing her physical blow with her significant Mindvoice power. Her control and precision was such that the heel strike to his chest broke no bones, but caused his heart to skip a beat and his much larger body to lift nearly off the floor and crash hard to the shiny tiled floor surrounding the table.

Karun and Pian were the only ones with enough sense to not move, Pian standing next to Jalersi and reaching out to grip her arm gently and shake his head. Qurot moved forward quickly, only to skid to a halt a few feet from Lisisa as Jeth's massive head appeared in front of him, his golden colored eyes burning with anger and his long fangs exposed in a vicious snarl. Matuarr and Jiss had begun to move but froze the moment Aradace came to her feet and in a burst of incredible speed from an animal so large, she appeared directly in their path. Denali held his K12 KM leveled at the two of them.

“That would not be the most intelligent thing you boys have done in your lifetimes.” Deni spoke calmly as he looked over the barrel at them. His Shi Viska flared to life and his left arm came up, leveled at the two members of the Kavalian security detachment that were rushing towards them even as he extended the K12 out completely in his right hand, his eyes never leaving Jiss and Matuarr. “Who exactly do you think will win here? I guarantee it won't be any of you.”

Jiss held his hand up quickly and halted the movement of the security detachment. “Stand fast!” He barked.

“Never touch me! Ever!” Lisisa screamed at Timur's red face on the floor of the Great Room, his hands holding his chest as he struggled to draw in air. “Only one man touches me and you ain't him!”

“Enough!” Jalersi bellowed from where she stood. Lisisa snapped her head around to look at Jalersi, forest green eyes ablaze. “We are accomplishing nothing acting like this!”

“There is nothing to accomplish.” Lisisa stated taking a deep breath and calming her anger. “I am not now... nor have I ever been a Kavalian citizen! I want nothing to do with the KFI or my father Pleistarchus! I already have a father... and though he may not be my father by blood, he is who I call father now and forever! You can tell Pleistarchus that for me!”

“His name is Marshall Pusintin and we can force you to...” Jiss began to speak.

“Be silent you stupid fool of a man!” Lisisa spat at him viciously. “I will call him by one name... you call him by another! It doesn't matter! Your words mean nothing to me! Nothing! I am Princess Lisisa Leonidas, daughter to King Leonidas and a member of *Mjolnir's Hand*. My husband and mate is Denali Leonidas and he sits there!” Lisisa pointed at where Denali had his K12 leveled at Jiss and Matuarr, and his Shi Viska humming on his arm leveled at the two members of the security detachment. “That is who I am! I do not know what it is you hoped to accomplish by pursuing this... but it will not work.” She turned to look at Timur

who was drawing in ragged breaths and rubbing his chest but otherwise unhurt. “In the Union... to touch me in the manner you have, Denali would be well within his rights to shoot you stone cold dead where you are! Do not press him Kavalian, I have seen my husband and mate angry and it is not a pretty sight to behold!”

Jalersi moved from around the table slowly, looking oddly at Pian as his arm held her protectively for just a split second longer than it should have. No one else noticed as focused as they were on Lisisa. Jalersi waited for him to release her and she continued around the table. She held up her hand quickly when she saw Jeth’s golden eyes shift to look at her and the low growl escaped his throat.

“Princess Lisisa... please... I apologize for what has happened.” Jalersi spoke as calmly as she could, the thumping of her heart easily heard as close to Jeth as she was. “If we could only talk to you about...”

“There is nothing to discuss.” Lisisa told her. Her green eyes went to Karun’s face and for an instant Lisisa thought she saw a smile on his lips. “My *father* has taught me to never abandon my blood.” She stated softly. “I do recognize you as my brother Karun, and I would welcome the opportunity to know you better. If this is something you wish as well then meet me at the Grand Center in Eden City in four days. Twelve hundred hours. I will wait until fifteen minutes past that time and if you do not arrive, then I will return to my duties and you will never see me again. Come alone Karun... leave your friends here in Sparta and come alone. And come with an open mind brother and not this political drivel that everyone else is so intent on spewing.”

“I will.” Karun replied instantly.

Lisisa met his gaze for a few seconds longer and then nodded. “I will make certain you are allowed transport to Eden City then and I will see you there.” Karun watched her as she moved up to Jeth’s side and easily scampered up his front foreleg and into the saddle. She looked at Qurot. “Move Kavalian. I wouldn’t want Jeth to accidentally step on you as he is taking off.”

Qurot did not question the warning and backed up quickly, the fear very evident in his eyes.

“This is not over!” Jiss barked out.

Lisisa turned to look at him as the Dragon Armor secured her legs tightly. “No I don’t imagine it is.” She said. “You will not succeed in getting what you want however. That much I can assure you.”

“The King will not violate his own laws!” Jiss snapped.

Lisisa grinned. “My father won’t have too.” She said. She turned and looked down at Karun. “Four days brother.” She said. “Don’t be late. Jeth go!”

With a trumpet of happiness Jeth flexed his powerful legs and propelled them up into the air and with one beat of his massive wings they were through the glass ceiling and out of sight. All eyes went to Denali now as he lowered the K12 and willed away his Shi Viska. He smiled as he looked at Jiss and Matuarr.

“You got to love a strong woman.” He said easily. “She gets my wolf blood to pumping no doubt!” He shifted the small pack on his shoulder and the Dragon Armor closed around his legs. “Have a nice day. Aradace!”

Aradace echoed her brother’s trumpet, cocked her legs and pushed them skyward through the ceiling, quickly vanishing from sight. Karun stood there watching the ceiling even as Jiss and Matuarr moved to help Timur.

Whatever had just happened... there was at least one person who no longer felt the way they did before this meeting had taken place.

SPARTA

DURCUNUSAAN BASE

Martin could only smile as he felt Lisisa pass to him what had just happened even as she and Denali were lifting off in their STRIKER DT. He felt Anja’s hand tighten in his and he turned to look at her as they walked. Her jade green eyes were bright, her Persian red hair long and shiny and she smiled as she bumped her hip against his.

“Well... we certainly know where she gets her disposition from lover.” Anja said with a grin.

“Now why would you say that Red?” Martin asked in mock surprise. “I am the picture of control and calm.”

“*Aur mida!*” Anja spat playfully.

Martin grinned and leaned over to nuzzle the side of her neck and ear. "And a delicious ass it is." He said softly.

"*Pafocha!*" Anja hissed as she leaned into his nuzzle her eyes closing. "I won't be able to sit right for days now." (Pervert)

"You didn't seem to mind last night." Martin said with a smile. "You made some very enticing sounds when..."

"*Narta!*" Anja gasped with a chuckle, leaning into him even more. (Stop)

They stopped outside the large door and Martin looked down at her as she stepped close and slid her arms around his waist.

"You are a wild one." He said softly.

Anja looked up into his beautiful dark eyes. "You could always get my blood boiling lover." She said in a seductive whisper. "Even before you made me part wolf."

"We'd better get inside before I decide to have a repeat of last night right here in the corridor." He stated.

"That sounds inviting." Anja spoke with a glint in her eyes.

"I'm going to have to give you extra attention tonight to tame that wild streak in you." He said.

"You like my wild streak." Anja said pressing her body even harder against his. "It's one of the reasons you love me so much."

Martin leaned over and kissed her deeply, relishing in the honey taste of her lips and the way her petite body molded against his. He had long ago grown used to Anja's four inch long tongue, and as she held the back of his neck she used that wonderful tongue to dance across his own in a myriad of ways that never ceased to make his blood burn, until finally she broke the kiss.

"Wow!" He stated with a smile. "You are still feeling full of yourself aren't you?"

"Me so horny." Anja drawled in a low voice causing Martin to burst out laughing at the ancient slang from their days as Navy SEALs.

Martin kissed her hard squeezing her to him once more. "Just hold onto to that thought. I'll arrange something as soon as possible."

"You'd better." Anja said with a smile.

"Now are you going to tell me what has got you all worked up coming from Hadaria?" He asked as he stroked her cheek.

"It's nothing I can't handle." Anja replied immediately. "It's Umbra getting the Elders all riled up about Vana and I. How we rule. How we don't adhere to ancient customs... yah... yah... yah. Same old drill every few years."

"You know... I'm seriously starting to dislike that woman. And the Hadarian Elders." Martin spoke. "They really need to step into real life for a little while. I understand keeping culture and tradition, but not at the expense of reality and moving forward. Retta and Calyb are our children and we will decide how to raise them. Not the Elders."

Anja looked at him as her eyes narrowed. "How did you..."

"You think Belen and I don't talk?" Martin asked with a grin. "I'm married to you and he's married to Sivana. We talk. He told me about what they threatened and having Siara leave Hadaria. Your Aunt believes very highly of herself if she thinks she can take our children."

"Just count yourself blessed that she isn't your Aunt." Anja spoke. "It's nothing Lover, really. I can handle Umbra and the Elders. You have enough to worry about and don't need the petty grievances my Aunt brings up distracting you."

"As long as you are sure." He said.

Anja's eyes closed in delight as the back of his fingers caressed her jaw and moved up to trace her ear lobe. "I'm sure." She said feeling his aura reach out and wrap around her just enough to let her feel his love and emotion. She stepped away from him holding his hand in hers. "C'mon lover... before we both lose control and put on a show here in the corridor. It would definitely make the Netnews Channels."

Martin rolled his eyes as they stepped towards the massive door, waiting as it began to slide open. "As if they needed more fodder to put us in the news." He said.

Anja chuckled as she pulled him into the massive room and nearly two dozen heads turned to look at them as they entered, not to mention the dozen holo images of men and women, including Andro.

“Well... well...” Danny bellowed from his chair. “Did you two get lost or something? The rest of us *were* on time!”

Smiles and soft laughter echoed in the room as Anuk elbowed her husband in the gut from her chair next to him.

“Blow it out your ass Simpson.” Martin spat as they walked in.

“Oh mighty king... forgive me... your witless servant. I know not what I speak.” Danny continued. “You need your beauty sleep, I know this now.”

Martin moved up to the chair next to him as Anja walked around and pushed Danny in the back of his bald head. “Asshole.” She muttered with a grin.

“As a matter of fact... I do need my beauty sleep.” Martin said as he settled into the chair next to Danny and Anja sat next to him.

“Only problem with that Skipper is that you ain’t getting any prettier.” Danny said. “You are still uglier than a three thousand year old zit that needs popping.”

“Daniel!” Anuk exclaimed.

“What? It’s the truth! Ask him yourself!” Danny protested.

“And you look like a six hundred year old shriveled raisin.” Martin spoke. “I wouldn’t talk.”

“I’m still prettier than you.” Danny said with a smile.

Martin poured a mug of coffee and slid it over to Anja before pouring one for himself. “I must have had a brain malfunction when I promoted you.” Martin spoke. “Riall... next time I want to promote General/Colonel Simpson, hit me really hard in the head with something... anything nearby.”

Riall nodded his head from where he sat to Anuk’s right. “A pleasure Martin... but I want the order in signed form before I do. It will save me from Gorgo’s wrath.”

This brought more laughter from around the massive table and the men and women in the holo images. They were most of the senior officers within the Lycavorian Union, and they had all seen this many times before in meetings just like this. There were very few who would dare talk to their King in such a manner and Daniel Simpson was one of them. Another such man snorted from the holo image beamed in from Apo Prime.

“Are you two done swapping spit?” Admiral/Colonel Benjamin O’Connor barked. “I ain’t getting any younger here you know.”

Martin looked at his former pilot and now one of his most trusted senior officers and the man who ran not only all operations within the Union fleet, but was also in charge of the Academy Flight School and New Projects. Ben had been human once... departing the base on the moon all those years ago with Martin. He and his long time lover Tina had discovered the stunning red haired female elf Endith in the first days after returning to Earth, and over the course of the next twenty-seven years the three of them were totally inseparable. As humans, Ben and Tina made the decision that changed their lives forever. Neither of them wanted to grow old and have to leave Endith behind, or worse yet have her witness them die of old age. Their love burned just as brightly as did Martin’s for his Queens, and Ben and Tina came to Isabella one day, asking her to turn them so that they would not lose that love. It was a decision that Martin had taken many months to come to grips with. He was not angry at what they had done, for he himself had turned Tareif’s son-in-law Steven so that Tarifa’s sister Zaala would not lose something they had only just discovered. He was more hurt that Ben had not come to him and asked that of him. He now understood why Ben and Tina had done what they did and why they went to Isabella and not to him, discovering the reasons after a long drunken talk and discussion with Ben and Danny and the party the night after Retta and Calyb were born.

Ben and Tina loved Martin, there was no question there. They did not want to put him in the position of having to choose their friendship and love over military matters, especially if he had been the one to turn them. Endith had played a large role in that decision as well, and now they had five children between the three of them, all of them healthy and very happy. Two half elf half vampire boys two years younger than Bryon and three full vampire children, twin girls and a boy that had just turned five and four respectively.

“Shit... you ain’t getting any older either Ben!” Martin snapped. “So sit down...”

“And shut the fuck up!” Danny finished the sentence with a wide smile.

Ben erupted in laughter from his office on Apo Prime and nodded his head. “And so speaks the voice of reason and knowledge. Simpson... you are nearly as half baked as he is. I swear the salt water on Tenla Eight corroded what little brains the two of you have left.”

“Then perhaps you should not have left them floating in the ocean for five days.” Anuk spoke crossing her arms over her ample chest and looking at him in the image.

“Ouch!” Ben spoke. “Check fire! Check fire! When you pull out the red haired gun it’s time to retreat!”

Everyone laughed again and Martin shook his head as he sipped his coffee. “Ok... folks.” He spoke. “What say we get this little party rolling? I get to spend the day with Aikiro when I leave here so give me lots of good news.”

“Better you than us Milord.” Imror spoke from one of the holo transmissions eliciting another round of soft chuckles.

Riall got to his feet with a grin and moved around the end of the table activating the huge star chart at the end of the room. The plain gray wall essentially became a star map of the entire Lycavorian Union, from one end of the immense system spanning empire to another.

“Overall Fleet and Ground Force Readiness is at ninety-seven percent Milord.” He spoke as dozens of large white dots began appearing on the map. “Twenty-one SCFFG’s are located as you see them here in white. The additional fifty-three Fleet Groups in blue are coming up now.” Everyone watched as the blue dots began appearing. “All Planetary Commands report readiness levels above ninety percent, with the exception of the Folcani Regiment and the Molari Division.”

“Reasons?” Martin asked.

“The Folcani Honor Regiment is in their Private Leave cycle Milord and are only at seventy-two percent for that reason. The Molari 1st Heavy HT Division Corp is split up in three different locations conducting extended training maneuvers. They just finished receiving their allotment of the new S94 Hover Tanks and are putting them through their paces with increased vigor from what I hear. Overall readiness is eighty-three percent because they are spread across so large a distance. Their commander, General/Colonel Gasile assures me they will be ready should they be called upon.” Riall said.

General Vistr snorted from his holo transmission. “She is a task master Milord. They will be ready if we call for them.” He spoke.

“Action and support ships are marked in orange.” Riall continued. “Eighteen medical ships and their accompanying Strike Wings. All fully staffed and supplied Milady.” He said looking at Anja and Anuk.

“They should be... it took Anuk and I nearly four months to get them that way.” Anja said. “I’m glad to see they have kept up the readiness.”

It may have been because of who she was, but Anuk Simpson was widely regarded as second only to Anja in terms of authority concerning medical matters. Officially she was listed as the senior medic within the Union, but when it came to medical matters, she was also Anja’s second in command. She may have been an elf, but she was perhaps the best medically trained elven female out there, with almost as much knowledge as many of the Hadarian Healers. It was another sticking point with the Hadarian Elders since they determined that Anja’s second in command should have been Hadarian.

“So am I.” Anuk spoke. “I didn’t envy having to leave Earth and spend several weeks chewing out lazy officers across the Fleet as we did last time.”

“I’ll drink to that.” Anja said.

“BIP patrols have reported nothing out of the ordinary.” Imror spoke now. “Aside from the visit from the High Coven, border activity is minimal.”

“Give me numbers Riall.” Martin said now. “If the Kavalians are planning what Aikiro says they are and they come pouring across the border what are we looking at?”

“I can only tell you what I would do Martin... and what I believe you would do as well.” Riall spoke. “Until we have a more definitive look at what they are fielding, all of it is guess work on our part. I don’t want to put much faith in the information the Coven has given us, but right now it’s all we have.”

Martin nodded. “Go with it.”

Riall motioned to the portion of the Lycavorian border that actually touched the Kavalian border. “Two invasion corridors Milord... possibly three... but that would be overextending themselves even if the numbers the Coven gave us are accurate. They have us outnumbered four and five to one in ground forces in many

places... and two to one in number of ships but then again that is just an estimate on what we think they would need to move that many troops in a possible attack. Of course... when are we not outnumbered?"

Martin nodded his head. "That's true."

"Those numbers don't include their forces poised and marshalling all along the High Coven border Milord." Armetus broke in. "Omen Five's last report put that number at or near what we are seeing here. It appears the KFI has spent the better part of the last ten years doing nothing but building their biogenic clones and ships."

"Anything from Omen about this intelligence yet?" Martin asked him.

Armetus shook his head. "I'm still waiting to hear back." He said. "We should be getting a burst report by tomorrow I would think."

"Who is it Armetus?" Martin asked.

"Omen One Milord."

Martin nodded slowly and only Anja heard the sigh from him, though she did not know why. He got to his feet slowly, mug of coffee in his hand and moved around the table to the map to look at the star chart. "One corridor straight for Folcan and Elear." He said. "No detours or deviations. They'll want to hit Elear with everything they can bring to bear and kill as many dragons as they can in the process. I would scatter my ground units to other targets and pound Elear from orbit. Admiral Po'Tal?"

The older looking Elven Admiral in command of the Elear Defense Sector nodded from the transmission. "We agree with that assessment here as well Milord." He said calmly. "Given this inbred fear they have of dragons, landing any number of troops on Elear would not be something they would do. At least not at first... or until they are sure most of the dragons are dead. They will go for our capital shipyards and construction facilities and then settle in for a polar orbital bombardment of Dragon Island. Perhaps as many cities as they can target as well, given that they now know dragons moved freely among us."

Riall nodded. "We hypothesize they will branch off from an attack on Folcan once it is secure and break for Semtola, Ryuid, Voelt, and Ezoru One. At least initially... while their main fleet forces head for Elear."

"The second corridor?" Martin asked.

Riall touched the star chart and drew his finger up along the border. "Straight for Beklan Two and then cut inward and make for our main capital class shipyards in the outer Sol System around Apo Prime and the Jahdi System and Nodon."

"That's quite a stretch." Martin spoke. "Do they have legs that can reach that far and still fight?"

"Their *GREATSOUL* dreadnoughts have the ability to extend that far easily." Komirri spoke from his chair at the table. "As do their *DIATAGA* Attack Cruisers and their *DIEROY* Heavy Cruisers."

"All of them Attack or Heavy cruisers." Andro spoke from SODRAG. "How many of these ships do they have staged in this area according to the Coven Intelligence grandfather?"

"That breakdown is not available from the Coven Intelligence, but at least equal to what they hit the Coven with in the initial invasion near Lycavore Andro." Riall answered. "Upwards of three thousand ships. Probably more. All of them with their *BLACK SOUL* Heavy Fighter and the *JAGUAR* Interceptors in support. We know each *GREATSOUL*-Class Dreadnought carries six squadrons of the Heavy Fighters and at least equal that in *JAGUARS*. Head to head they are more than a match for our *LEONIDAS IIA* sire."

"Coming down one invasion corridor." Martin shook his head. "Man they don't care what kind of damage or casualties they take if they throw that much down one corridor. Coming that far into Union space they have to know we would hit them every few hours."

"Their primary troop carrier is also LSD equipped just like our *VIPER*. They would be able to maintain position with the command ships and jump away in case of any attack by us." Riall said.

"It is a similar tactic to what they used during their initial invasion of the High Coven just as Riall has said Milord." Admiral Ceneu spoke now leaning forward in his chair next to Ben on Apo Prime. "Massive and overwhelming force applied to worlds as they progressed forward. A heavy bombardment from orbit, drop troops and leave behind support ships to assist the ground forces as they sweep over the planets. Once they have taken the main governmental offices they demand immediate surrender or they eradicate the populous."

"So they have no qualms about targeting civilians?" Anuk asked from next to Danny.

“None in the least it seems.” Riall spoke. “And while we have our shipyards spread out all over the Union for security purposes, most of their shipyards are far outside our reach deep within Kavalian space. Without the Kavalian Jump Corridors and their codes... we would be jumping blind looking for them.”

“What about their ground forces?” Danny asked after a glance at Vengal. “Sixteen million sounds like a lot... but can they do anything?”

“They...” Riall began.

NEOR

KFI MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

“...have at least a four to one advantage in most places... upwards of six to one in others.” The Kavalian Colonel spoke as junior aides were distributing data pads out to Keleru, Pusintin and a dozen others who had come for this secret briefing. “Essentially the odds will be even.”

“Even?” A Pride leader exclaimed openly incredulous. “Outnumbering them six to one is even? How exactly do you figure that?”

“Yes Pride Leader Miwel.” The Colonel answered. “We all must remember... *if* we are to undertake this operation... this will not be the High Coven troops and clones we will be facing. These will be Lycavorian Union Spartans. They do not retreat, they do not surrender, man or female, elf or Algolian, and they *will* fight to the death.” He looked at Pusintin. “It seems your brother has instilled in them the spirit and code of the ancient Earth warriors you led for a time Marshall Pusintin.”

Pusintin nodded. “For all the good it did. That mentality got my idiot Spartan father killed.” He spoke harshly. “My Kavalian father is far more intelligent and would never stand and die in a hopeless situation.”

The Colonel nodded his head slowly. “Yes... sir.” He stated turning back to the others. “Continuing... after many years of study, my analyst team and I have come to the realization that the Union ground forces are conditioned in such a way as to eliminate ten of the enemy before they fall. This is not forced upon them; this is an attitude, a mental state if you will. A state of mind that they have developed with a combination of superior training and adherence to traditions and culture we neither practice nor understand. It is more than likely practiced within their fleet to a lesser degree as well.” The man turned to look at Keleru and Pusintin. “I believe this is part of the reason they were able to so soundly wipe out our force of biogenic clones even though they were outnumbered five to one on Gamji Prefect.”

“Your professional assessment?” Keleru asked.

“We would be successful Prefect... there is little doubt of that. No enemy could hold against the sheer volume of destructive power we could bring to bear... but we would take massive losses. Far more than at any point in our war with the Coven.” The man spoke. “We can make more clones easily, but the main concern is their tactical plans and how far they would go.”

Pusintin leaned forward. “Elaborate Colonel.”

“We don’t know how far they would be willing to go to win.” The man answered. “Will they sacrifice planets and people to buy time to bring their forces to bear, or would they stand and fight us at every turn? Much of their military is spread out over a wide area conducting training and maneuvers constantly. Unlike the High Coven they do not mass anywhere in large numbers for any length of time. With the exception of the events on Gamji, we really have no idea how they operate as fleet units. Their procedures, their command structure, their rules of engagement. We know none of it.”

“What of the Coven?” Another Pride leader asked. “We can not open a new front against the Union without risk of the High Coven hitting us along our lines with them. It would...”

SPARTA

“...be tactically unsound to open a new front against us when they have so much devoted to the High Coven already.” Vistr spoke.

Tareif nodded from his seat. “No one has ever won a war fighting on two fronts.” He spoke. “At least not anywhere in the history of Earth that I have read and the humans were very good at having wars to solve their problems. At least before the comet came. Now... now it is a chore to involve them in anything more taxing than a game of chess. Until they are angered at least.” He finished with a grin. “Anger them and even as an elf I would get out of their way completely.”

“We aren’t talking of just a border with a country either.” Vengal said. “We are talking a border of light years in size. Are they so smug and sure of their ships and clones that they would do this?”

“We aren’t sure of anything.” Armetus spoke. “The Omen units have been tasked with monitoring their conflict with the High Coven and keeping an eye on the smaller Kavalian units they have within The Wilds just across their borders. With the exception of very short runs to get to other areas, we’ve never gone in depth into Kavalian space. Omen One will be the first real deep run penetration of their lines.”

“That is my fault.” Martin spoke. “I did not want to provoke anything with the Kavalians if one of our ships happened to be discovered twirling around deep in their space taking pictures of everything. They are too unpredictable in their actions and what they would do.”

“Better safe than sorry Lover.” Anja spoke.

Martin nodded. “But now that may come around to bite us in the ass. Up until the end of the war with the Evolli, I’ve tasked most of our intelligence assets to monitoring the Coven and their activities.”

“They have been the recognizable enemy for thousands of years sire.” Armetus spoke. “And if you set aside the battle on Gamji, the Kavalians have done nothing to warrant further scrutiny.”

“Have we stopped to consider that may be what they want?” Andro’s voice broke in once more. “No one saw their build up before hitting the Coven the first time. They were able to hide millions of biogenic clones and thousands of warships from us and the Coven both. They did not build that in only a few years. It took them decades. We know now that they have the ability to beat our long range sensor drones. Perhaps we should take a more active stance now father.”

“What are you suggesting Andro?” Martin asked.

“Release two more Omen ships into Kavalian space.” Andro answered quickly. “Omen Six from The Wilds and Omen Five from occupied High Coven space. It is what we built them for father. Deep Penetration Intelligence Gathering. The only people who know about those ships are those of us in that room with you and in these transmissions. The crews are the finest we have and know what their purpose is. Let’s cut them loose to earn their pay.”

“I agree.” Ben spoke from Apo Prime.

“As do I.” Ceneu echoed.

Martin looked around. “Anyone against?” He waited a few moments and nodded his head. “Very well. Armetus... coordinate with Ben and make it happen.”

Armetus nodded. “Happily Milord.” He said.

“Set aside the one hypothetical invasion corridor towards our shipyards for now.” Martin spoke. “Walter... how many boots on the ground can we put on Folcan if the need arose?”

Walter Carson, Polemarch of the entire Union Ground Command, leaned forward in his chair. He had returned three days early from his whirlwind tour of Union ground forces only to come directly to this meeting after only four hours of sleep. Well over three thousand years of age but looking only in his mid-forties he held the respect and admiration of every Spartan within the ranks of the Union for his actions as Guardian of the Line and now Senior Polemarch of the military.

“The Folcani have allowed us to garrison a full Brigade on Folcan Martin.” Walter said using his first name. Another of the handful that Martin considered family. “That was one of the units I inspected on my trip. I would stand them against a full division of Kavalian clones if need be. Getting the Folcani to allow more than the Brigade will be difficult. They are an anti-war species. It took us five years to get them to allow the Brigade to begin with.”

“The Kavalians are not fools, let’s not forget that. They will have learned from Gamji just as we did. *If* this attack does come... and it is a big if... they will hit Folcan with a minimum of seven to eight divisions of clones. They have the manpower to spare easily. And Folcan would be the perfect staging area for follow on attacks into Union space. It is relatively close to their border for re-supply, and within striking distance of three

main Jump Corridors. We would have to destroy upwards of four Jump Gates to limit their advance.” Vistr spoke.

“Destroying Jump Gates is not something we will do!” Komirri spoke now. “We would be cutting off our own ability to reinforce and supply.”

“Let’s not go there right now.” Martin spoke. “Riall... the Joint Training Exercises with the Bontawillian are still happening in three weeks right?”

“Yes.”

“Change the logistics.” Martin said turning to the star map. “Move three SCFFGs down into that training area here.” He spoke tracing his finger down the map along the border. “Put four more into a training pattern around Elear with the Elven Central Command Group. Then I want new patrol routes established for all nine Fleet Groups along the border here. Our staging areas are too far out of the way for them to have gotten spies close, so cut loose nineteen more under Shroud and move them to a forward staging area just outside the ECCG’s control grid.”

“How long do we keep them out there?” Riall asked.

“Four weeks and then they begin rotating back as the other Fleet Groups go out. Move them in and out of the staging areas under Shroud to hide the movements.” Martin said. “It should keep everyone guessing as to how many ships are actually in or out of harbor.”

“Ground forces?” Vistr asked.

“That will be tougher.” Martin said. “If we assume Elear and Folcan will be the focus of at least one invasion corridor, they will no doubt have eyes and ears out to feed back whatever information they can get.”

“Is it possible they have developed Shroud technology?” Danny asked. “It would be pointless to deploy under Shroud if they have. They’ll detect any large movement of ships and troops.”

Armetus shook his head almost immediately. “That is one of the things we need to ask Aikiro and the Coven.” He replied. “We simply do not know. Sire there is something else. Any large troop movement to Beklan Two, training or not, it will more than likely spook whatever High Coven insurgent forces that are there into leaving.”

“I ain’t telling Aikiro dick about what we are doing.” Martin said immediately. “I’m still not entirely convinced this intelligence they gave us is accurate. It all just seems too convenient to me. It’s almost as if they *want* us to conduct a preemptive strike of some sort.”

“I got a feeling that is what they want Skipper.” Danny spoke.

“The question is why?” Anja spoke now.

“Riall... let’s say this intelligence is confirmed by Armetus and his people.” Martin spoke. “Let’s say we launch a preemptive strike against the Kavalian forces there. How much damage could we do?”

Riall looked at Ceneu and Ben in the transmission and then back to Martin. “We have such a plan Martin.”

Martin grinned. “I know you do.”

“Told you.” Ben spoke. “Riall you owe me twenty Riyal.”

Riall shook his head with a smile. “We bet who would ask the question first.” He stated. “Ben won.”

Martin chuckled. “He knows how I think. He’s spent too much time around me.”

“You got that right.” Ben replied.

“What did you guys work out?” Martin asked.

“Five SCFFGs in a coordinated strike would obliterate the entire planet and everything on it.” Riall replied. “A simultaneous attack against the surrounding garrisons and the two Jump Gates in the system would render any Kavalian threat from this area null and void.”

“At least until they rebuilt their numbers or shifted units away from the High Coven border to hit us.” Danny said. “Then they would come at us full force. And not just from one direction or a couple invasion corridors. They would pour across that entire length of border like ants to honey.”

Martin looked at him slowly, his dark eyes intense. Everyone saw where Martin was looking and they fell silent as he stared at Danny. Dan finally met his eyes. “What? I got snot hanging from my nose or something?”

Martin turned to Riall. “Riall... hypothetically speaking... where is the most likely place the KFI would pull troops and ships from if we conducted such an attack and were successful?”

Riall looked at the star map. He pointed immediately to the area of former High Coven space that was now occupied by Kavalian forces. An area of space that held Ukwav and many other former High Coven fortress worlds. "Here." He answered. "These two systems around Ukwav and Yoimet. Several thousand ships and we estimate several million ground troops. All poised to hit the High Coven again no doubt."

"And how long would it take them to stage from this area and cross The Wilds?" Martin asked moving closer to the map.

"Two weeks at most." Riall answered. "That would put them within striking distance of Earth within four weeks easily."

Martin nodded. "It sure would." He said softly.

"Father, are you thinking we should conduct such a strike if the Coven intelligence turns out to be accurate?" Andro asked.

"Why mass that many ships and troops if you don't plan to use them?" Martin asked. "They are too far away to influence any battle against the High Coven in any amount of time that would matter."

"They did want a Free Passage of Rights through Union territory." Riall spoke. "Perhaps they did this thinking they would get such a thing."

Martin shook his head slowly. "Pleistarchus isn't that stupid. He had to have known I would never agree to such an arrangement. And shifting this much firepower near our border isn't exactly a friendly notion. They are planning something."

"They also do not yet know we are aware of this sire." Armetus spoke. "We could use that to our advantage."

"They'll figure it out sooner or later once we start shifting forces around." Dan said. "And if we approach them with it, they'll know we have some sort of asset in or around this area. Then things could get sticky for the Omen ships."

"We'll let it stand as it is for now." Martin spoke. "Have a release drafted so we can give the Netnews queers something on those Fleet Groups that aren't going out under Shroud. That should buy us some time. Maybe make them think twice about whatever it is they are planning. If anything at all." Martin looked at the time piece on the wall. "I got an hour before I have to head to SODRAG with my favorite person. They got us outnumbered in every aspect folks, and I want ways to neutralize that advantage within the first twelve hours of anything that might happen."

"Martin... what about Mando?" Ben spoke from his chair on Apo Prime.

Martin turned to look at the transmission. "Is she ready?"

"Is who ready?" Komirri asked.

"For the most part... yes." Ben spoke. "Riall can give you the latest report from her. She sent it three days ago."

"What are the three of you cooking up that the rest of us do not know about?" Vengal asked from his seat.

Ben leaned forward. "The *HORNET*, *BISMARCK* and *YAMATO* are three weeks away from joining the *ARIZONA* Marty. Six more within the year" He spoke calmly. "We should tell them now."

Danny's eyes narrowed. "Oh... secrets!" He stated. "I like your secrets Skipper."

Tareif nodded. "Indeed. I know my Earth history well... and the names you just spoke are all great water faring warships from Earth's ancient past." He said. "And we have all known Ben long enough to know of his predilection for rather nasty surprises."

Martin grinned. "One of his more endearing traits." He said. "Ben... why don't we give everyone a brief rundown on what you and I have been doing these last few years. They are your pride and joy."

Ben's smile grew wide. "It will be my pleasure." He said.

SODRAG

Sadi walked toward the door to hers and Andro's bungalow, her eyes shifting between the data pad she was reading and the direction she was going to keep from tripping over any furniture. She wore her usual evening attire, the nearly see through white robe clinging to her body. Sadi had always prided herself on the

condition she kept her body in, training with the *Nehtes* almost daily even as a cadet. Yet since coming here five days ago, really since becoming Andro's *Anome*, she discovered she truly loved working out in the mornings. She, Arrarn and the Coven pilots had made this part of the routine right from the start, and it was paying off even more for her as just in five days her body had taken on more muscular definition and she was leaner. She felt better physically now than she had in her life, and she discovered that it caused Andro to take even more time to discover her body when they made love, giving her that much more pleasure.

Sadi passed her hand over the sensor on the side of the door and looked up as it opened. Her jungle green eyes grew wide when she saw who stood there.

"Carisia!" She exclaimed. She stepped half way of the door, using her wolf eyes to scan the area around the villa. "What... what are you doing? Yuri... Yuri might see you."

"I don't care anymore." Carisia spoke confidently.

Sadi took her hand without hesitation and pulled her into the bungalow, watching as the door closed and locked behind her. Sadi turned to say something and found Carisia directly in front of her, smelling of fresh rose petals and unyielding desire. Her green eyes grew wide for only a second as Carisia stepped closer and covered her lips with her own. Sadi groaned as Carisia's arms pulled her tightly against her own body and she plunged her tongue between Sadi's lips without indecision. Sadi dropped the data pad instantly and pulled Carisia to her even tighter, accepting Carisia's kiss without question and returning it with equal vigor. Their bodies molded against one another, rising heat against rising heat. Desire and want and need that could no longer be denied.

They felt each other's nipples grow stiff, Sadi's loose robe doing nothing to hinder her hardening nubs from pressing firmly against the thin light blue shirt that Carisia wore, and not preventing her own hard as rock nipples from burning into her flesh. Their tongues danced a delicious tango, Carisia's hands clamping onto Sadi's perfect ass and pulling her closer with her vampire strength. Only the need to breathe caused them to separate, a thin strand of combined saliva connecting their lips as they slowly drew back to stare into each other's eyes with unrestrained ardor.

"Where... where is Andro?" Carisia gasped.

"A... a meeting." Sadi panted.

"I... I don't want to wait anymore Sadi." Carisia spoke softly. "I... I can't wait anymore. I want you both so badly it is all I can think of anymore."

Sadi's jungle green eyes burned with intense craving. It was a sensation matched only by her yearning for the man who held her heart and soul. "We... we are the same Carisia." Sadi stammered out the words.

"Will... will he be back soon?" Carisia asked.

Sadi's smile was one filled with sexual hunger and want. "Not... not before we have started without him." She stated confidently. "He can... he can join us when he returns."

"He... he won't be angry with me?" Carisia asked innocently.

Sadi smiled. "*Enylarcopri*... the moment he walks in here and smells us together... our pleasure will triple this night."

Carisia's face beamed as her smile matched Sadi's. "Then we should waste no more time." She stated confidently. "I wish to explore you for as long as I can before he comes."

Sadi leaned forward and brushed her soft lips against Carisia's. "We will have eternity *Enylarcopri*. Eternity." Sadi gripped her hand tightly and pulled her into the bungalow further. "Come."

Carisia had no doubts anymore as her body hummed with excitement and anticipation. Her fingers entwined with Sadi as she was pulled into the bungalow and she saw where Sadi was leading her. Directly for the very large bed she could see in the next room. The knowledge of what was going to happen this night made Carisia wet with the expectation of what was to come.

An expectation she knew without a doubt would surpass any dreams she had ever had up until this point.

"*Phraktos, nau mzild Toria!*" Narice exclaimed as her upper body fell back onto the sweat soaked sheets, her chest heaving in exertion, the nipples of her large breasts protruding proudly upward. Her deeply tanned skin was covered in a fine sheen of sweat, her fingers entwined tightly within the silky softness of Toria's lush red hair. (Gods no more!)

Narice felt Toria's lips gently suckle her still painfully hard clit before they began the trek up her glistening body. Her heart was hammering away in her chest, the extreme pleasure she had experienced still rippling along her nerves and causing her taut thighs to quiver in the aftermath. Their days may have been filled with instruction and schooling, but their nights were filled with each other. Toria's red hair fell across Narice's well defined abdomen as she made her way back up her lover's beautifully ripped body, very mindful to make sure their flesh touched in all the right places. She made it a point to lift her upper body slightly so that their nipples brushed together and brought her knee up gently to press against Narice's still dripping mound. She lowered herself back down onto Narice, their bodies conforming to one another's wonderfully.

Narice looked at her flushed face as she opened her eyes, Toria's full lips still slick with her cum and a tiny drop of her blood. Narice moved with vampire speed, bringing her hands up and pulling Toria's lips down on hers to share a blistering kiss. Toria's groan of delight was all Narice needed to hear as she wrapped her arms around her waist then and pulled her tighter. Narice tasted herself on Toria's lips and tongue, her juices and her blood, and she could only marvel at the world this woman had opened to her in just the last week alone. Since their first night together, they could barely keep their hands from each other when they were alone, and they shared everything. The bed, the shower, almost as if they were two pieces of a problem and the only thing they lacked was the solution. Narice had let go of all her inhibitions, feeling freer now than at any other time in her life. They had even established and explored a Mindvoice connection just the two of them shared, and the more time they spent together, the more it grew in power and feeling. Narice could still sense something within Toria, within that Mindvoice connection. She still held back a small portion of herself, abilities within Mindvoice that she kept hidden and shielded very deep. It did not matter to her, for Narice knew they would soon share even their most intimate secrets with each other, and then all that would be left for them to do would be to secure the one thing both of them desired as much as they wanted each other.

Arrarn Leonidas.

Narice ran her tongue along Toria's upper lip as their kiss drew apart and she squeezed Toria's firm ass in her strong hands. "I... I never want to lose you Toria Dellion." She spoke softly.

"Nor I you Narice." Toria said in reply. She reached up and traced Narice's lips with a finger. "You were right you know." She said.

"About what?"

"Earth. This planet... these people." Toria said. "Just being here... being among them... it has opened my eyes to so many things Narice. They are so passionate in everything they do. They do not fear showing emotions; they do not fear where their hearts might take them."

"Never fear the unknown." Narice whispered.

"What?"

"It is something Carisia told me yesterday while we were studying." Narice spoke softly. "She said the difference between us and the Union. The difference between their people and ours is that they do not fear what the next day will bring. They embrace the unknown, no matter what it will bring to them. Good or bad."

Toria stared at her for a long moment. "Narice... do you know what my mission was to be coming here?" She asked.

"I assumed it was intelligence gathering about the Union *STRIKERS* and their many capabilities." Narice said.

Toria nodded slowly. "That was part of it yes." She said. "The other part... Narice you know I was a member of the *Venorik Elghinn*. Trained by them."

Narice nodded. "Yes."

"Once you are a member of the *Venorik Elghinn* Narice, you are always a member of the *Venorik Elghinn*." Toria said. "Even when you don't want to be."

"That is how you have such a strong Mindvoice presence." Narice said. "They detected this in you when you joined them. They taught you how to shield your mind even from my mother."

Toria nodded. "It was actually a directive from your mother to the Commander of the *Venorik Elghinn*." She explained. "There are several hundred of us spread throughout the fleet and ground forces. Specialists in intelligence mainly. They wanted individuals they could trust completely. Your mother could breach my shields if she truly wanted too. I have learned to mask my true strength within Mindvoice especially after her... after she ordered me into her bed." Toria's body relaxed more and she shifted her frame so she was laying half on

Narice and half off. “My mission... the mission your mother and the Commander of the *Venorik Elghinn* gave to me was to come here, learn to fly their *STRIKERS*, learn as much as I was able about Arrarn Leonidas and his family and then... then I was to kill him and any others of his family that I was able to.” Her sky blue eyes stayed focused on Narice’s face for any sign of anger.

“But why?” Narice asked quickly. “Only they can give us what we need to train our Bonded Pairs.”

“I don’t know all of it... but I do know coming here to train our dragons is not the true purpose of why your mother came here.” Toria spoke.

“Toria... why are you telling me this?” Narice asked.

“The Commander of the *Venorik Elghinn*.” She answered. “Your mother gave him quite a bit of latitude in how he handled himself. I was purposely put on Tesand’s flagship so that he would notice me. They don’t trust him Narice. They think he is a traitor. It is not something that your mother is even aware of. They believe him to be the leader of the main insurgent group within the High Coven, but they fear approaching your mother. I was put there as a means to try and discover if this was in fact the case.”

“Tesand?” Narice exclaimed. “He is a military officer and totally devoted to my mother. He has neither the intelligence nor the drive to lead an insurgence against her and share her bed.”

Toria nodded. “That is what I believe as well... but he has acted suspiciously the last few years. Nothing major really... secret meetings with other officers and such, nothing which amounted to anything, but enough to have the *Venorik Elghinn* focus on him as much as they could without tipping off your mother. Our purpose here however, our purposes for being here are not what we think they are or have been told.” Toria said. “I don’t know why we are truly here, only that your mother and sister have ulterior motives. The *Venorik Elghinn* fears that Tesand will give away that purpose. They also fear what exposure to this way of life will do. The eyes it will open among our people. Your mother allowed the first slivers of another lifestyle into the open when she took power. The *Venorik Elghinn* fear it will grow now that we are here.”

“It is already happening.” Narice said quickly. “Among the riders anyway. We have opened ourselves more to the bonds we have with our dragons and what we are capable of. It is making many of us question what we have learned in the past.”

Toria nodded. “Then what they feared *is* happening. When word of this gets back to the *Venorik Elghinn*, they will no doubt tell your mother we need to act to bring whatever trust we have gained to an end. They want the Union involved in our war. I think we... I think we are closer to defeat than your mother or anyone will admit, and the only way to bring some relief is to involve the Union. They discovered something that made them press ahead with this mission to come here Narice. Something very important and something your mother feels is worth the risk of involving the Union. It is why your mother has bent so much to the demands that King Leonidas has made. They want the Union to enter this war for a reason that only those very close to your mother know.”

“Toria... Toria what you have told me could very well get you killed.” Narice said softly. “I am... I am a Princess of the High Coven... it is my duty to inform my mother of what you have told me.”

“I know this... but it also shows you that what I have come to feel for you is beyond trust for I have just put my life in your hands.” Toria said calmly. “You are not like your mother and sister Narice... your bond with Deneth is all the proof I need of that. I have placed my life in your hands in the hopes that you feel the same for me as I do for you. That you want to explore what we have discovered with each other and what we could have with Arrarn Leonidas just as badly as I do.”

“Oh Toria... I do.” Narice spoke without a moment’s hesitation.

“Then I have tied myself to you Narice. More completely than I have ever tied myself to anyone.” Toria said softly.

“How... how do you know I am not an agent for my mother or the *Venorik Elghinn*?” Narice asked.

Toria smiled. “If you were, you would never have let me feed on your blood Narice, no matter what you were willing or ordered to do. And you would never have tasted mine as you have. This relationship... what we are sharing... if your mother discovered what we have done while in this bed she would be incensed. I know that, you know that... and when you didn’t hesitate in your actions I knew you were acting of your own accord. I knew your actions were your own decisions and feelings.”

“They were and they are.” Narice said confidently as her hands left Toria’s ass and came up to grasp her face. “I will not let anything happen to you Toria. I swear this to you. Never did I expect to find what we have

discovered and I embrace what I feel when I am with you. What... what we could feel in his arms." Narice laughed softly at her own words.

"What?" Toria asked.

"I am speaking of a half elf, half wolf son of my mother's greatest enemy, and I want nothing more than to feel his arms around me. To feel him filling me in ways I have only dreamed of." Narice said. "It is almost surreal."

Toria nodded. "How do you think I feel?" She said. "Finding you and what we have begun to share. Wanting him just as badly as I want you."

Narice looked at her. "Toria... Toria there is something you should know." Narice spoke. "About..."

Toria put a finger to her lips once more and shook her head. "I will never allow harm to come to you either Narice. Of that I am certain." She said. She leaned forward quickly and kissed her softly. "That is enough of this talk for tonight. I have something I want to show you." She said.

"What?"

"Sadi has told me where he trains at night." Toria said.

"Arrarn Leonidas?" Narice asked her interest peaked considerably.

Toria nodded. "He is almost religious in his routine." She said with a smile. "As long as we stay upwind of him, we can watch him and he will never know."

"Why would we want to do this?" Narice asked with a grin.

"Because like you he is the first man I have ever wanted to give myself too completely. Because like you, I find him irresistibly beautiful and because like you, just watching him makes me just as wet as it does you." Toria said.

Narice scrunched up her nose in a grin of agreement. "It does not bother you that he is so much younger than both of us? And that he is half wolf?"

Toria waggled her eyebrows with a smile. "Not if I walk around with the same smile that Queen Isabella seems to walk around with all of the time. All of the Queens for that matter. And from what I understand... it is a trait that is quite frequently passed down in Lycavorian males."

Narice laughed. "You are so bad!"

"Do I need to go watch him myself?" Toria asked.

Narice shook her head quickly. "No."

"Then we should get going." Toria said as she dropped a feather like kiss on Narice's lips. "Because I intend to have my way with you later."

SPARTA

"...never expected to hear from you again." The male Eanae spoke from the holo transmission. A humanoid bi-pedal race with very thin frames and a large bony protrusion extending upwards from their foreheads like a horn. Their skin varied in color from mud brown to dark gray, but all of them had the lamprey like mouths and either orange or red eyes. They were a peaceful race for the most part, their planet of Eode situated within the Icalro Alliance, many of them turning out to be quite proficient at smuggling, information brokering and managing credits for others.

"I could say the same about you Joyar." Vonis spoke.

The Eanae nodded. "Indeed." His eyes fell upon Isabella and Aricia who sat on either side on Vonis in the secure communications room. "I see you are keeping better company these days... at least in the looks department. Two Queens of the Lycavorian Union. Vonis I am impressed."

"Joyar... my sister Isabella." Vonis spoke. "And Queen..."

"Aricia... the pureblood soulmate of the King. Yes... I know who they are." Joyar answered evenly. "The better question is why you and they are contacting me? I haven't checked this COM unit in over twenty years Vonis, and when my servant said there was an odd beeping noise coming from within our storage room I thought the old woman had finally lost her mind."

"You don't seem the worse for wear Joyar." Vonis spoke.

“Thanks to you.” The Eanae replied. “Your warning to your network saved many lives Vonis, mine included. We thought perhaps, after word had reached us that you defected, that your mother would come after all of us. Is it true? You defected for an elven female?”

Vonis nodded. “Yes.”

They watched Joyar nod his head slowly. “We always knew you were different than your father.” He said. Joyar saw Isabella look at Vonis oddly in the transmission and he smiled. “Just before your people picked him up on Elear, Vonis here sent a coded transmission to all of us that he used as his network here in The Wilds. It gave us the time we needed to close down our assets and save many lives.”

“Joyar... it has been many years I know... but I need information.” Vonis said. “The Union is my home now... my wife and children’s home.”

The Eanae held up his clawed hand. “You need not explain to me.” He spoke. “I have no wish to get on the bad side of the Union. Not with the way King Leonidas is known to treat his enemies. I owe a debt to you... what is it you need?”

“The High Coven Insurgents that are operating out of The Wilds and in several locations along our border.” Vonis spoke.

“Word is spreading quickly out here that the High Coven is on Earth and that a Cease Fire Accord is not far from being signed.” Joyar spoke. “This was not something that many people expected from your King given his history with them. It has caused everyone to become very cautious in their dealings. Many of those who support the Union are wavering because of this fact. They see it as a betrayal of their trust.”

“What do you mean?” Aricia asked now very interested in the Eanae’s words.

“Your mate is considered by many out here to be the lone beacon of light against the oppression of the Coven.” Joyar spoke calmly. “Even though they fight a war with the Kavalian animals, the Coven still has time to oppress those within their Empire. Many think of the Union and your King to be a singular point of hope that is not lost your majesty. The one ray of lasting defiance to what the Coven is doing.”

“And they believe because the Empress is here and we may sign a Cease Fire with them that we are somehow bowing to them?” Aricia asked.

Joyar nodded. “In a manner of speaking yes.”

“Do you have the information we seek?” Isabella spoke now.

“It is possible.” Joyar replied. “Why would you want this information?”

“The insurgency conducted an attack against the Kavalians on board the King’s own ship Joyar.” Vonis spoke. “They attempted to assassinate the Kavalian Trade Delegation that was enroute here to Earth. In conducting this attack, they put the lives of For’mya Leonidas and the King’s second oldest son Resumar in extreme danger. It was a suicide mission Joyar, and these insurgents were willing to kill whoever they could to complete this mission. They failed... but it also put my mother and her cronies on a much heightened state of readiness across the board.”

Aricia leaned forward in her chair. “Their people boarded a Union transport within Union space, hijacked that transport, and killed eleven Kavalians female aides after raping them for several hours. They then boarded the King’s ship and conducted this attack. These actions alone would warrant we respond in kind, you know this.”

Joyar nodded. “Yet you are contacting me.” He said slowly. “Go on.”

Isabella looked at Vonis. “Brother?” She asked.

“Your brother saved my life and the lives of my younglings.” Joyar spoke. “He allowed many the time they needed to escape and cover their tracks when he defected. He did not leave us hanging in the vacuum of space on our own. That is a debt many of us can not repay. This transmission is more than secure if my knowledge of Union communications is worth anything. And I also know what Queen Aricia speaks is the truth. King Leonidas’s protectiveness of his Queens is well known ever out here. I most certainly have no intention of contacting the High Coven after talking with you. I hate them almost as much as I do the Kavalians. I can not in good faith put at risk others who take a more active role in pursuing their goal of one day bringing down the Coven however. You must understand.”

Isabella nodded her head. “Let’s just say all is not what it appears where it concerns the High Coven Joyar.” She spoke calmly.

Joyar's orange eyes grew a little wider at this information but aside from that he showed no emotion. "That is interesting." He spoke finally.

Vonis leaned forward. "Any information you might have on these insurgents working within The Wilds. Names. Places. Contacts."

Joyar looked at him. "What... what you ask Vonis... there is great risk involved. They are very security conscious. With good reason. They are the only group the Coven Intelligence forces have not penetrated. Their leader is supposedly very well connected and very high up within the hierarchy. He or she is called The General."

"How high?" Vonis asked.

"If I had to guess... within the Empress's inner circle if my guess is accurate." Joyar replied quickly. "And that number has dropped considerably through the years. She trusts fewer than she did when she first took power from Veldruk. Perhaps a few dozen men and women."

"Can you arrange a meeting for us? Quickly?" Isabella asked him.

"To what end?" Joyar spoke.

"Let's just say the King requires some information they have." Vonis spoke again. "And you must inform them they should not attempt anything against the Empress while she is here. There is too much chance for innocents to be injured... and that is something the King will not tolerate."

"And what should I tell them is offered in return for this information?" Joyar asked. "If I knew how to contact them that is."

"The continued ability to operate out of Union space unhindered." Isabella answered. "And perhaps... and perhaps gain a behind the scenes ally in their fight."

Joyar's orange eyes grew even wider now. "Now that is very interesting." He said.

"We must know something very soon Joyar." Vonis told him.

"How soon?"

"Within a few hours."

Joyar leaned forward and began typing into some console they could not see. "Come to these coordinates." He stated. "Four days Vonis. And bring your friends."

Vonis looked at the coordinates as they came over the small screen in front of them. Vonis looked up. "These coordinates are within The Wilds Joyar." He said. "You expect me to bring two Queens of the Union to such a meeting?"

"I know for a fact the insurgent leaders were dressed down by The General for the attack of the Kavalians on the Union King's ship." Joyar spoke. "And you need not fear for their safety for two reasons... both of them are more than capable of taking care of themselves, and together they are a target people would want to avoid. At all costs. The second reason is the insurgents are not your enemies."

Aricia placed her hand on Vonis's arm as he prepared to retort. "We will come to this meeting." She spoke. "In good faith. I suggest you tell your contacts the same thing."

Joyar nodded. "Of course." He said.

"And what do you want for arranging this meeting Joyar?" Vonis asked. "I know you too well... and this is not something you would do for nothing."

Joyar nodded. "What I want is simple." He spoke leaning forward. "Citizenship in the Union for me and all of my family. Forever. Our species does not live as long as yours and the Lycavorians Vonis. Nor those turned by your kind. I want my last years to be filled with peace and security. And I want my family safe."

"How many?" Isabella asked.

"Twenty-three." Joyar answered.

Isabella nodded without hesitation. "Have them at these same coordinates Joyar. An added incentive for you to make sure this is not a trick. If you are true to your promise and your word, you may return with us right then. Aricia and I will see to it that you want for nothing. If not... then you will die with them. And if you are not there... rest assured there will be no place for you to hide."

Joyar nodded, also without hesitation. "Then I will see you in four days."

The transmission ended abruptly and Vonis sat back in his chair. "It is a risk sister." He said.

"Did you trust him back then Vonis?" Aricia asked.

“In our business trust is a relative thing Aricia.” He answered. “I trusted him as far as I would allow myself too.”

“It is a risk that we must take.” Bella spoke.

“I agree.” Aricia said.

“Will the King share your view?” Vonis asked looking at them.

“Yes.” Aricia and Isabella spoke at the same time.

CHAPTER TWENTY

SODRAG

“Milord?” Adriana asked in a very surprised voice when she opened the door to Malic’s quarters and Andro stood there, a smallish velvet bag in his hand.

Andro smiled as he looked at her. “I hope you are settling in.” He said. “Forgive me for coming here so late... I was just returning from a briefing.”

Adriana nodded as she stepped to the side to allow him entry. “It’s not that late sire. Please... come in.”

Andro stepped into the bungalow and turned as she passed her hand over the control panel and the door slid shut. “I apologize again for being so late?”

Adriana shook her head quickly. “It’s not late for me sire.” She answered with a smile. “I...”

“Please Adriana... my name is Androcles. Or Andro for short.” He told her.

“Milord... I... I couldn’t.” Adriana spoke.

“Yes you can Adriana. I insist. I will not have Malic’s sister calling me Milord whenever I interrupt her sleep.” Andro spoke with a grin. “My mothers would be very upset with me if I did that.”

“I wasn’t sleeping Mi... Andro.” She said with a smile. “Really. I was just unpacking a few things.” She replied.

“I apologize for the lack of comforts in the bungalows, but they weren’t really designed for...”

“It is nothing.” Adriana said with a wave of her hand. “I have stayed in far worse. Malic has given me the bed which is the most important thing. At least right now.” She said dropping her hand to rub her swollen abdomen.

“How soon?” He asked.

Adriana smiled. “Three more months.” She answered. “She is our first.”

“You and your husband must be very happy. I was returning from a briefing as I said and I wanted Malic to have this.” He spoke holding up the small bag. “He will be assigned to my section within *Mjolnir’s Hand* and this is something I have done for all of them.”

Adriana smiled. “I think everything that happened today took its toll on them.” She said softly.

Andro looked at her oddly. “What do you mean?”

Adriana led him to the large bay window in the rear of the bungalow and pushed it open all of the way. She pointed out of the window with a smile. “We returned here after darkness fell as you asked and they studied for four more hours straight through. They fell asleep like that an hour ago.”

Andro leaned out the window and saw Vincix’s huge body leaning against the rear of the bungalow, Malic sound asleep between Vincix’s front and rear legs, his head leaning against Vincix’s midsection. Vincix’s head was resting on the ground next to Malic’s thigh, two data pads resting on Malic’s chest, three more on the ground between them. Andro leaned back into the bungalow and closed the window to keep the cool air inside.

“I’ve done that many times myself.” He said turning to look at her with a smile. “It’s not important right now.” He lifted the velvet bag. “Just make sure he gets this tomorrow before he leaves the base.”

Adriana took the bag with a nod and looked at him. “May I?”

Andro nodded. “Of course.” He said.

Adriana untied the silk cord and pulled the bag down to reveal the gold Dragon Armor plated pommel of the *Nehtes*. There were some intricate carvings in the hand grip, and the *Nehtes* looked as if it was brand new. Adriana looked up. “It is beautiful.” She said softly.

“He should find it is perfectly balanced for him and...” Andro said.

“Will he succeed Milord?” Adriana asked softly.

Andro met her eyes. “Succeed?” He asked.

“In... in *Mjolnir's Hand*?” Adriana asked again. “It is the only thing he has ever truly desired sire. When he... when he failed the Academy... our father was not kind to him. He was considered an embarrassment by everyone. When he told all of us he would ride a dragon one day and be a member of *Mjolnir's Hand*... no one believed he could accomplish it. Not even me. They even laughed at him. They thought he was too... they thought he was unintelligent. Our own father... he called him stupid.” She related the story with sadness and anger in her voice. “None of my family... our family... none of them has ever supported him as they have our other siblings. He has always been an outcast. I think they blame him for being born less than what they expected. It is why they acted as they did.”

“You mean using the drugs on him?” Andro asked.

Adriana looked at him shocked. “You... you know about that?”

Andro nodded. “My sister Eliani told me.” He said. “She is Hadarian. She was the one who discovered it several days ago. That is the past now.”

“Is it?” Adriana asked.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “Malic is bonded with Vincix now Adriana. They are bound together more tightly than normal Pairs. It is what separates *Mjolnir's Hand* from the rest of the Pairs in the Union. The bonds we share with our dragon brothers and sisters runs far deeper than most normal Pairs. Essentially we become a part of each other. Vincix is... was a teacher among the dragons. One of the wisest among them who is not an Elder. That knowledge is Malic's now. Malic's strength of body and his will is now part of Vincix. Their desire for the same thing is part of what pulled them together.” Andro looked at her. “Succeed? Your brother has already succeeded Adriana. We did not think we would fill the last position within *Mjolnir's Hand* for many years. It was only when he came onto my ship and I met him that Elynth and I were able to sense there was something more to him. Something that was crying to get out. As we drew closer to Earth it got stronger, and then even others were able to sense the pull towards each other that he and Vincix had. This was meant to be Adriana, never doubt that.”

“He will not be... he will not be slow any longer?” Adriana asked him still unable to comprehend what Andro was telling her.

Andro shook his head. “Whatever affects the drug your parents used on him as a child... whatever those affects were, they ceased being part of him the moment he and Vincix bonded. You will probably notice the changes starting tomorrow.” He said. “He will begin taking on Vincix's traits, and Vincix will take on Malic's traits. They share everything now Adriana and that includes the sum totals of their individual lives. Those traits and experiences and thoughts are now part of them and joined together as one.”

“I could feel the tremors within Mindvoice as they talked.” Adriana spoke softly. “They included me in some of what they were talking about, but for the most part they just sat next to one another looking into each other's eyes and speaking on a level I could not hope to reach.”

“Things will move quickly for them.” Andro told her. “The strength of a bond within *Mjolnir's Hand* accelerates everything because they are able to draw on the experiences and knowledge of all of us. You will see... come time for the ceremony welcoming him and Vincix, they will be completely different. They will have been reborn.”

“And you knew this was going to happen?” Adriana asked.

“It was already meant to be... I only helped matters along. Both of them had reached a major juncture in their lives. Vincix on whether to give up completely his one true desire to be part of us, and Malic had begun questioning all your father and mother had taught him growing up. They had begun questioning themselves, their very purpose and that is never good.” Andro spoke.

Adriana snorted softly. “It is why we are both outcasts.” She said. “Malic because of his learning deficiency and me because I chose to become the mate and wife of a vampire.”

“You followed your own path and made your decision.” Andro spoke. “Malic has now found his path. There are many who still harbor old hatreds, even among our people. It will take many centuries for that to finally be laid to rest. If ever. We can only follow what our hearts and fate have in store for us. No matter what it is.”

“And Malic?”

Andro smiled. "Malic is one of us now. Part of the Sacred Three Hundred that my father formed when dragons first came into the lives of the Union. With you and Vincix and us, he will never be alone again."

"You said this was a stepping stone to what else he wanted." Adriana said. "What did you mean?"

Andro chuckled. "Just remember this... burgundy and yellow." He said. "That is what else your brother desires. More than even he realizes."

"What is that?" Adriana asked.

"You will discover soon enough I think." Andro spoke with a smile. "Your father arrives tomorrow. He was coming to try and convince Malic to leave and he has since discovered you came here to help him stay. I have strict policies when it comes to security clearances and access to this base and your father does not have clearance to enter this base unless I give it to him."

"You... you allowed me to come here? I am not part of the military in any way." Adriana said.

Andro nodded. "Malic needed your guidance and support when I signed that order. He was reaching out to you because he had made his decision to travel down this path he is now on. He will need you even more now, as his sister, his friend and his mentor." He answered.

"Androcles... he is older than me." Adriana said.

Andro nodded. "He sees you as something else because of what you are. He reached out to you because he wants to learn. And you are a teacher. I imagine you and Vincix combined will make him a scholar."

Adriana shook her head after a moment. "It doesn't matter what my father wants." She spoke. "Our father can come here and rant all he likes but it will change nothing now. We will not change to what he wishes us to be. Not now."

Andro nodded. "Then I will allow him limited access as long as he remains on his best behavior." He took a deep breath and Adriana watched him tilt his head slightly as if catching a scent on the wind. "I... I have some other business to attend to before I do what Malic is doing." He said turning back to her with a smile. "My sister Eliani is part Hadarian as I said, and I would feel better if you went and saw her tomorrow to insure everything with the baby is fine. And to let her know you are on the base in case you need her."

Adriana nodded. "That is probably wise." She said.

"Let Malic know that my Uncle Isra will be joining him and Vincix tomorrow at some point." Andro said. "My sister Lisisa and my brother Denali will be with him as well. To help him prepare for the ceremony. The studying I will leave up to you and Vincix as the teachers."

"Thank you Milord." Adriana said softly.

Andro shook his head. "Don't thank me. If anything I should be thanking you and Malic. He has completed the Sacred Circle of *Mjolnir's Hand* and you were part of the catalyst for that taking place. I would imagine when they all get here you will be thanked quite a bit... so get used to it."

Adriana's eyes were wide. "They... they are coming here?" She gasped.

Andro nodded with a smile. "All two hundred and ninety-five that are off Earth. They should start arriving the morning after tomorrow. It will be quite a sight." Andro tilted his head upwards for a brief moment again and then bowed his head to her. "It is late and I will let you go now. Welcome Adriana."

"Andro... what will happen to the dragon that they... that they fought?" Adriana asked quickly.

"The dragon Elder Mother has taken him where he can recover and finally find his true path." Andro replied. "The bond he had with Yuri was forced upon him. It was not a natural event as it is with the others. He is meant for someone else. Someone he has not yet discovered. Something deep inside Vollenth's mind knew this and it was twisting him in his actions and intent as he tried to fight her control over his perceptions. It is not something easily done and it requires a great deal of Mindvoice power to accomplish. Princess Yuri is such a person. Now that Elynth and I have severed that bond, he can recover and perhaps one day he will find the person he is meant to be with." He explained to her. "As with Malic and Vincix... he will know who that individual is when they finally meet. And they will meet one day. Perhaps not for days or months or even years, but they will meet." He bowed his head slightly. "I truly need to go now. Thank you Adriana, and welcome once more."

Adriana watched him turn and exit the bungalow quickly, as if something suddenly was pulling him somewhere else. She looked at the *Nehtes* in her hand as she moved back to the bay window and looked once more down on the ground where her brother and the huge form of Vincix slept.

“You will never be alone again brother.” She whispered seeing the moon bathing them in a soft light. “And I will never doubt you again.”

SPARTA
GOVERNMENTAL OFFICE BUILDING
OFFICE OF QUEEN DYSEA AND QUEEN FOR'MYA

For'mya stared at Dysea's empty chair across her desk as she sipped her mug of coffee. She worried more for Dysea than the others because she was also an elf and knew well the horrors that an Immortal could inflict on a female elf if they so chose. Sexual enslavement not by force but by need. That is what an Immortal could do to a female elf. She kept her fears buried deep for she trusted Dysea's judgment explicitly, and she knew Dysea was extremely lethal when she needed to be. She was much safer with Iriral at her side, but it still did not allow For'mya to not worry completely.

She and Dysea had grown close over the past years and not just as lovers, wives and Queens to the man they both cherished so utterly. They were Queens of not only the Lycavorian Union, but also of Elear, the elven homeworld. This was not something For'mya had wanted or worked for, but it was something that Dysea had insisted on.

“You are the last of the true Elven Royal Blood For'mya; you and your father.” Dysea spoke. “It is you who should sit on this throne, not I. If you will not do so willingly, then I will make you co-Queen and we will rule our people together.”

Dysea had done just that, passing a new amendment to the Elf Constitution that named For'mya as co-Queen of Elear, and for the first time in the history of the elven people they had two rulers who they all adored. The last twenty years had seen them rule their elf homeworld together, almost never disagreeing on what they should do or how they should guide their people. And after their initial meeting and distrust of one another, Dysea and For'mya's father L'tian had grown to deeply care for and respect each other. In many ways, L'tian had become the father Dysea never knew. This is why Dysea did not blink when Anton had presented the information to her, and after she and For'mya had discussed it, they had contacted L'tian on Elear to dig further. For'mya turned her head when the small chime interrupted her thoughts and she saw it was her senior aide.

She reached out and touched the panel. “Yes Un'la?”

“Your father is on secure COM channel seven Lady For'mya.” The young female voice spoke.

“Thank you Un'la... you may put it through here.” For'mya answered as she turned in her chair to face the holo disc in the floor of their office. They had long ago torn down the wall separating the two offices between them since they were co-Queens. For'mya watched as her father's tall for an elf figure take shape and burst into existence with clear precision. “Father... I was going to contact you in another hour or so.”

L'tian's dark eyes twinkled as they always did when he looked at his daughter. She was the image of her mother in many ways and L'tian often thought of how her life had taken shape since Martin Leonidas had entered it. It was more than he could ever have hoped for as a father and his respect and loyalty for Martin Leonidas knew no bounds. “I decided I would beat you to the punch so to speak For'mya my child. Especially considering the information I have.” He stated quickly.

“You are looking well papa.” For'mya said with a smile. “I see you are finally eating what mother is feeding you.”

L'tian waved his hand. “It only took me some time to get used to all this healthy food that your mother has taken to eating.” He answered. “Have you heard from Dysea?” L'tian was one of only three that knew For'mya's and Dysea's location constantly. He was now a very senior and influential member of the Elven Parliament and the right hand to the Elf High Minister.

“She contacted Martin this morning.” For'mya answered. “Everything is proceeding as planned and she will land some time this evening our time.”

“I don't know how comfortable I am with Dysea among Immortals.” L'tian spoke. “Even those that Martin Leonidas says are trustworthy.”

“I would imagine you are feeling exactly how I feel.” For’mya stated. “I worry for her, but I also know she is more than capable of taking care of herself.”

L’tian nodded his head. “Yes... that is without question.” He said. “I was able to obtain the information you and she requested of me. And quite a bit more.”

“Tell me.” For’mya said.

“It would appear that this Las’elh is correct For’mya.” L’tian spoke. “At least given the information you received from her and after speaking with Minister Cunlaut.”

“He admitted this?” For’mya asked stunned.

L’tian nodded. “After I told him you and Dysea threatened to bring him up on charges of treason if he did not tell us everything yes.” He answered. “Las’elh is right... the transport her sister and Cunlaut’s daughter were on was not destroyed. It was hijacked by at least two dozen unknown individuals. They acted swiftly and precisely and were able to subdue the crew and passengers before they were able to react. Definitely not Immortals. According to Cunlaut’s daughter it was done with surgical precision and then they checked the manifest thoroughly before deciding that to keep an elven Minister’s daughter was not in their best interests. They put her in an escape pod with instructions she was to say nothing except that the ship was destroyed. They told her they would be watching her and if she said anything else they would kill everyone they took hostage and then find her and kill her and her entire family. The young woman was petrified For’mya. She still is. I practically had to force the truth from her. I did some checking and we have lost nine ships in the last ten years alone to so called accidents that were questionable at best. When I cross referenced this information among Netnews reports and other official documents I discovered three Hadarian ships and two Acamarian ships that were lost during the same time period. All of them carried elves, and the two Hadarian ships carried some rather advanced medical equipment as well.”

For’mya leaned forward in her chair now. “How many total?” She asked.

“If the manifests were accurate, four hundred nineteen.” He answered. “All of them listed as transport accidents and with the exception of Cunlaut’s daughter, all of the passengers listed as killed in the accidents.”

“That she was the only survivor did not raise questions?” For’mya asked. “Her ship had more than enough escape pods to accommodate the entire passenger manifest. Only one of them returns and with only one survivor and nothing is investigated as to why?”

“The Commander of EI is a boyhood friend of Cunlaut. He knows what happened and to keep Cunlaut and his daughter safe he buried the other incidents and never pressed forward with investigations.” L’tian said. “He is also the one that pushed to get Las’elh vetted out of EI in an attempt to keep her quiet.”

“Sending an EI Recovery Team to Talbor Seven to collect Las’elh is in no way following the directives Dysea and I laid out for their use!” For’mya snapped as she came to her feet. “What was he going to do if she refused to accompany them peacefully? Silence her?”

L’tian watched as she moved to the counter in the office and refilled her mug of Aricia’s coffee. He sipped his own tea as he watched her quietly. He knew his daughter well, and in the time since Martin had turned her they had grown even closer. The daughter he had once known no longer existed, the wolf blood now flowing in her veins making her more passionate about everything. She was still very much in control of her emotions in the typical elven fashion, but there were times when she and Dysea both let their wolf blood come rising to the surface.

“Given that these unknown individuals were able to act with such impunity within Union territory tells me they had help.” L’tian said. “It would not be a stretch to imagine they could follow through with their threat if they so chose to.”

For’mya turned back to look at the image. “And we have no idea who they were?” She asked.

L’tian shook his head. “None. Cunlaut’s daughter says they all wore full face helmets that hid their features. She said they were all large and muscular but she was almost certain they were not Immortals.”

“So some other group is out there targeting elves.” For’mya spoke. “Mercenaries?”

“I also checked the records for all major spaceports within the Union for the last three years since the end of the war.” L’tian said. “There have been no ships reported missing or disappearing under suspicious circumstances in that time. If it was mercenaries... why would they stop after being so successful?”

“Fourteen ships in a decade.” For’mya said. “Perhaps they were frightened that we would catch on to what was happening. You know how Martin regards mercenary scum.”

L'tian nodded. "Not much higher than insects if my memory serves me correctly." He answered. "That must be a trait that is unique to those who come from Earth... Anja, Dysea, Tarifa, all of them seem to consider mercenaries and pirates with particular vitriol."

"Did any of the Hadarian medical equipment appear on the Black Market lists in The Wilds?" For'mya asked.

L'tian shook his head. "Not on any of the lists that Armetus provides to us." He said.

"That is odd." For'mya said. "Hadarian medical technology is highly regarded by everyone. It could have brought them a great deal of wealth."

"That is the other thing For'mya..." L'tian said. "Armetus's people keep track of things like that, yet there has not been a huge influx of elven slaves into the market. Part of that is because of how Martin regards slavery and many have stopped targeting elves and other species altogether, but I find it odd that not one of these elves that were taken has appeared in the slave pits or underground channels and fed this information back to us."

"Well... they had to have been receiving some sort of help from within the Union." For'mya spoke. "Our civilian flight plans are not secret, but nor are they easy to obtain without the proper clearances."

"Can Armetus have some people check on it?" L'tian asked.

For'mya shook her head. "Between what Anton and Cihera are working on, the High Coven and Kavalian delegations here on Earth and trying to confirm the Coven intelligence, the *Krypteria* is stretched very tightly. I do not want to saddle Armetus with another task that would not draw a priority. These events are troubling... but nothing has happened in the last three years and that would not warrant drawing resources from other tasks."

"Then I will handle it." L'tian spoke. "With yours and Dysea's permission and authority, let me take care of it."

"Papa... you are not an intelligence operative." For'mya spoke.

"No... but the Commander of the EI is." L'tian said. "I do not condone what he has done For'mya... but I do understand it. Let me give him an opportunity to make things right. If he knows we have yours and Dysea's full support, I can tackle the political side of it and leave him to discover what he can using EI assets. This does appear to be targeted at elves."

"Does he know Las'elh is with Anton and Cihera?" For'mya asked.

L'tian shook his head. "That was not something I deemed he needed knowledge of."

"You do realize Papa; if you get yourself injured in any way mother and Martin Leonidas will confine you to your home on Elear." For'mya said with a grin. "The better to control you."

L'tian chuckled. "I have no doubt of that." He said.

For'mya nodded. "Very well... I will cut you authorization orders and transmit them to you within the hour. Make it very clear to him that he answers to you Papa. And if he attempts to hide anything else I will have his elf ass arrested and he will be tried here on Earth in a Spartan court."

"I will let him know." L'tian said.

"Where will you start?" For'mya said.

"I am going to get a list of passengers and while he tracks down the names I will try and find the cargo manifests of the ships and determine if this Hadarian equipment has turned up in some of the more unusual places." L'tian said. "You are dealing with the Kavalian delegation daughter... and you need to be focused. Rumors are already starting to circulate that Lisisa told them where to go this morning. The Netnews channels seem to have an inside source and they have been hinting at some rather harsh words and actions that were exchanged this morning between the two parties."

For'mya nodded. "They are trying to use the fact that Pleistarchus is her father to force Kavalian citizenship upon her so that they can gain access to her personal belongings and such. It is my understanding Kavalian females are not afforded many rights."

L'tian nodded. "I had heard this as well." He said. "I take it Lisisa told them what to do with their demands?"

For'mya smiled. "With a little assistance from Denali, yes." She replied. "Though if my perception of this Jiss and Matuarr is accurate they will push their agenda regardless."

“Be mindful For’mya... someone there is leaking this information to the many Netnews channels.” L’tian said. “Something was mentioned about using the Galactic Courts to force Lisisa to do their bidding.”

“We will be mindful father... don’t worry.” She stated. “You just continue to eat what mother places in front of you and stay out of harm’s way.”

It was L’tian’s turn to laugh and he nodded his head. “I will deal with this and you can let Dysea know that as well.”

“Keep me advised of what is happening.” For’mya said.

“Always.” L’tian answered. “I will contact you back as soon as I find something.”

For’mya nodded as the image of her father faded from the disc and she moved back to settle in the chair behind her desk. She sipped her coffee before passing her hand over the desktop control panel. “Un’la... someone is feeding the Netnews channels information they should not have yet.” She spoke evenly. “Have Durcunusaan Security check all outgoing communications from the Senate Meeting room and offices.”

“Yes Milady.” The voice answered. “Right away.”

“And advise Deia I will be a few minutes late for our meeting. I want to check on the little ones before Aurith and I fly over to her office.” For’mya said.

“I will tell her thirty minutes then Lady For’mya?” Un’la’s voice held some small humor in it.

For’mya chuckled. “You know me too well Un’la.” She said.

“I will see to it Lady For’mya.” Her aide replied.

SODRAG

“*Sadi... f’sarn... gi phraktos... f’sarn aluin... ulu doer 'sohna!*” (Oh gods I’m going to come again)

Carisia’s body arched off the bed once more as the orgasm thundered through her lithe frame. Her body was glistening in the light of the moon bathing the bedroom, the very dim illumination globes adding to the dreamlike atmosphere. Her large breasts rose proudly upward as her back domed off the bed, her nipples burning hot points, even as her abdomen clenched almost painfully and her mouth opened in a breathless scream as her sweet come erupted from her body in riotous waves. Her normally maya blue colored eyes were now the cobalt blue color of her vampiric nature, her long fangs completely exposed. This almost violent explosion was unlike any of the others that Sadi had given her this night. It was so much more powerful and staggering, Carisia sure that her muscles would rip through her skin as she clenched the edges of the soft mattress until her knuckles were white.

Carisia had never been with a woman before this night, and Sadi had only the one tryst with Teeria all those years ago. This fact in no way dampened their desire and need for each other and once they fell upon the bed together, they both succumb to what they wanted so desperately. Their exploration had begun slowly as Sadi peeled Carisia’s clothes from her one piece at a time. By the time Carisia was completely naked on the bed next to her, Sadi had long ago discarded the thin robe she wore and their flesh was touching in numerous places. Their exploration had begun with kisses. Sizzling kisses of love, discovery and passion. They were kisses that ignited inside Carisia what had been lying dormant for so long, an unquenchable need that Androcles’s kiss had awakened and almost released. She knew now that he had held back when he had kissed her, something Sadi was not doing in the least. Sadi’s lips were wonderfully soft and tasted faintly of sweet spices, her warm tongue deliciously talented in its movements and the sensations it had caused. Sadi had wasted no time, the burning need in her now ruling her actions. As Carisia withered on the bed beneath her ministrations, Sadi had used her lips and tongue to seek out and find what she wanted. They had danced across Carisia’s wonderfully large breasts, teasing and nibbling on her stiff nipples as her hands had caressed and explored her legs and ass.

The moment Sadi had tasted Carisia’s passion she knew she was hooked. Her pussy was lusciously bare, her labia fully inflamed in lustful passion of her own. Her clit was protruding arrogantly demanding attention, and Sadi willingly lavished that nub with unabashed attention. She encased it within her soft lips and battered it mercilessly with her tongue as her fingers caressed featherlike along Carisia’s smooth silky pussy lips, tracing up one side and down the other before she slipped two fingers deeply into Carisia’s tight tunnel and the floodgates opened fully, and Sadi drank her passion like a fine wine.

Carisia may have only been five foot two and a hundred and ten pounds soaking wet, but she was also a pureblood vampire, with all the strength and skills of her species. It took several minutes after that first explosion and eruption of her essence before she could form concise thoughts again, but then the only thought she had was how badly she wanted to taste this woman. Using her vampire speed and strength, it had been nothing to turn the tables on Sadi, flipping her over onto the bed and then stretching her body out on top of her. After an incredible kiss, a kiss in which Carisia tasted herself on Sadi's lips, she began her own trek downward to the treasure she so desired. It took her forever to explore Sadi's flesh, stopping to fondle and knead Sadi's incredible breasts and suckle her hard nipples. She lavished Sadi's well defined abdomen with long licks and strokes of her tongue as she slid lower between her beautifully tanned and firm thighs. When she saw the incredible tattoo adorning the flesh just above Sadi's visibly excited and moist pussy Carisia wondered if she had perhaps died and gone to paradise. She attempted to focus and inexperienced as she may have been, she tried to do the exact same thing Sadi had done to her to make her quiver and cry out. Sadi's fingers had entwined in her radiant raven black hair, pulling Carisia's head closer as her breathing began to quicken. It happened almost instantly when Carisia plunged two fingers deeply into Sadi's already soaked pussy. Sadi's body went completely rigid, her hips undulating powerfully, shoving her spasming pussy hard against Carisia's face and she erupted as well. Carisia's eyes closed in blissful satisfaction as Sadi's sweetness flooded across her lips and tongue, and like Sadi had done, Carisia drank the passion down without hesitation.

That had begun three very long and nonstop hours of delightful entertainment. They were unable to get enough of each other, causing each other to explode more times than they could remember. Carisia took a slightly more dominant role, for when they were locked together she was always on top of Sadi. The bed sheets were long since torn from the edges and soaked in their sweat and residual excitement, something neither of them were concerned about in the least.

Carisia blinked several times, her eyes wide in wonderment. What had she done to her to make this orgasm so much more powerful? She could still feel lips delicately caressing her still aroused pussy, Sadi's tongue slowly dragging along to capture any drops that may have escaped her lips. As her mind once more came into focus she felt the tongue more keenly now and it was wider and moved with dominance. Her eyes grew a little wider when she felt soft brush of hair against the insides of her thighs and she reached down to grasp Sadi's head and pull her up for a kiss.

Carisia's eyes grew even wider as her fingers found not long silky blond hair, but soft short midnight black hair. She lifted her head instantly even as she saw Sadi's face drop next to her from the side with a loving smile. Carisia's cobalt blue eyes filled with unleashed ardor and worship when she saw Andro lift his face from between her thighs with a ravishing smile, her juices coating his lips and the goatee he wore.

"A... Andro!" She gasped even as he nuzzled the insides of her taut thighs which were thrown over his shoulders and she realized it was Androcles that had just given her the most crushing orgasm of the night. She had been so enveloped within what was happening to her she had not even realized that he had entered the room and Sadi had gleefully surrendered her place between Carisia's thighs to him.

Sadi chuckled as she traced her tongue along Carisia's ear. "I told you he was talented Carisia." She said in a husky whisper.

"How... how did..."

Sadi nuzzled Carisia's cheek before taking her head in her hands and turning her face to look at her. Sadi then kissed her intensely; one hand dropping down to cupped her breast and pinch her nipple. "You didn't think our mate and husband would not smell us together even from across the base did you?" Sadi asked as she drew back her lips, tickling Carisia's top lip with her tongue. "That he would not feel us and our pleasure within Mindvoice?"

"Our... our mate and... and husband?" Carisia exclaimed softly as she felt herself responding to Sadi's passionate kiss.

Sadi nodded with a brilliant smile. "Ours... *Enylarcopri*." She spoke in a seductive whisper. "And I don't think you will be disappointed."

Carisia turned her head once more when she saw Andro rise from between her thighs, gently lowering her legs back to the bed. He was completely naked, his glorious body totally exposed for her eyes to take in. As her eyes wandered over his magnificently sculpted body, Carisia felt her own desire surge to the forefront once more. Her cobalt blue eyes lowered and grew wider still as she saw his equipment. It protruded dominantly to

her eyes, so very long and thick and pulsing with desire and passion all its own. Compared to what she saw before her, what would soon be filling her, Thast's ridiculously small tool was beyond insignificant. It flashed briefly across her mind now why Lycavorian women were so completely devoted to their men. Carisia watched as Andro slowly moved onto the bed on his knees between her wide spread legs, his fingers dragging along her thighs and causing delightful shivers to skitter across her flesh. He moved closer to her, leaning over to drop his hands on either side on her hips until his handsome face was directly in front of hers, with Sadi's looking just over her shoulder. Carisia's heart was racing now, her cobalt blue eyes filled with renewed lust and want.

"I am going to make you ours now *Enylarcopri*." He spoke softly, his voice like wind chimes moving in the breeze yet commanding in tone and intent, as his lips came within inches of hers.

Carisia whimpered softly. "I... I already am yours." She hissed out the words gently as his head lowered to nuzzle the hollow of her throat.

"Not just yet." Sadi's voice whispered in her ear.

Andro's heart was pounding out of control within his chest, Sadi's sweet sugar plume and spice scent was sending his senses into overload mode as they always did. When saturated with Carisia's scent of newly blossoming rose petals as it was now, all conscious thought and decision making left him. He had heard their cries of zeal within Mindvoice, and as soon as he entered the bungalow, he was overwhelmed with the heavy scent of their combined passions. They had drawn him like a moth to a flame, and he had come without question or thought. He lifted his lips to capture Carisia's sweet rose tasting ones and what little control he had left evaporated when he tasted their combined juices on her soft pink lips.

Andro brought his hands under her thighs, leaning forward even more to push her back onto the bed, and with a single will crushing plunge he sank all twelve inches of his thick cock into Carisia. Her most recent orgasm still coated her tightness and it provided him all of the lubrication he needed to slam home fully into her depths. Her lips tore away from his, her eyes wide and she screamed in untainted ecstasy as her arms flew around his broad shoulders.

"Ahhhhhhhhhh!" The sound escaped her lips. "*Vith uns'aa! Morfeth uns'aa dossta ussta ssinsrrigg!*" (Fuck me! Make me yours my love.)

Carisia screamed as every wonderfully thick and throbbing inch of Androcles Leonidas sank into her depths and stole her mind, her heart and her very soul. Whatever lingering doubts that may have occupied the dark reaches of her mind were quickly smashed aside as his powerful arms completely wrapped underneath her waist and pulled her petite frame even closer to his scorching hot body. All ability to think with clarity was lost to her then as Andro began to drive into her with dominating power and divinely rapturous twelve inch strokes. Tears clouded her tightly shut eyes as she realized this was not merely a coupling of mutual desire and need. Andro was making her his, molding her to him and holding nothing back. She could feel every throbbing millimeter of his shaft as it filled her. Every vein as it pressed against the spasming walls of her pussy. He was larger than she had ever imagined him to be, yet he filled her so completely and without the slightest inkling of pain. He stretched her, shaped her to fit around his wonderful cock, and it was all she could do just to keep her heart from exploding at the devastating pleasure ripping through her at this very moment.

And then her heart did explode.

It exploded with emotions and feelings that she had never dreamed existed as three minds flooded together and they entwined the fabrics of their lives irrevocably. Carisia could feel Sadi's head drop to the opposite side of where Andro had tucked his face into her neck, her soft lips dancing across her ear and neck driving her to even higher heights of pleasure. As their Mindvoice shields mingled and combined and their collective power reached outward against those shields all three of them sensed it in the recesses of their minds. A fourth presence that was nearby and so very attuned to them. Attuned to them in a way it should not have been. Three minds probed outward, their collective power searching for that fourth presence. The contact had been fleeting but their united power allowed them to find that thread once more. It was suddenly lost to them however as their physical pleasure regained prominence in their minds and nothing but reaching for that pinnacle mattered anymore.

Andro was on the edge; Carisia's tightness and clenching heat far too much like Sadi's own pussy to allow him much in the way of control. He lifted his head from the crook of her shoulder and neck, one arm reaching for his *Anome*. Sadi did not hesitate as his lips claimed hers, stretching her body out to press against both their frames. Andro groaned loudly within their kiss as his cock swelled larger within Carisia's depths.

Carisia's eyes opened in blissful abandon, her fangs extended and prominent. She saw them kissing passionately, felt Andro's cock grow impossibly large inside her, felt Sadi's lush body pressed against both of theirs. And finally, just as Andro's burning come exploded from his deeply buried cock, Carisia snapped her fangs shut on his thick neck, piercing his jugular and flooding her mouth with his warm and heavenly tasting blood.

This action sent all three of them into volcanic eruptions, Sadi experiencing the first of what would be many orgasms simply because their three minds were so completely joined and she could feel every ebb of pleasure that shuddered through them. Andro's come blasted into Carisia's womb with electrifying force, and tears leaked from her tightly shut eyes. They could feel each other's pleasure racing through their minds to every corner of their beings, and without conscious thought they past that pleasure to another.

Andro crushed Sadi closer to him if that was even possible, even as his other hand held Carisia's head tightly to his neck. Sadi's lips claimed his as Carisia fed ecstatically on his blood even as her body shuddered in a mind numbing orgasm and she felt Sadi's pussy humping their hips, her juices coating their skin. They collapsed onto the bed a few moments later, Carisia sensuously drawing her tongue across the two puncture marks in Andro's neck, sealing the twin holes in his neck. As she drew her head back, Sadi's lips found hers once more and they shared a blistering kiss of love and commitment as he lowered them to the bed. Their limbs entwined together, Andro's powerful arms drawing both of them into his embrace as they basked in the aftermath of what would become the beginning of not only their future, but the future of their bonded ones as well.

Carisia drew her lips away from Sadi's and she looked at them with bright cobalt blue eyes, the tips of her fangs still very visible.

"Please... please tell me we are not finished." She gasped softly.

Andro grinned as he looked at Sadi and then back to Carisia. "Finished?" He said finally.

"*Enylarcopri*... we have..."

"Only just begun." Sadi finished his statement.

Anthar snorted heavily into the wind, trying to shake the sensations coursing through him. They were so powerful, unlike any emotions he had felt from his bonded sister ever before. She had finally found the love she had so desired, but neither of them expected the feelings and emotions to channel to him as well. It was not something he was prepared for, and he had taken to the calm skies to try and push the passion and desire from his mind, and subdue his own feelings of desire and want for a certain obsidian scaled female. He sliced through the skies, reciting the classes and calculations that Vincix had taught them over and over to escape the burning of his own blood. He had changed so much since coming here to this planet, his diet now allowing him to fully mature into the muscular form he now had. His sixteen meter long body had filled out incredibly since arriving on Earth and being able to feed on the protein rich food and prey they were allowed to hunt here. He was faster and stronger than before, his mind sharper with the new skills Vincix had taught them all. The calculations and equations of flight that they had once lacked was now theirs, and it was rapidly becoming second nature and instinct as he adjusted his flight to compensate for the less dense air this high up. His powerful wings beat easily, driving his four metric tone body higher with ease. Since coming here, the bond he shared with Carisia had grown nearly five fold in power and clarity, and that is why even through their natural shields he was feeling her pleasure and happiness and joy. Their minds had mingled even more as the days passed, making their connection stronger and focused. Unfortunately, that bond was now why he was experiencing the same passion and desire she was, but his feelings were directed toward one he had wanted more than anything since the day her golden eyes first penetrated his dreams. The stronger the emotions coming from Carisia, the stronger his desire for Elynth grew; until he could almost feel her hazel musk scent no matter which way he turned.

It was maddening to him, for he did not believe that Elynth would even feel the same as he did. She was far more refined a dragon than any he had ever encountered, and considerably more powerful.

Yet it was all Anthar could do to get her smooth obsidian scales out of his head this night and that was why he had taken to the skies.

An attempt to forget about her. An attempt that was not succeeding in the least.

It was so much more powerful.

Elynth had been able to block it from her mind when Andro and Sadi had come together, though only barely so intense was their love for each other. Now... with Carisia joining them as well, their combined Mindvoice powers were battering her shields in a way nothing ever had. Elynth had listened to Tharua describe her first time with Jeth, pretending she was asleep while Tharua related their coupling to Arydun in a hushed whisper within Mindvoice. It only made the deep set feelings she had for Anthar push closer to the surface. She had dismissed the dreams of him for so long, until he had come here to Earth and she had seen him. Never had she seen a more handsome male dragon in her young life, and there were dozens of their kind that wanted to court her. Most were too afraid to approach her father for his permission and thus remained away, and Elynth's indifferent attitude towards them also was part of why none had yet formally approached her. Elynth now knew why she acted as she did.

The cerise colored Anthar.

He had been part of her dreams for so long, and now that he was actually here among them and so much more handsome than in her dreams, Elynth was beside herself with trying to push her own desire and passion to the back. It had almost worked, at least up until tonight. She should have expected it, the intensity of what she would feel, but she knew there was no way she could have suppressed it for very much longer.

Perhaps it is time to follow our own path sister. Andro's voice had filled her mind just before he returned home this night. She could sense the building passion within him as he drew closer to Sadi and Carisia. ***I will not walk in my father's shadow any longer. It is time for me to reach for and grab what I want. Time for us to reach for and grab what we want sister. Anthar is what you want isn't he Elynth?***

Yes. She had answered without a blink of hesitation.

Then let us grab what we want sister.

Elynth had made for the pens immediately after that conversation, only to find that Anthar had taken to the skies already, unable to hide the burning of his blood. She had followed instantly, pulling herself high and trying to find him within Mindvoice. It wasn't hard for her to do, and she pulled close to him from underneath watching as he snorted and shook his head trying to fight the sensations within him. Elynth felt them as well, her heart racing as she flew along beneath him and to his rear. Her golden eyes watched with increasing desire as long his muscular form moved with each beat of his wings. He was larger than the average Firespitter by at least a meter, and would probably grow another meter or two over the course of the next few hundred years, but that would only add to his beauty in her eyes. He kept going higher in a losing effort to fight what she knew he was feeling, for she felt it rippling through her body as well.

Andro was right.

And now was the time she needed to act and grab what she wanted.

Anthar banked slightly, rolling onto his back, his magenta colored eyes staring at the moon. He was at thirty-three thousand feet and still his blood was racing and burning. He snorted loudly and trumpeted out in the darkness in anger directly at the moon.

Why can't I fight it! He bellowed out in Mindvoice.

For the same reason I can't fight it. The soft female voice echoed in his thoughts. Anthar rolled over instantly, his magenta eyes sweeping the sky all around him. ***I want it more than I want to fight it.***

Anthar's keen eyes swept left and right of him, and he dipped his wings slightly to shift course, scanning the empty sky all around. ***Elynth?***

Anthar? Her voice was like music to his mind.

Where... where are you? What are you doing up here?

Making a decision I have been denying for a long time. Elynth answered. ***And I have been fighting the same things you are fighting right now.***

I can't block them! Anthar exclaimed. *No matter what I do... I can't block them! It's too powerful!*
Why... why do you want to block these feelings Anthar? She asked her voice in his mind still whisper soft. *Why not surrender to them?*

Because it is you I want! It is you that has filled my dreams for so long! Just like Andro has filled Carisia's! He screamed out. *And I am not good enough for you!* He heard her chuckle softly within Mindvoice. *And you laugh at me now!*

Not at you my handsome Anthar. At us.

What... what do you mean?

We are the bonded dragons to two of the strongest Mindvoice users alive Anthar. And when they have decided to surrender all that they are to each other, we still fight what we know is meant to be. Elynth spoke. *What our own bodies and minds tell us is meant to be. Why do you think that is?*

Elynth... He began.

I desire you just as strongly as you desire me my handsome Anthar. She spoke with a husky voice filled with desire and want.

Do not play with me! He snapped out.

Look down you fool male! Elynth commanded. She waited for his head to whip around and turn downward where she flew beneath him not ten meters away. *You are so clouded with trying to deny what you want that you let me get this close to you undetected. I want you just as badly as you want me Anthar.*

Why do you tease me Elynth! He demanded in a subdued tone.

Elynth took a deep breath and rolled inverted so that the lighter obsidian colored scales of her belly was exposed to him, as well as her sex, which was swollen with excitement and passion. She smiled inwardly at hearing his audible intake of breath even as fast as they were flying and knew then her decision was the right one. *I tease you because you are who I want as well Anthar.*

Elynth propelled herself slightly ahead of him and adjusted her flight to ease up within a meter of his snout. It was here that she released a heavy burst of her female scent into the air directly into his snout just as her mother had told her to do. Isheeni had told her daughter it would send her father into passionate fits when she did that to him, but because she was mated it would not draw any other males. Elynth was not yet mated and her scent would carry that fact until she did mate. Anthar's magenta eyes exploded open as her hazel musk scent and desire spilled across his muzzle. His eyes narrowed a little as he heard her chuckle softly.

You are who I want Anthar, and you had better take me before my scent draws every unmated dragon within a thousand kilometers. Elynth spoke the words that set herself free just as her bonded brother had.

Elynth are you...

Elynth released another more sustained burst of her scent directly into his snout before he had even finished his sentence. *I desire no one but you Anthar! Now take me you fool male... and mark my scent as yours so that others do not come here thinking I just gave them an open invitation! I desire no one's attentions but yours!*

Anthar snorted loudly and peeled up and away from her. Elynth's eyes filled with worry as she watched him draw away quickly, and then they filled with anticipation as she watched him roll over and plunge towards her.

Elynth's eyes nearly bulged from her head and she let loose with a trumpet of unabashed pleasure and passion as Anthar slammed into her, his huge cock guided by instinct along and penetrating her fully. Pleasure unlike any her mother had tried to describe tore through her body and she clamped her talons into Anthar's armor like scales, attempting to draw him even deeper. He bellowed out his own trumpet of passion that rolled across the clouds like an echo before folding his wings around her, collapsing her wingspan within his and they plummeted towards the ground far below. Elynth wrapped her long neck around his as they fell, her golden eyes ablaze with heavy passion and she clamped her teeth onto his shoulder as his huge organ stroked into her with deliberate thrusts, filling her more completely than Elynth thought possible. The pleasure seared across her mind and her eyes became heavy with arousal and the burning of her dragon blood for this male who was making her his.

Gone was the hesitant nature and questioning personality. Now Elynth's talons dug deeper when he tried to withdraw, and they pulled him even closer when he rammed back in. Her fangs left his shoulder as the first

orgasm of her life caused her to trumpet her joy to the moon, her pleasure amplified by Anthar's organ swelling within her depths and filling her with his searing hot seed.

They parted still several thousand feet above the earth, both of them snapping into parallel turns away from each other. Elynth found herself suddenly very weak and she made for the small clearing on the top of the mountain below. She flared her wings and alighted gently, her heart still racing out of control. A sensation of not being fulfilled washed over her as she flared her wings suddenly. That could not be it she thought to herself. It can not be over. She could not have been wrong about what she felt for him. He was the one... but the sense of fulfillment was not there. It...

Elynth?

She turned quickly and Anthar was upon her again, knocking her over onto her back and slamming himself into her once more. She bellowed out her joy into the dark sky, his talons lowering her gently to the soft dirt beneath them as his massive cock filled her to overflowing once more. And then his mind opened and filled her completely and Elynth saw all that he was, all that he knew and all that he wished for. Foremost among that was her love.

His trumpet echoed hers as her talons gripped him tightly, drawing him tighter; not wanting to lose what was coursing through every fiber of her being. Her wings beat the ground madly in blissful delight, her tail slamming against the grass in rapid succession as he thrust into her with dominating power. This is what she had dreamed; the total and unconditional devotion Anthar was showing her by opening his mind to her. Even as their physical bodies were joined in carnal delights, their minds joined in idyllic bliss. His powerful thrusts were more measured and controlled as he plunged into her swollen sex, keeping her poised on the edge, every nerve singing out. His magenta colored eyes remained focused on her beautiful dragon snout, even as her golden orbs fluttered in ecstasy. And then the pleasure spiraled out of control and they both lifted their heads to the night sky and bellowed out their release and pleasure. Anthar hunched against her, holding himself deeply buried within her sex, her talons pressing hard against his scales and even drawing blood in several spots. As his huge wings flared out and then gently arched around to wrap her within their embrace, Elynth felt her eyes become moist. Though they could not cry as most species did, for they lacked the major tear glands, her golden eyes did become very moist and she lifted her wings inside Anthar's huge span. Her wings formed an inner embrace contained by his wings and Elynth sighed joyously as his large body came to rest on top of hers. Her golden eyes fluttered heavily, and it was only moments before both of them drifted into the peaceful embrace of sleep. Anthar's voice filled her mind just before sleep took her and his words made her heart sing out in unabashed love and devotion.

For eternity my beautiful Elynth. He spoke. For eternity.

SPARTA

"...is not turning out to be a very relaxing vacation." Martin told Aricia and Isabella as they stood on the tarmac behind the transport that would take them up to *MJOLNIR'S HAND*. They had had a relatively quiet dinner the night before, and after putting the children to sleep they had gathered in their bedroom, all of them content to simply be naked and lying together in some fashion.

Aricia laughed softly. "When was the last time we had a true vacation Beloved?" She asked.

"It's been a while." He answered. "I really did mean for the five of you to take week in Gytheio after we got settled."

"Then when everyone has returned you can make it up to us." Bella said. "And we will hold you to that offer."

"I will keep that bargain." He said with a smile. "The five of you need your girl time together... I know that."

"Girl time?" Isabella asked as she rolled her eyes.

Martin grinned. "Best thing I could come up with so quickly." He pulled them both close to him and they instinctively pressed against either side of his muscular body. "How long will you be gone?" Martin asked.

“A week... no more.” Aricia answered. “This meeting is not far into The Wilds and we will eliminate much of the travel time by Jumping to Gate Thirty-three and crossing the border through Bontawillian space under Shroud.”

“Have Komirri keep the Strike Wing Shrouded unless you come under attack.” Martin told them. “There’s no sense in letting anyone know how many ships we travel with.”

Aricia reached up and ran her hand down the shoulders of his ArmorPly body armor, the crimson color on his shoulders signifying that Mjolnir’s Hand was once more at full strength. “When is the ceremony?” She asked.

“Two days.” Martin answered with a proud smile. Aricia and Isabella Leonidas knew what Mjolnir’s Hand meant to him as a complete unit, and to finally see it at full strength once more filled their mate and husband with pride. “Andro and Elynth did well. Malic and Vincix were hidden right under our noses and they will make a powerful addition.”

“Has anyone told Dalah yet?” Aricia asked.

Martin shook his head. “Arzoal wants to surprise her.” He replied. “And they need these three days to fully complete their bond.”

“Vonis is relative certain we can trust this Joyar.” Bella spoke softly. “We will be fine *m'ranndii*. You agree with our deal I take it?”

Martin nodded without hesitation. “Of course.” He stated. “When have I ever second guessed either one of you? Any of you for that matter?”

“It’s nice to know we have such control over you Beloved.” Aricia said in a husky voice.

Martin nodded and pulled Isabella closer to him, kissing her passionately as Aricia watched with a happy smile. Isabella drew back and caressed his face for a moment staring into his eyes with a loving smile.

“We will see you soon.” She said. “Contact us if you hear from *ussta* she-elf?”

Martin nodded. “You know I will.” He said.

Isabella nodded and kissed him once more and then turned and headed for the transport leaving him with Aricia. Martin waited until she was out of earshot before speaking.

“She is worried about Dysea *Saaurano*.” Martin said turning back to look at Aricia.

Aricia nodded slowly. “Yes... but she trusts in Dysea’s and your judgment completely.” She replied. “That doesn’t mean she does not worry though.”

“I do know the feeling there.” He stated.

“Beloved... be mindful of what is happening with Anja.” She said softly. “There is something bothering her. Something that she is not telling us because she does not want us to worry.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “What do you think it is?”

Aricia shook her head. “She is almost as good as you at brushing things off.” She said. “I think this time whatever the Elders are doing has her concerned more than she is letting on. You have felt her anger... just on the edges of her aura?”

Martin nodded. “Yes... but I did not want to press her on it.”

“That they would even suggest something like taking our children from us tells me there is more to what is going on.” Aricia said. “Perhaps more than even Anja sees.”

“I will be mindful.” He said drawing her into his full embrace. Aricia smiled brightly and wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders. “When you return Aricia Leonidas... I am going to take you into the mountains and curl your toes. Just my *Anome* and I.”

“Hmmm... that sounds very promising.” She told him in a husky voice. Aricia covered his lips with her and kissed with scorching passion and promises of pleasures to come. She nibbled on his bottom lip before nuzzling his neck firmly. “I will see you when we return.”

“Yes you will.” He stated.

Martin squeezed her hands and then watched as she too turned and headed for the transport. He stood there as the transport’s engines spooled up and then the ship was lifting off and was quickly gone. He didn’t pause then and turned himself and headed for the *STRIKER DT* that waited. He crossed the two hundred meters to the ship, Endith starting their engines as she saw him approaching, and moved quickly up the ramp into the rear. Torma turned to look at him as his hand came down on the ramp controls.

[Do you have as many questions as I Martin? Questions as to why all of this seems to be happening all at the same time?] Torma asked him.

Martin met his bonded brother's gaze. *[I'm glad I'm not the only one who thinks it stinks to high heaven.]*

[What do we do?] Torma asked.

[What can we do?] Martin answered as he came up to stand in front of him and Torma lowered his massive head to within inches of Martin's face. *[We have no choice but to let it play out. At least until we get more information.]*

[Isheeni and I had hoped this would be a calm six months.] Torma spoke.

Martin nodded. *[You and me both Torma. You and me both.]*

Martin reached up and patted Torma's obsidian scales. *[We'll be ok.]* He said. *[We go down... look around... bring Yuri back and then we can relax until the ceremony. At least we have that to look forward too.]*

Torma nodded his massive head. *[Yes... there is that to consider.]*

Martin shifted his eyes and saw Aikiro and several others sitting on the bench and watching him. No doubt she could feel the tremors within Mindvoice easily enough, but she was unable to penetrate their shields and listen to them speaking. *[I should have told Endy to use all possible haste.]* He stated. *[Taking our time means I have to entertain Aikiro for two whole hours.]*

Torma chuckled. *[Better you than me brother.]*

[Yeah... tell me about it. You could just eat her and be done with it.] Martin said.

Torma shook his head. *[Too tough.]* He replied. *[I would expend too much energy trying to chew the stubbornness from her bones.]*

[Oh that's a pleasant thought.] Martin said with a smile. *[Are you sure you won't do that for me?]*

Torma tilted his head to the side and gazed at Martin with the dragon equivalent of an 'Are you insane look'. Martin chuckled. *[Not going to happen huh?]*

[No.]

[Ok... well I had to ask.] He said as he watched Aikiro get to her feet and move back towards them. He forced a smile onto his face as she approached. "Empress?"

"Are we leaving now?" Aikiro asked. "We have been waiting on this ship for over an hour."

"It's only 0300 where we are going Aikiro." Martin answered. "Most of the base is still sleeping. Don't worry... we'll get there early enough... have some breakfast and then take a look around and see how everyone is doing."

"I would like a private meeting with my family while I am there." She stated.

"I can arrange that no problem." Martin spoke.

"This base must be on one of the other continents west of here if it is 0300 there." Aikiro said.

Martin nodded. "Yep!"

"You have derived technology from your Mindvoice ship that blocks any probe I make Martin Leonidas. Why not just tell me where it is?" Aikiro asked.

"And make your life easier? Perish the thought." He said with a smile.

"What else have you derived from the technology on that ship?" Aikiro asked evenly. "In reviewing the history cubes you gave to me, it is easy to ascertain that our ancestors were far more technologically advanced than either of our peoples."

"That's a safe bet." Martin said crossing his arms over his chest.

"I have as much right to that technology as you do." Aikiro stated. "Perhaps even more."

"See that is where you are wrong." Martin said. "I have no intentions or aspirations to conquer or take what is not mine. Can you honestly stand there and tell me if I gave you some of this technology that we have developed... and we have developed some things from that. We may be animals to you, but we are smart animals. Can you tell me that you will not use that technology to wipe out the Kavalian species?"

"We are at war with them!" Aikiro hissed.

"Yes you are, however, war and genocide are two completely different things." Martin said. "Something tells me you wouldn't differentiate between the two."

"You can't stand them either!" Aikiro snapped.

Martin nodded. “No I don’t. That doesn’t mean I would try and wipe out their species. I don’t like you either... and I haven’t used any of that new technology to take you out now have I. And I have more of a reason to dislike you than I do the Kavalians.”

“That is not something you could accomplish Martin Leonidas.” Aikiro stated confidently to him. “No matter how much you boast.”

Martin smiled and stared at her for a long moment. “Are you so sure of that Aikiro?” He asked softly. “I’ll let you in on a little secret Empress Aikiro of the High Coven. I may not have anymore agents within your command structure... or even within High Coven space, but I have eyes and ears everywhere. If I really had a hardon for you, I could have walked right into High Coven space the moment the Kavalians pulled back ten years ago and we would have cleaned your clocks in less than eight months. Period. End of story.”

Aikiro forced a laugh to come out for she saw something in his eyes that told her what he was speaking was no boast. “You... you are lying.” She finally said.

Martin tilted his head to the side a little. “You think so?” He asked softly never taking his eyes off her face. “Why don’t you ask Moran and then chew on what he tells you for a while Aikiro.” Martin moved past her several steps and stopped. “The flight is just under two hours. If you have anything specific you would like for breakfast let me know and I can forward the request before we arrive. Enjoy the flight Aikiro.”

Aikiro turned slowly and watched him move quickly past the benches and head up into the cockpit portion of the *STRIKER*. Aikiro had always considered herself an excellent judge of people and whether they were lying to her or not. Suddenly her instincts were screaming out louder than they ever had before, and they were telling her that whatever she may have felt towards Martin Leonidas and his people...

They were telling her that Martin Leonidas had not lied to her just now.

ULU SCIMITAR

Her body lowered back to her bunk, her sleeping t-shirt thoroughly soaked with sweat, the nipples of her breasts protruding proudly through the damp fabric as if someone had been sucking on them for hours. Her chest rose and fell heavily as she tried to get her breathing under control. Her dark eyes were wide in wonderment, the sheets of her bed drenched in her come, and her thighs and stomach still quivering in the aftermath of the three volcanic orgasms she had just experienced rapid fire. They had come one directly after the other, more powerful than any she had ever received while making love with Tarren, and beyond any she had ever been able to produce herself. They had cascaded upon her, one after the other, with no break in between.

The dreams had been so vivid... so real. The bodies of the others in her dream had been right there, the satiny blond hair and raven colored locks of the two women. The black haired female was a vampire she knew, for it was almost as if she had felt the prick of her fangs in her neck when she bit first the man and then the blond haired female. The feel of those fangs had caused her body to heave off the bed in the stunning power of the two orgasms that came with that feeling. The incredibly delicious looking body of the male, his huge cock larger than any she had ever seen, far larger and thicker than Tarren. She had felt every quiver, every single moment of agonizing pleasure they had experienced as if it was her very own. As if she was there in that bed with them.

Ne’Veha took a deep breath as her mind began to clear and the buzzing of her COM panel brought her eyes down to the desk in her small quarters. She looked around her quarters quickly, drawing her legs up and tossing them over the side of the bunk. She gasped as her bare feet touched the floor and she rose to her feet. She had to steady herself on the edge of the bed and she felt her juices slowly roll down the insides of her thighs. The shirt was all she usually wore to bed, and like most female elves Ne’Veha detested any kind of undergarment. She moved quickly to the desk and activated the COM panel. The small holo image of her co-pilot appeared.

“Yes?” She asked in a raspy voice.

“Ne’Veha?” The male spoke. “Ne’Veha, are you alright?”

“Yes... yes I’m fine Pai’lan.” She answered quickly. “What is it?”

“We have been assigned to the morning patrol exercises and I wanted to know if you wished to meet for breakfast to go over flight plans and tasks before we launched.” He spoke.

Ne’Veha nodded slowly. “Very... very well. I will shower and meet you in the mess lounge.”

“Are you sure you are ok Ne’Veha?” He asked. “You look like... do you have company Ne’Veha?” He asked with a smile.

Her eyes flared. “What? No!” She exclaimed. “I’ll meet you in twenty minutes Pai’lan!” She detected the smile on his face as the transmission ended and Ne’Veha stood up to her full height of five foot three. “It was just a dream.” She spoke aloud. “An exquisite dream... but still only a dream.”

Ne’Veha felt sated like never before in her life. Tarren had been her first man, and after the first few times it had grown pleasant to be with him. He had never made her feel as she did now though, so completely fulfilled, but at least he was real to the touch. No matter how much she had responded to this dream, it was not real. There was no man out there with two women of such beauty fawning over him, especially not with a cock like she saw in her dream. While Ne’Veha had refused Tarren’s invitation to join him and his other elf female in their bed, she had never been dismissive of that type of relationship. Had he asked her before hand, after they had been together a few years, Ne’Veha probably would have been very open to it.

Ne’Veha realized she hadn’t thought about Tarren in several weeks until just this very moment, and that fact made her confident that he was well and truly out of her life. She took a deep breath and moved for the shower in her quarters.

Perhaps she would have a similar dream tonight.

BELID THE WILDS

Colonel Drtev of the KFI had never really cared for Immortals when he worked with them daily. He cared for them even less now. His cobalt blue eyes held nothing but death and mayhem for the two much larger Immortals that held him pinned to the wall, however he was not in a position to do anything about it. He tasted his own blood from his split lips, his arms pinned to his sides and his head throbbing from where they had slammed him into the solid steel wall. His eyes cut to the large Immortal that moved up in front of him, his dark eyes filled with hate and cruelty.

“I’ll give you thirty seconds to tell me why you have been looking for us Pureblood.” The Immortal spoke. “Then I will gut you and leave you here in this warehouse to die while we drink to your corpse.”

“I was ordered to find you.” Drtev hissed. “*Usstan xsa zhaunus kat ssinssrin ulu ragar dos.*” (I damn sure didn’t want to find you.)

“Ordered by whom?”

“Marshall Pusintin of the Kavalian Federation.” Drtev replied knowing that to lie would only lead to a faster death. And he had no desire to die.

“What does the Lycavorian traitor want with us?” The Immortal asked.

“He has a proposition for your commander.” Drtev replied. “A task he wants you to perform.”

“What task?”

“I was ordered to give it directly to your leader.” Drtev spoke.

“I am Phy’iad. These are my Immortals.” The Immortal spoke moving closer. “So speak Pureblood.”

“He came without weapons Commander.” One of the Immortals that held him spoke holding out the data pad. “He carried this.”

“So you are either telling the truth or you think too highly of your skills Pureblood.” Phy’iad said taking the pad. “Which is it?”

“Marshall Pusintin wants you to complete a task for him.” Drtev said. “Once you have done that I am to contact him and he will come to where you designate to insure you can do what it is you say you can do.”

“And again I ask you what this task is?” Phy’iad spoke baring his vampiric fangs. “Do not make me ask a third time.”

“It is all there.” Drtev answered motioning with his head to the data pad. “Enter the code nine nine four one.”

Phy'iad's large finger entered the code and the pad came alive with the typed message. His dark sunken eyes grew slighter wider as he read for several moments and then he looked up at Drtev. "Is this Pusintin *wun quarth d'ukt shar?* Why would I want to do this and risk all that we have now?" (In command of his mind)

"I was instructed to tell you price is no object." Drtev said. "You can name it and it will be paid."

"We must be alive to spend it fool!" Phy'iad spoke. "I am many things... but I am not *ushdui*. Why would he want us to do this?" (Crazy)

"I don't know all the details." Drtev spoke. "I assume it would be something he discussed with you if he was satisfied with whatever results you show him. This task will lead to another task in the future that is more important."

"What task?" Phy'iad asked.

"I do not have knowledge of that." Drtev spoke.

"And why would he send you to deliver this message?" Phy'iad snapped. "I have no more love for the Kavalians than I do for Purebloods."

"He sent me because I am expendable and I knew where to begin trying to find you and your organization." Drtev replied honestly. "If this is not something you wish to undertake then just tell me that and I will be on my way. I have no love for your kind either and I do not wish to remain among you any longer than necessary."

Phy'iad laughed. "You are very brave to speak in this manner to me Pureblood."

"It's not bravery." Drtev answered. "I am consigned to my fate whatever it may be. I will either die fighting you, or the High Coven, or I will die by the hands of the Kavalian Secret Police. The how and the why is meaningless now."

"Having second thoughts about throwing in your lot with the Kavalian dogs are you?" Phy'iad said.

"No." Drtev answered immediately.

Phy'iad stared at Drtev for a long moment. "Release him." He told his two men. Drtev made no sudden moves as they released him and he flexed his arms to work out the kinks. "This will not be cheap." He spoke holding up the data pad. "We will have to take them from one of the resort moons near the Union border. There is always more security and risk involved when operating that close."

"Can you do it or not?" Drtev asked.

Phy'iad nodded. "We could always use new playthings." He spoke.

"How long?" Drtev asked.

"A week to plan and execute." He answered immediately. "I will contact you when it is done. Where will you be?"

"I have reserved a suite on Ricot Four." Drtev answered. "4483. I will remain there for one week and one day. If I do not hear from you by then I will assume you failed and I will return to Cabelir."

"We don't fail Pureblood." Phy'iad snarled.

Drtev smiled for the first time. It was a smile of regret and despair. "I have learned many things serving the Kavalians Immortal." He spoke. "I have an idea what it is they will attempt. And what your role in that will be. Trust me, you may succeed in your plans for the immediate future... but ultimately if I am right in what I think, you will fail."

Phy'iad smiled as well. "We shall see." He spoke. "We shall see. Take him back to the tavern. I will contact you when we have completed this operation and we have what your Marshall requires. I want a hundred million credits for this. We will talk of further payment when he tells us what it is he wants in the end."

Drtev nodded. "I will see to the transfer of the credits." He spoke.

"Do that." Phy'iad said. "When that is done we will act."

BONTAWILLIAN LOW GRAVITY FRIGATE

"...mean you lost them?" The Kavalian officer snarled in the transmission. His blue eyes were not in any way inviting.

Gareld stared at the transmission from the small office he had off the bridge of his ship. "It is just as I explained to you. She had help. A pureblood traveling with Immortals. They were able to escape us near Yocetu

and my ship does not have the sensor capability to scan several sectors at once or to track them once they go to Shroud.”

“She is the elf daughter of the criminal Leonidas!” The Kavalian snapped. “Why would Immortals be helping her?”

“That is another story within itself.” Gareld spoke. “If you wish me to complete the task I will need assistance. The G9s have a limited range, and there are only so many planets they can go to but it would take me several months to search the nearby sectors with just my ship. We do not have the range of advanced sensors to conduct such a search.”

“You were paid fifty million credits and you told us you could do this Gareld!” The Kavalian spoke.

“Yes... and had not the Immortals interfered I would have.” Gareld snapped back. “You did not tell me she would draw interest from Immortals!”

“We do not deal with the scum that used to serve your kind!” The officer barked. “We kill them!”

“Yes, well it is that scum that has taken your fifty million credit elf.” Gareld spoke. “And I am not equipped to fight Cha’talla and his Immortals.”

“Cha’talla?” The officer spoke leaning forward in his chair. “You said Cha’talla. We were under the impression that the former High Lord’s Captain was dead. Killed by his very hand.”

Gareld nodded. “Yes... many were led to believe that. It is not true however. He told him. “He was saved by this pureblood female I have been speaking of. She is his plaything it seems. He has taken his entire Akruvian tribe and hides somewhere within The Wilds. If we find Cha’talla... we find the elf female.”

The Kavalian officer was silent for a moment. “Stand by on this channel Gareld. I need to contact my superior for directions.”

Gareld nodded. “I’ll be here.” He stated as the transmission ended and he sat back in his chair. He turned his head to look at his executive officer.

“We are taking a chance involving them in this way Gareld.” Sandur spoke. “And the men will not be happy about having to deal with Immortals. Not after we lost twenty-four on Yocetu.”

Gareld nodded. “A necessary risk Sandur.” He spoke. “I have made arrangements for you and I should the need arise. You have been beside me since the beginning. All is not lost yet however.”

“The funds?”

“Safely tucked away in four different accounts that only you and I know of.” Gareld spoke.

“Do we want to cross the Kavalians Gareld?”

“For the seventy million credits we made on this operation I would betray my very own mother.” Gareld said. “And if they help us to find her... we will not have anything to worry about.”

“He seemed very interested in the fact that Cha’talla is alive.” Sandur said.

“Yes... I thought that odd as well.” Gareld spoke. “It doesn’t matter really. If they want her that bad they will help us. And from the way they jumped at this opportunity when I first presented it to them, they want her Sandur.”

“I hope you are right.” Sandur spoke. “I hope you are right.”

SODRAG

“...he is correct Yuri.” Aikiro spoke from the portable chair she occupied inside the huge hanger.

The remainder of the flight to this base had been uneventful, Leonidas remaining in the cockpit of the *STRIKER* and his beast in the pens. When they landed, the dawn was beginning to spread its fingers across the sky and he led them to the large mess lounge. It was a common misconception that vampires did not need to eat. Contrary to the ancient Earth legends and myths, vampires were about as undead as Lycavorians and humans. It was true that they drank blood, and that they needed it to survive, but that was not their only means of sustenance. They could eat normal food just as well as the next person and upon entering the mess lounge they found many men and women had already begun to rise and were in the lounge when they got here drinking coffee and talking in quiet voices as they ate their food. And many of them were vampire members of the Durcunusaan detachment assigned to the base.

Aikiro was able to eat breakfast with her daughters and grandchildren, Javier and Lucia doing most of the talking during the breakfast, eager to show their grandmother what they had learned. Neither of them, however, gave their instructors any of the credit. After the breakfast Martin walked with Aikiro as they moved among the stations of hand to hand training that Zarah Leonidas was conducting, as well as the close quarter's flight maneuvering that Daurgo was instructing the dragons through. She sat through a brief class in Ground Support tactics for the pilots, noticing that Toria seemed very animated, more so than at any time since she had known the young woman. Looking at her, Aikiro decided she missed the red head's attentions and would take her back with her to Sparta. Though she remained silent during most of the short tour, Aikiro grudgingly admitted to herself that the instruction was intense and very thorough. She also was able to take in and memorize at least the portions of the base she was able to see. She didn't expect and was not given a tour of the main Operations Command and Control center, but she was able to mark entry ways and exits to that one story facility. She was also able to locate at least two positions that had to be assisting in generating the Mindvoice Shield that encompassed the entire base. She had been unable to sense anything before moving through a certain point, but once inside the shield her mind exploded with the thoughts and emotions of everyone within the shield.

Narice was being very reserved, more so than she usually was, and Carisia remained silent for most of the breakfast. Aikiro noticed a flush in their tanned skinned however, and she easily noticed that their Mindvoice shields had increased significantly in power, Carisia's even more than Narice. The dragons as well had radically more power in their Mindvoice shields from when they had arrived on Earth, and many of the Riders had grown in stature as well. Where as before she could easily touch all of them and breach their shields, she found it increasingly difficult to do now, not without directing more concentration to the attempt. She knew it was because their bonds with their dragons was growing more powerful, and to try and force anything while she was here would be a drastic measure she did not want to use for risk of it being detected.

Now as they gathered in one of the empty hangers near where the STRIKER was parked, Aikiro would get a better sense of what was really happening. She could detect no listening devices nearby or set up within the hanger itself as they gathered around and sat at the large table that had been set up for them.

"Mother I..." Yuri began.

"It is the truth Yuri. I had our own medical people on the *INQUISITOR* confirm and verify the information and data from the Hadarian witch. Leonidas is not the one who raped you nor is he Lisisa's father." Aikiro said softly. "It was his brother Pleistarchus."

Yuri sat in the chair still very stunned even though she had read completely through the information Androcles had given to them. The pad had been signed by her mother and unaltered in any way, but Yuri still could not believe the facts in front of her.

"How... how could that be?" Yuri gasped.

Aikiro shook her head. "I don't know all the details, but his brother, who we now know as Pusintin, is Lisisa's father." She replied. "Somehow he made his way inside whatever facility you were staying in and then faked the call from Leonidas. You saw what I sent you." She stated. "It matches perfectly with the time you were raped and then confirmed by some grainy but still very viewable security tapes. It is also the way they were able to confirm Pusintin's true identity. Leonidas was confirmed as on the EDEN Moon Base when you were raped daughter. That is in the standard logs from the base. Not to mention Lisisa's core DNA data strands match Pusintin's, not Martin Leonidas."

Yuri got to her feet slowly and walked around the table deep in thought. Aikiro and the others watched her as she moved in silence. She finally stopped behind Lucia and looked at her mother. "It does not matter." She spoke suddenly. "I do not distinguish between the two. They are both animals as far as I am concerned."

"Your hatred towards Martin Leonidas has been misplaced all these years sister!" Narice spoke. "And he is nothing like Pusintin and you know that. Pusintin is a monster that has gleefully butchered our kind for sport. Martin Leonidas has done none of these things."

"He is a pig!" Yuri spat viciously. "Their entire species are pigs! They are animals that are beneath us! Why do you defend him Narice?"

"I defend him because he is innocent of the reasons you hate him." Narice spoke. "You can not hold him responsible for something his brother did. He did not even know who he was when this act occurred Yuri. Your loathing is misplaced and it clouds your judgment and reason now. We are here to have them train us and our

dragons to battle the Kavalians. Since we have arrived you have been nothing but a distraction to the others and you have fought everything they have tried to teach us.”

“We do not need their help?” Yuri hissed.

“Perhaps you do not... but I have no desire to die in battle with the Kavalians. Nor do I wish to see Deneth killed because we are ill prepared.” Narice said. “You have seen yourself that our dragons and riders are children when compared to what they can do.”

“It has something to do with the Mindvoice ship.” Aikiro said. “They have found some way to increase their bonds with the technology in that ship.”

Narice shook her head. “I don’t think so mother.” She said. “The bonds we have with our bonded ones have increased ten fold since we came here, and that is simply because we have taken the time to study and know our dragons as we never did before.”

“Listen to yourself Narice!” Yuri snapped. “You are beginning to sound like one of them now!”

“I am listening and I am learning what they teach us, because unlike you and Vollenth sister, I know where my place will be when we fight the Kavalian dogs again!” Narice barked angrily as she came to her feet. “If Deneth and I die when that day comes, it will not be because I let some fool hatred of an innocent man keep us from learning all we can to stay alive!”

“Then you are a fool!” Yuri snapped dismissing her. “You are still a child when compared to me Narice. You have not seen what Lycavorians can do! You did not see the way he butchered our brother!”

“Our brother Xerxes was a demented pig!” Narice snapped. “As you so often have told me! He fancied himself a god!”

“Enough!” Aikiro snapped loudly. Aikiro watched her oldest and youngest daughters for a long moment, her dark eyes unreadable as they glared at each other. She took a deep silent breath and shook her head. “We must not fight among ourselves.” She said softly. “I will not allow it. Yuri... you will return with me to Sparta. The Kavalians know you are on Earth and you do not make an appearance with me they will know something is not right. And Vollenth must remain here and continue to be instructed. Leonidas is correct and the Kavalians undoubtedly know our dragons have left Usu Ozeib 7. We must not give them any reason to suspect they are here on Earth. They are already acting like fools by trying to force Lisisa Leonidas to become one of them.”

“The Kavalians are trying to force their laws upon her grandmother?” Carisia asked quickly, leaning forward in her chair.

Aikiro nodded. “They apparently tried to force their citizenship laws upon her early this morning in Sparta.” She answered. “They were not successful. Robert and Tesand were going to move among the streets of Sparta for the better part of the day and try to gauge what kind of reaction this will elicit from the people.”

Narice shook her head. “It will not matter.” She said as she settled back into her chair. “She is a hero to the people of the Union. She is almost as highly regarded as Androcles. The Kavalians will not succeed.”

Aikiro nodded. “Robert, Tesand and I agree with that assessment as well.” She stated. “Robert has also discovered some rather interesting information in regards to Androcles new wife.” This brought Carisia’s head up somewhat. “It appears she was part of a program that Veldruk established many years ago. They used Lycavorian women as low level Intelligence Agents. It appears this Sadi is the one that helped Leonidas and this Armetus to begin the Intelligence Purge twenty-five years ago. Her stepmother got her involved but apparently Sadi Leonidas became much more established than anyone thought. When she discovered they were about to expose her, she gave all she knew to this Armetus.”

Yuri looked at Aikiro her anger at Narice simmering just under the surface. “You think... you think her position as Crown Princess is a reward of some sort?”

Aikiro nodded. “Yes. Robert is attempting to confirm as much of it as possible, and it might be information that comes in useful when it is time to act. It apparently is not common knowledge among the people of the Union.”

“So our initial plans remain active then?” Yuri asked.

Aikiro nodded. “Yes.”

Narice leaned forward. “Mother isn’t it wise that all of us be aware of the initial plan?” She asked. “Whatever it may be?” Narice felt Yuri’s eyes focus on her as well as her mother’s but she remained calm and completely in control.

Aikiro shook her head after a brief moment. “The less that know of what our full plans are the better. You will be made aware of them when the time is right.”

“Is that wise mother?” Narice pressed forward.

Aikiro met her gaze. “It is how it will be Narice!” She spoke sternly. “I will speak no more of it now. Not here. Androcles Leonidas has demanded that Thast and the others return as well. He says he is tired of hearing them complain.”

“He will learn nothing useful where he is.” Yuri spoke turning to her mother. “Better to bring him and the others back and make it appear we are acquiescing. They might be useful within Sparta.”

Aikiro nodded. “Very well. Now tell me of this shield surrounding this base. Anything that you may have learned. We need to establish some sort of communication conduit through it.”

“The main gate is too heavily guarded and patrolled grandmother.” Dante spoke quickly. “It is, however, possible to penetrate it in one area that I have seen. One of us could do this, blur outside the shield range and send back a transmission from within the elf city nearby. I know the city is not surrounded by this shield for I heard several of the Durcunusaan talking how they hated having to enter the elf city to contact their mates via Mindvoice.”

“You are certain of this?” Aikiro asked.

Dante nodded. “Yes.”

“Explain it to me quickly Dante. Leonidas will be coming soon for us to return.” Aikiro said.

Narice glanced quickly at Carisia and they shared a concerned look before turning to listen to Dante.

“...damn fool thing to do!” Martin spoke firmly as he and Andro walked slowly along the tarmac heading for the *STRIKER*. Torma and Elynth moved with them on opposite shoulders. Andro’s ArmorPly matched his father’s with the crimson shoulder boards now adorning the body armor. “You should have contacted me first and got permission.”

Andro looked at his father. “It was a solid plan and we had to move quickly.” He said evenly. “Helen and Arzoal agreed and I thought I was beyond having to ask you for permission to conduct myself father?”

Martin looked at him and sighed. “You are Andro... but if the plan had backfired it would have caused a really big problem with the Coven.”

“It went perfectly.” Andro said. “Yuri does not even know the difference, and it only confirms our suspicions that the reason for his behavior was that the bond was not natural. Even you agreed with that assessment.”

“And what do we tell her when she discovers the truth?” Martin asked. “And she will discover the truth Andro.”

“We tell her to get *nubous!*” Andro popped. “They brought their dragons here to learn from us father. We agreed as Talon Guardians that we could not send forty of our brothers and sisters into battle untrained didn’t we? All of us?”

Torma nodded his massive head. [*We did.*]

[*King Martin... we did not act rashly.*] Elynth spoke gently. [*The Elders had the plan worked out very carefully. The Elder Mother would not have agreed to it otherwise.*]

“It also allowed us the opportunity to discover the final member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* father, and that is something none of us expected as an outcome.” Andro spoke softly. “You can’t tell me discovering Malic and Vincix was not worth it?”

Martin nodded. “True.”

“The shield will prevent her from discovering the truth until she returns father, and it will be all the time Vollenth needs to be well on his way to ridding himself of her. She is a festering disease with the hatred she carries in her. It taints her thinking.” Andro spoke. “It is a hatred that will not go away even though she now knows the truth. She will continue to hate you, all of us... and she won’t know why. There is something else going on with her. Inside her... and it is slowly eating away at her and you, me and our people are just the thing she needs to act out against.”

“I get that feeling too.” Martin said softly. “Well... it’s done now. We’ll deal with it when it comes up again. The others?”

Andro nodded. "They are progressing better than I had first thought father." He said. "Better than any of us had hoped I think. They are not like what we thought they would be."

[Even though their bonds were not well developed, they took on more of their bonded ones traits than we first thought.] Elynth said. *[Given time and training I believe that Deneth and Anthar could challenge for a spot among Mjolnir's Hand with their skill and ability. The others would make fine Bonded Pairs within the Union.]*

"Have we discovered anything on these insurgents?" Andro asked.

Martin shook his head. "Aricia and Bella left this morning with Vonis to try and make some headway. Anton and Cihera should be on Nebonese by now. They are trying to set up a meet with the Evolli who supposedly is in charge of the group that hit Eleysi Three and were targeting your mothers. Andreus is still trying to make headway into who gave up your sister's Jump route and do it without making too many waves and send whoever is involved scurrying for cover like cockroaches. We'll be announcing it tonight on the Netnews. You told Zarah I take it?"

Andro nodded. "Against my better judgment... but better she find out through us just before mother gets there. She will not worry as much knowing Normya is with mother. She took it better than I expected. She's maturing father."

Martin nodded. "I know... I just don't need her running off to save her sister and causing more issues with her temper, especially since she is going through her Coming of Age. She is too much like me in that regard."

"She won't leave... she knows with you keeping Resumar helping mother with the Kavalians I need her here." Andro spoke.

[Her unarmed skills are unmatched and it is better that they learn from the finest.] Torma spoke.

"Well... that's another thing. Just keep an extra eyeball on her." Martin said looking at him. "Has Res talked to you recently?"

Andro shook his head. "Not since right after they returned to Earth why?"

"He's been acting odd." Martin said. "Nothing real major, but not his usual self. I think he has found a female. I can detect a faint tangerine scent on him now, but he has been using scent maskers so I can't get a clear enough mark."

"Perhaps he does not want you to discover this woman and chase her away before he has a chance to prepare her for becoming part of our family." Andro said with a grin.

"Sadi didn't have any issues." Martin said.

"Sadi has been part of our family since that night on the island father." Andro answered. "Though twenty-five years had passed the transition for her was seamless."

[KertaGai is not your average female either King Martin.] Elynth spoke with some humor in her voice. *[She can't be and be devoted to Andro.]*

"Thank you so much sister." Andro spoke reaching out to shove her in her thick neck scales.

Martin nodded and laughed softly. "Yeah... that's true. You guys just used to tell me everything."

"And that usually amounted to us getting into trouble in some fashion." Andro said with a nod. "Perhaps he is preparing her. Give him space father. I have Arrarn working his contacts at Gate Control on Apo Prime. I will have him coordinate with Uncle Andreus so that they are not working against each other."

"Sending Normya back to Apo Prime with a busted ship was wrong." Martin spoke sternly looking at him. "She's still too young."

"She is the finest pilot we have behind mother and Arrarn in the *STRIKERS* and the *TYPE IIs* and you know that." Andro replied. "She is under my command, and Arrarn and I both felt it would be an excellent training experience. And it was. She made it to Apo Prime with no trouble. You are the one who told me I am Crown Prince and I will need to look at my siblings as soldiers when the time is needed. Normya is more ready than you give her credit for father. Arrarn and I agreed it was a good move to build her confidence."

"You should have checked with me or your mother." Martin said.

"My Command... my decision." He answered.

Martin met his eyes. "What else aren't you telling me son?" He asked. His dark eyes bore into Andro for a long moment. "Lisisa and Denali for example?"

“What aren’t *you* telling me father?” Andro asked him. “The *ARIZONA* Class you kept hidden from all of us? From me? Lisisa not being our sister by blood? For example.”

“It is a purely offensive weapons platform Andro.” Martin said quickly. “It goes against everything we have done for the last quarter century. It wasn’t something I wanted bandied about. And Lisisa is your sister, regardless of whose blood flows in her veins.”

Andro nodded. “We decided that within an hour of Helen telling us.” Andro replied. “You still should have told us.”

“Maybe.” Martin said. “I want you to watch them carefully Andro. I don’t trust Aikiro as far as I could throw her. None of them can be trusted in my opinion. And do not give them the Mark Eleven saddles.”

Andro stopped walking and looked at him. “Father the Mark Elevens are the only reason we were able to develop suitable tactics to fight the T19s.”

“Teach them whatever else you think they can handle... but no MEs.” Martin said.

[Without the MEs King Martin, the protection they provide, they will suffer many casualties needlessly.] Elynth spoke.

[They will also be able to reverse engineer the technology.] Torma spoke now. *[That is not something we can allow.]*

[Does grandmother know this?] Elynth demanded.

“This is a decision I’m making as King Elynth.” Martin spoke. “I will not hand them a means to create technology they will undoubtedly turn back on us. Arzoal... Arzoal didn’t like it... but she agreed to it.”

[But... they will die King Martin. No matter what or how well we teach them they will die. Sending them into battle without the MEs will see them invariably die in groups until they are all gone.] Elynth said.

“I know.” Martin said softly. “It is not a decision I made lightly.”

“Father... they are not our enemies.” Andro said. “They are Riders... just like you and I.”

“They are High Coven!” Martin said.

“Yes... but as we have seen over the years and even now with these insurgents... not everyone adheres to Aikiro’s and Yuri’s dream of domination.” Andro spoke.

[That is not a risk we can take.] Torma spoke.

“I know neither of you likes this but...” Martin said.

[It is wrong!] Elynth barked out.

[Daughter!] Torma exclaimed surprised at Elynth’s reaction to say the least. *[You will watch your tone!]*

[It is wrong father and you know it!] Elynth spat.

“You two are the ones who advised caution before they even got here.” Martin spoke. “You said if there is not a possibility of training them we should send them packing.”

Andro nodded. “Yes... but with the exception of Yuri and Vollenth... which we have already taken care of... it is possible to train them. They have come so far in only ten days father.”

Martin shook his head. “My decision stands. They are not here just for us to train their dragons and you know it. You can sense it just as I can.”

Andro nodded. “Yes I know... but where does the mistrust end father? Where does the inbred hatred stop?”

Martin stared at him for a long moment. “I’ll meet you half way son. Show me what you think they can do when they are ready. Show me that they won’t turn that technology around on us. Show me that and I will rescind the order. Until then it stays in place. We can’t take the risk that giving them the technology in the Mark Elevens will expose.” Martin turned his head and saw Aikiro and the others leaving the hanger near the STRIKER. “I want to get back before morning in Sparta and catch a few hours of sleep.” He looked at Andro. “I know the Coven son... they can’t be trusted.” He gripped Andro’s hand and forearm. “I’ll see you tomorrow evening your time so we can prepare for the ceremony.”

Andro nodded slowly. “Very well father.” He spoke tight lipped.

Martin nodded and then turned to head for the STRIKER with Torma on his heels. Andro felt Elynth move closer to him, dropping her huge head to within inches of his shoulder.

[Andro...]

[He has no intention of giving them the MEs Elynth.] Andro said softly to her in their private Mindvoice connection. *[No matter what we show him they can do. Dante and Javier I don't trust and Lucia is questionable... but the others... they are becoming just as dedicated to their bonded ones as any Pair in the Union.]*

[What... what do we do?] She asked.

Andro turned his head to look at her. He reached up and ran his hand along her snout and under her golden eyes. *[I will not let old hatreds and distrust take from us what we both have only just found Elynth... you know that.]*

[It is not Carisia and Anthar I worry for.] Elynth said. *[I understand what our father's mean Andro... part of me agrees with them... but the Talon Guardian in me is repulsed at the thought of just dismissing them.]*

Andro nodded. *[I as well.]*

[Then what do we do?]

Andro turned back to face the *STRIKER* as its engines wound up and they prepared to take off.

[I don't know.]

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

KRANEK

Normya stood on the walkway along the outside of her quarters looking down upon the small park like setting below. The sun was just beginning to lift over the trees and mountains and Normya was surprised at how long she had slept. The events of the last few days had taken more of a toll than she thought and with barely any reflection on where she was, Normya had gone right to sleep when Esther and Erli'ra had shown her to the small apartment. She had woken this morning, the throbbing in her leg gone, and feeling completely refreshed. In the small apartment's main room she discovered a bundle of clothes left for her by Erli'ra, and she quickly showered and changed into them. Though there was still some small fear inside her, lingering just beneath the surface, Normya found herself wanting to explore the settlement and see everything.

They had been very thorough in what they had left for her, leaving a small bundle of clothes and programming the coffee to be made and ready when she woke. Now she wore the almost leather like tan pants and the button down white shirt with her normal combat boots. Her combat harness was present as well, and she removed the shoulder straps and simply buckled on the holster with the K12 on her right thigh and her *Nehtes* on the left. Now she stood on the walkway looking down on what had to be one of the main thoroughfares of the settlement for there were already hundreds of men and women moving back and forth on the hard pack dirt street beneath her. Most of them were Immortals she saw, but she also spied a goodly number of different species as well. They moved among the streets with barely a pause, greeting the many Immortals with a wave or smile or laugh. It was beyond strange for her to see this, particularly with the training she had been given during the Union Academy and Union Flight School. She lifted the mug of strong coffee and sipped it once more, letting the liquid chase away the cool chill that still lingered in the air.

"It's not what you were expecting is it?" The female voice said.

Normya turned and saw Erli'ra approach her from a short distance away; carrying the small bundle in her arms of what could only be a newborn infant. As she came closer Normya saw the full head of dark hair on the baby as well as a much lighter but tanned skin tone. It was like a medium brown shade, almost sienna in its tone. The bone spurs were just small nubs along the baby's jaw line and extending back under the ears but that the child had Immortal blood in its veins was obvious. And then Normya saw the elven ears on the baby, and she realized they were much less pronounced and would more than likely end up being no larger than her own half elven ears.

Erli'ra saw where Normya was looking and she adjusted the thin blanket so that more of the baby was exposed.

"This is To'palia." Erli'ra stated quite proudly. "She was born six weeks and four days ago. She is our first child, Na'Thu and I, our light and happiness."

Normya had to admit that even with the bone spurs and oddly colored skin, the baby was incredibly adorable. “She is... she’s beautiful.” Normya said as she reached up and allowed To’palia to latch onto her index finger. Her emerald eyes flew open as she felt the small baby’s grip squeeze tight. “She is... she is so strong!”

Erli’ra nodded with a chuckle. “She has her father’s strength.” She said looking at her with a smile. “An Immortal’s strength.”

Normya glanced up into her eyes shyly. “Forgive... forgive me.” She said quickly.

“Forgive you for what?” Erli’ra spoke earnestly. “For not believing everything you have been trained to expect from Immortals? That is why you ask for forgiveness Normya... because everything you have ever been taught to believe is turning out to be wrong. At least for those Immortals you have seen so far.”

“How?” Normya asked. “I thought that... elves... female elves were...”

“You thought that female elves were the sexual slaves of Immortals.” Erli’ra said with a small smile. “That once we were broken by an Immortal, we would be forever bound to that Immortal because of a dependency on a chemical in their semen. Enslavement not by force but of need if we wished to stay alive?”

Normya nodded her head shyly. “Yes. That is what... that is what we are taught and trained to expect in the Academy.”

Erli’ra nodded. “Yes. It is what I was brought up with as well.” She said softly. “I would imagine that is still the case in many places with the Immortals that serve the High Coven, and with those Immortals who have turned to a life of mercenary work and such. Not here however. Not among the Immortals of our tribe.”

“How?” Normya asked.

“Esther is how.” Erli’ra answered. “She has several degrees and one happens to be in Bio Genetics. Using small samples of each Immortal’s blood she was able to develop a serum unique to each male Immortal. She basically rendered that one chemical in their bodies inert. Every single male in this settlement volunteered for this procedure Normya, without as much as a second’s hesitation. They knew their Tribe needed to be different in every way if they were to break from the old traditions of their people. And they have.” Erli’ra tucked the blanket back around a cooing To’palia and looked out over the settlement.

“Na’Thu rescued me from Kochab Bounty Hunters that had attacked our transport. There were over a hundred of us on that transport ship; elves mostly, but many others as well. They killed almost half, including my mother and older brother, before they took us to some desolate planet. They were going to sell the rest of us as slaves to whoever would buy us. My father and I, and some fifty others escaped with the help of Cha’talla and the Immortals here. They had intercepted our last distress call, and tracked the Kochab scum to where they had forced our ship to land because of heavy damage. Na’Thu found me about to be raped by three of them. He was so enraged at this he practically tore one of them in half with his bare hands. They brought us back here to Kranek, Esther healed my father and so many others and they protected us.” Erli’ra smiled as she remembered those weeks. “Na’Thu hovered and doted over me for weeks, like I was some precious gem. We didn’t believe them at first, much as you find it so hard to believe now. Slowly however, we began to see that what they were telling us was true. I think I began falling in love with him six months after I came here. I was... I was terrified the first time we were together, after I convinced myself I wasn’t going completely crazy for falling in love with an Immortal. Let’s just say Na’Thu is exceptionally well equipped shall we.” She said with a seductive smile.

“That... that is true of all Immortals I thought.” Normya spoke.

“I wouldn’t know... Na’Thu is the only one I care about.” Erli’ra stated with a fake smugness. “It was the most incredible experience of my life.” She continued. “I have not looked back since Normya Leonidas. I share my husband’s bed not out of some drug induced need, but out of desire and love. When I woke the next morning and I was curled into his arms it was the most incredible feeling in the universe. I *was* his gem, and he has been my prince since that day. I was the first, but the other seven female elves who had lost everything and remained here also found husbands among the Immortals. Husbands they adore just as deeply as I do Na’Thu.”

“What about the others? The ones that didn’t remain with you here?” Normya asked.

“A year past and once they were well enough to travel... Cha’talla told them they would be welcomed and honored to remain here with us. Many of us did because we had lost so much in the attack there was no point in returning to the lives we had. Those that did not he provided them a transport and escorted them back to Union space. Those that went back never revealed that we remained here, and we have had monthly contact with them over the years. We are friends with many of them and if we can not find something here in The Wilds

we ask them to provide it for us.” Erli’ra looked around. “There are over twenty Elven/Immortal children now Normya. Children born of love and devotion. To’palia is only the latest. Two more elves are expecting soon. There have been several mixed marriages among other species as well, but surprisingly all of the female elves that remained with us have chosen Immortal husbands. Once that ingrained fear was gone, the natural instinct in elf females to find strong, suitable husbands came forth. That just happens to be Immortals. Cha’talla made my father a member of our Ruling Council almost from the day he recovered from his wounds. I was elected two years ago. This is what we have built Normya... and it is something we are all so very proud of.”

Normya let her eyes wander over the settlement. “It is incredible.” She said softly. “You have kept it so very simple, but so modern as well.”

Erli’ra nodded as her eyes also drifted across the settlement. “It was T’lolt’s idea actually. To combine the older, more sturdy and plain architecture with modern facilities and advanced construction techniques. The Tribe has nearly doubled in size since they first came here twenty-five years ago. And we grow larger every year. We...”

They heard the squealing of small children and looked down. In the park like area below them were eight or nine children. Four were pure Immortal, that was easy enough to see, but of the others were three that were half elf. They were running in circles around the large fountain being chased by someone Normya recognized immediately, for he had filled her dreams the night before. She watched as Tir’ut roared loudly and lifted one screaming girl off the ground, while snatching another in his large hand. The others proceeded to leap upon Tir’ut’s legs and around his waist as he stomped along the ground roaring like a bear. Normya couldn’t help but chuckle at this. Erli’ra smiled as well.

“He truly loves children.” Erli’ra said. “Nearly every morning, if his duties do not pull him away, many of the children in his apartment complex go to him and this is what he does. He chases them around playing with them before they depart for the main school. He always encourages them to learn all they can from their teachers. He tells them education is the key to finding what their purpose in this life is.”

Normya looked at her. “Their purpose?” She asked.

Erli’ra nodded. “He is the first born son of a pureblood Akruxian Immortal and a pureblood vampire.” She said. “He and his brothers are unique... a new breed of Immortal if you will. The future. Just as To’palia is the future.”

“Esther said that as well.” Normya spoke.

Erli’ra nodded. “She is wise beyond her years.” She said. “As Cha’talla’s Blessed Wife, she is considered the Matriarch of our tribe.”

“You consider yourself part of their tribe?” Normya asked.

Erli’ra nodded. “Oh yes. All of us do. Without question or regret. Just as you are now.”

Normya’s eyes grew a little wider. “Me?” She gasped.

Erli’ra nodded once more, only this time with a small smile. “The moment that Tir’ut proclaimed an *Iglata d’Vlos* to protect you, he became your *Quortek S’argt*. While he lives, no matter where you may go, he will protect you with his life. As will the members of his family and his tribe. An *Iglata d’Vlos* is not something undertaken lightly by Immortals. It is a sacred tradition, one that Cha’talla has allowed them to maintain from their old lives.”

“Why would he do this?” Normya asked. “He... he doesn’t even know me.”

Erli’ra smiled and let her eyes gaze down on where Tir’ut was now on his knees while the children happily buried him with their bodies. “Tir’ut has always been different. Because he was their first born, Esther and Cha’talla were incredibly stern and rigid with him. He has all the strengths of an Immortal and a pureblood vampire, but almost none of their weaknesses. He is the perfect combination of the two. He also has quite a powerful Mindvoice ability.” She saw Normya’s eyes grew even wider. “Esther has taught him how to shield it ruthlessly, to levels that are nearly undetectable even by someone with your skill, but it is there.”

“That... that still doesn’t explain why he did it.” Normya said softly. “I saw that... that Bancorik that he attacked. It had to be three or four times his size but he didn’t hesitate. Fash’ka, Ja’narie, the others... they said he was crazy to do such a thing. That they don’t go after Bancorik without at least four in their hunting party.”

Erli’ra nodded. “That is very true.”

“So then why Erli’ra?” Normya asked.

“Why don’t you ask him?” Erli’ra answered. “He is your *Quortek S’argt*. He will deny you nothing Normya, no matter what you ask of him.” Erli’ra stepped closer to her. “Your Coming of Age is nearly over Normya Leonidas, I have seen enough of them to know that. And you can’t decide if your attraction to Tir’ut is because of the remnants of your maturing fever, or something that you really feel.”

Normya looked away quickly. “How would you know that?” She stated.

“Because I am a woman.” Erli’ra spoke softly. “And I have seen the look in your eyes when you gaze at him. I also noticed that you have not returned his uniform top, and I noticed the way you would sniff it when you first arrived. I do know something of Lycavorians and their ways. His scent tickles your senses.”

Normya looked at her shyly. “He smells... he smells like jasmine.”

Erli’ra smiled. “I also noticed the way you clung to him when he carried you in his arms when you first arrived. Everything you have been taught in regards to Immortals is being called into question because of your growing feelings for Tir’ut.”

“I... I am grateful to him for saving my life.” Normya spoke quickly trying to deny what Erli’ra was saying. And failing miserably. “But an attraction...?”

Erli’ra nodded. “Yes I’m sure you are grateful to him. However there is much more isn’t there? I am the Blessed Wife of an Immortal Normya Leonidas and I know that look.” She followed Normya’s gaze down to where Tir’ut was roaring like a large bear once more. “Isn’t your father the one who says never to fear the unknown?”

Normya looked at her. “Erli’ra...”

“You will do what you will Normya.” Erli’ra spoke with a soft smile. “If my judgment of character is still any good, you will come to realize what it is you want Normya Leonidas. All I’m saying is if what you want somehow includes Tir’ut, do not fear the unknown.” She shifted To’palia into one arm and reached out to take her hand. “Come... let us get you some breakfast. Your mother arrives in two hours and it wouldn’t do for you to greet her on an empty stomach.”

Normya nodded slowly and turned her emerald eyes once more on Tir’ut far below. Her heart caught in her throat as she realized he was looking up at her. It was only a fleeting glance, but it was enough to cause shivers to course through her even as she felt the gentle caress within Mindvoice of a new and powerful presence. It was something her mother had taught her, how to expand her horizons within Mindvoice almost subconsciously to detect other users without them knowing it. Normya Leonidas, as with all her brothers and sisters, was considered a very powerful Mindvoicer. She was easily on a level with her brother Resumar even though she was not bonded to a dragon, and she lowered her shields far enough to detect the new Mindvoicer. As Erli’ra had said, it was an exceptionally powerful mind, and heavily shielded in a way that made it impossible to penetrate those shields without a concentrated probe. Her father or Andro could have done it with barely any effort, perhaps even her mother, but she could not. She felt Erli’ra take her arm gently and she tore her eyes from Tir’ut and allowed Erli’ra to lead her down the walkway.

SODRAG

“...everything seems to be in perfect order. You and the baby are in ideal health.” The elven medic told Adriana as she lowered the scanner.

Adriana smiled brilliantly. “Thank you.” She said.

“Eliani will be in shortly.” The female spoke. “She’ll want to examine you. You are the only pregnant woman on the base at the moment, and we much prefer your company to the injured and grumbling soldiers and riders. They usually come in because they have injured themselves doing something stupid.”

Adriana chuckled. “Yes... I have heard that.”

The female elf heard voices and patted her leg and smiled. “I’ll be right back.” She said. She gathered the data pad and moved into the hallway outside the examination room where she saw Eliani and Nyla entering the small clinic. They were holding hands and laughing softly, having just returned from lunch. Eliani was the senior Hadarian Healer on SODRAG at the moment because the complement of base personnel was not that large. As SODRAG continued to grow and house more personnel a Hadarian Officer would be assigned permanently. The medic truly enjoyed working with Eliani. She was just as sharp witted as her mother and

unbelievably knowledgeable for someone only twenty-five years old. She walked up to Eliani who turned to look at her.

“I did a preliminary exam Princess.” She stated as she held out the data pad. “Lycavorian female, ninety-six years old, excellent health and twenty-nine weeks pregnant. Baby is also in excellent health and developing on the base scale.”

Eliani took the pad with a smile. “Thank you Renala.” She stated.

“I told her you would be in shortly. Exam Three.” She stated as she turned and began to walk towards another room.

“Renala?” Eliani spoke quickly looking up.

“Yes?”

“The baby’s father is not listed.” Eliani said.

“She is staying with Enomotarch Malic Princess.” Renala answered. “I... I assumed he was the father.”

“Malic?” Nyla gasped.

Renala nodded. “Prince Androcles granted her access to the base and she arrived late yesterday afternoon. She’s staying at Malic’s bungalow.”

Eliani looked at Nyla, her fern green eyes wide. She glanced back to Renala. “Thank... thank you Renala.” She said softly turning back to Nyla as Renala went about her duties.

Nyla’s green eyes were also wide in surprise and they quickly filled with regret and a little anger. “*Ussta Che?*” She questioned.

Eliani shook her head slowly. “This... this was not in his records *Aur Enyla.*” She spoke softly. “Not anywhere that I saw.”

“Nor I.” Nyla answered.

“That *ronnus!*” Eliani hissed softly. “She’s twenty-nine weeks pregnant! There’s no way he could not have known!”

“Perhaps that is why he brought her here!” Nyla stated with heat in her own voice. The most noticeable trait that their deep connection within Mindvoice gave Eliani and Nyla was that they could feel each other’s emotions and in many ways Nyla was almost able to use Eliani’s wolf senses. It also allowed them to feed off of each other emotionally. “She is staying with him at his bungalow. And he has not been on the base since late yesterday either. He was gone before full light this morning. I checked.”

“He’s avoiding us now that she is here.” Eliani said. “Andro knew! He had to have known!”

“Eliani... Andro... he knows how we feel about him. Why would he not tell us?” Nyla asked.

“I don’t know... but intend to find out!” Eliani snapped. “As soon as I meet this Adriana female!”

“May... may I come with you?” Nyla asked softly. “I... I wish to see her as well.”

Eliani nodded as she began moving down the corridor to the exam room. It took them all of twenty seconds to reach the room and they saw Adriana turn from where she was looking out the window as they entered. They both stopped when they saw her. Her face was bright, her hands rubbing her swollen abdomen. She was exceptionally beautiful, that they could not deny, and she appeared to be in excellent physical condition just as Renala had said.

“Good afternoon Princess.” Adriana spoke animatedly. “I hope my coming here hasn’t interfered with your schedule. Andro said I should come to see you.”

“Hello... hello.” Eliani stammered as they moved further into the room. “And no... you are not interfering. So you have talked with my brother?”

“Oh yes.” She said. “He’s not... he’s not what I expected from everything that I have seen on the Netnews. He’s much more... he’s very normal.”

Eliani looked at Nyla. “Yes he is.” Eliani almost snarled out the words as she turned back.

Adriana stared at them for a moment. “Is there something wrong?” She asked quickly.

“Huh... what? Oh no!” Eliani said. “We... we just didn’t expect you to be...”

“Expect me to be what? That I would be so pregnant?” Adriana said with a smile as she rubbed her abdomen.

“Renala didn’t tell me how far along you were.” Eliani caught herself quickly. “This is... this is Nyla Sinthe. She is... she is working with me in the clinic today.”

“Yes... it... it helps me to be better prepared on the field of battle.” Nyla stammered out now.

Adriana moved back to the low table and perched herself on the edge before pushing back and sitting. “Your medic said you would want to examine me.” She stated.

Eliani glanced at Nyla quickly before moving up to the table. “Just... just some questions really.” She said. “Renala... Renala is very efficient.”

“She’s very nice.” Adriana said with a smile. “We don’t have any elf medical personnel on Hunlar Five.”

“Hunlar Five?” Eliani said. “You came all the way from Hunlar Five?”

Adriana nodded. “Yes. I’m a teacher there. The smaller children mostly. It is quite an adventure teaching them. They are very active.”

“You are staying with *Enomotarch* Malic I see.” Eliani said looking at the pad.

Adriana nodded. “Yes. The bungalow is larger than I thought he would have.” She replied. “The bed is very soft though... which helps because I have to sleep on my side now.”

“Yes... I’m sure it is.” Eliani stated. “And how long have you known Malic?”

Adriana looked at her, surprised at the sternness of her voice and the set of her jaw. She glanced at the Nyla woman next to her and saw a similar look. Her husband was a pureblood vampire and Adriana knew well the nuisances that the faces of purebloods took on when they were perturbed or angry, as well as when they were happy. Her husband’s parents had been overjoyed when they were married and even happier when they told them she was expecting their first child. It was the complete opposite when Adriana told her mother. Her mother was incensed at this, her father even more so when he found out. Adriana had long ago accepted their attitude towards Tovar but she still felt the need to tell them they were going to have a baby.

“I’ve known him all of my life. I love him so much... and I’m even prouder of him because of his accomplishments.” Adriana replied. “We haven’t seen each other in a while and he was surprised when I arrived and was so pregnant.”

“He didn’t know?” Nyla asked.

“Oh no, he knew. He found out the same time I told my parents.” Adriana said. “They weren’t too happy I’ll tell you. Mal was more open to it though.”

“Mal?” Eliani said.

“My nickname for him.” Adriana answered with a smile.

“And my brother... Andro knew you were coming?” Eliani asked.

Adriana nodded. “Oh yes. He approved my clearance. I understand it was done much quicker than normal.”

“Yes... it usually takes almost a year for the correct security clearance to find entry onto a *Durcunusaan* facility.” Nyla answered in a similar stern voice.

Adriana looked at them, sensing the underlining hostility radiating from both of them. It was then that Androcles words came back to her.

Just remember burgundy and yellow. That is what else your brother desires. More than even he realizes.

Princess Eliani’s hair was the color of deep burgundy and Nyla’s was yellow blond. Adriana knew what they meant to each other, and there was almost no one within the Union who did not know of the relationship they shared. Right now they were acting as two very jealous Alpha female wolves would act in the face of competition for an alpha male’s attention. These two women wanted her brother Adriana thought to herself, and if Princess Eliani’s scent was any indication, they viewed her as a threat to what they wanted. Adriana smiled inwardly to herself, keeping this discovery from her facial expression. She was being continually stunned by the events and people surrounding her brother in the last few days. His bonding with Vincix in such a way that he was now a member of perhaps the most famed and feared unit within the Union Military. And now she was discovering that not only did a Princess of the Union desire her brother, but so did that Princess’s pureblood vampire lover and companion. Adriana did not take offense at the way they were reacting, for they wanted her brother and thought she had him. Strangely it made her very happy.

“Perhaps Prince Androcles knew I could be trusted.” Adriana said.

“Where... where has Malic been these last two days?” Eliani asked. “He hasn’t been reporting for his duties as he should.”

“Yes...” Nyla stated. “I’m... I’m going to have to recommend he be reprimanded. The *Durcunusaan* do not shirk their duty, no matter how mundane it may seem.”

Adriana shook her head. “I don’t know. He only told me he would be gone during the day and at the bungalow in the evening.” She replied, keeping with the story Malic had told her. Adriana knew Eliani undoubtedly would know she was lying, and no doubt Nyla did as well. Tuvar could tell when she was teasing him or not telling him everything just by her heart rate, though you had to be a very skilled vampire to be able to detect this. “You can stop by tonight if you like.”

[She’s lying to us ussta che.] Nyla spoke.

[Yes I know.] Eliani answered as she looked down at the pad. *[We need to go see Andro and find out why he allowed her to come here! I am so angry right now I want to rip her face off! And his!]*

[He should have told us!] Nyla declared.

[I know.] Eliani looked at her quickly and then turned back to Adriana. “Well everything appears to be in order. Remain with the diet you are on and if you have any problems one of the medics will assist you.”

“Andro said I should come to you.” Adriana spoke knowing she was prodding Eliani in an almost evil way, but she wanted to see just how much this Princess and her lover wanted her brother.

“I am usually very busy!” Eliani snapped intentionally. “I don’t really have the time to direct my attention to just one person!”

“Oh...” Adriana spoke sweetly. “I understand. I will see Renala if I need something then.”

“That is probably best.” Eliani stated. “It was nice meeting you, but I need to check other patients.”

Adriana got to her feet. “Of course Princess. It was a pleasure meeting you both.” She said with a smile.

“When you see *Enomotarch* Malic, please instruct him he is to report to me immediately when he returns.” Nyla snapped.

“Certainly.” Adriana said. “I should get dressed and leave you to your duties.”

Eliani nodded and looked at Nyla. “We need to do other rounds now Nyla.” She said in a flat voice.

“Of course Eliani.” Nyla answered.

Adriana watched as they both turned and exited the exam room. She smiled to herself as she began to dress in her normal clothes.

“My brother...” She said softly. “First you become a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*... and now you have a Princess of the Union and her vampire lover wanting you so bad they can hardly contain their anger at me.” Adriana chuckled. “Oh Malic... you have become so much more than even I had hoped.”

Background Music is Malic’s Theme in the Yahoo Group Black Hawk Down Soundtrack

The sum of cross currents in fifty-three knot winds and a gravity coefficient of point three nine? Isra’s voice asked the question.

Sixteen degrees. Vincix’s voice answered.

Turn radius in a gravity of 1.5, altitude of twenty-three and speed of two hundred nineteen kilometers? Lisisa’s voice asked.

Four point three meters per second. Malic answered immediately. Malic heard Denali’s voice chuckle within his head and he smiled inwardly, his hand reaching up to touch Vincix’s lower snout which was inches from his shoulder.

Twenty for twenty. Denali spoke. *Excellent.*

You and Vincix have been studying. Isra spoke with some humor in his voice as well.

And flying. Vincix spoke quickly. *We woke long before dawn and went out over the western portion of the base.*

We can see with each other’s eyes. Malic said. *We hunted together. I shifted and was on the ground, Vincix in the air.*

Isra nodded slowly his eyes remaining closed. *I can honestly say I was very wrong about you Malic.* He spoke. *I will never make that mistake again.*

We will never make that mistake again. Aelnala chimed in.
Nor will I. Lisisa said.

Take it all in brothers. Everything around you. Sense it... feel it... wrap yourselves within it. You must be aware of even the tremors of the smallest branch or leaf around you. All of it is life in some manner. Isra's voice was calm and even within Mindvoice. *And all of it could shape your actions and their consequences.*

The roaring of the hundred foot waterfall filled the clearing not far from the edge of the small lake the waterfall emptied into. The jungle was cut back in a large circle, able to fit a dozen dragons with no trouble. Now it held four with their riders. Isra sat between Lisisa and Denali, the three of them sitting around Malic in a loose circle. Jeth, Aelnala, Aradace and Vincix rested on the ground behind their bonded ones, all of them with closed eyes.

Feel the beat of your bonded one's heart. Lisisa's voice echoed now. *His blood pumping in his veins.*

You are one now... and you must surrender to each other all that you are. Denali's voice spoke.

Do not be afraid our brothers... Isra spoke once more. *Your bond was destined by greater powers than we. Just as mine and Aelnala's was. Just as Lisisa and Jeth were and Denali and Aradace. Never doubt each other. You have reached that pinnacle and now you must harness it. Do not be afraid to reach out Malic and Vincix. You have brothers and sisters now. Draw on their years of experience and knowledge, just as we draw on yours.*

We have become far more than the Elder Mother and King ever suspected. Aelnala's soft smooth voice caressed their minds. *Three hundred Pairs that think and fight and breathe as one. No doubts, no hesitation. You have learned much in only one day and more will come as the hours pass.*

We will teach you to absorb it all. To focus and retain everything. Aradace spoke now. *Unlike the other Bonded Pairs, who must nurture and develop their bonds, our bonds radiate at full power from the moment they come into being.*

It makes us different. Jeth's deep voice spoke now, all the childlike personality gone from his nature. Now it was Jeth, a member of Mjolnir's Hand talking. *More powerful, yet with that power... with that power also comes the added responsibility of possessing it.*

Others will look to you and Vincix now. They will trust you to lead them... to guide them in their endeavors. Isra said. *If you trust no one else... then trust in each other.*

I can... we can see all that you are. Malic spoke softly his voice filled with awe.

We keep nothing but our most personal thoughts from our brothers and sisters. We share all that we are. Isra continued.

Forget what has happened in your past Malic. Lisisa spoke. *Let go of it, for you are reborn now. You are no longer the Malic you once were. Now you are part of us, and we a part of you. Your failures are ours as well. Your victories we share with you. You no longer need to question your purpose in this life. You and Vincix are where you belong. Where you were destined to be.*

Can you lay down your lives Malic and Vincix? Lay down your lives so a stranger can live? Androcles's voice boomed within their minds. Clear, powerful and commanding.

Yes. They replied together.

Can you take what you need from your brothers and sisters Malic? But give back more than you take? This new voice burst forth with even more commanding a presence and Malic knew immediately who it was.

We will always give more my King! Malic replied.

Can you close every day without glory and fame? Torma's voice echoed now. *Can both of you hold your heads high even when no one knows your names? For that is our path... our calling as Mjolnir's Hand.*

You speak with a single voice now my brothers. Andro continued. *Do not be afraid to share with us your thoughts.*

I wished this at one point. Malic answered honestly. *But no more. Not after what I have seen. After what... what we feel coursing through us is not what we expected. I do not know how to describe it.*

It is purifying. Vincix said. *All our doubts and fears have been brushed aside. There is nothing left but the two of us. Pure. Whole. Free.*

Good. Martin's voice said. Very good. Never look back brothers. You are what you were meant to become. We live and we die for our bonded ones and those we serve within the Union. You have completed the circle for us and now we also can move forward. Welcome my sacred brothers and I will see you in the morning when the rest of us arrive.

Thank you my King. Malic spoke quickly.

No Malic. Martin spoke. To you and Vincix... now I am your brother as well as your friend. I am simply Martin Leonidas.

Sire... Martin... I wish...

He heard Andro and Denali's voices laughing softly within the connection. He certainly does not lack for courage father. Andro spoke.

Nor boldness it seems. Elynth's voice echoed with humor.

Martin could be heard chuckling as well. I have seen your heart and soul now Spartan. He said after a moment. What I have seen leaves me with no doubts as to what you desire in your heart. Yes... you have my blessing to pursue Eliani and Nyla if that is your wish Commander Malic of Mjolnir's Hand.

It is Milord!

I believe Nyla's parents would very much approve. Martin said.

We will not disappoint you Milord! Vincix announced.

No... I don't believe you will. Torma and I must go. We will see you tomorrow. Martin's voice said.

Speaking of my sister and Nyla... I must go as well. Andro spoke. They appear angry with me for some reason. I will stop by your bungalow tonight Malic. I have something else I want to give to you and Vincix.

Yes sire. They answered.

They felt Andro and Elynth leave the connection and Malic slowly opened his eyes. He looked around and saw Isra and the others gazing at him and Vincix.

"What... what do we do now?" He asked.

Isra smiled and looked at Lisisa and Denali and then back to him. "How about we do some close quarters flying." He stated. "That always gets my blood pumping. At least Tarifa and Aihola think so."

Lisisa shook her head. "Oh... that is so enough Uncle Isra!" She exclaimed.

"Too much information!" Denali agreed. "Way too much information."

Isra laughed and got to his feet. "Sister... why don't we show the young ones here a thing or too."

Aelnala snorted loudly and nodded her massive head. It would be my pleasure!

Isra looked at them. "Last one to circuit the base at a hundred feet and return here buys the first round tomorrow at the REC."

Lisisa and Denali scrambled to their feet. "That's a bet." Denali spoke.

They turned to see Malic scrambling onto Vincix's back. He looked at them as he settled into the saddle and smiled. "We are the newbies." He said. "We must use every advantage! Vincix my brother! Go!"

Vincix trumpeted his approval and propelled them into the sky.

SPARTA NEW KAVALIAN EMBASSY

[...are angry that your sister acted as she did.] Athani spoke as she walked the granite tiles in the large flower garden. The early morning hours in Sparta she had learned were the quietest times, and also when you could most often smell the pine trees that covered the surrounding mountains in the air. The moon was just beginning to begin its journey down to the western skies.

They had been allowed to move into the new embassy today and Athani knew it would be several days before she could feel her husband's arms around her again. Being able to touch him within Mindvoice provided her the comfort and strength she needed. His mothers and grandmother had surprisingly gotten over the shock of them being together rather quickly, and before she had left Resumar's mountain villa they had taught her several new tricks to mask her presence within Mindvoice to a level that would not raise the suspicions of anyone powerful enough to detect her. They seemed more concerned about what his father would do more than anyone else and that told Athani quite a bit about the type of people they were. She knew they were a spiritual

species, believing in a higher power or powers. She had spent countless hours researching the Lycavorian people and to a smaller extent many of the species that called the Union home. King Leonidas the First had started this ingrained mentality, the idea of Gods being very prevalent on Earth in their ancient times. The Spartan mystique was wide ranging and had taken root in almost everything they did. His son and five Queens continued this in how they saw the dragons and each other. They believed something larger guided their actions and reasons. They believed destiny and fate played a huge role in who a person was and what their ultimate path would be. Gorgo had said that she and Resumar had found each other for a reason as strong as their love for each other had shown itself to be. To brave what would undoubtedly be a death sentence for Athani if it was discovered she had married Resumar, or even allowed him to have her in his bed was all the truth that Gorgo had told her she needed.

Her species had always forged ahead in their lives mainly because they thought they were far more cunning and militarily superior to the next species. This mentality had almost cost them their very existence in Athani's eyes, for their war with the High Coven nearly a thousand years ago had brought them to the brink of extinction. Her father's actions had saved their species, but to Athani's way of thinking they had learned nothing from that action. They sought not to improve their people and live side by side with others, but only to conquer and regain the prominence they once had. The actions and concerns of Resumar's mothers and grandmother had shown Athani that, while the Union may have considered them a threat, they did not fear her people in any way.

The actions of Lisisa and Denali Leonidas today had only sealed that notion for her. Jiss and Matuarr were so incensed at what Lisisa had done and the disrespect she had shown them they were practically foaming at the mouth, while Timur fumed silently at how easily Lisisa had handled him. They were livid that she had taken Denali Leonidas as her mate, and thrown that fact into their faces. The part of their plan that Timur would play a role in was now effectively neutralized. Jalersi was also acting differently since they had come here. She remained silent for the most part listening to the males rant back and forth with each other and drinking the strong Spartan wine. Karun had come briefly to the embassy to secure his temporary quarters and then disappeared to walk the streets of Sparta. The Lycavorian blood within him allowed him to pass more easily among the citizens of Sparta, and he was more readily accepted. He had not returned as of yet, but Athani knew Karun was more than capable of taking care of himself.

Resumar's soft laughter filled her with warmth and she felt his aura wrap itself around her even from his villa in Gytheio. *[She has never been one to beat around the bush so to speak.]* He answered.

[I miss you my love.] Athani said.

[Has Qurot or anyone...]

[No.] Athani exclaimed quickly. Athani had seen Resumar in action on board his father's ship and she knew well what her new husband was capable of. *[They are too involved in trying to figure out how they will get your sister to respond to their demands.]*

[That is what my mother For'mya determined as well. Their attention will not be on you for the time being.] Resumar said. *[If anyone attempts anything with you Aryschanne you contact me instantly and I will send Cemath to get you out of there.]*

[That would be very revealing my husband.] Athani answered with humor of her own. *[Having Cemath snatch me from inside the embassy walls would undoubtedly announce to everyone that I am not just a simple Kavalian female.]*

[You are not just a simple Kavalian female.] Resumar answered. *[You are my wife and mate. I will not allow anyone to touch you.]*

[I am capable of taking care of myself.] Athani said.

[That is not something I question Aryschanne.] Resumar said. *[You are mine however, and I will not be happy if some fool thinks he can have his way with you.]*

Athani smiled when he called her his. *[I will call for Cemath if things get out of hand my love.]* She said. Athani was no fool, and while she was very deadly in her own right, she had no desire to feel anyone's touch upon her body now except that of Resumar.

[It will only be for another day or so Aryschanne.] Resumar explained. *[My mothers are working with Deia to make sure that when you announce you are defecting that your people can do nothing politically. They*

don't believe your father will be very happy, and they want to take away every recourse he may have before we act.]

[Resumar... I could try and find out as much as I can before I leave.] Athani spoke. [Troop deployments, fleet movements, what they plan for the embassy here. How they will try to discover about the High Coven.]

[No!] Resumar nearly shouted within Mindvoice. [You are my wife and mate Athani. I did not fall in love with you to try and discover what your father and others are doing and use you as some sort of intelligence operative. I don't want you to risk yourself in any way. My mothers agree with me.]

[I know that Resumar.] Athani answered gently as warmth swept through her at his words. Hearing his answer brought down any doubts that may have been lingering in her subconscious.

[Then do nothing to put yourself at risk!] Resumar stated again. [Nothing.]

Athani's tail twitched slightly and curled up around her waist in a sign of contentment and peace. *[Then I won't.]* She said. Athani's sharp feline like eyes caught movement near the turn up ahead and she stopped walking when she saw her sister appear. *[My love I must go. Jalersi is nearby. I will contact you later today just so that I may hear your voice.]*

[Soon Aryschanne. Soon nothing will draw us apart.] Resumar said.

[And I look forward to that day.] Athani spoke as she continued to walk towards her sister who had seen her now.

Jalersi held the mug of Kavalian tea in her hands as Athani walked up and stopped in front of her. She eyed her younger sister evenly, taking in the confidence in her gait and the brightness of her eyes. There was something different about her sister since they had arrived on King Leonidas's ship and Jalersi could not place it.

"You are up early sister." Jalersi spoke softly.

"With the men ranting and hooting from the first floor it is a wonder anyone can sleep." Athani replied. "I take it they did not agree with what the daughter of Leonidas did?"

Jalersi snorted softly. "I don't believe any female has ever talked to them as she did this morning. And she is Pusintin's daughter, not Leonidas."

"Really? Well... obviously she does not agree." Athani said.

"Jiss and Matuarr will force her to comply." Jalersi said slowly. "They are preparing an extensive brief to present to the Spartan Galactic Court. A brief this Lisisa will have no choice but to adhere to."

"And you think that she will just do this because Jiss and Matuarr say she has to? Sister... I have never known you to act stupidly." Athani spoke seeing Jalersi turn to glare at her. "Why is it so important for Jiss and the others to force this woman to do something she will not ever do?"

"You know why Athani." Jalersi replied. "She is a member of this *Mjolnir's Hand*. One of the most powerful of them if all accounts are accurate. Almost on a level with the King and his oldest son."

"And you think she will willingly give up this position because Pusintin is her father?" Athani asked almost sarcastically. "Or because of some ridiculous laws Jiss and Matuarr will attempt to use against her. And bringing Timur here, declaring he was promised by Pusintin that she would be his was foolish. Jalersi... we were the ones who studied these men and women for months. Why is father dismissing our council now? Or was his intent to never listen to us in the first place?"

"Athani you have no idea what you speak." Jalersi snapped but with no where near the vehemence she should have because part of her was beginning to believe her younger sister.

"Don't I?" Athani said softly seeing Jalersi look at her with bright blue eyes. "The moment Jiss and Matuarr revealed what their real purpose was I was pushed to the side like a piece of meat. I do know that father never really intended for us to make any serious decisions or commitments while we were here. We were only sent as a show to the Union that perhaps females were not treated as badly as the Union believes. They failed in that regard and now they will attempt to use outdated laws against the Union in the hopes of gaining what it is they want." Athani said. "This only serves to confirm to the Lycavorians what they have always believed. And the Lycavorians are not as stupid as Jiss and Matuarr believe them to be either."

"What would you have me do Athani?" Jalersi said. "I have spoken with father! He..."

"He told you that Jiss and Matuarr would now be in charge didn't he?" Athani said.

"Yes."

“And no doubt Pusintin agrees with him sister.” Athani told her. “He may be Lycavorian Jalersi, but he has been among our people for too long. In many ways he is no better than Qurot. Even Pian has shown you more respect since coming here.”

Jalersi looked at her evenly wondering if her sister was aware of what Pian had told her in the hospital room on the ship. Jalersi did not want to admit to herself that she had relished in the night she had spent with Pian all those years ago. He had not marked her because she was mated to Pusintin, but he had fucked her until her mind was awash in pleasure. It had angered her that he had not locked groins with her then, for no matter how much she professed to love Pusintin, Pian always had a small part in her head and she did not know why. Pusintin treated her with the respect she would not receive from a male of her own species and that is what drew her to him at first. But now Jalersi wasn't so sure. He had fathered a child from someone other than her, and he had never told her about it. It didn't matter to Jalersi that it was from the vampire witch, but the fact Pusintin hadn't told her made her wonder what else he had not told her. And it made her question whether he had gone outside their union since becoming her husband and mate. Since that moment on the ship when Pian had professed he loved her, Jalersi had begun to question everything. Athani was right she knew, for Pian had acted differently ever since then. He was always meticulously groomed, and he would be considered fantastically handsome by Kavalian standards. He had stepped up to shield her on several occasions since joining them on this mission, even facing off against his friend and mentor Qurot on one of them. His actions were not typical of the Pian of old, and though Jalersi had always found him extremely handsome, she had avoided him and his advances because of his association with Qurot.

Now she wasn't so sure that perhaps a different part of Pian was coming to the surface.

Jalersi looked at Athani. “You seem different Athani.” Jalersi said softly. “More calm and in command of your emotions. Why?”

Athani shrugged with a small smile. “I have accepted what fate and destiny have given to me Jalersi and what role I will play.” Athani spoke.

“You... you have never believed in these things before sister.” Jalersi said. “Why now? What has made you change your mind?”

“Does it matter?” Athani said gently.

“You... you will not protest Qurot taking you?” Jalersi asked.

“If that is what destiny decrees... then that is what will be.” Athani said. “There is no sense in fighting it.”

“You know that father will... he will order you to return to Cabelir within a few days.” Jalersi said. “He... he doesn't feel your presence here is needed any longer. He thinks you are more of a...”

“Distraction?” Athani said with a small smile. “Yes I determined that already. When will I be going back?”

“He dispatched a Courier Ship last evening. It was traveling with Qurot's ship and should arrive in three days I would think. The Union has given us access to their Jump Gates for diplomatic purposes.”

“Really?” Athani asked.

Jalersi shook her head. “Pian has already told me they are civilian Jump Gates and have no military value at all. They do not transit anywhere close to sensitive areas within the Union, and if we veer from them then our ships will be intercepted and they will need to travel with an escort all of the time.”

Athani nodded. “They are not fools Jalersi.” She said. “They don't trust us, and we do nothing to alleviate this in their minds with our actions here. You must know that no matter what Jiss and Matuarr come up with in regards to Lisisa, they will not succeed.”

Jalersi nodded. “In that I fear you are right. But they will try.”

“They will fail.” Athani said.

“You have always been the more stubborn of the two of us sister.” Jalersi spoke softly. “Athani... I... my intent all these years was never more than my way of protecting you. I may have gone about it wrong, but you know how our laws work. It was the only way I could think of to keep you at least reasonably safe.”

Athani nodded. “I know Jalersi.” She said softly. She stepped closer to her sister and took the hand that did not hold the mug of tea. “Jalersi... you will do what you must I know... but one day you will need to let your heart rule your actions. When that happens... you might find out your heart leads you down a different path than what you travel now.”

Jalersi's eyes narrowed. "You sound like we will never see each other again sister." She said with a smile.

Athani chuckled. "We are sisters! We will always see each other." She said. "What of Karun? You worry for him."

"Ever since meeting this Lisisa he has been odd." Jalersi said. "He hasn't returned from his walk. His locator beacon puts him somewhere in the southern section of Sparta, but Qurot and Pian can not go there. They would not fit in. And Timur is more interested in discovering a way to get this Lisisa into his bed now that she humiliated him."

"Karun is very capable of taking care of himself." Athani said with a small smile. "And he is half Lycavorian. He will be fine sister. I have discovered that even those who are half Lycavorian are treated as if they are full blooded. Even the elves. That elf female we saw, Ardis was her name; I saw full blooded Lycavorian males taking her orders without question. She seemed interested in Karun as well. Perhaps he is trying to focus himself for the tasks his father sent him here to accomplish."

Jalersi nodded slowly and looked up to meet Athani's eyes. "I will miss you when you go sister." She said.

Athani slipped her arm into Jalersi's, suddenly feeling very protective of her older sister. Jalersi had always seemed so confident and in control, and now it was as if she had lost that somehow. Or perhaps not lost it, but questioning all that she believed. "Come... let you and I go to the kitchen. The staff has not arrived yet and we can cook ourselves breakfast like we did when we were younger."

Jalersi smiled as Athani began to draw her back towards the embassy.

SODRAG

Eliani stared at her older brother, literally shaking in anger as he slowly moved his head back to look at her. He lifted his hand to rub the side of his face where her slap had struck like a trip hammer. The power of the blow had surprised Eliani, Nyla grasping her arm quickly after she had lashed out, and her own green eyes wide in shock at what Eliani had done.

Andro opened his mouth and moved his jaw back and forth a few times before meeting her fern green eyes with his azure orbs. "I can only assume you are not happy with me for some reason Eliani." Andro said calmly.

"You knew damn it!" Eliani exclaimed now.

"Knew what?" Andro asked.

"You knew how Nyla and I feel about... you know how we feel about Malic Andro!" She snapped. "You knew and you allowed him to bring his pregnant girlfriend here onto the base!"

"I take it you have met Adriana then." Andro said.

"Yes we met her." Nyla spoke barely able to keep the anger from her voice.

Andro smiled. "She's a teacher you know." He said.

"You think this is *nubous* funny?" Eliani snarled as she tossed the data pad at him watching him catch it easily and set it on his desk. "You know how we feel about him yet you bring his girlfriend here! And then you tell her to come see me specifically. Are you trying to make me look the fool Andro?"

"We thought perhaps he may not have known." Nyla stated. "This Adriana said he has known from the beginning. She made it a point to tell us how proud she was of him and how much she loved him."

"She was making fun of us!" Eliani stated angrily.

Andro couldn't contain his chuckle as he moved back to his desk and sat down. "Making fun of you huh?" He said. "She did a little more than I thought she would."

Two sets of green eyes grew even wider as they looked at him settle into his chair. "You knew she would do that?" Nyla exclaimed.

"Andro... you *nubous ronnus*!" Eliani spat. "How could you do that to us?"

"I did it so the two of you would pull your heads out of your asses and go after what you both want so much and stop tap dancing like a couple of love struck adolescent wolves." Andro stated as he poured himself a mug of his mother's coffee.

“What?” Eliani hissed.

“You are worried about what father and our mothers will think of Malic.” Andro said. “It’s obvious Eliani. You have never been shy about going after what you wanted. And neither have you Nyla. You were concerned about what everyone would think of Malic and you were playing games with him.”

“So you bring his pregnant girlfriend here!” Nyla declared. “This is supposed to inspire us to act differently. He is going to be a father Andro! This Adriana is carrying his child!”

“Did you examine her Eliani?” Andro asked.

“What? Why?” Eliani snapped. “Why would I need to? Renala examined her! She’s twenty-nine weeks pregnant with Malic’s child. What else do I need to know?”

“So you didn’t examine her?” Andro asked again.

“I didn’t feel the need to examine her! I’m the doctor here!” Eliani barked at him. “And I didn’t need her to keep flaunting in our faces that she had Malic and we didn’t! I can’t believe you would be so low as to do something like this!”

“You are only half wolf Eliani, but I know your sense of smell is very acute. Much more so than either Carina or Zarah or even Normya.” Andro said calmly as he sipped his coffee. “You and Nyla are so intent on trying to discover why Malic is why he is that you are letting it blind you to what you really feel.”

“We know why Malic is how he is!” Eliani snapped loudly. “His mother and father used Peteracal on him when he was a baby. It’s why he didn’t hardly feel the blade that vampire idiot stabbed him with! And don’t you dare tell me we don’t know what we feel!”

“I will tell you that because if you weren’t acting like such a *mida*... you would have detected the similarities to Malic in Adriana’s scent.” Andro said.

“What I detected was his scent all over her!” Eliani barked at him viciously. “I’m not stupid Androcles!”

“You are sure acting like it.” Andro stated.

“You egotistical bastard!” Eliani shouted.

“She has Malic’s scent on her because she slept in his bed.” Andro said picking up the data pad now. “If you would stop ranting like a child for a moment and look past your desire to fix what is not broken, you would have noticed that she has a similar scent to Malic. A similar scent to Malic because Adriana is his younger sister.”

“What?” Nyla gasped moving up to stand next to Eliani now.

Andro nodded. “Adriana is a teacher. Malic requested that she be allowed to come here and act as his teacher. His desire to become part of *Mjolnir’s Hand* led him to this decision. I approved the request immediately and had her brought here. Adriana is married to a pureblood vampire Colonel who is stationed on Hunlar Five. His name is Tuvar. The baby is their first child. I had to pull some strings, but Tuvar will be arriving next week so they can remain together while Adriana is here helping Malic with his studies.”

“His... his sister?” Eliani gasped now as Andro got to his feet and moved around to stand in front of her.

Andro smiled. “Eliani... do you honestly think for a moment that I would purposely do something to hurt you or Nyla. I know how Malic affected you the moment I saw you looking at him before we left the *SCIMITAR*. I also know you and Nyla are so closely bound together that you desire the exact same type of man, and that she would feel the same thing as you.” He said. “You and Nyla have been requesting his records and learning all you can about him by sneaking around with grandmother Gorgo helping you.”

“How... how do you know that?” Nyla asked.

Andro grinned. “A little bird told me.” He said. He reached up and placed his hand on Eliani’s cheek causing her to look up at him. “You are a Leonidas... and Nyla you have been considered a part of our family from the moment you and Eliani came together. Eliani Leonidas and Nyla Sinthe do not sneak around... they take what they want. This is how you have always acted, and it is how you acted with Malic when you beat his ass on the *SCIMITAR*.” He saw her surprised look and smiled. “Resumar told me. You put him down quite easily I understand, and then you made it very clear to him what you wanted. You acted exactly as father and mother would expect you to act. Do not change who you are now. Either of you.”

“He is... he needs help Andro.” Eliani said softly. “His condition is...”

“You are speaking as a Healer Eliani.” Andro said shaking his head. “Speak and act as a Lycavorian alpha female. That is who you are at your core.”

“She is his sister?” Eliani asked.

Andro nodded. "And more than likely she was getting great pleasure from seeing the two of you act as you did. She was testing you... just as you and Lisisa and Carina and my sisters tested every female before Sadi came back into my life. She loves her brother... the two of them have quite a bit in common."

"He thinks we have mocked him within Mindvoice." Nyla said squeezing Eliani's hand. "He believes we were making fun of him Andro."

"I think you will find Malic has changed quite a bit in the time he has been here." Andro spoke as the COM panel on his desk began to chime. He turned and reached for it. "Perhaps you should discover just how much before you get it in your heads that you must help him." Andro pressed the panel. "Yes."

"Milord... there is an Admiral Megdar and his mate Golina here to see you." The voice said.

Eliani's eyes grew wide. "His parents?" She spoke.

Andro nodded. "Yes." He spoke touching the panel again. "Show them here Jagar. Make sure they have the correct Security Pass on before you bring them through."

"Yes Milord."

Andro looked at his sister and Nyla. "I think I pissed his father off even more than Nyla did when I told him I added my name to Nyla's order stopping any transfer he may have initiated. Then I let it slip that Adriana was coming here to be with her brother and that angered him even more." He explained with a smile.

"He said he was coming here." Nyla said. "I didn't think he would actually do it."

Andro nodded. "Yes... well apparently he feels the need to be in control of their lives as he controls the lives of his other children. Malic and Adriana are the only ones to break away from that control."

Eliani blinked several times as she noticed the crimson shoulders of Andro's ArmorPly for the first time. "Andro... your... your uniform." She stated looking up into his azure eyes. "You have found the last Rider for *Mjolnir's Hand*?"

Andro nodded with a smile. "Among the *Durcunusaan* yes." He replied. "It came as quite a surprise to be honest. We hadn't detected them before a few days ago."

"That is where Lisisa and Denali are isn't it? That's why we haven't seen them since they returned?" She asked.

Andro nodded. "I asked them to help Uncle Isra in working with the new pair."

"Who is it?" Nyla asked.

"I don't think you know them. Uncle Andreus found them on Apo Prime several weeks ago and they only just arrived here two days ago." Andro lied. He had grown quite good at hiding when he wasn't telling the truth, and Eliani and Nyla were so worked up over Malic that they would not notice the slight change in his heart rate or the miniscule adrenalin dump into his system. He did not want to reveal to them that it was Malic and Vincix just yet. They would discover that when everyone else did tomorrow morning. "Do you want to remain and meet Malic's parents?"

"Are you kidding?" Eliani said moving to the couch and settling into the soft cushions. "I wouldn't miss this for the world."

"Nor would I." Nyla said settling next to her.

Andro grinned as the chime on his office door sounded and he shook his head. "Be on your best behavior." He spoke watching as Eliani stuck her tongue out at him. He chuckled and turned back to the door. "Come!"

They watched as Andro's *Durcunusaan* aide entered first, followed by the tall, heavily muscled Admiral and the more petite dark haired woman.

"Milord Androcles... Admiral Megdar and his mate and wife Golina." The young *Durcunusaan* lieutenant spoke.

"Thank you Jagar." Andro spoke. "I'll see to them now."

"I'll insure their quarters are ready Androcles." The officer spoke as he turned to leave. Andro took note of the twitch of disapproval in Megdar's jaw at the informal way the officer spoke to him.

Andro looked at Malic's father and mother and decided it was easy enough to see where Malic got his size and the color of his eyes. He held out his hand. "Admiral Megdar... it is a pleasure to meet you."

Megdar looked surprised as he reached out and shook Andro's hand. "Sire." He spoke.

Andro turned to Golina and bowed his head slightly. "Lady Golina... an honor."

Golina was just as taken aback and she forced a smile. "Prince Androcles." She stated.

Andro motioned to Eliani and Nyla. "You know my sister Eliani and I believe you have already spoken with Nyla."

Megdar's eyes narrowed when he saw Nyla and he forced himself to nod. "Princess Eliani." He stated as they got to their feet. "Commander."

"Star Commander." Nyla spoke quickly correcting him. "I'm quite proud of my rank Admiral as I have already told you. I earned it."

"Yes... of course." Megdar spoke dismissing Nyla almost out of hand. He turned back to Andro. "Sire... I am here to escort my daughter Adriana home and complete the transfer orders for my son Malic."

Andro motioned them to the two chairs in front of his desk. "Please... sit down." He said. "Can I offer you some of my mother's coffee? It's freshly brewed."

"No thank you Milord." Megdar spoke as he sat down.

"Lady Golina?"

"I do so love the Queen's coffee sire. Yes... with light cr me if you could." Golina asked as she settled into the chair.

"Certainly." Andro spoke as he moved to the counter.

"Sire... I was under the impression that we would be speaking alone." Megdar said.

"Eliani is the senior doctor on the base and Malic falls under Nyla's direct command." Andro spoke. "I felt they should be present. Is that an issue?"

"No Milord... of course not!" Megdar replied.

"Good." Andro spoke moving back and holding the mug out to Golina.

"Thank you sire." Golina spoke taking the mug from his hands. Andro saw the expensive jewelry adorning her wrists and glanced up to see the glittering ruby red pendant dangling from the pure silver chain around her neck.

Andro forced a smile and then moved back to his desk where he settled into the chair across the simple desk from them. "So... about the transfer orders." He spoke.

"Yes Milord..." Megdar spoke quickly. "I have an enlisted billet waiting for Malic on my Command Ship. Once he assumes his duties there he will see that hard work will pay off and he will climb in rank quickly."

Andro nodded as he sipped his coffee. "Malic is a *Durcunusaan* Candidate." Andro said. "He has expressed a desire to one day become bonded to a dragon and challenge for a position in Mjornir's Hand."

Megdar chuckled. "Sire... I think... I think after viewing Malic's record you will find he is not capable of doing that." He said. "He lacks the higher reasoning and abilities to solve advanced equations and calculations. The same equations and calculations he would have to contend with if he was ever able to... bond with a dragon as you say. Certainly he will never become a member of the King's unit. He does not have the necessary educational level or ability to reach that level."

"No thanks to you." Eliani snapped now as she got to her feet.

Megdar looked at her. "Pardon me Princess?" He asked.

"Don't play coy with me Admiral." Eliani stated. "You will find I am very much my mother and father's daughter when it comes to individuals who think they can play me. You and your wife had Malic treated with Peteracal when he was an infant. I have seen his medical records... Malic was born with Nomatel Syndrome."

"How do you know that?" Golina demanded. "His medical records were sealed!"

"I unsealed them." Eliani stated.

"You can not do that!" Megdar barked. "Even as princess you are not allowed to open sealed medical files without our permission!"

"Malic is a *Durcunusaan* Candidate." Eliani snapped right back unfazed by Malic's father. "I am senior medical officer on this base... as well as a Princess of this Union. Malic was stabbed by a vampire during training and even though the blade penetrated his flesh nearly three point two centimeters he didn't feel a thing. That is one of the classic signs of Peteracal use. When I did further research and discovered his inability to understand higher equations and functions I knew I was right. You stopped the treatments when he was four years old, after the Peteracal destroyed the Nomatel Syndrome, but by then it was already too late. If you want to deny it Admiral feel free, I will call my mother to confirm my findings, and then you will see just how much of a temper my mother has when she discovers what you and your mate have done."

“Milord... I must protest!” Megdar complained turning to look at Andro. “That was many years ago... my mate and I regret our actions, and we have done everything we could since that time to give Malic everything he needed.”

“Blivet!” Nyla snapped.

Megdar glared at her. “What did you say?” He demanded.

“Blivet!” Nyla spoke. “It is a term that Eliani’s mother taught me. She is quite fond of it. It means ten pounds of shit in a five pound bag. Basically what you are speaking now in trying to explain yourself and your actions.”

“May I remind you that I outrank you Commander?” Megdar spat. “I will...”

“You do not outrank me however Admiral.” Andro spoke now leaning back in his chair. “And you would do well not to threaten an officer under my command. Especially not one of Nyla Sinthe’s credentials and record. And most assuredly not in my presence.”

Megdar met his eyes now. “Forgive me Prince Androcles.” He stated. “We have traveled a long way and we are both tired.”

“Yes... I’m sure. It is my understanding that after arriving here Malic asked and was granted the request that no further communications from you or your mate be allowed to reach him.” Andro spoke. “He is well past the age where he need follow your direction. He has forged a name for himself with his deeds and accomplishments. You know of course he reached *Enomotarch* faster than anyone in the history of the Union?”

Megdar looked at him. “That... that may have been known to me.” He said.

“And yet you refused to go to his promotion ceremony Admiral.” Andro said. “In fact... neither you nor your mate has ever been to one of his promotion ceremonies. Neither you nor your mate, or any of his brothers and sisters was present for any of his decorations when they were awarded. And that includes the Union Commendation Cluster he received for saving the lives of two of his unit in a training exercise. The highest non-combat decoration that we can award to a Spartan and you saw fit not to attend that ceremony.”

“I do have my duties as Fleet Commander Milord.” Megdar spoke almost arrogantly.

Andro nodded. “Yes you do.” He stated. “Malic is a *Durcunusaan* Candidate Admiral, therefore he does not fall under the auspice of the regular Fleet Personnel Office. He falls under the control of the *Durcunusaan*. He belongs to me. I forwarded Nyla’s order voiding his transfer orders; my signature is right below hers. Malic is going no where.”

“Milord... he belongs with... he belongs with Spartans who are like him.” Golina spoke now for the first time.

“With all due respect Lady Golina... you have no idea who your son is.” Eliani snapped.

Golina looked at her. “He is my son! I think I know him far better than you.” Golina spoke.

“Do you?” Eliani said crossing her arms under her full breasts. Nyla looked at her lover with a knowing smile. She had seen Eliani in full alpha female wolf mode only once before, and it was certainly a sight to see. That day had seen her dress down a male officer who was interested in Nyla and would not take no for an officer. She had gone up one side of him and down the other before laying a blistering, toe curling kiss on Nyla directly in front of him. That night had seen them have some incredible sex together. The passion radiating from her right now, professing what they both felt so deeply for Malic made Nyla love her all the more.

“Then I’m sure you know that Malic has already made his intentions known to claim Nyla and I as his mates. He makes my blood burn just being close to him, his scent drives me into a lustful fury that I don’t want to control, and he didn’t need Peteracal to do that to me. Nyla can hardly be in the same room with him without becoming flustered because of what he does to her *vampire* blood. He does that to us all on his own. And when he claims me... when he claims Nyla, we are going to sing his name to the stars.”

Megdar actually laughed at this. “Malic would never have the courage to approach you in such a way Princess. It is not in his nature. He has never been able to keep a female because he is for lack of a better word... a brute.”

“That is because of what you did to him!” Nyla snapped.

This caused Megdar and Golina’s eyes to go wide. “Malic... Malic would never... he would...”

“He would never claim a vampire as one of his mates?” Nyla said with a knowing smile as she gripped Eliani’s hand tighter and felt her step close and press her body against Nyla’s svelte frame. “That is your first clue that you do not know who your son is.”

“He will not succeed in whatever he has come here for!” Megdar barked out turning back to Andro. “The *Durcunusaan* are not for him! And he would never claim a vampire as his mate! Not my son! None of my sons would ever do this!”

“What is it that you have against vampires and the *Durcunusaan* Admiral?” Andro asked calmly. “It is obvious in the way you speak their name that you do not hold them in high regard. Why is that?”

“Vampires are responsible for the death of my parents!” Megdar spoke with seething rage beneath his tone.

“You are referring to members of the High Coven Admiral.” Andro said. “Not the vampires that call the Union home.”

“In my opinion they are all the same.” Megdar said.

“And the *Durcunusaan*?” Andro asked.

“Respectfully Milord... they are undisciplined and do not know what respect is.” Megdar said looking at him. “They are unorthodox and do not follow procedure in how they conduct themselves. They do not even look like soldiers should look. Their hair is too long, their facial hair unkempt.”

Andro chuckled. “Have you brought this to the attention of my father?” He asked. “It appears he does not seem to meet your extraordinarily high standards either.”

“Milord... he is... he is King.” Megdar said more subdued now.

“And you think we will be angry if you speak ill of our father in our presence?” Andro asked with a smile. “You should see all of my brothers and sisters when we get together and talk about our father Admiral. Your concerns however, they have no bearing on why you are here.” Andro got to his feet. “I will inform Malic and Adriana you are here Admiral. It will be up to them what they want to do.”

“Milord... that is not acceptable to us.” Megdar spoke coming to his feet.

Andro looked at him. “Respectfully Admiral, what is acceptable to you and your mate is not my concern, nor is it Malic’s or your daughter. Adriana is mated to a senior vampire officer stationed on Hunlar Five. An excellent officer by all accounts, and they are expecting their first child in several months. Did you know that?”

“We know Milord.” Golina stated rather offhandedly. “We did not approve of her union with this man. He is several hundred years older than her and he...”

“Because he is a vampire?” Nyla asked.

“If you must know... yes.” Golina said.

“Colonel Tuvar has never married and he pursued Adriana for eight months before she agreed to finally acknowledge his advances.” Nyla spoke. “It was another seven months before they actually became an item. And then another seven months before she accepted his proposal of marriage. Yes... he is three hundred and fourteen years older than her, and he worships the very ground she walks upon. And if you had taken the time to know him, you would have seen that for yourselves.”

“Adriana... as well as Malic... they are well past the age that they can make their own decisions in regards to their futures.” Andro spoke. “I will advise them you are here, and it will be up to them how they wish to proceed. You have been given very limited access to SODRAG Admiral... but do not attempt to abuse that. You will find that those same disheveled and undisciplined *Durcunusaan* soldiers you don’t like very much will arrest you so fast it will make your head spin. We take security very seriously here.” Andro moved around his desk and stood in front of them. “We are having a promotion ceremony of sorts’ tomorrow morning. As a Flag officer you will be required to attend since my father will be there and you are here on the base. I will leave two passes for you and your mate. After the ceremony you can meet with Malic and Adriana if that is what you and they wish. Otherwise I will have a transport standing by to return you to your ship so you can depart.”

“You are dismissing me?” Megdar asked stunned.

Andro tilted his head slightly to the side. “Yes... I believe that is what it is called. I am very busy. Jagar will escort you to your quarters. I believe the mess lounge serves dinner at 1930 tonight. Good day Admiral.”

Dysea turned to look at Lexi and her seven member *Durcunusaan* detachment as the *STRIKER*'s engines began to die down. The trip here had taken far too long in Dysea's opinion, the whole time her concern for Normya increasing. She felt as Martin did, that for some reason these Immortals could be trusted on their word, but the inbred fear of Immortals still rubbed at her consciousness. All of them wore the standard ArmorPly body armor and were heavily armed. Lexi had been her Durcunusaan Captain since their inception, and while Dysea almost never went anywhere without Iriral, Lexi was also never far behind. They had become close friends through the years, Dysea even being named as Guardian to Lexi and her mate's two children should anything happen to them.

Dysea sensed Iriral unhook herself from the take off and landing harness and move gracefully into the main body of the *STRIKER*. Dysea's long, platinum blond hair flowed around her face and shoulders, reaching down to just above her firm buttocks. Her Nauta Melme had commented once on how delicious she looked when she allowed her hair to fall freely about her face and shoulders, and since that time she almost never wore it tied into a pony tail. Nor did any of her fellow Queens, unless it was needed in some fashion.

"Remember... we are not here for conflict." Dysea said. "We truly do not know what we are entering into and until we have Normya safely within our grasp I want nothing foolish undertaken that could put her at risk."

"I briefed them already Dysea." Lexi said with a smile.

Dysea looked at her and smiled. "I'm sorry Lexi... I am just worried for Normya."

Lexi reached out and took her arm. "There is nothing to apologize for." Lexi answered. "Many of us have been with you for over a decade... and we know how you are. You and the King felt she was not in danger right?"

Dysea looked at her and shook her head. "No. These Immortals seem to be... they seem to be different somehow. And the one we spoke to is the one who helped *Nauta Melme* to escape Lycavore."

"Then let's operate under the assumption we are entering into if not a hostile situation, an unknown one." Lexi answered. "Though we all trust yours and Martin's intuition more than most intelligence reports any day of the week."

Lexi is right Dysea my sister. Iriral spoke now causing Dysea to turn and look at her. *If their intent was anything but honorable would they have allowed Normya to contact us directly?*

Dysea shook her head. *No... I don't believe they would have.*

Then let us proceed as Lexi has said. Iriral said. *Every species is able to change... and perhaps we have come upon the first of the Immortals who are changing with the shape of the universe.*

Dysea took a deep breath and nodded. "Both of you are correct." She said turning to face the ramp. "Let us take our own advice and not fear the unknown."

Lexi smiled and motioned with her head to the Durcunusaan troop closest to the ramp controls. He nodded and brought his hand up, entering the code quickly. The ramp unlocked and began its trip down.

Dysea moved to the end of the ramp, Iriral on her right and Lexi on her left. They watched as the sun began to snake its way into the interior of the *STRIKER*, and then they could see lush green mountains on the horizon. As the ramp continued down they began to see the tops of the simple yet modern buildings spread as far as the eyes could see, as well as numerous figures in the distance walking casually along the upper pedestrian bridges they could see. As the ramp began to descend into its permanent fixed position on the ground all their eyes turned to the two dozen or so figures that waited a short distance away. The majority of them were Immortals, that was easy enough to ascertain due to their height and builds, but they also saw half a dozen elves mixed in with the Immortals. Standing between the bronze skinned Immortals was the exotic looking pureblood vampire female that Dysea had already talked to, and just to the right of who Dysea knew as Tir'ut was Normya. Her heart skipped a beat seeing her daughter so close to Immortals, but her face was beaming and the moment the ramp locked into place on the ground Normya was running forward.

Dysea forgo her royal position and rushed down the ramp as well, gathering Normya into her arms just past where the bottom of the ramp met the ground and she buried her face in Normya's long platinum colored hair.

"*Amille.*" Normya gasped softly as her mother's arms embraced her and surrounded her with her female wolf aura.

“Oh Normya!” Dysea gasped herself, squeezing her tightly as Iriral and Lexi came down the ramp next, followed by the six others in the detachment. She held Normya at arms length and ran her hands over her face and head.

Normya gripped her hands with a small laugh. “I am fine mother.” She stated with a smile. “Really.”

Iriral extended her head out and brushed Normya’s shoulder with her snout. *It is very good to see you safe Normya.* She spoke within Mindvoice.

Normya smiled and reached up to rubbed Iriral’s snout. *Thank you Iriral.* She answered. *It is very good to see you. All of you.*

It was becoming boring on Earth. I welcomed the trip. Iriral said with some humor. *And never let it be said that a Leonidas leads a dull life.*

Dysea couldn’t help but laugh now as well, tears of joy streaking her cheeks and she held Normya’s hands. They watched as Iriral lifted her snout and let her emerald colored eyes wash over those Immortals and others who stood patiently in front of them. She glanced back to Normya. *They do not seem frightened of me Normya.* She spoke.

Normya looked quickly back to where Tir’ut stood, her eyes finding him easily. *No. There is little that frightens them I think.*

Iriral nodded her massive head. *Then they are more like us than we suspect.*

Normya nodded. *Yes they are. Come mother... I will introduce you.* Gripping her mother’s hands she turned and drew her back towards where Cha’talla and Esther stood next to each other. Erli’ra and her father stood beside them as well and Dysea watched as Cha’talla’s head snapped around to the side.

“*Udos jous udossta bel'lain whol ilta ussgyot 'zil Valsharess d'l'Union.*” He barked. (We show our respect for her position as Queen of the Union)

Dysea watched wide eyed as everyone dropped to one knee in front of her, the Immortals rapping their weapons on the metal walkway loudly one time as they bowed their heads to her. The movement was very precise and the noise echoed across the area loudly as she stopped in front of Cha’talla’s kneeling form.

“I extend our sincere welcome to you Queen Dysea Leonidas.” Cha’talla spoke as he lifted his face to look at her. “To Kranek... and to our home.”

Dysea looked at him with wide eyes. It was easy enough to discern he was an Immortal, but his skin was more bronze in color and the bone spikes had been filed down to small nubs. Though he maintained his sunken eyes, it wasn’t nearly as pronounced as Dysea had expected and his face appeared very relaxed. But also very proud. She let her eyes drift over the gathered Immortals and the elves, stunned that there would be elves living freely among them.

“Please...” Dysea finally spoke. “All of you... you need not bow to me... or to anyone.”

Cha’talla allowed the small smile to split his face and he rose to his feet, recognizing that this elven queen was taller than he expected. She was easily five foot nine or ten and her figure was muscular and lean under the body armor she wore. Dysea watched as they all got back to their feet, but her focus was on Cha’talla the entire time.

“I welcome you to our home Queen Leonidas.” He stated again. “And though this day has happened much sooner than I had the courage to pursue, I am very glad it has come about.”

“I would like to... my *Nauta Melme* and I would like to thank you for what you have done.” Dysea said softly. “In protecting our daughter.”

Cha’talla bowed his head. “I would like to present my *Du'ased 'ranndi* Esther Saira. I believe you have already spoken with her.”

Esther stepped forward and held out her hand in greeting. “It is an honor to meet you Queen Dysea. Erli’ra and her father have told us much about you. And so has your daughter.”

Dysea didn’t pause and embraced Esther tightly, her hands on her shoulders. “*Nauta Melme* and I... we owe you a debt we can never repay.” Dysea whispered looking at her.

Esther shook her head with a smile. “Not me.” She said. “Our son Tir’ut.”

Dysea turned at where Esther motioned and saw the same half Immortal she had seen in the transmission. He was easily a match for his father in height and musculature, his skin a similar bronze color, but much more natural like a deep tan. His bone spurs were not filed down, but they were not as prominent as they

were on pure Akruvian people. His dark hair was cut very short and Dysea surprisingly found herself admitting he was handsome in a certain way.

“Tir’ut.” She said softly stepping up to him and looking up into his dark eyes. Dysea felt something within this young man, something powerful and bright. She sensed Iriral come up closer behind her and then two sets of emerald eyes were gazing at him and Dysea noticed this did not cause him to flinch in the least. He actually looked back at Iriral with something akin to great interest.

[He is so very strong Dysea.] Iriral spoke softly. *[The tremors I feel are... they are that of a Tier Six Mindvoicer easily.]*

Dysea nodded. *[Perhaps... perhaps you are right Iriral. Perhaps the universe is changing.]* She held out her hands to Tir’ut. “*T’yin ol zhah ulu dos udos ruebuss udossta dalharil’s dro.*” (Then it is to you we owe our daughter’s life)

Tir’ut looked at her evenly. He knew they had spoken within Mindvoice, but he never lowered his mental shields down very far, and all he felt were the tremors of their heavily shielded conversation. His mother Esther had been taught by the Empress herself, refining her Mindvoice abilities to levels that many within the High Coven would not achieve. The moment Esther had shared Cha’talla’s blood, they had established a personal connection, and the natural strength of the Akruvian people to shield against Mindvoice users was added to his mother’s considerable abilities and all of this had been passed to him. Tir’ut lifted his large hands and placed them in Dysea’s smaller ones gently.

Dysea’s eyes grew wider the moment he touched her. Images flashed through her mind as her precognition ability surged to the forefront, and she saw a radiant looking Normya holding the cooing baby. A baby with Immortal bone spikes and bronze tanned skin but with platinum colored hair and beautiful dark eyes. And she saw the huge Immortal that was Tir’ut step into the image and pull her daughter into a loving embrace from behind, Normya’s face happier than she had ever seen it as she leaned into the embrace.

Then it was gone.

“*Ol zhah sekene biu bel’la ulu thalra ussta il kal’daka darthirii’s du’ased darthirii ilhar.*” Tir’ut spoke bowing his head. (It is truly an honor to meet my she wolf elf’s blessed elf mother)

Dysea drew back her hands slowly as she looked at Tir’ut. “We can not... we can not repay this debt to you.” She stammered the words.

Tir’ut shook his head with a smile exposing the tips of his smaller vampiric fangs. “There is no debt to be repaid *Darthirri Ilhar.*” He stated evenly.

Dysea turned back to Cha’talla and Esther. She saw him turn to the side and motion to the two elven females and three elf males that were standing there. “Queen Dysea please allow me to introduce Erli’ra and her father Illiad. They are members of our small ruling body.”

Dysea looked at him with some surprise. “Your ruling body?” She asked still somewhat flustered by what she had seen when she touched Tir’ut.

Illiad stepped forward. “It is an honor Queen Dysea.” He spoke bowing his head slightly.

Erli’ra was much more forward in her words, not to mention she was the wife of an Immortal and not in the least bit ashamed of that fact. “The look on your face tells me you are shocked at this Lady Dysea.”

“Erli’ra!” Illiad hissed.

“I do not believe Queen Dysea thought there would be other elves among our number here.” Erli’ra said.

“She is very surprised. And something tells me she prefers blunt speaking.”

Dysea shook her head slightly. “Yes...” She answered. “My time with *Nauta Melme* has found me preferring forthcoming words and deeds.” She stated as she regained her composure. “And no... this is not something that I expected. However... seeing it only confirms what I had hoped in my heart and it lends credence to Martin Leonidas’s words to never fear the unknown, for you know not what it will bring to you.” She looked at Cha’talla and smiled brightly. “It has brought us to you and what you are building here.”

“What we are building Lady Dysea.” Cha’talla answered. “What we hope will extend into the future for many centuries to come.” He reached behind him and drew forward the blue satin like material. “I... I have made these for you. It is known among my people of your exceptional fighting skills and your fondness for using two blades. It is my hope that this gift will show you we have left behind most of the old ways of our people and that we forge ahead on a new path. One I hope you will see similar to that path which your mate walks.”

Dysea took the bundle slowly and un-wrapped it. Her eyes grew a little wider when she saw the dual knives with their matte black pommels, each with the half snout of a dragon extending onto the blade. In that was a glittering emerald eye. The blades themselves were honed to razor sharpness she could tell, and they appeared hand crafted for incredible strength and durability. She lifted her eyes to Cha'talla.

"They... they are beautiful." She said.

"Please allow me to show you that I am not who I used to be." Cha'talla said looking at her. "My love of Esther and what she has brought into my life when I thought it was over, it has made me see things in a very different light Dysea. Allow me to show that to you. Allow us to show that to you."

Dysea met his gaze and smiled. "I... I believe I would like that." She said. "Your brother... is he..."

"I am here." T'lolt's voice boomed from the rank of men and women behind Cha'talla. Dysea watched him move forward and come to stand beside his brother. "Lady Dysea." He said bowing his head.

"I don't know how much you and your people believe in destiny and fate Cha'talla." Dysea spoke.

"More everyday it seems." Cha'talla spoke with a smile looking at Esther.

"That it was your Blessed Wife, your son and your brother that saved the life of our daughter... to Martin Leonidas and to me... to our family... that is a chapter in fortune and destiny that can not be denied." Dysea spoke. "The Leonidas family is in your debt and we..."

T'lolt shook his head. "No." He stated sternly seeing Dysea's eyes grow a little wider. He looked at Cha'talla. "Brother?"

"You have always been better with words than me T'lolt." Cha'talla answered with a nod of his head.

T'lolt turned back to Dysea. "We were enemies once... and an act of selfless honor by your mate, even though we were enemies, altered my path in this life. It has allowed me the opportunity to come forward and help my brother in building what we have built. It allowed me the opportunity to find happiness again. I have taken another Blessed Wife and I now have three strong, fine sons and a young daughter. I have this because Martin Leonidas chose to act with honor that day. In rescuing and protecting his daughter, I have repaid what I thought could never be repaid. It is our hope... my brother's and mine... all of us... it is our hope that this will allow us to be, if not friends, then at least no longer enemies."

Dysea smiled warmly and stepped closer to him. "My *Nauta Melme* asked that I pass on a message to you both if events worked out as we had hoped." She spoke looking at Cha'talla. She turned back to T'lolt and reached up to take his hand. "*L'draeval p'los zhah zho'aminth. Ulu l'ulin.*" (The past is forgotten. To the future)

T'lolt looked at Cha'talla and then back to Dysea. "*Ulu l'ulin.*" He said.

"I brought the Spartan Wine you asked for." Dysea spoke seeing his eyes grow brighter. "And the medical equipment you asked for Esther. As well as some other things that I thought might be helpful. Let us begin to establish our future right now."

"I do believe that would be an excellent idea." Erli'ra spoke now.

Cha'talla nodded. "Indeed it would."

Tir'ut had a small smile on his face as well, and he turned slightly to look at Normya, only to find that her emerald eyes were already gazing at him. He held her gaze for several seconds before looking away shyly as Dysea took her hand and pulled her along as Cha'talla and Esther turned to lead them further into the settlement.

T'lolt watched his nephew's eyes follow her and he stepped up to him. "Tir'ut?" He asked softly.

Tir'ut looked at the man who held his utmost respect and had helped his father to raise him and train him. "Uncle... is it possible to feel... to desire something so much it is almost painful?"

T'lolt smiled. "That is usually the case when it comes to females Tir'ut. She is as fine a female as I have ever seen. If things work out the way you wish them nephew, treat her as you would treat a precious gem or ruby. For I have come to understand that they are our future."

"I will Uncle." Tir'ut said. "I will."

SPARTA GALLAIS'S LODGE

"...you don't know where they went?" Yuri asked her mother.

Aikiro turned from the balcony overlooking the rising city of Sparta and moved back into the suite sipping her glass of hot tea. Yuri wore only a loose fitting robe over Robert's large shirt that fell to mid thigh. She and her husband and shared an almost painful night of sex, fucking each other nearly to exhaustion, and Yuri felt wonderfully sore and fulfilled. He had risen early and departed with Tesand and Juliana One into the waking Sparta. They had been moving among the streets and alleys of Sparta, memorizing approaches and exits to the lodge and the area of the city they were in. They tested the limits of what they could do, knowing that they were under almost constant surveillance. Though they could never determine who it was that was watching them, they knew whoever it turned out to be, they were exceptionally skilled. Though they had used the shadows most of the time, no one ever stopped them as they did, but no matter where they unwrapped the shadows that feeling of being watched never went away. Tesand and Moran had come to the conclusion the Lycavorians had developed some sort of means to track them even when they wrapped the shadows around themselves.

Aikiro moved back into the large main room and shook her head as she went to the counter. "They departed so quickly... Robert was unable to track them for any length of time with our passive sensors on the *INQUISITOR*. Placing our ship on the opposite side of the moon also inhibits sensor function."

"Cha'talla is alive." Yuri spoke shaking her head. "That is not something I expected to be the case."

Aikiro nodded. "Nor I." She said. "And to have sired children with Esther? They have effectively created a new breed of Immortal... in that Esther was very correct. A breed of Immortal that we do not control, and one that we will find extremely difficult to defeat for they would have the skills of both. Akruxian and vampire blood?" Aikiro shook her head. "I certainly do not want to face an army of that combination."

"I hope you have told no one about this mother." Yuri spoke. "If it gets out that Cha'talla is still alive, the Immortals that still serve us might begin to question their orders."

Aikiro turned to look at her. "Only Tesand, Robert and I know. And now you." She said. "You think he actually holds that much sway over other Immortals Yuri. He was declared a traitor to his own people."

Yuri nodded. "Yes... but he was long considered a hero among his people, and that worship does not just disappear because father declared him a traitor. Many of them know what he was trying to do and why father killed him." She looked at her mother. "You are trying to discover where they went I hope."

"Of course." Aikiro said. "Tesand has gotten word out to our contacts within The Wilds to remain alert for one of the Union *DTs* and where it might appear. They were ordered to report back but do nothing." She moved to the couch across from Yuri and settled onto it drawing her legs up under her. "You have something on your mind Yuri. It is just you and I here daughter. Speak what you are thinking."

Yuri looked at her. "You did not put up much of an argument when Arrarn Leonidas told you Toria had to remain at the base if you wanted her to learn to fly a *STRIKER*. And when Narice agreed with him..."

Aikiro shrugged. "I was bringing her back for personal reasons." She said dismissively. "If I feel the need strongly enough I will order Juliana One to share our bed. She is an adequate replacement and she does not mind Tesand's touch. There is something else that troubles you however."

"I do not like the closeness Narice and Toria share." Yuri spoke. "I don't trust Toria Dellion... there is something more to her than we know. And I believe her and Narice... I believe they are sharing a bed with each other now as well."

Aikiro nodded. "Of course they are." She stated. "And from the possessive why your sister spoke I would say she is quite attached to Toria."

Yuri looked at her very stunned. "You know they share a bed? And you let her remain mother? Whatever for? Why?"

"You must remember Yuri... Toria Dellion was indoctrinated and trained by the *Venorik Elghinn*." Aikiro said softly. "She is more than just an Intelligence Officer and a superb pilot. Her Mindvoice abilities are exceptional, and she is able to block even me if she needs to. She also became quite good at giving me pleasure... she was very enthusiastic indeed. It is what the *Venorik Elghinn* trained her to be as well as an Intelligence Officer. They trained her to be perfect in terms of her body and skill in bed. I do believe she may prefer women to men anyway and Narice is naive enough to fall under her spell. Why do you think Dante and Javier enjoy her so much?" Aikiro said with a smile.

"I did not know they still trained their female agents for such things." Yuri said.

Aikiro nodded. "Those they find suitable yes. And to my knowledge Toria is the best they have trained in many centuries. Yuri, you know as well as I do that once you have been indoctrinated into the *Venorik Elghinn* you do not leave them for any purpose. Regardless of any of that Toria is a lethally trained killer who has never failed in a mission. Any mission. And she has her own task to complete in the grand scheme of things."

"You trust her that much?" Yuri asked.

"I trust in the training the *Venorik Elghinn*." Aikiro said. "I should... I designed most of it."

"And Narice?" Yuri asked. "She is becoming far too close with the Lycavorians. She is beginning to think like them when it comes to Deneth. She and Carisia were spending far too much time together to suit me, taking what Leonidas's son and others were teaching them far too seriously. I also believe they were able to detect and remove the subconscious thread Dante was using to control Carisia."

Aikiro nodded. "That was the First Oracle's doing." She spoke. "I sensed a faint presence from her while I was there. Carisia must have seen her during that time."

"How was she able to break away?" Yuri asked.

"Do not let it be said that the Lycavorians are not cunning Yuri." Aikiro spoke. "They are wolves after all. Some of the most prolific hunters and killers in the known universe. No doubt they devised something to get Carisia in front of their First Oracle. More than likely in an attempt to use her against us in some manner. As an intelligence asset. That would be the only reason I can see them risking discovery that they removed the connection Dante was using."

"So their First Oracle removed it?" Yuri asked. "We should have killed her when we had the opportunity twenty years ago. The Lycavorian Oracles have always been a problem for us."

Aikiro nodded. "More so this Helen than any other because she now has the wisdom and power of their First Oracle. She is the only one powerful enough and skilled enough to attempt it. Leonidas does not have the training or precision needed to do such a thing. Only she and I have the patience to do something like that." Aikiro said. "She also reinforced Carisia's shields as well, and made it harder to detect that the connection had been terminated."

"Mother... Carisia is becoming more of a liability since we came here. With Thast no longer on the base to control her, there is no way to monitor her movements all of the time. And now that I am gone..." Yuri spoke quickly. "We need to remove her from their influence and terminate her."

Aikiro nodded. "I'm beginning to agree with you on that." She said. "We can not ask Lucia or Javier to monitor her for they do not have the experience or ability no matter how much they boast. Dante could match her if he applied himself but I want him concentrating on the youngest daughter Zarah and obtaining the formula for their dragon armor and whatever else is in her mind. Carisia can not hurt us Yuri. We will give it a few more weeks, allow her to grow complacent and learn as much as she can and then we will act."

"And Narice?" Yuri asked.

"Narice is your sister Yuri." Aikiro said looking at her.

"I know that." Yuri answered. "That does not mean I trust her mother. She takes this Bonded Pair issue far too seriously. Dragons are a means to an end, animals and beasts of war, nothing more. Why encourage this?"

"I want her too Yuri." Aikiro said. "She is the one who will be leading our dragons against the Kavalians. Your talents are better suited to command. Your years with Robert have tempered you and you are able to make the hard decisions in a battle. That is something Narice will never learn I'm afraid. No... I let her remain because if she learns all she can, she may actually be able to turn our own dragons into a very effective force. And the Lycavorians have proven what tactical advantage dragons are against the Kavalians. Whatever she learns will only make her stronger."

"That is the problem I have mother." Yuri said. "What if all she learns ultimately turns her against us?"

Aikiro canted her head slightly. "Why would your sister betray us Yuri?" She asked.

"I'm not saying she will... only that there is a possibility." Yuri replied. "You have said yourself she is not like me."

"No she is not like you." Aikiro said. "That does not mean she is automatically an enemy either Yuri. She conducts herself differently than you... she has different leadership traits but I discovered that our other riders naturally look to her for guidance. She is different than you yes... but she is no traitor to us."

Yuri sighed heavily. "You are right mother. Forgive me." She said. "It is just being here causes me to become angrier more easily. I truly hate this planet and these people. Right down to the very core of my being."

"This stems from the knowledge you have maintained all these years that it was Leonidas that raped you doesn't it?" Aikiro said. "You don't believe it was Pusintin do you?"

Yuri looked at her. "It doesn't matter to me mother. I hate them equally. I hate them for what they have done to me... I hate them because they are animals and I hate them because we have to resort to using them to save ourselves."

"May I ask what drives this hatred?" Aikiro asked.

Yuri met her eyes. "I don't know mother." She answered. "Something... every fiber of my being vibrates with hatred whenever I am around Leonidas. Around any of them really... but more so when it involves anyone connected with Leonidas and his family."

"That is interesting." Aikiro said softly. "I never knew you felt this way daughter."

"It will not affect my duties mother." Yuri said quickly.

Aikiro shook her head. "Oh I don't question that Yuri." She stated. "May I ask when these intense feelings of hatred began?"

Yuri looked at her. "They did not become more pronounced until after my time on the Mindvoice ship on Nuwaroa. When you had me discover as much as I could before it lost power."

Aikiro nodded. "Yes I remember. You studied as many of the history files as you could." She said.

Yuri nodded. "It began then." She said. "Since we did not have any contact with them for so long it was not something I took notice of. However when we decided to come here on this mission it began to come forth more."

"The purpose of the mission is very important Yuri." Aikiro said gently. "I need you to maintain control of this hatred as you have done up until now, no matter what happens. It must not make you act in a way that reveals our true purpose for coming here."

"Mother I think you know I would not allow that." Yuri said.

Aikiro nodded. "I know... and I apologize for having to put you in this position... but it must be done."

Yuri nodded. "I know that as well mother. I will not fail you."

"I have never doubted you Yuri... and I never will." Aikiro said quickly. "Were you able to determine anything in regards to the shielded areas he has across the planet?"

Yuri shook her head. "I may hate them... but as you have said their operational security is impeccable." She answered with a disgusted look. "I was able to discover where it appears three Mindvoice generators of some sort were set up."

"Mindvoice generators?" Aikiro asked suddenly very interested.

Yuri nodded. "They were putting out concentrated and focused Mindvoice projections. A psychic beam if you will. Detecting the tremors was easy, and outwardly they look like normal power generators, but they were definitely helping to project the shield around the base. I was not able to get close enough to inspect one, security is heavy as I said, but the tremors were directed upwards so I can only assume they were helping to power the psychic shield that is surrounding the base." She replied.

"They have found a way to do this by using the technology they have discovered on that ship. It is the only explanation." Aikiro said. "Incredible. I did not think they had someone with enough intelligence to decipher the encrypted portions of the data pads as our scientists did. And because only a third of our ship was able to be salvaged our information was related to just our cloning processes. Since their ship was fully intact... it has given them access to technology we do not have."

"Why would they not use it then mother?" Yuri asked. "In all our time here I have seen nothing that would indicate they have some sort of secret technological advances."

"You forget what Narice reported to us about her encounter with Arrarn Leonidas in the tavern." Aikiro said. "Appearing as if from thin air?"

"You think they have developed some sort of untraceable Shroud then?" Yuri asked. "A Shroud that is able to mask them completely."

Aikiro nodded. "Something along those lines. It is all that makes sense. You said this human O'Connor possessed the needed skills to develop the advances?"

Yuri nodded. "As you know throughout the history of Earth there have been humans who were born with exceptional reasoning and logic aptitude, not to mention the ability to think outside the normal realm. Ben O'Connor was such a human. An intensely skilled pilot yes, but his gift was in developing new technologies. Were he a vampire among us he would be head of our Research Department without question."

Aikiro sipped her tea. "With technology like that, if we could apply it to our ships, we could strike the KFI headquarters and shipyards with impunity. Not to mention what else we could develop. That is why we must be mindful as our plan progresses." Aikiro told her. "Is there a way to coerce this man?"

Yuri shook her head. "Doubtful." She replied. "He has served with Leonidas longer than anyone except for Simpson. They saved each other's lives on many occasions. Leonidas went against orders to retrieve O'Connor when he crashed behind enemy lines during one of Earth's ridiculous little wars. His loyalty to Leonidas is without question. I know he has a human and elf wife. And he and his human wife must be reaching the pinnacle of their human lives. They will not want to leave their immortal elven wife. Perhaps approaching them with an offer to turn them and give them immortality will entice him to help us. You know how addictive elven females can be. Especially to human males."

Aikiro nodded. "Find out what you can now that you are back here in Sparta." She spoke. "If it is possible... it may be worth the risks."

"Robert told me he has confirmed that this Sadi Leonidas was in fact part of father's list of Lycavorian agents." Yuri said. "As was her stepmother. Her father was Governor of the Menkla District on Apo Prime at the time and was apparently unaware of their activities. Her current position is no doubt a reward for turning double agent."

Aikiro nodded. "Yes... he informed me of this as well. He has been researching your father's old records and finally came across the files on that portion of his failed plans to use the Lycavorians against each other as he had done before." She said. "I'm having Robert work with our people to determine what impact this information might have if it finds its way into the hands of some promising young Netnews journalist."

Yuri smiled. "Something else to drive them crazy and keep them confused and unable to focus." She said.

Aikiro nodded again. "The more they have to deal with... the less they will question what we have given them."

"No word on that yet?" Yuri asked.

Aikiro shook her head. "I'm assuming whatever ship they have trying to discover the validity of our information is just now getting to a location where they can scan the area."

"And you truly believe Leonidas will strike preemptively?" Yuri asked.

"The man is many things Yuri... but a military fool he is not." She stated. "His only viable option will be to strike preemptively if he wishes to keep the KFI from launching an overwhelming invasion into their territory in the same fashion they did us. At least that is what he will believe. He will act... of that I have little doubt. The man is stupidly predictable. And we can use that predictability to our advantage."

SODRAG

Arran Leonidas looked up from the data pad he was reading, holding the mug of coffee in his opposite hand when the two shadows fell across his table. He still wore his ArmorPly uniform, the one inch thick single crimson line extending from his collar down the top of his shoulders signifying that he was a *STRIKER DT* pilot for a member of Mjolnir's Hand. He was finishing up the reports for the day that needed his signature and putting the final touches on the training schedule for the next week.

That was until he looked up into the stunning blue eyes of Toria Dellion and the striking dark brown orbs of Narice.

The REC center was relatively full with almost everyone situated in the main room and watching the very close championship game of Triad Squares on the Netnews. The broadcast was from Apo Prime.

"Can we sit down?" Toria asked softly.

Arran turned quickly, looking behind him and to the sides to make sure that she was talking to him and this caused both Toria and Narice to chuckle softly as he turned back to them. "Ah... sure." He stammered

finally, their pineapple and cherry scents flooding into his nostrils and causing his wolf blood to stir. While he and his other half wolf siblings would never have the incredibly keen sense of smell that their father, Andro and Denali possessed due to their pure blood, the remainder of the Leonidas children had extraordinarily strong senses of smell for those who were not full blooded Lycavorian. It had been incredible torture to go through the past three days smelling Narice's pineapple like scent mixed so deeply with Toria's cherry scent. That they had been together was obvious to any wolf that could smell either of them, but their scent also carried with it a warning to stay away for they were not interested. At least it had up until now, and now their scents were calling to him more powerfully than he had ever smelled in two women before.

Toria and Narice settled into the chairs across from him. Neither of them wore their ArmorPly uniforms, both having changed into the civilian clothes they had. Clothes that Arrarn saw greatly showcased their incredible female figures. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

"Did... did I do something wrong?" Arrarn asked quickly. "Say something really stupid maybe?"

Toria looked at Narice with a smile. After what he had done this afternoon, standing up to Aikiro without fear and basically telling her that Toria was the finest pilot of the group, and that if she left she would never be able to catch up. He had told Aikiro he was suppose to train pilots and he did not need Aikiro pulling any of his pilots for activities that did not help their training. Of course that is what he had told Aikiro in front of his father, knowing Aikiro would not get into a spitting match with Martin there. In reality Arrarn Leonidas was slowly working up the courage to approach Toria and Narice, for even though he was half wolf, he could still smell the desire wafting from both of them.

Narice leaned forward a little and folded her hands in front of her on the table. This was something they both wanted immensely and after Arrarn's display earlier today, both she and Toria decided they needed to make the first move if they wanted to get this Leonidas in their bed. Narice could not explain the freedom she felt being here on Earth, even from the very first day. Her relationship with Toria was something she craved everyday, and the sense of openness and accepting attitude her on Earth had allowed that part of Narice to finally come forward. It also allowed the part of Narice that desired Arrarn Leonidas to the extreme, even though he was half of the species her mother called savage animals. Surprisingly, it was that part of him that Narice wanted to explore and touch.

"Actually... I wanted too... I wanted to apologize to you." Narice said. "And thank you."

Arrarn let his dark eyes move back and forth between them briefly before he looked back at Narice. "Did I miss something?" He asked. "Thank me for what?"

"For not allowing my mother to take Toria away from her duties here." Narice answered. "And to apologize for the way I treated you on your brother's island. It was uncalled for and vindictive. I acted... I acted arrogantly and did not know the truth."

Arrarn looked at her. "Wow... I bet that hurt." He said with a smile.

Narice looked down and away from his piercing gaze. "You... you have no idea." She said.

"I take it you don't apologize much huh?" He asked.

Narice lifted her eyes back to his. "I don't usually find myself in a position where I am wrong about something." She answered honestly.

"Really?" Arrarn said. "That's too bad. Sometimes being wrong about something can lead to situations that you gain experience from."

Narice's eyes narrowed somewhat. "Are you going to continue to hold it against me that I may have been wrong about you?"

"May have been?" Arrarn said.

"Ok... I was wrong about you." She stated sharply. "Are you happy now?"

"Narice!" Toria said.

Arrarn chuckled softly. "You know... you are incredibly beautiful when you are angry." He said causing both of them to look at him with surprise in their eyes.

"I'm not angry!" Narice snapped.

Arrarn touched his nose. "Your scent says different." He told her.

"Vampires don't have individual scents." Toria said.

Arrarn nodded. "Yeah... that's what my mother said for quite a few years, until my father tracked her across half of Apo Prime to prove her wrong. You smell like cherries in full bloom Toria, and Narice you smell

like fresh pineapples. Everyone has a unique scent, just because you ingest blood as a portion of your diet does not mean you don't have a scent. Your scents fit you both... whether separate or together as they are now."

Toria and Narice looked at him. "Together? You can tell that..." She gasped.

Arrarn nodded. "Any Lycavorian could tell that you two have... claimed each other so to speak." Arrarn told them. "Did you think that wouldn't be noticed?"

Narice was very embarrassed by this knowledge and it showed in her expression and the threat of the deep blush overriding her dark tan. "We... we did not think anyone would perceive this... no." She said softly.

Arrarn smiled and shook his head. "Hell, who am I kidding... both of you are downright gorgeous period. As for doing what I did, Toria is a superior pilot plain and simple." Arrarn said quickly. "Your mother wants skilled pilots. Taking her away from her training even for a day or two will set her back quite a bit. Much the same as taking you away from your training would set you back." He told Narice. "I only told her the truth."

"Well... well thank you for that." Toria said. "I did not want to be... I did not want to be taken away from Narice so soon after discovering what we share." She said becoming more confident and unashamed with her words as she spoke.

Arrarn nodded even as his wolf blood was beginning to burn in his veins. He needed to get out of here and away from them quickly. Individually their scents would drive him crazy, but together as they were now; it was driving him positively insane. "It... it was no problem really." He said as he began to gather his data pads slowly.

"We... we have discovered something else as well." Narice spoke, her own voice now confident and firm. "Something besides that which we share. Would you like to know what that is Arrarn Leonidas?"

Arrarn lifted his mug of coffee. "I'm sure you will tell me whether I want to know or not." He said as he began sipping from his mug.

"We have discovered... we have discovered we want you Arrarn Leonidas." Narice stated very plainly and clearly, her words spoken with firm confidence and without a trace of embarrassment.

Arrarn turned his head quickly to the side as the coffee he was holding in his mouth spewed forth in a spray of liquid. His dark brown eyes were wide as he lifted them and gazed at Narice and Toria from across the table while dragging the back of his hand across his mouth. He set the mug on the table and looked around quickly to see if anyone had seen or heard what had just happened. His eyes shifted back to Narice and Toria when he realized that no one who was within eye sight had paid any heed to them.

"Excuse me?" He finally blurted out.

"If you can pull yourself from your work..." Toria said with a seductive voice. "And your sense of smell is as keen as you say..."

"Then if you find us... you can have us." Narice finished in an even more alluring tone of voice as they got to their feet holding hands tightly.

Arrarn looked at them. "This... this is a joke right?" He stammered.

"What does your nose tell you Arrarn Leonidas?" Toria asked.

Arrarn got to his feet slowly. "I know what my nose is telling me." He said. "I just don't know if I believe it."

Narice blurred around the edge of the table appearing in front of him in an instant. She then did something that two or three weeks ago she would never have imagined herself doing. She grasped the front of Arrarn's uniform and pulled his head down to her face, covering his lips with her own and kissing him with all the same intense and sizzling passion she kissed Toria with. She felt her whole body ignite as never before, every nerve ending singing out in simultaneous rapture as his lips sent delicious shivers whistling through her. She pulled away just as quickly, before the plan she and Toria had so carefully crafted was tossed to the wind and she let him take her right here.

"You may... you may believe it Arrarn Leonidas." She whispered sensuously. "For it burns within our blood just as brightly as I feel it burning within your blood." She stepped back quickly and slowly backed up before taking Toria's hand again.

Toria for her part leaned over and shared an equally sizzling kiss with Narice before lifting her blue eyes to look at him.

"Don't make us wait too long Arrarn Leonidas." She said softly.

"Find us." Narice whispered just before they both blurred in motion and were gone from in front of him.

Arrarn stood there for several moments, the feel of Narice's lips still fresh in his mind and on his lips, along with her mouth-watering pineapple scent. This is what he had wanted from the moment he had seen them on Andro's island, and now his brother's words to him filled his head.

“Does your blood burn for her?” Andro asked him. “For them... because now that they have found each other I have a feeling they’ll be a package deal just like Eliani and Nyla.”

Arrarn shook his head. “As much as I would like it to happen... it won’t.” He answered. “I’m not that lucky... and I think they may be more interested in each other. I can smell Narice all over her. Similar to how Nyla’s scent saturates Eliani like you said. And there is something about both of them that is different somehow.”

“Don’t give up hope just yet.” Andro said with a grin. “Stranger things have happened to the members of our family.”

Arrarn Leonidas then made the decision that would alter his future as well as two others for all eternity. He swept his arm across the table, pushing all his data pads into the small pack, tossed his mug into the recyclable dispenser and then bolted for the door, his wolf blood beginning to boil.

Carisia turned her head slightly to take in the sight of Anthar and Elynth resting only a few meters away. His huge tail was caressing the top of Elynth's tail almost absentmindedly, each time her wings twitching in delight. Their mid sections were touching in a most intimate manner for dragons and they shared the enormous bone. Carisia could feel the incredible joy and happiness from her bonded brother and Elynth as well. The sense of complete love and devotion one feels for the one they were meant for. It matched Carisia's own sense of utter happiness. Feelings she never thought she would experience were hers now and she basked in the attention and delight they gave to her. She was naked, her back pressed firmly against Sadi's bare chest as she rested between her legs, with an equally seductive and naked Sadi resting between Andro's legs. Her head rested on Sadi's shoulder, their raven black and golden blond hair entwined together as it spilled down their shoulders. They sat on the large soft blanket, watching as the stars began to fill the sky above and sipping the same glass of sweet Spartan wine. The bottle rested in an ice filled bucket next to them, the plate of half eaten fruit and Greek beef appetizers covered but still warm. Sadi's hand gently stroked Andro's arm as it stretched out across both Carisia's and her shoulders in a possessive sort of way, while Carisia's hands caressed the inside of his thigh near his knee which was cocked upward. His back rested easily against the saddle behind them.

Carisia felt him lean over and nuzzle first the side of Sadi's neck and cheek, her wistful sigh of delight very audible and then he leaned over and did the same to the side of her neck and her cheek, his hand moving so that his fingers lovingly caressed Sadi's cheek and the side of her neck in the same motion. Carisia smiled and leaned into his nuzzle.

“What are you thinking *Enylarcopri*?” He asked in a soft whisper.

“That I have never known such wondrous feelings as I have discovered in the last few days.” Carisia replied.

“I hope that is a good thing.” He said softly.

“Oh yes... a very good thing.” Carisia answered. “I... I can not begin to imagine what it will take to repay what you and Sadi have given to me.”

Sadi's head turned slightly at her words and she shifted her body slightly to the side. Her jungle green eyes met Andro's azure blue ones and then moved to Carisia's face. “Repay us?” She stated as her arms tightened around the petite form of the woman who had so captured their hearts. “By the gods Carisia... there is nothing to repay. We wanted you just as much as you wanted us. Perhaps even more.”

Carisia laughed. “That is not what I meant my loves!” She exclaimed her maya blue eyes bright. “I was talking about what I could imagine to repay you both in our bed!”

“Oh... you slut!” Sadi announced as she reached over and pinched Carisia's right nipple between her fingers.

“We will have to punish you for that!” Andro declared lowering his head even further to run his tongue along her ear.

Do you mind! Elynth's voice erupted in their heads. *We are trying to eat here!*

All three of them turned to see Elynth's golden eyes and Anthar's magenta orbs gazing at them with almost a scolding look.

Well pardon us! Sadi barked out. *If I recall correctly... aren't you the one who came back early this morning with what could be considered bags under her eyes for a dragon.*

Yes... all because you and Anthar were up all night doing the dragon nasty. Andro spoke with humor in his voice. *At least we had the sense enough to sleep sister.*

There was nothing nasty about it! Anthar snorted. *It was... it was...*

Divine. Elynth exclaimed in a wistful voice her golden eyes falling on her new mate. Her snout brushed against the underside of Anthar's muzzle with loving affection, contrasting with his cerise colored scales.

Yes it was. Carisia echoed.

Five minds laughed quietly within Mindvoice. Minds that were now as open to each other as the floodgates of a raging river. Yet still there was the tiniest of gaps in those gates. A single gate that somehow remained closed to them and they did not know why. Whatever the reason, it would come to them sooner or later, and now they had each other to continue to discover.

Carisia shifted slightly, turning her body between Sadi's legs and resting her arm on Andro's upraised knee as she looked at them. Sadi draped her long leg seductively over both of hers with a smile.

"Andro... I... I must tell you some things." Carisia said softly.

Andro glanced at Sadi quickly detecting the indecisive tone in Carisia's voice before looking at her directly. "*Enylarcopri*... you make it sound like someone is dying." He said gently.

"It concerns my mother, my grandmother and what their plans are." Carisia said quickly. She would keep nothing from this man and women. She loved them too much.

Andro shook his head quickly. "No." He said firmly.

"My love... it..."

"No!" Andro spoke more forcefully. "I will not allow you to do this." He said. "*KertaGai* and I did not pursue this relationship with you as a means to garner information as to what your grandmother's purpose is. I won't allow you to do it."

"I agree." Sadi said taking her hands in hers and entwining their fingers together. "All we are is already known to us Carisia. What one of us knows... so does the other. There is a lingering presence of something or someone that we all feel... but in time that will become known to us. Right now... all we should be concerned with is discovering each other. You have made us happier than we ever thought possible Carisia. Andro and I both thought we were complete when we found each other, but it wasn't until we found each other that we realized we needed you to complete us."

"Sadi... we are not complete." Carisia said.

Sadi nodded. "And in time we will discover what it is that we feel as I said. Right now however... right now all we want is to wrap ourselves around you and share all that we are with each other."

Andro smiled. "*KertaGai* is much better than I with words." He said.

"This concerns Zarah." Carisia said.

Andro nodded. "Yes I know. *Enylarcopri*... we are connected now. All of us. You are concerned about what Dante's hidden agenda with my sister is. So am I. But I also trust in my sister and her abilities. She may be young... and she may act crazy at times... but Zarah is very intelligent and she will not fall prey to whatever your grandmother has planned. Your mother is no longer here... so she can not alter Zarah's perceptions of things in that way. She is the only one that we know of with this ability and with her gone it will be much easier."

"You will still... you will watch him?" Carisia asked.

Andro nodded. "Yes. And Zarah already knows. Now stop worrying and let us hold you. I have to leave early and I don't want to waste a minute I have with my mates."

Sadi grinned and turned her head. "Does that mean you intend to ravage us again?" She asked pushing back against him.

"The thought had crossed my mind, yes." Andro said.

"Then perhaps we should act before you have the chance!" Sadi quipped.

Carisia grabbed his ankles with her hands and pulled with her vampire strength, just as Sadi twisted her body on top of his and pinned his shoulders to the ground. She ran her tongue along his bare chest teasingly, lapping at his skin. Andro smiled at her as she did this, feeling her slender hand snake down to wrap around his rapidly thickening cock.

“What exactly... what exactly did the two of you have in mind?” He asked.

Sadi grinned at him as she looked into his striking eyes. “I don’t think you will mind very much my *Anome*.” She stated evenly. “It’s just that... Enylarcopri and I have something we simply can’t get enough of.”

Andro watched as her head dropped lower on his chest, her lips and tongue dancing across his flesh and he felt his blood begin to burn brightly. His azure eyes grew a little wider when he felt Carisia’s hand join Sadi’s around his now steel hard shaft and he lifted his head. “Now wait a minute!” He spoke. “Two against one is not fair odds! We...” Andro hissed and his head dropped back to the blanket as Carisia’s warm lips engulfed the head of his throbbing shaft.

“I’d say the odds are fair.” Sadi spoke just before dropping her head alongside Carisia’s and extending her tongue out to lavish attention on Andro’s warm balls.

Andro lowered his hands to their heads, wrapping his hands within the silky softness of their hair and surrendering to the pleasure ripping through him.

Anthar turned his head back from the sight and looked at his new mate with desire in his magenta colored eyes. Elynth was already looking at him and they both felt the passion from their bonded ones beginning to surge through them. They made no attempt to stop those feelings from spreading into them as well.

It is a beautiful night my lovely mate. Anthar spoke sliding his snout along the underside of Elynth’s neck while his tail caressed hers.

Oh yes... it is. Elynth answered softly her golden eyes closing at the exquisite sensations coursing through her.

Could I interest you in exploring the skies with me? Anthar asked with ardor.

I would be so very disappointed if you did not. Elynth answered.

Then let us take to the skies so that I can trumpet my love for you to the stars. Anthar said as he rose to his feet.

Elynth looked at him with increasing fervor as she too rose to her feet. *Yes... let’s do that. It is becoming far too crowded here.*

Anthar rubbed the top of her wings with his snout. *Yes it is.*

I will meet you at the second cloud on the right there. Elynth spoke sweetly just before launching her body into the air.

Anthar trumpeted loudly and snorted. *I shall make you sing my name tonight Elynth!* He declared as he propelled himself into the night air right behind her.

Elynth’s laughter was like music to his mind as she climbed with powerful sweeps of her wings. *Promises... promises.*

Narice squeezed Toria’s hand as they stood in the small clearing. The moon was filtering through the canopy of the jungle above them and filling the clearing with an almost surreal glow. They had spread a double wide blanket on the ground from the pack they had left here earlier, and now they sat waiting for the man they both so desired.

“Toria... you don’t think we scared him off do you?” Narice asked innocently. She felt like a small child in the way they were conducting themselves, but it was so liberating to her to feel this way.

“I find it hard to imagine there is much that any Leonidas son fears Narice.” Toria spoke turning to meet her eyes. “Why are you so nervous?”

“I’ve never been so forward with a man Toria!” Narice exclaimed with an embarrassed smile. “I practically assaulted him in front of everyone! And he is not... he is not a pureblood. He is not the one my mother hopes that I will one day marry.”

“I didn’t know your mother has made this known to you.” Toria asked.

Narice nodded. “She has been very subtle about it... but the clues have been there. He is the son of Admiral Unla.”

Toria's eyes grew a little wider. "You are speaking of Johan?"

Narice nodded. "You know him?" She asked.

"I know of him." She answered. "It is said he is a fine officer and leader of men."

Narice nodded. "My mother thinks he is incredibly handsome." Narice said. "I heard her talking with Yuri one time several months back. She hopes I will be more receptive to his advances once we have completed our training here and return to High Coven space."

"And will you?" Toria asked.

Narice looked at Toria and rolled her eyes in a bemused expression. "Toria Dellion how can you ask me that question now? After what we have discovered together?" She spoke. "What we wish to have with Arrarn. At least if I have not ruined that for us. I don't think I have ever wanted a man more than I want Arrarn Leonidas."

Toria smiled. "He is beautiful isn't he?"

"Toria... do you think he will come?" Narice asked her as she settled to the thick blanket they had brought, Toria matching her motions. "Do you think he will come and know that we do not want a causal fling?"

Why don't you ask him? The deep male voice erupted in their minds, slipping past their lowered Mindvoice shields easily.

Toria and Narice gasped together and spun around on the blanket. The huge dirty blond wolf rested on its haunches only three meters away from them, its yellow eyes outlined in dark brown. The same color as Arrarn Leonidas's eyes.

Arrarn? Narice exclaimed.

How... how did you do that? Toria demanded gently. You... you brushed aside our shields as if they weren't there!

For all intents and purposes they weren't. Arrarn answered. Following you was child's play. I told you both that you have unique scents. The wolf got up and moved closer to them. I burned your scents into my mind a long time ago. My father's children who are only half wolf inherited his sense of smell at least, albeit on a smaller scale since we are not pure Lycavorian. I could follow either of you across the surface of this planet if I needed too.

Narice and Toria watched as that wolf moved closer to them, until it's large muzzle was only inches away from their faces, his eyes burning brightly. Both of them could see the corded bands of muscle beneath that thick coat of hair, the claws of black razors and the gleaming flesh shredding teeth. For all they had learned in their lives about Lycavorians, Narice and Toria had never seen one this close before. Granted Arrarn was also half elf, but his father's genes were clearly far more dominant as shown in the large form of a wolf he could take. His father, Andro and Deni were all much larger in terms of muscle and size, but Arrarn was the largest wolf that either of them had ever seen.

And then in a soft flash of white blue light the wolf was gone and they were looking at Arrarn Leonidas in his entire naked splendor. Toria's eyes drifted lustfully over his hard body, and for the first time in her life she actually felt her vampire blood stir wildly for a man when it wasn't being forced from her. Her blue eyes lifted and she smiled when she saw Arrarn's face only millimeters from Narice's wide eyes. Her chest was rising and falling heavily, her large breasts heaving upwards and brushing against his bare skin. Her dark eyes were wide in shock at what was rippling through her body, and all Narice could think about at this moment was having this man possess her in every way.

Arrarn let a smile caress his face as he leaned closer to Narice, pressing his hard muscled chest against Narice's large breasts and hearing her groan in delight.

"I am going to possess you Narice." He whispered. "I'm going to possess you in such a way that you will look at that pureblood waiting for you back home and laugh at him. When you look at him you will see me... and what I am about to do to you and Toria both."

Narice groaned at his words, her eyes closing in passion as he pressed closer and she could feel his lips brush along the side of her cheek.

"Take you clothes off." Arrarn whispered. "Both of you."

"You presume much Arrarn Leonidas!" Narice fought the surging delight through her as best she could, the last remnants of her stern upbringing coming forth. "You..."

Arrarn kissed her then.

Arrarn kissed her, and as his tongue demanded entrance between her lips, molten passion exploded within Narice's veins. Colors burst forth behind her eyelids, her hands gripping his thick arms and her nails digging into his skin. Her thighs trembled once and then Narice cried out into his kiss as the orgasm surged through her from just his first kiss. Her hips lifted from the blanket to grind against his and her eyes flew open when she felt the size of his searing hot cock against the thin fabric of her pants. She tore her lips away from his and her eyes dropped between their bodies as he knelt over her, even as her orgasm threatened to cause her to pass out with the intensity of it. She saw his cock then, standing proudly at attention and throbbing madly with desire. Desire for her and for Toria she knew. Almost without thinking Narice was pulling at her lightweight pants and pushing them down around her hips, using her legs to kick and push them down to her ankles until they were completely off. She watched as he lifted one hand and with a powerful grip he shredded her lightweight shirt, exposing her bare breasts to his eyes and the cool night air.

Narice glanced up at him again, seeing the almost feral lust in his wolf eyes, yet also seeing something she had never seen before. She saw passion and commitment and love.

"Arrarn... you are... you are so big." She gasped. "Please you must..."

Narice's eyes practically exploded from her head as the lava hot shaft of his cock pressed against her already drenched center. Her engorged clit was throbbing madly, her sweet come already coating the insides of her thighs.

"All for you Narice." Arrarn hissed into her ear as he lowered his head to one of her painfully hard nipples just as every thick, throbbing inch of Arrarn Leonidas's half elf and half wolf cock buried itself into her.

In one soul robbing, breathe stealing and utterly orgasmic ten and a half inch plunge, Narice's world erupted into a realm she had never visited before. A dominion of pleasure she never imagined could exist. Her arms wrapped around Arrarn's broad shoulders, squeezing him with every bit of her vampire strength in an effort to keep from going completely off the edge. It didn't help her, as Arrarn withdrew all ten plus inches of his thick cock and rammed them back home in another equally spirit shattering stroke. Narice careened out of control then, her lithe powerful legs wrapping around his waist as her pussy clamped down on his throbbing shaft and she screamed out her pleasure to all who could hear them. Her sweet juices burst from her with a force she had never experienced before, squirting out around the circumference of Arrarn's thick cock as he held her trembling body in his powerful arms and simply remained still, buried so deeply inside her Narice thought she would fracture apart.

Arrarn clenched his teeth together, the dual wolf fangs that so distinguished the Leonidas males fully extended, and his own eyes wide in utter wonderment. Arrarn was no stranger to a woman's charms, yet Narice's clenching pussy and searing heat was almost too much for him to bear. Her pussy muscles milked his thick cock rhythmically, the walls of her tunnel velvet like in texture. Her hips undulated against his, as if she was trying to swallow more of his thick cock, even though she had all that he was already buried within her depths. He lifted his head from the valley between her large breasts and slowly looked up into her face as her cataclysmic orgasm began to subside.

"Tell... tell me what you want Narice!" He hissed out.

Her eyes opened, now changed to vampire cobalt blue, her own vampire fangs extended. Her features were a divine work of beauty to Arrarn as he gazed at her, and she wasted no time in answering him.

"*Vith uns'aa! H'aryn uns'aa! Morfeth uns'aa dossta!*" Narice cried out. (Fuck me! Possess me! Make me yours!)

Arrarn's lips curled into a smile. "Whatever you command of me Princess." He growled lustfully.

Narice's eyes rolled into the back of her head, as without warning Arrarn began to drive into her with controlling strokes. The pleasure rapidly spiraled out of control for her, every iota of her body responding to the touch and feel of this man who was making her feel crazed with lust and desire and...

And love!

Narice's eyes burst open. "Arrarn... my love!" She screamed out as her arms and hands slapped down onto the blanket, her ankles locked at the small of his back and she began lifting her hips to smash against his pile driving hips.

Arrarn cupped her incredible ass cheeks in his large hands and lost himself to the wolf within him. His large balls slapped against her upturned ass cheeks, his hips almost a blur of motion as he drove himself into her

velvety depths with wild abandon. He felt long silky hair brush against his shoulders and lifted his head quickly to see Toria's wide blue eyes and sexually charged body pressing up against his side. Without missing a single delving stroke into Narice's glorious body, Arrarn reached up with one hand and pulled Toria's face around in front of his with a commanding presence. Her wide blue eyes stared up at him with desire and passion as his lips descended to hers and he kissed her with all that he was. Toria nearly screamed out as the intensity of his kiss stole her breath away.

Venorik Elghinn trained she may have been, but Toria Dellion was still very much a woman. She was a woman who now held everything she had ever desired in her hands, and no training would ever take that away from her. She felt Arrarn's deliciously muscular body tense up and she tore her lips away from his, quickly moving behind him as he yanked Narice up into his lap. Narice screamed louder as she dropped even deeper onto his pulsating cock. His thick shaft plumed her pussy even deeper, as if trying to reach the bottom of her bottomless pond and Narice lost all pretence of control. The moment her tortured nub of a clit slammed against the wash board hard base of his cock Narice shuddered violently in a volcanic eruption. Without any cohesive thought Narice snapped her head forward and plunged her vampire fangs into Arrarn's neck, piercing his jugular vein. The instant his blood splashed across her taste buds, their world collided and blew fantastically apart. She felt his cock balloon enormously within her, his large balls drew up tight and then the first jet like blast of his come fired into her womb. The combination of feeling his scorching come filling her body and his spicy blood spilling into her parched throat caused Narice's eyes to roll into the back of her head once more in divine enchantment.

Narice fed on Arrarn's blood as if it was the sweetest nectar she had ever tasted, his hand lifting to hold her head in place as his other hand dropped to pushed at the small of her back, keeping her convulsing pussy impaled on his spewing cock. She suckled Arrarn's blood even longer than she had Toria's delicious sweetness, knowing that she was binding them together in the most scared of ways for a vampire and surrendering completely to the bliss that gave her. It was only a small twitch, but Narice felt the slightest ebb of her staggering orgasm and immediately she withdrew her fangs, her tongue quickly sealing the two puncture holes in his neck and then suckling the small dots lovingly. She felt the last of his come leak into her still quivering pussy and drew her face back to look at him, his wolf eyes still very prominent. The next thing that surprised her was that his enormous cock was not growing soft in any way even after unloading into her as he just had. She kissed him then, tasting the sweat on his lips and Toria's unique flavor as well. She groaned when she tasted her red haired lover's lips on him and she reached up to grip the sides of his face.

"Lower me down." She whispered to him with a seductive grin.

Arrarn's eyes became puzzled but he held her hands as he lowered her back onto the blanket, until she was stretched in front of him still impales on his cock. Narice took a deep breath trying to calm the overwhelming ecstasy ripping through her at just that small movement of his cock within her.

"Toria!" She croaked out softly. "Toria... I want to taste you!"

Arrarn's eyes grew wide when Toria was beside her instantly, her nipples hard points stabbing into the air, the cherry scent of her own excitement filling the air around them adding to Narice's more potent pineapple scent. He watched with wide eyes as Toria straddled Narice's head, lowering her dripping pussy onto her lover's extended tongue. It was almost as if she had forgotten he was there, facing away from him as she was.

"Ohhhh.... Narice!" Toria exclaimed as Narice's tongue stabbed deeply into her tight tunnel, the thin line of soft red hair rising from above her clit already drenched with her juices.

She... she belongs to us Arrarn Leonidas! Narice's voice projected into his still lustful mind. *Possess... possess her as you have possessed me my love Arrarn Leonidas! We... we belong to you now!*

Arrarn looked up and saw Toria gazing back over her shoulder at him, her blue eyes inviting him to take her in any way he wished. Instantly Arrarn was beyond ready. He pulled his still hard shaft from Narice's tight pussy, joining her in groaning as his cock finally left her depths. He shifted forward as Toria leaned further towards the ground, exposing her pink slit to him. The red hair glistened and he could see Narice's tongue and lips battering Toria's stiff clit mercilessly. Her somewhat fairer skin contrasted amazingly with Narice's deep tanned flesh, her ass nearly as perfect as Narice's. He wasted no time in moving up directly behind her, placing the head of his enflamed cock at her opening and reaching around to grab her equally large breasts. Her hands came up to cover his with a soft gasp of pleasure and Arrarn leaned forward, nuzzling the back of her ear.

"Are... are you ready Toria?" He gasped into her ear.

“Phraktos siyo! Vith uns'aa Arrarn! Vith uns'aa hwuen Usstan h'ros ul'nusst jalamzild!” (Gods yes! Fuck me Arrarn! Fuck me until I can't scream anymore!)

Arrarn didn't pause and speared Toria Dellion with ten and a half inches of cock in one single stroke. Her blue eyes flew open wide; her lips parted in a silent scream of unimaginable pleasure as the largest cock Toria had ever seen penetrated her right to her very core, even as Narice's tireless tongue drove her to atmospheric heights of ecstasy.

Venorik Elghinn be damned. Toria Dellion had found her place in the universe.

SODRAG

0530 HOURS

Background Music, Heavy Metal, Taking a Ride, Ozzy Osbourne Crazy Train, Mjolnir's Hand Themes

CRACK!

The noise rolled across the horizon like a slap of thunder causing both Narice and Toria to wake from a sound sleep and sit up instantly their eyes wide.

“Arrarn!” Narice snapped her eyes looking around for him. They had fallen asleep only a short time earlier, both her and Toria thoroughly exhausted and barely able to move. It appeared that even though he was only half wolf, his sexual stamina was equal to that of a pure blooded Lycavorian wolf, much to Toria's and her delight. They had curled against either side of his body and slept the sleep of the content. Narice looked around not seeing Arrarn, her heart skipping a beat and wondering if it had all been an exquisite dream of some kind.

“Narice... look!” Toria said softly.

She turned quickly to look at her red haired lover and Toria motioned to the end of the blanket. Narice turned then and saw the two bundles of fresh roses on the edge of the blanket and the single hand written note between the two bundles. Holding the thin blanket over her breasts, Narice scampered to the end of the blanket and picked up the paper as Toria moved up next to her. She unfolded it slowly, her heart racing as Toria rested her jaw on her shoulder.

Do not be angry with me for not waking beside you both. Today is a special day and one that I can not miss. Come watch on the airfield... you might like it. I will make it up to you both if you will allow me. I can think of nothing I desire more than to have you both in my arms. Tonight. Tomorrow. For eternity. I will see you both soon.

Arrarn

Narice pulled the note to her chest like a giddy school girl and sighed. She felt Toria kiss her shoulder softly. “It wasn't a dream.” She said softly.

Toria chuckled gently. “Not if the exquisite soreness in my body is any indication.” She spoke.

“Oh Toria... I feel so...”

“So completely happy and fulfilled?” Toria asked.

Narice nodded quickly. “Yes... it is like...”

CRACK!

Both of them ducked instinctively and rolled away from each other as all of their combat senses came alive.

“Phraktos! Vel'bol zhahus nindel?” Narice stammered as her eyes lifted skyward as the sound rolled across the horizon. (Gods! What was that?)

“A ship!” Toria responded her blue eyes also scanning the dark sky. “Entering the atmosphere at high speed!”

“A ship!” Narice exclaimed. “Over the base? Androcles Leonidas would never allow that!”

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

The sounds came one upon the other now in quick succession, each shattering sound making their bodies shudder from the reverberations.

“Narice... get dressed! Something is happening!” Toria almost yelled as the immense noises continued overhead. “The ships are entering the atmosphere faster than I have ever experienced. All of them over the base! Something is going on! We must get back!”

Both of them scrambled to pull on their clothes as the earth-shattering sounds of the ships entering the atmosphere over SODRAG continued to roll across the land.

SODRAG HIGH COVEN BUNGALOWS

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

Lights were coming on all over the Quad as the High Coven Riders and pilots began stumbling from their bungalows, many of them still half dressed, their eyes searching the skies above. Their dragons were already out among the area quad, eyes staring skyward. They alone could feel the staggering presence that was growing larger with every shuddering sound.

“An attack!” A voice screamed out.

“Impossible!”

“Ships! They are ships!”

“They are inside the Mindvoice Shield!”

“So low? What kind of ship has that power?”

CRACK!

CRACK!

“There!” Someone screamed out stabbing his hand upward into the darkness that was slowly beginning to lighten.

Nearly eighty pairs of eyes found the dark blue and black shapes of the *STRIKER DTs* as they ripped across the sky, curving slightly towards the airfield four kilometers away.

“*STRIKERS!*” Someone shouted.

“Damn! Look at how they are maneuvering!” One of the Coven pilots exclaimed as his keen eyes watched three *STRIKERS* bank tightly in perfect formation.

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

“More of them! Eight o’clock!”

“*Vith uns'aa!*” Another pilot yelled. “They’re spilling bonded pairs out the back!” (Fuck me)

“Where? Where?”

“Look at that! Full speed exits!” Another voice echoed. “They are exiting while still moving!”

The airfield! Deneth screamed out in Mindvoice, turning the heads of the riders towards him. *We must go to the airfield!*

Forty-two dragons didn’t hesitate and began lifting off into the night sky with mighty sweeps of their wings.

“Go!” A voice echoed. “Follow them!”

Background music Malic’s Theme, Blackhawk Down ST, Battlestar Pegasus theme from BG, Reuniting from BG

Malic stared at the black ArmorPly in the mirror of his bungalow as Adriana was behind him smoothing out the crimson cape dangling from the gold fasteners on the crimson shoulders of his Mjolnir's Hand uniform. His deep blue eyes were off somewhere in a mythical land of warriors and leaders as the realization that the one goal he had coveted for so long was only hours from truly being his. Androcles had delivered this uniform to him the previous night just after dusk, and Malic had remained awake for most of the night simply staring at it. He and Adriana had both refused to see their parents the previous night, saying only that they would visit with them the next day after the ceremony.

Malic's blue eyes shifted when the window shudders near the mirror pushed open and Vincix's huge head appeared, his amethyst eyes bright and clear.

[Brother?] He spoke softly.

[This is really happening Vincix.] Malic said with a halting voice. *[We... we have both achieved what we have so desired.]*

[And we will prove to all our fellow brothers and sisters this day and every day into the future... we will prove we are worthy.] Vincix replied. *[I thought this opportunity lost to me until you...]*

Malic stepped forward towards him, causing Adriana to look up. "Malic you..." She stopped when she saw her brother step up to Vincix's head and place his hands on either side of Vincix's muzzle. He leaned his head forward until his cool purple/silver scales touched his forehead. Adriana saw both of them close their eyes.

[I swear to you this day my brother Vincix. I will never fail you. I will never leave your side. Even if it means death takes us into its embrace. Without you I am nothing.] Malic whispered.

[I pledge to you the same my brother Malic.] Vincix replied. *[For without you now... I too am nothing.]*

The door chime echoing caused them to turn as Adriana went to the door quickly and passed her hand over the panel. She stepped back as Andro moved into the doorway when it opened, his uniform identical to Malic's except for the gold trim that lined his crimson cape. He carried his helmet under his arm, the golden figure of Elynth on top of his helmet poking out from under his bicep, the pommels of *Halize and Iphan Rie Aellseleum* protruding above his shoulders. He wore the K12 Kinetic Magnum in a right side thigh holster and the intricately carved *Nehtes* in a left thigh holster.

"What do my two newest bonded brothers say?" Andro spoke with a smile. "Are you ready?"

Adriana laughed. "I think they are so nervous both of them could shit!" She barked playfully.

Andro laughed as well noticing that Malic and Vincix made no effort to deny Adriana's statement. He stepped up to Malic.

"Your future begins today Malic." He spoke. He looked at Vincix's head and part of his neck in the window. "Both of your futures. This is what you were meant for. Grab onto it and never let go."

Malic turned and looked at Vincix who only nodded his massive head. He turned back to Andro. "We will Milord." He stated confidently.

"Good. Adriana... my sister Eliani and Nyla volunteered to pick you up in thirty minutes with your parents. Ostensively to provide you support with your parents. In reality they want to apologize." Andro said.

"Apologize?" Malic asked. "Apologize for what?"

Adriana grabbed his arm. "It's a girl thing." She said quickly. "Never you mind." She leaned up on her tip toes and kissed his cheek. "I am so proud of you Mal."

Malic pulled her into a gentle embrace, careful not to squeeze too tightly. "You have never doubted me Adriana." He said.

Adriana touched his lips with her finger. "I have Malic." She said softly. "But after what I have seen these last days... I will never doubt you again."

Malic leaned over and kissed her cheek. "I am ready sire." He spoke.

Andro nodded. "Then let's get Vincix ready and get to where we are supposed to be. The others have already begun arriving and your mother arrives with Arzoal and the rest of the Dragon Elders in one hour Vincix."

She does not know Prince Andro? He asked.

Andro shook his head. "Arzoal wanted to surprise her." He reached out and put his hand on Malic's shoulder. "Let's get his Mark Eleven on your brother and make sure it is adjusted properly. You have your entrance planned?"

Malic nodded. "We think it is appropriate sire." He said. "It will allow me to leave my past behind forever."

Andro nodded. "Good. Then let's get moving."

Background Music, Heavy Metal, Taking a Ride, Ozzy Osbourne Crazy Train, Mjolnir's Hand Themes

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

CRACK!

The High Coven Riders and dragons were mingled tightly together, most of them electing to climb on top of the hanger and watch as the *STRIKER DTs* of Mjolnir's Hand continued to announce their arrival with the staggering sonic booms. None of them knew yet who it was they were watching, only that the precision they were witnessing was beyond anything they had ever seen. Most of the dragons were gathered around the tarmac below the hanger, Deneth among them. He kept trying to find Anthar, calling out to him within Mindvoice to no avail, but he was not going to tear himself away from the spectacle he was watching.

"Did you see that turn?" One pilot called out.

"It was a one eighty standing on the ship's nose!"

"I'll do that no problem!" Another announced.

The Coven riders were grouped more closely together and not acting as excited, at least outwardly. All of them were studying as the dragons exited the *STRIKERS* with flared wings, many of them immediately diving for the ground as soon as they were clear and executing stomach twisting close quarter maneuvers as they plummeted. Dragons of all colors and breeds they could see now as the sun was beginning its march upwards, almost cresting the trees now.

"That's an inverted S-turn!" One rider called.

"The one on the left did a corkscrew the entire way down!"

Many of the riders were simply watching in awed silence for they too could now feel the staggering Mindvoice presence of each new arrival as they exited their *STRIKER*.

"They must be here for some sort of training!"

"I'm telling you... it has to be Mjolnir's Hand!" Another rider spoke.

"You're crazy!"

"Zarah said they never gather in one place!"

"She said almost!"

Deneth whipped his head around when he felt Narice caress his side. He saw her and Toria moving up alongside him, appearing as if they had blurred for a long period of time. They had returned to their bungalow in fact, so that Narice could replace the shirt Arrarn had shredded in their passion.

Narice... sister... look! Deneth exclaimed. It is amazing!

Narice and Toria too were awestruck by the sight of so many *DTs* in the sky above them, some very high, some executing low speed passes as they approached the airfield in the distance from them. Already over three dozen *DTs* had set down on the tarmac, some of them even executing mind numbing maneuvers just before they settled like feathers to the ground.

We have been watching since they started arriving. Narice told him. *How many have you counted Deneth?*

At least two hundred sonic booms. He answered immediately. *Many of them are still airborne and circling the base before landing.* Deneth looked at her keenly. *Narice... there is something different...*

Narice reached up with a smile and placed her hand on his snout. *I will fill you in later my brother.*

"Who do you think they are?" Toria asked.

Deneth shook his enormous head. *I don't know. They...*

"They are *Mjolnir's Hand!*" The female voice shouted causing all heads to turn and watch as Carisia settled to the tarmac on Anthar's back. "They are gathering for a ceremony on the other side of the base. The last Bonded Pair among their ranks has been chosen and they are going to welcome them. I know a place where

we can watch and stay out of the way for our presence here is still secret. Gather your bonded ones and a passenger. The rest of you follow in the Lifters near the motor pool. We must circle around to the west to avoid detection and protect ourselves. Hurry!”

“How do you know that?” Lucia asked from the top of the hanger and looking down on Carisia.

Carisia looked up at her. “How I know is not important. We must hurry before they finish arriving and the ceremony begins.” She called.

“Look!”

All of them turned to see Andro landing on Elynth, Denali and Lisisa right behind him on Aradace and Jeth. The three of them wore the crimson shouldered black ArmorPly with their gold trimmed crimson capes. They watched as Andro reached up to remove his helmet. He glanced at Carisia with love in his eyes that only Narice and Toria understood for what it was.

“You are welcome to watch the ceremony.” Andro spoke as the Riders were dropping down from the top of the hanger to gather around their dragons. The one thing that Andro and the others noticed was that the Riders didn’t hesitate to help their pilot brethren. “Carisia will show you from where so that prying eyes do not see you. We will be gathering in the REC center afterwards and I encourage all of you to join us.”

“So it is *Mjolnir’s Hand*?” A Rider called out.

Andro smiled as he replaced his helmet. “Yes. Now you will be able to see what bonded pairs can do when they are truly one.”

Andro lifted his right arm and touched a small, flexible control on his wrist. They watched as Denali and Lisisa did the same, and over a hundred pairs of eyes grew wide in shock as they watched conforming layers of Dragon Armor begin to extend from the Mark Eleven saddles and encase Elynth, Jeth and Aradace in shimmering invulnerable metal skin.

It was a device that Avi, the Mindvoice Ship Avatar, had developed for them during the scramble in the Evolli War to defend against the deadliness of the T19. The thinness of the Dragon Armor allowed it to be loaded in spring ejectors all along the saddle’s edge and on command from the rider or dragon, the armor would extend and encase the dragon in a matter of seconds. The High Coven Riders watched as the armor extended all the way up the necks of the three dragons, ending just behind their heads, with a thin strip working its way around their muzzles and extending outward on top of their heads, effectively encasing them in protective armor that could stop the fragments of a T19 missile at close range, as well as any number of smaller caliber weapons. The armor extended fully down their long tails, and since all three of them were half Heavyhorn dragon, it provided an additional measure of destructive ability when it encased their mace like tails. It snaked around under their midsections and down their legs, a thin strip covering each lethal talon. A thin strip extended down the front edge of their wings, enabling them to use their wings as ram weapons. As the riders watched, Andro touched another tiny button on his wrist and from the back of his body armor and a small compartment on his helmet that no one had ever noticed before sprang similar layers of Dragon Armor that more quickly encased his entire body. Denali and Lisisa also did the same thing and within seconds they were looking at three glimmering Bonded Pairs encased in the silver like metallic metal. Their eyes went to Andro’s face and they saw the edges of the Dragon Armor extended further past his normal helmet, the ends of the cheeks guards nearly touching his chest. The same was the case for Denali and Lisisa, and now all they could make out were small portions of their lips and their eyes.

“Follow the direction of your Section Leaders.” Andro spoke. “And witness what you could do one day if you believe. Elynth... go!”

Elynth ripped out a trumpet of defiance and propelled them into the air easily. The dragon armor was so light it was no different than if she was carrying an additional person in the saddle with Andro, something all dragons could do quite easily. Jeth and Aradace followed suit with similar trumpets and they too took to the air.

Carisia turned to look at the others. “This way!” She exclaimed.

CRACK!
CRACK!
CRACK!

Megdar and his wife were standing outside their bungalow staring into the sky as more *STRIKER DTs* entered the atmosphere. The thunder like claps had been happening for nearly an hour now, and he stood outside fastening his dress uniform jacket as he watched the ships hurtle over the base, some of them executing some sincerely insane power maneuvers that even he had to admit were impressive. Golina had never seen a dragon close up, and her eyes were wide as she saw dozens filling the sky above them.

“*Son vada carians!*” She gasped out.

“Impressive isn’t it?” Eliani’s voice echoed and they whirled around to see her sitting on Tharua’s back just behind them. Arydun was next to her, Nyla sitting proudly in her saddle. Megdar was stunned into silence for he had not heard them land behind them. How could they be such huge beasts and not make any sound?

“It’s... it’s incredible!” Golina panted.

“What is going on?” Megdar demanded.

“Mjolnir’s Hand is arriving.” Nyla replied. “They are welcoming the last member of the Circle of Three hundred. It is a special ceremony for them.”

“Where is Malic and Adriana?” Golina asked.

“Malic is providing security for the event as a member of the Durcunusaan.” Eliani answered as she climbed from Tharua’s back. “The Lifter with Adriana will be here shortly.” She ran her hand over Tharua’s scales as she walked up to where her head was. She leaned over and kissed Tharua’s muzzle.

Go sister! She said with a smile. *Go watch your mate.*

Tharua blinked and nudged her in the shoulder with her snout before taking to the skies once more, Arydun on her heels. Eliani and Nyla walked up to Megdar and Golina holding hands.

“I have been instructed by my brother to tell you that you will make no demands of Adriana or Malic.” Eliani said. “They have their own minds and free will to make their own decisions.”

Megdar glared at her. “They are my children!” He growled.

Eliani smiled unfazed by his words and demeanor. “Yes... they are your children... not your possessions. Perhaps things might be different if you saw them in that light.”

Golina took his arm quickly stopping the retort that she knew would do nothing but get him in trouble, Admiral or not. “We... we will see them both?” She asked.

Eliani nodded. “Yes. After the ceremony everyone will be gathering at the REC center. Andro also told me to tell you that what you will see when you are there at the REC center is Classified Compartmental Level Nine. If I’m not mistaken Admiral you only have a Level Seven Clearance, and I would hope that this show of trust in you is not misplaced.”

Megdar looked at her with wide eyes. “Level Nine?” He gasped. He was a Fleet Admiral and even he did not have Level Nine clearance.

Eliani turned as the large Heavy Lifter approached. Designed as a troop transport, it had been changed into a passenger carry easily and it came to a smooth stop three meters from where they stood. They watched as the Lifter’s door slid to the side and Adriana climb out slowly. Golina gasped, her hands going to her mouth as she saw Adriana’s swollen abdomen and the radiance she was projecting because of her pregnancy. She forgot herself and rushed forward to stop in front of her youngest daughter.

“Hello mother.” Adriana said with a reserved smile.

“Adriana... you look...” Golina was at a loss for words as tears began to form in her eyes.

“Pregnant?” Adriana said. “Yes... my husband and I are very happy.” She spoke being careful to emphasize the words my husband.

“I was... I was going to say you look beautiful.” Golina spoke reaching out with her hands. She stopped just before they touched her abdomen. “May I?”

Adriana nodded slowly and watched as her mother’s face became animated as she pressed her hands to Adriana’s abdomen. She and Megdar had no grandchildren as of yet, and Adriana carried the first of a new generation. Golina felt the baby kick and she laughed. “Oh... he...”

“She...” Adriana said with a smile. “And yes... she is very active. Especially around those she likes.” She told her. “She did the same when Malic touched her. She kicked for hours afterwards. And she never stops when her father rests his hands on her.” Eliani and Nyla stepped up to them and Adriana looked at them with a bright smile. “Princess Eliani... Star Commander Sinthe.”

Eliani took her hands quickly. “Adriana... we want to apologize to you for...”

Adriana laughed and shook her head. "Is my brother who you both desire?" She asked bluntly.

Eliani met her gaze. "More and more as each day passes." Eliani replied.

"Our blood burns for him." Nyla said softly.

Adriana nodded. "As his does for the both of you." She said. "I think after today things will be much easier to explain."

Eliani looked at her oddly. "What do you mean?" Nyla asked.

"You will see." Adriana said. "Both of you will see. We should go... Andro said your mothers would already be in the stands and that we were to sit with them."

Golina looked at Eliani quickly. "The... the Queens will be present?" She gasped.

Eliani nodded. "My mothers Anja and For'mya yes." She replied. She grabbed Nyla's hand. "We should go." She spoke turning back to Megdar. "Admiral... are you coming? Or would you prefer to walk the eight kilometers to where the ceremony is happening?"

Megdar grunted and nodded his head.

Dalah walked beside Arzoal as they made their way to the flat stretch of ground that overlooked the massive field below. Just below that piece of ground was the rapidly filling bandstand of bleachers. Stretched out before the bleachers was a huge expanse of open, grassy field immaculate in its green lushness. The flat ground above the bleachers was designed specifically for the Dragon Elders, each indent in the soft ground sized especially for the individual Elders for maximum comfort, not that any of them really noticed. It was a pointless effort since they would be comfortable on even the hardest stone given their scales, but the Elders sincerely appreciated that they were so highly thought of among not just the royal family but the entire Union.

... Wanted to remain and begin to help Vollenth as he woke and discovered his new world. Dalah complained softly to Arzoal.

There will be time enough for that. Arzoal answered. *This is an important occasion and it would be an insult if the Elders were not all here.*

Arzoal...

Dalah my sister dragon and fellow Elder... I do know how you feel. Arzoal spoke before she could continue. *Truly. You wanted so much for Vincix to be a member of this sacred circle, and you blame yourself because he could not.*

Dalah looked at her flame colored eyes. *I blame myself for his physical condition and his inability to land with a rider. He has all the other tools necessary to be a member of Mjolnir's Hand.*

Except a bonded one. Arzoal reminded her. *And that is what makes them so powerful as Pairs Dalah. You know this.*

A Bonded One would have come in due time. Dalah said. *One is out there somewhere for my son, of that I have no doubts. A powerful Lycavorian with a steel will and the desire to never fail. He will find my son soon.*

Arzoal looked at her somewhat surprised. *You have seen this?*

Dalah nodded confidently. *In my dreams. A face I never saw... but I know he exists. He is out there waiting for my Vincix.*

Arzoal nodded her head slowly. If anything, this confirmed in her mind without any doubt that Malic and Vincix had been meant for each other and as Andro had said, they would make a powerful Bonded Pair.

If you have seen it... then I believe you. Arzoal finally said. *Come my sister Elder... let us watch the ceremony and rejoice in Mjolnir's Hand being complete once more. You had a hand in helping the King and I form them, and you should be happy that they are once more complete.*

Dalah nodded her large head. *You are right. And I am happy Arzoal.* She looked around below them, her eyes scanning the expanse of ground before them. *Have you seen Vincix... he should have greeted me and he is not answering my calls to him?*

I know his role as the instructor to the Coven dragons has kept him very busy. Perhaps he is with them. I'm sure he will join us soon enough. Arzoal replied. She lifted her head and let her eyes drift to the distant hill top three kilometers away where she could see the lone figures of a single dragon and rider standing motionless. *Dalah... there... the chosen one is waiting.*

Dalah lifted her eyes as well and spotted the dragon and rider, both of them covered in full Dragon Armor and that silver like metal radiant in the morning sky as the sun began to rise over the trees.

It will be an honor to welcome him. Dalah said softly.

Eliani hugged her mother tightly; the gathered men and women around them smiling as the fiery Queen and Princess they all so adored greeted each other. Nyla and For'mya exchanged similar hugs and soft kisses while Megdar, Golina and Adriana looked on. Eliani held her mother's arms as they parted, the sun reflecting off their Persian and Burgundy red hair.

"Any word from Aunt Vana?" Eliani asked softly.

"She is contacting me later today." Anja answered.

"Why are the Elders being so obstinate mother?" Eliani asked.

Anja shook her head. "It's not something you need to concern yourself with. Sivana and I can handle the Elders and their stuffy old rules and ideals. When is this party going to start? Your father told me there is a free breakfast involved!"

Eliani laughed as she hugged For'mya tightly and Nyla embraced Anja. "The sections will be coming soon." She answered. "Where are Miath and Aurith?"

For'mya motioned to the hill just below where the Dragon Elders now sat. "They are catching up with Tharua and Arydun." She answered.

Eliani smiled as she saw the four dragons sitting on the hillside among perhaps a dozen more. She held For'mya's hand and took Anja's other hand as she turned to Adriana. "Mothers... this is Admiral Megdar and his mate Golina and their daughter Adriana." Eliani introduced them. "They are Enomotarch Malic's family."

Megdar snapped quickly to a rigid position of attention and bowed his head. "My Queens!" He almost shouted. "It is an honor."

Anja and For'mya nodded their heads. "Admiral Megdar." Anja stated rather coolly for she now knew Malic's entire history since he was the man that her daughter and Nyla so coveted. Her face and eyes changed instantly however as she stepped in front of Adriana and placed her hand on her swollen abdomen. "Oh my... she is a spitfire!" Anja declared.

Adriana chuckled. "Yes she is my Queen." She spoke. "It is truly an honor Milady."

For'mya stepped forward now and reached out to touch her abdomen and she smiled as well. "It must be that vampire blood in her Melyanna." She spoke gently, though emphasizing the word vampire. "It has combined so completely with Lycavorian blood, what we have here will be a whirlwind child with boundless energy."

"Indeed." Anja stated.

Golina stepped closer and bowed her head as well. "I never... I never imagined I... we would ever meet any of you." She spoke.

"We have come to the conclusion that things happen for a reason." For'mya stated with a smile as she turned to look at Golina. This ceremony was a welcome break from having to deal with the Kavalians. She and Deia had been working nearly non-stop over the last few days to thwart their political attempts. "And sometimes those reasons are not what we expect."

Golina met her dark eyes, seeing the way her golden blond hair reflected the rising sun making her appear almost angelic. "I... I have never thought of things in such a way." Golina said softly.

For'mya's smile was warm and friendly. "Perhaps it is time to start." She said. "There is..."

"There!" A voice shouted out. "The sections are coming!"

All eyes turned to the distant specks in the sky. Four long lines of dragons, twenty-five across flying in perfect unison, each section three rows deep. The two massive screens on either side of the huge field came alive with this picture as well.

"Admiral... I understand you don't care for *Mjolnir's Hand* or dragons very much?" Anja spoke looking at the man.

Megdar met her eyes without flinching which impressed Anja. He was a man of powerful convictions and will it seemed and while that was an excellent character trait, it was also a flaw as well. "I do not doubt their skill Milady." He spoke. "Their deeds speak for themselves... I just don't care for their practices."

Anja nodded slowly. “Well hopefully today will change your mind.”

“I don’t think that is possible Milady.” Megdar spoke.

For’mya took his arm in one hand and Golina’s in the other as Anja drew Adriana close to her. “You might be surprised Admiral. All you need do is look at things from a different perspective.” She said with a brilliant smile. “Let’s watch shall we?”

Background Music, Heavy Metal, Taking a Ride, Ozzy Osbourne Crazy Train, Mjolnir’s Hand Themes

Four sections of armored dragons and riders was impressive no matter how you cut it or what you thought of dragons. Two hundred and ninety-nine Lycavorian and Elven riders sat high in their Mark Eleven saddles, all of them with their hands on their thighs and their heads proudly looking forward, their legs held securely by the dragon armor wind brakes. Their Dragon Armor shone brilliantly in the sunlight, causing flashes of vivid light to reflect off the ground a thousand feet below them.

They flew as one mind, Martin Leonidas in the front with Section One behind him in three rows of twenty-five, followed by Andro, Andreus and Isra, all with their respective sections behind them. Andro’s section was missing one, that position in the first rank left open to signify that they were not yet complete. Their wings moved in perfect unison, no dragon missing a beat or moving their wings out of sync even though only a few meters separated their enormous wingspans. It was the perfect choreography, their minds and hearts acting as if they were all slaved to one central brain. They had become so much more than Martin and Arzoal had first envisioned through the years. Their training was intense, and they shared every experience with their fellow riders of Mjolnir’s Hand, for only they had the power within Mindvoice to do this. They had begun as Tier Six Mindvoicers, and now all of them were considered the most powerful of Mindvoicers within the Union save very few. Only Arzoal and the Elders, the First Oracle and members of the Royal family could hope to match what they could bring to bear.

Martin turned in his saddle as they grew closer to the ceremony field far below and he couldn’t help the swell of pride he felt when he saw them behind him maintaining perfect formation no matter what maneuver he and Torma executed.

[This is what it is all about Torma my brother.] Martin spoke. *[We will be complete once more.]*

[It has been too long Martin.] Torma answered knowing that three of his children had joined his bonded brother’s children in this calling of rider and dragon and were perhaps the strongest of them all.

[That it has.] Martin said. *[Malic and Vincix are a powerful pair and they will do justice to Mjolnir’s Hand I think.]*

[Even though he wants your daughter?] Torma chuckled.

[Given what he has accomplished up until Vincix came into his life... knowing the odds stacked against him, I would have given him my blessing even had this not happened.] Martin answered. *[Eliani and Nyla would have fixed him eventually, even if they had to hold him down to do it.]*

Torma chuckled. *[Yes... she is the more forceful of your daughters. And Nyla has taken after her in that regard.]*

Martin turned back around and saw they were nearly over the ceremony field. He turned to the right and off in the distance he could see Malic and Vincix standing proudly on the hilltop waiting for their time to come. *[Torma my brother... I believe its time we got this party rolling and brought our brothers and sisters together.]*

[I agree]

Martin reached down and removed the *Nehtes* from his right thigh. He triggered the extension button and watched as the spear extended to its full length of nearly nine feet. He lifted it above his head.

Brothers and sisters of Mjolnir’s Hand! Let us welcome our new brothers! He screamed out within Mindvoice.

Background music Malic’s Theme, Blackhawk Down ST, Battlestar Pegasus theme from BG, Reuniting from BG

All eyes in the grandstand watched as first their King and Torma peeled off and dove for the ground, followed in exacting formation by Section One. They saw them hurtle downward towards where the lone rider and dragon stood like a statue, the sun now reflecting off their armor dazzlingly, positioned as they were in the path of the rising sun. There were gasps of awe as first Martin and Torma swooped low to the ground, passing within a few meters of where Malic and Vincix stood, and he threw his *Nehtes* with incredible force from the saddle as he passed overhead. Men and women in the stands came to their feet as they watched the enormous screens on the sides of the field. Martin's *Nehtes* plunged into the ground only twelve inches from where Malic stood, each successive member of Section One breaking over the top of them and reaching out to them within Mindvoice.

Welcome brothers!

Welcome!

You honor us!

We are complete now!

Welcome!

Anyone who could Mindvoice at a Tier Four level or better could hear the many voices within Mindvoice and that was most of those gathered in the grandstand. Mjolnir's Hand was not shielding their words now, allowing all to hear them as each of them passed within feet of Malic and Vincix, never once revealing their names. That was to be their King's duty.

It happened again with Andro plunging his *Nehtes* down into the earth next to Malic's opposite foot as Elynth rolled on her side as they passed overhead. Lisisa and Denali followed next, Jeth adding a welcoming trumpet as they rocketed over the top of them. The same event happened with each section and soon Mjolnir's Hand was circling the ceremony field, every pair of eyes looking skyward at them. Even Malic's father had been impressed at the level of perfection they had displayed in formation and then flying over the lone rider and dragon. The few members of *Mjolnir's Hand* that Megdar had seen through his life were always on the ground, and he had not until this day realized the level of skill it took for a Bonded Pair to fly in such a precise formation, or do what they had done. Several times he had thought they would smash into the ground at such high speed as they passed over the lone pair, yet each time with a single flick of a tail or altering of wing position, they were soaring skyward once more. And through it all that lone pair had not moved a single muscle, remaining absolutely still, the rider standing slightly in front of the large dragon, his hand holding his extended *Nehtes*, his head never moving from looking forward. Megdar was considered a Tier Five Mindvoicer and he was able to hear the voices within Mindvoice easily. He had leaned over to his mate quickly when she yanked on his arm to inquire of what was happening and he explained rather animatedly what was occurring and telling her what was being said in Mindvoice. This excitement did not go unnoticed by Adriana, Eliani and Nyla.

"You see papa." Adriana said softly taking her father's arm in her hands and looking up at his weathered face. "They are more than you thought they were. So much more. This is what Malic desires... more than anything."

Megdar looked down at his youngest daughter and she thought she saw a hint of softness in his deep blue eyes that she had never seen before. "Adriana... how... how can he achieve this? He is..."

Adriana shook her head slowly with a gentle smile. "Never doubt the influence of destiny papa." She said. "What is done is done. You must let go of what you want of us and embrace the paths we take of our own accord. Be proud of who we are..." Adriana turned to gaze across the field and look at the lone rider and dragon in the distance. "And of what we could become."

"Is... is he watching this?" Megdar asked. "Can he see what is happening? He should be here."

Adriana turned once more and looked up at him. "He is closer than you think." She said with a smile.

It was then that Eliani and Nyla looked at her oddly, for they had heard everything she said to her father.

Background music Shall never surrender, Devil May Cry VGST, Leave No Man Behind Blackhawk Down ST.

Martin and Torma were the first to sweep over the field and land easily once they passed over Malic and Vincix. Martin remained on Torma's back as each member of Mjolnir's Hand Section One executed a perfect landing, once more in ideal formation behind him. Andro was next to land and Section Two behind him, again without so much as a millimeter of error. The front rank of Section two still missing one Bonded Pair. Andreus and Isra led their sections in as well, until all of them were on the ground in four sections. Andro and his father faced off across from each other, Andreus and Isra doing the same. Four sections all facing towards each other.

Martin climbed from his saddle and dropped easily to the ground, the psychic shield that encompassed them when they flew dissipating. He walked slowly to the center of the formation and waited as the rest of Mjolnir's Hand dismounted in unison and stood beside their dragons. The Dragon Armor reflected magnificently in the sunlight as the riders extended their *Nehtes* and drove the weighted ends into the ground with one mind. Even on the soft earth the effect could be felt vibrating through the ground even by those in the stands.

My honored brethren of Mjolnir's Hand! Martin's voice erupted from Mindvoice, easily carrying to all those who were able to hear.

We come together today to unite as one! Martin continued. *Five years we have searched for those to take the place of our fallen comrades! They died as they lived!*

HEROES! Five hundred and ninety-eight voices bellowed out.

They will never be gone from our hearts and minds! They live on inside us! We have searched long and hard to find others that would equal them in every way! I stand before you today... and I tell you... that search is over! Martin barked.

MJOLNIR'S HAND LIVES!

Against the enemies of the Union and those who are damned!

Against the enemies of the Union and those who are damned!

We shall show no mercy!

We shall show no mercy!

For we have none!

For we have none!

Our enemies shall fall!

Our enemies shall fall!

As we up rise!

As we up rise!

To claim our fate!

To claim our fate!

Now and forever!

Now and forever!

We will be together!

We will be together!

As Mjolnir's Hand!

As Mjolnir's Hand!

Martin turned to face where Malic and Vincix still stood in the distance.

Come with us brothers! Come with us and we'll stand and fight together! Through your strength and will you'll make us better! And you will see we'll fight until eternity. We'll make a better day tomorrow, for we shall never surrender!

All those who were watching turned their eyes to see the lone dragon in the distance let out a roaring trumpet that rolled across the field before them with supremacy and power. It was a trumpet that one dragon recognized instantly.

Dalah came to her feet as if she had been shot out of a cannon. *Vincix!* She gasped loudly within Mindvoice causing many to turn and look at her, including Eliani and Nyla.

They turned back and watched as the rider vaulted himself into the saddle and the dragon leaped into the sky with a surge of power and command influence. They watched as that pair climbed quickly into the sky with powerful sweeps of the enormous wings, rolling over several times as they climbed.

Vincix? Dalah gasped again as she recognized her son's coloring. Her eyes were wide as she turned to Arzoal and Daurgo, who were now standing as well. *Arzoal? Daurgo?*

Can you feel him Dalah? Arzoal spoke softly.

It is him isn't it? She exclaimed. *It is my son! How... how can this be?*

It is destiny stepping in once more to shape our future and the future of those around us. Daurgo spoke.

All of them looked skyward as Vincix hurtled over the huge field at breathtaking speed, banking sharply over the grandstand and rolling into another dive toward the field. They could only watch as the rider raised his arm and plunged it downward, the *Nehtes* releasing from his grasp to smash into the ground twelve inches from Martin's right foot.

We pledge ourselves to our brothers and sisters! Two voices rang out together.

Vincix executed a vertical climb rolling over at five thousand feet and spiraling back towards the earth. They watched the rider's arm flash forward three more times in quick succession.

We pledge ourselves to the Union! Andro's *Nehtes* slammed into the ground to his right.

We pledge ourselves to each other! Andreus's *Nehtes* came next.

We pledge all that we are as a Bonded Pair of Mjolnir's Hand! Isra's *Nehtes* was the last.

Vincix snapped into a tight roll and screamed across the field over the top of Martin's head, blasting directly at the grandstand. Dozens of men and women shot to their feet, Megdar and Golina among them as Vincix flared his massive wings and slowed to a crawl in mid air. Dalah realized what he was about to do and she shook her head.

No my son! She cried. You...

Vincix roared out his new position with a trumpet of happiness and elation and pride directed right at the grandstand as his hind legs touched down on the ground with Malic sitting high and proud in the saddle.

Dalah was shocked into silence at what she saw and Arzoal leaned close to her. *You see Dalah... fate always has a way of righting whatever might be wrong. Your dreams were correct Dalah. Destiny was only waiting for the right moment to fix itself.*

Megdar watched as the dragon moved closer to the grandstand, its amethyst colored eyes seemingly directed squarely at him. He felt Golina grasp his arm tightly as the huge dragon turned to the side and the tall rider slid easily from the saddle. Two gasps from behind him caused him to turn and he saw the unbelievable looks on the faces of Princess Eliani and her vampire lover Nyla.

Eliani's fern green eyes were wide as she felt the overwhelming power of his aura sweep over her. She leaned into Nyla slightly, knowing that Nyla could feel what she was experiencing easily.

"Malic!" Eliani gasped loudly.

Megdar turned back around at this and the armored rider was directly in front of him and Golina. He glanced at Adriana and saw his daughter was gazing with love and pride at the rider. He turned back once more his eyes wide now as he caught the ocean and driftwood scent of his son.

"Mal... Malic!" Admiral Megdar gasped focusing on the identical to his deep blue eyes set behind the shimmering helmet. They were wolf eyes now, but Megdar knew his son's eyes when he saw them. Malic was the only one of his sons to have inherited his blue eyes.

"Hello father." Malic spoke confidently. He glanced at his mother. "Hello mother."

Golina held her hands to her mouth as she burst into tears. "Malic!" She sobbed.

Malic lifted his right hand and touched the small control panel. Megdar watched as the Dragon Armor receded from around his son's helmet, exposing more of his eyes and mouth and revealing the standard matte black helmet, only with crimson slashes across the sides and front. Malic reached down and withdrew the *Nehtes* given to him by Andro and held it up for his father to see. His thumb caressed the trigger and the spear extended to its full length with an audible snap and click. The intricate carvings on the shaft were obvious as were the several amethyst colored jewels.

"I... I harbor no feelings of malice towards you father." Malic said softly. "I can not change who you are, nor do I wish to try. You told me once that this was out of my reach. That what I coveted more than anything would not happen. This is who I am father... this is who I was always meant to be. I will forge my

own path now. My bonded brother and I will forge our own path.” Malic held up the Nehtes. “This is for you father. To show you that you were wrong about what I could accomplish. This is to show you that I am not like you and nor will I ever be like you.” Malic plunged the Nehtes down firmly into the ground between his father’s feet. “My destiny lies down another path, and I will walk that path father... with your blessing... or without.”

Malic’s eyes shifted upwards and he looked at Eliani and Nyla who were too stunned to do anything but gaze back at him in shock. He let his eyes linger on them for a long moment before he looked at Anja and For’mya and bowed his head. “My Queens.” He spoke softly. “With your permission... with your permission I will take my place.”

“With our permission...” Anja said.

“And our blessing Star Commander Malic.” For’mya finished.

Malic bowed his head and touched the control panel once more, activating his helmet armor and waiting until the Dragon Armor had extended again. He glanced once more at Eliani and Nyla and then turned back to the field where the members of Mjolnir’s Hand had moved into a huge circle waiting for him. He stepped off the stands and began walking back to where Vincix waited.

“Malic!” Megdar’s voice boomed.

Malic stopped and turned back to look at his father. He watched him reach down and yank the Nehtes from the ground between his feet and walk up to him. Megdar depressed the trigger and collapsed the Nehtes. He thrust it out to his son in the horizontal fashion of greeting.

“You will... you will need this Star Commander!” He spoke.

Malic reached up and grasped the Nehtes with an armored hand, only to have his father grasp that hand with both of his tightly. He shifted his eyes up and looked into his father’s face seeing the single tear rolling down his father’s cheek.

“With my blessing... Malic. With my blessing... and the love I have never shown you... my son.” Megdar spoke.

Malic heard his mother and sister sobbing softly, Eliani and Nyla’s eyes also full of tears. He nodded his head to his father. “My Bonded Brother and I will never dishonor you or the title we now carry father. I swear this to you.”

Megdar nodded. “Then go! Go Malic... go and take your place! Do not keep our King and your brethren waiting.”

Malic nodded his head and moved quickly to climb onto Vincix’s back. “Vincix my brother! Go!” He barked.

Vincix trumpeted his agreement and propelled them into the sky once more as Megdar stepped back to stand between his mate and daughter.

They watched as Vincix circled the field once and then landed in front of where Martin’s place in the circle was. Andro was to his right, Andreus and Isra to his left.

King Martin Leonidas! Malic bellowed out. My Bonded Brother and I are ready to assume our duties! Take your place then! Martin spoke.

Malic saw the opening between Andro and the female rider beside him and he directed Vincix in that direction. They walked past the opening, turned and then filled the gap in the circle. Malic looked at Andro as he came into position next to him.

Mjolnir’s Hand! Our Sacred Circle is complete once more! We are united as one again! Martin shouted. *Let all who bear witness this day, pass on word that we are united once more! That we stand ready in defense of our Union! Let them know we will never surrender! Not while even one of us breathes air! This we swear!*

This we swear!

Mjolnir’s Hand I salute you! Martin screamed out.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

**MENKLA K2 MILITARY TRANSPORT
ASSIGNED ULU ARIZONA**

Earth.

She hadn't been back to the planet of her birth in more years than she could remember it seemed. This lush planet held nearly all of the most painful memories of her young life, and no matter where she went or what she did; it never failed to happen that she returned to Earth in some way. Perhaps it was the call of home, or perhaps it was the call of the few memories of what little happiness she had experienced on the blue/green world beneath her. Whatever the reason, she was back once more.

Captain Miranda 'Mando' Lorian allowed her dark brown eyes to gaze out the view window from the upper deck of the *MENKLA* transport as the pilot brought them closer to the planet on a smooth approach heading. She could see three of the colossal *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers in orbit, the smaller accompanying ships of their Strike Wings maintaining station outside of orbit to allow them freedom of movement in case they needed to respond. Miranda also knew the three captains of those three Strike Cruisers could have the ships moving from orbit in less time than it took her to get a mug of coffee. The gray moon she remembered from her childhood sparkled with lights from this distance and she knew it was from the major building expansion that EDEN Moon Base had undergone ten years ago, enlarging the base to cover fully twenty square kilometers. Combined with the *PROMETHEUS*-Class Planetary Command Station that orbited Earth, and the ASOC II Planetary Defense Platforms, or PDPs for short, Earth had become the second most heavily defended planet in the entire Lycavorian Union behind only Apo Prime.

The Lycavorian Union.

Her home and what she had now dedicated her life in defense of. Her parents had been original members of EDEN Moon Base's crew, her father a flight engineer for the *RAPTOR* squadron, her mother a civilian administrative assistant. She was their only child at the time; any brothers and sisters she knew had been put off after her birth because they had taken a huge role in making sure EDEN Moon Base succeeded. The comet and Senator Graham had changed all that. Her parents had taken Miranda in what was now known as the Eden Exodus, when thousands of men, women and children had left the moon with Martin once Graham had briefly taken power. All of them knew that they followed someone who was not entirely human in Martin Leonidas, yet they did not truly understand the truth of that statement until much later. Not that it would have mattered to her parents, they adored the man who they thought was a genome. Had they lived long enough to discover that he was actually a King of werewolves and the son of a legendary Spartan King who had lived three thousand years before, Miranda had no doubt her father would have thought that to be so very cool.

She lost her parents James and Miyazuki Lorian in that first unprovoked attack on the encampment they had established near the High Elf lands. If not for the superior reaction of one of those that Martin had turned into a werewolf, Miranda would have died as well. Her world had come crashing down that day when she was only four years old. At that age she hadn't known why someone would want to hurt her parents and take them away from her. It was a question she often asked the adoptive parents she had been placed with under the watchful eye of Ben O'Connor. The elven mother and human father had three other children, all of mixed heritage and she was accepted unconditionally and loved the same, if not more because of the loss she had already endured. They had taken part in the building of Eden City, both of them in the medical field under Queen Anja, and both of them intent on returning the life to her that had been ripped from her grasp. Those months with her adoptive parents and three siblings had been hard, many nights Miranda found herself crying to sleep in her elven mother's arms. However, she was a resilient young lady, and the loss slowly began to fade as her life with her adoptive parents grew more and more routine and happy.

The High Coven attack on Eden City had ripped that from her yet again.

Her adoptive parents and all of her adoptive siblings had been lost in the bombing and shelling of Eden City. The only thing that had saved her life was a half vampire Drow elf female that had snatched her from the jaws of death yet again and protected her ruthlessly. It was a stretch of seven hours that Miranda still had dreams about to this day. The way the Drow female had viciously killed nearly a dozen High Coven cloned troops as she fought to get them to the safety of the northern airfield and War Master Tareif's forces. It was that single event in her life that made Miranda always view Drow elves differently. She had a respect and affection for them that did not carry over to the majority of other elves.

Miranda Lorian bounced from home to home after things had once more become settled, always under the watchful eye of Ben and Tina O'Connor for they had been close with her parents and in some way they felt responsible for her. Their lives had taken a different direction when the spunky red haired female elf Endith

entered it, but no matter what happened in her life, Miranda could always turn to them no matter which one it was. She had done just that on several occasions when she had confrontations with the newly formed Eden City police force as she was growing up. Miranda tended to hang with a rough crowd as she grew, quick to anger and violence, she rapidly gained a reputation as someone you did not want to make angry. She had incredible reflexes for a human and though she stood only five foot two, and a hundred and thirteen pounds, constant life on the streets had honed her body to perfection. Many of the elf children her age would not tangle with her because they knew she was as tenacious as a lion on the hunt and would never back down. She had been in numerous fights, usually giving far more than she received.

It wasn't until she stole a planetary transport on a dare that she came back with a flare to the attention of Ben O'Connor and a certain reptilian Union Fleet Admiral. The transport just happened to be the personal transport of Admiral Ceneu and even without proper piloting skills Miranda had given the Earth Air Defense Forces fits for three hours before she managed to land the transport without damaging it. She was sixteen at the time, and her tough demeanor and experiences had impressed Ceneu to such an extent he backed her entrance into the Union Fleet Academy without so much as a passing thought.

Miranda had entered a new world then, leaving Earth for Apo Prime. So caught up in the utter strangeness of everything around her, Miranda Lorian nearly lost it all when during the first week in the academy she thoroughly beat a vampire cadet almost to death for a simple comment he had made in regards to her attitude. That is when Ben, Tina and Endith had taken her to see Helen. Miranda had a distrust of everything non-human with the exception of Drow elves surprisingly, and she had a particular dislike of vampires, which unexpectedly did not extend to the Drow. It was the Lycavorian First Oracle that discovered the fears Miranda held deep inside her, fears that would never go away, but fears that could be treated in some fashion so they did not rule her actions. Helen had taken her to the Royal Palace on Apo Prime, and it was there Miranda met and lived with the King and his Queens and small children for almost two months during the break in classes at the Academy.

Martin Leonidas was a portion of her memories that would never fade, for she blamed him in some small part for the deaths of both her families. As she had grown older, she realized that was not realistic for he was trying to save all those who desired freedom and happiness, and her parents would never have held their deaths against him. During her stay on the Royal Island, she had her first interaction with dragons and while she found their wisdom and strength to be magical, outside of her time on the island she stayed away from them unless she needed to be around them. They frightened her in some manner she could not explain. Miranda spent quite a bit of time with Queen Isabella who had taken a shine to her because she reminded Isabella so much of herself while growing up on Usu Ozeib 7. The feelings of being lost and unwelcome were something she understood quite well. Miranda had grown even closer to Ben, Tina and Endith as well, for they were her last link to her parents and her past which she clung to rigidly.

Miranda Lorian also had the distinction of being the only non member of his family to have spent so many hours with Martin Leonidas and his sons Androcles and Resumar. What she had learned from him during that time had remained with her until this day and it was a defining factor in her own command style. She learned about his life before he had discovered who he was, what he had felt after he had discovered his past, and how there had been many times he had attempted to escape that and return to simpler times as he called them. He also bestowed upon her in those two months the same skills he taught his sons when it came to fighting and when she left that island Miranda Lorian was far deadlier than when she had arrived for she had learned the patience of a wolf and Spartan.

And she had become completely focused on what she would accomplish.

Five years later she graduated third in her class, a feat that widely set the course for the rest of her career, for she had beat out nearly a dozen elves in terms of academics and piloting skills, not to mention she was one of only a handful of humans who had actually learned the Lycavorian ancient language and become fluent in its use. At the age of twenty-one Miranda 'Mando' Lorian returned to Earth for a brief stint in the Air Defense Forces that she had made look the fool five years earlier. Her rise to prominence continued steadily, all the while with Ben and Admiral Ceneu patting themselves on the back at their decision to see beyond the exterior and see inside her. Her relationship with Ben and Tina waned when she discovered they had asked Queen Isabella to turn them. At first Miranda had felt betrayed by the very man and woman who she trusted most of all and considered her only real family. She learned quickly why they had done what they had done, and

though that eased much of what she felt, it made her remain away from them until the end of the Evolli War. One of Admiral Ben O'Connor's first accomplishments as the new Admiral of Union Fleet Operations was to establish almost human like distinctions within the Union Fleet when it came to ships and fighter squadrons. He took a huge work load off of Admiral of the Fleet Riall in terms of planning and logistics and research, which freed Riall to use his tactical knowledge and skills to direct Union forces. It was something that Miranda had supported fully, for it allowed the humans that dotted the fleet to feel accepted and respected. It was also a sign to her of Ben's refusal to let go of his humanity even though he was now a vampire, and under Ben's care and with King Leonidas's support, humans within the Union fleet were becoming much more prominent and many of them held positions of great importance as pilots and engineers.

At the beginning of the Evolli War Miranda was leading a four ship flight in VFA7, one of the newer squadrons in the fleet onboard the new *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser *DORI LETH*. The first two years of that war had seen her score twenty-seven Evolli kills, all of them their most advanced fighter, and she become a five time ace and one of the most renown pilots within the entire fleet. Also during that time she did not lose anyone in her section or squadron and VFA7 became one of the premier fighter squadrons of the fleet. She was well known for her aggressive flying skills and decisive decision making, but she was also known to never leave or abandon anyone in her section. They had become her family now and she was almost possessive in her protection of them, and the two Elves and one Lycavorian in her section had become just as possessive of her in return.

All that changed in the Battle for Alba Tau.

The *DORI LETH*, or *HADES GATE* in translation, was supporting the ground attack on Alba Tau when word reached them that the King and Crown Prince and their reduced sections of *Mjolnir's Hand* had been shot down and were under sadistic and brutal attack by thousands of Evolli ground forces. This had sent the six supporting Union fleets into a controlled frenzy, for almost immediately after receiving word of that, fully seven front line Evolli Fleets jumped into the system and began attacking. Suddenly a well thought out Lycavorian attack against inferior Evolli ground and fleet forces had turned into an ambush by superior Evolli forces with top notch equipment and ships.

That had begun a twenty-one hour hell not only for those on the ground, but for the pilots of the Union fleets as well.

The seven Evolli Fleets were all top of the line ships, with their advanced fighters and experienced pilots. Apparently their goal had been to wipe out the King, Crown Prince and three of the Queens in one fell swoop thinking they could cripple the entire Lycavorian Union. With Aricia, For'mya and Anja screaming and directing forces from the surface of the planet, the next twenty-one hours had been one battle after another, the Evolli giving almost as good as they got. Miranda's wingman was the first to be killed in the thick fog of fighters that had filled the stars that day. One second he was there, the next he had been completely obliterated by an Evolli plasma burst. Miranda had killed that fighter screaming out her rage, and then she had reformed her section to continue the attack they had begun only to find that VFA7's squadron commander had been killed and she was now in command. Most of that time in her life was a blur now, but she had continued the attack against one of the main Evolli Carriers, she and the survivors of their squadron screaming out in happiness as that massive ship had nosed over and exploded in the upper atmosphere. Miranda led VFA7 back to *DORI LETH* to refuel and rearm, and then they launched once more to provide support for another attack on the second Evolli carrier that had jumped into the system. This ship and its fighters had already destroyed one *LEONIDAS II* Strike Cruiser and half a dozen smaller ships and it needed to be killed before it could bring its weapons to bear on the planet below. She and VFA7 provided fighter support as the older Lycavorian Union M4 *DEVASTATOR* Fighter Bombers finally blew that carrier into tiny pieces, the death blow coming when an M4 fighter had insanely flown its last missile right into the landing bay of the ship and then rode the expanding fireball out the other side.

An emergency call found her with nine of the original sixteen fighters in her squadron surviving and being sent to assist with the M4 squadron to attack and destroy the main Evolli Aerospace Command Platform. It was a huge oval shape sphere that was coordinating all the Evolli forces in the system. They needed to knock out that ship and do it ASAP before the Evolli could bring in more reinforcements. By the time that oval shaped sphere was cracking like an egg, Miranda was filled with nothing but rage. Miranda had lost the remainder of her squadron in the vicious attack, including the remaining three pilots of her beloved section members. The

Evulli defended their Command ship fanatically and many pilots died that day. The deaths of her section members, her family, brought long buried memories rushing to the front, only this time Miranda 'Mando' Lorian could lash out.

And lash out she did.

Taking her damaged fighter into the atmosphere against orders, Miranda proceeded to pull up the ground forces frequencies and was credited with destroying three heavy Evulli gun positions with just her pulse cannons. The last attack run however cost her fighter half of its propulsion, and trailing smoke for kilometers from the remaining engine, she finally crashed deep in Evulli territory. Miranda thought she was dead for sure so far behind enemy lines as she was, and she welcomed death's embrace if it came for her. She never imagined they would react to her going down so drastically. Her actions had saved countless thousands of Spartans lives, and the Lycavorian commanding General of that unit was not about to let her go down without a fight. He immediately dispatched two *RAPTOR* evac ships under heavy *RAPTOR II* gunship support to rescue her. Both of her legs had been broken along with one arm and several ribs when she crashed, yet when they found her she was ready to put our rounds from her K12 and go down fighting.

Her injuries got her an evac to the medical ship in orbit, and six hours after she arrived, so did the King, the Prince and the survivors of the ground battle, which she later discovered was far more grievous a battle. All of them were hard hit even with their famed healing systems, and they had spent a week in the same ward together as the medical ship made its way back to Apo Prime at its best possible speed, all of them under the watchful eye and care of Queen Anja. It was that week with them on the hospital ship that kept Miranda from going completely insane with grief and guilt for being the only survivor of the battle, all those she considered her family once more ripped from her grasp. That week with Martin Leonidas and his son, with General Simpson and his son, and dozens of others who had lived through Alba Tau, it granted Miranda a new family in a sense.

What war had taken from her, it had also given back.

It took her thirteen months to recover from her wounds, both physical as well as mental and she was immediately handed the position of the Commander Air Group for the *RAGE OF DRAGONS*, a new *LEONIDAS II* Strike Cruiser that had just been commissioned. It was over the course of the next two years of the war that she earned her nickname 'Rogue Alpha' by the Lycavorians, for her iron will and detachment from those around her unless her duties called for it. She allowed no one close to her emotionally, and while she flew and fought beside her fellow pilots, never allowing any of them to fall while flying with her, none of them reached the part of her heart that her former Squadron mates had. Those she had bonded to on that medical ship were the only ones she allowed close to her, and they were who she communicated with on a regular basis. Miranda considered many Lycavorians, Elves and vampires arrogant by their very nature, and while she knew there were exceptions to that rule she had only accepted her 'War Family' as part of that group. She clung stubbornly to her humanity, refusing many times the offers by Lycavorian men and even vampire men to turn her so they could build a relationship together. She attracted many males with her exotic beauty and raven colored hair, and many male wolves knew of her exploits and drooled at the opportunity to turn her and claim her as a mate. They knew she would give them strong children. Miranda worked very hard to keep her figure in superb condition, her breasts high and firm, and her waist small. Her legs were long for her height of five foot two, and she had what she considered being somewhat of a flat ass, though most men did not think of it that way. The choice to not be turned caused many wolves to regard her as a bigot, which anyone who worked with her knew was untrue. She was known as a stern disciplinarian, a CAG that would not tolerate fools or the risks they brought with them. She was known as someone who, while not a stickler for the rules, expected perfection from her pilots and ground crew no matter how they had to obtain it. Or they had to at least try for perfection to the very best of their abilities.

She attended the Lycavorian Senior Officer Command Academy two years previous at Ben O'Connor's recommendation, and upon graduating tops in that class she was promoted to Captain and assigned by Special Order of the King to the position she now held. She had spent a year going to the Command Academy and in that time had purge much of the hatred from her, and even strengthened the relationship she had with Ben and Tina. She lived with them for that year, and seeing them together and the way they interacted and accepted here without question purged any doubts or questions about them from her mind. They were all Miranda Lorian had

left that connected her to her past, and along with Endith, she swore to never lose them no matter what it cost her.

“Mando?” The male voice spoke softly from her left, pulling her out of her thoughts as she turned to look up into the face of her Executive Officer.

“Janon?” She spoke. “Something?”

The tall, thickly muscled older Lycavorian Spartan held up the data pads. He had been with Miranda since the *RAGE OF DRAGONS*, coming over as her Executive Officer and now one of only forty-three people within the entire Union with Level Ten Security Clearance. He trusted Miranda, or Mando as she preferred to be called, with his life for she had already saved it on several occasions. A fact that allowed him to continue to enjoy the pleasures of his elven mate of three hundred and nine years and their two small children. Janon was one of those exceptions to the rule as far as Miranda was concerned, and though she would never become fast friends with him and give of herself as she had done in the past, he was far closer to her than perhaps anyone but Ben, Tina, Endith and Miranda’s ‘War Family’.

“General Lynwe finally replied.” He stated. “She sends her apologies, but the King has her working on something that is taking up quite a bit of her time.”

Miranda motioned for him to take a seat opposite her and sat up straighter. “Well if the Drow are involved you can bet it is important.” She spoke watching him sit down. “The King only involves them when he wants his A Team on the job. And the Drow are definitely his A Team.” She took the pad from him as he settled into the chair. “She can still meet with us right?”

Janon nodded. “The day after tomorrow.” He answered. “The list she put together is very short... there are only five names, but I think the first two officers are what we are looking for. General Lynwe sends her recommendation for the third officer however. She is one of the original Drow elves to escape with her and Vice President Aihola’s brother Tari. She is only a Lieutenant, which could cause some waves.”

Miranda rubbed her face and activated the pad, her dark eyes perusing the information quickly but efficiently. She scrolled down to the third Drow elf, passing over the male and female above her. Miranda gazed at her picture for a long moment, taking in the gorgeous amber colored eyes that had always caught her attention on Drow ever since that female had saved her life as a child, and then the near flawless light chocolate colored skin. Her long shimmering white hair was tied into a tight pony tail with violet Drow silk and draped over one shoulder.

“Lieutenant E’dira. She’s two hundred and thirty-four years old.” Miranda spoke looking at him. “Why only a Lieutenant?”

“It seems she took offense to something an Amarian diplomat she was guarding said to her six years ago.” Janon replied with a smile. “She bent his feelers slightly. The Amarian demanded she be punished and threatened to make a political stink out of it. She volunteered to be reduced in rank to Lieutenant to avoid any political mess.”

Miranda smiled. “Really?” She asked. “Oh... I would have liked to have seen her bend his feelers. Amarians can get a little frisky at times.” She said. “What does Lynwe say about her?”

“Her transmission was short, but she said she would fill us in more when we see her.” Janon spoke. “Basically she says this Drow has a mind like a computer, finished at the top of every Security Operations course within the Union, and was part of the King’s invasion of Ukwav and the destruction of Enurrua. She is also the only survivor of her Drow Scout Team from Alba Tau.” Janon finished softly.

Miranda looked up at him quickly. “Alba Tau?” She said softly.

Janon nodded knowing the memories of Alba Tau sometimes made her very upset. “They were trying to get to the King’s position during the night and were caught in the same ambush as General Simpson.” He answered.

Miranda lowered the pad and looked out the window once more. “It seems I can’t escape the memories of Alba Tau Janon. None of us can.” She said.

Janon nodded. “My mate tells me there are times when she can hear me whispering in my sleep. Like I am re-fighting that battle. Not very often now... but it does still happen.”

“It has affected a lot more people than even I first thought.” She spoke turning to Janon. “It says she has never had a ship posting. Is she qualified on the Nodon JCN 71 Tactical Network and the NorthAm FCS?”

Janon nodded with a grin. “Completed last year with a 97 percent Attack/Defense ratio.” He answered.

“Oh... I like her already.” Miranda spoke. “The other top two?” She asked.

Janon shook his head. “They scored 89 percent and 92 percent respectively. Not even close to her.”

“Tell Lynwe we want to meet with her.” Miranda spoke immediately.

“I already did.” He answered with a smile. “She’ll be with Lynwe when we meet with her for lunch at the Grand Center.”

“Good.” Miranda said. “Let’s roll off the CAG names again.” She said. “I want to make sure we are making the right decision here.”

Janon looked at the pad he held. “Senior Lieutenant Rekon?”

Miranda shook her head as she lifted the pad. “Too tight in the thrusters and too by the book.” She said. “Senior Lieutenant Bolar?”

Janon shook his head now. “He thinks his *sibfla* doesn’t stink.” He said. “What about Junior Commander Golnar? He had fourteen kills during the war.”

“He spent most of his time trying to bounce the wives of other officers on his little *celie* after he got hurt. He spent a total of nine months in the combat zone Janon. We spent more time in the cockpit in the last two years than this *midaeus* spent the entire war. And nine of his fourteen kills were third rate Evolli fighters. Not exactly their top of the line.”

Janon nodded. “Point taken.” He said with a grin.

“This Senior Lieutenant Talay is promising.” Miranda spoke.

Janon looked at her. “Mando... you would eat that young elf for breakfast and spit him out in the first six hours. He’d be screaming for a transfer inside of the first day. He has no backbone and he is the epitome of why you think most elves are arrogant.”

“I’m not that bad!” Miranda exclaimed.

“This coming from the human officer who told the elven Commander of the 39th SCFFG to suck her left tit when he refused to allow you to refuel.” Janon said.

“He told me I couldn’t use his gas to get back in the fight when he had his birds sitting on ready in their launch tubes because it violated safety protocols.” Miranda snapped. “And I told him to suck my right tit. My tattoo was still healing.”

Janon laughed and nodded his head. “You are right.” He said. His eyes scanned the list of names and he stopped. “What about this one?” He spoke. “Major Steven Randall, he’s currently the CAG for EADF.” Janon’s eyes grew a little wider. “Whoa! Sixty-seven kills during the war! That’s almost as many as you! Five decorations for bravery, and get this... two letters of reprimand, one that should have been given to his wife.”

“What ship?” Miranda asked her interest piqued.

Janon looked up at her. “*NORMYA’S LIGHT*.” He answered.

“Queen Dysea’s ship?” Miranda spoke suddenly very interested. “She and Queen Isabella led some of the largest campaigns against the Evolli during the war. Dysea didn’t care for them very much it seems.”

Janon nodded. “He was a Squadron Commander for three years, and then acting CAG for the last thirty-six months of the war.”

“Call Sign?”

“Call Sign was...” Janon looked up from the pad. “His Call Sign was Scar.” He said softly.

“Scar?” Miranda said her mind flashing back over the years. “That was the... that was the call sign of the M4 Squadron Commander that took down the second Evolli carrier at Alba Tau.” She said quietly.

Janon nodded. “By shoving an Y14 missile right down its throat and into its landing bay.”

“He *flew* the damn missile into the landing bay Janon! His fire control computer went tits up and he executed a manual release inside the landing bay!” Miranda said. “And then he rode the fireball out the other side!”

Janon looked at the pad. “He’s one of Ben’s initial pilot trainees from after the Battle of Eden City. He’s qualified on everything we have in the inventory, with nearly seven thousand hours in the Tempest alone. He is married to War Master Tareif’s youngest daughter Zaala, has been for the last twenty-three years. He...”

“What?” Miranda asked.

“He was turned by the King.” Janon spoke looking up at her. “He was human but asked that the King turn him after he married Tareif’s daughter.”

Miranda took the pad from his hand, reading for a moment. “He asked for the same reason that Ben and Tina asked Queen Isabella to turn them. It says he rarely, if ever shifts to wolf form.” She said softly. “He’s turned down three promotions to remain in command of EADF. Superior pilot... the Lycavorian blood only increased his test scores by a factor of two instead of the usual four or five. He had... he had all the skills before the King turned him.”

Janon nodded. “That is love for you.” He said softly. “Tareif’s youngest daughter must be something else.”

“No children. Married to Zaala Randall, daughter to War Master Tareif and sister to Sparta’s Lieutenant Governor Tarifa. I wonder if she looks like Tarifa... that would explain a lot. Wow... she has two degrees, one in Astrophysics and the other in Quantum Engineering. She also has a Level Nine Clearance.” Miranda said reading from the pad.

“A civilian with Level Nine Clearance?” Janon asked. “That’s strange isn’t it?”

Miranda nodded her head. “We’ll have to ask Ben about that when we see him. There has to be a story behind that and it answers your question about her being something special.”

Janon nodded. “I guess so. Randall has two Flight Valor Awards one Cluster each, two Distinguished Valor decorations and one Distinguished Flight Commendation.” Miranda’s eyes grew a little wider as Janon spoke slowly. “He was reprimanded the first time when he told the Commander of the 23rd SCFFG to go fuck himself when he refused to launch an R&R mission to get one of his pilots who had been shot down over Modasi Three. He then proceeded to land his fighter on the surface, stripped out its weapons pods to dump the weight and then flew his ship back with his downed pilot crunched in behind his seat. The second reprimand was given to him when his wife punched out an Elf Minister from Elear for making advances towards her and then calling her husband an overbearing brute of a man.” Janon spoke his eye brows lifting a little. “The details of that incident are compartmentalized at Level Ten.”

“Level Ten? We have clearance.” Miranda asked motioning with her head. “Open it then.”

Janon shook his head. “Eyes only for Ben or Admiral Riall. We’ll definitely have to ask Ben about that if we go with this guy. We don’t need any baggage to come with him.”

Miranda scrolled down the pad and found the information she wanted. She ran her finger across the pad slowly and gently. “He’s the one Janon.” She said softly looking at him and holding out the pad. “He brought them all home. Every single one of the pilots in his squadron that started the war with him, he brought them all home Janon. Over a thousand sorties and not one death in his squadron. After he became CAG they didn’t lose one ship throughout the remainder of the war, and they took part in four of the last five major battles. We have our CAG Janon. Now all we have to do is convince Earth Command he belongs with us.”

THE WILDS NEBONESE

Las’elh stood to the side quietly, holding Gravork by his arm as she watched Anton and Cihera greet the male and female Drow elves just inside the entrance to the rear of the trading post. The last three days and nights traveling with them had exposed Las’elh to things she had never seen before. Working as a member of the EI she had never been exposed to the *Krypteria* in any way. It was said that you could be working next to one of them and not even know it. They were masters of disguise and being able to take on new identities and all of them could speak many different languages fluently. Quite a few of the operatives for EI had heard through different sources of operations conducted by the *Krypteria*. They were restricted from working within Union territory by their founding charter, but it was very well known they had a hand in breaking open the extensive High Coven Intelligence network over two decades ago and working hand in hand with the newly formed *Durcunusaan* to rid themselves of High Coven agents. They were overseen by a small committee of Lycavorian, Elf, Algolian and Hadarian senior ministers, unknown to all save the King and his inner circle, but to Las’elh’s knowledge these Ministers had never once refused a petition by Armetus.

The Lycavorian Spartan Armetus was legendary even among Elven Intelligence for his skills and tenacity and his ability to wade through the political muck as field agents called it. He never abandoned his people for any purpose, and during the Evolli war had even gone on several missions himself, one of them to

retrieve the bodies of two agents that had been killed transmitting secret Evolli documents to Union Headquarters. It was rumored that he had also slaughtered nearly an entire platoon of Evolli troops in retribution for their actions. Las'elh knew that he had a fondness for Drow elves, and it was by his actions that they now had the reputation they did.

Las'elh knew that many Drow elves called The Wilds home, with several reasonably large settlements spread on different worlds, all of them some of the roughest parts of The Wilds. Rumors had been started that the Drow were not happy with the more peaceful nature that their Queen Aihola had pushed on them, and had struck out on their own. The Drow were a dominant in all that they did, even with those they chose to mate with. Female Drow were higher in the pecking order than males, and it was not uncommon to see Drow females in The Wilds with female slaves doing their bidding. Mostly other female elves and humans, as it was not uncommon even in within the Union to see female Drow with female lovers, all of them very beautiful. The majority of them were elven or human but since being discovered some Drow had taken other compatible females as lovers as well. That was not to say that Drow females dismissed their male counterparts. They did not... and seeing the male and female in front of her told Las'elh that. It was a point of contention with the elves on Elear about why their King had allowed them to establish themselves like this, but as Las'elh had discovered from Anton and Cihera as they transited to Nebonese, the Drow who called The Wilds home were all members of the *Krypteria* and fanatically loyal to King Leonidas and their Queen Aihola. This was obvious to Las'elh as she watched the male and female Drow greet Anton and Cihera with animated faces and warm hugs.

Las'elh also knew that Drow females were considered by many to be exotically alluring even to other women. Two nights she had witnessed Anton and Cihera making love on their bed while she faked being asleep. Anton Simpson was larger than any man she had ever been with, his cock long and thick while his body was sculpted muscle, no doubt the result of his father's Spartan blood. Cihera was equally beautiful in Las'elh's eyes, her dark skin and very long legs supple and firm on her near five foot ten height. Her breasts were not as large as Las'elh's, but they were firm and pouty and obviously very sensitive if the noises she made while her husband suckled on them was any indication. Las'elh had watched them for hours it seemed, pleasuring each other in ways she had never imagined or attempted in most respects, and just last night she had brought herself to a silent but powerful explosion of her own, imagining herself sandwiched between their dark bodies and having them do all those things to her. It had embarrassed her this morning, for she didn't doubt that Anton Simpson could detect the scent of her lingering arousal, yet nothing was said or even hinted at to her about it. Though Cihera had gazed at her with those amber colored eyes almost hungrily it seemed.

The voices brought her out of her thoughts.

"...no trouble with the port authorities?" The female Drow asked.

Anton shook his head. "We hid Gravork in our equipment compartment." He answered. "We passed off Las'elh as Cihera's property."

"I did not agree to that!" Las'elh spoke quickly her elven modesty and independence coming to the forefront.

She saw four pairs of eyes turn to look at her. "Better that she did Commander Las'elh." The male Drow replied.

Las'elh's blue eyes grew a little wider. "You... you know who I am?" She gasped.

The male Drow elf spoke now as he moved closer to her. "Who do you think it was that cleaned up after you on Talbor Seven Commander? Once Anton and Cihera contacted us we sent our people on Talbor Seven to secure Gravork's suite before your EI recovery team could make an entrance. We took the young lady you knocked out into custody, removed any sign that you had been there, erased the traces of your stay from their computer banks, and basically made it so you never existed." He turned to Anton. "You are getting sloppy by the way. You know that head shots to Kochab's vent blood explosively."

Anton chuckled. "That wasn't me." He said motioning to his wife. "The fool got touchy feely with Cihera."

The Drow male laughed. "Oh..." He turned back to Las'elh. "A singularly bad thing to do with a mated Drow female." He stated to her with a grin. "As I was saying Commander... now that Cihera has established you as her property so to speak, her slave if you will, none of the vermin on this infested rock will approach you if they know what is good for them. We made it clear some time ago that to impose yourself between a

dominant Drow female and her slave was not a very wise move. It is more a security precaution than anything else. And trust me... with your beauty, if she had not done this, there would have been trouble.”

“So... you all play... you play roles here?” Las’elh asked.

“It is part of our cover.” The female Drow answered the question. “Nalar and I have been husband and wife for almost twenty years, though there are times when I question what was going through my mind when I fell in love with him.” She finished with a grin.

The male Drow chuckled. “Yes... I’m quite sure you have thought other things as well.” He spoke.

“I am Malia by the way. We own this establishment here. All the elves and humans you meet here work for us and are also playing a role Commander. We know of your proclivity for doing things your way, so I ask that you curb that while you are here, for if you do anything that puts our operation or friends at risk we will kill you Commander. Without a second’s pause. And then you truly will disappear. Forever.”

Las’elh watched as Cihera stepped closer to her. “We have covered this with her already Malia. She understands. And our goals seem to be converging at one point which makes our survival beneficial to her as well.”

Malia’s amber eyes looked at Cihera and she nodded after only a second. “Then we will speak of it no more and I welcome you to Nebonese.” She stated confidently bowing her head slightly to Las’elh. “Queen For’mya has sent word to us in regards to what it is that Las’elh was working on and Nalar and I both agree your two missions seem to be, at least partially, very much intertwined. Minister L’tian has discovered that what Las’elh has been saying all along is true and has begun a very discrete investigation of his own.”

“Minister L’tian!” Las’elh hissed. “He is one of the senior Elven Ministers. I tried to make them see what was happening in the beginning. They dismissed me! What makes you think he will do anything?”

Malia and Nalar shook their heads. “Minster L’tian is Queen For’mya’s father. He is also one of the four *Krypteria* Committee members.” They saw Las’elh’s eyes grow a little wider. “He did not dismiss you Commander... he was never made aware of what you presented to the other senior Ministers. The moment For’mya and Dysea contacted him he began a discrete investigation of his own as I said and what he discovered was eye opening to say the least. We have the reports upstairs and you can review them later.” She turned to look at Gravork. “First however... we need to secure our guest in special quarters.”

“I have cooperated with you fully!” Gravork snapped.

“And I’m sure the fact that all of your purported business partners are scrambling to find you played no part in that decision.” Nalar spoke. “You appear to be a very popular man now Gravork. Rumor has it that even the Kavalians are looking for you.”

“The Kavalians?” Gravork gasped.

“Oh yes. Since your disappearance all of them are apparently afraid that the information you have in your head will find its way to their competitors perhaps? I imagine many of them would rather see you dead than have that happen.” Nalar spoke.

Malia looked at Anton and Cihera now. “And our Evolli friend, the one you came here to meet, he was very interested in speaking with us when we told him we have news of Gravork here.”

“So you’ve made initial contact?” Anton asked.

Malia nodded. “I told him we had heard through some of our brothers and sisters on other worlds that Gravork would be coming here to meet with him the day after tomorrow. We made it seem as if Gravork was coming to him for protection. He was very insistent that no harm would come to him if we were able to arrange it.”

Anton snorted. “No harm would come to him until *after* he got the information he wanted no doubt.” He said.

Cihera nodded. “Did you set up a preliminary meeting?”

“Tomorrow evening at seventeen hundred hours.” Malia answered with a nod of her head. “An abandoned mining facility three kilometers southwest of the settlement. I don’t trust that Evolli scum any further than I could throw him. I’ve had my people scouting the site since dawn this morning. So far it is clean.”

Anton nodded. “Good. It will give us time to go over what For’mya sent to us and inspect our equipment from Armetus.” He said.

“That arrived yesterday. It’s upstairs as well.” Nalar spoke. “Malia my love... I will insure our guest is settled in for the evening. Why don’t you take Anton, Cihera and our good Commander Las’elh upstairs and help them settle in.”

Malia nodded. “An excellent idea.” She said leaning over to kiss Nalar’s cheek. “Don’t amuse yourself too much husband. We still have much to do.”

Nalar nodded. “I will join you all shortly.” He stated.

Malia looked at Anton and Cihera who were smiling. “This way. We changed things a bit since you were last here. We’ve made it more peaceful.”

Las’elh hesitated for a moment unsure if she was welcome to go with them. Cihera’s hand gently taking her arm gave her the answer.

“You are welcome here Las’elh.” Cihera said softly. “You may lower your guard as much as you are able and try to relax. Things will become quite busy in the near future and Anton and I would much rather have you sharp and confident.”

Las’elh met her soft amber eyes with stunning blue orbs that Cihera found intoxicating to say the least. “You’re not going to leave me here then?” She asked.

Cihera smiled and shook her head. “No Las’elh... your diligence through all the adversity you have faced has earned you the right to be beside us every step of the way to the end. The more that is revealed to us, the more it becomes clear that our tasks are becoming more and more linked. I think you will find that with L’tian and Queen For’mya and Dysea now involved we will discover much more about what is going on.” Cihera smiled and curled her fingers around Las’elh’s arm. “Come... I will introduce you to real home cooked Drow food while we are here. Malia’s mother is one of the finest cooks in the universe and she positively loves showing off her culinary skills to any newcomers. Especially elves from Elear who have never experienced our food before. Come.”

Las’elh allowed the smile to split her face and she relaxed somewhat as Cihera led her after Malia and Anton.

DRAGON MOUNTAIN FORMER ISLAND OF SARDINIA

You are safe now. Open your eyes... there is nothing to fear here.

The voice was soft in his mind. Soothing and calm. It filled him with warmth, the tingles coursing through his muscular body right down to his tail. His eyes had lost much of their redness with nearly two full days of sleep and healing. They now resembled a dark orange color and were much softer than they had been in years. He felt different. No longer did anger surge through his being, no longer did hatred for what he did not know or understand ripple through his veins. He felt empty somehow, but it was an emptiness that his mind told him was not a bad thing.

Slowly Vollenth opened his eyes.

And was looking directly into the most beautiful cyan colored eyes he had ever seen. He blinked several times, focusing his vision and saw that the cyan colored eyes were attached to a stunning light green female dragon that rested on the ground in front of him. The dirt where he lay was spongy and layered with soft hay. He lifted his large head from the ground, his eyes blinking several more times as he took in his surroundings. The cave appeared large, easily able to accommodate several fully grown dragons. The walls were a grayish brown color and dry of moisture, but it was cool and very comfortable. Sunlight was peeking in from high above, casting several rays of light on the ground around him, adding to the four illumination globes that were set in each corner of the cave.

Where am I?

You are within our mountain. The female spoke gently, tilting her head to the side. *This is Dragon Mountain. The King’s gift to our kind who call Earth home. This is your home now as well.*

Vollenth lifted his head higher. *Yuri!* He exclaimed. *She will...*

The vampire witch who was controlling you is not someone you ever have to suffer again. The female spoke firmly and with conviction.

Controlling me? Vollenth asked. *She... she was my bonded one.*

The female shook her large head back and forth. *No. The bond she created with you was forced upon you Vollenth. It was never meant to be. This Yuri... she used her Mindvoice power to tap into your subconscious and control you. To alter your perceptions. It is one of her many skills... but for those powerful enough to detect it... Prince Andro and Elynth, the Elder Mother, it was child's play to sever that hold she had on you.*

My perceptions? Vollenth asked as his mind cleared and he was sitting up fully, resting on his legs. *My mind... it is...*

Uncluttered? Focused and clear? The rage and hate that always was just beneath the surface? It is gone now isn't it?

Yes.

The light green scaled dragon nodded. *Her control has been cut. She can no longer cloud your perceptions and force you to do things that you know are wrong. She no longer has any hold on you. She will never be able to breach the Mindvoice shields that guard our island and mountain, and she will never set foot inside this sacred place. Your mind and your ability to decide things for yourself are yours once more Vollenth. You are free.*

I remember fighting. Vincix! Our instructor! I attacked him! He angered me and I attacked him! I remember the Lycavorian Prince and his dragon. She struck me! He struck me! Vollenth said. *I have never felt such agony as when her tail struck me.*

All true. She answered with a nod. *Elynth is a hybrid. Half Firespitter like us... half Heavyhorn like her father. There are several among those who came with you, but they have not yet learned to use the different skills that their blood grants them. She is also the bonded sister to Prince Androcles. She bonded with the Prince while he still grew inside his mother's womb. They are second only to the King and her father Torma in power and ability. You... you would not have defeated them.*

They spared me? Vollenth asked with surprise.

They knew the agony you were in fighting the control this vampire witch had of you. She answered. *It is what made you so angry Vollenth... you were fighting what your instincts told you was wrong but were forced to do. And... and you were meant for someone else.*

What do you mean? Who are you? Vollenth asked.

The loud scrapping sound drew both of their attentions towards the cave entrance and Vollenth turned to see three small hatchlings poke their heads around the edge of the cave wall. Two of them, females by their smell, had the same coloring of the female in front of him, while the third, a male had an almost golden yellow in color.

Mother? The child like female voice entered his thoughts.

You may come in now children. The female told them with small humor in her voice. *He is awake.*

Vollenth watched as the three hatchlings bound into the room flapping their wings madly as they crossed the floor to settle next to the female. She lowered her muzzle and rubbed the back of their necks and Vollenth saw their wings twitch in delight.

This is Isleia, Dela and Kenir. They are my youngest hatchlings... only four months old and nearly ready to take to the skies. The female told him.

We are waiting for our father and brother to return! The one she had called Isleia spoke excitedly. *They were helping you.*

Vollenth looked up at the female dragon in front of him. He could smell now that she was over two thousand years old, but she looked to be vibrant and healthy unlike any dragon he had seen before. Her scent was somehow familiar to him, but he could not place it.

I am Danica.

Helping me? Vollenth asked. *What does she mean?*

They remained at SODRAG to insure Yuri did not know of our deception. Danica spoke softly. They will be returning soon, in fact I feel they have already arrived.

What do you mean? How could she not know?

She does not know yet... but she will discover it soon enough. Since your bond with her was forced, it did not have the same level of emotional connection that normal Bonded Pairs have. She never knew that you

fought Andro and Elynth. My mate Galen and our son Visio were able to insure she took no notice when she left SODRAG to return to Sparta with her witch mother.

How is that even possible?

Visio took your place for a time. Danica said.

Took my place? How could he take my place?

He looks like you silly. Isleia spoke giggling as she moved closer and gazed at his thick leg. You are funny.

You could not fool Yuri with a dragon that looked like me. Vollenth exclaimed. No two dragons are alike!

Danica nodded. You are correct. Unless those two dragons are twins. Fertilized with the same gene and broken into two eggs. As was the case with you and Visio. We thought... we thought you were dead. Lost to us forever.

Vollenth came to his feet, his orange eyes wide in shock. What... what are you saying? He gasped out.

Danica followed suit and came to her feet as well. I am Danica... and I am...

She is your mother boy! The deep throated male voice spoke now. Vollenth's head whipped around and he saw the huge shape of the mustard yellow scaled dragon enter the cave. His movements were confident and graceful, his orange eyes bright and clear, and he was gazing at Vollenth with intensity. Vollenth's eyes grew even wider when he saw the image of himself enter behind the male dragon. The same orange eyes and greenish yellow scales. The same muscular body and proportions, nearly as large as the older male who he smelled was at least four thousand years old.

Mo... mother? Vollenth gasped. My... my mother is dead! My... my family is dead! They were killed in the same crash that orphaned me!

NO! Danica exclaimed as she moved closer to him. That was one of the lies they told you my son! One of so many lies. We were in a ship only an hour behind you. We were all returning to Elear for a welcoming ceremony. Your ship was attacked and crashed. The High Coven stole you from us! We... we thought you were dead! We thought all of you were dead! We knew you lived the moment you entered the system just weeks ago. We could feel you within us and we rejoiced. We have been plotting to save you ever since you came here. To get you away from the witch who was torturing you! She moved closer to him. I am Danica... and I am your mother. You are not alone anymore Vollenth my son. We are here! All of us. You have met your younger siblings... and this is Visio... your twin dragon brother. He is the one who never allowed us to give up hope. He is the one who refused to believe you were dead. He and your father.

Vollenth watched wide eyed as the identical dragon came right up to him and stared into his eyes. It was amazing to actually look at an exact copy of himself, but Vollenth could feel the truth coursing through him at her words. He could feel his mind screaming out in happiness and joy at what all of his senses were telling him.

I have waited for this day my entire life brother. Visio spoke softly. And now that day has come and I can not begin to express what it means to me. I have felt the power of the witch Yuri and the hold she had over you. Without the aide of the Elder Mother and Prince Andro and Elynth I would not have been able to resist her. We succeeded however, and she has gone back to Sparta. We...

Enough Visio. The stern voice spoke as the yellow scaled beast moved closer. We will have plenty of time to tell your brother of the years that have passed.

Vollenth's eyes shifted to the male dragon, his scales shiny with health but marked with scars in some locations. His Mindvoice presence was strong and clear however and he projected authority and power. He also projected something that Vollenth had never felt before. He felt Danica moved closer to him, touching his neck scales with her snout almost shyly. This is... this is Galen my son. She spoke softly. This is your father.

As Vollenth gazed at the stern dragon he felt him moved closer, until his snout was within inches of his. Those orange colored eyes gazed at him intently and then the words burst into his head that could not have come from so dominating a male dragon. They were soft and compassionate and filled with sadness and even greater joy.

The... the Elder Mother has shown me the battle you waged within you as this vampire witch controlled you. I have fought many battles... I have fought beside the King and Torma... yet never have I seen such bravery as you displayed by fighting her within your heart and mind. Galen spoke gently.

She... she made me do things! Vollenth said softly. Things I... things I knew were wrong. I... I hurt others of my kind!

Galen nodded slowly. *Yes... this is true. The Elder Council has already decreed that you will not be held accountable for your actions because of the witch Yuri and her control of you. You... you have been given back your life my son. How you go forward with that life is what will matter. Those are worries for another time however... now... now all your mother and I... all your family wants is to be with you.*

Vollenth looked at him. *I am dead aren't I? He asked. I fought the Prince and Elynth and they killed me as they said they would didn't they?*

Danica brushed up against him firmly, using her snout to caress his wings and neck and causing them to tremble. *Would you feel these things if you were dead my son? She asked softly.*

Vollenth's head snapped around when he felt the three small hatchlings flap their wings madly and bound up onto his back. Isleia was closest to his head and she bounced upon his shoulders happily.

Our brother is home! Our brother is home! She announced loudly.

Vollenth turned when Visio moved around to stand beside him, their muscular bodies touching in affection. His head lifted to gaze at those orange eyes again.

Father? He spoke in barely a whisper.

Welcome home my lost son! Galen spoke his deep voice within Mindvoice heavy with emotion. Finally... welcome home where you belong.

OMEN ONE

ULU EIRANS TRYN

1.2 LIGHT YEARS FROM UIRMEIK

KAVALIAN SPACE

Tinnuar looked up from the sensor screen he was standing next to and let his eyes sweep across the bridge of his ship. With the exception of two tense three hour long periods when they detected Kavalian patrol craft moving across their course, the trip to their current location had been uneventful. His crew was among the finest within the small Omen Fleet, and he had complete faith in them. The YA9 Sensor Array was the most advanced sensor grid they had, most of the technology derived from the Mindvoice ship and at the moment it was detecting many things that Tinnuar had hoped they would not find.

“Status!” He echoed across the bridge.

“Sixteen hours until final Nav position sir.” The Helm officer reported from his seat.

“Sensors are operating within optimum ranges sir!”

Tinnuar turned slightly as his XO came up next to him. “Captain?” The man asked him softly.

Tinnuar shook his head. “I don't like it Perein.” He spoke.

“Sir?” The man asked.

Tinnuar looked at him. “How many troops have we detected on the ground Perein?”

“At last count... better than eight million.” He replied quickly. “We won't be able to get an accurate count from the other side of the planet until we arrive in our final position. That will be before the planet completes another rotation.”

Tinnuar nodded. “Eight million that we can see right now... and at least two complete Fleet Groups.” He said. “The Coven Intelligence is turning out to be accurate it seems.”

“I take it you and the King were hoping this was not the case.” Perein said.

Tinnuar looked at him. “The King has no more desire than I to face eight million ground troops and two fleet groups. And that is just what we can detect on the core side of the planet.” He answered. “The Coven intelligence stated nearly sixteen million ground troops with ships to match and carry them all. Have we detected any Troop Transports?”

“Not as of yet sir. They could be on the surface or hidden behind the planet itself. We won't know until we are in our final sensor position.” Perein answered.

Tinnuar nodded. “Another sixteen hours.” He said. “I just find myself being surprised that High Coven Intelligence picked this up and we did not as close to our border as it is.”

“Perhaps we just...”

“Captain...” The sensor operator spoke now, turning in her chair. “Captain... Captain I’m detecting an unknown power source.”

Tinnuar glanced at Perein before moving to the woman’s station. “Let’s have it.” He stated leaning over her shoulder.

“It’s... it’s weird sir. It’s very faint, but wavelength doesn’t match any known Kavalian power sources in our databanks. I only picked it up because I was doing a spectral analysis of the upper atmosphere of Uirmeik and it spiked on the Cohesive Fault Line at four point six.” The woman said.

“Four point six?” Tinnuar said somewhat surprised.

“Yes sir. Too high for a Kavalian ship or ground station.” She replied.

“Location?”

“That’s another thing Captain. It’s not coming from Uirmeik. It’s radiating from Ritaah. Three point three light years past Uirmeik. Southern pole area of the largest continent. I’m also detecting six other much smaller TriCobal power centers eighty kilometers from the unknown. I doubt anyone but us can pick them up. They are being masked in some way.” She answered adjusting her screen so that the dark green planet came into better focus now. It centered on the large continent and zoomed in to a hundred kilometers distance. She pointed to the sensor screen. “This is the unknown sir, in this mountain range here. These are the others, roughly five kilometers between each one. Low power emitters too. They are definitely being masked in some fashion.

“Ritaah?” Perein spoke softly. “I thought Ritaah was nothing more than a jungle planet with a whole lot of nasty creatures and bugs on it.”

“That’s what Intel says on it sir, but that is where the readings are emanating from.” She answered.

“Whatever this power source it is I can tell you it isn’t Kavalian. At least nothing that we have ever seen.”

“Perein move us eight degrees port, Z-plus forty thousand meters and keep the starboard YA9 array focused on Uirmeik.” Tinnuar said. “Put us between the two planets here.” He pointed at a position on the star chart. “Bring all passive sensors on line and focus them on Uirmeik.”

“We’ll be dodging a lot of Kavalian traffic to obtain that position sir.” Perein spoke.

Tinnuar nodded. “It will keep us sharp.”

Perein nodded and turned. “Helm... eight degrees port! Z-plus forty thousand meters. Increase speed to one quarter on the sublight drive and take us to six four nine three point seven!”

“Helm answers! Adjusting course!”

Tinnuar looked at his sensor operator. “Lieutenant... once we are in our position the port array is yours. You find out what that power source is.”

“Understood sir.” She replied.

Tinnuar stood back up and looked at his XO. “Perein... load three TOPA decoys in the torpedo tubes. If someone gets a hit on us for some off the wall reason launch two decoys on a heading of two seven three, and one more on a heading of sixty-two. We’ll scatter them in different directions and sneak out of here right between their Fleet Groups over the top of Uirmeik.”

Perein nodded. “Lots of nice imagery from that position.” He said with a smile.

Tinnuar met his smile. “Prep a Black Sun Shrouded COM probe too. Load it with what we have and program it to jump back to Union space and begin broadcasting. We’ll pick it up on the way back.”

Perein nodded. “Yes sir.”

“Perein... make sure everyone is on their toes.” Tinnuar spoke his voice turning serious. “Something about this stinks to the heavens.”

Perein nodded and moved to follow his Captain’s orders.

They were a body formed almost from the outset of the birth of the Lycavorian Union. A group of men and women who would put aside their personal loyalties to whatever their species were and make rulings of law between the hundreds of different species within the whole of the Union. Though they held no official governmental powers, their rulings on civilian law were binding and upheld on a regular basis without fail. They heard cases from Trade Agreement law disputes between official parties to simple land disagreements, as well as many contested issues between major corporations within the Union. They were respected by all, and many of them also had a deep respect for King Leonidas. When he first took power, given his attitude toward frivolousness, they wondered if he would simply disband the Galactic Court Body. Surprisingly he had honored them by acknowledging the importance of the many duties they performed and swearing that would never change. He had even gone so far as to have built a similar building like the one they used on Apo Prime. It was their realm and in the center of Sparta where all the major government buildings resided. Whenever the King came to Earth for the Royal Family exodus... six of the twelve sitting Magistrates remained on Apo Prime and six came to Earth with the Prime Minister to conduct their duties from Earth.

The elevated half oval table held six high backed chairs with an additional space between each sitting member. These open spaces were now filled by six holo images of the Magistrates on Apo Prime sitting in a similar chamber within their building on the capital planet. There was a Magistrate from each founding species of the Union, all four permanent members of the Court Body, while the other eight were elected for ten year terms from across the Union. Three of those eight were also from founding species of the Union, two elves and a Lycavorian. In front of the oval table on the main floor of the chamber sat two similar tables, though much smaller in size. Behind those tables was a gallery of men and women from dozens of different species, as well as every major Netnews organization in the Union. Today's setting was one for the history books, and no one wanted to miss this.

Sitting at one of the smaller oval tables were Jiss and Matuarr. Jalersi, Pian, Qurot and Timur sat behind them in comfortable chairs in front of the waist high divider between the table and gallery. Video drones were hovering all around the chamber covering every aspect and angle of the hearing. Deia sat at the opposite table with For'mya and two senior aides behind them. The video drones were whirring silently as Jiss was finishing his presentation even as the sun was beginning to dip below the horizon.

"...you can see your honors we have followed to the letter of your very own laws the proper course of action. Our petition, all six parts of it, have been recorded and filed in proper format and in accordance with your rules and guidelines." Jiss was speaking confidently, his fur meticulously groomed and his clothes pressed and smooth. He moved and spoke like a man who was confident in his position. "We ask for an immediate ruling on Part One of our petition which relates directly to Section Thirteen, Paragraph Four of the Lycavorian Union Constitution concerning non-interference with the Laws of Union members and said Laws of Compliance for non Union members." He held up the data pad and read from it directly. "Section Thirteen, Paragraph Four of the Union Constitution states no interference shall be endorsed or acted upon concerning the recognized and the written laws of character and faith among non Lycavorian Union members." He looked up once more. "We have produced sufficient evidence in regards to the birth and status of the female known as Lisisa Leonidas. This information is indisputable and is reinforced by your own medical findings. Her bloodline marks her as the daughter of Marshall Pleistarchus and not of King Martin Leonidas. It also marks her as a direct descendant of King Resumar through Marshall Pleistarchus and goes towards her position within the Rule of Ascension Law of the Lycavorian Union." Jiss let his eyes wander over the faces of the Magistrates before him before continuing.

"We also ask for an immediate and final ruling on Parts Two, Three and Four of our petition concerning the search and seizure of three different locations and any property known to be owned or considered living accommodations of the aforementioned female known as Lisisa Leonidas to include the dragon she rides. We request that she surrender herself to our newly established embassy so that she can return to be among her people and consummate the union promised to Kavalian Commander Timur by her father Marshall Pleistarchus. All in accordance with Kavalian custom. Parts Five and Six of our petition relates directly to the Kavalian citizenship of the aforementioned female and the laws of the Kavalian Federation in regards to this, as well as the consequences should these laws not be followed. I believe your honors that we have stated our case unequivocally and that following your own Standards of Protocol that the Union states to hold so dear, you will rule in our favor on all parts of our petition. Thank you."

Jiss bowed his head slowly and then turned to walk to the empty chair next to Matuarr. He wore a smug expression on his face that was easily discernable even through all the hair that covered his features as he settled back into his chair.

All of the Magistrates wore dark green robes over their normal clothes, while the Chief Magistrate wore a crimson sash over his shoulders as well. The Elven Chief Magistrate fingered the data pad in his hand and turned his head to where Deia and For'mya sat. "Prime Minister Deia... this Galactic Court Body recognizes and welcomes you and Queen For'mya Leonidas before us once more. It is an honor to have your company among us."

"Thank you Chief Magistrate Sel'ke." Deia answered.

"I may assume then you will act on behalf of King Leonidas and the Lycavorian Union in this regard?" He spoke.

Deia nodded as she stood up. "I will be acting on behalf of the Union and Queen For'mya will act on behalf of King Leonidas. I know Queen Dysea usually acts with me when we appear before this body; however her duties as Queen and mother have pulled her away for the moment to be with her daughter Princess Normya. As I'm sure you all have heard just recently, Princess Normya escaped a serious collision during a training mission and was injured slightly. Since our goals are the same... Queen For'mya and I will speak with one voice throughout these full proceedings."

Sel'ke nodded. "We were made aware of this incident only this morning Prime Minister. Our blessings and prayers go out to Princess Normya, and we extend our wishes for a safe return here to Sparta."

Deia nodded. "We did not feel the need to make a public announcement until we had the majority of the facts. They will be released later today by order of King Leonidas."

Sel'ke nodded again. "Very well. This body recognizes you and Queen For'mya. Do you have a statement you wish to open with?"

Deia stepped forward slightly. "Actually Chief Magistrate we have only two corrections to Legislature Jiss's fine opening statement that we would like entered into the record." Deia spoke. "We will then present our evidence to you which you may release to Public Record as you see fit. This matter, as far as we are concerned, is quite indisputable as Legislature Jiss has said."

"Continue." Sel'ke spoke.

Deia got to her feet. "The first correction we would like to make to the record is that of whom Legislature Jiss refers to as Marshall Pleistarchus. We feel this needs to be clarified before we continue."

"I fail to see what clarification there is to make." Jiss spoke. "We have..."

"Legislature Jiss... you have had your opening statement." The Hadarian Magistrate spoke now, her green eyes flashing. "Please refrain from interrupting again."

Deia smiled. "Thank you Magistrate Galia. As I was saying... the individual to which Legislature Jiss refers to is in fact now called Marshall Pusintin of the KFI military. He is a Lycavorian by birth, formerly known as Pleistarchus, the first born son of King Leonidas the First yes, but a man that freely chose to leave behind his people and start a new life with the Kavalian people. He has no claim to anything whatsoever concerning the Rule of Ascension Law of the Lycavorian Union. The Ascension Law is very clear in this regard. Pleistarchus willingly gave up his seat as King when he decided to leave Earth with the Kavalian people and become Marshall Pusintin a Kavalian citizen." Deia moved around to the front of the table she sat at and walked directly up to stand in front of Sel'ke, handing him the data pad. "The second correction we would like to add relates directly to Lisisa Leonidas's status as a Kavalian citizen in relation to the Union. Now... we do not dispute the bloodline of Lisisa Leonidas in any way. We do however point to the fact that twenty-six years ago Marshall Pusintin stood not three kilometers from this very spot and essentially gave up whatever right he wishes to claim now in regards to Lisisa's status as his daughter. I think the many security footages of what was said between King Leonidas and Marshall Pusintin will attest to that fact irrevocably. I will present three different ones now just as a reference." Deia moved forward and set another data pad in front of Sel'ke. "Three weeks after that meeting and confrontation, King Leonidas officially adopted Lisisa Leonidas in accordance with Lycavorian Law and all of these records are now being made public for review by anyone who wishes. Since Lisisa was already considered his daughter by so many, the truth behind the Lycavorian half of her bloodline was not released so that she could continue to build on the life she so embraced when King Leonidas

rescued her. So in reality... Lisisa Leonidas is a citizen of the Lycavorian Union as well as the Kavalian Federation and she has held this distinction for twenty-six years.”

Jiss stood up. “Respectfully your honors, we were not made aware of this.” He spoke quickly.

“Perhaps it was something you should have checked before moving down this road then.” For’mya spoke sternly from her chair. “We have made copies of the official documents for your review.” She turned back to one of the aides and handed him a data pad which he then walked over to where Jiss stood and handed it to him.

“Your honors... we protest!” Matuarr came to his feet. “This is information that was not readily available to us when accessing Union records!”

“Legislature Matuarr... you will find that personal information on the Royal Family is not readily available to just anyone who asks for it.” Sel’ke spoke calmly. “This type of guarded information must be requested through not only the Royal Ministry, but also through the office of General/Colonel Vengal of *Durcunusaan* Command. Had you done further investigation you would have realized this.” He turned back to Deia. “Is there anything else you would like to add Prime Minister?”

“The Royal Family will also be releasing a statement later today announcing the mating and marriage of Lisisa to Prince Denali Leonidas.” Deia spoke calmly. This announcement caused a mild uproar among the many Netnews people present as they all pressed forward.

“Prime Minister... I hope this was not done as a means to counter this Petition by the Kavalian delegation.” Sel’ke asked sternly.

“It most certainly was!” Jiss demanded coming to his feet.

Deia smiled and shook her head never taking her eyes from Sel’ke’s gaze. “No Chief Magistrate... I believe you will find that the relationship between Prince Denali and Princess Lisisa had been going on in secret for the better part of the last three years. It was kept secret because Prince Denali and Princess Lisisa were regarded as brother and sister and they did not know how their love for each other would be received. Just before the State Dinner recently they confided in their grandmother Lady Gorgo of their relationship, who in turn took this information to Governor Panos. Since unions of this nature were not uncommon in ancient Sparta, no law is present that forbids this. The First Oracle also insured that no Union law outside the realm of Spartan law addressed this and she found nothing to deny Denali and Lisisa what they both so wanted. With the blessing of the King and Queens, they consummated their union four days ago. I believe these facts will null and void Part Three of Legislature Jiss’s Petition.”

Sel’ke nodded. “It would seem so. We will review the timetable of these events however, to insure accuracy and adherence to established laws.” He said.

“Of course Chief Magistrate.” Deia spoke.

“Is there anything else?” Sel’ke asked.

Deia shook her head. “Not at this time.” She stated. “We believe Union law is very clear in this case.”

Sel’ke nodded. “Very well... we will recess until thirteen hundred hours tomorrow local time to review this case. I will say this however, Legislature Jiss and Legislature Matuarr... our ruling on Part Four of your Petition we can give you right now. Dragons are considered sentient life forms within the United Lycavorian Union. The Elder Mother Arzoal sits on the Senate body in case you were unaware of this. They are honored members of the Lycavorian Union, just as every race and species within the Union is, and many of them are considered part of more families than I can begin to mention or imagine. You request in your Part Four that the dragon known as Jeth be turned over to your control as part of Lisisa Leonidas’s property.” Sel’ke looked at Jiss and Matuarr. “I find this request personally insulting to even address. The many actions and deeds of Jeth, the son of Torma and Isheeni are well documented in Union history, separately and together with his bonded sister Lisisa Leonidas. Sentient lifeforms are not property Legislature Jiss... and I can give you our answer to that demand right now as I said. The answer is a vigorous denouncing of such a demand in the first place. We will not even dignify such an application by addressing it in any way.”

Jiss bowed his head slowly. “Then we will wait for your ruling on the remaining portions of our Petition.” He stated.

Sel’ke lifted the gavel and banged it on the table. “We will adjourn until thirteen hundred hours tomorrow.”

Everyone in the room came to their feet as the judges present stood and began filing out of the room. The members of the Netnews organizations began to swarm forward around the Kavalian delegation even as members of the *Durcunusaan* crowded around Deia and For'mya to prevent this. For'mya got to her feet and looked at Deia.

"That went well." She said softly.

"Too well." Deia answered. "We need to speak with Martin. They can only rule one way as our laws state clearly, but we will need to make concessions of some sort I'm sure For'mya. If nothing else... to keep them off balance and unaware of what is really happening."

"Why?" For'mya asked. "This action only confirms their true purpose for being here in Union space."

"Yes... I agree." Deia spoke. "However... that is not something we can expose or even suggest openly."

"Martin will not budge in regards to Lisisa's status Deia." For'mya said. "You know this. Especially now that she and Denali have claimed each other and are mated. You know how Martin regards marriages and mates. They are sacred to him and to many others of pure Spartan blood."

Deia nodded. "Which I am sure the Kavalians will use as a means to turn opinion in their favor. Or at least attempt too. That's why the concessions need to be in other areas if they are needed."

"What did you have in mind?" For'mya asked.

"I don't think Martin will have a problem with it. But we should meet just to make sure." She said.

EDEN CITY GRAND CENTER

Karun stared up at the towering horseshoe shaped building at the center of Eden City from the surrounding plaza all around it. The sun was beginning its rise into the sky from behind the eastern mountains and casting almost majestic shadows from the many buildings. The large circular base of the building and the many lights dotting this circular base told him that the city and its people were early risers. It was the governmental head of Earth as a planet and naturally those who governed Earth would be on the job before others. He was surprised however at how many people he did see already crowding the streets and promenades that filled the area. Flying in on the planetary transport Karun had seen many parks like settings spread out among the many square miles of Eden City. Sandwiched between two mountain ranges, Eden City had expanded south and north primarily, though thousands had built homes within the mountain ranges on both sides. The reservoir was still present, the area around it turned into the largest park in the city's domain. New Technologies had allowed a man made river to be cut through the center of Eden City and connected to hundreds of underground tributaries flowing from the north. The Grand Center had been built spanning this river and Karun had to admit to himself, the architecture was far more impressive than anything he had seen within Kavalian space.

He could see the Lifter traffic darting back and forth among the designated lanes, most of them along the outskirts of the city as in Sparta. There were very few buildings over fifty stories high within Eden City, and Lifter traffic between them was limited. The dawn sky revealed many small transports however, bringing men and women to work in Eden City, as well as at least a dozen dragons he could see just from his spot alone near the Grand Center Square. He had walked the streets of Sparta near the new embassy for hours and found things similar to what his father had described to him, but also very different in some respects. He knew what his mission here was and after meeting her that first time, Karun found himself questioning those orders. His mother was distracted for some reason as well, torn between the fact that his father had not told her about Lisisa, and perhaps now questioning his truth to her in regards to many things. Karun had been surprised when his father had first told him before coming on this mission, stunned that his father had a child that was half vampire. That this child was a result of his father raping the vampire witch Yuri did not bother him as much as the fact that while she was half vampire, Karun still felt drawn to her in some way.

Karun turned back to look at the two *Durcunusaan* soldiers that had accompanied him to Eden City, one of them the half elf female Ardis. He had not seen her since their first day here on Earth but her scent he remembered instantly when she entered the transport a few hours ago. This in and of itself had surprised him for while he had an excellent sense of smell because of his Lycavorian blood, he had never had much luck in

sorting and keeping different scents separate from each other. It was not something that his father had ever showed him how to do and it was a skill he lacked. His keen wolf nose twitched slightly once more when he detected her peach and wild timber scent filter to him on the slight breeze. She sensed him looking at her and her incredible eyes turned to gaze at him across the three meters distance between them. He watched her turn her head to the second *Durcunusaan* soldier and he nodded his head towards her. Karun knew then she must have been speaking to him in Mindvoice and he watched as she covered the distance to him in several even strides, nearly as tall as his own six foot one.

He gazed at her when she stopped close to him. "You are nervous Karun." She stated evenly.

"I am not nervous!" He answered a touch too forcefully.

Ardis smiled at his reaction and tilted her head slightly. "Admitting something you feel is not a crime Karun." She said softly. "It is a sign of strength."

"It is a weakness." He said.

"Why is it a weakness?" Ardis asked as she shifted her P190 into a more comfortable position on her shoulder.

"Kavalian males must not show weakness." He stated. "It makes the Pride weaker."

"But you are not entirely Kavalian." Ardis spoke. "You are also half Lycavorian, and I have found that Spartan men are quickly shedding their veil of strength now that my Uncle Martin is King. He is not ashamed to show emotion with his Queens and children in public. It makes us stronger." She moved closer to him still, sniffing the air gently. "It is overwhelming isn't it?"

Karun looked at her. "What do you mean?"

"I have watched you since getting off the transport. You do not know how to categorize scents you don't know." Ardis said. "When you smell everything assaulting you now, like in Sparta, you can't keep it all separate. The wolf in you is edgy and nervous because you can not distinguish the myriad of scents assailing you. Your... your father never taught you this skill?"

Karun shook his head minutely as he cast his eyes downward. "No."

"Would you like for me to explain how you do this?" Ardis asked him. "It is not such an overwhelming task as you might think."

Karun looked at her. "You can do this?" He asked surprised.

"Whether full blooded or only part Lycavorian, it is a skill that is passed on to every child who is wolf." Ardis said. "My father taught all of us this by the time we were four. It was harder for my mothers to learn since one was turned and the other is only part Lycavorian, but it is relatively easy to teach to children as they are growing."

"Why do you call her your mother when she is a vampire?" Karun asked.

"She is only part vampire." Ardis told him. "She is also a Drow elf and since my father came into her life and bit her, she is also part Lycavorian, albeit on a much smaller scale. She was experimented on as a child by the High Coven. They thought to make better warriors this way, and in a way the failed experiences with my mother Aihola and others enabled them to create the clones they now do. What was done to her did not change the person she was inside. When she and my birth mother Tarifa came together, they followed what was in their hearts. They came together at a time in both their lives when they needed each other. Just as they did when my father came into their lives. Destiny and fate brought them together. She is just as much my mother as my own birth mother. Just as my siblings from her and my father call my birthmother their mother."

"Kavalians believe we make our own destiny." Karun spoke. "We do not believe things are preordained as you do."

Ardis moved closer still, only a few steps from him and she could smell his unique scent then. It was pungent and pure; a mix of walnut and hazel, and it sent little tremors through her body.

"There are many who do not believe as we do." Ardis said. "Elves and Lycavorians have powerful faith in destiny and fate. It is one of the reasons that our two species are so compatible in relationships. That does not make what others believe wrong. Hadarians believe strongly in faith and what my Aunt Anja brings to them, and to a lesser extent in many of the same things we believe in. The Folcani and Amarians are two species that do not believe in a higher being or purpose, yet they are honored members of the Union, respected and holding great knowledge."

Karun shook his head. "It is all very confusing." He stated. "So many different species and having to accommodate all of them. Their beliefs. Their culture."

"Yet you are here now." Ardis said.

"What do you mean?"

"You are here to meet Lisisa, your father's daughter by Yuri, Princess of the High Coven. A half vampire. Even though your people war with them." Ardis said. "In Kavalian culture, would your father's children by another Kavalian female be considered by you to be a brother or sister?"

"My father would never do that!" Karun snapped. "He... he would never take another female into his bed over my mother! He lov..."

Ardis smiled as he stopped his words. "He loves her?" She said.

"I was not going to say that!" Karun spoke.

Ardis's eyes glittered in the rising sun. "I believe you Karun. However, if he was to do this, would you consider a child from that union a brother or sister?"

"They would be of his blood." Karun said. "I would not question that."

Ardis nodded. "It is really no different for me... or others within the Union in similar circumstances. It just happens that my father has taken both my mothers as his mates and we are always together. They speak with one voice in more ways than one since they were so deeply bound together even before he came into their lives."

"My people... my people do not allow relationships such as you have here." Karun said. "Two females would never... they would never be allowed to be together. We are taught it is wrong."

Ardis shrugged. "Wrong by whose standards?" Ardis asked. "Have you ever shared a bed with two females who love each other as much as they love you? Who take great pleasure from each other as well as you?"

"Certainly not!" Karun barked.

"Nor have those among your people who make the laws I imagine." Ardis said. "They outlaw it because they don't understand it... or they fear it. Take your pick."

"Have you ever done this?" Karun snapped.

Ardis smiled and shook her head. "No... but only because the opportunity has never presented itself to me. I would not dismiss such a relationship out of hand. One day I will have a mate and with the gods blessing I will have many children, but if along that road another woman comes into my life and we are compatible and wish the same things and we fall in love, I will not dismiss that either."

"I... I could not do that." Karun said.

Ardis nodded. "It does take a special kind of man to be able to accept that. It is why it is not common within the Union. The man has to be confident in himself almost to the point of arrogance to be able to accept that his mates derived as much pleasure from each other as they do him. You will find that the majority of these relationships in the Union involve exceptionally strong Alpha males. My father, my uncle Martin, my adoptive uncle Daniel Simpson. They seem to be among the few who can accept this for the most part." Ardis shook her head. "But we veer from our original topic don't we? Are you meeting Lisisa because it is what your father has ordered you do, or are you meeting her because despite everything you have been told and ordered to do, you find yourself interested in her because she is your sister?"

Karun looked at her. "Does it matter?"

"It will to Lisi." Ardis answered seeing his confused look at her name. "It is the nickname given to her by Andro when he was too small to speak her full name. It kind of stuck for all of us as we grew." She explained gently. "She will detect what your purpose is within the first few minutes Karun. She may be half vampire, but she is also one of the most powerful Mindvoicers within the Union now. Your meeting today will either be very short, or you just might discover you have quite a bit in common with her."

"She is half vampire!" Karun declared.

Ardis nodded. "And both of you are half Lycavorian. That is your common ground. Whether you choose to build on that or dismiss it as the others of your delegation have is up to you."

"She is a Kavalian citizen." Karun said firmly. "Our... our laws are very specific when concerning our females."

"Yes... so I have gathered." Ardis said. "That is a shame really."

“Why?” Karun asked her quickly. “It is how our people live. Why would you think this to be shameful?”

“You misunderstand the context of the word.” Ardis stated. “I said the way you treat your females is a *shame*, not shameful. There is a difference. For instance... someone like me... who finds you incredibly attractive...” Karun’s eyes grew wide at this. “...in your society I could not approach you as my mate and whisper to you that I want you to make me scream your name in passion. I would not be able to show others what I felt for you in public and you would not be allowed to do the same.”

“Kavalians mate to reproduce.” Karun said.

Ardis nodded. “Yes I know. There is no love or exploration or passion.” She said. “No desire or want. At least that is shown publicly. That is the...”

The large shadows passed over them and Ardis smiled as she looked up and saw the two dragons swoop low over the Grand Center promenade. Karun followed her gaze and watched as first Jeth and then Aradace settled to the ground lightly ten meters away. Karun clenched his teeth, refusing to show any anger at the two monsters that moved closer to where he stood before settling to the granite surface of the promenade. He watched as Lisisa tossed her leg over the saddle and dropped easily to the ground, Denali Leonidas matching her movements. Lisisa moved up to Denali immediately and smiled as his arms and aura enveloped her and pulled her close.

The party yesterday celebrating Malic becoming a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* had lasted well into the early evening, until Denali had pulled her away so that he could curl her toes in their bed before they slept and came here this morning. Lisisa looked up into his dark eyes and felt her heart sing as it always did when she knew she belonged to this man in heart and mind.

“Do you want me to stay with you Lisi?” Denali asked softly.

Lisisa shook her head. “You promised Jeth and Aradace you would take them to the school. They are looking forward to having the children around them today. I will meet you there. It’s why we came four hours earlier than I had told him Deni. We need to get back to SODRAG before mid-day so that we can start close quarters flying. Besides... I will know in the first few minutes why he is truly here.”

Denali nodded. “Call if you need us.” He said.

Lisisa pulled his head down and kissed him passionately. “I owe you for last night.” She whispered seductively.

Denali grinned. “I will hold you to that.” He said kissing her quickly and then releasing her and moving back to climb into the saddle on Aradace. She trumpeted quickly and launched them into the air.

Jeth stepped close to Lisisa, his massive head lowered next to her upper body. *You are sure about this sister?* He asked.

Lisisa nodded and reached up to stroke his snout. *I will see you in a few hours. Now go have fun with the children.*

Jeth butted her shoulder gently and then flared his wings, reaching into the sky to follow Denali and his sister. Lisisa turned back to see Karun and Ardis watching her. She took a deep breath and began walking towards them.

Karun watched as she strode confidently towards them. The ArmorPly she wore was different from the other morning, as now it had large crimson colored shoulder boards, and the crimson cape she wore was trimmed in gold. The K12 and *Nehtes* were in the same spots as they were before and Karun noticed for the first time the thin leather strip that cut across the palm of her hand. He knew what that was immediately, the bridle of a Shi Viska, a weapon only Lycavorian Spartans could wear and control. A weapon whose technology was beyond what his people could easily manipulate. Phased Spatial Dimension Shifting was something that none of their scientists was very knowledgeable in. Lisisa’s long black hair flowed around her face and cascaded over her shoulders.

Lisisa stopped in front of them and looked at Ardis. “Ardis.” She said happily and Karun watched as they embraced and shared soft kisses on the cheeks.

“You are looking well cousin.” Ardis said holding Lisisa’s hands.

“So are you.” Lisisa replied. “Thank you for escorting him here.”

Ardis turned and looked at Karun briefly before nodding and looking back to Lisisa. “It was a pleasure.” She said. “We will meet you by the school in four hours as agreed.”

Lisisa nodded and squeezed her hands before Ardis glanced at Karun once more and then turned. She motioned to the other *Durcunusaan* soldier and they began walking back towards where the small transport was resting. Lisisa watched her for a moment and then turned to look at Karun.

"I apologize for changing the time, but my duties require that I be somewhere else at mid-day." Lisisa spoke.

Karun shook his head slowly. "I... I'm not exactly busy." He said. "You sent... you sent your mate away?"

Lisisa smiled. "We arranged for him to visit a local school with Jeth and Aradace."

"Your dragon's names?" Karun asked.

Lisisa nodded. "Jeth and I bonded the day we found each other on Lycavore. Denali and Aradace a week after she was born. Deni was six at the time I believe. The children love getting rides and playing on their tails." Lisisa answered.

"And your... your guards will not remain?" Karun asked.

"They are not my guards." Lisisa spoke with a smile. "I asked that someone escort you here and remain with you until I arrived. They will join with us near the school to take you back to Sparta in four hours. Like my brother Androcles, I detest having the *Durcunusaan* follow me wherever I go."

"He is not your brother!" Karun hissed.

Lisisa canted her head. "Is this visit where you tell me what I am supposed to think and say according to what our father has directed you to tell me?" She spoke. "If it is I will call Jeth back right now and we can end this right here. I have known only one family in my life Karun, and how I regard them will not in any way change. Androcles is my brother just as much as Eliani and Carina and Normya are my sisters. As Resumar and Arran are my brothers. As all my siblings are, from all of my mothers. That is what I have known and come to cherish. Do not think because we share the same father I will change who I am." Lisisa said. "I came here with the intention of getting to know you because you are my brother by blood, and the man who I call father has a saying he has pounded into our heads for years."

Karun looked at her. "What is that?"

"Blood before all else." Lisisa replied. "I will not listen to you try and convince me the Kavalian way is how I should act and respond. If that is why you came here... again... we can end this right now."

"They will... they will try to force you." Karun said. "That is what they are doing even now."

Lisisa shrugged. "They will fail... but they are not my concern. My mother For'mya and Prime Minister Deia will deal with them." She said. "Why did you come here Karun? You can not force me to do something I don't want to do. You aren't skilled enough to beat me in a conflict if that is your intention."

Karun looked at her. "You think much of your skills." He stated.

Lisisa shook her head. "Not really. I'm just very confident in what I can do." She said. "I have both Lycavorian and vampire skills Karun. I can blur, I can use the shadows, I have wolf and vampire strength, speed and endurance and thanks to my father, I have become very good at using my nose and sense of smell. My sisters Carina and Zarah are equally as skilled, Zarah more so. If I found myself in a situation that was untenable I would simply need to speak one word within Mindvoice and every *Durcunusaan* soldier in this city, my mate Denali and Jeth would be here in under a minute."

"So we are being watched?" Karun asked.

Lisisa shrugged. "I may be able to dismiss my guards... that doesn't mean they don't find a way to keep an eye on me regardless of what I want. It drives all of us insane, but we have come to accept it." She said with a smile. "So please tell me... have I wasted a trip here... or do you wish to know about me? About what has occurred in my life to bring me to this day? You are not like those fools Qurot and Timur in Sparta, I can tell that much just from your scent."

Karun met her forest green eyes. "Do you wish to know of me? Of my life?"

Lisisa stepped closer to him. "Yes Karun... yes I do."

"Why?" He asked softly.

"You are my brother." Lisisa said softly. "And just as I have found a sister of my blood recently, now I have found you."

Karun nodded his head. "Then I wish to know you as well."

Lisisa smiled and surprising Karun she stepped even closer and took his arm in her grasp. “I know of a quaint little café nearby where we can sit down and talk then. It has my mother’s coffee and it’s quiet.” She said. “You do drink coffee don’t you?”

Karun nodded. “My mother tells me far too much.” He said.

Lisisa smiled. “Well there you go... that’s something we have in common to start and we have only been talking for five minutes!” She squeezed his arm. “Come.”

SODRAG

Her mother had been so wrong.

Narice’s body still hummed gently in delighted harmony as the memories of the previous night made her tremble exquisitely. Narice felt alive with new found strength and purpose. She could not remember how many times he had made her explode in delirious passion. Just feeling how she folded into his powerful arms with his cock buried deeply inside her caused incredible sensations to ripple through her supple frame. He had feasted on her body, his lips and tongue and fingers caressing every portion of her flesh, never stopping in their wondrous exploration. He never seemed to tire of her or Toria, his huge cock always ready to plunge into their depths and make them scream. Narice thought perhaps she would be jealous that Toria took from his attentions to her, yet watching him please Toria gave Narice fits of delight as well, this only serving to confirm to her that whatever else happened going forward the three of them were meant for each other. They never stopped touching each other in some fashion, and neither she nor Toria could get enough of his huge cock. It was the largest either of them had taken inside their bodies, yet the incredible thickness and heat of it within them caused their eyes to glaze over in passion and lust. And then, while gripped in the throes of passion she had never felt, Arrarn had bitten her. His unique dual wolf fangs had penetrated the skin of her shoulder, sending her tipping over into the abyss of carnal heaven. Toria had joined her seconds later and they writhed in fantastic bliss while he made them his. His bite would not affect them, as vampires were immune to the virus within Lycavorian blood, but both of them knew it was how many Lycavorian males expressed their final commitment to a female. A show that he would take no others. To Toria and Narice, it was the ultimate sign they were to be together.

Her cheek was pressed to the tanned washboard hard skin of his powerful abdomen now, her raven colored hair splashed wildly over the rest of his midsection. She had slept for the last five hours just as she was laying, waking only moments before. One of Arrarn’s long legs was cocked upwards, Narice lying between his legs, her large breasts covering his now flaccid cock. She could feel its warmth against her skin, and the memories of what it had made her feel when it was throbbing and alive inside her sent shivers through her. One of her arms was resting on Arrarn’s chest, her fingers entwined in thick strands of Toria’s lustrous red hair. The other arm was draped over Toria’s naked hip, her lightly tanned leg resting atop Narice’s lower back.

Toria’s face was tucked into Arrarn’s neck, her lips slightly parted as she breathed deeply. Narice lifted her head slowly not wanting to wake her two lovers as the sun began to shine in earnest through the window. Her dark eyes lifted slowly, gazing across the muscular definition of Arrarn’s body, and the incredibly lithe figure of Toria pressed against his side as she was. Her eyes continued to rise until she was looking up at his face and she nearly gasped when she saw Arrarn’s eyes already open and gazing at her. Gazing at her intensely with almost palpable emotions that Narice could feel just through his gaze. She opened her mouth to speak but saw his hand raise and put a finger to his lips.

[She is still sleeping.] Arrarn spoke within Mindvoice, throwing up shields around their private connection. *[I think we wore her out.]*

[How... how long have you been awake Arrarn?] She asked him within that Mindvoice connection, adding her own considerable power to the shielded connection between just the two of them.

[I never went to sleep.] He answered with a smile as his hand lowered so that his fingers were grazing her cheek. *[Watching you and Toria sleep is much more fun. I told you I would make it up to you.]*

Narice’s eyes closed at his touch, and she reveled in the sensations that his touch gave to her. *[Arrarn...]* She began.

[Are you going to tell me that no matter what has happened between us you are still a Princess of the High Coven and nothing can ever come of this?] Arrarn interrupted her.

Narice opened her eyes quickly and looked at him. *[Do not say that! And that is not what I was going to say!]* She snapped.

[Good! Cause I was going to tell you to just shoot me and get it over with if you did.] He answered with a grin.

[I was going to ask... I was going to ask if it would be like this always.] She spoke softly. *[I have... I have never given of myself to a man as I have given to you. I have... I have had other lovers but none that I have... none that I have tasted their blood in the midst of passion.]*

[And correct me if I'm wrong... but in your culture that is like taking a husband.] Arrarn said.

Narice nodded. *[Yes... that is essentially what it means.]*

[Are you regretting it now Narice?] He asked.

Narice shook her head quickly. *[Phraktos Arrarn Leonidas... no! Not one bit of it. I want it to happen again and again. Just as it has with Toria! I want it to continue for all of us. I don't want it to stop! Ever!]*

[Then what is the problem?] Arrarn asked.

[I think... I think I may be in love with you.] Narice said shyly. *[I know I am in love with you. With both of you.]*

[And that is a bad thing?] He asked with a grin his own heart singing out in happiness at her words.

There had been five women in his life, the first at fifteen years of age, the last only eight months ago. None of them had caused his wolf blood to burn as Narice and Toria did, Narice even more so than Toria. His wolf blood just called that extra bit for Narice in some way. His mothers had always said that when the person who would be beside you into the eternal future made an appearance in your life, you would know without question. Arrarn only had to look at Narice's sizzling eyes to know that she was one part of that for him. Her lush body was a divine wonderland, the most incredible female figure he had ever had the pleasure of exploring; the only one coming close was the second woman who rested now in his arms. He could have gone on for hours more last night, never tiring of their incredible scents and the taste of their flesh. They had fed on his blood two times each, and though he should have been tired because of it, it only made him feel more alive. He knew it would catch up to him today at some time, but he didn't care in the least.

[No... it is not a bad thing you fool!] Narice snapped. *[Why do you insist on commenting on everything I say with ridiculous questions?]*

Arrarn chuckled within Mindvoice. *[Sorry.]*

Narice dropped her forehead to his abdomen. *[My mother and Yuri would be incensed and shocked if they saw me like this.]* She stated looking back up to his eyes. *[In this bed with you and Toria. If they knew what we have done.]*

[I'm thinking my father wouldn't be too happy either.] He said. *[Especially since Andro and Sadi have claimed Carisia too.]*

Narice met his eyes. *[I wondered if that had happened.]* She said softly.

Arrarn nodded as his fingers gently caressed her shoulder, tracing over the now faint scar of where he had bitten her. He watched as she shifted her body and moved up, her large breasts dragging across his abdomen, her nipples burning into his skin. Toria groaned in his arm as Narice settled once more on his chest, her raven locks falling over one shoulder as she gazed at him. She reached up and placed her palm flat on his cheek and stared into his eyes.

"Tell me... tell me what we have begun here will never end Arrarn Leonidas." She spoke in a soft whisper. "Tell me that no matter what happens you will never take anyone but Toria and I into your bed. Tell me that no matter what happens... tell me that we will always be together."

"I can tell you that no one makes my blood burn as you do. As Toria does." Arrarn answered. "I can tell you that no one will ever share my bed but you and she. And I can tell you that no matter what happens, I will fight until there is no breathe left in my body to keep us from being separated."

Narice couldn't help the warmth that surged through her at his words and she lowered her lips to his kissing him as deeply as she had at any point thus far, feeling his arm curl around her back and draw her body closer as their tongues danced together.

"Ahem!" Toria's raspy voice spoke gently. Their kiss ended and they both turned their heads to look at her, though since her face still resided in the crook of his neck Arrarn could not turn his head very much. "I understand... I understand that the two of you with all your royal pureblood have a little more energy..." Narice

watched as her lover's gorgeous blue eyes opened and she smacked her lips lifting her head to gaze at them. "There are those of us who actually enjoy sleeping however, and it is very annoying to be woken when..."

Narice covered Toria's lips with her own and kissed her deeply, cutting off her words and making her whimper in delight. The dryness in her mouth and the faint taste of Arrarn's blood was rapidly chased away by Narice's kiss and Toria pressed her body tighter to Arrarn's side. Her eyes were closed once more, her face frozen in an idyllic pose, when Narice drew her head back and looked at her with a brilliant smile. Arrarn didn't wait and fisted her thick red hair in his hand and pulled her head down to his and kissed Toria as well. Toria felt the shudders of delight course through her and she felt Narice's lips graze her shoulders as Arrarn kissed her wantonly. The fire in her belly reignited and Toria groaned reluctantly and pulled her lips away from his.

"Ok... ok..." She gasped. "I forgive you for waking me up!"

Arrarn and Narice laughed softly. "But we didn't wake you in the proper manner Toria." Narice said.

Toria's blue eyes looked at her, new passion and desire filling them. "We... we don't have much time before..."

Arrarn growled softly. "We'll make the time." He said.

"Now wait a minute..." Toria protested. "We have too..."

Her words of protest vanished as Narice's lips covered hers once more and Arrarn rolled all of them over on the bed.

"We are hungry for you!" He growled. "And we won't be denied."

KRANEK

"Sabotage!" Dysea gasped from where she sat back in the chair.

The previous day had been quite the eye opener for Dysea Leonidas. She had been given the whirlwind tour of the settlement on Kranek, Cha'talla and T'lolt intent on showing her that at least their tribe of Immortals had changed their ways. What Dysea saw could not have been faked or staged in the two and a half days it took for her to get here. She saw a main school where Immortal children and half elf half Immortal children were learning a variety of subjects, many of which were taught in Union schools. Dysea was a voracious reader and advocate of education and this pleased her greatly. She had even spent time sitting with the children and taking part in their reading classes. Lexi could only stand to the side and shake her head as she saw something she never thought she would see as long as she lived. Immortal children sitting in the lap of an elven Queen and proudly showing her what they had learned. Dysea had toured a medical clinic that would have been first rate even in the Union. She saw Immortals of all ages working in the many fields that surrounded the settlement, harvesting any number of plants and vegetables. The facilities were all as modern as they could get; some of the tools ancient but extremely well cared for.

She witnessed a pure Immortal father chasing his two half elf children around their small home, the small boys screaming out in joy while their blond haired elven mother looked on holding the small baby. It was no different than what Dysea had seen so many thousands of times on Earth and Elear and Apo Prime. She was introduced to several Amarian settlers from the nearby Amarian settlement several kilometers north of them. This was no guided tour, as they randomly walked along the many pathways and roads, Normya clinging to her mother's hand for the most part. She had seen much of it already on her lone forays during the last two days here. Dysea noticed that Normya appeared to hold no fear of the Immortals in any way, some of them even waving to her as she passed by. It was different seeing the fearsome Immortals as she had seen them on Earth, waving and smiling even laughing uproariously with each other. She was introduced to many of them, all of them greeting them with friendly shakes of her hand. She learned a little of their lives, what they had done while being here, and almost always the praise that was heaped upon Cha'talla and Esther for what they had succeeded in doing was rapidly chasing away the former Immortal Captain's past. Dysea knew just by looking that this was a united settlement, and while she had not seen everything by the time darkness fell, she and Iriral agreed that what Cha'talla had told them was in fact the truth.

Much quicker than she had suspected, evening was upon them and she sat down with Cha'talla's family. The food was not extravagant, but it was delicious as far as she was concerned, and Iriral earned a friend for life when Tir'ut had dropped an entire hind quarter from a Bancorik in front of her, seasoned with sweet smelling

spices. At Esther's suggestion they refrained from speaking of what had brought them to this day until Dysea was well rested and they had time to actually sit and discuss everything. Dysea had woken this morning to the sounds of Normya's high pitched squealing and she rushed outside to see her daughter and Tir'ut chasing a dozen small children around the small fountain beneath her quarters. One of the smarter Immortal children had spoken that Normya was not scary enough and her squeals had come from Tir'ut lifting Normya onto his broad shoulders which when combined made them over nine feet tall. This caused the children to begin running around the courtyard with wide eyes as Tir'ut provided the roaring and Normya the arms that were reaching for the children. Dysea had lifted her eyes when she felt her bonded sister nudge her within Mindvoice and she spied Iriral on the ground beneath her apartment.

Sister? She had spoken then.

The past is changing into the future before us my bonded sister. Iriral had told her softly lifting her head to gaze at Dysea.

Dysea had watched for a few more minutes as Tir'ut and Normya chased the children around the courtyard until ushering them off to school. She had watched as Tir'ut had lowered Normya to the ground in front of him then, gazing into her face and speaking softly. Even from her elevated position Dysea knew right away that Tir'ut desired her daughter, and when she saw Normya make no move to pull away when he took her hands and kissed the knuckles softly, Dysea knew that there was something there for her as well. She watched as Tir'ut bowed his head to her and then Normya watched him move off before turning to move for the stairs that would bring her up to the apartment.

That had been two hours ago, and after a filling breakfast Cha'talla had led them here to this large building that apparently doubled as some sort of command center for the settlement. Dysea and Normya sat at one end of the table, Lexi to their right, while Cha'talla, Esther, Tir'ut and T'lolt filled the rest of the chairs. Fash'ka, Cha'talla's remaining pureblood Immortal son would join them shortly after retrieving some information from the G9 Runners. Cha'talla had even banged open a window that had not been used in a decade to allow Iriral to extend the majority of her head and neck into the room.

Esther nodded from her seat next to Cha'talla. "Normya's co-pilot found the device used to destroy their LSD Drive Coil just before it exploded."

Dysea looked at Normya. "Normya?"

Normya nodded. "Toral discovered the explosive device. It is the reason I was bringing the ship out of the Jump Corridor early. We found it too late, and by the time I acted we were already within the threshold of the Gate. The explosion sent us crashing into the Gate Ring and sheared off our Starboard engine nacelle and put us in a wild spin. It also destroyed the Gate, and that explosion sent us spiraling towards the border."

"Who would do this?" Dysea demanded. "Why?"

"The Chief Engineer at the Apo Prime Port Dry Dock." Normya said. "He was the one with access to our ship before we left Apo Prime. If it was someone else, his pre-release check should have discovered the device. One of the check points is the LSD Main Drive Coil. Since he did not find it, I can only assume he was the one who put it there, or at the very least gave access to whoever did."

"But why?" Dysea asked.

"I believe that I can answer that." Esther said waiting until Dysea turned to look at her. "His name is Gareld. He's a pureblood vampire, a former aide to Aikiro herself who deserted when it seemed the Kavalians would win the war in the beginning. He became a mercenary. We ran into him on Jagaliu several days before and he mentioned something about a big pay day coming for him. We didn't think anything of it until we detected the Gate Explosion on our way back here and moved to investigate. We picked up the *TYPE II* drifting, and then we detected Gareld's ship waiting in the exact spot where Normya's ship came across the border."

"He was waiting for her?" Dysea said.

"It appears so yes." Tir'ut spoke now Dysea turning to look at him. "Which means that someone within the Union gave him the flight plan that *il kal'daka darthirii* was going to be using. What Gates she would be transiting and possibly where she would come across the border. I would like to meet this person soon."

Dysea could detect the possessive tone of his voice and the real anger he used when speaking. She turned back to Normya. "This is all very..."

"*Amille...* someone did not notified Gate Command that the Gate was destroyed until just before the maintenance pulse. We were watching it from here when father allowed the information to be released three

hours prior to the pulse.” Normya spoke. “If Gate Control detected the destruction of a Gate someone would have responded within hours. Nothing happened. Toral and I floated for almost nine hours as we tried to fix our ship. No one came. Which means no one knew the Gate was gone.” She met her mother’s eyes. “That could only mean one thing.”

Dysea nodded her head slowly. “Someone was hiding it.”

“Gareld knew who was piloting that ship. He knew who your daughter was Queen Dysea, for he pursued her relentlessly.” T’lolt spoke. “He would not have...”

Dysea held up her hand quickly. “After what you and the others have done... let us drop the formalities please. It is rather silly don’t you think?”

T’lolt smiled. “Very well Dysea.” He said.

“My brother is correct Dysea.” Cha’talla said now. “He would not have pursued her to the surface of Yocetu if he did not know who she was. Mercenaries do not put down on the surface of any planet once they see a ship break up in the atmosphere. It is not tactically sound for them to do so considering their numbers are limited and they do not know what they are walking into. Gareld knew who Normya was and that is why he pursued her. He also knows who Esther is, and he knows that we helped your daughter escape. He knows she is alive; Gareld only retreated from Yocetu because T’lolt arrived with our three G9s. His ship, a Bontawillian Low Gravity Frigate, it was no match for three G9s. Even now he is more than likely searching the surrounding systems for where we are.”

“Our settlement here is not well known.” Esther spoke. “We have maintained a very low profile over the years so as not to draw interest in ourselves and because the Empress still has death warrants for Cha’talla and I and anyone related to us.”

“That is why she tried to convince us you were not who you said you were?” Dysea asked.

Esther nodded. “Cha’talla and I did not leave the High Coven on the best of terms.” She said with a small smile as she looked at Cha’talla.

He shrugged his massive shoulders. “She had you raped and beaten and then she tried to kill us both even after I told her what she wanted to know.” He said. “If I could have survived I would have tried to strangle her myself.”

“Why does she want you dead?” Dysea asked.

Esther and Cha’talla chuckled softly. “Pick a reason.” She said extending her hand out and placing it in Cha’talla’s. “The main reason if I had to guess is because she does not want the Immortals that still serve the High Coven to know what we have built here. She does not want them to know that they could be so much more. She does not want them to know that Cha’talla has taken me as his wife and she most certainly does not want them to now know they can have children outside their own species.”

Dysea glanced quickly at Tir’ut. “Your children with Cha’talla?” Dysea said looking back at her.

Esther nodded. “Tir’ut and our other three sons, they are a new breed of Immortal if you will Dysea. All the strength and the more primal skills of an Immortal, and all the abilities of a pureblood vampire. The ability to blur; use the shadows, and at least here in our settlement, expand the boundaries of their minds to whatever their limits may be. Something they are not allowed to do within the Coven.”

“Now that she knows we are alive... I have no doubts she will do everything within her power to find out where we are.” Cha’talla spoke.

Esther nodded. “Yes she will; however, our more immediate concern is Gareld.” She said. “Unless Aikiro mounts a full scale assault against our settlement here, there is little she can do. Gareld is another issue altogether.”

“Why?” Normya asked leaning forward.

“Gareld was working for someone *Il kal'daka darthirii*.” Tir’ut spoke turning towards her. “Someone within the Union.”

“And he is not the type of man to give up easily.” Esther spoke. “He knows we are now involved and he will stop at nothing to discover where we have taken Normya. Gareld and I... we have a history. He is a vain man... and I... I insulted him many years ago.”

“Insulted him how?” Dysea asked.

Esther looked at Cha'talla with love in her eyes and then back to Dysea. "As he was raping me I told him he could never do to me with his little tool what Cha'talla's cock could do to me." She said with a grin. "He did not appreciate that comment very much."

"Esther!" Cha'talla exclaimed.

Dysea looked at Cha'talla and saw that even under his new bronze colored skin that he was blushing something fierce. "Oh my." Dysea spoke finally.

Tir'ut couldn't help but laugh at the look on his father's face. "Oh thank you mother." He stated. "I will become a hero to our warriors when I tell them what you just said and the look it invoked from father."

Cha'talla glanced at his son. "You will do no such thing!" He roared.

"It is a compliment brother!" T'lolt spoke.

Esther leaned over and kissed Cha'talla's cheek as he sat there with his arms crossed over his massive chest. She turned back to Dysea. "Anyway... I insulted him again on Jagaliu when we last met. And Tir'ut nearly killed him."

"You should have let me." Tir'ut barked out.

"He knows we helped Normya. And he will not stop until he finds her. He also knows when he finds her... he finds us. And the location of our settlement would bring a hefty price from Aikiro." Esther said evenly. "Whoever he is working for right now must be paying him a fortune."

Normya's eyes went from Esther to Tir'ut and back to Esther. "You... you did not tell me what kind of risk you were putting the settlement in by helping me." She said.

Cha'talla shook his head quickly. "Do not worry for this Normya. We would have come forward eventually." He stated confidently. "That we were able to do this now... to show you and your mother that we have changed... that is well worth the risk."

"I must contact *Nauta Melme*... we must tell your father." Dysea declared.

"No!" Tir'ut barked out causing everyone to look at him as he came to his feet and moved up behind Normya's chair.

"Tir'ut... the King must know." Esther said looking at her son.

Sister... he is right. Iriral broke in for the first time, not shielding her thoughts or words and causing Dysea to turn and look at her directly.

"Iriral... we have to tell Martin." Dysea said.

"With all respect *darthirii ilhar*, if we do that we run the risk of exposing *Il kal'daka dardhirii* to greater danger." Tir'ut spoke waiting until she turned back to him. "If we are to discover who is behind this, then it must remain unknown that this was more than an accident. We have seen the broadcasts of your Netnews, and they are saying it is nothing more than a misfortune. Right now... those who are behind this do not feel in jeopardy. If you tell the king he will initiate a full scale investigation and he will want blood. It will cause those involved to go underground and we will never determine who is behind this."

Tir'ut... you and your mother can hear me? Iriral asked.

All of us in this room can hear you Iriral. Esther replied. *Cha'talla and T'lolt have Tier Five ability within Mindvoice. They can hear you as long as you don't shield.*

Iriral nodded. *Your son is right Esther. Martin will act Dysea... you know this. He is already on edge with the High Coven insurgent attack on the Kavalian delegation. Not to mention having both parties on Earth and in Sparta. With what the Kavalians are now attempting in regards to Lisisa... if another threat to his family is brought to his attention he will automatically go into a lock down mode.*

Normya looked at her mother. *He still believes it was an accident mother?*

Dysea nodded. *I spoke with him last night, but I did not know what I know now. He is still under the impression that the accident and the attack by mercenaries are unrelated.* She looked at Tir'ut. *You are asking me to lie to my mate and bounded love Tir'ut of the Immortals. This is not something I have ever done. It is not something any of us have ever done.*

Would he lie to protect you? Tir'ut asked quickly. *Would he lie to protect any of his mates and children?*

Normya looked at her mother. *Amille... Tir'ut is right.* She said softly. *We should take advantage of this and return to Apo Prime and discover who it was that is behind this. I know Andro and Arrarn will have already begun inquiries outside of the normal channels. They know far more people than father. Many of those now working in these fields went through their Agoges with my brothers. And if I know them, Andro and Arrarn*

will feel responsible for what happen and they will act outside of father's realm to discover the truth. And if they find out who is behind this, that person will disappear forever without us ever getting the chance to question them.

Dysea looked at her. *Your brothers would not act in such a way!* She stated.

Normya canted her head slightly. "Mother... do you remember the vampire officer who wanted to take Eliani and Nyla as his mates? He wanted to use his position as their husband to get close to father and act larger than he really was. To strut around and to show what a big man he was. When Eliani and Nyla told him to *nubous* off, he got angry and struck Eliani. He tried to rape her mother, in Nyla's parent's home." She spoke openly now. "Nyla's father and brother returned just in time to keep him from raping Eliani and killing Nyla. They contacted Andro immediately."

Dysea's eyes grew wide. "What? We... we never knew this!" She exclaimed.

Normya nodded her head. "Because we never told anyone." She replied. "Arrarn, Zarah and I flew the *DT*; Andro, Denali and Resumar then threw him out the back of the *DT* into the atmosphere of Rellaon Two. Lisisa, Carina and Nyla's two brothers emptied his apartment on Apo Prime making it appear as if he left in haste and Nyla altered the records to show that he had deserted his post. All of it was conducted in two days time. That was four years ago mother, right before the end of the Evolli War."

Dysea looked at Cha'talla and the others with a mortified expression at this admission by her daughter of the cold blooded murder. What she saw were the stern set of jaws and the looks of sincere appreciation for what Normya had just admitted too.

"Forgive... forgive me..." Dysea stammered. "I..."

"Would King Leonidas have acted any differently than your children Dysea?" Esther asked gently.

Dysea looked at Normya for a long moment and then back to Esther. "In all honesty... in all honesty, *Nauta Melme* would probably have made the officer suffer for quite some time before he killed him." She finally spoke.

"It was not a lawful action no." T'lolt spoke now looking at her calmly. "But it was a just one."

"I can call off Andro." Normya spoke softly. "If we tell him what we want to do he will give us whatever information he and Arrarn have gathered and he will allow us to handle it. But not if father is involved. In many ways my brothers are far more subtle than father."

"I can say the same *Il kal'daka darthirii*." Tir'ut spoke looking at his father and placing his large hand on Normya's shoulder. Dysea noticed that Normya did not flinch in the least at the contact, and her eyes even seemed to grow a little brighter.

"Bah!" Cha'talla exclaimed waving his hand at his son. "At least I know the King and I share one trait. We confront these issues head on and do not sneak around like our children appear to prefer!"

Esther laughed. "Yes you do my Blessed Husband. However... the trail of bodies you and King Leonidas would leave might be harder to explain."

Dysea couldn't help herself and now she laughed as well, even Iriral joining in within Mindvoice. All of them turned when the door slid open and Fash'ka came into the small command center.

Tir'ut turned to face him fully. "Brother... what have you found?" He asked.

Fash'ka moved right up to Tir'ut. "Ja'narie and I did as you and Normya suggested." He said. "We went through the sensor logs of the G9's." Fash'ka replied. "Only one G9 was in a position to pick it up. It was higher in synchronous orbit and on the trail of the formation. It also jumped twenty-six minutes after we did."

"Pick up what?" Dysea asked.

Fash'ka turned to look at her. "A low frequency sub-space transmission Lady Dysea. A transmission from Gareld's ship directed into Union space."

Dysea slowly came to her feet. "Into Union space where?" She asked.

"The G9 sensors have a limited range... but we were able to determine it was aimed at the general direction of Apo Prime." Fash'ka answered.

Normya looked at her mother. "The Chief Engineer." She said. "It has to be."

Dysea turned her head and looked at her bonded sister. [*Someone has tried to kill my child sister. Nauta Melme's and my child. Our child!*] She spoke heavily shielded.

Iriral's eyes narrowed slightly. [*Then we will do what we must.*] She replied.

[Yes we will.] Dysea turned to look at Cha'talla. "I can not ask you to do more than you have already done Cha'talla of the Immortals. Saving the life of my daughter is a debt that can never be repaid."

"As my brother has already told you Lady Dysea." Cha'talla spoke getting to his feet. "There is no debt to be repaid."

"Your actions in saving Normya have put your settlement here at great risk, hidden though it may be." Dysea said. "The sooner we leave, the safer you will be."

Cha'talla shook his head. "We are involved now." He spoke confidently. "My Blessed Wife has told me we would need to reveal ourselves one day. It appears that destiny has decreed that day come sooner than I had expected. We have a long range transmitter here, encrypted communications, and whatever you have on your ship. Tell me what it is you wish Lady Dysea. This concerns my tribe now, and we can accomplish more if we work together."

Dysea smiled. "Yes we can." She said. "Normya... use the secure COM controls in my *DT* to contact Andro. Call your brother off and get whatever information he or Arrarn has gathered. Tell him I want no one that is connected to this suddenly disappear. I have a feeling this is much larger, and when we act I want to gather all of them up in my net."

Normya stood up and nodded. "He's still at SODRAG?"

Dysea nodded. "Yes."

Normya looked at Tir'ut. "Want to see a real ship?" She asked.

Tir'ut nodded. "Indeed."

Normya took his large hand. "Then follow me."

The diminutive Normya leading the much larger Tir'ut out of the command center caused smiles to split the faces of T'lolt and Fash'ka. Dysea watched until they were gone and turned back to Esther and Cha'talla to see them looking at her intently. Seeing how easily Normya was accepting of the Immortals and their company, especially the hulking Tir'ut caused shudders of fear to course through her. While everything she had seen so far had done a great deal to dispel her uncertainties in regards to the Immortals, after seeing the vision she had, Dysea still harbored doubts and questions.

"Never fear the unknown." Dysea whispered.

Cha'talla looked at Esther and then back to her. "Lady Dysea?"

Dysea lifted her eyes to meet his. "It is something *Nauta Melme* has instilled in all of us." She told them. "Never fear the unknown for we don't know what treasures it could bring us."

T'lolt snorted. "If we had feared the unknown, we would have never gotten this far." He spoke.

Cha'talla nodded. "Indeed brother." He said.

Dysea took a deep breath. "Your transmitter?" She asked. "May I use it?"

Cha'talla nodded with no hesitation. "This way." He said.

SPARTA ROYAL VILLA ESTATE

"Really is no other way they can rule on this *Mandri*." Deia spoke as she sat on one of the couches in the main room of the villa. "Our laws are very clear. Lisisa has renounced whatever Kavalian citizenship she may hold, and her adoption by you makes her an immediate citizen of the Union. Very nice planning by the way... making sure you filed the proper documents so long ago."

Martin turned from where he stood in front of the repaired glass doors staring out into the night. Anja and For'mya rested on one of the couches dressed casually as they had finished dinner not so long ago. They could hear the high pitched voices of Retta and Calyb playing with Nara, Deion and Bryon as they chased their bonded dragon brothers and sisters through the villa's large hallways."

Martin shook his head. "That wasn't me." He said. "That was my mother's idea. She suspected something like this might happen. I don't think she ever considered from where however."

"Well according to our laws, the adoption and Union citizenship trumps whatever they can declare because Lisisa is here, and she has lived within the Union since you rescued her." Deia spoke. "Worse case

scenario is the Court rules in their favor, in which case Lisisa declares for political asylum and you grant it. Sel'ke shot down their primary reason for doing this I believe.”

“Getting their hands on Jeth?” Anja said.

Deia nodded. “Yes.”

“Don’t you find it odd that they did not know dragons are considered sentient beings in the Union? Able to make their own decisions and guide their own lives?” For’mya asked.

Deia shook her head. “Oh... I believe they were aware of it.” She said. “I just don’t think they care. To make it appear we are not being totally unreasonable and to further our standing I suggest we grant them concessions as I told you during dinner.”

“You mean letting them search her apartment here on the estate.” Martin said.

Deia nodded. “I know it violates your privacy *Mandri*... all of you.” She said. “The *Durcunusaan* can insure they are escorted directly to her apartment and out. They will not go anywhere else. And it will immediately put us on the high ground.”

“They won’t find anything Deia.” For’mya said. “Lisisa has, for all intents and purposes, been living with Deni for the last three years. Everything she considers of value has already been moved to their new villa in Gytheio.”

Deia nodded. “I know that.” She said. “So there is no reason not to allow them to search her apartment.”

“And if the Kavalians demand to search their villa in Gytheio?” Anja asked.

“It is in Deni’s name.” Deia said. “I already checked. They can do nothing if Deni does not approve it. The Lycavorian Union Galactic Court will not go after Denali Leonidas, nor will they allow the private residence of a Prince and Princess of the Union to be searched by agents of a foreign government. It would set a very dangerous precedent and they know that. At least this way we will look like we are trying to reasonably cooperate with them.”

Martin looked at Anja and For’mya. Anja shrugged. “I don’t care.” She spoke. “As long as Lisisa has no issues with it. From the gate to her apartment and then back. If it helps put this behind us...”

For’mya nodded. “I agree Martin.” She said.

Martin nodded slowly. “Very well *Tenna*.” He spoke softly. “Lisisa already agreed to this action if it ever came to be, so if that is what they request, give it to them. No scanners of any kind will be allowed and only three individuals.”

Deia nodded. “I will not offer it unless they press the issue Martin.” She said. “Most of their embassy staff finishes arriving tomorrow. All of them appear to be the biogenic females similar to Jalersi and Athani.”

“Any word on who their Ambassador will be?” For’mya asked.

Deia shook her head. “I’m assuming either Jiss or Matuarr.” She stated. “Whoever it is will only be a figure head really. All of their directives will come from Prefect Keleru.”

“Armetus has his people in place?” Martin asked.

Deia nodded quickly. “An office building four blocks away.” She answered. She looked at Martin. “*Mandri*... you do realize that when we sign this Cease Fire Accord with the Coven, they will automatically be granted an Embassy here in Sparta and on Apo Prime.”

Martin nodded. “It can’t be helped.” He said. “As long as the High Coven behaves, I won’t send forty dragons to their death. I promised Arzoal and the Dragon Elder Council as Talon Guardian. Militarily... they are in no position to challenge us, not with their ongoing war with the Kavalians. Aikiro is many things; stupid is not one of them. She doesn’t want to fight us as well as the KFI.”

“I quite sure she would be tickled if we got sucked in against the Kavalians though.” For’mya said.

“That’s why we need to make sure the intelligence she gave us is accurate.” Martin spoke with a nod. “I’m not going to do anything until I know for sure the Kavalians have plans for a preemptive invasion of Union space. We...”

The holo disc in the corner of the room on the floor chirred loudly. Anja got up quickly and moved to the small panel above it, touching the console. “Yes?”

“Lady Anja... we are receiving a priority transmission from the Hadarian Governmental Arch Ministry for you.” The female voice spoke. “A Chief Minister Wiktor. She is being quite insistent.”

Anja looked at Martin who shrugged his broad shoulders. “Very well Lieutenant... you may route it here.”

“Stand by.” The voice said.

Anja stepped back as the holo disc shimmered into life and the figure of the Hadarian Chief Minister of government appeared. She was dressed formally, her dark hair graying and tied back tightly in a large bundle at the rear of her head.

Anja lifted her coffee mug as the image cleared up and became focused. “Chief Minister Wiktor...” She spoke sipping her coffee. “What can I do for you?”

“I have been bounced from place to place for thirty minutes Queen Anja.” The woman stated in a stern voice. “I am not in the best of moods so I will make this very short.” She lifted a data pad in the transmission. “The Hadarian Governmental Arch Ministry is issuing an Executive Directive that you return to Hadaria immediately and appear before this Ministry body.”

Anja lowered her mug as her jade green eyes darkened. “Chief Minister... the Hadarian Governmental Arch Ministry as no authority to order me anywhere.” Anja snarled. “And I suggest you watch your tone of voice when speaking with me.”

“In this case we do Queen Anja.” The woman spoke her voice more subdued. “We have recently been given evidence of several alarming charges that have been brought against you. This evidence is very damning in many respects... and we are utilizing our Ministry Dictates to order that the Queen return to Hadarian and face these charges forthwith.”

“What charges?” Anja snapped.

“The most serious and damning charge among the three being leveled against you is that you were maliciously negligent in the death of Senior Mage Warrior Seanna.” Wiktor answered sternly.

Anja’s eyes grew wide at this announcement. “What kind of bullshit is that?” She nearly screamed. “Who is saying that? Chief Minister Wiktor if this is some kind of ploy by you and the other ministers to...”

“This is an attempt to get the truth!” Wiktor snapped in anger. “This evidence was passed on to us from the Hadarian Elder Healers! Mage Warrior Seanna’s own mother is leveling this charge against you! And the evidence she presented to the Elder Healers in defense of her charge is quite... it is repulsive for lack of a better word. Combined with the two charges being leveled against you by your Aunt, the Governmental Arch Ministry decided that action was demanded.”

“Charges that my Aunt has brought forth?” Anja declared stunned. “What charges?”

“Two charges. One brings into question your fitness as mother to the Hadarian heirs to the throne. Umbra charges they are being exposed to influences that are detrimental to their spiritual growth and could very well end up damaging them as they grow. She has presented evidence of Eliani’s upbringing as supporting this charge. The second charge is that you willfully violated established Hadarian Protocols concerning medical and political matters and bypassed not only the Elder Council, but this Ministry as well!” Wiktor stated smugly. “Due to the first charge from your Aunt, we are also ordering that Retta and Calyb return to Hadaria with you, without the dragon creatures that they are said to be bound too. Once here they will be placed in your Aunt’s temporary care until such time as a decision is made in regards to your status.”

“My status?” Anja growled. “I am Queen!”

Wiktor met Anja’s eyes in the transmission. “Based on the outcome of these charges against you Anja, your reign as Queen may very well be over.” She spoke with that same smugness and arrogance. “Failure to return with your children and surrender them to your Aunt will force us to remove them from your custody permanently by order of this body. In that circumstance the Hadarian Militia will take them from your...”

“That will not happen!” Martin’s voice was loud enough to cause Wiktor stop in mid-sentence and glance up from the pad she was reading from as Martin stepped into the transmission.

“King... King Leonidas!” She exclaimed her eyes wide. “I... I thought Anja was alone!”

“Anja is never alone Chief Minister.” Martin snarled. “And you are threatening to take my children Chief Minister. Our children. That is not something you want to do.”

“Milord... Milord Retta and Calyb are heirs to the throne of Hadaria.” Wiktor stammered out the words. “They...”

“Chief Minister Wiktor... if the Hadarian Militia comes to Sparta and tries to take our children from us, I will personally send every one of them back to you in a box and you can explain to their families why they are dead!” Martin growled menacingly. “And Anja is still Queen of Hadaria *and* the Lycavorian Union! You will

address her with respect Minister, or I will see to it your career in politics is over! Am I making myself clear enough for you?” Martin snarled at the woman.

Anja reached out and took his hand, seeing that he was about to lose all pretense of calmness with Wiktor. “Lover... calm down.” She said softly.

“Sire... sire I am only speaking on behalf of the Hadarian Governmental Arch Ministry and their directives.” Wiktor spoke quickly knowing she had crossed an invisible line and trying to reign herself in. “This... this is a purely Hadarian matter. It has nothing to do with Union laws or procedures.”

“You threaten to take the King’s children and think this has nothing to do with Union laws or procedures Wiktor!” Deia snapped as she too came to her feet and moved into the transmission.

“Deia!” Wiktor spoke.

“Where is Zaniai?” Deia demanded. “Is he aware of what you are doing?”

“Prefect Zaniai is fully aware of what the Arch Ministry is doing.” Wiktor stated now regaining control of her composure. “He has seen the evidence and reluctantly he voted to pass this measure.”

“What evidence?” Anja snapped.

“You will have full measure of all the evidence when you return to Hadaria Queen Anja.” Wiktor spoke. “It pains me to have to relay this information to you, but the Hadarian Ministry and Elder Healers are in full agreement in this situation. Failure to comply with these directives will only result in an admission of guilt, in which case you will be stripped of your authority as Queen, your sister will be stripped of her authority and Umbra will be named as Steward until such time as Retta and Calyb come of age. Furthermore... formal charges will be brought against you within the scope of Union law.”

“Umbra?” Anja barked. “This is all a ploy by her to make a grab for power! Can’t you see that?”

“Will you acquiesce to this body’s directive Queen Anja?” Wiktor spoke firmly.

“You’re damn right I will!” Anja snapped. “And when I get back there... we are going to have a long conversation Chief Minister. You, me and the entire Governmental Arch Ministry!”

“I’m sure.” Wiktor spoke smugly. “I will arrange for your Aunt to take custody of Retta and Calyb when you arrive.”

“No you won’t.” Martin stated plainly. “Umbra will come no where near my children! And neither will they be taken from their Bonded Ones.”

“Milord... this is a directive of the Governmental Arch Ministry!” Wiktor spoke in an urgent voice.

“Tell them to suck it up and drive on! They are our children Minister Wiktor! No one tells me or my mates how to raise our children!” Martin spoke in a menacing voice. “Or does the Hadarian Governmental Arch Ministry suddenly tell me what to do?”

“Sire... no... of course not!” Wiktor stammered. “I am only following the directive laid out by our ruling body.”

“Yes and you can explain that to Anja and I when we arrive Chief Minister.” Martin barked.

“King Leonidas... Milord... there is no request or need for you to come here.” Wiktor stated.

“But I intend to anyway Chief Minister.” Martin spoke. “We will see you in three days. Good evening!”

Martin slammed his hand down on the small panel and the transmission vanished before Wiktor could speak another word.

“Martin... this is for shit!” Anja snapped quickly. “They are trying to get back at me for going against them for so many years! This has my Aunt’s fingerprints all over it! Take my children from me and put her as Steward!” Anja flung her half filled coffee mug across the room where it shattered against the fireplace.

Martin nodded and stepped up to her quickly. “You don’t need to explain anything to me Red. To any of us.” He said pulling her into his embrace. He could feel her diminutive frame trembling in anger within his arms and he squeezed her tightly, letting his aura wash over her completely. For’mya came up to them immediately and pressed her body tightly to both his and Anja’s frames, and each of them slipped an arm around her waist. “The arrogance in her voice was enough proof of that. *Kinsoaurgai?*”

“Deia and I can handle things here.” She said softly.

“Martin you don’t have to come with me.” Anja said pulling her head from his chest and looking up into his face. “I can handle this... really.”

Aricia's words came back to Martin in that moment and he nodded his head. "I know you can. I'm going to keep you from killing anyone. At least initially. And to make sure they know that no one takes our children from us."

"Damn straight!" Anja barked.

Martin turned to Deia. "*Tenna*... we'll be leaving in the morning on the *SPIRIT*, if you need me for anything contact me on my personal channel." He said.

Deia nodded quickly. "I don't think it will be necessary Martin, but I will do so if I feel the need. You will leave me with full authority in regards to these Kavalian fools?"

Martin nodded. "Don't you already have full authority?" He asked with a grin. "A quick hop to Hadaria... we settle this... and then come back." He stated calmly. "Let Andro know in the morning *Kinsoaurgai*."

For'mya nodded. "Of course."

Martin pulled Anja and For'mya into his arms tighter and Deia saw Anja's petite form relax in her nephew's embrace. She smiled when she felt the tremors within Mindvoice signifying they were talking to one another and she picked up the data pads from the table in front of her. "I will leave you alone now to prepare for your trip." She said not expecting an answer.

Deia headed out of the main room and moved for the door that would take her to the main entrance of the Estate. She had things of her own to prepare for.

Martin stared at Anja's sleeping face resting on For'mya's smooth, flat abdomen as he sat on the edge of their massive bed. Her Persian red hair was splashed across For'mya's midsection, sleep finally claiming her after three hours of second guessing everything she had done through the years, Martin and For'mya providing her with a ranting board. They had put the small children to bed and then moved into their own bedroom, Anja's aura angry and twisted and confused. It had taken three hours just for him and For'mya to caress her with their own auras, listening to her vent and being there for her until finally she fell asleep pressed between him and For'mya. Looking now at two of the five women that so held his essence in their hands, Martin Leonidas could do nothing but thank the gods they were part of his life. He would be nothing without each of them and what they brought to his life. Even after all these years Aricia was the one he would reach for first as his *Anome*. She was the one who knew him better than anyone alive, who could elicit just that little extra surge in his blood, yet each and every one of them held a part of his heart. They were what made him whole in this life.

They were who he would protect with his last dying breath if need be, and he had decided long ago he would shatter more worlds if need be to save them from harm.

Martin sighed gently and got to his feet moving to the chair near the bed. He pulled on the loose fitting black pants and made his way out of their room and down the long corridor back to the main room of the villa. He lifted his hand to indicate the two *Durcunusaan* troops to remain in their chairs as they were beginning to rise and turned as Colonel Fache moved up to him and held out the mug of coffee. He turned to see the large monitor on the wall, one of the Netnews channels on it and interviewing the Kavalian Jiss. He turned slightly to listen along with the *Durcunusaan*.

"...do you think the Galactic Court will rule?" The reporter asked.

"There is really no other way they can rule." Jiss replied. "*The female you know as Lisisa Leonidas is in fact a Kavalian citizen, and therefore subject to our laws. She is not the daughter of King Leonidas as he has made everyone believe all these years. She is the daughter of Marshall Pleistarchus, the King's brother.*"

"You mean Marshall Pusintin don't you?" The reporter spoke.

"We know him by one name... you know him by another." Jiss answered. "*He is still the King's brother. He is still of the same bloodline of King Leonidas the First.*"

"Marshall Pusintin deserted Sparta over three thousand years ago Legislature Jiss." Another reporter spoke up. A female this time. "*When he returned... he attempted to kill his own mother in front of many witnesses. According to Court transcripts he knew who Princess Lisisa was then. Why didn't he come forth then instead of trying to kill his mother?*"

Jiss looked at her. *“Passion of the moment.”* He said. *“He allowed pent up anger at what he perceived to be his mother’s desertion of him when he was still a boy to control his actions. He has tried many times since that day to contact her and explain his actions. Lady Gorgo has never responded to his attempts. Nor has his brother I might add. And if I am not mistaken the current King Leonidas is the younger brother, the second of King Leonidas the First’s sons, yet it is he who rules the Lycavorian Union.”*

“Many people, including the First Oracle, have said Pleistarchus gave up the right to his bloodline when he deserted his people and swore his allegiance to the Kavalians.” The same female reporter said.

“How does one give up the right to their bloodline?” Jiss asked. *“It is still part of who he is.”*

“By being a traitor and taking an active part in a war against the Lycavorian Union, as well as killing his own people.” The female said.

Jiss’s jaw twitched as he looked at her. *“At the time Marshall Pusintin came to live with our people we were not at war with the Lycavorian Union. He really had no contact with any of his own species, and given the way we were regarded even by the Union, he chose not too.”*

“Why fight then?”

“Marshall Pusintin was defending what had become his home and family by then. Brutal attacks against those he considered his people. Is that not natural.” Jiss spoke.

“Legislature Jiss... the Kavalian Empire started the war between our two peoples and that is an indisputable fact you can not deny.” The female said firmly not in the least deterred by the angry look Jiss gave her. *“Marshall Pusintin or Pleistarchus, or whatever you want to call him, he is a traitor. He actively sought out and killed his own people during the war.”*

“Your current King Leonidas killed far more of our forces twenty years ago if I am not mistaken.” Jiss told her.

“Your forces had brutally conquered a Union planet!” the first male reporter spoke up.

“Those Kavalian forces were led by a rogue officer acting on what he thought was accurate intelligence.” Jiss answered. *“That operation was neither sanctioned nor approved by Marshall Pleistarchus or Prefect Keleru, and in fact we have tried to make reparations through the years. All of our overtures have been rebuffed.”*

“And the Trade Agreement now?”

“Is mutually beneficial to both our peoples.” Jiss answered. *“And we hope more will happen in the future. First however... first we must have closure on this issue with Marshall Pleistarchus’s daughter Lisisa.”*

“And her adoption by King Leonidas?”

“We do not recognize this adoption.” Jiss spoke. *“Nor does Marshall Pleistarchus. He never gave up the rights to his daughter.”*

“It would seem he did not care in the least considering he is the one who raped the High Coven Princess Yuri, knowing that a child might be the result of this.” The female reporter broke in once more. *“And Princess Leonidas is not a piece of property that you can assume ownership of as you have implied.”*

“Kavalian females do not have the rights that the females in the Union have, that is correct.” Jiss spoke. *“We have never tried to deny that. It is how we have lived our lives for millennia. Do you deny us our culture now?”*

“What if she chooses to remain here? To continue the life she has here within the Union.” The female asked.

“She does not have the right to make that decision according to our laws.” Jiss spoke.

“What if the court rules against you Legislature Jiss?”

Jiss paused for a moment and then shrugged his broad shoulders. *“Then we will know that the Union does not follow the very laws they purport to uphold now won’t we.”* He smiled and bowed his head. *“Thank you for your time. I must go now.”*

Martin turned back to where Fache stood. *“Wonderful people aren’t they?”* He said.

“Please tell me that when we are done training the Coven dragons sire... please tell me we will throw their barbaric asses out of Union space.” Fache spoke. *“Their arrogance is far greater than the High Coven’s ever was, and it makes me want to vomit.”*

Martin chuckled. "In a New York minute Colonel." He said.

"Milord?" Fache asked confused.

Martin patted his shoulder. "It's slang from a long time ago. It means you bet your ass that is what I intend."

Fache smiled and nodded. "Good."

"We all ready?" Martin asked.

"Everything is set up Milord." Fache spoke. "I put some of the *Feravomir's* biscuits on your desk as well."

Martin accepted the mug and nodded as he sipped the strong rich coffee that Aricia had invented and was now a mainstay of millions across the Union. "Lock me in then Fache." He said.

Fache nodded as Martin turned to the door into his inner office and moved through it. He waited until the door had slid shut and he heard the electronic locks activate from the opposite side. Colonel Fache would stand just on the other side and not unlock the door unless directed by Martin himself within Mindvoice. Martin smelled the sweet delicious scent of Helen's biscuits and moved to his large desk to pick one up. He savored the flavor and texture of the still warm dough as he bit into it and closed his eyes settling into the high backed leather like chair. He let his mind wander for a few moments, enjoying the quiet and collecting his thoughts on what he was about to do. He took a deep breath finally and leaned forward in his chair, tapping the control console built into the top of his desk.

There were only two people in the entire breadth of the Lycavorian Union who knew the code he was entering and he watched as the COM panel rose at a slightly inclined angle out of his desktop.

"Spartan One Actual. Code One, One One, One Alpha. Spartan Alpha One Protocol initiate."

-Authorization confirmed Martin Leonidas. Initiating Spartan Alpha One Protocol. All records of this transmission will be deleted upon completion-

-Confirm Command Authorization Codes-

"ADAFI Crimson Shield one four plus one."

-Command Code Authorization Confirmed-

-State Communication request King Leonidas-

"Omen Three. Secure voice and image. Yuriko seven nine seven."

-Stand By-

-Initiating-

Martin sat back in his chair as the holo disco on the floor flared to life, flickered and then cleared almost immediately to reveal the sleepy eyes of the stunning young Asian female as she sat up in the bed slowly. Her own eyes focused and then grew wider.

"Papa!" Yuriko Leonidas rasped as she sat up in her bed the rest of the way instantly, holding the sheet around her obviously naked body.

Martin's smile was warm and sincere and he gazed at his adopted pureblood vampire daughter with love and respect. "I apologize for breaking established procedures Yuriko." He spoke.

"Papa!" She gasped using the name she had called him as a child on EDEN Moon Base. "What is wrong?" She asked instantly. "We were not due to communicate for another two weeks."

Martin sat forward in his chair now and set his mug on the top of the desk. "I have a mission for you." He said. "And then I want to drop this façade you and I have been playing all these years and I want you to come home."

"Father... what is wrong? In the four years I have been doing this you have never contacted me on the SOA channel." Yuriko asked once more, her voice soft but confident. "You are scaring me."

Martin lifted the data pad and plugged it into the slot on his desk. He pressed two buttons and then looked up at the image of her. "This is what I want you to do." He said.

He watched Yuriko scramble from the bed and move for the desk in her quarters. He spied the lanky but muscular form of the Hadarian Healer Filrian roll over to the side, his long hair wild and unkempt. It had taken Martin ten years to finally make Yuriko see that the man who now shared her bed and her life worshiped the very ground she walked on, and not just because she had saved his life. When Yuriko finally came to realize this herself, after several failed relationships, she had thrown all that she was into their relationship. It had not made the Hadarian Arch Ministry very happy, but Filrian had long ago stopped trying to please them. He and Yuriko had been married in a very lavish ceremony in the mountains of Sparta nine years ago, and Martin still recalled the incredible party they had afterwards.

“King Martin.” He spoke in a sleepy voice.

“Filrian... I hope you are taking care of my daughter.” Martin said with a smile. He knew those on Yuriko’s ship held the highest security levels among any of the Omen crews, and those on Yuriko’s ship knew well the guise of anger that he and Yuriko had been operating under the last five years so that she could go places not normally accessible to a member of the royal family.

“When she lets me Martin.” He answered with a grin. “When she lets me.”

Martin chuckled and cut his eyes when Yuriko lifted the pad from the slot on her desk and directed her eyes back to the transmission.

“Father...?” She asked.

“Can you do it?” Martin asked.

Yuriko nodded and moved back to the edge of the bed, resting next to Filrian as he too sat up. She handed him the data pad. “Easily. We are only ten light years from the facility, and security is not what it once was. Husband?” She asked turning her head to look at Filrian.

Filrian nodded. “We have enough tactical team members to conduct the mission yes.” He looked up at Martin in the transmission. “Why would we want too? This is one of the reasons you have had us out here. To monitor this facility. Why do this?”

“Yuriko... remember when I told you and Andro that an end game was coming and we would have to play by other people’s rules?” Martin asked.

Yuriko nodded. “Yes.”

“Well that end game is coming. Sooner than I had thought.” Martin answered. “You are sure you can do this without risking your ship?”

Yuriko and Filrian both nodded. “Yes.” Yuriko answered. “Aside from that one security breach of the facility seven years ago, there has been nothing out of the ordinary. We never did find out who made it on to the station, or if they succeeded in doing what they came to do. We tracked the ship out of High Coven space to Icalro Alliance space, but lost them in the swarms of mercenary ships hiding out there.”

Martin nodded his head. “Good enough. Once you have what I want, destroy the facility and make it look like an accident.”

“Father... who knows about this?” Yuriko Leonidas asked.

Martin met her eyes. “Just you and me Yuriko. Just you and me.”

“Not Andro?” She asked.

“He’ll discover it before everyone else... but not right now no.” Martin said shaking his head. “Contact me when it’s done and you are on your way back Yuriko.”

Yuriko nodded slowly and got to her feet. “I will see you soon father.” She moved a little forward towards the holo image. “It will make me very happy to feel your arms around me again Papa.”

Martin smiled. “It will be good to hold you in person as well.” He stated. “Then you can help Lisisa deal with your sisters.”

Yuriko chuckled and nodded her head as the transmission faded.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

CENTRAL DISTRICT/SPARTA KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

“Get out of my way!” General/Colonel Vengal roared as he charged down the corridor of the maternity wing in the hospital, his elven wife of nearly four hundred years doing her level best to keep up with his long strides and shaking her head. The sun was beginning to set outside and as it poured through the many windows in the rooms it caused Vengal’s shadow to stretch down the corridor for what seemed like forever. She tried to apologize for her husband’s words and actions, to no avail. There were few people who did not know General Vengal, as he was one of the most well known and respected elves in the entire Union, and he was also one of the deadliest men alive.

General Vengal was tall for an elf, nearing six feet in height, his two hundred plus pounds lean and muscular and uncharacteristic for an elf. His long hair was nearly all white now but neatly groomed, with a bushy mustache that extended to just past the corners of his mouth. The many elf, Hadarian and human nurses and technicians got out of his way quickly as he strode briskly down the long, wide corridor. This was a man who had fought beside King Leonidas since before the day he discovered who he truly was. This was the elven man who, along with General/Colonel Vistr, had formed, trained and now led perhaps the second most feared Spartan military unit within the entire Union.

The Durcunusaan. The Wolves of the Blood.

He and Vistr commanded all Special Operations Units within the Union, and the two men had grown as close as any brothers could ever be. It was not uncommon to see them training with the troops they led, neither man afraid to jump into the same dirty water or crawl through the foot thick mud. It was the main reason Generals Vengal and Vistr were so revered among the *Durcunusaan*. Outside of the *Durcunusaan* Hippies Sedla assigned to the Royal family, no one actually knew the number of *Durcunusaan* within the Union. It was not an uncommon sight to see them out and about with other troops, but actually pinning down their exact number was something no one could ever do. Vengal and Vistr had designed them that way to keep their numbers a secret. Not even *Durcunusaan* members knew how many of their unit was active outside those detachments they were assigned too. General Vengal was also the father to Star Commander Anuk Simpson, and adopted father to Star Commander Nayeca Simpson, both wives and mates to General/Colonel Daniel Simpson. And everyone knew who that man was. The men and women in the hospital knew why Vengal was bellowing as he led his wife Narlea down the soft white of the maternity corridor, and they paid him no mind.

“Veni...” Narlea hissed softly as they walked the corridor. “You must stop bellowing like a wounded bear. You are scaring everyone!” She admonished him, though her own face was animated and bright. They had gotten the call only thirty minutes before and while she projected calm and control outwardly, Narlea would have been charging down the corridor in the lead had her husband not taken the point.

They rounded the corner and saw Moneus already gathered with Daniel Simpson’s father Melancton and Daniel himself in the hallway, Melancton holding a small bundle in his massive arms. Most elf men would never walk up to the three hulking figures without some trepidation. All of the men were nearing six and a half feet tall, well over two hundred and twenty pounds each and their bodies forged into muscular Spartan perfection. The sight of the three of them together was nothing short of frightening. Vengal was not one of those elves. Melancton caught his scent first and turned. His dark ebony face was scared in some places, and his usually stern look was now one of gentle grace. His dark eyes were bright as he saw Vengal and he held up the bundle in his arms, two tiny arms and legs kicking and jerking from within the white blanket.

“Vengal my friend!” Melancton bellowed happily, matching Vengal’s tone. “Look what your daughter has brought into this world!”

Vengal and Narlea stopped in front of the massive ebony Spartan and Vengal held out his arms for the bundle. Belying his huge size, Melancton gracefully and with the utmost gentleness placed the cooing baby in Vengal’s hands. Narlea gasped at the soft dark skin and bright eyes as her husband held the baby in front of him.

They knew the relationship their birth daughter Anuk had with Nayeca was one of Drow Mistress and Drow slave. They also knew that turn of phrase did not extend outside the realm of playful expression in their bed with Daniel. They loved each other just as intensely as they both loved the large black Spartan who had claimed them both. Within a year of their relationship beginning, Nayeca had become a cherished member of their family and adopted daughter to both her and Vengal in every respect.

“Another fine elven Spartan son to join our family!” Melancton spoke proudly. “Your blessed Drow daughter has done it again Vengal.”

Danny looked at his father. "Hey... I had a hand in this too you know!" He spat.

Narlea slapped Danny's shoulder, never taking her eyes from the baby in her husband's arms. "Nayeca did all the work Daniel Simpson. Carrying your children is a duty all its own!" She exclaimed happily as she reached up and gripped the baby's hand in hers. She smiled as the tiny fingers clamped down with strength.

Melancton laughed heartily. "That it is!" He said looking at his son. "That it is."

Narlea looked around the men and into the private room they stood outside of, seeing Nayeca sitting on a pillow on the floor, Anuk, Carina and Daniel's mother Malaika sitting with her and holding hands in the traditional elven way of thanking the gods for a healthy child. She brushed past the doting men and moved into the room quickly where she saw Anuk and Nayeca make room for her on the floor between them. She settled easily between her birth daughter and the Drow female they had called daughter almost from the moment she had come into Anuk's life. She leaned over and nuzzled Nayeca's beaming face in wolf fashion.

"He is beautiful daughter." She spoke softly.

"Thank you *Amille*." Nayeca replied gripping Narlea's hand tightly.

"Yes he is." Malaika spoke softly holding Carina's hand her face also very bright and animated at this happy time. "Strong and proud like his parents. We have been waiting for you Narlea. Shall we welcome him in the fashion of your ancestors? As we have welcomed all of my son's children with his beloved elven mates?"

Nayeca nodded her head, her shimmering white hair shiny in the light of the room, her amber eyes vivid and clear. "Yes. Let us welcome our son..." Nayeca said looking at Anuk who met her eyes with love and adoration. They both turned to look at Malaika. "Let us welcome Melancton Simpson."

Malaika's eyes grew a little wider at this and they became moist as she heard the name of her new grandson. She nodded her head slowly. "Oh... you... you will make him so proud." She said softly.

Narlea smiled. "And he will honor that name throughout his life. Malaika... would you do the honors?" She stated confidently. She squeezed Anuk and Nayeca's hands and closed her eyes as the others followed suit.

"I would be privileged." She answered taking Carina's hand in her right and Anuk's opposite hand in her left. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. "The... the gods have smiled upon our family once more... for they have seen fit to bestow a new life to us. A new life burning with Spartan and Elven blood. Proud blood... honored blood. The blood of warriors and scholars both."

"*Aovi*." They all spoke together in the Lycavorian tongue.

"May his hand be guided by the spirits of both our people. Those still living and those no longer among us." Malaika continued in the elven ritual.

"*Nasie*." They spoke in the elven language. (Amen)

"And may blessings reign down upon him from the gods and all those who shape our destiny."

"*Aa' menle nauva calen ar' ta hwesta e' ale'quenle*." (May thy paths be green and the breeze on thy back.)

Their eyes opened slowly and they began to chatter among themselves as only women could do.

Danny looked into the face of his new son, the hard warrior look now gone from his expression, the baby curled into the crook of his arm.

"He will be a strong warrior." Vengal spoke.

Melancton nodded as he draped his arm over Vengal's shoulders. "Indeed." He spoke looking at Danny. "What will you name him boy?" He asked.

Danny looked up at his father, glancing at Moneus quickly with a grin. "We decided he needed a strong name." He said.

"Bah... he is of Spartan and elven blood." Melancton spoke with a wave. "There is no question of his strength. All one has to do is look at Moneus here. Or Anton. Or Odara, or any of Vengal's and my grandchildren. Just spit out his name will you! Vengal and I need to know what we will be drinking too!"

"It took us a while to come up with a name we thought would be worthy of this little guy." Dan spoke.

Moneus chuckled. "Who are you trying to kid father? It took you and my mothers all of thirty seconds to decide." He said.

"Well...?" Vengal barked.

Danny met his father's eyes. "Melancton Simpson." He stated.

Melancton didn't do anything at first, but Vengal felt his arm tighten around his broad elven shoulders and he smiled. Daniel's father was an old Spartan Vengal knew, nearly two thousand five hundred years old, and he was still of the mindset that Spartan men did not show emotion. Vengal felt Melancton nod slowly, but he knew the emotion whirling through the man just by the grip he had on his shoulder.

"A... a fine name." Melancton spoke.

"A strong name." Moneus said looking at his grandfather.

"Yes... yes..." Vengal broke into the awkward moment knowing he was saving Daniel's father from having to respond further. "When is the party to welcome our new boy home?"

All four of them broke into laughter as the female elf nurse walked up tentatively, not wanting to intrude on the moment. Daniel looked at her as his father gripped his shoulder. "What is it Lieutenant?" He asked.

"General... I hate to interrupt sir, but there is a priority transmission for you." She spoke.

"Marty?" Dan asked.

"No sir... the King departed earlier this morning with Queen Anja for Hadaria. This is a Spartan woman by the name Hali." She answered.

Danny looked at his father quickly and motioned for Vengal to take his new son. "I'll take it over here." Dan spoke motioning to the small monitor. The nurse nodded and tapped on her pad several times as Danny moved to the monitor. He touched the panel and the face of Julie Collins's mother appeared. Spartan woman though she may have been, she was still a mother and Daniel detected immediately that something was seriously wrong. "Hali... Hali what is wrong?" Danny asked.

"Daniel... please forgive me... forgive me for interrupting you at such a time..." The older Spartan woman spoke in a weak voice.

Danny shook his head hastily. "Never think that." He said quickly. "What is wrong Hali?"

"Kim So is in Eden City Daniel." Hali spoke. "My children spread throughout the Union. I did not know who to contact. You and Martin... you have always told me to contact you if ever I needed something..."

"And we meant it. You contacted the right person Hali." He said seeing the woman's distress. "Now tell me what is wrong?"

"She's here Daniel." Hali spoke softly.

"Who?"

"The... the clone of my daughter that you and Martin told us of." Hali replied softly. "She is standing outside my home right now Daniel. Staring at the house. This is the fourth day in a row now she has done this. She is wearing a cape and cowl... but I know it is her. She has been there for nearly an hour doing nothing. Just staring."

Danny's eyes were wide now and he glanced at his father quickly. "Hali... we'll be right there. Go out the back and get over to Larissa's house. Do it now. Don't worry about taking anything... just go."

"Please hurry Daniel." Hali said.

Danny turned to look at Vengal who shook his head. "Go!" He spoke immediately. "I will watch out for my grandson."

Danny moved to the door into Nayeca's room waiting until they all looked up at him. "Carina... with me. I may need your skills." He stated formally, everyone detecting the sudden shift in his demeanor to his command voice. Daniel Simpson was the most laid back person anyone could know, but when he shifted into his role as a General of Spartans, something was wrong. He moved quickly to Anuk and Nayeca as they came to their feet.

"Daniel what is wrong?" Anuk asked.

"Hali just contacted me." He said softly drawing both Anuk and Nayeca into his arms. "The clone of Julie is stalking her home and has been for a few days. She's outside the house right now. I told her to go to Larissa's out the back, but I need to go there now and find out what is going on."

"I thought Martin told Aikiro she was not to leave their ships for any purpose!" Anuk spoke sternly.

"Yeah... well apparently the great Empress Aikiro doesn't listen too well. Or she thinks she doesn't need to listen." Danny answered. "I need to go."

Anuk and Nayeca nodded immediately. "Go!" Nayeca spoke. "Hali is like family to you Daniel. Go!"

Danny leaned over and kissed first Anuk and then Nayeca with deep passion and intense feeling before turning and heading out of the room, Carina on his heels. They watched as first Moneus and then his father fell

in behind him as they moved down the corridor. Anuk looked at Nayeca's amber eyes as they drew each other close and Vengal came into the room slowly rocking Melancton in his arms.

"Anuk?" Nayeca said softly, barely a whisper that only Anuk heard.

Anuk smiled at her. "The Julie Collins our Daniel knew and shared his life with is dead Mistress." She said softly. "We are his wives and mates and we have been for a quarter century. This clone is nothing to him."

Nayeca shook her head. "It... it was silly of me to think..."

Anuk leaned over and kissed her. "No Mistress. I thought the same thing for an instant when Martin first told us." She said softly. "I only needed to look at our husband's face to know we are the only ones in his heart. We are his world, just as he is ours. Nothing will ever come between us."

Nayeca nodded. "Of course I know that." She said sheepishly. "It must be my hormones to even think such a thing." She squeezed Anuk's hand and smiled once more, her amber colored eyes bright. "We need to plan our welcoming party." She spoke now so that everyone could hear her.

"It's about time." Vengal interjected. "We haven't had a good party since Moneus and Carina were mated. It's been nearly a month now!"

"Oh hush papa!" Anuk hissed at him with a loving voice.

SODRAG

"...everything Arrarn was able to obtain from his sources at Jump Gate Control mother." Andro spoke to Dysea and Normya in the secure holo transmission from within his office.

He could see three others in the transmission with them, one a dark haired pureblood who Dysea had called Esther and the other two were oddly colored Immortals, and one who he was sure was known as Cha'talla. The second bronze skinned Immortal sat closer to Normya than Andro would have liked but he said nothing in regards to this. He was still very unsure of the trustworthiness of the Immortals his first elven mother and younger sister were among.

"This information is accurate Andro?" Dysea asked looking at the pad in her hand.

Andro nodded. "As accurate as Arrarn was able to press for." He replied.

Dysea looked back up at him. "There are several names here Andro." She stated.

"Yes." He answered.

"Does your father have these names?" Dysea asked.

Andro shook his head. "Arrarn and I were gathering this information on our own mother. Outside the official investigation. Father left with mother to return to Hadaria very early this morning. It seems the Arch Ministry is having another of their fit in regards to how our father and mothers raise our siblings. He will probably contact you while they are enroute."

"The Arch Ministry?" Dysea exclaimed rolling her eyes. "Will they never give up trying to change *Melyanna*?"

"Apparently not." Andro stated. "From what little father was able to tell me before they left with Retta and Calyb, the Arch Ministry has brought three charges against mother."

"Charges? That is something new Andro." Normya asked leaning forward now. "What charges?"

"The main charge is for supposedly being maliciously negligent in the death of Seanna in some fashion. Seanna's mother Pcillany has brought that charge forward. Aunt Umbra has also charged that she is an unfit mother and that she circumvented the Arch Ministry in regards to several medical and political practices." Andro said. "It all sounds like a big load of *sibfla* to me."

"Anja had nothing to do with Seanna's death!" Dysea snapped. "The Evolli caused her death! I was there. I watched her try and save Seanna for three and a half hours!"

"Well apparently Seanna's mother does not think so." Andro stated. "They supposedly have some evidence that they intend to show her and father when they arrive that proves their charge. All I know is that Eliani is steaming mad right now. Chief Minister Wiktor said Eliani's upbringing was proof that she is not a good mother, implying in some fashion I would imagine, that Eliani is some how twisted or deranged because of how we were raised. It is a ridiculously veiled criticism of Eliani's and Nyla's relationship. I had to order

Eliani to remain here before she went to Hadaria and extracted a pound of flesh from someone.” Andro saw the woman Esther and the two Immortals chuckle softly within the transmission.

“Andro... your father does not know the incident with Normya was sabotage.” Dysea said. “And he must not know. At least not yet.”

“Yes... I gathered that when Normya contacted me and asked me not to do anything that would alert father to something other than what the Netnews people are reporting.” Andro said. “It’s just as well. With the High Coven and Kavalians in Sparta, father probably welcomed the chance to leave for a time. You know what they are trying to do in regards to Lisi?”

Dysea nodded. “Yes... we suspected as much when this Karun first informed us of his intent to seek a meeting with Lisisa.”

“They met yesterday morning mother.” He said. “According to Lisi... it went better than she had truly expected. The Galactic Court postponed making a ruling on the Kavalian petition today as well mother. I don’t know whether that’s good or bad.”

“For how long?” Dysea asked.

“Just until tomorrow Sparta time.” He replied.

“There is only one way they can rule according to Union law.” Dysea said confidently. “It matters not what Kavalian law says because she has been adopted and a citizen of the Union since your father returned from Lycavore with her.”

Andro nodded. “She and Deni aren’t concerned.” He said. “What exactly are you and Normya going to do mother?”

“The assistance Cha’talla, Esther, Tir’ut and their tribe have given to Normya has most likely exposed them to possible serious repercussions. I do not intend to let that happen if I am able.” Dysea said. “Apparently the man who was contracted to capture your sister knows of Esther and Cha’talla. They have a rather one sided history together.”

“One sided on his part I’m guessing.” Andro spoke seeing Esther holding Cha’talla’s hand on the table.

“Let’s just say Gareld and I do not see eye to eye.” Esther spoke from her chair. “In fact, given the opportunity, I would gladly remove his eyes from his head.”

“Andro... how is the training of the Coven Riders coming?” Dysea asked.

Andro looked at his mother in the transmission with slightly wider eyes. “Mother... mother you have just...”

Dysea shook her head. “They are already aware that the Coven has dragons on Earth and that we are training them Andro. They have known for some time it seems. They apparently have contacts within the ranks of the Immortals that still serve the Coven.” Dysea said. “I ask because we could use yours and Arram’s sources more efficiently if you were helping us.”

Cha’talla leaned forward in his chair. “We are not your enemy young son of Leonidas.” He said.

Andro met his eyes unwavering. “Simply because you have filed down your bone spikes and changed the color of your skin does not make you a friend Cha’talla of the Immortals. You are the former Captain to the Coven High Lord.” Andro stated coldly.

“Androcles Leonidas!” Dysea barked. “You will speak with respect to this man and his son and wife! They saved your sister’s life! Cha’talla’s brother is the Immortal your father told you about as a boy! They have risked a great deal in this venture.”

Andro nodded. “That is all well and good mother.” He stated. “And I bless the gods you were there for her. Respectfully however, that one act does not erase the thousands of years of war and mistrust between us. I thank you for what you have done, truly I do, but you will forgive me if I reserve judgment until more time has passed.”

Cha’talla laughed from his chair and nodded his head. “I like your son Dysea.” He stated. “Straight to the point! And in his position I would say the same thing. Are all of your child just as stubborn and cautious?”

Dysea turned to look at Cha’talla. “That seems to be the case.” She said turning back to Andro. “All of them have inherited their father’s blunt and sometimes tactless nature.” She scolded.

Andro shrugged his shoulders and smiled. “You still love him though.” He said seeing his mother nod her head in the transmission and smile affectionately.

“With every breath I take.” Dysea spoke softly.

“Will you be getting anymore information? While these names are helpful, considering their positions within your Union, they do not seem capable or highly placed enough to be the man or men who would be powerful enough to hire Gareld and direct all of this.” The second Immortal called Tir’ut asked the question. He leaned forward in his chair, his broad shoulders brushing against Normya’s arm. Like Dysea did the day she arrived, Andro noticed that this did not seem to trouble Normya in the least and she in fact turned to look at his face with dazzling emerald eyes.

“Arrarn’s contacts will continue to delve for information, but there is probably little more that they can tell us.” Andro replied. “It helps that the Netnews announced this was nothing more than an accident. Whoever is behind it will not immediately panic and it gives us time to discover more.”

“This man may very well try again.” Tir’ut spoke again. “I will allow no harm to come to *Il kal'daka darthirii*, and I will eliminate even those who come from the Union if they intend to harm her or her mother.”

Andro tilted his head as he gazed at Tir’ut and saw the fiery look of passion in his dark eyes. He watched his sister take his large hand in hers and look at him.

“*Kestall ith'arl ol won't doer ulu nindel Tir'ut.*” Normya spoke softly. (Hopefully it won’t come to that.)

Tir’ut met her emerald eyes and Andro saw him nod in the transmission. He shifted his eyes back to Dysea. “What is your plan mother?” He asked.

“I’m going to have my flight crew change the IFF transponder on my *DT*.” Dysea spoke. “I’m going to take Lexi, Iriral and Normya to Apo Prime without anyone knowing we are there and have a talk with the people on this list.” She answered. “The two engineers your father told me to take will remain with the rest of my detachment here and they return to Yocetu to fix their *VANGRA 9* transport. They will also try and salvage what they can from the *TYPE II* that Normya was flying before destroying it completely.”

“Mother anyone willing to go after our family in this way is either very crazy, or very well connected.” Andro stated evenly. “Iriral and Lexi can only protect the two of you to a point.”

Dysea nodded. “Yes... that is why Tir’ut and Esther have volunteered to come with us as support.” She stated. “And I have accepted. Cha’talla and T’lolt will return to Yocetu with the remainder of my detachment while Illiad and Erli’ra, the elves on Cha’talla’s ruling body here put together an extensive list of everything they will need here to defend themselves.”

“Elves?” Andro asked.

Dysea nodded. “There are a dozen or so elves here, seven of them females that I have seen, among perhaps a hundred others from different species. All of them are the Blessed Wives of Immortals my son. They... I have seen most of them Andro... they have children and they love with the same passion as we love your father. I was skeptical as I traveled here, but after what I have seen... not anymore.”

“As you say mother.” Andro spoke.

“It will not be a large list” Cha’talla spoke quickly. “What we lack are planetary shield generators and anti-air batteries. Those are far too expensive for us to purchase in The Wilds, and it would draw attention to us that we don’t want. We might be able to trade for them in Bontawillian space but we...”

“No.” Andro said getting to his feet.

“Andro... they have risked their lives to protect me! To protect our mother!” Normya protested.

“*Pen pera allon arande.*” Andro spoke.

“Then why are you being such a butt head?” Normya snapped using slang she had learned from her mother Anja and her sister Eliani.

Andro chuckled as he came around his desk and pushed aside his chair to begin typing into the control panel on the desk face. “You are spending too much time with Eliani.” He said with a large smile.

“Aikiro knows they exist as well now, and she wants nothing more than to kill all of them to keep what they have built here from being discovered by the rest of the Immortals within her ranks. The threat to them has increased two fold because of me! I won’t just leave them to their fates!” Normya spoke.

Andro looked at his sister in the transmission and he smiled at the set of her jaw, and he also noticed she had not released the hand of the bronze skinned Immortal. “You never used to get into this much trouble my elven sister.” He said as he continued typing on the main console of his desk. “Why have you suddenly become a nuisance?”

Normya smiled at the look on her older brother’s face knowing then that he was playing with her as he had when she was younger. “It must be all the time I have been hanging around you.” She stated confidently.

Andro chuckled and nodded his head. “Yes... well I have only just begun to rattle many cages with my actions sister.”

Dysea looked at him oddly in the transmission. “Andro what are you speaking of?” She asked.

Andro didn't answer but picked up the pad and inserted it into the slot on the panel. He keyed several sequences and looked up. “Normya... Encryption Algorithm Three Nine Nine Beta Four. Same as our training exercise on Podella Three. Do you remember?”

Normya nodded as she got to her feet and moved to the control panel in the large table, Tir'ut right behind her very interested in the coded talk they were using. He stood behind her as she keyed in several sequences on her end. “Initiating.” She said.

“Sending.” Andro stated as he stabbed down on the button.

“Locked. Receiving.” Normya said.

Tir'ut's eyes grew a little wider when he saw what she was receiving. He lifted his face up to glance at Androcles and then back down to the table as Normya finished downloading what he had sent to her and withdrew the data pad from the slot.

“Got it.” She spoke.

Andro moved back around to stand in front of the transmission disc and looked at them. “The seal security code is six four one three seven seven alpha Normya. Tell the *Durcunusaan* detachment leader that remains behind he has seven hours after he cracks the seal to take what he and Cha'talla believe they will need to defend the settlement. After that the seal code will randomly change and reset.”

Andro watched as Cha'talla rose and moved up next to his son and Normya, looking down over her shoulder as she held it out. His own eyes grew wide as he saw the information scrolling across the small screen and he turned back to Andro.

“This is... this...” Cha'talla was too stunned to speak. “This is on Yocetu!” He declared finally. “We... we never discovered it.”

Andro nodded his head. “We have such caches all over The Wilds Cha'talla. My father and uncles plan very well. It is very well hidden and unless you knew exactly where to look, you would never find it. It's an older Union cache, most of the equipment left over from the Evolli War, but it is still very serviceable and in excellent condition.” Andro said. “It will have all you will need to defend your settlement from everything except a dedicated ground and orbital assault.”

“Why?” Cha'talla asked him.

“My mother and sister apparently trust you Cha'talla, and my mother is the best judge of character I have ever met in my young life. I also find myself wanting to trust in you after what you and your son have done.” Andro spoke softly. “Mother... I sent a *Mjolnir's Hand* IFF code to program into your *DT*. Land at the *Mjolnir's Hand* base across the lake from the palace. Stay away from the palace to avoid anyone seeing you. The base commander will have documents for Esther and Tir'ut when you arrive.”

Tir'ut looked at him now. “My mother will pass easily, she is a pureblood. I will not be so lucky. I am an Immortal.” He spoke.

Andro nodded. “Yes... and when you arrive on Apo Prime you will be a member of the *Krypteria*.” He spoke seeing Tir'ut's eyes grow larger. “I'll contact Armetus and he will arrange it.”

“Thank you my son.” Dysea said softly. She looked at him in the transmission for a long moment staring into his azure eyes in the transmission. “What were you going to do with this information Androcles?” Dysea asked him finally.

Andro returned her gaze for an equal amount of time. “You don't really want to know do you mother?” He asked finally.

Dysea met his azure blue eyes once more and shook her head finally. “No.”

“Keep me in the loop mother.” Andro said as he tilted his head away for a moment like he had detected a scent. “If we are going to keep this unknown to father for the time being you need to keep me apprised of what is going on.”

Dysea nodded. “Of course.”

Andro lifted his eyes and looked at Cha'talla and Tir'ut reviewing the information on the data pad. “Cha'talla of the Immortals.” Andro spoke waiting until Cha'talla and his son looked at him. “Hear me now... you may be many thousands of years older than me Cha'talla, but if I discover you have betrayed my mother

and sister, and harm comes to them because of this, I will come for you no matter where you may run. You will not need to worry about my father for there will be nothing left of your corpse for him to find. And neither your son, nor your tribe will keep me from watching you die beneath my sword. On that you have my word as a Spartan Prince.”

“Androcles!” Dysea hissed.

Cha’talla didn’t bat an eye and nodded his head with a knowing smile. “May I expect the same of you in regards to my Blessed Wife and son while they travel within your Union young Leonidas?”

Andro nodded. “A Blood Oath then?”

“A Blood Oath it is.” Cha’talla spoke without hesitation.

“Then I look forward to the day I meet you in person sir.” Andro said.

“As do I young Leonidas. As do I.” Cha’talla spoke.

“Mother, you and Normya travel with my love always. Contact me immediately if you need anything.” Andro said. “I must go now mother. Sadi and Carisia are calling for me.”

Dysea’s emerald eyes grew quite a bit wider at this bit of information. “Carisia?” She gasped. “Andro... this is... she is the daughter of...”

“I know who she is mother.” Andro spoke with a grin and a shrug his broad shoulders. “One of the many cages I have begun to rattle mother. No doubt there will be many more.” He said. Andro’s azure blue eyes settled on Tir’ut as he stood very close to Normya. “*Sslig'ne ussta dalniril Tir'ut.*” He spoke. (Protect my sister)

Tir’ut nodded. “*Xuil ussta dro.*” He replied. (With my life)

SPARTA

She knew this place.

And she didn’t know how.

The modest sized home looked so very familiar to her yet she had never been here before. Sparta was new to her, filled with those she knew only as enemies, yet as she had walked the streets these last few days it all seemed so natural to her. She knew exactly where she was going without looking at the map on her data pad. The main entrance to the Royal Villa looked like someplace she had been before. The sights and sounds ringing in her vampire ears chimed with sensations she had experienced before. It was all very confusing for her. Ever since coming down from the *INQUISITOR* and becoming Aikiro’s shadow, feelings and sensations she had never felt before, but they seemed so real pulsing through her.

She had spent the last fifteen years of her life fighting the Kavalian dogs, killing them with no remorse. Her skills were beyond reproach she had heard many say, she held the rank of Major in the High Coven military, yet she had never felt so odd and out of place among her own kind as she did now. She was a vampire clone, she knew that. The last of a special batch of clones bred many years ago from the cells of known natural vampire leaders she had been told. The others of her unit had been killed through the years fighting the KFI, many of their bodies never recovered, but she had always survived. She was used now mainly for protection of high ranking officials and assassination missions. When she arrived here on Earth, she had been Empress Aikiro’s shadow for the first two days until she was ordered to walk the streets of Sparta trying to gather information and intelligence about where the KFI delegation was staying and any intelligence she could gather about city defenses and troop garrisons.

In the week she had been doing that, she had discovered only one actual garrison of Spartan troops, and that was more of a police barracks than anything else. She had witnessed dozens of dragons and their riders walking the streets, species of every kind sitting among the hundreds of cafés and shopping plazas that dotted Sparta. Her trained eye had detected no city defenses of any kind, and she determined that these Spartans had hid whatever anti-air batteries or artillery positions they had and hidden them very well. She did not think they would rely just on the PDP platforms in orbit. She had absorbed everything while walking the streets, yet somehow she always seemed to end up here in front of this house. Today she had decided to enter this home and try and discover why it felt as if she had been here before.

Her five foot nine body was muscular and lean, her black hair cut short around her face. Her breasts were firm and pushed against the sweater like turtleneck shirt she wore. Her black leather like pants was

actually a form of body armor, and dual fighting knives occupied sheaths on each of her thighs. The cape and cowl hid her features almost completely, allowing her to move about the city without notice really. Juliana One glance up quickly at the sun as it began to dip below the mountains in the west. The rays cast long shadows from many of the surrounding buildings, and as she looked around carefully she saw that no one was nearby. With a simple wave of her hand she wrapped the shadows around her and blurred forward towards the house. It was a simple matter to bypass the security lock still wrapped within the shadows and Juliana One stepped into the modest home and waited until the door closed before she allowed the shadows to fade from around her body. She detected no heartbeats within the home, telling her the house was empty and she stepped into the small main foyer, her dark eyes scanning the area.

Different smells assailed her nostrils, home cooked food, the spicy smell of Lycavorian blood. These smells made her stagger slightly as images flashed across her mind. A smiling woman and man... a white haired Drow elf male with glittering amber eyes. Images of the King of the Lycavorian Union and a huge black Spartan. A gorgeous red haired woman, their naked bodies entwined with that same ebony skinned Spartan. Juliana moved forward slowly, turning to look into what appeared to be the main room. She saw several couches and chairs, a fireplace and mantel with at least a dozen holo pictures. Juliana crossed the floor to the mantel and began looking at the holo images. They were of several large dark skinned Lycavorians smiling and holding the older man and woman. Several images of the older woman and man standing in front of their home and one where they stood with the King and several others she did not recognize. Juliana's face softened somewhat as she looked at the photos, a small smile creeping across her features, until she reached the last holo frame.

Juliana froze and her eyes grew wider.

She saw images of herself in the holo picture. Her hair was much longer, but it was definitely her. Several images she was posing in what appeared to be a park with the older man and women, holding both of them tightly. Several other images had her in the arms of a Drow elf male, her face looking animated and bright. She reached forward and picked up the holo frame, her eyes wide as she watched the images change within the frame. As she lifted her hand to touch the image she heard them.

Three heartbeats.

Three powerful heartbeats and beating with calm control, but most definitely Lycavorian hearts. She had been discovered.

Slowly she slipped the holo frame into her uniform and wrapped her hands around the pommels of her dual blades. She prepared herself for action but froze once more when she heard the snik of three *Nehtes* extending at the same time and then the razor sharp spear head of one touched her right shoulder.

"That would not be the smartest move you ever made." The deep voice spoke calmly. "Lift your hands back up and turn around slowly assassin. I'm not in a real good mood, so no funny stuff."

Juliana did as she was instructed. She was no good to the Empress dead, and she could easily say she had simply gotten lost. As she turned her eyes focused on the face of Danny, his wolf eyes very prominent and the *Nehtes* in his hand unwavering as it held the spearhead only two inches from her neck. A single flick of his wrist and he could decapitate her easily. That is not what concerned her at the moment, not nearly as much as the fact that this was the man she had seen in her mind. She saw the much older Lycavorian and then the younger one in the middle surrounding her on three sides, but her eyes went back to Danny's face.

"Do you make it a habit of breaking into people's homes?" Dan snarled at her. "Cause here in Sparta that is not a nice thing to do."

"I do not wish any trouble." She spoke. "Please just allow me to leave. I have only lost my way."

Melancton shook his head. "That won't happen." He said.

"I have done nothing wrong." Juliana spoke her eyes never leaving Danny's face. "I do not wish to hurt any of you."

"You think highly of your skills vampire." Moneus spoke menacingly. "Too highly I believe."

"I could easily avoid all of you." Juliana spoke once more. "I have not because I mean no harm. Just allow me to leave."

"We can track you even in the shadows assassin." Melancton spoke. "All of us have the training for that. And we have brought the cure for your speed."

"I'm sorry... I can not let you take me." Juliana stated.

Juliana spun away from Danny's *Nehtes*, wrapping the shadows around her as she did. She had never been trained to fight Lycavorians, and even during all her additional hours of training no one had ever told her wrapping the shadows around her while fighting pureblooded wolves would not help her. As she shifted towards the door the younger Spartan, he appeared to be half elf as well, moved with speed belying his size. His arm flashed forward and Juliana's eyes were wide as she saw the blow coming directly for her. Stunned, she could do nothing to stop it from connecting, and his thick forearm smashed into her upper chest with enough power to stop her in her tracks and make her stagger back as she gasped for air. The shadows fell away from her as she lurched, and the older Spartan spun gracefully, sweeping his right leg in front of him and taking out both of her legs. Juliana felt her body fly back and up before slamming to the floor of the home and the air left her lungs in an audible rush of noise. As her now cobalt blue vampire eyes looked on, the space in front of her blurred and the shadows fell away from around a stunning young woman who extended her arm and pressed the cold barrel of the K12 against her temple.

Juliana stared at the dark haired young woman for she looked vaguely familiar somehow. Juliana also knew just from the sound of her heartbeat and the smell of her blood that this young woman was a perfect combination of vampire and wolf blood. Something else she had not been told to expect.

Carina jacked back the hammer on the K12 and smiled sweetly, her own dark eyes now cobalt blue in color. "I have never particularly cared from seeing someone's brains before I eat dinner." She spoke calmly. "However, if you do not stand down, I will pull this trigger without hesitation."

Juliana recognized the cold tone of her voice for what it was. The finality of death if she refused. She slowly opened her palms and began to relax on the floor of the home. The Empress would be upset, but not overtly so. Juliana would never reveal anything to the Lycavorians, and all she had really done was to enter someone's home without permission.

"Very well." She said softly.

**EDEN CITY MILITARY AIRFIELD
OFFICE COMMANDER AIR GROUP
EARTH AIR DEFENSE FORCES**

Zaala Randall hated when she woke early and he wasn't beside her.

It was something she had grown accustomed too through the years, for there were times when her work kept her at the Research Facility overnight, but it was something that neither of them cared for in the least. She used her finger to curl her long black hair around her elegantly curved elven ear on one side as she sifted through the data pads on his desk. This move revealed most of her flawless features and the identical beauty to her older sister.

Lieutenant Governor of Sparta Tarifa.

Zaala was the youngest daughter to War Master Tareif and his wife Palina, nearly twenty years Tarifa's junior, but she and her sister were as close as any set of twins could ever be. She spoke to her sister two, sometimes three days a week and they shared almost everything with each other. Zaala had grown up almost completely opposite of Tarifa, not holding the title of Queen of the High Elves and being the more promiscuous of Tareif's daughters. She was well known back then as a female elf that would truly rock your world between the sheets. Since female elves born and raised on Earth had far less inhibitions than their sisters from Elear, they were prone to being more open about having relationships, even with men they had just met. It was not considered loose behavior for female elves from Earth to do this while they were investigating the possibilities for marriage and a husband. Zaala had been the epitome of this type of female elf, never one to shy away from getting a man in bed, especially the Spartan wolves once they had become more open about their existence. She wanted a man and wolf like her sister, one who was incredibly well endowed, and treated her like a goddess. There were many wolves vying for that honor, but not even Zaala had expected to fall head over heels in love with a human.

Steven Randall had won her heart from the moment he stood up to that hulking Spartan some twenty plus years ago. Zaala still remembered that exact moment almost like it had happened yesterday and she could not recall how many times she had lain in Steven's arms after a breathless night of sex and stared at his sleeping

face, thanking whatever gods were up there that they had given him to her. Zaala had taken his last name when they were married in a traditional elven ceremony to honor his human heritage, and she had used that name as a blanket of warmth and honor ever since. The ultimate expression of his love for her was when he asked Martin Leonidas to turn him because he did not want to lose her. To Zaala that had bound them together even tighter for all eternity. The change had not only turned him into a wolf, but ironically it had also changed him physically in some respects. He gained nearly three inches in height when the change had finally become complete, his body adding at least forty pounds of muscle to his already delicious frame. While he was not the largest man Zaala had ever been with, his size fit her like the piece of a puzzle, and he could make her see stars with his skill in their bed. When the change had granted him an additional two inches in the length of his cock and also increased thickness, Zaala's already overwhelming pleasure had increased three fold when her husband made love to her. Whenever her husband took her, it most definitely rocked her world.

Zaala Randall was considered one of the foremost experts within the Union in regards to Quantum Engineering and the new technologies developed from the Mindvoice ship. There were few who could match her intellectually, and her husband was one of them, which only served to make her elven blood call out for him even more. He was a superior pilot, considered by many as among the top ten or twenty within the Union even before Martin had changed him. While he was now part wolf, Steven clung to his human traits and history with fervor. He had asked to be changed so that he could stay with her as long as they lived, not to become a better person physically. He rarely changed to wolf form, and the Lycavorian blood in his veins now had really only increased his skills by a factor of two compared to four or five in other humans who were turned. He could have an intelligent and thoroughly analytical conversation with her in one minute, and the next he was acting like a love struck school boy as he nuzzled her elven ears making her melt into his arms. Zaala had helped to design and develop many of the new trinkets that Spartans and elves and others within the Union used to defend them. Her mind was like a sponge, absorbing everything around her, and then sorting it all out. She could attack problems and issues from inside or outside the box, and more often than not she was successful in solving them. It was Zaala who worked out the extension coefficients when deploying the Dragon Armor from the Mark Eleven saddles. She was also responsible for incorporating new techniques in the Flat Spatial Dimension Shifting technology that Lycavorians used with their Shi Viskas, making it more efficient and reducing the size of the bridle one needed to wear to operate it. She had tried to discover a way to allow those non-Lycavorians to be able to use the FSDS technology as well, but the only person within the Union without some small portion of Lycavorian blood in them that could use a Shi Viska was Isabella. That was still a mystery to many on why only she could use the FSDS technology. The only species known to exist right now that could use the Shi Viskas were Lycavorians. The FSDS Technology disrupted the cellular tissue and genes of its operator and only the advanced nature of the Lycavorian healing factor coupled with the speed in which it worked allowed them to be able to safely use the technology. Those with even small amounts of Lycavorian genes and blood in them could use the FSDS technology, but it was considered extremely lethal for any others. Why Isabella was different was a mystery, and Zaala and the others working on that project had stopped trying to figure it out.

Zaala Randall, because of her work with the Mindvoice ship, held a Level Nine Security Clearance and was privy to much of what was going on behind closed doors within the Union as far as advancements and new technologies. She communicated with Admiral O'Connor whenever she needed too, and given her status and position she was one of the few who could contact Tarifa or the King directly. Even with all that she had accomplished in her life, though she was still considered a child in elven terms, Zaala was essentially unchanged. Even with all the respect she held among so many, the thing that gave her the greatest joy was to be wrapped within her husband's embrace, on the couch in their home as they shared a mug of coffee and read to each other from a novel.

Zaala found the data pad she was looking for and shook her head at Steven's filing system. "How do you ever keep track of everything my husband?" She said softly as she lifted the data pad on Tempest Maneuvering Thruster Control and turned to perch her butt on his desktop.

Zaala's figure matched her sister's in almost every way, though she was three inches shorter than Tarifa's five foot nine frame. Her tanned body was lean and typically elven in nature with the natural musculature and definition of all elves. She had full and exceptionally firm breasts topped with pert nipples and even darker areolas. Her legs were long and her ass incredibly perfect in shape and firmness. She knew many men gawked at her when she walked the streets of Eden City or Sparta, but she also knew that those who were

even part wolf could detect Steven's heavy Dogwood scent embedded in her elven blood and they would not dare approach her without respect. Those who were not Lycavorian had only to look at the glittering ring she wore on her finger, or the way she dismissed all those interested with barely a thought, to know she was well and truly in love and very taken. There had been those who had tried to approach her anyway, the majority of them being shown the error of their ways quickly by Zaala. Only one had resulted in a confrontation with Steven, and now Steven wore the thin scar on his cheek from his right eye to his jaw from the blade of a vampire male. It was the only blow the man had gotten in before Steven had killed him in the street for attempting to force himself on Zaala. The investigation had been quick but thorough, the vampire male's body destroyed and they had gone on with their lives. In Zaala's eyes, the scar only made him more handsome.

Zaala looked up when she heard the voices in the corridor outside his office and her dark eyes grew a little wider when the human female and Lycavorian male walked through the open door into the office. They both wore Union Fleet uniforms, jumpsuits of dark gray sleeves with crimson and black on the shoulders and across the waists. Zaala quickly recognized the four thin silver strips on the woman's cuffs and the three on the Lycavorian. The Asian woman was incredibly attractive, but Zaala had always found human females of the Asian persuasion fascinating in many respects. They both came up short when they saw her sitting on the edge of Steven's desk.

"I'm... I'm sorry." Miranda spoke quickly, taken aback at the absurd natural beauty of the female elf. "We were looking for Major Randall's office."

Zaala nodded her head with a disarming smile. "This is Steven Randall's office." She stated quickly sliding off the desk. "Can I help you?"

Miranda glanced at Janon quickly and then back to Zaala. She hadn't realized that officers here on Earth had begun using female elves as secretaries. Especially not ones that were as drop dead gorgeous as this one. "We were told by base operations that we would find Major Randall here this morning." Miranda spoke.

Zaala nodded as she moved closer to them. "He will be here in a few minutes. He left very early this morning to try some new modifications to the lateral thrusters on his Tempest." She said. "He landed a few minutes ago. I'm waiting for him too."

Miranda looked at the very friendly female elf and tilted her head slightly. "You are his secretary then?" She asked.

Zaala laughed and shook her head. "I am many things to Steven Randall... but I am not his secretary." She said. She motioned to the desk behind her. "I'm much more organized. I truly don't see how he keeps everything in order."

Miranda saw the data pads scattered on the desk and she looked back to Zaala. "Then you are a civilian?" She asked.

Zaala nodded. "In a manner of speaking yes." She replied.

"Yet you are standing in the office of the Commander Air Group for Earth Air Defense Forces." Janon spoke now. "This is a highly restricted area you know."

Zaala nodded. "Oh yes... I know that."

"How did you get past security?" Miranda asked.

"I walked. Just like you." She replied as she moved to the counter and began pouring herself a mug of tea. "Is there a problem?"

Miranda looked at Janon once more and then back to the female elf. "If you are not his secretary and you are not part of the military... who are you?" She asked finally.

"I could ask the same of you." Zaala spoke lifting the mug to her lips as she turned back to look at them. "You are not assigned to Steven's Squadron, and based on the rank you both wear, I'd say you are not assigned to any unit here on Earth either since they maintain the ancient Earth ranks for the most part."

"I didn't realize Major Randall allowed civilian females into restricted areas to give them tours." Miranda spoke. "Does he do this often?"

Zaala laughed. "Oh no." She exclaimed. "Steven only has eyes for his wife."

"You seem to know Major Randall very well." Miranda said. "I wonder... does his wife know you are so familiar with him?"

Zaala's dark eyes twinkled at them. "Hmmm... that depends on your definition of familiar." She said with a smile.

Janon snorted in disgust. "I don't particularly care for officers who are not satisfied with the attentions of their wives." He spoke sternly. "Mando... I think we have made a mistake."

Miranda cocked her head to the side as she stared at Zaala. "You don't seem to care that Major Randall is married." She said.

"Is that how it appears?" Zaala asked sweetly. "I wonder; do you often intrude on the affairs of people you know nothing about?"

"Miss... I think I will call security and have you escorted off this base." Miranda stated. "And then I intend to have a talk with Major Randall and his commanding officer in regards to security issues."

Zaala chuckled. "Be my guest." She said. "I'm quite sure War Master Tareif would like nothing better than to discuss base security with you."

"I don't think I care for your...?" Miranda began to say.

"...told you it would work *Mela en' coiamin*." The new voice broke in. A low deep voice. (Love of my life in elven)

Miranda and Janon turned as the tall man walked in wearing a basic flight suit and carrying a flight helmet. He barely glanced at them as he tossed his helmet onto the chair as Zaala put her mug of tea down on the counter.

Major Steven Randall swept his elven wife up in his arms and laid a blistering kiss on her luscious lips, Zaala wrapping her arms around his shoulders and drawing her legs up along his hips. Janon glanced at Miranda quickly his eyes wide. This was Steven Randall, all six foot one inches of him since being turned. His dark hair was cut short, his exposed skin deeply tanned. The standard flight suit for a Tempest pilot was lightly armored as they knew, but providing excellent mobility. Major Randall filled out his flight suit quite well Miranda had to admit. She and Janon watched quietly as Steven pulled back, nuzzling Zaala's four inch high elven ear firmly and watching her eyes close in bliss. They acted like a couple that was newly married within the last week.

"I missed you this morning." Zaala gasped softly. "You left so early."

Steven held her in his arms easily, Zaala's hands holding his face. The thumb of her left hand traced the long scar on his cheek absently as she gazed at him.

"I wanted to test the engine seals you designed for the lateral thrusters in the cooler air." He said with a grin. "At'loa and Tomas went up with me."

"And what did you find?" Zaala asked.

"I told you they would work." He said with a smile.

"I believe it was I who told you it would work." Zaala said with an equally bright smile.

Steven shrugged his broad shoulders. "Ah... schematics." He stated with a quick kiss of her lips. "We'll need to let Ben know so we can start getting all the Tempest engine mounts reworked."

"You have visitors?" She stated motioning with her head.

"Huh?" Steven turned quickly, still holding his wife in his arms and he saw Miranda and Janon. He silently berated himself for missing them; for once he locked his wolf nose onto his elven wife's sweet almond scent he was like a guided missile. "Who are you?" He asked quickly. "And what are you doing in my office?"

"You are Major Randall I take it?" Miranda asked even though the image she had seen on her data pad already gave her that answer.

"Yeah. I'll ask again... who are you?" Steven spoke.

"Major Randall... do you know the penalty for allowing unauthorized civilians into a restricted area?" Janon asked.

Steven looked at the big Lycavorian as he lowered Zaala back to the floor. "I don't think you answered my question *Lieutenant Commander*." He stated firmly. "Who are you people?"

"Major... I am Captain Miranda Lorian." She spoke. "I had come here with the intention of finding a new CAG for my ship. I was told you were one of the top candidates. Apparently my information was wrong."

"Why's that?" Steven asked.

Miranda glanced at Zaala quickly before shifting her eyes back to him. "I can't abide an officer who is married and screws around on his wife." She snapped looking at Zaala's smile. "Especially one that doesn't even attempt to hide it." She nodded her head. "I will make a formal complaint to War Master Tareif when I see him later today Major. I wonder what he will say considering you are supposed to be married to his daughter."

Steven felt Zaala tighten her grip on his hand and he glanced at her to see her shake her head minutely. He turned back to Miranda. "Suit yourself Captain." He spoke.

Miranda looked at him stunned. "You have big balls Major!" She hissed. "Do you know who I am?"

"Someone who obviously does not do their homework." Steven replied nonchalantly. "And my wife likes my balls."

"And so do I." Zaala chimed in with a smile.

Janon stepped forward. "She is a Captain in the Union Fleet Major!" He barked. "You will speak with the proper respect!"

Steven shrugged his shoulders. "Your Captain and I are equal in rank here on Earth Lieutenant Commander whatever your name is. I command a ground based Air Group while she commands a ship." He said calmly. "This is my base area. My command. I'll treat her with the same respect she shows me, which so far ain't jack shit! War Master Tareif's office is down the hall to the left. I believe he just got here. Unless you got something important to tell me in regards to my mission here, you'll excuse me if I take this stunning young lady to a late breakfast. I missed chow this morning and I'm starving. My suggestion is leave your attitude at the door when you see Tareif though. He's grumpy in the mornings."

Steven gripped Zaala's hand and pulled her along as he headed out of his office. "Come with me *Mela en' coiamin*, I'll give you the specs and stress ratios on the way to the mess lounge."

Miranda looked at Janon with a stunned expression on her face at what Randall had just done. "C'mon Janon." She growled. "I'm about to stomp Major Randall's world into little pieces!"

Miranda had only met Tareif twice, but each time he had struck her as the epitome of the soldier's soldier. He was rough around the edges, but exceptionally smart, and he had no trouble jumping into a work detail with any of the Spartans or Dragoons under his command. His two sons were much the same as their father and were rapidly climbing the ladder within the Union military. Randall had been right however, and when they marched into his office, they found Tareif gulping coffee and grousing over reports from the previous night's work details. He looked up after a moment or two and saw them, his eyes showing instant recognition of Miranda. A smile split his face as he came to his feet.

"Miranda Lorian." He stated loudly. "Well... look at you!"

Miranda smiled warmly. Tareif was one of the exceptions to her elves are arrogant rule, and she genuinely liked the elf War Master. He had refused to change his rank or title, and with no hesitation in the least, Admiral Riall had instituted the rank of War Master to accommodate the gruff warrior.

"War Master... it's been a long time." She stated as he came around his desk and held out his hand.

"Indeed it has. Nearly fifteen years if my memory serves me right." Tareif spoke. "I see you have made Captain now. Outstanding Miranda... outstanding."

"Tareif... this is Janon... my First Officer." Miranda said introducing the man.

Janon shook Tareif's hand. "My elven mate speaks fondly of you all the time War Master Tareif." He said. "She says with a hundred like you... the High Coven would never have conquered her world."

"Bah... all the stories are untrue." Tareif barked. "I hate violence of any kind." He said with a twinkle in his eyes. He looked back to Miranda. "What brings you to my realm Miranda? You haven't come back to drive the EADF insane have you?"

Miranda shook her head. "No. One of your officers came up on a short list to be my new CAG." She spoke. "It's a classified ship right now Tareif so I can't tell you anything."

Tareif nodded. "I understand perfectly. You must be speaking of Steven. He just came back from a pre-dawn flight. He should be in his office by now."

Miranda looked at Janon and then back to Tareif. "We just left his office." Miranda spoke. "I... I don't know how to say this Tareif... but I question his integrity."

Tareif leaned against his desk. "In what way?"

"He is married to your daughter isn't he?" Miranda asked.

Tareif nodded. "Twenty-four years next month. Tarifa, Isra and Aihola just celebrated twenty-five years together last month." He answered proudly. "I am lucky as a father, for both my daughters have chosen excellent husbands. Men who honor them and love the ground they walk upon."

Miranda canted her head slightly. “Tareif... we just saw Major Randall getting very cozy with a dark haired female elf that had somehow gotten through security and was in his office.” She said. “Neither of them seemed in the least bit ashamed at what they were doing. Frankly... I’m flabbergasted they are bold enough to do this so close to your office.”

Tareif couldn’t help but smile and shake his head. “I see they have not yet changed the picture of Zaala in the Union personnel database.”

Miranda looked at him. “What?”

Tareif nodded and held out his hand for the data pad Janon held. “May I?” He asked.

Janon nodded. “Certainly.”

Tareif activated the pad and typed in some keys before nodding his head with a smile. He held it out to them. “This is not the woman you saw in his office I take it?”

Miranda looked at the dirty blond haired elf female. She shook her head quickly. “No it’s not.” She said.

Tareif turned and took a holo picture frame from the top of his desk and held it out to her. “This is Zaala and Steven on Isra’s birthing day last year. We threw a huge party here in Eden City.” He said.

Miranda looked at the holo image, seeing the dozen or so pictures flash across the display. She recognized Tarifa, Aihola and Isra easily, along with Tareif and his wife Palina. There were many others in the photos, but she froze the last two images on the display when she saw Major Randall and the same dark haired female elf from his office. One photo had them sitting on a stone bench, Zaala between his longer legs and feeding him something. The second photo was a close up shot up them facing one another, the sun just ducking below the horizon, Zaala’s arms wrapped around his waist and his arms holding her tightly. They were just staring into each other’s eyes, but for some reason Miranda did not believe the picture had been staged.

“This is who you saw in his office yes?” Tareif asked.

Miranda held the holo frame out to him. “Yes.”

Tareif nodded. “You must forgive my daughter.” He said with a shake of his head. “She is sometimes overly protective of Steven when she does not know who you are. Did you tell her why you were there?”

“I may have mentioned it...” Miranda said softly. “I think I was just too pissed off after seeing the game I thought they were running.”

Tareif smiled. “Twenty-four years they have been together and they act as if they are still newly married at times. It is a gift they have. A gift both my birth daughters and my adopted daughter Aihola have. You know of course that is how Steven got the scar he wears on his face? Protecting my daughter.”

Miranda shook her head. “That wasn’t in his file.”

Tareif nodded. “A vampire gave it to him. The man just did not want to understand that Zaala and Steven were married. They were returning from dinner one evening and he attacked them. It was shortly after Martin turned him. The vampire thought he would make short work of Steven and take Zaala for himself. He slashed Steven in the face...” Tareif touched his own face by his eye and traced an imaginary line down to his jaw. “Witnesses were saying Zaala was screaming for him, seeing the blood and thinking him to be mortally wounded. Steven Randall grabbed the vampire’s hand when he attacked again, broke his arm like dry timber and then snapped the fool’s neck in two places. He had Martin turn him so that he would not have to bear Zaala watching him grow old and die before her eyes. His devotion to my daughter and hers to him is beyond question Miranda. The picture in the database file is of Zaala’s cousin. When it was taken, Zaala and Steven were visiting the southern continent and she did not want to come back. Believe me... Tarifa and I scolded her for days for doing such a thing, but they have not changed the database to reflect her picture.”

Miranda looked at him. “Ok I think I have made an ass out of myself then.” She said.

Tareif chuckled and stood up straight. “Nonsense.” He said. “Come... we will join them for breakfast. Have you and Janon here eaten?” He saw them shake their heads. “Then follow me.” He stated.

Zaala’s arm was laced within Steven’s as they sat close together at the long table in the mess lounge, Zaala sipping tea while Steven was tackling the heaping pile of eggs and bacon and toast on his plate. She had long ago given up trying to get her husband to eat healthier foods, and he did often acquiesce to her requests, this morning she let him splurge however.

“The fractal ratio was point three, and even during an eleven G climb at full fusion burner the seals maintained their cohesion.” Steven told her as he stabbed another piece of egg on his fork. “Shrinking it three millimeters was brilliant. It negates almost all residual plasma leakage and increases coil efficiency by six point three percent.”

“And I only estimated a four point one percent increase.” Zaala spoke. “It did not affect your turning power?”

Steven shook his head quickly. “No... and At’loa executed a split S turn with flaps fully extended. She practically came to a standstill at full throttle and turned it on its nose.”

“And you engaged the XLM-800s at the precise moment I told you?” Zaala asked.

Steven rolled his eyes. “We followed your maneuver list exactly *Mela en’ coiamin*.” He said leaning over and nuzzling her ear. “The seals are perfect.”

Zaala’s heart was racing as she felt him nuzzle her four inch high ears and she leaned into his caress with a smile. The shadow casting over them drew her attention and she saw her father standing in front of where they sat with the human woman and Lycavorian man from earlier. She looked up at her father.

“Papa?” She asked.

“I believe we have a misunderstanding here.” Tareif spoke as he sat down directly across from Steven and eyed his food hungrily.

Steven grinned and pushed his plate forward slightly as Miranda and Janon settled on either side of Tareif. He watched Tareif snatch up a fork that Zaala wasn’t using and stab a piece of bacon from the plate. His dark eyes fell on Miranda and Janon.

“I understand the Captain and her Lieutenant Commander here made some accusations without attempting to discover all the facts.” Steven spoke setting his fork down as Zaala handed him the coffee she held in her hand.

“They haven’t changed Zaala’s photo in the Union personnel database Steven.” Tareif said. “They saw how you and Zaala were acting and assumed that the photo in the database was accurate. They thought it was Zaala.”

“Assumptions are...” Steven began.

“The mother of all fuck ups.” Miranda finished. “Yes... I read that book by Benjamin too.” She said. “It might have helped if your wife had told us who she was right away. And please forgive my language.”

Zaala looked at her and smiled as she took the mug back from Steven. “You did not ask Captain.” Zaala spoke with a calm smile. “And regardless of the rank and uniform you wear, it is not good OPSEC to just announce who I am to whoever appears in my husband’s office. I do hold a Level Nine Clearance Captain, and doing that to people I don’t know is not the smartest thing. As for your language... I have heard far worse from my husband and father. You should hear them when they are drunk and together with Isra.”

“We are not that bad.” Steven spoke turning to look at her. “Are we?”

Tareif chuckled. “I believe we are.” He said.

Miranda nodded her head with a small smile of her own now, amused at the antics of the three of them. “You are very correct Mrs. Randall.” She said.

“It is just Zaala.” She said quickly her dark eyes gazing at Miranda evenly. Almost as if she was measuring her up.

“And forgive me for questioning your integrity Major Randall.” Miranda spoke turning back to Steven.

Miranda let her eyes linger on the long scar that adorned the right side of his face and decided that his call sign was aptly given. His face was restful and calm right now, but given the location of the scar, Miranda was quite sure if he ever got angry that scar would give him a frightening visage. In its current state however, it did not mar his looks in any way and in fact only added to the rugged handsomeness of his features. That she looked at him in such a way surprised Miranda and she berated herself, considering what his elven wife looked like.

Steven waved his hand in a dismissive manner. “Water under the bridge.” He spoke quickly. “And Zaala and I tend to act rather possessively towards one another sometimes.”

“I act possessively with good reason.” Zaala said squeezing his arm and looking at him with those large dark eyes and a heart stopping smile. “You don’t often get beautiful women who come looking for you in your office Steven.”

Steven looked at her. "As if I need anything more than you." He spoke softly before kissing her tenderly. Miranda watched Zaala's face soften even more, though her comment had surprised her. Steven sat back in the chair now, his food forgotten and looked at Miranda. "Would you care to tell me why Miranda 'Mando' Lorian is here on Earth wanting to talk to me?" He asked calmly. "I already have a job I'm very happy with."

"Your name came up on a short list of possible CAGs for an assignment I have been given." Miranda spoke.

"My name?" Steven said. "I don't know why."

"Sixty-seven kills during the Evolli War is why." Janon spoke up now. "Two FVAs with cluster, two Distinguished Valor Awards and a DFC. That is why?"

"Two FVAs?" Steven asked surprised. He looked at Zaala. "I have two of those?"

Miranda and Janon looked at him stunned as Zaala nodded. "Yes you do." She answered. She turned and looked at Miranda. "He doesn't wear his dress uniform very often and when he does I am the one who puts it together for him."

Tareif chuckled. "As your mother does for me." He said.

"You don't... you aren't aware of the decorations you have been awarded?" Miranda asked.

Steven looked at her. "Colorful medals don't interest me." He said. "They don't mean spit in the cockpit in the middle of a fight. You know that as well as I do. When is the last time you wore your uniform?"

Miranda grinned. "Three years ago." She answered.

"And you got more fruit salad than I do." Steven said leaning forward and looking at her. "Miranda 'Mando' Lorian. Hero of Alba Tau. Four FVAs with clusters, three DFAs and two Distinguished Flying Commendations with clusters. A shitpot full of lesser medals to go along with the three WIA Crimson Hearts for wounds received."

"I... I was no hero." Miranda whispered.

"That's not the way I heard it." Steven spoke gently. "You took out two Evolli heavy gun positions with just your pulse cannons, and when they ran dry you used your engines to melt the third by passing only five meters above it at high speed."

"That one got me shot down." Miranda corrected him.

Steven nodded. "And you saved the lives of six thousand Spartans who were on the ground and about to come under fire by those heavy gun positions." Steven said. "I'd say that makes you a hero."

Tareif nodded. "As would I."

"I... I lost my entire Squadron." Miranda said meeting his eyes.

Steven met her gaze without flinching and nodded his head again. "We all lost a lot in those twenty-one hours Captain." He said softly. "We all lost a lot. Zaala's love helped me to let go of my demons from that war... maybe you should do the same."

Miranda shook her head quickly. "I didn't come here to trade war stories or be analyzed Randall." She said with no hostility in her voice, no emotion in her voice at all. "I came to offer you a new job."

"What's wrong with the one I have now?" Steven asked with a smile.

Miranda looked at Tareif. "War Master... you'll forgive me if I have to ask if you can leave us alone. This is classified at Level Ten, I'm sorry."

Tareif nodded. "I understand." He said rising to his feet. "I hope you will stop by once more before you leave Miranda."

Miranda smiled. "I will War Master. Thank you." She watched him nod before turning back to Zaala. "I'm sorry... but..."

Zaala shook her head. "There is no need to apologize." She said getting to her feet. She leaned over and kissed Steven deeply, caressing his face as she did. "I will see you for lunch my husband."

Steven nodded. "That's a date *Mela en' coiamin*." He answered.

Zaala looked at Miranda. "It was nice meeting you Captain." She said. "Perhaps we will see more of you in the future."

Miranda watched Zaala as she turned smartly and moved to catch up with her father. She turned back and looked at Steven as she slid the data pad across the table. "These are the initial details." She spoke softly. "I can't tell you more unless you accept. I suggest you look this over and then take some time to think about it."

Steven picked up the pad. “Level Ten huh?” He said. “That’s cool.”

“I suggest you read Major.” Miranda said.

“Zaala comes with me.” Steven said.

Miranda looked at Janon quickly and then back to Steven. “We don’t have any slots for civilians on this ship Major Randall.”

Steven set the pad down. “Then I can give you my answer right now.” He said getting to his feet. “Zaala is my wife and mate. She goes where I go. That is a decision we made together when we were married. It is why I returned here to Earth after the Evolli War. This is where Martin sent her to continue her work on the Quantum aspects of the Mindvoice ship.”

“She was aboard *NORMYA’S LIGHT* with you?” Janon asked surprised.

Steven nodded. “She may seem to be eccentric Miranda; sometimes that comes across as arrogant, but she is anything but. She ran the Astrometrics Sensor Array on *NORMYA’S LIGHT*. And Dysea and Isabella didn’t cut here any slack either.”

Miranda looked up at him. This was the man she wanted on the *ARIZONA*, of that she had no doubt. This was a man who cared more for his pilots than he did for any medals and that is what she wanted. “I’ll talk to Ben and see what we can come up with.” She said finally. “I can’t make any promises.”

Steven nodded. “619.” He said.

Miranda looked at him. “619?”

Steven nodded again. “That’s our house number in Officer Country. When you get your answer that’s where I’ll be. No offense Captain... but if it’s Level Ten... it’s probably one of Ben or Martin’s wildly dangerous schemes. That doesn’t bother me... but if I buy it... I want you to be the one to tell my wife. Not some officer coming here to Earth who doesn’t even know her.”

Miranda got to her feet and looked at him. “I could offer the job to someone else.” She said.

Steven nodded. “Yep.” He spoke. “And that won’t bother me one bit either. 619 Captain Lorian. Have a nice day.”

Miranda and Janon stood there slightly stunned as Steven Randall smiled and headed for the door to the mess lounge. They heard him laugh as two pilots in flight gear walked up to him and they began talking animatedly as they left. She watched Steven put his arms around the shoulders of the two pilots as the three of them left the mess lounge.

“We should go with someone else.” Janon spoke turning back to her.

Miranda shook her head. “No.” She said instantly. “Let’s find a transmitter and get in touch with Ben.” She stated looking at him. “I want him Janon. And if we have to make a position for his wife so that he agrees... that’s just what we’ll do.”

“May I ask why Mando.” Janon asked.

Miranda met his eyes with a smile. “The man who just walked out of here will do everything in his power, including giving his own life, to make sure he brings as many of his pilots back as he can. He’s a leader Janon. Most of the pilots we are getting have been flying for what, two or three years. They’ve never experienced anything like Alba Tau. One day they will Janon, and if Randall is leading them, he’ll bring the majority of them home. Put him in command of those pilots and I’ll have an Air Wing that could tear the ass from the Kavalian Empire all by itself.”

“There are other leaders Miranda.” Janon spoke.

“Not like him Janon.” She answered.

“What makes him so different?” Janon asked.

“Major Randall has faith Janon.” Miranda said softly. “And he has attitude. Attitude and faith. That is a deadly combination. No... Major Randall is the man we want. Cancel the other interviews Janon. Let’s go talk to Ben.”

Aricia walked confidently and calmly down the wide corridor of her Beloved's ship, the gold trimmed crimson cape just brushing the deck of the corridor as she walked.

Twenty-five years had changed Aricia from the young, wide eyed female wolf the first day she had stared into Martin's deep brown eyes. He was so imposing, so powerful and so very confident. When compared to Anja and Dysea at the time, Aricia had felt so very inferior even though it was she who was the pureblood Lycavorian. Her times with Martin had stolen her breath away, and then when they had bitten each other and let instinct take over and become Anomes her life had begun to change.

What Joric had done to her would have destroyed her if not for Isheeni. It also made her a far stronger woman than when she had first met Martin Leonidas. Those months on Enurrua had changed her significantly, almost resulting in her death. Isheeni had kept that from happening, and that night had been the defining moment in her young life. When Martin had come to Enurrua and crushed an empire to get her back, her life had begun anew. Their connection as soulmates had become so much more powerful and focused. Their lovemaking had become more passionate and intense, almost to the point that they could pleasure each other just within their minds. She had become a complete woman after that.

And far more deadly.

It was without question that in terms of Mindvoice powers, Aricia was second only to Martin, though her son with Martin was rapidly closing the gap and she had no doubts he would one day surpass her and his father. And twenty-five years of training with him, Dysea and Bella had also made her into a Black Widow spider in many respects. Exceedingly lethal. She was able to use her Mindvoice powers to enhance her physical abilities just as Martin, Andro and Zarah could. The explanation behind Zarah having this ability had long eluded them, but after a few years it no longer mattered. The four of them were the only ones able to use this skill outside the riders of Mjolnir's Hand. While the many Bonded Pairs could use something similar, it did not have the power or focus. Aricia had given her Beloved four strong children, all of them bonded to dragons and growing stronger by the day. Aricia was truly a Queen in every definition of the word. She could be the most compassionate person in the universe, or the most savage. She had spent years learning of combat from Martin and the finest warriors in the Union. During the Evolli War she had led countless missions on her own, earning her the admiration and respect of even the gruffest Spartan warrior who may have thought her too young. When Aricia spoke now, everyone listened. She was incredibly intelligent and could almost always think outside the norm and figure a way to complete a task.

Aricia Leonidas was also the one that Martin's Queens all deferred to in regards to almost everything. While they all loved Martin, and he loved them all in return, because she was his anome Aricia was considered senior among the Queens of the Union. She had an insight into Martin Leonidas that none of them would ever have, and knowing this they naturally gravitated to her. Aricia had never imagined herself in this position when she first came into Martin's life. Soulmate to the King of the Lycavorian Union, and lover of four woman who she considered even more beautiful than herself. They never denied each other attention, and their love for each other was just as powerful as their love for Martin. In times like this when they were separated from the others because of their duties and such, it only brought them closer. She and Bella had done nothing but talk of past and present things while transiting to their meeting. They trained together several hours a day, ate together and made passionate love to each other in the evening. They were both concerned for Dysea, but For'mya had contacted them to let them know what was going on, and while they still worried it had helped to alleviate some of their concerns. Isabella was more concerned because of the deep love she had for Dysea, and it seemed whenever she and Dysea were apart they worried for each other and Martin more than even themselves. It did not stop them from taking comfort in each other however, as attested to the twin puncture marks low on Aricia's neck, just below her ArmorPly collar. Bella had a way of being able to make all of them do anything she asked when she bit them. Perhaps it was because of her darker and more dominant side, but whatever the reason, Bella could make her fellow queens quiver in delight.

Aricia came to the large double door and past her hand over the sensor to the side. The twin blast doors responded immediately and she entered the bridge of *MJOLNIR'S HAND*. As with all the newer class *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers, the bridge of *MJOLNIR'S HAND* had been refit to match them. It was laid out in such a way that Martin or Komirri could stand in the center and shout commands in any direction. Helm controls were directed from the main console in the center of the massive view window, navigation and operations directly behind the helm officer at consoles facing each other. Tactical and Communications were

slightly elevated on opposite sides of the bridge to either side of the main doorway she had just entered. She saw Komirri and Bella standing in the center of the bridge; Isabella dressed almost identical to her, while Komirri wore the standard Fleet uniform of dark gray and crimson. She crossed the open area between them until she was standing next to them. Komirri and Bella turned as she came up.

“We are at the coordinates.” Bella spoke with a smile. *[Did I wear you out Aricia?]*

Aricia looked at her seductively with vivid azure colored eyes. *[We shall see tonight won't we Bella?]* *[I can hardly wait.]* Isabella answered.

They both turned as Vonis moved from the main sensor console and looking over the chief's shoulder. He wore a standard ArmorPly uniform with a K12 strapped to his right thigh and a wicked looking hand knife strapped to his abdomen on the left side for easy drawing.

“Sensors show no other ships in the area.” He spoke as he came up to them.

“Our Strike Wing is Shrouded and maintaining positions to cover us.” Komirri told them.

“Are we early?” Aricia asked.

Vonis shook his head. “I believe Joyar is on a Shrouded ship.” He spoke. “Making sure we came alone no doubt.”

“Would he have access to such a ship?” Aricia asked.

Vonis shrugged. “It's very possible if he is traveling with the insurgents. I think we all agree he is involved with them far more than he wanted us to believe.” He answered. “They would most definitely have Shroud capable ships.”

“Which also reveals to us that they are far more organized than Aikiro believes.” Bella spoke. She turned to Komirri. “Send out a low frequency, short range transmission Komirri. We are here as we said we would be. Reveal yourselves or we will immediately return to Union space and regard the High Coven insurgents as hostile and deal with them accordingly.”

Komirri nodded. “Repeating every twenty seconds?” He asked.

Isabella nodded. “That is sufficient yes.”

Komirri nodded and moved to his communications station. Aricia stepped closer to Isabella, taking her hand. “How long do we wait?” She asked.

Bella looked at Vonis. “Brother?”

“Joyar isn't stupid enough to think he can try anything Bella.” Vonis answered. “If he is sincere... and the insurgents are sincere... I would think thirty minutes. No more.”

“What if they are not here yet?” Bella asked. “Perhaps they had trouble coming here?”

Vonis shook his head. “Joyar has my personal channel. Now that he knows it is active once more he would have contacted us.”

Aricia turned to where Komirri was giving orders to his COM officer. “Komirri... tell them we will wait only fifteen minutes and then we will leave.” She looked at Bella and Vonis. “Tell them fifteen and we wait thirty. It makes us appear more than serious in regards to this meeting.”

Komirri nodded his head to his operator and walked back over to them. “The signal is going out.” He said.

“Now we wait.” Bella spoke.

High Coven *DARKBROOD*-Class Frigate *ORCAVA*

“It's a short range, low frequency transmission.” The woman spoke turning in her chair to look at the *ORCAVA'S* Commander. “Repeating every twenty seconds.”

“Let's hear it.” The man spoke leaning forward in his command chair.

“...arrived as agreed. We will wait fifteen minutes and then return to Union space and regard any insurgent contact as hostile. We will act in the best regards of the Union and dismiss further contact. No distinction will be made between High Coven forces and insurgent forces. This is your only chance.”

“It's showing the authorization codes of both Queen Aricia and Queen Isabella.” The woman said.

The Commander turned to the Eanae male standing next to his chair. “Isabella and Aricia?” He asked.

Joyar nodded. “The two of them are the more militant of his Queens.” He spoke softly. “And perhaps the most deadly of the five. You are aware of Isabella’s skills, and no doubt they have improved considerably in the last quarter century sharing a life and bed with Leonidas. He is said to have trained all of them extensively. The Evolli War showcased Aricia’s proficiency at warfare, and she is regarded as the most powerful of his Queens within Mindvoice and the one who he holds closest to his heart as well.”

“Can we trust them Joyar?” The man asked. “The General’s ultimate goal was to achieve the Union’s aide, but even he did not know how this meeting would evolve. Our assassination attempt of the Kavalian delegation on this very ship may have killed whatever hopes we had of Union help.”

Joyar nodded. “It is a possibility yes... but I do believe we can trust them.” He replied. “If I did not... I would not have brought my entire family on this trip.”

“You can damn sure bet that there’s an entire Strike Wing out there somewhere.” The Commander spoke.

Joyar nodded again. “Undoubtedly.” He said. “But would you send two of your Queens into The Wilds with just one ship. Even if it was a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser?”

The man nodded. “Good point.”

Joyar looked at the former High Coven commander. “You broke from the High Coven because you believed in what the General and the insurgents were doing Maros.” Joyar said. “This is the opportunity that the General has waited for. Do we just throw it away?”

Maros held his gaze for several more seconds before exhaling heavily and turning his head. “Tactical... de-shroud the ship.” He barked. “And pray we are not making a mistake.”

MJOLNIR’S HAND

“Admiral Komirri! High Coven *DARKBROOD*-Class Frigate de-shrouding off our port quarter!” The officer at the tactical station snapped out loudly.

“Stand by!” Komirri barked out looking at Isabella and Aricia. He smiled. “Looks like you were right Milady.” He said.

“Let’s see where this takes us first.” Bella spoke.

“Admiral... they are hailing us?”

Vonis nodded and looked at the COM officer. “Narrow beam! To the main bridge holo disc!”

“Transferring.”

The holo disc in the center of the floor of the bridge shimmered to life and they were looking at the Eanae Joyar and a pureblood vampire officer sitting in the command chair of the frigate.

“Joyar.” Vonis spoke calmly. “A *DARKBROOD* frigate my friend. You travel in style. I’m impressed.”

The Eanae chuckled softly. “I said I would put you in contact with the Insurgents.” He said. “Queen Aricia... Queen Isabella... may I present Commander Maros.”

The man rose from his chair slowly looking at the transmission calmly. “An honor.” He spoke.

“We almost left Commander Maros.” Isabella spoke calmly. “Aricia and I are not the most patient of individuals.”

“I... I am only protecting those I fight with Queen Isabella.” He answered. “Our actions on that very ship you occupy did not advance our status among you or King Leonidas I’m sure.”

“In that you would be correct.” Aricia said.

“Our leader... he was not happy that some of our other commanders took this tact when they decided to attack the Kavalian delegation.” Maros spoke quickly. “I have been instructed to offer my sincere apologies for that, and to insure you it will not happen again.”

Isabella glanced at Aricia. “I understand from Queen For’mya and Prince Resumar that your men fought bravely Commander. They were just overmatched from the outset.”

Maros nodded. “Against Queen For’mya, Prince Resumar and their dragons... yes I could not agree more.” He said. “While she is not considered to be the strongest fighter of King Leonidas’s Queens, she is more than a match for any of our soldiers. I...”

“Commander... why don’t you dispense with attempting to stroke our egos. None of us have egos to stroke.” Aricia stated bluntly. “We are here to discuss matters and I assume you have been given the authority to act, at least in some regard, on behalf of this General.”

“I have Lady Aricia.” Maros answered.

Aricia nodded. “Then Colonel Vonis will give you instructions and Isabella and I will meet you in the landing bay.”

Maros watched in the transmission as Aricia and Isabella turned and left the bridge. He cut his eyes to Vonis. “They do not mince words Prince Vonis.” He spoke.

Vonis smiled and shook his head. “No they do not. I suggest you keep that in mind.” He said. “And I am no longer a Prince. You have a transport?”

Maros nodded. “A long range G9, yes.”

“Then why don’t you and Joyar use it to come over.” Vonis spoke. “Joyar... have your family ready to transfer over as well. I will send our *MENKLA* transport to conduct a dry seal dock.”

“So you will keep your word?” Joyar asked the relief in his voice very evident.

Vonis nodded. “You will find that King Leonidas and his Queens do not break their word when they give it.” He spoke.

“I will not forget this Vonis.” Joyar spoke seeing Vonis nod in the transmission.

SODRAG

“...contact you when we return to Apo Prime.” Golina told Adriana and Malic as they stood in the departing passenger area of the small spaceport on SODRAG.

“I have some time coming to me...” Megdar spoke looking at his daughter and son. “It... it is time we became a family again. Time for your mother and I to atone for what we have put you through all these years Malic; Adriana. Time for...”

Malic looked at his father and shook his head. “No father.” He spoke looking at Adriana who smiled at him. “Better that we leave the past where it belongs and begin fresh.”

The last two days they had done just that.

Seeing Malic during that ceremony, the pride and accomplishment that he had achieved when no one believed in him had changed Megdar. The huge, silvery/purple dragon rested comfortably on the ground behind where Malic stood those amethyst colored eyes clear and shining with intelligence. They had never been apart in the last two days, and many times he had felt the tremors within Mindvoice as they spoke to each other on a level he could not achieve. Seeing his son upon that dragon’s back, seeing him wearing the shimmering Dragon Armor of a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand*, that had brought it all home for Megdar. The son he thought would never amount to anything without his help had achieved something Megdar had never suspected. He had failed the Union Academy yes, but as a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* he had automatically been promoted to Star Commander. Parts of their duties within the Union were to act as Ambassadors of a sort to the many different species that called the Union home. And Megdar knew that to become a member of the King’s revered unit, his son must have been very special indeed. Until two days ago he had never thought much of the men and women who were members of that unit, but watching the Acceptance Ceremony and then mingling with them afterwards had changed all of his views on the members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* as well as the Durcunusaan.

Watching Malic standing proudly among the ranks of dragons and men, listening to Malic’s numerous achievements as they were read off in the small promotion ceremony afterwards, it had humbled Megdar. Listening to all that his son had accomplished even without his guidance, it was these things had filled Megdar with a sense of guilt and dishonor that shamed him. It was then that he finally admitted to himself he was holding onto a hatred that was not only wrong, it was a hatred that would eventually destroy him. And his family. Megdar had wept in his mate’s arms the night after the ceremony, wept in shame for all he had done. Those tears had been cleansing in a way, for he had woke the next morning with new purpose, a purpose to discover who his children were once more. It would take time Megdar knew, time to let go of all the past distrusts and suspicions, but what he had begun here two days ago was something he would continue into the future.

He and Golina had spent the day after the ceremony learning of their son and daughter once more. He truly did not want to leave, but his command waited for him and he needed to return. In the last two days however, he had learned who his son and daughter had become, and he could not have been prouder. He made a silent vow to begin making amends for everything he had done.

Megdar nodded his head at Malic's words. "You are right." He spoke softly. "Adriana will remain here with you?"

Malic nodded. "A member of *Mjolnir's Hand* I may be... but we are still very new to the knowledge that has been given to Vincix and I, and I must still pass my exams in three months. Adriana will be able to help me."

"And Tuvar arrives next week to be with you?" Golina asked holding Adriana's hands tightly.

Adriana nodded. "Prince Androcles has made it so he could conduct many of his duties from here on this base. Those he can't will be given to another officer to manage. I think we may visit Sparta when he arrives. It is something neither of us has ever done."

Megdar took Malic's arm and pulled his son to the side to speak privately with him. To Malic, this is what he had waited for his entire life from his father. He held no malice towards his parents, his bonding with Vincix making that emotion impossible when it came to family. Megdar reached up and placed his hand on Malic's shoulder, spreading his fingers out on the wide crimson shoulder boards that signified his unit.

"Malic..." He spoke softly.

"No father." Malic said. "I meant what I said. "Let us leave the past behind us. We..."

Megdar shook his head. "That is not what I was going to say." He said. "I was going to speak of Princess Eliani and this Nyla Sinthe."

Malic looked at him oddly. "I don't... I don't understand."

"You told me that they are connected in a way that makes them almost one mind yes?" Megdar asked.

Malic nodded. "Yes."

"The Princess... her aura and her blood burns for you my son. Her scent... her scent is sweeter when she is near you, anyone who is wolf can detect this. If this is how you affect her, then I can only assume this Nyla feels the same if they are connected as you say." Megdar spoke.

Malic dropped his dark blue eyes and shook his head slightly. "I don't know... I don't know how to approach them father. Or if I should even try." He said softly.

"Do you desire them as your scent tells me you do?" Megdar asked.

Malic lifted his eyes. "Yes." He stated without hesitation.

"You are an Alpha Malic." Megdar spoke. "She is an Alpha female with the blood of our King in her veins. The blood of a Leonidas. She is waiting for you to come forward and claim her. Claim them. If they are what you truly desire... then as I did with your mother do not hesitate and make them yours. As old as I am... I have seen my share of female wolves make their intentions known to the male they want. That she wants you... that they want you is quite obvious my son. Act on it Malic. And make them shout your name to the moon. And also as I do your mother... worship them Malic... for they are your future as well. The future of our family."

Malic met his father's eyes and took a deep breath. "Then I will do just that." He stated confidently.

Megdar nodded. "Good." He said with a smile. He gripped his arm as they turned back to where Golina was hugging Adriana. "I will return to my command now. I have several lessons that I insist my officers study and commit to memory. They are tactical lessons learned from centuries ago, but I have found many of them still apply. I will send them to you. You may find them interesting."

Malic nodded. "Thank you father."

Golina released Adriana as they came up and she turned to Malic. Her eyes were moist and she immediately embraced him tightly, barely able to get her arms around his waist. "Watch out for your sister Malic." She said looking up into his eyes.

"I will mother." He stated with a smile.

Golina patted his broad chest. "And do not keep those two females waiting forever." She said with a glint in her eye. "Your father did not make me wait."

Malic chuckled and leaned over to kiss her cheek. "Travel with the gods mother." He said squeezing her hands.

Golina nodded. "I will contact you when I return to Apo Prime and see about having some of your things sent here from your apartment there. I imagine you will be securing your own home here on Earth." She said.

Malic nodded. "That is my hope." He said. "Within Gytheio, Sparta's ancient port city."

Golina nodded. "Good." She pushed him to arms length and smiled. "I will try and return in a few weeks to visit with both of you if that is something you both wish?"

Adriana nodded. "It is mother." She spoke.

Golina saw Malic nod and smile at her. "Very much so." He stated.

Golina nodded once more and stepped back to grip Megdar's arm. "I will see you then." She stated.

A loud chime echoed in the spaceport and the voice announced the transport was leaving for orbit. Megdar nodded his head. "We must go." He said.

"Be safe." Adriana told them as she took Malic's hand.

They both nodded and turned to head for the ramp that would take them to the transport. Malic felt Vincix move closer and turned to look at him.

They have changed my brother. He spoke so that both Malic and Adriana could hear him within Mindvoice.

Malic nodded. "Yes they have."

Then you only have one other task before you are complete. Vincix spoke as Malic met his amethyst eyes.

Are you going to badger me about that as well? Malic asked.

Vincix chuckled in Mindvoice and Adriana smiled. *Until you follow where your heart leads. As I now have with Arydun.*

Adriana squeezed Malic's hand. *He is right Malic. Now do what your bloods burn for you to do. Vincix and I will find something to do won't we Vincix.*

I believe we can come up with something. Perhaps a study plan for my bonded brother that will allow him to score perfect on his upcoming exams. Vincix answered.

Malic rolled his eyes. *Will I have time to pursue other things as well?* He asked.

Vincix butted Malic in the shoulder with his snout. *We will see what we can do.*

Malic reached up and placed his palm flat on Vincix's snout, staring into his eyes. *My... my life has truly begun again.* He said.

As mine has. Vincix answered. *Now go... do what your blood burns for you to do. Adriana and I will see you tomorrow and we will begin our training together.*

Malic took a deep breath and nodded. He leaned over and kissed his sister on the head. "Keep him out of trouble." He said.

Adriana nodded. "He will keep me out of trouble." She said.

Malic grinned and stood up straight. He nodded to them and turned to leave the spaceport with confident strides.

Vincix lowered his head even more until he was staring at Adriana. *We should start with a lesson plan.*

Adriana nodded. "We will need to add several items from the manuals he has at his bungalow." She said as they began walking. "It will be intensive since he only has three months, but it is not impossible."

ELIANI AND NYLA'S BUNGALOW

It had been a very hard two and a half days for them.

Their emotions had run the gambit from anger to jealousy to stunned shock and then back to anger. Discovering Malic was the final member of Mjolnir's Hand and set them reeling, only to have the situation with Anja and the Hadarian Arch Ministry cause considerable anger within Eliani about what they thought of her upbringing. Andro had practically ordered her to remain at SODRAG and not attempt to return to Hadaria with their parents and kick someone's ass. He had told them to take two days to come to terms with everything and then get back to work for he needed them. What the Arch Ministry was doing alone would have been enough to

deal with, but discovering that Malic and Vincix were the last of the Sacred Circle was the most prominent in their minds.

Seeing him gazing at them in the stands with those devastating eyes, his features hidden behind the Dragon Armor, his male aura coursing through Eliani and by virtue of that through Nyla as well. He had suddenly vaulted into a position of incredible importance and with that came mastery over Mindvoice abilities neither of them would ever have. It had suddenly made them feel inferior to him in some way. Images of him taking other women as his mates flashed through their minds, and they had remained away from him trying to come to terms with this new knowledge. Through it all, since that day on the ceremony field, their blood burned for him now more than it ever had. He was no longer a man that would need their support, now he had become the alpha wolf fate and destiny had intended him to become.

Nyla came out of their small kitchen dressed in the loose fitting sun dress. Her long blond hair fell well below her shoulders as it always did when she was off duty. She carried the two plates and moved to the table as Eliani pulled down two glasses from the cupboard and poured them both a glass of Spartan Wine.

“Maybe it won’t be as bad as you think *Ussta Che*.” Nyla spoke as she put the plates on the table. They each had sandwiches and a small portion of green vegetables on them over the top of spicy cooked noodles.

Eliani moved into the small room with the table and nodded. “Maybe... but I wouldn’t trust the Arch Ministry as far as I could throw them.” She stated coming up to the table. “They have always given mother a hard time about how she and Aunt Vana rule. They just can’t seem to get past the part where they have to move and change with the times.”

“You think these charges will be worrisome?” Nyla asked as Eliani came up to her.

Eliani held out the glass. “I don’t know. They never gone this far before.” She stated. “I bet my Aunt is dancing up a storm thinking she’ll get her hands on Retta and Calyb and turn them into the automations she has made of her own children.”

“Take them from their Bonded Ones?” Nyla spoke shaking her head. “Your mother and father would never allow that.”

Eliani nodded. “That’s why I’m glad father went with her.” She said. “Elder Healer Buonau is a grade ‘A’ bitch and always has been. And her daughter Duewa has hated me ever since I told her she was an arrogant, obnoxious wench and if she wanted to challenge me I’d beat her like a two riyal whore.”

Nyla chuckled softly as she nodded. “I remember that.” She said as they sat down at the table. “It was quite amusing to watch the look on her face. I imagine she ran home to her mother and told her what you had learned from Anja.”

Eliani laughed. “My mother didn’t teach me that one.” She said. “I learned that one from Uncle Danny.”

The chime on their door sounded and Nyla turned. “I will get it.” She said rising to her feet. “Did you tell her to contact you when she arrived?” Nyla asked as she moved to the door. She turned back when Eliani didn’t answer. “*Ussta Che*?” She asked as she passed her hand over the sensor pad.

Eliani felt him first and her fern green eyes grew wide as she turned to look at the door. His aura was pulsating powerfully, radiating from him like a beacon and it was causing her blood to grow hot with desire and passion. His aura was focused and directed, not like an alpha on the prowl for a female. His aura was focused on her and Nyla and he was holding back the majority of it, caressing their senses letting them know what he wished and waiting to see if they would respond. Nyla turned to the door as the sun light shone into the bungalow and her green eyes green wide when she saw him filling the doorway.

“Ma... Malic!” She gasped.

Malic had changed into civilian clothes, a dark gray t-shirt and dark blue pants. The shirt conformed to his muscular body, outlining every ridge and contour of his chest and abdomen. He had waited until he was outside their bungalow before releasing his aura. Their scents filled his head and made him smolder with want. He touched Eliani with his aura, knowing that Nyla would feel it as well through her. Even Sadi had never affected him in this way, causing him to tremble with need and excitement. His blue eyes took in the curves of Nyla’s face, the delicate lines of her lips and cheeks, the way the dress outlined every delicious curve of her body. He watched as Eliani rose from the table she was sitting at, her lunch forgotten as she gazed at him. She wore a simple short skirt and top with large sleeves, her feet bare on the cool floor as she stepped up next to Nyla. Malic gazed at them standing together and the sweet buttercup and maple and willow scents were very

near too much. Eliani's aura was hitting him back as she had on the ship, more a matter of instinct than her controlling it.

"Malic?" Eliani stammered softly as she gripped Nyla's hand.

"I have..." Malic stared at them, the color of their skin, and the brightness of their eyes. All of it was combining to literally drive him insane. His eyes followed the curve of their moist lips and the arc of their throats. "I wanted to..."

"Malic..." Eliani finally spoke getting her raging hormones under some semblance of control. "Malic... why are you here?"

"I wanted too... I have asked your father Eliani..." Malic looked at them standing so close together. "I wanted to tell you that..."

Eliani and Nyla inched closer to him, everything else forgotten as his driftwood and ocean scent ignited all kinds of receptors in Eliani's body and transferred to Nyla's as well through their bond. "Tell us what Malic?" Nyla asked softly, almost cooing the words out.

Malic looked at them now and something inside him just switched on. "Ah... *nubous* it!" He declared.

Eliani and Nyla both gasped as he stepped close to them and gathered both of them in his arms, his lips descending onto Nyla's moist lips. Their bodies went rigid for a split second, unsure of how to respond, and then they melted into his embrace and both of them groaned loudly. Eliani's eyes were ablaze as she clutched Nyla's waist with one arm, her other wrapped around Malic's broad shoulders. Nyla's arm joined hers there as her other arm drew both of them tighter. Nyla's light green eyes closed dreamily as passion and desire all her own crushed through her, enveloping Eliani as well as Malic. Her entire body grew hot, her nerves singing out in happiness that was all her own. This was not sensations and emotions she was feeling because of her beloved Eliani. These were feelings and sensations she was feeling because of what Malic was doing to her.

She gasped loudly when Malic tore his lips from her, turned his head slightly and claimed Eliani's full lips. He had lifted them both off the floor now, his arms crushed around their lithe bodies with possessive fervor. As these new vibrations coursed through her, Nyla gazed at Eliani and Malic wide eyed as they shared an equally blistering kiss. She watched as he pulled his head away quickly, their eyes large with the trembling engulfing them.

"I want you!" Malic's voice was raspy but very clear. "I want you both! For the women you are! I want to claim you both! I don't care what I have to do! Tell me how I can prove this to you! Tell me what I need to do! I... I need you both! Now! Tomorrow! Forever!"

Eliani and Nyla looked at each other for a long moment, their passion undeniable, and the joy both of them felt at his words evident in how their lips trembled.

"Our bedroom!" Eliani gasped turning to look back at Malic. "Hurry!"

"Where?" Malic exclaimed beginning to move forward into the bungalow.

Nyla released her arm from around Eliani's waist and pointed past the table with their forgotten lunches. "That way!" She panted loudly.

SPIRIT OF HADARIA

Martin lay face down on the large bed, the sheet covering his naked lower body, while his upper body rested on the edge. His arms hung over the side of the bed, the data pad in one hand, the glass of Spartan wine in the other.

"Avi... give me the odds again for successful completion of Operation *Spartan Wind*." He stated looking at the face of the avatar on the small screen.

-Which Scenario should I load King Leonidas? - The image of the Mindvoice ship avatar asked.

"Run them both." Martin spoke as he lifted the wine to his lips.

-Operation *Spartan Wind* Scenario One Four... initiating... running. Calculating. Odds of successful completion 74.9%-

-Operation *Spartan Wind* Scenario One Five... initiating... running. Calculating. Odds of successful completion 83.2%-

Martin shook his head slowly. "What if you factor in what Yuriko's mission is?" He asked.

-Successful completion of Yuriko Leonidas's mission will only increase the odds by two percent on both scenarios-

"Avi... those odds suck!" Martin spoke.

-I agree King Leonidas. However the other scenarios we have run have had much less of a success rate-

"I've had the odds stacked against me before." Martin said.

-You are the descendant of the Chief Elder Pralor King Leonidas. This fact has no doubt played a large role in what you consider luck. Even before you were able to advance your skills to the level they are now, your abilities would have manifested themselves subconsciously in certain situations. I have reviewed your history King Leonidas and there is substantial proof to back up this data-

"So you have been telling me for years." Martin said. "Is Aikiro more powerful than me Avi?"

-Given what we know King Leonidas, she is undoubtedly the direct descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon on City Ship 19-

"Wait... you never told me they had names." Martin spoke.

-You never asked King Leonidas-

"What... was my ancestor's name?" Martin asked.

-Chief Elder Pralor of City Ship 41 was called Sumar. He and Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon were considered two of the most advanced Elder Pralors-

"Sumar?" Martin said softly. "Resumar?"

-Yes. The possibility that your grandfather was named after him in some way is very probable. Chief Elder Pralor Sumar was known as a supreme mediator and accomplished Warrior Pralor. Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon was recognized as the premier Warrior Pralor of his time-

"So you had wars?" Martin asked.

-Yes King Leonidas. The last one Warrior Pralor Xaxon started. It lasted for nine thousand years. He was given command of a City Ship as punishment. It was considered an exile by many of the ruling Pralors-

"I thought it was considered an honor to be in command of one of these ships?" Martin asked.

-To those who had earned the command yes. To others it was an exile. The species you know as the High Coven discovered City Ship 19 approximately three thousand years before the Lycavorians began to realize their potential under your grandfather. By then Xaxon's war like nature would have been generations advanced within their species-

“My people were war like.” Martin said. “They were savage Avi.”

-This is true Milord. Until your grandfather was born. The direct descendant of Sumar. It was he who began to turn your people from their violent ways. Xaxon’s descendants did not follow this path. If my data scrolls are accurate, Xaxon held great hatred for those who exiled him. Sumar was one of those that voted to have him exiled. It stands to reason he would have passed this on within his genes to his descendants-

“So her hatred of me and our species is inbred?”

-To a certain degree-

“And does that make Aikiro stronger than me?” Martin asked.

-She has had millennia to learn precise control of her abilities King Leonidas. In terms of raw power no, she is not stronger. In terms of experience in what she can do... my calculations indicate yes. You have not reached the pinnacle of what you can achieve. Nor has Queen Aricia or your first born son Prince Androcles-

“Avi... can she find City Ship 41 on Earth?” Martin asked.

-If she were to remain on Earth long enough she would eventually discover City Ship 41 yes. She has the ability to eliminate many of the Mindvoice Ghost Zones we have established as more time passes. The odds of Empress Aikiro actually penetrating the security we have in place, and being able to remain undiscovered by the dragons that reside here is only 11.45% King Leonidas. I have also established protocols should my calculations of the odds prove incorrect-

“Would she know that?” Martin asked.

-As you and your son have secretly studied the many functions of City Ship 41 through the last years King Leonidas, no doubt Empress Aikiro did the same with City Ship 19. It is very possible that the avatar for City Ship 19 did not survive the crash. This would explain their lack of significant engineering advances such as those we have made. However based on the level of their cloning technology, she has extensive knowledge of a City Ship’s systems-

-The initial sensor scan I ran as we were leaving Lycavore twenty-five years ago specified that no Quantum signature was present. That indicates the Quantum Drive Nacelles and Engine Propulsion Systems were destroyed upon reentry. This is the engineering basis for many of the advancements we have gained in the last years as you know-

Martin nodded. “And this is what she would want to get her hands on no doubt.” He said. “I have to believe that is why she came to Earth. Avi... is there anyway for you to reactivate your engines?”

The Avatar shook his head. **-Such an event is not possible King Leonidas. Due to the relative solar activity and collectors built around City Ship 41 it is possible for me to maintain full power indefinitely. However, I estimate it would take one thousand five hundred and thirteen years for my repair drones to harvest enough Quantum particles from within this system to actually infuse my engine cores to full power-**

“Then she is there for whatever technology she thinks she can get her hands on.” Martin spoke. “Technology she will reverse engineer and use against the Kavalians and then probably us.”

-That is the most likely scenario King Leonidas. The sections I detected on City Ship 19 were not equipped with sensors. There is no way she would have been able to detect the other ships that crashed. Your orders to destroy whatever did remain were quite effective-

“Avi... do not release anymore history files to Panos to give to her.” Martin ordered. “I’ll let him know as well... but I don’t want to take the chance she will discover something we consider to be innocent information and turn it into something it was not intended for.”

-Done-

“Send a transcript of our conversation to Andro at SODRAG and then delete any records that remain of what we have discussed.” Martin said. “She isn’t stupid... and she has to know even if she finds City Ship 41, she’ll never get near it. So she has something else in mind. Freeze all access to City Ship 41’s database by anyone outside of my family and Arzoal. No one else gets access until I say so.”

-Does that order extend to Zaala Randall and personnel involved in Operation Arizona as well?-

Martin shook his head. “No... Zaala is Tarifa’s sister and our foremost expert on your technology correct?”

-She is the only one so far to have grasped the higher calculations and functions King Leonidas. She is incredibly astute considering her ancestors were cloned by Walter Carson. Given her medical scans and growing Mindvoice abilities, I estimate within five hundred years she will be able to construct at least a working design of my engines-

Martin nodded. “Leave their access as is. Restrict everything else... but I want you to start keeping records of everyone who accesses your database even if they have clearance.”

-As your order-

“I have one more task for you Avi.” Martin said looking at the humanoid avatar on the small screen.

-Standing by-

“I want you to use whatever scenario your brain can think up, no matter how crazy or implausible it may seem.” Martin spoke.

-What would be the purpose of this King Leonidas?-

“When you have the results, you will send them to Androcles and me via Level Twelve Encryption and then destroy all records.” Martin said.

-Understood. What is the design of this operation?-

“Find me a weak spot for the Kavalians that I can use Avi.” Martin spoke. “Find me a weak spot that if I need to, I can send them a message that tangling with us would not be the most intelligent thing they have ever done. I need to buy us more time. I need you to find me a way to get that time.”

-I will begin work immediately King Leonidas-

Martin nodded. “I will return to Sparta within the week Avi. If you get something before then, advise me. If not... Andro and I will meet with you when I return. And Avi?”

-Yes King Leonidas-

“I am authorizing you to activate and deploy your static defenses on Earth.” Martin said. “If it doesn’t belong on Dragon Island or the other safe zones we have established... kill it. With extreme prejudice.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

CENTRAL PRISON SPARTA

“...were instructed to leave her on your ship!” For’mya snapped as she stood between Daniel and his father glaring at Yuri and Moran in the prison room.

Sparta’s prison complex was just that.

It was a prison. There were no amenities or comforts within the walls. Criminals were treated with dignity, but they were given no special care. The cells were standard six by eight rooms, the force fields blocking the entrance, and the small windows allowing the sunlight in during the day. Each cell had a small sink and toilet and a bed that slid out of the wall on the side. There was a desk and chair that were both bolted and welded to the floor. Right now the moon could be seen rising in the night sky, casting its glow through the many windows of the empty cells on this floor.

There was very little crime within the limits of Sparta, Eden City or any of the rapidly rebuilding and enlarging cities on the planet. Like Apo Prime and the rest of the worlds within the Union, men and women wanted for nothing and crime as a whole was just not accepted. There was no poverty within the borders of the Lycavorian Union, and while there were parts that were less developed and not as wealthy, the basic needs of everyone were met without question of status or standing. Prisons were to house those who chose to break what few laws there were, and the penalties for breaking those laws were severe depending on the crime. Criminal punishment within the Union was harsh before Martin found himself and took his place as King, and it grew even harsher once he took power. Many found their king had a particular dislike for those who would not help themselves and took from others who would.

Individuals did not need to steal from their neighbors, no one was denied medical care and there was the opportunity for everyone to become wealthy if they worked hard enough. One of the reasons that crime was so rare is that those who had wealth, people, major corporations and companies, all of them gave back to society without question. Many had come from a life of slavery and poverty under the High Coven boot heel and once they found their dreams within the Union, they gleefully gave back to celebrate what they had achieved. Many of the deals that Martin Leonidas had brokered with the five major companies within the Union in relation to Enurrua and the breaking up of the People’s Lycavorian Republic raked in billions of riyal each year. Fully half of that profit, Martin and his Queens ordered redistributed to those who were not as fortunate, to allow them to realize and advance their own dreams. Several funds were established and now thousands, if not millions of families across the Union and even within The Wilds benefited from the education and assistance those funds had given to them initially. It was one of the primary reasons that the Leonidas family was now revered more than they had ever been.

Those in the prisons were offered rehabilitation and either trained in a useful skill or some field or given schooling in an area that would allow them to rebuild their lives. Most accepted this second chance without question, and many had gone on to become prominent figures within Union society because of the second chance they were given. Those that were not given this opportunity were those who had shown a depraved lack of compassion for life and freedom, and they were locked up for eternity.

Murder.

Rape.

These were two of the most heinous crimes that would result in execution or send men and women into the darkness and solitude of a prison, never to be seen again. Sparta’s prison held only twelve such individuals, three of them Lycavorians who had taken females against their will, showing no remorse for their actions and were awaiting their execution. There were four humans and two elves that had committed murder without

purpose and they were spared execution for one reason or another, usually due to circumstances beyond their control, and the Union judges were not monsters after all. They would spend their lives in this prison. Then there was one Algolian and two Kochab mercenaries that had been captured on Earth trying to establish a slave trading black market. Their sentences had been handed down by the human judges in Eden City within two days for the crimes they had committed. All three of them received the maximum sentence and since they had not taken life or raped anyone while on Earth they would remain in Sparta's prison for the duration of the rest of their natural lives.

The tenth floor of the prison was used by the *Durcunusaan* exclusively to hold high value targets or spies caught within the boundaries of the Union. The only other location similar to this floor of the prison was on Apo Prime in a very remote section of the northern hemisphere. Very few people had access to this floor of the prison, even fewer knew it existed. For'mya and Daniel were among those who did.

"So it is now a crime to walk the streets of Sparta?" Yuri asked smugly standing beside Robert. They had responded to the summons by *Durcunusaan* guarding her mother, and upon arriving found a very upset Daniel Simpson and an even angrier For'mya Leonidas.

"Walking the streets of Sparta is one thing... breaking into someone's home is quite another!" For'mya barked.

"It is my understanding Juliana mistook this home for a shop of some sort." Yuri stated calmly.

"That's a load of shit and you know it!" Danny snarled. "She bypassed the door security locks and when we found her she was just standing in the living room of this home."

For'mya took a step closer to her. "Do not take us for fools Yuri!" She hissed. "You are in our realm now, and I could order you and your pathetic husband put in that cell beside your clone spy and there isn't a thing you could do about it."

Yuri smiled as a small flash of red escaped her dark eyes. "My dear For'mya... you are not still angry with me for the exquisite visit we had so long ago are you?" She spoke sweetly. "We had such a wonderful time together, you, me and Robert. Don't you remember the wonderful times?"

For'mya's dark brown eyes narrowed slightly. "You think too highly of your influence Yuri." She spoke in a low, menacing voice. "Your powers to alter ones perceptions and control their actions will not work on me any longer. Attempt this again and I will gut you where you stand and feed you to the dogs in the streets."

Yuri's eyes flared angrily. "You? You do not have the skill to face me!" She spoke savagely.

For'mya smiled. "Would you care to put that boast to the test vampire witch? I have not shared Martin and Isabella's bed and love for twenty-five years and learned nothing. You would be surprised at what your sister and Martin know about you."

"That bitch is not my sister!" Yuri almost shouted.

For'mya smiled even more at Yuri's anger at being compared to Isabella and saw her eyes grow smaller and change to vampire cobalt blue. "Do not mistake the freedom Martin Leonidas has granted you while you are here for something it is not. Your being here on Earth serves only one purpose Yuri. Violate the rules he has laid down for you and the bargain we have struck will be off. I will order our son to confiscate your dragons and I will send you and your people back to your ships in the same amount of time it would take you to formulate the next coherent thought in your hate filled brain."

"You do not have the authority to do that!" Moran spoke now.

For'mya glanced at him. "You seem to keep forgetting that as his Queens, we all speak with Martin Leonidas's voice. That is how he wants it, and he has never once gone against one of us when we have made a decision. If I decide it is in our best interests to rid Sparta of you, your mother and your cohorts, he will not question that decision in the least."

Yuri took a step forward towards For'mya but suddenly found she was staring at the dark and deadly barrels of two K12s and three P190s. Danny and his father extended their arms over both of For'mya's shoulders with their K12s, and the three *Durcunusaan* in the room with them stepped up to either side of For'mya their weapons leveled at Yuri's head. Moran had reached for her arm seeing her actions and he too now froze as he gripped Yuri's forearm.

"Give me a reason you bloodsucking vampire cockroach bitch!" Danny snarled viciously. "I'd be doing the universe a fucking favor, and I will put you down like right now!"

Yuri hissed angrily and turned her now changed cobalt blue vampire eyes from Danny and glared at For'mya, who met her withering gaze without flinching. "I want Juliana released!" She demanded.

"She was apprehended in a private home within Sparta... not a shop or store. She was gathering intelligence for you and your mother. While we may not be able to prove that, we will hold her for trespassing." For'mya spoke calmly. "The owner of that home will determine what her fate will be."

"You actually intend to hold her?" Moran demanded now.

"Oh yes, I intend to... and if the owner of that home wishes to press charges than she will be prosecuted under Spartan law for her actions." For'mya answered. "Martin warned you when you first arrived he would not tolerate your attempts at subversion."

"My mother will not allow you to hold her." Yuri snapped.

"Aikiro has no say in the matter whatsoever!" For'mya spat turning her head slightly. "Enomotarch?"

The *Durcunusaan* soldier turned his eyes slightly, never removing the barrel of his 190 from Yuri's head. "My Queen?"

"Escort our guests back to street level." For'mya spoke. "Make sure they are pointed in the right direction to Gallais's lodge."

The *Durcunusaan* nodded. "Yes my Queen!" He turned his eyes back to Yuri and Moran. "The door is behind you. Move towards it... now." He snarled.

Yuri glared at For'mya. "This is not over." She said softly.

For'mya grinned as her eyes changed then and her wolf fangs extended in that instant. The tips of those fangs protruded past her glistening lips, her bottom lip fuller than her top, making more of her fangs seen. "It had better be..." She spoke softly. "For your sake."

Yuri spun around quickly and Moran followed her out of the door of the room. When the door slid shut behind the *Durcunusaan* troop that is when For'mya lost her patience. She turned and scooped up the metal chair within her TK power and sent it hurtling across the room to smash against the far wall as Danny and Melancton looked on with surprised but amused expressions.

"Oh... I so hate that perverted, twisted *upae*!" For'mya nearly screamed. She scooped up the chair twice more, both times smashing it into the invulnerable walls and reducing the chair to nothing but a bent pile of scrap.

She stood in the center of the room taking deep breaths, the loud trumpeting of a dragon now heard from outside. For'mya looked up quickly and reached out within Mindvoice to Aurith who was in the street below, bellowing in a mixture of rage and concern, her large tail thrashing back and forth as she twisted around in large circles and sent *Durcunusaan* soldiers scurrying for cover in the street.

[Sister!] Aurith screamed out within Mindvoice.

[Aurith... Aurith I am fine!] For'mya spoke quickly. *[I... I lost me temper my sister. I lost me temper because of Yuri!]*

[Where is she? I will burn her to cinders!] Aurith declared as her head whipped around looking for the vampire princess who had so humiliated and tortured For'mya a quarter century ago.

[No!] For'mya announced. *[I made my point sister! I am here with Daniel and his father. I am fine Aurith.]*

The *Durcunusaan* soldiers began coming out from behind the thick concrete pillars that dotted the area around the prison entrance as they saw Queen For'mya's dragon begin to settle down.

[For'mya...] Aurith began.

[Truly I am fine.] For'mya spoke. *[I will be down momentarily and we will return to the Royal villa. I need to feel the peace our children bring me and contact Deia.]*

Aurith settled to the street once more and looked up at the side of the building, her tail twitching only mildly now as the *Durcunusaan* guards began to return to their duties. Many of them had seen fits of unexplained anger or worry from dragons of the Royal family before. It only showed them how closely tied together the royal family was to their dragons. The only thing to do when this occurred was get out of the way until it passed.

[We will fly first sister.] Aurith declared now. *[We will fly and allow the anger we feel to bleed away. Just as Aricia and my mother taught us.]* Aurith heard For'mya sigh within Mindvoice and she could almost feel her nodding her head.

[That is probably a good idea.] For'mya answered instantly. *[I will see you soon.]*

Danny was holstering his K12 when For'mya turned around and looked at him and his father. His dark eyes held questions in them and For'mya moved closer.

“What?” She asked.

Danny shook his head. “Nothing.” He said.

Melancton shook his head. “Coward!” He hissed at his son. He looked at For'mya. “We are wondering now who has the most volatile temper of Martin’s Queens. We thought perhaps it was Anja or Aricia... but after seeing that display...”

For'mya saw the looks on their faces and felt her anger bleed off even more and she laughed. “I am fine.” She said. “I don’t like Yuri or her sick husband. That is all.”

Dan snorted. “Yeah we got that part!” He stated with a grin.

The door into the room opened once more and Moneus and Carina rushed in their eyes wide. Carina went directly to For'mya.

“Mother?” She exclaimed taking her hands.

For'mya shook her head. “I am fine. I only got angry.”

“Mother... Aurith was smashing planters in the street.” Carina declared. “Perhaps you should not be in the same room as the witch Yuri.”

For'mya rolled her eyes and leaned forward to kiss Carina’s cheek. “Enough of this! I am fine.” For'mya looked back at Danny and leaned up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek gently. “And I understand congratulations are in order. A fine Spartan and Elven baby boy!”

Melancton nodded his head proudly and punched his son lightly in the arm. “His name is Melancton!” He announced loudly.

Danny chuckled and nodded to For'mya. “Nayeca is doing fine.” He said softly. “I think this pregnancy took more out of her than she lets others see.”

For'mya took his hands in hers and smiled. “Carrying children for Spartans with the pureness of blood that you and Martin have is no small task Daniel.” For'mya said. “She will be fine. I will come over tomorrow to see her and little Melancton and bring some of Gorgo’s tea that she likes so much.”

Danny nodded. “I’ll tell her.” He said. He motioned with his head to the door. “What about our guest?”

“Hali has already informed me she refuses to press charges. Keep her overnight and then release her in the morning.” For'mya spoke. For'mya squeezed his hands tightly and Danny met her eyes puzzled. *[Daniel... I want you to contact Lynwe. I want a team of her best Drow scouts here tomorrow morning. I do not want this clone to go anywhere without us knowing it. They are half vampire and are the only ones with the skill to accomplish that. I want to know what she does and where she goes. And if she violates anymore of our laws or the rules Martin has put in place.]*

Danny nodded. *[I’ll make it happen.]* He said. *[If she does?]*

Melancton, Moneus and Carina knew they were communicating heavily shielded within Mindvoice and simply stood there watching and wondering what was being discussed.

For'mya met his eyes. *[If she does... take her into custody again and make it appear she was killed. Make it appear like an accident. I don’t care how.]*

Danny didn’t flinch and nodded his head. *[Done.]*

SODRAG

Malic had carried them into the bedroom easily, the sexual energy radiating from the three of them unbearable. Their scents were burning into his mind like nothing he had ever known, the flavor of their lips like the finest aged wine he had ever tasted. He had intended to take both of them quickly, claiming them urgently.

Eliani and Nyla had other ideas however.

Malic found himself pushed onto his back on the large bed within moments of entering the bedroom, and he could only watch from a half sitting position as both Eliani and Nyla did a slow striptease in front of him. They undressed each other in seductive movements, their hands wandering over each other’s bodies intimately and slowly exposing each other to him, until Malic’s eleven inch cock was ready to rip through the

fabric of his pants. Their hands roamed each other's tanned, silky skin, his deep blue wolf eyes wide as he gazed hungrily on Eliani's large firm breasts. Her nipples were standing erect a quarter inch, begging for attention. Her center was already drenched just from feeling his aura caress her, the scent of her juices wafting to him and causing his blood to scream out. Nyla's breasts were equally as aroused, and firm, her own nipples protruding proudly outward. When Nyla's lips descended to Eliani's breasts Malic very nearly lost control and erupted in his pants. He watched Eliani's head fall back and she sighed heavily, holding Nyla's head tightly to the nipple she was lavishing attention upon. Watching them had caused his passion to surge to heights he had never known and when he could take no more he reached for them.

[No!] Their voices burst into his mind stopping him in tracks. He looked at them with sudden confusion and worry.

[I... I want to...]

Eliani shook her head quickly. *[I guaranteed you that you would never wish for another female the rest of your days once you tasted us Malic.]* Eliani spoke in a voice that simply overflowed with rampant desire and need.

[I wish for no one but the two of you now! You have nothing to prove to me!] Malic announced without hesitation. *[I desire no one else!]*

[Then let us take care of you.] Nyla spoke now.

"But I..."

Eliani pressed her naked flesh to his shoulder and grabbed his head before plunging her lips down and kissing him as she had only kissed Nyla before this day. Her fingers entwined within his dark brown hair and she pushed even closer to his broad chest, crushing her breasts against his hot skin behind his shirt. Her four inch long tongue extended completely out and Malic's eyes grew wide as she explored with her tongue where no woman had ever gone before. His hands reached up to grasp her firm ass and pull her tighter to him as Eliani's hands dropped to his shirt and began quickly stripping it off his upper body. Nyla helped her pull his shirt off and Eliani had to force herself to reach down and take his hands from her body. The feel of his hands and the grip he had on her ass cheeks had ignited flash fires across her flesh. She and Nyla had planned this together, how they would seduce him, and it took every bit of her will power to keep from simply surrendering to his aura which was calling for her to do just that. Eliani knew he could push his aura beyond what he was using, for he was a powerful Alpha wolf, and as her lips descended to his throat and she pushed him back further on the bed, small tears of joy crept into her fern green eyes as she realized he was holding himself in check.

Eliani and Nyla explored his broad chest with just their lips and tongues, bathing his burning skin as they teased the nipples of his chest, their fingers dancing across his sculpted abdomen. Each of them was pulling at his pants with one hand until they finally got them unfastened. They dropped to either side of his body and with powerful downward yanks Malic's pants flew across their room. When they turned their heads and saw what awaited them, neither could contain the whimper of wanton desire and shock.

Nyla's vampire blood was churning madly for her lover and the man who would make them his, and the moment her eyes settled on the towering eleven inch shaft that would soon possess them both, a small orgasm rippled through her.

"*Ussta... ussta che...!*" She gasped through clenched teeth and closed eyes. When Eliani did not immediately answer and she heard Malic hiss loudly she opened her eyes, shuddering in the aftermath of her tiny orgasm.

Eliani had taken the base of Malic's cock in her small hand, her fingers unable to reach around the thickness, her fern green eyes now changed but her fangs not extended and her face gazing at Malic's cock with wonderment. Her upper body was pressed against his thigh and hip, her large breasts crushed against his skin. "*Aur... Aur Enyla... I have never... it's...*" She gasped. "I... I suspected he was... but never like this!"

Nyla lowered her head down now and slowly brought her hand up to encircle Malic's cock just above hers. They could feel the searing heat of his cock and the incredible hardness in their palms and they looked at each other. They had taken men into their bed before in the last four years, however none of them came close to equaling the size and dominance of what Malic offered them, and what they were about to accept without hesitation. It would be a chore Nyla thought, but oh what pleasure that chore would bring them.

"It's magnificent!" Nyla gasped out.

Eliani's wolf eyes glanced up and she saw Malic's face distorted in agonizing pleasure. His hands had slapped down onto the bed the moment Eliani had grasped his quivering cock, and now he threatened to tear up the mattress with his immense strength. She looked quickly back to Nyla.

Aur Enyla... he can feel. She gasped out in Mindvoice. *When he... when he bonded with Vincix... it must have... it must have healed him.*

Comprehension dawned in Nyla's cobalt blue vampire eyes and she glanced quickly at Malic's face and then back to her lover with a passionate glint in her eyes.

Ussta Che... Eliani my love... this is...

Nyla's eyes grew wide when she watched Eliani lips engulf the head of Malic's cock and she swallowed clearly half of Malic's thick throbbing shaft. Nyla wasted no time and lowered her head beneath Eliani's and began to use her own talented tongue to stroke and torture the portion of Malic's dominating cock that Eliani strained to take more of.

It happened without warning... Nyla felt Malic's lower body surge off the bed, his hands coming to rest on both hers and Eliani's heads and instead of grinding their faces into his groin as the other men they had taken into their bed had done, Malic simply plunged his fingers into their satin like hair. She felt the thick vein adorning the underside of his cock throbbing madly, and then his cock swelled in size. Eliani groaned loudly, gagged softly and Nyla felt Malic's come erupting upward. She could actually feel his come exploding up the length of his cock as she had the thick shaft pressed against her tongue. Nyla was just as far gone as Eliani now and she brought her face up as Eliani slid her lips to the tip of Malic's exploding shaft, his hot come filling her mouth and belly as she swallowed without question. Malic roared loudly as Eliani squeezed the base of his cock tightly and quickly tore her lips away from the bulbous head, Nyla's equally warm and soft lips engulfing his cockhead and shaft with barely a pause. Eliani released her grip and Nyla's eyes went wide as Malic's come rocketed into her mouth and raced down her throat. She moved upward on the bed, crushing her body to Malic's naked skin and simply forced her head down further, not wanting to release his erupting shaft and delirious with pleasure and the wonderful taste of his essence.

Eliani had a wistful look on her face as she licked her lips and savored the taste of her new mate's offering to her. With blissful contentment and burning desire Eliani simply lowered her face once more to provide much needed attention on Malic's large balls, content to let Nyla feed on what both of them had craved for so long.

Eliani smiled as she used her tongue to tickle Malic's pulsating hairless balls; for she knew their time together had only just begun.

EDEN CITY

It did not take a lot of convincing Miranda thought as she walked along the crowded street in southwest Eden City.

The moment she and Janon had left the airfield Miranda had contacted Ben on her Secure Personal COM unit. Every officer over the rank of Star Commander carried a SPC so that they would always be in touch. They were just tiny little flexible boards that fit right on the inside sleeve of their uniforms and allowed them to communicate securely with nearly anyone in the Union who had a similar device. She had explained her meeting with Major Randall to Ben and waited while he roared with laughter for a good three minutes. When he had finished, Miranda herself couldn't help but shake her head at what she had done. Looking at Ben's glowing face and eyes, Miranda would never understand why she had let his and Tina's decision and love for the sexy Endith push them away from her for those years. They had Isabella change them for one purpose, and that purpose was love of the red haired female elf who was perhaps the most skilled pilot in the Union right now along with the Queen and her son Arrarn. Within twenty minutes Miranda had the authorization and blessing of both Ben and Admiral of the Fleet Riall. Ben even thought it might give them an added advantage having her. Zaala Randall was no stranger to combat he had said, having been aboard *NORMYA'S LIGHT* when her husband had served there, and she knew more about the new technology they had built than anyone since she had a hand in building most of it.

Miranda stopped and looked up at the sign that Tareif had told her to look for. She knew it once he described it for she had been here several times before leaving Earth to attend the Academy. The sign was easily five meters across and two meters wide, and the most colorful in the area.

FREEDOM FIGHTER'S TAVERN
Within these walls tread our heroes.
Treat them that way.

Miranda had to smile as she remembered the tall, voluptuous woman Mary who owned the tavern.

“Mando?” Janon asked.

Miranda looked at him. “Lots of memories here Janon.” She answered his questioning look. “All of my good memories from Earth anyway.”

Miranda didn't pause and pushed through the now gleaming polished oak doors and stood in the foyer as she took in all that had changed. No longer were the floors worn and unpainted as they had been for so many years. Now they were treated pinewood floors, the walls paneled in a similar color. There were dozens more tables on the main floor and Miranda realized Mary must have enlarged the interior significantly over the years. It reminded her of ancient holo vids she had seen as a child of the old western taverns, only this was very modern and exceptionally well kept. The lunch crowd had long cleared out, but still the tavern was busy as the dinner crowd was beginning to filter in, the waitresses moving back and forth from the old style bar and food counter to the many tables they had assigned to them.

Miranda and Janon had returned to the airfield in time to see Tareif closing up his office early. At the end of every week they gathered at Freedom Fighter's Tavern with their wives for dinner he had explained. Since the only scheduled flight was the one this morning, Steven always let his pilots go to be with their families or enjoy the time together. Tareif had invited them to the event and they had arrived fashionably late.

“Oh my god!” The female voice spoke.

Miranda turned and saw the tall and still voluptuous human Mary step up to her from the side. Her hair was still white, her face now more wrinkled as she showed her sixty-seven years of age, but she was still a commanding presence regardless.

“Miranda Lorian? Is that you?” Mary declared as she stepped up to her.

Miranda couldn't help but smile. “Hello Mary?”

“Well I'll be a sonofabitch! Look at you young lady!” Mary announced taking hold of Miranda's shoulders and ignoring the hulking Lycavorian next to her. She pulled Miranda into a rib cracking embrace, though Miranda smiled through the whole process. Her five foot two frame looked petty against Mary's near six foot height. She pushed Miranda back and stood looking at her. “My gods... haven't you grown up now!”

Miranda chuckled. “You aren't any different Mary.” She stated.

“The hell I ain't! I'm twenty plus years older with the wrinkles to show for it!” Mary answered. “You should hear these old bones go snap, crackle and pop in the morning!” Her dark eyes fell on Janon. “Who is this fine looking wolf man here Miranda?” She asked. “Is he yours?”

Miranda smiled at the look on Janon's face. “Mary this is my First Officer Janon.” She said.

“First Officer? Well now... isn't that a leap forward for women power.” Mary declared. “You aren't an Admiral or anything are you?”

Miranda chuckled. “God no!”

“Well good... I charge them extra. Overbearing basket heads is what they are.” Mary replied. She looked at Miranda and her face turned semi serious. “We... we followed your career here Miranda... the others and I. It wouldn't do to forget the street urchin that got all of us into more trouble than the rest. We all worried about you endlessly after Alba Tau. We drank buckets when we found out you had survived that meat grinder with Marty and Andro and so many others.” She took Miranda's hands and held them. “How are you doing? No bullshit girl... straight from the hip.”

Mary had been a safe zone for many orphaned children after the Battle for Earth, and she well and truly cared for dozens of them. There were some that she took special interest in; and Miranda had been one of them. She nodded her head as her face became serious too.

“I'm... I'm surviving.” Miranda said softly meeting her steady gaze.

Mary nodded and glanced quickly at Janon. She turned those eyes back to her and squeezed her hand. “I expect no less from Miranda Lorian.” She stated. “Now tell me... what brings you to my place?”

“You... you own this establishment?” Janon asked.

Mary looked at him. “No... I just stand around and hold up the walls!” She snapped. “Of course I own this place! Freedom Fighters Tavern is my life! You’ve never been to Earth have you son?”

Janon looked at her. “No. And with respect ma’am... I am considerably older than you and referring to me as son is not accurate.”

Mary burst out laughing and shook her head. “Nope... you’ve never been to Earth. I can tell. Well... we’ll fix that! Now... tell me Miranda... what brings you here?”

“I’m actually looking for a pilot.” Miranda said. “I’ve been given a pretty decent sized command and I wanted to talk to him about becoming CAG. You know him... Major Randall.”

Mary’s eyes grew a little wider. “Steven? Of course I know him! He and Zaala have been coming here for the better part of a quarter century! They are the ones along with her father Tareif who helped me to get all the improvements done!” Mary smiled. “It’s like their second home you know!” She said coyly.

“I understand he comes here with many of his pilots at the end of every week.” Miranda said. “I spoke with him earlier today and I wanted to get back with him.”

“He won’t go anywhere without Zaala.” Mary spoke firmly. “Those two are practically joined at the hip. Find one and you usually find the other. They still act like newlyweds half the time! You should see it when they get together with Martin and his ladies here for a big family gathering. It’s hysterical to try and figure who is more whipped. Steven or Marty.”

Janon’s eyes grew wide. “You should not speak of the King in such familiar terms.” He scolded.

Mary looked at him. “I’ll speak about him anyway I want!” Mary spat. “I’ve known him for over twenty years and they are in here eating almost as much as they are Gallais’s Tavern in Sparta when they come here for their six month stays!”

Miranda could attest to that for she had been chased away from the Freedom Fighter Tavern many times by the *Durcunusaan* when she was growing up. “Is he here?” Miranda asked.

Mary nodded. “They usually take over the upper dining room and balcony portion we built ten years ago. Most of the others are gone, but he is still here with Zaala and Tareif and Palina. Come on... I’ll take you up.”

Miranda smiled as Mary gripped her hand and began weaving her way across the main floor of the tavern. Towards the rear of the main room was a stairway and they went up it to reveal an expansive upper floor with two dozen additional tables that the employees were now beginning to turn over and clean for the dinner crowd.

“For the dinner crowd Steven and the others move onto the patio so the dining room here is free.” Mary explained. “We get pretty swamped sometimes, another thirty minutes and even the tables up here will be full.”

“You don’t have anymore problems like with the construction crews back then do you?” Miranda asked.

Mary shrugged. “Most of them know not to fuck around in my place.” She stated quickly. “There are those who like to test the waters so to speak, but since most of my customers are all regulars, they get shown the door quickly if they want to get out of hand. You know I don’t tolerate any of that crazy shit.”

Miranda chuckled. “Yes... I do remember that.”

Mary led them across the upper floor and through a set of french style double doors to an expansive patio balcony. She immediately saw the large table in the center of the patio and the six individuals that sat at it. Miranda could hear the laughing from the three men and she looked at Mary.

“Tareif and Palina’s oldest son Fal’sas returned from Elear just this morning with his new bride.” Mary spoke. “She is not like the other elves from Elear, not so stiffed upper lipped if you get my meaning. I imagine it’s because of Fal’sas... he is every bit his father’s son.”

Miranda watched as Mary led them up to the table and she saw Major Randall look up and get to his feet.

“More strays Mary?” He asked quickly with a smile. “They just can’t seem to stay away from you.”

Mary shook her head. “No I guess not. Look at you! You’re still here!”

“How true!” Tareif bellowed.

“Touché.” Steven said with a wide grin. “Captain Lorian... what can I do for you?” He motioned to the table. “Please... sit down.”

Mary leaned over and kissed her cheek. “Be careful of him.” Mary spoke. “He’s gotten more feral over the years. He’s corrupted poor Zaala and he’ll corrupt you as well.”

Zaala smiled brightly as she reached up and squeezed Steven’s hand. “Mary... I think it’s more the other way around.” She said.

Mary nodded. “Maybe.” She said with a smile. “If you need anything... just grab one of my girls.” She looked at Janon. “Except you... you might hurt them.”

Miranda chuckled as Janon looked horrified at her accusation and he watched Mary walk off laughing. She turned back to Steven Randall. “Do you have a moment?” She asked.

Steven nodded. “Sure. Tareif... why don’t you pour Commander Janon here a big glass of Spartan Wine.” He spoke turning around. “Captain Lorian and I are going to talk for a minute.”

“Sit down Commander!” Tareif spoke loudly. “That is an order!”

Steven and Miranda moved off to the edge of the enclosed patio and looked down on the streets of Eden City and the park like setting with the Grand Center in the background. Miranda looked up at him. “I talked with Admiral O’Connor...” She said.

Steven nodded. “Yep... so did I.” He said as he sipped his glass of Spartan Wine looking at her. “I caught him in the middle of Endith and Tina chewing him a new ass for trying to ride one of the *Durcunusaan* dragons. He and dragons don’t get along.” Steven told her with a grin. “You, Captain Lorian, have Level Ten Security Clearance... which in and of itself says more to me than anything else since only like fifty odd people within the Union have that. You have a direct line to Martin Leonidas, again which implies quite a bit, only twenty odd people have a direct line to Martin.”

“That number includes you.” Miranda told him.

Steven nodded. “That’s because of Zaala and Tarifa being sisters.” He dismissed her statement. “And then there is the fact that whatever you are working on doesn’t even exist.” He said looking at her. “I do have my own sources you know.”

Miranda looked taken aback at this but continued anyway. “Ben told me you were the best Randall. He said if I really wanted you, I needed to find a place for your wife. That you two were a package deal so to speak. Admiral Riall sent me her classified file... and most of the technology we will be working with is based on the Quantum technology derived from the Mindvoice ship. I discovered she is the foremost expert on this stuff and she actually helped to design some of the systems we’ll be using. I’d be a fool if I didn’t use her skills in that area. I’m many things... but I’m not a fool.”

Steven nodded. “Ben said that as well.” He spoke.

“So... you up for it?” Miranda asked.

“It’s a ship isn’t it?” Steven asked.

Miranda canted her head slightly. “Yes. A very special ship. The first of twenty in her class.”

“And you want me as CAG?” Steven asked.

“Most of the pilots that will be, or have already been assigned, are the best and the brightest of the lot.” She spoke.

“Which means that most of them will only have a few years behind the stick right?” Steven said.

Miranda nodded. “You know the drill just as much as I do.” She said. “We can’t pull the most experienced pilots away from their duties because that will draw attention. Up until a week ago, only three people even knew we existed. Ben, Martin and me. The selection process was rigorous and demanding. I should know... I’m the one who designed it.”

“What happened a week ago?” Steven asked.

“Tell me you’ll take the job and I’ll tell you.” Miranda said.

“And if anything happens to me...” Steven said looking at her. “If anything happens to me... you’ll be the one that tells Zaala and not some public relations officer?”

Miranda nodded her head. “May I ask why that seems to be the most important thing to you Randall? It’s not usually what most people ask when I offer them a job. They usually ask if it increases their pay or gets them better quarters.” She asked.

Steven laughed. “Hah! Zaala and I have enough riyal saved right now to buy a small island somewhere.”

“Then why?”

“My father was killed in the third Central American War.” Steven spoke softly. “He was shot down over what used to be Honduras. My mother was working with NASA at the time, getting ready for all of us to transfer up to EDEN and become part of the crew. I think I was seventeen at the time. I remember coming home from school and seeing the PR officer at the house and walking in to my mother in tears. They wouldn’t tell her anything. Only that he had been killed in action. I saw what it did to her, not knowing how he died. I don’t want to put Zaala through that. If I die... I want her to know how and why I died. And I want someone she knows to tell her.”

Miranda met his eyes. “I give you my word.” She spoke.

Steven nodded. “Then we’re in.” He told her.

Miranda looked surprised. “Just like that? Don’t you have to talk with her?”

Steven chuckled. “Miranda... I had Martin turn me so that I could spend my life with Zaala and not have her watch me grow old. I almost never shift to wolf form because I never took the time to learn how to run as a wolf and it wasn’t the main reason behind becoming what I am now. I like to think of myself as more human than wolf. I do like having the Mindvoice connection with my wife however.” He tapped the side of his head. “Took us a while to get past all the headaches and stuff, but we have a strong connection now that Marty and Tarifa have shown us some tricks to ease the transition.”

“So she has heard everything we have talked about?” Miranda asked sternly.

Steven looked at her and shook his head. “No... she is more security conscious in many respects than I am. And I’m a bear. Hell... her clearance is higher than mine. She knows why you are here and she knows I will tell her everything later.”

“Why did you take the second reprimand in your record?” Miranda asked. “Your wife was the one who punched out the elven minister not you.”

Steven met her eyes. “That is what the record shows yes.” He stated.

“So that’s not what happened?” She asked him.

“Maybe I’ll tell you someday.” He said with a grin. “Unless you order me to tell you right now.”

Miranda shook her head. “I wouldn’t do that. Just so you don’t use that Mindvoice thing too often.” Miranda said. “It drives me nuts when Janon uses it with his mate and others on the ship. What Tier are the two of you anyway? Your file doesn’t say.”

Steven smiled. “Who turned me Miranda?”

Miranda rolled her eyes. “Shit... so like you are Tier Six and higher I take it? You have to be if Martin turned you.”

Steven turned back to the table. “C’mon Captain Lorian... let’s have a drink together. Our family is pretty tight.”

Family.

Miranda looked at him for a long moment wondering if somehow he knew what her greatest fear was. She looked at his dark eyes and decided that couldn’t be possible. She nodded her head and allowed him to lead her back to the large table where Janon was already laughing at something Tareif had told him.

SODRAG

Malic had never felt the trembling sensations coursing through him before. He was no stranger to women by any means, but what he felt rippling throughout him now was unlike anything he had experienced in his life. No matter where they touched him, it sent shuddering waves pulsating across his body. It was as if he had been blind until now, and he was seeing wonders for the first time. He had dreamt of this moment for weeks, how he would act and what he would do. All those plans had fallen by the wayside the moment he bonded with Vincix and his life changed. He had tried to bring them back to the forefront when he came here, but Eliani and Nyla had other ideas.

They were not about to let him dominate them. They were not that type of female. They in turn directed him and caressed him, showing him where to touch them, how to stroke their bodies to elicit the most tantalizing reactions. His first explosion had been the most powerful he had ever felt, their hands and lips and

tongues upon his bursting cock indescribable in any words. It had taken him by such surprise that all he could do was lay back and attempt to keep his muscles from ripping through his skin at the intensity. Eliani and Nyla both had taken him deeply into their mouths, drinking down all he gave to them without hesitation, their hands never ceasing to drum across his body. He had caught himself right at the last moment, keeping himself from crushing their heads to his groin, settling by wrapping his hands within their silky hair. He was different, and they were different. He could not act as he had always acted, unable to sense the incredible feelings before. He knew now why Sadi and the other females he had taken into his bed never seemed excited about what he offered them, and he was determined to not go that route with Eliani or Nyla. After he had recovered from his first explosion, his cock softened only a fraction, but they had kissed and licked their way back up his now naked body until both of them were staring at his face. Without even thinking he had kissed first Eliani and then Nyla, not caring in the least that they had just shared his explosion of passion. If nothing else, this action seemed to incite them even more.

Eliani then scrambled onto the bed higher and Malic's exploration and instruction began.

Even though his cock was once more bursting within minutes, the new Malic took his time. The wolf within him wanted to physically possess these females in every possible way, yet the man within him, the man he had become wanted to possess their very essences. He had moved agonizingly slow down Eliani's body, discovering every contour, every crevice. With Nyla pressing against him and directing his actions he found the most erogenous zones in the most unlikely spots. The sides of her breasts, the insides of her knees, the supple curve of the top of her ass. All these spots served to raise Eliani's passion to heights he had never seen from a woman. When he finally found himself face to face with her center, Nyla was beside him, her long blond hair falling over Eliani's thigh. She taught him where to lick, how to caress Eliani's painfully erect clit, how to drag his lips along the outer folds of her glistening pussy to drive her insane. These are the things he had learned, and when Eliani's hips undulated off the bed and she screamed out in bliss, Malic received his reward. Her sweet juices tasted just as she smelled, and for the first time in his life Malic had greedily drank of a woman's passion while she writhed beneath him. By the time Eliani collapsed onto the bed, her breath coming in great heaves Malic had turned to look at Nyla, his wolf eyes very prominent.

Nyla had smiled seductively at him and whimpered passionately when he kissed her, pushing her up on the bed and beginning anew with her. Nyla Sinthe had more control, and her hands directed him to her spots, and the squeezing of his head was the indication he was doing everything right. Malic reveled in his new skill and as Eliani recovered and joined him in his exploration of his vampire mate, he began to take charge. As his lips and tongue explored Nyla's flesh his hands traveled over both of their taut bodies. He would show them that he wanted both of them equally.

He cast aside his old self and as Nyla's screams of release filled his ears and her juices flooded into his throat, Malic was truly reborn.

He was up instantly as her body fell back on the bed, caressing her long legs as he parted her thighs and positioned himself. Eliani rose off the bed quickly, opening her mouth to protest, but his kiss silenced her as he pressed the flared head of his rock hard cock at Nyla's entrance and pushed forward. Nyla gasped out, her cobalt blue vampire eyes wide as the largest cock she had ever seen began its torturously slow plunge into her body. Her hands pulled at the mattress as with inhuman control Malic pushed into her with precise power. The sensations he was experiencing were beyond his imagination and he did not want them to stop. The velvet like heat and powerful clenching of Nyla's pussy were combining to drive him into a whole new world, and he would not ruin this by acting like a brute. It took him several long minutes before he was buried completely in Nyla's clutching pussy, her legs wrapped around his lower back, her hands gripping his arms. Three times she had shuddered beneath him as an orgasm rocked her, Malic feeling the warmth and force of her come erupting from around his cock shaft. Eliani had moved up and with her own changed eyes wide with fervor she watched as Malic began to stroke into Nyla.

Watching them close their lips together, seeing their tongues lovingly entwined and playfully teasing within their lips when they parted slightly was enough to drive Malic to the edge rather quickly. His nerves were alive with new electricity, pleasure unlike anything he had ever experienced coursing through his powerful frame. He clenched his teeth, determined to make this last as long as possible, and show his mates that he was not the brute many thought him to be.

Nyla, for her part, was in a realm of pleasure that she had never experienced with Eliani. Malic's dominating cock was larger by a wide margin than any man they had ever taken into their bed. He stretched her in a way that caused her vampire blood to churn within her as only Eliani could do to her. Feeling her lover's hands caressing and licking her breasts while Malic's cock stroked into her with exquisite slowness was more than Nyla could take. Her orgasm came from deep within her belly, pushing outward with the force of a tidal wave until it consumed everything around her. With Eliani suckling one of her nipples, Nyla's head flew back and she screamed louder than she had ever screamed before. Her pussy clamped down on Malic's deeply buried cock and she erupted with the force of a hurricane. Her cobalt blue eyes rolled into the back of her head when she heard Malic groan loudly, his fingers pressing into her hips and then he was exploding inside her.

His come erupted like a cannon inside her, reaching places no man ever had, and her legs clamped onto his hips with all the vampire strength her body could generate. Her undeniable pleasure surged even more when he lowered his face to hers and kissed her, taking her head in his hands and kissed her with passion and desire that she had only ever felt from Eliani. Tears clouded her eyes then as her world became complete, and as Malic's come warmed her belly and he nuzzled her throat and neck firmly, Nyla lost herself to blissful sensations and collapsed onto the bed exhausted.

That had been thirty minutes ago and now Malic felt more than recharged, he felt like an Alpha wolf that had all he could desire.

His black outlined deep ocean blue eyes stared at Eliani as she straddled his hips; her full pouty lips parted slightly, her hands braced on his broad chest as she lifted her hips once more with deliberate slowness. Her juices coated half his straining cock, his hands resting on her thighs as he gazed hungrily at the protruding nipples on her breasts. She had been trying for ten minutes now to take him inside her, each time taking a little more as she slid deeper, and each time shuddering in gentle orgasms as they washed over her.

"Shit... shit... shit!" Eliani gasped softly as her face contorted and she lowered herself once more. Her velvet heat was so much like Nyla's, engulfing another inch of his cock shaft as she held herself above him, a look of pure unadulterated bliss on her face. "It's so... so big! Malic... Malic I..."

Malic turned his head as he felt Nyla's lips caress his neck and he lifted his hand to wrapped his fingers within her satiny blond hair. Nyla kissed him, their tongues doing an intimate tango as she dragged her nails down along his chest and arm.

Nyla pulled back from their kiss, gently biting his bottom lip as she smiled devilishly. "She is a female Alpha wolf Malic." Nyla whispered to him. "You are a male Alpha. Make her yours Malic, just as you have made me yours."

Eliani's black outlined fern green eyes grew a little wider when she heard Nyla say this. "*Aur Enyla...* he is too big... I can't...!" She gasped out the words.

Malic sat up then and Eliani's head flew back as the last five inches of Malic's wonderful cock impaled her in one single stroke.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh... Maaliicc!" Eliani screamed as the orgasm ripped through her and she felt his large balls pulsing wildly and pressed firmly against her ass cheeks. Malic's arms crushed her too him, her nipples burning points against his broad chest and he wrapped his aura around Eliani Leonidas.

Eliani's eyes were wide, her lips parted in another breathless scream as she felt every throbbing centimeter of Malic's eleven inches spear her to her core. She felt his wolf aura wrap around her, driving her nerves to incredible heights of orgasmic intensity, yet he did so in such a way that allowed her to keep her wits about her. Eliani knew what a powerful alpha could do to a female wolf with his aura; even her mother couldn't absorb the full force of her father's aura for she was not fully wolf. Like her father however, Malic was hitting Eliani with just enough of his aura to drive her right to the edge of the abyss and then holding her there. Every movement, no matter how insignificant, caused rapturous waves of pleasure to vibrate through her. She could feel every pulsing vein of his masterful cock against the walls of her tight pussy. There had been no pain when he plunged completely inside her, only a feeling of incredible bliss. Eliani smashed her head forward to his shoulder as he pressed a hand against the small of her back and pushed her downward, pressing her pussy further down on his will crushing cock.

"Malic!" Eliani rasped out in a hoarse voice as the pleasure trampled her earlier fears that he would hurt her with his size. "Malic... you... you better... you better *cado forn!* Scent... scent me Malic my love!"

Malic rolled her over on the bed then, causing her to cry out in abandon, her arms strong wrapping around his shoulders.

“Ohhhhh... *nubou lae! Nubou lae* Malic!” Eliani screamed.

Malic had learned one thing in all his years of watching his parents together. Rarely did his father ever refuse a request by his mother and mate. Malic had learned that lesson well, and at Eliani's request he began to do just that. He lowered his head to her shoulder, reached his hands under her body to cup her wonderfully firm ass cheeks, and Malic proceeded to fuck his breathtakingly beautiful Hadarian/Wolf mate with long, slow and powerful eleven inch strokes. Eliani's world descended into a sphere that she had never been to before. Malic's aura never ceased the endless teasing of her body, her own wolf aura responding to the magical feel of what he was doing to her by reaching out and spreading around him just as tightly as it could. This was a place Nyla could not send her because she was not a wolf, and she opened her mind to her vampire lover so that Nyla could feel every exquisite sensation that rippled across her mind and flesh. She heard Nyla gasp at the feeling and then Malic's mind, powerful and pure with an indomitable will joined their thoughts and Nyla could do nothing but writher on the bed beside them as she felt every delicious tremor of pleasure that Eliani felt.

Malic was well beyond anything he had ever dreamed this could be.

While he had desired it, and imagined it ever since meeting Eliani the first time, actually having her and Nyla both together was something he never realistically thought would ever happen. Even after bonding with Vincix so completely Malic did not believe they could ever desire him as he desired them. He knew that to be false now, for he could feel Eliani's aura wrapping around him like a loving blanket. He could smell Nyla's passion and desire for him just as easily as he could smell Eliani's, and it was driving him mad. His hips began moving faster, driving into his wolf mate with dominating strokes and hearing her cries of delight in his ears, feeling her hands clutching him tighter and urging him deeper. Malic could feel new vibrations through his body, sensations that he had never felt before, and instead of deep driving strokes that invoked no pleasure in the other women he had shared a bed with, now he was able to sense his own power. He could actually feel the euphoric vibrations Eliani's tight, clutching pussy caused as she squeezed her inner muscles on every downward stroke into her, milking his near bursting cock. He could feel the walls of her velvet tightness stretching to accommodate him, wrapping around his shaft like the fingers of a form fitting glove. These were the things he felt now, things he had never felt before, and it was these new sensations and vibrations that were driving him to new levels of pleasure that he had never achieved before.

Malic lifted his head as he felt his abdomen tense, the pleasure spiraling out of control. His large balls drew up tight to the base of his shaft and he looked at Eliani's gorgeous face. Her black outlined fern green wolf eyes gazed at him with a mixture of passion and love that Malic swore he could actually feel. His mind flared briefly with passion driven by instinct and he slammed into Eliani one last time. As her wails of utter blissful pleasure filled the room and the most spirit shattering orgasm of her life crashed through her, Malic dropped his head once more and bite down into her shoulder with his wolf fangs. Eliani's eyes burst open at that moment as she felt his cock balloon in size within her and then his lava hot come was erupting into her depths. When the first eruption splashed against her womb Eliani's own wolf fangs, now fully extended in passion, snapped shut on Malic's thick shoulder.

Nyla had tears in her eyes, for she knew the significance of what was happening and a part of her began dying at this, thinking perhaps she would become secondary in their lives. That is until Malic reached for her in an orgasmic daze and pulled her head closer to his. More tears came, tears of joy this time as she realized what he was doing and with barely any thought Nyla twisted around and pressed her lush body against his broad back, opened her mouth wide exposing her vampiric fangs and she bit deeply into his neck. As Malic's warm blood splashed across her taste buds Nyla came. And came hard as she felt every minute amount of staggering pleasure her lovers were feeling flood her mind and become hers as well.

It was over far too quickly to suit them, but as the last drops of Malic's come spilled into Eliani's belly, and they collapsed onto the bed in a mass of tangled limbs and sated spirits they knew they would have eternity together. An eternity to explore the boundaries of what they had discovered this night. Malic's powerful limbs pulled both of them to his warm body, and they gleefully curled into his arms before sleep took them all into its embrace.

They would awake in a few hours to continue their explorations well into the evening hours.

NEBONESE

Las'elh watched as Anton charged his K12 Kinetic Magnum and returned it to the holster on his leg as the Lifter shifted seamlessly across the rough terrain. The last two days had been eye opening to say the least. Until meeting Cihera and Anton, Las'elh had only ever heard about the Drow elves that hailed from Earth. They had been created by the Senior Polemarch of the Union, Walter Carson as the name he went by now. His skills in medicine and cloning apparently passed on to him through his genes when he was born. Though he still practiced medicine in many fashions, Walter no longer dabbled in any sort of cloning technology. He had achieved the goal he had sought all of his life in Martin discovering who he was and he had openly stood beside Queen Anja as they denounced cloning in all its forms.

The Drow elves were his creation and Las'elh knew their population on Earth had ballooned in size through the years. As she had watched and studied them in the last two days she began to realize why they were considered almost as deadly as a Spartan wolf. There were five Drow total in Nalar and Malia's family. Two of them were their children, a twenty year old boy and nineteen year old female. The third Drow was also a female who she was told was their cousin. Four different elves and three humans also lived with them, all of them members of the *Krypteria*, all of them having been born and raised on Earth. Two male and two female elves, and two female humans and one male human. All of them knew who Anton and Cihera were based on the greetings they had received, and all of them were part of some larger Drow clan she discovered. Nalar and Malia's son Idafi and one of the female elves from Earth were married, and had been married since they were teenagers. She carried their first child, and they were completely devoted to each other. Nalar and Malia's daughter Eriri was the one who ran the storefront they lived above. She was the face of their cover here, and after listening to them talk over the last two days, Las'elh discovered Eriri was the most deadly. She and the tall Wood Elf from Earth were planning to marry in the following year. Their cousin Ovana and one of the human females from Earth, a petite blond haired young woman named Rachel, were involved in a committed and torrid relationship if the soft sounds Las'elh had heard during the previous night from the room they shared were any indication.

Malia had told her during the day previous that Drow females were not shy about their relationships, and if it was another female that roused their passion, a Drow would not hesitate to pursue that. Las'elh could attest to that since Cihera was by no means shy based on what she saw enroute to Nebonese. If she wanted her husband, Cihera didn't seem to care that Las'elh slept only two meters away and neither did Anton.

No one was treated differently, and the table they all sat at for dinner was enormous. The conversation was plenty, discussing the ongoing events within the Union, and also the mission Anton and Cihera were on. Las'elh found that all Drow, no matter where they were, worshiped King Leonidas and their Queen almost fanatically. Their King knew of their history and skills and no matter what Scout unit you went to within the Lycavorian Union, more often than not you would find a Drow leading that unit. Though they projected an outward dominance to others and stuck to their reputation during the days and in public, here in private Las'elh noticed that all disappeared. Whether Drow or simply elf, the conversation and sense of warmth reminded Las'elh very much of her younger years when she was growing and the love and warmth her own family shared. It was why she had abandoned all she had gained to find out what happened to her sister.

Las'elh felt the nudge on her arm and turned to look at Cihera's amber colored eyes. She felt an involuntary shudder vibrate through her at those eyes and how they looked at her. It was a look that actually made her feel wanted, and for a brief instant she imagined herself servicing Cihera in any way she desired. She tore her blue eyes away and looked down at the wickedly shape knife Cihera held out to her. She took the blade and slowly withdrew it from its sheath. The blade was matte black; the pommel curved and with a stud point on the end for piercing, backhanded blows. The back of the eighteen centimeter long blade had two wide spaced teeth forged into it, the rear of the razor edged blade also having a small U shaped gap near where it met the base of the pommel. Las'elh was an expert with knives and the one she now held was an intricately carved blade, supremely crafted and weighted perfectly. She turned back to Cihera.

"It is a Drow *Vlos volve*. A Blood Blade. It would look odd if you were not armed." She spoke softly. "We will see about getting one balanced just for you, but for now this will do. I know you don't approve of how we established your cover when we arrived here Las'elh, but it was needed to protect you."

“I can take care of myself.” Las’elh stated quickly but without any trace of hostility.

Cihera nodded her head. “I have no doubts of that. You survived on your own in The Wilds without any support from the EI. I do not question your abilities. As you no doubt know, elves of any kind in The Wilds often disappear into slavery of the worst kind. And female elves are especially popular. Your beauty would have drawn much interest from the scum who live on Nebonese. Doing what we did keeps you from falling victim to this. As Anton explained... if they think you are my... if you are my...”

“Subservient Drow slave?” Las’elh spoke.

Cihera nodded and looked at her. “Yes. If they think this... most of them will not dare approach you.”

“Most?” Las’elh asked.

Anton leaned over from his seat across from her. “Even The Wilds has its share of stupid individuals who would risk their limbs to have an elf of your beauty Las’elh.” He said holding out the cut down version of what looked like the K12 to her. “For inside your calf. It is the K14 Special. Made especially for the *Krypteria*. Same design and action as the K12 KM, but much easier to hide.”

“It is why we asked you to wear what you do.” Cihera said.

Las’elh looked down at the one piece jumpsuit that conformed to her lithe body as if painted on. It proudly accented her large breasts and the curves of her ass, making it impossible for anyone to let their eyes drift down to her legs where the pant legs were free flowing and open. “I was wondering that.” Las’elh spoke.

Cihera smiled. “The jumpsuit is weaved with a reinforced Drow fiber that we harvest and design on Earth. It takes four months to make an outfit like that, but when it is done, it provides the same level of protection as a Scout/Sniper’s armor. It is very good at stopping small caliber weapons and blades, but also helps to accent your physical assets.”

Las’elh looked at her. “Do you have... do you have a real slave Cihera?” She asked quickly.

Cihera chuckled and shook her head. “No.” She stated. “And my people do not refer to their partners that way. Male or female.”

“It appears common among the Drow.” Las’elh spoke. “Your own mother has two. Don’t they call her mistress and she calls them slave?” She saw Cihera’s surprised expression. “Ovana told me last night.” Las’elh said quickly.

“Yes she does. However... my mother Lynwe is rather unique. And I consider Selene and Layna my mothers as well. They adopted me when I was very small and I have known no other family. You will find if you remain among the Drow for very long that those words are used more as affectionate terms of endearment and no longer have meaning among my people aside from expressions of love.” She said with a smile. “As for the second part of your question... the opportunity has never presented itself to us.”

“Us?” Las’elh asked.

“I love my husband Las’elh.” Cihera said.

“I certainly hope so.” Anton chimed in with a smile.

“It is not something I would do without Anton’s permission. If this opportunity ever came about... that female would need to understand that she would be part of both our lives in every way. Not just mine.” Cihera told her. “There are not many of them out there who would accept this... and I have no desire to look. Anton is already almost more than I can handle.” She finished with a smile.

“Wow! You’ve never told me that C.” Anton spoke with a larger grin.

Cihera looked at him with bright amber eyes. “And now that you know, your ego will grow by leaps and bounds I’m sure.” She said with an alluring voice.

“But you wouldn’t dismiss it?” Las’elh said.

Cihera looked back at Las’elh and shook her head. “No. My mother and Queen Aihola believe that Walter somehow and quite unknowingly, gave the Drow elves a predisposition in some fashion in this regard. A powerful attraction to both sexes.” She shrugged her shoulders. “It has been passed down through our bloodlines for centuries now and it is something Drow have come to expect and honor as part of our culture. Secretly I believe my mother and Aihola have always wished to see a Drow become part of the Royal family in some way. It would cement our standing within the Union for many still do not believe we are our own species of elf.” Cihera smiled. “Do not worry, Anton and I will let nothing happen to you Las’elh. Just know that we do not operate the same as the EI. Guard your emotions and responses well. The scum that live here in The Wilds

have come to expect those we call slave to be subservient, but not completely so. Prepare yourself... we will be arriving at the meeting in a few minutes.”

Las’elh fastened the *vlos velve* to the waist belt she wore. As she leaned over and used the Velcro straps to secure the K14 to her inner calf, she did not see the look that passed between Anton and Cihera. It was a look of intense interest, especially on Cihera’s part, and when she saw Anton give her an almost imperceptible nod Cihera knew he could smell it on her. She knew he could smell her desire for Las’elh wafting from her pores. And he approved. It was not something they had ever spoken of, yet seeing his acceptance if she wished to pursue it made her love him all the more.

As the Lifter glided up the worn gravel path towards the abandoned mining facility, Las’elh sat back up. The small armored window between the cockpit of the Lifter and the rear opened and Nalar’s face appeared.

“We are almost there Anton.” He spoke. “Our people say he has four in the towers above the entrance. Another seven inside. All lightly armed.”

“You think he plans something Nalar?” Cihera asked.

“I think he knows Gravork has disappeared from Talbor Seven and suddenly we know of his whereabouts here on Nebonese.” Nalar spoke. “While not unusual considering the type of information we have been able to obtain in the past, he also knows Gravork is one of the few who know who he is and where he can be located. He also knows that Anton’s father wiped out their weapons trading unit and Prince Androcles destroyed his forces on Eleyis Three. He will be cautious and suspect everyone. Considering the losses he has taken in the years since the end of the war he is allowing non-Evolli into his ranks now, he controls them but they are more unpredictable in their own reactions.”

Las’elh looked at Cihera. “Prince Androcles destroyed his forces? How?”

“These Evolli were the ones that Gravork put this Lycavorian in contact with. He wanted people willing to target Union assets and individuals. These same Evolli were contracted by the High Coven to deliver T19s to an Immortal detachment. They were also contracted by what now appears to be a Lycavorian to conduct an assassination of my Aunt Aricia and Aunt Anja as they were returning from Hadaria several weeks ago. The attempt failed mainly in part because Andro got there first with his brothers and sisters and killed them all.” Anton spoke.

Las’elh looked at him. “And now you want the name of that Lycavorian.” She spoke.

Cihera nodded as she met her eyes. “We told you this before... not in as great detail... and you were distracted with anger at the time, but essentially yes.” She answered. “We believe this Lycavorian to be the King’s brother Pleistarchus. We also believe he is attempting to hurt Martin Leonidas by going after those he thinks are easy targets. We came out here originally to discover about the weapons dealing, you were there when we first interrogated Gravork. You know what he said. This has gotten much larger than we first thought.”

“Those targets were my Aunts.” Anton spoke sternly. “My uncle doesn’t allow anyone to target his family. Especially not his Queens.”

“What does that have to do with my sister?” Las’elh asked. “I understand about these Evolli targeting the Queens. But this Lycavorian sold the information to Gravork, who then passed it on to these unknown mercenaries. Why would finding him help me?”

“Tell her Anton.” Cihera spoke. “She has a right to know everything now. All of this is now linked together.”

“Gravork put these unknown individuals directly in contact with this Lycavorian.” Anton spoke. “He did not sell them the information as he first said. During my interrogation of him I discovered he put them in direct contact with the traitor among our people. This Lycavorian met them on three different times that Gravork arranged. He was the middle man only. Similar to his actions with most of his weapons deals.”

“We believe this Lycavorian to be the King’s brother as we said. But to do what he has done indicates he is moving about the Union with more freedom than he should have. And that can only mean he has help among others within the Union.” Cihera spoke.

Nalar nodded from the front as he listened to them. “Queen For’mya and Queen Dysea’s directives were very clear.” He stated. “Discover who this Lycavorian is positively, even though we already believe it to be Pleistarchus, and then find out who is helping him. And end them.”

Las’elh looked at Cihera. “I thought the *Krypteria’s* own Charter forbade working within Union space.” She said.

Cihera nodded. "It does." She stated. "Unless a direct authorization from the King or Prime Minister Deia is issued."

Anton smiled. "Deia is the King's Aunt Las'elh." He stated seeing her blue eyes go wide at this information. "She is the younger sister of the King's grandmother Eliani. And she is far more devious and protective of the King than even his Queens. She released Armetus and the *Krypteria* to discover what is going on three days ago. The *Krypteria* Oversight Committee approved the request to operate within Union borders until such time as all the information is gathered. Minister L'tian, Queen For'mya's father, is now also involved in the investigation. As well as the Hadarian Oversight Minister since these ships were apparently carrying Hadarian medical technology and either leaving or going to Hadaria."

"So you see Las'elh..." Cihera spoke. "Our paths have crossed for a reason. And now our goals our mutually beneficial. We find this Lycavorian... we find who took your sister."

Nalar smiled. "Welcome to the Drow Clan Anatyla, of the Family Anatyla. The Drow Queen's family." Las'elh's eyes grew even wider at this and she opened her mouth to speak.

The deafening roar and sound of screeching metal silenced her and then the Lifter was struck by a hammer like blow lifting it up onto its side. Las'elh's last vision before darkness claimed her was of Anton reaching for Cihera.

Then blackness claimed her.

MJOLNIR'S HAND

Aricia and Isabella stood in the landing bay watching as the G9 Long Range Runner was guided by the anti-grav beam projecting from the massive struts and cylindrical balls that lined the ceiling of the bay. It was how all of the ships were moved as they were brought into the landing bay itself from the launch tubes, or lifted on elevators from the hanger deck and the repair facilities below. Along the massive length of the landing bay were lined *TEMPEST* and *DEVASTATOR* fighters and fighter bombers. Three *STRIKER ATs* could be seen parked along the far wall of the bay, their ramps down while crews moved in and out of the ships. The two *STRIKER DTs* that were always assigned to *MJOLNIR'S HAND* sat idle next to their more heavily armed sisters.

A reinforced squad of *Durcunusaan* stood in a loose half circle around Aricia and Isabella. Close enough to react to any threat they might detect, but also far enough away to make it seem less threatening. Aricia and Isabella both wore the black ArmorPly, their gold trimmed crimson capes brushing against the deck of the landing bay as their eyes followed the movement of the G9. They both turned when the azure scaled Isheeni moved off the elevator from the upper deck and deftly moved her muscular form to take up station just to Aricia's right. The *Durcunusaan* troops shifted slightly when Isheeni did this, allowing them and her more room to react if they needed. Isheeni settled gracefully to the deck, her four limbs cocked under her like springs while her wickedly long talons rapped on the deck plating gently.

While Arzoal held the title of Elder Mother and Matriarch, her daughter Isheeni was now widely recognized and known among the dragons of the Union as their moral compass. Like her mother, Isheeni possessed incredible awareness and intelligence because of her bond with Aricia and the strength of their Mindvoice abilities. Over the years she had also become known as the most compassionate dragon within the Union. Her uncompromising love of her hybrid dragon mate Torma was legendary among the dragons, as was the story of how they had become the two most powerful dragons within the Union. Yet for all her compassion, Isheeni was also the type that once you pushed her to the point of breaking, her wrath was unimaginable to behold. Three hundred Evolli soldiers had fallen under her talons and teeth and inferno like breath. She held the distinction of being able to sustain her flame for longer than most other dragons in the Union, and the retreating Evolli had learned just that in hers and Aricia's dash to get to their beloved mates the morning after the slaughter that was Alba Tau. Isheeni had wailed within Mindvoice upon seeing her Torma on the ground, soaked in blood and the wounds on his side beginning to grow infected from the foul dirt of the planet. He and Martin lay against one another, the bodes of the Evolli stacked sometimes six or seven high around them, the massive log beside her mate, stained with the blood and rotting flesh of those Evolli he had smashed into pulp with it when he could no longer pull his huge body off the ground. It had been a terrible time for her and Aricia,

their mates and children looking so batter and broken, Andro and Elynth a short distance away looking even more bloody and ragged. They had come through it together however, and only grown stronger for it.

Do you sense anything sister? Aricia asked her.

Isheeni shook her huge head slowly. *Only a mild Mindvoice presence. There is more confusion within several of those on board than anything else. Confusion directed inward really.*

Inward? Bella spoke looking at her.

Isheeni nodded. *A question of purpose really. But they are determined nonetheless. I sense no deception Aricia.*

Aricia turned back. *Nor do I.*

Isabella shook her head. *For'mya's skill is rubbing off on you.* She spoke. *It is very nerve racking at times to hear you talk like that.*

Aricia grinned and bumped her hip into Isabella. *We can teach you.* She said.

Isabella shook her head quickly. *No thank you. I don't want to know another's purpose until they act. Then I will know how to act. It keeps me sharp.*

Isheeni and Aricia chuckled within Mindvoice and Isheeni butted her snout gently into Isabella's shoulder. *Bella you are one of the calmest individuals no matter the situation.* Isheeni spoke. *Imagine if you had this skill.*

It is hard enough having to deal with ussta she-elf and her visions. Bella answered. *Knowing what another person thinks is not something I'm prepared for.*

We can only sense their surface emotions Bella. We can't read their thoughts. Aricia said.

That's bad enough. Bella answered with a smile. *What do you do when you come across a man who sees you and has intimate thoughts and fantasies about you suddenly racing through his mind Aricia? Or when a young dragon has fantasies about you Isheeni. And don't tell me that doesn't happen. What do you do?*

Aricia looked at Isheeni with a grin. *Well... it has led to some very promising nights of pleasure with the men in our lives.* Isheeni finally answered.

Aricia nodded. *It most certainly has.*

Isabella shook her head. *You two are such pomai!* She exclaimed with considerable humor.

Aricia shrugged her shoulders with a smile. *Martin and Torma don't complain. Besides... there may be men out there more handsome than Martin, but we would never deceive and betray him. Not with the way he makes us all feel.* She stated smugly. She looked at Isabella. *How long were you going to wait before you told the rest of us you are pregnant again Bella?*

Isabella looked at her with an embarrassed grin. *I was going to wait until we returned.* She replied knowing she could not deny it after all their years together. *I have wanted... I have wanted to give him a son for so long Aricia. Anuk received the results back just before we left to come here.*

That is why you have been so amorous then. Not that I am complaining mind you. Aricia said with a smile. *He is strong already Bella. We can sense that even now.*

Isheeni nodded. *And For'mya desires to give him a girl more than anything. When she does perhaps the five of you will stop having children and begin to enjoy your pleasure more.*

Aricia laughed out loud then and she reached up to put her hand on Isheeni's snout. "I believe Anja and I already came to that decision." She said. "After we both gave birth to twins, we said enough."

Bah! Isheeni exclaimed. *He has only to caress you with his aura and you will do anything he desires.*

Aricia snorted. "As if you are any different with Torma sister."

The three of them laughed and Aricia reached out and took Isabella's hand. "She's right you know." She said as the loud clunking noise indicated the G9 locking into place on the deck twenty meters away.

Isabella nodded. "Yes... but that is why it is so much fun." She answered.

They both turned as the whirring noise began and the ramp on the G9 began to come down slowly, the *Durcunusaan* moving closer, their hands holding their 190s ready, but not pointed at the ship. Aricia and Isabella moved closer as they saw three figures begin to come into view as the ramp lowered. They watched as the Eanae and vampire they had seen in the transmission were among the three men. The third looked vaguely familiar to Aricia in some way and she slowed her pace as they approached.

Isheeni detected this instantly. *[Sister?]* She asked.

[The one on the left.] Aricia said. *[I know him from somewhere.]*

Bella looked at the blond haired man, his face relaxed but his body tense. *[From where?]* She asked.

[That's just it...] Aricia spoke. *[I know I've seen him before... but I can't...]* Aricia's eyes grew wide in that instant and her hand dropped to her *Nehtes*, pulling it free in a single blink as the three men stopped in front of them. "Durcunusaan! Move!" She screamed.

There was no hesitation in their movements. No questioning looks around. Aricia swept her *Nehtes* in front of her, enhancing her movement with her Mindvoice abilities. The unknown vampire had no chance to blur. No chance to wrap the shadows around him and in that single instant before she dropped him painfully onto his back, Aricia wondered why. Isabella did blur however, her dual blades appearing in her fists as she appeared behind Maros and pressed them tightly to his throat as two *Durcunusaan* pushed Joyar to the deck none too kindly.

"Do not move if you wish to continue breathing!" Isabella hissed.

Aricia shoved the razor like head of her spear into the second vampire's chest, his blue eyes looking up at her from the deck. She reached up and tapped the COM unit on her uniform as alarms began going off all over the ship. "Komirri!" She barked.

"My Queen!" His voice was angered because he thought it was happening again on his ship. "Aricia what is going on?"

"Komirri... lock our port side Type Two batteries on that frigate and prepare to fire!" Aricia ordered without hesitation.

"Port side!" Komirri's voice chimed out on the COM. "Port side! Full charge! Prepare to fire!"

Maros's grew wide. "Wait! We aren't armed! We came just as you asked!"

"My family is on that ship!" Joyar screamed. "You gave me your word!"

"You bring this creature onto my Beloved's ship!" Aricia snarled poking her *Nehtes* harder into the vampire's chest.

"What are you talking about?" Maros exclaimed quickly. "He's a Commander in the Insurgency!"

"Aricia what is wrong?" Isabella asked holding Maros securely in her grasp.

"I knew this man!" Aricia snapped. "I knew this man on Earth! He was one of Martin's men! One that he turned before the comet! He was part of Martin's Royal Guard when he first came to Sparta. He was killed during the Battle of Eden City!"

Isabella's eyes dropped to the man as he lay on the deck, his hands extended out to show he was unarmed. His blue eyes flashed to her and then back to Aricia. He had a handsome face, and looked perfectly human except for the cobalt color of his eyes and the tips of his vampiric fangs protruding from under his top lip.

"I don't suppose... I don't suppose there is any way I could talk to the Skipper is there." He asked.

Aricia's face twisted slightly as she glared at him. "You will speak to no one but my *Nehtes* unless you tell me why you are here clone scum!"

The *Durcunusaan* troop stepped up to Aricia now, his 190 leveled at the vampire clone. His eyes were wide as he glared at the clone, but he motioned with his head to Aricia. "My Queen." He broke in. "He speaks of the King."

Aricia looked at him. "What?"

"This word he used. Skipper. It is what the King's unit called him. A term of affection and respect." He replied.

"Olant... are you sure?" Aricia asked.

He nodded. "Positive Milady. I studied the King's history before the comet quite extensively. I wrote a Final Term paper on his past to finish my studies before graduating and moving on to the *Durcunusaan*. I received an excellent grade for content. Bad grade for grammar." He said shrugging his shoulders.

Aricia looked at the vampire. "What name do you use now clone?" She barked. "And how do you know this term?"

"My name is Colin. Colin Walsh." He answered. "And I know that term because I know the Skipper. I was... I am Chief Petty Officer Colin Walsh."

Aricia glanced at Isabella quickly. "You lie!" She said. "You are a clone! Martin saw your body!"

Walsh nodded. "Yeah he sure did. Kind of spooky if you ask me. And yes I'm a clone. I was made by the High Coven scientists. Only problem is they never thought we would end up having the memories of the original host take over who they made us out to be? I much prefer being a wolf I'll tell you that."

Arcia stared at him as she slowly pulled her *Nehtes* back. "You expect me to believe this?" She snarled at him.

"Contact him! Ask him yourself!" Walsh spoke quickly. "Ask him about Operation Thunder Blade!"

"Martin's history is well known to any who have access to the Netnews!" Isabella snapped.

Walsh shook his head. "Not this mission. Only four of us went on it. It was unsanctioned! Only four of us went on it and only three of us came back! Contact him and ask him! I'm telling you I'm Colin Walsh!"

"My Queen... we are standing by!" Komirri's voice echoed over the COM.

"Komirri... stand down!" Arcia ordered. "And get me a secure Spartan One channel to Martin on the SPIRIT. Are we still within COM range?"

"Extreme range yes." Komirri answered.

"Then do it right now Komirri! We need to speak with him."

"Done." Komirri barked.

"Olant... take them to the holding room." Arcia said. "Bella and I will go and talk with Martin." She turned back to Walsh. "If what you say is false clone scum... I will vent your carcasses into the void of space myself and watch as we blow your ship from the stars! And I will not blink when I give that order."

Arcia stepped back as the *Durcunusaan* moved in to secure the three men. "Bella... Isheeni... come." She said. "Quickly... before Martin and Anja move out of range."

SPIRIT OF HADARIA

"...Operation Thunder Blade?" Martin asked softly looking down at the deck plating from where he rested on the edge of Anja's desk.

He and Anja were sitting in her office on the *SPIRIT* when the urgent communication from Arcia came in.

"Do you know of what this clone speaks Beloved?" Arcia asked.

Martin looked back up. "Yes." He replied. "It was an operation that four of us conducted when we returned from Iran. Unsanctioned like he said. We did it on our own. We... we went after the politicians who sold us out and left us in the desert. They did it for oil and money. We discovered that when we returned. One of us didn't make it back. Petty Officer Wendt took out his targets and himself to keep from being caught by police."

"Anja... how could this clone know of this?" Isabella asked. "If only Martin and Daniel knew of it when Colin Walsh was killed in the Battle for Earth... how could he know this?"

Anja got up from her chair and moved around to stand next to Martin. "There's only one way." She said. "Memory ingrams."

Martin looked at her. "Memory who?"

"All of us have memory ingrams in our brains lover." Anja explained. "They are sort of like memory discs for a computer. They are coded directly into our DNA. It's what allows us to remember things after we have been knocked unconscious for instance. Given the Lycavorian healing system... even if these ingrams are damaged in some way they will re-grow over time."

"Anja... this is a vampire we are talking of." Arcia said.

Anja nodded. "Yes... I know. But if the Coven cloning process is as good as Aikiro boasts... as good as we've seen in the past... it's possible the memory ingrams of the original host have resuscitated."

"So you are saying that though they may now be clones, they have all the memories of their original host?" Bella asked. "That is... Anja that is..."

Anja nodded. "Crazy I know... but we've determined that their cloning process is based at least in part off the Mindvoice ship technology. AVI himself has confirmed that. The clone I showed Martin in Sparta... the one who was part of the insurgent attack on the Kavalians... he was perfect in every way. Aside from the fact that he was a vampire."

“I thought you said Aikiro removed any Lycavorian DNA from these clones when she created them.” Aricia spoke.

“That’s what she told us as well.” Anja said. “That is obviously not the case if this clone with you retains memories of the original Colin Walsh. Especially memories that would have been buried very deep. I would need to have Anuk run tests on the body we have at the hospital to be sure... but that’s my guess on it.”

“But if she had any Lycavorian DNA removed... how could these memory ingrams have the original host memories?”

“He was a genome before Marty turned him.” Anja spoke. Aikiro couldn’t remove those Source DNA strands. Not is she wanted to create leaders. Once Martin turned them and the cellular bonding became complete, the genome DNA and Lycan DNA was fused. She may have taken it out of their bodies, but not out of their brains.”

“So this clone... this man *is* Colin Walsh Red?” Martin asked her.

Anja looked at him and nodded. “Maybe not in a physical sense... but if what Aricia and Bella are saying is accurate... then as far as his mind is concerned, yes.”

Martin rose to his feet then. “Man this clone *sibfla* gives me a headache!” He spat.

Anja looked at them in the holo transmission. “We’re going to lose the COM signal very soon Aricia. You and Bella get him to submit to an immediate medical exam and then send everything to me on Hadaria via secure data pack.”

“Not a transmission?” Aricia asked.

Anja shook her head. “Given what is going on with everything, the less people who know about this the better. I don’t think even Aikiro realizes what is going on with her clones.”

Aricia nodded as the transmission flickered suddenly. “We will make it so.” She said. “I will contact you when we return to Earth. You should be on your way back by then.”

Martin turned and nodded his head. “Be alert *Saaurano, Du’ased ’ranndi*. Cover each other’s backs.”

Isabella nodded. “We will.” She spoke. “We will see you soon.”

Martin looked at Anja when she turned from the holo transmission and met his eyes. “I’ll be able to tell what’s going on with the clones when I have live samples of their DNA.” She said confidently.

“Is all that crap you were just spewing... is all that actually even possible Red?” Martin asked her.

Anja chuckled as she stepped up to him. “Unfortunately yes.” She spoke looking up into his face. “The question remains... just how much of the memories have returned? And how many of your team that was cloned is still alive? Outside of this one with Aricia and Bella and the clone of Julie on Earth that is.”

Martin met her jade green eyes. “AVI told me that we have a genetic predisposition to hate one another.” He said. “Because of these Pralors. The Pralors used command of these ships as a reward and an exile. The one on Nuwaroa was being exiled. My ancestor was apparently one of those who voted to have him exiled. Guess they didn’t get along even then.”

Anja smiled. “I thought you didn’t like hanging around AVI?” She said.

Martin shrugged. “He ain’t so bad.” He spoke. “At least he doesn’t call me Milord... or your Kingship... or some other silly shit like that. When we get back from Hadaria I think I’ll have another talk with Aikiro.”

Anja slipped her arms around his waist. “You did not have to come with me Martin.” She said.

Martin looked at her. “You trying to get rid of me Red?” He asked.

Anja smiled. “Not at all... I can handle my Aunt and the Elders though. And you have enough to worry about.”

“My Queens come before everything else.” He said. “The women I love and my children. Besides... I’m getting sick of your Aunt and her arrogance.”

Anja chuckled. “You and me both. Do you think Aikiro knows what could be happening with her clones?”

Martin snorted. “Maybe... maybe not.” He spoke. “She either knows or just didn’t want to tell me why when I asked her in Sparta, or she doesn’t know why and can’t explain it any better than I can. In which case she would say nothing because she won’t let slip of that persona of hers that she is better than me.”

Martin inhaled deeply and Anja’s sweet honey scent filled his senses completely. She was worried about what would happen on Hadaria, angry that the Hadarian Elders were finally showing their religious fanaticism,

and very angry that they would threaten to take her children. Martin could tell all of this easily just by her scent and the gentle caress of her mind in his.

“What are Retta, Calyb and Siara doing right now?” Martin asked finally. They had also brought their niece with them so that she could return to Hadaria and be with her mother.

“Universal History Studies.” Anja replied immediately pulling back her head and looking at him, knowing exactly what her children were being taught in their schooling. The Hadarian Elders could think what they want, she and her fellow Queens were ruthless when it came to instructing and educating their children. All one had to do to discover that was ask Andro and the older Leonidas children who got more beatings by skipping their tutored classes on top of their normal schooling. “It just started... why?”

“So we got like two hours.” Martin said.

Anja saw the glint in Martin’s eye and a smile crept across her beautiful face. “Two hours and fifteen minutes.” She said. “Did you have something in mind lover?”

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. “I don’t know... there’s not enough time.” He spoke. “And we arrive on Hadaria in eighteen hours.”

Anja pressed her body tighter against his and smiled wickedly. “I’ll make it worth your while my big Alpha wolf.” She spoke alluringly, releasing her female aura to reach out and caress Martin’s senses.

Martin looked at her, maintaining rigid control of his own aura and senses which were rapidly spiraling about. “We should get back to the bridge and make sure we’re not needed.” He stated calmly. He leaned over and kissed her forehead before turning to head for the door.

Anja stared at him stunned and in a huff bent over her desk to stab the controls for the door. Her own passions had risen and now she wanted her mate and husband. If she had to force herself on him she would do just that.

“Martin Leonidas you stop right... Ohhhhhhhh...” Anja gasped as she felt Martin’s body press up against her tightly from behind, his aura reaching out to embrace her tightly. She felt his face lower to her neck and he nuzzled the skin of her neck and her ear firmly as his hands reached around in front of her. One hand smoothly covered her left breast while his right hand dropped lower to her abdomen and slid quickly inside the loose pants she wore, his fingers coming to rest pressed against her already aroused clit, slowly brushing against her nub and enflaming it even more.

“One minute with you is worth a thousand years of solitude Red.” Martin hissed into her ear gently.

Anja’s body ignited then as he hit her with nearly the full force of his aura, her jade green eyes flying open and her arms reaching up over her shoulders to grasp his long black hair. Every nerve ending lit up, every brush of his fingers against her clit savaging her rapidly dwindling control.

“Martin...” She gasped. “Martin... not... not in my office!” She stammered as the fingers of his left hand manipulated her breast expertly, as only he could. “The bridge... the bridge is...”

“Do you still have your extra uniform here?” Martin asked her.

Anja could only nod her head. “Yes... yes....”

“Good!” Martin said and took the fabric of her top in his left hand and yanked hard. Anja gasped delightfully as the shirt tore away under his powerful tug, exposing her heated skin to his male touch. Anja never wore undergarments and she hadn’t for more years than she could remember. As his hand came back up and his fingers found her hard nipple she gasped once more as his right hand left her now soaked pussy and quickly ripped away her pants with a single pull. All that remained of the pants were shredded parts that covered her calves, which she quickly discarded by kicking off the lightweight shoes she wore and letting the fabric drop away around her feet.

“Oh... oh you bastard!” Anja snarled as his face once more lowered to her neck and ear and he nuzzled her even harder, inciting her passion.

Anja’s whole body was on fire now... her skin burning with desire and need for her mate. Martin was hitting her with the full extent of what she could tolerate from his aura and it was driving her insane with want. It was as if his hands were everywhere, touching every square millimeter of her body at once, caressing her like a thousands feathers and setting fire to her skin and her blood. His lips came up to her ear, nibbled on her ear lobe and spoke to her in a husky voice.

“You are mine Anja Leonidas!” He rasped knowing that it increased her passion when he spoke to her in such a fashion. “And I am going to fuck you now!”

Anja's legs became weak and she shuddered in a mini orgasm as his words filled her head. He had her pressed against the front of her desk, his body somehow already without clothes. She felt his hot skin against her back, and the straining dominance of his thick twelve inch cock nestled between the cheeks of her ass.

"Yes!" She rasped out. "Fuck me Martin! Fuck me! Take me now!"

Martin pushed her upper body down, her breasts smashing against the top of her desk as he reached down and lifted one of her legs in his hands. He positioned the flared head of his cock at the sopping entrance to her bald pussy, hearing her moan loudly as he pushed the head inside her velvet heat and stopped. Anja's hands slapped down on the top and she lifted her upper body, her back arching off the desk as she glared at him over her shoulder with jade green wolf eyes.

"Do it Martin! Don't you tease me you prick! I need you too badly! Do it!" She growled at him.

Martin didn't make her wait. He rammed his hips forward and Anja could do nothing but wail in explosive delight as every wonderfully thick inch of his cock impaled her with a single dominating stroke. She grabbed the edges of her desk as he lifted her legs off the floor, holding her hips in his powerful hands and he began to stroke into her with spirit shattering twelve inch plunges. He reached forward with one hand, wrapping her silky Persian red hair in his fingers and pulled her head back as he leaned forward, her neck straining with effort. God she loved it when he dominated her Anja thought. He placed his lips next to her right ear as he pummeled her tight body, driving his cock into her. Smallest she may have been in physical stature Anja knew, but when Martin made love to her it was powerfully passionate and she used all her combined wolf strength and Hadarian healing power to make it last as long as possible. It would not happen now she knew as his cock pounded her with driving strokes; both of them wanted each other too badly to make it last for very long. She loved it when he spoke dirty to her as he possessed her, or when his fingers danced sinfully across her engorged clit as he was fucking her.

"This is what you want my Queen?" Martin hissed. "You want my cock inside you?"

Anja could only whimper out her response, her fingers clenching and unclenching on the top of her desk as his driving strokes into her petite body caused mountains of delightful ripples to tumble upon her with machine gun regularity. The orgasms were coming quick and furious, and her come had already soaked their lower bodies. This is what his aura could do to her; it held her on the edge of that pleasure crest, always in control and never pushing her into the realm where she could refuse him nothing. Her body drummed with a myriad kaleidoscope of delicious sensations as it always did when Martin made love to her. It never grew tiresome or superfluous what he could do to her, what he could do to all of them, each time seemingly surpassing the last.

"I... I love it!" Anja screamed out. "*Nubous lae! Nubous lae mathaa Martin!*"

Martin was lost already, her honey scent floating from her pores and saturating his wolf senses, her sweet come soaking his upper thighs. Her pussy was a delight he would in no way grow weary with. The heat and tightness, the exacting control she had of her inner muscles gripping his cock, and threatening at times to tear it from its roots. He reached forward and pulled her back towards him more, driving his hips faster and harder into her supple body. The groans and loud gasps of blissful abandon spilled from Anja's lips wantonly, filling his ears and her office with the tones of her voice. Her office was not completely soundproof, and Martin had no doubts those who passed by in the corridor could hear her sinful cries of pleasure. Neither of them could care in the least. He pounded into her once more, pinning her upper body to the desk and reached down to grasp her calves. Anja howled out her pleasure as he turned her slowly, still impaled upon his dominating cock. Her arms whipped about, knocking items from her desk as she tried to grab onto something and failed. Halfway through the belly clenching turn her back arched off the desk and she came again. Martin leaned forward quickly, his lips claiming hers in a demanding fashion as Anja's body bucked in his arms from the force of her orgasm. She plunged her four inch tongue into his mouth in response to his kiss as his arms curled under her. She tore her lips away when he lifted her from the desk and she sank ever further onto his thick cock, her eyes rolling into the back of her head as his hands gripped her firm ass cheeks and he began to raise and lower her upon his cock.

Anja felt the orgasm building once more and she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, nibbling his ear painfully hard with her wolf teeth as her abdomen undulated.

"Bastard!" She hissed. "You... bastard! So... so good! Martin... Martin I... I love you!" It hit her with the force of a meteor strike, ripping through her body and sending every pleasure receptor in her body into

overdrive. “I... ahhhhhhh... I love... youuu!” Anja screamed as her head flew back and her hips smashed against Martin’s and she held them there reaching for the pinnacle of release.

Martin’s groans matched Anja’s and he pulled her down tightly onto his throbbing cock. Her almost violent orgasm seized his cock, squeezing it tighter and Martin knew then he had lost this fight. His twelve inch length ballooned in size and he roared out his own release as his searing hot come erupted into Anja’s convulsing belly. Her ankles locked at the small of his back and she ground her pussy down on his length instinctively, not wanting to sacrifice a drop of his essence.

Martin staggered slightly as the orgasms shook them, and as Anja clung to him like glue with her hips still moving and milking his cock, he made his way to the couch in her office. He lowered them down with a heave of air, Anja whimpering in bliss at the vibrations this caused within her. Her head fell to his shoulder, her Persian red hair spilling across his shoulder and chest and down to the small of her back. Her fingers entwined in his long black hair as he nuzzled the side of her neck featherlike, dropping small kisses on her shoulder and upper arm.

Anja pulled her face back slowly and looked at his black outlined yellow wolf eyes. Eyes that had caught her attention and undying love from the moment she had seen them in their changed shape. She brought her finger up and caressed the savage looking dual fangs that protruded from his gums. To anyone else, even other wolves, his dual fangs gave him a frightening visage. To Anja and the four other women who worshiped this man, it was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen.

“It’s... it’s been a while since I’ve had you all to myself for so long a period of time.” She told him tilting her head slightly as she felt his throbbing cock still buried within her.

Martin’s eyes twinkled. “Do you think we should waste it?” He said with a grin.

Anja matched his smile. “Hell no!”

Martin laughed and rolled over onto the couch bringing Anja with him. “We still got two hours and nine minutes!” He told her before lowering his lips to hers and continuing his possession of her.

MJOLNIR’S HAND

“...what did the Skipper say?” Colin Walsh asked as Aricia and Isabella walked in with Vonis.

Walsh’s eyes grew a little wider when he saw Vonis and he turned to look at Joyar. “*Vith uns’aa!* You weren’t kidding Joyar!” He exclaimed turning back to watch as Vonis stood beside his sister. “Vonis... son of the Empress herself. Damn... she’s had a contract for you since you got smart and found yourself an elf woman and told her to take a leap!”

Vonis blurred instantly and was upon Walsh before he could react. His hand closed around the clone’s throat and he rammed him into the bulkhead while Maros and Joyar looked on with wide eyes. Maros had never seen a vampire move so fast, not even a pureblood like himself. He saw Isabella and Aricia looking on with smile on their faces.

Vonis’s cobalt blue eyes glared at Walsh intensely, holding him easier since he was at least six inches taller and probably eighty pounds heavier. Vonis was very large for a pureblood vampire. “You will speak of my Blessed Wife with more respect clone!” Vonis snarled. “I agreed to this meeting with Joyar, not you. Do not make my sister and Aricia regret staying their hands when they could have killed you without thinking. You are no match for either of them and I suggest you keep that in mind.”

“I... I was only trying to make a joke!” Walsh gasped as he tried to pry Vonis’s grip from around his neck. “I meant nothing by it!”

“Vonis!” Isabella spoke softly. “Release him brother.” Vonis didn’t take his eyes from Walsh and slowly backed up pulling his hand from his throat. He turned and returned to his spot by Isabella as she settled into one of the three chairs at the table. Isabella looked at him with a sisterly gaze and then turned back to Walsh and the others. “Sit down please.” She said.

“My family?” Joyar asked. “I have done what I said Vonis... my family is...”

“Your family is boarding our *MENKLA* transport as we speak Joyar.” Aricia said looking at him. “You are correct and you have kept your word. And Bella and I will keep ours. We have established new identities for

all of you and Martin has authorized a payment of fifty million riyal for you to live out the rest of your lives in peace.”

“Fifty... fifty million riyal!” Joyar gasped. “Lady... Lady Aricia this is... I did not ask for such a thing.”

Aricia nodded. “We know. But considering your actions may have just saved countless lives on both sides... Martin thought it appropriate.” She answered. “Vonis has suggested that you join us however, at least until your family has arrived. He says your insight into how conditions in The Wilds are could be even more invaluable.”

Joyar nodded quickly. “Of course. Anything Lady Aricia.” He said moving to the chair.

“You spoke to the Skipper then?” Walsh asked as he sat down.

“You would be dead if we had not.” Vonis snapped.

Isabella reached out and placed her hand on his arm. “My brother is very protective of his wife Va’nimia.” She said. “We are more respectful of such things within the Union Mister Walsh.”

The clone nodded his head. “Fair enough.” He stated sincerely. “I apologize if I seemed disrespectful. That wasn’t my intent. We have... we’ve just heard a lot about you from the General. How you made a choice to rebel against your mother. How you made a choice to live free and prosper. It has... it has inspired many of us.”

Vonis looked at Isabella with surprise on his face. He turned back to Walsh. “Me?” He gasped.

“You were the first.” Walsh said. “The first to decide your mother was a *vith'rell ushdui emp'poss*.”

(Fucking nut job)

Maros nodded his head with Walsh. “The General was the one who gave us the details to your defection Prince Vonis.” He said. “The uncensored version of what happen. Four years ago... when he first took over command of all the groups within our insurgency. You have been a light to what we all want. What you have achieved I mean.”

“Your insurgency attacked the Kavalian Trade Delegation on this very ship with Queen For’mya and Prince Resumar onboard.” Aricia stated. “Your people raped and murdered eleven Kavalian females to accomplish this mission. You’ll forgive us if we are leery of what you say.”

“The General wasn’t happy about that.” Maros said quickly. “In fact he was so angry he demanded we only concentrate on High Coven targets and remain out of Union space for the immediate future. Four other senior commanders made that decision without consulting him.”

“Let us talk about this General.” Aricia said.

“Hold on...” Walsh spoke. “How do we know we can trust you?” He asked. “We took a great risk coming here. Aikiro wants us dead! She’d give her left ovary to see all of us burn. How do we know you aren’t setting us up so she can bury all of us in one fell swoop?”

“Your first indication of that would be is that you still breathe.” Isabella spoke calmly. “And that order came from Martin Leonidas.”

Walsh leaned back in his chair. “He remembered huh?”

“He remembers the Colin Walsh who went on that mission with him.” Aricia said. “We are not yet convinced that is you. I will warn you, given Martin’s feelings towards clones because of what the Coven did to his mother; your fate now rests with us. Anja has demanded that you submit to a complete and extensive medical exam. I will only ask that you do this. She has an idea of what is happening with you... only a medical exam will confirm it.”

“And if I refuse?” Walsh said.

Aricia shrugged. “That is up to you.” She spoke. “You will never get close to Martin unless it is through us.”

Isabella smiled. “And you will never get through us.”

Walsh looked at her. “*Ph'jal d'ukt roma saph dos draa?*” (Are all of his women like you two?)

Isabella and Aricia chuckled together. “If you think we are bad... you should see Anja or Dysea when they are protecting him.”

“We know that there is more to my mother’s visit to Earth than a simple Cease Fire Accord.” Vonis spoke.

“You are training the dragons they stole from you twenty three years ago. We already know that.” Walsh said. “That doesn’t sit too well with many of us. That you are helping them in any manner makes a lot of us wary of what your intentions are.”

Aricia and Isabella looked at each other and Vonis. “You seem to be very well informed about things.” Aricia spoke turning back to him.

Walsh shrugged. “The General has a lot of sources.” He spoke.

“We do not wish to make an enemy of the Union.” Maros spoke. “That is not what we wish. We have built homes and settlements in secret. We have families and schools and hospitals. Ask Joyar. He has seen what we have built. And what we lack.”

Joyar nodded. “It is true Lady Aricia. Lady Isabella.” He spoke. “I have shuttled between these settlements for years.”

“And what is it you hope to achieve with your insurgency Commander Maros?” Vonis asked.

“The same thing you achieved when you defected.” Maros answered. “Freedom to make our own choices. Live how we want to live and not be under Aikiro’s brutal heel. She and her daughter throw our lives away needlessly against the Kavalians. In hopeless missions that cause thousands of lives and gain nothing. I have seen too many of my friends die to gain some pathetic moon or jungle world. For what? So that she remains in power and does not make the changes needed to end this war once and for all. We need to reach out to others. To show them we are willing to change. That is what we need to do. Now we do nothing to strike fear into the Kavalians. Nothing that makes them think twice about attacking us. Even Moran has become more political now. We grew tired of this and began to form the insurgency. We were scattered and inept at first... until four years ago when the General took over. His intelligence made the difference. His planning and where to strike. That is what made her take notice of us.”

“Yes... well... your information is true.” Aricia said. “However... we are training the dragons to give them a better chance against the Kavalians. Not to fight you. We did not even know there was an insurgency until you attacked the Kavalian delegation on this ship. Martin and our son Androcles are Talon Guardians. Sworn protectors of the dragons. They will not send them into battle without the proper training and skills to defeat an enemy who has weapons that, for a time, caused us a great deal of problems.”

“The T19s.” Maros said.

Aricia nodded. “A very nasty weapon... and one that took three years and twenty-three dragons and riders before we learned how to combat it effectively. The Cease Fire Accords are merely a front as you no doubt have figured out.”

Walsh reached over and tapped Maros. “We told you Maros. We told you the Skipper wouldn’t willingly side with that sadistic vampire bitch!” Walsh looked at Isabella. “Ah... no offense meant.”

Isabella looked at him. “None taken. Exactly how many of those like you still live?” She asked.

“You mean those of us that were cloned from our old team?”

“Yes.”

“Five of us.” Walsh answered.

“She told us those like you were all killed and that only Julie survived.” Aricia said.

“I bet she did.” Walsh spat. “It began happening to all of us. The memories of who we were began coming back. I’ll tell you we weren’t fucking happy. We went along with her little scheme until the time was right. By the time we decided to act there were nineteen of us left. Fourteen of us were killed in the mission to destroy the facility where we were made. We had to make sure we got the embryos and anything she had and make it look like an accident. All the data cores, all the computer discs and every fucking sample they stole from EDEN. We burned it all and fourteen of us died in the process. We are all that’s left. I haven’t seen Julie in years so I don’t know if what happened to us is happening to her. Aikiro paid her extra attention for some reason. Probably because Aikiro knows the Skipper and Danny were tight with her and she took to this vampire shit better than we did.”

“So you will allow our doctors to examine you?” Aricia asked.

“Hell yes, if that’s what it takes to get you to trust me.” Walsh spoke.

“In order for us to trust you... you have to do something to earn that trust.” Vonis spoke. “Everything you have told us up until now we have already known for the most part. Joyar I know... and he knows me. He has done what we agreed too and we will honor our bargain with him. This insurgency you say is going on...”

how do we know it isn't all an elaborate plot by my mother to gain more power? To affect the Union in some way."

"You ask us this question when the very woman we all hate is right now on your planet? The planet second only to your capital of Apo Prime in importance to the King." Maros said. "She has been trying to kill us and the only thing that has kept us alive is that the General knows her plans and leaks them to us discretely. We could ask the same question of you."

Isabella sat back in her chair. "Yes, you could Commander." She said simply. "Why haven't you?"

"I believe you already know the answer to that question Lady Isabella." Maros spoke. "I believe you have no more love for the High Coven than we do. I believe that King Leonidas is using Aikiro just as she is attempting to use him."

"Do you know she suddenly decided to come to us why this request for side?" Bella asked.

Maros shook his head. "All we know is that eight months ago she began calling more meetings of her inner staff. She wanted to know if their dragons would be ready to fight the Kavalians. Her own daughters disagreed on this."

"Yuri and Narice?" Vonis said.

Maros nodded. "Yes. Apparently Yuri said they were, but it was the younger one Narice that said no. It was Aikiro's idea to come to you for assistance. That much we have been able to determine positively through intelligence passed to us from the General."

"This General seems very high placed." Vonis spoke. "To know that it was her idea to come to Earth. How many know she brought her dragons to Earth?"

Maros shook her head. "While the existence of High Coven dragons has been known for some time, no one knows who the riders were. It was done to protect the riders from assassins that either defected to the Kavalians or those that were hired by them. Our contacts still within the Coven on Usu Ozeib 7 and in other places reported right away that the dragons and their riders disappeared from their normal training facility. If we know this, then the Kavalians know, for many who defected to them still have agents in many places. We surmise that the Kavalians are actively searching for these dragons."

"Considering how they react to dragons I'm not surprised." Vonis said.

"We did not know Aikiro had planned to bring them to Earth until four weeks ago." Maros told them. "It is also our understanding that Yuri protested vehemently while her sister Narice actually supported the idea immensely."

Aricia nodded and looked at Isabella and Vonis. "That seems to fit. Andro said her bond with Deneth was far stronger than the one Yuri had with Vollenth. More focused and natural like Yuri's daughter Carisia. It is the reason he and Elynth were able to sever the connection so easily."

"Wait..." Maros spoke. "You are saying that Yuri is no longer bonded with one of these dragons?"

Aricia turned back to him. "My son was able to sever the connection she had with her dragon." Aricia spoke. "The bond she had with Vollenth had been forced upon him and it was the main reason he was so violent. She was controlling him to a large extent. Perhaps she knew that if they came here this would be discovered."

"That must have pissed her off." Walsh said with a grin. "Good... maybe her black heart will blow up or something."

"She doesn't know yet." Isabella answered him. "At least not when we last spoke with Martin."

"The General believes that Aikiro went along with Narice for a reason that we do not yet know." Maros spoke. "He also believes that even with the additional training provided by you and your riders that Aikiro has every intent to allow her daughter Narice to lead the dragons against the Kavalians and be sacrificed if need be."

"What can you tell us about Narice?" Isabella asked.

"We have extensive files on all of them." Maros spoke. "At least as much as we were able to obtain. We can give them to you and..."

The chime on the table interrupted him and Aricia stabbed down on the small panel. "Yes Komirri?" She spoke.

"Aricia, Isabella... I thought this location was supposed to be unknown and almost never used because we are so far off the travel corridor." Komirri asked.

Aricia looked up at Maros. He nodded his head quickly. "It is." He replied. "We use these coordinates, as well as many others to exchange information with others within the resistance. Only a very few know its location."

"Well it's not unknown anymore." Komirri spoke calmly. "One *DIATAGA*-Class Attack Cruiser and two *PURUSIAN*-Class Heavy Frigates just jumped into the sector. They are on an intercept course."

Maros came to his feet. "You have betrayed us!" He snarled.

"*Gi zu'tour phor!*" Isabella snapped back as she got to her feet. "If we had wanted to turn you over to the Kavalians we would have done so already!" (Oh shut up)

"Komirri... how long?" Aricia asked as she triggered the small holo disc on the table and his image appeared from the shoulders up.

"Considering the speed they are traveling at... thirty-six minutes... maybe a little more." He answered.

"They have detected us I take it?" Aricia asked.

"It would be kind of hard to miss us as big as we are Aricia, even though their sensors are junk for the most part." Komirri answered. "We could just re-Shroud and be gone from here. There's no way they could track us."

"Perhaps not... but it would raise too many eyebrows and questions." Aricia said. "Questions that very well could get back to Aikiro and questions we don't want to answer."

Vonis nodded. "Like why we are meeting with members of a resistance group known to be fighting her."

"I didn't think they had any bases this close to their border." Komirri said.

"They have to be from Nefoa." Walsh said.

"This close to the Bontawillian border?" Aricia asked.

"They have the equivalent of a Fleet Group stationed at Nefoa." Walsh spoke. "We got word that many of these ships headed out about six days ago. In all different directions. The government on Nefoa has allowed them to use the planet as a base even though it's within The Wilds. They seem to think they run everything out here. Personally... I think the Kavs said either do it or we kill you."

"That does sound like something they would do." Vonis spoke. "Komirri... is the Coven Frigate on their sensors?"

Komirri shook his head. "Doubtful. Right now she's in our shadow. They'll have to get a lot closer to actually manage to separate the signals considering the level of Kavalian sensor technology on these class ships. They aren't the Kavalian front line warships by any stretch of the imagination, but they still pack a pretty good punch."

Aricia looked at him. "What do you have in mind Vonis?"

"Pull her in tighter Komirri." Vonis said. "Within our shield bubble. We can tell them we pursued and captured the ship in response to the attack on the Kavalian Trade delegation and that is all they need to know and they can be on their way."

Komirri nodded. "Nice."

"Do it!" Isabella ordered. "Aricia and I will join you on the bridge."

Aricia looked at Maros. "Commander... give the directions to your ship please. The trust you were speaking of... it appears that it will begin now."

NEBONESE

Las'elh shook her head to clear the ringing in her ears and opened her eyes.

The immediate air around her was swirling with black smoke, the horribly bent frame of the Lifter reaching above her head. She heard the weapons fire on either side of her then and snapped her head to the side. Cihera was two meters away firing a Kochab assault rifle from around the end of the destroyed Lifter, and she heard loud cracking noises to her opposite side turning her head quickly to see Anton on one knee, both his hands filled with K14 and blasting away.

"Ambush!" Nalar's voice filled her head now.

Las'elh looked down and saw the male Drow, a nasty cut along his hairline, as he was fumbling with the High Coven SA80 rifle. The driver of the Lifter was Idafi she saw, and he appeared unhurt as he inched along the lip of the dirt mound that the Lifter had plowed into the ground when it flipped. She glanced at the Lifter and realized she was staring at the roof of the vehicle, and lethal projectiles were slamming into the bottom of the Lifter and not penetrating.

“Dragon Armor protects the bottom! It is why we are not now in pieces scattered back to our home.” Nalar shouted with a grin as he got the SA80 charged. “We are safe right now.”

“They attacked us!” Las'elh shouted as she confidently yanked the K14 from the holster on her calf. “They know who we are!”

Anton ducked back down, his shoulder brushing against her as his large hands began to expertly change the hundred round magazines of the two K14s. “That’s possible.” He shouted. “However, more than likely, this Evolli got greedy!”

Cihera rolled back now as well. “*Nubous ronnus!*” She screamed out as puffs of shells hitting the dirt near her caused her to duck back behind the Lifter. “I hate Kochab! Nalar!”

Nalar didn’t hesitate and tossed her the heavier SA80 as she threw the Kochab rifle at him. “Full load!” He barked. “Our people our moving into position!”

“Look out!” Las'elh screamed as she saw the Evolli head lift above the boulder behind them only ten meters away. She didn’t hesitate and lifted the K14, ripping out five rounds in quick succession. The last of her rounds caught the Evolli in the top of the head a glancing blow that spun him around and flung him into the open. Idafi lifted his SA80 and the heavier sound of that weapon joined the chorus, stitching the Evolli from groin to neck and blasting him into ragged pieces. Las'elh came to one knee as another Evolli came charging around the boulder and she didn’t hesitate. She fired three more quick rounds, each of the Kinetic Magnum rounds punching into the Evolli’s chest center mass. The rounds staggered him at first and then the last one tossed his body back physically, slamming him into the boulder, most of his chest and back gone. Evolli blood stained the gray colored rock as he slumped to the dirt dead before his body hit the ground completely.

They heard screaming and Las'elh turned just as two Kochab burst around the side of the damaged Lifter lifting their weapons. She watched wide eyed as Anton lifted the K14 in his left hand and without even looking he fired four times. The heads of the two Kochab mercenaries blew apart as Anton returned to his knees and began firing once more back at the mining facility. Las'elh turned her head back and saw Cihera looking at her. Those amber eyes were vividly bright and gazing at her with amusement.

“He is such a show off!” She yelled. “He smelled their foul stench before they came around the side!”

Las'elh gazed at her stunned at the almost careless way they were acting. Projectile rounds were punching into the armored belly of the overturned Lifter, any one of them able to kill them with a single round, and Cihera was making jokes. Who were these men and women who were carrying on as if this attack was the most natural thing in the world to them? Las'elh waited until Cihera had turned back around the side before lifting her head higher. She inched up as rounds impacted the Lifter and caused her to flinch. She got far enough up on one knee that she was able to gaze through the now shattered windshield of the Lifter. The majority of the return fire was coming from their front, from inside the entrance to the mining facility it looked like. She could count eight dead bodies scattered in front of the Lifter, no doubt the work of Anton and Cihera.

Las'elh felt Nalar grab her leg and she ducked back down. He held out the small COM unit to her. “Put this in!” He screamed over the din of the weapons fire. “Our people are getting ready to assault from the opposite side!”

Las'elh snatched the COM unit and shoved the ear piece into her elven ear. It slid in easily, designed as it was for the four inch high ears of full blooded elves. When she stuffed the small box like object into her jumpsuit pocket the COM unit came alive with voices. Calm and very controlled voices.

“Nine targets!”

“Four upper! Five lower!”

“No sign of the Evolli lard ass Leader!”

“Fucker thought we would bring Gravork with us!” Cihera’s anger filled voice came across the COM. “Stupid sonofabitch!”

“Good bet! Standard ambush positions! Fucking amateurs! Armetus would be pissed off to see these idiots in action!”

“Request permission to engage!”

“Execute!” Anton’s voice echoed now. “Bring us a prisoner!”

“Nine minus one! Affirmative!”

“Engaging now!”

Las’elh heard the deep throated buzz of the deadly Spartan 190. There weren’t many who did not know that sound. The weapon was a rare find in The Wilds, but it was available on the Black Market she knew. And impossibly expensive. As she lifted her head once more, her blue eyes detected two Evolli turn at that moment to something behind them. She saw fine red mist explosions from their chests and then their bodies were blown backwards out the remains of the windows they were standing in front of.

“Engaging! Lower level!” The new voice spoke. “One down! Moving!”

“Engaging lower level! Two down! Continuing sweep!”

“Three down upper!”

“One down upper! Shit... I got too close on that one. He vented all over my uniform! Fucking Kochab bastard!”

Cihera had rolled back around and was resting beside Las’elh, the back of her thigh pressed into Cihera’s shoulder as Las’elh watched from her position with wide eyes. “Nalar... your head!” Cihera spoke.

Nalar waved at her. “It is nothing!”

Idafi moved quickly up beside his father. “Don’t move father! It’s deep!”

“Lower level! Engaging! One down!”

“Rabbit! Rabbit!” The voice declared. “Coming right at you Anton!”

Las’elh saw the Evolli burst from within the mining facility, no weapon in his hand as he ran. He was running right for where they were and Las’elh couldn’t shake the thought of how incredibly stupid that was. Her blue eyes cut left as she saw Anton rise quickly to his feet, the extended *Nehtes* appearing in his hand like magic and he threw it with every ounce of Spartan strength in his body. Las’elh couldn’t track the spear itself, but she saw the nine foot length of killing power strike the Evolli in the upper right side of his chest with such force it threw him back nearly five meters. The spearhead of the *Nehtes* embedded into the pile of twisted metal and dilapidated soft framework of what appeared to have been a crane of some sort once. The Evolli’s grunt and cry of pain split the air with a piercing sound causing Las’elh to flinch.

“Clear upper!” Sounded in her ear piece.

“Clear lower!”

“Full sweep!” Nalar barked out as he pushed his son away and climbed to his feet. “We have our prisoner! Anyone left alive is sanctioned! Terminate with prejudice!”

“Affirmative!”

“Roger!”

Las’elh turned as Cihera climbed slowly to her feet, her amber eyes sweeping the area around them. Her shimmering white hair was splotted with dirt and grease from the rear of the Lifter, but she was otherwise unhurt. She too climbed to her feet, her blue eyes looking around as she saw flashes of black clad apparitions within the windows of the mining facility in front of them. She turned back to Cihera.

“Who are they?” She asked.

Cihera met her eyes. “A mixture of Drow and human soldiers.” She replied quickly. “We call them a MUTT Squad because they have chosen to live and work together. They have been trained by Queen Aihola and several senior Drow Instructors. Each Drow settlement in The Wilds has such a unit within calling distance if it is needed. Today it was needed.” Cihera saw Anton had reached the struggling and completely impaled Evolli and she grabbed Las’elh’s hand. “Come... we will find out why they suddenly attacked us.”

Anton stepped up to the amphibian looking Evolli, his wolf eyes now very prominent. He had holstered one K14, but held the second in his left hand. He reached up quickly and took hold of the shaft of the *Nehtes* causing the Evolli to howl in pain.

“You made a mistake today Evolli scum!” He snarled. “Why did you attack us? We were coming for a meeting with your leader! To provide him information!”

“I... I will tell you nothing!” The Evolli screamed.

Anton lifted the K14 in one smooth motion and fired point blank into the Evolli’s thin leg. At such close range the Kinetic Magnum round blasted through his entire leg, shattering bone and shredding flesh. His

bulbous eyes nearly exploded from his head in unimaginable pain and his screamed echoed through the small valley as Cihera, Las'elh and Nalar approached. Las'elh looked at the Evolli, his leg now dangling by a few strips of flesh.

"Tell me what I want to know scum and I will see to it you are healed!" Anton shouted. "Tell me now... or I will shoot off your other leg and leave you to bleed to death where you are!"

"We... we wanted Gravork!" He bellowed. "We knew you had him! Told... told to take him from you!"

"And how were you to do that?" Cihera asked savagely.

"Take... take you alive! Find out where!" The Evolli stuttered now.

"How do you know we had him?" Anton spoke.

"Bontick knew! Bontick knew!"

"This is your leader?" Cihera asked.

The Evolli nodded. "Yes... Bontick!"

"And where is your precious leader now since it appears he is not here?" Nalar snarled.

"Spaceport! Waiting... waiting for us..."

"How did Bontick know?" Anton shouted.

The Evolli shook his head. "I don't know! I don't know!"

"Then you are no longer any good to us!" Cihera said coldly.

Anton lifted the K14 and fired once more, the round punching through the Evolli's head and splashing blood and brain matter over the twisted scrap of metal behind him. He reached forward and ripped the Nehtes free and turned to face a stunned Las'elh and Cihera as the headless body dropped to the dirt.

"Now we have a name." He said.

Nalar nodded. "I will redeploy the MUTT Squad to the spaceport." He spoke. "Then I will contact Malia and tell her to pack up and meet us there. It's time to leave this foul world."

Las'elh looked at him as he turned and headed off. Her eyes went back to Anton and Cihera who had stepped close to one another. Anton was nuzzling her neck and cheek gently and Las'elh watched as the pent up adrenalin began to bleed off of both of them. At least for now.

"Anton... Cihera? Why is he getting ready to pull your entire operation off Nebonese?" Las'elh asked.

"This Bontick knew we had Gravork." Anton spoke softly looking at his wife.

Las'elh nodded. "Yes... so?"

Anton and Cihera both looked at her. "Only one person knew we had Gravork Las'elh." Cihera said.

Las'elh's eyes widened. "Are you saying Armetus is a traitor?" She gasped.

"Armetus? A traitor?" Anton laughed. "No Las'elh... Armetus is no traitor. He is the only one we told that we had Gravork."

"But then how..." Las'elh stopped talking and looked at them her eyes wide. "He was already being watched." She said finally.

Cihera smiled and stepped up to her quickly. Las'elh had no chance to stop her, and given how she reacted, she probably wouldn't have tried. Cihera's lips came down on hers and among the blood and death all around them; Cihera laid a sizzling kiss on the shorter Las'elh. It was a kiss that had Las'elh's nerves screaming out within seconds as Cihera pulled her lush body closer to her own lean muscular frame, their breasts mashing together and Cihera's hands holding her head tightly. Las'elh, quite unlike herself, moaned deeply into the kiss and even reached up slightly to grasp Cihera's waist pulling her closer.

Cihera pulled back just as suddenly and stared at Las'elh's wide blue eyes while Anton looked on with a smirk. "Yes Las'elh... he was already being watched on Talbor Seven. Which means someone else knows we have Gravork as well. That is why we need this Bontick. We will continue this later Las'elh... I guarantee you that. Your lips are very inviting."

Las'elh could only nod her head in agreement mesmerized by those amber eyes as she was, her mind saying no, her body all but surrendering right there to this taller and very confident Drow warrior woman.

Anton chuckled. "Ok!" He bellowed. "Let's get to the spaceport shall we! We have no time for these intimate moments between lovers! All this killing and shooting has made me hungry and I want to secure this Bontick fool before I enjoy my next meal!"

Cihera smiled at Las'elh and squeezed her hand. "Come... before we have to listen to my husband gloat any further at what a perfect specimen of a man he is."

Anton shrugged. “Hey... it runs in the blood! I’m only stating the obvious.”

Cihera looked at him. “Perhaps I should have married Moneus.” She said with a grin. “He is humble at least.”

Anton watched her with wide dark eyes as she pulled Las’elh towards the destroyed Lifter. “Hey C... you don’t mean that do you?” Anton asked as he pursued them.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

SPARTAN GALACTIC COURT

“...would like to apologize for taking the extra time we needed to make a ruling on the Kavalian Federation’s Petition before this body. We felt it needed our undivided attention and further investigation given the level of importance.” Chief Magistrate Sel’ke spoke.

The court gallery was once more filled to near overflowing, many of the gathered men and women members of one Netnews Channel or another. For’mya sat with Deia and in quite the surprise to everyone who entered the gallery this morning, Andro and Sadi sat with them as well. Sadi was wearing a standard Union flight suit with her long blond hair cascading around her face, while Andro wore his customary ArmorPly with crimson colored shoulders. Jiss and Matuarr sat at the similar table to their left, Karun, Qurot and Timur sitting in the gallery behind them.

“On behalf of my fellow Magistrates I would first like to say that we view the intricacies of this Petition very seriously, however Lycavorian Union law is quite clear in this regard and this Galactic Court can not overrule Lycavorian Union law. We feel the circumstances behind Lisisa Leonidas being adopted by King Leonidas twenty-five years ago should have been made public knowledge, as well as her heritage and bloodline, however we do understand the reasons behind the King not being as forthcoming as he should have been.” Sel’ke looked directly at Deia and For’mya when he spoke now. “The Lycavorian Union has come far in the last several centuries in terms of acceptance of ones background and history, and our own Queen Isabella is the foremost example of this. She is a pureblood vampire and an honored Queen of this Union, something that I’m quite sure a thousand years ago would never have been accepted given the history between our two species.”

Deia nodded her head calmly. “I don’t disagree with that assessment Chief Magistrate.” She said.

Sel’ke nodded in return. “That being said... as I stated... Lycavorian Union law is quite clear. We have reviewed the security tapes from twenty-five years ago. This was the last time that Marshall Pusintin was...”

Jiss came to his feet. “You mean Marshall Pleistarchus don’t you your honors.” He said quickly. “He is also a son of King Leonidas the First and grandson to King Resumar, the founder of your Union. The oldest son I might add.”

Sel’ke turned to look at him now, his elven ears appearing to lay back along his head in anger. “No... I mean Marshall Pusintin of the Kavalian Federation.” He said in reply. “The man you refer to as Pleistarchus was a son of King Leonidas the First, yes. He was a King of this very city we now reside in Legislature Jiss, and Spartan Historical records indicate that King Pleistarchus died in 458 B.C. of Earth time. The statue honoring his rule resides on King’s row not a kilometer from here.”

This information caused Karun to sit up and look at the man intently. This was not something he had known or had been told.

“The man you refer to may be a Lycavorian by birth, however he is not Pleistarchus. He ceased being Pleistarchus the day he chose to depart Earth and become a Kavalian citizen, no matter the reasons behind that decision. Lycavorian Union records are meticulously kept in this regard Legislature Jiss; Spartan records even more so surprisingly. Governor Panos of Sparta was very forthcoming in allowing this body access to the Spartan Historical Archives, many of the documents still hand written and thousands of years old, and this entire court body is in full agreement. King Pleistarchus died in battle with the High Coven. Marshall Pusintin may be this same man, all facts lead to that undeniable truth; however he has no claim to that name anymore by his very own actions throughout the years no matter his status as first born.”

“I protest this! It...” Matuarr came to his feet.

“You may protest it as much as you like.” Sel’ke said calmly. “It will not change the true facts, nor will it have a bearing on the decision this body has made.” His gaze was steady as he looked at them. “Now... would you like to hear that decision?”

Jiss held out his hand to Matuarr and motioned him back into his chair. “Certainly Chief Magistrate.” He said finally.

Sel’ke nodded his head. “Good. As I was saying... we reviewed nine different security tapes of the last day *Marshall Pusintin* came to Earth and Sparta. What we saw was disturbing to say the least. Though many of us have heard of what happened that day; we have never seen actual security footage of it however. Marshall Pusintin made scant reference to Lisisa Leonidas that day, never by name and most certainly not in a way one would expect a father to react concerning his daughter if he was interested in a relationship with that same daughter. He did however attempt to kill Lady Gorgo if my understanding is accurate and was stopped by King Leonidas the Second, his brother, before he accomplished this vile act.” He turned and accepted the data pad from the Hadarian Magistrate Galia. “We will not begin to address nor bring up the grievous nature of this attempted crime, for by order of King Leonidas the Second, signed just six months after the events of that day, any and all crimes committed by this man have been pardoned in full. And it is also my understanding that decision was not greeted with much support. It is something he did despite what others were telling him.”

This knowledge struck Karun like a sledgehammer blow and his head turned quickly to where Androcles sat. He was surprised to see those azure colored eyes looking at him intently.

“While the medical records were sealed twenty-five years ago, I have Queen Anja’s official medical report right here. It was discovered as they were returning from the mission to Lycavore who Lisisa Leonidas’s true father was. Queen Anja’s medical scans only confirmed what King Leonidas’s extraordinarily keen sense of smell had already told him. He authorized the release of these records to us by the way, exactly six minutes after the request was presented to him.

“Now... exactly three weeks after the events of that day here in Sparta, King Leonidas officially adopted Lisisa Leonidas. Those records were also sealed, and we have them as well. They were sealed because of the circumstances leading up to her returning to Earth, and the possible security concerns given who her mother is. Marshall Pusintin has not made a single attempt in the last quarter century to pursue her, or contact her in any fashion. Nor had he made any attempt in this regard in the preceding four hundred plus years of her life that you have presented or we could find. Anywhere. Lisisa Leonidas was conceived due to a vicious crime that Marshall Pusintin committed while here on Earth as a member of the Kavalian military. A crime that is regarded by the Lycavorians as among the most heinous crimes one could commit. In essence he showed no interest in what his actions could bear, nor did he show any interest in establishing any sort of relationship with his daughter after discovering she existed. He gave up those rights the day he dismissed her existence here on Earth and chose instead to fight his very own brother. A brother I might add, that spared his life and the lives of every Kavalian soldier and individual on Earth at that time. All of them being held on Espionage charges at the time. Union law dictates that anyone held on espionage charges to be executed immediately upon conviction.

“Given all that information... this body unequivocally denies Part One of your Petition to force Kavalian citizenship upon Lisisa Leonidas based on who her father is. There is no legal basis for such a claim that we have found within Section Thirteen, Paragraph Four of the Lycavorian Union Constitution, nor within the Laws of Compliance for non Union members. And there is nothing in the Petition you have filed to provide anymore information than what we have now.” Sel’ke told him.

“Had he made such an attempt your honors, there is little doubt he would have been scorned at best and killed at worst for entering Union space.” Jiss spoke. “That is also an undeniable truth.”

Sel’ke nodded. “That may well be true, however, you can not just suddenly decide to become a father to a child of your blood when it suits you or your agenda if you have had no contact or interest in that child for the previous five hundred years of their life. I will not begin to weigh into the equation of what Princess Lisisa endured through the years before being discovered on Lycavore. Lisisa Leonidas is an active and respected citizen of the Lycavorian Union and is a recognized Princess of the Union, duly confirmed and all records support this fact. As Prime Minister Deia stated when we were here last, Princess Lisisa and Prince Denali were just recently mated, which once again according to Lycavorian Union law establishes the precedent.” Sel’ke spoke. “Therefore Part Three of your Petition is also null and void.”

“And you wish us to believe this was not done to counter this petition in some way?” Jiss demanded.

The Hadarian Magistrate Galia leaned forward now. "I examined Lisisa Leonidas myself Legislature Jiss. She willingly submitted to blood and tissue scans by members of my personal staff, as well as a full medical examination. Because she is half vampire her body and her blood retains the source DNA code for those she has been intimate with recently. In fact, it is retained in her blood for several months based on what we now know. The only source code I found in her blood was that of Denali Leonidas and given the levels that I found, it indicates a physical relationship that has been ongoing for at least two years, probably more. You may believe what you wish, but the medical data is without question. We would be more than happy to make the results available to you if you wish."

"We would prefer an actual copy of the examine itself and all materials relating to it, as well as her medical records, to confirm your results with past examines." Jiss spoke quickly.

"With respects Magistrates..." Deia spoke coming to her feet, holding out her hand to For'mya to keep her from standing. "Lisisa is a member of the Royal family and they would strongly denounce this action were it to take place. I see no plausible reason why a copy of the medical examine and related materials be handed over to Legislature Jiss. Princess Lisisa volunteered to undergo that examine in an effort to speed this process to conclusion. That does not give the Kavalian Delegation the right to her complete medical records."

Galia nodded her head and looked at Sel'ke. "I concur with the Prime Minister. The results will be made available to Legislature Jiss... but complete medical records are not called for and nor will they be surrendered."

Sel'ke nodded. "So noted." He turned and waited for Jiss to respond and when he didn't he continued. "Part Four of your Petition we already gave our answer to you, and I will only reaffirm it now. Dragons are considered sentient lifeforms with the Lycavorian Union, and the Dragon Elder Mother occupies a seat on the Union Senate. They are not considered property in any way, shape or form, therefore that part of your Petition is also denied.

"Parts five and six of your Petition relate directly to Marshall Pusintin having allegedly arranged a marriage between Lisisa and a member of the Kavalian military. While she may hold Kavalian citizenship in your eyes and the eyes of Marshall Pusintin and your people, she does not recognize that citizenship, and neither does this Galactic Body. She holds Union citizenship and has now become the wife and mate of Prince Denali Leonidas. I sincerely hope you do not expect this body to rule in favor of Parts Five and Six of your Petition Legislature Jiss. That will not happen. The Galactic Court is not going to tell Princess Lisisa that she needs to dissolve her union with Prince Denali because the father she has never seen supposedly arranged a marriage between her and an officer in your military. We would look like fools, not to mention she would most likely tell us what we could do with our decision, and given her closeness with the King and Queen Anja, she would do so in much more colorful terms than I am laying out to you right now."

This caused Andro to chuckle out loud and many eyes turned to look at him as he leaned close to For'mya and whispered into her ear. Sadi also had a smile on her face and was holding Andro's hand tightly within hers. Qurot and Timur glared at Andro from the gallery with rage in their eyes.

"Now... Part Two of your Petition relates to the search and the seizure of any property known to be owned by Lisisa Leonidas. Given the fact that she is also deemed a citizen of the Kavalian Federation because of whom her father is, and whether she or this court recognizes it or not, this Galactic body must by definition distinguish that fact in some format. In the interests of continuing the gains made recently in relations between the Kavalian Federation and the Lycavorian Union, this body has decided to rule in favor of Part Two of your petition. In that regard only and in accordance with Kavalian laws and customs. This is not an overall ruling as we have made perfectly clear, but a ruling towards one part of the complete Kavalian Petition. That being said... we do hereby order that any property or items belonging to Lisisa Leonidas, not received by her as gifts and prior to the filing of Legislature Jiss's petition, be surrendered to the Kavalian Delegation, and that her villa in Gytheio be subject to immediate search and subsequent seizure of said items. We also order that her Royal apartment within the Royal Estate grounds be made available for immediate inspection in accordance with this ruling and any location she may have frequented where she may have items stored, to include the homes and villas of her brothers and sisters. This action will be coordinated and supervised by the *Durcunusaan* as needed and directed." Sel'ke stopped talking and looked at Deia who was still standing. "Prime Minister Deia...?"

All eyes turned to Deia as she shifted her feet on the floor. "On behalf of the King and the Lycavorian Union, we will grudgingly accept your ruling Chief Magistrate." She stated evenly. "Though I will inform you

that the villa Lisisa owned in Gytheio has been sold. I can produce the transaction details for that if it is needed.”

“Then where does she live now?” Timur demanded from the gallery his voice harsh and not at all respectful.

“She lives with her mate Denali Leonidas, as is usually the case when that happens.” Deia replied as if Timur had asked the stupidest of questions.

Sel’ke’s eyes turned to For’mya. “Queen For’mya?”

For’mya stood up now. “On behalf of Martin Leonidas, my fellow Queens of the Union and our younger children, I would first like to say we honor and respect this Galactic Body and fully support its rulings. We will adhere to this court’s ruling and consent to the inspection of Lisisa’s apartment on the Royal Estate with *Durcunusaan* supervision only. They will escort whoever the Kavalian Delegation dictates, no more than three individuals, directly from the main gate to Lisisa’s apartment and back when they are complete. And this inspection will be of Lisisa’s apartment *only*. We will allow no other access anywhere on the estate. Any breach of this permission and the *Durcunusaan* will immediately remove any members of the Kavalian delegation from Royal Villa grounds and the offer will be withdrawn.”

“I object!” Jiss spoke up as he came to his feet.

Sel’ke looked at him. “What is it that you object to Legislature Jiss? We are granting this Part of your Petition.”

“We protest the supervision, as Queen For’mya refers to it, of the *Durcunusaan*. We feel that this will impede our ability to act within our laws.” Jiss said evenly. “As well as limiting our search to just her apartment. The ruling on Part Two of our Petition should include the entire Estate and all facilities therein.”

Sel’ke looked at him shocked as loud murmurs swept through the gallery at this brazen disrespect of the Royal family.

“You must be joking.” He said after a moment to gather his thoughts. “Having agents of a non-Union government search the Lycavorian King’s Royal Estate? His home and the home of his Queens and children?” Sel’ke shook his head. “That is not something this body would even consider Legislature Jiss. Your search has no basis for legality outside the confines of Lisisa Leonidas’s apartment, and the only reason we are allowing that is to further relations between our governments and to show that we desire peace and co-habitation and that we respect your laws as well as our own. The *Durcunusaan* will insure that the privacy of the Royal family is maintained. And you forget... we are a Galactic Court Body, and we have to adhere to the individual laws of each member world. No court within this Union will grant you unfettered access to search the Royal Estate either here in Sparta or on Apo Prime as if the King is some sort of common criminal. And before you ask, the Palace on Apo Prime will not be included in your Petition. It goes to the openness of the Leonidas family that you have been granted what you have so far. They could have just as easily told us they would not have adhered to our ruling. Would you allow agents of the Union government to search the Kavalian Prefect’s home and property in similar circumstances?”

“Certainly not!” Jiss replied indignantly. “However a situation like this would never be called into question within the Kavalian Federation.”

Sel’ke nodded. “We are not the Kavalian Federation Legislature Jiss. The *Durcunusaan* are charged with the protection of the Royal Family and everything that falls within their realm of influence, and they have done this since their inception. That includes the Royal Estate here in Sparta.” Sel’ke spoke. “Are you now saying that you will forgo this action because you will not have free reign within their home?”

“No your honors... we do however feel with the supervision of the *Durcunusaan* we will not be afforded the proper leeway to follow our own laws.” Jiss spoke.

“What law would that be?” Andro’s voice boomed out causing all heads to turn to him.

Jiss glared at him. “The Kavalian Laws of Possession and Property.” He spat.

“You mean the law that allows you to take what does not belong to you.” Andro spoke. “That law?”

Jiss turned back to Sel’ke. “Who is this upstart that he is allowed to sit with the Queen and Prime Minister and address me and this court so casually?”

“He is Crown Prince Androcles Leonidas Legislature Jiss. He and Crown Princess Sadi have just recently returned from a very quiet marriage vacation in the southern hemisphere of Earth. They decided to come to today’s proceedings to lend support to Queen For’mya and myself, and see that the rights of the

Prince's siblings were looked after." Deia spoke turning to look at him. "And he needs neither your permission nor this court's to go where he will. But then you already knew that didn't you? And for a senior diplomat from a foreign government Legislature Jiss, you tread very closely to open disrespect of a member of our Royal family."

"I would like to lodge a formal complaint in this regards." Jiss spoke quickly. "The presence of Prince Androcles has influenced these proceedings."

Sel'ke snorted. "The presence of Prince Androcles was not known to this body until, like you, we came out into this court room. The supervision of the *Durcunusaan* is something you will have to accept Legislature Jiss." Sel'ke told him. "And your compliant will be noted." He turned back to For'mya. "Queen For'mya... do you have anything else?"

For'mya nodded. "Yes Chief Magistrate..." She replied holding up four data pads in her slim fingered hand. "While my fellow Queens and I along with Martin Leonidas can speak for our younger children, we can not however speak for the older ones. It is well known that all of our older children own villas within Sparta's port city of Gytheio, and we anticipated your ruling, at least to some degree. We can not however dictate to them what they will do; they will follow their own hearts and conscious. Normya and Zarah Leonidas live together and both have authority to respond to your order. I have Zarah's signed acceptance of your directive here. Eliani Leonidas and Nyla Sinthe have also agreed since they own their villa together. I suggest whatever search that is conducted of their home be done so quickly however."

"Why is that?" Galia asked. She was Hadarian after all and she was very interested in the recognized heir to the Hadarian throne.

"We were informed very early this morning that Eliani and Nyla have been claimed and now mated with Star Commander Malic, the most recent addition to *Mjolnir's Hand*. They will begin the process to have their personal holdings combined with that of their new mate and husband within the next few days. Eliani and Nyla also informed me that Malic will not allow such a search to occur when the paperwork is completed. He is a very private young man and has expressed to them distaste for what is happening in regards to Lisisa." For'mya could hear the whirring of the holo feed drones in the back of the room.

"As you all know our daughter Carina Simpson just recently became the wife and mate to Moneus Simpson, and their holdings have been combined already. Moneus and Carina have agreed to such a search with one of them being present as well as the *Durcunusaan*." For'mya set the last of the four data pads on the table and reached for three more. "Our son Arrarn has consented to such a search, as well as our son Resumar as long as the *Durcunusaan* is present. I present their signed orders as well. Unfortunately... Denali will not consent to the search of the villa he just recently purchased as a marriage gift to Lisisa. His words to me were that Lisisa is his mate and wife and he will allow no one to violate the sanctity of that union and he would be remiss in his duty to her as her mate and husband if he allowed this."

"He realizes of course we could very well bring charges against him?" Sel'ke asked.

For'mya nodded. "Yes... he understands that. He believes you will do what you must, but his answer will not change. It is a matter of honor with him."

"We will address this in chambers at a later time and we will advise Prince Denali of our decision." Sel'ke said. He and his fellow judges had already expected this and they had decided they would in no way pursue this. The calm from the Netnews reporters also told Sel'ke this was not unexpected. "I can only assume then that the Crown Prince and Princess are here in regards to this as well?" Sel'ke asked knowing that the only reason for Andro and Sadi to be present would be to address this issue, not to lend support to two women who were some of the finest politicians in the Union.

For'mya smiled and motioned to Sadi. "I believe Sadi will address what hers and Andro's decision is Chief Magistrate."

Sel'ke nodded. "Very well... this body recognizes the Crown Princess Sadi Leonidas. We welcome you Princess. I would hope these last weeks since your mating ceremony have been pleasant?"

Sadi got to her feet slowly, squeezing Andro's hand as she rose even while the Netnews holo drones closed in around her and reporters became hushed and pressed forward.

"Thank you Chief Magistrate, and yes... these last weeks have been more than pleasant." She answered turning to give Andro a bright, dazzling smile with a devilish twinkle to her eyes. "Androcles and I come here

before you today since the end of our vacation and his duties found us within Sparta this morning. We felt one of us should respond to your ruling in person if you decided in the fashion that you have.”

Sel’ke nodded. “Of course.” He said.

“It is our decision alone and in no way reflects upon the rest of our family members and their decisions.” Sadi spoke evenly. “Androcles, I and Elynth, who is also a member of our family, we have made this decision based on our own personal feelings and convictions.”

“We fully understand and recognize Elynth, daughter of Torma and Isheeni, as Prince Androcles’s bonded dragon sister.” Sel’ke said.

“At this time Chief Magistrate... nor at any time in the future will we allow the Kavalian Federation, its personnel, or agents access to our home in Gytheio.” Sadi spoke clearly. “We feel it is inappropriate for members of the Kavalian Federation, no matter whether it is done in the auspice of good will or not, to be allowed to inspect where we live and essentially invade upon our privacy for the sake of political gain. We sincerely apologize to this body... but we will not acknowledge your ruling and we will not adhere to it in any way.”

The court room practically exploded with noise as reporters pressed closer around where Sadi stood and Andro sat, and the holo drones whirred on mindlessly doing their jobs and feeding the images they were taking to billions of species across the Union. Sel’ke lifted the silver rod and banged it on the large bench producing a loud ringing.

“There will be calm in this hall!” He bellowed out, surprising many who did not expect such a deep voice from an elf. He waited for several moments before turning back to Sadi and meeting her steady gaze. “You do realize Princess Sadi that we have the authority to force this issue further?” Sel’ke said.

Sadi nodded. “Yes... and if you feel that is what you need to do... then by all means go ahead. As it stands right now... any attempt made to breach the defenses of Cranae Island and our villa there, aside from those that we consider family and friends, will be considered hostile and the security apparatus that we have in place will respond accordingly.”

“Princess Sadi... is that a threat?” Galia asked now leaning forward once more a look of shock on her face.

Sadi shook her head quickly. “Not at all Magistrate Galia. It is a simply a statement of fact.”

Sel’ke looked at Andro who sat calmly, looking around at all the commotion that Sadi’s announcement had caused with an amused expression on his face. “Prince Androcles?” He spoke now.

Andro turned back to look at him. “Chief Magistrate?” He answered coming to his feet next to Sadi.

“Is this decision spoken by Princess Sadi also your decision as well Milord?” Sel’ke asked.

Andro looked at him confused for a moment. “Forgive me Chief Magistrate; was there something Sadi said that was not clear in any way?”

“No... she was very clear in her statement?” Sel’ke answered. “Exceptionally clear and blunt I might add.”

“Then why do you question me your Honor?” He spoke candidly but with the utmost respectful tone. “Sadi and I are *Anomes*. We speak with one voice.”

“I just want to make sure you understand what you are doing?” Sel’ke asked.

“I understand this Chief Magistrate...” Andro said. He ignored Deia who turned to look at him and shook her head quickly in an attempt to have him stop before he began what she knew he was going to say. He was like his father in that regard, and like his father, Deia failed in getting him to hold his tongue more often than not. For’mya simply shook her head politely with a small smile on her face knowing when Andro made up his mind in regards to something, there was little that would change it.

“I understand that for the twenty-six years of my life, Lisisa has been my sister. I have called her nothing else, thought about her in no other way than as my sister. I will not be party to any ruling, whether man made or handed down by the gods, that calls that into question. Nor will I be party to a ruling that invades upon the privacy of my family simply to advance the political notion of fairness as Sadi has already explained to you. I don’t care if her father is Marshall Pusintin, Marshall Pleistarchus or some masterful leader or tyrant from another universe, call him what you will. Lisisa is my sister, and while I support my brothers and sisters fully in their individual decisions but that does not mean that I will do the same. That is what I understand sir.” Andro spoke.

“We are not calling into question Lisisa’s status as a Leonidas or a member of the Royal family Prince Androcles.” The Algolian Magistrate spoke for the first time as he leaned forward in his chair.

Andro’s eyes moved to him. “That’s what this whole proceeding is about isn’t it?” He said. “That is why it was begun. You have acknowledged yourselves right here in this very courtroom that there is no basis for the Kavalian Federation claims in regards to my sister.”

“Yes we have.” The Algolian answered.

“If that is your ruling... why are you allowing them to conduct searches of my families’ homes to advance the political gains made by a simple trade agreement?” Andro said. “If the Kavalian Federation wishes to advance whatever was gained by this trade agreement we have recently signed, then perhaps they should go about it in ways similar to everyone else who wishes such things. Without veiled threats and the use of subtly worded threats and coercion.”

“Chief Magistrate...” Jiss shouted. “I must strongly protest this... this attack against my government, my people and our very laws and culture.”

Andro turned his head to look at Jiss and he chuckled gently before turning back to Sel’ke. “Sadi, Elynth and I made this decision.” He stated. “I know my sister Lisisa, and even though she may not outwardly show it, she abhors this type of politically driven *sibfla* just as much if not more than I do.”

“Androcles Leonidas... your language!” Deia barked showing real anger in her face. Anger that bounced off her nephew.

“My brothers and sisters do what they do because they wish to make this whole thing go away so that my sister and brother can get on with their lives. I love them for that. I will be the one that speaks to what is in Lisisa and Denali’s hearts however, and while they may not be able to publicly mention or display what they feel in regards to this situation, I will do it for them.” Andro took Sadi’s hand, leaned over and kissed For’mya’s cheek and then looked back to Sel’ke. “Our decision stands... and this honorable court my do what they feel is right. Just as I am doing.” Andro bowed his head slightly. “Good day Magistrates... may you walk in the shadow of the gods.”

Andro spun around and he and Sadi marched out of the courtroom with the Netnews reporters practically drooling in their chairs as they turned to face the Galactic Court body.

“Your honors...” Deia spoke quickly. “If you will allow me the time to speak with Prince Androcles I’m sure some arrangement can be reached. I...”

“We will recess for two days to discuss these events!” Sel’ke blurted. “The rest of our ruling stands and will be complied with!” He banged the gavel on the table and rose to his feet. “We are adjourned for today.”

“...that level of drama needed Andro?” For’mya asked him as they stood outside the courtroom. “We are trying to at least please the Kavalian fools, and actions such as yours do not help with that.”

They stood near the entrance to the courtroom, the *Durcunusaan* holding back the mob of reporters at a respectful distance. Some of them could be seen interviewing Jiss and Matuarr while Qurot and the others looked on with stern faces. Elynth and Aurith rested on the ground next to them flicking their tails at one another. They were sisters, and along with Jeth made up the first of the three clutches of eggs that Isheeni and Torma had brought into this world. They had a special relationship and were very close as dragon sisters went, both of them fighting the assassins sent after For’mya and Andro when they were less than a year old, something unheard of in the annals of dragon lore and history.

Andro smiled as he leaned over and nuzzled his second elven mother affectionately. “I realize that mother... I will not conform to how the Kavalians want us to act however. I only did what my heart and conscious told me to do, and what I know everyone else in my family wanted to do. Besides... if our entire family rolled over and bowed to their every whim they would suspect something right away.”

For’mya nodded. “You are correct in that regard, but you are the Crown Prince. Deia is beside herself you know.” For’mya said. “You should have told her what you and Sadi were planning.”

“If we had done that then the level of her reaction would have been muted.” Sadi spoke in reply. “Better that she looked as she did. Completely surprised.”

For’mya looked at her. “His more devious tendencies are rubbing off on you Sadi.” She said with a grin. Sadi nodded and pressed up against Andro’s side. “I know... and it feels wonderful.”

For'mya laughed and took her hand squeezing it. "It is probably good that you made your appearance now." She said. "How long will you stay?"

Andro shrugged. "A day or two at least." He answered. "Enough to make sure that the Kavalians do not suspect we are doing anything behind their backs. They have not reacted to Yuri being back in Sparta I take it?"

For'mya shook her head. "Not outwardly, but with Vollenth not at her side, it is a large signal that wherever the Coven dragons are, they are not here. That façade is at least holding up quite well."

"And the clone of the woman that father and Uncle Daniel fought with... this Julie?" Andro asked.

"She is being watched." For'mya stated. "Carefully. Two of Lynwe's Drow are tailing her wherever she goes."

"They are using the new technology to enhance their natural skills?" Andro asked.

For'mya nodded. "The first group to graduate the Advanced Training, yes." She said. "Lynwe and Aihola were very pleased with the results. Your father already had them tasked to watching the Kavalian embassy once it was established and it was a small matter for Lynwe to assign two more to this clone from those already here in Sparta. Aricia and Bella made contact with the High Coven insurgent group, and they should be back in three days. Your father and Anja will return hopefully by the end of the week. One can never tell with the Hadarian Elders. They can be even more infuriating than elven ministers at times."

"Mother... why is Res remaining here in Sparta?" Andro asked. "We could certainly use his help at SODRAG."

For'mya looked at him. "It is complicated." She said. "He is involved with something that is... it is sensitive right now."

Andro looked at Sadi and then back to For'mya. "Father has him doing something with the Kavalians?"

For'mya shook her head. "No... no your father doesn't know what Resumar is doing right now." She said.

"Why do I get the feeling that father would not approve from the tone of your voice." Andro spoke.

For'mya met his eyes. "I don't... to be honest I don't know how your father would react. I know that your mothers and I with the exception of Dysea have seen his commitment and dedication and we approve. And I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Dysea senses something and just has not said anything yet. Resumar is from within her, and she has always been able to sense his moods and such. The same with Normya. Just remember that he loves you Andro. All of you."

Andro looked at her for a long moment, questions in his eyes. Questions that he would have to ask his brother if he wanted answers. "She and Normya should be on their way back to Union space right now." Andro said. "They are going to attempt to discover who caused the sabotage on Normya's ship before father finds out about it."

For'mya nodded. "Yes... and if that happens... whoever did it will disappear." She said. "I spoke with her this morning Sparta time and I understand what they are doing. It worries me... but I trust them."

"You don't trust the Immortals For'mya?" Sadi asked.

For'mya shrugged. "They have been the enemy for as long as I can remember. It is hard to trust after so long a period. Dysea and Normya seem to trust them, and they are there. And from what Dysea has told me and what I have seen in her reports, she and Normya may have come across the first Immortals to actually change the direction of their lives. I must trust in their instincts but I do still worry."

"Mother you need too..."

"I hope you are satisfied Androcles." Deia's voice carried to them as they turned and watched her approach.

Andro smiled. "*Tenna*... whatever do you mean?" He asked.

"You are too much like your father Androcles." Deia snapped. "Jiss and his ilk are at this very moment suggesting to the Netnews vultures that you will not comply with the court's ruling because you have Lisisa's things at your villa."

"What he tells the Netnews vermin is of no consequence to me." Andro spoke.

"We are doing this in an effort to appease them Andro." Deia said. "So they do not go out of their way to discover what else we are doing."

"I know that." Andro snapped now.

"Don't you dare take that tone of voice with me young man!" Deia growled at him.

“Deia... we thought about this.” Sadi said now coming to her mate’s defense as any alpha female would. “This is a decision that we came too together with Elynth. This was not some last second decision done only to anger the Kavalians or make your life harder. It ultimately helps to keep the Kavalians focused on the issue with Lisisa as opposed to trying to discover what else they can while they are here. Namely that we are training the High Coven dragons.”

Deia looked at her for a long moment. “A warning of what you were going to do would have been helpful.” She stated now as she got control of her own anger. “Your father learned long ago to keep me in the loop with decisions such as these. He found it helped him more than hindered him.”

Andro looked at her. “I am not my father *Tenna*.” He said sternly. “And I wish people would begin to realize that!”

Deia seemed taken aback by the tone of his reply. “I did not mean to imply that you...”

“Yes you did.” Andro said quickly. “Everyone seems to think that I am in some way a clone of my father. That is not the case. I have my own beliefs, my own mind. I may be like him in many respects, but I am very different in others. I will not walk in my father’s shadow anymore and I wish people would stop treating me in such a fashion.”

“My apologies Andro.” Deia said softly glancing at For’mya who was also wearing a surprised look on her face at Androcles’s passionate reply.

Andro looked at her and shook his head after a long moment. “Bah... ignore my rants *Tenna*. I am sorry for acting like such a child, forgive me.”

Deia nodded her head. “We are family... there is nothing to forgive. And you are correct Andro, you are not your father and I will need to learn to recognize that. Though you do both have the skill of making my life extremely hard.”

Andro smiled. “I believe that does run in the blood.” He said with a twinkle in his azure eyes. “I will be more forthcoming in the future *Tenna*, I promise you.”

“You will need to speak with the Netnews Andro. You and Sadi both.” Deia said quickly. “If for no other reason then to give credence to your announcement and why you are doing it.”

“Oh joy.” Sadi exclaimed softly.

“We can limit their questions... but it is something that you need to do. This is the part of diplomacy that your father took years to learn. How to make it appear like your decision is the best one.” Deia spoke.

Andro sighed heavily and looked at Sadi. “*KertaGai?*” He asked.

Sadi grinned and leaned over to kiss him. “Let’s just do it and get it over with so we can go to Gallais’s Retreat and enjoy our time here.”

Andro looked Elynth then. *Sister?*

Personally I would burn them... Elynth replied playfully knowing For’mya and Deia could hear her easily. *But if it is something we must address then so be it.*

Andro nodded. “Alright *Tenna* a few questions.” He spoke.

Deia motioned with her hand to the *Durcunusaan* detachment leader from the villa and he nodded, motioning perhaps two dozen reporters forward past where their line was. They had been waiting patiently, for they knew it would cause painful backlash to try and press their way past the *Durcunusaan* security around the royal family. The Netnews channels had discovered this many years ago when they tried to rush the podium where Martin stood announcing the beginning of the Evolli war. Several of their number were beaten back and injured for this lack of protocol on their part.

Sadi gripped Andro’s arm as they approached and Deia faced them. “A few questions only...” She told them. “The Prince and Princess are here to enjoy the last days of their marriage vacation and I do not want it spoiled. Cammon... you may begin.” She indicated an older reporter who had followed the Royal family for years and was a staunch supporter of them.

“Prince Androcles... was the decision by you and Princess Sadi to resist the Galactic Court ruling made to conceal items of Princess Lisisa that may be at your home as Legislature Jiss and Matuarr accuse?” He asked.

“Lisisa is my sister, and like all my brothers and sisters, each of us have items of clothing and such at the other’s homes so that we can change if need be. My villa is the largest simply because of Cranæ Island and it has become a gathering spot as you all know for my siblings and I to relax and be with one another. Nothing more.” Andro replied. “I am hiding nothing more than a few bathing suits and clothes that belong to Lisisa.”

“If that is all that is there, then why not let the Kavalian delegation search your home?” Another reporter asked.

“Would you allow them to search your home if the situation concerned you and your family?” Sadi answered the reporter’s question with one of her own. “It is simply a matter of principle with us.”

“But the King has allowed them to search her apartment on the Royal Estate.” Another said.

Andro nodded. “Yes. That is my father and mother’s decisions.” He answered. “They feel it is right to further relations with the Kavalian Federation. While I support the decision for better relations, searching my home and the home of my mate is not advancing that, it is hindering that.”

“In what way?”

“We would never demand to search the private residences of the Kavalian Prefect if the situation with Lisisa was reversed and she was a daughter of Prefect Keleru.” Andro said. “Our laws are different and it would not happen. The Galactic Court has already said that Marshall Pusintin and the Kavalian Federation have no legitimate claim to Lisisa’s citizenship, not that she would care anyway, and in my opinion that is the end of it. Allowing them to search my home to further political gains because the court did not rule in their favor is not something I will do.”

“What if the court had ruled in their favor?” Another reporter asked.

Andro shrugged. “They didn’t.”

“But if they had; would you have allowed the search?” The same reporter pressed.

“No.” Andro stated flatly. “It is my home. No one searches my home but me when I seek to find my socks because Sadi has moved my laundry.” This brought a round of small laughter from the reporters.

“What of the decision by your brothers and sisters to allow the search?”

“We all have our own opinions in regards to everything.” Andro said. “As I stated earlier, I believe their decisions are motivated by wanting to put this business behind us so that Lisisa and Deni can get on with their lives. I love them for that... but that does not mean I agree with them. I would hope should you interview them, they would say the same thing about me.” Andro chuckled. “At least they had better. Half of them serve in my command.”

This brought another round of laughter from the reporters.

“Princess Sadi... can you say where Prince Andro took you on your vacation?” A reporter asked.

Sadi’s smile was dazzling. “A remote island off the southern tip of what used to be the African Continent. White sands and warm water. Though we did get chased out of the ocean several times by sharks in the area.”

“It has been reported that you have completed early graduation requirements from the Fleet Academy and now hold the rank of Lieutenant Commander in the Union Fleet.”

Sadi nodded. “Yes... that is true. I have been assigned as Arrarn Leonidas’s co-pilot on the *SCIMITAR*.” She answered. “I am looking forward to beginning my duties in a few days.”

“Princess Sadi...” An attractive female elf reporter spoke from near the back of the group of reporters. “Is there any truth to the rumors that you were once a member of what was once called the *Arryadyveluat*?”

Sadi and Andro’s eyes both grew wider at this. The expressions of their faces said all anyone needed to say.

“What? Where... who told you that?” Sadi stammered.

“Is it not true that The *Arryadyveluat* was an organization formed by the former High Coven Lord Veldruk? An organization that used young Lycavorian women as couriers and intelligence agents working against the Union. Is it not true that you were a member of this organization and that your eventual ascension to the role you now have as Crown Princess is only a reward for becoming a double agent and helping the *Krypteria* in the Intelligence purge that took place twenty-five years ago?”

If anything could silence a group of Netnews reporters it was the dropping of a proverbial news bomb on them unexpectedly. Which is exactly what was happening now as all of them had become silent and stared at the elven female with astonished looks.

“Reward? That is not true!” Sadi hissed.

“Is it also not true that you were the one responsible for bringing the assassins to the Royal Island on Apo Prime, resulting in Queen For’mya being gravely wounded and King Leonidas then having to turn her in order to heal her grievous wounds? And how is it possible that after twenty-five years, the mating of you and

Prince Androcles took place within a matter of days and not the normal months and even years of courting? When you first met the Prince he was only eight months old. It isn't possible for him to remember you let alone retain any feeling for you. Can you shed any light on these rumors Princess?"

The immediate air around Andro and Sadi became deathly quiet as the questions hung out there for a long moment. Deia moved forward but For'mya gripped her arm and shook her head.

Andro snarled. "Where exactly did you..." He started to say.

Sadi squeezed his arm tightly and he looked at her. "No *aur armen enyla*." She spoke softly. Her face relaxed and became confident in its expression and demeanor. "I am not ashamed of my past and I will not hide from it now." She said. "Better that they hear the truth from us and we put these rumors to rest."

"*KertaGai* you don't need to..." Andro spoke.

Sadi's eyes were bright and focused. "I know Androcles. I want too. We knew this day would come sooner or later my love. Let us face it and be done with it forever." She smiled and squeezed his arm tighter before looking at the reporter. "Which question would you like me to answer first?" She asked.

"Were... were you a member of this *Arryadyveluat* ?" The female elf asked again very much shaken that none of them were denying it.

Sadi nodded. "Yes I was. The *Arryadyveluat* or Traitors of the Female Flesh in the old language was an organization created by the High Lord Veldruk for the purpose of gathering intelligence and operating low level couriers within the Lycavorian Union. As you all know my father Vorilas was the Governor of the Menkla District on Apo Prime and head of the Menkla Engineering Corporation at the time. My mother had passed away many years before and my father was smitten by another Lycavorian female some ten years after my mother died. This woman as it turns out was also a member of the *Arryadyveluat* and she was using my father's position as Governor to..."

APO PRIME MENKLA ENGINEERING CORPORATION MAIN MANUFACTURING PLANT OFFICE OF THE FORMER DISTRICT GOVERNOR VORILAS

Director Vorilas sat at the large desk in the spacious office going over the reports from the monthly shipping and manufacturing numbers. The backdrop of the Menkla District of Apo Prime took up most of the massive window behind his desk as the sun was dipping below the horizon. He was a man who was dedicated to his work and he was usually the last one to leave the offices and the first one to arrive. Vorilas was well respected and very well thought of even before his daughter Sadi became Crown Princess, only now he just got more invitations to events and dinners that he had never received.

Vorilas looked up when the door to his office slid open and the young Lycavorian female rushed in. "Director Vorilas!" She exclaimed.

"Lenna... what is wrong?" Vorilas asked quickly. She had been his assistant for three decades now, and she never panicked.

Lenna moved to the large wall monitor and touched the panel. "Director you need to see this." She stated.

Vorilas got to his feet as the monitor came to life with an image of his daughter and Andro, Queen For'mya and the Prime Minister standing with two dragons in the background. "What is this?" He asked.

"It's a live broadcast from Sparta Director." Lenna replied as she adjusted the volume. "You need to hear this."

"...was using my father's position as Governor to conduct intelligence drops and gather information for the High Coven." Sadi was speaking. "I adore my father, I have ever since I was a little girl. That adoration only increased when my mother died and he became not only my father, but my very best friend. This woman that he took as his mate... neither me nor my brothers liked this woman. We all sensed there was something wrong about her, but my father loved her.

“She knew of the love I had for my father and she basically came to me one day and told me if I did not do as she told me, she would expose my father as a traitor that he was not. I was very young at this time, and like today I would do anything to protect my father’s good name. He was never a traitor to this Union, his own parents were killed by the High Coven in one of the concentration camps they had for our people. I did what this woman demanded of me in order to protect my father.”

Vorilas looked at Lenna. “This is live?” He asked stunned.

Lenna nodded quickly. “They were caught coming out of the Galactic Court Building and the ongoing case with the Kavalians over the status of Princess Lisisa.”

“What exactly... what exactly did your step mother force you to do?” The female elf reporter asked.

“I was used as an intelligence courier for the most part. I was sent to a High Coven training facility in The Wilds and trained in espionage as well as other arts and then sent back to the Union.” Sadi continued. *“The majority of the things I did were very low level intelligence courier missions. I was not a major player as some, including those who gave you this information would have you believe. My step mother made sure of that. She was my controlling agent. I was forced to...”*

Vorilas saw her look at Androcles, seemingly drawing strength just from gazing at him as she pressed closer to him.

“My step mother... she forced me to bed with my half brothers... and several other foul men to keep her from producing lies about my father. These lies would have seen his name dishonored and he would have been put in prison for life, or executed. I was not willing to take that chance. This went on for many years, and it is something I never told my father. I couldn’t tell him. My older brothers actually moved off Apo Prime because they saw how my stepmother was using our father and he did not see it. Only I remained to protect him. Up until I was given the task of ferrying the ten assassins to the Royal Island on Apo Prime, I had never been involved in anything even remotely damaging to the Union as far as giving away secrets and such. The day... the day I ferried those assassins to the island is the day my life changed forever.”

“What do you mean?” Another reporter spoke up.

“The assassins I brought to that island failed in their task of killing Queen Anja’s twin sister Sivana. That is why they were sent there. Sivana knew the location of Lisisa. Of where she was being held and the High Lord did not want that information discovered because it would also reveal other intelligence he was keeping from many in his own circles. What none of the assassins counted on was the presence of Torma and Miath, Anja’s dragon. Yes... For’mya was grievously injured and...”

Sadi stopped speaking to compose herself and Vorilas saw For’mya step up next to Sadi and take her opposite hand.

“You all know how I view my own father.” For’mya spoke now. *“I regard him in the same fashion as Sadi does her own father. My mother teases me about endlessly. Sadi came to us when she could no longer bear the burden herself. When she was at the end of her ability to deal with what was happening, she came to the island with her father and told Armetus and I what was going on. Once the reasons behind Sadi’s actions were discovered, how could I hold anything in my heart for her except understanding and anger at what she was being forced to do.”* For’mya looked at Sadi quickly with a smile.

“Sadi freely admitted to Armetus and I what was going on... what she was forced to do and why she was being forced to do it. Apparently however, the High Lord Veldruk got it in his head that I also needed to die for reasons known only to him. That is why the island was attacked a second time while Martin Leonidas was gone from Apo Prime. Sadi was there with me when the assassins attacked again. She killed one herself and had a hand in helping to kill two others.

“All of you know by now that our son Androcles had bonded with Elynth while Aricia still carried him in her womb. We have never tried to hide this fact. In essence this bonding allowed Andro to know complete awareness and understanding of everything around him even as an infant and it enabled him to see all that Elynth saw. We can not explain this, not even the First Oracle is able to explain such an utter and complete bonding of two minds, but it did happen. Andro was eight months old when Sadi came to our island, and that night when the assassins came, even though he was safe with his grandmother in the panic room we had built he...”

“He saved my life that night.” Sadi spoke softly looking at Andro with adoration in her green eyes. Andro rolled his eyes. ***“You and Elynth were doing quite alright by yourself.”*** He told her.

“Wait...” The elven female who had begun the questioning asked. ***“Milord... you can remember that night?”***

Andro met her gaze. ***“As if it happened yesterday.”*** He stated.

“He projected his thoughts to me through Elynth, warning me of an assassin nearby and it saved my life.” Sadi spoke once more. ***“It allowed Elynth to kill that assassin and give us the time needed until his uncle arrived. When Andro and Elynth touched me as they did that night, it triggered my own Mindvoice abilities that had been lying dormant, and I became part of his and Elynth’s mind. It appears my blood is purer than I first thought, for even after I left the island, my abilities only continued to grow.”*** Sadi reached under her flight suit and pulled out the Dragon Heart pendant and let it dangle as she fingered it with two fingers.

“He gave this to me... or rather Elynth gave this to me for him before I left the island. Elynth told me that night on the island that Androcles Leonidas was a child then... he was eight months old, but she said that one day he would be a man... and the love I had sought would one day walk into my life. I didn’t know it then... but the moment I saw him those weeks ago on Apo Prime, the love I had been destined for walked back into my life.”

Sadi looked at the reporters. ***“You ask if this... if being Crown Princess is some sort of reward for doing what I did all those years ago?”*** Sadi shrugged her shoulders. ***“Perhaps it is. I would dismiss it all if all I had was Andro’s love. My father never discovered what it was I was forced to do... and he doesn’t care very much for the Netnews channels so perhaps he isn’t watching now, though I doubt that. That was part of the reward I suppose if you wish to call it that. My father never discovered what was going on. That is why I did what I did to begin with. It just so happens it led me to Androcles and I finally found my Anome. The man I was fated to be with. And now that we have come together we have already found one of three others that we are meant for as well.”***

Andro looked at Sadi with wide eyes. ***“Three?”*** He gasped.

“Princess... are you saying... are you saying you and Prince Androcles... that you...?”

Sadi nodded. ***“Fate and destiny has shaped our path for us, mine and Andro’s. I firmly believe that. And that path will bring us to those who are meant to walk that path with us. We can feel them even now within Mindvoice. We have found one already... we will find the other two as well. Eventually.”*** She said with a smile.

“So Prince Androcles has taken another mate?” A reporter blurted. ***“Who? Where?”***

Deia stepped forward now. ***“You have had your questions answered.”*** She spoke evenly. ***“I believe it’s time we left Androcles and Sadi alone to finish their vacation. Since the events of that night are now public record, I will consult with my staff and I will make available to you everything that is still not classified in some manner. We...”***

Vorilas turned to his aide. ***“Lenna, contact Admiral O’Connor’s office. There will be many questions coming our way and I want to discuss with him what I should say.”***

The young woman looked at him. ***“You... Governor... you never knew this? Truly?”*** She asked.

Vorilas shook his head. ***“I knew she was on the island, but not for the reasons she has said. I never knew any of that.”*** His face turned hard. ***“Ask Admiral O’Connor if he knows where that back stabbing bitch of a wolf ex-mate of mine is Lenna. And those foul excuses for sons she bore me. Where are they being held?”***

“Why?” Lenna asked.

“Because if they have not been charged with rape... I will bring the charges against them myself and see to it they are executed for what they have done to my daughter.” Vorilas snarled.

Lenna nodded and moved quickly for the door where she stopped and turned back around to look at him. ***“Prince Androcles has loved her since he was eight months old Governor.”*** She said softly. ***“That... that is beyond romantic sir, that is simply... it’s dream like.”***

Vorilas nodded. ***“Yes it is.”*** He said softly. ***“Yes it is. Hurry along now... before the calls begin to start coming in. And bring in some extra personnel to assist you if needed. I have a feeling this day has just gotten***

much longer for us Lenna. Cancel whatever appointments I may have had for this evening and tomorrow as well.”

Lenna nodded. “Yes Governor. It may have gotten longer for us sir... but I for one look forward to it.”

SPARTA

Deia stepped forward now. “You have had your questions answered.” She spoke evenly. “I believe it’s time we left Androcles and Sadi alone to finish their vacation. Since the events of that night are now public record, I will consult with my staff and I will make available to you everything that is still not classified in some manner.”

Andro pulled Sadi back towards Elynth and looked at her. *[What is this KertaGai?]* He asked. *[What do you mean two others? I don’t want more than you and Carisia!]*

Sadi smiled and pressed her body up against his running her fingers along his jaw line. *[You have felt it just as Carisia and I have felt it Andro. Don’t deny it. Two other minds wrapped within our three. Both of them powerful but one stronger than the other... like a great distance is between us.]*

Andro nodded quickly. *[Yes I have felt it as well... that does not mean I will act on it KertaGai.]*

[Carisia and I have surrendered ourselves to destiny and whatever that may bring to us Andro. We have done that willingly and without doubt or question. We have embraced it and look forward to what it brings to us. It has brought us you and it has brought us each other. It will also bring two more who will share our lives just as intensely as we do now.] Sadi spoke softly. *[You are an Alpha wolf and like your father you will draw strong women to you. I know this. So does Carisia. Neither of us is afraid of that Andro. You have already felt one in our thoughts as we make love together. Sharing our thoughts openly, even as we share with her.]*

[You are my Anome Sadi! Nothin and no one will ever change that fact!] Andro spoke pulling her even closer to him. *[It is you I can not live without.]*

Sadi nodded. *[Yes I am. And that fact makes me sing every day. But like your mother I know that others will love you and I will love them as well. I’m comfortable enough with myself to know that no matter what happens I will always have the part of you that no one else will.]*

They both turned as For’mya came up to them and they opened their heavily shielded Mindvoice connection to include her.

[Deia will deal with them.] For’mya spoke. *[We need to leave and stop being targets for more questions. We have certainly made this day eventful don’t you think?]*

[For’mya... better that we faced it now.] Sadi spoke.

[Oh I agree. So does Deia. What is of some concern is how this elven reporter got the information to begin with.] For’mya said calmly. *[And we must keep the information in regards to Gorgo secret as well for now. No one knows the one on the island with us was a clone. That is information that is buried deep and needs to remain there.]*

Sadi nodded. *[I will tell no one.]*

[Good. Now perhaps you can tell me about this other woman?] For’mya said. *[This is not something that any of us knew Andro.]*

Andro shook his head. *[In due time mother.]* He spoke. *[We do not... we do not wish for her to become overwhelmed by everything.]*

For’mya gazed into his eyes for a long moment and then looked at Sadi for an equally long period of time. *[Why do I get the feeling you aren’t telling me for another reason?]* She asked with a grin.

[This is Aikiro’s doing.] Andro spoke changing the subject. *[Only they would think to do something like this in an effort to damage our family. And they would know about the clone of grandmother.]*

For’mya nodded. *[I agree. But I don’t think it will turn out as they had hoped. And if they release the intelligence about Gorgo to this reporter we can easily squash it and say they are simply coming up with fairytales. And Aikiro would not want it known that Veldruk held Gorgo for nearly fifteen years. As adored as Gorgo is... no matter what she said... Spartans young and old would begin plotting to remove the vampire witch.]*

[Are you so sure mother?] Andro asked. *[There are those who don’t like father or our family.]*

[No doubt.] For'mya said with a nod. [However their voices are small and they dislike us for the very reasons that we are so well thought of.]

[We will leave in the morning.] Andro spoke looking over to where Deia was talking with the reporters, some of them having departed already to file their own stories. [Better to be gone and let this die quickly on its own. I will tell the others to begin making frequent trips back here so the Kavalians do not suspect anything is going on.]

[Lisisa is still meeting with Karun?] For'mya asked.

Andro nodded. [She said it went very well and she was surprised at him and his posture. They are meeting again in Eden City in eight hours.]

For'mya nodded. [By then it will be common knowledge what has happened here.] She said. [And it will only help our cause when it is discovered that Lisisa has reached out to Karun. It will show she is not being as difficult as the Kavalians want everyone to believe she is.]

[What does it matter?] Andro spoke. [The Galactic Court has ruled.]

[Yes... but I would be very surprised if the Kavalians let it slide and never brought it up again.]

For'mya spoke. [This was all part of something larger. Dysea felt it... I felt it and your father is certain of it.]

Andro shook his head. [Plans within plans.] He stated. [I truly hate these games people think they must play. Why can no one just leave us alone in peace and not involve us in their schemes and plots.]

[Your mothers, your father and I have asked that question many times through the years Andro.]

For'mya spoke. [We have yet to find an answer. Go on! You were going to Gallais's Retreat. I will tell Resumar you inquired of him and Deia and I need to meet with Panos and Tarifa to finalize the terms of this supposed Cease Fire with the Coven. We must maintain the illusion of what we are doing.]

[Now that they have an embassy... the Kavalians will be out among the streets more. Trying to gather intelligence and cause trouble with the High Coven no doubt.] Andro spoke. [Are they being watched?]

For'mya nodded. [Already taken care of.] She stated reaching up to kiss his cheek. [Now the two of you go.]

Andro met her gaze for several more moments before nodding his head. He turned and hoisted Sadi into the saddle on Elynth's back and then bounced up himself as Elynth came to her feet. Both of them pulled on their helmets, their crested plumes blowing slightly in the mild breeze. For'mya noticed the golden blond of Sadi's hair in the plume. Unlike his father, who wore a plume of the hair color of all his queens and his own, Andro did not. Yet now For'mya saw the raven black section of hair within the plume, combined with Sadi's. Her mind raced with the possibilities of who her son's new mate was.

The Spirit of Grandfather guide you mother. Andro spoke.

And you son.

Be safe my sister. Elynth spoke nudging Aurith with her snout.

Give my greetings to our brothers and sisters. Aurith answered.

Call us if you need anything For'mya. Sadi spoke as Andro's arms snaked around her waist.

For'mya nodded. I will. Have fun.

"Elynth go!" Andro barked.

QUEEN DYSEA'S STRIKER ENROUTE BACK TO APO PRIME

"...message from Arram." Normya spoke coming up to the map chart in the center of the *DT*. "Not much else in the way of intelligence, but it does firm up some of what we already knew."

Dysea looked at the pad, reading quickly and nodding her head before passing the pad to Esther who stood next to her. Dysea watched as Normya stepped away from her and moved to where Tir'ut was bent over the map chart studying a diagram of a building with Lexi. Dysea watched as Normya brushed up against him intentionally and Tir'ut looked up and without question made more room for her next to him.

"If your son is correct..." Esther said looking up from the pad. "Then it appears making the announcement that the crash was an accident has paid off. No one appears to be missing from work shifts and such."

“That also tells me they are comfortable enough to believe in their own security.” Dysea said turning her head back to what Tir’ut and Lexi were doing. “Lexi... what is this?”

“A blueprint of the main hanger where the Chief Engineer works.” Lexi spoke. “Tir’ut and I were working out how best to enter and exit without being seen.”

“A difficult task considering how busy it is.” Dysea spoke.

Tir’ut nodded and looked at her. “Not as much as you might think Lady Dysea.” He said. “This man has his own office.”

Dysea leaned closer. “Yes.”

“Your brother’s information is accurate *il kal'daka darthirii*?” Tir’ut asked turning his head to look at Normya next to him.

Normya nodded. “Yes. Arrarn may seem carefree and unobservant when you first meet him, but he is very thorough.”

Tir’ut nodded and turned back to the diagram. “Then we will take him when he departs his office to return to his home.” Tir’ut’s dark eyes drifted over the blueprint and map again searching the new style of map trying to find what he wanted. Normya leaned under his arm and stabbed the board with her finger, not caring in the least that her firm, full breasts pressed hard against his side. Dysea also noticed that this did not seem to faze Tir’ut, as intent as he was on finding who was after her daughter.

“Here.” Normya spoke.

Tir’ut nodded. “Yes... here. The junction of this main promenade and alley near his home. It is quiet and remote, without much foot traffic. With your Iriral flying high and using her enhanced vision to insure he is not being watched, my mother and I can use the shadows to take him easily.”

Dysea looked at Tir’ut surprise in her emerald eyes even as Iriral moved forward from the pen in the rear of the *STRIKER DT*.

“How... how do you know of a dragon’s enhanced vision Tir’ut?” Dysea asked gently.

Yes... I would like to know this as well. Iriral said as she came up behind Dysea. They had agreed before leaving to not shield their conversations within Mindvoice since Tir’ut and Esther could converse on a Tier Six level easily, which had stunned Dysea and Iriral at first. They knew vampires had this ability, but never had they known or heard of an Immortal who could use Mindvoice with such skill and on such a level as Tir’ut. *This is not something that would be known to someone who is not a rider.*

Tir’ut looked at Dysea for a long moment. “I... I don’t know.” He answered softly. “It... it seemed like... I think I read about it somewhere. There were many brochures floating through The Wilds of your dragon mountain on Elear. Perhaps in one of those.”

Dysea nodded. “Yes probably.”

Tir’ut turned back to the board. “My mother and I take him and bring him to wherever you have decided we will set up. He is not a large man and I can carry him easily.”

Esther nodded quickly. “I will dose him with Lilpan. He will drop like a limp noodle from a single dart.”

“This will not harm him permanently?” Lexi asked.

Esther shook her head. “It’s a mild nerve agent really.” She answered. “He will retain all conscious awareness, his brain will function and he will not lose the ability to breathe but he will be unable to move his limbs for at least three hours. After that... the use of his limbs will return to him over time.”

Tir’ut looked at Dysea. “Why do you not wish to use your famed Drow Scouts Lady Dysea?” He asked.

Dysea shook her head. “There is only a small detachment on Apo Prime. Part of *Nauta Melme*’s 1st Spartan Attack Division. We can not request their use without him finding out about it.”

Normya smiled. “It wouldn’t do to have my father’s Spartan Attack Division running all over Apo Prime knocking heads.” She said looking at Tir’ut with bright emerald eyes.

Tir’ut smiled as well, exposing the tips of his fangs. “No... that would not be conducive to us remaining covert.”

“Dysea... you realize this Chief Engineer may only be a middle man?” Lexi spoke. “A go between or someone at the very bottom of whatever chain we are about to begin climbing.”

Dysea nodded her head. “That is a possibility yes... but given his position and the access to information and ships that he has, I’m going to take a guess and say he is rather high on whatever list we find ourselves with.”

“I agree.” Esther spoke now. “Normya... you are certain he is the only one who would approve whatever repairs were needed on your *TYPE II*?”

Normya nodded. “As Chief Engineer he is required to inspect every ship before he signs off on the report of whoever did the work. It is his only job. He is either involved in what happen... or he knows who is. One of the inspection points is the main LSD Drive Coil. He has to visually inspect it.”

“Is it possible he just forgot... or chose not to? Perhaps he was in a hurry to get home?” Esther asked.

Lexi shook her head. “Not with a ship being flown by a member of the Royal Family.” She spoke. “And Arrarn’s information says he is not mated and has no children. Why would he be rushing home?”

“Would this man have had access to the flight plan you would have filed *il kal'daka darthirii*?” Tir’ut asked.

Normya nodded. “Yes.”

“Then I wish to talk to him.” Tir’ut spoke in a low menacing voice.

Dysea nodded. “Yes... so do I.” She spoke. “Normya... how long?”

“Nineteen hours through Bontawillian space. Another four to Gate Two Three, two jumps within the corridor and then six hours to Apo Prime.” She replied immediately.

“Just over a day.” Dysea spoke with a nod. “I suggest we all get some rest. We will need to be on our toes when we enter Union space.”

Esther and Tir’ut looked at her. “Why?” Esther asked.

Dysea looked at her. “Martin Leonidas is many things Esther... stupid is not one of them I assure you. We may have said Normya’s Gate Strike was an accident to the Netnews people, but I guarantee you that the BIP ships are on high alert and will stop anyone coming across the border no matter what IFF we are using.”

“BIP ships?” Tir’ut asked.

Normya looked at him. “Border Interdiction Patrols. Usually a Strike Wing built around a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser. Very fast, very mobile and very possessive of our border.” She explained.

“The Union border is huge.” Tir’ut said. “What are the chances we will come across one of these BIPs?”

Normya looked at her mother and then back to Tir’ut. “Probably better than half.” She answered.

“There are that many of them?” Esther asked with wide eyes.

“Let’s just say that Martin Leonidas is possessive of our border as well.” Dysea answered with a grin. “With the IFF codes Andro has given us, we will not be questioned as much. Being in a *STRIKER* helps as well. Once we are past the Border Defense Zone we should be ok.”

“Border Defense Zone?” Esther asked.

Normya nodded. “Minefields. Automated Defense Platforms. It’s a pretty nasty area all around. Not someplace you would want to be stranded I’ll tell you.”

“No... I would imagine not.” Esther said softly.

“Esther... you may take my quarters.” Dysea spoke. “Lexi will stay in the pilot’s cabin. Tir’ut you...”

“One of these benches is fine Lady Dysea.” Tir’ut said quickly. “I am used to much harsher standards. And I wish to study these maps more and acquaint myself with the intricacies of them. They are far more detailed than anything we have had in our settlement and I do not want to take a wrong turn somewhere.”

Dysea nodded. “Normya and I will stay with Iriral in the pen in the rear.” She said. “It is not something we haven’t done before. I suggest we get as much rest as possible.” She looked at all of them. “Events will begin to happen very quickly once we arrive on Apo Prime. We need to be ready to act instantly.”

“I’m going to help Tir’ut *Amille*.” Normya said quickly. “It’s easier to learn how to read these maps from someone who already can.”

Dysea met her daughter’s eyes and nodded her head slowly. “Very well. Do not forget to sleep. Either of you.”

Esther watched Dysea as she turned and headed to the rear of the *STRIKER*. She turned back to see Normya move even closer to her son, their heads close together as she began to explain more of the maps. She smiled inwardly to herself. Normya Leonidas was growing more attracted to her son as the hours passed. Whether it was because he had saved her life and sworn a Blood Oath to protect her or not, she had quickly gotten over her inbred mistrust and fear of Immortals and it appeared she found her son just as handsome as he found her beautiful. Esther knew Dysea was having a hard time with that, for she saw the same signs as Esther

did. She would speak with her after getting some much needed sleep. Esther did not notice Dysea turn back around from the pen where she and Iriral had stopped.

[Sister... he did not read about our vision in a brochure.] Iriral spoke.

Dysea shook her head. *[No he did not.]*

[Dysea... only a rider would know these things. Our enhanced vision is not something commonly spoke of.] Iriral began. *[He knows this, yet he is not bonded with any dragon.]*

[He certainly has the Mindvoice ability for that.] Dysea said. *[He is as strong as any Bonded Pair I have felt within the Union Iriral. Perhaps more so than most.]*

[We would have sensed a dragon on Kranek if one were present.] Iriral spoke. *[They would not know how to hide their presence from the two of us combined. I sensed none.]*

Dysea nodded. *[Nor did I.]*

[Then how?]

[We have never been able to fully grasp much of how Mindvoice works Iriral.] Dysea said softly. *[Even Helen says there is so much she can not explain. Andro and Elynth bonding while he was still in Aricia's womb? Zarah's ability to draw from Mindvoice users all around her? There are things we just can not explain. Immortals have always had the powerful latent ability to shield. Esther studied under Aikiro for over near two centuries. While she does not use it as we do, in a physical manifestation, her blood must be very pure to be as strong as she is. Perhaps when her blood and Cha'talla's blood combined in Tir'ut it somehow made him even stronger than both of them in that regard.]*

Iriral nodded her massive head. *[Yes... but it still does not explain how he knows about our vision.]*

Dysea looked at her. *[There is much that we can't explain about what has happened in the last few weeks sister.]* She spoke turning back as she heard Normya's laugh and she saw her daughter pressed so very close to Tir'ut, her emerald eyes brilliant in the light of the DT and Tir'ut gazing at her intently, a small smile on his own face. *[There is also much I am coming to accept... and that is what frightens me.]*

OMEN ONE

ULU EIRANS TRYN

KAVALIAN SPACE

.05 LIGHT YEARS FROM UIRMEIK

Tinnuar looked up when the door to his small Ready Room slid open and Perein walked in, his face buried in the data pad. Perein was the only one among the crew who could get away with this. The two men had served together for nearly fifty years and were as close as any two brothers could be.

"Perein?" Tinnuar asked as he got up and moved to the coffee dispenser.

"We're holding station sir." Perein reported as the door closed. "Continuing to scan."

"I'm assuming you didn't come in here to tell me that old friend." Tinnuar spoke as he turned back to his small desk. "Spit it out man!"

Perein shook his head. "It's odd Tinnuar." He said.

"When has anything we have ever done not been odd?" He answered as he settled back into his chair.

"Well... that is true." Perein answered. "I want to show you something. Run it by you and see if it's odd to you."

Tinnuar nodded. "I was becoming bored with fitness reports anyway." He said sitting back in his chair as Perein moved to the wall monitor in his ready room. He plugged the data pad in and played with the side panel some, bringing up several sensor scans from the YA9 Array.

"This is the initial scan when we arrived in system." Perein said. The picture was on the planet's northern and western continents. Tinnuar could see the marked symbols of what were Kavalian troop encampments too numerous to count. Hundreds of small red dots on the two continents. The entire northern and western parts of the planet were covered in these red dots. "Now this is a graph showing YA9 pulses every fifteen minutes." Perein changed the view and the image began to change every few seconds.

Tinnuar got up from his chair and moved closer to the monitor with his coffee in hand while his eyes stayed focused on the monitor. “The contacts are cycling on the last frame. Fading in and out.” He spoke finally.

Perein nodded. “Yes sir.”

“How often?”

“We thought it was our instruments at first, or something within the atmosphere causing an echo to bounce, but it’s not.” Perein spoke confidently. “It’s a series of low power Avidyne generator Nodes on the surface. Doubtful the Kavalians even know they are there. We’ve detected thirty seven of them scattered all over the western and northern continents.”

“Avidyne generators?” Tinnuar asked. “Those are High Coven power node sources. Used to reflect solar radiation. What are they doing here?” Tinnuar asked.

Perein nodded. “Reflect being the key word here Tinnuar. I had Ops run a data search trying to come up with something that corresponds with the Avidyne Node capability.”

“And?”

“If you connect a Multisynaptic Polarity Baffle to the Avidyne Node... you can use it to reflect whatever is in the immediate area.” Perein answered.

“By reflect... you mean make it appear larger than it actually is?” Tinnuar asked.

Perein nodded his head. “They can be released from orbit. A shrouded ship goes over the continent in a low synchronous orbit and you could pump these things out all day and no one would ever know they are there. They burrow into the ground until only six millimeters extends outward.” He explained. “Drop one or two of these inside a perimeter that has, say a hundred troops in it, and suddenly you have a thousand troops showing up on normal sensors.”

“And inside the perimeter of say a thousand troops?” Tinnuar asked.

Perein nodded. “Instant army. Very big... very imposing... at least from preliminary sensor scans that is how they would show. Kavalian sensors aren’t as sensitive as Union or Coven sensors. Like I said... I doubt they even know that the nodes are there, or what they are doing.”

Tinnuar looked at him. “So what are we looking at Perein? Can you filter out the reflection of the Avidyne node and get an accurate count?”

Perein nodded. “Already did.” He said. “It’s still a lot more than we want sitting on our border... but it’s only half of what the Coven Intelligence told us. Still putting all the figures together... but it looks like roughly eight and a half million ground troops on the high end. Ship count is unchanged... and that is now two thousand three hundred and nine.”

“Why give us false intelligence?” Tinnuar asked softly. “That doesn’t make any sense Perein. Why go to all the trouble of planting these nodes to make it appear the KFI forces are larger than they are?”

“Almost nine million ground troops is nothing to sneeze at Tinnuar. And when has anything the High Coven did make any sense Tinnuar?” Perein said using his friend’s own analogy from earlier.

Tinnuar nodded. “True... but the Empress had to have known the King would want confirmation of what she gave us. She had to have known that he would get it somehow. Why risk our continued assistance with training their dragons when we found this? The King will be incensed that she has lied to us again.” Tinnuar turned as the chime on his desk sounded. He stepped over to the smooth surface and pressed the pad. “Tinnuar.”

“Captain... you should... sir... you should come to my station.” The sensor operator’s voice echoed gently.

“What is it Lieutenant?”

“Sir... you should really come to my station.” She repeated.

Tinnuar looked at Perein with puzzled eyes and saw him shrug. “Stand by... I’m on my way.”

They exited Tinnuar’s Ready Room, immediately turned right and moved the ten meters to the entrance to the bridge and entered. Tinnuar moved across the bridge to where the young woman sat.

“What do you have?” He asked.

The female Lieutenant shook her head. “It’s very strange sir.” She spoke. “I’ve been scanning the surface of Ritaah for the last thirteen hours on that unknown power source. I’m alternating between Graviton Emulator Pulses, Spectral Phase Scans and anything else I can think of. All I’m picking up is the six TriCobal power sources. Definitely settlements of some sort. There is... whoever it is they are using Magnetospheric

Deflectors to bounce their signal off the magnetic core of the planet. The interference isn't allowing me to penetrate the fields that are being generated."

"So what is the problem?" Tinnuar asked.

"The unknown source didn't show up on any of the normal sensor sweeps Captain. None of them. It should have at least shown up on the Polarized Magnetic Induction scan... but nothing. I was still getting that spike of the CFL of four point six, so I re-aligned the Phased Quantum Inducers." She spoke.

Tinnuar looked at her. "The PQIs? Why?"

"It wasn't showing up on anything Captain." She answered. She adjusted her controls. "Something Doctor Randall said during our initial training came back to me then and I executed the re-alignment."

"Zaala Randall?" Perein asked.

"Yes sir. She helped to design most of the systems we use." The Lieutenant spoke. "She's an *anse* genius if you ask me. This is what I got sir."

The small monitor changed views and several multicolored lines came up, slowly drifting across the screen like waves.

"*Nubou nio!*" Tinnuar gasped.

"Yes sir! That is what I said." The Lieutenant spoke.

Perein leaned closer. "Ok... help me out here." He said. "I'm not exactly a scholar in the field of Quantum Mechanics Lieutenant."

The Lieutenant touched the screen. "This is a Phased Quantum Based power signature Commander. An intact PQB... complete with Antilepton Harmonic Inducers and a Bio-Neuro Mechanical Matrix. "

Perein stood back up. "Phased Quantum Based?" He spoke. "I thought our *OMEN* ships were the only ships in the universe that used that?"

Tinnuar looked at him. "There is one other." He said softly. He put his hand on the young woman's shoulder. "Size?"

"If the readings are accurate seven point one kilometers." She answered. "Buried under a hundred and thirteen meters of lava rock it looks like. Probably an old volcano of some sort."

"Compress everything you have into a single data stream Lieutenant. You have sixteen minutes to complete whatever sensor sweeps you have in progress." Tinnuar said.

"Yes sir!"

Perein looked at him. "Captain?"

"Drop two Black Sun Probes into synchronous orbit of Ritaah Perein." Tinnuar told him. "Have them programmed to send back encrypted sweeps of their onboard sensor arrays every twelve hours. Full masking and encryption. Helm! Seventeen minutes... then come about to course three four nine six point three! Go to full power on the sublights and plot the fastest LSD Operational Course to return to Union space! Once you have your plot, engage the LSD Drive!"

"Helm acknowledges Captain!"

"Captain?" Perein spoke.

"Perein... you always wanted to find a prize worth writing home about right?" Tinnuar asked.

Perein nodded. "I'm... I'm not so sure right now."

Tinnuar nodded with a smile. "There is only one other ship in the universe with a Phased Quantum Based power source Perein. The same type of ship that most of our systems are based on."

Perein's eyes grew wider. "*Sibfla* Captain! Tell me you are joking?"

Tinnuar shook his head slowly. "I wish I was. We just discovered another Mindvoice ship buried in that mountain Perein and the Kavalians don't even know they are sitting on top of it."

"*Nubou nio!*" Perein gasped repeating Tinnuar's phrase.

"The King needs to know this like yesterday. I don't want any interruption in the LSD Drive core or computer. Tell the Chief we're going to be pushing her harder than we ever have before and we need to break every speed record there is."

Perein nodded. "Understood sir!" He spun around and headed for engineering.

Tinnuar turned back and looked at the Lieutenant. His eyes swept across the bridge before he tapped her shoulder once more and she looked up at him. "You confirmed your data Needa?" He asked.

Needa nodded quickly. “Three times Captain. There’s no doubt sir. I could increase the power, but our PQBs are so similar sir, we may activate something on that ship that will cause it to become detectable by sensors not as advanced as ours.”

Tinnuar shook his head. “No! We don’t want to do that. You are sure the Kavalians can’t detect it Needa?” He asked softly and calling her by her first name. “It wouldn’t do for them to discover this ship. Our lives would become a whole lot more difficult if they did.”

The Lieutenant shook her head knowing when he used her first name it was important and very serious. “Impossible Captain.” She replied instantly. “The best sensors they have are on their *GREATSOUL* Dreadnoughts sir. On a par with our *LEONIDAS I*- Class... but not the *LEONIDAS IIs*, and no where near as sophisticated as what we have on board right now. Even if they did detect it, they wouldn’t know what the hell it was, and given their propensity for discarding something they can’t use to build weapons, if they don’t know what it is they’ll ignore it completely. They’ve also had ships in this sector for the last ten years if the scans are accurate sir.”

“Drop a Class Four Masker anyway.” Tinnuar said. “Let’s keep it that way.” He shook his head as he moved to his command chair eight steps away. “Just what we did not need to find. Another Mindvoice ship. So much for a simple deep intelligence gathering mission. I knew something was wrong with this mission.”

HADARIA ROYAL LANDING PAD

Buonau stood with her daughter and Okein on the edge of the landing pad east of the Hadarian Royal Palace. Half a dozen Hadarian Militia stood behind her casually, their older side arms appearing as if they hadn’t been pulled from their holsters in years.

The Hadarian Militia was broken into two distinct and different groups; those who acted as peacekeepers in the many cities and as the last line of defense, and those who served only the Elders. These men and women were usually former Mage Warriors chosen by the older Elders to serve them as Elder Guards. They were referred to as the Elder Sentinels by many of the younger generations, mainly for their decided lack of personality and complete blind faith in the Elders and what they preached.

Since Anja had taken her father’s place on the throne, her following and standing among the millions of younger Hadarian Healers had grown by leaps and bounds. When Sivana had joined her in helping to rule Hadaria and bring the planet out of what many called the Blind Times, these millions of younger Hadarians had gleefully thrown their full support behind her. They welcomed the opportunity to serve in the fleet and among the ground forces of those they were chosen to treat. They welcomed the opportunity to meet the many different species and form lasting friendships and even many relationships with those off their world. While not overly oppressive in an outward sense, the younger Hadarians found the ancient teachings of the Hadarian Elders too anchored in the past and almost regressive in many ways. They happily went on to adopt their Queen’s approach of willingly heading into the unknown and discovering new and wonderful things. Combined with the fact that Anja and Princess Sivana, with the backing of the Divine One Eurin and the Prefect of Hadaria had all but pushed the Elders out of any true political decision making, it only served to make the Elders angry and very resentful towards her. They were appalled that she lived the life she did, many times in the past making spiteful comments in regards to her sharing a bed with four other women as well as the king. At times they openly criticized how she had raised Eliani, and was now raising Retta and Calyb. They were critical of how all of them were raised in an almost communal situation, calling five different females mother, and not getting the proper education in Hadarian culture that they felt was needed for those of Royal blood.

Okein leaned close to Buonau. “We did not plan for the King to return with her.” He spoke softly.

“It doesn’t matter.” Buonau answered looking over to where Eurin stood with Sivana and Zaniai on the far side of the pad. “Whether he sees our information from Sparta, or he sees it here will change nothing. He will be enraged and leave Hadaria within hours.”

“Are you so sure?” Okein asked. “He is said to be completely devoted to all of them.”

Buonau looked at him. “He is a man and a Lycavorian. They are all pigs. And our plan will show just how *devoted* he is to his many Queens. Do not worry Okein... I have thought of everything.”

“I just hope Rinard’s information doesn’t sink us before we accomplish our goals.” Okein spoke.

“Rinard is just as much a fool as Martin Leonidas. He thinks with his tool. All of them are brutes.” Buonau said. “When I approached him with our offer he jumped at the opportunity saying he had this information. You have seen it yourself. How much more damning could it be?”

“I know... I do not want to trust him so much that it endangers our own plans.” Okein spoke. “We’ve worked too long to achieve this.”

“And in a few more days we will have what we have sought.” Buonau said. Her head turned as she saw Umbra approaching with a Senior Mage Warrior from the palace. She marched right up to Buonau as if she belonged there. Buonau shook her head slowly knowing Umbra was only another pawn in their plan.

“The palace Senior Mage Warrior has told me they departed their ship thirty minutes ago.” Umbra spoke. “They should have been here by now.”

Buonau looked at the Mage Warrior. “Where are they?” She demanded sternly.

The young woman gave her a blank stare and an expression that said everything she thought about the senior Hadarian Elder. “I do not question the King and Queen.” She replied. “They do this often and will arrive when they arrive.”

“They left the *SPIRIT* thirty minutes ago!” Buonau snapped.

The young woman nodded her head, disinterested in the Elder’s attitude. “Yes... and most likely they are flying over the city on Torma and Miath to unwind from the trip here. They do this often. They may go directly to the palace. Who knows?”

Buonau’s eyes narrowed. “They were told to come here!” She barked. “I specifically directed the officer on the *SPIRIT* to tell them that! And to come here on their ship and leave their beasts in orbit!”

The Mage Warrior looked at her. “Oh.” She said casually. “Perhaps they didn’t get the message Elder Buonau. Or they chose to disregard it.” Her eyes lifted and Buonau followed her gaze to see two large specs in the blue sky and two smaller ones close to the larger ones.

The forms of Torma and Miath quickly took shape as they barreled over the landscape as if they were racing. The smaller dark specs were keeping up, barely. As the four dragons flew over the top of the landing pad, Buonau saw the smaller figures of two children in the saddle with Martin, and one in the saddle with Anja. Torma and Miath trumpeted out their arrival as they flared their wings and settled lightly to the landing pad to the excited cries of children.

“It appears they chose to disregard your directive Elder Buonau.” The Mage Warrior spoke as she began walking towards where the two dragons had settled completely to the ground.

Buonau glared at her back as Umbra and Duewa moved closer to her. “Oh I am so going to enjoy watching her fall.” She hissed softly watching as Sivana, Eurin and Zaniai moved up to where Martin was lifting Retta and Calyb from the saddle.

“Mother... perhaps bringing the Elder Guard to take custody of the children with the King here was unwise.” Duewa spoke her blue eyes bright in the sunlight.

“Nonsense!” Buonau snapped. “He will not resist the will of the Hadarian Elder Council or the Arch Ministry. Let’s get this over with. I want to spend as little time in his company as I have too.”

“I agree.” Umbra spoke.

They began walking towards the group.

“...did you see Mama?” Siara exclaimed as Sivana squatted on the tarmac and hugged her daughter tightly.

“Yes I did.” Sivana said with a smile. “Did you have fun with Aunt Anja and Uncle Martin?”

“They gave me candy.” Siara said shyly. “And I got to ride Miath a lot!”

Sivana laughed and kissed her cheek as she scampered over to where Retta and Calyb were stroking Mara and Endeem’s scales. While their bond with both Torma and Isheeni’s children was growing stronger by the day, they had only just begun to evolve. Mara and Endeem were now over three meters tall and nearing a thousand pounds. Sivana turned as Martin and Anja came up and she embraced her sister tightly.

“Anja.” Sivana said softly.

“We only gave her candy once.” Anja said with a smile.

Sivana laughed as she released Anja and embraced Martin tightly. "She does love her candy." She spoke. "I hope she wasn't any trouble."

Anja shook her head as she took Martin's hand in hers tightly and leaned up against him. "No... big boy here let her spend the days with Helen and the others and Gorgo spoiled her terribly."

Sivana looked at her sister as she pressed close to Martin, his arm snaking around her waist and holding her tight. Anja's jade green eyes were brighter than normal and she looked radiant. She watched as Eurin kissed their cheeks in greeting.

"It is good to see both of you." Eurin spoke gently. "I just wish it was for better reasons. Zaniai and I tried to divert this situation before it came to this but we were unsuccessful."

Zaniai bowed his head to them both. "I apologize for that." He stated.

Martin shook his head. "I needed to get off Earth anyway." He stated. "One more issue with Aikiro and I would have ended up punching her ticket myself."

Eurin chuckled and looked at Zaniai who had a confused look on his face. "I will explain later Zaniai." She said with a smile.

Anja shrugged. "We just arrived and I don't want to worry about that right now." She said.

Sivana stared at her twin sister for a long moment and smiled. "Anja... are you pregnant again?" Sivana asked.

Anja met her eyes. "What? No!" She exclaimed. "Why would you ask that?"

"You just look very happy." Sivana told her taking her hand.

Anja laughed and shook her head. "Martin made me an offer I couldn't refuse." She said looking up at him. "We had a very relaxing trip here, and I got pampered the whole way."

Martin grinned. "That's not exactly hard to do?" He spoke. "You are easy to please."

Anja's eyes grew wide. "Why you... I'll remember you said that!"

Sivana grinned knowingly. "We have..."

"King Leonidas!" Buonau's voice carried to them cutting Sivana's words off in mid sentence. They turned and watched her walk up with the others in tow.

"Elder Buonau." Martin spoke. "How wonderful to see you."

Anja was barely able to contain her laughter at the tone of Martin's voice, and it went completely over Buonau's head.

"King Leonidas... I specifically told your officer that I wanted you to come down on your ship and leave your... your beasts in orbit." Buonau told him sternly. "Did you not receive this directive?"

Martin nodded. "No... we got it." He replied. "I ignored it Elder Buonau in case you didn't notice."

"May I ask why?" She snapped.

Martin shrugged. "It seemed like a good idea." He replied his eyes going to the six Hadarian Militia behind her.

Buonau looked at Anja. "Majesty."

Anja nodded. "Elder Buonau... always a pleasure to see you."

"I have been authorized by the Arch Ministry to tell you that we will convene a special session for the morning." Buonau spoke. "At that time evidence will be presented to corroborate the charges against you."

"I can hardly wait." Anja spoke.

"My Hadarian Militia Detachment will take custody of Retta and Calyb now." Buonau continued. "Their beasts will remain with you and they will be staying with Umbra until this issue is decided." She turned to the Hadarian Commander. "You may proceed Commander."

"As you order Elder Buonau." The man nodded and began to move forward with his men towards where Retta and Calyb were with Mara and Endem.

"If you value your lives I would stop where you are." Martin spoke in a low voice.

The Militia Commander did so and looked at Martin with hard eyes. "We have our orders King Leonidas. The Elders have spoken."

Martin shook his head slowly. "Buonau... let me be very clear on something right now." He spoke turning to look at her. "If they take another step towards our children, you will have six deaths to explain to the Arch Ministry and six families."

Buonau held up her hand quickly stopping the men and turned to glare at him. "The Elder Council has ordered this!" She barked. "You must comply with our directives concerning the heirs to the Hadarian throne. You are not above the law King Leonidas." She spoke the words with a great deal of sarcasm.

"Buonau you *upae!*" Anja snarled. "Retta and Calyb are our children and you have no authority to do shit! And neither does the Elder Council!"

"We have decreed your children will be placed in an environment conducive to their growth and development. An environment that provides stability and safety and love with your Aunt." Buonau barked right back. "The charges against you are very serious Queen Anja... and it is the Elder Council's opinion that leaving Retta and Calyb in your charge is not healthy."

"Not healthy?" Anja quipped at her, her fingers digging into Martin's palm almost painfully now. "What a *nubous* joke!"

"Retta and Calyb are our children Buonau." Martin said. "And you will not take them anywhere. Not if you know what is good for you."

"It is the Elder Council's decision as a whole." Buonau stated. "It is for their own well bring of course."

Eurin stepped forward. "Retta and Calyb are children of the King and Queen of the Lycavorian Union Buonau. That takes precedence over their roles as heirs to the Hadarian throne and you know that. You can not remove them from their parents."

"Your attitude and actions right now only give credibility to our fears Anja." Umbra spoke now. "Why do you fight this? We only think of Retta and Calyb!"

Anja looked at her and began to speak but Sivana beat her to it. "You stay out of this Aunt Umbra!" She snarled. "You are part of the problem! You want to turn them into the religious automations that you have turned your own children into."

"I am only looking out for the welfare of Retta and Calyb, as well as Siara. She is also involved in this as well." Umbra declared. "Especially now."

"Now?" Martin asked.

Buonau looked at him. "You haven't spoken to Eliani I take it?" She said.

"Unlike you it seems Elder Buonau we don't feel the need to speak with our children every day." Martin said. "They have duties all their own that take up much of their time, and they are all adults."

"Apparently not enough of their time." She announced spitefully. "Did you think we would not find out?"

"What does that mean?" Anja spat. "Find out what?"

"It has been all over the Netnews for the last few hours." Eurin spoke now. "The Galactic Court ruled in favor of Part Two of the Kavalian Petition considering Lisisa. They have been given permission to search the places where Lisisa may have stayed recently before becoming Denali's mate. This includes the homes of her brothers and sisters."

Martin nodded. "Yes... we know that. It is a concession that we agreed too with the rest of our family. So?"

"Androcles and Sadi refused to allow this and will not abide by the Galactic Court's ruling, and neither will Denali." Eurin said. "It caused quite the spectacle."

Martin grinned and shook his head. "I haven't been able to control that boy since he was sixteen. And Deni's becoming just like him." He said looking at Anja. "We'll have to have a talk when we get back."

"You find their actions amusing?" Buonau demanded.

"Androcles has his own mind Buonau. So does Denali." Anja stated. "They are old enough to make their own decisions and they will do what their hearts and minds tell them to do."

"Well the Kavalian's did not find it amusing. And from what I understand their Petition was very fair." Buonau said. "Perhaps you need to instruct your sons to be more diplomatic in their actions with those outside their family. The rest of your children seemed to go along with the ruling just fine."

"Really? That just goes to show you that they have minds of their own." Martin said looking at her. "Well... I guess I should be lucky that you don't sit on that court then Elder Buonau?"

"That isn't all." Zaniai spoke now seeing Buonau open her mouth to retort. "The rest of it concerns Eliani."

Anja looked at him. "What about her?"

“It also came out during the same court proceedings that she has allowed a Lycavorian to claim her!” Buonau spoke harshly her voice laced with contempt. “Not only does she share a bed with a female vampire, she now has allowed herself to be mated to a Lycavorian! A member of your *Mjolnir’s Hand* it seems.”

“His name was Star Commander Malic Buonau.” Eurin spoke.

“His name is of no consequence Eurin.” Buonau snapped. “He is a Lycavorian!”

Martin nodded his head. “Malic is a fine officer and he makes a fine addition to *Mjolnir’s Hand*.” He said with a smile. “And it’s about time he got around to claiming her and Nyla.”

“Eliani did not receive permission from the Elder Council to mate with a Lycavorian!” Duewa spoke now stepping closer to her mother.

Martin looked at her his eyes taking in her long red hair and bright eyes. “Who the hell are you?”

“This is my daughter Duewa.” Buonau spoke quickly. “She is my assistant. And she is very correct in her statement.”

“You don’t say.” Martin spoke rolling his eyes.

“Eliani *did* not and *does* not need your permission to mate with a man Buonau! She is our daughter... and well past the age of consent!” Anja said. “Martin, I and Eliani’s other mothers approved of her and Nyla’s choice as a husband!”

“The age of consent for a Lycavorian perhaps!” Buonau answered her smugly. “But as heir to the throne of Hadaria, she should have sought our approval and blessing as well. That is how it has always been! The Council of Elders will be issuing a Directive that we did not agree to this union and in our eyes it is not binding. Eliani should have married a Hadarian male to keep her Hadarian bloodline pure.”

Anja shook her head. “This is crazy.” She said. “Why exactly does the Elder Council think they can tell a Princess of the Union who she can or can not marry?”

“She is not only a Princess of the Union, but a Princess of Hadaria as well!” Buonau snapped. “And she still needs to adhere to the dictates of the Elder Council! We do not approve of her relationship with this vampire female and we never have! Given that the charges being leveled against you are so severe, we are doing what we must to protect the royal bloodline.” Okein said. “You and Princess Sivana don’t seem to care in the least about this.”

“We don’t care about...” Sivana stepped forward but Anja took her hand and shook her head.

“No Vana.” She said softly. “It just isn’t worth it.” She turned back to Buonau. “I want a list of these terrible charges being brought against me. And the evidence you supposedly will present that is so damning.”

Buonau smiled cruelly. “Eurin has such a list.” She stated. “The evidence we will present to the Hadarian Arch Ministry tomorrow at the special session. You will view it when they view it Queen Anja.”

“Good... then we are done here and we will see you in the morning.” Anja said.

“Retta and Calyb will need to go with Umbra until such time as...” Buonau began.

“No.” Martin stated.

“King Leonidas... this is an internal Hadarian matter and you have no authority to...” Okein began to speak.

“No.” Martin spoke once more looking at him.

“You are interfering with a Hadarian political directive King Leonidas!” Buonau spoke.

Martin nodded. “Then you can fucking sue me.” He barked.

“I will bring this before the Hadarian Arch Ministry and contact Prime Minister Deia myself!” Buonau snapped. “You can not do this!”

“You can tell the Hadarian Arch Ministry whatever the hell you like!” Martin snapped. “And Prime Minister Deia is my Aunt and she will tell you exactly where to go and how quickly to get there when you tell her you want to take our children from us!”

Buonau’s eyes were wide. “Your... your aunt?” She gasped.

Martin smiled. “Yeah. She was my grandmother’s sister. Pretty neat huh?” He stated with sarcasm. “And if the bully boys you brought with you there take one more step towards my children, none of them will be breathing two seconds after that, because those I don’t kill Deia will.”

“You are threatening them?” Buonau gasped in shocked.

Martin’s eyes changed then and his dual wolf fangs exploded from his gums. Those yellow orbs outlined in black bore into Buonau with the intensity of a supernova and she actually took a step back.

“If they don’t stand down in the next three seconds Buonau... they’ll be deader than that bloodsucking fucker Xerxes himself! And he got off easy!” Martin snarled viciously.

“You wouldn’t dare!” Buonau exclaimed.

“You want to test that fucked up theory you got?” Martin growled at her as he stepped forward.

“Your grandfather would not have acted in this way!” Buonau barked.

“You’re right...” Martin snarled. “My grandfather would have put you out of your misery the moment you even suggested taking his children from him. You are getting off easy right now too! Touch my children and we’ll see just how much your title as Hadarian Elder will help your little weekend warriors! Even you won’t be able to save them, because you won’t be able to find all their body parts.”

Anja stepped in front of Martin quickly knowing he was right on the edge of snapping and she knew he would do just what he had threatened to do. “We’ll see you in the morning Buonau. If you have any common sense you’ll take your toy soldiers and leave now.”

“This is not over with Anja!” Buonau snapped.

“It is for right now.” Anja stated. “Have a nice day.”

SPARTA GALLAIS’S RETREAT

“...a rumor that there is a major fleet exercise coming up.” One of the female pilots spoke from the table they sat at.

Gallais’s Retreat was nearly full, Spartans and elves and many others from the three Strike Wings in orbit filling the place many had come to call their second home. This is where many of them came when the Royal family came to Earth. Hundreds had even bought homes across the planet.

Ne’Veha sat at the table with five other female elven pilots from the *SCIMITAR*, having arrived before the last table was gone. It was her third time here since coming to Earth; her efforts at trying to get her orders changed hitting obstacles no matter who she spoke to. Captain Sa’sur no doubt had something to do with it, but she never mentioned that Ne’Veha had even gotten her father to try and pull strings. He had told her there was nothing he could do, Fleet Command being very set on duty assignments. Her father and her mother were also upset with her for not telling them about her relationship with Tarren and both of them were very perturbed about how that relationship had since ended. Tarren had apparently contacted them directly and inquired of where she was and how she was doing, and that had led to them discovering their now ended relationship. It only confirmed to them both how they regarded most Lycavorian men. The previous two trips here had been uneventful, Ne’Veha eating some very delicious elven food and then returning to the *SCIMITAR*. This night however had seen Ne’Veha very depressed and she had accepted the other pilot’s offer to get together on Earth for dinner. She was on her third mug of Spartan wine and well on her way to becoming more intoxicated than she had ever been in her life because of what she had seen today on the Netnews.

It was them.

Ne’Veha, like many of the pilots and crew of the *SCIMITAR*, had seen Androcles and Sadi on the Netnews earlier this day. They had seen how they had stood up to the Galactic Court and then the Netnews reporters after they revealed Sadi’s history. Ne’Veha had been stunned into silence upon seeing them, for they were two of the three people from her dreams. Exquisite dreams no doubt, as each one had left Ne’Veha shuddering in the aftermath of an incredibly powerful orgasm, but dreams that troubled her. Tarren had destroyed her trust of Lycavorian men, and Ne’Veha had never considered sharing a bed with one woman let alone two. Princess Sadi’s words had shocked her quite a bit, not only because her words had filtered through her deliciously, but because her words had knocked the lock off a part of herself that Ne’Veha rarely showed.

Was she one of these women that the Crown Princess spoke of? Is that why she was having such wonderful dreams of them? How could she be one of these women? Ne’Veha hated Lycavorian men after what Tarren had done to her, yet looking at the Prince caused her heart to begin racing and moistness to creep into her center. When combined with Princess Sadi and the luscious raven haired woman in her dreams, those dreams were utterly divine.

The issue she was having was very simple. These feelings and thoughts were not going away and that frightened Ne’Veha, for she knew it meant something that she didn’t know if she was able to return. And they were only growing stronger as the days and hours passed. It was almost as if her awareness was expanding somehow. She had never been more than a Tier Three Mindvoicer, yet now she was seeing and even feeling things that she was not taking part in. These feelings troubled her to some degree, but they also filled her with a sense of warmth and belonging that she had never experienced either.

These are the things that had troubled her all day, and these are the things that now led her to be here this evening with her fellow pilots, and well on her way to waking up tomorrow morning with a agonizing headache and possibly not be able to fly. She had never been able to hold her alcohol very well, and the signs were beginning to show now.

Another of the female pilots nodded. “I heard we will be spread out across the sector conducting operations.” She spoke. “This is why I wanted this assignment. The 1st, 2nd and 9th are never stationary for very long. They train continuously.”

“What do you expect from the King’s personal SCFFG?” Another pilot said downing the last of her wine.

“General Simpson’s 2nd is no different.”

“I understand that Prince Androcles’s 9th will be taking the side of the aggressor in the exercise.” A female elf pilot spoke. “That will be fun.” She said with a smile. “Did you see him on the Netnews today? The story of how he and the Crown Princess have loved each other since he was eight months old? That is amazing.”

“And that he will have four mates?” Another spoke. “I’d give anything to be wrapped around his body!”

“I want to be one of the three females they find!” Another said cheerfully.

Ne’Veha looked up then. “You... would shares a beds with... with him and threes other womenz?” She gasped

The female laughed. “Are you kidding Ne’Veha? Princess Sadi could make anyone’s blood churn with desire. She’s breathtaking! Can you imagine being sandwiched between them? Think of the pleasure you could have in that bed?”

Another elf chuckled as well now. “Think of the pleasure you could have with Prince Androcles *and* three other women.” She made her body shudder on purpose as she smiled dreamily.

“They... they are females? And he... he is a Lycavorian male. They... they arezz all the samezz.” Ne’Veha slurred as she downed the last of her wine as well.

“Ne’Veha... are you drunk?” One of the pilots asked with a smile.

“I amzz nots!” Ne’Veha exclaimed.

“Oh yes you are!” Another spoke with a laugh.

One of the pilots looked towards the door as it opened, admitting three Lycavorian males in their dress uniforms. Her dark eyes narrowed as she saw one of them men and she looked at Ne’Veha. “I thought you and Lieutenant Tarren were through Ne’Veha?” She asked.

“Tarrenz izz a pig.” Ne’Veha snapped.

“Well... he just walked in.” She spoke.

Ne’Veha’s eyes grew wider and she turned quickly in her chair. “What?” Her dark brown eyes quickly found the tall, young Lycavorian male who had cheated on her. “*Sibfla!*” Ne’Veha barked surprising the five females with her.

“Ne’Veha... when did you learn to speak the ancient language?” One asked with wide eyes.

“I... I can’t!” She answered turning back to look at her just as Tarren’s eyes fell upon her.

“Ne’Veha... you just spoke in the ancient Lycavorian tongue.” The pilot spoke again. “You just swore in the ancient language!”

“I did not!” Ne’Veha barked out.

“We all heard it Ne’Veha!” Another said.

“I did...” Ne’Veha started to speak but stopped when she heard the familiar voice.

“Ne’Veha... this is a pleasant surprise.” Tarren spoke as he came up to the table with his two friends.

Ne’Veha sighed and looked up at him, anger surging through her and sobering her up to an extent.

“Tarren.” She stated coldly.

“We just arrived.” Tarren said as he pulled the chair up to the table and sat down next to Ne’Veha, his friends mimicking the action and settling at the large table with them. “Are you going to introduce us to your friends?”

Ne’Veha glared at him. “Where is your... woman?” She hissed.

“Ah... Hy’la... well things did not work out between us.” Tarren answered. “After you left... after you left I realized that I had made a mistake.”

“Oh really.” Ne’Veha said even as her elven ears were almost pinned back along her head in anger and distaste. On top of that... she was not feeling so well. “That’s too bad for you isn’t it?”

Tarren looked at her. “Ne’Veha have you been drinking?”

“No!” She snapped.

Tarren smiled at her leaning closer. “You can’t hold your liquor very well Ne’Veha. You smell of Spartan Wine. You know you shouldn’t be drinking, especially as much as I smell that you have. Your parents wouldn’t approve.”

“What... what do you want Tarren?” Ne’Veha snapped at him. “Have you not humiliated me enough with your actions?”

“You haven’t introduced us to your friends.” Tarren said looking at the other five female elven pilots. His two friends were smiling as they looked at the young women, all of them doing their best to remain away from the two Spartans.

“We know who you are.” One of the female pilots said with hostility in her voice. “My name is Ra’Neeria and Ne’Veha has told us all about you Tarren.”

Tarren looked at her. “Has she now?” He spoke with a smile. “All one sided I’m quite sure. This is Jocab and Merto, members of my new unit.”

“What are you doing here Tarren?” Ne’Veha asked. “You were assigned to the Spartan Division on Elear. Why are you here?”

“I came for you Ne’Veha.” Tarren spoke. “I followed you here to Earth. It was an easy decision and I have never been to Sparta before.”

Ne’Veha looked at him with wide eyes. “What?” She gasped out her face aghast. “You must be joking!”

Tarren shook his head. “Not at all. I found out where you were assigned and got some friends of mine to pull some strings. I am now a member of the 9th SCFAG.” He answered. “My detachment is posted to the *SCIMITAR*. And I got a promotion to *Pentekostyes*. Captain of Ground forces. Can you believe that?”

Ne’Veha shook her head. “No.” She gasped. “I can’t believe that!”

Tarren nodded. “I made a mistake Ne’Veha.” He said in a serious voice. “I want to show you that I have changed. That’s why I am here.”

Ne’Veha shook her head quickly. “You must think I’m a very large fool Tarren.” She quipped. “What would possess me to believe you now? After what you have done?”

“We were good together Ne’Veha.” He spoke. “That’s why?”

“So you can make me appear the idiot again?” Ne’Veha barked. “And you were not that good Tarren.”

Tarren chuckled. “Oh no? I was your first Ne’Veha and unless you have bedded with quite a few men since leaving Elear, then I am the only male you have been with. You forget... I can still smell myself in your blood.” He said. “I want to keep it that way. I’m ready to settle down.”

“You must be joking.” Ne’Veha spat. “I could never trust you Tarren. Ever! And what makes you think I even desire you anymore?”

“I’ll fight for you Ne’Veha.” He said quickly. “I won’t let any other male come close to you. I am a strong Alpha and I’ll stake my claim to you. No one will approach you Ne’Veha. I’ll see to that.”

“So now you are stalking me Tarren?” Ne’Veha snarled.

Tarren shook his head. “No... just staking my claim as I said.”

Ne’Veha got to her feet. “You have no claim to me Tarren!” She popped. “You gave up that right when you took another into your bed and cheated on me for seven months! I need another drink! Just stay away from me!”

Ne’Veha whirled around and started weaving her way through the crowd heading for the long bar at the far end of the building. Tarren shook his head with a smile and looked at Ne’Veha’s friends who were doing their best not to look at the two other young males who were gawking at them.

“She really does love me.” He said getting to his feet to follow her.

All of them snickered at him. “Perhaps someone should tell her that then.” The dark haired elf female Ra’Neeria spoke again. “Why can’t you just leave her alone?”

“Perhaps Merto and I could interest the four of you in some entertainment.” The Spartan Jocab spoke as he reached out to run his hand down Ra’Neeria’s arm.

Ra’Neeria snorted and pulled her arm away rolling her eyes. “Please...” She said. “We prefer real men.” She stated. “Not those who play at being real men.”

“I’m more man than you could hope for.” Jocab spoke confidently.

Tarren chuckled at this. “Careful... they might surprise you.” He spoke as he turned to follow Ne’Veha.

“If they are your friends... not likely.” Another of the female pilots said looking at his back. She got to her feet. “Let’s get out of here.” She spoke quickly. “If we are going to find *real* Spartan men... we need to look elsewhere.”

Ne’Veha weaved her way through the crowd, not really paying attention to where she was going. She just needed to get away from Tarren. How could he come here thinking she would take him back? She wiped at the sweat beginning to bead on her forehead as she darted up the small flight of stairs into the upper landing of Gallais’s Retreat. The tables were spread out wider and there weren’t as many people on this upper level. It was also much quieter and she slowed her pace considerably. The dozen or so tables on this level were all filled, but no one stood between them talking or trying to be heard over the din of other voices as it was on the main floor. These men and women maintained normal conversation levels and appeared to be much more in control.

She also felt something very odd. It was the same feeling she had relished in during her dreams. So warm and inviting and so welcoming and caring. A mild buzzing was sounding off within her head. Something she had felt only in her dreams when she was with them.

She felt them!

The ones from her dreams. Her dark brown eyes darted back and forth among the tables and finally widened when she spied them sitting at a table near the window. She recognized them immediately, her golden blond hair and his captivating azure blue eyes. Eyes that had stared into her own dark orbs in her dreams, almost as if he was looking at her. Ne’Veha also recognized Captain Sa’sur sitting at the same table and her heart skipped a beat. She could not allow Sa’sur to see her in this condition. The Captain of the SCIMITAR already didn’t care for her very much, and if she discovered her drunk like this when she had to fly tomorrow, Sa’sur would certainly recommend disciplinary action against her. She took several steps forward, her eyes darting back and forth looking for another exit and she saw the identical flight of stairs on the other side of the large open area. Many of those men and women on this upper level were looking at her oddly. They were a mix of Lycavorian, Elves, Algolian and several other species. Ne’Veha clenched her fists tightly. They could not see her like this, it would be humiliating to say the least, but the mild buzzing in her head was growing and making her vacillate in her actions. She focused on the stairs through the buzzing and the cloud of Spartan Wine she had drunk and began making her way as quickly as she could to the opposite set of stairs.

She didn’t make it.

Tarren’s hand closed around her arm firmly and she spun around. “Why are you running from me Ne’Veha?” He asked in an amused voice.

Ne’Veha turned her head and glared at him through her intoxicated eyes. “I want nothing to do with you Tarren.” She hissed softly. “Why can’t you see that? You disgust me!”

Tarren looked around slowly. “Ne’Veha... this is not the place for this.” He spoke softly. “Let me get you some coffee and we can sit down and discuss this. We...”

Ne’Veha yanked her arm away, her anger flaring and whatever natural Mindvoice shields she had acquired over the years came crashing down.

“NO!”

“...we can rotate them in shifts.” Sa’sur was speaking. “Three or four *DTs* at a time so as not to raise suspicion. How soon do you and Arrarn think they will be ready Sadi?”

Andro and Sadi sat close to one another, her hand resting on the inside of his leg as they leaned over the table looking at the data pad Sa’sur held. Sa’sur had worked for the last six years alongside Androcles Leonidas and members of his family, and she knew and had witnessed some of what they could do. The moment Sadi became Andro’s Anome, she ceased being a subordinate and was elevated to equal in Sa’sur’s book. You could not be a member of the Leonidas family and not experience some of what they had seen and done throughout the years.

Sadi met her eyes. “At the rate they are progressing... two weeks... perhaps three.” She replied. “All of them have already mastered atmospheric flight loaded with Bonded Pairs. Arrarn wants to start them on exiting procedures tomorrow when I return. It will be a learning experience for me as well since I have only done it once.”

Sa’sur smiled. “One time with this character and any of his brothers and sisters is worth a hundred exits for normal pilots.” She spoke jerking a thumb towards Andro. “Nothing they do is ever normal.”

Sadi grinned and squeezed Andro’s thigh. “Yes... I imagine that would be the case.” She stated.

Andro rolled his eyes at this. “Just because we do some things differently does not make us odd.” He said.

Sa’sur looked at him. “No? What does that make you then?”

“Different.” Andro spoke.

Sa’sur chortled. “Different is not a completely accurate word I would use to describe you Andro.” She said. “More like otherworldly.”

“When do the *DTs* begin arriving?” Andro asked.

“The end of this week.” Sa’sur answered. “I’m having them arrive in twos and threes to keep any prying Kavalian eyes from figuring out what we are doing. They’ll come in from behind EDEN Moon Base and land on the *SCIMITAR*. We’ll keep them over night and then cut them loose on a polar entry corridor to keep them out of Sparta’s airspace. They’ll come down over North America and drop to a hundred feet off the coast for the rest of the trip.”

Andro nodded. “We...”

“NO!”

Andro stopped talking and looked up quickly the movement catching Sa’sur’s eye. She glanced at Sadi and saw that she too was looking up with an almost blank stare.

“Andro?” Sa’sur asked softly.

Andro looked at Sadi quickly. [*KertaGai?*] He questioned.

Sadi nodded. [*I feel her too.*] She said softly.

Sa’sur picked up her mug of Spartan wine and nodded her head to make it appear as if they were still talking in soft whispers. She was only a Tier Five Mindvoicer, but she knew well the signs of Tier Six individuals as they spoke in a shielded conversation. She had also grown able to detect the faint buzzing in her head whenever Andro or any of the Leonidas clan talked within a heavily shielded connection.

[*Andro! Sadi! She is so close!*] Carisia’s musical like voice exploded within their minds as she communicated with them in Mindvoice from SODRAG.

[*You are undergoing training Enylarcopri!*] Andro stated in a humorously stern voice.

[*I am eating breakfast right now!*] Carisia answered immediately, sounding indignant in her reply. [*And I can’t help it if I feel everything both of you do.*]

[*We will need Helen to show us how to better shield between ourselves.*] Sadi spoke. [*If nothing else at least for our own protection.*]

Andro nodded as his azure eyes swept across the upper level reserved for senior officers and he saw her. He felt Sadi’s hand on his leg grip him even tighter as her eyes also found her. Her flowing dark brown hair, the way her dark blue jump suit clung to her lithe five foot three body. The elegant curve of her four inch high elven ears. Andro and Sadi both reached out with their wolf senses and quickly found her delicious sweet amaretto like scent.

This was her... the one they had felt so close to them and Carisia as they lay tangled in each other's arms every morning for the last week. Each time they had felt her more intensely, adding to the pleasure they were bestowing upon each other.

Andro turned and looked at Sa'sur. "Sa'sur... who is she?" He asked in a whisper.

Sa'sur turned and saw Ne'Veha standing with the tall Lycavorian. She shook her head. "Commander Ne'Veha." She spoke shaking her head. "She is one of our new *DEVASTATOR* pilots. She's been here about three weeks and she is intelligent enough to know this area is for senior officers only."

Sadi tore her eyes from Ne'Veha and looked at Sa'sur now as well. "Where did she come from?"

"The Elven Defense Squadron on Elear." Sa'sur answered. "She requested a posting to the elven squadron on Apo Prime but the commander of that squadron didn't want her. She has an issue with Lycavorians it seems. She floated around for six months before finally being assigned here with the new M5s. She has been trying to get out of the 9th ever since she got here. Her father is a low level elven minister and she has had him hounding personnel officers across the fleet to get her transferred to an all elf unit."

"That man is her issue with Lycavorians." Sadi spoke confidently.

Sa'sur looked at the tall officer. "He just came over two days ago. Took command of a company of the 9th. The same one that provides security on the *SCIMITAR*."

"He is trouble." Sadi spoke turning back to look at Ne'Veha. "He did something to her. He did something to her that hurt her."

"Sadi... she is arrogant and borderline disrespectful." Sa'sur spoke. "And she has a serious dislike for Lycavorians. I did some checking and it appears that her mother and father don't care for Lycavorians either."

Andro turned back to look at Ne'Veha. "There is a reason behind that." He said softly. "There is always a reason behind that. I don't like the way he is handling her."

Sa'sur looked at them closely hearing the tenseness in Andro's voice. She too had seen the Netnews interview they had given earlier in the day and what Sadi said then came back to her. She also knew Androcles Leonidas well enough to know when he was beginning to become angry. "Sadi... is this..."

Sadi nodded as her eyes turned back to Ne'Veha as well. "Yes." She replied softly.

"She's been drinking heavily." Andro spoke. "I can smell the wine in her blood. She is not used to it and it is affecting her equilibrium. She is going to be sick."

"Her scent is spiking with fear as well *Aur Armen Enyla*." Sadi said now. "Go! I will call Elynth."

Sa'sur watched as Andro came to his feet instantly and Sadi stood up on his heels. "Sa'sur... she will not be able to fly for at least two days with as much as she has drunk. Can you shift the flight schedule around and make it appear she is doing something else? It would not due for her squadron commander to know about this."

Sa'sur nodded as she stood up as well. "Of course. I'll say I had her do some remedial training here on Earth. What are the two of you going to do?"

Sadi smiled warmly. "We can not explain these things Sa'sur." Sadi spoke. "There are times when we wish we could but..."

Sa'sur shook her head. "You forget Sadi... I've served with Andro for the last few years of my life and I've seen some pretty unexplainable things. It is the norm with him. In situations like this... I have come to learn a few things and one of them is that I do not question his faith, your faith or my own."

"She is... she is one of those who will share our lives Sa'sur. We have felt this." Sadi said confidently. "We will act as wolves should to protect those that we will love and share our lives with. We will take her back to our villa tonight and the on to SODRAG with us in the morning. It will take at least two days for the wine she has drunk to purge from her system fully. She can return the day after tomorrow. At least then she will not show signs of how much she has drunk."

Sa'sur nodded. "I'll take care of it."

"Thank you Sa'sur." Sadi spoke before she turned and followed Andro.

"Don't touch me!" Ne'Veha exclaimed staggering somewhat as she pulled her arm away from Tarren's grip.

Tarren's eyes narrowed slightly. "Ne'Veha you are drunk and you are making a scene." He snarled at her. "Let me take you back to the room I have reserved at the lodge nearby."

"Oh that is just so convenient for you isn't it you pig!" Ne'Veha snapped. "What will you do then Tarren? Help me out of my clothes and then *nubou* me?"

Tarren's eyes grew a little wider and he looked around quickly. "Ne'Veha... when did you learn the ancient language?" He asked.

"I don't know the ancient language you *ronnus!*" She snapped. "I can't speak the ancient language! Why does everyone keep telling me I am speaking the *nubous* ancient language?"

"Ne'Veha you need to keep your voice down!" Tarren spoke sternly. "You are acting like a fool!"

"I hate you Tarren!" She barked. "You need to leave me alone now!"

Tarren took her arm again. "We are going to someplace more private and talk about this!" He snarled.

Ne'Veha yanked her arm away again, this time with enough force to cause her to stagger back and stumble into the table closest to her where two *Durcunusaan* officers sat. Ne'Veha yelped in surprise as she realized she was falling and would not be able to catch herself. She staggered back even more, her balance thoroughly fouled up because of the Spartan wine she had drunk, her body spinning around until she slammed into the unyielding chest of the tall male.

Ne'Veha felt the warmth flood through her as those strong hands gripped her arms and steadied her easily. She looked up then into the most delectable azure colored eyes, eyes she had seen only in her dreams up until this point. She gasped softly as her hands flattened against the broadly muscular chest. She could feel the warmth of the skin beneath the thin shirt, and the rapid but strong beating of his heart. She felt her senses come alive then, her head flashing with images and sensations that she had never experienced before as she looked into those eyes.

Tarren stepped forward quickly reaching for Ne'Veha. "My apologies sir." He spoke quickly not knowing who this young wolf was, but able to detect the pungent scent of lavender and pines along immensely powerful aura radiating from him. An aura Tarren could not come close to matching even on his best day. "She has had too much to drink. I will..."

"You will do nothing!" Sadi's voice filled the small area as she came up and blocked him from moving forward. "Whatever you have done is quite enough!"

Tarren looked at this blond haired Lycavorian female, wondering why she looked so very familiar. "I am Captain Tarren of the 9th SCFAG... Commander Ne'Veha is with me. I will take care of her."

"It appears she does not want your care Captain." Sadi spoke keeping the angry in her voice cleverly masked. "You will remove yourself from this level now sir. Your actions are no longer needed Captain and this area of Gallais's Retreat is reserved for senior officers or parties."

"I am a Spartan Captain!" Tarren retorted sensing the force of this female's aura easily. She was most definitely an alpha female, and a very beautiful one at that. In very male fashion Tarren wondered briefly what she would be like in bed. "I am commander of an elite company of Spartan troops of the 9th SCFAG. Prince Androcles's command!" He stated proudly as he pushed out his chest. "I don't believe I know your name madam." He said as he released a small portion of his own aura to test the compatibility between this female and himself. He could smell her sugar plum and spice scent mixed in heavily with lavender and pines, but he did not make the connection between the two.

Sadi couldn't help but shake her head. Before becoming Andro's mate, and before most knew who she was, many alpha males here in Sparta had tried to entice her with their auras. It had taken nearly two weeks for the information that she was now Crown Princess to filter down to every facet of life and touch even those who did not have access to the Netnews monitors. Or chose not to watch them. Sadi had endured this for she knew what it was, and none of them had even caused her to pause in what she had been doing, for she had already tasted Andro's aura and none of those males compared to her *Anome*. She saw Tarren's eyes narrow slightly as he realized that his aura had absolutely no affect on her in the least and he couldn't understand why the two Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* officers had looks of revulsion and anger on their faces at his actions.

"My name is not important right now Captain. Only that I most definitely outrank you." Sadi spoke sternly. "You..."

Ne’Veha coughed several times from behind her and Sadi turned quickly. Ne’Veha lowered her head to Andro’s chest, her fingers clenching and unclenching on his shirt. “Oh... oh no... I think I’m going to be sick.” She gasped out.

Sweat poured from Ne’Veha’s face now, her full lips quivering as her empty stomach rebelled against the copious amounts of wine she had drunk and heaved upwards. The two *Durcunusaan* officers backpedaled quickly as three full mugs of Spartan wine and what little Ne’Veha had in her stomach came billowing out from between her lips. They watched in horror as Andro took the expulsion full on in his chest, their noses wrinkling at the foul smell. Andro’s eyes were wide as he felt the warm liquid douse his chest, his own nose rebelling at the smell, but he didn’t release Ne’Veha’s arms. He pulled her closer to him and directed her head to the side as she heaved again, her petite frame shuddering as it expelled the cause of her condition from her body.

“Milord!” One of the officers barked out.

Tarren’s eyes went wide when he heard this and he saw Sadi’s head turn back to him, her jungle green eyes flashing with anger. “Remove yourself from this location Captain. I will not ask again.” She snarled angrily.

“I... I will take...” Tarren stammered as Sadi turned back to where Andro held Ne’Veha in his arms.

Sa’sur stepped up quickly from the side then. “Captain... it is my experience that when the Crown Princess of our Union gives you a directive... you obey it.” She snapped. “I do know for a fact that Prince Androcles Leonidas does not care for officers in his unit who do not have any common sense!”

Tarren gawked at Sa’sur for a moment and then looked back at where Andro held Ne’Veha. His azure blue eyes were focused on him and not in the least bit friendly. “Prince... Prince Androcles!” He gasped. “My... my apologies sire!”

Andro turned his head to the two *Durcunusaan* officers as he lifted Ne’Veha into his arms heedless of the vomit that soaked his chest. Ne’Veha had already fainted and gone limp in his arms. “Commander if you would, clear me a path out the back door and give our goodbyes to Gallais for Sadi and myself.”

The *Durcunusaan* officer nodded immediately. “At once Milord!”

Sadi felt Ne’Veha’s head with her hand. “She’s burning up with fever Andro.”

Andro nodded as he looked at her. “Spartan wine will increase an elf’s body temperature if they drink too much.” He said. “Have Elynth take her and you back to Cranae Island and allow her to cool down and sleep it off *KertaGai*. I will join you shortly, after I have cleaned myself up.”

Sadi nodded as they walked towards the exit leaving Tarren watching them with stunned eyes and a sinking feeling in his gut that he had made a mistake coming after Ne’Veha. There was obviously something she had not told him if the Crown Prince and Princess acted as if they knew her so well.

And he intended to find out why.

NEBONESE SPACEPORT

Las’elh watched the throngs of people moving about the spaceport as she stood beside Cihera in the shadows of one of the spaceport’s many vender stands. No one seemed to be moving with urgency, and there did not appear to be anymore security than when they had arrived. They had come immediately here after the ambush near the mine. Nineteen of this Evolli’s men now lay dead after engaging Cihera, Anton and the other Drow.

After engaging her as well.

Las’elh had never experienced a firefight like the one that still caused her heart to beat rapidly and her blood to churn. She had never killed before, at least not from this close up and by her own hand. Her actions during the Evolli war had led to the death of several dozen Evolli Commandos when she called in a *STRIKER AT* to attack their position, but she had never taken a life herself and been so close. She glanced out the corner of her eye and took in Cihera as she stood there calmly, amber eyes keenly sweeping the area around them. Las’elh could still feel Cihera’s kiss upon her lips, the way she had pulled her body close and how that single kiss had ignited sensations within her that Las’elh had never felt. She was no stranger to pleasure among females, during her time on Talbor Seven she had resorted to this with three different female elves in the course

of trying to find out information about her sister. While it had been very pleasurable to an extent, it had not set her body on fire as Cihera's kiss had. Perhaps it was because she was a Drow, and Las'elh now knew that if she was to enter into something with Cihera, she would also be giving herself to Anton Simpson as well. Surprisingly that knowledge did not make her blink and she could imagine herself between them now, being held in their arms and experiencing delights that she never had before.

"What are you thinking Las'elh?" Cihera asked softly without looking at her.

"You can't sense it? My surface thoughts?" Las'elh spoke.

Cihera looked at her with a small smile. "Neither Anton nor I use Mindvoice very much." She explained. "We are not as strong as others... though with training and time that potential is there for us because of whom our parents are I suppose."

"You never use it?" Las'elh asked.

"Only when we truly need too." Cihera said. "My birth parents escaped with Lynwe from a High Coven camp. They were trained as Lynwe, and our Queen's brother, as assassins and warriors, but still kept within this camp. When they joined with Martin Leonidas their lives changed. They died in the battle for Earth. I was only four years old then... and Lynwe and Selene adopted me without question. It was an easy decision really, for we are like Lycavorians in many respects. We know children are our future, and no Drow child that lost parents in the Battle for Earth was left to fend for themselves. All of us were adopted within months. Lynwe and Selene are powerful Tier Six Mindvoicers, but I never really chose to use that skill. Anton's younger brother Dario is even stronger in many respects than their father and my mothers, for he is bonded to a dragon. Anton and I prefer to use the skills we have been given and have cultivated over the years."

"I have never been very strong within Mindvoice." Las'elh spoke softly. "And I have never killed someone up close like I did today. You were so calm... and... and Anton was making jokes!"

Cihera chuckled softly. "You should see his father." She said. "Hearing him and the King toss insults and demeaning comments back and forth during a battle is most amusing."

"They are fearless?" Las'elh said meeting her eyes with no apprehension now. At this moment, standing here and now, Las'elh decided she wanted Cihera. She wanted this supremely confident and skilled Drow to have her in any way Cihera desired. And having Anton tossed into the mix would only be an added bonus as far as Las'elh was concerned for he was gifted in his own right.

"No... they fear." Cihera spoke. "They are afraid... they will be the first ones to tell you if you do not fear war and battle then there is something wrong with you. They are Spartans however, and from the time of his father they have been trained to embrace that fear and use it to give them strength. That is how they do it, by swearing and insulting each other. I do not understand it..." Cihera spoke with a smile. "But it works for them."

"Cihera... about earlier... I..." Las'elh stammered.

Cihera lifted a finger and placed it on Las'elh's lips silencing her. "Be very sure Las'elh." She said softly. "Be very sure it is what you want in your heart. It has happened very quickly and I do not want you to rush something that you are only experiencing for the first time right now."

"Aren't you rushing it as well?" Las'elh asked.

Cihera tilted her head with a smile. "Perhaps... but that is because I do not wish to lose you to another."

"My... my mind tells me to... it tells me that I shouldn't open myself to people who will be gone when this mission is over." Las'elh said. "My body... my heart screams out for your touch. For Anton's touch." Las'elh shook her head. "I can't believe we are even having this conversation right now."

Cihera grinned. "Wrap your mind around this Las'elh. If you enter into a relationship with us, you will become part of my family. Part of Anton's family. You will become part of a very large, combined Spartan and Drow clan that includes not only the Leonidas family but the Drow Queen herself. A Spartan and Drow clan that loves without question, fights for each other without hesitation, and we are utterly loyal to the man we call our King. If you decide to enter into a relationship with us Las'elh, you will never be alone; you will never have to rely on just yourself anymore; and we will love you fervently until the day we pass from this life and into the next." Cihera told her in a calm even voice, her bright amber eyes boring into her.

"And... and you swear this to me?" Las'elh asked.

Cihera smiled. "Oh yes." She told her.

“Then that is what I want.” Las’elh spoke instantly. “I...” She stopped speaking when Anton appeared ghostlike from the side of the vendor stall and moved close to them. She and Cihera turned to look at him, and for the first time Las’elh realized just how extremely well built he was and it made a warmth spread through her as she realized she had just committed herself to a relationship with a Drow and her husband. And that fact only made her happier than she had ever been.

“He’s here.” Anton’s voice carried to them in almost a whisper. “The MUTT squad has removed the outer layer of guards and they have sealed the other entrances into his lair. Three Kochab and two Evolli remain just inside the entrance according to thermal scans.”

“What is the overconfident Evolli bastard doing?” Cihera asked. “He obviously did not feel the need to be part of the ambush he planned for us.”

Anton met her eyes. “He is eating his dinner.” He replied. “He apparently did not think his men would fail my Drow wife. One of the outer guards told us he is preparing to leave Nebonese this evening once they had Gravork in their hands.”

“And he just offered this information to us?” Cihera asked.

Anton shrugged. “Well... he was promised his life would continue if he told us what we wanted to know.”

Las’elh looked at him now. “Was that promise kept?”

Anton grinned flashing his perfect white teeth. “Yes. For an additional four minutes.” He answered. “They never told him *how* long it would continue for.”

Las’elh couldn’t help herself now and she allowed the bright smile to split her face. She looked intently at Cihera with those dazzling blue orbs. “I find the prospect of our relationship more enticing by the moment... Mistress.” She said coyly.

Anton’s eyes grew a little wider. “What’s this?” He asked.

Cihera’s amber eyes were focused on Las’elh and she too smiled. “We will fill you in later husband.” Cihera told him as she looked into his handsome face. “Right now however, could you use your delicious skills as a Spartan warrior and clear us a path to this Bontick fool.”

Anton smiled and mocked bowed his head. “Your wish is my command... Mistress.” He spoke.

The Evolli guard turned from his conversation with his brother at the pounding on the door into the outer spaceport. They had followed Bontick since the end of the Evolli War. All of them had lost everything in that war, and with the unconditional surrender of the entire Evolli government at the end, they became mercenaries and pirates. Always with the intent to cause as much death and destruction to Union forces and people wherever they got the chance. Those opportunities had become less and less easy to obtain in the last few years since the Union forces were aware of their presence and very mindful of the fact that there were thousands of Evolli who had become mercenaries and pirates when their government signed the surrender. Bontick had offered those that joined him credits and power and they had that across The Wilds. They were feared by many people and even though there were other Evolli of Bontick’s power and influence, he was the most feared. They had been killing and raping for the entire three years since the end of the war, always more brutal to those they captured who were citizens of the Union. The elves they had captured were treated especially harsh, the females ganged raped and beaten, while the men were tortured for hours before being killed. Their organization had begun accepting outsiders when their numbers dipped too low, and while the Kochab, Unsaar and Bo’yak were savage and brutal in their own right, none of them held the hatred for the Union that the Evolli did.

They were waiting now for their assault team to report back that they had secured the Kochab Gravork in the ambush of the Drow. Bontick had arranged a huge payoff that somehow included getting their hands on Gravork. The Kochab was wanted by many people within The Wilds for the information he held in his head. When they had Gravork, Bontick told them their power and influence would grow exponentially. How he had found out Gravork was with the Drow who had recently come to Nebonese was not something they worried about.

The Evolli turned back to his brother. “Why would they knock?” He asked.

“Who cares?” His brother spoke. “If they brought some of those Drow females with them it will only make it better. I’ve always wished to fuck one of those Drow elves and listen to them scream.”

“You think with your dick brother.” He said as he moved to the thick armored door.

“Yes I know.” His brother answered with a laugh.

The three Kochab mercenaries watched from the table where they were playing some silly game with small cards and dice of some sort.

“You have to find your dick first Tenru!” One of the Kochab announced with a laugh, eliciting laughter from his two companions.

Tenru turned to look at them. “What the fuck do you know?” He snarled as the large door hissed open.

“Hi there!” The strange voice spoke causing their heads to snap around and stare at the tall dark skinned half elf Spartan in the doorway. The same one who should have been dead by now. “I believe we have an appointment!”

“Brother!” Tenru screamed as Anton brought up his left arm and the Shi Viska flared into existence.

In that split second the razors sprang into place on Anton’s Shi Viska and the shield launched. The Evolli in front of him, three meters by Anton’s estimate, lost his head before he even knew what was going on. The wet thud of his head hitting the floor was like a crack of thunder in the quiet of the doorway and long corridor, as was the sound of the explosiveness of his blood splashing on the walls.

Anton was moving forward before his Shi Viska returned to his arm, heading directly for where Tenru stood with every bit of his elven speed, even as the shimmering white hair of Cihera flashed quickly from the side of the door, and Las’elh’s long blond hair right with her. Though neither of them had vampire speed, both Cihera and Las’elh had the natural elven speed which was far faster than the three Kochab would ever be able to move. Two silenced K14s came up and four rounds were let fly. Cihera was the more experienced and better shot; both of her rounds struck their Kochab targets in the center of their foreheads, exploding their heads like overripe fruit. As was customary with Kochab because of the arteries that ended in their skulls, the blood spray was massive, coating the side of Tenru’s shoulder and face. Las’elh was less experienced, but still an excellent marksman. She fired twice, the first of her kinetic magnum rounds striking the third Kochab in his throat and the second punching through his open mouth. His blood fountained outward from his mouth and added to that already gushing from his ruined and shredded throat as he dropped to the floor, dead before he collapsed fully.

Tenru had only three seconds to react, and his reflexes were not even in the same league as Anton Simpson. As his head came back around dripping with Kochab blood, his bulbous eyes flew open as the head of Anton’s *Nehtes* perforated his chest and erupted from between his shoulder blades. Anton grabbed his shoulder and rammed the *Nehtes* further forward as he pulled Tenru closer to him with a vicious snarl, his wolf fangs now extended and his dark eyes changed to yellow orbs surrounded by blackness.

“You will never have your wish Evolli scum!” Anton mocked savagely. “You will be dead!”

Anton twisted the shaft of the *Nehtes* with precise movements, grinding it inside the Evolli’s chest cavity and destroying his internal organs even as Tenru hung from the *Nehtes* already dead. When Anton saw the life leave his sickly looking eyes, he stepped back and ripped his *Nehtes* free, the razor like head of the spear tearing more massive wounds in the Evolli’s chest and bringing with it pieces of his lungs and heart. Anton spun the *Nehtes* gracefully in his hand as Cihera and Las’elh watched, leaned back and brought his right leg up in devastating high kick that impacted just under Tenru’s jaw. The sound of his neck popping was like a gunshot in the room, Tenru’s body lifting into the air and crashing back down with a wet thud fifteen feet from where Anton stood. Anton lifted his hand, his *Nehtes* fully extended and he depressed the thumb button, collapsing the spear in a single blink. He lifted his left arm and his Shi Viska tore free of the wall it had impacted and remained after severing the head of the first Evolli. Cihera and Las’elh stood together and watched as his Shi Viska snapped back to settle onto his arm and then vanished with a soft flare of white light. Cihera nudged Las’elh gently with her elbow and waited until she turned to look at her.

Cihera smiled devilishly. “He will be exceptionally passionate tonight Las’elh. He may only be half wolf, but his father’s blood burns within him brightly.” She said. “I hope you are prepared.”

Las’elh matched her smile. “I’m looking forward to it.” She said.

Cihera nodded her head. “Good. Now let us go and see this Bontick. The rooms appear soundproof, and he is most likely unaware we have even come to visit him.” She turned and headed down the short corridor opposite the door they had come in, Las’elh right on her heels as Anton brought up the rear.

The inner door was not armored and no where near as thick. Cihera glanced at the wall panel and saw it was foolishly unlocked. She turned to Las'elh. "This Evolli fool is supremely confident in his manner. The door is unlocked."

Anton grabbed her arm and motioned downward with his head. "Daxen gas! He knows we are here!"

Cihera saw the wistful fingers of the deadly white vapor seeping out from under the door seals and she shook her head. "Fool!" She said. "Husband... you may have the lead."

"Thank you my Drow wife." Anton spoke. "A pleasure."

The three of them took deep breaths from the clean air above the gaseous vapor and Cihera punched the wall panel. While not able to hold their breaths for as long as Lycavorians or Algolians, elves could hold their breaths for three to four minutes easily. It was something all elven intelligence agents learned and practiced on a regular basis. Las'elh was no different as she nodded to Cihera and the door opened. She and Cihera went in first, their K14s out in front of them. The room they entered was completely filled with the gas vapor and had they not been holding their breaths, it would have penetrated their lungs and caused them to go into severe convulsions before death took them.

"Ah... I see you got this far!" The voice echoed around them as Cihera and Las'elh broke to different sides of the room, though it sounded muffled. "I must say I am impressed. You have managed to kill all of my men here on Nebonese! That is not something I ever expected. You are apparently much more than simple Drow elves."

Cihera and Las'elh held their K14s leveled at the sound of the voice and circled slowly. The gas did not allow them to see inside the center of the room or more than a few feet around them, but their elven ears allowed them to know exactly where Bontick was. They moved with precision, covering themselves as they moved closer.

"As you can see... I have released Daxen gas vapor into the room." Bontick spoke. "I am not without my means. In a few minutes you will be dead and I will leave this retched planet with Gravork."

Bontick stood by the large table in the room, his shaking hands holding the older High Coven assault rifle. The breathing mask covered his mouth and nose, his orange eyes darting back and forth at every shadow that the gas was causing. He could see nothing to shoot at, and the interior of this room was lined with armor and soundproofing material, making it highly resistant to projectile weapons. The rounds would ricochet lethally around the room if he didn't hit what he was aiming at. Fear gripped Bontick. A fear he hadn't felt since the last battle of the war when his entire command had been slaughtered while he listened and watched from orbit. Whoever these individuals were that were working with the Drow, they were certainly not normal elves, and he had to get off this planet if he was to report this to his Kavalian handlers.

Bontick heard the smashing sound of glass and his head darted to the left as the Daxen gas began to be sucked out in another direction. He swore to himself as he realized someone had reached the small control room and activated the vacuum controls for the room. He lifted his assault rifle and pointed it in that direction, intending to open fire at the first sign of flesh he saw and damn with the risks. He heard a metallic 'snick' like a door opening and saw a dark flash of something that was not a shadow. As his finger tightened on the trigger his eyes grew wide when he felt the horrible pain rip through his leg and cause him to scream in agony, dropping the rifle and reaching for his leg. His hands wrapped around the shaft of the *Nehtes*, his eyes growing wide in horror when he realized what it was. His screaming stopped when he felt first one and then two barrels press to the exposed skin of his head and he froze. Cihera and Las'elh appeared from the dissipating cloud fully, their silenced K14s locked and cocked and ready to deliver the final rounds of his life. His orange eyes darted to the side as the last of the gaseous vapor was sucked from the room and he saw the dark skinned male standing by the shattered window of the small control room. He stared at Bontick as he reached through the window and slammed his hand down on the controls and let out a slow breath.

"Spartans!" He gasped looking down once more and seeing the *Nehtes* clearly for the first time. The only people who could use these weapons with any effectiveness were Spartans that much he knew.

Anton smiled as Cihera and Las'elh also exhaled slowly so as not to cause blood to rush to their heads and blur their vision.

"Bontick my Evolli friend!" Anton bellowed as he walked towards him. "It's not polite to keep prospective clients waiting Bontick. Have you learned nothing in your time in The Wilds you pathetic worm?"

Bontick watched as Anton leaped up onto the table in front of him and squatted down on the surface, kicking several plates of expensive food onto the floor. He never saw Cihera's hand snatch the front of his breathing mask and rip it off with little fanfare, the straps slicing into his skin and causing blood to streak downward.

Anton looked at him, his wolf eyes going to the *Nehtes* that impaled Bontick's leg completely through. He smiled a cruel smile baring his wolf fangs. "Does that hurt Bontick?" He asked in an almost cheery voice. "Here let me help you with that." Anton leaped from the table and landed in front of him his hand closing around the *Nehtes*.

"No!" Bontick screamed too late as Anton yanked the *Nehtes* free from his leg with barely a pause.

Cihera snatched a chair from the table just as he began to fall and slammed it into the back of his legs causing him to collapse into the small seat. "Take a rest Evolli bastard!" She snarled.

Bontick cried out as his squat body settled into the chair, his yellowish blood splashing wetly on the floor as it flowed from between his fingers. "What... what do you want?" He shouted as he watched Anton remove something from his belt and slap it down on the table activating it. The small blue light came on and flashed on and off in the center of the small disc.

"I should skin you where you sit for ambushing my friends and attempting to kill us!" Cihera hissed at him. "Las'elh if he so much as twitches, please ventilate his empty Evolli skull!"

Las'elh jammed the barrel of her K14 tighter into Bontick's moist cheek. "With the utmost pleasure!" She spoke.

Cihera moved around in front of him. "How did you find out we had Gravork?" She asked.

"You will kill me anyway!" Bontick snarled. "Why should I tell you anything Drow bitch?"

Anton's fist lashed out with devastating power and smashed into Bontick's injured leg causing his eyes to nearly explode from his head. "That is my mate and wife you speak to Bontick!" Anton growled. "You will answer her questions... for if you don't I will begin with your injured leg and start removing pieces of you as I go! You will not die Bontick!" Anton removed something else from his belt and set it on the table, unwrapping it slowly to expose gleaming metal tools with edges and points. "I will keep you alive my Evolli friend... and you will experience more agony than you could ever imagine even on your worst day." Anton reached over and removed the first long tool. The edge was blunt with what appeared to be pinchers at the end.

Cihera smiled savagely. "You should listen to him Bontick." She spoke. "I have seen him keep a member of your vile species alive for six days before the fool broke. When my husband was done with him all that remained was his upper torso. He had lost both arms and legs."

Bontick's eyes grew wide. "You are part of the Union!" He screamed. "Only a Spartan can use a *Nehtes*! You can not do this!"

Cihera looked at Anton. "You may begin husband." She said. "Take his left fingers first!" Anton smiled and moved forward.

"NO!" He bellowed. "Wait! You are *Krypteria*! You have to be! Only the *Krypteria* would be so bold! I want... I want immunity! I will tell you everything... but I want to live!"

Anton's hand stopped and he looked at Bontick for a moment before turning to Cihera. "Wife?" He asked.

Cihera turned her head to the table. "Armetus?"

Bontick's eyes grew wider as he saw the small device on the table flare into a small holo image of the famed leader of the *Krypteria*. Armetus was in what appeared to be a very neat office standing in front of a large window and drinking the mug of steaming liquid. Bontick knew well who Armetus was; the Lycavorian leader of the *Krypteria* had a price on his head almost as high as the King and his vile son during their war.

"Give me a reason to not give you to Anton." Armetus spoke in a harsh voice. "I have little reason to trust you or any of your disgusting species Bontick."

"I have information!" Bontick barked. "Valuable information!"

"How did you find out my people had Gravork?" Armetus asked.

"The Kavalians told me!" Bontick barked immediately. "They have had people watching that Kochab bastard for months! The moment they left Talbor Seven with him my Kavalian contact sent me a transmission."

"You are working for the Kavalians?" Las'elh demanded.

“I worked for whoever paid me the most!” Bontick snapped. “The Kavalians have set up an outpost of sorts on Nefoa. They strong armed the government there and basically took control under the guise of keeping peace between the warring factions. They are branching out all over The Wilds from there!”

“Why do they want Gravork so badly?” Cihera asked.

“He has brokered all of their T19 weapons deals!” Bontick replied. “He has been to Nefoa! He knows the lay out of the base there and he supposedly has information that would lead them to some sort of resistance group!”

“Resistance group?” Armetus asked.

Bontick nodded. “Rejects from their early biogenic experiments! Biogenic clones that did not die at the end of their life cycles! Things like that! That is all I overheard when I met with them! Gravork knows who their leader is. And he was the one that set up the meetings between these resistance fighters and the Lycavorian who gave them the ship manifests!”

“Anton?” Armetus asked looking at him in the transmission.

Anton nodded. “It’s possible. I never asked directly about the Kavalians and there would have been no reason for him to answer. I was only concerned with the weapons shipment and how these scum got the information about my aunts.”

“Your aunts?” Bontick asked. “What are you speaking of?”

Anton looked at him. “The two Queens your men were waiting to ambush on Eleysi Three!” She spat. “The ones my cousins sent to an early grave!”

“They are related to you?” Bontick gasped.

“My father is General/Colonel Daniel Simpson!” Anton barked.

“The Black Devil!” Bontick hissed.

Anton smiled. “You know him? How quaint. This leads me to my next question. How did you get the information about them? When they were leaving Hadaria?”

“One of your people!” Bontick snapped with a grin. “He hates all of you!”

Cihera rolled her eyes. “As if that is anything new.” She stated as her hand snapped out and she slapped him viciously. “Tell us something we don’t know! Is it the traitor Pusintin?”

Bontick looked at her. “Pusintin? He is a rabid dog. He hates my people almost as much as your pathetic King! He would never give us anything. He enjoys being Kavalian! It allows him to be that much crueler.”

“Well... we both hate you; at least we have that in common with him.” Armetus spoke.

This time it was Las’elh and she smashed the K14 across the side of his skin head hard, the action of the weapon cutting open his hairless scalp. “Then who!” She shouted as she jammed the K14 back into his cheek.

“And I grow tired... my finger might slip if you do not begin telling us something we don’t know!”

“I don’t know who he is!” Bontick screamed. “We have only met once and that was in a crowded tavern on Jagaliu! He wore a helmet and cowl. I never saw his face clearly. He wanted people who would target Union assets! I offered my help! And he paid well!”

“How well?” Cihera asked.

“To target the Queens of Leonidas and Union assets near the border and in The Wilds... five hundred million credits!” Bontick exclaimed. “I am not the only one he hired!”

Armetus’s eyes grew wider. “What do you mean?”

“He hired vampires too! Rogue purebloods to target your King’s children! And he had another Lycavorian lap dog with him!” Bontick told them. “He is the one who was meeting with the Kavalian resistance leaders and giving them the manifest information about the ships. This Lycavorian dog is smart. He uses others to do his dirty work and he plays both sides of the coin. He is far more than he makes himself seem!”

“Tell us about this other Lycavorian.” Cihera asked.

“He also wore a helmet and cowl... but I saw him remove it just as they were leaving. I caught a glimpse of his face! Dark hair... thick neck. It was too far to see his eyes!” Bontick spoke quickly. “They talked for a few moments and then parted in separate ships!”

“To where?” Anton asked.

“I don’t know! I didn’t bother to check!” Bontick shouted. “He is also the one that hired the vampire to kill the half elf daughter!”

Anton came alert even more than normal. “What?” He exclaimed.

Cihera turned to the transmission. "Armetus? What does he speak of?"

"Someone sabotaged Normya's TYPE II." Armetus explained. "An explosive device on her LSD Coil Drive. It sent her ship out of control and she hit a Jump Gate trying to save it. A group of mercenaries waited until her ship drifted across the border and then they tried to take her."

"Tried?" Anton asked.

Armetus nodded. "Normya was rescued by a group of Immortals Anton." He spoke seeing the alarm on Anton's face. "She is alive because of them!" He added quickly seeing the looks of horror on both Anton and Cihera's faces now. "They are part of Cha'talla's Tribe and they have sworn a Blood Oath to protect her because of what Martin did on Lycavore a quarter century ago. Dysea and Iriral are with her now and they are heading back to Union space to begin a discrete investigation of their own. Normya and Dysea were with these Immortals for a week Anton. These are not the Immortals we have grown up knowing."

"Does Uncle Martin know this?" Anton asked.

Armetus chuckled. "If the King knew someone was targeting his children, we would have locked the Union down a long time ago Anton." He said shaking his head. "No... Dysea is keeping this limited to a few so that those involved do not run underground and hide. Which only makes her actions more intelligent based on what this fool has told us." They watched Armetus move to a large desk. "The weapons deal with the High Coven Immortals? Was this Lycavorian involved in that as well?"

Bontick shook his head quickly. "No. We did that on our own. They reached out to us and I had a supply of the dragon killers myself."

Armetus nodded as he sat down in the high backed chair. "That corresponds to what your father discovered Anton." He spoke calmly. "Martin is on Hadaria right now with Anja. The Arch Ministry is acting up again. They will be returning in a few days I'm sure. Dysea should be reaching Union space shortly and then on to Apo Prime. That is where they will start their investigation." They watched as an aide came in and Armetus took the data pad from him. "Commander Las'elh... I owe you an apology. It appears you were right all along. I intend to pass this information of to Minister L'tian and Colonel Su'ave. Once Dysea and For'mya got involved with this... he became rather forthcoming."

Cihera looked at Las'elh and smiled at her. "I told you." She said softly.

"Thank you... I... I don't know how to refer to you sir." Las'elh spoke.

Armetus chuckled once more. "You are permanently attached to the *Krypteria* as of right now Commander." He stated. "Full reinstatement with the EI is yours if you wish. Or you could remain with Anton and Cihera and continue helping them."

Las'elh didn't hesitate. "I will stay with them sir." She stated. "I am closer now to finding my sister than I have ever been, and I have found something I have never had before. I am not leaving now."

Armetus nodded. "Then welcome to the *Krypteria*." He said. "Anton... Cihera... have Malia and Nalar execute their extraction plan. If the Kavalians knew you had Gravork then they know that at least our operation on Nebonese was a front. I will need to review all our Drow Ops and decide from there."

"They are already working on it." Anton spoke. "Do we return to the Union Armetus?"

Armetus shook his head. "Not openly. Have Nalar and Malia bring their people home, but take half the MUTT Squad and meet Dysea on Apo Prime. I'll have Lynwe and Aihola debrief Nalar and Malia on Earth. Go to the Mjolnir's Hand base near the palace. That is where Dysea will be set up for now and your information will confirm what she already knows based on what Normya told her. As far as everyone else knows the royal family is on Earth... with the exception of Dysea. All they know is that Martin and Anja left for a quick trip to Hadaria and that is how it will stay. I will have some equipment and documents waiting for Las'elh when you arrive."

"Armetus... a Lycavorian with access to those types of funds." Cihera said. "There can't be that many of them."

"You might be surprised Cihera." He replied. "Millions have prospered since Martin became King. And prospered very well. Unfortunately... there are those out there that do not like that."

"The Peace and Utopia movement." Cihera said.

Armetus nodded. "Yes indeed." He lifted the pad in his hand and began reading. "We will need to..."

Anton and Cihera saw his eyes go wider as he read whatever was on the pad. "Armetus?" Anton asked.

Armetus looked up at the aide who was still in the office with them but out of the transmission cone. “This is accurate?” He demanded as he came to his feet.

“The transmission was received only nineteen minutes ago sir.” The voice replied.

“Armetus... what is wrong?” Cihera asked.

Bontick began to laugh then. “The great Armetus at a loss for words!” He bellowed. “I...”

Anton twisted around and delivered a straight right cross to Bontick’s face. The blow had the desired affect, Bontick’s head snapped around, his body warped out of the chair and he fell unconscious to the floor blood leaking from his now shattered jaw.

“Armetus... what is wrong?” Cihera asked.

“Nubou!” Armetus barked. “This is not good!”

“Armetus...”

“Anton... I want you to use your drugs on Bontick!” Armetus snapped. “I want you to take that scum and drain whatever may be of value in his head. Everything.”

“And then?” Anton asked.

“Martin has already ordered the sentence for Bontick and his ilk.” He replied. “Carry it out. I need to act on this here Anton!” He declared. “Marci has full knowledge of what you are doing. If you need anything... contact her. I will be out of pocket for a few days.”

“Armetus... what have you discovered?” Anton asked. “What is on that pad?”

Armetus looked at him in the transmission. “The real reason the High Coven is on Earth.” He stated. “And Martin Leonidas is going to *sibfla* in his pants when he sees this... for lack of a better phrase at the moment. I have to go. Remain alert... all of you.”

Armetus ended the transmission before Anton could speak and he turned to look at Cihera and Las’elh who had moved up next to her. “Cihera... when have you ever known Armetus to look as harried as he just did?” He asked.

“Never.” Cihera answered immediately. “Whatever he just found out I am sure we will discover it soon enough. I will contact Nalar and Malia. Will you see to our extra baggage here?”

Anton looked down at Bontick’s limp frame. “Can’t we just interrogate him here and then leave his corpse in the garbage pile in back? We already have one piece of garbage stinking up our cargo hold.”

“What... what is the King’s sentence for Bontick and the others?” Las’elh asked.

They both looked at her. “They began the war and did not want to stop when they lost.” Cihera said. “The Evolli who live peacefully on their worlds have no worry from us. Those who do not... well... Uncle Martin has said they are to be executed on sight.”

“Without a trial?” Las’elh asked.

“The Surrender Terms were their trial.” Anton spoke. “They chose not to abide by them... now when they are caught... they are treated as war criminals and executed without pause.” He told her. “We did not start the war Las’elh... and we have helped those Evolli who agreed to peace rebuild their world and government. This scum chooses not to follow their leaders who decided peace was preferable to war.”

“There are many like them out here Anton.” Las’elh spoke.

Cihera nodded. “Yes... that is what worries us the most.” She said. “It seems we have enemies popping up out of the woodwork I believe the saying is.”

Anton nodded. “Then it’s time to get an exterminator.” He stood up fully. “I will get my bag and interrogate this idiot here. Take Las’elh and prep our ship Cihera. I won’t be long. Whatever Armetus has discovered is very big and I want to be back in Union space with Aunt Dysea when we find out what it is.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

OMEN THREE

PE’LOHAGRO

HIGH COVEN SPACE

This is why her father had given her this command.

Yuriko Leonidas stared through the view window at the smoke rising from the other end of the compound that protruded from the barren rock surface of Pe'lohagro. Her personal Mark IV ArmorPly was covered in dust and splotches of blood from their assault, and now her team was working on placing their explosive charges. They had hit this place with no warning and no mercy, her team of vampire and Lycavorian troops superbly trained and having worked together for nearly five years now.

Yuriko let her mind wander back through the years, always going back to the day when Martin Leonidas, the man she called her father had come back into her life. The two years she had spent on EDEN Moon Base as part of the witch Yuri's cover story had very few moments of real joy in them, all of them concerning him. He had accepted her without question as his daughter, surprising even himself in his actions then. He had not known who or what he was at that time, nor had Yuriko for that matter. She had figured it out during her four plus centuries looking for Lisisa and fighting the Coven on Earth, and the one fear that had always crept into her belly was that he would not accept her once she came back into his life. All those fears had been laid to rest that day on the *LEONIDAS I*-Attack Cruiser when he had embraced her in his powerful arms outside that cell just as tightly as he had when she was but a child. Yuri had butchered her parents, robbing Yuriko of a childhood with her own kind, but in the process of doing that Yuri had unwittingly given her so much more.

That day on the ship outside that cell Yuriko had been reborn.

She had spent the next year looking for Lisisa with Daniel Simpson and Filrian at her side. At first she had questioned her father sending Daniel with her, believing he sent the man he considered his brother along to watch her because he did not trust her. That had never been the case as Yuriko quickly learned. He entrusted the man he considered his brother to Yuriko's care and guidance, entrusted her to teach him of The Wilds. He communicated regularly with her, denying her nothing when it came to searching for Lisisa or anything she might need on a personal basis. When she told him they had found Lisisa, her father had kept his promise to her, and together they had rescued her from Lycavore. It mattered not that Lisisa was not her blood sister; Yuriko had spent the first ten years of Lisisa's life shielding her from Yuri's demented ideas and experiments.

This was the entire bond Yuriko needed to call Lisisa her sister.

Even after Andro had been born, and then Eliani, he never dismissed her or Lisisa. If anything he pulled them closer to him, training them to be even more lethal and competent than they already were. They were his daughters, perhaps not by blood she now knew, but by the bond of a promise and love.

And Martin Leonidas never broke his promises.

It was her father who had finally gotten her to see the love that Filrian held for her in his heart. It was Martin Leonidas who finally got her to admit that she loved the Hadarian man back just as intensely as he loved her, and to let go of her past and embrace the future they could have together. It was just another list of events that tied her closer and closer to him in a way that even blood could not sever. She and Lisisa had gone with him to defeat the Kavalian animals when they had attacked Gamji, standing beside him and Torma in the thick of battle. She had fought beside him during the Evolli War, always covering his back and side. He left her out of nothing, and next to Andro, Yuriko knew without question that she was perhaps the best informed of any of his children. She and Andro had a very close relationship. One that nearly matched the closeness he shared with Zarah. And only Yuriko knew what the reasons behind that were.

When they discovered this facility existed he came to her with an opportunity.

It was during the third year of the Evolli War, and they had met in secret with Armetus and Andro. He wanted to give her this new ship, the finest technicians and skilled operators anywhere in the Union, and he wanted to turn her loose in High Coven space to monitor this facility and gather intelligence. She would be his 'Ace in the Hole' as he had called it. This opportunity entailed that they stage a falling out of sorts, a public disagreement that could be used to explain her disappearance from the Leonidas family venue. It was the hardest thing she had ever done in her life, savagely disagreeing with him in public, even striking him as hard as she could. All to advance their plan. Only Armetus and Andro knew the real reasons behind these actions, but it allowed her to go places and report intelligence that would not have been possible had she been on good terms with her father. It gave her freedom to operate as she wished, and while they could not speak to one another in the open, they spent hours talking of everything when they communicated once a month. Here she was, a pureblood vampire woman, and she called a pureblood Lycavorian her beloved father. A Lycavorian with the

purest blood of all, and who was King. Yuriko had to smile at this, for she knew Yuri had never envisioned this would come about.

Yuriko had an idea of what her father had going through his head when he sent her here. Like Andro she had spent hours upon hours delving into how his mind worked. He was not the violent, ignorant brute everyone thought him to be. He only cultivated that idea so as to disarm his potential enemies. Her adopted father was a cunning beast, more so than any man, woman or creature she had ever met and she would follow him into the very pits of Hades itself if he asked her too.

Yuriko shifted her 190 to the opposite hip as the door to her side opened and Filrian entered. His ArmorPly looked much the same as hers, his dark hair longer now and tied into long strips almost like dreadlocks. Her cobalt blue vampire eyes watched as he approached and Yuriko felt the warmth flood through her whenever she gazed at her husband. He had been with her for going on three hundred years now, and it had taken her that long to realize that he loved her with all that he was. She felt shame when she thought back on all the men who had shared her bed in that time, knowing now what he had felt for her for so long. This was another reason she so loved her adopted father, he had helped her to take off the blinders and see Filrian's devotion to her for what it was. He had not even gotten the question of her marrying him fully out of his mouth and Yuriko was telling him yes. He was not the largest man who had ever shared her bed, but his touch was the only one in all her years that could set her on fire with a simple caress or make her tremble in need. His marriage to her had caused many rifts within the Hadarian Arch Ministry, but as he had always done, Filrian dismissed them without thought. He had the backing and support of Anja and Sivana, the Divine One Eurin and Zaniai. What he had taught himself through the years on how to extend his powers and have to not return to Hadaria as often to Ascend was now taught within the Healer Academy on Hadaria.

"Husband?" Yuriko said softly as he came up to her.

"The facility is secure and Team Four is finishing its sweep of the lower levels." He spoke. "One minor injury. Security was higher than we had planned for, but we dealt with it. Fewer guards but much more electronic surveillance. We hit them in the middle of a shift change it appears. Six Immortals and forty-three High Coven Elite are KIA. We have the nineteen scientists who did not resist locked down in the mess lounge."

"The Immortals are new." Yuriko spoke.

Filrian nodded. "Perhaps after the breach seven years ago the Empress decided to station them here."

"How soon before High Coven Command realizes something is amiss?" She asked.

"I'd say three hours tops." Filrian answered. "Another two before that *ORIC*-Class Heavy Cruiser and its *DARKBROOD* frigate escorts get within sensor range of this rock."

"We won't be here that long. Make sure we download the entire core for my mothers to examine." Yuriko spoke. "I know it has been a long time, but let's see if we can discover who hit them seven years ago and what they took if anything?"

"I can't tell you who hit them... but I know what they took." He said.

Yuriko looked at him surprised. "How?"

Filrian handed her the datapad. "They never replaced it." He said. "Perhaps they felt they had enough."

Yuriko looked at the pad reading quickly and her cobalt blue vampire eyes grew darker. "We must get this information to father as soon as we are off this rock." She stated.

Filrian nodded. "I already have them prepping a Black Sun COM probe. We are placing Tetreon charges under each of the fusion units, and around the cooling system for the reactor. This planet has a sizeable volcanic and seismic signature. It will appear as if a dormant volcano erupted directly into the ground level of the facility. Team Three is in the process of removing any possible footprint we could leave. For all intents and purposes... we will have never been here."

Yuriko nodded. "What would I do without you Filrian?" She asked.

Filrian chuckled. "You did pretty well before you met me." He said.

Yuriko pressed her body up close to his taller frame and relaxed, her cobalt blue eyes returning to their normal dark brown as she gazed at him. "I bless the day you came into my life husband. And I berate myself just as much for being so blind as well through those years."

Filrian shook his head with a smile as he looked into her eyes and reached up to stroke her cheek. "Our time was not yet meant to be Yuriko. We have had this discussion before. We were not meant to come together

until after your father returned and changed the course of both our lives. I do not regret one moment of our time together before we were married. Now that I have you... I intend to make the most of it.”

Yuriko smiled up into his dark green eyes. “As do I.” She said. She rested her head against his chest, stealing a moment among the death and destruction to feel the peace he gave her so utterly. “I will be very happy to return and be among my family once more. As much as I know what we have been doing is important, I miss my brothers and sisters.”

Filrian stroked her long black hair and nodded. “Do you think our villa in Gytheio has held up to our absence?” He asked with a grin.

“We’ll just have to break it in again... as we did when we were married.” Yuriko said.

“Now I will look forward to that.” Filrian said.

Yuriko smiled. “As will I.” She said.

“Do we take the Coven scientists with us?” Filrian asked.

Yuriko allowed her head to rest against his chest for a moment longer, the beating of his heart always able to calm her. She took a deep breath and stepped away from him. “Is the item father wanted secure?”

Filrian nodded. “Already on its way back to *OMEN THREE*.” He replied. “Why would he want it?”

Yuriko shook her head. “I don’t know.” She replied. “I do know for him to resort to this action he is very worried about something.”

Filrian nodded. “Your father does nothing without thought Yuriko. You know this better than I.”

Yuriko nodded. “Yes I know. I have an idea what he is planning... and if I’m right he will cut the head from the Kavalian leadership in one stroke. Then again... he is as predictable as an Ion Storm.”

Filrian nodded. “That is also very true.”

“We know part of it husband.” Yuriko spoke looking at him. “A part that my father said Andro will be the first to discover. There is purpose in that statement. There is purpose in almost everything he does. He has a plan and our answer will come when Andro discovers what my father intends for him to discover.”

“The question remains... how Andro will react when he finds out?” Filrian said. “I have come to realize through the years that your brother has the potential to be far more ruthless and unforgiving than your father.”

Yuriko nodded. “Yes... he certainly does. And that is what I think my father is counting on.”

“And the scientists?” Filrian asked.

“*Vith* them!” She spat. “For what they have built here... they can die with the horror they have created. Let us gather our people and leave this place husband.”

“That’s the best news I have heard in a week.” He stated taking her hand. He lifted his other arm and placed it close to his lips. “All *OMEN THREE* units... this is Omen Three One Alpha. Execute extraction protocols per Omen Three Actual. We are leaving.”

Filrian and Yuriko turned and headed out of the room as acknowledgments came over the COM implants they wore in their ears.

EARTH EDEN CITY

Miranda had decided to meet with E’dira alone and while she had no fear of the Drow, the moment she laid eyes on E’dira, Miranda began to wonder if coming alone had been such a good idea. Seeing her the first time, back dropped against the rising sun in the window had sent a shudder through Miranda. A shudder she thought she would never feel again.

The Drow Lieutenant E’dira almost matched Lynwe’s height of six foot, her body a near perfect combination of muscularity and femininity. Her breasts were not large, smaller than Miranda’s own, but exceptionally firm and protruding proudly. The lightweight Drow Scout body armor hugged her lithe frame exquisitely, highlighting all her curves as well as the definition of her legs and ass. Her iridescent white hair looked like it was spun from silk, long and flowing over her shoulders to curl around her firm chest. Her skin was like dark chocolate in color, her lips full and a light pink in color. And her amber colored eyes held Miranda’s gaze as a flame could hold a moth. Tareif had allowed her to use his office and now she silently

thanked him for that. Unlike at any time in her adult life, Miranda Lorian found herself unable to call on her supreme self control and she found herself weak kneed and nervous.

The Drow E'dira for her part was in almost no better shape.

E'dira had escaped the High Coven concentration camps with Lynwe and Tari and three hundred others nearly twenty-six years ago, the Coven scientists and their twisted experiments turning all of them into things that they thought would make them outcasts even among their own people. The dramatic realization that Aihola, a fellow escapee and experimental subject just like them, was in fact descended from their Drow Queen began their long journey back into active life and honor. Aihola had been named Queen shortly before the Battle for Earth and had brought the remaining Drow out of hiding to the city their King had been building. They were accepted without question and many of them, Lynwe and Tari among them, were promoted to some of the highest ranks among the defenders of Earth. E'dira had fought beside Lynwe until she had been injured, then she had happily joined with General Vengal's unit just before they stormed that field of battle against the High Coven Immortals. She was one of hundreds of Drow who fought that day, who witnessed the unimaginable bravery and savageness of their King and so many Lycavorian Spartans they fought beside. They were made to be the closest to the Spartan warriors as was possible, and they proved their mettle that day. Since that day, King Leonidas had heaped upon them positions of honor and distinguished importance.

General/Colonel Lynwe was the highest among them not including their Queen. She was honored throughout the Union for her actions on that day so long ago and for her actions during the Evolli war. She had commanded a complete battalion of Drow Scouts that had wreaked havoc behind Evolli lines for the entire duration of the war. She now commanded all Drow Scouts with General Vengal. She was married to a Lycavorian, and she had two females that called her Mistress and were devoted to her. She had built a life for herself, with family and friends and a position few Drow hoped to obtain as one of King Leonidas's closest and most trusted advisors. It was well known among the Drow that when King Leonidas wanted something done, something very important and requiring the most unique of skills, the only place he came was to Lynwe. This respect and honoring of the Drow had earned him status on a par with their Queen Aihola, and there was not a Drow among their people who would not throw their lives away in a heartbeat for him.

It was Lynwe and Aihola who had shown E'dira that there was a path back from the abyss that the High Coven had dropped them into. She was half vampire, she could use blood to heal herself, but she did not need blood to survive. She had all of a vampire's skills, and none of their weaknesses. The training she had received from the Lycavorian Spartan instructors had given her and her fellow half vampire Drow elves unequalled skill, nearly doubling their lethal abilities. It was Lynwe who had shown her that she did not need to hold on to her hatred and anger, for it was a path to self destruction. It was Lynwe and her Queen, Selene, Tarifa and even Layna who had shown all of them they could love and be loved. When this epiphany finally came to E'dira; that is when she rededicated her life.

To the Union. To her friends and to herself.

E'dira took what she wanted, and what she wanted was to be the best Tactical Officer anywhere in the Union. She had worked towards this goal for the last two years, and now at two hundred and thirty-four years old, what she had desired for so long was finally going to be hers.

E'dira knew who Miranda 'Mando' Lorian was. There were few from Earth who did not know that name, or what she had accomplished as one of the fastest rising stars within the Union Fleet. She had the ear of Admiral O'Conner, Admiral Riall, and the King himself if the rumors were correct, and she had done all this as a human. Looking at her now from across the desk, E'dira couldn't help but be transfixed by the intensity of her dark eyes, or the way her uniform flowed around her figure. Lynwe had told her Mando Lorian was here for a tactical officer. A tactical officer on a new ship that would become King Leonidas's armored fist. She would not tell her more, but that was enough to entice E'dira to put forth her file for the chance to be chosen. It appeared that her dedication had paid off in more ways than one. She may have been human, but Miranda Lorian stirred E'dira in a way that no man or woman ever had, and for a female Drow who had returned to her roots that was significant. Like Lynwe and her Queen, E'dira was dominant in all that she did. Unlike Lynwe and Aihola however, E'dira had not yet had the courage to actively pursue a relationship because of what she was. Looking at Miranda Lorian across the desk caused E'dira to suddenly want that courage in the worst way. There was something about the woman and it was not just physical beauty. There were many beautiful females all over Earth, but to E'dira they lacked the one thing that she had always searched for in a partner.

Strength.

That is what Miranda Lorian had oozing from her pores. Strength of character, strength of body and spirit, and above all else strength of mind.

So caught up in her thoughts, E'dira almost didn't hear what Miranda was saying and missed the question.

"Excuse me?" She asked quickly for lack of anything better to say.

Miranda met her amber eyes. "Why did you accept the demotion?" She asked again. "I read the report... you were not wrong in your actions."

"A political situation would have embarrassed Aihola my Queen, and it would have also embarrassed King Leonidas, for they would have sided with me." E'dira said honestly. "I would never allow that to happen."

"You did it for political reasons then?" Miranda asked.

E'dira shook her head. "I did it because they would have done the same for me if our positions were reversed." She answered. "Some may call it politically motivated; they do not understand what honor is then."

Miranda sat back in her chair impressed by the answer. She nodded her head finally. "In that I would have to agree." She said. "May I ask you a question?"

"Of course Captain Lorian?"

Miranda shook her head. "You have the position E'dira... you had it before this meeting began based on your record alone." She said. "I wanted the best... Lynwe told me you were the best. She wasn't wrong. I prefer to be called Mando... it's my call sign and something I have worked very hard to build."

E'dira cocked her head slightly. "You and Lynwe speak of each other as if you have been friends for many years." She said softly. "If that is true it is something that is not well known among others."

Miranda nodded. "It's true." She said. "Lynwe had a hand in keeping me out of trouble when I was younger. My adopted parents and siblings were killed in the Eden City Battle. A half vampire Drow like you saved my life and protected me until the Battle was over. She looked after me for a few weeks until a foster care program was established after the war. Lynwe and Selene were part of that."

"Mary as well?" E'dira asked.

Miranda nodded. "Mary helped many orphans after that day."

E'dira nodded. "And many elves." She said. "Several dozen Drow children if memory serves me correctly."

"Yes she did." Miranda spoke.

"Please Mando... what is your question?" E'dira asked.

Miranda smiled. "Well... this is not in regards to the position or anything. It's more personal really, but it's something I've always been curious about." She said. "Aihola... Lynwe... the Drow as a whole really... you are, some would say you are fanatically loyal to Martin Leonidas. I have always wondered why that is."

"There was a time when King Leonidas held our Queen's life in his hands." E'dira spoke softly. "She didn't know who she was at the time... that knowledge did not come until later... but something stayed his hand that day. He could have extinguished her life flame in a blink of an eye, but he did not. He could have destroyed our city in Canada after the actions over those few days. He stayed his hand. We owe... we owe our very existence to him. We owe the life of our Queen to him. Never once has he brought this knowledge up or used it against us in any way. Instead... he considers us his elite warriors. On a par with his *Durcunusaan* and *Mjolnir's Hand*. That is why any of us would die for him. For any of his Queens or children as well."

"So it's a matter of honor?" Miranda asked softly.

E'dira nodded. "Honor and faith." She said. "One day... one day if we are lucky, perhaps a Drow female will attract a member of his bloodline enough that it will bind us to him forever. I believe many of my people secretly hope that this will happen one day. The Drow are few in number when compared to others, and a Drow female or male warrior within the bloodline of Leonidas would insure our existence millennia from now, for the line of Leonidas will never die." She shrugged with a smile. "Who knows?"

Miranda nodded as she got to her feet. "I'm sure by now you have figured out it is a ship." She said.

E'dira nodded. "I figured that out the moment you began meeting with Steven Randall." She answered. "With the exception of Queen For'mya, Arram and Normya Leonidas and Star Colonel Endith, and yourself I understand... there are none who could match him in the cockpit of a fighter. He and Zaala will be joining us?"

Miranda nodded. "Word gets around." She said.

E'dira shook her head. "Not as much as you might think... Mando." She said detecting a small amount of anger emanating from Miranda. "There is a very small circle on Earth... here in Eden City. It all stems from Aihola my Queen and Tarifa. War Master Tareif, Isra, General Lynwe, Lady Selene... those are a few in this circle. It is a very close knit and faithful family."

Family. There was that word again Miranda thought.

"Does that circle include you?" Miranda asked.

E'dira smiled and her amber eyes glittered in the light of the room as she shook her head. "No. I am just very close to the fringes of that circle. I will have my own circle, my own family one day. It will allow me to rebuild my clan and its name."

"What is your clan name if you don't mind me asking?" Miranda asked. "I know the Drow consider their clan and family name sacred... not something that is known to those who are not part of that. I would understand..."

"My Clan and family name is Tedeyara. I am all that is left of my clan and family, the rest were killed fighting the High Coven or the Evolli." E'dira smiled and gazed at Miranda. "I am the only one left... at least for the moment."

"Yet you fought at Alba Tau." Miranda said softly. "Why did you risk your clan name there if you were the last?"

E'dira got to her feet. "You must understand... King Leonidas... he is magical to us." She said. "No one knows how... but without even asking he knows every Drow family and clan. He knows our secrets... what resides in our hearts. Many of my people say that his gifts within Mindvoice have allowed him to become part Drow in a sense. Prince Androcles is no different now. I was on Alba Tau... yes... my scout unit was assigned to General Simpson's command. He is married to Nayeca as you undoubtedly know and he is a member of Clan Anatyla. The Queen's Clan. The others in my scout unit were killed. We were pinned down with General Simpson and I was injured... but somehow King Leonidas knew I was close by. He knew I was there... I believe he communicated within Mindvoice to some within our perimeter because three Spartans formed a protective circle around me and refused to let me throw myself upon the Evolli. I believe... I believe King Leonidas knew I was there... that I was the last of my family and clan and he ordered those Spartans to protect me at all costs."

"What makes you believe that?" Miranda asked enthralled with this knowledge.

"When it was all over... as the medics were putting me on the medivac, I asked one of these Spartans why they had done this." E'dira spoke softly. "He told me they were following orders and that I had more to accomplish in this life. When they told me that... I knew." E'dira stepped closer to her. "Just as you have more to accomplish Miranda Lorian. That is why you survived as well."

Miranda looked at her as she stepped even closer. "I... I always thought it was luck." She stammered.

E'dira stopped in front of her, looking down into her beautiful dark eyes as she shook her head. "Luck is just another word for destiny." She said softly. "For faith. Perhaps as we work together you will allow me to show you what faith and destiny is? If... if you will still offer me the position."

Miranda took a deep breath and called on her iron will to calm her racing heart as she stared into those near glowing amber points of light.

"The job is yours, I already told you that." She spoke calmly. "We just have one more place to visit before we begin heading back."

E'dira smiled as she held her own raging emotions and racing heart in check in typical Drow fashion. Oh she wanted this woman without question. She watched as Miranda turned and moved back to the desk and began gathering her things, E'dira's amber eyes admiring the way Miranda filled out her uniform. She felt the tug in her lower abdomen and the warmth it caused. It was a sensation that E'dira never thought she would feel again.

"Where is this visit we must make?" She asked finally.

"I made Admiral O'Connor a promise when he gave me this command." Miranda told her. "I intend to keep that promise. We are going to Pearl Harbor."

What was happening to her?

This was not what was supposed to be happening. This was not how she was told it would be. They had told her that she would be hated and looked down upon. They had told her they would not respect her or her abilities. They told her a machine would be used to increase her bond with her dragon.

None of that had come to pass.

Her bond was growing in power not because of a machine, but because she had finally taken the time and effort to learn of her bonded one. To meditate and speak with them and learn of their dreams and desires for the future. To see her bonded one not as a tool to be used, but as an extension of herself. In just short of a month now she had learned more than she had ever envisioned. Her body was leaner and she was faster and stronger, adding to impressive skills no one knew she possessed. Androcles Leonidas was a task master, driven and purposeful to the extreme. His siblings were no different, driving all of them to the edge of what they could do and then extending and expanding that edge a little each time.

They were accepted here in SODRAG. Accepted as fellow riders. Her bonded one had immersed themselves in the history and lore of their kind, discovering history they would never had known had they not come here. The others were changing as well, and it made her that much happier to see it was not just her. Seeing the interaction of the Leonidas family, the respect and adoration they held for each other was spreading to all the riders, not just her. The care and love that they bestowed upon their bonded ones, how they were viewed as members of their family and not as beasts of burden. Being surrounded by all of this had changed her even more than what she had witnessed those years ago that had set her on this path. Being here in this place, being treated with respect and equality, it made what she felt inside so much stronger and more pronounced. It had opened her eyes to things she would never have experienced or felt and she found herself embracing those new sensations and feelings tighter as every hour passed. Not to mention that she had found the one who would complete her, of that she had no doubts. And considering who it was, and the knowledge that she didn't care who it was, that told her all she needed to know. That told her she was right. Where she would be scorned and ridiculed in the High Coven for her feelings, here she would be embraced and honored.

She knew others were feeling it as well.

She and the others were sent here to hide a different agenda that much she was sure of. What that agenda was she did not know, but bringing them here was not going to produce the results that were expected. With only those fools Dante and Javier Moran as the exceptions, she and the other riders were learning and growing. They were seeing the High Coven for what it was, they were seeing the path of destruction the High Coven was hurtling down and they were seeing what all of them could become.

She had set herself on this path that day, and the more time that she remained here, she knew that had been the right choice.

And she had no intention of failing.

Eliani rolled over with a soft moan of exquisite soreness and settled her head onto Nyla's bare breasts. Her fern green eyes popped open when she realized Malic was not between them as he had been when they had fallen asleep and she lifted her head up. Her wild and tangled looking burgundy colored hair fell all around her face and shoulders, brushing against Nyla's flawless skin and she saw her beautiful green eyes half open and she was wearing a dreamy expression on her face.

"*Aur Enyla?*" Eliani whispered softly.

Nyla smiled and shook her head slowly. "Do not move *Ussta Che.*" She answered in a whisper as well. "I wish to relish the divine soreness I feel for as long as I am able too." She said.

Eliani grinned. "I do know what you mean." She said as she lowered her chin to Nyla's shoulder and stared at her vampire lover's face. Nyla's almost porcelain like features had always been a turn on for her and now that they had found Malic it was even more pronounced and deep.

"By the gods Eliani... he has reshaped us." Nyla spoke softly. "He was like an insatiable beast." She spoke with a chuckle. "And we loved it!"

“Well... we haven’t really left this bed for two days you know.” Eliani stated with a sated tone of voice. “I did not realize *how* well endowed our new husband is *aur enyla*. I don’t think I was this sore even after completing my Agoge.”

“Will it always be like this?” Nyla asked looking at her.

“*Carians* I hope so!” Eliani exclaimed.

The last two days had been nothing short of blissful ecstasy for both of them.

Eliani could not remember how many times she had exploded over the course of the last two days. If it wasn’t Malic exploring her body as a child would explore a new toy, kissing, nuzzling and caressing her in every way she could imagine, it was his huge cock making her scream out his name. And if it wasn’t Eliani crying out in abandon it was Nyla, quivering in the same devastating pleasure as she was. He had opened his mind completely to them, his soul laid bare, and they had wrapped him within their love as tightly as they were able, returning to him all that they were as well. Their only true break came as they laid here snuggling against his warm, powerful body and they spoke of Lisisa. They were his mates now, his wives, and they would not do something against his wishes. He had expressed his opinion and agreed to what they suggested to him. They would begin the process of combining their holdings as mated and married individuals did, but until the time the documents and paperwork was complete, he would not question their decisions. He felt it was wrong what the Galactic Court had ruled, for Lisisa had helped him to see who he truly was, and Malic abhorred politics in any form. Eliani had told her mother For’mya that if they were going to search their villa, they needed to do it before their holdings were combined, for Malic was opposed to the Court’s decision and would not allow it afterwards. He trusted them and did not question their decision, and they loved him completely and would not go against him once the process was completed.

Nyla looked at Eliani’s bright eyes and reached up to stroke her cheek. “We have found our future *Ussta Che*.” She said softly.

Eliani nodded. “Yes we have.”

Nyla dropped her fingers to caress the marks of where Malic had bitten Eliani. “It feels different.” She said softly. “You... you and Malic are Soulmates now... and you didn’t keep that from me. What it makes you feel. I can not... I can not love you both more completely for sharing that with me.”

“Nyla... we will never keep anything from you.” Eliani said. “We are all soulmates. We belong together. I’ve sometimes thought Andro was always a little too preachy and serious when it came to finding Sadi... but now after experiencing these last two days I have come to understand him much better. The way our thoughts and minds have come together now, it gives me such a sense of peace.”

Nyla nodded her head. “Yes. A sense we have finally found our place in the universe.” She said.

Eliani rested her cheek on Nyla’s shoulder just as the smells of cooking food reached her sensitive wolf nose. She looked up quickly when she smelled the burning of meat and she chuckled. “He’s trying to cook!” She exclaimed.

Nyla turned her head and sniffed the air, and while it was very pronounced to Eliani, she could just detect the smell of burning meat. She chuckled softly and looked back to Eliani. “Should we go rescue him?”

“If we want to keep our bungalow from burning down... yes.” Eliani declared.

I told you it was too much heat! Vincix’s voice spoke from the window opposite where Malic stood in the kitchen. His silvery/purple scaled head and long neck was poking into the large window and gazing at his bonded one from across the room.

Malic wore only a pair of loose shorts, the rest of his body bare. He felt more alive at this moment than at any other point in his life. Not only had he and Vincix discovered each other, but he had found two women that he worshiped the ground upon which they tread. That Nyla was a vampire could not have mattered less to him than the color of the sky. Yes he had bitten Eliani, instinct driving him to do this more than anything because of the pure wolf blood in her. She may have been half Hadarian, but the Leonidas blood in her veins was exceptionally strong and something he could smell if he concentrated enough. While Eliani Leonidas was now his wolf soulmate, both of them together had claimed his soul and his being and he would draw no distinction between the two.

Well thank you brother! Malic retorted as he pulled the steaks off the stove top. *Perhaps you could have said something before I wasted three perfectly good slabs of beef.*

Do not listen to him Malic! Arydun's soft voice cooed now as her head moved up next to Vincix's, her large eyes in their own dreamy state for a dragon. Though Malic could not see it, when Vincix caressed the back of her neck with his snout, he knew her wings were twitching in delight. *It is the thought that counts.*

They aren't wasted! We will eat them! Vincix declared happily.

"Eat what?" Eliani's voice carried to them.

Malic's head turned quickly and he looked at Eliani and Nyla. Eliani had simply wrapped a sheet around her lithe frame while Nyla had thrown a thin black robe on. He fought down the renewed surge of desire as he looked at them, knowing that they needed food and all of them needed to return to their normal duties. Androcles had given them ample time to discover each other, but Malic knew they could not abuse that. They would have the rest of their lives to discover each other. He watched as they came up to him standing in their kitchen, two sets of sizzling green eyes looking at him with desire and love.

"I was... I was trying to make us breakfast." He spoke sheepishly. Eliani and Nyla looked at the burnt steaks on the counter as they pressed up close to him and they both smiled. "I am not much of a cook it seems."

Not a cook at all I'd say. Vincix chimed in with considerable humor.

Malic turned and looked at his bonded brother, seeing the humor in his eyes. "I will remember you said that when we are stranded somewhere and I need to cook for you." He stated stabbing the thick steak with the knife and flipping it at him across the room.

Vincix caught it easily in his razor like teeth and he turned to Arydun. *A gift for you my beautiful new mate.*

Arydun snorted and snatched the steak from his teeth, gulping it down. *Thank you my handsome new mate.*

Eliani and Nyla laughed and both of them extended up on their toes to kiss Malic's cheeks. "Sit down Malic." Eliani told him. "We will cook for you."

Malic drew them closer to him, wrapping his arms around their waists. "I will learn to cook." He said nuzzling first Eliani's neck and ear and hearing her sigh in delight and then switching to Nyla. As closely tied together as they had now become, Nyla could almost feel Malic's aura as he nuzzled her. She could feel what it did to Eliani and by virtue of that, what it did to her and she too sighed in enchantment.

We have more items to learn first. Vincix declared quickly. *We still need to study for our exams!*

Malic stabbed another of the steaks and flipped it at him. "Will you allow me to eat in peace before you assault my head brother?" He exclaimed as Vincix snatched the steak from the air and gulped it down.

Arydun was chuckling softly in Mindvoice as Vincix smacked his dragon lips. *Perhaps if you give me that last one.* He said.

Eliani and Nyla laughed and Eliani reached down and grabbed the last steak, flipping it through the air towards him. Vincix caught this one as well, but Arydun then snatched it from his jaw and gulped it down. He stared at her in surprise.

I was going to enjoy that! He exclaimed.

Arydun butted the underside of his jaw with her snout. *Come my new mate... let us join Tharua and Jeth while they hunt. We need more than these morsels. We will leave Malic in the capable hands of his new mates.*

Malic watched with a smile as their heads retreated from the open window and then he turned and looked at Eliani and Nyla as they stared up at him. Their green eyes gazed at him and he found his breath constricting in his chest as he gazed at their sensual and staggering beauty. "What?" He asked softly.

"Malic... do you realize how utterly and completely happy you have made us?" Eliani asked him in a similar voice as she stared into his gorgeous sea blue eyes.

"As happy as you have made me?" He asked her.

Nyla shook her head. "No Malic my love." She said. "We had almost given up hope of finding a man who could embrace what Eliani and I share. A man who could embrace it and not be frightened of it."

Malic smiled warmly. "I have come to understand that is what makes the two of you so very unique." He said. "It is part of who you are, and any who try to change that are fools. I have the two most beautiful women in the universe, and they are mine. That they love each other as much as they love me only makes it all the more sweet."

Eliani grinned as she pressed closer to him still. “Wow! And he even says things that make our hearts beat faster.” She said.

Malic chuckled. “Actually... Vincix told me to say that.”

They all laughed now and Eliani reached up to stroke his cheek. “I told you there was an Alpha in there somewhere that was scratching to find his way out.” She said as she nuzzled his chest. “I am so very happy he finally came out of his shell.”

“As am I.” Nyla said.

They heard the soft growling of Malic’s stomach and all of them burst out in laughter again. Eliani pushed him towards the nearby table with a gentle nudge. “Go sit down our love. Smelling your attempt at cooking has made us hungry as well. Can you make coffee?”

Malic smiled. “That I can do very well.”

Nyla directed him to the machine. “Then that is your task.” She said.

SPARTA GALLAIS’S LODGE

“...did not work as we had hoped.” Moran said as he sat in the main room of the suite apartment with Yuri, Tesand and Aikiro. “We did not anticipate they would admit what her role was so readily, nor did we take in to account that she may have been forced into her actions by her control officer.”

Tesand leaned forward. “Her step-mother and half brothers are currently in the maximum security prison on Apo Prime serving life sentences.” He spoke. “I was able to obtain that bit of information using the Netnews archives. Based on the reports that they have made public, it appears her version of the story is all very true.”

“This Sadi is also being hailed as the second coming of Gorgo in her manner, intelligence and how she treats others.” Moran stated evenly. “Acting as they have, admitting it and giving an extensive explanation as to what happen; it makes her untouchable right now. Even if we came into the open and revealed the situation with the clone of his mother, they would label us liars and no one would believe us.”

Aikiro nodded. “That was to be expected.” She said calmly. “I did not hope for anything to come of it. I only wanted to see their reaction. How they would act in the face of an event totally out of their control to predict.”

“His son’s action concerning the Kavalian Petition also gives us insight into him.” Yuri said. “Refusing to honor the Galactic Court Ruling, even as his other siblings followed the path of their bastard father.”

Aikiro nodded. “Indeed it does.” She said softly. “Though not as much as I would have liked.”

“It tells us he does not care for the Kavalian animals.” Yuri said confidently. “The reason he gave for refusing their ruling was very weak. It could only mean he distastes them almost as much as we do.”

Aikiro got to her feet and moved to the counter in the suite. “I question that to some degree.” She said thoughtfully. “Leonidas’s actions we can predict with reasonably certainty, the oldest son however, I am not so sure he follows his father’s path as closely as others seem to think.”

“What do you mean mother?” Yuri asked.

Aikiro poured herself another crystal glass of cloned blood and turned to look at them. “Androcles Leonidas is an enigma. In some respects his path parallels that of his father, but in many others he is completely different. His dedication to training our riders is not something I anticipated, nor is it something that his father expected, of that I am positive. His Mindvoice potential is... it can not be measured to be honest. It may have to do with the emotional state of his parents when he was conceived, that and the extreme pureness of their blood. If measured... I expect his blood is even more pure than yours Yuri.”

“Are you saying he is more powerful than me?” She asked.

Aikiro shook her head. “Not in terms of his different abilities no. I have taught you far more than he has learned simply because we discovered the remains of our Mindvoice first and were able to understand its effect on us. However, what he lacks in expertise, he more than makes up for it in terms of raw power. Just like his father. It would indicate that this Aricia is also descended from the Pralors that crashed on Lycavore, and somehow her ancestors were among those chosen to come here to Earth by Resumar.”

“You don’t actually believe Leonidas is on the same level as you mother? Do you?” Yuri asked aghast.

Aikiro nodded. "Like his son, he lacks finesse and experience, but in terms of raw power yes. Much of that is because of the bonds they share with their dragons, but technically in a prolonged one on one confrontation, they would ultimately win. You and I lack the necessary endurance that is a part of their wolf genes Yuri, and that is why we must use the superior skills that we have."

"Are you concerned about Leonidas's reaction Aikiro?" Tesand asked. "When he finally discovers why we are really here?"

Aikiro returned to the couch. "As long as we stick to the second phase of our operation we can control him. We can make him believe what we want him to believe. He will bluster and bluff, but he likes having the only Mindvoice ship in the universe under his control and he will do everything within his power to keep it that way." She replied. "That is why Juliana One is so important in the plan."

"Well... the only way he could discover what we want him to discover is to put boots on the ground." Moran spoke. "And in doing that he risks discovery, which would lead that pig Keleru to respond in kind."

"Leonidas may be a brute..." Aikiro said with a small smile. "But he surrounds himself with those who are intelligent and cunning. While we may have not seen the signs of superior technological advances, do not assume they are not there." She spoke. "What were you able to discover about this O'Connor person?"

Tesand shook his head. "What we talked about will not work." He replied. "Apparently he has had an ongoing relationship with an elf female since they first returned to Earth twenty-six years ago. She is Leonidas's personal pilot. He and the human female that he married were turned by Isabella two decades ago. There is nothing we can offer him that will coerce him to betray Leonidas now."

"It was a long shot anyway." Yuri spoke shaking her head. "I have found out through the years that he is very careful about whom he allows into his inner circle. Those that reside in that circle are completely loyal and will never betray him."

"We will sign this farce of a cease fire in three weeks." Aikiro spoke. "All the details have been worked out. Once that is signed we will be granted an embassy as well. It will allow us to do the same thing the Kavalians are doing now. Keep an eye on things."

Moran nodded. "I've seen some of their biogenic females that are now working at the embassy. They are being allowed to move about Sparta freely without obvious security." He said. "Including Keleru's youngest daughter. Don't you find that surprising?"

Aikiro shook her head. "Leonidas is doing the same thing I would do." She stated. "He is trying to insure the Kavalians do not find out about our dragons being here on Earth. He and his son have a fondness for the beasts that I do not understand. If that were to be discovered before our plans are in complete motion, it would be a major setback. We must do our part in that regard as much as it pains us."

"We should be mindful of where we go and what we do from now on." The new voice spoke.

They turned and Juliana moved from the shadows of the balcony where she had been standing silently. She had maintained a very low profile since being released from the prison cell, but still found herself drawn to that house and having to fight the increasing desire to return there. Her dark chocolate features were void of emotion, but her dark eyes were bright and very intelligent. Aikiro felt sexual warmth spread through her as she looked at her. While she may not have been as experienced as Toria in hers and Tesand's bed, Juliana was turning out to be an adequate replacement.

Aikiro nodded. "Juliana has informed me she is reasonably sure she is being followed. She can not pinpoint who or where, but she is certain of it. They are using the shadows but she can not detect them even when they move. Only that they are there."

"Drow." Moran told them confidently. "More specifically, the half vampire Drow that your scientists experimented on when we controlled Earth Yuri."

Juliana nodded. "I have reviewed that information and I believe Admiral Moran is correct in his statement." She said. "They were difficult for even purebloods to detect once they were altered and changed. My assessment is that they have had substantial additional training in using the shadows from someone very skilled and have blended this with their natural ability to remain undetected."

"Vonis and Isabella." Yuri spoke. "It has to be."

Aikiro nodded her head. "I would agree. Vonis was better at using the shadows than even your father." She said looking at Yuri. "And Veldruk, as much as it pains me to say, he was the finest I had ever seen. I have

this *Durcunusaan* escort wherever I go so they must be using these Drow to cover the rest of you, and possibly the Kavalians. That is why they are letting them roam freely within the city.”

“Neither of us has done anything that would draw attention to ourselves.” Moran spoke quickly indicating Tesand.

“I would be extra cautious however.” Juliana spoke. “They will no doubt make the very correct assumption that the only place the elf reporter you approached could have gotten the information she had is from us.”

Yuri nodded. “And I doubt they will be happy we tried to embarrass the Crown Princess of their precious Union.”

“They will not do anything. They would have come to us already if they were going to do something.” Aikiro said calmly. “Even though Leonidas is not on Earth right now, his elf Queen For’mya or Deia would have come to me and blustered and blathered and threatened by now.”

Yuri looked at her. “If he is gone, will they adhere to the schedule you and he made for returning to the base and speaking with Narice and our people?”

Aikiro nodded. “I have already received confirmation from his son that he will arrive at the end of this week to take me there if Leonidas has not returned.” She looked at Yuri. “Both of us will not be able to be gone Yuri.” She stated. “I am quite sure the Kavalians are doing their best to watch us in whatever way they can. If we are seen departing together they will start asking questions. Once the Cease Fire is signed and the embassy is established, I will move to a home on the outskirts of Eden City. We have arranged for a Netnews release saying I will be remaining here on Earth to try and work out the details of several minor trade agreements with Earth’s President. Yuri... you will return to this base to continue your training with Vollenth, but it will be reported that you have left to return to Usu Ozeib 7. The Kavalians are being limited to Sparta right now, and I don’t imagine that will change in the near future, so they will think you have departed Earth completely to return to wherever they think our dragons are. Or attempt to follow you. In which case... the ship you will supposedly be on will be tracked going across the whole of High Coven space.”

“I don’t look forward to returning to that place mother. If they have not already killed Vollenth I might just do so myself.” She snorted in disgust. “He is becoming unmanageable even for me. I welcome the opportunity to not have his foul presence in my head.”

“It must be done Yuri.” Aikiro said.

Yuri nodded. “I know. I will endure.”

“I believe I have thought of a way for me to communicate with our people there even through the Mindvoice barrier. I think I have discovered a pattern to how the void Mindvoice areas are arranged.” Aikiro said gently. “I will need to test this idea when I am there again to see if it is possible. It may help me to discover where he is hiding the Mindvoice ship.”

“That is still a goal then?” Moran asked.

Aikiro nodded. “Oh yes. If anything... to deprive him of using it against us.” She looked at Tesand. “Have our people discovered anything in regards to where Dysea went?”

Tesand shook his head. “Nothing so far.” He replied. “The Wilds is a large place Aikiro. And if she went aboard a *STRIKER DT*, they would have a very long range.”

“That she has not returned yet is a surprise. Leonidas can not have any love for Immortals in his heart.” Moran spoke with a nod. “And it could also be a problem as well.”

Aikiro shook her head. “What I saw in the transmission... the conversation between him and the Immortal T’lolt... they appear to know each other. They spoke of some incident and words that were exchanged. We need to be very careful in that regard.” She said in agreement. “However, Dysea could very well lead us to Cha’talla and his tribe and enable us to remove that possible problem. At the very least it will allow me to achieve some measure of retribution for his traitorous actions by taking Esther as his wife and birthing those abominations.” She leaned forward now. “Also Tesand... get word to our agents in the KFI and abort the operation against me that we had planned. Given what is happening... such an attack will only seem more staged to Leonidas and hinder my plans for Phase Two.”

Tesand nodded. “Good.” He said quickly. “Too many things could have gone wrong with that.”

“Once Phase Two begins, as long as we stick to the original plan and maintain a very low profile, Leonidas will have no reason to suspect anything other than what we tell him.” Aikiro said. “Yuri... Dante had made initial contact with the daughter Zarah before you left?”

Yuri nodded. “It was brief but according to him effective.” She said. “He has taken to heart what we discussed with his mother. He will move things along as slowly as he sees fit so as not to draw attention to himself or what he is doing.”

Aikiro nodded. “Good. Her abilities within Mindvoice make her a better candidate than her older sister anyway, and I would like to discover just how those abilities came to be. The Coming of Age Fever for Lycavorians drags on in half breed female children longer, especially those who are half vampire. That much I have been able to discern from reading several medical journals and such. They are pathetically open in this society and everything one needs to fight them can be found in their books or on their Netnews. This Coming of Age fever for her should give Dante an excellent advantage. It will make her more pliable whether she wants to be or not.”

“What should he be looking for?” Yuri asked.

“Anything that might help us to find the Mindvoice ship.” Aikiro said. “He and Javier can rape her mind as well as her body for all I care... but I want to find that ship. That is the most important of his tasks. Combined with Toria’s separate mission... once that takes place we will cause sufficient confusion and angst that we can move on the Mindvoice ship here on Earth and either take control of it or destroy it.”

“We’ve been bringing our people down very slowly over the last weeks.” Moran spoke. “Most of the team is down and in hiding.”

“Where are they set up?” Aikiro asked.

“The remains of London. The city is empty right now. They haven’t begun to rebuild the cities along the Atlantic coast of old Europe yet.” Moran replied. “They’ll be ready to move when we call for them.”

Aikiro nodded. “Good. Once Dante and Toria execute their objectives we will need to move quickly in the confusion and mayhem they create.”

“Our escape routes are all plotted and committed to memory.” Tesand spoke. “Once we determine the location of the base our riders are at we will begin to move ships into position slowly. They will be disguised as civilian transports and we have already obtained clearances through our Limian contacts. The ships have been moving back and forth for the last month as part of the ongoing reconstruction projects across the planet.”

“The contacts were eliminated I take it?” Aikiro asked.

Tesand nodded. “Various accidents... yes.”

Aikiro nodded. “We must be cautious but we will move forward with our plans as if the Kavalians are not here on Earth. When we execute... we will try to take out Keleru’s daughters and Pusintin’s son as well... but that is not a mission priority.”

“I will attempt to discover if destroying their embassy is even feasible Empress.” Juliana said. “I am being watched, but if we do nothing in the way of trying to discover what the KFI are doing, the Lycavorians will suspect something as well. Better that I do this than someone more high profile.”

Aikiro nodded again. “Very well.” She said. “We have waited a long time my friends... we must be patient for a few months longer and we can succeed.”

KAVALIAN EMBASSY

“...press as far as we are able Prefect.” Jiss spoke from the chair. “I don’t know how much support we will receive however.”

Jiss, Matuarr, Qurot, Timur and Pian sat around the small table in the Communications room of the Kavalian Embassy. The Images of Keleru and Pusintin were exceptionally clear, almost a 3D image of the two men generated from the holo disc in the center of the table. It was easy enough to discern they were in Keleru’s office on the Kavalian homeworld.

“This Galactic Court of theirs is nothing more than an extension of Lycavorian Union and their rule.” Keleru spoke offhandedly. “Our petition was never meant to be successful, and you can be assured whatever

items of importance this Lisisa had are long gone. You may conduct the searches and press as much as you are able of course, but do not cross the diplomatic line. Timur?"

"Prefect?"

"Insure that you maintain control of your temper and keep your men in check." He stated flatly.

Timur nodded. "Of course Prefect." He answered. "What of the Marshall's promise to me of having his daughter?"

"Short of kidnapping her, what would you have us do Timur?" Pusintin asked from his chair next to Keleru. "You would never make it off the planet with her, and you most certainly would have to kill her dragon."

"And if I found some way?" Timur asked hopefully. "I need only lock groins with her once and leave her with child to be successful in making a claim on her."

"She is that worth it?" Pusintin asked slightly surprised by his demeanor. He was of the same mind as Keleru, that no female was truly worth the effort. He had attempted to discover how his brother could have five females so utterly devoted to him. While all of them were exceptionally beautiful, there was no doubt of that, he never understood why his brother just remained with the five of them. As King he could have any female that he wanted within the Union. It was one of the reasons Pusintin enjoyed being King of Sparta. He had only to demand that a female join him in his bed and they would happily comply. Even the married ones.

"You have not seen her in person Marshall Pusintin." Timur spoke. "She is like a goddess to gaze upon, even though she is half vampire. In bed I do not doubt she would be worth the effort."

"There is no guarantee that will work Timur." Keleru said. "Pusintin and I have already spoken of this scenario. You would not know for several days at least, and in that time the first place they would come for her is there at the embassy. They would kill you with the utmost prejudice and then expel the rest of those from the embassy." Keleru shook his head quickly. "I am not willing to risk our one asset within Lycavorian space to sate your sexual urges. There will be other females for you to choose from."

The twitch of Timur's jaw indicated he did not like that decision but he nodded his head. "As you order Prefect." He said finally.

"Where are my daughters Jiss?" Keleru asked.

"Jalersi is seeing to the arrangements for several meetings with the representatives of Union members who might be sympathetic to our cause. We have many items that we can trade and now that the door is open, other members of the Union will speak to us about it." Jiss replied. "We have Athani moving among the streets near our embassy during the day Prefect, under guard of course. She has gathered some excellent intelligence as to the mindset of the people in and around the building and grounds."

"The last time I spoke to Jalersi, she told me Athani was being difficult." Keleru said. "That is no longer the case?"

Jiss shook his head quickly. "I believe she is doing as much as her limited skills enable her Prefect. She has made it very clear she abhors being here among the Lycavorians. She does not hold them in very high regard. She is looking forward to returning on the transport that will bring the remaining staff members."

"The transport will be there in two days." Keleru said. "Once it was made clear we would be getting an embassy I dispatched them immediately from Qurot's ship. The transport will then return with her and Jalersi. Qurot... you will return as well with Pian and leave Timur as the head of the security detachment."

Qurot nodded. "Thank you Prefect. Will I still..."

"She is yours Qurot." Keleru stated. "I will submit the documents tomorrow to the Pride leaders and she will be yours. Tomorrow evening you may do as you wish... but my directive still stands. If you mark her in any way Qurot I will have your cock and your head stapled to my wall. Is that understood?"

Qurot nodded his head. "Clearly Prefect." He stated quickly. "We will give you many fine grandchildren."

Keleru nodded with a grunt. "You will be officially named Ambassador by the end of the week Jiss. Matuarr will be your deputy. Your actions have done your Prides proud."

"Thank you Prefect." Jiss spoke bowing his head.

"Many thanks Prefect." Matuarr echoed.

"Where is Karun?" Pusintin asked.

“He is having his second meeting with your daughter Marshall Pusintin.” Jiss answered. “He told me he was operating with yours and the Prefect’s direction. I did not question him.”

Pusintin nodded. “So he is.” He stated. “He will try and learn as much as he is able from her by pretending to want to know her as a sister. He is not to be interfered with in any way. He may be able to learn items of intelligence that are not readily available, and no woman is smart enough to *not* speak of things they shouldn’t speak of.”

“Is that wise Marshall?” Matuarr asked. “He is your son. He may very well become a target of the Lycavorians should anything happen.”

“Karun is more than capable of taking care of himself. Trust me when I tell you my brother will not allow harm to come to his blood. No matter how much he hates me.” Pusintin said. “And Karun is expendable when it comes to our ultimate goals.”

“Leonidas departed a few mornings ago for Hadaria with the red haired wench.” Matuarr spoke now. “We have not seen the vampire Queen Isabella, the first elf queen or the youngest one, Aricia. It appears he is leaving all dealings with us to the elf queen For’mya and his Prime Minister.”

“The Coven?” Keleru asked.

“They are remaining on the opposite side of the city for the most part.” Jiss replied. “We have seen the Empress Aikiro and her daughter on the Netnews channels several times walking the streets. It appears they will be signing the Cease Fire Accords in three weeks time. This will also grant the Coven an embassy here.”

“My brother is becoming soft to allow such a thing.” Pusintin spoke looking at Keleru. “This knowledge bodes well for our plans.”

Keleru nodded. “Indeed it does.” He said. He lifted his hand and picked up the data pad from the table. “I trust that all of you have reviewed the information Timur brought with him in regards to our ultimate plan?”

“Is this information we truly need to know Prefect?” Jiss asked.

“Yes... the time has come for you to be made aware of our plans for it will require you to respond in a certain way.” He stated as he looked at them. “I suggest you begin your research as soon as you can. What I presented to you must be made to stand firm Jiss. I am sending you the Union archive files and laws that were referenced initially to analyze but you will need to insure it can work. How you put it all together Jiss is up to you and Matuarr, but we want to review it first. You are certain they can not intercept this transmission?”

Qurot nodded. “I sweep the embassy every morning Prefect.” He replied quickly. “Our communications are secure, and we have jammers operating regardless.”

Keleru nodded. “Very well. Jiss... your initial thoughts?”

“Very feasible Prefect.” He replied. “Matuarr and I will have to delve more into what you just sent us... but at first glance... a bold plan with a better than half chance to succeed. As long as certain other conditions are met.” He spoke as he withdrew the pad when it beeped softly and notified him the download was complete.

“Pian, Qurot, you may review the plan as well and provide your military input when you arrive back here.” Keleru said. “As it stands, only four of us know of this plan here, and now the five of you. It will remain that way upon pain of death and honor to your Prides.”

The men nodded quickly. “Prefect!” They all stated together.

“Karun?” Jiss asked.

Pusintin shook his head quickly. “It is not something he needs to be made aware of.” He said. “He is not to know.”

Jiss looked at him oddly and nodded slowly. “As you order Marshall.” He stated.

“He would not understand Jiss.” Pusintin spoke explaining further. “Unlike my younger sons, he is still too close to his mother.”

“That is why he will remain on Earth with you when Jalersi returns here Jiss.” Keleru spoke. “Some time under Timur will be good for his advancement.”

“Understood Marshall Pusintin. Prefect.” Jiss spoke.

“We have already put in motion the first portions of this plan within The Wilds.” Keleru stated. “We should be receiving reports of successes within a few days.”

None of them took note of the shadow outside the room. Had Karun been present he may have smelled her tangerine scent, but Kavalian males were not taught to use their sense of smell in such a manner. The capability was there, but never taught.

Athani Leonidas however, did not limit herself in such a way. Especially not now, when the man she loved and who was now her husband was half wolf and a Prince of the Union. Her blue/ green eyes stared ahead at the wall across from her, her mind racing with options and what to do. She did not panic in the least, but instead went over the alternatives to their plan and how it would affect things if they acted a day earlier. Resumar's calming aura filled her even from where he was in his apartment on the Royal Villa Estate and she let it fill every portion of her body and mind. Athani pushed off the wall silently and began moving back to her room.

[Resumar my love! Cemath! We must act sooner than we had anticipated!] She called out within Mindvoice.

Athani felt both of their consciousnesses become more alert in their private connection and she smiled. She felt so very complete because of this man and what he made her feel.

[Aryschanne! What is wrong?] Resumar's voice filled her head instantly.

MJOLNIR'S HAND

THE WILDS

SIXTEEN HOURS FROM BONTAWILLIAN SPACE

Aricia looked up when Komirri entered the Ready Room from the short corridor to the bridge. She was sitting in the long couch against the wall, staring out into the stars through the view window. Even from this distance, she could feel Martin's apprehension on Hadaria within Mindvoice. The years had seen them develop an uncanny ability to feel each other even across great distances like now. This unique skill carried over to their son as well, and Aricia could feel Andro's own wariness, but she could also feel great happiness within him. She had seen the interview he and Sadi had given, and while she could feel nothing but pride in her sons for their actions, she was left with many questions as to who these additional females that would fill Andro's life with Sadi would be. Sadi had said they had already found one, and Aricia knew that it had to be one of the High Coven riders, though part of her hoped it was not one of Yuri's daughters or her sister. There was no other explanation for what Sadi had said, and she knew her son well enough to know what kind of female would attract him. If they were not in some way similar to Sadi in their strength and demeanor, they would have no chance of drawing even a glancing sniff from her son or from Sadi.

Denali she already knew would remain devoted to Lisisa for the rest of his years. They had a connection that was rarely found in those who were not soulmates, and he was a son of hers and Martin's blood. Avi had told her some years ago that within her blood was the blood of the Pralors, and any children she and Martin had would naturally be more attuned to Mindvoice. Denali was a pure blood Lycavorian, their son and therefore much more powerful than any normal Spartan. He would never come close to achieving what his father and older brother had and would achieve within Mindvoice because of how Andro and Elynth bonded while she still carried him in her womb, but Denali was very powerful within his own right.

So many things were now beginning to happen at once, Aricia herself thought, and the more they discovered the more it led her to believe everything was all tied together somehow. And she did not know if that was a good or bad thing.

Aricia Leonidas had grown in the last quarter century, grown into the woman she was now. She was widely considered the most militant of Martin's Queens, the most like him in almost every respect. Her fighting skills were hailed from one end of the Union to the other, and like the man she so loved, she was not known for being very forgiving. And she most certainly was not known for being diplomatic. Though she was the youngest of Martin's Queens, she was the one they all naturally deferred to in many respects. It was also Aricia that was the one to continually make time for all of them to be together.

As her azure colored eyes came to rest on Komirri, she remembered the confrontation with the Kavalians only eight hours ago.

"The Kavalian ship is hailing us!" The male COM officer sang out.

"Activate the main holo imager." Komirri barked after looking at and receiving a nod from Aricia.

Isabella had gone with Vonis to the landing bay to return to the Coven Insurgent Frigate to make sure that they did exactly as they were told. Neither of them doubted the sincerity of the insurgents and Isabella's presence on the frigate would insure the Kavalians did not do something stupid like trying to destroy or board the ship.

The Kavalian officer's face appeared in the holo disc emitters, his dark brown fur neatly groomed and covering every portion of his body. His yellowish vertical slit feline like eyes glared at them from the transmission.

"My name is Commander Angak, commanding officer of the Kavalian Seventh Echelon, Twenty-Fourth Legre ship NGANE." The man spoke. "You will immediately stand to and prepare to be boarded for inspection."

Komirri laughed heartily at that. "I am Admiral/Lieutenant Komirri, commander of the United Lycavorian Union flagship MJOLNIR'S HAND! Just what would possess me to allow you to set foot on my ship Commander Angak?"

"You have a known High Coven frigate within your shield arc." Angak snapped. "That ship and its crew are wanted for crimes against the Kavalian people! You will remand this ship to my custody and prepared to be boarded for inspection."

"We will do no such thing!" Aricia spoke now moving forward to stand next to Komirri.

"Commander, please allow me to introduce Queen Aricia Leonidas of the Lycavorian Union." Komirri spoke with a grin.

The Kavalian's eyes blinked several times before he shook his head. "This is of no matter to me." He stated ignoring Aricia and looking at Komirri. "You will do as I order you to..."

"Commander... this ship is carrying the individuals responsible for the attack on your trade delegation within Union space. I have no intention of handing them or their ship over to you." Aricia stated flatly. "We will take them back to Union space and they will face our justice."

Angak's eyes grew a little wider and he came to his feet. "You will hand them over to me this instant!" He nearly shouted. "They are criminals! They have butchered a dozen Kavalian females! I demand that you..."

"You demand nothing Commander!" Aricia barked now. "You have no jurisdiction within The Wilds Commander; therefore we will be on our way back to Union space. With our prisoners."

"You will do as I order you woman!" Angak snapped vehemently as he glared at her. "If you do not I will fire on that Coven frigate even though it resides within the shield arc of your ship!"

"That ship carries another Queen of the Union Commander." Aricia spoke evenly. "Isabella Leonidas is on that ship with a detachment of Durcunusaan insuring the prisoners are secured. If you attempt such an action, you will kill a Queen of the Lycavorian Union and that action will plunge our two peoples into a war you will not win. The moment we detect your weapons powering up I will order you and your ship blown into nubous atoms Commander."

"I have you outnumbered and I do not fear your vaunted LEONIDAS II-Class ships!" He barked.

"Then you are a fool." Aricia said calmly. "But my experiences with the males of your species as already proved that to me. If you wish to expand this meeting into a shooting match, you are more than welcome Commander. You will lose and we will continue on our way without as much as a pause."

"You would not dare woman!" He barked. "I don't believe you!"

Aricia smiled as her eyes changed and her fangs extended. "Then that would be the single most ignorant thing you have ever done Commander. You go ahead and let your male pride rule your actions fool! I will blow your ship into so many tiny pieces no one will ever know you existed."

Angak's eyes grew wide as the insult to his male pride hit him. "I will contact... I will contact my superior officers! You will remain here until this is done."

Aricia chuckled. "You may remain here if you wish." She stated simply. "We are leaving however." She looked at Komirri. "Take us home Komirri. For olyn allon igord sarad ioion aen derolfar willude, tyna jen mida dur rie vada sivrera." (And if this fool so much as twitches wrong blow his ass out of the stars.)

Komirri's reptilian face was locked in a wide grin showing his razor like white teeth. "It would be my pleasure Milady."

Aricia lowered the tea she was holding and looked at the man who held her beloved Martin's complete and utter trust. Komirri had been the commander of Martin's ship since he had assumed his role as King, and he was the one who had taught Martin everything he knew of ship combat and tactics.

"Something Komirri?" She asked.

"We are sixteen hours from the Bontawillian border Milady." He spoke.

"We still have our guests I take it?" Aricia asked.

Komirri nodded. "Trailing behind us by several million kilometers and matching our course and speed. I ordered our Strike Wing to remain Shrouded and keep separation between them so no accidents happen."

Aricia got to her feet. "So what is it that you need?"

Komirri held out the pad to her. "Long range sensors have detected three additional Kavalian ships entering the sector on an intercept course with us. They will reach us before we get to the border."

Aricia took the pad and looked at it. "What type of ships?"

"Two *DIATAGA*-Class Missile Cruisers, we call them the Civet Cat because of their long range capability and one *DIEROY*-Class Heavy Cruiser. What we call the Sabertooth." Komirri answered.

"Threat level?" She asked looking up at him.

"The Sabertooth is more the concern because of her massive weapons load, but she has a very limited firing arc and we can maneuver to defeat that should it come to an exchange. The Civet Cat ships are more a nuisance with their missiles. Our point defenses would destroy their missiles before they ever hit." Komirri answered.

"You think this Angak fool called for reinforcements?" Aricia asked.

Komirri shrugged. "If he did... they did not bring enough." He stated calmly. "They obviously think we are out here alone. I have tasked our Strike Wing into sections, targeting all the ships. The Kavalians fight with a brute force mentality Milady. We maneuver against the Sabertooth, staying out of her forward firing arc and decimate her with our port and starboard Type One batteries as well as our missile launchers. We use our torpedoes in a support mode on the other ships while our Strike Wing cleans up the others."

Aricia nodded her head. "Martin has told me this. They charge into battle thinking they are superior to all around them and no one could defeat them. They do not care about the losses they suffer, as long as they accomplish their goals."

Komirri nodded. "Essentially yes."

"How soon before they intercept us?" Aricia asked.

"The Civet Cats will be in extreme range of their missile batteries in fourteen hours if they maintain their present course." Komirri answered. "They'll reach us..."

"...still two hours from the border." Aricia said to herself as she turned to look out the view window once more.

"Yes."

"Will this Sabertooth ship have a senior officer on board?" Aricia asked.

Komirri nodded. "Senior to Angak... more than likely."

"They wish us to back down Komirri." Aricia spoke softly. "They want us to do what they tell us to do. They want us to fear them? And they want us to hand over Maros, Walsh and the others."

Komirri nodded. "Yes Milady. All they really know is how to use threats and brute force to make others comply with what they want."

"I don't respond well to threats Komirri." Aricia said.

Komirri chuckled. "No... as Martin's wife and one of our Queens I don't imagine you do."

Aricia looked at him her azure eyes smiling. "Martin holds you in such high regard Komirri." She said softly seeing Komirri's eyes grow a little wider at this. "You have taught him so much through the years and you are one he trusts completely."

"I could say the same about him Milady." Komirri said softly.

Aricia nodded. "Yes I suppose so." She said evenly. "Have our fighters ready to launch if they attack Komirri. If it is a test of might the Kavalians wish to engage in, I will be more than happy to oblige them. I will not be cowed by these ignorant people and neither will Isabella I assure you."

Komirri nodded. "I will give the orders."

DARKBROOD-CLASS FRIGATE **HIGH COVEN INSURGENCY**

“The Kavalian ships are still there Commander.” Maros’s operations officer told him.

“Maintain your course.” Maros ordered. “We must not do anything that would provoke the Kavalian pigs into something rash.”

Maros turned his head and looked at Isabella who stood beside him on the bridge. He had never envisioned this day. Isabella and Vonis were famed heroes of the insurgency and they didn’t even know it. They had stood up to Aikiro and Veldruk and decided they wanted more than what life within the Coven offered. They now had that life, Isabella being a Queen of the Lycavorian Union against all the odds, and the mother of two of the King’s daughters. And as Maros had discovered when they returned to his ship, she would be mother to his son as well for she carried the King’s sixteenth child in her womb. Vonis was married to an elf female with five children, and a senior officer within the Union military and Intelligence establishment.

Vonis and Walsh were standing by one of the computer stations deep in a conversation and Maros looked at Isabella intently as Vonis turned.

“Sister... a message from Aricia.” Vonis spoke. “Three additional Kavalian ships on intercept course with us. They will come into weapons range while we are still two hours from the border.”

“Type?” Bella asked. She was no stranger to space combat.

“Two Civet Cats and a Sabertooth.” Vonis replied.

“The senior officer must have called for assistance.” Maros spoke. “They do not take kindly to being insulted. Especially by women as Queen Aricia did.”

Isabella smiled. “No I didn’t think they would.” She said looking at him. “You enjoyed that exchange I take it?”

Maros smiled broadly. “Best show I have seen in decades Lady Isabella. I thank you for leaving the channels open so that my crew could view it.”

“No matter what you may have heard Maros... Martin Leonidas is no friend of the High Coven.” Isabella said. “And he certainly will not allow Aikiro to discover your identities...” Bella turned as Vonis and Walsh came up. “...or that you and her other clones still live.”

Walsh grinned. “No sense in telling her that her cloning process is flawed.” He spoke. “She’ll find that out so enough on her own.”

Vonis gave Isabella the data pad. “Walsh and I have worked out a code.” He said. “I will return with them to their operating base and try to make contact with this General.”

Isabella looked at the pad. “You truly have no idea who this General is?” She asked.

Maros shook his head. “He has been giving his commands from the shadows since he made himself known to us.” He answered. “We understand why considering the position he must be in.”

“How do you know he is not a plant of Aikiro?” Bella asked.

“Two of the initial operations he planned and sent to us were on high profile targets. A weapons research lab and a new ship yard that was to build their *BLOOD REVERENCE* dreadnought.” Maros replied. “We were skeptical at first, just like you. The intelligence was perfect Lady Isabella. Plans, defenses, positions of ships, what docks to destroy. The weapons lab was the better target of the two in my opinion.”

Walsh nodded. “They were building new planetary missiles.” He said. “They could have launched them from orbit and devastated entire kilometers of ground on the surface. Even our underground facilities would have been at risk. They were fucking expensive to build and once we whacked the facility, Aikiro decided not to reconstitute the program.”

Isabella looked at him and laughed softly. “There is no doubt in my mind that you are who you say you are Colin Walsh.” She said. “You even speak like Martin does when he is excited or angry.”

Walsh chuckled. “He kind of rubbed off on us through the years I suppose.” He said.

“Wouldn’t Aikiro have clamped down on intelligence once these two operations were successful?” Isabella asked.

Maros nodded. “She did... but the General is a superior tactical mind. His tactics were to make it appear as if the intelligence we received was random in manner. We would attack some facilities, only to make it

appear as if we lost badly and then run with our tail between our legs. Others we would press as hard as we were able until we were victorious. His transmissions are random and usually come as a surprise to everyone. He is smart. He even stopped us from attacking the base where they had their dragons. We didn't want them used against us."

Isabella looked at him. "Why?"

Maros shrugged. "We never knew why... but we didn't go through with the attack. And they have never been used against us in any manner. He finally told us the dragons were not our enemy and they were being forced to do things against their as well. It was a compassionate plea to be honest."

"Indeed." Isabella said.

"What happens when those Kav ships get here?" Colin asked.

"If they wish to try and intimidate Aricia they will not succeed." Isabella spoke. "She is... hard as fucking nails... I believe Martin says often."

Vonis chuckled. "That she is."

"And if they pick a fight?" Walsh continued.

Isabella looked at Vonis for a moment and then back to him. "Then they will quickly find that Aricia Leonidas's bite is far worse than her bark."

DYSEA'S *STRIKER DT* FIVE HOURS FROM APO PRIME

Dysea stood silently as she lifted the mug of tea to her lips, her emerald eyes focused on where her daughter sat.

Normya was curled up on the couch of the *STRIKER*, her body pressed tightly to Tir'ut's muscular side, her head resting comfortably on his broad chest. He was slumped lower on the couch, and Normya's platinum blond hair splashed across his chest and abdomen. Tir'ut's left arm was draped over her upper back protectively, Normya's face tucked against the side of his neck, both of them sleeping soundly.

"What is going through your mind when you look at them Dysea Leonidas?" Esther's voice asked from behind her. "I know of your abilities within Mindvoice. You saw something when you touched my son on Kranek. What did you see Dysea?"

Dysea turned slowly and looked at her. Esther was holding her own mug of steaming tea in her hands, her beautiful face relaxed and calm. Dysea doubted very much could get this woman to show her emotions unless it was related to her husband Cha'talla.

"I saw... I saw a child. A beautiful child. A child with my daughter's hair, and your son's skin and eyes." Dysea said softly. "Their child. I saw... I saw the love for my daughter in his eyes, and the shining brightness of Normya's eyes when she looked at him."

Esther stepped up beside her and glanced at where Tir'ut and Normya slept. "Is this a bad thing Dysea?" She asked softly.

"Love is never a bad thing Esther." Dysea said.

"I never imagined myself falling in love with an Immortal Dysea." Esther said. "It just happened. I did not see Cha'talla's outward appearance. I saw what was inside him. I know what you fear Dysea, and I don't know how to make you understand that can not happen to your daughter."

"You sound so certain." Dysea said.

Esther nodded. "I should be... that particular Akruxian gene is not present in my sons." She said confidently. "None of them. Every Immortal male in our settlement has voluntarily had that gene within them suppressed Dysea. Erli'ra and the other elven females who are married to Immortals show no signs of what you fear Dysea. You saw that for yourself. You spoke to all of them."

Dysea nodded. "Yes." She said.

"I knew something was there the first time he spoke to her over the COM. There was something in his voice. He had not even met her yet but I could sense it. And then when he attacked the Bancorik without even a moment's hesitation I knew for sure. He would gladly give his life to keep her safe Dysea." Esther said.

Dysea nodded. "Yes... that is quite obvious."

“Is it... is it that my son is not good enough for Normya?” Esther asked with a very neutral voice.

Dysea shook her head adamantly. “No Esther! Never that! We... we pride ourselves on being so open to change... yet looking at her in his arms, it makes me shudder, but it also makes me very happy that she found someone who loves her as Tir’ut obviously does.”

Esther nodded with a smile. “As King Leonidas no doubt loves you.” She said.

“*Nauta Melme* loves all of us equally.” Dysea said.

“Yes I imagine that is true. But there are many who say he favors you most after his soulmate Aricia.” Esther said.

Dysea nodded. “Yes... we have heard that too. Some say me... some say *Melyanna*. We laugh about it.” She said with a smile.

Esther took a deep breath. “Cha’talla will be the first one to admit that the Akrujian history with elves is wrought with violence and forcing them to be slaves to Immortals. It was one of the things he most wanted to change. He values the wisdom of elves Dysea; that is why he has Erli’ra’s father running our schools. It was the first thing he told me in our bed when they came to be with us. He wanted Illiad to teach our children, and the children of our future.”

“How did you do it?” Dysea asked.

“Do what?”

“Change them so.” Dysea finished her question.

“It was relatively simple really.” Esther answered. “To be honest I only followed Queen Anja’s blueprint.”

“*Melyanna*?” Dysea asked surprised.

Esther nodded. “She came up with the suppressive compound and didn’t even know it.” Esther answered. “I suspected that was the case when I saw the balance of amino acids and nuclides. I spent quite a bit of one of our harvests to get the needed samples from within Union space, but it was money well spent. With blood samples of every male Immortal in our tribe, it took only eight months to test and then produce the serum. When I announced it was finished, they were lining up outside our clinic the next day Dysea. Cha’talla’s tribe has embraced the changes he has brought Dysea. Changing our past history with elves was the first and most important step.”

“Our history?” Dysea asked.

Esther nodded. “I am Cha’talla’s Blessed Wife. I am a member of their tribe... so yes... it is our history.”

“I only saw your two younger sons and Tir’ut Esther.” Dysea spoke. “You said you have four sons with Cha’talla.”

Esther nodded. “Lynom was born a year after Tir’ut. He is doing something for his father in The Wilds that ultimately protects us as well. He is almost as skilled as his brother, and shares his wild streak, though he is not as accomplished within Mindvoice. He and Tir’ut are very close.”

“This is the connection I sense within him then?” Dysea asked. “It is heavily shielded and even I would be hard pressed to intrude upon it.”

Esther nodded. “More than likely.” She said. “He keeps it open in case Lynom contacts him for some reason.”

“You will not tell me where he is will you?” Dysea asked.

Esther smiled. “I would if I knew.” She said. “Only Cha’talla and Tir’ut know where he is. I do not want to know, the truth is told... for it will undoubtedly make me very upset. He is my son, and putting him in danger goes against every instinct inside me.”

Dysea nodded with a smile. “Yes... I do know that feeling.” She said. She turned back and looked at Tir’ut and Normya on the couch.

“Will Martin Leonidas try to separate them when he finds out Dysea?” Esther asked softly. “I know he must harbor quite a bit of hatred for Cha’talla’s people over the events with his father.”

Dysea shook her head. “No. We made a promise to ourselves that we would not interfere in the lives of our children. That we would allow them to find their own paths. *Nauta Melme* is very open Esther, more so than most give him credit for. He embraces change and the unknown, and over the years he has come to trust in fate and destiny more than he ever did.”

“Like when he saved T’lolt’s life?” Esther said softly.

Dysea nodded. “Yes. Once he sees the love for our daughter that Tir’ut holds; the love for him that Normya is no longer fighting within herself, he will embrace change once more. It is just part of his nature.”

“Dysea... does... does this nature allow him to trust what Aikiro tells him.” Esther asked softly.

Dysea turned and met her eyes and Esther thought she saw a vicious glint in those emerald orbs that disappeared just as quickly as it flashed across them.

“Martin Leonidas is many things Esther.” She said calmly. “A fool is not one of them. He no more trusts that woman than he trusts the Kavalian pigs that have come to Earth.”

Esther grinned. “I take it he does not care for the Kavalians.” She said.

Dysea shook her head. “There are exceptions to every rule Esther, you know this as well as I. When it comes to the Kavalians however, we have not found any of them yet. They have more in common with that vampire *upaee* Aikiro than they think. They seek to conquer and control by brute force and fear, while Aikiro seeks the same thing; only by using subversion and assassination. He may be a Spartan, and he definitely loves to fight, but we have found he much prefers when he is in our bed and we shower him with attention.” She said with a seductive grin and twinkle in her eye.

Esther chuckled. “That sounds very much like Cha’talla.” She said.

“No Esther... he does not trust Aikiro. Or anything she tells him. What we are doing... what our son Androcles is doing... its only purpose is to give those dragons that she stole from us so long ago a chance to see for themselves what they could become. And have a chance if they need to fight the Kavalians.” Dysea said with a smile. “Empress Aikiro is not as skilled and influential as she likes to believe she is. And she does not know what is happening right under her own nose.”

Esther looked at her confused. “What do you mean?”

Dysea smiled. “It is something I sensed several weeks ago. That is part of my ability and I can’t control it. Like the visions it comes to me out of the blue really. It will come out soon I think.” She said. “And no doubt you and Cha’talla will hear her scream from here when it does.”

Esther grinned now. “I will certainly look forward to that.” She said.

Dysea nodded and took her hand. “Come Esther... let us as mothers insure our plans are adequate enough so that our children do not place themselves in too much danger. And Iriral I know would like to question you and get to know you more since we will be working together.”

Esther nodded. “I would like to know her as well.” She said.

“Then we have six hours to insure that your son does not kill those who have tried to kill the woman he loves.” Dysea said. “At least not before we have had ample time to question them.”

“And then?” Esther asked.

This time Dysea’s smile was exceptionally cruel. “Then Tir’ut may do with them what he will for trying to kill my daughter. I may be an elf Esther, but I was turned by the most powerful Lycavorian Spartan within the Union and I have inherited many of his traits, first and foremost among them is the savage protectiveness of family. I do not think they will like what Tir’ut has in mind for them.”

“No... I don’t think they will.” Esther spoke. “Not one bit.”

IRARUZU THE WILDS

A world of towering white capped mountains and rolling green plains. It was a world that many would be proud to call home and live upon, except for the growing population of pirate and mercenary scum that now called the world their home. It sat within a week’s travel of the Bontawillian border, but those blue and black skinned aliens had grown very close to the Union and its King in the last twenty years, changing many of their own laws to mirror those of the Union. They dared not approach the Bontawillian Alliance border any longer looking to cross into Union space or for any nefarious purposes. The destruction of a dozen of their pirate ships through the past years had shown them the Bontawillian Alliance had thrown their hat in almost completely with the Lycavorian Union. The Bontawillian Alliance had the strongest treaties of mutual trade and protection among the non-Lycavorian Union worlds, and the fact that the Lycavorian King had embraced their

independence and even encouraged it only made the Bontawillian Alliance that much more loyal to him. He gave them weapons and training and ships, and their trade agreements were among the most profitable in the Union.

The mercenaries and pirates who stayed on Iraruzu were some of the vilest in The Wilds, but they were also some of the most intelligent and they knew who not to make angry. As with Jagaliu, Ricot Four and Aprian Two, Iraruzu had several large settlements where most of the pirates and mercenaries tended to remain. There were many smaller settlements along the outer rim of the main spaceports on the planet, those who chose to remain away from the laws of the Union, but who were not criminals in some shape or form. One of these small settlements was a combination of Drow elves and humans, situated exactly thirteen kilometers from the main city. Like the settlement on Nebonese, all of these Drow and humans were members of the Krypteria. They were highly skilled and trained, and their main task was monitoring the area near Gellen Station and the planets within the former Lycavorian People's Republic that their King had destroyed a quarter century ago. There were twenty-seven of them altogether, fifteen Drow and twelve humans, all of them from the same family clan. The humans, seven females and five males were the wives or husbands of the Drow since the family clan Dareitara worked very closely with humans in Eden City. The Dareitara Clan was well respected among the Drow and looked to for leadership and wisdom. They were among the first who had embraced the changes brought about by their Queen when they had come from Canada to Eden City.

The Dareitara Clan was her family clan and she could not have been prouder.

Her name was Lu'ria and she was the epitome of a female Drow warrior in looks. She was only twenty-five years old and in the lifespan of elves, still very much a child. The black Drow jumpsuit held a five foot nine, hundred and twenty-one pound frame of feminine curves and Drow muscularity. Her breasts were not large, but they were very firm, her waist small but highlighting an incredible firm and perfectly shaped ass. Her long legs were taut and powerful, and her abdomen flat and displaying the feminine ripple of her stomach muscles. Her long and silky shimmering white hair was braided, with several dreadlock strands ending in black beads on either side of her face. Her skin was typical in its flawless, elven texture and the sepia color of her skin contrasted greatly with the lustrous white of her hair. Her eyes were a burnt amber color, very alert and holding great intelligence in them.

Lu'ria had accomplished much in only twenty-five years of life. She held a Degree in Aerospace Engineering from the Eden City University and she was an accomplished pilot with hundreds of hours in both the Raptor III as well as several different transports. She spoke both the ancient language of the Drow as well as being fluent in the Lycavorian ancient language. This was something that all Drow learned without question to honor their king. Her parents were well respected and influential in Eden City and the Drow city of Dalmouzh only six kilometers away. Her mother was the Matron of their family, and one of Queen Aihola's advisors, while her father was a sought after and very skilled engineer in his own right. Their family and clan were very traditional in many respects, adhering to the culture of their Drow heritage almost religiously. Her mother had been one of the first to fully commit their family to support of Queen Aihola when she had come to Canada and over the years the strict laws by which they had lived lessened to some degree as they embraced the new life that had been granted to their people. Her parents had been very proud of her when she made the decision to join the Krypteria, following in the footsteps of her three brothers and two sisters.

Lu'ria had come to Iraruzu after fully completing three years of intense training for the Krypteria, to include days and weeks of hand to hand training, and the use of every conceivable weapon known to exist. She was technically an agricultural expert as her cover and she was very knowledgeable of plants and flowers and weeds. It was not the most enjoyable of fields, or the most exciting, but to get into the Krypteria was all that mattered to her. In typical Drow fashion, as the youngest child she was also the one to be the brunt of her older sister's and brother's jokes about her standing within the family. She would never be the head of their family unless some catastrophic event killed her sisters and mother, and the likelihood of that happening was astronomical. To compensate for that Lu'ria was a little more adventurous and took a few more risks than her sisters and brothers, a fact that angered her parents to some extent. Lu'ria was also the only one of their children to not have at least a steady lover. She was no stranger to relationships, but Lu'ria was not one to let a man or woman tie her down. She had had three lovers in her young life, two Drow elf males and a female High elf while in school. As with any culture, the two males had hoped to advance their own status within the Drow hierarchy by becoming her husband, and Lu'ria had quickly shown one of them to the door while her father had

chased the other one away. The female she had been with for five months, and while it had been very pleasurable while they were together, both of them wanted much more in their lives and went their separate ways after school. Her brothers and sisters made fun of her because Lu'ria said she would only be swept off her feet by royalty. That one day she would know the love of a Prince and Princess. Her mother thought this childish, while her father secretly wished for this to happen for his youngest daughter.

The post on Iraruzu was an excellent starting point for the Drow in their Krypteria careers for their settlement had existed longer than all the others. The Matron mother of Clan Tonairo was an older woman, but close friends with Lu'ria's mother and almost like a loving aunt to Lu'ria. Many of the pirate scum and mercenaries had long ago learned not to mess with anyone associated with the dark skinned elves if they valued their lives and their sexual equipment. The settlement was six kilometers away from the main spaceport where they had opened and now ran a well established weapons shop. They bought and sold weapons from all over The Wilds; some of them legal, some not as legal, as was their cover.

Lu'ria looked across their establishment at the counter where the older son of Clan Tonairo was showing a long energy weapon to a Kochab. She stood behind the herbal counter in keeping with her cover, as they sold many items that had natural healing properties in them, and provided an excellent additional income considering the line of work of many of those that frequented their establishment.

"He's handsome isn't he?" The female voice said from just behind her.

Lu'ria turned and looked at the very pretty human female. She smiled. "If you prefer his type Jennifer, then yes I suppose he is handsome." Lu'ria said.

The blond haired young woman was one of the "slaves" to Clan Tonairo, and the frequent lover of one of Clan Tonairo's daughters. She was exceptionally bright and always had a kind word to say to everyone.

"You don't find him attractive?" Jennifer asked.

"I didn't say that." Lu'ria spoke with a smile. "He is just not my type."

Jennifer moved closer to her. "I didn't realize that clan Dareitara allowed the youngest females to have relationships outside of the Drow." She said. "I thought custom dictated that the youngest female marry a Drow to keep their bloodline strong."

Lu'ria nodded. "Yes... that is our custom... but that does not mean I agree to it." She stated shaking her head. "No... the man I spend my life with will have blue eyes, and the three women I will call my slaves will have sea green eyes, soft blue eyes and glittering dark orbs. They will worship and pleasure me just as I will worship and pleasure them."

"Three slaves?" Jennifer spoke with wide eyes. "Wow... even General Lynwe has only two slaves. You are aspiring to greatness Lu'ria."

Lu'ria shrugged. "It is what I feel inside me." She said. "It is what I have felt for many years. Everyone laughs at me... but they will see."

The young blond stepped right up to her. "You know... Kodsu and Ixara are spending the night together." She spoke boldly. "She doesn't mind if I *occupy* myself when she and her husband are together. Do you think you might want too...?"

Lu'ria lean over and smiled seductively. "I think I would like that Jennifer." She said with a smile.

"Like what?" The gruff voice spoke and they both turned to look directly in the cruel green vertical slit eyes of the Kavalian. He was close to six and a half feet tall and easily over two hundred pounds. The dark blond hair that covered his body was groomed well enough, but he gave off a musky odor that was not pleasant in the least. An odor like one would smell from someone who had not bathed in several days.

Lu'ria forced a genuine smile onto her face. "Good day sir." She announced. "Can I interest you in some herbal medicines that my people developed on Earth? They are guaranteed to take care of whatever ails you."

"I want nothing from that backwater planet you call Earth!" The man snapped.

Lu'ria's Krypteria training was perfect and she kept the smile on her face. "Then can I interest you in something that you don't have right now?"

"How much for you?" The Kavalian barked. "Think you can survive a night in my bed Drow wench?"

Lu'ria continued to smile sweetly. She knew how Kavalians viewed their females, and that apparently extended to females of different species as well. "That would very much depend sir." Lu'ria stated.

"Depend on what?" The Kavalian snapped with an evil grin. "Wench... once I lock groins with you... you'll be ruined except for another Kavalian. You'll never want another."

“Locking groins with me would mean you need to actually have a cock right?” Lu’ria stated calmly, the smile never leaving her face. “Something you won’t have if you touch me.” Lu’ria made a show of sniffing the air and she wrinkled her nose as she turned to look at Jennifer. “It would also entail that you bath more than once a week.”

The Kavalian’s eyes flared wide in anger and he leaned across the counter, placing his hands on the top for better leverage. He froze when he felt the cold metal of two very large hand weapons placed to his temples, and the tiny pin prick from the tip of the wicked looking blade Lu’ria now held in her right hand.

“Your actions will be forgiven right now.” The older female voice spoke from the side in as calm a voice as the Kavalian had ever heard. “Raise your hand another millimeter Kavalian, and you will no longer have brains to control your body. Not to mention Lu’ria there will open your throat so wide not even a Hadarian Healer could save you.”

The Kavalian looked out of the corner of his eye at the face of the older Drow female as she came closer. He saw the male Drow from the weapons counter standing just to one side with the large K12 KM pressed to his temple, and another smaller female with a cut down version of the K12 in her hands and jammed into his opposite temple.

“She insulted me!” He roared.

“Another step and she would have cut off your cock before you knew what happen.” The older Drow spoke. “My name is Vlonjra... and I am the Matron of the Drow Clan Tonairo. You will find we are not like other elves Kavalian, and we do not fall down with our legs open whenever a male who says he has a big cock comes forward. We are Drow... and we left Earth because that fool King would not allow us to live as we please.” Vlonjra stepped right up to him as he looked into Lu’ria’s bright burnt amber eyes. They held no fear of him, only contempt. “You are welcome to shop in our establishment sir, and if there is something you need that we do not have, we can probably obtain it for you at a very reasonable cost. You will not however, you will not treat members of my family and clan with your Kavalian bravado and abusive nature. If you do... I will ask you to leave. If you do not... I will kill you sir. You will disappear and your leaders will think you have deserted for no sign you ever existed will remain.” She leaned close to his face and waited until his eyes left Lu’ria’s and looked at her. “Am I making myself clear enough to that underdeveloped feline brain of yours?”

“Do not push me woman!” He snarled at her. “I heard you!”

Vlonjra nodded. “Good. Now... do you wish to buy something?”

“Not from this place!” He snapped.

“Then I will ask you only once to leave.” Vlonjra spoke. “We have been doing business here for near two decades now and I don’t need your foul kind chasing away my legitimate customers.”

“I will not forget this woman!” He growled.

Vlonjra nodded. “Yes... I had heard that about you Kavalians. All brawn and no brains. Living off of centuries old hatreds and vendettas. I am quite sure you won’t forget it, but now you need to leave.”

Vlonjra motioned with her head and the two weapons came away from his head. His eyes went to Lu’ria and she smiled as she slowly drew back the blade, lifting it in front of his face and angling it in the light.

“It is very sharp.” She said softly.

The Kavalian push back slowly from the counter and then turned to exit the store without so much as a second glance back. Vlonjra moved closer to the counter as Lu’ria vaulted herself over the chest high obstacle and landed cat like next to her. She looked at the Drow from the weapons counter as he came forward and the younger female Drow as she replaced the K14 in the small holster within her loose fitting dress.

“Rikmyr?” She asked softly.

“I’ve never seen him before mother.” He answered.

“Neduna?” Vlonjra asked.

“Nor have I mother.” The female spoke.

“There is a Kavalian frigate in orbit. It arrived only yesterday.” Rikmyr spoke. “I saw dozens of them walking the streets earlier today.”

Vlonjra nodded. “Perhaps.” She said thoughtfully.

“Matron Mother... did I act wrongly?” Lu’ria asked.

Vlonjra looked at her. “No.” She answered immediately. “You acted just as they have come to expect a dominant Drow female to act. Any other way and others would become suspicious.” Vlonjra turned back to the

door that the Kavalian had exited. “This however, was no ordinary soldier from one of their ships as we have seen before. He tried to act the part, and he may fool others who are less observant.”

“What do you mean mother?” Neduna asked.

“He was wearing very loose clothing.” Lu’ria spoke. “His hands are scarred which means he does not work on a ship. He was too alert and he acted as if he wanted to provoke a reaction from us.”

Vlonjra nodded. “Excellent Lu’ria.” She said. “Rikmyr... pass the word to the others to be more mindful of Kavalians who come around the store here and the road towards our home.”

“You don’t think he will try something do you mother?” Rikmyr asked quickly. “After the reputation we have cultivated here?”

“I would not put anything past these Kavalians.” Vlonjra spoke evenly. “They use cloned soldiers that they know will not live past a certain time. It makes it easier to control them.” She shook her head. “No... once those fools on Nefoa gave them complete control of their planet; the Kavalians began acting like they owned The Wilds. Have our family keep more of a watch on their surroundings.”

Rikmyr nodded. “I’ll pass the word mother.”

Vlonjra looked at Lu’ria. “You have done well Lu’ria.” She said warmly. “You will do your mother proud as you grow older.”

Lu’ria smiled. “Thank you Matron.”

The Kavalian made his way through the streets of the Iraruzu spaceport and when he was almost to the actual landing bays he ducked into a dark alley and moved quickly for a man his size. He sprinted down the dark alley and around the rear of the spaceport, coming to the ten story abandoned building. He slipped between the bent doors and took the old stairs three at a time until he was on the fourth floor. He moved around to the east side of the building and came to the closed door. He knocked several times and pushed the door open to reveal a dozen other Kavalians lounging around the large room, all of them cleaning weapons of some sort. He moved directly to the senior officer who sat at the table looking at a chart of the terrain. The Kavalian looked up.

“Report?” He ordered.

“Just as the intelligence said Major.” The man spoke. “I saw at least six Drow elves and two human females.”

“The leader?” The Kavalian Major asked.

“An older Drow female.” The man answered. “They reacted just as you said they would to my actions.”

The Major nodded as another Kavalian came up to the table. “Byttao... send your initial report. The intelligence from the contact has proven to be accurate and we will begin planning our assault.”

The man nodded. “Yes Major.” He spoke before turning and moving to the large communications set up on the table near the wall.

“A request Major.” The man asked.

“You have done well Kamal.” The Major spoke. “What is your request?”

“When we finally move against them, I request that the female who stuck her knife to my throat be mine.” He said.

“Why?” He asked.

“I intend to use her as a repository for my seed for however long she survives.” Kamal said cruelly. “She was a lush thing and she needs to learn her place.”

The Major nodded. “You will have her Kamal.” He replied. “Get some rest. We will begin setting up observation points tomorrow so that we can learn their routine. If they are members of the Krypteria, their routine will never be the same from one day to the next and we will need to discover how to eliminate them with the most efficiency.”

“Thank you Major.” Kamal said bowing his head slightly.

CRANAE ISLAND

The sunlight bathed her face in its warmth and she knew immediately something was very wrong.

Ne'Veha sat up in the bed quickly; the satin like sheets caressing her naked flesh as the cover fell away exposing her firm breasts, her nipples hardening instantly in the cool morning air. Her long brown hair fell around her face and well past her shoulders, and when she sat up fully the wave of nausea hit her and the temples in her head began to throb almost painfully.

“Ohhhhh.” Ne'Veha groaned loudly her hands going to her head.

She waited for a long moment as the pain and nausea passed after a time and then she lifted her head to look around the huge bedroom she was in. This was most definitely not her quarters on the *SCIMITAR*, nor was it any lodge or resort suite she had ever been in. She felt the sun coming in through the large double doors leading out onto some patio, and then she smelled the salt in the air. She was by the ocean, for as she listened she could hear the birds and the gentle lap of the waves as they came up onto the beach. She was very close to the ocean if she could hear that. Ne'Veha looked around the huge room once more, seeing several dressers as well as a large couch near a fireplace against the wall. There were two large windows with blinds of some sort, as well as the double doors leading outside. There was another set of double doors on the wall closest to the bed that obviously led into another part of wherever she was. She saw a discarded male shirt on the floor near the bed, as well as a pair of light blue panties.

“Oh *carians*.” Ne'Veha muttered. “Please tell me I didn't sleep with Tarren last night.” She spoke as she gathered the sheet around her body. She froze as she realized she had just spoken a word in the ancient Lycavorian language. Tarren's comments as well as those of her friends came rushing back to her now. How could she know the Lycavorian language? She had never studied it in school, never even bothered to make an attempt to learn it. Her parents had made sure that it was not part of her curriculum.

You understand and speak it because it is now part of you Ne'Veha. The female voice rang out softly in her mind. *Just as we are part of you. And you a part of us.*

Ne'Veha looked around the room quickly, her dark eyes darting from corner to corner looking for the owner of that voice. “Who are you?” She demanded. “Where are you?”

At this moment I am in our kitchen preparing something for your headache, which must be nearly intolerable considering the amount of Spartan Wine you drank last night. The voice answered. *You may join me if you like. You know the way Ne'Veha... you are part of us now.*

“Spartan Wine?” Ne'Veha asked softly as the memories from last night came rushing back. Her eyes grew wider in horror as she remembered what had occurred at Gallais's Retreat. “Oh... oh no. Please... please tell me I did not do what I remember doing?” She gasped. “Please tell me I did not vomit all over Prince Androcles.”

The female voice chuckled softly. *I don't believe anyone has ever thrown up on Andro.* She spoke with considerable humor. *It was quite entertaining to see the look on his face. Come Ne'Veha... join me in the kitchen and we can discuss what you and we have discovered.*

Ne'Veha wrapped the sheet around her tighter and climbed from the bed, moving for the double doors into the interior of the home almost instinctively. It was almost as if she already knew where she was going. Like she had been here many times before. She pushed open the door and was assaulted with the smells of cooking food. The smell of the meat almost made her nauseous, but she fought it down quickly. She stepped into the massive expanse of the main room, the morning sun shining brightly in through several windows along the wall and from the massive skylight above. There were couches and chairs all over the room, as well as several large book cases and a great fireplace along the north wall. She heard the sizzling and angled across the room, the rug covered tile floor cool and soft against her bare feet. The kitchen area was large and set against the west side of the main room, attached with two large arches leading into it. Ne'Veha gasped loudly when she saw the golden blood hair and wonderfully tanned skin of the female sitting at the counter sipping a large mug of steaming liquid and reading from a data pad. She saw those dazzling jungle green eyes come up to gaze at her and they wrapped around her with warmth.

It was her!

It was the Lycavorian female from her dreams. It was the Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union. One of three others that she had been having delicious dreams about over these last weeks, along with the raven haired vampire female and a faceless dark skinned woman with long legs and confident hands.

Sadi got to her feet, the thin white robe hugging her figure. She was naked underneath the robe as she always was, and it was tied loosely around her waist exposing a good amount of the valley between her large breasts. "Good morning." She said warmly, her voice sounding exactly like the echo in her mind. She motioned to the additional chair at the kitchen counter and held up the large mug. "This should help with your headache and the nausea you feel."

Ne'Veha moved forward slowly, her eyes darting back and forth around the kitchen and main room looking for him. Sadi smiled as she lifted her own mug of coffee now and looked at her. Six months ago Sadi would never envisioned this. She would never have seen herself so eagerly wanting to taste another woman. She had that brief relationship with Teeria yes, but what she felt now for Carisia, for Ne'Veha and for the last woman who occupied their dreams, that simply had no words to describe. Helen had begun her on the road to discovery and their conversation just before the State Dinner those weeks ago had only reinforced what Sadi felt coursing through her. She could no more deny the incredible attraction and pull towards the others anymore then they could deny it to themselves. It all centered on Andro, he was the focus and the core of it all. It was not merely a physical attraction between all of them, it was far deeper than that and it was something that made them all far more powerful and committed. She could feel it within Ne'Veha even now, and she passed it without question through Mindvoice to Carisia who eagerly awaited their return at SODRAG. As with his mother, Sadi was Andro's soulmate and she would always have the part of him that no other female ever could. But like his mother Aricia, she would also love the other three females who were destined to be part of their lives, and they would love her just as intensely.

And all of them would love Andro without question or hesitation in the least.

Sadi smiled as Ne'Veha stepped up to the counter looking at her. "Andro is walking along the beach with his brother." Sadi said.

"I... I was sick... I vomited on him." Ne'Veha spoke softly. "I am... I am so horrified. I will never live it down."

"No one will know." Sadi spoke.

"Tarren will tell everyone!" Ne'Veha exclaimed.

Sadi smiled. "Tarren will tell no one if he knows what is good for him." She said. "I think he is still trying to grasp how it is you know us. How you deal with him will be up to you Ne'Veha, but whatever you do we will support you."

Ne'Veha lifted the mug from the counter top and her nose wrinkled slightly. "What... what is this?" She asked.

"It is something Andro's mother Dysea made. She is a genius with natural herbs and such." Sadi answered. "It does not smell very pleasant, but one mug of that and it will settle your stomach and rid you of the pounding in your head."

Ne'Veha didn't hesitate and took a long sip of the lukewarm liquid. It was dark brown in color and tasted faintly of mint, but as the warmth entered her throat and stomach, the effects were almost instantaneous. The nausea began to subside and her headache no longer throbbed quite as painfully against her temples. She looked up at Sadi with wide eyes and saw her jungle green orbs smiling back at her.

"I told you." Sadi said. "Drink the rest Ne'Veha, and I will get you a mug of Aricia's coffee and then you will need to eat."

"You... he has been in my dreams." Ne'Veha spoke quickly.

Sadi looked at her and nodded as she stood up. "And you have been in ours."

"I... I felt everything that you... I felt all that you did." Ne'Veha stammered. "You, him and... and Carisia." She looked at Sadi. "How... how do I know her name? I have never met her in my life, yet I feel as if..."

"You feel as if you know her completely." Sadi asked moving around the counter to stand in front of her. "You feel as if you know Andro and I completely. You feel as if you know the last of us completely. The one we haven't found just yet."

"She... she is a Drow." Ne'Veha said. "Her skin is so... it is so perfect. And her hair!"

Sadi nodded. "Like white silk spun from masters." She said. "Yes... we feel it too. We see her too Ne'Veha."

"Carisia... she is a vampire!" Ne'Veha said. "A member of the High Coven!"

"Carisia is a vampire yes." Sadi answered. "But like Androcles and I were fated to be together... she was fated and destined to be part of our lives as well. As were you Ne'Veha. You can't deny it. You have been using the ancient language... yet you never learned out to speak it. Others have commented on that haven't they?"

Ne'Veha looked at her. "My friends... and Tarren."

Sadi nodded. "It is coming from us." She said. "The closer we are together, the faster our minds will come in concert."

"Princess... I am only a Tier Three Mindvoicer." Ne'Veha said.

"Is that what you think?" She asked with a smile. "Then how is it you can hear my words in your mind Ne'Veha? Andro, me, Carisia... we are all much stronger than Tier Six, and we almost never drop our shields enough to communicate with anyone who is not at least a Tier Five. Yet you hear us easily. You feel us easily. How do you explain that? And don't call me Princess... it's ridiculous considering what we will mean to each other."

Ne'Veha looked at her. "I... I don't know."

Sadi nodded. "Do you believe in destiny Ne'Veha?"

Ne'Veha nodded her head. "I believe we are all here for some ultimate purpose in our lives." She said. She looked away shyly. "It is an idea my parents have tried to get me to leave in the past. They don't think it is realistic."

"Why do they dislike Lycavorians so much?" Sadi asked.

Ne'Veha looked at her. "My grandmother had an affair with a Lycavorian that resulted in her leaving my grandfather. She followed this Lycavorian because her heart told her too I suppose." Ne'Veha met her eyes. "She was killed with him during one of the battles with the High Coven a hundred and seventy years before King Leonidas returned to us. They had a son..."

"Did he survive?" Sadi asked.

Ne'Veha nodded. "Oh yes... but he is not welcome by my father or my other uncles and aunts." She stated. "He is an officer in the fleet. I understand he commands a *Leonidas II*-Strike Cruiser now."

"And you have fought with this for quite some time I take it." Sadi said. "Your parents have tried to shape your thinking along their lines when it comes to my people."

"Tarren's actions did not do much to alleviate their concerns." Ne'Veha said.

"No I don't imagine they did." Sadi said.

Ne'Veha nodded slowly. "I... I thought they were right after he cheated on me." She spoke looking at Sadi. "I thought that was the reason I would never let Tarren *cado forn*. That I could not trust him." Her eyes grew a little wider when she spoke the words and Sadi grinned.

"I told you." She said.

"That's... that's not the reason is it?" Ne'Veha asked.

Sadi shook her head. "It may have played a small part in your distrust of him. But you did not let him *cado forn* because a larger part of you knew he was not the one that called to you. That he was not who you were destined to be with." She said gently reaching out and taking her hand. "You were meant for Andro... for us... for all of us. No more and no less than I was meant for Andro and for us. Just as he was meant for me, for Carisia, for you and for the Drow when we find her. As much as he hates being compared to his father... because of who he is... the type of man he is... he will have all of us. And we will have each other and him."

"You sound... you sound so sure." Ne'Veha said. "I have... I have never been with a woman before."

Sadi shrugged. "It is something that only happened to me once before I met Andro. And up until that night on the island I was sure about nothing." She said softly. "I struggled with it just as you are now. I could not believe I was in love with an eight month old infant... but I was. It was the reason that I never let any man I slept with before Andro came back into my life *cado forn* Ne'Veha."

Ne'Veha looked at her. "And now?"

Sadi smiled. "Now?" She asked. "Now I could not imagine anything else. Carisia and I can give each other almost as much pleasure as Andro gives to us. It would be no different for you and me, or Carisia and the

two of us. But no man will ever take Andro's place in our hearts or our lives. And I have come to accept that there is a higher power, or powers, guiding us in all that we do. We were meant for Andro Ne'Veha and him for us."

Ne'Veha looked at the mug in her hand and took another long drink of the odd tasting liquid. Her mind was telling her that this was all too much to believe, that it could not be the way Sadi was explaining it. Her body however, her body was calling out for Sadi in a way she had never experienced before. Calling out for Androcles like it had never called for any man, not even Tarren who she thought she had loved. And calling out for the touch of two women who she had never even met before. She looked at Sadi who was simply gazing at her with those beautiful jungle green eyes.

"I... I need... I need some time to wrap my mind around all this." She said softly.

Sadi nodded. "I'm sure you do." She said getting to her feet. "Right now... why don't I finish cooking us some breakfast? You can't return to the *SCIMITAR* because the wine in your blood is still very pungent for a wolf's nose. It will be at least another day before it fully leaves your system. We are returning to SODRAG later this afternoon and you will go with us. You can return to the *SCIMITAR* from there."

"Just like that?" Ne'Veha asked.

Sadi laughed. "Did you think we would keep you prisoner?" She asked. "You need to eat... and I know Andro is hungry, I can hear his stomach growling from here. Our path is already laid before us... time does not have any meaning right now." She turned and moved for the large stove. "I hope you like Greek meat? It is a recipe Andro's mother showed me."

"...coming along better than we had hoped." Andro spoke as he and Resumar walked along the beach near the villa. Elynth and Cemath rested near the patio of the villa, both of them flicking their tails at one another in some manner of sibling torment. "We could certainly use you and Cemath when we begin CQCF next week."

They stopped walking to look across the bay at the city in the distance. They were both barefoot in the white sand, their upper bodies exposed to the rising sun. Physically it was like looking at two perfect specimens with the extreme definition and ripped muscularity. All of them, whether half elf or not, all of them had taken after their father in that regard. While Andro was the tallest and heaviest at nearly six feet two and two hundred and twenty-five pounds, they were within two inches of each other in height and perhaps twenty pounds in weight. Andro wore his customary white pants, while Resumar had stripped off his civilian shirt to join his brother on the sands.

"I'll probably be there relatively soon." Resumar answered him.

Andro looked at his brother. "Why do you say that?" He asked.

Resumar met his brother's blue eyes. They had fought together in some of the most horrific places in the universe during the Evolli war. They had seen death and war at its worst, or so they thought. Never once had Androcles treated him, Denali or Arrarn any differently because they had different mothers. It was not the way they were raised. Resumar also knew that his brother hated the title of Crown Prince because to him it signified in some way that he was supposedly better than his brothers, something that Andro had never once cultivated or even brought up in a joking manner. This was the brother who had worked with him, helped him to become a better leader of men, and then assisted in Resumar getting his own command.

If he could not trust this man, who could he trust?

"Andro... do you love me?" He asked finally.

Androcles Leonidas looked at his brother and smiled. "You have never asked me that question Res." He said.

Resumar nodded. "I didn't think it was ever needed?"

"And you feel it is needed now?" Andro questioned him.

Resumar shrugged his broad shoulders. "I guess... I guess I wanted to be sure." He said.

"I think the better question here brother... is do you love her?" Andro asked.

Resumar looked at him with wide eyes. "You know?" He gasped.

Andro chuckled. "Did you think I wouldn't be able to sense her?" He asked. "Resumar, I am the one who taught you how to shield in a way so that none of our parents could intrude upon something we wanted to keep from them."

"How... how long have you known?" Resumar stammered out the question.

"When I felt her presence in Sparta using the same techniques you and I use." Andro answered. "It was easy enough to realize it wasn't you. The first night she was having difficulty adjusting the layers of Mindvoice and how much shielding to apply. I helped her until she was able to finally reach out to you."

"You helped her?" Resumar exclaimed.

"As loud as she was announcing her presence within Mindvoice, if I hadn't caught it when I did, father was sure to detect her." Andro said with a knowing smile. "Do you love her Res?"

"More... more than I can put into words Andro." Resumar answered.

Andro nodded. "Then that's good enough for me." He said.

"You don't care that... you don't care that she is Kavalian?" Resumar asked.

Andro shrugged once more. "Once I got past the tail part...?" He asked with a wide grin looking at his brother. Andro reached up and put his hand behind Resumar's neck and squeezed tightly. "If she was able to claim your heart brother... that says it all right there. Yes... she is Kavalian. That does not automatically make her a bad person. She obviously does not adhere to the twisted views of her people... and while she may not know it just yet, her abilities within Mindvoice do not allow her to hide her true intentions. She wears them on her sleeve for all to see. And the love she feels for you is genuine and real."

"You didn't probe her did you?" Resumar asked.

"That is not something I will do and you know that." Andro said. "You don't need too anyway. Like I said... her feelings for you are open for all to feel right there on the surface. She hasn't learned how to shield them just yet. That is something you should probably get around to teaching her by the way." He spoke with a smile.

"She... her scent drives me mad." Resumar spoke with a sheepish smile.

"As Sadi's does to me." Andro said.

"I can hardly think straight let alone teach her something when I am with her." Resumar said.

"Then you need to take her to see Helen and let Helen teach her." Andro spoke. He looked at his brother. "You are going to do it today aren't you?"

Resumar nodded. "Athani heard them talking last night. Her father gave her to Qurot... and he will undoubtedly come for her tonight and try to force himself on her. I won't allow that Andro."

"Nor should you." Andro stated. "I hope you at least married her already?"

Resumar nodded quickly. "Six days ago." He answered. "Thr'won conducted the elven ceremony."

"Does mother know?" Andro asked.

Resumar shook his head. "She left to gather Normya before I had a chance to tell her. The rest of our mothers know however, but I did not want to tell her via a communication. She already has too much to concern herself with when it comes to our sister."

Andro nodded. "Ain't that the anse truth?" He said with a smile. "I take it mother has been working with Aunt Deia to put the petition through?"

Resumar nodded. "Tenna got the final signatures last night." He spoke. "I'm going to pick her up today and get her out of there. She will be in the Market Square at noon. I imagine I will need to get her out of Sparta quickly."

Andro nodded. "I was going to send Sadi back with Ne'Veha but we will wait over the city and you can return to SODRAG with us. At least until father returns. You do realize he will be crazy with anger."

Resumar nodded. "That's what I'm afraid of."

"He'll get over it." Andro said. "Especially if Athani has proved to four of our mothers that she is indeed sincere. And that is no easy feat I will tell you that."

Resumar looked at him. "I'm more concerned with what you feel brother." He said seriously. "I don't have a friend like Moneus is to you Andro... you are my closest friend. I need to know that you approve... that you trust in me."

"You don't need my approval Res." Andro said quickly. "If you are asking me as your brother and friend if you have made the right choice... then I will say without hesitation that you have. Vampire, Kavalian,

Drow... it matters not as long as they are true in their feelings Resumar. Isn't that what Helen always taught us in those tediously boring classes?"

Resumar nodded. "Yes."

"Then that is all you need to know." Andro spoke. "Now... for the record... I wouldn't choose her over Sadi... but she is a hottie. Isn't that what Uncle Daniel always calls Aunt Anuk?"

Resumar laughed and nodded his head. "Yes! And she hates that name!"

Andro laughed and nodded. He squeezed the back of his brother's neck. "And for the record as well brother... I will always trust in you. Without question. Without pause. And without reservation."

Resumar reached up and took his brother's thick arms. "Thank you."

Andro motioned with his head. "Now let's get back in there and eat that breakfast Sadi is making. I can smell it from here and my stomach is very close to overpowering my mind." He draped his arm over Resumar's shoulder as they began to walk back to the villa. "Tell me though... what exactly can she do with that tail of hers?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

SPARTA

KAVALIAN EMBASSY

The door hissed open loudly, shorting out the security system and allowing Qurot to burst into Athani's room on the second floor of the embassy. Qurot marched right into the room as if he owned it, gripping the data pad tightly in his hand and a large smile decorating his cat like features.

"You belong to me now Athani'Puat! A full day earlier than I had expected woman!" He bellowed too loudly, his voice carrying humor and arrogance as his eyes darted back and forth. "Your father has..."

Qurot stopped in the middle of the room and looked around. The large main room was empty; the blinds pulled open allowing the sun to pour into the room. The couch cushions were tossed askew on the floor as if someone had been looking for something in a hurry. His eyes narrowed slightly as they scanned the room. He moved to the counter along the wall and saw the empty containers of food sitting casually. The dispenser was still active with a large mug of cooling coffee in it. Qurot dipped his finger into the liquid and brought it to his mouth, tasting the flavor. It was the coffee they had served at the dinner on the royal estate. The coffee made by the youngest wolf Queen. Qurot turned his head towards the bedroom, remembering that Athani had commented that the coffee was foul tasting and she didn't care for it.

Qurot's head came up and he moved to the COM panel, slamming his hand down on it. "This is Commander Qurot!" He barked. "Where is Athani'Puat?"

"The Prefect's daughters left this morning Commander." The female voice answered. "Their departure orders said they were going to the Market Square."

"Who authorized that?" Qurot snapped.

"Ambassador Jiss Commander." The voice answered.

"Instruct Jiss to meet me in Athani's quarters immediately!" Qurot nearly screamed as he started walking towards the bedroom.

He paused for only a second as the door slid open to reveal the unmade bed and different clothes strewn about the floor and on the bed. He stepped further into the bedroom; the blinds in this room were not yet open and he moved to the window stabbing the control panel impatiently and hearing the soft whirring as the blinds began to open. He looked back to the bed as the sun began to light the interior and his eyes grew even wider. He moved quickly to the bed and scooped up the silk garments, holding them up to the light. He realized the garments were some very expensive and seductive underclothes, one side of the soft pink panties torn in such a way that they appeared to have been pulled off Athani's body in haste. Qurot hissed loudly, knowing that Kavalian women were not allowed to wear such clothes. He lifted his head and moved around to the other side of the bed, his yellow eyes searching the floor. He spied the flicker of metal on the floor just under the edge of the bed as the blinds opened fully and he bent over to pick up the object. As he stood back up and looked at it,

his eyes began to grow dark with killing anger. He turned as Jiss entered the main room and moved across to the entrance of the bedroom quickly.

“Qurot... how dare you!” Jiss exclaimed. “You have no right to...”

Qurot whirled on him savagely. “I have every right!” He screamed. “Prefect Keleru sent the order making her my mate this morning!” He flipped the data pad at Jiss and he held up the undergarments with the opposite hand. “Where did she get these?”

Jiss looked at the undergarments and his eyes grew a little wider. “I don’t know.” He declared reaching up to take them.

Qurot snatched them away and then he held up the small object. “And this?” He growled angrily.

Jiss took the object, staring at it for a long moment. “This is... this is...”

“Yes Ambassador! It is a button from a man’s shirt! Athani’Puat has no clothes made for men.” Qurot almost screamed. “A male has been in this room with her! A male!”

Jiss looked at him. “What... what are you suggesting?” Jiss spoke.

“How did a man get in her room with her Jiss?” Qurot barked. “She is on the second floor of this embassy. The only way to get into her room unseen is by using the roof! The only way to get to the roof is to move through the embassy! I checked all access points myself!”

“There have been no others except Timur, Pian and Karun!” Jiss snapped right back. “Are you suggesting...”

“You fool! It is a Lycavorian!” Qurot screamed out tossing the garments down to the floor. “A Lycavorian that rides one of their beasts! He must have landed on the roof and then dropped to her balcony!”

Jiss looked at him wide eyed. “Impossible!” He gasped.

“Athani’Puat is mine! Her purity will be mine!” Qurot snarled. “I am going to the Market Square! She will not be allowed out of the embassy until such time as the transport arrives and we leave!” He spoke as he headed for the door. “I will have that wench under me and I don’t care what the Prefect says!”

Jiss turned slowly as Qurot stormed from the bedroom.

SPARTA MARKET SQUARE

Athani and Jalersi sat at the small café table in Market Square, the largest and most popular gathering place for assorted vendors and men and women simply looking to relax and be with family and friends. Jalersi had begun coming to the Square with her sister four days ago at Athani’s suggestion, in essence to get her out of the embassy since it was now very clear that their father had only sent her to Earth as a figurehead. Jiss and Matuarr were running things, and Jalersi was left out. Unlike her younger sister, this did not bother Jalersi as much as Athani, for she was more anchored in the culture of their people. It did bother her however that her father chose to disregard her council when it came to the Lycavorians. Jiss and Matuarr had gone about things the wrong way. Facing the Lycavorians head on was not the answer she was beginning to learn. More often than not their endurance was far superior to whoever they faced. They were a much more tolerant people, allowing species of every known race to walk freely within their city. She did not see any Evolli or Kochab, and the only Unsaar people she had seen were peaceful traders, but aside from those examples she saw them all. The vampires she had seen in the last four days went out of their way to greet her openly and with friendly voices. Jalersi quickly learned that the vampires within the Union were in no way like those among the High Coven. She saw females in high ranking positions within the military, and she saw one thing she never imagined and that was mothers walking their children on the streets.

Jalersi had been working on trying to set up trade agreements with member worlds of the Union, anything that would help them to advance her father’s goal of expanding the KFI and become a major player in the universe. She found that while the men and women politicians and the heads of companies she had spoken to in regards to trade were open and frank, they were very wary of doing business with them. King Leonidas had opened the door to trade with the KFI without so much as a question but that now gave Jalersi pause for she saw why he had done it. He was not telling these people what to do; they made their trade decisions for

themselves, but they were exceptionally wary of the Kavalian people because of the policies her father had enforced for so long.

Jalersi lifted her mug of tea and looked at her sister over the rim of the mug. Since that last day on Leonidas's ship her sister had been different somehow. She was more animate and full of energy and also more prone to question what it was their father was doing. Her normally dull blue/green eyes were bright and full of life, as if she had found something recently that caused her great joy. When she had been confined to her quarters she had not questioned it, and when she had been instructed to venture out into the city proper near the embassy she had done so without question. This was not the Athani she was used to seeing and had seen for the last few years. This was a different Athani's Puat. She watched as Athani glanced at her time piece again for the third time in the last hour.

Jalersi lowered her mug. "That is the third time you have checked your time piece sister." She spoke. "Is something going to happen?"

Athani looked at her evenly. "Jalersi... have you ever thought about what it would be like to live like they do?" Athani asked motioning with her head to the people all around them. "Do you never wish for something more than what you have?"

Jalersi let her blue eyes sweep across the expanse of the café, taking in the soldiers and civilians and the young couples along with the older ones. Males and females and children of all species. "It is not our way Athani." She said softly turning back to look at her.

"So you don't want to know what it is like to be able to walk the streets and not be looked at like a piece of meat." Athani said. "As something beneath the males of our species?"

"Now you are beginning to sound like you did as we were coming here." Jalersi spoke. "I wondered where that Athani had gone too."

"Jalersi... do you love Pusintin?" Athani asked abruptly.

Jalersi looked at her wide eyed. "What kind of question is that?" She declared. "He is my husband."

"That is not what I asked you Jalersi." Athani spoke matter of factly. "I asked you if you loved him."

"I won't answer that question." Jalersi hissed softly. "It is inappropriate."

"Why?" Athani asked softly staring at her older sister for a long moment. "You don't love him do you?"

"Athani..."

"Is that why you slept with Pian shortly after Pusintin returned to you from here? After his brother almost killed him?" Athani asked seeing her sister's eyes grow wide in horror. "I know he wanted nothing to do with you for many months. Did you turn to Pian for comfort because you care for him and always have, or did you turn to him for the physical gratification that Pusintin does not provide to you?"

Jalersi looked around quickly. "Athani... you know not what you speak of! How dare you ask me such questions?" She spat.

"Don't I Jalersi? I saw the two of you leave his home Jalersi. You can't deny it." Athani asked. She leaned forward over the small table. "You can't see it can you sister?"

"See what?" Jalersi demanded.

"Pian has changed Jalersi. He has changed for you." Athani spoke softly. "Why do you think he is so well groomed now? Why do you think he returned to his schooling even as a fleet officer and got a Decree of Education? Why do you think he has never taken a mate in all the years since that day?"

"Athani stop it!" Jalersi spoke.

"He loves you Jalersi." Athani spoke. "Even Karun sees it. You do too... you just won't admit to yourself your own feelings. And do not sit there and tell me you feel nothing for him because you would be lying to me."

"Athani..."

"Pusintin is not for you sister." Athani spoke. "He has become no better than father in many respects. He speaks of change and nothing ever comes of it. Only more war and death and conquering. He said he would pull our females out of the horrors we have to endure. Has he done this? Do you wish this for your daughter? Pusintin is sure to do things in the old fashion way. Do you wish to see your daughter given to some brute like Qurot?"

Jalersi glared at her. "He promised me we would not allow that!" She barked. "He told me he would allow me to choose her mate!"

“And you believe him?” Athani asked.

“He would not...” Jalersi stopped speaking then and Athani nodded her head slowly in confirmation.

“You were going to say he would never lie to you weren’t you?” She asked. “Are you so sure sister?”

“Why... why are you questioning me like this?” Jalersi spoke quickly.

“Because for all your talk sister, you are too frightened to take a chance on something that would give you happiness.” Athani replied. “You thought sending us here was father’s first attempt at making good on what he has told us for so many years. It did not turn out that way did it? It was never meant to turn out the way you had hoped. The way we had hoped.” Athani reached across the table and took Jalersi’s hands in hers, squeezing them hard and meeting her sister’s beautiful blue eyes. “I don’t hate you Jalersi... I could never hate you. I love you with all my heart. You are my sister and under that façade you put forth, you are no different than me. You tried to protect me from our more disgusting laws and you thought it would be different with Pusintin. You thought that he would be the catalyst for the changes that we thought would finally be coming forth. You have really discovered that he is no different than the Kavalian father who raised him in our ways. He is no different than our father Jalersi, and you know that in your heart. He relishes his role as a Kavalian, and he plays the part much better than some of the other fool Pride Leaders.”

“Athani... if Qurot or Timur... if they heard you speaking like this they would punish you harshly!” Jalersi said. “I don’t want to see that sister... no matter what you may think I do love you!”

Athani nodded her head as she sat back. “I know you do Jalersi... truly I do. But I will no longer hold in my words or my emotions. I have discovered something Jalersi... something that gives me more joy and happiness than I have ever known. And it will only grow as the days pass by.”

Jalersi’s brow furrowed. “Athani... you are speaking in riddles.” She said. “You will return with Qurot and I when the transport arrives. You will be Qurot’s mate.”

Athani met her gaze evenly. “No.” She said shaking her head quickly. “Qurot will never have my purity Jalersi. He will never have my love and devotion... and I will never be his mate.”

“Athani... what are you saying?” Jalersi asked as a sudden sinking feeling began in the pit of her stomach and began to climb upwards inside her chest.

Athani smiled at her lovingly. “Qurot will never have these things Jalersi... he will never have them because I have found and given them to the man I will gladly spend the rest of my days with.”

Jalersi’s eyes grew wide. “What?” She gasped.

“We must go *Aryschanne*.” The male voice spoke from behind Jalersi and she bolted to her feet quickly whirling around as Athani got up with a smile on her face.

Jalersi watched as Athani stepped up to Resumar and slid her arms around his waist lovingly, her long tail curling around his right leg in affection as the memories of their previous night together flooded her. He had torn the undergarments from her body in the midst of their passion, forgetting that he had bought them for her only the day before, before spending the next hours worshiping her in ways that still caused her to see stars. Jalersi watched with wide eyes and a sudden feeling of lost chances and opportunities as they shared a blistering kiss right there in front of her. Resumar Leonidas had come up behind her without so much as a rustle in the leaves and Jalersi’s heart was racing out of control. She watched as his right arm closed around Athani’s waist possessively pulling her closer to him and they turned to look at her.

None of them noticed the Netnews crew twenty meters away standing among others as they began watching what was taking place.

Watching and recording.

“Jalersi... you know Resumar Leonidas.” Athani said with a brilliant smile. “You are exactly four minutes late my love.” She continued looking back up at Resumar’s face with an adoring gaze.

Resumar grinned and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek. “I had to bring backup.” He stated. “Just in case.”

“Backup?” Athani asked with a confused expression.

“In case those who wish to stop your defection decide to make a scene.” The new voice spoke causing Athani to turn quickly and watch Androcles Leonidas walking confidently among the tables.

Andro wore his Mark IV ArmorPly with the crimson shoulders and carried his helmet under one arm. The pommels of his swords could be seen extending up over his wide shoulders. Athani looked behind him and saw Elynth resting on the stone walkway next to Cemath, an elf female she did not recognize in Elynth’s saddle with a wide eyed expression on her face under the helmet and gripping the saddle mounts tightly. Andro

stopped in front of her and Athani pressed back closer to Resumar as she gazed into those azure colored blue eyes. “Good morning Athani’Puat, excuse me... Athani Leonidas.” He spoke.

“What?” Jalersi gasped loudly now.

All of them heard the commotion to the side and saw Qurot and Timur shoving their way through the crowd with two other members of the Kavalian security forces. It took them only five seconds to finish closing the distance, Qurot’s eyes ablaze with rage when he saw Athani holding Resumar Leonidas, tail curled around his leg, and his arm intimately around her waist holding her close to him.

“What is going on here?” He barked. “You will remove your vile touch from her person immediately son of Leonidas and I will forget this ever happened!” He snarled.

“Not likely fool!” Resumar stated.

“Seize her!” Qurot snapped.

Timur and the two Kavalian security troops had taken only three steps to comply with this order before they were confronted with two gleaming silver Shi Viskas, one razor sharp sword tip pressed tightly to Qurot’s throat, and the barrel of the K12 which had appeared in Resumar’s hand almost magically pressed against Qurot’s opposite cheek. Resumar had inched Athani behind his body protectively Jalersi saw, but not enough to take away her natural defiance, and she glared at Qurot with undisguised hatred.

“It is my recommendation that you stand your puppets down Commander Qurot.” Andro spoke. “If you do not... you and they will be very dead.”

“Athani’Puat is a Kavalian!” Qurot shouted angrily. “She is to be my mate! You will have your brother unhand her! She is mine! My property! Her purity and her possessions will be mine!”

Athani laughed at this and she stepped forward slightly, her tail retreating from around Resumar’s leg to curl seductively around his waist as she pressed up against his front. “I told you Qurot!” She snapped. “I told you that you would never have my purity. I have given that to the man I love! I have given that to my husband!”

Jalersi’s and Qurot’s eyes grew wide at the same instant, but for entirely different reasons to be sure. Qurot made to step forward, anger surging through his veins, but the tip of Andro’s sword held firm and Resumar pressed the K12 tighter into his face as he shifted Athani to his side and Qurot glared at them savagely.

“Give me a reason *channubous!*” Resumar growled viciously. “She is my wife! My mate! And you will never lay your hands on her as long as I live!”(Motherfucker)

“Then I will kill you!” Qurot hissed.

Resumar’s smile was not one of friendly greeting, and his eyes changed while his wolf fangs extended. “I have more important things to do *igord!* Licking my wife’s body all over comes to mind right away!”

More shouted voices caused Jalersi and Timur to turn and see Jiss sprint up to where they stood his own eyes wide.

“What... what is going on?” He barked taking in the situation. He saw Athani’s hands holding to Resumar’s waist and her body pressed far too intimately against his back where she had moved after her outburst. “Why is your brother holding the Prefect’s daughter in such a way Prince Androcles? You will unhand her immediately!”

“Tell your troops to back away Ambassador.” Andro stated firmly. “If you do not... you will have four less embassy security.”

“You threaten them!” Jiss shouted. “While your brother paws the Kavalian Prefect’s daughter like she is...”

Andro’s eyes turned to him. “She is his wife!” Andro snarled at him seeing their eyes grow wide at this information.

“That... that is not possible!” Jiss finally stammered.

“I won’t allow it!” Qurot screamed.

Andro moved with lightning reflexes when he detected Qurot beginning to spring. He snapped his sword back and drove the hilt of the weighted sword into Qurot’s jaw with the force of a club. For all his size, Qurot dropped to the ground like a rock under the blow, his hands coming up to grasp his now fractured jaw. His eyes glared up at Andro, staring into azure colored wolf eyes now, Andro’s fangs fully extended.

“I am unlike any man you have ever met Qurot!” Andro snarled at him. “Do not make the mistake of thinking I will not stand with my brother against you. It would be a painful lesson for you to learn. Perhaps even fatal.”

“I will not allow this!” Jiss bellowed.

Andro lowered his sword from Qurot’s neck but kept this Shi Viska leveled at Timur and the others. “You have no choice.” He growled. “Athani... look in the pouch on Resumar’s belt. Take the pad out and give it to Ambassador Jiss here.”

Athani did so quickly, her own eyes wide at the utter vehemence with which Resumar’s brother was displaying in defending her. Resumar’s words to her many days ago came rushing back.

“We will always stand with each other.” Resumar had said. “That is something our father and mothers have drilled into our heads for years.

Athani removed the pad from the pouch and came up next to Andro holding out the pad to Jiss confidently as the enormity of what was happening hit her full force. And it made her want to scream with happiness.

“I have defected.” She announced proudly. “I have officially renounced my Kavalian citizenship and everything that offers me, which is precious little anyway. I have requested and been granted citizenship within the Lycavorian Union.”

Jiss looked at the pad for a long moment. “You can not do this.” He finally stated.

“Oh but I have.” Athani said getting over her own surprise at having Resumar’s brother defend her so diligently. “I have met and fallen in love with Resumar Leonidas. He asked me to marry him and I said yes without so much as a second’s pause.” Athani looked down at Qurot who was glaring at her with cruel eyes. “Resumar didn’t take my purity Qurot... he didn’t have to. I gave it to him freely and with enormous exuberance... and I have done so many times since that first night we shared. And it is more glorious each time! You should hear me cry out his name in passion. Something you would not be able to produce from me no matter how hard you tried you *nubous ronnus!*”

Andro glanced quickly at Resumar who met his eyes at Athani’s words. Resumar shrugged his broad shoulders. “She learns quickly.” He said in reference to Athani’s use of the ancient language.

Andro grinned. “There you have it Ambassador Jiss.” Andro said turning back to the man. “She is no longer a citizen of the Kavalian Federation. She is now my brother’s wife and mate. She is now a Leonidas and a Princess of the Union. You will find that the last signatures needed to approve her citizenship were inked last evening, and the request was approved by not only my mother Queen For’mya, but the Prime Minister as well. Not to mention eighty-three Senators of the Union. Now stand your men down, for the penalty for attempting to assault a mated and married female in this Union is imprisonment for a minimum of twenty years. To actually lay hands on her means death if her husband discovers you in the act. I won’t tell you what it would mean to assault a Princess of the Union...” Andro glared at Jiss. “You would not enjoy that reaction in the least. All of which means your men will be dead since I will support my brother without thought in defending his wife.”

Jiss looked up from the pad. “Stand down!” He snapped.

“Jiss... you can’t...” Timur stammered.

“You will do it damn you!” Jiss barked. “We can not break their laws!” He said holding up the pad. “It is all here in writing! Athani has made her decision! Now stand down!”

Timur snarled his own distaste and anger and turned to help Qurot to his feet as the others took several steps back. Jiss looked at Athani with distaste. “You will be marked among our people Athani’Puat.” He spoke softly, the anger and hatred in his words very evident. “You will never be allowed to return.”

Athani snorted in disgust. “Do you see me shedding tears over that fact Jiss you fool?” She snapped.

“Cemath my brother!” Resumar called over his shoulder.

Cemath came to his feet instantly and moved forward, men and women alike moving back further as he pushed aside tables and chairs to come up behind them. Resumar squeezed Athani’s hand. “After you *Aryschanne.*” He said.

Athani looked at Jalersi for a long moment. “I love you sister.” She said softly. “But I want a future of my own making. A future with a man I love. Not with a pig like Qurot!”

Athani turned without hesitation and walked confidently to where Cemath looked at her. He lowered his huge head affectionately, his eyes bright as she reached up to kiss his snout fearlessly, stunning those Kavalians in the security force that were watching them as she climbed easily and without hesitation into the saddle on his back. All of them were holding in the fear these dragon beasts produced almost naturally in their species, and Athani'Puat had just shattered that with her actions and made all of them look the fool.

“Go brother.” Andro spoke looking at Resumar. “I will meet you in the sky.”

“Are you sure?”

Andro nodded. “We have come to an understanding.” He said looking at Jiss. “Go now... for we don't want to cause more of a scene than we already have.”

Resumar nodded and his Shi Viska vanished instantly. He wasted no time and crossed to where Cemath was, using his TK power to lift himself into the saddle behind Athani. Her blue/green eyes were bright with love and promise as she looked back over her shoulder when his arm slid around her waist and pulled her firmly against his chest. Her tail snaked around his waist completely.

“The first day of the rest of our lives starts now *Aryschanne*.” He whispered into her ear.

Athani Leonidas kissed him as fervently as she could given she was twisted around at the odd angle. Even Cemath getting to his feet and spreading his wings did not cause them to break their kiss. He trumpeted out his own happiness, echoed by Elynth as she moved forward and then he launched them into the blue sky.

Andro waited until Timur and the others had helped Qurot to his feet and stepped back before he spun his sword gracefully and returned it to the scabbard on his back. He lowered his arm but did not dismiss his Shi Viska as he looked at Jiss.

“Do you realize what this will do to relations between our governments?” Jiss declared. “The repercussions this will have will resonate loudly.”

“It will do nothing.” Andro answered him evenly. “If it does... it will be by your doing and not ours. We followed our laws Ambassador Jiss. Just as we have done for thousands of High Coven men, women and children who have defected to us over the years. We have also followed Galactic Law and its processes, something to which you purport to hold in such high regard. We just sped up the process somewhat.” Andro said with a smile. “Any repercussions will be on the part of the KFI... and it will show all those in the Union just how unyielding and barbaric you truly are. And nothing that you do will change that.” Andro turned his head slightly. “Sister?”

Elynth moved the last several meters up behind him, causing the Kavalians to back up in fear. Andro willed away his Shi Viska and it vanished into Flat Space once more. He paused a few seconds and then turned to climb easily onto Elynth's back. He settled himself in the saddle, one arm going around Ne'Veha's waist without thought. The helmet hid most of her features except for her lips and eyes, and her hands gripped his arm tightly as his arm encircled her. He used his other hand to call his helmet to him from where it had dropped on the ground and he slid it down over his head. He leaned close to Ne'Veha's head.

“Ready?” He asked softly. Ne'Veha nodded without speaking and Andro smiled. He looked at Jiss and Jalersi standing there. “It was pleasant talking with you.” He spoke. “Elynth go!”

Elynth trumpeted out her answer and cocked her legs beneath her, exploding into the air and spreading her enormous wings easily to gain lift. Jalersi watched with a stunned expression completely different from the expressions of Jiss and the others.

“I love you sister.” She whispered to herself so that no one could hear her. “I pray the gods grant you all that you desire.”

None of them saw the Netnews crew off to the side watching intently, the small holo recorder drifting to the right shoulder of the man who was directing it and focused on the two dragons as they lifted into the sky and quickly receded from sight.

ANDRO'S STRIKER DT TEN THOUSAND FEET ABOVE SPARTA

Ne'Veha watched for as long as she was able while they closed on the back of the single *STRIKER DT* with Sadi at the controls. The rear of the ship was wide open, a long ramp extended outward and she had

witnessed Resumar Leonidas land on that ramp with no difficulty. She had agreed to fly with Prince Androcles because he had offered and she had never flown on a dragon before. Speeding along at five thousand feet from Gytheio to Sparta had been exhilarating to say the least, only the landing had given her any pause. Sadi had been right when she told her that Andro would do or say nothing to try to convince Ne'Veha of her place in this universe. They would allow her to discover that all on her own. He spoke to her easily within their Mindvoice connection while they were flying, Ne'Veha almost feeling her ability within Mindvoice growing by the hour the more she remained with them. When she had stammered out her apology for vomiting on him he had laughed softly and his arm pulled her closer to him.

Ne'Veha had to admit to herself, Androcles Leonidas was the most physically handsome man she had ever seen and the numerous scars she had seen on his chest and back only added to his beauty in her eyes. His skin was more deeply tanned than Tarren's, the muscular definition far exceeding what Tarren sported. His eyes however, his eyes could cause her knees to become weak just by looking into them, a feeling she had felt with looking into Sadi's eyes as well. He did not come across as arrogant or pompous as she had always assumed members of the Royal family to be. As her mother and father had always told her they would be.

Ne'Veha had watched him while they ate breakfast with Sadi and his brother, the jokes that were tossed out between the two brothers wildly humorous and directed normally at each other. She was amazed at how much he could laugh at himself and the fool things he had done as a boy. She also noticed the complete and total trust he had in his brother and his decision to marry the Kavalian female. He and Sadi were always touching in some way, their fingers, their arms brushing against one another and the love they had for each other was plainly apparent. Yet as they sat there, Ne'Veha could also feel that love wrapping around and surrounding her. She could touch them both within Mindvoice even then, sensing their powerful desire for her and for the raven haired Carisia who she would meet later. She could also feel the desire and want for the dark skinned elven female, she had to be a Drow, Ne'Veha determined. While linked with them in such a way she could see flashes of the shimmering white hair and unique amber eyes. They could not see a face clearly, but the pull to her was there and very strong. Ne'Veha also couldn't deny the utter sense of belonging that filled her when she floated within their minds and saw their dreams for the future. Dreams that very much included her.

Having him hold her as they flew to Sparta and then back up to the *STRIKER* had sent sizzling sensations of pleasure through her. Her fear had caused her to press against him tightly initially, but that quickly passed and yet she stayed pressed against him because it caused her to shudder in delight she had never felt before. She had her eyes shut tightly as they landed softly on the ramp, but then opened them quickly as Elynth moved into the interior of the *STRIKER*. He jumped from the saddle and turned to help her down, her hands on his arms as he lowered her in front of him and she looked up into his azure blue eyes.

I know what Sadi told you this morning comes as quite a shock Ne'Veha. His voice filled her head and her dark eyes grew a little wider still at the ease with which this happened. It was just not something she was used too. *Trust me when I tell you, it was more of a shock to us when we discovered this. We will not pressure you in any way Ne'Veha. If this is to develop, we want it to be something you want as well.*

Can... can you hear my thoughts? She asked haltingly.

Andro smiled. *Yes. Quite well in fact. You are far stronger within Mindvoice than you first thought.*

This... these last hours have been overwhelming. She spoke honestly.

I imagine for you they have yes. He told her.

You... you don't question it? She asked looking at him surprised.

Andro chuckled within the connection but his face remained unchanged. *Actually... I question everything.* He replied. *It drives my father and mothers crazy. If you are asking if I question what I feel for you... what Sadi and Carisia feel for you... no. When it feels right... when my mind and body tells me it is right, as it does now... I don't question. I follow what they tell me. As do Sadi and Carisia. And I know you can feel these same things running through you because we are tied so closely together.*

What... what do they tell you? Ne'Veha asked softly. *About me?*

They tell me that when I taste you... when we taste you... we will all be that much closer to being complete. Andro answered.

When? Ne'Veha exclaimed.

Andro shrugged. *I'm confident I guess.*

Ne'Veha couldn't help the smile that crossed her face at his words. They were not spoken with arrogance, but with commitment and truth. *It appears that you are.* She said finally. She looked down away from his eyes. *I need... I need time Prince...*

Andro took her chin in his fingers and lifted her head back up. He stared at her for a long moment and traced the edges of her cheek that he could reach behind the helmet. He reached up and took the sides of her helmet and gently lifted it from her head. He let it drop gently to the deck using his TK power and then reached up to remove his helmet. He leaned over quickly and placed his lips next to Ne'Veha's four inch high elven ear, nuzzling the edges of her ear oh so gently, causing Ne'Veha to grip his arms tighter and close her eyes as wonderful sensations coursed through her. Tarren had only nuzzled her elven ears when he was about to fuck her, never as a means of affection or foreplay. Prince Androcles obviously knew quite a bit about elven females, and the reaction he would illicit when he nuzzled the edges of her ears. It would not have worked had she not been at least somewhat attracted to him, but from the force of the delightful shivers coursing through her Ne'Veha knew she wanted this man badly.

My name is Andro. And you will have all the time you desire Ne'Veha. We are not going to change our minds... and no one will take your place I can tell you that. We will wait forever if need be... even after we find the last of us. He told her.

Your words... your words threaten to make me surrender right now. Ne'Veha spoke softly. *Being able to talk with you like this... what I feel racing through me for Sadi... for Carisia... for another that I have not even met. It is... My parents would... they would tell me I am crazy for feeling these things. She... she is a Drow you know?*

Andro nodded. *Yes she is.* He said. *A supremely intelligent and capable young woman, just like you and Sadi and Carisia. I don't know how this all came to be, I've told you that. It began only after Sadi and I came together. Only then were we strong enough together to feel Carisia and you and her, and what we feel for all of you. We could not just dismiss that, as much as I wanted too.*

You wanted too? Why? She gasped.

I am trying to forge my own life Ne'Veha. Out from under the shadow of my father. Andro said looking at her. *Discovering that I have these feelings for four different women reminds me that I parallel my father in many respects, no matter how much I try not too.*

Ne'Veha gazed at him for a long moment before reaching up and running her fingers along his cheek and through the neatly trimmed goatee that he wore. She could feel the truth of his words to her, feel the conviction in them, and more than anything this is what started Ne'Veha down the road to her future. *Perhaps... perhaps destiny has plans for you Androcles Leonidas.* She said softly.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. *When you are ready Ne'Veha.* Andro spoke to her. *And only when you are ready.* They heard the ramp finally lock in place and Andro turned as Elynth moved completely past them. *My sister Eliani will give you something to help purge the wine completely from your blood so you can return to your duties. A transport will take you back to the SCIMITAR in the morning from SODRAG. Tonight you can stay with us and learn about us. If that is what you wish.*

Ne'Veha nodded quickly. *Yes. I believe I would like that very much.*

Andro nodded. *Good.* He squeezed her hands and turned to face the cockpit, tapping the COM unit on his chest. *"KertaGai... shall we return to SODRAG?"* He asked.

"On our way!" Sadi answered.

Andro turned as Resumar and Athani stepped up to him. He gazed into her blue/green eyes and saw the questions in them as she clung to Res's arm tightly. "You have a question Athani Leonidas." He said. "Go ahead and ask it. You are among family now and you need hold nothing in."

"You... I did not expect acceptance from Resumar's family so easily." She said haltingly. "Why?"

Andro chuckled. "That's easy Athani. You have taken my brother's heart and wrapped it within yours. Resumar trusts you completely. He loves you without question. That is how I feel for my brother." Andro smiled at her as he leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Welcome to our family Athani Leonidas and thank you for making us better for it." He spoke to her. He stood back up and looked at Resumar. "Our brothers and sisters will be waiting for the two of you Res. You had better prepare her for Arrarn's warped sense of humor, and Eliani's sharp tongue."

Resumar could only nod his head as he looked at him. "I will." He said finally.

Andro nodded. "I must talk with Moneus and Carina and make sure the training is still taking place as we had planned. You know that our brothers and sisters are very much the slackers when one of us isn't around to watch them."

Resumar chuckled as Andro began walking forward towards the cockpit.

HADARIA ROYAL PALACE

"...as you can see from this taped recording, the encounter in Sparta's main Merchant Square between Prince Resumar and Prince Androcles and members of the Kavalian Embassy Security Forces was far from friendly and open?" The voice of the female elf Netnews reporter spoke confidently. *"We have learned very little since this incident four hours ago, but Queen For'mya has scheduled a Netnews conference to explain what is happening. Once again if you missed the footage just shown, Prince Resumar and Prince Androcles confronted Kavalian Embassy Security Forces in the main Market Square four hours ago. Blows were exchanged and the Princes left with Athani'Puat, daughter to the Kavalian Prefect. At question is the status of the Kavalian Prefect's youngest daughter Athani'Puat whom you saw in this footage, though it is apparent she and prince Resumar are much closer than was previously known."* The attractive elven female turned her head quickly at something to the side. *"Queen For'mya has just come out the main gate of the Royal Villa and she will make a statement now."*

The picture changed to For'mya stepping up to the podium looking radiant in the long Brandeis blue dress that hugged her slim hips and waist and was cut low enough to show a good amount of cleavage from her small but very firm breasts. Her hair was pulled back tightly along the top of her head, showing her four inch high elven ears, while most of her blond hair fell to just past her shoulders.

"Good morning." For'mya began drawing the attention of at least two dozen Netnews reporters. *"I will make a brief statement and then take a few questions, but then I would like to get back to my children."* For'mya took a deep breath. *"It was made known to me several days ago by our son Resumar that Athani'Puat, the youngest daughter to the Kavalian Prefect Keleru, was expressing a great desire to defect to the Union. It seems that Resumar's bold actions on board MJOLNIR'S HAND in saving her life opened a unique relationship between Athani and Resumar. For the past several weeks since the Kavalian Trade Delegation has been here, they have been meeting in secret, exploring the boundaries of this relationship. They announced to me and to Prime Minister Deia that they had in fact fallen in love and four days ago were joined in marriage in a traditional elven ceremony conducted by Senior Mage Thr'won in the mountains around Sparta. Knowing that her people would in no way approve or accept this marriage to Resumar, and knowing that she was going to be given to an officer in the Kavalian Delegation whom she has considerable distaste for, Athani asked that she be allowed to remain here with Resumar with political asylum. Deia and I explained to her that this was not possible as she was a citizen of the Kavalian Federation. Two days ago Athani'Puat presented to us a signed document from her renouncing her claim to any sort of Kavalian citizenship and formally requesting asylum and citizenship within the Union."* For'mya looked up. *"After consulting with Deia and several senior Senators, as well as several of the Magistrates on the Galactic Court, we accepted Athani's petition. Her sworn statement has been entered into official Union record, and she has been granted temporary asylum here in the Union until such time as her full citizenship request is processed. Given the fact that she is now also my son's wife and mate, that process will be completed by the end of today. Athani has eliminated her Pride's name and taken Leonidas as her married name. Just so everyone gets that right... her name is now Athani Leonidas."* For'mya said with a smile. *"Any other important information or details that you want will be released in an official statement later today by my office. I will take a few questions now."*

The reporters all shouted out questions as any reporter dating back centuries would do and For'mya pointed to the young male Lycavorian in the front row.

"Lady For'mya is this in any way a response to the Kavalian attempt to have Princess Lisisa handed over to them?" The man asked.

For'mya shook her head quickly. *"This is nothing more than two people falling in love."* For'mya replied. *"When Athani realized her feelings for Resumar she knew she would not be able to pursue them if she returned home. Her feelings for my son guided her actions. This has nothing to do with Lisisa."*

"So it's not some form of retaliation?" He pressed.

For'mya smiled. *"Retaliation for what?"* She asked. *"We defeated all but one portion of the Kavalian petition in regards to Lisisa. We agreed to the search portion of their petition to further the gains the trade delegation had made."*

"So you do not see this as affecting the new Trade Agreement?" Another reporter shouted.

"Why would it?" For'mya asked. *"This has nothing to do with the Trade Agreement. If the Kavalians wish to withdraw the Agreement because Athani decided she wanted to pursue a love she has discovered for my son that is their right. We did not force her into her decision. It was something she decided all for herself. A decision, if I'm not mistaken, that would not have been given to her if she returned home."*

"The confrontation this morning in the Square?" The elven female who had been giving the initial report asked now.

"The confrontation in the Square this morning was regrettable." For'mya answered. *"We will gladly treat Commander Qurot for any injuries he may have sustained, but he attempted to take the wife of a Spartan against her wishes. As you all know this type of action is frowned upon heavily within the Union. We hold our wives and mates in the highest of regards, just as we do all freedom loving species. Resumar asked his brother Androcles to accompany him to avoid just this sort of thing, but the Commander and his men were not as understanding. Andro was defending his brother and his brother's new wife as any brother would do."*

"Queen For'mya... is King Leonidas aware of the events that have taken place?" Another reporter asked.

"Martin Leonidas is well aware of the events that have taken place." For'mya answered. *"There is little that goes on within our Union that he does not know about. I spoke with him very early this morning and he sends his love and well wishes to his son and new daughter-in-law. He..."*

Martin turned and looked at the holo image of For'mya in the corner of the main sitting room of the palace.

"You didn't speak to me *Kinsoaurgai!*" Martin snapped. His arms were crossed over his broad chest and he wore only his loose fitting black pants. Anja sat on the couch sipping the mug of coffee and wearing the simple thigh long sleeping shirt with three button lace appliqué in the front that displayed the deep cleavage between her full breasts. The thong panties matched the soft white color of the sleeper perfectly.

"Do not bark at me Martin Leonidas!" For'mya snapped right back. "And what would you have done? Denied your son the woman he loves? The woman that loves him?"

"How do we know this is not some sort of game?" Martin asked his tone softening.

"Thr'won married them Martin." For'mya spoke. "I spoke with her, as did Deia. She told us there is no chance that Athani was acting in any way. The love in her eyes for Res was very real and very powerful. Her presence within Mindvoice grows by the day and I for one am not going to dismiss that. You can punish me for my actions when you return."

Anja chortled from where she sat on the couch. "Ohhh... that sounds like fun." She said waggling her eyebrows. "I want a piece of that." She saw Martin turn and glare at her. "Glare at someone else you big oaf! You don't scare me!" She snapped.

"How long have you known about this? It damn sure didn't just come up within the last few days!" Martin said.

Anja shrugged. "A couple of weeks." She answered dismissively. "I won't begin to bore you with the details."

"A couple weeks?" Martin gasped turning back to For'mya. "Do I assume my other Queens know about this as well?"

"Dysea left before we or Resumar could tell her." For'mya said with a smile. "Though I'm sure she will see this transmission at some point and contact Res. The rest of us knew."

"And you didn't feel the need to tell me about it?" Martin asked.

“You would have told Resumar to stop seeing her and he would then have ignored you completely and done it anyway.” Anja said getting to her feet and moving up next to him. “Better it happen this way lover, better this way than it be discovered by the Kavalians while he is sneaking her around on Cemath so they can be together.”

“How long has Andro known?” Martin asked.

“When you are able to crack that boy’s Mindvoice shields you let us know.” Anja stated. “I for one would love to see what he’s got swirling around inside his head. He’s worst than you when it comes to keeping secrets from those he shouldn’t.”

“*Melyanna* does have a point Martin.” For’mya stated.

“*Sibfla!*” Martin swore. “Any reaction from the Kavalians?”

For’mya shook her head quickly. “Not as of yet. At least not officially or publicly. There is nothing they can do really; Jiss is smart enough to know that. Not if they wish to continue trying to arrange trade agreements with other member worlds of the Union.”

“You can bet they will attempt something.” Martin said. “Where are they?”

“They returned to SODRAG with Andro and Sadi.” For’mya answered. “And before you say anything, Resumar told her to bring nothing with her when she left and she did not. All she had were the clothes on her back. Resumar trusts her Martin, and after speaking with her I do not doubt her intentions. She loves our son Martin Leonidas.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “Then I will not question your decision *Kinsoaurgai*. You are there and I am not. I will have a talk with my sons when I return however.” He said. “You and Deia must be prepared for repercussions. Have they searched Lisisa’s apartment?”

For’mya shook her head. “They are scheduled here this afternoon. They have already been everywhere else. They moved quickly hoping to find something. The Galactic Court is officially still pending a response to Deni and Andro refusing to accommodate their order. Unofficially they have let it be known to Deia that they are not going to pursue it in any way. They are not particularly proud of the ruling Martin.”

Martin shook his head. “They did what they were supposed to do.” He stated quickly. “You tell them that from me. They have to weigh the laws from all members of the Union, and whatever non-Union members we do business with and then make decisions. They did the right thing.”

“They will appreciate that.” For’mya spoke.

“The Kavalians take anything from our children?” Martin asked.

For’mya shrugged. “A few items of clothing, nothing of real significance.” She answered. “Deni had already moved most of her possessions into their new home by the time the ruling came down.” For’mya turned to look at Anja. “Speaking of rulings... the Hadarian Magistrate Galia inquired of why you had returned to Hadaria so quickly *Melyanna*. She does not seem to know what is happening.”

“That doesn’t surprise me.” Anja said with a nod. “The Elders don’t appreciate Galia’s more liberal ideas when it comes to Hadarian Healers serving in the fleet and ground forces. She supported that decision by Sivana and I.”

“What is happening there *Melyanna*?” For’mya asked as Martin turned to the counter and began preparing himself a mug of coffee.

“They postponed the meeting with the Arch Ministry until this afternoon.” Anja replied. “Buonau is coming here later this morning to discuss some things in regards to Retta and Calyb. The woman is infuriating to say the least.” She said rolling her eyes.

“There is nothing to discuss.” Martin spoke. “They are our children and that is final. No one will take our children from us.”

For’mya smiled and nodded her head. “No doubt.” She said. “I have spoken with Aricia and Bella. They will cross the border back into Union space in a few hours. They have gathered some very clear and precise intelligence Martin. I believe that we may have stumbled across a movement that could very well play a large role in the future of the High Coven. And be an ally as well.”

“I wouldn’t be so quick to surmise anything just yet.” He stated. “Aikiro is still in charge of the Coven... and after her Yuri. Neither of them is trustworthy past the end of our noses.”

For’mya nodded. “Indeed.”

“We should be done here some time this evening.” Martin said looking at Anja and seeing her nod. “We’ll leave first thing in the morning and return to Earth. Once we are clear of Hadarian space I will contact Aricia and Bella on *MJOLNIR’S HAND* via a secure channel.”

“I miss all of you.” For’mya stated. “When you return we must really make time just for us. I do not like being the only one here. Our bed is very empty.”

Martin looked at her. “We’ll make it up to you *Kinsoaurgai*.” Martin said with a smile.

“You had better.” For’mya answered. “My love to you both. Deia is arriving and I must go.”

Martin turned and looked at Anja as the transmission ended. “These Elders of yours are seriously beginning to piss me off Red.” He spoke sipping his coffee. “They could fuck up a wet dream.”

Anja chuckled. “Tell me about it.” She replied.

Martin looked at her, his eyes gazing at what she was wearing and he felt a surge of desire course through him. His eyes moved back up to her jade green orbs and saw they too were full of passion and her female wolf aura was leaking through her Mindvoice shields. His gaze turned smoky and he stepped closer.

“I could surmise from your attire that you are trying to attract my attention.” He spoke huskily.

Anja’s jade green eyes smiled at him. “Is it working?” She asked. Martin stepped closer to her and hit her with a small dose of his male aura and Anja’s sighed heavily. “Ohhh... I guess it is.” She gasped as her body began to tingle all over and she pressed her petite frame against him. He leaned over to nuzzle her ear and the side of her neck and Anja groaned as shivers of wanton passion swept through her.

Martin released his mug of coffee into the air, the mug remaining stationary in mid-air as he gripped it with his TK power. Anja’s mug joined his as he pulled her closer and lifted her into his arms, even as his lips came down on hers. The two mugs drifted over to the table and gently settled to the surface as Martin’s arms pulled his smallest Queen tighter against his powerful frame, her four inch long tongue nearly shoved down his throat as Anja grasped the side of his head tightly.

The loud chiming noise shattered the moment and Martin pulled his lips from hers, resting his forehead against her chest.

“*Nubous!* That always happens to us!” He snarled.

Anja laughed softly as she held his head tightly to her breasts and the heat that was rising between them slowly began to dissipate. She pressed her cheek to the top of his head and closed her eyes. “God... I love you Marty. So very much.” She spoke softly.

Martin pulled his head back and looked at her bright eyes as she opened them and gazed at him. “No doubts Red.” He said softly nuzzling her throat gently.

Anja held his head and smiled dreamily. “No doubts.” She echoed him. “No doubts and no questions.”

The room intercom opened and the female voice broke into their moment. “Queen Anja, King Leonidas... Elder Buonau and Elder Okein are here with her daughter Duewa.”

Anja shook her head as Martin made no move to release her and she tightened her grip on his head. “Thank you Letia. Please show them to the sitting room.”

“Yes Milady.”

Anja pulled Martin’s head from her breasts and looked at him. “Are you going to put me down?”

“What do you think she will do if she comes in here and we are...?” Martin asked with a grin.

Anja laughed. “Oh... that would go over real well.” She exclaimed. “Put me down lover. We don’t need to make things any harder.”

Martin rolled his eyes. “Spoilsport.” He said as he lowered her to the floor.

Anja grinned and placed her hands on his bare chest feeling his heart beating strongly. “If we get rid of her quickly, I’ll let you have me however your heart desires before this ridiculous meeting with the Arch Ministry.”

Martin smiled. “Now that’s a deal.”

Anja wrapped her arms around his waist and pressed her head to his chest, his arms crushing her to him and his hand stroking her long Persian red hair. They were in that position when the Hadarian Warrior Mage led Buonau and Okein into the large room, Duewa trailing along behind them demurely.

Buonau’s eyes narrowed when she saw them, and the way Anja was dressed. “Anja?” She spoke firmly.

Anja opened her eyes and looked at Buonau, feeling Martin’s head turn to gaze at her as well. Okein appeared very uncomfortable being there in Anja’s state of dress, and Duewa looked somewhat stunned. She

had never seen the King in such a state, nor had she ever seen her Queen wearing something like what she had on at the moment. Duewa knew that anyone of Lycavorian or elf blood was usually much more open in their state of dress and how they expressed their emotions. Lycavorian and Elf females were notorious for being very open in their tastes of clothing and even in their choice of partners.

“Elder Buonau.” Anja spoke patting Martin’s chest and feeling his arms drop away from around her. She turned to reach for their mugs of coffee and turned back handing him his. “To what do we owe this visit?”

“Anja... are you aware that your Spartan Captain... Atropos I believe his name is... he is refusing us access to your personal ship.” Buonau spoke.

Anja’s jade green eyes narrowed as she moved to the couch and settled onto the cushions, drawing her legs under her. Martin simply rested his frame on the arm of the couch next to her and she draped an arm over his legs. “Elder Buonau... I am not usually one to care how people address me; however you seem to enjoy not referring to me by my title. And if memory serves me correctly, you have gone out of your way for several years now to do just that. Why is that?”

Buonau opened her mouth to reply but the crashing sound cut her off. Their combined attention was directed to the wide double doors and the yelping of a pair of young wolves. Buonau’s and Okein’s eyes went wide when they saw the russet colored adolescent wolf come racing through the doors, followed immediately by the dark brown fur of the second wolf. One set of jade colored eyes and one set of dark brown eyes went wide and the two adolescent wolves slammed their paws into the tile floor to no avail as they tried to apply the brakes. Their talons clicked and clattered on the floor, even as they tried to stop before slamming into Okein. Following quickly on their tails were the two adolescent dragons, their wings flapping madly and knocking items from the end tables as they too could not stop their forward momentum quickly enough. Duewa was fast enough to step back out of the way as first Retta, then Calyb slammed into Okein full tilt. He suddenly found his feet above his head as he went sailing into the air, Calyb’s larger bulk slamming into his sister from behind and adding to her already considerable momentum to take out his legs completely. Retta yelped out in surprise as they both skidded across the tile floor, Mara and Endeem following right behind them. Both adolescent dragons stood two meters tall and several hundred pounds already, and it would have been a painful experience for Okein. Anja’s hand snapped out and she caught Okein in the grip of her TK power, holding him suspended above the sprawling wolves and dragons. Retta was snarling in surprise as she and the others were about to slam into the unyielding wall.

It was hysterically funny to watch as the two wolves crashed headlong into the wall, followed quickly by their two bonded dragons. There were the sounds of rushing air as both young wolves got squashed with the combined seven hundred pounds of their bonded ones, all of them ending up in a tangle of legs and wing spans, flattened against the wall. Martin was laughing loudly, and Buonau and Duewa turned quickly when Torma’s massive head burst in through the window behind the couch, extending on his long neck. His golden eyes took in what had taken place and he began to chortle as well in dragon fashion. Anja was barely holding in her laughter as she lowered Okein to the floor gently, his eyes wide in shock at what had just happened.

Retta’s jaws snapped shut as she yelped at Calyb, and he returned the gesture as they attempted to scramble to their paws and push their bonded ones off of them. They were not having much luck and Duewa moved over to help them. As she leaned over and reached out her hand Retta’s jade green eyes focused on her and she snapped her jaws together viciously causing Duewa to jump back in surprise.

“She... she almost bit me!” Duewa exclaimed.

Anja smiled as Martin got to his feet. “If she had wanted to bite you she would have.” Anja spoke calmly as she watched Martin moved over to them and squat in front of them.

“What have we told you about running in the house in wolf form?” Martin asked calmly as he looked at his children sternly.

They watched as first Retta and then Calyb lowered their muzzles quickly, unable to meet their father’s eyes as they finally got their paws under them and each of them rose to their full heights. Even though only ten years of age, Calyb was larger than his sister in wolf form, and he was very protective of her. He stood two feet tall at the shoulders, already beginning to show the muscularity of his father and brothers. Retta was only a few inches shorter at the shoulders and she leaned closer to her brother instinctively. Calyb yelped and clicked his jaws together at his father in a challenge.

As Buonau and Okein watched in stunned shock there was a flash of silver and white light and then the enormous raven black wolf was in front of them. Martin was over a meter tall at his shoulders and nearing four hundred pounds of muscle and bone and he dwarfed both his children. His yellow/gold orbs were very evident and Buonau couldn't help but cry out in fear when those massive jaws, filled with two and three inch long razor like teeth, opened and snapped shut right in front of Calyb's muzzle with a resounding pop that echoed in the large room. This action caused Calyb to shrink back from his father without hesitation, Retta following his movement. Mara and Endeem simply stood there behind them, their heads low and being scolded by their father within Mindvoice.

Martin changed back into human form just as quickly in another flash of silver/white light and still squatted in front of them. "You can't stop on a dime on the tile floor. We've told you this before." He lifted his eyes to look at Mara and Endeem. "All of you."

Buonau watched wide eyed as in two additional flashes of soft silver/white light Retta and Calyb changed back into their human forms looking just as cowed as when they were in wolf form. Martin stared at them for a long moment, Buonau watching as his eyes shifted to her quickly and then back again to the children. Her eyes narrowed as she realized he was speaking to them in Mindvoice.

Martin jerked his thumb towards Anja finally. "Now go give your mother a kiss, say good morning and then go sit down and eat the breakfast Letia made for you."

Retta was the first to push away and she darted to the couch while Calyb looked into his father's eyes. Martin nodded and placed his hand on his head as he stood up, entwining his fingers in Calyb's thick dark brown hair. They watched as Retta hugged her mother tightly, kissed her cheek and then motioned to Mara with her hand, speaking to her within Mindvoice as she dashed out of the room. Mara didn't hesitate and followed.

You did good son. I expect you to always defend your sister Calyb. No matter what. He said within Mindvoice.

Calyb smiled and nodded his head. *I will father.*

Go eat.

Calyb smiled and then darted after his sister with Endeem on his heels while Martin looked at Buonau grinning. "The tile floor doesn't agree with wolf paws." He stated.

"You will not discipline them?" Buonau snapped.

"Having over seven hundred pounds of dragon crushing you to the wall was punishment enough don't you think?" Martin answered.

"They could have injured Okein!" Buonau spoke sternly. "They should not be allowed to alter their forms unless they are outside. They should not be allowed to alter their forms nearly as much as they do! And only then under supervision."

Martin picked up his coffee once more and sipped it. "That's your opinion." Martin said. "The wrong opinion... but your opinion doesn't count when it comes to Retta and Calyb."

Buonau glared at him before moving her eyes to look at Anja. "You allow this as well?" She demanded.

"They are children... not robots." Anja spoke as she got up and moved to stand next to Martin. "They are raised just as the rest of our children are raised."

"Yes... well we have seen how that has turned out." Buonau spat. "I take it you that have no intention of having Eliani return here to seek approval from the Council of Elders for her marriage to this Malic."

Anja shook her head. "Why would I tell her to do that?" Anja asked simply. "You have already made it clear you don't approve, and Eliani is her own woman. The only reason you want her here is to try and influence her. Something you and my Aunt haven't been able to do since she was four."

"She is a Princess of Hadaria and needs to at least make an attempt to adhere to our customs!" Okein snapped.

"More than an attempt!" Buonau echoed looking at Anja. "Since it appears her mother will not do so."

Anja shook her head and patted Martin's bare chest as she moved to the counter to pour more coffee. "You asked for this meeting Elder Buonau... what is it that you want?" Anja asked. "I thought you were all fired up to get me in front of the Arch Ministry. Why spoil our morning?"

"I have come here to give you an opportunity to come to an agreement with the Elder Council about Retta and Calyb." Buonau spoke. She reached inside her robe and produced the data pad. "And to give you this."

Anja looked at her and took the pad. “What’s this?”

“A directive to search the palace and everything on the grounds to include your office and all computer cores you and Sivana have access too.” Buonau replied smugly. “The Ministry has investigators arriving shortly.”

Anja looked at her. “Wow! You are feeling full of yourself aren’t you Elder Buonau?” She said.

“This order also includes your personal *STRIKER* that now sits on the landing pad. You have been allowed to do what you wish for too long. That will stop.” Buonau said.

Martin chuckled and shook his head. He moved to the COM panel by the double doors and touched it. “Atropos?”

“Milord?” Anja’s Captain and Aricia’s brother responded instantly.

“Atropos please lock down the *STRIKER* and seal the computer core.” Martin said as Buonau’s eyes went wide. “No one but you the pilot or a Spartan is to be allowed access.”

“Understood Milord!” Atropos spoke as Martin turned to look at Buonau.

“You defy the order of the Arch Ministry!” Buonau barked.

“The *STRIKER* is a Union military aircraft Buonau.” Martin said calmly. “The Arch Ministry has no authority to order a search of one of my ships. And I certainly didn’t give it to them.”

Anja handed the pad back to her. “You can search the palace all you want.” Anja spoke. “You and the Elders already have access to research files. You don’t need my help to do that.”

Buonau turned angry eyes from Martin to Anja. “We do not have access to your restricted files.” She snapped. “That is what we want?”

Anja tilted her head. “Why?” She asked.

“Pcillany’s charges are very serious.” Buonau stated.

“Last time I checked I haven’t been charged with anything.” Anja spoke. “And even if I was... I am still Queen of Hadaria. No one accesses my restricted files Buonau. Not now... not ever, unless the constitution has been changed in some manner and I am not aware of it.”

“I’m only trying to... make it easier.” Buonau stammered.

“Make what easier Buonau?” Anja asked moving closer to her. “The fact that you are trying to usurp me? The fact that you are trying to restore the religious power and aspect of ancient Hadarian rule. I won’t allow that Buonau... not while I live. Just as my father and mother didn’t allow it even though you tried back then too.” Anja smiled now and it was not a pleasant smile. “As for my restricted files... you will never have access to them. We are done here Buonau. We will see you at the gathering this afternoon I imagine.”

Buonau turned and looked at Martin. “You don’t even know the woman you call Queen!” She snapped. “What she is capable of! What she has done!”

Martin smiled as he crossed his arms over his chest. “Actually... I think it’s you who doesn’t know her very well.” He said.

Buonau glared at them for a few moments longer and then spun on her heels and marched out of the room with Okein and Duewa following quickly as Anja moved to stand in front of Martin, leaning into him.

“What the hell was that all about?” She asked softly. “She isn’t stupid enough to think we would allow her to search a *STRIKER* is she?”

Martin shook his head. “Maybe she thinks whatever it is you have done gives her special status.”

Anja turned her head and looked at him. “What I’ve done?” She asked.

Martin looked at her with a grin. “You must have done something big to really piss her off like this Red. C’mon... you can tell me.”

“I haven’t done anything wrong you big oaf!” Anja barked. “And for even suggesting that... I might just make you sleep on the floor!”

Martin smiled and released a small portion of his aura, wrapping it around her. Anja sighed in delight and turned to glare at him with eyes that were filled with adoration instead of anger. “Bastard!” She hissed.

Martin gathered her into his arms and lifted her off the floor. “What say we go join Retta and Calyb for breakfast?” He said. “The sooner we get off this planet the better.”

“...didn’t work Rinard.” Buonau spoke to his image on the small monitor in their private Lifter as they moved through the Lifter Air Lanes heading back to the Council chambers.

Rinard nodded his head. “I did not suspect it would.” He stated. “I wanted to give it a try anyway.”

“May I ask why?” Buonau spoke. “We risked exposing our hand by doing this.”

“If we were able to access the computer core on a *STRIKER* it would give us a wealth of intelligence.” Rinard answered. “We could even access classified information using her very own command codes.”

“I am not interested in the military secrets of the Union.” Buonau spoke sternly. “Not unless they can help me get that arrogant bitch out of my way.”

Rinard chuckled. “I don’t particularly care about your small aspirations Buonau. I am working towards a completely different goal, and your grasps at power through your whore Queen do not interest me, or those who support me. I expect you to follow through on your part of the plan. Though... what is in that computer core might very well be able to help you.” He told her. “According to my contacts on Apo Prime that work in the main docking repair facility, all the *STRIKERS* for the Royal family have a unique command code that allows them to access the computer cores of all the other ships within their family.”

“Wouldn’t you need a password?” Okein asked.

Rinard shook his head as he rolled his eyes. “No wonder you Hadarians need the Union to protect your *mida*. You are helpless. You don’t need a code if you were already inside the system using an established Royal Command Code. At least according to those who service these ships.”

“And where do you propose to get a Royal Command Code Rinard?” Duewa asked with a shake of her head. “One of the Royal Family is not going to just give it to you fool.”

“Well... that’s where you would come in Duewa my little slut!” Rinard snapped. “Once we take care of Anja... and you get Leonidas to *nubous* your brains out, he’ll probably just give you one. You are quite good in bed you know.”

“You disgusting pig!” Duewa snarled at the monitor.

Buonau held up her hand in front of her daughter before she said anything else. “I will see what we can do Rinard.” She stated. “We will see you this afternoon.”

Buonau stared at the screen for a moment. “We need to make plans to eliminate that fool man when we have accomplished our task.” She stated softly. “He is one of the vilest of his foul race.”

Duewa looked at her mother, blue eyes wide. “Mother... you never said anything about me having to share Leonidas’s bed!” She snapped.

Buonau met her gaze while Okein sat there quietly. “We are trying to accomplish a task here Duewa. Getting Anja disgraced and out of power is what we need to do. Anything that helps us in that task is worth whatever we have to do.”

“So now I have to tolerate his groping and slobbering as well? To further our cause?” Duewa spoke heatedly.

“I don’t think he will be the least bit interested in me Duewa.” Buonau said with a smile. “You will already be among him to be the tutor to Retta and Calyb, which has already been arranged. If you can obtain this information and it furthers our cause yes. Using your beauty and mind to entice Leonidas into trusting you and forgetting Anja will only serve to give us more control of him and his actions. Only you can do this.”

Duewa crossed her arms over her full breasts. “That is what you said before I had to tolerate Rinard’s vile body and touch.” She spoke. “Now I have to do it again? You know the type of relationship Anja has with the other Queens. Even if they were to accept me, I would have to share their bed as well. I don’t know if I can do that mother.”

“The rewards will benefit you and your sons Duewa.” Buonau said. “You know that. If you can insinuate yourself into his graces it will benefit all of us in the end.”

“That doesn’t mean I enjoy it!” Duewa hissed. “And I expect to be very well rewarded mother. I’m only doing this for my sons and their future.”

Buonau nodded. “I know... and they will never have to fight in any war or battle Duewa. I promise you.” She said.

Duewa stared at her mother for a long moment before sitting back deeper in the Lifter seat. Buonau turned to Okein.

“Let us go over our testimony for this afternoon.” She stated.

Rinard turned from the one monitor and looked at the helmeted head on the second monitor. The cowl was drawn back, but not fully, exposing only the armored cheeks and dark eyes. The background was completely sterile with no indication of where the individual was.

“You think they will accomplish that task?” Rinard asked.

“It is not really needed... but it will keep them occupied and out of our affairs.” The voice answered. “If they succeed... we can use it to confirm the information I have already obtained. If they don’t... they will take the fall and not us.”

“Buonau needs someone to fuck her long and hard.” Rinard spoke with a cruel smile. “Before they slit her throat.”

“Something I’m quite sure the Kavalians will enjoy doing if everything works out.” The man replied. “Have you been able to contact Gareld? He failed in his first attempt and I assume he is going to try again?”

“He thinks we don’t know he went to the Kavalians for help.” Rinard said with a smile. “He is just as big a fool as Buonau.”

The man laughed as well. “Well... they did pay him more than we did for the half elf bitch.”

“He hasn’t reported in for several days... but that is not surprising.” Rinard spoke. “Was it wise to pay him upfront?”

“Like Buonau... he is only a means to an end.” The man answered. “If he succeeds... excellent. If not... the Kavalians will... and that will only serve to help us.”

“You know of course that Bontick is dead.” Rinard said. “His entire operation destroyed totally on Nebonese.”

“I understand he died quite a gruesome death.”

Rinard nodded. “He was crushed by a fruit harvester.” He answered. “Witnesses say he was sitting in the street babbling like some newborn child just before the harvester ran over him.”

The man nodded. “No doubt using his own product.” He stated. “Evulli are notoriously incompetent... no matter how much they like to think otherwise. I would imagine Anton Simpson interrogated him thoroughly before they left him there to die. It is of no matter... the information I passed on to the Kavalians will cause significant confusion in The Wilds when the time comes and Bontick and his ilk won’t be needed. It will also rob Leonidas of his eyes and ears.”

“Do you know what their plan is?” Rinard asked.

The man shook his head. “Nor do I want to know.” He replied. “You can be assured it will be very violent and brutal. In the end it will give all of us what we want.”

Rinard nodded. “As long as I get to kill her myself.” He spoke in a low menacing voice.

“And you will my friend. You will. I gave you my word on that Rinard and I will keep it.” The man said. “Keep me advised if we hear anything from Gareld. And watch your back Rinard. Leonidas is sure to go into a fit of rage when your information comes to light. And no doubt you will be one of his targets. Along with his red haired whore Queen.”

“I will. Don’t worry.”

EARTH
MENKLA K2 MILITARY TRANSPORT
ASSIGNED ULU ARIZONA
PEARL HARBOR, HAWAII
BATTLESHIP ARIZONA MEMORIAL
Background music: Pegasus from Battlestar Galactica

“What are we doing here again?” Steven asked looking at Miranda as they stood at the bottom of the ramp of the *MENKLA K2* Military Transport.

The transport rested on the enlarged landing pad built at the end of the quay where in years past visitors came to visit the memorial. The memorial had survived the sky fires that swept the earth after the passing of the comet with nothing more than extensive burn marks. Many had questioned this occurrence since not half a mile away on Ford Island, every structure had been destroyed. At Martin's order and under Ben's direction, the memorial had been repaired and made even stronger. It had not changed in the nearly six hundred years of its existence, looking exactly the same now as it did in the year nineteen hundred and eighty when it opened. Due to massive underwater earthquakes and the shifting of tides and submersion of many islands across the planet, the water depth at Pearl Harbor had lowered several feet and now nearly eighteen inches of the gray ship itself extended above the surface of the calm waters.

Zaala clung to his arm, her wide dark eyes taking in all around her. E'dira stood silently to Miranda's left, her amber eyes also drifting over the mountains in the distance and the ocean breeze sweeping over them and scouring the many buildings on Ford Island itself. Pearl Harbor was the only base that belonged to the former United States of America that maintained its name and function. There were many ocean going vessels that roamed the oceans of Earth, most of them pleasure ships for those still inclined to take such a trip. Most of those ships left from Pearl Harbor. Several of them could be seen in the distance, their huge bulks on the horizon docked at terminals where hundreds of species came to take leisurely cruises of the oceans of Earth. To the right of the memorial, roughly half a mile away, they could just make out the specks of men and women working on the slightly tilted remains of the Battleship Missouri. The ship where the Peace treaty signifying the end of World War Two with the Japanese was signed. Slowly but surely the ship was being restored to its once proud state. All over the harbor could be seen ocean going vessels from Earth's past being worked on and restored. It was intended for Pearl Harbor to be a redoubt of history from a time long past. A place where everyone could come and see that humans were just as brave and dedicated as any other.

Hawaii was one place Zaala and E'dira had never been, though both of them had been off world many times in the last quarter century. Zaala squeezed Steven's arm tightly.

"Steven... it's beautiful." She gasped softly looking around in wonder.

E'dira nodded her head in agreement. "Indeed it is." She said. "I did not know that such places still existed on Earth. It is so... calm and serene. It... it radiates with history and so many stories."

Miranda smiled at the comments from two of her newest crew members. "It's the only place like it on Earth now." She told them softly. "I think it has something to do with Martin being a former Navy SEAL back in the day. He has never forgotten this place. And the attack on Pearl Harbor was the only battle of World War II that did not include any Lycavorians in some way."

E'dira looked at her, even her amber eyes surprised. "Truly?" She asked. "I never knew that."

Miranda nodded. "They had not gotten to the US in time to spread among the US military before the Japanese attacked. It is the only battle in history really. Martin... he wanted to make sure it was seen and known that humans are capable of great sacrifice and bravery and they should not be looked down upon."

Janon looked at his Commander now. "Mando... wasn't your real father Japanese?" He asked.

Miranda nodded. "Japanese American. My mother was Korean. He loved coming here." Her face became serious. "We came here right before moving to EDEN BASE."

E'dira saw the look on her face and moved closer to her, almost possessively. "They are pleasant memories for you?" She asked.

Miranda looked up into her face and nodded. "Very much so. I was only four... but I can remember that last trip almost as if it was yesterday."

E'dira nodded. "Then grasp tightly to those memories Miranda Lorian. And never lose them. They make you part of who you are."

Steven nodded. "Amen." He said softly.

Miranda nodded as a small smile crossed her face. "We are here because Ben made me promise to do something for him once I had all of you together." She stated looking at them. "This memorial will reopen in six months. It is meant to show that humans can be just as brave and resourceful as any other species. This whole harbor will bear witness to that. Martin came here quite a bit back before he discovered who he was. Ben too. They said there was a draw to this place, something that made them wish to be here. I understood what they meant the first time I came here two years ago and I want my officers to see that as well."

They all turned as the incredibly old human man came walking towards them. His hair was completely white, and his movements showed his age. The cane he used to walk was a simple walking stick with a knob on the end, yet he walked with his head held high.

“Jesus Miranda... that guy looks older than God.” Steven muttered leaning close to her.

Miranda chuckled as Zaala yanked on Steven’s arm. “Steven Randall you will not be rude!” She hissed softly.

“He would be the first one to agree with you.” She stated as she turned to face the man as he moved up slowly but purposefully. “Mister Franklin... how are you?”

The wrinkles in the man’s face were evident, his skin burned a deep bronze from too many years in the sun, but his dark eyes were bright and very alert. He leaned on his cane with one hand as he took Miranda’s hand in the other. That he was completely human was very evident to all of them.

“I’m still kicking.” He spoke surprising all of them with the conviction and strength of his voice. “I got a few years left in me.”

Miranda smiled and stepped close to him while turning to look at her core of officers. “This is William Franklin. He is a fifth generation caretaker of this place. Martin and Ben found him living on the beach nearby when they first came back here twenty-five years ago.” Miranda looked at him. “He and his family have cared for the Arizona Memorial since the late 21st century.”

The man nodded calmly. “And done so proudly.” He stated evenly. “It began the day my grandfather’s grandfather died on this very ship.”

“Ben told you why we are here?” Miranda asked.

The man nodded. “He did. I didn’t want to do it at first...” He spoke. “It’s all that is left from the original and it’s amazing it still survives now.”

“William we...” Miranda began to speak.

Franklin held up his thin boney hand. “Ben, Martin and I came to an agreement. He may be a Lycavorian and our King, but damned if he doesn’t remember his roots. Ben too... though he is a former jarhead.” He spoke with a smile. “I’ll forgive him.” Franklin looked at her. “I’m all set up.”

“Set up?” Janon asked softly.

Franklin nodded. “You will get the first tour of the new facility.” He stated. “It hasn’t changed much... but the new holo technology really makes it so you feel like you are there.” He motioned them forward. “Follow me.”

They watched him turn and move for the entrance of the soft white building in front of them. It was taller on the ends and sunken in the middle as a structure, but Miranda had read once that this was meant to signify the United States and it’s rise to power before World War Two, the sunken middle was meant to signify the depth she fell to during this attack on her homeland, and then the rise again of her naval might and majesty. They followed him until he stopped in front of the door and looked at them.

“It will activate when you enter. It should only take you about fifteen minutes to walk through.” He said softly. “I’ll meet you on the other end and have what you came here for.” He didn’t say another word and turned to walk to a smaller building on the side.

Miranda looked at them and Steven smiled. “After you Captain.” He said holding Zaala’s hand.

Miranda nodded and took a deep breath before entering the darkened interior. E’dira followed without hesitation and then Steven and Zaala. Janon brought up the rear glancing back over his shoulder to where William Franklin had disappeared into the smaller building. He shook his head before stepping into the building. Even though his wolf eyes adjusted almost instantly, he had taken no more than ten steps and nearly collided with Steven. His eyes grew wide as he too stopped and the holo images filled the massive room. The strange voice filled the interior.

“December 7th 1941, a day that will live in infamy, according to President Roosevelt.” The deep male voice echoed throughout the huge room. “It began as any ordinary day for everyone but soon escalated to the most horrific event in the history of the United States of America up until that time. War was brewing across the oceans...”

Janon saw that the others had begun moving slowly forward listening to the voice and he followed them, drawn by the inescapable sense of something alive within the building. The holo images of hundreds of men and women walked all around him, moving back and forth between very old style buildings, and what appeared to be barracks. The sky was blue and the sun just beginning to rise, ancient wheeled vehicles moving along the roads. As they moved further along, the scenery changed to that of a great harbor, and Janon realized it was the very harbor they were in now. He could see massive ships lining the old quays, gray ships that by contrast to even the smallest frigate of this age, didn't come close in size.

“There was no warning before the bombs began to fall.” The voice continued. “One moment it was a quiet Sunday, and the next the gates of hell had opened.”

Janon heard Zaala yelp softly as suddenly they were surrounded by what seemed like hundreds of very loud and strange shaped flying craft, many of them carrying items beneath their bellies. Janon watched as these items began to drop from under the planes, an ancient wailing noise now beginning to sound in the background. He could see men running now, running and screaming to each other. And then the first explosion sounded, causing even the grizzled combat pilot of hundreds of missions to jump from his skin. The fire was almost real, and Janon swore he could feel the heat as ships began to explode. It appeared as if they were walking along the very pier where the Arizona was tied, ancient anti-aircraft guns spilling out their fire at a deadly rate, the yammering of those guns making it so no other sound could be heard. The screaming of men, either wounded or dying filled the room now as they moved slowly down the middle of the building.

She was on fire Janon could see that, and then as they watched the Arizona's massive bulk heaved from the surface of the water as a deafening roar filled the room and caused them to stop as if they were right there, watching everything take place. The reverberations of the enormous blast were almost real, buffeting their bodies as the Arizona fell back to the surface of the water and began to roll over almost immediately, the killing blow having been delivered and the proud ship beginning its slow death. He saw Zaala press her body close to Steven, her eyes moist as broken bodies began to bob in the now flaming ocean water. They could see men leaping from the sides of the rolling ship, some of them on fire, some missing body parts. They could see others dragging their comrades to the side of the ship, blood beginning to stain the deck of the once grand ship as it died. They watched groups of men leap for the water, many dragging their friends clear of the sinking ship, swimming as fast as they could. They heard and felt more explosions from within the symbol of power, and then more followed from all around them as other ships nearby took hits. Nothing mattered to them now except the Arizona, their attention riveted to the dying ship and the unimaginable acts of bravery that were happening all around them at every turn.

Men clung to the hull of the ship that was now coming to rest face up in the water, even as rescue craft raced to try and save as many as possible. They braved Japanese fighters that strafed the water beneath them, savaging those who floated helplessly. As Janon watched faces began to appear like ghostly images and move past them, young, old, it didn't matter. Some wore stern faced looks, others tight lipped smiles and others still wide boyish smiles. No matter their color or creed one thing was almost always the same.

They were all impossibly young.

“You walk above hollowed ground my friends and visitors,” The voice continued. “For the souls of one thousand one hundred and seventy-seven men lie entombed beneath you in honor. They died gallantly trying to save their ship... their shipmates... their honor. The acts of bravery can not be chronicled, and they rest with the remains of the men who called the Arizona home. They died for a cause; they died for a purpose; and the Arizona became the rallying cry of a nation. Despite all that has taken place in the six hundred and thirty-two years since her sinking, the Arizona's remains have not moved. Not underwater earthquakes of even the passing of the comet could budge her. It is almost as if the souls of her crew have held her together in death when they could not save her in life. Though now only a trickle of what it once was, oil still leaks from her number three turret mast, and it has for over six hundred years.

Some say the oil should have run out by now, that it's not even possible. Others believe it to be the blood of those who died trying to save her and that their blood is eternal. While she did not fire her main guns against the enemy before her death, the Arizona to this day fights to keep her charges safe against all

enemies, be they on the surface or under the waves resting within her. Remember what you have seen here today and take heart to the desire and bravery and will of all humans. It resides within all of them, and they will fight even after death. Remember them... honor them."

The holo images faded only to be replaced by the huge wall in front of them, white marble with black lettering. The edges of the marble were now encased in gold. All of them saw the large plaque near the bottom of the huge wall of names.

"TO THE MEMORY OF THE GALLENT MEN HERE ENTOMBED, AND THEIR SHIPMATES WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES IN ACTION ON DECEMBER 7TH 1941 ON THE USS ARIZONA."

"She will be the first ship to carry that name since 1941." Franklin's voice spoke from the side causing all of them to turn as he stepped up to them holding the bundle in his hands. "You will be the four senior officers on her from what Ben and Martin tell me. They also tell me you are the finest that we have."

Miranda reached up and used the back of her hand to wipe away the wetness from her eyes. Zaala was unashamed of the tears streaking her cheeks and Steven did not attempt to wipe away the small tears on his cheeks either.

Franklin held up the bundle. "This is her battle flag." He spoke. "The one that was flying on her the day she sank. It is really amazing that it has survived all these years, but perhaps it was for this very reason." He held the bundle out to Miranda almost reverently. "Display it for all to see Captain Miranda Lorian of the *ULU ARIZONA*. Let everyone know that the *ARIZONA* lives once more if you would Captain."

"I... I am only a caretaker Mister Franklin." Miranda said softly. "She will have her own Captain in the future."

Franklin shook his head. "A ship chooses her Captain Lorian, not the other way around. The *ARIZONA* has chosen you. Ben and Martin agree." He said seeing her eyes going a little wider. "They left that tidbit of information for me to tell you. They thought it might be appropriate for *ARIZONA'S* past to meet *ARIZONA'S* future." He held out the bundled flag. "This belongs to you now. Honor it and honor her name."

Miranda reached out and took the bundle just as reverently. "We... we will." She said softly.

"Martin and Ben allowed me to see the ship that will carry *ARIZONA'S* name into the future." Franklin spoke.

Miranda's eyes grew a little wider. "That... that was you?" She asked remembering the brief visit to the shipyards that even she knew nothing about.

Franklin nodded with a smile. "They knew what it would take to get me to agree to this. She looks fit for battle Captain Lorian. Do her namesake proud, and make sure this time she survives to make our Union proud. All of you."

Miranda looked at Steven and E'dira as their hands settled on the bundle of cloth, Janon's hand next and finally Zaala's over the top of Steven's. She turned her eyes back to Franklin. "We will sir." She spoke in a raspy whisper. "We will."

Franklin nodded. "Good. They'll be watching over you." He spoke motioning with his hand all around them.

All of them gasped as they turned and saw the hundreds of holo images of the smiling young faces all around them, like they were looking at them, as if they were gazing into their souls and giving them their blessing to carry the name of their ship into the future.

The *ARIZONA*.

MJOLNIR'S HAND **TWO HOURS FROM THE BONTAWILLIAN BORDER**

"They are maneuvering to get in front of us Admiral!" The Ops officer barked from across the bridge. "The *DIATAGAs* are taking up position to limit our maneuvering and the *DIEROY* is boring straight in."

Komirri nodded. "Typical." He said to no one in particular. "They underestimate our abilities. The trailers?"

"The *DIATAGA* and *PURUSIAN* trailers have spread out their formation. It's a standard support role Admiral."

Komirri turned as the doors to the bridge opened and Aricia strode confidently through them. He didn't smile at this as he looked at her, for he had watched her grow into the woman she was now. "I want the Ready Alert Squadron in the port tubes! Two more on standby for primary launch vectors! Put one squadron of M5s in the starboard tubes and another on priority stand by! Load the M5s with ship busters!"

"Yes sir!"

"All manual turrets to standby! All automated defenses to standby!" Komirri continued as Aricia came up next to him. "Full power to shields and give me full proton yield on torpedo tubes four through eight. Decoys in one through three. Look sharp people!"

Aricia looked at him. "I take it our guests are not going to leave us alone?" She said.

Komirri looked at her. "They have put themselves on an approach vector that forces us to stop or alter course. Essentially they wish to play chicken as Martin says."

Aricia nodded. "Typical." She muttered the same word Komirri had.

Komirri smiled. "I said the same thing." He told her. "They haven't tried to contact us yet, but I imagine that is coming."

"Bella?" Aricia asked.

"The *DARKBROOD* is tucked in nice and close." Komirri replied with a nod. "We've reinforced that shield grid with additional power. She should be fine unless the Kavalians get stupid and target her."

"Have you ever faced them Komirri?" Aricia asked.

Komirri shook his head. "My father has... but even I was too young to fight in that war with them. He tells me they have not changed their tactics much since then if the reports coming out of High Coven space are any indication."

"Explain." Aricia said looking at him.

"Very centralized control." Komirri spoke. "Not much information gets disseminated down to the lower levels and ranks. The officers have complete control for the most part. The biogenic clones are fodder on the ground and the officers lead from the rear."

"Their fleet?"

Komirri shrugged. "Intelligence says there are not many biogenic clones in their fleet forces."

Aricia nodded. "They may use them all over, but they are considered inferior to normal Kavalians. Fodder as you say. Their overall society is broken up into Prides." She said. "Similar to the Clan Families of the Drow. If I understand correctly there are always power plays within their ranks."

Komirri chuckled. "Careful Milady, don't let Vice President Aihola or General Lynwe hear you say that."

Aricia smiled as well. "Yes... I don't think they would appreciate it." She said.

"Admiral we are being hailed!" The COM officer turned in her chair. "The transmission is originating from the *DIEROY*."

Komirri met his Queen's blue eyes. "Here we go." He said. Aricia nodded and Komirri turned to his officer. "Put it on the main holo disc!"

The image of the hulking Kavalian came into view, flickered and then cleared instantly. His coat of light golden hair covered his face, his feline features giving him a very imposing visage. His green cat eyes looked up at them as he handed something to an officer on his right. He did not get out of his chair in the rear center of his bridge.

"I am Pride Captain Fener of the KFI Sixth Echelon Command ship *SICOR*." The Kavalian spoke calmly. "To whom am I speaking?"

Komirri felt Aricia's hand gently touch his arm and he remained silent as she stepped forward. She was going to take the lead on this because they both knew Kavalians did not relate well to women in general. And it was unheard of apparently for them to take orders from a woman. "I am Aricia Leonidas." She stated plainly. "Queen of the Lycavorian Union. Your ships appear to be blocking our way Captain. Please remove them from our path so that we may continue."

KAVALIAN SHIP *SICOR*

Fener blinked several times as Aricia finished speaking, completely caught off guard by the raven haired woman's orders. Fener was not used to taking directives from females, no Kavalian was, and Aricia's order had confused him for a moment. He turned quickly to the two men who stood just to his right side at vertical control panels and motioned discretely with his hand to cut the audio from the transmission.

The taller of the two Kavalians next to him nodded. "She is the youngest of the Queens, but the only one of pure Lycavorian blood. She is considered the most powerful of the five sitting Queens Captain. It is a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser and if she is on that ship then we must be looking at the flagship of the Lycavorian Union."

"*MJOLNIR'S HAND*?" Fener gasped.

The man nodded. "Yes Captain."

"Sensors?" Fener called out.

"We are unable to get precise sensor readings from the ship sir!" The Kavalian replied. "It is a combination of jamming and whatever metal they have coating their hull. It is returning most of our passive scans too warped to make sense of."

"Active sensors?" Fener asked.

"They could penetrate Captain." The officer answered.

"It may also be interpreted as hostile Captain." The second Kavalian spoke now. This was Fener's Second Officer.

"Are they scanning us?" Fener asked.

"Not actively sir!" The Sensor operator spoke. "The *LEONIDAS IIs* use a JCN Nodon Engineering Type 71 Tactical Network. They are equipped with Nodon Engineering Class Five Multi-spectral Primary sensors and Phased Passive lateral sensors. We wouldn't know if they were scanning us with passive sensors sir."

"Engage the jammers!" Fener quipped.

"Jammers engaged."

Fener looked at the two men. "You are telling me I have to talk with this child and not the Algolian?" He snapped.

"It would appear so sir." The first Kavalian said.

"Matig... what information do we have on this female child?" Fener asked his Second Officer.

The Second Officer worked the computer controls on his podium. "She is the youngest of his Queens, mother to his oldest son the Crown Prince Androcles. She is connected to one of those foul dragon monsters, and considered by many of our Senior Scholars to be the most inexperienced in terms of war and politics."

Fener nodded. "Good. Broadcast this to all our ships. I will put this female child in her place." He stated turning back to the transmission. "Audio!"

"Restored Captain."

"You have in your custody the ship and crew of vampire criminals that are wanted by my government Queen Aricia." Fener spoke smugly. "I am here to remove them from your custody and transport them to Kavalian space to stand trial for crimes against my people. Please make ready to hand them over to me, and for my boarding teams to inspect your ship for those who you might decide to hide. Once they come on board your ship they will deal with your Algolian senior officer and you will remain in your quarters out of harm's way until our inspection is complete."

MJOLNIR'S HAND

Aricia looked at Komirri with wide eyes and saw him shrug. "No one ever accused them of being subtle Milady." He muttered under his breath.

Aricia chuckled and nodded her head. “No they have not.” She said. She turned back to the image of Fener in the holo disc. “Captain Fener... we are in The Wilds, not Kavalian space. This is the Union flagship, and since my husband and mate is not on board, I am in command. I am not a Kavalian female Captain, therefore your directives fall on deaf ears. I have absolutely no intention of handing anyone over to you, nor do I intend to allow you to board this ship for any purpose, and certainly not for some ridiculously contrived inspection.”

“Then we will simply target the vampire frigate and destroy it woman!” Fener barked as he came to his feet. “I am not giving you a choice!”

“Queen Isabella Leonidas is on that frigate as we speak Captain Fener.” Aricia spoke calmly. “Please sit back down in your chair and do not attempt to intimidate me. I assure you it will not work. This is free space, and we are returning to Union territory with the criminals that conducted an attack on this very ship. An attack that targeted your own Trade Delegation. We will return them to Union space where they will be charged and convicted in our justice system, not yours.”

“That is not acceptable to me!” Fener snapped. “You will surrender their ship and those individuals you captured! You will also prepare to be boarded and have your ship inspected by my men! That is what you will do woman!”

Aricia stepped closer to the holo image, her azure eyes changing to her wolf persona and her fangs extending half way as she glared at him. “Captain Fener, three seconds after we detect boarding teams leaving your ships, I will order them blown out of the stars. Half a second after we detect any type of weapon on your ships charging I will order an attack that will kill you and every single ship under your command. Your posturing and foolish actions do not frighten me Captain. They only confirm to me just how ignorant you are. I have faced far more dangerous and intelligent adversaries than you Captain Fener. Your actions will only serve in getting you and your men killed.”

Fener looked at her wide eyed unable to comprehend she was speaking to him in such a way. “I have you outnumbered woman child!” He nearly shouted. “Will you fight all six of my ships?”

Aricia smiled. “I will *destroy* all six of your ships... and you will succeed in starting a war that neither of our peoples wants. A war which you will ultimately lose as I have already told the fool Captain of your other ship.”

Fener was fuming, even under his coat of hair. Aricia could tell he had never been talked to in such a way by a woman. She watched his eyes narrow. “You are out here all alone child Queen of the Union.” He snarled. “No one will get to you before I kill you! And your pathetic Union can not stand against the Kavalian Empire!”

“Then that makes you stupid as well as foolish Captain Fener!” Aricia spoke calmly. She turned to Komirri. “*Kenetavorn vada lenee arduus Aranna!*”

Komirri didn't hesitate. “Strike Wing stand to!” He bellowed.

Aricia smiled, her eyes never leaving Fener's face. “Allow me to introduce you to the *Lenee Arduus* of *MJOLNIR'S HAND* Captain.”

SICOR

Fener's head snapped around when alarms began to sound all over his bridge.

“Captain! Union ships are de-shrouding all around us!” The sensor operator barked out. “Thirty-three contacts!”

“Thirty-three? Impossible! What class?” Fener snapped stunned.

“Captain... four *LEONIDAS* I-Class Heavy Cruisers, four *MOONLANCER*-Class Battle Cruisers, seven *NOVA*-Class Attack Cruisers, eight *ADMIRAL CENEU*-Class Heavy Destroyer, five *AUTUMN MOON*-Class Attack Frigates and five unknown class! They appear to be some kind of escort class!” The sensor operator barked out in reply over the alarms.

Fener looked at his Second Officer with wide eyes. “This is a standard Strike Wing?” He gasped.

“It can't be.” The second Kavalian spoke. He was the ship's pseudo political officer and the one man with a direct link to Kavalian High Command.

“What do you see all around us fool!” Matig barked.

“Captain!” The sensor operator shouted. “Captain... the *NGANE* is powering its forward Gauss cannons! She’s targeting the vampire frigate!”

Fener reached for the control panel on the arm of his command chair. “Angak! Angak what are you doing?” He screamed.

“The bitch Queen insulted me!” The voice answered. “They will not fire on us! I will destroy the vampire frigate and we will have what we came for!”

“Angak! I order you to stand down!” Fener screamed. “Stand down do you hear me?”

MJOLNIR’S HAND

“...powering their forward Gauss cannons!” The sensor operator shouted. “Locking on to the High Coven frigate!”

Aricia looked at Komirri and then back to the holo image of Fener, her eyes filling with rage. “You have just signed your own death warrant you *nubous aulved*! Command is yours Komirri!” She stated without vacillation.

Komirri didn’t hesitate. “Ready squadrons launch! Lock port side batteries on the Serval targeting the Coven frigate! Helm execute evasive pattern three nine! Mask the Kavalian firing solution! Turn us! Turn us! Strike Wing is weapons free! Strike Wing is weapons free!”

MJOLNIR’S HAND veered hard to port and almost immediately *DEVASTATOR* and *TEMPEST* fighters began spilling from her launch tubes in droves like angry hornets.

“Admiral they are firing!”

“Bella!” Aricia screamed.

Komirri’s order to mask the firing solution caused the helm officer to yank the massive bulk of *MJOLNIR’S HAND* over in a turn that seemed impossible for a ship of its size. Dozens of maneuvering thrusters lining the entire top of the ship fired almost at once, spinning the aft portion of the ship down and around and effectively covering three quarters of the High Coven frigate. The blasts from the Kavalian Gauss Cannons would have effectively vented the rear sections of the frigate to space killing hundreds. Now the two potent blasts of the medium powered weapon skipped off the powerful shields of *MJOLNIR’S HAND* and only scored a glancing blow on the frigate’s rear quarter. In testament to his skill as a commander Maros was able to maintain control of his ship and insure it maneuvered almost identically to the colossal ship protecting him. This gut wrenching maneuver saved the High Coven frigate from major damage and loss of life.

“Weapons lock!” The officer screamed out over the many alarms blaring on the bridge. “Weapons lock!”

Komirri looked at her. “Kill him! Kill him now!”

Twenty-five MK9C Type One Plasma Batteries fired at one time, lighting up the entire port side of *MJOLNIR’S HAND* and the immediate space around it. It was the heaviest plasma battery in the Union inventory and the most destructive by far. Twenty-five thick red bands of devastating and concentrated plasma based energy slammed into the upper port side of the *DIATAGA*’s superstructure overwhelming the three shield grids along the length of the ship. The result was never in question as the first massive barrage shattered the shield grids and began blasting great swaths of superstructure from the Kavalian ship without regard. The *NGANE* was primarily the Kavalian long range missile carrier, and hence it was unfit for close up fighting let alone against a ship armed like *MJOLNIR’S HAND*.

The aft quarter of the *NGANE* came apart first, the first plasma barrage slicing through the ship’s armor with lethal precision. Two massive internal explosions lit up the space around the ship and the rear five hundred meters of the ship ripped away from the remainder of the superstructure. This section contained the engines, their cores and most of the *DIATAGA*’s emergency power batteries. As it drifted away, explosions rocked that section violently until finally it blossomed into a bright point and the two overloaded Tri-Cobalt Matter Reactor engine cores blossomed in a single explosion that peppered *MJOLNIR’S HAND*’s shields with bits of ship pieces.

SICOR

“...gone captain! The *NGANE* has been completely destroyed!”

Fener snarled savagely. “Angak that fool!” He barked. “Evasion pattern Theta One! Scatter! We are not to engage! Priority transmission to all ships! We are not to engage and anyone who does I will destroy them myself!”

“Captain?” Matig gasped.

“We are not here for combat! Angak attacked a ship with one of their Queens on it and I hope his spirit wallows in eternal agony for his fool actions! He could damn us all!” Fener shouted. “We are outnumbered and heavily outgunned! Emergency transmission to Kavalian Command! Get me a direct line to Marshall Pusintin! Connect me now, before we lose more than we already have! And begin broadcasting on all open frequencies that we are not hostile!”

The political officer stepped from his podium. “Captain Fener... we can not let this action go unanswered! We...”

Fener struck the man viciously across his face staggering him back and bleeding his mouth. “Shut your hole of a mouth Neskatin! The child Queen just obliterated over seven thousand of our men because Angak allowed his pride to overcome his actions! And she did it without blinking! That was simply for firing on the ship carrying the vampire Queen! It appears she is not as big a child as you and your political cronies thought! You will not kill anymore of my men! And make no mistake if we fight she will kill us all!”

“Captain... Marshall Pusintin is not responding! He is out of the command loop right now! I have Pride Admiral Lingatt’Oturro.”

Fener nodded. “Put him up! Quickly! And continue to broadcast we are not hostile!”

SPARTAN BLACK TALONS M7 TEMPEST SQUADRON

“Roll right now!” The senior elven pilot barked into his helmet as he slammed his M7 Tempest into a tight corkscrew turn. “Form on me! We are weapons free! Target any Jaguars they might be able to launch! Clear the way for the M5s and look sharp! Once the Jaguars are dealt with, fire SWARM Missile Packs into the sensor and communications pods!”

“Commander Lanust... sensors are picking up a call off!” A voice announced in his helmet. “The Kavalian ships are maneuvering defensively! No Jaguars are being detected as launched.”

Lanust glanced at his consoles, his six hundred year old hands caressing his controls as if he was stroking his wife’s skin. The M7 responded to his touch just as his wife did and Lanust grinned under his full helmet. He was the CAG of *MJOLNIR’S HAND*, selected thirteen years ago after serving as Squadron Commander for the previous ten years. He and his pilots were among the finest anywhere in the Union and all of them were completely, some would say fanatically loyal to their King. Lanust and his pilots had seen their King disregard safety and his own life to rescue pilots that had been shot down in the Evolli war. Martin Leonidas never left anyone behind, and his style of command brought him down into the gritty launch bay with the pilots that would die for him as often as time would permit. There had been many games of Tarnarb Poker that King Leonidas had played with them in the large recreation centers on *MJOLNIR’S HAND*. And while Lanust had to grow accustomed to the fact that everyone was treated equally, right down to the lowest conduit cleaner, he could not deny the camaraderie that this brought to his pilots and their ground crews. The ground crews took loving care of their fighters and the pilots in turn made sure that their crews wanted for nothing, even if it meant bending some rules sometimes.

Lanust’s eyes darted to his sensors at his wingman’s announcement and he saw the transmission. It was a universal non-hostile transmission, and all of the Kavalian ships were radiating this transmission even as they were turning away from *MJOLNIR’S HAND* and exposing their backsides to Admiral Komirri.

“I have it! M5 Squadron Commanders hold at point Bravo! We will cover you!” Lanust spoke crisply.

“Moving to Point Bravo! Ship Busters are live! Give us a target and we’ll make them eat pain!” The lead *DEVASTATOR* pilot spoke. He was a Lycavorian and Lanust loved the man like a brother.

“Black Talon One to Control! We are detecting a universal non-hostile beacon radiating from remaining Kavalian ships! Request instructions.”

MJOLNIR’S HAND

“...are fine Aricia!” Isabella exclaimed in the transmission. “Minor damage! Thirteen of Maros’s crew were injured, none seriously. Vonis is helping to direct damage control teams, but Maros says we can still maneuver and fight if need be.”

Aricia felt her heart ease quickly and she shook her head. “We will take it from here Bella.” She spoke. “The ship that fired on you is gone! We are moving to engage the others!”

“This was a stupid move on their part Aricia.” Isabella spoke. “Kavalians are violent brutes yes, but they are not stupid! Once the Strike Wing de-shrouded they would not have attacked! Not against these odds!”

“Well... I intend to show them the error of their ways!” Aricia snarled.

“Black Talon One to Control! We are detecting a universal non-hostile beacon radiating from remaining Kavalian ships! Request instructions.”

Aricia’s head came up at this voice over the internal bridge COM and she watched as Komirri looked up from his plot board. “Strike Wing weapons hold!” Komirri barked as he stabbed the control panel on his board. “Lanust? Speak to me man!”

“Universal non-hostile beacon is radiating from the remaining five Kavalian ships Admiral!” His CAG’s voice filled the bridge speakers. ***“None of them have raised shields and they are maneuvering defensively.”***

Komirri turned to his sensor operator. “Confirm that!” He barked.

The operator nodded. “That is confirmed Admiral.” The woman spoke quickly. “They have presented their flanks to us and have not raised shields! No weapons signatures are being detected.”

Komirri looked at Aricia, his reptilian features filling with questions. She stood to her full height and met his gaze. “I am out of my realm here Komirri.” Aricia admitted without any hesitation.

Komirri nodded and turned back. “Maintain weapons lock on the Kavalian ships!” He barked. “Section Two move to three nine seven four mark five! Section One cover our starboard side. Lock port side Type Ones on the Sabertooth and hold.” Komirri stabbed his panel again. “Control to Black Talon One. Lanust... give me a look! Keep this channel open!”

“Understood Admiral! Talon Flight maintains cover! Talon Three you are with me!”

“Like glue One!”

“Executing flyby! Rotate thirty degrees and in we go! Fire control tracking!”

SICOR

“...damn fool!” The dark haired Kavalian Admiral exclaimed in the transmission. “He is dead?”

“They blew his ship out of the stars before the flash of his cannons was gone Admiral!” Fener replied.

“They killed seven thousand of our men!” Neskatin barked.

“Be still you idiot!” Lingatt shouted from the transmission. “The Lycavorians did us a favor! You know how Leonidas views his Queens! He’d slaughter millions if any harm was intentionally brought to them! Angak was a fool! These Union men and women are not the High Coven! Marshall Pusintin has tried to tell us that for years! They will not turn tail and run at the first boast and threat from us! We are not at war with the Union and Angak fired on a ship carrying one of his Queens! What do you expect them to do in this situation?”

“A ship carrying criminals wanted by the Kavalian government!” Neskatin spat.

The Kavalian Admiral glared at him in the transmission. “You are ignorant Neskatin! You are a political cronie with a military commission, not an officer. The vampire High Coven insurgents attacked our Trade Delegation on their ship! They threatened another Queen of the Union and one of Leonidas’s sons. They will fare no better in the hands of the Union than they would in ours. Angak let his pride rule his actions and he underestimated the ruthlessness of this child Queen.”

“I wish to communicate directly with Prefect Keleru!” Neskatin demanded.

Lingatt shook his head. “Marshall Pusintin is out of reach on a mission and the Prefect is dealing with the defection of his daughter to these Union dogs!” Lingatt spat. “I do not take orders from you little cronie so be silent!”

Fener’s eyes were wide. “The Prefect’s daughter defected?” He gasped.

Lingatt nodded. “It happened this morning on Earth. She apparently has become the wife to his second son. The half elf Resumar. The Prefect is not happy and nor will Marshall Pusintin when he finds out this information.”

“Admiral... we are in a situation here ourselves!” Fener spoke keeping his professional cool. “They have not pressed their attack because I have a non-hostile beacon radiating, but I do not doubt we are all targeted! We can not penetrate the hulls of their ships with passive sensors and if we go active they will blow us all from the stars because of what Angak has done.”

“Fener... you must defuse the situation!” Lingatt spoke. “Do what you must... but do not trade shots with them. You face the Union flagship and the Strike Wing that protects that ship Fener; do nothing that will cause more encounters and loss of our people and ships.”

Fener nodded. “Understood Admiral!”

“Contact me when you have broken from the Lycavorians and they are out of range.” Lingatt ordered. “I will inform the Prefect of what is happening and if he decides something else you will hear from me.”

“As you order.”

Fener stood up from his chair as the transmission faded. “Get me the Union Command Ship!” He snapped. “And do so quickly before this gets out of hand!”

MJOLNIR’S HAND

“...Incoming transmission from the lead Kavalian ship!” The man announced. “It’s the Kavalian Fener.”

Komirri nodded motioning to Aricia. “Put it up!” He called out.

Fener’s image flickered and became clear and Aricia pounced immediately. “Give me a reason why I don’t kill all of you!” She sneered. “You have attempted to kill a Queen of the Union! You have exactly five seconds to explain yourself Kavalian or I will order my ships to turn all of you into nothing but memories!”

“The commander of the ship that fired on you acted of his own accord!” Fener barked. “You insulted him! He wanted revenge!”

“You expect me to believe that!” Aricia hissed.

“It is the truth!” Fener exclaimed loudly. “I know you can see my ships are only acting defensively! We have not raised shields and we are all radiating a non-hostile beacon! Angak acted of his own accord and he paid for that folly with his life and took his crew with him. You have killed over seven thousand of our men.”

“And you expect me to weep for them?” Aricia seethed as her eyes and teeth were still very prominently wolf like. “They fired on Isabella Leonidas unprovoked because I insulted this Angak’s pathetic manhood. Make no mistake Captain Fener, if Martin Leonidas were here you would all be dead for this action! Now what do you want? Our forces are maneuvering to kill the rest of you... so speak quickly if you wish to save them.”

“You would continue your attack?” Fener gasped.

“For what you have done I will destroyed all of you!” Aricia barked viciously. “Give me a reason not too!”

“This was a mistake!” Fener spoke quickly. “You have suffered no damage while you have destroyed one of our ships and the seven thousand men on it. Surely this is retribution enough?”

“I am a Spartan female and Queen!” Aricia told him with fervor in her azure eyes. “I will say when there has been enough retribution Kavalian!” She moved closer to the holo image of the Kavalian Captain. “Plot a

course away from the border Captain Fener and do so quickly. Direct your ships to not power their weapons or raise their shields. I will have part of my Strike Wing following you, and if you so much as sneeze in a threatening manner I will have them finish you without hesitation. Am I making myself clear little man?"

Fener's face was twisted into a sneer as he looked at Aricia in the transmission but he kept what he wanted to say from escaping his lips. "How do I know you won't attack regardless of what you say?"

"You don't!" Aricia told him. "That is why you should leave quickly. The longer you remain the more my anger grows. And it is that time of the month for me and I can become very unpredictable."

"We will do as you say! This time." Fener spoke in a low growl. "Pray we don't meet in the future child Queen. I will not hold back then."

Aricia smiled exposing her fangs. "Do not flatter yourself Captain Fener." She spoke coolly. "And thank whatever gods you may pray to that I *have* held back this day. *MJOLNIR'S HAND* out!"

Komirri looked at her with a sly smile. "That time of the month my Queen?" He asked.

Aricia grinned. "Something I learned from Anja." She said. "I am going to transfer to the frigate Komirri to help Bella. Track these Kavalian fools and if they veer from their course kill them. All of them."

Komirri nodded. "Consider it done."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

APO PRIME

MJOLNIR'S HAND BASE

Resumar had taken a mate!

Her son with *Nauta Melme* had chosen a wife!

Dysea Leonidas stared at the monitor after watching the Netnews reports for the third time, the image frozen on the screen was that of the golden blond hair and bright blue/green eyes of Athani Leonidas.

Resumar had taken a wife and mate and not just any wife, but the youngest daughter of the Kavalian Prefect and a woman that was twice his age if her history was accurate. Dysea gazed at the picture of Athani Leonidas sitting without fear on Cemath's back. The likeness had apparently been taken just as Resumar had climbed into the saddle on Cemath's back behind her, and it captured the smile on her face and the adoring look in her eyes just seconds before they had kissed. She looked quite beautiful at that moment, her body firm and definitely in peak physical condition from what Dysea saw. It had taken her a moment to realize that the young woman had a two meter long tail that extended out from her tailbone. A dexterous tail that this Athani could obviously use quite well considering she had wrapped it around her son's leg and his waist at different times. Dysea could feel nothing but extreme pride at Andro's actions in defending his brother, or at Resumar's obvious protective nature of one he considered his wife. He was without a doubt committed to this young woman if Thr'won had been the one to marry them. She would never have performed such a ceremony if she had any doubts to Resumar's intention or his true feelings, or those of this Athani.

And Dysea had missed it entirely.

Dysea heard the humorous intake of breath from beside her and turned to look at her daughter Normya.

They were occupying the north end of the base, their *STRIKER* already hidden in the hanger. The barracks building and gathering center were connected and allowed for passage through interior halls and corridors without having to leave the actual building. This lounge area was set up to be very comfortable and even though they all had separate quarters, they were spending most of their time here. No one knew they were on Apo Prime and they had spent the last two days resting, scouting and working out the details of their plan to capture the Chief Engineer who had worked on Normya's ship. Dysea knew Anton and Cihera were joining them today with several Drow, and they would wait until they arrived before moving. Esther and Tir'ut were using the shadows almost constantly to follow and track this man, making sure the intelligence they had was accurate. The pureblood female vampire Marci, Armetus's second in command and someone Dysea knew well from their time on Elear, was operating with them personally and her praise for Tir'ut's skill and patience was very genuine.

Dysea met her daughter's emerald colored eyes. Resumar had inherited his father's deep dark eyes, while Normya looked the twin to her. Dysea had discovered much about her daughter in the last few days, more than she had ever suspected or known and needless to say it made her very proud.

"You look as if a Parletian weasel has stolen your necklace mother." Normya said with a grin.

"I should have sensed it when they returned to Earth." Dysea said softly.

Normya shook her head with a bright smile. "You would not have been able to mother. Andro taught all of us to shield in a way that none of our mothers or father could probe us." She told her mother with that ever present smile.

"You don't trust us?" Dysea asked shocked.

Normya chuckled. "Mother... you are our parents. It's not a matter of trust." She stated. "We don't want you to know everything that goes through our minds. We do have some secrets you know. Andro taught all of us how to do it."

Dysea shook her head and smiled and took Normya's hand. "Well Andro has done an excellent job in teaching this to all of you." She said. "Though I doubt your father will be very happy he has done this."

"She's very beautiful." Normya spoke motioning with her head to the image of Athani. "If she was able to grab onto Res's heart mother, she must be very special. You trust him don't you?"

Dysea nodded. "I know... and yes I trust him completely. He is far too much like Andro and your father." She said. "Though I fear things will become very dangerous for her now. And for your brother. The Kavalians are not very forgiving."

Normya nodded. "Maybe not... but neither is father or Andro."

Dysea grinned. "This is very true." She stated. She looked at Normya, saw something in her eyes and knew instantly that she wanted to talk with her. "What is it Normya?"

Normya Leonidas met her mother's eyes evenly. She had always been able to talk with her birth mother, all of her mothers in fact, quite easily and about anything. All of her sisters had, and it made all of them very close through the years. Normya had struggled these last days with the feelings that were coursing through her for the hulking son of the Immortal Cha'talla. Her Coming of Age fever had long since passed, and Normya Leonidas now knew this was not related to that. Tir'ut's ginger like scent tickled her female wolf nose in a way no man ever had, and there were many males that had shown quite a bit of interest in her in the last two years alone as she got closer to her Coming of Age. Elves and Lycavorians alike. There were some who wanted the prestige and honor of being husband or mate to a daughter of the King, not to mention that she was breathtakingly beautiful. She and her sisters were always on some Netnews magazine or something after a State Dinner or function that they had to dress formally to attend. There were other males who were genuinely interested in her for her beauty and her brains as well.

None of them compared to Tir'ut however.

Tir'ut was different in so many ways from the men who wanted to court her, and it was this difference that drew her to him like a powerful magnet. He was an accomplished pilot as well as being an extremely lethal fighter. She had seen that all with her own eyes. He was huge in comparison to her, equally as large as her uncle Danny, yet she had also seen him playing with the small children on Kranek as if they were precious items. He encouraged them to learn all they could, to never be biased and to have an appreciation for beauty and intelligence and above all else... life.

Normya remembered how she felt being carried in his arms, the heat his powerful body caused within her. She knew that he could not affect her as they had been trained to believe about Immortals. His mother Esther, easily equal to her mother Anja in knowledge of genetics, had utterly eliminated that particularly nasty part of Immortal genealogy in Cha'talla's tribe. She had seen it for herself on Kranek in the very happy marriages of the female elves to the Immortal soldiers in his tribe. How they were all viewed as the Blessed Wives to these men, which to an Immortal and a vampire was like godliness. They were Immortal and elf marriages that were equally as strong and powerful as any in the Union. The many different children of Elf/Akruxian genes as well as the pure Akruxian children that she and Tir'ut had played with were bright and playful and above all else they were happy. The complete acceptance of her and the other elves as cherished members of the Immortal tribe of Cha'talla. It was very nearly overwhelming to her.

Tir'ut's dark eyes were like bottomless orbs of beauty to her and Normya wanted to lose herself in those eyes more and more each day. She pressed against him whenever she could, loving the feel of his hard body

against her. He no longer drew away when she did this, and Normya knew he was becoming more possessive of her and that fact sent incredible, delightful shivers shooting through her whenever she thought about it. He was the son of an Immortal yes, but while she had seen the serious side of him, the side that could turn deadly in an instant, she had also seen the playful and humorous side of him as well. This more than anything had pulled her in and kept her wanting to discover more, until she felt as she did now.

“*Amille*.” Normya spoke softly using the elven term for mother. Dysea smiled inwardly knowing Normya only used that name for her when she was serious about something and wanted her to know she valued her mother’s advice. “*Amille*... I think I am...”

Dysea took her hands and squeezed them. “Are you falling in love with him Normya?” She asked softly.

“Mother... it’s not the fever!” Normya said quickly. “That has long since passed! I don’t want you to think...”

“I don’t think that Normya.” Dysea continued. “Your scent would be very different if it was simply your Coming of Age Fever. What I smell is your womanly scent. And I know it calls for him, it spikes whenever you are in the same room as him. Just as mine does whenever your father and I are together.”

“I think about him all the time mama.” Normya said shyly. “I smell him wherever I go, even if he is not near me. His scent... it is like sweet ginger on the wind. I want to be around him all the time. I want to... I want to feel his arms around me mother, holding me. Squeezing me as he did on Yocetu.”

Dysea smiled at Normya having already accepted what was happening between Tir’ut and her daughter. Her conversation with Esther had only confirmed everything to her. “These things you feel are not wrong Normya.” She said. “Don’t ever think that. And from what I have seen he is just as drawn to you as you are to him. That much is very obvious. Esther and I have already spoken of this.”

Normya looked at her surprised. “You have?”

“Did you think as mothers, seeing what is happening between our children, did you think that we would not talk?” Dysea said with a smile.

“His tribe is different now mother.” Normya spoke and finding she was defending the Immortal tribe of Cha’talla, one of the most feared Immortals to ever live. And she was doing it without question. “They have changed *Amille*. Cha’talla has changed.”

“Yes I know.” Dysea spoke nodding her head. “That change began the day your father saved T’lolt I think. And the day Esther gave to Cha’talla what he had never had before. Your father has always told us to never fear the unknown and our children are following that teaching right to the letter.” She said with a smile.

Normya chuckled. “Well... he did pound it into our heads as we were growing up.” She stated.

Dysea nodded. “Do not fear what you feel for him Normya. If it feels right to you, if it is what you want, then go after it. Do not hesitate and do not question. You are still a female Alpha wolf and you do not lack for confidence. Go after it Normya... just as we have taught you.”

“I think he worries that he... he won’t be accepted.” Normya said.

Dysea laughed softly. “Your brother just married a Kavalian female.” She stated plainly. “And your brothers Arrarn and Andro have entered into a different world themselves. I think acceptance is something we will grow very intimate with in the months ahead.”

Normya looked at her. “What do you mean?” She asked.

“It is something I have seen through the years in my visions. I have never told anyone, not even your father.” Dysea said looking at her with a smile. “And what I have seen is coming true. Do not worry Normya, change and different is a norm for our family it seems. And as our children grow and become who they are meant to be... we will become very familiar with those words.”

“We...”

The door to the lounge area slid open and they turned to see Anton and Cihera walk into the room, three Drow behind them and the petite blond haired elf female between them. They came to their feet with bright smiles.

“Anton!” Dysea exclaimed. “Cihera!”

There was no hesitation as Anton and Cihera crossed the room quickly, and Las’elh watched as Anton gave his Aunt a bear hug, picking her up off the floor while Cihera and the near twin to Queen Dysea shared a pleasant and warm hug.

“It is very good to see you *Tenna*.” Anton spoke as he set Dysea back on the floor.

Dysea touched his cheek and nodded. "Marci told me what happened on Nebonese." She said. "The MUTT team and your friends made it off?"

Anton nodded as he turned and looked at Normya. "Hi ya cousin." He spoke as he lifted her into his arms and hugged her tightly while Cihera and Dysea shared a much more subdued embrace.

"Armetus split us up." Cihera replied as she held Dysea's hands, picking it up from her husband. "It seems our paths are converging and he thought it might be better if we assisted you and Normya."

Dysea nodded. "Indeed." She spoke. "And your assistance will be much appreciated."

Cihera turned and took Las'elh's hand with no hesitation, pulling her closer. Dysea saw the possessive nature of this act and she smiled inwardly. She knew full well the influence and magnetism a Drow female could have on not only men but other females as well, and Cihera was a powerful Drow female raised by another powerful and influential Drow female in Lynwe. It appeared as if Las'elh was just as taken with Cihera as Dysea watched her grip Cihera's hand tightly.

"Tenna... this is Commander Las'elh. You spoke to her briefly on our ship." Cihera spoke.

Las'elh bowed her head slightly to the Queen of Elear and one of the five Queens of the Union. "It... it is an honor Milady." She said.

Dysea nodded. "Yes I remember. Commander Las'elh... the first thing you should be aware of is that I abhor titles." She took Las'elh's hands and squeezed them. "And I believe many of us, me included, owe you an apology."

Las'elh looked at her stunned. "Queen Dysea... that is not..."

"That is needed." Dysea interrupted her. "And I give it to you now, with the pledge that we will find your sister and the other elves taken with her. It seems that path is also converging with what we are working on as well."

Las'elh met her eyes and nodded her head. "Thank you Milady." She stated.

Dysea smiled and looked at the Drow behind them. "Welcome... all of you." She said. "We are waiting for the other members of our team to arrive and we will fill you in on what is happening."

Anton looked at her. "Other members of your team?" He asked puzzled. "I thought it was just you, Normya and Lexi." He said. "Where is Lexi by the way? And Iriral?"

Dysea smiled. "There are some things you should know before we move forward." Dysea said. "And I don't want you to be surprised."

Normya canted her head slightly as Tir'ut's ginger scent filled her head and she felt his Mindvoice presence wash over her, making her fidget on her feet in happiness. "Too late." She said.

"Too late for what?" Anton spoke as he turned to look at her.

Anton's eyes grew wide as he saw something he was completely unprepared for in any way.

"Immortal!" He screamed as his Shi Viska burst into existence and he was bringing it up to bear on the huge Immortal that was coming up behind Normya like a silent ghost as he unwrapped the shadows from around his body. His mind didn't register the dark haired woman beside Lexi, or that Iriral was just entering the massive room as well, acting as if nothing was wrong in the least. Cihera and the Drow were reacting just as Anton was, bringing their many weapons up. He didn't understand why the huge Immortal stopped in his tracks with a surprised expression on his face, nor was he able to process that this Immortal had unwrapped the shadows from around his huge body or that he looked unlike any Immortal he had ever seen images of.

"Anton... no!" Dysea screamed moving as fast as her elven and wolf speed allowed. Her emerald eyes were wide as she realized it wouldn't be fast enough and Anton's Shi Viska left his arm in a blur.

It was not fast enough for Dysea, but someone else moved with greater speed and urgency.

None of them could have predicted the speed with which Normya moved. Part of it was her inbred elven and wolf speed and reflexes, but the larger part of it was her growing love for the massive half vampire, half Immortal who had risked everything that he was to save her. And the man who was claiming her heart more and more as each hour passed. Normya appeared in front of Tir'ut, her five foot three inch body looking ridiculously tiny against his six foot four frame, but her emerald green eyes were ablaze and her wolf fangs were fully extended as she pressed herself up against the front of Tir'ut and snarled almost viciously as she lifted her hands in front of hers and Tir'ut's bodies as his arm curled around her waist protectively.

Tir'ut himself acted with all his inbred vampire speed as if someone was attacking his beloved Normya. His thick arm snaked around her waist and he was pulling her to the side as his other hand came up with

blistering velocity, his Immortal sword held tightly in a one handed grip, his eyes now cobalt blue and his vampiric fangs extended fully as he hissed in anger at Anton. Surprisingly he was unable to move Normya very far for she had pushed against him snugly and was holding herself in front of him for some reason. Anton, Cihera and the others could only watch in deep wonder and fascination as a soft, shimmering and almost metallic glow surrounded Normya and Tir'ut, completely encompassing their bodies. Anton's Shi Viska appeared to ricochet off some invisible field only inches from them and it spun out of control before slamming into the wall of the lounge and imbedding itself eight inches deep. It was then Dysea was able to get in front of Anton, his dark eyes wide in shock at what they had just seen. She lifted her hands.

"Enough!" She bellowed even as Esther and Lexi could only stand there in gaping awe. "They are friends!"

Anton was looking at where his shield was stuck in the wall, Cihera, Las'elh and the Drow were staring open mouth in astonishment at Normya as she tucked her frame even closer to Tir'ut as he spun the sword gracefully in front of them defensively. Normya's striking emerald wolf eyes were outlined in black and her wolf fangs were prominently exposed. She made no attempt to dislodge Tir'ut's firm grip on her body, and she either didn't notice or did not care that his large hand was pressed firmly against the underside of her left breast as he held her.

Anton shook his head, unable to comprehend that someone had deflected his Shi Viska, and he looked at his aunt. "*Tenna?*" He spoke cautiously.

Dysea took his arms. "They are our friends! Put your weapons down! All of you!" She barked.

"*Tenna...* Aunt Dysea... he is... he is an Immortal." Anton gasped looking at Tir'ut and the way his cousin was protecting him, shielding him with her body. It was the typical reaction of a female wolf when defending her mate or loved one and it stunned Anton to see Normya displaying this behavior. "Isn't he?"

Dysea turned and looked at Tir'ut, seeing both him and Normya now taking notice of the soft metallic glow around both of them. She watched as Normya reached out tentatively to touch what appeared to be at first glance, a very powerful Mindvoice shield. Normya's head turned upward to look at Tir'ut who was also doing the same thing, his cobalt blue vampire eyes wide in astonishment.

"Did... did we do that Tir'ut?" Normya gasped.

Tir'ut pulled his hand back and spun the Immortal sword gracefully in his grip until it resided back in its scabbard on his back. This motioned impressed the Drow who were present for he had not hesitated in the least. He glanced at Normya quickly, staring into her eyes. "I... I don't know. I... I think so." He spoke softly as he too reached out to touch the near invisible shield again.

Irral chose this time to come forward from where she had watched everything transpire with some dragon humor. She had suspected what was happening between Normya and Tir'ut from the first moment she had seen them together. What they had just accomplished only served to confirm this beyond any doubt.

It appears that Normya and Tir'ut share a bond much like rider and dragon. She spoke within Mindvoice so that everyone heard her. *And powerful it is.*

Tir'ut and Normya looked at her as the others stood there looking at her still shaken by what had just occurred.

"...saved her life without any hesitation and against his father's orders." Dysea was speaking. "And he did it twice."

Anton, Cihera, Las'elh and the Drow sat with Esther and Lexi. Anton and Cihera turned and looked at where Normya and Tir'ut sat a short distance away in front of Irral. Normya sat on the floor in a lotus position, Tir'ut's huge frame squatting behind her easily and touching her back. They had their hands together as they spoke with Irral in Mindvoice, the soft metallic like glow active around their joined hands and Normya with a bright smile on her face.

Anton turned back to his elven aunt. "Cha'talla's tribe? The Cha'talla?" He spoke still somewhat incredulous. "Aunt Dysea... I... we thought he was dead. Those are the reports we have been getting out of Coven space all these years. He was... the High Lord's Immortal Captain. He was... he fought Uncle Martin's father on Earth."

"Yes he did." Dysea answered. "And yes he was."

“Then... then he is not dead?” Anton said.

Dysea shook her head with a smile. “Not unless there is another six foot six Immortal out there who goes by the name of Cha’talla.” She said.

“Everyone thinks... everyone thinks he is dead.” Cihera said.

Esther chuckled as she sipped the mug of tea she held. “Yes... and we have cultivated that idea.” She answered from her spot next to Dysea. Esther felt a fast friendship growing with the elven Queen because of what was happening between their children and she was not going to shy away from it. “Now however, now I don’t think we will be able to hide it for much longer.”

“He is... he is your son?” Cihera asked Esther as she turned her head back from looking over at Tir’ut and Normya with her amber eyes.

Esther nodded. “Tir’ut is the oldest of mine and Cha’talla’s sons. Only he and Lynom, who is a year younger, only they are old enough to actually leave Kranek and go out into the world. Their younger brothers are only thirteen and eleven.”

“And you are... you are married to him? To this Cha’talla?” Las’elh asked still somewhat shocked.

Esther smiled and nodded her head. “Very happily I might add.” She said. “For a quarter century now. He is not the same Immortal all of you have been raised reading about I assure you. The High Lord’s attempt at killing him for attempting only to improve his people’s outward appearance ripped whatever loyalty to the High Coven he had out of his chest.”

“He was holding Lisisa for this purpose! To experiment on her!” Cihera spoke somewhat harshly.

Esther nodded. “He was the one responsible for her being on Lycavore yes. He did not bring her there to conduct experiments on her however. His intent was to try and discover how her vampire and wolf genes blended so synonymously with one another in the hopes of using that knowledge to alter the outward features of his people. He was not aware of how she would be treated by those on that planet, or how the Lycavorians would view and treat her. He will not say he wasn’t wrong in his actions. Quite the contrary actually. He will be the first one to say it was the wrong thing to do. He has balked against revealing our settlement to the Union before now for the simple fact he did not think he had done enough to show King Leonidas that he has changed. I fell in love with the Cha’talla that remained after Veldruk stripped all that he was from him in that moment. He died that day, yes. But he was also reborn into the man he is today.”

Dysea nodded. “I have seen this myself. I spent nearly a week with them on Kranek and what I saw was remarkable. Esther has suppressed the gene that makes female elves subservient to them. Suppressed it within every male of Cha’talla’s tribe. The men of Cha’talla’s tribe did this willingly, knowing they had to change who they were fundamentally. They have elves living with them now. Other species within their settlement. Part of their ruling body has elves on it and all of the female elves that have come to be with them through the years are now the Blessed Wives to Immortal soldiers and they love their husbands just as any of us would here in the Union. All of them have beautiful children; I saw three newborns while I was there. Elf and Akruxian. The head of their school is an elf. They...”

“How many?” Anton asked.

Dysea shook her head. “That is not important now. We...”

“Dysea...” Esther interrupted her. “We can not hide any longer. Cha’talla knows this, and especially not now with what is happening between Tir’ut and Normya. We don’t want to hide any longer.” She looked at Anton evenly. “We came to Kranek with just over ten thousand of Cha’talla’s tribe. Those that were not butchered by the Coven when they broke away twenty-six years ago. We have prospered and grown to include many different species. Our tribe is now just over thirty thousand strong. And we are not on the top of Aikiro’s list of happy people to visit.” She finished with a smile.

Dysea matched her smile. “Yes... I saw this myself as well.” She answered. She turned back to Anton. “Tir’ut and Esther saved Normya from the vampire scum who were ordered to capture her. Then he saved her from a horrible death on Yocetu at the hands of a vicious predator on that planet and he was seriously injured in the process. Cha’talla and his tribe protected both of us while we were on Kranek and even now they are working with several of our engineers to bolster the defensive capabilities of their settlement with Andro’s help.”

“Andro knows?” Anton gasped.

Dysea nodded. “Yes.”

“So... so Uncle Martin knows all this?” Cihera asked almost immediately after her husband.

Dysea nodded and looked at where Normya and Tir’ut sat. “Martin knows most of it. Andro knows all of it.” She said. “We have not told your uncle about the attempted kidnapping and sabotage of Normya’s ship for obvious reasons.”

“*Sibfla!*” Anton hissed. “Uncle Martin... he would close down the borders and take his entire Fleet Group into The Wilds after this Gareld fellow.”

Dysea nodded. “Which is exactly what we don’t want until we find out who among our people here on Apo Prime are involved and how much.”

One of the Drow males hissed in anger now. “I thought we had gotten past traitors within our Union Lady Dysea!”

Dysea nodded. “So did I Neerzen. So did I. It appears that is not the case. For whatever reasons, we have traitors among us again, and they apparently have no qualms about targeting whoever they need too in order to accomplish their goals.”

“That’s why Armetus sent us here?” Cihera asked.

Dysea nodded. “It appears that whoever is targeting Normya got their directives from here on Apo Prime. And whoever is targeting Normya is also involved with the disappearance of the elf females. Just under a hundred of them if L’tian’s information is accurate from what they have uncovered.” Dysea looked at Las’elh. “Your sister included Las’elh.”

“And it starts with this Chief engineer I take it?” Anton asked.

Esther nodded now. “It appears that is the case yes. Though I do recommend we put off snatching him as we had first planned Dysea. At least until we have watched him for a time more.”

Dysea looked at her. “Something happened today?”

“Tir’ut noticed it from the ground first.” Esther spoke. “I was on the other side of the promenade and did not see it. He says this man has recently been paid for something he has arranged concerning elves.”

“How did he see that?” Anton asked.

Esther smiled with a shrug. “Tir’ut and his brother Lynom have taken the very best from both their father and I it seems. All of our sons it seems, as even my younger sons are showing signs of having the same skills as their brothers. Cha’talla was the foremost warrior among his people, something for which he was feared for, even among your people. I can not begin to describe the type of training he has received from so many different sources. I was trained by some of the most powerful Mindvoicers within the High Coven including Aikiro herself. Both of my sons can use the shadows far better than I, on a par with what you have told me Isabella is capable of.”

Anton’s eyes went a little wider. “*Anse!*” He exclaimed. “Aunt Isabella is a *nubous* ghost when she wraps the shadows around her! Carina and Zarah too!”

“Yes well... Tir’ut was tracking this man today and he got close enough to read over his shoulder from a data pad.” Esther spoke calmly. “Funds were being deposited into an account he has set up for arranging the kidnapping of half a dozen female elves from a transport that departed several days ago from the border resort Tupacia Prime. It is just across your border and near Gellen Station.”

Dysea looked at her. “This involved the same people?”

Esther shook her head. “Tir’ut doesn’t seem to think so. He wasn’t able to make out the entire message, but he did manage to make out a name. A Colonel Drtev. Does this name sound familiar?”

Dysea shook her head. “No... but the kidnapping of more elf females troubles me. I will need to contact L’tian and speak with him in regards to this.” She answered. “You think this Drtev is important?”

“It is a vampire name. Reasonably common, but a vampire name nonetheless. I would suggest allowing your nephew here to go over all the information we have gathered until now and combined it with whatever they have gathered.” Esther said. “I am not an intelligence operative or analyst... I am more of a...doctor and teacher now. They are trained for this, I am not. Perhaps they can pick up something with their training and knowledge that we have overlooked. And do so quickly.”

“Why? What is the rush?” Cihera asked.

“As long as there is a threat to Normya and her safety, my son will not rest until that threat is eliminated. His vow to her and his love for her will not allow it.” Esther spoke looking over to where Tir’ut was squatting

behind Normya, Dysea following her gaze. “Soon however, soon he will begin to grow tired of all this sneaking around and he will take what his father calls the direct approach.”

“The direct approach?” Anton spoke softly, his eyes narrowing. “Why do I get the feeling that would not exactly be a pleasant experience?”

Esther nodded with a smile. “Tir’ut is very much like his father I’m afraid. If we do not discover who is involved in this, and do so in an expedient manner, Tir’ut will begin killing his way to the person who took the contract out on her to begin with. And he won’t stop until that person is dead by his hand and the threat to Normya is eliminated. Once he initiates that, the rest of our clan, his older brother Fash’ka, his uncle T’lolt and a few others, they will mobilize to assist him as part of their *Iglata d’Vlos* to your daughter Dysea.” Esther looked at her. “And he will start with this Chief Engineer person.”

Anton grinned. “Wow... I can’t believe I’m going to say this... but I like his version of the direct approach!”

Dysea reached out and took Esther’s hand. “Then let us make sure he does not need to do this.” She stated. “Because I’m quite sure that should it come to that, Normya’s brothers will be beside him, and we do not need Spartans and Immortals killing their way across the Union in search of this person.”

Esther nodded. “No we do not.”

...*excellent*. Iriral told them as Normya and Tir’ut moved the small glimmering metallic ball between their hands almost effortlessly. It was a definite physical manifestation of their new Mindvoice bond, and something that Iriral knew they would have to learn to control very soon to keep from hurting themselves as well as others.

That is excellent control for just now discovering what you share. Do not move too quickly, either of you. Iriral spoke softly. What you have discovered is very new and if you try to do too much too soon it may injure you before helping you. You will need instruction from the Elder Mother or the Val’istar very soon as I am not a teacher. Only they would have any knowledge of what you have found this day.

Tir’ut had been trying for several minutes now to ignore the sensations sweeping through him with Normya leaning into his body and his face so close to her hair that he could just detect the sweet smell of orange cloves in her blood. His dark eyes fell upon Normya’s elven ear, and while not the four inch high ears of her mother or other full blooded elf females, they were still just over two inches high and elegantly curved to a point. Tir’ut knew that elven ears were extremely sensitive and he knew of this about female elves from those Immortals on Kranek who had elven wives that they worshiped. He knew that to caress the outer ridges of their ears expressed affection and desire for them and was deeply rooted in their elven culture. Tir’ut could no longer control himself and he lowered his lips to her ear and nuzzled the outer ridge gently with his nose.

The effect on Normya Leonidas was very telling.

Elven ears were one of the most erogenous zones of the elf body, even on the males. The right amount of pressure and caress could make a female elf coo out her delight if she desired you or found you attractive, or she could snap your head back violently if the advances were unwanted. In Normya’s case, given that she was falling in love with Tir’ut more by the hour, the incredible vibrations of delight rippled through her making her entire body pulsate. Her eyes closed dreamily and she leaned into Tir’ut’s nuzzle of her ear almost naturally, her hands gripping his tightly as Iriral looked on with an amused expression. Tir’ut mistook her leaning into him as rejection and he began to pull away.

“Forgive... forgive me *Il kal’daka darthirii*.” He spoke softly.

Normya turned her head quickly, pulling his arm tighter around her waist before he could pull it away. “No.” She gasped in a whisper looking into his beautiful dark eyes. “Do... do it again Tir’ut.”

Tir’ut looked at her stunned with her reaction. “Normya... I... it was wrong of me. I should not have...” Her mother’s words to her just a short while ago came back to Normya.

“Do not fear what you feel for him Normya. If it feels right to you, if it is what you want, then go after it. Do not hesitate and do not question. You are still a female Alpha wolf and you do not lack for confidence. Go after it Normya... just as we have taught you.”

“Tir’ut... do you love me?” She asked him softly her eyes glittering points of love and desire.

Tir’ut simply stared back at her with those dark eyes and for a moment Normya was afraid of what his answer would be. Could she have been wrong all this time? She saw him nod his head finally. “*Siyō.*” He replied in a whisper.

Normya felt like shouting to the heavens as she stared at his face. She did not see the bone spikes along his jaw line, or the tips of his vampiric fangs. She didn’t see the odd coloring of his bronze skin due to the mixture of his father’s pure Akruvian genes and his mother’s pure vampire genes. She didn’t see everything that announced to all that Tir’ut was the son of an Immortal. She only saw the glaring love in those dark eyes for her, and they way they gazed at her with complete devotion.

“*Xun ol 'sohna* Tir’ut. *Qualla* Tir’ut.” She spoke softly. (Do it again. Please)

Tir’ut was many things, but his father and mother had not raised a stupid son. He leaned over slowly once more and caressed her elven ear with the tip of his nose and his lips. He felt Normya draw his arm tighter as she leaned into him once more, a sigh of contentment escaping her lips. It was not a fluke she determined. It had not happened because he had caught her off guard. It had happened because she desired him just as strongly as he desired her. He told her he loved her, and two or three weeks ago had he said that to her, Normya would have laughed at him. Now at this very moment Normya’s mind and body were singing at his profession of love to her.

Now... now Normya Leonidas embraced that word because she no longer denied that she loved him as well.

Pardon me! Iriral exclaimed within Mindvoice. *I am trying to teach here!*

Normya and Tir’ut turned their heads quickly to look at her. Normya chuckled as she held Tir’ut’s arm and pulled it even tighter around her waist, not carrying in the least that his forearm brushed the bottom of her full breasts.

Sorry Iriral. She stated.

Iriral brought her huge head and snout closer to them. *Your love for each other grows stronger by the day. Leave behind all you have believed until this point and forge your own path into the days ahead. Both of you. What you have found... it is guided by destiny’s hand.* She said softly. *This love by itself may be part of the power you have discovered together. If you choose to pursue this, embrace it completely and without question, both of you. Do not hesitate and do not doubt. You will only be stronger this way. And happier.*

Normya could feel the heat of Tir’ut’s arm around her waist and the shivers of delight that still trickled through her from his caress. *I will.* She said immediately without the slightest amount of doubt in her voice.

As will I. Tir’ut echoed equally confident.

“Normya! Tir’ut!” They heard Dysea call to them from where they sat.

Tir’ut stood up from his squatting position with barely a pause and he pulled Normya to her feet easily. She turned and looked up into his eyes, still holding his arm tightly, not caring that others might see now her actions. “Our mothers call for us *Il kal'daka darthirii.*” He said softly.

Normya rolled her eyes and almost without thought she stepped closer to him and folded her petite frame into his powerful arms. She sighed in happiness when his arms wrapped around her, practically swallowing her body within his embrace. “They always will call for us.” She stated pressing her head to his chest. “At least until this issue is solved.”

Tir’ut nodded as he dropped his cheek to the top of her head and felt the strands of her platinum hair delight his skin. “Then let us solve it *Il kal'daka darthirii.* So that we may turn to other pursuits.”

Normya grinned. “Oh... I think I like the sound of that.” She told him. “So very much Tir’ut.”

SODRAG

Athani Leonidas stood next to Resumar holding his hand but not showing nervousness or intimidation of any kind. At least not outwardly.

Inside however, inside her heart was racing as she gazed at Resumar’s brothers and sisters in the back of the *STRIKER*. His brothers Arrarn and Denali matched him in height and physical definition, while his sisters were a varied sort. Eliani and Lisisa were shorter than her own five foot seven, but only by an inch or two,

while Carina and Zarah matched her height. Athani didn't know who the massive Spartan with blue eyes was, nor did she know who the blond vampire that stood to the side with him was, but at this moment it didn't seem to matter. Moneus stood beside Carina with a bored expression on his ebony face. Cemath and Elynth had already exited the *STRIKER*, but Athani could see those dragons easily butting heads or tapping tails with the five other dragons on the airfield.

Andro came walking back from the cockpit holding Sadi's hand while Ne'Veha walked beside them still in somewhat of a daze herself at what was happening all around her. He saw his siblings and shook his head.

"C'mon... I think we are all beyond the fear the unknown part! Our brother has returned! And he has brought his wife and mate with him!" He spoke loudly.

Resumar watched Eliani step up to him, her fern green eyes bright and her burgundy hair shiny. He knew Eliani would be the first one to come forward but he didn't expect her reaction. Eliani drew back her hand and popped her younger brother right in his jaw with a stinging slap, the noise echoing in the interior of the *DT*. Resumar's head snapped back as Athani looked on in horror.

"*Forn tukannaupae!*" Eliani spat. (You sonofabitch)

Resumar turned his head back around holding his jaw, but with a huge smile on his face. "It's nice to see you too *arande*."

"Why didn't you call us Res?" Eliani demanded. "We would have been there! *Forn piegn igord! Forn dervi sey alad allon meroc!*" (You stupid fool. You didn't have to do it alone)

Resumar picked Eliani off the deck and hugged her tightly before she could slap him again. "Thank you sister." He said as she wrapped her arms around her brother's shoulders and squeezed him back.

Athani watched as Arrarn stepped up now and looked at Athani from the side, seeing her tail and how it twitched nervously behind her. His eyes grew a little wider and he looked up into her eyes before shifting them to where he saw Resumar putting Eliani down.

"*Fervon... forn alad pera via kirs... eochos?*" Arrarn spoke. (Brother... you do know she has a tail.)

Athani's eyes darkened as she understood the words clearly. She may have still been learning how to speak this ancient language that Resumar told her about, but there was no doubt she understood it very well. She snapped the tip of her tail up to slap Arrarn square in his cheek. He staggered back, his eyes wide.

"*Sibfla!* It's alive!" Arrarn shouted before dashing forward and scooping Athani into his arms and squeezing her tightly. "I'll save you *fervon!*"

Athani was stunned and could do nothing as Resumar's brother squeezed her tightly in a bear hug. She finally got her arms free from his grasp and pushed against his shoulders. "Put me down you brute!" She barked to the laughter of some of those gathered.

Arrarn dropped her instantly with a large smile on his face as he looked at her. "She talks too!"

"Of course I talk *igord!*" Athani spat. "I am not stupid!"

Denali burst out laughing now and shook his head. "You're screwed Arrarn." He spoke stepping up to her. "She speaks the ancient language now too. She'll know what you are saying brother."

Athani looked at him warily as he took her hands in his and leaned over to kiss her cheek gently, surprising her even more since this was the same man who was husband to Lisisa had been poised to kill several of the Kavalian security detail as well as that idiot Jiss not so long ago.

"Welcome to our family Athani Leonidas. Don't mind Arrarn... he has recently been struck in the head by two bombs. One with black hair... one with red hair. They have combined to turn him into a raving madman!" Denali spoke.

"They love my charming personality!" Arrarn spoke crossing his arms over his chest. "Ask them yourself."

Lisisa dismissed him and shoved him in the shoulder as she came forward. "More than likely they do not yet know how *malda* you are." She stated as she gripped Deni's arm in her hands and looked at Athani.

"Welcome Athani."

"Thank... thank you." Athani stammered not really believing that the woman her people had only recently tried to force into the way of life she had left behind could be so kind to her. Lisisa saw the look on her face and she smiled.

“My father... our father Martin Leonidas... he has always told us that we should never fear the unknown. We should embrace it and cherish the wonders it could bring to us.” She stated softly. “You will find that we adhere to that. Sometimes more than he does.”

“Ain’t that the truth?” Eliani spoke as she moved back to stand next to the tall Spartan and vampire female.

“You have done nothing to warrant distrust from us.” Lisisa continued with a small smile. “Quite the opposite in fact if you have managed to pull our brother’s heart out of the box he has always kept it in.”

Zarah and Carina came up to her next. “Put aside all you have heard about our family Athani.” Carina told her as she kissed her cheek. “More than likely it is not even close to being accurate. We are much tamer.”

Zarah laughed as she too kissed Athani’s cheek. “Which day of the week is that sister?” She asked looking at Athani. “As our mother Anja says... be afraid... be very afraid. We are all crazy.”

Athani couldn’t help but chuckle now as Eliani leaned up on her tip toes and planted a soft kiss on Malic’s lips and then stepped back up to her with Nyla, taking her hands in her grasp. “You must be very special to have claimed our brother’s heart.” She said.

“Wait... I thought I was special?” Sadi spoke with a grin from next to Andro.

“You don’t count Sadi.” Eliani said turning to look at her with a smile. “Andro is easy when it comes to you. Essentially you have been together since he was eight months old and you are guilty of robbing the cradle.”

Sadi pressed close to Andro. “Then I believe I will insist on robbing more of the cradle.” She told them.

“Oh please!” Denali exclaimed. “Way too much info. Way too much!”

Athani heard the Leonidas children break into genuine laughter as Eliani turned back to her. “I want to give you a complete medical examine if that is all right Athani. Just to make sure Arrarn didn’t pass any known or unknown diseases to you. He can be very contagious at times. My mother sent me all the information she had on you. It will only take about an hour and then we’ll join my *piegn* brother and the rest of my *malda nathos* for dinner.”

Athani looked at Resumar quickly, questions in her blue/green eyes and he leaned over to kiss her deeply. “You are safe here *Aryschanne*. We are safe here. You will never have to be afraid again.”

Athani nodded with a bright smile then, his words washing over her and she allowed Eliani to lead her off the *STRIKER* with her sisters and Nyla in tow. She was walking into a new world, and it was a world she fully intended to embrace with all that she was.

Denali stepped up to Resumar as they watched them. “She smells good brother.” Deni spoke.

“Real good!” Arrarn agreed waggling his eyebrows.

Sadi snorted in disgust. “Oh please!” She exclaimed pushing Andro towards his brothers now. She grabbed Ne’Veha’s hand. “Come on Ne’Veha... the Alpha testosterone back here is getting too thick to breath through.”

Andro laughed as Sadi led Ne’Veha down the ramp, leaving the four brothers with Malic and Moneus. They all moved into a small group and the smiles faded quickly. They suddenly became six very serious Spartan soldiers.

“Res?” Andro asked.

“Qurot and Timur will be a problem as long as they are on Earth. Only Timur was going to be staying but now that Athani has gone and defected, they might be here a while.” Resumar spoke as he pulled the data pad from the small pack he was carrying. “This is everything she heard them speaking about. Everything she has been privy too. Given that their females are not part of military operations and such it isn’t much. I told her I didn’t want it, but she insisted Andro. She said it was her way of proving to us that her intentions are honorable. That this is what she really wants.”

“Her intentions have never been in doubt.” Andro spoke taking the data pad. “Not with the way her scent spikes when you are near her brother.”

“Nice tangerine scent too.” Arrarn spoke now; all trace of the carefree Spartan pilot gone and in its place a lethal and extremely skilled soldier. “I see why she caught your attention at first.”

Denali nodded as he looked down the ramp and saw the females in the distance. “She is learning the ancient language quickly brother. That is good. If we need to use it when they come for her she will know what we are saying.”

Resumar looked at Andro now. "You really think they'll come after her Andro?" He asked.

"It is hard to say." Andro answered. "On one side they are a brutal species when it comes to their females; we all know how they are treated."

Malic nodded. "Like animals." He said. "It is sickening."

Moneus nodded. "*Aovi*."

Andro nodded as well. "Normally I would say they wouldn't give it a second thought. On the other hand... she is the daughter of the Kavalian Prefect. The head *ronnus*! He might not take it too kindly that she has defected. I checked with mother in Sparta just before we landed and they have made no official announcement. That could be bad or it could be good. We won't know for a few days I'm betting, but it is definitely something we need to plan for. And until the Coven riders get used to her being here, for however long that is, get her an ArmorPly rig and make sure it has the markings of a Princess. That's what she is now, and that is how I want her treated. Though hiding her tail for the immediate future might be advisable."

Resumar nodded. "I'll see to it. She is very adept at hiding her tail and she knew that it might be a good idea at first. You think there might be trouble?"

Andro shook his head. "I have already told Carisia and Arrarn has told Narice and Toria. Between the three of them and the new attitude the riders and pilots have, I believe they will get over it quickly. None of them have directly fought the Kavalians in any way so the natural hate and anger is not there. Dante and Javier we will need to keep out of the loop though. The other riders are doing that almost as second nature now and they know it, but it makes them more dangerous."

Resumar looked at him. "Is this Dante Moran a threat to Zarah?" He asked knowing that Dante had been making comments and accidentally bumping into their sister at odd times if the reports he had read from Andro were correct.

Andro shook his head. "I don't believe so." He replied. "Yes Zarah is the youngest of us, but she has taken on many of Normya's more sedate traits and she is not stupid. Even with the fever running through her I believe she is safe. They have not had much contact outside of brief meetings in the REC center, but Rotan is keeping an eye on her. Whatever Dante has planned will not work."

Resumar nodded slowly and then looked at his brothers, Malic and Moneus. "Thank you Andro." He said turning to look at all of them. "Thank all of you."

Denali waved that off before any of his brothers did. "There is nothing to thank us for." He said. "We are your brothers and your friends. That is what matters."

"There is no way they could track the *STRIKER* here Andro but I'm going to push the defensive patrol line out another three kilometers anyway." Moneus said.

"Malic... don't neglect your studies with Vincix, but give Moneus as much help as you are able in arranging the new line." Andro spoke.

"Done." Malic spoke nodding his head.

"Mother is on Apo Prime with Normya. Anton and Cihera should have arrived sometime today." Andro spoke. He looked at Resumar. "You need to contact her *aulved*. She won't be happy you didn't tell her about Athani."

Resumar nodded with a knowing grin. "Thankfully I'm too old for her to spank anymore. That would be very embarrassing in front of my new mate and wife."

Arrarn laughed. "You just hang onto that thought brother. When she's done beating you, Deni and I will be laughing our *midas* off."

"Make sure she gives you an update on what is happening on her end Res. She can be just as sneaky as father at times." Andro spoke laughing softly. He lifted the pad. "And we need to find out what this plan they are talking about is. They obviously don't want Karun to know what it is for fear he may give it up to Lisisa I suppose."

Deni crossed his arms over his chest. "Lisi says Karun told her already that these were his instructions. Get close to her... and learn what he could. She was surprised that he revealed this to her."

Andro nodded. "Perhaps he thinks that could be a way for him to get inside our family. Get us to trust him."

“Or maybe he isn’t the son our uncle seems to think he is.” Deni said softly. “I trust Lisi on this Andro. And Ardis has become his constant shadow. Aunt Deia released her to be his escort whenever he leaves Sparta and Lisisa says our cousin is taken with him.”

“Ouch!” Arrarn said. “I wonder how that is going to fly with Uncle Isra? Ardis looks like Aunt Tarifa and is just as bull headed as Aunt Aihola.”

“I trust Lisi as well. Just remind her to be mindful... and to keep an eye on Ardis and how deeply that may be unfolding.” He said looking at him. “You are the only one Lisisa seems to listen to anymore.”

Deni snorted. “Yeah... like she’ll listen to me.”

Malic chortled with laughter. “And here I thought I had the only Leonidas daughter that is pig headed and willful.”

“Not by a long shot Mal.” Deni replied with a smile. “Not by a long shot. You got the one with the shortest temper though.”

“When are you going to tell father?” Arrarn asked looking at Resumar.

Resumar met his gaze. “Probably the same time you tell him that you are sleeping with Aikiro’s daughter *and* an agent of the Silent Death Division.” He answered with a grin. “Or the same time Andro tells him he and Sadi have taken Yuri’s daughter as their mate.”

“Whoa brother!” Arrarn said with a smile. “Check fire! Check fire!”

Resumar punched Arrarn’s shoulder lightly. “If I know father, his first stop when he returns from Hadaria will be here.”

Andro nodded. “A visit I am not looking forward too considering what we have taught the Coven riders up until now.”

“What do you mean?” Res asked looking at him.

Andro looked at Deni and then back to Resumar. “With the exception of Yuri’s sons, the riders are not turning out to be what Aikiro wants them to be I’m thinking.” He said. “They are different. Even Yuri’s daughter Lucia is changing.”

“Come again? Different how?” Res asked.

Deni looked at Resumar now as well. “They are beginning to believe in what they can do together Res.” He said evenly. “They are becoming true bonded pairs.”

RITAAH KAVALIAN SPACE

The sun was beautiful as it rose above the mountains and she allowed it to bath her naked body in its warmth. She was of medium height for an elf female, just five foot seven and barely a hundred and ten pounds soaking wet. Her breasts were not as large as her sister’s she thought, but that didn’t stop her husband Mican from lavishing attention on them nonetheless. Her waist was small and her legs lean and taut thanks to three years of living on Ritaah. Her legs ended at an exceptionally well sculpted ass that always seemed to draw the extra attention of Mican and his insatiable caresses.

Not that she complained about it in any way.

So much had happened in the last almost four years, beginning with the horror of being taken hostage by unknown assailants, and coming to this point of her young life. A point where she was a wife and mother already and loving every minute of it. Their life was not easy, in fact it was very hard and sometimes brutal, but Na’lia would not trade it for anything right now.

She and eighty odd other elves had been captured in that one raid. She had been on her way to the Medical Academy on Hadaria, having been offered a once in a lifetime event. An invitation to study and learn from the foremost medical researcher in the Union, the Hadarian Divine One Eurin. She was a Genetic Engineer by her schooling, and perhaps the brightest one to graduate from the University on Apo Prime, especially since she had been awarded the chance to study with The Divine One. She was only a hundred and twenty years of age, still a child by elven terms, yet her experiences in the last four years had made her grow up very quickly. She reached up and tucked her long, silky brown hair behind her four inch high elven ear as she sipped the

harsh coffee. It was an acquired taste really, and they had run out of their supply of Lycavorian coffee many weeks ago.

All of the elves with her on that ship, male and female alike, were some of the finest young researchers that the schools on Elear and Apo Prime could produce. Their fields varied from Genetics to Advanced Medicine to Bio-Engineering to Phased Physics. Like all elves they were benevolent by nature and once the initial shock of being kidnapped had subsided, the leader of their captors had put a choice to them on that ship. A choice none of them had ever expected.

He had begged them actually.

All of them towered over most of the elves by nearly a foot, his men no different than their leader, yet none of them brandished their weapons in a threatening manner. Not that it would have mattered, none of those with her were soldiers and they would not have known how to fire a weapon let alone hold one. At least not then. They had heard of these soldiers in the many different science reports, and they were said to be extremely violent and unstable. They were capable of aggressive behavior at the drop of a hat, killing without mercy or regard. At least that is what they had been led to believe about them. About all of them. They were bred to be fighters. Thrown into the thick of battle with no care for the cost of their lives. Many of them did not live for more than ten years, those that did were said to become crazed and out of control monsters. Na'lia and the rest of the elves discovered that day that these stories were put out by the Kavalian leadership itself to frighten others from discovering what these men had discovered all on their own.

Kavalian Biogenic Clone soldiers who desired freedom.

What they discovered on that ship that day completely destroyed all of their preconceived notions and beliefs. The leader of the raiding party had pleaded with them, begged them for their help and aide. He told them their plight, what all of them desired above all else. They were hunted by the Kavalian government, running from place to place staying one step ahead of their hunters, resorting to hunting themselves to defend each other. None of them were innocent of killing, all of them had seen some of the most vicious fighting between the KFI and the High Coven, and when it had come time to be put down at the end of their ten year life cycle, they had chose to rebel and not walk to the execution chambers willingly. They needed help. They could not survive without the help of the male and female elves on this transport, nor the three other ships they had captured and done the same with during the ensuing year. They had allowed the only one among them who desired to return to do just that. They had placed her in an escaped pod, given her ample rations and water, and even programmed the pod to take her to Union space. The others with Na'lia, and Na'lia herself, all of them had elected to remain and help them.

The Kavalian had been true to his word in every way.

They had eventually made their way here to Ritaah. They had the finest equipment that the Kavalians could purchase in The Wilds or steal. They were allowed to be armed and go within the massive encampment freely. They were protected without question, and they were given much leeway in how they ran their research facility. Many of them had even been off Ritaah on trips into The Wilds looking for equipment they needed. Na'lia and a dozen elves had even helped them to steal a transport laden with Hadarian medical equipment from orbit around Hadaria. They worked feverishly at solving the biggest issue facing the biogenic clones, their ten year life span. When nineteen of them could no longer sustain themselves and died before their very eyes, Na'lia and all the elves vowed no other would die. Three weeks of exhaustive work with little sleep and less food had given them their breakthrough after eight months of work. They had developed a compound that could halt the degenerative design of their genetic structure and allow them to live full lives. Within hours, every Kavalian clone was lining up to have their injection and feeling reborn in many cases. Those in their encampment here vowed to reach out to others who felt as they did, and in the following year their number grew by the hundreds, to include regular Kavalians who were not clones, but disenchanting with the war and the government as a whole.

In that year as well Na'lia had found love and become a mother.

The Kavalian clone leader who had pleaded with them that first day had always been close by to her. She had gone on several missions with him and while Na'lia was young for an elf, she was still a female and not stupid. The cloning process for the Kavalians removed their light coat of fur from their bodies, but maintained the feline nature of their bone structure and facial features. It had taken several months, but Na'lia eventually found herself comparing Mican to other males within their compound and coming to the conclusion that he was

very handsome. He began to spend more and more time around her, bringing her choice morsels of fruit he had discovered in the jungle all around them, or brightly covered flowers. It was not easy to claim the heart of a female elf, regardless of what different male species said to the contrary. Na'lia was no different, but she also found herself drawn to Mican in many ways. While he was a masterful military leader, Na'lia discovered his education was sorely lacking in other aspects and she took it upon herself to begin teaching him. Whether it was because he loved to learn, or he simply wanted to be with her, Mican absorbed and retained the information like a sponge. When he finally got around to being brave enough to nuzzle her elven ear, Na'lia could no longer deny her attraction to him.

Now she was so very glad she hadn't.

Na'lia felt the smooth touch of flesh on her leg and she smiled as that long and extremely talented tail began to curl around her calf and extend up her thigh. That tail, so soft and agile in its velvet like texture, had given her incredible pleasure through the last two years. Pleasure she would never have imagined, and now pleasure she found she could not live without. She felt him step up behind her silently, his thick, powerful arms encircling her waist as he leaned over nearly a foot to nuzzle her ever so gently behind her right elven ear. Na'lia sighed contently and leaned back against his broad chest, feeling the heat of his body as their flesh touched.

“Good morning.” She spoke wistfully.

“I woke and spied a goddess on my balcony.” His deep voice rumbled in her ear. “She was naked and her body called to me. She spoke to me as well.”

Na'lia smiled. “Did it now?” She said. “And what did this goddess have to say?”

“That I should worship her body completely for the rest of my days in this life.” He answered.

“You know... I have a husband who does a very splendid job in doing that.” Na'lia spoke.

“And your husband says it is time I showed you just how much happiness you have given him.” He answered.

Na'lia chuckled. “The last time you said that... we were locked together for two hours and Biama joined us six months later. Not that I'm complaining mind you, it was an exquisite two hours. And our daughter is a joy.”

“It is still early... she will not wake for at least three more hours.” He spoke as he nuzzled her ear firmly once more.

Na'lia closed her eyes in delight. “Then perhaps you should show me just what you have in mind husband.”

Na'lia heard the low growl escape his throat and he turned her quickly in his arms. She allowed the mug of coffee to drop to the floor as she gazed at the man who had stolen not only her heart, but her mind as well. His six foot three body was Spartan like in his definition, and oh so deeply tanned. The vertical slit of his stunning blue eyes could make her knees weak just looking at them, not to mention that when he smiled it was the most amazing thing to see how perfectly straight and white his teeth were. Not to mention sharp. It had taken her several attempts to learn how to kiss him without cutting her lips open on his fangs, but after that his kisses made her melt in his arms. She felt the hardness of his huge cock press against her bare abdomen and she became instantly wet and ready, knowing what he offered her and only her.

Mican stared into her beautiful elven face and could only thank whatever gods resided in the universe for bringing this creature into his life.

He had fought in hundreds of battles against the vampires and in all that time he did not know why. He had killed thousands of their soldiers and clones and even their famed Immortals who were said to be their deadliest and most skilled troops and he did not know why. He did not escape unscathed as the many scars on his body attested too, but all during that time he kept asking why. Whether from the horrors of war, watching the clone troops treated as so much fertilizer in battle at the hands of the Kavalian commanders, or from his own history he didn't know.

Mican came to the point where he had had enough.

The only difference between him and his clone brothers was that Mican knew who he was. He had a father and mother when he was born. A father that had callously subjected him to the early biogenic experiments attempting to create better soldiers. When he did not turn out as his father had wanted, he was cast aside and sent to wallow in the hundreds of vile battlefields that the clones were sent to. He had watched them

butchered by the hundreds, by the thousands, dying without hesitation at the orders of the Kavalian commanders wanting only glory. Mican alone had some sense of whom and what he was, and it was this that he began to pass onto his clone brothers.

A sense of individuality.

When it came time for those clones in the last batch to be led to the execution chambers like so many animals, Mican led the revolt that freed them. It was not well known among the Kavalian people or even the regular military officers that this had taken place. The Kavalian people really had no say in the government or what was happening except what his father and his cronies told them and most of the pureblood Kavalian military officers were only interested in advancing their own careers for the honor and placement of their Pride. Mican escaped that day with nine hundred and sixty-five clones, all of them within three years of the end of their life cycles. It was not his idea to capture the elves to help them, which had been the decision of his co-leader Channa, but it was a decision that had saved over eight hundred of his men. Since that time, their number had grown as they had spread the word among the clones and normal people. They still were not large, numbering only six thousand in all. They were a mixture of clones and normal Kavalians who wanted nothing to do with the KFI or his father anymore. And he was the unofficial co-leader of this group. This resistance as Channa called it, though they made many of the decisions together, so that if one of them were to die the other could still lead.

Mican had made a vow many years ago. A vow to see his father pay for what he had done to him. He had carried that hatred and revenge close to his heart for over twenty years and it was not until this elven female had come into his life that he had begun to heal and put that hatred aside. She had looked past the outer appearance and the remnants of the experiments on him, namely his tail and fangs. Na'lia had looked past this and accepted what was inside him, she had helped it to come out, and then she had given him a beautiful baby girl. She was the center of his universe now and Mican had dismissed his father completely. He knew one day however, one day he would need to face him.

His father was Prefect Keleru... and he would not let him live very long if he knew Mican still survived.

Mican lifted his petite elven wife into his arms and crushed her lithe body to his equally naked frame as he kissed her hungrily. Na'lia responded just as urgently, her arms wrapping around his shoulders and her hips undulating against his flat abdomen in need. Mican did not need to be aroused; simply holding his elven wife in his arms was more than enough to make him ready to please her. His cock was typical of Kavalian males, long and tapered almost to a point at the tip, growing thicker the further back along the shaft you went. He had thought he would hurt Na'lia with his size the first time they were together, but she quickly showed him the error of his thinking and knowledge of elf females. Of all the female species in the universe, it was most common to see elven females with men of other species. Their bodies were simply much more pliable and able to accommodate different species of males' reproductive organs. It was why elven females were so sought after as slaves in The Wilds, though he knew that particular trade had come to all but a screeching halt as soon as the new Lycavorian King had come to power. He had two elven females as mates, and it was not something he or they would allow.

"Take me husband!" Na'lia gasped in his ear, nibbling on the bottom of his ear lobe as she knew he liked.

Her words brought his full attention and focus back on his wife and with barely any effort he held her with one hand while positioning the tapered head of his fifteen inch cock at her already dripping opening. Na'lia whimpered in delight, shifting her hips quickly until the thin head slid inside her slick opening. Mican quickly gripped her wonderful ass cheeks in his hands as he looked at her. Her dark brown eyes were alive with blazing passion, matching his look of ardor.

"I love you Na'lia." He growled through clenched teeth before pulling her hips down.

Na'lia's eyes flew wide and she opened her mouth and howled out her ecstasy as Mican's cock impaled her completely in one single heart shattering stroke. Two years of loving this man had allowed her to adjust to his incredible size, and now Na'lia felt only agonizing pleasure as her husband sank into her tight, warm depths with barely a pause. When she finally reached the end of her plunge and she felt his huge balls come to rest against her ass cheeks Na'lia climaxed and climaxed hard.

Mican didn't pause a moment in pleasing his wife and he began to lift her hips and lower her back down even as he turned and pressed her back against the exterior wall of their balcony. Their bedroom faced outward

into the jungle all around them and not inward towards their encampment which allowed them some semblance of privacy. As he held her against the wall, he began to stroke into her body, slowly at first and then faster. Their lower bodies were already covered with her sweet juices and this had never stopped them before. Her hands gripped his shoulders, his back, her nails digging into his skin as she urged him to higher passion. Her lips and tongue danced across his cheeks and neck, licking him like a small puppy. He closed his eyes tightly and tucked his face into the hollow of her throat, trying to hold back his own explosion. His cock may have tapered to a thin head, but the last six inches of his shaft was extremely thick, and incredibly sensitive. Na'lia had learned how to send him over the edge just by using her inner pussy muscles, and she was not holding back now. She clenched the inner walls of her pussy tightly on his shaft every time he withdrew to slam into her again, each time causing blistering jolts of pleasure to careen through his body and mind.

“Fill... fill me!” She gasped into his ear. “Give me... give me your entire cock husband! All of it! Fuck me!”

Mican's hips were a blur now, his thick shaft thrusting into his elven wife with dominant power and control. Na'lia was coming continuously now, her juices pouring from her as they always did whenever Mican took her with such fervent passion. Her whole body was singing out its pleasure, white flashes exploding behind her wide eyes, a kaleidoscope of colors and incredible bliss washing over her. Somewhere in her mind she felt him begin to pound into her harder, his body tensing as he did, the signal that he was going to give her what she so desired.

His eruption started in his toes and his mind and traveled up his legs and down through the nerves in his body. It was a chain reaction, each wave of pleasure cascading upon the other for both of them. Despite his incredible stamina, Mican did not want to hold back, and when Na'lia reached down along their hips and clutched his pulsing balls in her soft hand he knew she did not want him to hold back any longer. He slammed into her one last time, burying all fifteen inches of his cock into her petite elven body and causing her head to toss back in wondrous enchantment.

Na'lia whimpered in delight when she felt the now familiar bulb at the base of his huge cock swell inside her, effectively sealing them together. She cried out in joyous harmony when she felt the rest of his cock shaft engorge, and grow incredibly hot and then her husband's seed was exploding from the now bloated cockhead deep into her belly. Na'lia's eyes rolled into the back of her head and she shuddered as each successive explosion was more powerful than the last. Instinctively she used her pussy muscles to caress his deeply anchored cock, drawing each eruption from him with gleeful abandon. Na'lia had studied the Kavalian reproductive organs in school, but she never thought she would be on the receiving end of a Kavalian male's explosive release. It was the reason for the huge bulb at the base of his cock, for when they were that close the bulb grew in size inside their mates and sealed them together so that none of his life giving seed would escape. It had startled her terribly the first time, when Mican couldn't withdraw from inside her and he continued to come for what seemed like forever. She couldn't however deny the immense pleasure having him filling her like this caused. Each of Mican's orgasmic explosions within her petite body triggered another orgasm from her and she would shudder, sometimes violently in her own release for as long as her husband expended himself into her depths.

Even as the first waves of mutual pleasure began to subside minutes later, Na'lia gripped the sides of his now sweaty face, kissing his lips and cheeks. Kissing him all over his face, unable to get enough of the way he smelled to her, or the way his thick arms held her tightly to his muscular body.

“Take... take me to our bed husband!” She finally gasped loudly. “I do not want... I do not want us standing up while we are locked together. I want to feel your weight upon me as you hold me.”

Mican didn't question her in the least and with an exhalation of exertion he held her in his arms and pulled her away from the wall. Na'lia wrapped her arms around his head and hissed in delight as each step he took caused more pleasure to seethe through her. She smiled to herself knowing they would be coupled together for at least an hour, and Mican would hold her tightly to his powerful body that entire time whispering professions of his love to her.

What had begun as something from a nightmare nearly four years ago had become a dream that Na'lia had no intention of ever letting go of. And she knew her husband felt the same way.

MJOLNIR'S HAND

UNION SPACE

1.8 LIGHT YEARS FROM BONTAWILLIAN BORDER

“...decided it would be better if Colin returns to Earth with us while Vonis continues on with you.” Isabella told Maros as they sat in the small pilot’s briefing room.

“To lend credence to our cause to the King?” Maros spoke.

Aricia shook her head quickly. “No Maros.” She stated confidently. “We do not doubt your cause. And Vonis will insure that whatever help we can give to you... you will receive. I believe... I believe Martin would want to see and talk with Colin. Perhaps to fully believe it is possible what has happened and to see it with his own eyes.”

“Maros... I want to do this.” Colin said gently. “I’ve... I’ve had the memories of who I once was back for a long time now. The one person who can make all that real is the Skipper.”

“You are real Colin!” Maros said. “You do not need a man to tell you that!”

“In this case... yes I do.” Colin spoke.

“You need not fear for him Maros.” Aricia said. “He will be quite safe. And he can be our conduit to Vonis, you and the other insurgents.”

“And we still need you to arrange a meeting with this General.” Isabella spoke. “We will help as much as we can, but Martin will want to meet this man before we fully commit.”

Maros nodded. “I believe the General would be open to that.” He said. “We can only contact him from certain ground based arrays. It is a security measure he put in place to protect his identity.”

Vonis nodded. “Excellent security. If the communications is not from a pre-picked array he won’t answer because he knows the communications will be compromised.”

Maros nodded. “Yes.”

“We’ve restocked your stores and you now have a full weapons load.” Aricia told him as she held out the data pad. “Several of our engineers have increased the efficiency of your LSD coil drive and the Shroud by point six mega-jewels whatever that means, and they say it will make you appear like a phantom among the stars.”

Maros looked impressed. “Point six?” He spoke incredulous. “Amazing.”

“Komirri suggests exiting at a different point along the Bontawillian border and not to reveal yourselves for any reason.” Aricia said. “The Bontawillian allow us to move freely through their space as their allies. A High Coven frigate is not something we could just explain away and for the moment it needs to remain a secret that we have met with you.”

Maros nodded. “I understand.” He looked at Aricia and Isabella sitting close to one another. “What will you do when you return?” He asked. “Your Netnews is sure to be waiting if what you have told me of the Kavalians is accurate. They will use your own Netnews people against you and demand that those you have supposedly captured have an open trial and then be executed.”

Isabella nodded. “More than likely.” She answered. “Let us deal with them.”

Maros looked at Colin before turning back to Aricia and Isabella. “I never truly believed this day would come.” He said. “I had no hope.”

“Well now you do.” Aricia told him. “Hold on to it Commander. Things as you know them will not be that way for much longer. That I can almost guarantee.”

Maros nodded and rose to his feet. “Then with your permission I will take my leave of you and escort Colonel Vonis to where we can contact the General.”

Aricia and Isabella got to their feet and shook the man’s hand. Vonis stepped up to Isabella and embraced her tightly. “Take care of Va’nimia for me sister.” He said softly. “Tell her I will be back soon.”

Isabella held his arms and nodded. “Always.” She told him. “Just don’t do anything stupid or reckless. She would be very upset with you if you did.”

Vonis chuckled. “I won’t.”

Aricia looked at Maros. “We are going to Shroud our entire Wing Commander. When we do, you may break away and begin your journey.”

“I look forward to one day standing with you again Queen Isabella.” He stated proudly.

“And I you.” Bella replied. “Now go... both of you. The Kavalians no doubt have long range sensors reaching across the border trying to find us. You must go to Shroud exactly when we do so that it appears we are slaved together.”

Maros nodded. “We will.”

“Then go with the gods Commander.” Aricia told him. “And we will see each other again in the future.”

Maros turned and with Vonis in tow they headed out of the small briefing room.

Colin looked at Aricia and Isabella as the door slid shut and he smiled. “So... now what?”

Aricia looked at him. “Now Colin Walsh.” She said taking Isabella’s hand. “Now we try and figure out a way to keep you alive.”

Colin grinned. “I like that. Alive is very good.”

THE WILDS

BELID

Pusintin stared at the Immortal leader Phy’iad with no fear in his eyes. He had a full squad of elite Kavalian Shock Troops from the famous Puma Bane Pride with him. They were Keleru’s personal troops, and they received training far in advance of normal Kavalian soldiers and were considered on a par with the Union *Durcunusaan*. At least they thought so. Pusintin also had his personal *GREATSOUL*-Class Dreadnought in orbit above. He was being sized up by the Immortal he knew, just as he was doing in return. Drtev had contacted him from Ricot Four to advise him that Phy’iad had completed the task he had required and was back on Belid. Pusintin had arrived only a few minutes ago to insure that the Immortal Phy’iad had kept his end of the deal. And to make sure he could do what Pusintin wanted him to do.

“So you have completed the task I asked of you?” Pusintin spoke finally, realizing that the Immortal was not going to be the first one to talk.

“I completed it.” Phy’iad answered. “Your lackey spoke of more work.”

Pusintin turned slightly and looked at Drtev and grinned slightly as the man rolled his eyes. “You don’t like Purebloods I take it?”

“We normally kill them when we come across them in The Wilds.” Phy’iad spat.

“And do you feel this way for Kavalians?” Pusintin asked turning back to look at him. They were almost equal in height, though Phy’iad was considerably wider in the chest and waist area.

“As it stands right now I have no use for them.” Phy’iad spoke seeing the Puma Bane troops glance at one another and bristle at his words under their different colored coats of hair. “Are you saying you will change that?”

“That depends on whether you are open to working with us in the future.” Pusintin spoke.

“What do you offer?” Phy’iad asked.

“Freedom to continue to do what you do now.” Pusintin said. “An increase in whatever profits you make doing assorted tasks that I give you and an endless supply of elf females to do with as you wish.”

Phy’iad snorted. “We already do what we want now.” He snapped. “And we take all the profit from whatever ventures we undertake. We do not share them. Why should we share them with you?”

“I have no desire for whatever profit you might make in our employ... only that you accomplish whatever tasks I assign you to my specifications.” Pusintin told him. “Besides... there will come a time when the Kavalian Empire will rule this area of space, and it would be better for you to be friendly to us.”

“So you say.” Phy’iad spoke. “I told you already Lycavorian... I do not need your help to accomplish what I want to accomplish. I have men... I have ships... and I already have elf females.”

“An unlimited supply?” Pusintin spoke with a grin.

“And just where will you obtain this unlimited supply?” Phy’iad asked with a chortle.

“That is not important at the moment.” Pusintin told him. “Think about it however. You already know I pay well for whatever risks you might take. The more risk... the better the reward as this task I gave to you shows you. How many did you take?”

“Six.” Phy’iad answered motioning for Pusintin to follow him. He stopped when the Puma Bane soldiers began to follow and he looked at them. “Leave your toy soldiers here Kavalian Marshall. You will not need them. I do not go back on my deals and if I had wanted you dead, you would already be dead.”

“Do not be so sure Immortal fool!” The Puma Bane senior officer hissed loudly.

Phy’iad chuckled now and looked at Pusintin. “They have guts.” He said. “Not very bright... but they have guts!”

“They are Puma Bane troops.” Pusintin answered proudly. “The finest soldiers in the Kavalian Empire.”

Phy’iad nodded. “Should I be shaking in my boots?” He asked with a smile.

“You should treat the Marshall with more respect!” The Puma Bane officer snarled. “The ship above us could blow this little base of yours into atoms with a single command.”

Phy’iad’s eyes narrowed. “Could it now?” He said. “That might be hard to do considering they would have to contend with two *REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts first. As well as any number of my smaller ships Kavalian! Do not think you are superior to everyone fool! It could very well lead to pain for you.”

Pusintin held up his hand before the officer could respond. “They will stay here.” He spoke motioning with his hand several times to the officer who immediately nodded his head at the Marshall’s use of coded hand signals.

Phy’iad smiled as Pusintin began to walk along the corridor of their underground base beside him. He held out the data pad to him as he began to talk. “We took exactly the number you asked for. Five full blooded elves and a half breed.”

Pusintin looked at the data pad as they walked. “How do I know these are not simply elf females you already had in your possession?”

Phy’iad met his gaze. He pointed to the data pad. “The manifest from the transport is there, and we have the ship itself if you want to inspect it. We took the ship as it was leaving Tupacia Prime before it crossed back over the border into Union space. I told you... I do not go back on a deal once I have been paid.”

“And the results of what I wanted you to do?” Pusintin asked.

“You can see them for yourself.” Phy’iad spoke as they moved down the corridor. He grinned. “They are... entertaining.”

Pusintin didn’t understand Phy’iad’s comment until they reached the door and he passed his hand over the control on the side. The door slid open and the scent of sex and the female cries of wanton actions were nearly overwhelming. Pusintin staggered for a moment under the onslaught of his senses and his eyes grew wide when they stepped into the room.

There were five female elves, all of them deliciously naked, all of them with exceptional figures, and all of them currently being fucked into mindless slavery by nearly a dozen naked Immortals. One blond elf was screaming out in wanton abandon as two Immortals drove their massive cocks into her pussy and ass at the same time, all three of them reaching for the pinnacle of their act. Another was being fucked from behind as another Immortal was holding her head tightly to his groin while he emptied his seed into her gagging throat, her hands holding his muscular ass cheeks tightly to her face. The scene was the same all over the room, and Pusintin could only look around with wide eyes. He could not see the full body of the red haired elf as she was lying beneath another Immortal, his massive cock buried in her bowels, her hands clutching the dirty sheets of the bed as she cried out.

“Break me! Break me Master! Yes! Yes!”

Pusintin watched as she drove her tight ass upwards, swallowing even more of the Immortal cock stretching her ass, her blue eyes glazed over in what appeared to be some drug induced behavior. He could hear two of the other females uttering similar exclamations as they were being fucked harshly by three Immortals. He couldn’t believe these female elves were able to accept the large Immortal cocks as they were, and not only were they accepting them, they seemed to crave more of them.

“Master! My Immortal Master! Ahhhhhhhhhhh!” A blond female shattered the noise of the room with her high pitched scream as the Immortal soldier fucking her roared out his own release, his huge cock pulsing as it filled her pussy with his come and then he sank his vampiric fangs into her neck and fed while she held his head tightly in orgasmic release.

Pusintin saw several scantily clothed female elves standing around the perimeter of the room simply watching and moving forward at different times to clean the Immortal soldiers who were stepping back from

empting themselves into one of the female elves. Pusintin shook his head and brought the data pad up, trying to match the images of the elves on the pad to the ones who were being gang raped, enslaving them for eternity to the Immortal soldiers who broke them. He looked at Phy'iad as he stood there with his arms crossed and an evil grin on his face.

“Who are the others?” Pusintin asked.

“Elven females we have taken through the years.” He replied. “Many of my men have their favorites... ones they have broken for their personal entertainment. I have one myself. Most of them prefer the blond ones. They seem to scream louder.” He answered with a laugh. “The rest we keep for variety. You have never had an elf?”

Pusintin shook his head. “Never cared for them.” He answered.

“The female elven body is a marvel really. No matter how many cocks fuck her, no matter in what orifice they use, their bodies always return to normal after a few hours and they are just as tight as the first time.”

“This technique you use?” Pusintin asked. “It is foolproof?”

Phy'iad looked at him. “You do not know about the effect we have on female elves I take it?”

“The effect yes... not the how.” Pusintin answered.

Phy'iad grinned exposing his vampiric fangs. “It has something to do with a chemical compound in our release.” He spoke. “It reacts with the composition of different chemicals of an elven female's body. It is like an instantly addictive drug. Once infected, it can not be removed and they belong to whoever breaks them. They need almost daily doses, and they will do anything to get it. They know nothing else... only that they need it. If it is denied them for too long they go mad. They will do anything to get it as I said.”

“And how do you regulate this when you or your men go away for periods of time?” He asked.

Phy'iad smiled. “They must ingest a small amount daily. We leave it for them if we depart. We are not fools. They are very pleasant to have around and they will do anything the Immortal who breaks them tells them to get their reward. Why risk having them go mad while we are gone. Once their minds are destroyed they are worthless to us. Even as toys.”

“And if the Immortal who breaks them is killed?” Pusintin asked.

Phy'iad looked at him. “Then the female will go insane within a week.” He replied. “If such a thing takes place... she will be executed before this happens to save her from the agony of having her mind destroyed.”

Pusintin snorted. “Mercy?” He asked.

“Tactical decision.” Phy'iad answered sternly. “They are unpredictable if they go insane. Better to kill them before it happens. After they are used as much as possible of course.” He answered with a grin.

Pusintin looked around the room. “Which one is the half-breed?” He asked.

Phy'iad met his eyes. “She is another story.” He stated.

“What do you mean?” Pusintin asked.

Phy'iad motioned for him to follow and they moved across the room and through a large archway into a smaller corridor. Pusintin saw the single Immortal standing outside the door they were approaching and he saw those dark eyes fall on him and look at him with something akin to dire hatred. Pusintin also saw the four long pink claw marks that stretched down the left side of his neck and disappeared below the uniform he wore.

“Ralmin?” Phy'iad spoke.

“Commander!” The young Immortal barked loudly turning to look at him.

Phy'iad smiled. “This is Ralmin... he is the youngest of my men and one of the deadliest! He recently deserted from the High Coven...” Phy'iad looked at Pusintin. “He grew tired of killing your men it seems.”

Pusintin looked at the Immortal. His grayish skin was slightly lighter in shade, but the bone spikes and vampiric fangs were very noticeable. “If you survived... then they were not applying themselves enough.” He spoke.

Ralmin hissed in disgust. “Your men are poorly trained and lack courage!” He spat. “I killed dozens as they ran in fear!”

Pusintin's eyes narrowed. “Kavalians do not run from battle.” He snarled.

“Then perhaps you don't know your troops very well Kavalian Marshal.” Ralmin snorted back in arrogance.

“You don’t have many years behind you do you?” Pusintin asked.

“I have enough to know about your vaunted soldiers!” Ralmin spat. “I was not impressed in the least!”

Phy’iad chuckled. “You see Marshall Pusintin. My men are confident and determined.” He spoke.

Pusintin looked at Phy’iad. “The half-breed?”

Phy’iad looked at Ralmin. “You see those four claw marks on his neck Pusintin? Those are from the half-breed. She was strong. Very strong. And very skilled. She killed one of my men before they subdued her. She is one of their Spartan warriors. She ran him straight through with her *Nehtes*.”

“Was strong?” Pusintin spoke.

Phy’iad nodded. “We have never attempted to enslave a half-breed.” He spoke. “We won’t after her I will tell you.”

“Why?” Pusintin asked.

“The healing power of her Lycavorian blood nullifies the chemicals in our bodies almost immediately.” Phy’iad explained. “It does not make her susceptible to what we implant the others with. My man broke her the first time... he had her screaming for more... but once her system purged the chemical we implant in their bodies, it made her immune and the next time he came for her she killed him. He was foolish for leaving her weapons in the room with her; he paid for that with his life. Ralmin here was able to subdue her before my men simply killed her, but as you can see it came with a price.”

“She has a Shi Viska?” Pusintin asked wide eyed.

Phy’iad nodded. “Easily countered by Inverted Power Inhibitors. It prohibits them from calling their shield from Flat Space... or whatever they call it. We learned that from Empress Aikiro and her cronies. Also how to inhibit her Mindvoice powers.”

“How?”

Phy’iad held out his hand to Ralmin who dropped a small capsule into his large palm. “Inject this into the base of their skull and it acts as a Mindvoice inhibitor. It throws up an invisible shield of sorts and they can’t use their mind powers. It’s quite handy really.” Phy’iad stepped up the door and looked through the clear window. “See for yourself... she is helpless now. We had to beat her senseless to get her this way... but she is broken now. Those among my men who have more violent tendencies, they have taken her many times once we beat her. We injected her with Lazamine to keep her from shifting. It will be another few days before she heals completely. Ralmin here guards her... feeds her... and fucks her when he wants.” Phy’iad laughed.

Pusintin stepped up to the door and looked in. Her saw the female elf of medium height lying in the middle of the cell floor. Her long hair was two different colors, a bright blond that was now dirty and stained with blood and the excretions of no telling how many Immortals that had raped her. The second color was a dark black and layered under the blond hair, falling almost to the middle of her back. She looked badly beaten, blood staining her body in several spots as well as between her legs.

“So you do you do not affect females who are changed?” Pusintin spoke turning to look at Phy’iad.

Phy’iad shook his head quickly. “Not like the others. It only lasts for an hour, two at most... depending on the strength of the wolf that changed her or gave birth to her. This one here... she must have had strong parents. It is usually the male Lycavorian who changes the female. Her father must be very strong. It only lasted for seventy-three minutes before she became a snarling furball with very sharp teeth.”

“Seventy-three minutes?” Pusintin said softly. “Interesting. And you say that the strength of who changed them factors into it?”

“I do not know the exact properties.” Phy’iad spoke. “The person who I rely on for this information could tell you better.”

“I would like to speak with this individual.” Pusintin spoke.

“What good is finding out how long it lasts?” Ralmin barked. “They become a liability once their Lycavorian genes purge our chemicals from their bodies.”

Pusintin looked at him. “My questions are my own boy!” He spat. “You would do well to remember that and do not anger me!”

Ralmin looked at him without backing down. The Immortal was taller than Pusintin by a good two or three inch margin and though he was young, he outweighed him by forty or fifty pounds in his estimate. Even under the loose fitting clothes Pusintin could tell he was thickly muscled and he would be fiercely strong. Pusintin had killed many Immortals in battle before, hundreds of them in fact, but the burning in this Immortal’s

eyes was different somehow. He glared at Pusintin without fear, looking as if he would just as soon rip his heart from his chest then look at him. That wild look insured Pusintin didn't push him. He had no desire to die in this shithole among Immortals. And he didn't doubt that if this young and crazy looking Immortal chose to strike him down, every Immortal on this base would side with him.

"I do not fear you Pusintin!" Ralmin growled. "I would welcome an opportunity to meet you in battle! And I would enjoy tearing you limb from limb. Why do we trust this traitor to his own kind Commander?" He asked looking at his leader.

"Why indeed young Ralmin." Phy'iad spoke. "You are young Ralmin... but you have desire. A relationship with this man and the Kavalians is good business. And that is what we are here for is it not?"

Ralmin met his commander's eyes and finally nodded. "Your wisdom is more than mine Commander. I will follow where you lead." He spoke. "Just do not ask me to tolerate his stench for longer than necessary. His blood smells of foul flesh."

Phy'iad laughed then and pounded Ralmin on the shoulder. "You see Marshall Kavalian. My men are loyal to me because they know I am their best chance of survival."

Pusintin stared at Ralmin for a moment longer seeing something in the young Immortal's eyes that did not sit well with him. "They are your problem Phy'iad." He said finally. "As long as you keep them under control."

"Commander!" Ralmin spoke firmly. "Sir... may I request something?"

Phy'iad looked at him. "Speak Ralmin."

"I wish... I wish to make the half-breed mine." Ralmin spoke. "I wish to make her mine and feast on her blood for as long as she lives for the way she marked me."

Phy'iad looked at him for a long moment before turning to Pusintin. "You do not need the half-breed wench do you?"

"Not as long as this person you take me to can explain what I need to know." Pusintin spoke.

"She can." Phy'iad spoke. "But you must make that decision now. Once Ralmin makes his claim on the half-breed bitch, you will not take her. I insure no one interferes on those that my loyal men claim as their own. Ralmin has been with me for three years now and he is utterly loyal. It is past time I rewarded him. He has mean streak and he likes to feast on their blood. Once he takes this female's blood, no matter how much she fights him, she is his till death. You will not take her."

Pusintin looked at him for a long moment and then moved his eyes to Ralmin who glared back at him. "As long as your person tells me what I need to know you can have the bitch. If you let her strike you a few more times it may improve your looks." He spoke with a grin.

Ralmin laughed at this. "At least I am no traitor to my own kind dog!" He finally hissed as his face became mean once more.

Pusintin opened his mouth to speak.

"Say nothing Kavalian Marshall!" Phy'iad snapped. "You have no friends here... and you will have less if you insult one of my men. Your business is with me... now come!"

Pusintin stared at Ralmin. "One day Immortal... one day we may very well meet on the field of battle."

Ralmin bared his vampiric fangs in a vicious smile. "And I will enjoy taking your heart on that day." He growled.

Phy'iad laughed as he took Pusintin's arm. "This way Kavalian Marshall." He bellowed. "Before you say something you will regret."

Pusintin took one last look at Ralmin before he turned and followed Phy'iad.

"Osiri... where are you wench!" Phy'iad bellowed.

"Here! I am here Master!" The female voice echoed.

Pusintin's eyes went a little wider when he saw the female elf scamper from around the other side of the room near where there appeared to be an entire laboratory of some sort set up. She appeared to be an older elf female, with flowing blond hair and very large breasts. She had long legs and appeared to be five foot eight or nine inches in height. She scampered over to stand in front of Phy'iad dressed in the skimpy light blue covering that did nothing to hide her firm figure and bowed her head.

“Master... Master I need.” She spoke in barely a whisper.

Phy’iad smiled. “Yes... it is almost time for your dose isn’t it?” He answered.

Pusintin watched as the elf female dropped to her knees in front of Phy’iad and her delicate hands went immediately to his crotch where she stroked the huge cock hidden by the fabric. “Please Master.” She whispered out.

“Soon Osiri.” Phy’iad snapped. “You will answer this Kavalian’s questions and then I will give you what you need.”

Her green eyes lit up and she smiled as she got to her feet once more. “Thank you Master.” She cooed. She turned to Pusintin. “You are not a Kavalian however.”

“This is Pusintin. Marshall of the Kavalian forces.” Phy’iad exclaimed.

Pusintin saw the elf’s eyes grow a little wider. “You are the Lycavorian traitor that leads the Kavalians. Yes... I have heard of you. Brother to the Lycavorian King.”

Pusintin looked at Phy’iad. “You give this female much leeway Phy’iad.” He spoke.

Phy’iad nodded. “Yes I do.” He spoke. He reached out to stroke the top of her head as if she was a pet. “I captured Osiri twenty years ago. The first elven female I took as my own once I deserted the Coven. I took her from her husband and three children and made her mine. And even after twenty years she still sucks my cock and slings her pussy on me better than any elf we have captured since. She has come to adore my big cock haven’t you Osiri?”

The elf’s eyes became dreamy and she looked at him. “Only you Master.”

“She also has a degree in science which comes in handy at times.” Phy’iad spoke. “The Kavalian Marshall here wants to know the specifics of why the half-breed is not affected by the chemicals in our blood. Explain it to him Osiri.”

“It is quite simple really.” She answered immediately.

The pain had receded to nothing more than a dull throb now.

The memories of what had happened however, they would remain, as would the shame of screaming out for the scarred one to break her, if only that one time. She had lost count of the number of times she had been raped by the Immortals. One... two and sometimes three at a time. They had abused her body savagely, hitting her viciously, beating her nearly senseless when they realized her Lycavorian genes had made her immune to what most elven females feared. Complete and utter sexual enslavement to an Immortal. She had fought them, killing one with her *Nehtes* and slashing one with her wolf claws before they had hit her with the drug that caused her to lose the ability to shift to her wolf form. Since she could not shift, her injuries could not be healed by shifting and she had to endure the long hours of pain while her elven half healed what it was able to, but nowhere near as quickly.

It had happened so quickly that she had been unable to react.

They had hit the transport from two different locations, quickly killing the crew and overpowering her attempts at fighting them. The five elf females she had been traveling with were returning from Tupacia Prime after three weeks on the resort celebrating their recent graduation from a University on Elear. They were former students and soon to be scholars and therefore useless in a fight. The male elves they had come with were slaughtered like so many hogs before they had been taken. She had been on Tupacia Prime trying to recover from the pain of a training accident that had occurred because she was distracted over a relationship that had failed. She was twenty-five years old, the product of a three hundred year old marriage between her Lycavorian mother and Elven father. She was the youngest of nine children, and had followed in her mother’s footsteps and entered into the life of a Union Spartan willingly. She had finished sixth in her Agoge Training, not bad for a half-breed female when you took into consideration that Resumar and Eliani Leonidas finished first and third in that class. She had been assigned to the fleet soon after her advanced training and fought in the last two years of the Evolli War. She was no stranger to death and war, yet nothing in her life had prepared her for this.

To be raped by Immortals.

To be beaten and fed upon like some animal.

She was a Tier Four Mindvoicer, but they had injected something into her head that did not allow her to use those skills. Her Mindvoice abilities were somehow dampened and she didn’t understand it. She could not

call her Shi Viska, she was naked and she was helpless. All she wanted now was to die. She had heard the screams from the females they had captured with her. Screams of horror, followed soon afterwards by blissful screams of their forced sexual submission and complete acceptance as the Immortals broke them to their will. It had to be her Lycavorian genes that did not allow this to happen to her. Yet what she had always thought of as her best advantage in any fight was now her worst enemy. Better to be a mindless sex slave to an Immortal than endure the rapes and beatings and know that all was lost.

[All is not lost!]

The deep heavily shielded voice sounded in her head like a clap of thunder and her dark brown eyes burst open. She pushed herself up off the floor with a groan of pain, her body feeling sore and dirty as she looked around the small cell. She shivered as the cold began to hit her now, forcing the nipples of her medium sized and very firm breasts to harden instantly. She wrapped her arms around her chest, suddenly self conscious as she realized she was completely naked. Her two toned hair fell around her shoulders, the dark roots of her father's hair and the blond highlights of her mother's hair. To her it signified that she took the best from both her parents whom she adored. She looked around the small cell.

[You must remain strong and fight them. I will do what I can to protect you. I have begun this already but you must fight them with all that you are.] The voice spoke again. A male voice, confident and deep.

She reached behind her head and touched the spot under her hair where they had injected some sort of capsule, effectively silencing her Mindvoice powers. She had felt the bump before, but now that bump was gone and whoever was speaking to her within Mindvoice was someone with far more skill than she had ever had.

[I have removed it.] The voice spoke evenly, almost as if the voice was watching her. *[You must not make or give any indication that we are communicating within Mindvoice or all will be lost and both of us will be killed instantly. Nod your head if you understand me and tell me your name she-wolf elf.]*

She sat there unmoving staring at the door into her cell. This was a trick of some sort. It had to be. She heard the soft sigh in Mindvoice.

[This is no trick. Your friends are lost. I can not help them. Perhaps my mother if she was here, she is a genius in genetics, but I can do nothing for them.] The voice said. *[I do not wish to see anymore harm to come to you. I could not stop what they have already done to you but I believe I have succeeded in keeping them from doing more. If you do not wish to acknowledge me that is fine. I will leave you to your fate, for I am already risking far too much to contact you like this.]*

[Wait!] She announced instantly. *[I... my name... my name is As'hia.]*

[As'hia. A beautiful name. Your mother is an elf then?]

As'hia looked around the room carefully trying to detect a camera or something. The voice had to have eyes inside the cell to be watching her.

[My mother is Lycavorian.] As'hia answered. *[My father is elven.]*

[Truly?] The voice said. *[Then you are very special indeed.]*

[They are both in the Union military! They will come for me!] As'hia exclaimed instantly as she turned her head to the back of the room.

As'hia heard the deep exhale and she could almost feel the person shake his head. Her mind felt charged somehow, her Mindvoice powers even more pronounced than they had ever been.

[No. They will not come for you. Not unless I can somehow contact my brother and tell him where we are. Your parents would never find us.] The voice answered. *[We are alone you and I. Alone among a den of butchers and animals. We need to help each other.]*

As'hia knew no Immortal could have such strong Mindvoice powers. While they were naturally able to shield exceptionally well, there were no recorded instances of an Immortal being able to use Mindvoice. *[Who are you?]*

[Who I am is not important. My name is Lynom. I am an agent of my father sent here to infiltrate this group of Immortals in order to protect my people.]

[Your father? I don't understand?] As'hia spoke. *[How do you infiltrate a mercenary group of Immortals? You are a vampire!]* She exclaimed.

[My mother is a Pureblood. I have inherited many of her traits.] Lynom answered. *[I have arranged for the Immortal outside your door to claim you As'hia. He is a stern faced fool and he is the one you marked with your claws. He will not hurt you, but you must follow his direction to the letter.]*

[Claim me?]

[He has requested of the Immortal leader to make you his property. The Leader agreed. You belong to him now, but he is also new to this group and will be watched. You must act fully cowed, and no matter what you do not allow it to show that you have your Mindvoice powers back.] Lynom explained to her.

[I will allow no Immortal to rape me without fighting!] She snarled out the sentence.

[He will not try to rape you As'hia.] Lynom countered quickly. *[You must understand he will need to treat you as a slave. This will entail certain things that I find distasteful, but in order to survive it must be done.]*

[What things?]

[I will tell you later... but right now tell me why the military leader of the Kavalian Federation is here?] Lynom asked.

[Pusintin? He is here?] As'hia gasped.

[He was the one that paid to have you and your friends captured.] Lynom answered. *[He has been asking about the effect Immortals have on female elves and the process by which it happens. He is also very curious why it does not have the same effect on those females such as you? Kitrye-kyuvr. Half-breeds.]*

[I don't know.] As'hia spoke. *[Why... why would he care?]*

[I don't know.] Lynom answered. *[But you can be assured it is not for any good purpose. I must go As'hia. You are a Ssin'urn 'Anon As'hia. I will protect you. Rest now... food will be brought for you shortly. You must eat and conserve your strength so that you can completely heal.]*

[So they can rape me more?] She snapped. *[You are a vampire! You can not fight Immortals!]*

[Do you wish to see your mother and father again As'hia?] Lynom asked.

[Yes... yes.] She answered softly.

[Then I must ask something of you that will not be easy for you.] He told her. *[Even after what has happened to you... you must trust me. If you do not... I can not protect you and very likely we will both be killed.]*

[I... Lynom I will try.] As'hia answered gently.

[Do not give up hope Ssin'urn 'Anon. I will make certain you see your family once more.] Lynom spoke. *[Rest now until your food comes. And do not attack the Immortal who brings it to you. He is... he is working for me.]*

RITAAH KAVALIAN SPACE

Her gait was confident and strong as she walked along the main central pathway of the settlement heading for Mican's home with Na'lia. Like the majority of those cast away by the Kavalian leadership through the years, by them she was considered a failure, when in fact she was so much more.

At twenty-six years old she was far from being a failure, and had become a bane in the lives of many senior Kavalian officers through her actions and superior combat training and skills. Her long black hair fell to just above a magnificently sculpted ass and incredibly long legs. Her five foot nine height gave her a long stride as she walked, but it was measured and filled with certainty. The dark brown leather pants encased those legs and her ass making it appear as if they had been painted on. The tan shirt she wore was loose fitting, the sleeves pulled up along her forearms, but it did nothing to hide her firm breasts and proud nipples as they pushed against the fabric of the shirt. Her black hair outlined an oval shaped face, full soft lips and dazzling vertically slit green eyes. The biogenic experiments she had undergone as a young woman did not completely change her as the scientists had hoped. Yes they had succeeded in removing the fine coat of black hair from her body, leaving only the long locks on her head, but the experiments had not changed her feline like eyes as they had hoped. She was meant to go out among the Lycavorians as an intelligence agent and assassin, but when it was discovered her eyes were not taking to the change, she was dismissed and scheduled for an execution. She was rejected by her Pride, her parents, her siblings.

They had tossed her life away without as much as a second thought.

This had made Channa a very angry young Kavalian female.

That was until Mican and Na'lia had come into her life three years earlier. He had led the assault on the Kavalian prison where she was being held. He had slaughtered the two Kavalian officers who were laughing as they raped her, knowing she would be dead within hours. Mican and his men had left no one alive and rescued nearly a hundred Kavalian males and females that were scheduled for execution because they had not taken to the biogenic treatments as easily as others. He had carried her beaten body nearly thirteen kilometers to where their ship was waiting, and then she had met Na'lia. The elven female who would eventually become Mican's wife had cared for her without question. On the journey back to Ritaah Na'lia had washed her body, cleansing all signs of the brutal rape from her, showing her kindness that she had never known in her life as a Kavalian female.

It was Na'lia and Mican who had nursed her back to health, and when Mican discovered what she had been trained for, what her skills were, he had immediately named her his second in command. As she recovered, Channa noticed that those who followed Mican cared not that she was a female. And they soon realized what her skills were as soon as she began training once more. Channa's height gave her an advantage that many did not have. It allowed her to use her very limber tail that had re-grown while she was recovering. Her tail provided her added balance and incredible reflexes, and she had taught herself how to use it almost as a third hand. She kept it wrapped around her left leg in most cases when she was within the compound simply because in here she felt wanted and welcome. Men and women and even many of the children waved at her as she passed them by. All of them knew who she was, and she had quickly gained a reputation as a cunning and vicious fighter. She had led a dozen missions in the last three years; all of them complete successes for the most part. She had lost men and women under her charge, but she only pushed herself that much further to honor their memory and sacrifice. When she was within the compound, she trained with Mican daily, adding to her own skills while also taking it upon herself to train Na'lia in all that she knew.

Mican and Na'lia had become her family. Her older brother and sister. They had helped her to overcome her anger and depression at being tossed away so callously, even by her own family. They did not attempt to instill anger and revenge in her; they sought to instill confidence in herself and the knowledge that she was better than those who had so ruthlessly ordered her death. Na'lia had given back to her as much as she could in terms of medical training, making Channa not only a skilled warrior, but a very competent battlefield medic. Her mind was like a trap and it absorbed everything and retained it. She was exceptionally intelligent, and Mican used her intelligence on many occasions to plan missions and the defenses of their compound. She knew should anything happen to Mican, the leadership of their small resistance force would fall to her without question. No one among their group, male or female, doubted that for a moment. And even in the Kavalian culture, where females were oppressed and looked down upon as nothing more than baby makers, Channa knew the men and women here would follow her without question.

Channa had let go of the hatred and anger just as Mican and Na'lia had shown her. She began to rebuild her life upon coming to be with them. She would still not hesitate to kill any of those who had been complicit in the decision to execute her, including her own father, but Channa had found the strength to reach beyond all that. Na'lia in particular had shown her what she could be, what she could accomplish. She had dedicated her life to the resistance, just as Mican had.

Channa's beauty also drew attention from the many males within their compound, but she had made it very clear she was not ready to commit herself to one man. She had slept with only two men since coming here, the first to only prove she could still feel pleasure after her rape. Once she had discovered that feelings of pleasure and joy were not lost to her, Channa had entered into the second relationship. It had ended amicably, but the male decided Channa was just too aggressive in bed. She knew what she wanted in bed and in her partner, and she was not afraid to reach for that. It was not something that the Kavalian males within their compound could easily accept. They trusted her and would follow her to the very end in battle, but when it came to a relationship, she was just too confident for them. At first Channa had been very much disheartened at this, until she realized it would take a very different man to tame her, and that was not a bad thing in the least. Mican was a different type of man, and it had taken an elf female to tame him. At least when not on the battlefield.

Channa saw the dirty blond hair of Biama playing in front of their home and she smiled. Even though Biama was half elf, the natural accelerated growth process for children in the Kavalian genes and their culture still persisted, and though Biama had only been born sixteen months ago, she was already the size of a four year

old child within the Union. And she was just as smart. She looked up when Channa began walking down the short pathway and her face lit up. Channa smiled as she looked at Biama. She had her mother's elven ears, though much smaller, and her father's devastatingly gorgeous blue eyes. Her features were soft like Na'lia, but tanned like her father.

"Aunt Channa!" Biama squealed as she ran to meet her and Channa lifted her into her arms.

"Biama... you grow bigger by the day!" Channa exclaimed. "And heavier!"

"I will be as big as my dada soon." Biama spoke happily.

"Maybe!" Channa said as the door to their home slid open and she saw Na'lia come out with a large smile on her face.

"Channa!" Na'lia said as she came up. Channa lowered Biama to the ground and like any child she lost interest quickly and moved back to her flowers.

Channa closed her eyes as they embraced and she relished in the feelings of warmth that radiated from Na'lia. This elven woman, though very young herself, had played the largest role in allowing Channa to reclaim almost all she had lost. Though she was several inches taller than Na'lia, Channa released her and held her at arms length.

"You got back last night I take it." Na'lia said.

Channa looked at her oddly for a moment before she smiled and canted her head to the side. "Did you and Mican lock together before Biama woke this morning?" She said with a grin. "You look tired. And fulfilled."

Na'lia laughed and pulled her close. "It was wonderful." She whispered. "And we have so little time now that Biama is growing. She never wants to sleep. We must take our time when it comes."

Channa laughed softly. "When will you know?"

Na'lia's dark eyes were bright. "Hopefully by the end of the week. If not... we'll keep at it I'm sure. We both want more children."

Channa nodded as Na'lia took her hands and began leading her into the medium sized house. "Children are our future." She stated softly.

"You will have children one day Channa." Na'lia said with a large grin. "Never doubt that. You are a virile young woman. You just need the right man to tame you."

Channa waggled her eyebrows. "Preferably one of those Spartan men we have heard so much about." She said. "I understand they are not only wonderfully endowed because of their wolf blood, but they also worship their wives and mates like goddesses."

Na'lia nodded. "So I have heard." She said as they entered the large main room of the home and Mican looked up from the table he was sitting at. "I have my own god however." She said moving over to kiss her husband deeply as Channa watched with a smile.

"I am a god now?" Mican asked with a playful grin.

"It will go to his head now Na'lia." Channa said.

"Perhaps. But that is just fine as long as he continues to do to me what he does in our bed." Na'lia said. "I expect at least a millennia or two."

Mican got to his feet. "I was thinking much more." He said.

"That can be arranged as well." Na'lia said. "I will get us fresh coffee and we can go over the information Channa brings."

Channa allowed Mican to fold her into his massive arms and hug her tightly. She returned the embrace just as she did with Na'lia since she considered them her family now. And she would do anything for them.

"When did you return?" Mican asked.

"Late last night." Channa answered. "We must talk Mican." She said looking at him.

Mican nodded as Na'lia came back into the room holding the tray. He looked at his elven wife and then back to Channa. "Should I call the others?"

Channa nodded. "It might not hurt." She said. "We may have to alter our disposition if my information is accurate. And everything points to the fact it is."

Na'lia set the tray down on the table. "I will put more coffee on and call the others." She said. "We should activate the jammers husband."

Mican nodded. "Channa and I will do that. Tell them thirty minutes Na'lia."

“Are you sure Channa?” The Kavalian male asked as the seven of them sat at the table in Mican and Na’lia’s house. His fur was laced heavily with gray, but his eyes were bright and alert and he could still fight with the best of them despite his age.

Channa nodded. “Yes. The strange man told us as we all stood there.” She answered. “And then he went back inside the ship.”

“He moved?” The female Kavalian asked.

Channa nodded quickly. “Yes. It frightened me as well as I have never seen him move.”

“What exactly did he say?” Mican asked.

“That was the odd thing. He said something about Pra... Pralors. I have never heard this term before. He said agents of the Chief Elder Pralor had finally discovered him and he needed to make preparations for their arrival.” Channa answered.

“But your sensors detected nothing in orbit?”

Channa shook her head. “They are only passive sensors meant to sweep the immediate area around Ritaah. You all know that.” She answered. “And they are certainly not powerful enough to detect a shrouded ship. But the strange man felt sure he sensed something in orbit, and when has he ever been wrong? He has always warned us of ships that were approaching in time to activate defensive plans and our camouflage screens. Even before I arrived... isn’t that true Mican?”

Mican nodded. “Yes. It is why we stationed people near the ship to begin with. So that they could warn us when he reported something. If he sensed something in orbit important enough for him to actually move into the ship then we can not just dismiss it.”

“Channa... this was several days ago.” The first man asked. “Why wait until you returned to tell us?”

“I still needed to meet with our western group and get their data reports. The strange man was not acting urgently as he does when he has detected ships before.” Channa answered. “I made the decision to continue with my other tasks as well.”

“We needed those reports.” Na’lia spoke now. “The western group just returned from the operation to Cabelir. We needed that intelligence.”

Channa nodded and held up the intelligence. “And a prize the operation was.” She spoke. “The Sect is active Mican.”

Mican’s eyes narrowed slightly and he leaned back in his chair. “They are sure?”

Channa nodded. “Almost one hundred percent.”

Mican smiled to himself. “We may have just found ourselves some new allies my friends. Allies that we need.” He spoke.

“What is this Sect Mican?” The first man asked again. “What does Channa mean?”

“It is a very old religious Sect among our people.” Mican answered looking at them. “I learned of it during my schooling when I was growing up in my father’s court. They are not fanatics mind you... but men and women bent on seeing the Kavalian people bring themselves out of the oppression and brutal history of our past. Something my father and others are refusing to allow happen. They were thought long dead... killed off by my father and his men... but if Channa’s report is right and they are in fact active on Cabelir, then our hope of seeing a free Kavalian people just got a little brighter my friends.”

“While that sounds very interesting and promising husband.” Na’lia spoke from her chair next to him. “I think we have a bigger issue.”

“What is that?” Mican asked.

“If the Strange Man did indeed detect a ship in orbit, then it is safe to assume they would have detected him and the ship as well.” Na’lia said. “You have heard what I call this ship and I have told you King Leonidas returned to Union space twenty odd years ago with a similar ship. No one knows where it resides now... but based on the Strange Man’s reactions... I can only assume that the Lycavorians had a ship in orbit doing something else and it was they who were able to detect it somehow. If they are not already here it can only mean one thing.”

Mican and Channa nodded. “They left to gather more men and equipment.” Mican said.

Na'lia nodded her head slowly. "They will not allow this ship to fall into the hands of the Kavalian government or the High Coven. We can not allow it." She said. "They will destroy it first."

"And that means they will be coming back." Channa said softly. "The question remains however, are they returning as friends or enemies?"

Na'lia nodded. "Yes."

Mican looked at all of them. "We must be prepared for both." He stated. "Since the Strange man will not allow us entry into the ship I want enough explosives put in position around the ship that the concussive force alone will destroy it completely."

"If they come... they will bring dragons." The woman spoke. "How do we fight dragons when all of us fear them so?"

Channa held up the second data pad. "That is the other thing the team discovered." She said. "It appears your sister has defected Mican. She has defected to the Lycavorians and even married one of their Princes. And the rumors are running rampant that she no longer fears dragons and is even riding them."

Mican looked at her for a long moment. "Interesting." He said. "Which one?"

"Athani." Channa answered.

Mican got to his feet slowly. "Athani?" He said in almost a whisper. "She is the one that has rebelled in the past."

"Well... this rebellion may very well get her killed." Channa said. "Your father is beyond angry and he is supposedly readying a covert assassination team of biogenic clones to travel to Earth and kill her and the King's son."

"He would risk open war with the Union if this is discovered." A man said.

Mican looked at them. "I believe that is what my father and that idiot Pusintin want." He said finally. "Something we must do anything we can to prevent."

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY BUILDING

The Arch Ministry Council Chambers was a large room within the center of the main governmental building. It was shaped in an oval fashion, with three rows of comfortable chairs lining either side of the main floor in the center. On one end of the floor sitting in two ornately carved and gold lined chairs were Anja and Sivana. Both of them wore royal robes of green velvet, their hair perfectly styled and both of them looking radiant. The chairs on either side of them held Eurin and Zaniai, while a small five seat box is to Anja's right is where Martin sat with Atropos and Belen.

Anja and Sivana both had been surprised that the entire two hundred members of the Arch Ministry would be here. Usually over half of them were off world conducting business with the Hadarian Healers spread all over the Union as they were. Anja looked over and saw Martin talking in whispers with Atropos and Belen and she turned to look at Eurin.

"Did you know all of the Ministers would be here Eurin?" Anja asked.

Eurin shook her head quickly. "No. Buonau must have pulled quite a few strings to get all of them to return for this." She stated.

"The question remains as to why?" Sivana said now.

Eurin motioned with her head towards the entrance. "I believe we will find out now." She spoke.

They turned to see Buonau leading Umbra and Pcellany into the chamber, the tall and obscenely muscular Rinard just behind them wearing his Spartan uniform. The remaining sixteen Hadarian Elders trailed behind them and silently moved to the empty seats to Anja's right near where the head of the Arch Ministry Wiktor sat at the opposite head of the chamber. They watched Buonau step up to Wiktor and whisper into her ear. Zaniai leaned closer to Anja.

"Whatever is happening, Wiktor is involved somehow Anja." He spoke quickly.

Anja glanced at him. "How do you know?"

"I may be a politician and not a Healer... but I know by body language and her actions that Wiktor is involved in this. Whatever it may be." Zaniai answered.

They all turned as the soft horn sounded and the chamber became silent.

“I will now call this Special Session of the Hadarian Arch Ministry to order.” Wiktor announced. “I would like to recognize the presence of King Leonidas the Second in the gallery, but I must also make clear that this is a purely Hadarian matter and request that you honor that Milord. No matter what you see presented here.”

Martin looked at the woman oddly and nodded his head. “Of course Chief Minister.” He stated.

Wiktor nodded and came to her feet. “This Special Session has been called under the gravest of concerns to us all and our continued ability to guide our people. Recently the mother of Sage Warrior Seanna came to the Aunt of Queen Anja concerned that there may have been more to her daughter’s death than what has previously been made known. Acting as a member of the Hadarian Royal family and a concerned citizen, Umbra brought this information to the senior member of the Council of Elders. Chief of the Hadarian Elders, Elder Mage Buonau began an investigation into claims made by Pcillany. What she found was very disturbing to say the least. She then brought it to my attention and after careful review I ordered this Special Session to address what Elder Buonau and I feel is a defining moment in the future of our people.”

Wiktor stepped from behind her chair and moved into the center of the chamber looking directly at Anja.

“Queen Anja Leonidas... after careful review of the evidence presented to me... I am using my authority as Chief of the Arch Ministry to bring charges of Depraved Indifference To Life, Unlawful Actions, Abuse of Power, Depravity of Self and Others, and finally Complicity of Negligent Murder in the death of Senior Mage Warrior Seanna.” Wiktor was looking at her when she finished speaking and the look on Anja’s face made her fight to keep from smiling.

“Murder!” Anja shouted as she came out of her chair! “I tried for three hours to save Seanna! She... I loved her! What kind of fool would accuse me of murdering her?”

“All of these charges stem from evidence presented to me and Elder Mage Buonau by a number of sources.” Wiktor spoke smugly. “Including you having a hand in her death!”

Anja came down off the slight platform. “Seanna was hit by shrapnel from two T19 missiles that exploded over her head!” She barked savagely. “Her entire upper body was practically shredded! Two of the larger pieces of shrapnel penetrated her skull and into her brain! There was not a Hadarian medic in the area and I got to her as fast as I could! I tried to save her! I loved her you bitch! How dare you accuse me of killing her?” Anja turned and glared at Pcillany in the gallery. “How dare you accuse me of killing her? After all we shared together, you do this?”

“Pcillany and Seanna’s husband have presented information and evidence that make it clear you had every reason to insure Seanna did not recover.” Wiktor spat.

“Seanna’s husband?” Anja snapped. “Seanna and that buffoon Rinard never married!”

“Oh but they did Queen Anja.” Pcillany announced loudly as she came to her feet. “They married six months before you killed her! You killed her to hide your sick perversions!”

“Sick perversions?” Anja barked right back. “Rinard was the one who harassed me for years to sleep with them! He was the one that drove Seanna and I apart! His constant badgering of her to get me to join them in their bed! I wouldn’t believe anything that *nubous ronnus* says if my life depended on it!”

“You may not Queen Anja... for good reasons.” Wiktor spoke. “The Council of Elders and I have seen evidence that refutes your claims. And refutes them quite well. Would you care to admit to them now, before they are exposed to the entire Ministry and become damning to you?”

“I have nothing to hide *upaee!*” Anja snarled. “Is this the best you can do Wiktor?” Anja demanded. “You and Buonau have despised my sister and I both for pulling our people out of the archaic past you want to cling too! Now you accuse me of murder?”

“We accuse you of much more!” Wiktor spoke. She held up her hand. “I have in my hand thirteen instances where Queen Anja has exceeded her constitutional authority in either making political decisions that did not come before the entire Arch Ministry, or dismissing laws that have been in place for hundreds of years!”

Anja rolled her eyes. “Laws that have not been used in nearly the same amount of time unless they suited the Hadarian Elder Council!” She spoke. “I simply took out the loop holes that would allow them to weigh in on decisions that did not concern them! Political decisions they had no right to weigh in on! I did not need to put that before the Arch Ministry!”

“On the contrary Queen Anja... yes you do.” Wiktor spoke. “You have dismissed three requests by the Kavalian Federation for our medical skills and equipment to help in their ongoing war with the High Coven. Those decisions needed to come before the Arch Ministry in accordance with Statue 27, Paragraph 9 which states the King or Queen can not refuse medical requests from member or non-members of the Union under any circumstances unless directed by the Arch Ministry.”

“You would speak with a species and government that regards females as low on the chain as insects?” Anja gasped.

“That is not the point!” Wiktor spat. “You made this decision without the authority to do so!”

“I am Queen!” Anja screamed now her famous anger coming fully to the forefront now. “My sister and I rule in a way that best suits our people! I will not send our Healers into an arena where they must fear for their own safety and dignity as well as that of their patients! Not to mention that the Lycavorian Union forbids any kind of trade with the Kavalian Federation that involves personnel from the Union military!”

“Yet we have just signed a Trade Agreement with them.” Wiktor spoke.

“An agreement for the berries for Spartan Wine Wiktor you fool!” Anja spat.

“It is you who are the fool Queen Anja!” Wiktor snapped now. “Did you think that your actions would not come to light? Did you actually believe you could hide your complicity in Seanna’s death to hide your own perversions?”

“*Son vada carians channe!*” Anja exclaimed. “What are you talking about now?”

“Your dress! How you choose to raise your children! The heirs to the Hadarian throne. Princess Eliani shares the bed of a vampire female and she did not present herself to the Council of Elders to gain their approval of her marriage to this Malic person. You approved of this?”

“Eliani is her own person! She makes her own decisions! She does not need my permission or that of the Elder Council to marry a man or take anyone into her bed!” Anja barked. “As for Retta and Calyb... we will raise them as we see fit! Period!”

“They do not know who their mother is!” Wiktor said looking around the chamber. “They know nothing of their Hadarian culture or heritage.”

“That is a lie and you know that!” Anja snapped.

“Is it? Not according to your Aunt Umbra!” Wiktor retorted. “Not according to Elder Mage Buonau and her daughter who have seen for themselves the atmosphere the heirs to the throne live in! You allowed them to become... bonded to these beasts... these dragons! They shift to their alter forms whenever they wish! Without regard for who sees them! This Ministry has granted you much leeway in your marriage to King Leonidas. We allowed it!”

“You allowed nothing!” Anja spoke viciously.

“And what of your choice of bed partners? Your actions in the bed of others!” Wiktor said heatedly. “Corrupting Seanna with your sick perversions!”

“My choice of bed partners?” Anja asked aghast. “I am the wife and mate to King Martin Leonidas. I share his bed and that of the four other women that I love. What are you speaking of Wiktor? You make no sense. What Martin and I and the others do in our bed is most definitely not any of your business. I did not corrupt Seanna... her relationship with me only allowed her true self to come out!”

“Do not insult this scared chamber with such drive!” Wiktor barked. “You are the one who pushed her into that... that life! And when she told you she wanted no more of it... when she told you that she would reveal your own secrets if you did not allow her to live her own life... you helped to kill her by not treating her!”

Anja’s jade green eyes were burning. You have absolutely no idea what you are spewing from that hole beneath your nose!” Anja spat.

“Don’t I?” Wiktor demanded. “Seanna’s husband has produced evidence that shows you stand before this body and you lie!” She motioned to where Rinard sat and he came to his feet slowly. He looked forlorn and humble in his expression.

“I’m... I’m sorry Anja.” He spoke loud enough for most of the chamber to hear him. “You took Seanna from me. All I wanted was to live happily with her.”

“Oh shut up you pathetic idiot!” Anja snarled at him. “No one with a lick of common sense would believe the shit you are shoveling! You wanted to get me in bed with you so you could say you fucked your Queen! So many people saw right through your façade Rinard! Why would anyone believe anything you said?”

“I have given proof of your actions.” Rinard replied keeping his voice normal and respectful.

“Proof of what?” Anja barked. “Your ignorance!”

Wiktor held up the data pad. “Perhaps this will bring you down from that high horse you sit on!” She said. “This is the proof presented to myself and the Elder Council. Proof that Queen Anja had every reason to not attempt to heal Seanna when she needed her most. Proof that our Queen is unfit to sit on the throne. And this may also be proof that Retta and Calyb are not the children of King Leonidas!”

Anja’s eyes flew open as Martin came to his feet. “What?” Anja gasped unable to believe she was hearing this.

Wiktor moved quickly to her chair and plugged the pad into the slot. A huge two sided monitor used for reports and meetings for the Arch Ministry dropped from the ceiling of the chamber, lowering in place quickly so that all members of the chamber could view the picture on it. Anja’s eyes were wide in disbelief as she gazed at what was on the screen.

“This is who our Queen really is!” Wiktor shouted out.

“...ahhhhhh yes Seanna!” Anja gasped out as the black hair of her Hadarian lover flowed across her abdomen and Seanna slowly kissed her way back up Anja’s firm, flat abdomen. They were both naked on the monitor, both of them covered in a light sheen of sweat from obvious sexual activity.

Anja’s eyes went to where Rinard sat. “You sick fuck!” Anja snarled. “You filmed us making love?” Anja started to move towards him but froze when she watched on the monitor as Seanna moved behind her and she sat up, exposing her gloriously naked flesh glistening in exertion and her juices.

Seanna leaned over and nuzzled Anja’s neck and cheek as her hands slid around and cupped her large breasts. “That was only the beginning Anja.” Seanna gasped into her ear. “Are you ready?”

Anja leaned over and kissed Seanna, their tongues dancing together.

“Oh yes! Martin... Martin must never know!” Anja hissed out. “Never!”

Seanna smiled. “He won’t find out.” She said as she looked up. “Will he Rinard?”

“I will never say a thing!” Rinard spoke as he moved into the picture. He too was completely naked and the angle of the video also allowed everyone to see his raging cock at full mast as he stepped between Anja’s legs.

Anja’s eyes dropped to stare at his enormous cock and she licked her lips in anticipation. “He must never know.”

“Are you ready Anja?” Rinard asked.

Anja lifted her head up and looked at him. “Fuck me Rinard! Nubou me with your huge cock!”

Rinard needed no further urging and he placed the engorged head of his cock against the pursed lips of Anja’s already excited and moist pussy. With a single plunge he drove his entire cock into Anja’s bald pussy. Her head flew back as his balls slammed into her ass cheeks and her legs wrapped around his hips.

“Oh god! Fuck me!” Anja howled out as Rinard began to hammer his huge cock into her with deep strokes. Thrusts that made the bed shake as he slammed into her. Seanna leaned over and was kissing Anja deeply, her moans of pure delight muffled by Seanna’s four inch long tongue stuffed down her throat.

The chamber had become deathly quiet except for the grunting of Rinard and the blissful moans of Anja as the members of the Arch Ministry of Hadaria watched as their beloved Queen committed adultery before their eyes. Many eyes turned to where Martin Leonidas had moved from his seat and now stood across from Anja staring at the monitor with a stunned expression that was rapidly turning to one of anger.

“That... that is not me!” Anja gasped softly gazing at the monitor.

“Fuck! I’m going to fill you with my come!” Rinard snarled on the monitor. “Tell me you want my come inside you! Tell me!” Rinard’s hips were moving in a blur as he pounded Anja into the mattress of the bed.

“Yes! Ohhhh.... Yes! Fuck me! Fill me with your come my Alpha wolf! Give it to me! Fill me completely!” Anja’s eyes went wide on the monitor and she howled out her own orgasm, her small body going rigid under Rinard.

“I’m there! Yes!” Rinard screamed out and rammed into her one last time.

Anja’s hands dropped to his muscular ass and she held him tightly to her body as he blasted his come into her. Anja was licking the side of his neck and face as he grunted his release into her, his body hunching forward to bury as much of his cock into as her as he could.

The monitor went dark suddenly and Wiktor snorted loudly from where she stood. “It does not end there!” She shouted. “This was only the beginning! And this is what Queen Anja forced upon Seanna! There is nine hours of security footage on this pad! Nine hours of Anja displaying her disgusting base side. Her wolf side! Not only with Rinard... but up to three other men as well. Men who also forced themselves upon Seanna even though it was obvious things had gotten out of hand! When Rinard and Seanna told Anja they no longer wished to participate in these... these sick sexual meetings, this is when Anja pushed Seanna out of her life. When Seanna threatened to reveal this side of her Queen unless Anja released her from her service as her handmaiden, Anja allowed her to die from wounds she received during the Evolli war. She did this to keep her secret buried. Or so she thought! She robbed Rinard of a wife and Pcillany of a daughter and possible future generations!”

“That is a fucking lie!” Anja screamed. “That... that is not me! What did you do?” She snarled as she leaped for where Rinard sat, her jade colored eyes now ablaze with her wolf persona and her fangs completely extended.

Rinard was coming to his feet just as Anja’s body froze in its motion. All eyes went to where Martin stood, his hand extended and holding Anja in the grip of his TK power. His eyes were also fully changed now, his dual wolf fangs extended and his face was twisted into an angry snarl all its own. Anja’s head snapped around and she glared at him.

“Martin!” She gasped. “Martin... put me down! I want to tear his eyes from his skull for his lies!”

Martin’s face turned from the dark monitor and he looked at her. “This is how you repay my love for you all these years?” He spoke his voice low and quivering in barely controlled anger.

“Martin... Lover... that is not me!” Anja declared.

“Then who is it?” Martin screamed the words so loudly that they echoed within the silent chamber. “They produce proof of your actions and you deny it! You seek to injure the man who brings these charges against you?”

“Martin... I swear to you that...”

“Shut up!” Martin screamed. He released his grip on Anja and she dropped the three inches to the floor. He turned to Wiktor. “There is more of this?” He demanded.

Wiktor nodded her head quickly. She had never seen Martin Leonidas shaking in anger as he was now and she stammered her words. “Yes... yes Milord.” She spoke. “The last... the last portion shows her with three additional men as well as Rinard. Milord... I... I must express my sincerest apologies for...”

Martin stepped toward her. “Save your apologies for someone who believes them Chief Minister Wiktor!” Martin hissed. “I do not!” He turned his head back and glared at Anja. “You... you bed with this fool over me?” He barked. “You take... you take three others into your bed with him? At the same time? I am not enough for you?”

“Lover I...”

“Don’t call me that!” Martin growled his words causing his entire body to vibrate. It was obvious to all in the chamber that he was struggling to maintain his composure in the face of what had just been presented to him. He snapped his head back to look at Wiktor. “I will be leaving immediately to return to Earth with my children. I...”

“Milord... Retta and Calyb are...” Buonau started to speak as she stood up from where she sat.

“They are my children!” Martin screamed at her cutting off her words instantly. “I felt their life force when they were conceived in Anja’s womb! They are my children and they will return with me to their home!”

“King Leonidas... I could have the Hadarian Arch Ministry issue an order forcing you to leave them here.” Wiktor spoke firmly.

Martin turned on her. “And you will explain to the families of them men you sentence to death that you tried to take my children?” He snapped.

“Milord... they are...” Wiktor said.

Martin tapped the COM unit on his ArmorPly. “Master of the Guard?” He barked.

“Milord!” The reply was immediate.

“You will gather Retta and Calyb from wherever they are. Mara and Endeem as well. Escort them to the *SPIRIT*. If anyone attempts to impede your progress you will fire on them with extreme prejudice!” Martin ordered with a voice as cold as the vacuum of space.

“As you order sire!”

“King Leonidas you...”

“Do not push me Chief Minister Wiktor!” Martin barked at her. “You have your pound of flesh. Anja will be made to answer for whatever crimes you say she has committed. I wash my hands of this issue!”

“Martin!” Anja shouted moving towards him.

Martin held up his hand and pointed at her. “Don’t come near me!” He spoke savagely. “Do not come near me! I will return the *SPIRIT* when I am back on Earth. You are still a Queen of the Union. At least until I speak with my mother and Deia. You will not keep our children with you however!”

“King Leonidas!” Buonau spoke.

“What do you want woman!” Martin screamed at her.

“Sire... I only wish to... may I offer an alternative?” Buonau spoke softly and without a trace of her normal arrogance. “Allow my daughter Duewa to return to Earth with you. At the very least to maintain the studies of Retta and Calyb and perhaps help them through the next few weeks.”

Martin glared at her for a long moment. “I am leaving in thirty minutes. If she is on the pad then she can return with me. If she is not... I do not care.”

“Martin you can’t believe...” Anja began as she stepped towards him.

Martin held up his hand once more and Anja fell silent and stopped, tears now clouding her beautiful eyes. “I do not know what to believe anymore.” He said softly. “Not when it concerns you. Do not attempt to contact me or our children until this mess you have gotten yourself in here is complete. Then we will decide where to go from there. Goodbye Anja.”

“Martin!” Anja screamed as he turned and began walking out of the Arch Ministry chamber. “Martin... don’t leave me!”

Her words fell on deaf ears as Martin’s long legs carried him from the chamber within seconds.

Anja collapsed onto the floor sobbing uncontrollably as Sivana and Eurin rushed to her while Atropos and Belen moved closer. Buonau was speaking with Duewa in hushed whispers as she practically dragged her daughter out of the chamber. The Ministers were chattering among themselves and only Wiktor stood by herself.

She stood there with a smug expression of accomplishment as the first part of their plan came together.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

EARTH

DRAGON MOUNTAIN OF SARDINIA

...*feel something father*. Vollenth spoke softly as he and his father sat on the floor of the cave looking out into the night sky. The wide doorway allowed the light from the stars and the smells of the salt air from the nearby ocean fill the cave.

These last days had been a wonder for Vollenth. A wonder of new experiences and new discovery as he relished in the presence of his family. The family he had never known existed. Yuri had told him he had no family, that they had been killed in the crash. The last days had seen him realizing just how devious and cruel she was as Vollenth rested and spent hours speaking with his mother Danica and Galen his father. Even more hours with his twin brother Visio and his younger siblings as they bounced from their backs and tails playing their games. Vollenth had spent the most hours with Arzoal the Elder Mother. He was completely fascinated by

her wisdom and majesty. The way she moved confidently among the hatchlings and the adolescents, never once injuring one of them despite her immense size. The way her voice encouraged them and scolded them. She related to him the history of their kind, the battles fought and their brush with extinction. She schooled him as well, teaching him things he would have never known or learned with Yuri or the High Coven.

Vollenth felt powerful for the first time in his life. He was fully recovered from the injuries he had sustained growing up with Yuri and his injuries from fighting Elynth and Andro. He had blossomed in weight with the regular and protein rich meals that he ate daily, his muscularity filling out completely and for the first time in his life his scales were shiny with health. He would sit for hours listening to the musical voice of his mother in his head as she told him of her life. How she had met his father, how they had become mated. Vollenth learned the Dragon Mountain here was actually a ship. A massive ship with the mountain built around it. A ship that their King had brought back from far across the stars and made their haven here on Earth. Around the ship was a powerful ten kilometer Mindvoice shield that blocked everything from the outside. Within this shield the last remnants of Yuri's influence over him had finally dissipated over three days. He could no longer feel her within him, her darkness and hatred, and that fact alone was the most incredible emotion he had ever felt. He soared through the skies with his brother and father learning new tricks and tactics on hunting and flying. His father was bonded to a senior elf Spartan who was now on Elear visiting with his family while Galen remained with him. Vollenth learned that this is where all the female dragons on Earth who were about to give birth to eggs came. Here in this mountain the eggs were laid and cared for lovingly by not only dragons, but Lycavorians and elves as well. The eggs were maintained and cared for in a nursery on the deck below where he now sat for however long it took for them to hatch. The parents were allowed to remain with them until that happened, no matter how many days or weeks it took. The Elder Mother's personal chamber was on the very top of the mountain, a massive cave where she trained the adolescents and hatchlings in everything from flying to controlling their Mindvoice powers. Many of them knew who he was and at times he could hear their whispers within Mindvoice about him. Never clear enough to know what they were saying, but just enough to hear his name once or twice. Vollenth really did not care what they were saying; his joy and happiness at being here and discovering this new life far outweighed anything.

What is it you feel my son? Galen asked.

I think it is because I am here. My mind... my thoughts have never been so clear and focused. Vollenth said calmly. *Father... I can feel the one I am meant for.* He spoke turning his head to look into his father's orange hued eyes. *It is... it is almost as if they have come closer to me. It is almost as if I can feel the pulse of their mind and heart.*

Galen nodded slowly. *This is not uncommon Vollenth. The King and Torma can feel each other across the stars. Andro and Elynth too. That you can sense this however faint it is, it speaks towards your power within Mindvoice. That is a true bond that you feel, not that twisted hold over you that Yuri the witch had. Tell me what else you feel son.*

Vollenth didn't hesitate in his words. *I feel life father. My life. But it is not me. Close by too.*

Galen nodded his huge head once more. *It is time.*

Vollenth canted his head slightly. *Time? Time for what?*

Come with me my son. Galen spoke lifting his massive body off the floor easily. *It is time I showed you what you feel. In time... as the Talon Guardians knew when they spared you... you and your Bonded One will meet. Now it is time that I showed you what else it is that courses through you.*

Puzzled and curious at the same time Vollenth rose up and followed his father out of the cave into one of the two main corridors. They ran the length of the ship, or mountain if you chose to call it that, over five kilometers long. Vollenth walked beside his father as smaller dragons scampered by, almost all of them staring at him as they past. Vollenth finally turned to his father.

Why do they look at me differently father? Vollenth asked softly. *Do they... do they hate me?*

Galen turned his head as he walked and blinked quickly. *Hate you? They do not hate you Vollenth my son. They admire you. The young ones look up to you. To the strength you have shown.*

Admire me? Vollenth gasped. *I have... why would they do this?*

Vollenth... only three dragons in our history have endured what you endured under the witch's thumb. They too fought the control. They fought the forced bond as hard as they could but in the end they succumb to it.

None of them were oppressed as long as you, none of them were treated as you, and yet you survived the severing of that bond. You survived and now you are stronger for it.

Prince Androcles and Talon Guardian Elynth severed the bond for me. Vollenth spoke. *It was not I.*

Oh but it was my son. Galen told him. *Yes... Andro and Elynth severed that bond, only they and their fathers carry that power. Not even the Elders can do that alone. Only they can as Talon Guardians. Yet while they severed the bond, it was your will to live and be free that saved you. If you did not have that... then we would not be here today speaking. You would have gone mad and eventually you would have died. No... they admire you and the strength of your will to continue on. It shows them that we can all have that power and will.*

Vollenth was silent as he followed his father a ways further and then they turned into a large room. Vollenth saw the elegant and powerful lines of the tan female dragon in front of him resting on the floor. Her scales shone with health and promise and dragon beauty. Her scent filled his nose and was familiar to him in some way. He was sure he would have remembered a female dragon that looked so beautiful. His orange eyes grew slightly wider when he saw the two small newborn hatchlings lying on the hay covered floor, their eyes shut as they slept. He snorted softly when he smelled them, stunned that they carried his unique scent. His snort caused the head of the female to turn quickly and her eyes went a little wider and she gathered her legs under her. Vollenth watched as she rose, feeling a desire burn inside him at her lithe dragon beauty.

Galen? Viera's voice gasped within Mindvoice. Her voice was like the whisper of chimes to Vollenth and he felt his whole body throb with want and desire.

I have come to see my grandchildren. Galen spoke proudly as he moved forward and looked at the two male dragon hatchlings as they snored happily. *They have grown!*

Viera nodded her large head, tearing her eyes from Vollenth. *They eat well and are very active.*

Galen turned back to look at his son. *You said you feel your life my son. Your life, but it is not you. This is what you feel. Your sons.*

Vollenth's eyes grew wider as he moved forward slowly his eyes focused on the two tiny hatchlings. He looked up quickly, his eyes wide as he finally remembered. *Viera?* He gasped as his eyes settled on her.

Viera looked at Galen and he nodded his head. *This is my son Viera.* He stated. *The Vollenth you knew... he is dead. This is the dragon my son was always meant to be.*

Viera moved closer to Vollenth staring into his eyes. *They... they are your sons.* She spoke. *Our sons.*

There... there were four! Vollenth snapped. *You carried four eggs!*

Viera nodded slowly not letting his voice dissuade her actions for she had secretly wished for this very day and did not think it would ever happen. *Yes. I was not able to eat enough to provide all of them nutrition within me. Eliani of the family Leonidas was able to save our sons.*

I... I killed them! Vollenth gasped closing his eyes in agony.

No! Viera exclaimed moving even closer to him. *You did not kill our children! The Coven killed our children!*

Viera had come here to this mountain and discovered a new life just as Vollenth now had. Galen and Danica both had been to visit her often, nearly every day since Vollenth had returned to the Mountain. Amazingly, her two remaining eggs had hatched within hours of Vollenth coming to the mountain, and Viera took it as a sign that they had waited for their father to come home to them before hatching. Vollenth's sires had held nothing back from her, telling Viera everything about what had taken place in SODRAG once she had left, and the reasons for Vollenth's vile nature through his early years. Viera had always found him handsome, yet she had wanted to wait before having him claim her. The Vollenth controlled by Yuri had not given her that choice. Now looking at him however, Viera felt he was very different. She could sense his power coursing through him, but it was tempered and focused.

Vollenth opened his eyes as it all came back to him. *I... I forced myself on you! I... you did not want me!*

Viera once more shook her large head. *I did want you Vollenth.* Viera corrected him. *You are very handsome. I only wanted to wait before you claimed me. Wait until we were older. Until we were ready.*

Vollenth looked at her. *I... I did not give you that choice.* He said softly.

Yuri did not give us that choice Vollenth. Viera said softly. *Galen and Danica... your parents have told me what you were enduring. The battle that raged within you. Why you acted as you did. How you fought all she was doing to you and this is why you were so...*

Cruel? Vollenth spoke the word.

Viera moved closer to him, touching her snout to his ever so gently and feeling shivers of happiness course through her. *That was not you Vollenth. This is who you are.* Viera spoke softly. *I have learned so much here. About our history and who we are. I... we could not save two of our eggs... but we can show our sons the love we were denied Vollenth. And we can have more children one day.*

More? Vollenth exclaimed. *Why would you...*

Why? Viera's voice dripped with female seductiveness now. *Because you are handsome and powerful. And you are meant for greater things.* Viera said. *What more could a female ask for in her mate.*

Viera... Viera I am sorry. I...you should find a different one. A mate who has not treated you as I have.

I want no one else. Stay with me Vollenth. Stay with our sons. Let us give them what you and I have lacked for so long Vollenth. We can give them what they deserve... and we can discover ourselves as well. Together. Viera said.

Vollenth met her beautiful eyes, once more admiring her coloring and scales and the muscles that rippled along her female frame. She was beautiful to him. *You wish this?* He asked stunned.

Viera nodded. *More than anything.*

Vollenth turned and looked at the two sleeping hatchlings for a long moment. He then moved closer to them, lowering his snout and brushing their wings ever so gently. He didn't pause and lowered his powerful body to the floor next to them, instinctively shielding them from the outside world.

I will not fail you my sons. Vollenth whispered.

Viera could feel her heart singing out in happiness and she too settled once more to the floor opposite Vollenth, shielding the hatchling's other side and her head close to Vollenth's.

Galen didn't speak as he backed himself from the room with a knowing smile and nod of his head. He turned when he felt the presence of the large dragon and he saw Arzoal approach slowly. She glanced into the room and saw them and nodded her head slowly as well.

She hoped for this day when we discovered what vexed your son Galen. I told her she did not have to regard Vollenth as her mate. Arzoal spoke. *She told me this is what she had always wanted to begin with.*

Galen nodded and looked back to see them touching their snouts together as they talked in a shielded Mindvoice connection.

He has felt his true Bonded One Elder Mother. Galen spoke. *The one he is meant for. The one he was always meant for.*

Your son is powerful Galen. As you and his mother are. Arzoal told him. *Now that he has gained the clarity and focus Yuri denied him... it does not surprise me. Andro said as much to me before we left SODRAG to bring him here. The one he is meant for is powerful as well. I have sensed them within his mind. They will make you proud Galen but we have to insure they are guided and given the instruction they will need as any new bonded pair. When that day comes.*

Galen nodded. *I will be ready.* He said. *And my Bonded One and I will teach them all that we know. As it should be.* Arzoal spoke.

SODRAG

"...Anton and Cihera have joined with us now." Dysea spoke within the very secure holo transmission. The new holo communications discs were one of the first inventions that Avi had given them, making their communications practically invulnerable and superbly encrypted no matter where they were. "They are going through all the intelligence we have gained in the past weeks and blending it with what they found."

Andro, Resumar and Arrarn sat at the small table in Andro's office, all of them looking at the smaller image of their first elven mother that resided on the table top.

"Mother... father will eventually discover all this sneaking around that you and the others are doing." Resumar spoke from his chair. "You more than anyone knows that he has keen eyes everywhere."

Dysea nodded. "That is why I have talked with him as often as I can. Right now he thinks we are simply back on Apo Prime to discover what could have happened to Normya's ship."

"And you think he believes you?" Arrarn asked leaning forward.

Dysea shrugged. "Your father knows me well. He will figure it out soon enough, if he has not already, but for the time being he is allowing me to do what I must. I think he suspects there is more to what is going on... but he will not intervene as long as we continue to follow the path we are on. Aricia and Bella passed close enough to Apo Prime on their way back to Earth and I was able to speak with them. They agree we must keep this from your father as long as possible. He is dealing with whatever happened on Hadaria. His presence is somewhat clouded... as is *Melyanna's*."

Andro nodded. "We felt this as well. Almost as if they are trying to hide something from all of us."

Dysea nodded. "Yes... that is what your mothers and I felt too. You have not spoken to him?"

Andro shook his head. "No, not directly. Not since he left. I know he left Hadaria late yesterday afternoon and mother remained. I have not spoken to him since. He is due back here in three days. I'm sure he will come here within hours of returning."

"How goes the training?" Dysea asked.

Andro smiled. "You know very well how the training is going mother." He said. "You are avoiding the answer to Resumar's question. Where is Normya?"

Dysea matched his smile. "Normya is with Tir'ut. They are going over a *TYPE II* in the main hanger here on the base. They are trying to determine how exactly this Chief Engineer accomplished what he did without anyone noticing."

"So then..." Arrarn began.

Dysea nodded. "Yes. They are falling in love more as each hour passes. And they have discovered some rather interesting things they can do together."

"*Magar tanor vada vochan.*" Resumar spoke softly. (Never fear the unknown)

Dysea nodded. "*Neweni.*" She said. "It is a saying our sons seemed to have embraced. Literally." (Indeed)

Resumar looked at her in the transmission. "Mother... I didn't tell you before you left because I could not explain it myself. What I felt for her."

Dysea nodded. "That is usually the case when love blossoms Resumar." She answered with a small smile. "We need not worry about your sister. As long as Tir'ut lives, no harm will ever come to her. You however, you have two verifiable threats on Earth. One that will undoubtedly be very upset that you have taken your young wife from them. And the second and possibly more immediate threat will be equally incensed that my other sons have claimed the daughters of Aikiro and Yuri as their mates and wives."

"Well they can't have her back!" Resumar snapped. "Ever!"

"What is it that Uncle Danny says all the time?" Arrarn said nodding his head. "I'll open a whole can of whup ass on them if they try to take Narice or Toria from me."

Dysea looked at Andro in the transmission and saw him shrug his broad shoulders. "My brothers speak very eloquently. For all of us I think." He said finally with a smile. "I especially like the whup ass part. How did you find out?"

Dysea shook her head with a smile at the antics of her sons. "A vision." She answered.

"When did you have this vision mother?" Andro asked.

Dysea met his eyes. "Sixteen years ago." She answered without hesitation. "May I then assume that this young female elf I saw on Elynth in the same transmission is one of the three that Sadi spoke of during your interview?"

"Her name is Ne'Veha." Andro told her. "Our instincts... our instincts tell us yes she is one of them. We are not going to pursue her. She has trust issues because of past relationships and the way she has been raised."

"You mean the way her parents have raised her?" Dysea said knowing that is usually how elf distrust of Lycavorians started.

Andro nodded. "She is very close with her parents. Something occurred in her past... in their past that turned them against Lycavorians to an extent. It is private to her and I do not want to bandy it about."

"And if she can not reach past these issues Andro?" Dysea asked.

"Sadi is my *Anome*." Andro spoke confidently. "She will always be more than I need or expect. Carisia... Carisia has been dreaming of us for as long as we have been dreaming of her. She is part of us whether we recognized it or not. She will always be with us. Ne'Veha and Lu'ria are meant for us as well... but in order to have a lasting relationship, you must have trust and openness. You taught all of us that mother."

Ne'Veha will always be part of us and no one will ever fill that void where she resides, but it will be her choice to pursue anything. As it will be Lu'ria's."

"You are just a male slut *fervon!*" Resumar spoke with a grin.

This brought laughter from all of them and Dysea shook her head slowly before looking at them all.

"You must guard yourselves until the time is right my sons. All of you."

"We have heard nothing from the Kavalians since we left according to Aunt Deia and mother in Sparta." Andro spoke slowly, still somewhat shocked that his first elven mother had this vision so long ago. A vision of the future that no one could have ever predicted at the time. "Personally I think it means they are plotting... but it could be that they are simply trying to decide *how* to react to Athani defecting and marrying Res."

"True." Dysea said. "As we are doing here... leave nothing to chance my sons. All of you will have targets painted on you once all is revealed."

Andro nodded. "*Sibfla!* Like that is anything new. Father has been a target since he was a child and why should we be any different. People just don't seem to care for our unique charm." He spoke with a grin.

Dysea chuckled now and nodded her head. "Well... it does need to grow on you." She said. "We are going to watch this man for a few more days at least. Tir'ut was able to extract some information in regards to another plot concerning female elves that he arranged. We are trying to get more details and I will speak with L'tian shortly in regards to it."

"More of these strange accidents?" Arrarn asked.

Dysea shook her head. "It doesn't appear so. This transport was deliberately targeted it seems, but the females and males on it were simple students, and not any sort of specialists as with the others. They were simply returning from a vacation when their transport was lost. This appears unrelated to what we are working on... but it troubles me, happening now when we are conducting this investigation."

Resumar nodded. "Someone is getting bolder."

"Yes." Dysea agreed. "And that can not mean good things."

"Mother," Arrarn chimed in. "Have Normya check the LSD Flux Conduits and Internal SCR Sensors if she hasn't already. They are almost always forgotten during the flight checks and they could very well have an imprint of whoever set the explosive device."

"I will tell her." Dysea said. "Esther has spoken with Cha'talla and they were able to retrieve quite a bit of equipment and supplies to help them protect the settlement. Cha'talla and T'lol both send you their sincere thanks Andro. That is not something you needed to do."

Andro shrugged once more and got to his feet. "Given what they have done... with Normya... with you... protecting you both. It was a small response to them saving our sister's life."

"Cha'talla has asked me to rely to you an open invitation to Kranek whenever you wish." Dysea said with bright eyes. "You will be welcome there always. Your actions have earned a friend Androcles, and it is my understanding that Cha'talla's people do not make friends easy."

"And father?" Andro asked.

Dysea smiled. "Your father... your father has been welcome wherever they have gone because of what he did that day on Lycavore." She said. "That bit of information will come as quite a surprise to him... but his name is spoken of with honor among Cha'talla's tribe."

"You seem taken with them mother." Resumar said softly.

Dysea nodded. "I look at what they have accomplished there and can only be amazed at the drive it took to establish themselves and completely change how they live and view others. It is astounding to say the least. Like your sister I have finally looked beyond all we have been raised to believe about them, and what I see is perhaps a group of men and women who are much closer to us than we have ever thought. They may have only just discovered this part of themselves... but it has always been within them."

The soft chime sounded and Andro turned to the panel on the table as Arrarn touched it. "Yes." Arrarn spoke.

"Prince Arrarn... Empress Aikiro's transport is twenty minutes out and Princess Sadi has requested Prince Andro meet her at the airfield." The voice said.

"Thank you." Arrarn answered looking at Andro.

"Mother... we need to go." Andro stated. "Please keep at least one of us in the loop with what you have planned."

Dysea nodded her head. "I will do that. Do not worry. Good luck and hopefully we will see you all very soon."

Andro nodded and turned to his brothers as the transmission faded. "Res... make sure you stay out of sight with Athani while wonder bitch and her daughter are here." He spoke. "She'll raise a shitstorm if she knows Athani is here."

Resumar nodded. "Will do." He said coming to his feet.

Arrarn stood up as well. "Wonder Bitch?" He said with a grin.

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders once more. "Does my dislike for her show through that much?" He asked.

"Oh no... not in the least." Arrarn replied with a grin.

"She'll want a tour of the pilot training no doubt." Andro said.

Arrarn nodded. "Have Sadi return to the hanger as soon as you guys say goodbye to Ne'Veha. We're ready for her."

"We'll get together with Deni, Malic and Moneus later tonight and go over some new procedures and whether the Coven riders are ready to have access to the nearby city." Andro said as they all moved for the door. "Deni is finishing up their initial CQCF by later this afternoon and Aikiro will be able to see them in action while she is here."

"You are ok handling Yuri?" Resumar asked. "Once she discovers that Vollenth and she are no longer bonded she's going to be hopping mad."

Andro nodded. "Yes she is... but I doubt she will lose much sleep over it. The ease with which Elynth and I severed their bond tells me she was not holding too tightly. I'll be fine."

The Leonidas brothers nodded as they moved for the door.

Ne'Veha stared at him as he made his way across the tarmac towards where she stood with Sadi. The last two days and nights had been eye opening for her to say the least. She had never imagined she would meet any of the Royal family, and while both her parents respected and trusted King Leonidas and his Queens, that did not change the overall distrust they had for Lycavorians as a whole. She had been raised her entire life with that mentality, and Tarren's actions had only served to reinforce what they had told her. At least until she had blundered into the lives of Androcles and Sadi Leonidas in the most embarrassing of ways.

Ne'Veha had met and interacted with many handsome Lycavorian males, some of whom even wanted to claim her for themselves. She had resisted all of them until Tarren had come along. More than anything else she thought perhaps he was the exception to her parent's rule. She should have seen that was not the case the first time she had let him take her to bed. Her mother had always told her that Lycavorian men were interested only in satisfying their own needs and desires, and Tarren had proven that. He treated her well enough, but he never seemed to care about taking his time with her, only reverting to nuzzling her elven ears when he was about to explode. It was never enough to get her to respond to him. Now... now Ne'Veha was discovering that perhaps it was not Tarren at all. Sadi had told her that she was destined to be with them, all of them together, and Sadi Leonidas was one of the most intelligent and faithful women she had ever met. It hadn't always been that way Sadi had told her, but the moment her life had taken a new course on the Royal Estate Island twenty-six years ago, it had opened her eyes to just how truly and completely fate and destiny could direct their lives. It had made Ne'Veha look back on her own life and see the relation of events that Sadi spoke of. Seeing them together with Androcles Leonidas the night before in their bungalow, how they interacted and how so totally she was accepted as part of their intimate circle made Ne'Veha begin to question all that she had ever held as truth and fact. She was so very confused now, confused because she could not deny the irresistible draw she had to not only Androcles, but Sadi and Carisia as well as the Drow female they had yet to even meet. It was as if their minds had suddenly come together in a small way, allowing them to almost feel and see her and each other.

Ne'Veha had slept in a separate room in the bungalow, and even though they told her they would block their emotions from her so as not to influence her, she could still hear the muffled cries of passion from both Sadi and Carisia and this only made her want to join them in the worst way. She had finally been able to drift into a fitful sleep dreaming of Andro's powerful embrace and the soft lips of both Sadi and Carisia, and then she woke up to bright sunlight and the smell of coffee and breakfast. Her stomach did not rebel at the smells this

time as whatever Andro's sister had given to her had completely purged the excessive amount of Spartan Wine from her system. She joined them for breakfast with no hesitation, and she found Andro and Sadi eating thick steaks and eggs to satisfy their wolf hunger, while Carisia was enjoying mainly a breakfast of fruits and small nibbles of the meat from both their plates. They pulled her to the table and Andro was the one who allowed his own food to go cold while he made her a delicious meal of eggs and fruit, knowing almost uncannily what she would eat. He was the first to leave that morning, giving her an extra hour with just Sadi and Carisia, and Ne'Veha could feel the powerful pull towards the beautiful blond wolf that was Sadi and the alluring raven haired vampire Carisia. While tiny in comparison to Andro, Carisia fit so very easily into his arms Ne'Veha noticed. While she knew that Sadi was his *anome*, and within Lycavorian culture that was the most sacred of positions, Ne'Veha saw him treat Carisia to the same nuzzles and nibbles as Sadi enjoyed the entire evening. And Ne'Veha could not deny to herself that she felt a little emptier when Andro left, something she felt from both Sadi and Carisia.

Ne'Veha watched as he stepped up to them, leaning over to kiss Sadi hungrily as she looked on. He didn't hesitate and took her hand in his as they ended their kiss and he looked at her.

"I hope... I hope you decide to return and visit us." Andro said. "I have upgraded your authorization to allow you access to the base here whenever you want. Just don't tell anyone." He said with a smile.

"Androcles... Androcles I..." Ne'Veha stammered.

Andro put a finger to her full lips and shook his head. He leaned over and used the tip of his nose and lips to gently nuzzle just the tip of her elven ear. Ne'Veha felt warm shivers course through her at this and she gripped his arm tightly in response.

"I told you that you are not expected to do anything." Andro spoke softly. "No one will replace you Ne'Veha. When... if you decide you desire to explore what we already know we want to explore, all you need do is tell us." He said. "We will not pressure you in any way. You have duties to conduct just as we do. All I ask is that you do not speak of what you have seen here on the base."

Ne'Veha looked at him, meeting his gorgeous eyes and then turning to look at Sadi and looking into her dazzling jungle green orbs. "What... what if I decide I am unable to enter... to have a relationship with you? With Sadi and the others? Carisia and... and Lu'ria? What if I can't set aside all I have grown up believing? Or I wish to try and repair my... my relationship with Tarren?"

Andro nodded. "Then that is what you decide... but it will not change how we feel about you." He said. "I could shower you with gifts... insure you have only the best assignments and missions as a pilot... and even help your career along." Andro shook his head when she opened her mouth to retort. "I could do all these things for you Ne'Veha... to show you that we truly desire you. However... that would play exactly into the frame of mind that your parents have been telling you we are like since you were a child. You belong with us... and you can feel it just as clearly as we can. When you decide that is what you want... you will know. We'll wait for that day to come, however long it takes." They heard the engines of the transport on the pad begin to rise in power and Andro looked up. "Your ship is about to leave."

Andro leaned over further and placed a soft kiss on her lips, reaching up to caress her cheeks as he did. A kiss of deep feeling and the promise of what she could have and a kiss that left her trembling in need. He stepped back and Sadi did the same quickly, her full lips tasting faintly like berries and incredibly soft in their texture. Ne'Veha found herself responding to their kisses, but then Sadi pulled back.

"We will see you soon Ne'Veha." Sadi said squeezing her hands. "We are here when you make your decision. We belong to you just as much as you belong to us and that will never change."

Ne'Veha met her eyes for a long moment and then glanced at Andro before bending to retrieve the bag Sadi had packed for her. She didn't really know what to say then, her body still strumming with sensations she had never felt, so she turned then and sprinted for the transport as Sadi leaned back against Andro's chest. His arm pulled her closer and he nuzzled her neck and cheek.

"She will come to know what she feels Andro." Sadi said softly. "And she will be with us, because she knows this is where she belongs."

They watched as the transport began to lift off and they waved even though Ne'Veha's face was lost in one of the small windows. Andro pulled Sadi closer to him as the ship receded into the blue sky and he nuzzled her neck once more, this time sending his aura pulsing through her unchecked. Not in an overtly sexual way, but strong enough to let his *anome* know that she was his.

“No matter destiny and fate *KertaGai*.” His voice said softly next to her ear. “You will always be first in my heart and mind. I can not help that... nor do I want to. I may love... I may love them as well... but you are my soul Sadi Leonidas.”

Sadi turned in his arms with a blissful look on her face and they shared a sizzling kiss right there on the tarmac, not caring who saw them. It was a kiss of devotion, of desire and of unquestionable love.

Sadi pulled her lips from his after a long moment, using her tongue to trace his upper lip lightly. “And it is the same for me Andro my love.” She whispered. “I could never... I could not go on without you.”

Andro grinned. “I’m not going anywhere anytime soon.” He said. “That thing you got behind you is amazing! I’d be a fool!”

Sadi’s face took on a horrified and indignant expression and she pushed him away with a laugh. “Oh you pervert!” She exclaimed. “You have a one track mind do you know that? I have to meet your brother and actually do some work and the only thing you can think about is my ass?”

Andro waggled his eyebrows. “Well... it is magnificent.” He stated.

Sadi concentrated and flicked her finger at him, the small manifestation of her Mindvoice powers erupting from her finger and crossing the distance between them instantly, giving Andro a shove. She had been practicing nightly with both Carisia and Andro to improve the control of her rapidly growing skills and how she could direct it and she had gotten very good in just a few short weeks.

Andro chuckled as he regained his balance and saw her walking away from him with a brilliant smile. “I can’t help it!” He barked.

“Pig!” Sadi called over her shoulder happily as she headed for the long row of hangers in the distance.

“You love me though!” Andro called.

[YES! Yes I do. More than any breath I might take.] Sadi’s musical voice sounded in his head. *[I will see you tonight. Be careful Androcles Leonidas... my mate and husband. I look forward to every day and what we may discover, and I would be very unhappy if that discovery stopped so soon after it has begun.]*

Andro allowed his aura to wrap around her even as he turned and headed to meet Aikiro’s transport. *[And I love you Sadi Leonidas... my mate and wife.]*

SPARTA

ROYAL VILLA ESTATE

“...told me was to arrange for guest quarters for one adult and two children.” For’mya spoke as she handed Deia the mug of steaming tea.

“Anja’s not returning with him?” Deia asked.

For’mya shook her head as she returned to the couch and settled next to where Nayeca sat holding her newborn son. The couch was huge and it allowed her to stretch out comfortably and lean against Danny’s side where he sat. Anuk had her legs pulled under her and was sitting on Danny’s opposite side. “No.” She answered. “He was very vague... and both of them are hiding their emotions very well. He did not elaborate on what took place and only said that he would tell us when he returned.”

“Something has happened.” Gorgo spoke from her seat next to Riall on the second of the three couches. “Anja would not have remained unless it was absolutely necessary.”

For’mya nodded as she sipped her own mug of coffee. “I agree that something has taken place, however Anja is almost as guarded as Martin.” She said.

“Not to mention her temper is nearly as bad as Marty’s.” Dan spoke. “She will only take so much *sibfla* before she unloads on someone. That won’t be pretty.”

For’mya nodded. “They are both shielding to such an extent that Aricia, Bella and I can only get fuzzy sensations. “And contrary to what everyone outside of this room hears and believes, we all know that *Melyanna*’s Mindvoice powers are considerably more than she allows others to see, and many have underestimated her due to her physical stature.”

“To their woeful realization.” Anuk said. “I have witnessed this very thing from her.”

“The Hadarian Elder Council has gone and done something stupid. That has to be it.” Gorgo said. “It is the only reason Anja would have remained. They have fought her tooth and nail over everything she and Sivana

have put forth in the last quarter century, and she would not remain willingly on Hadaria when we are in our six month rotation here to Earth.”

“Who is returning with him?” Deia asked now.

“The daughter of their senior Elder Mage Buonau.” For’mya answered. “Duewa I believe her name is. And her two young sons.”

“What about Andro?” Panos asked from where he stood behind the end of the couch where Tarifa, Aihola and Isra sat. “Can he tell us more?”

For’mya shook her head. “He can get no more than what we are detecting, which in and of itself is telling us something. He has also not pushed it because Aikiro is at SODRAG today and Yuri will discover he has severed her bond with Vollenth and he needs to be sharp for their visit.”

Danny chuckled now. “Oh that will go over well.” He stated lifting his glass of wine and taking a sip. “Yuri isn’t one to take that sort of information very well.”

“No she is definitely not.” For’mya spoke with a smile. “Martin told me that Armetus is rendezvousing with the *SPIRIT* sometime tomorrow. He apparently has some information that is urgent and could not be sent via transmission. Riall... he wants you to arrange a Command Staff meeting for immediately when he returns. If Armetus will not use the new communication protocols we have devised since having the Mindvoice ship in our possession you can be assured it is very important and will require all of us to attend the meeting.”

Riall nodded. “Done.”

“Aricia and Bella will be back sometime tomorrow as well.” For’mya said turning to look at Danny. “Daniel... he wants you to meet with this Colin Walsh and determine if what Anja has said could have happened is indeed true. Only you and he were on this mission he speaks of with Martin. Only you and he would have all the details.”

“I am meeting their transport as soon as it touches down.” Danny answered. “Isabella already contacted me about it.”

Tarifa leaned forward in her chair. “For’mya... *Nya Istel* and I... tell us of Dysea.” She asked. “She is like a sister to us and we worry for her. Is she among...?”

For’mya nodded. “Yes. She is with Immortals.” She answered. “To make a long story short... the story filtering in the Netnews about Normya’s accident was in fact not an accident. Her ship was sabotaged and she was nearly captured by a pureblood vampire mercenary called Gerald. He is a former student of Aikiro who defected during the latter portion of the first year of the war. He has been prowling The Wilds doing whatever he could to survive. Apparently that now includes trying to kidnap our children for his own vile reasons no doubt. Normya was rescued by a group of traders who kept her from falling into this mercenary’s hands. A group of Immortals.” For’mya looked at Panos. “Cha’talla’s tribe.”

“Cha’talla!” Panos hissed from where he stood. “Impossible! He is... the High Lord killed him for his part in holding Lisisa prisoner!”

For’mya shook her head. “I assure you... he is far from dead. Dysea spent a week with them in the settlement they have built in The Wilds. Normya even longer. A settlement of many different species to include elves.”

“Elves?” Aihola gasped.

“This is not the same Cha’talla that we have read about.” For’mya spoke. “His life was saved by a pureblood female vampire. A woman who was also being schooled by Aikiro herself. This woman... Esther is her name... she is now Cha’talla’s Blessed Wife. They have been married for over twenty years and have built quite the settlement. Cha’talla’s oldest son with this Esther, his name is Tir’ut, he saved Normya’s life twice and he has sworn an *Iglata d’Vlos* to protect Normya and Dysea at all costs.”

Aihola’s eyes went a little wider. “An *Iglata d’Vlos*!” She stammered.

“What is this *Iglata d’Vlos*?” Panos asked. “I have never found the need to learn the ancient vampire language.”

“It means Promise of Blood.” Nayeca spoke now. “It is essentially a vow to defend and protect a person or object until all the blood has left their bodies.”

“To the death.” Aihola said nodding her head.

For’mya nodded. “Dysea went to retrieve Normya from their settlement and discovered what really happened. She and Normya are now working with this Tir’ut and his mother Esther in discovering who was

behind it, while an engineer detachment helps Cha'talla and the others to better fortify their settlement. Daniel... the Immortal that Martin saved on Lycavore?"

Danny nodded. "Yeah?"

"It was Cha'talla's brother T'loht." For'mya said.

Danny's eyes were wide now. "He... he was the one who took out an entire Immortal detachment and saved our flank!" Danny shook his head like a large bear as he got shivers. "Man that is just down right spooky."

"Anton and Cihera have joined them on Apo Prime as whatever mission they were on has apparently led them in the same direction." For'mya said. "And it includes the weapons deals of T19s, who arranged them and the kidnapping of roughly a hundred elves over the course of several years. To what end we don't know. At least not yet."

"Traitors!" Deia hissed angrily. "I thought we had gone beyond this in our time. This time I will leave none of them alive."

"Well... we do know that this High Coven insurgency is not involved with whoever attacked Normya's ship." For'mya stated. "Vonis remained with the ship they met with and will try to facilitate a meeting with the leader of this insurgency."

"So everything is not as cozy as Aikiro would have us believe." Gorgo asked.

"No. Not in the least. But until we know more... their ultimate goal for coming here still eludes us." For'mya said. "It most certainly does not relate to the dragons they have brought here if what Andro's reports have indicated are true."

"What information does Armetus have?" Deia asked.

"That I don't know. Martin did not either. Armetus felt it too important to reveal to anyone but him and only in person. That is why he is meeting with the *SPIRIT* as she returns here." For'mya said. "I'm sure we will find out however."

"Was it wise acting in such a way with the Kavalians then For'mya? With the High Coven here and the unknowns that surround them." Anuk asked. "Allowing the daughter of their Prefect to defect and then marry Resumar? It is almost as if we are purposely acting in this way to retaliate for what they attempted with Lisisa. No matter how vile that was."

Deia shook her head. "We acted in the best possible way we could have actually." She replied confidently. "If we had not done this... Resumar would simply have kidnapped her. And trust me, Athani would not have resisted in any way and probably helped him as much as she could to accomplish that task. Then we would have bigger problems. For'mya, Gorgo, Thr'won and I were all convinced that her desire and love for Resumar was very genuine. You all know Thr'won would not have conducted the ceremony if she had any doubts. This way... it was legal and we announced it to the universe in such a way that they can do nothing but accept it."

"This gives us insight into how things truly are within the Kavalian Federation." Tarifa spoke now. "Perhaps all is not as it seems or how they want us to believe. Selene has always said they had many vile skeletons in the closet and one day they would come out."

"It is worse than what my father was doing to our own people." Isra said. "Eventually free will and the desire to follow your own path will prevail. Could this Athani be the first of many?"

"Unfortunately... probably not." For'mya said. "Deia and I both concur that because Athani's defection is so high profile, the Kavalians will most likely immediately clamp down on any dissent that might be filtering among their people."

"If they know about it." Nayeca spoke.

"True. If they know about it." For'mya said. For'mya shook her head slowly. "I must apologize. These gatherings for us are meant to be times of happiness and joy, not what could be considered a war meeting. We..."

"Why do you feel the need to apologize to us For'mya Leonidas?" The new voice asked.

They all turned to see Helen enter the main room through the open double doors that led out onto the patio, the light tan shawl draped over her shoulders and her hands wrapped around a steaming mug of Aricia's coffee.

“Helen... Martin never intended for us to come together like this and discuss the bad things that are happening.” For’mya spoke softly. “He wanted us together to enjoy what we all share.”

Helen nodded slowly. “Yes that is part of it.” She stated.

“Part of it?” Gorgo said catching the tone of her voice and the double meaning in her words. “Dustha... what do you mean?”

“What do I mean?” Helen said as she moved closer to them. She moved around to the front of the couch and set her coffee mug down on the knee high table before settling to the couch between For’mya and Nayeca. She looked at the sleeping Melancton in Nayeca’s arms and held her arms out for him. Nayeca didn’t pause for an instant and she deftly handed her son off to Helen who cuddled the baby in her arms and looked into his face. “This is what I mean.” She said softly.

“*Feravomir*?” Tarifa asked.

“Martin Leonidas may be King of our Union... and in many ways he is far more than his grandfather and father ever were.” Helen spoke softly. “His destiny and path was laid over three thousand years ago, and he unerringly walks that path now. Yet the reason you are all here is because this is the path that destiny and fate laid before *you*.” Her eyes cut to Gorgo and then to Daniel. “Some of you were set on this path before you were ever born.” Helen turned her eyes back to the half Lycavorian and half elven baby, the dark color of his skin shiny in the light of the room. “Daniel Simpson... why do you think that when he has three brothers who carry his mother’s blood in their veins... who he loves and honors... why do you think that only you carry the term of *Fervon* to Martin Leonidas?”

“I... I never really gave it much thought.” Danny replied softly. “It... it has just always been there.”

Helen nodded. “Gorgo... why do you think when all else has failed... why do you think that men and women alike come to you and want you to speak to Martin for them? And that after you do... Martin will concede to what it is they wish if it meets with your approval.”

Gorgo’s dark eyes went to Danny and then back to her. “I... like Daniel I have never given it much thought.” She said.

“Have none of you stopped to consider that I was responsible for sending his father to his death.” Helen said gently. “I was the one who told Leonidas that in order to save Sparta, one of its Kings had to die. Have you never wondered why Martin regards me as some precious item to be protected even after that?”

“You are the *Feravomir*.” Panos spoke. “The First Oracle of our people. How... how could he not?”

“Is that what all of you believe?” Helen met all of their eyes as she looked at them. “I will tell you why. Because Martin knows that all of you were meant to be here as well. You are his family yes... but like him you are part of the greater whole. He knows your commitment to each other as well as to this Union is what drives you forward. Without all of you... Martin knows that without all of you...” Helen smiled now. “He told me once that without all of you he would go screaming into the darkness somewhere and bawl his eyes out. All of you play a role in his life as well as the Union... and it is *that* destiny and fate that allows you to sit here. And it is Martin’s uncanny ability to somehow sense that within all of you and hold you close. It is an ability he has without fail passed down to his own children.”

“*Feravomir*... what are you trying to tell us?” Deia asked.

“The Union has experienced unequalled prosperity since Martin returned and took his place as King hasn’t it Deia?” Helen asked.

Deia nodded without hesitation. “More than at any time in our history.” She said. “The growth is unparalleled. As is the return to our heritage and culture in many ways. And the way he has blended that with the Spartan nature of our people on Earth.”

Helen nodded with a smile. “As Anja has said in the past... and it is a phrase I thoroughly enjoy saying... who would have think it?” She chuckled softly as they all smiled. “We will always be tested... in many ways and in many shapes from many directions. We had many years of peace until the Evolli became greedy and violent and we needed to defend what we believe in. Never make the mistake that there are not others who want what we have. Do not become complacent and begin to believe in our own superiority. It is your destiny to be here. To be leaders of our people. All of you. Just as it is Martin’s destiny to lead all of us. But we can never lose our vigilance or all will be lost.”

“Helen... are you saying that we have lost our way?” For’mya asked.

“I don’t know. Have we?” She asked looking at her. She leaned over and placed a soft kiss on Melancton’s small head before handing him gingerly back to Nayeca. She got to her feet then and picked up her coffee before moving to the edge of the couches and stopping. “I do know that things have changed since the end of the Evolli war. People have changed and I am still trying to determine how and why.”

“What people *Feravomir*?” Tarifa asked her softly. “We... we are the same people as we were then.”

“Are we?” Helen said softly. “Or does it just seem that way?”

They were all silent as Helen lifted the mug to her lips and walked slowly out of the main room and back onto the patio disappearing into the shadows as silently as she had appeared.

Danny leaned forward now and shook his head. “Does she creep anyone else out as much as she does me when she speaks in riddles and goes all prophetic on us. She was bad before she got Canth’s memories. Now she is just plain scary.”

“Daniel!” Anuk hissed.

“What?” Danny defended himself. “The woman is scary sometimes! I’m not being mean about it! Just truthful!”

“Yes.” Deia said. “But is she right?”

SODRAG

“...seem to be coming along very adequately.” Aikiro stated as they entered the small briefing room.

Andro stood just inside the door and he looked at Lisisa who stood next to him as Aikiro passed in front of them with Yuri just behind her, Thast and two others behind her. He waited until all of them had entered the room before allowing it to slid shut and he turned to see Aikiro settling into the chair, while Yuri and the others stood around her loosely. Yuri was glaring at Lisisa with undisguised hatred in her eyes, while Lisisa seemed calm and even cheery in Yuri’s presence. Andro held in his smile as he and Lisisa took the two chairs at the opposite end of the table.

He looked at Yuri. “Are you going to stand Princess Yuri?” He asked.

Yuri turned her glare on him and seemed to grow even angrier as she realized it had a similar effect on Andro, which was to say... no effect in the least. They both appeared very bored by her in fact. They waited patiently until Yuri pulled out the chair and settled next to her mother.

“Your brother has certainly caused quite the commotion with the Kavalians.” Aikiro stated as Yuri sat down. “I understand he has disappeared with his new Kavalian *wife*. I do hope you did not bring him here. That would not be the best of actions... and it would make me begin to question what your father’s ultimate goals are.”

Andro cut his eyes back to Aikiro. “I do not know where my brother has gone with Athani.” He said calmly. “And we could say the same about you Empress.”

“I have stated my reasons and goals for coming here.” Aikiro answered somewhat harshly. “I did not however, expect your brother to take the Kavalian Prefect’s daughter as his wife! What would you have me deduce from this action?”

“You may deduce whatever it is you choose.” Andro said. “Your riders are coming along much more than adequately.” He stated now. “Much more than we thought them capable of actually.”

“Their training appears to very intense.” Aikiro said realizing no matter how hard she tried she would not breach his Mindvoice shields and determine if the Kavalian female was here. Aikiro didn’t think they would be fool enough to bring her here, but her gentle probes were going nowhere on either Androcles or Lisisa. “I am assuming this is why you would not allow me to meet with my daughter and grandchildren?”

Andro nodded. “It is intense. For the pilots as well as the riders. They do not need any distractions at this point in their training. From anything or anyone for any purpose.”

“Commander Thast came with us hoping to visit with his wife!” Yuri spoke severely. “Are you going to deny him time with his wife?”

Andro looked at her. “Yes.” He said. “As I said... the riders and pilots do not need any distractions. The commander is a point of contention for Carisia... a conflict that she does not need to deal with while she is here

training. When I give them permission to visit the nearby city, and Carisia chooses to, he can meet with her there.”

“I am Carisia’s husband!” Thast spat with considerable venom in his voice. “She has no choice!”

Andro looked at him with his azure eyes and Lisisa could sense his burning desire to gouge out the man’s eyes and tear him to shreds with his teeth and claws. Lisisa determined that if she could sense this, then Aikiro might be able to as well.

“You will find Commander...” Lisisa spoke now. “All of the riders will be different when they leave here. More independent! More confident! And much more able to act of their own accord. My sister will make her own decisions.”

“She is not your sister!” Yuri snarled.

Lisisa met her eyes. “Isn’t she? We are both of your blood Yuri. You will not be able to take that away from us no matter what you do or say. And we are far more similar than even you know. You are not as good a mother as you think yourself to be. In fact... you are as cruel and sadistic as they come. Though considering whom your own parents are... that shouldn’t surprise me in the least.”

Yuri glared at her for a moment before turning to look at Andro. “Where is Vollenth?” She demanded. “Why was he not here to meet me?”

Andro took a deep breath knowing this moment had been coming and not really knowing how Yuri would act to the news.

“Vollenth is someplace safe.” He stated evenly. “Your bond with him was one you forced upon him Princess Yuri. It very nearly drove him mad. That is why you could barely control his actions. My bonded sister and I have severed your bond with him. Something that you have not noticed since you have been here, which is only an even greater sign that what we did was right and needed to be done.”

Yuri bolted to her feet as she reached out within Mindvoice for Vollenth. “How dare you!” She screamed out angrily. Her eyes narrowed savagely as she could no longer feel the tremors within Mindvoice of Vollenth’s more abrasive nature and the anger that drove him. It was an empty void where once she could feel him.

Aikiro’s dark eyes remained on Andro as he sat back in his chair calmly and she studied him. There was something in his voice and manner, some self-serving tone that went beyond simple confidence. It was almost as if he knew something none of them did, which was very apparent it seemed.

“You had no right!” Yuri shouted as she leaned over the table and glowered at Andro.

“I had every right!” Andro answered coming to his feet. “I am a Talon Guardian of the dragon species! It is my sworn duty to protect and shield them in any way I am able! I told you from the outset that if you could not control him I would! Vollenth was a festering boil bonded to you as he was, something else I told you in the beginning! Your anger and hatred, which you wear on your sleeve for some reason, it was slowly poisoning him. It would have eventually killed him and quite possibly you as well. I chose to not let that happen... for *his* sake. He had no choice in what you did to him. He is somewhere safe now... a place where he can heal and be among those of his kind that can help him. A place far from you!”

Yuri cut her eyes to Aikiro. “Mother!” She snapped. “This is unacceptable to me!”

“This was not something we agreed too!” Aikiro spoke now.

Andro nodded. “No... it is not.” He spoke. “However... if you had a choice of losing your daughter and a dragon, or just simply a dragon, what would you choose Empress?”

Aikiro stared at him for a long moment. “You are correct in the choice I would have made young Androcles.” She stated evenly.

“Mother!” Yuri exclaimed.

“He is right!” Aikiro spoke. “You have said yourself that he was nearly out of control Yuri! Better to lose him than lose you!” She turned back to Andro. “Your father should have told me.”

“My father had no say in it.” Andro spoke. “Your riders are for me to train. He has taken no part in this... and he did not know I had done it until after it was completed. It was my decision and mine alone. If it had been a true bond between rider and dragon your daughter would have felt the moment Elynth and I cut the bond. She did not. Only the Elder Mother knew anything, and we were in agreement completely. Essentially... you owe us for saving your daughter’s life.”

Aikiro tilted her head. "This Elder Mother of yours... she appears to intervene in the affairs of my dragons whenever she feels like it. That is not something I will tolerate for much longer."

"They are not your dragons Empress Aikiro!" Lisisa spat. "They are sentient life forms with hearts and minds all their own! Arzoal will do what she must to insure that they survive. Unlike you."

"Then she will come into conflict with me." Aikiro stated evenly. "I am not Kavalian and I do not fear dragons. And you would do well to watch your tone of voice with me young lady. While you are very strong... you are no where near as powerful as your brother and the man you call father."

Lisisa snorted at her. "You don't frighten me upaee!" Lisisa snarled. "If I die... I will die knowing you would follow me into the abyss within moments!"

Andro smiled knowingly as he put his hand on Lisisa's shoulder. "If you wish to come into conflict with Arzoal that is entirely your business Empress Aikiro. She was the flame red dragon you saw on the tarmac the first day we were introduced to your riders. The one who took Viera. I would be most happy to let her know you do not appreciate her interference in your affairs."

"In many respects Androcles Leonidas... you surpass your father's arrogance in your action and tone to those who are your betters." Aikiro snapped turning to look at him with angry eyes.

"You assume that you are my better Empress." Andro spoke. "My father is fond of saying that assumptions are like assholes. Everyone has them." Andro saw her eyes narrow and her jaw twitch in anger. "I assume nothing Empress... and if you choose to take my demeanor as arrogance that is something I can not help. You came to us for a reason. I am fulfilling that purpose. In order for your riders and dragons to have any chance against the Kavalians... you need to allow me to teach them as I have been doing so for nearly two months now. I will give you back true Bonded Pairs."

"I wish to speak with my daughter and grandchildren." Aikiro demanded.

Andro shook his head. "No." He stated simply. "If I let you interfere in their training now then you may as well take them back now. I will give them the freedom to go the elven city nearby in another few weeks. You can arrange to meet them there if you wish. They have only just begun Close Quarters Combat Flying and I will not take them away from it to meet with you. They will fall too far behind the others and not be able to catch up. We have to squeeze years of training into several months. That can not be interrupted for you to interrogate them about this base or what they have learned."

"I care nothing about this base!" Aikiro snapped.

Andro and Lisisa chuckled. "You have been probing Andro and I since you arrived Empress." She said sitting back in her chair. "And we know you are looking for a way to find out where the Mindvoice ship is." Lisisa got to her feet. "As my brother has said... do not assume you are smarter than the person next to you Empress. It could very well come back around to take a huge chunk out of your ass!"

Yuri opened her mouth to retort but Aikiro got to her feet and closed her hand over Yuri's wrist. "No Yuri." She stated in a low voice looking at her. *[There is something else to this.]* Aikiro reached out to her. *[Something else driving what he is doing. He is shielding them for some reason.]*

[What?]

[We will discuss this when we return Yuri.] "May I at least leave some things for them?" Aikiro asked turning back to where Andro was watching them.

Andro nodded. "I will allow that yes." He stated. "You may leave the bags here and I will see to it that they are given to them. And as I said... in a few more weeks you may meet with them in the elven city nearby. Perhaps sooner depending on how they progress."

Aikiro nodded. "Very well."

Yuri looked at her shocked. "Mother, we...?"

"We will wait!" Aikiro barked quickly. "If you will not allow us to see them I wish to return to Sparta now." She stated. "And this is something I will speak to your father about when he returns."

Andro nodded. "I'm sure." He said touching the panel on the table. "Empress Aikiro's escort to return her to the *STRIKER* and to Sparta."

"Yes Milord!" The reply was instantaneous.

Aikiro stepped up to Andro looking him in the eye. "I have many more years than you Androcles Leonidas. Do not think that you can play this game better than me." She stated in a low menacing voice.

Andro smiled. "I don't need to play it better Empress. Just well enough that it negates your moves. And if you remember nothing I tell you then remember this. It is not a game to me."

"We shall see." Aikiro said in a low voice filled with menace. "We shall see."

Andro and Lisisa watched as Aikiro stormed out of the room. Yuri stepped up to him, her eyes evil points of brightness as she glared at both him and Lisisa.

"You are not your father boy!" Yuri snarled at him. "One day you will answer to me for what you have done! Vollenth was mine, and the only thing that keeps me from striking you down now is my mother!"

Andro's face remained impassive. "We agree on something Princess Yuri." He spoke softly. "And it is something that you should retain in that haze of anger and hate that you carry in your mind and heart. I *am not* my father."

Yuri glared at him for a moment longer. "Believe me... I *will* remember that!" She snapped before turning and following Aikiro with long angry strides. Thast and the others followed her out, Thast also glaring at Andro who only grinned at him.

Lisisa looked at her brother as the door slid shut behind them. "You do realize that you and I have just decorated very large targets on our backs. Yuri will not forget what you have done or what I said to her."

Andro nodded slowly. "Yes. However... I have Elynth and you have Jeth. In many ways, we more than our siblings, are capable of sensing things around us and defending ourselves due to the bonds we share with Jeth and Elynth." He looked at her.

"They were speaking within Mindvoice." Lisisa said.

Andro nodded and looked at the now closed door. "Aikiro suspects something. I don't believe she knows just yet what it is, but she will figure it out sooner rather than later. I will not allow her to take Carisia from Sadi and I. Or Narice and Toria from Arrarn. Nor will I allow anyone else to do this. Including father."

Lisisa placed her hand on Andro's arm and looked up into his blue eyes when he turned to look at her. "I will stand with you Andro. Always."

Andro smiled. "I know." He said. "Let's make sure she leaves and then you and I will go through the bags she leaves for Dante, Javier and Lucia."

"Not Narice?" Lisisa asked.

Andro shook his head. "Aikiro doesn't know her own daughter very well." He said with a grin. "Narice is more a leader than Yuri will ever be and she will never allow her mother to take her away from our brother or Toria. Not after what they have discovered together."

"I know... but that will also bring us into conflict with the *Venorik Elghinn*." Lisisa said. "They are as unpredictable as the winds."

"Perhaps." Andro said. "But it will keep us on our toes sister."

SPIRIT OF HADARIA **THIRTY-SIX HOURS FROM EARTH**

Duewa walked the corridors briskly. It was not her first time on a star ship, but it was her first time on one so large where it seemed the entire crew looked upon her with vile contempt. She had remained in the quarters given to her for the most part, her two sons busting to get out and explore, no matter how much she reprimanded them for their eagerness. She had sensed the anger coming from nearly everyone on the ship that she passed and it did nothing to put her at ease. She wore a casual outfit, very unlike the conservative Hadarian clothes she wore on her planet. The pants were a dark blue in color and outlined her legs and ass. The shirt was loose fitting and a light shade of blue, but did nothing to hide the fullness of her breasts either. The long deep auburn color hair flowed around her face and past her shoulders. Duewa knew she was very attractive, as she had many Hadarian men who welcomed the opportunity to be seen with her, not to mention the Lycavorian men who had pursued her through the years. Duewa was trying to use her beauty to her advantage right now, but so far it was not really working if the looks she received from the crew were any indication.

Duewa had studied the schematics for the *LEONIDAS II*-Class ships and she knew right where she was going. As she approached the door to the lounge off the bridge she passed the small view window and saw that they had come to a stop among the stars. She turned back to the door as it slid open surprising her. She slowed

her gait and moved into the lounge and saw it was of relatively good size with several doors leading in different directions. Duewa saw Retta and Calyb sitting at the large table eating their breakfast as their two dragon beasts bounced back and forth between where they sat. She heard the soft swish of the door to her right and her eyes grew wide when she saw Martin Leonidas walk into the room. He wore the bottom half of the standard fleet duty uniform with combat boots, while his chest and back were bare from the waist up. Martin was sipping a mug of coffee and holding several data pads in his hand, his soft shoulder length black hair tied into a tight pony tail.

“Finish your breakfast before you go to the training gym!” Martin spoke to Retta and Calyb. “Torma will wait for you!”

“Papa I’m full!” Retta complained.

Martin smelled her then and his head turned. Duewa almost brought her hand to her chest in surprise when she saw the brightness of his dark eyes. They were infinite dark brown orbs that seemed to swallow you entirely.

“King... King Leonidas.” She stammered finally.

“Duewa.” Martin spoke. Duewa noticed his voice was somewhat harsh, but he was trying to remain in control of his emotions after what he had witnessed. In some small way Duewa felt sorry for him. His stern face, while mainly unreadable on Hadaria in the chambers of the Arch Ministry, had shown what she thought to be sorrow and pain afterwards when they were flying up to this ship. He had held his children in his lap and spoken to them in Mindvoice. While she did not have this skill she was able to tell this is what they were doing by the nodding of the children without speaking any words.

Martin turned from her and she watched as he moved across the room to the table and looked at their plates. He leaned over with a smile then and kissed Retta on top of her head. “Ok. But you will eat more for lunch.” He stated. He looked at Calyb and nodded. “Watch over your sister boy.”

Duewa watched as Calyb grinned and they bolted to their feet, Mara and Endeem following them quickly as they dashed from the lounge through one of the other doors. Duewa moved forward slowly as she watched him settle into the chair Retta had just been occupying and set his mug down. He scooped up what remained of the eggs and meat she had not eaten, which was not that much considering she was a girl, and finished off what was on her plate. Duewa looked at the selection of food that was on the table and appeared horrified. The large platter held both meat and fruit, as well as pastries and juice. It was arranged very neatly on the platter, and three place settings had been brought into the lounge. Only two had been used by the children. She watched him put the fork down and pour himself a glass of strange yellow juice and look up at her.

“You wanted something Duewa?” He asked.

“I... I am here to tutor Retta and Calyb Milord. To look after their well being.” She spoke softly. “Their day should begin early and after a balanced meal...” Duewa looked at the platter of food with something akin to disgust. “They should begin their schooling.”

Martin saw where her eyes were and he motioned with his hand. “Would you care to have something to eat?” He asked. “The *Bougatsa* is exceptionally good.”

Duewa looked at him. “What?”

“It is an ancient Greek food.” Martin told her as he picked up one of the oddly square shaped pastries from the platter. “It is custard, cheese and minced meat between thin layers of *phyllo*. It is usually served with a sugar dipping sauce but we skip that.” Duewa watched as he popped it into his mouth and began to chew.

“This... this is what Retta and Calyb eat?” She asked aghast. “Their diets should be regulated and maintained each day. They should not be allowed to eat whatever it is they like.”

Martin looked at her. “You don’t think so?” He asked leaning back in his chair.

“No... I do not.” She stated. “They obviously need...” Duewa saw his eyes and she stopped talking. “You are mocking me!” She snapped angrily.

“No I’m not.” He replied. “Just knocking you down off your arrogant pedestal.”

“I am here to insure the heirs to the Hadarian throne are cared for and schooled!” Duewa spoke. “That is the directive of the Arch Ministry and the Hadarian Elder Council! They...”

“I could give a flying fuck what the Hadarian Ministry wants!” Martin barked. “And I certainly do not give a damn what your Elder Council wants!”

Duewa rolled her eyes. “That is quite obvious!” She snapped. “It is also quite obvious that Anja neglected their schooling with woeful consequences. She...” Duewa saw him get to his feet and step close to her as her words trailed off.

“Let’s get something straight right now shall we?” Martin spoke in a low voice as Duewa backed up as much as she was able when he moved close to her. “Retta and Calyb are mine and Anja’s children. They...”

“That is still up for debate by the Hadarian Arch Ministry King Leonidas.” Duewa spoke flatly. “You saw the evidence of that yourself!”

Martin stepped closer to her now, causing Duewa to back up further until she banged into the edge of the table and could go no further. She looked behind her quickly and saw that she was cornered and turned to see his eyes only inches from her face.

“You are a guest on this ship!” Martin snarled. “A guest that is rapidly wearing out what little welcome she has! They are my children Duewa... do not ever forget that! Ever! And they are Prince and Princess to the Lycavorian Union before they are anything to Hadaria! Is that in any way unclear to you?”

“So you will not allow me to teach them?” Duewa stammered. “Is that what you are saying?”

“When we return to Sparta you will be given the schedule that they go by. Their school classes and training and everything they undergo with their brothers and sisters. You will fit whatever it is you want to teach them into that schedule. A schedule made by Anja and their four other mothers. I will not interrupt their normal lives over what has happened.” Martin spoke slowly. “Their Bonded Ones go where they go. Period. You will not separate them and you will not teach them anything without it being looked over by one of their mothers or the *Feravomir*. How you raise your sons is your business Duewa... but you will not turn my children into automations that can not think for themselves and follow the religiously dogmatic and unrealistic views of your mother and the other Elders! Men and women who for the most part could not find their way out of a dark forest with both hands and a *nubous* six million gigajewel supernova lighting their way!”

“King Leonidas... I... I understand that you are upset about events that have transpired.” Duewa spoke switching to a soothing and seductive voice. “But Anja did betray your trust and your love of her! You saw the evidence for yourself! You have not told Retta and Calyb have you?”

Martin glared at her. “And I don’t intend too.” Martin spoke his voice softening at the mention of his children. “At least not yet.”

“They have a right to know.” Duewa prodded him gently. She reached up and placed her cool palm on his bare chest, finding herself marveling at the warmth his body was producing. “You will have to tell...”

Martin looked down at where her hand was and then back up into her eyes. Duewa almost caught her breath at the way he gazed at her. She was certain she saw desire and lust in his eyes, just as she had with Rinard, but she also saw pain and sorrow in those eyes.

“I will tell them when I am ready and not before.” Martin spoke finally. He reached up and gently pulled her hand from his chest and turned to go back to the table. “When the full scope of what she has done is revealed then I will tell them. Not before.”

Duewa took a deep breath knowing she had accomplished a small portion of what she wanted. She had instilled more doubt in him concerning Anja. The more she was able to accomplish in this fashion the less she hoped she would have to tolerate his touch upon her. She knew he would approach her eventually. Her mother had said so. Then she would be able to do what they planned and with her skill it would never be detected by anyone with Anja no longer in the picture.

She nodded her head. “As you wish.” She spoke. “I will do as you ask Milord. I will care for Retta and Calyb as if they were my own children.”

Martin looked at her as he sat down. “I have arranged for you to have whatever security clearance you will need.” He spoke. “You will have your own apartment for you and your sons on the Estate. There is much to do in Sparta and they will enjoy themselves.”

“I’m sure they will.” Duewa spoke. “You can... you can come to me whenever you like to talk Milord.” She said. “About anything.”

Martin nodded and opened his mouth to say something when the COM panel on the table buzzed. He reached over and touched it. “Yes.”

“Sire... we have rendezvoused with *THE WIND CUTTER*.” The voice said. “Spartan One One is transferring over now.”

“Very well.” Martin spoke. “In the Ready Room in twenty minutes.”

“Yes Milord.”

Martin stood back up and looked at her. “This was Anja’s ship.” He said. “The crew is loyal to her no matter what. Do not let their treatment of you cause any misgivings.”

Duewa nodded. “I understand.” She stated.

“You and your sons may join me for dinner if you wish.” He spoke. “You can have the Chef make whatever you feel is appropriate for you and your sons to eat.”

Duewa nodded again. “I... if that is what you wish.” She said almost shyly. “I would be honored.”

Martin met her eyes again and for a moment she thought he wanted to say more but he nodded his head and turned to exit through the same door Retta and Calyb exited. Duewa couldn’t help the small smile that split her lips. Her mother had been so very right about this man.

Armetus looked at his King as he came into the Ready Room. He had been told that Anja was not on board and that came as a surprise to him. He could also tell by the look and set of Martin’s face that something else was going on. Something he was not aware of.

“Sire?” He asked as the door slid shut behind Admiral Omore.

Martin met his eyes and shook his head almost minutely. “I will fill you in on everything later Armetus.” He spoke quickly. “Now tell me why you came all this way and could not just send a secure transmission.”

Armetus nodded his head knowing that Martin would do just that. In reality... Armetus probably knew almost as much if not more about the King than even the women who shared his bed or the man he called brother. He held out the data pad to him. “This is why?” He spoke before beginning to expand the small star chart on the table they stood around.

Martin began to read from the pad his eyes going wider as he read. “Armetus... tell me this is a very large joke.” Martin spoke as he looked up. “You missed my birthday and are just playing a trick on me right?”

“If only that was the case Martin.” He said. Armetus was on the very short list of those within the Union who dared called him by his given name. “I confirmed it myself with Omen One. They are enroute back here at their best possible speed with hard copies of all the data, but aside from Yuriko’s crew... they are the best of the Omen teams. There is no mistake.”

Omore looked at Martin. “Sire?”

Martin handed him the pad as he turned and looked out the small view window. “*Nubou nio!*” He spat viciously.

“Yes. Indeed.” Armetus said. “My words were a little more forceful, but essentially the same.”

Omore was a fast reader and his eyes were wide as he looked up. “Another Mindvoice ship!” He gasped. “In Kavalian space? How can that be Armetus? I thought... I thought Avi said no more of these ships existed.”

“How it came to be is not important.” Armetus spoke interrupting him. “What are we going to do about it is the more important question. And how much of what we have discovered does Aikiro already know?”

Martin turned to look at one of the few men he trusted without question and one who knew almost as much as he did about the happenings within the Union. Armetus met those dark orbs evenly. Unlike so many others he had no fear of his young King, and he knew behind the façade of brutishness, Martin Leonidas was a savagely cunning and supremely intelligent man. As well as a completely unforgiving beast when he wanted to be. They had worked seamlessly over the last quarter century in establishing the Drow as a legitimate intelligence gathering force within The Wilds, as well as many operations that even Deia was not aware of. With L’tian sitting among the four members of the Oversight Committee, and Armetus keeping them in the loop about almost everything he was doing, he had little or no trouble in obtaining permission and funds to do what he wanted. Everything Armetus had done since Martin had become King had gone off without so much as a hiccup because he and his King were so closely connected in terms of their thoughts and how to operate in a covert manner. Armetus had grown up with a deep love of the Union as a whole. He had seen the latter years of their time under the boot heel of the High Coven, and like his father and grandfather before him, Armetus had no intention of allowing their people to suffer such a black mark in their history ever again. It did not matter who attempted to perpetrate it. If Armetus discovered them, he would do everything within his power to stamp them from existence.

“Why would she send us out there on purpose?” Martin asked softly. “Knowing it was there and we would undoubtedly find it.”

Armetus shook his head. “That I do not know.” He replied. “While the numbers they provided to us were quite exaggerated, the KFI still has massive force numbers right where she said they would be.” He pointed at the star chart now, stabbing his finger down on the dark green planet. “Uirmeik does have nearly nine million ground troops on it and almost equal the number of ships they hit the High Coven with in the first wave of their surprise attack twenty-five years ago. The numbers they gave to us in their intelligence and what we have seen in place could have changed in the last months for we don’t know how long ago her intelligence was gathered. Or they could have altered the intelligence to make it appear to be more than it really was to get us into this area. Entering Kavalian space as we have is a big enough risk as it is.”

Martin looked at Armetus. “Armetus... between you and me... does Aikiro do anything without purpose or by accident?”

Armetus shook his head. “No.”

“That fucking bitch knows that ship is there! I know it!” Martin snarled. “And she knew we would find it! Fuck!”

“The question remains though... why would she want us to find it Martin?” Armetus said softly. “She knows there is no way you would ever allow her access to Avi and City Ship 41. You told her that without question within hours of her arriving on Earth. She had to know that. There are only two reasons she would want us to find it that I can conceivably view as prudent in any form. At least from her perspective. She wanted us to find it and destroy it so that it does not fall into the hands of the KFI. Or she has some outrageous plan to use us as a blanket while she tries to recover it.”

“By giving us this information and hoping to drag us into a war with the KFI.” Martin nodded his head. “It is starting to make sense now Armetus. Based on the intelligence she gave us, she would hope for us to act on it. She is not aware of the Omen ships or our capability in gathering intelligence now. Or how sensitive and accurate our equipment has become.”

“Yes.” Armetus spoke. “And if we moved preemptively against this buildup of Kavalian forces here, it would result in an all out war with the KFI. It would also take sufficient pressure off her forces deployed in other areas and enable her to initiate some sort of plan to recover this ship while we were keeping the Kavalians and their allies busy.”

“Sire this is has to be a staging area of some sort?” Omore said. “Why else mass so many troops and ships?”

Martin nodded in agreement. “But a staging area for what?” He looked at the chart. “Is it another assault into High Coven space or against us? Why stage here? They are no where near High Coven Space. They would have to cut across half the Union to get close to Coven territory and even that is a reach. We would never allow unfettered access to their warships across Union space. Pleistarchus knows that.”

“He may know that but is your brother insane enough... does he hate you enough... to start a war with us Martin?” Armetus asked. “While they are, for all intents and purposes, preparing another invasion into High Coven space?”

“That is suicidal.” Omore spoke. “Even the most reckless Kavalian Commander would know they could never hope to defeat both of us. We may not match them in numbers, but our superior training and equipment more than breaches that divide. They could never hope to cross our borders and think we would not do anything.”

Martin nodded in agreement. “Yes... but do the Kavalians care. We’ve already seen their callousness towards their own ground troops. The majority of them are biogenic clones. Fodder really. The pureblood Kavalians are the leaders, but for the most part their ground troops are all clones. Pleistarchus and Keleru are arrogant to the extreme in their own superiority.”

Armetus nodded. “And all the information we have indicates their clones are very close to mindless machines who only wish to do the bidding of their officers.” Armetus looked at Martin. “Would you sign a Mutual Defense Treaty with the High Coven if the Kavalians invade Martin?” He asked him pointedly.

Martin met his eyes. “And risk getting butt fucked by Aikiro and her cronies without any lube while we fight the KFI for her?” He said harshly. “Not a chance. She wouldn’t even kiss me first, before she fucked me, and that is even worse!”

Armetus chuckled softly. "You do have a way of bringing everything right down to the basics my King." He said. "It is very refreshing." He lifted the second data pad from the table top. "Andro forwarded this to me yesterday as well. It is the extent of what your new daughter-in-law knows in regards to plans. It is not very much... but she did overhear the others speaking of some sort of plan they are going to activate in The Wilds."

Martin took the pad and looked at it intently. He looked up after a moment. "Athani gave this to Andro?" He asked surprised.

Armetus nodded. "I vetted it as much as possible on the way to meet you... but based on what happened with Aricia and Isabella in The Wilds I can only agree with what she says in that report."

"Nothing about what this Jiss and Matuarr are supposed to investigate further?" Martin asked.

Armetus shook his head. "She did not know anything more than what she put in there according to Andro and Resumar. You know how Kavalian females are treated... and it does not surprise me that she is limited in her knowledge. According to what Resumar told me... her being on Earth with Jalersi was more a show for us than anything. They never had real power. This Athani has been planning her defection for almost twenty years Martin. How she was going to do it originally is in there as well. It had nothing to do with Resumar. That changed when she met him. I truly believe her love for him is genuine and discovering him was not in any way planned by her."

Martin nodded in agreement. "We knew about her and Jalersi not being the ones who were in charge almost immediately. Deia and For'mya sensed that right away. Though I should have smelled her all over Resumar that night they came to dinner. I didn't." He said. He looked at the pad once more. "The Wilds?" He said softly his mind working many calculations at the same time. "Completely the opposite direction of Uirmeik and not even close to this KFI troop concentration. Or the MV ship."

"I have informed our people in The Wilds to maintain a higher level of alertness without giving away their covers." Armetus said. "My primary concern right now is what to do about this ship? We can not allow the Kavalians to discover it and perhaps begin to learn the secrets within it. Not even factoring in the High Coven, it would tip the balance of power drastically against us."

Martin nodded. "And we can't let Aikiro get her hands on it either."

"If that was her plan to begin with. In many ways she is like you Martin. She is impossible to read." Armetus said.

Martin looked at him. "Explain?"

"Why would she go after this ship in Kavalian space and attempt to steal it when she could just as easily go after Avi and our MV ship? It is the basis for all the technological improvements we have made in the last quarter century." Armetus said. "She is devious and without conscious yes... but she has very competent military commanders. Moran and Tesand are the only reason that the High Coven has not fallen already."

Martin nodded. "Ok... I'll give you that. He's a traitorous bastard... but he is a very competent military commander." He said. Martin looked at the chart for a moment. "So he and Tesand advise her to alter intelligence scans somehow to show exaggerated numbers to draw us to this location and find this ship. Whether we believe it or not, she knows it's enough to get our attention and check it out. Whether she did or did not know if the MV ship really exists no longer matters because we will confirm it for her either way."

Armetus nodded. "Then the only two questions that remain; is she trying to draw us into the war with the Kavalians for the purpose of spreading both the KFI forces and us out enough that she can sneak a team into Kavalian space try and destroy or steal this ship? Or does she intend to use this as a means to somehow get her hands on Avi and City Ship 41? An MV ship that she does know exists and is far closer to Coven space than this one."

Martin shook his head. "Aikiro is not insane enough to try and take Avi and CS41 off Earth. She knows I would never allow her to get close to it. She doesn't even know where it is, and Avi has so many Mindvoice void areas covering Earth it would take her months to figure out where it is let alone try and steal it."

Armetus nodded. "I agree. She has not gotten to her position by being insane and reckless in her actions. However... perhaps stealing Avi and CS41 is not her intent. A few hours within the libraries of that ship downloading any information she could would be just as damaging."

Omore looked at Martin. "She has been on Earth for nearly two months now Milord." He said. "How do we know she has not been working to find CS41 all this time while allowing us to train her dragons to fight the Kavalians?"

"I don't doubt she has." Martin said with a nod.

"I would not hesitate to say she was also responsible for the recent leak of information in regards to Sadi." Armetus spoke. "Only someone within the Royal family... or high up in the Coven would know the details that were given out."

"I'm not concerned about Sadi." Martin said. "She is growing stronger by the day within Mindvoice according to Helen. She is Andro's *Anome*, and if there is one thing that I know about my son when it comes to Sadi, anyone attempting to bring her harm better be willing to take three very long and painful days to die if he catches them."

Omore nodded. "Yes... I have noticed that about him Milord." He said. "He reminds me of you in that regard."

Martin grinned. "Must be a defect in our genes then."

"We must also consider the possibility she wants it destroyed." Armetus spoke causing Martin and Omore to look at him.

"Come again?" Martin exclaimed. "Aikiro want to destroy it? Why?"

"If the Kavalians discover it... if they are able to glean even small amounts of technology from its systems... Aikiro knows if will irrevocably tip the scales in their favor. Instead of decades... the KFI could destroy them in years." Armetus spoke.

"Aikiro is about as self-serving as they come Armetus." Martin said. "I find it hard to believe that is her plan."

"We never thought she would come to us to train the dragons she stole either." Armetus spoke. "That caught even you and Arzoal off guard. That could even be part of her plan. We train her dragons and invariably draw our people together. They build trust among our two peoples and then when we least expect it, she executes a plan to either seize CS41 or at the very least somehow get onboard and take as much as she is able."

Martin turned back to the chart and nodded. "Point taken." He said. "Plans within plans." He said softly.

"Milord?" Omore asked looking at him.

Martin glanced up. "It is something I learned as a Navy SEAL on Earth. The government of the US was the reigning world power. Yet the men in charge all had hidden agendas. Plans within plans. They planned for one thing while actually doing another. And the one plan you didn't see coming was usually the one that really screwed you over."

"Aikiro has no desire to fall from power Martin." Armetus said. "We know this. She will do anything to keep a hold on what she has. But if she does die, which will hopefully not be soon, she leaves it all to Yuri."

Martin rolled his eyes. "Oh that's a pleasant thought. Thank you so much for reminding me."

"Better that we deal with Aikiro." Armetus said. "At least her we can predict with some reasonable accuracy. Yuri is an unknown... and this hatred she carries for you is beyond my understanding given what has become known these last few weeks in regards to your brother and Lisisa."

Martin shrugged. "Maybe I didn't fuck her good enough." He stated simply.

This caused Armetus and Omore to laugh deeply now and Armetus shook his head. "I will be sure to leave that part of your statement out of my report. It wouldn't do for the Queens to hear that."

"Yeah... please." Martin said leaning over the chart table. "She brings her dragons to us for training, hoping to worm her way into my good graces. We sign this Cease Fire; we give them an embassy, all under the guise of not letting the Kavalians know what is really going on because they wouldn't be too happy if they found that out. I have people targeting my children. We..."

"Targeting your children?" Omore exclaimed.

Martin looked at him and nodded. "The Netnews reported that Normya's TYPE II had an engineering malfunction. It was sabotaged. That is what *Melda Min* is doing now. They don't think I know exactly what they are doing... but I do."

"And you have not stepped in?" Armetus asked. "I am shocked."

Martin shook his head. "I don't need to." He said. "When all is Sadi and done, Dysea is just as downright dirty and nasty as I am. She'll find out who is behind that and then she will make them see the error of their ways."

"That is not something I doubt." Armetus said.

"Too many things are happening at once." Martin said. "Too many plans within plans and up until now we have been playing their game. All of them. That stops now. It's time for us to make our own plans within plans. Where exactly is the new MV ship?"

"On Ritaah." Armetus answered pointing on the chart in front of them. "Just over three light years away... with no Kavalian ships or troops in orbit or on the ground."

Martin met his eyes. "They don't know it's there?" He asked with some disbelief in his voice.

"Apparently not. If the passive scans are correct, it is buried within a mountain much the same as Avi's ship on Lycavore was." Armetus replied. "Unlike that ship however, this one is extended into its full cruising length and is larger than our ship by at least a kilometer in length. It takes up nearly seven kilometers of this mountain range. There are smaller power signatures within four kilometers of the ship itself... but none closer. The Captain of Omen One did not want to increase power to his passive scans for fear his quantum based power source might trigger something within the MV ship itself. That has happened before when we came within range of the ship on Earth. Avi reported it to us."

Martin looked at the chart before making his decision. He stabbed his finger down on the table. "COM Officer?"

"Milord?"

"Initiate an Alpha Protocol Secure Transmission to Spartan Four One on Earth! Full encryption algorithms! Immediate response! Patch it through to the Ready Room. No recording and once the transmission is over, it disappears! Is that clear?"

"Clear Sire!" The voice answered. "Standing by to initiate an APST!"

"Do it now!" Martin snapped. "Four One only!"

SCIMITAR

Ne'Veha dropped her duffel bag on the bunk with a sigh and looked around her small quarters. It had taken nearly four hours for her to return to the *SCIMITAR* due to a dock accident on the orbiting station above Earth. Once they were allowed to transfer to the shuttle going to the *SCIMITAR*, Ne'Veha had almost missed that because she had been deep in thought about what had transpired over the last two days. She was still very much trying to come to grips with the fact that part of her had not wanted to leave them behind. She wanted to remain with them and explore and discover what it is they had. The night before had been quite the eye opener as she had gathered with all of the Leonidas children as they welcomed the Kavalian female into their family. What stunned her even more were the presences of not only Empress Aikiro's daughter Narice, but the stunning red haired agent of the famed Vampire Silent Death Division. Their very own secret intelligence gathering apparatus not that much unlike the Krypteria, but far more ruthless. Narice and Toria had not moved more than a meter or so from Arrarn Leonidas the entire night. She had never imagined a daughter to the Empress of the High Coven to be so open and accepting. She had walked right up to Athani Leonidas when she arrived and greeted her with a gentle kiss on the cheek and a squeeze of her hands. It very much appeared that the axiom that she had heard Andro and Sadi use also extended to those who were involved with a Leonidas son or daughter.

Ne'Veha had also learned much about herself last night.

Seeing the way Sadi and Carisia acted with one another, sharing soft kisses and gentle caresses as lovers do. Seeing Eliani Leonidas and Nyla Sinthe doing much the same thing. And then seeing that this interaction between them in no way factored in how Andro or Malic treated them. Whether it was Sadi or Carisia, or Eliani or Nyla, the love, attention and devotion both Andro and Malic bestowed upon them was equal in every way. The more she watched, the more she found herself looking upon Sadi and Carisia in a new light. These were two of the three women who had pleased her in her dreams. Two of the three women who she had taken great delight in pleasuring. Her dreams had been so vivid and real, almost as if she could feel and taste them like they

were right with her. And those feelings and sensations only increased three fold when she tossed Andro into the mix with them. She found herself wondering if indeed he was really as large as he was in her dreams. She found herself wondering if he could truly make her scream out his name in unadulterated bliss. Sadi had told her they were still growing accustomed to the bond they shared that allowed them to pass these things to her even though she was so far away. Sadi told her they would shield from her when they were together now, for they did not want to influence her into a decision she was not ready to make. And Ne'Veha did not know why she resisted.

Ne'Veha knew without question she wanted Andro just by the way she reacted when he nuzzled her elven ears so deliciously. She knew she wanted Sadi and Carisia just from the way her body reacted when she had kissed them both goodbye only a few hours before. They were not kisses of friends departing either. Sadi and Carisia had kissed her with urgency and need and desire, pulling her body tightly against their firm flesh and when Carisia had nibbled her bottom lip as she pulled away, Ne'Veha was stunned to find that she was moist at her center. Ne'Veha had never entertained the thought of a relationship with another woman, and now it was one of the things that she had spent the last four hours going over in her mind.

What would her parents say if they knew? What would her friends say? Would she be mocked or insulted? Would she be treated differently if she chose to enter into a relationship she had come to discover she wanted very much? Ne'Veha's parents would be livid with her, no matter that it was the Prince of the Union she had chosen. To discover that not only had she chosen to enter into a relationship with a Lycavorian male, but a Lycavorian female, a vampire female and a Drow female. Would they disown her? Would it destroy her father's desire to one day serve on the Elven Ruling Ministry? Would it make her parents outcasts among their many friends? Is this what she truly wanted?

Ne'Veha thought she had been in love with Tarren until she discovered him with another woman. That had caused her to leave him almost without hesitation no matter how hard it had been to leave Elear. Yet now... Ne'Veha found herself wanting to enter into a relationship that was very similar and included even more than one other female. Had she dismissed Tarren for fear of that, or because he had gone behind her back and not told her until after he had cheated that he wanted them both. He had come across the universe to find her, according to him. He said he still cared for her... yet his actions in Gallais's Lodge did not endear him to her in any way. He had not stuck up for her, helped her, he had only wanted to get her out of the area so others would not see her drunk. As if being seen with her in that condition would have hurt his career somehow. Ne'Veha knew that if she had been sick on him in the same way she had vomited on Andro he would have been incensed to the extreme. There were times when he took being a Spartan to the excessive. No Ne'Veha decided... he would not have acted in a similar manner. Ne'Veha didn't think he knew how. And she knew that since the King, General Simpson and Star Colonel Isra, three of the six or seven most high profile Lycavorian males in the Union, since they had multiply mates it had become almost a contest to see how many young wolves could do the same.

Ne'Veha shook her head quickly and cleared her mind. She was on duty tomorrow and she needed to be focused and ready. She unzipped her duffel and stood up to begin unpacking the items Sadi had packed for her just as the door to her quarters buzzed. She turned and looked at the small screen letting out a sigh of deep relief when she realized it was her friends and not Tarren. She was not ready to face Tarren and his inquisition of questions just yet. Ne'Veha passed her hand over the small panel unlocking the door.

"Ne'Veha!" Ra'Neeria exclaimed.

Ne'Veha had to smile now as Ra'Neeria embraced her tightly and her two other friends crowded into her quarters. Ne'Veha could tell all of them were amped up and she prepared herself for the questions she knew were coming. Questions from her friends that she would not mind answering. Ra'Neeria pushed her back and held her at arm's length.

"We were so worried when Tarren came back without you!" She spoke. "He wouldn't tell us what happen at first."

"Until Ra'Neeria threatened to have charges brought against him if he didn't tell us." The young blond elf said with a smile.

Ne'Veha looked at her with wide eyes. "You didn't!" She gasped.

"Damn right I did!" Ra'Neeria snapped. "After I told him that Coria and I would beat his ass first."

"We would have too." The blond spoke.

“Ne'Veha... he said you went home with Prince Androcles and Princess Sadi! To their villa in Gytheio!” The second dark haired elf said with wide eyes. “Is that true?”

Ne'Veha looked at Ra'Neeria and grinned as she smiled. “Yes. But that was only after I vomited all over Andro's chest.”

“Andro?” Coria exclaimed. “You are on a first name basis with them now Ne'Veha?”

“You didn't Ne'Veha?” Tana exclaimed as their eyes grew wide. “Tell us you didn't heave all over the Crown Prince of the Union!”

Ne'Veha couldn't help but laugh now as she nodded. “I did.” She said. “I swear I will never drink another ounce of Spartan Wine in my entire life!”

“What... what did he do?” Ra'Neeria asked.

“Ne'Veha... did they take you to their home and ravage you senseless?” Coria asked with a grin.

“We saw you on his dragon! On the Netnews! That *was* you wasn't it Ne'Veha?” Tana asked.

Ne'Veha nodded as she turned to pick up some clothes from her bag. “They took me to their villa that night and I slept.” She said. “I didn't wake up until the next morning. Sadi had made me breakfast and gave me some drink that Andro's mother made. It made my nausea and headaches go away almost immediately.”

“The Crown Princess made you breakfast!” Ra'Neeria hissed in amazement.

Ne'Veha looked at her. “They do eat Ra'Neeria.” She exclaimed. “I wrapped myself in a sheet and went out into their villa and she was making breakfast. Andro was on the beach talking with his brother.”

“Wait! Wrapped in a sheet?” Coria asked. “Where were your clothes?”

“Being washed I supposed.” Ne'Veha answered. “I didn't ask.”

“So you were practically naked in the villa of the Crown Prince and Princess of the Union and you did nothing? You didn't ask where your clothes were. Did you sleep in their bed Ne'Veha?” Coria said.

“No!” Ne'Veha exclaimed.

Coria tilted her head to the side. “You expect us to believe that?”

“What do you think?” Ne'Veha exclaimed. “I was in no condition to do anything Coria. I could barely stand up when I first woke.”

“So you were naked in their home and nothing happen?” Tana said.

“I was not naked!” Ne'Veha exclaimed.

“Wrapped in a sheet does not constitute clothing Commander Ne'Veha.” Coria spoke with a smile. “Not in anyone's book.”

“We ate. I met his brother Resumar and then we left for Sparta.” Ne'Veha said.

“What was it like flying on his dragon with him?” Ra'Neeria asked with bright eyes. “He was holding you very close Ne'Veha.”

“It was incredible.” Ne'Veha answered animatedly. “The sky was so clear and Elynth is so very fast. We were skimming over the trees at nearly two hundred kilometers per hour. It was amazing. And then when we landed on his *STRIKER* above the city? That was terrifying... but it was...” Ne'Veha saw the way they were looking at her and stopped. “What?”

“You mean to tell us... your dear friends... you mean to tell us that having those arms of his around your waist and being pressed so close to his chest and all you can remember is the flight on his dragon?” Tana exclaimed.

Ne'Veha blushed then and couldn't meet their eyes. “Well... it was... it was a very quiet ride. We talked within Mindvoice and...”

“Mindvoice?” Ra'Neeria spoke stunned. “Ne'Veha it is well known that Prince Androcles almost never speaks below a Tier Six level. You spoke to him in Mindvoice?”

Ne'Veha nodded. “Yes.”

“The Crown Princess?”

“Sadi too yes.” Ne'Veha answered. “It is not as hard as you might think. All of you are Tier Four.”

“Where did you go from Sparta?” Tana asked. “We inquired of the dock master on the station but there was no record of you scheduled to return until today.”

“I stayed with them.” Ne'Veha said. “I can't say where. I'm sorry. They are... they are involved with... some special training for *Mjolnir's Hand* with his brothers and sisters.”

“You met his brothers and sisters?” Coria almost shouted. “Which ones?”

Ne'Veha blushed again. "All... all of them." She replied.

"Ne'Veha... you are one of the four that Princess Sadi spoke of aren't you?" Ra'Neeria said.

"What? No!" Ne'Veha exclaimed. "Nothing happened! I visited with them until all of the Spartan Wine was gone from my system and then I returned here!"

Coria looked at the clothes in Ne'Veha's hand and reached out for it. She pulled it quickly out of her grasp and looked at it. It was a button down shirt four sizes too large for Ne'Veha and that it was a man's shirt was obvious. "Then what is this?" She demanded playfully.

"It's a shirt!" Ne'Veha retorted.

"Ne'Veha you left the *SCIMITAR* without any clothes because we did not plan on staying in Sparta all night." Ra'Neeria said with a grin. "Now you return with a bag full of clothes and..."

"Sadi made the bag for me! I..."

Coria held up the shirt. "I don't think it will fit you Ne'Veha." She said with a smile as Ne'Veha's dark eyes grew larger.

"Ne'Veha!" Tana gasped out as she pulled the small box from the bag. "What is this?"

Ne'Veha turned to look at her and took the box from her. "This was in the bag?" She gasped.

Tana nodded. "Yes. It looks expensive! Open it Ne'Veha!"

"No!" Ne'Veha said holding it tightly.

"It was in the bag Ne'Veha... and you said the Princess packed it for you! It must be yours! Open it."

Tana spoke rolling her eyes.

Ne'Veha looked at them and saw all of them eagerly waiting for her to open the box. "You guys are so terrible!" Ne'Veha spoke. "It's probably just some trinket to thank me for staying with them." She shook her head as she opened the box and they all saw her eyes grow a little wider.

"What?" Ra'Neeria spoke quickly moving closer and looking at the open box as Ne'Veha cradled it in her hand with a stunned expression as she lifted it out of the box slowly.

Ra'Neeria gasped as both Tana's and Coria's eyes went wide when Ne'Veha slowly lifted the dangling coral red pendant from the small silk box. It swayed from a glittering silver chain and as it spun in the light of the small quarters it gave off a dazzling glow to it. "Ne'Veha... this is part of... this is part of a Dragon's Heart Pendant."

Ne'Veha met her eyes with silence as she held the pendant in her hand. "It can't be." She said softly.

"It is!" Ra'Neeria said. "I saw one on display at the Dragon Mountain on Elear."

Ne'Veha shook her head. "It can't be!" She gasped.

[But it is Ne'Veha!] Sadi's voice burst into her head with the same musical tone as when they had been on the planet.

"Sadi?" Ne'Veha gasped looking up while Ra'Neeria and the others looked at her in shock.

[It is part of the Dragon's Heart Pendant given to Andro when he was born by his parents Martin and Aricia.] Sadi's voice told her. *[He told Elynth to split it and gave me half when he was only eight months old. I have worn it every day since. When we discovered Carisia and what we would have with her, with you and with Lu'ria we rejoined our pieces and had Elynth divide them again.]*

[Sadi I can not take this!]

[Five parts of a whole Ne'Veha. That is what we are.] Sadi said. *[We don't expect you to wear it now. Perhaps not ever. But this piece belongs to you nonetheless. We told you we would wait for eternity if we had too and we will Ne'Veha. This pendant means no one will ever take your place in our hearts no matter what takes place.]*

[Andro... Andro knows this?] Ne'Veha asked.

[Not yet, no. This is something that Carisia and I wanted to do.] Sadi replied. *[We will tell him tonight however. He will not be displeased Ne'Veha. I know it is so much to take in and accept... but when you are... if you are ever ready, all you need do is come to us wearing that pendant and we will know what is in your heart and mind and you won't have to say a word in explanation.]*

[You...]

[This is what we want to do Ne'Veha.] Sadi cut her off. *[Find your way Ne'Veha. Find what it is in your heart that will put you on the path you are meant to walk.]*

[You told me you would not...] Ne'Veha stopped before she finished her sentence and silently berated herself for being so cold. She heard Sadi chuckle within the shielded Mindvoice connection.

[And we won't.] Sadi told her. *[This decision must be yours without fail. Our connection will always be open to you... but we will not reach for you without your permission Ne'Veha. You will have the space you need.]*

[Sadi... what if I choose not to pursue the road you want me to take?] Ne'Veha asked. *[What if I find I can't?]*

[Then that is the decision you will make.] Sadi answered. *[It will not make us love you any less. Andro calls for me Ne'Veha... I must go. If the gods will it... you will be part of our lives. We love you Ne'Veha.]*

Ne'Veha felt the connection fade away before she could speak and she shook her head slightly as she felt the tremors of love and devotion filter to her through the remnants of the Mindvoice link. She felt them wash over her like the fingers of a superbly skilled musician and then they were gone.

Ra'Neeria was the one who saw the confusion in Ne'Veha's face for what it really was and she quickly took the small box and pendant from her hands and gingerly replaced it inside. She set it on Ne'Veha's desk and then took her hands. "What we need to do is get some food into you." She finally spoke. "You look famished and we have not eaten dinner yet."

Ne'Veha shook her head to clear her mind once more and looked at Ra'Neeria. She nodded with a small smile. "Yes... food sounds very good right now." She said.

"Good. Then you can fill us in on everything that happened and you will leave nothing out." Tana said taking her other hand.

Ne'Veha nodded. "Everything that I can." She said with a smile.

SPIRIT OF HADARIA

-...of a design I am not familiar with King Leonidas-

Avi's dinosaur like head turned from the screen he was studying. At the moment his skin was a dark orange in color and Martin had seen it change to an almost bright yellow. It was the design of the two and a half meter tall cyborg that allowed him to adjust to changing weather and temperatures.

"But it is a Pralor ship correct?" Martin asked from the chair behind the desk where he had moved. It was Anja's chair, with a high back and arms so she could lean way back and use her feet to twirl around on the swivel mounted brackets from computer console to computer console. She had three of them surrounding her desk and Martin had watched her use all of them at once. It had hurt his head to see her twisting and turning and working on three different problems at the same time.

-Yes. While the design is not familiar... the power readings and bio-mechanic ribbed construction mark it as such- Avi's head came up. -A question King Leonidas? Where did these sensor scans come from?-

"Omen One." Martin answered. "A reconnaissance mission in Kavalian space. What can you tell me from just the passive scans?"

-The ship is approximately one point two kilometers more in length then City Ship 41 in flight configuration-

-Beam is significantly less than City Ship 41. Interesting-

-It is buried under one hundred and thirteen meters of a combination of bedrock and lime deposits with seven layers of harden lava rock-

-There are six low power TriCobal power sources within four point three kilometers of the ship. They appear to be reflecting their power readings off of the magnetic core of the planet itself. A masking procedure no doubt-

-Interesting-

Martin watched as Avi moved from the station he was at within the bowels of CS41 to another one across the room. He willingly stayed mostly within this room and insured that the configuration of the ship did not alter unless needed to suit Arzoal and the dragons. Endith once said he had developed a fondness for the dragons and he was extra careful in his calculations for the interior of the ship to achieve optimum hatching temperatures and conditions for the eggs. Martin had learned long ago that while he was a cyborg, he still needed duties to perform and in some cases he even had a personality. Martin had provided him with whatever information he requested and that included information and history dating back as far as the Black Day. Avi was now perhaps the most informative computer database anywhere in the Union.

He also had come to know when Avi found something to be disturbing.

“Avi?” Martin asked coming forward in the chair. “Avi... what is wrong?”

-Conducting a memory search of City Ship 41 data banks. Searching-

“Avi?” Martin asked again.

-Search complete. Data recovered. Processing-

Martin looked at Armetus and Omore as they occupied the couch across from the desk and in full view of the military holo-image transmission disc in the floor.

-Processing complete. Results fall within one point two percentage points of central inquiry- Avi turned back to the holo transmission. **-King Leonidas... you must destroy this ship-**

“What? Why?” Martin exclaimed.

-The design schematics do not match exactly to parameters... but they are within point four of known specifications within my data banks-

“What specifications?” Martin asked.

-Given the growth of rock and stone covering the foliage covering this ship, it has been in its current location less than ten thousand years. Approximately nine thousand seven hundred and four years-

“Why does that matter Avi?” Armetus asked.

-City Ship 41 and the other ships of its class departed the Pralor homeworld exactly thirty-seven thousand years and six months ago. You asked me if the Pralors had wars not long ago King Leonidas?-

Martin nodded slowly. “Yes. And you told me that you did. One that lasted nine thousand years.”

-Correct. That war ended three years before we departed Pralor space. I am unable to access information in regards to the actual war since it was never included as part of my databanks. I do know however that we built warships to fight in this war. Warships of great destructive power-

“The... the enemy you faced Avi? What happened to them?” Armetus asked.

-As I said Armetus of the *Krypteria*... much of the data on the war was not included in my central data banks. It was not something the Pralors deemed necessary for CS41 to have access too. That includes information on the enemy they faced-

“Avi... why do I get the feeling I ain’t going to like what you are about to tell me?” Martin said.

-This ship is of a similar design King Leonidas. Only the sensor scans show it is no more than ten thousand four hundred and nineteen years old-

“Ok? And?”

-The warships we built to fight this war were all destroyed before City Ship 41 left Pralor space King Leonidas-

-This ship was built after City Ship 41 departed. Its existence indicates that for some reason the Pralors once more built warships. Just based on the initial sensor data there does not appear to be any damage to the exterior of the ship itself.

-The sensor operator on Omen One was correct to use low power scans. If they had increased power it would have activated automated defensive systems that would have announced the existence of this ship to everyone in the sector-

“Exactly why are you telling me this Avi?” Martin asked knowing he was going to dread the answer.

-King Leonidas... this ship was built for war. If my extrapolations are correct... this one ship has the destructive power of five Combined Union Fleet Groups at its disposal. It is completely intact, and it would house trillions of terawatts of data on any number of systems in the universe. Its power systems are fully functional-

Martin’s eyes went wide. “Functional?” He almost yelled.

-Yes. The power systems are in a state of hibernation if you will. I do not know why this ship or its crew chose to land on this planet and not return to our home system, but if these sensor scans are accurate and my data is correct... this is not a ship that we want to fall into the hands of either the Kavalians or most especially the descendants of Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon-

“Why?” Armetus asked softly.

-The answer to that question is simple Armetus of the *Krypteria-*

“Indulge us Avi.” Armetus said.

-This is a Pralor ship built for one purpose. Much the same as our new Arizona Class. It is built only for war. –

-City Ship 41 is an Exploration, Restoration and Seed vessel. We had only defensive systems as were seen when we departed Lycavore. Our archives were far more advanced and complete than our warships and this information would allow the Pralors to be able to fit in almost anywhere. This ship however, this ship will have systems and data cores on it that would allow those who discover it to advance their current technology generations ahead of the High Coven and centuries ahead of the Kavalian Empire. Even more than our own. It would allow them to develop weapons systems similar to what we have done, but with greater power and much quicker-

-The existence of this class ship would also indicate that the Pralors had another war after City Ship 41 departed. A war that required they once more build warships to defend themselves. Something they swore never to do again-

“Avi... the first war your people had?” Martin asked.

-Technically they are your people as well King Leonidas-

“Ok... my ancestors if you will.” Martin snapped. “How many people died in that war?” Avi paused for a long moment staring at Martin in the transmission. “Avi?” Martin pressed him.

**-As I explained the history data banks provide no information on the war itself King Leonidas-
-Other information does allow me to extrapolate however-**

“So extrapolate.” Martin told him.

-Combining several different data streams allows me to piece together intelligence that would be ninety-eight point three percent accurate. That intelligence indicates the war took the lives of seventy-nine trillion lifeforms in its nine thousand year span King Leonidas-

-The war involved over a million species. Many of them now long dead-

“*Son vada carians!*” Armetus gasped loudly.

APO PRIME MJOLNIR'S HAND BASE

[Are you certain brother?] Ti'rut asked.

He rested in the center of his small quarters, naked from the waist up. His dark bronze hued skin was slick with a fine sheen of sweat as he concentrated hard to touch his brother within Mindvoice and maintain the connection. He could feel his brother also struggling to keep the connection solid from his end, but it was a battle for both of them.

[I would not have contacted you if I was not Ti'rut. You know that. We have trouble enough keeping the connection for long even when we are closer.] Lynom's voice spoke. *[He has returned to his ship in orbit, but they are still here. I think he plans to return to the surface in a few hours once he speaks with his masters.]*

[What did he want?]

[Ti'rut... he had Phy'iad capture half a dozen female elves to break them to the will of an Immortal. One was a half-breed like...]

[Like Normya?] Ti'rut said with some humor. [You can say her name brother. We have discovered much about our feelings for each other. I have found the woman I will devote my life to Lynom.]

[I am happy for you brother. You did not however tell me what effect they... how they would affect me Ti'rut. Not that you would have known I suppose. As'hia... she is like Normya. Half wolf and half elf. Ti'rut she is... she is like the most beautiful flower I have ever seen brother. Pusintin was particularly... he wanted to know about the effect it had on her most of all. She killed Phy'iad's Lieutenant Ti'rut. The one who had rape her when she first arrived. He left her alone after breaking her, thinking she was his. When he returned she ran him through with her Nehtes. I wanted to laugh until tears came from my eyes.] Lynom said.

Ti'rut's brow furrowed slightly. *[It doesn't work on half-breeds.]* He said slowly. *[At least not for very long. The Lycavorian DNA in their bodies takes longer to process the chemical in Immortal fluids yes, but once it is localized, the natural Lycavorian healing properties will make them immune.]*

[I know that brother!] Lynom announced. [I did pay attention to mother's classes as well! More than you! The question we should be asking is why he wants to know these things.]

[She sounds strong Lynom.]

[Oh she is brother. Much like you told me your Normya is.] Lynom spoke and his words were laden with a prideful tone. *[They beat her for three hours before I was able to stop it. I have talked with her briefly since then. Phy'iad gave her to me and that will eliminate her from being beaten and raped again, but I will not be able to maintain this façade for much longer brother. It becomes too much.]*

[You must remain strong Lynom, son of Cha'talla. For the both of you.] The female voice broke into their connection surprising both the brothers.

[Ti'rut?] Lynom exclaimed.

Ti'rut's eyes popped open in his quarters and he nearly shouted when he saw Normya sitting in front of him in a lotus position. Her eyes were closed and she was concentrating just as hard as he was. He could feel her even now as her Mindvoice powers combined with his own and those of Iriral who was the one who had spoken. He had not heard Normya enter his quarters.

[Do not fear Lynom!] Ti'rut spoke quickly. [It is Normya and Iriral. Queen Dysea's bonded dragon.]

[I felt you straining Ti'rut. I became worried and came here to see if you were alright. I could feel the tremors within Mindvoice but you were resisting me. I asked Iriral to help.] Normya's musical like voice filled the connection now.

[Normya... Iriral... my younger brother Lynom.] Ti'rut said as he closed his eyes and resumed his concentration. He was stunned to find the connection much easier to feel, more focused and filled with power. He didn't resist when Normya's hands took his and she entwined her delicate fingers within his.

[It is wonderful to meet you Lynom.] Normya announced then.

[And you Normya.]

[You said Pusintin is there with you now?] Iriral asked.

[Lynom... Queen Dysea's Bonded One Iriral. She is very wise and has helped Normya and I to begin to discover what we share.] Ti'rut spoke.

[What you share?] Lynom asked.

[That is something you will discover when you see your brother again.] Iriral spoke. [I can feel your concern for this As'hia in your words Lynom. Your concern and interest. She stirs you?]

[Nothing will ever come of what I feel.] Lynom spoke quickly. He was very flustered now and it could be heard in his tone of voice. *[I have sworn to protect her until she sees her parents once more. I will do this!]*

[If you are as much like your brother as Ti'rut says you are Lynom, I have no doubts about that.] Iriral answered.

[Pusintin arrived here because he contracted Phy'iad to kidnap several elven females.] Lynom spoke. *[They were taken from a transport leaving a resort moon near your border with Gellen station. I don't know the name. As I was telling Ti'rut he was only interested in the effects Immortals had on female elves. Particularly As'hia, since she is only half elf.]*

[And you don't know why?] Iriral asked.

[No. Once I saw... once I saw As'hia, my only wish became to protect her.] Lynom answered immediately. *[I don't believe Phy'iad even knows. At least not yet. I have heard others talking that we will begin working for him soon. For Pusintin.]*

[The other elven females?] Iriral asked.

They could hear Lynom sigh heavily within the connection. *[They are... they are lost.]* He said sadly. *[They were broken within hours of coming here. I could not help them without exposing myself. I...]*

[There was nothing you could do.] Normya's voice spoke now and though there was sadness in her voice, there was no anger or distaste directed at him.

[How many elves do they hold brother?] Ti'rut asked.

[With these five new ones... thirty-nine.] Lynom answered instantly. *[Mother could help them Ti'rut. I know she could.]*

[I know she could as well.] Ti'rut said. *[I may have come across the beginning of the contact that initiated the kidnapping of those elf females who have come to you recently.]*

Lynom snarled viciously within the connection. *[You save his vile carcass for me brother! He is mine! Swear this to me Ti'rut! I will make him pay for what he has done to As'hia and the others.]*

[I swear it Lynom!] Ti'rut spoke.

[Your powers have increased brother.] Lynom spoke. *[Our connection is much clearer and not as much of a strain.]*

[It is Normya and Iriral.] Ti'rut answered.

[I am doing nothing.] Iriral spoke with a chuckle. *[What you are experiencing is part of what your brother and Normya have discovered together Lynom. We are working on what is happening from here on Apo Prime Lynom. Now that we know you and Ti'rut can communicate within Mindvoice, even from such a distance, we can better discover what is happening all around us.]*

[I will be strong brother.] Lynom spoke. [If you are at all able... get a message to As'hia's parents Ti'rut. Let them know she lives and continues to fight. Do not let them lose hope.]

[I won't brother.] Ti'rut said. [Mind everything all around you Lynom. Especially now with that pig Pusintin among you. If Phy'iad has decided to work for him, it cannot be good.]

[I will be mindful.] Lynom said. [Give mother my love and tell father I carry on. I must go now Ti'rut. Until I see you again.]

The connection faded leaving just Iriral, Ti'rut and Normya. [I will inform Dysea we need to speak with her and the others. Come to the main lounge, both of you.] Iriral told them.

[Right behind you Iriral.] Normya spoke opening her eyes to gaze at Ti'rut.

Ti'rut met Normya's gaze and after a long moment he opened his mouth to speak but no words came out. Normya moved with all her elven speed and was upon Ti'rut in the blink of an eye. She settled into his lap without hesitation as her lips covered his and her hands gripped his face tightly. Normya whimpered in delight when his arms crushed her to him without pause, her firm breasts mashed against his iron hard chest and her nipples burning through the fabric of her shirt and pressing against his bare skin with sudden need. Her hands and fingers stroked the side of his face, gently grazing across the bone spikes of his face, the tips of her fingers exploring those spikes as she plunged her warm tongue between his lips to do battle with his tongue. His lips tasted how he smelled, like sweet ginger, and this only increased Normya's passion.

Ti'rut for his part was very nearly overwhelmed. The smell of her blood pulsing through her veins, the orange clove scent of her blood, it was driving him mad as he pulled her tighter against him. He heard her whimper in want and deepen their kiss, Ti'rut meeting her delicious tongue with his own in a battle of supremacy. A battle he knew Normya let him win as he took control of their kiss now. His hands dropped from her back slowly, moving to grip her incredibly tight ass in his hands. This action only caused Normya to undulate her hips closer to him, pressing her mound against his steel hard abdomen. Ti'rut's eyes grew a little wider when he felt the heat from her pussy against his skin and he almost lost control right there. Normya felt this within him and she drew back from their kiss, her face flush with passion and furnace like excitement, her emerald green eyes brighter than at any time since Ti'rut had known her.

"Ti'rut... I..." Normya gasped.

Ti'rut did not release his grip on her ass cheeks and shook his head. "*Ussta il kal'daka darthirii.*" He spoke.

"Ti'rut... I burn... I burn for you." Normya gasped once more, stroking the bone spikes along his jaw causing Ti'rut to close his eyes in delight.

"And I... and I for you *ussta il kal'daka darthirii.*" He said.

"I have... I have never been with a man Ti'rut." Normya spoke pressing her forehead to his. "Have... have you...?"

"No Normya." He answered without hesitation. "Never."

Her emerald eyes focused on him. "I want to... I want to share your bed Ti'rut. I want to sleep in your arms with your skin against mine, but I don't know if I am ready for..."

"Are you asking me if I can control myself *il kal'daka darthirii?*" He asked with a smile, revealing the tips of his vampiric fangs.

"Yes. I'm asking because I don't know if I will be able too." She stated.

"To hold you in my arms... that is more than any man could hope for *ussta il kal'daka darthirii.*" Ti'rut answered as he lifted his hand and pushed some of her platinum colored hair aside, tucking it behind her elven ear. He leaned forward and nuzzled the ridge of her ear with his lips, Normya cooing out her delight and leaning into his caress. "We should not rush things Normya. I... I love you more than my own life. And if it is your wish that I do this... I will not hesitate."

"It... it will be very hard on both of us Ti'rut." Normya said. "My wolf blood churns to feel you inside me and my elven blood yearns for your touch. None will have what you will have Ti'rut my love. I just want it to be... I want us to crave one another so badly we can't resist. I want us to be able to devote hours to discovering each other. We can't have that right now."

"Then holding you in my arms will be more than enough *ussta il kal'daka darthirii.*" Ti'rut spoke. "That is not something you ever need to question."

[Normya! Ti'rut!] Iriral's voice burst into their heads. [Pull yourselves from each others grasp and join us now! But if you wait much longer, neither of you will be of use to anyone! You are destined for one another and you should not be afraid to begin that exploration.]

Normya looked at Ti'rut as she sat in his lap and couldn't help but laugh. Ti'rut quickly joined her and he rose to his feet effortlessly, as Normya wrapped her legs around his waist as he stood. When he was all of the way up, she released her leg lock and he lowered her back to the floor, towering over her.

"Come *ussta il kal'daka darthirii*." He said. "*Ori'gato udossa xun vel'bol udos z'klaen. Whol Usstan intend ulu Z'hennu'elggur dos senseless p'luin.*" (Let us accomplish what we must. For I intend to ravage you senseless after.)

Normya grinned devilishly. "*Nindel ul'tro trelao.*" (That sounds divine)

ELEAR

CAPITAL CITY OF AETIA

OFFICE OF MINISTER L'TAIN

FATHER TO QUEEN FOR'MYA

L'tian leaned back in his large high backed chair, several data pads scattered across the wide expanse of his marble desk and the huge mug of Queen Aricia's coffee in his hand. He turned in his chair and let his eyes settle on the rising sun and how it bathed the capital city of Aetia. Far off in the distance he could see several dragons floating lazily in the morning sky as they hunted for food. When he shifted his eyes to the portion of the city twenty stories below him he could just make out the forms of several more dragons moving among the streets of the city with their bonded ones of even individually. With the exception of Sparta and Eden City on Earth, no other planet within the Union could boast that dragons moved freely among their city streets. When Martin had returned the dragons to Elear and it was discovered that the elves had evolved from dragons themselves, it was as if a missing piece of a puzzle had fallen into place for the elves of the Union. This was the planet of their origins, and King Leonidas had brought them home that day twenty-six years ago.

L'tian let his eyes drift to the holo images that dotted the credenza along his wall. The first one was of his wife and For'mya with Martin. The others were mixed, some of Martin and For'mya together, others of just her and the women she so loved and their children. He would have laughed at the person who told him a quarter century ago that their lives would be as they were now. For'mya, his only surviving daughter and child, and the only one now besides him that had the royal blood of the last elven King in their veins. That King had committed their people to the Lycavorian Union under King Resumar before the Coven had butchered him. Only L'tian's father, that King's youngest son, had escaped the death squads, going into hiding and finally into The Wilds until such time as they could safely return when they Union was truly born with the death of Martin's father across the stars.

L'tian had pushed for For'mya to take her station beside Martin Leonidas when he had returned to claim the throne of his grandfather. The throne of the Lycavorian Union that was his by birthright. He pushed her to take the position that her ancestor had taken, Royal Concubine to the King. He knew For'mya had not wanted to, it cut against the grain of everything she believed at the time. It had caused a rift between her and him, as well as her mother. That rift had been filled the moment Martin Leonidas had rescued his daughter from the hands of the Immortals and given her choice. After the events they had experienced together, it was a decision she had made all on her own. When Martin had changed her less than two years later, once more saving her life, L'tian knew their lives would be forever intertwined. For'mya was a Queen now, by unanimous order of the Union Senate and its four other Queens. She was a concubine in no one's mind, and she would carry the title which she deserved Dysea had once said to the Elven Parliament.

Their lives had changed dramatically through the years, L'tian growing closer to his daughter than he had ever envisioned, and relishing in it. Like his daughter, L'tian and his elven wife regarded all of their Leonidas children as their grandchildren and while Arrarn and Byron would always be extra special to them, that ideal would never change. He had grown very close to Martin as well, learning something new about the man every time he saw him. Martin was devoted to For'mya and his other Queens, and that was something

L'tian could not deny. It was something he actually embraced each time he saw the look of happiness on her face when he saw her.

L'tian heard the commotion in his outer office and turned in his chair when the door slid aside to reveal a stern faced Lycavorian woman of medium height wearing the uniform of a Spartan *Lokhagos*, a Colonel in the Union ground forces. Her blond hair was cut short and styled, and under her uniform she appeared to be in excellent physical shape as she strode confidently into his office. His senior aide darted around her and looked at him.

“The *Lokhagos* would not wait Minister!” He spoke. “I’m sorry.”

L'tian came to his feet slowly, his dark eyes never leaving the woman’s face. “That is alright Rema.” He said. “I don’t believe we have ever met however Colonel.”

“Minister... this is...”

“I can speak for myself boy!” The woman snapped turning her head to glare at him. She turned back to L'tian. “My name is *Lokhagos* Danarla. I am the commander of the Spartan 7th Expeditionary Brigade. We are based in the Western...”

L'tian held up his hand. “I know where your Brigade is based Colonel.” He spoke. “I visited them last year.”

The woman looked somewhat taken aback. “I... I did not think you would remember. It was a very fast visit.” She stated.

L'tian nodded his head. “Too fast if I recall.” He stated. “Rema... get the Colonel of mug of coffee. You’ll forgive me... I have developed a taste for Aricia’s coffee. I no longer drink the tea my wife forces upon me. At least not when I am here.” He said with a smile. He motioned to the chair. “What can I do for your Colonel? I thought the 7th was in a training cycle?”

“I have taken a leave of absence Minister.” Danarla answered. “My husband will be joining me later today from the 23rd SCFG. He is the Air Commander for the *DAUNTING FOE*.”

“A *LEONIDAS II*.” L'tian spoke as alarms began sounding in his head. He turned and moved back to his chair as Danarla settled into the chair. “A prestigious position. There are not many Lycavorian Air Commanders.”

Danarla tilted her head to the side. “My husband is an elf Minister.” She spoke. “Senior Major Ta’lon.”

L'tian looked at her as he sat down the surprise very evident in his eyes. “Truly?” He asked. “I’m sorry Colonel... it’s just that...”

Danarla nodded. “Yes I know. There are not many unions such as ours, a Spartan woman with a male elf. I assure you Minister... my husband is not a normal elf. And no one stirs me as he does. We have been married for three hundred and nineteen years and I could not imagine life without him.”

“Forgive me I meant no offense.” L'tian spoke.

Danarla shook her head. “It is a common reaction sir. One we have grown accustomed too, and even joke about now.”

“He is coming here as well?” L'tian asked.

Danarla nodded. “Within the hour his *TEMPEST* will be landing. I spoke to him only a few minutes ago.”

L'tian set his mug on the desktop and looked at her. “This brings me to my next question Colonel.” He spoke. “Why exactly would two senior officers in the Fleet and Union Ground Forces be coming to see me?”

“Our daughter.” Danarla spoke.

“Your daughter?” L'tian asked.

“*Hyperetes* As’hia.” Danarla replied sternly. “The youngest of our seven children.” (First Sergeant)

L'tian’s eyes grew a little wider at the name and he immediately reached over and touched the panel on his desk. “Rema?”

“Minister?”

“After you have prepared the Colonel’s coffee, send word to Colonel Su’ave to join me in my office immediately.” L'tian spoke. “Tell him it is urgent and to bring all the intelligence on Event Three Nine.”

“Yes Minister.” The aide answered.

“Once you have done that... use my daughter’s Spartan Five Secure Channel. If she is not available... then route it directly to Dysea’s unit.” L'tian spoke seeing Danarla’s eyes go wider.

“As you order Minister.” Rema answered.

L’tian looked back up and met Danarla’s eyes. “I think we may have much to talk about Colonel. If you don’t mind?”

Danarla nodded her head. “This... where is my daughter Minister?” She asked. “And please do not lie to me. My husband has tried to do that many times through the years over little things and I could smell them all.”

L’tian shook his head. “That is something I will not do.” He spoke. “We should probably wait until Colonel Su’ave and your husband arrive. And I will tell you now; whatever we cover with you is being held at Level Ten Security Access Colonel. Something I’m quite sure neither you nor your husband has.”

“Is... is As’hia... is she dead Minister?” Danarla stammered the question.

L’tian shook his head. “No. We do not believe so.”

“You do not believe so?” Danarla asked.

L’tian leaned forward in his chair. “Tell me of your daughter Colonel.” He spoke. “All the information you have would be helpful. No matter what it is.”

“What do you wish to know?” Danarla asked.

“Everything actually.” L’tian said.

No one would mistake this man for an elf by the way he walked or the way he filled out his uniform. He was exceptionally tall for an elf male, his six foot one body made up of hard and extremely well defined muscle. His dark hair hung well past his shoulders and flowed with the breeze he created with the speed in which he was walking down the corridor. His uniform marked him as a Major in the Union Fleet, with six vertical rows of ribbons decorating the left side of his broad chest, among them two of the highest awards for flying that the Union could award. The Bird of Prey Cluster of Honor. His features were such that elven females would swoon at him as he passed them by when he was younger. His face was angular and flawless with startling dark eyes. His lips were thin, his nose sharp, but they were a perfect match with his dark tanned skin. His handsome face still caused female elves to swoon over him, though for the last three hundred and nineteen years, no female but his wife could cause him to even bat an eye.

Air Commander Major Ta’lon walked with a single-minded purpose now, as for the first time in their over three hundred year marriage, an event concerning one of their children had caused them to put their family before their duties. Men and women alike scampered to get out of his way as he walked, most of them not even taking notice of the Junior Lieutenant that was doing his best to keep up the major’s long stride.

He entered Minister L’tian’s office and saw the male elf come to his feet from behind the desk.

“Ah... Major Ta’lon.” Rema spoke. “The Minister is...”

“Where are they?” Ta’lon growled in a menacing voice.

Rema moved quickly to the door and passed his hand over the sensor pad. “In here.” He stated indignantly.

Ta’lon dismissed the aide and moved through the door to see his much-loved Spartan wolf wife come to her feet in front of the two male elves. Her own dark eyes grew softer as she saw him and without pausing she moved to be swallowed within his embrace.

“Ta’lon my husband!” Danarla gasped as he pulled her into his embrace, and felt her nuzzle the bottom of his four-inch high elven ears as their cheeks brushed together. His eyes closed for the briefest of moments as he felt her presence fill him and she used the tip of her nose to caress his ears as she had for the last three hundred and nineteen years. She had learned very quickly what would cause him to become sexually charged and ready to pleasure her, and he had spent hours discovering her every time they were together.

Danarla opened her eyes after inhaling her husband’s musky clove like scent and letting it sweep through her. Those dark orbs fell on the young elven officer who stood to the side looking on with an uncomfortable look on his face. She drew back and looked at her husband.

“Why did you bring him Ta’lon?” She asked softly looking into his eyes.

Her husband may have been an elf and therefore not able to affect her with a male aura, but Danarla had learned long ago he could make her blood sizzle in so many different ways. It had gotten to the point where the aura of a male wolf would not even faze her.

Ta'lon held his wife at arms length and looked into her eyes. She was nearly as tall as him, something that he found incredibly attractive about her. He had told her on more than one occasion that she carried herself like royalty because of her five foot ten height.

"He... O'lan cares for her Danarla." Ta'lon spoke.

"He is the reason she went on that fool trip to begin with." Danarla hissed. She turned to face the blond haired elf with pale skin and green eyes. He was a pilot among her husband's squadron and by all accounts a very good one. He was also extremely arrogant in regards to his flying, something that Danarla and her daughter found distasteful to the extreme. He wanted As'hia to leave her duties and become his wife knowing that is not something she wanted. He had told As'hia she needed to choose between her duties or him, and that is why she had gone to the resort. To clear her mind and make a decision that would alter her future forever. "She went there because of you! Because you demanded something of her she was not prepared to give you! And you threatened to leave her because of it! If you truly loved our daughter you would not have asked this of her!"

"Danarla this is not the time." Ta'lon spoke.

"Colonel Danarla I..." O'lan started to speak.

L'tian stepped forward to intervene before things got nasty. "Major Ta'lon... a pleasure to meet you."

"Minister?" Ta'lon spoke bowing his head slightly in respect while pulling Danarla closer to him and stop any more interaction between her and O'lan.

L'tian motioned to the older elf male with graying hair. "This is Colonel Su'ave of Elven Intelligence."

Ta'lon bowed his head as he looked at the man. He had wise eyes and Ta'lon turned back to L'tian. "Is there a reason why Elven Intelligence is involved with what happened to my daughter? Her transport was not destroyed Minister. Do not try and..."

L'tian held up his hand. "No... As'hia's transport was not destroyed. Please sit down, both of you." He motioned to the couch for them to sit down and turned to O'lan. "Well now Senior Lieutenant O'lan. What should I do with you?"

"Minister... the Senior Lieutenant is an excellent pilot and well skilled in many aircraft. He is one of my Air Wing's finest." Ta'lon spoke even as Danarla yanked on his arm to keep him from saying more.

L'tian didn't look at Ta'lon but kept his eyes on O'lan. "No doubt I'm sure." He spoke. "However... considering the flying skills of who is involved in what is happening... I do not see the need for his assistance."

"He knows too much already L'tian." Colonel Su'ave spoke from where he stood next to the desk. "Dysea will not be happy to begin with that we have brought so many into the fold."

L'tian nodded. "Yes... I'm quite sure of that. It could not be helped however."

"Queen Dysea?" Ta'lon spoke looking at his wife and then back to L'tian. "Minister... what is going on? Where is my daughter?"

L'tian had evolved as much as his daughter in the last years, and like his daughter and Dysea, he could no longer stand those who carried themselves in arrogance over skills they did not have or exaggerated. He ignored Ta'lon's question and continued to look at O'lan. "As Colonel Su'ave has wisely stated... you already know too much by even being here. A word of warning though Senior Lieutenant... if one word of what you see and hear finds its way outside this room... saving your career will be the least of your worries. I know three individuals involved in this operation right now that will cause you great distress if what we are doing is known. Find a chair along the wall and remain silent if you would."

L'tian turned back to Danarla and Ta'lon just as the chirping sound came from his desk. Su'ave moved the three feet to the desktop and pressed the panel. "Yes?"

"Spartan Five is standing by Colonel." Rema's voice sounded.

Su'ave looked at L'tian. "We did not contact her yet. She told us to contact her when we were ready."

"Spartan Five initiated the contact colonel." Rema spoke. "Level Ten Protocols. With full encryption."

"Activate Rema!" L'tian spoke now. "The main disc."

"Transferring now Minister."

All of them turned to see the large, decorated holo disc in the floor flare to life to reveal the beautiful face and figure of Dysea. Danarla and Ta'lon gasped slightly as they saw the first elven Queen of Elear and the Union. L'tian moved around his desk with Su'ave. They appeared to be in a large lounge area that had been converted to a temporary command post from the items spread across the top of the chart table in view.

"Dysea!" L'tian spoke with a smile. "I was just going to contact you again."

Dysea smiled as she looked at L'tian in the transmission. "We have recently discovered new information L'tian. I decided to contact you immediately."

L'tian nodded. He and Dysea had gotten off on the wrong foot as Deia had once told him. Their initial meeting had been no less than her almost beating him within an inch of his life. They had grown close through the years and it had been Dysea who began the push to have For'mya named the co-Queen of Elear. He was very happy to say those times were long forgotten and now they worked closely together in regards to almost everything. Dysea considered him one of her closest advisors and he cherished that role.

"Those we were waiting for have arrived Dysea. You have already met Danarla... may I now introduce her husband Major Ta'lon." L'tian spoke.

Ta'lon got to his feet quickly. "Queen Dysea... it is truly an honor." He stammered.

Dysea bowed her head slightly. "Major Ta'lon." She spoke. Dysea's emerald eyes shifted to where O'lan sat silently along the wall. "L'tian?"

L'tian saw where she was looking and nodded. "This is Senior Lieutenant O'lan Dysea. He arrived with the major and since he is already here and has at least some knowledge of what is happening I have allowed him to remain with a stern warning."

Dysea nodded her head. "Which I will reiterate now Senior Lieutenant." She spoke seeing O'lan jump to his feet.

"My Queen!" He barked. "It is... it is an honor to meet you Milady. Your achievements are well..."

Danarla rolled her eyes at his actions and smiled when Dysea cut him off without regard. "Senior Lieutenant... I am not in the mood for false praise. What you have inadvertently found yourself involved with is something I consider to be of the highest importance for the Union. If I consider it such, you can be assured Martin Leonidas does as well. Should anything of what we about to speak find its way to those outside this room without my authorization, they will recover find your body from the hole I will have it thrown into. Is that clear?"

O'lan's eyes were wide but he nodded his head quickly. "On my honor Queen Dysea!" He stammered. "I am well aware of intelligence protocols with out fighter aircraft. I will..."

Dysea turned back to L'tian without pause, ignoring him. "Have you told them?" She asked.

"I felt it better to come from you Dysea." He spoke. "You are there with them."

Dysea nodded. "Thank you L'tian." She spoke. She looked now at Ta'lon and Danarla. "You will need to be aware of something before we proceed." She spoke. "We have recently been assisted by individuals that in the past have not been friends to the Union or elves. This group is not among those we call enemy, and they willingly and without thought saved the life of my daughter. They have also protected her and I for a number of weeks now. You need to be made aware they are not the enemy and are only concerned with helping us."

Danarla and Ta'lon glanced at one another with confusion in their eyes but Danarla finally nodded. "Of course Queen Dysea." She said.

They watched Dysea nod to someone they couldn't see and then the image widened considerably. Ta'lon, Danarla and O'lan came to their feet when they saw Ti'rut leaning over the chart table. Normya was pressed up against him and leaning over the table as well as they moved data pads across the table to where Anton and Cihera were standing plotting something while Las'elh read off information from another pad. They could see a dark haired woman across the room that appeared to be speaking with Iriral.

"My Queen!" Ta'lon barked. "That is..."

"A stinking Immortal!" O'lan hissed with revulsion.

Normya's head came up at this and her emerald eyes narrowed in anger. She started to move towards the transmission but Ti'rut's arm around her waist stopped her. She turned back to look at him, pressing close to him and not caring who saw. And all of them saw as she reached up and placed her palm on his cheek.

"Ti'rut he..."

"No *il kal'daka darthirii*." He spoke. "He is entitled to his opinion. I have been called much worse." He looked at Esther as she came up next to him. "Haven't I mother?"

"They do not know you or us." Esther stated calmly hearing the gasps from Danarla and Ta'lon in the holo transmission..

"Senior Lieutenant... another outburst like that and I will have you imprisoned until what we need to accomplish is complete!" Dysea snarled angrily. "Is that clear?"

“My Queen! He is...” O’lan pressed.

“Be silent you fool!” Danarla shouted at him. “No one is speaking with you! And you have done quite enough!”

“Queen Dysea... what is happening?” Ta’lon asked now moving closer to the image of the transmission. “Where is our daughter? And why... why are you in the company of Immortals?”

“Ti’rut is only half Immortal Ta’lon.” Dysea replied. “His birth mother stands next to him. His father is Cha’talla.”

Ta’lon’s eyes grew as wide as his wife’s in stunned astonishment. “Cha’talla?” He gasped. “The High Lord’s Captain? He is... he is dead my Queen.”

“The former captain of the former High Lord.” Dysea corrected him. “And no... he is not dead. At this moment Union engineers are assisting Cha’talla and his tribe in fortifying their settlement. We all believe their home will become a target soon, and we want to be prepared for that.”

“My Queen... I... we don’t understand.” Danarla spoke.

“We don’t have all the information at the moment.” Dysea told them. “When you arrive here hopefully we will know more.”

“When we arrive there?” Ta’lon spoke.

Dysea nodded. “Minister L’tian has arranged for both of you to accompany him to Apo Prime while Colonel Su’ave remains on Elear to coordinate from there. You will be leaving as soon as we conclude this transmission. It seems... it seems from the new information we have received that your daughter has been taken prisoner in The Wilds.” She said hearing Danarla gasp in horror.

Ti’rut stepped forward now. “Your daughter... As’hia is her name. She lives!” He spoke. “She is strong willed and she lives. My brother protects her even now and he has sworn to die before allowing more harm to come to her. He told me to tell you that you must not give up hope! He has promised your daughter she would see you again and you must not give up hope!”

“Your brother!” Danarla hissed.

“Queen Dysea?” Ta’lon spoke now, his voice laced with anger. “My Queen... who has taken my daughter and why?”

“Your daughter was apparently taken prisoner by a mercenary group that was employed by Marshall Pusintin of the KFI. Their instructions were to capture several elven females so that Pusintin could assess their reaction to...” Dysea stopped talking.

“Reaction to what?” Ta’lon demanded.

Dysea met his eyes. “To assess their reaction to Immortals.”

“NO!” Danarla wailed. “Not our daughter! No!”

“Listen to me both of you!” Dysea snapped. “Your daughter is half Lycavorian! She is immune to the effects of Immortals on female elves! She was raped yes... but she has not been... she has not been broken! She lives and fights. She killed the Immortal who raped her! She still fights and you must as well!”

Ta’lon gripped Danarla’s shoulders tightly, both of them looking at Dysea in the holo transmission. “Lady... Lady Dysea... she is our... she is our youngest child. She...” Ta’lon was speaking.

“She lives Ta’lon. And as Ti’rut has told you... she still fights! You have raised her well.” Dysea spoke. “Now... now we must put our heads together and discover why she was taken, what Pusintin wanted this information for, and how we are going to get her back.”

“We... we will go after her?” Ta’lon asked softly.

Dysea nodded. “Oh yes Ta’lon. We will go after her. We have a source of information now that we did not know we had before. Ti’rut’s brother will die before he allows anything to happen to her believe me.”

“How do you know this my Queen?” Danarla spoke. “They are... they are Immortals.”

“I know this Danarla... I know this because Ti’rut and my own daughter are in love and he has sworn the same thing to her.” Dysea spoke softly.

CHAPTER THIRTY

HADARIA

ROYAL ESTATE

Eurin and Zaniai watched as the three *Durcunusaan* soldiers led them down the tunnel, Eurin trying her best to keep up to their determined long legged strides. She still wore her night clothes, the *Durcunusaan* appearing out of the darkness of her bedchambers like otherworldly apparitions and ordering her to come with them without so much as an explanation.

It had been a trying two and a half days since that awful moment in the Arch Ministry's Chamber. Eurin could not believe what her eyes had seen. She did not want to believe it. She refused to believe it, and she had spent the last two and a half days scrambling to find out how Buonau and the others had accomplished such a vile and heinous event. Zaniai had kept her in the loop as much as possible about what the Arch Ministry was doing, but even he was being shunned in many aspects. They had confined Anja to the Royal Estate and Sivana to hers and Belen's home while they began an intense review of everything Anja and Sivana had done in the last twenty-five years. Eurin had been beside herself trying to discover how Rinard had been able to seduce Anja in such a way. She never imagined for a moment that Anja was capable of such action. She knew her to be perhaps the more sexually adventurous of Martin Leonidas's Kings, but certainly she would never act in such a way. She loved Martin Leonidas and her fellow Queens far too much.

Yet Eurin had seen the footage of the security videos. She had seen all of them, including the one Martin had not seen, with Anja servicing four different men at once, and appearing to be enjoying it immensely. It had been horrible to watch, and Eurin could only tell herself it was all untrue and just a horrible dream somehow. Eurin had been chosen within the first few hours to act as the liaison between the Arch Ministry and Elder Council towards Anja at the palace. They would tell her when they expected Anja to come before them again to answer the charges that had been brought against her. No matter what Eurin did, the evidence presented was damning to the extreme. The security videos had been reviewed by the finest electronics men and women on Hadaria and pronounced very authentic by over a dozen experts. The Elder Council and the Arch Ministry was moving very fast now, and with Buonau providing them details on almost everything Anja had done over her reign as Queen, she was rapidly building a case against her.

Eurin could not believe that Buonau desired power so much as to go this far, but she was witnessing it with her own eyes. She knew Buonau hated Anja and Sivana for their actions in willingly drawing the Hadarian people further and further away from the more conservative and restraining practices of their past. Practices that were monitored and controlled by the Council of Hadarian Elders. Practices that for the most part many of the younger generation of Healers had let fall to the wayside as they followed their petite but fiery and beautiful Queen into the future. Anja had brought passion to the ranks of the Healers and Mage Warriors, and it was common to see those same Healers and Mage Warriors now participating in very intense training exercises with the men and women they would be called upon to heal. Living with them, training with them, forging friendships and sometimes even relationships. In doing this, every year that went by, the Elders lost more power within the fabric of Hadarian society for these Healers would spread these new ideas and ways of doing things among their own friends and family when they came back to Hadaria to Ascend or just to visit. Eurin knew this disturbed many of the Elders, but she never imagined they would go to this extent to regain their lost power. Power and influence that they had begun losing, for the most part, the moment that Anja and Sivana's father King Yelu had come to power.

The rumors were rampant across all of Hadaria now. Almost everyone now knew that Martin Leonidas had departed within minutes of Anja appearing before the Arch Ministry. Rumors were starting to come out now as to why this was, and why Queen Anja had not been seen in almost three days. Rumors of the security videos were also starting to stir and Netnews reporters were beginning to skulk about looking for information. Not surprisingly it appeared no one within the Arch Ministry had any intention of curbing the rumors. Eurin had watched Anja slumped on the floor of the Ministry Chamber, the tears pouring from her jade eyes as Martin walked out of the chamber, the anger pouring from him in waves so apparent that even someone with no Lycavorian blood in them could detect it. It had happened so quickly, no one had really recovered until after he had already left the planet. As Sivana and Eurin held a distraught Anja between them, looks of stunned knowledge on their faces, the Arch Ministry ordered that Anja be confined to her home while a formal investigation was begun. They were going to determine if Anja was indeed culpable in the death of Mage Warrior Seanna and whether she had acted with conscious thought in letting Seanna die to hide her sexually

deviant behavior from being publicly brought to light. They were also going to try and determine if Anja and Sivana had willfully disregarded their positions as Queen and Princess in political matters by not including the Arch Ministry and Elder Council in decisions they had made. While Eurin herself knew they had no real power to do this, Anja was in no position to argue with them.

The Hadarian Elder Guard that served the Elders had set up a perimeter around the estate, insuring that Anja would not leave. There had been a confrontation with the *Durcunusaan* force under the command of Belen at first, and it wasn't until after six of the Hadarian Elder Guard were nearly killed trying to enter the grounds of the Royal Estate, that they were called off and told to establish a perimeter around the outside of the palace grounds and insure Anja complied with the confinement order. Elder Buonau had stepped into that temporary void quickly and taken charge and Eurin had no doubts she was directing the investigation as well as everything else that was happening. That Buonau was making a concerted attempt to usurp Anja's rule was obvious to anyone who was paying attention. What frightened Eurin the most was the fact that no one seemed to be protesting what she was doing in any way.

Eurin looked around the tunnel once more, trying to determine where they were. She had never seen this tunnel before, or the men that were escorting her. She knew they were not part of the normal detachment of *Durcunusaan* that guarded the palace and Anja when she was here. She had no idea where she was to be honest. The Lifter that they had escorted her to had been blacked out so she could not see where they were going to. They had made one stop to pick up Zaniai, who was also in a state of shock, before they continued on. That two *Durcunusaan* members had removed him from his home as well as all he was able to tell her before they were told politely but firmly to remain quiet until they reached their destination. A moment of indecision flashed across Eurin's mind then as she and Zaniai walked. Was Elder Buonau bold enough to make her and Zaniai disappear? They were both staunch supporters of everything Anja and Sivana had done through the years, and both of them had been trying vigorously to find out more information about what was happening for the last two days. No one would give them any answers as Buonau had declared a complete blackout on any information in regards to the investigation or how it was proceeding. Could these new *Durcunusaan* troops be pulling them from their homes to protect them in some fashion?

Looking up at the ceiling of the tunnel as she walked Eurin stumbled in her night clothes, but the *Durcunusaan* soldier walking next to her reach out quickly and kept her from falling on her face with a gentle grip that was surprising. The small group came to a halt then and Eurin grasped the man's arms and looked at him through the helmet he wore. His blue eyes bright and alert and filled with respect.

"Forgive us Divine One." He spoke gently. "We are moving too fast for what you wear. We will slow our pace. It isn't much further, just around the corner up ahead."

"Where are we going?" Eurin asked him quickly.

"All will be known in a short while." He answered as he held her arm now and urged her forward.

Voices could be heard as they moved closer to the corner and Eurin recognized Sivana's voice easily. Sivana was like her sister in almost every way, and backing down from someone was not something she would do willingly. Her eyes went wide as she came around the corner and saw her.

"What is going on?" Sivana screamed once more. "You tell me why you have brought me here? Where is my husband?"

"The others have joined us Princess." The stoic faced *Durcunusaan* troop replied. "We can make our way forward now!"

"I want to know what is going on right now!" Sivana hissed. "Where is my sister? Tell me where Anja is right now!"

"Sivana?" Eurin gasped causing her to turn.

"Eurin!" Sivana gasped as she turned and saw her and then rushed over to her and they embraced quickly.

"Sivana what is going on?" Eurin asked. "These men... they came and took us from our homes in the black of night! I have never seen them on Hadaria before. They..."

Sivana nodded. "They came for Belen and me too?" She said. "They took Belen Eurin. I don't know where they have taken him. I..."

They turned at the deep rumbling sound and watched as the thick steel wall in front of them began to open and take the shape of a door as it began to slide open with ease. As it got past the half way point, they saw

Belen standing with his father Atropos, both of them wearing their standard uniforms and Belen now carrying his weapons very openly. Sivana's eyes flew open.

"Belen!" She gasped rushing forward. Sivana felt relief wash over her as her husband's aura swept across her senses and embraced her. She gasped softly as he nuzzled her cheek and neck and gripped her tightly with one arm. It amazed her how he could do this to her now that she was part wolf, but she relished every time he pulsed her with his aura. She pulled back quickly and looked at him. "Belen... husband... what is going on?"

"I apologize for frightening everyone, but it had to be done in this way." Atropos spoke in a firm but gentle tone.

Sivana looked at him with anger returning to her eyes. "What had to be done this way?" She popped.

"Sivana!" Belen retorted.

"What?" Sivana snapped. "You are keeping even me out of the loop father! As if... as if I can't be trusted." Sivana said firmly turning back to Atropos even though small tears could be seen in the corner of her eyes.

Atropos looked at Sivana as she stopped talking and reached up to wipe the tears from her eyes. He smiled and moved closer to her, his normally stern dark eyes becoming soft and welcoming whenever he looked at her. Anja's sister and Princess of Hadaria she may have been, but since the day his son had turned her to save her life, Sivana had acted as if she had been Lycavorian from birth. She had begun calling him father many years earlier because in her eyes his age and wisdom deserved that respect, and as Belen's wife Atropos had treated Sivana as he had his two daughters.

"I serve Anja Leonidas." Atropos spoke softly as Sivana looked at him. "I have served her since that day in Sparta when the King restored my honor. She is the High Guardian of my young children as you well know. I will always serve her Sivana, no doubts, and no questions. You have been part of my family for so long, loved my son and our ways, and honored them without question. You, more than anyone here, you know what security is. My son and I have taught you this."

Sivana looked at him her eyes moist and she finally shook her head. "I know... I just hate not knowing what is going on." She stated softly.

Atropos smiled and leaned over to kiss her cheek softly. "All will be revealed within a few moments." He spoke. "It is not a trust issue Sivana... you know that. Not with you or those with you."

Sivana nodded. "I know."

"And what is going on?" Zaniai asked now. "You pull us from our homes in the middle of the night and bring us here. Where is here?"

Atropos smiled as he looked at him. "We are under the palace." He answered reaching out and squeezing Sivana's arm firmly, reassuring her with his touch.

Eurin's eyes grew wider. "Under the palace?"

Atropos nodded. "Three hundred meters under the palace to be exact. The tunnels you see around you all lead out to different portions of the city and the countryside. Some end only a kilometer away, while others extend for many kilometers and join with other bunkers like this."

"Bunkers?" Zaniai spoke. "There were never any bunkers under the palace. It is built on a single slab of Lava Granite Phospherate. The hardest stone known to exist on Hadaria."

Atropos nodded. "Indeed. That is why it took four hybrid dragons six months to finally burn through it with their superheated breath. It took us five years to build this underground complex in secret. No one outside of the *Durcunusaan* knows it exists except for those eight Amarian engineers who designed it and the other four bunkers off world. That group now includes you. They are spread out now among the bunkers with their families maintaining them. A similar bunker is built under the palace on Elear and Apo Prime and one under the villa on Earth. All built by the same team of engineers and four dragons. The one on Apo Prime has been completed the longest, this one only three years ago."

"Atropos...?" Eurin spoke. "Atropos what is going on?"

Atropos met her eyes and a smile softened his usually stern and unreadable face once again. "I told my Queen not so long ago that she and the other Queens have come to think they can predict everything Martin does. I told her to step back for a moment and look past what they have come to expect from him and look into the place they don't go to anymore. I told her they would find a very different Martin Leonidas." He said. "Anja told me she would think about what I said. Anja took my words to heart it seems."

“What do you... what do you mean?” Eurin asked.

“Did you know... did you know that both Martin Leonidas and Anja were members of perhaps the most elite unit of soldiers in the entire world on Earth? They were feared by all for their cunning and ability to come and go like ghosts. For their ability to adapt and change to suit the mission requirements. And for almost never failing in a mission and its objectives. Anja... Anja finally realized this and she and Martin came up with a plan.”

“A plan?” Zaniai spoke.

Atropos turned. “Come... she is waiting.”

“Wait?” Eurin exclaimed. “Anja is here?”

Atropos nodded with a smile. “Divine One you did not think those fool Elder Guard Militia would actually be able to keep Anja Leonidas penned up somewhere she does not want to be did you?”

“But in the Chamber?” Eurin gasped. “Martin... he...”

Atropos smiled again. “Come... you will see for yourself.” He said turning and moving into the doorway. “Be mindful of the four steps down into the circle.”

Sivana held tightly to Belen’s hand as he walked with her. “Belen... what is happening?”

Belen smiled and squeezed her hand. “Have faith my wife and mate.” He whispered to her. “Everything is not always as others see. You must look beyond what your eyes can see. Especially when they are not friends to those who are family to us.”

Sivana allowed him to help her down the steps and then she was beside the others as Atropos began to walk along the circular hallway. They could see other *Durcunusaan* members moving along the smooth corridors going in and out of other doors. All of them armed and none of them were members of the Guard Force for the palace above them. They had not walked very far before they heard the laughter of children echoing along the walls. As they drew close to the large archway entrance that Atropos seemed headed too Sivana looked at Belen as the laughter of the children’s voices grew louder.

“That is Retta!” She declared recognizing her niece’s voice.

Belen nodded. “Yes... I do believe it is.”

Sivana saw where they were heading and she broke away from Belen’s grasp and rushed to the doorway. She skidded to a halt just inside the archway at what she saw, her eyes wide and she let out a small yelp of surprise.

Anja turned from where she was sitting on the edge of the couch and holding the mug of coffee in her hands. She was dressed in a casual light blue pantsuit that accented her petite but very curvaceous body.

“They’re here Lover.” She stated confidently.

“Jeez! It’s about time! I’m running out of stories to tell.” Martin exclaimed from within the transmission.

Eurin and Zaniai moved up next to Sivana and saw the massive holo image of Martin, Retta and Calyb along the spotless white wall. Martin was sitting on the couch in their quarters on the *SPIRIT*, Retta and Calyb on either side of him. Mara and Endeem could be seen sitting leisurely on the floor in front of the couch. Anja got up and set her coffee on the low knee high table before moving over to where Sivana and the others stood and taking one of Sivana’s hands and one of Eurin’s hands.

“You’ll never run out of stories papa!” Retta spoke happily behind her from within the transmission. “Momma says you can’t stop talking.”

“Is that what she says now?” Martin asked with a grin looking at Anja in the transmission as he nuzzled Retta’s head.

“Retta... you weren’t supposed to tell your father I said that.” Anja commented in an embarrassed tone of voice as she pulled a stunned Sivana and Eurin into the room further, Zaniai following his own eyes wide.

Martin laughed and leaned over to nuzzle the top of his daughter’s head once more. “Go get ready for bed.” He told them. “We’ll get in early tomorrow and you need to go to school still.”

“Papa!” Retta announced. “That is so unfair.”

“Why can’t we visit Andro?” Calyb asked.

“You can’t visit your brother because Nara, Deion and Bryon will be in school and you will be too.” Martin answered lifting Retta off the couch easily and setting her on the floor. “Momma and I need to talk so... Mara, Endeem, make sure they brush their teeth and then go to bed.”

The two dragon hatchlings rose to their full height, bobbing their heads up and down while Mara pushed her large head towards Martin. Sivana and the others saw Martin chuckle and nod.

“Ok... but only one story and not too long.” Martin spoke. “Now go!”

“Only *one* story you two!” Anja declared as she released Sivana and Eurin’s hands and looked back at the holimage. “Listen to your mothers, both of you and I will see you as soon as I can. And do not neglect your studies!”

“I love you mamma!” Retta exclaimed.

“I do too!” Calyb echoed before they both raced from the large main room.

They watched as the dragon hatchlings scampered after Retta and Calyb and Martin got to his feet. “Better tell them everything that is going on when we are finished Red.” He spoke as he moved to the ever present coffee dispenser. “They look like they are about to stroke out.” He stared into the image disc on the *SPIRIT*, his dark eyes never leaving Anja’s face.

“I will.” Anja said softly.

“Ok... let’s have it. How far have things progressed?” Martin asked.

“She has confined me to the estate and the Arch Ministry is supposedly in secret session and trying to figure out what to do with me.” Anja replied as Atropos nudged the others fully into the room and motioned for them to take seats. Eurin and Zaniai still had looks of shock on their faces, but only Eurin and Zaniai chose to sit. “She’s moving much faster than we had anticipated, which tells me she had things in place long before now.”

“Secret Session my ass! They know exactly what they are doing.” Martin spoke as he moved back from the dispenser with a steaming mug of coffee. “She hasn’t cared very much for you or Sivana ever since you took power Red. You know that. In a way it doesn’t surprise me in the least.”

“Well... I don’t particularly care for her sorry ass either.” Anja barked. “They are going forward with the investigation. Buonau will try and have me dismissed as Queen over these charges, I can feel it Lover. It is becoming readily apparent that is what she is pushing for and she seems to have quite a following Martin. She just may succeed.”

Martin nodded slowly. “We talked about this possibility Anja.” He said.

“I know... but that doesn’t mean I have to like it.” Anja spoke. “Or allow it to proceed unhindered if I can stop it. They will undoubtedly demand that Eliani return to Hadaria without Nyla and Malic, to interrogate her I’m sure.”

“And Eliani will promptly tell them where to go and how to get there.” Martin said with a grin. “Not to mention *what* to do *when* they get there.”

“I don’t want her coming here.” Anja said. “Keep her with Andro. She is too volatile and will only lash out to protect me. That could do more damage than good, she has become too much like Andro and Lisisa when it comes to family. Besides... she is needed more with Andro in case something happens. Behind Sivana and me she is the most powerful Healer in the Union and she is needed more where she is.”

“She gets her temper from your side of the family you know?” Martin said looking at her. “I’m as mellow as they come.”

“*Please*... excuse me while I vomit.” Anja said with a grin.

Martin’s face sobered and he took a seat on the couch. “Anja... you do know you may have to initiate a Shining Path. Can you do that Red? I know... I know it will tear you apart but can you do it?”

Anja took a deep breath and nodded her head. “If I have too Lover... if I have too yes. I will do it.”

Martin nodded. He knew Anja would do as she said. In many ways she was nearly as tough minded as him and would only take so much shit before she starting shoving back. “Then I won’t mention it again.”

“Will the two of you stop talking as if we are not here!” Eurin all but screamed. “And someone tell us what is going on?”

Anja turned and looked at her as Martin settled to the couch on the *SPIRIT*. “Eurin... we are having a conversation.” She said with humorous tones in her voice.

“I can see that!” Eurin barked. “Tell me why?” She looked at Martin in the transmission. “I saw you in the chamber! I saw how you acted!” Her eyes went to Anja. “And you? You were devastated! You... the tears!”

“Eurin... how long have you known me?” Martin asked softly.

Eurin looked at him from where she sat. "I do not need a lesson in the history we have together Martin Leonidas!" She spat.

"As long as you have known me... as much as you have studied our people. Lycavorians. You still do not understand do you?" Martin said.

"I understand that something is going on." Eurin spoke heatedly. "You looked as if you were ready to..."

"Kill Anja." Zaniai stammered finishing Eurin's statement. "In the Ministry Chamber. Anja... your face... the tears..."

"It was staged!" Sivana gasped now from where she stood.

Anja looked at Martin in the transmission and smiled. "I told you practicing like we did could only make it better." She said. "Now you owe me. Big time."

"And I will happily pay up on that debt when I see you again." Martin answered with a grin. "In spades."

"Ohhhh... I can't wait for that." Anja said with a delightful shudder.

"You staged the whole thing!" Eurin said incredulous.

"It was the only way to get our enemies to begin to reveal themselves and their plans." Anja said returning her gaze to Eurin with unflinching confidence. She moved to the small half couch across from where Eurin and Zaniai sat and settled onto it easily. She held out her hand for Sivana, who didn't hesitate and moved to sit next to her sister. "They had to think... they had to think that they accomplished what they were attempting to do. They had to think they had separated Martin and me."

"Then... the security tapes?" Zaniai gasped. "They..."

"They are about as false as they come." Martin snapped from the transmission. "And not even very good ones either."

"Then you... you don't believe them?" Zaniai asked hesitantly.

"Believe them?" Martin said with a chuckle. "You must be joking Zaniai. How could I believe something so obvious? Besides Anja is considerably more vocal in bed. Not to mention she doesn't just lay there as the security footage shows."

"Martin!" Anja exclaimed with wide eyes. "You don't have to go into detail!"

Eurin looked at Anja with a stunned expression. She and Martin were trading one-liners right now, trading them back and forth as they had done for the last twenty-five years of their relationship and marriage, their comments laced with sexual innuendo and possessive tones. It was something she had seen often in the past, whether they were relaxing in the palace or preparing for battle against the Evolli. Anja was very much like him in that nothing seemed to faze her very much. At least not outwardly. "Anja?" She asked softly. "What is going on here?"

"As much as you have studied Lycavorian DNA and physiology Eurin... you more than anyone should know the security tapes they showed were forged." Martin answered before Anja could.

Anja smiled gently as she looked at Martin in the transmission. "I could never cheat on Martin Eurin. Not only because I love him with every breath that I take, not only because no man could do to me what his touch does to me, but also because of my wolf physiology. It would be impossible for me to act in such a way as long as Martin is alive, as it would be for any of us. Dysea and For'mya included." She spoke confidently.

"What?" Eurin gasped. "What do you mean?"

"Eurin... I'm part wolf." Anja said.

"I know that!" Eurin snapped impatiently.

"There is not a male Alpha wolf alive that could possibly illicit the type of reactions from me that you saw in those tapes. Martin is the most powerful Alpha wolf in the Union, Rinard doesn't even come close. His pitiful aura, even at full strength, would have no effect on me in the least because my wolf blood calls only for Martin in that way. And it would always call for him and him alone while he lives. Dysea and For'mya as well."

"While he lived?" Zaniai asked.

Anja nodded her head. "It was the natural state of things for Lycavorians long in the past. It allowed females to become receptive to other alphas, other males really, after the death of their mate. It insured the continuation of the species in the most basic of ways. That is one of the reasons Resumar thought it so vile when females came of age and were forced by the first male to reach them. It took emotion out of the equation.

It is the main reason he began pulling the Lycavorians out of that train of thought and banished that practice. It is no different for any pureblood female Lycavorian wolf. Or those turned by powerful alphas. Sivana and Tarifa for example. Belen and Isra are among the strongest of alpha males among the Lycavorian species and their blood would not allow them to react in such a way with another male unless their mate was dead. When combined with the emotion of love, it's virtually impossible for a female wolf to willingly act in such a way with another male. She would consider it an act of vileness and dishonor of the highest order to act in such a way. The female wolf would need to love the other male considerably more, or not love her mate at all, in order to act in this way. Why do you think there are so few instances of adultery in mainstream Lycavorian society within the Union itself?"

Sivana looked at Belen and then back to Anja. "You mean that you wouldn't have said those things?" She spoke hearing these explanations for the first time. "Not that I believed for an instant you had Anja... but..."

Anja smiled. "I would be incapable of saying those things to Rinard, on top of the fact that I wouldn't fuck him if he was the last man in the universe. That is the most disgusting thought I can picture. I may be sexually open and free Sivana but I do have my standards. And besides... the others and I have plenty of toys to keep us deliciously occupied with each other if Martin is not around. Not to mention Rinard does not compare to Martin in equipment either. Any of us would laugh at him if he pulled it out in front of us, before we cut it off that is." She finished with a smile and flash of her teeth.

Martin's eyes grew a little wider in the transmission. "Toys? Really?" He asked with a grin. "Is that what those...?"

Anja pointed at him. "Forget you ever heard that big boy. And the part about the toys." She snapped playfully. "You'll regret it if you don't."

Eurin looked at her. "I... I knew of what you speak Anja. I have heard many others say the same thing." Eurin stammered. "I just... I did not... scientifically there was no basis for that thought. I never believed it. It seemed more an emotional thing to me."

Martin smiled. "Well now you know. There is not a scientific explanation for everything that happens Eurin. You should know that by now." He said. "I will never desert my Queens. Any one of them. Just as they could never betray me, I could never betray them. Our hearts and minds are entwined too deeply."

"So everything in the chamber?" Zaniai asked. "It was all an act?"

Martin grinned. "Pretty good acting huh?" He spoke looking at Anja. "I knew I should have gone to Hollywood Red."

Anja rolled her eyes. "As a porn star maybe." She turned her head and looked at him as he opened his mouth to reply. "Don't go there Martin Leonidas!" She scolded.

"What is this place Hollywood?" Zaniai asked.

Martin chuckled. "I have to go Red." He stated getting to his feet. "Armetus put together an extensive overview of what options we have with Aikiro and the Coven. I want to examine it with him before we reach home. *Pen enyla forn Red*. Fill them in on what is going on, but you make sure you watch your ass. It's too damn perfect to get shot off, and I like it just the way it is."

Anja's face beamed as she stared back at him in the transmission. "I love you too Marty. With every beat of my heart." Anja spoke softly. Her face changed quickly. "You just keep that bitch away from our children as much as possible. I don't want her corrupting them!"

Martin nodded. "Consider it done." He stated. "I'll contact you again in two days from Sparta."

"Lover... you be careful. Now that we know some of what Aikiro is up too, she will become even more dangerous." Anja said.

Martin nodded. "I intend too." Martin's eyes turned to Atropos. "Atropos?"

"Milord?" Atropos spoke alertly.

"Bold Shield." Martin said simply.

Anja noticed that both Atropos and Belen became instantly more alert and she looked at her captain intently. That was a phrase even she had never heard of. Atropos nodded his head smartly. "Consider it done Milord." He spoke.

"Anja... if you need anything, use our secure channel. Nothing over normal COMs." Martin said.

Anja nodded turning back to his image. “I know Lover.” She said. “I kind of like you just the way you are too, so don’t do anything stupid.”

“Me? Do something stupid?” Martin exclaimed. “I will have you know that I am the epitome of calm and composed.”

Anja snorted. “When pigs fly maybe.” She spat.

Martin smiled warmly his eyes locked on Anja. “I will talk to you in two days. Anja...?” He waited until her jade colored eyes were focused intently on him. “No doubts Red. No doubts ever.”

Anja nodded. “No doubts and no questions Martin. Ever.”

He smiled just before the transmission ended and the holoimage faded leaving nothing but the wall. Anja stared at the empty wall for a few moments more as if trying to feel even the smallest portion of his aura even over this distance. Her eyes closed for a long moment and she smiled to herself before turning from the transmission and looking at the others. “Well... now you know.” She said softly. “Now all we have to do is find a way to stop what Buonau is doing before she really fucks things up.”

“That... that will be easier said than done Anja.” Zaniai spoke quickly. “She is rapidly consolidating her power base.”

Anja nodded. “I know. We have to stall for time. Demand that the Arch Ministry allow you to interview these men in the video footage. Demand to search Rinard’s home. Pcellany’s home. I still have access to Seanna’s apartment on Apo Prime and I have people moving there now. General Vengal will arrive in three days with a company of his Drow Scouts to assist us. He is also the one who threw Rinard out of the *Durcunusaan* and I want a better explanation as to why then the one he provided to Atropos.”

“General Vengal?” Zaniai said coming to his feet now. “Anja there are few who do not know what role Vengal and his half-vampire Drow Scouts play within the Union military. Along with *Mjolnir’s Hand* and the *Durcunusaan*, they are the King’s fist. His very personal hammer.”

Anja nodded quickly. “Yes I know.” She said. “We need people who can move among the shadows and ask questions without really being noticed. They are the only ones who can do that and it is why we need them here. I requested them Zaniai. You saw Martin... you spoke to him. You don’t believe that I...”

Zaniai’s eyes went wide. “Never!” He hissed. “Fuleos is the one who got me to see the type of woman you were. I have seen the complete devotion between you and Martin and the others. I saw it between you and Seanna. No... I... you are not capable of such things. And you are right... we may very well need them.”

“Buonau will fight us on everything we request.” Eurin spoke.

Anja nodded. “Yes she will, but she will have no choice really. She may have much of the Arch Ministry in her pocket, but she can not change the constitution that quickly. We have a chance to stop her before she does too much damage.”

“Anja... what if we can’t?” Belen asked now. “She has obviously been planning this for some time. What if we can’t stop her?”

Anja met his eyes and then the gazes of the others. “You... you don’t want to know the alternative.” She spoke. “So let’s not think about that and start looking.”

Sivana stepped forward. “Anja... sister... what exactly are we looking for?”

Anja grinned. “Oh that’s the easy part.” She said. “We’re looking for me.”

They all looked at Anja as if she had truly lost her mind.

THE WILDS

BELID

DEVIL’S BANE

KAVALIAN FLAGSHIP IN ORBIT

“...had our people here on the *BANE* going over all the data.” Pusintin was talking with Keleru in the holo transmission. “I brought two of our senior biogenic scientists just to be sure. Their consensus is the same as Phy’iad’s elf female.”

“It won’t work.” Keleru stated.

Pusintin shook his head. "Oh no... it will work." He said quickly. "But considering that my brother is the one that turned her... we don't know how long it will last which could pose a problem."

"Explain." Keleru ordered.

"It has to do with the strength of the Lycavorian that turned them." Pusintin spoke. "At least Phy'iad's elf slut was right about that. The female that they captured lasted seventy-three minutes before her natural wolf healing system localized and then purged the chemical from her body, thereby making her immune to the effects of Immortals on normal female elves." Pusintin leaned back in his chair. "The elf Queen was turned by my brother and because of that, it may very well make her immune immediately."

"Because of the pureness of his blood. Like yours."

Pusintin nodded. "It would be like trying to harness a rabid wolf." He said. "The moment her system purged the chemical in the Immortal's fluids, she would turn into a very lethal female wolf not at all happy about her situation. And we don't know how long it would take."

"This is not common knowledge Pusintin." Keleru spoke.

Pusintin shook his head. "I know. I had never heard of this before Phy'iad told me. I asked the three vampire officers I have on my ship and they knew nothing about it. Apparently it is something the Immortals have known for several thousand years but never felt the need to bring to anyone's attention and it is why they never intentionally tried to capture half breeds. They thought it was an anomaly when it was first realized because the percentage was so low. Once they discovered that it was related to Lycan and Elf pairings, and any female children or turned females would be like this they tried to avoid them. Any that were taken prisoner were used for a few hours and then had to be killed or beaten severely. In which case they were useless to begin with to the Immortals. It isn't something that elves or Lycavorians have made common knowledge because our scientists say it is still somewhat new to them as well. They have known about it for many centuries but are still studying the effects."

"So that part of our plan will not work." Keleru said. "Not if she will react in this way. It could very well be counterproductive to the overall plan."

"It doesn't necessarily have to work the way we intended." Pusintin said. "If it is not common knowledge, then perhaps the target is not aware of it either. We know for a fact that their female pilots and ground troops are cautioned against confronting Immortals in any way. If it is not common knowledge we can still use it as a tool, not to mention the more physical means of convincing her."

Keleru was silent for a moment. "So it is still an option?"

Pusintin nodded his head. "I believe so." He spoke. "It has to be her Keleru. It would give me firmer ground to stand on."

Keleru nodded. "I agree. Can we confirm any of this information further?"

Pusintin nodded. "It is a question we can put to our lone contact." He stated. "Is it worth the risk for you to order that?"

"The alternative is a long and drawn out war." Keleru spoke. "I will make the necessary arrangements."

Pusintin nodded. "Then I will take as much information in regards to this as Phy'iad can supply me and commit it to memory. As much as I am able."

"The Immortal dogs will work for us?" Keleru asked.

Pusintin nodded. "I believe so. We are going to make it worth his while. At least for a time. Their unique skills could come in handy, and once we control The Wilds those skills will be needed."

"We must keep them away from our regular troops." Keleru said. "We know from that fool Gerald that he lost the half elf daughter near Yocetu. There is any number of worlds they could have gone too to hide in that sector and the adjoining sectors combined. Our ships from Nefoa have been spread out searching for one that has any sign of Immortal presence. Gerald is confining his search to within three sectors of Yocetu with instructions to contact the Kavalian commander if he finds them."

"He is an idiot... but he does have his uses." Pusintin said.

Keleru nodded. "And he will die like the others when the time comes." Keleru got up within the transmission and moved to a large desk. "They have made hardly any mention of their confrontation with our ship in The Wilds on their Netnews."

"That is surprising in and of itself." Pusintin spoke. "There were no survivors on the *DIATAGA*?"

Keleru shook his head. “The fool commander fired on the vampire frigate while it resided within the shield arc of the Union flagship and carried the vampire Queen of the Union on it.” He said. “I am actually surprised the child queen didn’t destroy all of the ships. As it was, this *LEONIDAS II*-Class ship... this *MJOLNIR’S HAND* hit our *DIATAGA* with a concentrated broadside that completely overwhelmed their shields and blasted them to atoms. They never stood a chance.”

Pusintin’s eyebrows went up a little. “Really?” He spoke. “That would imply that their weapons systems are more advanced than we thought.”

Keleru nodded. “Those were my thoughts as well.” He said. “Unfortunately... as much as it angers me that this happened, I can not press the issue beyond asking for a formal apology and demanding reparations. They *were* targeting the vampire scum that attacked our delegation on their ship after all. To press beyond what would be politically correct would only draw suspicion.”

Pusintin nodded. “You did the right thing Keleru. If you make too much of an issue about it they will begin to wonder why. It will draw them into The Wilds more to discover why our ships were there to begin with. Then our presence there will start to illicit more attention and that is not something we want.”

“This business with Athani troubles me Pusintin.” Keleru said sitting down at the desk now.

“I have racked my memory to try and determine if I should have seen this coming, but I can remember nothing that stands out Keleru.” Pusintin spoke softly. “Jalersi would have seen the signs before anyone as her sister.”

Keleru nodded. “I do not hold you to blame Pusintin.” He stated. “It has forced me to denounce her publicly and now I have to deal with Qurot’s Pride over this issue. They are demanding to know how I allowed this to happen. I have also confined Jalersi to the embassy for the time being. She was not happy about that.”

“Keleru... you don’t think...” Pusintin began.

Keleru shook his head. “No... she would never betray me as Athani has done. She is too ingrained in our ways. Athani was always the one who rebelled. While it angers me greatly that this has happened, I should have seen it coming myself when I allowed her to visit with the Ancient Priestess. Demahra has disappeared as well it seems.”

“Disappeared? Where could she go? She is over a thousand years old.” Pusintin asked the question.

Keleru nodded his head. “Apparently she believes I would have come after her for not seeing these signs in my daughter and doing something to stop them. She is right of course... but I would not have killed her. Simply maimed her. I have ordered her home in the mountains destroyed, and all of her teachings burned, but one can never be too careful.” He said.

“You think she had a hand in Athani’s actions don’t you?” Pusintin asked.

Keleru nodded. “Outside of Jalersi... she is the only one Athani spent considerable time with in the last two decades. It has to be her. Where else would she have learned these fool ideas of choice and emotion? Who else but Demahra would be brave enough to put these ideas in my daughter’s head? She believes her age gives her some sort of special authority to shape the future of our young ones. When I find her I will teach her this is not the case.” Keleru looked at him oddly. “You sound angry with my daughter Pusintin. Has something happened?”

Pusintin shook his head. “When I spoke to her last she seemed distant and only wanted to question me about what I have been doing with my time. It was almost as if she was probing me for information. Trying to see if I have had other relationships.”

“She is still very angry about you having this other child from the vampire wench Yuri.” Keleru stated. “That much I do know. She was angry with me for not telling her.”

“She needs to get over that!” Pusintin spoke.

Keleru nodded. “I agree... however I still must caution you that she will not understand if she discovers you have acted within our laws as any virile Kavalian man would and taken other females into your bed. Nor will she understand if she discovers our plan.”

Pusintin nodded. “I know. No one else knows about those times. I was smart enough to take precautions to not be discovered. And I have no intention of telling her what we are planning. At least not until it is over and done with.”

Keleru nodded slowly. “Good. I do not need my daughter slaughtering three or four of our females in a fit of jealous rage.”

“She will never find out.” Pusintin spoke. “Almost all of our teams are in place now.” He changed the subject not wanting to linger on talking about Jalersi as her actions and attitude was beginning to piss him off. “Three more will need another two weeks to fully be ready, but then all of them will begin their surveillance and training at their hidden locations.”

“All of them made it in undetected?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin nodded. “Yes. I told you training them as we did would one day benefit us.” He said.

Keleru nodded. “Yes you did. Their preliminary chances of success?”

Pusintin nodded. “Eighty percent or better on the three main targets, slightly less on the others due only to lack of intelligence about their whereabouts.”

“Speaking of whereabouts we have heard back from our agents in Coven space.” Keleru said. “I was going to wait until you returned here to inform you, but then this thing with Athani reared its vile head.” Keleru shook his mane, the graying blond hair moving gently with the motions. “I can not fathom why she would turn on me as she has done. And with the son of the Lycavorian King no less. If she is wise she will never show her face again, for I will insure she is sent to a labor camp and used as a whore for the rest of her days.” Pusintin remained silent as Keleru vented knowing that the Kavalian leader meant every word. Keleru took a deep breath. “As I was saying... our agents in Coven space. They were able to search the last of the locations where we believe the Coven may have taken their dragons. They watched the facility for a week and saw no sign of them.”

Pusintin got to his feet now. “I felt sure they had hidden them away at one of those three locations.” He stated.

“Not that it matters.” Keleru said. “We have upwards of five million T19 missiles in our inventory now. All of them very safe in storage bunkers where we believe they will use these dragons most of all.”

“Oh... I don’t question that.” Pusintin spoke. “It just surprises me that we have not been able to discover where they have gone. Yuri is on Earth, without her dragon, so they have not taken them there.”

Keleru looked at him with some surprised. “You considered that?” He asked.

Pusintin nodded his head. “It was one of many different scenarios I ran through my head. The Coven dragons could receive advanced training from my brother and his people that would have effectively neutralize the tactics we have learned from the Evolli in regards to the T19 use. It was a long shot... but seeing Yuri on Earth without her beast quickly set that particular scenario aside. And my brother would never do such a thing. Aikiro stole those dragons from him and he would not forgive that. Ever.”

“I have ordered our agents in Coven space to expand their search outward from each of these three planets and begin to make discrete inquires as to where their beasts have gone.” Keleru spoke.

Pusintin nodded. “I will be leaving here later today after telling Phy’iad what it is we seek.” He stated. “I should be back there in four days maximum. I intend to stop on Nefoa to review their deployments, but that will only be a few hours.”

Keleru nodded. “We should know more from Jiss and Matuarr by then in regards to what we asked them to investigate. When we initiate this plan of ours we will need to move very fast initially to keep the Union off guard.”

Pusintin nodded. “They won’t just roll over Keleru. You know that. Once it is discovered we were the ones who conducted the attacks they’ll hit us. And they’ll hit us hard. Harder than the Coven has ever hit us. We need to be prepared for that.”

Keleru met Pusintin’s gaze. “Oh... I know this. However... once we reveal the goal of our plan they will have no choice but to follow their own laws. If Jiss and Matuarr confirm that nothing has changed, then they will have to call off their military and let the people decide. It is written right in their constitution.”

“We are hoping.” Pusintin spoke quickly. “Two of our primary targets are making only sporadic appearances however. In order for this to work... we need to take out not only my brother, but both of my older nephews by the child Queen Aricia. They are the pure bloods. The others are of no large consequence and they will fall in line if they are told too. Denali Leonidas always comes with Lisisa when she meets him according to Karun, so he should not be a large problem. Karun, Timur and our security detail on Earth, combined with the assault team should be more than adequate to take him out of the picture. My nephew Androcles however, he will be tough to nail down.”

“Then we must find his Achilles Heel. As your brother’s weak spot is his feelings for his Queens, his oldest son will have a weak spot as well. We need to find it and exploit it.” Keleru spoke. “I will have Jiss and Matuarr broaden their work to include all the information they can get on this Androcles, including the blond female he has taken as his mate.”

Pusintin nodded. “That is probably a good idea.”

“Our attacks combined with the confusion our agent in the Union should provide will be more than enough to counter any moves by the Union leadership.” Keleru spoke. “We estimate at least two to three months of confusion before they fully realize what has happened and begin to recover. There will be confrontations no doubt, but they will be sporadic with no real central control. By then you will have completed your part in the plan and we will already have secured a foothold deep in their territory that they can not dislodge us from.”

Pusintin nodded his head confidently, his dark eyes cruel and unforgiving. “Once the cycle starts it will be nearly a one hundred percent guarantee. Once we make that announcement I can move quickly.”

“It is a superior plan Pusintin.” Keleru spoke. “When it is successful, our people will sing your name with honor and shower you with wealth.”

Pusintin waved that off quickly. “I don’t care about that.” He snapped. “My brother will be dead and when I finally rule the Union; my mother will follow him into hell’s flames.”

Keleru smiled. “An excellent plan indeed.” He stated calmly. “Contact me when you reach Nefoa. I will have more information to pass on to you then.”

Pusintin looked at Keleru in the transmission. “Keleru... Jalersi is...”

“I will talk with my daughter Pusintin.” Keleru told him holding up his hand. “This is not the time for her female sensibilities to begin raising their ugly heads. She is a Kavalian and she knows our laws. I will tell her to accept things as they are and move on.”

Pusintin nodded. “Thank you.”

“I will speak with you in two days when you reach Nefoa.” Keleru said.

BELID IMMORTAL BASE

As’hia looked up when the door to her cell slid open and the small force shield dropped. She watched the huge Immortal enter the cell carrying several bundles in his hands. She had seen him several times since discovering he was working in tandem with Lynom. She did not trust him as completely as Lynom appeared to, but even though she had not yet managed to meet Lynom, everything he had told her up until now had come to pass. This Immortal did not talk very much, and As’hia had begun to wonder if he was even capable of talking. As’hia’s Spartan training allowed her to quickly approximate an opponent’s size and skill just from their body movements and language. She estimated this Immortal at six foot three or four, and even under his loose fitting clothes she determined he was incredibly muscular. The sheer strength contained in his body must have been incredible. Certainly enough to snap her in half with barely any thought. What she found interesting most of all was the fluidness of his motion and movements. He did not move like other Immortals, with the choppy almost predictable motions common to them. This one however, he moved with a fierce predatory nature, always constantly aware of everything around him it seemed. In complete and precise control of every limb of his body and what it was doing. He reminded her of many of the most senior and skilled vampire instructors in the Advanced Martial Combat Classes she had taken and the way they conducted themselves.

While they took no part in the initial Agoge that every Spartan went through, since Queen Isabella had taken her place at the King’s side, many of the advanced classes were now given by a combination of senior Lycavorian and vampire instructors. This combination made the graduates even more deadly in many opinions. As’hia had finished second in her Advanced Classes, taking to the lethal training like a fish in the water, and it had made both her mother and father bubble with pride as they listened to the praise from the senior Vampire instructor upon her graduation in front of nearly four thousand visitors and family members of the class of three hundred and sixty-five graduates.

Lynom had told her this Immortal was on their side, and that he worked with him. So far that had proven to be true, but As'hia had no trust of Immortals in the least, especially not now. She had killed the Immortal that broke her initially, the one who had turned her into a weak pile of whimpering flesh before him. She could remember most vividly how she had willingly thrust her hips back on him with enthusiasm and need, wanting nothing more than to feel him fill her with his come. She had called him Master several times and that more than anything disgusted her. She was no one's possession. When her Lycavorian DNA had finally kicked in and purged his foul essence from her body, As'hia had run him through with her very own *Nehtes*, which he had carelessly left in the room. That act led to several hours of being beaten and then raped twice more, until the Immortal leader had called off his men and left her to lie on the dirty floor, bloody and broken. As'hia felt sure her life was over then. That was until Lynom's soothing voice had erupted into her mind like a ray of sunlight.

First she had to rid herself of this Immortal and find Lynom so then they could escape.

As'hia what you are thinking? Lynom's voice filled her thoughts.

I'm going to kill this Immortal you work with and then we are going to escape! As'hia answered immediately.

It came so easily now. Her Mindvoice skills before meeting Lynom had only been a low end Tier Four. Now she had felt her awareness and skill grow beyond anything she had ever sensed, and she knew it was because of Lynom. He was the most powerful Mindvoicer she had ever come across, even stronger than her mother, and somehow when he had established the link with her it had increased her skills beyond what she had been able to do.

As'hia... please do not. Lynom told her in an even voice.

You have access to a ship! We can leave this place! As'hia exclaimed.

It is not that simple Ssin'urn 'Anon. You must trust...

I can do it now! As'hia spoke as her fingers curled around the utensil the Immortal had given her to eat. She had filed it down to a needle like point and now she leaped off the floor intending to drive it into the back of the Immortal's skull just above his left ear.

The rest and food the Immortal had given her the last four days had allowed her elven body to heal almost completely. She felt like she had regained all of her speed and strength. It would not have mattered had she been at peak health and primed for combat. As'hia blinked and the Immortal was gone from in front of her, the bundles dropping from under his arm. Her dark eyes grew wide as she could not stop her forward momentum and she crashed headlong into the steel wall with a grunt. She whirled around and saw the Immortal standing behind her now and her eyes grew large as she lifted the homemade Shiv.

As'hia stop this before you are hurt! Lynom's voice rang out in her mind.

As'hia lunged forward at the Immortal trying to stab him, but once more he vanished from in front of her. Just like a vampire when they blurred. As'hia turned with blistering speed, her eyes wide as they came to rest on the Immortal once more. He was gazing at her with those dark orbs, but surprisingly she saw no anger or cruelty in them. She saw humor.

"What are you?" She hissed out.

As'hia took a deep breath and used all of her elven and wolf speed in a final lunge at the Immortal. The beatings and rapes had taken too much out of her and she was no where near fast enough. The Immortal blurred once more and this time As'hia slammed hard into the wall behind him, the Shiv falling from her hand as she cracked her head on the unyielding metal. She whirled around, almost staggering and froze when she saw him staring at her again with that same humorous expression. As'hia's eyes darted to the fallen Shiv and then back to the Immortal. She made one final lunge to get to the weapon and felt her fingers closing around the tool before she was jerked back to her feet and the large hand close around her fist. She gasped as she felt herself being lifted off the ground like a doll and braced for the savage impact she knew would come from being slammed into the wall behind her. The large hand closed around her throat and fist, but only enough to keep her from using the Shiv. The hand around her throat did not squeeze or try to crush her neck; it merely held her suspended eight inches off the floor as the Immortal pressed her against the wall gently.

Lynom! As'hia screamed out within Mindvoice as she closed her eyes and prepared to die.

"I told you not to attempt that *Ssin'urn 'Anon.*" Lynom's voice spoke. As'hia's eyes grew wide as she realized the sound echoed in her ears and not her mind. She stared at the face of the Immortal with his grayish colored skin and dark eyes. The bones spurs decorating the edges of his jaw were very prominent and his lips

were somewhat thicker than normal Immortals. “You have not fully regained all of your combined elven and wolf speed and strength. If I had been anyone else, they would not have hesitated and they would have killed you. I would have been very upset.”

“Lynom?” As'hia gasped her eyes wide and her brain rebelling from this new knowledge. How could this be the vampire who had been helping her? It couldn't be. He was an Immortal. “You... no! You are an Immortal!” As'hia shouted as she began to pummel his shoulder with her free hand. “No! Put me down! Let me go!”

Lynom was the second son of Cha'talla and Esther Saira. He had been given a vampire name by his parents in honor of his mother's father, whom she had never known because the Empress had murdered him. It was custom among the Akruvian people for the males to name the children, especially the sons, and when Cha'talla had named him for the father of his Blessed Wife, Esther had cried for two hours straight. Like his older brother Tir'ut, he had led a hard life of training and schooling under his father and mother, but Lynom would trade it for nothing in this galaxy. His father worshiped the very ground his mother walked upon, and she reciprocated those same feelings back to him. They held nothing back from Tir'ut and himself as they grew, allowing them to find their own way under their firm guidance. He was almost a twin to his brother in looks, and had undergone six hours of surgery to alter his features to match what he looked like now. Cha'talla knew it would be the only way he would be able to infiltrate the mercenary group to begin with. This particular group of Immortals had drawn the interest of his father many years ago due to their savage nature within The Wilds. None of the members of Cha'talla's tribe would be able to infiltrate them as completely as Lynom had because of their history. Lynom and his brother were not so limited. He had volunteered for this duty because it allowed his father to plan and keep an eye on Phy'iad's group until the time was right to remove them as a threat to free men and women in The Wilds.

Lynom, also like his brother Tir'ut, possessed all the massive strength of an Immortal and vampire combined. But like his brother he had also inherited the incredible ability to blur and wrap the shadows around himself like a vampire. It was something their mother had schooled them both on mercilessly as they grew so that they could use these skills to one day save their lives if need be. He abhorred being among these foul men, and it had taken all of his willpower to not succumb to the callousness and savagery they used when dealing with others. He had killed to maintain his cover within their organization, but thankfully none of those he had killed were innocents. The more time he spent among them however, the harder it became to hold onto who he was at his core. That was until As'hia had been captured. Now Lynom had a reason to continue on with his mission and bring these monsters to an inglorious end. And he would do it in order to protect this she-elf in front of him that stirred his blood like no other he had seen in the nearly two years he had been among Phy'iad's group. And it would take even less time to undo the procedure he had endured to make himself appear like a normal Immortal and it was a day Lynom waited for eagerly.

Lynom did the only thing he could think of to keep As'hia from losing her grip on reality that her connection to him had given her. He pressed his body close to hers, pinning her against the wall with only his chest and abdomen and gripping her face tightly in his large hand.

“As'hia!” He hissed loudly. The harshness of his voice caused her to stop whipping her head from side to side and look at him with wide eyes that were filled with fear now.

As'hia gazed at him, her whole body trembling in a potluck of emotions ranging from anger, to shame, to despair. Her heart raced madly, and she could not shift to her wolf form to tear him limb from limb with nothing but her claws and teeth. As he pressed closer to her, easily pinning her lithe figure to the coolness of the cell wall she felt the incredible warmth of his body through the clothes he wore. The haggard wrap that adorned her skin barely covered her body with any modesty, half of it now torn away so that one of her bare breasts was currently pushed against his incredibly broad chest. Her eyes grew even wider as she felt the heat from his body, quite unlike the cool skin of an Immortal, and her own body reacted in a way she did not expect.

It reveled in the warmth that washed over her.

As'hia had long ago passed through her Coming of Age, and she had been pulsed by many an Alpha wolf, and even bedded with several of them. None of them elicited the reaction she was now experiencing having the steel hard body of this huge Immortal pressed against her near naked flesh. Even the elven pilot whom she had gone on the trip to the resort to escape had never gotten this reaction from her. Her dark brown eyes were wide as she stared at him.

“Kill me!” She jeered. “I will never submit to you! Kill me now for if you don’t I will surely kill you!”

Lynom shook his head slowly and removed his hand from her throat to grasp her jaw and keep her head from moving. He took it firmly, but did not squeeze very hard. It was enough to keep her from speaking and moving her head.

“I will not kill you!” He snarled. “And I do not expect you to submit to me! I am Lynom As’hia! It is me!”

“You lie!” As’hia growled savagely. “Lynom is a vampire! His mother is a pureblood vampire! He told me!”

“My mother is a pureblood vampire!” Lynom growled back at her. “And my father is a pureblood! He is... he is a pureblood Immortal.”

As’hia’s eyes grew wider at this. “You lie!” She barked. “No vampire would sleep with an Immortal let alone bear them children! It is a crime in the High Coven! Even I know that! You...”

“Silence woman!” Lynom finally rumbled loudly. He pressed closer to her, his lips only inches from hers, As’hia unable to move her head due to his powerful iron like grip. She thought his foul smell would overwhelm her wolf senses, but to her utter amazement she found the sweet scent of Amarian Willow Flowers wafting to her nostrils. It was a flower she had watched her mother raise in their home on Elear for it signified being reborn to the Amarian people whenever the flower bloomed. Her eyes watched as his lips curled back in a snarl, exposing the tips of his vampiric fangs. “My mother is Esther Saira and she is a Pureblood! How do you explain that I can blur? How do you explain I can move faster than you? Think As’hia! I could not tell you who I was before! You were still recovering from what they did to you! You...”

“What you did to me!” As’hia barked.

“No!” Lynom snapped. “I did no such thing! I could not stop what happened to you when you first arrived! I did not know who you were or that you were even here! I could not save your friends from being broken and I am sorry! I...”

“You tricked me!” As’hia snapped viciously. “You are nothing but a monster!”

“*I SAVED YOUR LIFE!*” Lynom roared now as anger flooded his veins. He easily heaved As’hia across the cell and watched as she hit the ground and rolled into the far wall with a rush of pain and the air leaving her lungs. Once more she was not fast enough as Lynom blurred in motion across the room in a blink and his hand clamped onto her throat. She gasped as this time he exerted pressure and he held up the homemade Shiv she had made with his other hand. Her eyes were wide now, but not in anger. Now she was frightened she would die under the very weapon she had made. “I could kill you now without as much as a blink!” He snarled at her. “I have risked much to shield you. If not for me you would be in the main chamber screaming in shame under who knows how many of these foul members of my father’s species. They would fuck you and feed on your blood until you were insane! They would beat you senseless because you are immune to that part of how Immortals affect female elves! When they were done using you, they would exploit you to practice their torture techniques, and then you would know pain! Then they would let you heal... and it would begin all over again!”

Lynom leaned close to her face, his dark eyes now the color of vampire cobalt blue and his fangs fully extended. He gave off an incredibly fierce visage that would have frightened even a harden Spartan soldier, and As’hia was helpless before him and she knew it.

“My mother and father have been Blessed husband and wife for nearly a quarter century! I am the second of their four sons! They have raised all of us with honor and respect! To treat others with that same respect and honor! My name is Lynom... and I am no monster As’hia of the elves! I would gladly slaughter every one of the fools here who call themselves Akruvian Immortals, simply for the dishonor they heap upon my kind with their actions!” He held up the Shiv. “You meant to plunge this into my brain, behind my left ear. Even after I told you to do nothing foolish. Without me there is no escape for you As’hia! You will die on this *vithu* rock! It appears that is what you wish. So be it!”

Lynom raised the Shiv as if to strike her with it. As’hia closed her eyes in abject horror expecting to feel the steel of the Shiv penetrate her head, but then there was a rush of wind and a small snapping sound next to her head. Her eyes popped open as the hand left her throat and she turned her head quickly, seeing the Shiv now bent and broken lying next to her head. Her head came back around and she saw Lynom lifting the bundles from the floor. He brushed some dirt from the top and turned back to her as she lifted herself up off the floor

with her arms. She watched as Lynom moved back towards her, his eyes still cobalt blue and she scrambled back against the cell wall. He stopped and lowered the bundles to the floor, placing them neatly at her feet.

“I had... I had brought you some things.” He spoke softly. “What you do with them now is up to you. I will trouble you no longer.” As’hia watched him rise back to his feet and cross the cell to the door in four strides. He turned back and looked at her once more. “You may be right.” He stated in a soft voice. “I may be a monster in your eyes, but at least I do not move through my life with blinders over my eyes and blocking everything else around me. I... I did the right thing in saving you As’hia of the elves. At least I thought so at the time. Now... now I am not so sure I haven’t condemned my tribe because of my feelings.”

As’hia watched him gaze at her for several more moments before he turned and left the cell. The force field re-activated and the door slid shut behind him. As’hia sat there on the floor of the cell for a long moment unsure of what to do. She heard the soft rumbling and watched as a part of the far wall folded inward and a small shower extended into her cell. Her eyes then fell to the small bundles he had left and she moved closer to them slowly. They appeared to be thick blankets, but as As’hia flipped over the several folded layers she discovered different items that no Immortal would have given her freely. Namely soap and several different types of food that would energize her wolf cells, including dried beef, which carried the most nutrients of all for her wolf genes. She lifted the package of dried beef and looked at it, turning it over in her hands as the spicy scent filled her nose and set her mouth to watering. She set that bundle aside and flipped over the top of the second blanket her dark eyes getting larger. She discovered a pale blue dress wrap that, while nearly transparent in nature, was clean and neatly folded. The style of the dress and length of the ends insured that she would not be as exposed as the other elf females she had seen so far. On top of that wrap she discovered a small brush for her long hair and when she lifted the wrap dress she saw the knife. It was still in its scabbard and no more than four inches long, but the matte black blade was easily razor sharp, and appeared to be extremely well crafted and easy for her to hide. Her head came up and As’hia looked at the entrance to the cell where Lynom had left from.

Was it possible that he was telling her the truth?

How could that be? Throughout all of her training and even her life in school and during her Agoge, Immortals were described as vicious and skilled soldiers. They showed no mercy to their enemies and they eagerly enslaved and broke female elves to their will. Never in the annals of their history had she ever heard of a pureblood vampire mating with an Immortal. It was a High Crime within the High Coven she knew. Could Lynom be telling the truth? She had seen him blur like a vampire, but that could have been just that her reflexes were slowed by her captivity. She gripped the knife tightly in her small fist. Why had he given her a knife? She had no doubts that giving her a blade to defend herself was not something the leader of these foul Immortals would have approved of. Why had he done this? Why...?

As’hia’s dark eyes grew a little wider when she realized she could no longer feel his comforting presence within her mind. He had slammed incredibly powerful Mindvoice Shields up and when she probed gently, all she detected was an empty void. It was similar to what her mother was able to project when she was upset, and her mother was considered a very powerful Tier Four Mindvoicer, only Lynom’s shield far exceeded what she was able to project. As’hia knew that Immortals had natural Mindvoice shields that were very strong and very natural within their species, but Lynom’s shields were well above anything that had been described to her. This caused As’hia’s heart to race quickly for she had come to rely on his Mindvoice presence to calm and sooth her over the last few days. That was now gone, and As’hia realized it was her fault. Yet he was an Immortal... how could she hurt his feelings in any form enough to make him act in such a way.

Her eyes narrowed and her face took on a determined look then. The next time he came in here she would have her answers. All of them.

EARTH
SPARTA
DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD

Duewa was very surprised when she saw the number of men and women waiting to greet Martin Leonidas when their *STRIKER* landed on the tarmac. She stood at the bottom of the ramp and watched as the

huge obsidian colored dragon she knew as Torma moved with startling speed to where the azure blue dragon stood. As she gripped the hands of her two sons she saw them rub against each other firmly, their tails dancing a delicate chorus of love and dragon love and devotion, while the two smaller dragon hatchlings hopped around them both. Her blue eyes watched as Martin Leonidas met three more of his queens and he crushed all of them to him tightly, sharing blistering kisses that left no doubts to what he felt. Duewa noticed that the kiss between him and Queen Aricia was slightly longer and perhaps a tad bit more passionate, but there was no uncertainty as to what he felt for them. The Prime Minister stood there as well and she watched as they embraced tightly, her eyes showing her surprise at this outward display of emotion. It was almost as if there was far more to their relationship than what was publicly known. Duewa filed this information into her mind to pass on to her mother. Perhaps there was something there they could use in the future. She had watched as both Mara and Calyb didn't hesitate and ran into the arms of the waiting queens. Mara leaping into Isabella's arms and Calyb into Aricia's. Her devout religious beliefs took a hit when she saw this, for there was barely a pause in how Mara and Calyb treated them. It was no different than how she had seen them treat their true mother Anja. It made it very hard for her to understand how they could call another woman their mother, let alone four other women. And not only call them mother, but look to them for the same guidance and support that they should only have to look to their birth mother for. This was beyond her comprehension.

Duewa let her eyes wander around the airfield for a long moment. She had never been to Sparta and from their position on the airfield and even as they had come in for a landing she had been keenly aware of the size and scope of what was now considered the unofficial capital of the Union. She could see parts of the city between the mountain peaks in the distance, the sun rising in the east causing many of the taller buildings to reflect the bright sunlight across the valley between the mountains.

"Senior Mage Duewa?" The male voice spoke from just behind her.

Duewa turned quickly and looked into the sparkling blue eyes of the *Durcunusaan* soldier that stood behind them. Her hands tightened on the grips of her two sons as she looked at him. He stood just over six foot tall by Duewa's estimation, with shoulder length bleach blond hair and an incredible tan. His Mark IV ArmorPly conformed to a muscular body that was lean and easily put him over two hundred pounds. His Nehtes was strapped to his left leg, the Shi Viska bridle easily discernible on his left arm and the K12 KM in a holster on his right thigh. He wore the long crimson cape that marked many of the *Durcunusaan* from normal Spartan soldiers, as well as the crimson sash around his waist.

"Yes... yes?" Duewa stammered out as he stepped closer to her.

"I am *Dilochitès* Thoti." He said. "I have been assigned as your escort and guardian to your sons while you remain in Sparta with the Royal Family."

"Escort?" Duewa asked harshly as her eyes narrowed. "I am to be limited in what I do then?"

Thoti smiled flashing perfect white teeth. "Not at all Senior Mage Duewa." He spoke casually. "However... with both the Coven and the Kavalians within the city limits of Sparta, anyone who is considered important now has an escort. Just to be safe." He spoke. "I will take your sons back and forth to school, and should you need to go anywhere outside of Sparta I will escort you, at least until you have learned your way around Earth. I understand this is your first trip here?"

"Yes... yes." Duewa answered taken aback by this *Durcunusaan* soldier's obvious good natured attitude and his extremely well spoken words. He did not strike her as an unintelligent brute as she considered most of the Spartan warriors to be. As her mother said all of them were. Of course, she had never interacted with any of them either.

Thoti nodded and hefted the two bags Duewa had packed for her and her sons quickly to his shoulders. "There are many things to do here in Sparta and on Earth." He spoke with that same smile. "I understand that you had to leave in a hurry from Apo Prime. I will show you to your apartment on the Royal Villa Estate and then I will take you into the city so that you may purchase some additional clothes for you and your sons."

"Is that real?" Duewa's oldest son asked pointing at the K12 on Thoti's right thigh.

"Tinyn?" Duewa hissed at her son. "That is not something that concerns you!"

Thoti chuckled softly as he looked at the dark haired boy. "Yes it is real." He replied squatting down easily, even holding the two large bags. "But weapons are not something that you need to concern yourself with young... Tinyn is it?" Duewa's eyes grew a little wider when he said this to her son.

"Yes sir." He answered shyly.

“My son is about your age Tinyn.” Thoti spoke. “You will meet him I am sure.” He looked at the second boy. “And what is your name?”

“Tinrell.” The younger of Duewa’s sons answered.

Thoti nodded. “A pleasure to meet you both.” He spoke standing back up to his full height. “I have a Transport Lifter to take us to the Royal Estate parked over here.”

Duewa looked at where Martin stood and then back to Thoti questions in her eyes. “I thought... I thought I would accompany King Leonidas. To look after Mara and Calyb.” She said quickly.

Thoti shook his head. “Mara and Calyb will be taken to school to join their siblings.” He answered. “Queen Dysea is a task master when it comes to the schooling of the children. Even though she is not here right now, they still follow the regimen she has devised for them to the letter.”

Duewa tilted her head. “And when will I be able to fit my classes into their schedule?” She asked with that insensitive tone of voice once more. “I came here to school them, not act as their housemaid!”

Thoti smiled at her tone, the terseness of her words bouncing off of him completely. “That is being arranged as we speak.” He answered. “You can review that when we arrived on the estate. The King and Queens will be attending several meetings I understand before they return to the estate. They will be gone for several hours. It is more than enough time for you to settle in and begin to learn your surroundings. This way please.” He motioned with his head.

Duewa chanced one more look back to where Martin was standing and she found the azure blue eyes of Queen Aricia focused on her intently. Aricia was pressed closed to Martin, her body touching his in a very intimate fashion, his arm wrapped around her waist, his other hand holding Isabella’s hand tightly while For’mya was leaning into him from the front. The look she was receiving from Aricia was not at all very friendly.

Duewa wondered for a moment if perhaps she had become involved in something that was far beyond what she had bargained for.

Martin held Aricia tightly as he leaned over and nuzzled the tip of For’mya’s four inch high elven ear and feeling her lean into him. He turned his head and looked at Isabella, her dark eyes gazing upon him with love and devotion.

“So... when were you going to tell me?” Martin asked with a smile. “Before he was born I hope.”

Isabella smiled and shook her head. “I found out just before we left.” She replied. “I was not keeping it from you. I was hoping to surprise you this evening. I should have known you would have sensed him.”

Martin pulled her closer to him and kissed her deeply, her hands coming up to stroke his cheek as Aricia and For’mya looked on with bright smiles of their own. Isabella felt the warmth spread through her just from his kiss and she leaned into him further, her arm snaking around his waist. It didn’t matter who it was, whether Martin or Dysea or one of the other women she loved with all that she was. Whenever she kissed one of them, she could feel the warmth and feeling pouring from them for her.

“She wishes to name him after her mother’s father Beloved.” Aricia said with a smile. “Bella was afraid to ask you, so I told her I would ask you for her.”

Martin looked at Bella’s hazel/green eyes. “Why would you be afraid to ask me that?” He said.

“I... I know you have named all our sons.” Isabella answered. “I did not want to make any waves. He was... he was a loyal officer to the High Coven and...”

“What was his name?” Martin asked.

“Stefan.” Isabella answered.

“Stefan...” Martin nodded his head. “It’s a strong name Bella, and I think he would be proud to carry the name of his grandfather.”

Aricia grinned. “I told you Bella.” She said.

Isabella continued to stare into Martin’s eyes. “He will make us all proud Martin.” She said.

“I’m proud of all my children.” Martin said. “Though there are two or three of them in particular who I would like to stop doing things that make my life difficult.” He replied turning his eyes to look at For’mya.

For’mya chuckled and rolled her eyes at him before she squeezed her arms around his waist tighter. “If our sons did nothing to keep us on our toes, what would be the point of being parents?” She said cheerfully.

“Marrying the youngest daughter of the Kavalian Prefect isn’t exactly keeping us on our toes.” Martin said. “More like insuring that we get gray hair prematurely. And that doesn’t include our oldest son telling them to go fuck themselves in front of every Netnews channel in the Union.”

Deia chuckled now. “At least he used much better language than what my nephew now uses.” She stated. “And he allowed Sadi to do most of the talking... unlike the times when you have chosen to voice your opinion over the objections of your more diplomatic Queens.”

“Bah... sometimes diplomacy is overrated.” Martin growled playfully. “We have heard nothing from them in regards to what happened out there *Tenna*?”

Deia shook her head. “Nothing beyond demanding a formal apology and reparations.” She stated. “They did fire on a ship that they knew carried a Queen of the Union. What is there to complain about? Their people started it.”

“They are lucky I did not order all of them wiped out!” Aricia hissed. “They knew Bella was on that ship! I told them myself!”

“Even so... we kill nearly seven thousand of their men and destroy one of their frontline ships and all they can do is puff their chests out and shake their branches?” Martin said. “That doesn’t make a whole lot of sense to me.”

“You think there is more to it?” Deia asked.

Martin nodded. “Yes... but what that is escapes me. Besides... right now we have bigger issues.” He said. “Namely the one called Aikiro.”

“I read Armetus’s report this morning.” Deia spoke. “He brings up some very interesting points *Mandri*.”

Martin nodded. “No doubt.” He said. “However... we need to find out what point Aikiro is making.”

“You believe that she knew this ship was there somehow don’t you Martin Leonidas?” For’mya asked.

Martin nodded slowly. “Oh yeah.” He said. “She knows it is there. The question remains why she brought it willingly to our attention when she knows my first reaction will be to blow it into a billion pieces as Avi recommended we do.”

“We can ask her when we see her later this morning.” For’mya said. “I have arranged for a meeting at eleven hundred hours, but did not know where you wanted to hold it so I told her to be ready to leave her quarters on a moment’s notice.” For’mya grinned. “I don’t think she or Yuri appreciated my tone with them.”

“She’ll like my tone even less.” Martin said.

“Beloved... why has this woman come back with you?” Aricia asked the question all of them wanted to ask, but only Aricia would be brave enough to ask about before he told them what was going on. “Where is Anja? And what is going on?”

Martin nodded. “Anja and I determined on the way to Hadaria that something was going on with the Hadarian Elder Council and the Arch Ministry. We also deduced that Buonau was behind it. Given a little luck and deduction on our part we came up with a plan to counter what we figured she was going to attempt. So far we have been almost dead on. Buonau has more of a following than we first thought, more influence within the Arch Ministry, but this plan is the only way we could figure had a reasonable chance of success.”

“Attempt? What is she going to attempt?” Deia asked moving closer to them.

Martin nodded his head. “Buonau is trying to have Anja and Sivana removed as Queen and Princess of Hadaria. And ultimately put the government back in the hands of the Elder Council with her as the head poo bah. She could not do it by influencing Anja and Sivana, so she is going to try and do it by making it look like Anja is a sex crazed lunatic that cheated on me with Rinard and several other men and then killed Seanna to cover it up.”

The looks on their faces told Martin what they all thought of that. There wasn’t shock or disbelief, there was anger.

“You are joking of course?” Deia finally managed to stammer. “She couldn’t hope to actually pull that off. Could she?”

Martin shook his head. “Nope... it’s no joke. They submitted some security footage of Anja sleeping with Rinard and other men. Even at the same time. I didn’t see the other security feeds they had, if I did, knowing they were false to begin with would have really set me off. We executed the plan we came up with

when we felt it was a good time. Buonau thinks she has split us apart now, and she thinks Anja will be easy to take down. Duewa is their plant here to try and keep an eye on everything I do. She is also Buonau's daughter."

"*Melyanna* allowed this woman to do this?" For'mya asked incredulous.

Martin nodded. "It will hopefully draw out our enemies on Hadaria. This is not a plan that Buonau and her cronies thought up by themselves; that much we agreed on. There is something totally different at work here and the only way to determine what it is... the only way to figure it out was to act in the manner we have. Duewa thinks she will be the conduit to her mother for information and trying to influence me. You must act angry in a fashion because of what Anja has done, but keep her at arm's length. She undoubtedly has an agenda when it comes to me... and I want her to feel comfortable enough to act on that."

"Retta and Calyb?" Aricia asked.

"Nothing changes with them. I made that very clear to her. Whatever she thinks she is going to teach our children will need to be approved by one of you." Martin said. "I already told Retta and Calyb that mommy and I are playing a game and they need to play along too. Mara and Endeem will help them maintain the illusion we want."

"You think this Duewa is involved with what you saw on Hadaria?" Deia asked.

Martin nodded. "Oh yeah. I don't know how just yet... but she had a hand in it."

"*Melyanna* is alone?" Bella asked referring to Anja's by the elven name given to her by Dysea so many years ago.

Martin shook his head. "Of course not! Atropos is with her, and Vengal and a company of his Drow Scouts will join her secretly in two days." Martin said. "You don't actually think I would leave her hanging out there all by herself do you?"

"How strong is the case against her?" Deia asked.

Martin shook his head. "Pretty solid. Buonau has most of the Arch Ministry in her pocket and she is playing them like a Master Fiddler. This was the only way to get them to relax even a little bit."

"Enough to allow us to see what they are planning perhaps?" Isabella asked. She had the most experience with situations like this because of her upbringing within the corridors of power of the High Coven.

Martin nodded. "That is what we are hoping?" He said.

"Martin you don't..." Aricia began to ask but then she stopped herself. "That is a stupid question." She stated quickly. "Of course you don't. Anja is not capable of doing something so vile. None of us are."

Martin nodded. "Neither am I. That is why I know it was all bullshit."

"*Mandri*... if the security footage that they showed is not Anja... who is it?" Deia asked. "You..."

Martin met his aunt's eyes. "It is a clone *Tenna*." He spoke matter-of-factly. "And a *nubous* damn good one too. That is why we need to proceed very carefully. Buonau has her hands in something that is far beyond what she comprehends, and when she realizes that and tries to pull her hand back out of the cookie jar, I want to be there to hand it back to her gnawed off at the elbow." Martin smiled. "That is if Anja doesn't plant her ass first. Red is pissed right now... and I wouldn't want to be in her crosshairs at the moment. I've seen her pissed and it isn't a pretty sight."

Deia looked at him oddly. "I know she has a temper... that is common knowledge... but she wouldn't consider assassinating this Buonau would she?" She asked surprised.

Martin met her gaze. "I have seen Anja this angry only one other instance in the entire time we have been together *Tenna*. Cold and calculating, just like the wolf I turned her in to." He stated.

Deia looked at Aricia and the others quickly seeing in their faces that they knew what Martin was talking about simply because of the depth of their Mindvoice connection with one another. None of them hid anything from each other. Not events from their past, or dreams and hopes for their future. She cut her eyes back to her nephew.

"And what happened?" She asked.

Martin smiled. "She beat a man to death in front of me, Danny, Dysea and about sixty others. He was nearly a foot taller and easily a hundred and fifty pounds heavier and my petite little red haired firecracker beat him to death without batting her beautiful eyes or raising a sweat."

"Over what?" Deia asked stunned.

"Over Martin Leonidas of course." For'mya stated calmly reaching out to take Deia's hand. "Come Deia... we will tell you the story while we walk to the conference room."

Deia let Aricia take her other hand as they began to walk, even as Martin held Isabella and kept her from following them. She looked at him and saw him shake his head slightly. She let him pull her close as they walked further away knowing he would keep nothing from his aunt so it was something Deia was already aware of.

“What is it *Du'ased m'ranndii*?” She asked softly.

“Melda Min is on Apo Prime.” Martin spoke.

Bella nodded. “Yes... Aricia and I touched her before we returned to Earth.”

“Regardless of what happened on Lycavore... I still have my doubts as to Cha'talla and his people.”

Martin said softly.

Isabella met his dark eyes for a long moment. “You usually do not question what your instincts tell you Martin.” She spoke. “What worries you?”

“Anton and Cihera are with her. They have part of a MUTT team with them. Get with Marci and choose five of your *Vlos Sargtlinen*. They answer to you or to Marci and no one else. Only Armetus knows they will be there.” Martin said.

“*Ussta* she-elf is more than capable of taking care of herself *m'ranndii*. You know that.” Isabella said.

“I don't doubt her Bella. Not for an instant.” Martin spoke evenly. “It's the events happening around her that concern me.”

“Their task?” Isabella asked becoming more alert. The *Vlos Sargtlinen* was a very small unit of pureblood vampires trained by Isabella and Marci. All of them, whether man or woman had husbands and wives who were either Lycavorian or Elves. They were what Martin had once called super-patriots. Their lives in the Union had allowed them to realize all the dreams they had ever had, and all of them had volunteered to be part of this unit. Though technically part of the Krypteria, the *Vlos Sargtlinen* answered only to Isabella or Marci.

“Remain unseen and observe.” Martin answered. “And protect *Melda Min* and Normya at all costs. She won't like it... but my gut tells me Dysea just may be heading for something that might over her head.”

Isabella nodded without hesitation. “I will see to it immediately.” She answered.

Martin pulled his vampire Queen tighter to him and she smiled at this show of affection. “Stefan huh?” He said. “I like that name. Tell me about your grandfather Bella. What was he like?” He asked as they began to follow the others.

SODRAG

Resumar sat on the couch of his bungalow reading intently from the data pad. Cemath was out hunting with his brother and sisters to include Anthar, Deneth and Seyra surprisingly. Lucia Moran's dragon was spending more and more time with Anthar and Deneth since coming to SODRAG Andro had told him. She was very much like Elynth in that she was introverted and kept much of herself hidden inside and only those close to her were allowed to see who she was. The trait hadn't carried over to Lucia unfortunately as she still remained either alone in the REC center or bungalow. The only good thing about that Andro had told him, was that she spent more and more time away from her brothers.

Resumar lifted only his eyes when he felt the silky smooth tip of Athani's tail caress the skin behind his neck. Her tangerine scent permeated the air of the bungalow now and it always put him at ease. He had thought perhaps coming here and meeting all of his siblings would overwhelm her at first, but once more he underestimated his Kavalian bride. She interacted with Eliani and Carina more easily than the others, but her face and eyes were always animated when she was around any of them. They had accepted her as part of their family without question and more than anything Resumar knew he could never repay them for that. He would never be able to repay Androcles for standing beside him in the thick of it without hesitation. Resumar knew this had brought them closer together as brothers, for they both now had mates and wives that they were sure their father would not approve of, even though their mothers would. Resumar had learned from his father well when it came to being attentive to his mate. The moment Athani's tail touched his skin, his mind forgot the report he was reading on the training.

He had learned much about his new wife in such a short time, and part of that were her moods. Her tail just grazed his skin tentatively, not completely wrapping around one of his limbs like when she showed her

affection for him, and he knew then that she had something on her mind. He set the data pad on the empty cushion of the couch and turned his head slightly. She stood behind him dressed only in one of his oversized shirts. It fell to the middle of her tanned thighs and only the bottom three buttons of the shirt was actually fastened. He could see the swell and valley of her full breasts and the way her nipples protruded against the fabric of the shirt. Her golden blond hair, now splashed generously with the dark blond hair of her roots flowed around her face and blue/green eyes.

“She likes you.” He said. “My mother does not normally keep others in a transmission for so long. That means she likes you.”

Athani leaped cat like to the back of the couch, balancing her body with her tail as she stepped onto the cushion next to him and fully settled beside him. “She is beautiful.” Athani spoke softly.

“What is wrong *Aryschanne*?” He asked.

“Resumar... Resumar can we make this work?” Athani asked softly. “Us I mean. You and I.”

Resumar didn't hesitate and pulled Athani into his lap, covering her lips with his and kissing her with every ounce of passion he possessed. She whimpered in delight, her tail curling around his upper arm tightly as her body hummed in approval. He crushed her to him, the fabric of the shirt the only thing keeping her breasts from mashing against his bare chest. His hands went to her firm ass and he pulled her closer, lifting one hand to caress her tailbone where her tail began. Athani gasped against his lips as his touch flamed her desire for him, touching her in the one spot on her body that could always illicit a burning need for him. As his hands rose up her back, her tail released his arm and snaked upwards, gently wrapping once around his neck. His hands finally grasped her face and he nibbled her lip as he pulled back and gazed at her. Though she could feel his thick cock against her bare pussy through the thinness of the loose pants he wore, he was not excited as he knew something was bothering her. This act, that he loved her enough to discover what vexed her even though she was nearly naked in his arms made Athani's heart tighten a little more on the love she felt within herself for this man.

“Do you want this to work *Aryschanne*?” He asked in barely a whisper.

“Resumar... you...” Athani began.

“No. Answer the question.” He told her.

“You know I do.” Athani answered without hesitation. “You have given me the life I always dreamed of. Freedom and happiness with a man that *I* chose. A man that *I* love. You.”

“Then why do you ask the question Athani Leonidas?” He said gently. “What frightens you?”

Athani smiled when he spoke her name. Hearing him speak Leonidas after her name always made warmth wash through her. “The future.” She replied. “What the future holds for us. My father will never rest until he has punished me for doing this. He never knew that the Ancient Priestess Demahra always told me to follow the path my heart and mind told me to follow. It is why I decided to defect in the first place. When I discovered you... it was like a gift to me from whatever gods inhabit the stars. My father has probably had her killed by now. He would never let her live once he realizes she is the one who set me on this road.”

“The future is what we make of it *Aryschanne*.” Resumar spoke. “You have heard the phrase my brothers and sisters and I live by many times since you have been here. It is the one thing that our father told us that we all took to heart.” He said with a smile. “It is something you are already beginning to exercise. You seemed to enjoy Carisia and Narice's company. They are vampires from the High Coven, the enemy your people have fought for decades.”

“I know.” Athani said looking at him. “It's just...”

“Athani... are you angry that we are training the Coven riders and their dragons to fight your people?” Resumar asked.

Athani shook her head quickly. “I... I thought I would be when I first discovered it.” She replied. “Then I realized they are no longer my people. You are my people Resumar... you and your family and the Union. I made a choice and I do not regret that choice for an instant. And after speaking with Narice and Carisia so much over the last few days I have come to realize they are escaping lives that were forced upon them just like me. We have more in common than I ever imagined. I made my choice my love... and I will never regret it for an instant.”

“Nor will I.” Resumar said with a smile.

Athani caressed his face and looked into his dark eyes as she lifted her fingers and lightly ran them along the outer ridge of his elven ears. She watched with desire in her eyes as his eyes closed and she felt his

body gently tremble under her fingers. "I am anxious because your father has returned to Earth. I heard Andro talking today. He frightens me my love... he frightens me because part of me thinks he will separate us and send me back to my people."

Resumar opened his eyes and pulled her closer to him. "That will never take place Athani Leonidas." He hissed. "I would never allow that. And nor would my brothers and sisters. You are part of this family now, and nothing will ever change that. Ever. Even the Netnews channels agree with me."

"What?" Athani gasped.

Resumar smiled. "They have been doing a very informative few segments on the new Athani Leonidas." He spoke. "At least what they could discover about you anyway. My Aunt and my mothers are making sure most of the information about you is kept under tight control. At least for now. They released footage of our ceremony in the mountains, and a brief profile, but nothing else."

"You are joking?" She gasped again.

Resumar chuckled and lifted the data pad from the cushion. He typed something into it and the holo monitor activated in front of them. "See for yourself." He said. "You have already been immortalized."

Athani turned her head but did not move from her spot in his lap as the monitor came alive with the face of the female reporter.

"...not much is being said about the new Princess of the Union Athani Leonidas and the Royal family is keeping it that way for a reason. Since being carried away by Prince Resumar and his Bonded Dragon Cemath from this very café, Athani Leonidas has not been seen within the limits of Sparta or Eden City. We can only assume the Royal family is being very protective when it comes to Princess Athani until the corollary of her defection and subsequent marriage to Prince Resumar are known and the dust settles. They have released footage of the discrete but typically beautiful elven marriage ceremony conducted by Mage Thr'won of the School of the Oracles." The human woman was moving through the outdoor café where Resumar had staked his claim to her.

"A personal bio was released just two days ago chronicling Athani Leonidas's life until she came to be the wife of Prince Resumar. Channel Seventy-Three will hopefully be doing a follow on interview with the Union's newest princess if circumstances permit. What is readily apparent however, is the fact that Athani Leonidas, a Kavalian and newest Princess of the Union is here to stay by her own words and actions in this café in Central Sparta. There is very little within the boundaries of our great Union that makes more of a statement than Crown Prince Androcles standing beside his younger brother Resumar without hesitation and striking a senior Kavalian military officer who attempted to take Athani back. That incident will forever be ingrained in our minds as the day Athani Leonidas became a member of the Royal family and our Union. I wish her all the best going into the future. This is Allison Torberg reporting from Central Sparta."

"See..." Resumar said softly. "You are already being accepted *Aryschanne*. You are now stuck with me. For all time."

Athani turned back to look at him with her blue/green eyes. "When do you think he will come here?" She asked.

Resumar shrugged his broad shoulders. "Tomorrow... the next day. I understand he is not happy with me or Andro." He said with a smile. "That is not a big surprise to either of us... it is something we have dealt with all of our lives. He is always upset with something one or both of us have done through the years. Once he meets you *Aryschanne*... once he meets you he will see what everyone else sees. He will not be angry with you in the least."

"Just you and Andro?" Athani spoke. "For what you did?"

"My brother will always stand with me." Resumar spoke. "And I with him."

"But... but what if you don't agree on something and it brings you into conflict with each other?" Athani asked.

"In that case... in that case we adhere to four simple words taught to us as we grew up. Words that apply just as equally to Cemath and Elynth and all their brothers and sisters and to the Bonded Ones of my parents. Words that bind all of us together. We are wolves and dragons of the blood." Resumar spoke. "One blood."

Athani looked at him. "Four words?" She questioned.

Resumar nodded. "Blood before all else." He said firmly. "Four simple words that carry a meaning for us more than anyone could possibly imagine. Blood before all else." He told her softly, his hands tightening on her firm ass and pulling her closer. "And you are now part of that blood Athani Leonidas. For all time."

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

SPARTA

DURCUNUSAAN BASE

Martin Leonidas watched as Aikiro entered the large conference room within the highly secure *Durcunusaan* base. She was trailed closely by Yuri and Robert Moran and then Admiral Tesand. Martin's dark eyes were drawn to the clone of Julie when she came in with Thast right behind her. Isabella sat to his left, Deia next to her and Walter Carson sat to his right. Avi stood directly behind Martin's chair, towering over everyone in the room by quite a margin. Aikiro's eyes, as well as all of them, were drawn immediately to where the broad alien reptilian species stood behind Martin. That he was not a living breathing lifeform was easily enough for them to determine since he had no heartbeat that they could hear, and there was no warm blood moving through his body. Aikiro moved slowly as she came up to her chair, her eyes going from Martin to Avi and back again. Martin noticed the clone of Julie look at him for a long moment as she took a position behind Aikiro as she sat down. Her dark eyes were unreadable, but Martin swore he could detect something there in those orbs. He detected recognition, however small it may have been, but it was there. He thought for a moment about what Danny had told him only an hour earlier in regards to the clone of Colin Walsh. There were few that could read people like Danny, and he was emphatic in his decision that Colin Walsh had been reborn. Perhaps as a vampire and clone, but every memory that Danny was able to conjure and relay to Walsh was matched by his own replies. After five hours together, Danny was sharing a mug of Spartan wine with Walsh and they were shaking their heads at the path their lives had taken. Looking at Julie brought back many memories of the good times they had had together, the times when they had relied on each other on one battlefield or another and all they had shared with each other and Danny. The three of them had been so close. Martin now saw something in those eyes; some spark in the clone's eyes that perhaps meant that Aikiro had no idea what she had wrought.

Martin's eyes settled on Aikiro and Yuri and he felt the anger inside him building for what these two women had done to his friends and family in the past and even now. He turned his head when Isabella's smaller hand covered his and she squeezed. Martin gazed at her serene and beautiful face for a moment and felt the anger begin to subside. This woman next to him embodied the heart of a true vampire, Isabella and the millions that had fought for and called the Union home since they had defected so many years ago. Many of them had crossed that great unknown and taken Lycavorians or elves as wives and husbands. Those who had not had built friendships that would carry on for centuries, friendships that brought whole families of Lycavorians and vampires and elves together with so many other different species within the Union. The two witches across the table from him were part of the disease that Isabella and the others had escaped from. Martin took a deep breath and smiled at her, squeezing her hand back and nodding his head. He turned back to face Aikiro and Yuri and now he could see the hatred for him clearly in Yuri's eyes. It bounced off his skin like water off a leaf.

"It is good to see you made it back safely Martin Leonidas." Aikiro began speaking, even as she tore her eyes from Avi's impassive face and sat down at the table. "I was beginning to wonder if perhaps you were letting your son deal with me for a reason. He is not very diplomatic you know."

Martin grinned. "I'm guessing you found out about Vollenth then." He stated looking directly at Yuri. "Andro told me he was going to do that."

"So you did know?" Aikiro said with some surprise on her face.

"There is precious little my son feels he needs to keep from me." Martin spoke sitting back in his chair. "He is the one training your dragons and riders and it was his decision, but I knew about it yes."

"You vile offspring had no right to do what he did!" Yuri exclaimed now. "Vollenth was mine!"

"Keep thinking like that Yuri." Martin said. "It's a wonder the two of you didn't kill each other before you came here. You should be grateful that Andro saved your ass. The bond you forced upon Vollenth would

have short circuited eventually, and it would have killed one or both of you. And if it happened in the middle of a battle, a lot more than just you two would have died. Andro did you a favor.”

“You and your son continue to reveal that you have a different agenda than what we agreed upon when we first arrived Martin Leonidas.” Aikiro spoke evenly putting her hand on Yuri’s shoulder before she could reply. “This makes me hesitate in allowing things to go further.”

“I could say the same thing about you Aikiro.” He said. Martin swiveled in his chair and motioned to Avi. “This is Avi. I won’t bore you with his full name since the technical terms give me a headache and Avi prefers the name we have given him.” He turned back to Aikiro. “He is the avatar of City Ship 41.”

Aikiro’s eyes went wide at this information and she came to her feet in an instant. “The... the Avatar?” She gasped. “You... you mean that... we saw an alcove that looked to be used by a lifeform of some sort. It was empty when... when my father and grandfather discovered the ship. They...” Aikiro moved away from her chair and moved closer to where Avi stared at her with a blank expression. Walter began to come to his feet to keep her away but Martin took his arm and shook his head. Aikiro moved closer to Avi now, looking up into his eyes since he stood nearly seven foot in height, totally enraptured with his existence. “This... this is how they looked?” She asked turning to Martin.

-I am not an accurate facsimile of the Pralor’s natural form descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon- Avi answered in that almost mechanical like voice. **-Their physical appearance was humanoid in nature-**

Aikiro’s eyes went even wider and she stepped back quickly as Yuri and the others came to their feet in shock. “It... it speaks.” Aikiro gasped.

Martin rolled his eyes in disgust. “Of course he speaks.” He said. “What did you expect him to do?”

-As Avatar of City Ship 41 I am fluent in three thousand four hundred and twenty-nine languages- Avi answered. **-Many of which you are incapable of learning-**

Aikiro’s eyes narrowed and she turned to Martin. “This is how you got the ship off of Lycavore isn’t it?” She asked quickly.

Martin nodded. “Part of the reason yes.” He answered. “No thanks to your daughter and her Immortals I might add. They were rather pesky.”

Aikiro looked back to Avi with wonderment in her eyes. “It is... it is a machine.” Aikiro asked.

“He is not a machine!” Isabella snapped in disgust. “He is not a tool for you to abuse. He is an individual! Just as much as you!”

“Incredible!” Aikiro stated ignoring Isabella’s outburst. “A cyborg then.”

-Cyborg is not an accurate description of what I am descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon-
-I am far more advanced than any cyborg you could possibly comprehend. I am a fully autonomous entity with the ability to adapt and grow in my knowledge and abilities. As all Avatar units for the City Ships were-

Aikiro stepped back now and looked at Martin. “This is a change Martin Leonidas.” She said. “To bring the source of all your latest technological advancements to a meeting with me? I thought perhaps you might be a little more security conscious where it concerns such a treasure as this.”

Martin chuckled. “You would think that wouldn’t you?” He said. “But then again, you also had a hunch that Avi existed, or at the very least something similar to him. And you knew he would come to a meeting like this.”

Aikiro moved back to her chair. “A meeting... a meeting like what Martin Leonidas?” She asked arrogantly sitting down. “You still have not told me why we are here.”

“No... I don’t suppose I have.” Martin said reaching to the panel on the table. “*Niob!*” He barked as he touched the panel twice. In the blink of an eye half a dozen vampire Drow scouts unwrapped the shadows from around their bodies led by Lynwe herself. Moran and Tesand suddenly found themselves pulled none too kindly

from their chairs and slammed into the wall behind them bladed weapons pressed to their very surprised throats. Lynwe had stepped right up to Julie even as she was beginning to react. As Julie began to call the shadows around her Lynwe slammed her against the wall and jammed the curved blade of the R4 Hybrid under her chin. Julie's eyes went wide as the gathering shadows spilled away and she heard the heavy grunt of Thast being body slammed to the floor by the much smaller Drow female.

Lynwe leaned close to Julie's face. "Do not make the mistake of thinking you can escape clone." She snarled. "That would be a very painful assumption for you to make."

"What is the meaning of this?" Aikiro shouted as she came to her feet. "We have done everything you asked of us!"

Yuri remained in her chair, her dark eyes glaring daggers at Isabella who sat with a bland expression. "This is where we are assassinated mother." Yuri snarled never breaking eye contact with Isabella.

They heard the soft chuckle as Martin got to his feet and took the data pad that Walter held out to him. He moved down the side of the table towards where Aikiro sat his eyes on Yuri. "If I had wanted you dead Yuri... I would have had Andro do it a long time ago." Martin spoke softly. "You haven't seen the half of what my son and Elynth are capable of together and having them on your bad side is perhaps the worst possible position to be in. They are as relentless and unforgiving as the Colmarian Plaque."

"I asked you a question!" Aikiro snarled angrily cutting off Yuri's retort. "What is the meaning of this?" Aikiro demanded glaring at him.

"You know Aikiro... you will find I am a very tolerant man." Martin spoke turning back to look at her. "Just ask your daughter... I put up with her for two whole years. What I can not abide is a liar. I will give you one more opportunity Aikiro. And only one. If I don't like what you tell me, then all bets are off and I will take your dragons from you and kick you out of Union space to fend for yourselves."

"What are you babbling about?" Aikiro demanded. "I have no idea what you are talking about!"

Martin set the data pad in front of her. "Don't you?" He asked leaning against the edge of the table next to where she stood. "Perhaps you can explain this then?"

Aikiro looked at the pad and picked it up from the table and began reading. Her dark eyes began to grow wider the more she read and she looked up to stare across the room. "Then it... it does exist." She spoke finally in a low voice. "I... I wasn't sure if it did or not."

Martin stood back up and headed back to his chair. "I suggest that you start talking now Aikiro." He said as he sat down. "I'm not in a particularly good mood right at this moment when it comes to you and the High Coven and for you to yank my chain anymore would not be in your best interests."

Aikiro lifted her eyes from the pad and looked at him. She glanced at Avi behind him for a long moment and then back to Martin. "I did not know for sure." She stated finally. "It was discovered during a routine patrol of this section of Kavalian space at the end of our last period of open conflict. We knew this base on Uirmeik existed and wanted intelligence on it. The ship we sent to conduct the reconnaissance on it also picked up this unknown power source. It was dismissed as a natural phenomenon at first, until I saw it in a review of field reports some five months later. By then... by then the Kavalians had turned this world into a fortified garrison with massive amounts of troops and ships. We could not get back into the area undetected. As much as it pains me to admit Martin Leonidas... the advances you have made because of your Mindvoice ship have enabled you to make your Shrouds function much more efficiently than ours."

"The intelligence you gave us was contrived!" Martin snapped.

"It was not!" Aikiro barked back. "The troops are there! We detected them and confirmed it with our agents within the Kavalian military!"

"Not in the numbers that your intelligence told us!" Martin spoke.

"The intelligence we gave you is thirteen months old!" Moran popped now from his spot against the wall. He glanced quickly at the male Drow who pressed his Shukur tighter to his neck.

"You will address King Leonidas with respect dog!" He spat viciously. "Or I will remove your ability to speak permanently."

Moran glared at the Drow for a moment before looking at Martin once more. "We have not been able to get a ship into that area of space for some time! The Kavalians are massing on our borders near Lycavore and Diela Luavor! That is where we think their next attack will come from! At least into High Coven space."

“When our agents confirmed that Uirmeik was now a staging base of some sort for a possible attack into Union space I thought the Kavalians had gone mad. They could not possibly hope to open a second front with the Union and defeat us both.” Aikiro spoke quickly meeting Martin’s eyes. “At least that was what I thought until I factored in that they might be aware of this ship and somehow have gained use of it.”

-Given all data gathered to this point on the Kavalian species to date... we have seen no indication of any such advancement that may involve technology derived from this ship- Avi spoke now.

“I did not know that!” Aikiro exclaimed angrily. “And given the fact that neither of us detected the advances they had made twenty-five years ago when they invaded the Coven, I was not willing to take that chance!”

“So you get us involved?” Martin asked.

“We have not fought an engagement in nearly a quarter century!” Aikiro snapped. “You have had your ship for that entire time! You have made both military and civilian advances with the technology you have been able to use.” She looked at Avi. “Probably more than we are even aware of if he is any indication! I was not willing to risk an undiscovered Mindvoice ship being discovered by a race that wants to destroy me and my people! The one thing I knew about you was that you would not use this technology to conquer! Your ridiculous sensibilities would not allow you to do that. The Kavalian dogs are not so limited! They would gladly jump at any one chance to build bigger and better weapons to use against my Coven. And then they would turn those weapons on you.”

“So what... you devised this plan to come here asking for our help to train your dragons and give us this intelligence?” Deia spoke now. “You devise this plan in the hopes that we would confirm or deny that this ship does exist even when you were relatively sure it did? What would this gain you?”

“I did not know that it really existed!” Aikiro said. “I had only rudimentary sensors scans of an unknown power source that could or could not be a Mindvoice ship. I did not know what it was! And my ship did not investigate further!”

“Do not sit there and tell me that after centuries of having a complete section of a crashed Mindvoice ship that you did not know what it was.” Martin spoke again. “Avi was able to scan your ship when we lifted off from Lycavore Aikiro. We have known since then that is where you got your cloning technology. The section of City Ship 19 that was intact and operating was the medical and research section. We also know that this ship lost power roughly fifteen years ago. You were able to extend its life somewhat past what Avi first said, but it has been a dead hulk now for almost two decades. Do not sit there and tell me you did not know what this ship was when you first detected it!”

“What do you want of me Martin Leonidas?” Aikiro snapped. “Do you want me to admit that I thought it *might* be a Mindvoice ship? Of course I did... why else would I go to the trouble of coming here?”

“Why didn’t you reveal this when you first came to Earth?” Isabella barked.

“This ship is in a part of Kavalian space that we can not reach without untold problems.” Aikiro stated. “I was not going to risk a Shrouded ship falling into Kavalian hands by trying to find out! I do not have the forces to spare! I made the decision to come here willingly and give you the intelligence... to have you train our dragons.”

“Dragons that you quite possibly will turn against us if any survive.” Deia spoke.

“I doubt very much you would have allowed me to come here if I told you I believed another MV ship existed in Kavalian space. They are animals who can not be trusted and will do anything to destroy both of our species!” Aikiro snapped.

“And your son went and married the youngest daughter of the Kavalian Prefect!” Yuri snapped. “What are we supposed to deduce from that action? She has killed members of the High Coven military! She is not as innocent as she makes herself out to be! How do you know her actions are not part of a Kavalian plan to infiltrate the Union and your family?”

“Deduce what you will sister.” Isabella spoke. “But you will leave Resumar and Athani out of this discussion. It has nothing to do with what we are here for!”

“I am not your sister!” Yuri snarled viciously. “We may share a father... but that is where all similarities end! Our father was a fool and you are part of the proof of that! He should have killed you the moment you were born!”

Isabella smiled. “Yes... but he didn’t.” Isabella answered. “And that just infuriates you doesn’t it?”

Martin reached over and placed his hand on Isabella’s arm as he looked at Aikiro. “I want the fucking truth.” Martin spoke. “I want the truth right now Aikiro or it all ends here and now. Ten seconds after I Mindvoice him, Andro will pull your dragons out of where they are training and arrest all your riders. I will not play games with you any longer nor will I allow you to draw us into your war with the Kavalians. I have already gone too far as it is. You have done nothing but lie to us since you came here. I told you to leave her on your ship...” Martin motioned with his head to where Julie stood unmoving under Lynwe’s blade. “You ignored me on that. I know it was you who leaked the information about Sadi to the Netnews and I know you have been actively searching for where our MV ship is within Mindvoice.” Martin saw the surprised look on Aikiro’s face and he grinned. He watched her look at Avi and then back to him. “Bet you didn’t think of that huh? Avi has been tracking what you do ever since you got here. You’d be surprised what he can do from that ship. Now... I’m quite sure there is probably much more that you have done while you have been here that I don’t know about just yet... but I will find out don’t you worry.”

“I am not lying to you right now.” Aikiro snapped.

“You aren’t telling me shit either!” Martin snarled coming to his feet. “Why should I believe anything you say? You are a backstabbing bitch who only cares about getting her hands on more power. You will not use me anymore!”

“I am not using you!” Aikiro hissed. “I gave you intelligence that is a clear threat to your precious Union. I correctly deduced you would investigate the data we gave you and find this unknown power source. I also correctly assumed that you would know what it was and be just as concerned as I was if indeed it turned out to be a MV ship. The Kavalians are like rabid dogs and they will not rest until they kill all of us and enslave our people! You know these things as well as I do! And your putrid older brother is their military commander! And like you he has inherited your father’s uncanny ability to fight us quite well!”

“And I bet that just burns your ass.” Martin spat.

“Unlike you Empress Aikiro... we do not lump an entire species into the category of their leaders.” Deia spoke. “Athani defecting is the first sign that there may be unrest within the KFI that we are unaware of and could potentially help us.”

“We have fought them for over two decades!” Yuri shouted. “Do not presume to tell us how they are! Their whole retched species needs to be wiped out!”

“That is something you haven’t done a particularly good job of so far is it?” Walter spoke from his chair.

Aikiro tilted her head somewhat and looked at Martin. “You are not being truthful with us either Martin Leonidas. You have in your custody a member of the largest insurgent group who plaques my Coven. One of their leaders if I’m not mistaken. Were you going to allow me to interrogate him? Or use him and his traitorous group against me in some fashion?”

“Neither.” Martin spoke. “He’s going to stand trial for the attack on my ship and then I’m going to execute his sorry ass for putting For’mya in danger. I don’t need a bunch of insurgents that have a hard on towards you operating from within the Union. When I hang him... I’ll send a message to the rest of them to get the fuck out. Last chance Aikiro.”

“I came to you for help!” Aikiro screamed the words across the table shocking almost everyone in the room with the vehemence of her tone. “The Kavalians would see all of us dead if they discover that ship!”

Martin crossed his arms over his broad chest and allowed his dark eyes to bore into her for a long moment. “I will not allow you to...”

“I want your help in destroying it!” Aikiro hissed the words interrupting him.

Martin looked at her. “Excuse me?” He said.

“You heard me!” Aikiro snapped. “I came to you for help in destroying it if you were able to confirm it actually existed.”

“Why would I believe that?” Martin asked.

“The Union and the High Coven have not fought a battle in over two decades!” Aikiro said forcefully. “You have had your MV ship that entire time. As I said before... you have not used what technology you have

gained from it in an aggressive manner. Your pathetic morals... your very nature precludes you from building dedicated weapons of war from this technology! You have enhanced your defensive capabilities ten fold, you have discovered new technologies to improve the lives of your people... but you have not built weapons with the intent to conquer and kill. I would see this ship destroyed before I allow it to fall into the hands of the Kavalians! I want your help in destroying it!"

"You must be joking." Martin said.

"I have had a special unit of commandos training for over a year for this very mission." Aikiro spoke. "Juliana One leads them."

Martin lifted his eyes and looked at Julie before turning back to Aikiro. "And?"

"Now that you have confirmed that this ship does indeed exist... now that we know for sure... I propose a joint mission to destroy it." Aikiro said. "You know as well as I do Martin Leonidas... you know that if the Kavalians find this ship and manage to discover even small gains from it they will turn those gains on not only me... but you as well. And they will not stop until both of our governments and empires are destroyed. Yes... I have not been entirely forthcoming. Yes... I have not told you everything I suspected was going on. I determined that the better course of action was to allow you to discover it for yourselves."

"We are not at war with them Aikiro." Martin said. "The High Coven is. Why would I get involved in such a manner? I've already gone spying in their space. I'm already training your dragons behind their back. If that is discovered..."

"Perhaps that is something you should have thought about that before allowing your son to marry the Kavalian whore as he did!" Yuri growled from her chair.

Martin moved closer to Aikiro ignoring Yuri's rant. Their eyes met and everyone in the room who could Mindvoice could detect the trembling power that the two of them radiated within that realm. It was hard to see where one began and the other ended.

"Help me Martin Leonidas." Aikiro spoke now. "Help me to guarantee a future for both our peoples."

APO PRIME

MJOLNIR'S HAND BASE

It had been nothing short of agonizing the first night for Normya Leonidas.

It was much better now, but Normya knew they would not be able to resist each other for much longer if they continued to do this. The only problem with that scenario was that neither of them wanted this to stop.

She had to pull him into the quarters she was using on the base the first night. For all his strength and courage, Tir'ut was even more nervous than she was. Normya had watched him from under the covers of the bed as he undressed in front of her. His bronze colored body was as chiseled and muscular as any of her brothers or her father. His six foot four frame appeared as if it had been sculpted by the gods of ancient Earth. Even though he carried two hundred and sixty-four pounds of muscle and bone, Normya knew just by looking at him there was not an ounce of fat on his body. Normya Leonidas may have been half elf, but she was also half wolf, and the wolf blood in her was calling for this man with a burning that threatened to overrule her self control. Normya had been pulsed by many powerful Alpha wolves as she drew closer to her Coming of Age and even during it. They were respectful about it because of who she was, for she knew that males of any species tread very lightly when it came to daughters and sisters of King Leonidas and her brother Androcles. She had her mother's exquisite elven beauty with her platinum hair and emerald green eyes but Normya also had her mother's body, with her full and exceptionally firm breasts topped by protruding nipples. She had long legs for her five foot six height, with slender hips and a truly amazing ass. Normya had actually found three of the male Lycavorians to be very attractive, and two of the male elven pilots she found equally attractive. Yet none of them did to her what Tir'ut could do just by looking at her.

Her elven blood called for this man quite loudly, while his powerful Mindvoice presence and sweet ginger scent tickled her wolf nose like no man ever had. She fit within his powerful embrace like the fingers of a glove, and when they had finally fallen asleep that first night, Tir'ut was spooning her from behind with his strong arms wrapped around her protectively and his face just grazing her elven ears. Normya Leonidas had never felt so safe and secure in her entire life. Amazingly Normya discovered she was nearly as jealous and

possessive of him as he was of her. She made it a point to be with him whenever Las'elh or any of the female MUTT team members were present. And when she was with him, she made it very clear that Tir'ut belonged to her. It came instinctually for her to act in this manner and it was something her mother said was very normal for an alpha female wolf. Normya was staking her claim to Tir'ut just as her mothers continually staked their claim to her father. Not that she needed to do these things Normya knew. If anything, even when she was around Anton her cousin, Tir'ut acted in a similar fashion. They were always touching one another now, and it was rare to see them not holding hands in some fashion. Tir'ut had taken to nuzzling her elven ears whenever he could, and this never ceased to make Normya coo out her delight and cause her knees to become weak.

And last night had been the ultimate sign of what Tir'ut felt for her. Normya had been staring into his eyes as she sat in his lap and she had nodded her head to him almost seeing what was running through his mind. What he desired above all else.

“Do it Tir'ut my love.” She had whispered to him.

“Il kal'daka darthirii I...”

“No... I burn for you just as badly as you do for me Tir'ut. I am not afraid of what it means. It is what I want and I have never been surer of anything in my life. If it helps us to quell the desire we both feel... if it allows us to lessen the need for each other even a little so that we can do what we must I want this.” Normya spoke caressing his cheek. *“Just as much as you do.”*

She hissed loudly when Tir'ut didn't hesitate and he sank his fangs into her neck and fed on her blood. She knew he wanted to do this, for him it was the ultimate sign of his devotion to her. And inwardly Normya wanted him to do it just as much as he wanted to. She clutched at his head, her whole body on fire, not with pain but with desire as he fed on her blood, and then the wolf in her reacted and her own fangs burst forth and she bit deeply into his shoulder, his warm blood splashing across her gums and slipping into her throat.

They had collapsed onto the bed afterwards and his arms closed around her like a warm blanket as he wrapped his body around her and whispered in her elven ear.

“Never will I abandon my love for you Normya Leonidas. It will be the beacon of my sight until the day I pass from this life and into the next.”

It pleased Normya to no end that Tir'ut and Anton had developed quite the relationship over the last two days. They were always discussing tactics off some sort and slowly but surely they were working out a plan with Esther and her own mother while they did surveillance on the Chief Engineer who had worked on her ship and planted the bomb. Tir'ut had begun calling Dysea *Darthirii Ilhar* (Elf Mother) in the vampire language almost exclusively. Dysea found this very much to her liking and she had made it known to Esther that she approved of how she had raised her son. Esther had laughed and said it had all been Cha'talla. He had been the one to pronounce and deliver all punishment as Tir'ut and his brothers were being raised as well as how to show respect and honor.

Now this morning Normya woke as she had the last two mornings, curled intimately against Tir'ut's powerful and very much naked body. This morning however, it was unlike the previous two mornings, this morning Normya woke as part of a man's life in a way that made her delirious with happiness. She lifted her fingers and touched the two now tiny puncture marks on her neck, knowing that in another few hours they would be gone, but the significance of what they meant would be with her forever. Her night shirt was pushed up around her waist, her bare legs entwined with his, and her smooth hairless pussy pressed against his thigh. Her platinum hair was splayed across his chest, and she used her index finger to trace the scars that the Bancorik's spikes had left in his abdomen. Her head was resting on his broad chest, her eyes staring down the expanse of his rippled abdomen where she could see the bulge of his cock under the thin sheet and she suppressed a shudder at the thoughts of having that long, thick cock buried within her body. Normya had never been with a man, but she knew from her survival training that Immortals were incredibly well endowed in the cock department. It appeared that Tir'ut had inherited his father's genes in that regard. At least from what she could see but then again she had no experience to compare it to for Tir'ut was the only man she had ever seen completely naked. She spread her palm flat across his lower abdomen and inched it closer to the edge of the

sheet. She wanted to look at him more. She wanted to look at him and imagine what it would be like when the moment finally came.

Tir'ut's large hand covered hers then and immediately their fingers entwined and she lifted her head from his chest to gaze into his dark eyes.

"*Il kal'daka darthirii*... that would not be the most advisable of actions." He spoke with a smile. "Not if you wish me to be able to control myself."

Normya grinned seductively. "Spoilsport." She stated. Normya yelped playfully as Tir'ut rolled her under him on the bed pinning her to the soft mattress. Her legs curled up along his hips as he settled partially resting on her body, her breasts pressed against his bare chest. "No fair... you are bigger!" She declared.

Tir'ut dropped his lips to hers and kissed her hungrily, Normya responding to his kiss with equal emotion as her hands spread out across his wide back and pulled him even closer to her. His lips pulled away slowly and he grazed them across her ear causing her to groan in delight.

"When... when the time comes for us *il kal'daka darthirii*, I intend to worship you until you can no longer stand it." He whispered in her ear.

Normya chuckled. "You might be surprised at what I can stand." She said.

"Then it will be even better." Tir'ut spoke softly moving his lips across her cheek until he was staring into her face once more. He was silent for a long moment gazing into her emerald eyes until Normya reached up and caressed his cheek with her fingers.

"What?" She asked softly.

"You will be looked at differently *il kal'daka darthirii*." He spoke softly. "Others will see you with me... they will not... they will not understand. They will try to... they will try to convince you I am not the one for you."

Normya bit her bottom lip and felt a rush of warmth spread through her. "You have been talking with Anton." She stated.

Tir'ut nodded his head. "He told... he told me there were several Lycavorians who are very interested in you. That they were waiting for you to move past your Coming of Age before approaching you. That they wanted you."

Normya nodded. "See... the problem with that is I want you Tir'ut." She said softly. "No one else but you."

"Are you sure *il kal'daka darthirii*?" He asked.

"I was sure the first moment I laid eyes upon you." Normya spoke. "It just took a while for it to sink into my thick head." She chuckled. "I tend to be as hard headed as my father. At least that is what my brothers and sisters say. And after last night it is not something that ever needs to concern you Tir'ut. I know what it means to you... and it means just as much to me."

"I will love you and only you Normya Leonidas." Tir'ut said reaching up and running a finger along the ridge of her ear. "I will love you for eternity."

"And I will love and want no one but you." Normya told him. "And as hard as it is... I do want to wait until we are joined properly. Be it by a Mage from the School of the Oracles, or an elder of your tribe. I want to know that when I give myself to you, I will truly be yours in every way. We just have to find a way to do it quickly." She looked at him with bright emerald eyes. "That is how your people do it isn't it?"

Tir'ut nodded. "How did you know that?"

Normya smiled. "I asked your mother silly." She said.

Tir'ut smiled. "She is very happy you know."

"As is my mother." Normya said. "They make a pretty good team don't you think? Our mothers?"

Tir'ut nodded. "They are methodic together." He said. "I would not wish to anger either of them. I have a feeling that would not be the wisest of moves."

Normya chuckled. "You know... maybe we could..." The chirping noise from the desk in the room made both of them look up. Tir'ut reached above them on the wall and touched the COM panel that resided above the bunk.

"Yes?" Normya asked.

"Normya... come to the main lounge immediately." Dysea's voice announced urgently.

Normya's eyes narrowed and Tir'ut's head came up further. "What is wrong mother?" She asked.

“Just come to the lounge daughter. We will have breakfast here by then. Is Tir’ut with you Normya?” Dysea’s voice asked casually.

Tir’ut looked at Normya with a horrified expression even as Normya tried to suppress the laugh at his expression. “I... I am here *Darthirii Ilhar*.” He finally spoke clearly embarrassed.

“Something has come up and we need to act.” Dysea spoke. “Join us as quickly as you can *ussta Rinovdro dalharuk*.” (Immortal son)

Tir’ut’s dark eyes grew wider at her words and the transmission cut off. Normya lifted her head from the pillow and kissed him. “See... you have already been accepted by the second most important person you need to impress.” She stated. “And my father has never gone against my mother.”

“The first... the first is your father?” He asked.

Normya shook her head with a grin. “The first is me. And you have already convinced me many times over.”

Tir’ut smiled then and he rolled back over pulling her tighter as they kissed once more.

NODON

MAIN UNION SHIP YARDS

The industrial heart of the Lycavorian Union and home to the main ship building yards as attested to the massive semi circular ring that encircled the light blue planet below. The ring comprised nearly three thousand different types of space docks with a large and varying amount of different class ships in various stages of being built. The Nodian people were an affable species setting aside their bony reptilian features. They are an offshoot of the Algolian people that departed Algolia thousands of years ago to form their own society. What they created was by far the most capable engineering species in the entire Union and quite possible the universe. There was very little they could not build, and their trademark was building ships that would last for centuries as well as be able to sustain the stress of space combat and remain in a fight longer than the enemy. Thousands of ships hovered in and around the immediate space of Nodon, waiting for one docking slip or another to open. The hulks and frames of ships in different phases of construction could be seen dotting the massive docking ring. The Nodon were fearless creatures and the engineers and construction crews used only simple jetpack suits to move around the immense docking bays.

It was here that the members of the 1st Elven Engineering Corp received their training allowing them to become the eyes and ears of the Nodon people. The Nodian species rarely ever left their homeworld and the elves were revered among their kind for their innovative ideas and their uncanny ability to adapt. They were fanatically loyal to the Lycavorian Union and any family member or even close friend of the Leonidas Royal Family were treated like monarchs when they came here. King Leonidas himself had come here many times in the last twenty-five years, establishing close ties with the ruling family of Nodon, as well as endearing himself to the entire species.

It was not uncommon to see hundreds or thousands of elves and Lycavorians moving among the many corridors of the space dock or even on the surface of the planet among the many cities. Many of the elven pilots came here to test new fighters and ships under the watchful gaze of the Nodon people. They were always looking for ways to improve the ships they built, or to improve upon the superior craftsmanship of the Menkla Corporation and their capacity to produce durable and extremely agile and deadly fighters. It was here on Nodon that the *OMEN*-Class ships were built in the super secret section of the space dock. When it came to engineering tricks and secrets the Nodon were notorious for their security. There were three hundred briefing rooms scattered among the planet station ring, almost all of them in use at least once a day. Martin Leonidas took the security of Nodon and its people very seriously, and one would have to penetrate three layers of PDPs to get anywhere close to Nodon. If by chance they were able to get that far, they would be met by four complete Fleet Groups and a ringed station that was more than capable of defending itself.

This particular briefing room was used for pilots of fighters, and this morning it was full of nearly a hundred Lycavorian, elven and human pilots. The room was shaped like a large horseshoe; with a massive screen in front of them that was the backdrop for the podium and several groups of comfortable chairs. The pilots were mingling along the rows of seats and along the walls where refreshments had been spread out on

half a dozen tables. The pilots were talking amongst themselves in regards to why they were here, the rumors running wild and free, especially with the mentality of a fighter pilot. The inbred arrogance was there among all of them. Who else but the best could pilot eighteen metric tons of steel as if it was an extension of their own bodies? The majority of them had been flying for less than ten years, and roughly a quarter of them had actually seen any combat in the Evolli War. Those pilots were easy to spot as they sat in small groups away from the untested pilots, conversing in softer tones and with far more reserved voices.

A group of half a dozen pilots, all of them elves, stood near the entrance to the briefing room. All of them were ogling the ravishing dark haired elven female that sat talking with one of the senior Nodian engineers.

“Definitely an Earth elf.” The blond haired pilot spoke as he sipped his glass of fruit juice.

“What makes you say that Irhiad?” Another asked.

“Well... look what she is wearing for one.” Irhiad answered. “How many elf females from Elear do you think would wear an outfit like that Seluh?”

“I’m staring at her chest trying to imagine her without clothes.” Seluh answered. “Not *what* she is wearing.”

The six of them laughed softly. “Odds are she is an aide or something to this high ranking officer that is supposed to meet with us.” Irhiad spoke. “She looks like she would be a wild one in bed.”

“I heard the female elves from Earth are much more open when it comes to their sexual likes and dislikes.” Another pilot spoke. “They do not put as much emphasis on being joined before they jump in bed with you.”

“No one is going to jump in bed with you Rahot.” Irhiad spoke. “They would have to be crazy or seriously drunk on Spartan wine. Thirty seconds and you are done.”

“Perhaps... but it is the best thirty seconds of their lives.” Rahot answered with a grin bringing laughter from the others.

Irhiad looked at the dark haired elf, admiring the way her raven black hair fell well past her shoulders and curled around her large firm breasts. The jumpsuit looked similar to a normal flight suit but without the pockets and added items to go with it. It hugged her long legs and from where he was standing wondrously perfect ass incredibly well. Most of her black hair was pulled over one shoulder, leaving only several locks to fall across her face on that side. She was holding two data pads and speaking with the Nodian almost animatedly.

“So... do you think there is any truth to the rumors?” The fourth elf pilot spoke up.

“Which one Ahtels?” Rahot asked. “I’ve heard like six different ones since arriving yesterday morning.”

“That we are here for a secret assignment.” Ahtels answered quickly. “A top secret ship posting.”

Rahot rolled his eyes. “Ahtels... none of us have been flying for more than five years. We don’t even have any combat experience.”

“There are some among us who do!” Ahtels protested.

“Yes... like twenty. And they view us as children because of it.” Seluh spoke. “Why do you think they sit apart from us?”

“They know we are better than them.” Irhiad spoke now looking at his friends. “We have all received the same training. Just because they have seen battle does not make them better than us.”

“I didn’t say better Irhiad.” Ahtels spoke.

“I’m more interested in the rumor that Captain Lorian is who we are being assigned too.” Seluh spoke.

“Wait... Captain ‘Mando’ Lorian? From Alba Tau?” Rahot said with wide eyes. “It is said she had over ninety kills during the Evolli War. Why would she be involved in some sort of experimental program?”

“What do you think Irhiad?” Seluh asked.

“What I think...?” Irhiad said setting the glass he was holding on the table. “What I think is that I am going to get that female into my bed.”

“How do you know she is not already spoken for Irhiad?” Ahtels spoke quickly.

“Tell me Ahtels... what man in his right mind would allow his woman to come here when she looks like that?” Irhiad said. “There is nothing but single fighter pilots all over this station, all of them looking for female company. She’s the finest looking elf I have seen since arriving here, the finest I have seen in several years. Look at how her eyes sweep the room. She’s on the hunt for companionship my friends... I can tell. I have

heard that female elves from Earth are not afraid to make it known they want you. She will be in my bed tonight, and I will let all of you know how it was.”

“You think highly of your skills Irhiad.” Rahot said with a grin.

“That’s because I know what women like.” Irhiad said. “I’ll be right back.”

They watched him start walking towards where the elf female sat.

“Twenty riyal says he scores with her.” Seluh said quickly.

Ahtels shook his head. “This one is different somehow.” He said softly looking at the female. “I’ll take that bet.”

“I want a piece of that as well.” Rahot spoke.

“...have adjusted allzz the *TEMPEST* and *DEVASTATOR* fighters with the modifications just aszz you transmitted to uszz Zaala.” The Nodian spoke. “We will replace the last of the sealszz by tomorrow and all of the new shipszz coming out of the Menkla Manufacturing facility will be fitted with these sealszz before they come here. I must say... it was something we did not think of before and my staff knew immediately it would work.”

“It was a joint project Chuess. Steven and several of his pilots were involved as well.” Zaala spoke with a bright smile. “We had to come up with something to compensate for the small drop in power when they turned radically.”

The Nodian grinned and for his lizard like features it looked as if he was baring his teeth angrily. “That is not what Major Randell your husband sayszz.” He told her. “He said you did most of the work on the design of the sealszz.”

Zaala smiled. “Designing them is one thing.” She stated. “Actually installing and then flying with untested parts is quite another.”

Chuess nodded his head. “Very true.” He said. “If you are able I would like for you to review the Biomechanical generatorszz based on the Mindvoice ship. We believe we have figured out a way to build our own and generate essentially the same power output. They are larger than the test generator, but Avi believeszz they could work with minor adjustments to the Phased Quantum Flux Stream. He is involved in something with King Leonidas and could not speak for very long, but he did know you would be coming here.”

Zaala nodded. “I’d be happy too.” She said. “We will be here for at least six weeks while the remainder of the pilots is brought up to speed on certain new skill sets that they will need to operate off the *ARIZONA*-Class. I reviewed the specifications on the ship while traveling here Chuess... you and the others did an amazing job putting her together.”

Chuess nodded. “She izz our proud and joy. All of themzz really. Even more sozz than the *LEONIDAS IIAs*.”

“Will you be...?” Zaala began to ask the question but stop when the voice interrupted her.

“Excuse me?” Irhiad broke into their conversation. Zaala and Chuess turned to look at the very handsome elf pilot of medium height. “I apologize for interrupting you. I am Senior Lieutenant Irhiad and I was standing with my fellow pilots and couldn’t get over how familiar you look to me. Have we met somewhere before?”

Zaala Randall knew exactly what was on this pilot’s mind the moment he opened his mouth. She may have been young by elf standards, but she was no one’s fool. Since becoming Steven’s wife and Earth had become a focal point for travel throughout the Union, Zaala had been approached by many elf pilots from Elear who had not bothered to read pamphlets given out when they first arrived on Earth. While female and male elves from Earth shared many characteristics with their brothers and sisters on Elear, they were regarded as more open and free. There were customs from Earth that many elves from Elear did not know of, one of them being that the human tradition of wearing matching wedding bands now extended to their culture if the male or female elf had married a human. There were many of these marriages on Earth, hers and Steven’s and Leland and Cathy’s being two of the more prominent ones. All of them had taken to wearing wedding bands, and even though this fact was in the pamphlets given out to all who came to Earth, many simply did not read them. And most of those who did not read them were pilots of one sort or another, whose natural arrogance in matters precluded them from doing something informative. Zaala sported a glittering gold wedding band lined with

diamonds and a single large one carat diamond ring with that. Diamonds were a rare commodity now, more so than they had ever been on Earth of the past, and they were hideously expensive. What she wore on her finger must have cost Steven a small fortune in riyal, but from the moment she had put the two rings on, she had never taken them off.

Zaala smiled brilliantly at the pilot. "I'm sure you have me mistaken for someone else." She said calmly. "I have an excellent memory and I don't know you."

"You are from Earth aren't you?" Irhiad said.

Zaala nodded. "Yes I am. Does that make a difference somehow?"

"I'm positive I have seen you before...?" Irhiad pressed.

"Zaala. Zaala Randall." She told him putting emphasis on her last name more than she normally did trying to get the point across to him. She just wasn't that lucky it seemed.

"Zaala... that is a beautiful name. Perhaps I have seen you in Sparta before, or Eden City's Central Grand. I was there several months ago for a symposium on Flight Operations. You must be an aide for one of the senior officers who spoke there." Irhiad said.

Zaala rolled her eyes and chuckled softly. Like Tarifa... Zaala had long ago accepted the fact that most men would assume they were something lesser than what they were simply because she had her sister shared an exquisite beauty inherited from their mother. "You have never been to Earth have you Lieutenant?" She asked.

"Of course I have... it is where I know I have seen you before." Irhiad spoke. "Perhaps in the Market Area then Zaala."

Zaala looked at Chuess briefly and smiled. "You mean the Market Square?"

"Yes... that's it! I never could remember the name." Irhiad spoke with a smile of his own. "So I *have* met you. I believe you were out with your friends at one of the all night cafés. A little after hours party no doubt."

Zaala shook her head. "No... I'm afraid not." She stated. She had to admit that this pilot was very smooth and very handsome. Had she met him before falling in love with Steven, she probably would have allowed him to take her to bed. Now males of this type only made her angry, not only for their actions, but primarily because Zaala had once been the type to be taken in by his smooth and practiced conversation. "I don't do after hours parties." Zaala met his eyes. "While your interest is flattering Lieutenant..."

"Senior Lieutenant Irhiad." He said quickly.

"Senior Lieutenant then." Zaala stated. "While your interest is flattering... you are not my type at all and I am not in the least bit drawn in by your nature. And its Eden City's Grand Center Senior Lieutenant... not Central Grand. And they do not hold symposiums on Flight Operations in Eden City's Grand Center Senior Lieutenant. You should really learn more about Earth before professing you have been there just to pick up a companion to share your bed. And unless you have been to the King's Royal Estate Villa in Sparta or Gallais's Retreat, than you would never have seen me in Sparta either. Now... before you switch your story and say that is where you have seen me you should know that Gallais can spot your type from a kilometer away and she would never allow you into her establishment."

"I don't understand... my type?" Irhiad asked.

Zaala nodded. "You are a pilot... and probably a very good one no doubt if you have been chosen to come here. However... your arrogance oozes from your pores like sap from a tree. And you in no way compare to what I already have Senior Lieutenant Irhiad." Zaala held up her left hand and flashed the sparkling rings on her wedding finger. "You should probably go back to your friends now."

Chuess chuckled now. "This iszz good advice." He spoke.

"I was only trying to make conversation." Irhiad said.

Zaala nodded. "Yes... and I'm sure you had no ulterior motives for coming over to speak with a strange female you have never met. You are far from home and you wish to show your fellow pilots you are the epitome of what every elf female desires." She spoke. "Words of advice Senior Lieutenant... do not assume that every female elf from Earth will be taken in by your charm simply because you are a pilot. We are far more intelligent than you give us credit for and we have pilots on Earth as well. Some of them far better than you."

Irhiad shifted on the balls of his feet. "I finished at the top of my Flight School Class!" He responded defensively in Zaala's obvious hit at his skills. "I am in the top five pilots within the Union Fleet I will have you know!"

“Truly?” Zaala asked sweetly while batting her dark eyes. “Does that include by chance Queen For'mya and Star Colonel Endith O'Connor? Or Arrarn and Normya Leonidas perhaps. If it does... then I would be very impressed. Senior Lieutenant Irhiad... with all respect to your skills... I am simply not interested in you. Period. As I said... you could not hope to compare to what I already have. You are plainly not in the same category.”

“How do you know that if you don't give me the chance?” Irhiad asked. “I might surprise you.”

“You are persistent... I'll give you that.” She stated shaking her head slowly. “Extremely dense... but very persistent.”

Irhiad smiled. “See... I am growing on you.”

Zaala met his eyes and got to her feet. “No... actually you are beginning to irritate me.” She stated. “I am married Senior Lieutenant. I am married and exquisitely happy. You would do yourself a favor if you went back to your friends now. Before I grow tired with you and rip your face off!” She finished with a snarl.

Irhiad's eyes went a little wider at her outburst and he opened his mouth to reply but did not have the chance as the claxon within the briefing room rang loudly one time.

“Attention to Orders!” A voice bellowed.

Irhiad turned and watched as the three individuals entered from the back of the room, the Lycavorian male walking to the right of Admiral Ben O'Connor and the human female who wore the rank of Captain. They were whispering to each other as they walked down the center of the room. Janon looked up quickly.

“Take your seats pilots!” He bellowed as Miranda handed him the data pad and they came to the small open area in front of the huge monitor and turned to look at the pilots as they scrambled for their seats.

Zaala grinned as Irhiad darted back to where his friends were moving to their seats and her eyes fell on Steven and E'dira as they moved gracefully along the wall towards her. Her smile grew brighter when he came up to her and leaned over to nuzzle her ear.

“*Mela en' coiamin...* you looked pleased with yourself.” He said softly.

Zaala leaned into his nuzzle and placed her hand on his chest. “It is nothing.” She said as her eyes went to where Irhiad's friend was elbowing him and motioning for him to look. She saw Irhiad's eyes turn and he saw her leaning into Steven's nuzzle and one arm embrace and his eyes grew a little wider wondering just who the human pilot was.

Benjamin O'Connor moved to the podium in the center of the room and faced the gathered pilots. There was no one in the room who did not know who the Chief of Union Operations was. Along with Admiral of the Fleet Riall they were the two men most responsible for the overwhelming victory over the Evolli. They were close friends, and always worked and supported one another. Ben had assumed the role of Chief of Union Operations to free up Admiral Riall to do more of what he did so well, and that was lead ships and men in combat. While Ben had his own command, a large SCFG totaling nearly three hundred ships, he rarely left Apo Prime unless it was important. He had small children under the age of sixteen with his two wives Tina and Endith O'Connor, and he spent as much time as possible with them.

“How is everyone today?” Ben asked as his voice carried to the back of the room. He waited for a moment as the many pilots responded to him. Admiral O'Connor was well liked and respected by all pilots within the Union, for he was a pilot himself and knew what they went through. “I suppose you are all wondering why you are here... and now you will find out.” He moved away from the podium after touching the control panel to make the COM implant in his jaw able to project his voice clearly.

“You are the last group of pilots who have been reassigned to a special project by order of King Leonidas.” Ben spoke evenly. “This project is, at the moment, being kept in the utmost secrecy. There are perhaps a dozen individuals outside this room that know the full extent of what you are about to enter into. Those of you in this room will not be able to see or talk with your families once you leave Nodon. This could possibly last anywhere from six months to a year. If this arrangement is not something you can tolerate, simply let me or your commanding officer know immediately and we will see to it that you are returned to your former duty station without so much as a nick against your record.” Ben gave that a moment to sink in and he noted approvingly that not one of them batted an eye from what he could see. “Very well... I believe now would be a good time to introduce your new commanding officer. I doubt all of you want to hear my wrinkled ass rattle on for more than a few minutes.” Ben smiled when he heard the soft laughter come from the gathered pilots. “So without further ridiculous bullshit ladies and gentlemen... pilots all of you... allow me to introduce Captain Miranda Lorian, better known by her callsign Mando. She scored ninety-seven kills during the Evolli War

against front line Evolli Penetrator Fighters. She has four FVAs with Clusters and two DFAs with clusters. Do not think you can out fly her because she will plant your ass quite easily.” Ben motioned to the side to where Miranda stood as soft murmurs filled the ranks of pilots.

Miranda walked up to stand next to Ben as every set of eyes were on her. She had grown accustomed to the attention since beginning this project, but she hated that Ben used this time to really build her up. Ben held out his hand and Miranda took it without question.

“Thank you Admiral.” She spoke.

Ben leaned over and kissed her cheek. “Stand tall Manda.” He whispered using the name they had called her when she was growing. “You have earned this.”

Miranda looked at him. “Thank you Benjamin.” She answered gripping his hands. “I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t.” He said.

Ben nodded and moved to stand beside Janon as Miranda moved up to the podium and looked at the men and women in front of her. “I will make this short and very clear. I have three rules that I expect my officers to abide by. Rule One... your fellow pilots are your family... and you will treat them as such no matter what species they are. Rule Two... each of you will have your own ground crew and chief... and when we arrive at our final destination I expect all of you to meet them and get to know them. Your ground crew, your aircraft and then yourself, in that order. Those will be your priorities. No exceptions. If this is something you can’t do, you will last at most a week in my command. Rule Three... you are becoming part of the very first ship built for one thing by order of King Leonidas. War. This will require that you change your mentality somewhat and begin to think outside the box. Once we become active, we will be the ones that the King will use to project his will. We have longer legs, better offensive systems and the ability to put a serious hurting on any enemy. We will not negotiate with the enemy, we will not have coffee with them, when King Leonidas sends us somewhere, it will be to tear someone a new asshole and leave them bleeding and busted. Period.

“Now... in order to turn not just you, but the other pilots that have already reported and moved on to our final destination, into the type of pilots that King Leonidas and I expect I went out and got the best CAG in the Union Fleet. He will be your father, your god, and the one you will go to for all things. Some of you may have heard of him, hell most of you have probably heard of him, he’s the crazy ass pilot that rode his Y14 missile into the landing bay of the second Evolli carrier at Alba Tau and then rode the fireball out the other side. He’s about as unorthodox as they come and he will teach you to fly by your instincts as well as using the systems on your fighters. Major Steven Randall... callsign Scar.”

Irhiad sat up in his chair his eyes wide when he heard the two names. He had indeed heard of the human pilot with the callsign of Scar. As with the callsign Mando, there were very few pilots who had not heard those names and the deeds for which they were responsible during the Evolli War. He turned and watched as the tall human leaned over and gave a soft kiss to the elf female Zaala he was hitting on before he started walking towards the podium. He watched Zaala follow him with her eyes for a moment and then she looked at where he sat. She held up her left hand and wiggled her fingers flashing her marriage rings with a smile. Irhiad turned away quickly and let his eyes go to where the human stepped up next to Miranda and it was then he saw the shining gold and diamond band on the same finger of the same hand as Zaala. He felt the nudge in his side and turned to look at Ahtels.

“Good job Irhiad.” He said softly. “Hitting on the wife of the one they call Scar. Very smooth.”

Irhiad really had no come back as he turned back to see Steven shake Miranda’s hand. Steven stepped up to the podium and looked at them. “I don’t have much to add to Mando’s comments because I’m not much of an orator. I prefer to do my talking in the cockpit. Your additional training will begin in two days. We will be here about six weeks, and our Nodian hosts will finish installing some refinements and new gadgets on your *TEMPEST* fighters by the end of tomorrow. There are pads by the entrances that give you an idea of some of the upgrades and I suggest you study them tonight and tomorrow. In two days we are going to start going hot and heavy operating off the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser *HARBINGER*. Enjoy your two days here because we won’t be back.” Steven smiled. “That’s it.” He said turning back to Miranda. “Mando?”

“Your Executive Officer is Colonel Janon standing with Admiral O’Connor.” Miranda told them. “Janon and I have been flying together for the better part of a decade... so if you get on his bad side... it usually means you will be on my bad side automatically. Star Commander E’dira of the Drow is our Strategic Tactical

Operations Officer and fourth in command. If it concerns security or defensive systems, she is the guru. Standing next to her is Zaala Randall who will be given an active duty rank of Commander and is assigned as our Assistant Chief Engineer. Her professional title I have learned from her sister Lieutenant Governor Tarifa is Professor Zaala Randell, so you will refer to her as one of these two titles. And last but certainly not at all least, beside her is Star Commander Chuess, our Chief Engineer and the first Nodian to become an active member of the Union military. If there are two people who know more about the systems on our ship they haven't been found. They helped to design most of them."

Miranda saw a pilot's hand go up towards the rear of the room. "Yes?"

All eyes turned to see the elf pilot get to her feet. "Captain... will we be assigned to the *HARBINGER*?"

Miranda shook her head. "The *HARBINGER* is part of our Strike Group and has just finished refits here on Nodon. We'll join with our ship in about seven weeks."

"Is it a *LEONIDAS IIA*?" The female asked.

"No." Miranda answered. "She is a new class ship. The first of twenty scheduled to be built. Your new home when we join with her is the *ULU ARIZONA*. She is a new class ship, and will officially be referred to as an *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Carrier. That is all I will say for right now. In seven weeks you will be able to see her for yourself. If there are no further questions, as Major Randall has said... enjoy the next two days as much as you are able. I think you will find your lives will change quite a bit when we leave here."

APO PRIME

MJOLNIR'S HAND BASE

Tir'ut and Normya entered the large lounge area that they had been using as a command center twenty minutes after her mother had called them. They were holding hands as they were almost all the time now and Normya's laughter from Tir'ut's joke just before they entered the room died when they saw the new additions to who they were used to. Normya didn't recognize the Lycavorian woman or the two male elves but she did recognize L'tian and she flipped the large fruit she and Tir'ut were sharing into his hand once more before moving to where he stood. L'tian embraced her warmly and ran his hand over the top of her head.

"*Indyoatar*." She spoke softly in elven. (Grandfather)

L'tian smiled as he embraced her tightly. It had taken some getting used to at first, but if his daughter could regard Normya and all of the Leonidas children as her sons and daughters no matter whom their mother was, then L'tian and his wife could do the same. "*Indyorel*. You are looking radiant as always." (Granddaughter)

Normya held his hand with one of hers and turned to hold out her hand for Tir'ut. L'tian watched with wide eyes as the immense Immortal stepped up to them and took Normya's outstretched hand while looking for a place to put the fruit down. L'tian noticed immediately that this was not any Immortal he had ever seen in his lifetime. While the bone spurs were still there, along with the incredible physical size, Tir'ut had short dark hair on his head and his skin was bronze in color and not the grayish color of most Immortals.

"*Indyoatar*... this is Tir'ut." Normya spoke with just a touch of pride in her voice.

Tir'ut bowed his head quickly. "A honor sir." He spoke.

L'tian held out his hand without hesitation. He had learned one thing among many others in the last quarter century and that was if an individual could stand in a room full of members of the Leonidas family and their friends and hold his own and be respected, then L'tian knew he could be trusted. He watched as Tir'ut looked around and finally Normya chuckled and took the fruit from his hand enabling him to shake L'tian's outstretched one. The handshake was firm and confident and to L'tian this said quite a bit about the son of Cha'talla. All of it good.

"I understand we have you to thank for saving Normya's life." L'tian said calmly.

Tir'ut glanced at Normya quickly and then back to L'tian. "It was the easiest decision I have ever made sir." He spoke.

L'tian smiled. "Let us hope you do not have to do this often. Normya's propensity for getting into trouble is well known."

"*Indyoatar!*" Normya exclaimed.

“While I live no harm will come to *il kal'daka darthirii*.” Tir’ut said.

L’tian nodded approvingly. “Allow me to introduce *Lokhagos* Damarla and Major Ta’lon. They are As’hia’s parents.” Normya and Tir’ut turned to gaze at the older male elf and the calm looking Lycavorian woman. The male elf appeared very stern looking and was taller than the average elf, while the younger one who stood to the side wore an expression that spoke of distaste and distrust. “Dysea felt it better that they are involved in this then made to wait on the sidelines until something happened.” L’tian explained.

Normya stepped up to Damarla and took her hands. “Greetings *Lokhagos* Damarla.” She spoke.

Damarla nodded her head, her eyes still moving back and forth between Normya and Tir’ut. “Your beauty matches that of your mother Princess.” She spoke. “It is...”

Normya shook her head. “No. Events have brought us together and there is no formality between us. That would be silly. Please.”

Ta’lon looked at her. “Your mother said the same thing.” He spoke. “We are honored.” He motioned to O’lan. “Senior Lieutenant O’lan from my command Princess. O’lan is to be As’hia’s...”

“We will let our daughter decide that!” Damarla hissed softly her dark eyes glaring at O’lan. “He is...”

Tir’ut stepped away quickly moving carefully to stand beside Anton Simpson who stood there with his arms crossed over his chest. Cihera and Las’elh stood to his right holding hands. Anton looked at the towering Immortal that he had come to regard as an equal and almost a friend in just three short days. “Relax Tir’ut.” Anton spoke softly.

“It is better if I remain away.” Tir’ut spoke. “They do not yet trust me and considering how my brother feels for As’hia... I doubt that will improve.”

Anton’s eyes grew a little wider and he opened his mouth to speak but Las’elh beat him to it. “You mean...?” Las’elh gasped from beside Cihera.

Tir’ut nodded slowly. “He is my brother and we are very much like. He would not have risked his position within Phy’iad’s organization unless this As’hia affected him in some way. I could hear it in his voice when he spoke of her.”

Anton looked at him and chuckled. “Boy... Cha’talla’s sons don’t do things half way do you?” He said. “You ever hear of discrete big guy?”

Tir’ut met his eyes and shook his head. “Discrete to an Immortal is making his intentions known. For my brothers and me it is even worse, for we have inherited our mother’s emotional abilities in many respects. My father finds it easier to shield his emotions from others eyes, for he went so long in not displaying them, but even he will bend to my mother’s influence more often than not now. She has made it possible for my people to express what they feel inside. It is just harder for my father and others of his age... but they are learning.”

The main door to the lounge opened once more and Dysea and Esther walked in side by side, Esther holding the small holo disc in her hand as they were speaking to the figure within the transmission. Iriral was moving deftly behind them and she split to the side as they entered fully. Esther saw that everyone was present and looked at the transmission.

“Everyone is here *Du’ased m’ranndii*.” Esther spoke to the figure of Cha’talla in the transmission. “I will transfer you to the main transmission unit.”

They watched as Esther moved to the large table near the door and plugged the disc into the main COM unit. Dysea waved all of them over as Cha’talla’s imposing figure burst into a life sized image causing Damarla and Las’elh to gasp softly. Cha’talla was in what appeared to be some sort of command center, and they could clearly see two bare chested Spartan engineers working in the background with several shirtless Immortals as they wrestled with moving a large computer bank into place. Cha’talla himself wore only an undershirt that was partially soaked in sweat and he held a towel in one hand.

“Forgive our appearance.” He spoke quickly... his bronze colored skin glistening in the light of the room they were in. It made Esther fidget for she missed her husband. Dysea saw this and took her hand giving it a reassuring squeeze. “We are finishing the installation of the new computer systems to operate the settlement defenses. Two of your engineers are supervising the final activation protocols on the anti-air turrets while Illiad and Erli’ra assist the remaining engineers in schooling my people how to use the new equipment.”

“Cha’talla... how long before you will be fully operational?” Dysea asked.

“At the rate we are working... no more than two days.” Cha’talla spoke. “The systems in the bunker Andro gave us access to may be older to those within the Union, but they are state of the art for us. Your people

have been very thorough in making sure that we can operate them efficiently. We learn quickly. The ground based sensor arrays will be online by the end of today, but I am going to activate them slowly over a period of several days to avoid detection.”

“Aricia and Isabella have told me the Kavalians are out among The Wilds in force.” Dysea said.

Cha’talla nodded his head. “Lesede has gotten word to us from Jagaliu that Kavalian ships and men are flooding The Wilds *Du’ased ranndi*.” He spoke. “They are now on Jagaliu, Nebonese, Ricot Four and several other worlds. They are not following any sort of pattern, but one thing is certain... they are looking for you... Tir’ut and Normya. And conducting scouting missions into the surrounding terrain.”

Esther looked at Dysea. “That confirms it I think.” She said. “Gareld is working for the Kavalians as well as whoever gave him the information on Normya’s ship within the Union.”

Dysea nodded. “I agree.”

Cha’talla nodded his head to his oldest son. “My son.” He said.

“Father.” Tir’ut answered.

Cha’talla’s dark eyes shifted to Normya and his face softened considerably. “Normya Leonidas... I trust you are keeping my son in line?”

Normya smiled brightly and she looked up at Tir’ut. “I am certainly trying *Rinovdro ilharn*.” She stated with an adoring glint in her eyes. “It is not an easy task however.”

Cha’talla looked surprised at Normya’s words and this showed in his expression. He glanced quickly to Esther and Dysea and then back to Normya and Tir’ut. His dark eyes bore into Tir’ut sternly. “*Bel’la nindol j’nesst xuil jal nindel dos ph’ussta dalharuk*. He spoke without hesitation. (Honor this woman with all that you are my son.)

Tir’ut nodded his head. “*Zil dos bel’la udossta ilhar ilharn. Zuch*.” (As you honor our mother father. Always.)

Dysea chuckled softly as Normya leaned into Tir’ut and tucked her body close to his her face beaming. Danarla and Ta’lon did not speak the ancient vampire language and could only watch and wonder what was being said. Obviously it had something to do with the way Princess Normya acted with the large Immortal. Or half Immortal as L’tian had told them. Danarla’s eyes were on Tir’ut and she gazed at him intently, watching how he possessively laced his arm around Normya’s waist. Whatever was between them, it was quite apparent that Princess Normya was not being coerced in any way to act in such a manner. She appeared just as possessive of Tir’ut as he was of her.

This towering half Immortal moved with confidence and deadly grace Danarla saw. It was quite apparent that he was very capable of tearing someone limb from limb, yet he spoke with intelligence and wisdom. Her eyes shifted to the pureblood vampire Esther who was his mother. Danarla could see the similarities between mother and son, and even father and son and it was clear they regarded each other as closely as any family would regard each other. This surprised Danarla, for she did not think Immortals capable of such emotion.

“Cha’talla... now that everyone is here...” Dysea spoke now. “These are As’hia parents Danarla and Ta’lon.”

Cha’talla looked at them in the transmission. “I... I wish we were meeting under better circumstances.” He spoke evenly.

Dysea motioned everyone closer to the large table as they saw Cha’talla move out of the main room he was in. “Tell us of this Phy’iad Cha’talla.” Dysea said. “You know him?”

Cha’talla shook his head. “I know of him.” He replied. “I heard his name mentioned several times when I served Veldruk as his Captain. He was... loose cannon... I believe that is how you describe men of his caliber Dysea. He was reprimanded numerous times for going beyond his orders in putting down the populous of several worlds. Even among our people back then he was shunned and avoided.”

Esther’s eyes were wide now. “And this is the man you sent our son to infiltrate?” She gasped.

Cha’talla took a deep breath. “We discovered four years ago that he was the one in command of the Immortal mercenaries that have been savaging The Wilds. I asked for volunteers to undertake a mission to infiltrate his organization and attempt to keep tabs on him and make sure our settlement here on Kranek was not discovered. Lynom volunteered. I refused at first Esther... I no more wanted to put our son in such danger than you. You schooled our sons too well my wife. In the end... Lynom used logic to convince me he was the best

choice. He was an unknown... no history to be discovered and therefore far safer than someone else from our tribe. He could establish a background far more easily than anyone else. We worked for seven months making that background for him. We used our contacts within the ranks of the High Coven Immortals... those that are working for us and we made him a history. The original Ralmin... a known Immortal within the Coven who was disillusioned with the wench Aikiro's leadership was removed from the picture when the time was right to act."

"Cha'talla... your sons with Esther all look like Tir'ut. They are only half Immortal." Dysea spoke. "How could you possibly get Lynom into this Phy'iad's organization without him knowing who he was?"

"Cosmetic surgery *Darthirii Ilhar*." Tir'ut answered now looking at her. "Six hours of surgery to make his outward appearance match this Ralmin in every way."

"It worked." Cha'talla spoke. "I would not have gone through with it had there not been a one hundred percent chance of success. He has been feeding us information on Phy'iad and his doings for two years now."

Esther looked at Tir'ut. "Through you?"

Tir'ut nodded. "Our Mindvoice bond is very strong thanks to you and your training. We discovered as boys that we could communicate across vast distances if we concentrated hard enough. This private connection allowed us to keep many things from you and father as we were growing." He spoke embarrassed. "It was his idea to use our bond to pass information to us. It ultimately keeps him safer since he does not need to use normal secure communications equipment. It is how he was able to tell us that Pusintin is the one who engineered and directed Phy'iad to capture As'hia and the other female elves."

"For what purpose Tir'ut?" Cha'talla asked. "While it is not common knowledge, Phy'iad would know that elf females who are half Lycavorian are not affected by Immortals in the way full elves are."

Dysea looked at Esther. "Esther?"

Esther nodded. "It's true. It was being studied by the Coven... but it was very low profile and not considered very important by Veldruk or any of his cronies. Elf females of mixed Lycavorian and elf blood..." She stopped and looked at Danarla and Ta'lon.

"Hold nothing back from us." Danarla spoke. "No matter what it is. We have gotten past the part where she has been captured and raped. Now all we are concerned with is how do we get her back."

"You all know of the chemical in an Immortal's semen that reacts with a certain chemical in the body of an elf female... a chemical that when mixed acts like a drug. A powerful additive drug for the elf female."

Esther spoke. "It is... it is how they... *break* elf females and enslave them to their will. Because of the natural healing properties of the Lycavorian immune system, how it localizes diseases and viral infections and destroys them within hours or days, elf females who are half Lycavorian will only be affected partially."

"Partially?" Cihera asked.

Esther nodded. "The initial rape will affect them... but once the Lycavorian properties of their DNA kick in, it will centralize the chemical and utterly wipe it out. Essentially it will then make them immune. Depending on the level of pureness of the Lycavorian blood in the female, the stronger it is the quicker it will happen. And if the female is born half Lycavorian and half elf as your daughter As'hia was, it would make it that much stronger and her system would react much quicker. Dysea for instance would more than likely not be affected at all because of the pureness of Martin Leonidas's blood. He is the one who turned her and it is well known his blood is as pure as it gets."

"Could the effects be reversed?" Dysea asked.

"It's possible yes. If it would actually work I don't know." Esther answered. "It is similar in many respects to when someone is turned. Once the change has completed at a molecular level it can't be reversed. Since this is an addiction to a drug basically... it should be possible to reverse the effects. But like any drug... once it is bonded to your cells it is extremely difficult to get rid of it completely."

"So turning them would have no effect." Anton asked.

Esther shook her head. "That might work on those who have recently been captured... as would an antibody. The addiction would not be fully ingrained in the host body's cells and new Lycavorian DNA might be enough to reverse it. It wouldn't work for those who have been prisoners for any length of time. They could be turned but then they would be half elf and half wolf and still addicted. It wouldn't help them. They would need some sort of antibody to destroy the chemical and the dependence on it."

“And we do not turn individuals arbitrarily Anton. You know this.” Dysea spoke. “No matter the reasons.”

Anton nodded. “It was only a thought *Tenna*.” He said.

“Would this not be detected in your son Esther?” Las’elh asked now. “That he does not have this chemical in his body.”

Esther shook her head. “Tir’ut and Lynom, as well as their younger brothers were born without this chemical in their bodies. Through the years I devised a unique formula for the males of our tribe and developed a serum that destroys this chemical in their system altogether. It is not something they needed to survive and every male of our tribe lined up to get this serum when I made it known. It is not something that is outwardly detected however. A detailed medical scan would be required to even break down the DNA properties to get to that point.”

Dysea looked at Danarla and Ta’lon. “I have seen this myself.” She spoke. “At their settlement on Kranek. There are marriages of elf females and Immortals. Strong, emotional marriages that have produced children.”

“If what you say is true...?” Danarla asked. “What is to keep them from hurting our daughter? Torturing her? Raping her even more?”

“I don’t know what...” Esther spoke softly.

“Lynom has taken her.” Tir’ut announced meeting his father’s eyes in the transmission. “Taken her in the way of our people.”

Ta’lon came to his feet his face a mask of rage. “So he rapes her to protect her!” He roared clawing for the blade hidden in his uniform. “He is no better than the scum who took her! An animal!”

“Ta’lon no!” Danarla shouted as her husband brought the blade out.

Ta’lon’s snarl of rage was cut off as the large hand closed around his throat and lifted him clean off the floor. Lieutenant O’lan came to his feet reaching for a weapon to help his Air Commander but suddenly found himself on his back on the cold floor, the air rushing from his lungs as Normya dropped her knee into his chest and pressed the K14 to his cheek. The black ring around her emerald eyes announced her change and her wolf fangs burst forth. While she and her sisters had dual front fangs like her father and brothers, they were no where near as pronounced even when fully extended, however they did give Normya a frightening facade. That she was defending the man she loved was quite obvious to everyone in the room.

“That would be the single most unintelligent thing you have ever done in your life fool!” She snarled at O’lan.

Ta’lon grunted as Tir’ut slammed him onto the top of the table, his vampiric fangs fully extended and his own face a countenance of anger. Tir’ut’s fist closed around Ta’lon’s hand that held the knife and slammed it to the table, the knife skittering across the table top where Cihera’s hand snatched it up and made it disappear.

“My brother is no animal!” Tir’ut hissed savagely only inches from Ta’lon’s face as his hand closed around Ta’lon’s throat and his eyes shifted to cobalt blue. “And he is nothing like the vile scum that did this to your daughter! He risks all that he is... he risks our entire tribe to protect As’hia!”

Danarla looked at Esther and Dysea with wide eyes. “What... what does he mean?” She gasped.

Esther looked at her from where she had come to her feet her own face angry. “It is already known to Aikiro that Cha’talla and I live!” Esther snapped. “When we broke from the Coven a quarter century ago she swore to hunt down all of Cha’talla’s tribe and exterminate them. If it becomes widely known that Cha’talla lives then not only will the Coven come for us if she has not already ordered this, but the Kavalians and every scum in the universe will try and claim the bounties on our heads!”

“So he rapes our daughter?” Danarla asked harshly.

Esther looked at her and now her own eyes changed to cobalt blue as her anger got the better of her. “My son would never stoop to the level of the monsters he is among! If he did... I would kill him myself!”

Danarla came to her feet. “Then tell me what it means when your son says he has taken her.”

“He has bitten her. Marked her and tasted her blood.” Cha’talla said softly from within the transmission. “It would be the only possible way to keep the others from passing her among themselves and using her until she went insane.”

Danarla looked at Cha’talla. “What?” She gasped.

“It is a custom among my people from when we first came under the boot heel of the Coven.” Cha’talla spoke. “If we took a slave we marked them. We took their blood and then no others would make a claim to them. It is still practiced among the Immortals within the Coven and apparently by Phy’iad’s group as well. If he has marked her in this manner then she is safe from enduring more mistreatment. At least for a time.”

Dysea looked at Cha’talla confused. “Then why are you and the others acting in such a way Cha’talla?” She asked. “As if this is a bad thing?”

Cha’talla met her eyes. “As you know Dysea this practice among my tribe is now our way to show devout love and commitment. My tribe has adopted the Coven tradition in this regard and it is no different than vampires who share blood to show their love and commitment to one another.”

“Yes.” Dysea spoke.

“It is how I raised my sons.” Cha’talla spoke. “If Lynom has resorted to this in order to protect As’hia then it is just a matter of time before he is discovered as well.”

“Why?” Dysea asked.

“For the answer to that question you need only ask my son.” Cha’talla spoke.

Dysea looked at Tir’ut and then her eyes shifted to Normya who only looked at her with a bright smile. She turned back to Tir’ut. “*Ussta Rinovdro dalharuk?*” She spoke softly.

Tir’ut lifted his eyes and looked at her. He released his grasp on Ta’lon and watched him push away from the table as he took a deep breath. Danarla gripped her husband’s arm as they both turned to look at Tir’ut.

“Tir’ut you will tell her my son!” Esther spoke.

Tir’ut looked at Dysea as his eyes reverted back to normal. “The why is simple *Darthirii Ilhar?*” He answered. “I have tasted *il kal'daka darthirii's* blood... I have bound my heart to her for all time.”

Normya stood up drawing the K14 back from O’lan’s cheek and she pressed her petite frame against Tir’ut. “As I have.” She spoke confidently.

“If Lynom has done this with As’hia... then like with me... any who seek to harm her or touch her in any manner will die.” Tir’ut spoke. “I told you I would destroy any who attempted to harm *il kal'daka darthirii*. That *is* what I will do. It is no different than what your own son Androcles has professed when it comes to his mate and wife Sadi is it not? What King Leonidas would do for any of his Queens *Darthirii Ilhar?*” Tir’ut looked at Danarla and Ta’lon. “As Lynom will now do with As’hia.”

“This is a problem.” Cha’talla spoke from within the transmission.

“Why?” L’tian asked still somewhat shocked at what had just occurred.

“Because eventually someone will challenge Lynom for As’hia.” Cha’talla said. “They will grow tired with what they have and want something new. As callous as it is. Phy’iad and those who follow him are the epitome of the vile nature of my people that my tribe has rejected. When this occurs... Lynom will defend her. And he will use all his skills to do so. Just as I have taught all my sons.”

“And this is bad why?” Anton asked.

“How many Immortals do you know Anton Simpson that can blur and wrap themselves within the shadows as my sons can?” Esther spoke.

Recognition burst onto Anton’s face. “Oh boy. Now I understand.” He stated. “Not good. Not good.”

“Tir’ut... when is he going to contact you again?” Cha’talla asked.

“Unless something happens... not for another week father.” Tir’ut answered.

“Dysea... if Phy’iad is now involved with that dog Pusintin and the Kavalians and we have confirmed that Gareld is working with them or for them... then there is much more going on than we first thought.” Cha’talla spoke. “This is no longer simply about an attempt on Normya’s life. The weapons trail that Anton and Cihera follows... the information in regards to the transport that held Las’elh’s sister. Now the Kavalians expanding their presence in The Wilds and the confrontation with Queen Aricia. This is all ties together somehow.”

“I agree.” Dysea said.

“Send As’hia’s parents here.” Cha’talla spoke. “Let them see for themselves what we have built. And we can begin putting a plan together to get their daughter and my son both out of the scum invested pit they are in.”

Dysea looked at Danarla and Ta’lon. Danarla didn’t hesitate and nodded her head. “Yes.” She spoke.

Ta’lon nodded grudgingly. “Very well.” He spoke.

“Control the young one or leave him behind. His distaste for my people is understandable and evident. However if he is not willing to see beyond what he already thinks he knows then he will only cause trouble here and get himself injured.” Cha’talla spoke motioning to O’lan.

“As’hia is to be my wife!” O’lan spat. “You can not keep me away!”

“Do not say I did not warn you.” Cha’talla spoke. “Dysea... this man... this Chief Engineer that you have been watching. He may only be the tip of the iceberg in this whole scheme of events, but I would not hold out much longer before picking him up and discovering what he knows.”

“He may not know anything husband.” Esther said.

“He knows something and he is involved.” Cha’talla answered. “To what end we do not know... but he is involved deeply. At the very least he is getting his direction from someone else and that is who we need to find next.”

“Cha’talla I wish to give Andro your direct communications channel.” Dysea said. “It is highly secure and encrypted. He is aware of everything we are working on... more so than his father. *Nauta Melme* is dealing with another issue that has recently come to light concerning the High Coven.” This caught the attention of everyone in the room. “I will put everything into a secure pad that As’hia’s parents will give to you when they arrive. At the moment... we in this room are all that is working on this end of what is happening. Esther... I wish to send *Melyanna* a complete transcript of your work. Between the two of you... it may be possible for us to help those female elves that this Phy’iad has with him.”

Esther nodded without hesitation. “Of course.”

“Cha’talla... any information that comes to you, send immediately to us.” Dysea said. “We will do the same. It seems all roads are leading in one direction and since they are... our paths will eventually converge.”

Cha’talla nodded. “To what end Dysea? To what end?”

IRARUZU

Lu’ria stood on the balcony of her room watching the shooting star as it rocketed across the night sky and listening to her mother speak from the small holo transmission disc on the small table near the door. The fresh night air fanned her slender sepia colored body, the nipples of her breasts stiff from the cool breeze that caressed her naked flesh. Her long shimmering white hair flowed around her face and shoulders as she turned back to the small projection of her mother.

“I know it is not what you wanted to hear Lu’ria.” Her mother spoke softly. “When you return to Earth we can discuss it more.”

“Why?” Lu’ria asked.

“You are the youngest of our daughters Lu’ria.” Her mother said. “This is our way. At least meet him. He is a fine young warrior and could be an excellent husband.”

“Mother... you know how I feel about that.” Lu’ria spoke. “I am meant for others.”

Daba nodded her head. “Yes... as I have heard you say for years now.” She spoke gently. “When will you see that what you aspire to will never come to pass daughter. Prince Androcles has already claimed his woman. His soulmate. You could never be more than a second choice to him.”

“That is not what you say about the King.” Lu’ria said. “You have always said the King loves all of his Queens with equal passion. That no one of them is regarded above the other except for Queen Aricia.”

“Our King is a unique man Lu’ria.” Daba said. “The chances that this trait has been passed to his son are astronomical. You must accept that! The sooner you do... the sooner you can begin to find happiness.”

Lu’ria shook her head. “No. I do not believe that. I am meant for him... for her. For them. I am meant for larger things than what you envision for me mother. I will never give up on that. Father believes this will happen... why can’t you?”

Daba sighed heavily. “Your father loves you. That is what he is supposed to tell you. I am the Matron Mother of our Family and our Clan. I must think practically. The Prince’s path leads him down a different road Lu’ria. He is destined to follow in the footsteps of his father and his grandfather. You have never met him Lu’ria... or the women you say will share your life. How can you believe these things?”

“I feel him mother!” Lu’ria said. “I can feel them! In here!” She touched her fingers to her temple. “And in my heart. Why is that so hard for you to believe?”

“Lu’ria... with the exception of Queen Aihola, General Lynwe and Colonel Nayeca none of our people have the ability to Mindvoice, certainly not on as grand a scale as you speak of. Even Queen Aihola is limited in what she can do.”

“I am not Queen Aihola.” Lu’ria said.

Daba shook her head. “You have always been the most stubborn of my children and I have adored that in you Lu’ria. Now however, now it is beginning to grow tiresome. You must put aside this fantasy of yours and move on with your life. You are returning to Earth in three months and we will talk more of this. And I will arrange for you to meet Betat. I think you will find him acceptable.”

“Will you force me to marry him mother?” Lu’ria asked.

Daba’s eyes grew wide at this. “Lu’ria! You know that is not something I will do! We left those ways behind us when we joined with Queen Aihola! I only want you to be happy and move on with your life.”

Lu’ria turned at the soft female voice calling out her name and she saw Jennifer’s blond head lift from the pillow of her bed. She turned back to the transmission. “I... I will do as you say mother.” She spoke. “But I will never let go of what I know I am meant for mother. I am meant to be part of Androcles’s life. Of Sadi’s and Carisia’s and Ne’Veha’s. All of us. We are the pieces of a puzzle and we will find each other one day and we will be whole.”

Daba looked at her surprised. “You... where did you hear those names? How do you know those are the names of the women he will take as his mates as Sadi has said? She spoke no names.”

“I hear them every night in my dreams mother.” Lu’ria stated. “And the voice of my Bonded One. It is like a whisper on the wind and it fills me... it fills us with emotion and power.”

“Bonded One?” Daba gasped wide eyed. “Now you say you will be bonded to a dragon Lu’ria? Will your stories ever cease?”

“They are not stories!” Lu’ria snapped angrily.

“Of all the hundreds of bonded riders in the Union there is not a single Drow among them Lu’ria.” Daba spoke. “We may be elves... but we do not have the ability to Mindvoice on the level of a dragon. What makes you think that you do child? Now you say things that make me wonder about you daughter. You are twenty-five years old now and I expect these outrageous stories to cease Lu’ria! You are too old for children’s fantasies.”

“They are not fantasies mother!” Lu’ria barked.

“Enough!” Daba snapped. “You will do as I say Lu’ria!”

“And if I don’t?” Lu’ria hissed.

Daba looked at her stunned. “Be silent with your words Lu’ria!” Daba spoke quickly. “You are my daughter... and I only wish to see you happy.”

“Then why can’t you believe in me mother?” Lu’ria asked. “I have come further within the Krypteria than any of my sisters. I have scored higher in all my classes and training. I am out here among the stars engaging in my duties four years before my sisters were allowed to go into the field. I am different mother. Why can’t you believe in me?”

“I do believe in you Lu’ria.” Daba spoke. “Just not in your insistence on maintaining these childhood fantasies of yours.” She turned as someone was speaking in the background and then looked back to her. “We are returning to session and I must go. We will speak of this when you return Lu’ria. I promise you.”

“I will show you mother.” Lu’ria spoke. “I will show you I am right.”

“I will see you in three months daughter.” Daba spoke before the transmission ended.

“Lu’ria?” The soft voice spoke.

Lu’ria turned and saw Jennifer in the doorway. Her blond hair was tousled and she held the sheet over her voluptuous body. Lu’ria smiled at her. Jennifer had become a very good friend and listener. She encouraged Lu’ria to pursue whatever she felt her heart was calling her towards. Jennifer was the very committed lover of Ixara, but Ixara did not mind if she shared Lu’ria’s bed when she and her husband were together for one or two nights when he returned from his patrols in the surrounding mountains. Jennifer was an adequate lover and very submissive, but she was not the woman who made Lu’ria shudder and cry out within her dreams.

“Are you ok?” Jennifer asked stepping up to her.

Lu'ria nodded completely unashamed that she was naked. She and Jennifer had explored each other's bodies many times. "My mother." She said. "She discourages what I feel. She is arranging for me to meet with a warrior from another Clan that has shown interest in me when I return to Earth in three months for my rest period. She insists I need to leave behind my dreams and move on with my life."

Jennifer took her arm. "Never let anyone take away your dreams Lu'ria." She said softly. "They are what make us individuals." She said. "She does not believe you can feel the Prince and Princess? The dragon you are meant for?"

Lu'ria shook her head. "She is very traditional." Lu'ria answered. "She does not believe the Drow can aspire to such things. Being a rider I mean."

"Well... I have always been of the mind that you can do whatever you put your mind too." Jennifer spoke. "That you can feel... that you can sense this dragon within your mind just as you do the Prince and others... that tells me all I need to know."

Lu'ria leaned over and kissed her softly. "You are a very good friend Jennifer." She said. "Thank you."

"Come back to bed Lu'ria." Jennifer told her wrapping her hands around Lu'ria's waist. "We will have a full day in the shop tomorrow and we need our rest."

"Yes we will." Lu'ria said as she allowed Jennifer to guide her back into the bedroom.

"What did you say her name was?" Jennifer asked. "The dragon I mean?"

Lu'ria smiled. "Her name is Majeir."

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBERS

"...have found there is sufficient evidence to support the charges against Queen Anja and Princess Sivana and we will proceed to the next step Divine One." Chief Minister Wiktör spoke from her seat at the long table.

The other fourteen Ministers sat on either side of her, all of them with blank expressions on their faces. Anja and Sivana stood on either side of Eurin, both of them dressed far more conservatively than they usually did.

"According to the Constitution Chief Minister... there must be a hearing to determine the validity of the charges." Eurin spoke calmly.

"We have had a hearing Divine One." Wiktör answered.

Eurin shook her head. "No... a public hearing Chief Minister."

Wiktör looked at her with a surprised expression. "You wish to make what has happened here public knowledge?"

"What has happened here Chief Minister..." Eurin spoke. "...is that the Arch Ministry began an illegal investigation directed at Queen Anja and Princess Sivana based on hearsay and unfounded speculation. None of the initial information put forth to this Ministry by Pcillany was grounded in fact. She..."

"Divine One she..."

"I have seen and read the initial report taken from her Chief Minister!" Eurin snapped. "None of what she says is based on fact. It is based on her own personal feelings and fabricated ideas implanted within her by others. This Ministry chose to ignore the obvious tampering and outside influence of others involved in Pcillany's initial interview. Namely this Rinard and Umbra. Others that she openly names in her interview and this Ministry chose to disregard that and proceed regardless."

"The investigation that was begun uncovered everything we are here in regards too!" Wiktör snapped.

"What have you uncovered?" Eurin demanded. "This Ministry says Anja and Sivana acted improperly in deciding political matters that fell well within their realm of control as Queen and Princess. In fact... the entire Hadarian Ministry was aware of every decision made by Anja and Sivana in the time since they assumed their rightful places. Those decisions were not opposed at the time. Why is that Chief Minister?"

"Not all the information was provided to us that is why!" Wiktör spat. "I know what you are trying to do here Eurin... you will attempt to shift blame for Anja's despicable actions onto us!"

“Is that what you think I am doing Wiktor?” Eurin stated calmly. “Whose actions are despicable here? According to our constitution we have a right to a public hearing. That is what we want.”

“You would have her actions put before our people?” One of the other Ministers spoke now.

“What actions are those Minister Grona?” Eurin asked.

“Her complacency in the death of Mage Warrior Seanna? She stands accused of letting Seanna die to hide her actions.” The man snapped quickly. “Her sexually... her sexually deviant behavior outside of her marriage to the King. Forcing Seanna to partake in this lifestyle and...”

“I forced nothing on Seanna!” Anja spat angrily. “Whatever we did was by her choice as well as mine!”

“So you stand there and admit the security videos we have all seen are true?” Grona asked stunned.

“Those security videos are many things... but truthful is certainly not one of them!” Anja barked.

“The King did not seem to agree with you Anja.” Wiktor commented cruelly. “Or did he leave Hadaria as a show of support for you?”

“Fuck you Wiktor!” Anja shouted.

Eurin turned quickly. “Anja... let me handle this!” She stated.

“Her actions right now lend credence to what this investigation revealed to us.” Wiktor barked. “And we will act on it!”

“No.” Eurin spoke. “We have demanded a public hearing and that is what you will give us.”

“Do you threaten this Ministry Eurin?” Wiktor hissed.

“We will not return to the old ways of doing things secretly.” Eurin spoke shaking her head. “I will not allow you to use deceit and closed hearings to decide what you will do. Anja Leonidas is Queen of Hadaria and one of five Queens of the Union... and if you wish to charge her with something you will do so publicly and that is where it will be addressed. As our very own constitution states.”

“You will not allow?” Wiktor demanded.

Eurin nodded. “Yes... I will not allow. If you refuse this, which according to our laws you can not, if you refuse this... then when I leave here I will make a public announcement to that very effect. It will be broadcast not only here on Hadaria but across the Union. How far do you think you will get then Wiktor?”

“We... we do this to maintain the credibility of our Royal Family!” Wiktor spat.

“No... you are doing this so that the Hadarian Elders can regain some small measure of the power and influence they have lost through the years. I will not allow it to go unchecked. You will give us a public hearing. We want access to every report you have that even mentions Anja’s name. We want access to these men in these supposed videos so that we can question them. We...” Eurin stated.

“We have transcripts of their statements to our investigators!” Wiktor spoke. “That is sufficient!”

“No it is not!” Eurin snapped. “We want their names. Their units. Their commanding officers! And their connection to Rinard.”

“Why don’t you ask your Queen?” Grona growled. “She is the one who took part in the acts of depravity we saw with these men!”

“I don’t need to ask Anja.” Eurin spoke. “She does not know them with the exception of Rinard. She certainly has never met them in any sort of environment like what has been seen. The security videos you have viewed are all forged.”

This caused many heads to turn in amazement. Wiktor laughed at Eurin’s words and shook her head. “This will be your defense?” She asked arrogantly. “These videos are forged? They have been reviewed by over a dozen expert technicians who...”

“Yes... technicians that you had view them.” Eurin spoke. “Not us.”

“And what of her actions in regards to Seanna?” Grona spat. “For all intents and purposes she killed her!”

Anja opened her mouth to speak and Eurin held up her hand quickly. “If that is what you claim... then provide us with the statements and names of the witnesses that saw this.”

“It is what Pcillany and Rinard state!” Grona barked.

“Pcillany and Rinard were not there!” Anja snarled at him. “And neither were any of you the last time I checked!”

“We have statements.” Wiktor spoke.

“Then produce them for us to review. As well as the names of those who made these statements.” Eurin declared.

Wiktor sat back in her chair. “If that is the defense you will use... of course we will provide this to you.” She stated. “And you Anja will provide...”

“Queen Anja Wiktor!” Anja spat at her. “You will address me as Queen until the time that I no longer hold that title for I have no intention of giving it up freely and allowing you to send our people back into the middle ages.”

Wiktor glared at her with hatred in her eyes. “Very well *Queen* Anja... you will provide all security codes for every bit of research you and Princess Sivana are currently involved in. You will provide your personal and Union computers for inspection and review by this Ministry immediately. And you will immediately order Princess Eliani home to Hadaria so that she can also present herself before this Ministry and the Council of Elders. If her duties do not allow her to depart from her location, then we require her whereabouts so that she can be interviewed. We did not recognize or approve of her marriage to this Malic... and we certainly do not recognize or approve of her relationship with Nyla Sinthe. She will come before us and hear us. Retta and Calyb will return to Hadaria as well as Siara. They will be placed in the custody of your Aunt Umbra until such time as...”

Anja shook her head. “No way! Eliani is well past the age of consent for a female within the Union. She makes her own decisions. She certainly is not going to return here and listen to you blither and blather about her mates.”

“She is a member of the Royal Hadarian Family!” Wiktor spat.

“She is first and foremost a Leonidas and Princess of the Union.” Anja spoke. “At the moment she is conducting her duties as part of my son’s overall command. I do not know where they are or what they are doing, and even if I did I would not tell you. Her duties with Andro take precedence over your fool actions here. Retta and Calyb have only just returned to Earth and I will not allow you to uproot them again. You sent Buonau’s bitch daughter to school them in regards to whatever you think you can teach them. You will have to be satisfied with that.”

“It is no matter... we will issue official edicts for these things to take place immediately.” Wiktor stated. “Our voice will be heard and obeyed! If we have to send Elder Guard Militia to Earth to do this we will!”

Anja shrugged. “Suit yourself. It’s their funeral. You can have every computer I have in the house. I’ll even help you load them. I am, however, still a Queen of the Union and you will not be allowed access to Union computers. I will not give you my security codes or passwords for them. And if you attempt to have them removed from the palace I’ll have my *Durcunusaan* detachment shoot the person who does.”

“You are the criminal here!” Grona shouted. “How dare you speak to this body in such a way!”

“Anja has not been convicted of any crime.” Eurin spoke now. “And she is still a Queen of the Union. You have no authority over any computer cores or equipment belonging to the Union military or Medical Corp.”

Wiktor smiled arrogantly. “If King Leonidas’s reaction to what you have done is any indication... you will not be a Queen of the Union for very long.”

“You will pay for that.” Anja spoke harshly. “I promise you.”

“Do not blame me or this Ministry for your pathetic lack of self control Queen Anja. Or your sick perversions. You will remain confined to the Royal Estate grounds unless you are transiting to come before this body.” Wiktor stated. “Any offworld transmission you make will need to be approved by this body. We will block any outbound communications and any attempt to get around these restrictions will only add additional charges to those we have already filed.”

“You will need to provide a clear list of what it is you will be charging her with.” Eurin stated. “I expect to have that before the end of this day.”

Wiktor nodded. “As you wish Divine One.” She answered.

“If there is nothing else...?” Eurin asked.

Wiktor shook her head. “We are finished for now.” She said.

“Then we will return to the Estate and prepare our defense.” Eurin told them. “You will inform us of when the hearing is to be scheduled and please provide all the information I have asked for.”

“Of course.” Wiktor retorted.

Eurin looked at Anja who was glaring at Wiktor with unrelenting anger and hatred. She took her arm and waited until Anja's eyes turned to her. "Come." Eurin said. "Before you say something they can use against us."

Anja took one last look at Wiktor's smug smile before turning and allowing Eurin to lead her and Sivana out of the chambers.

GYTHEIO
CRANAE ISLAND
ANDRO AND SADI'S VILLA

"...not tell me to calm down!" Eliani screamed as she heaved the mug across the patio of Andro and Sadi's villa with all of her wolf strength.

Denali and Lisisa ducked from where they sat as the mug soared over their heads and disappeared into the late afternoon sun before splashing into the ocean some two hundred meters away. Eliani had returned here with her brothers and sisters and their wives and husbands when it was discovered what was happening on Hadaria. This was where the children of Martin Leonidas came when they were troubled or distraught. It was one of the main reasons Andro had chosen this villa to purchase when it was nearly complete. He cared not that it was far larger than he or Sadi and Carisia would ever need. Even when Ne'Veha and Lu'ria joined them, it would still be too large for them. Andro had bought it so that he and his brothers and sisters would always have a place to come away from the Royal Villa Estate in Sparta. A place away from their parents, where they could simply be who they were at their core. It was also a place where their dragons could come and relax with them and share in the emotions and feelings of family. Elynth and Anthar sat close behind Andro, Sadi and Carisia, their midsections touching and Anthar slowly stroking Elynth's tail with his own. Tharua and Jeth sat in a similar position slightly behind where Denali was stretched out on the sand, his upper body resting on Lisisa's lap. Malic and Nyla sat beside them, Arydun and Vincix sitting beside one another. Aradace sat on Jeth's opposite side gnawing a large bone. Cemath rested behind where Resumar and Athani sat on the two person chair that rested low in the sand. Athani was pressed tightly up against his side, her long tail absently stroking the back of his neck.

Arrarn leaned against the chair Toria sat in, Narice casually sitting between his legs while Toria stroked her hair and Arrarn's cheek. Deneth was happily munching on one of the treats that Andro had made for them shortly after arriving. Moneus, Carina and Zarah all sat in the sand, the two sisters leaning up against Moneus. The table behind them was crowded with food that all of them had picked at for most of the afternoon. Now they simply gathered around the fire, some of them drinking coffee, others sipping Spartan Wine.

"Anse Andro..." Deni spoke with a grin. "You better hide the rest of your mugs. She keeps heaving them into the ocean. That's the third one so far today."

"Deni hush!" Lisisa retorted at him.

"Eliani park your ass or I will have Malic and Nyla hold you down!" Andro snapped from where he sat.

Eliani whirled on her older brother. "Don't you tell me what to do!" She barked at him. Her fern green eyes glared at Andro but he sat there with a small smile on his face. Sadi sat between his legs in the sand, Carisia lying on her side on the lounge chair behind him. "This is what I think of your *nubous* mugs!"

Andro looked at his sister with that ridiculous overprotective gaze he had used on her as they were growing up. He twisted his face horribly to one side and crossed his eyes at her when she did something that totally befuddled him. He watched her pick up Malic's mug from the sand just as he was reaching for it. His face took on a surprised expression when it wasn't where he put it and he looked up to see Eliani about to throw it. He bolted to his feet just as Eliani turned to heave the mug into the ocean two hundred meters away. Eliani's arm impacted his jaw and shoulder as she turned causing him to stagger and her face took on a mask of horror as everyone broke into laughter.

Eliani! Tharua exclaimed.

"Malic!" She gasped dropping the mug and reaching for him. Malic shook his head and looked at her. "Oh my love I am so sorry!"

Malic didn't hesitate and drew her quickly into his embrace before she could throw something else. Nyla smiled and got to her feet joining them in their embrace as Malic pulsed Eliani with his aura, allowing her to take solace in his love for her and Nyla. She sighed deeply and passed these sensations to Nyla without conscious thought through their bond and then slid her arms around Malic's waist. They both stepped into his embrace and relished in the feelings.

"Quick!" Arrarn snapped. "Hide your utensils and cups while she is occupied!"

Narice sent an elbow back into Arrarn's washboard hard abdomen and heard him grunt. "It is not funny Arrarn Leonidas!" She spat.

Six months ago Narice, Princess of the High Coven, would never have imagined she would be in this position. It never ceased to amaze Narice, the path her life had taken since coming to Earth and discovering both her love for Toria Dellion and Arrarn Leonidas, but her rapidly growing abilities with Deneth. She had always been different, but now Narice knew why. This is where she had belonged all along. Among these men and women, a different generation than their parents and grandparents, and a generation that went even further to discover new and exciting things. Narice's acceptance of Athani was the largest sign so far that coming here had been the best thing she could have ever done. Narice's acceptance of Athani Leonidas, indeed her growing like of the young woman, it only confirmed to her that she was on a different path than her mother and sister. One only needed to see the passion she kissed Toria and Arrarn with, the unadulterated desire that burned in her for Arrarn and Toria both, one only needed to see that to know Narice was not her mother and never would be.

"She has been doing this for years Narice." Carina spoke now with a smile. "Whenever she gets angry she starts hurling things."

"And it is usually other people's things." Zarah stated. "I lost my entire collection of Grotorian Lava rocks because of her. Lisisa had to replace her collection of romance novels too."

Eliani pulled her head from Malic's chest. "I replaced them!" She protested.

"Six years later!" Zarah quipped. "And they weren't even the same style!"

Zarah is correct sister. Tharua stated.

"A rock is a rock! And you are supposed to be on my side Tharua!" Eliani declared turning slowly and looking at Andro who still wore that same expression. She couldn't hold it in anymore and burst out laughing herself as Andro got to his feet and held out his arms for her. Eliani crossed the distance quickly and hugged her brother. "You are a goofy bastard you know that." She said. "I didn't think you could still make that face."

Andro chuckled and kissed the top of her head. "It hurts to make it now." He stated. "You know why mother has told you to remain here Eliani. You would go to Hadaria... you would unleash your anger on them at what they are doing... and it would only make matters worse. And in many ways... you surpass our mother when you are angry. At least she knows how to channel it."

"They've really sunk to new levels of low down and dirty by doing this." Eliani said softly.

Why don't we just all go there and burn them? Jeth asked. It would solve the problem easy enough.

Jeth... how would that solve the problem? Tharua asked calmly.

Jeth looked at her. They would be nothing but ash. No muss... no fuss.

Andro laughed at Jeth's words as he nodded. "Yes they have sunk to new lows. I'm sure mother will show them the error of their ways in the end however. Remember... she and father have been doing things like this since before they knew who they really were. This was the only way they could draw out all mother's enemies on Hadaria at once. Now that they are doing this... when the time is right... she will act."

"I just hope it's not too late." Eliani spoke. "Father said they were far more organized this time in their actions and what they hope to accomplish."

"Do you wish to return to Hadaria and explain to those robe wearing idiots how you feel about Malic and Nyla?" Lisisa asked now. "They wouldn't know love and commitment if it jumped up and bit them in the *mida!* And it's not so much the fact that you choose this life that bothers them Eliani... it's the fact you did not ask them for their permission or go there to obtain their approval."

Resumar laughed now. "Now that would be fun to watch!" He said. "Eliani asking those stuffy bastards for their approval to marry Malic and Nyla."

Will you allow us to watch Eliani? Aradace asked. I have never liked them. Or the way they treated you as we were growing.

“Which is why you need to maintain your temper.” Andro spoke looking at their bonded brothers and sisters. “And we will not attempt to burn them or watch Eliani beat them silly. We are too far along in the training for you to leave anyway.”

Brother you are such a curmudgeon. Elynth told him extending out her head and butting him in the back of his shoulder with her snout.

Eliani looked into his blue eyes. “I can’t even go to Sparta and hit Duewa once? Just one time... that’s all I want.”

Andro shook his head. “Sorry.” He said.

“*Midaeus.*” Eliani spat but with a smile. (Asshole)

Andro chuckled and leaned over to kiss her cheek before she pushed him away and moved back to where Malic and Nyla were.

“Andro... are you going to tell us why you got us all here?” Deni asked. “Cause I know it ain’t to smooth over little miss ruffled here and her out of control temper.” He spoke motioning to Eliani.

Eliani looked at Lisisa. “Lisi...?”

Lisisa grinned devilishly and ran her hand down inside Denali’s shirt to pinch his nipple between her fingers.

“Whoa!” Denali jumped and rolled away from her. “I give up! I give up!”

Lisisa laughed and pulled his upper body back into his arms, her long black hair falling across his chest as she leaned over. “His nipples are very sensitive.” She said nuzzling Deni’s cheek.

“That’s not fair.” Denali protested. “I am your mate. You’re not suppose to give away the secrets from our bed.”

“And Eliani is my sister *and* a woman.” Lisisa spoke.

“You’ll pay for that.” Deni said rubbing his nipple.

Lisisa leaned over his head and kissed him tenderly. “I was hoping you would say that and I look forward to it.” She whispered. Deni reached around with his hand and pulled her head down, their lips coming together passionately.

“Oh please!” Zarah exclaimed. “Get a villa will you!”

Andro smiled and bent over to retrieve his mug of coffee. “There is another reason why I had us all come together. Some information that father passed to me earlier today just before he went into the meeting with Aikiro and Yuri.” Andro saw Narice and Carisia look at him. “The intelligence that was given to us when you first arrived? Did either of you ever see it?”

Narice and Carisia shook their heads. “No.” Narice answered. “It was tagged far beyond the security clearances Carisia and I had. Toria?” She asked turning her head.

Toria also shook her head. “No.” She answered immediately. “My duties on the way here were to gather all the random intelligence we could find on you and the others Andro, and try to make some sense of it. I have... I have already told you and Arrarn what the *Venorik Elghinn* was expecting of me.” She finished in a subdued tone of voice.

Andro nodded. “Yes... they’ll be surprised I suspect when they discover that their plan in that regard will not work out as they had hoped.”

“You have no idea.” Toria answered.

Dante and Javier may have seen it. Anthar spoke up. *I saw them with their mother on many occasions acting as if they were trying to hide something.*

Vollenth may know something as well. Deneth chimed in. *He was her bonded one, forced though the bond was.*

“Well it appears this intelligence has to do with...” Andro stopped when Athani began to get to her feet. “Athani?”

“*Aryschanne?*” Resumar asked looking at her. “What is wrong?”

“I shouldn’t be here.” Athani said. “I am...”

“You are now a Leonidas.” Moneus spoke for the first time. He waited for Athani to turn and look at him. “You are no less important than any one of us.” He said. “We do not keep secrets from one another.”

“Well spoken Moneus.” Lisisa echoed. “Sit down Athani. You are just as much a part of this family now as any one of us, as Moneus has said. Your voice carries just as much weight as any of ours, never doubt that.”

For you to have captured Resumar's *riad aulved for gai* speaks more than you will ever know trust me." She said with a smile.

Resumar grinned. "Thank you sister." He exclaimed.

Lisisa smiled at him. "Always brother." She said.

Athani felt the gentle nudge in her back and she turned to look at Cemath's huge snout. *You are one of us now little one. As Resumar told you recently... one of our blood.*

"My brothers and sisters speak the truth Athani." Andro said. "Besides... I was hoping you may be able to provide possible insight to what they found. Or at least where they found it."

Athani looked at him and once more the sensations of acceptance and total commitment washed over her. She felt Resumar squeeze her hand and she looked at him gazing into his beautiful dark eyes. "Sit down *Aryschanne*." He said.

"Yes please! Sit down!" Arrarn spoke as he waved his arm around his head and shoulder where Athani's tail was twitching nervously. "We can not send away the only Leonidas woman with a tail!"

Athani turned her head and looked at him before snapping out with that same tail and striking him in the side of the head gently before settling back to her seat beside Resumar and tucking her body close to him. "*Igord!*" She snapped at Arrarn.

This brought laughter from all of them including Arrarn and eventually they all turned back to Andro. "So what did this intelligence reveal Andro?" Moneus asked finally, still chuckling to himself.

"It revealed about eight million Kavalian troops and upwards of three thousand ships massing on a planet called Uirmeik." Andro said watching their faces change to one of shock. "It is a garrison of some sort it seems."

"*Saoi sibfla!*" Denali exclaimed. (Holy shit)

"It gets better." Andro said. "The intelligence also led us to a previously unknown power source on a nearby planet. Ritaah. The Omen ship knew what it was the moment they detected the power readings."

"Ok... so what is it?" Arrarn finally asked.

"A completely intact and functioning MV ship buried in a mountain much like City Ship 41 was buried on Lycavore." Andro answered.

This caused all of them to look at him with something akin to them thinking he had lost his mind. Only Athani didn't know what he was talking about, but she knew the names of her people's planets well enough. Moneus was the first to speak.

"Man... Andro... that ain't even a little bit funny." He said.

No it is not! Jeth spoke lifting his huge head from caressing Tharua's wings. *You are joking aren't you Andro?*

No... he is not. Elynth said.

Andro shook his head. "It wasn't meant to be funny I'm afraid." He said. He looked at Narice. "Narice your mother knew it existed before she came here. Well... she says she suspected it existed. She didn't tell us when you first arrived because she thought it would be better if we discovered it ourselves."

"Andro... Androcles... we knew nothing about this!" Narice said quickly sitting forward between Arrarn's legs. "Neither... neither Carisia or I were ever involved in the intelligence meetings outside of those concerning Deneth and Anthar and the rest of the riders. I swear this to you!"

Andro nodded his head. "I know that Narice." He told her quickly. "You have nothing to be worried or concerned about. Your actions have never been in question. Your mother actually admitted as much to my father when he confronted her earlier today about it."

"What... what happened Andro?" Carisia asked softly.

Andro chuckled. "They came to an agreement surprisingly." He stated. "Your mother has suspected that this ship might exist for over a year it would appear. She says she was not able to actually confirm this information because the Kavalians only recently turned this planet into a fortified garrison. Once they did that she was unable to get a reconnaissance ship into the area. She apparently has had a small team of commandos training for the last year."

"Commandos? Training for what?" Narice asked.

"Training to destroy the MV ship." Andro told her. "She has proposed a joint undertaking with us to conduct such a mission."

“To keep it from falling into the hands of the Kavalians?” Lisisa asked.

Andro nodded. “That is what she says.” He answered turning to Athani. “This type of ship is the basis for many of the advanced technology gains we have made in the last quarter century Athani.” He stated evenly. “The improvements in our propulsion, our power generation, shielding, LSD drives... pretty much everything. It is all based off our own MV ship. What we call CS 41.”

“It has advanced our medical technology light years ahead of what it was... even for the Hadarian people.” Eliani chimed in as well. “We know more now than we ever did because of the vast database and library on CS 41. It’s part of the reason why my mother was able to find out so much about you Athani. Your DNA and such.”

“Your mother has a right to fear my father and Pusintin getting their hands on this ship Narice. As does your father Androcles.” Athani said honestly. “My father and Pusintin... they are always looking for ways to make new weapons and better power generators. They have always coveted the technology the Union has. If what you say is true about this ship they have found... it must be destroyed Andro. Without question. If my father discovers this ship... there will be no chance for my people to pull themselves out of the oppression they live under. None of them will have the opportunity I have been given.” She took Resumar’s hand in both of hers and squeezed it to her chest. “He will only cement his power base more and devise new ways to suppress my people.”

“Well... they haven’t found it just yet.” Andro spoke. “And this mission is going to take place so that they don’t.”

“It will be tricky Andro.” Moneus spoke. “Getting a Strike Team into Kavalian space is bad enough. Blowing up a ship as large as this one must be won’t be easy to cover up.”

“Are we sure they don’t know it’s there Andro?” Deni asked.

“Omen One’s sensor team picked up what appeared to be several small settlements on the surface around the ship... all within four kilometers... but they were masking their locations using the magnetic core of the equator and the natural disruptive properties of the surrounding mountains to hide them.” Andro answered.

“Masking their locations?” Carina asked as her keen mind kicked in. “Why would they do that? If they have discovered the MV ship and those are Kavalian settlements I would think the area would be flooded with scientists and ships from all over.”

Andro nodded. “You would think.” He stated. “However... there were no signs of ships in the area of Ritaah, or any signs of ground based troops. And Ritaah is off the main jump gate corridor in that system.”

Athani’s blue/green eyes grew wide. “Rebels.” She gasped.

Andro and all of them turned to look at her. “Come again?” Andro said.

Athani looked at him. “Rebels.” She replied. “It is not something my father or Pusintin have allowed to become common knowledge... but there are biogenic clones who reached the end of their usefulness according to our scientists. They were scheduled to be put down but they staged a rebellion just as this was happening. I only saw a brief clip of the intelligence report after it happened. Apparently a first generation clone was somehow able to survive past his termination date. No one seems to know how but he lived. He led the other clones in an escape of the execution facility.” Athani shook her head slowly. “I know it made my father crazy with anger when this happened. He kept saying it had to Mican. It had to be Mican. I never knew what he meant. After that... after that I heard nothing else.”

“Would they stay within Kavalian space Athani?” Sadi asked. “That seems... that seems rather... well ignorant. To remain in Kavalian space as fugitives when they could have gone anywhere if they had a ship.”

“Ritaah is a large planet.” Athani spoke. “Mountains, jungles, all the types of terrain and environments that my people avoid whenever they can. While we enjoy excessive heat at times... we do not go out of our way to remain longer than necessary. It is possible my father and Pusintin deemed they would not remain in Kavalian space when they escaped. They had a ship, it is how they escaped the prison planet... but I don’t know what type or what kind of range the ship may have had.”

“How long ago was this?” Andro asked.

“Ten years ago perhaps.” Athani answered. “Jalersi would know more. She was there for the initial report when it came in.”

“Athani...” Lisisa spoke now. “What is... what is Karun doing?”

Athani met her eyes. "I can not answer that Lisisa." She said. "Whatever directives he got came from Pusintin himself. He worships his father, but he is not like him in many respects. He is more like Jalersi. He dotes over his younger sister Nikkei even though it is frowned upon in our culture to do this. He tries to act like his father, but I don't believe his heart is in it. Nikkei looks like my sister in almost every way. And coming here... coming here I think is changing Jalersi as well. My father told her she would be in charge... that she would be the one to make the decisions." She shook her head. "He lied to her. To me. He has never openly lied to her like this and I believe... I believe she feels as if he betrayed her. And she has seen for herself the freedom that females have here in the Union. I have known for sometime that he is not the man he wants us to believe he is. It is one of the reasons I made the decision to defect when we began the war with the Coven. That and the schooling I received from our Wise One. My time... my time to act did not come until we came here." She looked at Resumar. "Until I met you."

"Your Wise One?" Zarah asked.

Athani nodded. "She is like your First Oracle. She is the oldest female of our kind and the Prefect before my father deemed she would be granted certain status that our females do not normally receive. She was the one who encouraged me to pursue my dream of being free."

"Lisi... is Karun coming alone to the meetings with you?" Andro asked.

Lisisa nodded. "As far as Jeth and I can tell." She answered. "Ardis escorts him to Eden City and then she picks him up. I think she is taking a fancy to him Andro. He seems to respond to her as well. She has passed to me within Mindvoice that they talk on the flights over the ocean."

I do not like that and neither will Roluth. Jeth spoke.

If anything inappropriate happens, Ardis will tell one of her mothers and they will deal with it Jeth. Tharua said.

I agree with Jeth. Aradace said. *If she is taken by this Karun, and she knows how others feel about him, how do we know she will tell us if he does something he should not.*

"What do they talk about Lisi?" Andro asked.

Lisisa shrugged. "I don't know. She wouldn't tell me."

"Andro... why does it seem that there is an awful lot of *sibfla* all happening at the same time?" Malic asked now. "This attempt to bring down your mother on Hadaria. The attempt on Normya. And now discovering this MV ship. It all seems very convenient if you ask me."

"I tend to agree with you Malic." Andro stated. "I would imagine that father will be here either tomorrow or the next day to talk with all of us about that very thing. Arrarn... as much as we hate it brother... I believe we will need to hide our relationships. If he was to discover that I have claimed Carisia and you have claimed Narice and Toria... considering who they are... I don't think he would react well."

"Neither would our mothers I'm quite sure." Narice answered knowingly.

"Father is the one who has always told us to never fear the unknown or what it could bring us Andro." Arrarn spoke. "Why do we have to hide what we have found because we have followed his words to us?"

"I don't like it anymore than you do." Andro said. "There is something different about him lately though. Something I can't place my finger on. Given what has just been discovered, telling him we have taken the daughters of Yuri and Aikiro as our wives would probably not go over very well as I said."

"About as well as dropping a mountain on him." Eliani said with a grin. "He doesn't like that very much."

"I guarantee that mother would pull Toria and I out of here so fast we would not know what happened." Narice spoke. "She is already beginning to push me into a relationship with the son of a man who is loyal to her."

"Really?" Arrarn said drawing Narice tighter into his embrace. "I do believe Toria and I would have something to say about that."

"Indeed we would." Toria echoed.

Narice smiled wistfully when he nuzzled the side of her neck and back of her ear. Having his powerful arms wrapped around her always seemed to make her melt, and this time was no different.

"Thast and I will come to blows as well." Andro spoke looking at Carisia. "I have no intention of allowing him to ever touch you again, let alone come near you."

"Nor do I." Sadi spoke turning to look at her.

Carisia leaned forward and kissed Sadi softly. "Good." She said.

"We have a task and that is to train the Coven riders. That is the task we must focus on." Andro spoke. He leaned over and took Sadi's hand pulling her to her feet. He pulled Carisia from her chair and pulled them close to him. "I don't know about the rest of you... but I have eight hours that I am going to use wisely."

Sadi tilted her head seductively as she looked at him. "And what exactly did you have in mind Andro?" She asked. "Carisia and I were not aware of any special plans you may have had."

Andro grinned. "I believe it involves many nibbles." He said. "To different portions of both your bodies."

Sadi's jungle green eyes began to smolder. "Well... I suppose Carisia and I could tolerate a few nibbles here and there."

"Yes... it will be difficult... but I think we can tolerate it." Carisia said with a dazzling smile.

Zarah rolled her eyes now. "*Son vada carians.*" She gasped. "It has infected all of my siblings."

"So there are no other secrets that you are keeping from the rest of us Andro?" Denali asked with a smile.

Andro turned to meet his brother's eyes. "Me? I don't keep secrets Deni, you know that." They watched him look over at Elynth and she opened and closed her golden eyes several times.

Tell them Andro. She spoke with gentle humor. *It has been too long.*

Lisisa perked up now. "Tell us what?" She spoke.

Andro's eyes lifted behind Lisisa and Deni who sat with their backs to the beach. He saw them walking along the shore and smiled. "Yes it has." He said softly. "Yes it has."

"Andro what the hell are you talking about?" Eliani exclaimed as she saw where his eyes were looking. She turned to follow his gaze and slowly got to her feet, her fern green eyes getting bigger by the second and her wolf nose suddenly very active with the familiar scent. A scent she had not detected in almost four years. "Yuriko?" She gasped.

"What?" Lisisa, Carina and Zarah all spoke at once scrambling to their feet. All of them came to their feet now, turning to watch their adopted sister kiss Filrian and then begin to run towards them through the sand.

"Yuriko!" Lisisa was the first to break from the patio in a sprint, followed quickly by the rest of her sisters.

Sadi and Carisia pressed close to Andro on either side of him and looked up into his face. They saw happiness in his azure colored eyes as his arms drew them tighter and they watched Arrarn and Resumar pull Narice, Toria and Athani toward the petite dark haired woman. "This is Yuriko I take it." Sadi said softly.

Andro nodded his head and smiled. "Come... let me introduce you to my sister." He said. "She has been gone a long time and now she has come home."

Andro held their hands tightly as he led them off the patio onto the beach. Sadi and Carisia watched as Eliani was embracing the young woman, Lisisa and Carina hanging off each other while Zarah clung to Yuriko's arm. As soon as Eliani released her, Denali was next to scoop his older sister into his arms, followed by Resumar and then Arrarn. Lisisa had tears in her eyes, Carina was openly weeping holding tightly to Moneus's arm, Zarah and Eliani holding to one another. Yuriko's moist eyes watched as Andro walked up holding the hands of the two stunning young women. She squeezed Arrarn one last time before whispering for him to put her down. Arrarn stepped away and drew Narice and Toria into his arms with an animated smile as Yuriko looked at Andro when he stopped in front of her and she wiped her eyes.

"*Ol uriu thul ichl verve yol dos inbal thul delmah dalniniil.*" Andro spoke softly. (It has been too long since you have been home sister.)

Yuriko nodded her head. "*Delmah vel'klar Usstan wund'akh.*" Yuriko said. (Home where I belong)

"*Udtila ilharn zhaun dos inbal raq'tus?*" Andro asked. (Does father know you have arrived?)

Yuriko nodded. "He was the first one I contacted." She smiled warmly. "He would not shut up Andro. Our mothers had to pull him away so that I could dock my ship!"

"Wait!" Lisisa spoke shocked. "Father... father knows you are here?"

Andro burst out laughing and embraced Yuriko, lifting her into his arm and crushing her to him. The woman, the sister that had taught him even more than Lisisa, she was finally home and no longer would she have to remain away from home under the guise of some ridiculous façade. Yuriko basked in the feelings of Andro's arms around her as Filrian walked up and was greeted by Deni and Arrarn. She had succeeded in her

mission. The mission both she and her father knew was important. Now she was back home and now new things would require her attention, but at least she would be back among her family.

The final Leonidas child was once more home.

None of them noticed the small six inch diameter sphere floating several hundred feet above them. It resided just outside the cone of Mindvoice dampeners that Andro had established around the island and it was recording everything that was happening.

GYTHEIO PIER SIDE APARTMENTS

It was a small apartment and crowded with electronic equipment and two computer stations. The large bay windows faced the gulf across the street and Cranae Island was easily seen in the distance. The two men, one human and one elf, sat at the computer stations side by side and manipulated their controls. Empty food containers were strewn about the main room and the apartment appeared as if no one had cleaned it for some time. They turned from their stations when the door beeped and slid open to reveal the elf female with dark hair. She walked in confidently carrying the large bag over her shoulder and the jacket in one hand. She walked into the main room of the apartment and her eyes took in the state of the apartment and grimaced.

“I got here as soon as I could.” She spoke walking up behind them. “Don’t you guys ever clean this place?”

“We aren’t paid to clean Dilaen.” The human man replied with a grin.

“Yes... I can see that Thomas.” She replied. “So why did you call? I was busy trying to arrange something with the royal family for an interview with Athani Leonidas.”

Thomas motioned to the three computer screens in front of him. “Take a look. Hatol picked up on it first and then he called me. We got here six hours ago.”

“Picked up on what?” Dilaen asked as she looked at the center monitor.

“Seven *STRIKER DTs* made an unannounced landing on Prince Androcles’s island late this morning.” The elf man spoke. “They came in low out of the gulf and were not picked up on radar.”

Dilaen nodded. “So... that happens all the time.” She stated.

Hatol nodded. “I know... but what made it different was not the ships landing themselves but who got off the ships.”

“How were you able to determine who got off them?” Dilaen asked. “The Mindvoice bubble that surrounds the island also does an excellent job of rendering any and all surveillance drones inert. And there is a law that says we can not use any type of military grade equipment to obtain footage of the Royal family.”

“What we are using is not military.” Thomas said. “I built it from parts I purchased in Sparta and Eden City. I was going to use it to spy on you at your home Dilaen...”

Dilaen looked at him and her eyes narrowed as she shoved him in the back of his shoulder. “Very funny.” She snapped.

“It’s essentially a remote drone.” Thomas explained. “I left out anything that might be considered military in nature. All it has are two small thrusters, and an onboard camera system. My brother’s son needed something to use for a school project so I built him this. He wanted to get footage of falcons nesting in a mountain range.”

“It can not be detected?” Dilaen asked.

“Not easily... and not because it’s stealthy.” Thomas answered. “I used a thin nickel coating on the shell to protect against the harshness of the mountains in winter. It just so happens that it reflects the heat back just as easily as it insulates from the cold. It can’t be picked up on radar, and there’s nothing illegal about it. I parked it just outside the range of the Mindvoice dampeners and we’ve been taking pictures all day. It’s only six inches in diameter so you could be looking right at it and not see it if it doesn’t move.”

Dilaen smiled. “Thomas... I am impressed.” She stated placing her warm hand on his shoulder now. “So what do we have?”

“What we have Dilaen is all of the Leonidas children and their dragons, minus Normya Leonidas and the five smaller ones.” Hatol answered as he adjusted the screen in front of him.

“We are still trying to find out where Normya And Queen Dysea are?” Dilaen spoke as she gazed at the monitor. “They appear to have completely dropped off the network since it was announced Normya hit the Jump Gate upon exit.” She pointed to the screen her eyes wide. “Is that...?”

Hatol nodded. “The new Princess of the Union.” He stated. “One Athani Leonidas.”

Dilaen watched as the golden blond hair of the young woman caught the breeze as she walked off the back of the STRIKER with Resumar. They were hand in hand and followed quickly by Prince Resumar’s dragon Cemath and a dragon she had never seen before. The dragon had coal black scales on his upper body and a dull white underbelly. She continued to watch as two women exited the STRIKER, one with long black hair and another with flame red hair. They held hands as they walked down the ramp, until Dilaen saw Arrarn Leonidas bolt down the ramp to catch up with them and pull them both into a very intimate embrace while kissing the dark haired women.

“It looks like Arrarn Leonidas has discovered some company.” Thomas spoke.

“Who are they?” Dilaen asked. “I’ve never seen them before.”

“I took close up images of them, well as close as I could get the cameras.” He answered. “They are a little grainy, but useable. I’m running them through several different databases. As well as this one.”

Dilaen watched as he adjusted the monitor to show another woman with black hair, equally as long and lustrous as the first, and riding on the back of the cerise red scaled body of another dragon she did not recognize as being so close to the Leonidas family. Dilaen immediately recognized Elynth as she guided her muscular body down the ramp and then she saw Prince Androcles walk down the ramp running his hands along the red dragon’s hind quarter. He moved up to where the woman sat in the saddle and she practically leaped into his arms where they shared what could only be described as a blistering kiss of passion. Dilaen’s eyes grew even wider when she saw Princess Sadi walk down the ramp in her flight suit and the prince lowered this strange woman to the ground as Sadi walked up to them. Then she saw the two of them share an equally passionate kiss before they began walking towards the villa.

“Wow!” Dilaen spoke softly. “Any idea who that is?”

“Thomas already told you we’re working on it.” Hatol said with a grin. “Could she be the one from the café?”

Dilaen shook her head. “No... we are pretty sure that one is an elf female. We were able to extrapolate her features even from under the helmet she had on. We have a solid picture of her and we’re washing it through the public military database. I’m almost one hundred percent positive she is a pilot on the SCIMITAR. I’m trying to find out her name and other information. This one is different though.”

“Well... judging from how Princess Sadi is acting... she approves.” Thomas spoke.

“And if I know anything... that red dragon is hers.” Hatol said. “We’ve been monitoring them all day and she has been the one taking care of him. The second dark haired woman takes care of the other new dragon.”

Dilaen pointed to the monitor. “Wow... this is Malic and Vincix.” She stated. “Princess Eliani’s and Star Commander Sinthe’s new husband and mate. Carina and Zarah Leonidas... Moneus Simpson. All of them are here.”

Thomas nodded. “looks like a regular family get together.” He said. “With the exception of these three new women and Athani Leonidas... we know who all of them are.”

“They aren’t Lycavorian or elf.” Dilaen spoke. “If I had to guess I’d say they were vampires.”

“How can you tell?” Hatol asked looking at the monitor.

“Even though they are tanned... their skin tone is lighter.” Dilaen said.

“Every vampire rider in the Union is known to us Dilaen.” Thomas said. “Hell... there are only twelve of them. Nyla Sinthe is one... but these three aren’t part of the other eleven. King Leonidas made it a point to show that even vampires can become riders when they graduated and they were popular news for a time.”

Dilaen nodded. “Yes I know.”

“So who are they?” Hatol asked looking at her.

“I guess we’ll just have to find out won’t we?” Dilaen said as she watched the monitor. “We... wait... is this happening now?” She asked pointing to the monitor.

Thomas nodded. “Yeah. Real time... neat huh?”

“That’s Yuriko Leonidas!” Dilaen gasped as she pointed to the woman who was now being embraced by the Leonidas children.

“What? I thought she was... I thought she was like banished or something.” Thomas said.

“Her and the King had a very public falling out if that is what you are referring to.” Dilaen answered. “She hasn’t been seen or heard from in nearly four years. And now she shows up on Cranae Island out of the blue. That is very interesting.”

“No one ever said following the life of the Royal family would be dull.” Thomas chipped in with a smile.

“Keep working at it.” Dilaen spoke softly. “Pull your remote back Thomas. I don’t want to lose this source of information for us.” She looked at him with bright blue eyes. “I am very impressed.” She leaned over and kissed his cheek. “Let me know the moment you are able to find out who these women are.”

Thomas nodded. “Will do.” He answered.

“I need to head back to the main office and do some research of my own.” Dilaen said now. “I want to know where Yuriko Leonidas has been for the last four years and why she is suddenly no longer *persona non grata* within the Royal Family.”

Thomas looked at her. “Watch your tail Dilaen.”

Dilaen looked at him. “Thomas... I didn’t know you cared?” She spoke huskily.

“I do. I love this kind of work... but with the Royal Family you don’t know want to make too many waves. They aren’t particularly fond of people trying to dig into their private lives if you know what I mean.” Thomas said as he rose to his feet.

“They are public figures.” Dilaen spoke watching him as he came closer. He was nearing six feet in height and towered over her five foot frame easily. He was also very handsome in his own right Dilaen noticed for the first time. She had never viewed him in such a way for the entire five years they had worked together. “It is part of the way things are.”

“Just so long as we don’t end up out of work or in prison.” Thomas said stopping right in front of her and looking down into her face. “We keep things truthful and accurate just like we always have.”

Dilaen nodded. “That is without question Thomas.” She stated. She stepped closer to him now feeling something very different between them in all the excitement of what they were discovering. “Stay in touch Thomas.” She whispered to him. “I mean that.”

Thomas Gunner nodded his head slowly surprised at Dilaen’s sudden concerned tone. “I will.” He answered her.

Dilaen nodded and moved to the door of the apartment. She glanced back at him quickly as the door opened and smiled before stepping into the corridor. Thomas shook his head as the door closed and he turned back to Hatol.

“She finds you attractive Thomas.” Hatol spoke now.

Gunner looked at him. “Yeah... right. What have you been smoking?” He asked moving back to his chair.

“Trust me my friend. I’m an elf... I know these things.” Hatol said.

Gunner waved his hand in dismissal. “You are seeing things. She’s got no interest in me at all. I’m human. C’mon... let’s try and pan the remote out wider before we pull it all the way in.”

SPARTA KAVALIAN EMBASSY

Jalersi’Puat moved slowly down the corridor on the third floor of the embassy lost in her own thoughts. This was the floor that would house the majority of the embassy staff once they were allowed to have a full staff. It was empty for the most part now as those members already assigned were being kept on the second floor. Jalersi had been pacing the corridors of this floor since the day Athani had left. Her younger sister’s words and actions had thrown Jalersi for a loop. The first day she had been angry with Athani. Angry because Athani had left her to deal with their father’s fury at what she had done. Their father blamed Jalersi for not keeping more of a leash on Athani, he blamed her because Athani had made all of them look the fool. Timur,

Qurot, Jiss and Matuarr would not even speak to her after that incident at the café when Jalersi simply stood there and did nothing. They said she should have done more, that she should have physically restrained her sister and kept her from leaving. It was well known that no Lycavorian male would strike a woman for any reason, or at least that is what they believed, and they felt it was Jalersi's position to restrain Athani and keep her from defecting. The truth of the matter was that Jalersi was in a state of shock at the strength of will which her sister had displayed. The determined firmness of her voice and demeanor when she announced proudly she was defecting. How she told Qurot in that mocking tone how he would never have her purity. That she had given it to a man that she loved. A man who loved and worshiped her. And then to see Androcles Leonidas smash Qurot to the ground with such ease and even less hesitation as he had stood up and defended his brother and Athani without question.

It was something that Jalersi should have done she knew. She should have defended her sister. She should have defended her for all those years, but in her own twisted way she had allowed Pusintin to rape her sister for that time, thinking that this more than anything protected her. In the ways of her people Jalersi thought, what she pushed her sister into was defending and protecting her. In reality Jalersi saw now, it had done more to push Athani away than anything else. Jalersi thought back on how Resumar Leonidas had held Athani tightly to him, shielding her with his own body from Qurot as if she was some precious gem. How beautiful Athani had looked in the arms of the muscular young Prince. And then she had witnessed the sizzling kiss of love that they had shared before launching into the sky on the back of his dragon. These were the scenes that had played out countless times on the Netnews channels, further incensing Qurot and the others. These were the scenes that Pusintin had thrown back in her face when she had talked to him. Jalersi was not a fool nor was she unintelligent, and she knew immediately that her husband was lying to her. He no more cared about Athani defecting than he did the color of the sky. He was concerned more with the ramifications of her actions and of his position within the Kavalian hierarchy. Jalersi had questioned him several times on what he was doing and where he was, and each time he deftly avoided the subject and always returned to what she should have done to stop Athani. How it made the Kavalian people look foolish, and the shame it would bring to her father's Pride and their own. What hurt the most, and what possibly was the catalyst for how she felt now, when she asked him if he missed her. If he missed her in his arms, the smell of her in his nose. Jalersi felt like someone had struck her with a large metal bar when his only answer to her was how she should have done more to stop Athani. Pusintin's own words to her had done more to confirm to Jalersi where she stood in his life than what Athani had told her in the minutes before she had taken control of her life and defected. She...

Jalersi stopped in the corridor when she saw the door to the room open and low voices coming from inside. She looked around quickly trying to determine if there was a cleaning crew on this floor, or if they had begun moving some of the staff up here. Nothing reached out to her and she moved closer to the open doorway, peering into the main room of the small apartment. These embassies had been built so that each individual room was a mini apartment. It had a main living room with a small bedroom and kitchen attached. The apartments weren't overly large or glamorous, but they were comfortably furnished. The main room was only partially lit by a single lamp globe, the small desk with the computer monitor on it active with the face of the Kavalian male in a fleet uniform. A man she vaguely recognized. Then she saw him step into the dim light and Jalersi had to suppress her gasp of surprise.

Pian's towering muscular form Jalersi would never forget. He wore only a pair of fleet pants and his boots, his dark brown fur still damp from what could only be a shower. He was using a thick brush to comb out the hair on his head, the thinner and shorter fur on his face already impeccably groomed. Even under his coat of fur Jalersi could see the steel hard muscles and extreme definition. This was a different Pian than the one who had shared her bed that single night after Pusintin's return. His six foot four frame was without question much more defined in its muscularity, his entire coat of fur was now much shorter and smoothly groomed. She remembered it had been wild and tangled when she had given herself to him all those years ago.

Pusintin had returned from Earth, his brother almost killing him in a ferocious and barbaric duel between two wolves of equal size and lethal ability that hated one another. A battle of brothers. Pusintin had shunned her upon his return as he healed, unwilling to allow her to care for him or many times to even see him. He remained at his Kavalian father's home for weeks on end and ignored her. Jalersi didn't remember what brought her to Pian's home that night. It may have been loneliness or the beginnings of what she felt was

happening now. All she knew was that it had been the most erotic and passionate night of wild sex she had had in her lifetime. The times with her husband were nothing compared to what Pian had done to her. He was several inches larger than Pusintin, and much thicker as was the norm with Kavalian men. Jalersi could not remember how many times he had taken her that night, only that she was deliciously sore for two full days afterwards.

Her horror and anger at what she had done had hit her the next afternoon. Horror because she had allowed another man besides her mate to have her. The anger because throughout it all, Pian had never once locked groins with her while he spilled his seed into her. She was angry at herself for succumbing to the overwhelming desire for him, and the immense pleasure she had gotten out of it, but also angry with Pian because he feared Pusintin enough to not take the chance of impregnating Jalersi with his child. Looking at him now, so superbly groomed and defined, Jalersi once more felt the tug in her own loins for him. A tug that had been there for as long as she could remember. A desire that Athani had seen in her far clearer than Jalersi had seen herself. She remained quiet as she realized the Kavalian male on the monitor was Pian's younger brother Galisk.

"...fears a purge of some sort will start because of what Athani has done Pian." Galisk spoke from the monitor.

Pian shook his head. "They will not act in this way Galisk." He spoke confidently. "If they begin to oppress the people more there is too much of a chance of this type of activity leaking out. That is not something they will risk now that they have established diplomatic ties with the Union. The Union would no doubt protest this vehemently."

"You sound very sure of that Pian." Galisk spoke.

"I am. I saw this coming in Athani many years ago. Her spirit... I knew they would never be able to break her spirit." He replied. "This plan they have Galisk... they did not give us all of the parts to it. There is far more to it than what the Prefect gave to Jiss and Matuarr. They will undoubtedly review it and tell the Prefect it is a fine plan and without fault. Qurot and Timur as well. And they will do this without having all the information."

"You don't believe this plan will work Pian?" Galisk asked.

"No plan is without some fault." Pain spoke. "Qurot and the others will fall behind it with no questions because all of them wish to gain more. They will not care about what they have not seen and that is what ultimately leads to failure. I have no interest in gaining more than I have within our military Galisk... you know this brother. I do not aspire to command huge fleets. I have my ship and our Pride's ships and that is enough. We have always defended what our people have and that will never change. I want only one thing now, you know that."

"Pian... I do not understand that part of you." Galisk said. "She changed you."

"She did not change me Galisk." Pian spoke.

"No? Look at you brother. You have become leaner and far stronger. You have become educated! You are the most finely groomed of our entire Pride, and we are all well groomed. Our mother could not be happier about that. Our Pride has become stronger than ever under your leadership since father passed on and you keep us out of the ridiculous and petty infighting between the Prides. You need children Pian. Strong children to carry on what you have begun for the Nruarani Pride."

"I want only her Galisk." Pian spoke. "I will succeed one day."

"Is she worth it brother?"

"As Athani's Puat never lost her desire and spirit to be free, I will never lose my desire and spirit for her sister. Yes... she is more than worth it." Pian answered. "Now tell me... what have you discovered?"

"It is as you thought." Galisk replied. "There have been four times that I can name for certain and probably more... but I did not want to delve too deeply. The questions I asked were well within my level of security and not out of place. They drew no suspicion. Will you tell her Pian?"

Pian shook his head. "No. If I did this... it will only make it appear as if I am being vindictive. I do not want her to love me because of what her husband has done. I want her to love me for who I am. He is a idiot Galisk... and she will discover it eventually all by herself. Jalersi's Puat is no fool."

“What will she do if she discovers it Pian?” Galisk asked. “Technically he has done nothing wrong according to our laws. The Prefect no doubt knows about these instances as well Pain.” Galisk said. “Are you sure this connection is secure?”

Pian smiled as he settled into the chair. “It is secure Galisk. I would not put you at risk if it wasn’t brother. To answer your question... I don’t know what she would do.”

“Do you think she would ask for an Edict of Dissolution if she discovered this? It is one of the things that our females have the right to do.” Galisk asked.

Pian shook his head. “I don’t know. I know I will protect her from harm for as long as I am with her. I do not trust Qurot or Timur to protect her. Not while we are here.”

“You don’t think the Union would do something do you?” Galisk asked.

Pian shook his head. “It is not the Union I am worried about. If it is within their power to prevent, then no harm will come to Jalersi. It is that which is not within their realm of control that concerns Karun and I both.”

“I will continue to keep my eyes and ears open brother.” Galisk spoke. “If I feel you should know something I will contact you in this manner.”

Pian nodded. “Remain safe Galisk. I will talk to you soon.”

Pian waited until the secure transmission had faded before he stood up and deactivated the monitor. He took a deep breath and looked towards the window in his apartment.

“You can come out now Jalersi.” He stated as he turned to the door. “I know you are there.”

Jalersi stepped into the doorway slowly her beautiful blue eyes wide. “How did you...?”

Pian stepped closer to her his eyes never wavering from her gaze. “We may have shared only one night together Jalersi’ Puat... but I will never forget how you smell. I don’t need to be Lycavorian to use my sense of smell more than our people do.”

“Pian... Pian I...”

“How much did you hear?” Pain asked gently.

Jalersi met her eyes. “Pian... what has your brother discovered about my husband?” She asked.

“Jalersi you...”

Jalersi took his hand in hers and squeezed. “Pian’Nruarani... if you care anything for me... you will tell me what it is your brother discovered about Pusintin.”

“Care for you?” Pian gasped. “Look at me Jalersi! Look at me! I am this way for you! I have changed who I am for you! I *like* who I am now... but I changed for you! Because I wanted you! I have known since that night I have wanted you and no other! I have changed who I am in the hopes that one day I would be able to win your affection. Informing on your vile husband and his activities is not the way I wanted to do it! You should not have listened to a private conversation.” He spoke turning away and moving to the window, passing his hand over the sensor so that the blinds slid open the rest of the way and lights of the city of Sparta poured into his near dark room.

Jalersi stared at his broad back finding herself admiring the exquisite definition of his powerful shoulders and back and the way his short hair flowed over his skin. She stepped closer to him fighting back the urge to touch him and run his fingers through the soft hair. Silhouetted against the skyline as he now was caused tremors of desire to sweep through her as she remembered their night together once more.

“How is it that you... how is that you have secure communications outside the normal one provided to the embassy?” She asked. “And how is it that you get around the Union’s ability to jam anything outside of the main terminal?”

Pian turned only his head and looked at her from over his shoulder. “I am a Pride leader Jalersi.” He said softly.

“Qurot is also a Pride leader and he does not have this ability.” Jalersi said moving closer to him.

“Qurot is an idiot who craves only power.” Pian hissed. “His Pride members follow him because they fear him. I do not crave power and the Nruarani Pride follow me because they respect me. I will not throw their lives away needlessly and they know that.”

“Tell me Pian.” Jalersi asked him watching him turn to look at her once more. “Please tell me.”

“I asked my brother to discover if Pusintin has exercised his right under the Senior Pride Leader’s Act to take others into his bed.” Pian spoke finally.

“He has... hasn't he?” Jalersi asked suddenly feeling her anger towards Pusintin begin to grow into hatred. Pure unadulterated hatred.

“You heard my brother's answer Jalersi.” Pian said. “It is no different than what you have already begun to suspect.”

“Why would you do this?” Jalersi asked softly after a moment and looking at him.

“What does it matter Jalersi?” Pian asked quietly. “You have told me yourself that I do not know how to love. That the night we shared would never be repeated. Why do you care why I did it?”

“Yet you told your brother you would never lose your desire or spirit for me.” Jalersi said as she felt something else begin to make its trek across her body.

Pian looked at her as if she had gone crazy. “Any man would be fool to desire more than you!” He hissed softly. “If they desire more than what you provide to them, then they do not deserve you to begin with!”

Jalersi stared into his dark eyes, Athani's words that day coming back to her now.

“Pian has changed Jalersi. He has changed for you.” Athani spoke softly. “Why do you think he is so well groomed now? Why do you think he returned to his schooling even as a fleet officer and got a Decree of Education? Why do you think he has never taken a mate in all the years since that day?”

“Athani stop it!” Jalersi spoke.

“He loves you Jalersi.” Athani spoke. “Even Karun sees it. You do too... you just won't admit to yourself your own feelings. And do not sit there and tell me you feel nothing for him because you would be lying to me.”

Jalersi thought back to when she had seen the *Durcunusaan* soldiers pull him from the back of the transport on the King's ship. He had been beaten so severely they did not think he would survive. She had felt the concern for him nearly consume her then and she did not know why. Yet he had survive, only for her to discover he had volunteered to come here and be with her.

“Pian... I...”

Pian lifted his hand and with far more tenderness than Jalersi ever expected from him, he placed two fingers on her lips silencing her words. “I am not afraid anymore Jalersi'Puat.” He stated. “I am not afraid anymore... but I will not take advantage of your anger with Pusintin because he is blind to the treasure he has in front of him.”

Jalersi lifted her blue eyes and met his gaze taking in features that could be horribly frightening if he wanted them to be, but were now soft and warm as they looked at her. “You... you consider me a treasure Pian'Nruarani ?” She asked softly.

“To me... to me Jalersi'Puat you are the most valuable treasure in the universe.” He replied. “If I had you... if I had your love, I would need nothing else in my life. Not power. Not position. Not wealth. You are all of these things and so much more all wrapped into one.” He drew his fingers back along her cheek. “Go now Jalersi. Please do not make this any harder for me than it already is.”

Jalersi nodded slowly and let his fingers fall away as she turned and began moving towards the door. She stopped just before reaching the door as Athani's words once more resonated in her mind.

“Jalersi... have you ever thought about what it would be like to live like they do? Do you never wish for something more than what you have?”

Jalersi then did something she had never consciously done before in her four hundred and thirty-three year old life. Jalersi'Puat made a decision because she wanted to. She made a decision based on something she wanted and desired. She lifted her hand and passed it over the sensor on the side of the door and watched as the door responded instantly and closed. When she heard it click into a locked position she felt the swell of desire in her begin to bubble forth. Without turning around she reached up and began unfastening the ivory white jumpsuit she was wearing.

“Show me Pian.” She said softly.

“Jalersi... you...”

Jalersi pulled the top of the jumpsuit from her shoulders and in a single graceful motion peeled it down her legs and off her body until she was standing in front of Pian completely naked, her back to him. She stepped to the side and pressed her body against the cool wall in the customary position of submissiveness for a Kavalian female, her blond hair falling to the middle of her firm ass cheeks like spun silk.

“Show me Pian’Nruarani.” She whispered once more, feeling the fire in her body beginning to grow hotter.

Jalersi heard the snarl of want and tearing of fabric and then he was upon her. He pushed her against the cold wall and she gasped when his immensely powerful body pressed up against her back. She hissed in sudden delight as his hands touched her thighs flaming her desire even more. Instead of the rough pawing she expected Jalersi’s eyes grew wide when his hands began to explore her flesh intimately and ever so gently. His fingers dragged across the flesh of her legs and hips, his stroke so hot that no matter where he touched she felt electric currents pulsing through her. This she did not expect and she could not stop the overwhelming surge of passion that was rapidly smashing aside any doubts she may have had. If the exploration of his hands did not convince her that Pian meant every word he had said to her, his next action persuaded her beyond any reasonable or basis of thought.

Pian gripped her waist and he spun her around within his arms before lifting her off the floor and crushing her body between his broad chest and the wall behind her. His hands cupped her firm ass and he looked at her with an inferno in his dark eyes and a craving that Jalersi had never seen in Pusintin’s eyes. A craving for her.

“You... you will never be submissive Jalersi’Puut! Not to me! Not to any man!” Pain hissed out the words before plunging his lips down on hers and stealing her breath away with a kiss that burned away all that Jalersi had been.

As the conflagration within her heart and soul erupted, Jalersi’Puut wrapped her arms around Pian’s massive shoulders, her large breasts crushed almost painfully to his fur covered chest and she kissed him back with every ounce of her living being. She felt the flared head of his huge cock press against her already soaked opening and the memories of his size and girth came rushing back to her in that instant.

I am not afraid anymore Jalersi’Puut.

Pian’s words echoed in her mind like a horn and her lips tore away from his as he pulled her down on his massive cock. Her stunning blue eyes opened wide in blissful, agonizing pleasure as Pian speared her with his entire fourteen inch cock in one dominating plunge. As every thick wonderful inch of his pulsing shaft pummeled its way into her body, it smashed aside the old Jalersi’Puut and made room for the new. When she ended her glorious plummet onto Pian’s throbbing shaft and felt his enormous balls press tightly against her ass cheeks, Jalersi erupted in the most soul shattering orgasm of her life.

And her rebirth began.

BELID IMMORTAL BASE

As’hia reached up and allowed her fingers to gently touch where Lynom’s fangs had sunk deeply into her flesh as she watched him busy himself near the door. The two small marks were almost fully healed and would disappear from her skin by the end of the day tomorrow. She had foolishly attempted to attack who she thought was Lynom when he had come into her cell two nights ago. She was completely healed she knew and she felt as if all of her normal power and speed had returned. As’hia was of the mind that if he had left her a knife it was for a purpose. There was only one problem with her actions.

The Immortal that had entered her cell was not Lynom.

She had not wanted to kill Lynom and she was poised only to injure him so that she could question him. Her downward slash with the knife only managed to produce a four inch long slice in the skin of the Immortal before As’hia realized it wasn’t Lynom. By then it was too late. Fueled by anger and alcohol, this Immortal had come to rape her. He had followed Lynom to her cell and knocked him unconscious before entering. His first

blow set her head to ringing and sent her flying across the cell, the knife skittering useless across the floor in the opposite direction. Laughing hysterically to himself about how he had taken Ralmin out of the picture and now he would have her, he began advancing across the cell toward her dazed form while unbuckling his pants. As'hia's eyes were darting back and forth, trying to focus and find a weapon she could use to defend herself. A single blow from this Immortal had knocked her almost senseless and without a weapon she would not be able to fight him. He would have his way with her and because of her own selfish attitude there was nothing she would be able to do about it. Unable to find anything to fight with As'hia rolled back over on the floor to see him directly above her. She prepared to scratch and claw him to death if that would help but as she lifted her hands to do this, the point of a sword blade burst from the front of the Immortal's chest. As'hia could only watch as it appeared to happen in slow motion. She saw Lynom appear from behind the Immortal, his features twisted into a mask of rage unlike anything she had ever seen in her lifetime. She watched as he twisted the arm of the Immortal savagely upwards and back. She could hear the popping of his shoulder sounding like a P190 as if went off. She watched him open his mouth to scream out his agony but no sound came forth as Lynom buried the blade of his Immortal fighting knife into the soft tissue under his jaw. The blade sliced through his tongue and the roof of his mouth and buried itself deeply into the Immortal's brain. Lynom twisted the blade viciously, no doubt tearing hundreds of brain cells to pieces as the Immortal's body rose on its tiptoes trying to escape the agonizing pain. As'hia watched the body twitch grotesquely twice and then Lynom tore the blade free and sent a crippling front side kick smashing into the Immortal's head. She had never seen such a tall individual, such a muscular individual able to kick as high as Lynom did. His heavy boot crushed the side of the Immortal's head, the sound of his skull cracking like a gunshot in the enclosed room. The force of the kick lifted him off the floor and sent his body rocketing across the cell before crunching against the opposite wall of the cell.

And then Lynom's crazy eyes fell upon her.

They had changed to cobalt blue now, and As'hia realized then that when he allowed his vampire blood to come forth from where it remained always hidden and mix with his Immortal blood, Lynom became a near unstoppable master of destruction and death.

“I told you to not attempt anything foolish!” He had screamed at her. “Now there is only one way I can protect you!”

As'hia didn't even see him move, and before she could draw another breath into her body his vampire fangs had sunk deeply into her neck and he fed. As'hia tried to beat him off, but found her arms had no strength in them as he held her body crushed against his. She felt no pain, only incredible pleasure and an indescribable warmth flood through her. Within moments she was clutching his shoulders tightly, holding onto him as he drank her blood. She couldn't remember when he released her, only that he kept apologizing and lowered her like a newborn baby to the mat. She felt extremely tired then, her eyelids heavy, and the last thing she could remember before blackness claimed her was him covering her body with the blanket.

Watching him now As'hia took notice that the back of his head was still soaked with dried blood as if the wound he had suffered had not healed. He had not spoken to her, he had barely looked at her when he had entered bringing her food and water. He brought another bundle with the food, setting that beside the tray as he opened two small packages and placed four pills on the tray next to her food.

“They have nothing resembling the juice you need to replenish what I took from you two nights ago.” His voice carried to her softly. “These pills are the best I can come up with. Take them or not... it is up to you.”

“I need nothing from you!” As'hia hissed at him.

Lynom's head snapped around and he glared at her. “If you wish to survive you need to listen to me!” He spat angrily. “If you wish to see your parents again you need to do as I tell you! I am trying to protect you!”

As'hia rubbed her neck where he had bitten her. “If that is your idea of protecting me... I will do without it thank you.”

As'hia gasped when he blurred and was instantly beside her, leaning over her and causing her to push back against the wall. His eyes had once more changed to cobalt blue and they stared at her angrily.

“If I had not done what I did, then right now you would be getting gang raped by every Immortal on this base As'hia of the elves!” Lynom spoke the words cruelly. “You are not fully healed from what you have endured, no matter how much you believe you are! You can not shift to wolf form to heal the internal injuries

that they inflicted on you. They will only heal as fast as your elven metabolism can cure them! Attacking that Immortal was one of the stupidest things you have no doubt ever done!”

“I... I thought he was you!” As'hia stammered.

“If it had been me... I would not have had to do what I did!” Lynom nearly screamed. “By having to kill that pig of my people, you forced me to prove to Phy’iad I had taken you as my property! You forced me into a position where I had to bite you to keep you safe! It was the only way to justify killing that idiot! Why do you think I have almost never left the door of your cell? Do you think it was because I wanted to remain here and ogle you while you slept? I stayed because it was the only way for me to keep the others from raping you! Because I had not marked you in the way of our people! It was... it was not something I wanted to do!”

“It sure seemed like you were enjoying it when you were feeding on my blood!” As'hia snarled at him.

Lynom leaned even closer to her, his forehead touching hers. “Your blood tastes like foul stagnant water!” He growled at her. “Do not flatter yourself she elf!”

“How... how does feeding on my blood protect me you bastard!” As'hia snapped. “It is just a different kind of rape!”

Lynom’s face suddenly softened considerably and his eyes changed back to their normal dark brown almost instantly. This transformation shocked As'hia and for a fleeting moment she saw compassion and concern in his dark eyes. Then those eyes became the emotionless orbs she had seen since she had been here.

“If that... if that Immortal had raped you... if he had seen that I had not bitten you...” Lynom took a deep breath and leaned back several inches from her face. His willow flower scent filled her senses then and almost made her head spin. “If he had reported back to Phy’iad that you were not bitten, that I had not marked you, Phy’iad would have become suspicious. And while his men were having their way with you, he would have been interrogating me. You left me no option! I had to bite you. Now they will smell me in your blood and they will leave you alone. At least as long as you do nothing stupid as you did two nights ago. No matter what you believe or think about me or my people, I am trying to keep you safe. I... I told my brother to tell your parents I would keep you safe.”

As’hia’s eyes grew wider as he moved away from her and returned to the bundle. She scrambled to get her feet under her and moved closer to him. “My parents?” She gasped. “What do you mean? You have... you have talked to my parents? How?”

“Not your parents.” Lynom replied softly. “My brother Tir’ut. He is on Apo Prime with Queen Dysea, my mother and his *il kal’daka darthirii*.”

“His what?” As'hia asked.

Lynom looked at her. “You do not speak our language? I thought all Spartans warriors were instructed in the ancient vampire language?”

As'hia could not meet his eyes. “It is... it is a course I barely passed during my schooling. I did not feel the need to learn it.” She answered. “My... my mother and father can speak it fluently but I have no vampire friends. I did not see how it was necessary.”

“*Il kal’daka darthirii* means she-wolf elf.” Lynom told her. “It is the name my brother has given to the one he loves and will one day take as his *Du’ased ‘ranndi*. His Blessed Wife. Your parents would have arrived on Apo Prime sometime today their time.”

“You expect me to believe an elf is in love with your brother?” As'hia spoke.

“She is like you.” Lynom answered. “Half elf and half wolf. And you will believe what you will. I no longer care.”

“How can you talk to your brother if he is on Apo Prime?” As'hia snapped harshly. “Wouldn’t your friends detect you using secure communications to speak with your brother in Union space?”

Lynom glared at her. “They are not my friends!” He growled the words.

“You are an Immortal!” As'hia quipped.

“I am only half Immortal!” Lynom snapped turning to face her now. “My mother is a pureblood vampire!”

“You sure... you sure look like an Immortal to me.” As'hia spoke.

“This is not how I look!” Lynom barked. “Do you think I like having to look like this? To wear the skin of the man I replaced? He was a mindless brute of an Immortal! Uneducated and unskilled. My twelve year old

brother has more intelligence than he did. He fell out of favor with the High Coven and was going to come here! We intercepted him and I took his place!”

“Twelve year old brother?” As'hia asked surprised.

“Tir’ut is older than me by a year. I have two younger brothers. Twelve and nine. My mother and father will try for a daughter next.” Lynom replied.

“So how can you talk to your brother if you are not using communications?” As'hia asked.

Lynom tapped his forehead lightly. “We communicate regularly within Mindvoice.” He answered. “My mother is a powerful Mindvoicer, trained by the witch Empress Aikiro herself. Combined with the natural strength of Immortals to shield Tir’ut and I developed advanced skills. We have a connection we use to give reports. We do not use it often or for very long. It is very difficult to maintain the connection.” Lynom’s face grew softer. “Well... it was until Normya and Iriral began helping us. They are stronger than us.”

“Normya?” As'hia gasped. “Normya Leonidas?”

Lynom met her eyes. “Yes. Do you know her?”

“Know her... she is a Princess of the Union!” As'hia exclaimed. “I suppose you are going to tell me she is the one who will marry your brother? I’m supposed to believe that? You must think I am a fool Lynom. You have done nothing but lie to me since I got here!”

“I have never lied to you!” Lynom spoke. “I will never lie to you!”

“I don’t believe you!” As'hia snarled. “How can you come and go here and no one knows what we are talking about? You must think I am a complete fool to...”

Lynom lost his temper then and he snatched her by her hair, yanking her to her feet in a single blink. She cried out softly, her hands going to where he had hold of her hair. As'hia had no choice but to follow him as he walked out into the corridor, practically dragging her along with his long strides. Fear began to wash over her then, her heart racing nearly out of control. She heard soft cries and harsh grunting and then Lynom pulled her in front of him and her dark eyes went wide when she looked down into the huge room from far above. In the room below were dozens of female elves, close to forty if she counted accurately, and at the moment all of them were sexually servicing Immortals in every conceivable way and position. Their cries of delight filtered to As'hia’s ears, even those female elves that were handling two and sometimes three Immortals. As'hia found herself backing up against Lynom, trying to get away, his huge body blocking any exit for her.

“Once a day they come here.” His voice spoke softly from behind her. “For three... and sometimes four hours this perversion goes on. These are the female elves who have been broken by these vile scum of my father’s people. Unlike you... they are not half wolf and their bodies can not reject the addicting properties of those *vithu* creatures below. They want to submit... they must submit or they risk going insane and dying. This is the time I come to see you... because even Phy’iad must participate in this orgy of decadence and dishonor. For most of the elves below... they do not know which Immortal broke them... and because of that they must fuck all of them or risk death.

Lynom released his hold on her hair but As'hia was frozen in her spot unable to tear her eyes from the horror that was happening below. She felt his arm slip around her waist and pull her tightly against his powerful frame. “You may believe me or not As'hia of the elves... but this is the fate that awaited you if I had not done what I did. If it had been discovered I had not marked you, if I had not taken your blood, this is where you would have spent the rest of your days. And since you would have fought them, they would have taken great pleasure in beating you into submission before they raped you for hours.” As'hia heard and felt him take a deep breath before continuing. “I came here to send information to my father on this group of putrid parasites. They had been making inquires of my father’s tribe and we needed to discover what they knew. My father’s tribe deserted the High Coven when they tried to kill him As'hia. They succeeded in destroying my father’s sons and daughter from his pure Akruxian wife. My older brother Fash’ka was the only one of his nine children to live. They tried to kill him and failed. The High Lord Veldruk smashed him through a window some forty stories above the ground. My father felt sure he was plunging to his death. My mother Esther saved him. She allowed him to feed on her blood and she saved him. When she fell in love with him the Empress tried to kill her. She ordered her associates to rape and kill my mother for giving herself to an Immortal willingly. They escaped together and their love has only grown through the years. My father’s tribe escaped High Coven space and we settled in secret on Kranek. This group of Immortals you see below you deserted the High Coven when the

Kavalian dogs began kicking their asses. The few inquiries they made of us were passed on to my parents by friends we have made in The Wilds.

“My tribe is no longer what you have been schooled to expect from Immortals As'hia. My mother is a genius scientist and she eradicated the chemical in Immortal blood that addicts female elves. The men in my tribe worship her for this and so much more. She is a pureblood vampire and my people revere her as the Matron mother of our tribe. Some of the men have taken elven wives in the time since we have been free. Elves that we rescued from bounty hunters or mercenaries. Our tribe now has elves and several others we count among our number. Including children.”

As'hia turned her head slowly looking at him, detecting the pride in his voice when he spoke of his father and his tribe. “The time is approaching when my father will order this nest of vermin destroyed and I will take immense pleasure as I stand beside him and my brother Tir'ut and we hand out retribution for all the vileness they have performed on others. We will leave none alive... that I promise you.”

As'hia turned back to the scene below and closed her eyes unable to watch any longer. She felt him pull her away now and he led her back to the cell within moments. He released her arm once in side her cell and bent next to the bundle, picking something up. As'hia's eyes went wide when he turned around and she saw the same knife he had left with her before.

“I have marked you. Taken your blood. Even these scum will honor that. You are deemed my property and none of the others will attempt anything.” Lynom spoke holding out the knife. “I can not remain outside your cell any longer for that would draw attention. Take this... and if you must use it do not stab behind the left ear As'hia. That will not work on an Immortal no matter how much you have been trained to believe. Stab under their jaw as I did... directly into their brain and twist as hard as you can.” As'hia looked at him stunned. “Take it woman!”

“How... how do you know I won't use it on you?” She stammered as she took the blade.

“I have tasted your blood As'hia. As Lycavorians can track prey across whole planets by their scent... I can do the same just by the smell of your blood.” Lynom spoke. “And I am hoping perhaps now you will see that without me... your life will be over. I told Tir'ut to inform your parents I would protect you and I will. With all that I am I will protect you. I can not do that if you kill me however.” He bent to pick up the rest of the bundle and held that out to her. “Besides... I don't die as easily as normal Immortals. I am half vampire.”

“How... how do I know I can trust you?” As'hia asked softly. “You... you are...”

Lynom met her eyes. “I am half Immortal yes. I am half of the species of criminal that brought you here. That did horrible things to you. I know all this. I understand why you feel as you do As'hia of the elves. I do. But it was not I who did these things... and I give you my sacred word, before we leave this place, every one of the scum who touched you in any way will die by my hand. I know who they are... all of them. None of them will survive.”

“Why... why would you do this?” As'hia asked.

Lynom stared at her for a long moment before motioning with his head to the tray. “Take the pills. They will replace the nutrients in your blood that I took. The drug they injected you with to keep you from shifting will dissipate enough for you to change in a week or so. Then you will be able to transform to heal your wounds completely. I must get back to my post before they begin returning. Our Mindvoice connection will remain open for you to contact me if you need me. I know you won't do this for you want nothing to do with me... but it is there.”

As'hia watched him turn slowly and move to the doorway. “Lynom?” She spoke waiting for him to turn back around. “Who is your father? You said the High Lord tried to kill him so that must mean he was high up within the ranks of the Immortals.”

“Why would this matter to you?” Lynom asked.

“You want me to trust you?” As'hia asked. “This is a start.”

“My father was the Immortal Captain for the High Lord Veldruk.” Lynom answered seeing her eyes grow wide. “My father's name is Cha'talla.”

“...Pian’Nruaraniiii!!”

Jalersi’Puats Columbia blue eyes rolled into the back of her head as another crushing orgasm swept through her for yet the fourth time in less than two hours. She could do nothing but clutch at Pian’s powerful shoulders, her fingers laced within the soft hair covering his body, as her entire body shuddered almost violently in release. Her lips were parted in a breathless cry of passion, her cheek pressed tightly against his neck. She felt his large hands squeeze her ass cheeks tightly, almost painfully and pull her spasming pussy even tighter around his pulsating fourteen inch shaft. Her sweet come poured forth from her body, coating his already soaked cock and drenching their lower bodies even more than they already were. The smooth tapered head of his cock was touching her in places Pusintin could never hope to reach, places he cared nothing for. Jalersi could only lay there with Pian’s massive body on top of her as she withered in unabashed enchantment, her ankles locked at the small of his back and her hips undulating of their own accord, as she tried to draw more of his incredible length deeply inside her.

It had started the moment he pulled her down on his cock. Jalersi’Puats had forgotten how wonderfully endowed he was. She had forgotten how he had stretched her beyond what Pusintin ever could achieve. She had forgotten how the heat and pulsing of his thick cock had her hissing his name in blissful passion thirty seconds after he had rammed home fully into her depths. She had forgotten all that until the moment she felt his huge balls come to rest tightly against her ass and then it all had come rushing back. Only this time... this time what she had forgotten didn’t matter in the least. This was not the same Pian’Nruarani from so long ago. She recognized that the moment his large hand closed on the back of her head and he crushed her lips against his in a kiss that stole away her ability to breath. With his enormous cock stuffing her unlike anything she could remember feeling and his thick tongue dancing with her own in a musical duet, Pian had carried her to the bed. The slick juices of her first overwhelming orgasm dripped from around his deeply buried cock, leaking from her still constricting pussy. She thought briefly this would deter him in some way, make him stop what he was doing. Jalersi had been so delectably wrong. She clung to his powerful body with her arms and legs as he lowered her to the soft mattress, never once breaking their kiss. Her large breasts were crushed against the soft fur of his muscled chest, the heat of his skin sending her into a heat of passion unlike anything she had ever experienced. This was so unlike what they had shared twenty years ago Jalersi thought for a moment that this was not Pian at all. Those thoughts left her mind when he gently took her ankles in his hands and pulled away from their kiss. He brought both her legs in front of him and positioned them over his right shoulder before looking down into her wide eyes and blissful face.

“Now I will make you mine Jalersi’Puats!” He had said.

And make her his Pian’Nruarani had done. He began slowly, pulling his huge cock from her almost completely before driving it back in with deliberate slowness. It was almost as if he wanted her to beg him to fuck her faster and harder. After eight mind numbing strokes into her extremely wet pussy Jalersi *was* begging him. She was screaming his name with abandon, thanking the stars that the rooms in the embassy were soundproof. Within minutes Pian had her whimpering in uncontrollable glee as she tore at the sheets of the bed in another mind numbing orgasm. All thoughts of her bastard husband Pusintin were shredded and tossed to the wind as this man claimed all that she was.

The quivers of that orgasm had barely left her before Pian was shifting his position once more. He pulled her up into his arms and lap, her golden hair splaying wildly around both of them as his lips dropped to her throat and he began his ministrations again. Jalersi’s mind could barely comprehend that this was Pian. His fur covered cheeks brushed across her flesh, his lips and tongue dancing across the skin of her shoulders and neck as she rocked back and forth on his still burning hot cock. When his lips found the nipples of her large breasts, that is where they stayed for what seemed like forever, sucking and nibbling the sensitive nipples while his large hands stroked her back and the area at her tailbone where her tail would have been. The moment his fingers touched that superbly sensitive area, a spot that Pusintin had long ago stopped giving attention too, Jalersi cooed out her contentment and shuddered wonderfully in a softer, gentler orgasm. She could not clutch Pian tightly enough to her as the throes of that orgasm rippled outward from her belly. His hands and fingers did not stop their work even as she clutched his head in her hands and adorned his face with soft kisses and professions of love. They were professions that Jalersi knew without doubt were truthful and spoken from her heart.

The next hour had brought them to this point. An exquisite hour of Pian exploring every crevice of her body, even while his massive cock remained firmly anchored within her depths. No matter how she moved, tiny jolts of riveting pleasure would stream across her body. Oh yes... this was not the Pian'Nruarani that had found a crack in her heart a soul and infected her. This was a different Pian... a Pian that worshiped her in every way. A Pian that had so easily shattered every wall she had built through the years. He had been so true to his word and though she wanted to, he had not allowed her to be submissive to him. He had worshiped her as one would worship a goddess, refusing to let her give him pleasure in any form. Every kiss he gave her, every stroke of his dominating cock, and Jalersi felt her life altering. She felt the old slipping away to be replaced by the new.

Athani had been so right. Her younger sister had discovered what it meant to love and be loved, and she had begged Jalersi to open herself to this. Had it not been her discovery that Pusintin was not the man she thought he was, not the man who she envisioned changing the future of her people, had she not discovered all this Jalersi would have missed all that she was feeling at this moment. Feelings and emotions and sensations Jalersi'Puat had no intention of ever letting slip away.

"...Pian'Nruaraiiiii!!" Jalersi cried out, clutching to him as he lowered her to the bed once more.

Pian lifted his upper body up and simply gazed at this lovely woman beneath him. Her golden hair splashed across the pillows of his bed, her Columbia blue eyes gazing at him with newfound love and adoration. How could any man want more than what this creature could give to them. He had made a promise to himself many years ago. Two promises actually as he had watched Jalersi walk from his home in the early morning sun twenty years ago. Even then Pian knew Pusintin was a whore for Jalersi's father. He was a Lycavorian who played at being a Kavalian. He would not bring the change the Jalersi thought he would, and through the years after, the change Pian'Nruarani embraced and knew his people needed if they were to survive as a species.

Jalersi'Puat had changed him. He had never cared for rank or power before that night with this woman, but once she was in his blood, all he cared about was reclaiming her in every way he could. He vowed to change. Even as Pusintin flaunted the fact he had Jalersi in front of him, Pian never veered from his course. He acted as any well respected Kavalian Pride Leader should, leading his men in battle. And while it seemed he followed Qurot's way of carelessly throwing away the lives of his men to gain status, Pian in fact went far out of his way to insure he was successful and the men of his Pride survived. He had led his Pride in many vicious a battle, but unlike Qurot he struggled to bring his men home and keep his Pride strong. This fact, while not talked about outside of the Nruarani Pride, this fact sealed the loyalty of his men for all time. When it appeared he was acting recklessly, Pian'Nruarani was in fact, following a carefully orchestrated road that would earn him what he desired most of all. And the object of that desire and want was now beneath him. The first promise he had made was to change who he was at his core. To improve himself and his Pride so that if the day came, Jalersi could hold her head high when she was a member of his Pride and his wife.

Pian'Nruarani's second promise, and the one he had imagined from that very first day watching her walk out of his life the first time, that promise was to worship the very ground Jalersi walked upon. In and out of his bed. That promise meant he had to treat her as an equal in all things. That meant he had to smash aside the inbred dominance of the males of their species and treat Jalersi as a precious gem. That meant he had to pleasure her so completely, so utterly in his bed, that she would never desire another. He had to show her that her future resided in his arms and in his life, and not the arms of a man who could dismiss her beauty with barely a thought.

Pian lowered himself upon her glorious body once more, feeling her delicious breasts press firmly into his chest and her long legs curl wantonly around his hips. Her arms went around his shoulders with barely a pause and Pian knew she was his. He brought his hand up slowly, using his clawed fingers to caressed her unmarred cheek and stroke her jaw and lips. Her eyes were half closed in heavy lidded passion as she hummed her happiness at his touch.

"Jalersi?" He spoke softly. The heat off her tight pussy was too much to bear now, and he could feel the familiar ache in his loins. An ache that had not been there for over twenty years.

Jalersi opened her eyes more and focused them on his handsome, fur covered face. "Pian?" She whispered to him with a beautiful smile.

"I am... I am not afraid anymore Jalersi'Puat." He said. Jalersi's eyes grew larger as she understood the connotation of his words. "I am not afraid anymore my beautiful Jalersi."

Jalersi's head flew back, the veins in her neck straining as she felt Pian ram his full length into her with startling power. She felt the thick veins adorning his cock against the walls of her pussy burning with need. She felt him tuck his face into the crock of her shoulder and neck, his hands sliding down to cup her asscheeks and then Pian'Nruarani began to pummel her tight body. Jalersi screamed in devastating pleasure, her hands clutching his shoulders as his massive cock drove into her with domineering fourteen inch strokes. Whatever resistance to what was happening that remained, and there was far less than even Jalersi knew, whatever remained of this resistance was swept aside in the wave of the pure all consuming emotion of love.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhh! Pian... Pian.... yeesssssss!" She howled. The raging tidal wave of her orgasm trampled the old Jalersi into dust and made room for the new. Her hands dropped to Pian's tight, muscular ass and she dug her nails into the hard flesh even as she felt his cock smash into her depths one last time.

"Do it! Do it my love! Fill... fill me with your come." Jalersi screamed as her head was thrashing from side to side. "Ohhhhhhhh Pian... Do it! Make... make me yours! Pleaseeeee!"

Jalersi's eyes exploded open when she felt the base of his cock engorge abundantly, the huge bulb expanding to seal them together, locking their groins as one. She felt the length of his huge cock grow even hotter and then swell within the confines of her tight pussy. She felt his body go rigid, she could feel the hammering of his heart against her bare skin and then all conscious thought left her as the first eruption of his searing hot come exploded from his cock head and sent her spinning into a plane of pleasure she had never visited before.

Jalersi'Puat's only action was to ram her hips upward, trying to swallow even more of the enormous cock buried within her. She held Pian's intoxicating asscheeks even tighter, trying to draw this man into her very being. Pian's powerful arms crushed her to him with a ferocious need that Pusintin could never hope to duplicate. All thoughts of the man who was her mate and husband, the father of her children, all thoughts of Pusintin vanished from her mind and heart to be replaced by the man who now held her. Held her in such a way that the very thought of losing her would be the end of him. The man Jalersi suddenly knew would be her future.

In that endearing moment, Jalersi'Puat knew what her sister now felt. And like her sister, it was a feeling Jalersi was unwilling to ever let go of.

No matter what the future held in store for her.

Part Two

*Pain And Fear Comprise The Forge In Which The Finest Living Weapons Are Created
This Holds True For Both Wolves And Dragons
You And Elynth Have Survived This Crucible Androcles Leonidas
Alba Tau Was Where You Were Truly Born And Forged And Where Your Father Almost Lost Himself
He Left You To Carry On In His Stead
For He Knows This Will Not Be The War That Will Decide The Fate Of Us All
Now It Is Time To Turn The Weapon You And Your Bonded Sister Have Become Loose
And Woe Unto Those Who Stand In Your Way*

*-Chronicles of the First Oracle Dustha-
-Opening Of The Kavalian Wars-
-Earth Year 2574-*

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

ELVEN CITY OF REYLAN

THREE KILOMETERS EAST OF SODRAG

SEVENS WEEKS POST SIGNING OF THE CEASE FIRE WITH THE HIGH COVEN

Her dark eyes viewed the end of the street as they came in from the outskirts, many of them leaping from their saddles before their dragon had come to a complete stop. They were different now. She had hand selected all of them for their Mindvoice ability, almost all of their bonds forming easily. What training they had been given before coming here only strengthened that bond. Now however, now they were all different. There was no hesitation in their actions, no questioning about what to do. Each of them radiated within Mindvoice brightly, some more than others, but all of them much more powerful than when they had arrived only four months before.

Androcles Leonidas had been true to his word. He was turning them into fighters. True Bonded Pairs. And Empress Aikiro of the Vampire High Coven no longer knew if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

What she saw before her now, moving easily among the streets of the elven city, was not a group of undisciplined men and women. Even before many of them had stopped their motion, they were turning to take away the saddles from their bonded ones. They landed in groups of three and four, but none of them bolted for the tavern or restaurant before all of their fellow riders had removed the saddles, stacking them neatly in a shed and insuring their bonded ones were free to move about unencumbered. She saw many walk to the head of their dragons as the beast lowered its massive snout. They would touch foreheads briefly, check their dragon's teeth or eyes, and then watch as they moved off to be among the dozens of others at the special place the elves had arranged for them. A massive circular stadium just on the northern outskirts of the city, filled with fresh hay and different kinds of food. They were no longer the emaciated and underfed dragons they were when they had arrived, all of them now lean and muscular and ready.

The farce of a Cease Fire Signing was seven weeks behind them now, both she and Martin Leonidas looking across the table at each other with false smiles as they affixed their seals to the document. She and Yuri had moved not to Eden City as she had expected, but to a remote but very comfortable ranch style estate ten kilometers outside Eden City. They were allowed to go into Eden City when they wished, but their activities were curtailed for obvious reasons and they were required to keep their features hidden. While the Kavalians had not made it as far as across the ocean to Eden City, neither Aikiro nor Martin Leonidas wanted to take that chance of being discovered. If they were seen by someone working for the many Netnews Channels, their faces would be broadcast all over the Union and at this moment even Aikiro did not want this to happen. Not until she was ready.

The joint operation they had agreed to was now underway with Juliana One leading the Coven Strike Team beside an equal sized Union Strike Team. They had been whisked away to another location in the jungles and mountains of what was formerly Southeast Asia Yuri had told her. It was the closest terrain type on Earth to that of the location on Ritaah where the Mindvoice ship had been plotted. Juliana reported in to her every night, and while she missed the ebony skinned clone's sexual attention to a degree, Aikiro was glad to be rid of her. Since coming to Earth Juliana One had been different as well. She did not care for this planet or the freedom it allowed to her people. Aikiro had felt it when she had first arrived here on Earth. An air of openness and calm radiated everywhere around them, and it was so unlike the more confined and oppressive nature of Usu Ozeib 7. It did allow her additional time with Tesand however, which she had come to enjoy more and more through the years. Even twenty-five years together now had not dimmed Tesand's desire for her, and Aikiro now openly admitted that he far surpassed Veldruk when it came to giving her pleasure.

Martin Leonidas had also allowed her a secure communications link with her ships and even further to Usu Ozeib 7. That had been quite the surprise, but she knew they had to be monitoring what was said, so she had begun communicating in coded phrases to High Coven Command, who then translated her orders. She may have been further from her homeworld than she liked, but at least she was back in touch with those who would follow her orders without question. There had been no discovery of the whereabouts of Queen Dysea or her daughter, and consequently the traitors Cha'talla or Esther. Her people were limited in where they could now go in The Wilds, the Kavalian dogs seemed to be everywhere, as if they too were searching for something. Her orders had been very clear however; avoid confrontation with the Kavalians at all costs until she ordered it. In a move that had yet again surprised her, Martin Leonidas had allowed her to watch in person the trial of the insurgent they had captured, and though she would have preferred to interrogate the scum herself, at least she had the satisfaction of watching him hang at the end of a rope. It had been gruesome to watch, Aikiro would have favored an execution by lethal injection, but she at least got some small pleasure in watching him die.

It wasn't until two weeks earlier that Aikiro had been allowed to see Narice and the others, Androcles Leonidas saying they were too involved in their training to break away. When it finally occurred, Aikiro was quite surprised at the coolness she received from Narice. Their meeting was very brief, but Aikiro knew for sure at that moment what she had only suspected the last time she had seen them. Something was going on with her daughter and Yuri's daughter as well. Narice seemed distant and preoccupied with her, while Carisia was blatantly rebellious towards her mother, though not outwardly disrespectful. They kept saying that as the Section Leaders they had to keep track of their people and make sure they remained out of trouble. Lucia also was very quiet, though she seemed to be very genuinely interested in what else was going on within their lives the last few weeks surprisingly so. Dante and Javier had not changed thankfully, Aikiro thought to herself, and this seemed to make Yuri and Robert very happy. If anything Dante and Javier both had grown much more powerful within Mindvoice. Not as strong as Narice or Carisia, or even their sister Lucia it seemed, but far more than when they had first arrived. They had apparently learned to keep their mouths shut and learn all they could from the wolf dogs who were teaching them.

Aikiro lifted her head slightly when she felt the almost miniscule of tremors within her perception of Mindvoice. Inwardly she cursed to herself, for she knew this signaled another shift. Since their meeting that day when the existence of the new MV ship had been revealed and Martin Leonidas had introduced this Avi, or Avatar of the ancient Pralor beings, Aikiro could just barely detect each new Mindvoice bubble as it was formed somewhere else on the planet. Martin Leonidas was taking no chances with her and this cyborg machine or Avatar being was putting up new bubbles and taking down old ones before she had a chance to localize them and eliminate them as possible targets. She had all but given up hope of finding the location of the Mindvoice ship here on Earth. City Ship 41 they called it she remembered. She did not believe that the fool Leonidas had anything to do with this; she didn't consider him intelligent enough to devise such a scheme. This had to be the doing of their First Oracle or this beast Arzoal they called her, the dragon Elder Mother. Aikiro was a patient woman however, and eventually she would succeed. She trained with Yuri every day, refining her daughter's skills within Mindvoice to razor sharpness. She had yet to determine where the underlying current of hatred came from within her daughter, all of it seemingly directed at Martin and Androcles Leonidas. However Yuri was not deterred and she used the time they had to train with her mother and work on details of one thing or another with Robert. Even Robert Moran was curious as to where the hatred came from, but he loved Yuri without question and he never pursued it.

Aikiro's eyes spotted them now. Narice and Carisia landing just on the outskirts of the city. Their MV shielding had increased nearly five fold since coming to Earth, and while that bode well for their fighting skills, it all but insured Aikiro could not hope to penetrate their MV shields without vast amounts of time and energy. Where as both had come here in excellent fighting shape, both Narice and Carisia now sported incredible figures of lean muscle and curves. The constant training had toned them into instruments, though Aikiro was still trying to determine if she would be able to use these instruments. Lucia had also slimmed down and become much more muscular and lean, her figure now surpassing her mother in its firmness and curves. Aikiro watched them as they were talking to one another, their dragons Deneth and Anthar following close behind them. She had never realized they were so close, and Aikiro was now glad she had brought Thast and Johan to keep them away from each other in their weekly visits to this city. There was something very different about the two of them, something very different about Toria Dellion as well. Toria avoided coming to the city whenever Aikiro came here. Whether it was so she did not get pressed into Aikiro's bed, or if it was something else entirely Aikiro didn't know. The last two visits Narice had said Toria was training with Arrarn and Sadi Leonidas more than the other pilots. Her words had been delivered in such a way as to make Aikiro think coming to see her was an annoyance for Narice. It was no matter really, Toria Dellion reported to her control officer of the *Venorik Elghinn* every two weeks, and had since arriving here. The security measures in place around the base they occupied were unable to detect Toria's secret transmitter or her bi-weekly reports. Her reports had been very thorough as they always were, giving her observations and opinions, as well as the actual facts.

Aikiro knew something was going on, and she had detected it during the briefing by Androcles Leonidas when he had told them of Vollenth. He had been protecting the Coven Riders when he said they could not be pulled from their training just yet, but he had been protecting Carisia and Narice even more. She had not asked

to see the Riders, only Narice and Carisia, and his answer had come far too quickly to suit her. She still had not determined the why of what he was doing, but she had no doubts she would eventually.

Aikiro turned slightly as Yuri came up beside her. "Mother... Dante, Javier and Lucia are downstairs." She said.

Aikiro nodded. "Narice and Carisia just arrived. They will be here shortly."

"Time is growing short mother." Yuri spoke softly. "We will need to act soon."

Aikiro shook her head as she watched Narice and Carisia walking down the main street towards the shed. "Not just yet." She spoke. "Juliana's team needs another week, possibly two to fully understand what they must do and how. And Leonidas has not yet named the leader of his team."

"I don't understand how you can trust her so implicitly mother." Yuri said. "She is a clone."

Aikiro nodded. "And that is why I trust her." She answered looking at her daughter. "She knows only what we have taught her. You have seen in her action Yuri. She shows no emotion at all... no passion... no remorse. She is like a machine. And since our facility on Pe'lohagro was destroyed, she is the best opportunity we have to gain control of this new MV ship."

"You believe the reports then?" Yuri said.

Aikiro nodded. "I sent Admiral Corana to Pe'lohagro Yuri. He viewed the destruction himself. Your father built the base on a dormant volcano believing it would never become active again. Another of his fool mistakes. The mountain erupted directly into the west portion of the base and destroyed everything. Docks, workshops, engineering specs. Nothing was left... not even bodies. No one escaped, for it happened too fast. Hundreds and thousands of years of research and development and it was all completely destroyed in two hours. We will need to increase expenditures on the other weapons facilities just to compensate, though none of them are capable of producing the weapons we had there."

"And the reports from Leonidas on this new ship?" Yuri spoke. "Do you believe them as well?"

Aikiro looked at her and smiled smugly. "Are you trying to test me daughter?" She asked.

"I only... I only wish to know that you have not been drawn in too far by this sense of collaboration mother." Yuri said. "You know I mean nothing by it."

Aikiro nodded and took her hand. "I know. And no Yuri... our new 'status' has done nothing to alter my perceptions of the Lycavorians or Leonidas." She stated. "Like you... I still believe them to be beneath us in every way. At the moment however... at the moment we are in a position where we need to use the superior technology they have gained from their own MV ship to facilitate us getting our own."

Yuri nodded grudgingly. "The sensor readings they provided were exceptionally detailed and accurate." She said.

Aikiro nodded. "Yes they were. This is only another sign that they have increased their intelligence gathering abilities far beyond what we have. At least right now." She said. "I would have preferred to obtain whatever we could from the ship they have; it would make things easier on us as far as production and such, but right now that does not seem feasible. Martin Leonidas and his machine have discovered a unique way to stymie my ability to centralize and locate this ship. It may change in the future but we will see. That is why Dante's part in all this has become so crucial."

Yuri nodded once more. "Then let us go downstairs and see how things are coming in that regard."

Aikiro stopped Yuri before she could turn completely and she took both her hands and squeezed them tightly drawing her daughter closely. "Yuri... my daughter... should anything happen to me..."

"Mother stop!" Yuri spoke urgently. "Nothing is going to happen to you!"

Aikiro smiled. "I hope to avoid that as well... but if something does. I want you to know Yuri, that all of my hopes for the future of the High Coven rest with you. I have never been prouder of you then I have been these last years Yuri. And if I die... I will die knowing the Coven is well on the path to the greatness and dominance that I envision. With you at its head."

Yuri shook her head. "Nothing is going to happen to you mother." She stated confidently. "There is not a Lycavorian dog or vampire traitor on this planet that could best you. Not even Martin Leonidas. No matter how much credit you give him."

Aikiro smiled and kissed her cheek. "It is not Martin Leonidas that I am concerned with. Be mindful of all around you... just as I have taught you daughter. Trust no one but Robert, for that man will burn planets on a whim for you so strong does he love you."

Yuri nodded slowly. "I hear you mother." She said softly.

Aikiro smiled and squeezed her hands once more. "Good. We should probably forgo speaking on the Strike Teams we have in place in front of Narice and Carisia as well. I do not want them aware that they are already in position."

Yuri looked at her. "You don't trust them do you mother?" She said. "I see that in your eyes."

"Let's just say I do not approve of the manner in which they have been acting." Aikiro spoke. "They have grown far more powerful than I first envisioned when we first came up with this plan. And far too close to those who are training them to suit me. I sensed this several weeks ago based on what Androcles Leonidas said to us, but it was only a fleeting thought then. Now however, now that feeling has grown much stronger and more pronounced."

"You don't think..." Yuri gasped.

Aikiro met her eyes evenly. "I no longer know Yuri. And that is part of the problem. Whatever Leonidas's son is doing, he's making all of them more powerful. Their Mindvoice abilities have increased to the point that they surpass even those I have allowed to obtain Senior MV Rank. Even I could not penetrate their MV shields without much time and effort. Dante and Javier have said there is no machine they have seen that can do this or at least one they have been allowed to experience, and I question how Leonidas has accomplished it without some sort of outside influence. Many of their new abilities are skills I would not have allowed them to be taught, and their bond with their dragons only increases this. I am concerned I will no longer be able to control them when the time comes. Narice and Carisia more so than the others."

"You should have allowed me to kill her when Robert and I wanted too." Yuri spoke softly.

Aikiro nodded. "Perhaps." She stated. "I do not sense we have lost complete control of the situation at this time, but just to be safe we will not speak of our more advanced plans. Once Dante has completed his task we can act, but leaving Narice and Carisia out of the loop so to speak will improve our chances I believe. They are too close to those we intend to act against. Now let us go see what we can learn from Dante and your children. They seem to be the only source of accurate intelligence we are getting lately."

"That knowledge troubles you doesn't it?" Yuri asked.

Aikiro shrugged. "I do not know yet what to make of it... but it is something we should probably keep a very close eye on as I said." She spoke as they walked across the room heading for the door that would take them to the elevator lift and to the main dining area where they had reserved a room.

"She is watching us." Carisia spoke as they came up beside the shed.

"Yes... I know." Narice replied softly. "And she is very upset she can not penetrate our thoughts."

"She brought Thast Narice." Carisia said softly. "I can smell his foul blood even from here."

"You took fresh *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos* this morning didn't you, so that he can not smell Andro and Sadi in your blood?" Narice asked.

Carisia nodded. "Yes. And you?"

"Two full glasses. I felt bloated when I left." Narice answered with a nod of what could only be shame. "Toria and Arrarn were not amused very much. We had such a wonderful night too."

Carisia nodded looking at her Aunt and now her closest friend outside of Sadi Leonidas. All the years of having those dreams. So many nights where she had seen Andro and Sadi in her mind, their bodies entwined together with not only each other but two other women. Two very delicious looking female elves, one of them being of the exotic Drow species, with satin like shimmering white hair. Now however, it was no longer a dream, and she spent her nights after training with those who had once occupied her dreams. And it was a thousand times better in person. They did not fall into bed every night and have passionate sex, though they did partake of the pleasures of the flesh quite often she thought with a smile. And it was utterly glorious to the extreme. Many nights they simply lounged together, half dressed as they studied one thing or the other. Both Andro and Sadi were voracious readers she discovered. When they were together like that, they let their minds float freely within one another's thoughts, which was even more divine than feasting on Andro or Sadi's blood. They were so tightly woven together that it was scary sometimes to view their thoughts.

They had done as Ne'Veha had asked them, as hard as it was to do, and not included her when they were together. They could still feel her within their connection very strongly, and her MV ability seemed to be

growing, though at a much reduced rate. She was confused they could tell that, her emotions off in every direction. Incredibly Andro had not ordered the Spartan Tarren transferred off of his ship. Carisia knew how possessive he could be of them, yet the largest and potentially most explosive circumstance keeping Ne'Veha from finding her own way was this Tarren. He was an alpha wolf as well Carisia had learned, but no where near as powerful as Andro, and yet Androcles did nothing to keep him away from Ne'Veha. His only explanation was that Ne'Veha had to make the decision for herself, though she and Sadi had shopped many times and bought things for Ne'Veha, sending them to the *SCIMITAR*.

Ne'Veha was never far from their thoughts, nor was the one they had yet to meet. Lu'ria was her name and Carisia and Sadi could not get the image of her smooth and muscular ebony body out of their minds. Nor could they block out images of Ne'Veha's petite but likewise scrumptious form. Andro was better at hiding his desire for all of them, but she and Sadi could tell it affected him just as powerfully as it did them, he was just far better at hiding it.

Neither she nor Sadi had ever expected to feel the way they did. Sadi had only one brief encounter long ago while Carisia had never shared the attentions of another woman before Sadi. Now both of them burned for Ne'Veha and Lu'ria just as intensely as they did for Androcles and each other and it all seemed and felt so natural. When they had questioned the *Feravomir* about it she had simply chuckled and told them fate and destiny worked in many ways that they would never understand. Helen had come to see them often over the last few weeks, always to work with Sadi and her on their abilities and control within Mindvoice. Narice and Toria had begin to join them in the last two weeks, and while Andro and Arrarn were off doing other things, the four of them were being schooled by perhaps the most wise Mindvoicer they knew. Helen had the combined wisdom and knowledge of Canth, the First Oracle of the Lycavorian people, and within her mind was untapped knowledge and ability.

“Andro and Arrarn grow tired of hiding what we have with them.” Carisia said finally. “He and Sadi told me as much last night. As far as they are concerned, we are their wives and mates Narice! We should not have to hide that from anyone.”

Narice met her eyes. “Arrarn has said the same thing to Toria and I in no uncertain words.” She spoke. “It is not time yet Carisia. If we reveal ourselves too soon... if we allow our mothers to know what is happening, we may not be able to stop whatever it is she is planning. And you know as well as I she is planning something, especially since this new MV ship has been discovered.”

“When will it be time Narice?” Carisia asked. “I have been with Andro and Sadi for almost four months now. You and Toria with Arrarn for only a week less. I have no intention of allowing that foul man Thast to touch me Narice. I could not stand his putrid hands upon me. Not now.”

[We have a plan Narice.] Anthar broke in now, both of them turning to look at him. *[If we must act... then Deneth and I will act tonight.]*

[Plan?] Narice asked looking at Carisia. *[What do you mean?]*

Carisia shook her head. *[I have no idea what they are talking about.]* She answered looking at Anthar. *[What are you talking about brother?]*

Deneth bobbed his head up and down. *[You know what Androcles and Arrarn will do if Thast or Johan touch either of you. They are for all intents and purposes your husbands now. They are also Alpha wolves and they will honor that fact and act on it if they must. No matter what consequences may befall them.]*

[What plan?] Narice asked once more.

Deneth leaned his head forward and touched his snout to Narice's forehead. *[Do you trust me my Bonded Sister?]*

[Deneth... why do you ask me that? You know I do. Without question.] Narice answered him immediately.

[And do you love Arrarn Leonidas and Toria Dellion?] Deneth continued.

[Deneth... what...?]

[Answer my question Narice.] He told her.

[With every breath that I take.] Narice told him. *[You know this.]*

Deneth drew back his head and blinked his beautiful eyes. *[Then leave everything to us.]* He spoke. He turned to Anthar and he nodded his cerise colored head.

[I will call my mate.] He spoke looking at Carisia with his magenta colored eyes. *[Elynth will bring Jeth and Tharua and we will take care of everything. Trust us sisters... we will not fail.]*

[Anthar! You can not kill them!] Carisia exclaimed. *[That would only...]*

Anthar chuckled within Mindvoice and butted Carisia in her shoulder gently. *[Have faith my Bonded Sister.]* He spoke. *[You forget who my mate is. Come Deneth... we have things to do.]*

Narice and Carisia stared at their bonded dragons as they adroitly moved away towards the stadium, maneuvering their massive frames easily among the many elves that crowded the streets.

Carisia looked at Narice. "Narice?" She asked gently.

Narice shook her head. "I have no idea what they plan." She replied quickly.

Carisia turned back to see the back of Anthar as he lifted his head into the sky while they walked, no doubt reaching out within Mindvoice to call Elynth. "Why do I get the feeling that whatever it is they plan, they will succeed?"

Narice took her hand. "Come... my mother is calling me." She said softly. "Do nothing to expose your feelings Carisia. It could put both of us in jeopardy. I will do the same, for we can not allow her to discover what we share with the men and women that we love. Not just yet."

Carisia nodded. "I will Narice. Until that fat slob touches me. Then I intend to feed him his entrails."

Narice nodded and smiled softly. "Just insure you are out of sight when you do it." She said causing Carisia to look at her.

Carisia squeezed her hand and they began walking towards the large building in the distance. "Your time with Arrarn is giving you a perverse sense of humor Narice." She said as they walked.

Narice chuckled. "I know. It is so very liberating."

GYTHEIO CRANAE ISLAND

It had been the most amazing period of her young life and Athani Leonidas was relishing this fact every time her eyes opened to a new day, for she knew it would continue for eternity now. She was a Kavalian female, married to a man that far surpassed her dreams *and* she was a Princess of the Lycavorian Union. She had her own *Durcunusaan* detachment, two very stern looking Spartan soldiers who would protect her at the cost of their own lives. These two men had learned quickly that Athani Leonidas may have been a Kavalian, but she was in no way any different from any of the other Princesses of the Union. She was headstrong and independent, she was incredibly smart, and she did not have an arrogant bone in her body. Whether it was because of her upbringing or simply because that was not who she was, her two-member *Durcunusaan* Guard had sworn to die before harm came to her. To them she was a Leonidas above all else, and her actions to this day had only reinforced this. She may have had a tail, and been of a different species, but Princess Athani went out of her way to insure she looked out for her two guards constantly. It was her way of showing them that she cared for them and honored them and what they would do without question.

While she had not gone back to Sparta since that day in the café, Athani had gone shopping in Eden City with Resumar's sisters when they were able to pull away from their training. She had gone to dinner with Sadi and Resumar's mothers and grandmother in Athens, enjoying a wonderful night out. She had not received any hostile looks or words from anyone, and through the course of the evening Athani came to realize just how completely tolerant the men and women and the different species in the Union were. She had even just completed a two hour interview with a stunning elf female for the Netnews channel in Eden City. An interview that was going to air across the Union this very night. She was so overwhelmingly in love with Resumar Leonidas and the way he treated her as some precious gem. Their nights were filled with passionate and sometimes wild sex, and others she simply cuddled in his powerful arms and basked in the way his aura would tickle her senses. As her newly discovered MV abilities grew, she could feel his aura more profoundly than ever before when he wrapped her within its embrace, and it made her giddy with happiness.

Her only regret and worry was that she had not yet met Martin Leonidas since becoming his son's bride. Athani was seriously beginning to think he didn't approve of their marriage, no matter what Resumar's mothers told her.

Athani held tightly to Resumar's arm as they exited the *STRIKER* on Andro's landing pad. Cemath followed behind them like a protective shadow, but she could feel his excitement within Mindvoice. Athani looked up at her husband's face as she clutched his arm seeing the two other *STRIKERS* on the second pad nearby.

"Why have we come here Resumar?" She asked leaning into him with a seductive smile. "Is Andro allowing you to use his home so that you can have your way with me?"

Resumar looked at her beautiful blue/green eyes and smiled. "Maybe." He said. "We do get a little wild and boisterous at times you know. Though that might be hard to do with him already here."

Athani looked at him offended. "That is not my fault!" She exclaimed. "I can not help it if you refuse to stop stroking the base of my tail. You know how that makes me sing. And I have heard Sadi and Carisia cry out because of what your brother does to them. I think you both do it on purpose."

Resumar chuckled and leaned over to nuzzle her ear. "I brought you here because I want you to meet someone." He said.

"I have met enough people." Athani spoke firmly as they entered the doors of Andro's home. "The only person I wish to meet now is your father. I swear my love... I'm beginning to feel as if he is avoiding me on purpose. Because he does not approve of our marriage in some way."

"That could not be further from the truth Athani Leonidas." The deep male voice spoke.

Athani came to an abrupt halt halfway inside the foyer, her eyes going wide as the tall and powerful figure of Martin Leonidas appeared from around the corner, a large mug of coffee in his hand. She gazed at him in astonishment. She had been this close to him during their dinner that night months ago, but somehow he appeared different now. More relaxed. He wore causal clothes, but standing this close to him now, Athani could see why he had defeated Pusintin so soundly all those years ago. And she saw where Resumar got the delicious body he had. A body she had spent many a night exploring in every way. It was certainly in the genes. Martin Leonidas was built like a piece of mountain granite, his black hair tightly secured in two pieces of decorated leather that looked to have been made by a child.

Athani bowed her head quickly as she clutched Resumar's arm in sudden fear. "Mi... Milord King Leonidas." She gasped.

"Anse Res... haven't you told her I hate that silly *sibfla* from my own family!" Martin spat.

Resumar chuckled. "I have tried to tell her father. There are times when she doesn't listen to me."

Martin laughed when he saw Athani stab Resumar in the ribs with two fingers and he set his mug of coffee down on the small table and stepped up to her. Athani lifted her eyes to stare into those dark brown orbs. She was growing in Mindvoice power, the *Feravomir* had told her it would grow to its full potential within a few years now that it had been released. Yet even as unskilled as she was Athani could easily sense the staggering power of the man in front of her, and not just his physical power either. And her fear increased even more.

Martin held out his large hands palms facing up for her to take and Athani glanced at Resumar quickly. He grinned and nodded his head. "My father *Aryschanne*. Martin Leonidas." He said.

Athani turned back to look at him and slowly brought her hands up and placed them within his palms. They were exceptionally warm like Resumar's hands always were and she gasped softly as he squeezed them and pulled her into an embrace. Athani could feel it then, the unbelievable sensation of love and acceptance that Sadi had told her she had felt when she first embraced this man. Her eyes became moist as she felt his arms tighten around her and he lowered his cheek to the top of her head.

"Welcome Athani Leonidas. Welcome to my family." He said softly. Martin's eyes took in her long tail twitching madly behind her and he smiled. "I hope that is an indication that you are happy." He said.

Athani burst out laughing then as his hands pushed her away and he looked down at her. She nodded her head quickly and looked at him with tear stained eyes as his hands came up to hold her face. "I... I am exquisitely happy." She choked out the words. "I... I was beginning to fear that you did not... did not want me to be with your son."

Martin shook his head. "Never that." He spoke dropping his hands and taking hers once more. "I haven't made an attempt to meet you before now because I wanted you to adjust. And I did not want us to be seen together publicly so soon after you defected. It was a very political decision, nothing more, believe me. My Aunt and mother always have a way of maneuvering me when it comes to politics. Since *Melda Min* is not here,

it falls to them. Personally... I think it's all a bunch of *rensibfla!*" He looked at her, his eyes wide. "Ouch... forgive my language. I hope..."

"Yes Beloved. I heard that." Aricia's voice carried from across the room as she came out of the kitchen area with two large mugs of coffee in her hands.

Athani smiled brightly now as Aricia walked up to where they stood and she glanced at her *anome* with a disapproving stare in her azure colored eyes. "We have told you before about your language when in the company of civilized people Martin."

"It was an accident." Martin protested.

Athani laughed again as she held his hands. "Res... Resumar has said much worse." She answered.

Martin looked at his son. "Has he now?" He spoke seeing Resumar's embarrassed look as both he and Aricia looked at him. "Well... we'll just have to have a talk about that now won't we?" He turned back to Athani and smiled. "You are picking up the ancient language quickly I see."

Athani nodded. "I study whenever I can!" She answered quickly. "I..."

"Athani Leonidas... you stop right there." Martin spoke firmly. "The moment you were able to capture my son's heart you were accepted into this family. Though someday you might regret that. Some of us aren't exactly all there." He said looking at Andro before turning back to her. "You do not need to do anything to impress me or anyone else. It's taken me this long to be able to meet you for a number of reasons like I said. Many of them politically... some not... but none because that is not what I wanted to do." He smiled warmly. "Come... we'll introduce you to someone else and then we can sit and talk more. And I have a favor to ask of you."

Athani looked at him. "A favor?"

Aricia held out the mug to her. "Just as you like." She stated. "I thought I should come so that you do not feel overwhelmed by all the male testosterone and insanity that permeates this room whenever they are together. If it does become too much, just wink. Isheeni is outside and we'll go for a flight over the bay."

Martin grinned and leaned over to nuzzle Aricia's ear firmly. Athani watched as her eyes closed in bliss and she smiled. "It's nothing major Athani but let's get comfortable for a while and talk shall we." He took her arm, drew Aricia close to him with the other and guided them into the main room of Andro's villa.

"Dario!" Resumar almost shouted before sprinting across the large room to where the equally as tall and perhaps more physically imposing Spartan stood beside Andro.

Athani watched as the two men embraced tightly and then looked at each other. "It's good to see you cousin." The dark haired young man spoke. "Better to see your new bride of course... but good to see you."

Andro laughed softly as he walked over to Athani and leaned over to kiss her cheek as he always did. "Ignore him Athani." He spoke. "This is my cousin Dario. He is the oldest son of my mother's nephew Pasha. Pasha is my Uncle Atropos's oldest son and Dario takes after both his father and grandfather in his carelessness."

"That is an understatement." Aricia said.

The tall Spartan laughed as he came up to Athani, his arm over Resumar's shoulder. He stopped in front of her and bowed his head slightly. "It is an honor to meet the woman who finally made an honest Spartan of this fool." He spoke pulling Resumar's head closer.

"Yeah... look who is talking!" Resumar replied.

Athani smiled at him as he took her hand and lightly kissed her knuckles. She had learned quickly that true, honorable Spartan men would greet her in this fashion, and it appeared this Dario was just that as he released her hand and turned back to Resumar.

"I sincerely hope your children take after her cousin. If they take after you, you'll never have grandchildren." He said while softly punching Resumar in the gut. "How exactly did you manage to trick her into becoming your wife?"

"He needed no tricks." Athani said with a sultry smile as she stepped up to Resumar and tucked her body against his side while Dario released him. "He simply touches me in all the right places. Perhaps you should take lessons."

Aricia burst out laughing now at the expression on Dario's face and she leaned over to kiss Athani's cheek. "Touché Athani." She said with a chortle. "Touché. An excellent statement in defending your husband."

"Oh I like her cousin!" Dario exclaimed happily.

“Alright!” Martin spat with a grin. “Enough of that! Let’s sit down and have a talk.”

“What are you doing here Dario?” Resumar asked as he squeezed Athani and took her hand. “Did you bring Sorran?”

The twenty-four year old Dario nodded his head as he took a seat on the couch next to Andro. Six foot three and two hundred and twenty pounds of lean muscle, Dario took after his father in almost every aspect. The only exception being that he was now bonded to a dark green scaled dragon that was six hundred years old and as ornery as dragons got. His dark hair was cut very short, making his light green eyes that much more prominent. Like Andro and Resumar and many of the younger Spartans, he wore the newer Shi Viska bridle on his left arm. The newer bridle allowed for total use of the hand without having a strip of leather across the palm. It also made the transition of the shield from Flat Space to real space that much easier and faster. The new bridle was rapidly being issued to every Union soldier who could wear one, though many of the older Spartans were hesitant to let go of the older ones. Including their King, for Martin had not switched to the newer one, it gave them a special feeling to wear something that was designed and implemented so long ago and held such honor in its history.

“He’s outside... hopefully learning new techniques from Torma and Isheeni that will allow him to better interact with others.” Dario spoke calmly.

Watch yourself Dario my Bonded Brother! I might drop you on the flight back to Sparta. The deep male voice bellowed within Mindvoice, strong enough and loud enough that Athani heard it easily.

Dario chuckled. “See what I mean.” He said. “Actually... I’ve been here for six weeks. I’m part of the Union Assault Team. Second in command to be honest.” He said proudly. “I’m just waiting for my commander to get off his sorry *mida* and come to work.”

“Union Assault Team?” Resumar asked looking at his father and Andro. “What Assault Team?”

Martin took a deep breath. “The one training jointly with the Coven to go after the MV ship.” He stated gently. “The one I want you to command Resumar.”

Resumar’s eyes went wide at this information and he looked quickly between Athani, his mother and back to his father. “Me?” He finally gasped.

Martin nodded. “Next to Andro... you have more operational experience than Denali. I can’t send your Uncle Danny or Walter. I can’t send anyone high profile. Their absence would be picked up on almost immediately. You and your brothers and sisters disappear for weeks and months at a time. It’s expected of you to be honest, and if that suddenly stopped, that would draw suspicion.”

“But... aren’t we high profile now?” Athani asked as her heart tightened. The prospect of having Resumar leave her for a mission into Kavalian space that could very well go horribly wrong terrified her so soon after discovering him. “Because of me?”

Aricia shook her head. “Not as much as you might think.” She answered. “It is why we arranged for the interview you conducted recently. As far as the people of the Union are now concerned, you are a Princess of the Lycavorian Union Athani. Our family is... we are so good at doing things outside the norm, that it is now expected of us.” She said sheepishly. “Having you and Resumar disappear for any length of time now would be normal. We can say you are simply having an extended vacation.”

“Me and Resumar?” Athani asked.

“That is the favor I want to ask you.” Martin said. “I want you to go with them.” He held up his hand before his son could retort. “Hear me out Res! I have thought about this son believe me. Athani is Kavalian... she can give you an insight into how her people think. She may be able to help if you are discovered within Kavalian space and she can talk to whoever is in those settlements around the MV ship if they are friendly. And if they are these rebels she thinks they might be, who better to make contact with them than the woman who basically just told her own father... the Prefect of the KFI no less... she just told him and the whole of the KFI leadership to get fucked.”

Aricia rolled her eyes and Andro shook his head.

“It’s too dangerous.” Resumar complained. “You are asking her to go back into the very territory she just spent over twenty years planning to get out of! If anything happens... if she is captured... they won’t just kill her father. They’ll...”

“Yes.” Athani stated firmly. All eyes went to her. “Yes... I will go.” She repeated.

“*Aryschanne* you...”

“I am not afraid Resumar my love.” She said taking his hands. “I will be with you... and I am more than capable of taking care of myself.”

“I know that!” Resumar snapped gently. “I don’t question that! I saw that for myself! This is...”

“I am your wife!” Athani spoke quickly. “I am your wife and I love you with all that I am... but I do not want to be *just* your wife Resumar. This is my home now... with you... with your family. This Union. I will fight for what I love. I am not afraid. And if your father is right... if these *are* the rebels I spoke of... this mission could have huge implications for not only us... but for the Kavalian people as well.”

Resumar stared at her for a long moment, unable to feel anything but pride for his breathtaking Kavalian wife. “Athani...”

Athani shook her head and pulled his head down so that she could kiss him softly. “We will do this. We will do this together.” She said softly. “And we will return successful. I know as well as your father and you that we can not let my father or Pusintin get their hands on this ship. It would do more to tip the balance of things against us than anything else.”

Resumar stared at her, saw the determined look in her eyes and he nodded his head. “I know.” He said.

“Then you know I am right.” Athani spoke. She kissed him once more and looked at Martin. “I will go.”

“Athani... I want you to be sure about this.” Martin spoke. “It...”

“I am... I am a Leonidas now, am I not?” She asked quickly.

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.” He replied without hesitation.

“Do any of the Leonidas women sit and do nothing while others take risks that protect us?” Athani asked.

“Hah!” Aricia barked. “Not by any stretch of the imagination!”

Athani nodded. “And I will not be the first.” She spoke. “I am not afraid. I will go... and we will succeed.”

Resumar looked at his father. He shrugged his broad shoulders unable to find a logical argument against what Athani was saying. “We have spoken.” He said.

Martin looked at Aricia as she leaned into him with a smile. “She reminds me of *Melda Min*.” He said.

Aricia smiled. “Yes she does.” Aricia said. “Yes she does.”

Martin looked back to Resumar. “Dario is your second in command. Cemath, Sorran, and two other dragons will be going with you. A Firespitter and a Hybrid. Arzoal chose them from her pool here on Earth. Those who have just completed their advanced training. The Hybrid is a female and she has an attitude, but she has a nasty burn distance. The Firespitter is a little smaller than most but she turns on a dime. It was Avi’s suggestion actually... he feels the more Mindvoice power we can put on the surface the better.”

“The Empress’s people know I am in command?” Resumar asked. “That they will follow my orders?”

“They will in about seven hours when she gets back.” Martin spoke. “I don’t imagine she’ll put up much argument. They can’t get there without us.”

“*Will* they follow my orders father?” Resumar asked him. “Or do they have a different agenda?”

“Oh... I’m quite sure that Aikiro’s people have a different agenda.” Martin spoke sitting back. “That is why we are going to devise a way to make sure she doesn’t get her rickety old hands on that ship. Avi is going with you.”

“Avi?” Resumar asked surprised.

Martin nodded. “I don’t doubt for a moment that Aikiro has every intention of getting there and if not stealing this ship, then attempting to download everything she can from its data cores. Avi is going to make sure that doesn’t happen. He says because this ship is intact, more than likely the avatar is as well. He wants to interface with this avatar and find out whatever he can about what became of the Pralors.”

Andro leaned forward in his chair now looking at his father, his face puzzled as well. “Why risk Avi father?” He asked. “What aren’t you telling us? What is it about this ship that makes it so different than CS 41 that you are willing to risk Avi on this mission? Resumar and his team can download data from the cores.”

Martin looked at his sons. “This was Avi’s idea, not mine. I have learned to trust him in all things concerning this technology. I originally was going to have Zaala go with you, but at the moment she is involved with something else and her expertise is needed where it is right now.”

Andro nodded. “Miranda and the Arizona project.” He said.

Martin nodded. “Of the two dozen engineers Avi has trained, he says Zaala is the one who took to it more than the others. This ship is different than CS 41. It is a warship plain and simple, and from what Avi and I have discussed, the Pralors did not build warships by choice. They built them out of necessity.”

“Wow... you and Avi seem to be pretty close father!” Andro said with a grin. It was well known that Martin Leonidas hated computers and anything technical.

“I have my moments.” Martin said with a grin. “And according to Avi’s compilation of the data from the sensor scans... it is less than ten thousand years old, which means the systems on this ship will be far more advanced than CS 41 in many respects. Avi believes he can pull cores from this ship that will enable him to improve our own MV tech by a factor of three. He can tell you more but I have no intention of allowing Aikiro to get her hands on that ship. The *PILLAR OF FAITH* is one week from being out of refits. She’s your ship son, bigger than what I would normally send on this type of operation, but as with the *SCIMITAR* she has the same Whisper Class Mark Eight Shroud generators and you should be pretty safe. You need the room for the dragons anyway, and it won’t hurt to have the extra firepower or extra troops that the FAITH can carry and have on stand by.”

“And if... if her people attempt this? If they attempt to take this ship?” Athani asked softly.

Martin met her eyes and there was a cold hardness in them that made Athani shudder inwardly in fear. “That’s easy.” He spoke.

“Kill them.” Aricia stated firmly. “Kill them all.”

ULU *SCIMITAR* ORBITING EARTH

What had she done?

Ne’Veha stared at the large, sleeping form of Tarren who now occupied her small bunk, with wide dark brown eyes. She held the sheet around her naked body, her long hair spilling about her shoulders and falling to the middle of her back. Ne’Veha stared at Tarren’s form and felt the guilt wash across her like a wave.

It had been seven weeks since she had seen Androcles. Seven weeks since she had seen Sadi or Carisia. Seven agonizing weeks since she had felt them within Mindvoice. They had done as she asked them, closing off their connection to her, giving her the space she told them that she needed. Yet each and every night she could not feel them, the emptiness in her heart grew. She filled her days with her fellow pilots and friends. She tried to go on with her life, perhaps trying to see if what they had told her was not true in some way. She had gone to Sparta on several occasions, never drinking but attempting to distance herself from the thoughts of them. Even in Eden City, where they attended a concert in the Grand Center, Ne’Veha found herself searching the crowd. Hoping that perhaps she would see them. Even a fleeting glance might tell her that they wanted her. Yet she saw nothing.

How could they tell her those things and then not even attempt to let her know they wanted her in the way Sadi had said? When she thought like that, it made her terribly lonely. Ne’Veha was not an insecure female, not by any stretch of the imagination. She was very independent and active with her friends. However, since discovering that she did indeed share something with Andro, Sadi and Carisia it had become so very confusing. On one side there was how she was raised by her parents, respectful of their King, but not trusting of the Lycavorians as a whole because of that one instance long in the past. Her father’s mother falling in love with a Lycavorian and leaving his father for him. This had made her father angry and resentful of Lycavorians, a trait which he had passed to his children.

Ne’Veha had thought perhaps Tarren was different, but his actions had proved otherwise. At least until he had come across the breadth of the Union to find her. Discovering he had done this in the same time span of finding out about the connection she had with Androcles and the others had thrown her into a tailspin she had yet to pull out of. Her emotions would run the gambit from confusion to anger to desire and loneliness and then back to confusion. This usually led her to be angry inside. Angry because she could not feel Androcles, Sadi and Carisia. Angry because she did not know what she felt for Tarren? Her anger usually led to loneliness and then more anger.

That anger had come to a head last night the moment Tarren had begun gently goading her. He had been after her ever since she returned from SODRAG to tell him where he stood in her life. No matter where she went, he always seemed to appear, further mocking what Sadi and Andro had told her. Last night had been the final straw.

“How much longer are you going to wait Ne’Veha?” Tarren asked her. “It should be obvious to you that whatever they told you was not true.”

“You don’t know what they told me Tarren!”

“I know I came here looking for you.” Tarren spoke. “I came here because I decided I wanted you. Where are your Prince and Princess Ne’Veha? They have not been to see you, nor contacted you since you returned.”

“How do you know that?”

“I checked Ne’Veha! I care about you. They have left you alone. I am here... what does that tell you?”

Ne’Veha had looked at him then, his words sinking in through the fog of anger and loneliness and that had led them here to her bed, against her better judgment. Now as she sat in the chair looking at his snoring body Ne’Veha felt so much guilt. She should not have listened to him because now things were even worse. He had been attentive to her last night... at least until he began insisting she allow him to *cado forn* and finally claim her. She had told him no right up until he had stroked her elven ears. He caressed them generously as he thrust into her body, albeit not very gently, inciting pent up passion in her and causing her to clutch his body to her own in need, yet still saying no. After the second time he had exploded within her, Ne’Veha was panting in want and right on the brink of having a much needed orgasm. It was then that he returned to the old Tarren and when she told him no once more, he simply proceeded to grunt and groan his way to another release for himself as he pummeled her body into the mattress. The sudden change in the tempo of his lovemaking quickly dissolved any pleasure she had been feeling and when he finally exploded inside her again, he simply rolled off her, thanking her as he drifted to sleep.

Now Ne’Veha was even more confused. Why would she feel guilty about her actions with Tarren when there was nothing between Prince Androcles and her? Why would she insist that Tarren not scent her? Why after telling her what he had, why would Andro not at least attempt to contact her in some way? She was under the impression that Alpha wolves went after what they wanted. If Androcles wanted her, if Sadi and Carisia wanted her as they professed, why would they not contact her in some manner? Seven weeks and she had not felt them include her once within their minds. Those dreams, if they were even dreams at all, they had been so superbly gratifying. And yet they had not even reached out to her. She...

The chime on her door sounded and Ne’Veha turned her head as Tarren stirred. It was still very early and she wasn’t due on duty for another hour. Ne’Veha got to her feet holding the sheet around her body and crossing the room to her door. Her bunk was situated against the wall in a small alcove and was not immediately visible from the door.

Ne’Veha’s anger at herself for her actions caused her to pass her hand over the door sensor before looking to see who was there.

“What is it?” Ne’Veha spoke harshly assuming it was some officer wanting her to come on duty early. Her eyes flew open when she saw Sadi’s long blond hair pulled over one shoulder and her lush figure encased in the standard flight suit. She wore no crimson colored cape, but the gold trimmed crimson sash around her waist marked her as royalty.

“Sa... Sadi?” She gasped in horror.

“I know it’s early and I’m sorry.” Sadi spoke quickly. “I know we said we would not do anything to place pressure on you but I wanted to bring this to you. We... we didn’t know for sure if you had received the other items we sent to you.” Sadi held out the small package to her. “It’s something that Carisia and I picked out in Eden City. It...” Her eyes grew a little wider seeing Ne’Veha’s current state of dress and the condition of her hair. “Oh my... Ne’Veha I’m so sorry. I... I didn’t mean to wake you.”

Ne’Veha glanced quickly over her shoulder and then back to Sadi. “Sadi... what... what are you doing here?”

Sadi smiled brightly her jungle green eyes glittering. "I came up with a *STRIKER* for some minor work. I thought we might be able to have lunch together. I know that you said you wanted your space but I didn't think lunch would..." Sadi stopped talking when she caught the heavy scent from Ne'Veha's quarters. The heavy scent of sexual activity and male mixed in with Ne'Veha's sweet amaretto fragrance.

Ne'Veha felt her heart coming to reside in her throat. "Sadi... it..."

Sadi moved around her into Ne'Veha's quarters and her eyes quickly found Tarren awake and pulling on his pants. He looked up and saw her and a smug expression came over his face.

"Good morning Princess Leonidas." He spoke arrogantly standing there without fastening his pants and puffing out his chest.

Sadi's eyes narrowed and she turned back to Ne'Veha. "I... I see you have made your decision." She said softly. Sadi turned and placed the package on the nearby table. "I will just leave this here."

"Sadi..." Ne'Veha began to speak, stepping closer to her.

Sadi turned back and moved for the door her face impassive. "I apologize for interrupting Ne'Veha. I'll leave you alone."

"Sadi... wait!" Ne'Veha stammered reaching out to take her arm. "Let me explain!"

Sadi stopped in the doorway and looked at her with those wonderful jungle green eyes. There was no anger in her eyes that Ne'Veha could detect. No disgust at her actions. Just deep sadness. "There is nothing to explain Ne'Veha." Sadi spoke softly. "You have made your choice."

"That's right she has." Tarren spoke with even more arrogance and sarcasm, stepping up behind Ne'Veha and leaning over to nuzzle her elven ear. "Haven't you Ne'Veha?"

It had no effect on Ne'Veha and she shrugged her slim shoulders to push him off. "Shut up Tarren!" She snarled. "Sadi... I... I have heard nothing from you in seven weeks! Tarren... Tarren has been there for me!"

"Yes... I can see that." Sadi replied.

Ne'Veha's eyes narrowed. "You dare judge me!" She snapped.

Sadi shook her head. "No Ne'Veha... I'm not judging you. I should probably go." Sadi turned and exited the quarters quickly; two *Durcunusaan* soldiers Ne'Veha had not seen falling in behind her instantly.

Tarren took Ne'Veha's arm. "Let her go Ne'Veha." He said. "You belong with me."

Ne'Veha yanked her arm free. "Not now Tarren!" She spat wrapping the sheet around her tighter and moving out into the corridor and going after Sadi.

Sadi was moving down the corridor quickly and Ne'Veha had to run in her bare feet to catch up. She ignored the looks of surprise and outright interest from the many males in the corridor. She wasn't going to catch up so she came to a stop and shouted the first thing that came into her mind. It surprised Ne'Veha as it came out, but it certainly did the trick.

"*Sadi narta anse un!*" Ne'Veha exclaimed in the ancient language as she saw them reach the lift and Sadi came to a halt. She watched as Sadi took a deep breath and turned her head slightly, speaking to the two *Durcunusaan* soldiers. Ne'Veha saw them nod their heads and then move off down the corridor a few meters as she came up. "Sadi..." (Stop damn it!)

Sadi turned and looked at her. "Yes?"

"What... why haven't you contacted me? It's... it's been seven weeks!" Ne'Veha spoke. "I haven't... I haven't felt anything from Androcles, from you or Carisia."

"You did not want us to Ne'Veha." Sadi answered softly. "We were only doing what you wanted us to do."

"That's... that's not what I wanted!" Ne'Veha said.

Sadi blinked several times. "Excuse me? That's what you told us Ne'Veha."

"No it's not!" Ne'Veha snapped.

"Ne'Veha... you asked Andro what if you couldn't pursue a relationship with us. What if you wanted to repair your relationship with Tarren?" Sadi spoke. "Andro told you we would not pressure you in any way Ne'Veha. He said you would be free to make that decision on your own without any pressure. It is what you wanted and that is what we have done."

"He... he is... Androcles is an Alpha!" Ne'Veha exclaimed. "Alphas go after what they want don't they?"

Sadi nodded. "Yes they do." She stated calmly.

“That is what Tarren did!” Ne’Veha snapped. “He is an Alpha and he came across the entire Union for me!”

“Did he now?” Sadi asked canting her head to the side.

“Yes!”

“Perhaps you may wish to discover why he did that.” Sadi said. She stepped closer to her, Ne’Veha’s sweet amaretto scent filtering into her senses and making Sadi’s blood burn in want but unable to shake the scent of Tarren from her body. “Ne’Veha... the chasm between Alphas like Tarren and Andro is so wide it is pointless to try and describe it. Even our own people can not explain it.” Sadi said. “Yes... Tarren is an Alpha. He is the type of Alpha wolf who will never be satisfied. He will always be arrogant. He will always want more. Androcles Leonidas is not that type of Alpha Ne’Veha. He is the type of Alpha that will covet *you*, cherish *you* more than anything he could obtain materially. He is also the type of Alpha who will not pursue you unless he knows it is something you want as well. If that was the case Ne’Veha... Andro would not stop at the borders of the Union. He would pursue you across the breadth of the entire universe until you were his. Until you were ours. Just as his father would do for any of the Queens.”

“Seven weeks and nothing!” Ne’Veha spat. “If Andro wanted me... if you and Carisia wanted me so badly why have I not heard anything from you in seven weeks?”

“You asked for time and space to think things through Ne’Veha. To make a decision. We told you that you would have that time. Pressuring you to be with us when your heart is not in it is not what we wanted Ne’Veha.” Sadi answered. She glanced back down the corridor and saw Tarren marching towards them pulling his shirt on. “You apparently have made that decision. I wish you all the best Ne’Veha.”

“That’s it?” Ne’Veha gasped.

Sadi met her eyes. “What more do you want?” She asked softly. “Do you want Andro to fight for you Ne’Veha? You know as well as I do your Tarren would last perhaps ten seconds against Androcles Leonidas. He has fought and survived in places Tarren can not possibly begin to imagine. Would that be fair?”

“He is not my Tarren!” Ne’Veha hissed.

“That is not the way it looks to me Ne’Veha.” Sadi said pointedly.

“I... I was...!” Ne’Veha snapped. “I was lonely!”

“Lonely? His scent saturates your body Ne’Veha. Anything further and he would have practically scented you. That doesn’t seem like lonely to me.” Sadi spoke as Tarren came down the corridor almost upon them, Ne’Veha’s eyes wide in astonishment. “What am I supposed to identify with that?”

“I... no... I told him he couldn’t scent me!” Ne’Veha spoke her mind racing.

“Why would you tell him that Ne’Veha?” Sadi asked her, as Tarren came up to them. Sadi saw her *Durcunusaan* detail begin to move back to where she was from the location they occupied several meters away and she lifted her hand slightly and shook her head minutely and they stopped instantly.

“Ne’Veha... you need to get out of the corridor.” Tarren spoke taking her arm. “You have only a sheet on and other males are beginning to stare. Come back to your quarters.”

“I’m having a conversation!” Ne’Veha snapped at him. “Let them stare!”

“I do not approve!” Tarren told her.

Ne’Veha looked at him her dark brown eyes bubbling with anger. “I don’t care!” She snarled at him.

“Ne’Veha you are...” Tarren began to speak but was never able to finish his sentence. Sadi’s hand moved once more and her two *Durcunusaan* soldiers stepped up to Tarren.

“Step back Captain Tarren.” The detail leader Marte spoke firmly. “This conversation is a private one.”

Tarren looked at him. “You can’t order me around. I am a Captain in the...”

“You could be an Admiral and I wouldn’t care or be impressed. Step back now... or I *will* make you. Go back to where you came from.” Marte spoke.

“I will file a formal complaint!” Tarren snapped releasing Ne’Veha’s arm.

The second *Durcunusaan* troop chuckled. “You do that.” He said. “It will end up with all the rest who have gotten their egos bruised. On General Vengal’s desk... where it will find its way to the incinerator.”

Sadi stepped even closer to Ne’Veha, whose eyes had never left her face. “What do you want from us Ne’Veha? From Andro? Do you in some way want him to prove to you that what your parents raised you believing is not true? That would not be right, especially not now. What they think... it is true in many cases. There are many Lycavorians out there who do not hold the same values as most others. That usually changes as

they grow older, but Alphas like Tarren will not change until something actually happens to make them change. Your grandmother left your grandfather because she fell in love with a Lycavorian. If what you have shared with us is accurate... this man loved your grandmother, and he did not dishonor her marriage by having her commit adultery. They waited until after she had dissolved her marriage before they were together. Perhaps you should talk to this Uncle you have. Their son. Maybe you might discover a new perspective on things.”

“Sadi you... you still have not told me why you have made no attempt to contact me!” Ne'Veha blurted.

“That is what *you* wanted Ne'Veha. Not us.” Sadi said watching as her eyes fell. “Not a day has gone by that you have not been in our hearts and minds Ne'Veha. Do you think this is easy for us? Having you so close to us and not being able to reach out to you. To touch you and hold you? To share what we have together with you?” Sadi shook her head. “We can't... we won't do that now Ne'Veha. Not after what I have seen. Andro and Carisia have seen it as well. That is how tightly we are bound.”

“Sadi... Tarren...”

“No. I understand Ne'Veha, truly I do.” Sadi spoke softly. “You... you feel something... but you don't know what it is and the strength and purpose of it frightens you. You have not...” Sadi took a deep breath. “You have not had the same chance that Carisia and I have had because of the paths our lives have taken. Your Mindvoice abilities are growing, but they have not allowed you to feel what we have felt for so long. For Andro most of all but for each other as well. To be honest... even Andro was not able to sense the role that you and Lu'ria would play in our lives until we were mated and Carisia came to be with us. Only then were we strong enough to feel you and Lu'ria within us. It is a cruel trick that fate has played on all of us and what makes it worse is the way your parents have raised you to believe what Lycavorians were like. Tarren only enforces that in your mind.”

“Sadi I...” Ne'Veha started. “How... how do you know that?”

Sadi smiled. “If this is your decision... and it appears like it is... we will accept that.” Sadi spoke softly. “We will always love you Ne'Veha. No one will ever take your place with us... Andro meant that when he spoke those words to you. And so do I.” Sadi leaned forward and kissed her softly on her lips. “If you wish a transfer to another ship or command let Captain Sa'sur know and it will be processed immediately. I must go Ne'Veha...” Sadi spoke squeezing her hand. She turned quickly and stepped onto the elevator lift and Ne'Veha felt Sadi's two *Durcumusaan* soldiers move around her to follow. Sadi lifted her hand over the panel but stopped. She looked back at the stunning dark haired Ne'Veha.

“Ne'Veha...?” Ne'Veha lifted her moist eyes and looked at her. “When was the last time you checked your personal COM channel?”

Ne'Veha shook her head. “My... my COM channel... I never check it.” She answered softly. “I... I have never used it! I can't even remember my security code.”

“Perhaps you should try.” Sadi spoke as the doors closed in front of her and she was gone.

Tarren turned as Ne'Veha came back into her quarters and he caught the full brunt of her well aimed slap square on his face. The hard blow carried enough power to snap his head back significantly surprising both of them.

“You *ronnus!*” Ne'Veha snarled savagely.

Tarren looked at her with angry eyes as he held his cheek, the pain from the stinging pop very real. “What... what did she tell you?” He spat.

“Do you feel powerful using me like you have Tarren?” Ne'Veha growled. “Taking advantage of me like you have been doing these past weeks. You know what I have been going through and you are only concerned with yourself!”

“What are you talking about?” He exclaimed. “Is this about last night? Ne'Veha you were clutching me like your life depended on it and you groaned in my ear! Before sticking your tongue in it I might add! I don't see that as using you Ne'Veha!”

“You had no right!” Ne'Veha barked. “I don't belong to you Tarren!”

“That is not what you said last night!” He spoke with a smile. “You didn't seem to mind the attention!”

“Get out Tarren! Get out right now!” Ne'Veha shouted.

“No one will come near you now Ne'Veha!” Tarren snapped. “You know that. You may not have let me scent you... but no wolf will come near you. Let’s just move forward now! The next step is for you to become my mate and then we can be happy. That is what you want isn’t it Ne'Veha?”

“Get out!” Ne'Veha screamed. “Get out before I call security and have you removed!”

“Ne'Veha...”

Ne'Veha stepped over to her desk and with a smooth practiced motion she drew the K14 from where it resided in the holster hanging from the back of the chair. She leveled it at Tarren and saw his eyes grow wide. “Get out of my quarters Tarren. Right this instant or by the gods I will shoot you.”

Tarren’s eyes narrowed. “Fine!” He snapped gathering up his clothes. “We are not done yet Ne'Veha!”

“Leave Tarren! Now!” Ne'Veha’s aim never wavered and she held the K14 on him until he had stormed out of her quarters and the door slid shut silencing the sounds from the corridor. The moment she heard the door click Ne'Veha settled into the chair and booted her computer.

-ACTION REQUESTED-

“Ne'Veha, Commander ULU *SCIMITAR*, four one six five one. Personal COM channel.” Ne'Veha stated.

-PROCESSING-

-SECURITY COMMAND CODE REQUIRED?-

Ne'Veha’s mind raced with options as she tried to remember when she had last accessed her personal COM channel. She hated using the things because they were encrypted and always so security conscious about what was spoken. “SCC authorization eight... eight nine three four two!” She gasped.

-PROCESSING-

-STAND BY-

-PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL VERIFICATION COMPLETE-

-NE'VEHA, COMMANDER, ULU SCIMITAR. FOUR ONE SIX FIVE ONE-

-ACCESS LEVELS ALTERED. STAND BY-

“Altered?” Ne'Veha asked the computer. “Altered how?”

**-IDENTIFICATION DESIGNATION HAS BEEN CHANGED. COMPLETEING CHANGES.
STAND BY-**

“Identification designation altered? What does that mean?” Ne'Veha declared.

**-MODIFICATIONS ENGAGED. DESIGNATION NE'VEHA, COMMANDER, ULU SCIMITAR
HAS BEEN CHANGED TO SPARTAN EIGHT DASH CHARLIE. COMMAND AUTHORIZATION
CODES TRANSFERRED AND ADDED TO DATABASE-**

-ALL ACCESS LEVELS-

**-DETECTING THIRTEEN UNREAD COMMUNICATIONS. DO YOU WISH TO REVIEW
COMMANDER?-**

“Wait!” Ne'Veha spoke. “Who changed my authorization? When?”

**-AUTHORIZATION LEVELS CHANGED AND APPROVED BY SPARTAN EIGHT ACTUAL.
LEONIDAS, ANDROCLES, CROWN PRINCE OF UNION. DO YOU WISH TO REVIEW THE
QUEUE OF TRANSMISSIONS COMMANDER?-**

“Who... who are they from?” Ne'Veha asked with a sinking feeling.

**-FOUR MESSAGES FROM SPARTAN EIGHT ALPHA-
-FOUR MESSAGES FROM SPARTAN EIGHT BRAVO-
-FIVE MESSAGES FROM SPARTAN EIGHT ACTUAL-
-DO YOU WISH TO REVIEW MESSAGES COMMANDER?-**

“Yes... yes.” Ne'Veha replied feeling the bile rise in her throat and the tears come to her eyes.

**-MESSAGE ONE FROM SPARTAN EIGHT. RECORDED FIVE WEEKS AND FOUR DAYS
AGO. PROCEED WITH PLAYBACK?-**

“Yes.”

The screen on her computer changed and Andro's handsome face appeared in the image.

“Ok... I really hate these things.” Andro's image spoke. “I know I said we would give you time and space but I just wanted you to know that I have changed your authorization levels and code, and your Command designation. You don't want to know what is involved in doing that... man! It may seem presumptuous of me... but I'm planning ahead. I hope. If in any way you don't approve Ne'Veha, just let me know and I will change them back. What I did is all contained in this message, I just figured I would say hello as well. There is not much going on here. We...”

Ne'Veha didn't hear the rest of the message for the tears were pouring down her cheeks and she could hear nothing over her sobs.

THERMOPYLAE KING LEONIDAS MEMORIAL

He came here often now. It seemed to be the only place he could come to get away from the constant badgering and mocking of Qurot and Timur and bring himself any semblance of calm. He sat in the large stadium like bleachers that faced the memorial that bore the name of the legendary King of Sparta and his grandfather.

It had taken six trips to this memorial before he could come to bring himself to say that word. Twenty-four years of having his father do nothing but curse the name of his own father took its toll on you Karun knew. When he had arrived here, it was with the same fervor of hate that so fueled his father. Now after nearly three months, that hatred had been smashed aside by the undeniable truth. Karun's father had never told him that he had a statue on King's Row in Sparta. His father had never told him that up until the day he had defected to the Kavalian people, Pleistarchus's reign as King was chronicled in Sparta's Archives of History. He obviously did not know this, for he most certainly would have told Karun about them and the *lies* they held. Since he had not told Karun about them, his son correctly deduced that he did not know of them, and therefore what part of what was written could be lies? What Karun had discovered in those archives gave him insight into the man his father truly was. And Karun found himself not liking this man in the least.

Nor did Karun like the man he himself was becoming.

At least the man he was before he came here to this place. To this planet. To the part of his history that his father would never have told him. Yes he was half Kavalian, and Karun would never be ashamed of that. But he was also half Lycavorian... a part of whom he was that he would never have discovered without coming here. A part his father would never have given him. Karun would never have learned the history of his grandfather or the Spartan warriors he had commanded, the same Spartan warriors that his father had commanded before deserting them. Karun didn't hold it against his father for leaving, how could he? If his father hadn't left these people, if he hadn't met his mother, Karun would not be here. Karun knew now though, given the same choice, he would not have taken the path his father did. There were many reasons for that

choice, and it *was* a choice. One of those reasons was the half sister he had never known existed and discovered just before leaving Kavalian space. The half vampire sister that was beyond impressive. Not only was Lisisa's beauty stunning, but also her skills and intelligence was an equal to any Kavalian male he had ever come across. The man their father had arranged to give her too, if they succeeded in having her designated a Kavalian citizen, was laughable compared to her. Timur was nothing more than a bumbling fool in contrast to Lisisa. He was nothing more than a biogenic altered idiot in Karun's mind, a man who only enforced that idea every time he opened his mouth. His meetings with Lisisa were almost weekly now and he thoroughly enjoyed spending time with her. In many ways Lisisa reminded him of his younger sister Nikkei. She was of the same bubbly personality, though she was the image of their mother Jalersi with her long blond hair and bright blue eyes. Karun doted on her whenever he was home even though his father and grandfather frowned upon this. It wasn't the Kavalian way they said. His younger brothers Quatu and Kenerr were more like his father in the way they treated females. Karun simply could not resist Nikkei's brilliant smile no matter how he tried.

Karun had tried to be like his father in that regard, but even he treated their mother differently than most Kavalian males treated their mates. At least he had up until Athani had defected. Now he avoided even talking to her because of something that was not even her fault. Though the last few weeks his mother had seemed different somehow. She no longer walked the corridors of the embassy for hours. It was almost as if she was a different woman now. She held her head high when she walked, and she had a spring to her step that he had not seen since he was a child. Karun was no stranger to women, and there were times when he had been dominant and expected that of his partners in the way of any Kavalian male. It had been hard for him to let go of that, so ingrained in his mind and culture as it was, but one thing Karun was beginning to understand since being here was that everything happened for a reason. There was a reason he had come to Earth and Sparta. There was a reason he had discovered the history of his Spartan blood, and above all else there was a reason he had discovered the completely intoxicating and devastatingly beautiful half elf Ardis.

What Karun had discovered in that blue and violet eyed woman was beyond anything his imagination would have been able to comprehend only four short months ago. She had taught him so much in that time. Ardis had taught him how to use his Lycavorian sense of smell, something his father failed in doing, and now he used it as often as he could. Learning how to categorize scents and then file them to memory was the hardest, but the more he did it, the easier it became. Ardis's sweet timber and peach scent however he would never forget, for it was burned into his mind now. She had taught him how to concentrate enough to shift to his wolf form, something he had never been able to do before coming here. It had frightened him terribly the first time he accomplished it, and being on four legs with a tail had caused him to wobble and teeter for a full thirty minutes before he was able to learn to stand on four legs and not have his bushy tail throw him off balance. Yet being in wolf form and seeing the world from an entirely different perspective had been utterly fascinating. It was something he vowed to teach Nikkei when he saw her next.

So lost in his own thoughts Karun did not notice the dark haired woman who watched him from the side of the stadium like seats, the two *Durcunusaan* soldiers standing on either side of her.

Gorgo watched Karun as he sat there in the front row of the comfortable seats; neatly eating something from the small pack he had with him.

[He comes here almost every day Lady Gorgo. He has for almost five weeks now. We have come later today and that is why we do not see him.] The *Durcunusaan* soldier on her right spoke within Mindvoice.

[What does he do Jocis?] Gorgo asked not turning to look at the man who had been her constant shadow for the last twenty-five years. It was not something she had wanted at first, but Martin had insisted, especially after the events with Pleistarchus so many years ago. Riall also had a *Durcunusaan* officer that went wherever he did, as well as anyone who Martin considered family. Whenever she went anywhere Jocis was with her. She knew his mate and sons as if they were part of her own family, and had come to trust the man implicitly.

[Just what we see here Milady.] Jocis answered. *[If the reports are accurate. He stands in front of the monument for ten or fifteen minutes when he first arrives, and then he sits and simply watches it. He snacks while he is here... but never leaves garbage where he has been.]*

[The sign of a good soldier.] Gorgo spoke softly. *[Never allow your enemy to see where you have been.]*

[Perhaps.] Jocis said in agreement. *[It is also the sign of someone showing honor and respect where it is deserved.]*

Gorgo turned to look at him now. *[What are you not telling me Jocis?]*

[He has been spending quite a bit of time with Ardis Milady.] Jocis told her.

[Tarifa and Isra's oldest?] Gorgo asked surprised.

Jocis nodded. *[It is said she is like her mother Milady, shrewd and extremely intelligent. It is no wonder she is the King's favorite niece. She reminds him of Tarifa. The reports say she has been teaching him things. Things he did not know before. They say he is different than when he first arrived.]*

[Different how?] Gorgo asked.

[Perhaps now might a good time to find out.] Jocis told her.

[Jocis...]

[Lady Gorgo... he is not Pleistarchus. He is not your son. You are not one to casually dismiss others no matter their crimes. You never have been. This boy has committed to crimes Lady Gorgo. Maybe you should see for yourself if he is like his father. I do know that Ardis is an excellent judge of character, and if she has chosen to spend almost all of her off time with him, there must be a reason.] Jocis spoke.

Gorgo turned back to look at Karun. *[Never fear the unknown.]* She whispered.

Jocis nodded. *[Indeed.]*

Gorgo took a deep breath and started forward while Jocis and his second remained where they were but they came into view fully now. The movement caused Karun to finally look their way and his eyes grew wide when he saw Gorgo approaching. He got to his feet and quickly picked up his bag, readying himself to leave. He started to step off onto the ground, trying to leave before she approached fully, but he was either too slow or part of him did not want to leave.

"You... you do not have to leave... Karun isn't it?" Gorgo spoke softly holding out her hand as she approached.

Karun's eyes cut to where he saw the two *Durcunusaan* soldiers standing near the side of the rows of seats and then back to her. "I... I thought you... I thought you would be gone by now." He stammered.

Gorgo looked at him surprised. "You wait until I am gone?" She asked surprised. "Why would you do this?"

"I know... I know you come the same day and time every week. I have tried to make it so you do not need to see me." Karun told her.

"I had a meeting this morning." Gorgo answered as she moved closer to him seeing his apprehension. "Do I frighten you young man?"

Karun glanced at the two *Durcunusaan* troops quickly and then back to Gorgo. "In a way... yes." He finally answered honestly.

Gorgo looked at him surprised now and her face showed this. "Why would I frighten you young Karun?"

"You... you are King Leonidas's mother." He answered. "Everyone knows how he views you."

"And how is that?" Gorgo asked as she sat down.

"He... he views you as I do my own mother Lady Gorgo." Karun spoke looking at her.

"And how do you view your mother Karun?" Gorgo asked. She motioned with her hand. "You may sit Karun. I will not chase you away." Gorgo watched him briefly consider that statement and then he lowered his bag back to the ground and settled in the seat next to her. "So how do you view your mother Karun?"

"She gave me life." Karun answered. "I respect her. I honor her even when it goes against the ways of my people." He met Gorgo's eyes. "I love her."

"And that does not sit well with the Kavalian blood within you does it?" Gorgo asked. "It is not something they encourage within your culture is it?"

Karun shook his head. "No." He fidgeted briefly. "May I ask a question?"

"You should never request permission to ask a question Karun." Gorgo spoke suddenly finding this young man endearing in a sort of way. He was not what she expected him to be, yet he looked so much like Pleistarchus she had never attempted to know him. Sitting next to him as she now was, Gorgo could easily see the influence of his mother's genes in him. "Questions are one of the ways we gain wisdom."

"May I ask why you... why you left my father?" Karun spoke softly.

"Would it make a difference?" Gorgo asked him.

"To my father or to me?" Karun said.

"I don't know." Gorgo told him. "Who is asking the question? You or your father?"

“I am asking the question.” Karun spoke. “I want to know.”

“And will you tell your father the next time you speak to him?” Gorgo asked.

“I have not spoken to my father in three weeks.” Karun said quickly. “I have sent coded reports so that I would not need to speak with him. I have done this on purpose.”

Gorgo tilted her head slightly. “Interesting.” She told him.

She turned her head to look at the monument to her beloved Leonidas. “Sparta in that time was a male dominated society. Don’t get me wrong, the females were treated with the utmost respect and honor, and we were allowed many freedoms, more so than any other society in the world at the time. When my Leonidas told me what we were... or more accurately where we had come from... it was incredible to believe. I could not deny what he said however... not when so many others and I had been shifting our forms for years. I discovered I was carrying Martin the day after he died here. I was so filled with worry for him I did not take notice of Martin growing in my womb. He knew when he left that we had conceived Martin because he could feel his spark of life begin. When I realized this myself I went to Dustha... the Oracle at the time. She knew Leonidas’s actions would bring the Coven here in force. She was not simply thinking of Sparta and the other nations on this planet; she was also thinking of the trillions out among the stars that would be directly affected. She advised me to leave. She would be here, and so many others that your father could look to for support. She could not take the chance that all of us would be killed if Sparta and the other city-states were unable to defeat the Xerxes and the Coven. I agonized over the decision for days... but then I knew I had to think of not just your father and myself. I had to think of Martin and so many others who would be affected by my decision. If I chose to remain and was killed? If we remained and all of us were killed... if Martin had been killed... so much would be lost. The Coven would have won right then because the Union would never have come together as it did.”

“So... so you did it for the good of others?” Karun asked softly.

Gorgo nodded slowly. “I truly thought your father would be fine with so many Alphas to help guide him. I loved him and I certainly did not want to leave him. I was wrong and that is a burden I must carry for the rest of my life. I do not regret my decision however. If I had not done what I did, things would be different now.”

“Will... will you ever forgive him... Grandmother? Can you forgive him? Can... can my uncle forgive him?” Karun asked in that same soft voice lifting his eyes to look at her.

Gorgo met his gaze evenly and then lifted her hand to place her palm on his cheek. “I forgave him long ago Karun my boy.”

“Even after... even after that day?” Karun asked. “When he tried to kill you?”

Gorgo nodded. “I forgave him... but I will never forget. That is the difference.”

“And my uncle?” Karun asked.

Gorgo shook her head slowly in sadness and lowered her eyes. “Forgive him?” She said in a whisper like voice. “No... Martin will never forgive him. You must understand Karun, when Martin finally discovered who he was... what he was; he made an effort to learn all he could about his true father and brother. Even though he thought Pleistarchus dead... he secretly worshiped his brother. I didn’t discover this until well after their battle, and surprisingly it was Daniel Simpson who told me. How your father betrayed his people and the memory of their father... how he regarded Lisisa as a tool. All Martin had built his brother up to be came crashing down that day on that field.” Gorgo shook her head. “No... he will never forgive him I’m afraid.”

“Is that why he hates me?” Karun asked.

“Hate you?” Gorgo gasped. “Why in the stars would you think he hated you?”

“I am my father’s son.” Karun said.

“Karun... whom do you think it was that ordered you were not to have an escort while you were in Sparta?” Gorgo said seeing his eyes grow wide. “Unlike everyone else at your embassy, you alone are free to go where you will. Only when you leave Sparta does Ardis go with you. That was Martin Leonidas and no one else. He wanted you to be able to experience everything Sparta offered for yourself. Not take the word of others.”

“My father.” Karun said with a nod looking towards the Leonidas monument.

Gorgo nodded. “Yes.”

“I... I think I am coming to believe that there are many things that I am starting to question Grandmother.” Karun said softly. He looked at her quickly. “If I can call you...”

Gorgo nodded with a smile. "That is what I am." She stated. "And whatever stigma may surround your father... I have come to see this day that it does not extend to you. I was wrong to think you were not intelligent enough to see these things for yourself."

Karun chuckled softly. "I wasn't." He said. "I needed help Grandmother."

"We all need help at times Karun." Gorgo told him. "What really matters is if you will take that help when it is offered. Who has helped you?"

Karun lifted his eyes and gazed at her. Gorgo noticed his gaze drift at something behind her and she turned her head quickly to see Ardis moving past Jocis and her other guard and moving towards them tentatively. Gorgo smiled warmly and turned back to him waiting for his eyes to once more meet hers. "There is no better help than what you have." She said.

"Grandmother... is it wrong to question what your father and others have taught you all of your life?" Karun asked.

"That depends." Gorgo said as she watched Ardis move up alongside Karun, tucking her slim figure in very closely to the taller Karun, her eyes on Gorgo.

"*Aryatara.*" Ardis spoke hesitantly in Elven. "*Naa iluve?*" (Grandmother. Is everything alright?)

Gorgo looked at the way Karun's eyes gazed at Ardis's face with what she could only describe as fierce devotion. "Everything is just fine child." She answered with a smile. "My Grandson and I have been having a rather enlightening conversation."

Ardis shifted her eyes to Karun and then back to Gorgo surprise very evident in them. "Really?" She asked.

Karun looked at Ardis and smiled. "Yes we have." He turned back to Gorgo again. "What does it depend on Grandmother?" He asked.

Gorgo smiled and without hesitation stepped up to Karun, leaning over to place a soft kiss on his cheek. "It depends on whether or not all you have been taught... if what you have discovered since you have been here is the same as what you have been led to believe. Is it?"

Karun shook his head. "No." He replied instantly.

Gorgo nodded. "Then what you feel is not wrong. And it may be time for you to begin making decisions for yourself."

TAYGETOS MOUNTAINS WESTERN EDGE OF SPARTA

Walter stepped onto the patio of his villa holding the mug of Aricia's coffee, the loose fitting clothes hiding his scarred but still muscular body. Even at just over three thousand years old, Walter remained the epitome of a Spartan warrior. The only man living who could claim to have known King Leonidas the First on a personal basis. A personal basis forged in the fires of combat for Walter had fought with him at Thermopylae. Fought and nearly died if not for the actions of his King. Walter had sworn two oaths that day to his dying King, just before the Thebans who had remained with them threw his body into the ocean in order for him to escape.

He had sworn to protect and guide the descendents of Leonidas, no matter where they might be. And he had sworn to protect the humans on this planet against everything the Coven could throw at them. Walter Carson as he was called now, he had succeeded in fulfilling one of those oaths, and now the unborn son of his long dead King sat in his rightful place. And Walter served him proudly and without question, honoring another oath he had made to the vision of his long dead King and friend. The second oath was still an ongoing affair as far as Walter was concerned, and aside from mandatory inspections from the Senior Polemarch of the Lycavorian Union Ground Forces, Walter resided here on Earth to advise and attempt to guide the humans that still populated Earth. Tarifa, Selene, Aihola... they still came to him for his opinion on many things and he never refused them his council.

With the advances in medical science and the introduction of Hadarian Healers back into the ranks of the Union, the life spans for humans had increased dramatically. Most diseases that had once ravaged the human race were now completely extinguished and it was not uncommon to see humans who were nearing a century old and in peak physical and mental condition. The ravages of time would eventually catch up to them,

but since the passing of the Great Fire and the expulsion of the High Coven from Earth completely, the humans had made a remarkable comeback. Slowly but surely they were reviving their species and cultures, many of the elf species on Earth adopting countless numbers of their once dead traditions as they were reintroduced.

Under the leadership of elves and humans alike the last quarter century, Earth was once more becoming a thriving planet and had become a mainstay of trade and prosperity across the Union. Charles Taylor was Earth's president and well into his eighties now. He had just be re-elected by a five to one margin to another six year term, both humans and elves feeling that he had their planet on the right track and was unburdened by anything but the welfare of the men and women who had elected him. It helped that he had an immediate and direct line to the King or Tarifa here in Sparta or on Apo Prime, but Charles Taylor was not one to be pushed around or told what to do. If it did not benefit his people, humans and elves and the thousands of others that now called Earth home, if it did not benefit them he wanted nothing to do with it. He and Aihola and Selene worked seamlessly for the people of this planet, all of them having lived through the worst period in human history and vowing to never see that happen again if it was within their power to stop.

Humans as a whole were branching out now, many rediscovering the skills that had once made them a great species. Their intelligence, ingenuity and their ability to adapt. Many of the Union's newest and brightest fighter pilots were humans. Though many would never have the reflexes and coordination of an elf, they more than made up for that in their fierce drive and dedication, as well as their ability to adjust almost instantly to any given situation. Steven Randall was always held up as an example of what humans could achieve. He had risen to the top of the heap of pilots, humans and elves, and that was before he had decided to have Martin change him so that he could remain with Zaala for eternity. Captain Miranda Lorian was also another example of a human shooting to the top, and Walter knew many more were on their way. Not just in the military, but in engineering and politics. Everything they had once excelled at, they were doing it once more, and only this time they had learned from the mistakes of the past and were determined to not repeat them. Those humans who resided on Earth would fight and die in an instant for Earth and the Union. And for the man who had freed them to regain their place among the stars.

As Senior Polemarch of the Union Ground Forces Walter had many duties and chief among them was the training and preparation of all young Spartans. He supervised the Agoge program that now included Lycavorians, Elves and humans and scattered others from different species. It was a brutal and demanding Agoge... nothing like what he had gone through as a child, but certainly the most demanding and harsh six year training regime ever devised by anyone's mind. When they graduated on that field of Thermopylae, every one of them held their heads high in pride at what they accomplished. Walter had a say in everything that happened within the ranks of the ground forces, and when he spoke, people usually listened for they knew he did not speak unless he knew what he was talking about. His mate and wife of nearly his entire lifetime stood in their kitchen, her abdomen swollen with his eighth child and looking just as beautiful now as she did the day Walter turned her and made her his.

His home was a massive mountain estate villa built on the Taygetos Mountain range overlooking Sparta. A *STRIKER DT* landing pad was a hundred meters to the north, the ship silent for the evening. His young elven pilots resided on the estate in comfortable apartments not far from the main home, his three person *Durcunusaan* detail sharing another set of medium sized apartments on the south end of the estate.

Walter turned his head to the left and a smile pried apart his lips as his eyes fell upon the huge muscular form of the viridian green scaled dragon that now occupied almost a third of his patio. Majeir had grown so much from that bouncy dragon hatchling he had saved twenty-five years ago. She was now just as large as her older sister Syrilth, perhaps even larger by half a meter or so past Syrilth's sixteen meters, and she ranked in the top five of those dragons here on Earth in speed and strength and the ability to sustain a flame. Since that day so long ago, she had been his constant companion wherever he went almost all of the time. She traveled with him to other planets, she traveled with him to graduations and meetings, anywhere a dragon could fit and you found Majeir there. While they had never bonded as a pair, they were as close as two friends could possibly be, and both of them knew that one day Majeir was meant for grander things. She was known as the dragon who had decided the fate of Vile Maruad as he was known in the annals of Dragon history now, and a kind fate it was not. While not known at the time, she had sentenced him to perhaps the most agonizingly slow death ever recorded in history. When asked about it now, her only statement was that he got what he deserved.

Majeir was considered a beautiful and lean female dragon Walter knew, and though she was now past the age where males were allowed to show interest in her as a mate, because of who her sister was and even because of Walter none dared come forward just yet. There was not a dragon alive who did not know who Syrilth or Walter was, and many of them were hesitant to approach Majeir because of this fact. Majeir had no problem with that in the least since unlike her sister Tharua; Majeir had no interest in discovering a mate just yet. Walter watched her as she gazed into the bright sky, watching as her head tilted to take in the shape of a certain cloud. He stepped up to her without fear and ran his hand along the smooth scales of her flank as he moved up to stand beside her shoulders.

What are you thinking Majeir? He asked within mindvoice. *Your thoughts have been wandering quite a bit in the last few weeks. And you have spoken a name in your sleep many times.*

Majeir turned her huge head and looked at the man who had been her rescuer, her protector and now her friend for so long. Her ruby red eyes gleamed with intelligence and beauty.

I... I have come to a crossroads Walter. Majeir's voice spoke in response. A soft, delicate voice that belied her immense power.

Walter smiled and nodded his head as he sipped his coffee. It had taken him ten years to get her to stop calling him Guardian. *Yes you have.*

You believe in destiny don't you Walter?

If I did not believe in destiny, I would not have come this far in my life. Walter answered. *Now tell me what it is Majeir?*

I... I have felt my Bonded One Walter. Majeir answered. *I know I have. I have felt her for many weeks now. And it is growing stronger.*

You knew this day might come Majeir. Walter said meeting her ruby eyes. *Your mother and father, Tharua, Roluth. It is in your bloodline to be bonded to a rider. It is something that all of your siblings can aspire too.*

Walter... she is... she is a dark skinned elf. Majeir spoke.

A Drow! Walter gasped.

Majeir nodded her head. *It shocked me too... but I know it to be true. I have seen her hair, her eyes. She is very beautiful. And she is aware of me. Her Mindvoice ability is growing as well and I do not know why. But it makes the urge to go to her harder to fight.*

Walter looked impressed. *Well... that is truly something. With the exception of Aihola and Lynwe I did not think the Drow were capable of Mindvoicing on such a level Majeir.*

Nor did I. Majeir said. *There is something else.* Walter looked at her. *I... I have seen her dreams Walter just as she has seen mine. We are calling for each other Walter. And it grows stronger by the day. Her name is Lu'ria... and it echoes in my mind all the time now.*

Is she here on Earth? Walter asked.

Majeir shook her head. *No. The draw to her grows Walter. The need to find her. To be with her.*

Then why are you still here? Walter asked. Walter saw Majeir blink her ruby eyes several times as she looked at him and he made a disgusted face. He tossed his mug onto the nearby grass and moved in front of her, placing his hands on either side of her huge snout as she easily lowered her head to look at him. *Majeir... what have I told you through the years we have been together?*

That no matter what happened we would always be the dearest of friends. Majeir answered immediately.

Walter nodded. *What happened that day in that mountain bound us together Majeir. We have given each other strength these last years. Supported each other. That is what friends do. And that will never change. Ever. I have known this could happen one day, and I am not sad. This is guided by destiny Majeir. I am not sad because I know it does not affect what we have as friends and whether you are bound to a rider or not, we will always be friends. That connection, that bond can never be broken now.*

Then what do I do Walter? She asked. *I have to find her but I do not know where to start.*

Walter smiled and leaned forward to kiss her snout as he had done so many times in the past. *I do. And we will find her together.* Walter turned his head and activated the COM implant in his jaw with a simple twitch of his head.

“Ceneia?”

The voice of Walter's female *STRIKER DT* pilot answered instantly.

“Senior Polemarch!”

“Ceneia... spool up the engines! We have a trip to make!” Walter declared.

“At once Senior Polemarch! Destination?”

“Eden City to start! After that... who knows? Contact Aihola’s office and let her know I need to speak with her as soon as we arrive.” Walter spoke.

“Understood! Six minutes to come to full power!”

Walter turned to Majeir. *Let me change and I will meet you on the pad.*

Walter... Majeir began to speak.

No... this is what you are meant for Little One. And I intend to see you fulfill that part of your destiny.

Walter told her. *I’ll meet you at the pad.*

FLIGHT TRAINING SECTOR THREE NODON STATION SYSTEM

“They on us yet *Mando*?” Steven’s voice echoed in Miranda’s helmet.

“Coming on at point six three *Scar*! Closing speed nine thousand. Range fourteen.” She snapped out the reply.

“Ah shit! They’re in vector three formations! How many times do I have to tell them no vector formations when only two inbounds? What am I... speaking to stone heads?” Steven’s voice spoke.

Miranda Lorian was truly in her element and loving every moment of it. Despite Steven’s complaint, she knew he was exceptionally proud of what he had accomplished with this group of pilots in the last seven weeks. He had turned them into the type of pilots needed to operate off the *ARIZONA*. Bold, reckless, and methodic. All of the pilots had responded to him as she had hoped. They knew of what he had accomplished during the Evolli War and even before that. He was wolf now, but it was well known that he had only done that for one reason, and it had nothing to do with his flying.

Miranda had taken to flying in the training drills as well, and though she and Janon had flown together for many years, they had never been wingmen. Flying with Steven Randall was like flying with a shadow. He almost instinctively knew what she was going to do and when, and Miranda knew the exact same with him. It was the same feeling she had grown so accustomed to with her very first wingman, and never found again. Until now.

“Range to target?” Steven barked.

“Forty-one!” Miranda answered looking out the cockpit side window of her M7 Tempest to see Steven’s M7 not four meters away in perfect formation. “They’ll be on us before that!”

Miranda saw his helmeted head turn to look at her. “Not if we cheat!” He snapped.

Miranda chuckled. “What did you have in mind *Scar*?”

“A little razzle-dazzle do dad *Mando*!”

“Oh... I like razzle-dazzle do dad *Scar*! Slingshot?” Miranda asked.

“Why not? I’m feeling my oats today!”

Miranda turned her head to look out into the darkness of the stars surrounding them. She could just barely make out the point of light that was the *HARBINGER* in the distance, and for this mission, her target. “*Jester*... you with us?”

“High slot!” Janon’s voice replied instantly. “Standing by to pounce!”

“***Unidentified aircraft you are approaching a United Lycavorian Union warship! You will alter course immediately or we will destroy you!***” The voice exploded into their internal speakers anxious and out of breath.

“Looks like they’re awake at least!” Miranda exclaimed as her hands flew across her controls. “VMTs set! Laser pods active! I’m green! Computer assisted?”

“I hate computers doing my flying *Mando*!” Steven announced.

Miranda smiled. “So do I!”

“Unidentified aircraft you have not altered course. This is your last warning. Veer away now or we will kill you!”

“Who is that?” Miranda asked.

“Sounds like Ahtels!” Steven answered.

“He’s excitable.” Miranda commented casually. “Range to target now thirty-two! *Mando to HARBINGER!* E’dira, are you recording all this?”

“Signal is clear Miranda.” The Drow’s voice replied with infinite calmness.

Miranda suppressed a shudder when she heard E’dira’s voice in her helmet. While seven weeks flying with Steven had made her feel reborn, seven weeks with the ravishing Drow elf officer so close by had reignited feelings Miranda had long buried. No matter what they were doing together, whether in a meeting or simply conversing in the lounge going over the day’s reports, E’dira always found a way to touch her in some manner. A brush against her shoulder, an innocent caress of her hand or arm, it didn’t matter. Wherever E’dira touched her, Miranda felt electric jolts across her skin. She knew of the Drow elves and their ability to be nearly irresistible to both men and women. They radiated a sexual confidence and persona that was hard to ignore, and when they looked at you with those amber colored eyes it only intensified. Whenever Miranda caught herself staring into those amber orbs she had to consciously tear herself away or be lost within them. She heard E’dira’s voice in her head, even when the Drow was not around. Miranda Lorian could count her relationships on one hand, and while she had never really found another woman attractive enough to go that route, she was beginning to perhaps feel something for E’dira that went beyond a professional manner. Something that Miranda found herself wanting to discover. E’dira’s eyes were like a magnet, and just looking at her body made Miranda visualize them together. And not only together, but Miranda acting as willing slave to her Drow Mistress. And if Miranda Lorian was any judge of actions, and she thought she was, it was becoming obvious that E’dira felt the same way.

“Acknowledged!” Miranda declared. “Steven?”

“Not yet!”

“*Scar...* they are closing their formation! Splitting into pairs!” Miranda snapped. “They are going to split and try and get us both. Completely off attack profile!”

“Damn! That’s Irhiad! Last mission out and he wants to show off! I should have known!” Steven declared.

“Down to eight range!” Miranda announced.

“On my mark!” Steven barked out. “School’s out boys and girls! *Mando!* Execute!”

HARBINGER TRAINING FLIGHT M7 TEMPEST INTERCEPTORS FLIGHT OF FOUR

“I have them!” Irhiad heard Ahtels announce over their internal COM. “Unidentified aircraft you are approaching a United Lycavorian Union warship! You will alter course immediately or we will destroy you!”

Irhiad’s eyes scanned his instruments behind his helmet faceplate. “They are in tight formation!” He barked. “Holding four meters apart! Speed eighty-five hundred! Range fourteen! Rahot... pull in tighter! Seluh... you and Ahtels form together and we will split apart and take them from two sides!”

“Their target is the *HARBINGER* Irhiad! We should hit them full on! Go after Captain Lorian! She is representing the Heavy Fighter Bomber!” Ahtels barked. “Attack and cover as Major Randall showed us!”

“We can get them both if we break into pairs!” Irhiad snapped. “Their attack profile gives us the advantage!”

“That is not the mission!” Ahtels barked. “We are to keep Captain Lorian from killing our ship!”

“I am the Flight Leader and the senior officer!” Irhiad snapped. “Do as I say Junior Lieutenant Ahtels!”

“HARBINGER Flight Patrol from HARBINGER base! Two targets inbound in attack profile! SAP is out of position and can not respond! Our weapons are non-operational. We have copied your warning to unidentified fighters! You are weapons free! Repeat... you are weapons free!”

Irhiad heard the voice of their command ship over his COM and smiled to himself. It was the elf female Zaala Randall. She was on the bridge acting as an additional tactical officer it seemed and now she would get to see him simulate blowing her precious husband out of the stars. It almost seemed to him that she went out of her way to mock him now. He had made a fool out of himself by propositioning her that first day. He hadn't known she was married until Captain Lorian introduced Major Randall, and he stepped away from next to her. But not before giving her a kiss. A kiss that she seemed to direct and deepen just to humiliate him more. There was a bounty of females on the *HARBINGER*, and he had found plenty of company since they had come out here, but what Zaala had done still rubbed him the wrong way. And in seven weeks he had yet to defeat Major Randall, either one on one or in a group exercise such as this.

"We will form into pairs and come at them from both sides!" Irhiad snapped. "Ahtels... let them know!"

"Unidentified aircraft you have not altered course. This is your last warning. Veer away now or we will kill you!" Ahtels voice announced.

"Negative response!" Rahot spoke.

"Prepare to split and engage! I have Randall! Ahtels and Seluh take Captain Lorian!" Irhiad snapped.

"Range is now eight!" Rahot spoke.

"On my mark we will split!" Irhiad spoke adjusting his controls and gripping his control stick tighter. "Three! Two!"

"Breaking! They are breaking! By the gods look at that!"

Irhiad's eyes were wide behind his helmet as he watched the two M7 Tempest fighters that were Captain Lorian and Major Randall execute half turns and then peel away from each other in a maneuver he had never once contemplated attempting. He could tell they were at full engine power, the bright flare of their J LX-Fusion Plasma Drive exhausts visible for a split second until they turned toward each other and passed within a hairs breath of one another. His eyes went wider when at the peak of the turn, they peeled in opposite directions once more and Major Randall was heading directly at them while Captain Lorian was blazing away toward the *HARBINGER*.

"Captain Lorian's speed just jumped to twelve thousand!" Ahtels roared. "Major Randall is at full Fusion Burner coming right at us! Gods Irhiad... they just performed a Slingshot! He is coming right at us under full power! Captain Lorian is pulling away!"

"Break! Break! Go after Lorian!" Irhiad ordered. "Banking right! Seluh with me!"

"We need to stay together!" Rahot barked now.

"Randall is mine!" Irhiad snarled.

"Damn!" Ahtels snapped. "Rahot... full power or we will lose her!"

Irhiad didn't see the two M7s leap forward at incredible speed; his eyes were locked on Major Randall who did not appear to be trying to maneuver away and was boring right in towards them. "Tracking!"

"Range down to four!" Seluh shouted.

"He's not maneuvering!" Irhiad barked.

"Range is at three!"

"Lock! I got lock!" Irhiad declared happily. "I'm killing him now!" He yelled as he mashed his fingers down on the firing button for his pulse cannons.

The training pulse lasers flashed away into the space in front of him. They would impact Randall's fighter and he would lose power for twenty seconds Irhiad thought with amusement. As his eyes lifted to follow the lasers he saw something then that he had never seen before in all his time flying and it appeared to be happening in slow motion. The M7's tail rose and Irhiad could see its XLM-800 VMTs at full power, lifting the ship nose down even as he was passing under it. As his head lifted in awe, looking out the top of his cockpit, he saw Randall's pulse cannons fire and begin striking his M7 in dozens of different spots. Alarms began to sound throughout the cockpit and his engines immediately died. His control stick became completely unresponsive and Irhiad slammed his head back against his seat because he knew he was well and truly dead.

"I got him!" Seluh screamed as he flashed by. "I got the Major! I got him!"

Irhiad heard his COM unit crackle. "*I win!*" Major Randall's voice echoed in his helmet.

“Range down to four!” Rahot barked. “We’re closing! She’s not maneuvering! She’s going in full throttle!”

“Range to *HARBINGER!*” Ahtels shouted.

“Six thousand!”

“Can you get a lock?”

“Negative! Too far for cannons and too close for SWARM Pods!”

“We should have gone in on the Captain!” Ahtels shouted. “We’re not going to get her before she reaches firing range!”

“No you are not!”

The new voice echoed in their helmets. A male voice. And one that signified both of their *deaths*.

“New contact! New contact! Just powering up! We...”

“Are dead!” Ahtels screamed with disgust just as Janon’s M7, sitting dormant with no power readings until now, kicked to life not six thousand meters from them and raked both of their fighters with laser training fire. As Janon kicked in his engines and roared over the top of the now powerless M7s, he could only grin savagely inside his helmet.

HARBINGER

Miranda Lorian let out a war whoop that deafened those on the bridge of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser, and left her Drow Tactical Officer E’dira and several others with smiles on their faces. Some of the lights and systems on the ship flickered gently signifying several hits and then everything returned to normal.

Oh yes E’dira of the Drow thought to herself, Miranda Lorian was everything she was looking for in a ‘slave’, a serious lover and a companion that she could spend the rest of her life with. Seven weeks of working with her side-by-side, of gazing at her Asian beauty and the way she filled out her uniform. Seven weeks of watching her plan training operations with Major Randall, all of them intricate and so very tasking. Seven weeks of watching her supremely sharp and tactical mind work. When combined with her incredibly firm and lush body, E’dira had never been more attracted or wanted a woman more than she did Miranda Lorian. She had made certain her personal quarters were only two down from Miranda’s on the *HARBINGER*, and had requested quarters next to hers on the *ARIZONA*.

She had spoken at length with Lynwe before leaving Earth. More than any other Drow that had survived the High Coven experiments and torture, General Lynwe had done the most to help E’dira to move on with her life. They had discovered a special kinship because of what the Coven had done to them both, and the results those experiments had on both of them. It was not something either of them had discovered until E’dira had come to live in Eden City and she saw how Lynwe lived. She not only had two female ‘slaves’, but a handsome Lycavorian mate who did not care in the least about what she had between her legs. Lynwe had a large family now, a family that included children who she had adopted with Prime Minister Selene and Layna, and children that both Selene and Layna had given their husband Admiral Joarl. Lynwe was still dominant with her ‘slaves’ in their bed, but with her husband she was a woman first and Drow second. And whatever took place in their bed; whatever games they might play with each other, that all remained in their bed. Outside of their home, Lynwe was not afraid to show emotion with both her ‘slaves’ and her husband. It had begun with Lynwe and Aihola and now extended to all the Drow elves on Earth. They had learned how to blend their own dominant traditions and the more open and endearing culture and traditions of others together seamlessly. The Drow as a whole were almost fanatic in their loyalty and support of King Leonidas and the Royal family, for it was King Leonidas who rescued them from the abyss and then allowed them to build what they had in the last quarter century.

E’dira turned to look at Zaala Randall and watched her walk across the bridge of the *HARBINGER* with a smile on her captivating face. E’dira could see clearly why Steven Randall treasured his elven wife so completely. She was a stunning elf female with a firm, luscious body and bright dark eyes. E’dira wondered for a brief moment what it might be like to have both Miranda and Zaala in her bed. She shook that thought from

her head quickly but realized that her time with Lynwe and Aihola had truly changed her and made her more confident in who she was.

“She can certainly fly.” Zaala spoke as she looked at the Drow officer.

E'dira nodded. “Ye s she can. As can your husband Major Randall.” E'dira gazed at Zaala with her amber eyes. “This Lieutenant Irhiad seems to have an issue with you Zaala Randall. As well as your husband.”

Zaala nodded and waved her hand dismissively. “That is my fault. He propositioned me when we first arrived.” She spoke offhandedly. “He assumed because I was from Earth and he was a fighter pilot that I would be falling over myself to jump into his bed and he could score easily.”

“Yes... I have heard that elf males from Elear tend to believe that about female elves from Earth.” E'dira spoke nodding her head. “I take it you put him in his place and he did not appreciate it?”

“Something like that yes.” Zaala spoke with a smile. “I don't know why his ego is still bruised. I know he's found several females that have been drawn in by his charm since we came out here. And he is charming.”

“He does not affect you however?” E'dira asked.

Zaala shook her head. “My blood sings for only one man now.” She said. “No one could hope to come close to Steven. Not in my book.”

E'dira looked at her. “I have wondered something if I may?”

Zaala nodded. “Of course.”

“Steven was turned by King Leonidas, whose blood is purest of all Lycavorians.” She stated. “You have been married to him for twenty-four years now. Have you not acquired some of those Lycavorian traits? Albeit on a smaller scale.”

Zaala nodded. “My sense of smell is much more acute. My vision. In moments of...” Zaala blushed under her tan. “In moments of passion or excitement I have shorter fangs that extend. Since my eyes are dark you can't tell that they change, but they do. It is fascinating really, but like Steven I choose to not show that part of myself outside of Steven's company. Steven considers himself human and I consider myself elven.”

“Does... does being with him for so long change Zaala Randall?” E'dira asked now. “I know of the aura that Lycavorians can project to those they love, but does it ever get...”

“Old?” Zaala asked with a smile.

“Forgive me... I did not mean to...” E'dira stammered.

Zaala shook her head and reached out to squeeze her arm. “Lieutenant Irhiad is right that we are much more open. To those we consider friends anyway.” Zaala said with a smile. “And no... it does not get old.” She answered. “Steven and I can be very inventive. I had many lovers before Steven E'dira. Tarifa and my mother would scold me all the time for being so accepting of male companionship. The first time Steven Randall took me into his bed, that first time he left me trembling in bliss for an hour in the aftermath of what he had made me feel. And he was still human then. No one had ever done that to me before him. It has only gotten better with years. I knew then I had found the man I was to spend my life with. Surprised my father as well.”

“You consider me a friend?” E'dira asked.

Zaala nodded. “Yes I do. We work well together. Steven compliments your tactical expertise all the time. I think all of us make a very good team. I am looking forward to seeing the *ARIZONA*. I have reviewed all the specs on her three times!”

E'dira grinned. “Yes... so have I.” She admitted. E'dira made a decision then that would put her solidly on the path to her own discovery. “Would you... would you care to walk with me to the debriefing? I would like to... I would like to ask you some questions.”

“Questions?” Zaala asked.

E'dira nodded. “Questions about Captain Lorian as a woman.”

Zaala grinned. “Let's stop by the mess lounge though. Steven needs his coffee after he flies. And he will not be happy with how the pilots performed today.” She answered. “Not in the least.”

“Yes... I have gathered that about him.” E'dira said as they turned and began to head off the bridge.

Dilaen stepped in front of Thomas's desk and dropped the data pad onto cluttered top. Her blue eyes watched as he looked up. Thomas took his eyes from his computer and picked up the pad, puzzled by her smug expression.

"You are looking pleased with yourself Dilaen." He said.

"We wanted to know who the elf female was." Dilaen tapped the pad. "One Commander Ne'Veha; assigned to the ULU *SCIMITAR* just over four months ago." Dilaen said as she pulled her thin coat off. "Do you know how long it took me to get this information? I had to call in three markers with Personnel at Fleet Headquarters. I got this before I left my apartment this morning."

Thomas continued to look at the data pad and scrolled through the information. He looked back at Dilaen. "She's a looker." He said.

Dilaen's eyes narrowed and she snatched the pad from his hands. "Seven weeks Thomas? Seven weeks to discover who she was? Don't you think that is a little much?"

Thomas shook his head quickly. "When it comes to the Leonidas family I take nothing for granted." He said evenly. "Partly because I don't think it's any of our business who Prince Androcles is sleeping with or how many females share his bed. And partly because this is our Union too, and so far King Leonidas has done a bang up job of running things."

"It's news Thomas." Dilaen spoke gently. "Any story we can get on Androcles or any of the Leonidas children is news."

Thomas nodded. "Oh... I know. All I'm saying is that we need to be mindful of what we find and what we release to everyone else."

Dilaen nodded. "And I agree." She stated. "Now what about the other women we have seen?"

"Their last two trips to the villa have given us better pictures of them, but no identities." Thomas answered with a shrug. "Nothing comes out of the Union Military Database so they aren't in there."

"Not in the UMD?" Dilaen spoke perching her firm butt on the edge of his desk. "Did you try the employees of IES?"

Thomas nodded. "No hits." He answered looking at the way her tight ass cheeks rested on his desk. He had worked with this elf female for over a decade, and he had wanted her all of that time. His wife had died in an accident just before he got this job with Channel 76 and he had been raising his son alone. Dilaen was all that occupied his interest outside of his son. "I have them filtering through a database I put together over the years now. Different stories we have done. It's got like six hundred and thirty million entries in it."

"Entries from what?" Dilaen asked as she looked at the computer on his desk running through images at a rate of about four per second.

Thomas looked at the computer. "It compares images taken from different sources here in the Union and out in The Wilds. Old intelligence files that have been released. Stuff like that. I started the search yesterday and it's about half through now. It matches characteristics like height and body shape. Physical characteristics like I said." He looked at her.

Dilaen looked at the computer. "You designed this?" She asked clearly impressed.

Thomas nodded and shrugged his shoulder. "It wasn't that big of a deal. I have lots of time. Are you teasing me on purpose Dilaen?"

Dilaen looked at him and jumped up quickly when she saw where his eyes were. "What? Oh... sorry." She stated calmly though inwardly she was smiling.

"Will you have dinner or something with me?" Thomas Roan blurted.

Dilaen's blue eyes smoldered when she looked at him this time and she smiled. "Do you know I long I have waited for you to ask me that?" She asked.

Thomas's eyes were wide. "Is that a yes?"

Dilaen moved closer to him, leaning over his chair and insuring her firm breasts were displayed quite prominently in his face. She lifted her hand and ran her fingers along his cheek. "It is most definitely a yes Thomas." She told him.

Thomas Roan would have pulled her into his lap at the very moment had his computer not beeped loudly. His eyes cut to look at the screen and grew wide. "Holy shit! Dilaen look at this!" He exclaimed sitting forward.

Dilaen's eyes narrowed just a fraction. She had hoped he would make an attempt to kiss her so that she could feel him caress her elven ears. She knew quite a bit about Thomas Roan, and while he acted inferior at times, Dilaen knew him to be exceptionally intelligent and fiercely devoted to his son. His wife had died in a transport accident just before he had begun working here and even then, human though he may have been, Dilaen had found herself incredibly attracted to him. She turned to look at his computer as his hands danced across the control panel and her eyes grew wide when she saw what had gotten his attention and pulled it from her.

"Oh my..." Dilaen gasped as she shifted her body and settled onto his left leg facing the monitor with barely a thought. "Thomas... Thomas is this accurate?"

"I don't know!" Thomas replied quickly. "These particular images are just a compilation of thousands of images... millions really... taken all over The Wilds, here in the Union, just about everywhere. All of them random. It's not like I planned to use it as an intelligence database Dilaen!"

"Where... where is this image from?" Dilaen asked touching the screen where his monitor had frozen with the two images on it.

"The tag says Usu Ozeib 7!" Thomas answered. "Four years ago!"

"How did you get images from Usu Ozeib 7? That is the High Coven homeworld Thomas!" Dilaen asked stunned.

Roan shook his head. "I know what it is! It must be from one of the declassified images that the military releases when it has no more value to them! I've added hundreds of them when they are released every year." He replied. "I certainly have never been there!"

Dilaen leaned closer to him. "Can you clear it up more? It's still very grainy."

"Hold on!" He said as he worked at the panel.

The image of Carisia was frozen on the left side of the screen, taken only two weeks earlier at Cranæ Island. It showed her face almost perfectly in focus, with Anthar's cerise red scales behind her. She was holding Androcles Leonidas's hand as they walked toward the villa, and apparently had turned to say something to Sadi Leonidas who was just coming up behind them. Her face was very animated, though her maya blue eyes were still out of focus. The image on the right appeared to be taken in some sort of market on Usu Ozeib 7, the same cerise colored scales in the background, as well as many other individuals. Her face appeared drawn and emotionless in the new image, as if she wasn't happy in the least, unlike the recent photo which showed her with a dazzling smile.

"Shit!" Thomas gasped softly. "There... there it is!"

-SEARCH PARAMETERS MET-

-PROBABILITY OF MATCH 92.3%-

-PROBABILITY OF MATCH 92.3%-

Thomas turned his head and looked into Dilaen's blue eyes. "Dilaen... whoever she is... four years ago she was walking the streets of Usu Ozeib 7 and someone thought her important enough to capture her image."

"Thomas... do you know what this means?" Dilaen asked softly.

Thomas nodded. "Yeah... we just stuck our noses in something way over our head!" He replied.

"It means we still have agents on Usu Ozeib 7 Thomas." Dilaen spoke softly. "The King didn't pull all of them off twenty-five years ago as he said he did."

"That doesn't surprise me." Roan said. "He's not a fool Dilaen. That's how the game is played. The better question is..." Roan pointed to the screen. "Why is she here now? And why is she so cozy with the Crown Prince and Princess of the Union?"

Dilaen looked at him. "Why don't we find out?" She said.

"How do you propose we do that?" Roan asked.

"Do they still gather on Cranæ Island tomorrow?" Dilaen asked.

Thomas nodded. "Same day every week." He replied quickly. "They show up early in the morning and stay until early the next morning." His eyes narrowed. "What do you got running through that head of yours?"

"Why don't you and I show up there tomorrow and ask him." Dilaen said.

Roan looked at her astounded. “And just how do you propose we do that?” He spoke. “What are we going to do... walk up to their door and knock?”

Dilaen smiled. “Essentially. Yes.” Dilaen grasped his face in her hands and lowered her lips to his kissing him fiercely; stabbing her tongue into his mouth and feeling his arms crush her to him instinctively. She groaned softly when her breasts pressed hard into his chest and his right hand reached up to caress her elven ear with his fingertips. When she finally pulled her face from his, their lips moist and her body humming in delight, she watched his eyes open slowly and stare at her. “Thomas Roan... you are simply incredible.” She spoke softly. “I am so going to enjoy giving myself to you.”

“Hum! Well... I...” Roan stammered.

Dilaen kissed him once more quickly. “Can you download that to my pad? I have to go visit someone.”

“Ok... sure.” He spoke still utterly confounded at what just happened, though he could not deny the sexual desire sweeping through him. “Who are you... who are you going to see?”

“The one person who can get us into Cranae Island tomorrow.” Dilaen answered.

“Who is that?” Thomas asked as he took her datapad from her bag and plugged it into the slot on his terminal.

Dilaen had not removed her body from her perch on his leg because it felt so very good. She looked at him with those blue eyes and grinned.

“Chief Mage Thr’won.” Dilaen answered.

HADARIA UNDERGROUND BUNKER

Eurin stopped in the doorway and simply watched Anja Leonidas for a long moment.

She had converted this large room into almost an exact duplicate of her office in the palace above. Three very powerful computers all linked together with access to a database that Eurin had no doubts surpassed anything in any lab on Hadaria. Anja’s high back chair had small hover jets in the bottom that allowed her to lean in any direction and the chair would move. She had seen her diminutive Queen going from computer to computer with practiced ease more times than she could remember and not bat an eye. Exactly as she was doing now. She held a large mug of coffee in both her hands; reaching out at different times to touch one of her four control consoles. It appeared she was doing some sort of gene comparison on two of the screens, the third she could not see.

Seven weeks had past since that day in the Arch Ministry Chamber. Seven weeks and still the Ministry had not set a public date for a hearing, yet they had released almost every second of the security footage to every Netnews channel they could find in an effort to destroy the woman who sat before her. Within four days of first releasing it, the footage was playing out all across the Union on every monitor and screen. The moment it hit the Netnews Eurin had released her prepared statement, categorically denying that the individual within the footage was Anja, and that as soon as the Arch Ministry granted a public hearing this would become public knowledge to everyone. She also released a separate statement, all but accusing the Arch Ministry and Elder Council of attempting to force Anja from power because they did not approve of the popularity she or Sivana had. It was worded in a very specific and open-ended manner, not naming anyone in particular, and leaving it for the viewers to determine whom she was talking about. Eurin knew full well what they were doing when they released the footage, and her own statement so soon after the disclosure only added to the sense that this was a politically motivated move. Eurin had no doubts as to what the reaction across the planet would be. There was not a Healer within the Union military that did not adore their fiery Queen or her Princess sister Sivana, and Eurin knew this as fact since she spent many months going to visit them across the Union. The ranks of Hadarian Healers totaled nearly three and a half million, a goodly part of that number within the Union Fleet. None of those Healers, men or women, believed it for a single second. This was quickly realized, as soon as the thousands of messages began pouring into the families on Hadaria from these Healers expressing anger and harsh words for the Ministry and Elder Council. Many of these messages were making their way to the Netnews channels and being relayed across the Union.

Public opinion outside of the ranks of Healers was divided, but nowhere more than here on Hadaria. Fully a third of the population didn't believe it to be anything more than what it was. A politically motivated play for power that had been lost. There was another third of the population that was somewhere in the middle, not wanting to believe it. They were trying to make some sense of the evidence presented by the Ministry and the Elders, and trying to *not* believe that the men and women they had looked to for guidance over the years were actually power hungry moguls. The last third of the population was solidly in the hands of the Elder Council and Ministry. They were mostly members of the elite really, men and women who had served the Ministry and the Elders in some way at some portion of their lives and passed these positions to their children. They had a very hard nosed following, most of them schooled almost exclusively in the Elder Council run schools across Hadaria, and none of them appreciating the openness and casual attitude that Anja and Sivana brought to the Royal family and the way they governed. Many of these men and women were also of them mind that they needed to declare their independence from the Lycavorian Union and give Hadaria the right to trade with and support whomever they wanted, and not get their dictates from the Lycavorian Union Senate and King. And almost to a man and women, none of them cared for Martin Leonidas or any member of his family in the least.

Anja Leonidas had taken twenty-five years to build the image of the woman she was, and not including here on Hadaria, that image remained untarnished across the Union Eurin realized instantly.

Martin Leonidas. Now there was a man for the ages Eurin thought. A living, breathing legend and contradiction in terms. Once they had been let in on the plan Anja and Martin had hatched, and the display they had put on in the Arch Ministry Chambers, their enemies began lining up to jump on the bandwagon as Martin and Anja knew they would. Through it all, with clockwork precision, Martin and Anja talked every two days. For'mya, Isabella, Aricia and even Dysea were always in constant touch with the Persian haired woman they all loved. It angered them to some extent that they could not show this publicly, but all of them accepted the plan Anja and Martin had initiated and none of them would break that. Eurin had gotten many disapproving comments through the years for allowing Martin to view Anja's Ascension so long ago, breaking for the first time in their history a ceremony the Hadarian people coveted so completely. He was the first non-Hadarian person to witness an Ascension Ceremony, and seeing the type of man that he was constantly reaffirmed her decision that day. Martin Leonidas had waited almost two hours for Anja to leave a scheduled meeting with the Ministry to take one transmission, and then they had spoken for nearly three hours. When she had arrived after that meeting Anja was steaming mad, yet after talking with Martin Leonidas for only a few minutes Eurin had watched the anger and tenseness of the situation bleed away quickly. He had her laughing in less than thirty minutes and Eurin saw then what they truly meant to each other. Their words to each other at the end of every conversation showed that.

No doubts. No questions. No regrets. Ever.

It was then that Eurin truly understood the power and sway that Martin and his Queens had on the people and planets they ruled. They never doubted one another, and without question they were reverently devoted to each other in a way Eurin had never witnessed until all this had begun. These were the same traits they showed toward the people they ruled. Through it all, the Persian haired woman who sat before her had remained strong at heart and in mind. Nothing seemed to faze her, and it was because of the unconditional love Anja knew she had no matter what occurred.

Eurin blinked when she heard the voice burst through the COM unit of the room and the holoimager came to life with the dark haired woman she now knew as Esther Saira and wife of the Immortal Cha'talla.

"...is it!" Esther exclaimed.

"I thought you might like that!" Anja spoke with a smile. "You had already done all the work Esther. It was just a matter of splitting the protein nodes twice more. You already had the Copaxin Enzymes and Peninol Inhibitors at the correct levels."

Esther nodded. "Something I did not have the equipment for here or on Kranek." She spoke.

"That's about to change." Anja spoke. "I can't release anything from the equipment stores here on Hadaria... but there are six protein sequencers in storage on Apo Prime. I'm ordering two be put under your direct control through the Krypteria. They'll be brought to the base sometime tomorrow morning. You can set up one at the base and have the other one sent to Kranek for your lab there. Three of Sivana's assistants that

were on Apo Prime when everything here hit the fan have volunteered to assist you, or even go to Kranek if you wish. They have full clearances.”

“I can combine the sequenced proteins with a neuro stimulator and extra powerful dose of the base serum I developed.” Esther was speaking enthusiastically. “Adjusting for their weight and size, we can hopefully cure all of them! Anja... this is amazing! I did not think it was possible.”

“It might take several doses for those who have been held prisoner for more than a few months, but yes.” Anja answered. “The only downside is that it has to be injected directly into a major artery, preferably the carotid or jugular because they are closest to the brain. That will immediately eradicate the mental dependence as well as get to the heart faster to speed the compound into the blood stream.”

Esther looked at her. “Then it will be just a matter of helping them to adjust. They will need counseling and support. Anja... I suggest once this is done, we mass-produce this and have all elven females inoculated. We do not control the Immortals within the Coven, but if we do this, it will not matter. That would no longer be a fear. If this is done pre-infection, this hold over female elves that Immortals have would evaporate overnight. They would be immune.”

Anja nodded. “I agree.” She replied turning to see Eurin as she detected her scent now. Anja waved her into the room. “Where is Dysea?”

“She decided we have waited enough time before picking up this fool engineer.” Esther spoke with an approving tone in her voice. “We have been watching him for seven weeks now, monitoring his communications and his financials. He appears to have access too much more wealth than he should have for someone in his position. And she knew Tir’ut was growing more impatient. He is like his father and he is not much of a diplomat. He’s no diplomat at all to be honest. They went with Anton and Normya to finally pick this man up and confront him.”

“Will he talk?” Anja asked.

Esther chuckled. “You have not met my son yet Anja Leonidas.” She said. “Normya is his life now. *Ukt dros’he whol tupora*. If the man does not wish to experience pain beyond his imagining he will talk. We have already decided if he will not talk to Tir’ut willingly... we will return with him to Kranek and let Cha’talla and T’lolt work to make him see the error of his ways.” (His purpose for living)

“Ouch!” Anja snipped with a laugh.

“Our investigation here on Apo Prime has determined he is the cog in the wheel here. He associates with no one else in a manner of collaboration, and every person he has had contact with in the last seven weeks has been discretely looked at and they have come back very loyal to the Union.” Esther said. “If there is a connection here on Apo Prime outside of this man, Anton, Las’elh and Cihera can not find it. Anton and Cihera have been using all the resources of the *Krypteria* on this, and Las’elh has been unofficially accepted into their fold. They can find nothing.”

“Then it extends somewhere else.” Anja said confidently. “He is the point on Apo Prime but there are others somewhere off Apo Prime. There have to be. And more than likely someone here on Hadaria as well to have gotten the manifests of the ships they did.”

Esther nodded. “That is what Dysea believes as well.” She said. “To keep the chance of what we are doing from being discovered, once we have this man we will be leaving to return to Kranek. Both of us believe it is the better course of action. It is only a few days from Union space and it keeps those who would do Normya or Dysea harm unaware of what we are doing. Your son Andro agrees. He is a supremely intelligent and cunning young man Anja. A very frightening young man.”

“Yes he is. He reminds us too much of his father when we first met him.” Anja said. “He is afraid of nothing and that is what scares us most of the time. We have got Martin to be more cautious... but it hasn’t caught on with Andro yet.”

“Dysea and I will work from Kranek in discovering what we can while we finish putting together a mission against this scum Phy’iad to rescue my son and the elven females he has taken prisoners. And perhaps determine what it is that the Kavalian Empire wants with him and his Immortals at the same time.” Esther said. “And this time we will have *NORMYA’S LIGHT* with us in orbit. Your son takes no chances.”

“Only in regards to his own safety.” Anja smiled in reply. “Let *Melda Min* know to contact me here before you depart. And if you need anything more on this serum do not hesitate to contact me.”

Esther nodded in the transmission. “I won’t. Thank you again Anja.”

Anja turned to look at Eurin as the holoimage faded. "Eurin... I didn't expect you back for at least another hour."

"That is what I expected as well." Eurin spoke holding out the data pad. They have set a date Anja. One week from tomorrow."

Anja took the pad. "Well... it took them long enough." She said as she read.

Eurin moved to the waist high counter along the wall that always had freshly brewed batches of Aricia's coffee. She poured herself a mug and sipped the liquid before turning back. "I get the sense of things that they feel very confident." Eurin said. "Zaniai does as well. Tezu has been trying to rally support among the Parliamentary Ministry... but he believes many of them are either too frightened to openly side with you, or Buonau controls them completely. It did not help our cause that two of the men in the footage have since been killed in accidents, and the second two have disappeared."

Anja nodded. "Hypothetically because they fear Martin will come after them for what they have supposedly done. What a load of *sibfla*!" She said. "Vengal is trying to discover where they have gone, but they covered their tracks well. Too well."

"What do you mean?" Eurin asked as she took a chair across from Anja's desk. Anja leaned to one side and the hover chair darted to the side of the desk where Eurin saw what she was wearing. It was a man's shirt, far too large for her diminutive frame and it fell to her knees. She wore thick socks to ward off the coolness of the metal and concrete floor, leaving her legs bare. Anja saw her gaze and she chuckled.

"It's Martin's." She said in explanation. "I think we wear his formal uniform shirts more than he does. It lets me keep his scent fresh in my nose." She finished as she settled to the couch next to Eurin. "Both of these men are simple Union Spartans. They would not have the means or the training to make themselves disappear like they have."

"Could they not be members of your *Kryperia*?" Eurin asked.

Anja shook her head. "Armetus selects all his agents personally. He already told Martin these men were not any of his."

"You think they are dead as well don't you?" Eurin asked.

Anja shrugged. "It's very possible. Perhaps very likely." Anja looked at her. "That is not what's important right now."

Eurin looked surprised. "Not important?" She gasped. "Anja these men... they could exonerate you!"

"Let me show you something." Anja spoke springing to her feet. She moved back to her hover chair and settled lightly into it, leaning to the side as it darted across the floor back behind her desk. Eurin couldn't help but chuckle at how childlike it looked.

"You really must get a chair more befitting your position Anja." She stated. "Watching you dart back and forth like a small child seems rather ridiculous."

"I like my chair!" Anja exclaimed as she settled back in behind her four control panels. "Here watch this." Anja's finger danced across one control panel and then the footage of her and two men appeared on the screen. One of them was obviously Rinard; the other was the ebony skinned Spartan who was now dead. Killed in a transport accident, or so the reports say. In the background of the footage was Seanna, also servicing two men on the large bed, her black hair flying about randomly as the two men slammed into her. Eurin winced at the sight and silently thanked that Anja had at least turned off the sound.

"Anja!" Eurin exclaimed looking away. "I have seen each one of these more times than I care to remember!"

"Eurin it's not me." Anja said.

"I realize that! I know that! But it is still astonishing to look at this clone of you and not be a little bit convinced." Eurin answered.

"Eurin... that's not me!" Anja stated again as she pointed to the screen. "And that isn't Seanna!"

Eurin looked at her. "What?" She gasped.

Anja nodded and typed something on her computerized keyboard. "Look!" She stated as the image zoomed into a close up of the clone's breasts. Eurin blushed but kept her eyes on the screen. "I've been going over every millimeter of this footage Eurin. Trying to find something. I found it last night. Two things actually and it's been right in front of me all these weeks." Anja looked at her. "You know of course that Martin turned me?"

“Of course.” Eurin answered.

“Martin bit me here.” Anja said pointing to the monitor that showed the frozen image of clone/Anja’s large breasts. On the monitor very clearly were two neat puncture wounds on the left breast that had long since healed.

“He is not very selective in his location is he?” Eurin asked sounding like the researcher that she was.

Anja chuckled and shook her head. “When he’s heated... anything is possible.” She said. “One time he had Aricia and I...” Anja stopped and looked at her sheepishly. “Never mind.”

Eurin smiled. “Thank you.” She said.

Anja shook her head and turned back to the monitor. “Anyway... the most unique thing about Martin, something that he has passed down to his children and something that only those of the Leonidas bloodline have. It’s much more prominent in Andro and his brothers, but Eliani and our daughters have them too.”

“Have what?” Eurin asked.

“An extra set of incisor fangs.” Anja spoke curling back her lips and pointing to the almost imperceptible tips of the small fangs against her larger incisor teeth. They were almost impossible to notice having a normal conversation with her, and even fully extended unless Anja snarled savagely they would go unnoticed. “Martin and Andro have the largest... and when they bite...” Anja unbuttoned the shirt by three and pulled aside the fabric exposing the faint scars on her left breast just above her nipple. Four faded puncture marks in her flesh were very evident. “They bite deep.”

Eurin’s eyes went from the scars on Anja’s breast to the scars on the clone/Anja’s breast. “They are not the same.” She said softly.

Anja shook her head. “Nope.” She said. “Seanna may have told him where Martin bit me and that is where he bit this clone, but she failed to tell him about the dual fangs. And she failed to tell him about this.”

Eurin looked as Anja pulled the shirt off her right shoulder now, exposing the two smaller puncture wounds in her upper shoulder near her neck. These were not vampire bite marks as Eurin had so often seen. These two marks were permanent but still larger than the marks Eurin knew Isabella left in Anja’s flesh during their lovemaking. “What...?”

“This is where Dysea bit me at the exact same time Martin did.” Anja said. “We were all together that night he turned me Eurin.”

Eurin looked at the screen once more, her eyes going a little wider when she did not see similar marks on Anja’s shoulder. “Anja... this is explosive!” She gasped. “How could you not...”

“Remember it?” Anja said.

Eurin nodded and looked at her. “Yes.”

Anja shrugged. “We have been together over twenty-five years Eurin.” Anja replied. “I may bless the day Martin turned me... but there have been so many nights since then that have been a hundred times more passionate and intense. I just... I just never thought about it until I was watching the footage trying to pick up anything.”

“You said you found two things.” Eurin said. “That this woman in the footage is not Seanna?”

Anja nodded and her slim fingers danced across the panel once more. “Our fourth year together... Seanna and I went to the Hot Springs on Kolvar Nine with For’mya and Aricia. Isabella and Dysea were attending a lecture on Elear at the time.”

Eurin nodded. “I remember that.” She said quickly. “For’mya and Seanna were bitten by Kolvarian Water Spiders. They were sick for two weeks afterward.”

Anja nodded. “And the Kolvarian Water Spider bite leaves a scar since they tend to take a hunk out of your flesh when they bite you, albeit a very small one.”

Eurin nodded. “Yes. So?”

“Seanna was bitten on the back of her left calf as she and For’mya were wading through the shallows. Aricia and I were in the resort village shopping. The reaction to the bite caused her to lose consciousness in seconds. For’mya contacted me through Mindvoice, but by the time I got there, the cells around the bite were already filled with poison and dying. I couldn’t repair the damage to the dying cells and it left a scar. That is why Kolvarian Water Spiders are nasty little critters.” Anja said. Anja pointed to the image of the left leg on the screen. The left leg that supposedly belonged to Seanna. “Do you see a scar there?”

“Anja... Seanna was seeing Rinard at this time.” Eurin said. “He would have known she was sick then; that she had been bitten by a Kolvarian Water Spider. Do you think he forgot this? I agree with you that he and Buonau are the masterminds behind what is happening, but would they make so obvious a mistake?”

Anja nodded her head. “Yes... if these security feeds they have were made after Seanna died. They would have no choice.” She said. “Obviously they would think everyone would be watching me in these vids and not think to inspect Seanna more closely.”

Eurin looked at her. “Wait! Another clone?” Eurin gasped. “Anja... it is going to be hard enough to prove this one of you is a clone. We have been unable to find anything to support this fact so far. It is obvious that Rinard more than likely eliminated her. Now you are suggesting that this is not Seanna as well? How is that even possible? There are full facial exposures in all the footage, she speaks to you and it is Seanna’s voice.”

“She doesn’t speak to *me*.” Anja spoke.

“You know what I mean!” Eurin snapped. “They have had seventeen experts review this security footage and all of them say it is genuine. How could they make someone look like Seanna?”

Anja nodded again. “And it is genuine Eurin; it’s just not me or Seanna. And you can alter someone’s facial features quite easily with cosmetic surgery, you know that. Especially here on Hadaria. It can be done quickly and very safely. And it can be undone almost immediately with a simple skin regenerator.”

“What Hadarian female would debase themselves enough to take part in such an action?” Eurin asked. “That is beyond even my comprehension.”

“Whether a clone or someone who had cosmetic surgery... that is not Seanna.” Anja said. “I would know! We shared a bed on and off for almost fifteen years Eurin. I knew every portion of her body, just as she did mine. How do you think Rinard knew where to bite this clone so that he could use his aura on her and make her crazy with lust for him? So that it would appear it was me doing it? Seanna must have told him in one of the periods where he was trying to get me to sleep with them.”

Eurin turned away from the screen. “I do not hesitate for a second that this is a clone of you Anja.” She spoke. “What you have shown me today only confirms that. But if this is a clone of Seanna, where are they getting them. Only the Coven has the technology to produce a clone of such exacting detail. We saw that with Martin’s mother.” Eurin turned and looked at her. “Are you saying the High Coven is involved here? Or that Rinard and Buonau are somehow working with them?”

“I don’t know.” Anja said softly. “They have to be working with someone to be able to finance what they are doing.”

Eurin looked at her. “Why do you say that?”

“Eurin... this plan of theirs has been in the works for years. Martin and I, even you in some manner, we already knew that. But you don’t just make four Spartan soldiers disappear Eurin and not expect someone to ask questions. Questions that someone bigger than that idiot Rinard has buried quite well. I don’t care how many accidents you arrange... whoever gave the order to kill Spartans... it wasn’t Rinard.”

“We only have a week to discover what is happening Anja.” Eurin spoke. “Even with your General Vengal’s Drow Scouts following Rinard and Buonau for the last seven weeks, they have been unable to produce anything. If they are communicating... it is using a way we cannot detect. Peillany is a hostile witness and has been combative during every interview she has given. They have lists of every order you have given as Queen. They are specifically targeting your political directives barring the Kavalians from any sort of aide, and bringing Hadarian policy more in line with the Union. They say it has damaged our reputation as a medical species and our duty to give care to all.”

“We do give care to all!” Anja snapped. “All but the Kavalians and their sick friends! You know why I did that Eurin!”

Eurin nodded. “Yes... over ninety percent of our Healers are female. The Kavalians treat females as beneath them. I know.”

“Trust me; we do not want to do business with the Kavalians.” Anja spoke. “If we sent our Healers in there we would never see them again.”

“I agree.” Eurin said.

“Then what is worrying you Eurin?” Anja asked.

“They are saying you and Sivana made these decisions arbitrarily. Without consulting them.” Eurin spoke gently. “That is one of the major points they have been pushing all along Anja! They say you do things to

spite them! On purpose. The Zalesians requested our aide after the earthquake nine years ago. You refused it without the Arch Ministry knowing about it or even allowing it to come up for a vote.”

“Yes!” Anja answered. “They are aligned with the Kavalian Federation Eurin.”

“And nearly half a million of their people died from injuries sustained in that earthquake Anja.” Eurin said softly.

“I asked for a written guarantee that if we allowed our Healers to go in there and help them, the Zalesian government would insure my people were protected and nothing would happen to them! Namely... that the Kavalians would not kidnap all of them! They refused to provide such a guarantee. I refused them aide.”

“You did not allow it to come before an emergency vote?” Eurin asked.

Anja shook her head. “If I did... the Arch Ministry would have allowed it with the backing of the Elder Council. It would have put four thousand of our Healers in harm’s way with no support.”

“The others?” Eurin asked. “The Colarians? The Evolli? The Kochab?”

Anja nodded. “Most of them are true. Eurin... the Evolli and the Kochab were our enemies during the war.” She said completely unashamed of her actions.

“Yes they were... but the Elder Council saw it as an opportunity to expand our influence and help others.” Eurin said.

Anja looked at her. “Eurin please don’t tell me you are buying into their game.” Anja exclaimed.

Eurin’s eyes grew wide. “What? Oh... Anja no! Never! Forgive me if it sounded that way! I am only trying to express to you what the Elder Council and Arch Ministry will do.”

“I made the decisions I did for the benefit and protection of our people Eurin... all of our people. You know that.” Anja spoke.

“They do not see it that way Anja.” Eurin spoke.

“Fuck them!” Anja snarled. “From what I can see up to now, all of them have this holier than thou attitude, and they expect everyone to follow inflexible guidelines and principles that have been out of date for so long they have dust particles imbedded in the screens!”

“And that is exactly the attitude they expect of you!” Eurin declared. “And they will use it against us.”

Anja got hold of her famous temper and took a deep breath. She opened her mouth to reply but did not have the opportunity. General Vengal strode into the room with a purpose, a look of concern on his elven features. Anja got to her feet as she looked at him. “Vengal?” She asked. “What is wrong?”

“I... I believe I have failed you Anja.” Vengal spoke.

“What do you mean?” Anja asked.

“While we were on Earth you asked me why I dismissed Rinard from the *Durcunusaan* when we returned from Lycavore.” Vengal asked.

Anja nodded. “Yes. It was because he falsified his training records you said.”

Vengal nodded. “Yes. That is not all he falsified however.” Vengal spoke. “And I did not pursue it because I did not want to embarrass him and Vistr and I were still establishing the *Durcunusaan*. When I arrived here I had General Vistr begin a more in-depth investigation into Rinard. We could not be as open because of what is currently going on, and it has taken us this long to make this discovery because of it. And we only uncovered it by accident.”

“Uncovered what?” Anja asked.

Vengal held out the pad to Anja. “This.” He spoke watching as Anja’s jade green eyes began to wide in astonishment.

APO PRIME

MJOLNIR’S HAND BASE

He opened his eyes slowly, trying to focus them. His arms were sluggish and heavy and securely tied to the chair in sat in. He could not move his legs, as they too were secured tightly to the legs of the chair. His head hung down, his chin against his chest and he blinked several more times trying to focus on his naked feet. He was sitting in the chair, the room he was in brightly lit. As he opened his eyes fully and they began to clear he

saw another set of booted feet across from him. As he lifted his head slowly, his muscles screamed out in pain and he winced. His eyes traveled up the long, lean and definitely feminine legs that were crossed at the knee.

“The pain you feel is the muscle relaxant leaving your system.” The female voice spoke. “It will pass in a few moments.”

He lifted his eyes more to see the curve of a very shapely female set of hips and firm ass. A small waist and full high breasts under the Mark IV ArmorPly body armor. He was confused for a moment as he saw the gold trimmed crimson sash tied around the waist and then he saw the ends of the platinum blond hair. He lifted his head fully then and was staring into the emerald green eyes of the first Elven Queen of the Union.

“My... my Queen?” He stammered. His throat was dry and his lips parched.

“I am not your Queen traitor.” Dysea spat. “So do not refer to me by that name.”

“What... where am I?” He asked.

“Chief Engineer Tyaln,” Dysea spoke lifting the data pad and beginning to read. “Four thousand three hundred and nine years old.” Dysea looked up into his eyes. “You have lived a full life I see Tyaln.”

“What is going on?” He spoke as more of his strength returned.

“You have been the Chief Engineer of the Apo Prime Main Maintenance Facility for the last six hundred years and fourteen years. Impressive.” Dysea continued as she looked back at the pad. “You have no mate. No children. No family that is known. You have nearly four million riyal in two separate accounts here within Union space. Not surprising considering your position and that you have no family. What I found more interesting is the thirty-nine million riyal secured in three different accounts within The Wilds. Why is that?” Dysea lowered the pad and looked at him. “I wonder just how you were able to acquire so much financial success Chief Engineer Tyaln. And why exactly would you feel the need to have accounts in The Wilds that are not traceable? It would not be because you have been selling information to our enemies for who knows how long would it? Or that you have been selling elven females into slavery perhaps?”

“What is going on?” Tyaln spoke now looking at the elven Queen whose daughter he had tried to kill. “Why am I here? I demand to...”

Dysea moved with all her combined elven and wolf speed and backhanded Tyaln, his already dry lips cracking and blood spurting from them because of the viciousness of the blow. The hard punch almost knocked him from the chair, but hands he could not see kept this from happening and righted him almost immediately. “You demand nothing!” Dysea snarled at him. “Be glad you are even still living!”

“What is the meaning of this?” Tyaln spat tasting blood in his mouth and the cold grip of fear in his stomach.

“We have been watching you for quite a few weeks now Tyaln.” Dysea spoke returning to her chair. “I have asked this question of myself for all of that time. Why? Why would a man who does not know my daughter outside of repairing the ships that she flies... why would this man want to hurt my daughter?”

“I do not know what you are talking about!” Tyaln barked.

Dysea’s emerald eyes changed then, the familiar black ring surrounding the cornea of her eye as her long wolf fangs extended. “I have been patient Tyaln” Dysea growled at him. “I have been patient and wondered why. Now I would like an answer. And believe me when I tell you Tyaln, you definitely want to give me those answers, for the alternative is not the most pleasing of substitutes.”

“I have rights!” Tyaln shouted. “I have rights and I demand you release me!”

“You are directly responsible for an explosive device being placed on the LSD Drive core of my daughter’s ship. That device exploded shortly after it was discovered and caused heavy damage to their ship and completely destroyed a Jump Gate. If not for the skills of my daughter and her co-pilot, they would be dead. Subsequently... my daughter was then targeted by a group of mercenaries who seemed to be conveniently waiting for her, right where her damaged ship would be. Tell me... how did they know that?”

“What are you talking about?” Tyaln demanded.

“These mercenaries then attempted to board her ship and were repelled. They then chased her to a planet, caused her to crash and caused the death of her co-pilot.” Dysea looked at him. “So not only did you attempt to murder my daughter, you are complicit in the death of a Union officer and pilot. You are not in the best of positions. This is what I want.” Dysea spoke. “I want the name or names of the individuals who contracted you to kill my daughter Tyaln.”

“I will tell you nothing!” He hissed. “You can do nothing to me! I will tell you nothing elf bitch!”

Dysea nodded and got to her feet. "I suspected that would be your answer." She stated calmly as her fangs retracted and her eyes returned to normal. "I was actually hoping you would have a reaction like this. It makes what I will do now that much more satisfying." Dysea tossed the data pad to a hidden figure behind Tyaln and looked at him. "You see Tyaln... your actions unwittingly ended up being a blessing for my daughter. A blessing because it brought her together with the man who worships the very ground she walks upon. The man she loves just as intensely. Would you like to meet him Tyaln? He is very upset with you for attempting to kill his *il kal'daka darthirii*, and he would like to have words with you."

"I am afraid of no Lycavorian!" Tyaln snapped.

Dysea smiled. "Well good for you." She told him. "The only problem with your mindless boast is that Tir'ut is no Lycavorian."

Tyaln watched Dysea turn her head to the side and his eyes grew wider when Tir'ut stepped slowly into the glare of the single light and stood next to Dysea. Towered over Dysea really, by six inches easily. His normally dark eyes had changed to the cobalt blue of the powerful vampire blood that flowed in his veins and he crossed his thick arms over his chest as he glared at Tyaln. He watched as the much smaller figure came into the light now, and Normya Leonidas appeared next to Tir'ut dressed in the same Mark IV ArmorPly, her equally long platinum hair wrapped loosely in a pony tail and hanging over her shoulder. The crimson and gold sash was tied around her waist, the K14 secured in a holster on her right thigh. Tyaln watched as she stepped up to Tir'ut and intimately pressed her lush, elven body against the towering Immortal. Tyaln had never seen an Immortal up close, and though this one looked different than the images he had seen, there was no mistaking the bone spurs along his jaw line that marked all Immortals. That grip of fear that he had felt in his stomach tightened almost painfully now and grew even larger.

"Remember me?" Normya spoke softly. "I should probably thank you. If you had not tried to kill me... I would never have met Tir'ut." Normya Leonidas was shorter than her mother by several inches which actually surprised everyone considering the height of both her mother and father. She did not however lack for strength due to her vertical deficiencies. Tyaln barely saw her move and then the heel of her small palm was impacting his jaw and very nearly breaking his neck with the considerable power of the blow. This time no one stopped the chair from toppling over and his shoulder and side of his head impacted the cold steel floor with a thud, knocking more air from his lungs. "That is for Toral you worthless bastard!"

Tyaln once more did not see the hands that righted his chair none too gently, or yanked back on his chair causing his neck to strain painfully. Blood was pouring from his lips and nose now, covering the front of his shirt.

Dysea smiled at the look on Tyaln's face as Anton Simpson stepped up next to her on the opposite side. "Allow me to introduce Anton Simpson Chief Engineer Tyaln. He is the oldest son of Daniel Simpson... I'm sure you know General/Colonel Simpson. Anton is also an officer of the *Krypteria* Tyaln. Rest assured... what you fail to willingly tell Tir'ut here... you *will* tell Anton."

"You... you can not do this!" Tyaln shouted. "I have rights!"

"Rights which you forfeited the moment you attempted to kill my daughter." Dysea spoke harshly. "I do not act as a Queen now Tyaln... I act as a mother. And as an elf and Spartan woman, you will now answer to me for what you have done."

Tir'ut stepped into the blow that hit Tyaln in the center of his chest and it felt as if a building had smashed into his chest. His eyes flew open in agonizing pain, the air whooshed from his lungs, and his eyes bugging from his head as the chair he was sitting in toppled backwards and smashed into the wall three meters behind him. Tir'ut turned and looked at Dysea as Anton moved to right the chair once more.

Darthirii ilhar? He said softly.

Dysea looked at Normya briefly, seeing the coldness of her emerald eyes as she watched Anton lift the chair once more. *Normya?*

Normya turned and looked at her mother. *I need to prepare the STRIKER for when we leave.* She spoke.

Dysea nodded and turned back to Tir'ut, looking into his cobalt blue eyes. *He is not the one you want my rinovdro dalharuk.* Dysea said softly.

Tir'ut nodded. *No he is not.*

Dysea nodded her head. *Find out what you can, rough him up somewhat if you must, but do not kill him. Your father will want to question him in regards to Gerald when we return to Kranek.*

Tir'ut nodded. *Then he will live. For now.*

Normya stepped up to Tir'ut and wrapped her arms his waist, pressing her body to his front and gazing up into his eyes. His eyes returned to normal as he gazed back at her, staring down into her angelic face, and closing his arms around her.

[I have a surprise for you tonight Tir'ut my ssin'urn rinovdro. Before we return to Kranek.] Normya spoke in the heavily shielded connection biting her bottom lip as she looked at him with an adoring love.

[What is that il kal'daka darthirii?] He asked with a smile.

[You will see.] Normya spoke seductively.

Tir'ut leaned over and nuzzled the top of her elven ear, feeling Normya lean into him and then squeeze his waist tighter.

It had been difficult without a doubt Tir'ut thought to himself as he inhaled the sweet orange clove scent of Normya's blood. The most difficult thing he had ever had to do in his life. Resisting the desire for Normya was next to impossible, especially since they had slept in the same bed for the last weeks now. Neither of them with very much on in the way of clothes. If not for the daily sessions with Iriral, helping them to balance their growing abilities together, neither of them would have been able to hold to their vow to be properly married before succumbing to the want they both felt for each other.

Iriral had helped them to be able to manipulate the powerful Mindvoice shield that they could project together. They were now able to manipulate it to the extent that they could expand that bubble outward by several dozen meters. The further away it got, the harder it became to maintain it, but within six meters of their bodies it could stop a point blank strike from Anton's Shi Viska easily as well as a full burst of Iriral's hottest flame breath. Their connection had grown so deep now that it had become impossible to penetrate their MV shields, and they had used this to reinforce and expand their awareness of each other. They were in each other's blood now, Tir'ut feeding on Normya's delicious orange clove flavored blood four more times since that first night, and Normya tasting his own blood when she bit him in return. It also helped to sate their yearning for one another and when they finally were able to share that moment, as they wanted, it would be glorious indeed.

Normya reached up on her toes and kissed him once more before patting his broad chest. *[I will see you in the main lounge for dinner my love. Do not be late.]*

Tir'ut smiled as he watched her walk off; taking her mother's hand as they headed for the door. He turned back around as Anton came up beside him, Tyaln's head bobbing back and forth as he tried to maintain consciousness. Anton watched Normya and his aunt exit the door and he looked at Tir'ut.

"So... have the two of you...?" Anton asked.

Tir'ut shook his head and looked at the man he now considered an exceptional friend. Tir'ut had learned many things from Anton Simpson and he in turn had showed Anton some things he had never known. "We are going to wait until we are properly joined by a Holy One." He answered Anton's question.

Anton looked at Tir'ut a new respect in his eyes. "Wow! How hard is that? I know she is my cousin and all... but damn Tir'ut!"

Tir'ut smiled but fidgeted his large feet as he looked at them. "You have no idea Anton." He said softly.

"Oh... I can imagine. She's a *nubous* hottie as my father would say." Anton spoke. "I shouldn't talk really... Cihera and I are doing the same with Las'elh. We don't want to push her into something she might regret later."

"Forgive me... I thought... the way she acts with Cihera I thought perhaps..." Tir'ut spoke.

Anton shook his head. "Not yet." He said. "Soon I think... but not yet." They both turned when Tyaln groaned in pain. Anton shook his head. "You want to hit him a couple more times? It's actually very entertaining."

Tir'ut shook his head. "*Il kal'daka darthirii* made me promise not to kill this man." He said. "As hard as that is... I will honor my promise to her."

"Why would she ask that?" Anton inquired.

Tir'ut's eyes took on a decidedly evil glint and he smiled, baring his vampiric fangs. "She wants the 'chief' as she called him. These 'little fish' do not interest her."

Anton chuckled. "That sounds like a Leonidas." He said. "I hope you know what you are getting yourself into with her. She can be a polecat."

Tir'ut looked at him. "Polecat? What is this Polecat?"

SPARTA

Jalersi was very relaxed as she made her way down the empty corridors of the third floor of the embassy, clutching the data pad in her hand tightly. She moved casually, as if she was just walking the corridors as she had done for the last several weeks. Jalersi'Puat had learned many things in the ninety odd years of her life; chief among them was caution when it was needed. And it was needed now, especially with who might be watching her every move. She was a Kavalian female, and while she may have been the daughter of the Prefect, she was still a female. She and her sister had been allowed to do many things that the majority of their females were not. They were far more educated than normal females, and given many more freedoms, but their society was still oppressive in nature when it came to equality of the Kavalian female. Jalersi thought that would change when Pusintin became her mate. She thought he would be the instrument by which her father Keleru would bring about the change. It turned out Pusintin was no different than her father, and subconsciously this had weighed heavily on her mind through the years, though it was something she would never show openly. Considering the events that had happened in her life in the last two months, this fact now came roaring to the forefront as she checked the corridor once more before entering the six digit code Pian had given her to enter his quarters. She stopped just inside the doorway, her blue eyes falling on where he sat in the chair with his back to her and she simply gazed at him.

Jalersi had turned to Pian that one night some twenty plus years ago, a night of incredible passion and intense sex, because Pusintin had been dismissing her for months after his brother had soundly defeated him in battle. His younger brother had in fact almost killed him, and only the fact that their fight took place in front of their mother kept Martin Leonidas from killing his brother. Keleru her father had been promising that he would begin to change the violent and oppressive way their society and culture deemed females were treated. While Athani had seen their father's boast for the lie it was years ago, it had taken until just recently for Jalersi to finally admit it.

As the years passed, Jalersi could never get that one night with Pian out of her mind. He had made her feel things Pusintin never did. He had worshiped her in every way she could have wanted, dominating her in the ways of their people, yet being gentle and caring at the same time as if she was precious to him. He fucked her brains out to be very blunt, and he did it in a way that forever left an impression on her. Jalersi had thought for so long that he had not locked groins with her because he feared Pusintin in some way. It wasn't until just recently that Jalersi had come to realize that she *was* precious to him and he had not locked groins with her that night to protect her status and her life. Until Pian, Jalersi had never been with another man besides Pusintin, and the feel of his fur against her skin and his immense size had made her shiver almost non-stop in rapture that night. Looking back now with a clear mind, that night with Pian was always there, and always on the very edge of her memories whenever she was with Pusintin. Pian was so different now, so different and yet the same.

The soft fur covering his powerful body was no longer thick and matted, but short, a yellow gold color and so very well groomed. It was consequently soft like feathers to the touch, and Jalersi had taken great joy in curling her fingers through his fur the last weeks. Pian had been leader of his Pride even then, but his father had died prematurely, leaving him in charge of Pride Nruarani while he was still very young by Kavalian standards and unprepared for that duty. At the time Pian was undereducated and even violent in many ways, as all Kavalian males were. After their night together however Jalersi learned that Pian he had changed for her. He became exceptionally well groomed, and had gone back to get a Decree in Education in Astrometrics, which he then applied to his role as ship commander. Pian had changed who he was at his core, and he had not done it for power or wealth or status among their people. He had done all of it for her and only her.

Their second time together had occurred in this very room less than two months ago, and it was a defining moment in her life.

She had discovered Pusintin's numerous jaunts outside of their marriage bed from Pian, and while this was acceptable within their culture, it was not acceptable to Jalersi'Puat. And ultimately it was the final piece of the puzzle that had reunited her with the man who she now knew commanded her heart and being and had since that night so long ago. It had taken her this long to finally realize that. Pian had not wanted to win her this way, by exposing Pusintin for what he was and he had refused Jalersi's attentions at first. Until Jalersi had made a

decision she knew would change her life forever. A decision she had made with a clear mind and conscious. A decision that, like the one her sister Athani had made, went against everything she had been raised to believe but felt so very right. Pian had never been afraid Jalersi discovered, he had felt himself not worthy of her, and that is why he had not locked groins with her that night. Pian had no reservations this time around, and Jalersi' Puat had blissfully felt for the first time in her life what it was like to be locked together with a male of her own species. Pian's huge cock, easily five inches longer than Pusintin's and much thicker, had locked within her and sent Jalersi spinning into a world of pleasure that she had never visited before. A full three minutes he had spilled his hot seed into her, Jalersi unable to do nothing but clutch and squirm within his grasp and adorn his face with kisses of newfound love and adoration as one raging orgasm followed another rocking her body. Pian had carried her to the bed and they had remained locked together for nearly an hour, every movement sending shivers of delight through her body. His large hands and stroked her body with infinite grace, exploring her in a way she never thought a Kavalian male could comprehend, especially when he went out of his way to caress and tickle the base of her tail where it met her tailbone. No matter how he touched that single spot, it never failed to send Jalersi into zealous shudders of glee. And then it had started all over again.

Pusintin had never done these things to her, never made her feel what she had felt with Pian and continued to feel with him. He never seemed to tire of her, his large hands roaming her body followed by his lips and tongue. She had never known a Kavalian male would resort to such action with a female, and Pian was proving her wrong at every turn. He had thoroughly loved her in more positions and ways than Jalersi could remember, dominating her at times yes, but in such a way that it had her begging him for more. And then he had locked groins with her again, Jalersi singing out her intense enchantment and clinging to him for fear of ever letting him go. Pian crushed her body to his as the bulb of his huge cock sealed them together, and that is how Jalersi had fallen into an exhausted but content filled sleep. Jalersi had spent almost every night in Pian's quarters since, discovering just what she meant to this man, and also discovering what it was to truly love someone.

Pian would lay on the bed with her, their naked bodies entwined and he would tell her of his family history and his hopes for the future of their people. Jalersi found Pian had no interest in conquering anyone, and while he truly hated the High Coven for nearly extinguishing their people, he also knew that not all of the Coven was bad. Pian spoke of intelligent things that actually interested her, unlike Pusintin with his military strategies and how much he hated his brother. Pian had a vision for his Pride that in many ways did not match the vision that her father had for the Kavalian people. Pian was Kavalian through and through, that much was without question, but he also knew that in order to survive and grow and become powerful they had to change and build alliances. If that meant they had to look at things differently then so be it. Pian also felt that treating their females as they did only hampered their growth. It had been the first night with her that had made him see this fact so clearly and the entire time he was improving himself in an attempt to win her, he was improving his Pride by his actions. The Nruarani Pride occupied the outskirts of the Kavalian Empire, far from the Orion Spur Core and away from the more developed worlds of the KFI. This enabled them to practice many things that were not followed within the center of the empire. That included treatment of females and the attitudes towards her father and Pusintin and they way they ruled and fought the war with the High Coven. Jalersi would in turn tell him of her daughter Nikkei, and how Karun would fawn over his sister, quite unlike Kavalian males. She told him that her two youngest sons were more like Pusintin in their actions and mentality, and that often brought them into conflict with Karun.

Jalersi's head canted slightly when she saw him tilt forward to light the pipe in his hands. Her eyes grew wide and she gasped.

"Pian!" She exclaimed rushing forward.

Pian turned to look at her quickly hearing the tone in her voice as he came to his feet. "Jalersi... what is wrong?" He stammered.

Jalersi glared at him. "What... what are you doing?" She demanded as her eyes went to the pipe in his hand and then back to his face. "You are smoking Tazli Root!"

Pian looked at the pipe and then back to her. "Tazli Root?" He said. "This is not Tazli Root Jalersi. I have told you I do not smoke the root anymore. Not since that night with you."

Jalersi looked at him. "What is it then?"

Pian held up the pipe, the whispers of smoke wafting from it. "I discovered it in one of the nearby shops along the market's edge today." He replied waving his hand gently over the top of the pipe. "It is called tobacco."

Jalersi's nose wrinkled at the strong cinnamon scent, but she had to admit it did smell pleasant enough. Her eyes went back to Pian and she looked ashamed. "For... forgive me Pian. I..." She whispered.

Pian turned and took something from the desk and held it up for her to see when he turned back. "I found this as well." Jalersi's eyes grew a little wider when she saw the bracelet in his hand. It was made of a metal she had never seen before, lined with small glimmering blue jewels. Pian took her hand in his and gently slid the bracelet into her wrist. "It was once the strongest metal known to exist on this planet. Titanium the woman told me it was called. People would give gifts of this metal to show the strength of their... their feelings for someone." Jalersi looked up into his dark eyes. "I bought this for you."

Jalersi ran her fingers over the cool metal as she looked at the bracelet. Her eyes lifted and she looked at him, fighting back the moistness of tears that threatened to spill from her eyes. Pusintin had never bought her anything in all their years together. "It's beautiful." She said softly. "I will... I will never take it off Pian."

Pian smiled and the fierce look of his Kavalian features softened considerably. At least to Jalersi. He took the pad from her hand. "What is this?" He asked.

Jalersi took a deep breath as she watched him begin to read. "An Edict Of Dissolution." She stated firmly. "I am going to reject Pusintin as my husband and mate. This is the only way I can legally do it by our laws. I must submit this Edict of Dissolution because of his activities outside our marriage bed."

Pian lifted his eyes to look at her. "Jalersi... you can not do this." He said.

"I most certainly can!" She snapped. "After what he has done, it is the only recourse for me so that I can be with you Pian."

"Jalersi... you can not do this now." Pian stated again.

"What? Why not?" She demanded as her eyes narrowed. "I thought... I thought this is what you wanted Pian. I thought... it is what you want isn't it? Or has... has all this been a means to get back at Pusintin?"

Pian looked at her, his dark eyes wide. "What?"

"Please Pian... please tell me that this is not just some way for you to make a grasp for power." Jalersi spoke her voice choked up.

"Power?" Pian nearly shouted. "I want nothing to do with power! Power corrupts men! All I have done... everything I have done... it has been for you! For my Pride! You are all I have ever wanted Jalersi'Puat. All I will ever want! You doubt me?"

"Then why?" Jalersi asked.

Pian took a deep breath and sat back down in the chair. He looked up at her and pulled her into his arms, her arms going around his shoulders. "I did not say this is not what I want you to do Jalersi! It is what I want from you! Just... just not now!"

"But why Pian?" She asked. "I could not... Pian I could not tolerate his attentions now. Not after what you have made me feel."

"You will never have to feel his hands upon you again Jalersi! I swear this to you! You are mine now Jalersi'Puat! Mine! And I have no intention of allowing anyone to have you ever again! The only man who will ever hold you in his arms again, the only man who will enjoy the pleasure you give will be me. And I will never share!" Pian hissed.

Jalersi almost burst out crying at his words and she wrapped her arms around his head, pulling it tightly to her large breasts, his eyes never leaving her face. "Oh Pian." She spoke softly.

"I do not fear Pusintin! I have never feared him Jalersi. I fear what he is capable of when it comes to you. To your children. To our people." He told her. "I will not risk you or anything you might care about because I am being selfish Jalersi. That would be the ultimate crime against you."

Jalersi's face took on a look of confusion. "What do you mean?"

Pian grasped her firm asscheeks in his hands and pulled her tightly to him never taking his gaze from her gorgeous blue eyes. She could see the indecision in his eyes, struggling with the ingrained traditions of their people about females not being involved in male business. Jalersi lifted her hands and placed them on either side of his face. She stroked the fur on his cheeks and neck, loving the softness against her fingers. "Athani..."

Athani told me something just before she left.” She said softly. “She told me... she told me she wanted a future of her own making. A future of her own making with a man that she loved.”

“Do... do you love me Jalersi?” He asked softly. “Am I... am I what you want this future to have?”

“More than anything I have ever desired Pian.” Jalersi said without hesitation.

Pian crushed her to him and kissed her hungrily, passionately and it was a kiss that Jalersi returned with all that she was. It was a long moment before they parted and her heart was racing as Pian nibbled her bottom lip as he pulled away.

“You will present that to Pusintin Jalersi.” He told her. “You will present that to him and be proud to proclaim yourself my wife and member of Pride Nruarani.”

“Then... then why can't I do it now?” Jalersi asked him gently. “I don't understand.”

Pian pushed her back gently and got to his feet. He turned to his desk and picked up the data pad, holding it in his hand. Jalersi looked at his back, knowing he was struggling with something inside his mind.

“Pian...?”

Pian'Nruarani made a decision then. A decision that put him on the road Keleru'Puath had sworn to his daughters that he would take. A road Pian would now truly walk because of his feelings for Jalersi. He turned back to Jalersi and held out the pad to her.

“Your father and Pusintin have been having Jiss and Matuarr investigating something involving ancient Lycavorian law.” He said quickly revealing intelligence and information that up until this moment would have reached the eyes and ears of no female.

Jalersi shook her head puzzled as she took the pad, knowing what Pian had just done and the step it meant in his life. “Lycavorian Law?” She asked. “But why?”

Pian shook his head. “I don't know.” He answered. “I have been trying to determine for what reason ever since becoming aware of it.” He reached up and tapped the pad. “This is not all of the information your father and Pusintin have. It is only a small part of some plan that they are putting into play Jalersi. A very small part if I am right. Jiss and the others could only piss on themselves in praising them. I am a Kavalian... I am proud of my species and our culture! I hate the Coven with everything I am, but I have also seen those vampires who reside here in the Union. They do not look upon our people as beneath them Jalersi! If anything... they look upon us as equals.”

Jalersi tore her eyes from the pad and looked at Pian. “Pian... these excerpts are from ancient Lycavorian Ascension Law.” She stated. “These are not something that... these excerpts are not something that Jiss or Matuarr could simply ask for and receive Pian. At least not to my knowledge.”

Pian nodded. “I guessed as much.”

“What... what does this mean?” Jalersi asked.

“It means that your father and Pusintin are planning something Jalersi.” Pian said. “They are planning something against the Union, and they have someone inside the Union corridors of power helping them.”

Jalersi's eyes grew wide. “Against the Union?” She gasped. “We only came here... we only came here to keep track of the High Coven! To monitor their activities!”

Pian nodded. “Yes. That is what they want everyone to believe.” He said. “However... I don't think that is their ultimate goal. That... that is why you can not give your Edict of Dissolution to Pusintin yet. If they are planning something and you do this... I believe it will put you in grave danger. You... your daughter and possibly your sons.” He took her hands. “They have already issued an standing execution order for Athani.” He told her seeing her eyes go wide. “And believe me... if Qurot or Timur find her... they will do far more than kill her Jalersi.”

“Pian... it would be insanity to start a war with the Union when we are already embroiled in a war with the High Coven!” Jalersi said. She gasped and her eyes grew wide. “Unless...”

Pian looked at her. “Unless what?”

“Unless they feel they can avoid a full scale war somehow by using the Union's own laws against them.” Jalersi spoke softly.

“They have not been very successful in doing that.” Pian spoke.

Jalersi shook her head and looked at him. “And what if that was my father's intention all along Pian?”

It was Pian's turn to look confuse. "I don't understand. Attempting to force this Lisisa to become a Kavalian citizen and losing and then only half heartedly challenging Athani's defection is part of this plan somehow?"

Jalersi nodded. "Yes. To learn how the Union will act." Jalersi spoke. "How committed to their laws they are."

Pian looked at her. "Why would they do this? What would this prove?"

"It has something to do with the Lycavorian Ascension Laws." Jalersi said. "It has to be!"

"Pusintin can't challenge for the throne of the Union Jalersi." Pian spoke. "Even I know that."

"Then why have Jiss and Matuarr examining the ancient Lycavorian Ascension Laws?" Jalersi spoke. "And how did they get the excerpts that you have shown me to begin with."

Pian shrugged. "That is easy. Someone is helping them. A Lycavorian."

*"I've seen horrors beyond the pale my love and I have done far worse since this war began.
The Feravomir was right.*

I have stared into the abyss, and it has become a part of me. That is how I know we can win!"

*-Androcles Leonidas's words to Sadi Leonidas-
-Kavalian Wars-
-Earth Year 2576-*

**-Recorded by Dilaen Roan-
-Narrator-
-Personal Journals of Androcles Leonidas-**

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

SPARTA

HOME OF CHIEF MAGE THR'WON

Dilaen watched as the *Durcunusaan* soldier exited the door of the large sitting room and left her alone. Thr'won's home was of medium size, certainly nothing lavish, and it rested in the small neighborhood below the mountain road heading up to the King's Villa. The home was a single story structure, with large rooms and windows to allow the sun into the villa. She briefly wondered how they retained heat in the winter months until she realized the glass was triple paned in many cases and there appeared to be steel shutters ready to drop into place on all the windows. Dilaen knew Thr'won was also wolf, her Lycavorian husband was a senior instructor for the Agoge program, and even before King Leonidas had returned to claim his throne she was a Chief Mage for Sparta. It was a title she had retained even after Helen had become the First Oracle of the Lycavorian people during the *Tuarvomir*, a title Helen had encouraged her to keep. Thr'won had studied for nearly six years at the School of the Oracles on Apo Prime, her husband following her there and living there until she had completed fully the regiment of classes and such that the *Feravomir* had devised. Like Helen, she was said to be considered part of the King's extended family, and the *Durcunusaan* guards outside gave much weight to that. She had counted four *Durcunusaan* alertly moving about the front of the property and Dilaen guessed that the King thought very highly of Thr'won for such protection.

The home was very comfortably furnished with many chairs and couches and several large fireplaces spread throughout from what she saw as she was led here to this sitting room. The furniture was anything but extravagant, much of it hundreds of years old, but in pristine condition from what she could see. Dilaen moved to the wall where she saw the mural. It depicted a battle of some kind, with spear wielding Spartans in full body armor against an equally armored foe she didn't recognize. They wore some kind of black armor with multiple light green openings in their helmets. Shi-Viskas could be seen in the mural, Spartans fighting with 190s and *Nehtes*, the flame and superheated breaths of dragons dotting the sky and the ground. It was incredibly detailed

and as she gazed at it, she thought she saw the single figure who could only be King Leonidas with the mammoth obsidian dragon Torma at his side.

“It took them a full year to finish that.” The female voice said from behind her.

Dilaen turned quickly, her blue eyes going wide when she saw Chief Mage Thr'won entering the room with the *Feravomir* right next to her. Thr'won was the taller of the two but only by perhaps two inches.

“Chief Mage Thr'won!” Dilaen gasped bowing her head quickly. “*Feravomir*! I am honored!”

Helen chuckled. “Why would you be honored young lady?” She asked calmly.

Dilaen lifted her head and looked at them. “It is not often that one is in the company of the *Feravomir* of the Lycavorian people *and* the Chief Mage of Sparta at the same time. I did not realize you would be here as well *Feravomir*.”

“No I suppose we don't spend as much time together as we should.” Helen answered as she settled into one of the chairs. “I imagine we will have to change that Thr'won.”

“I imagine we will.” Thr'won stated moving to the table that held several different mugs and two large carafes. She set the data pad from her hand on the counter as she poured two mugs of steaming liquid and then looked at Dilaen. “Dysea had that as one of her first visions when her Mindvoice powers were beginning to fully manifest themselves. She had an artist draw it for her and I liked it so much I had them put it on my wall.”

“It's... beautiful.” Dilaen spoke looking back to the mural. “And somewhat dark.”

“Yes I know. But my husband enjoys that part of it.” Thr'won spoke. “You prefer tea don't you Dilaen?”

Dilaen looked at Thr'won surprised. “Yes... yes I do. How... how did you know that?”

“You might be surprised at what we know.” Thr'won said with a smile as she poured the tea from the second carafe. “Cream or sweetener?”

Dilaen shook her head slowly, alarms in her reporter brain starting to sound loudly. “No... thank you.”

Thr'won nodded and picked up the mug, carrying it over to where Dilaen stood. “It's a green herbal mix. I hope you don't mind.”

Dilaen shook her head and took the mug, watching as Thr'won handed Helen the mug of coffee and then she retrieved her own mug and the pad. Thr'won looked back to Dilaen as she moved to the couch and settled her willowy frame onto the cushions. She motioned for Dilaen to sit in the chair across from her and Helen. “Please Dilaen... sit.”

Dilaen looked at the two women as she moved to the chair and lowered herself onto the soft pillow like seat warily. “Thank you for seeing me so quickly... I know it was very short notice.”

Thr'won leaned forward and placed the pad on the table between them seeing Dilaen's eyes watch her movements. “Yes it was.” Thr'won answered. “So what can we do for you Dilaen?”

“You... you have the pad that your *Durcunusaan* Detail leader gave to you.” Dilaen spoke.

Thr'won nodded. “Yes. It is a picture of a young woman with what appears to be a dragon behind her. Does this have some meaning that I am unaware of?”

Dilaen looked from Thr'won to Helen and then back to Thr'won. “Who is she?” Dilaen asked.

“Why would I know who she is?” Thr'won asked.

Dilaen tilted her head slightly as she looked at them. “The picture I sent you was taken four years ago on the High Coven home world of Usu Ozeib 7.” She set her tea down and took another data pad from her large tote bag and keyed in several commands before setting the pad down on the table next to the identical one already there.

“I ask again... why would this matter to us?” Thr'won spoke as she sipped her tea.

Dilaen touched the new pad on the table and the image of Carisia from Cranae Island only two weeks earlier. “This was taken on Cranae Island two weeks ago. Prince Androcles's island. It's the same woman and the same dragon.”

Helen leaned forward now and picked up the new pad and looked at the image of a smiling Carisia. “It could be.” She said with a noncommittal shrug. “Or it could not be. How did you get this image?”

“Does it matter?” Dilaen asked.

“It will when I give this to Androcles. It will matter to you then when he comes asking how you obtained it.” Helen answered matter of factly.

“So you do know who she is?” Dilaen prompted.

“I never said that young lady.” Helen said. “You work for Channel 76 I understand. You are the Dilaen that just hosted the interview with Athani Leonidas last week.”

“Yes.” Dilaen said.

“You did a superb job with that. I commend you.” Helen spoke. “However... going from interviewing a Princess of the Union to spying on the Crown Prince? That is quite another thing altogether don’t you think?”

“I wasn’t spying!” Dilaen spoke quickly.

“What would you call it? There is a standard No Fly area around Cranae Island Dilaen, as well as every home of a Leonidas.” Helen spoke calmly. “I am intelligent enough to know that this image came from the sky. How exactly did you obtain it?”

“The... the drone we were using was outside the zone with a powerful lens.” Dilaen spoke.

Helen set the pad down on the table once more. “And why did you find it necessary to do this? Are the comings and goings of the Leonidas family so interesting to you that you must invade every aspect of their lives?”

“*Feravomir*... they are... they are the Royal family.” Dilaen spoke. “Everything they do is news. Especially Prince Androcles.”

“Putting aside who this young woman *might* be for a moment...” Thr'won asked. “Why would it interest you?”

Dilaen looked at them with her blue eyes. “You know who she is, don’t you?” She said. “Both of you.”

“And again... I ask why it matters to you?” Thr'won spoke.

“Princess Sadi said there would be three others who would share their lives.” Dilaen said quickly. “I’ve already discovered who one of them is.”

“Have you now?” Helen said.

Dilaen looked at her. “Commander Ne'Veha of the *SCIMITAR*. She’s a pilot... and from all accounts a very good one. She is the one who was riding on Elynth when Prince Androcles confronted the Kavalians in the café.”

“And why would this fact lead you to believe she is one of them?” Helen asked. “There are many who ride dragons in the Union Dilaen.”

Dilaen shook her head. “Not Elynth. I know Elynth and the Prince have allowed only two people other than himself to ride Elynth in her entire life. It is no secret she is the most reticent of the children of Torma and Isheeni.” Dilaen spoke. “Princess Sadi and this elven female are the only ones besides the Prince to have ridden her. I think that says all I need to know about that.” Dilaen picked up the pad. “Now this woman is a vampire, and she is bonded to a dragon. There are only twelve vampires within the Union who are bonded to dragons, and we have all of their names and pictures. She is not one of them. She is not within the UMD, or an employee of IES. Now... I could release this image without trying to find out who she is, but something tells me from the way you both are acting that whoever she is, it is not something that you want known. I would guess it is something that Prince Androcles doesn’t want known either... and that is why I want to speak with him. And her. Personally.”

“Child... you must be joking?” Thr'won spoke calmly. “Do you think coming here and threatening us is the way to get what you want?”

“I’m not threatening Chief Mage Thr'won... I’m simply making a statement.” Dilaen said knowing that she was walking a very fine line. She thought with Chief Mage Thr'won being an elven female like herself she would have an advantage. That apparently was not the case Dilaen was discovering.

“It definitely sounds like a threat to me.” Helen spoke evenly. “Young lady... have you ever visited the prison here in Sparta?”

“Certainly not *Feravomir*!” Dilaen exclaimed.

“Would you care to spend some time there?” Helen asked bluntly.

“*Feravomir*... I...”

Thr'won got to her feet slowly. “Thomas found this didn’t he?” She said as she turned to walk to the counter.

Dilaen’s blue eyes cut to her with a definite look of shock. “How...?”

Thr'won smiled. “It took me all of three minutes to find out all about you and Thomas Roan once this was placed in my hand. I am not without my resources Dilaen.” She said. “The Administrator at Channel 76

said you were his brightest star, and that Thomas Roan is a genius when it comes to electronics and such. He also says that Thomas has somewhat of a crush on you, and he suspects you have one on him since he has offered to give you three different support personnel and you have refused all of them and remained with this Thomas Roan.”

Dilaen’s face took on a slight blush to it and she looked down. “He is... he is very good at his job.” She said. “And he is a genius when it comes to electronics. And he is a wonderful father as well! He has nothing to do with this. I made him make the drone that took the pictures. I put him up to it.”

Helen chuckled from her spot. “She protects him.” She said looking at Thr’won.

“Tell us why you want to know this information Dilaen.” Thr’won asked her. “And do not attempt to lie to us. If you were truly only interested in a story and you did not care who your information hurt, you would have already released this photo, and the information on Ne’Veha. I suspect that you would release it if we told you no... but we want to know why you desire it so much. Why do you want to know so much about Androcles and his family?”

Dilaen moved her blue eyes back and forth between Thr’won and Helen for a moment before settling them on Thr’won. “I am a reporter.” She spoke. “This is what I have always wanted to do Chief Mage... *Feravomir*. I’m good at my job. A large part of the credit goes to Thomas... but I am tenacious and I will pursue a story until the end. It matters not where Prince Androcles goes, stories always follow him.”

“That is not all that follows him Dilaen.” Helen spoke. “He is far too much like his father, and trouble seems to go out of its way to find him wherever he is.”

“Then that is where I want to be.” Dilaen spoke without hesitation.

“Be careful what you wish for Dilaen.” Thr’won spoke. “With the Leonidas family you just may get it.”

“Someone will discover who she is *Feravomir*.” Dilaen spoke quickly. “Someone who may not come to you first and just release her images not caring who she is.”

Helen looked at her. “Your Thomas Roan and yourself? You are the only ones who know of this?”

Dilaen nodded. “Yes. It is a program Thomas developed. Images he has gathered from hundreds of sources. We did not know it would discover anything. It was a last ditch effort on our part.” She said.

“He is resourceful... this Thomas Roan.” Thr’won said looking at her. “You care for him don’t you?”

Dilaen nodded her head once more, this time without a second’s pause. “Yes I do. Very much so. He is human but he does not treat me as some sort of sex object simply because I am an elf female from Earth.”

Thr’won rolled her eyes. “I have yet to discover how that belief came about, but it is very taxing on my nerves as well.”

“Thomas... he is one of the most honorable men I have ever met, and I hope to pursue our relationship further if he does as well. And he caresses my ears so very well.” Dilaen spoke honestly knowing that it was needed above all else now if she wanted to be able to achieve her goals. She looked up quickly, her face blushing as she realized what she had just said and she saw both Helen and Thr’won smiling. “Forgive me.” She said.

“Do not be afraid of your feelings and never apologize for them.” Helen spoke. “Charles Turner has turned the corner on humans and their history and he is leading them into the future with conviction and values. It seems your Thomas Roan learned his lessons well.”

Dilaen looked at Thr’won and then cut her eyes to Helen. “Who is she *Feravomir*? If she was an agent of the *Krypteria*... you would not be acting like this, trying to protect her identity. I would already be on my way to be interrogated by Armetus himself. Who is she? Who are the others?”

Helen got to her feet. “Meet us here tomorrow at ten hundred hours sharp Dilaen.” She spoke. “They arrive early and sleep for a few hours but are usually up by then. I am going to Cranæ Island anyway. Bring your Thomas Roan and you can discover for yourself.” Helen’s dark eyes bore into her as she came to her feet. “I will speak honestly now Dilaen. What you will see must not become public knowledge. Not yet. If it does child...” Helen shook her head. “If it does, I will warn you now... you and Thomas Roan will not live out the remainder of the day it becomes public knowledge before Androcles is ready.”

Dilaen looked at her with wide eyes. “*Feravomir*?” She asked.

“Be sure of what you want Dilaen.” Thr’won continued. “Androcles Leonidas is like his father in many ways, but he is also far more dangerous in many ways. If you betray him... put those he cares for in peril... there will be no place you can hide.”

Dilaen could tell they were not joking with her in any way and she nodded her head. "I do understand." She spoke finally.

"Then meet us here tomorrow and you will have the answers to your questions." Thr'won spoke.

BELID IMMORTAL BASE

As she pushed her long, two-toned hair out of her face and broke the surface of the hot spring, she immediately detected Lynom's Amarian Willow Flower scent perhaps three meters away. She turned her body in the neck deep spring, her dark eyes coming to rest on his wide back as he squatted on the large boulder facing in the other direction. As'hia realized then that he must have heard her mumble under her breath the comment on how she badly needed a hot bath several days ago. Hot springs like this had always relaxed her and made her mind clear and focused, and considering what she had been through in the last weeks, it was just what the doctor ordered. At least until she looked at Lynom and realized that she was living a perilous, day-to-day life, and the only thing she was sure of was an Immortal who said he would protect her.

As'hia stood there in the water watching him for a moment. He was shirtless now, the Immortal SA80 resting across his thighs as he squatted and ate the large Tulsian Date. As'hia could clearly see the scars her wolf claws had left on his upper back and across his shoulder. It must have happened when she first arrived, before they had injected her with the drug to keep her from changing. He had said nothing about this to her, he had not even mentioned it in passing, but looking at the pink scars on his grayish colored skin As'hia knew it had to have been painful. The drug was now gone from her system, as was the capsule in the back of her head just under the scalp that prevented her from using her MV abilities. She had been able to shift several times over the course of the last three weeks, each time her Lycavorian genes becoming stronger and healing the injuries that her elven metabolism was still working on. She was completely healed according to Lynom, his medical sensors unable to detect any of the internal injuries that had hindered her for so long. As'hia had no choice but to trust him, not if she wanted to live, but the only problem with that was that she was beginning to trust him too much. Since the day he had shown her the perverted orgy that the rest of the Immortals took part in every day, he had been blocking all of her Mindvoice probes. However it had happened, As'hia discovered that her MV powers had increased by a substantial amount, even greater than her mother and father. Like any good Spartan soldier, she tried to use her new abilities on the most likely target and that was Lynom. He had batted aside her probes as if they were nothing more than a nuisance, refusing to talk to her unless he needed too. As'hia was beginning to think she had hurt his feelings in some way. He would come to her cell everyday, bringing her food and clean clothes, never speaking to her unless he needed to. The first few days, before she knew what he was, As'hia had talked to him easily. Discovering he was an Immortal had changed all that.

Or so she thought.

As'hia wasn't so sure what he had told her wasn't true in some way. He could do things that As'hia knew no Immortal could do. He could blur in motion like a vampire, and she had seen him wrap the shadows around himself twice until it was like he wasn't even there. As'hia was not a fool, and she knew that no Immortal could do that. He had told her his mother was a pureblood vampire, but As'hia found that hard to believe. She knew that was impossible. No pureblood vampire would willingly bed with an Immortal. He said his father was Cha'talla, the most feared Immortal to ever live, even to Union Spartans. Yet As'hia knew that was impossible also for the many Union reports all said Cha'talla was dead. Looking at Lynom, all As'hia saw was the image of Immortals she had seen in all her training classes. Immensely proportioned hulks with grayish colored skin and frightening bone spurs along the jaw lines extending down from their ear lobes to the cleft of their square jaws. That is what she saw when she looked at Lynom, but as she saw this As'hia also saw something else.

As'hia saw an Immortal who had butchered one of his own kind to protect her. He had killed that Immortal without so much as a pause in his mind, and killed him in a particularly brutal way for attempting to rape her. Even in that rage of action As'hia had seen intelligence. Cold and calculating intelligence. Her actions had caused him to bite her and feed on her blood, telling her it was now the only way to protect her. She had hated him for that... hated him until she realized he had been right. Since he had fed on her blood, not a single Immortal had looked at her in a threatening manner. The incredible thing was that he had taken her blood four

times since to reinforce the scent of himself in her veins. Each time he had apologized profusely to her for having to do something so vile. The second time she had tried to fight him, but she was still too weak. The third time she had accepted it stoically, but the last time... the last time she had clutched at his broad shoulders as fire ignited within her veins. A flare of incredible desire, and this had shamed her.

Lynom possessed strength that normal Immortals should not have had As'hia was sure. The kick that had crushed her attacker's head was delivered with lethal precision and incredible power. His reflexes were just as fast as her combined elven and wolf speed, yet he moved with measured confidence in everything. He neither acted nor moved like an Immortal should according to her instructors and this more than anything made her not trust him. He was lying to her about something, but As'hia couldn't decide what that was, and she couldn't trust him because of that.

So you will not talk to me again? As'hia reached out easily within Mindvoice, probing his shields gently. She had quickly mastered her new MV abilities and had discovered she was very good at it. It did not occur to her that the reason for this increase in her MV abilities was Lynom establishing the initial connection between them, and his taking of her blood only made that connection stronger and more intertwined.

What would be the point? Lynom answered not seeing her eyes go wide at the first words he had spoken to her within Mindvoice since her first week as a prisoner here. *You will believe nothing I tell you going forward, just as you don't believe anything I have told you in the past.*

You could start with the truth. As'hia spoke. *The truth about who and what you are? You haven't exactly been forthcoming.*

My mother told me once that like trust... truth is a relative term. Lynom told her softly not turning his head to look at her as she thought he would. *There can be no trust if there is no truth. There can be no truth without trust. There can be neither truth nor trust if you do not believe.*

Believe what? As'hia asked him.

That there is more than what you have been taught. Lynom answered. *Your mother and father are finding this out even as we speak.*

As'hia's eyes grew wide. *What do you mean? What are they learning? Where are they? If you have hurt them I will...*

They have been with my father and among my tribe for almost two months now. Your father, your mother and another elf male. An O'lan. A pilot. Lynom told her as he took another bite out of the date in his hand.

O'lan? As'hia gasped. *He is the reason I went to that damn moon to begin with!* Her words were laced with anger.

You know him then?

As'hia whipped her head angrily to the side in the hot water. *I know him! I was... I was in a relationship with him for almost a year. He is a pilot in my father's command and he wanted to marry me. He wanted me to stop being a Spartan and become his trophy wife so that he could parade me around.*

And this is not what you wanted? Lynom asked.

I have too much of my mother in me. As'hia stated. *I like what I do... and I am good at it. O'lan... he told me if I wanted him that is what I would have to do. I was angry and upset. I want a husband and children, but I do not feel I have to give up what I want to achieve that. I went on that trip to try and sort everything out.*

You cared for him?

Yes. As'hia answered softly.

You should not be made to do something you do not want Ssin'urn 'Anon. Lynom spoke. *Any man who would attempt to confine you is not a man who truly wishes you for the woman you are.*

As'hia turned her head and looked at Lynom's back once more. *He most certainly will not want me now regardless.* She said more harshly than she had intended. *Not after I have been raped by Immortals!*

As'hia watched his eyes close slowly and he took a deep breath. *Then he... then he does not deserve you if this changes how he feels for you.*

What would you know about it? She snapped. *You are an Immortal! Or a vampire! Both! I don't know! You have no idea what I'm talking about! You have never loved anyone!*

Lynom turned his head slowly to look into her dark eyes, now alive with a myriad of emotions as she glared at him. All emotions that he understood. Emotions that she had every right to have. Possibly had they

crossed paths in the future and met under a different set of circumstances, maybe if he had been able to stop her rape when she first arrived, conceivably if he had been able to save her as his brother had saved Normya. Perhaps... maybe... conceivably. They were all words that mattered not now. Even if As'hia saw whom he was inside, what he felt for her even when he wasn't in the same room, Lynom doubted if it would change her view of his people. Of him.

You are right of course As'hia. He spoke softly, his words filled with pain and sadness. *I do not have the ability to love. I am nothing more than a mindless brute.*

As'hia's eyes grew wider when she heard his words. It was because they were spoken within her mind and not out loud, but As'hia could almost feel the sorrow in Lynom's words. The sorrow and the hurt. She looked at his face, his eyes focused on her, and As'hia saw in his eyes what her words had done.

Lynom...

I talk with my brother once a week now Ssin'urn 'Anon. Lynom spoke quickly cutting off her words before she could continue. *It is much easier to communicate with him now that he and his il kal'daka darthirii have come together. His Mindvoice abilities have increased by a factor of three now and it makes it much easier for me. He is meant for great things my brother Tir'ut. He has told me everything that is happening. Your parents have gone to Kranek, the planet in The Wilds that my tribe calls home. He and Normya will return to Kranek with our darthirii ilhar Queen Dysea and my mother soon. Your xinanath, your parents... they are working with my father and uncle T'lolt on a plan that will enable them to come here and rescue you and the other elven females who are here. And finally bring an end to Phy'iad and his foul regime.*

As'hia watched him get to his feet and reach for the shirt he had removed. As he set the SA80 aside, As'hia's dark eyes followed the line of his powerful body, the way his muscles were so exquisitely defined and rippled under his skin like bands of steel. Her eyes also took in the scars she had inflicted on him, the jaggedness of the tears her claws had rendered in his flesh easily seen. He turned to face her as he pulled the shirt on.

We must go before Phy'iad and his men finish with their vile entertainment. He spoke softly. *I brought you some fresh clothes. They are beside the spring. I will wait for you by the cave opening.*

Lynom... you said they were coming for me and the other elven females. As'hia said looking at him from the pool.

Yes.

What about... what about you?

My well being is not your concern Ssin'urn 'Anon. Lynom answered. *You have made that very clear. Just worry about rejoining your parents and perhaps moving on from this portion of your life as best you are able. I will wait for you by the cave opening.*

SODRAG

Sadi stood on the end of the ramp of her *STRIKER*, her jungle green eyes resting on where Andro and Elynth relaxed on the tarmac a hundred meters away. She felt Carisia move up next to her and she turned her head seeing Carisia's beautiful Maya blue eyes watching them as well, the setting sun reflecting deliciously on her face and skin.

"He is still angry with us isn't he *D'anthe xukuth*?" Carisia asked softly. (Dear heart)

"Not us." Sadi answered feeling warmth flow through her at the name Carisia had begun calling her. "With himself."

Carisia looked at her. "Himself? But why? Arrarn was not upset with Deneth. He was very happy Deneth did what he did."

Sadi smiled warmly. "Andro is considerably more traditional than Arrarn. Even more than his father in many ways. If I had to guess... I would say he is upset with himself for not being the one to deal with Thast."

"If he had been the one... we would not have been able to hide our relationship any longer." Carisia said. "He is not the most subtle of individuals *D'anthe xukuth*."

Sadi chuckled. "No he is not. At least not when it comes to protecting what he sees as belonging to him. Namely us."

“Then why... why not do the same for Ne'Veha Sadi?” Carisia asked. “Allowing Tarren to remain on the *SCIMITAR* and continuing to influence Ne'Veha? He used her confusion to make her do what she did. Tarren manipulated her, knowing she was torn between worlds, and he broke her down enough to where she succumbed to his advances when deep within herself she did not want to.”

Sadi nodded. “Yes he did.” Sadi looked at her. “It is as I told Ne'Veha. She did not have what we have always had Carisia. She never understood why she acted like she did. Why she questioned her parents and what they taught her. We have always known we would be Andro's. We have always seen him in our dreams. Seen each other and what we would share. Ne'Veha has not had that because of the distance between us, and until Andro, you and I came together we were not strong enough to feel her or for her to feel us.”

“Isn't that enough reason to pursue her?” Carisia asked. “To show her that she belongs with us?”

“If she doesn't accept or understand it, how can she give totally of herself as we have?” Sadi asked the question. “She will always question the purpose of what we share. I am like you *Enylarcopri*... take her and make her see we are what she desires. But we are women Carisia, and that is what we feel. I understand why Andro has not done this even though his blood burns for her just as intensely as it does for us. As it does for Lu'ria. It needs to be her choice. It needs to be what she wants.”

“Lu'ria... she does not question what she feels.” Carisia said. “At least I don't think she does. I have sensed no indecision in her. Have you?”

Sadi shook her head. “No... but I think that has more to do with her being a Drow than anything else. They do not question something when it feels right to them. It is not in their nature.”

“She is very intriguing.” Carisia said.

Sadi smiled alluringly. “Intriguing... a neutral word to describe the fact that we have never had a Drow Mistress before.”

Carisia shrugged. “Being a slave to her sounds very *zhas*.” She said with a similar smile. “It might turn out to be very pleasurable for all concerned.” (Wild, kinky)

Sadi looked at her with mock horror. “*Enylarcopri*... your time with us has turned you into a *pomai*!”

Carisia laughed and pressed her body intimately against Sadi's. “But think of the fun we have had! Can you imagine yourself feeling what Andro makes us feel with any other male *D'anthe xukuth*?”

“Hah!” Sadi declared. “Never! Even without his aura burning around my senses, his size alone would leave me gasping for breath because he actually knows how to use it. As well as the fact that he nibbles so well with his fangs I melt in seconds.”

“Ohhhhh!” Carisia cooed. “Did you have to say that? Now I won't be able to get that out of my head!”

Ahem! Anthar's voice from within the *STRIKER* broke into their minds. *I realize that you and Sadi are planning your evening with Andro sister. But you have not finished securing me in this ridiculous harness, and I do not wish to fall out.*

Carisia looked at Sadi and they both burst out laughing as they moved back into the *STRIKER*.

[...Should not have done that!] Andro said.

[And what would you have done?] Elynth spoke as she rested on the tarmac near the end of the ramp and looked at Andro as he checked the equipment pouches on her saddle, his hands roaming along the edges of the saddle and along her underbelly to make sure it was secure. Androcles Leonidas was the only person who Elynth allowed to touch her in this manner. In all her twenty-seven years, outside of Androcles, only Sadi and Ne'Veha had ever ridden her. It was not something she had allowed. Very few individuals would dare touch her without hers or Andro's permission. It was not something she did on purpose; it was just something that she had always done. They had bonded while Andro was still within his mother's womb, and though she joked with him about it, the closeness they shared was in fact reserved for many lovers and couples. They would share things with each other that not even their mates knew, and that would never change. Elynth cared for no other hands on her and most definitely only the caress of Anthar's tail upon hers or the stroke of his wings on her own. She was not known as the most introverted child of Torma and Isheeni for nothing.

[I don't know.] Andro answered.

[Bah! You know exactly what you would have done!] Elynth exclaimed using the tip of her tail to tap Andro lightly on the back. [Thast would be a cooling piece of vampire flesh in the morgue at Reylan and what

you and Carisia share... what Anthar and I now share... it would no longer be secret. That is something neither you nor I want to happen just yet my bonded brother.]

[I know.] Andro spoke softly.

[Then what is the problem?] Elynth asked pointedly.

Andro looked at her and moved up to where she had lowered her head to shoulder level. He placed his hands on either side of her huge snout and caressed the scales just under her golden eyes, watching as they closed in happiness. Elynth could not deny the pleasure she got from this action. It had been this way since he was very small, he always scratched her scales in the same spot and it was a sensation she had grown to cherish and look forward to.

[It should have been me.] His voice answered in almost a whisper.

Elynth opened her eyes and looked at him as he lowered his forehead to her snout. *[Have we not always spoken and acted as one mind and voice Andro?]*

[Yes.] He answered immediately. *[There is not me without you Elynth.]*

[And there is not me without you Andro.] Elynth answered. *[I did what you could not because of who you are and what we are trying to hide for a time longer. Just as you would do for me without question.]*

[Yes.] Andro told her.

[It would not do for you to approach King Anon and ask of him what I did.] Elynth said. *[He would have looked at you differently. I knew it would come to this sooner or later. Once the witch Aikiro began to suspect, I knew she would bring Thast here to confirm her suspicions. I doubt this did anything to convince her otherwise, but at least Enylarcopri will no longer have to deal with that foul man. At least until you kill him.]*

Andro chuckled and looked at her golden eyes. *[Probably. I still can't believe Anon's daughter actually agreed to it.]*

Elynth laughed softly as well. *[Rlina's prospective husband is one of Vengal's half vampire Drow scouts. Anon can not speak enough of him. She told me he has bitten her before and she knew just how to act. It accomplished what we needed it too. When she appeared in Thast's room clad in only a sheet, and then accused him of biting her the previous night, it kept Carisia from disemboweling him. The witch Aikiro knows Thast is a vile creature... and it did not surprise her in the least that he may have done this. She only seemed to be angered that he had gotten caught.]*

[Why doesn't that surprise me? And it only confirms for me she is planning something else.] Andro said. *[What did Yuri do?]*

[Before or after Carisia told her that if she was going to arrange a marriage with a man, to at least arrange one with someone who was actually pleasant to look at and had something larger than a morning sausage for a cock!] Elynth answered.

Andro looked at her with wide eyes. *[Carisia said that?]* He gasped.

Elynth nodded quickly. *[Oh yes! Anthar and I watched from outside the window and it was hysterical to see the look on her face when Carisia stormed out. The glare Yuri gave Thast after that would have melted Dragon armor!]* Elynth's voice was full of mischievous humor and it was very noticeable.

[Anon released him though?] Andro asked.

Elynth nodded. *[The object was never to keep him there. It was to give Carisia a reason to return to SODRAG and you much sooner. It accomplished that.]*

[You are devious sister.] Andro spoke.

[Well... I am a female.] Elynth spoke smugly. *[And just as I wish to feel only Anthar caressing my wings and tail, Carisia and Sadi wish to feel only your hands upon them.]* Elynth butted him gently in the shoulder. *[Now tell me why you are letting this fool Tarren remain on our ship and have your woman?]*

Androcles looked at her. *[She must find her own way sister... you know that.]* He said. *[I do not wish her to be with us in a manner not of her complete choosing. She is strong Elynth... she may not seem that way now... but she is strong.]*

[I don't question that Andro. You only attract strong women.] Elynth said.

Andro smiled. *[Even Ulana?]*

Elynth tilted her huge head and batted her golden eyes. *[Ok... perhaps not her.]* She said. *[She was more of a whiner. And her voice grated on my hearing.]*

Andro laughed and nodded his head. *[It grated on mine too.]* He said. *[Ne'Veha has discovered the messages that we sent to her.]* Andro told her. *[Perhaps now she will begin to discover she belongs with us.]*

Elynth looked at Andro for a long moment in silence. There was very little they could hide from each other and she pressed on. *[What else troubles you Andro?]*

[Elynth... Elynth we may have to leave when our fathers discover our secret.] Andro said. *[At least for a time.]*

Elynth nodded her huge head slowly. *[I know.]*

[It almost seems as if their roles have become reversed.] Andro spoke. *[Our mothers have become the more accepting of the unknown, while our fathers have not. They are much more cautious now.]*

[I have felt this for some time now as well. And it has gotten stronger since the Coven has been here.] Elynth said. *[What do you think it means?]*

Andro shook his head. *[I don't know. It is very strange... I can't really describe it, but it is something that has occupied my mind for the last few months.]*

[We will face it as we have faced everything else in our lives my Bonded brother.] Elynth spoke confidently. *[Head on without hesitation. And we will face it together. Just as our fathers have taught us.]*

[I remember what the Feravomir said to me on this tarmac sister. That I would need to make decisions that will alter the future. She asked if I was ready for that. Do you think that includes my father?] Andro said.

[The Feravomir has a way of speaking in riddles Andro... you know this.] Elynth said. *[There are times when I question if even she knows what she is saying.]*

Andro met her golden eyes and stroked her scales once more. *[Enough of this sister.]* He said confidently. *[We are going to Cranae Island to relax and be with those we love. Let's do that shall we?]*

[You must make me a promise though.] Elynth spoke as they began to walk towards the STRIKER. *[When you have your mates in your arms... do try to shield better. Last week you dropped all pretense of shielding and it affected Anthar and me as well.]*

[I didn't think that bothered you.] Andro spoke.

[It doesn't... a divine time was had by all, but we need to eat more than you my brother. You interrupted our meal and we could not help ourselves.] Elynth said her voice soft and embarrassed. *[When we finally returned to the beach, the ocean had claimed our meal and we had not the strength to go hunting again.]*

Andro chuckled. *[I will try to be more mindful.]* He said.

Elynth flicked her wing forward on this occasion and shoved Andro harder this time making him stumble forward. *[Liar!]*

REYLAN

Her name was Libala. She was an elven female. And never before had Libala felt such agonizing pleasure. Every nerve in her body was alive and singing out with delightful abandon. It had been like this for four weeks now, ever since she had discovered them.

Or more correctly, they had discovered her.

They had discovered her about to be savagely attacked and eaten by a wild Grizz Beast. The monster was a rare one now, leftover from the High Coven experiments on the animals of Earth. It stood nearly ten foot tall and easily four feet wide, yet they had descended upon it without hesitation, swords flashing in the setting sun. She heard the animal roar in pain as those swords bit deeply into its flesh, and then they would dance away as it swung its massive paws, the four inch long teeth snapping viciously at air. One of them had snatched her arm and physically tossed her up into the branches of a tree, well out of reach of the Grizz Beast and allowing her an unobstructed view of the life or death battle beneath her. They moved in perfect unison they did, swords flashing out with incredible power and precision, and the Grizz Beast dying the death of a thousand cuts. It ended when both of them stepped in and drove their swords into the head and neck of the staggering creature. It struck out once more in its death throes, catching both of its attackers a glancing blow before it finally fell to the jungle ground dead.

Libala watched as they withdrew their swords from the dead creature and inspected each other for wounds. One of them had four long, deep tears in his lower abdomen while the second had four slashes in his

shoulder and arm. She watched them begin to strip out of their now torn and shredded clothes only to stare at them in even further horror. She had only heard of their species before, stories told by adults who had fought in the Battle for Earth with King Leonidas. Never did Libala imagine she would see them, but standing before her had been two very large and wounded Immortals. And they had saved her life. They had saved her life by risking their own and now they were both wounded horribly for their actions. Libala had dropped from the tree cat like and poised herself to run as fast as her legs could carry her. She didn't know what made her stop, but she hadn't moved and she watched them turn to look at her. Not with blood or lust in their eyes, but what seemed to be relief that she was safe. They made no threatening moves toward her; they did not try and chase her. They simply dropped to the jungle floor and took out small vials of blood and drank them quickly. What she had seen flashed into her mind as the pleasure overwhelmed her senses in waves.

"We will not hurt you Lotha Uss." The first had said.

"You... you are Immortals!" Libala gasped.

The second one had nodded then. ***"I am Am'rul ... this is my brother As'pin. And we are not like any Immortals you may have heard about Lotha Uss. You should not have been out here alone."*** (Little One)

"My... my name is Libala." She stammered.

"You risk much coming out into the jungle at this time Libala." Am'rul told her as he began applying a green balm to the tears in his shoulder. ***"We have been tracking this creature for three days now. We did not know why it was circling back towards the city until we saw you."***

"You were hunting it!" Libala gasped.

As'pin chuckled as he applied the green ointment to his grayish colored skin. ***"These beasts do not provide the challenge we are used too Lotha Uss."*** He said. ***"Nind ph'izznarg lu'waele."*** Libala's ice blue eyes scrunched up in confusion and As'pin looked at his brother. ***"Am'rul... what are the words?"***

"They are large and stupid." Am'rul spoke. ***"Our brother has told you As'pin, you need to concentrate more on your studies."***

"Around these fool Immortals it is better to act dumb so that we fit in." As'pin answered. ***"You always were more interested in learning different languages."***

"That is why the Matriarch Mother praises me more." Am'rul stated.

"Bunjiro!" As'pin hissed. (Asshole)

"Ak'nenn'nehr wael!" (Brainless fool)

Libala found herself moving closer to these hulking Immortals who seemed to be more interested in the Grizz Beast and insulting each other than her. At least she thought they were insulting each other. Libala had always been the more adventurous of her parent's children, often going into the jungle at night. She was the youngest of nine children at only twenty-three years old, but she was definitely the one who gave them the most fits. When Am'rul dropped the tube of ointment, Libala was close enough to reach out and snatch it from the ground. She lifted it to her nose as Am'rul and As'pin watched her closely. Her nose wrinkled in disgust.

"This smells horrible!" She exclaimed.

"Be that as it may... it works." Am'rul spoke holding out his hand for the tube.

Libala was close enough now to smell them and her nose wrinkled even more. ***"You both smell horrible!"*** Libala's eyes had gone wide then, realizing she may have just ended her own life by insulting them as she did. She looked on in shock as they both began to bellow in laughter.

"Yes!" As'pin exclaimed. ***"Yes we certainly do!"***

Libala watched as Am'rul got to his feet and looked down into her face. The blond color of her hair could still be detected even in the fading sunlight through the jungle canopy and he could not keep his heart from jumping in his chest. She was only five feet five inches, if that tall, yet she had a typically perfect elven body. Long legs for her height, a small waist and above average breasts that pushed proudly against the tan shirt she wore. Her hair fell well below her shoulders and her ice blue eyes seemed to almost glow in the growing darkness.

"We... we will dispose of this creature Libala." Am'rul spoke softly. ***"You should make your way back to your home now."***

Libala looked at him stunned. ***"You are going... you are going to let me go?"*** She asked.

“Why would we not?” As'pin asked her.

“I am... I am a female elf.” She stammered. “You... you are not going to break me to your will?”

Am'rul hissed softly in anger. “That is a vile practice of our people and not something we take part in!” He spoke harshly though Libala could tell it was not directed at her, but more at the mention of what Immortals were known for throughout the Union. “My brother and I can not do this, even if we chose to. Which we don't!”

“You... you can't?” Libala asked shocked. “You are... you are Immortals.”

“It is a long story Lotha Uss.” As'pin spoke now. “And it will be full dark in a few minutes. You can use your elven speed to return to your city before this happens. Go now. All we ask is that you do not speak of us within the jungle here.”

“Yes. Our presence is not known but for one... and that is how we need to keep it for now.” Am'rul agreed.

“You are... you are Immortals serving the High Coven.” Libala said. “Aren't you?”

“My brother and I do not serve that witch of an Empress.” As'pin told her calmly. “And if she discovered we were here, our lives would be forfeit.”

“You should go Lotha Uss.” Am'rul told her.

Libala looked at them as they turned to the carcass of the Grizz Beast. And she made a decision that would change her life forever. “I know... I know of a place nearby.” Libala spoke up. “It is a cave with a hot spring inside. It would allow you to... it would allow you to bathe at least.”

Libala had never been more pleased with a decision she had made than she was with that decision that night. Over the course of the next five weeks she would bring them different foods from the city. They would not tell her why they were here only that it was their duty to protect someone who was close by. They did not tell her who that was, and she did not ask. She would sit for hours with them, discovering just how intelligent they truly were. They were nothing like the Immortals she had heard about growing up. As she grew more accustomed to their features, Libala was easily able to discern that they were indeed brothers. Am'rul was older by a year, though both of them were over two hundred years old, and still very young by Immortal standards. Am'rul was the more reserved and businesslike of them, always touching her when he was showing her something, while As'pin was the more comical of them. As'pin completely blew apart the stern tacturian picture of Immortals that so many had.

Libala did not remember the exact moment it happened; only that she had come to the cave one morning and found both of them leaving the hot spring in the back completely naked and dripping with water. Whatever she had learned of Immortals and their ability to break female elves quickly fell by the wayside seeing them that way. This was the main reason she had resisted so long, but after their first night together, she had not seen them for almost four days. There was no physical need to be with them, no addiction that controlled her actions. She was the same individual she was before they had fucked her senseless. She was sure it was Am'rul's arms she had thrown herself into that first time as she found herself gravitating to him most of all, but over the course of those first nine hours Libala of the Moon Elves had been the focus of their complete and very carnal attentions. And Libala had fallen head over heels in love with both of them.

As it was that first night, it was the same now. They devoured her body completely, their hands and fingers, their thin lips and tongues, all dragging across her lush young body and setting fire to her flesh wherever they touched. Am'rul was the more methodic of the brothers, always taking extra time to explore her succulent body. Even after As'pin had spent himself, Am'rul would take longer and completely drive Libala insane with his ministrations. They pulled crushing orgasm after crushing orgasm from her until she could no longer stand it and was begging them to take her.

Her long blond hair was damp with sweat now, her lightly tanned skin glistening with the intensity of her pleasure, As'pin's hugely thick Immortal cock buried deeply in her bowels. She was stretched out on top of his rock hard body, her head whipping back and forth as her hands clutched at his wrists. He was constantly using his nose to firmly brush the backs of her four-inch high elven ears, driving her to heights of gratification she had never known could exist while his hands stroked the sides of her breasts. They were heights of gratification that were quickly surpassed, as they always were, when Am'rul drove his own deliciously huge Immortal cock back into her spasming pussy with heavenly slowness.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhh... yes Am'rul!” She shrieked out as another orgasm smashed through her.

She released As'pin's wrists, her arms flying around Am'rul's broad shoulders as every sinfully marvelous inch of his cock stretched her pussy in a way nothing ever would. When they had first taken her, she blessed her elven genes endlessly, the genes that allowed her body to accept both of them at once. Elven bodies were much more adaptable and pliable and it was this that made the females so valuable to slavers and such. Libala had been sore the first morning after, but it was a luscious soreness that she had welcomed for it continued to remind her of what she had found. Am'rul's thin lips came down on hers as the whole of his fifteen inch cock finally finished it's devastating plunge back into her depths. Libala felt his huge balls press tightly to her upturned ass cheeks, so hot and ready to explode and she screamed out into his kiss as another staggering orgasm ripped through her mind. She could feel her juices spilling from around Am'rul's huge cock, coating their lower bodies. She could feel their two massive tools pulsing inside her supple form, stretching her in a way that she had never imagined. Her ankles locked around Am'rul's powerful asscheeks as she kissed him back with a fervor. He responded without hesitation, and his ability to steal her breath away with just his kisses is what caused Libala to love him just that tad bit more. That and the fact that when he fucked her singly, he would perch her in his lap and simply flex his huge cock inside her while his lips suckled her nipples. He would not allow himself to come until she had experienced at least three orgasms of her own and was hissing in his ears to love her completely.

You could not see her body, sandwiched as it was between the brothers, and only her long legs were visible locked around Am'rul's hips. They were both nearing release now Libala knew, As'pin's breathing becoming faster in her ear as they sawed their massive cocks back and forth within her openings. With Am'rul's divinely powerful two hundred and sixty pound body on top of them, her shapely ass had swallowed every millimeter of As'pin's cock and she began clenching her inner muscles instinctively, wanting them to fill her with their seed.

Libala heard As'pin roar out his release, his face burying in the back of her neck as his cock swelled inside her. Libala could only squeal out her own delight as the upward push of his hips impaled her deeper on Am'rul's immense cock. She felt As'pin's hot come flooding her bowels, Am'rul's hands moving to hold her asscheeks in his grip while she shuddered in climax. It was the third time As'pin had exploded within her this night, and this release was not as large, but it mattered not to her. Libala's ice blue eyes lifted from where she had buried her face into Am'rul's shoulder and she stared into his dark orbs. He understood what she wanted and with hardly any effort, he began to lift her from his brother's body slowly. Libala hissed delightfully as As'pin's cock began leaving her ass, the tightness of her opening milking every bit of the come from his cock before Am'rul had lifted her completely free. He lowered her back to the bed, covered her lips with his once more, and began to pummel her lush body with his fifteen inch cock. Libala sang out in shameless delight, her arms clutching him, trying to pull him tighter into her body even as his fifteen inches finally drove her up to the edge of the pleasure abyss and then over it. The moment he tucked his face against her neck she knew what was going to happen next, what she had wanted for some time now, and the fleeting prick of pain from his vampire fangs was instantly washed away as she exploded in the most soul shattering orgasm she had yet experienced in her life with them. Her wail of bliss was muffled as she bit down on his shoulder and felt his enormous cock swell even larger within her and then erupt with scorching hot, life giving seed deeply into her womb as he fed on her blood.

The wave of celestial pleasure swept over her, her ice blue eyes rolling up into the back of her head, as blast after blast of Am'rul's come filled her.

“I love you!” She gasped into his ear. “I love you! *I love you!*”

Then it became too much and Libala let the divine sensations sweep her away and she descended into heavenly contentment.

The eyes behind the mask gazed on the sight before them and the anger grew.

The Immortal known as Am'rul lay between the elf female's legs, his hairless head resting on her chest, one of her arms draped almost possessively over his shoulders. The second one lay beside her on his back, her other arm tossed lazily across his broad chest, one of his hands resting on the flesh of her forearm. Her long

blond hair was splayed across the pillows of the bed, and she wore a peaceful expression on her face. The twin puncture marks in her neck were easily discernable, but they would disappear completely in a few hours.

The figure was only of medium height, and clad entirely in black. The black cape and cowl were wrapped around the figure tightly, the cowl hiding the angular helmet that the figure wore. Only two small eye slits were visible, and behind those slits were cobalt blue orbs that held intense anger. The mask, helmet really, wrapped around the head hiding everything from sight. The uniform looked similar to the Union Mark IV ArmorPly, conforming to the body and providing substantial protection against projectile weapons and even bladed weapons.

The figure moved silently up beside the bed like a shadow. The home was sitting on the outskirts of Reylan and providing ample opportunity to eliminate these vile Immortals without fear of discovery. The figure silently slipped the gleaming, slightly curved blade from under the cloak. The gloved hand closed tightly around the hilt of the knife, the matte black finger guard with four half-inch long spikes protruding from it. The figure stepped closer, intending to drive the blade into the soft tissue under the exposed jaw of the Immortal lying beside the elven female and killing him instantly. Dealing with the second Immortal would not be difficult. It would have worked out quite well had the elven female not taken that time to cluck out her enchantment, stretch her arms and open her ice blue eyes. To her credit... the elf female did react incredibly fast and invariably saved the first Immortal from dying without knowing what had killed him.

“NO!”

The figure drove the knife forward with blinding speed, only to see it sink into the now empty pillow as the Immortal rolled to the side faster than the figure had seen any Immortal ever move. The helmeted head tracked him easily however, as the second Immortal rolled off the bed on the other side pulling the female elf with him protectively. The figure hissed their disgust at the typical Immortal behavior, protecting the elven females that they broke to their will so they would not have to find another.

“You were assigned follow the Empress’s orders!” The mechanical voice sprang from the helmeted figure, harsh and unforgiving. “Not to prey on helpless elven females! Now you will die for both actions!”

Am'rul came to his feet, his Immortal sword appearing in his hands far quicker than the figure believed possible. “It is not as it appears!” He snarled.

The figure lifted their hand and with a flick of the wrist Am'rul found himself hurtling through the air to smash painfully into the far wall as Libala scrambled to her feet, trying to hold the sheet over her naked body.

“Stop it!” She screamed.

The figure turned to the Immortal who had rolled off the bed and was scrambling to grip his sword. The figure stepped back as As’pin’s hand closed around the pommel and he brought it whistling forward with deadly velocity to cut through the air where the figure had been standing only an instant before. This fact did not go unnoticed by the figure as they lifted their hand once more, but extended it out to the side. As’pin’s eyes watched in desperate awe as the soft white color flared around the figure’s hand and suddenly what appeared to be some sort of whip materialized in that same hand. It seemed to come directly from the figure’s wrist, and though not as long as some of the whips he had seen, it was easily a meter long if not a little more. The hand snapped forward and the tip of that whip crashed into his sword hand, white hot pain lancing up the back of his right hand and his fingers becoming instantly numb.

“Ughhhhh!” As’pin howled rolling to the side even further as blood blossomed from the torn skin. He looked at the figure once more, his dark eyes now changing to cobalt blue in anger and pain.

“You force yourselves upon this female!” That mechanical voice hissed out now. “You break her to your will by addicting her to your foul essence! I will not allow you to live for one second longer than necessary for what you have done!”

As’pin surged off the floor intending to smash his left fist into the smaller figure, but that whip came lashing out once more, the tip of it not just opening another deep gash on the flesh of his leg but also hitting him with the force of a large rock and knocking his leg out from under him. He grunted in pain as he fell onto his side, and he could only watch as the end of that whip like weapon became a small ball studded with needle like spikes whistling through the air.

Am'rul groaned in his own pain, the slices of the shattered glass from the table stinging his shoulder and back as he rolled to his feet and saw the figure standing over his brother. His eyes were now also changed and they grew wide when he realized he was watching this figure wield some sort of psychic weapon. The soft

white color of the whip made it appear to not even be real, but the damage it had already done to his brother was without doubt. It must have been a psychic weapon of some sort, it was the only explanation. Am'rul rushed forward as fast as his Immortal body would carry him, which was considerably faster than any Immortal that served the High Coven. Fear of more injury to his brother and injury to the elf female who meant so much to them now driving his actions.

For all his training and speed among the finest weapons masters of his tribe, Am'rul was far too slow. This was the person they were sent here to protect and that person was going to kill them for something they did not understand. Am'rul swung his heavy Immortal sword over his head, intending to bring it down on the figure's arm that was wielding the whip like psychic projection. The blow never landed as that whip end appeared to have a life of its own and it snapped away from As'pin to smash into the side of his shoulder. Am'rul thought an adolescent Bancorik had hit him, and his body rocketed across the room to crash into the opposite wall, his sword skittering across the floor. The figure turned his head and glared at him from under the helmet.

"You can not sneak up on me Immortal dog!" The mechanical voice hissed out. "Now I will kill you!" The left hand came up now and without even touching him Am'rul was lifted off the floor and smashed savagely into the wall with such force his body left an indentation in the granite and brick the wall was made from.

"We did not force her!" Am'rul screamed.

The figure snapped their left hand forward this time, another whip like psychic projection appearing from that hand, the tip viciously slapping into his face and cutting his cheek down to the bone. Am'rul's blood splashed on the wall behind him as the figure stepped closer to him, ignoring As'pin, who was still on the floor attempting to gather his senses.

"You lie!" The figure growled moving closer, the psychic whip zipping out once more and opening a three inch long slash across the front of his shoulder.

"Stop it!" Libala screamed.

"I will find you help!" The figure spoke turning the helmeted head to look at her. "I will get you help before their vileness hurts you!"

"There is nothing wrong with me!" Libala spat. "Let him go!"

The helmeted head turned back to Am'rul. "That is what I expect from an elven female who has been broken to the will of an Immortal."

"They can not affect me like that!" Libala shouted, moving closer while still trying to hold the sheet over her naked body.

"They are Immortals!" The figure barked out. "You have no choice!"

"We... we know who you are!" Am'rul gasped against the pain, his cobalt blue eyes glaring at the figure as the head snapped around and glared at him. The whip like psychic projection slapped forward a third time, striking Am'rul in the side of his head brutally even as Libala screamed in horror.

"You lie!" The figure shouted. "No one knows who I am!"

"We were there!" Am'rul hissed out, his vampire fangs barred savagely, blood pouring from the wound in his head. "We saw what happened that day! My brother and I! We saw what it did to you and your dragon! It is why we took the posting we did!"

"You are members of the Empress's Immortal Reactionary Company!" The helmeted figure snarled. "You are my enemies! She is my enemy!"

"It is the only way we could watch over you!" Am'rul spat.

"And why would an Immortal want to watch over me?" The figure rasped. "Who gave you these orders? Tesand? Moran? Yuri!"

"Our Tribe Leader!" As'pin gasped as he came to his feet, his SA80 now in his hands and leveled at the figure's head.

The figure laughed. "No High Coven Immortal Tribe Leader would go against the orders of the Empress! They fear her wrath!"

"Our Tribe Leader does not fear the witch or her minions! Our Tribe leader is Cha'talla!" Am'rul barked.

"You think me a fool Immortal?" The figure snarled. "Cha'talla is dead! He..." The figure stopped talking when they felt the barrel of the small Union P12 Holdout Laser press to the side of the helmet.

Libala held the weapon in her right hand, the left holding the sheet around her figure, and a look of pure hatred in her ice blue eyes. "If you do not release him... I will shoot you where you stand!" She spoke in a voice filled with savage intent. A voice that the figure knew would not come from an elven female that had been broken by an Immortal. It was the voice of a woman who was protecting what was hers.

"They forced you..." The figure started to say.

"They forced me to do nothing!" Libala growled. "Everything I have done has been of my choice! Do I act like a woman who has been addicted to anything? They are incapable of affecting me in that manner! Now... you are killing the man I love... the men I love... and if you do not release Am'rul right now I will scattered your fool brains all over my bedroom."

The figure sensed movement behind him and saw the SA80 come up out of the corner of his eye and point directly at his face. As'pin held the assault rifle with his left hand, his still numb right arm bracing the weapon, blood dripping to the floor. His face was twisted into a feral snarl, his cobalt blue eyes blazing with rage. "We were ordered to protect you!" He spoke harshly. "But if you do not release my brother... what brains remain after *Lotha Uss* shoots you I will gladly send into the abyss."

The figure looked at him. "Do you think you can Immortal? I could kill all of you and you would never know what happen."

As'pin pushed the barrel of the SA80 closer, almost touching the armored faceplate. "Then kill us! But if my brother is not released in two seconds... I will fire this weapon! As will *Lotha Uss*. Do you care to see how devoted we are to my brother Pureblood?"

As'pin could see the cobalt blue eyes go wide behind the helmet slits. "How...?"

"We have guarded your secret Pureblood! Since that day we have guarded your secret, and eliminated those who have gotten close to you! And we have guarded *you*... for that was Cha'talla's order!" As'pin spoke harshly. "Do not make me break that order now and waste twelve years of our lives."

Am'rul suddenly dropped to his feet on the floor, as if the invisible hand holding him had simply vanished. Libala whimpered in relief and was quickly beside him, edging her own body under his armpit to try and keep him from falling completely to the floor.

"Am'rul...!" She gasped pressing her body against his, heedless of the portions of their naked flesh that pressed together and trying to use the corners of the sheet to staunch the flow of blood from his head wound. She glanced up at the figure now, holding the sheet to Am'rul's head. "Idiot!" She screamed. "Look what you have done!"

Am'rul reached up and took her hand gently. "I am fine *Lotha Uss*." He spoke.

"No you aren't!" Libala hissed turning back to him pressing the sheet to his head and shoulder. "You are bleeding all over me Am'rul! Take my blood to heal! Hurry!"

The figure looked at her stunned. "You offer... you offer him your blood willingly?" The mechanical voice rasped out.

Libala glared at the helmeted head and face. "Shut up! Shut up! I should shoot you for what you have done!" She spat looking for the P12 she had discarded. "Where is my weapon?"

Am'rul took her arm in his hand and she turned to him. "No *Lotha Uss*. And I do not need blood to heal. The wounds will heal quickly."

"He hurt you!" Libala spat. "He hurt As'pin."

"They will live." The figure spoke bluntly.

Libala came to her feet now, standing to her full five foot six height, her ice blue eyes wide in unbridled anger. She was the same height as the armored figure, and this gave her some courage. She yanked the sheet away from Am'rul's head and pulled it tightly around her body, blood stained and all. "You are in my home you bastard!" She roared. "Get out! Get out right now before I call the Security Force!"

"Libala..." Am'rul spoke getting to his feet now, towering over her as she looked at him. "We can not explain our presence here either *Lotha Uss*. And what do we tell them about you and us my *Lotha Uss*?"

As'pin stepped up to his older brother, keeping the helmeted figure in the corner of his eye. "*Dalninuk*?" (Brother)

Am'rul nodded his head slowly. "I will live." He spoke.

Libala stepped in front of them, realizing both of them were still very naked, and finding herself not wanting to share them with anyone. She tore pieces of the sheet from what was wrapped around her and lifted

her hands to press it to the wounds Am'rul had suffered, and then another piece to As'pin's injured hand. Am'rul looked at the figure standing there watching them. He could see the confused cobalt blue eyes behind the helmet, uncertainty and hesitation rampant in those eyes.

"The power... the power you wield influences you Pureblood." Am'rul spoke. "You must learn to control it better. And you must learn to trust what your eyes and senses tell you and not allow it to make you lash out."

"That... that makes me weak!" The mechanical voice snapped.

As'pin shook his head. "That makes you smart." He spoke. "Attacking us... without full knowledge of what had transpired between us? That was reckless and weak."

"Why are you here Pureblood?" Am'rul asked then. "I know you did not just happen upon us."

The helmeted head turned to look at him. "I... I needed to make a transmission." The voice spoke. "This home... this home provided the needed distance and cover from the city. I did not know anyone would be here. I only smelled... I only smelled your blood when I was under the window."

"Where is your dragon?" Am'rul asked.

"I told them to remain behind at the stadium so as not to draw attention to myself." The voice answered.

Am'rul nodded. "A wise decision."

The helmeted head met his gaze. "How long?"

"Since the day of the explosion." Am'rul answered. "We are the ones who pulled you and the others to safety from the ship. We saw, my brother and I, we saw everything that happened. And we have seen how you have been acting since. It was the obvious choice for Cha'talla to make."

The explosion. The blackness that had begun this journey. An explosion of blackness, of hate and anger that threatened to engulf everything inside unless they came together soon. The figure looked at Am'rul.

"I am... I am losing control." The voice spoke. The quivering sound of the voice was awful coming through the mechanical device but it was clear. "I must... there is only one thing... one person that can stem the tide within me. Before... before I become like her!" The words came out with utter contempt and disgust even through the mechanical filtering system. "I must protect them."

"That time grows near doesn't it *K'olah vlos*?" Am'rul asked, feeling Libala take his arm and grasp it tightly as he stepped forward slowly. (Pureblood)

"I don't know... I don't know if I will be rejected."

"You must remain strong and continue to do what you have done these last years." Am'rul said. "It is the only way to keep the balance."

The figure took a deep breath and the cobalt blue eyes disappeared to be replaced by dark orbs. Dark orbs that once more had confidence in them. "Put your clothes on Immortal." The figure spoke each word stronger than the last. "I have a transmission to make and then we need to speak at length about where we go from here. You and your brother have hid yourselves from me most ingeniously these past years, and I want to know how."

Am'rul nodded his head. "As Cha'talla hoped would happen one day."

"That is one of the things we will need to speak of." The figure turned its helmeted head to Libala.

"May I use your sitting room downstairs?" Libala nodded her head quickly, not really understanding what was going on, but feeling that she had just fallen into a situation that was far beyond her realm of understanding.

"Join me in twenty minutes. Tend to your wounds before coming downstairs. I can't have you bleeding all over the place."

Am'rul and As'pin watched as the figure turned and exited the room with a steady and confident gait. Am'rul turned to his brother slowly.

"Things have been set in motion already brother." Am'rul spoke. "I saw it in those eyes. We must be ready."

Tenilo.

A city of thirty-two million spread over fifty square kilometers that was the heart and soul of the hard-line religious movement on Hadaria, and home to most of the Arch Ministry and the Elder Council. The home of the Chief Minister of the Arch Ministry was situated on a slight rise that overlooked many of the most revered symbols of ancient Hadaria that were not in the capital. It was Chief Minister Wiktor's home, and it had some rather unique guests this day.

"Could not get something done before now!" Rinard spoke harshly as Buonau handed him the glass of Spartan Wine.

"There are rules we must follow Rinard." Buonau answered as she moved to her own chair across from him and settled into it.

"Change them!" Rinard barked.

"If we attempt to circumvent the established guidelines in any way, especially now that they have requested a public hearing, we will not achieve what we all want." Wiktor spoke from the high backed chair she occupied.

"We have set the date of the hearing." Buonau said. "And we have had seven weeks to slander and smear her within the Netnews. What kind of support do you think she garners now?"

Rinard looked at Buonau. "Her position off Hadaria is unchanged!" He snapped. "She is still a Queen of the Union and the reports from all of my contacts have stated her support is nearly one hundred percent! Eurin's statement so soon after the release of the footage has even solidified her position! There are not many off Hadaria who do not see these actions as a political ploy to gain power."

Okein moved from the counter he stood next too. "Her support on Hadaria is much less... and it matters not what the people off our planet think. They will hold no sway over the Arch Ministry or The Elder Council."

Buonau nodded. "Our decision is already made." She spoke. "No one will go against us on the Elder Council or within the Arch Ministry."

"You are sure of this?" Rinard asked.

Wiktor nodded. "Without question." She answered. "There is little defense she can claim against these security videos, and even less when it comes to the decisions she has made in the past without the consent of the Arch Ministry or the Elder Council. Ultimately that will be her undoing."

"Word from my daughter Duewa on Earth is even more promising." Buonau spoke. "Her last report three weeks ago states that the King and the other Queens have had no contact with her since he left Hadaria. Duewa says Anja has tried to contact all of them these last weeks and they have refused to speak with her. There is even rumor within the walls of the King's own villa that he will dissolve her status as Queen soon. I believe he is waiting to see the outcome of her hearing here. Prime Minister Deia has been to his home frequently in the past weeks, and Duewa has heard the minor servants speaking in hushed whispers. I have already dispatched a squad of the Elder Guard Militia to collect Retta and Calyb from Earth." Buonau smiled and sipped her tea.

"You will kidnap her children?" Rinard asked surprised.

"The Elder Guard Militia Commander feels they can accomplish this with minimal risk." Buonau spoke. "They will take them when they are enroute back from their school. Duewa will be with them and this will facilitate the action."

"You risk retaliation from Leonidas if you do this." Rinard spoke.

"I have maintained for many years that the man is nothing more than a brute." Buonau said. "Once the children are in our custody here on Hadaria he will be powerless to do anything about it."

"If your men succeed." Rinard told her.

"They will succeed." Buonau said. "We are getting closer to our goal Rinard. Patience is required now."

"Anja has not left the palace in the last two months unless under Elder Guard Militia eyes." Okein said. "We have limited her use of subspace communications and everything she does is monitored. She is without the means to do anything to stop us, and even Eurin and Zaniai will not be able to help her."

"She is defiant yes." Buonau said with a nod. "That is her nature... and she knows what is at stake. She can not win however. She knows the footage is forged... but without these men to question, she can not refute what is plainly visible. And it will be harder for her to dispute what she has done politically as Wiktor has said."

Wiktor looked at Rinard. "There is no way these men can come forward correct?" She asked.

“Not unless they can raise themselves from the dead.” Rinard answered. “I arranged for three of them to die in accidents over the last year. Two of them they have already discovered are dead, the third I would imagine when they investigate further they will find out about. My contact on Apo Prime made sure of that. The fourth did me a favor and got stinking drunk and drowned the same day I killed the clone and dumped her body.”

“And you left her remains in the incinerator at the military shipyard correct?” Buonau said.

Rinard nodded. “The Union Fleet did the disposing for us.”

“Then we have nothing to worry about.” Wiktor said with a grin. “The man you represent has already assured us he has everything worked out for after we dispose Anja. Once we have declared our independence from the Union, we can seize control of the Union shipyards and the remaining facilities in and around Hadaria. We will then reestablish Elder Council and Arch Ministry control over the planet. We already have one of the most valuable commodities in the Universe in our Healers. We will be totally self sufficient.”

“What is to keep the Union from moving against you?” Rinard asked.

“They wouldn’t dare!” Buonau spat. “The Union Senate would never allow them to rule us by force. That is why we will depose Anja legally. They will have no choice but to recognize our government and open trade corridors through Union space so that we can conduct our own business.”

“As long as your employer keeps his end of the bargain, we will be well on our way almost immediately.” Okein spoke from his chair.

“He’ll keep his word.” Rinard spoke. “You’ll have your assistance.”

“Then aside from a few small bumps that may arise, everything we have planned will proceed very nicely.” Buonau spoke.

“Nothing ever happens as it is supposed to, remember that Buonau.” Rinard spoke. “What happens to Anja?” Rinard asked.

“We will charge her with Seanna’s death.” Wiktor answered immediately. “She will be incarcerated to stand official charges. She is sure to be forced to resign as Queen of the Union.” Wiktor shrugged her slim shoulders. “Who is to say that she does not take her own life in grief before that ever comes to trial?”

Rinard looked at her and saw the cruel smile. He nodded his head. “Then she is mine?” He spoke.

“According to our agreement.” Buonau said nodding her head.

Rinard got to his feet and set the glass of wine down. “Then I believe our business is done.” He spoke. “Once she is imprisoned I will come for her. You will have your planet back with new allies... and I will have my revenge.”

“Rinard... why do you want her dead so badly?” Buonau asked.

Rinard met Buonau’s gaze. “She killed my father.” He said in a low, savage and anger filled voice. “She killed my father and I intend to see her die for that. After I have taken from her all that she cares for and loves and I have raped her body and mind so much that she begs me to kill her.”

Rinard settled back into the seat of the armored Lifter as it made the turn into the Lifter lanes for return to the capital. His eyes were flint hard and cruel in anticipation of having Anja within his grasp and listening to her howl under him. His eyes turned to the COM panel when it beeped softly.

**-INCOMING TRANSMISSION-
-CODED CHANNEL ENURRUA ONE-**

“Receive.” Rinard spoke touching the panel.

He watched as the tall image appeared in the small holodisc on the dash of the Lifter. It was grainy and blurry, but he could see the helmeted head and the heavy cape and cowl as he always did.

“I did not expect to hear from you for another week.” Rinard said.

“The meeting went according to what we discussed?” The figure asked.

Rinard nodded. “Just as you planned.” He spoke. “They are so bent on regaining what power they have lost they will stoop to any level to get it back.”

The figure nodded. "Our mutual friends are prepared to move." He said. "Their plan is interesting. I have only just received the full scope of what it is they are doing, and it is bold to say they least."

"Will it succeed?" Rinard asked.

"Whether it does or not is not our concern." The figure answered. "We will have what we both want. A small concern has come up however."

"A concern?" Rinard asked.

"Since this footage of Anja has been broadcast throughout the Union, my people on Apo Prime have become nervous." The figure spoke. "I have gotten reports of sightings of her from Palno. One from a reliable source. You are certain the clone has been disposed of Rinard?"

"I dumped her body at the incinerator myself sir." Rinard answered. "There is no way she lived. I ran her through twice in the chest. I watched the light leave her eyes! The incinerator would have begun its normal burn period minutes after I departed."

"And Anja is confined to the palace on Hadaria?" The figure asked.

"She can not leave without someone from the Elder Guard Militia with her." Rinard spoke.

The figure nodded. "I assumed as much."

"Sir... do you want me to go to Apo Prime." Rinard asked.

"No!" The answer was firm and full of command. "Tyaln has disappeared as well. He has not reported for duty the last two days and an investigation has begun. If you arrive there, it will only cause more suspicion to be cast on you. I have asked our friends to look into this report. They had people in place already. What did Tyaln know?"

Rinard shook his head. "Nothing that I did not allow him to know. He assisted with the hiring of Gerald to go after Normya Leonidas."

The helmeted head tilted slightly as if the individual was thinking. "The search for her has narrowed considerably now that our associates are involved. She is obviously hiding somewhere with the Immortals who helped save her. She will be found soon."

Rinard nodded. "Aside from that... Tyaln helped to arrange the kidnapping of the elven females a few years ago to establish our credit base. Transport manifests and such. Nothing of value. Do you think the *Krypteria* has taken him?"

"It is too early to say." The figure answered. "More than likely when news of Anja broke he panicked and fled. He helped to arrange the transport of the clone didn't he?"

Rinard nodded. "The transmission codes and such for the *STRIKER AT* we used yes."

The figure nodded. "He is more than likely half way into The Wilds already but I will have our associates check just in case."

"Her hearing is set for another seven days from now." Rinard spoke.

The figure nodded once more. "I will begin releasing some rather interesting information I have obtained in just the last few hours concerning the Crown Prince. It appears some rather promising Netnews reporters had gotten their hands on information and images naming one of Prince Androcles's future mates. An elf pilot. They seem to be working on gathering more information on the others and we will wait for that information to come to me. I have people within the Netnews organization they work for and they will get whatever information is available."

"Truly?" Rinard asked. "This could be valuable information."

The man nodded. "Our allies will begin acting shortly after the verdict concerning Anja. It will start slowly in The Wilds and quickly blossom into action on Apo Prime and here on Earth. Once you have her, move quickly Rinard. The ensuing storm will not be long in coming and we must be clear of it before it arrives."

Rinard nodded his head. "I understand."

"I will advise you of what our allies discover on Apo Prime." The figure said. "You must maintain for a few more days and then everything we have worked towards these last years will be ours."

"I will be ready sir." Rinard said.

CRANAE ISLAND

Carisia leaned against the doorframe of the double patio doors holding the mug of tea in her hands and her maya blue eyes focused on the beach in the distance. She wore the simple blue robe over her naked body underneath, her senses still humming from three hours earlier. They had arrived on Cranae Island just before the sun had begun to rise, and Andro had spent the next three hours making both her and Sadi shudder in marvelous pleasure. She may not have been wolf, but her Mindvoice connection with Sadi and Andro allowed her to feel everything Sadi did when Andro pulsed her with his aura. It was as if he was pulsing her as well, so tightly bound were their minds now. Bound with each other and the other two who would share their lives in the future.

Like Sadi, Carisia had been filled with sadness over what had transpired with Ne'Veha on the *SCIMITAR*. The vampire blood in her wanted to go up there and beat Tarren senseless for his actions in using the woman who would be theirs, this emotion only fueled by Sadi's obvious disgust at the man and his actions. Carisia also knew that would not be appropriate. Ne'Veha would be with them, Carisia knew this, and she only had to find her own way as Carisia had done. She didn't turn when she felt Sadi come up behind her and lean over slightly to nuzzle the back of her neck. Carisia smiled and leaned into the gentle caress.

"Good morning." Sadi said softly.

Carisia turned her head and saw her beautiful lover, a flush cascading through her body at the things they had done to each other these last months and the pleasure that had given both of them. Sadi wore the usual thin ivory robe over her delicious body, and she held the mug of freshly brewed coffee in her hands.

"Good morning." Carisia replied with a bright smile.

"What are you doing *Enylarcopri*?" Sadi asked.

Carisia motioned with her head as she saw her sister Lisisa move into sight behind Sadi from the kitchen holding her own mug of coffee. "I was watching him." Carisia said. She turned her head back out onto the beach area and Sadi followed her gaze to see Andro walking along the shore in only his white pants, Zarah at his side in little more than bikini bottoms and a loose shirt and Elynth splashing through the surf as she followed them. "Have you noticed *D'anthe xukuth*... he and Zarah share something the others do not?"

Sadi nodded. "Yes." She answered thoughtfully. "I noticed that very quickly. He almost never questions her or gives her direction even though she is so much younger. Zarah never questions him either. It's almost as if she knows what he will do."

"It has been that way for years." Lisisa's voice from behind them spoke. They turned and watched her walk up close to them, Denali's shirt buttoned only half way and barely reaching down to the middle of her taut thighs. Lisisa leaned over and kissed Carisia's cheek. "Good morning sister."

Carisia smiled brightly. "Lisisa... did you sleep well?"

Lisisa chuckled softly as she kissed Sadi's cheek. "You forget who my mate and husband is sister." She spoke wistfully. "I swear sometimes Deni is like a machine and he could go on for hours."

Sadi grinned and nodded her head in agreement. "That does seem to run in the male side of the Leonidas family." She said. "Carisia and I have experienced that on many occasions. And of course you protested his action loudly I'm sure."

"Hah!" Lisisa exclaimed. "Denali can worship me whenever he wants! I will never grow tired of his attentions."

The three of them laughed as their heads turned back to the beach. "So why are they so close Lisisa?" Carisia asked softly.

Lisisa sipped her coffee. "No one really knows for sure." She replied. "It started when Zarah was nine. She was adventurous as all of us were... but sometimes she got a little too adventurous. She slipped away from her *Durcunusaan* detail one evening just as winter began and went up into the northern Rolnar Mountain range. She wanted to prove to father that she was ready for her Agoge then." She said. "Well... we were going crazy looking for her. There was a planet wide alert! We thought someone may have abducted her. Andro had just returned from completing his Agoge and he and Elynth violated the curfew father put in place and went looking for her." Lisisa chuckled softly. "You can imagine how livid father was when Andro did that."

"What happen?" Sadi asked.

Lisisa met her eyes. "He has not told you?" She asked surprised.

Sadi shook her head. “No. I asked him about it once... but he dodged the question by hitting me with his aura. He’s such a pig that way!” She answered sheepishly.

“And I just bet you protested vehemently.” Lisisa said with a grin.

“Hardly... I took advantage of the situation.” Sadi replied.

Lisisa and Carisia chuckled. “To be honest... no one knows what happened.” Lisisa finally answered. “We discovered she had gone into the mountains and had not been kidnapped. A storm moved into the mountains during the second day of the search and grounded all the rescue vehicles. Sensors in orbit could not pick them out of the clutter because of the high deposits of Duridium ore. The fourth day the storm broke and just as the search vehicles were getting back into the air, Andro returned to the palace with her on Elynth. Zarah had a broken leg and both of them looked as if they hadn’t eaten in all that time which in and of itself... it was very strange. She could have shifted to heal herself, and both of them could have hunted even if Elynth wasn’t able to fly in the weather. They wouldn’t tell anyone what happened, not even our mothers but ever since then, they have always been very close. It is almost as if they both share an ebb or strand of their minds now, we can feel the Mindvoice connection they have at different times, and they always seem know what the other is thinking all of the time it seems.

Sadi nodded. “We have felt that connection he has with Zarah, but he keeps it tightly locked away from anyone.” Sadi said.

“Grandmother Dasha told us much later that when Andro went down in that valley on Alba Tau... Zarah became suddenly withdrawn and unresponsive. She was fifteen by now and grandmother thought maybe her Coming of Age had come early. Zarah wouldn’t speak with anyone and she broke out crying at different times during the hours Andro and father were in the valley. She couldn’t be consoled by anyone. It was very bizarre grandmother said. When they finally pulled him and father out the next day... Zarah was fine. She demanded to go to the medical ship though and be with him. With them.” Lisisa let her eyes drift out to where they walked.

“Whatever happened in the mountains those days they were gone made them as they are now. They share something that only the two of them and Elynth understand, and they will talk about it with no one. Not even our father. I think the *Feravomir* may know what happen or at least suspect, but like Andro and Zarah she will never speak of it openly.”

“That is why he is so protective of her then?” Carisia asked.

Lisisa shook her head. “I don’t believe he is protective of her in the sense we understand that word to mean. It is something else entirely. And Zarah is like that as well with him. Watch them for a time and you will see. Or you may have already noticed it. Even though Androcles may hold one or both of you in his arms, Zarah is never far from his side. Deni and I thought perhaps the same thing that happened to us, falling in love I mean, we thought that perhaps Zarah had fallen in love with Andro. It was silly really... that was never the case. When Mother and grandmother began putting the plan to finally bring you and Andro together Sadi, Zarah was the first one to volunteer to help in any way. She is the one who convinced the young woman before Ulana that Andro wasn’t for her. She was a pest really, never leaving him alone, always trying to contact him.”

Sadi smiled. “Convinced?” She asked.

Lisisa smiled. “You would be surprised at how convincing Zarah Leonidas is.” She said with a smile.

“Why do I think she didn’t invite her over for coffee and biscuits?” Carisia said as she sipped her coffee.

Lisisa shook her head. “No she did not.” Lisisa let her green eyes go out to where Andro and Zarah walked side by side. “It is something we have come to accept for what it is now. They will always share something that they do not share with the rest of us. Something we do not understand. We don’t even think about it anymore.”

“Will... will they ever tell anyone?” Sadi asked softly. “What happened between them I mean?”

“We thought you would give us that answer Sadi.” Lisisa said honestly. “I guess that is not the case.”

“...don’t really know what it is.” Zarah spoke as she walked beside Andro just out of reach of the warm ocean surf.

“How long has this been going on?” Andro asked her.

“Since we arrived at SODRAG.” Zarah answered looking at him.

“Why didn’t you come to me before now Zar?” Andro looked at her.

“Because initially I thought it was from that idiot Dante.” Zarah answered plainly. “Then I thought it was the fever.”

“It’s not? It wasn’t?” Andro asked surprised.

Zarah shook her head. “This one is... it’s different Andro.” She said thoughtfully. “It’s a lot stronger for one... and it’s not forcing itself onto my shields. It’s not even trying to breach my shields. It’s almost as if...”

“What?” Andro pressed. Zarah looked at him with her dark eyes, hesitation in them. “We have never held back from each other Zarah Leonidas. Not after that day in the mountains. Let’s not start now ok?”

“You have... you have Sadi and Carisia now. And the others will join you soon. I didn’t want... I didn’t want to be a burden anymore Andro. You need to get on with your life.” Zarah began to answer.

Andro stopped walking and turned to face her completely. “I could have twenty mates Zarah... it would not change or alter the connection we have. It never has and it never will. You are not now, have never been and will never be a burden to me. What happened was meant to be Zarah, and it has made us stronger because of it. My life will go on... as will yours... but I will never dismiss you, no matter how many mates or children I have.”

“It was something that happened because it was my fault Andro.” Zarah spoke meeting his gaze. “I was stupid for even trying to do that and I almost killed us both. You know what you should have done.”

“Hey!” Andro snapped softly. “We made a promise to each other to never question what happen that day didn’t we?”

Zarah nodded. “Yes... but that was before Sadi and...”

“No!” Andro spoke firmly. “We made a promise to each other Zar. Just because Sadi and Carisia have come into my life changes nothing. When Ne’Veha and Lu’ria join us it will change nothing! Our words to each other that day still stand yes?”

Zarah nodded as she looked at him, her dark brown eyes moist with tears. She felt the warmth and support he had always given to her sweep through her being once more. No matter what it was he had always been there. “Yes.”

“Then tell me.” Andro spoke.

Zarah almost blushed under her tan. “It feels warm and beguiling Andro. It wants to wrap around me. I can feel it pulsing along my shields, never trying to break through, but always wanting to come together with me. It’s... it’s very alluring... very...” She met his eyes. “Very sexual... but in a reverent sort of way. I have...” She saw his eyebrows raise slightly. “Oh never mind. Andro it’s getting stronger.”

“Stronger?”

Zarah nodded. “There’s darkness to it... but...” Elynth had now stopped trying to catch the small fish near the shore as she listened to Zarah talk and she moved closer, her shadow covering both of them and causing them to look at her.

Darkness? Elynth asked looking directly at Zarah. *What kind of darkness Zarah?*

Zarah nodded as she looked at only other individual outside of Helen who knew what happen that day. “It’s not... it’s not an evil darkness as most would attribute to darkness. It’s more of a lonely darkness.” She answered softly. “Like someone reaching out from within a shadowy room. It’s getting stronger and more frequent now. As if it is worried that it may... almost like it thinks it may lose me.”

“And it’s not Dante?” Andro asked.

Zarah shook her head quickly. “No. This is much more poignant. I don’t think Dante can spell poignant, let alone know what it means. And if he could use his skills in this way, he would have done so already.”

“Elynth and I have not felt anything.” Andro said.

Zarah shook her head. “I know... I have been using the reinforcing techniques you taught us.” Zarah said meeting his gaze once more. “I... I like the way that it makes me feel Andro and I didn’t want to share it with anyone else. Not yet anyway.” Zarah held up her hand before he could say anything. “I know... it isn’t safe... but this... this is no danger to me Andro. I can feel it... sense it. It only wants to protect me.”

“It could be Dante Zarah.” Andro told her. “Using a different technique to try and get inside your head.”

Zarah snorted in disgust. “That fool couldn’t get into my shorts let alone my mind even on his best day. And that is *with* his ridiculous mind control attempts! I’m not a child anymore Androcles. You of all people should know that. I am stronger than Carina, stronger than Lisisa in some ways even. And my Coming of Age fever is long since passed.”

Andro nodded. “No you are not a child Zar, and I haven’t looked at you as a child for a long time. Far longer than you might realize.”

“Father does.” Zarah snapped.

“Zarah... I am not father.” Andro told her. “You *are* stronger than Carina and maybe even as strong as Lisisa in many respects... but there is something you lack sister. And that only comes with time.”

“What is that?” Zarah asked.

Elynth lowered her head close to Zarah’s shoulder. *Experience.* She answered without pause.

Zarah crossed her arms over her breasts. “Why did I know you were going to say that?” She popped.

Because you know it to be true. Elynth told her.

“I can’t get experience if I don’t do anything!” Zarah barked.

“You are doing something Zarah.” Andro spoke. “When I needed to pick someone to teach the Coven Riders hand-to-hand skills they did not possess... only one person came to my mind. That is you.” Andro lifted his hand and pushed some of her long dark brown hair from her face. “Yuri has grown stronger through the years as father has said. It stands to reason she would have been schooling Dante. And *I* have been teaching them how to focus better for the last four months. He’s more dangerous now than when he first arrived Zar.”

Zarah nodded and looked at him. “I know he’s dangerous. That is why I came directly to you when he hit me the first time during hand-to-hand.” She spoke. “Torcia confirmed it because of her experiences with him... and I know what to look for now.”

He’s targeting you for a reason Zarah. Elynth said. *You must always remember that and always maintain your guard.*

Zarah nodded. “And I do.” She spoke reaching up to place her hand on Elynth’s snout. “Now what about this other... presence I feel?” She took Andro’s arm. “What... who do you think it is Andro? One of the riders? Some of them are very cute you know!”

Andro rolled his eyes at her antics and looked into Elynth’s golden eyes. “Elynth?”

It seems unlikely that it would be one of the riders. Elynth said. *Why would they not have come forward before now to convey themselves to you? From what I can see... none of them have issues with expressing themselves. Given that many of them know of Andro and Arrarn’s relationships with Carisia, Narice and Torcia, coming to you would not present much obstacle if they were sincere.*

“Have you given any additional training to others?” Andro asked. “Outside the normal classes?”

“Several of them yes.” Zarah nodded her head as she answered. “Why would that matter though?”

“Dante?”

Zarah shook her head. “No. He thinks he’s too good to face me even after I beat his ass.” She replied. “Lucia came for two extra classes which surprised me considering how pompous she acts sometimes. She was almost afraid to ask I think. Maybe she felt asking me for help was beneath her. Javier once with two others... but he never returned with them.” Zarah shrugged.

“I want you to do something.” Andro said.

“What?”

“The next time this happens... I want you to immediately reach for me or Elynth.” He told her. “Elynth if you do not want to reveal too much to me. Let her experience it with you... get a sense of things.”

Zarah nodded. “Fair enough.” She said. “Will you... if this does turn out to be someone who cares for me you have to promise not to run them off Andro. You have to promise to let me make that decision.”

Andro smiled. “I promise Zar.” He stated. “You would just ignore me anyway... no matter what I told you.”

Zarah nodded. “Yes... but at least now I know I got you to promise. Then if you step out of line I can stomp you proper like.”

Andro laughed and draped his arm over her shoulders as they headed back for the villa. “And what makes you so sure you can stomp me.” He asked as Zarah’s arms went around his waist in a sisterly fashion.

Ne'Veha walked down the corridor between her friends as they were returning from the training flight, her mind wandering as it had been for many hours now. She had gone through the motions of today's flying, her Weapons Officer basically doing most of the work. He knew something was bothering her and he got them through the majority of the flight. Yesterday with Sadi was still fresh in her mind, and no matter what she tried to do to forget their conversation, it failed. She had gone through all of the messages from them, four times each. They had been little in the way of informative, but it was quite obvious that all of them wanted her badly. Ne'Veha had also discovered that the package Sadi had brought yesterday was not the only package they had sent for her. Upon arriving at the mail station of the *SCIMITAR*, the small office that handled all of the care packages and such from family and friends, Ne'Veha discovered five additional packages from them. All of them being held in the mail room by Tarren's order. The clerk had said Tarren told him that Ne'Veha was still settling into her quarters and didn't need the extra clutter. What Ne'Veha had discovered upon taking the packages back to her quarters and opening them was even more surprising. She thought for sure there would be some sort of slinky undergarments for her to wear so that he could remove them from Androcles Leonidas, and instead she found two different holonovels from her favorite horror author. Her hands had been shaking, wondering how he had found out who her favorite author was. The other three packages were from Sadi and Carisia, one of different sized holoimage frames and two of elegant and sexy but still very conservative dresses, both of them in her favorite color of soft peach.

Tarren had tried to approach her in the mess lounge last evening, but Ra'Neeria had chased him off quite effectively, with Ne'Veha's dark eyes burning into his back as he walked.

“Perhaps you wish to discover why he did that.” Sadi had spoken.

Discover why Ne'Veha did. All it took was one simple vid/call and she knew. Tarren had cheated on Hy'la the same way he had cheated on Ne'Veha. Only she was strong willed enough to tell him to get lost immediately. Ne'Veha felt nothing but guilt when she looked at Tarren now, guilt and anger at what he done. Or more importantly, what she had allowed him to do. Guilt because she had surrendered to him, even when her mind had told her not too. Anger because she had allowed it to happen, when in her heart all she wanted was to be wrapped in the embrace of others. Ne'Veha knew she may have very well ruined any chance of that happening now, especially since Sadi had not returned any of her three messages since leaving the ship yesterday morning.

Sadi had told her she needed a different perspective on things, and once discovering the packages from Andro and them, that is exactly what Ne'Veha went in search of. Whether she would get a reply was another question, but at least she had...

“Commander Ne'Veha!” The male voice boomed in the corridor snapping Ne'Veha out of her funk and causing her to stop and turn.

“Yes?” She asked watching as the Lycavorian Junior Lieutenant came jogging up to her in the corridor.

“That COM request you made? The one this morning?” He spoke.

“Yes... what about it?” Ne'Veha snapped without patience. It seemed to bounce off the young officer.

“A reply came in.” He said holding out the data pad to her.

Ne'Veha's eyes went wide. “It did?” She gasped snatching the pad.

“Yes ma'am. It was very brief... but it said to contact that channel when you got back from your flight. The sender would be there for the remainder of the day.” The officer answered with a smile.

“Thank... thank you.” Ne'Veha stammered as she looked at the pad not seeing the officer nod and turn to head back down the corridor.

“Go on Ne'Veha.” Ra'Neeria told her. “We'll cover the debrief.”

Ne'Veha looked at her quickly. “Ra'Neeria... I...”

Ra'Neeria leaned over and kissed her cheek. “It was a training flight Ne'Veha. And a very boring one. Go... we'll handle the debrief.”

Ne'Veha nodded with a smile and bolted down the corridor for the lift to her quarters. She must have broke the record for getting from the flight deck to her quarters, for faster than she could ever remember she was settling into the front of her computer and plugging the pad into the COM unit.

**-INITIATING COMMUNICATION-
-DESTINATION SOURCE, PRIVATE RESIDENCE, COLONEL RI'NOL-
-COMMANDING OFFICER ULU *WANDERING SOUL*-**

“Halt connection!” Ne'Veha barked as she looked at the screen. “Verify!”

**-VERIFICATION ACCURATE SPARTAN ONE ONE CHARLIE-
-COLONEL RI'NOL, COMMANDING OFFICER NOVA MARK III-CLASS ATTACK
CRUISER, *WANDERING SOUL*-
-PROCEED?-**

Ne'Veha took a deep breath and nodded. This is what she had wanted to get herself a different perspective as Sadi had said. “Yes. Proceed.”

-CONNECTING-

The holodisc on her desk flared to life and flickered briefly. She saw the fuzzy image of an older woman and she was speaking to someone out of the transmission.

“...start getting messages from the Royal family Ri'nol?” The woman spoke as her image cleared and stabilized and Ne'Veha saw the dark haired elven woman with bright green eyes and gray just beginning to touch her dark hair. Ne'Veha watched her turn back to the monitor and her green eyes grew wider as the much younger half elf/half Lycavorian officer came into the picture now.

“...are you talking about mother? Why would anyone from the Royal...” His voice trailed off as he saw Ne'Veha in the transmission. “*Son vada carians.*” He muttered softly.

“Ne... Ne'Veha child!” The woman gasped her name loudly.

Ne'Veha tilted her head, wondering why this woman looked so very familiar. “Excuse me... I'm sorry... I was trying to contact Colonel Ri'nol.” Ne'Veha spoke.

“I am Ri'nol.” The man spoke as he was wiping his hands on a towel. “Sufai!” He called out turning his head to the side. “Sufai come quickly!”

Ne'Veha gave an embarrassed smile. “Forgive me... I... I don't know why I called. I'm sorry to disturb you.”

“No! Wait!” Ri'nol exclaimed coming to stand beside the much older elven woman as the Lycavorian woman came into the room holding a small child in her arms.

“Ri'nol... what is wrong?” She asked quickly as her eyes went to the transmission. Her eyes got a little wider as well and she came up short.

“Oh my!” She declared.

“My apologies again Colonel.” Ne'Veha stammered. “This was a mistake... I won't trouble you...”

“You look so much like your father.” The older woman spoke softly.

Ne'Veha looked at her again, saw the tears slowly rolling down her cheeks, her hands shaking as she gripped the Colonel's arm. “I'm sorry... do I... do I know you?” Ne'Veha asked.

“You... you are a captivating young woman Ne'Veha.” The woman spoke gently, her voice filled with warmth.

“You... you act as if you know me.” Ne'Veha spoke softly, her bottom lip beginning to quiver.

“I would know my granddaughter no matter what she looked like!” The woman stated firmly.

“Granddaughter?” Ne'Veha gasped. “You must be mistaken... my... my father's mother died many years ago. Before I was born. I have only my grandmother on my mother's side. You are not her.”

“Is that what he has continued to tell you all these years? That I am dead?” The woman asked softly lowering her eyes and shaking her head. “He always was like his father. Too stubborn and bull headed to ever admit he was wrong. Do I look dead to you Ne'Veha?”

Ne'Veha felt something gripping her insides as she looked at this woman. “What are you saying?” Ne'Veha gasped.

Ri'nol stepped closer to the woman now. "This is Na'rnoas." He said. "She is my mother Commander Ne'Veha. And she is your grandmother."

Ne'Veha sat staring at the woman in the transmission and was unable to speak. She shook her head quickly. "That... that can't be right." Ne'Veha said after a long moment. "My father... my father told me that..."

"Yes... he has told you I was killed with the Lycavorian officer I left your grandfather for. Killed by the High Coven in the last great battle before the return of King Leonidas." Na'rnoas said. "He has been telling that story for decades. And it is no more true now than it was then! Do I look dead to you Ne'Veha?" She turned to Ri'nol. "Where is your father?"

Ri'nol smiled now. "He will be here soon. He was stopping at the airfield before returning for dinner."

Na'rnoas looked back to Ne'Veha with a bright smile and tear-filled eyes. "I have... I have followed your career Ne'Veha." She said softly. "I am so very proud of you and what you have accomplished."

Ne'Veha sat back in her chair. "I... you are... you are my grandmother?" She gasped. "But... but why would my father lie to me all of these years?"

"That is... that is a difficult question child." Na'rnoas told her. "One that I would rather not answer through a holo transmission. Come here! Come visit us!"

"Visit you?" Ne'Veha gasped. "I am on... I am on my ship! I can not just leave! I don't even know where you are!"

Ri'nol chuckled. "You do not use your COM channel very often do you?" He spoke.

Ne'Veha shook her head. "No sir! I am... I have only just begun using it."

"Understandable given your COMDESIG." Ri'nol said.

Ne'Veha looked at her. "Sir?"

"Spartan One One Charlie." Ri'nol said. "You carry the designation of a member of the Royal Family Ne'Veha. Only they have Spartan in their designation code. You have Crown Prince Androcles's prefix. You are one of his mates and wives then?"

"What?" Ne'Veha gasped. "No! I... that... that is a mistake! I think." She finished in a much softer voice overwhelmed as she was at the moment.

Na'rnoas couldn't help but laugh gently now, the tears coming freely. "We... we are in Eden City Ne'Veha." She said. "That is where we have made our home for twenty years now. My mate... my husband is the commanding General of the 47th Spartan Guard Division."

Ne'Veha's eyes grew wide. "The Spartan Division that..."

"Protects Earth." Na'rnoas said nodding. "One of them anyway. Come here Ne'Veha. It... it would make me so very happy if you did. Your father need never know if that is your wish!" She pleaded. "Make an old woman happy."

"Mother stop!" Ri'nol spat. "You are not old!"

Na'rnoas chuckled and looked at Ne'Veha. "It usually works with him." She said. "I will have to work on my delivery!" Ne'Veha couldn't help but chuckle as well, despite all that was rushing through her at the moment. "Please Ne'Veha. I have inquired of you through your father Ne'Veha. Many times over the years... but he..."

Ne'Veha looked up quickly. "We just finished a training flight. I get off duty as soon as the debrief is over. I can catch the first transport to Eden City and be there... I can be there in less than two hours."

Na'rnoas brought her hands to her face and the tears really came this time as Ri'nol pulled his mother to him and looked at Ne'Veha in the transmission. "I will have my father's Lifter meet you at the spaceport. The 47th SGD... it will be on the side of the Lifter. Please Ne'Veha... it would mean far more than you know. Do not... do not hurt her anymore."

Ne'Veha looked at him in the transmission and Sadi's words to her came rushing to the forefront again.

"Perhaps you should talk to this Uncle you have. Their son. Maybe you might discover a new perspective on things."

Ne'Veha met Ri'nol's gaze and a new firmness came to her jaw. "I will be on the transport sir." She spoke.

Ri'nol shook his head. "I am not a sir to you Ne'Veha. I am your uncle Ri'nol." He said with a smile. "And I do so look forward to seeing you."

CRANAE ISLAND

Thomas Roan tried to remain in his spot next to Dilaen as they watched the obsidian colored dragon float in a circle above them and settle lightly to the causeway bridge that connected the island and the mainland. His eyes shifted to the cerise colored dragon as that one settled beside the obsidian colored one. He had never been this close to dragons, and their size alone was incredibly intimidating. These two in particular looked very menacing with their viciously sharp curved talons and the long razor like teeth. He was shocked to see Helen and Thr'won walk right up to the dark colored one as the dragon brought its head level with theirs, while the red scaled dragon looked upon him and Dilaen with magenta colored eyes that appeared to him as if this dragon was deciding whether to eat them or not.

Elynth closed her golden eyes as Helen reached up and caressed her snout. *It is very good to see you Feravomir.* She spoke softly. *Chief Mage Thr'won.*

Helen smiled. "I see being the mate to Anthar agrees with you Elynth." She spoke out loud simply for the benefit of Thomas and Dilaen who could not Mindvoice. "Your scales are looking especially shiny."

Elynth turned her immense head to look at her mate. *He is very handsome isn't he?* She said lifting her long tail and running it along the length of Anthar's much thicker one. *I suppose I will keep him.*

Anthar snorted. *I should hope so!* He declared. *Who else makes your wings twitch as I do? Who else can make you trumpet in...?*

"That is quite enough young dragon!" Thr'won stated holding up her hand and pressing it to his snout. "No more information is required."

Elynth's head turned and she looked at the bright eyed elven female and the human man who looked very uncomfortable. *We did not know you were bringing guests Feravomir.* She spoke.

Helen turned to look at Dilaen and motioned her forward. "This is Dilaen Elynth." She stated. "And Thomas Roan."

Dilaen had no fear of dragons and she stepped up next to Helen without question, lifting her hand to touch Elynth's snout. Helen took her wrist gently but very quickly as Elynth drew her head back just as quickly. "No." Helen spoke. "That would not be wise."

Dilaen looked at her with wide eyes. "I don't understand... I am not afraid *Feravomir.*" She gasped.

Helen nodded. "And that is an excellent trait to have." She stated. "However... this is Elynth. Not one of her brothers or sisters."

Dilaen nodded quickly. "Yes I know!" She chattered looking back to Elynth and gazing into her golden eyes.

Andro is not aware you were bringing anyone Feravomir. Elynth spoke returning her gaze to Helen. *I know who this woman is. She works for the Netnews. She is the one who interviewed Athani just days ago.*

Helen nodded. "Yes."

Anthar turned his huge head as well. *Feravomir... you know who is inside. Who shares their lives now? If this was to get out into the public before...*

"It may already be in the public realm and we just don't know it yet Anthar." Thr'won stated quickly causing both Elynth and Anthar to look at her as she held up the pad.

Thomas stepped forward now next to Dilaen. "Perhaps we should just leave!" He said softly. "We..."

Anthar lifted his head slightly, looked over the top of Elynth's long neck and snapped his jaws shut with a resounding click of his fangs while he looked directly at Thomas. Dilaen's eyes grew wide and both of them stepped back now in fear, Dilaen clutching Thomas's arm tightly and him pulling her back and placing his body partially in front of her.

Feravomir? Elynth asked. *Thr'won? What do you mean?*

"Thomas Roan here is very good at his job." Helen stated.

“Probably too good.” Thr'won chimed in as she activated the pad. “He stumbled across this while searching for information on those who would be Andro’s mates Elynth.” She held it up and both Elynth and Anthar gazed at the image frozen on the screen.

Anthar’s magenta colored eyes grew wide as he looked at the image. *That is... that is Carisia and I!* He exclaimed.

Helen nodded. *It is an old intelligence image Anthar. Taken four years ago and released by the Krypteria when they deemed it no longer useful. This was not done purposefully. He discovered it in a program that he devised that pulls image from hundreds of different sources. They have been... they have been watching the island.*

Elynth’s head snapped to the side at Dilaen, her golden eyes narrowing into slits. *They have been spying on us!* She hissed angrily causing both Dilaen and Thomas to back up several steps.

“*Feravomir!*” Dilaen gasped.

Helen reached up and placed her hand under Elynth’s mammoth jaw. *It is what they do Elynth and just as Andro and you are good at what you do, so are they.* She said. *They brought this to us when they discovered it Elynth, which tells me they have honor and values that others might not.*

Then why bring them here? Anthar demanded.

Helen looked at Thr'won. *To show Androcles that sooner or later it will come out. And he must be prepared for the repercussions.*

Elynth turned her eyes back to Helen and Thr'won. *They... they have just finished eating breakfast and are in the main sitting room.*

I believe they are honorable Elynth... and once you listen to them I think you and Andro and Carisia and Anthar will as well. Helen spoke.

Narice and Toria are here as well Feravomir. You know this. Anthar spoke.

Helen nodded. *And perhaps the time is coming for both of them to come out and reveal what they share.*

Elynth blinked her eyes once and nodded her head. *Very well. You know the way Feravomir.*

Helen nodded as she and Thr'won stepped back and Elynth and Anthar lifted off into the sky above the island. Dilaen watched them for a moment before looking at here.

“*Feravomir? What is happening?*” Dilaen asked.

Helen looked at her and Thomas. “You are entering into a world you know very little about Dilaen and Thomas Roan.” She spoke somewhat harshly. “A world of dragons and men. There are rules you must follow, and foremost among them is never seek to touch a dragon without their approval and most especially not ones that are bonded to riders. They are not pets!” Helen spoke firmly. “There are few who Elynth allows to touch her if they are not Androcles Leonidas. You are not among them Dilaen! Remember this child! Both of you.”

“I did not mean to...” Dilaen began.

Thr'won nodded. “We know that...” She said. “Just listen to us and above all else be honest. Androcles is like his father and he will smell you lying to him before the lies finish leaving your lips.”

“Maybe... maybe this isn’t such a good idea Dilaen.” Thomas said.

Dilaen looked at him. “This could be what we have worked for Thomas.” She said. “And we have not lied... nor do we intend too.”

“Is it worth what it could cost us?” Thomas said. “I don’t want... I don’t want to lose you Dilaen.”

“Then come with me... and let’s enter this together.” She said. Dilaen stepped up to him, pressing her body against his. “I do... I do not want to lose you either Thomas Roan.” She said. She took a deep breath. “If you... if you question what we would enter into...” Dilaen looked at him. “Then let us turn and go now.”

“Us?” He asked softly.

“I have waited for ten years to feel you caress my ears Thomas Roan.” Dilaen spoke looking at him with those stunning blue eyes. “Ten years to realize that I want you... and I have wanted only you all that time. I... I much prefer you and your son to any news story.”

Thomas Roan looked at this elven female for a long moment. He was twenty-three when his wife died. His son had never really known his mother and Thomas had devoted every minute to him since. His boy was ten years old now, and even he had begun to ask when Dilaen would be coming to visit them more often.

“Ah fuck it!” Thomas spat. “You only live once.” He stated.

Helen nodded her head smiling at his words. “Spoken like a Spartan Thomas Roan.” She said motioning with her hand to the end of the bridge causeway and entrance into a whole different life. “Spoken like a Spartan.”

SPARTA ROYAL VILLA ESTATE

Duewa raced into the courtyard of the villa upon hearing the cries of pain from her oldest son Tinyn. What she saw made her eyes go wide in horror.

“Tinyn!” She shouted rushing across the courtyard to where her son was curled into a fetal ball groaning and holding his broken arm.

Calyb Leonidas stood over Tinyn, his fingers half curled inward, his palms facing Tinyn on the ground. It was a classic defensive posture, one of the first he had learned from his father, and one he had mastered at only six years of age. Duewa went first to her son, and then turned to Calyb anger in her eyes. “What have you done?” She shouted.

Calyb glared back at her, Endeem mirroring his bonded brother in posture, his wings fully extended to the sides as he towered over Calyb. “Protecting my sister!” Calyb barked.

“You have injured him!” Duewa shouted.

“He will live!” Calyb snapped uncaring.

“You have learned nothing I have taught you these last weeks!” Duewa snarled. “You or your sister!”

“Because what you teach us is stupid!” Calyb shouted.

Duewa’s eyes went wide. “Stupid!” She exclaimed. “How dare you Calyb! They are some of the most sacred rules of conduct as Healers! You are Hadarian! You do not attack and injure people like you! Never!”

“I will protect my sister!” Calyb barked. “I will protect my sister always! I am a Spartan first and I don’t care if he is Hadarian! If he strikes my sister I will hurt him!”

“You are a child!” Duewa screamed. “A child with no discipline! A child that needs structure and strict principles!”

“Like your son Tinyn!” Calyb snapped. “He was mocking Retta and the color of her hair! Telling her our mother is a whore! He is stupid! He knows nothing! When he slapped her... I hit him!”

“Tinyn would not strike Retta!” Duewa barked.

“Retta!” Calyb spoke turning his head to the side. Duewa watched as Retta came out from behind the granite pillar, Mara flapping her wings angrily. Duewa’s eyes grew wider when she saw Retta’s very red cheek and the imprint of fingerprints in her skin. Retta moved right up next to her twin brother and Calyb motioned to her cheek. “Did she just happen to bump into Tinyn’s hand Duewa?” He snarled.

“You will speak to me with respect Calyb Leonidas!” Duewa snapped. “What did she say to invoke Tinyn’s reaction?”

“I did nothing!” Retta barked now. “He called my momma a whore! I told him he was stupid and did not know what he was talking about! My momma loves my papa! And he loves her!”

“Do not lie to me Retta!” Duewa barked.

“I am not lying!” Retta spat.

“Tinyn would not say such things!” Duewa said. “I know this! You are lying to me! Both of you are lying to me! You do not study what I tell you to study! You do not conduct the five simple lessons I give you! How do you expect to become strong if you can not heal?”

“Your lessons are stupid!” Calyb barked. “Why should we study lessons we have learned and mastered before now?”

Duewa paused as she looked at them. “You could not have possibly learned them!” She said finally. “Who taught them to you? You have not even ascended yet! You can not have mastered the lessons.”

Calyb looked at her oddly, as if what she was saying was crazy. “Are you a fool?” He snapped. “Our mother taught them to us!”

Duewa sprang to her feet. “You apologize to me right now Calyb Leonidas! You are a disrespectful young man and someone needs to teach you discipline.”

Calyb laughed. "You?" He spat. "You are not our mothers!"

"You have only one mother!" Duewa shouted angrily. "And she is not the woman you think she is! She is a..."

"Duewa!" The female voice echoed across the courtyard causing all of them to turn.

Aricia and For'mya walked into the courtyard slowly holding the mugs of coffee in their hands. They were dressed in their morning clothes, which consisted of the thin robes that did little to hide their bodies underneath. Though both of them wore undergarments, nothing else adorned their tanned bodies in any way except for the robes, and if not for Duewa and her sons they would not even wear undergarments.

"Mommas!" Retta exclaimed as she dashed across the courtyard to For'mya, hugging her leg tightly as Aricia stepped up next to Calyb and looked at him with bright azure eyes filled with pride.

"Let those words pass from your lips Duewa..." Aricia spoke as she turned and looked at her, the black band surrounding her azure eyes and her long fangs extending partially. "And you will cease to have the ability to talk for the remainder of your pathetic life!"

"Calyb attacked my son!" Duewa snarled unafraid of Aricia.

"A Spartan does not attack unless he is defending or being attacked." Aricia answered looking at him. "Calyb... what happened?"

"Tinyn called mother a whore." He spoke firmly and confidently. "When Retta called him a stupid fool he slapped her. I only hit him twice mother." He said looking up into her eyes. "I did not know he was so weak!"

Aricia smiled and lifted her hand to run it through his hair and around his cheek. "Not everyone is trained as you are Calyb. As your brothers and sisters are. Not everyone is as strong as you. You must always remember... you can injure as well as heal. Just like your mother. What has she taught you? What have we taught you?"

"To harness my wolf blood and control my instincts. Blood before all else." He answered softly.

Aricia nodded. "Blood before all else." She squeezed his shoulder. "You did well in defending your sister Calyb." Aricia spoke.

"You praise him for injuring my son?" Duewa gasped looking at her. "My mother was right you know! They will not get the education they need in Sparta! They are heirs to the throne of Hadaria and they..."

"Can do far more than any ten year old you have ever seen!" For'mya spat angrily. "They can do these things because of what Melyanna has taught them, what we have taught them. And I grow tired of your condescending attitude and words Duewa."

"Anja is no teacher!" Duewa snarled. "All they get here... all that Anja gives them is how to walk around in their undergarments! These... these are things that they do not need to see! It corrupts them!"

"Is that a fact?" For'mya said turning to Retta. "Retta... I want you to heal Tinyn. As your mother *Melyanna* has taught you and your brother."

Retta looked up at For'mya. "Do I have to momma? He is an idiot. Father says idiots deserve their pain."

Duewa's eyes went wide. "This is what I mean!" She declared.

"Yes Retta. It is what your mother would do." For'mya stated.

Retta turned back to look at Tinyn and began moving towards him. Duewa looked at her stunned. "She has not ascended! She will not be able to..." Duewa watched as Retta walked up to where Tinyn lay on the ground and rested her hand on his broken arm and her words died in her throat. Duewa gasped when Retta's hand flared a soft white healing glow. She watched as Retta then passed this hand over his entire arm, the pain on Tinyn's face quickly going away as he looked at her stunned. Duewa watched as Retta examined her work and then got to her feet, pulling her hand away and then sticking her tongue out at Tinyn. She moved back beside her brother and Calyb touched his own hand to her face. His palm glowed briefly as he healed the imprint of Tinyn's fingers on her cheek and then they looked at her.

Aricia and For'mya smiled at this. "Go now... both of you!" For'mya spoke. "You will be late for school!"

Calyb glared at Duewa for another instant before turning and taking Retta's hand. Mara and Endeem fell in behind them as they marched out of the courtyard. Aricia and For'mya watched until they were gone and then turned to look at Duewa.

“They balk against your fool teachings DUEWA because you did not learn what they are capable of when you first came here. You assumed.” Aricia stated calmly. “You assumed Anja taught them nothing when in fact Anja has taught them far more than any Healer on Hadaria would have learned at the same age. They know the first Seven Tenants of the Ancient Hadarian Healers Code backward, frontward and sideways. You treat them as if they are your children... as you treat any child it would seem... like they are stupid and beneath you... when that is not the case at all.”

“Seven weeks you have been here. Teaching them what they already know.” For'mya spoke now. “Seven weeks you have been trying to influence our children DUEWA. To turn them against their mother. You could have taught them much, but instead you choose to try and turn them against their mother. Against us. Something you will never be able to do.”

“I have done no such thing!” DUEWA hissed.

“Haven't you?” For'mya said. “The sly innuendos. Using your own sons to invoke harm by their words and actions. Have you ever put aside your misplaced hatred of *Melyanna* to actually see who she is? What she has done? Or do you let your mother guide you as you guide your own children? Shamelessly forward with blinders on.”

“You dare question how I raise my sons?” DUEWA snapped.

“We don't question how you raise your own children DUEWA.” Aricia spoke. “We are just telling you that you will not attempt to raise our children in a similar fashion. Not only will we not let you... but they won't as well.”

“They are not your children!” DUEWA hissed loudly. “You confuse them by having to call all of you mother!”

“It seems to me that you are the one who is confused.” Aricia spoke. “Our children don't seem to have a problem and they never have. None of them have. It is people like you who do not understand that have the problem.”

“They need discipline and structure!” DUEWA spoke. “They need to learn more than how to walk about in their undergarments! Especially after what I have seen today. They... they have skills they should not have at such a young age and this is why they need to be with the Elders. So they can learn how to control that.”

Aricia and For'mya looked at each other, two sets of eyes wide in surprise. For'mya looked back at her. “You have issue now with how we dress in our own home?” She said aghast.

“They should not be exposed to such things!” DUEWA snapped. “Seeing their mother... you and the others... they are seeing you walk around here with barely anything covering your bodies. It is...”

“Natural.” Aricia cut her off. “Natural for Lycavorians and Elves. We do not harbor the same misgivings as Hadarians where it concerns our sexuality DUEWA. Why is that so hard for you to understand? Simply because we share each other as well as Martin... because we enjoy the attentions of other women whom we love... that is wrong to you? Anja is just as much wolf as she is Hadarian... perhaps more so. That just infuriates you and your mother. Why is that DUEWA?”

“How can you stand there and defend her after what she has done?” DUEWA asked. “She betrayed you by fornicating with those men! Four strange men and she acted like a whore with them! Doing whatever it is they wished! With Rinard as well! How can you defend her after that? After betraying you... after betraying the King? I have seen you viewing the security footage!”

“We... we love her.” Aricia spoke softly.

“The King does... he does not seem to share your sentiments!” DUEWA snapped.

Aricia stepped closer to DUEWA. “Do not press too far DUEWA.” Aricia growled softly. “You walk on shells now with your presence here, but do not assume you can simply come here and replace Anja. Do you think we don't know that is what you want to do?”

“I have no idea what you are saying.” DUEWA hissed.

“Yes you do.” For'mya spoke now moving up next to DUEWA. “You think you can replace Anja. You think you will be able to insinuate yourself into Martin Leonidas's bed. To gain power and influence over him somehow.” For'mya smiled and shook her head. “You and your mother do not know Martin Leonidas very well DUEWA. There have been many women, female alpha wolves far stronger than you DUEWA that have tried to garner Martin's attentions through the years. His blood calls only for us... and ours for him. You will never find your way into his bed DUEWA... for you are not his type of woman. You are not *Melyanna*, and you will never

be *Melyanna*. And you could never replace her in his heart no matter what you and your mother and your security footage say she has done.”

Duewa looked at them a look of disbelief on her face. “You... you all still... you still love her.” She gasped softly unable to comprehend their devotion to Anja. “Even after... even after what she has done?”

“Why have you come here to Sparta Duewa?” Aricia asked now using a much softer tone of voice. “What do you hope to accomplish?”

“I... I have come to school Retta and Calyb.” Duewa stammered. “That... that is my purpose.”

Aricia nodded. “Then learn about them and what they can do. Anja taught them far more than you could imagine. Learn about them and then take off the blinders you wear and open your mind to what is around you. You wish to understand us? You wish to know why we act as we do, then open your mind and allow yourself to see for yourself. What you learn Duewa, it may just make you a superior teacher and mother and allow you to see that you and Anja are not so different in the end.”

“Impossible.” Duewa spoke pulling Tinyn to his feet and embracing her son. “I am nothing like her!”

Aricia and For'mya smiled. “Impossible? Impossible is not a word that resides in the vocabulary of a Spartan Duewa. *Dilochitès* Thoti is interested in you... you should spend more time with him and his son if you wish to learn about Spartans and Lycavorians. Then perhaps you would have a different view of things.”

“Thoti?” Duewa gasped.

The tall Spartan had been a constant shadow wherever she went. He never intruded on what she did, but was always there in the background. She remembered a time several weeks back when she had been approached by a young Lycavorian who obviously did not know who she was. He was very forward in his actions and words, saying that he found her very attractive and would like to take her to lunch. He would not take no for an answer until Thoti had stepped into the picture. Then the young man simply moved away without so much as a backward glance. Duewa had not understood what happened then, and even to this day she did not understand it.

Duewa looked at Aricia and For'mya. “And if I chose not to learn of you?” She asked.

Aricia shrugged her shoulders. “Then you will last perhaps a few more weeks before your attitude and hidden agenda brings you into direct conflict with one of us. It is a conflict you will not survive I assure you.”

“You... you would kill me?” Duewa gasped.

“To protect the man we love... to protect Martin Leonidas...” For'mya met her wide eyes. “Killing you would be nothing more than a blip on our sensor screens.”

“...smell it Thoti?” Martin asked as he looked out the floor to ceiling window in the main sitting room, watching Aricia and For'mya talking with Duewa. He had been witness to the entire incident, Thoti coming in a few minutes after it had begun.

Thoti nodded. “Yes Milord. Adrenalin.”

Martin nodded his head as he sipped his coffee. “Adrenalin pumping through her system because she is frightened. Frightened that whatever she came here for is not what her mother told her it was for. She's discovering all is not how she said it would be.”

“Why doesn't that surprise me?” Thoti spoke.

Martin looked at him. “Does this woman intrigue you Thoti?”

“I am a Spartan Milord.” He replied with a grin. “Everything intrigues me.”

Martin matched his smile. “Ok... I had that coming.” He spoke.

Thoti let his eyes look out the window. “She has a strength about her Milord. Whether that is something she has always had, or something she has had to develop through the years, it is there.”

“What do you think?” Martin asked.

“Milord, are you asking me to initiate a relationship with her?” Thoti asked.

Martin met his eyes. “Is that something that interests you?”

Thoti was silent for a moment. “She is... she does smell very good sire.” He replied. “I... I do not wish to...”

Martin stepped up to him. "I have told you why this woman is here." Martin said softly. "You said she has a strength about her. Is she strong enough to realize on her own that her mother is using her just like she is using everyone else?"

Thoti looked at him a new understanding in his eyes. "You wish me to help her to see that we are not as her mother says we are?"

Martin shook his head. "No. I want her to see who we are Thoti. No acting... and no shows. Let her see who we are inside at our core. If I am right... once she sees that her mother is feeding her a pack of lies... she will come to realize not everything is as her mother says."

"And if I discover I want to pursue this woman Milord?" Thoti asked.

"Your scent and aura already tell me that." Martin told him. "She reminds you of Hanna, doesn't she Thoti?"

"She has... she has the same strength of spirit and tenacious stubborn side Milord." Thoti answered immediately. "The same things that attracted me to my first mate yes."

"It's been fourteen years Thoti." Martin said softly looking at him and staring into his soft dark eyes. "You have raised your son on your own and committed your life and his to my family. It is time for you to move on if that is what you desire. Hanna was Hadarian and she was devoted to you yes... but she would not want you to be lonely forever."

"Serving... serving you and your family is what has kept me sane sire." Thoti spoke. "I do not wish to move on if it is not in service to the Leonidas family."

Martin nodded. "Then start looking for another mate my friend." He spoke. "As Hanna would want you too. Your son needs a mother to help him discover that side of himself. And if you are able to break down the walls around Duewa's arrogance and untrustworthiness of others, she may just turn out to be the best teacher of all."

"And if she can not sire?"

Martin shrugged. "When has a Spartan ever backed down from a challenge?"

Thoti met his King's eyes and smiled. "Thank you Milord."

Martin chuckled. "Don't thank me... you might end up cursing me for setting you on this path. Duewa will be a tough nut to crack."

Thoti laughed now at his King's use of slang. He had heard it many times through the years from both Martin and Anja. He knew what that particular saying meant and he nodded his head. "Then there would be no challenge." He said.

**EDEN CITY
GRAND CENTER SENATORIAL BUILDING
OFFICE OF DROW SENIOR SENATOR DABA**

"...are working late Daba. It is nearly eleven at night there." Vlonjra spoke from the transmission. "You should be home by now in Eden City time. The sun is only just coming up here."

Daba nodded with a smile as she held the small holotransmission disc in her hand as she walked through the corridors. "The Queen asked me to stay for a time longer. She wanted me to meet someone and she is on her way over now. I am going to the Senate Hall to meet with her now. I wanted to speak with you about Lu'ria before she arrived."

"She is as fine a Drow warrior as I have seen in two centuries Daba." Vlonjra told her honestly. "You should be very proud of your daughter."

"Truly Vlonjra?" Daba asked. "She... we have not spoken in several weeks. She is upset with me for arranging for her to meet a fine young man when she returns in two weeks. I am hoping she becomes enthralled with him and wishes to make him her husband. He comes from an excellent family and is an established Drow soldier."

Vlonjra nodded. "My observation is without question Daba. I would not lie to you. We have been friends far too long." She said. "Lu'ria... she has..."

"What?" Daba asked quickly.

“She a level of awareness that I have never seen in one so young Daba.” Vlonjra spoke thoughtfully. “Almost as if she can predict what an opponent will do. None of the others here will challenge her to sparring matches any longer. She has beaten all of them at least twice. She is still somewhat reckless... but even that is beginning to wane. She has done nothing but train and work in the store for the last weeks. Like she is preparing for something. She no longer takes Jennifer into her bed either.”

“Jennifer?” Daba asked.

“A young human woman. My daughter’s lover. They have been together for many years and she is an excellent botanist, which fits very well with our front operation here. When my daughter’s husband returns from patrol every few days, Jennifer shares Lu’ria’s bed. Or at least she used too. Not for several weeks now.” Vlonjra explained.

“Why?” Daba asked.

“Lu’ria says it would not be right any longer.” Vlonjra spoke. “At least that is what she told Jennifer. She has told Jennifer she is meant for others and it would not be right if she was with someone else besides them. They are still very close friends however. It is similar to what happened between you and your lover many years ago Daba.”

Daba nodded as she remembered the High Elf female that shared her life and her bed for almost a decade before dying in the Battle for Earth. Daba was a very traditional Drow in many ways, but when it came to her ‘slave’ Norela, Daba shared her with no one. Not even her husband, who she loved. Daba nodded her head. “She has said these things to me as well.” Daba spoke shaking her head. “She has it in her head that she will be one of the mates and wives to Prince Androcles. That she will share his life and the lives of the other women he chooses.”

“You do not approve of this I take it.” Vlonjra said.

“I was tolerating it...” Daba answered. “Until she told me she is to be bonded to a dragon Vlonjra. Then I could take no more. I may have been too harsh on her.”

“Bonded to a dragon?” Vlonjra spoke with raised eyebrows. “The... the only Drow to ever bond with a dragon is Queen Aihola. And that is only because of her husband and lover. She was able to accept the Lycavorian virus within Isra’s blood and it changed her, and when combined with sharing blood with Tarifa, this gave her the ability. None of our people have ever shown this ability since. Not even remotely the Mindvoice ability to bond with a sacred dragon.”

Daba nodded. “I have told her this... but she insists that is her destiny. As it is her destiny to be the wife of Androcles.”

“Have you spoken with the Queen about this Daba?” Vlonjra asked. “If there is anyone who can assist you with explaining this to Lu’ria it would be her.”

Daba nodded. “That is what Lynwe said as well. She has a powerful Mindvoice ability... but not what is needed to bond with a dragon. I do not wish to see Lu’ria wait for something that will never come about and I can’t get her to see this.”

“Do you wish me to try and speak with her Daba?” Vlonjra asked. “Now that I know what troubles you and her... I may be able to get her to see this could never happen. I doubt the Prince even knows she exists. He walks a path that not many can or will tread as the son of our King.”

“I have told her this as well.” Daba spoke. She chuckled softly. “She is just as stubborn as I was at that age. Do you remember?”

Vlonjra nodded her head. “I do.” She answered with a smile.

Daba looked up as she came to a halt in front of the huge double doors leading into the Senate Hall. The intricately carved and forged double titanium doors into the Senate hall began to open when the sensors detected Daba’s bio signature. “Vlonjra... I must go.” She spoke.

“I will speak with Lu’ria Daba.” Vlonjra told her. “I can make no promises... but I will speak with her. I will contact you in a day or so and let you know how it went.”

“Thank you so much my friend.” Daba said. She saw Vlonjra nod her head as the transmission faded and she tucked the disc into the pouch on her jumpsuit as she entered the hall without waiting for the doors to fully open.

The first thing she noticed was the massive shape of the viridian green dragon standing with Aihola and the Holy One himself, Walter Carson. Daba's eyes were wide as she slowed her gait somewhat moving towards them. She saw Aihola turn and see her and a wide smile appeared on her face.

Aihola didn't hesitate and walked up to her with bright smiling amber colored eyes. "Daba." She said as she hugged her briefly and kissed both her cheeks. "You are looking well."

Daba smiled. "As are you my Queen." She stated her own amber eyes cutting to see Walter step up to them.

Aihola held her hand. "Daba... you know the Holy One."

Daba bowed her head slightly. "Who does not?" She spoke quickly. "It is a true honor Holy One."

"I am not a Holy One." Walter stated as he leaned over and kissed her cheek. "But it is still a joy to meet you."

"My... my own parents are your creations Holy One." Daba spoke almost reverently.

"And how are they?" Walter asked.

Daba smiled. "They live in Delmah now. And they are so very happy with the lives they have."

Walter nodded. "Good." He said.

Aihola squeezed her hand once more. "Thank you for coming on such short notice Daba. I hope it did not put you out in any way."

"No... of course not." Daba spoke with a smile and shake of her head. "What can I do for you Aihola? You do not often call for secret meetings in the Senate Hall when we are not in session."

Aihola chuckled. "This isn't a secret." She said. "It's not political either. It's actually a personal matter. Walter has asked me to help him find someone."

Daba looked back and forth between them. "If I can certainly. Why would I know where this person is?"

Daba gasped as Majeir's massive head moved slowly between Walter and Aihola and stared at Daba with ruby red eyes for a long moment of silence.

This is her mother! Majeir declared after a moment. *I can feel her imprint on Lu'ria. She loves her mother.*

Aihola smiled and reached up to place her hand on the side of Majeir's snout. "Daba... I almost forgot. This is Majeir. She is Roluth's younger sister and a dear friend to Walter."

Daba had seen dragons before many times here in Eden City walking the streets with their bonded ones or filling the skies above. It was so common now to see these majestic and sacred animals among them now. More so than anyone except perhaps those bonded to dragons, the Drow revered these magnificent creatures as almost godlike in stature. Though she had seen them before countless times, Daba had never had one standing so close to her, gazing at her with large eyes. This dragon was larger than most she had seen by a meter or more in length, her viridian green scales shiny in health and power.

"I am... I am honored Majeir." Daba finally stammered as she lowered her head slightly.

Aihola... tell her I am not a god or something to revere. Majeir said quickly. *I am just a dragon.*

Aihola smiled and looked at Daba. "She says she does not want you to look at her as anything other than a dragon Daba." Aihola spoke. "They are uncomfortable with the status the Drow give to them."

"It... it is only out of respect and awe that we do this Aihola." Daba spoke.

Aihola nodded. "I know." She said. "I have tried to tell Roluth this as well, but he is very stubborn." She looked at Majeir. "Something I see his sister shares."

Walter grinned. "You have no idea." He stated.

Majeir did an excellent impression of rolling her eyes and she butted Walter in the shoulder gently with her snout. Daba couldn't help but smile as well and she looked at Aihola.

"You said you are looking for someone my Queen." She spoke. "I don't know what I can do that you can not... but I will help as much as I am able. I would be honored."

"Daba... do you know much of the bond between dragon and rider?" Aihola asked.

Daba shook her head quickly. "No. I know it runs very deep emotionally and it allows them to feel each others thoughts and such. Beyond that... no. Excluding yourself... there are no Drow with the ability to bond with a dragon my Queen. You know this."

Aihola nodded. "Yes I know... but there are instances... quite a few actually... where one or both of them can feel the other before they actually bond. Both rider and dragon can feel the pull between them, and as

time passes and they remain apart it grows stronger. Eventually... they will not be able to push it to the back of their minds anymore and they will go in search of their bonded one even across the stars.”

Daba looked at her. “That is fascinating Aihola!” She gasped. “I did not know that.”

Aihola nodded. “It is not common knowledge.”

Daba’s amber eyes became confused. “I... I still do not know how I can help you Aihola. I am not aware of any Drow with the Mindvoice ability for this.”

Aihola looked at Walter and then turned her eyes back. “One Drow does Daba.” She spoke softly taking Daba’s hand. “Majeir has come here to find her bonded one, because her bonded one is a Drow.”

Daba looked from Aihola’s amber eyes to Majeir’s ruby red eyes, both of them staring at her intently. Daba felt tightness in her throat, and she saw Majeir move her massive head even closer to her, those ruby colored eyes so bright and clear and intelligent.

“Majeir is here to find her bonded one Daba.” Aihola said. “She is here for your daughter Lu’ria.”

“Lu’ria!” Daba gasped as her daughter’s words to her not so long ago came rushing back when Aihola spoke. “It... she... it can’t be!”

Majeir moved her head closer, until her snout was only inches from Daba’s forehead. Her ruby eyes blinked several times. *She knows.* Majeir said in a whisper within Mindvoice. *Lu’ria, she has told her mother, but she does not believe.*

Aihola squeezed Daba’s hand tightly. “This is no joke Daba.” Aihola told her gently. “What has Lu’ria told you?”

Daba tore her eyes from Majeir’s and looked at Aihola. “She... she told me a wild story of being... being bonded to a dragon! She was angry with me for not believing her. Angry with me for not believing all...”

Aihola smiled. “This is no wild story Daba my friend.” She spoke. “This is very real. What Lu’ria feels is Majeir. Just as Majeir can feel her. And that bond is growing stronger.”

“But... but how? Why?” Daba gasped turning back to look at Majeir.

Fate and destiny will always find a way to bring together those that are meant to be joined. This we have learned from the Elder Mother and King Leonidas. Majeir said softly projecting her thoughts as gently as she could to Daba.

Daba’s eyes flew open wide as the female voice whispered those words into her mind and she staggered back. Her amber eyes were wide as she gazed at Majeir. “I... I heard... I heard her words in my head!” She gasped.

Walter looked sternly at Majeir. “Majeir... you know...”

If she is to understand... she must know what it feels like. Majeir said. *I am stronger now with Lu’ria’s bond Walter. And we grow stronger every day. This woman is her mother... she loves her... and she must understand.*

Daba was staring at Majeir with huge eyes as she had heard every word the dragon had spoken. Her voice was soft and soothing and definitely female. She felt the throbbing in her temples, the pounding that was quickly fading.

“I can hear your words!” Daba gasped.

Aihola lifted her hand and placed it on Majeir’s snout as she looked at Daba. “Majeir has granted you a gift Daba.” Aihola spoke. “It is easier for her to do this because we are elves. We may have been born from those the Holy One created... but we are still elves and we are descended from dragons.”

Daba looked at Aihola. “Descended from...”

“It’s true.” Walter spoke now. “It is not something that is bandied about openly... but Elves are what dragons evolved into many thousands of years ago. I don’t know all of it... only Martin and the Elder Mother can tell you the entire history. Perhaps Dysea now as well... but what Aihola and Majeir speak is the truth.”

Daba looked at Majeir once more and lifted her hand hesitantly. “May... may I touch you?” She asked. Majeir blinked those ruby orbs and nodded her huge head. *Please.*

Daba moved slowly, extending her fingers out to touch the smooth scales and warm flesh of Majeir’s snout. She gasped in delight when she felt Majeir’s muzzle twitch at the touch and then her hand was flat against her scales.

She is to my Bonded One Daba of the Drow. Majeir spoke softly the words filling Daba’s head. *That is our part of our destiny. To be as one. I must find her. I... I feel she will... she will need me soon.*

Daba looked at Aihola. “She works for Armetus’s *Krypteria*.” Daba said quickly.

Aihola nodded. “Yes... I know. I helped to set up the training for them with Armetus. Lynwe and I. Where has she been assigned?”

“Iraruzu.” Daba answered immediately.

Aihola looked at Walter as he lifted his hand and touched the COM implant in his jaw. “Ceneia?”

“Here Senior Polemarch!” The voice answered instantly.

“Iraruzu?” Walter said. “What can you tell me about it?”

“Nothing good sir.” She answered. “A haven for the dredges of The Wilds. No law! No rules!”

“I’m guessing then that a *STRIKER* showing up there is not such a good thing?” Walter spoke.

“Probably not sir.” Ceneia answered with some humor in her voice. “Give me four hours and I can scrap up a Menkla Three transport or even better a Bontawillian KJU-21 Corvette. It’s big enough for Majeir and has the range if you are thinking what I think you’re thinking. And it’s a civilian model and won’t draw unnecessary attention.”

“Crew?” Walter asked.

“Standard is three. I can fly it myself with you and one other sir.” She answered. “It’s mostly automated. It’s more a pleasure craft than anything really. Heavy shielding and powerful sublights to escape pirates and such. The Bontawillians began marketing it three years ago and it’s very popular in The Wilds now.”

Daba looked at Walter. “I will go.” She stated quickly. “She is my daughter and I... I need to beg her forgiveness for not believing her. I am a qualified pilot on the Raptors Holy One.”

“Ceneia?” Walter asked.

“Good enough sir.”

“You have three hours Commander.” Walter spoke. “I want to be underway in three hours. Iraruzu is at least three days away.”

“Four in the KJU-21 sir.” Ceneia spoke immediately. “Her LSD coils are only Mark Three Class Twos. Efficient... but not exceptionally fast.”

“Then you have two hours Commander.” Walter spoke with a smile.

“I’ll be ready in one.” Ceneia said.

“We’ll meet you on the Eden City Airfield then.” Walter said. He looked at Daba. “You don’t have to come Daba.” He said. “Once Lu’ria and Majeir bond... she will need to return anyway. I need to inform Armetus of what we are doing as well. He will no doubt want to arrange for a replacement for Lu’ria.”

Daba shook her head. “Is this... is this bonding something I can witness?” She asked looking at Majeir.

Majeir nodded. *It is not much to see... and sometimes it can be painful for both of us... but you can witness it, yes.*

Daba nodded. “Then I am going.” Daba said firmly. She looked at Aihola quickly. “With your permission my Queen.”

Aihola didn’t hesitate. “Done.”

CRANAE ISLAND

Dilaen and Thomas did not know what they expected to see upon being led into the main room of Androcles Leonidas’s villa on Cranae Island. Whatever they may have been, it was definitely not what they saw as Helen and Thr’won led them past the large kitchen area and into the area with all the furniture. Couches and chairs that were for the most part all being used in some manner.

Arran, Toria and Sadi were sitting around one of the small knee high tables manipulating a holographic model of a *STRIKER DT* and the image of a dragon and rider behind it. Denali Leonidas sat on the floor atop the massive white skinned rug of soft fur. It was the pelt of a Golsium Artic Bear Dilaen saw quickly, easily one of the largest carnivorous creatures in the Union. Denali and Moneus were engaged in a conversation with Carina and Zarah their hands moving as if discussing the finer arts of fighting. Lisisa Leonidas sat shoulder to shoulder with her sister Carisia on one side and Narice on the other as she and Androcles were showing them something with what appeared to be small models of dragons. Eliani Leonidas and her lover Nyla were stretched out with the upper backs against either side of their husband Malic who was shirtless and leaning

against one of the chairs. It appeared as if they were quizzing him from the two data pads they were holding. There were coffee mugs and several glasses of what appeared to be some sort of fruit juice spread out on the tables, as well as platters of fruit and pastries of some sort.

Dilaen looked at Thomas quickly seeing his own surprised face at what they saw. She had expected them to be fully dressed and the arrogance within the room so thick you could cut it with a knife. The young red haired vampire who sat conspicuously close to Arrarn Leonidas was the one wearing the most clothes, and that outfit consisted of only a long robe with a man's shirt underneath it. Dilaen noticed that none of the other women in the room had much on in the way of clothing to be honest. Simple undergarments, long shirts that left little to the imagination or like Sadi Leonidas and the raven haired vampire female, long robes that were practically transparent in nature. Dilaen was struck by the openness of the men and women in the room. They seemed so comfortable with each other, so comfortable in fact that none of them seemed to notice what they wore, so intent were they on what they were discussing with one another in the small groups. Lifting her eyes Dilaen could look out past them and onto the large patio where she saw the bodies of at least four dragons stretched out and gnawing some very large bones of some sort, their heads bobbing up and down as if they were having a discussion of their own.

Amazingly, it was not until Helen cleared her throat that anyone seemed to take notice of them. Dilaen watched Androcles Leonidas turn his head, the mug of coffee lifting to his lips as his bright azure eyes fell on them. Dilaen thought she detected surprise in those eyes and she watched as he slowly uncoiled his body and rose to his full height. He wore only white pants with crimson trim down the side. Dilaen looked at the extreme definition of his muscular body and the many scars on his broad chest. She saw the odd marking just above his heart that looked strangely like the talon of a dragon and appeared to be branded into his skin. Almost completely by instinct, Dilaen stepped closer to Thomas. It was a reaction that Thr'won took notice of right away and told her without question that Dilaen had far more than a passing interest in the human Thomas Roan. Thomas was several inches shorter than Androcles Leonidas, and no where near as muscularly defined, but he was in excellent physical shape Dilaen knew. In a move that was intended and one she did not have to force herself to conduct, Dilaen laced her hand within Thomas's and pressed close to him protectively.

Andro stepped up to them now, his eyes going from Dilaen and Thomas to Helen and Thr'won. "*Feravomir*." He said softly as he leaned over and kissed her cheek. He did the same with Thr'won. "Chief Mage Thr'won." He spoke stepping back to look at them. "This is a surprise as Elynth said."

Dilaen looked at Helen quickly and then back to Andro. "Your... your dragon told you we were here?" She asked.

Andro sipped his coffee as he met her eyes. "Elynth and I do not keep secrets from one another. I knew the moment she saw you." He turned back to Helen. "The question remains... why have you brought them here knowing who they are, and who would be with us?"

Thr'won stepped closer now and held out the data pad. "This is why." She spoke as Andro took the data pad and looked at it just as Sadi came up beside him. Dilaen watched as she greeted Helen and Thr'won in a similar fashion and then pressed close to Andro, her arms slipping around his waist. Carisia saw the look on their faces and got to her feet slowly, moving up on the other side on Andro and bowing her head to Helen and Thr'won.

"*Feravomir*. Chief Mage." She spoke softly as she greeted them as Andro and Sadi had done.

"Carisia... how are you child?" Helen said in reply, her voice filled with affection.

"Happier than I have ever been *Feravomir*." Carisia answered.

Dilaen's eyes grew wide then and she squeezed Thomas's arm tightly as she saw Carisia move up next to Andro's opposite side and press her petite frame against his. She had heard that name before Dilaen gasped to herself soundlessly and she racked her brain trying to figure out where.

"What is it my love?" Carisia asked as she looked up into Andro's face her arms going around his waist now, interlacing with Sadi's.

Dilaen's eyes grew even wider and her fingers dug imprints into Thomas's hand. Her free hand came up to her mouth as she nearly squealed in shock, drawing the attention of everyone in the main room now.

"Carisia... Carisia Moran!" She gasped out loud. "You are... you are Princess Yuri's daughter with Admiral Moran!" Her eyes darted to where Arrarn was now standing and Narice had moved over next to him

and Toria. "I remember now! Carisia Moran... and you are... you are Princess Narice! You are the daughter of the Empress of the High Coven! I remember you from the dinner right after you first arrived on Earth!"

Andro looked up as he handed the pad to Carisia, whose own maya blue eyes grew wide as she gazed at the images. She looked up quickly. "Where... where did you get this?" She hissed out loud.

Andro looked at Dilaen and Thomas for a long moment and Thomas Roan fidgeted nervously, not liking the way those blue eyes sized him and Dilaen up like two pieces of meat. He finally turned his head and his eyes fell on Helen and Thr'won once more.

"Perhaps you could tell me why you have brought them here *Feravomir*?" He asked. "Before I have them arrested and thrown into a very deep, dark cell for spying on me at *MY HOME!*" His voice rose so quickly and so forcefully that Thomas actually pulled Dilaen back behind him as the words echoed through the room like a cannon shot and those azure orbs fell upon them again, and this time not in a least bit friendly manner.

"You will not raise your voice to us Androcles Leonidas!" Helen barked back at him just as loudly. "And you will do no such thing where it concerns Thomas and Dilaen! I forbid it!"

Andro's eyes cut back to her and his head tilted slightly to the side. "You forbid it?" He spoke harshly. "You are the *Feravomir* of our people Helen but you..."

Helen and Thr'won felt it then because Helen was Lycavorian and Thr'won was turned by a pureblood Lycavorian. They felt Sadi's very female aura wash over Andro, and even more easily than they realized, her aura caused him to pause in his words. They watched him close his eyes and take a deep breath as her hands came forward to cover Carisia's hand on his abdomen. Sadi's aura was nearly the equal of Aricia's now, and feeling what they had just felt; neither of them doubted that one day she would equal Aricia Leonidas in what she could do. And Aricia was still growing. Combined with that very powerful aura Sadi projected Helen and Thr'won also felt the powerful Mindvoice presence of Carisia mixed in with their minds. Unlike four short months ago, her presence now was focused, peaceful and utterly clear. And it was also wrapped quite intimately within the fabric of Andro's and Sadi's presence in Mindvoice, and incredibly the presence of two other minds that were very faint right now but still detectable and caused them to look at each other.

Andro's eyes opened slowly and Dilaen and Thomas watched him lean over and nuzzle the top of first Sadi's golden blond hair and then Carisia's raven locks. Their faces too took on a much more peaceful nature now.

"Let them report it Andro!" Arrarn's voice snapped now as he stepped forward. Narice and Toria were clinging tightly to his own powerful arms Dilaen and Thomas saw. "I don't care what father or Narice's mother says or does anymore. I'm tired of hiding it."

"As are we." Narice stated firmly and without reservations.

Andro shook his head looking at Helen and Thr'won. "We can't." He spoke softly. "Not yet."

"Why not?" Toria demanded. "The *Venorik Elghinn* and Aikiro can be damned! If they haven't figured out by now that I am sending them false reports every two weeks then they are bigger fools than I thought them to be!"

"Andro... we..." Narice began. "Deneth scared Johan *shun'nehr* with his actions the other day, but my mother will not cease pushing me towards him. We can not do what Elynth and Anthar did for Carisia. My mother would know immediately something was odd. If she does not already suspect something." (Shitless)

Carisia turned her head. "We can't allow it to become known, not yet Narice." She stated calmly. "If we did that it would put the mission Resumar and Athani have begun in jeopardy. We can't do that! The mission is too important!"

Dilaen's eyes went to Carisia. "Athani Leonidas?" She said stunned. "She is Kavalian! You... you are at war with the Kavalians!"

"Athani Leonidas is just as much our family now as everyone in this room!" Narice spoke surprising even herself with the conviction in her words. "Carisia and I. Toria... we have never fought the Kavalians directly, and whatever Athani did was only to protect herself until she could defect as she has done."

"But you are High Coven!" Dilaen said. "The treaty is already signed! It was signed weeks ago. It has been reported you had left Earth. Why... why are you still here? You are talking as if... as if the Empress is still here!" Dilaen pushed away from Thomas but did not release his hand. "The Empress is still here isn't she? Where? Sparta? Eden City? Where is she hiding? What is she still here for? Why...?"

“Enough Dilaen!” Helen barked quickly looking at her. “Rein in your questions child, before you cause all of us to go deaf.”

Thr'won moved up next to Andro. “They came to us Androcles.” She said softly. “They did not have too... but they did.” Andro’s eyes were on her now. “They could have simply reported it and then all we are doing would come out and it would be for naught.”

Dilaen looked at them as they talked. “What... what are you doing?” She asked. “Why are they here? What...”

Thomas Roan was not an unintelligent man and he put it together before Dilaen. He glanced out onto the patio and saw the dragons, he remembered the images and how the new dragons that this Carisia and Narice were with stuck in the back of his mind. He remembered the forgotten reports several months ago of unknown riders within Sparta who were assumed to be a graduating batch of new vampire riders within the Union. It was never pursued and only assumed that was the case. Thomas knew how hard it was to gather information on the Royal family as a whole, but within Sparta it was practically impossible. The Lycavorians and others who called Sparta home did not discuss the Royal family in any way. Thomas knew it was from some sort of ingrained loyalty and respect that still survived from the Sparta of old since there were nearly three hundred thousand men, women and children that had been living in Sparta since only a few years after the death of the King’s father.

“You are training... you are training their dragons!” Thomas finally spoke.

Andro turned his head and looked at the human man, impressed by his insight. “What makes you say that?” He asked.

“It all makes sense now!” Roan continued quickly. “Four months ago there were brief reports of a new class of graduating vampire riders. Some of them were seen in Sparta the first days after the Coven arrived here. It was assumed they were from the Union military and would join the ranks of Bonded Pairs. The report was never followed up on. It never went anywhere. The connection was never made and the reports were quickly pushed aside and buried! They weren’t Union riders were they... they were High Coven riders. That’s who was seen in Sparta isn’t it?”

Dilaen looked at Thomas. “What do you mean Thomas?” She asked.

“Don’t you see Dilaen?” He asked looking at her and squeezing her hands. “We’ve... we’ve stumbled across something here that is way beyond what we first thought it was. The Cease Fire signing is a charade isn’t it?” Thomas asked meeting Andro’s eyes now with confidence as he spoke. He was sure of his words and this came across in how he spoke. “It was... it was done to cover up what you are really doing isn’t it? You are training dragons that somehow came to be part of the High Coven. You are training them to fight the Kavalians. Why would you do that?”

Andro turned his head to look at Helen and Thr'won now. *You see why we brought them Andro? Helen asked knowing everyone in the room could hear her within Mindvoice except Thomas and Dilaen. They came to us with what they had found instead of reaping the rewards of reporting it first. Thr'won and I saw it when we met with them. You and your father have always hated the Netnews people because like the news people of old, many seemed only trying to outdo each other in what they could report. They didn’t care who it hurt or for what reason. Thomas Roan and Dilaen are different. And they could be a valuable ally going into the future.*

And Ne’Veha? Andro asked. Lu’ria?

It will come out about them without Dilaen and Thomas saying anything. Sadi spoke now. I have unwittingly made sure of that by going to see her the other day. Anyone could do what Dilaen did in discovering who Ne’Veha is my love. Once they discover that... Lu’ria will not be far behind.

They are to be your mates and wives Andro, and like your father you will not be able to shield them. Helen spoke. *They won’t allow you to shield them.*

The Feravomir and KertaGai are right my Bonded Brother. Elynth’s voice filled his head now from where she sat next to Anthar on the patio. Perhaps this is a part of the destiny we are all supposed to walk.

This... this could very well turn out to be the biggest mistake I have ever made. Andro spoke softly.

We all make mistakes my love. Sadi chimed in. However... this time I think Helen may be right. I don’t smell and deception from them. Only intrigue and interest.

Dilaen’s eyes kept going between the men and women in the room. “You are talking within Mindvoice aren’t you?” She asked quickly. “What are you saying? It is very rude you know!”

“Dilaen!” Thomas snapped.

“What?” Dilaen protested turning to look at him. “It is rude to speak within Mindvoice when there are others present who can not Thomas!”

“Dilaen... it is his home.” Thomas told her.

“I don’t care! It is...” Dilaen turned her head again and came eyeball to chest with Androcles Leonidas. Neither of them had seen him move and now he towered over Dilaen by at least eight inches.

“Why are you here?” He asked her, his voice neutral.

“I... I am... we’re reporters! Dilaen stammered.

“I know what you are.” Andro spoke. “I asked why you are here. Why did you come to my home when you had this information?”

Dilaen looked up and met his eyes. “We did not... we did not want to release information without facts to back it up!” She stated. “And we knew... we knew she had to be someone special if we had an image of her from Usu Ozeib 7.”

“We didn’t know who she was until coming here.” Thomas added moving up next to Dilaen protectively, something that did not escape Andro’s notice. “I give you my word on that. I never knew the program I designed would kick out something like this. We were going to release the information on Commander Ne’Veha because that we could back up. But not this stuff.”

“And why didn’t you?” Andro asked.

Thomas snorted. “Are you kidding?” He hissed with wide eyes. “And take the chance of pissing you off? I’m not stupid! I have a son to look out for.”

Andro’s azure orbs changed a little Dilaen thought to herself. “You have a son?” He asked.

Thomas nodded. “He’s eleven.”

Andro looked back and forth between Dilaen and Thomas. “Then the two of you are...”

“I wish.” Thomas muttered.

“Yes!” Dilaen stated quite emphatically.

Thomas Roan’s eyes grew a little wider and he looked at her. “What?” He gasped.

Dilaen looked at him with a bashful smile. “I have made you aware of what I want Thomas Roan.” She stated.

“I... I thought you were joking with me!” He declared.

Dilaen shook her head and wrapped the fingers of her hand within his. “No. I was not joking.”

“You have not answered my original question.” Andro spoke drawing their eyes back to him. “Why are you here? What do you hope to gain?”

Dilaen drew herself up to her full five foot four height. “History follows those with the courage to make decisions that will affect others. You... you and your father are history makers. All of you in this room. Your entire family! I... we... we want to record that history.”

“Why?” Narice asked coming forward slowly.

Dilaen met her eyes now. “So the truth of what happens now is known to the future generations that come after us. The truth and reasons behind those decisions that are made. *Will* be made. So that potential generations know we did not act blindly in laying the foundation for *their* futures.”

The room was silent then as everyone was looking at Dilaen with thoughtful gazes. It was the least expected of them that broke the long silence.

Give them a job Andro! Jeth’s voice boomed out in Mindvoice as his massive head and neck pushed the double doors open even wider and his blue/black scales filled the entranceway onto the patio. *With them writing about what we do... we will be immortalized!*

I’ll give you immortalized! Tharua’s voice echoed as she slammed her tail into Jeth’s muscular side. *You buffoon! You can not even get out of the way of your own four feet! You stepped on my tail we when woke this morning! The only thing that will be immortalized is your clumsiness!*

Dilaen and Thomas did not know why everyone broke out into genuine laughter and they could only watch as Lisisa turned, snatching up one of the large pillows and began beating Jeth’s enormous head. Dilaen and Thomas looked at Helen as she stepped up between them.

“*Feravomir!*” Dilaen asked in a confused voice.

Helen smiled as she watched Andro and the others turn and begin to push and shove Jeth back out of the patio doors. “I hope the two of you are prepared for what you have succeeded in doing this day.” She said.

“What do you mean?” Thomas asked.

“The children of Martin Leonidas and his Queens and the children of Torma and Isheeni. Bound together for all time by something that no one understands. Not even me.” Helen said calmly. “To impress one... you must impress the other. They are wolves and dragons of the blood. One blood. You have impressed both this day.”

“And joined the very small circle of those who are welcome within their personal lives.” Thr'won finished speaking.

“Indeed.” Helen said drawing them further into the main room. “Come... we will help ourselves to coffee and tea while they discipline Jeth for his remarks.”

Dilaen and Thomas glanced out of the double doors and saw Lisisa holding tightly to Jeth's neck, Androcles Leonidas and his brothers attempting to hold down his legs while the mahogany colored dragon was using her huge tail to try and push him over, while Elynth and the cerise colored dragon were behind Jeth's huge bulk attempting to keep him upright.

“Discipline him?” Dilaen gasped. “How do you discipline a dragon that big?”

Helen and Thr'won chuckled. “Very carefully.” They said together.

JORJAI THE WILDS HIGH COVEN INSURGENT BASE

It took quite a bit to impress him given what he had seen in the last twenty-five years, but Vonis was indeed impressed. The return trip to the insurgent base here on Jorjai had taken five days under Shroud, avoiding the Kavalian ships that were appearing more and more frequently in The Wilds. Jorjai was a medium sized, mountainous planet in what was once the former Lycavorian People's Republic space. Due to Martin Leonidas's actions during that short conflict, the planet had been stripped of everything man made. Little remained of the nineteen cities that had once populated the planet, and it had returned to the once wild planet that it had been thousands of years ago. Since almost everyone avoided this territory because of the angry reaction they thought they would receive from Union traders and importers, this space was rarely traveled through any longer and made for an excellent base of operations.

The Insurgent base was built into the ground beneath one of the former cities, hundreds of tunnels and rooms dotting nearly six square miles of underground. Built directly into the small asteroid sized moon of the planet was the insurgent shipyard, which much to Vonis's surprise held upwards of forty ships, to include four of the new *BLOOD REVERENCE* Class-Dreadnoughts. The base had exceptional defensive systems and plans considering that the insurgents were operating off of stolen funds. Vonis learned there were a much larger number of citizens within the High Coven that supported the insurgents than he was led to believe. They were provided with funds, weapons, supplies, food; everything needed to maintain their readiness and continue to be a very large thorn in the side of the his mother and her oppressive rule. He did not understand the almost reverent way he was looked at upon arriving here and receiving the tour of the base from Maros, but after nearly two months among them, he had come to accept it.

This is what Vonis had wanted to do from the outset. This was what he was born for he now knew. Shadow operations with men and women who were trained and at the razor's edge of readiness. For the vast majority of his life he had performed those tasks for the wrong side, and he had spent the last two decades doing all he could to atone for that mistake. If not for the half sister he had almost killed, and the Lycavorian man who loved her without question, Vonis had no doubts he would be nothing but a memory in the minds of so many. His excitement and happiness at doing what he knew he was good at was now tempered by only one thing. He missed his elven wife and their children. Va'nimia had been his savior and lifeline. Her dark hair and incredible blue eyes had been the catalyst to Vonis discovering his true purpose in this life, and not a morning went by that he did not thank her gods for giving her to him. She was his heart and soul now. She had given him five strong, healthy children and she loved him even more shamelessly now than she did the first year they were together.

He could remember every detail of their first days together, from the curve of her elven ears, to the taste of her incredibly sweet blood. She had loved him even then, when he had taken her prisoner as a sexual plaything on Elear, and she had started him down the road to his redemption. This was the longest he had been away from her since they had been together, and he ached for her. They had spoken three times since he arrived, each time her bright eyes and smile making him long for her more, but she was strong. She knew what he was doing was important, and even though she missed him terribly, he had her complete support.

Vonis heard the chime on the door for his quarters and he lowered the towel from his face. He was meeting with a group of senior insurgent officers to try and plan supply routes that would keep them out of Kavalian contact. The Kavalian surge into The Wilds had been the talk for the last three weeks among the men and women here, everyone having their own ideas as to why. They appeared to be looking for something, and as yet, no one could figure out what that was. Vonis moved quickly to the door and unlocked it. He waited while it slid open to reveal the female insurgent officer. It was a young vampire female, barely three hundred years old, and incredibly beautiful. She had long black hair and dark blue eyes, with flawless features and soft red lips. Vonis kept himself from smiling since he knew without Maros had assigned her to him in case Vonis wished companionship while he was here. Though the old Vonis would have leaped at the chance to have such a beautiful Pureblood in his bed, Va'nimia was all that occupied his thoughts now and he would never dishonor his elven wife in such a way.

“Colonel Vonis... Commander Maros sent me to get you sir! We are... we are receiving a transmission from the General!” She stated. “He has asked that you come right away!”

Vonis lowered the towel enough to expose his upper body which was bare and he reached for the shirt that hung by the door. “When did this come about Asharli?” Vonis asked as he pulled it on quickly.

Three hundred and three years old and her blue eyes flicked across Vonis’s chest and abdomen with great desire. Asharli was a Lieutenant in the insurgency, a communications and electronics expert. The High Coven had killed her parents when they were arrested for speaking publicly about ending the war with the Kavalians, and she had barely escaped with her life. Her dearest friend had been killed in the mad dash out of High Coven space and Asharli had gone to Ricot Four in the hopes of finding the insurgency. They had found her actually, after she had killed three Kochab mercenaries for attempting to have their way with her. She had not looked back since. When Colonel Vonis had arrived, Asharli had been like all the other young Purebloods and tried to catch a glimpse of him right away. She and several of her friends had fawned over him and his incredible good looks, and they wondered what it would be like to have his fangs sinking deeply into their necks while he pleased them.

“Asharli?” Vonis asked again.

Asharli shook her head. “Sir! I’m sorry! This transmission is unusual sir. It is being bounced between thirteen different repeaters so that it can not be traced. The General knows of this base, but he has never tried to contact us in this way before.”

Vonis finished buttoning his shirt and looked at her. “Lead the way Asharli.”

Vonis walked slowly into the communications center of the base, his eyes focused on the holoimage of the armored figure in the transmission stream. The helmeted head turned in the transmission to look at him as he entered and Maros turned.

“Vonis! Finally!” He exclaimed. “We have been waiting for you.”

“Have you?” Vonis spoke calmly as he stepped up next to Maros and looked at the life sized figure in the transmission.

“Yes.” Maros spoke. “General... may I present...”

“Colonel Vonis of Union Intelligence.” The mechanically filter voice finished. “Yes... I know who he is Maros.”

“Vonis has been among us for two months now General.” Maros said. “We made contact with the Union as you directed. Colonel Vonis is acting as their liaison to us.”

“Is he?” The voice said. “My directions were to make contact Maros... not allow them to look into the workings of our insurgency. And certainly not allow them to know where our largest and most secure base is?”

“You have no worries with me.” Vonis spoke now.

“Don’t I?” The figure spoke. “There is a standing Kill Order on you Colonel Vonis. You have far more people who want you dead than we have looking for us.”

Vonis grinned. “I know... and it pisses my mother off to the extreme that she can’t accomplish her goal where I am concerned.”

“Your presence is putting our insurgency in danger.” The figure spoke.

“My presence has kept your insurgency from coming toe-to-toe with the Union military.” Vonis said. “The actions of your men on Martin Leonidas’s flagship do not ingratiate trust. Had my sister and Aricia not intervened... your insurgency would have come to a very abrupt end for putting For’mya and Resumar Leonidas in danger.”

“My men went above what their directives were!” The figure snapped. “They were not authorized to conduct such an operation!”

“And you believe this would have stopped Martin Leonidas from hunting you down?” Vonis said. “He holds his family above everything but the survival of the Lycavorian Union. Our action in meeting with Maros and Colin Walsh... that is all that stopped him from unleashing wave after wave of Spartan warriors upon you. Do not overestimate your abilities General whoever you are. You have done well to remain hidden this long with my mother actively searching for you... however... without the ongoing Kavalian War have no doubts she would turn loose every *Venorik Elghinn* agent at her command and she would have found you.”

“Do you think me a fool?” The mechanical voice hissed. “These are things I have already considered.”

“Then you would do well to allow us to help.” Vonis said. “I have been here almost two months and you have known this no doubt. Why wait until now to contact me?”

“I have been conducting other business.” The armored figure said calmly. “I can not simply excuse myself and contact you on a whim. I must be mindful of everything around me. Everyone. If it was discovered who I am... all we have worked towards would be lost.”

“And what is it that you want?” Vonis asked.

“To end the oppression that m...” The figure began to reply angrily. They watched as he stopped talking and could see him take a deep breath. “The Empress and her daughter Yuri must be stopped. They are slowly leading our people into the abyss and are doing so with only the thought of more power in their minds. They must be stopped and made to atone for the crimes they have committed and continue to commit.”

“By putting you in charge?” Vonis asked.

“I have no interest in leading the High Coven.” The figure answered almost immediately which caused Vonis’s eyes to widen slightly.

“Yet you fight to overthrow Aikiro. You lead others in this endeavor.” Vonis said softly. “Does that not imply some interest?”

“My reasons for doing this are my own Colonel Vonis.” The General answered. “They do not include leading the High Coven, but they will ultimately lead to the same end. There are many competent individuals within our many cells that are more than qualified. And recent events around me have shown me that anything is possible.”

“And where are you now?” Vonis asked.

The General shook his helmeted head. “As I said un... Colonel Vonis... I am not a fool.”

“I am not implying you are.” Vonis said. “However... I have been going through the mission specifications of the last seven assignments you have given to Maros over the last five years. They have been critical targets to the High Coven and it has severely hampered them in many ways. This information implies a working knowledge of my mother’s inner circle. A circle that has shrunk considerably in the last years. That tells me two things sir. The first is that whoever you are, you have access to information that very few do. A hundred... perhaps two hundred individuals since the Kavalian war began.”

“While it has shrunk as you say...” The General spoke. “It is much larger than you think it is. There is really no choice for her but to trust others.”

“Such as yourself?” Vonis asked.

“Yes.”

“And she does not suspect your dual allegiance?” Vonis asked. “As powerful as she is... I find that very hard to believe.”

“You may believe what you wish Colonel Vonis.” The General spoke evenly. “And my allegiance is to the High Coven and its continued existence under a leader who does not crave power and things that are not hers to have. If she suspected me... we would not be standing here having this discussion now would we?”

“Maybe... maybe not... this leads me into my second point. Given the position you seem to have... how do I know you are simply not working for her? How do I know she is not the one that has given you all these grand targets you have supplied to your leaders? All in an effort to make the leaders of the insurgency expose themselves to her so that she can kill them.” Vonis spoke. “This could very well be an attempt to draw the Union into your war with the Kavalians using blackmail and threats if it was discovered we are helping the insurgents against the laws of our own constitution.”

“How do I know you are not doing the same thing?” The general said. He turned his head. “Maros... shoot Colonel Vonis in the head.”

Maros’s eyes went wide. “General!” He exclaimed.

“Shoot Colonel Vonis in the head please.” The general said again.

“I will not!” Maros barked. “I will not! He is a hero to the insurgency! A light of hope of what we could be! I will not be the one to extinguish that! No!”

Vonis looked at Maros and saw the set of the man’s jaw, and how no one else in the room had moved to comply with the order.

“You see.” The general spoke waiting until Vonis turned back. “I do not command... nor do I demand complete obedience Colonel Vonis. We are all working towards one goal and that is the day Empress Aikiro or Yuri no longer leads the High Coven. They look to me because of my position and the information I can and do provide to them that will best insure that goal. There have been far more times when I have ordered them not to act because it was a trap. That is why we have survived as long as we have. With the Union’s help or without it, one day we will achieve that goal. I believe... as many others do... that with your help we can make that day come much sooner.”

“And why do you want this?” Vonis asked. “You have more to gain than anyone. What inspires you to act as you do? What possessed you to start down this road?”

The general took a deep breath and began to talk. The communications room became as silent as a tomb as the past of the leader they all followed was related to them. A past they had never known before this day.

“Twelve years ago I witnessed something. I was still but a child then and I witnessed something evil and I saw where that evil would lead my people. Our people. I saw burning hatred. Hatred that has existed and fermented for millennia because of a deed none of us had anything to do with. Not you. Not me. Not anyone in that room with you. And not anyone who occupies this planet I am on now. We are all innocent. That evil touched me as well that day Colonel Vonis. Not as completely as it did the other I was watching, but it marked me just the same. It made me what I am today.” The general’s forged mechanical voice cracked a little. “In that evil however... in that evil I saw my salvation. My salvation is a person. Twelve years I have seen this person, felt them within me. As part of me. It is they who have allowed me to control what is within me, and soon we will be together. I have no intention of allowing the Empress or her daughter to keep me from my salvation, and I will kill without remorse or hesitation whoever stands in my way. And make no mistake... I do have the skills to do just that. It just so happens that my salvation is the High Coven’s salvation as well.”

Vonis was silent for a long moment as he looked at the figure in the transmission. “You weave a compelling story General.” He spoke finally.

“Yes... I’m sure.” He spoke holding up the data pad. “Perhaps this will help you to see that I am pure in my intentions.” He plugged the pad into the portable console he lifted into sight. “Maros... encryption algorithm two one nine. These are your orders.” Maros moved quickly to the large computer console as the data began coming in. “The High Coven and the Lycavorian Union are planning a special joint covert operation into Kavalian space to destroy a previously unknown Mindvoice ship. The Union and King Leonidas are going for the purpose of destroying this ship and making sure it does not fall into the hands of the Kavalians. The Empress does not intend to let any of the Union team survive, and she plans to steal this ship to use for her own evil purposes. Prince Resumar and his new wife Athani are leading the mission, and while I’m quite sure they no more trust the Empress than we do, I’m also quite sure they do not know the lengths she will go to in order to have this ship.” The general spoke. “Maros... you will take two of our *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts and an entire squadron of other ships under shroud into Kavalian space and stand by at these coordinates. The

Union is sending only one ship... a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser called *PILLAR OF FAITH*, but if I know the Empress as I do... they will not be alone.”

“Our orders General?” Maros asked.

“Remain hidden until such time as Resumar Leonidas is successful in destroying this ship, or as I suspect, he will need help.” The general replied.

“That... that is half our heavy capital ship numbers General.” Maros said.

“I know... but we do not want the Empress to secure this ship for any reason Maros. And we most definitely do not want the Kavalians to discover it either.” The General spoke. “If the ground operation fails... it is my hope that a combined bombardment from a *LEONIDAS II* and two *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts will be enough to smash this ship into atoms. The operation will commence in five days time... calculate four days travel time to the target... and you have over a week to get into position and request that Colonel Vonis be returned to safety.”

“I will go with them.” Vonis spoke immediately.

The general shook his head quickly. “No. I can not be responsible for you once we are in Kavalian space. I do not know what will happen and I do not want your death on my hands. You will return to your elven wife Va’nimia and pass on what I have told you in case anything happens.”

Vonis cocked his head slightly. “I can get you Jump Gates codes and Jump corridors through Union space that would get you there much quicker. They are known only to the military. You can be in position when this strike team arrives. And I will not allow my nephew, adopted though he may be, I will not let him go there with no support.”

“He will have support.” The general said. “Us.”

Vonis nodded. “And mine as well.” He stated. “A familiar voice and face that he knows he can trust. I can vouch for your people as well.”

The general looked at him. “Very well Colonel. I accept your offer.”

“Now I want something in return.” Vonis said. “A show of good faith if you will.”

“And that would be what?” The general asked.

“I think you know.” Vonis said. “You want trust from me... then give me that same trust back.”

The helmeted head stared at him for a long moment before turning slightly to Maros. “Maros... clear the room.”

“General?” He gasped.

“Clear the room Maros. You and Asharli may stay... but clear the others.”

Maros snapped his head around. “You heard the general! Clear the room!” He bellowed. It took only moments before the room was cleared and Maros turned back from securing the doors. He stepped back up to Vonis staring at the transmission.

“General... you do not have to do this.” Maros spoke softly.

“Yes I do.” He replied. “I also need to reveal to you some new allies that we have been looking for Maros.” He spoke motioning with his hand to the sides. “It seems I have had guardians all of this time and did not know it.”

They watched as the two hulking Immortals stepped into the transmission now on either side of the man he had followed for seven years now. Maros’s eyes grew wide. “Immortals!” He gasped.

“Not just any Immortals Maros.” The general spoke reaching up to unlatch one side of where his helmet was attached to his armor. “Immortals who follow Cha’talla.”

Asharli stepped closer. “Then it is true!” She gasped. “Cha’talla lives!”

The general looked at Vonis who did not appear surprised. “You knew.” He asked.

Vonis nodded. Yes.” He answered. “We discover this shortly before leaving to meet with Maros and Joyar.”

“You are very good at keeping secrets Colonel.” The general spoke unlatching the opposite side of his helmet. “I truly hope you can keep this secret just as well.” He spoke as he pulled away the helmet and revealed his face.

COASTAL CITY OF ACHIM SIX HUNDRED KILOMETERS SOUTH OF TUYA

He didn't pause or hesitate and drove the point of his *Nehtes* through the back of the black clad attacker in front of him. His wolf senses were on full combat alert, every scent and shift of the light coastal breeze carrying all the information he needed to know. His dark eyes were filled with anger. Anger that they had been found. His six foot one frame was tightly packed with muscle, the ebony skin of his hand and arm coated in a mixture of sweat and blood. Three times he had avoided his death this night, each time adding another scar to his body. One bullet wound in his upper arm had missed the bone and seated itself in the meat of his muscle there. It was the most painful of the wounds, but nothing like he had experienced in the past. Two other silenced rounds had grazed his leg and abdomen while he had fought. He twisted his *Nehtes* violently in his large hand, feeling and hearing the damage he was doing to the body cavity of his attacker. It was nothing more than a soft gasp and inaudible whiffing sound and then the body of the fourth attacker was crumbling to the grass under him. He reached out quickly and snagged the attacker's weapon before it clattered to the ground and yanked his *Nehtes* free of the body as it collapsed.

There was one more attacker somewhere on his mother's property. Her estate was of medium size and very modest. The east side was lined with white sandy beaches; the north with hilly terrain leading up into the mountains and to the west laid the rest of the bustling and growing city of Achim. He squatted in the night air allowing his wolf senses to reach out around him. He had been alerted to their presence by the motion alarms he had installed after bringing her here. It had taken him thirty seconds to come fully awake and leave her warm body and arms and disappear into the night. She knew what to do, and along with his mother they were now in a very secure vault room in the basement of her home.

His name was Joci, and at the moment he was very dead and had been for over a year. Or at least that is what was being reported by the Netnews. His ebony skin glistened in sweat and his skin felt the breeze from across the ocean shift inland. As it changed direction, he caught the pepper like smell faintly. It filtered to him from the east, and was quickly gone as the breeze swirled around the buildings on her estate. It was all he needed and he moved soundlessly to the east, blending into the darkness like a shadow. His six foot one body had been forged over six hundred years of combat and training and he moved with the confident grace of a master killer. He had been betrayed by someone he thought was his friend. Rinard had told him he had quite unexpectedly discovered a Hadarian female that was a twin to Queen Anja in almost every way, and she enjoyed the company of multiple men at once. He knew Joci had somewhat of a mild infatuation with Anja and he had used that against him. He had used that infatuation to coerce Joci into the group fucking sessions with the woman and several other men. They had thought it hysterical that she looked a twin to their queen, and they did all sorts of vile things to her during the times they were together. Queen Anja's beauty had always been able to illicit reactions from Joci, and when he was part of that group Rinard had put together, he knew almost immediately that something was wrong.

Yes... he had fucked her just like all the others, yet the third time he had taken her; he had seen something in those jade colored eyes. Some faint pain and hurt in those beautiful orbs that told him this woman was not doing this willingly, and did not completely understand what was happening to her. Joci could smell Rinard all over the woman, and unlike the others Joci was intelligent enough to realize that Rinard had changed her into a wolf. Her Mindvoice abilities were stagnant and almost non-existent, and even for a turned female that should not have been the case. She had no scent except for Rinard's foul stench in her blood and that had been the biggest alarm in his head after getting over his excitement.

Joci had remained on Hadaria after their last tryst, if only to try and discover what it was Rinard was doing. When he saw Rinard come out of his apartment that night with the large bundle over his shoulder Joci knew something was terribly wrong. He had followed him to the Union shipyard and waited while Rinard tossed the bundle into the incinerator pile. Once Rinard had departed Joci raced forward to see what it was that Rinard had dumped. To his horror he found her.

Two *Nehtes* thrusts directly through her chest, blood saturating the front of her naked body with a nasty cut across her left cheek and blood staining the insides of her thighs and ass. It was a body Joci had taken immense pleasure in only a few short hours before. As he was beginning to turn and leave to follow Rinard back to his apartment and kill him she groaned softly. Joci turned back to see those beautiful jade colored eyes

fluttering open and close, blood escaping from between those soft lips, and to his complete and utter amazement the two *Nehtes* wounds beginning to slowly and painfully knit themselves back together. Joci's decision had been immediate and without hesitation. He had covered her body in the same blanket Rinard had brought her in and just minutes before the incinerator destroyed any trace that she had ever been there, Joci disappeared into the Hadarian night.

That had been just over fourteen long months ago, and now whatever Rinard had been involved in had come back to haunt them. They had seen the Netnews broadcasts these last weeks and Joci knew then why Rinard had done what he did. It angered him almost to the point of insanity, but his love for his mate did not allow him to do what he felt was right. She had come so far in fourteen months thanks to his love and his mother, and Joci had no intention of allowing anything to affect her now. This time was different however. This time she was his mate and wife, and she was not the weak woman she had been those nights long ago. She was no longer the clone Joci discovered that she was three weeks after bringing her here to his mother's home. And this time they had come looking to kill her.

Joci spotted the fifth attacker easily. The fool had unwittingly silhouetted himself on the corner of the house in what little moonlight there was on this night. Joci smiled a savage smile as he moved silently through the trees and bushes, his bare feet making no sound. He came up behind the fifth attacker and was upon him before the man knew he was there. Joci didn't extend his *Nehtes* this time; he simply rammed the short shaft forward into the man's armpit with all of his strength. The man's body lifted off the ground as the air left his lungs in a loud whoosh! Joci ignored the dropped weapon and let it clatter to the concrete and granite walkway as he rammed the man's head into the side of the brick and steel house. The unknown attacker could not fight back as his entire left side was numb from the blow to his armpit. He clawed at the secondary weapon he always carried, a long bladed knife with his right hand. As he got it clear of the sheath on his right side his head smashed into the unyielding side of the stone structure and his vision blossomed into bright stars and agonizing pain. Fighting through the pain he tried to stab out with the knife into the chest of the Spartan who held him. He could only just understand what was happening as Joci grabbed his right wrist and twisted savagely while leaning close to the man's head. The man's wrist and forearm was crushed under the immense power of the Lycavorian and when he opened his mouth to scream Joci brought the edge of the *Nehtes* smashing across his exposed face. The assassin's jaw shattered like glass fragments. Joci pulled the *Nehtes* back and spun it gracefully in his fingertips before jamming the spear end against the assassin's head and thumbing the extend button.

The head of the *Nehtes* drove through the assassin's skull and embedded itself into the wall of his mother's home, killing the man instantly. Joci ripped the *Nehtes* free and spun around searching for more targets, but knowing there were none. He collapsed the one half of his *Nehtes* and squatted down for a moment, drawing his combat adrenaline into his wolf senses and reaching out with his wolf senses. After two minutes Joci was satisfied that all of his attackers were dead. He immediately moved for the door into his mother's home and passed through the main room, barely glancing at the cooling body of the first assassin. He made his way to the kitchen area and to the back wall that held the cabinets and cooling units. He grabbed the side of the cabinet and heaved to the side, the two hundred kilo metal cabinet sliding easily on metal tracks to reveal a steel door. He stepped up to the panel and punched in a seven digit code. The door beeped three times and then hissed upward. Joci found himself staring down the barrels of two K14s held by the dark skinned older woman with white hair and the deeply tanned face of his mate. Her brown streaked blond hair was long and so very soft, her jade green eyes bright and extraordinarily alert. She was more of a twin to Queen Anja than her own sister Princess Sivana, and if not for the blond hair and two inch long scar that now marked her cheek it would be as if he was staring into the face of his Queen.

Joci knew this woman was not the Queen he had once fantasized about however. This woman was his mate and his very life now. This woman wanted only him. This woman was Ceuma and she was his light.

His mother Toncae was a traditional Lycavorian female of almost five thousand years of age. The moment she saw the clone in her son's arms in her doorway, she knew he had gotten involved in something far beyond his ability to cope. It had taken her only another three days to come to realize that her son had fallen deeply in love with a clone of Queen Anja. While this did not come as much of a shock to her, what shook Toncae to her core was the fact that the clone was now half wolf, with the cognizant abilities of a seven year old in the body of a woman. Joci had told her everything, and from that day forward she had set upon the task of

changing the clone into a Lycavorian woman. Six and seven days of schooling Ceuma went through for seven months. She absorbed everything that his mother could throw at her and even more. Rinard had apparently never allowed her to learn, keeping her locked away in some small room she had told them, but she had a thirst for learning that his mother had never seen before and it was this thirst that she fed. At first Joci thought she would hate him for what he had done, he avoided her for weeks because of this, but knowing that he could not show his own face in the city or its many markets, he had to face her. He had faked his drowning death that day Rinard had dumped Ceuma's body, and now he could not leave his mother's estate. He busied himself running in the mountains of her property and honing his already lethal skills, all in an effort to find redemption by killing Rinard. He did not know that his mother had told Ceuma everything that had happened, and not only was she not angry with him but she had developed very powerful feelings for him. It was Ceuma who had told him that of all the men who had taken her, Joci had been the kindest and most gentle. He could almost not bear to be in her presence so shamed that he was, but Ceuma had drawn his attention anyway.

Eight months after arriving at his mother's estate, Joci took an extremely animated and very happy Ceuma as his mate, biting her in exactly the same location that Rinard had and washing away some of the horrible memories she might have had about that time. He swore to her he would honor her for all time from that day forward, always trying to find redemption for his actions. The memories would never go away he knew, but she was turning out to be a strong woman. Stronger than he had ever thought possible.

"They are dead." Joci spoke softly.

Ceuma lowered the K14 instantly and stepped into the arms of the man who held her very essence within his grasp. Ceuma knew what she was; Joci and Toncae held nothing back from her once she was able to understand what had happened. Because of her clone genes she learned at an incredibly accelerated rate and in only eight months time she had the complete knowledge and skills of a female wolf that had been raised in this life from birth. Ceuma knew why Joci had first been part of Rinard's plan, and though that thought had entered her mind every so often, it never stayed for more than a second and had not occurred in the six months she had been his mate. In the last fourteen months, Joci had shown her it was Ceuma that he loved and not the clone that looked like Anja Leonidas. Joci's mother Toncae had encouraged Ceuma to change her hair color and choose a name, joking that it wasn't often you got to pick your name. She had chosen Ceuma because it meant roots of the tree in Lycavorian and with Joci's mother guiding her actions; Ceuma was much more a traditional Lycavorian woman tied to the roots of what she learned. While she shared many of the traits of Queen Anja, and had much knowledge that she did not understand, Ceuma was far more demure in her manner. At least out of their bed. Joci's nuzzle could set her on fire, his very touch could ignite burning desire within her for him, and in their bed Ceuma wanted to be a spitfire. The simple difference in their skin color was enough to incite her passion for him. She pressed her face to her mate's bare chest and felt the blood on his skin now. She pulled her head back.

"Joci you are injured!" She exclaimed loudly. "Toncae my mother... the lights please... hurry."

Joci braced for the brightness of the lights and then the small room he had built for just this purpose was bathed in harsh white light. He heard his mother gasp at the wounds on his body.

"Joci!" She exclaimed.

Ceuma guided him to the bench and began examining the wounds. True to the Hadarian genes in her clone body, Ceuma had become very interested in healing. She had knowledge within her that she did not understand or comprehend, but she instinctively knew how to treat injuries.

"The projectile is still lodged in your muscle my mate." She spoke probing his dark skin with her delicate fingers. "I need to remove it."

Joci nodded. "Do it." He spoke.

Toncae moved around to the other side of her youngest son. "Who were they Joci?" She asked. "It has to do with everything concerning Queen Anja doesn't it?"

Joci nodded and looked at Ceuma. "I don't know who they were, but they were after us." He said. "Five of them."

"Someone must have seen me in the market and gotten a good look at my face." Ceuma spoke as she lifted a pair of automated forceps. She held the tapered end of the forceps near the wound and watched as the small fingers extended and entered the entry wound in his arm. He winced in pain as the thin fingers probed through his skin and flesh until they found the projectile and began extracting it from his arm. The moment it

came free Ceuma tossed the forceps down and placed a sterile bandage over the wound. He lifted his hand and held it there while she let her fingers drop to the two other wounds. The grazing wounds had long ago stopped bleeding and they would heal on their own as soon as Joci was able to shift.

“I know you are careful.” Joci said. “We can not stay here anymore however.”

“Joci where will we go?” Toncae asked. “I will not be chased out of my home!”

“Whoever sent these assassins will send more when they do not check in. If more are not already on their way.” Joci spoke.

“Your mother is right husband.” Ceuma spoke softly. “And we place her at risk no matter where we go.”

Joci looked at her and brought his hands up quickly. Ceuma smiled as his large hands took either side of her face and he ran his thumbs across her cheeks. She covered his hands with her own and brought her forehead to his. “I will allow no more harm to come to you Ceuma. I have caused you more pain than a husband ever should cause the one who he loves. Never again.”

Ceuma kissed him softly as his hands dropped to her firm ass and he pulled her petite body close to his. She loved it when he crushed her body against his. “You have given me far more than you will ever know Joci my love.”

“Ceuma...?”

Ceuma dragged her finger across his lips, silencing his words. “You know there is only one way to end this Joci. And so do I.”

“It does not... it doesn’t have to be that way.” He protested.

“Yes it does.” Ceuma spoke. “I am not afraid husband. Not any longer.”

Joci stared at her for a long moment saying nothing and just staring into her jade green eyes. Finally he nodded and rose to his feet.

“I... I know where we can go.” Joci spoke rising to his feet. “Gather some things quickly. We must leave within minutes. They could have others arriving at any time.”

Husen watched as his mate Relina lowered their youngest son into the small crib and spread the blanket over him. Watching her as he did, his mind was flung back over two decades to the day he killed his own father and cemented himself on this path. He was among the thousands rescued by King Leonidas and his Queen Anja from Lycavore and that action had locked his loyalty in for all time. It had also allowed him to realize what the woman in front of him meant to his future. She had given him four children now, and his desire for her had never waned once. They had returned to Apo Prime and settled in Achim because neither of them had ever seen an ocean before. Husen had made the decision to enter the Union Ground Forces after he and Relina had settled into their home. He had been assigned to one of Apo Prime’s premier ground divisions and was now a Captain in that same unit.

Neither of them believed for a second the Netnews reports that had been playing for weeks about Anja Leonidas. They had seen the savage devotion to each other that King Leonidas and Anja had displayed on Lycavore, and no security footage would make them doubt that in the least.

Husen turned his head when the chime on their door sounded. He turned back to Relina as she looked at him confused. “Who would come calling at this hour?” She asked walking up to him.

Husen shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know... but I will be getting rid of them quickly.” He told her. “I have developed a sudden urge to feel my mate’s flesh in my hands.”

Relina grinned and looked at him. “Have you now?” She asked. “That sounds promising my husband.”

Husen smiled and turned from their son’s bedroom. “I will be right back.”

Their smallest had a room all his own, their two daughters shared a room further down the corridor, and their oldest son had his own room. Husen had expanded their home twice since they had been living here, and had plans to expand it a third time. Husen moved across their main room to the door and unlocked the sensor pad. He passed his hand over the sensor and watched as the door slid open.

Husen’s eyes went wide when he saw the tall black Spartan in his doorway and the two cloaked figures behind him.

“Joci!” He gasped aloud. The security footage of Queen Anja flashed in his head and Husen acted as any Spartan would. He snatched Joci by the front of his shirt and with a great heave of strength he slammed him into the wall inside his home. “You *ronnus!*” Husen screamed. “*Forn nubous ronnus!*”

“Husen! Wait! I can explain!” Joci stammered quickly.

“Do you know what you have done?” Husen spat. “You are supposed to be dead! What did you and the others do to her! What drug did you give her to make her act in such a way! Tell me Joci! Tell me and I may spare your life!”

Husen froze when he felt the cold steel of the weapon barrel press to the side of his head. He looked out the corner of his eye and saw one of the cloaked figures holding the K14 in a very steady grip.

“Release my mate this instant or I will shoot you dead where you stand.” The very female voice spoke from under the cloak.

“In which case I will kill you both!” Relina’s voice echoed and they all turned to see her standing to the side holding Husen’s P190.

“Husen... let me explain!” Joci hissed softly.

Husen turned back to Joci. “What is there to explain?” Husen snapped.

“You do not know what is going on Husen!” Joci pleaded.

“Explain it to me then!” Husen snarled. “Explain to me why they say you are dead and have been for over a year! Explain to me why you are in security footage taking part in the rape of our queen! Tell me Joci! You were my friend!”

“I still am!” Joci declared.

“No friend of mine would debase our Queen!” Husen shouted. “Not the Queen who had a part in pulling Relina and I from a life that would have killed us! Not...” Husen stopped talking when the cloaked figure next to him threw back the hood.

“*Son vada carians!*” Relina hissed.

Husen stared in open mouth shock at what he saw. She had long blond hair streaked with brown, she had jade green eyes and a two inch long scar on her cheek, but standing before them was Queen Anja Leonidas. At least that is what it appeared.

“We need your help Husen.” Joci spoke. “We need you to contact someone who can get word to Queen Anja. I know you and several others that came from Lycavore have this ability.”

Husen glanced back to him and then turned his head back to Ceuma. Anja Leonidas had been present at the birth of all his children and even after the events on Lycavore; she had never held it against him.

“How?” Husen gasped.

“It was Rinard’s doing Husen.” Joci spoke. “And now somehow they found out Ceuma is still alive. They...”

“Ceuma?” Husen asked.

Joci nodded. “That is the name she has taken. They came for us tonight. I eliminated five of them on my mother’s estate. I... I can no longer protect us alone. We... we were friends once Husen. I beg you to help us now.”

Husen looked at him. “She... she called you her mate?”

Joci nodded. “Yes. Six months now.”

“Joci... Joci what is going on?” Husen asked as he released him and stepped back and Relina came up next to him.

“It... it is a long story.” Joci replied. “I will tell you... but can you help us?”

Husen looked at him for a long moment before nodding his head. “I have... I have Anja’s personal COM channel.”

Relina was the first to react and she slung the P190 over her shoulder and ushered them into the main room of their house. “Come inside quickly. Before others see you.” She spoke holding out her hand for Ceuma.

“My father taught me the art of war is simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike him as hard as you can, and keep moving on.”

“And what did he tell you about being outnumbered seven to one Andro?”

“Ah... that one is easy Sa’sur. Put your head between your legs and kiss your ass goodbye should cover it nicely.”

“Oh that’s brilliant! So what you are saying is when that arrogant Kavalian Admiral asshole, whatever his name is, contacts us demanding our surrender I can tell him to kiss my elven ass!”

“I would use more colorful language, but yes essentially that is what you can do.”

“Well that’s good to know.”

*-Conversation between Androcles and Captain Sa’sur of the SCIMITAR-
-Battle of Petoria Three-
-Kavalian Wars-
-Earth Year 2576-*

**-Recorded by Dilaen Roan-
-Narrator-
-Personal Journals of Androcles Leonidas-**

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR EDEN CITY

Ne'Veha had never been more nervous in her entire life. Twice she had changed her mind about going, but her curiosity as to why her father had lied to her and Sadi’s words ringing in her head overpowered that quickly. She dressed in conservative civilian clothes and made the transport just as it was leaving. All during the trip her heart was racing, wondering why her father would tell Ne’Veha that her grandmother was dead all of these years. She sat by herself, her dark eyes staring off into space for the entire trip to the station and then down to Earth and Eden City itself. She ignored the hundreds of others that were making the trips back and forth to the ships in orbit of Earth, dismissing the frequent looks from males of both elf and Lycavorian descent as they admired her, and making her way through the spaceport until she saw the Heavy Military Lifter with the insignia of the 47th Spartan Guard Division.

Ne'Veha knew of the 47th SGD and its short but compelling history. It was formed after the Battle for Earth some twenty-six years ago, and was made up of all the surviving members of General Vistr’s 800 Spartan Shock Troops that had come to Earth to fight the High Coven in that last great battle on the plains outside Eden City. They had fought beside their King that day and almost to a man, they had chosen to remain on Earth and make new lives for themselves and help to guard the planet they had a hand in restoring. The driver of the heavy Lifter was a senior enlisted man and he treated Ne'Veha as arriving royalty in his actions and words. The trip to the modest home on the outskirts of Eden City was usually quick but because of the heavy Lifter traffic near the spaceport it took one hour and nine minutes this time. Ne'Veha was then standing outside the home and staring at the woman who was her grandmother. A woman who her father had told her since she was a small child had been dead for almost two hundred years.

Na'rnoas was not much taller than Ne'Veha’s own five foot three, her dark hair still shiny and soft in the light inside the home. She was a typical elven woman in her beauty and the way she carried herself. She had long legs, a small waist and medium sized breasts that were full and firm wrapped in the shirt she was wearing. What Ne'Veha thought was gray hair in the original transmission were actually streaks of white hair that looked to be put there on purpose as a style of some sort. Ne'Veha could only stare at her, taking in the tall Colonel who she now knew was her uncle standing beside her. The younger Lycavorian woman with a huge smile on her face stood on the other side of Ri'nol, the woman gripping his arm tightly. Ne'Veha also saw the towering Lycavorian man who stood behind Na'rnoas. He was easily over six feet tall, and looked to be over two hundred pounds easily. His brown hair was cut short, the beard and mustache he wore meticulously trimmed. His narrow dark eyes watched her intently, almost protectively as he stood just behind Na'rnoas. This must be the man that Na'rnoas had left her grandfather for.

Na'rnoas had embraced her then, and Ne'Veha had felt the warmth spread through her without knowing why, but savoring in the feelings it made course through her. Na'rnoas had taken her hands and simply stared at her before pulling her into the home, tears streaking her face, and that had begun nearly four hours of discovery that Ne'Veha found herself thoroughly enjoying. She was struck by the openness and warm air of the home; she was treated as a member of the family without question or pause. The banter was pleasant and free, Ne'Veha being included in everything. She discovered Na'rnoas had had three other children with the Lycavorian officer Jonout, two of them girls and another son and all of them lived on Earth with their husbands and wives. They spoke of their children and what was happening in the city and the Union, never pressing Ne'Veha on anything and acting as if she had been joining them for dinner like this for years. Ne'Veha also noticed that Jonout and Ri'nol had a habit of nuzzling their wives and mates at different times, nuzzles which always seemed to elicit soft sighs of delight and contentment. Ri'nol's two children, the baby girl she had seen in the arms of his Lycavorian wife in the transmission and the young boy who was full of energy and running around the table for most of dinner had kept her entertained as well. The baby had a habit of shifting to wolf form at the most inopportune times, and this caused everyone to laugh and chuckle, especially when the wolf pup would bang its nose into the wall and start wailing.

It wasn't until Na'rnoas had taken her hand, given her a large mug of coffee and one for herself and directed them into the yard and patio that Ne'Veha's true discovery began. Na'rnoas guided her to the comfortable bench in the yard and they settled into it silently. She sipped her coffee and turned to look at her.

"You look as if you have hundreds of questions child." She spoke softly. "I will answer as many as I am able."

"Why?" Ne'Veha asked first of all.

Na'rnoas smiled gently. "I do not know why your father has told you I was dead all of these years. As I said... he is much like his father... and he even followed him into politics. Something that I abhor."

"What... what happened?" Ne'Veha asked her.

"That is simple really." Na'rnoas replied. "Your grandfather Me'mar was a member of the Lower Parliament just as your father is now. He was almost never home, always attending one meeting or another. I got to attend all the official functions and such but I was never more than an add on to him. Something pretty to look at while he mingled with the others. When your father was born I saw even less of him. When your grandfather sent your father to the finest private political school on Elear, I was lost. I had nothing to do Ne'Veha. Your father was only seven at the time he left, and your grandfather took that away from me. Your father was my life up until then, but your grandfather didn't want the added responsibility that a child gave us... and I did. It was also the reason we never had more children." Na'rnoas took a deep breath.

"After this happened I would travel to Aetia on the other side of the planet on certain days as a way to punish your grandfather. It really had no effect. I continued to go in order to fill my time and that is where I met Jonout." Na'rnoas spoke. "I always went to the same café and one day he was there. He was with two other officers; they were part of the Elear Defense Forces at the time. He was new to Elear and I would see him every time I went there. I didn't find out until much later that this is actually how he planned it. He had seen me there that first day and couldn't get me out of his head. One day the café was unusually busy and I arrived later than normal and could not get a table. Jonout offered me his. He was going to leave because he was embarrassed, but I insisted he stay and allow me to buy him a cup of tea for his kindness. We began to talk and every time I arrived in Aetia at that time he was there. I knew he was planning it, but he was very handsome and very friendly and I enjoyed the attention." Na'rnoas looked at her with a smile.

"It started off innocent enough really. I was lonely... he was new to Elear and wanted the company. We talked of everything we did. A decade this went on Ne'Veha! I saw him in this way for a decade... that is the extent and power of his love for me." Ne'Veha could see the happiness in her eyes when she spoke and knew that what she was saying was the truth. "At first it was only once or twice a month... I was married to your grandfather and I felt guilty for meeting with him. I think that was one of the deciding factors in my decision. A family was not what your grandfather wanted. A family is what I wanted. Jonout understood that because he wanted a family as well. We began seeing more of each other then... easily four or five times a month. I had more in common with Jonout than I ever did with Me'mar."

"You didn't...?" Ne'Veha began to ask but quickly stopped herself. "Forgive me... I should not have asked that."

Na'rnoas chuckled and took Ne'Veha's hand and squeezed it. "No. Jonout was and still is in many respects a very traditional Lycavorian. Having an affair with me while I was married was not something he would have done. I would have... gods I would have. I wanted him so bad." Na'rnoas shook her head. "He would not. Looking back now... when I see how long he pursued me but never pressured me..." Na'rnoas shook her head.

"Then... then what happened?" Ne'Veha asked.

"I went to your grandfather Me'mar finally and confronted him." Na'rnoas answered easily. "I told him about Jonout... that Me'mar never paid me any mind and I wanted more. I told him Jonout gave that to me. I told him we had been seeing each other for almost ten years and Jonout loved me even though I was married to him. I told him we had never slept together but the urge was becoming too strong to resist." Na'rnoas met her eyes. "Your grandfather told me to do what I felt I needed to do to curb my physical needs. His only requirement was not to embarrass him in any way."

Ne'Veha looked at her stunned. "You are... you are serious!" She gasped.

Na'rnoas nodded her head. "I was just as stunned then as you are now." She said. "When I told Jonout he was absolutely livid. He almost went to your grandfather himself and was intent on letting him know what a fool he was. How he was disrespecting me with his actions."

"He... he didn't?" Ne'Veha asked.

Na'rnoas shook her head quickly. "No! I couldn't allow that! Jonout would have hurt him and quite possibly ruined his career." She smiled fondly as she remembered how Jonout acted back then. So protective of her, so loving and caring. "Up until then all he had done was kiss me Ne'Veha. And I practically had to force him to do that." Na'rnoas continued. "Oh my, but what a kisser he was! The way he nuzzled my ears... I thought for sure I would faint whenever he did that."

Ne'Veha's mind quickly went to the moment that Andro had nuzzled her own ears so very gently and sent shivers shooting through her. And that was without her even being sexually excited. Just his casual nuzzle had nearly overcome her. Thinking on it now, Tarren's nuzzle, even in the midst of the passion of the moment did not come even close. She lifted her eyes and looked at her grandmother. "What did you do?" She asked softly.

"I did what my heart told me to do." Na'rnoas answered immediately. "I returned and told your grandfather I was leaving him. I told him I was ending our marriage. On the shuttle ride back to Aetia... oh Ne'Veha I had never felt such freedom. Jonout was waiting for me at the spaceport. Your father was almost twenty by now and I quickly tried to contact him when I got to Aetia... but your grandfather had already gotten to him. He was enraged and demanded that I return and make amends with your grandfather. I tried to explain to him why I had done what I did, but all he could say was that I was associating myself with a Lycavorian military officer! A man who was beneath my position as your grandfather Me'mar's wife. Your grandfather went so far as to try and have Jonout arrested for abducting me." Na'rnoas shook her head sadly. "Imagine the surprise on the two elven officers who came to Jonout's home in Aetia to arrest him and I was there. I presented my petition to dissolve my marriage to your grandfather to them."

Ne'Veha shook her head. "This is all so... so unbelievable." She stated.

Na'rnoas nodded. "I agree." She said. "I thought perhaps time would have smoothed things over and when we returned for your grandfather's passing on ceremony I spoke with your father."

"You went to grandfather's ceremony?" She gasped.

Na'rnoas nodded. "Jonout insisted." She answered. "He said it was the honorable thing to do. We did have a child together, Me'mar and I."

"What... what did father do?" Ne'Veha asked.

"He called me some choice names mind you..." Na'rnoas answered. "And Jonout even worse. He told me I was not welcome and I would never be forgiven for what I did. That was one hundred and eighty years ago. Jonout's ship was involved with the Entalian Incursion by the High Coven. It was destroyed and he lost a lot of good people that day. I was with him... and we escaped with the survivors of his crew. It was initially reported that all hands were lost. This is where your father got the idea we were dead."

Ne'Veha looked at her. "How long... how long has he known you were alive?" She asked.

Na'rnoas shrugged. "He discovered the truth ten years later when Jonout and I returned to Elear from Apo Prime. Jonout had taken a temporary command in the Elear Defense Forces. It was only for two years

while his new ship was built. Ri'nol had been born by then, as well as his younger sister Telaria. Your father was not happy in the least, but by then I had found all I had ever desired in Jonout's arms as his wife and mate. I had found a man who worshiped me Ne'Veha, in every possible way you could imagine. He treats me now the same as he treated me then, like I am some precious jewel. When your father came to our home, I had been the wife of a Lycavorian Spartan for a decade and I was not the same woman I was when I left. I had learned much in those ten years, most of it from Jonout's own mother. She was so happy that her son had finally taken a mate and wife, and even happier when she realized I was an elf. We are still very close. She lives on Apo Prime and runs a small trinket shop in the Northern Tuya Merchant Quarter. Your father demanded I leave Elear! He said he would insure Jonout would suffer for stealing me from your grandfather."

"What... what did you tell him?" Ne'Veha asked enthralled with the story now.

"I told your father that Jonout never stole me from your grandfather, because I was never Me'mar's property to begin with. I told him that perhaps if Me'mar had treated me as something more than a trophy, things would have been different. I told him that if he wanted to take on my mate Jonout, he was more than welcome to try." Na'rnoas answered. "I told him he would have to go through me first however! Your father didn't like that so much, especially when he saw Ri'nol and Telaria come running across the main room of our home calling me mommy. I told him I was not the meek woman who his father had neglected for so many years and that I would beat him down if he attempted anything."

Ne'Veha's eyes were wide. "You... you told father that?" She gasped in shock.

Na'rnoas nodded her head. "That didn't go over well." She stated with a grin. "Not at all."

"What... what did he do?" Ne'Veha asked.

"He tried to have the Elven Parliament banish Jonout from Elear." Na'rnoas answered her quickly. "That was until I showed up at the meeting and told the Elven Parliament exactly what had taken place a decade earlier. Your father's petition died right there in its infancy. He swore never to talk with me again and so far he has kept to that. I have inquired of you, and you alone since I realized you were my granddaughter. When you joined the fleet I was so proud. Jonout and Ri'nol have kept watch over you and..."

"Kept watch over me?" Ne'Veha hissed.

Na'rnoas laughed. "Nothing like that child." She said quickly. "They have kept track of your career nothing more. They have kept track of your career because I asked them too. You are the only one of your father's children to go against his will and join the military and I hoped that one day we might cross paths." Na'rnoas smiled. "My prayers were answered because you are here now."

Ne'Veha shook her head. "Grandmother I..." She stopped herself when she realized what she had called Na'rnoas and met her green eyes.

"Why did you contact your Uncle Ri'nol Ne'Veha?" Na'rnoas asked gently squeezing her hands. "There must have been a reason for your actions, and unless I miss my guess it probably has something to do with your new COM designation as Ri'nol told me. Spartan One One Charlie."

Ne'Veha shook her head. "Andro did that." She said quickly. "I... I didn't discover it until just recently. I feel like such a fool."

"Andro?" Na'rnoas spoke with some surprise in her voice. "You do know that there are very few who would even think of referring to the Crown Prince with such familiarity Ne'Veha. It *was* you on the Netnews two months ago, wasn't it? You were the woman on his dragon's back weren't you?"

Ne'Veha looked down at her hands. "Yes." She answered before lifting her eyes and nodded slowly meeting her grandmother's gaze. "I... I see them in my dreams grandmother." She said softly. "All of them... and I yearn... I..."

Na'rnoas took Ne'Veha's hands in hers and squeezed them even tighter still. "Perhaps you should start from the beginning Ne'Veha."

Whether it was the soothing sound of her voice, the warmth in her eyes or simply the fact that Sadi had been right all along, Ne'Veha began to speak. "It... it started when I first arrived here on Earth... I could feel them even then. I..."

Na'rnoas did nothing but listen to her granddaughter speak uninterrupted for nearly an hour. Her emotions came through in her voice at different times, but even still Ne'Veha spoke with clarity and great intelligence and feeling. Na'rnoas silently cursed her son for being so insensitive and openly lying to his children about Lycavorians as a species. His false words and teachings were only compounded by the fact that

this Lycavorian Tarren had simply reinforced her son's teachings to Ne'Veha and it had confused her even more. Na'rnoas had been married to a Lycavorian for far too long now to not feel angry at what Tarren had knowingly done. She could feel Jonout standing in the shadows only a few meters away silently listening to Ne'Veha speak. They had both met the King and Queens and almost all of their children at some point since coming here and calling Eden City and Earth home. The King's relationship with President Turner, Selene, Tarifa and Aihola almost guaranteed interaction with the most senior military officers on Earth, of which Jonout was one. Na'rnoas found them to be the most down to earth and normal royal family she had ever read about in the history cubes and pads. She and Jonout had even sat at Prince Androcles's table only two years ago during one of these informal dinners and Na'rnoas had been struck at how traditional he and his siblings really were, and how completely lacking in arrogance of any kind. Now as she sat listening to Ne'Veha, she could tell right away where Ne'Veha wanted to be, where she knew she belonged. And Na'rnoas vowed to show her granddaughter just how correct her feelings were.

"...don't know what to do anymore." Ne'Veha finally finished speaking and looking up at her face.

Na'rnoas nodded slowly and put her palm to Ne'Veha's cheek. "There is one question I must ask of you before I say anything else." She spoke softly. "This Tarren... do you have any feelings for him in the least Ne'Veha?"

Ne'Veha shook her head immediately. "No! Of course not! He is a fool who only wishes to have me in his life so that it looks good. I believe now... I believe now that he was only the method for me finding Andro and the others grandmother. He was the reason I left Elear and part of me... more and more of me believes that is what set me on the path to finding Andro. But now... after Sadi discovered him in..."

Na'rnoas put her fingers to Ne'Veha's lips silencing her words. "There are many things that we do not understand Ne'Veha." She spoke softly. "Many things that we can't hope to explain. Why did the events in my life lead me to where I am now? Why did I fall hopelessly and shamelessly in love with a Lycavorian who worships the ground upon which I walk? Why did I leave your grandfather? Why is what's happening to you mirroring almost exactly what happen to me? Everything has reason and purpose Ne'Veha, and sometimes we can not see that reason and purpose because we are trying to understand and answer the overall complexity of it all."

"What... what do you mean?" She asked.

"You have felt them since arriving on Earth." Na'rnoas said. "Probably long before that if what Sadi told you is true, you just did not understand what it was you felt. Sadi may have been right when she told you that they could not feel what you are meant to mean to them until they eventually came together. The scope of Prince Androcles Leonidas; his father the King as well, their true power and abilities? It has befuddled so many who have tried to understand it. The Prince and his Bonded Sister are still growing in what they can do, as are the King and Torma. One thing is certain however... as his father worships his Queens, the Prince will worship any who are meant to be with him by fate and destiny. You have not questioned that Sadi and these other women are part of this life you feel you are meant to travel; and that tells me that it is not something you would turn away from."

Ne'Veha met her eyes evenly, feeling very much like she could tell this woman anything. She shook her head slowly. "It does not deter me." She said softly. "Unbelievably... I embrace it."

"You question whether he can love you as intensely as the others however." Na'rnoas said. "Don't you? You question whether he can love you just as equally given everything your father has hammered into your head all of these years about Lycavorians. Especially after what this Tarren has done."

Ne'Veha's eyes were wide as she stared at this woman. "How... how could you know that?"

Na'rnoas smiled. "It is written all over your face Ne'Veha." She answered. "You question what you feel... yet you want to embrace it. You made the decision to come here. To seek out your Uncle for a reason. You found what you didn't expect... but your reason for coming here is still the same. What is that reason?"

Ne'Veha shook her head. "I don't know anymore." She said softly.

"I think you do." Na'rnoas answered gently. "You just have to have faith in what you feel and let it happen."

Ne'Veha looked at her. "Will... will you help me?"

Na'rnoas smiled. "There is nothing that would make me happier Ne'Veha. First you have to tell me what it is you want. Then you will have started yourself down that road you feel you are supposed to walk and everything else will fall into place."

"They... they can smell Tarren grandmother. Sadi and Andro. I can not pursue anything if they smell him all over me. I... I think Tarren; he went as far as he could without actually *cado forn*." Ne'Veha spoke softly, her voice barely a whisper. "I want to... I want to know how to get his scent off of me grandmother."

Na'rnoas smiled. "I thought that might be it." She said.

"Is... is there a way?" Ne'Veha asked.

Na'rnoas nodded. "A tried and true way." She replied. "But before we get to that... tell me of yourself Ne'Veha." She squeezed Ne'Veha's hands tighter. "I would very much like to know who my granddaughter is. If that is alright with you?"

Ne'Veha smiled for the first time all evening. A smile that wasn't forced or done to cover up the fact she was uncomfortable.

"I would like that very much grandmother." She said.

Ne'Veha didn't see her Uncle Ri'nol move up beside his father in the shadows just by the outside door into the patio area. Jonout glanced at his oldest son and child. He may have been half elf, his two inch high elven ears very prominent, but he was all Lycavorian in his manner and actions. Jonout had raised his children to honor both of their heritages; it was just that all of them chose to be more Lycavorian than elf. It was not something that upset Na'rnoas in the least and she in fact encouraged this.

"Everything happens for a reason son. I see that more and more each day." Jonout spoke softly.

Ri'nol nodded. "Yes it does father." He stated.

"You know Sa'sur? The captain of the *SCIMITAR*?" Jonout asked.

Ri'nol nodded. "Yes. It is said she and Prince Androcles are of one mind and when they stand on their bridge together. It is almost as if they read each other's thoughts."

Jonout nodded. "Contact her for me son." Jonout spoke. "Find out everything you can on this Tarren fellow."

Ri'nol looked at his father. "What are you going to do father?" He asked.

"What rule have I always raised you to follow without fail when it concerns your mate Ri'nol?" Jonout asked his son.

"Honor and respect them always. Love them completely and without question." Ri'nol answered.

Jonout nodded. "I have loved your mother since the very first moment I saw her on Elear. There has never been any doubt in my mind about that. I will do whatever it takes to see her happy. She is as happy now as I have ever seen her son. I do not intend to let anyone take that away from her. And I will do what Prince Androcles can not do because of his position. It would not do for the Crown Prince to pursue Ne'Veha if she smells of this Tarren. Your mother will help Ne'Veha rid herself of his scent, and I will insure Tarren does not bother her anymore. There are many Lycavorians who do not follow the rules we live by son. That usually changes with time and experience, but I intend to see this Tarren fellow is out of the picture."

Ri'nol looked back to where his mother and Ne'Veha were sitting and talking in animated voices. "There is no question the Prince wants her. He would not have changed her COM designation unless he was without doubt."

Jonout nodded. "And that is why we will kill two birds with one stone as General Lynwe is so fond of saying."

"I'll contact her in the morning." Ri'nol spoke.

Jonout nodded. "Good. Now let us go back inside and leave your mother to discover something of her past and hopefully her future. I wish to bounce my grandson on my knee a few more times before he goes to bed."

“Chetak!” Martin Leonidas hissed angrily. “Is that like a fucking joke?”

“He’s actually Lucvaun’s son Marty.” Anja answered. “His youngest son. He apparently was able to hide his identity during the trials by changing his name and his face. He wasn’t old enough to take part in any atrocities back then Martin; he was off Enurrua until only two weeks before we arrived. He was attending a military academy in Limian space under false papers. He was making his way back to Enurrua when we attacked. He was caught on Elear when we hit Chetak and his ilk. His mother apparently began telling him that I killed his father as soon as they discovered one another upon arriving on Apo Prime.”

Martin turned from the transmission as Aricia walked in carrying two mugs of coffee. “Lucvaun is the asshole who shot Isheeni right?” He asked as he took the mug. “The one Torma killed?”

Anja nodded. “One and the same.”

“How did his son slip past the screeners even with a new face and name?” Martin asked. “It isn’t something he could have hidden during that time period. Is it?”

“That is my fault sire.” Vengal spoke moving into the transmission now and looking at Martin. “I... I did not thoroughly vet his application when he applied to the *Durcunusaan*. Vistr and I received hundreds of applications a day. His skill set indicated he was well qualified. It wasn’t until the mission to Lycavore that we actually began to see his true nature come through. I...” Vengal lowered his head. “I assumed he had a cruel streak and it was natural for him to rebel against orders. That is why I reassigned him when he returned. I did not stop to think why he was like he was. Rinard apparently made contact with Seanna during that mission and then it continued even after I forced him out of the *Durcunusaan*.”

“It is not your fault Vengal.” Aricia spat as she handed Martin the coffee and sat on the edge of his desk in front of him. “None of us are perfect in what we do, and that was a very trying time for all of us.”

“But I should have questioned why he didn’t protest when I expelled him. I...” Vengal started.

“No!” Martin barked. “This is not your fault Vengal, and I will not have you second guessing yourself after all these years! You have been with me... with all of us since the very beginning. We have all made mistakes since that time... me more than anyone. We do not dwell on those mistakes Vengal... you know that. Period.”

Vengal looked at him in the transmission and nodded his head. “No, no we do not.” He stated.

Martin sipped his coffee. “The question now is how can we use this information against him?”

Anja took a deep breath. “I don’t think we can Lover.” She said simply.

“Anja... why not?” Aricia declared now. “Does this not prove that anything Rinard has stated or sworn to can not be trusted?”

Anja nodded. “In a normal world I would say yes.” She stated. “But...”

Martin looked at her. “Red? What’s going on?”

Anja met his eyes. “I don’t think we can stop what is going to happen Martin.” She said softly. “No matter how much we prove that Rinard and Pcillany have been lying through their teeth since this all began, I don’t believe it will change the outcome of what Buonau and Wiktor already have planned.”

“And that is?” Martin asked.

“They want power back.” Anja said. “Plain and simple. No matter what I do... they are intent on insuring I do not get exonerated from these trumped up charges. Eurin and Vana agree with me. Zaniai and grandfather have been hearing rumblings as well among the aides to some of the Ministry members.”

“Anja... Anja can they do that?” Aricia asked softly.

Anja shrugged. “Anything is possible.” She spoke. “The Hadarian Constitution of Law is very complex and it does allow the Ministry to limit and even remove many of the powers from the Royal family. They would need to keep a member of the Royal family in the forefront, but essentially they *could* take back power and rule like they used to after my father and mother were killed. They had absolute power for over six hundred years after Vana and I were taken from Hadaria Marty. They have grown power hungry.”

“What else are you not telling me?” Martin asked her his dark brown orbs focused on her intently.

Anja met his gaze evenly. “There... there have been other rumors that my grandfather and Zaniai have heard Lover. Rumors of Hadaria declaring their independence from the Union. Rumors of an outside group willing to step in and support them if they go that way.”

“An outside group?” Martin asked. “What group?”

Anja shook her head. “No one knows.” She replied. “Eurin and Zanai are limited in how far they can push, and even the information they get is questionable. Buonau and her cronies have had a long time to plan and put this together, and they have effectively neutralized Eurin’s role as Divine One because of her support for me. There is no doubt that Rinard is working with them though.”

Vengal nodded. “I’ve had two of my scouts trailing him since I arrived.” He spoke. “He has met with Buonau on two different occasions. They were unable to obtain any information on what was talked about, but they are continuing to try. The Hadarian Elder Guard Militia is far more advanced in their training than Buonau wants us to believe. They were using some very sophisticated jammers around the meeting places and security was very tight, and very well hidden. My people said they move professionally and confidently.”

Martin looked at Anja. “Rinard?” He asked.

“He does have the skills needed to give them this training.” Anja answered him. “And the more little things that we discover as we go, the more we are beginning to believe that he is also involved in what Dysea and Normya are working on.”

“You are speaking of the kidnapping of female elves and Hadarian medical equipment aren’t you?” Aricia asked.

Anja nodded quickly. “Yes. As well as the attempt on Normya’s life. Or the attempted kidnapping. Whatever you want to call it.”

“They didn’t want her dead.” Martin said softly.

Aricia looked at Martin quickly, her azure blue eyes filled with questions and surprise. “You... you know?” She asked.

Martin nodded. “I’ve known since the first week.” He replied. “I’ve let *Melda Min* and Normya handle it. They don’t need me sticking my size eleven boot in something as delicate as that. I’m not exactly subtle you know.”

“Beloved... who would say such a thing?” Aricia gasped out with mock surprise.

Martin chuckled. “Anton, Cihera and this Las’elh are with them so they have plenty of Krypteria support as well as some of Bella’s *Vlos Sargtlinen*. I... as much as it just blows my mind when I say it... I think we can trust Cha’talla, T’lolt and their Immortal tribe. *Melda Min* trusts them and that is no small feat. I’m more concerned with Buonau and her partners. Could she be involved with the kidnapping of elves as well?”

Anja shrugged. “It’s unlikely but possible. I don’t think she fully understands what she has entered into working with Rinard.” She replied. “And there is far more to him than what he is showing her I’m betting. He’s too confident in what he does. Too sure of himself. As if he knows something that we don’t. Something that we don’t know yet.”

“If this Rinard is involved with trying to have Normya killed or kidnapped, then he got the information on Normya’s ship from somewhere. And Dysea is almost positive it is Rinard who enlisted this vampire mercenary that she has spoken of. He is the one that went after her in The Wilds. The one that still searches for her if Dysea is correct. After For’mya and I explained what was happening on Hadaria and what role this Rinard was playing, Dysea was sure of it.” Aricia spoke now. “If he got that information on Normya, then it stands to reason that he got the information on the female elves from the same source.”

Anja nodded. “And that means...”

“That could only mean that we have traitors in our midst.” Aricia snarled.

“Probably more than one.” Anja said meeting Martin’s eyes. “The question that remains though is who would want to target Normya? And why. And how many of our other children are being looked at as targets of some kind?”

Martin nodded. “*Melda Min* thinks she might have picked up a major player in that.” He spoke. “The Chief Engineer at the repair facility on Apo Prime. He has all the access to provide Rinard with this information. We are just trying to determine a connection between them, as well as any other connections they might have.”

“Marty... they aren’t staying on Apo Prime are they?” Anja asked quickly. “That might not be the wisest thing if they picked up this man. The little ones as well! They...”

Martin shook his head and held up his hand. “They left this morning to return to Kranek Red.” He answered. “They took *NORMYA’S LIGHT* this time. She’ll stay shrouded, along with her wing to provide

support if its needed. None of the Netnews jerks have been making any inquiries as to where she is, and that is a good thing.”

“It won’t last sire.” Vengal stated.

Martin nodded. “I know. But we’re going to milk it for everything we can get out of it. The more time she has to figure out what is going on, the better off we will be. I have ordered the *Durcunusaan* to put added security on our smaller children Anja. The rest of them rarely leave SODRAG, and when they do, it’s usually to Andro’s villa. Their movements are too erratic to get a solid lock on them.”

“What about Duewa?” Anja snarled. “Has she made any strange indications that she will try and remove Retta and Calyb from Earth?”

Martin shook his head. “No.”

“They would be the ones Buonau would want to use as her fronts for the Royal family if she is successful. They are still young enough for her to twist them to her views and turn against all they have learned so far.” Anja said quickly. “She knows Eliani would tell her to stuff it up her ass, and the only hope she would have is to try and turn Retta and Calyb into the mindless automations they are turning out of their school now.”

“For’mya and I may have put the fear of the gods into Duewa Anja.” Aricia said. “At the very least we have given her pause in whatever she may have planned.”

Anja shook her head. “It won’t be enough.” She said. “She has been under the thumb of her mother for too long.”

“Enough of this farce Red!” Martin snapped. “If you think all is lost then pull yourself out of there and we will let the chips fall where they may.”

“No!” Anja said immediately. “I will not abandon the people here unless my position becomes untenable Marty. I can’t! It wouldn’t be right! That would be worse than standing up to Buonau, for then she could use it against me.”

“Anja... you have seen the same Netnews reports we have!” Martin snapped. “You don’t have the support on Hadaria that you do in the Union. No one off Hadaria buys into the shit Buonau is shoveling. They know it is all a big scam! If you stay there she will find a way to make you disappear Red! She will succeed!”

“I’m willing to take that risk.” Anja said evenly meeting his gaze. “I’m in no danger right now Lover. They haven’t discovered the tunnels or the bunkers. I have Miath, Atropos, Belen and two hundred *Durcunusaan* troops here, plus Vengal’s scouts. I need to stay Martin. I need to see this out to the end. Sivana and I agree on that. We won’t leave unless it is absolutely necessary! We will send Siara back to Earth though Aricia. She does not need to be here to see what may happen.”

Aricia nodded. “I will make sure she is watched over Anja.” She stated. “My mother will be overjoyed to have all of her grandchildren and great grandchildren to spoil!”

“Anja I don’t like this.” Martin said getting to his feet. “You are leaving yourself exposed in too many spots.”

“I’m not leaving!” Anja snapped. “And that’s final!”

“Anja at the very least allow me to send one or two of Helen’s senior students from the School of the Oracles, or even just one. You have only yourself, Miath and Atropos. Even with yours and Miath’s advanced skills and power, you would not be able to form a MV bubble. My brother is a Tier Six yes, but he is not powerful enough to sustain the bubble. At bare minimum, one other Tier Six Mindvoicer will enable you to form a link should you need to vanish, and then you can maintain it.”

Anja contemplated that for a moment and then nodded. The MV bubble was something they had devised and developed some fifteen years ago, and when there were enough Tier Six Mindvoicers with the level of training needed, they could initiate an MV bubble and essentially disappear from any known lifesign sensors or scanners. “Very well.” Anja said with a nod. “I’ll have Vengal arrange for their arrival.”

“What angles are you working for Rinard Anja?” Martin asked changing the subject.

Anja shook her head. “There aren’t many of them I’ll tell you that.” She replied. “He’s pretty much covered himself very well. The men who took part in the security footage are all dead so we can’t bring them forward to testify. He would have killed the clone too. He is sitting in a pretty good position. Buonau has been over every thing I have done since being Queen. She has sensitive information on several things she should not have been able to obtain, but that doesn’t matter now because she has it.”

Vengal nodded. “Another clue that Rinard is far more connected off Hadaria than we first thought. I would like permission to have Vistr begin running background checks on anyone even remotely close to Rinard Milord.”

Martin nodded. “Do it.” He stated. “Red... the SPIRIT and her Wing are standing by just outside the PDP line of Hadaria. Do not hesitate to use them if things get to that point.”

Anja nodded. “Don’t worry Lover... I still have a couple more tricks up my sleeve. I’m not going to go as quietly as Buonau hopes.”

“I would prefer you didn’t go at all.” Martin spoke.

Anja chuckled. “Me either.” She stated. They watched Anja turn her head to look at someone out of the transmission window and nod then she turned back. “Marty... I’m getting another transmission from off Hadaria on the Secure Spartan Channel. It’s probably Dysea. Let me take that and come up with a better fall back plan and I will contact you when I have that.”

“Red?” Martin waited for her to look at him. “No doubts Anja.” He spoke. “No doubts ever.”

Anja smiled brightly. “No questions or regrets Lover.” She answered. “I will talk to you in another day or so.”

Martin looked at Aricia as the transmission faded and she met his gaze with those azure orbs he could not stand to be without. Her lavender and coco scent was strong and clear, and it would grow even more ripe and sweet over the next three weeks because she was coming into phase. For’mya’s Wild Orchid scent was peaking as well. The four of them always came into phase at the same time now, and it drove him crazy with want and desire. Aricia’s scent would always be the one that was more pronounced in his mind because she was his *anome*, and she was pure Lycavorian, but having four of his five queens come into phase at the same time usually meant endless hours of pleasure for all of them.

Aricia’s eyes bore into him now with a confused expression though and he sipped his coffee. “What?” He asked gently.

“What is bothering you Beloved?” She asked softly. “You should have ordered Anja home and you didn’t. No matter what is happening on Hadaria my love, she is still a Queen of this Union, a Lycavorian Spartan Queen and she is in danger.”

“She wouldn’t have listened to me *Saaurano*.” Martin spoke. “You heard her for yourself.”

Aricia stepped closer to him. “Then you should have ordered my brother to bring her home Martin.” She stated confidently. “She would have been angry at first yes, but she would have understood.”

“Where are For’mya and Bella?” He asked.

“They are shopping in the quarter for our new son when he arrives.” Aricia stated. “And do not change the subject.”

“I’m not changing the subject!” Martin snapped.

“Yes you are.” Aricia spoke calmly. “And do not raise your voice to me. We are *Anomes* Martin Leonidas. There is very little you can hide from me. Your other Queens yes... but not from me. Something is bothering you, and it has been bothering you for some time now. What is that?”

“Nothing is bothering me!” He said.

Aricia set her own coffee down and stepped close to him then, inhaling deeply of his mint scent and feeling his aura caress her mind and body in a way only he could. She felt his arms close around her, and his scent and aura stirred her passions and desire as they always did. She pressed her face to his chest and squeezed his arms tightly. “You need never fear my Beloved. You are able to share anything with me and I will understand. Just know that you have will have to come to grips with what is troubling you sooner or later and I will help you however I am able.”

Martin pulled her lush body tighter against his, fighting the brief urge to take her right there in his office. Her buried his face in her thick black hair and nodded his head slowly. “I know.” He whispered. “I know.”

Aricia smiled to herself. “Then I will speak no more of it.” She said softly.

It was one of a handful of secret bases that had been established over the last twenty years on earth. Used for specialized training in jungle and mountain warfare, it was situated in the deep jungle between the crossroads of two rivers in what was once known as Vietnam. At the moment it was also one of the most active bases on Earth. Sixty-three men and women and four dragons had been training intensely for the last two months in moving through the thick jungle and combining their unique ways of fighting. The Lycavorian unit had been handpicked by King Leonidas himself, while the High Coven unit was a special unit that had been together since its inception in fighting the Kavalians. The many buildings within the base perimeter were all one story and painted in the color scheme of the jungle all around them so that they blended well into the surroundings. It would be hard to spot the base from the air, and combined with the sophisticated sensor jammers built into the surrounding mountains, it would be almost impossible to detect the base from orbit.

Resumar Leonidas was in his element here, and it was something that his new wife was easily able to pick up on. They had been here for less than a week and Athani noticed how much more alert and attuned to everything around them Resumar was. He moved like a giant wolf waiting to pounce onto its prey, and it made her blood churn for him more than it had at any point in their relationship together. Athani Leonidas knew what it was, the more feral instincts of both of their species was coming out in them, for she felt it within herself as well. Their lovemaking had become much more intense and passionate, their couplings lasting for hours as they allowed their inner animals to move closer to their outer skin. His reaction may have been due in some part to Athani more than anything. Kavalians were always closer to their wilder instincts and untamed nature, and as she became more and more comfortable in her new position, as she grew confident in the intense love Resumar had for her and she for him, Athani Leonidas was coming out of the shell she had built around herself all these years. She knew it was due to the complete acceptance of her within the small circle of Resumar's family and friends, something she never imagined she would ever obtain. This allowed her to be more like herself, and more like Demahra told her she could become.

Athani's upbringing was traditionally Kavalian, but as the daughter to the Prefect she had received far more education and training than any other normal Kavalian female. Keleru knew his daughters would be targets someday and he made sure that they were at least able to defend themselves very well. Athani's combat training was excellent in every way, and with her ability to use her tail as an extension of her will, it made her that much more deadly as she had proven on *MJOLNIR'S HAND*. Most of the actual physical training had been completed by the time they arrived, but all of them knew Resumar's skills and what he and Cemath were capable of, and no questions were brought forth as to his ability to lead this mission. Athani noticed he fell right into the role of leader, and she knew then that he had learned his lessons well from his father and brother. The High Coven troops looked upon her with a wary and unfriendly eye, but this was something Athani was well used too. It neither concerned or bothered her. They knew who she was and what status she now held, and in some ways that made them even angrier, but they made no remark or gesture that could be construed as threatening. In fact it seemed as if they were going out of their way to avoid her in some strange fashion. Athani maintained her guard however, aside from Resumar's mother Isabella, the High Coven Princess Narice and Resumar's own sisters, Athani trusted no vampire.

At least not yet.

As they stood in the main operations building looking over the holoimages of Ritaah and where the location of the Mindvoice ship was, Athani let her alert blue/green eyes sweep over the leader of the High Coven part of their combined unit. The ebony skinned clone vampire had once been like a sister to Martin Leonidas and Daniel Simpson Athani now knew thanks to her husband. She had been killed savagely by High Coven warped creatures during the very last Battle for Earth nearly twenty-five years ago, and Athani knew Resumar's father was not in the least bit happy that this vampire clone who was an exact copy of the woman he once considered a sister now walked among them. There was no doubting or questioning of her skills however. Juliana One as she was called possessed incredible strength and agility and an extremely keen mind Athani noted to herself. When combined with her vampire abilities it made her amazingly lethal. Athani noticed however, that she talked with great intelligence and respect towards Resumar, and there were times when Athani thought she might want to speak about something else with her husband. At first Athani thought it might be because she was taken with Resumar in some way and wanted to get closer to him. This had been something of a worry for her after first marrying Resumar. She knew that the males of her species often went beyond the confines of a union to seek female companionship, and this was something she thought Resumar might do. Not

until she had seen how he treated her, and ignored other women did Athani begin to put aside those worries. He never even gave another female a passing glance when they walked among the streets of Eden City, and this was not something he had to force himself to do. His actions were what Athani considered to be the final test of her resolve and her past, and when she let go of those worries and concerns, she began forging a new path into the future. Looking at her now, Athani knew there was something about this clone that she was not showing them, and she did not know if that was a good thing or a bad thing. She decided to approach Resumar about it after their meeting today.

The operations building was large enough to accommodate half a dozen dragons with its smooth domed structure, and Cemath and Sorran were sitting on one side listening intently as they discussed logistics. Two other dragons sat on either side of them; the purple hue scaled dragon that Athani now knew was a hybrid was called Mirra while the Firespitter's name was Farlaa. Mirra was the more open of the two other dragons that would be accompanying them, slightly larger than Farlaa and a tad bit more muscular. Athani found her to be intelligent and thoughtful and it almost appeared as if she wanted to get this mission underway as soon as possible. Mirra had other things on her mind as well as the mission; they were things that she had given Athani a brief glimpse into, but she had not elaborated on them afterwards.

"...alright *Aryschanne*?" Resumar's voice broke into her train of thoughts and Athani looked at him.

"Pardon me." She spoke quickly with an embarrassed blush to her cheeks. "My mind was wandering for a moment."

"We are planning a combat operation and your mind is wandering?" The male vampire officer snarled from his place next to Juliana. He turned his dark eyes on Juliana. "I told you Major... bringing a Kavalian is a bad idea!"

"Being Kavalian automatically makes me bad?" Athani asked calmly. "Why is that do you think Captain Krius?"

"I don't trust you!" Krius snapped.

"Well... that much is painfully obvious." Athani stated evenly with a touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"Surely you must have a better reason than that?"

Resumar crossed his arms over his broad chest and looked at Dario out of the corner of his eye. His cousin smiled as he watched the exchange. He had told Resumar several times since meeting Athani that she was very impressive. Not only was she alluringly beautiful, but she was exceptionally intelligent, and incredibly skilled in the art of combat. Dario had been fascinated with Athani's tail and what she had been able to do with it. Her tail still shocked him at its strength and what she could accomplish with it. He also commented to his cousin that she was enormously willful and sharp as a whip.

"We are going into Kavalian space!" Krius barked. "To a Kavalian occupied planet. Your species isn't exactly known for their trustworthiness. What's to keep you from contacting your people in some way and compromising our mission?"

"My people?" Athani stated. "I am a Leonidas now Captain Krius... my people as you say... they are my husband, his family and this Union. In that order. I no more want this ship to fall into my father's hands than you or Martin Leonidas. It would be catastrophic in every sense of the word. I am going on this mission because if by chance we happen to not be able to avoid these small settlements around the MV ship, then seeing me may give whatever Kavalians we come across... it may make them pause in their actions."

"We'll leave the *PILLAR* on two *STRIKER DTs* and come in over the southern pole landing fourteen clicks from the ship itself." Dario said. "It puts us far enough away to not be detected by any of the settlements, but still with an hour or two on foot. I assume all of your people will be able to keep up at night?" He asked Juliana.

Juliana was quick to nod her head. "Without issue." She said. "We have been training for several years to track through the heat of a jungle."

"Why are we bringing four dragons?" Krius asked now. "Two is pushing it... four of them and we will surely be detected. They aren't exactly discrete you know."

"Well... unless you want to carry four thousand pounds of explosives across fourteen clicks of jungle..." Resumar told him. "They will be carrying our load Captain. They can not be detected on sensors because their scales are naturally reflective and it will be dark. Dragons love the night."

"Is it really necessary?" Krius asked.

“Avi recommends it yes.” Resumar spoke. “The more Mindvoice power we can put on the ground the better off we will be. The four dragons with Dario, Athani and I will provide all we need.”

“This machine of yours is still coming?” Juliana asked.

“Avi is not a machine.” Resumar snapped.

“What would you call him?” Krius asked. “He’s nothing but wires, gears and electrodes. What else could he be?”

“Avi is a member of my crew for this mission and he will be treated with equal respect and status!” Resumar snapped.

“Then where is he?” Krius demanded. “Shouldn’t he be here taking part in this briefing then?”

“He can download the entirety of this briefing in three seconds.” Athani stated. “He does not need to be here.”

“So you say! I wouldn’t trust anything you said to me.” Krius snapped.

Athani looked at the man intently. “Captain... you seem to have a severe issue with me. Perhaps you could explain to us what that is before it causes you to act more the fool than you already have.”

Krius’s eyes burned with hate. “Your biogenic troops killed both my sons and their wives in your second invasion of High Coven space! Your troops forced my sons to watch while your troops entertained themselves with their wives and then locked them in confinement without any way to get blood! They died two weeks later from The Blood Fever! They went mad! And you made my sons watch it all before your troops killed them!”

Athani shook her head slowly. “I was only involved in five ground battles Captain, all of them during the initial invasion twenty-five years ago. I am sorry for how they were treated, it is not something I condone... but I did not kill them.”

“You are all the same!” Krius spoke viciously. “Their wives were innocent! They had nothing to do with the military! Neither did my sons! They were researchers!”

“And I’m sure all the Kavalian women and children the High Coven butchered in their poison missile attack were innocent as well.” Athani said evenly. “That did not deter your leaders from trying to commit genocide against the Kavalian species. If you are looking to gain sympathy from me, you are gnawing up the wrong tree.”

“Sympathy?” Krius barked. “I don’t want your sympathy! As far as I am concerned, all of your species should be wiped out!”

“Krius... hold your tongue!” Juliana hissed vehemently.

“She started this!” Krius exclaimed. He motioned to Resumar. “He may trust her because he is fucking her... but I don’t trust her one bit.” He looked at Resumar. “And if you were smart you wouldn’t either! She’ll turn on you in an instant! She’s an animal... just like the rest of her vile race!”

Dario opened his mouth to come back but Resumar’s hand closed around his arm and he shook his head. He turned when he felt Cemath’s anger also rising and he shook his head. *No my Bonded Brother.* He spoke quickly.

Resumar... he insults...

Let me handle this. Resumar answered him quickly.

Cemath met his eyes for a long moment and then nodded his huge head. *As you wish.*

Juliana was far more intelligent than Krius and she knew what was happening. Resumar Leonidas was communicating with his dragon within Mindvoice. She was about to turn to Krius and tell him to keep his mouth shut, however she wasn't in time.

“Go ahead boy!” Krius snapped. “You know I speak the truth! They can’t be trusted! She must be real good in bed if you made her your wife! I am not afraid of you or your dragon! What are you going to do boy? You...”

Athani turned her head expecting to see Resumar holding in his temper and to tell him to ignore the vampire fool. Dario was standing there alone with his thick arms across his chest, his normal light green eyes dark and foreboding looking. Athani heard the loud grunt of pain and it suddenly dawned on her that her new husband was a Leonidas who was also half elf. Resumar Leonidas possessed all the natural speed of an elf, combined with the immense strength of his pure Lycavorian blood. Her eyes darted back to where Krius had been standing only a split second before, only now he was flat out on his back on the floor of the room. His dark eyes were wide in sudden pain, but he could not speak through his shattered jaw. He looked up at Resumar

Leonidas who had allowed the pseudo change to come over him. His dual wolf fangs were fully extended exposed in a vicious snarl. Resumar's dark brown eyes now bore the single black ring around them as they were now fully wolf eyes.

"I will endure much vampire!" Resumar growled in a voice filled with malice and anger. "I will not endure you insulting my wife and mate! I have solved your problem with her *igord!* You will remain behind to recover from your injuries! Be thankful it was I who hit you! She would have torn your eyeballs free from your pathetic head before she killed you!"

Bravo my brother! Cemath roared within Mindvoice flapping his huge wings twice to show his approval.

Excellent form and power! Mirra's voice announced.

You should have just squashed him like the roach he is! Sorran spoke in the disinterested voice. *But I approve of your technique!*

Athani could barely contain her laughter as she heard their voices easily and she turned as the door to the conference room opened and three additional *Durcunusaan* soldiers rushed in.

"Milord!" The lead *Durcunusaan* spoke quickly, his hands tightening around his weapon.

"Take this piece of *sibfla* to the infirmary!" Resumar spat. "Have him treated... and then ship his smelly ass back to his masters."

Two of the *Durcunusaan* troops were holding back smiles as they lifted Krius between them, his hands holding his face in pain, tears in his eyes. His eyes lifted to meet Resumar, filled with a combination of hate, anger and pain.

"I'm sure your dear Empress will be so very pleased that you could not hold your foul tongue long enough to get off the planet." Resumar growled. "We will accomplish the mission without you Captain Krius. Major Collins is more than capable of leading the team without you."

Juliana's eyes came up quickly and she looked at Resumar oddly as his words echoed in her head.

Resumar looked at the *Durcunusaan* team leader as Athani moved slowly up beside him. "Inform Empress Aikiro why this asshole is being sent back." He stated. "If she has a problem with that... too damn bad!"

Resumar looked at Athani who was staring at him with adoring blue/green eyes. She truly gazed at his changed eyes and his prominent fangs for the very first time since she had known him. He had never been pushed to the point of anger where he changed like this and Athani found it fascinating as she reached up to place her palms on either side of his face. She let her eyes wander over the ferocious looking dual fangs unique to only the Leonidas males, and the intense black ringed dark brown eyes.

"Res... Resumar?" She asked softly.

"He made me angry." Resumar stated simply.

Dario couldn't stop his laughter at this simple statement and he shook his head. "That is so typical." He spoke. "Father said you and your brothers would be bastards when it came to protecting your wives and mates. Just like Uncle Martin."

Resumar turned to Juliana as Athani pressed her body up against his, wrapping her arms around his waist and feeling the passion and excitement beginning to hum through her at his actions.

"Anything you want to add?" Resumar asked.

"I believe you have made yourself very clear." Julie answered immediately. She was very skilled and very confident in those same skills, but she truly did not know if she would be able to defeat Resumar Leonidas in an even test of their abilities. There was far too much that was unknown about him from what she could see, especially considering his bond with his dragon.

"We leave in three days." Resumar spoke.

Juliana nodded. "I was hoping that we could allow our soldiers one last night in either Sparta or Eden City." She added quickly. "Many of them... many of them might not be returning from this mission."

Resumar's eyes reverted back to normal and his fangs retracted as he looked at her. He felt Athani's arms tug tighter around his waist.

That is an odd thing for a clone to say. She spoke within Mindvoice, the skill becoming increasingly easier for her to use as time passed. *That... that is something that... something that a leader would say. Not a clone bred for war.*

I agree. Dario echoed from where he stood next to Sorran.

Resumar didn't acknowledge their words as he stared at Juliana for a long moment. He felt Cemath move closer, his head extending out on his long neck to take up position next to his right shoulder. *They are right Res. It is an odd thing for her to say.* He said.

Perhaps there is more to this clone than everyone thinks. Resumar spoke. He nodded his head. "I'll make the arrangements. One night. I assume you will want to go to Eden City so that you can report to the Empress?"

Julie shook her head. "I was thinking Sparta." She replied. "It's closer and... and they are more familiar with it."

She's lying. Dario said instantly turning to look at them as his nose detected the spike in the adrenalin in her body though it was expertly masked.

Yes she is. Resumar said. *But for what reason.*

Your father said to be careful in your dealings with her. Athani said.

Resumar nodded to Juliana. "I'll order the transport standing by on the pad at seventeen hundred hours. They'll have twenty-four hours. Anyone who doesn't make the return trip gets left behind."

Juliana nodded quickly. "I'll let them know."

Dario and the remaining dragons moved closer as she turned and they watched her leave. "Was that a wise thing to do cousin?" He asked.

Resumar continued to stare at the now closed door Juliana had exited. "Perhaps not." He said softly turning to look at him. "But it is done."

Dario nodded. "It would be nice going into this thing knowing that we could at least trust those we are fighting next too. Maybe we'll get lucky with her."

"You just want to see her without clothes." Athani stated.

Dario looked at her with wide eyes. "Me? You injure me with your words Athani! I'd much rather have myself a Kavalian female with a tail like yours! It would be so much more interesting!"

Athani's tail whipped around as he knew it would and slapped him in the side of the head lightly. "Pervert!" She hissed.

"Well I can't have you... so I must continue to hold out hope there are others like you!" Dario exclaimed as he reached up to rub the side of his head where her tail had struck. Even a light slap caused his skin to tingle. Athani apparently did not know her own strength when it came to her tail.

Athani leaned up on her tip toes and kissed Resumar softly. "I will see you later my handsome husband Resumar Leonidas." She stated. "Before your cousin Dario leaves me without recourse and I need to slap him silly."

Resumar chuckled. "I think that is what he wants." He said.

He is off in that manner. Sorran's voice echoed in Mindvoice. *He is very strange.*

And you aren't? Mirra announced to Sorran as she deftly maneuvered her purple scaled bulk toward the large secondary door following Athani out of the room.

Dario laughed at the expression in Sorran's eyes. *You left yourself open to that one brother.* He said.

He certainly did. Mirra said with feminine laughter as she exited the conference room.

HADARIA UNDERGROUND BUNKER

"...not a very good time Husen." Anja said as calmly as she could. She sipped her coffee as she looked at the image of the young Lycavorian in the transmission.

Anja could only be amazed at the change in the young man in the last two plus decades from that time on Lycavore walking in the shadow of his power hungry father. Husen was now a well respected Spartan officer, a devoted mate to Relina and father to four healthy children. He had come a long way from Lycavore and Anja could not have been happier for them. She had personally taken care of most of those they had discovered on Lycavore, always making time for the men, women and children that they had rescued. Many of them would allow no one but Anja or those she designated to treat whatever ailed them. She had taken a

particular interest in Husen because he had gone so far out of his way to apologize and make up for what his father did while they were on Lycavore.

“I did not think it would be my Queen.” Husen spoke from within the transmission. “However, you need to be made aware of this.”

“Anja rolled her jade green eyes. “Husen I have told you and Relina to not do that!” She snapped. “There are very few who do not treat us like saviors and you are among them. For all intents and purposes, those of you who fought with us to escape Lycavore are family to us in many ways.”

Husen nodded his head. “As you are to us.” He spoke. “This is why I felt the need to contact you now. Something has happened here on Apo Prime that requires your immediate knowledge and which will necessitate me bringing Relina and our children to your location. I believe I may have involved us in whatever is happening concerning you on Hadaria, and considering what has happened here, we are safer with you.”

Anja met his eyes within the transmission. “I don’t think I follow.”

“I have a friend.” Husen spoke. “He was one of the first who befriended us when we arrived and he has been a friend since we settled here. He... he got himself in a bit of trouble Anja and I thought he had drowned fourteen months on Hadaria.”

“And?”

“He appeared at my door several hours ago with quite a wild story.” Husen spoke. “A story that in fact angered me greatly because of what has been reported by the Netnews over the last weeks.”

Anja’s senses were quickly coming to full alertness. “Go on.” She spoke slowly.

“He is not dead Anja.” Husen told her. “Contrary to what many people believe. He has been living with his mother on her estate since the first reports came out. Her estate is on the edge of one of the smaller cities and she is known to be reclusive. He has been living there with his new mate and wife.”

“Husen...”

“His name is Joci.” Husen told her.

Anja didn’t stop Atropos from stepping up close to her, a look of anger on his face. “Do not jest with us Husen!” He snarled. “This man is dead! He is one of those who have been...”

“Yes Atropos I know.” Husen interrupted him. “One of those pictured in the forged footage relating to Anja. He is not dead however. He is in fact here in our home with us right now. Someone tried to kill him earlier this evening. They tried to kill him, his new mate and his mother. He was able to defeat them, but he came here knowing he could no longer protect them himself. He fears that whoever is trying to bring you down has found them, and they won’t let him live. It would in fact be very damaging if it was discovered he was alive. As well as his mate.”

Anja set her coffee down and got to her feet slowly. “Husen... are you saying...?”

“Yes he is my Queen!” The new voice spoke and Anja and Atropos watched as the tall, thickly muscled Spartan stepped into the transmission. His skin was a deep chocolate color, his black hair done into long dreadlocks that fell to just below his shoulders. “I am very much alive but I do not know for how much longer without your help.”

Atropos’s eyes grew wider. “You pig dog!” He almost shouted. “You dare... you dare ask for help after what you have done! You...”

Anja placed her hand on Atropos’s arm silencing him with her touch as he glanced at her. “He has done nothing Atropos.” Anja spoke. “Not directly.”

“Anja he...”

“I was duped!” Joci spoke from within the transmission. “Rinard tricked me into taking part in his scheme.”

“Tricked you?” Atropos roared. “You...”

Atropos... you must give the man an opportunity to explain what is happening! Miath’s voice filled his and Anja’s minds as his dark green head snaked its way into the room.

Yes you must! Anja spoke. *I want to hear this Atropos. He has done nothing to me and you know that. Your honor...*

Is unblemished Atropos. I know that... you know that and so does everyone else who knows me. Anja told him. *Only those who wish to do me harm believe I am capable of such actions. Now let us hear this man*

out. Then we will decide what to do. We did not even know he was alive so this could very well turn out to help us immensely.

Atropos nodded his head. *As you wish.*

Anja turned back to the transmission. "Continue... Joci." She ordered.

"Rinard knew of the... he knew of the attraction I had to you my Queen." Joci spoke slowly. Anja could see he was uncomfortable with revealing this information but he forged ahead as if something was giving him strength. It was not very often that you publicly told your Queen that you were infatuated with her. "He approached me one day saying that he had discovered a Hadarian female that was a twin to you. He said she was very... open shall we say in fulfilling... fulfilling fantasies that many of us had in regards to you. I was fool enough to pay him what he asked. It was not until I took part in what has been shown on the Netnews that I knew something was wrong. This woman acted differently than he said she would. She... she accepted the attention given to her, but I don't believe she knew what was really happening. Rinard treated her harshly. He is the one who changed her... and it was then I realized she was a clone. She had no natural scent of her own, just Rinard's foul smell and I knew she could be nothing but a clone. I did not know what Rinard had planned my Queen... at first I thought it was just a way for him to make a profit as vile a man as he is. I did not come to my senses until the third man who took part in those security videos was killed. Then I knew something was very wrong. I faked my own death the day I watched Rinard carry the body of this clone to the Union shipyards main incinerator. He dumped her there without so much as a blink or care, as if she was some piece of meat to be discarded!"

Anja took note of the savage way he spoke the last part of his sentence and the almost possessive tone he used in regards to the clone and the treatment she had obviously received. She looked at Atropos briefly before turning back to him. "Go on." She said evenly.

"Rinard had stabbed her through the chest with his *Nethes* twice." Joci explained. "He thought this would be enough to kill her but he was wrong."

"Wrong?" Anja asked quickly as her heart began to race.

Joci nodded. "Ceuma survived."

"Ceuma?" Anja spoke quickly her eyes wide now.

Joci nodded. "Ceuma is the name she has chosen to live by. Rinard failed to take into account she is a clone of you my Queen. And as such... she is Hadarian... with the ability to heal. She does not possess your skills of course, but she does possess your DNA and genes. He left her there to die, but did not realize that her body was already beginning to heal itself."

"Wait!" Anja declared loudly. "Are you telling me... are you saying the clone is alive?"

Joci turned his head slightly as Anja watched the cloaked figure step into the transmission and press up against him tightly, wrapping her arms around his waist. Anja watched the figure reach up and throw back the heavy cowl to reveal a blond haired version of her. Anja's jade green eyes grew even wider when she saw the clone's jade green eyes focus on her in the holo transmission. Her blond hair fell well past her shoulders, but aside from that, Anja was looking at an exact duplicate of her.

"Yes my Queen. She is alive... and she is my mate and wife now." Anja heard Joci answer proudly.

"*Son vada carians!*" Anja hissed out. "Atropos... how soon...?"

"I can have a ship leaving in one hour." Atropos replied knowing what she was going to ask him almost immediately.

Husen came back into the transmission. "Anja... we need to leave now." He stated firmly. "They have already come after Joci and Ceuma once this evening. How they found her I do not know... but they will undoubtedly follow them here. I have access to the *STRIKER AT* that you and Martin left for those of us who know of its location. I do not wish to put Relina or our children in danger, and Joci's mother is capable but she is not a warrior. We need to leave now."

Anja nodded instantly. "Atropos, send the release code immediately." She gasped. Atropos didn't hesitate and turned to rush from the room. "Husen... make your way to the ship. It will be ready when you arrive."

Husen nodded. "Relina is already readying our little ones." He spoke.

Anja looked at Joci in the transmission. "What... why?" She asked softly. "Why have you come forward? You could have disappeared into The Wilds and made lives for yourself."

Ceuma looked at her in the transmission. "My husband is a Spartan." She stated. "As I now am thanks to that *ronnus* Rinard! We would never be safe as long as he lived."

Anja looked stunned that the clone was speaking. "You..."

Ceuma smiled shyly. "Yes... I know what I am." She stated. "I also know I have all the same rights as everyone else. Joci's mother taught me that. You will not hurt us... because not only can you use us against Rinard... you are an honorable Queen, and you value life. All life."

Anja was surprised at the intelligence that came forth in her words and manner and she glanced at the Spartan Joci quickly. "You... you have let this man take you as his mate and wife. After what he took part in doing to you?"

Ceuma looked up into Joci's face with a bright smile before answering her. "What Joci has done is give me a life." She replied turning back to Anja in the transmission. "That life may have started out in the wrong way, but he was being misled by Rinard and did not know what I was. Once he discovered that... well... he did not have to save my life and protect me as he has done for the last year. It is only in the last two months that he has stopped whipping himself for what he was tricked into doing. And he has made things right according to his mother and that is all the avowal that I need."

"Can you...?"

"I am you Anja Leonidas... and I am not you." Ceuma spoke softly. "I hope that our actions now, while they keep us safe and benefit us, I would hope you do not see them as a threat."

"You will need to undergo a full examination!" Anja announced quickly. "You will..."

"I will do what is necessary... but I will not allow myself to become an object of experiments and discussion." Ceuma told her.

"Nor will I." Joci spoke firmly.

Husen's head turned to outside the transmission and then back. "Anja... Relina says we are ready." He told her. "We will make our way to the ship and contact you once we are in the Jump corridor."

"Wait!" Anja barked. "Who... who tried to kill you?" She asked.

Joci met her eyes. "I do not know my Queen. But I can tell you one thing for certain. They were not Lycavorian."

SPARTA

"What is it that you are thinking Duewa?" Thoti asked from across the table in the small café.

Duewa turned to look at him, her green eyes settling on his face. The café was where they always waited to pick up the children from school, over the last weeks Thoti finally sitting with her at the table. They never spoke much, and Duewa was surprised that he would speak to her after the events of this morning.

"Does... does it matter?" She asked finally.

"Why wouldn't it matter?" He asked.

"You must... you must hate me." Duewa said after a moment.

Thoti put his mug of coffee down. "Why would I hate you?"

"I... I just don't understand." Duewa said softly.

"And what don't you understand?" Thoti asked leaning forward in his chair.

"I don't understand you... your people." Duewa said. "Your culture. It is all so alien to me. You are so... casual about everything. It's almost as if you take nothing serious."

"And why would you think this makes people hate you?" Thoti asked with a smile.

Duewa's eyes narrowed. "You are mocking me!" She snarled.

Thoti shook his head quickly. "No... not at all. You misunderstand." He met her angry eyes from across the table. "Hanna was like you are when we first met. She..."

"Hanna?" Duewa asked quickly.

Thoti nodded. "My mate." He answered.

Duewa looked surprised. "Your mate?" She asked shocked. "I didn't know... you are always with me or your son! How does she...?"

Thoti shook his head. “She died fourteen years ago.” He told her evenly. “Just after I was assigned to the Leonidas Family Detail here in Sparta. She was killed in an engineering accident on her transport up to the station. One of their plasma coils overloaded and she was treating the wounded when the artificial gravity generators failed. A secondary plasma coil exploded and sent a construction container whirling through the area she had set up as a triage center. The container struck her when she imposed her body between an injured crewman and the crate. She died almost instantly. She didn’t even have time to shift or attempt to heal herself.”

“Heal herself?” Duewa asked softly.

Thoti nodded quickly. “Hanna was a Hadarian Mage Warrior.” He said. “We met a hundred and nineteen years ago on Apo Prime. We married two years later. She was like you are now when we first met. Confused. Unable to fully comprehend the Lycavorian people as a whole. Or Elves for that matter.”

“Then... then your son is...?”

Thoti nodded. “He’s half Hadarian yes.” He answered in a low whisper. “He was only six months old when Hanna died. He never knew his mother. Not like he should have. The King... Martin, Anja and the others... they insisted I move him and myself onto the Estate so that my son would have others his age to grow and play with. Whenever I was on duty, Dasha would care for him as she did for Retta and Calyb. For Nara and Deion. As well as Normya and Zarah since they were not yet old enough to make their own way.”

Duewa suddenly discovered herself entranced by this story and she found herself looking at Thoti in a new light. “You have raised him on your own?” She asked.

Thoti nodded. “And it has not been easy I will tell you.” He said with a smile. “There are times when Hiero has needed a mother. Dasha has filled in admirably over the years, but he only opens up to me now. He grows too old to be pampered by a female as he says. He is a Spartan... and he hates to show weakness... yet his Hadarian blood naturally calls for him to heal others.” Thoti looked at her. “You seem surprised Duewa. Does the fact that I have raised my son alone surprise you so?”

“I... I did not think that Spartan men took great care in raising their children.” Duewa said.

Thoti’s eyes grew a little wider. “You jest!” He exclaimed. “Who told you this?”

They care only that the woman serves under them! They do not care about the woman’s pleasure or what the result may be. And none of them have a hand in raising the children they sire.

Duewa shook her head quickly, pushing her mother’s words out of her head. “It is... it is something I heard. I don’t know where from.” She stated quickly. “I’m assuming that it is incorrect based on your reaction?”

“There was a time in ancient Greek history here on Earth when Spartan males were given over to their Agoge when they were seven. The King’s own father was given to the defense of Sparta when he was only seven. It was then that the males of our species remained distant in some respects to their children. That was not the case on Apo Prime since unlike Earth it did not necessitate being prepared to fight at a moment’s notice, and shortly after the King’s father was killed at Thermopylae that changed here in Sparta as well. The children became our future and both male and female were looked upon with love and guided by their parents. What you regard as overly inappropriate in nature was common here in Sparta and in some respects on Apo prime. Young boys and young men were encouraged to look to the older men for guidance and to have relationships with, and they turned to their fathers and others among the males of our species. It seemed unusual at the time and Earth history has called it many things over the centuries, but it was done so that our males here in Sparta were taught about our species and who we were. The Lycavorians here on Earth did not fully understand who they were until King Leonidas discovered himself, but they knew they were different. Females were also encouraged to have similar relationships with other females as they grew. That is why it is commonplace to see them forge romantic relationships now. It was like this with all Lycavorians as well as elves and that is why it is so natural for us to display our bodies and to not be ashamed. It is why we are not ashamed to proclaim and cherish relationships with members of the same sex.”

Duewa looked at him. “I know there are many relationships like this across the Union?” She asked.

Thoti nodded. “Oh yes. The Queen’s love for each other and the King is just better known because of their positions. Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Vice President Aihola have been together longer than they have been mated to Colonel Isra. Prime Minister Selene and General Lynwe as well. There are hundreds more out there, but because of who they are, the Leonidas clan gets all the attention.” Thoti lifted his coffee before it got

cold and finished the mug before signaling for more from the female elven attendant. “I think what you are feeling is more because you are surprised that Retta and Calyb know more than you thought. And it was their mother who taught them.”

Duewa looked at him. “She taught them the First Five Tenets of a Healer! This is not something that is taught to our young children.” Duewa announced. “They should not be able to heal like they do. Not at this age!”

“Given what the King is capable of... and to some extent what Anja is capable of... why would you not believe that their children would be special?” Thoti asked. “I have seen Eliani and her mother working the aftermath of a battlefield during the Evolli war. They swept across that land healing hundreds. Lycavorian, elf, Algolian, and Evolli alike.”

“Evolli?” Duewa asked.

Thoti nodded to Duewa as he passed a ten credit Riyal to the young girl for refilling his mug. “King Leonidas and his sons and daughters may be whirlwinds in battle, but they are by no means without compassion. We do not shy from battle; we actually enjoy fighting as perverse as that may sound. We relish the rush of life or death that comes with battle but we will not go out of our way to look for a fight. And we do not conquer as others do. The Queens are brutal when it comes to the education of their children and they always have been. All of them. Dysea and Anja more so in many respects because of their backgrounds.”

Duewa looked at him. “You don’t believe... you don’t believe what is happening with Anja on Hadaria do you?” She asked. “You don’t believe she did those things do you?”

Thoti sipped his coffee and shook his head slowly. “Not many people outside of those on Hadaria believe it.” He answered after a moment. “They believe it is a political move initiated by your mother and others among the Elders to take power from Anja. The Hadarian Elders are not very well thought of right now off your planet.”

“Even... even with all the evidence against her you don’t believe it?” Duewa asked.

Thoti set his mug down. “Evidence?” He said with a smile. “The only evidence anyone has seen is the total lack of knowledge displayed by those aligned against Anja. They want others to believe only what they see with their eyes, and dismiss the fact that our eyes can play tricks on us more often than not. Your mothers and those who side with her do not know very much of Lycavorians if they think that the evidence they presented is accepted.”

“What do you mean?” Duewa asked feeling tightness in her gut.

“You are a Healer yourself.” Thoti said. “Have you never studied the Lycavorian people outside of medical purposes? Our history and culture? What it is that makes us who and what we are?”

Duewa quickly lowered her head. “No.” She said softly feeling suddenly embarrassed for this lack of knowledge. Thoti was not treating her in the manner she assumed she would be treated. In actuality, outside of the coldness that the other Queens displayed towards her, no Lycavorian or elf she had come in contact with since arriving on Earth had treated her with anything other than respect. “It... it was not something my mother... it was not something my mother thought necessary to my education.”

Thoti smiled gently. “Duewa... Anja is incapable of acting in the manner depicted in the security footage presented by your mother and the Elders. Even Rinard should know this as a Lycavorian. She was claimed by the most powerful Alpha wolf among our species in the King. Combined with this fact and the obvious emotion that any mates have for each other, Anja would not be able to respond in such a way to the attentions of another male. Her body would not allow it. Rinard is an Alpha yes, but his aura and power do not come close to the King by anyone’s stretch of the imagination. Her wolf blood would sing only for the King while he lived and breathed. Not to mention the devotion they share with each other and the Queens is beyond questioning. You know the history of that devotion, for all you need do is look back on what the King did in reclaiming Aricia. He would rend worlds for any of them, and just as no female wolf, no female period could ever cause him to stray from his mates, no male could come close to the King in the Queen’s eyes. Any of their eyes.” Thoti smiled. “So you see... the security footage your mother and the Elders presented for all the Union to see is obviously forged in some way. And outside of those on Hadaria, there are very few who believe it.”

Duewa met his gaze, his eyes seemingly staring right through her façade and into her very soul. For the first time since arriving here and having him shadowing her wherever she went, Duewa found herself looking at

him much more carefully. He was not as physically handsome as her now dead husband, but there was a decided difference between them anyway. Her husband had been Hadarian and there were very few Hadarian men that grew to the proportions of the Lycavorian males. Thoti was much more thickly muscled and defined than her husband had ever been, his face deeply tanned and showing no signs of the pallor that came with many Hadarian men who did not work outdoors very much. Looking at him now across the table, Duewa found the ruggedness of his face and features very appealing. There was a distinct air of confidence around Thoti that Duewa now noticed for the first time as well, and incredibly she found herself attracted to that. This was not that pig Rinard she had to remind herself, and from everything she had seen so far in the two months she had been here, Rinard was most definitely not the measure of a Lycavorian man.

“You... you do not seem to be angry with me that my mother is doing what she is doing.” Duewa spoke finally.

“Carrying over to you my distaste for what your mother is doing would be wrong.” Thoti said. “You are here attempting to instruct Calyb and Retta in the ways of the Hadarian Healer. There is nothing wrong with that. It seems to me that you are caught in the middle... unless of course you had something to do with what your mother is doing.”

Duewa shook her head quickly. “No! Certainly... certainly not!”

“May I make a suggestion?” Thoti asked.

Duewa nodded quickly this time wanting to get off that subject as swiftly as possible. She had no desire to relive the times she had to endure Rinard’s foul touch or grunting body upon hers to advance her mother’s plan. Her husband had not been a skilled lover, but Rinard was simply a brute who cared for nothing but his own pleasure. “Of course.” She spoke.

“Open yourself to other things Duewa.” Thoti spoke. “Do not judge by what your eyes alone tell you. Look at things you don’t understand or have never seen as a means to improve your knowledge of the universe and everything around you. The bond that Retta and Calyb have with Mara and Endeem to begin with. That is part of the reason they are so advanced at their ages.”

“They... they frighten me.” Duewa said softly. “Dragons I mean.”

“There is nothing to fear from them Duewa.” Thoti answered. “Just consider them to be something that you can gain knowledge from and explore.”

Duewa chortled and shook her head. “That... you ask quite a bit. I had... I had a very strict upbringing.” She said.

“Do I?” Thoti said. “Stop thinking of yourself as superior to everyone and begin to see things through curious eyes. You might be surprised by what you discover Duewa. Our ways may seem barbaric or shameful to you, but that is because you don’t know us. Learn about us. Allow your sons to experience things they have never experienced. Allow yourself to do the same thing. It will make you a better person and it will make you a far more knowledgeable teacher. And as Anja has said many times in the past... knowledge is a gift. A wondrous gift that everyone should have.”

Duewa looked at him surprised. “Anja... Anja said that?” She asked.

Thoti nodded with a smile. “It is among her more tame sayings. I have no doubts her more passionate one liners have become common among the people here in Sparta and many of the Union military, she and the King are famous for tossing them about, but she is incredibly insightful as well. It just so happens that when the Netnews captures her, it is usually during one of those outbursts of passion. She can be very fiery when she wants to be.”

“What... what do you suggest?” Duewa asked.

“Bring your sons to my home tonight.” Thoti said quickly. “Hiero and I will make you dinner and begin to show you that not everything you have been taught or shown is true. And in the process... perhaps you can... help Hiero as he discovers his abilities.”

Duewa was surprised at how quickly she answered, but she in no way regretted her answer.

“Yes.” She said.

Thoti nodded with a smile and got to his feet. “Excellent. Why don’t you finished your tea and I will fetch the Lifter so that we can pick up the children from school.”

Duewa smiled then and it was a smile that she did not have to force in the least. She cut her eyes and saw the older man sitting at the nearby table looking at her. He motioned discretely to her, folding the two

fingers of his right hand within the palm of his left. Duewa shook her head quickly and got to her feet without a second glance to follow Thoti. She did not see the look on consternation the man gave her.

LEONIDAS IIA-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER ULU HARBINGER

Miranda sat in the small starboard lounge on deck twelve watching as the stars whipped by the view window. They had just exited the Jump corridor and were twelve hours at their present speed from reaching their destination. Judging by the speed and configuration of the stars as they zipped by, Miranda judged that Janon had just increased their speed to point two on the LSD coils. She was going over the duty reports and assignments Steven had given her for when they arrived with the new batch of pilots. He was nearly busting at the seams to see this new ship and his new command, and Miranda couldn't help but smile as she recalled how he acted like a child with a new toy. It didn't take long for her thoughts to drift to E'dira, the Drow tactical officer seemingly popping into her mind at all odd hours now. Miranda Lorian had always considered herself open minded and while she had never entertained the thought of having a relationship with another woman, it was not something that put her off. Since meeting E'dira however, she could not get the Drow's taut ebony body out of her mind. Her flowing white hair and amber eyes only made it worse, as did the very slight accent that E'dira spoke with. She had seen her sitting with Zaala Randall only two days ago, and amazingly Miranda had felt jealously. She didn't know what to make of what she was feeling, though the attraction that she felt for E'dira was growing stronger by the day, of that she had no doubts. She wanted to see her without clothes. She wanted to explore E'dira's wonderfully firm body. She wanted...

"Miranda?" The soft voice interrupted her thoughts and she looked up quickly into those shimmering amber orbs. E'dira stood next to the table with a tray of food.

"E'dira!" Miranda exclaimed suddenly feeling embarrassed.

"I was... can I join you?" E'dira asked.

Miranda sat up straighter and motioned with her hand. "Yes... please."

E'dira smiled and settled into the chair next to Miranda instead of across from her at the circular table. Her amber eyes gleamed in delight when Miranda did not seem to bat an eye at this action. E'dira's life had always been filled with duty and tradition. She had never even considered that she would want more until she had been introduced to Miranda Lorian. The black hair and dark eyes had entrapped her almost from the outset. E'dira was not one to open up to others easily, especially about what the High Coven had done to her. Turned her into. Until only a few days ago, only Lynwe knew fully what it was she was capable of. Upon meeting Zaala Randall, knowing that her sister had once shared Lynwe's bed willingly and knowing that Tarifa was the 'slave' to her Drow mistress Aihola, made it easier to talk to her of what E'dira was beginning to feel. What she was beginning to feel for Miranda Lorian most strongly.

Zaala had been very pointed in her advice, though she did not know all of E'dira's secret. If Miranda Lorian was who E'dira wanted, then she should act like the Drow she was and go after her. E'dira found Zaala to be refreshing in her advice and after thinking about what she had said for a full day E'dira decided Zaala was right. E'dira had never desired a woman as strongly as she wanted Miranda and there were only two others outside of Lynwe and Aihola who knew what she could do. She wanted Miranda to be the one who she gave herself too completely and who she allowed to know and experience even her deepest secret. Zaala had told her that she thought Miranda was open to such a relationship based on what she had seen in how they interacted, and the only way to fully know if that was the case was to pursue that. E'dira had decided to take Zaala's advice and take a chance.

"I'm not disturbing you am I?" E'dira asked.

Miranda shook her head. "No... not at all! I'm just reviewing the duty assignments Steven gave to me." She answered as E'dira rested fully into the chair next to her. Miranda almost groaned at the almost sensuous movements of the Drow's limbs as she settled gracefully into the chair.

E'dira looked at her. "You are working?" She asked somewhat surprised.

Miranda nodded slowly. “There isn’t much else to do until we get to the *ARIZONA*. Two of her *TAUR’OHTAR*-Class Destroyer Escorts and her secondary Command and Control ship the *TAU CETI* will meet us in just over twelve hours.”

E'dira looked surprised. “The Fleet Group’s Secondary C and C ship is a *NOVA*-Class?” She asked.

Miranda nodded. “A *NOVA*-Class Mark III Attack Cruiser. The *TAU CETI* is the newest one to join *ARIZONA*’s Group and has been fitted with the same Tactical and Command stations as the *ARIZONA*’s. We’ll transfer over to her for the remaining six hours of the trip.”

“Why not a *LEONIDAS IIA*?” E'dira asked.

“Everyone would expect that.” Miranda answered. “It was Tina’s idea actually. They’ll meet us at the coordinates and we’ll take the squadron that did the best in the final exercises on Nodon. I want to fly in to meet our new home in a *DEVASTATOR*. Seeing her for the first time out of the cockpit of a fighter is inspiring. I think everyone will appreciate it more.”

“If this ship is even half of what I have read, that alone is enough to inspire.” E'dira spoke. “I am looking forward to serving on her.”

“You seem... you seem more animated and excited than you were on Earth.” Miranda said.

E'dira nodded. “I have always enjoyed traveling and adventure. It appears I will get both serving with you Miranda.” E'dira’s amber colored eyes fluttered for a moment and Miranda could have sworn she saw the Drow officer blush under her ebony colored skin. “Forgive me... I did not mean to refer to you so casually.”

Miranda shook her head. “No... for you... for you it is alright.” She said softly.

E'dira met her dark eyes. “For me?” She said wistfully.

Miranda couldn’t meet her gaze for very long and she looked away after a moment, turning her eyes to the data pads in front of her to hide her embarrassment. E'dira had confided in Zaala Randall because she was the sister of Tarifa and both of them were dear friends of General Lynwe. She had told Zaala she wanted Miranda Lorian in every possible way, and Zaala’s words rang in her ears now.

“You are a Drow E'dira. I know you are dominant in all that you do, but if you truly want Miranda Lorian in every way possible, then learn of her first. Learn what she likes, what makes her happy? Learn of her past. Connect with her. Tarifa told me this is how Lynwe won Selene’s heart so completely when they first met.”

“I am not Lynwe Zaala.”

“No you are not, but you are a Drow.” Zaala had told her. “And a Drow never backs down from a challenge. Especially when it concerns something they want as badly as it appears you want Miranda.”

“She... and if she is not receptive to such a relationship?” E'dira asked.

Zaala had smiled then and looked at her with a twinkle in her dark eyes. E'dira knew instantly why Steven Randall was so devoted to her, and why he had become wolf so that he would never lose her. “I think you just might be surprised E'dira. I get the feeling that you have had just as much an impact on Miranda as she has had on you. If that is the case, and I believe it is, then you will have what you want.”

E'dira dismissed her tray of food and slowly covered Miranda’s hand with her own. This caused Miranda’s eyes to lift once more until they were staring at her. E'dira felt the tug in her heart as she gazed into Miranda’s eyes. “What... what is it you feel Miranda Lorian?”

Miranda shook her head slowly. “It doesn’t matter.” She said.

“But it does matter.” E'dira corrected her quickly. “It matters to me. You still have a soul Miranda, no matter what you have endured in the past. You have kept that soul locked away for so many years that... it is difficult for you to express yourself.”

“And how would you know that?” Miranda asked her.

“Because up until a week ago I was the same way.” E'dira replied.

“What happen a week ago?” Miranda asked her in a tone of voice that was almost pleading for a particular answer.

“I met you Miranda Lorian.” E'dira spoke the words. “I met you and my life became so much brighter. Now I want to know about the woman who will share my bed and my life. I want to know everything about her.”

“Isn’t that a bit presumptuous?” Miranda asked tilting her head slightly.

E'dira shrugged her shoulders with a small smile. “I am a Drow.” She stated. “We don’t deal in presumption or questions. If I am wrong... and if I am I apologize... but if I am wrong than at the very least you will have a friend who will forever support you in your endeavors.”

“E'dira... I don’t know if I am capable of...”

E'dira lifted a finger and placed it on her lips. Just her touch alone was enough to make Miranda shiver in want and desire. Things she hadn’t felt in a very long time.

“I will help you find your inner self again Miranda Lorian.” E'dira said. “She is in there; it is just a matter of discovering her again. And if there is anything I know about, it is discovery of one’s self.”

Miranda stared at her for a long silent moment. E'dira thought perhaps she had misjudged what Miranda wanted and she was going to pull away when Miranda gripped her hand tighter. “I was... I was only four years old when...”

MEYAKOI FORWARD KAVALIAN MILITARY HEADQUARTERS LIMIAN SPACE

Pusintin stood to the side of the control center watching intently as troops and officers shuttled equipment and crates of weapons back and forth out of the military spaceport below. This base was the newest forward operating center within the Kavalian military, and at the moment there were not many who knew it even existed. Unbeknownst to the Lycavorian Union, the Limian government had thrown their support behind the KFI most willingly. Keleru had promised them a dozen of the mineral rich worlds within the Union borders once they had accomplished their goals, including Hadaria. Most of the Kavalian officers gave their Marshall a wide berth as he stood taking everything in. He may have been Lycavorian by birth, but no one doubted that Pusintin was Kavalian through and through by his actions and loyalty through the years to their cause. His eyes shifted to another monitor as he saw Keleru exit his personal transport in the bay below, surrounded by half a dozen of the Puma Bane Pride that provided his security. He felt the presence of the pure Kavalian officer move up next to him and turned to look at his executive officer. Their *GREAT SOUL*-Class Dreadnought was in orbit of the planet above, the crystallized remnants from the now dead Pulsar Star in the next system effectively blinding any and all sensors scans of this region of space.

“Gelin?” Pusintin asked.

“The Prefect being here was not planned.” He said.

Pusintin nodded. “No... but it must be for good reason.”

The officer held out the data pad to him. “The reports from the units around Uirmeik.” He spoke. “The first legions of Pride Troops will be arriving here in three days with their complete equipment list Marshall. Nine of the twenty-three Fleet Groups are accompanying them. They are on the last leg of the veiled route you laid out for them.”

Pusintin took the data pad and nodded. “Good. Another nine days and all of them will be present and ready to make the jump.”

“Yes sir.” Gelin spoke.

Pusintin detected the tone of the man’s voice and lifted his eyes from the pad to look at him. “Something Gelin?” He asked.

“No Marshall. It is nothing.”

“Gelin... how long have we served together?” Pusintin asked.

“Almost thirty-five years sir.” He answered.

“And in that entire time have I ever dismissed anything you had to say or think?” Pusintin asked.

“No sir.”

“Then tell me what it is you are thinking.” Pusintin told him.

Gelin took a deep breath. “This plan sir.” He answered. “It could very well backfire on us horribly.”

Pusintin met his eyes evenly. Gelin was the only man outside of Keleru who knew the entire scope of what it was they were going to do, at least the military portions of it. Pusintin trusted him and had for the last thirty-five years. "Explain your points."

"There are too many unknown variables Marshall Pusintin." Gelin said quickly. "At least from how I view it. Jump corridors, Gate locations, not to mention driving so deep into Union territory right under their noses."

"By the time they realize what is happening it will be too late." Pusintin said.

Gelin nodded. "*If* we are able to eliminate those we are supposed to sir." He said. "My fear is if we miss one of the sons. They will not be in a panic for very long; it is not in their nature and if we leave one of them alive... especially the oldest one... it could spell doom for us."

"That is why we are hitting them in so many places to begin with." Pusintin told him evenly. "If we sow confusion among their ranks it makes it easier for us. Our support and acceptance has already been guaranteed by the government that will come to power. The only thing they will be able to do, even should we miss Androcles, is scream and protest to their Galactic Courts. We will have already done enough to establish ourselves to the new rulers and once we are there, we can do as we please."

"They will not be happy once they realize what they have done." Gelin said.

Pusintin chuckled. "No... I don't think they will be. Once we are in control it won't matter."

Gelin nodded. "The Healers will be a significant advantage." He spoke. "It will give us an ability that we do not have at the moment."

Pusintin nodded. "It will also give us a stronghold deep within Union territory to operate out of."

"Do you think the confusion we sow; combined with the assassinations will be enough to render them impotent from acting sir?" Gelin asked. "The forces we send will have to fend for themselves for an indefinite amount of time for the Union will surely blockade the planet. Without Jump Gates to move through... they will be very alone."

Pusintin nodded. "That is why we are coordinating everything to happen at once. It will give us the ability to take the Gates before they have the opportunity to destroy them, though I don't believe that is something any of them would do. It is also why we have Pride Leader Ngaze leading the delegation."

Gelin looked at him surprised. "Ngaze?" He said. "I did not know that."

"Keleru just decided a few days ago." Pusintin said. "He has experience in this sort of thing."

"He oppressed three entire High Coven planets Marshall Pusintin. Ground their civilian population into submission. Is that the best way to approach this situation? We do not know their correlation of forces in and around Hadaria Marshall Pusintin. Should we not exercise more care?" Gelin asked.

"That is why we are sending so many troops and ships initially." Pusintin answered. "The Prefect's contact within their government has been accurate up until this point. The contact has told Keleru he can get him Jump Gate locations and corridors. We have the locations of their Drow spies in The Wilds and will eliminate them. Whoever this contact is they are actively assisting in getting my scum brother's red haired wench unseated from power. If we are lucky, we can capture or kill her in the process and in doing so take out at least four of his Queens in one fell swoop, possibly more members of their family as well."

Gelin did not remind Pusintin that the Evolli had tried something similar during their war with the Union. They had targeted and put prices on the heads of all King Leonidas's Queens. No mercenary had come forward to take the money the Evolli offered so they resorted to using their military to directly target locations the Queens were known to be in. They determined that if they eliminated one or more of his Queens it would render him impotent and unable to act. Gelin didn't remind Marshall Pusintin that two attempts were made on the Queen Anja. She ended up destroying nearly a two legions of Evolli troops with only four hundred Spartans and her dragon. One attempt was made on the vampire and elf queens Isabella and Dysea and that too failed miserably, costing the Evolli almost a hundred ships and nearly twenty thousand troops. The final attempt they had made was against the one they should never have targeted to begin with. The pureblood Queen Aricia had become a snarling and deadly wench since the events on Enurrua and she and the elf Queen For'mya were never far from Leonidas's side. The poorly planned assassination attempt against her had cost the Evolli an entire Fleet Group of ships and nearly a full division of troops when all was said and done. Gelin did not want to bring up that targeting his Queens was not a particularly intelligent idea in his opinion.

Gelin finally nodded. "I'm sure you and the Prefect have everything worked out sir." He spoke with more confidence than he actually felt.

Pusintin nodded and pounded him on the shoulder as he smiled. "Trust in us Gelin my friend." Pusintin said. "In a year's time we will own the Lycavorian Union and the High Coven will be nothing but a memory."

Gelin smiled. "That will be good to see sir." He stammered quickly. "I will return to our ship in case the Prefect wishes to come aboard for a stay."

"I'll meet him in the conference lounge and contact you depending on what he wants to do." Pusintin answered. He watched his executive officer nod and then he turned to make his way out of the control center. Gelin was right however. This visit by the Prefect of the Kavalian Federation was much unexpected and had come up only yesterday. It was not well known, but there was no denying that dozens had seen him get off his ship and make his way to the conference room Pusintin thought as he too began moving the short distance to the comfortable lounge room. He barely paid any mind to the six Puma Bane Security troops that remained outside the door to the conference room, and they only nodded to him as he passed through the door.

Keleru turned from the view window as the door began to slide shut behind Pusintin. The two men met gazes and Pusintin smiled.

"Keleru... this is a surprise." He stated.

"Indeed." The man spoke as he turned fully. "The base is coming along quite nicely I see." He said.

Pusintin nodded as he came up next to him. "Units slotted for the mission should begin arriving in the next several days, and within nine days we will be ready to launch our expedition into Union space. Somehow... somehow I don't get the feeling you came here for a progress report however."

Keleru held out the data pad. "We may not have nine days Pusintin." He said. "Read this. I received it two days ago from our contact within the Union."

Pusintin began reading from the pad, his eyes darkening the more he read. He looked up quickly after a moment. "This is confirmed?" He gasped.

"Not only confirmed, but he sent images as well." Keleru said reaching out to touch the pad and it changed to two different sets of photos. "The first image was taken on Uzu Ozeib 7 four years ago. The second only weeks ago on Earth. The rest are an assortment taken within the last weeks as well, all on Earth."

"Keleru... you know who these women are?" Pusintin asked.

Keleru nodded. "Indeed I do. The one on the left is Carisia Moran. The daughter of that vile, putrid vampire bitch Yuri!" He spat. "The second is Princess of the High Coven Narice, daughter to that murdering whore Empress Aikiro. The third took several hours to discover, but she is now confirmed as a medium level operative for the Coven *Venorik Elghinn* Intelligence Division."

"Keleru... this Narice and Carisia... they are bound to dragons!" Pusintin stated as cold realization washed over him. "I don't know about the red haired female, but Aikiro's daughter and granddaughter are bound to dragons!"

Keleru's head nodded. "Yes I know. I believe you will agree with me when I say it is safe to assume that this is where the High Coven dragons have gone too." He said. "The questions remains... for what purpose?"

"I think that is obvious." Pusintin spoke quickly. "My brother is training them. Training them to fight us! Carisia Moran is with Androcles in this image. During their war with the Evolli he established himself as one of their premier riders. Almost as experienced and skilled as my brother. He must be the one doing the training."

"Well... he is a member of their dragon unit." Keleru spoke. "One of four leaders to be precise. All the intelligence we have been able to gain on that unit, precious little that it is, all of it points to the fact they are very particular about who leads them. They would not just choose the son unless he was capable."

Pusintin looked at the more recent image and saw Carisia holding hands with Androcles Leonidas. Another image had the younger High Coven Princess Narice sitting between the legs of Arrarn Leonidas on the beach, with the red haired female positioned between her legs.

"Carisia Moran is holding his hand." He said softly. He looked up at Keleru. "They are involved in a relationship. And it appears Arrarn Leonidas is with Narice as well."

Keleru shrugged. "I care not that the sons of our greatest enemy are fucking them like the whores they are!" He snapped. "What does this mean about the Coven intentions?"

Pusintin met his eyes. "Are you thinking the High Coven will launch a preemptive attack against us?"

“Their dragons have been there at least as long as they have been missing from our spies within the High Coven.” Keleru spoke as he moved to the refreshment counter and poured himself a glass of water. “That means almost six months. We have spent years buying up every last T19 that we could. If the Coven riders have now been training with the Union riders under Androcles Leonidas, then our advantage with the T19s just became null and void. They will know how to defeat the rockets and missiles easily. The Evolli were never able to determine how the Union riders managed to do that, only that they did. If that is the case, then yes, a preemptive attack by the Coven just became a concern.”

“We have detected nothing that would indicate this.” Pusintin spoke.

“That does not mean it is not a possibility.” Keleru spoke. “The vampire scum can be devious when they want to be.”

“Then the Cease Fire Accord they just signed with the Union is probably a farce to cover up this training.” Pusintin said. He looked at Keleru his eyes suddenly wide. “And it also means they are probably still on Earth.”

“Aikiro and Yuri?” Keleru gasped. “Impossible!”

“When have you known either one of them to not have their hands in the pot when it came to something important?” Pusintin asked him.

“Never! But what you are suggesting... it is...”

“Outrageous I know.” Pusintin said. “Why is it that Aikiro has made no appearances since the signing? No sightings of Yuri or Moran either. It didn’t occur to me until right now. They are all still on Earth Keleru! In hiding until this training is over!”

Keleru met his eyes. “How long does this training normally take?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “I have no idea.” He replied.

Keleru hissed underneath his breath. “And they have had four months at least to train them!” He growled. “This is not good. We can not fight a war on two fronts. Our plans are contingent upon the Union being neutralized by our actions and what you will present to them.” He looked up quickly. “Is it too soon for that?”

Pusintin shook his head. “No. It has only just started for all of them. It’s not the prime time, but it’s still very promising.”

“So if we proceed a few days sooner than we had anticipated it will not matter?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin shook his head once more. “It shouldn’t... no. What are you thinking?”

Keleru looked at him. “Our contact is going to release this information within the next day or so.” He said. “Imagine Leonidas’s reaction when he discovers two of his precious sons have been consorting with the daughters of his most hated enemies. He will livid.” Pusintin nodded slowly as he turned to look out the massive view window into the spaceport below. Keleru watched him carefully knowing that he had a keen methodical mind. “What are you thinking Pusintin?”

“It doesn’t make any sense.” Pusintin said finally.

“What?”

“My brother hates Aikiro and Yuri almost as much as we do.” He continued. “Why would he agree to train dragons that she stole from him?” Pusintin looked at Keleru. “All the intelligence we have indicates that he holds dragons among the most precious of lifeforms within the Union. Why would he agree to train dragons with High Coven riders knowing she could very well turn them against him one day? Probably will turn them against him one day.”

“So there is another reason he is doing what he is doing?” Keleru said thoughtfully. “A reason which we do not have the time to discover, though I will bring it up to my contact. We can not allow Androcles Leonidas to finish training these dragons so the Coven can use them against us Pusintin. If we speed up our timetable by days, perhaps even two weeks, then combined with what is obviously happening on Earth and Hadaria now, we can deal a fatal blow to the Union’s leadership. If what you suggest is indeed true, when word gets out that his sons are involved with the daughter and granddaughter of Aikiro, Leonidas will be beside himself.”

“That is true but we still don’t know where Dysea is.” Pusintin spoke. “That is an integral part of our plan. Perhaps the largest one.”

“Our contact is working on that as well.” Keleru said. “He reported he is close to this information, but it will be another few days before he can get that. Then once we have it we can direct our forces in The Wilds to

converge on that location. They are stationed all over The Wilds as it is and it should be simple to redirect them. Who knows... when this information comes out perhaps she will reveal her location herself.”

“And Gerald?” Pusintin asked.

“Fuck that vampire fool!” Keleru spat. “He has made enough mistakes! If he is in the area he can participate in any attack, but aside from that, I don’t want him involved. He could not capture one half breed child even with the exact information given to us by my source.”

Pusintin moved closer to him. “Keleru... we are putting an awful lot at risk with just this contact of yours.” He said softly. “His information has proven accurate to a fault over the years, but are we so secure we can trust everything he has told us?”

“I haven’t relied entirely on his information. That is why we will attack the Drow elf settlements throughout The Wilds.” Keleru said. “It eliminates a valuable intelligence resource for the Union and also clears the way for us to push our control further into Wild space. I have other measures in place to verify his intelligence to us, don’t worry.”

Pusintin looked at Keleru oddly for a moment and the Kavalian leader laughed. “You do not think I have allowed you to know everything do you?” He said. “I have done it this way to protect my sources, as well as keep you free of distractions Pusintin. It is not a matter of trust my friend. Never think that. It simply protects all of us.”

Pusintin nodded. “I know all about security.” He replied. “That is the one thing you do not need to explain to me.”

“Can we move early to act shortly after my source releases this information?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin thought for a moment. “All the elements are in place.” He answered. “Except those in regards to Dysea, but that is only a matter of a single transmission. She will turn up as soon as things begin to happen I imagine.”

Keleru nodded. “Yes she will. She will have no choice.”

“Our assassination teams can be in place in a matter of hours.” Pusintin said. “It might be a little more difficult given the short notice and warning, but we can still conduct the operations easily enough. If your contact’s information is accurate, they all arrive at Androcles’s villa on a regular basis. Our people have been monitoring it ever since their courts sided against us and it is usually the same days.”

Keleru nodded. “They do love their courts and laws don’t they.” He said with a smile. “Their own laws have made them predictable.”

“That won’t matter in about eleven months.” Pusintin said with a smile.

Keleru nodded. “No it won’t.” He said. “I’m going to order our teams in The Wilds to hit the Drow settlements beginning in four days time. They will be the very tip of the spear we drive into the heart of Leonidas and his family. They will sever all outbound communications and then leave no survivors. Their orders are to make it appear as if mercenaries and pirates have done this. It is also my understanding from my contact that one of the Androcles’s mates to be is at one of these settlements?”

Pusintin looked at him. “Really?” He answered. “A Drow elf?”

Keleru’s nose wrinkled. “That is what the contact suspects based on what he has seen. A Drow?” He exclaimed shaking his head. “Disgusting. Normal elves are bad enough, but when you add those dark skinned ones into the mix it is unbearable.”

Pusintin nodded. “I agree.” He said. “I will contact all the teams personally within the next twelve hours and give them their orders. I’ll have Phy’iad on standby as well. You do realize that once the Drow settlements begin to not check in they will suspect something? And probably investigate.”

Keleru nodded his head. “That is why we have coordinated our strikes to occur almost immediately after they have checked in for their weekly report. It will buy us more time. Watch that Immortal scum Pusintin.” Keleru said. “I do not trust them.”

“Nor do I, but better they are fighting for us than against us.” Pusintin said. “And they will have the much better chance of securing Dysea for us than any of our men. Especially if the rumors that she is meeting and working with Immortals are true.”

Keleru nodded in agreement. “Very true. Jiss and Matuarr have also confirmed what we suspected and hoped for. We will be acting before we get their official report, but it is of no matter. Tell Ngaze I want him and the advance units of his occupation force underway in three days. Do not wait for his entire force to be in

position. When the first units arrive they are to move immediately and we will reinforce him as quickly as the other units arrived from Uirmeik. Travel time to Hadaria?”

“There is only one Jump Gate within range of the Union border in this sector of space. We can’t use it for it would take us too far out of a direct path. There is another Gate on the other side of Elear. We’ll steer well clear of the elf homeworld for now until we get to that Gate and then jump almost directly to Hadaria. There are not a lot of travel corridors in this part of the Union. The Limians have never done a whole lot to give the Union a reason to build more well traveled corridors. We can remain unseen barring any mishap. If all goes well... six days tops.” Pusintin spoke.

Keleru nodded with a smile. “Just in time to show our support for our new ‘allies’ when the moment is right and they throw their Queen to the wolves so to speak.”

Pusintin matched his nod. “It might be better for us to keep them Keleru.” He said. “If any of our teams fail, having two or three of the Union Queens in our custody might come in handy.”

Keleru shook his head. “No. They would rally support against us. Do not discount the influence they have gained through the years. Your brother chose well when he picked the women who would share his bed and give him children. And that decision will serve us as well now.” He said. “When the time comes, my contact and those working with him will get the rewards they have required of us. Who knows... we may need their help down the road.”

“The assassination teams?” Pusintin asked.

Keleru nodded. “Move them into their final positions and have them stand by to act. In two weeks time we will begin the dismantling of the Lycavorian Union, and your rise back to the throne of your father. Then we can concentrate entirely on the Union and solidify our place in history.”

Pusintin smiled. “I like the sound of that.” He said.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

BONTAWILLIAN KJU21 CIVILIAN CORVETTE TWO DAYS FROM IRARUZU

Ceneia stepped from the small quarters on the corvette her eyes darting back and forth in the small corridor. She straightened her shoulder length dark hair and reached down to smooth out her uniform. Having been assigned to fly the Guardian of the Line’s *STRIKER DT* around at the tender age of a hundred and twenty-two years of age was an honor that few within the entire Union would discount. Ceneia’s flying skills were very much beyond reproach, and when she had applied for the position she never thought she would be the one chosen. Twelve years now she had been Walter’s pilot, all through the Evolli War and up until now. Never did Ceneia ever take into account what she would experience as Walter’s *STRIKER* pilot. Her formative years on Elear had been filled with schooling and boys. She had driven her mother and father crazy at times with her very curious nature, always striving for more knowledge and never shying away from any new experiences no matter what they may have been. Though nothing had prepared her for what she would see with Walter and Majeir.

Since she had begun flying Walter and Majeir around, her life had never been dull for one moment. They had gone through three elven co-pilots during that twelve year span, two of them moving on because they could not handle Walter’s sometimes reckless nature and Majeir did not care for them in the least. The third had been killed during the war when an errant Evolli missile had been able to strike the side of their *STRIKER DT* during a combat descent. It was finally decided that since Walter had learned enough in his years with Majeir and knew enough about flying to be an adequate co-pilot for a *STRIKER*, no more would be assigned to them unless either he or Ceneia requested it. Ceneia had no intention of ever requesting another pilot. She was having too much fun and she loved the traveling they did throughout the Union. She had a modest apartment not far from Walter’s home which was only five hundred meters from the *STRIKER DT* that belonged to her. Her piloting skills had enabled her to learn to fly many different classes of ships in the past years and this only made her more valuable to Walter as a pilot and a friend. Though Admiral Joarl insisted they take another pilot and

security with them on this trip, Walter instead choose three young Dragoon elves from War Master Tareif's main command to accompany them instead. While they were her age and very handsome, Ceneia had almost completely ignored them. She knew Walter looked at her as another of his daughters, and this was not lost on her parents who knew that their child was in good hands and never alone with the Guardian of the Line and Majeir. She assumed he had brought them along to try and make it easier for her to discover a male friend.

The one thing that Ceneia had never had experience with, even as Walter's pilot for so long now, were the Drow elves that populated Earth. She knew Vice President Aihola was a Drow and she had met General Lynwe on many occasions as she and Walter had a very close working relationship. However, General Lynwe was blissfully happy in her relationship with President Selene, Colonel Layna and her husband Admiral Joarl. Ceneia had never been the target of a confident Drow female. That was until she met Senator Daba.

The moment the older Drow female had come onboard the ship Ceneia knew something would happen. Just what she did not know, but seeing Daba's amber colored eyes gaze at her had caused shivers to race through her body. Ceneia had had several relationships since becoming Walter's pilot, none of them lasting very long because of her duties, and certainly none of them with another female. Yet upon seeing the exotically alluring Drow elf, something inside Ceneia had come on like a light in a dark room. She found herself admiring the way the woman moved with incredible grace and sultry measured practice. Almost from the moment she had sat in the cockpit with them as they left Earth Ceneia could not tear her dark eyes from Daba. She knew her to be the mother of the Drow female that Majeir had said she was bound too, and she was far more a natural pilot than Walter. Her long white hair was like spun satin, the specially made Drow field uniform hugging her lush body as if it was made to fit her every curve. She found herself stealing glances at Daba all the time that first day, always finding those amber eyes focused on her in a way that caused goose bumps to dot her skin.

Their second day out from Earth on this trip had seen them together in the cockpit of the civilian corvette almost exclusively, Daba's soft Drow voice with a slight lilt to it. Her voice strummed across Ceneia's skin and senses for the entire day, enraptured as she was by the older Drow woman. Ceneia was also intelligent enough to know that this Drow female wanted her. She was always touching Ceneia, making it a point to caress her exposed skin whenever she could. When Ceneia did nothing to stop this action it only made her bolder. By the end of the day when Walter came to take his spot in the cockpit, Ceneia had every intent of rushing back to her small quarters and pleasuring herself with her ever present toys to relieve the pent up emotions that Daba had brought out in her.

Ceneia never made it as far as her quarters.

As she came around the short corridor leading to her quarters she found herself swept up in the taller Drow woman's arms, their bodies crushed together as Daba laid a kiss on her that just about caused her to pass out. Whatever resistance she may have had to the idea of sleeping with this Drow woman quickly found its way into the garbage as she surrendered completely to the passion and desire Daba brought out within her. She had never been more enflamed with fervor than she was then, and when Daba had led her into her own quarters, Ceneia could not imagine the pleasure that would follow. She had heard the Drow were dominant in almost all that they did, especially in relationships with other females, yet Ceneia found herself relishing in her sudden role as slave to this Drow female. Daba had directed her to do everything, where to lick, where to touch and how to give her pleasure. Ceneia found herself an excellent student, craving even more from Daba as the night progressed, much to Daba's eternal delight. She could not get enough of exploring Daba's firm ebony flesh.

Ceneia felt her knees become weak when the soft lips and tantalizing tongue brushed firmly against the back of her elven ear and Daba's warm breath caressed her skin. She turned without question and looked up into the face of the five foot nine tall Drow female, her heart skipping a beat when she saw that Daba held the thin sheet around her delicious body with only one hand. She had learned the pleasures of a woman from this Drow female last night, and it was by no means one sided. Daba had explored her writhing body in ways that no male ever had. She discovered erogenous zones on Ceneia's body that even she did not know she had, all while Daba greedily lapped away at her juices every time an orgasm smashed through her, an event that had happened more times than she could remember. While Daba was dominant, she by no means let Ceneia suffer in any way, though by the fifth hour of their tryst Ceneia was all about pleasing and tasting her new Drow Mistress in whatever way she could. Seeing her Drow Mistress tossing about wildly while her tongue delved deeply between those delicious ebony pussy lips had given Ceneia pleasure all her own. To know she could elicit such responses with her touch and kisses was something new and wonderful to her.

Her Drow Mistress Ceneia thought quickly as she gazed into Daba's amber eyes. Nothing she had ever experienced up until now had prepared her for what she had felt last night, and Ceneia found herself wanting it to continue with this sensuous woman forever.

Daba for her part stared down at Ceneia's five foot one frame, her amber eyes taking in the contours of her lips and face. Not since Norela had a female caused Daba to react in such a way. From the moment she had been introduced to Ceneia, Daba knew that she would have this female elf. In the twenty-five years since Norela's death Daba had never taken another female lover into her bed. None had stirred her enough to make her want them as she had wanted Norela. That was until she saw Ceneia, and suddenly the desire and need for her surpassed even what she had felt for Norela. Daba had been right, for Ceneia tasted even better than she looked, and though she was a Drow female Daba had spent far more time pleasuring her slave than she had ever spent giving Norela attention.

Staring at her dark eyes now, she reached up and ran a finger across her cheek softly. "It would... it would pain me greatly Ceneia if you said that what we have shared these last hours was not beyond incredible." She spoke softly. "You have... you have stirred a passion in me that even I did not know existed until this very night. I would hope you do not regret it, for I do not."

Ceneia shook her head quickly. "Never!" She hissed stepping closer to her and pressing her body against Daba's. "I... I am to be your slave then... my... Drow Mistress?" She spoke shyly.

Daba smiled and shook her head as she snaked an arm around Ceneia's waist, pulling her tightly against her. "Oh... I would so covet that Ceneia." She said. "Yet... I want you to be sure about this. The terms Slave and Mistress have long been words of endearment for Drow. They hold a far different meaning than they did so long ago; one that our Queen showed us was so much more powerful and fulfilling. They are definitions that the Drow have easily embraced for it means much to us and our tradition and it makes us stronger."

"I would... I would be a part of your life?" Ceneia asked.

Daba nodded quickly. "Oh yes. A very integral part of my life. One that I will share with no one."

Ceneia smiled brightly. "Then that is what I want." She said.

Daba felt her body become aroused once more at Ceneia's words and she leaned over to kiss her hungrily knowing that Ceneia had duties she needed to perform. As Ceneia melted into her arms and met her Mistress's skillful tongue with her own, Daba knew that she had found total happiness once more. She loved her Drow husband without question or doubt, but for too long she had missed the attentions and closeness that her 'Slave' gave to her. They had shared a bond that only two women could share and for the last two decades Daba had missed that, and when she had first seen Ceneia, the prospect for having that feeling once more became so much greater. After a long moment they parted and Daba used her nose to nuzzle Ceneia's ear once more.

"You have duties to perform." She stated with reluctance. "Think... think about what we have shared Ceneia and know that I want it to continue for as long as I have years."

Ceneia drew back slowly her hands gripping Daba's arms, wanting to stay, but her sense of duty calling to her as well. She nodded with a bright smile and turned to move down the short corridor while Daba watched her with adoring amber eyes. Only when Ceneia turned the corner out of sight did Daba turn to go back into her quarters and she nearly screamed when she saw Walter standing silently in the corridor behind her. He had crept up behind her as she had watched Ceneia walk away and Daba had never even sensed him.

"Holy One!" She exclaimed loudly.

"Forgive me Daba." Walter said with an embarrassed smile. "I... I tend to move rather quietly."

"Quietly Holy One?" Daba gasped looking around and pulling the sheet tighter. "More like a phantom from the grave!"

Walter chuckled and moved closer, ignoring Daba's obvious near nakedness under the sheet she held around her. "You know... Ceneia is very special to me Daba." He said meeting her amber eyes. "She is like another daughter to me. I have sworn to her parents to watch out for her and I do not wish to see her hurt."

"Do you think this is my intent Holy One?" Daba asked.

Walter shook his head. "No... not at all. She is from Elear however Daba. She is not wise to the ways of the Drow like the female elves from Earth. I know you would not have taken her into your bed unless you truly desired her... but I..."

"Holy One... I have had only one other female lover in my entire life." Daba said. "I lost Norela in the Battle for Earth twenty-five years ago. I loved her dearly... and not since Norela have I felt I would find

another. What I... what I feel coursing through me for Ceneia is beyond even what I felt for Norela. I will have her Holy One, if that is her wish as well. She will be my Slave and I will be her Mistress. And I will share her with no one! Not even my husband! She has touched..."

Walter held up his hand as he stepped even closer. "I can hear the passion in your voice Daba... you don't need to convince me of your intent." He said. "That might not sit well with your husband however."

"I am the Matron Mother of my family!" Daba spoke with firmness. "If I do not wish to share my lover with my husband than he will have to tolerate it! And Ceneia... I would share her with no one!"

Walter nodded. "Good." He spoke. "Why don't you get dressed and meet the rest of us for breakfast. Though I'm quite sure the young Dragoons we have brought with us will be very disappointed. They were beginning to become interested in Ceneia."

Daba snorted in disgust and shook her white mane head. "Tell them to find their own lovers! They can not have Ceneia!"

Walter laughed. "I will tell them that."

Neither of them was aware of Ceneia standing just around the corner out of sight. When she heard Daba exclaim Walter's name in surprise she had stopped heading for the cockpit and positioned herself just in front of the ventilation duct which was sucking whatever scent she had into the shafts throughout the ship. She knew Walter's sense of smell was very keen, but she also knew that her scent would be all over the ship as well. Hearing Daba's words to Walter and the confidence in her voice in addition to the desire in her tone... it made Ceneia's heart sing out silently in joy. She turned to continue to the cockpit, knowing that she was now a "Slave" to her Drow Mistress, and that gave her more happiness than she had yet known in her life.

KRANEK

"*Nau... nau mzild* Tir'ut my... my love! *Usstan... usstan ann dos!* Ahhhhhhhhhhhh! Yesssssssss... my hussbaaand!" Normya cried out in the ancient vampire language. (No more. I beg you.)

Normya's sweet voice echoed among the towering trees all around them as her lithe body arched off the thick blanket once more and another mind numbing orgasm rippled through her. Her lean muscles stretched to the point that they felt as if they would tear through her skin, her flat abdomen undulating as her juices spilled from her like a flowing river. Her hands clutched Tir'ut's head, her strong fingers digging into the short dark hair for some sort of grip as his tongue and lips drove her over the edge of the precipice so easily yet again.

Normya's quivering thighs clamped against the sides of his head, her heels digging into the middle of his powerful back as she held him in place and her beautiful new husband feasted on her flowing passion like a newborn pup. His hands cupped her firm ass cheeks with ease and he held her firmly within his powerful grasp as bright colorful lights burst behind her tightly shut eyelids, her mouth open in a silent scream of delight. No matter what Normya Leonidas had anticipated their first night together would be like, Tir'ut was resolute in his drive to see that it surpassed anything her creative imagination could conjure up. So far he was succeeding beyond any shadow of doubt.

Their marriage ceremony had happened within hours of arriving back on Kranek, neither Normya nor Tir'ut wanting to wait any longer. They had made a promise to each other to not be together until after they were properly married, yet the more time they spent together the harder that vow became. With her mother and Cihera acting as her seconds and Cha'talla standing tall and proud next to his son, the Akruxian religious Elder that had escaped their planet with their tribe conducted a traditional Immortal ceremony. It was a ceremony that they had adopted since Cha'talla had taken Esther as his Blessed Wife. Even Dysea had been brought to the point of tears, partly because Ja'narie and several others had placed large bright red and purple flowers all throughout Normya's platinum hair and she looked ravishing in the simple but elegant ivory colored dress, and partly because her *Nauta Melme* and the rest of their family were not here to witness the event. She took heart that before they had been married Tir'ut had come to her and vowed he would marry Normya once more in whatever way Martin Leonidas deemed him to when time and events permitted. Dysea had come to know that Tir'ut did not go back on his word, much like her *Nauta Melme* and her sons.

Tir'ut had spirited his new Blessed Wife away into the towering trees almost immediately after the ceremony, and while a celebration ensued in the settlement, he had been undressing his very own Blessed Wife among the whispering trees and songs of the hundreds of birds that filled those same trees.

Normya's body collapsed back onto the thick blanket Tir'ut had carried with them, her skin slick with a sheen of sweat from her exertion. Her chest heaved up and down; her firm breasts exposed to the night sky now, her nipples hard points begging for attention. She tossed her head back and forth slowly, her platinum colored hair splayed upon the blanket beneath her, as she tried to gather her senses once more. Her mothers and older sisters had talked with her through the years, trying to describe to her what it would be like the first time, especially with the one she was meant to be with. What she would feel. None of their descriptions had come even close to what she was experiencing now. Her petite Elven and Lycavorian body hummed ceaselessly with bliss, Tir'ut's large hands incessantly caressing her skin, the lips she had been kissing for weeks, now exploring every millimeter of her body. They had been sleeping in the same bed for weeks now, their flesh touching in the most intimate of ways, but not until this night had either of them surrendered to the overwhelming need to touch and explore.

Normya had taken great joy in reciprocating her husband's explorations, committing every delicious inch of Tir'ut's powerful body to her memory and burning his ginger scent into her mind. She had only seen him in a flaccid way up until this night, yet as she gazed hungrily at his now steel hard cock this night, with her small hands wrapped around its thickness and eleven inch length, Normya could only yearn to feel him inside her. He had not lasted long with the ministrations of her lips and tongue on his thick pulsing cock, and Normya shuddered in her own orgasm as she finally tasted his passion. As he had acted like he was a man dying of thirst, Normya was no different as she savored his flavor and texture while his fingers were wrapped within the strands of her platinum blond hair.

The first time her had entered her Normya was coming before he had fully seated himself within her depths. There was a tiny flicker of pain at his incredible size and then her petite elven body easily adjusted to his size and she was clutching at his shoulders and screaming out her delight until he finished that wondrous first plunge. It had been quick, that first time. Neither of them had ever been with another and their inexperience came out now as they couldn't control themselves enough, overwhelmed by the pleasure and sensations they were feeling. Tir'ut had bitten her as he exploded deeply anchored in her tight pussy, and Normya found herself lost in a realm of unique pleasure as his come filled her and he fed on her blood. It was as if her blood began a slow burn that first time, a burn that tantalized her nerves and senses unlike anything she had ever felt.

That first time had only been a prelude to the hours that had followed, and as the sun was rising above the tall trees, Tir'ut made his way back up her gasping body sliding easily between her welcoming thighs. Normya's emerald green eyes fluttered open as she gazed into his face. Yes he was half Immortal, and though the bone spurs along his jaw line were not as pronounced as his father's, they still proclaimed to all that he was his father's son. As she gazed into Tir'ut's face and his bright dark eyes, his lips moist from her drinking her passion once more, Normya Leonidas was sure she had never seen anything so utterly beautiful.

Tir'ut could only stare into the angelic face of his Blessed Wife and thank every god that had ever existed that he had discovered her. This alluring and willful creature beneath him was all his and no matter how many years he lived from now on Tir'ut, the first born son of the Immortal Cha'talla and his pureblood vampire wife Esther, would want for nothing else. As he gazed at her face, her lips trembling slightly from the orgasm he had just given her, he saw her smile up at him and he felt the heels of her feet hook around his thighs. Never in his wildest dreams had he ever thought such a beauty could desire him, yet as his Blessed Wife had shown him this very night, her desire for him matched his own for her. They had not stopped since coming here nearly fourteen hours earlier, both of them utterly charged with energy and ardor. And still it continued as he shifted confidently between her thighs now and placed the flared head of his throbbing cock at the soaked entrance to her velvet tightness. Normya's arms came up and she locked her fingers behind his neck.

"Rilbol!" She hissed out the words, her emerald eyes alive with fervor and need and unrequited love. Love for the half Immortal son of Cha'talla. *"Give me everything my Blessed Immortal Husband! Jal d'dos! Usstan ssinssrin ol nin Tir'ut!"* (All of you! I want it now.)

"Dos ph'usst nin Normya Leonidas! Mal'rak!" Tir'ut snarled his reply. (You are mine now Normya Leonidas! Forever!)

Tir'ut obeyed his beautiful half elven wife and with one powerful thrust he buried his entire eleven inch cock into Normya's magnificent velvet like depths. He was no longer the inexperienced man who had never been with a woman. Now he was a confident man who wanted only to please his Blessed wife. As Normya's head arched back and she screamed out her blissful enchantment, Tir'ut began to thrust into her with strong even strokes.

"Vith... siyooooo! Mzild! Belbau uns'aa mzild! Vith uns'aa! Vith uns'aa!" Normya wailed to the brightening sky above. (Fuck yes! More! Give me more! Fuck me! Fuck me!)

Tir'ut stretched his powerful body out on top of her five foot four frame, tucked his face into the crook between her neck and shoulder, filled his hands with her exquisite ass and began to make love to his half elven bride with every ounce of power and emotion he could bring forth. She possessed his very bring now, and among the silent vows Tir'ut had made this night was to insure she never wanted or could ever want another man in her life. As with his father, he did not need the addicting elements of an Immortal's semen to make his elven bride want only him. He only needed to love her more completely than she had ever been loved before, and as his mother now worshiped his father, Normya would worship him as he worshiped her.

Normya was lost once more, feeling every hot thick inch stretching the walls of her pussy in ways she had never contemplated. The moment Tir'ut's huge cock rammed home she began coming, and now one raging orgasm was crashing upon the other without fail. She could feel every glorious eleven inches of his thick shaft as he plunged into her, every searing hot vein as he withdrew, and the pleasure was beyond anything she had felt this night so far. He was not holding back as she had told him, his two hundred and fifty pound body completely enveloping her within the protective cocoon of his arms as he pounded into her supremely willing body. She wrapped her own arms around his shoulders, buried her beautiful tear streaked face against his neck, and howled out her satisfaction as loud as she could heedless of who might hear her.

Normya Leonidas didn't care who heard her, for she had found what every Lycavorian woman sought. A man who would fuck them senseless in their bed, and covet them as some precious jewel out of it. He was so massive, so large and Normya Leonidas was so petite and tiny it was humorous to look at them standing side by side. Now however, Normya could not pull him close enough to her. With her ankles locked at the small of his back, Normya began smashing her hips upward on every downward plunge of his huge Immortal cock, the agonizing pleasure ripping completely through her every nerve as she sought to make them erupt together. She wanted him to fill her with his scorching seed again! She wanted to feel his come erupting deep inside her, flooding her belly. She was his forever now and nothing would ever take him from her.

Tir'ut's dark eyes were wide, the fire in his groin burning and spreading outward to all his limbs. The smell of her skin, the taste of her passion and her blood, the music of her voice as she cooed out her unearthly delight. It was too much for him and with a bellow not unlike that of a giant bear Tir'ut lifted his head slightly, exposing his ferocious looking vampiric fangs and he sank them into Normya's neck just as his thick cock swelled to even larger proportions and he began to explode into her heated center. As he fed on her blood, his erupting cock spewing his seed within in, Tir'ut heard Normya's wail of pleasure in his ear. Her wondrously tight pussy clamped down on his cock like a vise and her body went rigid as she shuddered violently in his arms from her own staggering orgasm.

Normya's emerald green eyes rolled into the back of her head the moment she felt his fangs pierce her skin and his massive cock began shooting his molten hot come deep into her belly. She shrieked to the rising sun as her own orgasm overwhelmed her senses and everything coalesced into a blinding white veil of light and sheer awe-inspiring pleasure.

They would remember this day for all eternity, for they would try to surpass this very moment many times through the years. And amazing though it seemed... they would succeed each and every time.

"...in all my life thought I would say this my Queen." Danarla spoke as she walked beside Dysea along the walkway high above the village as they made their way towards the expanded command center that doubled as where they took all their meals. "They... they are more like us than I could have ever imagined."

Dysea smiled and took her hand. "I could not agree more." She spoke. "I have come to believe that had the High Coven not conquered their world so long ago, the Akruvian people would have been trusted allies and

friends to the Union. And to Lycavorian people especially. Their sense of honor and tradition is just as deeply ingrained in them as it is in us.”

Danarla looked at her. “Us?”

Dysea smiled. “Danarla... the moment my *Nauta Melme* turned me I became Lycavorian. You don’t know the issues this has caused for For’mya and I with the Elven Parliament. Much like *Melyanna*, I believe they think we cater more towards the Lycavorian people as a whole.”

“And do you?” Danarla asked.

Dysea shrugged. “Perhaps. I know I could not imagine *not* being wolf now. It has become such a core of my being; it is not something I even consider anymore to be honest.”

“What do you think he will say when he discovers Normya and Tir’ut have married?” She asked.

Dysea shook her head. “Five years ago... five years ago he would have embraced it. He has always said to never fear the unknown. Now? Now I am not so sure.”

“What do you mean?” Danarla asked.

“He is different now.” Dysea said softly. “I think Aricia is the only other to really see a change in him. He has been different since... since Alba Tau.”

“Different? He does not seem different. At least not in the times I have seen him on the Netnews.” Danarla said.

“He hides it very well.” Dysea replied. “The only reason Aricia and I see it is because she is his *Anome* and he can hide nothing from her. I see it because I am the first he turned, and it has and always will be a stronger tie to him in some ways. I... I could always sense his moods. Even before he turned me I could almost see what he was thinking. Our time together building Eden City brought us very close.” Dysea waved her hand dismissively. “Bah... listen to me. I am just coming into phase and I miss his touch upon me. That is all it is.”

Danarla chuckled and nodded her head. “Yes I do know about that.” She said. “Ta’lon may be an elf, but he knows when my blood burns for him.”

Dysea looked at her. “We will get As’hia back Danarla.” She said. “You must never lose hope. I have talked to Esther and Cha’talla at length about Lynom. They say he is even more methodic than Tir’ut and I have seen Tir’ut when he is in defensive mode. Lynom will allow no harm to befall her.”

“I worry about the harm that has already been done.” Danarla spoke. “My daughter is no stranger to men or even women my Queen, she has had lovers in the past before that fool O’lan, but rape is not something she ever imagined would happen to her. It is not something any of us contemplate. And while she is still in danger now, I can not begin to imagine the harm done to her self worth. I have seen it already with this fool pilot who is the reason she went to that resort in the first place.”

Dysea met her eyes. “He questions whether she will still be worthy of his attentions?”

Danarla nodded. “Not openly no and certainly never with Ta’lon nearby... but I have seen the looks he gives Tir’ut and Normya when they are together. I have seen the looks he gives the other Immortals with elven wives that live here. It is as if they are beneath him somehow. It disgusts him.”

“Then he does not deserve your daughter.” Dysea spoke instantly.

The delighted squeals of small children drew their attention and they looked down into the main dirt path beneath them in time to see Tir’ut toss a smaller Immortal child into the air, Normya half a step behind him and carrying a half Immortal half elven child in one arm, and holding the hand of a pure Immortal child as they walked along behind. Dysea stifled the gasp that escaped her lips as she saw the brilliant radiance of her daughter’s face and eyes. She had never seen such a large smile on Normya’s features, even as a small child and it made Dysea’s heart weep in joy.

“Dysea! Danarla!” Esther’s voice carried over the distance and they turned to see her running up to them just as one of Tir’ut’s younger brothers ran up to him and Normya.

Dysea watched her as she sprinted up to them. “Esther! What is it? What is wrong?”

Esther took a deep breath. “Lynom!” She huffed having blurred from the control center on the other side of the compound. “He’s establishing a secure communications link with the command center. Cha’talla and T’lolt are clearing the signal. He sent me to call for you! Come! I believe he has your daughter As’hia with him Danarla. Hurry!”

No further words were spoken as in two brief bursts of white light Dysea and Danarla shifted to wolf form and Esther could only watch as a platinum haired wolf bolted for the command center with a dark haired

female wolf half a step behind her. Esther shook her head. "Sometimes I don't wonder if it would be easier on four legs." She muttered before turning back and blurring in the direction of the command center.

"...occupied at the moment father." Lynom spoke to his father from within the crystal clear holo transmission. "It is a normal routine for them, and we have perhaps thirty minutes before they start to stir again."

Cha'talla and T'lolt stood in the center of the room, Lynom's image centered in the middle of their chart table. They could undoubtedly see the stunning young As'hia sitting next to him in the chair. Cha'talla shook his head minutely thinking once more at the way his life had taken a new direction when he met Esther. A new and better direction. And now his oldest son with his pureblood vampire Blessed Wife had just married the half elf daughter of the King of the Union, and his second oldest had proclaimed a Blood Oath for another half elf female. If these two events were not the biggest sign to Cha'talla that his people's future was growing brighter and that it was entwined with the Lycavorians and the Union he did not know what would convince him. Cha'talla glanced at his brother and saw T'lolt nod his head knowing what his brother Cha'talla was thinking.

"Our destiny brother." T'lolt whispered.

Cha'talla nodded again. "So it seems." He turned as the door to the command center slid open and Dysea moved quickly into the small area, Danarla and Esther on her heels. He saw Ta'lon and the elf pilot O'lan coming up directly behind them. The Lycavorian woman Danarla had impressed Cha'talla with her knowledge and experience and over the course of the last two months he was reasonably sure he had shown her where the path of his people now lay. They had worked together with her husband tirelessly on a plan to go to Belid and rescue not only their children, but all the female elves that Phy'iad had taken over the years. A dozen plans they had come up with a rejected, but they were still hard at work. Her elven husband was a much tougher critic of the Immortals who followed Cha'talla, but over the last several weeks he had been spending much time with Illiad and discovering what had transpired over the last twenty-five years. While he was still cautious, Ta'lon had a developing respect for the Immortals that he did not think he would ever have. O'lan was a lost cause as far as Cha'talla was concerned. The young elven pilot was so full of himself that no matter what any of his people did, he would never lose the distrust and disgust he held within him. Cha'talla looked back to the transmission now.

"Do we want to know what this routine is my son?" Cha'talla asked as everyone looked at him.

"No father you do not." Lynom answered as he watched the others move up around his father and uncle.

Cha'talla looked at his brother quickly and snarled. "We will end that vile practice soon enough brother." He growled.

T'lolt nodded in agreement. "Indeed we will."

This exchange was not lost on As'hia's father Ta'lon, and once more everything he had been raised to believe and know about Immortals was being slowly but quite surely shredded into nothing. He turned back to the transmission when he heard his wife gasp.

"As'hia!" Danarla exclaimed excitedly as she finally saw her daughter and Cha'talla saw the young woman's eyes light up.

"*Amille!*" As'hia wept as she saw her mother for the first time in months.

Danarla fought the tears that threatened to spill forth as she moved as close to the transmission as she could. "My daughter! Oh As'hia!" She wailed as Ta'lon moved up beside her.

"*Ontaro.*" As'hia spoke to him as tears clouded her eyes and he gripped Danarla's arms.

"*Rel'yende.*" Ta'lon spoke as sternly as he could though it was easy to hear the emotion in his voice. (Daughter) "As'hia... you are..."

As'hia nodded quickly. "I... I am enduring *ontaro*. For now. When... when are you coming for us?" She asked.

Dysea moved up next to Cha'talla now. "We are working on a plan now young As'hia." She said.

"My... my Queen!" As'hia spoke taking a deep breath and getting her emotions under control. She obviously knew she could not lose it where she was.

Cha'talla looked at the transmission once more, his eyes falling on As'hia now. "You are proud and strong As'hia, daughter of Danarla and Ta'lon, as my son has told his brother. It will not be much longer. I give you my word."

As'hia could only stare at Cha'talla from her end of the transmission in awe. Up until this very minute she had not believed that Lynom was the son of Cha'talla as he had told her. The feared Immortal Captain was dead from all the reports they had. Those reports she had read were quickly were tossed into the incinerator as she was staring at the man who was Captain to the High Lord longer than any other Immortal in High Coven history. He looked different than the images they had of him, his skin more dark bronze in color and his features not as harsh, but there was no debating who it was in the transmission.

As'hia nodded her head slowly. "Ye... yes." She stammered.

Cha'talla nodded to her. "A blessed honor to meet one as strong as you young As'hia." Cha'talla spoke to her. "Your parents are here with Dysea and you may speak with them soon, but now we need information."

As'hia looked up at Lynom who had stood silently beside her as she greeted her parents and she nodded. "I know."

Cha'talla nodded. "Lynom... your brother and Normya became joined in a Blessed Union just yesterday. I wish you could have seen him bumble about with his words. They will be here in moments as well."

As'hia was shocked when she heard this and Lynom chuckled at his father's words as he dropped to one knee next to As'hia. "He never has been good with words father." He spoke.

"As if you are!" The voice bellowed from out of the transmission.

As'hia's face turned in the transmission and Dysea saw her eyes grow a little wider when Tir'ut filled the transmission next to Cha'talla. He was equal in height to Cha'talla and while he too looked like an Immortal, the differences with him were much greater. The bone spurs were less pronounced, he had short dark hair covering his head, and his skin was even more naturally deeply tanned. As'hia glanced quickly at Lynom as he shifted even closer at seeing his brother, and Dysea looked at Esther who stood beside her with a knowing glance.

"Tir'ut my brother!" Lynom spoke warmly from within the transmission. "Do you have Normya with you?"

As'hia's dark eyes grew even wider in the transmission as she saw the beautiful Princess of the Union step into the transmission, wrapping her arms around Tir'ut's waist tightly. "I am here Lynom." She announced with bright emerald green eyes.

"*Ol zhah bwael ulu finally kyorl dos wun iwaotc Du'ased dalnini!*" Lynom spoke with a good deal of warmth in his voice. (It is good to finally see you in person Blessed sister.)

"*Lu'dos ussta sel dalninuk.*" Normya said in reply. (And you my new brother.)

As'hia could only sit there in silence not understanding what was being said, but reading the body language she saw between Princess Normya Leonidas and the towering Immortal that she clung to happily.

"Lynom... how are you able to use their communications hub?" Tir'ut asked quickly.

"They have left Tir'ut. Father." Lynom answered.

"Left?" Cha'talla asked.

Lynom nodded his head as he knelt down very close to As'hia and looked into the small transmission window. Danarla noticed that her daughter did not try and move away. "Early this morning. Phy'iad took the majority of his men and they departed on their small group of ships. He has a *REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought and several *BLOODLETTER*-Class cruisers father, just as we feared. They are heavily modified and equally automated so that they can be utilized with a fraction of the crew members, but they are still a threat."

"Lynom... where have they gone?" Dysea asked now.

Lynom shook his head. "That I do not know. Phy'iad got a transmission yesterday. I don't know what it contained but I was able to find out several details and it came from that traitorous pig Pusintin inside Kavalian space."

"Pusintin?" Dysea asked quickly. "Are you sure?"

Lynom nodded. "Yes *darthirii ilhar.*" He answered.

"Lynom... where are they going?" Tir'ut asked now.

"Again... that I do not know brother." Lynom told them. "Father... they set a course that will take them to Aprian Two, but I don't know if that is their destination."

Cha'talla shook his head. "That still brings them far closer to Kranek than I want." He stated. "How many?"

Lynom shrugged his shoulders. "He has perhaps five hundred on the *REVERENCE*, another equal number spread between the three *BLOODLETTERS*. Not all of them can be used on any assault they may take part in. The automation requires constant monitoring by several dozen crewmembers at least."

"Well... this confirms that he is working for Pusintin at the very least." Dysea said as she met Cha'talla's eyes.

"Yes." Cha'talla nodded his head. "And that they are in some way related to the attempt to kidnap Normya." He turned back to Lynom. "How many of you are left there Lynom?"

"There are perhaps a hundred." He replied confidently. "I... I waited until they were occupied and then brought *Ssin'urn 'Anon* here to contact you. We have perhaps thirty minutes before they begin to regain their dull senses."

Danarla and Ta'lon took definite notice of what Lynom called As'hia Dysea saw and she glanced at Esther to see that she had noticed it as well.

"I heard Phy'iad talking with several of his senior lieutenants." Lynom spoke once more. "He told them the Kavalians are going to act soon here in The Wilds. I don't know what that means, but I do know Kavalian warships have been spotted and tracked with more frequency in this portion of space. I put together a rough graph of the sightings and the only thing I can think of is that they are searching for something. And I know Gareld has been working with them as well."

"Then they are still looking for me." Normya stated.

Lynom shook his head. "I do not think it is just you anymore *dalniril*." He said. "There is something else going on and I do not believe it is related to what Tir'ut and you are currently investigating. At least not directly."

"We have the *fa'la zatoast* from Apo Prime." Tir'ut said. "It is more than likely he was the one who sold the information on *Ssin'urn 'Anon*'s transport to Phy'iad's bunch." (bastard)

Lynom nodded. "If he has been doing this as you and Normya have told me before then yes that is probably the case. *Darthirii ilhar* Dysea... I believe this new information relates to you."

"Me?" Dysea asked.

"One of the few details I was able to pry from one of Phy'iad's lieutenants before they left is that there is a traitor within the Union who has been feeding information to Pusintin and the Kavalians." Lynom said. "Phy'iad was told to take up position and be prepared to act on information once this traitor passed it on to the Kavalians."

"How do you know it was related to me?" Dysea asked.

"*Darthirii ilhar*... you are the only platinum haired Queen of the Union that I am aware of." Lynom told her. "I... I do not know for sure father, but I believe Phy'iad's task is to capture or kill *darthirii ilhar* Dysea when this information is passed to him. Somehow they must know she is working with Immortals, and Phy'iad's men are the ones who have the best chance of infiltrating Kranek and conducting such an action."

"Lynom... there are only a handful who know where Normya and I are." Dysea said. "Most of them our family. They would never betray us."

Lynom nodded. "I know *darthirii ilhar*, but someone is attempting to obtain information on your whereabouts, and they intend to pass it to the Kavalians when they do. Why else would Phy'iad get a message of that nature? It also... it also explains why As'hia was taken. The other female elves they captured were a bonus... but..."

"A bonus!" O'lan almost shouted. "How dare you speak about...?"

"Shut up O'lan!" Danarla snapped looking at him.

"Colonel... he speaks of elven females as if they were pieces of meat to be traded and bartered." O'lan snapped.

"O'lan is with you?" As'hia gasped from within the transmission. Her face took on a most definite hardness to it.

"He accompanied us from Elear." Ta'lon answered looking at his daughter in the holo transmission.

"You should not have brought him *ontaro*!" As'hia hissed. "He..."

"He cares for you As'hia." Ta'lon spoke. "He..."

O'lan stepped forward quickly. "I do not care what has happened to you As'hia." He spoke quickly. "No... no matter what those bastards have done to you... we can work past the taint they have left upon you!"

"Taint?" Danarla snarled as she whirled on him.

"O'lan!" Ta'lon spat looking at him.

"Colonel... Major... he... how do we know he has not forced himself upon As'hia in some way?" O'lan demanded.

"*Dos jaed wael!*" Tir'ut roared angrily turning to face O'lan even as Normya clung to his arm and held him back. (You ignorant fool!) "My brother has risked everything to save her and keep her safe! He has risked his own safety and that of our people to keep her safe!"

"He should have acted before they were able to taint her with their vile touch!" O'lan snarled back.

"*Ssin'urn 'Anon* is not tainted scum!" Lynom barked from within the transmission with all the fury of a raging meteor storm across the stars. Everyone turned to see his eyes had changed to vampire cobalt blue and his vampiric fangs were fully extended in savage anger. "And I would give my life without pause to keep her from harm! That is my *hithern d'vlos!*" Lynom leaned closer to the transmission. "It is you who are tainted! You are the reason she is here to begin with!" They all saw As'hia's eyes fixate on Lynom now, wide with surprise at his words. "Had you embraced her spirit and soul, who she is at her center and not tried to alter her essence to suit your pathetic needs, she would never have been on that transport!" Danarla was wide eyed as she realized that Lynom knew things that As'hia had only told her.

Lynom continued quickly as angry as he was. "She would never have had to endure what she has had to endure! Pray I die here protecting her before I return there you elf bastard... for when I meet you face to face, you will feel my wrath for what you have assisted in making happen to her! You will feel my blade for all the pain you have helped to heap upon her with your arrogance!" (oath of blood)

"O'lan how dare you!" Danarla exclaimed.

Ta'lon stepped up to him even as Tir'ut was about to snatch him by his neck and rip his head off, something Ta'lon did not doubt Tir'ut could do quite easily. "Leave O'lan!" Ta'lon spat. "Wait in the quarters they have provided for you!"

"Major..."

"Do it now... or I will beat you down right now in front of everyone!" Ta'lon snapped. "My daughter was right about you! I just... I never saw it until now. Get out O'lan... get out quickly before I let Tir'ut snap your arrogant neck and you disappear while on a secret mission for the Union! No one will ever know how or where you died!"

"Major... I only..."

With a roar of anger and pent up emotion not normally seen from an elf, Ta'lon reared back and hit O'lan with every ounce of his elven strength square in the center of his chest. The sounds of several ribs snapping, combined with the air leaving his lungs was plainly audible in the confined room as his body flew through the air until impacting with a sickening thud and rush of air against the metal wall. The brief pain was as intense as any he had ever felt and his eyes rolled into his head as blackness claimed him and his body slumped to the floor. No one in the room moved for a long moment until T'lolt walked up to him and squatted next to O'lan's inert form. He could see the rise and fall of his chest, albeit barely, and smell the blood running from his mouth. He turned back to Ta'lon, who was angrier at this moment than he had ever been in his lifetime.

"Remind me to never make you angry Major Ta'lon." T'lolt spoke with small humor. "He will not soon forget this day I am thinking."

"Enough of this!" Cha'talla barked drawing everyone's attention back to him. "Let him lay there and call the medics brother." He turned back to his son in the transmission. "Lynom... whatever information you have... give it to us now."

“...have condensed everything into this pad father.” Lynom spoke as he plugged it into the slot on the console. His eyes quickly returned to normal and his long fangs retreated. “It is everything I heard and everything I was able to pull from the computers here. It includes my opinions as well.” Lynom was well aware of As'hia's eyes on him as he worked the console, but he did his best to concentrate on his task.

“Lynom... the implants?” His mother asked.

Lynom looked at her. “The implants are failing mother.” He said much more calmly as his anger cooled. “There was external damage to the cellular tissue when As'hia arrived. I have tried to repair it, but it did not take. I have perhaps another week before the tissue degrades completely and I must take it off.”

“A week!” Esther exclaimed with worry on her face. “Lynom... what happened? The implants were designed to take quite a bit of damage.”

Lynom looked at As'hia quickly and then back once more to the transmission and his mother's worried face. “It does not matter. I have already planned for when I need to shed this skin.” He answered. “Belid is a barren planet, but it has many mountain ranges. *Ssin'urn 'Anon* and I can hide out in them for several weeks if need be.”

“You will take her with you?” Danarla asked surprised.

“I will not leave her here to the mercies of these animals *darthirii ilhar* Danarla!” Lynom answered instantly looking at As'hia's mother in the transmission. “She is a Spartan warrior just as you her mother are. We will be better suited to fighting and hiding in the mountains until you arrive and then we can take all of the prisoners they have here. I have sworn an oath to protect her and I will.”

“Cha'talla?” Esther asked looking at her husband.

“Lynom... we... we will be to you soon my son.” He spoke quickly. “A week Lynom. Two at most... if I have to get out and push our runners myself. Do what you must to survive... but we will be there!”

Lynom nodded. “I know.” He stated. “I added updated information in regards to the base here and it's defensive platforms. They are active but should not prove too difficult to defeat.”

“We won't need your runners.” Dysea spoke quickly. “We can use our *STRIKER DTs. NORMYA'S LIGHT* has three of them on board. They are faster and more heavily armed and can carry more passengers.”

“Dysea... this is our problem.” Cha'talla spoke looking at her. “This is not something you need to concern yourself with. You should concentrate on discovering...”

“*Zu'tour phor dos Rinovdro wael!*” Dysea exclaimed. “Our families are entwined for all time now Cha'talla! Normya and Tir'ut have seen to that! What affects one of us will affect the other! You need assets to do this mission? One transmission to my son Andro and you will have all the assets you need heading here in a matter of hours!” (Shut up you Immortal fool!) Dysea turned back to the transmission. “Lynom... how much information are you able to get out of their computers?”

Lynom shrugged. “Quite a bit... but it does me no good *darthirii ilhar*. It is all encoded and encrypted.”

Dysea nodded her head. “Yes... and we have the best deciphers right here on Kranek with Anton, Cihera and Las'elh. Where are you safer son of Cha'talla? There at the base or in the mountains?”

“Dysea... what are you suggesting?” Esther asked.

Cha'talla smiled. “I know what she is leading up to.” He spoke quickly.

“As'hia would be safer in the mountains of course.” Lynom spoke immediately. “Inside the base her she must act docile and defeated. Out there she can fight back and allow her spirit to come out. With our combined skills we could survive for weeks or months as I said.”

Dysea squeezed Esther's hand and nodded her head. “Yes. Then empty their computers of everything as you have done and get out now while Phy'iad is gone.” She spoke without hesitation.

“Dysea is that wise?” Esther asked.

“The cellular tissue on his second skin is breaking down Esther... and he does not have the means to repair it. He said so himself. Then allow him to take As'hia and escape into the mountains now. He can shed this false skin he wears and be done with it.” Dysea turned to face the lone empty wall of the command center. “We won't need anymore help in planning an assault because we already have the finest scouts on the ground. And I will send him even more help right now!”

“Dysea... what do you mean?” Cha'talla asked.

KRANEK

“*Shunveil dosstanen nin!*” She ordered. (Reveal yourselves now!)

Cha'talla and the others looked at her oddly. “Dysea what...?”

The two lone figures along the wall unwrapped the shadows from around their bodies and standing not six meters away were two members of Isabella's elite *Vlos Sargtlinen*. They could only look at their elven Queen sheepishly, amazed that she had been able to detect them. They were the finest vampire warriors in the Union, trained by Isabella, Vonis and even the Drow to use the shadows as no one ever had. And all of them were female.

“My... my Queen how...” The female with blond hair began to speak.

Dysea smiled. “I have shared Bella's bed for over two decades.” She stated with some pride. “Do you truly believe she would not train me to detect the *Vlos Sargtlinen* if I needed them? I have been aware of your presence since Apo Prime.”

Esther stepped up to her. “Dysea?” She asked surprised.

Dysea took her hand once more. “No Esther... it is not because I don't trust you that I never revealed them to you. It is because if they knew I detected them, they would have gotten sloppy and Bella would have been very upset.”

“My Queen!” The blond haired one exclaimed indignantly.

Dysea laughed and squeezed Esther's hand as she looked at her. “We are family now Esther Saira.” She stated. “Trust is no longer an issue with us. Never doubt that Esther.” She looked at Cha'talla and T'lolt and the two other Immortals that were in the center. “Any of you.”

T'lolt was the first to laugh out loud and then Cha'talla joined in. “Now we have the ability to be destructive *and* sneaky!” T'lolt spoke now. “Oh my nephew...” He said slamming his hand down on Tir'ut's shoulder. “When you fell in love with your *il kal'daka darthirii* things really began to look up for us.”

Normya didn't hesitate and slugged T'lolt in his chest and more laughter ensued as he staggered back. “*Kitrye grt!*” She shouted. (Half wit)

Dysea was smiling as well as she drew Esther closer, two mothers who were now fast and loyal friends. “Lynom... you should prepare what you need and allow As'hia to speak with her parents while we begin going over the information you sent us.”

Lynom nodded from within the transmission. His eyes turned to Danarla and Ta'lon. “I will safeguard your daughter with my life's breath.” He spoke. “And I will insure she returns to you as she now is. Injured but not broken. You should be very proud of her... she has a fire that burns like a sun within her soul.”

Danarla and Ta'lon did not know what to say and they watched him lean close to As'hia's cheek. They noticed she did not pull away in the least or appear frightened of his presence so close to her. “Fifteen minutes *Ssin'urn 'Anon*, we must be gone before they fully regain their foul senses.”

As'hia nodded quickly as he rose and moved from the transmission. She turned back to face her parents as Cha'talla ushered the rest of them away to the side of the command center. He looked at Dysea with a grin as the two *Vlos Sargtlinen* looked very upset they had been discovered.

“What is it you have in mind Dysea?” He asked.

“I grow tired of reacting to moves by others against me and members of my family and the Union.” She stated. “How long to plan an operation to retrieve these young elves along with Lynom and As'hia?”

Cha'talla looked at his brother quickly and then back to her. “Her father and I have devised a plan. It is risky since the base on Belid is so large, but we think it gives us the best chance to find and remove all the elf females from Phy'iad as well as render his organization very much dead.”

“How soon to refine it until it could work?” Dysea asked.

“Knowing the personnel we will now have to conduct it.” Cha'talla answered looking at the *Vlos Sargtlinen* troops. “Ta'lon and I can have it finished and rehearsed to the point it would work in perhaps ten days.”

Dysea nodded. “Then do it.” She said firmly. “I told *Nauta Melme* I would contact him in three days. That should give us enough time to go over the information Lynom has sent to us, decrypt it, and at least have some idea of what they have been up to.”

Cha'talla nodded. “Then we should not waste anymore time talking about it.” He stated.

**EARTH
SPARTA
HOME OF DANIEL, ANUK AND NAYECA SIMPSON**

It was not a large home by any stretch of the imagination, but the size was something that all of them had insisted on when they first purchased it. It had been crowded at one point, the three of them and five little ones running around, but the warmth and sense of closeness and love that permeated the home was all they needed to know it had been the right decision long ago. Now they only had the three small ones in the home, Odara playing happily with a computer station against the wall, Danny and Anuk's fourth child and third son Roman upstairs in his room and Danny bouncing Melancton on his abdomen. He was stretched out on the large couch, his head and shoulders resting on Anuk's naked thigh while she read from the data pad, and Nayeca was pouring them all tea from the ever present tray on the shin high table. Neither Anuk or Nayeca wore much of anything when they were in their home together, both of them opting for Daniel's oversized shirts most of the time, while he wore only a black pair of loose fitting shorts.

Anuk lowered the data pad she was reading and glanced at Melancton in Daniel's arms. The almost three month old baby was growing fast and he looked to be headed to having the same build as all of their sons. Their father's height and build. Anuk let her cerulean colored eyes gaze down Daniel's chest and across his rippled abdomen, fighting an urge of desire down. She would come into phase soon enough and then much fun would be had by all. She had long ago accepted the incredible journey her life had taken since meeting the bear of a man who was Daniel Simpson. Accepted and thanked the stars it had occurred as it had. The love she felt for him and for Nayeca was almost a palpable thing, and as his *anome* Anuk knew without a single doubt they would be together for eternity.

She looked up as Nayeca held out the mug of tea and her beautiful Drow Mistress leaned over and they shared a warm, sensuous kiss before Nayeca moved to the other end of the couch and squeezed in between Daniel's legs, her amber eyes watching as Daniel made their son coo out in happiness as he tickled him under his chubby chin. For such a large and extremely deadly man, when it came to children, General Daniel Simpson was a large cuddly bear.

"Has Martin heard anything more on what is happening with Anja?" Nayeca asked.

Daniel held Melancton under his arms and danced him on his broad chest as he replied. "You mean aside from the fact that he wants to send an entire Fleet Group to Hadaria and string Buonau up by her toes?" Daniel chuckled. "Not since the day before yesterday. Apparently... the clone of her is still alive and was on her way to Hadaria."

"Alive?" Anuk asked shocked.

Daniel nodded. "Yeah." He answered. "Pretty wild huh? Imagine if a clone of me walked through the door. What would the two of you do?"

"If our Slave was in phase, probably jump the clone's bones." Nayeca said casually as she sipped her tea.

"Mistress!" Anuk declared with mock horror. It was a running joke with the three of them. No matter how much sex they had, when Anuk was in phase she became a red haired vixen with no inhibitions in the least. "Why do you reveal our secrets?"

Daniel tilted his head up a worried expression on his face and he looked at Anuk. "You... you wouldn't do that would you?" He said.

Anuk laughed and leaned her head over to kiss him. "Daniel you fool!" She stated. "No clone of you could hope to make us feel what you do. No matter how perfect or close he was to being you."

"Indeed." Nayeca echoed as the door buzzer on their main door rang. She turned and set her tea on the table. "I will answer it." She saw Anuk and Daniel locked in a sizzling kiss of love and she smiled knowing that tonight would be full of pleasure for all of them.

She moved to the door and looked at the small vid/monitor seeing Hali and Kim So outside their door. Nayeca stabbed the controls without hesitation and waited while the door opened.

"Hali?" She gasped. "Kim So! What is wrong? What is it?"

“Nayeca... forgive us child.” Hali spoke as Nayeca ushered her into the foyer. “I know it is late but...”

“Nonsense!” Nayeca spoke. “You are always welcome in our home! Always!”

“Is Daniel here Nayeca?” Kim So asked.

Nayeca nodded quickly. “Yes... we are in the main room. What is wrong?”

“Perhaps we should speak with all of you.” Kim So said taking Hali’s hand in his. “Then we need to decide when to inform Martin.”

Nayeca motioned towards the main room. “Of course. Come.” Nayeca wasted no time and led them down the short flight of stairs into the main room. Daniel and Anuk smelled them instantly and were already sitting up with Anuk holding Melancton. Danny got to his feet when he saw them.

“Hali? Kim So? What is wrong?” He asked motioning them to the couch across from where he and Anuk sat.

“We did not know where to come Daniel.” Hali spoke first as she settled onto the couch. “Something has happened and we... we don’t know what to make of it.”

Nayeca was pouring them tea as well as Danny sat back on the couch. “What exactly has happened that you come here so late at night?”

Hali looked at him. “Daniel... the clone of... the clone of Julie was in our home when we returned from the market two nights ago.” She stated.

“Sonofabitch!” Danny roared coming to his feet. “That’s it! I’m going to have that...”

“Daniel no!” Kim So declared quickly as he rose. “You... you must hear us out!”

“She was ordered to stay away from you!” Danny shouted. “She was...” He stopped and looked at them. “Wait... two nights ago?” He said. “That... that would be just before she left with Res and the others.” His face took on a confused look. “Why are you coming to me now?”

“Daniel... we found her in the middle of our living room, holding a picture of Julie.” Hali spoke. “She was holding a picture of Julie, with you and Martin outside Sparta and she was weeping like a newborn baby.”

“She begged us not to say anything.” Kim So said now.

“You did not see her Daniel.” Hali said. “The... the tears were real! She kept saying... she kept saying she did not know who she was anymore. She wanted to know the truth of who she was.”

Daniel looked at them evenly. “What... what are you saying?”

“Daniel... this was no High Coven killer in our home.” Kim So stated calmly. “This was... this was our daughter Julie. It was the Julie we greeted when she returned to Sparta with you and Martin twenty-six years ago.”

“Kim So that’s not possible!” Daniel said coming to his feet. “Julie died in the Battle for Earth. She...”

“Her body died!” Hali announced firmly. “Her soul did not!”

“Hali... you can’t possibly believe that...” Daniel began to speak.

“I believe what I saw and heard with my own eyes!” Hali snapped. “We did not send her away! We almost did... but we did not. Daniel... she had memories of times she spent with you and Martin and the others of your team! She could name names, places. She could tell us what she remembered and saw and did. But she did not know who she was!”

Danny sat back down on the couch between Anuk and Nayeca, their hands coming up to rest on his back. The look on his face was one of shock and disbelief. “Are... are you sure?” He asked finally.

Kim So nodded. “Yes. We... we quizzed her Daniel. Things that Julie told us before she... before she died. She knew these things. The photos of Tari... she kept asking who he was and why they were so tightly holding each other.”

Danny turned his head and looked at Anuk. She nodded without hesitation. “It has to be.” She said softly.

Hali looked at them. “What do you mean? What has to be?” Her eyes darted back and forth between Danny and Anuk, growing moist with tears now. “Daniel Simpson... if ever you were a friend to our daughter you will tell us what you know!”

Danny turned back and looked at them. He took a deep breath and sat back on the couch while Anuk leaned forward. “Anja calls it Recurring Memory Ingram Synapse.” She said. “It... essentially it is the re-growth of memory ingrams.”

Hali looked at Kim So confused and then back to Anuk. “I don’t understand.” She said.

“This clone... she is perfect in everyway.” Anuk explained. “She was conceived with one hundred percent DNA strands of your daughter. When the High Coven made her, when they gave her life, they removed the basic gene strand that made her Lycavorian. It is a very complex procedure and without the knowledge they got from the Mindvoice ship they would have been unable to do it.” Anuk set her tea on the table. “They removed Julie’s Lycavorian genes and introduced vampire genes into a pure cell of Julie. They made her a vampire. Anja... Anja could explain it so much better and probably in a way you would be able to grasp completely.”

“Anuk... are you saying that...” Kim So began.

Anuk nodded. “Yes. The High Coven may have schooled her and trained her to be what she is now, but they did not take into account that her memory ingrams, those cells that contain who we are inside, they did not foresee those cells would begin to regenerate.” She told them. “This clone is... every memory your daughter had before the sample was taken will be with this clone. That is why she remembers these things so clearly. Essentially she has lived them as your daughter. She...”

“It is Julie!” Hali gasped.

“It is not Julie!” Danny snapped. “She is a fabrication! A clone! And a vampire to boot at that!”

“A fabrication with the memories of my daughter!” Hali barked. “She sees things in her head Daniel. Events and places you have been to with her. She sees the three of you laughing and crying!”

“Hali... she was made!” Daniel spoke.

Hali nodded. “As Kim So and I made her! What is the difference? Just how it was done! She started out as a cell inside my womb! I did not want to believe this! I have tried to deny it for the last two days. Part of me has always... I have always wanted my daughter back.” Hali met Daniel’s eyes. “The gods... the gods have found a way to give me this.”

“Hali... the gods had nothing to do with this.” Daniel spoke.

“Didn’t they?” She snapped. “Why did the High Coven choose Julie’s DNA to copy? Why did they choose her DNA to steal? They are giving back to me what the High Coven took!”

“Kim So... will you tell her!” Danny pleaded.

“Tell her what Daniel.” He spoke. “I did not believe either. Not until she was sitting with us two nights ago. I saw the tears in her eyes, the recognition on some parts, and the confusion on others. I did not see a vampire Daniel. I saw my daughter trying to discover what it was the High Coven took from her!”

“She’s a fucking vampire!” Daniel shouted coming to his feet now. “She’s a vampire! She...” Danny fell silent and moved to the large bay window in their main room, gazing out at the moon in the sky.

Hali and Kim So looked at Anuk and Nayeca oddly. Anuk slid closer to the edge of the couch. “It... it is happening with the other clones the High Coven made from their old team.” She stated. “They failed to take into account that the memory ingrams would eventually re-grow. Once that happen, the memories these men and women had of being part of their team came back. We have... there is another within Sparta as well. Colin Walsh. He was killed in the very first battle after they returned to Earth from the moon.”

“There are others this is happening too?” Kim So asked. “Where?”

Anuk looked at Daniel’s back. “They...”

“Most of them are dead!” Daniel spoke softly. “Dead. Killed all over again.”

Hali got up from her seat and moved up next to him, looking up into his face. “I... I can hear the pain in your voice when you say that Daniel Simpson. The gods have given those we love back to us. It matters not in what form... not to me. This is my daughter. Of that I have no doubt or question.

“Nor do I.” Kim So stated from the couch as he came to his feet.

“And she is reaching out... she is asking us for help in discovering who she is. Who she was.” Hali said softly. “Martin... he has not accepted this other clone has he?”

Danny looked down into her face and shook his head slowly. “No.”

“Why?” Hali asked.

“We... we buried them Hali.” Danny spoke in almost a whisper. “We buried them once and we still hold the pain at having to do that. They... they were our family. They were all we had.”

“You fear having to do it all again.” Hali said with wide eyes. “You fear losing Julie again. I can see it in your eyes and if Martin was here I would see it in his eyes as well. That is why you resist what your heart tells you!”

“I buried her once.” Danny spoke. “I will not bury her again!”

Hali reached out and placed her hand on his arm. “You knew her far longer than I did Daniel Simpson. I gave her to the Guardian of the Line when she was only a child, a baby. So that Martin would never be alone. When she finally returned to me... it was only for a short time. Too short a time. And then she was taken from me again.”

“Hali I...”

“No. You will believe what you will Daniel... but as far as I am concerned this is the work of the gods.” Hali spoke. “They have given back to me what the Coven took. And done so in such a way as to make the Coven pay for taking her in the first place.”

“Hali... she is a vampire.” Danny spoke softly. “She is our enemy.”

“Is she?” Kim So spoke moving up next to him. He reached into the jacket he wore and pulled out the data pad, holding it out to Danny. “If she is our enemy and not our daughter then why did she give us this?”

Danny looked at him as he took the pad. “What’s this?”

“She told us she took it from the Empress’s personal computer when she was forced to share that witch’s bed.” Kim So answered. “She told us to give it to you or Martin and you would know what to do with it.”

Danny looked at the pad and saw the encryption on it. “It’s encrypted.” He said. “It does us no good.”

“Have it decrypted and see for yourself.” Kim So stated.

Danny shook his head sadly and moved to the communications panel on the nearby wall. He tapped in a code and the small screen came alive with the face of a Lycavorian officer.

“Duty Officer, *SPARTAN’S SOUL*.” The young man spoke as he looked at the screen. “General Simpson sir!”

Danny plugged the data pad into the wall slot. “Captain, wash this through the database and tell me what you have.”

“Yes sir!” The young Spartan exclaimed looking at the screen beside him as he waved over another officer. “Stand by. It appears to be... yes it is a High Coven encryption algorithm sir. Very sophisticated and very... by the gods!” His face came up. “General... where did you get this?”

Danny turned to look at the screen. “Why? What is it?”

“General... this is... this is a Level Ten High Coven encryption! There are some oddities mixed in with the base code that I have never seen before.” The captain replied. “Adjusting for them... *nubou!*”

Danny’s eyes grew a little wider at this. “What is it?” He demanded.

“General... this... this is a list of High Coven Jump Gates and corridors as well as dozens of names of Coven agents in The Wilds. It has a list of mission objectives... places...” The man looked up. “General... this is unbelievable! This is something we need to get to the Krypteria sir! This is... this is like reading the Holy Book of Law for the High Coven! There are dozens of overlapping layers of encryption; it will take some time to decode all of them but...”

Danny’s eyes were wide as he looked at Hali and Kim So. Hali could only smile. “She is reaching out to those who she knows.” Hali said softly. “Daniel she is asking for our help in discovering who she was. Who she is. This is the work of the gods Daniel Simpson. I know you believe... I can see it in your eyes. This is the woman who you and Martin once considered your dearest sister. Will you just dismiss that?”

Danny yanked the data pad from the slot in the wall and the young Captain on his ship looked up at the sudden interruption in the transmission.

“General?” He asked.

“Captain, find out where Armetus is!” Daniel spoke never losing eye contact with Hali. “I want his best code breakers to meet me in the King’s conference room in one hour.”

“Sir?” The man questioned.

“Just do it!” Danny snapped. “I’ll inform the King myself.”

“Yes sir!”

Danny stepped up to Hali and Kim So. “I... I truly hope you are right.” He said.

“I am right.” Hali said confidently. “As right as any mother would be.”

“Wait here.” Danny said. “I’m going to change and then we’ll go see Marty.”

SPARTA ROYAL VILLA CONFERENCE ROOM

“...is fantastic!” The man spoke as he leaned over the large table studying the data pad. “This is an unedited copy of Admiral Tesand’s personal logs and the massive amount of information he is privy too.”

The room was full of men and women. Isabella, For’mya and Aricia still wore their night clothes, Armetus and two of his code breakers looking as if they had just been wrenched from their sleep, which they had. Martin was bare chested, holding the mug of coffee and leaning against the wall next to Daniel. Hali, Kim So and Anuk sat in the couch along the wall.

Isabella looked up from the table where she sat. “He is right *Du’ased M’ranndii*.” She spoke. “This information... it is beyond anything we have ever had. Tesand shares Aikiro’s bed, and has access to information others would not. Information that is here.”

Armetus looked up now shaking his head. “Coordinates of Jump Gates. Travel corridors. Location of weapons caches. The names of at least two dozen High Coven agents in The Wilds. Some of them that my people deal with everyday! Much of it is encoded and it will take us some time to decipher it but...” He turned and looked at Martin. “Milord... this is incredible. Where... where did you get it?”

“Is it possible to confirm any of it?” Martin asked.

Armetus nodded. “Some of it yes... but not without the risk of having it discovered we have this. I ask again Milord... where did we get it?”

“The clone of...” Martin looked at him. “The clone of Julie.”

Armetus’s eyes grew a little wider. “The Empress’s assassin?” He asked.

“She is no assassin!” Hali exclaimed from her seat rising to her feet.

Anuk took her hand and pulled it tighter. “Now... now is not the time Hali.” She said softly.

Hali took a deep breath. “My daughter is... my daughter is no assassin!” She said once more before sinking back into the couch.

Armetus looked at Martin. “Martin?” He asked.

Martin turned to the wall monitor where Anja’s image was displayed from Hadaria’s bunker complex. “Red?” He asked.

“The clones the High Coven made of Julie and the others on Martin’s team.” Anja spoke. “The Coven scientists removed any Lycavorian DNA strands from their cells, but they forgot to purge the memory Ingrams in their brains. It has taken many years, but over those years the memories Ingrams have reasserted themselves.”

Armetus’s eyes went wide. “Are you saying...?”

Anja nodded. “Yes... these clones... all of them. They will have every memory of who and what they were up until the time the cells were taken from the original hosts.” She told him. “It’s all very complex, even my people have avoided testing with memory Ingrams because of the issues involved. Essentially Julie and the others like her that remains... while they may now be vampires... they *are* the men and women they were before.”

“What... how much do they remember?” Armetus asked.

“According to Colin Walsh... the last memories he has of being a member of SEAL Team Twelve are roughly six months before the coming of the comet to Earth. Still well within the time frame that Yuri was on Eden Base and manipulating all she could.” Anja answered.

Armetus glanced at Martin quickly. “Martin... then she was able to clone...”

Martin shook his head. “No. Danny and I she was not able to clone.” He said quickly.

“Their Lycavorian blood is too pure Armetus.” Anja answered from the monitor. “Kim So’s mother was turned, while Hali’s parents were part of the original ten thousand fetuses sent to Earth by Resumar. Though her blood was nearly as pure, it did not have the same levels of L-stereoisomer and Tryptophan that Danny and Martin do. That is why they were able to clone her. Any clone they attempted to make from Martin or Danny’s cells that she stole would have been deformed beyond recognition.”

“English sister!” Danny blurted out with a grin, never missing the opportunity to throw a jab at Anja, and wanting to lighten the mood somewhat in the room. “Speak English for those of us who are beneath you in medical knowledge!”

“Stuff it chrome dome!” Anja declared from the transmission.

It had the desired effect and soft laughter filtered among those in the room. Martin smiled gently and shook his head as he stepped away from the window. "Hali... why did you and Kim So wait so long to bring this to us?"

"We were trying to come to grips with it ourselves." Kim So answered for them. "Why has this taken place? How could it have been done? Finally we decided the gods had..."

"The gods had nothing to do with this." Martin spoke hurriedly in a stern voice. The tone of his words caused both Aricia and For'mya to look up at him quickly. "This was done by that twisted bitch Aikiro and her cronies!"

"The clones were made by them Lover." Anja spoke. "But there was no way to determine or predict that the memory Ingrams would survive. Not to the extent they have it appears."

Martin looked at the monitor. "What are you saying?" Martin asked with some heat in his voice. "That this is the work of some higher power?"

Anja shrugged her slim shoulders. "I'm not saying anything." She answered in a similar tone. "I'm saying the memory Ingrams could have just as easily been lost! Nothing medical made them re-grow to the extent they have, I can tell you that. And even with the advances in cloning that they had on their MV ship they couldn't manipulate that. I checked with Avi when we discovered this had happened with Colin Walsh. And don't snap at me you overgrown tree trunk!"

Martin looked at Armetus. "Verify what you can without compromising the intelligence." He told him. "And no one outside this room knows about this, is that clear?"

"I'm not in that room lover." Anja barked from the monitor. "I guess it doesn't apply to me."

"Red!" Martin growled.

"Oh... please... bark at someone who it will bother." Anja snapped. "Armetus... I will run some figures and tests on the information I have to try and confirm the medical side of what has happened. We still have the scan from her when she arrived on Earth yes?"

Armetus nodded. "Yes Milady."

"Send it to me." Anja said. "I need to meet the *STRIKER* coming with Husen and the others. It will be arriving in a few hours, but I will try to get back to you as soon as I can."

"Anja..." Martin began.

"Save it Lover." Anja said quickly. "The more I discover what Buonau and Rinard have done the angrier I get! I'm sending a copy of everything I am working on to Eliani at SODRAG in case anything happens here."

"*Melyanna*... if they are willing to target our children as Dysea and the rest of us believe, they will not hesitate to come after you." For'mya spoke. "Be mindful of everything around you and take nothing for granted."

Anja nodded. "I will don't worry. I'll contact you again in a couple of days. I love you all."

Martin waited until the monitor went dark and he shook his head. "You know... she has to be the most pig headed female I have ever come across." He said.

"I believe you have said that about all of us at one point or another Beloved." Aricia told him with a grin.

Martin took a deep breath. "We can't do anything about the clo... about Julie right now." He said. "Res and the *PILLAR OF FAITH* are on a communications blackout, and won't report in until they are on the surface of Ritaah. And he's too far for me to reach him with Mindvoice."

"Martin... you don't believe she will put the mission at risk do you?" Armetus asked.

Martin turned and looked at Hali and Kim So. "I hope not." He said softly.

"You must have faith in the gods Martin Leonidas." Hali said.

"My faith in the..." The beeping on the conference table interrupted him and Martin stabbed down on the panel in frustration. "What is it now?" He demanded.

Colonel Fache's voice came over the COM clearly. "Milord... perhaps you should turn on the Netnews. Channel 74."

"What? Why? Fache I don't have..."

"Milord... you should turn it on now!" Fache spoke insistently.

Danny moved to the large monitor on the wall and adjusted the controls. He stepped back as the wide picture of the front gate of Andro's villa and the long connecting road was being displayed. "Oh boy." He said softly. "This can't be good."

All of them watched as the young male human stepped into the picture now.

"Turn it up!" Bella exclaimed.

"...here in front of the Gytheio home of Crown Prince Androcles and Crown Princess Sadi. As I reported earlier, information is still coming in, but Channel 74 has obtained classified images of a developing story concerning the Crown Prince and his brother Prince Arrarn."

The picture changed to a fuzzy image of Carisia and Anthar in what appeared to be some sort of market.

"Channel 74 has obtained this image and several others that we will now show you from a reliable source. The image you see here is of the oldest daughter to Princess Yuri of the High Coven. Her name is Carisia Moran. The image was taken by an agent of the Union stationed on Usu Ozeib 7 some four years ago and recently declassified as unusable. It found its way into two of Channel 74's promising young journalists, Thomas Roan and lead elven field reporter Dilaen. The next image we will show you was taken only a few weeks ago right here at the Prince's villa in Gytheio."

The image changed to the one with Carisia holding Andro's hand as they exited the *STRIKER DT*, her face brightly lit up with happiness. In the distance you could see Narice and Toria walking with Arrarn, his arms around both of them and while further away than Carisia, their images were very clear.

"As you can see... it appears that Princess Carisia of the High Coven and Crown Prince Androcles know each other quite well. How well is still a matter of discovering, but if the images we are seeing are any indication their relationship is more than friendly. In fact Channel 74 and I have learned that Crown Princess Sadi's statement before the Galactic Courthouse steps just months ago that there would be three others that shared their lives appears to be very true. Channel 74 has been told that Princess Carisia Moran of the High Coven has been seen coming and going from Prince Andro's villa for at least the last two months on the dragon you can see in these images, which would perhaps indicate that when Princess Sadi made her statement, she was already involved with them."

"As you can see from the next images, we have also learned that the youngest daughter to Empress Aikiro herself and an unknown female have apparently become the object of affection for Prince Arrarn Leonidas. Affection that is apparently being returned quite easily. These images were cross referenced with images taken during the Cease Fire Accords and Channel 74 has learned that Princess Narice is the name of Empress Aikiro's daughter, and that she too is bonded to a dragon. The black and white Firespitter seen in the far distance in the image you are viewing. The red haired female remains a mystery, but it is apparent from these images that at least two of King Leonidas's sons are following in his footsteps and having relationships with more than one female. And that these females are very high ranking individuals within the High Coven hierarchy."

Martin's face was a stone mask as Aricia moved quickly to his side. "Beloved?" She asked in barely a whisper.

"Does someone want to tell me what we are seeing is just all a bad dream?" Martin spoke in a voice that was as equally void of emotion as his face.

"Further reports that we have obtained indicate that one Commander Ne'Veha, an elven pilot from Prince Androcles ship the SCIMITAR, is also involved with him. This would seem to confirm once again Princess Sadi's statement that there would be three others in their lives, though the fourth one still remains quite the mystery. Considering how secretive the Leonidas family is, that is not surprising."

"As all these images clearly show in them, both Carisia Moran and Empress Aikiro's daughter Narice are bound to dragons, which then brings into question the validity of three unreported instances

several months ago about a new class of vampire riders seen in Sparta almost immediately after the High Coven delegation arrived. It was thought that these riders had recently graduated from training and joined the ranks of vampires within the Bonded Pairs. Were these riders actually members of the Lycavorian Union, or are they in fact High Coven dragons and riders that the Union is in some way training? We at Channel 74 are working diligently to discover these answers for our viewers. We will continue reporting as more information becomes available. This is William Conley, Netnews Channel 74.

The room was silent for a long moment, no one daring to speak as Martin stood there like a statue.

“Armetus?” Martin finally spoke.

“Yes... yes Milord?”

“Kindly have someone find out where Mister Conley got his information.” Martin spoke with icy calm.

“Yes Milord.”

Aricia squeezed his arm. “Beloved you must remain calm.” She spoke.

“Oh... I’m calm.” Martin said as he continued to stare at the image of Andro’s villa on the monitor.

“Two of my oldest sons are not only training our enemy... they are actually sleeping with them! And not just any High Coven scum... but the daughters to the two women I hate most in this world. The two vile bitches that have done more to hurt me, my family and our people than any other individuals in the whole *nubous* universe! Oh... I’m very calm!” Martin turned and looked at her. His eyes shifted next to where For'mya and Isabella sat.

“All of you knew this didn’t you?”

“We...” For'mya stammered.

“You did know!” Martin exclaimed looking to Isabella and then Aricia. “Oh that’s just beautiful! The five of you knew about this and didn’t tell me! Just like you didn’t tell me about Resumar and Athani. I thought we were suppose to share things like this? I thought we had promised to not keep any secrets from each other!”

“Martin you have not been...” For'mya started to speak.

“No!” Martin snapped holding up his hand. “I’ll take care of this the way it should have been taken care of. Before it even got started!”

For'mya got to her feet. “You can not force them to go against what their hearts tell them Martin.” She exclaimed.

“They aren’t thinking with their hearts For'mya! Wake up will you! They are not children anymore!” Martin snapped at her stunning For'mya with the intensity and callousness of his words to her.

“Martin... what will you do?” Aricia asked.

“What the five of you should have done to begin with! Right when you first realized this was going on.” Martin snapped.

No one said anything as Martin stormed out of the conference room without another word. Aricia turned back to look at For'mya and Isabella. “Perhaps... perhaps not telling him was not such a good idea.” She said softly.

“Wow!” Danny spoke softly. “The shit hasn’t just hit the fan... it’s done been splattered all over the fan.”

SODRAG

Narice and Toria unwrapped the shadows from around their bodies and skidded to silent halts outside Andro’s office when they saw Carisia and Sadi standing beside the open door. Sadi and Carisia both had sent out urgent Mindvoice messages to come to Andro’s office and now they were standing waiting for them.

“Sadi... Carisia!” Narice gasped. “What... what is wrong?”

Sadi held up her finger for quiet and their sensitive vampire hearing was able to pick it up then. It was Arrarn’s voice inside Andro’s office.

“So what do we do?” Arrarn asked as he walked up beside Andro’s desk. “How did they get the information Andro?”

“I don’t know.” Andro answered sitting back in his chair.

“You think it was Roan and Dilaen?” Arrarn offered.

Andro shook his head. “No.” He said immediately. “The *Feravomir* was right. Their hearts are in the right place and they would do nothing that puts us in a bad light. They want to be here.”

“*Nubou!*” Arrarn snarled. “Has he...”

Andro met his brother’s eyes. “No. This tells me that...”

Arrarn nodded. “He’s probably already on his way here.” Arrarn said as he settled onto the couch in Andro’s office. “Well... we knew he would find out sooner or later.”

“You can take a *STRIKER* to the *SCIMITAR*.” Andro spoke. “Training perhaps?”

Arrarn shook his head. “No way.” He answered. “I’m not going to avoid father over this. He can’t tell me who I can fall in love with. I won’t hide the fact we are together Andro. I... I love Narice and Toria.” Arrarn shook his head. “Anse! I was the last one I thought would ever be saying that!” He looked at his brother. “I can’t get them out of my head Andro. Their taste, their touch, how they feel in my arms. I am certainly not going to let our father tell me I can’t be with them.”

Andro chuckled. “Now you know how Deni and I feel.”

“No doubt Aikiro and Yuri will be raising a shitstorm with father over this.” Andro said. “I wouldn’t doubt it if she demanded Narice and the others return to their ships and only come down here to train.”

Andro shook his head. “That is something neither you nor I would allow Arrarn.” He said.

“Damn right I wouldn’t!” He exclaimed. “Now that I have found them... I don’t intend to let anything take them away from me! That includes our parents!”

They both turned when the door to Andro’s office filled with Narice, Toria, Carisia and Sadi. Narice and Toria had been unable to contain themselves any longer listening to Arrarn talk. He came to his feet and started to speak but was unable to get word one out before Narice blurred to where he was standing and clamped her lips over his in a blistering kiss of love, wrapping her petite body around his as if she was trying to suck the life from him. Andro could only grin as Carisia came up to him and wrapped her arms around his waist, burying her face against his chest as Sadi pressed up against his opposite side. He looked up to see his brother now sharing an equally heated kiss with Toria as both of them were pressing their lush frames against Arrarn’s body.

Arrarn was smiling when he broke his kiss with Toria and he nuzzled her cheek before leaning over Narice’s five foot two frame and brushing his lips over her ear and neck.

“I have... I have never had a man profess his love for me in such a way.” Narice spoke wistfully as she looked at him. “I have never had a man profess his love for me period.”

“Nor have I.” Toria said with an adoring smile. “Will you do it again?”

Narice’s eyes sparkled and she giggled. An act quite unlike the stern young High Coven Princess who had first come to Earth. She nodded at Toria’s words. “Yes... please do it again.”

Andro laughed at their antics. “Get a room!” He echoed causing Sadi and Carisia to laugh as well. “All of you... go about your duties. I will handle our father.”

Arrarn looked at him. “Andro...”

Andro shook his head. “No. This is my command. My responsibility. Besides... this has more to do with me than it does you.”

“What do you mean?” Arrarn asked pulling Narice and Toria close against him.

“It’s not something you need to worry about.” Andro replied. “Narice... you and Carisia have CQFB training today with Deni and Lisisa. Don’t be late. It’s the most important part of what we do as Bonded Pairs. Arrarn... you and *KertaGai* were going to go heavy on flight training this week. Don’t change your schedules. I’ll take care of our father.”

“You’re sure?” Arrarn asked squeezing Narice and Toria closer, but not wanting to leave his brother to face their father’s wrath alone.

“I’m sure. Go on. All of you.” Andro spoke. He pulled Carisia and Sadi closer to him as well now, kissing Carisia deeply. “Especially you *Enylarcopri*... Anthar missed the last portion of the training last week because I had you occupied.”

Carisia grinned. “Well... it’s not like he wasn’t occupied either! And it was such a delicious diversion!” She exclaimed.

“Oh yes it was.” Sadi chimed in.

Andro grinned. “Go on. Not this week.”

“Spoilsport.” Carisia told him.

“We will see you for dinner *Enylarcopri*.” Sadi told her leaning over to kiss her as well.

Carisia tightened her grip on Andro’s hand quickly and then turned to depart his office. Sadi was going to break away too until she felt Andro’s hand tighten and she looked back to him as Arrarn led Narice and Toria out of the office. Sadi looked at him and for the first time since reuniting with Androcles Leonidas and becoming his mate she saw concern on his face.

[My love? What is it?] Sadi asked quickly.

Andro pulled her close to him, reaching out with his TK power to manipulate the control panel for the door and insuring it was locked. *[I can feel my father KertaGai.]* He spoke to her in a connection that was more shielded than she had ever felt from him. A connection that only she shared with him. *[He is angrier now than I have ever known him to be.]*

[He’s coming here isn’t he?] Sadi asked.

[He’s on his way now. Torma is with him and neither of them is happy. It will be even worse when he discovers Elynth and Anthar are now mates.] Andro said.

Sadi reached up and took his face in her soft hands. *[Androcles... do you regret anything that has happened these last months?]*

Andro shook his head immediately. *[No... well... the only thing I regret is that we did not have more time alone together before we discovered all this.]* He spoke meeting her jungle green eyes. *[I will make it up to you KertaGai.]*

Sadi felt warmth flow through her at his words as his aura caressed her senses. Staring into his azure eyes Sadi did not think she could love a man more completely than she loved him. She leaned forward and kissed him delicately.

[We will have eternity together Androcles Leonidas. In that time I’m quite sure we can find time to discover each other as we desire.] Sadi told him. *[You fear what your father will do don’t you?]*

[To be honest... I think this is the first time in my life that I don’t know what he is going to do.] Andro answered. *[I won’t let him send Carisia away. And I’ll protect Arrarn, Narice and Toria. I worry for what he will tell me about the riders. They have come so far KertaGai. They are so close to throwing off the yoke of Aikiro’s influence.]*

[Then you need to follow what your heart tells you my love. Not your father.] Sadi said evenly.

Andro chuckled. *[That’s easy for you to say.]* He said pulling her tighter. *[He’s changed in the last few years. He is... different.]*

[Different how?]

Andro shook his head. *[It’s hard to explain. It’s almost as if he is a different man in many respects.]*

[He is the one who told you to never question your faith in yourself and others.] Sadi said. *[Stay true to that faith now. You know what the right thing to do is.]*

Andro met her eyes for a long moment. *[You’ve been spending far too much time with the Feravomir.]* He said. *[You are beginning to sound like her now.]*

Sadi grinned and shrugged her shoulders. *[She has taught me much. About my abilities and myself.]*

[Just so long as you don’t begin preaching to me when we are engaged in hot and sweaty sexual encounters.] Andro spoke with a grin. *[That would do my ego irreparable damage.]* He said as he leaned over and inhaled deeply of her sugar plume and spice scent.

Sadi laughed and pulsed her female aura back on him, pressing her breasts harder against his broad chest and pulling his groin tighter to her own. *[The only thing I will preach to you while engaged in hot and sweaty sexual encounters is to never stop what you do so well.]*

Sadi seized his lips with her own wrapping her arms around his shoulders as he picked her up off the floor and crushed her to him. His kisses never failed to ignite her deepest passion and this time was no different as his tongue danced with hers for a few seconds before claiming what had always been his since that first day on the island. After a long moment they drew apart, a thin strand of salvia connecting their lips. Sadi brought her fingers up and caressed his handsome face.

[By the gods Androcles Leonidas... I can not put into words how much I love you.] She gasped.

[This is a good thing I hope.] He spoke nuzzling the side of her neck and her cheek with his lips and nose.

[Oh yes. A very good thing.] She answered. *[Do... do you want me to remain my love? Your father will not be so harsh if I am here.]*

Andro shook his head quickly. *[No... that is not the Spartan way. I will face him and take whatever lumps he dishes out. But I will hold to my convictions.]*

[I know you will.] Sadi said. *[I truly don't want too... but I have to go.]*

Andro nodded as he released her. *[I will see you and Enylarcopri for dinner.]* He said.

Sadi kissed him gently once more before moving for the door and leaving the office. Andro turned to the large window in his office and looked out over the airfield. He could just make out the Coven riders beginning to lift off and follow Deni and Lisisa for their training. He reached out within Mindvoice for the one source of strength and sisterly love he had always had no matter where he was. They had never been apart in the twenty-six years of their lives, and they were and always had been of one mind and voice.

[Elynth my sister.]

[I am here Andro.]

[Elynth I believe it's time we confronted our fathers and let them know who we truly are.] Andro said.

[I'm landing outside now Andro my brother. And yes... it is time, for I do not intend to allow anyone to take my happiness from me.]

[I'll be with you in a moment sister. Then we will see what the new moon will bring to us.] Andro said as he turned and headed for the door.

BELID IMMORTAL BASE

As'hia was stuffing the medium sized pack Lynom had given her with the items he was pulling from the large supply bunker. Everything was happening so fast. It had taken her nearly five full minutes to reassure her parents that she was in control of herself and her actions. She knew her mother wanted to ask her personal questions, to reassure her that she was still a beautiful young woman no matter what had happened, but this was not something she would do in front of her father. Ta'lon was very protective of his youngest daughter, and he kept telling her to be proud and strong and that they were coming soon. Seeing them in the transmission, being able to hear their voices, this had been the balm she had needed. To know that they still loved her and were working diligently to find a way to get her off this rock. And then As'hia realized none of that would have been possible without the incredible risk the man in front of her had taken.

She looked at Lynom's back as he rummaged through one of the huge metal lockers that filled the bunker. He hadn't lied to her As'hia realized at that moment. As'hia had seen and talked to his mother and father. Nothing he had told her had ever been a lie. His father truly *was* Cha'talla of the Immortals and his mother was a breathtakingly beautiful pureblood vampire. Her parents were moving about the Immortal base on Kranek freely, the first Elven Queen of the Union among them. And like a knife to her gut, As'hia had seen Princess Normya and Lynom's older brother holding each other with love and devotion. Princess Normya's eyes were so bright and full of happiness, that much was easy enough for a fool to see. And that happiness stemmed from the massive half Immortal brother of the man in front of her. He had been brief with his parents and Queen Dysea, sending the information he wanted to relay to them in a single burst transmission, while he gave her the rest of the time to talk with her parents as he prepared for them to leave. They would never have been able to leave had Phy'iad and all of his men been here on the base. Now, even though there were still a hundred odd Immortals present, the corridors and hallways seem deserted. And Lynom was wasting no time in making sure they were gone as quickly as possible.

He had told his mother that the implants were failing and he could not repair them. She did not know exactly what he meant by that, only that the look he had passed her briefly told her it was she who had caused the damage to these implants. As'hia had seen his brother, and while there was no mistaking he had Immortal blood, his features were not at all unpleasant as they were with many of the Immortals here. As they were with Lynom. She wondered exactly how that had come to be and could only surmise that he had inherited more of his father's genes than his mother. Looking back on everything now, hearing what his brother had said, how Lynom had risk his own safety and that of his tribe to rescue and protect her, it suddenly caused As'hia to stop

for a moment and process all that had happened. With the exception of the times she had attacked him; never once had he had a harsh word to say to her. Even when he began to take her blood, he would apologize to her profusely for having to resort to such action.

Setting aside her pain and humiliation, As'hia realized that what he had done had indeed saved her life. Once the other Immortals could smell his blood within her, on her body, none of them attempted to do what the first one had tried. And As'hia's own actions had almost cost them both their lives that day, forcing Lynom to do what he had done. As she stared at his back, she could not help but realize she owed her life to this man and she had treated him so terribly for so long.

"Lynom?" She said softly.

His arm came back holding out the small scanner. "Take this as well." He told her.

As'hia looked at his back once more as she placed the scanner in the pack. "Lynom?" She asked again.

Lynom turned and glanced at her as he began searching the locker next to the one he was at. "What?"

"Thank... thank you." She said softly.

Lynom stopped what he was doing and looked at her. As'hia ignored his harsh Immortal features and concentrated on his dark eyes. She hadn't realized until this very moment how bright and intelligent they were. "You needed to speak with them and they with you." He said finally. "You are welcome."

"You took a great risk doing that." As'hia said.

"Every day we live is a risk." He answered. "It is how we live those days that is the measure of who we are. My father taught me that." He took the pack from her arms and hefted it easily. "Can you carry this without discomfort?"

As'hia nodded. "Yes... easily."

Lynom nodded. "Then we have enough. We should make our way to the exit."

"What did your mother mean when she asked about the implants?" As'hia asked. "What was she talking about?"

"The implants that keep my skin alive." Lynom told her.

"Your skin?"

"I told you this was not my skin *Ssin'urn 'Anon*. I was not lying to you about that, just as I have not lied to you about anything since this horror began for you." Lynom said.

"I don't understand." As'hia spoke. "How could that not be your skin?"

"The implants keep the biogel within this false skin alive. It gives it blood and warmth and makes it pliable to the touch. Just like normal Immortal skin." Lynom explained. "It is how I was able to infiltrate Phy'iad and his group."

"But you... you are an Immortal. Why would you need to infiltrate his group?" As'hia asked. "Why wouldn't they just accept you?"

"I am not just an Immortal *Ssin'urn 'Anon*. You saw my mother... I am half vampire." He replied.

As'hia looked confused. "But you look no different from any other Immortal here."

"What I look like under this skin is of no matter." Lynom spoke. "I will need you to help me remove it when we are free of this place however... or I will become sick from the toxic elements it could infect my blood with."

As'hia looked away quickly suddenly very ashamed of herself. "Lynom... I am... I am sorry for not believing what you told me."

"It is no matter." He told her as he reached for something in the locker. "In your position I would have done the same thing I believe."

"You could have... you could have told me." She said.

"I tried to tell you As'hia." He replied turning to look at her. "The Mindvoice connection we share enables you to see inside my mind. Taking... taking your blood has only made that connection that much more powerful."

"I don't see anything." As'hia spoke. "You won't allow me to see anything. You don't even answer me half the time."

Lynom looked at her. "With good reason." He spoke evenly. "This O'lan... he is the one who... who wanted you to change who you are?"

"How did you know that?" She asked.

“You hold a great deal of anger towards him. You blame him for what happened. For trying to change who you were and putting you in such a way where you felt you needed to go to the resort in the first place.” Lynom said.

“You could tell all that just from my mind?” As'hia asked.

Lynom looked away quickly. “You do not shield as well as you should.” He said. “When I lower my shields far enough I can sense and see your surface thoughts.”

“How... how often have you done this?” As'hia asked surprised.

“Not for many weeks.” He answered just as quickly.

He pulled the pack he would be carrying over to him and put several more items into it as As'hia watched him. She secured the top of her pack and then looked up at his face as he turned once more. She didn't know why she asked the question, it just blurted out of her before she actually thought about it. His answer however, his answer to her question caused her shame to increase to levels she had never felt before.

“Do you have anyone... anyone on your planet? Someone special?” She asked.

Lynom shook his head. “I have never experienced a relationship with a woman.” He replied. “Until recently... until recently I have never wanted too.”

“So why don't you when you return home?” As'hia asked.

“It will never happen.” He spoke.

“Why? You will be home soon.” As'hia asked.

“It will never happen because the only woman I want... the only one that stirs me enough to try, she considers me to be a monster.” Lynom spoke softly looking directly at her. He hefted the pack as As'hia stared at him open mouthed. “We must go now.” He told her.

“And just where do you think you are going?” The male voice asked. Lynom and As'hia looked up quickly and saw the bulk of the armed Immortal staring at them from the entrance to the bunker. “I told Phy'iad we should never have taken you in. I told him you were different and we shouldn't have trusted you.”

Lynom stepped in front of As'hia. “I do not wish to injure you Tau'ra. Step aside and let us pass.”

The Immortal laughed as he looked at Lynom. “Injure me?” He snorted. “What makes you think you can injure me young pup? I have a thousand years of life on you, and there is no Akruxian Immortal of your age who could hope to defeat me! Your disgrace your people with these traitorous actions! I...”

Had As'hia not been paying attention she would have missed the entire event. Lynom blurred in motion, sweeping under the Immortal's outstretch arm that held the weapon. She saw the flash of a blade just before it buried itself into the Immortal's midsection. She heard the snapped of thick bone as Lynom's grip on the Immortal's wrist twisted and wrenched. As the blade perforated his chest cavity there was a rush of air from his lungs and Lynom lifted him into the air and smashed him back to the floor of the bunker. As'hia winced at the sickening crunch of bone and flesh as his large body hit the floor and then she heard Lynom's voice. It was the voice of a merciless killer, so cold and calculating in its intensity.

“You are not my people!” Lynom snarled viciously as he lowered his face close to the dying Immortal. “You have never been my people! I despise you and all who follow Phy'iad! And one day soon, I will see this den of sadistic, butchering animals erased from existence! As the life leaves your eyes Tau'ra, take heart that Phy'iad and your sick friends will be joining you in the days to come. You will die under the blades and weapons of the Immortal hero Cha'talla and his sons!”

Lynom wrenched upward with his blade and the Immortal's eyes flashed open wide at his words. They closed just as quickly as Lynom's blade sliced through his internal organs like a hot knife through butter and his blood began soaking the floor beneath him. Lynom pulled the blade free and pushed the body away from him as he got back to his feet. He wiped the blade on the Immortal's chest and returned it to the hidden scabbard and turned back to look at As'hia as he lifted the pack. Her eyes were wide in shock and just a little bit of fear as she looked at him.

“Come *Ssin'urn 'Anon*, we must move quickly before they discover his body.” Lynom spoke.

“What... what about any elves he may have...” As'hia asked as she pulled on the pack.

Lynom shook his head without pause. “He is not among the men that Phy'iad allows to... allows to break the elves in that way.” He answered as he held out Tau'ra's hand weapon to her. “None of those he left behind are.”

“How do you know?” As'hia asked.

“You must trust me at some point if you wish to escape this place *Ssin’urn ‘Anon*. Now would be a good time to start.” Lynom spoke as he toed the cooling body of the Immortal out of their way.

As'hia took the weapon and looked at Lynom as she did. “What if they follow us?” She asked.

“When we get outside I have the weapons you were captured with.” Lynom spoke. “If they follow us, we will kill them. I swore to your parents I would return you to them and I will keep that vow. Now let us go before I have to kill more of these vile imposters of my people!”

EDEN CITY TEMPORARY HOME OF AIKIRO AND YURI

“...little whoring bitch of a daughter!” Yuri snarled viciously as she flung the vase across the room to smash against the far wall. Pieces ricocheted off the wall to bounce harmlessly off Robert Moran’s shoulder where he stood silently, stewing in his own anger. “Carisia... she had this planned all along! I know she did!”

Aikiro stood looking out the window silently, her own rage simmering just beneath the calm exterior she was struggling to maintain. Tesand stood to her side, and like Moran was silent, but ready to speak if they wanted.

“I... I expected something like this from Toria Dellion... but Narice?” Aikiro said softly. “My own daughter is willingly laying with one of that animal Leonidas’s sons. A mongrel no less... she can not even pick one of the purebloods! It has to be a ploy! It has to be!”

Tesand watched Aikiro’s face carefully and could honestly say he had never seen the cold calculating anger that was now displayed in the set of her jaw and hardness of her dark eyes. He was about to say something when Yuri whirled around to look at her.

“It’s no ploy mother! You told me yourself you felt something different from her the last time we saw her.” Yuri hissed. “This is it. Leonidas’s son has corrupted her! Corrupted all of them! I should have killed that *lotha nek* the moment they pulled her from my womb!” (little slut)

“The larger and more important question is whether we can trust the remaining riders.” Moran spoke now.

Yuri cut her eyes to him. “This is not the time Robert!” She growled.

“Yes it is!” Moran insisted without fear of her. “If Androcles Leonidas has corrupted all the riders as he has corrupted Carisia and Narice, then it will not matter if our mission to Ritaah succeeds, we will lose a vital asset in the dragons. An asset that would have prolonged the war enough so that we could weaponize the technology we would get from the MV ship.”

Aikiro turned to look at him and once more she silently thanked her decision to put this man in command of her military. “Robert is right.” She spoke finally.

“Mother you...!” Yuri protested.

“Yuri!” Aikiro barked at her. “What would you have me do? I have been trying to contact Leonidas ever since we saw the broadcast. He refuses to even answer me, either by COM unit or within Mindvoice! I can not penetrate the MV bubble around the base they are on! I will not put our primary mission here in jeopardy because of our daughters and their inability to keep their *vithin* legs closed in the face of two animals with big *we’has!*” (cocks)

“I will slit her pretty throat when I see her again!” Yuri snapped.

Aikiro shook her head. “It is doubtful we will ever see them again.” She stated. “If what that fool on the Netnews reported is accurate, then both of them are lost to us already. You saw the images. Even I could not foresee your sister doing something like this. It makes me want to vomit to think of her in that animal’s arms, but it is now outside my realm of influence.”

“We just let her... them get away with it?” Yuri demanded.

“I would imagine Leonidas is just as incensed as we are right now.” Aikiro spoke. “He is probably on his way down there right now to beat his sons for consorting with their vile enemy in such a way.”

“Perhaps we will get lucky and he will accidentally kill them.” Tesand said.

“All of you know Lycavorian cultures as well as I do.” Aikiro said. “If Androcles and Arram Leonidas have claimed them for their mates and wives Leonidas will be able to do nothing.”

“What will the people of the Union say?” Moran spoke. “How will they react knowing two of their precious Leonidas sons have taken mates from their vilest enemy? Can we use this against them?”

Tesand shook his head. “Reaction to the Cease Fire Accords was well greeted by almost every Union politician.” He said. “A farce it may be to those of us who know, but to the general population of the Union it shows that our two species have come a long way and that we can live in peace. This will only be seen as another sign to them that the Cease Fire was the right course of action.”

Aikiro nodded. “Tesand is right.” She said. “And we are not supposed to be here. Martin Leonidas had that bitch Selene insure we could not reach out to the Netnews in any way. We are isolated here.”

“This will cause the KFI to accelerate their invasion plans.” Moran spoke. “Even though no proof was given... the Kavalians are just ignorant enough to take this reporter’s words as gospel and correctly assume our dragons our here.”

“Leonidas will never publicly acknowledge he is training our dragons.” Tesand spoke.

“He can’t deny it Tesand.” Moran said. “Not now. The Netnews just reported it.”

“They reported innuendos and rumors.” Tesand said calmly. “Nothing factual to base it on and Leonidas’s lapdogs will grasp at that. At least until he is able to either take our dragons from us, or get them off of his planet and out of the Union. He has no choice if he does not wish to be drawn into our war with the Kavalians.”

“If his son has not turned them all against us!” Yuri spat.

Tesand nodded slowly. “Yes... there is that to consider as well.”

“This Androcles is far more talented than I ever gave him credit for.” Aikiro spoke softly. She laughed and shook her head. “He told me he did not have to play the game better than me. Just well enough to counter my moves. He has done just that. In many ways he is even more cunning than his father.”

“Mother... how can you compliment that vile dog after what he has done?” Yuri looked at her with wide eyes as she exclaimed the question.

“I can compliment him because he has succeeded in countering our goal in training our dragons to one day combat the Union pairs. That is why we brought them here. To fight the Kavalian animals and then eventually turn them against the Union.” Aikiro spoke looking at her. “Androcles Leonidas has effectively nullified that goal. Narice and Carisia were the most powerful of the dragon pairs we had, and if he has been able to turn *them* against us, then the others are lost as well.”

“Are we so sure he turned them against us?” Moran asked causing Aikiro to look at him oddly.

“Not Dante! Or Javier or Lucia! He could never turn them against us!” Yuri snapped quickly. “I still have three children who are bound to dragons and who would not be lured in by his words!”

Aikiro nodded slowly still looking at Robert. “This is true.” She said. “And we will need to get them out of there quickly for them not to be affected. Robert... what is it you mean when you say that?”

“Carisia has never been fully on board Aikiro. You know that. Not since she took that red dragon from Yuri.” Robert said. “It pisses me off... but it doesn’t surprise me that the first opportunity she got she deserted. To be honest... in a way I’m not as surprised as the rest of you about Narice. She has always been introverted. Contemplative. I believe in our way of life, I embrace it, Narice never has. We’ve been here going on four months now and all of us have seen how deeply spiritual the Lycavorians are. It is nonsense to us, but to them it is part of their way of life... it means something. Especially if you include the fact that one of these dragons is considered a leader of sorts. A holy icon by some definition, held up there with their in the same light as their First Oracle. And we all know how they view Leonidas and anyone within his family.”

“Robert you are speaking nonsense now!” Yuri hissed.

Aikiro stepped closer to him. “No... go on!”

“Mother...?” Yuri spoke looking at her.

“No... I want to hear what he is saying.” Aikiro told her holding up her hand. “Go on Robert.”

“All I’m saying is we should not be surprised by those who are drawn in by the nature of the Lycavorians and the Union.” Moran spoke.

“You are hinting that they may be brainwashing them?” Aikiro said.

Moran shook his head. “I wouldn’t call it brainwashing.” He said. “Not in how we view the definition of that word.”

“Then what do you call it Robert?” Tesand asked.

Moran shrugged. "For lack of a better word... faith."

"Faith?" Aikiro said.

"Yes... faith. Faith in a higher purpose and reason." Moran told her. "Personally I think it is all hogwash, just like you do, but ever since Leonidas returned twenty-six years ago their *faith* has only gotten stronger. And everything that has happened since he returned has only lent credence to their belief that everything happens for a reason."

Aikiro stood there for a long moment looking at him. This was a side of Robert Moran she had never seen and it intrigued her. "Robert... you do more to reinforce my decision to make you the High Coven Military Commander every day. And you continue to impress me. Be that as it may... we need to put our own plans in motion." She turned to Tesand. "Juliana One has her orders correct Tesand?"

Tesand nodded to her. "They will not break communications silence until they are on the surface of Ritaah according to the plan. She and her team will execute their portion of the plan as they are moving from the *LEONIDAS*-Class Cruiser to the surface on *STRIKERS*. They will kill Resumar Leonidas and his Kavalian whore of a wife, the dragons they have with them, the entire Union Strike Team and then proceed to the Mindvoice ship and prepare it to lift off for return to Coven space."

Aikiro smiled. "I told you using the clone of his friend would make him more agreeable to the mission." She said. "It makes him pause in his actions and decisions."

Tesand nodded. "Indeed." He said. "They will contact us when they have secured the MV ship according to plan. She will inform us then if they were able to deactivate and secure the MV avatar from Leonidas's ship as well."

"By that time we need to be on our way back to High Coven space." Moran spoke now. "Three... four days maximum... or we will never get off this planet alive."

Aikiro looked at Yuri. "Two days." She said finally. "Get a message to Dante through the team we have in place in the nearby jungle. They have been hiding correct?"

Moran nodded. "They haven't left the caves they have been in except to transmit every other night." He answered. "If they come out... it won't be long before they are spotted."

Aikiro nodded. "It won't matter in two days anyway."

"What message mother?" Yuri asked.

"Tell him he is to execute the plan with Zarah Leonidas." Aikiro spoke. "I want what is in her head. I care not how he gets it."

"His powers of influence have worked only moderately well on her." Yuri stated.

"Then we will set up neural boosters here and he can draw from your power as well." Aikiro answered. "She is the youngest and least experienced of that pig's children. He will need to grab her when she is distant from her brother for I sense a deeper connection there. Once he does Yuri, you will need to throw up shields to mask the fact he has her."

Yuri moved closer to her and nodded. "You don't care how he obtains the information?" She said.

Aikiro met her eyes. "He and Javier may rape her body as much as they like as long as he gets that information. I want to know where Leonidas's Mindvoice ship is, for I intend to either take what I can from it, or destroy it so he can no longer use it."

Yuri's smile was exceptionally cruel and she nodded. "I will get the message to him." She said. "The team will need to expose themselves to get the message to him as Robert said you know this."

"It can't be helped. We can not risk Androcles Leonidas detecting a shielded Mindvoice conversation so close to his precious base. He will instantly order a bubble formed and we will lose our opportunity." Aikiro said. "These are our best troops and I have confidence in them."

"I have our escape plan already worked out." Moran said. "We've made it a point to go back and forth to our ships at odd times since we have been here. Alone and together. It will not look strange for us to do this once we have the information we want."

Aikiro looked at Tesand. "The Alpha Team that will strike Leonidas's MV ship." She said. "I want to meet them."

Tesand's eyes narrowed. "Why?" He asked.

"I intend to lead them myself." Aikiro stated confidently.

HADARIA UNDERGROUND BUNKER COMPLEX

Joci looked up from the chair at the table finally, unable to stand Atropos's eyes boring into him any longer.

"Why do you stare at me?" He barked.

Husen knew well what Atropos was capable of and he placed his hand on Joci's arm from where he sat next to him. "Joci... you should mind your temper." He said in a calm voice. "This is..."

"I know who he is!" Joci snapped looking at Husen. He turned back to look at Atropos, matching his glare evenly. "Atropos, older brother to our beloved Queen Aricia, Star Colonel of the *Durcunusaan* and commander of our beloved Queen Anja's *Durcunusaan* Detail. I am not a fool!"

"Your actions mark you as such!" Atropos snapped.

"Father!" Belen barked as he came to his feet from the chair he sat in along the wall.

"My actions!" Joci snarled. "Now I am to be ridiculed for being a man!"

"You are a Spartan!" Atropos growled back. "You should not have acted in the way you have!"

Joci came to his feet. "And how have I acted?" He hissed.

"What you did was dishonorable!" Atropos spat at him. "Succumbing to your ridiculous fantasies regarding your Queen!"

Joci laughed at him then. "Bah! What do you know! There are hundreds... thousands of Spartans who fantasized of the Queens every day! What it would be like to lay with such beauty and grace and intelligence! That does not mean they would not willingly throw themselves upon our enemies, or any who would do our Queens harm! Any who would do our King harm! That scum Rinard offered an opportunity for me to fulfill that fantasy! I did not know what his vile intentions were, and if I did I would have gut him where he stood! There is no harm in what I have done! When I discovered something was amiss I tried to rectify the situation!"

"Rectify? You have made things worse! What do you call what is happening now with Anja and the fools on the Elder Council?" Atropos roared stepping closer to him.

"I call it deceitful politics! Something that would have happened no matter whether I took part in!" Joci snapped. "I did take part in it however! And when I saw and came to realize what Ceuma was, I attempted to make things right! I did not know Rinard would try to kill her! Or those that took part in what happen!"

"You should have come forward immediately!" Atropos barked.

Joci shook his head. "And risked Ceuma's life? No."

"She is a clone!" Atropos roared.

Joci stepped up to him without fear as Husen and Belen moved to come between the two men. "Her name is Ceuma!" Joci shouted. "And she is my wife and mate! I do not fear you Atropos... and do not make the mistake of thinking I will not defend my mate's honor."

"She is a clone of Queen Anja!" Atropos snapped.

"And she is her own person!" Joci exclaimed. "She has her own mind. Her own thoughts. Her own will! She is nothing like Queen Anja, may the gods bless her! My mother, a traditional Lycavorian woman no different than your own, my mother helped her to discover herself. She helped Ceuma to realize who and what she was. Or will you now speak unkindly of my mother as well?" Joci's features changed quickly then and his fangs extended while his eyes took on a decidedly orange like hue to them. "I will only tolerate you speaking of what you don't know and don't understand in regards to my mate because of what is happening Atropos of the *Durcunusaan*. Do not think I will allow you to speak badly of my mother, a woman who is far older and more experienced than you! For if you do... then we will come to blows."

"And I would squash you like the insect you appear to be!" Atropos growled at him.

Joci's smile was crazy. "That may be so... but I guarantee you will know who it is who marks you!"

Belen took his father's arm. "Father enough of this!" He snapped. "This man is not our enemy!"

"What he has done is...!" Atropos began to speak.

"Will you think this way of me as well?" Belen asked.

Atropos whirled on him. "What?"

“What do you think father?” Belen spoke. “Before I found Sivana, do you not think I had similar thoughts of Anja? What it would be like to hold her in my arms? To bed with her?”

“Belen!” Atropos rasped.

“You are her Captain!” Belen pressed forward. “And you have loved our mother since long before Queen Anja ever became part of your life. There are many who are like Joci... like I was until I found Sivana. There is nothing wrong with it. Sivana and I both have commented through the years on many female elves who resemble Queen Dysea or Queen For'mya and what men must think when they see them. You have said yourself that Martin has the finest taste in females that you have ever seen. This is not a crime father. Joci did not partake in a crime.”

“What he did...”

“What he did was to accept an opportunity presented falsely to him to fulfill a fantasy that thousands of our men have, just as he said.” Belen spoke calmly. “When he discovered the insidiousness of what was happening he attempted to make things right. To protect the innocent. Just as any Spartan would. You can not blame him for falling in love with her.”

“Can't I?” Atropos demanded. “Why not?”

“She may be a clone of Queen Anja.” Joci spoke. “She may look a twin to her in every way, but she is so far removed from her they may as well be night and day.”

“So you say!” Atropos declared. “And yet you took her as your mate and wife!”

“Because I fell in love with whom she is now.” Joci announced. “Not who she looks like on the outside.”

“Any fool could say that!” Atropos snapped. “Why should I believe you?”

“What you believe is of no concern to me!” Joci snapped. “Only what my mate and wife believe about me matters anymore.” He turned and moved back to the chair and sat back down. “She is all that matters anymore.”

Eurin drew back the gene sequencer from Ceuma's arm and looked at her with a smile. Even as the Divine One and senior Healer among the Hadarian people, Eurin had very little contact with actual living breathing clones. Sitting before her, with the exception of the corn shade blond hair, was Anja Leonidas. Right down to the incredible jade green colored eyes, full lips and dimples.

“Thank you.” Eurin said with a tentative smile. “We... we are almost done I assure you. It should not be much longer.”

Ceuma looked at Eurin and nodded. “I know. There are not many more tests you can run are there?”

Eurin tilted her head slightly. “You... you know what we are doing?” She asked. “The types of tests?”

Ceuma nodded. “You have done a Beta Gene Sequencer Test, a Hyperspatial Scan, and two different types of Protonic Enhancer Neuroscopes. If you have not found what it is you are looking for yet, further tests will not be helpful.”

Eurin looked surprised. “You... you know what these tests are?” She asked.

“I know what they are.” Ceuma answered.

“How do you know this?” Eurin asked.

Ceuma shook her head slowly. “That I do not know. You could give me the tools and I would know how to use them, but do not ask me how I know how to use them.”

Eurin smiled and held up the gene sequencer. “I'll be right back.” She said turning and moving across the room to stand next to Sivana. She was watching the monitor with Anja next to her, neither of them talking. “She knows what the tests are?” Eurin told them.

Sivana nodded slowly. “That's not surprising.” She said. She lifted her finger and traced the colorful lines on the monitor. “This is her MIS scan. Her memory Ingrams are regenerating at ten times the normal cycle. I would estimate that within the next day or so she will have fully regenerated the Memory Ingrams up until the point Anja's DNA sample was taken.”

“Can we determine when that was?” Eurin asked.

“When I first transferred to Eden Base I downloaded all of my medical records to the base's computer system.” Anja answered. “The sample would have had to have been taken after we lost the base to the Coven

for a few weeks. I'm sure Yuri took the opportunity to empty whatever she could salvage from the database after Admiral Wallace ordered it wiped and destroyed."

"That is why she knows how to use the tools." Eurin said.

Anja nodded. "It was no different for me when I began to discover the more advanced facilities and equipment in Sparta when we first arrived." Anja said. "I knew how to use them... what they were used for... but I didn't know how I knew."

Sivana looked at her sister. "She is... she is a perfect copy of you sister." She said softly. "In almost every way. She is cognizant of herself, what she is and her surroundings. And based on what she has told us, the Hadarian genes in her body have already manifested themselves. She healed herself after Rinard stabbed her. She was able to heal the injuries this Spartan Joci suffered just recently if his scans are accurate. The bandages and balms she used did nothing, as her touch had already taken the healing process beyond what they could have. It will only grow stronger now that it has begun to set itself in her touch. She will need to learn how to control it Anja."

Anja nodded. "I know." She said softly moving closer to the monitor. "You have studied the growth of Hadarian Metaphysical Radiation more than I Vana. Will she... will she be as powerful as us? As Eliani?"

Sivana shrugged her slim shoulders. "That is hard to say." Sivana replied. Sivana glanced at Eurin. "Eurin?"

Eurin shook her head. "It is doubtful. Belen is a Tier Six Mindvoicer. Malic and Nyla are also Tier Six. Martin can not be measured and nor can you now Anja. Your PCC coefficients are so high that it would be pointless to try and measure them. And with the exception of Belen and Sivana, all of you are bonded to dragons. I believe a great deal of your ability to channel your power comes from your strength within Mindvoice. It allows you to focus and concentrate that much harder, making the metaphysical radiation and healing properties more focused. She will not have that ability."

"This Joci is only listed as a Tier Four." Sivana spoke looking at the data pad.

Eurin nodded. "Yes... and Rinard as well. Which means her Mindvoice ability, once it begins to manifest itself, will be in the same range. Considerably stronger than the majority of our Healers, but not close to those of you with purer blood. If she... if she walks that path of course, she would become one of the few dozen strongest Healers within the Union quite easily I would think."

"What do we do with her?" Sivana asked softly looking at Anja. "We are fraternal twins Anja... but in many respects you and she are identical. The variance in the differences of your DNA is even less than ours."

"Vana?" Anja declared looking at her sister.

"I'm only stating the obvious!" Sivana spoke. "I'm not saying anything else."

"I don't know what we are going to do." Anja said. "Discovering that she is alive is not something that had ever played into the equation to be honest. Martin and I both thought for sure that Rinard would have eliminated the clone when he got what he wanted. If not for this fool Joci..."

"My mate is no fool!" The angry voice growled from behind them. Anja, Sivana and Eurin turned quickly to see Ceuma standing behind them, her jade green eyes flashing angrily in the light of the examining room. "And I will not allow you to decide my fate and future. What right do you have to decide that for me?"

"Listen... you..." Anja began to talk.

"My name is Ceuma!" She barked. "It is the name I have chosen for myself and the name I have lived with for over a year. If it is too hard for you to pronounce correctly I would be most happy to explain it to you. Or do you refuse to speak my name because I am a clone of you and you consider me beneath you in some manner."

Anja's own jade green eyes grew wider. "What? No... no that is... it is nothing like that!" She exclaimed.

"Do I frighten you then?" Ceuma asked.

Anja's eyes narrowed. "You are not supposed to be alive!" She snapped.

"Anja!" Eurin gasped in shock, though Ceuma and Sivana simply looked at her.

"Yes... I know that most intimately." Ceuma finally said. "However... I am alive. You are troubled by that. That I exist."

"It's not everyday you meet an exact duplicate of yourself." Anja stated. "I think troubled is actually a mild word to be honest."

“I am alive.” Ceuma said. “I may look like you... be a copy of you... but as I told you in the transmission I am not you. Do you... do you intend to kill me?”

“What?” Anja gasped. “No!”

“That is good.” Ceuma said with a sigh. “I would not want to fight you. Joci has made sure I am capable of handling myself if need be.”

“You... you don’t need to be with this man.” Anja stated.

Ceuma’s eyes grew wide. “He is my mate and husband!” She exclaimed. “Why... why would I not want to be with him? I love him with all that I am!” She saw Anja glance quickly at Sivana and she smiled. “Yes... I know what love is. I feel it every morning when I wake in his arms. I feel it every night when I fall asleep in those same arms. And I feel his love and utter devotion to me whenever he makes love to me and steals my breath away.”

“How... how could you feel that way after what he did?” Sivana asked softly.

“I know everything about what happen.” Ceuma asked. “I know what that bastard Rinard told him, and I know what you saw in the security footage was not done at different times as Rinard would have you believe.”

“It wasn’t?” Eurin asked surprised.

Ceuma shook her head. “It all took place in one day and the moment Joci knew that there was something not right he began to plot to get me out of there. Even then I knew what was happening... but Rinard was using his aura against me. Inflaming my...” She stopped talking for a moment and that is when Anja reached out and touched her arm.

“We... we know about their auras.” Anja said gently.

Ceuma took a deep breath and nodded. “Of course you do.” She stated. “The moment Joci knew that there was something wrong he began to question what Rinard was doing. That is why you only see him in the first security footage taken and not the rest.”

Anja’s eyes narrowed. “He’s... he’s in all of them.” She stated.

Ceuma shook her head. “It may appear that way... but in fact he was not. I would know this because he was the only one who poured forth his feeling when he took me. He was the only one... he was the only one who was larger than Rinard and who I actually enjoyed being with that day. The footage that is being shown to you and all of the Union has been altered to show him in all of the sessions, when in fact he and Rinard argued after the first time and he departed.”

Sivana’s eyes grew wider. “That is how he survived Rinard killing the others!” She gasped. “He left before Rinard discovered where he lived.”

Ceuma nodded. “That is what we determined as well when we first saw the footage on the Netnews. Rinard is better connected than you might think... and he has others willing to do his dirty work for a price.”

“The woman?” Anja asked. “Who is the woman? Did Rinard kill her as well?”

Ceuma shook her head. “No. He was harsh with her in bed. He knew she did not want to be there... she kept saying she was only doing what she had been told. He took her roughly at times... but she was a good actress it seems. It took several hours to prepare her physically for her role. She had to alter her features and body enough so that it appears to be this Seanna in the footage.”

“Did you see her face before she changed it?” Anja asked.

Ceuma shook her head. “No. I’m sorry.”

“What do you remember?” Anja asked.

“About Rinard? I remember everything that...” Ceuma began to reply.

“No.” Anja said softly. “Before Rinard. Do you know where you came from? Where you were made? Where you have been? What you have done?”

“I have memories of a man.” Ceuma said in reply. “He was a stern man... kind but stern. I remember going through some training, schooling. I remember fighting in the desert. I can... I can remember the first night I... you... spent with the King.” Ceuma tilted her head slightly as she looked at Anja. “He is... he is very gifted physically...” Ceuma smiled wistfully. “Much like my Joci, though only a little thicker. He...”

“Ah... I believe that is enough of a description.” Eurin spoke quickly.

“I don’t understand why you would choose this Kevin person over him at that time of your life.” Ceuma said. “I would not have done so.”

Anja rolled her eyes. "Yeah... I've asked that question of myself a few times over the years." She spoke as Sivana grinned.

"I guess that answers the question of whether her memories are yours sister." Sivana said.

"There is a gap." Ceuma said evenly. "I remember being assigned to a place on a dead planet. I did not want to be there. The next thing I remember is waking up in a ship and looking at Rinard. His is not the most pleasant face to wake up to."

"I don't imagine it is." Eurin snorted.

"Up until Joci and I returned to his mother's home, everything else is pretty much a blur." Ceuma said. "It wasn't until Toncae began helping me to focus that I was able to fully become aware. I know that Rinard bit me to change me and make me more susceptible to his aura, and there were voices and images, but I can't remember them very well."

"I believe this is what Anja meant when she said you don't have to be with this man." Eurin spoke.

Ceuma looked at her. "Perhaps you don't understand. Rinard may have turned me into what I am now, but it is Joci who my blood burns for completely. Just as yours burns for the King." She said looking at Anja. "He does not love me because I look like you; he loves me for who I have become. It is his aura that caresses my senses and nerves now. It is Joci that my mind and heart calls for, Joci whose touch my body craves and Joci's name I cry in the midst of our passion. The color of our skin when pressed together... the way he kisses me. No... Joci is my choice... and I wish to be with him now please."

"We need to discuss quite a bit before I allow you to return to him." Anja said.

Ceuma's eyes narrowed. "Allow me to.... it was my choice to come here!" She snapped. "Our choice! We knew the only way we would be safe was to come here and help you prove everything that Rinard is doing is a lie! Do not presume to stand there and tell me when you will allow me to be with my mate! You would be sorely mistaken! We could just as easily have done what Toncae wanted us to do and run away!"

"And why didn't you?" Anja asked.

"Because Joci is a Spartan!" Ceuma barked. "It is all he has ever wanted to be! He will never run away when there is a threat to those he is sworn to safeguard! And I am his mate and wife! I won't allow him to run from his duty just to protect me!"

"That doesn't excuse what he has done." Anja said.

"What has he done to break any law?" Ceuma spat. "Is a crime to secretly desire your Queen now? Though after speaking with you, I can't imagine why he would desire you! You are an *upaeel*!"

Sivana couldn't contain her outburst of laughter at the expression on Anja's face. Eurin looked positively horrified and Ceuma glared at Anja toe to toe and eyeball to eyeball, no back down in her whatsoever.

"You speak the ancient Lycavorian language?" Anja spoke finally.

"Of course I speak it!" Ceuma barked. "Joci's mother is very traditional. Did you not hear me when I told you that?"

Sivana gripped her sister's arm and shook her head unable to get her laughter under control. "Oh sister!" She gasped between chortles. "Anja... she is so much like you it is scary!"

"Vana... this is serious!" Anja protested.

"Trust me Queen Anja... I have no desire to steal your life from you." Ceuma spoke once more. "The Hadarian Elders I would just shoot; the King is not in the least bit desirable to me; while intriguing I have no desire to sleep with other women, and I most certainly do not wish to have children. At least not yet. You can have your life. We are here so that we may get our lives back."

Even Eurin smiled now and she looked at Anja. "I can honestly say she most definitely has your disposition Anja. And I hardly believe she is a threat to us. Not when they could have just as easily not come forward as she said."

Anja crossed her arms under her full breasts and stared at Ceuma. Ceuma copied her exactly and folded her arms under her equally full breasts and stared right back.

Sivana chuckled. "This is going to be very interesting." She said.

Atropos turned when the door to the room slid open. He saw a flash of corn blond hair on the head of his Queen and instinctively reached out to snatch Ceuma's arm.

"Joci!" Ceuma exclaimed just as Atropos snagged her forearm.

Joci bolted to his feet. "Release her!" He bellowed stepping towards them just as Anja, Sivana and Eurin appeared in the doorway.

Ceuma wrenched her arm free with surprising strength and snarled at Atropos, her wolf fangs bursting from her gums. "Only my mate touches me!" She screamed. "Don't you..."

Ceuma's eyes grew a little wider when Joci's aura washed over her and his thick arms encircled her from behind. Her eyes softened and her fangs quickly retracted and she cooed out her happiness as she leaned back against him. "Husband." She whispered.

"I am here my wife." Joci whispered in her ear, nuzzling her cheek as he did so. "You are safe."

Ceuma turned within his embrace and wrapped her arms around his waist, crushing her small frame against his six feet of muscle and bone.

Atropos turned his head as Anja came up next to him. "Anja?" He asked softly.

Anja looked at him and patted his arm. "They are no threat to us or to me Atropos." She said. "In fact... they just became our biggest asset. I am going to love seeing the look on Rinard and Buonau's face when Ceuma here unveils our surprise."

"My Queen... Anja... she is you." Atropos said.

Anja shook her head. "No... she may look like me... her DNA may be identical to me... but she is most definitely not me."

"Then who is she?"

Anja found herself smiling. "Her name is Ceuma." She answered.

CITY OF TENILO WESTERN CONTINENT HOME OF CHIEF MINISTER WIKTOR

"...do not know why she has not signaled me Elder Buonau." The Commander of the Elder Guard Militia spoke from the secure transmission. "I have seen her five times over the last three days and she waves me off. Three times when it would have been perfect to execute our plan to take the children."

"Why would Duewa do that?" Buonau asked.

"I do not know." The man said. "I do know that the Co-Commander of the Royal Estate's *Durcunusaan* detail, a *Dilochitès* Thoti, has been spending quite a bit of time with her. They have rarely been apart over this same time frame. Perhaps the King is aware we may attempt something like this and is having her watched more carefully."

"Impossible." Buonau snapped. "Our security has been impeccable."

Wiktor leaned forward in her chair. "Buonau... the hearing for Anja is in two days. Is it possible Duewa is getting anxious and not willing to go through with our plan?"

Buonau looked at her. "No... I don't believe that." She stated. "My daughter has just as much to gain as we do from taking power from Anja. Besides... she is the one in the footage impersonating Seanna. She is even guiltier than the rest of us for acting with Rinard against the ruling Queen."

Wiktor looked at Okein quickly but kept her expression neutral. She knew Buonau was a hard woman and would do anything to regain the power she had lost since Anja had been Queen, but sacrificing her own daughter to safeguard herself was not something she thought Buonau capable of.

"What do you wish me to do Elder Buonau?" The Militia Commander asked.

"The hearing where we will usurp Anja is in two days." Buonau spoke quickly. "I will contact my daughter before then, but for now plan your assault for that day as they are returning from their school."

The man nodded. "As you order Elder Buonau."

Buonau turned to face them as the transmission went dark. "I will contact her and find out what is going on."

“Having Retta and Calyb with us when we denounce their mother will have a telling effect Buonau.” Wiktor spoke. “That is why we went through with this and let them return to Earth with Leonidas.”

Buonau nodded. “I know that. You decided against my recommendation to take them before he left however.”

“Taking the Union King’s children from him on the day we charged their mother would have appeared just as false as the charges we have brought against her. And it would have thrown Leonidas into a frenzied rage.” Wiktor said. “He would have slaughtered any who attempted to take them.”

“I don’t believe he would have.” Buonau said. “I have studied this man extensively. He is a mindless brute, nothing more.”

Wiktor nodded. “As you have said in the past Buonau. However there are those of us who do not agree with that assessment. We give the man more credit than you. And even if what you say is true... he is a mindless brute with control of the most powerful weapons known to exist, and men and women willing to die at his very word.”

Buonau met her gaze. “Do you doubt what we will do?” She asked.

Wiktor shook her head immediately. “Not in the least.” She spoke. “I’m only saying we should be more cautious. You know of course who it is Rinard’s contacts have said will support us when we break away from the Union?”

Buonau nodded. “The Kavalians. Yes.”

“We need to be very careful in our dealings with them Buonau.” Wiktor spoke. “I do not fully trust their intentions.”

“We will have everything in writing and by contract Wiktor... don’t worry.” Buonau said. “Have you finished the formal announcement for when we declare our Independence?”

“It is nearly complete.” Wiktor said.

“Then I will allow you to go about your work while I contact Duewa and find out why she is delaying action.” Buonau said getting to her feet. “We will meet in the normal spot tomorrow to make final preparations in turning Anja over to Rinard.”

Wiktor and Okein watched as she made her way out of the main room and headed for the door. Okein waited until the door to the home had closed before turning to Wiktor. “We are doing the right thing aren’t we Wiktor. We are not going to regret this are we?”

“What choice do we have now but to go through with it?” Wiktor said. “We can not turn back and we must see it through to the end.”

“Why do you think Duewa has not given the signal to take the children?” Okein asked.

Wiktor shook her head. “Buonau is right in that Duewa dislikes Anja and the Lycavorians more than most.” She said. “Perhaps the Commander is correct and she is being watched much more carefully now by the *Durcunusaan*. In any event, that is not our concern. Help me finish this announcement for the hearing. It must be perfect.”

EARTH SPARTA

Buonau and Wiktor were correct in that *Dilochitès* Thoti, the Co-Commander of the Royal Estate *Durcunusaan* detail was spending much more time with Duewa. However it was not for the reasons they thought. And none of them would have been in the least bit happy had they taken note of Duewa’s reaction to this added attention.

In fact they would have been downright horrified.

Horrified because, after three days of spending nearly every waking moment with Thoti and his son Hiero; seeing the interaction between Hiero and her two sons, Duewa was calling into question everything her mother had taught her through the years. It wasn’t the substance of what her mother had taught her, nothing of what she had schooled and drilled to Duewa was wrong in any way. The Lycavorians were a barbaric and sometimes cruel species. Many of their customs and traditions were foreign to Duewa, foreign to her mother

and many of the older Elders and that is why they did not understand. And it had dawned on Duewa during the second day with Thoti that understanding was the major difference between them.

The dinner he and Hiero had prepared for her and her sons had been delicious, and it had stunned Duewa to think that a man could cook better than her. Yet Thoti's culinary skills far surpassed her own, and at first she thought it was because he had raised his son for so long by himself. It wasn't until they were eating that she discovered it was a recipe he had received from the King. When she questioned him in a joking manner that Martin Leonidas had five wives to do his cooking, not to mention countless servants, Thoti had laughed and shook his head. She discovered that while all his wives and mates were incredible cooks, as any Lycavorian born or raised woman was, it was Martin Leonidas who had done the most cooking while his children were growing. Even to this day, it was something he looked forward to doing when it was just his family present for the meal. Duewa had listened to Thoti enraptured as he related to her his childhood, how he had met his Hadarian wife, and everything in between. His manner was laconic in many respects, but Duewa could see the burning intelligence in his eyes.

She had watched him while he cooked with Hiero, directing his son in what to do, and even taking the time to pull her own sons into the kitchen with them. She had watched him skill them in cooking as he no doubt skilled the warriors he had trained through the years. He moved with confident grace, always aware of what was going on around him. Even talking to her and seemingly not paying attention to the three young boys in the kitchen, he had stopped her youngest from burning himself on the hotplate. He had not scolded Tinyn harshly, only told him that he needed to be aware of all around him. When her oldest Tinrell asked why they needed to do that Thoti had only smiled and said it would make them better Healers.

Duewa was an exceptionally intelligent young woman, yet for the first time in her entire life, she had actually stopped to take in all around her. The day after their dinner, she had actually asked Retta and Calyb to show her what they could do. Thoti had told her to find a door into their world the previous night, and when Duewa asked them to show her what they could do, that door not only opened it was smashed off its hinges. She had been amazed at what they could do at so young an age, and when she asked Retta to show Tinrell to do something, she had willingly agreed. She had watched as with patience a ten year old should not have had, Retta showed him what she had asked and did so until he had gotten it exactly right. The joy in her son's eyes was something she had never seen before and within hours Retta and Calyb were sitting in the courtyard, Mara and Endeem just behind them, listening without hesitation as Duewa schooled them in a style of Healing that they did not know. When she had sent them off to school later that morning, Duewa had reflected on what had happened, keeping an open mind and realizing that perhaps her mother had been wrong all along. There was an old saying that she had heard while on Earth in the previous months, people fear what they don't understand, and realization dawned on Duewa that is exactly what was wrong with her.

That had been two days ago, and now she sat at the table in her small apartment while Thoti busied himself making them breakfast and she watched him. Watched him as she had watched no one in her life. Thoti stood a tad over six foot one in height; most Lycavorian men were well over the average five foot nine height of others within the Union. His two hundred and nineteen pounds was all tightly packed and lean muscle and definition. Duewa's now dead Hadarian husband came no where close to the physical proportions of Thoti, and he was much more feminine in nature. Thoti was not a man who spent much time indoors, his skin deeply tanned. He was certainly not the most handsome man she had ever seen, or the most attractive male who had been interested in her, but as she gazed at him now Duewa found her heart racing at the prospect that this man might actually want her. Duewa had seen for herself the devotion and absolute commitment to their mates that Lycavorian and Elven males presented. The largest example of that was Martin Leonidas himself who, though the security footage of the clone of Anja being taken by many men still circulated throughout the Union, still remained utterly in love with her. Just as he did his other wives and mates. Duewa wondered if Thoti had been that way with his wife. She had been Hadarian Duewa discovered from Thoti himself, with short bright red hair and soft green eyes if the images of her in their home were accurate. Duewa learned he had committed himself to his son after her death, never showing interest in any female until... until her!

This insight hit Duewa like a slab of stone as she stared at him and incredibly Duewa felt a sudden surge of desire sweep through her at this knowledge. She had never had a Lycavorian man show interest in her. Those stationed on Hadaria knew her as an *upae* they called her so often. A woman to steer well clear of if you valued your sanity. Rinard did not count as far as Duewa was concerned. He truly was a vile brute of a man who

treated her as a slab of meat in their encounters. The times she had to allow him to slobber and grunt all over her body for the security footage to be taken Duewa thought she would vomit. He had been very rough with her, causing her quite a bit of pain with his size and demeanor. He had taken her like he hated her, without regard for what she was feeling. And Duewa had certainly felt no pleasure that day. As she gazed at Thoti, she felt a wave of shame sweep over her as she found herself wondering how large he was. Duewa had always heard from others that Lycavorian men were very well equipped sexually, and Rinard had far surpassed her husband in size, but he had truly been an animal. Duewa found herself wondering what it would be like with Thoti, and the thought of that caused her to become aroused just enough that she saw his head come up quickly as if he detected a new scent.

Duewa silently cursed her stupidity as she looked down at the table, realizing that she should have known he would have smelled her arousal because of his animal senses. She took several deep breaths before lifting her head once more, only to find Thoti's ruggedly handsome face not three inches from hers. His blue eyes were bright and filled with craving. Duewa knew instantly who that craving was for and try as she might to force it down, her arousal only grew.

"Tho... Thoti!" She gasped.

"Duewa!" He spoke to her in a husky tone. His deep voice strummed across the skin of Duewa's cheeks and she had to stifle a groan of wanton need.

What was happening to her? She should not be acting this way. She should not be feeling this way, but no matter how she tried to fight it, she found herself wanting this man to have her. She watched his head tilt to the side slightly, his blue eyes measuring her up and she saw him smile ever so slightly, exposing the tips of his wolf fangs.

"Is what I smell... is it for me Duewa?" Thoti asked as he pushed the arranged flatware out of the way, some of it hitting the floor and shattering.

"Thoti I... I..."

Duewa nearly came in her thin panties when his hand came up behind her head and he pulled her lips to his as his fingers entwined in her thick auburn red hair. Her green eyes were wide for the briefest of moments at what was happening, and then his warm tongue invaded her mouth and embraced her own. Her eyelids closed almost dreamily then, as his tongue demanded entrance and she gave it to him. She had kissed her husband like this many times, but he never seemed to respond, and it had never made her body ignite in the way it was igniting now. Thoti not only kissed her, he devoured her. His tongue danced with hers in ways she had never felt, and the sheer dominance of his kiss was sending jolts of electric pleasure skittering throughout her body.

By the grace of the Divine One he was going to make her come just by kissing her this way Duewa thought.

Her nipples were burning points of hardness pressing almost painfully against the fabric of her clothes. No matter how tightly she squeezed her thighs together, she could not stop the burning from her pussy or the wetness that was soaking her inner thighs. Duewa felt him begin to pull back from the kiss and felt suddenly empty. She opened her eyes slowly and saw his blue orbs staring at her with a devastating yearning. Blue orbs that were now encircled in a deep dark black ring; his wolf eyes. Duewa had never seen such beautiful eyes before and she gasped softly at the intensity of their gaze. A gaze that only increased the ardent fervor that was rapidly sweeping through her. Duewa was shocked at how badly her body yearned for this man's touch upon her, her regimented Hadarian training inexorably being smashed into oblivion.

"Send... you must send me away now Duewa!" Thoti rasped. "If... if you do not want this to go any further, please send me away now!"

"Thoti... Thoti I can't..." Duewa stammered trying to focus her words and get her raging emotions under control.

Thoti's eyes closed then and his face drew away quickly. She could see him struggling to bring his own emotions under control as he stood up completely. "Forgive me." He spoke very solemnly. "I... I should not have... *tarfarie lae*." (Forgive me)

Duewa watched him turn and begin moving towards the door to her small apartment. Her soft green eyes grew wide as she became conscious of the fact that something she sought badly was about to leave. Duewa got to her feet slowly as she abruptly realized her future was about to walk out of her life forever and she was not going to stop him. After decades of listening to her mother, of doing her mother's bidding no matter what it was

or the shame it caused her, Duewa recognized it was everything her mother had wanted from her. Everything her mother expected her to do. All of it was guided by the fact that it helped her mother to regain power she had lost. None of it was what Duewa wanted. With the only exception being her beautiful sons, nothing Duewa had done in her adult life had been because it was what she wanted. All of it had been guided by her mother's desire.

"Thoti!" Duewa heard herself call out his name just as his hand reached up to open the door. Duewa moved in front of the table, her hands shaking terribly as small tears spilled from the corners of her eyes. "Don't... don't you leave me!" When Thoti turned slowly to look at her with those devastating blue wolf eyes, the walls within Duewa, the walls she had spent so many years erecting, those walls came crashing down in an instant. "Don't you leave me like... don't you leave me like everything else in my life has left me."

Duewa attempted to blink away the tears and then he was in front of her once more. She gasped at the speed with which he had moved, she had never seen anyone move so quickly, and then she sobbed loudly as his arms swept her up and he crushed his lips to her once more. It was the final instant that caused her to weep as everything she had learned, everything she had been raised to expect and experience was eternally shredded into nothing. She felt Thoti stagger back slightly until she bumped into the table, but this did not register fully for his soft lips and talented tongue were plundering her very essence. She gasped for air as he pulled back and she felt his hands reach up to grasp the flimsy shirt she wore. It came away in one tearing motion, the brassier confining her firm breasts with it, and Duewa saw stars as his head dropped down instantly and his warm lips engulfed one of her searing hot nipples. Duewa whimpered as the first orgasm smashed through her, Thoti's strong hands pulling at the matching pants of the outfit that was now useless to her. Duewa heard more tearing sounds, but was lost within the grips of her orgasm, and then Thoti dropped her firm butt on the top of the table. He didn't let go of her as she shuddered in the throes of passion, gingerly stretching her body across the table, and then his head dropped even lower. Duewa's hands slammed down on the table top and she screamed in overwhelming delight when his lips found their way to her center like a heat seeking missile. His mouth clamped over her spasming pussy, his lips sealing themselves to her labia as his tongue stabbed out and battered her stiff clit without mercy. This action triggered another orgasm instantly, for no man had ever done this to her before. Duewa's mouth fell open in a silent wail of pleasure, her soft green eyes wide in incredulity as her lithe body shuddered violently in needed pent up release.

Thoti, for his part, was equally incensed. The wolf within him was charging forward as he took what he wanted so badly. Duewa's sweet berry blossom scent filtered into his nostrils and his brain, searing itself into his core, as he drank her sweet come like a starving madman. He detected the faint scent of another in her blood, but as she screeched out her passion and filled his mouth and throat with her essence, he dismissed it. When he was done with her, the only scent that would saturate her blood and being would be his. The burning in his blood for this woman he had not felt since his long dead mate and wife Hanna. She had been the only one able to make him feel this way, and Thoti was determined to love this Hadarian female so completely she would never wish to be with another. His cock was harder now than it had been in many years, and he yanked at his uniform pants with one hand as the fingers of his other hand manipulated Duewa's stiff nipples. He didn't need to worry about holding her in place for she had locked her thighs tightly around his head, her fingers clutching his head tightly as she shuddered in bliss.

Duewa basked in the incredible sensations of what she had just had ripping through her. Never had she felt such total and dominating pleasure. Never had she thought such sensations could exist. As her head tossed slowly from side to side she could feel the burning still growing, still building. She gasped when Thoti's oh so wonderful lips and tongue left her now soaked pussy and he pushed her long lean legs further apart. Her pussy, her center, never had she even thought these words before, and now they came so naturally. By the gods what had this man's passion released within her she thought? Thoti grasped her hands and yanked her up with barely a pause and then she tasted herself on his lips as he kissed her with scarcely controlled, but completely animalistic passion. A passion that was stirring her to a higher plane as well. She vaguely noticed that he was now shirtless, and her breasts were crushed against his hot, tanned skin, her erect nipples sweltering to the touch. He yanked her head back gently and gazed into her eyes, his hands and fingers wrapped within her long hair now wildly strewn about and unkempt. Duewa saw the animal then, and what she saw impelled her further into that realm she had never been before. She glanced down when his hands pulled her forward and her green eyes grew wide as she saw what he was offering her. What he wanted from her.

Duewa shook her head quickly, placing her palms against his chest, trying to push him away. “Tho... Thoti... no! I...”

He was far too strong for her, especially in her state and soon he had her off the table and had pushed her to her knees in front of him. Duewa’s wide eyes gazed at his huge cock as she placed her hands on his hips, still trying to hold him back. He *was* larger than Rinard, so thick and dominating and so...

Delicious looking!

Duewa could not believe she had just thought that but it was so true. Even with Rinard and the others she had tolerated in that disguise, she had never done what she wanted to do now. It was disgusting and beneath her to resort to such methods, yet now her mouth was watering at just the thought of it. His fingers were laced within her hair and pulling her head closer to his throbbing cock. Whatever misgivings had been bred into her from her childhood quickly found their way in oblivion as Duewa took her hands from his hips and wrapped them around that pulsing shaft. She heard Thoti gasp out and his abdomen quivered at just her touch upon his cock and this knowledge only caused Duewa to feel power. Power over him in a way that he had power over her only moments ago. Power to make him feel the same pleasure he had given her so easily. Duewa leaned closer, marveling at the throbbing shaft just millimeters from her lips. It had to be at least twenty-five and a half centimeters long and six centimeters thick. She could barely get her fingers to touch around the circumference and...

“*Anse* woman!” Thoti’s voice rasped out. “Don’t... don’t play with me! I won’t last if...” Duewa didn’t let him finish his sentence as she engulfed the bulbous head of his cock within her lips and took him deeply into her mouth. “Arrrrggghhh!”

Duewa’s eyes were wide as she felt the cascading heat from his throbbing cock within the confines of her mouth. Her tongue pressed against the underside of his shaft and she could actually feel the blood pulsing along that thick vein. She closed her eyes in surreal bliss and shivered in a tiny orgasm just from the feel of his thick pole within her lips. The texture of his cock was like soft satin, so smooth and warm. She held him motionless within her mouth, the head of his cock at the back of her throat. She could feel his thighs tense and his abdomen clench as he held back from plunging his shaft entirely into her throat. The musky fragrance of his maleness filled her nose and then she could taste him. It was lightly salty but delicious in its consistency and flavor. This only caused her to groan even more around his thick shaft, the humming vibration rippling along the fifteen or so centimeters of his beautiful shaft that she held tightly between her lips. Instinctively she began to draw her head back, keeping her lips tightly sealed around his cock until she could feel the ridges of the underside of the pulsating head. Without further question or thought she plunged her head back down the length of his thick cock and heard him hiss out his satisfaction. Duewa dropped one hand from around the base of his shaft to cup his large balls. They felt so full to her and she wondered just what it would be like to taste him fully. She knew from her time with Rinard that Lycavorian men were able to release quite a bit of come and she didn’t know what she would do when...

“Duewa!” Thoti cried as his hands tightened on her head. “Duewa... I can’t hold it any... *nubou*.”

The answer to her question came then as the head of his beautiful cock engorged even larger at the back of her throat and she felt the first blast of his burning hot come race down her throat. Duewa’s eyes closed in faraway delight as she realized the control she had over her man.

Her man.

As his come warmed her stomach, the next eruption flooded her mouth without pause and Duewa savored the flavor as she swallowed what he gave to her devoid of hesitation and realized that he *was* her man now.

This is what she had been missing for so many years Duewa thought as she released his erupting balls with her hand and wrapped her arms as far around his powerful ass cheeks as she could reach. Tiny orgasms quaked through her as she drank Thoti’s essence fervently, never wanting it to end. Four. Five. Six. Seven powerful explosions of his mouth-watering come found their way into her mouth and belly before it began to ebb. Duewa felt magnificently full then as Thoti leaned forward slightly to rest his hands on the edge of the table. She suckled every last bit of his essence from his still unbelievably hard cock, not wanting to let a single drop escape the prison of her lips, and still he did not diminish in size. Duewa found she would have been quite content to spend the rest of the day snuggled between his legs and feasting on his essence so marvelously did she enjoy herself, but Thoti had other plans.

Duewa felt his hands slide under her armpits and reluctantly she released his magnificent cock as her lifted her easily. Her face was reddened and she attempted to wipe her lips but Thoti took her face in his hands and gazed at her with those incredible eyes.

“*Son vada carians* woman!” He gasped looking at her flushed cheeks and quivering lips. “That... that was beyond incredible!”

Duewa was stunned as his lips came down on hers and she had no doubts he could taste himself on her lips. Apparently it did not matter to him in the least as he lifted her into his arms with another breath stealing kiss and rested her firm ass on the table top. Duewa lavished in his kiss and what it made her feel, until she felt him move between her spread thighs and the head of his huge cock press against her slick labia. She tore her lips from his and put her hands on his shoulders.

“Thoti... wait! I... I have never had one so...” Duewa gasped out the words.

His finger on her lips quieted her words of reluctant protest and he shook his head with a smile. His beautiful blue eyes had changed once more and Duewa could clearly see the black ring around the powder blue cornea. She saw the tips of his fangs just beneath his lips and he leaned forward to brush those wonderful lips across her own lips and then her cheeks until finally he nuzzle the side of her neck and her ear.

“No my sweet Duewa.” He spoke softly. “I have tasted you and you have tasted me. I am in your blood now... and I will never do anything to harm you. You are mine now Duewa of Hadaria and I intend to leave you breathless.”

Duewa felt the warmth and sincerity of his words sweep through her, but before she could answer him he hunched forward and the pulsing head of his huge cock pressed into her easily, followed by four inches of his shaft. Duewa’s fingers curled inward on his shoulders as her eyes bulged open and her head dropped limply to the side. Nothing she had experienced had ever prepared her for what she felt now. Thoti’s cock filled her like nothing she could describe and her lips parted as she howled out her shameless delight. The orgasm smashed aside all that remained of the old Duewa and ushered in the new. Not even pausing to allow her to catch her breath, Duewa felt him hunch forward again, burying the remainder of his huge cock into her velvet tightness. Her head lolled to the side once more, bright flashes of light bursting in her head as Thoti stretched her magnificently. Her orgasms were coming nonstop and she could not focus her mind enough to do more than clutch him as he began to move within her depths.

“Thoti! Thoti!” Duewa screamed with abandon. “My... my beautiful Thoti! I... fuuccckk meeeee! Give... gives me... aahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Duewa could no longer form coherent words as Thoti filled his large hands with the cheeks of her ass and began to pummel her firm body with devastating strokes of his massive cock. He was reaching up inside her to places she never knew she had, hitting spots within her pussy that had until this day remained untouched, and Duewa was awash in the agonizing pleasure it was causing. He lifted her from the table and without hesitation she wrapped her taut legs around his waist, and her arms around his broad shoulders, never wanting the feelings to stop. Still he continued to drive into her with power and ease, the walls of her pussy contracting and releasing his dominating cock with a will of its own it seemed. Duewa could feel his heavy balls slapping against the underside of her ass every time he rammed home, and she only had to glance down between their bodies once to see every incredible inch of his huge cock buried inside her trembling body to know that what she was feeling was very real.

Duewa felt his movements become faster and harder and she whimpered out her ecstasy as her orgasm began deep in the center of her belly and exploded outward like a supernova. She screeched out her brazen enchantment, every nerve ending in her body shouting to the heavens as she felt his huge cock distend to almost impossible proportions inside her. With a final grunt of wanton surrender, Thoti rammed into her completely one last time and Duewa’s world descended into a sphere of emotion that she had never visited when the first explosion of his molten come detonated directly into her womb. He crushed her small frame against his body, his face buried in her sweet smelling hair, even as Duewa tried to pull him tighter to her.

You are mine now Duewa of Hadaria. He had said to her only moments before.

Duewa allowed the tears to come once more. Tears of release, of happiness, of wanton enchantment. But most of all, tears for a love she never imagined she would find.

SODRAG

“...completely lost your *nubous* mind?” Martin Leonidas raged at his oldest son as he paced back and forth on the tarmac.

Andro and Elynth stood quietly as Martin kept shaking his head as he moved. Torma rested on the ground behind him, their *STRIKER* a hundred meters further back. Andro had no intention of letting his father anywhere near Carisia or Arrarn, Narice and Toria. He had felt something different from his father for some time now, something dark and foreboding and he did not want to expose those he loved to it without reason.

“Have you *and* Arrarn lost your minds?” Martin continued. “What were you thinking?” He held up his hand. “Don’t answer that! You weren’t thinking... or you were thinking with the wrong head! That I can forgive, they are beautiful young women!”

“I assure you father... we are in complete control of our facilities.” Andro stated as calmly as he could.

Martin stopped pacing and looked at him. “What the fuck is that? A joke?” He snapped.

“Now is not the time to joke with me son!”

“It is not a joke.” Andro answered. “I’m not understanding what it is you are so upset about?” Andro said.

“You’re kidding right?” Martin barked. “It’s all over the Netnews Andro! You and this Carisia. Arrarn and Aikiro’s daughter Narice... and this unknown red head. The entire Union knows about it now.” Martin looked at him. “That vile bitch Yuri’s daughter? Andro... this is way beyond the pale son.”

“*Enylarcopri* is not like her mother in any way.” Andro spoke. “In fact she despises her mother with every fiber of her being.”

Martin looked at his son with wide eyes. “*Enylarcopri*?” He spat. “Ah... Andro you didn’t?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“*Nubou lae!*” Martin swore. “Tell me your brother didn’t...?” Martin’s eyes grew even larger and he stepped right up to Andro, his face only inches away. “Have you and your brother gone completely off the fucking deep end! You married them?” He screamed. “You took them as your mates?”

Andro’s azure blue eyes remained undaunted. “You have still not given a reason why this is so unacceptable to you father.” He said calmly.

“Reason?” Martin hissed. “They are our fucking enemies! That is reason enough!”

“Carisia, Narice and Toria are not our enemies.” Andro stated. “Nor are the riders and dragons I am training.”

“They are High Coven!” Martin snarled. “They killed your grandfather! They have tried to kill your mothers and me in the past! They...”

“Have never done any such thing.” Andro interrupted him. “Is that what this is all about father? What the High Coven has done to you and our family in the past?”

“Don’t you tap dance with me boy!” Martin barked at him.

“I know all about our past father.” Andro spoke. “I grew up every day hearing about our past and how it has shaped our future. It shapes our future even now. Carisia is the future of the High Coven. Narice and Toria as well. They are our future.”

“You won’t have a future if you trust them!” Martin roared. “They’ll gut you in your sleep and leave you for dead! There is no future with them and you will end it now!”

Elynth’s head came up now and her golden eyes stared right at Martin. *So you will force me to leave my mate as well King Martin.* She spoke.

What? Torma snapped.

Martin looked at Elynth. *Ah... not you too!*

Elynth looked at her father without fear as his obsidian body rose off the ground. *Anthar!* Elynth said. *He has taken me as his mate and I have joyously accepted. We have been mates for almost three months and I bless the gods above every day I wake with him next to me father.*

Torma growled menacingly. *You had no right to do this!* He roared within Mindvoice. *You should have asked permission from the Elder Council as is our way! You should have asked your mother and me!*

And listen to a litany of false reasons why it would be such a horrible idea? Elynth shook her head. *I don’t think so. I have shared dreams with him for many months now father. Long before he ever came here. Just*

as Andro and Sadi have seen Carisia in their dreams. This is not something that just happened. This was preordained. We are meant to be together. And I am old enough to make decisions for myself and I have been since well before now.

“*Rensibfla!*” Martin growled before Torma could reply causing both Andro and Elynth to look at him. “Your actions only prove neither of you can make sensible decisions!”

“By whose definition father?” Andro asked harshly. “Ours or yours?”

Martin glared at him. “By mine!” He shouted. “By Torma’s! By the fact that I am your father and the fucking King of this Union! The Coven can’t be trusted! Yuri, Aikiro... none of them! And most especially not their slut daughters.”

Andro’s eyes narrowed. “I will forgive your comment this once father. I will not forgive it again.” He spoke maintaining control on his own anger which was building now as well. “Your mistrust of the High Coven is relevant to a point father.” He spoke evenly. “But it should not include those who have been here. Those you have not seen and trained every day. These men and women, these riders and dragons, they grow by leaps and bounds in what they can do. Each day brings them closer to breaking the chains that tie them to the Coven. They...”

“They will leave here when you are done!” Martin barked out. “They will go into battle against the Kavalians and more than likely be the turning point in their war with the Coven. We will have handed the Coven victory because you know as well as I do that even one dragon can alter the landscape of a battle! When the Coven is done with the Kavalians... we will end up facing these same riders and dragons! We will have created our own worst enemy!”

It is true! Torma echoed. *We are training them to do everything we can do! It will only make it harder to defeat them!*

“You both seem to think that a battle between them and us is inevitable.” Andro said. “Why is that?”

“They are High Coven! Vampires!” Martin snapped. “Our two species have been at war for as long as anyone can remember!”

“Yet you still took mother as your mate and wife.” Andro said.

“Don’t bring your mother into this!” Martin barked.

“And why not? She is a vampire. A Pureblood. What makes her any different than Carisia or Narice? What makes it so you can accept her... love her... and despise who Arran and I now love?” Andro spoke.

“Your mother has never been part of the High Coven!” Martin snarled. “She has always hated it... and the first chance she got she left! Her mother died insuring she was free!”

“And because Carisia and Narice are of the same blood as the two women our family hates the most... they are not capable of such action as well?” Andro said. “Father... that sounds awfully close to distrust by association. Something you yourself have told me and my siblings to avoid.”

“You can not trust Yuri’s daughter!” Martin roared. “You can not trust Aikiro’s daughter! They are not your mother and I won’t allow it!”

Nor will I allow this relationship to continue between you and this... this Anthar! Torma announced.

“You won’t allow it?” Andro stated. “What gives you the right to tell us who we can take as our mates?”

“I am your father and King!” Martin hissed. “That gives me the right!”

The right to tell me who I can take as a mate as well King Martin? Elynth spoke.

No! I have that right as your father! Torma declared.

“You are not even giving them a chance.” Andro said. “You never have. Not since they have been here. You have seen them once! Only once! You don’t even know what they can do!”

“You disobeyed my instructions and issued them Mark Eleven saddles!” Martin nearly screamed. “The most sophisticated saddle we have in our inventory and you just give it out to our enemy!”

“I had the TJB removed from all of them.” Andro spoke. “The Mark Eleven is the most comfortable and streamlined of our saddles. You wanted me to train them and I decided they needed them!”

“You decided!” Martin snapped.

“You put me in charge of their training!” Andro reminded him.

“I did that because I could not be seen by the Kavalians as moving back and forth to a secret location!” Martin exclaimed. “Now that doesn’t matter... because your reporter friends have let the fucking cat out of the bag!”

“Dilaen and Thomas Roan had nothing to do with the information that was released.” Andro spoke. “They have... they have been here with us for three days now! They are not responsible!”

Martin glared at him. “You... brought two reporters from the Netnews to one of our five most secret bases within the Union?” He screamed. “*Aur carian* son... you have gone insane!”

“Having them on our side for a change will work to our favor!” Andro snapped. “I would think you would understand that!”

“First Yuri’s daughter... then Aikiro’s daughter... now these reporters!” Martin barked. “Is there any other bombs you are planning to drop on me?”

Andro shook his head slowly. “None that would make you see things differently it appears.” He said.

“You’re *nubous* right about that!” Martin shouted. “You have royally fucked up here Andro! Aikiro has been screaming for me in Mindvoice since this news broke. She is beyond mad... and no doubt that lunatic, whack job daughter of hers is even more crazy with anger. Not to mention I have to explain to the Kavalians...”

“It is the Kavalians we should be worried about.” Andro said instantly.

“We are not at war with the Kavalians!” Martin snapped.

“Nor are we at war with the High Coven.” Andro interjected. “Not any longer.”

“The Cease Fire Accords were a farce to cover you training their dragons!” Martin exclaimed.

Andro nodded. “And to all but a select few, the Cease Fire Accords are very real. This announcement concerning Carisia and Narice has nothing to do with the Kavalians and hiding the Coven dragons. You are really pissed off because Arrarn and I have fallen in love with the daughters of two women you truly hate!” He turned to look at Torma. “And you are bent out of shape because Elynth allowed a male she was most attracted to claim her as his mate without consulting you. Anthar is as devoted to her as you are to Isheeni Torma. He would...”

“Love!” Martin barked.

I do not care what he would do young Androcles! Torma snarled within Mindvoice. *This... this relationship is not acceptable to me! Nor will it be to your mother!*

I would like to hear mother say that! Elynth barked right back.

You dare question me daughter!

Elynth drew herself up on all four of her legs now. *Yes!*

Andro looked at his father. “What is it with you two?” He asked quickly. “Where... where is all this anger coming from father? You have never been like this before. You always were one to look at everything before making a decision. What... what has changed?”

“Nothing has changed!” Martin spoke.

“Never fear the unknown.” Andro said. “Is that not what you have raised all of us to believe and follow? Why can you not look past your own hate and distrust of Yuri and Aikiro and see the...”

“Two days!” Martin shouted. “You put together a plan to separate the coven riders from their dragons. In two days they will be taken into custody and their dragons taken from them. I should never have agreed to this in the first place.”

Andro’s eyes were wide. “You are joking!” He gasped.

“Fuck no, I’m not joking. Aikiro and Yuri, all of them, they are gone. They stole those dragons from us and they will not leave with them!” Martin snapped.

“Carisia is my mate!” Andro barked. “My wife! As Narice and Toria are Arrarn’s! Anthar is Elynth’s mate! You can’t just send them away!”

“You should have thought about that before you thought with your dick and not your head!” Martin hissed. “That’s exactly what I’m going to do! Torma and I talked about this on the way here. They will be separated from their riders and taken to Dragon Mountain to be reintegrated into the population. And Vollenth... he’s done! You should have killed him when you had the opportunity! He is a disease and he will only be a problem as long as he is alive. A problem we don’t need.”

You can’t! Elynth declared her wings rustling at this news.

You will obey daughter! Torma spoke.

The bonds they have created with their riders are too strong! Elynth announced. *If you... if you separate them now, after what we have taught them, you will be condemning all of them to eternal emptiness! They will never recover! They will have a hole in their psyche and their souls that can never be filled!*

Martin shook his head. "I'm sorry... but that is the fault of you and Andro. Not ours." Martin spoke more softly. "You should never have given them the training that you have. You should have remained with the very basic maneuvers and tactics. You two chose to go deeper and bring them together."

Andro stood there wide eyed. "Have you even seen Vollenth?" He snapped. "Did you even stop to see who he has become before you made this decision? He has sons that he adores. Viera and he are discovering each other as mates should!"

Martin shook his head. "He was Yuri's dragon, and he will always have a part of her within him. She's a black hearted bitch and she passed that on to him."

Does grandmother know you have decided this? Elynth snapped.

"Arzoal had no say in this." Martin answered. "This is a decision I made for the security of the Union."

"Father... you... this is not you!" Andro pleaded. "What you are doing... you would not do this!"

Martin met his eyes. "It's already done. In two days a detachment from the *Durcunusaan* Dragon Guards will be here to take the dragons into custody and then return them to Dragon Mountain. You will insure there is no trouble. Is that clear?"

"NO!" Andro roared. "It is not clear! This is wrong! You are letting your hatred and mistrust of Yuri and her mother influence your decisions! Both of you are being affected! It is wrong and you both know it!"

"Do you two want to take care of Vollenth... or should we?" Martin continued.

"Father you..."

"Androcles Leonidas!" Martin bellowed. "Do I need to relieve you of your command or will you follow the directives of your King?"

Andro's azure eyes held boundless shock in them, unbelieving that his father could act in such a callous way. "You... you would relieve me of my command?" He gasped.

"If that's what it takes to make sure my orders are followed... yes." Martin stated. "Now what is it going to be?"

You would take from us those that we love! Elynth snarled glaring at Martin. *Those that love us?*

Be silent Elynth! Torma declared.

I will not be silent! Anthar is my mate! I love him as he loves me! What right do you have to tell me otherwise?

We only do this for your own good. Torma spoke.

"Andro?" Martin asked never taking his eyes off his son. "Give me an answer. I have other meetings to attend and I have to deal with that bitch Aikiro. What's it going to be?"

[Andro my brother, what is happening?] Elynth spoke slamming up shields that neither her father or Martin could breach.

Martin looked at Torma quickly when they felt it. "Don't do that." He stated turning back to his son. "Don't make me relieve you son."

Andro didn't look up but raised his hand and placed it on Elynth's muscular neck as he met his father's eyes. "I... I will do as your order King Leonidas." He spoke with a chilling cold in his tone.

"Vollenth?" Martin asked.

"Those are your orders are they not?" Andro hissed savagely.

Martin nodded. "You'll thank me later son." He said.

"You may believe that if it makes you feel better father." Andro spoke coldly.

"Contact me when it is done. The DDG detail will be here in two days. First thing in the morning." Martin said. He turned without pause and began moving back towards the *STRIKER*.

Torma looked at his daughter. *It is for the best daughter.* He told her.

Would you say the same thing if mother was being taken from you? Elynth snarled at her father. *I think not! Not my father! He would never accept that!*

Torma shook his massive head and began following Martin back towards the *STRIKER*.

Elynth lowered her head next to Andro's shoulder and pressed the side of her snout against his cheek.

[Andro my beloved brother, what is happening?]

Andro lifted his arm and laced it under her jaw as far as he could, watching as the ramp on the *STRIKER* began to close and the engines began to spool up.

[Did you see it Elynth?] Andro asked her. *[Did you see it?]*

[See what?]

[The darkness that swirls around both of them.] Andro spoke looking at her golden eyes as his father's STRIKER lifted into the sky. *[Like a fine mist within Mindvoice.]*

Elynth's eyes grew wider. *[I thought... I thought it was just because he was so angry with us.]*

Andro shook his head. *[No. How many times have we angered them before now? Have they ever acted in this way? With such virulent hatred and anger?]*

[No.] Elynth answered.

[Something is wrong.] Andro spoke turning back to watch the STRIKER disappear quickly into the horizon. *[Something is very wrong.]*

[Andro... I will not allow him... I will not allow them to take Anthar from me.] Elynth declared. *[I must talk with my mother.]*

[NO!] Andro said looking at her now. *[No. She would not be able to do anything now. We must do this ourselves sister.]*

[What do you mean?] Elynth asked.

[Do you believe I will forsake Carisia? Do you believe I will make Arrarn forsake those he loves? I will protect my brother. I will protect them all. Including Vollenth and his sons and mate.] Andro spoke forcefully.

Elynth tilted her head slightly. *[Andro... what do we do? How can we stop this?]*

Andro turned to face her fully, reaching up to take her snout in both his hands. Elynth lowered her massive head even further and placed it against his forehead.

[They can't take what they can't find sister.] He stated simply.

"There will come a time. A defining moment in your life; when all you have been taught and trained will mean nothing. At that time you will need to make a decision on the path your life will take. And it is at that time when you will break the chains that bind who you at your core. You will need to surge forward into the future then Androcles, with only your experiences up until then and your heart as your guide."

"I do not wish to be alone Feravomir."

"A Leonidas is never alone Androcles. Your grandfather's spirit has always traveled closely with you and your father. With Elynth and Torma. More so than even you know I believe. And you will always have Elynth. That time will come Androcles, and it is at that time when you will truly be free and discover all you and Elynth are capable of. It happened to your grandfather. It happened to your father and it will happen to you."

- The First Oracle speaking to nine year old Androcles Leonidas as remembered and dictated by Prince

Androcles-

-Centennial of the Moon Celebration-

-Sparta-

-Earth Year 2558-

-Recorded by Dilaen Roan-

-Narrator-

-Personal Journals of Androcles Leonidas-

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

ULU SCIMITAR

"What are you doing here?" Ne'Veha demanded of her father La'sar on the deck of the SCIMITAR's main landing bay.

La'sar had just left the small surface-to-ship transport that shuttled the pilots and crew members of the SCIMITAR to Earth and the moon. La'sar had been on Earth for a full day waiting for clearance to grab one of

the transports going to the *SCIMITAR*. He hadn't realized that the Crown Prince's ship was considered a highly secure area, and only his status as a Lower Elven Parliament Member got him the clearance to come up here. He had seen the broadcast this morning and he was not in the least bit happy about what was happening within his youngest daughter's life. He lowered his bag to the deck and looked at his daughter.

"I was already on my way here for a visit *rel'yende?* The last time you spoke with your mother she said you seemed distant and lonely." La'sar spoke.

"I did not ask her to tell you to come here!" Ne'Veha said.

"No... I was on my way here anyway for a meeting with Queen For'mya. Your mother sent me a transmission and told me a young Lycavorian male contacted her at our home." La'sar said. "He told your mother that you were feeling lonely and out of place. He told your mother that he wished to claim you as his wife Ne'Veha!"

Ne'Veha shook her head. "Tarren." She stated.

La'sar nodded. "Yes... that was his name. He told your mother that you had been seeing him for quite some time. So you would imagine my surprise when I arrive and discover that you have not been forthcoming with us."

Ne'Veha looked at her father. "I could say the same thing about you father." She told him.

"I saw the Netnews broadcast this morning Ne'Veha. What exactly do you think you are doing?" He spoke firmly.

Ne'Veha stood motionless, everything her grandmother had told her over the course of the last three days still very fresh in her mind. She had spoken to her for several hours each day since first meeting her, and had had dinner with them last night again. Ne'Veha had not believed the almost archaic method her grandmother had given her to rid herself of Tarren's scent in her blood. Na'rnoas had assured her this way was tried and true, as she had said before. There were more modern methods, but none of them were guaranteed to work one hundred percent.

It is said that Androcles Leonidas has a nose just like his father. Her grandmother had told her. If there is even a whisper of Tarren's scent upon you child, what you wish for will not happen. Do this... do this and what you want so desperately will take place.

So Ne'Veha had drunk the foul tasting liquid twice a day for the last two days, and then brought herself to several satisfying orgasms in her quarters during the night. Na'rnoas said it would flush her system entirely within two days time of any remnant of Tarren's scent upon her. The orgasms had been quite easy to achieve, for all Ne'Veha had to do was imagine herself within Andro's arms or the arms of Sadi and Carisia and Lu'ria. Their images were so clear and focused within her mind, as if they were almost there with her, and she had gone to sleep quite easily dreaming of them. Ne'Veha no longer doubted what she felt growing within her, not after having spent so much time with her grandmother. The woman was a marvel of knowledge and had shared so much of that knowledge with Ne'Veha. And there was still so much more to learn from her. She had begun sleeping in the two oversized shirts that Sadi had returned with her so long ago. They were Andro's shirts she knew, and amazingly just being wrapped in the same fabric that had touched his skin was soothing to her. Sadi's jungle green eyes and his azure blue eyes filled her dreams at night. She saw all of them really, Carisia's petite frame and maya blue eyes and Lu'ria's tall, lean ebony body and her beautiful amber orbs. Yet it was Sadi and Andro's eyes that she always returned to. Her body entwined with the rest of them, their naked flesh touching in the most intimate of ways. Feasting on each other's bodies as if it was the most natural thing in the universe. Yes... Ne'Veha no longer had any doubts about where she belonged.

Ne'Veha too had seen the Netnews broadcast, she had been hearing about it all day for it was now the talk of the ship. Incredibly... not one person she had seen since the broadcast had mocked or joked with her about it. They treated her differently, more respectfully, but no one questioned it in the least. It was then Ne'Veha discovered the almost total loyalty that Androcles Leonidas inspired in those who served on his ship. They determined that if Androcles Leonidas had chosen her as a wife and mate, then there was something to Commander Ne'Veha that they had not yet seen.

Ne'Veha stepped forward and took his arm. "This is not the place to talk." She stated. "And you should not have come father."

“You are my daughter!” He announced as he picked up his bag once more. “And I want to know what is going on!”

“Come with me.” Ne'Veha said as she looked around and quickly spied an empty briefing room on the landing bay level that was within reach. Ne'Veha guided him confidently among the many landing bay crewmembers that were going about their duties. La'sar had never been aboard a warship of this size and he was stupefied at how they kept everything so organized and did not end up killing one another with the machinery and hand lifters that serviced the many aircraft he saw within the main bay. He allowed his daughter to maneuver him through the mass of machinery and people, watching as she did it with an accomplished ease that seemed almost natural to her. It suddenly became less noisy and he looked around where she had brought him. It appeared to be some sort of briefing room, with several rows of comfortable chairs that were stretched across in front of a large star chart and podium. He watched her as she turned back and secured the door. The sounds from the main landing bay became significantly muted then.

La'sar dropped his bag onto one of the chairs and turned to look at her. “So... now young lady you will tell me what exactly is going on?” He said.

Ne'Veha's dark eyes narrowed just a fraction. “I am not a child any longer father.” She spoke moving away from the door and closer to him.

“You are my daughter!” La'sar told her. “I have every right to inquire about you, and to intervene in your life when your mother and I see that you are doing something to bring harm upon yourself.”

“You mean harm upon you don't you father? And your position within the realm of the Elven Parliament.” Ne'Veha asked.

La'sar glared at her. “I have raised you Ne'Veha!” He said with a large amount of passion in his voice. “Your mother and I raised you to be proud of your bloodline and to always keep it pure. What are you doing consorting with Lycavorians?”

“Who I choose to spend with life with is not your concern *Ontaro*.” Ne'Veha said. “Not anymore. Not after what you have done.”

La'sar looked at her wide eyed. “What I have done?” He exclaimed. “What rubbish is this Ne'Veha? Your mother and I have forbidden you and your sisters to enter into any relationship with a Lycavorian. Why have you gone against our wishes? Not once... but twice it seems! This Tarren fellow... and now I come here and discover it is the Crown Prince! What exactly have you been doing Ne'Veha? Not one... but two Lycavorians! This does not look good Ne'Veha!”

Ne'Veha's eyes narrowed and she stepped closer to her father. “Does not look good for who father?” She asked. “Are you worried that I will embarrass you among your associates on the Parliament?”

“Do not disrespect me Ne'Veha!” La'sar snapped. “I am your father!”

“Who is Na'rmoas father?” Ne'Veha asked suddenly.

La'sar's eyes and face changed then and he looked at the floor quickly. Anywhere but at his daughter's eyes. “It... it was your grandmother's name.” He spoke softly.

“My dead grandmother?” Ne'Veha asked.

La'sar nodded slowly. “Yes.” He looked up at her meeting her dark eyes. “I never told you the name of your grandmother because of what she did.” He said. “How did you find out her name?”

“Perhaps because I have spent a good amount of time with my grandmother the last three days and she has opened my eyes to many things!” Ne'Veha snarled at him. La'sar's look of shock was all the confirmation Ne'Veha needed to know that everything Na'rmoas had told her the last three days was true. “Why have you lied to us all these years *ontaro*? Why have you told my brothers and sisters and I that grandmother was dead when she is very much alive and healthy and happy?”

“Ne'Veha...”

“I want an answer papa!” Ne'Veha snapped.

“Do not raise your voice to me!” He barked back. “Your grandmother brought dishonor upon your grandfather! She...”

“That is so much *sibfla* and you know it!” Ne'Veha shouted causing her father's eyes to grow wider as the ancient Lycavorian word came within the sentence as if Ne'Veha was fluent in the language. “She never dishonored grandfather! If anything he dishonored her for treating her as a possession and not a woman!”

“When... when did you learn the ancient language of the wolves?” He gasped.

“You might be surprised at what I have learned in my time away from the shell you and mother created around me father.” Ne'Veha spoke as she glared at him. “What I have learned about myself and so many other things as well.”

“What has she told you?” La'sar demanded. “Where is she?”

“She has told me quite a bit.” Ne'Veha answered. “All of which is coming true as my eyes are opened. And she lives on Earth now, her husband and mate Jonout is the Commander of the 47th Spartan Guard Division.”

“She is... she is here?” He gasped.

Ne'Veha nodded. “Oh yes.” She answered.

“You will stop communicating with her immediately!” La'sar ordered. “She will twist your mind against your mother and I! She will...”

“She has done nothing but tell me the truth!” Ne'Veha almost screamed. “Grandfather dismissed her! He dismissed her so he could continue his climb within the Elven Parliament! Just as you dismissed her when he told you so many lies about what she had done!”

“You do not know what you are talking about child?” La'sar barked.

“Don't I?” Ne'Veha spoke heatedly. “Are you going to tell me that I am wrong? Are you going to stand there and tell me that grandfather did not do this? That he did not tell her to do what she needed to do to ease her physical needs? That is what he told her when she told him she had fallen in love with Jonout? Do what she needed to do as long as she did not embarrass him. Is that wrong? Ten years father! Ten years she endured grandfather's dismissal before succumbing to the love that had grown between her and Jonout! Ten years father! That is not a simple thing to do?”

“Ne'Veha you...”

“And then when she came to honor grandfather at his Passing ceremony because of what they had shared, you verbally threaten her?” Ne'Veha snapped. “She went there because of you! She went there because Jonout wanted her to go because of you! And you dismiss your mother like she is nothing!”

“She was married to Jonout by then!” La'sar shouted back. “I had taken my father's place and...”

“And you tried to have Jonout exiled from Elear, yes I know father!” Ne'Veha said. “Will you just dismiss me when I do something that does not sit with your view father? Will you dismiss me when I tell you that I love a Lycavorian with every iota of my being? And not only a Lycavorian, but three other women as well!”

La'sar's eyes took on a disgusted gaze. “I forbid it!” He bellowed. “You are my daughter and I will not have you involved with such a relationship!”

Ne'Veha shook her head. “No *ontaro*.” She said softly. “The moment I left Elear I left your world and entered my own. You will not deny me the love I want. You will not deny me the man or the women that I have discovered I love with all that I am.”

“The Crown Prince! Or this Tarren!” La'sar snapped sarcastically. “Or haven't you made up your mind Ne'Veha?”

“Tarren is a fool!” Ne'Veha said. “You and he would get along famously father. He too thought he could use me for his own purposes. When I should have been a daughter to you, I was a possession. Now... now I will live my life the way I want to live it and I don't care what it means to you or your status in the Elven Parliament!” She hissed at him.

La'sar then did something he had never done with any of his children and he stepped forward and slapped Ne'Veha. She staggered back more from the shock of the blow than the actual force used and she reached up to her cheek her dark eyes wide. She held her cheek with her hand as she looked at him.

“Ne'Veha... I... I came here to guide you!” La'sar spoke. “Now... look what you have made me do?” He reached for her.

Ne'Veha brushed aside his hand and stepped back from him just as the internal ship COM came alive.

ATTENTION IN THE LANDING BAY!

ATTENTION IN THE LANDING BAY!

SPARTAN ONE ONE ACTUAL ARRIVING!

SPARTAN ONE ONE ACTUAL ARRIVING!

Ne'Veha looked at her father for a long moment and shook her head slowly. "My future is arriving father." She spoke softly. "As you dismissed Na'rnoas as your mother, I dismiss you as my father."

"Ne'Veha you..."

"No!" She spat. "This conversation is over. I will arrange for lodgings for you until the next transport to Earth but then I expect you to leave this ship. And leave me. You will not keep me from what I was meant for."

"I will do no such thing!" La'sar announced.

"Then so be it father." Ne'Veha said softly. "I have no wish to know you anymore. Not after what you have done. You will find your own way... it seems you are good at that. I will contact my mother and let her know what has happened here. She may not like it, but at least she will get the truth."

La'sar reached for her as she moved for the door, but she was gone, leaving her father to ponder many things. Foremost among them was what had just happened.

As Ne'Veha moved further down the side of the landing bay, closer to where she saw Andro's *STRIKER* coming in, her pace increased and her spirits brightened. Yes... her future was only just in front of her and she had every intention of reaching out and grabbing onto it just as her grandmother had said. She skidded to a halt at the yellow safety line marker as the *STRIKER* did a slow half turn and settled to the deck. The confrontation with her father was being quickly pushed aside by her overwhelming need to see Andro again. It had been over two months, and slowly the need to be with him had built. More so over the last three days, but now she was ready. Now she was ready to take that step. Her heart began to beat faster as the ramp came down and the engines began to whine to silence. She saw him standing there then, so tall and handsome and proud. He turned as Sadi came walking down from the cockpit of the *STRIKER*, both of them dressed in casual clothes. Elynth did not appear and Ne'Veha realized she must have stayed behind which she knew was unusual to say the least. She watched as Sadi took his hand and they began to walk towards her, deep in conversation. Neither of them even bothered to look up as they walked, Sadi trusting completely in Andro's knowledge of the ship to keep them from crashing into any barriers or walls. Whatever they were discussing must have been very important because they were upon her in seconds.

And they walked right on past her.

Ne'Veha's eyes grew wide as they passed and she felt her heart sink into the abyss. They had moved right past her with barely a look, without any look and Ne'Veha suddenly felt that future she was going to grasp onto slipping away. It must not have worked Ne'Veha thought. Her grandmother had said it would work! They could still smell Tarren in her blood somehow, they could...

Ne'Veha!

Ne'Veha shrieked when his voice boomed within her mind and she spun around as fast as her elven speed allowed even as ground crewmembers turned to look at where she stood drawn by her sound. She gasped when she saw him standing there, towering over her. How did he move up behind her and she not sense it. How...

SirsanGai! (Elven Heart) His voice echoed within the chambers of her mind and Ne'Veha felt amazing warmth surge through her as the Mindvoice bond that they had closed to her what seemed like forever ago now reopened and all that he was poured forth to her. All that Sadi and Carisia were and what Lu'ria would be poured forth through him and into her. The last of them to truly accept that which bound them all together as one. Ne'Veha could only look up into those fascinating azure blue eyes as he stepped closer to her, taking her face in his hands with the same tenderness as one would handle a newborn child. He had called her *SirsanGai*, Elven Heart. Ne'Veha felt her eyes filling with tears now. His striking orbs were so alive, so bright with emotion and wonder.

Ne'Veha closed her eyes in enchantment as Andro leaned over and inhaled deeply of her unpolluted and fresh amaretto scent, lowering his lips to the sensitive outer front ridge of her elven ear and brushing across it ever so lovingly. How Andro did not know, but somehow she had removed any minute trace of Tarren's lingering scent from her blood and this more than anything told him she was ready. Carisia had been more than slightly put out that she could not accompany him and Sadi and share in what Andro knew would happen later this evening. The last few hours had not been enjoyable for Androcles Leonidas, and this is what he needed now. He needed to feel Sadi and Ne'Veha in his arms. He needed more than anything to taste his *anome* and his elven heart. He drew back and looked at her beautiful elven face feeling Sadi's own happiness that Ne'Veha

would finally be theirs running through him. Feeling Elynth's joy from the surface in SODRAG where his Bonded Sister was preparing her part of their plan. And without further pause he covered her full lips with his and kissed her. With no effort in the least he wrapped his arms around her mid-section, lifted her off the deck and crushed her lush elven body to his.

There was no hesitation, no uncertainty and no doubt in her actions and Ne'Veha threw her arms around his broad shoulders as his kiss set her on fire, and she kissed him back with every ounce of undiscovered passion and desire within her petite elven body. Ne'Veha moaned deeply as his superbly talented tongue plundered and tasted, battling with hers before she submissively surrendered all that she was to him. She curled her legs up along his hips as she felt him begin to move, unwilling to end their kiss or let him go after what she had been through to finally get to this point. She gasped reluctantly as he pulled away and Ne'Veha saw he had only moved a few meters towards the accessway corridor that ran along the length of the huge landing bay. Her hands came up to grasp his face tightly and she looked at him with smoldering dark brown eyes.

"Make... make me yours Androcles Leonidas." She rasped out. "Please... I have never... I have never wanted anything so much in my entire life! I... I do not want to be alone anymore! Make me yours! Make me Sadi's! Make me part of all of you. Of us!"

Andro smiled and leaned his face forward to firmly nuzzle her elven ear, hearing her coo out her delight at this. "I intend to do just that Ne'Veha my *SirsanGai*." He spoke in his husky voice; a voice that Ne'Veha knew was filled with desire for her. "But first... first I need to eat. I have not had the best of days so far, and I want to eat and spend time with you and Sadi. *Before* I take you to my quarters and ravage you both."

Hah! Promises! Promises! Sadi's musical voice echoed within their minds, serving only to inflame Ne'Veha's desire. *SirsanGai... bring him to the mess lounge. Let us feed him so that we can proceed to the more pleasurable things.*

Ne'Veha couldn't help but chuckle at Sadi's words and she traced her fingers across his cheek and lips. Now that their Mindvoice connection was reopened, Ne'Veha could feel so much pouring through her. So much knowledge and love. From him, from Sadi, from Carisia far below them and even from Lu'ria, who they had not even met yet except in their dreams. And she reached out with far more ease than she had ever expected into Mindvoice. Almost as if it was second nature to her, which in actuality it now was. *Andro... Sadi... Carisia... Lu'ria... I am so...*

It does not matter SirsanGai! Sadi's voice interrupted her. *Not now. Not any longer.*

Andro smiled. *No it doesn't; for when we are done... the only thing that will matter is you will be ours and only my scent will burn within your blood.*

Ne'Veha's smile was brilliant and she laughed as he spun her around and headed for the accessway corridor. Neither of them saw two sets of eyes watching from two very different men. Tarren stood on the catwalk above the landing bay and La'sar watched from just outside the briefing room. One with a look of anger, the other of indignation.

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN

Are you sure about what you saw Elynth? Helen asked.

I do not know what it was Feravomir. Elynth spoke softly. *Andro saw it first and only when I concentrated and looked with his eyes was I able to see it, but yes I am sure. Dragon eyes can not detect it, but wolf eyes obviously can.*

Elynth had flown to Dragon Mountain almost as soon as Andro had departed with Sadi, calling insistently for Helen to meet here there so that she could speak with her and Arzoal together. Her one stipulation was that no one could know she was going, most especially not the King. This immediately sent red flags up and alarms baring in Helen's head and with the skill of a consummate intelligence officer, she disappeared from Sparta without anyone knowing she was gone. Elynth rested now on the smooth, stone like floor of the converted MV ship next to her flame red scaled grandmother. Arzoal was much larger than her, nearly equaling her father in size, but as with her mother Isheeni, Elynth never feared coming to Arzoal with anything that might have been troubling her.

Helen rose from where she had been sitting on the boulder like chair and paced slowly in front of them. *What spectrum?* She asked Elynth.

Scotopic. Elynth answered.

She stopped suddenly and looked at Elynth. *Scotopic? Elynth are you sure?* She asked.

Oh yes Feravomir. I had to adjust the luminance levels of my own eyes to shift to Andro's eyes. It requires I concentrate thoroughly.

Helen looked at her. *This is new. How long have you and Andro been seeing through each other's eyes? For several years now Feravomir. We... we discovered this ability at Alba Tau. Andro's heightened endorphin count created a rise in his Scotopic vision results. It is why he was able to see the Evolli with far greater clarity. We have been practicing and refining this skill since then.*

And you never thought to share it with us? Arzoal asked.

We did not think it very important grandmother. Elynth answered. *We do not use it very often due to the levels of concentration required. The members of Mjolnir's Hand are aware but no one else.*

Arzoal your thoughts? Helen asked.

Arzoal shook her massive head as she looked at Elynth. *I know your father was right in saying you should have come to the Dragon Elder Council before mating with Anthar. I agree with him on that part my granddaughter.*

Grandmother... I love Anthar with all that I am! I...

Arzoal lowered her head and butted Elynth gently in the tip of her snout silencing her words. *And once the council saw that, do you think we would have refused you? We did not refuse your brother Jeth. I said I agreed with Torma in that regard. I do not agree with him or Martin on their actions in response to this knowledge. And I most certainly will not allow Vollenth to be harmed in any way. That young dragon has been through enough pain and horror to last two lifetimes, and he simply adores Viera and his sons now. Not to mention that the call of his true bonded one is becoming increasingly difficult to block out of the mountain here. This individual must be very strong to be able to batter the mountain's own MV shield. It is almost as if they received a massive influx of power only recently.*

Do you have any idea who it could be grandmother? Elynth asked.

Arzoal shook her huge head. *Of those I know about here on Earth, none of them have the power I am sensing with the exception of Sadi and now Ne'Veha. They are the only ones who have showed no signs of bonding with one of our kind. Though given who they are, and their connection to you and Andro, it is only a matter of time before all of them discover they will be bonded to one of us.*

So you think KertaGai and SirsanGai will find bonded ones? Elynth asked.

I don't think... I know this to be true. Arzoal said. *Not only because of a feeling I have within me, but because it was also in a vision that Dysea had many years ago. That is in the future however. I don't know how far into the future, but we have bigger issues to deal with now.* She turned her head back to Helen and blinked her ruby red eyes. *I have never heard of such a thing within Mindvoice such as what Elynth describes Feravomir. Daurgo would be better versused to answer that question, but that does not seem like it is something that...*

Is normal? Helen said.

Yes. Arzoal answered.

It's not normal. Helen spoke.

Helen... we both know that Martin, Andro, even Aricia, we can not measure what their Mindvoice powers are. In many respects they are all still growing in their abilities. We have seen the leaps KertaGai has made in such a short time just by becoming Andro's Anome. She is not so far behind Aricia at this point. Certainly more powerful than any of the other Queens should she put her mind to it and focus? Arzoal said.

Helen nodded. *Indeed.* She said. *I can recall nothing within my experiences or those of Canth that remotely mention something like this. However... I will add that he has been acting odd since the Coven came to Earth.*

Arzoal nodded. *I have seen that as well. He has allowed some things that he would not normally allow, and then not allowed others which he would normally agree to.*

Confusing is what he has become. And angry. Helen spoke. He has a temper, no doubt of that but to demand that Andro and Arrarn dismiss their unions to Carisia, Narice and Toria? To demand that you give up Anthar? That is not something Martin Leonidas would do. That is beyond the pale even for him.

Nor my father. Elynth chimed in. Angry he would be. But to tell me to dismiss Anthar after so long when he knows we would have consummated our union many times over by now.

Arzoal nodded in agreement. Yes... that bespeaks of someone without knowledge of dragons or our customs. Whatever is causing Martin to act in this way must be affecting Torma as well. They are bound just as deeply as you and Andro Elynth.

Elynth nodded. I know.

Helen looked at them both oddly. What are you saying Arzoal?

I'm not saying anything, for I have no experience in matters like this. She answered. In all my twenty-five thousand plus years of life I have never seen this before.

Then leaving is our only option. Elynth spoke softly.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. It would appear so!

Helen snorted angrily. I can't believe this is happening! She snarled. A Crown Prince of Sparta and the Union forced to leave the planet of his birth! By his own father's actions! This is unacceptable!

What other avenues are open to us Feravomir? Arzoal asked her gently. I can not... I will not allow Martin and Torma to end Vollenth's life. I know Andro will not do it, he has seen the dragon Vollenth has become. Will become in the future. And it was Andro and Elynth who first sensed his bond was forced to begin with. If Martin is acting as they say he is, there is no way to guarantee he will not come here himself to end his life. We as dragons are forbidden by our very own culture to do such a thing. It is the reason we have Talon Guardians. Only they have this power to act.

I must see this... this darkness. This mist that you and Andro saw Elynth. Helen spoke softly.

It is the only thing that we could think to call it. Elynth told her. Andro has gone up to the SCIMITAR for the evening to arrange things for when we leave. When I return I will inform Deneth and my mate what is happening and with Enylarcopri we will begin to gather what we need here on Earth.

His brothers and sisters? Arzoal asked.

Elynth shook her head. He has not told them just yet. She answered. Arrarn knows for he is fully involved. Sadi and the others... but no one else. He will not make them betray their father. He will give them the choice after he has everything in place.

He has shielded them! All of them! Helen spoke. He has shielded and protected them since he was a small boy. Especially Zarah. Once he tells them what is going on none of them will go against him. She looked at Elynth quickly. You know why Elynth.

Elynth nodded slowly. I was witness to it Feravomir. All of it. And never a braver thing have I ever seen than what he did that day. Not even during the worse of the war with the Evolli Black Hoard.

Arzoal's eyes moved back and forth between them wide in surprise. What do you mean? What did you witness Elynth?

Helen met her gaze now. There is reason and purpose to why Androcles and Zarah share something that their siblings do not. I know only because they came to me afterwards. Elynth knows because she lived it with them. We swore to Andro never to reveal what took place that day. I'm sorry Arzoal... I can not break that vow. And you... you know why.

Elynth nodded. It would be the ultimate betrayal to my beloved Bonded Brother for me to do this as well grandmother. One day... one day it may come out. But it will not come from me.

Helen nodded. Continue with your plans. She said. He is returning to the villa now and I will try to see what it is you and Andro saw. I do know he is angry with his queens as well for not telling him.

Arzoal looked at Elynth once more. But where will you go? She asked. Where can you take forty dragons and still have the means to train them as they should be trained?

Elynth met her eyes. There is a place grandmother. It is not in the Union, and we will be welcome there. It will not be easy, but we can finish their training there.

Elynth... be sure of your answer to me now. Arzoal said. You and Andro speak with one voice granddaughter. You have always spoken with one voice, even when he could not yet form words. Is there any possibility that what King Martin says could be true? About these dragons and their riders?

Dante, Lucia and Javier Moran and their dragons... more than likely yes. Elynth replied nodding her head without hesitation. The others? Impossible. They have evolved into something far greater than what they were when the coven witches brought them here. They know it. They can feel it.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. Then you will have my full support in whatever you do. She told Elynth. As well as that of the Dragon Council.

Andro wanted me to be the one to tell Vollenh. Elynth said.

Arzoal shook her head now. No... I will tell him. You need to return to SODRAG and continue with your plans. I have been the one schooling him and it is I who should tell him. I will insure he meets with you at the appointed time. Viera will not part from him now. Not after seeing his inner self and who he truly is. She is completely devoted to him and him to her. And they are devoted to their hatchlings.

Elynth nodded as she came to her feet. Andro has already insured there are two slots for the hatchlings grandmother.

Arzoal also rose and she lowered her head to brush her snout against Elynth's. May the gods speed you safely to your destination granddaughter? And may they help us to discover what it is that vexes our King.

Elynth nodded and looked at Helen. Be safe with the winds Feravomir.

And you child of Isheeni and Torma. Helen answered.

Elynth blinked her golden eyes and then turned to move for the opening into the large chamber they were in. Helen stepped up next to Arzoal. She placed a hand on Arzoal's front leg and the dragon Elder Mother looked down upon her.

Will he be able to tell us anything? She asked.

He is immediately descended from a Pralor. Helen answered. He actually knew his father before he died. If anyone knows what this could be... he will know. And if he does not know... he will know someone who does.

I suggest we remain in close proximity Helen, my Bonded Sister. Arzoal spoke revealing something that they had agreed they would keep secret until it was necessary. After nineteen years, Arzoal believed it was now necessary. As did her Bonded Sister. I fear... I fear events could spiral away from us if we are not vigilant.

Helen nodded and smiled as she looked at her. I agree. We would not have been able to hide it for much longer regardless. I apologize for acting as if you do not know what happen between Andro and Zarah.

Arzoal snorted. We must hide it for a time longer so there is nothing to apologize for. What do you think they will say? Helen asked her.

Arzoal chuckled within Mindvoice and lowered her massive head brushing it against Helen's shoulder. To witness it would have been extremely humorous, for Arzoal's head was nearly as large as Helen's body. I think they will ask how one so small could bond with one so large.

Helen looked at her. Are you going to tease me about my stature now too sister?

I am only telling you what they will say. Arzoal spoke. I would never tease you about your stature sister. I have seen what you are capable of.

It seems like we have enemies at every turn now Arzoal. Helen spoke.

Perhaps... but we will face them as we have faced everything these last years. We will face them together. Arzoal told her. And we will not fear the unknown.

EMBASSY ROW SPARTA KAVALIAN EMBASSY

"There is really no way to confirm it Prefect." Jiss spoke to the secure holomage of Keleru and Pusintin on Cabelir.

"The King's people were denying it moments after this young reporter released the information." Matuarr echoed.

They watched Keleru turn and look at Pusintin at the table they sat before in Keleru's office it appeared. Qurot and Timur sat to Jiss's right, while Pian and Jalersi sat to Matuarr's left. They saw Pusintin nod his head towards Keleru.

“I told you.” He stated.

Keleru nodded. “So it would seem.” He said turning back to the transmission. “I asked that all of you be present Jiss. Where is Karun?”

“He was gone early this morning Prefect.” Jiss replied looking at Pusintin. “He has been doing what you instructed him Marshall Pusintin. Quite cleverly I might add. He gave Matuarr and I a briefing not two days ago on what his actions have been over the last two months. He is still meeting with Lisisa Leonidas and he is using this half elven female Ardis as his conduit. He believes he has developed enough of a relationship with her, enamored her enough to him to press her for access to more sensitive information. Her position as one of the Prime Minister’s personal *Durcunusaan* Guard gives her unprecedented intelligence.”

Pusintin smiled from Cabelir and nodded his head. “That’s my boy.” He said.

“And he has kept you apprised of his plans and actions?” Keleru asked.

Jiss nodded. “We know where he is going and when.” Jiss answered. “He reports on what he has seen and done when he returns. His intelligence so far has been superb. It is information we already have, but now with his added insight, it is even more valuable. He believes he has discovered a weak link in the defenses of the capital center in Eden City that would allow an assault force to enter their command center without being seen Prefect. During his last report to us he suggested it is something we may wish to plan on exploiting.”

“Truly?” Keleru spoke. “Now this is information we did not have.”

“He left the plans with us and even Qurot and Timur agree it is an excellent table and chart to execute from.” Jiss said.

Timur nodded his head grudgingly. “Considering his age... it is an excellent arrangement Prefect. Marshall... you would be proud.”

“Is it possible to add it to the list of targets we already have without overextending our forces already in place?” Keleru asked.

Pian’s head came up at that statement, causing Jalersi to blink quickly and turn her head from where she was admiring him sitting there. The fingers of her right hand were caressing the bracelet he had given her only a few days ago. In all the years she had been Pusintin’s mate, he had never given her a gift. Where Pian had secured the funds to buy it she did not know. The Riyal they had converted from their Kavalian Nacha Credit was rigorously maintained by either Jiss or Matuarr. Every credit chip kept track of and documented. Only Karun was allowed to have access to the funds for his forays into Sparta and Eden City. Jalersi had not taken the bracelet off for any reason since he had given it to her and she toyed with it almost endlessly now. She shifted her slim hips slightly on the chair, the delicious soreness from their tryst last evening still with her. He had done something to her last night, done something that Jalersi certainly never believed a Kavalian male would do. Something that Pusintin had also never done. Yes he had explored her body in their time together. Explored it quite intimately in fact, but never had he used his long, cat like tongue to give her pleasure until last night. Jalersi had screamed for what seemed like hours, writhing in his grasp on the bed as her orgasms crashed upon her continuously. He had not allowed her to even move from their bed, shuddering in the exquisite aftermath of what she had experienced before he was plunging his magnificent cock into her depths. He had locked groins with her quickly; unable to hold out for long against her already overheated and extremely tight pussy and that is how they had fallen asleep. Jalersi wrapped within his powerful embrace, his come still leaking into her from his enormous cock.

She lifted her eyes shyly now and glanced at his face, only to see the scowl. This new visage of his face immediately set alarms buzzing in her head, for she had never seen him scowl before, and it twisted his handsome feline features horribly.

“Forces in place!” Pian gasped. “What... what do you mean Prefect?”

Keleru smiled. “We will begin acting in a few hours regardless, so I believe it is prudent to fill you in on the rest of our plans. At least those that concern you.”

“Our plans?” Pian asked only Jalersi detecting the tint of dread in his words.

Keleru nodded from the transmission. “In just under twenty hours we are going to set in motion a carefully thought out and planned operation to remove the Union as a threat to the Kavalian Federation forever.”

Jalersi tore her eyes from Pian’s shocked face and looked at her father in the transmission before them. “What?” She gasped.

“How do you plan on doing this?” Pian spoke quickly.

“You do not need to know all of the specifics.” Keleru answered. “Only that when we are done, the Union will be leaderless and it will open the door for Pusintin to return to the throne that is rightfully his to begin with. We will begin by destroying their intelligence gathering ability in The Wilds, eliminating the Drow elf settlements they have established on several different planets. As that is ongoing, we will be holding out our hand in friendship to the new government on Hadaria and providing them the means to defend themselves.”

“Prefect... there is no new government on Hadaria.” Jiss said.

“In less than two days there will be.” Pusintin spoke. “And the new government will give us the Healers we have needed within our ranks for decades. We already have forces standing by to move across Union space to Hadaria and establish a “safe zone” so to speak. We will help the new government in maintaining their independence from the Union and facilitate trade and other intergalactic commerce.”

“The Union will not stand for that!” Pian spoke quickly.

“The Union will have its own problems to deal with!” Pusintin snapped. “Namely picking a new leader. They will have no time to deal with events on Hadaria, thereby giving us ample time to impose our will on the new government and give us a fortified position deep in Union space.”

Pian’s eyes grew wide. “You are... you are going to target the Leonidas family?” The shock of this knowledge was very evident on all of their faces, but all of them for different reasons.

Keleru nodded his head once more. “Yes.”

Qurot laughed arrogantly and nodded his head. “An excellent plan Prefect!” He bellowed. “I grow tired of tolerating these fool Lycavorians!”

“Our plan is foolproof Pride Leader Pian.” Pusintin spoke arrogantly. “We will eliminate the Union’s ability to gather intelligence within The Wilds. All of the Drow elf settlements we have targeted will report in within the next eighteen hours. They are all being monitored right now, and have been for some weeks. Once these reports are made, they will not report in for another four days and our Puma Bane Pride Squads will attack and decimate them during that period. They will leave no survivors.”

“We have a very well placed convert within the Lycavorian government who has been feeding us information and intelligence for some time as well.” Keleru started right in. “He has helped us to facilitate the overthrow of the Hadarian witch’s government, which will also occur within the next few days. Once that happens fully four entire Fleet Groups will jump through Union space to Hadaria using Jump Gates, Jump Corridors and Jump Gate Codes provided to us by this same convert.”

“You expect the Union to sit by and do nothing Prefect?” Pian asked aghast.

“The Union will be attempting to insure the survival of the remaining members of their precious Leonidas family!” Keleru snarled. “The King will be dead! If all goes well, four of his queens will be dead! All of his sons and as many of his remaining children as we now have targeted. This operation has been in the planning stages for some time Pian.”

“This is madness!” Pian declared. “The Union... the Lycavorian Union will declare full scale war against us! They will unleash every weapon they have in their arsenal against us! Including their dragons! Their dragons alone number upwards of a thousand bonded pairs!”

“When have nearly twenty million T19 missiles now in our inventory.” Pusintin stated. “They have been issued to our front line troops for the last two weeks.”

“The Union defeated the Evolli even with millions of these magic missiles!” Pian barked. “They learned how to defeat them!”

“They can field no more than a few hundred dragons at any one time.” Pusintin spoke. “Like the Coven, they only have so many of the ships needed to transport them. We know how many they have and have been tracking these ships for over a month.”

“When the Union attacks our people the High Coven will strike with every soldier and ship under their command!” Pian complained. “We can not fight a war on two fronts! Not against two enemies such as these! You are talking of spanning thousands of light years with our forces! Controlling thousands of worlds in both the Union and the Coven! We do not have enough clones for this. We can not make enough clones for this!”

“We won’t need too!” Keleru spoke confidently. “There will be no war with the Union.”

“Forgive... forgive me Prefect Keleru... Marshall Pusintin... I am inclined to agree with Pride Leader Pian at the moment.” Jiss spoke haltingly. “What you are suggesting is... it is perilous at best. It...”

“It is you and Matuarr who gave us the information we needed to complete the plan Jiss.” Keleru spoke. “Your study and confirmation of the intelligence we sent you was paramount in my decision to go forward fully. We have discovered the loop hole within their very own law that will allow Pusintin to challenge for and resume his rightful place as King of Sparta and the Lycavorian Union.”

Jiss looked at Keleru in the transmission oddly while Matuarr sat back in his chair with a smug look on his face. “You assume they will in fact adhere to this law!” Pian snapped. “Even after we have taken part in the assassination of their beloved Royal family! That is... that is preposterous!”

“You will mind your tone with me Pride Leader Pian!” Keleru snapped. “This operation and plan was fully vetted by myself and Marshall Pusintin. Jiss and Matuarr confirmed the intelligence given to us by the traitor as being very real and accurate. We have seen in recent weeks how dearly they cling to their laws. We are simply going to use their laws against them this time.”

“How?” Pian demanded.

“That is not something we will reveal at this time.” Keleru replied. “The circumstances to how Pusintin will regain his throne must remain ours for right now. Just know that the Union will be thrown into chaos with our actions. We estimate at least several weeks before they are fully able to bring any semblance of order back. During that time we will have secured Hadaria, eliminated the red hair witch Queen and any with her, and eviscerated the Union leadership.”

“Our task Prefect?” Matuarr asked proudly.

“Simple.” Keleru stated. “You in the embassy will be our conduit to the Union leadership and whoever remains. Once we have completed our initial goals we will cease any further military action against the Union and present our petition for Pusintin’s reinstatement. During the entire Evolli war all they did was isolate their embassy. As long as you remain within the walls of our building you will be safe.”

“Safe?” Jalersi gasped her blue eyes wide in disbelief at what was taking place.

“Do not worry Jalersi my mate.” Pusintin spoke to her with a voice that attempted to be tender and warm. “The Lycavorians are predictable if anything else. They will not target our embassy and risk alienating the other governments that have embassies on Earth along that same stretch of ground.”

Jalersi’s eyes held no love in them for Pusintin any longer. She now doubted that she had ever truly loved him, only the promise of what she thought he meant to her and what future she would have. Looking at him in the transmission now she felt only disgust. Disgust with herself for ever believing anything he told her and for allowing him to have her any way he desired. Looking at him now, Jalersi felt shame for not seeing who he was to begin with. A man who desired only power and whatever that power could bring him. Athani’s words to her that day came rushing back and now they made everything so very clear. Jalersi’s Puat had discovered something wonderful while on this planet. And that something had been staring her in the face for so many years and she had never seen it. She glanced quickly at Pian and saw the total devotion for her in those beautiful dark eyes of his and knew where he future lay. If she was to have a future that is.

Jalersi turned back to the transmission. “You are there Pusintin. We are here. And it is we who will be in the line of fire when you go through with this insane plan. You will forgive me if I choose to worry.”

Pusintin looked at her puzzled by her reply. He could easily detect the tone of her voice and the hidden meaning behind her words, yet he did not know what it meant for he did not know the woman who he had been husband to for over four decades now.

“Worry if you must Jalersi.” Her father spoke once more. “This plan will work however, and then you will be a Queen.”

“I do not wish to be a Queen father.” She told him.

“Enough of this!” Keleru snapped losing his patience with his oldest daughter. “Send us the particulars on this plan Karun has developed and we will allocate additional forces to be placed under his command to carry them out. The more confusion and destruction we can cause the better it will be. Timur and Qurot, three Puma Bane Pride squads will break for the embassy during the assault. You will take command of them and wreak as much havoc as you are able.”

“Happily Prefect!” Qurot declared with humor. “It will be an exciting night.”

“Once we begin the operation we will keep an open communication loop to you there. They have been unable to block this secure transmission up until now which leads me to believe they can not block it.”

“Marshall... what of the information broadcast on the Netnews just this morning?” Timur asked. “That the High Coven dragons are here on Earth and that the King’s son is training them?”

“It will not matter.” Keleru spoke. “Our contact will speak to us within hours. They will have the locations of both his elven Queen Dysea and the majority of his older children. We do have some idea of the training involved and it appears that they have been the ones doing the training.” He told them. “They will not be expecting an attack of any kind.”

“Prefect... this sounds... this sounds almost too good to be true.” Matuarr spoke.

Keleru chuckled. “Yes it does I know.” They watched him place the data pad in the slot. “This is what I want you to reply with when the Union officials come calling. We will go over it now so that it is very clear.”

“Of course Prefect.” Matuarr said in reply.

Jiss remained silent in his chair, Pian still with disbelief in his eyes and Jalersi sitting there wondering why her life had to have so many damn bumps in it.

SCIMITAR

It couldn’t be this utterly amazing, but she was experiencing it first hand and her mind was now awash with unadulterated passion and never-ending pleasure.

Ne’Veha’s upper body fell onto the bed, her long dark brown hair splayed over the cool sheets even as her supple elven body was sizzling. Her eyes were tightly closed, her lips parted in silent gasps of delight. Her fingers clenched and unclenched the sheets in her fingers, pulling at the material. Her firm breasts were pressed into the mattress of the bed, her pert nipples hard nubs of over stimulated flesh. Her legs were pulled up so that she was kneeling on the bed; her firm and lusciously perfect elven ass proudly held up in the air, and her insanely aroused pussy was once more spasming wildly around the most inconceivable sample of male flesh she had ever seen let alone had so overpoweringly buried within her body. The mind numbing orgasm rippling through her was far more powerful and rewarding than any dream she had ever had and it was only one of so many she had experienced in the last few hours. Would experience for all eternity now.

It had started off innocent enough, sitting between Andro and Sadi in the mess lounge while they conversed within Mindvoice during the entire meal. They had of course filled her in on everything that was happening on Earth and what their plans were. And of course Ne’Veha agreed with them on the way their plan was taking shape, how could she not? They had opened their minds and hearts to her completely and she had finally become part of the whole. They held nothing back from her, and Ne’Veha had felt her level of awareness and comprehension become greater than she had ever imagined it could be. There was no going back now, and Ne’Veha charged ahead unafraid of what the future brought as long as she had them in her life. She could also distinctly feel the burning in their minds and their blood for her as if it was a palpable thing, and soon she found they could contain themselves no longer and had made their way back to their quarters. It was here where Ne’Veha’s world came alive with new sensations and experiences, and it was here that she discovered the true sinful pleasures of the flesh.

Moments after they had come here, she was completely naked on the bed and two sets of soft lips were exploring her body more intimately than she ever realized was even possible. It flashed in her mind briefly that Andro and Sadi Leonidas were Alpha wolves, and they were memorizing her body and how she smelled and tasted in every way for she was theirs now. The first kiss Sadi had given her had set her lithe body to singing as Sadi’s tongue danced a superbly delicious tango with her own, only to be replaced and surpassed a moment later by Andro’s lips. The moment his tongue met hers, Ne’Veha’s eyes grew wide and her entire body shuddered in an orgasm more intense than anything she had ever experienced. And that had come from only a kiss and the caress of his powerful mind on hers.

The next three hours had been nothing but exploration and pleasure. A delicate sonata of love and new sensations. Ne’Veha had discovered the pleasures of another woman, reveling in how Sadi could make her body quake in delight, and how her lush elven body responded to Sadi’s caresses. The tattoo that decorated Sadi’s beautiful pussy was something of a fascination for her now, and Ne’Veha realized the first moments after her lips and tongue had begun their exploration that it was extremely sensitive when she was aroused. And Sadi Leonidas was supremely aroused. Sadi’s hands had laced within Ne’Veha’s long dark hair only moments after

she had begun her new discovery and journeying and Ne'Veha was then treated to the second most delicious nectar she had ever tasted as she enthusiastically drank Sadi's essence. With her lips locked around Sadi's smooth pussy and her tongue darting about with all the eagerness of someone with a new toy, Ne'Veha tasted a woman for the first time. Even as Sadi's abdomen undulated and she pressed her pussy tighter to Ne'Veha's eager mouth Ne'Veha cried out in her delight at Andro's exploration of her own splendid curves. As Sadi's strong hands held her head between her slim, beautiful thighs, Ne'Veha's juices spilled from her in the first of many ever increasingly powerful orgasms. She hadn't expected Andro to use his warm tongue and fingers so expertly on her, and the moment his finger had slipped slowly into her ass Ne'Veha could do nothing but alternate between screeching out in delight and swallowing Sadi's come and as the new experiences swept through her. It was the first of many falsehoods her father had told her growing up and it was tossed into the trash heap moments after they had found their way here. This one being that Lycavorian men cared only for their own pleasure. Ne'Veha was learning first hand how wrong that was.

It was an almost endless composition of carnal desire. Andro was her man, Sadi's and Carisia's and Lu'ria's man. And as they exchanged soft lingering kisses as they went, Ne'Veha discovered all there was to know about her man from Sadi. When they reached that part of him, she was awed at what she discovered, and she watched as Sadi showed her what a female wolf so adored about their mates. The readiness to possess them in every way.

Sadi had engulfed Androcles's cock with consummate ease, moaning in blissful delight the entire plunge, until her beautiful lips anchored at the base of his hugely thick shaft. Twelve and a quarter inches of Alpha wolf Ne'Veha would later learn. And he was all theirs as Sadi projected within Mindvoice what Ne'Veha should do. Seconds later, with a growl of passion from Andro, Ne'Veha was settling her still dripping pussy on Andro's face yet again. Her body stretched atop his powerful frame and with her lips a mere millimeters from the throbbing heat of his cock, she and Sadi feasted wantonly. Try as she might, Ne'Veha could not take him as deeply into her throat as Sadi, but the realization that she would have eternity to obtain that goal made her hum in happiness. And considering the sounds coming from his throat, and the way his abdomen would clench and unclench, Ne'Veha knew what she was doing was just fine with him. They bathed Andro's beautiful cock with attention and lathering tongues and lips until they shared his explosion. And what an explosion it was. That was when Ne'Veha tasted the sweetest nectar she had ever drunk and she knew nothing else would ever compare. The green eyed Sadi eagerly gulped the first eruption and then pulled his exploding cock from her soft lips, only to have Ne'Veha inhale half of his throbbing cock in her mouth heedless of what splashed onto her cheek. As her fingers curled around his power thighs, Ne'Veha shuddered in her own orgasm from Andro's ceaseless ministrations with his tongue. Sadi's gifted tongue licked every drop that had escaped his pulsating cock from Ne'Veha's skin even as her dark eyes closed in ardor and she swallowed all Andro gave her without pause. It could have ended there and Ne'Veha would have been utterly fulfilled. To her absolute delight, she knew they were no where near finished.

Now Andro's pulsing manhood was once more anchored completely in her spasming pussy, every pleasure receptor in her body firing at once. Ne'Veha never thought he would be able to get all of himself into her, and she had howled out her delight for a full twenty minutes the first time he had bore into her tightness. She had been leaning back against Sadi the first time, her golden haired lover's expert fingers manipulating her painfully erect nipples while her lips and nose firmly caressed her super sensitive elven ears. It practically drove her mad as every wondrous throbbing inch of Andro's beautiful cock found its way into her silky depths one euphoric inch at a time. Ne'Veha could do nothing more than clutch him tightly and wail out her ecstasy when his cock finally ended that soul possessing plunge and his scorching hot come was erupting into her belly and her womb. It was then she shared a blistering kiss with both of them at the same time as Ne'Veha grew accustomed to his enormous cock and Andro rested. And then it had started all over again when he began to make love to her and Ne'Veha could do nothing but quiver and shudder beneath him as he drove into her lush elven body with will crushing strokes, taking what belonged to him. She had always belonged to him and Sadi. To Carisia and Lu'ria. She had belonged to all of them from the day she had entered this world of theirs and they had belonged to her.

Ne'Veha whimpered in unabashed delight as Andro leaned forward now, his wonderful tongue tracing a line up her spine as his hands slipped under her body to grasp her breasts. As he filled his large hands with her breasts, the nipples pressing insistently into his skin, Andro began to thrust into her again. He inhaled deeply of

her delicious amaretto scent, his soft lips brushing decisively against the back ridge of her four inch high elven ears and hearing her groan in sensuous delight, and he stroked into her. She was so warm and tight and as with Sadi and Carisia, Ne'Veha had the maddening and uncanny ability to squeeze her powerful inner muscles tightly, milking him for everything he could give her. He turned his face and saw his *anome*'s amazing jungle green eyes and her sweet lips. Taking one hand from Ne'Veha's slim hips he pulled Sadi's lips to his hungrily and they shared a blistering kiss of passion and love. Her body was flush and slick with the same sheen of sweat that his and Ne'Veha's was, for no matter how many women shared their bed with them, Sadi was his soul and he could never deny her attention of any form. As their lips parted Sadi's wolf eyes were alive and glinted with arousal. She smiled and the tips of her fangs showed. Andro saw in her mind what she wanted and without further thought he pulled Ne'Veha up from the bed to his chest. Her squeal of heavenly delight filled the room as his cock speared her more completely than ever before.

“*Carians... Andro?*” She screamed out as her arms reached up and over her shoulders to grasp his head.

Andro smiled and dropped his lips next to her right elven ear. His strong hands cupped her conical breasts, holding her against his chest. “*SirsanGai...*” He gasped out as he drove his hips forward once more.

“*Sarad... sarad inion!*” Ne'Veha cried. “*Pen niium cova! Cova!* I want... Ahhhhhhhhhh!” The words in the ancient Lycavorian language came so easily to her now, joined as she was within their minds, but as Andro pulled her tighter and flexed his massive cock inside her pussy Ne'Veha could do nothing as the explosions of divine pleasure rippled through her.

Ne'Veha's eyes opened wide as she felt Sadi's wonderful lips encase her exasperatingly erect clit even as Andro slammed his mammoth cock into her one last time. Her scream of pure, cataclysmic pleasure deafened Andro and Sadi as he buried his face in her hair, his throbbing cock erupting into her depths yet again. Neither of them could stand the lashing that Sadi's oh so talented tongue was giving them and they fell forward onto Sadi's abdomen shuddering in release. One trace of Sadi's passionate sugar plume and spice scent was all it took to send Andro into wolf paradise. As Ne'Veha shivered in inconceivable release, Andro's twitching cock buried within her and Sadi's tongue smashing her reserves of energy, Ne'Veha could only watch with dreamy eyes as Andro grasped Sadi's hips and he buried his face between her beautiful thighs.

Sadi's cries of blissful fervor echoed in a symphony with their voices within their room then as Andro's tongue lifted her over the abyss and then dropped her into it. After a long moment of heaving breaths and quivering flesh, Sadi suckled expertly on Ne'Veha's superbly aroused clit, licking up every drop of hers and Andro's combined juices. Ne'Veha was tumbling about in a new world of new pleasures and erotic delights and she blissfully closed her eyes and let exhaustion take her; at least until her beautiful new wolf mates dragged her wantonly back into the tangle of flesh and pleasure they had ignited within her. Until then she would rest. As she basked in the wonderful new pleasures, and watched Andro lovingly clean his *anome* with his tongue Ne'Veha realized something.

It would not be a long rest.

SPARTA

Duewa's eyes fluttered open slowly and the first thing she realized was that it was dark in the room, only the light of the half moon filtering into her lone window. The second thing she noticed was the exquisite soreness that permeated her entire body, and the reasons behind that soreness. She pursed her lips in delight as the memories of what Thoti had made her feel came rushing back. The man was a beast, and he had taken her more times than she could remember in the five hours they had together. Taken her like a an possessed And the one thing that always remained the same, Thoti had made sure she was screaming in enchantment before he filled her again with his hot come. It was unlike any sexual encounter she had ever experienced or even considered. He was tireless in his actions, never ceasing to stroke her flesh in some manner, if only to elicit small shivers of delight from her. He had the largest cock of any man who she had bedded, to include that pig Rinard. He...

Darkness!

Duewa yelped suddenly and sat up in the bed quickly. “The children!” She cried.

“The children are fine.” Thoti's voice came from the side almost instantly.

Duewa turned her head quickly, reaching for the sheet that had fallen away from her breasts and saw him sitting in the chair next to the bed. He was naked and almost without any hesitation her eyes dipped to where his flaccid cock was and she vibrated at the pleasure that tool had given her. Her sharp mind came instantly back to the present however and she returned her eyes to his.

“The children Thoti! Retta! Calyb! My sons!” She exclaimed moving to get out of the bed. “I can’t believe we forgot the children! How can you sit there so calmly?”

Thoti smiled. “The children are fine Duewa.” He told her leaning forward in the chair. He reached up and tapped the side of his head. “My connection with Retta and Calyb is quite strong and I let them know that Dasha would be picking them up.”

“My sons?” She gasped.

Thoti nodded with a smile. “At the moment... they are enjoying a rather large meal with Dasha and Gorgo who will no doubt spoil them just as badly as they spoil the King’s children. They will undoubtedly experience many culinary delights tonight for Dasha and Gorgo are among the finest cooks I have ever known. I told Hiero, Tinrell and Tinyn that you and I had to work on a special project for a short time this evening and we would pick them up later. They have become just as important to me as my own son now.”

Duewa tightened her grip on the sheet as she looked at him and smiled shyly. “A special project?” She asked. “Is that what I am to you Thoti?”

“You are very special to me... but you will never be a project.” Thoti answered. He reached out and took hold of the sheet and began to pull it away from her. “You won’t need this.”

“Thoti... did you not have me enough today?” She asked as she let him pull the sheet away exposing her naked flesh to his eyes. What was the point in hiding from his gaze? He already knew her body more intimately than her husband ever had. It flashed in Duewa’s mind that not so long ago she would have thought that perverse and now it seemed like the most natural thing in the world.

Thoti looked at her. “Any man who says he has had enough of you Duewa, that man should have his head examined. The gods willing, the only eyes that will ever view you again as you are now are my eyes and it is not something you will ever hear escape my lips.”

He took her hands and pulled her off the bed. Duewa smiled as she gracefully lowered herself into his lap, stunned at how easily it came to her. She stifled a soft groan when she felt his thick cock press against her opening but settled into his lap anyway and placed her hands on his shoulders as he pulled her body close to his and rested his head on her breasts. Duewa could feel the warmth of his wolf body against her naked flesh and she relished in how it made her feel. She tightened her arms around his shoulders, pulling him closer still.

“We need to talk... you and I.” Thoti said softly. “About many things.”

“Will we stay unclothed as we are while we talk?” She asked as she pulled his head away from her breasts and looked into his blue eyes.

“You will discover that physical touch, our skin against another’s skin is something that is very natural to my people. It is something we crave as wolves... the touch of another body. Most especially those we care for and love. It is why I can hold you like I do now and feel your body against mine, breathe in your scent and not ravage you senseless. It is something you have wondered while you were here I know. Why does it seem that the King and Queens are forever touching each other? Why do Lycavorians as a whole touch each other so much? Even the men seem to do this.”

“Are you reading my mind Thoti?” She asked with a smile.

He chuckled at her words and shook his head. “It is something everyone wonders who is not Lycavorian my sweet Duewa.” He answered. “It is part of who we are.”

Duewa used her finger to trace his cheek and lips. “I believe I very much like when my skin touches yours.” She said with a bright smile. “What shall we talk about then?”

“Why don’t you tell me?” He stated confidently. “Because I know after what we have shared this day, after what we have made each other feel, you want this to continue. At least that is what your scent tells me.”

Duewa nodded her head quickly as she bit her bottom lip. “Oh yes!” She gasped out.

“Then tell me what it is your heart wants to tell me so badly my sweet Duewa.” Thoti said.

Duewa’s face lost its smile then as she looked at him for a long moment, fear creeping into her expression and her heart. “Thoti... there is nothing that...”

Thoti reached up with his hand and placed a finger on her lips while shaking his head. "Let me clarify something for you." He told her. "You should never fear me Duewa... for I have wanted you since you first came here. From the very first moment you set foot in Sparta I have wanted you. What I feel inside me for you... I have not felt it since the death of my mate and wife so many years ago. I never thought I would feel it again... until you got off that *STRIKER*. If you so choose we can go forward from this day. I will be devoted to you and only you! I will love you like you have never been loved Duewa of Hadaria. I will never hurt you, never stray on you and I will always protect and love you *and* your sons. For they will be my sons as well. You will be the mate and wife of a Lycavorian Spartan. A *Durcunusaan* member. Nothing you have done in the past will matter to me Duewa! To anyone! We are the most forgiving of races and though you may not see it often, it is very true. It will not... it could not change how I feel about you. But in order for us to move forward... we must let go of the past. Can you do that my sweet Duewa? Do you wish a future with me more than the pain of your past? If you do not... then it is best if I left now and never returned."

Duewa stared at him, her soft green eyes wide as the impact of his words filtered through her. She couldn't meet his beautiful eyes for long and she looked down shamefully then. "You know." She whispered to him.

Thoti nodded. "Yes."

Duewa looked up again. "How?"

Thoti smiled. "I have just spent the last few hours memorizing every millimeter of your body Duewa and you ask me that?" He spoke. "You make it so it seems to others as if you do not like my kind. The minute I tasted you Duewa I knew. His scent still lingered, albeit faintly, deep in your blood. Given what I know you felt for my people before this day, there could only be one explanation."

"Thoti... I..."

"And you forget that Hanna was Hadarian like you." Thoti continued quickly. "I learned a great deal as her husband and mate. Namely how to detect the small, hidden puncture scars from constructive surgery."

Duewa sat there in his arms. She was as naked now as she had been the day she was born, in the arms of the man who had just spent the last few hours making love to her with such passion and hunger it left her senseless. Senseless and craving so much more. He knew what she had done and Duewa knew she could not lie to this man. He was Lycavorian and would be able to smell her lying to him. And after what he had shown her, made her feel, Duewa found she did not want to lie to him. He didn't look angry or indignant, nor did he appear ready to toss her from his lap. She had been here over two months now, and only in the last three days had she discovered so much about herself and others. She had discovered that perhaps everything was not as her mother and the Elders had made them out to be. And she cursed her own closed mindedness for not discovering everything so much sooner.

"How... how long have you known?" She asked him finally.

"I noticed the scars the week after you arrived. No one else would know where to look if they did not know what to look for. I did. The rest I did not know for sure until today." Thoti answered immediately.

"And you... you never said anything?" She gasped looking at him. Thoti shook his head. "But why?"

"I believe I have already given you that answer Duewa." He replied. Duewa attempted to climb out of his lap in shame then, no longer able to stand the humiliation at him knowing what she had done. What she had allowed done to her. Thoti's shook his head and his arms held her tightly. "No."

"Let me go Thoti! Please let me go!" Duewa sobbed.

"I will not let you go!" Thoti announced loudly. "I will hold you in my arms and you will look me in the eye and tell me all you have done! You will look me in the eyes Duewa, for you will see that my eyes hold nothing but love for you! No matter what you have done! As long as you have the strength to tell me!"

"How... how can you say that?" Duewa said. "You do not... you do not know me. You hardly know me! What I have done!"

"You will discover that much of the makeup of a Lycavorian is done by instinct my sweet Duewa. That is what our King gave back to us when he returned." Thoti spoke softly. "The lost ability to once more use our instincts as they should be used. To help guide us in what we do. In ways that many do not understand. Many call it barbaric... as I have told you before... and in many ways it *is* barbaric... but it is who we are. The moment I detected your sweet berry scent on that airfield my instincts have told me you would be mine Duewa. I had no doubts or qualms about that. And you *are* mine now. I am an Alpha Duewa, after today no male

Lycavorian will come near you. They will smell me in your blood and know that I am the luckiest man in all of Sparta, for it is I who has claimed you. And no male who has spent any time around our people will come near you, certainly none of those here on Earth. Many of them use how we treat our females as a map. If Lycavorians do not approach a beautiful woman, they suspect it is for a reason and they mirror this action.”

Duewa’s eyes were filled with tears now and she lifted her hands to place them on his neck even though she could not lift her eyes to look at him. “Thoti...”

“The clone of Queen Anja is alive Duewa.” Thoti said softly seeing her head come up and look at him with wide eyes. “She is alive and right now with the Queen on Hadaria. This plan your mother and the other Elders have will not work now. You do not need to protect them anymore my love. I am asking you to make a decision about right from wrong. What you know is right and what you know is wrong. Did you change your appearance to look like Seanna and then endure Rinard’s rutting because it was your choice or because it was something your mother told you to do? Told you needed to be done for the future of your people or some other ridiculous *rensibfla* as that.”

“I do not... I do not wish to see my sons face war Thoti.” Duewa answered as the tears streaked her face. “I did... I did what I did to protect them! To protect their future!”

“And what do you think I do every day when it comes to my son Hiero?” Thoti asked her passionately.

“You... you are a soldier!” Duewa gasped.

Thoti nodded his head. “Yes I am and I am proud of that fact Duewa. Very proud. I am a *Durcunusaan* soldier. A member of the Wolves of the Blood. The purest blood and finest trained of all Spartans. Does that make me a bad person Duewa?”

Duewa lifted her hands and took his face in them looking at him with wide eyes. “No!” She sobbed. “Never! Not you!”

“We have a reputation as Lycavorian Spartans; we have a reputation of reveling in the lust of battle. That we yearn to crush our enemies beneath us and fight every day.” Thoti spoke shaking his head. “That could not be further from the truth Duewa my love. We train... and we fight so that our children do not need to fight. Just as any father and parent would. We just happen to do it better than most because we take it seriously. It is not a game to us *because* of the consequences that come with failure. If given a choice... what do you think I would rather do... fight a squad of High Coven Immortals or wrap your luscious body around mine and feast upon you every hour of the day? What do you think the King would rather do? Trust me... you taste and smell far sweeter than any Immortal my sweet Duewa.”

“You are asking me to... you are asking me to betray my mother Thoti.” Duewa said dropping her eyes but still holding his face in her hands. She loved the feel of his weathered skin in her hands.

“Has she not already betrayed you Duewa? By asking you to do what you have done, has she not already turned her back on you?” Thoti asked passionately. “What mother would ask their daughter to do what she has asked you to do? That is not something a mother would ask of her daughter. Of any child of her blood.”

Duewa looked up once more, this time her soft green eyes a little wider as she gazed at him and contemplated his words. They rang so true in her mind now. Her first two months here she had struggled to obtain what she was tasked with. Over the course of just the last three days alone, her world had altered dramatically. She had learned more about Retta and Calyb, about their bond with Mara and Endem. She had learned so much about her own sons in just three short days. And it was not a school or university that had taught her this. It had been one simple sentence from the man who now held her in his arms. The man who had known all of this time what she had done and never said a thing to anyone.

“Why... why do you need to hear me say it Thoti?” She asked softly. “You... already know all you need to know. I... I didn’t know the entire plan. Not that part about killing the... Thoti I can’t...”

Thoti shook his head. “I need to hear you say it. I want to hear you say it... because then you will be free my Duewa. You will be free to live your life as *you* want to live it, and not as your mother dictates to you how to live it. Only when you admit and speak of what you did will you truly be free to begin a new life. And I want nothing more than to have you with me for eternity. I want you too want me in your life as much as I want you in mine.”

“Thoti you...”

“Do you want this to continue Duewa? What we have discovered this day?” He asked her gently. “Do you want me in your life? You have discovered in just these last three days that not everything is as you thought

it was. As you were told it would be. As more time passes you will see that even more. Do you want to take the chance to discover this with me? To look beyond all you have known and been taught and perhaps see so many wondrous things where you never expected to find them.”

Duewa tightened her grip on his rugged face as the real fear of losing him so soon after discovering him filled her with anxiousness. There was only one answer that filled her mind now. There could be *only* one answer after what he had made her feel and see. “Oh... oh yes.” She gasped.

“Then it comes down to what do you want more?” Thoti said simply. “The life you have now... or a new life for you and your sons with me.”

Duewa stared at him for what seemed like an eternity, the brightness of his eyes never diminishing as he looked at her. Duewa reached up with one hand and used the back of her hand to wipe the tears from her eyes and cheek. She lowered that hand back down and tightly grasped his rugged face in her fingers once more and then kissed him with everything that she was. She kissed him with everything that she had discovered about herself in the last few hours. She kissed him with everything that his touch and love had brought out in her. Her mind and heart sang out with joy and the very real prospect of new discovery as he returned the kiss with equal if not more passion and feeling. And as before he did not simply kiss her, he devoured all that she was, leaving her shuddering for more. It was really no decision at all as far as she was now concerned.

“She first came to me with the plan two years ago...” She began as she pulled her lips away from his reluctantly and met his eyes.

Once the words started, they poured forth from her without pause. The only thing that changed was that Thoti’s arms closed tighter around her and he pressed his forehead to hers as Duewa let loose her demons into the chasm and began the trek down whatever life brought to her now. She had decided if this ruggedly handsome Lycavorian Spartan was part of her life, then she would never have need to be fearful again. She had decided that perhaps all was not as she had been led to believe.

NOVA-CLASS MARK III ATTACK CRUISER TAU CETI SECONDARY COMMAND SHIP FOR ARIZONA FLEET GROUP

The bridge of the *TAU CETI* was not as large as that of the *HARBINGER*, but it was certainly just as advanced, and in some ways even more advanced. She had a lesser payload of fighters because a large portion of her flight deck had been carved out and replaced with the highly sophisticated SCC. The Secondary Command Center was identical to what would be on the *ARIZONA* they had discovered, and to say it was impressive would be an understatement. They had spent the last six hours in the SCC, running many different simulations and scenarios, getting a feel for what their duties on the *ARIZONA* would be. Only when the Captain of the *TAU CETI* had called for them did they leave and make their way to the bridge. Miranda stood calmly with her hands behind her back watching as the bridge crew of the *TAU CETI* went about their duties with expertise. Whether she knew it or not, Miranda Lorian commanded far more respect and admiration than even she realized.

Zaala Randall stood just in front of Steven, leaning slightly against the front of his body. She could tell he was excited about seeing their new ship. While he always made love to her with intensity and passion, leaving her gasping in happiness, the last few days had been even more enjoyable. Part of it Zaala knew was because he was now wolf. Turned by Martin Leonidas himself. When that change had become complete within him, it also affected her in many ways. Their lovemaking became more fervent and deep. He could make her scream for hours now, and Zaala had changed as well. Just as any woman who bedded with a Lycavorian would change in some respects. Their senses became sharper, their endurance stronger, and all of them could alter their eyes and extend much smaller wolf fangs due to the strength of the virus now in their bodies. Unless truly bitten they would never advanced past the stage they were at, sort of a pre-altered stage, but Zaala was certainly very happy with where she was. Zaala had envied her sister Tarifa, first for being the one who discovered Martin Leonidas. Then Dekton, and finally the man who would claim not only her heart and soul but Aihola’s as well in Isra. That envied vanished the day she had fallen in love with Steven Randall and that was long before Martin had ever turned him. Through their years together, their love and passion for each other had never once

diminished, and Zaala began to discover she had a zeal for flying that almost matched that of her husband. She knew he was perhaps one of the finest fighter pilots within the Lycavorian Union, his skills superb even before Martin turned him. He was also one of the most intelligent men she had ever met, though it did not often come through in his gruff and sometimes brash nature. They were the very best of friends and could talk about anything together, which is why Zaala knew, their love burned so brightly. Zaala's eyes found E'dira standing silently just behind Miranda.

The tall Drow female was every bit as beautiful as Zaala knew Lynwe and Aihola to be. She had yet to meet a Drow female that was not exceptionally alluring. She also knew, after E'dira had confided in her, that this particular Drow wanted Miranda in the worse possible way. She smiled as she realized that E'dira had taken her advice and begun to discover what it was that made Miranda Lorian tick. Though she knew well the signs of desire that E'dira was displaying, Zaala had seen them more than enough times with Lynwe and Aihola, E'dira was determined it seemed to win Miranda over conventionally before she became unconventional. And Zaala certainly had to admit E'dira was definitely a Drow that would be very easy to fall hard for. Zaala leaned back further against her husband, her left hand deftly reaching back to squeeze the side of his hip.

You were very good to me last night my husband. She spoke alluringly within Mindvoice knowing that there were few who could detect their MV level on this ship.

Zaala felt Steven press closer to her back and lean over just a little to brush the very tip of her four inch high elven ear with his lips. *I could say the same of you my exquisite elven wife.*

Well... you do taste wonderful. Zaala answered with a seductive smile. *You know I can not help myself at times.*

Neither can I. And you taste better. He spoke placing his hand on her hip.

We should be there soon I think. Zaala said. *I wish to see this ship almost as much as you it seems.*

She felt Steven nod. *Yes... I am...*

“Coming up on the Dreamland outer marker!” The voice of the tactical officer echoed across the bridge and cut off Steven's words.

They watched Miranda nod and step closer to the large bridge screen. “Very well.” She stated. “Order our escorts to proceed to the holding area! Contact Dreamland Control and put them on speaker!” Miranda turned to face everyone now, her dark eyes alive with life. She glanced quickly to E'dira first, almost to make sure that she was beside her still and to make certain that the story of her life over the last three days had not frightened the Drow woman away. E'dira's beautiful amber eyes blinked knowingly at her and she nodded her head almost minutely.

“Ok... I feel I have to say this one last time.” Miranda spoke now, all eyes turning to her. “If any of you are having second thoughts, now is most definitely the time to voice them. Once we make the final jump to Dreamland, there will be no turning back. There are very few who decide to leave Dreamland Command when they are assigned, and it's even harder to get out than it is to get in, simply because of what you will be exposed too. What you will see... the projects and equipment... it is the very cutting edge of our technology. Most of it is derived from the Mindvoice ship, some of it inventions of our own, but it is most certainly not for common knowledge. I want to give everyone...”

“Jesus Christ already Miranda!” Steven could no longer contain himself. “Let's just stop with the fancy words and do this! Before we all keel over dead from old age!”

The laughter that erupted from those on the bridge was genuine and Zaala elbowed her husband in his washboard hard abdomen. “Steven Randall... you will behave yourself!” She snapped playfully.

“I believe Major Randall is saying we would not be here were it not our wish Captain Lorian.” E'dira stated confidently with her Drow calmness. “As our King is so fond of saying... Never fear the Unknown... for you know not the treasures it could bring.”

“Yeah! What E'dira said!” Steven echoed.

Miranda nodded her head as she chuckled. “Ok.” She turned back around and looked at the communications officer. “You have them?”

“Dreamland Control standing by Captain.” He said.

“Dreamland Control this is Captain Miranda Lorian! Execute EGA! Authorization Lorian three nine five delta! Confirm!”

“*TAU CETI*, Dreamland Control confirms Lorian, Miranda, and Captain *ULU ARIZONA*. Security code is authentic! Stand by for Entry Gate Activation! Do not deviate from your flight corridor *TAU CETI*! Deviation by even one kilometer will be considered hostile and you will be targeted and destroyed by Dreamland Defense Platforms and fighters.”

“Understood Control.” Miranda spoke.

“Admiral O’Connor wishes to see you and your command staff once you arrive. He is waiting on board the *ARIZONA*! See you soon Captain Lorian! And welcome back!”

“Thank you Control!”

“De-shrouding Dreamland Entry Gate and powering Phased Quantum Gate coils!” The voice continued. “Stand by!”

“Phased Quantum coils!” Zaala gasped with wide eyes as she stepped forward.

Steven stepped up to Miranda his eyes wide as well. “The Gate is shrouded?” He gasped.

Miranda nodded. “Yes. This Gate has only one entry and debarkation point. It’s the only way in or out of Dreamland. Ben wanted to make sure no one found it, even by accident.” She spoke as E'dira and Zaala moved closer to her. Chuess hung back for a moment unsure if he was to be accepted, until Zaala snagged his large clawed hand and pulled him closer. As he stepped up next to her and Steven, he saw the tall human look at him and move to the side a little more to allow him to be able to see Miranda. Chuess felt Steven put his hand on his shoulders and even through his beak like mouth it appeared as if he had smiled.

There had been much talk and ballyhoo about a Nodian joining the Union fleet. The Nodian people as a whole adored their King, but none of them had ever served in the active military before. When Martin was approached about it, the first thing he did was contact the Nodian Prime Minister. The two men had a lengthy discussion about the history of the Nodian people and what their traditional role in the Union was. Many thought that while they were valued as engineers and builders, they would not be accepted in the regular fleet. King Martin Leonidas had changed all that when the decree came down that should a Nodian apply for entry and meet the standards for acceptance to the Fleet Academy, they were to be afforded every single opportunity as others. Chuess was the first of nearly five hundred Nodian officer trainees that had gone through the Academy, and the only one who had joined the actual fleet. Now he was seeing that he had made an excellent decision. He was treated with the utmost respect and honor, though his four foot high stature meant he was always being looked down at. He was actually very well built for his race and among the taller of his species at four foot five. Their lack of height had always been a source of shame for them in some manner, a feeling that was quickly being laid aside as Chuess blazed his way through the fleet, meeting and serving with different people everyday.

“Howzz have you equipped the Gate’zzz control with Quantum coilzzz?” Chuess asked.

Miranda held up her hand. “Whoa!!! Trust me... all of you will have the time to ask all you want.”

Miranda said. “But we need to get there first.”

“Captain!” The tactical officer exclaimed. “Dreamland Gate has de-shrouded and is fully powered.”

Miranda smiled and turned back around. “Very well!” She spoke. She turned to the Elven officer who had up until now been standing monitoring everything from a control station. “Captain Na’nal... the *TAU CETI* is your ship. Would you do the honors please.”

The elven officer nodded with a smile. “Spool up the LSD Coils!” He bellowed. “Lock our course into the computer! Power down all weapons pods and make sure the landing bays are sealed! Give me a read on the grid parameters!”

“Parameters are all green Captain! We are in position!”

“Dreamland control, *TAU CETI* is standing by!” Na’nal spoke now.

“Affirmative *TAU CETI*. Be advised, *ULU MERCY* will be proceeding out of the area with her escorts as you enter!” The voice echoed across the bridge.

“Understood!”

“Very well *TAU CETI*! You may execute jump! See you on the other side!”

Na’nal smiled and turned to his helm officer. “Execute!”

“Jumping now!” The female elf officer exclaimed with a smile.

The stars on the screen transformed to bright lines as the *TAU CETI* exploded into light speed. Steven and the others were impressed with the smoothness of the transition, the normal vibration of conducting a jump no longer present and Miranda turned to them seeing the looks on their faces.

“We’ll be in the corridor for ninety seconds.” She explained.

“No residual vibrations!” Zaala said quickly.

Miranda shook her head. “The *TAU CETI*... every ship in our Fleet Group has brand new engine plants. It was a special project Chuess, one that your Prime Minister worked on himself at the King’s request. They designed and built Equator Resonance Field Reactors. They are pretty much exact copies of the Quantum Resonance Field Reactors on all the Arizona Class ships, but not as powerful. We built them using our technology and some wild new schematics that the brainpans here at Dreamland thought up. Essentially we took the same theories and principles from the QRFR’s and applied them to our own technology. The result was the ERFR’s. Prince Androcles’s ship the *SCIMITAR* was the first *LEONIDAS IIA* refitted with the new engines. More power and a much more stable reactor core.”

“Damn! What else they got cooking out here?” Steven asked.

Miranda chuckled. “This is Ben’s baby and you know how he likes to tinker. Martin has given him pretty much free reign and...”

“Martin?” E'dira asked surprised. “You refer to the King by his given name Miranda. There are very few who have that honor.”

Miranda turned a slight shade of red under her dark tan and olive skin. “I lived with them for a few months when I was small. Not... not many people know that.” She stated. “Right after I joined the Academy. I got into some trouble and Ben didn’t know how to handle it. I ended up living with them on the Island Palace for three and a half months. It was what helped me make it through the Academy.”

“Wow! We learned something new about you every day!” Steven commented.

“You should talk Randall.” Miranda said. “You and Zaala see him more than I do.”

Steven nodded. “Yep... and to be honest... he ain’t the prettiest individual to look at across the dinner table.” He said with a grin.

Zaala’s eyes grew wide and once more she elbowed him in the abdomen. “Major Steven Randall!” She exclaimed. “I will pretend I didn’t hear that!”

This brought laughter from all of them and Miranda stepped closer to Steven. “By the way... it’s now Colonel Randall.” She said. “Congratulations.”

Steven shrugged. “Just more weight to have on on my shoulders when I wear my dress uniform.” He dismissed the promotion.

“You never wear your dress uniform.” Zaala told him.

Steven nodded. “That’s the point.” He spoke with a smile.

“Dreamland Control this is *TAU CETI*! We are preparing to enter the grid!” The tactical officer spoke loudly causing all of them to turn back around. They could see Na'nal moving among the different stations of his crew with a keen eye and confident touch.

“Confirmed *TAU CETI*. Ten seconds!”

“Look sharp people!” Na'nal barked. “I for one do not wish to be blown out of the stars by our own weapons platforms!” The bridge crew of the *TAU CETI* chortled among themselves at their Captain’s words. “My wife would never forgive me for being so stupid!”

“Exiting Jump Corridor now!” The helmsmen barked as his hands flew across his control panels.

The only real sign that they were leaving the light speed Jump Corridor was the streaking stars that became single entities once more. Immediately upon exiting they could see the bulk of the massive three thousand bed medical ship *ULU MERCY* off to their left shadowed closely by her three *TUAR’OTHAR*-Class Destroyer escorts. The *TUAR’OTHAR* was an older Elven design ship that was rapidly being pulled back into service throughout the Union Fleet as sector patrol ships and Fleet Group Flank protectors. Built for speed and maneuverability, they were far easier to refit and rearm with state of the art weapons and systems than it was to build new ships. They were quickly beginning to make a name for themselves as premier anti-missile ships and were considered extremely deadly in groups of three or more. The Elf Prime Minister Alocgeid was exceptionally happy about it, for elf ingenuity was now being used to the extent that it had been many hundreds of years ago. The *MERCY*’s Captain flashed his bridge running lights in recognition of their arrival and without

a word from Na'nal; his Executive Officer did the same. In the blink of an eye the four ships jumped into the corridor and were gone and they turned to view the most secret facility to exist within the entire Union territories.

Dreamland shipyards stretched before them now.

They could see the planet sized asteroids in the distance, many of them with hundreds of lights dotting their surfaces. Dozens of smaller rocks, some the size of moons drifted about in a pattern that all of them recognized as being man made. These could only be the Dreamland Defense Platforms, and considering the size of some of them, it was easy to see the *TAU CETI* for all her size and firepower would never stand a chance.

“Release side locks and open viewing ports!” Na'nal called out.

“Opening ports!”

Within seconds the two sides of the *TAU CETI*'s bridge were bathed in star light as the fields of stars were revealed. Steven's sharp pilot eyes caught the slight movement to the right and then two M7 *TEMPEST* fighters were roaring at them in close formation from around the backside of one of the DDPs. All of the asteroid objects were of a dingy gray color and didn't look natural in the least which to the uninitiated was the biggest give away that they were in fact not asteroids. They would give an enemy that somehow found their way here pauses for a few seconds however, and that would be all the time needed to blow their ships into atoms.

“Dreamland fighter patrol.” Miranda spoke as she too saw the two ships sweep across over the top of the bridge and scream out past them on the other side. “They are checking us out. Verifying we are who we say we are.”

“Who elsezz would we bezz?” Chuess asked his small yellowish eyes wide in open and unconcealed wonderment.

E'dira answered this time and smiled as she touched his arm. “It is a security issue Chuess my friend.” She spoke. “You have never met Admiral O'Connor I take it?”

Chuess shook his head. “No.”

“When you meet him you will understand.” Miranda said with a smile of her own as she looked at E'dira.

They had spent more time together over the last three days than Miranda had spent with anyone before and her feelings for the Drow elf were growing stronger. Miranda had never been one to be attracted to another woman, but there was something about E'dira that made her wet just thinking of her. E'dira too had changed in the last several weeks with all of them, and she was coming out of the shell that most Drow kept around them. Her actions with Chuess just now showed that.

“Ok... the *TAU CETI* will be taking up station near the first marker and we'll go from here in two *DEVASTATORS*.” Miranda spoke. “Chuess will be bringing the remaining crew and pilots over in the transport.”

E'dira looked at her now. “Why not us on a transport?” She asked. “I do not mind flying in a fighter, but it is not my... my first choice.”

Miranda could only smile at her and reach for her hand. “You'll see.” She stated with bright eyes. “Colonel Randall?”

Steven's eyes were also bright and charged with energy and Zaala saw this easily. “We're ready.” He said.

Miranda nodded. “Then let's get moving.”

BELID

As'hia could see nothing through the long lenses that Lynom had brought with them. He had been right in saying that Belid was barren, much of the surface had been burned away thousands of years ago it appeared. There were stretches of where the timber and plains were making a comeback within the mountains and it was one of these where they had finally come to a rest. They had moved for nearly seven hours straight, As'hia often shifting to her wolf form during those seven hours to revel in her freedom and let the wind and air filter through her two toned fur. Her belly and legs was the blond of her father while her upper body and shoulders were the

black hair of her mother. She was a medium size female wolf, just over a hundred and thirty pounds when in wolf form and almost a meter at her shoulders. Her mother had taught her the freedom of running and she used it here, all the while using her wolf senses to make sure they were not being followed. The one thing her sensitive wolf nose picked up immediately was the Verbena scent of Lynom. Within the Immortal base it had not always been a clear scent, and many times it was masked by the foul smell of the others, but out here in the free air As'hia could detect it quite easily and it tickled her wolf nose as nothing she had ever smelled before.

She stood back up and tucked the lenses away in the pouch on her utility belt and turned back to see Lynom setting something up near the edge of the cool mountain stream they had stopped next too. The small waterfall was flowing from above as they had continued to work their way up the mountain and it now fell into a six meter wide pool on the ridge they had come to. She had been carrying her uniform when she had been captured and it felt so very good to feel the ArmorPly against her body once more. Lynom had returned her *Nethes* as well, and she now wore that on her right thigh. She watched him as he began to strip out of the shirt he wore and began crossing back to where he was confusion in her eyes.

“What are you doing?” She spoke quickly. “We need to keep moving!”

“They will not send anyone out after us until they speak with Phy’iad.” Lynom answered her, pulling off the combat harness and then the thick outer shirt. “We have time.”

“Time for what?” As'hia asked. “We should get to the top of this mountain and make our way west! The caves you spoke of there are the best place to hide.”

“I need to do this first!” Lynom snapped.

“We don’t have time for you to take a bath Lynom.” As'hia spoke with an exasperated tone. “We need...” Her words died in her throat when she saw him remove the thin fabric of the t-shirt that he wore. Three quarters of the way down the exquisitely defined chest, the dark gray skin of an Immortal ended and a deeply tanned bronze color began. It was the same on his back and sides, the grayish Immortal skin color stopping just above his waist and turning to that tanned bronze color. It almost looked as if the grayish Immortal skin was growing on top of something else. Her dark eyes went back to his face. The only other time she had seen him even remotely in this state of undress had been by the hot spring. Even then he had not removed the thin t-shirt and all she saw were the muscles and the powerful definition. “Lynom... what is... what is wrong with you?” She asked.

“The implants!” Lynom said. “I need to remove them now before they infect my blood. The outside air and the physical exertion have caused them to deteriorate faster than I had anticipated.”

“Implants?” As'hia asked harshly. “We are stopping so you can play with your skin?”

Lynom looked at her, his dark eyes angry. “If you wish to continue so badly then go! Unlike your wishes for me As'hia, I have no desire to die. If I do not remove the implants they will kill me!”

“Lynom we...”

Lynom lifted his hand and pointed. “That way!” He snarled. “I will remove them myself and follow when I am done! Go!”

As'hia’s face twisted indignantly and she gathered her SA80 tighter. “Fine!” She spat as she began to march off up towards the top of the ridge. She moved only a dozen meters away before stopping and turning back to watch him. He unrolled what appeared to be a surgical kit of some sort, and he settled half in the swift moving current of the stream. As'hia remembered his words then.

“Ssin'urn 'Anon is not tainted scum!” Lynom barked from next to her. Everyone had turned to see his eyes had changed to vampire cobalt blue and his vampiric fangs were fully extended in savage anger. As'hia had never seen him as angry as he was at that moment. “And I would give my life without pause to keep her from harm! That is my hithern d'vlos!” Lynom had leaned closer to the transmission then. “It is you who are tainted! You are the reason she is here to begin with!” As'hia knew that everyone could see her eyes fixate on Lynom then, wide with surprise at his words. “Had you embraced her spirit and soul, who she is at her center and not tried to alter her essence to suit your pathetic needs, she would never have been on that transport!”

Lynom had continued quickly as angry as he was. “She would never have had to endure what she has had to endure! Pray I die here protecting her before I return there you elf bastard... for when I meet you

face to face, you will feel my wrath for what you have assisted in making happen to her! You will feel my blade for all the pain you have helped to heap upon her with your arrogance!” (oath of blood)

As'hia's head tilted slightly as she gazed at him in the stream, struggling with the surgical laser scalpel. He was the son of an Immortal and a vampire. He could blur like a vampire, he had the combined strength of both species, and his Mindvoice skills were beyond any she had ever heard of except for members of *Mjolnir's Hand* and members of the Royal family. He had fed on her blood four times, each time practically begging her to forgive him, even as during the last time As'hia's body had ignited with fire in her blood and she had clutched at him tightly. Not out of pain or fear, but because of what he was making her feel. He had protected her, guarded her, and all she had done was demean him and try to kill him. She called him monster and liar. And just this day she had seen how wrong she had been. He had not lied to her about anything, and As'hia felt the shame sweep over her then. Now she looked at him and saw that there was something very different about him. No Immortal she had seen on the base, or even in images during her training had skin like his. Growths like his. There was something very different about him she knew. He had risked his life and the survival of his entire tribe to save her and then protect her, his brother had shouted at that fool O'lan. The Queen trusted them. Princess Normya had become the wife of his brother, a brother that looked like no Immortal she had ever seen. As'hia's eyes grew wider now. Tir'ut was his brother! As'hia dropped her pack where she was and bolted back towards the stream.

Lynom swore under his breath as he lifted the laser scalpel and tried to line up the starter incision he needed to make. He could feel the toxic elements of the biogel that kept the realistic and surgically implanted false skin alive beginning to seep out. If he did not get it off soon, the gel would reach the injuries As'hia had inflicted on him and he was unable to heal completely because they were covered with the false skin. He had used the blood he had access too in order to inject it into the skin so that it would heal, while ignoring the wounds to his physical body. He needed the protection of an intact false skin more than anything, for if they had discovered who and what he was before he was ready, all would have been lost. If he had asked for more blood suspicions against him would have risen because everyone assumed he had been taking As'hia's blood all of this time, and all of them were very envious of him.

Lynom lifted the small mirror and tried to look out of the corner of his eye to line up the scalpel where his mother had told him he needed too. He could not see where he needed to begin the cut and he smashed his hands back into the water.

“*VITH!*” He screamed.

“Lynom!” As'hia's voice spoke from the side.

Lynom turned cobalt blue vampire eyes on her, his fangs bursting from his gums and his face twisting into an angry snarl. “You wish me dead!” He shouted at her. “I am a monster! I understand this! You could at least let me die without having you gloat over my corpse because you got your wish!”

As'hia dropped her combat harness and began pulling off the top of her ArmorPly. She stripped down to the simple t-shirt and then lowered herself into the cool mountain water. She gazed at his face as she moved closer, suddenly marveling in how his cobalt eyes were so bright and full of intelligence. Lynom glared at her as she moved up in front of him, looking up into his face as he towered over her. His cobalt blue vampire eyes held her in their gaze and As'hia suddenly realized just how dangerous this man could be. Those eyes looked upon her as if she was simple and tiny to him, and after all he had done to protect her they held contempt for the way she had treated him. As'hia lifted her hand and placed it over the top of his, never taking her eyes from his. She should have been frightened out of her mind, but even through the anger in those cobalt orbs, As'hia somehow knew he would never hurt her. She curled her fingers long around the laser scalpel.

“I'm sorry Lynom. I will help you. I... I owe you my life and my dignity.” She spoke softly. “Tell me what I need to do.”

She watched as his eyes changed back to their normal dark brown and once more As'hia saw something in them she had never taken notice of before. The delightful flecks of light green in them. His fangs retracted as well and his angry face dissolved.

“The... the implants are basically a second skin I had surgically grafted over my own.” He explained slowly. “The biogel that makes them realistic is polluted now because of the damage to them. It is...”

“Damage I am responsible for?” She asked.

“It does not matter now... but yes.” He replied nodding his head. “You only... you only advanced my own plans to leave this place. These places I have been too... these foul Akruxian fools... they were beginning to taint me and I was at my limit of tolerance. I would not have been able to stand their actions for much longer and most likely would have died in an attempt to kill as many as I could before they killed me.”

As'hia could detect the truth of his words in the flutter of his heartbeat and the conviction with which he spoke them. “What... what do I do?” She asked. “Tell me.”

“Look closely and you will see what appears to be a seam in the skin at the juncture of my neck and shoulder.” Lynom spoke. “This is the main seal for the grafts. You must use the scalpel to reopen the incision. Once you do that, you will be able to peel the implants away one section at a time.” He spoke slowly.

“Won't it hurt?” She asked quickly.

“Yes... but not as much as dying.” He replied dropping to his knees in the water so that she was level with his upper body because of their height. “And I have endured far more pain than that As'hia.”

As'hia took a deep breath to calm her nerves and moved closer to him, leaning over his shoulder and beginning to probe with her fingers where he said. It took her a full minute before she found the seam and she marveled at the skill with which the procedure had been done. “I found it.” She said. “*Carian* Lynom... who did this?”

“My father is not as mindless a brute as many think.” Lynom answered. “He did not serve as Captain to the High Lord for over a thousand years and learn nothing. It is a skill from the old ways of our people. Before the High Coven conquered our planet so long ago. My father learned it from his father before him. Our planet was harsh at times and these skins allowed us an added layer of protection against the elements. It was a simple matter to form it to be identical to real Immortal skin.”

As'hia activated the laser scalpel and paused for a moment. His face was level with her firm breasts; in fact his lips were only millimeters from the t-shirt she wore and her protruding nipples. The coolness of the water had caused her skin to react and now her nipples were erect and standing quite proudly at attention. As'hia cursed her reaction for only a brief moment for Lynom's eyes were closed as he drew in deep breaths, completely ignoring the fact that she was standing so intimately close to him. Astoundingly this fact annoyed As'hia in a way she had never felt before.

“Lynom?” She whispered.

His dark brown eyes opened and moved up to look at her face, not even glancing at her proud breasts so close to his face. “Yes?”

“You... you called me *Ssin'urn 'Anon* in your language.” She said.

“Yes.”

“What... what does it mean?” She asked.

“It does not matter.” He spoke.

“It... it matters to me.” She said.

Lynom lowered his eyes once more, closing them slowly. “Beautiful Flower.” He said in almost a whisper. “It means beautiful flower.”

DREAMLAND SHIPYARDS

DEVASTATOR TWO ONE; CALL SIGN *MANDO*

DEVASTATOR TWO TWO; CALL SIGN *SCAR*

“Yeah baby!” Steven whooped as he banked the M5 in a tight turn only six meters from the tip of Miranda's wing.

Zaala could only smile at her husband's actions from under her helmet and she heard Miranda chuckle over the internal COM link between the two ships.

“Happy to be back on the stick I see *Scar!*” Her voice spoke.

“You have no idea *Mando!*”

“Think you can hang with me?”

“Just don't come to an abrupt halt *Mando*, or you'll find out how close I will be!” Steven replied causing both Miranda and Zaala to laugh openly.

“Perhaps a sedate entry is more appropriate in this situation.” E'dira's voice carried over the COM now. “The tone of your voices does not equate to sedate.”

“Sedate?” Steven asked. “What is that... the name of a food?”

“Sounds like a new drug to me!” Miranda said. “Burners *Scar!* Now! And eat my tail!”

Many of the sensor operators within Dreamland were all centrally connected to provide better coverage of the super secret area that spanned nearly three full light years in size. The moment the two M5 *DEVASTATORS* had launched from the *TAU CETI* every sensor screen in Dreamland focused on the two ships and COM channels were left open. The word had passed quickly of the two pilots who had entered Dreamland space, and now they would get a show few would ever see. There were very few pilots within the Union outside of Queen For'mya, Star Colonel Endith and Prince Arrarn who could invoke a sense of awe.

The two pilots known as *Mando* and *Scar* were such a pair.

As any pilot will tell you, whether they were elf, Lycavorian or human, flying was something instinctual. You could be an adequate pilot with the proper training, perhaps even a good pilot, yet without instinct you would never achieve the status of superb pilot. There was a union of pilot and ship that was almost magically in many respects and to view the skills of such pilots was something that stayed with you forever. There were few instinctual pilots, because they were born, not made. Miranda Lorian and Steven Randall were two of these very special individuals, and the blue eyes of the officer that watched from the CIC of the most secret ship in the Union knew this. He knew it because he was one as well, and he had carefully orchestrated the road that put the two of them together. Admiral Benjamin O'Connor grinned as he stood there.

“Now we'll see why they are the best!” He said in a whisper that only the officers and men closest to him could hear.

The audience had grown to several thousand across the whole of Dreamland, and none of them were disappointed. The M5 *DEVASTATOR* was almost as maneuverable as its smaller sister the M7, but it was still a fighter/bomber. As thousands of pairs of eyes watched, two pilots made those two ships dance among the stars in a choreograph of maneuvers that regularly brought gasps of disbelief from across the stars. On the deck across the face of the man made asteroids, barely a hundred meters from the surface of the massive rocks, the engines lighting up surrounding space as neither dared turn off their burners. Twisting and turning, darting across the field of stars and ships and frustrating the sensor operators that tried to track them with visual cameras. They could hear the squeals of delight as Zaala thoroughly enjoyed the ride, having complete faith in her husband's skills. What they soon discovered was that Drow were not so reserved as they thought. Though they could not see it, they could easily imagine E'dira's head whipping about in the cockpit and letting out the howl of amazement and then unabashed glee as the two fighters crossed within five meters of each other at full speed and darted between the massive power coils of the mammoth Dreamland transports. The maneuver would be talked about for months, as the crews of the two ships swore the two fighters had passed within a few feet of the many view windows at the top of the transports.

Ben had planned this moment perfectly, for he wanted everyone involved with bringing this ship to life to know they had done the finest job of their lives. He knew what was coming, for he also knew Steven Randall well, and he waited as Miranda slowed their sometimes insane maneuvering through the space of Dreamland, always carrying them toward one point. It was the point she had left her ship at, and Miranda Lorian knew right where her ship was.

“Steven, look over there! Those are Type One Dragon Transports!” Zaala's voice echoed. “I have never seen... they are different somehow!”

“This place is amazing!” Steven's excited voice announced. “Look at all the Mark III *NOVAs!* Zaala... they all have new engine plants! Look at the escorts! This...”

Steven!” Miranda's voice interrupted him. “Check your eleven o'clock Steven!”

Inside the cockpit of *DEVASTATOR* Two Two, Steven turned his head only slightly and what he saw as they skimmed over the top of the huge asteroid made his skin prickle and his eyes go wide behind his helmet.

Beyond the *NOVA*-Class Mark III Attack Cruiser and the three *TAUR'OTHAR* escorts, silhouetted in front of the enormous and very real asteroid, she waited. Colonel Steven Randall immediately slashed power to

his engines and executed an inverted roll, spinning the M5 towards the arrow head shaped ship rapidly filling the window of his cockpit. As he righted his M5 once more he heard Zaala gasp softly in his helmet.

“Miranda?” Steven spoke almost reverently.

“Yes.” Miranda Lorian replied without pause. “That is her Steven. That is our new home. That is the *ARIZONA*. She’s beautiful isn’t she?”

Zaala looked out the cockpit window and saw Miranda’s fighter pull up alongside them. She could hear the way the tones of Miranda’s and Steven’s voice changed when they spoke of this incredible ship before them. Almost as if it was alive. As that thought flashed in her mind she heard E'dira’s voice speak softly.

“They’ll be watching over us.” E'dira said.

“E'dira?” Zaala spoke puzzled.

“William Franklin Zaala.” E'dira continued. “He said... he said they would be watching over us remember.”

“The Memorial?” Zaala gasped from the M5 behind Steven’s seat. Her head turned even further to see E'dira’s helmeted head turn to face her. As close as Miranda and Steven were flying it was easy enough to see her shimmering white hair flowing from under her helmet.

E'dira nodded. “The Memorial.” E'dira continued. “Some believe the oil is the blood of those who died trying to save her. And their blood is eternal. Oh... now I see... now I see why they are so proud. They may not show it Zaala Randall... but human faith... oh it is a powerful thing. This ship... this ship and her name are testament to that faith.”

Zaala turned back to look at the crimson coloring of the nose of the ship as they allowed a flight of sixteen *DEVASTATORS* from the *TAU CETI* to streak overhead. It was the same squadron chosen to accompany them, the men and women who finished best out of the training. There was no arrogant chatter on the COM now she noticed. The entire squadron flew in perfect formation, not one ship out of the precise line.

“Shall we check out our new home Steven?” Miranda’s voice came over the COM.

“Oh yeah... I think we should.” Steven answered instantly.

“Follow me in CAG!” Miranda announced proudly.

Both Zaala and E'dira let out yelps of surprise when Miranda and Steven dropped the noses of their fighters and dove for the surface of the *ARIZONA*.

“She has two Quantum Resonance Main Reactors as her main power plant.” Miranda’s voice began as they pulled out of the dive just across the point of her bow and began to skim across the surface of the ship. “A JCN 71 Tactical Network, Mark VIII Whisper Class Shrouds. She has twenty Type One Terra Series Plasma Turrets, and thirty Type Two. Sixty Quad Point defense turrets. Sixteen Photonic Torpedo Launchers.”

“Jesus *Mando!*” Steven gasped behind his helmet.

“I told you she is built for only one purpose.” Miranda said. “She has ten Squadrons of M7’s and fifteen Squadrons of M5’s. Electronic Warfare capability, Laminated Crystanium Weave Dragon Armor.” Miranda chuckled softly. “This is it.” She spoke. “This is the pinnacle of a career Steven. And she is all ours! With the right crew... our crew... she can go toe to toe with anything in the stars and kick the living shit out of them!”

No matter where the person stood throughout Dreamland, everyone could hear the pride oozing forth in Miranda Lorian’s words.

Their COM units crackled to life as they split down the port side of the *ARIZONA*, Steven’s eyes wide as he took in the launch bays and Type One turrets waiting to unleash their fury.

“Lorian! Randall!” The voice bellowed out over the COM.

“Admiral!” Both Miranda and Steven answered at once.

“If the two of you are done gawking at the newest lady in our fleet... how about both of you carry your asses onboard before I die of old age while you play your pilot games!” Ben’s voice boomed.

“Aye Admiral!” Miranda barked.

Sitting behind her in the second chair E'dira could only smile behind her helmet. What they had shared over the course of the last weeks E'dira would treasure for the rest of her years. It was not common for a Drow female to court another female as the term normally would mean. Yet E'dira was no normal Drow female, and hearing the joy and happiness in Miranda’s voice now, after hearing the pain and sadness of so much loss while they talked confirmed to E'dira that she had not been wrong about this woman. Human she may have been, but Miranda Lorian was as strong as any Drow E'dira had ever known, and knowing that Miranda wanted her just

as badly as she wanted Miranda made their coming together a sign of the faith that E'dira had just been talking about.

She let her amber eyes gaze out across the massive expanse of the ship they would now call home, and for a brief moment she felt what Miranda and Steven Randall felt. She could not put it into words, but it made her feel as she felt the day Lynwe and Selene dragged her into a world of love and friendship. This ship, this object of such staggering power belonged to them now, yet they also belonged to it. To her.

The *ARIZONA*.

BELID

It was without a doubt the most disgusting thing As'hia had ever done. Twice she had to stop and take deep breaths to control her breathing. It was almost as if she was skinning a living breathing person. The implants were surgically grafted onto Lynom's body, and while the laser scalpel did the majority of the work for her, As'hia still had to pull and pry as each section of implant was peeled away. As she tossed the now useless and dead section of bio-organic skin to the ground she would need to clean the area where it had resided with thick towels that Lynom held for her. Incredibly, as As'hia worked diligently and pulled away the implant skin, she began to reveal and take notice of the man who was underneath what she now knew was a very sophisticated disguise. As she exposed more of his body to the air, she exposed more of the deeply tanned bronze colored skin. Though he had worn the implant skin for almost two years, the moment the bright sunlight touched his now exposed real skin, it reacted by changing its shade and returning to the color of the bronze skin she saw just below the line of his waist. As'hia also began to take note of just how exquisitely defined Lynom's body was.

It did not appear so under the implant skin, but as she pulled away each section and wiped it clean, it revealed more and more of the Spartan like definition of his muscular body. She revealed the bone spikes along the outer ridge of his hands and wrists, much smaller than those of the implant skin, and no where near as pronounced. As she worked her way around and peeled away the implant skin from his abdomen, she discovered a stomach that was as flat and ripped as any she had ever seen. Her touch caused his stomach muscles to tighten and contract and for reasons which she didn't understand she took joy in the fact that her touch affected him so.

Three hours she worked until all that remained was the skin on his face and neck. Lynom took the scalpel from her then saying he would take care of the rest and thanking her for her assistance. As'hia stepped back in the cool water then as he used the scalpel to make the incision along his neck and up the side of his head. He moved quickly and efficiently, finally grabbing the edges of the implanted skin and pulling upwards. As'hia winced at the tearing sound, even as he dropped fully into the water and disappeared beneath the surface. It was a full two minutes before As'hia began to think something was wrong and she stepped forward.

"Lynom!" She hissed softly seeing his powerful back just beneath the surface of the cool water, but appearing as if he was having convulsions of some sort. "Lynom!" Her voice became more urgent and she reached for him without hesitation surprising herself at the thought of not having him with her.

As'hia, the half elven daughter of the Lycavorian Dandarla and the Elven Major Ta'lon, staggered back as Lynom's body surged out of the water with a great bellow and huge intake of air. He rose immediately to his full height of six foot four and As'hia could only watch as he whipped his head back and forth, locks of long dark blond hair flaying about like the hair from a shaggy beast. He turned slowly to face her and her eyes went wide when she found herself staring into perhaps the most incredibly handsome face she had ever gazed upon. The bone spikes along his jaw line were like his brother's, less pronounced but very evident, yet the long hair and deep dark eyes gave him a look Tir'ut did not have. While they both shared their mother's flawless skin, it appeared that Lynom got the majority of her beauty and it translated into an exceptionally handsome face which now dripped oh so sexily with water. He looked less like his father Cha'talla then did Tir'ut, but the similarities were still there. As'hia could only gape at him in shock as the realization that this was the man who had protected her all of this time hit her like a bolt from the heavens. This was the man who she had tried to kill. This was the man who she had never shown one ounce of gratitude to for keeping her alive and safe from the

daily rapes that the other female elves had to endure. This was the man who had kept her from a life that would have destroyed not only her spirit, but her mind as well.

Lynom's smile split his face and caused her to blink to insure she was not seeing things. The very tips of his vampiric fangs were visible when he smiled and his dark eyes shone with a light she had not seen until now. Oh yes... this was the most handsome man she had ever set her eyes upon and he was an *Immortal!!*

"Forgive me As'hia. I did not mean to frighten you." He spoke quickly. "Using the water made it easier to remove the headpiece. It was tangled within my hair, but I was able to free it."

"You... you have hair." As'hia gasped still trying to wrap her mind around the fact that standing before her was a completely different Lynom than the one whom she had grown accustomed too over the past weeks. And exceedingly easier on the eyes to look at.

Lynom nodded. "Yes." He answered. "It is much longer than it normally is, but I will cut it later." He spoke moving closer to her. As'hia backed up quickly and Lynom stopped when he saw the look on her face. "It is me As'hia." He said.

As'hia nodded her head quickly as she moved to the bank of the stream. "Yes. I know that!" She stammered. She turned and pulled herself out of the water and looked down at him. "We should... we should get going now."

Lynom followed her movements with his eyes and finally nodded sadly. "Yes. Yes you are right." He said softly moving for the bank of the stream as well.

As'hia tensed as he hauled himself out of the water, her dark eyes taking in every single measured movement he made. His body was deliciously defined and each movement caused the muscles to ripple under his bronze skin. She relaxed slightly when he moved directly to where he had placed his clothes and equipment, but that did not stop the sudden sensations of desire and want that flooded her elven body. They were the same sensations of desire As'hia had experienced when she saw a handsome elf or Lycavorian Spartan and looking at Lynom, they were definitely not what she expected to feel in regards to this man. Nor did she expect the near overwhelming power with which these sensations swirled through her lithe elven body.

"We should be able to cover half of the remaining distance to the caves before dark." Lynom told her as he pulled his shirts back on and then his harness. He was dressing quickly As'hia saw, and she knew it was because of her reaction to him that he was moving so quickly. His mind was a steel trap to her and had been for quite a long time, so trying to breach his MV shields was not something she would even consider, not that she could accomplish this anyway. She watched him stand back up and look at her. "Are you ready?"

Not trusting herself to respond in a normal voice As'hia could only nod her head quickly. What was happening to her? Why was Lynom affecting her so... and how far away was her mother? She needed her mother's guidance now. She needed to ask her mother why she suddenly could barely hold back the desire to be swept up in Lynom's arms and have him take her in any way he desired.

As'hia didn't bother to put her outer shirt back on and simply lifted her pack to her shoulders and picked up her SA80.

"I'm... I'm ready." She said.

Lynom took a step towards her. "As'hia I..."

She backed up several steps. "I'm fine." She stated quickly.

"You are not." Lynom spoke.

"Really... I'm fine. Let's just go. The closer we get to those caves the sooner we can expect the others to get here."

BONTAWILLIAN KJU21 CIVILIAN CORVETTE TEN HOURS FROM IRARUZU

Walter glanced out of the corner of his eye at Ceneia as her hands adjusted the course of their ship. He did think of her as a daughter and he had taken note of the spring in her step these last two days. When she wasn't here in the cockpit she had spent every moment with Daba. There wasn't a whole lot to do on the ship and they had simply been discovering each other outside of their bed. They took their meals together, Daba bringing her snacks and such when she was in the cockpit and preparing the ship rations in different ways for

them during dinner. Walter took notice of the fact that Daba was just as taken with Ceneia as her new 'slave' was with her. She acted less like a Drow Mistress than she did a love struck young female and he knew that Daba's words had been very true, and in some respects even more heartfelt than Daba realized herself.

"You can stop sneaking looks at me from the corner of your eyes Walter." She spoke finally turning to look at him. "You don't approve?"

In all the years she had flown him and Majeir around he had made it clear there should be no secrets between them and he sat back in his seat and shook his head. "Quite the contrary." He answered. "I more than approve."

"No one has ever treated me as she does Walter." Ceneia said. "I... I know it happened so very quickly... but I welcomed it. I wanted it to happen. We have only laid together and talked since that first night. She is so strong and wise. She said she wanted us to know each other Walter. Our thoughts. Our hopes and our fears. She listened to me."

"I listen to you." Walter said with a grin.

Ceneia reached over and slapped him lightly. "You know what I mean." She snapped. "She is not afraid of you or Majeir and what would happen if her intentions are not honorable. You and Majeir have chased off more than one male suitor for me you know."

Walter nodded his head. "Yes we have. All of them with the idea to use you to get close to me." He said.

Ceneia's eyes grew a little wider. "Even Na'malan?" She asked.

He was the worst! Majeir's voice filled their minds in V. *I enjoyed chasing him away.*

Majeir! Ceneia gasped.

"She's right." Walter said. "You are so intent on flying us around and being the best you can be that you drop your guard on occasion when it comes to young males."

Daba is not like this. Majeir said quickly.

Walter shook his head. "No she is not."

"Do you think... do you think my mother and father will approve?" She asked softly.

"Your mother and father want you to be happy Ceneia." Walter answered. "Relationships such as yours and Daba's have been around for millennia; it's just now they are widely accepted as natural when once they were considered a stigma. Much of that is due to the interaction and acceptance of other species and the instinctive nature of not just Lycavorians and Elves, but Algolians and many others as well."

"That didn't answer my question Walter." Ceneia said with a grin.

He does have a tendency to go off on tangents does he not Ceneia. Majeir spoke with some humor.

Walter shook his head. "You two take great pleasure in putting the needle to me whenever you can don't you?"

Well... it is rather entertaining. Majeir replied.

Walter looked at Ceneia and reached out to squeeze her hand. "Whatever doubts your mother and father may have while vanish as soon as they meet Daba and see how she treats you."

"You don't think they will mind she is so much older than me?" Ceneia asked.

Walter chuckled. "As if age matters when it comes to elves and Lycavorians. You don't give your parents much credit girl." He said. "Your mother is two hundred years older than your father or did you forget that?"

Ceneia's eyes grew a little wider as she realized that was indeed the case and she couldn't help but smile. "Oh boy, please don't tell them I forgot that." She said. "They will never let me live it down."

Walter laughed and opened his mouth to answer when the COM chirped. Ceneia turned and looked at the panel on her left. "Incoming transmission." She spoke.

Walter leaned forward. "From who? No one should have a direct COM link with us. We are ostensibly a civilian ship."

"I routed all our personal COM channels into the ship's computer core." Ceneia said as she adjusted the controls on the panel. "Just in case someone needed to get hold of us."

Walter looked at her. "Oh." He said.

Ceneia laughed at his expression. "It's inbound from Iraruzu." She said. "It's for Daba. Return code looks like it's from Lu'ria her daughter."

Walter reached forward and touched the controls in front of him. "I got the ship. Why don't you go back and let her know she's got a transmission from Lu'ria."

Ceneia smiled and practically jumped out of her seat. She leaned over his shoulder before moving past him and kissed his cheek. "Thank you Walter." She said softly.

"Thank me later." He said. "Don't leave me up here too long. I don't know *sibfla* about this ship."

Ceneia chuckled as she headed for the lounge area of the ship.

Daba looked up from the data pad she was reading when she felt the presence of the young Dragoon soldier by the table. She set aside the pad of ancient Drow lore and leaned back to look up at him.

"Something Lieutenant?" She asked.

"May... may I join you Senator?" He asked.

Daba motioned for him to take the chair opposite her. "Please...?"

"Dragoon Lieutenant Hval Senator!" He spoke proudly as he sat down. "Wolf Dragoon Legion Nineteen."

"Ah... Legion Nineteen is War Master Tareif's personal Legion. Impressive Lieutenant." Daba said. "What can I do for you Lieutenant?"

"I wanted... I wanted to ask you a question Senator." He spoke haltingly. "A personal question."

Daba's eyes narrowed slightly and she leaned forward. "Lieutenant... if you are going to inquire about my relationship with Ceneia... perhaps if you treated females as we Drow do you would..."

"What?" He gasped. "No Senator! That does not interest me! I am not as inexperienced as my two comrades. They were put out that you were able to..." Daba's eyes grew slightly wider now as she prepared to snap at this young soldier. "...win Ceneia's *xukuth* when they could not."

Daba blinked when he used the ancient Drow word. While the ancient Drow language was derived from the ancient vampire language, it had remained almost identical in many respects and there were not many who chose to learn the language. "You... you speak the language of the Drow Lieutenant?" She asked.

Hval nodded. "I have learned a great deal and I study every day." He said.

"Not many chose to learn our language. It is the language of the vampires and that still holds some stigma." Daba said.

Hval nodded. "Yes... but I decided to learn it when I became interested in..." He looked at the table embarrassed.

Daba's amber eyes became amused now as she realized why this young soldier had come to sit with her, and it had nothing to do with her lovely Ceneia. "You are interested in a Drow female I take it." She said finally.

Hval looked at her. "I am Senator." He said quickly.

"May I know her name?" Daba asked.

"Re'sora of the Family Yevna. Daughter to Venro and Matron mother Runeha." Hval answered without hesitation.

Daba's amber eyes grew wider now and a smile split her face. "Lieutenant Hval... I must say... you have impressed me greatly. There are not many who learn how to introduce a Drow family in conversation. You have done it perfectly."

"Re'sora taught me." He answered pulling out the small holoimaging disc and activating it. Daba saw the small holographic image of the young Drow female appear and begin to rotate slowly. "I know it is not common for Drow females to marry outside of their species but..."

"That is something that our Queen and many are changing Lieutenant." Daba answered. "Aihola, Nayeca, Cihera, even Lynwe... they have all married outside the Drow race."

"But it is not something you approve of." Hval spoke. "I have listened to your arguments in regards to this matter on the Senate Floor."

Daba nodded. "That is true... but..."

"May I ask why?" Hval asked her before she could finish speaking. "I wish to ask for the blessing of her mother when I return to Earth. Her family. The blessing to take her as my wife. Her mother thinks very highly

of you Senator and she follows your views in this subject. I only wish to know why you think like this so that I can try to convince her mother that I am fit to be husband for her daughter.”

Daba looked at him for a long moment her amber eyes searching his face. It was true that Daba felt Drow should marry within their own race, but she also knew there were exceptions to this rule. She did not feel those exceptions were many, but over the course of the last few years this topic had not come up very often. “I believe that many men... no matter their species Hval... I believe they choose to take a Drow as their wives with the intent that their wife will take a lover. They know that many of the Drow females have female lovers. As you well know that is very common in our society.”

Hval nodded. “Yes.”

“Lovers that in many cases they share with their husbands.” Daba continued. “In many respects... and this is perhaps a very old fashion train of thinking... in many respects I think of men as pigs when it comes to sex. The more they get... the more they want.” Daba saw him begin to speak and held up her hand. “I know Hval... it is a very archaic train of thought and left over from our early years under the High Coven but...” Daba watched him activate the holoimager again and there appeared the image of a stunningly beautiful human female with flowing blond hair and striking green eyes.

“This is Tenia.” He said. “This is Re'sora's lover Senator. They have been together for going upon seven years now, since Tenia was only seventeen. Not once in the two years Re'sora and I have been together have I desired Tenia in any way, shape or form. To be honest I view her as a sister. She has shared in almost everything we do, and she even sleeps in our bed. I desire only Re'sora. No other. And Re'sora has offered Senator. As has Tenia.”

“Does Re'sora's mother know that you are sleeping with her daughter?” Daba asked.

Hval shook his head. “No.”

“Then why may I ask would you reveal this to me?” Daba stated. “As Matron Mother of my family I am honor bound to tell Re'sora's mother what is happening between you.”

Hval nodded. “Yes.”

Daba's head tilted to the side. “And still your love for her drove you to come to me and reveal this?” She questioned.

Hval met her amber eyes. “I chose to reveal this to you so that I may learn what I need to do. Who I need to convince that I am the best choice for Re'sora. That I will love and honor her for all of my years! That I will...”

Daba held up her hand quickly. “You may stop there Lieutenant.” She said as her amber eyes detected Ceneia enter the lounge. “I must say Lieutenant Hval... you have done more in the past ten minutes to make me rethink what I have always thought than anyone in the last two centuries.”

“It is my hope that before we are done with this mission I can gain your trust and belief so that you would help me to convince Re'sora's mother of my intentions.” Hval told her honestly.

Daba smiled as she came to her feet. “You do not mince words Lieutenant.” She spoke as Ceneia came up to her with a bright smile.

“War Master Tareif does not allow us too Senator.” He answered as he stood up and watched Ceneia press up close to Daba and kiss her softly.

“We are receiving a transmission from Lu'ria Mistress.” She said. “Walter thought you might like to take it.”

Daba's eyes were alive and smiling at this information. “I do.” She answered as Ceneia began to pull her away. Daba stop for a moment and turned back to Hval. “We shall talk more Lieutenant.” She said. “We shall talk more.”

Hval nodded. “I look forward to it Senator.” He answered before Ceneia pulled Daba out of the lounge area.

“...are you mother?” Lu'ria asked. “The transmission has been routed three different times now.”

Daba smiled as she settled into the chair and looked at the image of her daughter in the transmission. “I'm on a ship coming to see you.” She spoke.

“Me?” Lu'ria exclaimed in surprise.

Daba nodded. "We are bringing someone who I think you will be very happy to see." She said.

Lu'ria's amber eyes narrowed now. "Mother... I told you already I am not interested in whoever you want me to meet! I am meant for others! I will not betray that!"

"Lu'ria no!" Daba spoke quickly. "It's not what you think! We..." The transmission flickered heavily and Lu'ria's face blinked in and out. "Lu'ria!"

"Mother!" Lu'ria's voice echoed from the holodisc. "Mother there is something wrong with the transmission! Mother can you hear me!"

Ceneia leaned forward. "Juicing power to the receiver!" She spoke. Her eyes focused on the COM sensor and she blinked several times even as the transmission flickered once more and disappeared. "What the hell?"

Walter sensed her tone of voice immediately. "Ceneia what is it?" He asked. "A loss of power on their end?"

Ceneia shook her head. "No! The signal is being jammed!" She announced.

"Jammed?" Walter spoke coming up between her and Daba. "Jammed how?"

Ceneia shook her head again. "Unknown." She said quickly adjusting her controls. "It... it looks like some sort of atmospheric disturbance. Heavy concentration of polarized particles. Almost like a sun flare."

"Iraruzu is too far from this system's sun to be affected by a flare." Walter said.

Ceneia nodded. "Yes I know."

Daba looked at her beautiful young lover. "Ceneia?" She asked.

"One of Irauzu's moons is made up of concentrated Deutrino Ore Mistress. It is heavily mined and if there was an accident on the moon then it would cause these same readings. I'm sure there is nothing to worry about." Ceneia said.

Daba took a deep breath and smiled. "You are right of course." She said.

Walter turned his head to her. "You mentioned something about what your daughter said while on Earth Daba." He spoke. "What exactly did she mean? You obviously know."

Daba looked at him and nodded her head. "As I did not believe her about Majeir... I did not believe her about her insistence in not taking a Drow husband. There are several who have expressed interest in her. Strong Drow males from good families."

"I take it Lu'ria is not keen on this idea?" Walter said.

Daba shook her head. "That is putting it mildly Holy One." She replied.

"Who does she believe she is meant for Mistress?" Ceneia asked.

Daba looked at her and then turned her amber eyes to Walter. "She believes she is to be the fourth wife and mate to Prince Androcles Holy One. And the loving Mistress to his other three wives and mates."

Walter couldn't help but smile. "Leave it to a Drow to reach for the stars!" He said. "You taught her well Daba."

Daba grinned. "Perhaps too well. But... but after discovering that she is indeed meant to be bonded to Majeir."

You question if perhaps what else she has seen and feels is also true. Majeir's voice joined them in their minds from her place in the cargo bay.

Daba nodded. "Yes."

Walter sat back in his chair. "Androcles Leonidas is an equal to his father in every way. They are different, yet they are the same. If what we have seen on the Netnews is indeed true, there just may be some relevance to what your daughter is saying Daba."

Daba looked at him. "Holy One?" She asked.

"If what Sadi said outside the courthouse holds true, then he will have four mates and wives. And while Sadi will always have a piece of him that the others will not because she is his *Anome*, he will love them all just as intensely." Walter spoke.

"I don't follow Holy One." Daba said.

Walter looked at her. "If the reports we have seen are accurate and knowing Andro as I do, I tend to believe they are, he has found three of them already."

"Yes. And?"

Walter smiled. "If the fourth was on Earth he would have found her by now."

Daba's eyes grew a little wider at this information. "Holy One! Do you... do you know what this would mean to the Drow?" She gasped.

"If this is true you can not use it as a tool Daba." Walter spoke. "Andro would not allow it and from what I have seen of Lu'ria nor would she."

Daba shook her head and reached for the data pad in her side pouch. "No! No!" She exclaimed. "I have been reading the ancient texts Holy One. I do this in times of restfulness."

"Ok." Walter spoke.

"It is in the texts Holy One!" Daba exclaimed once more becoming even more excited.

"What is?"

Daba activated the pad and began scrolling through the pages hurriedly until she found the passage she wanted. She highlighted it and held it out to him. "It is one of the first passages written shortly after the Great Sky Fire Holy One. One of the passages in the *Yara Parma*. The firstborn of many, the son of *knif'rt kal'daka* eyes and virile manhood. He will have the heart of amber and wrap his hands in white satin. *Yvalm xuil to'ryll euol, uuthli ujuol lu' charnag d' olath solen, whol jal draeval orn nind ssinsrigg.*"

Bound with greenest gems, bluest glass and deepest of dark orbs, for all time will they love. Majeir spoke softly within Mindvoice.

Daba nodded slowly. "Holy One... it is one of the most sacred of our ancient prophecies. It has all but been forgotten except for the older Drow like myself who still read the Ancient Scrolls. You know this! This... this passage, written so long before King Leonidas ever returned to us, it foretells of a Drow who will become bound to the line of Leonidas. She will... she will become the wife of Androcles Leonidas. Glowing wolf eyes Holy One. Not even his father has eyes like Androcles when in wolf form. You know this! And she will... she will become..."

Valsharess d'Ilythiiri. Majeir whispered.

Ceneia looked confused. *Majeir... I'm not familiar with that phase in the ancient vampire language.*

Because it has not been spoken in over four hundred years Ceneia. Majeir answered. *Not since shortly after Walter created the Drow and the High Coven nearly wiped them out.*

"What does it mean?" Ceneia asked.

Daba nodded. "It means that at some point in our future... my daughter... Lu'ria. She will become Queen of the Drow!"

SCIMITAR

Lower Elven Parliament Minister La'sar watched silently from the side of the mess lounge as his daughter Ne'Veha laughed happily at something Princess Sadi had said and the two women leaned into one another and they shared a soft kiss. They had arrived after him in the mess lounge, without Prince Androcles and took a single tray to the table along the wall. He watched as they picked at the food, Sadi choosing the meat while Ne'Veha nibbled on the fruit. La'sar had inquired of his daughter's or the Prince's whereabouts three times in the last nine hours, each time being told flatly and rudely by the *SCIMITAR*'s ranking duty officer that it was none of his damn business. When he demanded to speak with Captain Sa'sur she had promptly responded to him and told him he was now on a military ship under the command of the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union and he did not demand anything. This dismissive response left La'sar fuming and he had not gotten much sleep before coming here to try and make sense of what he would do next. He had attempted to contact his mother on Earth this very morning, but she had been very harsh in her demeanor. Her words to him had been brief and very much to the point.

"I am dead! That is what you have been telling my grandchildren! Why are you talking to me?"

"What lies have you told Ne'Veha?" He had demanded.

Na'rnoas had laughed at him. "Lies?" She asked. "I have told my granddaughter no lies over the last four days!"

"Four days!" La'sar had gasped in disbelief.

“Unlike you La'sar my son... I have given her facts and allowed her to make her own decisions. She is far more intelligent than you give her credit for and she apparently did not see things as you did.” Na'rnoas spoke. “Not surprisingly. She does not strike me as the arrogant type.”

“What have you told her?” La'sar demanded again.

“I'm sorry... I'm dead to you. Isn't that what you told me so long ago? I'm dead to you my son? Excuse me for asking... but if I am dead... who are you talking too?” Na'rnoas asked with a smug smile. “I could recommend an excellent counselor here on Earth if that is what you need sir.”

“You know what I mean!” La'sar had shouted. “If you do not tell me I will...”

His mother had stepped closer to the transmission now, her elven face angry. “You dare contact me and threaten me!” She snarled. “After what you have done all these years? The lies you have told to your own children about me? Well now Ne'Veha knows what lies you have been telling her! And she has grasped onto something she has been meant for since the day she was born. Go ahead La'sar... attempt to separate her from Androcles Leonidas. I will laugh from here on Earth when it is announced on the Netnews how he ground you into raw meat for trying to take one of his mates from him. You thought my husband Jonout was bad La'sar? I dare you to confront Androcles Leonidas and tell him he can not have Ne'Veha now that he has claimed he!”

“Claimed her?” La'sar had gasped.

“You fool! What do you think this is all about? Go ahead La'sar; you will make a bigger fool of yourself than you did the last time!”

“Mother you...”

“No! I am not your mother! No son of mine would act as you have acted through the years!” Na'rnoas spat. “As you dismissed me... now it is I who dismisses you! Goodbye La'sar. Do not contact me again!”

The transmission had been cut off before he could reply to her and it had left him angrier than before he contacted her. Not because of what she had said to him, but with the tone she had delivered it. Now La'sar sat at the table and stared at his daughter from across the large room. He took notice of the two *Durcunusaan* soldiers who stood to either side of the table they sat at, their weapons slung across their backs, but their eyes alert and watchful. He watched as two other female elven pilots came up to the table and sat down with their trays and Ne'Veha then introduced them to Sadi.

“He calls her *SirsanGai* you know.” The female voice spoke and La'sar turned to see two female pilots settling to the table he was sitting at.

“Excuse me?” He asked.

The dark haired elven pilot tossed her head at the table where Ne'Veha sat. “Ne'Veha... he calls her *SirsanGai*. The ground crew in the landing bay heard him call her that.”

La'sar shook his head. “What does that mean?” He asked.

They looked at him with surprised expressions. “You don't know the Ancient Lycavorian language?” The second pilot asked.

La'sar sighed with disgust. “No... it never interested me.”

“*SirsanGai* means Elven Heart in the Ancient Language of the Wolves.” The first pilot said. “Ne'Veha is so lucky. Do you know how many elven females would give their right arm to have Prince Androcles wrapped around them?”

“It is not something I think about obviously.” La'sar snapped. “Perhaps as pilots who defend this Union, you should think of defending the Union more!”

The elven female's face twisted into a mask of surprise and angry. “*Nubou forn Ementon La'sar!*” She hissed at him before snatching her tray up and she and her friend left the table.

La'sar looked around quickly and saw several other Lycavorians and Elves at other tables softly smiling to themselves. The Algolian officer was the one who leaned over with a grin on his reptilian face, showing is sharp fangs.

“She said fuck you Minister La'sar!” He spoke as the others at his table began to chuckle openly. “Just in case you are wondering.”

La'sar's eyes went wide at this and he came to his feet in indignation. He turned to head for the door but stopped when he saw Androcles Leonidas enter the mess lounge reading from a data pad and holding a mug of coffee. He watched as the young prince weaved his way through the throngs of men and women, greeting some, nodding to others even as he read from the pad and moved directly to the table where Sadi and Ne'Veha sat. He moved behind them as Sadi shifted seats opening a spot between her and Ne'Veha.

Andro leaned over and nuzzled Sadi's cheek and neck and they shared a nibbling kiss and then he turned to Ne'Veha, running his nose along the ridge of her elven ear and seeing her sigh in delight. Their kiss was softer as he settled into the seat between them.

"We leave in an hour." He told them as he sniffed the plate of food that had been in front of Sadi. "My brothers and sisters will meet with us at SODRAG in ninety minutes."

Ne'Veha looked at him surprised. "I'm coming with you?" She asked.

Andro looked at her as he picked up a piece of meat. "Why wouldn't you?" He said. "You are not flying today... I checked the flight schedule. You... you are my mate Ne'Veha. Our mate. Where we go... you go if your duties do not interfere." He smiled. "I also spoke with your grandmother this morning. We will have a proper elven ceremony as soon as the situation with the Coven riders is over." He saw Ne'Veha's eyes grow bright with adoration at this.

Sadi laughed softly and leaned against his shoulder. "*SirsanGai* did not think we would have a ceremony Andro my love. I tried to tell her we would not allow that to happen." She said.

Andro's face showed his surprise. "And risk the wrath of my two elven mothers?" He gasped. "I am many things Ne'Veha my *SirsanGai*. Insane is not one of them. Even I would not risk their anger to me if I did not marry you in a traditional elven ceremony."

Ne'Veha gripped his arm. "It is not necessary Andro." She said though her mind and heart were flying in the clouds at this news.

"I disagree." Andro stated confidently. "And so does your grandmother. She is quite the character your grandmother." He said with a smile. "She told me that she would unleash the hounds of hell upon me if I did not love you with all that I was."

Ne'Veha's eyes grew wider. "She said that?"

Andro chuckled and nodded. "Quite forcefully I might add." He said. He leaned over and kissed her tenderly. "We will have the ceremony you dreamed of *SirsanGai*. All of us will. I promise you."

Sadi leaned across in front of him and smiled at her. "I told you *SirsanGai*." She said softly.

Ne'Veha looked at her friends with a shy smile as they laughed at Sadi's antics. "Andro this is Ra'Neeria and..."

"Prince Androcles!" The male voice spoke loudly from behind Ne'Veha's friends and her eyes went wide when she saw her father.

Andro looked up from his chair at the man and though he knew who he was he leaned back in his chair. "And you are?" He asked as he lifted his mug to his lips to take a sip.

Ne'Veha opened her mouth and began to get to her feet when Sadi's musical voice burst into her head. *No SirsanGai!* She spoke quickly looking at her. *Let Andro handle this.*

Sadi... he does not know my father! He is...

Do you love us SirsanGai? Sadi asked with bright eyes.

That is a question you never have to ask me! Ever! She declared.

Then let your new husband and mate take care of your father. Sadi told her.

La'sar watched Ne'Veha settle back into her chair and he glanced quickly at Princess Sadi Leonidas as she too sat back. Could Ne'Veha have been talking to her within Mindvoice? That wasn't possible since Ne'Veha did not have that skill. He dismissed those thoughts and looked at Andro.

"I am Minister La'sar of the Lower Elven Parliament." He announced. "And I have come here to demand you rescind your claim to my daughter Ne'Veha as your mate before it goes any further!"

La'sar was suddenly aware that the mess lounge had become deathly quiet. The random conversation that had been going on seconds before had stopped immediately and all eyes had turned towards him. He looked around slowly and saw looks of astonishment, of anger and of pity. The two *Durcumusaan* soldiers at the ends of the table began to move toward him but stopped instantly when Andro's hand came up La'sar saw.

Even Andro was shocked at La'sar's brazenness and complete lack of tact and respect for his daughter and he got to his feet slowly, his anger at the obvious insult to his beautiful elven wife by her own father making his wolf blood simmer.

Andro looked at the man, his azure eyes narrow and not at all friendly. Something that anyone who knew Andro would have noticed right away. "I'm afraid I can't do that." Andro said coolly. "Actually... I won't do that. Ever! It is already done. I claimed her last night Minister!"

La'sar's eyes were wide at this and he looked at Ne'Veha. "Is this true?" He gasped.

Ne'Veha sat back in her chair and folded her arms under her firm breasts as she glared at her father. "Yes." She answered simply. "And it was... it was gloriously divine!"

Sadi chortled softly. "Divine doesn't even begin to describe it." She said wistfully.

"Ne'Veha how could you do this?" La'sar demanded.

"I am very capable of making my own decisions father!" Ne'Veha snapped. "I will no longer allow your views to be mine. I love Andro with all that I am. I love Sadi and Carisia and when we find Lu'ria I will love her as well. This is the path I am meant to walk and I intend to walk it, regardless of how it affects you!"

La'sar glared at her for a few seconds and then turned back to Andro. "I demand that you dissolve this claim!" He spat. "Release her from this claim you have made!"

"By the gods father!" Ne'Veha gasped appalled as she came to her feet. "How could you?"

La'sar didn't understand why Sadi and every Lycavorian female within hearing range gasped horrified. Nor did he understand why every Lycavorian male who had heard him suddenly began to rise to their feet. La'sar staggered back even as Andro climbed over the table in three strides, his face a mask of real rage now. His azure blue eyes were ablaze, his dual wolf fangs exploding from his gums and he stepped right up to La'sar with a snarl.

"If not for the fact that I love your daughter Minister La'sar, I would gut you where you stand for what you have just asked me." Andro hissed vehemently. "I have claimed Ne'Veha! She is your daughter Minister but she is my *SirsanGai*! She has moved beyond your false hatred of my species! She has seen where her path takes her and we bless the day she came into our lives, for it was meant to be long before we were even born! I will love her shamelessly as I love my other mates! We will love her... just as she loves us!"

"Milord!" The *Durcunusaan* troop spoke softly stepping forward from the side.

La'sar had never been more frightened in his life than he was at this time. No matter what he felt towards Lycavorians he was smart enough to know he stood on the edge of the dark abyss right now. He watched Andro take a deep breath and close his eyes before opening them again. The wolf eyes and dual fangs remained, but the anger appeared to have vanished in that instant.

Andro turned to the *Durcunusaan* soldier and shook his head before turning back to La'sar. "You have dishonored me and your daughter with your words this day. Be mindful of where you tread in the future Minister for you will not be welcome among my people and you will see just how spiteful we can be. There is a transport leaving for Earth in two hours Minister La'sar, I suggest you be on it. After that it is my recommendation you return to Elear as quickly as you can carry your ass! You are no longer welcome on my ship! Or in Sparta!"

"Are you threatening me Prince Androcles?" La'sar asked stupidly.

Andro shook his head. "Oh no. Not at all." He said. "However... even I can not keep what you have done today from reaching the elven ears of my mothers, or did you forget they are now wolf as well? It is not me you need to worry about anymore." Andro looked at the *Durcunusaan* soldier. "Delcano... escort Minister La'sar to his quarters to collect his things and then to the landing bay. Make sure he is on that transport."

The *Durcunusaan* soldier nodded. "As you order Milord." He spoke stepping up to La'sar.

Ne'Veha had moved around the table, holding tightly to Sadi's hand as Andro turned without further word and headed out of the mess lounge. They stopped in front of him and Ne'Veha let her father have it. The slap carried more power than La'sar had expected and he staggered under the assault.

"You... you bastard!" Ne'Veha barked. "You just couldn't let me be happy could you? Don't try to contact me father. And I will contact mother and tell her what has happened here today. You can't hide what you have done! Too many people have heard and seen it! We'll see just how much my brothers and sisters will think of you when they learn the truth as well!"

Ne'Veha spun on her heels and followed Andro out of the mess lounge. La'sar's eyes shifted to Sadi whose jungle green eyes bore into him. "You truly have no idea what you have done do you?" She asked softly.

"Apparently not!" La'sar snapped.

Sadi shook her head sadly. "Your arrogance will be your undoing sir." She said sadly. "Demanding a Lycavorian to rescind the claim to a female he has taken as his mate and wife, a woman who has happily consented to such a union, it is tantamount to telling him he is not worthy of your daughter's love. It is telling him she is not capable of making her own decisions which is another insult in and of itself. To your daughter and the wolf that claimed her. And it tells him you hold no respect for him as a man." Sadi shook her head once more. "Telling any Lycavorian that is ridiculous, though there are some bad apples out there. But telling Androcles Leonidas that you don't respect him as a man? That he is not worthy of Ne'Veha's love? That speaks of a greater ignorance than is found even among Empress Aikiro herself. Andro will not soon forget your words Minister. Nor will his father or mothers when they find out. And trust me... they will find out. You have succeeded in disrespecting the extended Leonidas family Minister La'sar. I commend you. Not many people would want to do that, even by accident considering how many of them there are." Sadi took a deep breath. "I can see everything I have told you does not matter. You will do as you will. Good day Minister. I hope you are happy for you have lost a daughter this day. And a part in the future she so covets."

Sadi spun around without another word and followed Andro and Ne'Veha. Delcano reached out and took his arm tightly. "This way Minister. I don't want anything to happen to you until you are off the *SCIMITAR* and no longer our responsibility."

La'sar allowed the *Durcunusaan* soldier to pull him along even as his eyes remained on the door Ne'Veha had exited. Whatever he had accomplished here, La'sar suddenly did not think it was for the best anymore.

IRARUZU

Vlonjra looked at Lu'ria as she came into the large store that acted as their cover her on Iraruzu. She had watched Lu'ria for the last five months, ever since she had arrived here as part of her first assignment with the Krypteria. She had never seen the look on her face that she did now and very casually Vlonjra's Drow combat senses began coming to full alert. She let her eyes sweep across the interior of their store, nearly two dozen patrons inside already and they had been open for only an hour. She adjusted some things on the counter she stood in front of before nonchalantly crossing the short distance to the counter where Lu'ria was helping Jennifer to set up their products. She looked directly at Lu'ria as she turned with a large rack of mineral ointments and made it seem as if she was helping her to situate the rack on the counter.

"Lu'ria?" She asked. "What do you sense girl?"

Lu'ria made no show that Vlonjra was talking with her and bent over to gather another smaller rack and set it on the counter. Then she and Vlonjra began fastening the two racks together.

"The weekly report was passed on by your husband Matron Mother." She spoke in barely a whisper.

"That does not tell me why your senses are so alert and why you are bouncing on the balls of your feet girl." Vlonjra said.

"I tried to contact my mother as you suggested Matron." Lu'ria said. "Our transmission was cut off before we were able to finish."

"Cut off how?" Vlonjra asked.

Lu'ria met her eyes. "A massive Deutrino surge Matron Mother. It burned out both our receivers as well as the long range transmitter."

Vlonjra blinked slowly. "A Deutrino surge." She whispered. "That is not possible. It would take an explosion from the mining facility on the moon to produce such an event. And if that was the case, rescue and work crews would even now be tearing from the surface to respond. Not shopping in our store or drinking in the tavern."

Lu'ria nodded. "That is what your husband said as well Matron." She said. "On the way here Matron... I felt... I felt odd."

Vlonjra no longer cared what it looked like and she stopped fussing with the rack to look at Lu'ria. The young woman before her had shown more skill and ability than any Drow she had seen in decades. Vlonjra had not lied to Daba about that. Lu'ria had the skills of a Drow warrior three times her age. Skills and strength and speed she should not have had at such a young age. There was something very different about her.

“What did you feel Lu'ria?” She asked slowly.

“Matron Mother... I felt as if I was being watched.” Lu'ria answered.

Vlonjra's amber eyes narrowed as she stared at Lu'ria intently. “Lu'ria child... return to the estate now!” She hissed quietly.

“Matron Mother why?” Lu'ria asked. “What...”

The commotion by the front entrance drew their attention and they turned to see the same Kavalian soldier that had come into the store weeks ago and made a nuisance of himself trying to entice Lu'ria to be his pet.

It happened in slow motion from there and Lu'ria would never forget the murderous look in his eyes as he stepped right up to Matron Mother Vlonjra as she began speaking in that stern threatening voice.

“You were told you were not welcome in here unless...” Vlonjra began to say even as the Kavalian began to lift his arm.

“Matron... no!” Lu'ria screamed as she began her leap over the counter.

Drow though she may have been Vlonjra turned suddenly at the tone of Lu'ria's voice and saw her leaping over the top of the chest high counter with the ease of a leopard. Vlonjra heard the unmistakable click of a weapon cocking and her head snapped back around her amber eyes going wide as she saw the incredibly large dark hole staring at her. She was vaguely aware of five other Kavalians running into her store, their assault weapons already up and coming to a firing position.

“Time to die Drow whore!” The Kavalian snarled viciously and pulled the trigger.

The sound was like a crack of thunder within the confines of the store and Vlonjra's head erupted into a fine mist of blood, bone and brain matter, splattering Lu'ria across much of her face and chest as she landed on the floor too late.

Then the gates of Hades opened and the slaughter began.

BONTAWILLIAN KJU21 CIVILIAN CORVETTE FOUR HOURS FROM IRARUZU

Walter came up into the cockpit holding the mug of coffee in his hand and looked at the back of Ceneia's head.

“Ok... tell me why you interrupted my nap?” He stated with a false stern voice. “You know how I need my beauty sleep.” Ceneia turned to look at him and Walter immediately saw that something was wrong. “Ceneia?”

“You'd better look at this Walter.” She said.

Walter moved up next to her pilot's seat and looked down at the medium sized sensor screen between her seat and the co-pilot's seat. “Look at what?”

Ceneia adjusted the screen and touched her finger to the screen over the top of the planet. “This is Iraruzu.” She said. “We came into sensor range of it thirty minutes ago.”

“Ok.” Walter spoke. “How did you manage to do that?”

“I liberated some portable V Nine sensor pods and wired them into the grid on this ship.” She replied. “It expanded our range by half a light year.”

“So what are we looking at?” He asked as he settled his eyes on the sensor screen. The planet appeared like any other planet he had seen in the last twenty-five years, but as he looked closer he saw the dark gray area over one portion of the western continent. He tapped it with his finger. “What's this? This isn't normal is it?”

Ceneia shook her head. “No. That is why I had you come up here without Daba.”

Walter looked at her his eyes narrowing. Ceneia had been his pilot for going on thirteen years now and he knew when she was troubled by something. “Talk.” He said simply.

“It's a Deutrino cloud Walter.” She said.

“You said that before. The Deutrino was interfering with our transmissions.” Walter said.

Ceneia nodded. “And they are. Except this cloud is not natural.” She told him. “I ran two different types of spatial scans. Each one came back identical to the other. The figures weren’t off by more than point two. It’s a jammer Walter. A Deutrino jammer and it’s centered over the Drow estate.”

Walter’s eyes grew wider. “You are sure?” He asked.

Ceneia nodded. “Positive. Someone has set up a very powerful and uniform jammer over the Drow estate. And that could only mean one thing.”

Walter nodded. “Indeed!” He said softly. “Sibfla... and I wanted...”

LU’RIA!!!!

The scream within Mindvoice deafened both Walter and Ceneia and caused quite a bit of pain to Daba who suddenly collapsed out of the chair she was sitting in talking to Hval in the small lounge.

Walter shook his head quickly to chase the fog out. *Majeir! Majeir you are hurting us!* He roared out in Mindvoice. *What is wrong? Majeir what is wrong?*

Lu’ria! Oh Walter... she is in such pain! So frightened! Majeir bellowed from the cargo hold she was in. *We must go to her now! NOW!*

Walter looked at Ceneia. “Deutrino fields don’t block Mindvoice!” He barked. “How far away are we?”

“Three hours forty-seven minutes!” Ceneia answered immediately.

“Can’t this *nubous* bucket go any faster?” He snarled.

“How safe do you want to stay?” Ceneia popped.

“*Nubou* safe Ceneia! Lu’ria is in trouble! Something is happening and we need to find out what it is!” Walter said. “Can you contact Armetus?”

Ceneia’s hands were flying across her consoles and she shook her head. “I’m going to pull power from all the systems and that means shutting down COMs!”

“Do it!” Walter snapped. “We’ll contact them when we get there!” He turned and headed out of the cockpit. *Daba! Daba... meet me in the cargo bay!*

Holy One! By the gods Holy One what was that? My head... it felt...

Majeir has sensed something very wrong. Walter replied. *Meet me in the cargo bay now! It has to do with Lu’ria!*

SODRAG

“...can’t be serious Andro?” Eliani gasped as Andro moved into his office on the base, Sadi and Ne’Veha beside him. “Father wouldn’t do something like this!”

Andro turned and looked at her. She stood between Malic and Nyla and looked every bit like their mother. “Well he has.” He spoke.

“It’s true Eliani.” Arrarn said from his seat on the couch, Narice and Toria sitting on either side of him. They watched as Carisia greeted Ne’Veha with a blistering kiss of incredible passion and love and they smiled.

“I don’t believe it!” Carina exclaimed.

Andro leaned up against his desk. “Do you think I’m making this up? Elynth was there as well. Something is affecting our father and Torma. It’s making them act as they would not normally act.”

“Something?” Lisisa asked from where she stood next to Deni. “What do you mean by that Andro?”

Andro shook his head. “I don’t know Lisi. I’ve never experienced anything like it before. It was like a black mist surrounding them. Enveloping them. It seemed to amplify father’s own distrust and anger towards the Coven in general and Yuri and Aikiro especially. He was not happy in the least about the wives that Arrarn and I have chosen.”

Nor was my father pleased that Anthar and I have mated. Elynth’s voice echoed within Mindvoice so that all of them heard her easily. *He demanded that I denounce our union and he agreed that the Coven dragons were to be taken from their riders.*

“Wait? Taken from their riders?” Deni asked. “He can’t do that! Not now! He has to know what we have taught them. How deeply they have come together with their Bonded Ones!”

Andro nodded. “He doesn’t care.” He said softly.

“He said that?” Lisi gasped.

“Yes.” Andro looked around the office. “Where is Zarah?”

“Andro... taking the Coven Riders from their Bonded Ones now would do irreparable harm to both of them.” Nyla spoke.

“It would... it would damage their psyche beyond repair.” Eliani said. “We have seen this in the past Andro! Why would he order something like that? He has to know what it would do!”

“As I said... he doesn’t care.” Andro told them. “I have made a decision... but I can not ask any of you to follow me in that decision. This is something you have to decide for each and every one of you.”

Moneus got to his feet. “You’re taking them off Earth aren’t you?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. Where is Zarah?” He asked again.

“We’re leaving by the end of the day!” Arrarn spoke now. “The Type II’s are already on the airfield ostensibly for training missions.”

“We?” Malic asked.

Arrarn nodded. “Andro, Carisia, Narice, Toria and the Coven Riders and dragons.” He told them. “I may not be bonded to a dragon, but Narice is, and I know first hand what this could do to them if we let father do it. And I have no intention of giving up the two women I have taken as my wives.”

“Nor will I give up Carisia.” Andro said as he felt something sweep across the edges of his mind. It was a tremor of some sort... just on the peripheral of his ability to sense things. He lifted his head slightly even as he felt Elynth doing the same thing for she sensed it too.

“Until we can determine what is wrong with father we need to leave.” Arrarn continued.

“Leave to go where?” Eliani asked. “There’s no place within the Union we can go that father can not reach us.”

“We’re not remaining in the Union.” Arrarn stated.

“Then where will we go?” Deni asked. “I trust you brother... I believe you. We have all seen how father has been different since the Coven came here... and we know...” Deni saw Andro looking confused and he stopped. “Andro?”

Sadi turned to look at him now and she reached out within Mindvoice to him, trying to see what he was concentrating on. “Andro my love?” She asked softly. “What is it?”

Andro shook his head. “I... I don’t know. Something... something on the edges of Mindvoice. Very distant... but strong enough for me to detect it.” He turned.

I feel it too. Elynth spoke. *A... a warning of some sort.*

“Warning?” Malic asked. “A warning about what?”

Andro turned to face them again his face taking on a pale look, which is something none of them had ever seen. Eliani stepped towards him.

“Andro... what’s wrong?” She asked reaching for his arm.

“Andro?” Sadi asked stepping closer.

Andro looked up now... his azure eyes wide. “Where... where is Zarah?” He gasped. “Where is Zarah?”

“I... I don’t know.” Eliani answered. “She knew about the meeting. She was in the city when I mindvoiced her. She was shopping.”

Andro felt the pain begin in his gut. It wasn't a physical pain... almost a projected image of pain. He reached down to grab the edge of his desk just as a muted explosion of some sort rocked the building. Andro dropped to one knee his face grimacing in pain as Deni and Malic dashed to the windows.

Sadi grabbed Andro’s shoulders, trying to support him from one side as Carisia clutched his other side. “My love!” Carisia stammered. “Andro what... what is wrong?”

Andro shook his head back and forth. “Pa...pain!” He gasped.

“Smoke coming from the Coven barracks!” Deni announced as he went to the wall monitor slamming his hand down on the panel. “Duty Officer what is going on?” He barked.

“We... we are responding now Prince Denali!” The voice echoed. “An explosion of some sort we think!”

“You think?” Deni growled.

“Milord... we are getting reports it came from one of the Coven bungalows!” The voice shouted. It was easy enough to recognize the man was running. “It appears... Milord... the Coven Riders are saying it was...”

“It was what?” Deni shouted.

“Milord... they are saying it was a Mindvoice explosion!” The man replied. “One of the bungalows has collapsed. They heard a scream of terror and then the explosion! I am three minutes from there myself sire! Stand by!”

Deni turned back to look at Andro. “I’ll go with...” He stopped talking when he saw Andro’s face. “Andro?”

His brothers and sisters turned to look at him and even the women he loved stepped back. Androcles Leonidas’s face was twisted into a visage of pure, unadulterated rage. His Mindvoice shield shimmered to life as he slowly got to his feet.

“Zarah!” He gasped. “Zarah! Zarah!”

“Andro... what about... what about Zarah?” Sadi asked stepping forward cautiously.

His azure blue eyes went wide and his lips parted just as his wolf fangs burst from his gums and Andro let out a howl of agony that caused them to cringe as it shook the very walls of the room, and smashed at their Mindvoice shields unlike anything any of them had ever experienced.

ANDRO!!!!

Zarah’s voice within Mindvoice staggered all of them with the power of that one word and they bent over double or dropped to their knees.

All except Androcles. Andro turned towards the wall of his office, lifted his hands and two psyche diamonds formed at his fingertips. Seconds later they were hurtling at the wall, and an entire ten foot section of the steel and concrete simply blasted away from the building as if it was papier-mâché. All of them glanced up holding their heads in discomfort, only to see a dragon lifting off far in the distance across the base and heading for the city, while Elynth landed directly outside the now nonexistent wall. Fragments of the stone and steel ricocheted off her active psyche shield even as Andro didn’t pause and leaped from the side of the building onto her back.

As Elynth took to the sky without pause all of them felt it then. They felt it from not only their brother’s mind, but the intensity of the emotion caused them to feel it from one other person’s mind as well. Never had they felt such raw emotion from their brother, let alone anyone else, yet as they watched Elynth climb into the sky above faster than she had ever moved before they felt it now. The vitriol of the emotion was nearly overwhelming and it was something they were unaccustomed to.

The emotion they felt from these two minds was shocking. It was unrefined, focused and immeasurable... Hatred.

“*Sibfla!*” Deni screamed shaking his head, trying to clear it. “Follow him!”

Two powerful minds were on a collision course to one point on the surface of Earth. Both of them with the same intent burning openly within Mindvoice. It could be felt almost planet wide by anyone who was a Tier Five Mindvoicer or higher. These two minds would collide over the peaceful elven city; they would collide and lay waste to all beneath them and it would never be the same again.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

PILLAR OF FAITH

KAVALIAN SPACE

ELEVEN HOURS FROM RITAAH

Athani Leonidas stirred on the large bed in hers and Resumar’s quarters and rolled over slowly, the thin sheet over her naked form pulling away to expose her breasts but still remain over her hips and legs. Athani never slept with clothes now, she loved the feel of Resumar’s hard body against her own too much to deny herself that simple pleasure, and it was something her handsome elf/wolf husband adored. Her tail twitched gently under the sheet as her hand reached for Resumar but found empty sheets and she lifted her head, her feline like eyes finding Resumar sitting in the chair across from the bed seemingly staring off into space. She lifted her upper body slightly, her golden blond hair falling around her shoulders and stared at his back and shoulders for a moment.

The crew of the *PILLAR OF FAITH*, once it was discovered that Resumar and she were married, had worked feverishly for four days knocking down bulkhead walls and enlarging the quarters that Resumar and she would occupy. She was astounded at the room they had provided for them, their quarters separated into three different sections, and very comfortably furnished. She recognized many of their things from the villa in Gytheio that had been brought up while they trained in Asia to make it more welcoming for them. Resumar had wanted her to buy whatever she desired while he helped to train the Coven Riders at SODRAG, but Athani had been much more frugal. She was used to not having very much, and what she had now was far more than she had ever dreamed she would have, and it would be a waste to simply buy things because she could. The single most important item she had found was the man sitting in the chair across the bedroom. Yes he was younger than her, nearly forty years younger than her, but Athani could not deny the irresistible love that she had for him. She in fact embraced it and everything it had brought her. It did bring her some measure of vengeance as she realized that Pusintin was also Lycavorian and wolf. Yet no matter how often he had taken her against her will, using his Alpha aura against her many of those times, he could never do to her what this half elf and half wolf man could do to her. Resumar Leonidas could make her toes cry out in happiness and delirious passion if he so chose to Athani thought with a smile, and she had felt within Mindvoice just how devoted to her he was. A feeling that Athani returned with ardor.

“Resumar?” She finally called out in barely a whisper as she drew the sheet around her and slid to the end of the bed. He didn’t answer her and Athani pushed off the bed to pad across the cool floor to where he sat. She made a mental note to buy some of those wonderful rugs she saw in the royal villa for their room here to chase away the chill. She came up beside him and reached out to place her hand on his shoulder, caressing the back of his neck and his two inch high elven ears with her fingers while her long tail lifted to trail along his upper thigh as she knew he so loved. “Resumar... my love?”

Resumar turned to look at her then and Athani saw his changed wolf eyes focus on her for an instant and then suddenly disappear. “*Aryschanne?*” He spoke.

“You looked very distant my love. Very distant from here.” Athani spoke softly. “Are you... are you alright?”

Resumar nodded and pulled her onto his knees and upper thighs. Athani smiled as she situated her petite frame in his lap, feeling his wonderful cock press against her smooth pussy through the sheet, but instinctively knowing now was not the time to pursue more pleasurable events. Athani had found that as much as she loved this man and all he had given her, it did not take much for her to surrender to him completely. His cock filled her to overflowing, and he made love to her with a passion and intensity that took her breath away every time. Athani had discovered very quickly in their relationship that Resumar Leonidas did not have to use his wolf aura on her to make her desire him insanely. The knowledge of how he felt about her and how he treated her usually did that all by itself.

“I am fine.” He said as his hands settled on her hips.

Athani lifted her hand and stroked his cheek. “Resumar Leonidas... I am your wife now and I have grown enough within Mindvoice thanks to Deneth and your *Feravomir* to know you were very distant from this room. This ship. What is wrong my love?”

Resumar looked at her blue/green eyes and gripped her firm ass cheeks pulling her even tighter onto his lap and feeling her tail curl around his calf and up along his thigh. “There is something happening on Earth.” He said softly.

Athani’s head tilted slightly. “What do you mean happening?”

Resumar shook his head slowly. “We are too far for me to communicate with anyone there in Mindvoice, not even my father or Andro, and they would be the only two who I could touch anyway. My family... we have always been able to sense when there is something wrong with another in our family. Perhaps not what that is, but that there is something wrong. It is a sense of unease that overtakes us and remains in the back of our minds until it is settled.”

Athani took his face in her hands. “What have you felt Resumar?” She asked.

“I don’t know for sure... but whatever has happened it has Androcles enraged to a point I have not felt from him since Alba Tau.” Resumar answered her. “It was very faint... but if I could sense it over this great a distance then something very bad has...”

“Something has happened to someone in your family?” Athani said immediately. “We could break COM silence and transmit home. We could...”

Resumar shook his head. “No. This mission is too important to risk detection by your people *Aryschanne*.”

“You are my people now Resumar Leonidas my love!” Athani stated with unequivocal pride. “You... Andro... your father... your family. And all who are included in that circle. My life began the day I met you and I have buried my past.”

Resumar smiled as he looked at her with love. “Then it is too important to risk detection by Kavalian forces.” He said. “I’m quite sure there are enough of my family members on Earth to handle it.”

Athani smiled and leaned forward to brush her lips across the front ridge of his elven ear and feeling him shudder in delight. “Better.” She said softly into his ear. “But there is still room for improvement.”

Resumar took a deep breath. “My family is strong. My siblings are strong. If it is something that I need to know then my father or Andro will break COM silence and let me know. We will contact them anyway when we get on the surface and find the MV ship as we planned. Until then we will stick to the plan we have made.”

“So you trust the High Coven to do their part?” Athani asked.

“I trust you. I trust Deneth and Dario and Sorran.” Resumar spoke. “Trusting the High Coven is another matter entirely.”

“This... this Juliana One seems different since we left Resumar.” Athani said. “Almost as if she has discovered something she did not know before.”

Res nodded. “I’ve noticed that too. Dario as well.” He said.

“Your cousin teases me endlessly about my tail you know.” She said with a smile as Dario’s name came up.

Resumar chuckled softly. “It is his way *Aryschanne*. He means nothing derogatory with his comments.”

Athani nodded quickly. “Oh... I know.” She stated with a smile. “I tease him back just as badly I suppose.” She said.

“He has always been like that. He spent quite a bit of time with my mother Anja as he was growing. His father was part of her *Durcunusaan* detail before shifting over to Deia’s. He acts like her in many ways. He tries to use humor and funny quips to keep the mood light no matter what is happening. You notice Sorran has taken after him in a darker sort of way?”

Athani nodded with a smile. “Yes. Well... we will have to find Dario his own Kavalian female that still has her tail so that he may become fascinated with her instead of me. If he is half as good to her as you are to me, then he will sweep her off her feet in moments.”

Resumar laughed. “Yes... that would be interesting. And if she is like you, he will be quite the clown around her.”

“Juliana One troubles you, doesn’t she?” Athani asked.

Resumar shook his head. “Not in the way you might think. There is something different about her since we left, but for some reason I don’t think it involves us. If it does... I don’t believe it is a threat.”

“The others I am not so sure about.” Athani spoke. “The man who replaced the fool you struck despises me even more... he just hides it better.”

“You must remember... these are the High Coven Elite troops.” Res told her. “They have been under the thumb of the High Coven Weapons Masters and those who have hated our kind for hundreds if not thousands of years. They have been brainwashed quite thoroughly.”

“Perhaps they...”

The COM panel interrupted Athani’s statement and she turned her head towards the desk. She went to move but Resumar held her tightly and stood up quickly. Athani laughed and wrapped her legs around his hips and her tail around his waist. Resumar moved to the desk holding her like that and Athani reached down and pressed the panel.

“Yes?” She asked turning back to Resumar and seeing his dark eyes grow alluring and filled with desire.

“Princess Athani... you and Prince Resumar may wish to join me on the bridge.” The voice of the *FAITH’S* Captain came over the COM. “Long range sensor readings have altered somewhat.”

The look of desire vanished quickly from Resumar’s face and he became all business once more. Athani could only inwardly shake her head. These were the men her father and Pusintin wanted to provoke and anger.

Men who could be loving you senseless in one moment and slaughtering their enemies in the next. Not the sort of men you wanted to get on the bad side of she decided.

“Altered how?” He asked now.

“Perhaps you should see for yourself Milord.” The Captain answered. “And I recommend having the High Coven female join us as well.”

“Send for her.” Resumar ordered. “Athani and I will join you shortly.”

“As you order Milord.”

Resumar turned and looked at his wife. “I’m sorry.” He said.

“Don’t be sorry my love. As you have told me before, we will have eternity together.” Athani said with a smile. “Think of what we can do with all that time? Think of the pleasure we will give each other.” She batted her beautiful eyes at him and leaned forward to nibble his lips. “I know I look forward to it.”

Resumar chuckled. “So true.” He said. “So true.”

The Captain of the *PILLAR OF FAITH* turned as the main doors to the bridge slid open and Resumar came in with Athani besides him holding his hand. He was a Lycavorian officer, young by some standards at only six hundred and nineteen years old, but a man that had seen much action during the Evolli War and several border clashes with High Coven forces through the years. When he had been chosen to command the *FAITH*, knowing that it would be the ship of the King’s second oldest son, he knew he had reached the pinnacle of his career and that there was only one place he could go after this. To be chosen to command the warship of a Leonidas was the most honored of positions, and he had every intention of doing his duty to the very best of his ability. It was one of the reasons he had hand picked his entire command crew. He knew what skills Resumar Leonidas had, and Captain Antell would insure that he had the best teachers within the realm of starship combat just as his brother Andro had had. Like his brother however, Resumar had made it very clear to Antell when he first came onboard that he was sorely lacking in command experience when it came to ships. As Andro had done with Sa'sur and his father with Komirri, Resumar stated he was ready to learn and they would command this ship together.

“Antell... what do you have?” Resumar asked as he saw Juliana One enter the bridge from another side entrance, the *Durcunusaan* troop as her escort.

The burly Lycavorian motioned to one of his officers. “Switch it here.” He said as he moved up next to the main star chart as it came alive. He adjusted the controls from the panel until the holo image showed a single planet and dozens of red dots. “The disposition of the Kavalian forces has changed in the last several days it appears.” He spoke. “They have moved from orbiting Uirmeik into this portion of space that borders U’zolot Consortium space.” He motioned with his finger. “It is essentially Wild Space that the Consortium no longer deems of value.”

“Because they have mined it for everything within it.” Resumar said in disgust.

Antell nodded. “Yes. They are extending further out from their opposite border with the Union since your father refused them access to Union space and the mineral rich planets along the border.”

Juliana looked at Resumar. “The Union forfeited a windfall profit when your father did that.” She said. “The Empress... she called him a fool.”

Resumar nodded. “Yes we did... but the Consortium is not known for being kind to the planets they mine. Or the indigenous life that occupies a world. They are scavengers... nothing more. They sell whatever they can mine from these worlds and they don’t care who or what it hurts.” He answered tersely.

“I did not say I agree with the Empress’s assessment of your father’s actions Resumar Leonidas.” Juliana spoke quickly. “I was only stating what she said.”

Resumar looked at her then. “Then forgive the terseness of my reply.” He spoke. “Antell?”

“They have only left a few ships around Uirmeik. The rest have moved to this new area.” Antell told him. “They are staging for something.”

Resumar looked at him. “Staging for what?” He asked. “They can’t possibly think they can invade Union space from these sectors. They would not be able to put enough ships or troops across the border before we responded.”

“Upwards of three thousand warships and eight million ground troops Milord.” Antell spoke. “That is enough to obtain a foothold.”

“Athani?” Resumar asked looking at his wife.

Athani shook his head. “I was not privy to many of the plans my father and your uncle had Resumar.” She said. She motioned to the star chart. “This is not something I have ever seen reference to. They are oriented towards Limian space Antell, could this be their target?”

Antell shrugged. “It’s possible.” He said. “They have had dealings with the Limians in the past, but since Queen Isabella told the Limians to stop smuggling weapons across Union space to High Coven insurgents or risk losing their trade agreements with us, they have been much more agreeable.”

“Could they be poised to invade Limian space as a means of retribution for their past actions?” Juliana asked now.

“As I said... anything is possible.” He spoke. “But they would have to know the Limians would scream to us for help and more than likely we would help.”

Resumar nodded. “My father does not want any larger a border with them than we have now.” He stated. “What does this do to our approach?”

Antell smiled. “That is the good news.” He stated adjusting the chart once more. “We thought we would have to pick our way through the lines of Kavalian ships to reach Ritaah. That is no longer the case.”

Juliana leaned closer. “We have an open corridor.” She spoke looking at the chart.

Antell nodded. “Indeed. A very large corridor.”

“This is very good.” She stated. “It allows us to leave in our *STRIKERS* sooner than we had planned and allow the pilots a better approach vector to our landing zones.”

“With more time to factor calculations for gravity variance and better orbital scans of the area around the MV ship... our LZ accuracy will improve dramatically.” Resumar spoke.

“Not to mention give us a more detailed look at the settlements that surround the ship.” Juliana said. “There is no reason to invite their presence if we can avoid them entirely.”

Resumar and Athani both looked at her intently when she said that and it only reinforced what they had already discussed about her. Something had happened to her on that last night in Sparta, something that Resumar felt compelled to ask her about but didn’t.

Resumar looked at Antell. “How soon?” He asked.

“Present speed will bring us to launch range in nine hours and twenty-six minutes.” He replied.

“Then let’s be ready to go.” He said quickly. “Cross deck the new sensor feeds to the *STRIKERS*. I want the crews to see everything we are seeing now. I wish Normya and Zarah were here.”

“Sire?” Antell asked.

“Normya and Zarah... they were my flight crew.” Resumar answered. “I’m going to have to break in a new crew to get this party rolling. Have Dario meet me in the main landing bay by the *STRIKERS* immediately. We have a lot to do with this new information. And Antell... prep an COM probe. The minute we send word that we are down and safe launch the probe back into Union space to begin transmitting one hour after it crosses the border.”

“Yes Milord.” Antell said.

Resumar looked at Juliana. “You want to join me in the bay. We’re going in separate ships, but we need to know what the other does.”

Juliana nodded. “Of course.” She stated instantly.

“Contact us if there are any changes Antell. And keep your eyes open.” Resumar spoke.

“Always Milord.” He said with a smile.

RITAAH

Channa squatted on the large boulder that occupied the small clearing on the northeast side of what they knew to be an enormous ship half buried in the mountain. In actuality, the ship made up most of the mountain itself, for Channa had been braver than the others and explored the entire length and girth of the ship. If she was any judge of size, the ship appeared to reach almost seven kilometers down the valley and was nearly a

kilometer wide. It had grass and trees growing all over the outside so that if you were on the ground and did not know what you were moving across, you would never know you were walking on top of a colossal starship buried under tons of rock and dirt.

Channa's vertically slit feline like green eyes focused on the strange looking man that had remained on guard over this ship as long as any of them could ever remember. Certainly for far longer than they had had their small resistance settlements scattered all around it, using the natural masking properties of whatever the ship was made of to hide their settlements from the random sensor sweeps conducted by the Kavalian ships that came near Ritaah. Channa squatted on this boulder as she had for the last several weeks, sometimes for hours on end as she gazed at the strange man. There were not many alien species that were tolerant enough or brave enough to call the Kavalian Federation home, and those that did were carefully watched by Kavalian Internal Security. Channa knew well what KIS was capable of, for she had been their prisoner for several months, and they did not treat alien species very well in the least. This bi-pedaled humanoid man was almost reptilian in nature, with rounded features and orange tinted skin. He was easily close to seven feet tall, but the material of the uniform they had seen in him every day hid any sort of physical definition he may have had. He moved with an almost mechanical nature to stride, and given how his voice sounded the few times he had warned them to stay back, Channa thought for sure he was some sort of advanced robotic being. He would stare at the sky for several hours at a time, not moving a millimeter from his stance. Channa could detect no rise and fall of his chest to signify breathing, no blinking of the reddish colored eyes, and no twitch of his limbs. Insects did not gather around him, and one night she had even seen a Ritaahian Three-Toed Silver Bear cross within three meters of him. The Three-Toed Silvers were among the most lethal of predators on Ritaah because of their massive power and razor like claws and teeth. Their hides were three times as thick as the next most dangerous predator and would be next to impossible to penetrate with any sort of bladed weapon unless it was wielded by an incredibly powerful individual. The Silver had moved across the small clearing, barely paying the strange man any mind, before continuing on its way into the deep timber.

He never moved far from the entrance to the interior of the ship. The ramp was down now and Channa shifted her eyes to try and peer into the ship, trying to detect anything at all inside. Her vision was much more acute than normal Kavalians, for the biogenic treatments had increased the output of her retinas and her vertically slit feline like eyes had far more light absorbing capability than normal. It was why she was so coveted during their night training and raids on Kavalian outposts. Her eyes allowed them to approach troop placements and trenches while avoiding almost all detection devices and their enemy would not know they were there until they began killing them. Channa canted her head slightly, her black hair spilling over one shoulder as she focused and reached out with her eyes. She sensed the movement behind her but didn't turn as she knew it to be Mican and Na'lia coming to check on her. She felt Mican come up on one side of her, looking up at her on the boulder while Na'lia allowed her eyes to sweep alertly around the small clearing. Channa smiled as she let her eyes drift down to Na'lia. An elf she may have been, but she had been Mican's mate and wife now for just over two years, and he had turned her into a warrior. In turn, Mican and many others were skilled medics, something that until Na'lia and the other elf females had come to be with them, the resistance had not had.

"Anything?" Mican asked softly.

Channa adjusted her position and settled nimbly to her firm ass, sitting on the top of the boulder as she shook her head. "He moves from the control panel to his current position. He stares at the sky for hours and then returns to adjust something on the console. He repeats this action perhaps ten or twelve times a day."

Mican let his eyes move to where the strange man stood thirty meters away. "Is it possible to get inside without him knowing about it Channa? We have never attempted this, perhaps it is time to try."

"We have never attempted it because it would not work." Channa replied. "His position allows him to detect anything moving in front or behind him. We could not get anyone inside without being detected. And we have seen him move trees and rocks around Mican, do we want to test our physical strength against him?"

Na'lia looked at them. "If he has been here as long as you believe husband, why do we want to risk angering him now?"

"If what he said to Channa..." Mican began. "What he has said since that day... if it is accurate, then the Union is coming here. For reasons we do not know. I do not wish to be caught off guard. We could use the systems inside that ship to monitor their approach."

“Mican my husband... we don't even know where to go if we did get inside.” Na'lia said. “Not to mention that none of us would have the first idea how to operate any systems we found inside.”

Mican grinned revealing his sharpened teeth. “I have faith in you my elven wife. Faith in you and the others to discover how it works.”

Na'lia smiled in return. “I have faith in my abilities as well; however I am not an engineer or a pilot. At least not a certified one.”

Mican slung his liberated Kavalian ERS9 Assault Rifle over his shoulder. “Do you think the Union will have people who can operate it?” He asked.

Na'lia turned her head and looked at where the strange man stood gazing at the sky. “I did not follow much of what went on outside the medical field before I came to be with you my husband.” She answered. “We were researchers, doctors and scientists. We did not care for the makings of weapons of war. At least not then.”

“That is not what I asked you Na'lia.” Mican said.

Na'lia's eyes narrowed and she glared at him. “Do not rush me when I am attempting to explain something.” She hissed playfully.

Channa reached down with her hand and slapped Mican in the side of his head gently. “If you anger her... she will deny your attentions fool! Remember the last time you made her angry? You wailed like a baby for a week because she would not allow you into your bed. Must I explain everything to you my adopted brother!”

Mican lifted his clawed hands slightly in a defensive posture. “I meant nothing!” He protested meekly.

Na'lia looked at Channa and they both giggled softly. Na'lia moved up next to her handsome Kavalian husband and leaned against him. “I will never turn away your attentions husband. That was the hardest week of my life as well.” She turned back to look at the strange man. “There was talk of such a ship like this that King Leonidas brought back from Lycavore. It is on Earth somewhere I believe. The advances in technology we gained since this ship came to be within the Union were extensive; propulsion and shielding mainly, but the King's Admiral of Operations... a Benjamin O'Connor... he is said to be a magical wizard when it comes to designing new things. I never saw any of these advances myself, most of the large ones were for the military, but there were many new discoveries made in agricultural areas, pollution control, and new engineering designs to make buildings stronger. Things like these.”

“He did not keep the advances only for the military then?” Mican asked surprised.

Na'lia shook her head. “Oh no. We have talked of him before husband. He is a different sort of leader. He... he genuinely cares for his people. He wants to improve their lives and protect them. No one knows what wonders they discovered for the military purposes, but the new discoveries that improved the lives of so many were well known. There were many, but the most significant in my opinion were the atmospheric processors that were made. Twenty huge machines were placed across the surface of the homeworld of the Yigant people. For thousands of years they had never been able to breath the atmosphere of their planet due to the very acidic nature of the atmosphere caused by an asteroid strike. These processors took eight months to purge the atmosphere and make it breathable. It is events such as this that have endeared King Leonidas and his Queens to the people of the Union. He is nothing like your father or Pusintin or the other Pride Leaders that sit on the Kavalian Council.”

Mican nodded. “Yes I know.” He spoke with disgust in his voice. “Something I hope to remedy one day.” He stated. “We should...”

-I require your assistance.-

The strange alien man had moved up on them without sound, causing Na'lia to screech out in surprise, Channa to almost fall off the boulder, and Mican to reach for his ERS9.

“By the gods!” Na'lia gasped as she held out one hand to steady herself on Mican's side even as he brought the weapon up.

“Mican, wait!” Channa exclaimed as she caught her balance and dropped to the ground in front of the large alien.

“I did not see it move!” Mican hissed. “How did it move so quickly?”

“Nor I!” Na'lia spoke.

Channa held out her hand, placing her fingers on the barrel of his assault rifle. "If... if it wanted to hurt us do you not think it would have done so by now? After so many years of us being here? Of us being around it?" She asked calmly.

"Channa you... you don't know what it is!" Mican hissed out. "What it will do!"

Channa turned her head back quickly to look into those near glowing red eyes. "You... you are talking to us." She spoke quickly. "You have... you have never spoken to us except to warn us away. To keep us from going inside. Why are you...?"

The red eyes focused on her, towering over even her own five foot nine height and Mican's six foot one.
-I require your assistance- It said again.

"Assistance for what?" Channa asked. "Who are you? What are you?"

"Channa!" Na'lia gasped in shock.

Channa turned to look at her. "We have always wondered this Na'lia! Now is our chance to find out!"

"Not at risk to us!" Mican declared as his hands tightened on the ESR9.

"Why do you require our assistance?" Channa asked once more. "Tell us what you are! Why do you need our help?"

-I am a completely autonomous Avatar of the Elder Pralors. I am Avatar for this ship. VORTEX Cruiser 341-

Na'lia's eyes grew a little wider. "It's voice!" She spoke quickly. "It has changed."

-I have a Phased Quantum Neuraltronic Processor Network. It allows me to learn at accelerated levels. I have done intensive scans of your biological bodies and noted the inflection and tones of your voices as well as your brain patterns for the last twenty-six of your years. Since you first established settlements on this world. This Processor Network allows me to communicate more completely-

Na'lia stepped up to Channa now, equally entranced by this alien lifeform. "You... you are a robot then? A machine." She asked.

-The closest term that you would comprehend is cybernetic lifeform. Living organic tissue over my Psilosynine Alloy armored exoskeleton-

"How... how long have you been here?" Na'lia asked softly.

-Ten thousand seven hundred years, eight months, fourteen days, seven hours and six minutes as you measure the passing of time-

"Ten... ten thousand years!" Channa gasped incredulous. "How... how did you get here? What have you been doing?"

-Watching. Waiting. That is why I now require your assistance-

"Assistance with what?" Mican asked firmly. "Why should we trust you?"

-Trust. Processing. Trust... assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something- The red eyes focused on Mican. -Avatar 341 has increased the overall efficiency of your crude masking nodes by two hundred and nine percent over the last five year period-

Na'lia's eyes grew wide. "You've... you've been protecting the settlements!" She spoke.

-Insuring the efficiency of your masking nodes also insured that this planet remained free of unwelcome trespassers who would otherwise attempt to take control of VORTEX Cruiser 341- The Avatar spoke. -It was determined from intercepted transmissions within range of VORTEX 341's receiver node units that your group was not a threat to VORTEX 341. Only to subculture known as Kavalian-

Mican moved closer now. "Receiver node units? You mean like transmitters?"

-In a crude sense that is an accurate description. I deployed nine of them within this system before landing VORTEX 341 on the surface-

"Was... was your ship damaged in some way that you had to land?" Channa asked.

-Negative. I was following established mission parameters-

"Mission parameters?" Mican asked. "What does that mean?"

The Avatar met Mican's gaze. **-In the event of loss of communication with established Pralor Command Units, my orders were to set down on viable world and await further orders from Pralor Command or contact by Pralor sub units-**

"Who are these Pralors?" Na'lia asked. "Are they the crew of your ship? Are they dead? Did they survive the landing?"

-VORTEX Cruiser 341 is an automated combat cruiser under Pralor Nonwe's Command. It had no indigenous crew as you know it. There are four replicas of my Avatar in cryogenic holding shells and nine hundred and thirteen Class Nine Repair drones remaining. We have operated the ship in the sense you are asking-

"In all the time we have been here you have... you have never spoken to us as you are now." Channa stated. "Why... why now?"

-Contact with Pralor sub units has been made. I require your assistance to reactivate my power nodes in anticipation of their arrival-

"Wait... there are others like you coming here too?" Mican asked. "There are KFI ships and ground forces all over this area of space!"

-Designation Kavalian subspecies and ninety-five point seven percent of their combined ship and ground forces have moved from this sector of space. Only a small number remain and neither they nor the seven ships with subspecies designation High Coven currently in orbit will not detect the arrival of Pralor Sub unit-

"High Coven ships are in orbit!" Channa gasped.

-They arrived nineteen point three hours ago-

"What... what are they doing?" Channa asked.

-Unknown. Since establishing high polar orbit of this planet they had done only passive scans of the surface. They have made no attempt to deploy forces which is most curious-

“Only seven ships?” Mican spoke softly. “Why only seven ships?”

“You said this Pralor sub unit is coming here.” Na'lia spoke now. “What do you mean?”

-A Direct Descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar. Sensor scans and contacts with Avatar 41 of previously lost City Ship 41 reveal Sub Pralor as fourth generation descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar-

Na'lia looked at Mican. “That’s what they called it Mican.” She said quickly.

“Called what?”

“The ship that King Leonidas brought back from Lycavore. They called it City Ship 41.” She replied. She turned back to the Avatar. “It is a ship like this one isn’t it?”

-City Ship 41 was a seed ship. They were designed for the expressed purpose of seeding dead planets and systems with new life. It is what the Pralors as a species did. City Ship 41 and five others were lost approximately forty thousand years ago. No contact with them was made until six point three hours ago when City Ship 41’s Avatar establish a passive link with me here on the surface-

“Are you saying that the Lycavorians are coming here?” Channa asked.

-The Lycavorian Union designated *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser carrying them is already within the system and only two point three hours from arriving in orbit above us. It is using technology derived from City Ship 41 and therefore will be undetectable by either subspecies Kavalian or subspecies High Coven ships in the area-

“You said the descendant of this Sumar fellow was with them though.” Na'lia said.

-Chief Elder Pralor Sumar was a very respected and influential leader among the Pralor species. And an accomplished warrior-

“I thought you said the Pralors seeded dead worlds with life.” Na'lia commented. “That doesn’t sound like someone who is a warrior.”

-That was their primarily goal yes. Turning into warriors was a necessity and Chief Elder Pralor Sumar was among the finest-

“What turned them into warriors?” Na'lia asked.

“That doesn’t matter now.” Channa interjected. “You said they were coming here.”

-According to data received from Avatar 41, the descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar will be coming to the surface with several subspecies of Lycavorian and Vampiric, one biogenically altered Kavalian female subspecies such as yourselves and four Cretvore Draconius-

“Like us?” Channa asked surprised. “This descendant has Kavalian with him? How is that possible?”

“Cretvore Draconius?” Na'lia asked.

-Your designation is Dragon-

“Dragons?” Mican hissed. “Here?”

-They will be accompanied by subspecies referred to as High Coven, or vampire, as I stated. It is unclear what their mission will be. City Ship Avatar 41 will review this information with me when they arrive with the Sub Pralor-

“Who is this Sub Pralor?” Na'lia asked stepping closer to him. “You make it sound like we should know him somehow.”

-It is unlikely that direct contact with Sub Pralor has ever been achieved; however there are intercepted transmissions over the course of the last decade that indicate you are aware of him. Or the name he carries-

“What... what name does he carry?” Na'lia asked.

-You would know the Sub Pralor by his designation Resumar Leonidas. Second son of King Martin Leonidas who is himself third generation descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar and the closest in abilities to the Chief Elder Pralor-

“Resumar Leonidas is coming here?” Na'lia gasped.

-My information is accurate. That is why I require your assistance-

“Athani!” Mican spoke softly looking at Na'lia. “It has to be Na'lia. The news that she married the son of King Leonidas spread even out here. You know this.”

“Mican my love... she does not know you exist.” Na'lia said. “Your father never told her or Jalersi. Jalersi only discovered it by accident and she has made no attempt to discover you. Please... do not get your hopes up.”

-I require your assistance-

“Our assistance?” Channa asked. “Our assistance for what?”

The Avatar's red eyes focused on her. **-Not them. You-**

“Me?” She gasped.

-The Pralor VORTEX Cruiser 341 is powered by two very advanced Seventh Tier Phased Quantum Resonance Reactors. When I landed this ship as per my default orders, main power was reduced to barely sustainable levels to conserve energy and avoid hostile detection by other forces. I need you to assist me in returning power to normal levels-

Channa shook her head. “I am no engineer!” She exclaimed. “I know nothing about your ship or your Quantum things!”

-The Pralor VORTEX Cruiser is a bio-mechanical ship for the most part. For security purposes, several measures were put in place to insure that only those with the knowledge and skill to use or at least understand the technology could activate the ship's systems-

“But I don't have... I've never been inside!” Channa declared. “I don't know how your... your ship works!”

-In order to activate the power cells once more, an individual with sufficient Etheric abilities must be present to unlock the restraining mechanisms. The Sub Pralor Resumar Leonidas will have such abilities, as will several others among his group, but I have determined that one other on this planet has this ability as well which would allow me to be prepared for when they arrive-

“What is... what is this Etheric Ability?” Na'lia asked as she stepped up to Channa and took her hand.

-The term most commonly used to describe Etheric Abilities among the species of this quadrant is Mindvoice- The avatar answered. –An individual with sufficient Mindvoice abilities must enter VORTEX Cruiser 341 in order to release the restraining locks and activate the power cells once more-

“But... I don't have... I don't have this ability.” Channa stammered.

-Your statement is inaccurate. Using the measuring means established by the subspecies Hadarian known as the Divine One, and the subspecies Lycavorian known as the First Oracle, you would be considered a Tier Five Etheric user. My active systems can scan directly into Lycavorian Union space from this location. I have been monitoring the changes within the Union since the return of King Leonidas-

-Using the same measuring means established by these individuals, I have determined that with your assistance, I can return full power to VORTEX Cruiser 341 before the Sub Pralor arrives with new orders for me. All you need do is enter the ship with me-

“King Leonidas has been in power for over twenty years.” Mican spoke. “Why have you only activated now?”

-Direct contact with them was not initiated until now. My orders were very clear-
Channa looked at the ramp into the interior of the ship her green eyes wide. “In there?” She gasped.

-That would be the appropriate course of action yes. My intent is not harmful. I am an Avatar of the Pralors and unable to harm sentient lifeforms who do not attempt to harm me first. I am only allowed to use non-lethal methods to subdue them-

“She won't go alone!” Mican announced moving forward as well. “We won't let her!”

The Avatar looked at him with those red eyes. **–My intent will do her no harm, but if you wish to accompany her that is allowable. It is likely once the Sub Pralor arrives you will have access to the ship as well-**

“Why do you say that?” Na'lia asked.

-Establishing contact with your settlements is one of the mission goals according to Avatar 41- The near seven foot tall cybernetic avatar stepped to one side and motioned with his arm to the ramp. –We should proceed quickly-

With Na'lia and Channa holding his hand and arm tightly, Mican and Channa took the first steps of what they would later recognize as the beginning of the future of their lives. His future with his beloved elven wife Na'lia, and the future that awaited Channa as soon as she opened the door she was about to walk through.

If only they could survive the horrors his father and Pusintin had planned.

IRARUZU

Walter Carson had made them to be the closest to Spartan warriors as he could possibly come. He did not know where he had the knowledge to do such things, not discovering this knowledge until the return of a Leonidas to the throne, but through the thousands of years of his life he had always managed to put the skills to use. After the Passing of the Comet on Earth and his decision to make a superior and all around more attractive and seductive being, the elves of Earth were born. High Elves and Wood Elves being the main cultures he had

made after ancient Earth lore and fantasy books. The Drow elves he designed to be the elven version of his Spartan heritage. They were no different in strength and speed and reflexes than any other clans of elves he created, they were just far closer to the feral instincts of the wolves Walter knew Spartans to be. Even now, over five hundred years since the first Drow had been created, they persevered. Even the might of the High Coven on Earth could not wipe them out, though they did nearly succeed. The Drow as a culture survived.

They were still closer to the feral nature and instincts of the Lycavorian Spartan, more prone to follow their gut reaction to something, and still very much steeped in the culture of their past. Aihola had been able to change quite a bit since becoming Queen, but even as she renounced some of the more barbaric ways of the Drow, she embraced others. Slavery by the Drow had been abolished within months of Aihola becoming Queen, yet the relationship she shared with Tarifa showed the Drow they could still maintain their 'Mistress' and 'Slave' unions. Walter had made all elves almost irresistible in their attraction by other species. The female elves from Earth were far more open about their sexuality than their brothers and sisters from Elear, though even now that was changing as well. This sense of openness had begun to spread to the humans that remained on Earth, and for the most part they had let go of thousands of years of ridiculous culture and tradition to embrace new ways of doing things and the more open culture of the elves. They were determined to not repeat the mistakes of their past. The Drow were part of that. While the Drow still remained quite a mystery to many who did not live on Earth, it was not uncommon to see Drow females with either human or other female elves as lovers. In many respects Drow women had an affinity to these types of relationships with other females, almost as if it was something Walter had bred into them. These relationships, as with Aihola's and Tarifa's, were born from emotion and desire since there were still many human and elven females who had been victims of sexual abuse during the dark days of the High Coven rule. They were still very shy about males of any species, and it was they who turned to the Drow females for they knew how serious the Drow took their relationships. While 'Mistress' and 'Slave' had become more terms of endearment now, female Drow were still exceptionally possessive of the women that shared their lives.

Only one item ranked higher to the Drow than their relationships, and that was their commitment to their King and the training that they underwent to be the finest fighters they could possibly be. The Drow were trained solely by other Drow, who in turn had been ruthlessly trained and baptized under fire with Lycavorian Spartans. They knew their Queen was considered a beloved sister to King Leonidas, and that had not King Leonidas followed his soul and spared them for their actions they would no longer exist as a culture. It was this act that sealed their loyalty for all time to King Leonidas and the royal family. When they trained the Drow took everything seriously, for they knew because of their skill and the closeness they shared with Lycavorians and their instincts, the King would always call on them first to be his shadow warriors.

It was this training that Lu'ria called upon now.

As her scream of anguish echoed within the walls of the store and she watched Vlonjra's now limp body crumble to the floor, the entire back of her head missing, instinct drove Lu'ria. She heard the fast paced cracking shots of additional Kavalian weapons as they erupted and her wide amber eyes turned to look at the Kavalian male who had brutally gunned down Vlonjra, Matron Mother to the Clan and Family of Tonairo. His face was twisted into a cruel sneer and he was shifting the hand weapon in his grip to aim at her.

"You will be mine now dark elf!" He snarled as he snatched her arm in a viciously hard grip and was bringing the weapon to bear on her neck.

Lu'ria acted with all her elven alacrity and Drow training. The razor thin blade she kept secreted in the fold of her layered pants appeared in her long fingers and with speed born of fear and desperation she drove it up and forward into the Kavalian's disgusting face. As his eyes grew wide in sudden agony, the blade disappeared into his cheek up to the hilt guard and his hand dropped from Lu'ria's arm. She snapped out with a devastating low front side kick that smashed into the thick portion of his leg, staggering him as he dropped the hand weapon and reached for the blade stuck in his cheek with both hands, still screaming in pain. As the force of the blow drove him to his knees, Lu'ria snapped out with a heel strike that punched into where both his hands were trying to pull the thin blade free of his face. Her hand stopped this and with surprising power caused his own hands to drive the blade even further into his cheek. Another front kick connected with the side of his head now, smashing him down to the floor of the store and Lu'ria darted to where Vlonjra's body lay.

“Matron Mother!” She cried as the tears came to her eyes and she looked into the open and completely lifeless eyes of the woman who had helped to guide and instruct her while she was here. A woman she considered a dear aunt of sorts.

Everything appeared to be happening in slow motion now, and Lu'ria's head came up when she heard Jennifer's wail of savage anger fill the room, followed quickly by the sounds of a Lycavorian P190A3 as she let loose with a sustained burst from the deadly weapon from behind the counter.

“Bastards! Bastards! Bastards!” Jennifer was screaming now. She had seen Vlonjra fall, seen three of the four Drow at the other counter be taken by surprise and gunned down before they could respond. They were her friends! The family she had come to love! The fourth Drow was Vlonjra's oldest son Rikmyr, and he was now engaged with the five other Kavalian troops from behind the counter as they took up positions inside the store. Lu'ria's wide amber eyes lifted to where he squatted behind the counter trying to clear a jam and reload while projectile rounds slammed into the armored front of the counter. He sensed her looking at him and his amber eyes came up, his face splattered with copious amounts of blood, his chest and abdomen saturated.

Jennifer was holding back the trigger of the P190, not really even aiming in her rage and fear. Lu'ria looked at Vlonjra's oldest son; saw his amber eyes and the acceptance of his fate in them.

“RUN!” He screamed. **“RUN NOW!”**

Lu'ria watched as he roared in a crazed frenzy and like Jennifer, he held back the trigger on the P190 as he moved around the corner of the counter he was behind. Lu'ria saw one Kavalian go down, the kinetic projectiles from the 190 ripping into his flesh and shredding his internal organs. She saw another go down as his head erupted like an overripe fruit and then Rikmyr took three more rounds in the chest staggering him back, blood blossoming from the projectile strikes!

“RUN LU'RIA! RUN!” He screamed one last time, blood spraying from his lips, his shimmering white Drow locks now drenched in his own blood.

Lu'ria of the Drow, daughter to Matron Mother Daba of the Clan and family Dareitara, sobbed hysterically as she turned and used her elven agility to clear the counter behind in her one graceful leap. As she cleared the counter, one hand caught Jennifer's shoulder pulling the human female back into the small alcove behind the counter with her. They both staggered and fell to the floor, Lu'ria dragging Jennifer to the back of the alcove.

“Lu'ria! What is happening?” Jennifer wailed. “What is going on? The Matron mother is... her head is gone! What is happening?” She screamed insanely as she fumbled with the 190 trying to point it back out to the front of the store.

Lu'ria snapped out with her left hand and slapped Jennifer viciously in the face as she punched in a code into the small panel with the bloody fingers from her right hand. “We must go!” She hissed loudly. “Jennifer... we must go! We have to get back to the estate and warn the others!”

“The others? They...”

Lu'ria leaned forward and grabbed her powerfully by the front of her now bloody shirt. “They are all dead!” Lu'ria screamed. Her amber eyes detected movement just as the hidden door slid back and open. She snapped her head around and saw the Kavalian she had stabbed staggering to his feet and bringing his weapon up to bear on her once more. She noticed oddly that he had removed the blade from his face, blood gushing from his cheek and his eye nearly swollen shut.

“Fucking Drow whore! I'll kill you!” He screamed as Lu'ria pulled Jennifer closer and rolled into the hidden room, slamming her hand on the control panel as she rolled by.

The door came down instantly and Lu'ria heard the thud of several rounds smashing into the bullet resistant steel. She scrambled to her feet quickly, pulling Jennifer up with her and they stumbled down the short corridor into the much larger underground railway section. Lu'ria looked at Jennifer and gripped her face tightly.

“Jennifer!” She snapped. “Jennifer!”

The human girl's eyes focused immediately and she looked back at Lu'ria. “Lu'ria!” She hissed as more tears came.

“Jennifer... I need you now my friend.” Lu'ria pleaded. “Can you stay with me? Please Jennifer... you must hold it together!”

Jennifer took a deep breath and nodded her head. She was the devoted lover of a Drow female because she was strong as well as beautiful. “Yes!” She stammered. “Yes.” She pushed the 190 into Lu'ria's hands and

turned to nearly tear open another small cabinet by the short corridor. She began punching in a numerical code with bloody fingers and the lights in the underground section began to come on revealing a small rail car and a set of Lifter rails that moved off into the distance.

“We need to take the rail back to the estate.” Jennifer hissed. “It’s the quickest way to warn the others! Why are Kavalians attacking us Lu’ria?” She asked as she punched in another code that began to feed power to the small rail car.

Lu’ria shook her head as she made sure the 190 was ready to fire. “I... I don’t know!” She spoke as she worked the action on the 190 and making certain it would not jam. “They didn’t even pause... they just came in and began firing. Almost like...” Lu’ria’s eyes went wide now and Jennifer looked at her.

“Like what?” She spat. “Lu’ria like what?”

“Like an assassination!” Lu’ria declared in reply looking at her. “Like an assassination was all they intended to begin with.”

“But why?” Jennifer demanded. “We have done nothing to them!”

“I don’t... I don’t think that matters Jennifer.” Lu’ria answered. “Something else is... something else is going on!”

Jennifer had been among the Drow long enough to understand what it was that Lu’ria was saying. “The Estate? Ixara! Lu’ria we...!” She gasped thinking of her longtime Drow Mistress and lover.

Lu’ria grabbed her hand and pulled her to the Lifter Car. “We must hurry!” She barked. “Perhaps we will be in time!”

DROW ESTATE

“Two dead Major! Two more injured, but not seriously!” The Kavalian snarled into the transmission as he held the bandage to his face, the fur on his face and neck coated with bright red blood. “The son put up more of a fight than we expected. Two of them escaped through a door we were not aware of. The youngest of the Drow females and the human whore!”

“They can’t have gone far!” The senior Kavalian officer barked. The senior officer could hear sporadic weapons fire in the background of the estate, as well as the screams of females. His men were having their way with the females they took alive. “The estate here is no more, but as with you we encountered more resistance! We will finish the elf sluts before we depart and begin moving towards...” He stopped when he saw the approaching Kavalian in the transmission.

The Kavalian in the transmission turned as well as his man came up. “The room led to a Lifter rail.” The man reported. “The car is gone, but it appears that it goes in the direction of the estate.”

“Major!” He asked turning back to face his commander in the transmission.

“We will be waiting for them.” The Major barked now. “Pull your men into this rail system and follow on foot. Do not go back out into the streets of the city. I am deploying the rest of our men from the redoubt to encircle the estate and eliminate any Drow who may have survived our initial assault.”

“As you order Major! The Drow whore?” He asked.

“If she lives... she is yours as I said before.”

“We will follow sir.” The man said just before the transmission went dark.

The Kavalian Commander turned to his senior aide just as the painful wail of surrender came from a Drow elf and it made him cringe. He stormed into the blood splattered bedroom and saw one of his men holding the badly injured Drow female Ixara to the floor while another was hunching forward over her wonderfully bare dark skinned ass. He was obviously forcing his large Kavalian cock into the Drow’s ass and it was not at all pleasant for her as she howled out her pain and degradation.

“Stuff her mouth with your cock to shut her up!” The commander snapped loudly. “Her screeching hurts my ears!”

Laughing manically, the second Kavalian soldier holding the Ixara’s arms tied her wrists together quickly, not caring that the plastic bindings cut deeply into her skin. He fumbled with his pants for a brief moment before bringing out his huge tapered Kavalian cock. It was easily twelve inches long and very thick at

the base, while the head was taped almost to a point. He filled his hands with the blood stained white hair and brought the taped end of his cock up to Ixara's lips.

"Suck it Drow whore!" He snarled. "Suck it good!"

The Major watched as his soldier forced his thick cock into her gullet, hearing her gag horribly as he rammed his entire shaft into her throat without care. At least the gagging and heaving noises she was making now were tolerable the Major thought as he turned back to his aide.

"Have the others search the lower levels for the entrance to this Rail tunnel." He stated quickly. "It is not something we saw from the outside so it must be inside the home here. Go through every room and find it."

"As you order Major." The aide said. "When they find it?"

"I will not waste anymore men on these Drow savages." He snapped. "When the entrance is found, have Konark set a clever trap. Once he is done we will retreat back to the out edges of the estate with the females we have and entertain ourselves until the two females from the secondary target return here. Once the trap is sprung we will return and discover if anything is left."

"Yes sir!"

EARTH
ELVEN CITY OF REYLAN
THREE KILOMETERS EAST OF SODRAG
SIX HOURS EARLIER

"No more! No more! Please... I beg...!! Aaarghhhhhh!" Zarah's cries of humiliation and hurt had filled the room as Javier rammed his cock into her perfectly shaped ass one final time and then his hot cum was blasting into her bowels.

"Tell me what I want to know Zarah you whore!" Dante screamed into her bruised face as he rammed his hips upward into her once virgin pussy. "*Vith*... you are... you are still so tight you half breed whore! You like this don't you bitch!"

"No! No! Ahhhhh! Stop... no more!" She had cried her eyes tightly shut as she tried to fight.

"Four fucking hours and half a dozen men and you are still fucking tight as a bitch!" Dante shouted. "You *are* a whore! Just like my mother and grandmother said! A Half breed fucking whore!"

His eyes were changed to cobalt blue, yet they were different in that the iris of his pupil was a burning blood red color. His strong hands held Zarah's face in his hands uncaring that he was bruising her skin, his thumbs roughly prying her eyelids open and keeping her eyes open and staring at him.

Her face was badly black-and-blue, her bottom lip cracked in three different locations from cruel blows. Her nose was broken, blood leaking from the nostrils. Her arms were tied securely behind her back, excruciatingly twisted so that every movement caused pain to wash through her mind. She couldn't remember how they had gotten behind her, only that she hadn't been paying attention as she was shopping and as she turned the corner to cross through an alley shortcut, the butt of the SA80 was the last thing she saw.

When she woke it was to the savage pain of Javier Moran fucking her ass with his thick cock like a rutting bull. She was stretched out on top of his hard body, his hands holding her wrists at an agonizing angle, his hard chest pressed against her back as his cock grind into her bowels and he held her legs spread obscenely wide. She caught flashes of shadows, and then Dante Moran was above her and smashing his thick cock into her virgin pussy brutally and baring his fangs fiercely just before he bit into her large breast and fed on her blood. Her wail of shame filled the room until a hand savagely twisted her head to the side and another thick cock was shoved into her gasping mouth. She went rigid; her eyes wide when she felt Javier Moran's fangs pierce the skin of her neck and he too began to feed on her blood. The large man above her pulled his cock from her gasping mouth and slapped her sadistically in the face, causing stars to burst in her eyes and the pain from Javier's fangs to lance through her.

"Don't bite me half breed!" He had snarled at her before once more ramming his cock into her throat, Zarah gagging uncontrollably at the violent intrusion and then her world went black.

PRESENT TIME

Her whole body ached with pain unlike any she had ever felt when she woke again, the fogginess of her mind, trying to focus her eyes. Hours... it had gone on for hours! She couldn't focus... couldn't think... couldn't bear the shame. She could feel the cum of half a dozen men at least running down the insides of her thighs and along her ass, her face and breasts slick with their cum, her dark hair coated in it. They had laughed hysterically at her as they raped and beat her brutally. Laughed at her and then splattered her with their cum. They had fed on her blood countless times, the puncture marks of dozens of bites dotting her once tanned, flawless skin. Her firm full breasts were red from the rough handling and bruised in several spots from where they had bitten her, her thighs caked with dried cum and even blood.

Dante had been in her mind, probing her thoughts, digging into her shields with far more power than he had ever had before. This was not the same Dante Moran who she knew was attempting to get something from her, attempting to influence her with his pathetic mind control skills. He was so much stronger now, the blackness in his heart and the rage he had streaming through him almost too much to bear. She had fought valiantly for hours, each time feeling him shredding her mind more and more, dismissing her Mindvoice shields like they weren't even there. He was searching for something, digging into her most intimate thoughts. He wanted something and he would not be denied. He had never been this strong, and now she could not even bring herself to focus any longer.

It had continued for hours, Zarah unable to count how many times Dante and his brother had violated her, or how many men had despoiled her body? The only thing that remained now was the pain and shame of how she allowed this to happen. The complete degradation of what she had surrendered to him at the end. She could not even weep at the information she had finally given to him. She couldn't weep at the loss of life she would cause with what he had taken from her. Zarah could barely move her limbs now without almost unbearable agony flowing throughout her entire body. She could hear voices in the background, several voices and even laughter. And then she saw him standing in the open doorway talking to a person in the transmission. A woman. She blinked several times, trying to focus even more, and then she saw her.

Yuri.

"She was stronger than we thought Dante." Yuri stated looking at her son proudly in the transmission.

Dante nodded as he drank from the glass of cloned blood. "Yes... but with your power added to mine it was only a matter of time mother. The men have had her four or five more times since she revealed the location of the Mindvoice ship an hour ago. We could probe her for even more. She has to know things that could be useful to us. Military secrets perhaps!"

"No." Yuri ordered. "We have what we wanted. We have the location of the Mindvoice ship."

"Has grandmother left with the assault team?" He asked.

Yuri nodded. "They will land and attack in less than fifteen minutes." She replied. "Our team in Sparta will also hit the Kavalian embassy as soon as she begins her attack."

"We are prepping the transport to depart mother. Once we leave, we will grab Lucia and meet you in orbit." Dante said.

Yuri nodded. "Our ship is almost finished loading." Yuri answered. "We had to move to within three kilometers of the city you are in to allow me to assist you under the new Mindvoice bubble they extended last night."

"We are sure that was only a random bubble?" Dante asked.

"Yes." Yuri replied. "It did not even extend all the way to the surface so that is why we knew it was random and that we could sneak in under it." She explained. "Finish your tasks with her and then kill her Dante." Yuri stated cruelly.

"Mother if we are to kill her why...?"

"Just do as I have asked you." Yuri stated.

Dante nodded. "As you wish. Javier wants to abuse her once more before we leave. She does have an incredibly tight ass mother. Javier has done nothing but rave about it." He stated with a grin.

Yuri could not help but shake her head and chuckle in the transmission. "Do not remain for much longer! Use her a last time and then kill her my son."

“We have time... she is not due back to SODRAG for another three hours and they will not miss her until then.” Dante spoke. “Javier can have his fun while we prepare to leave and then I will dispose of her.”

“So long as she is dead when you leave.” Yuri snarled.

“We could leave her to die mother. We have nearly drained her of her blood.” Dante said thoughtfully, his twisted mind thinking of more ways to hurt Zarah in particular and the entire Leonidas family in general. “Without a massive influx of new blood within the hour she will die.”

Yuri shook her head. “No. When they find her... when Androcles Leonidas finds her... I want her in pieces to look like the animal she is. Gut her like a pig and let her remaining blood leak onto the floor so she is nothing but a shell when they find her. I want him to know he failed to protect his sister!”

Dante nodded. “As you order mother.” He stated.

“I will see you soon.”

Dante shook his head as he turned to see his bother once more preparing to mount Zarah Leonidas’s body. Javier looked at him as he grabbed her hips roughly.

“She has the tightest ass I have ever fucked!” He spat. “Better than even Toria!”

“Finish with her quickly Javier. We need to leave.” Dante spoke.

This time there was no reaction when he shoved his cock into Zarah’s abused body and ass. Dante’s smile vanished when he let his eyes drift to her battered and broken face. Her eyes were staring right at him, staring at him and burning with an intensity he had not seen in them at all these last few hours. Dante stepped forward quickly lifting his hand to smash it into her face.

The scream within Mindvoice was powerful, clear and no matter what Dante and Yuri thought, completely unstoppable! Zarah had channeled all that remained of her will; all that remained of her essence in one final Mindvoice scream to the one person who she knew would come for her without fail no matter the cost. It just so happened that she also set forth a chain of events that would bring her future into her life.

ANDRO!!!!

Whatever will she had remaining she must have summoned to let go with a last ditch desperate attempt for her arrogant brother to come to save her Dante thought. He smashed his fist down into her face opening a fresh cut in her cheek just as Javier thrust into her ass. Blood splashed wetly on the floor from the new injury and her head flopped to the bed. Dante filled his hand with her dark hair then and viciously yanked her head up and looked into her clouded and vacant dark eyes as Javier began to pump his cock into her ass.

“No one is coming to save you half breed! There are Mindvoice dampeners up all around this room!” He snarled at her. “You were tight... I’ll give you that. I don’t think I’ve ever had a better pussy or ass. And you suck cock like a fucking airlock hatch!” Dante heard the laughter of the three men in the room watching Dante and Javier. He shoved her head back down and looked at his brother. “Finish with her and then kill her. Mother says to gut her and leave her where she is.” Javier grunted at him as he continued to pummel her ass into the bed and Dante turned to go into the next room.

Dante’s mistake was not comprehending that Zarah’s cry for help had been heard. It had been heard, and not just by Andro, but by every Mindvoice capable person on the planet higher than a Tier Five, including his mother and grandmother. That included the figure that lay in the bunk in the High Coven barracks.

Dante Moran would not get his mother’s frantic warning on the COM unit for he had already shut it down. The moment that scream of help erupted across that single spectrum of Mindvoice, two individual minds saw it for what it was. Two of the most powerful minds on the planet, one of them completely unknown until this day and moment.

That mind and presence would become known this day, and as it descended upon Reylan with Androcles Leonidas close behind, it had nothing but homicidal intent filling its presence. Dante and Javier Moran were unaware of the emergent wave of death that approached on two equally incensed dragons. Death that they had unleashed with their actions. They were unaware of the consequences of their actions this day, unaware of the door they had opened into hell’s fiery pits and completely unaware of the path three individuals would now chart in order to see the High Coven pay for their deeds. They were completely unaware that, of the four minds that had devised, ordered and executed this hideous event, only two would escape Earth alive this day.

And of those two, only one would ever know peace again.

SPARTA ROYAL ESTATE VILLA

“...is everything my Queen.” Thoti spoke as he handed the data pad to Aricia.

Aricia took it from him and looked at For'mya and Isabella who sat on the couch only a few feet away. “Thoti... this is not... we did not ask this of you.” She said quickly turning back to face him. “Martin did not ask this of you.”

Thoti nodded. “I know my Queen.” He replied with a gentle smile. A warm, happy smile that all of them noticed easily. “Martin asked that I show her that we are very different than what she has been led to believe all of her life. This was something that I did. That we did. She knows I am giving it to you. She wanted me too. It... it gave her the release she needed to go forward and perhaps someday make things right between her and Anja. And... and it gives me the peace of mind that this *is* where she wants to be. With me. With Hiero.”

“Thoti... will she be alright?” For'mya asked softly.

Thoti turned his head and looked out the clear glass doors into the courtyard and saw Duewa. She wore a simple ivory colored dress, but her hair was down now, flowing around her face and shoulders and no longer held back in restrictive ties. Her beautiful face was beaming as she listened to Tinrell and Tinyn relate to her what they had done. Retta, Calyb, Nara, Deion and Bryon were also in the courtyard crowded around them, their dragon hatchlings scampering about as they too were talking to Duewa at the same time. She did not try to stop them, nor did she try to act as teacher. She listened to them all and for the first time in her life Thoti knew, she acted as a loving mother. He had *cado* Duewa, with far more intensity and strength than he had scented his wife Hanna, Duewa's berry scent maddening to him. He was right when he told her no Lycavorian would come near her now. They would smell him in her blood from kilometers away, and there were few who didn't know who *Dilochitès* Thoti was.

Thoti turned back to look at For'mya and smiled. “It will take time my queen. But yes... she will be fine. She is a strong woman, stronger than most give her credit for, but she will be fine.”

Isabella came to her feet and moved up next to Aricia. The slight bulge in her abdomen told all who knew her that she carried another child. She reached out and touched Thoti's arm. “Love her shamelessly Thoti.” She said. “She will need that. The rest will come in time.”

Thoti smiled. “I intend to Queen Isabella.” He answered. “Is the King here?”

Aricia shook her head quickly. “No. He is... he is with Torma at Thermopylae. They are meditating I believe.”

Thoti caught the tone of her voice and the way she looked at For'mya and he knew then something was wrong. He had served on the Royal Detail for the last fourteen years, and he knew every mood of the King and Queens. He did not press the issue however and nodded his head. “If you will inform him of my...”

ANDRO!!!!

The power with which Zarah's voice filled their minds was unlike any they had felt from her before and For'mya came off the couch in an instant. Isabella's face had gone white as a sheet and she staggered as she gripped Aricia's arms.

“Zarah!” She gasped. “Zarah... Zarah my daughter! No!”

Two hundred kilometers north, at the monument of Thermopylae, a large Spartan with shoulder length raven black hair leaped upon the back of the largest known dragon within the Union and with a bellow of utter fury they took to the skies. All of the men and women visiting the monument knew who their King was and many would remember that scream as the most terrible sound they had ever heard in their lifetimes.

Most would never forget it.

DRAGON MOUNTAIN ISLAND OF SARDINIA

Aikiro shook her head in disgust as Zarah Leonidas's scream echoed still within the realm of Mindvoice. "The fool boy!" She hissed softly. "He should have cut out her heart long ago!"

The Elite High Coven Commander turned to look at his Empress when he heard her hiss in just barely a whisper. "Empress?" He asked softly.

Aikiro looked at the man and shook her head. "We must hurry!" She urged. "Our time has become very short and we will not have what we first thought."

The Commander Leader, a full Fleet Colonel in the High Coven military, nodded his head quickly. "The island appears deserted Empress. Our other two teams are reporting no signs of life. There are many cave entrances into the mountain, but it appears as if the ship is not here."

Aikiro's eyes grew a little wider. "The Mountain!" She gasped.

"Empress?"

"The ship is able to take different shapes because of its bio-mechanical nature. We saw that when it lifted off of Lycavore and the section on Nauwora was made of similar material." She spoke excitedly.

"I don't understand Empress." The Commando said.

"The Mountain is the ship!" Aikiro announced. "Oh what an ingenious way to hide it! Order your teams to enter the cave entrances they see. It will undoubtedly take them into the bowels of the ship itself."

"Empress, are you sure?" The commando asked.

Aikiro came to her feet and nodded, surprising the man because she did not react angrily to his questioning of her orders. "Yes. I am sure! I am absolutely sure!" She stated. "There are no lifesigns?"

The commando looked at the small sensor scanner on his arm. "No Empress."

"Ohh... Martin Leonidas you were a fool to leave it undefended." Aikiro spoke with a vicious smile. "Quickly... we must head inside."

The commando leader turned to his lead man and motioned with his hand into the entrance they were hidden just outside of. The many rocks and boulders provided excellent cover for them. The man nodded, hefted his weapon and plunged into the darkness of the cave followed by the first nine of their twenty member team.

REYLAN

It was known to only her mind.

They were born on the exact day as each other, at the exact hour, the exact minute and second. In two different parts of the universe. Even then it had formed a link that was hidden to all but that her mind. It was a link that her mind had tried to suppress and ignore when it became aware of what it meant and who it was with. It was a link her mind had tried to bury and push away, but no matter what was done it remained, and it only grew stronger.

It was a Mindvoice link that her mind reached for instinctively at the age of thirteen when the explosion of darkness had changed all that she had ever known and been taught. A day that saw the darkness reach out and envelope and expose the one person in the universe that was trusted above all others. It exposed that person's deepest hatred and anger, unwarranted though it may have been, like an open sore. It was the day that saw the darkness reach for her as well.

Just a small finger of that vile darkness touching her mind was more than enough to show her unimaginable horrors already committed and terrors yet to be committed. It showed her death on a scale inconceivable to a mind so innocent and young. Just a finger of that darkness touching her was enough to expand her Mindvoice powers beyond what anyone could possibly predict. It also allowed her mind superior awareness; a superior awareness that in an instant knew whatever had infected her could not be allowed to rule her and consume her, lest she sink into the bottomless abyss of pain and loneliness.

Thirteen year old Lucia Moran had done something then that she would keep hidden from everyone, to include her grandmother, and something she would treasure beyond all else. She reached for that link without hesitation. A connection that had been there since the day she was born, a bond that was powerful and loving

and warm and so very inviting. A relationship that she had felt spike four years earlier and then grow even more powerful. A tie that would now shield and save her soul and change her forever. Lucia had reached for and grasped hold of the one thing that she knew could save her for she would not be able to hold back the darkness forever. As Lucia watched her mother writher on the ground only meters away, watched as the black mist surrounded her, enveloped her and consumed her, Lucia reached out within the realm of Mindvoice for the burning brightness that was...

Zarah Leonidas.

Eight years she had cultivated their connection. She had trained as her brothers, shown the same cruelty as her brothers and watched her mother sink deeper into the darkness. It was easy for her to act in this fashion, the darkness that had touched her provided her with abilities that she nurtured and hid, abilities that made her far more powerful than anyone suspected. Abilities that only her Bonded Sister was aware of. Seyra had been her passion, her hope of one day finding what she knew she needed. It tortured her to have to treat her Bonded Sister in such a way, to dismiss her and leave others to her care, only to prolong the façade they were portraying. Lucia was playing a role, just as her half sister Carisia had been playing a role. Just as her Aunt Narice had been playing a role. They had reached the limits of their tolerance and finally broken away when they had come here, and only her bond with Zarah and Seyra gave Lucia the strength to continue to hold out.

Over the last weeks she had tried to get close to Zarah, tried to explain to her what they shared. It was no easy task, and Lucia could do nothing but laugh inside when Zarah defeated Dante so easily. Zarah was skilled beyond anything Lucia had first thought, and it was due to something tying her tightly to her brother Androcles, almost as if an invisible connection or thread bound them together in some way. A thread similar to what bound her and Zarah. She had tried to reach out to her, skipping ever gently across her shields, always projecting inviting sensations and protectiveness but never going that last step. Lucia knew that her future lie with Zarah Leonidas. Any hope she had of building a future rest with the strength and the enormous power of Zarah. Only together could they push back the darkness that threatened to overwhelm her as it did her mother, as it did everything it touched. She had watched Zarah over these last weeks, memorizing her smile, her beautiful dark eyes, and the way she moved. Lucia also found herself admiring and wanting the lush and desirable body she had, and there had been many nights she had drifted off to sleep wondering what it would be like to hold that body in her arms, to taste Zarah's flesh and kiss her sweet lips. To savor the flavor of her blood as she fed during a time of passion. These were the things that had filled her mind when she and Seyra were not training to be one of the finest Bonded Pairs alive.

Lucia vowed long ago that nothing would ever take Zarah Leonidas from her. Over the last weeks she had also felt Zarah reaching out tentatively when she probed her, wondering who could make her feel so loved and wanted, and wanting to experience more, only to have Lucia back off for fear of rejection.

Zarah's scream within Mindvoice was nothing more than a pure and focused wail for help. Lucia could feel the agony and shame in that torturous wail, and suddenly she understood completely what her mother and grandmother had planned. Lucia had never known the full scope of what they had planned; only that Dante was some way involved. Lucia had watched Dante carefully, protecting Zarah from the shadows, but these last few days had been hard. Since Am'rul and As'pin had discovered her secret, and she had discovered that the Immortal Cha'talla was very much alive and watching over her, everything was very confusing. She had lost her focus, and dropped her guard. The moment Zarah's scream touched her, Lucia nearly lost it.

The Mindvoice bubble she created had blown out three quarters of her bungalow, and Lucia was leaping onto Seyra's back before her talons had fully come to ground. She saw a dark dot lifting off in the distance and knew without question it was Androcles Leonidas responding to his beloved sister's scream within Mindvoice. Urging Seyra to fly faster than she had ever flown before, they rocketed over the top of SODRAG heading for the elven city, knowing that unless she got there first Androcles Leonidas would slaughter whoever had harmed his sister without pause or question. The echo of Zarah's cry within Mindvoice provided all the beacon she needed and as she grew closer to the city, the total agony of what her beautiful Zarah had endured burst into her mind and very nearly overwhelmed her. She could not see images, only feel the agony which told her Zarah was not strong enough to project them, and this served only to increase her savage anger. To break a person down to what she felt from her beloved Zarah took practiced skill and indescribable acts of horror. Seething hatred and anger boiled to the surface now and Lucia Moran embraced the power that the darkness had given her for the

very first time in her life. Ignoring the frantic calls on her implanted COM unit from Am’rul, Lucia and Seyra swept in low over the elven city with only a single intent.

Lucia could feel her brothers below her, and amazingly she could feel her mother also nearby. How she had gotten so close was of no matter, if her brothers had hurt her Zarah in any way she would flay them alive and make them beg for death. If her mother had hurt Zarah she would shatter her skull upon the end of her whip and feed her entrails to the dogs. Lucia Moran wouldn’t realize it until months later, but she had forgotten to shield these thoughts so powerful was her anger, and they had been seen and felt by two terribly powerful minds who were only moments behind her. It was these thoughts and feelings that kept Androcles Leonidas from calling upon all of his immense power as a Talon Guardian and crushing her and Seyra within the combined TK grip of his and Elynth’s power before she ever reached the city.

Lucia turned her head back just before Seyra landed by the edge of the building and scattered elves and Lycavorians in all directions. Reylan had a standing rule that there was to be no dragons flying above or within the city proper. Lucia was much stronger than anyone had ever suspected and the training she had received from Androcles Leonidas and his siblings had only increased that refinement and her abilities to higher levels. She would never be in the same class as Androcles himself, but she was strong enough to detect the burning and cruel anger that wafted from his persona like a fog, even from this distance. She had no more time to think as she felt Seyra land easily and she was leaving her back before she stopped moving, landing lightly upon the ground next to her.

Sister? Seyra called turning her head to look at Lucia.

Lucia turned when she felt and heard the commotion to her right and she saw the two Immortal brothers running side by side down the street towards her, the elven female who had amazingly fallen deeply in love with the Immortals brothers trailing just behind them and raising eyebrows and alertness up and down the city streets. Calls began to go out among the elves and Spartans who saw her and Lucia knew she did not have much time.

Marux and Naruth must be nearby! I can feel my brothers here! Guard yourself sister! Once this begins it will...

It will set us on the path we should have been on long before now! Go sister! Find her! Protect her until her brother arrives! I will keep watch for Marux and Naruth! Seyra answered immediately.

Lucia turned as Am’rul and As’pin skidded to stops beside her. “Princess Lucia!” Am’rul stammered. “Princess... what are you doing?”

“You wish to protect me!” Lucia barked. “Then come with me and protect me!”

Am’rul looked briefly at his brother and they followed Lucia without hesitation. Libala stepped forward to follow but Seyra moved her large head in front of her stopping her motion. She concentrated and projected her thoughts to Libala.

No little one! Remain here with me!

Libala looked at her wide eyed. The huge dragon of Lucia Moran had befriended her once Lucia had revealed herself that day in the house to her Uncle Vonis. Seyra had helped her to see that her burning love for the Immortal brothers was not wrong and she should embrace it and all that it could bring to her.

Seyra... what is happening? She gasped out as she looked around and saw elves and Spartans beginning to move toward them.

Seyra shook her huge head. *I... I do not know.* She answered quickly shifting her bulk around to better keep an eye for Marux and Naruth. *Whatever has happened is not good little one! We must remain...*

“NOOOOO! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!?! NOOOOOOO!”

The scream carried many things within its tone as it echoed through the building and into the street around them. The one thing that caused Seyra’s eyes to go wide was the piercing resonance of fatality that permeated those words.

Dante Moran laughed as his brother grunted and slammed his cock fully into Zarah’s ass a final time and he began to spew his cum into her bowels. He heard the soft beeping of the COM unit on the table and reached

for it as Javier began to pull his thick shaft from Zarah's sore and bleeding anus. He stepped part way into the other room as he heard Javier and the other three members of the conversing and laughing as Javier pushed Zarah back down onto the dirty, cum and blood stained bed. He activated the COM unit and stepped back surprised.

"Mother what are..."

"Dante! The dampeners didn't work!" Yuri screamed. "Kill her and get out of there! Do it now!"

"Mother what..."

"NOOOOO! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!?! NOOOOOOO!"

He would recognize his sister's voice anywhere and his head snapped around to see Lucia standing in the open doorway of the small apartment her dark eyes wide and a scathing snarl of disbelief frozen on her face as her scream echoed in the room. He watched the two Immortals he didn't recognize fill the doorway on either side of her, their eyes taking in the scene before them and filling with primal rage. Dante turned back to his mother.

"Mother it's Lucia!" He snapped ignoring her as she began to respond and stepping fully into the room and looking at his younger sister. "Lucia you stupid bitch! Shut up! You'll have Spartan Security here before we finish..."

Dante stopped talking when her eyes fell on him and he saw the cold hand of the Grim Reaper in them. Her dark eyes shifted instantly to cobalt blue, her vampiric fangs bursting from her gums. Dante's eyes grew wider as he saw her trembling in what could only be described as unrestrained fury.

"You... you will not take her from me!" Lucia screamed out her rage. ***"You will not hurt her anymore!"*** Her hands snapped to the sides and those psychic whips took shape with but a thought in a bluish white flash of color. ***"Now... now you will die for what you have done to my Zarah!"***

It appeared to Dante as if time had slowed to a crawl. He could only watch as the whip like psychic projection in Lucia's left hand began a slow motion movement as it snapped out. It appeared to extend outward, reaching for where their brother stood at the end of the bed, his still semi hard cock dangling in front of him. Dante would never know or understand why the detail he remembered the most was that his brother's rapidly deflating cock was coated with small spots of blood and his own cum. He would never remember or understand why his eyes tracked the very tip of the whip like projection and watched as it almost magically altered its shape into that of a hard round object. A hard, round object that suddenly sprouted dozens of needle like spikes. He would remember the sound it made when that spiked psychic projection smashed into Javier's groin, the needle like projections stabbing savagely through his cock and into his now empty balls. The wet squishy sound of a blade penetrating flesh filled the room then. He saw Javier's eyes nearly bulge from his skull as the smile he had worn just microseconds before vanished to be replaced by an indescribable look of horrible agony. His body doubled over, his hands reaching for his groin, and it was then that Lucia snapped the whip back.

The sound of tearing flesh was reminiscent of a play his mother had taken them to as children on Usu Ozeib 7. The stringed instrument was so savagely loud during the solo portion and it had hurt his ears. His brother's wheezing howl of pure anguish quickly drowned out that sound by nearly ten fold as blood and a bit of flesh cascaded through the air in the room, along with pieces of Javier's now mangled beyond repair genitals. As Javier's squeal of misery and pain reached unbearable proportions, Dante watched Lucia's now murderous eyes turn to him as the two Immortals who had stormed the room with her brought up their SA80 assault rifles. He watched as the whip in her right hand snapped out to the side towards the nearest of the commandos that had taken part in the rape of Zarah Leonidas. The tip of this whip stayed very narrow, almost blade like, and Dante saw it slash across the commando's throat and open his neck to the air of the room like his skin and muscle were paper. As his eyes went back to Lucia, he saw that left handed whip curling back just before it would reach for him and vaguely he heard the deep yammering of weapons fire and saw the chests of the other two commandos blossom bright red as their bodies were tossed back against the wall from the impact of dozens of well placed rounds.

Dante could hear his mother's screaming voice from the still open transmission as he blurred two feet to the side and snatched up the heavy chair. He raised it to his face to protect himself and staggered back as the spiked round tip of the whip smashed into the chair with shattering force. It splintered the chair in his grasp and

the spikes slashed across his shoulder deeply. He screamed as he dove to the side in an effort to get away from this creature who was no longer his sister, slamming his hand on the control panel as he dove and shutting the door into the main room. Dante Moran didn't pause and he gathered his feet under him and ran for the back door of the apartment.

He heard it then and it brought him up short in his mad dash for safety. It was the very unmistakable howl of a savagely angry wolf and Dante Moran's vampire blood went ice cold.

Dante Moran blinked as something gripped him like an invisible hand, stopping his forward motion with barely any effort. His eyes grew wide when the deep voice shredded his Mindvoice shields as if they weren't even there, in a manner similar to how he had joked with the others how he had done the same with Zarah Leonidas. That voice bellowed within his mind now with unspeakable wrath and Dante Moran realized just how unimportant he was.

NOW IT IS YOUR TURN MOTHERFUCKER!!!

Dante Moran's eyes exploded open as his body was lifted off the floor and launched backwards. Launched backwards with enough force to send him smashing through the very hard main wall of the apartment building, sending bits of steel and concrete three stories to the ground below, his body following shortly behind. The air left his lungs as he hit the ground with the force of small boulder dropped from hundreds of feet up. A dust cloud blossomed around him, half a dozen of his ribs snapping like twigs from the force of the impact. He groaned in his own agony, the ends of his ribs grinding together. He felt something slam into his back and he was lifted off the ground and jerked around like a ragdoll, coming face to face with the most frightening visage he had ever witnessed before.

Androcles Leonidas's azure blue eyes were outlined in the black of his wolf eyes, but the blue color was nearly glowing with the intensity of the fury on them. His vicious looking dual fangs were fully extended now and they appeared much longer than Dante thought possible. His tanned face was twisted horribly in a mask of pure, unadulterated hate.

Andro lifted Dante's shorter frame completely off the ground and brought his face close to his with a snarl.

"Time for you to join your sick, perverted brother!" Andro snarled with vitriol.

Dante did the only thing he could think of and he smashed his forehead into Andro's face with whatever strength he could muster in such an unbalanced position. Andro's head snapped back, but his grip on Dante only tightened and he staggered half a step. When his eyes turned back to look at Dante, there was a nasty cut high on his cheek that was now seeping blood, but Andro looked anything but dazed.

Andro bared his fangs and roared into Dante's face. "It's kind of different when you pick on someone your size isn't it you perverted *rensibfla!*" Andro snapped his own head forward, directly into Dante's nose. The cartilage surrendered to the overwhelming power of the blow and Dante's nose was crushed in that instant. Pain ripped through his brain and he tasted his own blood in his mouth. "It's time to die now Dante Moran, you sick fuck!" Andro yelled.

"I... I don't think so!" Dante snarled as he felt what he thought was his salvation fast approaching.

DIE SCUM!

The voice of Marux shattered Mindvoice and he roared in from the side, flaring his wings and reaching for Andro with his wickedly sharp talons. Andro didn't even bother to look at him and Dante's smile vanished instantly for he knew there could only be one reason for that.

"A true Bonded Pair is never alone." Andro spat in his face.

Marux! Look out! He screamed raising his hand to bash his fist into Andro's face.

Marux had the time to cut his eyes to the side before the obsidian colored body of Elynth screamed out of nowhere and smashed into his side with blinding speed and meticulous control. Almost four metric tons of muscle and precision plowed into Marux as he was caught out of position and completely vulnerable. Elynth may have got her father's coloring and eyes, but she had inherited her mother's viciously curved and razor like talons. They were talons that she now raked across Marux's scaled side, carving furrows in his muscular hind

quarter as she rode him to the ground, her muzzle snapping shut with a resounding snap just inches from his neck, her golden eyes filled with fury at what was happening.

Fool boy! Elynth screamed within Mindvoice. Now you will feel the wrath of two Talon Guardians for what you have taken part in! Die now!

As Marux struggled to gain his feet under him, Elynth stepped back and lashed out with her Heavyhorn tail. The near flat bony protrusion at the end of her whip like tail smashed into Marux's muzzle with a crack that rolled across the streets of Reylan. His three metric tons went spinning out of control, smashing into the side of a nearby single story building, bringing down several large chunks of concrete and glass all over his body as several windows shattered all around him. Spartans and Elves were scrambling to get out of the range of the titanic battle that was taking place, none of them having ever seen the full fury of a Bonded Pair as they were experiencing now. That this was Androcles Leonidas locked in mortal combat was lost on none of them.

Andro's bloody face glared crazily at Dante, the vampire's half dozen blows to his face hardly fazing him in the grips of the berserker like rage he felt at this moment. "You made a mistake Dante Moran!" Andro screamed as he heaved Dante's two hundred pounds through the air directly into the unyielding brick and steel corner of the building closest to them. "You and your pervert brother raped *my* sister!" Andro's psychic knife erupted from his right hand and he began his death march toward the moaning Dante Moran. Nearly eight inches of shimmering psychic demise extended from his fist and he was intent on using it to shred whatever mind Dante Moran had. "Now I'm going to make sure you experience pain beyond what your feeble mind could possibly imagine."

ANDRO! Elynth's voice cried out in his mind.

Andro whirled around without hesitation as Elynth dashed gracefully from where she stood above Marux to take a position behind Andro. Far faster than anyone present had ever seen a dragon move.

Androcles Leonidas and his Bonded Sister Elynth were Talon Guardians. Within the long and storied history of the dragon species hierarchy, Talon Guardians had been held in the utmost reverence. Throughout the millennia, the nine Dragon Elders always knew that their kind was exceptionally hard to kill. They also knew that dragons, while not as susceptible to temptation as other species, could still fall victim to greed and arrogance and any number of crimes made up of the mind and heart as well as the physical nature. Talon Guardians were those chosen for their adherence to the sacred principles of dragon culture as well as abilities that other dragons did not have. There had not been Talon Guardians in nearly a thousand years because of the war on Enurrua with Chetak and his people, and never in their history had any non-dragon held this title.

Not until the Battle of Alba Tau had shown the universe the type of hallowed actions that were required of Talon Guardians. The true measure of Androcles Leonidas, his father; Elynth and Torma would be spun through tales during history and told to every new dragon hatchling to open their eyes and breath new air. It would be a tale of how two Lycavorians, father and son, had risked all that they were beside their bonded ones, father and daughter, to protect and defend the remains of their fellow Bonded Pairs against immeasurable odds. The complete selflessness of their actions, refusing to leave their fallen behind, it was all the information that the Dragon Elders needed to realize that they had their Talon Guardians once more. On a moon lit night gathered on the plains of Thermopylae, with billions of stars shining brightly overhead, four Talon Guardians were branded in the most venerated ceremony that could take place among the dragon species. It was a private ceremony, only the nine Dragon Elders and the Chosen Ones. As the brand of a dragon's Talon was burned into their skin, so too was a small part of each Dragon Elder's Mindvoice essence. A miniscule bubble of great knowledge and power that they could call upon to execute their duties as Talon Guardians. They could tap into this reserve of Mindvoice power in order to match the power and skill of any dragon that had fallen from the path of benevolence and was deemed a threat to them all. It was a gift of power that Androcles and Elynth had never tapped into before, for there was never a need.

Until today.

The insane trumpets of a madden dragon filled the sky all around them just as Denali was setting down nearby on Aradace with Carisia and Sadi upon Anthar. They turned to see Moneus careening the Medium Lifter around the corner filled with Carina and Ne'Veha. All of them looked up to see the dirty white scales of Naruth plummeting from the sky above at frightening speed. Dropping directly for where Andro and Elynth were standing in the middle of the street. Marux had moved up behind them beside his rider Dante as he struggled to his feet.

Turn back Naruth! Elynth's voice jumped out within Mindvoice to everyone in range who could hear her.

You killed my rider! Naruth's voice savaged Mindvoice, nearly deafening in its insane rage.

Naruth... you can survive if you don't do this! Andro announced. *You can go on without him. You can live a full life!*

I liked my life! I embraced my life! Naruth screamed back as he banked sharply and began a dive directly at them from nearly ten thousand feet.

Then you have sealed your own fate fool! Elynth spat.

Their shimmering light blue psychic shield increased in brilliance as they both looked skyward to see the dirty white scales of Naruth diving out of the sky trumpeting out his insane madness. Naruth had felt Javier Moran fall, felt his bonded one's agony, and it had driven him insane with the magnitude of the horror that had hit him at one time. Given as twisted as he was to begin with and the bond he shared with an equally twisted Javier Moran it was only a matter of time. Naruth had now snapped completely and he was pointing himself at the two individuals his deranged mind told him were responsible, every muscle and impulse driving him to butcher the ones to blame for taking his bonded brother from him. To tear them apart with his talons. Had he any remnant of sanity left, it was not something he would have done willingly.

Deni stood next to Carisia and Sadi as they looked skyward, their eyes focused on Naruth as he plunged from the sky above.

He's diving on them! Aradace screamed out. *He is going to burn them!*

"NO!" Sadi and Carisia screamed almost at the same time.

Deni turned his head quickly to face his Bonded Sister. "Aradace?"

I can do nothing! The angle is wrong and it could not deflect his flame stream in time. She answered almost immediately.

Anthar trumpeted out his own anger. *I can't take off now! He's too close!*

As he dropped to five hundred feet Naruth reared back his head and trumpeted out his rage, and then he cut loose with a stream of scorching three thousand degree fire directly at Andro and Elynth. A stream of fire that would have seared to a crisp any caught in its path. Denali and the others could only watch in abject terror as that stream of flame reached for his brother unerringly. Dozens of Lycavorians and elves on the streets screamed out in shock at what was happening, witnessing this colossal battle but not believing they were right in the middle of it. Denali Leonidas closed his eyes in surrender as the flame stream struck Andro and Elynth full on to the horrified wail of three women who stood and watched.

The moment that flame stream struck their psychic shield an enormous hissing sound erupted into the air causing everyone to stagger back. It was as if a dozen giant smoke pots went off all around Andro and Elynth, pure white smoke rising from where they had stood so calmly.

Die! Die! Die! Naruth's voice ripped through Mindvoice as he landed a hundred meters away and kept up his stream of flame, trying harder to increase the intensity of the heat.

Denali did the only thing he could think of and he snatched up his P190 and brought it to bear. He was not as powerful in Mindvoice as his parents and older brother. While pure of blood like Andro, he had never wanted to learn to control the power that his blood gave him. He could not throw psychic diamonds as they could, and he cursed his own stupidity at this moment as he held back the trigger on the P190 and began sending hundreds of lethal metal projectiles hurtling at Naruth. The powerful rounds impacted his shimmering psychic shield with such intensity they caused him to cease his flame stream and turn maniacal eyes on Denali.

"*Nubou!*" Denali swore under his breath as he saw Naruth turn to face him.

NARUTH!!

The deep voice belonged to only one person and all of them knew it and dozens of heads turned with equal amazement back to where Andro and Elynth stood. The white cloud of smoke had cleared enough, like steam from something hot touching something very cold, and Andro and Elynth stood there unharmed. Elynth rested on her hind legs, her wings unwrapping from around where Andro stood in front of her. Her front talons rested unbelievably on his shoulders and looked ridiculously huge compared to the Lycavorian in front of her. Their psychic shield was glowing brighter than any of them had ever seen before and Andro's azure blue eyes shone with a brilliance that equaled the shining points that were Elynth's golden orbs.

It is over Naruth! Andro's voice echoed within Mindvoice. *You will...*

...*Die now!* Elynth finished the statement as if she had been speaking the entire words herself.

I will kill you! I will kill... Naruth screamed out and opened his maw once more to send another stream of flame at them.

No... Elynth spoke.

...*You will not.* Andro finished in that same fashion.

Had Naruth altered his path even a fraction he may have survived, though it was very doubtful. As another stream of flame began to exit his muzzle his eyes saw a Mindvoice shield of such power burst into existence that easily surpassed any he had ever known could exist. It completely engulfed Andro and Elynth, Androcles holding his hands out in front of them. In the seconds before he died, Naruth witnessed something incredible. A flare of intense power from within that shield from two who were bonded as one, and then Androcles Leonidas brought his hands together in a reverberating clap and the psychic spear formed and launched at him within the blink of an eye.

May you rot in eternity evil one! Elynth's voice echoed menacingly in Mindvoice.

Naruth could not turn, could not go up or down. All he could do was die. The oversized psychic spear struck him at the juncture of his long neck and broad chest. It instantly punched all the way through his chest, destroying everything from his breastbone to his stomach before exiting out the top of his back and blowing bits of his spine with it. His eyes were frozen open in death as the spear lodged in his body before fully exiting; his wings ceasing their movement almost immediately when his spine was severed. His legs trembled horribly for a split second and then Naruth; Bonded dragon to Javier Moran simply tipped over and fell to his side with a wheeze of air leaving his lungs forever as he joined his rider in the blackness of the abyss.

Andro and Elynth stood there for a long moment staring at his unmoving form and Andro shook his head slowly. *The Gods forgive us sister, for what we have done this day.* He spoke softly.

Marux had regained his feet by now and with a roar of rage he launched himself at Andro and Elynth who were not facing him. He let loose his own stream of intense flame at what he thought was their unprotected rear, only to have his jet of flame intercepted and redirected by another powerful flame stream. He snapped his head around to see Seyra's tail already headed for his head and he ducked just enough to save himself another full on impact. Seyra's tail grazed his shoulder with enough force to stagger him backwards and she let loose with another bolt of hot flame aimed at him. Only his and Dante's combined Mindvoice shield stopped the stream of searing agony from burning them, but it allowed Andro and Elynth to turn to face them once more with renewed anger, not that they had been in any danger to begin with. Elynth's head whipped around to look at Seyra.

Stay with your Bonded Sister Seyra! Elynth barked out. *We will deal with this trash!*

Elynth we...

We already know Seyra! Elynth told her. *We already know! Protect them! Protect them both! That is your charge now! Now go!*

Andro didn't speak, didn't blink, he just began launching psychic diamonds at Dante and Marux as fast as he was able to generate them from his fingertips. He wanted them to feel the agony and pain they had forced upon his precious sister.

Zarah.

The one person that held his heart outside of the four women that he loved with every breath he took. The upstart sister that he was tied to for all time in a way that only they knew and shared. He had risked all to insure that her life continued so long ago, and that moment had bonded them in a way very little could. For his wives and mates, and in the fashion of his father, he would smash whole Empires to keep them from pain. For his beautiful and precious sister Zarah he would insure Dante and Marux were rend limb from limb. He wanted them to endure what he had felt Zarah had endured. He wanted them to know pain at its most exquisite pinnacle before he ended their lives in the most agonizing way he could possibly come up with. And he would kill them if it was the last thing he ever did. His psychic diamonds were driving them back, smashing into their own shield with enough force to stagger them and not allow Dante to climb onto Marux's back. Every time he tried, Andro hit him with another. Every time Marux tried to send a seething stream of flame back at them a psychic diamond smashed into his already injured muzzle and he would bellow in pain. It was relentless and completely without mercy.

Andro sent another psychic diamond out that smashed into Dante's back and sent him hurtling away from Marux with crushing force.

Jeth! Now! Elynth screamed out within Mindvoice as she followed behind Andro just as relentlessly as he pressed forward.

The bright sky suddenly became black as the massive twenty-one meter long, hugely muscular body of Jeth dropped like a meteor from the sky above. He had dropped Lisisa off at the apartment building and lifted off immediately following her directions to assist Andro. He had been circling above waiting for the right time and projecting his intentions to his sister below as they drove Marux and Dante further and further away from the city streets on purpose. Marux had time to glance up and then nearly eight tons of massive muscle dropped on him like a load from the heavens. Jeth's massive jaws opened in that instant and then they snapped shut on Marux's neck.

A Bonded Pair never fights alone! Jeth screamed out in Mindvoice, his usual jovial and humorous side completely gone now. In its place was the savage beast that had terrified the Evolli alongside his sister Elynth during the war. Determined. Deadly. Devastating. And at this very moment extremely pissed off.

Marux bellowed out his pain as Jeth's razor like teeth sank deeply into the flesh of his neck and his massive talons came up to rip savagely along his side. He tumbled sideways just as Elynth had planned and then her Heavyhorn tail was whipping forward and smashing Marux's left hind leg into pieces.

Andro sensed it first as he stepped toward Dante. A powerful surge within Mindvoice. A surge equal to himself. He turned in an instant as Yuri Moran stepped from around the corner of the building followed by two very large Immortals and several High Coven Commandos.

Yuri's face was a facade of rage and she lifted her hands directly at Andro. She had felt the death of Javier within Mindvoice and it had very nearly driven her just as insane as Naruth. She was not about to lose another son to these animals. As she unleashed a psychic blast of power all her own Andro lifted his hands and caught it within an invisible grip and then it appeared as if two people were holding opposite and powerful streams of water at one another and trying to defeat the other. The two Immortals and the commandos began firing point blank at Jeth and Elynth while two more appeared from around the building to grab Dante between them. Elynth spotted them first and her eyes went wide.

Dragon Killers! She screamed out as two commandos lifted the boxy missile tubes to their shoulders.

Jeth whirled around, his fangs saturated with blood. *Sister!*

No! I won't leave him! Elynth screamed.

Sister we must! At this range we will both die!

No! He is...

Go my sister! Andro's voice echoed in her mind. *Help Seyra protect Zarah and Lucia until I return.*

Andro I will...

Jeth! Now! Andro's voice screamed.

Jeth didn't hesitate and slammed his muzzle into the side of Elynth's saddle.

NO! Elynth cried before she disappeared into a silver vortex of light.

Jeth snapped his head around on his longer neck and smashed his snout into the side of his own saddle and in an equally brilliant silver vortex he vanished as well just as the T19 missiles were launched and spun off into empty space.

Yuri's eyes were wide at what she witnessed and she knew instantly that whatever had just happened could not be good for them. She drew on all her reserves of energy and shoved her arms forward directing all her immense power in a concentrated blast and she won the gigantic shoving match as Andro's body lifted off the ground and went hurtling backwards into the timber on the edge of Reylan.

"Princess!" Her Immortal Colonel barked as he ran up to her as she dropped to her knees in complete exhaustion.

You must use your experience daughter, for none of us can match the raw power of a Lycavorian.

Yuri shook her head as her mother's words rang true. She shook her head as Pa'cour's arm slipped around her waist to support her. "Get Dante and Marux out of here Pa'cour!" She ordered as she held his arm. "Everything is going to shit and we need to get out of here before the window closes!"

"My men are already moving out back to the transport with your son Princess!" Pa'cour answered. "Marux is following now. And we must go now!"

“No! Where did he fall?” Yuri asked coming to her feet.

“A hundred meters inside the treeline.” Pa'cour answered immediately.

Yuri pushed away from. “No! I want to see him dead.” She barked as she broke into a run towards where Andro had fallen into the treeline.

“Princess!” Pa'cour barked as he followed. “Get moving!” He screamed to his men and the remaining Commandos. “Back to the ship! Go!”

Yuri didn't hesitate and plunged into the forest near where Andro had fallen through the trees. Her cobalt blue vampire eyes searched keenly in the shadowy light of the timber moving faster than she should have and making far too much noise. Not that she was being tracked by the noise she was making anyway. Had she been more alert and not so engulfed by anger and hatred she would have been more cautious and not followed a wolf into the timber where they were at their most lethal.

Yuri heard the snarl of insane hatred and whirled around far too late. There was a flash of azure blue eyes on a black muzzle. A muzzle filled with the flesh shredding white fangs of a three hundred pound wolf. Those jaws snapped shut with the power to crush bone and that was all she would remember.

Lucia smiled grimly when she felt her brother ripped from the room on the other side of the door by someone far stronger than her. It took her only a second to dismiss him then and turn back to see Am'rul and As'pin kneeling by the door and covering the entrance. Their eyes were wide, but true to their Immortal heritage they would not leave her side for anything, and they would protect her until they died. They would protect them.

Lucia blurred to the bed then, unable to comprehend the brutality of what they had done to her Zarah. Tears came almost immediately as she dropped to the side of the bed and reached out tentatively for Zarah's bruised and bloody face.

“*Gi ussta ssin'urn ssinssrigg! Vel'bol inbal nind xunor ulu dos?*” Lucia sobbed as her hands shook terribly reaching for Zarah's face. (Oh my beautiful love! What have they done to you?)

Lucia began tearing at the uniform top she wore, shredding the body armor with her vampire strength as she pulled it off. She snatched the dingy sheet from the floor and draped it over Zarah's inert form. Her body was a mass of bruises and welts. Dozens of bites from vampire teeth dotted her perfect skin. Her color was rapidly turning to the pallor of the dead and Lucia knew she was dying. She was breathing, but the air was soft and wheezing as she took in breaths.

“Zarah! Zarah my love... you must hold on!” She gasped placing her hand on Zarah's bloody cheek and moaning in agony at how cold her skin felt. “Your... your sister is not... not far behind me.”

Lucia watched as Zarah's one good eye, swollen that it was, fluttered open to look at her. “Yo...you?” The words came out in a hoarse whisper, barely discernible.

Lucia nodded slowly, the tears streaming from her now dark eyes. “Androcles is here Zarah! You must... you must hold on!”

“So... so... cold.” She wheezed. “It... it hurts!”

Lucia couldn't hold back anymore and without so much as any thought to the disgusting filth of the bed, the blood or dried cum from the now dead men in the room, Lucia crawled slowly onto the bed and slid ever so gently under Zarah. She pulled her into her embrace, feeling how badly the pain wracked Zarah's body. She wept uncontrollably now as Zarah groaned in agony. She stopped when she had Zarah's head resting on her chest, and she pulled her as tightly as she could without causing her more suffering.

“You must hold on Zarah Leonidas!” Lucia wept the words. “You... you can not leave me. Not now! Not after all this!”

Zarah's good eye blinked once. “It... it has... has been you all... all along.” She panted out the words.

Lucia nodded slowly uncaring of the blood that now stained her hair and face. “Yes.” She gasped. “Take... take my blood Zarah *ussta ssinssrigg!* You can not shift! Take it!” She pulled at the collar of her undershirt exposing the softness of her throat and neck. “I... I have done so much! I have seen so much! It has been... it has been so long! I can't... I *won't* lose you now! Take... my blood please!”

Lucia felt Zarah shake her head slowly against her firm breasts. “Not... it... not right.” She gasped.

Lucia moaned in defeat. “Please Zarah! I love you! I have always loved you! We... were meant... we are meant for each other! I see that now! I do not want to go on without you! You... you will die without blood! You must... you must survive! There is... there is so much we need...”

“Love... loves me?” Zarah’s soft pain filled voice carried over her own sobbing.

Lucia stroked her hair and saw Am'rul looking at them from the doorway through her tears. She saw a flash of blond hair that could only be the elven female as she threw her arms around As’pin. She could hear voices from outside, the flap of huge wings and the Mindvoice presence of the arriving Leonidas children. And she could still feel the unmitigated rage of Androcles as he waged a battle below. A battle that now included her mother.

“Please my love!” Lucia wept. “I have come this far to find you! Do not leave me alone now! I need you! I need you! I...”

Lucia gasped in pain as she felt fangs pierce her neck. She saw flashes of stars in her eyes which quickly changed to cobalt blue, and then she felt undeniable pleasure as Zarah’s cracked and bleeding lips closed on her neck and she sank her own vampire fangs deeply into Lucia’s neck. Lucia’s face became animated and bright and she grasped Zarah’s head tighter, holding her by her dirty hair.

“Yes my love!” Lucia cried out. “Take... take as much as you need! We... we were meant for each other!”

Lucia could feel the fire in her blood. The fire of intense desire and pleasure as Zarah fed hungrily on her blood. She gripped her body tighter, pulling her closer and with skills she had learned through the years she erected a Mindvoice barrier around them that rivaled Androcles Leonidas in its power. A barrier she would not drop until he came to be with them. She did this just as the door to the next room blew inward under the controlled and powerful Mindvoice explosion of a male she knew to be the mate of Eliani Leonidas. As she clutched Zarah’s head to her neck, giving of herself to save the one she was to be with, Lucia saw Malic’s angry face and body fill the room, his *Nehtes* out and fully extended and Eliani and Lisisa just behind him.

She saw the looks of horror fill her sister’s eyes at what they saw in the room, saw Am'rul and As’pin lay aside their weapons as Libala imposed herself in front of them to protect them from the wrath of the Leonidas family, but it all mattered not.

As Zarah fed on her blood, she could feel her injuries healing; feel the life returning to her body. This is all that mattered to her. This was all that ever mattered to her. They would go forward from here now. As Zarah Leonidas fed on her blood, she could feel their bond growing and expanding, and she could feel the darkness within her being pushed aside. She could see so many things, all of which she shared with the one person in the universe she cared about more than her own life.

They were together now. That was all that mattered.

“There's something I know about you that you may or may not know about yourself. You have within you more resources of energy than have ever been tapped, more talent than has ever been exploited, more strength than has ever been tested, more to give than you have ever given. Whatever has happened in the past; leave in the past sister. Take the hands of those you love and who love you and moved forward into the future now. Without hesitation. Without regret. And without looking back. That door you thought closed is open Zarah. All you need do now is walk through it.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

SPARTA

KAVALIAN EMBASSY

TWO HOURS PRIOR TO HIGH COVEN ACTION

Jalersi sighed in contentment as Pian’s two clawed fingers traced the skin of her upper thigh, eliciting small shivers of excitement within her. This simple fact was something she had not taken notice of until after their four or fifth time together, but now she relished in it. Just having his fingers dancing across her skin in this manner caused numerous shivers of enigmatic delight that Pusintin’s touch had never invoked from her.

Kavalian males and females could extend their claws at will, and while Pian never had them extended all of the time as Qurot or Timur, he would extend one or two when he stroked her skin like he did now. Her head rested on Pian's shoulder, the brush of his soft coat of fur feeling wonderful against her skin. Her lithe naked body was pressed tightly against his equally naked form, her large breasts pressed against his ribcage, the fine coat of fur on his skin warm and inviting. Her long silky white blond hair splayed across both of their shoulders and the pillow, her right leg drawn up over the top of his long powerful legs. As she opened her sleepy eyes she could tell Pian had been awake for some time. His left hand held the data pad that he was studying very intently, several of the pillows on the bed shoved under his head so as not to disturb the position of his body and therefore wake her. This was another item that had escaped Jalersi's notice in the beginning but not any longer. The constant and almost natural way of him doing so many small things that Pusintin had never done. Things that were guided by his desire to show her he was different than Pusintin, and that she was now the single most important thing in his life.

Jalersi opened her pale, powder blue eyes slowly and looked at the side of Pian's face, the sun behind the closed curtains silhouetting the outline of his jaw and nose. She didn't move so as not to disturb him and she simply stared at his face, something she found herself doing quite a bit over the last weeks. The more she looked at him, the more handsome he became in her eyes. Jalersi knew that you had to be a Kavalian female to truly appreciate the handsomeness of some of the Kavalian males. Jalersi may have been biogenically altered at a young age to appear almost human in nature by removing the fine coat of hair from her body and altering her feline like eyes but she was still a Kavalian female. Their faces were almost naturally feral in repose, and combined with the coat of fur that covered their bodies, it always made them look savage. Yet if you caught them in a moment of relaxed time, you could see the difference immediately. She had never truly studied Pian's face before they had come together again this time. His dark blond fur was impeccably groomed now, much more so than when they had been together all those years ago, and she adored running her fingers through the soft fur on his chest and cheeks. Jalersi had never been with anyone besides Pusintin before that one night with Pian some twenty years ago. She had never been with a male of her own species before Pian, and now she could not imagine ever feeling as satisfied as she did when Pian filled her. His fourteen inch cock was thicker than Pusintin by almost half and tapered to a narrow end, but it stretched her and reached inside her tight pussy to depths that Pusintin had never imagined and could never have obtained. The length of his beautiful tool alone usually had coming even before he was completely inside her. The more he sank into her, the more his incredible thickness and hard flesh stretched her until she was squealing out her divine delight. When he finally sank completely into her taut depths, and the bulb at the base of his cock expanded just before he came, Jalersi never failed to experience a devastating orgasm that stole her breath away. And then he would come inside her for what seemed like minutes, the bulb at the base of his shaft sealing them together and insuring his come remained in her belly and womb where it belonged, all the while Jalersi clutched him to her whispering out her enchantment. How long they stayed locked together depended on how excited he was and Jalersi had a large say in that she soon discovered. Just by using her inner pussy muscles and squeezing his dominating shaft, Jalersi could insure he stayed very excited and very hard and therefore sealed within her longer. She had done this many, many times since rediscovering him, each time reveling in the nearly three hours he could and had happily held her body wrapped around his while she murmured out her pleasure and lavished his face and lips with kisses until neither of them could stand it anymore.

How she had ever allowed Pusintin to have her was something of a mystery to her now. She loved her children with Pusintin without question, especially Karun and Nikkei for they were more like her. Her middle two sons were more like their father and he had made it a point to spend more time with them in their training and schooling. Yet looking back now, Jalersi realized she had never truly loved Pusintin and whatever they had shared was a matter of convenience for him more than her. She had however, always loved Pian it seemed, since that very first night together with him.

"It is good you are awake, I was going to wake you soon." Pian spoke softly turning his dashing blue vertically slit feline orbs on her.

Jalersi smiled dreamily. "I was having a very pleasant erotic dream." She answered very seductively.

Pian's eyes widened slightly. "An erotic dream?" He asked genuinely surprised. "What was this dream about?"

Jalersi grinned up at him and allowed her hand to slide down his flat, powerful abdomen to grip his flaccid cock with her fingers. His *huge* cock and his large balls were the only things on his body without hair, and the skin of his shaft felt warm, smooth and supple. “What you make me feel with this wonderfully glorious specimen of manhood.”

Pian grinned almost shyly and Jalersi smiled. “I hope it was satisfying.” He said slowly.

Jalersi purred openly and batted her eyes. “Not as utterly delicious as the real thing, but yes it was quite enjoyable.”

Pian stared at Jalersi for a long moment. She had beauty unparalleled as far as Pian was concerned, and even before the biogenic treatments she had been a goddess to him. He was discovering however that she was just as intelligent as any man he had ever met. She was also very witty, and not afraid to be strong and confident. He had never met a woman who was as skilled in their bed as she was, and up until that night with her so many years ago, he had had many females in his bed. None since the first time with Jalersi however. She could be very submissive if she so desired, but as she had just displayed by grabbing his cock, she was also very headstrong and not afraid to voice what she wanted. This was something he would need to grow more comfortable with, but he found the prospects enlightening to say the least and it was growing easier by the day. He leaned over and kissed her softly.

“You are the most amazing woman I have ever met Jalersi.” He said softly staring into her eyes.

Jalersi scooted closer to his body, his words warming her body and her mind at their very sincere tone. “And you continue to make me desire you more every day Pian.”

“Karun will be here in ninety minutes with this elf female Ardis that has taken up so much of his time. We should be prepared.” He said finally.

Jalersi nodded slowly. “I know... just let me feel you against me for a time longer.” She spoke running her fingers through the soft fur of his chest. “What are you reading?” She asked looking at him.

“The added information Jiss gave to me. There is not much... but none of it is good.” He answered. “The Plan with the Drow in The Wilds is set to begin in a few hours if it has not already begun. The Puma Bane Pride is notoriously efficient and that is why I was so urgent with Karun that we needed to meet this morning. Perhaps they can salvage something if they act quickly, for we don’t know their timetable and they may be able to save some.”

Jalersi lifted her head now at the mention of Jiss’s name and put her jaw on his shoulder. “I was very surprised Jiss came to you Pian.” She said. “He and Matuarr tried with such vigor to get this Lisisa to be recognized as a Kavalian citizen. I thought for sure he was solidly behind my father and Pusintin.”

Pian nodded his head. “That was his task yes.” He said. “Jiss is many things Jalersi my love, but he is still a Kavalian at his core. He was doing what he was tasked to do by your father but he is also a politician, which means he is not stupid. This plan of Pusintin and your father... it is beyond insane.”

“You don’t have to remind me of that.” Jalersi spoke.

“Jiss realizes this and he believes what we believe; that an action like this will plunge us into a war on two fronts that we can not win.” Pian told her.

“It’s not a trick on his part then?” She asked.

Pian shook his head. “No. He came to me remember, and he was just as taken aback at this plan as we were. We must make it clear to this Ardis that we did not know of this plan and we certainly do not condone it.”

“Do you think they will believe us?” She asked as she pushed herself up further on the bed and pulled the sheet loosely around her body, more to block the chill than to hide her body from this man. A man who knew her body far more intimately than her husband had ever taken the time to discover. He was a man that had broken every ingrained taboo of Kavalian males by treating her as an equal in everything, and lavishing her with unfettered attention in their bed, in ways that caused Jalersi to sing in bliss. Jalersi’Puat was reasonably sure that he was the only Kavalian male to ever use his lips and tongue to give pleasure to his mate. She doubted that any Kavalian male would even know how to do that, and she wondered just where or who Pian may have learned it from. Pian was learning still she knew, but he was taking great relish in learning and giving Jalersi sinful pleasure in the process. “Given what we have attempted to do since we have been here, and then the recent knowledge that has become public that they are training the Coven dragons to fight us. This does not garner a whole lot of trust between us Pian. I find it hard to believe anything right now.”

“I know it does not garner trust... but we need to make them understand as well as we are able that we are not the enemy. We talked of this Jalersi my love.” He told her. “This is the way we decided to proceed.”

Jalersi nodded. “I know Pian.”

Yes they had talked of it. They had talked of it extensively much to Jalersi’s surprise. It was not something she expected, though as every day passed, an adoring love grew minute by minute for this man and the new doors he was opening for himself as well as her. They were Kavalian, both of them, and neither of them wanted to do something that would hurt their people as a whole. Neither of them supported what her father and Pusintin were doing but neither was Pian’s Pride, while large in size, equipped with the best and most powerful ships. Pian had done what they could do with the resources provided to him, and built Pride ships outside the normal Kavalian channels. Not overly large ships, but fast and very deadly when operating together and he was a task master when it came to training. The largest ship within the Nrurani Pride was Pian’s *GREATSOUL*-Class Dreadnought. He rotated all of his officers onto the *GREATSOUL* at some portion so all of them would be familiar with the larger ship and operations.

Yes they had talked, and Pian had listened intently to her and her ideas and even asked what she would do in a situation such as the one they found themselves in. Jalersi met his eyes and he looked at her tilting his head as he did and looking incredibly delicious as a result of this action. At least in her eyes. “What is it Jalersi?” He asked seeing her face take on a worried expression.

“I worry for... I worry for Nikkei and what Pusintin may... what he may do to make our daughter suffer for what I have done. Falling in love with you. My sons I believe are lost to me because of their father’s influence, but Nikkei...” Jalersi’s began to speak.

Pian held up his hand and shook his head as his clawed finger stroked her cheek. “Put it out of your mind Jalersi.” He told her with warmth. “I have already had my brother place very skilled members of our Pride in place to watch over Nikkei. No harm will come to her Jalersi. I will not allow it. I swear this to you.”

“Pian... she is Pusintin’s daughter.” Jalersi said stunned as she looked at him. “She is not your responsibility. By Kavalian law you have no obligation to...”

“She is your daughter Jalersi’ Puat. She is part of you... and that means she is part of me as well now.” Pian said confidently. “I will not abandon her to the fates. She will be protected. You are my mate now Jalersi. And I am not Pusintin. If we are to move into the future we both want, then we need to begin changing how we act. It can begin with us.”

Jalersi leaned forward and took his feline face in her hands staring into his eyes. “No Pian... I am Jalersi’Nrurani now.” She stated confidently and with no small amount of pride. “And no Pian my love... you will never be mistaken for Pusintin. Certainly not in our bed by any means, not in my mind and most definitely not in my heart.”

“That is good.” Pian said as he covered her hands with his. “Because I plan to have you in our bed quite a bit.” He said with a grin. “Now that I have discovered what you taste like my sweet Jalersi, I intend to indulge as often as possible.”

Jalersi purred inside at his words knowing that would mean his incredibly talented tongue would be exploring her body. His tongue was large and felt sensuously rough when he dragged it across her susceptible pussy and clit, driving her insane with pleasure. She moved her body into his lap and he immediately set aside the data pad to cup her firm ass and pull her close to him. Something else that Pusintin had never done. When Jalersi had done this with him as he was reading reports and such, to try and elicit a reaction from him and draw his attention to her, he had never responded by dropping what he was doing and pulling her to him.

“And I will never refuse you when you offer to do that.” Jalersi said looking into his eyes with a smile. “It was... divine.”

“Good. You are... you are yummy!”

Jalersi’s eyes went wide at this. “Yummy?” She exclaimed with a laugh. “Pian’Nrurani where in the heavens did you hear that?”

Pian shrugged his broad shoulders. “It is something I heard on the Netnews channels while we have been here. You might be surprised what is on their Netnews channels here in the Union.” He stated. “I believe I put the word in the correct context.”

Jalersi laughed as loving warmth and relief flooded through her. She leaned forward and pulled his head to her breasts, feeling his powerful arms pull her closer to him. “My handsome mate Pian’Nrurani... you may

have my yummy delights whenever you wish.” She said with a smile. “We will only need to devise new positions for you to have me. I take pleasure in being inventive.”

Pian’s eyes twinkled in mischievousness. “I believe I will enjoy that.” He said. He lifted his head from her breasts and stared at her beautiful face. Her white blond hair framed her powder blue eyes and her lips looked very inviting.

Jalersi chuckled as she held his head tightly. “Oh... I know I will enjoy it.” She stated confidently as the different ways he could fill her with his enormous cock began to run through her head.

“I will make you happy Jalersi. I swear to you I will make you happier than you have ever been.” He spoke.

Jalersi leaned over and kissed him tenderly her eyes moist at the heartfelt words he had spoken. “I am already happier than I have ever been. If it gets better my love... who am I to complain?”

Pian squeezed her tightly before leaning back. “We must get ready to meet Karun.” He said. “We will start exploring when they leave.”

SPARTA

APARTMENT OF *DURCUNUSAAN* LIEUTENANT ARDIS

Whatever he had expected to find coming to this planet had never materialized. Whatever his father intended for him to find, Karun was pretty confident it definitely wasn’t what he had in fact discovered. He had discovered what he knew was in complete contradiction to almost everything his father had told him growing up. Looking back now and finally seeing what his father’s lies, hate and quest for power had wrought only made Karun realize that this is not what he wanted for his life. He had come here to Sparta and found not a closed minded society of men and women who would never accept him as his father had said, he had found a society and history that was rich and welcoming and it was partly his history. A society and history that welcomed him with open arms, regardless of who his father was.

He had discovered a half sister previously unknown to him. Half wolf and half vampire and one of the strongest women he had ever met in his life outside of his mother. They had tried to force Lisisa to renounce her Union citizenship to become a member of the KFI, not because his father wanted to know his lost daughter, but because they wanted to study her bond with the dragons that Kavalians so feared. To better improve their cloned soldiers. When that failed they wanted him to pump her for information, to gain her trust so that he could betray her in the future. Karun had certainly gained her trust, and he had gained so much more in the process of doing that. Looking back now, Karun believed the first day they had met in Eden City was the turning point in his life. He had gained a new perspective on life and what it could be. He had gained knowledge of his history from the woman who was his grandmother; the woman who had brought his father into this world and the one his father hated so. Hours he had spent with Gorgo learning of not only Spartan history, his history, but Lycavorian history as well. A long history of honor and faith. Of reaching out and acceptance. It was a history that his father never relayed to him, because his father had never taken the time to know it. None of his questions were refused by anyone, and while he would have liked to know his uncle better and discover what type of man he was, his grandmother said it wasn’t time for that just yet. His Uncle Martin still had a deep hatred and anger for his brother and not for the reasons Karun had thought he would. He hated his brother not because he had betrayed him personally, but because he had betrayed his people when they needed him most.

Selflessness.

It was a word he had become intimately familiar with while exploring this new world. No one looked at him differently because of who his father was, and he was treated as an equal by everyone. Once more defying his father’s words to him, Karun had been taken in by so many people, talked too openly and even invited for dinner. Almost as if they could sense something within him that he could not sense himself. He had learned so much, and he knew if he wanted that to continue he had to change the path his father had placed him on. Karun knew that if he wanted what he had found to continue he needed to walk a different road.

What he had found was the violet and sapphire eyed half elf, half wolf Ardis and she alone had made that decision so much easier for him. Karun had accepted that path the moment Ardis began to change him. Change him in a way that forever altered his path in life. She was like a drug to him that he could not get

enough of. Ardis was the one who had showed him the true nature of his wolf side. How to shift into an animal with four legs, how to hunt and use all his senses as a wolf did. How to enjoy the feelings of freedom and strength when he was in wolf form. It had frightened him terribly when he had first shifted, leaving a yellow streak of urine beneath four very wobbly legs. It was a moment that Ardis thought hysterically funny, and at first he had been savagely angry at her for embarrassing him in such a way. Until he discovered it had happened to her, in far more public surroundings, in front of hundreds of men and women in the middle of Eden Center. Lisisa had confirmed this for him, and then relayed her own story of when she first learned to shift her form and after a long moment he had joined them both in laughter over the incidents. That had been the turning point Karun knew; being able to laugh at himself because others were not afraid to laugh at themselves. Karun had not looked back since.

Ardis's sweet wild timber and peach scent filled his head wherever he went now and it had since the first night they had been together and he discovered the pleasures he could have with a woman who wanted him just as badly as he wanted her. Ardis's lush body was a temple he had worshiped at many times over the last few weeks, willingly dismissing all his father had taught him about females in general and elf females in particular. He realized that everything his father had told him about elf females was so very wrong, probably because he had never had an elf female by his own spoken word. Ardis was totally uninhibited in bed, and Karun could not get enough of caressing her two inch high elven ears with his nose. Due to her powerful wolf genes, Ardis had tiny scent glands behind the outer ridge of her elven ears. Karun had soon discovered, quite by accident, that when he nuzzled the back ridge of her pointed ears, her scent spiked to much higher proportions, becoming sweeter and more pungent and setting his own senses ablaze. She also became a wildcat in bed when he did this, and much pleasure had been had by both of them during this state. She was not afraid to be submissive to him, to let him dominate her, because somehow she knew it would never extend out of their bed. She could also be very forceful in what she wanted, and there had been many times she wanted more from him, and she did what she needed to go to get that. As he crushed her body to his chest now, the last twitches of his cock emptying his come into her satin like depths, Karun knew he would never be the same.

Ardis groaned in blissful passion as Karun lowered his head and firmly nuzzled the back of her right elven ear. His left hand still gripped her firm breast, his right hand resting just above her painfully aroused clit on her lower abdomen, holding her body in place. His wonderful cock was buried fully in her tight elven pussy, the retreating tremors of her staggering orgasm just now beginning to recede as he ground his cock into her, his hips pressed against her firm ass cheeks. Ardis was no stranger to men, but Karun had rocked her world in more ways than she could recall. He devoured her like a fine meal, nuzzling her elven ears and causing her to chant his name loudly no matter how many times he had taken her. She had never really cared for this position because she enjoyed kissing her lovers far too much while they fucked her. With Karun however, he could rotate his hips, move and flex his large cock so well in this position that she couldn't stop coming. And he was by far the largest man she had ever had inside her, and this knowledge only made her more possessive of him. His hands were never idle either, his fingers always dancing across his skin, tickling her ass or simply toying with her erect clit until she exploded on his driving cock over and over. He had quickly surpassed any of the men she had been with in her young life and that made her very happy indeed. Ardis smiled languorously now as he lowered himself onto her back, making no move to remove his cock and sliding his arms under her body while pulling her tightly against him as he laid on his side and took his weight off her.

Ardis had no doubt that her mothers and father would not approve of Karun. Especially her father. At least not just yet. There was a wildness in Karun that mirrored the wildness in her own father, the same wildness that her mothers so adored about him. The same wildness that had them screaming out his name in their bed no matter how often he took them when she was growing up. They would keep her awake at times with their trysts Ardis thought with a grin as Karun's powerful body wrapped around her. She had spent many years looking for a similar type man, and Ardis was confident she had finally found him. He soaked up information like a sponge, wanting to know so much more about their history and the history of the Union. The moment he had begun submitting false reports to his father Ardis knew that he had made his decision and that she was part of that decision, and it was a fact that made her elven body shout with joy. Ardis reached back with her hand as his lips caressed her elven ear making her body strum out its pleasure, and she grasped his head entwining her fingers in his hair and sighing in happiness. She could feel him still emptying himself into her depths, though he was almost done. She didn't know much about Kavalians or their physical nature, but his Kavalian blood combined

with his Lycavorian blood must have given him enormous reserves of energy. He could empty into her for nearly two or three full minutes, his explosions powerful and intense and always causing her to respond with her own multiple orgasms. The sheets on her bed here in her apartment always needed to be washed thoroughly once they were done.

As his arms pulled her even closer Ardis smiled wistfully as she fit perfectly within his embrace. “We... we need to leave soon.” She gasped out softly. “It’s almost time.”

Karun nodded even as he continued to caress her ear, nuzzling her neck. “I know.” He answered finally. “Why do you think... why do you think they wanted you to bring me?” She asked.

Karun stopped nuzzling her and simply placed his cheek against her elven ear and sighed deeply in exasperation that was very evident in his voice. “I don’t know... but it is interrupting a very pleasant morning.”

Ardis grinned and nodded her head squeezing her inner muscles around his thick cock and hearing him groan in response. “Yes it is.” She stated.

“Wench!” Karun growled playfully. “I will punish you for that!”

Ardis chuckled. “I hope so.” She told him as she turned her head seeking his lips. She adored kissing him because it was something new he had never experienced and his enthusiasm could curl her toes. Karun gave her what she wanted and kissed her hard then, holding her head up so she did not have to strain and slowly withdrawing his cock so he could rotate her in his arms. He knew she liked to cuddle after they were together and he found he liked it just as much as she did. He liked it because she was his and no one else’s and she was not shy about showing that fact. Ardis was even more beautiful than her elven mother in his eyes and knowing that she wanted only him made him feel powerful.

He settled back to the bed between her long legs, feeling her arms snake around his back as she curled her heels around the back of his thighs. Ardis nuzzled his throat then, tracing the hollow of his throat with her tongue until she reached his jaw where he took her lips once more for a searing kiss of passion that lasted for nearly a minute. When they parted again her face was flush, but her eyes were alive with ardor. She reached up and ran her finger along his jaw then.

“What is she like?” Ardis asked. “Your mother I mean. She has never spoken to me much when I have come to get you?”

Karun looked at her. “She is very intelligent. She has a dry sense of humor when she allows it to show through. She has been different these last weeks though.”

“Different how?” Ardis asked.

Karun shook his head. “Just different. Happier almost. I do not spend much time with her at the embassy. I much prefer your company. And that of my sister Lisisa.”

“Happier?”

Karun nodded his head as he stroked her cheek with a finger. “Almost as if she has found something she didn’t have before.” He answered thoughtfully. “There were times when I could see the loneliness in her eyes... but now it’s different. Her eyes don’t have loneliness in them anymore.”

“Could it have something to do with this Pian you told me of?” Ardis asked. “The one who always seems to be protecting her?”

Karun looked at her keenly. “Protecting her?” He asked.

Ardis nodded quickly. “Like you do with me. Lisisa noticed it first. You don’t even know you do it really. You always make sure you walk on the outside of the promenade to safeguard me from unknown threats. Your eyes always sweep a room when we enter it. Pian does this with your mother.”

“She is the daughter of the Prefect of the Kavalian Federation.” Karun said. “I would think that is normal.”

Ardis smiled. “He loves her Karun you *riad aulved!* And if what I smell is any indication she loves him just as much back.” She exclaimed happily, taking his face in her hands. “I can smell him all over her. You could too if you concentrated hard enough. Just in the few times when they have been with you at the café when Lisisa and I have come to get you I have been able to smell it. His scent saturates her entire body, just as yours saturates mine. Her scent fills him as mine does you.”

Karun’s eyes grew a little wider at this revelation. “You... you are sure?” He gasped.

Ardis nodded. “Oh yes.” She replied.

“She is... she is having an affair with Pian?” Karun whispered softly.

“The tone of your voice tells me that this doesn’t surprise you as much as it should.” She told him.

Karun looked at her. “My father... my father has not been faithful to her through the years.” He said. “He doesn’t think anyone knows... but I have seen him with other women. It is not frowned upon in Kavalian culture for a male to do this, but my mother never thought he would do such a thing to her. I could never bring myself to tell her.”

“How does that make you feel?” Ardis asked softly.

“Before I met you... before I would have said it was alright.” He answered her honestly. “Now... knowing what I feel for you... I could never imagine doing this. You will be all I will ever need Ardis. And we have only just discovered each other. My mother is a beautiful woman and very smart, and my father should be content with her. And love her.”

“There are many men who do this Karun.” Ardis said. “And some women. Elves and Lycavorian alike. All species.”

“It is still wrong.” Karun said.

“I feel the same as you... we have only just come together and we have much to learn of each other.” She said with a smile. “And I can’t imagine anything being more blissful than what you make me feel.”

“I intend to improve upon that.” He said with a smile as he kissed her.

Ardis laughed. “Well... if you can do that... I just may have to devise some new ideas of my own.” She stated.

“We can start after we return from meeting my mother and Pian.” Karun said with a smile.

Ardis nodded. “I do believe I would like that quite a bit.”

Neither of them would ever know it was almost exactly what his mother and Pian had told one another in their room across the city. If they had, it would only prove to Karun that he shared far more in common with his mother than he did with his father. And it would have made him embrace both his heritages more than he had already done.

KAVALIAN EMBASSY FIFTEEN MINUTES BEFORE HIGH COVEN ACTION

As he sat now looking at his mother and Pian’Nruani, Ardis’s words came back to him and he noticed it as well. His mother sat next to Pian’Nruarani, closer than a mated Kavalian female should sit to another male that was not her mate. He used his sense of smell as Ardis and Lisisa had taught him and though he was still not as skilled as them, he detected her soft scent wafting from Pian’s pores, as well as his musky aroma drifting from his mother’s body very intensely. Karun thought perhaps he might feel anger at this information, but instead he felt happiness for his mother. Happiness because she had obviously found a man who wanted her for much more than her beauty. If he had not, Pian would never have gone this far with her to begin with. She had been a very stern Kavalian mother as he was growing, but she never failed to show him and his younger brothers and sister love that was not common among Kavalians. He and Nikkei always responded more than his younger brothers, and he suspected that the time his father spent with them was the reason behind this. His father had stopped trying to get him to not show his mother affection a long time ago. He found himself wondering if Pian and his mother would have a future together, and if he would be part of it. Karun already knew that he would not be returning to Kavalian space, not after what he had found here with Ardis and the people who had accepted him without question regardless of who his father was.

Jalersi sat next to Pian and gazed carefully at the female half elf who sat so very close to her son thinking almost the exact same thing. Her eyes were fascinating to look at in their dual color, and Jalersi knew well who her parents were. That information was public knowledge and very easy to obtain. She was well aware of what Pusintin had told her son to do in regards to this female. Pian had kept nothing from her. Pusintin told Karun to get close to her, use her and gather whatever information he could. Play to her womanly side and win her affection he had said. Jalersi hid her smile of perverse pleasure because it was very obvious Karun had done just that, only to Karun it was all very real and truthful and something that he obviously took great care in. Jiss sat on her opposite side and it was Jiss who began their conversation.

“We thank you for coming Lieutenant.” He spoke.

Ardis nodded. "You told Karun it was urgent and very important." She replied. "I'm surprised that you had us come in through the basement though. Everyone knows that Karun spends quite a bit of time with me."

Pian nodded. "Yes... but there are only three of us who know the basement entrance is there." He spoke now. "Only three of us have taken the time to do a thorough walk through of this embassy and memorize all the rooms and exits and entrances. Qurot and the others are stupidly ignorant of the basement entrance because they have not been down there yet and I have gone out of my way to conceal it without actually being noticeable. It is an emergency exit that I'm quite certain is in all the embassy buildings you have built in here in Sparta."

Ardis smiled. "I observed your attempts as well." She said. "And yes, the tunnels are known to the individual ambassadors, but it is not something we advise them of until they have established themselves. I'm guessing then that Commander Qurot and Ambassador Matuarr do not know I am here?"

"Matuarr and Qurot have no idea you are here." Jiss answered. "Nor does Commander Timur. Matuarr is very fastidious in his morning routine, and he will not leave his quarters for another hour at least. Qurot and Timur will sleep off their drunken state until mid day. We needed to make you aware that the information we are about to give you are..." Jiss took a deep breath. "We wanted to make the Union aware that what we give you in no way reflects our own feelings on these plans and nor do we agree with them."

Ardis's face became serious and she looked at Karun. He shook his head. "I have no idea what it is Jiss is leading up too." He said quickly. He turned back to Jiss. "What *are* you talking about Jiss?"

"This is not something Karun was aware of. He has been spending most of his time with you. Though unless I miss my guess, not for the reasons that your father and Prefect think." Pian spoke now. "We only just discovered what we are about to tell you two days ago during a secure transmission with Prefect Keleru and Marshall Pusintin."

Ardis looked at him. "Ok... now you have me interested." She said leaning forward. "Is this information so secret that you can not arrange a public meeting with someone from within the government? Or bring it to our attention before now?"

"You must understand Lieutenant Ardis..." Jiss spoke. "What we are about to do could very well see all of us executed for treason. And though we have had this information for two days, much of it is still unconfirmed and given what has recently come about with us learning that Androcles Leonidas is training the Coven dragons, we did not know if it was in our best interests to pass it on."

"What has Andro training the High Coven dragons got to do with what you are going to tell me?" Ardis asked.

"You are training High Coven dragons to fight our people!" Jalersi barked quickly. "To kill our people! Even as you deny it publicly! It has much to do with what we are risking at this moment!"

"We haven't denied anything to my knowledge." Ardis spoke calmly. A female elf does not become the Lieutenant Governor of Sparta by being excitable, and Tarifa had passed this patience to all of her children, at least the part of her that did not take place behind closed doors with her husband and Drow lover.

Jalersi looked at Pian quickly and then shifted her eyes to Karun. "Do you take us for fools?" She snapped turning back to Ardis. "Your Prime Minister has denied you are training the High Coven dragons that have been seen on Earth! Or do your Netnews channels not tell the truth as well?"

"Jalersi..." Pian spoke softly.

"No Pian... I want her to answer my question!" Jalersi snapped. "We are risking our lives here! Our very futures Pian!" Karun looked at his mother oddly at the way she was being so forceful, almost as if she was trying to protect something and Ardis's words only a short while ago began to ring very true.

"The truth?" Ardis spoke still remaining calm. "Prime Minister Deia didn't lie to anyone when she said we were not training the Coven dragons to fight the KFI."

"You expect us to believe that?" Jiss asked.

Ardis moved her eyes from Jalersi and looked at Jiss. "You will believe what you choose to believe Ambassador Jiss. Andro and my Uncle Martin are Talon Guardians... and they are not training the Coven dragons to fight you."

Pian leaned forward now. "Talon Guardians?" He asked holding up his hand before Jiss could answer. "What is this Talon Guardian?"

Ardis took a deep breath. "Just what the name implies." She stated simply. "They are Guardians of the dragons and their species. It is a much revered and honored position within dragon history and culture."

“Culture?” Jiss spoke but with much less forcefulness. “They are... but they are simply beasts.”

Karun shook his head now. “No they are not.” He replied quickly. “Simply because they are not like us Ambassador does not mean they are any less intelligent or inferior. In many ways they are superior to us and not just in what they can do. I have spoken many times with Jeth, my sister Lisisa’s dragon. I have spoken with Tharua his dragon mate. They are just as smart as any of us; some of them even more so, for they have thousands of years of life and knowledge and experience to fall back on and draw from.”

“Spoken to them?” Jalersi asked stunned. “How?”

Karun tapped his forehead. “The same way Aunt Athani did mother. In Mindvoice. I don’t know how my aunt came to discover this skill but my Lycavorian blood gives me this ability; I just never used it until I came here.”

“You... you can speak to them?” Jalersi asked shocked still unable to believe this new information.

Karun nodded. “Yes... quite easily once they made the initial connection with me. I would be consider a Tier Five Mindvoicer using the system the Union measures Mindvoice users.”

“If... but if you are not training the Coven dragons to fight us... what are you doing?” Pian asked.

“The High Coven took these dragons from us many years ago. A ship carrying the hatchlings and eggs crashed in The Wilds. The Coven got to them before we could.” Ardis explained. “Andro is not training them to fight your people; he is training them as he would train any of our Bonded Pairs. He is training them because while that Empress witch may have stolen them from us, she does not rule their minds or the minds of those who ride them. He is basically training them to have free will.”

Jalersi gasped at the forcefulness of Ardis’s words and the way she spoke and both Pian and Jiss looked at her. “Jalersi my love?” Pian asked quickly causing Karun’s eyes to bore into him. “Jalersi what is it?”

Jalersi looked at him quickly her eyes wide. “He is training to turn them against their masters. He is training them to rebel against the High Coven!” She stated turning back to Ardis. “Isn’t he?”

“If the only thing we intended to do was train them to fight your people, Andro would not be involved as a Talon Guardian. He has far too many duties as Crown Prince.” Ardis answered her with a gentle smile at her obvious insightfulness. “Even though my Uncle Martin hates your husband Jalersi... he cares more for the well being of the dragons than he does in giving the High Coven an advantage in their war with you. The vampires who live within the Union, are citizens of the Union, they are different from those who rule the Coven. You must have noticed this in the time you have been here?”

Jiss could not deny this and he nodded his head. “Yes... this is true.” He spoke looking at her. “If truth is what we want, then yes... I have noticed this on many occasions.”

“As have I.” Pian spoke.

Karun watched his mother’s eyes as she glanced once more at Pian when Ardis called his father her husband. It was true! The mention of his father did not even register in his mother’s eyes and she immediately had turned to Pian. He glanced between his mother and Pian several times before settling his eyes on his mother once more; knowing that what Ardis had suspected was in fact true. He reached out and took Ardis’s hand in his without shame or regret.

“I’m not returning with you to Kavalian space mother.” He spoke confidently looking at her. “Everything father told me about Earth, about Sparta, about this part of my blood. It was all a lie. I have... I have found my future here.”

Jiss shook his head quickly and dismissed his words with a wave of his hand. “You must hear what we have to tell you!” He spoke quickly. “Or none of us will have a future!”

Karun and Ardis both looked at him. “What do you mean?” Karun asked sternly. “What is he talking about mother?” Karun cut his eyes to her and Pian. “Commander Pian?”

Pian lifted the data pad. “We have discovered some information that could drastically change the scope of what is going to happen in the coming weeks.”

Ardis’s eyes narrowed. “Happen? What is going to happen?”

Pain opened his mouth to reply but his words were lost in the massive explosion that blew all of them from their chairs and sent them hurtling across the room. The vast concussive wave smashed into them without mercy, slamming their wildly flailing bodies into the interior walls of Pian’s quarters and sending all of them into the blackness of oblivion.

**DRAGON MOUNTAIN
ISLAND OF SARDINIA
HIGH COVEN STRIKE TEAM ONE
PRESENT TIME**

Aikiro looked at the back of the Commando's head as he stopped and signaled for them to follow his action. She shook her head disgusted and moved up next to him quickly as the other fourteen commandos took up defensive positions in two files facing in all directions. The corridor they were in was massive, easily ten meters across and thirty meters high, and the commandos took up positions to cover all their angles as their training dictated. The domed lighting in the ceilings cast a yellowish luminosity up and down the corridor. The temperature in the ship was high so it was useless for them to use their infrared visual spectrum.

"Commander... what is the problem?" Aikiro asked in a hissing whisper as she came up next to him. "We do not have much time left and we can not keep stopping like this."

The man looked at her. "Empress... the internal mapping system has stopped working." He told her holding out the one by one flat screen portable sensor he was holding. "One second we were following the corridor to the point you indicated and then the next it just stopped."

"What do you mean?" Aikiro asked looking at the portable sensor in his hands and taking it from him. The green and white sonar like mapping system was blank and not pulsing out the invisible mapping waves. "How deep are we into the ship?"

"Four hundred meters from where we came in and if the scans were right we've been following a eight degree downward path that puts us a hundred and sixty meters deeper from the entrance." He answered. "You have noticed how the walls are a combination of steel and rock now?"

"Yes." Aikiro said.

"It is not rock at all Empress." He answered. "It is a bio material of some sort made to look like rocks. Like the inside of a cave."

"What are you saying Colonel?" Aikiro asked.

"You told me this ship could alter its shape?" The man asked.

Aikiro nodded quickly. "Yes... we saw this when it lifted off from Lycavore. It grew and expanded in size to what it is now."

The Colonel nodded. "The interior of this ship has been made to look like caves Empress Aikiro." He spoke.

"Why would they do that?" Aikiro asked.

"I don't know... but it must be for a reason. Camouflage perhaps. The exterior has been made to blend in perfectly with whatever ground was here when it landed. It essentially formed the mountain we thought it to be when we first arrived."

The colonel reached up and pressed two fingers into his ear as his ear piece cackled and the voice of his Team Leader came on.

"Colonel... our MAPSEN has ceased functioning." The voice spoke.

"Team Three... reports the same." Another voice came into his ear piece as well as Aikiro's.

The colonel looked at Aikiro. "Hold positions!" He hissed. "Empress... these MAPSEN sensors are state of the art. I can see one of them malfunctioning, perhaps two... but all three at the same time?"

"Colonel... the ship is empty!" Aikiro snapped. "You have detected no lifesigns! I can sense nothing within Mindvoice. It is a void area like the bubbles all over the planet. It does not matter to me that the walls look like the inside of a cave. You know what we came here for and we need to get down to the core to find it!"

"Whoa! What was that?" The voice echoed in their ear pieces.

The colonel pressed his finger to his ear tighter. "Team Two report!" He demanded.

"I don't know sir! It's almost like... it's like the wall just moved!"

"We are not far from the main computer core!" Aikiro snapped. "It has to be in a similar location as the ship schematics told us from the MV ship on Nuwaroa. They were near identical ships in their design!"

"Colonel... the corridor we are in sir. It... it's like..."

"What?" The Colonel spoke.

“Sir... it’s far too large for humans or Lycavorians.” The man in Team Three spoke. ***“Even the entrance we came in was massive! It... shu... we just lost the lights. Switching to hand Illum.”*** (Shit)

“Team Three report!” The Colonel demanded.

“The lights that were on down here have just gone out Colonel!” The man replied. ***“Our infra red vision doesn’t work sir; there is too much residual heat! Ol zhah renor 'zil mithuth down here!”*** (It’s black as sin!)

“Team Two?” The Colonel demanded.

“We still have lights up here sir!” The voice answered. ***“We can continue... oh vith! The lights just died here too Colonel! Holding position!”***

The faint clicking sound began far in the distance and began to get closer. The Colonel and Aikiro turned to gaze down the long corridor as the domed lights overhead began to go out one at a time as they came down the corridor towards them.

“All Teams stand by!” The Colonel spat. “We’re losing lights here as well! *Shu!*” He turned to look at Aikiro and saw that her eyes had suddenly changed to cobalt blue and they were very wide. “Empress... do we continue!”

Aikiro didn’t answer him and simply stared down the corridor as they began to hear more metallic clicking sounds in the distance. These were similar sounds that appeared to come from a door opening and closing but did not have quite the same tone to her vampire ears. “Colonel, how far are we from the core?” Aikiro spoke quickly.

Her mind went back several years to when she was monitoring a training exercise with Robert Moran. They were flying in a LRR watching as Narice took the dragons through a series of maneuvers and she had asked him why she could not see them on the sensor display.

“The dragons don’t show up on sensors.” Moran had answered. “We don’t know why really, but our scientists believe it is because their scales have some sort of reflective property to them.”

“Empress... we are almost there!” He replied. “I thought you wanted...I can take us there by memory! We can...!”

Aikiro shook her head. “No... we’re being herded.” She told him softly. “Directed down a certain path for a reason. This path.”

“What? Empress... there are no life signs! The ship is empty. You said so yourself!” The Colonel insisted.

Aikiro felt a slight tremor within Mindvoice and shook her head as her eyes grew wider. “No... this ship is not empty Colonel. Call your teams back now! Call them back or they will die.”

The colonel touched his finger to his ear just as the cold sensation of fear began to rise in his gut. “Teams Two and Three! Abort! I say again... abort! Return to the entrance you came in and evac back to the ship! Do it now!”

“Two acknowledges!”

“Colonel we’re almost there!” The Team Three leader announced. ***“We can see small lights in front of us! They are dim... but they are there sir!”***

“Damn it Lieutenant! You will follow orders! You will abort the mission and...!” The colonel’s blood went cold when there was a flash of white light and then standing in front of them was a holographic image of a middle aged woman.

“Vith Colonel! A woman just appeared in front of us!” The team three leader’s voice burst from their COMs.

“Team Two reports the same! It’s like black oil down here Colonel! We can’t see two feet in front of us and then this holograph just popped up!”

They watched as the woman lifted her head from where she had been looking at the floor and Aikiro’s eyes narrowed.

“The Lycavorian First Oracle!” She hissed angrily.

“We finally meet in person Empress Aikiro of the High Coven!” Helen spoke with a smile that held no mirth in it. ***“I can’t begin to tell you how happy that makes me. You have much to atone for!”***

“If it is just you old woman, I will enjoy tearing your heart from your chest!” Aikiro snarled.

“Yes... Canth told me you would be defiant to the very end. It was the nature of your Pralor ancestor I understand.” Helen spoke. Her image saw Aikiro’s eyes grow a little wider and the mirthless smile appeared again. **“You did not think we would know? Another sign of his inherent ignorance, something that I see the he passed down in his ancestors. Assuming you that have more knowledge and power than others. I know it was you who instructed Veldruk to imprison Canth’s mind on Ukwav. Imprison him so that you could devise ways to torture him and gain knowledge of the very ship you are standing in now! You have just taken it to levels beyond even what he showed from what Canth has told me.”**

“Canth is dead!” Aikiro barked. “He can not help you now! Give me what I want you crazy bitch! Give me what is rightfully mine and I will leave you and your vile species behind without harm.”

“Rightfully yours?” Helen spoke. **“You have allowed his depraved Mindvoice spirit to infect your own daughter! He controls her mind and you allow this! It is he who twists her, and in turn it is you who slyly led Yuri to infect Martin Leonidas! He is the ultimate personification of evil and you embrace that! You would return to him a means to destroy us all with your actions! To satisfy your sick ideals!”**

“He makes Yuri stronger!” Aikiro snarled.

“He infected your granddaughter!” Helen’s image snapped angrily. **“She has been fighting his corrupt presence within her since the day you allowed him to consume your daughter.”** Helen saw Aikiro’s eyes grow wider at this information. **“Yes... Lucia was there watching her mother! She witnessed it all! And unknown to even you, he infected her with a strand of his darkness! She has been fighting his corruption since that day and you have not been aware of it in the least! You have not been aware of it because Lucia saw what you and he intended and how it would cause billions to suffer and die needlessly and she hid it from you! She hid it from you because there was only one who could help her! Save her! Lucia killed Javier because he almost took that away from her! You can not control him Aikiro you fool woman! The Pralors did what they did for a reason!”**

“Yuri can! She is stronger than me!” Aikiro snapped at the holographic image.

“Yuri is dead!” Helen stated plainly.

“You lie witch!” Aikiro screamed out.

“Killed by Androcles’s hand only moments ago.” Helen told her nodding her head.

“YOU LIE!” Aikiro shrieked.

“Your grandson Javier Moran and his dragon Naruth as well. Dead at the hands of Androcles Leonidas and Lucia. Do you see now what you have wrought? You have forced Androcles Leonidas to use his powers as a Talon Guardian to kill one of the species he considers sacrosanct Aikiro. To him that is among the highest crimes you could commit. You have caused a rift to form between him and his father with the putrid darkness that grips Martin as it does. That rift between them however, it did not have the results you had hoped for I’m afraid. Androcles has made his decision Aikiro and that decision to go against his father has set him free. He will grow now... he will grow and become what his father and grandfather were and still are.”

“I do not believe you!” Aikiro shouted.

“Dante Moran is seriously injured but he will not escape the wrath of the Leonidas family for what he has done. If he is lucky... someone will find and kill him and Marux before he is found by Androcles or his father. I fear for what they would do to him should they discover him first.” Aikiro watched Helen shake her head sadly.

“Raping... raping poor Zarah was the surest possible way to bring an end to your precious High Coven Empress Aikiro, for two reasons.” Helen spoke eyeing her in the transmission like a cat ready to pounce on its meal. **“They are bonded you know, Zarah and her brother Androcles... bonded in a way not unlike the bond that exists between rider and dragon. He saved her life many years ago, he went against everything we know and believe to be true, every ideal we follow and he saved her life. Androcles is free now of everything that ever restrained him as a man from becoming who he is supposed to be, as his father will soon be free once more. And for what you have done... Androcles will bring fury down upon the High Coven the likes of which you could not possibly imagine. If you feared Martin Leonidas Aikiro... you have not truly known fear until his son marks you. He will be relentless and remorseless and he will grind your precious High Coven into dust beneath his paws. And beside him will be Zarah**

and Lucia. Lucia, who you, by your very own actions facilitated in bringing her to the only person in the universe who could save her. And all those who you have turned aside or thrown away, among them your youngest daughter Narice.”

“You lie!” Aikiro screamed again. “I would know this! I would feel it!”

“**You feel nothing!**” Helen snarled now. “**You feel nothing but your own importance and perceived power! Andro has already turned the riders and dragons against you, and while they do not yet know it, none of them will abandon Androcles Leonidas after what he has taught them! What he has shown them! He has shown them choice! None of them will betray him now!**”

“I will kill you!” Aikiro screamed out. “I will kill you and finally be rid of Canth’s pitiful essence!”

Helen’s image gave that mirthless smile once more and they saw the holoimage expand outwards around her to encompass the flame red scales of the enormous dragon next to her. They watched as that massive head lowered next to Helen’s shoulder.

“*Vith uns’aa!*” The Colonel hissed as Arzoal’s massive head and shoulders filled the image. (Fuck me)

“**Allow me to introduced the Dragon Elder Mother Arzoal.**” Helen’s image spoke with a smile as her small hand reached up to touch Arzoal’s snout. “**My Bonded Dragon Sister! We... we never expected to be bound to each other like the riders because of whom we were. Fate has a way of shaping things it seems. Shaping them to meet some unseen task or goal. I believe you have said some very unflattering things about her over the course of the last few months.**”

Aikiro looked around quickly, her cobalt blue eyes suddenly full of doubt and fear. “We will leave your foul planet!” She exclaimed quickly. “There need not be more bloodshed! Let us leave and this need go no further!”

The Colonel looked at her with wide eyes. “Let us leave?” He gasped.

They watched Helen shake her head slowly once more. “**No I’m afraid I can not allow that.**” She answered her softly. “**You have made your final mistake coming here Aikiro. You have made many mistakes, but none more ignorant and incomprehensible as thinking Martin Leonidas would leave this hallowed ship undefended.**”

“Empress... Empress... what is she talking about?” The Colonel demanded.

“**Allow me to welcome you and your poor soldiers to what was formerly Pralor City Ship 41 Aikiro. Better known now as Dragon Mountain!**” Helen stepped closer in the very clear holoimage, her eyes alive with anger and hate. “**And I assure you Aikiro... you will not leave this mountain alive!**”

“I offered a deal!” Aikiro screamed out quickly. “Are you frightened to face me alone? Hear me out first! I know things! Give me... give me the Avatar of this ship and I will leave without question.”

Helen laughed in the holoimage. “**Give you Avi? Your dismissal of anything you can’t control amazes me. Avi is not a tool or item for barter. I believe Martin has already told you that. I will make you another deal Empress of the High Coven. A chance if you will! We will revisit your death warrant if you make it to the center chamber of this ship! You will know it when you enter, for it is where we train our hatchlings to soar in the sky.**”

“And if we make it there?” Aikiro asked quickly.

Helen leaned even closer. “**You won’t.**” Her answer was given with the cold finality of death.

Aikiro watched as the image faded and almost immediately it began.

“*Vith! Tagnik'zun! Gaer ph'tagnik'zun ghil!*” (Fuck! Dragons! There are dragons here!)

The ear splitting roar of at least two or three dragons erupted over the COM channel, followed quickly by the rushing sound of jets of flame sucking the air out of the tunnels. The screams of the High Coven Commando team quickly followed, as did the sounds of weapons fire and burning flesh.

DRAGON MOUNTAIN AUXILIARY CONTROL ROOM ADJOINING MAIN CHAMBER

Helen turned to the young elven female Spartan who bore the colors of the *Durcunusaan* on her shoulder boards.

“Tar’la please have the drones in place at the entrances seal them.” She ordered. “No one is to get out! No one! And activate the defenses that Avi left in place as well.”

“Yes *Feravomir!*” The female answered as she began typing into the small console.

Helen turned to the large spider like drone that stood beside the station. Six legs and nearly eighteen inches across with glowing red eyes similar to Avi’s. The six legs were three inches thick and it was armored with the same alloy surrounding Avi’s internal processors. Those red eyes were eerie to look at in most cases, but Helen had spent much time in Dragon Mountain over the years and she found them comforting. The drones were free to roam the ship, doing what needed to be done to adjust this or adjust that to insure the nursery of dragon eggs and hatchlings were cared for. Avi had reprogrammed part of their central core processors to guard the small dragons at all costs, and since the drones were not helpless by any means it came easily.

“There will no doubt be damage to the interior of the ship during the fight Viktor Nine Six. Avi placed you in charge of the care of this great ship while he was gone with Resumar. He has programmed you with knowledge the others do not have. I will trust all the repairs to you.” Helen spoke.

The drone’s eyes blinked twice and twisted on his head as he rose to all six legs. As he began to move to the small tunnel on the floor Helen’s voice stopped him, his eyes swiveling back on their appendages to look at her.

“Should you or your drones come across any High Coven troops, you are free to use whatever means you deem appropriate to eliminate them Viktor Nine Six. However, Aikiro is not to be harmed. Pass this to your fellow drones.” Helen spoke. “As they move deeper into the ship seal the sections behind them. Bring them to the Central Chamber. Arzoal, the Elders and I will deal with whoever remains.”

The soft beep signaled the drone understood and he darted into the tunnel. Helen turned and looked at the elven female. “Has there been any word from SODRAG?” She asked.

Tar’la shook her head. “No *Feravomir.*” She answered. “Not since Prince Arrarn ordered an immediate lock down of all airspace around SODRAG.”

Helen nodded. “They will have a ship in orbit waiting to take any of them that survive aboard. They will attempt to reach it somehow. If it has not already been issued planet wide Tar’la, contact Admiral Joarl and initiate an immediate Command Override lock down of all space around Earth. Then contact Admiral Wallace on EDEN BASE and tell him to begin a full spectrum scan of the area looking for shrouded ships. Any that he finds, no matter where they are, he is to destroy them immediately.”

The King? Arzoal asked now.

Tar’la shook her head. “No one has heard from him since he left Thermopylae.” She stated. “There was an explosion in Sparta at the Kavalian embassy only moments ago. Security and rescue is responding but nothing is known just yet.”

Helen looked at Arzoal. “They have been planning this for some time.” She stated.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *So it seems. Was it wise to reveal we know so much of the Pralors and their history my sister?*

Helen met the eyes of her Bonded Sister. *We will need to tell everyone sooner or later. And I have no intention of allowing that vicious upaee to leave this ship alive.*

Good... nor did I.

Then let us go prepare to meet her sister, for if anyone gets to the chamber... it will be her.

Helen turned back to Tar’la. “Tar’la... the contents of Sealed Room fourteen? Activate the burn measures installed there and destroy them. Make sure nothing remains. When that is done, please insure that the ashes are transported to EDEN BASE and scattered as we discussed with Anisa.”

Tar’la nodded. “At once *Feravomir.*”

AIKIRO’S TEAM

The Colonel’s head went to Aikiro when that trumpet filled the corridor and caused the rolling echo to pass them by.

Empress!” he asked with real fear in his voice.

Aikiro met his eyes. “The Chamber!” She hissed. “Get us to the chamber! Do not stop for anything!”

“What was that?” One of his men snapped loudly spinning around to their rear.

“Quiet!” Another hissed out. “You will bring them to us!”

“Listen! I heard something I tell you!”

“Shut up!” Aikiro barked out.

“Empress I know I heard some...” The commando never finished his sentence as the huge shadow stepped into the small light given off by their hand Illum lights attached to their wrists. All anyone saw was a flash of dark green scales and then a huge gaping maw descended over the top of the entire upper body of the commando and long viciously sharp teeth bit into his midsection. His screams of agony were muffled as his kicking legs were lifted into the air and he disappeared.

“*Vith nindol!*” The commando next to him exclaimed with a shout and bulging eyes just as he brought his assault rifle up and began firing into the darkness behind them uncaring of where he aimed. “*Ilharvith'rell!*” He screamed as the flash from his muzzle lit up the area surrounding them. (Motherfucker)

The flash from his weapon also silhouetted two other savage looking dragons that were inches away from where other commandos stood and with screams of surprise and pain, two more High Coven elite soldiers were pulled into the darkness howling out their agony.

“Stop firing!” The colonel screamed. “Stop firing!”

The first commando ignored him and continued to hold down on his trigger until the metallic spider like object dropped from the darkness above directly onto his head and shoulder. His assault rifle began firing off into the surrounding walls as two of those long legs stabbed deeply into his neck, blood erupting in both directions. His scream could not cover the whirring sound as a small cutting tool extended from the belly of the metallic monster and began sawing its way into the soldiers jaw, blood splashing wetly and spraying all over those close to him.

“*Dalharuk d'natha elg'caress!*” The man next to him screamed as he lifted his weapon and sent forty rounds directly into chest and face of his fellow commando, shredding his comrade's head as well as the metallic monster. The repair drone lost four of its legs and a quarter of its thick body before it stopped moving, its two appendages still imbedded in the neck of the now dead commando.

Aikiro and the Colonel moved back quickly and pointed their lights down at the dead commando. Aikiro winced at the savage injuries and brought her eyes up to try and peer into the darkness.

“Hunter Drone!” She hissed. “We saw them on our ship but they were inactive!”

“*Vith* empress! Dragons and now these!” The colonel stammered.

Aikiro looked at him. “You can find this chamber!” She demanded.

“Yes.”

“Then get us there as quickly as possible!” She shouted. “Stop for nothing! Now run!”

SODRAG

When two dragons as large and powerful as Elynth and Jeth come tearing around the corner of a building as if they appeared out of nowhere, the easiest way to keep from dying is to get out of the way. This is exactly what the *Durcunusaan* troops that were now filling the streets of Reylan with their Elven counterparts did. You did not attempt to stop a combined mass of nearly eleven tons moving as quickly as they were.

...never forgive you Jeth! Elynth screamed out within Mindvoice.

I did what he wanted me to do sister! Jeth shouted back. *Just as you would have done if Lisi told you the same thing! The missiles were too close! If...*

They came to skidding halts as Arrarn, Toria and Carisia came dashing across the street, Anthar directly behind them.

“Elynth!” Arrarn barked. “Where... where is Andro!”

He was fighting Yuri! Elynth snapped.

“My mother?” Carisia gasped in shock.

They had Dragon Killers Arrarn! Jeth spoke now. *I activated our TAD units as he told me!*

“Elynth... are you sure?” Carisia stammered.

I am sure Enylarcopri. Elynth answered. *Andro ordered us out of the area! I don't know where he is now and he is not answering me in Mindvoice!*

“*Nubous lae!*” Arrarn snarled. “Toriam get back to SODRAG! Grab two flight crews and get *STRIKERS* up! Start searching the jungle and mountains around Reylan in a circular search pattern! They’ll try and make it back to whatever ship they have hidden nearby! I want that ship found!”

Quickly Toriam! I will take you! Anthar exclaimed using his TK power to lift her into the saddle on his back. *I will return quickly sister!*

“Go Anthar! Go!” Carisia barked slapping him on his hind scales.

With a trumpet of haste Anthar leaped into the sky and was gone with powerful sweeps of his massive wings.

Arrarn motioned the *Durcunusaan* officer over to him with a frantic wave. “I want you to contact control! Toriam Dellion is on her way back to the airfield! She is under orders from me to get two *STRIKERS* in the air! Anyone who gives her *sibfla* I will hang out to dry by their *nor*! She is my wife and mate and that makes her a Princess of the Union! Her orders are to be followed without question!”

“Understood Milord!” The officer panted.

“I want an immediate lockdown of the planet!” Arrarn exclaimed. “Nothing comes or goes! Contact...”

“Prince Arrarn... the *Feravomir* has already ordered this!” He stammered.

“Helen?” Arrarn asked.

“Yes sire. And an explosion in Sparta has collapsed part of the Kavalian embassy. There are reports of weapons fire from within the remaining structure! We have units moving there now but no contact has been possible!” The man barked.

“It’s a coordinated attack!” Carisia exclaimed. “It has to be!” With her next order Carisia Moran stepped completely through the doorway into her new life without hesitation or regret. She glanced at the *Durcunusaan* soldier’s rank boards and then back to his face. “What is your name *Hyperetes*?” She asked.

“*Hyperetes* Ganeu...” The man looked at her for a brief second surprised that she would know his rank. He knew who she was of course. He knew where she had spent most of her time since coming here and he knew what she meant to his Crown Prince and Princess. Unknown to him he would be the first who would summon in a new era and generation within the Union they so loved. “I am *Hyperetes* Ganeu Princess Carisia!”

“You will contact *Durcunusaan* Command and tell them this is a coordinated attack by High Coven Commando forces. You must secure the entire Royal Family and any of those who are important to them!” Carisia ordered. “Then you will dispatched security units to all sensitive areas that may be targets! Can you do that *Hyperetes* Ganeu? Will you follow my orders?”

Ganeu nodded his head without thought. “I will make it so Princess Carisia!”

“Go now!” Carisia ordered.

The *Durcunusaan* troop turned and lifted his hand to his lips as he began to follow the first orders given by the new Princess of the Lycavorian Union.

Where is Lisisa? Where are the others? Jeth demanded.

Arrarn and Carisia looked at him silently for a moment. Elynth turned to Carisia then and looked at her. *Enylarcopri?* She asked.

“Eliani, Sadi, Deni, Narice... they are all with Zarah and Lucia.” Carisia told them.

Zarah? Jeth barked.

Carisia looked at Arrarn quickly and then back to Elynth and Jeth. “She is in a bad way!” She answered finally. “When Eliani got to her, Lucia had already erected a Mindvoice barrier around them. We can’t even see inside it Elynth. Sadi and I tried to push through, but it was too strong and wouldn’t let us. Even with Anthar, Narice and Deneth providing us added power we could not breach it.”

Where? Elynth exclaimed.

“The third floor of the lodge.” Carisia answered.

Elynth looked at Arrarn. *Arrarn Leonidas?*

“I couldn’t stay any longer!” Arrarn confessed. “I had to... I had to do something. Malic is holding the two Immortals we found in the room, but they didn’t even put up a fight. They laid their weapons aside and we had to pull the elf female from out of in front of them to secure them with restraints. Elynth I want to kill them for what they have done to my sister! Every fucking one of them! I want...”

Elynth stepped forward quickly and placed her snout to his head. *Be strong Arrarn Leonidas. It is not wrong what you feel. You do what you must, but be assured Andro is making them pay as we speak!* Arrarn nodded slowly. *Jeth come with me. Even without Andro we are the strongest of our family outside of our parents. Let us see if we can't break this barrier.*

Reylan was not a large city, perhaps only forty thousand elves, humans and Lycavorians called it home. Everyone knew everyone if that was possible. The streets of Reylan were often crowded with men, women and children shopping or enjoying coffee or food at one of the many outdoor cafés. Since there were not many cities on this continent, the many roads throughout Reylan usually ended near the edge of the thick forest and timber. The streets were filling up with men and women rushing towards where the titanic battle had taken place; wanting to see what was happening as was the curious nature of all creatures. No one was facing the timber as they moved toward the center of Reylan and this is where the huge black wolf burst from the shadows of the timber in the middle of a leap unlike any of them had ever seen and with a snarl so loud it caused heads to turn towards the sound from a hundred meters away. The elven father standing closest to the massive beast yanked his two sons back quickly, his eyes wide as the wolf landed in a cloud of dirt and exploded into a run without so much as a second's pause. Hideously powerful legs propelled this black wolf at speeds that those who witnessed it would have spent years denying if they hadn't seen it for themselves.

Androcles Leonidas was every bit as large as his father in wolf form, his coat of raven black hair luxurious and shiny, though it was marked now with angry slashes across his rib cage and on his left shoulder. His muzzle sported a nasty gash as well, but none of these injuries deterred Andro from digging his three and a quarter inch wide paws into the ground and impelling himself forward with only one purpose. Corded steel bands of muscle rippled under the coat of fur, working in concert with the powerful lungs and heart that were the engine of this frightening beast he could transform into. Nothing would stand in his way now; nothing would stop him from reaching his sister. He ignored the pain of his injuries, he blocked out the frantic cries of Elynth, Sadi and Carisia inquiring to his location. He had only one reason for living now, and that was to reach Zarah and fold his sister into his arms and beg her forgiveness for not being there to protect her. The rage he had felt beating Dante Moran had surpassed nearly everything he had ever felt in his lifetime, and he took immense satisfaction as he was beating him. He took even greater happiness at the critical injuries he had inflicted on Yuri. She had been a fool to follow him into the timber, and he had made her pay for her folly and what she was responsible for. The feel of his dual fangs tearing at her flesh, his black talons carving into her limbs, the taste of her foul blood in his mouth. It had driven him into a further rage and only the four rounds from the Immortal's SA80 that punched into his muscular side had stopped him from tearing her head from her shoulders with his jaws. It had taken him only a second to see her broken body there, blood pooling quickly around her chest and neck to know she would be dead in moments. Grimacing against the pain of the projectiles, he had howled madly into the air and bolted into the deep timber before the Immortal could bring his weapon to bear on him again.

Now he had only one thought and as he urged his legs to go faster, he would be with her soon.

Andro didn't see the elven father follow his two sons to the point where he had landed after leaping from the timber. He didn't see the young ones chattering away to each other and to any who would listen as their father knelt over the huge paw prints from where he had landed. He didn't see the elven father reach down and dip his fingers into the three large drops of his blood and then turn to watch as the massive wolf galloped around the corner out of sight. Word was already spreading like a wildfire that the High Coven had savagely attacked one of the Leonidas children, and the elven father stared at where Andro had disappeared.

"For shylon gente un vada Malprinth, for jen theol tor Androcles. Aovi!" He spoke in a whisper. *"Cuia fas vada carians Milord."*(And death came to the High Coven, and his name was Androcles. Amen.)(Go with the gods Milord.)

We can not penetrate it. Elynth's voice spoke to all of them in the large room. She and Jeth were standing just below the portion of the wall that had come down when Andro had brought Dante Moran smashing through it. *I'm so sorry.*

"No!" Carina wailed as she stood close to the edge of the bubble, Moneus holding her shoulders in his hands.

"*Nubou!*" Eliani screamed as she whirled away from the opaque bubble three meters high and three meters across. "*Nubou! Nubou!*" Her fern green eyes fell upon the body of Javier Moran, now covered in one of the dirty sheets, his blood soaking the material. Eliani stepped up to the inert form and kicked him savagely. "You motherfucker!" She screamed. "You sick bastards!"

Malic moved away from where he was standing beside a kneeling Am'rul and As'pin and gathered Eliani into his arms. "Eliani..." He spoke softly as he wrapped his aura around her, trying to sooth the helplessness and rage she felt at not being able to reach her sister.

"I... I can't help her!" Eliani cried. "I can't... I can't reach her! That... that bitch is killing her! She is killing our sister!"

NO! Andro's voice boomed within Mindvoice causing all of them in the room to turn toward the opening in the wall.

Their eyes went wide when they saw the huge black form of the wolf leaping directly at the opening and in a silver/white flash of light Andro landed on the floor of the room in his human form kneeling on one knee. Deni had moved up into the room by now and was closest to the opening when Andro dropped in. His eyes were wide as he looked out and down to the ground three stories below.

"*Saoi sibfla!*" He gasped softly turning back to look at his older brother with the same wide eyes that everyone in the room was viewing him as he came to his feet. They had never seen their brother, let alone any wolf, make such a leap in wolf form and transform just before he landed. All of them could feel the immense Mindvoice power radiating from him then, a power none of them had ever felt coursing through him.

"Andro!" Sadi panted as she stepped up to him and threw her arms around his waist.

Andro closed his wolf eyes briefly reveling in her female aura as she bathed him in it while Elynth's massive body was now suspended on the side of the building by her curved talons as she extended her head and neck into the room.

Andro my Bonded One! She announced.

I am fine sister. Andro answered her immediately.

You fool! If you ever send me away like that again I will... Elynth snorted loudly as her talons dug deeper into the wall in immense relief.

Eliani, Carina and Lisisa stepped up to him just a moment later.

"Andro... it's some sort of Mindvoice bubble!" Lisisa declared quickly and you could see the tears about to come bursting out of her eyes. "We can't penetrate it! We've been trying ever since we got here! All of us together! It's..."

"I know." Andro spoke opening his eyes and looking at her.

"She's killing our sister!" Carina spat vehemently as she lashed out at him, her hand striking his side. "She's killing our sister and we can do nothing!"

All of them saw Andro visibly grimace and his groan of pain filled the room. That was when they took notice of his condition. Blood streaked the left side of his shirt, four neat holes in the fabric. His right cheek had a three inch long gash in it from something sharp that had already partially healed because of his shifting. Blood spotted his jaw and lips, and there were four neat tears down the side of his right shoulder, also partially healed because of his shifting. Carina saw what she had done and brought her hand to her mouth in a gasp of horror.

"Ohhh... Andro... I'm..." She stammered.

"My love?" Sadi spoke grabbing him tighter. "*Carians* Andro you're bleeding!"

Andro grimaced as the pain from Carina's blow began to lessen. "Yes... it would seem that way." He stated.

"My love what... what happened? Elynth said... Elynth said you went after Yuri."

"Yuri is dead." Andro spoke quickly causing everyone in the room to gasp in shock.

"Dead?" Denali spoke softly as he came forward. "*Carians fervon!* You took on Yuri by yourself? Are you *malda?*"

Andro shook his head quickly. “That doesn’t matter now.” He said looking at Eliani. “We need to get Zarah and Lucia out of here.”

“Andro we can’t get through the bubble!” Deni spoke coming forward now. “None of us can. Not even all of us together! We have been trying everything we know!”

Andro gently took Sadi’s arms from around his waist and his wolf eyes fell on the bubble in the room. It was centered over what was the bed and did not allow any visual reference. He stepped up to it slowly, his eyes going to where Am’rul was staring up at him.

“Cha’talla?” He asked softly.

Am’rul nodded in response. “For many years now.” He answered.

Andro turned to Malic. “Malic... release them.” He said.

“Andro they...” Eliani began to speak as she stepped forward.

“They have been protecting Lucia for years from the shadows.” Andro spoke as he turned to look at her. “They are part of Cha’talla’s tribe. And they came here with Lucia to save Zarah. She did save her. I can feel it.”

“Save her?” Lisisa exclaimed as she stepped forward gripping Carina’s hand now. “Lucia is the one killing her! She is trying to...”

“Lucia is protecting Zarah. Protecting her with all that she is.” Andro spoke as he turned back to the MV bubble and lifted his hand to place it an inch above the shimmering opaque color. He closed his eyes and let go of his Mindvoice shields, wrapping himself around the bubble and merging with it. He felt easily what Lucia had done and also what she would allow. Sadi and Elynth were the only ones to feel what he was doing, and Andro felt them reaching out to him, allowing him to draw from them if he needed. He didn’t need them for this but he sent a pulse of love and warmth back to them both within Mindvoice before opening his wolf eyes once more.

“Protecting her?” Eliani spat. “Protecting her from what? No one can get through that MV shield Andro! How do we know what she is doing?”

Andro met his sister’s eyes. “She is protecting her from us.” He spoke before stepping forward and walking right through the bubble with a flare of soft azure blue light. His brothers and sisters turned away at the brightness for a moment and to their complete and utter shock when they turned back he was gone.

“Andro!” Sadi screamed rushing forward. “No! You don’t know what will...!”

“*Son Vada Carians!*” Lisisa gasped as she gripped Carina’s arms.

Eliani’s eyes were equally wide. “Lisi... Lisi... did Andro just walk right through that bubble?” She gasped.

“Yes.” She answered stunned.

“*Sibfla!* Can this day get any worse?” Eliani sobbed as she hugged Malic.

Lucia’s dark eyes opened slowly when she felt his presence. Zarah was curled up in her arms, Lucia’s hand stroking her dirty hair and cheek as her head rested just above her breasts. Zarah’s arms were wrapped tightly around Lucia’s upper body as if holding on for dear life. Lucia was deathly pale, the puncture holes on her throat from Zarah’s vampire teeth closed but still very tender and outlined in blood indicating that Zarah had nearly killed her by taking too much blood. Zarah’s full lips were stained with Lucia’s blood, but the split skin of her lips was now healed. All that remained on her body were dozens of bruises, the lacerations and cuts and most of the urgent internal injuries from the beatings healed. Andro looked at his sister’s face tucked into the hollow of Lucia’s throat and tears came to his azure wolf eyes. She looked so peaceful, and fresh anger at himself for allowing this to happen coursed through him. He lifted his eyes to look at Lucia’s face. Her cheeks were drawn and hollow in pallor, now lacking the normal radiance of her vampire complexion as he had seen these last months. Her usually tanned skin was deathly white with the amount of blood Zarah must have taken from her. This told him she had been in even worse condition than he had thought and he cursed himself for not coming to her sooner.

“No.” Lucia’s voice rasped out.

Andro lifted his eyes further and looked at her reaching up to wipe the tears from his cheeks. “I... I did not get here fast enough.” He stammered out the words softly.

“This... this is not your fault.” Lucia said. “As... as she saved me... I gave myself back to her Andro.” Andro nodded slowly. “I know.” He answered softly.

“We... we knew you would come.” Lucia said with a small smile. “She... she knew you would come.”

“We need to get you back to SODRAG. Both of you.” Andro said reaching out to caress her pale cheek and then letting his fingers brush Zarah’s skin lightly. “You... you have saved my sister Lucia Moran. I can... I can never repay you for this.”

“As... as you saved her so long ago.” Lucia said. “I... I know what you did those days in the mountains Androcles Leonidas. You... you did not forsake her. I have seen with her mind what you did. I have seen so many things. So much love. I will not forsake her either. Now... that we are together... nothing will break us apart. I won’t... I won’t allow it.”

“Neither will I.” Andro said firmly.

“I should have... I should have come to you sooner.” Lucia spoke pulling Zarah tighter in her arms. “If I had come to you sooner... this would not have happened.”

“No.” Andro said softly. “This would have happened regardless. Your mother and Aikiro would have found a way Lucia.”

Lucia looked at him. “You killed her?” She asked.

Andro nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“The darkness took her.” Lucia said. “It changed her. It changed me and only a finger of it touched me. I knew only Zarah could save me. I have always known and I don’t know why. I thought I had lost her, and then you saved her. Made her stronger.”

Andro shook his head. “No... she was always strong. She is stronger than everyone gives her credit for.” Andro spoke looking at his sister’s beautiful face. Andro looked at Lucia once more. “Lucia... this darkness... it is like a mist isn’t it? It surrounds a person?”

“You have seen it?” Lucia gasped her vampire eyes going wide.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes. It surrounds my father... though not to the extent it did your mother. Do you know what it is?” He asked her.

Lucia shook her head slowly. “It made me see things Andro. Terrible things and I did not want to touch it.”

“It also increased your Mindvoice powers.” Andro spoke. “Your whips? You have hid them well. And your skills with Seyra.”

“But I waited to long!” Lucia sobbed. “I waited and look what they did to my beautiful Zarah! I swear to you... I swear I will make them pay!”

Andro shook his head with a gentle smile. “You leave that to me.” He whispered. “Zarah will need you now. She will need you more than ever Lucia, to give her strength to get past this. You... you are part of each other now and that is why we need to get you and Zarah back to SODRAG and then up to the *SCIMITAR*.”

“You are taking us away?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. All of you. I can not predict what my father will do now. It seems your mother and grandmother had a very carefully orchestrated plan working. There is an attack going on at the Kavalian embassy as we speak and...”

Lucia’s eyes grew a little wider with insightfulness. “Your Mindvoice ship!” She spoke quickly. “That is what she wanted!”

Andro met her gaze for a few seconds and then shook his head sadly. “Then whoever went there will die.” He spoke. “You will need to lower the bubble around us Lucia. I know you matched it to my Mindvoice resonance so that only I could enter. Now you need to release it so we can leave.”

Lucia pulled Zarah tighter. “I can feel their hatred for me. They think I was hurting her. They think I was killing her.”

“They are her brothers and sisters and they love her. Just as you do.” Andro spoke.

“They... they must not see her like this Andro.” She said quickly. “I won’t allow it!”

Andro nodded slowly. “I’ll be right back.” He said. He stood up turned and moved to the edge of the bubble, paused for the briefest moment and then stepped through the bubble shield with another soft azure colored flare of light.

He saw the eyes and faces of his brother and sisters turn as he stepped through and he lifted his hand before a barrage of questions hit him. “Deni... Malic... your fatigue tops!” He ordered as Eliani and Carina stepped up to him.

“Andro?” Carina whispered looking up at him.

Andro reached up and placed his dirty palm to her cheek. “She’s battered and bruised but Lucia saved her.” He answered the unspoken question in her eyes. “I don’t know all of it, hell I don’t know hardly any of it, nor do I understand it but she has loved Zarah for a great many years. I will explain what I can later, right now we need to get them to SODRAG and then up to the *SCIMITAR*.”

“The *SCIMITAR*?” Eliani asked. “Why? I can treat them both at SODRAG.”

“Trust me Eli.” Andro spoke. He paused for a moment, closed his eyes and then opened them. He took the fatigue tops from Deni and Malic and handed them to Eliani and Carina. “Step through. She will allow it now. Eli... Lucia is near dead. Zarah took too much of her blood to heal. Be prepared for how she looks. Both of you. And know that she loves our sister and will die to protect her and act accordingly.”

Eliani took Carina’s hand and without another word they stepped through the bubble shield. Andro looked skyward for a moment. *[Arrarn?]*

[Andro... Andro please tell me she is...]

[She will live brother. She is badly hurt but she is alive.] Andro could hear Arrarn sigh in overwhelming relief. *[Where are you?]*

[Trying to establish communications with Sparta Central Control and our mothers. They launched in a STRIKER a few minutes ago and blasted out of the spaceport without so much as a word to anyone. Isheeni and Aurith are with them.] Arrarn answered. *[Reports coming in are sketchy, but the Kavalian Embassy was hit and there appears to be some sort of firefight going on there. Admiral Wallace has been alerted and EDEN BASE and PROMETHEUS Station are on full alert. They are sweeping the area for shrouded ships. It’s the only way they could have gotten out of the sector after doing this. I have Toria and another Flight Crew up in STRIKERS doing a search pattern around Reylan to find the ship they were going to use to leave the surface.]*

[We won’t find it brother.] Andro said. *[They are probably already airborne. And we were foolish for not believing they have not improved the performance of their Shrouds after all this time. Leave them for Admiral Wallace to deal with. Have Toria come here and bring her STRIKER into the street below this building. We need to get Zarah and Lucia back to SODRAG and then up to our ship. The second ship can provide close support. We don’t know what else is happening and I don’t want to take chances.]*

[I’m contacting her now.] Arrarn announced.

[Arrarn... your Coven pilots and crews. Get them off the surface as quickly as you can.] Andro told him.

[Andro they...!]

[They are not our enemy Arrarn! You know that just as well as I do. Nor are the riders. With the way he has been acting, our father will kill them all for what has happen, regardless that they had nothing to do with it! You know this. Or do you include your new mates in that same sentence you were about to speak?]

[That’s not fair!] Arrarn snarled.

[Then do you wish to throw away their lives out of our anger over what has happened?] Andro asked.

[No!]

[Then get them off the surface and up to the SCIMITAR as quickly as possible. Father is shielding heavily and I can not detect him anywhere. There is no telling where he will pop up.] Andro said.

[I’ll see you on the SCIMITAR.] Arrarn paused. *[And you are right brother. You are right.]*

Andro looked back down at those who were still watching him. He turned to Moneus first. “Get back to SODRAG and get the Coven dragons and Riders on the Type IIs and headed up to the ship Moneus.”

Moneus moved closer. “Andro... are you sure?”

Andro nodded. “Yes. Malic... you are a member of *Mjolnir’s Hand* and they will respond to you as well. We need to get them off Earth before my father gets here or they are all dead.”

Malic nodded without hesitation. “Moneus... you can ride with Vincix and I.” He spoke moving for the opening in the wall.

Andro reached out and took Moneus’s arm. “Let no one stop you Moneus.” He said softly. “No one. Blood...”

“Before all else.” Moneus answered without hesitation. “Consider it done.”

Andro nodded and Moneus made for the opening in the wall as well just as Vincix landed outside with Malic already leaping onto his back. He jumped from the opening without any question, landing easily just behind Malic in the saddle and then Vincix was trumpeting his departure with fervor as he took to the skies.

Andro turned to Denali and Lisisa as Sadi moved up closer to him. “Deni... you and Lisi take Jeth and Aradace and see if you can track and find where Marux went. Now is the time to open yourself to what the pureness of our blood can do Deni. If they are still in the area I want them found. Do not attack them... call me and we will finish it together. Whatever has infected Yuri and our father, Dante and Marux are touched by it as well and it makes them stronger because of it. If you have found nothing in an hour return to SODRAG. We’re leaving.”

“Andro...” Lisisa started to speak.

Andro looked at her. “I can not force you to go. Either of you. Arrarn and I must... you know that. Eliani and Carina won’t leave Zarah’s side now, and where they go, Nyla, Malic and Moneus will follow without question. I can not ask you to betray father. You must follow what your own hearts and minds tell you.”

Lisisa tilted her head. “I was going to ask you what you intend to do with Dante and Marux if we find them.” She stated. “I feel as you do Andro... going with you is not something Deni and I would even think twice about.”

“*Nubous* right!” Deni quipped.

“What do you intend Andro?” Sadi asked softly.

“If they have escaped Earth then I intend to hunt them!” Andro spoke softly. “I will hunt them until I find them, however long it takes, no matter where that hunt leads. And when I find them... what they have done to our sister will pale in comparison to what I will do to them. I will make their deaths last a long time I promise you.”

Deni nodded his head. “As it should be.” He said softly.

Andro looked at them. “Go! And be back in an hour! No more!”

Deni and Lisisa nodded and were moving out the opening in the wall in an instant. Andro looked at Sadi as she once more moved up next to him and began inspecting his wounds. She pushed aside the shirt he wore, her eyes going wide.

“Andro... you have been shot!” She exclaimed. “Four times!”

“Yes. I know.” He spoke. “Where is *Enylarcopri*?”

Sadi began tearing strips from her own shirt as she looked at him. “She is... she is directing the *Durcunusaan* troops who arrived in Reylan just after we did. They are sweeping the surrounding buildings for any Coven Commandos that might remain and be hiding among the elves and others who live here. Ne’Veha is with her. Narice as well I believe.”

Andro looked at her surprised. “The *Durcunusaan* are following their orders?” He asked.

Sadi nodded quickly. “Yes. It surprised them... but they recovered quickly enough. Narice and Carisia are used to giving orders.”

They turned as Eliani exited the bubble shield then. She went straight to Andro and looked at him. “If you find that fucking disgusting pig, you give him to me!” She snarled. “I want to castrate him with a dull rusty spoon! And make him eat his own *nubous nor*!”

Andro winced slightly at the thought of that and leaned over to kiss her head. “Zarah? Lucia?”

Eliani looked back at the bubble. “Lucia saved her Andro.” Eliani said softly. “I did a quick pulse scan. She had more fractures than I could believe. Jaw, nose, cheekbone, several ribs. Internal lacerations from...” Eliani stopped and Andro and Sadi took her hands as she gathered her composure once more. “I don’t understand how... how Lucia got Zarah to bite her. Zar has never liked to take blood Andro.”

Andro nodded. “Zarah knew who it was that was with her. That is why?” He replied. “Lucia?”

“She didn’t try and stop her.” Eliani said looking at him. “She just held her head until Zarah could take no more. It... it practically did kill her. I only had a small amount of blood in my kit, I gave her that... but she will need a lot more. I managed to fully heal most of Zar’s remaining injuries, but she is going to be bruised and sore for a while. And she will...”

Andro nodded. “Yes. She will need all of us in the days moving forward. Can we move them?”

Eliani nodded. "As soon as Toria gets here with the *STRIKER*. Right to the *SCIMITAR* Andro. No need to stop at SODRAG. I want to get them both into beds so I can start monitoring them immediately. They don't need to be moved more than once."

Andro nodded. "Done." He turned to where Am'rul and As'pin stood weaponless, Libala pressed tightly to Am'rul's side with As'pin directly behind her and looking positively tiny against their bodies. "What are your names?"

"I am Am'rul Prince Leonidas." He replied. "My brother As'pin."

Andro pushed away from where Sadi was showing Eliani his injuries and she was trying to send healing pulses through him. He stepped up to the Immortal brothers and looked at Libala. "And you?" He asked.

"Li... Libala Milord." She stammered pressing even closer to Am'rul. She had never had contact with any of the Royal family and looking at him now, seeing what he had done, there was just a little bit of fear in her at what he could do.

Andro lifted his eyes and looked at Am'rul. "For whatever the reason Am'rul, the gods of fate and destiny keep pushing my family and that of Cha'talla closer and closer. Entwining us together it seems."

Am'rul nodded. "I know of your mother and sister on Kranek Milord." He said. "When I last spoke with Cha'talla, the pride in his voice that they were there among them was... it was very real."

"You know of my sister and Tir'ut then?" Andro asked.

Am'rul nodded. "Yes."

Andro nodded. "Well... you have protected Lucia all these years and she is now part of my family because of another of my sisters. It appears that makes you defacto members of my family now as well. Interesting don't you think?"

"Honored is the word I would use Milord." Am'rul spoke.

Andro nodded and he heard the *STRIKER* beginning to set down in the street below. "I believe it's time we took our first steps into a future that I have no idea where it leads." He said looking at Am'rul. "Are you prepared for that?"

Am'rul met his eyes. "Is it not your father that always says to never fear the unknown?" He spoke.

Andro smiled. "Yes it is." They all turned as Andro lifted his hand and with a powerful pulse of his MV power the bubble shield vanished, much to the stunned surprise of Eliani and Sadi. They could see Carina beside the bed stroking Zarah's hair while she helped Lucia to pull on the fatigue top. "I'll take my sister. You get Lucia. Let's get out of this hell hole shall we."

The Gods of Providence and Destiny had indeed spoken this day. And they would continue to speak for several more hours before vanishing once more into the backdrop when their work was done.

KAVALIAN EMBASSY SPARTA

Pian heaved the two meter long section of wall off his back with a growl and surge of power. The wall of heat hit him then and he ducked quickly as flames licked at his fur. The hair on the side of his neck was drenched in his blood from the slit in the top of his shoulder, and his legs ached. His eyes did a very fast look around and then he looked down at the most precious thing in the universe to him. Somehow he had wrapped his arms around her as they were propelled through the air and he protected her against the full force of the blast. The shirt he had been wearing was shredded from small pieces of glass and wood that had sizzled through the air behind them. The others were either dead or buried under the rubble. He could see patches of blue sky filtering into the room from the half destroyed wall and he realized that the entire west side of the building must have been open to the daylight sky. He reached down just as Jalersi coughed against the dust and smoke that filled the room.

"Jalersi!" He gasped as his clawed hands went to her face and her blue eyes opened to look at him.

"Pian!" She rasped out.

"Are you hurt?" He questioned her.

Jalersi shook her head quickly. "No... no I don't think so." Her eyes saw the difference in the color of his fur and flew open. "Pian... your neck!" As she reached up to inspect his wound her eyes flew open in pain and she cried out. "Aaargh!"

"Jalersi!" Pian shouted.

Jalersi looked down. "My leg!" She exclaimed.

Pian looked down and saw her legs covered by pieces of furniture and he began tossing aside the large pieces. He froze when he saw the two inch thick splinter impaling her thigh. Blood was oozing from the wound soaking her pants and the floor around her. "Fuck!" Pian hissed as his hands pushed items away from her leg and her fingers pulled on the fur of his arm. "Jalersi... I must pull it out my..."

"Pian!" Jiss's voice carried to them and they saw the Ambassador pulling himself over the top of some rubble blocking his way. He braved the nearby flames, but insured his fur did not get close to the deadly fingers of fire.

"Here Jiss!" Pian shouted. "Over here!"

Jiss finished scrambling down the rubble and stumbled over to him. "We must get to safety!" He barked.

"Jalersi is injured!" Pian barked. "I'm not leaving her!"

"You must... if we..." Jiss grabbed his arm. "Leave her or we will die inside this death trap!"

Jiss yanked his arm away and snatched Jiss's wrist in a crushing grip, twisting it down until Jiss dropped to his knees in pain. His blue feline eyes were alive with rage. "She is my future!" He snarled into Jiss's face. "My future if I am to have one! I will die before I leave her here! You wanted change Jiss... well this is part of it! Help me or go! I care not either way!" Pian shoved him away and turned back to look at her.

"Do it!" She snarled looking at him and gripping his arm tighter. "Do it my love!" She spoke.

They both looked up when they heard weapons fire from the lower floors and just down the hall. "Lycavorians are attacking the embassy!" Jiss declared wide eyed.

"No!" Pian answered immediately. "Those are High Coven weapons. Too heavy for the Spartan 190s. They sound like a buzz saw when they fire!"

"The Coven is attacking our embassy!" Jiss announced in disbelief.

"Hurry Pian!" Jalersi gasped. "I have no wish to be killed by vampire scum this day!"

Pian looked at her and nodded. He began to bend over once more when the remainder of the wall fell inward. Or rather was shoved inward and three sets of Kavalian eyes looked up into the cold eyes of death. Three black clad Coven Commandos were standing in what remained of the corridor and they were bringing up their weapons. Jalersi couldn't tear her eyes from their movements, but her grip on Pian's hand became painful in its strength.

"I love you with all that I am Pian'Nruarani." She whispered.

"Kavalian dogs!" The commando hissed as they held their weapons in position to fire. Pian moved his body to shield Jalersi, for all the good it would do, and his only thoughts were that it was not fair.

Of course, neither were the odds. A pissed off half elf/half wolf female and an enraged half wolf/half Lycavorian appeared out of the smoke with snarls of utter rage. Karun stepped up behind the first Commando and drove his right leg forward, rapping into the barrel of the Coven Commando's weapon and knocking it off center. Karun never gave him a chance and reached up, grabbing his jaw and the back of his head and twisting with all of his combined strength. The tearing and snapping sound was excruciatingly audible even above the crackling of the flames and weapons fire from the lower floors. The Commando's head was nearly torn from his shoulders, blood blossoming from ripped and torn arteries and skin. Karun was moving before that commando even began to fall.

Pian, Jalersi and Jiss could only watch as Ardis stepped up behind the Commando closest to her. Her cheek had a cut on it and she was covered in dirt and soot from the smoke but she appeared unhurt otherwise. Her violet and sapphire eyes however, they were alive with savage fury, fully changed to the black ringed persona of the wolf within her and her vicious wolf fangs were fully extended in anger. She drove the knife edge of her right hand down on the collarbone of the commando in front of her and shattered the hard bone with one blow. As the commando opened his mouth to scream in agony, Ardis reached down and pulled out the K14 she had been wearing hidden on her waist. As they commando she had struck dropped to one knee his weapon falling from fingers that could no longer hold it, Ardis stuck the barrel of her K14 to the side of the third commando's head and caressed the trigger.

“Suck on this!” She hissed sadistically as the weapon boomed in the corridor and the commando’s head erupted like a small balloon popping. Blood, brain matter and bits of bone splashed wetly through the air and the man’s body was physically lifted up and tossed nearly four meters.

The Coven soldier with the broken collarbone screamed in agony as Karun slammed his hand down on that useless shoulder and squeezed cruelly. “How many?” He screamed.

“Eleven total! Including us!” The man wailed back.

“Asshole!” Karun hissed into his ear. “This is for trying to kill my mate and my mother!” Karun picked up the eighteen inch long piece of piping on the floor, drew back his hand and then shoved it into the neck of the Coven soldier. The man made no sound as his body toppled over and a fountain of blood continued to erupt into the air.

Karun and Ardis turned immediately to inside the room and moved forward. “The force of the concussion blew us into the hallway through the wall!” Karun exclaimed coming up to Pian and his mother while Ardis kept the K14 ready and her eyes alert. She glanced down at Karun’s mother and saw where the splinter of wood was, her eyes going wide as Pian made to pull it out.

“NO!” She shouted bending over to stop his hand.

“I must take it out!” Pian protested.

Ardis passed the K14 to Karun without hesitation and this did not go unnoticed by Jiss. “If you pull it out that way you risk tearing the artery!”

“It may already be severed!” Pian growled. “If I don’t take it out she will bleed to death without us knowing.”

“Wait!” Ardis exclaimed as she moved closer to the wound. Her wolf eyes examined it quickly and then she looked at Jalersi. “You must slow your heart rate.” She said softly. “There will be less chance of tearing the artery if you are calm.”

“Calm?” Jalersi exclaimed with a snort. “I am not calm!”

Ardis placed her hand on Jalersi’s cheek. “Let me help you.” She said softly. “You have a pressure point on your neck. If I press on it you will faint instantly. You will only be out for a few seconds but it will give Pian the time to pull the sliver of wood from your leg without the blood swarming through it. Do you trust me?”

Jalersi met her wolf eyes and then glanced at her son. His own eyes were changed as well and she realized for the first time in her life that she had never seen her son in this manner. Karun looked more confident and assured than at any point in his life. She turned back to Ardis and nodded. “Do it!”

Ardis smiled and leaned closer to her. “I love your son Jalersi’Puat. I am his mate and wife now. And now you are my mother as well because of that.” She whispered so that only Jalersi could hear her. She lowered her fingers to just beneath Jalersi’s right ear and pressed just below the bone of her skull. Jalersi’s powder blue eyes rolled into the back of her head and she went immediately limp. Ardis placed her palm on Jalersi’s cheek, feeling the warmth of her skin and beating of her heart, counted to three as her pulse and heart rate slowed immediately and then she looked at Pian. “Do it now Pian!”

Pian didn’t hesitate and with a sloppy squishy sound he pulled the sliver out of Jalersi’s leg slowly. He leaned over so that his keen feline eyes could detect anything that might hinder its progress, and then the splinter was out and he tossed it aside. “The artery is undamaged.” He spoke quickly tearing at the edges of his shirt.

“Is it out?” Jalersi’s voice asked.

Pian looked at her with surprised eyes and saw her looking at him and holding Ardis’s hand to her cheek. He glanced quickly at Ardis and then back to the woman who held his soul. “It is out.” He spoke as he finished tearing a large strip of clothing off and wrapped it around her leg.

Jalersi gripped his shoulder. “Pian... can we go now?” She asked in a calm but wavering voice.

“Go where?” The new voice asked.

All of them turned to see Timur standing in the ruined doorway of what used to be Pian’s quarters. He held the assault rifle in his hands but it was pointed at the floor.

“Timur!” Pian exclaimed.

“I heard the... the weapons fire from up here and came to investigate!” Timur spoke as his eyes fell on Ardis kneeling next to Jalersi. “What is the meaning of this? Why is the she-elf whore in here? No one is

allowed in the embassy without..." His eyes grew larger as he saw Jiss and Pian and in his mind it all came together. "Traitors!" He hissed loudly snapping up the rifle.

The booming of the K14 drowned out the sound of the fire and sizzling of burning steel and melting glass. It caused even Pian to jump at the unexpectedness of it and the first round punched into Timur's shoulder, spinning him half around. The assault rifle flailed wildly in his hand as the next round smashed into his chest just above his heart. His body twisted violently as three more rounds in quick succession slammed into the center of his broad chest, each of the 10mm kinetic magnum rounds doing untold damage. The weapons had been designed to bring down Immortals with their power if need be, and even as Karun emptied the remaining eight rounds of the ten round magazine into Timur's chest, Timur was dead after the fourth round that punched clean through his heart and shredded the organ to nothing. Karun stepped up to Timur as the K14 locked open on empty.

"My mate is no whore!" He snarled savagely. Karun then brought his heavy combat boot whipping forward and the toe of that boot crushed Timur's skull instantly. "And that is for my sister and all the things you have said you would do to her!"

"Karun!" Ardis's voice brought him instantly out of his anger induced response to Timur's words and he turned quickly. Jiss's eyes were wide in abject terror at what he had just seen, Pian's eyes showing no small amount of pride in them. He caught the extra magazine Ardis threw to him and reloaded instantly. "We have to go!"

Karun jammed the K14 into his belt and picked up the assault rifle. "Then we go." He spoke. He stepped into the hallway and pointed the rifle back down the corridor as Pian lifted Jalersi into his arms like feather.

"Get to the stairs!" Pian barked. "At the end of the corridor to the east. They lead directly to the bottom floor and we can get to the tunnel from there."

All of them heard the door smash inward further down the corridor on the west end and Qurot burst through the opening. His eyes found and focused on them instantly, his face twisting into a mask of rage at what he saw. "Traitors!" He screamed.

Karun didn't hesitate and brought the rifle up cutting loose with a long burst from the weapon and sending Qurot diving for cover in the direction he had come. "Go!" He shouted holding the K14 out for Ardis. "Go!" He barked as Ardis took up position next to him the K14 leveled down the corridor. They backed up quickly, mindful of not tripping on the fallen debris and heard Pian's powerful leg smash into the half open steel door. Jiss burst by Pian and began scampering down the stairs.

"Jiss!" Pian screamed.

Jiss stopped and looked at him. "Wait for me! Five minutes Pian! If I am not there then go!"

"Jiss no!" Jalersi exclaimed.

"Five minutes!" Jiss said again and then he was gone.

Karun and Ardis stood on either side of the hidden doorway of the tunnel in the embassy basement. The air down here was clearer, but fine wisps of smoke still wafted through the area. They could still hear the burning of the upper floors and the shouting of many of the embassy staff that had arrived over the last weeks. Most of them were females that had been altered biogenically to better fit in. They did not know how many had survived the explosion or the follow on attack by nearly a dozen High Coven commandos.

"We can't wait much longer." Karun spoke looking back into the entrance of the tunnel where Pian held his mother in his arms.

"Another minute Karun." Pian said.

"Qurot will figure out where we have gone soon Pian." Karun stated.

"I will not leave him to fend for himself unless I have too." Pian said.

The sound of footsteps and running reached their ears and both Karun and Ardis turned toward the entrance into the sub-basement and raised their weapons. Jiss skidded to a halt when he saw them with their weapons leveled at him.

"Wait!" He exclaimed holding up his hands.

Their weapons came down instantly as he finished rushing up to where they stood. Pian stepped from inside the tunnel, Jalersi clinging to his neck and shoulders. "Jiss... what was so important that you needed to go back and risk everything?" Pian demanded,

Jiss removed the large data cube from under his jacket. "This." He said.

"What is that?" Jalersi asked.

"If Qurot was on the upper floors responding to this attack, I deduced that he would have left his personal computer unsecured in his quarters." Jiss replied.

Pian's eyes went wide. "Jiss... that was genius!" He barked.

"Now I suggest we leave quickly however." Jiss spoke. "Embassy security has eliminated the High Coven assassins and they will determine we are gone very quickly. Especially when Qurot tells them he saw us."

"Where will we go?" Jalersi asked. "If they have teams in place, we will become targets once Qurot informs them we are gone."

Ardis turned to look at her. "Targets?" She asked. "Why would you become targets?"

Karun looked at his mother and Pian. "Mother?" He asked. "Mother... what is going on?"

"It is why we brought you here this morning Lieutenant Ardis." Pian explained shifting Jalersi in his arms as if she was light as a feather.

"I'm listening." Ardis stated. "Why would your own people target you?"

"We have information that confirms Prefect Keleru and Marshall Pusintin have a plan in place to eliminate members of the Leonidas family and assist in the change of power coming on Hadaria." Pian told her watching as her eyes grew wider as he spoke. "Somehow Pusintin believes whatever it is they have planned will assist him in taking the throne of the Union as King."

"King?" Ardis gasped.

Pian nodded. "There is not much time Lieutenant." He spoke. "If the information we have is accurate the attacks will begin in only a few hours when the Drow elf settlements in The Wilds that you use as Intelligence gatherers are targeted and destroyed."

"What?" Karun gasped in disbelief. His eyes went to his mother. "Mother? Mother is this true?"

Jalersi nodded. "We don't know everything... but yes it is true Karun. Once... once Qurot informs your grandfather what we have done... that we have left the embassy... we could not let this happen."

"Do you realize what will happen?" Karun barked. "Do you know what this will do? What the Union will do?"

"That is what we are trying to avoid." Jiss spoke. "There could be assassination teams already in place... and no where will be safe for us now."

Ardis's eyes were wide in disbelief, but her mind was racing with options. She looked at Karun then. "My love?" She asked softly. "Please tell me you..."

"Ardis... I did not know this!" He said quickly. "I had no idea they..."

"Karun did not know Lieutenant." Pian spoke quickly. "We only found out two days ago as I was trying to tell you before we were interrupted. Karun has been with you."

Ardis stepped closer to Karun and pulsed him with her female aura, feeling his more powerful male aura respond instantly to her and confirming that he was an open book for her and only her. There could be no deception between them, not after what they had shared in the last weeks. "My mother's home Karun my love." She said quickly. "We must take them there."

"Your mother? Why?" Karun gasped.

"Their home is on the edge of Sparta and isolated in the same mountains as Uncle Martin's villa." Ardis answered.

"She is also surrounded by *Durcunusaan* soldiers Ardis my *innel enyla*." Karun spoke quickly. (Elf love)

"And what am I?" Ardis spoke. "We must Karun!"

Karun stared at her for a long moment and then nodded. "We must go then!" He snapped. "Now!"

DRAGON MOUNTAIN

The Empress of the High Coven was many things.

Aikiro was admittedly a self proclaimed bitch. She was cruel and everything she had done in her life was dedicated to increasing her power. Even for the many millennia that she had allowed Veldruk to rule the Coven, she had always had her hands and her spies involved in what was going on. She had chosen to remain outside the halls of power so that she could study the Mindvoice ship and the systems on it that still were operating. The more she learned about the wondrous systems and the history she was able to learn while studying the section of ship she had built her sanctuary around, the more power she began to crave. She had killed Veldruk not for his failures and there were many, but she could tolerate failure easily enough; no she had killed him for his total incompetence and greed. Admiral Tesand had been the only man in her life that she had been in any way submissive too. He had been confident in his abilities and his only desire was to be faithful to her. He had no dreams of conquest and wealth and power. He had already reached the pinnacle of his career when he came into her life, and that was one of the reasons he had been bold enough to crack that façade she wore all the time. Twenty plus years of having him fuck her silly and Aikiro still could not get enough of him. Perhaps when he had come into her life it was the sign that she should have been content with what she had and stopped there. The war with the Kavalian dogs had changed all that, overruling all other wants and desires.

She had supported Veldruk's plan to conquer Lycavore completely. The Lycavorian ability to transform into wolves made them the perfect soldiers, wild, powerful and cunning. Keeping Resumar their King alive had been Veldruk's way of controlling them. Unknown to Veldruk or Aikiro, a Mindvoice ship had crashed on Lycavore as well and just as they had bred with the vampires on Usu Ozeib 7, the Pralors had bred with the Lycavorian animals. It was not until they had conquered the planet and killed so many while enslaving the rest that they had discovered this had happened. Veldruk did not understand the implications of this act, he was not aware of the complete history that she had learned, and the moment King Resumar had been killed during the first meeting of his fledging rebellion they should have exterminated the entire Lycavorian race. That action would have ended the rebellion before it began for the other races involved had been enamored with Resumar and his words and uncanny ability to inspire others to greatness. Once it was discovered that he had sent his last surviving son and ten thousand fetuses to Earth, Veldruk had sent her son Xerxes there to subdue them. They may have killed his son, but not before the stage had been set for what would be the future.

Over three thousand years were wasted on trying to kill his descendants, fighting a rebellion infused with hope and leadership at the death of their King's last son and the actions in which he died, and trying to make Earth a colony world. The humans were a notoriously fickle and untrustworthy species, and Veldruk supporting so many tyrants through the centuries did more harm than good; men who ultimately were killed for their foolishness. He had been content then to insert agents within the corridors of power in the hopes of finally taking over the planet in a political fashion.

The Comet had changed all that, and looking back now, Aikiro knew it had changed the face of the future with the knowledge that Leonidas's unborn son had survived and had returned to Earth to claim his birthright. His returned had infused the rebellion with uncharted resolve and will. Martin Leonidas's force of will alone had brought them together even more than his father's death and she should have known then that he would grow into something she could not begin to predict or control. Yes... Aikiro was many things and right now she was tasting fear for the very first time in her nearly eighteen thousand years of life.

They had lost contact with Team Three almost immediately, their screams of horror and agony echoing among the corridors of this ship through speakers they could not see. Over the last fifteen minutes as they ran for the Central Chamber they had to stop three times to blast their way through a group of vicious Hunter Drones, every minute going by allowing dragons to snatch members of their team from adjoining corridors or even from the very ceiling. Their screams of agony battered her resolve and will. The First Oracle telling her Yuri was dead.

Her beautiful Yuri.

Aikiro had allowed the darkness to infect her daughter because she felt that her feelings for Robert Moran were making her weak. The love she had for him made her weak. Aikiro very much respected Robert, admired his ruthlessness and usually listened to his council. She had not made him overall commander of High Coven forces without a reason. She didn't like what he did to Yuri though. She didn't like how he distracted her

and made her frail. The darkness had made Yuri stronger yes, but she still did not care that Yuri showed her husband so much open fondness. Aikiro had finally given up hope of changing that and now she would never see her beautiful daughter again. Killed by the son of the man she should have killed herself decades ago.

“Empress!” The Colonel’s hoarse voice pulled Aikiro out of her thoughts and back to the present. She looked at the man’s wide eyes. “We think... we think it’s clear now Empress.”

Aikiro looked at the man for a moment and felt the SA80 in her hands. She had scooped the weapon up almost instinctively only moments ago during the last attack. Her mind was very jumbled and unfocused. Her Mindvoice powers were being severely hampered by the minds of so many powerful dragons within this ship. Her shields were under constant attack, battered from every corner without fail. None ever strong enough to breach her shields, but having to keep her Mindvoice shields at such a high level and then running down this corridor filled with so much death had weakened her to the point of exhaustion. They were playing with them she knew, playing with her. They would snatch one of the commandos from their ranks as they ran down the corridor, usually disemboweling them with their talons or dropping their headless corpses in front of them. Their weapons were useless against the psychic shields of these beasts since she ordered soft ammunition to be carried so as not to damage any equipment in case they ran into the occasional sentry. Even with normal the ammunition she doubted it would have mattered. These beasts came out of the shadows like dark specters from childhood nightmares. Even for all their massive size, they could move nearly silent, and one swipe from their talons was enough to open you from groin to neck. She looked at the three men who had survived with them simply because they were closest to her and the Colonel who was leading them. The door to the Central Chamber was only twenty meters away now according to him, though it could have been twenty kilometers as far as she was concerned.

Aikiro, Empress of the High Coven, and as cruel a woman as had ever lived was truly terrified. An emotion unknown to her until these last few minutes, now it was all she could focus on. She fought down the bile that rose in her throat and nodded her head.

“I am ready.” She spoke.

They could feel the fresh air caressing their faces the moment they entered the room. Fresh air and the smell of salt water. There was a single beam of sunlight that touched the floor in front of them perhaps two hundred meters away and this is where they ran. Wherever they were Aikiro could sense it was massive. The single beam of light was coming in from higher than them nearly half a kilometer above. With the exception of that single stream of light the entire area around them was pitch black. As black as a tomb.

“I can’t see any walls.” One commando spoke as he aimed his wrist mounted light upwards toward the opening in the ceiling.

“Repel Gun!” Another spoke.

“We had one! Gola had it! He got eaten first!” Another answered.

“*Vith!* How do we get up there?” One of the commando’s spat.

“I would think the answer to that question is painfully obvious.” The female voice spoke from the darkness to their right causing all of them to whirl around as the shape of Helen came stepping slowly from the shadows into that single beam of sunlight. “You don’t.”

“Ahh! Kill her!” One of the commandos screamed as he brought his SA80 up and held back the trigger. His two surviving companions joined in, having seen their comrades torn to pieces in front of their eyes by creatures and machines this woman commanded. Three SA80’s were deafening in the massive chamber, the echo of their thunder rolling across the area and reflecting off walls in the distance.

Aikiro whirled on the commando who had fired first and was about to scream at him to stop when she saw the dark head snap out of the shadows behind him. Aikiro saw a flash of gleaming white fangs and then those fangs sank into the commando’s shoulder and upper body and bit clean through his entire chest cavity. Her eyes were wide as she saw the head disappear into the darkness once more to leave the commando staggering in place, his weapon silent and missing half of his upper body. It took him several moments for his body to get the signals from his brain that he was dead and then he collapsed onto the floor. Aikiro’s head snapped around as more screams filled the huge chamber and the two other commandos were ripped from her sight by massive talon equipped claws. She could not see anything once they were pulled out of the light, but she could hear the

tearing of flesh and the screaming of men until their voices were cut off for one reason or another. The quickness of the action stunned her and she whirled back around to see the colonel still beside her, and Helen standing in front of them unharmed, the silver shimmer of the Mindvoice shield encompassing her entire body just now fading into obscurity from the weapons fire. Nearly a hundred rounds had been fired and she stood there unharmed with a very unpleasant look on her face.

“As you have no doubt become aware by now Aikiro, the majority of your Mindvoice powers will not work within this ship. Every dragon, every Lycavorian of Elf, anyone who has come or gone from within these walls on a regular basis, their unique Mindvoice signature is categorized and filed in a massive computer core. They have to be added to a database that Avi developed and maintains. Those that are not... well they find their abilities severely limited. I on the other hand do not have that problem as you can see. Nor do the dragons that call this mountain home.” Helen spoke. “Tar’la... if you would open the dome please?” Helen spoke to the thin air it seemed. “And activate the Light Globes.”

There was a second’s pause and then a low rumble reached them. Aikiro and the colonel looked up as the opening in the ceiling began to grow larger and suddenly from all around them, large one meter across globes began to wink on. They began to wink on and Aikiro’s eyes grew wider as each globe illuminated more and more of the massive chamber. More and more of the cave like structure easily half a kilometer high and nearly a kilometer long from what she could tell. The walls in the distance looked like any cave walls she had ever seen and not the bio material she knew them to be.

The other thing Aikiro and the colonel saw were dragons. Hundreds of them in different colors and sizes. Some used their talons to watch them from anchored into the walls, and some even were looking at them from above hanging upside down as they were on the ceiling high above. There appeared to be small ledges of sorts dotting the sides of the massive cavern and on those ledges more dragons sat. She could see hatchlings, adolescent dragons and fully adult dragons all scattered throughout the chamber. Some fidgeted on their talon equipped hind quarters, some flapped their wings to released this tension, and others simply stared at her with a myriad of colorful eyes that held no mirth in them whatsoever. Aikiro finally turned back to look at Helen.

“Welcome Aikiro, Empress of the High Coven!” Helen spoke lifting her arms up and her voice projecting further and louder. “Welcome to Dragon Mountain!”

The harmony of the trumpets that followed was nearly deafening. Aikiro could only grab her ears as the chamber was filled with the bellow of every dragon within the chamber, young and old. Nearly seven hundred had crammed into the hall, many of those in the first rows the fathers and mothers of the High Coven dragons, a fact which Aikiro was about to find out.

Long, loud and echoing madly through the chamber, Aikiro could actually feel the litany of dragon voices reverberating through her body and it was anything but pleasant. And then one trumpet, louder than the others drowned out all of them from above as Arzoal settled to the ground behind Helen from where she had been turning in the chamber in slow looping circles near the very top.

“*Vith!*” The colonel gasped and he staggered back as Arzoal’s massive body settled to the ground as lightly as a feather would touch a pillow.

Helen looked at Aikiro now, her hands held very demurely crossed in front of her waist. She waited until Aikiro had dropped her hands from her ears before speaking. “You should probably know that many of the first rows of dragons you see are the parents of those dragons you stole and corrupted so long ago. This day is their reckoning as well for the crimes you have committed Aikiro. None of them hold any affection for you after taking their children from them I assure you.”

Aikiro could only glance around at the angry eyes of dozens of very large dragons. “What do you want?” She snapped finally turning to look at Helen.

Helen looked at her. “Want?” She asked.

“Yes! You want something... or else you would have killed me already!” Aikiro barked. “You... you won’t kill me! It goes against the very laws and values that you and your pathetic species hold!”

Helen tilted her head her eyes slightly wide. “This is what you believe?” She asked stunned. “Do you have an ounce of compassion in your body? Do you have any idea what you could have had for your people? Do you realize what you have thrown away with your actions this day! For someone who claims to be so superior to everyone around her, you are incredibly dim-witted!”

Aikiro’s eyes flared. “What are you blathering about?” Aikiro snapped.

“I’m talking about the future!” Helen barked angrily. “Your lust for power has doomed your people! You have destroyed them Aikiro! You! Androcles Leonidas is only the instrument by which you yourself have chosen with your actions to bring about the downfall of your High Coven! And a more devastating instrument does not exist. You could have had so much Aikiro. You had a unique opportunity when you displaced Veldruk. You had an opportunity to start fresh. Our... our two peoples could have been such great allies! Friends! Even when you first arrived here many thought that this was possible. And then when it was discovered that Carisia and Narice have become the wives and mates of Andro and Arrarn Leonidas that hope doubled! Your family... the Leonidas family... do you have any concept of what we could have built together? Your two families... you are drawn so strongly to one another because of your Pralor ancestors! Have you never considered that?”

Aikiro’s eyes were wide now. “What... what are you... you are speaking rubbish!” She barked.

“Am I?” Helen spoke moving closer. “They were brothers! Xaxon and Sumar. You had it within your power to change things. If you had... if you had embraced that opportunity Martin Leonidas would have poured across your borders with every troop and ship under his command and he would have stood side by side with you and together we would have utterly crushed the Kavalians into dust. We could have built a galaxy spanning empire. All you needed to do was let go of your desire for power and revenge. You carry a hate inside you that is over sixty thousand years old... passed down within your blood and genes! A hate that is not yours! A hate that has ultimately led to your demise!”

“You have no idea what you speak of!” Aikiro snapped.

“Don’t I?” Helen spoke. “I have Canth’s memories Aikiro. I have all his wisdom and knowledge.”

“You lie.” Aikiro hissed.

Helen shook her head. “The moment Martin freed his Mindvoice essence from Ukwav he was able to perform the *Tuarvomir*. The Change of the Oracles. He passed all he knew, all he was to me.” Helen looked at her. “You... you had no idea did you?” Aikiro stared at her wide eyed as so many things ran through her mind. “Canth stood beside Resumar for generations; it is why Veldruk targeted all the Oracles when he conquered our world. He knew what we could do. The history we could hold. I know everything Aikiro. Everything that Canth had within his thoughts is mine now. He was as close to the Pralors as you ever got, and you imprisoned him. Thought to use him.”

Aikiro’s head snapped up. “My people will take the Mindvoice ship from Ritaah!” She exclaimed. “Give me that ship and I will order them not to kill Leonidas’s son and the others! I give you my word!”

Helen shook her head. “Your word?” Helen spoke. “Your word has as much value as the dirt that surrounds this mountain. And none of the lackeys that you sent with Resumar are capable of bringing about his death. He may not be as powerful as his brother, but he is more than a match for your troops. Especially since he has a Guardian Angel if you will. A Guardian Angel that you put there with your own actions. You dismiss so much Aikiro. You are such a stupid woman!” Helen snorted. “How the gods ever saw fit to allow you to birth children is beyond me!”

Aikiro’s eyes were wide with rage at Helen’s words. “You... you will rue those words one day.” She snarled savagely.

“You just continue to believe your own filth.” She said. Helen turned and looked at the Colonel. “What is your name?” She asked.

“Don’t answer her!” Aikiro snapped. “She is trying to play games with you!”

The colonel looked back and forth between the two women. He was a survivor above all else and he knew right away he was entirely out of his league when compared with these two women, and that did not even include the hundreds of dragons in the huge chamber.

“I asked you a question.” Helen spoke calmly once more.

“Colonel... Colonel Aenbevi.” He stammered.

“Do you have a family Colonel?” Helen asked. “Wife? Children?”

“Do not answer her!” Aikiro screamed. “She is trying to twist your mind! That is what she does!”

“Colonel?” Helen asked.

“My Blessed Wife is Dalatier.” He replied looking at Helen.

“Do you have children?” Helen asked.

Aenbevi nodded. “Three... three.” He replied. “The youngest... she is five.”

“A daughter then?” Helen said.

“Yes... she is my youngest.”

“Colonel Aenbevi... how would feel if your Empress directed half a dozen men to brutally rape and beat your daughter to get information that was in her mind. All done so that she could increase her power and hold on the people of the Coven?” Helen asked.

Aenbevi looked quickly at Aikiro and then back to Helen. “You... you are testing me!” He snapped.

“I am simply asking a question.” Helen spoke. “Your answer will determine whether you live or die. And make no mistake; there are six hundred eighty-nine of us in this chamber that will know if you are lying.”

“I am not afraid to die!” Aenbevi declared drawing himself to his full height. “I will not beg for my life!”

“I am not asking you to beg Colonel.” Helen asked. “This is what your Empress has done this day. Zarah Leonidas’s life hangs by a thread because of what Dante and Javier Moran have done. Because of what the men with them have done. They raped and beat her for hours Colonel Aenbevi. Feeding on her blood, relishing in her cries of helplessness and terror as they broke her bones and her spirit. This is the type of cruel woman you follow. Zarah Leonidas has never seen combat. She has never lifted a finger nor a weapon against the High Coven. Her only mistake was being born a Leonidas and knowing where this ship was. Now your Empress’s actions will unleash the wrath of a man who grows stronger by the hour. He will destroy your High Coven for what she has done. What others have done. What if this had been your daughter? What if your precious Empress had wanted something from your daughter and this is what she had done. How would you feel?”

Aenbevi stared at Helen for a long moment. He turned to look at Aikiro and then back to Helen his face confused. His eyes finally went back to Aikiro. “Empress... we... we were told by Admiral Moran she would be interrogated but...”

“She *was* interrogated.” Aikiro answered with absolutely no remorse in her voice. “She was interrogated and then she provided entertainment to those who interrogated her. She is a half breed whore! Nothing more!”

“She was saved Colonel Aenbevi.” Helen continued in a calm voice. “She was saved by Lucia Moran because Lucia has seen a small portion of what your dear Empress intends for the future and she could not go along with it.” Helen turned to Aikiro. “The main item you came for has been destroyed Aikiro.”

Aikiro looked at her in shock. “No! Do you know what you have done?” She shouted with wide eyes, spittle flying from her lips.

Helen nodded. “What we should have done many years ago. As soon as Avi told us what it was.”

“*YOU WITCH!*” Aikiro screamed.

“Empress... is what this woman says... this is true?” He asked Aikiro his eyes wide.

Colonel Aenbevi was a soldier plain and simple. From the first moments he had put on the uniform seven hundred and nine years ago, all he had wanted was to serve the Coven to the best of his ability. His Blessed Wife of five hundred and twenty-three years had given him three strong children, his sons also members of the Coven ground forces. He had never desired another woman, for his wife was beautiful in his eyes and fulfilled all his desires. He had most certainly tortured Kavalian prisoners for information they had, beaten them until near death. They were trying to destroy his way of life and they would strike down his family without pause or mercy. Yes... Aenbevi was a soldier, but no matter the species or military one served in, every soldier in history that was worthy of that title would tell you that raping a helpless female prisoner was unacceptable and not tolerated. The Kavalians had no qualms about such action and it was this among many things that separated them from honorable troops. He had known Zarah Leonidas had been captured, but as he was told, she would be interrogated for the location of this ship. No one had passed to him that she would be treated in such a manner, or how the interrogation would proceed.

To be honest... he did not ask. It was not his duty to ask, only to follow orders and execute this plan. A plan that had seen his most experienced and well trained group of men slaughtered like so many animals. Men he had fought and led in countless operations against the Kavalians and now their bodies and their blood littered the inside of this infernal ship like some sadistic art project. They had been ill trained and ill prepared for what they would face here, and the more he saw the fashion in which Aikiro was acting now the more it dawned on him that she may have known full well what they were walking into.

“Shut up you idiot!” Aikiro snarled at him as she stepped closer to Helen without fear. “You have... you have...” Aikiro stopped talking when she felt the cold steel of the hand weapon placed against her left temple.

“Your life for hers Colonel.” Helen spoke softly. “The choice is yours to make. Make the right one and I give you my solemn word as First Oracle of the Lycavorian people I will insure your family is brought to you here. You will not be harmed or interrogated and you can remain here in Dragon Mountain until they arrive. Here you will be safe.”

Aenbevi looked at her. “You... you can do that?” He gasped. “They are in... they are in High Coven space.”

Helen nodded. “Yes... I know. But then only someone very foolish or completely stupid would believe that Martin withdrew all of our agents from within Coven space.” She spoke looking directly at Aikiro.

“Put your weapon away Colonel!” Aikiro snapped. “As your Empress I command you to...”

“You knew!” Aenbevi spoke softly. “You knew what we would find here and you did not tell us. We were not prepared to... to fight dragons and these machines! You threw... you threw their lives away! My men’s lives!”

“They were my men!” Aikiro snapped as she turned to face him slowly. “I am Empress of the High Coven! They were mine the moment they were born, just as you are mine! Now put down that fucking weapon or I will tear out your eyes and force you to eat them!”

“You sick, demented *elg'caress*! You let this happen!”

“Colonel... you will...”

“*Ilharvith'rell!*” Aenbevi screamed his face twisting into a snarl of anger and desperation and his finger tightened on the trigger.

You do not reach nearly eighteen thousand years of life and not learn things however. Aikiro saw the twitch in his jaw and focused on his hand. She saw his knuckles become white and just as he pulled back on the trigger of his weapon she blurred to the side and brought her hand up grasping his wrist. The crack of the weapon in the chamber was thunderous as the round zipped off into the air to plow into the wall above them, eighteen inches from where a medium sized Firespitter was clinging to the ceiling with his talons. His blue eyes focused on them and he trumpeted out his anger and surprise. Aikiro continued to twist Aenbevi’s arm upward and to the side. For a woman of such slight stature she had insane strength. Aenbevi screamed out his agony as the pressure on his bone increased to the breaking point.

He would remember the soft thud and the sound of tearing flesh for the remainder of his years and his eyes grew even wider when the broad steel head of the *Nehtes* spear burst from Aikiro’s chest directly between her breasts. Aikiro’s eyes went wide in silent agony and her grip on Aenbevi’s arm disappeared. Her vampire eyes dropped to look at the bloody head of the *Nehtes* unable to comprehend why she felt such terrible pain coursing through her chest and mind. Aenbevi’s own eyes were wide as he saw Helen’s face appear next to Aikiro’s cheek over her right shoulder. Her eyes had fully changed to her wolf persona, her vicious looking wolf fangs fully extended to proportions not often seen from the First Oracle of the Lycavorian people. It was very rare indeed to even witness her transformation to the wolf within her.

“***Over three thousand years have passed since I failed one King Leonidas!***” Helen’s voice was a raspy, savage sneer. Her face twisted even more and Aenbevi saw her shoulder move slightly and the shaft and head of the *Nehtes* twisted cruelly in Aikiro’s chest. Her vampire cobalt blue eyes grew even wider if that was possible and she rose on her tip toes trying to escape the ghastly, agonizing pain racing through her body. Her hands suddenly grasped the portion of the shaft of the spear that protruded from her chest, her fingers becoming slick with blood as it rushed from her body like a faucet. “***Never... never will I fail this King Leonidas! Or his first born son!***” Helen continued her pronouncement.

Aikiro’s mouth was open in a silent wail of unimaginable torment. The broad steel head of the *Nehtes* was forged from Dragon Armor, the wondrous metal discovered by four Union scientists many years ago. It had almost fallen into the hands of the High Coven thanks to Chetak and his actions, and since that day it was one of the most closely guarded secrets within the Union. Wielded by a powerful person, a weapon or blade forged from this metal could very easily penetrate nearly four inches of normal steel like putty in your hand. It was this metal that had saved countless dragons and riders during the Evolli War, and it seemed only fitting to Helen that it should bring about the death of the woman who was the cause of so much horror and anguish through the years.

“Martin Leonidas told you when you arrived on Earth if you fucked with him you would never leave this planet alive!” Helen spoke in an almost manically voice. “It seems he had less faith in you than I did vampire

witch! For all the lives you have destroyed, for all the souls that have been altered by your continued lust for more power and control, I curse you Aikiro of the Vampire High Coven. I curse you and the very memory of your name as you find your way into the deepest pits of hell!”

Helen placed her hand on Aikiro’s shoulder, twisted the *Nehtes* viciously once more, shredding what remained of Aikiro’s now mangled heart and lungs and then she yanked the *Nehtes* out with all her strength. There was a hiss of air and the sound of snapping bone as the spear head caught for a split second on her spinal column before tearing free and bringing parts of her spine out her back. Free of the impaling weapon and without any feeling in her body from the waist down, Aikiro collapsed to the floor instantly. Her eyes were still open, her bloody hands twitching as thick blood began to pool around her inert form. Helen depressed the recessed button and her *Nehtes* collapsed instantly. She walked around to where Aikiro’s head was and got down on one knee as Aikiro’s eyes lifted slowly to look at her. They were glazing over quickly, becoming white in death.

“A Changing of the Guard comes Aikiro.” Helen spoke softly. “As you linger on the edge of death, know this. Your daughter Narice will bear many strong and happy children with her husband. They will be vampire, wolf and elf. The sum of her love for Arrarn Leonidas and his for her. She will rebuild the Coven from the ashes that Androcles leaves behind him in his anger and retribution for what you have done this day. She will rebuild it into what it was meant to be with Arrarn at her side. She will rebuild it into what you could have built had you not been so twisted and greedy.” Helen leaned closer to her, her lips almost touching Aikiro’s ear. “And know that none of what you have planned or wished for will ever bear fruit. It dies with you Aikiro. It dies with you.”

Helen stood back up slowly and looked at Arzoal as she stepped up to her slowly.

Sister? Arzoal asked.

Helen nodded. *I am fine. I am finally free Arzoal. All the anguish and self doubt I have carried through the years over Martin’s father is gone. I am free.*

And my heart sings for this my Bonded Sister. But we have much to do if we are to stem the wave that this wretched creature began. Arzoal spoke.

Helen nodded quickly. *Yes... you are right.* She turned and lifted her head and eyes up towards a single point in the ceiling. “Tar’la are you there child?” She spoke openly.

“I am here Feravomir.” The voice came back echoing gently within the chamber.

“A *STRIKER* Tar’la!” Helen ordered. “Immediately... for we need to get to SODRAG before more damage is done.”

“One is already landing outside the northeast door *Feravomir.*” Tar’la answered. “I summoned it and a full platoon of *Durcunusaan* from the Barracks in Sparta. Apparently the order had already gone out to secure all facilities and every member of the Royal Family.”

“Who gave that order Tar’la?” Helen asked quickly.

They heard Tar’la chuckle softly. “The *Durcunusaan* Duty Officer stated the order came from Princess Carisia Leonidas.”

Helen looked at Arzoal and smiled warmly. “At least part of our plan is proceeding properly.” She said. “Have the platoon leader insure Colonel Aenbevi is treated for any injuries and with all respect as a guest. He is not to be taken from Dragon Mountain for any reason with expressed orders from me or Arzoal. Most especially not the King. At least not until we get to him and attempt to show him what is going on.”

“I understand *Feravomir.*”

Helen looked directly at Aenbevi when she spoke next. “Contact Krypteria Command Tar’la. I want to speak with Marci and those in charge of Coven operations. You can transfer the communication to my *STRIKER.* We’re leaving.”

“Yes *Feravomir.*” Tar’la paused. “The body of the Empress *Feravomir?* What should we do with it?”

Helen turned to see the sightless eyes and gray pallor that her skin was now taking on as the majority of her blood had already left her body. “Have you destroyed the remains in Room Fourteen?”

“The incinerators were charging to full power when I last looked.” Tar’la answered.

Helen nodded. “Then give the Empress in death what she so craved in life.” She answered. “Put her in the room with the remains of Pralor Xaxon and burn them both. The same result applies Tar’la. Nothing but ash that is to be spread on the moon in the places Anisa has chosen.”

“I will see to it *Feravomir*.” The elf female spoke with a nod they could not see. “The pilot of the *STRIKER* is signaling he is waiting for you and the Elder Mother. Flight time to SODRAG at full atmospheric speed and ignoring all safety protocols is twenty-six minutes.”

Helen chortled. “Safety protocols?” She asked as she turned to look at Aenbevi. “Who uses safety protocols in the Leonidas family? None that I am aware of.”

“That is true *Feravomir*.”

Helen looked at Aenbevi. “I will keep my word to you Colonel Aenbevi.” She spoke. “You will be shown a place to stay and we will talk when I return.”

Aenbevi could do nothing but nod his head, still in shock over what had occurred in the last moments. Helen turned to Arzoal.

Come sister! We must hurry if we are to stop what we both know is coming. Helen stated as she began moving for the door far off in the distance.

Will we be in time? Arzoal asked.

I sincerely hope so. Helen stated softly. *I sincerely hope so.*

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

EARTH SODRAG

“...not able to reach your father!” Wallace spoke from the command center on EDEN BASE.

“None of us are able to reach him.” Andro answered from main Command and Control center for SODRAG. “He’s coming here, that much I can feel, but he’s not communicating with anyone.”

“Lock down of the planet is in place! All ships have been tasked with maintaining their current positions and will be advised when they can move again. Joarl has issued an Authority Override only. Unless they get clearance from EDEN BASE or PROMETHEUS they don’t move.” Wallace continued. “*Durcunusaan* units have all deployed to their primary objectives, minus the ones responding to the Kavalian Embassy in Sparta. Andro... what the fuck is going on? I have my people sweeping the grids around Earth for Shrouded High Coven ships with orders to destroy them where they are found! That order came from the First Oracle. Can you tell me what is going on because we are lost up here? I got Helen in secure COMS with my wife about something and she won’t tell me. I’m becoming agitated.”

“There has been a coordinated attack by High Coven Commandos. One part against my sister Zarah to gain information from her that...” Andro began to answer.

“Zarah?” Wallace gasped. “Andro please tell me...”

Andro looked at him in the transmission his face still battered but holding extreme anger inside. “They raped and brutalized my sister Admiral.” He answered somberly. “Raped and brutalized her to get the location of the MV ship from her to launch their attack against Dragon Mountain.”

“*Carians joa!*” Wallace gasped. “She is...”

Andro shook his head. “She’s alive. My sister is stronger than they thought. Lucia Moran got to her first and saved her from further acts of humiliation. She killed her own brother for what he had done.”

“Yuri’s daughter?” Wallace asked with wide eyes.

Andro nodded his head quickly. “They are... they are bound by something we don’t understand, Lucia and Zarah. Arrarn and Toria are on the way to the *SCIMITAR* with them as we speak. My mothers as well I imagine. Only Denali and Lisisa remain on the surface with me, I’ve sent everyone else up to the *SCIMITAR*.” He said. “I’m waiting until the *Durcunusaan* finish their sweep of the area around Reylan and my father arrives before I leave too.”

Wallace shook his head. “Aricia and For'mya dropped Isabella on the *SCIMITAR* only moments ago and are on their way to your location. Sa’sur contacted me and Joarl both to inform us of their departure from the *SCIMITAR*.” He asked.

“Carisia believes it was a coordinated strike. Using the information they got from Zarah’s mind to target Dragon Mountain apparently and then this attack against the Kavalian Embassy in Sparta.” Andro answered.

“Aikiro apparently wanted to take out as many of us as possible, along with the Kavalian delegation. If Lucia had not got to Zarah when she did, Zarah would be dead.”

Wallace saw the condition of Andro’s injuries. “Looks like one against you as well.” He stated.

Andro shook his head. “Elynth and I battled with Dante Moran and his dragon. We had to kill Javier Moran’s dragon but Dante and Marux escaped us. Then Yuri showed up with...”

“Yuri?” Wallace exclaimed.

“Yuri is dead.” Andro stated flatly. “I killed her with my own teeth and claws. I left her a mangled mass in the timber. Deni and Lisisa are searching the area around where we fought to confirm this and bring her remains back here.”

Wallace tilted his head slightly. “Andro it was reported by *Durcunusaan* Command that Carisia Leonidas gave the order to initiate a lock down of the royal family.”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“Then what the Netnews has been reporting is true? You and Arrarn have taken this Carisia and Aikiro’s daughter Narice as your wives and mates?” Wallace asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. Is that a problem Admiral?”

Wallace shook his head. “Quite the contrary Andro.” He spoke. “Once that word began spreading up here, people began to talk of a real lasting peace with the Coven. The vampires that live and work up here are truly hopeful. That you and Arrarn would take these women as your mates spoke volumes to them.”

“Not you though?” Andro said.

“I am old and set in my ways young Androcles.” Wallace said. “Anisa tells me if not for her I’d still be living in the past. I will grow accustomed to it as I do everything else. What has happened will change the feelings when news of this breaks however.”

Andro shook his head. “Don’t let it Admiral.” He said quickly. “These acts were thought up and acted upon by men and women who hold nothing but hate for us. They do not represent the will of all the people within the High Coven.” He looked at the man who had once been his father’s commanding officer. A man he respected without question. “The *Feravomir* has killed Empress Aikiro.” He said softly.

Wallace was silent for a moment before nodding his head. “I will shed no tears for her I can tell you that. She was a fool to think your father would leave Dragon Mountain undefended. Fuck her!” He paused and shook his head finally. “In with a bang out with a whimper.” He said finally. “It is something your father used to say many years ago. A fitting end to both of those wenches if you ask me.”

“What is your status?” Andro asked.

“We’re orienting the main sensor array back towards Earth now. We found nothing that could be construed as a Shrouded ship outside of Earth’s gravitational pull. If they have a ship hidden, it must be in low orbit. Between us and the PROMETHEUS we’ll find it! Joarl has two *AUTUMN MOONS* on standby to paint any ship we find and then our missile batteries will obliterate it.” Wallace answered.

“I’ve sent everyone up to the *SCIMITAR* except Denali and Lisisa as I said.” Andro told him. “The three of us and the *Durcunusaan* can handle anything that might come up.” He turned his head as the door to the Command Center opened and Denali and Lisisa strode in quickly carrying their helmets. “Admiral... Deni and Lisi are back. Let me confer with them and I will check back in with you in a few minutes.”

Wallace nodded. “I’ll inform you the moment we find any ships that are hiding.” He stated before the transmission went dark and Andro turned to look at his brother and sister.

Andro noticed they both wore scowls of consternation as they moved up next to him. He looked back and forth between them.

“What?” He asked.

“We circled Reylan as you wanted and then moved to where you said you fought Yuri.” Deni spoke.

Andro nodded. “And?”

“Her body is gone Andro.” Lisisa said.

Deni nodded. “We found where you said you fought her. You couldn’t miss it with the amount of blood spread all over the area. You mangled her good to make her bleed that much *fervon*.”

Andro’s azure eyes were wide and he shook his head. “Impossible!” He hissed out. “I practically tore open her throat! I know I severed the artery in her leg when I slashed her with my claws. The wound was spurting blood all over.” He looked at them. “There is no way she could have survived that. Her throat wound

alone, Deni if the Immortal hadn't shot me I would have torn her throat wide open. I had to have ripped open her jugular at least!"

"The Immortal shot you four times Andro!" Lisisa exclaimed loudly. "You are strong brother, but even you couldn't have stood more than that." She reached up to check the torn shirt he still wore. "Wounds that you haven't gotten treated yet! You sent Eliani and Sadi back didn't you?"

"They don't need to be here." Andro spoke.

"You should have had Eliani heal you first asshole!" Deni spoke stepping up to his older brother. "Did you get all the projectiles out at least?" He asked making Andro lift his arm as he began inspecting the wound.

"Two of them." Andro answered as he winced when Deni touched his side.

Deni looked at him with wide eyes. "You idiot! Are you crazy? You shifted back without forcing the bullets out?"

"Two of them were too deep and Zarah needed me." Andro snapped.

"Zarah needs you alive you *igord!*" Lisisa snarled openly. "We... we all need you to be breathing Andro!"

"You need to get to a medic and get those slugs out brother!" Deni spat. "Before they become infected."

"I will." Andro said. "There is too much to do right now!"

"*Rensibfla!*" Lisisa barked. "You need to..."

"Andro!" They turned at the sound of Aricia's voice and saw Aricia and For'mya rushing into the command center. Aricia went right to her son and embraced him tightly while For'mya stepped up to Deni and Lisisa and wrapped her arms around them both. Their eyes closed as all of them savored the moment with their mothers and then it was over as Aricia pushed her son to arm's length. "Tell... tell us what happen Andro." She spoke as For'mya moved closer and took his hand.

"I... I called a meeting for this morning." Andro spoke slowly. "We were going to put the final touches on our plan and..."

"What plan?" For'mya asked.

"I'm... I'm leaving mother. I'm taking the Coven riders and dragons away from here to finish their training. Father was not going to allow me to do that so I decided to act on my own." Andro told them. "When Zarah did not show up I knew something was wrong. Then I heard her scream!"

"Taking them away?" For'mya gasped. "To where?"

Andro shook his head quickly. "The less you know the better." He told them. "I won't allow father to separate them... and now I won't allow him to kill them. This is exactly what he would order now after what has happened."

"Andro... your father is..." Aricia began.

"Do not make excuses for him mother." He spoke forcefully. "And do not stand there and tell me he is not different. He's been different since Yuri got here. He's... he is..."

"What?" For'mya asked softly.

"There is something influencing his actions." Andro finally said. "It is causing his darker side to rule his emotions and decisions. He asked me to dismiss Carisia as my wife and mate. He ordered I do this! That Arrarn do this! He and Torma ordered Elynth to dismiss Anthar as her mate! Our father... my father would not do that out of hand!"

Aricia looked at him with wide eyes. "Andro... are you sure?"

"You haven't noticed it?" He asked.

"We thought... we thought it was because so much is happening at once." Aricia finally answered after looking at For'mya quickly.

Andro shook his head. "It is a mist that surrounds him and Torma. It has infected them. The same mist like darkness that controlled Lucia's mother. I saw it swirling around them both using the Scotopic spectrum of our vision."

"Scotopic?" Aricia asked. "Are you sure?"

"Yes I'm sure mother." He replied.

"Helen contacted us." For'mya spoke now. "Aikiro..."

Andro nodded. "Yes... she is dead. I know. I had thought... Yuri..."

"What?" Aricia asked squeezing his arms.

“Andro fought Yuri!” Deni said now watching as Aricia’s and For’mya’s eyes grew even larger.

“You fought her?” For’mya gasped. “Andro are you...?”

“I thought I killed her.” Andro spoke. “I severed the artery in her leg and I nearly tore out her throat! If the Immortal hadn’t shot me I would have...”

“Shot you!” Aricia gasped. Her eyes grew wider as she noticed for the first time the blood stains on the side of his shirt and the tears in his shoulder and on his face. “Oh Andro...” She exclaimed reaching up to touch his face as her other hand went to his side. For’mya was already pulling aside the shirt.

“Andro... you were hit four times!” For’mya nearly shrieked as her fingers touched the flesh of his side.

“Two were flesh wounds more or less.” Andro spoke grimacing as she gingerly lifted his arm again.

“He still has two slugs inside him!” Lisisa snapped. “The fool shifted before forcing them out.”

“I needed to get to Zarah!” Andro snapped. “She was more important than two projectile wounds because I was stupid.”

“Helen... she said... she told us that Lucia Moran saved Zarah’s life.” Aricia spoke softly.

Andro nodded. “Yes.” He replied. “I did not see Zarah directly afterwards. Lucia was dealing with Javier and I ripped Dante Moran through the wall in a fit of rage and began pummeling him. Naruth attacked Elynth and I and... her injuries were severe enough that she nearly killed Lucia by taking so much blood to heal.”

For’mya looked at him wide eyed. “She took Lucia’s blood? Zarah... Andro you know that Zarah she hates taking blood.”

Andro nodded. “I know. Somehow... somehow Lucia got Zarah to bite her and take her blood. It saved her life mother. Lucia’s only purpose this entire time has been to find a way to come together with Zarah. Even I didn’t sense it until I saw them together today. Their essences are so intertwined now it is nearly impossible to tell them apart. It...”

“Like... like Tarifa and Aihola.” Aricia said with wide eyes.

Andro nodded. “Yes!” He said. “Yes... exactly like that. I was trying to find a way to describe it and...”

“This is what you have allowed to happen!” The voice boomed in the room. They all turned to see Martin Leonidas in the doorway of the Command Center. “This is what happens when you go against my orders!!”

“Father you can not blame...” Andro began to speak as Martin started forward towards him.

“You lied to me son!” Martin growled as he moved for Andro. “You lied to me and now look what has happened!”

“Father...”

“This is your fault!” Martin roared. “Where were you? Why weren’t you protecting your sister? You were suppose to be protecting your sister!” He stopped in front of Andro, his dark eyes alive with anger. “You allowed this to happen! You and no one else!”

“Martin... you can not blame Andro for something that members of the High Coven did? That is ridiculous!” Aricia snapped.

“Can’t I?” He snarled. “I told you to have them ready today! Where are they Andro? Where are the dragons and riders?”

“Martin Leonidas you...” For’mya began to speak as she reached out and took his arm. Martin turned his head and glared at her.

“Stay out of this For’mya!” He growled at her.

“I will not!” She exclaimed. “He is my son as well!”

“Martin you can not blame...” Aricia stated forcefully.

“Shut up! Both of you shut up!” Martin snarled at them causing their eyes to go wide in shock. “*Your* sons have taken the daughters of two of the vilest women in the universe as their wives! *Your sons!* And you both knew about it! How convenient is that? This is between my son and me!” Martin lifted his hands slightly and gave both Aricia and For’mya mild pushes within Mindvoice. In his current state however, he did not know his own strength and they both went sailing across the control room in opposite directions with stunned looks of horror and surprise on their faces.

“Father!” Denali and Lisisa shouted at the same time, both of them breaking away, Lisisa for Aricia and Denali towards For’mya as they crashed into the floor.

“You bastard!” Andro snarled as he started to move for where Aricia had fallen.

Martin snatched his arm and shoulder. “Not so fast boy!” He shouted. “We aren’t through talking yet!”

“I will not let you kill them father!” Andro stated flatly yanking his arm away. “I won’t let you separate them either! They had nothing to do with what has happened and you know it! They are becoming true Bonded Pairs. Just like any of us in the Union! They are embracing all that they are learning and it is changing them! Look at you! You have changed! The darkness is eating away at you so much that you strike your own mates!” He tried to move once again but Martin snatched him back roughly and stared into his face.

“Bullshit!” Martin screamed. “They had everything to do with this! They’ve been playing you boy!” He lifted his hand and stabbed his finger into Andro’s chest. “They’ve been playing you like a puppet boy! And so has that woman you supposedly claimed as your wife! Yuri’s daughter? I can’t believe you would stoop so low as to fall into her web! Or your brother Arrarn and Aikiro’s bitch daughter!”

“Father I told you I would...” Andro’s voice was now low and menacing.

Martin stepped closer to his son and stabbed him in the chest again with a finger. “Told me what *boy*?” He spat. “Your incompetence has allowed this to happen! Your infatuation with that little slut has resulted in your sister being beaten and raped! This is no one else’s fault but yours *boy*!”

ULU SCIMITAR

Isabella sat beside the medical bed her youngest daughter rested in, stroking her hand and face. Isabella had dried tears in her eyes as Eliani passed her hand over Zarah’s midsection once again, the soft glow of white light from her hand following as she passed it down Zarah’s chest and upper abdomen and then down to just above her hips and lower abdomen. She was sleeping soundly now with the help of a small sedative that Eliani had given her when they first arrived and she looked very peaceful. Isabella looked up at Eliani as she pulled her hand away slowly not releasing Zarah’s hand.

“Eli?” She asked softly.

“I eliminated all trace of any sperm mother.” Eliani replied softly meeting her gaze. “She won’t get pregnant.”

“And she is not injured in that way?” Isabella asked.

Eliani shook her head slowly. “No. There some minor tears of her... inside... more from the roughness and lack of lubrication than anything, but nothing permanent.” She replied.

“How many?” Isabella asked.

“Mother... that is...” Eliani began to answer.

“How many Eliani?” Isabella asked once more.

Eliani sighed heavily. “Six different specimens.” She answered.

Isabella looked back to her daughter cursing under her breath. “Bastards!” She hissed viciously.

“She will still be able to have children easily. I know that is what...”

Isabella turned back to Eliani and then back to Zarah to stroke her cheek once more. “It was something she was so adamant about.” Isabella answered. “She used to tell me when... when she found the man who could tame her she wanted to give herself to him in every way. She wanted to be adventurous and open to anything. She wanted to give him many strong children. As many as he wanted. She wanted a large family.”

“That ability hasn’t been taken away from her mother.” Eliani spoke softly.

“No.” Bella whispered shaking her head. “But what man will she trust now? They took her... they took her purity away Eli. She will never get that back. She wanted... all the times she acted so free and teased the males sniffing after her... she never intended to surrender her purity unless it was to the man she would stay with forever.” Isabella looked at her. “That is gone from her now.”

“Then we will need to make her see she is still pure mother.” Eliani said softly placing her hand on Isabella’s shoulder. “Pure inside as well as out.”

Isabella reached up and covered Eliani’s hand with her own and nodded. “Yes we will.” She said in barely a whisper.

“Mother... you are pregnant and you shouldn’t have this much stress.” Eliani said. “I can give you something to...”

Isabella shook her head. “No. I will be fine.”

A soft beep called Eliani’s attention and she turned toward where Lucia lay in the next bed. “*Sibfla!*” Eliani cursed as she moved over next to the bed. Isabella turned to watch her and as she wiped the small tears from her eyes she saw Lucia’s condition. Her color had returned with the infusion of new blood, but her skin was now sweating profusely and she was obviously burning up with a fever.

Isabella got to her feet and moved closer with a look of puzzlement, looking down at the young woman who had saved her daughter’s life. Yuri’s daughter. The half sister who she so despised. Yet Lucia’s actions, based on what Eliani and Carina had told her were the actions not of an enemy, but actions of someone deeply in love. To risk all that you were to save someone as Lucia had done for Zarah, no matter whom her mother was Isabella thought; in that action Lucia Moran had instantly earned Isabella’s unfettered trust and thanks. She looked at the young woman, took in the angular sweeps of her cheeks and the firmness of her body. She was a very beautiful young woman and Isabella felt remorse that her mother was such a vile *upae*.

“What is wrong Eli?” Isabella asked as she saw Carina come back into the med bay with two mugs of coffee.

Eliani shook her head. “I don’t know. She should be recovering fine.” Eliani answered. “Her blood count has returned to normal... but she has a dangerously high fever and it’s making her organs work harder.”

“Fever?” Isabella asked gently. “Eliani... Lucia is a pureblood vampire... we do not get fevers.”

“That may well be mother... but she has one now.” Eliani spoke as she yanked something off the wall next to the bed and passed it over Lucia’s body watching as a readout appeared on the small sensor pad she held. “And unless I bring it down... it will kill her.” She fern green eyes grew a little wider. “That’s... that’s not possible!” She gasped loudly. “I got to her in time! It shouldn’t...”

“Eliani... what?” Carina gasped.

Eliani looked at them. “The instruments are telling me she... they are telling me she has the symptoms of Stage Three Blood Fever.”

“Stage Three Blood Fever!” Isabella gasped in horror. “How... how can that be? She has none of the... none of the outward signs!”

“I know mother!” Eliani snapped as she moved around the bed to the front and held her hand over Lucia’s chest. The soft white glow was a little brighter this time and Isabella and Carina could do nothing but watch.

“This can’t be right.” Eliani exclaimed as she took her hand away and leaned over to adjust the monitor by the bed. She used another portable medical scanner this time, her eyes never leaving the screen as she passed it over Lucia’s body. Her head snapped around to look at her sister in the other bed. “I... I don’t believe this!” She gasped.

“Eli... what is it?” Carina asked moving closer.

Eliani took the scanner and moved next to Zarah in her bed and then slowly played the scanner over her body from her head to her abdomen. Eliani Leonidas was second only to her mother and Aunt when it came to her healing abilities, and not since her grandfather had one so young been so well thought of and respected among Healers. She was widely regarded as the most powerful Field Healer in the Union since Anja and Sivana were not always in the field. Her knowledge was equal to her mother in every way, as well as her inventive ideas on treatment and such.

As she looked at the screen, Eliani’s eyes grew wider and wider. “That’s impossible!” She hissed.

“Eliani!” Isabella barked loudly. “What is going on?”

Eliani looked at her and Carina now. “The scans must be wrong!” She rasped out. “They have to be wrong!”

“What? What are they telling you?” Isabella hissed.

“Stage... Stage Three Blood Fever alters the very composition and molecular structure of certain cells.” Eliani explained as she moved between the beds. “It’s the reason that Stage Three can not be cured. Because it alters the genes so completely.”

Isabella nodded. “Yes... I know this! It destroys your mind, killing all cognitive decision making ability. I know all this Eliani, I have seen it! If Lucia has Stage Three Blood Fever, why then is she acting so normally? How could she be acting so normally? Stage Three takes days to manifest itself in our bodies. Surely one of you

would have noticed the advancement of the fever inside her. The outwards signs are easily seen. How could she have saved Zarah in this condition?"

Eliani looked at her. "She couldn't have."

"Eli... you are not making any sense." Carina snapped.

"Lucia didn't have Stage Three Blood Fever when Zarah bit her." Eliani said with great confidence. "The altered cells I'm seeing are ambient chromosomes with the signature of Stage Three Blood Fever in them. They are perfectly healthy cells but they have the residual signature of Stage Three Blood fever. And they are not Lucia's cells."

Isabella's eyes grew wider. "Eliani... are you..."

Eliani nodded and looked at her. "Yes mother. At some point... at some point Zarah was in the third stage of Blood Fever. The residual cells are from her body and they transferred to Lucia when Zarah bit her. Lucia's body is reacting by displaying the fever common with all the stages of the disease but none of the other signs. I adjusted her heart rate and endorphin levels and the fever will pass soon enough."

"Eliani what you are saying is not possible!" Carina exclaimed. "How could that be? Stage Three is incurable! The machines are wrong! Zarah has never had Blood Fever in any stage!"

Eliani shook her head. "And I'm telling you she has." Eliani answered confidently. "I wouldn't lie about this *arande!*" (Sister)

Isabella stepped up to her. "Eliani... how is this possible?" She asked softly.

Eliani shook her head. "I don't know mother." She replied. "I..." She stopped talking as she felt the massive tremors within Mindvoice. She saw her mother and sister act in a similar matter. "You felt that?" She gasped.

Isabella nodded quickly as Carina came up next to her. "Yes." She said. "It came from your father and brother on the surface."

"Something is happening." Carina exclaimed.

Isabella moved to the wall and slapped her hand down on the wall panel. "*SCIMITAR* Duty Officer this is Queen Isabella!" She barked.

"Yes Milady!"

"Current location of Androcles and Martin Leonidas?" Isabella snapped.

"*Durcunusaan* Command reported moments ago that both King Leonidas and Prince Androcles are now in SODRAG Command Center." The Duty Officer replied instantly. "Queen Aricia and Queen For'mya are with them, as well as Prince Denali and Princess Lisisa."

"Can you get a direct video COM patch to SODRAG Command?" Carina asked now stepping up to her mother.

"I believe so Princess." The officer replied recognizing her voice.

"Then do it and bring it up on the monitor here in Med Bay!" Isabella hissed. "Quickly! Something is happening on Earth!"

"Stand by! Syncing up transmission frequencies! There! It should be coming through now Milady!" The officer exclaimed. "It will be..."

"Bullshit!" Martin screamed. **"They had everything to do with this! They've been playing you boy!"** They watched as Martin stabbed his finger into Andro's chest. **"They've been playing you like a puppet boy! And so has that woman you supposedly claimed as your wife! Yuri's daughter? I can't believe you would stoop so low as to fall into her web! Or your brother Arrarn and Aikiro's bitch daughter Narice!"**

"Father I told you I would..." Andro's voice was now low and menacing.

Martin stepped closer to his son and stabbed him in the chest again with a finger. **"Told me what boy?"** He spat. **"Your incompetence has allowed this to happen! Your infatuation with that little slut has resulted in your sister being beaten and raped! This is no one else's fault but yours boy!"**

All of them stared at the transmission in shock as they saw Denali and Lisisa in the background of the command center helping Aricia and For'mya to their feet.

“You will believe what you will father! I don’t care anymore!” Andro snapped at his father menacingly. ***“I don’t need you to tell me this is my fault! You know nothing about what Zarah means to me! Nothing! No one knows my sister like I do! But I will not let you kill innocent riders and dragons over something that they knew nothing about! And I will not let you take Arrarn’s mates from him! Or Carisia from me! He loves them just as deeply as they love him! And what Sadi and I feel for Carisia goes deeper than love! They...”***

“They are vampires!” Martin roared out his response. ***“None of them can be trusted! None of them! I’m going to put them on trial and then I’m going to execute each and every one of them! Including you and your brother’s sluts! Now tell me where they are! Tell me why there is a Type II sitting on the airfield with its engines idling! Tell me where your sister is! And tell me why my Command Codes for the SCIMITAR don’t work anymore!”***

“I will not let you wrap Zarah in some bubble thinking you are protecting her!” Andro snapped. ***“That is not what she would want! The SCIMITAR is my ship! Your Command Codes haven’t worked in over two years!”***

“And how the fuck would you know what you sister wants? They raped my daughter! They raped and beat my daughter until she was almost dead!” Martin screamed.

“Lucia saved her father! She saved her life because she loves...” Andro tried to speak the words but Martin snatched him by the front of his shirt.

“Tell me what I want to know Androcles! Tell me what...”

“NO!” Androcles Leonidas once and for all time stepped out from underneath the larger than life shadow that was his father. With his next words he would begin blazing his own path into the future and beyond.

“I will not! Your history is not mine! Your history is not ours! We will make our own history now! Carisia, Narice, they are part of that history we will make! Toria and Lucia and Zarah and every Coven rider and dragon that came here! I won’t let you take that away from my brother and sister! I won’t let you take it away from me! From them! NO!”

Martin’s face was twisted into a mask of rage none of them had ever seen before and even that was nothing compared to what he did next.

“Fine! I’ll just beat it out of you like when you were a boy!” And then Martin Leonidas hit his son. Hard.

“NO!” Three women screamed out from within the medical bay of the SCIMITAR at exactly the same time.

They were not aware that seven other sets of eyes on the SCIMITAR were watching what was happening from different parts of the ship, for they had felt the massive tremors within Mindvoice as well. One set of jungle green eyes, one set of Maya blue eyes and two sets of dark brown orbs were leaking tears at what was happening. One of those sets of eyes, pale blue in color, was also recording every bit of what was happening even as two individuals were landing on the airfield at SODRAG knowing they were too late to stop it from beginning, but vowing to keep it from escalating. They knew what they had to do, but as Arzoal broke for where Torma was facing off against four of his children and his mate, Helen’s mind was awash with the information that Canth had passed to her on how to act. She had to do it if she was to salvage anything of the future that was rapidly slipping away.

SODRAG

Androcles Leonidas’s body went careening across the Command Center like a runaway bull. His father’s heel strike walloped him just above his left nipple and launched his body across the room with the force of a gun blast. He smashed through the framework and glass of the star chart directly behind him and slammed into the sensor operator’s console with all two hundred and twenty-five of his pounds like dead weight. Technicians scattered like roaches to get out of the way, while Aricia and For'mya stood with Deni and Lisisa, looks of disbelieving awe on their faces. Aricia remembered Andro’s words and quickly shifted her vision into

the Scotopic spectrum, having to focus hard for she had never used it before. What she saw made her gasp in horror. The black mist surrounded Martin like a fog, swirling all around his large frame, pulsing from his chest and looking as if he was burning with black fire.

“*Son vada carians!*” She gasped in incredulity.

“Aricia?” For'mya gasped looking at her with real fear in her eyes.

“I see it!” Aricia panted. “I see what Andro told us!” She started forward. “I... I must stop this!”

Deni grabbed his birth mother with one strong hand and For'mya with the other. He too had shifted to Scotopic vision and was beyond frightened about what he saw. “Mother no!” He yelled out. “You can't!”

“I won't let this continue!” Aricia snarled pulling against his arm hold on her and unable to release her son's grip.

“You can't! You'll get hurt if you...!” Deni started to speak but was cut off by a voice that was Androcles in tone, but a voice that fairly trembled with vicious intent and unrestrained malice.

They all turned to watch Andro heave a large section of the frame of the star chart off his body and begin to pull himself from the floor.

“I won't allow you to do this!” Andro hissed vehemently as he dropped to the floor. “You are not my father and I won't let you turn my father into a monster! You will have to kill me, for I will not give you what you want!”

Martin kept striding towards him without pausing. “Then I will kill you boy!” The voice that came from Martin was not his and everyone in the room knew it.

“Martin no!” Aricia screamed struggling against Denali's grip.

Andro rose to his full height and brushed the back of his hand across his face which was not bloody with several cuts from the glass of the star chart. He lowered his hands then and they instantly began to glow a soft blue color all the way up to his elbows.

“Then come creature!” Andro snarled his hands flaring brighter with psychic power and ability. “Come and let us do battle beast of the dark mist! I don't know who or what you are, but I want my father back and I will do what I must to achieve that!”

With a savage howl of battle Andro leaped at his father without thought.

SCIMITAR

“*Carians!*” Eliani gasped.

“***Martin no!***” They heard Aricia's wail in the background.

“***Then come creature!***” Andro snarled his hands flaring brighter. “***Come and let us do battle beast of the dark mist! I don't know who or what you are, but I want my father back and I will do what I must to achieve that!***”

Carina noticed it first and her eyes grew even larger. “Mother! Eli!” She gasped. “His hands! Andro's hands!”

Isabella's own eyes went wide when she saw the identical flare of Mindvoice power wrap around Andro's hands and up to his elbows. The same type of power that Zarah had developed and had been cultivating and growing stronger with for the last ten years. Isabella glanced back to look at Zarah on the bed. Her dark eyes were open and she was watching the monitor just as they were.

“Zarah!” Isabella gasped as she turned and rushed to the bed. She settled back into the chair and reached for Zarah's hand.

Zarah's dark eyes, sprinkled generously with flecks of green, looked up at her as Isabella took her hand. “*Nin dos zhaun ilhar.*” She said in a soft whisper. “*Nin dos zhaun.*” She met her mother's eyes. “I want my brother here with me mama.” She said sleepily. “I want my brother here with me.” (Now you know mother. Now you know.)

Isabella nodded without question. “Soon *dalharil.* Soon.” She waited until Zarah's eyes closed with a dreamy smile and then she turned back to the monitor and watched as things began to unfold.

SODRAG

Their bodies' coming together was a sound that caused the room to vibrate with the force of it. Andro leaped directly at his father and sent his open fist slamming into Martin's face. The force of his blow and the momentum of his leap carried both of them staggering into another wall of computer systems which sparked and flared with the abuse they were not designed for. Martin's head slammed into the top of the console, blood erupting from a slice in his scalp that a bent piece of metal caused. He howled in pain, his wolf fangs bursting from his gums and his eyes changing to black ringed yellow orbs. He and his son were only half an inch different in height, but Martin had twenty-five more pounds of tightly packed muscle and weight on his body. Andro had left himself in an awkward position when he leaped and he knew this. While Andro was a lethal hand-to-hand fighter, he did not use the psychic shields around his fists to fight as often as his sister and he did not have the same level of training with them surrounding his hands. This was his father he was attacking and knowing that a part of him instinctually held back his full power. Martin Leonidas was not so limited.

"Is that all you got boy!" He snarled viciously before grabbing the front of Andro's shirt and slamming him sideways into the now destroyed computer system.

Andro yelped out his pain as his already injured side impacted the unyielding computer bank. His wolf eyes had time to only blink before his father's fist was smashing into his jaw with trip hammer like speed and power. He was already weak from his battle with Dante and then Yuri and matching his father's size, skill and power even without the added energy this dark mist gave to him would never have entered Andro's mind. He had to protect them. He must protect them. It was all that rang true in his mind now as he caught his father's wrist in suddenly resurgent hands and twisted with all of his considerable strength. The maneuver did not have the desired effect Andro had hoped. He had wanted to throw his father off balance so that he could hit him with a blow that would at least stagger him, giving him time to get out of the confines of the command center.

Andro could feel Elynth projecting her power to him through their bond. He had told her to remain on the *TYPE II* and not leave the ship for any reason. If they needed a quick escape she needed to keep the *TYPE II* clear of any obstacles. Jeth and Aradace were with her, trying to feed their own power to their sister in order to help her provide Andro with support. Whatever was affecting his father, whatever power had infused him it was much stronger than Andro had suspected and Martin simply twisted his hand back around and grabbed Andro's wrists. With a shout of rage he hauled Andro up off the computer bank and tossed him through the air once more. Andro crashed into another wall of computer monitors and consoles with a cry of pain and lay still dazed and very confused.

He hardly felt his father lift him up or slam him back down on the hard steel floor.

"Can't fight anymore boy!" Martin hissed gleefully as he savagely punched his fist into Andro's face. "What's wrong boy? Fight me!"

Andro's dazed mind felt another of the blows strike his face, rocking his head back. This blow was much lesser in comparison then the others and an idea sprang into his jumbled brain. He opened his azure eyes and looked at the cruel sneer of his father as he cocked his fist again. "You feed off... you feed off anger and hate!" Andro hissed. "I will... I will not give that to you anymore! And I will never surrender to you the lives of those I protect! As my father will never surrender to you in the end!"

Martin slammed his fist into Andro's face once more. "Fight me you coward!" He yelled. "Fight me or I will beat you to death!"

Andro looked at his father as he willed away his wolf fangs and eyes. His mouth was bloody, his father's blows cutting his cheeks in several places from the hard, calloused knuckles his father possessed. Each blow was like getting hit by a giant rock as hard as his father's fists were. Andro shook his head and spit out saliva coated with blood to the side.

"Then you... you will need to kill me!" Andro spat.

The sneer was still there but not as dark and savage as before. Martin's wolf eyes were wide as he snarled out his rage and lifted his hand once more. "So be it!" He growled.

"**MARTIN LEONIDAS!**" The female voice roared from off to the side.

Martin's head snapped around just as the enormously powerful helmet sized ball of psychic power struck him in the chest and launched his body across the room, through a plate glass window and into a small conference room on the side.

Helen staggered slightly from the expenditure of power even with Arzoal's support but she caught herself quickly and reached for the pillar that had been her support through these last two decades.

Sister?

Act quickly as Canth told us my Bonded Sister! Arzoal's voice filled her head. Torma is free of whatever is affecting Martin Leonidas! When Martin went underground it was enough to block the influence of the mist somehow! He will provide us added support!

Torma! Helen barked.

I am myself Feravomir! Torma's voice quickly answered. *And the shame I feel is beyond measure!*

The time for shame is past! This is not our Martin. The last vestiges of a sliver of what possessed Yuri is upon Martin! We must make him see what is happening! Canth said he must be the one to take back his own mind or we can do nothing! Helen explained as quickly as she was able.

Canth? Torma exclaimed.

Now is not the time Torma! Join with Arzoal and help me! Helen declared. Helen whirled on where Denali and the others stood in openmouthed shock. "Take Andro now!" She snapped. "He has become the focus of the darkness within Martin. He must leave or this will not end until he is dead and then all will be lost! That will destroy Martin! Tell him to go with his plan as we discussed and Arzoal or I will contact him!"

"*Feravomir!*" Aricia yelled.

"You and For'mya get out of here now!" Helen barked.

"No! We will stay!" For'mya cried.

"Denali, Lisisa, you must remove your mothers and then get Andro off Earth and away from here in case I am unable to stem this tide!" Helen growled. "Go now! Now!"

Denali didn't hesitate and rushed forward to gather his brother into his arms as Lisisa pulled on Aricia and For'mya's arms pulling them toward the sealed corridor to the outside and the surface. Andro was trying his best to get to his feet, but failing miserably as he staggered like a drunken fool in the street. Deni reached down, heedless of the blood on his older brother, and gathered his brother into his arms. A brother who had protected his and Lisisa's secret love without question or hesitation. A brother who had encouraged and made it so they could be together more and more as their love for each other grew into the devotion it was now.

"I have you *fervon!*" Deni whispered softly as he pulled Andro's body up and rammed his shoulder under his armpit more harshly than he intended. He would apologize later, but he was no where near as powerful as his older brother and he certainly did not want to face the monster their father had become. "Time to go now!"

SCIMITAR

Captain Sa'sur had seen Androcles Leonidas do many brave things in the nearly seven years she had served with him as his Captain and his friend. He was just as fearless and laconic as his father, in some ways even more so, yet what she had just witnessed surpassed anything he had ever done before. She stood up slowly from her command chair, the huge bridge of the *SCIMITAR* as silent as a tomb after witnessing what they had just seen. Most of the men and women on this watch of the *SCIMITAR*'s duty rotation had served directly as Andro's bridge crew when he was on shift. They had eaten with him, laughed with him and cried with him. To them he was not just their Crown Prince and heir to the throne of the Union, he was their friend.

"Well *sibfla!*" Sa'sur finally spat. "What we have just seen pretty much seals what we are about to do for me. Anyone have any questions?" Sa'sur knew there would be none as all heads turned towards her and she saw the determination in their eyes. "Very well. Helm the moment Andro's ship comes aboard, execute Emergency Order Four Nine and jump us the hell out of here! Give coordinates to the Strike Wing, and tell

them this is the only chance they have to back out. Begin powering the LSD Drive Coils and prep for combat jump!”

“Helm acknowledges!” The young officer spoke.

“I want full power to the Shroud... have all sensor nodes to passive... and let’s make like the ghosts we can be. Prepare to go dark!” Sa’sur snapped as men and women began to turn back to their posts. She stepped over to the COM station and looked at the young female wolf there. “Elylca... where are the Coven dragons and riders?” She asked softly.

“All of them have been directed to the Dragon Den on deck ten Captain.” She answered instantly. “Andro wanted them to get accustomed to the Den.”

Sa’sur nodded. “Patch me through and make ready to play what you have recorded for them. And pull up the intelligence footage from the after action report at Alba Tau. The one taken immediately after the rescue teams got there by the Krypteria Officer.”

“Captain... those... those files were sealed by the King.” Elylca said softly. “Only the King or Prince Androcles can open them.”

Sa’sur nodded. “Now is the time to unseal them. Command Code Talon Guardian Four One Beta.” She said with a smile as she gave the young woman Andro’s personal Command Code. “Andro and I have grown close these last years Elylca. We think alike in many respects. Pull it up for me and prepare to transmit it to the holo emitters in the Dragon Den.”

Elylca nodded as her hands flew over the control console. “Ready Captain.”

Sa’sur nodded. “Patch me in.”

SCIMITAR DRAGON DEN DECK TEN

They were cramped in some areas, but each dragon had their own space and they were settling in for a journey they didn’t know they would take. The dragons conversed easily with one another now, never having taken the time to really know one another before coming here to Earth. Their riders were gathered in small groups or sitting with their Bonded Ones waiting for what they did not know. All of them, rider and dragon, all of them knew they were different than when they had come here. Different in so many ways. And to a man and a dragon they knew something very big was happening and it concerned them.

The huge holodisc in the center of the Den came alive with an image of Sa’sur from what was obviously the bridge of the *SCIMITAR*. Her image didn’t speak for a moment allowing all the riders and dragons to direct their attention to her image.

“You have probably wondered over the course of the last few months what it is that drives Andro to train you so intently.” Sa’sur’s voice came through the transmission. ***“You are supposed to be his enemy. He should not trust you. There is some ulterior motive to his actions and what he wants to obtain.”***

All of them came to their feet when the holo emitters in the Den came alive to show them a scene from someone’s nightmares. They saw hundreds of bodies strewn about in hideously grotesque fashion surrounded by towering green mountains in the distance. Some of the bodies were stacked four and five high. That they were Evolli was easily enough to discern from their twisted features and amphibian like skin. Some were missing different parts of their bodies, arms, legs, and heads. Some appeared to be burnt to nothing but black shells. The terrain all around was mountainous but it appeared burned away in some sections in the distance with the fingers of smoke still filling the air like a light mist, and the amount of blood that covered the ground was simply gruesome.

“What you are seeing all around you is Alba Tau. The battle that altered the course of the Evolli War for many. The battle that made Andro who he is today.” Sa’sur’s voice echoed as the views changed to a small perimeter with what appeared to be the large bodies of thirteen dragons. Not far away were the bodies of

thirteen men and women, they couldn't tell if they were elf or Lycavorian, covered reverently with dark sheets. Men and women were scrambling throughout the perimeter trying to help those five Bonded Pairs that were left. There were dozens of Spartan troops within the perimeter, all of them either providing security or sitting with the five pairs that remained. The image shifted to that of Andro and his father, both of them within reach of each other. Torma and Elynth rested unmoving on the ground, their heads on the soil, both of their bodies covered in blood. Their own blood and Evolli blood. ***"This footage was taken by an Intelligence Officer from the Krypteria who got to the site before the Queens and the rest of their family. It was later confiscated and sealed. No one knows it exists outside of the King and Andro and four others. They... they did not want anyone to know what had happened there. To this day they will not speak of it, and nor will any who survived it with them."***

There was not a single Coven rider or dragon that rested on the floor any longer, all of them up and turning in slow circles as the ghastly footage was replayed for them. Security footage that had only been seen by four others outside of Andro and Martin because of the gruesome nature as Sa'sur had told them.

"Only five of the eighteen Bonded Pairs that went into this valley survived. They killed just about six thousand Evolli scum through the nearly twenty hours on the ground and throughout the night. You can see they stacked the bodies sometimes four and five high at different points. All of them suffered injuries that would have fell lesser men. All of their dragons were severely injured but they could have left." Sa'sur's voice continued. ***"Yet they left no one behind."***

The footage shifted to Andro sitting on the ground leaning against Elynth's muscular side with the young black skinned Spartan they now knew as Moneus Simpson beside him, their shoulders touching and their eyes staring off into the unknown. Blood covered his waist and legs, his shoulders and parts of his face. Most of it was Evolli blood, but the injuries to him were visible as well. He clutched one of his swords in his right hand, the blade bent at an odd angle, his Shi Viska still deployed on his arm and shiny with several layers of Evolli blood. Elynth's head rested next to his right leg, the puncture marks in her scales easily seen, as well as the odd angle of her broken rear leg.

"You have all probably asked at some point what makes him so special that he can train you when he himself is so young. The answer and reason for that swirls around you now in the images you are seeing. He does not care that you are vampires." Sa'sur continued once more.

"He cares only that you are like him. You are Bonded Pairs. He has more faith in you than you think, and right now he stands against his father in protecting you because he says you are different. Do not make him regret his decision to save all of you. And he has saved you... all of you from a death that would not have been pleasant. After you watch what I am going to show you next, make your decision as to your future. It will be the only opportunity for you to choose. If he is right... then all of you will choose correctly. If he is wrong... then those of you who don't will die. It is now up to you."

The holo emitters flickered and then the scene of Andro and his father in the SODRAG command center came alive.

"I will not let you kill them father!" Andro stated flatly yanking his arm away. ***"I won't let you separate them either! They had nothing to do with what has happened and you know it! They are becoming true Bonded Pairs. Just like any of us in the Union! They are embracing all that they are learning and it is changing them! Look at you! You are..."***

The first six sentences he spoke sealed their paths for them, everything they witnessed after simply added to their reverence for him. Six minutes after the holo emitters in the Dragon Den went dark Sa'sur stood on the bridge and saw the power spikes from both the lifts into the Dragon Den suddenly became very active. She smiled to herself as she sat back down in her chair and waited for Andro's ship to arrive.

SODRAG

Helen watched Martin toss aside the pieces of furniture and large table that rested on top of him and he rose to his feet, his face a gruesome mask of fury.

“I will kill you woman!” He screamed.

Helen tried to remain calm. She would either succeed or she would die she knew that without question.

“I know who you are dark one!” Helen spat. “I know what you have done! And I will not allow you to have him as you have taken Yuri!”

“You know nothing!” Martin screamed again as he kicked the frame of the console out of his way and began walking towards her. “And you can’t stop me!”

“You are part of the Pralor Xaxon! A festering boil among your own kind to say the least. A being that craved death and war! A vile being exiled by his own species for your actions in bringing about their end.” Helen snapped viciously. “And what I know is that you have infected someone far more powerful than Yuri could have ever hoped to be! I am going to release that person now!”

“You can do nothing!” Martin screamed once more, spittle flying from his twisted features. “You are nothing but an old woman!”

“An old woman who will now kick your ass!” Helen snarled as she lifted her hands and let loose with a barrage of oval shaped psychic projectiles far faster than the eye could follow.

Denali waited on the edge of the ramp while Lisisa got Andro secured in one of the seats on the upper deck and Elynth, Jeth and Aradace moved quickly to the harnesses. He stopped Aricia and For'mya from joining them on the ship.

“No mothers.” He said softly. “Where we are going you can not come.”

“Deni...” Aricia spoke looking at him surprised.

Denali shook his head. “We have made this decision. All of us. We’ll be back after we have finished what we started. Just like father taught us. You need to stay here and help him. He will need you more.”

“Where are you going?” For'mya asked.

“The less you know the better as Andro told you.” Denali answered as he heard the *TYPE II*'s engines begin to grow louder. “Helen knows... but only you and she can help our father now.”

“Denali Leonidas you...” Aricia began to speak but Denali pulled her close and kissed her forehead before doing the same with For'mya. He stepped back quickly as the ramp started to rise.

“Take care of father.” Deni spoke loudly. “We’ll do the rest! We all carry the name of Leonidas! And that will never change! We’ll see you when we see you!”

Aricia and For'mya had no choice but to begin to back up and move away from the ship as its powerful engines began to spool up quickly. Even before the ramp was fully closed on the massive ship, it was lifting off into the blue sky, buffeting them with its take off engines as they staggered back.

They whirled around quickly when they heard Torma let out a trumpet of intense anger and dash forward to the top of the underground command center. They rushed back to Arzoal's side as Torma's great talons began tearing at the dirt and rock above the buried facility. It was only ten meters underground and Torma was making short work of that ten meters of dirt ripping up great swatches of ground.

Arzoal! Aricia screamed out in Mindvoice.

Arzoal's head whipped around to face them. *He has seen the darkness infecting his Bond Brother and he... he is...*

Enraged. Isheeni spoke now from where she stood next to her mother. *He is enraged that this... this thing has affected them as it has. Caused them to act in such manner.* She turned her azure eyes on Aricia and For'mya. *Whoever this dark mist represents... he did not know or understand the level of commitment and loyalty Martin and Torma share. He will discover it now I would imagine. And if I know my beloved mate... he will not be at all pleased.*

Aricia and For'mya turned to watch as enormous gouts of dirt and some rock were flying through the air as Torma's talons tore at the earth beneath him.

“...not have him!” Helen screamed as she launched another barrage of oval psychic projections at Martin, watching him stagger back with each successive impact. “This is your fault! You have brought this upon us! You thought to twist him to your desire as you twisted Yuri! Never! I will never fail another King Leonidas! Never!”

The last projectile slammed into Martin’s broad chest and set him hurtling wildly across the conference room to smash into the far wall. Helen leaped across the expanse of the room without even hesitating. Even with Arzoal still helping her she was losing strength. Martin was just so powerful and Helen truly did not know how powerful until this very day. Her reserves were draining rapidly as she landed on his chest and began pummeling his face with her small fists.

“Fight him Martin Leonidas!” She screamed. “Fight him damn you! Fight him like the Spartan I know you are! No retreat! No surrender! Fight him you bastard!”

“NO!” Martin screamed his eyes going wide even as her fists continued to pound his face.

“I know what you fear Martin Leonidas!” Helen shouted. “You can not hide it from me! Every moment since that day you returned from that slaughterhouse you have been different! You are afraid! You are afraid of losing what you have!”

“Never!” Martin shouted as he heaved off the floor knocking Helen off of him as he surged to his feet.

Helen rolled away from him and came to her feet. She heard the pounding against the steel of the ceiling and could feel Torma tearing at the earth and metal to reach them. She looked back to where Martin stood and saw him standing there unmoving, his face a myriad of emotions and his wolf eyes brighter than she had ever seen them.

Now Helen! He says now! Canth’s voice roared within her head. ***You have cracked the armor and Martin’s mind has heard you! Now!***

“You are afraid!” Helen shouted without hesitation stepping up to him. “Alba Tau shattered all you have known! Everything you saw and felt! The death of so many you hold sacred! Your son having to experience it! It made you afraid of the unknown! It made you hesitate!”

Those black ringed yellow wolf orbs focused on her now and she saw in them all the truth of everything she was saying.

“I am not afraid!” Martin shrieked.

“This darkness... Xaxon’s vile essence infected you! It went after the one thing you hold dearest of all! The one thing you left unprotected! Your heart!” Helen spoke rapidly. “You have blamed yourself for what happened. You have blamed yourself all of these years for what your son had to see and experience and you became afraid! The one person in this universe who worships the very mention of your name. Andro... Androcles would follow you to the ends of the universe Martin Leonidas. He would slay any foe, fight any enemy with nary a pause if you so asked him!” She stepped closer to him hesitantly watching his eyes and his actions. “He is... he is you all over again! And your actions have driven him away! The one person aside from his *anome* who he would crush empires for and you have driven him away because of the darkness that has infected you!”

“NO! Alba Tau... he... he should not have had... he should not have been there!” Martin shouted.

“You fool! He chooses his path! He has chosen his path since he was an infant! You know this as well as I!” Helen screamed. “Your own fears of what happened... what you saw! What you did! These fears cloud your thoughts! Your son... your son did not die at Alba Tau Martin Leonidas! Your son was born at Alba Tau! That is where he was forged and polished into the man he is today! Just as you were born and forged in the deserts and jungles of this very planet we walk upon! Just like your father!”

Martin’s eyes snapped up quickly to look at her. “My... my father!”

Helen nodded. “Yes! You must fight this putrid essence that infects you Martin Leonidas. You must deny it what it wants and...” Helen stopped talking when she shifted to the scotopic visual spectrum and saw the dark mist surrounding him. It was forming itself into a vague shape of an upper body next to him as she watched. Then Helen heard it and her eyes went wide.

{She lies!} The mist spoke. The voice was deep and almost soothing in nature, but the cruelty pouring from its essence was palpable.

Helen shifted her vision back to normal and could not see the mist then. “You are Martin Leonidas! You are the son of King Leonidas and Queen Gorgo of Sparta! The King of the Lycavorian Union! Blood before all else Martin Leonidas! Blood before all else!”

Martin staggered slightly and his wolf eyes disappeared. His dark brown orbs were wide then, snapping back and forth as if looking for something. The terrible tearing sound made Helen cringe and even as she stepped back quickly four massive talons stabbed through the ceiling of the command center, sunlight burst through into the shadows, and Torma peeled the metal back with a trumpet of rage and desperation.

The hybrid Heavyhorn Talon Guardian known as Torma was not celebrated as the most physically dominating dragon among their species for nothing and the weakened metal ceiling of the SODRAG command center surrendered to his impossible strength like a sardine can being peeled open with a very sharp knife. Martin’s eyes lifted to see his Bonded Brother and closest friend extend his massive head and neck into the hole he had just made.

Martin my brother! His voice screamed out in Mindvoice.

Martin’s head whipped back around when he heard the vicious laughter and snickering. Helen had heard it too and she saw his eyes darting back and forth trying to find the source of the voice.

“Your Scotopic vision Martin!” She barked. “Switch to your scotopic vision!”

Helen watched as he blinked several times and then his eyes grew huge.

“Holy fuck!” Martin shouted as he saw the mist for the first time. And it was connected to him.

{If you are too weak to kill her} The mist spoke. {I will do it for you.}

Helen watched as the mist began to separate from Martin’s body and move towards her. She took several steps back before banging into what was left of the conference room wall and then she could go no further.

{Canth and he should have stayed out of this old woman!} The mist snarled as it moved closer to her. {They should have left us alone! I am too strong for you! Now you will die! Just as my brother’s son died! As his son’s son died!}

Helen felt something then. Arzoal was pouring her love and support into her from above, but there was something far more powerful and warm wrapping her within its embrace. She had felt it many times before and she could only smile as it came for her now, now shining more brilliantly than she had ever felt it. She cut her dark eyes and looked behind the mist to behold something she would remember for the rest of her days.

A single coalescing strand of bright white connecting Martin and Torma unlike anything she had ever seen. It enveloped both of them, wrapped around them and ran through them. A shimmering window of their combined psychic power, which until this very moment she had never seen nor comprehended just how utterly powerful they were together. Their eyes were closed tightly as if they were concentrating intently and then Martin Leonidas’s black ringed, yellow wolf eyes sprang open once more at the exact same time as Torma’s glowing golden eyes and both sets of eyes turned to look at the dark mist.

<YES!> Canth’s voice erupted in Helen’s head. **<Now they are truly one! Now they are like Androcles and Elynth! Now they will do what they must!>**

Hey fuck nuts! Martin snarled savagely in Mindvoice. The Mist stopped immediately and turned it’s misshapen form to face Martin. *Yeah you... misty, dark and just butt fucking ugly!*

Truly fucking ugly! Torma growled within Mindvoice.

Helen’s eyes exploded open, for in all twenty-six years of knowing Torma she had never heard him utter one vulgar word to anyone. She watched Martin lift his hands and the psychic sphere formed instantly in his palms. A sphere not much larger than the oval shaped projections she was throwing earlier, but far more lethal she knew without question.

Hey Misty boy! Martin spoke as the brilliance of that sphere grew in intensity. *When you get back to Yuri... give her my love! And tell her I’m coming for her!* Martin snapped his hands out in front of him and the instant before the sphere left his hands Helen heard the words. ***Blood before all else motherfucker! Blood before all else!***

The sphere covered the distance between Martin and the mist apparition in a single heartbeat. There was no chance to move, dodge or even blink. One instant it was there not two meters in front of her and the next it was shattered into atoms. She could do naught but watch as it drifted lazily in the air for an instant before it dissolved into empty space. Her head snapped around when she heard Martin groan loudly and she watched him

fall to his knees as if in great pain. Helen didn't hesitate and she dashed forward to catch him before he toppled completely.

"Martin!" She gasped as she caught almost his full weight. One of his hands stretched out however and he stopped himself even as he began vomiting profusely off to the side.

They both heard soft laughter and as he spit to the side Martin looked up slowly as the shape took form next to them and his eyes grew a little wide.

"*Nubous lae*. I must be dead." Martin muttered. "Heaven wouldn't torture me in this way."

<I told you once that you were just as *gostin con* as your grandfather boy. It seems I was right.>

The astral projection of Canth materialized clearly in front of them and he was plainly chuckling. His eyes turned to Helen. **<It seems he did not care for the time we spent together.>**

Martin my brother? Torma's voice broke in as he stretched his head and neck further through the opening he had created in the ceiling.

Canth's face turned and looked up at Torma. **<Dragons.>** He spoke softly. **<Who would have thought such a wonder could exist? They will come as quite the surprise I'm sure.>**

Martin squeezed Helen's arm and pushed himself to his feet spitting out to the side once more to get rid of the foul taste of vomit. "It's alright Torma." Martin spoke as he stood to his full height, wavered just a bit and then put his arm around Helen's shoulders to steady himself. "I told you about Canth. The bad dream on Ukwav. Remember?"

Canth's astral projection laughed heartily. **<I see your disposition hasn't changed. That is good.>**

"What the hell was that?" Martin snapped. "It was... it was connected to..."

<To you? Yes indeed.> Canth spoke. **<That my boy... it was you in a sense.>**

Martin looked at him. "What?" He exclaimed turning to look at Helen. "Helen... Helen you still talk to this character? He's just as fruity now as he was then. What the hell does he mean that was me?"

"Martin Leonidas you will mind your manners in the presence of your betters!" Helen snapped sternly.

Canth laughed softly. **<It is truly an honor to see you again my King.>** He spoke. **<You do your father and grandfather proud!>**

"Proud?" Martin gasped. "They never beat their own son within an inch of his life!" He snapped. "*Son vada carians*... what have I done? I... I turned against my own mates! Against my son!"

<Listen to me Martin.> Canth spoke quickly. **<I can not fully explain what it was that infected you. I do not have the time needed in this form. You must go to the neural boosters in your father's tomb. There you will get your answers. He will meet you there.>**

"I need to contact my son and tell him to come home!" Martin barked. "That's what I need to do! I need to take Aricia and For'mya in my arms and beg their forgiveness!"

"Martin... you must listen to him." Helen spoke from her place next to him. "You can not contact Andro. In moments the *SCIMITAR* will go dark and leave the system. He will take the Coven riders and train them fully. I will tell Aricia and For'mya what is happening. They are Queens and they need to act it now. There is still much that is going on and we don't know the half of it."

"Then I need to be in Sparta!" Martin protested.

<You have defeated the dark mist for now Martin.> Canth spoke. **<But it is not gone from your body. You need to speak with him in your father's tomb. It is the only place with Neural Boosters powerful enough that he can reach us from his location.>**

"Who is he? What is he?" Martin asked. "Some sort of doctor?"

Canth nodded. **<In a manner of speaking.>**

"Can't this wait?" Martin insisted.

"No." Helen spoke. "You have controlled it now Martin. Beaten it back. If it returns however... I don't know if we can fight it again. We may not have all the pieces in place as we did this day."

<You need to do this Martin.> Canth spoke. **<As much as I know you despise being maneuvered and manipulated... now it is a necessity. I would not tell you otherwise. Was anything I told you that day on Ukwav a lie? Did everything I tell you not come about in some way or form?>**

"Yes." Martin spoke without hesitation.

<Then trust my word now. Events are going to begin to tumble and you must be clear headed in order to keep them from overtaking us.> Canth said.

“What events?” Martin asked. “What are you talking about?”

<I can no longer maintain this projection. Do as Helen and I ask of you Martin. You will not be disappointed.> Canth spoke. **<I will speak with you in the future Helen. Mind yourself around this one.>**

“I will *Feravomir*.” She spoke softly.

They watched as the astral projection vanished and then Martin looked at Helen. “Just what in the hell has happened Helen?” He asked.

“Sit and I will fill you in as quickly as I can.” She spoke.

Arzoal turned her massive head to look at Aricia and For'mya. *Helen has done it. Martin is once more himself.*

The sigh from Aricia and For'mya was easily seen and both of them began moving for the entrance to the command center, though For'mya seemed to hesitate just a moment causing Aricia to turn and look at her.

“For'mya what is wrong?” she asked.

“He... he lashed out at us Aricia.” For'mya spoke softly. “He struck us.”

“For'mya that was not our Martin.” Aricia said.

Aricia Blue Eyes is correct For'mya. Arzoal spoke looking at her. *This was not Martin. Whatever controlled him was amplifying the darkness within Martin. He...*

“That’s just it!” For'mya said. “It amplified the darkness within him, but that darkness allowed him to strike out at two who he loves! Darkness that is inside him. Always.”

“For'mya... Martin would never do this!” Aricia exclaimed. “You know he would never willingly strike any of us.”

“I know that! But unwillingly... he...”

All of them turned when the *Durcunusaan* officer trotted up to where they stood quickly. He came to a halt in front of them.

“Queen Aricia! Queen For'mya!” He spoke hurriedly. “The Prime Minister is demanding that one of you return to Sparta! She has... she has ordered it to be honest. The Kavalians are refusing us access to their embassy. They will not let us approach with rescue personnel or equipment.”

“I will go back.” For'mya spoke immediately. “I have dealt with them since they arrived. I will handle this.”

Aricia looked at her squeezing her hand. “For'mya you know...”

For'mya smiled and stepped closer to her kissing her softly on the lips. “I was foolish to think such things. Bring him back to us *Saaurano*. I will be fine.”

“Are you sure my love?” Aricia asked.

For'mya nodded. “Yes. Now go.”

Aricia nodded and turned to head into the underground command center. Aurith came up behind For'mya and lowered her large head to For'mya’s shoulder.

[For'mya... I can sense your fear my Bonded Sister.] Aurith spoke in the heavily shielded conversation.

[I can't explain it Aurith.] For'mya answered. *[I did not think Martin capable of such action no matter the circumstance. Suddenly... suddenly I felt as if I was... I was a prisoner of the Immortals once more.]*

[Come sister.] Aurith spoke. *[You are reading too much into what has happened. You know Martin would never hurt you or any of those he loves. Let us return to Sparta and deal with these fool Kavalians. In a few hours you will long for his embrace just as you always do.]*

For'mya looked at her and nodded. *[You are right.]* She said with a smile. She turned back to the *Durcunusaan* officer. “We’ll take my *STRIKER!*” She spoke. “Let us go!”

SCIMITAR

TYPE II DRAGON TRANSPORT

STARBOARD LANDING BAY

Andro leaned back in the couch like chair of the upper deck and looked up at his sister Eliani with a bloody grin. “Hi ya Eli.” He said.

Eliani looked at her brother and the tears came to her eyes once more at what they had witnessed. She had raced from the med bay and beat all of her siblings onto the ship. “You *nubous igord*.” She exclaimed squatting down in front of him and pulling aside the tattered remains of the shirt he wore.

“Andro!” Sadi’s voice cried as she leaped onto the couch he sat in and gingerly hugged his battered face to her full breasts, her own eyes streaked with tears, as the upper deck of the *TYPE II* filled with his family and friends. Sadi inhaled deeply of his musky lavender and pines scent and felt her body come alive as it always did having him so close to her. Deni and Lisisa got up from the couch on Andro’s opposite side as they saw the dark haired elf female rush forward as well. They both knew immediately who she was, for their brother’s scent saturated her own sweet amaretto scent. Ne’Veha didn’t hesitate in the least, filling the space occupied by them instantly and pressing close to Andro.

“Androcles.” She said softly pressing her face to his neck as the thought of losing him so soon after finding him and Sadi and Carisia terrified her.

Andro turned his head and pulled her close with his free arm, pulling his head away from Sadi’s breasts to nuzzle Ne’Veha’s throat. The others watched as her eyes closed in bliss and her arms moved to hug both him and Sadi.

“Ne’Veha I can’t see!” Eliani exclaimed. Ne’Veha gasped and quickly shifted her body as Eliani passed her hand over the area of his side where he had been shot. “You fool!” Eliani snapped. “One of the projectiles came within half an inch of your heart!”

“I love you too sister.” Andro spoke gruffly. “Just take them out!”

Eliani concentrated and the white glow from her hand flared for several seconds and Andro grimaced in pain but uttered no sound. Eliani then she drew her hand away cupping the two bullets in her palm. She tossed them across the deck with an angry motion and then set about to healing the vicious looking bruises the wounds had caused. The scars would remain because he had shifted back to human form before getting treated but the wounds closed and healed easily enough as powerful a healer as Eliani was.

Arrarn stepped around in front of Andro on the couch, Narice and Toria clinging to his arms and looking at him with adoration at what he had done. “You look like *sibfla fervon*.” He said.

Andro chuckled as he pulled Ne’Veha closer and rested his head against Sadi’s breasts again. “It’s an improvement right?” He said.

“Heh!” Arrarn said wagging his hand back and forth with a grin though his voice with filled with emotion. “A little.” He answered.

“Taking on Yuri and then your father all by yourself...” Moneus spoke from the side. “Better check and make sure all his brain functions are normal Eliani. What he did ain’t so bright.”

“Where is...?” Andro began.

“She’s in the Med Bay with your mother and Carina.” Sadi answered before he had the question fully out.

Eliani looked at him. “I... I discovered something while I was examining Zarah Andro.” She said.

Andro turned his azure eyes on her. “Yes I imagine you did.” He spoke as he pushed gently away from Sadi and rose unsteadily to his feet. Denali and Arrarn reached out to steady him and then he nodded. “I need to see her.”

“Let me treat your face.” Eliani spoke.

“Zarah is more important than my face!” He snapped.

“Don’t you dare bark at me Androcles Leonidas, or I’ll put those bullets back inside you!” Eliani snapped right back. “I don’t want you to scare anyone with the way you look! Arrarn’s right! You look like shit!”

Andro met her eyes. “That bad?” He asked softly.

“*Carians* Andro... he did a number on you.” Moneus spoke softly.

“I had forgotten how hard our father can hit.” Andro said as Eliani lifted her hands on either side of his face and the soft white glow flared gently. “Do I want to know how bad?”

“No!” Deni barked quickly.

“Right to the Med Bay with you!” Eliani ordered. “I want to give you a full exam.”

“Eli I...”

“No... don't you argue with me Androcles Leonidas!” Eliani demanded using his full name once more. All of them knew when she started to spout their full names Eliani meant business and it was pointless to argue with her. She was just as stubborn and unmovable as their mother. “Not this time. Not after what we saw happen Andro. We saw how badly he beat you *fervon*.”

Andro's eyes went wide at this and he looked at them each in turn. “You... you saw?” He gasped. “How?”

“And we heard.” Sadi said softly as she got up and pressed her lithe frame against his firmly, Ne'Veha matching this action. “Your mother ordered a patch to SODRAG from the Med Bay when she felt the spike in Mindvoice. The Duty Officer made the connection and only assumed that the rest of us would feel it as well and he routed the transmission to where all of us were.”

“It was horrible to watch Androcles.” Ne'Veha said softly. “Knowing we couldn't do anything because you sent all of us up here.”

Arrarn released Narice's and Toria's hands and stepped up to his brother. “Andro... what you did... you...” Andro lifted his hands and grabbed Arrarn's head bringing it forward until their foreheads touched.

“You are my brother!” Andro hissed softly. “I will always stand with you Arrarn. With any of you! Without question or pause. Blood...”

Arrarn nodded and looked at him. “Before all else.” He said firmly.

Narice moved forward now and took his hand. “Andro... I... I swear to you... I give you my vow as a Bonded Pair that we did not know...”

Andro shook his head and leaned over to kiss her forehead gently. “There has never been a doubt in my mind Narice.” He said softly. “Your's and Toria's love for Arrarn is all the proof I need.” He placed his palm on her cheek and looked at her tear stained eyes. “Your... your mother is...”

Narice nodded. “I know.” She said softly. “I can not... I can not bring myself to feel sorrow for her loss after what her actions have wrought. I feel only anger and shame for what she and Yuri did.”

“Their shame is not yours to bear Narice Leonidas.” Andro said seeing her head come up when he said that. “You and Toria are part of our family now. Remember that.”

“Then... then you have my solemn promise as a Leonidas that I will do everything within my power to insure Dante is caught and made to answer for this heinous act.” Narice said. “I will do everything I can to make this right.”

“Then he should pray you find him before I do.” Andro smiled gently then. “You should talk to Lucia. You and she just might have the very opportunity you seek and not even realize it.”

Narice looked at him oddly for a moment before stepping back as Eliani's hand moved across his cheek. “Let's get you to the Med Bay.” Eliani said. “And don't give me anymore shit either.”

Andro nodded. “Arrarn... give Sa'sur the order.” He said. “Let's do what we said we would do.”

Arrarn nodded. “Done.”

Andro gripped Sadi and Ne'Veha's hands and began moving down the stairs into the main hold of the *TYPE II*. He saw Elynth, Jeth and Aradace waiting with Anthar and Tharua as the others followed him down the stairs. Anthar was moving around Elynth, his snout rubbing against her hind quarters and sides, her wings fluttering in delight as his caresses soothed her while he inspected her for injuries. Tharua was doing the same with Jeth, looking almost ridiculously small compared to her dragon mate.

As they headed down the ramp Sadi squeezed Andro's hand tighter. “You should be prepared.” She said softly.

Andro looked at her as the light of the landing bay bathed them. “Prepared for what?” He asked.

“Something wonderful.” Ne'Veha said.

Andro's head snapped around at the trumpeting roar that washed over the area, followed almost immediately by forty-one other trumpets. The sound was deafening even within the expanse of the enormous landing bay, and it caused every single crewmember in the bay to turn towards the sound no matter how far away they were working. His azure eyes saw the Coven riders standing beside their bonded dragons with their heads held high and looks of pride on their faces even as their dragons let loose with another reverberating symphony of trumpets, the dragons pouring all that they were into the sound.

The pronouncement of their unwavering trust and love that Androcles Leonidas's actions this day had instilled in them. In him and themselves. Andro turned to face them and felt the swell of pride fill his own chest. He released his grip on Sadi and Ne'Veha and stepped closer to them as the sound quickly died away and they watched him.

"You... you are free now!" Andro shouted his voice carrying to all of them. "Free to become what you are meant to become. I have only one request and one piece of advice! It is the same either way you take it!" Andro let his eyes drift over the group slowly. "All of you have a gift! Grasp onto that gift now and never let go! You are Bonded Pairs and I want you to live! Live your life!" Andro roared.

"Live your life now!"

If they thought the first trumpet was deafening, the one that followed Andro's words rolled and echoed through the *SCIMITAR*'s corridors for what seemed like hours later as some crewmembers of the *SCIMITAR* would swear. It was the sound of a beginning of a new day.

They just didn't know what they day would bring, for if they did many of them would have been frightened beyond their ability to act.

EDEN BASE

"C'mon... can't the sensors work any faster?" Admiral Wallace roared.

"It's another drone Admiral!" The tech yelled turning from his station.

"Fuck!" Wallace spat. "How many left?"

"Nine sir!"

"Target the next one and get to work! Shit!" Wallace cursed.

"Admiral Wallace... it's Admiral Joarl from the *PROMETHEUS*!" The communications officer barked from across the command center on the moon.

"Put him up!" Wallace barked turning to the large holodisc in the floor of the command center. The image burst into existence, flickered and then became clear and focused as if Joarl was standing with them.

"Joarl... anything?"

The Lycavorian Admiral shook his head quickly. "We have swept the inner perimeter of the PDPs and come up empty."

"We are working through these damn Shrouded drones in low orbit. They seeded them all over and the Shroud is a lot more sophisticated than what we have seen in the past!" Wallace spoke.

"We have improved our systems my friend." Joarl said. "We should have expected the Coven to do the same."

Wallace nodded. "We have broken fourteen of the twenty-three that we found. One of the remaining nine has to be a ship. When we find it I'm going to blow it to atoms!"

Joarl nodded. "Lynwe and Layna are with the team we sent to the residence they were occupying. Per orders by the *Durcunusaan*, Selene and Charles are now in protective custody with their *Durcunusaan* details. Famus and Thoti are reporting that the Royal estate is locked down and secure."

"Queen For'mya is on her way back to Sparta to deal with the Kavalians." Wallace told him. "They refuse to allow us entry into the embassy to search for survivors and conduct an investigation."

"Half of one wing of their embassy has collapsed!" Joarl gasped. "The remainder of their staff arrived four weeks ago. They must have casualties!"

Wallace nodded. "Their actions do not elicit a whole lot of trust Joarl." He said.

"No they do not." Joarl agreed. "I've ordered all Fleet Groups to maintain and hold their current positions and..."

Wallace heard the alarms behind Joarl and then those same alarms began to go off in his command center. He turned quickly. "Report!"

"Admiral... the *SCIMITAR* and her Strike Wing are shifting position!" The tech shouted out. "We're detecting LSD coils powering up!"

"I ordered a fucking hold!" Joarl shouted from the *PROMETHEUS*. "William... Sa'sur is shifting *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Wing!"

“We see it too!” Wallace barked turning to his officer. “What is she doing? You get me Sa'sur on the COM right now!”

“The *SCIMITAR* is not responding Admiral!”

“You order her to stop damn it...”

The sensor operator turned to look at him her green eyes wide. “Admiral Wallace... the *SCIMITAR* and her Strike Wing have gone dark! They are off the board! Sensors detected twenty-two LSD drives activating just before they went dark!”

“*Nubou!*” Wallace screamed. “Joarl... it must be worse on the surface than we thought! Andro and his siblings were heading to the *SCIMITAR* and for them to jump out of the system and not tell...”

“Getting a feed from Deia in Sparta William.” Joarl announced looking at a screen in his command center that Wallace could not see. “It reads... Disregard *SCIMITAR*'s actions and concentrate on finding the High Coven ships. Empress Aikiro is now being confirmed dead by the *Feravomir* and *Durcunusaan* officers. A High Coven Long Range Runner was detected attempting to land at Dragon Mountain just prior to her death and it was destroyed by Avi's automated defenses. It is believed that Yuri is still alive however, and she may still be on the surface! *Durcunusaan* and other ground units are moving in force to search the area around Reylan.”

“Alive?” Wallace gasped. “How many lives has that bloodsucking *upae* got? Andro said he shredded her!”

“Lock down is to remain in place until further notice. All non-military ships that move from their current locations are to be considered hostile and fired upon. That part of the message is being transmitted to all civilian ships in orbit now.” Joarl continued. He turned back to look at Wallace. “William... Deia says for us to find the High Coven ship that will try and take them off world and blow it straight to *nubous* hell!”

Admiral William Wallace the Third stood a little taller in his command center. “Consider it done!” He said firmly.

HIGH COVEN *BLOODLETTER*-CLASS CRUISER LOW ORBIT OF EARTH OVER SOUTHERN CONTINENT

“...down to seven Admiral Moran!” The officer shouted.

Robert Moran's face was drawn with lack of sleep, tension, worry, anger and mourning. He hadn't slept in nearly thirty hours as he put the finishing touches on their plan, and now that exquisitely planned operation had gone right to the shitter. They had lost contact with the High Coven Commando team that had attacked the Kavalian embassy. They had lost contact with the three teams that had gone to find the Mindvoice ship with Aikiro, and their carefully laid plans in the elven city of Reylan had fatally fallen apart because of his very own daughter and her traitorous actions. His son was dead, his son's dragon was dead and he had heard nothing from Yuri after she had gone against Androcles Leonidas to run interference for their son. Dante had reached the transport the commandos had used to land and contacted him. Moran already had ordered a Long Range Runner to the surface from their shrouded ship and he had ordered Dante and the surviving commandos to extract from the planet in the transport. The LRR would land at the same location and wait for Yuri.

Dante Moran and the surviving commandos were now safely in the landing bay of the improved version of the *BLOODLETTER*-Class Medium Cruiser *ARCHANGEL*. The ship had been specially outfitted for this mission with the latest in High Coven Shroud technology, as well as the unique capacity to discharge dozens of Shrouded drones that could act as bait or cover depending on what was needed. Each shrouded drone was prepared with a transponder that gave off the faint signature of a full sized *BLOODLETTER*. They were equipped with overlapping Shroud generators operating on multi-phased frequencies that made it harder to detect what they really were. Tesand had stolen another of their LRRs when they lost contact with Aikiro and headed to the surface against Moran's orders. They had lost contact with him shortly after he reported they were coming up on the MV ship.

“Admiral... the pilot is requesting permission to leave!” The COM officer spoke turning in her chair. “He says the area is becoming very hot. Union fighters are beginning to arrive and there are at least a dozen dragons that have entered the area as well.”

“Tell him... tell him to hold!” Moran said.

“Admiral...”

“Tell him to fucking hold damn it!” Moran snarled. “How long does it take them to burn through the drone’s Shrouds?”

“They are better at it now sir! Two minutes tops!” Another tech answered.

“Then we wait twelve more minutes or until we are targeted.” Moran snapped. “We can...”

“Admiral!” The COM officer held a finger to her ear and her eyes were wide in stunned shock.

“Admiral... I have been monitoring Union civilian channels! I’m picking up a report from one of their Netnews Channels.” She looked up at Robert. “Admiral they are reporting that the Empress is dead. Prime Minister Deia is about to make an announcement.”

Moran’s own eyes grew a little wider. “Put it on the holodisc!” He snapped.

The young woman altered her controls and the image of Deia appeared looking harried and unkempt. She was wearing whatever she had thrown on before her *Durcunusaan* detail had spirited her out of her home in Gytheio. She was now surrounded by at least a dozen of those same *Durcunusaan* soldiers looking quite ready to kill anything that they deemed threatening.

“They’ll burn through drone fourteen in ninety seconds!” The voice from across the bridge said.

Moran heard it but kept his attention on the holoimage of Deia as she stepped up to the podium.

“I will make a brief statement and then take a few questions, but please understand the situation is still ongoing and we are still reacting to events.” Deia spoke. She took a deep breath. ***“Approximately seven hours ago Zarah Leonidas was captured by High Coven Commandos in a vile terrorist act. She was brutally beaten and raped by Dante and Javier Moran as well as others. Their purpose was to obtain the location of the Mindvoice ship. Once this objective was met, that information was passed on to Empress Aikiro and additional High Coven terrorist forces that have been hiding on Earth for what appears to be several months. An attack was then launched against Dragon Mountain. At the same time other Coven forces attacked the Kavalian embassy here in Sparta while still others attempted to extract the Moran brothers from the elven city of Reylan in the south. Empress Aikiro of the High Coven and all the men with her that attacked Dragon Mountain are now dead. Aikiro was killed by the Feravomir’s own hand. Our brothers and sisters who call Dragon Mountain home insured that there were no survivors. A small transport that attempted to land shortly after the attack began was destroyed as it approached Dragon Mountain by automated defensive systems.”***

“Javier Moran is also confirmed dead at the hands of his sister Lucia, who as it is known to me right now, saved Zarah Leonidas’s life. His bonded dragon Naruth was killed by Prince Androcles and Elynth in battle. Dante Moran and his dragon Marux were severely injured battling Prince Androcles until his mother intervened and allowed him to escape. Androcles then took the fight to Yuri and gravely wounded her before being seriously injured himself and having to withdraw. Currently we are in the process of trying to find her and any who may be assisting her. When we do, she will either be captured or tried as a terrorist or she will be executed on sight. Probably the latter if the Durcunusaan find her first. Androcles has taken his older siblings aboard the SCIMITAR and left the system in order to protect them. The younger Leonidas children are all under heavy guard at the royal estate. The King and Queen Aricia are on location at our southern base and helping in the search for Yuri. Queen For'mya is on her way back to Sparta now. Queen Isabella Leonidas has left with the SCIMITAR.” Deia looked up. ***“There is not much else we can tell you at this time. Events are still happening as I said.”*** She set aside the data pad. ***“I will take a few questions... but I will warn you now, terrorist forces have acted in a heinous string of events against members of my family and I am not in a particularly good mood at the moment!”***

This information caught the many Netnews reporters blindsided and it showed on their faces. Deia pointed to one of the Netnews reporters in the front row. ***“You?”*** She asked quickly.

The man looked stunned but he stammered out his question. ***“Prime Minister Deia... you said... you said members of your family. Are you saying...?”***

Deia nodded. ***“Yes... King Leonidas and I are related. I am... I was Queen Eliani’s sister. I knew both Resumar and Eliani very well. And no... I will not go into details at this time. Martin Leonidas and I***

decided long ago there was no need to reveal this information. Now however, now after what has happened, I felt the time had come so it will give you some idea as to my anger over these monstrous acts."

"Prime Minister... is the story that we have been reporting about Carisia Moran and Prince Androcles... about Empress Aikiro's daughter Narice and Prince Arrarn... are they true?" A woman spoke from the side. *"And if so... are they involved in any way with what has happened?"*

Deia nodded. *"Yes they are true. Carisia Moran is now Carisia Leonidas. She was married to Androcles little more than a month ago. In the same ceremony where Narice and Toria Leonidas were married to Arrarn and became members of this family."*

"And this was not a ploy to..." The woman attempted to continue.

Deia turned dark eyes on the woman. *"Carisia Leonidas is the one who gave the order to activate the Durcunusaan and lock down the Royal family and priority individuals! Her actions could very well have saved lives!"* She hissed. *"She and Narice were part of the initial search for Yuri and in cleaning out Coven terrorist forces from Reylan. They are not part of this vile act and any insinuations from any of you in that regard will be met with the full weight of my office in retaliation!"*

This caught many of the Netnews reporters by surprise as well since it was well known Deia was very patient and methodical in her actions. This showed on their faces and the way they looked at each other.

"Is it true Prince Androcles was training High Coven dragons to fight the KFI?" Another reporter blurted out.

"Empress Aikiro brought those dragons here as a means to gain our trust. They are the same dragons that she had taken from their mothers and fathers when their ship crashed in The Wilds nearly twenty-four years ago." Deia announced. *"They were a façade for her to earn our trust. She did not foresee that Androcles would turn those riders and dragons into true Bonded Pairs. Yes... he has been training them... but certainly not to fight the KFI. He has been training them to realize their own potential and break the bonds of High Coven oppression. A goal he succeeded in since every single one of them departed with him aboard the SCIMITAR."*

"And Princess Carisia... Princess Narice...?"

Deia shrugged her slim shoulders. *"They found love and their futures in the arms of two Leonidas brothers. What more is there to say in that regard? They looked past what they have been taught and made their decision. It is a decision the Leonidas family has embraced."*

"It is being reported that the Kavalians are not allowing any rescue personal and equipment into the remains of their embassy Prime Minister. Can you comment on that?"

Deia shook her head. *"Queen For'mya is returning to Sparta to address this issue as we speak. Their embassy is sovereign Kavalian territory granted to them by the Union Senate and leadership. We can't force them to take our help."* Deia held up her hand. *"I will address you all in another few hours when we have more information. Please wait until then for further questions. Thank you."*

With that Deia turned away from the podium and her protection detail cleared the way for her to exit.

Moran's eyes were wide in shock on the bridge of the *ARCHANGEL*. "Aikiro..." He whispered. "Tesand as well! I told that fool not to go! *Vith!*"

"Admiral... they've burned through another drone. Only four left!"

"Helm... four degrees down!" Moran barked. "Put us between the last two drones!"

"Helm responding!"

"Anything from the LRR?" Moran hissed.

"Nothing so far sir! We have been... wait!" The COM officer jammed her finger deeper into her ear.

"Admiral! They just lifted off the surface!"

Moran moved closer to her. "Yuri?" He asked.

"She's badly injured but alive sir!" she answered looking at him.

Moran let the sigh escape his chest even as he turned. "Helm as soon as they are onboard, execute a full Z radius climb out of the atmosphere!" He barked. "Once we are clear of the atmosphere... punch in the emergency jump coordinates and implement!"

"They could very well see us climbing Admiral!" The tactical officer spoke from his station. "A full power Z radius climb will leave a wake in the ionosphere!"

Moran nodded. "It will keep their weapons from locking though! It will give us the time we need to escape! I'm going to the Med Bay! Don't fuck this up people or we are all dead! Get us out of here and we can fight another day!"

Moran turned and rushed from the bridge without another word. The Tactical officer turned to the Communications officer at her station. "Fight another day?" The man spoke very softly. "The Lycavorians just killed practically half the Empress's family including her. And they weren't even trying hard."

"Keep your voice down!" The woman spoke in reply.

"I'm afraid to ponder what will happen next." The officer said turning back to his station. "It damn sure can't get any worse."

He was wrong of course. He just didn't know it yet.

"*Vith uns 'aa!*" The *ARCHANGEL*'s Medical Officer exclaimed when the towering Immortal smashed his way into the med center with the limp form of Princess Yuri cradled in his arms.

Pa'cour's entire upper body was saturated in blood, his muscular arms holding his Princess's frame close to his chest so her body did not bounce around. Blood still seeped from the savage looking wounds around her throat and left side of her face, but they were at least partially healed from the ghastly wounds he had seen on the surface. She had been near dead when he reached her after Androcles had run off, her left leg torn wide open and the artery in her leg spurting blood into the air with much less explosiveness as less blood became available. Androcles Leonidas had torn his Princess to ribbons with graceful ease, capitalizing on her anger and overconfidence as she followed him into the timber. Had he not plunged into the timber wildly after her and shot the huge beast four times Yuri would be dead and all he had done in the last twenty-five years in protecting her would have been for naught. Yuri had assigned him as her Immortal Captain after the debacle on Lycavore when he had saved her life and Pa'cour had spent the last two plus decades proving to her that her action in promoting him was not a mistake. He had hated that planet and the stink on it, and the day she arrived to try and kill the Lycavorian king Pa'cour had seen his chance to finally be free of Lycavore. He had protected her all of these years, through the violent war with the Kavalian killers, through her pregnancies, through everything. He had been present that day in the ship on Nauwora and he had noticed the change in her almost immediately but said nothing. It was not his place.

Pa'cour's father had taught him to be mindful of his personal place in the scheme of all things. Immortals had served the High Coven for millennia and to be in the position Pa'cour now held was an honor to be cherished. His duty was to his Princess no matter the risk involved in anything. Pa'cour had honored that role for these last years in every way. Earning Yuri's respect and at times even her wish of his council. He cared not for Moran and was always on high alert whenever he was in the area. It had taken him only moments to know Yuri needed massive amounts of blood to survive and he had done the only thing he could think of to save her. The moment he exited the transport, refusing to allow the medics to take her, no one stood in the huge Immortal's way. Pa'cour stood six foot five and nearly two hundred and sixty-five pounds of nothing but solid muscle and bone. His skin was not as harsh looking as that of his father, and not looking as if someone had stretched it with a machine over his body. The dark gray of his skin color was actually very healthy for his species and it hid most of the more unpleasant ripples across his body.

Now as he gingerly lowered Yuri into the medical bed he would allow the doctors to do what they could. He had done his part in protecting his Princess.

"Give me six whole units!" The doctor ordered immediately. "Pump them into her now! And prep the Blood Chamber! *Vith*... it looks like an animal got her!"

"She... she followed Androcles Leonidas into the timber while he was in wolf form." Pa'cour spoke softly.

The doctor shook his graying head for even he knew that is not something you did with a pureblood Lycavorian. "Foolish!" He spoke.

"Will she survive?" Pa'cour asked.

"Her wounds look partially healed!" The doctor spoke looking at him. "You gave her blood?"

Pa'cour nodded quickly. "All... all that I carried." He answered.

“You must have been carrying quite a bit!” The doctor spoke casually as he adjusted something and used an inculcator to insert a tube into her arm. “We’ll get her into the Blood Chamber and go from there.”

“Yuri!” Moran’s voice exclaimed as he ran into the Med Bay and came to a skidding halt when he saw her. “Oh... oh my god!”

Three long slices ran down the right side of her face from her hairline to her jaw, one of them just barely missing her eye. Her throat appeared to have been torn open and he could still partially see the muscles and healed arteries pumping blood through her system. She had several deep slashes across her shoulder and chest, and her right leg was laid open to the bone, the artery exposed but now appearing to be still pumping blood through her extremities. Moran forced the look of revulsion from his face as he leaned close to her.

“Yuri?” He whispered softly as he reached out to try and take her face in his hands.

“There’s no time Admiral.” The doctor spoke. “We need to get her in a Blood Chamber if we are going to save her.” The doctor was an older man and not one to fear senior officers. If there was something about the vampire body he did not know it was because it was not known to any. He pushed Moran out of the way as he activated the hover jets on the bed and they began to push it further into the med bay.

Moran whirled on Pa'cour. “What the fuck happen Pa'cour?” He snarled at the Immortal. He took in the ashen color of Pa'cour’s face and neck, and noticed he still had his bloody body armor fastened all the way up on his neck but quickly dismissed this. “Why weren’t you with her?”

“I was with her!” Pa'cour hissed. “But I can not blur! She threw Androcles Leonidas into the timber and followed after him! I warned her not too but she ignored me! I got to her as quickly as I was able!”

“Not quick enough damn it!” Moran barked.

They turned when the medic came up to them. “The doctor wants me to check you out Colonel.” She said.

Pa'cour shook his head vehemently. “I am fine!” He snapped.

“You look like you’ve lost some blood yourself? Are you injured?”

“I will acquire blood from another of my men!” Pa'cour spoke. “I need nothing! Treat the Princess!”

Moran turned back to him. “Pa'cour...”

“She would not listen to me.” Pa'cour spoke. “When she heard the Leonidas child scream within Mindvoice she insisted we move closer to the city. I advised against it but she did not listen. She...”

Moran shook his head. “She went outside the plan!”

Pa'cour looked down at this man, towering over him by almost six inches. “She was acting as a mother should when her children are in danger!”

“Bullshit!” Moran quipped. “Dante could have handled Androcles. He said he was handing him!”

“Androcles Leonidas was crushing your son Admiral Moran!” Pa'cour snapped softly and with some anger. “Dante Moran was being pummeled by a superior warrior! Had the Princess not intervened both of them would now be dead! Not just Javier!”

Moran glared at him. “Watch yourself Colonel!” He snarled softly.

“I will not!” Pa'cour exclaimed loudly causing heads to turn towards them. “My duty is to Princess Yuri! Not to you! Not to your sons! That is my sworn duty! Your sons could not simply take the information from this child’s mind could they? They had to entertain their sick notions of arrogance and superiority! Now... the Empress is dead... Princess Yuri lies near death! One of your sons is dead and your daughter has betrayed you!”

“Yuri approved of what they did!” Moran barked at the Immortal officer.

Pa'cour nodded. “And when she asked me, I told her it was a tactically wrong move to make.”

Moran looked at him with wide eyes. “She told you?” He gasped.

“I have guarded her person for over twenty years!” Pa'cour barked back at him. “If it helps me to protect her... she tells me what I ask her! I told her the Lycavorian sense of honor would consider raping the Leonidas child a high crime. Even worse than murder. She did not listen to me. Now look at what our actions have wrought!”

Moran glared at him for a few moments and then turned when the ship’s internal COM activated.

“Admiral Moran we are clear of the atmosphere and making the jump!”

Moran turned and moved to the wall panel and slapped his hand down. “Acknowledged!” He spat.

“Initiate random course changes until we get to the border in the Utari Sector and then head for the defensive

line. That entire section of DPs is not active. They are being repaired. Once we clear Union space head right for the rendezvous with the *INQUISITOR*, best possible speed!”

“*Yes sir!*” The voice replied.

Moran turned back to Pa'cour. “You get me a report!” He snapped. “And keep your opinions out of it Colonel!” Moran looked him up and down. “And clean yourself up Immortal! You look like shit!”

Pa'cour kept his mouth shut even as Moran whirled around and moved across the med bay to where the doctor was standing and supervising Yuri being lowered into one of the five large tanks filled with reddish liquid. It wasn't really blood, but the healing properties of the liquid made it appear red through the glass. It was a formula the High Coven had stolen many years ago from the Union Hadarian doctors and implemented within their own ranks. The medic who had checked on him before came back over and looked at him.

“There is a shower in the empty quarters down the corridor Colonel.” She spoke. “The doctor insists he look at you once you have had a chance to clean up.” She held out the bundle. “An extra uniform sir. We keep them around just in case. It should fit.”

Pa'cour took the bundle from the woman and nodded his head. He noticed she did not appear at all put out by his bloody appearance, but she was very standoffish in regards to him. Many Purebloods reviled Immortals and the way they looked, and this woman apparently was one of them. His father had once told him that the Purebloods needed them, but that they hated them. Pa'cour didn't fully understand that until he came to be in the service of Princess Yuri and saw the treatment he got from those she associated with. Moran hated him he knew, but he didn't particularly care for the High Coven military Commander either. The man had betrayed the Immortal Cha'talla after he had gone out of his way to assist Moran in his rise to power. Though outwardly his name was never spoken of, it was now a crime to speak of him in public, many Immortals that Pa'cour knew looked up to Cha'talla and what he had tried to accomplish for their people. When it was discovered that Cha'talla still lived, the Empress had thrown a fit while Princess Yuri was more reserved. She at least respected him for insuring her consort had found his way in the fleet when they had returned from Earth. She had done everything for Moran to help him get to where he was today. As far as he was concerned, Moran didn't deserve Yuri.

Pa'cour's dark eyes glanced once more to where they were finishing lowering Yuri into the chamber and then he turned to leave the med bay.

IRARUZU

Lu'ria eased her head around the corner of the wall and let her amber colored eyes sweep the corridor in front of them. She gripped the K14 she had retrieved from the rail car's hidden compartment with both hands, while Jennifer held tightly to the P190A3 she held and covered their rear. There had been no incidents as they were racing the five kilometers back to the estate in the underground rail system, yet even as they ended at the underground entrance, the alarm in the car indicated someone had breached the tunnel under the store. Neither Lu'ria nor Jennifer had ever been under combat conditions before, and considering the slaughter they both had witnessed first hand, they were holding up rather well.

Lu'ria leaned back and looked at Jennifer. “It is clear all the way up to the entrance.” She said.

“How do we know they did not find the main entrance Lu'ria?” Jennifer whispered the question.

“That is why we are using the emergency entrance in the study.” Lu'ria answered. “It is impossible to detect situated as it is. The entrance in the kitchen has more than likely been discovered.”

“How do you know?” Jennifer hissed again.

“I don't damn it!” Lu'ria exclaimed softly. “My instructors always said that when in doubt better to be safe than sorry.”

“Lu'ria... Lu'ria I am frightened beyond belief.” Jennifer admitted.

Lu'ria nodded. “You are not the only one.” She spoke. “We must get supplies and then get to the communications bunker and warn the others. Warn Armetus.”

“Are we sure they even hit the estate?” Jennifer asked. “Is there no way we can check first?”

Lu'ria's eyes grew a little wider. “Jennifer you are right!” She exclaimed. She headed back down the tunnel.

“Where are you going?” Jennifer stammered as she followed.

Lu'ria didn't turn to her as she walked. “There is an auxiliary control room forty meters from the main entrance into the kitchen. It has monitors that we can use to sweep the house. The Matron Mother showed it to me when I first arrived. I haven't been to it since.”

“Why?” Jennifer asked.

Lu'ria stopped as she came back to the end of the rail tunnel. “Because I never thought anyone would attack us in such a blatant way.” Lu'ria answered. “To simply march into the store as they did and kill the Matron Mother and then begin firing? They do not care who sees them.”

“What does that mean?” Jennifer asked.

Lu'ria looked at her. “It means just that. They do not care who sees them attacking us.” She told Jennifer. “It means they do not care that they have just started a war between our two peoples! Which also means that something else is going to happen, or it is already happening right now!”

“How do you know this?” Jennifer asked.

“Because it is what King Leonidas would do.” She answered. “It is what my *'chev* Andro would do. And it is what my people would do.” (Beloved)

Jennifer shook her head. “I certainly hope you are wrong.”

Lu'ria nodded. “This way!”

The two young women darted along the rail car they had just exited and further down the tunnel to a different access tunnel. Lu'ria led them past this larger tunnel deeper into the shadows and counted off the steps before stopping. She lifted her hand and spread it flat on the smooth steel wall, feeling the texture of the metal as she moved it slowly along the way. Once the texture changed to a rougher surface Lu'ria pushed as hard as she could and the wall gave way. She pushed the section back further and revealed the small control panel. She quickly typed in a code the wall made a soft hissing noise and slid to the side. She grabbed Jennifer's hand and pulled her into the darkness before turning back and pressing several of the dimly lit buttons on the panel. The exterior wall returned to its original place within seconds and it appeared just as another part of the wall.

“Don't move!” Lu'ria spoke. “I have better night vision. I will activate low light lamps.” She stepped into the darkness with ease and in seconds two small overhead lamps came on. Jennifer looked around and saw that they were inside a ten by ten room with several chairs, two different computer stations and a large rack of weapons and equipment. Jennifer watched as Lu'ria settled into one of the chairs in front of the console and began typing quickly. The upper wall started to come alive with monitors from the many different video feeds inside the estate.

Almost immediately they knew their hopes would not be answered.

The monitors showed the insides of the estate from different rooms, and every room appeared to have been destroyed by rampaging monsters. Windows were smashed, blood covered the walls and floors, holes and dents from weapons fire pocked the walls and much of the furniture. Whoever had hit the estate had done so in force. Lu'ria's amber eyes went wide and she heard Jennifer gasp in horror when the monitor switched to the den of the estate and they saw the bodies. The few men, all of the children and several of the females that called the estate home. Most were Drow, but the flash of tanned skin could be seen signifying that those females who lived with them as 'slaves' to the Drow females, human and elf alike were among the dead. They had died fighting beside the men and women they had come to care for completely.

“Oh Lu'ria!” Jennifer gasped softly. “They... they even killed the children.”

Lu'ria adjusted her console to the outer cameras and they saw the outside of the estate. Two of their Lifters were smoking ruins flames licking from the interiors, the third not burning but obviously no longer working as attested to by the dozens of holes in the engine core plant. Lu'ria tried to activate the Communications equipment and got nothing but interference. She knew immediately from the readings that it was a jamming field of some sort.

“They must have some sort of dampening field in place over the estate.” She spoke. “The communications array is not working.” Her keen Drow eyes caught movement and she stopped the sweeping of the camera and focused on the area in the treeline where she had seen the movement. As the camera gained distance and focus, they saw the flash of shimmering white hair and the naked forms of three Drow females.

“Mistress!” Jennifer cried. “Lu'ria they have Ixara!”

Lu'ria nodded slowly. "And two others as well. I can't tell who it is from this distance." She said holding back the bile in her throat that threatened to come spewing forth. "They are in the southern treeline."

"We have to help them!" Jennifer hissed.

Lu'ria looked at her. "What would you have us do?" She demanded in a soft voice. "If they are still here then they are waiting for us! The ones from the store must have told them we escaped. They knew we would come back here!"

"We can't just leave them!" Jennifer protested.

"Jennifer we don't know how many of them there are!" Lu'ria exclaimed. "We would be giving ourselves to them! The Matron Mother would not want us to do that! We'd be throwing our lives away for nothing."

"They are our family!" Jennifer hissed again. "Ixara is my... she is my Mistress! I won't leave her!"

"She would expect you too!" Lu'ria said quickly. "She would not want you to fall into their clutches as well!"

"I won't leave her! I won't! I..."

Lu'ria slapped her viciously then. The blow rocked her head back and sent her staggering slightly as Lu'ria came to her feet. "Don't you see? Ixara and the others are bait Jennifer!" Lu'ria snapped. "Bait to capture us! If we attempt anything we will become prisoners as well. And then we will be dead! We must get supplies and move into the mountains. We need to contact *Krypteria* Command! The Union! We must let them know what has happened here!"

Jennifer turned back around and glared at her. "How can you be so callous?" She sobbed. "They are your friends! They are like family to us!"

Lu'ria blinked her amber eyes and turned back to the monitors. "It is what they would do." She said softly. She turned back and looked at Jennifer. "I do not want to do this either! The Matron Mother would expect us to leave them! You know this Jennifer! They are waiting for us out there. And more follow in the rail tunnel behind us. We must escape! You know I speak the truth!" Jennifer was silent as she glared at Lu'ria for a long moment. She knew Lu'ria was right, yet the thought of leaving her Drow Mistress and lover in the hands of the Kavalians was revolting to her. "Please Jennifer... I need... I need your help. I can not do this alone."

"You promise me one thing." Jennifer demanded knowing that Ixara would not want her to throw her life away. "You promise me that they will pay for what they have done Lu'ria! You promise me..."

Lu'ria took her hands in hers and squeezed them tightly while pulling her close. "I give my vow to you as a Drow that they will pay for what they have done Jennifer. I swear this to you."

Jennifer nodded then and stood a little taller. "Then let's take what we need and get out of here before they catch up to us." She said.

Lu'ria nodded and turned to the opposite wall of the small room. "There are packs and equipment in these lockers. You take those two and I will take these. Take only rations and small weapons. We must travel light."

Jennifer stepped up to the first set of lockers and entered a code. The three doors slid open to reveal an assortment of equipment and weapons. "Which direction will we go?" She asked.

Lu'ria waited while the second set of three lockers opened. "North." She answered as she pulled down the small pack. "We have to get out from under whatever sort of field they have active and then contact someone."

Jennifer was shoving items into the small pack and she looked at her. "Will anyone answer?" She asked.

Lu'ria met her eyes. "*Krypteria* Channels are monitored around the clock." She replied. "Someone will hear us."

**EARTH
SPARTA
KAVALIAN EMBASSY**

"...mean gone!" Keleru roared from the transmission.

“Just as I said Prefect.” Qurot answered. “They killed Timur and escaped out of a secret tunnel in the basement of the embassy. A tunnel none of us knew about. It must be how they got the elf female in to begin with! Jalersi appeared injured for Pian was carrying her, but Karun emptied almost an entire clip from an SA80 at me! He knew exactly who he was firing at!”

“I refuse to believe both my daughters have betrayed me!” Keleru hissed angrily. He was pacing back and forth in the transmission.

Pusintin appeared now. “You said you found High Coven Commando bodies near by?” He asked.

Qurot nodded. “Yes. I surmise that Timur happened upon them, killed them and when he discovered Pian and the others they killed him. He had been shot nine times with a Lycavorian K14 hand weapon. That is no accident!”

“Jalersi and Pian?” Pusintin gasped.

Matuarr came up next to Qurot. “I have suspected for some time but did not say anything until I had real proof. I have seen her exiting his quarters at odd hours of the day Marshall Pusintin. I can only surmise she is...”

“She’s fucking Pian!” Pusintin growled. “That’s just beautiful! I’ll gut that fucker and feed his intestines to the worms!”

“Without an Edict of Dissolution from her in regards to your marriage, her actions call for a death sentence Marshall.” Matuarr spoke.

“I know what it calls for Matuarr!” Pusintin snarled at him. “And she would never file an Edit of Dissolution! She’s not smart enough to do that and she loves me too much!”

Matuarr nodded his head slowly. “Then... then perhaps I am wrong.”

“This is unbelievable!” Keleru spoke once more. “First Athani... now Jalersi? Pian and Karun? I refuse to believe they are all traitors! You have no idea where they went? Perhaps they were just running for shelter somewhere and mistook you for a Coven soldier through the smoke.”

“Karun looked right at me Prefect!” Qurot answered. “And it was a K14 that killed Timur... not a Coven weapon.”

“You did not attempt to contact them?” Keleru asked.

“Karun almost killed me Prefect!” Qurot snapped. “I did not feel it necessary to ask his intentions after that.”

“You did not follow them?” Pusintin asked.

“I did not find the tunnel until a short while ago! The damage to that side of the embassy is extensive and it took me several minutes to even reach that area. I have part of our remaining security detachment guarding the entrance.”

“Casualties?” Pusintin asked.

“A third of the staff. Mostly the administrative females who had *other* duties as well.” Qurot answered. “The High Coven attacked with only eleven commandos. I don’t believe they knew we had recently arrived security personnel.”

“Prefect... the Union has offered their assistance several times already.” Matuarr spoke. “If we continue to refuse it they will grow suspicious as to why?”

“What did they know?” Keleru asked now his voice low and trembling with anger.

“Only what you have allowed us to know Prefect.” Matuarr answered. “I do know that Pian and Jiss both did not agree with our plans to target the Leonidas family. They believe it will pull us into a war we can not win.”

“That’s bullshit!” Pusintin snapped viciously. “We have more than enough men and ships to do what we want to do. I could invade the Lycavorian Union from four different directions and overwhelm them if I wanted!”

Keleru stopped pacing in the transmission. “These events could work to our advantage.” He said finally, Pusintin turning to look at him Qurot and Matuarr saw. “It will make our tasks easier.”

“How so?” Pusintin asked.

“We will know where all of them are.” Keleru said. “If they have locked down the royal family as their Prime Minister announced so generously only moments ago, we can combine our teams and hit them in larger force.”

“Androcles took the older children off Earth Keleru.” Pusintin spoke. “We don’t know where they went.”

Keleru met his eyes. “Oh... but we do.” He said. He held out the data pad to him in the holo transmission. “I received this late last night from our contact within the Lycavorian Union government.” He said as Pusintin began to read. “It took some time... but they were able to find out where the elf Queen Dysea is. As well as her daughter.”

Qurot and Matuarr watched Pusintin look up at Keleru. “Cha’talla?” He gasped.

“Cha’talla?” Matuarr asked quickly. “Prefect we were under the impression the Immortal Cha’talla was dead.”

Qurot looked at Matuarr. “Who is this Cha’talla?” He asked.

Matuarr looked at him. “Former Captain to the High Lord Veldruk.” He answered. “The Immortal who protected Veldruk during our last war with the Coven. He was believed killed by Veldruk twenty-six years ago just before Aikiro rose to power. Something to do with betraying the High Lord.”

Keleru nodded. “Interesting isn’t it?” He said from the transmission. “The first Elven Queen of the Union and she is among Cha’talla’s tribe of Immortals. It’s perfect. That is where the son Androcles is taking them to finish their training. Kranek has the space and the terrain he needs apparently, and our contact has already confirmed several messages between Kranek and the son from his ship.”

“We’ll need to shift some forces around and contact Phy’iad and his mercenaries and let him know where she is!” Pusintin spoke now looking at Keleru. “This is like a gift to us Keleru!”

“Indeed.” Keleru spoke. He looked at Matuarr and Qurot. “There is a Puma Bane Pride Team in Sparta now disguised as traders. They have all undergone biogenic treatments and have been filtering among the city for weeks. I will send them a message. I want my daughter and the others found!”

“Is it wise to continue with our plans Prefect?” Matuarr asked. “They will be at their highest state of readiness now since the Coven did this.”

Keleru nodded. “This will limit them immensely and make it far easier for us to act.” He answered.

“And when your daughter and the others are found Prefect?” Qurot asked quickly. “What do you wish done?”

“Jalersi will be taken unharmed Qurot!” Keleru spoke quickly. “Pusintin will deal with her. Pian and Jiss are to be executed upon sight. Karun...” He looked at Pusintin.

Pusintin turned to the men from within the transmission. “I have two other sons who are risking their lives as we speak with the Puma Bane Pride Assassin Teams in The Wilds. Loyal Kavalians both of them! Karun can burn with Pian and the others for all I care. He has always been different.”

“The information he gave us is undoubtedly false then.” Matuarr spoke. “Do we still act on it?”

Pusintin looked right at Qurot. “NO! It can’t be trusted anymore. Make him pay Qurot.” He spoke. “I will give Jalersi and our daughter to the brothels of Nefoa for what she has done. I will have other children!”

Keleru nodded his head in the transmission. It would be fitting punishment for what she had done. “Matuarr... accept whatever help the Union offers you.” He spoke finally. “We need to keep them off balance for as long as we can. Our operations in The Wilds have already begun with great success, and by this time tomorrow Hadaria will be under our control as well. These attempts by the Coven have given us the advantage and they don’t even know it. This could not have come at a better time. That fool Aikiro, I always knew the bitch was insane. To attempt this without proper support was completely stupid.”

Matuarr nodded. “As you order Prefect.”

“Contact us with any strange requests they might have, but be as accommodating as possible and make it appear like we are victims as well.” Keleru spoke. “We must keep a public image of openness and friendship for a time longer. Qurot... I will pass on the coded channel of the Assassin Team when this transmission ends. Coordinate with them to complete our goals, but insure that you and Matuarr are off of Earth within moments of the attacks. They will not be accommodating to us once we kill off their precious royal family.”

Qurot nodded. “Of course Prefect.”

“Contact us if you discover my daughter, but until you leave Earth we should not speak again.” Keleru told them. “Your part of these plans is essential Qurot. Do not fail for everything hinges on what you do!”

“We won’t Prefect.” Qurot spoke firmly.

CABELIR
KAVALIAN HOMEWORLD
OFFICE OF PREFECT KELERU

“The man is a fool!” Keleru spoke as he turned and returned to the chair behind his desk. “He thinks brute strength will suffice at all times!”

“He serves his purpose.” Pusintin answered as he went to one of the chairs across from the desk Keleru settled behind. “I’ll be surprised if he makes it off Earth alive.”

“Well... it will be no great loss.” Keleru said as he settled into the plush chair. “This business with Jalersi and Pian is...”

“I reacted angrily Keleru.” Pusintin said. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be.” Jalersi’s father answered. “If it is true and she is consorting with Pian... you have the right to act in any manner you see fit according to our laws. Including disowning her and sending her to the brothels on Nefoa! Your daughter is another matter however. She is still very young Pusintin and...”

Pusintin shook his head. “She is just like her mother.” He spoke. “She is always pushing for more freedom and things that our females are not allowed. Karun does not treat her as a brother should. He is always giving her gifts and things. Telling her to read and be educated. I do not want to deal with that.”

“Then give her to a male seeking a plaything.” Keleru spoke. “Or arrange it that you can profit if you give her to the brothels.”

Pusintin looked at him. “You will not contest what I do?” He asked.

“Jalersi is your mate.” He answered. “She may be my daughter... but after what Athani did... it would not do for me to treat her differently than any other of our women who would dare entertain the attentions of a male that is not their mate. Pian’Nurarani however... he should know better.”

“He has always wanted Jalersi for himself.” Pusintin declared. “For many years now. I could sense that even though he gave no outward indications.”

“His Pride is large... but they are on the outskirts of our border with Wild Space... and unless I send a full force I can do nothing right now. At least not directly to his Pride aside from cutting off funds and such, which I will do immediately when we are done here.” Keleru said.

“Are there any members within the inner ring of planets?” Pusintin asked.

Keleru shook his head. “Not in positions of power no.” He answered. “Pian has kept them out of the main parts of the KFI and now I question as to why. Perhaps I will send a small ship to discover just what it is he is doing out there.”

“Nikkei is on Femeyau right now.” Pusintin spoke. “She went there to attend a gathering of Kavalian females who are coming to mating age. She didn’t want to go. She actually told me she didn’t want to be submissive to any male. She wanted to be like her mother.”

Keleru nodded. “Then I suggest you seize her as quickly as possible when she returns.” Keleru said. “If you wait to long and she discovers what it is you intend...”

Pusintin nodded. “They return tomorrow.” He said. “I’ll meet her myself and turn her over to the Entertainment Bureau for processing.”

“I will send word to our border post in that sector and have the officer there dispatch a small cruiser to investigate what exactly Pian is doing with his Pride.” Keleru spoke. “In the meantime, you need to notify Phy’iad of the location of the elf Queen so we can continue with that portion of our plans.”

Pusintin nodded and got to his feet. “I’ll do that right now.” He stated.

“You should be happy Pusintin.” Keleru spoke. “In a few short days you will have a new plaything, and we will be on our way to controlling the Lycavorian Union with you as its ruler. As it should have been long before now.”

Pusintin nodded. “And I look forward to that.” He stated. “As well as the fact my brother and that bitch of a mother will be very dead.”

ANJA'S OFFICE IN PALACE

“Buonau you *upae*!” Anja snarled angrily at the small holoimager on her desk. “Zarah is my daughter!”

“Zarah Leonidas is not your daughter. She is the vampire Queen’s daughter.” Buonau’s face answered smugly. “And your use of foul language does not do your cause any good!”

“*Nubous* my cause! And her name is Isabella Leonidas!” Anja barked as she came to her feet. “This is not a game to me Buonau! The Coven just tried to kill members of my family! My daughter was raped and beaten by...”

“And according to the Prime Minister’s own statement just moments ago, she is alive and no longer on Earth and has left with Androcles and her other half siblings! There is no reason for you to return to Earth right now and delay the hearing.” Buonau spoke. “I have granted you a stay for one day to discover more information Anja, but your hearing will progress tomorrow morning.”

“You have granted me a stay?” Anja spat. “*You* have granted me nothing... and when I am through with you Buonau, you are going to wish you never were born!”

Buonau shook her head in the transmission. “Such talk and threats is another reason why you will not be Queen after tomorrow.”

Anja’s jade green eyes narrowed. “We’ll see Buonau! We’ll see!”

“You really should...” Buonau began to speak but Anja stepped to the side of her desk and slammed her finger down on the control panel terminating the connection.

“I hate that woman and her smug, arrogant attitude!” Anja snapped. “Someone needs to fuck her in the ass and then I’ll bet she sings a different tune!”

“Anja Leonidas!” Eurin declared from her spot on the couch next to a smirking Sivana. She turned to look at Atropos and Belen and saw them smiling as well. “That is not funny!”

Atropos turned from Eurin and looked at the petite Queen that he so adored. “The *SPIRIT* is in orbit Shrouded Anja.” He spoke. “We can be gone and half way to Earth before they even know we have left.”

“Do not encourage her Atropos!” Eurin snapped.

Anja took a deep breath and shook her head. “No. That will only make things worse. As much as it burns my ass to admit... Buonau’s right. There’s nothing I can do. Andro has left with his brothers and sisters and the young ones are safe within the Estate.”

“For’mya or Aricia will contact you as soon as things stabilize Anja... you know this.” Sivana spoke softly. “For the moment, aside from Zarah we know they are all safe.”

Anja returned to her chair. “I can’t believe Aikiro is dead.” She said softly.

Atropos chuckled as he moved towards her desk and Anja looked at him. “I have always known there was more to the Feravomir than her outward appearance.” He stated. “She has only proven that this day with her actions.”

“It certainly has.” Anja said. “I only wish she could have gotten Yuri too.”

“If she lives Anja rest assured that Androcles will have marked her good.” Atropos spoke.

Anja nodded. “That’s the truth. That boy is frightening sometimes.”

“He takes after his father.” Belen spoke as he moved over to the couch and sat on the arm next to Sivana. She looked up at him with an adoring smile as she placed her hand on his leg.

Eurin got to her feet. “We must be prepared for tomorrow.” She stated evenly. “Once this distasteful event is behind us we can all return to Earth. I haven’t been there in some time myself and after all this I believe a vacation may be in order.”

“I’m going to crucify Buonau for this.” Anja said with considerable heat in her voice. “And that will be pleasant compared to what I plan for Umbra!”

“I wish to be there for that.” The female voice spoke causing them all to turn.

Ceuma stood in the doorway to the office wearing a simple jumpsuit that hugged her curves exquisitely. She clung to Joci’s hand tightly looking tiny compared to her Spartan husband as Anja and Sivana came to their feet and Eurin turned. Anja’s eyes were wide as she looked at her and Sivana smiled as she walked up to her.

“It’s perfect.” She exclaimed reaching out to touch Ceuma’s hair and the Persian red color she had turned it to. It matched Anja’s exactly. “I do good work!”

Ceuma smiled shyly and reached up to run some strands through her fingers. "I prefer blond." She spoke simply.

"As do I." Joci commented.

"Don't worry... after tomorrow we can wash it out." Sivana said turning to Anja as she walked up. "Not bad heh sister? I will always have a career in disguises if I ever lose this one."

"Sivana stop!" Eurin declared as she moved around Ceuma looking at her intently.

Ceuma looked directly at Anja, her jade green eyes identical to Anja's in every way. "Your family?" She asked.

Anja nodded slowly. "They are safe for the moment." She answered. "Thank... thank you for asking."

Anja looked at Joci. "You are prepared?"

Joci nodded. "Yes my Queen." He answered.

Anja waved her hand dismissively. "We can dispense with the my Queen, or Milady crap right now! It's kind of pointless don't you think?"

"You are my Queen." Joci stated firmly. "It is not pointless to me. No matter what I have done in the past... my duty is to you, to Ceuma and to this Union. I will not falter in my duty ever again."

Anja met his eyes and nodded. "Well said Spartan. Well said." Joci did not see Atropos's face take on a stern look of approval at Joci's words. Anja returned her eyes to Ceuma and reached out to take her hands. "I... I was taken by surprise when I... I apologize for anything I may have said to you."

The corners of Ceuma's lips curled. "You do not apologize much do you Anja?" She asked.

Anja matched her smile and shook her head. "No. Usually only to Martin when I am in phase and I am demanding more of his attentions." Anja watched Ceuma smile even wider and turn to look up at her husband and his ebony skin.

"It seems we are not so different." She spoke softly turning back to look at her while Joci lowered his eyes in embarrassment.

"It will take some getting used to but..." Anja began to speak.

"I wish to learn all I can." Ceuma said. "Joci has protected me... trained me to fight... now I want to learn to heal. I can feel it within me... the ability to do this. I have been able to use it to some extent... but I want to learn more. I do not want to be a freak. I want to be my own person. I will go to another part of the Union if my presence makes you uncomfortable but I wish to..."

Anja shook her head. "No." She stated. "Martin has always told us... he has told us to live by the rule to never fear the unknown. I will not send you away. You will stay here with Sivana and Eurin and I. We will teach you. And we will move into the future together."

They watched as the wide smile split her face. It was the first genuine smile they had seen from her since she had arrived. Anja turned to look at Joci. "Joci you are officially reinstated into the ranks of active Spartans." She spoke seeing his look of shock. "You have been assigned to the *Durcunusaan* under *Lokhagos* Atropos and will hold the rank of *Dilochitès* to him. I have already entered it into the Union database. After tomorrow it won't matter who knows."

Joci looked stunned and bowed his head. "Milady... Milady I do not deserve... my actions up until now have not been..."

"You acted as a man." Anja said with a small smile. "I can not hold that against you Joci. Martin wouldn't let me considering the fantasies we have..." She saw his eyes widen and Anja blushed as she stopped. "Never mind. The point is... once you realized your feelings you acted and you saved Ceuma's life. And you have forsaken all that you were to protect her since then. Just as any Spartan and wolf would do. Besides... it was Atropos's recommendation and I rarely go against his recommendations."

Atropos snorted. "If only that were true." He snapped stepping up to look at Joci. "I loved my mate Lilika for many years even while she was mated to another. I can not condemn you for the very thing I did. You have my respect *Dilochitès* Joci."

Joci took a deep breath as Ceuma squeezed his hand tightly and pressed her petite frame against his. "I will... I will not fail you, my Queen or my mate." He stated.

Atropos nodded. "Then let us leave Ceuma with Anja and we will go over our plan once more."

Joci nodded and looked at Ceuma. He leaned over and kissed her deeply, her tiny hands coming up to stroke his cheek and his dreadlock hair. "Don't let them make you cut your hair Joci." She whispered to him. "I like it too much."

Joci smiled and nuzzled her cheek and neck and everyone saw her eyes close in bliss and happiness. "I won't." He spoke.

SCIMITAR

Isabella watched him enter the Med Bay slowly, his eyes immediately going to where Zarah lay sleeping. Carisia walked on his left side, Sadi on his right with Ne'Veha holding her hand tightly. He released Carisia's and Sadi's hands instantly and moved up next to the bed slowly as the rest of them came into the Med Bay and moved around the bed. Tears filled Andro's eyes as he pulled the chair closer and he slid his hand under Zarah's, entwining their fingers gently. The signs of the beating she had seen him take from Martin were still somewhat visible, though Eliani had healed them almost completely. His face was drawn and tired though and Isabella could see that right away.

Eliani came up next to him and dropped her hand onto his shoulder. "I gave her a mild sedative when we got here. She woke briefly... but now she is sleeping soundly." She said softly.

Isabella reached over and placed her hand on top of his gently. "She asked for you." She said softly. "She wanted you here with her."

Andro nodded. "I know." He whispered.

"Andro..." Isabella said staring at this young man she called son without hesitation or doubt.

"I failed mother." Andro said softly. "Father was right you know. I should have been protecting her more. I should have..."

"No!" Isabella stated emphatically squeezing his hand. "You will not carry blame for this! I forbid it! And so would she! Do you hear me Androcles? You will not carry blame for this!" Isabella lifted her head and looked at Carisia and Narice directly. "None of you, do you hear me? None of you?"

"The others are dead." Andro said softly turning his azure eyes on Isabella. "All of them but one. I swear to you on my life mother, I will hunt him until the end of time if I have to. I will see he answers to me for what he has done! No matter how long it takes, no matter where I have to go, I will find him mother. I will find him and I will make his death as painful and as hideous as I am able."

Isabella wasn't the only one in the Med Bay who felt the shudder of death's hand brush through them as Androcles uttered his vow. There was no question in his voice, no doubt in his words and all of them at that instant realized just how seriously dangerous their brother truly was.

Isabella squeezed his hand and nodded her head. "I will hold you to that vow Androcles Leonidas." She said softly. "You have... you have always been closer to Zarah Andro. I need... I need you to tell me why now my son. During... when Eliani was examining her she found..."

Andro turned his face back to Zarah's and lifted her hand in his. All of them gasped when the soft blue psychic shield activated around their hands and shimmered gently, pulsing with power and life. "She found trace elements of Stage Three Blood Fever in Zarah's cells." He spoke softly. "Yes... I know."

Blood Fever was the vilest of diseases among vampires. It was brought on by a lack of blood when it was time to feed. Many pureblood vampires could go weeks without needing to feed on blood. The purer their blood the longer they could survive without it. Isabella herself could go almost two months without needing to ingest fresh blood to maintain her body if need be. With the development of the cloned blood by Anja, and the many improvements over the years in the taste and texture of it, Blood Fever cases had dropped to nothing. Vampires could drink the cloned blood like others drank coffee and tea, and most of them did everyday, which then eliminated the worry of ever having Blood Fever affect them. It was a common sight to see them in the many taverns and cafés drinking cloned blood which had been named Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos because of its fruity taste. It allowed them to fit in quite naturally among the citizens of the Union and it was something that had endeared Anja to every vampire who called the Union home.

If one went without blood when their time came however, it was not a pretty event to behold. The first stage of Blood Fever was the cold, damp skin and minor trembling with a slight fever. This was easily treated

when discovered, just by ingesting new blood. The second stage was further along and harder to treat since the individual would now be losing their sense of reality and all thoughts of trying to cure themselves. A much higher fever and spasms were the usual signs of Stage Two. It was still very treatable, sometimes having to be forced due to behavior, but as long as the individual got blood they could be helped and would recover.

Stage Three of the Blood Fever was fatal.

Once an individual advanced to the third stage, their normal brain functions rapidly deteriorated to that of mindless machines whose only thought was to kill. The fever was at a point that it would begin shutting down other organs within their bodies, shrinking the size of the blood vessels within their internal organs and even if they fed, their minds were usually destroyed by now and they would continue to feed and kill until the fever ended their lives or they were killed by someone else. They essentially became monsters. And it was this reason that within the Union, anyone known to have Stage Three Blood Fever would be put out of their misery before they were allowed to die such an agonizing death. It was a little known or used law, but in all the time vampires had been part of the Union, the law was never disobeyed. This was the manner that the Kavalian Federation had refined to a sick art with prisoners they took during their war. Starving the vampires until Stage Three of the Blood Fever had gripped them and then turning them loose on other prisoners who they had taken and betting on who would survive the longest. It was a heartless practice and completely heinous, and one of the reasons the vampires within the High Coven so dreaded being taken prisoner by the Kavalians.

“Andro... Andro how could that be?” Isabella asked.

“She always hated having to take blood.” Andro spoke softly. “When she ran away that time... into the mountains it was because she didn’t want to take blood.”

“But... Andro you were the one who found her.” Eliani said.

Andro nodded. “Yes. And when I did... the Third Stage of Blood Fever had already set in.” He answered. “She attacked me when Elynth and I landed. She was so strong. She could smell my blood and it was all she wanted.”

Isabella’s hands went to her mouth in horror as she turned back to her daughter and looked at her.

“But... Andro... there is no cure for Stage Three. Her mind... her mind would have been... the law says...”

“She was my sister and I was not about to let any law take her away from me.” Andro stated firmly.

“She is stronger than you know mother... stronger than any of you have ever suspected. She was fighting it... Elynth and I could sense it... she was fighting it with all that she was.”

“But how...”

“I reached for her mind... I wrapped my shields around her mind and I let her feed.” Andro said flatly as if it was the most natural thing in the world. “Elynth and I shielded her mind for three days... I let her feed in increments to satisfy the thirst... and as each hour passed we pushed back the fever. I wasn’t going to let her die.” He reached up with his other hand and caressed Zarah’s cheek. “I had to break her leg when she fought me, but Elynth and I channeled my blood into her brain for the most part. There were times when she wouldn’t take her fangs out of my neck and I had to force her, but by the end of the second day it was working and she was becoming herself once more.”

“Andro... Anja did not detect this when she examined her after you returned.” Isabella spoke in shock.

Andro shook his head. “No. When I knew she was well enough to travel and had beaten it I took her to the *Feravomir*. She hid what I had done... after calling me some choice names and saying I was just as reckless and stupid as my father. And then she made sure she was present when mother examined her to insure her subterfuge worked.”

“Why?” Eliani asked softly.

“To protect her.” Andro answered. “All of you would have fawned over her and protected her to the extent she would never have grown into what she is now. What she will still be one day.” Andro willed away the psychic shield around their hands and brought it to his cheek, pressing the back of her warm skin to his. “A devoted lover, a beautiful wife and a wonderful mother to many children.” He said softly. “We must help her to regain that. Lucia is the biggest part of it, but she will need our support and guidance, not our pity and sorrow over what has happened. I will do it alone if I must... as I did before... but it will be much easier with all of you helping me this time and not trying to hide it.”

Isabella was the first to answer wiping the tears away as she placed her hand on Andro’s short black hair. “Yes.” She said softly.

“Yes.” Carina spoke almost immediately after her mother.

“Yes.” Sadi spoke next as she, Ne'Veha and Carisia stepped closer.

They converged as one then, all of the Leonidas children and those that were now members of their family. All with that one goal and purpose in their minds.

Blood Before All Else.

CHAPTER FORTY

RITAAH

KAVALIAN SPACE

STRIKER ONE

Her decision had been made the moment she had left that warm, modest home on the outskirts of Sparta. She didn't know how to explain it, only that the sights, smells and sounds of Sparta had ignited within her the desire for knowledge and truth and above all else closure. To know who she was and why everything felt as it did. Why she saw things in her mind that she hadn't actually physically seen while here in Sparta. To feel like she knew so many people yet have them look at her like she was a stranger. She had spent nearly seven hours with them, well into the evening and early morning hours, all the while holding the holoimager in her hand. They had been so kind and open and... and so very loving towards the end. Love... it was an emotion she had never felt before now, and it filled her entire being. They had held nothing back from her, condensing so much information into so few hours. The horror she felt at what had been done to her was a blatant thing, knowing that she had died on this very planet over two decades ago. Knowing that she had been wolf at one point in her life, and now she was a vampire. The eternal enemy of the wolves or at least that is what she thought. The tears had flowed freely at that time, the sense of loss like a dark chasm that could not be crossed. She had felt so alone and frightened at that one point in her life, another emotion she had not experienced so far in this new life she now hated. She was unsure of what to believe or what to do. So much had been lost that she could not even remember. It was nearly unbearable.

Until two sets of hands, one smooth and gentle and the other warm but rough from hard work and years of harsh fighting, until those two sets of hands had reached across that great dark chasm and reclaimed what they had lost so long ago through no fault of their own.

Hali had gathered her into her arms then and cradled her as she wept, her soft, tender hands caressing her long hair and skin. Hali... Hali her mother. And then the lean but muscular frame of the Spartan Kim So had wrapped his arms around them both and together the three of them had wept for what had been lost, and what was now found again. Over the course of the next five hours they had sat with her, held her and attempted to help her fill in all the blanks that filled her mind. When she left that home as the sun began its rise over the horizon many things had changed in her life. She had learned more of whom she really was and the history behind that woman, more than she had known before coming here. She had discovered that she had a man and a woman who now regarded her as the daughter they had thought lost to them so long ago. She discovered she had a mother and father who did not care that she was a vampire now, they cared only that their daughter had been given back to them. And most important of all, she had discovered who she truly was.

That morning the vampire known as Juliana One had died and in her place was now the vampire Julie Collins. She had a long way to go to get her life back, but as they parted ways that morning a tearful Hali and Kim So, her mother and father, vowed they would help her regain all that she was and had lost. And most important of all to her, she would have to gain back the trust she had taken so many years to earn with the two men who she wanted most to be part of her life once more. And she knew right where she had to begin.

Julie Collins looked up from her seat in the *STRIKER* and stared at the back of Resumar Leonidas's head as he knelt between the two pilots and the atmosphere buffeted their ship as they skipped along the surface. The memories she had of her former life never imagined that Martin would have children. The life they had led back then, the missions, the fighting, those thoughts had never entered their minds. Now she knew he had many children. Strong, powerful children just as he was. She could almost feel his arms around her from the different times they had embraced through the years. Strong arms that held her close and comforted her. Martin's arms...

Danny's arms. His smiling ebony face could always make her laugh. Her family back then, and if she had anything to say about it, her family in the future once more. Julie let her eyes drift to the over two dozen men and women on this ship; half of them part of the vampire strike team she was leading. She glanced back to where the dark green scales of Resumar's dragon Cemath resided beside the purple hued scales of the female she had heard them call Mirra. She was slightly startled to see both sets of their eyes focused on her, but she hid the outward reaction from her face. They appeared calmer than her, secured in the harnesses as they were. Julie had fought the Kavalians for more years than she could remember, all under orders from the Coven Empress. She had killed hundreds of them, and been injured many times in the process, but always there was a sense of instinct that kept her alive. She hadn't known then what it was, no one did, but she knew now. It was the instinct of the wolf that was ingrained in the memory of her former self. That almost sixth sense of danger that had saved her more times than she could recall. That instinct was screaming at her what to do now, and Julie Collins stood up slowly intent on doing just that.

She glanced at the men and women she knew had every intention of killing as many of the Lycavorian Union team as they could before blending into the darkness and making their way to the Mindvoice ship on their own. Their task was simple enough. They were to secure the ship, and if at all possible remove the ship from the planet as Martin had done twenty-five years ago on Lycavore. Julie had worked with this team for years and she knew each and every one of them very well. They were all loyal to the High Coven no matter what it was they were asked to do. They followed her orders because the Empress had put her in charge; however Julie knew they did not trust her as they did each other. That suited Julie just fine since she had no intention of betraying the loyalty that had taken her more years to cultivate and grow long before she had ever known them any of them. She moved up into the cockpit area of the *STRIKER* and saw Athani Leonidas sitting at the engineer station monitoring their progress and different settings while her tail twitched nervously behind her. The wondrous cyborg like machine they called Avi sat beside her silently monitoring different functions of their *STRIKER*.

"Coming into pattern now." The elven pilot spoke softly as she adjusted her controls.

"Point Two percent degradation of Shroud." The co-pilot spoke in return. "We are still ghosts."

"*STRIKER* Two, ease four degrees to your port." The pilot spoke. "We don't want to mix on trails going in. No sense in testing if the Kavalian sensors are better than we think."

"Two confirms." The voice spoke from the COM.

"Princess?" The female pilot asked turning her head slightly. "Avi?"

Athani shook her head. "No indication that the remaining ships even know we are here." She replied quickly. "I'm not picking up any transmissions that are unusual. Avi?"

-Sensor emissions from the remaining Kavalian ships do not indicate any activity outside of normal parameters- Avi answered.

"What's normal Avi?" The co-pilot asked with a smirk.

Avi paused before turning to look at him. **-Anything that would likely cause them to increase their scanning parameters and reveal our position is not normal Lieutenant-**

Athani smiled in response to Avi's answer. "An announcement that they have detected two Lycavorian Union *STRIKER DTs* entering the atmosphere of Ritaah would probably qualify as very unusual as well." She said reaching out to place a hand on Avi's massive shoulder.

That they were entering the atmosphere of a Kavalian planet, deep in Kavalian space, knowing that she more than likely had a death sentence on her throughout Kavalian territory did not deter Athani from feeling the excitement. Since becoming Resumar's wife and a Princess of the Lycavorian Union, Athani had seen and experienced more wonders in the last almost five months than she had in her entire life with Jalersi and the others of her kind, and it all began with the man she loved devoutly. She wondered briefly how her sister was, and if she had ever opened herself to discovery as Athani had done. Athani hoped so for she did love her sister and wanted to see her happy. The co-pilot's voice brought her quickly back to their very tense and current situation.

The co-pilot nodded his helmeted head with a chuckle. “Yep! That would qualify since we ain’t suppose to be here.”

“How many ships Athani?” Resumar asked now.

Athani shook her head. “I’m only detecting twenty-six.” She answered. “There should be thousands Resumar. Avi... do you have the same amount?”

-Affirmative. Twenty-six confirmed. One GREATSOUL-Class Dreadnought, eight DIMERU-Class Medium Cruisers, nine PURUSIAN-Class Heavy Frigates and eight as yet previously unknown Frigate Class sized vessels. Passive Thoron Scan indicates similar weaponry as PURUSIAN-Class but with thicker hull dimensions. Supposition is they are meant to replace the older PURUSIAN-Class vessels. I can detect nothing else that would hide a Kavalian ship from the sensors on this STRIKER-

“New class of ship huh?” The pilot spoke.

Resumar looked at Athani. “Anything?” He asked.

Athani shook her head. “I was not allowed to look through plans of that nature.” She answered. “It doesn’t surprise me though... my father and Pusintin are always looking for bigger and better ships.”

Resumar nodded. “Bigger isn’t always better.” He spoke softly.

Athani batted her blue/green eyes at him seductively. “It is in your case my love.”

The soft coughing sound came from the pilot. “Oh... gag me to death!” She exclaimed. “Way too much information!” The female elven pilot spoke.

Resumar laughed and looked at Avi. “Ok... Avi give it a name and file it to the Union databanks. I’m sure Antell is doing the same thing on the FAITH.” Resumar spoke.

-Considering the Union’s penchant for naming ships of the Kavalian species after feline creatures or of similar meaning, I will call it the NIGHTFANG- Avi answered.

Athani looked at him. “There is a reason for that Avi.” She spoke with a smile. “We *are* a feline species.”

Avi’s almost crimson colored red eyes turned to her. **-This is why many Union ships have references to the Lycan heritage of their species then. As the High Coven ships have blood in their names in many instances?-**

“Yes.” Athani said.

-A curious practice- Avi spoke. **-I have added and filed the proper category to the data banks Resumar Leonidas-**

Resumar nodded. “Thank you Avi. That they left only a few ships in the area fits with what we picked up on the FAITH. The majority of their forces have left the area. Maybe this new class is undergoing some sort space trials.”

“But the question remains husband, to where did the rest go?” Athani asked looking at him. “U’zolut Consortium Space in this region is completely empty and void of anything worth while. Unless they are preparing to invade Limian space as Captain Antell suggested.”

“As long as they ain’t here I’m not going to complain.” Res answered. “And that isn’t our mission right now.”

Athani nodded. “Point taken my love.” She stated with a grin.

“Dropping through outer atmosphere.” The pilot spoke. “Glide pattern Delta Four One.”

“Delta Four One confirmed. STRIKER Two is maintaining separation and matching your maneuvers.”

The pilot of the second STRIKER spoke.

“Release altitude in six minutes!” The pilot of Res’s ship spoke softly.

Julie stepped forward and placed her hand on Resumar's shoulder then. She watched as his handsome face turn to look at her and she saw Martin's eyes looking at her. It made her unique decision so much easier. "A word Resumar." She whispered to him.

"Juliana this is not..."

"My name... my name is Julie Collins." She spoke in that same soft whisper but this time with more forceful tone to it.

Athani turned her head this time for she had heard Julie speaking. She had spent many days and weeks learning of the history of Resumar's father and how he had returned to the Union. Martin Leonidas's victories on Earth against the High Coven were legendary even in The Wilds and Kavalian space. She also remembered the name of the one who he considered a dear sister. A sister whom he had buried after that Battle for Earth. She sensed Resumar's dark eyes focus on her for a moment and then he casually stepped toward Athani. "Bring up the two dimensional specs of the terrain once more for the Major and I *Aryschanne*." He told her in a voice that could be heard by those first few soldiers just outside the cockpit.

Athani nodded and did as he told her even as Julie moved closer and made a show of looking at the screen.

"I am not your enemy Resumar Leonidas." Julie whispered. "However... those who are part of my team do not share that same view. They will attack you once we are on the ground, try and kill as many as possible and then blur into the night. Their goal is the Mindvoice ship. It has always been the Mindvoice ship. The Empress's plan was to eliminate all of you and then take the ship from this planet if it was possible."

Resumar's expression didn't change and Julie could only inwardly smile at the calmness he displayed at this information. He was like his father... at least the part that she remembered Martin to be.

"Why should I trust you?" Res asked her softly.

Julie met his eyes. "If you are your father's son, like your brother Androcles, you will not trust me." She answered just as evenly. "I am speaking the truth however." She tilted her head slightly. "You already suspected didn't you?"

"They won't succeed." Resumar told her gently. "If you care for them you will inform them that..."

"You assume that I care for them." Julie said firmly. "Which I do not."

"Then they will die." Resumar told her.

Julie nodded. "So be it." She said. "I am not Juliana One anymore... if I ever was. I know who I am... and I hope to rediscover all that I have lost in the future. I would like it to start here and now with you. You may be half elf... but you carry the blood of Martin Leonidas in your veins and that gives you an uncanny sense of smell if my memories of your father are correct. Am I lying to you Resumar?"

"No." He stated without hesitation.

"Then will you tell your mate and wife to take her hand off the K14 she now has leveled at my abdomen. I would prefer not to hit a patch of rough air and have her blow my stomach out my back." Julie said calmly turning to look at Athani.

Athani met her gaze unwavering. "I will protect what is mine." She said softly. "Against any threat."

Julie smiled gently at her. "Yes... I predict you would." She turned back to Resumar. "I imagine you have already briefed your people to be aware of such action by the Coven troops considering your reaction now?"

Resumar nodded slowly. "Yes. Dario and Sorran will act the moment we touch down. My cousin will leave none of them alive."

Julie nodded her head. "I once considered your father like a brother Resumar Leonidas." Julie spoke softly. "I may be... I may be vampire now, but all of my memories are the same as that woman. My... my mother and father will help me to regain what I have lost and I hope... I hope to consider him a brother one day in the future again. I will not betray one of his sons. I would die first."

"I know." Resumar said his eyes staring at her without wavering. "We..."

"Whoa!" The pilot of their *STRIKER* spoke causing them to turn around.

"What is it?" Resumar asked her moving back between the seats.

"I don't know." The pilot answered. "A good sized power surge from the *PILLAR OF FAITH*. It caused their Shroud to fluctuate for several seconds!"

Resumar's eyes grew a little wider and he turned to Avi. "Avi were they seen? Were they seen?"

-Unknown at this time- Avi answered. **-It appeared to be an ion particle burst of some sort-**

“There it is again!” The co-pilot hissed. “*Sibfla*... bigger this time!”

-The lieutenant is correct- Avi stated turning to Resumar. **-I have confirmed it as a level three Controlled Ion Particle Emission Burst. Similar to what the Union calls their PSGs. The Portable Sensor Grenades designed to scramble ground sensor arrays. These are much more concentrated however-**

“*Nubou*! If the *FAITH* loses her Shroud she’ll be a sitting duck and we’ll lose our support and ride out of here!” Resumar cursed. “Athani get me Captain Antell! Quickly!”

PILLAR OF FAITH

“...find out where the fuck it’s coming from before it kills us all!” Antell bellowed at his bridge crew.

“Captain... incoming transmission from *STRIKER* One!”

“Put it up quickly!” Antell barked turning to the Holo Disc on the floor of the bridge.

“Antell!” Resumar’s image burst into existence.

“Milord... we don’t know what it is! We are...”

“Antell... Avi says they are PSGs!” Resumar exclaimed.

Antell’s eyes went wide. “PSGs!”

Resumar nodded. “The High Coven Strike Team must have placed them all over the ship and set them with timers! You must get out of the area until you find them all!”

“Milord you...!”

“Damn it Antell! If we lose you and the *PILLAR OF FAITH* we are finished before we even get started! Evac the area now! That is an order!” Resumar barked.

Antell was a military man before all else and he reacted as such. “Helm! Bring us about! Full power to the sub lights! Prepare for a combat jump to the secondary holding position! Stand by on the...”

The systems on the bridge of the *FAITH* flickered madly for several seconds before returning to normal.

“Fuck!” A voice screamed. “Captain we’ve lost the Shroud! They can see us! They can see us!”

Antell had not been chosen to command the *PILLAR OF FAITH* because he was hesitant in his actions. Martin Leonidas and Admiral Riall had chose him for his decisiveness and his ability to command.

“Milord... you are on your own! I will contact you when I am able!” Antell barked as he turned from the transmission. “Helm! Evasive pattern Echo Three! Full power to all turrets and missile batteries. Shields to max power and prepare a full spread on Photonic torpedoes! Max yield! If we have to blast our way clear then let’s get to it!”

STRIKER ONE

“Fuck!” Resumar exclaimed.

Julie grabbed his arm quickly. “Do not react as you want to Resumar.” She said quickly, consciously blocking the view of him from the rear of the ship. “We do not want a battle on board this ship while we are descending. You can do nothing for your Captain now except trust in his ability while he leads them away from us.”

“She’s right Resumar.” Athani said quickly. “My people will assume the *FAITH* was here to spy on the ships and ground troops. They won’t suspect we are landing on Ritaah. As much as it pains me to say, they are not that forward looking.”

Resumar stared at Julie for a long moment as he breathed deeply and got his anger under control. “If you betray me or anyone under my command... I will feed your guts to the insects that inhabit this world!” Resumar hissed softly.

Julie nodded without hesitation for she had no intention of doing any such thing. “I will not.” She spoke. “We must act as if nothing has happened. It will confuse them when it comes time to act on the surface”

-Resumar Leonidas... my counterpart on the surface has initiated contact with me again. He was able to activate many of the main systems on VORTEX Cruiser 341- Avi spoke as he turned to look at him in the oversized chair built specially for him.

Resumar turned to him surprised. “How did he do that?”

-Apparently... he has found someone with sufficient Etheric abilities located on the surface of this rather unsightly and humid planet and this enabled him to activate the majority of Cruiser 341’s main power drives-

Athani looked at Resumar with a stunned expression. “Someone like me. Among the ones we think are rebels!” She gasped. “Your mother said the biogenic treatments altered me enough to be able to develop Mindvoice abilities. It is why Cemath was able to speak with me. It is why I can converse with anyone now in Mindvoice.”

“Wait!” Julie demanded looking at him. “You... you have contact with this ship on the surface?”

Resumar looked at her. “The ship’s Avatar. One like Avi.” He spoke quickly. “Every Pralor ship had one. The one down there made contact with Avi few hours ago and Avi’s been in contact with him ever since.”

“And you didn’t tell me!” Julie said.

“I didn’t feel the need to share that with you... no.” Resumar stated flatly. He turned back to Avi. “Avi... can he get those with him to meet us when we land?” He asked softly. “Julie says the Coven troops will attack us and a battle on the surface is not something we need to have draw attention to us.” Julie looked at Resumar when he spoke. There was no hesitation in his words or his tone when he had called her that. This more than anything proved to her that he believed her.

-Many of those with him are like Athani Little One- Avi answered. **-I will ask him to do this-**

“Avi... I have asked you not to call me that.” Athani stated looking at his reptilian features.

-Yes I know. However... Martin Leonidas told me fourteen point three years ago if the name fits... the name fits- Avi answered blinking his red eyes at her innocently. **-Taking into account your physical proportions to your husband and myself... the name does fit you-**

Athani looked at her husband with a stern expression. “Your father and I will have words when we return.” She spoke.

Resumar grinned in spite of what was happening all around them. “I’ll make sure I’m somewhere else then.” He stated. He turned back to Julie. “Be prepared Julie. When we land Dario will attack immediately. We must as well. It needs to be quick and decisive. We don’t want a long, drawn out battle. It will only bring the Kavalians to the surface.”

Julie nodded. “I will be.” She stated.

Resumar nodded and turn to his pilot. “Senior Lieutenant, inform *STRIKER* Two to close formation and get us on the ground as quickly as you can.”

The female pilot nodded. “Here we go.” She said.

**HIGH COVEN BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
FREEDOM’S VOICE
ORBITING RITAAH**

“... appears to be some sort of ion surge sir!” The tactical officer spoke from across the bridge.

“Ion surge?” Maros exclaimed looking at Vonis as they stood on the bridge of the largest and most powerful ship in the High Coven inventory.

“Ion surge from what?” Vonis asked now.

“Unknown Colonel!” The officer replied. “Appears random and... there it is again! Whatever they are, it’s causing their Shroud to fluctuate wildly!”

Maros looked at Vonis. “We did not detect their presence when they arrived Colonel Vonis.” He spoke. “The Union has improved dramatically on the Shroud technology, or our passive sensors are not as good as we thought. I tend to believe you have improved on the Shroud.”

Vonis nodded with a small smile. “We’ve incorporated technology from the Mindvoice ship into the newer ones.” He spoke.

“Then I can assume they are probably already headed to the surface?” Maros spoke.

“More than likely yes. No telling how long they have been here... but my guess is the *STRIKERS* are heading down now. Resumar is a careful one Maros... he would have run sensor sweeps of the surface before leaving his ship.” Vonis answered.

Vonis spoke freely with this man and had for several months now. Their commitment to seeing his mother’s rule end was genuine and serious. The men and women he had worked with and watched these last months were of the highest caliber and all of them knew their jobs well. All of them also wanted to see the war prosecuted in another fashion that saw them give up less and end it quicker. They had seen too many of their friends and family suffer under the current leadership and their policy of reacting to Kavalian moves as opposed to making their own. The shock that the leader they had followed for so long was actually Lucia Moran had passed within hours of Lucia revealing herself to them in the control center of their command base. It had impressed Vonis how they had gone from shock to questioning to having their purpose renewed even more when they came to the realization that if Lucia was with them, there could be others who had not yet revealed themselves. He could not fault their trust; Lucia’s information through the years had been dead on accurate, many times forgoing obvious targets because they were traps she warned them about. It also pleased Vonis to know that it was his sister’s daughter who was leading the insurgency, and the fits they must have had trying to discover who it was, when all along the very person they wanted to find was sitting with them.

They had arrived two days previous, leaving one of their *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts and the rest of their ships further out in the system. They had approached Ritaah with only their seven ships to limit accidents or exposure. Vonis knew Resumar to be the more methodical of the Leonidas sons and more than likely had plans for every circumstance. The vampire commandos with Resumar didn’t concern Vonis as much as the unknown factor that Resumar could not prepare for. Vonis knew from experience that the unexpected usually and often happened to even the best laid plans. And the unusual was happening right now.

“Shit!” The tactical officer barked. “Captain! Colonel! They just lost their Shroud! The Union ship just lost its Shroud!”

“Put it up!” Maros hissed loudly. “Put it up!”

The star chart in front of them burst to life from the table and they could easily see the streamlined and massive shape of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser beginning to turn rapidly.

“They just went to full power on their sublights!” The officer screamed out. “Their weapons are fully charged and they are heading on a course that takes them away from Ritaah! The planet’s gravity well is holding them back some but they are maneuvering!”

“I can see that!” Maros barked. “What are the Kavalian dogs doing?”

The chart shifted it’s shape and widened and then they saw the red dots that signified Kavalian ships. They were beginning to turn towards the Union Strike Cruiser.

“They are slow!” Vonis spoke softly. “Very slow!”

Maros nodded. “Ill trained and caught by surprise no doubt. Sloppy.” He looked at Vonis evenly. “Even a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser can not stand against twenty-six ships Vonis.” He said.

Vonis met his gaze. Maros was an excellent tactical leader and a man who sincerely cared for his crew and those who followed his orders. “You realize by now that the word has gone out to KFI Headquarters. They’ll turn more ships this way.”

Maros nodded. “Our primary mission according to Lucia was to safeguard your nephew and his people while they conducted their mission to destroy this ship on the surface. I am a fleet officer sir... I...” Maros took

a deep breath. “We are not the enemy of the Union and I can not allow a fellow ship captain who is not my enemy face such odds alone! Not when we are so close to achieving part of what Lucia wanted for us!”

Vonis looked back to the star chart and made his decision. “Well... it may not be what Lucia wanted... but the day had to come sooner or later. Give me a LRR with Shroud capability and two officers. I’m going to the surface.”

“I will fly it!” Asharli declared moving from her spot on the bridge.

Vonis looked at her and then turned back to Maros. “Give me an experienced soldier then Maros. A heavy weapons person preferably.”

Maros nodded. “Done.”

“COM Officer...” Vonis barked. “Open a channel to the Union ship. Secure COM Code Vonis six four three Alpha! Do it now!” Vonis looked at Maros. “Time to let them know they aren’t alone.”

Maros smiled. “Helm! Standby to maneuver! Weapons and shields to full power! Full yield torpedoes to standby!”

PILLAR OF FAITH

“...weapons range in forty seconds!” Antell’s Tactical Officer declared. “We’re ready Captain, but the gravity of the planet slowed us down enough that we couldn’t turn as sharply and then turn away in time to beat them!”

“Maintain course!” Antell barked from his chair. “We have to draw them away from Ritaah! Standby aft Type One turrets and missile batteries to draw their attention and...”

“Captain! Incoming Secure transmission!”

Antell came to his feet. “The Prince?”

“Negative sir!”

“Then who?” Antell snapped. “We are the only ship out here!”

“Secure COM code Vonis six four three Alpha!” The officer turned to look at him with wide eyes. “It’s Colonel Vonis’s Command Code Override!”

“Activate!” Antell almost screamed turning to the holodisc on the deck. He watched as the image burst into existence and he was looking at Colonel Vonis of Union Intelligence and brother to Queen Isabella. “Colonel Vonis!” He snapped.

“We are monitoring your situation Captain.” Vonis spoke. “I will make this brief. I’m heading to the surface of Ritaah to help my nephew. There are thirty-seven former High Coven ships that are now part of the Insurgency lurking about all around you. I’ve been operating with them for three months now by order of the King. This is Captain Maros, commander of this ship *FREEDOM’S VOICE*. His forces are standing by to assist you.”

Antell looked at the image in shock. “Assist me?” He gasped.

Maros stepped forward fully. “Captain... it would be our honor to stand beside you and squash these Kavalian dogs!” He spoke forcefully.

Vonis chuckled. “Make it happen Captain! I’ll contact you from the surface when I have linked up with Resumar.”

Antell watched with wide eyes as Vonis disappeared from the transmission and it focused fully on Maros. “I have seven ships moving with me right now and another thirty inbound from coordinates 56793 Mark four. They will join with us in fifty four seconds.”

Antell’s stern face took on the look of a predator about to feast on its prey and he smiled widely. “Helm! Come about one hundred and eighty degrees!” He barked out. “Full power to forward shields and armor. Standby main Type One and Type Two turrets! And jam any further communications from those damn ships!”

“Already on it sir!” The COM officer replied.

Antell looked at Maros. “I’ll bore in on the *GREATSOUL*’s port side!” He said.

“We will take the starboard then!” Maros barked. “We’ll see you after we blow her to ashes!”

Antell smiled. “That we will!”

Maros turned in the transmission. “Helm... port turn to course 7754 point three! Standby all weapons for a suppression barrage to starboard! All port side batteries to manual for targets of opportunity!” He turned back to Antell. “Fight well Captain!”

“Live well Captain!” Antell replied as the transmission ended. He turned to his executive officer and shook his head. “I’ll be damned! Fighting beside High Coven ships! I never thought I’d live to see that!”

His XO grinned. “The King told you it would never be dull sir.” He spoke.

Antell laughed. “That he did!” He nodded. “Let’s do this people! Stand by suppression barrage to port! High yield warheads in the Mark 22Bs! Let’s hurt them real bad in the first pass people! Starboard batteries to engage at will any ships in their cone of fire! Once we are clear of the *GREATSOUL* launch every fighter we have to help coral the others! And make it clear to our pilots the High Coven ships are on our side!”

His XO turned from the console he stood next to. “I’ve already sent word to our fighters sir! Medical Bay reports they are ready and damage and control crews are standing by!”

Antell nodded in approval. “Then let’s get to it and see what our new ship can do!”

The first instance in known history of Lycavorian Union and High Coven ships fighting as allies would come in a little known system of space above an even lesser known planet on a mission that had already altered the future with its implications the moment it was begun.

Only the gods knew if it would grow into anything more than that, but the odds had just gotten a whole lot better.

RITAAH VORTEX CRUISER 341

Channa had never seen or experienced anything so amazingly wonderful in her young life.

It began the moment they entered that hatchway into this ship and a new world. The second she entered the first corridor, bright lights began to come on extending down the long tunnel like scene in front of them. Channa watched as this towering cyborg nodded his head in obvious approval and motioned them further into the ship. Avatar 341 began explaining that there were fourteen decks on the nearly seven kilometer long ship. Discovering just how big the ship was stunned all of them. It took up the entire ridge of the mountain; it was the mountain for all intents. No matter where they went in the ship, every section, corridor or room; as soon as Channa entered the illumination rose nearly twice what it was before they had entered and computer consoles came to life all around them. The walls of the ship were odd, Na’lia commenting that they almost appeared alive in many respects. While many of the walls in the corridors appeared to be cave like in nature, the individual rooms they entered definitely appeared with metallic walls. They eventually made their way onto what could only be a bridge of some sort with over a dozen individual chairs and consoles. The bridge was enormous and surrounded by a clear glass like substance that showed the rock like façade that surrounded the outside of the ship.

Na’lia was sitting at one of the consoles now watching as copious amounts of information was filtering across the large screen. It appeared that Avatar 341 had extensive files on all of them and she realized as long as he had been here it stood to reason he would know far more about them than they did of him. She was also gazing at some of the most sophisticated medical journals she had ever seen. Avatar 341 stood next to where Channa sat in the body hugging chair. The chair had shifted shape to wrap comfortably around her lithe frame when she settled into it, frightening her terribly at first. Avatar 341 explained that that chair was activated by each individual operator and conformed to that operator’s shape for maximum comfort. Her hands rested on the two arms and her palms were spread out within the similar conforming spots obviously meant for hands. Her heart was racing as the towering Avatar 341 directed her to concentrate on certain things and she watched as the nine screens around her chair came alive. Channa watched in unmitigated delight as the different parts of the kilometers long ship activated because of her ability. An ability she never imagined that she had.

Mican stood close to his elven wife and mate, gripping his weapon and unwilling to leave her side for very long. He could only shake his head and decide that in some cases females were far more calm and accepting of the unknown. Channa and Na’lia were enjoying the new ship and the discovery it was bringing to them immensely, and they had been for the last twelve hours. He was a warrior however, and he knew that you

always had to be ready. Mican's blue eyes shifted to the nine screens that surrounded Channa in the incredible chair and his keen feline sight caught the image of ships in the stars exchanging fire. His eyes grew wide and he moved to where Channa sat, standing opposite of where the avatar stood across from Channa. His red eyes were watching the screens as well and seemed focused on a plain image of Ritaah that looked to be part of the next valley.

"What is that?" He demanded looking at the screen and pointing to it with his finger.

-The Union ship bringing the Sub Pralor here was struck by sabotage and has lost its ability to remain hidden. The High Coven ships we detected in orbit are apparently friendly to the Union forces and they are now engaging the remaining Kavalian warships in this sector. I was unable to jam the initial call for assistance the Kavalian Command ship sent, but using my nodes throughout the system and combined with the jamming capability of the Union ship, they will send no more messages-

Mican and Channa's eyes shifted to the large screen that showed three massive ships exchanging immense amounts of weapons fire. The Kavalian *GREATSOUL*-Dreadnought was taking a severe pounding at the hands of the Union and High Coven capital ships, while smaller High Coven ships were locked in battle with the other Kavalian ships that had remained behind.

"What are they doing?" Channa asked looking at the Avatar. "They are moving further away from the planet!"

Avatar 341 nodded. **-Yes it appears they are drawing them away from Ritaah. There can only be one reason for that-**

"What? Why?" Mican asked.

-To keep them from learning the Sub Pralor known as Resumar Leonidas has already begun to make his descent onto the surface of this planet I would surmise- The avatar moved to a console near where Channa sat in the chair. **-I am adjusting my primary sensor array to compensate for disturbances in the atmosphere and residual Ion pulses. Curious-**

"What?" Channa asked as Na'lia came up to stand next to Mican.

-It appears they have incorporated small bits of technology from City Ship 41 into their Shroud capable ships. I am detecting similar Quantum fluxes in the design of the Shroud's power matrix-

Mican's eyes were wide now. "You... you didn't think to tell us this!" He demanded. "Where?"

The avatar pointed to one of the other screens. **-Their landing zone is three point six kilometers due east of our current location as it stands-** He answered. **-My counterpart has since requested...-**

"Counterpart?" Channa gasped as she came half out of the chair turning her body to face him. "Wait... there is another of you coming here as well?"

-Avatar 41 is the primary Avatar of City Ship 41. He is an earlier model avatar, not as sophisticated as myself. We have been communicating for the last three point four hours through coded sub space transmissions. It was surprising that he would leave his duties on City Ship 41 to accompany the Sub Pralor, but he has informed me they will be landing in...-

"You told us he had made initial contact but you've been communicating with them this whole time?" Channa snapped turning even more in the chair to look at him.

-That is correct- Avatar 341 answered.

“Why didn’t you tell us?” Mican demanded.

-It was not necessary to inform you of our communications. However... two point seven minutes ago Avatar 41 requested that the forces I am in contact with here on the surface meet with their ships as they land. They apparently are aware of a plot by the High Coven members of their crew to eliminate them when they land. Their goal is this ship-

Channa looked at Mican without hesitation. “Mican we must go to them and help them!” She exclaimed as she practically leaped from the chair.

“Channa... we don’t know if they are friendly to us!” Mican spat.

“They specifically asked for our help!” Channa protested. “This is what we have talked about so many times in the past Mican! We have our opportunity right now! We must seize it right now!”

“Can’t you help them from here?” Mican asked Avatar 341.

-The geography of the surrounding terrain prohibits use of my weapons array to provide assistance due to the location of their landing zones- Avatar 341 answered quickly. -An errant missile strike without proper guidance could very well injure or kill the Sub Pralor. My programming does not allow me to exercise such risks concerning the safety of the Pralors descendants-

“Mican... we have to go!” Channa declared confidently.

Mican looked at her oddly at the tone of her voice. “Why?”

“Mican... I have always trusted you. I need you to trust me now. I... something is telling me we need to help them. It is drawing me to help them. Calling me.” Channa said softly.

“Why?” Mican demanded.

Na'lia moved closer to her. “Channa... what is it?” She asked gently. “What do you feel?”

Channa shook her head slowly. “It is hard to explain.” She answered. “It has grown so much stronger since we have been in this ship.”

-It is reasonable to assume that your Etheric abilities have become more prominent since you have been onboard. Combined with the biogenic alterations to your internal structure that stimulated L-Stereoisomer cells within your molecular structure, it has also stimulated the dormant abilities within those same L-stereoisomers-

“My name is Channa!” She barked out looking at him. “Channa! Do not speak about me as some sort of medical finding.”

Na'lia stepped up to her quickly. “He meant nothing by it Channa.” She said softly.

-The elven female is correct. I...- They watched as his facial features changed, almost as if he was thinking and those red eyes blinked several times. -Ten thousand years on this planet alone has caused me to lose the interaction I had obtained with the Pralors. I have slipped back into the primary mode of my programming and not realized it. Interesting- He looked at Channa then and moved closer to her. -The Pralors used this unique Etheric ability exclusively to communicate... Channa. Though VORTEX Cruiser 341 was not assigned a crew as it was originally designed for, it was built by the Pralors and their Etheric residue would permeate the entire ship and encourage your own abilities that have laid dormant until now-

“Why now?” Na'lia asked him holding Channa’s hand.

-Etheric abilities powerful enough to allow communication and such aspects are very rare among the Kavalian species. Only Lycavorians, Elves and what you call the High Coven are inherently born with this ability. Others can learn it if they have been touched in some way by a person with powerful

Etheric skills but for many of them it does not advance past the initial stages. The recent discovery by the descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar of the Cretvore Draconius only enhanced this ability among their kind. Since the biogenic treatments you have undergone had minute traces of L-Stereoisomer cells in them, and since these cells are known to exist only in Lycavorians or those turned by Lycavorians, it is reasonable to assume your Etheric ability has been slowly building over the years. Entrance into this ship simply speeded that evolution. The Sub Pralor Resumar Leonidas and three others approaching are among those who have refined this talent to very skilled proportions and use-

“Who?” Mican asked now finding himself very interested in what this cyborg was telling them.

-The Sub Pralor himself, a Kavalian female like you Channa and one Lycavorian male. My supposition is that this other female is the wife of the Sub Pralor and has been touched similar to your interaction within this ship allowing her abilities to come forth. She is the one with similar DNA structure to you Mican. Your sister I believe you called her. The Lycavorian male is undoubtedly a rider of one of the Cretvore Draconius for his abilities to be so powerful-

“A rider?” Channa whispered. “That’s... that’s not what I feel.” She said looking at Avatar 341. “It’s different... more feminine.”

-Etheric abilities are hard to focus when first discovered and they need to be stimulated constantly or they will degrade over time. I do not wish to guess at what it is you are feeling. I am unable to feel emotion so anything I say will only seem... it will only seem useless-

“Is it dangerous for her? This Etheric ability?” Mican demanded now as worry for the young woman he regarded as a sister came forth.

Na'lia was the one to take his arm. “No husband.” She said softly. “It is not dangerous for Channa. What the Avatar is saying, is now that Channa’s natural ability with this skill has been realized and stimulated, it has reached the point where she can now feel things we can not.”

-Crudely put but reasonably accurate- 341 answered.

“Channa?” Na'lia asked. “What do you feel?”

“It’s pulling me.” She answered softly. “Pulling me towards where those ships are going to land. It’s... it’s stronger than anything I have ever felt Mican. So warm and inviting and so very...”

“So very what?” Mican asked stepping closer to her.

Channa rolled her eyes as she looked at him. “So soothing.” She spoke sheepishly.

Mican stared at her for a long moment. They had fought and worked and trusted each other for almost four years now. Channa had beaten all the odds stacked against her after her time as a prisoner and being beaten and raped. She had used Mican and Na'lia as her lifeline to keep from falling into a pit of despair and now she was stronger than she had ever been both physically and emotionally. She had become a part of the family he and Na'lia were building. She was like a sister to both of them, and in the future they had talked of the hope that Na'lia would one day have her elven family accept and welcome all of them and their children into their extended family. He knew there were many things he did not understand in this universe. Mican did not understand his elven wife’s shameless love for him even though they were completely different in almost every way. He was stern and reserved while Na'lia’s true elven nature was outgoing and adventurous. Na'lia proved that every time they made love, and she had proved it from the very first day when she decided to stay among them with the other hundred or so elves and discover a way to save them from dying. He did not understand many of the more advanced properties of ships or engineering, though he was learning daily under the expert tutelage of his wife and other elves who were teachers in their settlements. Mican was a soldier and what he did understand was that in order to improve yourself and understand what you do not comprehend you must be open to things that perhaps you did not believe before. When he thought like that, as the leader he had become, it was really very simple.

Mican made his decision and lifted his hand, pushing two fingers into his right ear and activating the COM implant. "Pasat, dispatch your squad to our location immediately! Light weapons and ammo! Quickly my friend... we might be heading into a hailstorm." Mican waited for a response and then looked up at Channa. "I hope you are right Channa." He said.

Channa nodded. "I am Mican." She said. "I can feel it!"

Na'lia stepped up to her and looked at 341. "Can you monitor from this location without Channa being here?"

-Main power has been restored enough at minimal levels to sustain all systems- Avatar 341 answered. -Ground sensors are powered by subsystems not connected to the main power relays. It is accessible-

"Is that a yes?" Mican demanded.

-Affirmative-

Mican nodded. "Channa, Na'lia let's go and meet these men and women you say we need to meet." He spoke. "Will you allow us back onto this ship when we return?"

Avatar 341 looked at him with that blank expression. **-That decision will be made by the Sub Pralor Resumar Leonidas, however I see no reason he would not grant this request. If you follow the corridor all the way to the end and then turn right you will see a sealed hatch that will allow you to exit above where we came in- He looked at Channa. -You will be able to open this door just by touching it Channa-**

Mican shook his head. "Infernal machine." He spat with disgust before turning and heading for the doorway.

Na'lia and Channa could not help but smile as they began to follow him. The Avatar's next words made them pause.

-My primary function is the overseeing of VORTEX Cruiser 341 and safety of any Pralor that may come in contact with me. Be advised... any attempt made to injure the Sub Pralor known as Resumar Leonidas and those with him will be met with the full power of this ship-

Mican turned to look at him. "Is that a threat?" He asked.

-My programming does not allow me to make threats Mican. I am simply stating a course of action. Your obvious willingness to assist me and communicate with the Sub Pralor, as well as Channa's Etheric abilities, this shows you are not a threat to the Sub Pralor or this ship. You never have been. It is the primary reason I have allowed you to place your settlements so close to VORTEX Cruiser 341, and increased the masking nodes without your knowledge. That does not mean however that others of your species will act in similar fashion-

"What are you saying then?" Mican asked.

-Act quickly Mican. The terrain in which they will land does not provide adequate space for the Cretvore Draconius to use their full abilities. They will need your assistance- He moved to a console and his large hand danced across the multicolored lights on the panel. He turned back to them. -I have activated a communications channel within your implants that will allow you to speak with me directly. I will provide whatever support I can from here-

"So you will help us?" Channa asked.

-Helping you was never in question Channa- 341 replied. –Only the manner in which it would be done-

Channa looked at Mican as she hefted her rifle. Her blue eyes shone with brightness and hope and she smiled, revealing perfect white teeth with the slightly pointed incisor teeth that marked all Kavalians unless they were completely changed. “I told you this would be a good day!” She announced.

KRANEK

“*Ohhh... Mistress!* I can’t... Ahhhhhhhhhhh!” Las’elh’s head came up from between Cihera’s quivering thighs and she tried to escape the devastating pleasure smashing through her. She slid up her Mistress’s lithe body and screamed out her delight as Anton buried his heavenly thick ten inch cock fully in her convulsing pussy and the orgasm ripped through her lush elven body.

Las’elh’s blond head dropped to Cihera’s heaving abdomen, her lips slick with her Drow Mistress’s sweet come, as Anton bellowed out his release and his huge cock erupted deep into Las’elh’s shuddering frame. His head came forward and he nuzzled the back of her four inch high elven ears firmly, switching from one ear to the next as he did with Cihera, and prolonging the sensational feelings of bliss as his cock filled her with his searing hot come. He would erupt inside her for at least a full minute she knew from familiarity now, each explosion lessening in force, but no less wonderful to experience. The combination of his elven and wolf genes gave him incredible staying power, and it allowed him to release enormous amounts of his delicious come inside her or Cihera, depending on which one of them was lucky enough to receive his gift to them in the midst of their passion. As his powerful body came to rest on top of her back, his cock completely buried inside her, Las’elh rested her head between Cihera’s firm medium sized breasts and allowed the feelings of love and happiness to wash over her. Never had she imagined herself in such a position, but now as her tanned body was sandwiched between her ebony skinned Drow Mistress and the exquisitely powerful form of their chocolate skinned Spartan husband, Las’elh could not picture herself anywhere else.

Until she had met Cihera and Anton Simpson, nothing in her life seemed to have purpose or direction. Las’elh had never met a Drow elf female before Cihera had come into her life. She had heard about them yes, and the almost surreal reaction they could elicit from other females was practically legendary. Las’elh never thought she would experience that, yet from the first moment Cihera had looked at her with those amber colored eyes Las’elh had been hers. The blistering kiss Cihera had given her on Nebonese had begun what all three of them now vowed would continue for as long as they had days in this life. Their goals had been traveling in the same direction and meeting at the same people, but until Las’elh had joined them and had the full resources of the *Krypteria* at her disposal through Anton or Cihera, Las’elh had only been spinning her wheels in finding her sister as Anton had once told her. She was closer now to finding her sister than she had ever been before, and the biggest part of that was because of this man and woman who had given her so much.

Las’elh had gone from a rogue agent with Elven Intelligence, to a respected temporary member of the *Krypteria*, the willing slave of a Drow Mistress and then wife to both that same Drow Mistress and her Spartan husband who adored them both immensely. That single kiss on Nebonese had begun it all and Las’elh hadn’t looked back yet. She was no stranger to sleeping with other females; her main cover on the resort had been one half of an elven female duo that pleased each other as well as their clients. Las’elh thought she knew what she was doing in that regard, at least until she had surrendered to her desire for Cihera that first night and learned the wickedly divine pleasures that she received and gave to and from her Drow Mistress. Their first night together had been right here on Kranek, and it was a night Las’elh would remember always. Anton had made no move to intervene or join them for the first few weeks, content to see that they were both happy exploring what they had found together. When he did eventually join them Las’elh had been stunned at what he made both her and Cihera feel. He was unlike any man Las’elh had been with, and Anton Simpson had made her elven blood sizzle that night. She discovered what it was that made Cihera so utterly devoted to her husband, at least the physical part of it. Las’elh discovered the rest as more time past and Anton showed her what he showed Cihera every day. The complete devotion to both of them.

They had been married for two weeks now Anton, Las'elh and Cihera, and none of them had any intention of looking back.

Las'elh lifted her blond head from between Cihera's breasts and saw her Mistress's eyes gazing at her with love and desire. She leaned forward without question and their lips came together in a sizzling kiss while Anton nuzzled her ears and the back of her neck. He groaned softly as he withdrew from Las'elh's warmth and tightness, Las'elh matching his sounds even as she continued her kiss with Cihera, and rolled slowly to the side to keep his weight off them. It had been an incredible morning for all of them, Anton still coming to terms with the fact that like his father he now had two women who adored him just as much as he adored them. He had woken to the sounds and smells of Las'elh and Cihera locked in a torrid position of mutual pleasure and he had become instantly aroused and ready to perform. Now... two hours later, after having both of them twice, they collapsed onto the bed exhausted.

Anton smiled as he saw they were still locked in their kiss. "You two are going to kill me." Anton finally spoke as he leaned back away from them.

This caused Las'elh and Cihera to finally pull apart from their scorching kiss and turn their heads to look at him. One set of amber colored eyes and one set of bright blue eyes gazed at him with worship and unrestrained desire.

"Think of the death it will be husband." Cihera spoke finally. "You will be the only Spartan alive that can say he was fucked to death! Of course... you will be dead and only my 'slave' and I will ever know."

Las'elh burst out in a soft laugh and quickly climbed off Cihera's body to scramble across Anton's broad chest, making certain to rub her large breasts and moist center across his skin as she shifted positions so that they could both cuddle up to him. Cihera joined her as they pressed up against his sides and his powerful arms pulled them tighter.

"I think I'll last a while longer." He spoke with a grin.

"I would hope it's for many centuries to come." Las'elh said as she nuzzled his neck. "My Mistress and I still have many things we have not yet tried with you husband."

Cihera did the same and she grinned at Las'elh's words. "Indeed we do."

Anton smiled as he let his eyes drift between these two women. "We should get up and get some food in us before the meeting." He said finally. "We have to put the finishing touches on this Op and I would rather do it with a full stomach."

"We are not enough food for you husband?" Cihera asked.

Anton chuckled. "Very high sweet content." He answered with a straight face. "But aside from that..."

The pounding on their door of their small apartment given to them by the Immortals caused all of them to sit upright quickly. Anton moved quickest of them, pulling on his pants as he moved across the bedroom and into the main room. Cihera looked at Las'elh and they both licked their lips in desire at what he showed them.

The banging continued and Anton finally slammed his hand down on the control panel to the side. He was about to snap at whoever was on the other side when he saw Tir'ut's massive form standing in the doorway and he was pulling on a shirt over his bare chest and abdomen.

"Tir'ut?" Anton asked.

"Something has happened on Earth and Dysea *darthirii ilhar* is calling all of us to the command room immediately." Tir'ut spoke looking at Anton. "Normya has gone on ahead for her mother was..."

"What?" Anton asked suddenly very much alert. He sensed Cihera and Las'elh coming out of the bedroom as well pulling sheets around their bodies when they heard the tone of Tir'ut's voice.

"*Darthirii ilhar* Dysea was... she was incensed!" Tir'ut answered.

It took them only a few minutes to throw clothes on and rush to the Command Center in the center of the Immortal Settlement on Kranek. The pathways and metal walkways high above the ground made for easy access to different parts of the settlement itself without having to walk the crowded streets below. They burst into the command center to see Normya in Tir'ut's arms a look of extreme worry on her beautiful face. Dysea was standing beside Esther and holding her hand tightly as she trembled in anger and the others in the command center looked astonished, among them Danarla and her elven husband Ta'lon. Anton knew that his Aunt Dysea and Cha'talla's wife had become very close friends over these last weeks and they were almost never apart when

they weren't working on the operation to rescue the female elves from Belid. They had much in common it seemed, especially now that their children were married and their friendship was growing. The image of Deia was on the table in the holoimager and she was speaking to several aides in whispers as she approached the podium that was set up from what looked like outside the Spartan Senate Building on Earth. T'lolt stepped up to them immediately when they came in.

"We have been monitoring Union Netnews Channels and discovered they were reporting explosions and attacks in Sparta and different parts of Earth. The only thing they will say is that there have been attacks against the Royal family. They have been saying that the Prime Minister will be making a statement and finally stopped trying to guess at what was happening." He then pointed to the transmission. "She just arrived and is about to speak."

"Attacks against the Royal family?" Anton asked quickly.

T'lolt nodded his head. "Whatever it is that is happening... it isn't good." He answered as the image of Deia began to speak.

"I will make a brief statement and then take a few questions, but please understand the situation is still ongoing and we are still reacting to events." Deia spoke. She took a deep breath. ***"Approximately seven hours ago Zarah Leonidas was captured by a handful of High Coven Commandos in a vile terrorist act. She was brutally beaten and raped by Dante and Javier Moran as well as others."***

"By the gods no!!" Dysea gasped as her eyes filled with tears and she gripped Esther's arm tighter.

"NO!" Normya screamed pulling away from Tir'ut's embrace. "Zarah no!"

"...location of the Mindvoice ship. Once this objective was met, that information was passed on to Empress Aikiro and additional High Coven terrorist forces that have been hiding on Earth for what appears to be several months. An attack was then launched against Dragon Mountain. At the same time other Coven forces attacked the Kavalian embassy here in Sparta while still others attempted to extract the Moran brothers from the elven city of Reylan in the south. Empress Aikiro of the High Coven and all the men with her that attacked Dragon Mountain are now dead. Aikiro was killed by the Feravomir's own hand. Our brothers and sisters who call Dragon Mountain home insured that there were no survivors. A small transport that attempted to land shortly after the attack began was destroyed as it approached Dragon Mountain by automated defensive systems."

"Javier Moran is also confirmed dead at the hands of his sister Lucia, who as it is known to me right now, saved Zarah Leonidas's life. His bonded dragon Naruth was killed by Prince Androcles and Elynth in battle. Dante Moran and his dragon Marux were severely injured battling Prince Androcles until his mother intervened and allowed him to escape. Androcles then took the fight to Yuri and gravely wounded her before being seriously injured himself and having to withdraw. Currently we are in the process of trying to find her and any who may be assisting her. When we do, she will either be captured or tried as a terrorist or she will be executed on sight. Probably the latter if the Durcunusaan find her first. Androcles has taken his older siblings aboard the SCIMITAR and left the system in order to protect them. The younger Leonidas children are all under heavy guard at the royal estate. The King and Queen Aricia are on location at our southern base and helping in the search for Yuri. Queen For'mya is on her way back to Sparta now. Queen Isabella Leonidas has left with the SCIMITAR." Deia looked up. ***"There is not much else we can tell you at this time. Events are still happening as I said."*** She set aside the data pad. ***"I will take a few questions... but I will warn you now, terrorist forces have acted in a heinous string of events against members of my family and I am not in a particularly good mood at the moment!"***

Dysea and the others could see that many of the reporters were stunned at this revelation and it showed on their faces.

"You?" Deia asked quickly.

The man looked stunned but he stammered out his question. ***"Prime Minister Deia... you said... you said members of your family. Are you saying...?"***

Deia nodded. ***“Yes... King Leonidas and I are related. I am... I was Queen Eliani’s sister. I knew both Resumar and Eliani very well. And no... I will not go into details at this time. Martin Leonidas and I decided long ago there was no need to reveal this information. Now however, now after what has happened, I felt the time had come so it will give you some idea as to my anger over these monstrous acts.”***

“Prime Minister... is the story that we have been reporting about Carisia Moran and Prince Androcles... about Empress Aikiro’s daughter Narice and Prince Arrarn... are they true?” A woman spoke from the side. ***“And if so... are they involved in any way with what has happened?”***

Deia nodded. ***“Yes they are true. Carisia Moran is now Carisia Leonidas. She was married to Androcles little more than a month ago. In the same ceremony where Narice and Toria Leonidas were married to Arrarn and became members of this family.”***

“And this was not a ploy to...” The woman attempted to continue.

Deia turned dark eyes on the woman. ***“Carisia Leonidas is the one who gave the order to activate the Durcunusaan and lock down the Royal family and priority individuals! Her actions could very well have saved lives!”*** She hissed. ***“She and Narice were part of the initial search for Yuri and in cleaning out Coven terrorist forces from Reylan. They are not part of this vile act and any insinuations from any of you in that regard will be met with the full weight of my office in retaliation!”***

This caught many of the Netnews reporters by surprise as well since it was well known Deia was very patient and methodical in her actions. This showed on their faces and the way they looked at each other.

“Is it true Prince Androcles was training High Coven dragons to fight the KFI?” Another reporter blurted out.

“Empress Aikiro brought those dragons here as a means to gain our trust. They are the same dragons that she had taken from their mothers and fathers when their ship crashed in The Wilds nearly twenty-four years ago.” Deia announced. ***“They were a façade for her to earn our trust. She did not foresee that Androcles would turn those riders and dragons into true Bonded Pairs. Yes... he has been training them... but certainly not to fight the KFI. He has been training them to realize their own potential and break the bonds of High Coven oppression. A goal he succeeded in since every single one of them departed with him aboard the SCIMITAR.”***

“And Princess Carisia... Princess Narice...?”

Deia shrugged her slim shoulders. ***“They found love and their futures in the arms of two Leonidas brothers. What more is there to say in that regard? They looked past what they have been taught and made their decision. It is a decision the Leonidas family has embraced.”***

“It is being reported that the Kavalians are not allowing any rescue personal and equipment into the remains of their embassy Prime Minister. Can you comment on that?”

Deia shook her head. ***“Queen For'mya is returning to Sparta to address this issue as we speak. Their embassy is sovereign Kavalian territory granted to them by the Union Senate and leadership. We can't force them to take our help.”*** Deia held up her hand. ***“I will address you all in another few hours when we have more information. Please wait until then for further questions. Thank you.”***

“I want to speak with Deia!” Dysea snapped angrily as she reached up and wiped away the tears. She turned to T'lolt where he stood next to a stunned Cihera and Las'elh. “T'lolt can you do this if I give you her personal COM channel! Aricia, Martin, For'mya... none of them are answering their personal channels... and I have tried several times since this news began to break!”

T'lolt nodded immediately. “Give it to me.” He replied moving quickly towards the main communications console. He caught the pad Dysea tossed to him and plugged it into the console without pause. “It asks for a code Dysea?”

Dysea didn't hesitate in answering. “Spartan Three... nine three seven one ML.” She answered.

T'lolt nodded and entered the code. “It's activating!” He spoke turning back to the holomager on the chart table.

The image of Deia lifting a mug of something to her lips came into view, flickered and then cleared instantly. They could see several individuals moving around inside what could only be her office. Dysea gasped when she saw For'mya step into the transmission as well. She looked tired and worried and her face showed it.

“Dysea our love!” For'mya gasped.

“For'mya... *Kinsoaurgai!*” Dysea exclaimed. “Tell me... I have just seen this... tell me what is happening For'mya!”

For'mya began to speak but stopped as the emotions finally became too much and she shook her head tears filling her eyes. They watched Deia get up from her chair and moved up beside her quickly, placing her hand on her shoulder and squeezing. For'mya turned to look at her and nodded as she struggled to gain her composure.

Deia turned to face them in the transmission. ***“We are still investigating Dysea.”*** She began.

“We... we just saw your announcement to the Netnews!” Dysea spoke.

She nodded. ***“I gave that about forty minutes ago. We do not know much more than what I said in that briefing.”*** Deia told her. ***“Things are still rather confusing at the moment.”***

“Deia... do not...” Dysea began.

Deia shook her head quickly. ***“I’m holding nothing back Dysea. Not now, not this time. There is too much at stake.”*** She replied instantly. ***“Martin and Aricia are still at SODRAG with Helen.”***

“Aikiro is dead?” Esther asked now stepping closer to Dysea.

Deia looked at Dysea in the transmission. ***“Dysea we should...”***

Dysea shook her head. “We are among friends and allies here Deia.” She said quickly. “You may speak freely.”

Deia nodded without hesitation then. She had worked with Dysea more than enough times through these last years to know that she was a superior judge of character. If she said it was ok to speak freely than that is what Deia would do.

“Yes... Aikiro is dead.” Deia answered. ***“Helen was the one who killed her. Androcles killed Javier’s dragon Naruth and he came very close to killing Dante Moran and his dragon as well. Witnesses from Reylan... they are saying they saw him doing things Dysea! Things they had never seen before. He went after Yuri and...”***

“Does that monster live?” Dysea asked with heat in her voice.

Deia nodded slowly. ***“We believe so unfortunately. How we don’t know. Androcles’s own words to others at SODRAG made it seem as if he mangled her too severely for her to survive. If he hadn’t been shot he would have...”***

“Shot?” Normya barked moving up next to her mother as well.

Deia held up her hand to stop any further rapid fire questions as For'mya lifted her head, once more in command of herself.

“He was hit four times Dysea.” For'mya spoke now. ***“When Aricia and I saw him at SODRAG before Martin arrived he had been able to push two of the projectiles out before he shifted back.”***

Dysea and Normya looked at her with wide eyes, as did Anton now as he stepped closer. “He shifted back to human form before purging the projectiles from his body?” Dysea gasped. “Andro should know better than that!”

For'mya nodded slowly. ***“His only concern was getting back to where Zarah was.”*** She stated.

“Mother...?” Normya spoke. “Mother how is... Zarah? Is she...?”

“She was aboard the SCIMITAR and that is where Aricia and I dropped Bella before returning to Earth.” For'mya said. ***“I did not see her Normya, but Eliani was with her. To have reacted as Androcles did... I can only assume the reports were accurate.”***

“Lucia Moran saved her?” Dysea asked in disbelief.

Deia nodded. ***“Andro made that very clear to me. He contacted me from the TYPE II he was on after the confrontation with his father as they were returning to the SCIMITAR and...”***

“Confrontation?” Dysea asked moving closer to the transmission. “What do you mean Deia? What confrontation?”

“Martin has not been himself these last weeks Dysea.” For'mya spoke now. ***“It has something to do with his Pralor ancestors and those of Yuri. We are waiting for Helen to tell us more, but Martin has been... he has been under the influence of an evil force that was somehow warping his mind. It was controlling his actions and... he struck out at Aricia and me...”***

“Kinsoaurgai no!” Dysea sobbed.

For'mya waved her hand. ***"It was not our Martin."*** She said quickly. ***"Our Martin would never strike out at us for anything. You know that! I... I questioned this as well right after... but it was a foolish thought Dysea my love! He loves us with all that he is and he would never hurt us willingly. It was stupid of me to think such a thing. This thing... this evil thing was controlling him."***

"Then this thing... it still..." Dysea asked.

For'mya shook her head. ***"He is free of it once more. Helen, Arzoal and Torma have made certain of that. Unfortunately, they did not get there in time to stop him from beating Androcles severely in his rage. It was almost as if this dark evil wanted Martin to kill his son. It was horrible to watch... it... he beat his son so badly."*** For'mya stopped for a moment then continued. ***"Helen and the others saved him though. I returned here to Sparta because the Kavalians would not allow our rescue personnel to help them. I had to contact the Kavalian Ambassador myself as I was enroute back here. He relented and I have gathered with Deia here in her office until we discover what else is going on."***

"The Durcunusaan has locked down all family members and any sensitive locations here on Earth." Deia picked it up then. ***"The only one unaccounted for at this time is Ardis, Tarifa's oldest, but she is also a member of the Durcunusaan and will more than likely contact us soon. She is probably on her way to a secure location now and has just not checked in. A team is going to her apartment as we speak."***

"Deia... you said Andro has left with his siblings!" Dysea asked. "Where has he gone? Why..."

"He is coming here." The deep male voice spoke from behind all of them. Dysea spun around quickly and saw Cha'talla enter the command center holding several data pads in his hands. "They are taking a longer than necessary route here, but they should be here in three days time if Androcles's calculations are accurate. And I believe they are."

"Cha'talla?" Dysea asked even as he came forward, his dark eyes looking at For'mya and Deia in the transmission. He stopped next to Dysea and Esther, pulling Esther close to him and looked down into her surprised emerald green eyes.

"You... you have spoken with him?" She exclaimed.

Cha'talla nodded. "Just after they left Earth." He answered. "I spoke with Captain Sa'sur personally."

"That is where you went three hours before daybreak?" Esther asked pressing closer to her Immortal husband and placing her hand on his massive chest.

Cha'talla nodded. "He brought this idea to me six weeks ago. The possibility of coming here to train these dragons. He said it was important that the Coven riders have a place that will be neutral to them, a place where they would not have to guard their actions and words. A place where they could grow and become one. Androcles asked me if I would allow this and I said yes immediately. Over these last weeks we have finalized the details, and just a few days ago he contacted me to confirm that this is what he needed to do."

"You... you allowed this husband?" Esther asked with surprise.

Cha'talla looked at her with his dark eyes. "It was you and our son who started us down this path my Blessed Wife." He told her softly. "A path that I was reluctant to take for fear that we have not done enough to show we are different than the other Immortals. Look at what has happened because of your actions. Normya Leonidas loves our first born son and she is now his Blessed Wife; Lynom protects with his life the one who he has come to love no matter what she thinks of him..." This information made both Danarla and Ta'lon look at him stunned.

"We are different! Our tribe is different and I will no longer attempt to hide them! Our actions speak louder than our words and I will not sit by any longer and be without action." Cha'talla turned back to look at Dysea even as Esther's eyes became blurry with tears. "Your son did not question my request for help in defending our home here Dysea Leonidas. He acted because he could see the love his sister held for my son... the love Tir'ut holds for her. He acted because he trusts you and your purpose here. Saying yes to Androcles was as easy as breathing in the air around me.

"I no longer care if it becomes known I still live. That my tribe is here. Let them come for me! We will stand and defend what we have built. And we will stand with those who did not hesitate in trusting us to begin with. It is why T'lolt and I have worked so diligently with Anton and the others to come up with a plan to rescue As'hia and my son as well as the other elven females Phy'iad and his men hold against their will. Our future began the day Normya Leonidas stumbled into our lives, and I will make sure that future does not die in its infancy."

Dysea was unable to say anything as she looked at Cha'talla. He was at one point in time perhaps the most feared Immortal in High Coven history. He had been Captain to the High Lord for well over a thousand years, longer than anyone before him. His history before that was well documented within the Coven history scrolls and the history texts of his own people. He was fearless and intelligent and supremely skilled in the art of war. His years since Esther had come into his life had tempered and refined him and Cha'talla knew it. He was smarter and more skilled now than he ever was, all because of the diminutive pureblood vampire female who had claimed his heart and soul that day so long ago.

Cha'talla turned to the transmission where Deia and For'mya were still watching. "The *SCIMITAR* and her Strike Wing will be here in three days. Androcles asked that I not pass that information along, but I am a father as well and it is something you must know. Your family and friends will be safe here, just as Dysea and Normya and all others who have come here have been safe. You have *my* oath on *that* Prime Minister Deia of the Lycavorian Union."

Deia nodded her head confidently in the transmission. She stepped closer to the small holomager in her office on Earth. "***Then know this Cha'talla of the Immortals... you have but to ask me for anything for your people and it will be yours. Anything at all.***"

"The two that were protecting Lucia Moran?" Cha'talla asked. "They were the sons of a fellow warrior in my tribe. They were good men. Do they...?"

"***They survived. They left with Andro.***" Deia said immediately. "***And they are bringing with them a surprise as well.***"

"A surprise?" Cha'talla asked.

"***You will see.***" Deia spoke.

"***Dysea my love...***" For'mya spoke. "***We must keep an open channel now. Too much is happening here and I don't know if it is over? I need to be able to contact you if the need arises. We have arranged such a thing with Melyanna as well on Hadaria.***"

Dysea's eyes went a little wider. "*Melyanna!*" She barked out. "I never thought to ask! What is happening there? Is Buonau letting her leave?"

Deia shook her head. "***She refuses to allow this.***" She answered. "***Anja is furious... but she is remaining for now. The hearing has been moved back until tomorrow morning and when Anja is done dealing with Buonau she will take the SPIRIT and return to Earth.***"

"And Resumar!" Dysea asked. "The High Coven troops with Resumar! They must be aware of what Aikiro and Yuri planned! They will attempt..."

Deia nodded her head. "***We know.***" ***She answered. "However... Resumar is under a communications blackout until they reach the surface of Ritaah. He will not break that blackout. We will know nothing until he contacts us from inside the new Mindvoice ship. It is one of the reasons Avi went with him."***

"How soon will we know?" Dysea asked.

"***They should be reaching the surface just about now if everything went according to plan.***" Deia spoke.

BELID

As'hia didn't know why she felt so warm as she woke lazily.

They had reached the caves easily enough just before dusk and then moved deep into the bowels of the huge mountain range. Lynom obviously knew where he was going and she simply followed him as he used his vampire vision and she her wolf eyes until he came to a tunnel that became a dead end. She was about to question him and ask him quite sarcastically if he had gotten lost when he stepped up to the rock face of the wall and touched his hand to two small boulders that protruded from the rock face. The moment his hand touched them, a two meter wide, half a meter thick section of the wall lifted up to reveal an enormous cavern behind it. As'hia's eyes were wide as she followed him through the entrance. She didn't even bother to look back as the hidden section of rock wall dropped back into place, so stunned by the inside of the cavern as she was.

It was obvious Lynom had been here many times before. She watched as he immediately began to activate Illum globes all around the huge cavern when they arrived and she began to see even better just how big it was. There was a large fresh water pool near the back and she could hear the running of the water which told her it was being fed from somewhere else in the mountains. There were large crates of equipment scattered all about, several heating globes near where most of the equipment was stacked neatly. She saw boxes of fresh clothes and boots, weapons, food and even medical supplies. Enough to last for months if need be she estimated. She had watched him silently as he set about activating the heating globes and set aside the equipment he carried. He hadn't spoken three or four words at a time to her since they had left the stream where she finally saw who Lynom truly was. Her reaction towards him had no doubt made him think many things and withdraw further into the wall he kept so powerfully erected around him. They had slept that night on different sides of the main camp area, and even with the blanket As'hia had been shivering most of the night from the chill of the caves. The next day he had left her in the cavern while he scouted back along the trail. As'hia had never felt so alone while he was gone, and even though she took a long bath in the cool spring water and found clothes that fit her in the many crates, she could not escape the sense of loss that gripped her. She spent the better portion of the day cleaning every weapon Lynom had stockpiled in the cave and adjusting the ground sensor units he had placed during his patrol. When he had returned, she had waited expectantly for him to speak with her, yet he had only grunted that no one had followed them. She had sat sullenly while he took fresh clothes and moved to the spring and jumped in fully clothed before removing the uniform he had on while he was in the water.

He was attempting to hide his body from her, believing she could not stand the look of him after her reaction the other day, and not knowing this was the furthest thing from the truth. As'hia had watched him while he washed his upper body, her wolf eyes easily able to see him even in the dimness of the cavern when he shut off the Illum globe near the pool. The ripple of the muscles in his shoulders and arms and the ripped definition of his abdomen and back could only be described as glorious. His physical definition matched that of any Spartan that As'hia had ever spent time with, and in many ways was even more impressive because of his size. The bronze color of his skin shone in the dim light, no trace of his Immortal blood seen until you saw the bone spikes along his jaw and the outer portions of his hands. Even the normal sunken eye sockets were not as prominent because of his long dreadlock like hair. And As'hia loved his hair. It was almost as long as her own dual colored locks and he had apparently decided not to cut it off, instead unwrapping and then re-braiding each strand of his hair. Once that task was complete he used a leather strand to pull it all together and secure it in a dreadlock ponytail. He must not have known she was watching him, for Lynom had climbed from the pool completely naked and As'hia had to consciously suppress the groan of intense desire as she saw his flaccid cock dangling between his legs.

Whatever the cause, As'hia could not remember the Immortal men who had raped her. Whether it was due to the beatings or the drugs, she did not know, but she could remember only small bits and pieces of that time and only very vaguely. Lynom's cock was not as large as the Immortal cocks she had seen on the men at the base raping the other female elves, but it was certainly quite impressive. Easily nine inches long even flaccid as it was and it looked to be very thick. It matched the color of his skin and As'hia was stunned at her next reaction. She actually licked her lips in desire when she saw it and felt the wolf blood in her begin to simmer. She looked away quickly when he dressed efficiently and headed back into the light of the main cavern. Once more he only spoke short words to her, while giving her rations and such before he moved to the spot where he had spread out a sleeping mat. He ate quickly and then stretched out his six foot four body on the mat saying he would scout the area once more tomorrow to insure they were not being followed and then he was asleep in minutes. He left As'hia poking at the rations in her hand before she too settled onto the sleeping mat and allowed sleep to claim her.

As As'hia opened her dark brown eyes slowly she discovered the reason she felt so warm and it was quite the surprise to her. She was not staring across the ground at the back of the cavern; she was staring across the broad expanse of Lynom's chest looking at the back of the cavern. As her eyes grew wider and she realized where she was, she also realized her firm breasts were pressed tightly against Lynom's ribcage, her right leg drawn up over his and her right arm stretched across his powerful abdomen. She felt the pressure on her shoulders and down her back and knew it could only be his arm holding her in place. The warmth radiating from his body was filtering wonderfully through her, her cheek resting on his chest. Her mind exploded with

many things, foremost among them was how she had gotten in this position. She didn't move a single muscle and she could feel the even rise and fall of his broad chest that told her he was very much asleep. As her senses came back to her she realized that the warmth of his body had attracted her at some point during the night and she had sought out this warmth as her wolf instincts naturally took over. Lynom's Amarian Willow Flower scent filled her nostrils powerfully and she felt even more warmth surge through her as her body reacted to his scent. Reacted in a way she certainly did not expect. Her nipples grew extremely hard and she felt moisture seep out of her suddenly very aroused pussy and soak into the pants she wore as her mind remembered the view of his naked body. Instinctually she reached out with her mind and felt the warmth of his presence within Mindvoice and the way it made her feel, and her eyes grew suddenly very wide.

As'hia yelped in stunned surprise and pushed off of Lynom's body, propelling herself away from him. She didn't see his dark eyes burst open and his hands reach for the rifle that rested next to him as he rolled and came to his knees instantly alert and ready to kill.

"As'hia! What is it?" He barked as his eyes swept around them holding the SA80. As'hia sat on the ground staring at him with wide eyes. "As'hia!"

"You... you bastard!" She exclaimed viciously causing Lynom's eyes to grow wider at her words.

"What?" He asked with a confused expression as the SA80 lowered slightly. "What is wrong?"

"You... you let me lay next to you!" As'hia snarled.

Lynom's eyes grew wider and he lowered the SA80 fully. "You were cold! Your whole body was shivering!" He spat. "You mumbled something and then laid next to me!"

"You should have... you should have given me another blanket then!" As'hia growled at him as she got to her feet.

Lynom stood up fully as well and looked at her with a disgusted expression. "I am that much of a monster to you that you would rather lie on the ground and shiver than be warm?" He asked walking up to her.

As'hia looked up at him and lashed out with her hand, raking her nails along his cheek savagely and drawing blood. "Did you get your thrills having me so close to you Lynom?" She hissed as Lynom's head rocked back more from the surprise than the force of the blow. "Did it make you feel manly when I was...?" As'hia gasped when he turned his head back to her slowly, the four bloody scratches from her nails on his cheek and his dark eyes now the cobalt blue of his vampire genes.

Lynom trembled in anger, his vampire blood boiling in his veins at this unexpected attack against him for something she perceived he had done. He hissed softly at her surprised face, fully exposing his vampiric fangs and seeing her eyes grow larger, changing to her wolf eyes and her own wolf fangs extending as she naturally reacted in a manner to defend herself. Lynom paused for a long moment and simply stared at her. His love for her would not allow him to react as she expected him too, and he no longer denied the fact that he did love her. He would not act as those animals that had mistreated her so. Lynom almost laughed at the irony of this situation. He loved this elven female with every fiber of his being and had since the first moment he had seen her strength in fighting those animals who had forced themselves upon her. As'hia in turn hated him with equal feeling he wrongly assumed. He knew what he was doing the moment he laid his eyes upon her and had acted the way he did even knowing it would put his people in jeopardy. He had not cared. He still did not care, for even though she hated him, he still loved her with all that he was. It was more painful than any physical hurt he had ever experienced to know how she felt about him, but at least she was alive and would be safe when she returned to her family. For all that... he would not have done anything differently.

Lynom turned quickly away from her startling As'hia somewhat, and he moved to several of the equipment crates and picked up the pack.

"Your elven metabolism has not fully recovered from the drugs and beatings you were subjected too." Lynom spoke as he began stuffing items into the pack. "That is why you are still cold during the nights. I know you have refused so far, but I suggest taking the medicines I left for you so that it speeds your recovery."

"What are you doing?" As'hia snapped as she watched him moved to the crate with the rations and take an armful, only to move to the pack and drop them in.

"My presence here is not beneficial." He spoke softly. "You don't want me here and you certainly don't need me here."

As'hia watched as he dropped several small cans of ammunition into the pack and took several plasma grenades and then he sealed the pack. He hefted it onto one shoulder and then turned to look at her as he lifted

the Immortal sword from the rock and pushed it through the straps on the pack. “Where are you going?” She demanded.

Lynom’s laugh held no mirth in it. “One day to hell probably.” He answered her. “Right now I am going to set up my own camp on top of this mountain and leave you to yourself.”

“What?” As'hia gasped.

Lynom stepped up to her side as his cobalt eyes vanished. He looked down at her face. “I do not begin to understand what you must feel after enduring what you have *Ssin'urn 'Anon*. But I am not one of the monsters who did these things to you.” He said softly. “Even so... my presence continues to remind you of what happened so I will leave. I will be on top of the mountain making sure no one followed us and monitoring the communications array. My father and brother will be here soon, as will your parents, and then you will never need to see another Immortal in your lifetime. You can return to your life and try to rebuild what you have lost. I will not remain here and let you hate me for being what I am however. Not with as much as I have fallen in love with you As'hia. That is too painful to endure.”

As'hia stared at him in shock at this pronouncement and he turned without another word and moved to the cavern entrance. He touched the opening and As'hia watched it slide open and then Lynom moved through it without a second look back. The sound of the rock wall closing was almost thunderous in the now empty cavern and As'hia was then truly alone. As alone as she had ever been.

RITAAH

Resumar didn’t think it was going to be easy.

It seemed nothing a Leonidas did was ever easy, and this fact appeared to follow him and Andro more so than their other siblings for reasons which he could not begin to fathom. The clearing was there just as their imagery had told them, however the terrain surrounding the clearing was far thicker than it appeared and this immediately caused problems. The moment the *STRIKER*’s landing pads touched the ground the High Coven troops in the back began their assault. Even as prepared as they were, the sudden quickness of the attack caught them only partially aware. Cemath and Mirra could not use their superheated breath within the confines of the *STRIKER* and they were left to activate their psychic shields and try and stay out of the fighting as the Coven troops began exchanging heavy fire with the Spartan troops among the numerous large crates of equipment they had brought. A stray projectile round had ricocheted off the interior walls of the *STRIKER* and then into the cockpit where it entered just below the pilot’s left ear and blew her brains all over the front of the windshield even before she had fully powered down the ship. As the co-pilot worked frantically to shut down the ship’s systems so they were not damaged more by stray fire because they were powered on, more projectiles slammed into the armored sides of the cockpit doorway making Athani cringe and stay out of the line of fire as she clutched the K14. One vampire commando had blurred fast enough to reach the doorway of the cockpit, intent on killing the Kavalian whore and the two pilots. All of the commandos knew the layout of the *STRIKER* by memory and he knew he could escape through the cockpit hatch.

His plan did not factor in the towering bulk of Avi, or the immense strength of the cyborg in the cockpit. As he blurred into the cockpit, the tree branch thick arm came whipping from the side to smash into his chest even in the middle of his blur. As he wailed in agony, his body lifting into the air and all forward momentum gone, he wondered how anyone could have matched his speed while blurring. He never got the chance to answer that question as when he landed on the deck with a grunt of pain and rush of air, the Kavalian whore appeared above him the K14 extended in her hand, and she calmly pumped two kinetic rounds into his cranium. Athani didn’t pause as she stepped over his lifeless corpse and slammed her hand down on the controls, activating the emergency hatch and turned back to the co-pilot. Though filled with worry for her new husband, Athani had a job to do and she knew Resumar would be upset with her if she did not complete it.

“Open the ramp!” Athani screamed out. “We must get them off the ship before they destroy all our equipment or ignite the explosives!”

“Ramp coming down!” The harried co-pilot shouted as she slammed her hand down on the panel between the seats.

“Avi... the cameras in the back? Can you get them working?” Athani screamed as they heard the roar of gunfire that could only be the exchange of P190A3s and SA80 weapons fire. Athani knew that while the STRIKER was a large ship for its class at over seventy meters, it was only twelve meters wide and there were only so many places Resumar and the others could hide from sustained weapons fire.

-Stand by- The hulking cyborg returned to the seat he had occupied and his hands flew over the console with a blur. **-I have all the cameras up-**

Athani crossed over to stand beside his shoulder, her blue/green eyes wide as she saw the gaping opening in the back where the ramp was now down. She could also see Cemath and Mirra attempting to make themselves as small as possible in the back of the STRIKER. There were two bodies by Cemath’s right foot and she could see bright blood on the deck. She smiled grimly as she realized two Coven troops had gotten too close to him. The cameras could also see the bodies of half a dozen others, but it was too dark to make out whether they were Coven troops or Spartans.

“Damn!” Athani swore. “Is there nothing we can do to help them?”

-This vessel has no internal defensive systems. It was not designed for battle on the interior- Avi answered. **-We must remain here as Resumar told us and keep the Coven troops from taking the ship-**

“*Nubou!*” Athani spat. “If they hurt my Resumar I will gouge out their eyes and feed them their entrails!”

Resumar ducked down behind the crate once more and slammed a fresh magazine into his K12. More projectiles whizzed over his head and impacted the bulkhead of the STRIKER and he winced slightly as the buzz saw sound of the 190s returned fire. He turned his head quickly as Julie Collins blurred across the open area between the two massive equipment crates and skidded to a stop next to him holding the K12 in her hands and slamming roughly against the crate.

“They want this ship as much as we do!” Julie barked above the gunfire.

Resumar looked at her. “No! What gave you that idea?” He shouted before leaning around the crate and sending six rounds whistling down the center of the STRIKER before leaning back. “How many are left?” He barked out.

Julie squatted on the balls of her feet and launched another half dozen rounds over the top of the crate before lowering herself back down. “Nine I believe!” She yelled back as she quickly changed magazines.

“We aren’t going to stay lucky for very long!” Resumar declared. “One of us is going to hit the crates with the explosives and do major damage!”

“Your dragon can do nothing?” Julie asked.

“Too confining!” Resumar answered. “He can’t even get his wings open fully inside the ship to fight! He did take out two of them who got too close to them though!”

“Yes! I saw that! Efficient use of his talons if you ask me!” She answered.

“We do try!” Resumar shouted.

Julie looked at him and couldn’t help the smile on her face from showing. Yes indeed, he was so much like his father, and Julie had every intention of returning that part of her life to herself no matter what she did.

“Are you always so nonchalant about men and women shooting at you?” She screamed as she extended and sent another tirade of projectiles down the length of the STRIKER.

“You should see my brother!” Resumar answered. “He would have just stood up and pushed them all out the back with...” Resumar’s dark eyes grew wide for a moment. “That’s it!”

“What is it?” Julie declared.

Aryschanne? Resumar reached out within Mindvoice.

My love? Athani answered immediately.

Athani... release the upper rear compartment locks! Resumar commanded.

What? Resumar... that's insane! She barked within Mindvoice. The entire ship will drop! The landing struts will be crushed! They...

Aryschanne... we must get them off the ship! They are all located behind the last two equipment crates. He explained quickly. If you unlock the upper rear compartment locks it will knock them over and allow us to rush their position! Trust me Athani... it will work!

Very... very well husband! But if you die on me Resumar Leonidas I will haunt you for the rest of your spirit life! Athani spat.

Resumar looked at Julie. "Grab onto something!" He barked. "The others will know what it is when they hear the alarm!"

Julie watched him wrap his hand and arm around the large straps securing the crate to the floor and she did the same as a red light began flashing a buzzing alarm sounded. "What are you doing?" She screamed at him.

Resumar smiled stupidly at her. "Giving us the edge!" He exclaimed.

Cemath's eyes went wide and he turned to look at Mirra! *Mirra! Brace yourself! Quickly!* He commanded as he wrapped his tail around one part of the harness mechanism and saw her do the same. He dug his talons into the deck plating as much as he was able and closed his eyes. *I hope you know what you are doing brother!* He shouted within Mindvoice.

The alarm stopped sounding and the floor of the *STRIKER* dropped away. Literally.

Athani opened the dividing door into the rear of the *STRIKER* and bright moonlight met her eyes. She gasped at what her feline eyes saw. The moment she had bypassed the upper locks on the rear compartment, it was as if they were separating the rear of the ship from the cockpit area as an in-flight emergency. Since she only released the upper locks, the last fifty-five meters of the ship had dropped with all of its weight down ten meters. It had the desired effect she saw, as Resumar and Julie were now mingling at the rear of the half buried ramp, the landing struts on the *STRIKER* crushed beyond repair. She could see all the way through the ship even though the forward section was also beyond repair bent down and inward as it was. Even the Dragon Armor skin of the outer shell could not withstand the stress of the odd position and weight and had buckled outward as opposed to ripping completely as the rest of the normal Duridium shell had done.

Athani leaped across the small opening nimbly and used her catlike abilities to slide and maneuver her way down the steep incline of the rear section of the ship. She saw Resumar turn towards her as she neared him at the foot of the ramp and she leaped the last six meters with ease landing in front of him.

"This was your solution!" She exclaimed. "This was... it was..."

Suicidal! Mirra exclaimed with equal emotion in Mindvoice. *Athani Leonidas... you married this one?*

Cemath chuckled. *I thought it was a brilliant move.* He spoke.

Mirra whirled her purple scaled head toward him. *You would! You are just as suicidal as your Bonded One!*

Resumar looked at Julie with a smile and then turned back to her. "It worked didn't it?" He spoke.

Athani looked around and saw the remains of five High Coven troops in the light of the moon, three of which had been crushed by the last equipment container when it broke its restraining straps. Julie was squatting slightly away from the overturned crate as the remaining Spartans moved back from around the now grounded *STRIKER*. The senior enlisted Spartan came up to Resumar.

"We swept a hundred meters around the clearing as you ordered Milord. No sign of them." The man spoke.

"How many dead?" Resumar asked with some trepidation.

The enlisted man shook his head. "Surprisingly none Milord. The High Coven was using soft ammunition. Seven of our people were knocked out by the massive concussive force of the projectiles, but none were killed."

"Soft ammunition?" Resumar said looking at Julie.

She nodded standing back up. "The Empress did not want any equipment damaged Resumar. She wanted these ships as well as the MV ship." She turned back to the woodline along the clearing. "The remaining Coven troops blurred off in that direction." She said pointing to the southeast.

Resumar nodded. "That's the secondary landing zone where Dario's *STRIKER* was setting down. He isn't answering calls in Mindvoice, though I can feel him and Sorran both. They are agitated to say the least!" He turned to the enlisted Spartan. "*Hyperetes* Mescis, leave half the team here and ready the others to move to Dario's location. You remain here and secure the ship and prep the contents to be moved."

Brother? Cemath inquired as he came to his feet.

Resumar nodded. "Get airborne and see if you can see anything Cemath. Mirra go with him. Athani..." He spoke turning to her.

Athani shook her head. "I will remain with Avi." She said quickly. "I know. He seems to be the only one who thinks your stunt was just as insane as I do."

"I don't like that Dario won't answer me." Resumar spoke.

"Perhaps he thinks you are just as crazy as I now do." Athani snapped.

Resumar began to smile but was cut off from completing that smile by the massive explosion to the southeast. All of them whirled as the huge fireball spiraled skyward lighting up the darkness like a small sun. A fireball that was quickly followed by the sound of rolling thunder. A powerful gust of wind slapped all of them in the face, staggering Athani and Julie slightly as they watched with horror in their eyes.

"Dario!" Resumar exclaimed. "No!"

Dario was not answering his cousin for a very good reason. He was fighting to stay alive to the very best of his ability.

Things had started to go wrong the moment their pilot flared their ship for landing. They had hit a batch of rough air and two Coven troops mistakenly took this as them setting down on the surface. Even though Dario and the other Spartans were prepared for an attack, the two troops blurring into the cockpit before they had landed surprised them completely. Without even thinking to look out the cockpit window and take notice that they were still a hundred feet in the air, the two Coven troops lifted their SA80s and shot both pilots in the back of the head. Though they were using soft ammunition, *STRIKER* pilots rarely wore helmets, and Dario's eyes were wide in horror as the blood and brains of both pilots decorated the inside of the windshield almost simultaneously. Their deaths sent the *STRIKER* into an immediate tailspin from which there was no recovery. Thrown violently back by the gravity of the tailspin Dario was pinned against the chair he sat in even as the two Coven troops were turning their weapons on him.

The *STRIKER* impacted the ground at nearly a hundred and thirty KPH directly on its belly with no landing gear to break its fall. Not that it would have mattered anyway. Dario was saved from the fate of the Coven troops in the cockpit for the simple reason that he was sitting and not standing. The impact on the unyielding ground sent both Coven troops rocketing upwards and then down again, their heads and shoulders instantly crushed by the crash as the dorsal section of the *STRIKER* caved downward from the force of the contact with the ground, and then their lower bodies shattering in the downward motion of the crash. As it was, the chair Dario sat in was nearly torn from its metal bolting in the deck and he was suddenly dangling sideways, dazed and very confused.

The *STRIKER*'s collision with the ground sent up a billowing cloud of dirt and shredded grass. The ramp was torn from its mountings and all twenty-two members of the assault team were sent hurtling in different directions. Sorran and Dario had been in another *STRIKER* crash similar to this before and the moment Sorran felt the ship go into a tailspin he shouted a warning to his partner and drew his tail and head as close to his body as he could. He relaxed his body so as not to try and anticipate the impact with the ground and he would be able to spring about with the force if he was lucky. His fellow dragon was not as lucky. He did not pull his body in as tightly as he could, ignoring Sorran's directions in fear. The rear of the ship smashing into the ground shattered all four of his legs for he was trying to brace for the impact. As his head came up and he began to bellow in pain, the top portion of his harness snapped off and was driven downward through his skull as the top of the rear of the *STRIKER* dropped a good meter and a half, turning the now lethal protruding piece of metal into a killing apparatus.

Dario shook his head to clear his mind and began tearing at the straps holding him in place. Using his strength he was able to yank the main one free of its mounting bracket and he slipped out of the chair under the other strap. He staggered towards the open door into the rear of the ship and came face to face with the dazed

High Coven senior officer of their group. With a snarl of intense rage Dario smashed his head forward, the thicker bone of his Lycavorian skull impacting the nose and cheek of the dazed vampire officer and crushing that bone and cartilage to mush. As the officer screamed in pain and staggered backwards away from him Dario drew his *Nehtes*, thumbed the extending button and drove one half of the nine foot spear through the man's chest. He yanked it out in the same motion and looked into the rear of the ship with wide eyes.

"Execute! Execute! Execute!" He screamed the words as he moved into the rear of the ship.

Then all hell broke loose.

Dario dove for cover behind one of the crates as he saw two High Coven troops rise up and level their weapons at where he was standing. As he rolled into the back of the first crate his eyes caught the motion of three of his men struggling to get their weapons unlimbered. They accomplished this exactly at the same time as two High Coven troops dashed forward with their weapons already out. Dario could only watch with wide eyes as the five men unloaded on each other from point blank range. He watched as the bullet strikes to all of them men were burned into his memories for all time. Blood blossomed from the bodies of the Coven troops even as two of his troops staggered back under multiply impacts to their reinforced Mark IV ArmorPly. Dario would learn later that this is what saved them from the soft ammunition that the Coven troops were using.

Sorran! Dario screamed out in Mindvoice.

Brother I am stuck! Sorran answered instantly. *Get out Dario! My harness is crushed and the body of...*

No! Dario exclaimed.

He died quickly! Sorran spoke. *His body pins me to the floor. You must get out! The impact broke open one of the explosive crates! The electrical fire will ignite it in moments! Get out Brother!*

NO! Dario screamed out. *I will not leave you!*

Dario bolted to his feet and turned to run to the back of the ship just as another High Coven troop stepped out in front of him and lifted his SA80. Dario didn't hesitate and didn't pause. He simply reached out with his long, powerful arm and snatched the shorter Coven troop up by his throat and ripped him off the ground carrying him with him as he walked. The Coven troop dropped his weapon as he tried to claw at the iron grip now squeezing his throat closed to no avail. Dario was a large Spartan, nearing six foot three and two hundred and thirty pounds and he was physically extremely powerful. As he moved forward he finally squeezed with just enough force that he crushed the vampire's larynx as he rammed him into the next equipment crate in the line. Dario didn't hear the man's spine shatter on impact with the metal crate, or the gurgling of the blood pouring into his throat. The only thing that mattered to him was getting to his Bonded Brother. Dario ignored the random weapons fire, or the fact that both the Coven troops and Spartans that had survived were doing all they could to get out of the ship before the electrical fire that had begun along the port side reached the now shattered crate that had held the explosives they were to use to blow up the MV ship.

Dario made his way quickly through the increasing smoke from the widening fire and reached the pen area of the *STRIKER*. His eyes were wide at what he saw. Sorran was pinned under both the crushed harness and the body of the second dragon that had come with them. Blood was pouring from the massive wound in the second dragon's skull all over his Bonded Brother's back. He rushed forward immediately and without regard for his own safety he began trying to heave the head and neck of the dead dragon off Sorran's back and shoulders so that they could tear at the harness.

Dario you have to go! You have to leave me! Sorran growled out even as he tried to move his shoulders and help his Bonded Brother push the weight of the dead dragon off him.

"NO!" Dario screamed as he grabbed the saddle harness the dragon wore.

You will die fool! Sorran snarled.

Dario glared at him then. "Then we will die together!" He shouted. "Now shut up and help me idiot!"

Sorran gathered as much of his legs under him as he could and with Dario using all of his wolf strength and their combined TK power they were finally able to push the body of the dragon off Sorran's back and shoulders. Dario immediately looked at the crushed harness and yanked his *Nehtes* from the thigh holster once more.

"Can you never do anything the easy way!" Dario screamed at him as he began to hack at the remaining sections of the twisted metal dragon harness.

Only you would put us on another ship that crashes! Sorran barked right back at him. *You volunteered us for this mission!* He continued as he used his clawed talons to pull down on the opposite section of the

harness framework. *See the sights you said! Meet beautiful female dragons you said! And here we are! I should have known! Once more digging our way out of a crashed STRIKER that is going to explode at any moment and scattered us to ashes!*

“It won’t if you shut up and pull!” Dario screamed as he finished severing the frame at the top and it dropped free of the ceiling allowing Sorran to pull the remainder off his back and shoulders with his talons. Sorran looked at him then, his eyes bright. “Can we go now Brother?” Dario snapped.

With all haste! Sorran popped.

Their psychic shield almost glowing, they plunged through the smoke and flames licking at them as they dashed for the ramp. They had to duck lower than normal to clear the top of the ramp but then they were out among the stars and moonlight and Dario immediately shifted to his wolf form to put as much distance between them and the ship as possible. His dark blond fur rustled in the night air as his powerful legs propelled him away from the doomed ship.

Go brother! He screamed out as he willed his four legs to carry him away as fast as possible. *Go!*

Sorran didn’t hesitate and immediately snapped out his wings and reached for the sky, pulling away rapidly with powerful sweeps as he climbed into the cloudless sky. Just as he cleared the tops of the trees and the edge of the clearing the *STRIKER* exploded.

The resulting concussion wave sent him spiraling out of control over the tops of the trees, snapping the crowns of large trees off as his nearly four metric tons became something akin to a meteor. He didn’t hear his Bonded Brother yelp in surprise as the concussion wave picked the dark blond wolf up in its wake and tossed him like a ragdoll. They didn’t see the fireball that blossomed in the night sky and reached nearly four hundred feet up considering the amount of explosives the *STRIKER* was carrying.

Oh this is going to hurt! Sorran heard Dario spit out just before his huge skull smashed into the top of a three hundred foot tall tree and knocked him silly.

“Gods!” Na’lia gasped as they came up short and watched as the fireball reached skyward and the explosion caused the ground around them to tremble.

Nine Kavalian rebels had joined with them and they were sprinting through the darkness with ease, navigating the terrain easily since they knew anything with ten kilometers of the settlement like the back of their hands.

“They must have been carrying a huge amount of explosives!” Mican declared without pause. “No transport ship would cause that large of an explosion!”

“We must hurry!” Channa spoke as she began to move again.

“Channa... there could be vampire troops out there!” Mican snapped. “We can not fight vampire troops at night! They’ll take us down one at a time using the shadows!”

“Mican... do you think they would be moving back towards that explosion if any of them survived?” Channa barked. “They would be moving as fast as they could away from that in case it draws the attention of the Kavalians in the sector! They don’t know the ships are above us fighting! I thought I saw a body flying through the air to the northwest! Lycavorians are hard to kill! Perhaps he or she survived!”

“How do we know that?” Pasat spat as he stepped forward. “Channa... we are taking a huge risk! The Lycavorians can see in the dark far better than we can! They might mistake us for Coven troops! You said yourself that the Coven would tried to kill them! How do we know that is not what has happened?”

The pull was becoming too strong for Channa to ignore and she snarled viciously. “Then I will go alone and we risk only me!” She spat before turning and bursting into a run into the darkness heading northeast.

“Channa!” Mican shouted to no avail as Channa used her feline speed and agility to disappear almost immediately. “Fuck!” He whirled on Pasat. “Take half your squad and move around to the west Pasat!”

“Mican she...”

“Has she ever been wrong before?” Mican snapped.

Pasat blinked several times and then turned to the group following them. Channa had saved his life once and he would not forsake her. “First four with me! The rest of you stay with Mican!” He ordered.

Mican looked at Na’lia who was still watching the fire reach into the sky. “Na’lia?” Na’lia turned to him and lowered the portable scanner she held. “The composition of the explosion was concentrated

Talorium Mican. From the force of the explosion and radius of the blast I'd estimate at least two thousand kilos of it." She said softly. "Whatever they are here for, it's not to hurt us. They came to destroy something with explosives!"

"Are you sure?" Mican asked.

Na'lia nodded. "Yes."

Mican took a deep breath and turned back to the darkness. "Let us find Channa before she steps into a shitstorm and hurts herself."

He took off at a fast trot followed by the others.

Dario! Brother where are you! Dario wake up anse you! Sorran's voice filled his head.

Dario groaned loudly as he opened his eyes and found himself staring at the night sky through the trees. *Stop shouting!* Dario snapped. *You're hurting my head! Uhhhhhhh!*

Dario! Resumar's voice broke in now filled with relief. *Are you hurt? Where are you?*

That... that depends on your definition of hurt. Dario answered as he slowly moved his head back and forth. When he felt no pain he lifted his head slightly and looked down to make sure he still had his arms and legs. He lifted his hands and only felt the painful ache of soreness as his arms followed. He wriggled his toes in his combat boots and then bent his legs slowly so that his knees were extended up and his feet were flat.

"Ok... ten fingers... ten toes." Dario croaked softly. "At least everything is still present."

Dario! Sorran's voice erupted in his head again.

"Damn it Brother! Stop shouting!" Dario snapped.

I'm not shouting fool! Sorran snarled back.

Dario can you see where you are? Resumar asked. *Sorran nearly crushed us when he fell!*

I see two moons! Dario replied. *Does that count?*

There is only one moon Dario! Athani's voice spoke. *Resumar... Avi has got the short range sensors working again. He is four hundred meters to your northeast.*

Dario... we're on our way!

"Great!" Dario spoke letting his hands drop to the ground once more. "I'll just sit here and rest then."

The Coven is still out there cousin! Resumar barked out. *Be mindful of everything around you!*

"The way I feel... dead might be better." Dario spoke with a soft chuckle.

I will show you dead when I get there idiot! You should have left me! Sorran declared but the worry in his voice was obvious.

Complain. Complain. Complain. Dario retorted.

Dario grunted when the weight pressed onto his chest and he blinked several times until he focused and saw the boot attached to the very long leg. His eyes followed that lean leg up to the very shapely hips and firm ass, the slim waist and large breasts and then into the most delicious blue eyes and full lips he had ever seen. Blue eyes with vertical slits like the cats he had seen on Earth. He saw the amazingly long raven black hair surrounding those eyes and sensuous lips and the near flawless tanned skin.

"Athani... you have blond hair right?" Dario spoke.

What? Yes... you know that!

"Then I'm looking at a beautiful angel and I must be dead." Dario spoke.

Resumar! Athani's voice erupted. *Avi is detecting a dozen heat signatures closing on Dario! One is already on top of him!*

Shit! Resumar's voice filled Dario's head.

"Who are you talking too?" The soft voice asked him as the large caliber projectile hand weapon lowered to point at his chest.

Dario smiled as the scent of apricots filled his nostrils. "The angel smells good too." Dario said.

"Tell me who you are talking too!" Channa barked as she leaned over and brought her handgun closer to his chest. "Who are you?"

Dario we are almost there! Resumar shouted.

Dario looked into those beautiful vertically slit blue eyes. "You know... it's not polite to pretend you are an angel." He spoke.

Channa's face became confused. "Are you stupid?" She asked the moonlight bathing the face of the man beneath her boot in a dim light. She could see the strong jaw and masculine cheekbones but the shadows hid the rest of his features. She knew he was a large man, easily the size of Mican, for he had made a slight impression in the ground where he had landed after she watched him fall through the trees.

"You smell really good!" Dario said once more.

Channa leaned over even more as she felt tingles in her body at the whisper of his voice. "Can you hear me?" She barked. "Who are you talking too? Tell me or I will shoot you in the chest and leave you here to die!"

"No." Dario said.

"No? No what?" Channa snapped.

Dario ignored the ache in his body and his hands flashed up. He grabbed the barrel of the weapon with his left hand, his long fingers wrapping around the weapon and twisting it to the side directing it away from him. His left hand snatched the front of the shirt the female wore and he pulled her down towards him. His green eyes changed and his wolf fangs burst from his gums as he snarled viciously.

"You won't shoot me!" He spat before lifting his right leg and using his knee to heave Channa off the ground above him and throw her over his head. He used the momentum of his throw to roll over on top of her and pull the weapon out of her hand which he promptly tossed to the side. He pinned Channa's hands to the ground and leaned over her face seeing her eyes go wide. "I told you it wasn't polite to point guns at people you don't know."

"Get off me!" Channa snarled baring her feline fangs.

"Care to tell me why you..."

Dario's head snapped back as Channa brought her tail whipping up and smashing into the side of his head. His grip on her hands loosened just enough that she pulled her left hand free and sent it driving upwards into his chest with all of her strength. This caused Dario to roll to the side of her and Channa instantly rolled away from him and leaped to her feet. She whirled and watched Dario stagger slightly to his feet holding his head where he tail had struck him. He turned wolf eyes on her in surprise. "You are Kavalian!" He gasped.

Channa didn't hesitate and snapped up with a front kick aimed for his head. Her five foot nine height and long legs gave her exceptional power and her constant training regime with Mican and Na'lia had made her a deadly fighter. She had killed over a dozen Kavalian troops with just her hand to hand abilities, using her speed and the superior acrobatic ability her tail gave to her. She had underestimated Dario's height in the dimness of the timber around them however and her boot slammed into his shoulder and stopped as if it was hitting a wall. She heard him grunt in pain as she faltered with her balance. Channa didn't hesitate and seamlessly went with the momentum of her action, turning in mid air and whipping her tail around to strike him again. She heard the satisfying *thwap* of her tail striking skin and she felt him stagger once more as she completed her spin in the air and landed on her feet. She immediately launched into another side kick that would have crushed the skull of her opponent if it had connected. This kick did not and two very strong hands caught her foot easily with speed she had never been witness to before. Dario glared at her down the length of her long leg.

"*Nubou* woman! I am not your enemy!" Dario shouted.

His words fell on deaf ears as Channa leaped off the ground even as he held her right leg and she sent her left leg whistling forward to connect with Dario's jaw. The power of her kick sent him stumbling back as he released her foot and she landed upright on both her feet once more.

"I will not allow you to hurt those I protect!" Channa barked as she stepped forward. "I will kill you Coven scum!"

"I am not part of the...!" Dario began to shout as he looked up, blood running from his mouth where Channa's kick had smashed into his jaw and lips.

Channa's tail whipped out once more as she leaped into another flying kick at his head. The tip of her tail slapped into Dario's face and she heard him grunt in pain just before her fist smashed into his cheek. Channa used her fists and her tail in conjunction, pummeling Dario with blow after blow. She had refined this skill to an art, her tail acting as a less powerful fist so it appeared she was a whirlwind of action. Channa had never felt so charged and powerful and she was caught up in this new feeling. Her limbs felt quicker, her blows more powerful, and her speed even more than what it normally was. Her blue eyes were wide with newfound energy and she did not know why. There was only one downside to her current fight.

Channa had never fought a Lycavorian that was bonded to a dragon.

“Enough of this tail *sibfla!*” Dario’s voice growled.

Channa’s eyes went wide when Dario caught one of her wrists and her tail in his two hands and she froze in mid motion. The next thing she knew, she was sailing through the night air where she landed with a loud grunt of pain and air escaping her lungs from the force of her landing. Dario wiped the back of his hand across his cheeks as he moved towards her. The force of her landing had stunned her and Channa blinked several times trying to focus once more as she pushed herself up on her elbows.

“Are you done?” Dario snapped as he moved to stand above her. “Listen... I just had my big ass tossed over three hundred meters through the air when my ship exploded. I came down through those trees hitting every *nubous* branch there was, and then I landed like a sack of limp *sibfla!* I am not in the mood to play games with you anymore! And I am not part of the High fucking Coven! And if you hit me with that tail one more time...”

Channa sprang off the ground and did just that, her tail snapping forward and crashing into Dario’s face with enough force to knock him back a few steps. This time however she darted to the side after hitting him, preparing for his retaliation. She did not see the Coven soldier unwrap the shadows from around his body and lift his weapon to shoot her in the back. Dario however, he did see the Coven soldier the moment the shadows began to shift behind her. His wolf eyes were much more attuned to the night and he moved forward with speed that stunned even Channa. Her blue eyes were wide as she blinked and then the huge man was upon her. She closed her eyes in recognition that she was about to get hit very hard but all she felt was a rush of air move past her and the sound of the collision of bodies. She spun gracefully and could only watch with unmitigated awe at what happen next.

“You Coven motherfucker!” Dario snarled with fury as he knocked the SA80 upwards and used his superior height to wrap his arm around the soldier’s head and shoulders while he twisted his body back to face Channa. “A dragon is dead because of you and your pals! My friends are dead!”

Channa heard a ghastly guttural sound as she watched the larger man use incredible strength to lift the lower body of the vampire who had appeared behind her in the air and then bring it smashing down as he held the man’s head in the crook of his arm. The snapping of the man’s neck and spine was grisly in its tenor. His legs twitched horribly several times and then the man dropped the body without regard on the ground. She could see his chest heaving in the dim light and suddenly she realized that this man was far more dangerous than she had first realized. He had moved with speed and strength she had never seen before. He had frozen her with some sort of power in the middle of a kick that would have snapped his neck and then he only tossed her a few meters. Her eyes lifted from the twisted body of the Coven troop and she gasped softly at what she saw. The moonlight caught those eyes just right and they were the most appetizing eyes she had ever seen. She could not determined their true color in the darkness even with the moonlight, but she could see the black ring around the light cornea and she could also see the man’s long flesh tearing fangs extending from his upper jaw. He hadn’t been lying to her. He was no vampire.

Channa saw Mican and Pasat emerged from the darkness with their weapons leveled at the man with unwavering arms. She opened her mouth to warn them but Mican spoke first.

“Do not move!” Mican spat. “There are a dozen weapons directed at you this very moment.”

Dario lifted his wolf eyes and looked at Mican. “You think?” He snapped sarcastically. “Is this beat on Dario day? Do I have *nubous lae* stamped on my head somewhere?!”

“Shut up!” Mican barked. “Channa are you alright? Did he hurt you?”

“Mican this is not...” Channa began to speak but this time Dario cut her off.

“You know... I’m really tired right now! I was almost blown up! I fell through a bunch of really hard tree branches. I’ve been slapped by her tail way too many times. I save her life... and now you are pointing weapons at me.” Dario spoke. He threw up his hands in disgust. “I can’t win cousin.”

“Do not move!” Pasat shouted as Na’lia came forward now and moved up next Channa.

“Channa... are you...” Na’lia looked at her face and saw her looking at the man oddly. “Channa?”

Whatever it was Channa decided; it was growing stronger by the millisecond. She could feel it pulsing through her like currents of electricity and it was energizing her body like before. It was like a blanket of power and warmth that was wrapping around her, protecting her and feeding her energy. The only problem with that was that Channa also felt it coming from the man in front of them. And it was staggering in its power.

Her eyes went wide and she looked at Mican. "Mican put your weapons down!" She barked. "Do it now! Quickly!"

Mican looked at her confused. "What?" He exclaimed. "Why?"

"Because if you don't... we will kill all of you and leave your corpses to rot." The new voice spoke from Mican's right side. He froze when he felt the cold steel barrel of a weapon press to his temple and he saw the slightly shorter but equally as wide Lycavorian step further from the shadows.

Pasat and the others began to shift their weapons and make ready to fight when the three piercing roars filled the darkness and three massive dragons dropped out of the night sky. The sounds of snapping and crushing trees that surrounded them echoed across the landscape as they landed in a triangle all around them, Sorran behind his bonded brother and Cemath behind Resumar. Gasps and yelps of surprise and fear echoed in the small clearing Dario and Channa's fight had brought them too and the Kavalian rebel troops staggered in all directions. They found there was really no where to turn as a dragon glared at them from every angle.

"I suggest you take my advice." Resumar spoke once more. "It has been a bitter night for us... and we would rather not have to kill those who are suppose to be our allies."

Mican didn't lower his weapon but he turned his eyes to look at Resumar and the head of the massive beast behind him, his arms shaking. He was superior in controlling his fear, but even Mican could feel the coldness of death grip the pit of his stomach with three of the beasts his kind were so terrified of.

"All... allies?" Mican spoke.

"You are Mican correct?" Resumar asked.

"How do you know that?" Mican demanded.

"The Avatar I have traveling with us heard it from the one you just left on VORTEX Cruiser 341." Resumar answered. "Put your weapons down... there are still High Coven troops like this one that survived the crashes of our ships. We do not need to fight them as well as each other."

"You... you are Resumar Leonidas?" Mican asked as his weapon began to come down slowly. "Son of King Leonidas."

Resumar nodded. "Yes. The man your friend here..." Resumar motioned to Channa. "...has been slapping around is my cousin Dario."

"She wasn't slapping me around." Dario snapped.

That does not appear to be the case my brother? Sorran spoke as he lowered his huge head next to Dario's shoulder and turned his eyes on him.

Dario turned his own head and looked at him. "Yeah... look at you? Big old knot on your head! Scales all busted up! You ain't looking so rosy either! I just got tossed three hundred meters across the surface of this planet and..."

Channa watched them converse back and forth with eyes of wonder. The head of the dragon alone looked as if it could swallow the man whole, but yet he stood there talking to the dragon as casually as one would a family member. She could not hear the dragon's end of the conversation, but it was obviously a lively one no doubt. Channa felt the presence of someone close to her and she turned her head quickly to come face to snout with the rather large dragon only one meter away. Her gasp of surprise drew the attention of Mican and the others.

"Channa!" Mican barked reaching for Na'lia instinctively to protect her. "Channa get back!"

Mirra moved her head closer to Channa; her amethyst colored eyes wide and unblinking as everything she had felt for two weeks came crashing to the forefront once more. The reasons she felt she needed to come on this mission. The reason that she choose to ride with Cemath and not Sorran, who she had taken quite the liking too according to Athani Little One. This was the reason standing before her with raven black hair and dazzling blue feline like eyes.

You can feel me can't you? Mirra asked gently within Mindvoice. *You can hear my words yes?*

Channa's eyes grew enormous then as the soft tone of the female voice echoed in her head. Amazingly it didn't frighten her... it soothed her more than anything else she had ever felt. Channa found herself nodding her head quickly at the question that voice had asked her and she sensed Mirra move even closer. Once more Channa ignored Mican's shout of alarm and that voice filled her head once more.

My... my name is Mirra. Touch me please.

Channa did so without a moment's hesitation, placing her palm flat on Mirra's snout. Na'lia, Mican and the other Kavalian troops all gasped in stunned shock as the light blue color psychic shield activated at the tips of Channa's fingers and began to spread back up her arm and around Mirra's massive head and snout and then down her long neck and across her lean muscular body until it ended at the very tip of her tail. By now it had engulfed Channa's entire body as well and she felt a whirlwind of memories and experiences race through her, places she had never been, people she had never seen. Wondrous places with towering mountains and lush forests, blue green oceans and white sandy beaches. Mirra's amethyst colored eyes opened slowly and she stared at Channa.

Destiny has brought us together my Bonded Sister. She spoke with giddy happiness in her words. And I am so very happy to finally meet you. May... may I hear your voice Channa my Bonded Sister?

"You know my name?" Channa gasped.

Mirra nodded her massive head. *I know many things about you now. Just as you know many things about me. You are strong and willful. Speak with your mind sister. It will come easily to you now.*

I don't know... Channa's eyes flew open when she began to answer without even using her mouth. She looked at Mirra with unabashed glee. *I... I spoke with my thoughts!* She exclaimed.

Mirra nodded. *And we will do so much more.*

Channa turned to the man and women who she regarded as brother and sister and she saw Na'lia with tears in her eyes and her hands over her mouth. Mican looked utterly stunned as she moved closer to Mirra and lifted her hands to brush her smooth scales.

"Mican! Na'lia!" She exclaimed now. "This is... this is Mirra! She is what I have been feeling all along!" Channa declared. "It has been her all this time!" Channa turned her head back and placed her small hands on either side of Mirra's massive snout. "My... my Bonded Sister!"

IRARUZU

"...say again?" The Puma Bane Commando Leader spoke as he pressed his finger into the curve of his slanted ear.

They were holding position four hundred meters away from the Drow estate waiting for the explosive traps to be tripped so that they could move forward and confirm that the two females who had escaped the store were dead. The soft whimpers of humiliation and pain still filtered to his ears from the two Drow females his men had brought with them. His men were growing tired with them, both of them beaten and raped more times than he cared to keep count.

"Major... a Bontawillian KJU21 Corvette landed at the spaceport minutes ago." The voice of the five member team he had left in the city reported.

"Why is this of interest to me?" The Major snapped.

"Not the ship sir... who exited the ship." The voice answered. "Senior Polemarch Walter Carson."

The Major's eyes grew wide. "The senior enlisted man in the entire Union? Here on Iraruzu! You must be mistaken!" He spat.

"No sir! I checked with our data files three times." The man answered calmly. "Two Elven Dragons from a unit assigned to Earth and an older Drow female also left the ship with him. They are just now departing the spaceport facilities and moving into the city."

"Why would the senior Enlisted man in the entire Union military be here? In a civilian ship no less." The Kavalian Major asked no one in particular.

"Events are still very confused here sir! Many people are still running around and looting the store! Others are just milling about in shock."

"Extend the simulated Deutrino field around the city as well." The Major ordered immediately. "His presence here is not a coincidence! It can't be! We are still waiting for these two females to show themselves and can not leave until we know they are dead. Destroy the Corvette with missiles from a secure location and then kill this Polemarch when he returns to investigate."

"As you order sir!" The voice answered.

“Major!” Another voice barked from his left and he turned to see the stationary guard pointing back towards the house. He could see the three remaining members of the Puma Bane team that had hit the Drow store in the city running across the open area towards them.

“Damn this can’t be good!” He spoke getting to his feet as the three men trotted up.

“Major!” The one who had been stabbed in the face by Lu’ria’s blade was first to speak.

“Why are you here Kamal?” The Major demanded. “You were suppose to insure they were dead before leaving the estate!”

“They did not enter the estate sir!” The assassin answered. “We discovered a hidden control room of sorts near the main entrance. Inside we found cameras and monitoring equipment. One of the cameras was directed on this location! They knew you were here!”

“Fuck!” The Puma Bane Leader snarled. “Where did they go?”

“They appear to have loaded several packs and then moved above ground through an escape hatch of sorts. It came out on the far side of the estate five hundred meters inside the timber. We returned rather than follow them.”

“They are on foot?” The Major asked.

“Yes sir.”

“They will try and get out from under the Deutrino Field!” The Major spat. “We can’t allow them to make their way into the mountains or we will lose them for sure.”

“Major... one of them is a human female.” The man spoke.

“Yes... a human female who has lived among the Drow for at least two to three years! She will be in excellent physical condition and extremely intelligent if she is a member of the Krypteria! She will also know how to kill our men! Take two more men with you and follow them! Pick up their trail before it becomes cold and...”

“I will find them Major.” The voice spoke from behind them.

The Major turned to see the tall young man come forward from behind two other commandos. His dark blond hair was matted with sweat and the camouflage paint decorating his face gave him a disturbing look, but there was no mistaking whose son this was.

“Leruk... your father entrusted you to me.” The Major spoke.

The young man nodded. His skin was deeply tanned with no trace of hair so like the Kavalian commandos that stood around him. He wore similar body armor and carried identical weapons, but he was definitely not Kavalian. “Yes he did.” The young man spoke. “He expects us to accomplish our mission as well. Making sure I am not put in danger was not part of that mission.”

“Leruk... you are the second son of Marshall Pusintin! You...”

“I am a Puma Bane Commando am I not?” The young man asked. “I have completed all the training just as these men have. I have been on four operations with your unit before this one. I am very capable Major. And I’m the only one among us who has the ability and advanced enough skill to track them by their scent. An ability my father taught me quite well.”

The Major met Leruk’s eyes for a moment before making his decision. “Kamal... take Leruk with you. I will remain here until I know this Carson person is dead and then I will follow with the rest of our force. Our secondary team is waiting at the rally point. If you need assistance contact them.”

“I will not need them sir.”

“If you do... do not hesitate to call them.” He spoke. “They are a hundred strong and they arrived only yesterday so they are fresh. Do nothing stupid Kamal... we have already lost more than we were supposed to lose on this mission. I hope the other teams fared better than we have. Six dead and five wounded. Against elves!” The Major shook his head. “I do not want to lose anymore.”

Kamal nodded. “As you order sir.”

Walter and Daba moved along the main street of the city. It had no official name but was the main port city and was simply called Iraruzu Center. The two Dragoons walked behind them, their eyes and ears alert for anything. All of them wore civilian clothes so as not to draw attention to themselves, but even still whoever they came across as they walked made it a point to move away quickly, all of them muttering under their breath

and looking at Daba. Walter's hand unconsciously caressed his right leg where his Nehtes rested in its thigh holster. He carried a standard P190A3, since these weapons were common finds out in The Wilds now. It was one of the very few weapons of war that Martin and Deia had allowed to be exported to allied worlds for the simple reason it was extremely reliable and rugged. They knew of course that the designs would have made their way to the Black Market eventually and they wanted to insure their allies had such weapons to defend themselves if need be. Over the course of the last few years however, many of them were turning up on the Black Market because of lost equipment caches or Black Marketers who had gotten their hands on several shipments of the weapon. While they had been seized and dealt with severely, they had already sold the weapons by the time they had been caught and now forged copies of the real weapon were turning up all over The Wilds. The real P190A3 was now considered a status of wealth and skill in The Wilds. Walter also wore a Limian Hand Blaster that fired hardened darts that carried a small explosive charge in the tip of the round. The charge was powerful enough to blow a half credit sized hole in the target causing massive bleeding and pain. He carried the weapon because it reminded him of the ancient Earth weapon he had grown fond of as a young man, the M1911 .45 caliber automatic.

Daba carried a K14 secured in a holster on her side under the long cape she wore, plus her dual Shakur fighting knives. They were a gift from Aihola when she became a Senator and she treasured them. The two Dragoons carried an assortment of weapons but Walter knew they were out of place here almost immediately. All of them moved with practiced grace and natural confidence. And there were very few elven mercenaries or pirates. The elves were just too noble a race to resort to such a life.

Walter finally stopped on the street outside what appeared to be some sort of small general store and he turned to look at Daba. "Something isn't right." He spoke to her.

Daba nodded as she looked around and then back to him. "I agree." She said softly. "And whatever it is... it has to do with me. They... the people are avoiding me like I have Acamarian Plaque."

Walter reached up and tapped his right ear. "Ceneia?"

"We're here Walter." She answered from the Corvette.

"Have you pulled up an overview of the city yet?" He asked. "It's bigger than we first thought."

"According to *Krypteria* records... the Drow front operation should be straight on the main street you are now on. It is approximately a hundred meters across from the large ten story structure on the left. It is the tallest building in the area. That is the main Lodge for visitors to this dreary place it appears."

Walter turned and spied the ten story building. He estimated it was three quarters of a kilometer away and he nodded. "Very well. I see it."

"Walter... be mindful. There is a lot of chatter on the radio frequencies about some sort of assassination at a store in the vicinity." Ceneia said. "I can't make heads or tails of what the idiots are saying, it's all very random, but I can tell you that something has just occurred that has got the population stirred up quite a bit."

"Yes..." Daba broke in touching her ear implant. "We are seeing it on the streets as well *ussta cryso*. They are treating me as if I have a disease of some sort."

"You Mistress?" Ceneia's voice answered.

"Yes... they are avoiding me." Daba spoke. "And going to great lengths to do so I might add."

"Walter... I don't like this." Ceneia said quickly. "Given what Majeir felt and now this? It smells like a trap."

Majeir... can you sense Lu'ria nearby? Walter asked within Mindvoice. He left their conversation open so that Daba and Ceneia would be able to hear and speak as well.

Not nearby no. I can feel her... but she is heavily shielded Walter and this is preventing me from touching her. I wish to take to the sky. I can find her quickly this way. Majeir told him.

Walter shook his head. *Not yet. We don't know what is going on Majeir and having you take to the skies from the spaceport would announce to everyone that there is a dragon on this world. The Drow's cover would be blown wide open.*

Walter... her shields have a... they...

Walter looked at Daba when he answered. *They what?*

They are far more powerful shields than she should have. Majeir told him. *It is almost as if someone is reinforcing her natural shields for her and they are doing it subconsciously. Someone with... Walter it is the*

same level of power I have felt whenever I go to visit Syrilth and Androcles or his father is there to see the Elder Council. Daba this... this is...

Another sign that what Lu'ria has felt all this time is true. Daba spoke softly.

Yes. Majeir answered.

Let's get to the store they are using and go from there. Walter spoke. *And do so quickly. Ceneia... keep your eyes open and let us know if you pick up anything unusual.*

Affirmative.

Walter turned to Daba. "Let's get moving." He said. "The longer we stay here the more this stinks like a trap just as Ceneia said."

WESTERN MOUNTAINS FORTY-SEVEN KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF CITY

Lu'ria lowered the small pair of macrobinoculars and looked at Jennifer who laid next to her. "See them?" She asked.

Jennifer nodded not taking her own long glasses from her eyes. "Six of them." She stated. "Roughly five clicks behind us. Moving quickly but not overly fast. They are being careful. They should not be able to follow us Lu'ria. How are they still tracking us?"

Lu'ria nodded and lifted her glasses again to focus in on Kamal and the five others with him. "The one in the front. He is not Kavalian."

Jennifer focused her glasses on the tall figure moving easily through the timber. He was not as large as the Kavalians though he conversed with them easily and they appeared to take his directions without question. Jennifer lowered her glasses. "A Lycavorian?" She gasped.

Lu'ria nodded as she watched them in her view. "Not part of the Union." She said. "But yes, he is a Lycavorian. He wears their uniform, carries their weapons and they are taking his orders without question. That is how they are following us."

"Our scents?" Jennifer exclaimed.

Lu'ria nodded. "Kavalians do not have as acute a sense of smell as Lycavorians. Whoever this man is, he is helping them willingly and must be someone of importance if they follow his directions and consult with him."

"If he can track us by our scent we will never lose them." Jennifer spoke quickly. She looked at Lu'ria. "They will run us into the ground Lu'ria."

Lu'ria shook her head. "The Matron Mother took me up here to hunt for several days. There is a stream two clicks further north from here. Along the bank are Hadarian Tulip Buds." She saw Jennifer's eyes fill with realization. "Yes... we can spread the buds all over our clothes and keep enough with us to continue doing this so that their bitter smell masks our scent. We will be ok until help arrives. Come."

"NO!!!"

Daba's cry shattered the chatter of the half dozen scavengers that were in the Drow store looting the shelves and manhandling the bodies of the dead. All of them had been stripped of their boots and half of their clothes, the many shelves of herbs and ointments now scattered all over the floor of the large store.

It was when her eyes fell upon the half naked body of her dear friend Vlonjra that Daba, Matron Mother of the Drow Family and Clan Dareitara, Senator on the Earth Council, went totally off the deep end and lost all control. Moving with all of her inbred elven speed Daba snatched her dual knives from her belt and fell upon the luckless Limian male before he ever knew what happened. Two vicious slashes and a gurgling sound filled the air as his head was nearly sliced clean off when Daba ripped both blades down either side of his neck. Moving with the fury of a Hurricane, the Limian female died next as Daba plunged her blades into the woman's chest as she turned to run. Two Evolli males, obviously leftovers from the war with the Union, began to unlimber their weapons. They were incredibly slow in their efforts and Daba had buried her blades in the neck

of one even as a P190 blew apart the silence in the store and the second Evolli's head splashed yellow blood onto the wall behind him as the Dragoon soldier next to Walter had brought his weapon up and fired with barely a pause.

The Icalro male and female were trying to back peddle from the lethal whirlwind of death that Daba had become and bring their sidearms up to target her. The male's eyes went wide when he saw the long shaft and broadhead of the Nehtes burst from his neck just below his jaw. He died without seeing Daba spin in midair and bury one of her blades in the oval skull of the Icalro female just above her eyes. Walter ripped his Nehtes free of the Icalro male's shredded throat and kicked him forward with a heavy boot, his own face a mask of disbelief and rage. He turned as Daba dropped her blades and fell beside her friend on the floor of the store, weeping uncontrollably as she reached out with shaking hands. She ignored the insects that were buzzing around Vlonjra's bloody skull, ignored the bits of her scalp and hair that fell away when she lifted her ever so gently off the floor and Daba dropped her head to Vlonjra's chest and let out a wail of sorrow that would have woken the dead.

Walter turned to the two Dragoons, the one having fired his weapon being Hval. "Hval... check the others! Olar... watch the entrance!"

Walter kept his Nehtes extended for quick use as he let his eyes move around the inside of the store. There was blood everywhere on the floor, the bodies of six Drow crumpled in death, all of them having been shot at least a dozen times, including the two females. The male Drow closest to the door was perforated with holes, half his head gone and his mid section looking as if someone had used him for target practice. The fingers on his bloody hands were all broken from where someone obviously smashed them to get the weapon out of his dead hands. As his eyes scanned the interior he noticed the smashed wall behind the counter to the left and he moved quickly to the counter, vaulting it on one bound. He slowly drew his K12 as he let his Nehtes lead his body into the darkness of the tunnel. He squatted and stopped, letting his eyes change and then taking note of the rail tunnel and dimly lit section of track.

"Holy One!" Hval spoke moving up to the counter.

Walter stood back up and turned to looked at the Dragoon. "Hval?"

Hval shook his head slowly. "None of them survived Holy One." He spoke softly. "Four appear to have been caught completely off guard, the last two at least died fighting." He pointed to the front. "From the directions of the projectile strikes, they assaulted from the front door. Rigor is only just now setting in, this did not happen long ago. An hour... two at most."

Walter nodded his head as he cleared the counter once more in a single leap Hval saw this and watched with keen eyes. Nearly thirty-one hundred years old and he didn't look a day over forty-five. The last surviving Spartan to have fought with his former King at Thermopylae, and next to that King's son who he now served with devotion and honor, he was perhaps the most recognizable face within the Union. His history was taught in the schools on Apo Prime, Earth, and every planet in the Union just about. He was in better physical shape now than he had been in nearly a thousand years, for the moment Martin had named him Senior Polemarch of the entire Union Ground Army, Walter's life had begun once more.

Walter moved quickly to where Dana wept softly now. He didn't bend over but instead placed his hand gently on her shoulder. "Daba?" He said seeing her head come up. "Daba... I need your skills now. Tell me what happened here."

Daba lowered Vlonjra's body reverently to the floor and wiped the tears from her eyes. She folded her friend's hands across her chest and touched her fingers to Daba's open amber eyes. Gently she closed her eyelids and stroked her cheek one more time before slowly getting to her feet. She turned to Walter and met his eyes taking a deep breath. "Forgive me." She whispered.

Hval was the one to answer and he reached out to squeeze her arm. "You have nothing to apologize for Matron Mother. You acted as any of us would have."

Walter nodded. "Hval is right." He said. "Right now however... I can smell over a hundred scents, mixed in with the herbs and ointments that are now scattered over the floor; I can't pick out any individual one."

Daba nodded and allowed her eyes to sweep the room quickly. She stepped away from the two men, bending down to pick up her blades as she looked toward the entrance. "Seven of them." She spoke. "Two

broke towards the counter, the other five stood here.” She said moving to one spot in the floor that was covered in blood.

“Hval?” Walter spoke and the Dragoon pulled the small hand sensor from a pouch on his combat harness and moved up next to her squatting by a large portion of the blood pools and holding the sensor out.

Daba turned her head and looked around. “Two fell.” She said pointing to blood pools larger than the others and squatting next to Hval. “Another injured badly but living.”

Hval looked at her. “How can you tell that Matron Mother?” He gasped.

Daba pointed to the blood pools on the floor. “The differences and color of the texture of blood.” She answered him. “Lethal wounds produce dark red blood that is thick and consistent. Severe wounds... but those that aren’t life threatening... they produce a lighter color blood with less consistency and less thickness like this.” She said pointing.

The sensor in Hval’s hand beeped softly and he looked at it with wide eyes. He stood up quickly, Walter looking at him. “Hval?” Walter asked.

“Kavalian blood.” He spoke.

Walter and Daba both stepped closer to him. “Kavalian blood?” Walter snapped. “Are you sure?”

Hval twisted the sensor in his hand. “The scanner is.” He replied. “We should...”

“Walter!” Ceneia’s voice broke through on the COM.

Water lifted a finger to his ear and activated his implant. “Ceneia we are rather busy here. There are no survivors inside the store, but it appears Lu’ria and another made it out. We...”

“Walter shut up and get back to the ship!” Ceneia barked. “Something has happened on Earth!”

Walter looked at Daba as his blood went cold. “What has happened?”

“I’m watching a garbled transmission from Prime Minister Deia recorded about thirty minutes ago. I tapped into the frequency of one of the spaceport Netnews channels. It’s an automated report that keeps repeating. The Deutrino field has somehow extended over the city itself. Walter... Walter there has been a series of coordinated terrorist assaults made by High Coven Commando units on Earth.” Ceneia’s voice sounded tense and anxious. “It’s says that Zarah Leonidas was... *Saoi sibfla!*”

“Ceneia!” Walter barked.

“Majeir! Unamal! Get off the ship! Get off the ship now!” Ceneia’s voice screamed into his implant.

The explosion caused Walter to wince and then they felt the ground shudder beneath them. Olar rushed into the building.

“Holy One! The Spaceport!” He shouted. “Our ship!”

“Ceneia!” Walter screamed. “Ceneia answer me!”

“Holy One!” Daba snapped. “We must go back!” She exclaimed. “I will not lose her!”

Walter looked at Hval. “Incendiary Charges!” He popped.

Hval yanked his small pack from his shoulders and practically tore open the top before yanking out three oversized grenades. “Plasma grenades!” He announced.

Walter snatched one. “Good enough!” He barked. “Burn it! Burn it all! We won’t leave them for the scavengers on this foul world to have!” He twisted the charging timer on the top of his grenade and tossed it over the counter into the opening of the tunnel he had viewed. Hval tossed one of the grenades to Daba as he twisted the timer on his grenade and tossed it behind the main counter. Daba repeated the action a third time and looked at the body of Vlonjra.

“You rest with the King’s father now my dearest friend.” She spoke softly before rolling the grenade onto the floor next to her body. “Watch over us and I will sing your name into the future.”

“Go! Go!” Walter snapped. “Back to the spaceport!”

The Kavalian Gunner lowered his rocket launcher after putting the third and final rocket into the now burning ship through the top of the spaceport bay ceiling. He felt the pat on his shoulder and turned.

“Excellent shooting Kao!” His squad officer spoke.

“Nothing will live through that sir.” Koa answered.

The officer nodded. “Indeed.” He answered.

“Now what sir?”

The officer grinned as he looked up the street where they could see hundreds of others scrambling to get out of the way of each other and to avoid any secondary explosions that might occur.

“Now we wait for the old Lycavorian and Drow bitch to show themselves and then we kill them.” The Kavalian said. “How many rockets do you have left?”

“Two.”

“Load one... prep the other.” The officer ordered. “We may need to take out some of these ridiculous scum to actually kill this Polemarch.”

Walter grabbed Daba’s arm as they made their way down the street, pushing aside civilians that were rushing in the other direction.

“Hval! Olar!” Walter snapped bringing the two Dragoons up short.

“Holy One we...” Daba’s face was filled with sincere concern and dread.

Ceneia? Walter reached out within Mindvoice. *Majeir?*

We live Walter. Majeir’s voice answer almost immediately.

Walter could see the massive relief on Daba’s face. *Where are you?*

Ceneia ussta cryso! Daba exclaimed.

I am alright Mistress! Ceneia answered immediately. *A little cooked from the rush of flames but ok.*

Majeir and I made it off the ship! Ceneia said. *Unamal was not so lucky! We’re hiding in a storage room off the west side of the hanger itself. It’s beneath the overhang of the ceiling and they can’t see us.*

Who can’t see you? Walter demanded.

Kavaliens Walter! Ceneia answered. *A rocket team from the building next to our hanger. It was looking directly down into the bay. They fired three rockets. The ship is wasted.*

Nubou the ship! Walter exclaimed. *Kavaliens attacked the Drow in their store. They killed everyone except Lu’ria and another female it appears. They made it out through a hidden rail tunnel.*

Walter... why are the Kavaliens killing the Drow and attacking us? Majeir asked.

Ceneia you said something about Deia. Walter asked.

We were watching it when the Kavaliens attacked. Several High Coven Commando Teams attacked different sites on Earth. Zarah... Zarah Leonidas was raped and nearly beaten to death. The Prime Minister was beginning to speak about Prince Androcles but then the rockets hit. Ceneia replied quickly. *It was a recorded transmission Walter. The damn Deutrino field has extended over the entire city now. This was a fucking trap! The whole thing was a trap!*

Ceneia... stay calm damn it! Walter barked out. *Majeir... can you get airborne?*

Yes. Unamal... Unamal was kind enough to put my saddle on while we waited for you. I will take Ceneia and burn them for what they have done! Majeir answered with heat in her tone.

No! Walter almost yelled. He knew Majeir to be strong willed and very independent. He had watched her grow from a hatchling and the day he had saved her from the White Skinned cannibals in that Mountain in North America. He had watched her on the oceanside cliff as Martin asked her to decide the fate of Maruad. And more horrible a death he could not think of at the moment. Through the years she had become supremely intelligent and having an older sister who sat on the Dragon Council, having a brother who was bonded to two of the most famous female elves on Earth, and having unfettered access to the Royal family and the Bonded dragons who were part of their family made Majeir very confident and skilled. She had trained for days with Elynth and Jeth and Tharua her second older sister. All of the children of Torma and Isheeni. She was just as much a part of their family as they considered Walter to be even though he and Majeir were not bonded. She was also exceptionally passionate about things and very defensive of those she loved and cared for. *Majeir... they will know where Lu’ria is. You can’t kill them!*

Lu’ria! Majeir exclaimed. *If they have harmed her Walter, by all that I hold dear, I will burn and tear my way to the very heart of the Kavalian homeworld and I will take my fury and vengeance on them!*

Daba looked at Walter with wide amber eyes when she heard this but he didn’t answer as he shook his head. *If you get airborne... can you find her quickly?*

Within a few hours at most. Majeir answered confidently. Having Androcles reinforcing her shields also makes it easy to track her. His signature is so clear and powerful and when combined with hers it is like a beacon.

I would assume the rail tunnel we found leads back to the Drow estate outside the city. That will be the first place we look. Walter spoke.

What about this rocket team? Ceneia asked quickly.

Walter looked at Daba. Leave them to Daba and I. Where were they again?

The five story building to the east of our bay. It appears decrepit and almost mossy green in color.

Ceneia answered. Walter how will we know when you have succeeded.

Walter met Daba's eyes and she watched his wolf eyes once more take shape and narrow. His wolf fangs slowly extended from his gums and Daba felt a shiver of fear course through her. He had known the Holy One for many years, and at this moment she was more afraid of him than at any time in her life.

You'll know when we discover if Kavalians can fly! Walter Carson snarled.

*Now that...!!! Majeir announced loudly. **That is my Walter!!!***

I can tell you that a tough-minded optimism is best.

The future is not shaped by people who don't really believe in the future.

Men and women of vitality and courage have always been prepared to bet their futures, even their lives, on ventures of unknown outcome Androcles.

If they had all looked before they leaped, we would still be crouched in caves sketching animal pictures on the wall.

That was always your father's way, and though you do not wish to admit it, it is your way as well my boy.

The decision is now yours Androcles Leonidas.

I suspect no matter what, you will do your father proud

-The Feravomir to Androcles-

-Three days before the start of the Kavalian Wars-

-Earth Year 2576-

-Recorded by Dilaen Roan-

-Narrator-

-Personal Journals of Androcles Leonidas-

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

RITAAH

PILLAR OF FAITH

Antell gripped the arms of his command chair as the *FAITH* executed an amazingly tight turn for a ship her size. It was habit for him, even though he could barely feel his ship turning, left over from his days as an *AUTUMN MOON* Commander. The attack frigate was perhaps the most maneuverable ship he had ever commanded and you could feel each and every turn and increase in speed.

“Port and starboard batteries reinforce!” Antell barked as the *FAITH* settled on a more level course. “Reload torpedo launchers! All Type One turrets to stand by, Type Two's to manual control! Status of Mark22Bs?”

“Thirteen seconds to full reload Captain!” The answer came immediately.

Antell stood up from his chair. “Damage status?”

“Moderate damage to our ventral hull!” His XO reported from the console to the left. “Minor cracks in the plasma conduit seals running the aft quarter of decks fourteen and fifteen. Damage crews are already

repairing them! Shields are down to fifty-three percent but they are recharging quickly! No hull breaches sir! That Dragon Armor coating our hull is a gift from the gods! We caught them flatfooted sir!”

Antell nodded. “That we did. Status of *FREEDOM’S VOICE* and the *GREATSOUL*?” Antell barked.

“*FREEDOM’S VOICE* took heavy damage to her starboard quarter, but she gave more than she got! She’s leaking plasma in two locations but it’s nothing serious. Her shields are down to thirty-eight percent and minor buckling to her forward compartment. Her shields are recharging faster than ours though!”

Antell grinned. “The Coven is making their ships tougher nowadays.” He spoke. “The Kavalians?”

“The *GREATSOUL* is dead in space sir!” His XO announced. “Massive damage to her structural integrity fields and engines! Shields are gone! Sensors are detecting over a dozen hull breaches including all three of her landing bays!” He turned and looked at Antell. “That must be why she got no fighters off! The Mark22s and Type Ones carved her up good sir! Our Point Defense turrets only added to the damage.”

“Power readings?” Antell asked.

“Minimal sir!” The XO replied. “Their power core is offline and readings indicate its fluxuating wildly. If scans are accurate... they have massive casualties. I don’t know if she will even stay together. Sensors are reading massive stress fractures to her hull in three different locations!”

“Too bad for them.” Antell spoke. “They chose the wrong ships to pick a fight with. What about the rest of the Kavalian ships?” Antell asked moving to a console and looking over the shoulder of the operator.

“The Insurgent ships and our fighters mopped them up quickly Captain.” His XO told him. “I don’t think they’ve had much experience in combined forces action sir. CAG reports they couldn’t respond quickly enough to their actions. Our fighters were working with the Coven fighters that launched and taking directions from the second *BLOOD REVERENCE*. And they were pounding the *sibfla* out of them!”

Antell couldn’t help but smile. “Interesting XO. Combined Forces Control gave them fits. I thought the Coven used CFC just as much as we did, the Kavalians should be used to it, so that’s a bit of information we didn’t know.” He spoke. “Let’s file that for further review XO, we might need it in the future.”

“Aye sir!”

“Get me Maros on the *VOICE*.” Antell ordered.

“Stand by!” The COM officer declared. It only took a few moments. “Captain Maros online sir.”

Antell turned to his holodisc on the bridge as Maros’s image appeared and became clear. “Captain Maros.”

“Captain Antell!” Maros spoke with a grin. “We are reading massive damage to the Kav ship! We caught them by surprise with our maneuver!”

Antell nodded in agreement. “Your damage sir?” Antell asked. As far as Antell was concerned these Coven ships were now his best friends, and Antell was known for looking out for his friends.

“Nothing we can not repair quickly. My damage control teams are already working on it. Twenty of my gun crew personnel were injured, but I have no deaths that I’m aware of right now.” Maros spoke his face showing the thanks of the question without actually speaking it. One commander to the next with respect. “You?”

Antell nodded. “About the same. Colonel Vonis?”

“He should already be on the surface by now.” Maros spoke. “I would imagine he will link up with his nephew shortly. One of us will hear from him when he does. Your Colonel Vonis does not strike me as one to stay out of the mix so to speak.”

Antell nodded with a smile. “No... I don’t imagine he is. Captain Maros, I extend an invitation to you and your senior officers to meet with me here on the *FAITH*. I can send a transport for you if needed. It appears we are now allies, and that makes me feel a whole lot better.”

“I would be honored to accept Captain.” Maros replied immediately. He had no intention of allowing this opportunity to slip away. Lucia had set the Insurgency on this path and Maros was going to see her wish fulfilled.

“The Kavalians got a message off just before we attacked. We don’t know what it was they were able to tell their command, but we should assume the worse. We should expect some sort of response within a day or so I would think. I suggest we put our heads together and plan for that.” Antell spoke.

Maros nodded. “Agreed. I will come over in a LRR. Say one hour?”

Antell nodded. "I'll be waiting." He answered. "*FAITH* is clear." Antell waited for the transmission to end before turning to his XO. "Let's get our fighters recovered and rearmed and have them on standby. And get the damn Shroud back up so we don't have our *mida* hanging out here!"

His XO nodded. "Yes sir!"

The sun was beginning its climb into the sky over Ritaah and it found all of them gathered around the rear ramp of Resumar's crashed *STRIKER*. The Lycavorian troops and Kavalian rebels were mixed together, all of them pointing out into the surrounding timber in case the Coven troops who had escaped made some sort of attack against them. Mican sat next to Na'lia across from Resumar, Athani and Julie. Mirra rested on the ground inside that small perimeter, Channa sitting between her front forelegs lotus style. Cemath sat to Mirra's right facing her and Channa and he watched with some humor as Mirra kept dipping her huge head and rubbing the back of Channa's shoulder and head. She hadn't stopped asking questions and Mirra and Cemath were doing their level best to answer them all without overloading her with information.

Mican turned his eyes from Channa and settled them back on Resumar and Athani who sat very close to him and was looking at him intently with those blue/green eyes.

"The... the green one is your dragon?" Mican asked.

Resumar nodded his head with a smile. "We are bonded as Channa and Mirra now are. We do not consider them possessions... but yes... he is my Bonded Brother. His name is Cemath."

"How long have you and he...?" Na'lia asked softly.

"Since I was eight years old." Resumar answered.

"And they are speaking within this thing you call Mindvoice?" Mican asked. "You can hear them?"

Resumar nodded. "Yes. Channa is very inquisitive. She is asking them question after question." He said with a smile turning to look back at her. "She will learn quickly however. That is usually the case with those who are not bonded from childhood. They learn quickly from their bonded ones. She's very strong within Mindvoice. Stronger than I would have thought to be honest." He turned back to Mican. "I wanted to thank you for coming to our aide so quickly."

"Not fast enough it seems." Mican spoke. "The machine at the ship did not tell us right away. We could not arrive before all of this happened."

Resumar looked around at the condition of the *STRIKER* and nodded. "Yes... well I don't think it would have mattered much at all given the way things went down."

"Do you know how many of the Coven survived?" Na'lia asked.

"That is what Julie and Dario will try and determine while they are out there." Resumar answered.

"They know where this ship is Resumar Leonidas." Mican spoke. "Will they not try and gain entrance to it?"

Res shook his head. "Avi... the avatar that travels with us... he made sure to inform the avatar on the ship here what our intentions were, as well as the possibility that the Coven might attempt to gain entrance to the ship without us."

Na'lia smiled now. "You gave him a name." She spoke evenly. "Avi... short for avatar I take it?"

Resumar nodded with a smile. "It was something my father's pilot did when they first discovered City Ship 41 on Lycavore." He answered looking up into the back of the ship where Avi was taking inventory of the explosives. "He's developed his own unique personality since he came back with the ship."

"How is it that a female elf came to be inside Kavalian space?" Athani asked looking at Na'lia.

Na'lia met her eyes. "That is a story for another time." She answered unwilling to just announce how she and the others came to be among them. "Mican is my husband... we have been here for almost four years."

"We?" Resumar asked.

"There are ninety-six other elves that live among the Kavalians here." Na'lia answered. "We are doctors and scientists. Many of us have Kavalian husbands. Some... like me... have children with our husbands." She said looking at Mican with love and adoration.

Resumar looked at Na'lia intently, suddenly remembering what Andro had told him their cousin Anton and his Drow wife Cihera were working on and how it related to their mother and what was happening with Anja and even connected to Dysea and Normya.

“So you are among the hundred or so elves that were ostensibly kidnapped from their transports within Union space and made to appear dead.” Resumar spoke calmly. His eyes went to Mican. “I take it you and your people did the kidnapping?”

“I will not...” Mican began to speak forcefully but Na'lia grabbed his arm and squeezed causing him to look at her. “Na'lia... I...”

“However we arrived here...” Na'lia began turning back to Resumar. “We remained here because it was *our* choice. Mican wanted our help in saving the biogenic clones from their built in cycle of death. We agreed once he explained to us what it was they wanted. We succeeded in this task and many of us chose to remain here willingly for we had found something to remain for.” Na'lia looked at Mican with those bright eyes. “I found love and so much more.” She turned back to Resumar. “I would not change anything that has happened in these past years and I will not allow it to be taken away from me. None of us will.”

Athani looked at Resumar and a small smile split her lips. She turned back to Na'lia. “As someone who found love and a future in the most unlikely of places Na'lia, you have no fears in losing what you have found. And you may tell the others this as well.”

“Your sister will be very happy.” Resumar stated.

Na'lia's head snapped around to look at him. “Sister!” She gasped. “Las'elh... she has...”

Resumar nodded. “She hasn't stopped looking for you. She never believed you died in the accident. She has been looking for you ever since. Right now she is with my mother and cousin working an angle of what is going on that seems to be all leading in one direction. I believe she has also found love. With my cousin and his Drow wife.”

“Drow?” Na'lia gasped.

“I don't know the whole story... but it appears from the last time I talked to my mother that is what was happening between them.” Resumar spoke. “We will need to pass on the information that you live. It will go a long way to easing the need to find you within your sister until such time as we can arrange it safely.” He looked at Mican. “And you will need to give us the names of those who you contacted that supplied you with the information you needed to kidnap them in the first place.”

“My name would be taboo in The Wilds then.” Mican spoke shaking his head.

“Your name would be taboo in The Wilds, but it won't matter because when we leave here all of you are coming with us.” Athani stated firmly. Athani looked at Mican and saw his eyes boring into her once more. He had been staring at her at different times since they had arrived back here and it was beginning to make her feel uncomfortable. True to her nature Athani decided to face this head on. “Why do you stare at me?” She asked. “You have been staring at me at different times since you came here. Why?”

Mican looked at Na'lia quickly before lowering his eyes. “Forgive me. I meant no offense.” He said. “I...”

Resumar came to his feet quickly then, his head coming up as he turned to the wood line. Athani looked at him oddly as she stood.

“Resumar?” She asked. “What... what is it?”

Uncle? Resumar reached out within Mindvoice as he felt the familiar tremors and MV resonance.

Resumar... it's been a long time my boy. Vonis's voice filled his head causing Athani to gasp in surprise.

Uncle... where are you?

I have two others with me Resumar. Vampires. Vonis's voice answered him immediately. *I would prefer we did not get shot. I'd like to come in and we can compare notes.*

Resumar stepped away from Athani. “Colonel Vonis coming in!” He shouted. “Hold fire! Colonel Vonis coming in!”

This pronouncement caused the Lycavorians to turn towards him surprised but they quickly lowered their weapons and urged their Kavalian counterparts to do the same. They all knew who Vonis was and none of them wanted to be the one to shoot and kill Queen Isabella's brother.

Mican and Na'lia came to their feet as well now as they saw three individuals unwrap the shadows from around their bodies as they left the tree line and trot quickly towards their small perimeter. Resumar moved quickly to greet his taller uncle as he entered the perimeter with the stunning young vampire female and surprisingly wide vampire soldier. Resumar knew right away they were both Purebloods like his uncle. Resumar and Vonis grasped forearms and he couldn't help but smile.

“Uncle!” He exclaimed with a smile. “To say this is a complete surprise would be beyond words!”

Vonis chuckled and squeezed Res’s thick arms. “Yes I would imagine it is.” He stated.

“Father didn’t...” Resumar started.

Vonis shook his head. “No! No one knows I’m here. Your mothers left me with the High Coven insurgents several months ago. That is where I have been.”

“Then you made contact with them?” Resumar asked remembering the Commando team that had attacked the Kavalian delegation on *MJOLNIR’S HAND*.

Vonis nodded. “You won’t believe me when I tell you who their leader is... but it is she who ordered them out here to watch over you. It appears she was right in sending us here. The Captain of your ship is a man of vision Res. He didn’t bat an eye when the insurgent ships with me offered their help.”

“Ships?” Resumar asked.

Vonis nodded again. “I haven’t made contact since we entered the atmosphere, but when we last saw them, the Kavalian ships were getting their asses handed to them by something I never thought I would witness in my lifetime. Union and Coven ships fighting as one unit.”

“I told Antell to get the *FAITH* out of the system.” Resumar spoke sternly.

Vonis nodded his head. “And that is exactly what they were doing. They were drawing the Kavalians into the outer system away from Ritaah. And kicking the *sibfla* out of them in the process!”

“Then she made it.” Resumar said softly.

Vonis nodded. “That is my conclusion as well. We’ll probably be hearing from one of them soon.” He looked up as Athani came up next to Resumar, Mican and Na’lia just behind her. Vonis looked at Athani with smiling dark eyes. “And this is the Athani Leonidas I have heard so much about these last months.” He spoke taking her hand and leaning over to kiss her knuckles. “Res... when are you and your brothers going to stop making so many waves in the things you do?”

Resumar laughed then and nodded his head. “We do have that tendency don’t we?” He said. “Athani... this is my Uncle Vonis. My mother Isabella’s brother.”

Athani smiled at him then. “Yes... I’ve heard much of you.” She stated.

Vonis chuckled once more. “Yes... all of it bad I’m sure. My elven wife Va’nimia is trying very hard to change my reputation around.”

“Actually... it was all very good.” Athani said.

“Really... then perhaps Va’nimia’s work is paying off.” He stated. He looked at Mican and held out his hand to the equally as tall Kavalian. “Colonel Vonis... Union Intelligence.”

Mican looked very surprised and hesitated for a moment before taking the hand. He had never had a vampire ask to shake his hand, and Vonis’s grip was firm and friendly. “I am Mican.” He said. “This is my wife Na’lia.”

Vonis bowed his head to her slightly, not batting an eye at this information and he turned too motion at the man and woman with him. “Lieutenant Commander Asharli and Senior Trooper Orthon. They are members of the insurgency as well.”

“Uncle... Uncle why are you here?” Resumar asked.

“Lucia Moran sent us out here to look out for you.” Vonis answered.

Resumar looked quickly to Athani and then back to Vonis. “Lucia Moran?” He gasped in shock.

Vonis nodded. “Trust me... I was just as surprised as you.” He stated. “But she is the leader of the Insurgency. They call her the General. I don’t know all the specifics, but she did not trust her mother and grandmother, she made me aware of this and then ordered her people out here to help in whatever way they could. We’ve been waiting for two days now and did not know you had even arrived until the *FAITH* lost her Shroud. You know that the Kavalian fleet that was here left just before we arrived?”

Resumar nodded. “Yes.”

“The other *STRIKER*? That was the explosion we detected as we were coming in?” Vonis asked.

Resumar nodded his head. “We knew they would attempt something. They hit us just as we landed. They killed my pilot and I had to detach the rear compartment to give us the edge to drive them off. They hit Dario’s *STRIKER* while they were still in the air the idiots! Killed the pilots and she dropped the last hundred or so feet. The crash broke open one of the explosive containers we brought and an electrical fire set it off.”

“Dario? Sorran?” Vonis asked quickly, the worry on his face evident and real.

“They survived. Barely. They are out now circling the area attempting to find out how many of the Coven troops survived and what direction they went in. Julie is with them and...” Resumar said.

“Julie?” Vonis asked.

Resumar shook his head. “Another long story.” He spoke. “They should be back soon. We’re going to move to the MV ship then. Avi has been in contact with that ship’s Avatar for a few hours now.”

Vonis nodded and looked around. “Well... you got three more under your command now.” He spoke. “Antell and Maros won’t come near the planet now... not with us here. They won’t want to draw attention to us and they will keep the Kavalians at bay as much as they are able.”

“We can talk to them once we get to the MV ship.” Resumar spoke.

“You were going to use Cemath and the other dragons to move the explosives from here to there weren’t you. That’s why you landed so far away?”

Resumar nodded. “We didn’t want to get too close until we knew where Mican and his people stood in the scheme of things. Those plans didn’t go very well.”

“Most plans never go right.” Vonis said.

“We’re not flying out of here in the *STRIKERS*, so I was going to get everyone to the MV ship and then contact Antell.” Resumar said. “We’ll have to go to plan B.”

Vonis grinned. “Plan B?”

“Uncle... I always have a Plan B.” Resumar spoke.

They turned as the hulking figure of Avi came down the steep ramp with a data pad in his hand. He marched right up to where Resumar stood and his eyes fell on Vonis.

-Colonel Vonis. None of our mission scenarios involved your presence. Interesting. You have a similar mission as we do?-

Vonis shook his head. “No. It just so happens that our paths have come together Avi.” He answered.

-Curious- He looked at Athani. –This is an example of chance I take it?-

Athani nodded. “Yes it is.” She said with a smile.

-Fascinating. I will need to study this more when we return to Earth- He replied holding out the data pad to Resumar. –I have finished my inventory Resumar Leonidas-

“Where do we stand Avi?” Resumar asked.

-With the destruction of *STRIKER TWO* we lack sufficient quantities of explosives to completely destroy the ship. We can cripple it... but...-

“It still allows others access to its technology with what’s left.” Resumar said.

Avi nodded. **-Correct-**

“You wish to destroy this ship?” Na’lia asked surprised. “But why?”

“Those are my father’s orders.” Resumar answered looking at her. “Destroy this ship so that it does not fall into the hands of the Coven or the Kavalians. The only problem now is that we don’t have enough explosives to do the job! We...”

Resumar stopped talking when Sorran’s massive form swept in from above the trees and he flared his wings quickly and landed to the excited and anxious chatter of the Kavalians on the perimeter. Julie was clinging tightly to Dario’s waist, her eyes wide and the moment they landed she leaped from Sorran’s back and landed on shaky legs. Dario was grinning as he dropped easily from the saddle while Sorran was still settling to the ground. He moved up and placed his hands on Sorran’s huge head as he lowered it to Dario’s shoulder.

Let me brief Resumar and I will tend to your scales brother. Dario spoke softly.

Sorran nodded his head as he looked at Dario. They had been bonded together for over fifteen years now, and though Sorran was six hundred and four years old, he felt younger and more vibrant now than at any point in his life. He had never envisioned himself bonded to a rider, yet their personalities matched seamlessly from that very first day. Their banter back and forth was famous among the Bonded Pairs, and while it may have seemed callous and uncaring to an outsider, there was nothing Sorran and Dario would not do for each other.

The Apricot salve. Sorran spoke. *It smells good.*

Dario chuckled and pounded Sorran on his thick scaled neck before turning to follow Julie. His eyes narrowed in surprise when he saw Colonel Vonis standing with Resumar, but Dario had grown up first with his father as part of Anja's *Durcunusaan* detail on Hadaria and other places she went. He had, more than any other cousin, interaction with all of the Leonidas children from a very young age. Some said this was the reason he was now bound to a dragon, that being with them and playing with them as children stimulated his MV abilities to higher levels than he might have normally achieved. Dario didn't care one way or the other. He loved his life and what he did.

Julie was looking at Vonis intently as she walked up, her eyes darting back and forth between him and Resumar. She knew who Vonis was; there was an extensive file on the son of Aikiro who was now considered a traitor of the highest sort by the High Coven. Julie had to admit, he didn't seem concerned about that in the least.

She turned her attention fully to Resumar when she stopped. "I estimate between fifteen and twenty of them survived Resumar." She spoke. "We swept the entire area for a kilometer around the ship with Dario in wolf form and I wrapped in the shadows. If any were watching us, we would have seen them."

Dario stepped up to the small group and smiled as Vonis held his hand out. "This is a surprise Colonel." He spoke.

Vonis nodded. "I imagine surprises are becoming common for you now that you are hanging out with your cousin more."

Dario nodded with a chortle. "That's the *nubous* truth." He said quickly. He turned to Resumar. "Julie believes they would have started for their preplanned rendezvous point Res." He said. "Four kilometers north of here and two kilometers west of the MV ship."

Mican's eyes grew a little wider. "That puts them very close to our settlement!" He stated. "Too close!"

Res met his eyes. "How many of your people are there?"

"Over three hundred. Including our daughter." Mican answered his voice holding the tenseness of a concerned parent.

Julie shook her head. "I don't believe they would try anything..." She said looking at Mican. "To be safe however... I recommend we move Mican's people from that settlement to the MV ship Resumar. I can not predict what they will do now and better to move them during the day. They would be safer in the MV ship for the time being. Even we would be hard pressed to defend ourselves against them at night and we can see them or sense them within the shadows for the most part. The Kavalian rebels would not stand a chance."

Resumar didn't hesitate in the least and nodded his head. "I agree." He said looking at Vonis. "Uncle?"

"You are in command Res." Vonis answered looking at Julie. "Though I tend to agree with..."

"Julie." She answered immediately. "Julie Collins."

Vonis's eyes grew a little larger but he didn't pause in his response. He knew well who Julie Collins had been. There were very few people close to the Leonidas family who did not know who Julie Collins was. Or who she used to be actually. "I tend to agree with Ms. Collins here." He said. "If any of them are injured they'll use whatever blood they have to heal and hold up today. Tonight however, they'll need to replenish that stock. The easiest way to do that is take Mican's people."

Resumar nodded then. "Avi... divide the remaining explosives between Cemath, Mirra and Sorran. The rest of us will load up with what we have left and move to Mican's settlement." He turned to Mican and saw his blue eyes were wide in shock and Na'lia's expression matched his. "Can you contact your people and have them prepared to move? Take only what they can carry."

"You... you will help us?" Mican asked surprised. "Why?"

"We are part of the reason your people are now at risk." Resumar spoke. "Helping you will only help us in the end. Uncle... your ship?"

“Well hidden and under Shroud.” Vonis told him. “Asharli has the remote for it. We could call it if need be.”

Resumar shook his head. “No. We’ll save it for when we need it.” He said. “How long are the days here?”

Na’lia stepped forward. “Once the sun fully reaches its apex, we will have perhaps ten hours left of daylight.” She replied. “It should reach its apex in three hours.”

“Thirteen hours.” Resumar spoke. “We’re already behind schedule as it is. Let’s get to it people!”

Avi stepped up to Resumar and Athani as the others turned to alert everyone that they would be moving.
–Resumar Leonidas... this is not part of the mission parameters–

“I know Avi.” Resumar said softly.

–Interaction with the rebels here was to be minimal at most. VORTEX Cruiser 341 is a Pralor combat vessel. This single ship under full power could decimate fully one quarter of the Union fleet if it fell into the wrong hands. It must be destroyed–

“I know Avi.” Resumar spoke. “We had a hand in putting these people at risk by coming here. We have to help them.”

–They were already at risk Resumar. The Kavalian government obviously would destroy them if they knew of their existence–

“Avi... it is the right thing to do.” Athani spoke. “We can’t just leave them to their fates. The High Coven actions most likely gave away our presence here. The explosion of *STRIKER TWO* would have been viewable from every ship in the immediate area. We must assume they know we are here. We need to move quickly now. Without the High Coven forces we need Mican’s help to assist us. Besides... having more allies never hurt anyone.”

–I do not question what we are doing Athani Little One– Avi spoke.

Athani looked at him oddly. “Then... then why mention it?” She asked.

–King Martin could have just as easily deactivated me when we returned to Earth. Instead he allowed me to remain active and learn. Just as Chief Elder Pralor Sumar did. My programming does not allow emotion to factor into my actions but it does allow me to grow and understand where emotion plays a role in decision making. This is one of those times. I was only informing Resumar of the possible end results of these actions. I did not say I agree with them–

“So you would do the same thing we are doing?” Athani asked with a smile.

Avi blinked his red eyes and tilted his head slightly. **–Given what I have learned and my interaction with the Leonidas family through the years. Yes–**

“Why didn’t you just say that?” Athani asked.

–Paraphrasing King Leonidas Athani Little One... that would just be too damn easy– Avi answered.

Athani’s blue/green eyes were wide and she glared at him for a moment before moving off towards the back of the *STRIKER* muttering under her breath. Avi and Resumar watched her.

“Avi... you are more human in your actions than you might think my friend.” Res told him looking up into his red eyes. “I’m glad you are here.” He left Avi standing there as he followed Athani and the hulking Avatar blinked his eyes several times processing what Resumar had said.

-Fascinating- He spoke finally.

EARTH THERMOPYLAE TOMB OF KING LEONIDAS

Martin stepped into the dimly lit tomb of his father with the same reverence he always had when entering. The Illum globes grew brighter, revealing the gold and now Dragon Armor encased caskets of two individuals. Martin stood in the entrance for a long moment and stared at the caskets. The one on the left was of the man who had set him on the path of discovery so long ago, and who now rested beside his father as Martin had sworn to him that he would. The man whose name his son wore proudly.

The casket on the right... Martin would never forget.

He brushed his fingers across the top of Androcles’s casket before turning fully to place both hands flat on the metal and Dragon Armor encased casket of his father. The man whose life had been cut short far too early. The father that Martin had never known or seen except for astral projections provided by powerful neural boosters within his tomb here and along the outer portions of the statue outside this very monument. Martin leaned heavily on the casket, trying to wrap his mind around everything that had happened in the last few months. Trying to determine when the darkness had infected him, what he could have done to prevent it. He let his hands slide gently over the smooth curve of the casket.

“Father.” He whispered softly. “If ever there was a time I needed your guidance... now would be it. I have... I have not acted as a king should act. A husband and a mate. As a father. I lashed out at my... I lashed out at my *Anome*. At my *Kinsoaurgai*. Two of the five brightest points in my life. The five who make me what I am.” Martin choked up then and clenched his teeth in anger at himself. He remembered taking Aricia in his arms upon leaving the SODRAG underground Command Center. He remembered crushing her lush body to his and kissing her with more passion and love than he had ever kissed her before. He could not express how horrific he felt about what he had done, and Aricia only grasped his face in her soft hands and looked at him with those breathtaking azure blue eyes and told him she knew it was not her Beloved who had done these things. For’mya had already headed back to Sparta to deal with the Kavalians and their refusal to allow entrance to their embassy after the attack but Martin swore to wrap his dark eyed elven Queen within his arms and love her until she couldn’t stand it any longer.

“They raped and beat my daughter father! Zarah is... she is... she is my daughter and those fucking bastards almost killed her! I beat my son father! I almost killed my son for what I perceived he had done wrong! My firstborn son! I’m lost father... I’m lost and I don’t know what to do! So much is happening around me and none of it is good! I...” Martin stammered now, not really knowing what he was saying or why.

“What happened today is not your fault grandson of Sumar.” The voice spoke from behind him.

Martin spun around as the astral projection of the much older humanoid man appeared in the tomb with him. The imaged faded in and out for a brief second and then became as clear an image as Martin had ever seen. The man was tall, with flowing white hair and a deep tan. He had wrinkles under his eyes but they were blue eyes that were filled with a knowledge that Martin could only guess at. There were slight differences in the figure, the voluminous ivory cape draped over wide but thin shoulders and half covering the dark tan earth tones of the pants and shirt he wore. His face looked no different than humans; except that he did not have the same ridges and curves within his ears as humanoid ears. This man was not a species Martin had ever seen before. He stared at Martin with sincere, intelligent eyes.

Helen had told him he needed to come here and talk with someone. She didn’t give him a whole lot of information, she could be incredibly tight lipped when she wanted to be and not even he could easily get information out of her when she didn’t want to give it. He had thought perhaps he was going to see some senior High Coven officer who would give him information. Information that would enable him to respond in kind to

what Aikiro and the Coven had done this day. Looking at this figure, Martin knew that was not the case. His dark brown eyes moved up and down the figure as he stood there silently looking at him. Martin knew who this person was. He didn't know how, but Martin knew who this man was. He could *feel* who this man was and his eyes grew wider as they came up to the face again and realization struck him like a slap in the face.

"You... you're a Pralor!" Martin gasped then.

The man in the image smiled warmly. "Your insight and instincts match that of your grandfather young man." He spoke evenly. "My name is Wayonn... and yes... I am of the Pralor species as we are called. I am the last of the Pralors to my knowledge. The last of my species."

Martin turned from his father's casket to face the image. "The last?" Martin spoke. "I thought... Avi said..."

Wayonn smiled. "Ah yes... you speak of City Ship Avatar 41. He was the avatar of Sumar's ship. Our ship. I never understood Sumar's interaction with him, but he was never far from Sumar's side."

"That's why...? Wait... your ship?" Martin started to speak.

Wayonn nodded with another smile. "Yes... Avi as you call him... he knew who you were the moment you set foot on Lycavore all those years ago." He answered. "If a machine could be happy, I'm quite sure Avi would have been thrilled that it was you who discovered him. That you have not deactivated him and he holds a role of some prominence within your family only makes you that much more like Sumar. Another reason he will forever be a rock for you."

"Your ship?" Martin asked. "Are you saying you were on that ship? That... that means you are..."

Wayonn nodded with a chuckle. "Yes indeed. Very old in terms of how you and your kind relate the passage of linear time to a person. Ancient would be a good term to describe me. It's really quite amusing actually."

"You called me..." Martin began.

"Yes Martin Leonidas, you are of Sumar's blood. His great great grandson if my vague recollection on humanoid descendants is accurate. Resumar was Sumar's first born son with the Lycavorian woman he took as his wife when the decision was made to join with the your kind after we had crashed on your world." Wayonn spoke.

Martin's face became confused. "But the ship crashed over thirty thousand years ago." He said. "How could..."

"There were nearly a million of us that survived the crash Martin Leonidas." Wayonn spoke. "We could not all just join with the Lycavorian people at once. The merging was spread out over the course of thousands of years. Sumar was the last of us to finally become one with Lycavorians. That was little more than eighteen thousand years ago. It took him that long to discover a Lycavorian that pulled at his heart. He always was odd in an eccentric way. When he finally found her, he had her change him, and they became mated. Resumar was the first of his four children with this woman."

Martin's eyes grew wider. "Four?" He gasped.

"Resumar... your grandfather... he had two brothers and a sister." Wayonn answered. "They were... they were killed in the High Coven conquest of Lycavore. Sumar and the woman he had chosen to love died during that time as well. They watched their son become King and begin to pull your people out of the barbaric and savage ways of your species before they passed on however. So many good people were lost during those days. So many."

"You... you sound like you knew Sumar well." Martin said.

"I did indeed." Wayonn answered. "We were very close friends. I was his Oracle. The teller of his tale. His wise one. There are many things you could call me."

"Oracle?" Martin asked. "Like First Oracle?"

Wayonn smiled. "That was my son's doing." He spoke.

"Your son?" Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded. "There is much I need to tell you Martin Leonidas. To be honest... up until you released my son's Mindvoice essence from his prison I had no idea a descendant of Sumar still lived."

"Wait!" Martin exclaimed. "Canth? Canth was your son?" He gasped.

Wayonn nodded. "Yes. He was the youngest of my thirteen children with my Lycavorian wife. I was among the first to become part of Lycavorian society. Sumar reasoned that my skills as a religious icon and

mediator if you will... he reasoned that these skills would be better put to use among the Lycavorians more quickly. I chose a Lycavorian woman. I didn't even know her really, she was about to be taken by one of the more aggressive males of your species and I saved her from that fate. She in turn chose me." Wayonn smiled warmly. "I didn't even care for her in the beginning but as the years grew I fell deeply in love with her and we started our own family. About a thousand years before Resumar was born Sumar asked that I take my wife and children and a few hundred others onto the only remaining escape ship we had left on City Ship 41. Avi had repaired it enough where we could use it once more. So I set out with roughly two thousand of the remaining Pralors, those they had taken as wives and husbands and all of our children. We were first going to attempt to return to Pralor space, and while we made it, what we found was not what we had expected. We were chased out of Pralor space by what we found and began to make our way back to Lycavore. We..."

"Wait! What chased you out of Pralor space?" Martin asked quickly.

"This is information I can give to you when I see you, however right now..." Wayonn began to answer.

"See me?" Martin exclaimed. "What do you mean see me? You're dead!"

Wayonn had a hearty laugh then and Martin watched with wide eyes as he shook his head and moved closer to him in the holomager his eyes bright. "Dead? No my boy I am not dead." He spoke with a chuckle. "At least I don't believe I am. I'm quite sure Dutkne would agree with you though."

"Dutkne? Ok... I'm really lost now." Martin said. "You're not dead?"

Wayonn shook his head. "No. Even with my abilities, if I was dead I would not be able to project and hold this transmission as I am now. The neural boosters here in your father's tomb help a great deal, but it is still I who initiated this contact."

"If you aren't dead... then where are you?" Martin quipped.

"Trust me Martin... I will answer all your questions." Wayonn spoke. "But first there are some things you need to know and understand." He moved around and appeared to be carrying something with him until he stopped in front of the long bench that Martin usually sat at. Martin watched him do something with his hands and then he settled onto the stone bench as if he was actually sitting down there. He looked up at him then standing next to his father's casket. "This is important Martin my boy." He stated. "I know you long to return to Sparta and your Queens. To take them in your arms and hold them. To go after your children who now all believe you have gone off the deep end as Dutkne says so often. Rest assured you will do these things, but for now know that your son Androcles will keep them together and not let anything happen to them. And since he knows at least in part what it was within you, he will insure your other children know. However... you need to know what it was that infected you and how it came to be. And you need to know the only way for you to be fully rid of the evil inside you is to come and see me."

Martin moved to stand next to the bench. "It's not gone?" He asked stunned.

Wayonn shook his head. "Not entirely... no." He replied. "You have Sumar's strength Martin, a strength which he passed down to Resumar his son. A strength he in turn passed to his son, your father. That strength of will, that untapped Mindvoice power you have yet to realize, that is what helped you to beat him back this time. That and your Bonded Brother Torma who waits outside for you."

"My brother?" Martin asked softly and he watched Wayonn shake his head.

"Pleistarchus is not like you Martin. He never was nor has he ever been. A son to your father he may be, but he has always been different. He has Mindvoice skills, but they are so far removed from his understanding he could spend the rest of his days learning of them and never achieve what you have right now. And you have not reached your potential just yet." Wayonn spoke.

"You said I beat him back?" Martin asked now settling to the bench.

"What infected you was a small portion of what now deeply contaminates Yuri Moran." Wayonn spoke. "It is the essence of Xaxon, Sumar's twin brother. And more evil a man did not exist anywhere within Pralor space. Xaxon was the complete opposite of his twin brother in every way. Where Sumar was everything a leader could be; compassionate, knowledgeable, a tactical wizard with a will and drive to never fail, his twin Xaxon was the mirror opposite. He was cruel, one of the cruelest Pralors to ever live. He thought himself a great military leader, and his arrogance is what led to the beginning of a war that cost over three trillion lives in the first seven hundred years. His actions began what would eventually lead to the downfall of our civilization. He was punished for his initial actions and his mind was separated from his body. He was given a chance to redeem

himself when his mind was placed in command of City Ship 19 while his body was placed on the ship of his brother, who would keep it safe.”

“You mean that this Xaxon’s remains are...”

Wayonn nodded. “They were.” He stated. “Helen destroyed his remains the moment she defeated Aikiro and discovered that it was him that had infected Yuri and that they were both here on Earth. As Pralors Martin, we did not regard our physical bodies as more important than our minds and spiritual essence. Our technology was at such a point where we could remove a person’s conscious mind, their essence and imprison it. This procedure was the very harshest of punishments our people could met out, and it was rarely used. Xaxon was the last one to receive this type of punishment. He was not happy about this at all I assure you, but he could not defeat the entire Ruling Quorum of Pralors and he knew it.”

“Doesn’t sound like something I’d be happy with either.” Martin spoke.

“He was given City Ship 19 as a means to redeem himself. City Ship 19 as you know thanks to Avi, it crashed on Nuwaroa. A world belonging to what you know as the High Coven. It was Aikiro’s father who found the ship, and it was he who made a deal with Xaxon’s essence. Xaxon told Aikiro’s father that he could have the survivors of City Ship 19 if he assisted him in returning to his body and gaining prominence once more. He wanted to return to Pralor space and take his revenge upon those who had imprisoned him. This is how the people of the High Coven soon realized their inherent ability to Mindvoice. It is the same way the Lycavorians realized this potential within them. It was one of the reasons Sumar decided to join you’re your kind. Your ability to Mindvoice. Through generations of breeding with the survivors of City Ship 19, sometimes forcefully I might add, Xaxon’s descendants cultivated it to the point they could use it like Aikiro and Veldruk. As a weapon. Xaxon’s influence is also what drove the High Coven to attack Lycavore, for Xaxon could sense the descendants of his brother among your kind. He did not foresee the stubbornness of that idiot Veldruk and his goal of finding his body was never realized thanks to Avi. Avi hid the City ship as you found it when you arrived. Buried in a huge mountain, operating with just enough power to generate a MV shield around the ship blocking it from Aikiro’s ability to detect. That is what Helen felt when you first arrived on Lycavore. Do you remember?”

Martin nodded quickly. “Yes. She said she could feel evil. Darkness.”

Wayonn nodded. “She had my son’s memories and knowledge in her head then. She knew that Xaxon’s remains were on City Ship 41 even though it was subconsciously and not something she could explain.”

“How did he infect Yuri?” Martin asked. “How did he infect me?”

“The only possible way he could have infected Yuri to the extent he has is if Aikiro gave him access to her daughter’s weaknesses. She had to have been communicating with him within the holding chamber that his essence was sealed in, just as her father did. It would have been located within the medical research sections of City Ship 19. The part of the ship that survived the crash. Xaxon was among the most powerful of Pralor Mindvoicers. Sumar as well. They were twins after all.” Wayonn stated. “Once Xaxon knew what to attack, he would have kept at it until Yuri unwittingly released the seals on his chamber. This would have been the explosion of darkness that Lucia speaks of. What she told your son she saw that day.”

“Wait a minute!” Martin snapped. “How do you know what she told Andro?”

Wayonn smiled gently. “Your son Martin Leonidas has embraced much of what you still balk at. The pureness of your blood, of your Queen Aricia’s blood, it gives him an advantage you did not have. You had to learn everything you now know, and learn it after thinking you were something entirely different for much of your life after you were removed from that sleep chamber. Androcles has not been so limited, and his bond with Elynth while he was still in Aricia’s womb only added to his power. He has embraced it all without hesitation and it makes him stronger because of it. Because he has chosen to let his essence open his mind to everything I have been able to catch words and phrases echoing within Mindvoice. He is exceptionally powerful just like you, but like you he lacks the skills to fully shield what he is thinking from Mindvoice users who have the ability and skill to skip along a person’s shields and detect the small things. I believe he and Dutkne will get along quite well.”

“How does this concern Lucia Moran?” Martin asked.

“A finger of Xaxon’s filth touched Lucia that day as well, but she knew enough to reach for the one thing that could save her. Something she had tried to deny up until that point. That was your daughter.”

Martin looked at him with wide eyes. “Zarah?” He gasped. “But why?”

“The possibilities of two people being born at the exact same moment in time, the exact same millisecond are infinitely impossible to calculate and even less likely to happen.” Wayonn said evenly. “Yet with Lucia and Zarah it happened. In such a circumstance, a union is created even from across great distances. This link if you will... it has existed between Zarah and Lucia since they were born. Lucia reached for it at that time, and it was Zarah’s strength and purpose and love that allowed Lucia to beat back the darkness. All things she learned from you and your Queens. When Lucia saw that... reached for it... it altered the path her life was on and without fail everything she has done since that day was with the goal single goal of coming together with your daughter. Your daughter is far stronger than you know Martin Leonidas. Androcles knows what she is capable of, or I should say, he believes in what she is capable of. He has seen it inside her. The reason why they are so tightly bound I will allow you to discover on your own. It will only show you the commitment and love that your son has for his siblings. A trait that he gets from you I might add.”

“So you are saying that Xaxon is controlling Yuri... like he controlled me?” Martin asked.

“Controlling is such a generic term. Xaxon’s foul Mindvoice essence within Yuri only increases the darkness within her own heart.” Wayonn spoke. “Increases it to levels that she can not control. If I am correct... there is no hope for her now. His essence has permeated her entire being now and it will only become worse until he actually takes over her essence completely and she essentially becomes him. Death is the only way she will be free of him now.”

“And me?” Martin asked.

“You can rest assured he knew who you were the moment she stepped into the same room with you when they came to earth. Aikiro would have known this too.” Wayonn spoke. “He sensed your weakness then and while he could not jump from one body to the next, he did the next best thing. He infected you and targeted the one weakness that had grown inside you since Alba Tau. Just as Helen told you. Your self doubt over what happened on that planet and your horror at having your son experience it as well.”

Martin was silent for a long moment as the scope of what Wayonn was saying hit him fully. “And it is still inside me?” He asked finally.

Wayonn nodded slowly. “Your natural strength of will and purpose is enough to contain that darkness for now.” He said. “However you will not be completely free of it until I can purge it from your essence.”

Martin looked at the image. “You can do this?” He asked.

Wayonn nodded. “It was part of our duty as the religious or spiritual support role that those in my caste among the Pralors played. We were the sounding boards for those we were assigned too as guides and advisors. As I played this role with Sumar, when we returned from Pralor space my son Canth chose to remain with Resumar and play this role. They became fast friends and as events evolved it was Canth who helped Resumar to shape the Chronicles of Law and the First Oracle’s Declaration that your people so cherish and follow.”

“Then that is why Deia says Canth just appeared one day and took his place at my grandfather’s side?” Martin asked.

Wayonn nodded. “The ship we were on was damaged as we escaped from Pralor space and we settled on a planet outside of known space. It was several hundred years before we were able to build a ship from the scraps to take a select few passengers back to Lycavore. It was essentially a one way trip at the time and they knew it. Canth was the first to volunteer, since he reasoned Resumar and him were so close in age it would be better if it was him that returned. Canth was... he was...”

“Unique?” Martin finished.

Wayonn chuckled. “Yes... unique. I see your time with him on Ukwav made a definite impression.”

“To say the least.” Martin agreed.

“Yes well... he took his mate and two oldest children with him and left his youngest two with me and the others. As it turned out, it was the last time I ever saw my son alive again.” Wayonn answered softly. “We had thought all was lost when we heard Resumar and he were dead. It took almost two years for that information to reach us, and when it did we left the world we were on and began returning to try and reclaim what we had lost. We got as far as where we eventually decided to make our homes. Returning would only bring us agony and slavery we knew, and it was decided collectively to attempt to rebuild where we were. My son was able to touch me those first hours after you released his mind Martin and for that I will always be in your debt. That is when I truly first discovered you still lived. That the grandson of Resumar and descendant of my dear friend was alive.”

“Then it was you who was talking to Arzoal all that time.” Martin said. “Not Canth?”

Wayonn nodded. “For the most part yes.” He replied. “I masked my voice to her using my son’s voice. In a sense it was a way for me to remember him. Even I did not know what it was you were doing or who you really were until you freed him. I was only assuming that the rumors of your bloodline that we had heard were true.”

“Are you saying that... are you saying that there are more of my people out there? More Lycavorians?” Martin asked him. “Canth told me I would need to find those who had been lost. When I discovered those on Lycavore I thought it was them. Are you saying it’s not?”

“Oh no... they were part of it.” Wayonn spoke quickly. “They were not all of them. No one among those I am with knows you live Martin. I have hidden it from those I am with to protect them. I did not know how you would act as King. I wanted to insure that you were like Sumar and your grandfather Resumar. That you carried the same values and morals as they did. I have seen all you have done through Helen’s eyes since the day you returned to your people and I am duly impressed. I will not apologize for my actions so whatever you say in that regards will not matter to me.” He turned those blue eyes on him. “However... when I felt Xaxon’s vile presence begin to grow stronger, I knew he had found a suitable shell to infect. I began to take notice even more when the Coven came to Earth. Helen has been communicating with me all these years thinking it was Canth.

“I did not have the heart to tell her that when he passed all that he was to her, he did so knowing his essence would be lost.” Wayonn told him. “She has... she has carried her own self doubt about herself and her skills after the horrid events surrounding your father. She believes she failed him that day so long ago, and she has carried that burden for so long, fearing that she would fail you in some way. At least until now. The death of Aikiro by her hand has set her free. You will find her to be your greatest asset now; that she is bound to Arzoal only makes her wiser and more powerful.”

Martin leaned over and placed his head in his hands and rubbed his face. “Oh man... this is giving me a headache.” He stated sitting back up. “I need to get back to Sparta. I need to hold For'mya and Aricia in my arms. I need to contact my son!”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes... I know. You can not just yet.”

Martin stood. “Why?”

“There are some things I need to show you first.” Wayonn spoke.

“What things? Why can’t this wait until later? You do realize what is going on here don’t you?” Martin barked. “My family is being torn apart before my eyes and I need to stop that!”

Wayonn shook his head. “Your family torn apart?” He asked gently. “I truly believe there is very little in this universe that could accomplish that task no matter how they tried. You and your five Queens have instilled in all your children that Blood comes before all else haven’t you?”

“Well yes but...” Martin began.

“Martin... a chain of events has been ongoing ever since Xaxon took control of Yuri. It can no longer be stopped. You have always believed that for every action there is a reaction yes?” Wayonn asked.

“How do you know that?” Martin barked.

“Because it was the same way Sumar thought.” He replied. “Your ancestor was like you Martin. He did not think simply in the here and now. He thought and acted for the many future generations that would come after. It is a trait he passed to all his offspring, and they to theirs. You can not stop what is already in motion Martin.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “What’s already in motion? Jesus... Canth talked in riddles too! Now I know where he got it! Where Helen gets it! Why can’t you just tell me what the fuck is going on?”

“If I knew that Martin I would.” Wayonn replied. “There are trials and tribulations that we all must face and pass through in order to better ourselves. How we react to them forms the basis for the person we are. What I can tell you is that events have already begun and nothing you do will alter their path. It is not a source of knowledge to me... it is only a feeling within the many threads and tremors of Mindvoice. These events will strain your control, and the control of your children, but these events are what will define you in the future and prepare you for what lies ahead.”

“That is why I need to get back!” Martin declared. “My children will...”

Wayonn shook his head with a small smile. “You think too little of your children Martin Leonidas.” Wayonn spoke. “Too little of the love and devotion you have shown your children through the years. What you

have taught them. You and your Queens are part of why they are who they are. Androcles will never let that be lost to them! Ever!” Wayonn spoke forcefully and looked at him. “As he gave without thought to save Zarah he will give without thought to keep them all together no matter the cost to him! He has even gone so far as to seal the bond of blood in the different Lycavorian bloodlines of your people and he doesn’t even know it. Neither of them do. It was something that Resumar and Canth tried to do very early on. He will discover it soon enough though. Your sons Androcles and Arrarn have brought the two bloodlines of the brothers back together again Martin. It is that bloodline that will be your greatest strength... and your greatest curse.”

“What are you talking about now?” Martin demanded. “How did Andro save Zarah? What curse?”

“Martin... while you find it distasteful to consider... Sumar and Xaxon *were* brothers.” Wayonn spoke. “Twins. There will always be an affinity between the descendants of those two bloodlines. While Aikiro is not a child of Xaxon as Resumar was of Sumar, she still carried within her his presence to a large extent because her father had allowed Xaxon to act through him for the most part. When he impregnated his wife and Aikiro was conceived she was born with part of Xaxon inside her. There will always be a Mindvoice connection between Aikiro’s children and her children’s children and the children of your blood. It is undeniable. It is part of why Carisia and Androcles came together. Part of why Lucia and Zarah came together. Why it feels so very right to them. Now that you are yourself once more, you will come to accept this has you have accepted everything in your life. Never fear the unknown you say... and you live by this creed more than any man or woman I have ever met. And now your children live by it, probably more so than you at times.” Wayonn stood up. “There are some things I must teach you now, so that you are better able to contain Xaxon’s evil within you until you reach me. What I will show you will assist you greatly until I can remove it permanently. It will also allow you to better understand some other things that I will tell you. At least until we are able to stand face to face in the future.”

“And how long will this take?” Martin snapped.

Wayonn smiled. “Just like Dutkne.” He said gently shaking his head. He looked at him. “You have Queens and other men and women who can get by without you Martin. Helen has informed them of where you are and that you are in good health. Like Sumar did, you have surrounded yourself with men and women who are exceptionally capable and this will only serve you well into the future, for you have some hard decisions facing you in that future.”

“Here we go again with the riddles!” Martin spat. “I really fucking hate riddles! I told Canth I hate fucking riddles! ”

“Yes indeed I remember. Your son hates riddles as well. Nearly as much as you. That is why he and Dutkne will get along famously. I suggest we get started my King. So that we can solve these riddles.” Wayonn spoke with a large smile.

SPARTA HOME OF ISRA, TARIFA AND AIHOLA

It was a larger than normal villa that sat only half a kilometer from the edge of the Royal Estate. It was surrounded by a decorative four foot high white stone wall that encased the ten acre property completely. The immediate area around the home and patio was an enormous flower garden lovingly tended to by Tarifa and Aihola almost daily when they weren’t in some sort of meeting either in Sparta or Eden City. The flight to and from Eden City was only half a hour for Aihola and it was a flight she had no problems in making. Her work and office may have been in Eden City, but her loves and her life was in Sparta. There was a very large dragon pen and cave along the north treeline for when Miath was on Earth this is where he called home. Roluth had begun flying back and forth to Dragon Mountain when Aelnala and Miath mated, giving them the privacy they needed and desired as mates. He didn’t mind making the trip each day, and when Miath wasn’t there he would remain on the estate.

Now Roluth landed carrying Tarifa and Anuk on his back and before he had fully settled to the ground, Tarifa and Anuk were leaping from the saddle and running for the front door of their home.

“Is she hurt?” Anuk asked as they darted from the dragon landing pad.

“I don’t know Anuk!” Tarifa answered. “She didn’t sound injured and she is blocking me within Mindvoice. She said only to grab you wherever you were and bring you here!” Tarifa passed her hand over the Bioscanner by the main double doors of their home and the doors slid open easily.

“Ardis!” Tarifa exclaimed as she burst into the foyer of their home, her sapphire eyes darting left and right looking for her oldest child.

“In the den mother!” Ardis’s voice reached out to her and Tarifa looked at Anuk oddly as she dashed to the right, her hand dropping to the K12 in its holster on her thigh. Tarifa may have been Lieutenant Governor of Sparta, but long before that she was a warrior and very skilled at taking care of herself. Anuk followed her motion, her hand dropping to draw her own K12 and they moved to the half open glass double doors.

Tarifa didn’t hesitate and burst into the large den, breaking left as Anuk entered and broke to the right. Their eyes went wide as they saw Karun and Pian standing behind the couch where the stunning blond haired woman Tarifa knew as Jalersi lay. They were both armed, but neither of them had lifted their weapons in a threatening manner. Jalersi’s leg was bloody and her jaw was clenched in pain. Tarifa saw the second Kavalian male holding the mug of tea in his hands which had froze as it was lifting to his lips. Ardis came to her feet from where she was kneeling next to Jalersi’s leg.

“Mother... Aunt Anuk! No!” Ardis barked as she came to her feet.

Tarifa looked at her daughter, seeing the soot and scraps on her cheeks and arms, her K12 dropping almost instantly. “Ardis?” She questioned as her daughter stepped up to her.

“Momma... please.” Ardis said. “You have to trust me.”

Trust was never an issue with Tarifa and she embraced her daughter tightly. Her wolf nose detected many scents on her, the smell of burning metal and wood very prominent. She could also detect the scent of something else permeating her daughter’s timber and peach scent. It was the heady scent of walnut and pines. She pushed Ardis away and held her at arm’s length. “Where have you been?” She demanded. “The *Durcunusaan* sent a team to your apartment and it was empty! It appeared to have been searched! What...?”

Ardis nodded. “It’s a long story mother.” She spoke.

“Why... why are these people here in my home Ardis?” Tarifa asked casting her eyes to Pian and the others.

“I can explain everything.” Ardis said quickly. “Where is father? I can not feel him within Mindvoice. He is shielding heavily.”

“At the *Durcunusaan* base!” Tarifa answered immediately. “He and Daniel are directing the deployment of forces throughout Sparta.”

Ardis nodded and looked at Anuk who still had her K12 leveled at Karun and the others. “Aunt Anuk... please!” Ardis spoke. “Jalersi is injured. These people are not a threat to us! We are unable to get the bleeding to stop. Her artery is intact, but I think the splinter of wood may have caused unseen damage.” She looked at Tarifa. “I tried contacting Eliani mother but got no response. You must trust me!”

Tarifa looked at Anuk and nodded. Anuk’s K12 dropped immediately and she flipped her large medical bag from her shoulder. “You had better contact them Tarifa.” Anuk spoke as she moved forward. “The moment you say we have found her Isra will come running!” Anuk went to the couch and knelt beside Jalersi. “I will treat you. I am...”

Jalersi nodded quickly reaching out and squeezing her arm. “I know who you are Anuk Simpson!” She spoke between clenched teeth. “Something mild for the pain would be most appreciated!”

Anuk nodded and delved into her Med Kit. Tarifa pulled Ardis closer as Anuk passed Jalersi a small pill and began to inspect the wound on Jalersi’s leg. “Tell me what is going on Ardis!” Tarifa snapped. “The High Coven has struck our family in the most heinous of ways! The entire planet is under lock down!”

Ardis nodded as she squeezed her mother’s arms. “I know... we saw the broadcast from Aunt Deia.” She spoke. “Karun and I...”

Tarifa looked at the handsome young man quickly and suddenly put together what she smelled on her daughter. Karun’s walnut and pines aroma filtered from every pore of her oldest daughter and Tarifa knew it could only be for one reason. “Ardis what...”

Ardis saw recognition at what she smelled in her mother’s eyes and gripped her arms. “Do not judge mother!” She snapped. “I know you can smell him within my blood. It was my choice! Our choice! And I don’t regret it in the least!”

Karun stepped forward quickly at hearing Ardis speak and he swiftly tucked the K14 into his waistband as he moved closer to them. “Lady... Lady Tarifa... I...” Karun saw those bright sapphire eyes focus on him and for the first time in his young life he felt fear looking into the eyes of a female.

Tarifa turned her eyes back to Ardis. “Ardis... this... he is the son of your Uncle’s brother! You know how Martin feels about his brother. He is...”

“Am I suppose to allow what Uncle Martin feels for his brother to influence my feelings for his son mother?” Ardis popped. “Karun is nothing like his father! Nothing! He is...”

Karun stepped up next to her and bravely put his arm around her waist. Tarifa’s sapphire eyes grew a little wider at this action and she was about to snap at him when he spoke. “Your daughter has shown me who I am Lady Tarifa.” Karun stated as calmly as he could. He did not want to lose Ardis, and he most certainly did not want to have her mother as an enemy. “I came here with many questions, and in the time that has passed, Ardis and my grandmother have answered most of them. I am not my father’s son... I am my mother’s son.” Tarifa’s eyes darted to where Jalersi was laying on the couch and saw her powder blue eyes focused on her son. “I have nothing to show you that what I say is the truth, no way to prove it to you. Only that I love your daughter with every breath I take. I can only ask that you give me the chance to prove what I say is what is in my heart.”

Tarifa looked back to him and then at her daughter who was also looking at Karun with violet and sapphire eyes full of love. “This... this is not the way I envisioned meeting the man who would claim my daughter.” She spoke finally.

“Believe me Lady Tarifa... this is most definitely not the way I wanted to meet you.” Karun spoke. “I was hoping to go about things as my grandmother told me I should. In the old ways of the Spartans. It appears fate will not give me that opportunity.”

“You believe in fate young man?” Tarifa asked surprised at his words.

“I believe I came here for a reason Milady.” He spoke with sincerity in his tone of voice. That was something Tarifa was able to detect easily. “I believe I was meant to come here and discover the part of my heritage I would not have learned had I stayed behind. Fate put me in the hands of my sister Lisisa, who did not turn me away. And fate guided me to your daughter.” Karun looked at her evenly and didn’t blink. “Do I believe in fate Lady Tarifa? After finally discovering what I have discovered... fate is all I have left. Fate and the love of Ardis and my mother.”

Tarifa stared at him for a long moment and then looked to her daughter. “Ardis?”

“This is what I want mother.” She spoke confidently. “Karun is who I want. No matter what that may bring.”

Tarifa couldn’t help but pull her daughter into her arms and hug her tightly. “What it will bring is gruff words and yelling when your father discovers this, but...” she looked at Karun. “You have convinced me.”

Karun felt a wave of relief wash over him and he too smiled. “Thank you.” He spoke.

“Now let me ask if what I have told you would have mattered to you when it comes to my daughter.” Tarifa spoke.

Karun shook his head. “Not in the least.” He answered without a moment’s hesitation.

Tarifa chuckled and nodded her head. “Good... you will need that commitment to Ardis when her father discovers what is going on.” She looked at Ardis. “Now tell me why they are here and not at the embassy with the others. If the *Durcunusaan* knew they were here our home would be swarming with them.”

This is when Pian stepped forward. “I am Pian’Nurarani Lieutenant Governor Tarifa. I am...”

“I know who you are sir.” Tarifa spoke firmly. “I make it a habit to know everyone who is within the walls of my city as guests of the King. And if I don’t know, you can be assured Panos does.”

“We can not return to our embassy.” Jiss spoke now setting his cup on the knee high table and moving closer to her.

“And why is that?” Tarifa asked.

“We would be executed on sight.” Pian answered her.

Tarifa looked at him, her wide eyes going from him to Jiss and then to Ardis. “What exactly is going on here daughter?”

Pian stepped even closer. “Lady Tarifa... I need to use a secure transmitter.” He said. “I need to contact my brother before word of our betrayal makes its way to the Kavalian military. The life of Jalersi’s daughter hangs in the balance.”

“Why?” Tarifa demanded.

“Milady please I...”

“Commander... you are in my home!” Tarifa said. “I have *Durcunusaan* Guards outside right now. You tell me if you return to your embassy you will be executed, yet you escaped the High Coven attack on your embassy. Now you are asking me to grant you the use of a secure long range transmitter so you can contact your people.”

“Only my brother Milady.” Pian spoke astonished at how easily respect came for this female elf now that he had discovered his true feelings for Jalersi and she was now his wife and mate. All that mattered to him was protecting her and their future and the future of his people. Pian was changing more and more as each hour went by.

“We wish to defect!” Jalersi barked from the couch.

Tarifa’s eyes went wide at this and she pulled away from Ardis to look at her. “I beg your pardon?”

“If you have loved one man for many years Tarifa of the elves, then you will know why we are doing this.” Jalersi said.

“My... Isra, Aihola and I have been together for over twenty years now.” Tarifa said. “I know what it is like to love a man for such a time.”

Jalersi nodded. “And I have loved Pian for just as long.” She spoke calmly. “Only I did not come to realize it until I discovered Pusintin regards me as nothing more than property and Pian showed me what was in my heart. I may look like you with the exception of your elven ears, but I am still a Kavalian female. I was not able to submit my Edict of Dissolution before events overtook us. When Pusintin discovers that I have laid with Pian, allowed Pian to make me his wife, he will take it out on our daughter. Nikkei is only twenty years old and still very innocent. I fear what he will do.”

Pian stepped up to her once more holding out the data pad. “There is also this information that we give to you to consider.” He spoke.

Tarifa took the pad and began reading it. Her eyes grew wider and her blood went cold when she saw what it contained.

“By the Gods!” She gasped.

“There are Kavalian assassination teams within Sparta even now.” Pian spoke. “If it is discovered where we are, they will come after us in force and do everything within their power to insure we do not speak. And they will not care we are here.”

“It is why I brought them here other.” Ardis spoke now. “My apartment is the first place they would think to look. It appears they already have given what you said moments ago.”

Tarifa looked up quickly and met Pian’s eyes. “This is... this is not some sort of joke?” She asked.

Jiss shook his head. “If only that were the case.” He stated.

“You... you were the Kavalian Ambassador!” Tarifa spat.

Jiss nodded. “I am a Kavalian as well. This path the Prefect wishes to pursue is a death sentence for my people. A war on two fronts? All we have built in the last years will be lost. I... I do not think like you in many regards Lieutenant Governor Tarifa, in fact our views on many things are probably very different. I am old and set in the ways of my people, but I am also intelligent enough to know change can come. I have seen a small part of that change with Pian and Jalersi and surprisingly I have accepted it.” This statement caught both Pian and Jalersi by surprise and they looked at him with equally stunned expressions. “I am Kavalian and I can not allow the current leaders of my people to throw away the few gains we have made in a fool attempt and grasp for more power.”

Tarifa looked up quickly from the pad as she listened to him. Her decision was easy to make. “Both of you come with me!” She ordered. “We have a secure transmitter in our office upstairs!” Tarifa turned to Anuk. “Anuk?”

Anuk’s eyes were wide as she met Tarifa’s gaze for she had heard everything. “Go!” She said. “I will finish here and treat Karun as well. Go! You must get this information to Deia or someone in her office!”

IRARUZU

The Limian couple and several Kochab mercenaries leaped back with shouts of alarm and confusion when the large body of the Kavalian soldier smashed into the top of the Medium Lifter crushing the frame of the vehicle and sending its Plexiglas windshield rocketing into the air to land several meters away. They had been rushing to view the burning of the large Drow store many of them had frequented on different occasions. Now they staggered back and their eyes were drawn skyward to the roof of the five story building that most visitors stayed at if they had the credits to do so.

Walter, Daba and the two Dragoons had crept up on the Kavalian assassination team with little problems. Their attention had been focused downwards into the landing bay and the now destroyed Bontawillian Corvette. Walter's thrown *Nehtes* now protruded from the back of the missile launcher Kavalian, his body skewered to the wall he had been leaning against. Daba had used all of her elven speed to fall upon the others with a savagery she hadn't felt in more years than she cared to remember. Her dual Shakur fighting knives, already bloody from killing the scavengers in the Drow store, quenched their thirst for more blood when she buried one in the chest of another Kavalian, while the other flash up and across his throat, his blood fountaining from his neck like a water faucet. Walter and the two dragoons quickly subdued the remaining three Kavalians, one of which had just taken a plunge to his death. Walter was in no mood for games at this point in time, and he had simply lifted one Kavalian within the grip of the TK power he had fostered through the years with Majeir. They were not a Bonded Pair, but they had learned how to share each other's strengths, and with Majeir assisting him from the hanger below, Walter had lifted the Kavalian a hundred meters into the air and smashed him back to the surface without a single word.

He turned back to the leader of the small team and the remaining Kavalian soldier. His wolf eyes were very prominent and his fangs were fully extended now. It had been many years since Walter Carson had felt the anger and power surge through him as it did now. Seeing the dead Drow and knowing that Kavalians hunted Daba's daughter only increased this anger to levels that he had not felt since Thermopylae.

"Well... now that I have your attention..." Walter growled as he moved back to the two Kavalians who glared at him with hard eyes. "Let us have a civil conversation shall we."

"We will tell you nothing Lycavorian dog!" The leader of the small team hissed savagely.

Walter nodded. "See... that is where you are mistaken." He spoke moving closer. "You made two blunders friend. The first was attacking and killing so many of our people to begin with. We are not at war with you... but after this... I assure you we will be if I know Martin Leonidas! The second blunder was attacking and butchering Drow elves." Walter motioned to Daba. "Allow me to introduce Drow Senator Daba of Earth. The Matron Mother of the Drow family you slaughtered here was a dear friend to her, and we know your friends are after two survivors from within the store. One of them happens to be Daba's daughter Lu'ria. The Drow are not known for their kindness towards those who do the things you have done. I should know since I'm the one who made them. Where is your main force and how many men do you have chasing Lu'ria?"

The leader of the Kavalian team laughed and spat at Walter, the spittle landing near his right boot.

"The place they lived is in ruins now!" He snarled at them. "We are from the Puma Bane Pride and we never fail! My brethren slaughtered the Drow and humans like animals! After they raped every Drow and human female there many times! You should have heard them squeal! They..."

Daba surged off the ground where she was squatting with a cry of rage and slashed out with her fist. She may have been a female, but she was still an elf, with all the speed and strength elves had. The heel strike to his fur coated face rocked his head back and tore open his lips with the power it carried. "I will remove your eyes from their sockets one at a time you foul beast!" She screamed loudly. "I will peel the skin from your disgusting carcass and feed it to the insects!"

The leader spit blood on the ground and lifted his head to glare at her. "You are nothing when held to the might of the Kavalian Empire! Nothing!"

Walter nodded. "I figured you would say that!" He spoke. "Be thankful we are not within Union space."

"Hah!!" The man spat. "Your threats mean nothing to me!"

Walter shook his head. "Oh no... I'm not making a threat! If we were in Union space I wouldn't be able to do what I'm about to do." Walter looked at Hval and could see the anger in the Dragoon's eyes at what he

had seen so far this day. Walter also knew that Hval was deeply in love with a Drow female on Earth and what he had seen caused his elf blood to churn with the need for vengeance. "Hval... hold him." Walter ordered. Hval didn't hesitate and let his 190 dangle on the quick release straps as he stepped up behind the man and seized his arms and shoulders. Walter leaned close to the man's frightening face. "I'm going to let Daba show you why the Drow are so feared on our world mister big Puma Bane Pride warrior. I hope you enjoy pain... cause you are about to experience it in living color." Walter stood back up and looked at Daba. "Daba... he's yours!"

Daba's smile was perhaps the most unpleasant thing Walter had ever seen so far this miserable day as she withdrew one of her knives. She glared at the Kavalian. "Let me show you what I will do to each and every one of your kind if you have harmed my daughter in any way!" She snarled stepping towards the man.

He was strong no doubt, but after the third section of skin Daba peeled from his neck, taking hair and hide with it the screaming began. It had no effect on Hval who exerted all his strength to hold the man who had inflicted so much agony on his lover's people. The second Kavalian soldier knelt on the ground in horror at what was taking place, his eyes wide as he watched the excruciatingly slow and painful death of his commanding officer. His dark eyes rapidly filled with fear as he watched the dark skinned elf female appear to take great pleasure in what she was doing. The screaming went on for four minutes before he vomited all over himself, but by this time half his commander's face was gone, nothing but raw, bloody muscle showing and Daba had dug one of his eyeballs out with the tip of her blade.

"They are... they are on the outskirts of the Drow estate!" The man finally screamed the front of his uniformed chest and fur matted in his own filth. "Our commander has perhaps twenty or twenty-five with him... another full company waits on the other side of the planet! A hundred men perhaps!"

Walter looked at the Kavalian. "The females who escaped?" He asked immediately as Daba turned to look at him.

"They are heading north! The Major believes they are trying to get out from under the Deutrino field and call for help!" The Kavalian exclaimed. "The Marshall's son leads the patrol hunting them!"

"Pusintin's son?" Walter asked in shock.

The soldier bobbed his head up and down quickly. "Yes! His name is Leruk! He is the youngest of Marshall Pusintin's sons! He hunts them like you would hunt them! He hunts them by their scent! I do not want to die!"

Daba used the but end of her knife to viciously smash it into the leader's head, the crack of his skull fracturing very audible. Hval let his limp and moaning form drop from his grasp then as Daba turned to the soldier and held up her knife. "Why have you done this?" She snarled. "And know that if you lie to me I will feed you to the dragon that travels with us. My daughter is to be her Bonded One and she is not happy at all that your people wish to harm her!"

The man's eyes went even wider. "Dragon!" He gasped.

Majeir chose that time to rise above the edge of the building, her massive wingspan causing reverberations in the air, Ceneia sitting calmly in the saddle on her back. The Kavalian soldier's eyes nearly exploded from his head as he watched her land gently only meters away from him. He pushed back against the dragoon still holding him, and lost control of his bladder then, urine staining the front of his pants as intense fear seized him. Majeir waited until Ceneia had dropped from her saddle before she moved even closer. Her ruby eyes were ablaze with hate and anger.

"I... I do not know all of it!" The man barked out. "I am just a soldier! We are targeting the... the Drow settlements all over The Wilds! I don't know why! I swear it! You... you won't kill me will you? I do not want to die in this way!"

Daba's eyes came up quickly and she looked at Walter. "Holy One!" She gasped.

Walter was already turning to Ceneia. "Can you burn through the Deutrino interference?" He asked her quickly.

"If we still had the ship yes!" Ceneia answered immediately her eyes wide. "I doubt there is anything on this planet powerful enough to do it now!"

"Can you make something?" Walter barked.

Ceneia glanced at the remains of the Corvette below her quickly. "I can yank whatever remains from the ship and see what I need. The cockpit is toast... but maybe the transmitters in the rear compartments survived." She turned back to Walter. "I'll need time Walter! Time and whatever electronic equipment you can find me."

Walter nodded. "I'm sure that won't be a problem on this fucking planet!" He snapped. "It's filled with scavengers. How much time?"

"If I can pull one of the main transmitters from the rear... some conduits and electronic components... maybe four hours!" Ceneia answered. "I won't know until I see what I can salvage Walter!"

"Take Olar with you. Strip what you need!" Walter snapped.

Majeir stepped towards him. *Walter... I can not wait four hours to find Lu'ria.*

Walter looked at her then back to the Kavalian. "Do any of your troops have T19s?" He demanded.

The Kavalian shook his head. "Not here!" He replied quickly. "Only the support unit on the other side of the planet!"

"How many?" Walter snapped.

"Four!" He stammered. "Only... only four!"

Walter turned back to Majeir. *Take Ceneia and Olar back to the hanger. Lu'ria will be headed north from the Drow estate when you find it. Be mindful Majeir... he is terrified of you but he may be lying. Stay low to the ground and avoid the Kavalian forces by the estate.* He looked at Ceneia as she was already moving to climb back into the saddle. Olar right behind her. "Strip what you need and let me know what you lack. Hval... head back down through the building and assist them. If anyone attempts to interfere, kill them."

"These scum Holy One?" Hval asked.

Walter looked at Daba. "Daba and I will take care of them." He said. "Go! We must move quickly!"

Hval nodded and gave a savage kick to the bloody body of the Kavalian leader on the hot surface of the building's roof. He gathered his 190 into his hands and ran for the door down into the interior of the building that they had come through.

I will Mindvoice you every fifteen minutes Walter. Majeir barked out as she propelled herself into the sky. *I am this close to her and I will not act foolishly. I promise you.*

Find her Majeir! Find her and let her know she is not alone! Walter barked.

I will! Majeir declared as she dipped below the buildings edge and was gone.

Walter turned back to the Kavalian soldier. "Let's talk boy!" He growled yanking his R4 blade from his belt. "And unless you wish to end up looking like your supreme asshole boss, you won't lie to me about anything."

ULU SCIMITAR ON COURSE FOR KRANEK

Viera! Seyra was the first to see her when the Lift Elevator arrived within the Dragon Den of the ship. She maneuvered her bulk quickly and was next to her as the elevator began to go down again.

Viera's eyes were bright and smiling as Seyra came up to her and they brushed their snouts together. *It is good to see you again Seyra!*

Oh Viera you look wonderful! So healthy and your scales shimmer! Seyra spoke as both Deneth, Anthar and Elynth now moved up next to her.

Viera! How are you? Anthar asked.

Viera bobbed her huge head up and down. *I understand congratulations is in order for you and Elynth. You are mates now.*

Elynth leaned into Anthar's side and ran her snout under his jaw. *A fact that makes me sing with happiness.* She cooed out within Mindvoice causing Anthar to shift on his clawed feet in embarrassment.

Where... where is Vollenth? Anthar asked finally.

Seyra looked at Anthar. *Why should we care?* She snapped. *He...*

Viera touched her snout to Seyra's side. *He is not the same Seyra my friend. He is not the same Vollenth you knew.*

Seyra looked at her. *I am glad you are free of him. You can find another mate and...*

Oh no! Viera said now shaking her head quickly. *I will never want or need another mate. He is all I will ever need.*

Viera he forced himself upon you! Seyra exclaimed. *You do not need to stay mated to him and you know that.*

He may have forced himself on me while he was being controlled by that vile witch Yuri, but he certainly did not force himself upon me the many times we have been together since he came to Dragon Mountain and begun healing. I will be a very happy female for the rest of my life. Viera spoke somewhat smugly.

Elynth chuckled and bumped her midsection against Anthar. *Yes... I do know the feeling Viera.* She said with some humor. *They make your talons ache with desire and your mind erupt with explosions of...*

Elynth! Anthar exclaimed. *They do not need to hear everything!*

You jest! Seyra said looking at Viera.

Viera shook her head. *No... not at all.* She said. *The Elder Mother told me the same thing Seyra, but you have not seen him since he came to Dragon Mountain. He is different. So very different. He has done nothing but learn from the Elder Mother and play with our sons. He...*

The elevator rising into view caused Viera to stop talking as they all turned to see the huge body of Vollenth rise into view. Pinned under one of his large talons was the light green scaled dragon hatchling perhaps three months old. The hatchling was snapping at Vollenth's snout, his wings beating furiously while the second hatchling was bounding up and down on Vollenth's back, his jaws snapping open and shut by Vollenth's head as his wings were flapping madly as well.

I got him Cinol! I got him! The hatchling on top of Vollenth's back was barking loudly within Mindvoice as he clamped his jaws on his father's armored scales just behind his head, his wings flapping to give him added leverage.

Knock him over! Knock him over Caydren! The one pinned beneath Vollenth's talons shouted as his wings beat madly, flapping on the deck plating of the elevator loudly even as he squirmed to get out from under his father's huge talon.

Knock me over will you! Vollenth bellowed as he lifted one wing and gently battered the hatchling from his back. The one meter tall hatchling stumbled forward from the nudge and rolled off Vollenth's back.

I got his leg! The pinned hatchling shouted out as his talons gripped Vollenth's foreleg tightly. *Get his other one brother! Get his other leg quickly!*

Seyra was looking at them with horror in her eyes as other dragons came to their feet from around the entire Dragon Den at the commotion. Many of them also gazed with horror in their eyes as they were witnessing an adult dragon attempting to injure hatchlings. They all looked at Viera who couldn't help but chuckle as she saw the looks of shock in the eyes of the other dragons. All of them except Elynth and Anthar who looked on with amusement. She stepped away from the others towards the elevator and settled to the deck casually.

AHEM! She barked within Mindvoice.

Viera's voice froze all three of them in mid motion and their heads turned to look at her. One of the hatchlings was dangling from Vollenth's raised talon, Vollenth's wings half flared to the side, and second hatchling's jaws clamped shut on the forward edge of that huge wing. All of their eyes went wide when they saw her staring at them.

Uh-oh! We're busted! The hatchling under Vollenth's talon stammered.

Oops! The other echoed.

Viera! Vollenth chimed in his eyes wide.

And exactly what do the three men in my life seem to think they are doing? Viera asked sternly.

Ummm... I was showing them... I was showing them the proper way to smooth their wings! Vollenth announced. *Yes that's it!*

He was momma!

And exactly what would Cinol be learning about smoothing his wings pinned under your talon my mate? Viera asked barely able to contain her laughter. *Or Caydren suspended from your other talon and gnawing on the edge of your wing? Hmmm?*

Huh? Vollenth spoke confused. *Oh that...* Vollenth lifted his huge foreleg and his light green scaled son scampered up to stand beside his father. His brother release his jaws from his father's wing and dropped nimbly to the deck. They both stood in front of their father then, trying to look as innocent as they could. *I...*

I have asked you not to wrestle with them my mate. Viera spoke pleasantly. *They will not sleep for days now.*

Who can sleep mamma! The dark tan hatchling barked. *This ship is amazing! Papa said he would give us a tour!*

And exactly how would your father do that when he does not know his way around the ship himself. Viera asked.

Trial and... Caydren looked at his brother. *What did papa say?*

Error! Cinol answered.

Yes! Trial and error! Caydren finished turning back to his mother.

Elynth and Anthar burst out into laughter within Mindvoice as many of the other High Coven dragons were crowding around, Deneth among them. Elynth was the one to step forward before all the others with smiling golden eyes. Looking into Vollenth's eyes she no longer saw savage anger and hate, but she did see peace, wisdom and happiness.

They look like fine handsome young hatchlings Vollenth. She spoke as they gazed at her with wide eyes.

Vollenth ushered his sons back gently with his huge snout as he came to his feet and met Elynth's gaze evenly and without fear. *I would never have experienced this happiness without yours and Androcles's actions Elynth. I would never have discovered how Viera feels, how I feel. And I would not know the joy of my sons. I am... I am forever in your debt. Both of you.*

Elynth shook her head and looked at him. *No Vollenth. Andro would never accept this statement from you and neither will I. To see you now... how you are with your sons... with your new mate? That is the prize that means more to us than anything. We only severed the tie Vollenth. It was you who broke the bonds.*

His sister? Vollenth asked. *She is...?*

She will be herself once more in the future. It will take time... but she is a Leonidas and she is stronger than many suspect. With Lucia at her side now, she will be who she once was one day in the future. Elynth spoke.

If there is anything we can do? Vollenth spoke. *You and Andro have only to ask.*

Elynth nodded. *I thank you. We thank you. Now why don't you and Viera and your sons sit with us? There is room for us all and we can enjoy the company of friends and loved ones. After the last few days that we have had, it seems the best course of action.*

Vollenth looked at Viera and she moved up next to him, brushing her midsection against his in affection and nodded. *We would like that very much.*

Androcles leaned against the bulkhead just inside the door of the Med Bay and let his azure blue eyes linger on Zarah. Even with Eliani watching almost constantly, she had missed it when Zarah had moved from her bed and slipped into the bed that held Lucia Moran. Zarah was now tucked very tightly against Lucia's body, her face resting peacefully on Lucia's firm cone shaped breasts, Lucia's arms holding her almost possessively. It was almost exactly how Andro had found them in that foul room on Earth what seemed like just minutes ago.

"Eliani can't determine when exactly Zarah did that, but it was within the last hour or so." Isabella's voice spoke softly from next to Andro. He had smelled his vampire mother coming from down the corridor and knew she could walk like a ghost when she wanted. "Eliani gave Lucia an added sedative so that she rests, but the remnants of the Blood Fever are almost completely out of her system." Isabella said looking at him. "They both need to rest right now."

"She loves Zarah mother." Andro spoke.

Isabella nodded her head. "I know." She stated. "I do not doubt that after what she has done. She knew didn't she Andro?"

Andro looked at her. "Knew what?"

"Pureblood vampires can smell even the earliest onset of stages of Blood Fever in another vampire's blood. You know that as well as I do." Isabella said. "Lucia had to know Zarah had it at one point. With the injuries Zarah had, Lucia had to have smelled it."

Andro nodded. "I'm sure she did." He said. "I don't think it mattered a whole lot to her to be honest mother."

"Androcles... what you did..." Isabella began speaking.

"I would have done for any of my brothers and sisters." Andro interrupted her. "It just so happens it was Zarah, and now she and I are connected in a way now that we don't regret and have learned to cultivate to our advantage."

"That connection has increased her Mindvoice abilities beyond what they might have been." Isabella spoke.

"Have they?" He spoke. "Or has it simply released any natural blocks that may have been there? It does not matter mother. I still have my sister, and I will keep my vow to you and to her."

Isabella saw the set in his jaw and knew he meant every word. "She could have killed you Andro. You know that don't you?" Isabella spoke softly.

Andro shook his head. "No. Even in the grips of the fever I think she knew who I was and what I was doing." Andro shrugged. "It doesn't matter... we have put it behind us and so should everyone else." He looked at her and saw the radiance of her face from her pregnancy. He smiled and reached out with his hand. "May I?"

Isabella rolled her eyes at him. "Like you need to ask." She spoke with a smile.

Andro placed his palm on her abdomen and smiled when he felt the flicker of powerful life in his vampire mother's womb. "He's going to be a handful." He said.

Isabella then allowed the first smile to split her face in many hours. "All of you were a handful." She said. She let her hazel green eyes fall upon Zarah once more. "We'll help her to get through this."

Andro nodded. "Yes we will, all of us. Lucia will be the biggest part of it, but we'll all be there."

"Andro... your father..." Isabella saw Andro's jaw twitch just a fraction and she knew that no matter how much he loved his father, he was still very angry with him for what had happen.

"Father will be alright." He said softly. "He is free of whatever it was that was controlling him."

Bella looked at him. "Are... are you sure?"

Andro nodded. "Helen was able to touch me before we left the system. It has something to do with the Pralor ancestors we have. We went dark and jumped before she could tell me everything."

"Yet you are still angry with him." Bella spoke softly.

"I can't help it I suppose." Andro said. "I know it's wrong but..."

Isabella stepped forward and took his arm and squeezed it tightly. "It is not wrong! Your father is not invulnerable Androcles." She said softly. "No one is. He has weaknesses and he has faults. We all do."

Andro nodded with a heavy sigh. "I know." He stated.

"You made a stand Androcles Leonidas." Bella said. "You made a stand and now every rider and dragon on the *SCIMITAR* owes you their thanks and their lives. Do not dismiss your actions my son. What happened was beyond our ability to control. I have come to realize through the years that being married to your father is no easy role. Our capabilities and our name make us targets Andro. That will always be the case. You know that."

Andro nodded. "Yes I do." He turned completely to face her. "It's not what... it's not what he did mother. That was not my father... I know that."

"Then what?" Isabella asked.

"I was powerless to help him mother!" Andro stated looking at her.

Isabella placed her hands on his cheeks and smiled up at him. "There are some things and some people you can not help Androcles. You and your father fail to see that all of the time and more often than not it gets you both into trouble."

Andro couldn't help the small smile that creased his lips. "We do have that in common don't we?" He said.

Isabella nodded. "And so much more." She stated. "Be angry if you must. At least for now... but I know you will let it go. That too is something you have in common with your father. You can not stay angry at those you love for very long."

Andro nodded his head. "I will be fine." He told her as he smiled. "Mother will be happy to see you. Especially since you carry our brother."

Isabella let the twinkle in her eye at his reference to Dysea show without shame. She missed her *ussta il-darthirii* and after twenty-five years she did not care who knew this fact. She nodded her head quickly. "It has been too long since I have tasted your mother's lips, and it will be useful for Zarah to be around her calming influence. It will also be interesting to see what Cha'talla has built on Kranek. "

Andro nodded. "There's no denying that." He said.

"You trust him Andro?" Isabella asked.

"I trust mother and I trust Normya." Andro answered. "They would not have associated themselves willingly with Cha'talla if there was even a hint of deception. And Normya would not have fallen in love with this Tir'ut had there been any doubt. You know that as well as I do."

Isabella nodded. "Yes. It will just take some getting used too."

Andro nodded looking back to Zarah. "Yep! I imagine it will. For all of us."

Isabella took his hand in hers and squeezed tightly. "You should get some rest Andro. You have not left the Med Bay since you returned." Isabella spoke. "You have three mates who worry for you, and you have a ship to run."

"Sa'sur is very capable of running the *SCIMITAR* without me." Andro said. "I want to be here when she wakes."

"No." Isabella spoke causing him to look at her once more. "You have been through quite a bit yourself and you need to reassure Carisia that none of this is her fault."

"Carisia?" Andro said. "What do you mean?"

"I am a woman and I saw it in her eyes." Isabella said. "She will not speak of it openly, but I know she believes you will think less of her because it was her brothers who did this."

"I don't think that!" Andro protested. "I have never thought that! Not for an instant!"

"Then go to her and make sure you show her that." Isabella said. "I will call you when Zarah wakes. She will ask for you first I have no doubt. Now go."

"Mother I..."

"Do I need to turn you over my knee like I did when you were a boy and you chose not to listen to me?" Isabella spoke sternly.

Andro rolled his eyes. "You only did that once." He said.

"You learned your lesson didn't you?" She snapped softly.

"Yes."

"Then do as I ask you now." Isabella said. "I will sit with her a time longer and then Eliani or one of the medics will call us when she wakes."

"Are you sure?" Andro asked.

Bella nodded. "Yes. Now go!"

Andro leaned over and kissed her cheek lovingly before turning and heading out of the Med Bay. He was sore yes, he was tired yes, but the best medicine he could think of now was to take his three mates and drag them into a very hot shower with him. He needed to feel Sadi's body in his arms, he needed to nuzzle Ne'Veha's elven ears and he needed to stroke Carisia's porcelain like skin. He needed to smell all of them close to him. That is what he needed right now. And that is what occupied his mind as he headed down the corridor of his ship.

FEMEYAU KAVALIAN SPACE

Nikkei was standing with four other Kavalian females chatting quietly amongst each other in the Spaceport as they waited for their transport to return them to Cabelir. The Spaceport was actually very busy at the moment, mainly filled with Kavalian Biogenic troops moving to and from wherever their bases were. There were thousands of civilians as well; the men keeping in small groups while the women and children kept to themselves. It was a typical scene almost anywhere within the KFI that you went. Even though the Prefect had loosened somewhat the restrictions on females and what they could do, they were still treated as second class citizens. Nikkei sat silently, her white blond hair matching her mother in its length and silkiness. Her skin was

deeply tanned, her blue eyes stunning in their brightness. The clothes she wore were very conservative and a drab light blue in color. She hated going off Cabelir for she was forced to wear the unflattering clothes that the majority of the Kavalian females in the KFI were forced to wear. Solid colors with no thought for style or attractiveness.

Anything that was remotely sexy in nature was a definite trouble starter and for a female who was mated, unheard of. Though her friends were pure Kavalian females, one having dark brown hair and the other two blond hair, they had undergone the biogenic treatments to remove the fine coat of hair from their bodies by order of their fathers just as Nikkei's mother and Aunt had. All three of them knew that this action was a precursor to them being drafted by the KFI Intelligence apparatus for use anywhere across the expanse of the KFI or wherever they were deemed needed. They all knew when that happened, more than likely they would never see their families again. No biogenically altered Kavalian female had ever returned to their families and Prides after serving with the KFI Intelligence. They were considered tainted then, exposed to the outside world and probably used by non-Kavalian males for sexual pleasure and unfit for breeding. Nikkei to them was a dear friend. She did not think of herself as any different as them no matter who her parents were. These three females were the only ones who had actually taken the time to get to know her and not assume she was arrogant. It helped that they had grown up with her for the most part, the young daughters of servants on the Marshall's property on Cabelir. Nikkei had played with them since childhood and many times they defended her willingly, for she was always sneaking them gifts or holo novels from off world and even out of KFI space. They were items that were strictly forbidden for anyone to have inside KFI space but Nikkei had been able to obtain them from her brother Karun. He was always bringing her gifts and things she should not have had. Karun was different than her two other brothers. He was more like their mother and he showed her far more respect and attention than did her other brothers. Nikkei asked for nothing in return from her friends for she wanted them to have nice things, and the risks she took for them elicited the manner in which they defended her while in school or walking among the markets shopping. There had been many occasions where she had thoughtlessly defended them with their parents if somehow they had managed to get themselves in trouble.

Nikkei's blue eyes wandered over the throng of civilians and military clones with intense interest while her friends chatted amongst themselves. The soldiers moved with a purpose and the civilians basically got out of their way. She knew right away who the officers were among the biogenic clones for they barked orders and generally moved with a bit more confidence and superiority. Nikkei guessed they were the newest batch of clones for all of them looked young and untouched by the war with the Coven. Nikkei let her eyes wander over the throngs of men and women and they fell upon the four, tall Kavalian males sitting nearby at a single table only four meters away from where she sat with her friends.

"Nikkei!" The dark brown haired female snapped softly causing Nikkei to turn her head around quickly.

"Linay ... what?" Nikki snapped back playfully.

"Don't stare at them Nikkei... you will draw attention to us." Linay spoke.

"They are staring at us." Nikkei spoke.

"Yes... they've been staring at us for nearly twenty minutes." The dark blond haired female Gualli said with a nod. "Ever since they sat down."

"Who are they?" Nikkei asked keenly interested as her eyes drifted back to the four males. One appeared younger than the others, his dark brown fur actually very handsome to look at. He and the four men with him appeared to be far better groomed than many of the Kavalian males she was used to seeing.

"I don't know. They don't have uniforms on, but they definitely look military." Gualli said softly.

"Why do we care who they are?" The second blond haired female spoke. "They are pure Kavalian males. We are nothing to them."

Nikkei looked at her. "They seem different somehow." She spoke thoughtfully. "They are definitely concerned with their appearance. I don't think I've ever seen a male with such well groomed fur. The one on the end is actually very handsome."

"Handsome?" Meoocki hissed softly. "Did you hit your head while we have been here learning how to be submissive to males of our species Nikkei?"

"No! I just think he is rather..."

The shadows of four large figures fell over their table and the four friends turned to look directly into the stern faces of four Kavalian men from the Puma Bane Pride. The Puma Bane Pride were the enforcers of her

father and grandfather's will, and there were very few who considered a visit from the Puma Bane beneficiary in the least. Their uniforms immediately set them aside from others as they wore black pants and combat boots with the khaki colored shirts. All of them wore rank insignia on their shoulder boards, but everyone within the KFI knew who Puma Bane soldiers were. Three of the men were lower in rank than the fourth and a quick glance from Nikkei told her he was an officer with the rank of Captain.

"Nikkei' Kagur... you are to come with us." The Captain was obviously leader of the Puma Bane squad and it was he who spoke.

Nikkei knew immediately that something was not right. She was never referred to by her Kavalian name. Kagur was the Pride name of the man who had adopted her father when he had become a Kavalian citizen. She and her brothers bore this surname, though most everyone considered them members of her grandfather's Puat Pride. If they were referring to her as a member of the Kagur Pride something was very wrong.

"I am waiting for my transport to return me to Cabelir!" Nikkei spoke quickly trying to keep her voice level and confident. "I do not need an escort sir. Our transport should be leaving shortly."

"We are not here to escort you wench!" The Captain spat with contempt. "We are taking you into custody! It has been decreed and ordered that you are to be given to the brothels on Nefoa for your mother's actions! I intend to see we enjoy your female charms before we take you there!"

Nikkei came to her feet angrily her blue eyes wide in disbelief. "I am the daughter of Marshall Pusintin!" She snapped. "You have no idea what you say sir! I wish to speak with my father!"

"Who do you think signed the order?" The Puma Bane officer stated tossing the data pad onto the table. "You will come with us now and do so quietly. I do not wish to make a scene here by beating you for your insolence! It would devalue the profit your father is making off of selling your whoring hide!"

"You lie!" Nikkei snarled. "My father would not do this! I want to speak with my father! You will let me..."

The officer's large hand whipped out and slapped her hard, snapping her head back and staggering her to the floor. "You do not know your place wench!" He growled as he stepped closer to stand over her.

The many dozens of Kavalian civilians in the area were rapidly putting as much distance between them and the Puma Bane soldiers as they could. They were notorious throughout the KFI as ruthless warriors and skilled above all others. They were also known as the enforcers of the Prefect's will. No one wanted to cross them in any way or get on their bad side for they had free reign to do what they wished.

Linay dropped to the floor instantly next to Nikkei, her hands going to her friend. "She has done nothing wrong! We have done nothing wrong!" Linay shouted looking up at the officer. "Why do you do this?"

"Take them all!" The Puma Bane officer ordered now. "The wench could probably use the company! And we can make some profit ourselves!"

"No!" Linay barked. "You can't do this!"

"We are Puma Bane whore!" The officer viciously growled. "We can do what we want! We can..."

Linay's eyes grew wide as she watched the blade of the sword emerge from the chest of the Puma Bane officer just below his sternum. She was secretly studying as much medical science as Nikkei was able to smuggle to her and Linay knew immediately upon the rush of the released air she heard that his entire diaphragm and lungs had been perforated completely. Nikkei sat up quickly now as well, pushing back against her in horror and they watched the face of the Kavalian male Nikkei had been admiring appear from the side as his fingers tightened on the bone shaped pommel of the sword and he yanked the nearly one meter long blade out of the officer's chest. Nikkei could only watch as his ocean blue eyes glared angrily at the now dying Puma Bane officer.

"Others of your foul, cruel Pride will follow you into the abyss soon scum!" He snarled savagely.

"Hatos!" The voice of one of the others barked out as the screams of horror and alarm began to sound all around them. Nikkei and Linay saw the other three men from the table now as well and each of them had already dispatched the remaining three members of the Puma Bane squad, their cooling bodies now on the floor and the blades of the three men wet with their blood.

"It is time to go Nikkei." The male voice spoke causing Nikkei's head to whip around once more and settle on those eyes. The Kavalian male extended his hand out to her as she and Linay looked at him in horror.

"You... you killed him!" Nikkei gasped.

The Kavalian nodded. "Yes. We must go before more of those within the Spaceport come to investigate!"

Nikkei shook her head. "No! I... I must contact my father! He..."

The Kavalian leaned over and snatched the data pad from the table and held it out to her. "The scum was not lying to you Nikkei!" He hissed. "It was your father who signed the order for them to arrest you! See for yourself!"

"No!" Nikkei barked. "No! My father would not..."

Linay took the pad from his outstretched hand and activated it. Her dark eyes grew wide as she began to read. She looked up and stared at Nikkei. "He's telling the truth Nikkei!" She gasped holding out the pad. "Your... your father ordered it!"

Nikkei grabbed the pad from her and her eyes showed the horror at the truth as she saw her father's electronic code at the bottom of the order to have her arrested and imprisoned in the brothels on Nefoa. She shook her head slowly unable to comprehend that her father would do this. He was stern with her yes; he hardly ever showed her affection as was the Kavalian way, but to do this?

"Wh...why?" Nikkei sobbed turning her blue eyes up to look at the Kavalian who had saved them. He appeared no older than perhaps thirty years of age, still a child in many respects among Kavalian males. His actions and skills however spoke of him being something much more however.

"I do not know all of it... and it is better if you hear it from your mother." He replied gently.

"My mother?" Nikkei asked now. "What do you know of my mother?" She scrambled to her feet.

"Has... has he hurt my mother? Has he..."

Hatos'Nruarani shook his head. "No... your mother is safe." He replied.

"Who are you?" Linay demanded. "What do you want from her? From us?"

"I want nothing." Hatos spoke. "Our orders were to watch over you and protect you should the need arise. This morning, only a few hours ago actually, we received new orders to retrieve you and insure you were spirited away to safety."

"Orders?" Nikkei asked. "Orders from whom?"

"My uncle. Pian'Nruarani." Hatos answered. He took Nikkei's arm in his grasp. "Now... forgive me... but we must go and I would rather not have to pick you up and carry you."

"Go? Go where?" Nikkei demanded. "I am not going..."

"If you remain here you will be killed." Hatos spoke. "All of you would have spent your remaining years on Nefoa in the brothels of that vile world entertaining every Kavalian pig who could afford to fuck the Marshall's daughter. And believe me Nikkei, there would be many who would save their credits to do just that."

"You have killed Puma Bane Pride officers!" Linay hissed vehemently. "Puma Bane officers! We will be flogged and tortured for this!"

"That is why you are going with us!" The new voice spoke softly. They turned to see the older Kavalian male come up holding Gualli's arm. "We must go now! Our ship is waiting in orbit and we can slip away into the crowd but we need to go! Your mother Jalersi will explain everything when we are safe."

"But..."

"Nikkei do you wish to be a whore for every Kavalian soldier who can afford to purchase an hour with you?" Hatos snapped softly. Nikkei looked at him with wide blue eyes filled with fear. "I did not think so. Come... we must go quickly."

Whether it was the inbred submissiveness of Kavalian females or simply the shock at what was happening, Nikkei was docile as she let Hatos take her arm and lead her into the crowd. She would discover soon enough what was going on, and the shock and horror of what had been planned for her would diminish over time.

The hatred and anger for her father however, that would grow as she discovered more and more about what was happening and those feelings would remain for the rest of her natural born life.

Walter and Daba entered the small room off the landing bay where their ship was now nothing more than a smoldering slag heap. Ceneia looked up from the contraption of equipment she was sitting in front of as they entered, Hval and Olar providing security. Ceneia had been able to salvage three of the powerful transmitters from the rear of the corvette and connected them all together with the single power node that had survived. With a jumble of wiring and conduits that Walter and Daba had secured from a very frightened local merchant she had been able to build this machine in just over four hours.

She stood up as she was wiping her hands and looked at them. "Ok... I have broken so many Union regulations and codes by building this I can't even begin to list them. This is it though."

Walter stepped up to her and looked at the square shaped box with a single computer keyboard and screen. "Will it work?" He asked quickly.

Ceneia nodded. "I had to reroute the power connections and I'm tapped illegally into the spaceport's power supply. It was built with Limian power conduits and I had to jury rigged a transformer to make them compatible, but yes it will work." She looked at him. "It will send one twenty second transmission before the entire thing overloads and fries. We'll be able to transmit it but not receive and we won't know if anyone answers."

Walter looked at her. "Ceneia..."

"Damn it Walter... it's the best I could do!" She spat. "Olar and I were barely able to save the three transmitters we did. I had to cobble the parts from them to make one, and then I had to recharge the single power node that survived! I...!"

Daba stepped up to her quickly and took her hands drawing her close. "Peace Ceneia." She said softly. "It is alright."

Ceneia nodded and took a deep breath. "I'm sorry Mistress." She spoke. "We've been shot down before... but I've never had anyone try to kill me while I'm on the ground. It's very unnerving."

Walter chuckled softly and squeezed her arm. "I told you it would be interesting flying for me." He said. "And I know you have done your best." He looked at the transmitter once more. "Will it burn through the Deutrino field surrounding the city?"

Ceneia nodded. "Yes. That's why it will burn out once we transmit. The power needed for such a thin beam to penetrate the field is extreme." She answered. "Where do we send it Walter? It won't reach Apo Prime. Not from here. The automated monitoring stations along the border will deflect it as an unknown signal and scramble it. It definitely won't reach Earth and... Earth!"

"Ceneia!" Daba asked. "What is wrong?"

"*Son vada carians!* We've been trying to stay alive and I forgot!" Ceneia declared.

"Forgot what?" Walter asked.

"The Coven! They launched terrorist attacks against specified targets on Earth!" Ceneia declared.

"Terrorist attacks!" Walter gasped.

Ceneia nodded quickly. "The Netnews recording was old, it was an interview by the Prime Minister actually but it said that Zarah Leonidas was captured and raped by Coven personal who wanted the location of the Mindvoice ship from her. It said Aikiro was dead, killed by the *Feravomir*. Yuri was believed gravely injured and that they were searching for her. It reported that Prince Androcles took all of his brothers and sisters aboard the *SCIMITAR* with the High Coven riders and dragons and jumped out of the system to protect them while the *Durcunusaan* got things under control on Earth!" Ceneia told them excitedly. "The report was several hours old and it was automated since nothing was penetrating the Deutrino field, but that is what I was contacting you to report when everything else happened."

"Zarah?" Walter gasped.

Ceneia shook her head. "All the report said was that she was still alive. There was also an attack on the Kavalian embassy in Sparta!"

"*Nubou* the Kavalian bastards!" Walter snarled. His mind was running different options over and over and he looked at Ceneia. "Does this thing have enough power to transmit to a specified channel?"

Ceneia shrugged. "It could." She answer. "It will shorten the transmission length if I adjust it to a specific frequency though."

"How long?" Walter asked.

Ceneia shrugged. "Ten seconds! Maybe twelve!"

“Do it!” Walter snapped.

“What channel?” Ceneia asked as she squatted back in front of the machine.

“The coded auxiliary fleet channel of the *SCIMITAR*.” Walter answered.

Ceneia looked at him. “Walter... we don’t even know where the *SCIMITAR* jumped to.” She said. “How do we...?”

“This report you saw on the Netnews... it said Andro took the Coven riders and dragons with him yes?” Walter asked.

Ceneia nodded. “That is what the Prime Minister told the Netnews in the report yes.” She replied.

Walter nodded quickly. “I spoke with Helen very briefly before we left Earth. She was Mindvoicing with Arzoal at the time when I contacted her and she mentioned something about Andro and The Wilds and Kranek. I don’t think she realized I overheard her.”

“Kranek?” Ceneia said. “There’s nothing on Kranek except some underdeveloped settlements.”

Walter nodded. “Which is exactly what Andro would look for in a place to train the Coven dragons. That boy thinks outside the box, just like his father. If he took the Coven riders and dragons with him, then that is where he is going.”

“Holy One are you sure?” Daba asked.

Walter looked at her. “What other options do we have?” He asked. “The *SCIMITAR* will be in The Wilds. The transmission won’t have to pass through the border scramblers. It’s our best shot.”

“A direct link to the *SCIMITAR*’s coded alternate fleet channel will mean we can only send words Walter.” Ceneia spoke. “The AFC’s are low power passive receivers.”

Walter nodded with a smile. “I know. And if it gets through I know just the words that will bring Andro running here without question.” He looked at Daba. “If what you and Ceneia think is true is actually true?”

Daba looked at him. “What do you mean?” She asked.

EARTH SPARTA

“...will insure this is passed to the Prime Minister immediately Lady Tarifa.” Laustinos spoke from the transmission. “She is still meeting with Queen For'mya at the moment, but I will hand carry this to her myself!”

Tarifa nodded as she looked at the man in the transmission from her home. “This is top priority Laustinos! Interrupt her if you have to! For'mya will want to know as well! Where is Aricia?”

“Queen Aricia has just returned to Sparta. She went directly to where the Prime Minister and Queen For'mya are meeting at the Senate Building.” Laustinos answered hesitantly as he fingered the data pad in his hand.

Tarifa had been informed that Deia was in a private meeting with For'mya and had been transferred to Laustinos’s office instantly. Tarifa knew the man to be practically worthless when it came to anything political. Like any other woman who came in contact with him when he was in the same room as Dysea, she had long ago detected his infatuation with the emerald eyed elf Queen Tarifa considered a dear sister. He walked the line among Lycavorian males when it came to Dysea, always doing whatever he could to be in the same room with her and then quite brazenly making it known he was interested in her. His actions were tolerated because of his position and because Dysea was so devoutly in love with Martin, that no other male even came close to him in her eyes. Tarifa was among those who secretly believed that Dysea was the Queen who Martin most loved after Aricia. She was the first he had turned among his three turned Queens, and Dysea was the one who had been the one with him the moment he had discovered his true nature and history. Tarifa was also one of only three women outside of his Queens who knew that Dysea was able to take Martin’s full unshielded aura during their times of passion. His blood was more deeply embedded in her body and this allowed her more of a natural resistance to his aura than Anja or For'mya. Like Aricia, she was still able to function and think when gripped in the throes of his aura, and for this reason alone Tarifa felt the way she did. Laustinos had about as much chance of stealing Dysea from Martin as he did in ever becoming Prime Minister of the Lycavorian Union.

“The moment we end this transmission you will take this to them!” Tarifa ordered. “Is that clear?”

“Forgive me Lady Tarifa... if it is so important why didn't you just go to the Senate Building yourself?” Laustinos asked smugly.

Tarifa glared at him in the transmission. “I have... I have other issues here to deal with!” She barked not wanting to let everyone in the government to know she had four Kavalians in her home who would likely end up very dead if it was known where they were.

Laustinos nodded his head. “As you wish.” He spoke.

“Have our rescue and recovery teams found anything of those missing from the Kavalian embassy?” Tarifa asked.

Laustinos shook his head. “It seems everyone is accounted for now.” He replied. “The death toll was very great. Fully one third of their embassy staff as well as senior members of their senior staff.”

Tarifa cocked her head. “Which ones?” She asked innocently. “I had a meeting with this Ambassador Jiss scheduled for next week to discuss ratification of a trade agreement that would have greatly benefited our poultry stocks.”

Laustinos shook his head. “I'm sorry Lady Tarifa; you will not be having that meeting. They have reported Ambassador Jiss as being one of those killed in the assault, as well as the Kavalian Prefect's daughter Jalersi, two senior military officers and his grandson Karun. To my knowledge the Kavalian government is already beginning to blame us for not providing enough security for the outside of the embassy. I am embroiled in trying to make them see they did not request our assistance so they can not hold us to blame.”

Tarifa nodded her head. “Very well.” She spoke. “Please get this information to Deia and have her contact me if she has any questions.”

“May I ask where you received this information Lady Tarifa?” Laustinos asked. “This evidence is... it is very volatile and it could cause a great many problems.”

“Yes... plotting to kill the royal family should cause problems!” Tarifa snapped. “If Deia wants to talk with me have her contact me on my personal channel! I will be waiting!” Tarifa ended the transmission bluntly. She hated having to deal with Laustinos. She turned to where Pian and Jiss were standing outside the range of the holo transmission cone. “Whatever doubts I may have had are now gone.” She stated looking at them.

“You trust this man to get the information to your Prime Minister?” Jiss asked.

Tarifa nodded her head. “He may be a joke of a politician, but he knows who leads the Union.” She answered easily. “He walks on very thin ice with Deia and the Queens right now for other reasons. He will not do anything to make them angrier with him than they already are and he will not risk alienating himself from the corridors of power.”

“I... I thank you for allowing what you have done so far.” Pian spoke looking at her.

“Why... why would your leaders set themselves on this course?” Tarifa asked. “Even with Aikiro dead, they must know the High Coven war will not end. They must know their course of action is flawed. There is no way Pusintin could ever gain the throne of the Union.”

“I don't believe they knew of the High Coven's actions on this day, so that would not have factored into their thinking.” Jiss spoke. “For whatever reason, they believe this turn of events will somehow keep the Union from responding in a warlike manner to whatever else it is that they have planned.”

“They can't simply believe we will sit by and do nothing.” Tarifa said. “Targeting the royal family? That is not the action of sane leaders Ambassador.”

Jiss nodded. “I could not agree with you more Lady Tarifa.” Jiss answered. “As I told you earlier, my views on matters are very different than yours no doubt, but I do not wish to see my people bear the brunt of what these actions will surely result in. At least that is the view I have. The Prefect and Marshall Pusintin seem to think you will not go to war if Martin Leonidas and others are dead.”

Tarifa shook her head. “I don't know what they think would stop that from happening.” She stated.

Pian nodded. “That is the piece of the puzzle that we do not have.” He stated.

“Knowing Pusintin like I do... it will most likely be something we can not imagine or suspect.” The new female voice said. They all turned to see Jalersi limping heavily as she came into the room.

“Jalersi!” Pian exclaimed as he started for her.

Tarifa got there first using her elven speed and agility and she placed a shoulder under Jalersi's arm and helped to support her. “You should not be up.” Tarifa stated.

“Your doctor... she said movement will help it to heal faster.” Jalersi said shaking her head. “And I do not wish to simply lay around.”

“Anuk is the senior Field Medic in the Union.” Tarifa said quickly. “Don’t let her hear you call her a doctor. She hates when people do that.”

Jalersi looked at her with wide eyes. “She is not a doctor? Her skills... her skills are...” She gasped.

Tarifa shook her head. “No. Anja offered to have her go to some additional training to become a certified doctor but Anuk refused. She said it would take her away from the soldiers in the field who need her more. Anja instead placed her in command of all medics and Healers who are not part of the planet based commands. Essentially she holds the rank of Admiral and commands all the Healers and medics that operate as part of Union Fleets.”

Pian stopped next to her and took her other arm gently. “You should move slowly Jalersi. Do not strain yourself to much.”

Jalersi looked up at him and the look of concern in his face made her feel warm all over. She gripped his arms as she looked at him with stunning blue eyes. “Did you...?”

Pian nodded. “I ordered my brother to have Nikkei taken.” He said. “There have been four of our finest Pride warriors following her since our first night together my love. Wherever she is they will make sure she is safe. They will contact us when they have her on one of our ships and are clear of any Kavalian fleet forces.”

“When Pian?” Jalersi asked. “I worry for her.”

“A few hours more I would think.” Pian said. “We can not contact them any sooner from here. They will not fail my love... I promise you that.”

Jalersi nodded and looked at Tarifa. “I can not... I can not thank you enough for what you have done.” She said. “You believed in us.”

“My daughter believes in you.” Tarifa said. “And I believe in my daughter. Your son’s words to me I believe. Trust begins in the simplest ways, and it has begun this night with us Jalersi. My daughter and your son have connected us now, and it is up to us to discover the rest. My father once hated my mate because he did not discover who Isra was before making a decision. He believed things about him that I allowed him to believe because of my emotional state at the time. I swore never to let that happen to us.”

Jalersi nodded. “What about now?” She asked. “Your mate and your father?”

Tarifa chuckled. “There are times when I have to pull the two of them apart.” She said. “The Spartan Wine flows freely when my mate and father are in the same room. And it is always an event to watch too.”

“I do not drink.” Jalersi said.

Tarifa nodded. “Neither do I.” She said. “I do like coffee however.” She looked at Pian and Jiss. “For all of us?”

Jalersi nodded. “I think we would like that.”

“What do we do right now?” Jiss asked.

Tarifa met his eyes. “We wait for the moment. Deia will contact me soon I would imagine and you can speak to her directly. Right now... right now our biggest concern is my husband Isra and Anuk’s husband Daniel. They know we are here and they will contact us sooner rather than later. Once they discover you are here they will come here immediately. Then we will need to find a safer place for you.”

“They will not...” Jalersi began to ask.

Tarifa shook her head. “No!” She stated emphatically. “If Anuk and I trust you... Isra and Daniel will trust you. Right now... right now all we can do is wait until Deia contacts me. If what you say is true then they will know who Ardis is... they will know who I am... and they will be watching our home. It is safer for us inside right now. Our home is very secure, and help is only moments away.”

“Your dragon’s presence will deter them somewhat as well.” Jalersi said.

Tarifa nodded. “Then I suggest we have coffee and wait until Deia contacts us. I know it does not seem like much... but it is all we can do right now.” She looked at Jalersi. “You can help me to get their coffee if you like. I believe there are some things we can discuss.”

Jalersi met those sapphire eyes and nodded. This was another part of her future now and she would not shrink from it in any way. “Of course.” She stated.

“Gentlemen... we shall return shortly.” Tarifa said as she and Jalersi turned for the door.

Jiss looked at Pian who shrugged his broad shoulders. “What do they wish to discuss?” He asked.

Pian shook his head. "I have no idea." He answered. "Each step we take forward is another step into the future and the unknown for me Jiss."

Jiss nodded. "Indeed it is. The question remains... will we see that future."

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

CABELIR

OFFICE OF MARSHALL PUSINTIN

"...do you mean gone!" Pusintin snarled at the man in the transmission.

"The Puma Bane squad sent to arrest your daughter was killed in the middle of the Spaceport Marshall." The man answered. "Your daughter and those with her were taken. All we know is that they were four Kavalian males. Very well trained to have surprised the Puma Bane team. Witnesses say these four males took your daughter and those with her and blended back into the crowd of thousands in seconds."

"Fuck!" Pusintin screamed. "Lock the planet down! Find her!"

"We have locked the planet down sir." The Kavalian officer replied. "However... over three hundred ships departed before the lockdown was fully implemented. We do not know if your daughter is still on the surface or on one of those ships."

"Then your mission is to find out General!" Pusintin barked. "Tear that planet apart if you have too! I don't care! I want her found and taken into custody! And you can announce that anyone aiding my daughter and her friends will be executed for assisting a fugitive!"

The Kavalian general nodded. "That is what I needed to hear you say sir." He spoke. "We will find her Marshall Pusintin. I promise you!"

Pusintin turned as the transmission went dead and he cursed long and loud, throwing his mug across the room and listening to it smash against the wall. "Fuck!" He said. "The wench is just like her mother!"

"Problem?" Keleru's voice broke into his thoughts and Pusintin turned as the Kavalian leader walked calmly into his office.

Pusintin took a deep breath and quickly got his anger under control. Keleru had to have heard him and if he did he showed no change in his expression. "The Puma Bane team sent to arrest Nikkei was killed." He told him bluntly. He wasn't about to start keeping things from Keleru. They had come this far because they shared all information. "She and the three friends she was with are gone."

Keleru came fully into the office carrying the two data pads. "Killed?" He spoke calmly but clearly surprised. "Who would dare attack and kill a Puma Bane squad?"

"I don't know... but whoever they are they blended back into the crowd and disappeared before the back up team got there." Pusintin answered. "They were very professional and well trained according to the Puma Bane Garrison Commander."

"Pian?" Keleru asked looking at him.

Pusintin shook his head quickly. "I don't think so Keleru. He would not risk his Pride by doing something that stupid." He said. "He may have convinced Jalersi to submit to him, but he is still a Kavalian male. Her children with me would mean nothing to him! He only cares that he finally twisted Jalersi enough against me to allow him lock groins with her."

Keleru nodded then. "That is true. We will deal with Pian accordingly when we find him I assure you. However, you must also realize she may have submitted to him willingly. The Union allows far more freedoms to our females Pusintin, you know this. Perhaps she was enticed by the perceived freedoms she has gained there." He spoke coming forward.

Pusintin met his eyes. "I... no." He said. "I refuse to believe she allowed Pian to take her willingly. There must be something else involved."

Keleru shrugged noncommittally. "When we find them we will discover what it is." He spoke. "You have made your decision as far as she is concerned I see. She will join your daughter on Nefoa?"

Pusintin studied Keleru's face. "Unless you order otherwise." He said. "She is your daughter and I..."

Keleru shook his head. "She is your mate." He stated. "She disappoints me with her actions and she is intelligent enough to know the consequences of her actions. No... she chose the path she now walks, and it is your right. I will not go outside our laws simply because she is my daughter. I can have more daughters if I need them for something. I would prefer to have sons however."

"Then yes." Pusintin spoke. "If and when we find her and she is arrested, she will join Nikkei in the brothels on Nefoa for what she has done."

Keleru nodded. "So be it. You have men active in finding Nikkei and you must leave that to them. Something has come up that we need to discuss."

Pusintin looked at him detecting the tone of his voice. "Something has happened with the plan?" He asked.

Keleru shook his head. "No... our plan is fully implemented and already in motion. It is proceeding according to our timetable. This Immortal scum Phy'iad and his men are moving towards Kranek as we speak and I have four Fleet Groups taking a longer than necessary route behind the Torana Protonic Nebula. They will crush whatever resistance is provided by the Lycavorian ships there and lead the ground assault against the Immortal settlement. Phy'iad and his ilk will complete their portion of the operation easily concerning what will be amassed against the fools there."

"The operations against the Drow are proceeding normally then?" Pusintin asked.

Keleru nodded as he settled into the chair. "Five of the Puma Bane teams have reported in. All of their targets have been wiped out. Your son is leading a small force in tracking two survivors of the attack on Iraruzu. Once they complete that mission five of the nine settlements we targeted will be destroyed completely with no survivors."

"The other four?" Pusintin asked.

"Another thirty-six hours before they report in to their superiors and then our forces will attack just as we did with the others." Keleru answered evenly. "Our complete Hadarian force is staged and ready to begin transit as soon as they receive word that the red haired Queen is in custody or dead. Do not worry Pusintin my friend. The Puma Bane Pride is our finest and most cunning and our forces have been training for nearly a year to take Hadaria. They will not fail. We will need to advise Vice Admiral Menot to have the Hadarian fools delay this hearing another day at least. I will tell him to contact this woman he is communicating with to delay her proceedings. It will allow our teams to further cement their positions and the confusion the Coven has unwittingly wrought to sink in further."

"It will also allow our teams in Sparta to try and discover where Pian and Jalersi have gotten too." Pusintin said. "Sparta is not that big and they would not have left the city."

Keleru nodded. "Our contact will inform me later today if he has been successful in this regard." He said.

"You've spoken to him already?" Pusintin asked surprised.

Keleru nodded. "Within hours of this information becoming known to us." He answered. "Our contact knows he will not be able to remain among his people when they discover what he has done. He is setting himself up to ask for sanctuary."

"Will you grant it?" Pusintin asked. "He's a traitor to his own people and he can't be trusted."

Keleru shrugged. "We will see. So far his information has been completely accurate and he has held nothing back. He could be a valuable asset into the workings of the Union Senate and how they will act when we present our case to them."

Pusintin thought about that for a moment and nodded. "I didn't think of it that way." He said. "But you may be right."

"I haven't made a decision yet... we'll see what else he can do for us until that time comes." He held out the data pad. "Have you gone over your daily reports yet?"

Pusintin took the pad. "I haven't had the time just yet why?"

Keleru nodded. "Understandable. You should read this however."

Pusintin joined him in sitting, taking the chair opposite Keleru and beginning to read the information on the data pad silently. Keleru saw his body stiffen slightly and his head came up. "When did this come in?"

“Early yesterday evening.” Keleru answered. “Our communications people were so intent on monitoring the events happening within the Union concerning what the Coven attempted that it slipped through the cracks until this morning.”

“What do you think the results will be of what happen?” Pusintin asked.

“They are still confused and gathering information.” Keleru spoke. “We do not have much intelligence on this so called Dragon Mountain. I understand it is actually a ship. Or it used to be.”

Pusintin nodded. “So I’ve been briefed yes.”

“Amazing.” Keleru stated. “A ship that can transform into a mountain. Think of the power we could wield with such a ship.”

Pusintin nodded. “And think of the losses on our part if even an attempt to take it was tried. We can use Aikiro as an example. Trying to take that ship was the end of her.” Pusintin said.

“I must inform our contact to obtain any information he has on this ship.” Keleru spoke. “Unlike Aikiro... I will be content to have even a small amount of its vast technology. It is undoubtedly where your brother has gotten the majority of his technological advancements in these last years.”

Pusintin nodded. “Yes... but he is also stupid. He should have been using those gains to build weapons and defenses. Instead they used these advancements to improve the lives of the citizens of the Union.”

“Have faith Pusintin.” Keleru spoke. “When you are once more in power... you can make whatever changes you deem necessary.”

Pusintin nodded. “And I will.” He spoke holding up the data pad. “This is only a partial transmission Keleru. It’s not... it’s not even clear. Union... Coven ships... engaging them... will report.” Pusintin spoke looking up at Keleru. “Have we tried contacting the ship’s captain again?”

“That is why I brought it to you.” Keleru said. “We can no longer communicate with him. He no longer answers any transmissions and though Ritaah is at the extreme range of our long range sensor platform in that sector, his ships are not showing up on sensors. We left a force of twenty-seven assorted ships in this system after moving our main Hadarian Assault force to the Consortium border.”

“They could have moved out of range.” Pusintin offered.

“Yes they could have.” Keleru said evenly. “Given what was recently staged in that area I dispatched an entire fleet group to investigate an hour ago. If a Union ship has been in that area spying on us, we can not let that ship escape. Even using our Jump Gates, it will take those ships two days to reach this area and our full plan will be in motion already. The second report was a bit more interesting however. It came from a border patrol ship on the border of the next sector that was taking sensor scans of a Polarized Ion Cloud.”

Pusintin nodded as he continued reading. “Large explosion detected on surface of Ritaah. Moving to investigate and will advise.” He looked up at Keleru. “There’s nothing on Ritaah Keleru. It’s a jungle world. Not the most hospitable.”

Keleru nodded. “I know. Union and Coven warships in our space concerns me greatly if it is true. Considering the amount of ships and planet based arrays we had in this sector, for a Union ship to slip past unnoticed is not good. It tells us their Shrouds are just as good, if not better than the Coven. That is why we can not let it escape. And now this explosion on the surface of Ritaah? A planet only a single light year from our staging area? It’s too much of a coincidence my friend.”

“I agree.” Pusintin spoke looking at the pad once more. “There’s nothing to indicate what kind of ships they were.” Pusintin said quickly. He snorted angrily. “I thought I was very firm when I told officers they need to be precise in their reports or we won’t know what they hell they mean.”

“You can deal with that when we discover what it is this officer encountered.” Keleru said. “I am going to have Matuarr file an official protest to see what type of reaction we get from the Union leadership. It will only add to the confusion they are already experiencing. You have found the one you were seeking?”

Pusintin nodded. “In Sparta.” He answered. “I’ve already sent a message forward to Team Three to execute her capture when the others act.”

“Good.” Keleru said. “If we are lucky... and so far our luck is holding it seems... if we are lucky we can take out your brother’s entire family in one fell swoop.”

Pusintin looked at Keleru. “Vice Marshall Menot has his instructions for when he arrives on Hadaria I assume?”

Keleru nodded his head with a small laugh. "Oh yes. And he is looking forward to becoming very close with this Hadarian Elder Healer. Buonau is her name. After seeing her image I believe he said she would look good with his cock stuffed in her ass."

Pusintin chuckled and nodded. "That might be interesting to witness." He spoke. "I understand Menot has been banned from just about every brothel within Kavalian space due to his size."

Keleru nodded. "Indeed." He got to his feet. "Keep me abreast of what the task force I sent to Ritaah discovers and inform me immediately should anything arise."

Pusintin nodded. "You know I will."

RITAAH

Channa stared across the large room inside the Mindvoice ship and watched him work.

It had been an eventful last few hours to say the least. They had descended upon the rebel village in haste and unbelievably everyone was ready to depart the village within three hours. They were used to being hunted so it was no matter to be prepared to move quickly, but even so three hours was the fastest Channa had ever seen them move. The move to the Mindvoice ship was also without incident, and Channa had looked on with awe as a massive door in the side of the mountain had opened to admit them easily. It was four hundred meters from the door they had been standing and watching all these years and it allowed everyone to enter the ship freely. It was something none of them had ever expected. Channa had watched as Resumar, Athani and Dario had entered and the ship became even more alive and bright on the inside because of the massive presence of the dragons and others who could Mindvoice easily. She had stood beside Mirra as they watched Resumar Leonidas, the second avatar and several others greet the avatar of this ship. Channa could not believe how easily Mirra moved along the corridors of the ship. She manipulated her huge body flawlessly, with graceful motions of her wings and tail and she very happy to be rid of the hundreds of pounds of explosives that she had carried on her back.

Everything to Channa was just so much more open now. Her mind saw images and places where her new Bonded Sister had been to and traveled to in her young dragon life. The last few hours as they explored their new bond Channa felt her awareness and knowledge of things expand to levels she had never reached. She discovered that Mirra was considered one of the brightest students under the tutelage of the dragon Elder Mother as she was growing. Channa could see and feel each event of Mirra's life as clearly as if it was her own, and now Mirra could see Channa's as well. It was something they would explore deeply in the months ahead, but both of them knew that what was going on around them needed their full attention. They were content to remain in almost constant physical touch sharing their feelings with each other without question and slowly forging their bond tighter and tighter as every minute passed.

Mirra butted Channa in the back of her shoulder tenderly with her snout. Channa had taken to sitting almost exclusively between Mirra's huge front talons whenever they stopped. Many of the Kavalian rebels had given her a wide berth while looking at her in amazement and a healthy dose of fear even while the children crowded around in wonder. It was becoming apparent that the inbred fear of dragons that was somehow coded within the DNA of the Kavalian species was something that could naturally be controlled. Though there were perhaps a dozen mixed elven and Kavalian children from the many relationships that had forged over the last four years, most of the children were pure Kavalian. When Na'lia and the other elves had worked their medical magic and discovered a way to reverse the DNA degeneration and slow deaths of the biogenic clones, they had unwittingly allowed them to have children as well. These children did not have the almost paralyzing fear of dragons that most Kavalians had, and when put together with the half elven and half Kavalian children that were among them, what little fear that was present was quickly brushed aside as the children crowded around Cemath and Mirra easily. They remained away from Sorran only because of the hulking Spartan that was applying the ointment to his wing scales.

[He is very handsome isn't he Channa?] Mirra said softly speaking within a shielded conversation. It was one of the first things that she had taught her new Bonded Sister and Channa was an excellent student.

Channa nodded slowly as her blue eyes followed Dario's movements keenly. He was shirtless and moving around Sorran's huge muscular body applying an ointment of some kind to several locations on his

wings which were spread out nearly to their full length on the floor of the ship. His six foot three body was superbly defined in exacting detail Channa thought to herself. *[His eyes are... they are beautiful. Are all... are all Spartans like him and Resumar Leonidas?]* She asked.

Mirra chuckled softly. *[Physically many of them are equally as muscular and defined. Since the return of the King many Spartans have dedicated their lives to being in the finest shape they could possibly be in. The King and all his sons are defined in such a way. Dario is just like them but he is also different however. Just as Resumar is different.]*

Channa turned her head. *[Different how?]*

[Dario has spent much of his life growing and interacting with the Leonidas children. Just being around them has stimulated his and Sorran's bond deeply.] Mirra answered. *[Their bond and abilities within Mindvoice are far more than the normal bonded pairs within the Union. It was one of the reasons the King chose them to come with Resumar. There are several bonded pairs that have gained more than they normally would because of their constant interaction with the Leonidas family. Dario and Sorran are among them. He and Resumar are very close.]*

[He was holding back when we were fighting wasn't he Mirra?] Channa asked looking at her. *[I saw him kill that vampire without so much as any effort or hesitation. He was not really fighting me was he?]*

Mirra nodded her massive head. *[We did not come here seeking confrontation, and the Spartan in him will not allow him to strike a woman unless he is in danger of losing his life.]*

[I was never a threat to him was I?] Channa asked.

[You are powerful and skilled Channa my new sister and together we will grow more skilled and powerful, but no, you were never a threat to him. Though I must say, you surprised him with your very advanced skills and your ability to use your tail to such a degree.] Mirra answered.

Channa looked down and allowed her hand to stroke her smooth tail curled around her thigh as it now was. *[My tail.]* She said softly. *[Most Kavalian women who are biogenically altered choose to take drugs so that their tails do not re-grow. It allows them to better fit in. I did not have that luxury because my eyes never took to the treatments. I like my tail. It gives me an advantage in battle.]*

Mirra nodded with a small chortle. *[Something Dario discovered unwittingly.]* She said. *[He has teased Athani endlessly about her tail since they first met. She has slapped him with it on many occasions for being so male.]*

[He mocks her?] Channa gasped.

[Oh no!] Mirra replied quickly. *[Not like that. Dario is very free spirited and he has developed a very dry sense of humor from his time among Queen Anja and Princess Eliani. In a sense... if Dario is teasing you or joking with you... it is because he considers you a trusted ally and friend.]*

[So he is eccentric?] Channa asked.

Mirra nodded. *[Very much so.]*

Channa smiled. *[I like eccentric.]* She said turning back to look at Dario once more as he squatted next to Sorran. She saw him nod his head and she knew he was talking to his bonded brother within Mindvoice.

[You find him attractive don't you?] Mirra asked.

Channa nodded quickly. *[Mmmmm... yes I do. Very much so.]*

[What happened in your past does not hinder you in this regard?] Mirra asked again.

Channa turned to look at her. *[I made a conscious decision to let that part of my life go.]* She stated. *[Mican and Na'lia helped me. If I had not chosen the path I did, I would never be able to go forward into the future. I may have been biogenically altered but I do still wish for the same things as any other female. Children. Happiness. A man who loves me for who I am inside. A man who will be satisfied with only me.]* Channa turned back to look at Dario. *[If I had held to the hate of what was done to me I would never have those things. I would much rather go after the things I want. Especially now. I am not ashamed of what happened to me... it has only made me more cognizant of insuring I act when I see something I want.]*

Mirra gently ran her snout along Channa's shoulder. *[Wise words my sister.]* She stated. *[If that is how you feel... then do not hesitate sister. Spartan men like Dario and Resumar are very quickly scooped up by the female wolves or elves who, like you, know a prize when they see it.]*

[How do I approach him?] Channa asked softly.

[You be the woman who was slapping him silly.] Mirra said with a laugh.

Channa looked at her oddly. *[I would prefer to worship his body Mirra. Not slap him silly.]*
[Do not change who you are for any male!] Mirra spoke firmly. *[You are confident and secure in yourself. Approach him as you fought him last night. Without fear. You might be surprised.]*

[She is very beautiful brother.] Sorran spoke as he watched Dario spread the apricot ointment on his scales where his tumble through the trees had scraped them.

Dario looked up from his work and met Sorran's eyes. *[She smells very good too. You should have seen her when I looked up from the ground and saw those eyes brother. They were two shining orbs of blue.]*

[Do you find her as attractive as I do Mirra?] He asked.

Dario smiled. *[I imagine so. And you really need to get over that age thing between you. The Elder Mother has stated many times since the Council loosened the restrictions on female dragons that no one can control what their hearts tell them.]*

Sorran nodded. *[I know. I'm quite sure however there are many younger dragons that have approached her. She has been of mating age for two decades now.]*

[So what.] Dario answered. *[Wasn't Torma almost three hundred years older than Isheeni when he first approached the Elder Mother? And that was during the war with the fools on Enurrua. Attraction and love know no age limits Sorran, you should know that.]*

Sorran nodded his head slowly. Outwardly around others the two of them were always gruff with one another. They enjoyed insulting each other over the smallest things; it only served to strengthen their bond in a way many did not understand. Alone however, alone they could and did have deep discussions on many different topics. They shared everything with each other and held nothing back. It was what made them such a powerful Bonded Pair.

[We should offer them whatever help we can give to them in this period.] Sorran spoke. *[Now was not exactly a good time to discover their bond. We are deep in enemy territory with little support.]*

Dario looked at him. *[We aren't exactly helpless you know. The FAITH is nearby, and if Vonis has vouched for these insurgents then we have an added ally as well.]*

Sorran nodded his huge head. *[But we are here on the surface of this world. They are not.]*

[Good point.] Dario spoke.

His head lifted slightly when the sweet smell of apricots filled his nostrils and he turned slowly to see Channa and Mirra moving over to them. He took the time to admire her even more in the light of the ship. She was taller than most women he knew, nearing five foot nine in height. Her legs were long and deliciously muscular and ended at what had to be the finest shaped female ass Dario had ever set eyes on. Her breasts strained against the civilian clothes she wore, and her raven black hair cascaded around her face and well past her shoulders. If she tasted as good as she smelled Dario had no doubts a night with her would be addictive in every way. Her vertically slit blue eyes were amazingly bright and the color of the deep blue of the Pacific Ocean on Earth, her lips full and incredibly soft looking. And then there was that two meter long tail that danced along behind her. She obviously was extremely adept at using it, and the force of the blows she could deliver with it were exceptional. He could attest to that quite personally considering she had been able to hit him with it half a dozen times. Now however, that tail hung loosely wrapped around her thigh. Dario watched as she marched right up to him and Channa suddenly became much more attractive to him. She did not lack for confidence and she was obviously independent, something that Dario found incredibly sensual in a female. He watched her stop half a meter in front of him and with dozens of Kavalian children and rebels looking on their official introduction took place.

"You do not... you do not have those words stamped on your body." Channa stated confidently.

Dario looked at her confused. "Excuse me?"

"Fuck me." Channa stated calmly. "You asked in your ancient language if you had fuck me stamped on your body somewhere because of the situation you found yourself in last evening. You do not."

Dario chuckled. "Well... it sure felt like it at the time." He answered unable to tear his gaze from those gorgeous blue slit eyes. "I see your bond with Mirra has allowed you to pick up our language very quickly."

Channa stared at this man and though she was only a few inches shorter than him, she felt in awe of his imposing size. In awe and very much wanting to discover what the rest of him looked like. His green eyes were

like two points of bright light and they twinkled with a unique combination of intelligence and mischief. She could feel his Mindvoice presence, as Mirra had taught her almost immediately how to detect and recognize another Mindvoice user's distinctive resonance within Mindvoice, and what she felt was very powerful and focused. She could also feel the warmth just grazing her mind and it made her body tepid and her skin tingle. Mirra detected the shift in her new sister's mind and she moved a little closer to her.

[You feel that Channa?] She asked shielded, her voice carrying surprise in it.

Channa kept herself from nodding. *[Oh yes! It is warm and inviting!]*

[It appears our bonding has allowed you to feel his aura.] Mirra spoke.

[His what?] Channa asked as she continued to stare at him.

[He is Lycavorian Channa.] Mirra told her calmly. *[He has the ability to project an aura or sorts. An invisible field of scent and curiosity and small charges of energy that he uses to allow females to know he is interested in them. All female wolves can feel this aura. Athani Leonidas is the only non-wolf who I have ever known that could feel it. At least until you it seems.]*

[He is interested in me?] Channa asked with some surprising desire in her voice.

[If what he is projecting is evidence... very much so.] Mirra answered. *[But he is also a Spartan raised in the traditional manner by his father and mother. Be confident and strong as your personality says you are. As we were destined for one another sister, perhaps our being here has also brought into your life something which you have not yet known.]*

Channa took a deep breath and pointed to the tube Dario was holding in his hand. "What are you doing?" She asked with a slight quiver in her voice.

Sorran had to lean forward and butt Dario in the back of the shoulder with his snout to snap him out of his surreal state.

The young woman asked you a question brother! He stated gruffly. *Do not make her stand there and wait for an answer!*

"Huh? Oh... it's... it's an ointment for his wings and scales." Dario answered quickly. "It helps them to heal quickly. He's so fat he took out a couple trees when he fell."

Sorran snorted. *More like an entire forest it felt like.*

Dario turned his head. "Next time duck." He snapped playfully before turning back to Channa. "I can show you how to apply it if you like?"

Channa smiled brightly and stepped closer to him. "Please yes." She declared.

Mirra settled to the floor of the ship then, her amethyst colored eyes gazing at Sorran as Channa turned with Dario to work on his wing. *[She is taken by him.]* Mirra spoke to Sorran.

[As he is with her.] Sorran answered turning to meet her beautiful eyes. *[It seems this mission has brought out much more in all of us than anyone ever anticipated.]*

[I would have to agree.] Mirra stated inching ever closer to him.

[Mirra...]

Mirra finally stopped moving for her talons now touched his. *[Do I desire you as much as you desire me?]* She spoke in a husky voice of her own. *[The answer is a resounding yes I do.]*

Sorran gazed at her. *[There... there must be others who...]*

Mirra nodded. *[There are.]* She stated confidently. *[Three have expressed great interest and never fail to try and impress me. Two have even asked me outright.]*

[You did not accept? Why?] Sorran asked.

[I have always felt I was different and that the male I chose to spend my life with would need to be different.] Mirra answered. *[You are as different as they come Sorran... and that is what causes my talons to ache just being around you.]*

Sorran met her beautiful eyes. *[My age does not...]*

[Are you still able to function at your advanced age of six hundred and four years old?] Mirra asked with a seductive and sarcastic voice.

Sorran's eyes grew a little wider and he knew then he would have this female for himself. She was brash and confident and for a female dragon exquisitely attractive. *[I function quite well thank you.]* He stated finally.

Mirra leaned her head forward and touched her snout to his with great affection. *[Then perhaps when we finish this mission you will see fit to make me yours for you are all I want Sorran.]*

Sorran blinked but pressed his snout closer to hers. *[I will look forward to that moment Mirra. I will not disappoint you.]*

[Hmmm! Of that I have little doubt.] She answered as she shifted her body around completely and lowered it back on the floor when she was resting alongside him. Their abdomens pressed together in the dragon show of intense affection and neither of them pulled away from the contact. *[I look forward to that moment.]* She said.

Resumar stood with Athani, Vonis, Asharli, Julie and Mican and Na'lia and they watched as Avi and Avatar 341 manipulated the side by side control consoles against the wall. Not really understanding what they were doing Mican looked at Resumar. His eyes fell on Athani standing beside him, her long tail alternating between twitching slightly behind her and curling around his leg. How to tell her that they were brother and sister? Mican had once planned a great speech where he would reveal this information to either Athani or Jalersi whenever he had the opportunity to see them. Now however, standing and looking at her beauty and confidence, that speech had been lost.

“What are they doing?” He asked finally asked Resumar Leonidas curious as they all watched the two cyborgs.

These men and women had arrived at their small settlement and did not blink at the biogenic Kavalian clones, or those who were pure Kavalian. They treated everyone with respect and sincere concern. Mican had never taken the time to discover much about the Lycavorian people, as he was more concerned with staying alive and keeping those with him alive. Seeing their interaction with his rebels, how they viewed them as allies without question stunned him to a large degree. They accepted and adapted to the changes that had occurred in the last hours with barely any effort, as if it was the most natural thing in the universe. Resumar Leonidas and this vampire colonel Vonis had refused him no answer to a question he asked. Mican had fought and killed many vampires in his years, but this Vonis was different. He was confident, keen of mind and he in no way acted superior to Mican or any of his people. None of them did for that matter. Several of the Spartan troops had even carried small Kavalian children on their broad shoulders as they moved through the jungle to the Mindvoice ship. They did not hesitate to help carry whatever they could even though they were loaded down with equipment as well.

Resumar turned to look at him. “They are trying to establish a secure communications link via subspace to my father on Earth. We need to report what has happened and that we are continuing with the mission.” Resumar told him.

“I still don’t understand why you want to destroy this ship.” Na'lia asked him. “It seems like... like such a waste. The technology alone could...”

-The technology will be preserved Na'lia of the Elves- Avatar 341 spoke as he and Avi finally turned from the two consoles. **-But the Sub Pralor Resumar Leonidas is correct. This ship must be destroyed-**

“Why?” Na'lia asked again.

-VORTEX Cruiser 341 is not a Seed ship- 341 answered. **-I have downloaded and analyzed the information Avatar 41 has passed to me and the most logical course of action is to download my computer core and then destroy this ship. If allowed to fall into the hands of those who would use the technological advancements this ship can provide for war and oppression, there is very little that could stop them-**

“But King Leonidas already has a ship like this.” Mican said. “Doesn’t he? He has not used those advancements for war?” He asked.

-City Ship 41 is not a warship- Avi answered. **-It was designed for the purpose of spreading life. The technological advancements the Union has procured from City Ship 41 technology is all defensive in nature-**

-And King Leonidas is the descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar- 341 added. -It is not within his biological makeup to seek oppression and war-

“But he is a Spartan!” Na'lia exclaimed. “A warrior! Descended from warrior Kings!”

-King Martin is a warrior unequaled- Avi agreed with her. -The difference is he will not use his skills as a warrior to enforce his will onto others. I am the Avatar of City Ship 41 and I am fully aware of every piece of technology that was shared with the Union engineers that came from City Ship 41. None of it is being used directly as a weapon to conquer others-

“We have no interest in conquering others.” Resumar spoke now. “Only to live happy and free and raise the children we have through the years.”

“*Avoi.*” Athani spoke softly Resumar’s words having special meaning for her.

“They are right my wife.” Mican spoke. “If my...” His eyes darted to Athani quickly and he saw her look at him oddly before he continued. “If the Kavalian Prefect or Pusintin were to discover this ship... if the High Coven were to discover and seize this ship... it could very well spell the end of us all.”

Avi also noticed his inflection and tone of voice and he activated his internal sensors and began to run a series of tests that only his mind could see.

“There is... there is so much we can learn from it though.” Na'lia said.

Athani nodded. “That is why Avi and Avatar 341 will download the core before we destroy it. We won’t lose that knowledge...” She said. “Only the means by which we study it. Trust me... Resumar’s mother Anja will be giddy when she discovers the wealth of medical knowledge on this ship.”

-This was only so we could contend with the effects of the...- 341 began to speak.

-It will be in the databases for us to study- Avi interrupted him quickly. -Resumar... there is a communications blackout surrounding Earth and all military channels within the Union-

“A blackout?” Res asked perking up.

“What sort of blackout?” Vonis asked.

-A Level Six Communications Blackout- Avi answered. -I am unable to penetrate the command overrides-

“Avi... you helped design the command overrides.” Vonis said.

-Yes Colonel- Avi answered. -However... I designed them in such a way to not allow me access should a certain level be reached for the sake of security. I did not want individuals to be able to breach secure communications should I be captured and reprogrammed-

“You can reach no one?” Res asked. “Not even Andro?”

-Avatar 341 and I were able to monitor and record several Netnews broadcasts. We were unable to penetrate secure Union channels however. The Netnews broadcasts provided the reasons why- Avi answered.

“And they are?” Resumar asked feeling a sinking feeling in his gut.

-It seems there has been an attack against your family Sub-Pralor Resumar- 341 answered him. - Another Sub-Pralor... your sister Zarah... she was attacked and...-

Resumar looked at him for a moment. “And what?” Res demanded stepping closer. He looked at Avi. “Talk to me Avi!”

Avi had been so named by Endith because it was much easier to say than Avatar. The name had stuck to him through the years however. Hardly anyone ever called him Avatar 41, and he rarely ever responded to that name now. He had been designed as a learning cyborg, part tissue and part autonomous lifeform. His time with King Martin and his family had given him the opportunity to learn vast amounts of knowledge in regards to moods and emotions. It was the reason he could not let 341 answer Resumar's question. **-Zarah was violated Resumar Leonidas-** Avi answered. **-Xaxon's descendants Dante and Javier Moran were among those who took part in this act-**

Athani gasped and grabbed Resumar's arm tightly. "Resumar no!" She hissed in horror.

-The Netnews reports that we were able to view state that there was a rather vicious battle between Andro and the Moran brothers- Avi continued. **-Helen is responsible for killing the Empress of the High Coven during an attack she led against Dragon Mountain-**

"She's... she's dead?" Vonis gasped now as he too stepped forward.

Avi nodded. **-Your sister Yuri was apparently gravely injured by Androcles before he had to pull back because of his own wounds. Lucia Moran is being named as the initial person who saved Zarah's life while Androcles and others did battle with her brothers and a High Coven commando team that infiltrated the city around SODRAG. Prime Minister Deia's statement to the Netnews channels was brief and vague in details. She has another briefing scheduled for six hours from now our time-**

Vonis looked at Resumar quickly. "That's why." He said.

"What do you mean?" Resumar asked.

Asharli stepped forward quickly now. "When she... when she revealed her identity to us... she said she had her own reasons for doing what she was doing." She spoke. "This must be... this is what she meant!"

"Avi... contact my brother!" Resumar snapped turning back to him.

Avi shook his head. **-The SCIMITAR left Earth orbit with all of your older siblings and all of the High Coven dragons and riders just after these events took place. Even if there was no communications blackout, we do not know where the SCIMITAR has gone-**

"Nubou!" Resumar exclaimed spinning angrily in place.

"Avi... you sure they said my mother is dead?" Vonis asked.

Mican looked at him with stunned shock in his eyes. "The... The High Coven Empress is your mother!" He snarled.

Vonis met his eyes. "That woman may have given birth to me but she was never a mother!" Vonis hissed back. "Avi?"

-The Netnews reports are very certain of that Colonel Vonis. It was one of the first facts that the Prime Minister confirmed- Avi answered.

Resumar turned back to him. "Avi... can you reach my mother on Kranek?"

Avi looked at him. **-Easily. If she is aware of these events, and she probably is, because she is off Earth and in The Wilds she would not fall under the Communications blackout-**

"Resumar my love..." Athani spoke. "Why?"

"That is where Andro will go." Res said.

"Res are you sure?" Vonis asked.

Resumar nodded without pause. "I know how my brother's mind works Uncle. He said something to Arran and Denali before we took this mission. It was many months ago, right after the Coven came to Earth. Deni told me when Athani and I went to SODRAG. Andro said *'We make our own history by the paths we choose to take.'*"

Realization blossomed in Vonis's eyes now. "Your sister Normya marrying the son of Cha'talla. Your mother working with them and living among them for so long now." He said softly. "A new path. A new history."

Resumar nodded. "Yes. That is where Andro is going. He will take the Coven dragons and riders with him and finish their training there."

-You must also be aware Sub Pralor Resumar that a Kavalian Fleet Group has been dispatched to this system to investigate the battle between your forces and the Kavalian fleet forces left in system- 341 spoke. -They will arrive in two days maximum-

"Shit!" Resumar swore. "When it rains it pours!"

-There is also a single Kavalian ship approaching Ritaah from the adjoining sector- Avi said. -It will arrive here in just under twelve hours-

"A warship?" Mican asked.

341 shook his head. **-It is too small for that Mican. I estimate a Border Patrol Craft of some sort-** He answered quickly. **-Preliminary sensor readings indicate a vessel heavy with scanning equipment-**

"It's a Recon Ship." Asharli spoke again. She turned to Mican "We saw several as we were coming into the system. They must have detected the explosion of the *STRIKER* on the surface and are coming here to investigate. The Kavalian Border Patrol Ships are used as early warning ships and are equipped with some of their most powerful scanners. Detecting the explosion, even from the border of this system would have been easy for them."

Mican nodded. "She is correct."

"Crew?" Resumar asked.

Mican shrugged. "No more than a hundred and fifty. They are atmospheric capable ships as well, so they will probably land to investigate. They..." Mican's eyes grew wide. "Yes!"

Na'lia looked at him. "Husband... what?"

Resumar smiled as he met Mican's eyes. "We let that ship land and then take it from the Kavalians." He said. "Will it fit three dragons and all of your people?"

Mican nodded. "Easily. They usually carry portable sensor platforms that they deploy to replace those that are old and broken. If we remove them we could fit five hundred if we squeeze them in."

Resumar nodded. "Mican... will you work with my uncle in putting a plan together to take that ship when it lands?"

Mican nodded. "Without question." He answered immediately.

Resumar turned to Julie who had remained silent so far. "Julie?" Julie looked at him her dark eyes holding a certain brightness in them. "Are you ok?"

A smile slowly spread across Julie's face and she nodded. "I am... with Aikiro dead... I am finally free." She said softly. "I can... I can get my life back. Part of it anyway."

Resumar nodded. "Yes you can." He said. "I need you to work with Dario and insure that the rest of Mican's people are brought here."

Julie nodded quickly. "Of course! Anything."

"Channa and I will assist her." Na'lia spoke now. "The other settlements know us and will listen to us."

Resumar nodded. "Very well... but you need to stay here for now."

Na'lia looked at him. "These are my people now. I will not abandon them."

“I’m not asking you too.” Resumar spoke. “However... your sister is with my mother and I’m quite sure she would like to talk with you, even briefly, so that she knows you are safe and alive.”

Na'lia's eyes grew wide. “Oh... I would so... yes!”

“Perhaps... perhaps Athani could assist your friends and Channa.” Mican spoke. “It is well known who she is and to see her now, back among her people helping them, it would go a long way to motivating the others.”

Athani squeezed his hand and reached up on her tip toes to kiss Resumar's cheek. “I will help Dario and this Channa. Mican is right... it might serve us to have the others see me so that they know there is much more to life than what they have known these last years.” Athani stepped close to him and everyone saw her tail wrap around his leg as her arms went around his waist. “They need to see they can be so much more.”

Resumar nodded as he pulled her tightly to him and kissed the top of her golden blond hair. “Then let's get started.” He said.

SCIMITAR

Sadi Leonidas was lost.

Lost in the overwhelming force of Andro's aura and passion. She did not know where it had come from considering what they had all been through in the last few hours, but Androcles Leonidas had returned to their quarters with his blood on fire. Sadi knew Carisia harbored a fear that Andro would think less of her after what Dante and Javier had done to Zarah, and thirty seconds after arriving in their quarters, Carisia no longer held that fear in her heart. He had gone straight to Carisia and picked her surprised form up in his arms and laid a kiss on her that had stolen her breath away and had Carisia whimpering in as yet unfelt passion. That single kiss had ignited the entire room, and Sadi and Ne'Veha practically leaped into each other's arms as he carried Carisia into their bedroom leaving a trail of clothes behind them.

That had started five blistering hours of passionate and inventive sex between the four of them. Sadi didn't think their lips or their tongues had ceased working during that entire five hour period. Kisses, caresses, and sharing Andro's magnificently huge cock. Sharing each other with barely a pause. While Carisia's fresh rose petal like scent surely tickled Sadi's female nose, it was Ne'Veha's sweet amaretto scent that had elicited the most response from her Sadi found out. She and Ne'Veha spent the first two hours of their tryst feasting on each other with equal gusto, exploring even more than they had their first night together, while Carisia's wails of delight filled the room. When Carisia collapsed exhausted it was Ne'Veha's turn, and she lasted less of a time than Carisia. Sadi knew by the time her beautiful mate got to her he was only just beginning to come alive and he proved to her in the first few moments that it was she who ruled his soul.

Ne'Veha and Carisia were curled into each other's arms on the bed completely exhausted now, even as Sadi's body was still singing out her exquisite delight at the attention Andro was showing her. He had taken her three times now with unrestrained zeal. He had brought her to the most crushing orgasm of their time together with just his soft lips and the tip of his tongue, teasing her until she was writhing on the sheets unable to keep the passionate screams of lust from escaping her lips. Even as her mind was still grasping what she had just felt ripping through her, it began again when his throbbing twelve inch cock impaled her in one glorious, soul shattering plunge. When his large balls bottomed out against her upturned ass, Sadi could do nothing but wrap her arms and legs around his powerful form and hold on for dear life as another will breaking orgasm smashed through her. His male aura was inciting her to new heights of their union, completely unrestrained and unleashed and focused entirely on her to Sadi's everlasting joy. Sadi knew that only she could feel his aura pulsing as it was, focused exclusively on her, wrapping around her and teasing her female senses until she could not take it anymore. When his huge cock ballooned inside her depths and she felt his searing come erupt into her clenching pussy, Sadi's mind sank into a coalescing stream of consciousness that had shattered the boundaries of everything she had experienced up to this point in her life. Andro's mind and essence filled her in a way they had yet to experience together and she surrendered all that she was to her husband and mate.

Even as they shuddered in the aftermath of that first titanic explosion, Andro was pulling her from the bed and moving to the couch in their quarters. Here he began to possess her with powerful twelve inch strokes of his enormous cock. Sadi could do nothing but grip the edges of the couch and howl out her bliss as one

volcanic orgasm crashed upon the other like the waves of a raging ocean storm. As he held her convulsing body in his strong arms, his lips and nose firmly nuzzling her ears and neck and throat, Sadi could feel every fiber of her man pouring into her. He was relinquishing all that he was to her and Sadi knew then that not even the gods could separate them now. The strands of their minds were so tightly intertwined it was impossible to tell where one of them ended and the other began. And as they wrapped each other within the fibers of Mindvoice and beyond, they drew three others with them tighter and tighter until there were no difference in the strands and fabrics of five individuals. Twice he had filled her with his essence on their couch and she had to do nothing but sing out her brazen answer to her mate's attentions.

Now as they stood beneath the hot stream of water, Andro stroked into her with slow, sensual and loving movements that caused sweet pleasure to undulate through her with every movement. Tiny mini orgasms swelled through her continuously now, and she could feel the pulsing veins on his beautiful cock pressing against the inside walls of her tightness as he lifted her and lowered her back down with exquisite slowness. No matter how often they made love, Andro's cock could and did stretch her to the extreme. He was larger than any man that had ever shared her bed, and though there weren't that many to begin with, the most exquisite thing about him was that Androcles Leonidas knew what to do with his delicious equipment. His hands never stopped stroking her skin and his fingertips danced along the outside of her taut thighs and down her legs which were securely locked around the back of his powerful legs. Even though her arms were wrapped around his broad shoulders, she was completely suspended off the floor of the shower by his dominating manhood. He nuzzled and suckled her full breasts, teasing her eraser hard nipples with his extended fangs until she was hissing out her glee.

Sadi Leonidas was not meek by any means, and every time he moved to withdraw his cock and plunge back into her she made him pay for that action by squeezing her pussy muscles as hard as she was able along the entire length of his cock shaft. His eyes would close tightly as agonizing pleasure seared his own pleasure receptors, his mouth open in silent gasps of ardor. Sadi took an almost perverse pleasure in seeing how she could make him react, his lavender and pines scent filling her senses to overload. She had let all of her shields come tumbling down this night, hitting Andro with the full force of her female aura, and seeing him react with such zeal in his actions only made her love him more.

Their lovemaking this night was more about completeness than physical pleasure. The complete and utter devotion that he felt for Sadi most of all, but for all of them as well. This was about Andro letting his mates know that they were everything to him, and the four of them letting him know that no man could ever take his place. While Lu'ria may not have been with them physically, her resonance within Mindvoice they felt as if she was next to them the entire time.

"Jainn aur enyla!" Sadi gasped in Andro's ear as she felt her belly tighten and undulate with the force of the orgasm that was rapidly building. This movement only caused his delicious cock to impale her deeper. *"Cova Andro! Cova!"*

Her handsome mate did not disappoint her as he tightened his grip on her firm ass and began to speed up his strokes, slamming into her with confidence and power. Sadi's jungle green eyes rolled into the back of her head as she brushed her cheek against the side of his face wondering how she had ever been so blessed. Her firm breasts were crushed against his steel hard chest, her nipples burning points of hardness that seared into his equally hot skin. Her golden blond hair was plastered to her face and his shoulders, her fingers clutching at the back of his neck. Sadi screeched out her irresistible enchantment when he rammed home within her, pulling her ass down on his cock completely as his own howl of release filled the small shower stall. As with so many times before Sadi felt his enormous cock swell inside her, the throbbing veins alive with life just before his eruption. Her eyes sprang open, black surrounding the green cornea now, her wolf fangs bursting from her gums and Sadi Leonidas sang her eternal love to whomever would listen as Andro's seed filled her for the fourth time this night. Once... twice... four times... five huge eruptions before it began to ebb, each one causing her to see stars and gasp at the intensity of what he could make her feel.

Sadi yanked his head back, gazed into his azure wolf eyes, stared at his dual wolf fangs and then she crushed her lips to his in a kiss of surreal passion. She felt his arms squeeze her to him now, even as she milked his cock for every precious ounce of his come. She wanted all of him inside her, unwilling to allow even a drop to escape her pussy. Sadi had no doubts that with the amount of his passion he could produce, when the time came and they decided it was time for her to bear him a child, it would not take much for that to happen. He

broke their kiss without speaking and lowered his soft lips to the hollow of her throat, nuzzling her slick skin with the gentleness of a parent nuzzling a newborn child. He dotted her skin with soft butterfly kisses even as he staggered slightly and placed his hands on the wall of the shower stall. Sadi had no fears of falling, for her legs were locked firmly around his hips.

[It is... it is you who commands my soul KertaGai.] Andro's voice filled her mind in the shielded connection that only they shared and she smiled wistfully at the soft brush and caress of his powerful aura as it began to lose its passionate claim on her senses even while swirling around her unwilling to let her come down. *[I will love all of you... but only you will have sway over my soul.]*

Sadi pulled his face away from her throat and gazed into his wolf eyes, the tips of his dual fangs just visible below his upper lip. She smiled dazzlingly, revealing her own fangs and her wolf eyes filled with shameless love.

[Aur enyla my Androcles Leonidas.] Sadi spoke softly stroking the skin of his cheek with her fingers and allowing her female aura to flutter across his essence and seeing his azure eyes twinkle in delight. *[Words... words do not exist that could begin to describe to you what I feel for you.]*

Andro stared into her shining eyes for a long moment. *[Have I failed Sadi?]* He finally asked her softly. Sadi's jungle green eyes filled with puzzlement. *[Failed? What do you mean?]*

[Everything that has happened?] Andro spoke softly. *[Have I failed by allowing it to happen in the first place?]*

[That is what this night was all about my love? You love us breathless because you think you have failed us somehow?] She asked.

[No!] He answered quickly. *[This night was about me needing you. Needing all of you. I am asking you... my KertaGai... I'm asking you if I have failed in my duties as a Prince and brother..]*

Sadi gripped his face tighter in her hands. *[Do not speak such words Andro!]* She told him forcefully. *[You have failed no one, least of all your sister! And Zarah would be the first to tell you that! I forbid you to place blame for what has happen upon your shoulders! As would Zarah! Do not begin to doubt yourself over something you could no more control than the weather.]*

[Sadi I...]

[Do not forget my love... I have seen inside your mind deeper than anyone ever will except for Elynth.] Sadi spoke. *[I have seen what you did. What you continue to do every day. You... we... we walk a different path Andro. And you have remained true to that path. The Feravomir told me once... she told me to pursue what our hearts told us. That we should not wonder what could have been when we had the opportunity to make it be.]*

Andro nodded slowly. *[Never doubt.]* He said.

Sadi nodded. *[Yes. Do not waste time looking back on what you may or may not have done my love.]* Sadi said stroking his cheeks and running her fingers along his mustache and goatee. *[Zarah is alive and we will help her to heal. We will see her through this as a family should, and as you have already said, she has the biggest piece of that already. Do not take upon your shoulders a burden that is not yours to bear.]*

[You will... you will not think less of me?] He asked her softly.

[Think less of you?] Sadi gasped. *[Oh Andro...]* She wrapped her arms around his head and pulled his face to her throat, feeling his powerful arms crush her lithe body to his. *[We would die for you my love! Carisia, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria and I. We would violently and without pause destroy any who tried to take you from us for any reason. Think less of you... son vada carians aur enyla... that is not even possible with how we feel about you.]* She whispered. *[You are the reason we are who we are. We belong to you and you belong to us. Without you we are nothing.]*

[Without you KertaGai... without you I am nothing.] Andro said. *[I have known that since I was eight months old and I smelled you for the first time.]*

Sadi smiled wistfully once more and closed her eyes in bliss. *[I know my love.]* She said. *[I have known as well... it just took me a little longer to figure it out.]* Sadi reached over and slapped her hand on the shower controls stopping the water. *[Take me to bed my handsome mate Androcles Leonidas. Take me to bed and let us lay with others who we love just as much as they love us.]*

Andro didn't hesitate and pushed away from the wall and stepped out of the stall. He held Sadi's firm ass in his hands as he padded across the floor to the bed. His azure eyes gazed at the two figures already there, surprised when a pair of maya blue eyes and stunning dark orbs looked up at them. There were no words spoken

and Carisia simply tossed back the sheet as she and Ne'Veha made room for them between their bodies. Andro didn't hesitate and while Sadi clung to him tightly he lowered them to the bed. He rotated his body until he was on his back, Sadi releasing a soft groan of pleasure as he slid from the warmth and tightness of her pussy. Sadi and Carisia pressed tightly to his sides, burying their faces into his neck while Ne'Veha shifted her body and settled between his legs, her head on his abdomen, her firm conical breasts pressing delightfully against his cock. She cared not that his and Sadi's passion coated his now softening cock, and her dark brown hair splashed across his lower abdomen as she closed her eyes in happiness.

This is how sleep finally took them into its soothing embrace.

"...what the hell got into you last night?" Arrarn asked him as they walked down the corridor heading for the mess lounge.

Arrarn and Denali had found their brother by his scent easily as pure and pungent as it was this morning. They met their brother as he walked slowly reviewing several data pads of reports he had retrieved from the bridge, both of them with grins of satisfaction on their faces.

Andro looked up from the pad. "What do you mean?"

"What Arrarn means is whatever got into you last night permeated the entire deck and affected all of us!" Denali spoke with a grin. "I don't think Lisisa and I have had such a night of hot sex as we did last night. It was incredible!"

Andro stopped walking and looked at them. "Wait a minute... you..."

Arrarn chuckled now. "Man... I about wore Narice and Toria out." He said. "I've never felt that charged with energy. Narice lasted longer than Toria but she finally had to beg me to stop. I couldn't get enough of her! Either of them... but her most of all!"

"*Sibfla!*" Andro exclaimed.

"Forgot to engage the dampeners didn't you big brother?" Denali laughed now. "Boy can you imagine the looks on the faces of any crewmen who cut through deck ten last night. I bet the corridor was filled with the screams and groans! Lisisa about blew out my eardrums with her howling!"

"Jeez! That means..."

Arrarn pounded him on the back. "You bet it does! I haven't seen Malic or Moneus yet, but they'll probably want to thank you as well." He said with a grin. "Thank you Andro... I think we all needed it." He said softly.

Deni nodded. "It's been a rough last day or so Andro, for all of us. You especially. It was nice to forget about it even for a little while and show the women we love what they mean to us in every way."

They turned the corner of the corridor and entered the large mess lounge in another fifteen steps. It was three quarters full of crewmembers, and Andro's eyes went immediately to where he felt Sadi, Carisia and Ne'Veha. They were sitting together with Eliani, Carina and Nyla. Malic sat between Eliani and Nyla and both of them were pressed very close to him, while Carina had an arm around Moneus's waist as they sat with their backs to them. Narice and Toria were having a rather dynamic conversation with his mother Isabella and Lisisa. Andro felt the flush of embarrassment when Sadi's eyes lifted and her face became bright and animated when she saw him. This caused everyone else to turn and Andro suddenly felt very small and very embarrassed. Arrarn and Denali shook their heads with smiles as they walked up to the table. Denali went immediately to where Lisisa sat, leaning over to give her a blistering kiss, which she returned with equal fervor. Arrarn did the same to a very receptive Narice and Toria while Andro moved timidly to the seat between Sadi and Carisia.

[We forgot to engage the psychic dampeners my love.] Sadi told him as he sat down.

Andro looked at her. *[Yeah... Arrarn and Denali were reminding me of that fact.]* He answered.

[Is that such a bad thing?] Ne'Veha asked with a smile. *[Given what has happened perhaps it was what everyone needed. I for one am not going to complain.]*

Carisia smiled dreamily and looked at Andro with those Maya blue eyes filled with love and devotion. *[Neither am I.]* She said leaning over to Ne'Veha and brushing her shoulder with her cheek. *[Your blood is very sweet when you are gripped in passion Ne'Veha. Sadi will have to show me what it is she did to you to make you scream so loud.]*

Ne'Veha blushed. *[Carisia stop.]* She gasped.

As close as they were, Moneus was the first to lean over to Andro across the table and nudge him in the arm. "I want you to feel free to leave the psychic dampeners off whenever you like brother." Moneus said with a grin.

Carina slugged her new husband in the gut and he groaned. "God... you are such a pig Moneus!" She exclaimed. Her face told a different story however as she looked radiant and extremely satisfied.

"I happily concur." Malic chimed in from his seat between Eliani and Nyla.

"I'm sorry ok!" Andro hissed loudly. "I forgot! So sue me!" He declared using a phrase his mother had often used in the past.

This brought a round of soft laughter from all of them and Eliani leaned into Malic's side with a huge smile on her face. "I don't know... I thought it was the perfect tension reliever." She said.

Malic leaned over and nuzzled the side of her neck and ear and all of them saw her fern green eyes close in delight. "Was that before or after I nibbled on..."

Nyla's hands whipped around to cover his lips. "Malic my love... we can not reveal our Eliani's secret weakness!" She said quickly. "It would not be proper. If I remember correctly, it was before you nibbled on..."

"Nyla!" Eliani exclaimed in mock horror as she turned.

The Leonidas children were like their parents in that they were not shy. All of them broke out into soft laughter then and silently thanked their brother for the strength of his aura and how it could affect them all as tightly tied together as they were. Andro shook his head as Carisia beamed and leaned into him. He looked at Eliani intently.

"Zarah?" He asked.

"I gave them both an additional sedative last night." She answered immediately. "They should be waking up in a few hours and then the healing will need to begin." She answered reaching over to squeeze her brother's hand.

The other men and women in the mess lounge could only watch and admire the fortitude of the Leonidas children. Their family had almost been torn apart and yet they were rebounding and laughing with each other in a discrete manner. Their sister lived, and while the events of the last few hours were beyond horrific, none of them had given up for an instant. They would support their sister with all that they were until their dying breath.

Andro nodded at Eliani's words and took the mug of coffee Sadi held out to him. "We will need to put together a schedule for the riders and dragons for when we reach Kranek." He said. "It will be condensed... but they can handle it." Andro turned to Narice. "Narice if you would..." Andro looked up when he felt and saw Sa'sur enter the mess lounge carrying a data pad and looking quite intense. His alarm bells began to go off and he came to his feet slowly as she came over to their table directly. "Sa'sur?"

"A transmission came in late last night." She spoke quickly holding out the data pad. "It was on the *SCIMITAR*'s AFC channel Andro."

"The AFC?" Andro stated as he took the pad. "We don't use the AFC channels for anything anymore."

Sa'sur nodded. "I know. It's a general transmission but it was directed specifically at the *SCIMITAR*'s AFC. And they had to know we would be in The Wilds or else it would have been scrambled by the border COM nodes. You had better read it Andro. I think it has to do with you."

"Me?" Andro said as he activated the pad and began to read. It took all of five seconds and then he looked up. "Deni... Arrarn, Malic and Moneus... meet me in the Captain's Ready Room in twenty minutes! Sa'sur... you're with me."

Andro handed the pad to Sadi as he grabbed the coffee from the table and moved quickly beside Sa'sur heading for the bridge. The others crowded closer to her as she read from the pad. Isabella moved closer as well. "Sadi?" She asked.

Sadi looked up her jungle green eyes wide. "It's from Walter." She spoke looking at Ne'Veha before meeting Isabella's gaze. "The AFC's do not allow for normal communications. It only allows single words to be broadcast in a set time frame."

Ne'Veha nodded quickly. "Every pilot is assigned a specific code word or words. Never more than two words though." She continued. "You are assigned this word or phrase when you complete flight school and it is listed in an enormous database at Fleet Headquarters. The word never changes throughout your career, and for the most part we do not share these code words with anyone else."

“It is basically a very advanced form of code words that are used when main COM arrays fail.” Sadi finished. “Ne’Veha, Arrarn and I have our own code words.”

“Wow... even I didn’t know that.” Deni spoke.

Arrarn shook his head. “It’s not something we pass around as Ne’Veha said Deni.” He spoke. “When you take command of your own Fleet is when you would discover these code words exist.”

“So what are the words in the message Sadi?” Eliani asked.

“Spartan. One. One. Crimson Storm. Iraruzu. Lu’ria. Drow. Come. Urgent. Walter.” Sadi said softly.

“Crimson Storm!” Arrarn gasped with wide eyes and coming to his feet. “*Sibfla!*” He spun from the table and dashed for the exit Narice and Toria watching with wide eyes.

“Sadi... Sadi what does this Crimson Storm mean?” Narice asked turning back to look at Sadi with large dark eyes. After last night, both Narice and Toria knew they could never love a man more completely than they both loved Arrarn Leonidas. They were older than him yes, but he spent more hours than they could even recall making them scream his name in unadulterated pleasure last night and the last almost three months prior to now. This fact more than anything showed them they were part of his life forever now. No matter what had happened to his sister, he harbored no hidden feelings of distrust within him. They were the wives of a Leonidas now, and both Narice and Toria could not have been more proud of that fact.

Sadi looked at her. “I don’t know.” She stated.

“*Anse!*” Deni spoke quickly. “Arrarn obviously did!”

“Arrarn has a different command authorization than the rest of us.” Sadi answered him quickly. “It stands to reason he would know the code words of anyone associated with your father or us for that matter.”

“It has to be Ceneia’s code word. The Guardian of the Line would not have his own.” Ne’Veha said getting to her feet.

“What the hell is going on? Man we don’t need anymore surprises!” Deni snapped angrily.

“Whatever it means... we will all go to the Ready Room.” Isabella spoke reaching for Carina’s hand as she came to her feet. “Something has happened and we all need to know what it is.”

The others didn’t hesitate and began to follow their vampire mother out of the mess lounge with barely a pause.

“...came in eleven hours ago Milord.” The COM officer told them in the holoimager from the bridge. “We don’t get AFC transmissions anymore so the duty officer called me. He thought it might be something important. It was garbled and I had my people spend the next few hours cleaning up the signal as much as we could. It took quite a bit of work but what you see before you is the complete transmission.”

Andro sat next to Sa’sur in the Ready Room off the side of the bridge. “No source?” Andro asked.

The officer shook his head. “No sir. AFC messages are low power and random. They can bounce between repeater stations for weeks before finally reaching their intended destination end. It’s why they are no longer used. Whoever sent this knew the *SCIMITAR*’s AFC channel and that it why it came directly to us. They also knew we would be outside the borders of the Union or the BSN’s would have scrambled it completely.”

“Excellent work Commander!” Andro said with a nod. “Excellent work. Thank you!” Andro turned to look at the others as the image faded.

“Andro... what is going on now?” Isabella asked. “What is this Crimson Storm that Sadi mentioned? She and Ne’Veha spoke of code words that all pilots are assigned.”

Andro looked at Arrarn quickly and then back to her. Arrarn leaned forward at the table. “Crimson Storm is the personal command code word for Walter’s *STRIKER* pilot Commander Ceneia mother.” He spoke. “It means that Walter’s ship has been destroyed and they are down but alive.”

“Destroyed?” Isabella hissed. “Destroyed by whom?”

“We don’t know.” Andro said.

“I confirmed with Vice-President Aihola that Drow Senator Daba and Majeir were with him as well as three of War Master Tareif’s Dragoons.” Sa’sur said.

Majeir?” Nyla spoke now. “Isn’t she the dragon hatchling that always follows Walter around but is not bonded to him?”

Eliani nodded to her vampire lover. “Syrilth’s sister. She’s the one who decided the fate of Maraud. Only she’s not a hatchling anymore. I saw her the last time we had a gathering at the estate. She’s just as large and beautiful as her sister as dragons go and she most definitely has got Walter’s disposition.”

“What is Walter, the Senior Polemarch of the entire Union Ground Forces, doing in The Wilds without backup?” Isabella was the first to ask. “He still has a very generous bounty on his head after his actions during the Battle for Earth.”

Walter Carson, Guardian of the Line of Leonidas, and now the Senior Polemarch of the entire Lycavorian Union Ground Forces was also well known as the only man in history to have killed more Immortals in battle than even the King he served so diligently three thousand years ago. With his actions during those days on Earth, Walter had personally killed or ordered the deaths of over sixteen thousand High Coven Immortals.

Andro looked at her. “Senator Daba is Lu'ria’s mother.” He said softly seeing everyone turn to look at him. “Majeir is meant for Lu'ria and Lu'ria is...”

“She’s the fourth woman that Sadi spoke of isn’t she Andro?” Carina asked very softly looking at her brother. Her keen mind had put it all together more quickly than the others. “The fourth one who will share your life?” Her eyes went to Sadi who sat on the other side of Andro.

Sadi nodded. “Yes.”

“She’s... she’s a Drow?” Eliani gasped in surprise.

“That is not a bad thing Eli.” Deni said.

Eliani’s eyes narrowed. “I didn’t mean it like...” She spoke quickly. “It’s just... it’s surprising that’s all. You know how deeply they are committed to father. To our family. They are even more devoted than the *Durcunusaan* at times.”

Isabella nodded. “Yes... and in some cases they would be considered fanatical in their devotion to him. To our family.” She echoed Eliani and looked at Andro. “You realized this will have a rippling affect through the Drow people when it is discovered. You have read their ancient scrolls?”

Andro nodded. “When I realized that Lu'ria was meant to be with us. Yes.”

“They regard your father... they regard us to be almost sacred in many respects and when it becomes known that a Drow will be a Leonidas and a Princess it...” Isabella looked at him.

“What do you mean mother?” Eliani asked.

“The ancient Drow scrolls have a passage in the Yara Parma, their Holy Book if you will. Dysea and I read the entire series of scrolls while we were pregnant with Normya and Zarah. Miai had just given birth to her first child with the Drow twins and they wanted us to act as Guardians.” Isabella spoke softly. “The firstborn of many, the son of *knif'rt kal'daka* eyes and virile manhood. He will have the heart of amber and wrap his hands in white satin. *Yvalm xuil to'ryll euol, uuthli ujuol lu' charnag d' olath solen, whol jal draeval orn nind ssinssrigg.*”

“Bound with greenest gems, bluest glass and deepest of dark orbs, for all time will they love.” Carina said with wide eyes.

Isabella nodded. “And she will become *Valsharess d'Ilythiiri*. Queen of the Drow.” She finished.

“Mother... do you honestly think I... we care about that?” He asked motioning with his hands to indicate Sadi, Carisia and Ne'Veha.

Isabella smiled gently and reached over and covered his large hand with hers. They all knew Andro to be very private and reserved outside of their family. He was also still trying to come to grips with the undisputable fact that like his father, he was meant to have more than one woman in his life that he loved and that loved him.

“No... I know you don’t care about it.” Isabella spoke softly. “But many millions more *will* care about it. This is... all of you are certain?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.” He said finally looking up. “According to Aunt Aihola... Walter was taking Daba and Majeir to Iraruzu to meet with Lu'ria. Majeir was finding it more and more difficult to block Lu'ria from her thoughts and Walter decided they needed to be together.” Andro chuckled without humor. “It’s our fault really.”

“What do you mean Andro?” Eliani asked.

“When Sadi and I came together it increased our MV resonance to the point that Ne'Veha and Lu'ria could finally feel us.” Andro said. “When *Enylarcopri* and then *SirsanGai* joined us, it only increased the

strength of our connection ten fold. Lu'ria's powers have been growing even though she is so far away and Majeir could no longer deny it or block it. Walter sensed this because they are as close as friends could be. It's not a matter of actually power and abilities, but more that we are so tightly knit together."

"The question remains... what does this message from him mean?" Moneus said. "His ship is obviously down and I for one have never known Senior Polemarch Carson to panic over anything."

"It can't be anything good." Malic echoed. "Why else would he use the AFC and this code word?"

"Deni..." Andro said looking at his brother. "I need you and Lisisa to continue on to Kranek with the others and finish the training of the High Coven riders with Malic and Moneus helping."

"Us?" Denali spoke. "We..." His eyes grew wide and he focused on his older brother. "And where will you be?"

"I'm taking a *STRIKER* and Elynth and going to Iraruzu. I..."

"We are taking a *STRIKER* and going to Iraruzu." Sadi corrected him. "Iraruzu is a haven for the scum of the universe and you and Elynth will not go alone. We forbid it."

Andro saw the set of her jaw and then saw similar looks from Carisia and Ne'Veha before smiling and turning back to his brother. "We are going." He said correcting himself. "Walter is obviously in trouble enough for him to send this." Andro announced firmly. "Ceneia would not have sent the words Crimson Storm unless his ship was really destroyed. We're talking about Walter here... and whoever was able to destroy his ship is a threat we can not ignore as Malic said. And it is a threat that endangers Lu'ria which is something I...we will not allow. She is part of us and we of her and I will not dismiss that."

Denali nodded his head immediately. "Most of the class work *sibfla* is done now. If any is needed Vincix can handle it." He spoke softly running different things over in his head. "Lisisa and I can take care of the aerial training and Malic and Vincix can handle the ground training with Moneus and the Durcunusaan we have on the *SCIMITAR*."

Lisisa watched him formulate plans in his head and she reached over to take his arm. Her long years of slavery and solitude had hardened her to everything until the man she called father had saved her. And now to have the unquestioning love of Denali, at this point Lisisa had far more in her life than she had ever hoped for. And it also helped that he could steal her breath away with just a kiss, not to mention set her blood on fire in their bed.

"We can handle it Andro." Lisisa said.

Andro nodded. "I know. Arrarn... continue with your pilot training. Cha'talla has already assigned an entire valley for the *STRIKER*'s in the Strike Wing. Get them on the surface and get them going. Use the *SCIMITAR* as your command post. I was going to say to keep the ships Shrouded at all times, but if Cha'talla is no longer concerned about others discovering where his tribe is, then there is no reason to be shy."

Arrarn nodded. "No problem."

"I will go with you." Isabella said.

Andro shook his head. "No mother." He told her quickly. "Zarah will need your strength. With two of our mothers and Lucia... she will be in good hands until we return. We are leaving in two hours and I suspect we will be no more than three days. We should actually be turning around to come back when you arrive at Kranek."

"I wish you would reconsider and take a *NOVA III* Andro." Sa'sur spoke referring to the new class of *NOVA*-Class Attack Cruiser.

Andro shook his head. "We are in The Wilds now. While there is no law prohibiting this from happening, I do not want to offend any of our allies by being out and about with warships in the places many of them trade and conduct business."

"If they are doing business in The Wilds you can be assured it is not approved Trade Agreements!" Isabella snapped.

Andro nodded. "Be that as it may... father and Aunt Deia would expect me to at exercise restraint. At least for now." Andro's mention of their father made all of them look at him oddly and he let his azure blue eyes sweep across the table. "Yes... I am angry with father over what happened. I'm very angry in fact. He is still our father however and he was not himself. I will come to terms with that in my own way and the anger will pass and things will be back to normal soon."

“Andro... Andro he beat you like...” Eliani began to speak gently. “I think we all would understand if you stayed angry for a long time.”

Andro sat back in his chair. “There is too much going on to keep hold of our anger.” He stated. “What happened with father is in the past now. We need to concentrate on our sister and completing the training of the Coven riders. That is our purpose now. Father and our mothers on Earth can handle that... and our mother can certainly handle what is happening on Hadaria with the help she has.”

“Yes.” Isabella said. “When it comes to deviousness and temper *Melyanna* can most definitely handle those stooges of Buonau.” She looked at Andro. “Don’t you find it odd that all of this is happening at the same time son?” Isabella asked.

Andro met her eyes. “I find everything is odd right now mother. From the moment very Normya’s ship was attacked it feels like everything has been happening has been rehearsed and planned.” He replied. “Too much is happening for all of it to be coincidence. Unfortunately right now we can only roll with the flow as mother says.”

Isabella nodded. “Yes.”

“One problem at a time.” Arrarn spoke mimicking a phrase their father used often.

Andro nodded. “Yes. Sa’sur will keep an open channel between the *SCIMITAR* and us and when we have Lu’ria and Walter and the others we will contact you and let you know we are enroute back.”

“I have to agree with Sa’sur brother.” Denali said now. “Going alone? It doesn’t feel right.”

Andro got to his feet. “I have my reasons.” He stated simply. “I’m going to say goodbye to Zarah and explain to her what is going on.”

They watched him turn and exit the Ready Room before they all looked at one another. Moneus shook his head finally. “Is it just me... or is he just as pig headed and obstinate as Uncle Martin?”

“No.” Lisisa said. “He’s infinitely worse than father.”

Andro settled next to the bed on the Med Bay and looked at his sister’s sleeping face. Lucia was spooned against her back, both of them sleeping with peaceful expressions on their faces. Lucia’s arm was wrapped possessively around Zarah’s midsection, her face half covered by Zarah’s long hair.

“You’re leaving?” Zarah’s soft voice filtered to him and he looked down quickly with surprise in his eyes.

“You’re awake?” He said.

Zarah didn’t move from where she lay on her side, her fingers interlaced with Lucia’s and holding their hand tightly to her chest. “I smelled you coming down the corridor.” She stated as he settled to the chair.

Andro fidgeted slightly as he got comfortable in the chair. “Zar...”

“I love you Andro.” She whispered. “You have always been there for me... no matter what it was... it was always you.”

“I was not there for you this time.” He stated flatly. He reached out and placed his hand on her cheek. “I can not begin to tell you how sorry I am that this...”

“No.” Zarah spoke firmly. “Do you remember... do you remember the talk we had after you returned from Alba Tau? At your villa?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“You told me... you told me everything happens for a reason.” Zarah said softly. “That for every action we take there is a reaction. For every cause there is an effect.”

Andro shook his head. “This is not... this is not what I had in mind when I said that Zarah.”

“I will not let this destroy who I am Andro.” Zarah said.

Andro looked at her and felt his eyes become moist. “This is not something you needed to endure.” He spoke softly. “This is not...”

“It wasn’t me Andro.” Zarah said. “I... once I knew... once I knew what was happening I did what you taught me. I separated myself Andro. They may have violated my body and parts of my mind, but they did not violate *me*! I wouldn’t let them!”

Andro stroked her hair gently. “I’m so sorry sister.” He said.

Zarah smiled then and her grip on Lucia's hand tightened. "Through all the horror of it Andro... through it all... at the end I found her. When I tasted her blood... it was like... it was like the finest Spartan Wine I have ever had. I saw her love for me... what she has endured. I have never felt as completely loved as she loves me Andro."

Andro nodded. "She has waited many years to find you sister. Everything she has worked towards has been with you as the ultimate goal."

"And that is the strength I have drawn on." Zarah spoke. "I almost killed her when I took her blood and no matter what happened to me, no matter how violated and sullied and in pain I felt... that knowledge is what frightened me more than anything. This is the love... this is the love I have always wanted Andro."

"You are young Zarah." He said. "Given time and healing you may..."

Zarah shook her head slowly. "Lucia is who I was meant for." She stated confidently. "I see it now just as she has seen it for so long. I... I don't think I will be able to trust another man the rest of my life."

"Then so be it." Andro said. "Just do not dismiss it now. It is something you have always wanted and you can work through this. Lucia will help you. I will help you."

"I do not want to be babied or pampered Andro." Zarah said softly. "I don't want to be treated differently."

"You won't." He said sternly. "I swear to you."

"Then go and find Lu'ria." Zarah said. "She needs you now."

"I can send others if you want me to remain." Andro said. "I can..."

"No!" Zarah said forcefully. "I am a Leonidas! I am strong. As long as I have Lucia I will... I will survive this. I would never forgive myself if something happened to Lu'ria because of me."

"Zar that is not..."

Zarah covered his hand on her cheek with her own hand and smiled. "Go to her Andro." She said. "Lucia and I will be here when you get to Kranek. We will... we will need what you can teach us. And then we will need the *Feravomir* even more."

Andro leaned over and kissed her cheek softly. "I will return in three days." He said. "I will... I will tell our mothers what you have said Zarah. But you must allow them to be mothers too. You are their daughter and they love you."

Zarah looked at him. "Andro... have you never questioned why you call five different women mother?" She asked. "I know... I know our siblings have asked the question in the past."

Andro shook his head. "Never." He answered. "Each of them is just as much a mother to me as the next. They are bound so tightly together it is very hard to differentiate to begin with. Each of them is my mother, and they will be my mothers until the day I pass into the next life. Nothing and no one will change that."

Zarah nodded. "I feel that way as well." She smiled. "Go to her Andro. And bring her back safely. Or do not come back at all."

Andro grinned and leaned over to kiss her on the lips in a very brotherly fashion. "I will do as you say Milady." He spoke. "Be strong sister. Lucia and I will help you every step of the way."

Zarah nodded and closed her eyes. "I want to sleep some more." She said softly.

Andro smiled and watched as she drew Lucia's hand tighter and drifted off to sleep again. He stood up slowly and nodded.

"Woe be unto the person or creature that ever brings you harm again Zarah my sister." Andro whispered softly his words barely audible. "For they will face my wrath and fury."

Andro didn't see Zarah's face break into a soft smile as he turned and moved out of the Med Bay. He didn't see her eyes flutter open for the briefest moment.

"*Avoi.*" Zarah whispered.

HADARIA
CAPITAL OF UNOPA
ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBER

Anja looked around the interior of the huge Arch Ministry Chamber and slowly shook her head. She wore the Persian red robes of Queen of Hadaria, every King or Queen having their robes match the color of their hair. She sat in the usual innately carved throne chair that she had tried many times through the years to dispense with. It was the chair of the King or Queen whenever they were in attendance and had been for millennia. No matter what Anja did, she had never been able to get them to disregard it. To her it was a single pompous piece of furniture that implied she was somehow better than everyone else when she was not. Sivana sat next to her in royal garb matching her raven black hair with Persian red trim on the sleeves and collar. Like Anja she had never cared much for the oversized robes and their significance, so she wore them as little as possible. Eurin sat on Anja's opposite side with Ceuma beside Sivana dressed in a plain Persian red cloak and cowl with the hood drawn far up to hide her features. Atropos stood behind the Queen he had served for a quarter century ever alert. Joci and Belen, Anja knew, were watching the proceedings from someplace high up as their guardians. Anja no more trusted the Hadarian Elder Healers than she did the High Coven. She saw Buonau sitting with the Hadarian Elder Council looking positively smug and arrogant dressed in her own elaborate robes as Chief Elder Healer. She saw Rinard sitting with her Aunt Umbra and Seanna's mother Pcillany in the row of seats directly in front of Buonau and the other Elder Healers. Her uncle was no where to be seen Anja saw, and then she knew the rumors she had heard that he was taking no part in Umbra's actions were true. Anja leaned close to her sister and spoke so that she and Ceuma both could hear her.

It was extremely unnerving for Anja to have Ceuma around them at first. Having to look at an exact twin of herself and know that she was a clone somehow felt so very different and unnatural. She and Sivana were dizygotic twins, so while they shared their mother's womb, they did not appear identical in any way. Their DNA was almost identical but that was common with any offspring of the same parents. Ceuma however, she was identical to Anja in every way. Her looks, her DNA and even sharing some of her mannerisms. It was Sivana who actually got Anja to realize that Ceuma was not an oddity. She was a clone of Anja, with the same genes and features as the two sisters. It was Sivana who told Anja that she was always going to be around now, and better to begin to treat her and accept her as a sister than try to deny she existed. And for the last three days Anja and Sivana had done nothing but get to know Ceuma as a person, for while she looked like Anja she was also very different. Joci's mother had spent a year schooling her as a traditional Spartan/Lycavorian woman, and it was a role Ceuma had embraced. She was exceptionally intelligent and dry witted they discovered and as the hours passed by they began to see that perhaps things would not be as bad as they first thought. Ceuma had no desire to be part of any royal family. She wanted to be a Healer and a wife and mate to Joci. She could not stop raving about her ebony skinned husband or how he treated her, and Anja and Sivana both were amazed at how expressive she became when speaking about him. Over the course of these last days, Anja found herself opening up to the idea that having Ceuma around was perhaps not the end of the world.

"I can't stand that smug assed smirk of hers." Anja whispered.

Sivana kept her face neutral and nodded. "Well... we will wipe it off soon enough." She replied.

"I can't believe she allowed the Netnews in here." Anja stated. "She hates the Netnews almost as much as we do."

"Perhaps she thinks publicly debasing you will make her famous." Sivana snarled gently. "*Carians* I hate this woman."

"Will you allow her to remain in her position when this is over Anja?" Ceuma asked turning her head slightly.

"I don't know." Anja replied honestly. "Her support with the Arch Ministry is significant and she holds absolute sway over the other Elders. They all fear her."

"Then knocking her down several notches is acceptable." Ceuma spoke.

Sivana contained her chuckle. "Oh Anja... it will be so much fun to have Ceuma around us all of the time now."

"Around you?" Ceuma asked in surprise. "What... what do you mean?"

"You wanted to be a Healer Ceuma... well that is what you are going to be." Anja told her. "You and Joci can stay at the palace with Sivana and Belen. I could bring our entire family here and there would be plenty of room. You will live here and stay with us when we go to Sparta every year."

"You do not trust me?" Ceuma said.

Sivana smiled and reached out to take her hand. "On the contrary." She said. "Whether you realize it or not Ceuma... you and Joci just became members of the extended Leonidas family."

"You will have the same opportunities and chances that both Sivana and I had when we got our lives on track." Anja said firmly. "We will not keep that from you. We will teach you all you wish to learn."

Ceuma opened her mouth to reply but the commotion caused many heads to turn as Chief of the Arch Ministry Wiktor and the other members began to file in.

"Here we go." Eurin spoke from Anja's right.

They all watched as the seven most senior members of the Ministry settled into the chairs in the front row, a long curved table in front of them with data pads and pitchers of water on it as well as glasses. Several dozens other Ministers filled in the three rows of chairs behind the seven member senior panel. It was done efficiently and quickly and Anja turned when she felt her great grandfather's unique presence fill her wolf senses. She saw him settling to the chair in the front row with Zaniai, the stern looking man beside him. Anja was surprised when she realized it was her Uncle and she saw Fuleos flash her a hand signal that spoke all he wanted to say. The rumors were true and her uncle was not taking sides with Umbra against her. This gave Anja an uplift in spirit and she smiled at them brilliantly until Wiktor's voice brought her head back around. She tapped the thin oak rod against the small chime.

"This session of the Arch Ministry will now come to order." She spoke firmly. Wiktor waited as it quieted down and members of the Netnews that had been allowed into the chamber were broadcasting the proceedings live and in color across the Union.

Anja watched as an aide to Wiktor leaned in from behind her at the exact same time as one was whispering to Buonau. Anja saw both their eyes go to where her uncle was sitting with Fuleos and Anja saw her aunt's eyes burning with anger at her husband. Wiktor leaned forward in her chair.

"Senior Mage Instructor Vamm... it is my understanding you had a part in bringing this petition to the attention of the Elder Council and this ministry." Wiktor spoke. "I have been informed that you have withdrawn your support."

Anja watched as her uncle, a tall man for a Hadarian, got to his feet easily. "My apologies Chief Minister Wiktor, but your understanding is not correct. I have never supported this action against the Queen. I just have been unable to voice my own opinion until now." He motioned with his hands. "This is my way of saying who I support and who I do not."

"Vamm!" Umbra hissed from across the chamber. "You will sit beside me!"

"No." He stated firmly. "I want the record to be clear Chief Minister. We failed in our charge once to protect Anja and Sivana from fates not of their own choosing. The gods gave us a second chance to do what King Yulu needed us to do. For twenty-five years since Anja and Sivana returned to us I have been silent and watching as others attempted to twist them into something they are not. I will no longer be silent. I support them in all that they do and I refuse to believe any of these charges that have been brought against Anja or Sivana. That is where I stand. And I represent every Mage Warrior across the Union in my words." He said holding up the data pad. "All seven hundred and nineteen of them."

The Hadarian Mage Warriors were the most senior of Hadarian Healers throughout the Union. The most powerful and best trained. They were the ones who staffed the four palaces across the Union, as well as working under many of the most senior Researchers within the Union. They were first trained as Healers and then spent six grueling months training under Spartan Instructors in all forms of combat to better be able to protect those they were charged with. This was an event neither Wiktor nor Buonau had counted on and the ripple of voices murmuring in the assembled gallery was very evident.

Wiktor glanced briefly at Buonau before looking back to Vamm. "Thank you Vamm." She spoke intentionally leaving off his title this time. "Your stance will be noted." Vamm nodded and sat back down with little fanfare, tucking the data pad back into the jacket he wore. Wiktor shifted in her chair and then turned to look at Anja. "Anja Leonidas you are..."

"Queen." Anja snapped.

Wiktor blinked. "Excuse me?"

"You heard me Chief Minister!" Anja stated getting to her feet. "I will refer to you by your title Chief Minister... and I expect the same in return. I am Queen of Hadaria and one of five Queens of the Lycavorian Union. You *will* use my title when you address me."

Wiktor's jaw twitched ever so slightly and she nodded her head. "Very well. Queen Anja Leonidas, the Hadarian Arch Ministry has called this special joint session to address six charges leveled against you by citizens of Hadaria and by the Hadarian Elder Council."

Eurin got to her feet now. "Six charges?" She asked. "We are only aware of five charges leveled against the Queen. Has something changed?"

Wiktor looked at her data pad. "I will read the charges if you like Divine One."

"Yes... I would like Chief Minister." Eurin snapped. "And I will also file a grievance with this Special Session for not being provided a complete list of the charges the Queen is being charged with to begin with. You can not just arbitrarily add charges at your own choosing and you know this."

"The Hadarian Constitutions states that additional charges may be filed after the original ones if sufficient evidence has been produced and the new charges fall in line with those already being leveled." Wiktor spoke. "Notification can be made at the time we convene Divine One."

"And what is this new charge?" Eurin demanded.

"I will read them all now if you are ready?" Wiktor acted smugly. "The new charge is the most serious and relates to the second and third charges."

"Please do so." Eurin snapped. She looked at Anja quickly as she felt Anja's soft hand slowly wrap around her wrist.

"Charge number one that has been brought against Queen Anja Leonidas is the most serious as I stated. After reviewing the information and relevant evidence given to this Ministry it was our decision to add the charge of Murder."

"Murder!" Eurin gasped astonished as murmurs swept through the chamber. "You can't be serious!"

"We are very serious Divine One. The evidence given to us clearly indicates that the Queen did knowingly delay her departure from the Field Hospital on Z'Qyhieu 5 when informed of Senior Mage Warrior Seanna's injuries. The Queen was the only Healer on the planet with sufficient abilities to render proper medical care to Seanna. The military records we obtained are quite clear. She knowingly delayed her departure from her Field Hospital after being informed of the seriousness of Seanna's injuries. The flight records indicate that her *STRIKER* was fully fueled and prepared to transport her directly to Seanna's location."

"I made a decision to remain because I was treating several dozen seriously wounded Spartans!" Anja barked.

"Spartans that could have shifted to at least make them stable so that you could respond to a fellow Hadarian who needed your attention." Wiktor replied.

Anja's eyes grew a little wider. "I don't play favorites in war Chief Minister! And your dismissal of the injuries to the Spartans I was treating are disturbing to me!"

"Seanna was an Hadarian who just happened to be your former lover and who had very damaging information in regards to your actions if they ever became public knowledge. The injuries to the Spartans you were treating were not injuries that needed your immediate attention or treatment." Wiktor finished speaking before looking at her. "Your refusal to respond to the transmission for aide for Seanna, this Ministry saw as a deliberate and conscious act of deprived and premeditated murder, hence the new charge."

"That is outrageous!" Eurin shouted.

"You will have time to address these charges in the future Divine One." Wiktor said smugly. "May I continue?"

Eurin's eyes narrowed and she glanced quickly at Anja. Anja gave her a minute shake of her head and Eurin turned back. "Very well Chief Minister." She snarled turning back to Wiktor fully. "Please do."

"The second and third charges have not changed. The second charge is willful acts of a deprived nature that resulted in the death of a fellow Hadarian and the third is neglect of duties as the senior Hadarian Healer on the planet that resulted in the death of a fellow Hadarian." Wiktor said reading from the data pad in her hand. "The fourth charge is perhaps the vilest next to the charge of murder. The fourth charge is levied against you for depraved acts of a deviant sexual nature while within the palace walls as Queen. The evidence supporting these charges has quite unfortunately been circulating across the Union thanks to the inadvertent release by an aide to this Ministry." She looked at Eurin and Anja. "Do you wish to say anything in regards to the fourth charge?"

"You mean aside from the fact that it's bullshit and not true?" Anja quipped. "No."

"Please refrain from using..." Wiktor began.

“Do not tell me to refrain from doing anything Chief Minister. I am still Queen and I will speak however I like!” Anja snarled.

Wiktor’s jaw twitched once more but she took a breath and continued. “The fifth charge is dismissal of the Hadarian constitution by both you and Princess Sivana concerning policies you put in place without the guidance or support from this Ministry or the Hadarian Elder Council. That charge has three sub-categories within the main charge itself relating to specific occurrences where you and Princess Sivana ignored the recommendation or advisement of this Chamber and or the Hadarian Elders.”

Anja rolled her eyes. “With very good reason.” She stated. “But we won’t get into that now.”

“The sixth and final charge is perhaps the most hard to accept. You are charged with the willful neglect as mother to the heirs to the Hadarian Royal Family. This charge has listed four sub-counts within the main one where you exercised depravity in the presence of Retta and Calyb, heirs to the throne of Hadaria, as well as allowing Princess Eliani to marry a Lycavorian male with a known history of corruption without first obtaining the blessing of the Hadarian Elder Council. Allowing your children into your bedchambers while you are taking part in actions with other females is at best un-queen like and at worst disgusting and inexcusable as a mother in my opinion and the opinion of the Hadarian Elder Council and this Ministry.” Wiktor stated.

Anja couldn’t help but laugh and shake her head. “Your opinion and that of the Elder Council in regards to my sexual preferences and what I choose to do in the privacy of our home do not concern me in the least. I have slept with one man and four women in the last twenty-six years and I will continue to sleep with them for as long as I have years left in this life. I rather enjoy our time together. It’s hot and steamy and...”

“That is quite enough!” Wiktor bellowed as Anja’s comment brought forth laughter from the gallery in the Chamber. She glared at Anja with real hate in her eyes. “You will maintain decorum while present in this Chamber and not disrespect this body with your dismissive and disgusting attitude! And I will tolerate no other outbursts from within the gallery either!”

“It does not appear that King Leonidas or the other Queens share your commitment to this supposed arrangement Queen Anja.” Buonau spoke from her seat. “It is well known he left Hadaria quite upset with you, and you have had no contact with him since. Or the other Queens of the Union for that matter.”

Anja met her eyes. “Is that what you think Elder Buonau?” She asked confidently. Anja snickered. “All I will say to that is... you don’t know Martin Leonidas very well at all. And as someone who is supposedly one of the strongest Hadarian healers within the Union, your lack of knowledge of the Lycavorian people as a whole is astounding.”

Wiktor’s eyes darted to Buonau and then back to Anja. “Are you... are you admitting to communicating with the King and Queens while confined to the palace here on Hadaria?” She demanded.

“He is my husband and they are my lovers, fellow Queens and best friends.” Anja stated proudly. “What do you think Chief Minister?”

It was Eurin’s turn to curl her fingers around Anja’s wrist before she got wound up and really let them have it. “Anja is still a Queen of the Lycavorian Union and has duties as such.” Eurin spoke. “Duties this body can not interfere in.”

“All forms of communication off world were blocked from within the palace!” Wiktor snapped. “How was she able to communicate?”

Anja shrugged. “I’ll tell you like I was taught by the man who raised me on Earth. That’s on a need to know basis.” She said with a grin. “And you don’t need to know!”

“You freely admit to violating the restrictions we placed on you!” Buonau barked.

“Last time I checked... I was Queen.” Anja said. “You can place all the restrictions on me that you like when it comes to Hadarian law, but as Queen of the Lycavorian Union you have no say or power over me in the least.”

“You will relinquish these means of military communications at once!” Wiktor snapped. “Any and all equipment will be confiscated immediately! You will surrender it to the Militia Guard!”

Anja shook her head with a laugh. “I don’t think so.” She said evenly.

“This body orders it!” Wiktor barked.

“This body does not tell the Union military what to do.” Anja stated calmly. “And as Chief Medical Officer of that Military, neither do you tell me what to do in that position. As much as you appear to want too.”

“So your hold on the King is such that you have somehow convinced him it is not you who has committed these vile acts? These acts that have been playing across the Union for months now.” Buonau barked from her chair.

“Yeah... and we all know how that happened don't we Elder Buonau.” Anja spat.

“That will not work on the members of the Ministry or the Elder Council I assure you Queen Anja!” Buonau hissed at her.

“Actually... love, trust and the truth worked better.” Anja said.

“Do you wish to respond to these charges now?” Wiktor demanded. She wanted to get this over with before Anja was able to wrest control and favor back to her.

Eurin stepped forward quickly. “I will respond...”

Anja stopped her by taking her arm. “No Eurin.” She said. “I've about reached the end of my patience with all of this crap and I will respond to each and every one of these trumped up charges myself.”

Eurin met her eyes and saw the confidence and pride in them and she smiled. Anja had taught her many things over the years, and even though several hundred years separated them in age, Eurin found she adored the younger Anja. They had worked seamlessly over these last years making several new discoveries while working side by side in one lab or another. She was fiery and brash and exceedingly intelligent as well as compassionate and brave. She handed the data pad to her and nodded. “I will enjoy this.” She said softly.

Anja grinned and leaned over to kiss her cheek. She waited for Eurin to sit down before turning back to Wiktor. “You are dismissing your council?” Wiktor asked stunned.

Anja nodded. “Pretty much.” She said. “Eurin is the Divine One of our people and I don't want her to be tainted by my responses or actions to these fubar charges!”

Anja watched several ministers lean over to Wiktor in puzzlement and Wiktor finally held up her hand to them and looked at Anja. “Fubar?” She asked.

Anja nodded. “Yeah... fucked up beyond all recognition.” She snapped.

Wiktor's eyes grew wide as muffled murmurs swept through the chamber again, some of them hiding laughter at Anja's words. “Your insistence on insulting this chamber with your use of foul language is beginning to tell on us Queen Anja!” She barked.

“You don't say?” Anja said. “How many languages can you speak Chief Minister?”

“What?”

“How many languages can you speak?” Anja asked again.

“What bearing does that have on these proceedings?” Wiktor barked.

“None I guess.” Anja said. “I can speak nine if case you're wondering... and that doesn't include the twelve different dialects of languages on Earth. I speak the Lycavorian ancient language, the vampire ancient language, the elven language, the Folcani native language, and the Nodan and Algolian languages to name a few. And I can swear in all of them real well!”

“I still don't see the bearing your fluency in languages has on the reasons you are here!” Wiktor snapped.

“No... I don't imagine you can see past your own narrow-mindedness.” Anja spat. “That has always been a problem for you Chief Minister Wiktor. Not to mention Elder Buonau and my Aunt.”

“Insulting me only enforces the view of this Chamber in regards to your actions over these last years!” Wiktor snapped. “Do you wish to address these charges or shall we move directly to the next portion of this hearing.”

“Let's do just that.” Anja barked at her.

EARTH SPARTA DEIA'S OFFICE

“They are setting her up. I've seen Wiktor work before... she's a shrewd *upaee*.” Deia stated from where she sat behind her desk. Aricia, For'mya and Gorgo.

Almost all of the Netnews channels were tuned to the proceedings on Hadaria, with billions of citizens watching across the Union. Gorgo had come here under heavy *Durcunusaan* guard once Riall moved to the station orbiting earth. With the level six lock down of the planet, only Netnews channels and military communications were allowed, and the Netnews channels were monitored heavily during this time.

“These charges are so outrageous it’s ridiculous to comprehend.” For'mya stated.

“Deia is right For'mya.” Gorgo spoke. “We saw her try the same thing about eight hundred years ago to Anja’s father King Yelu. Buonau was not yet the Elder Healer, but she quietly supported her actions from the shadows.”

“She didn’t succeed did she?” Aricia asked.

Gorgo shook her head. “No. The terms of the agreement he made with them were never released... but Wiktor suddenly stopped all proceedings she was undertaking.”

“Why?” For'mya asked.

“No one knows.” Deia answered now. “What I do know is that Wiktor is not to be trusted in the least. If you ask me... their decision has already been made. Now all we can do is see if they have enough support to succeed.”

“How do we...?”

They all turned as the door to Deia’s office opened and they heard the voices. “It is very important!” The male voice barked. “Now seal the damn building!” Aricia and For'mya got to their feet when they recognized Thoti’s voice.

They watched as Thoti squeezed the *Durcunusaan*’s shoulder and then proceeded into the office area. “Thoti?” For'mya asked. “What is it?”

Even in only two short days, it was easy enough for Aricia and For'mya to detect the monumental changes in Duewa since becoming Thoti’s wife and mate. It was almost as if she had woken up one morning and decided the life she was leading was the wrong one. Essentially that is exactly what happened when Duewa allowed herself to feel the love Thoti held for her and to return it as much as she wanted. She acted almost like a love struck teenager in the giddiness she displayed when around the man who had altered her life and that of her sons. She had not taught the children a single thing in the past two days, and only spent the days with them learning of what they could do with and without their bonds with Mara and Endeem. Even Nara and Deion had joined them and Duewa had spent hours with them in the villa’s garden seeing and learning what they could do. Her sons joined them for all of it and children will be children. Duewa’s sons had changed from the reserved and quiet boys they had been when they had arrived, to exactly how boys should be at that age.

The data pad Thoti had given them revealed the presence of at least three squads of the Hadarian Elder Militia Guards in Sparta, and these were the men that would try to take Retta and Calyb. Since there were thousands of Hadarians within Sparta, there was no way to put all of them under surveillance. The children were more closely guarded now by *Durcunusaan* troops that were not readily seen, but it still did not reveal the identities of the men who would try to kidnap them. Duewa had spent several hours going through holo images of men and women who had come to Earth but could find none she knew by face. To Aricia and For'mya it was the ultimate sign that Duewa had indeed changed in so short a time. The data pad she had given them contained information about her mother’s plan to usurp Anja, and Duewa’s role in it. She had given this freely even though it incriminated her as well. She didn’t care about this in the least and her honesty and obvious love for Thoti had convinced Aricia and For'mya. They could smell Thoti all over Duewa, and Duewa's scent always spiked whenever he entered the room she was in and she saw him.

“Duewa just reported from the children’s school.” He told them. “She has seen no faces of Hadarians that she recognizes but she will remain with the Schoolmaster until the end of the day and then return with them.” Thoti spoke. “She is concerned because this is the day her mother wanted the children taken. The day they put Queen Anja on trial.”

“There is additional security around them yes?” Aricia asked.

Thoti nodded. “They would be foolish to attempt to take them... but let it not be said I have ever met an intelligent Hadarian Militia Guard.”

“Well... they have gotten this far and remained undetected.” For'mya said. “Let’s not underestimate them.”

“Point taken my Queen.” Thoti said. “I thought it best to remain here with you in case anything does happen. I have a Heavy Lifter outside with a full squad on standby in the lobby.”

Aricia nodded. “Isheeni and Aurith are circling the city as well.” She said. “Their dragons eyes might detect something our men on the ground do not.”

“Has anyone heard from the King?” Thoti asked.

For'mya shook her head. “He is still at Thermopylae and heavily shielded. The tomb of his father is a natural Mindvoice dampener to those outside. All Helen told us was that he would be meeting someone there and it could be many hours before we heard from him. She has returned to Dragon Mountain with Arzoal to insure several things were complete that she needed to do.”

Aricia slid her hand into For'mya's. “Do not worry *Kinsoaurgai*.” She said. “He will return soon.”

For'mya nodded. “I know. I just want to feel his arms around me.”

“She is beginning to answer.” Deia barked out, her attention focused on the holomager of the Netnews broadcast.

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBER

“...Eliani is a grown woman and capable of making her own decisions. I do not know what information you have received in regards to Star Commander Malic, but I met the young man. I've met his parents. They are fine Spartans... and even though Eliani is half Hadarian, she and Malic have become *Anomes*.” Anja heard the murmurs from the gallery. “It surprised us all, but we were very happy.”

“The supposed mythical bond of the Lycavorian people between a man and woman. Something that conveniently came back into prominence with the return of King Leonidas and queen Aricia.” Wiktör said with contempt. “The Arch Ministry does not recognize it, nor does it recognize their marriage. They share their bed with a vampire female!”

“Nyla is just as much a wife to Malic as Eliani is!” Anja snapped. “She and Eliani are bound together by blood! It was Eliani's blood that saved Nyla's life during the Evolli War! There is not one without the other!”

“Princess Eliani is a lost cause.” Buonau spoke dismissively from her seat. “When she received the order from my office to return to Hadaria and come before us to seek our approval of her marriage to this Malic she told the messenger to... she told the messenger to... ‘go fuck himself’.”

Anja nearly burst out laughing but contained herself. She nodded with no small amount of pride. “That sounds like Eliani.” She said.

“We are more concerned with Retta and Calyb.” She held up the data pad in her hand. “We have concrete evidence of them appearing in your chambers while you were engaged in lewd sexual acts. Twice with the elven Queen Dysea and once when that included the vampire Queen Isabella. Once with King Leonidas. And once with King Leonidas and Queen Aricia. Do you deny these charges?”

Anja shook her head. “Deny them?” She gasped. “Why the hell would I deny them? They were acts of love within the privacy of our home. I'll dismiss how you obtained your so called information for the moment because I'm quite sure spying on the Royal family is against the law in some way. Did Duewa or your other children never walk into your bedroom by accident while you...” Anja stopped talking. “No... wait... I'm sorry. That is not a question I should be asking *you* Elder Buonau. If I remember correctly you once told me sex is only to produce children. It should not be used for pleasure. You probably had a schedule for your husband to follow when you let him touch you. Sex 101 maybe?”

“You do not dispute these charges?” Wiktör asked.

“What is there to dispute?” Anja declared without shame. “There have been times when all of our children have come into our bedroom through the years for one reason or the other. They were frightened or didn't feel well. If we were engaged at the moment we quickly stopped what we were doing and took care of our children. As parents should.”

“Hadarian parents would not allow such a thing to happen to begin with!” Buonau barked out.

“Well... as you so often remind me Elder Buonau... I'm also half wolf.” Anja stated. “We do not view sex as something vile and disgusting. Too bad for you really. Perhaps you should try it once.”

“You are the Hadarian Queen!” Wiktor snarled. “These acts fall under our laws as lewd behavior and when involving children, bringing harm to their welfare.”

“And I’m also half wolf thanks to the man I love.” Anja said. “I have the same Phases and desires as any other female wolf who wants the attentions of her mate. Marty doesn’t seem to mind.” Anja quipped with a dreamy grin.

“So you admit to being guilty of these charges?” Wiktor said.

Anja shrugged. “Are you expecting me to deny them?” she answered. “I’ll never turn away Martin Leonidas or any of my fellow Queens when they want me. Just as they won’t turn me away when I desire them. If you can’t understand or accept that... too bad for you. I made that very clear to this Council when I first returned here. You are beating a dead horse with that and it won’t get you anywhere.”

“Then let it be known that you willingly accept guilt for your actions concerning these charges and we will move on.” Wiktor snapped.

Anja again shrugged her slim shoulders. “Suits the *sibfla* out of me. I ain’t gonna change for a bunch of stuffy men and women if that’s what you are leading towards. As for Retta and Calyb, they are Prince and Princess of the Lycavorian Union before they are heirs to the throne of Hadaria. You will never control them or influence them. Martin and I... all of their mothers... we won’t allow it.”

“An order by this Arch Ministry can force you to delegate custody of Retta and Calyb to our care.” Wiktor popped.

“You mean to my wonderful Aunt Umbra.” Anja snarled glaring at her in her chair. “Fat chance that will ever happen. You can write as many orders as you want.” Anja snapped. “If you do... Retta and Calyb will never set foot on Hadaria again. Then what will you do with your precious orders.”

“Now you threaten this body?” Wiktor spoke stunned.

Anja shook her head. “Not at all. Just a statement of fact.”

“She has admitted guilt in this regard.” Buonau declared. “Let us move on Chief Minister Wiktor.”

Wiktor nodded. “Very well.” She shifted to another data pad. “The fifth charge states that on three separate occasions you and Princess Sivana disregarded the recommendations of this body and the Elder Council and made political decisions without our consent. The first instance is when you rescinded the lifetime exile of Mage Warrior Filrian and allowed him to return to Hadaria to Ascend.”

“Yes. I did that because the esteemed Elder Council refused to even consider that Filrian had learned and taught himself techniques that have allowed our Healers to go longer periods without Ascending. It allows them to use their abilities to the maximum affect. This act also allowed them to remain among the units they were assigned to and build unit cohesion. That is something all of them found very agreeable I might add.” Anja answered.

“No doubt the fact that he is now married to the adopted vampire daughter of King Leonidas played a role in your decision?” Buonau spoke sarcastically.

“Not a bit.” Anja said. “They got married afterwards if you recall.”

“The second instance of your abuse is when you told the Menoalian King you would not allow him to direct Hadarian Healers on the surface of his world after this body specifically told you that is what we agreed to.” Wiktor spoke.

“You agreed to let him use our Healers to cure only those men and women who were supporters of himself and his stupid ass government.” Anja popped. “Their decisions are what caused the outbreak of Jepalot Syndrome to become so out of control to begin with. I wasn't about to let them dictate to our people who to take care of and who not too.”

“Against our specific orders.” Wiktor said.

Anja nodded. “Pretty much yes.”

“And I suppose denying the Kavalian government access to our Healers after we agreed on a lucrative agreement with them falls into the same category.” Wiktor said.

Anja glared at her. “You were about to send our Healers, most of whom are female, into the territory of a regime that regards women as lower than dirt!” Anja snapped. “You’re damn straight I’m gonna stop that.”

“The representative of this body and the Elder Council signed an agreement with them Queen Anja.” Wiktor said evenly. “We are within our rights to do such things you know. You however, even as Queen, do not have the authority to rescind an order given by this body unless you present sufficient evidence to support your

claims. You broke our laws on all three of these occasions, and Princess Sivana supported you in these decisions which makes her just as guilty in their actions.”

“So what were you going to tell our Healers Chief Minister?” Anja snapped. “What were you going to tell them when our Healers began to disappear or end up beaten or killed because they violated some law within Kavalian space?”

“We had assurances from the Kavalian Prefect that this would not happen!” Wiktor barked back. “You broke the law by ordering our Healers to disregard this agreement with the Kavalian people!”

“And I saved a lot of lives in the process too.” Anja said. “Hadarian lives. Or doesn’t that concern you?”

“So once more you do not deny guilt to these charges brought against you?” Wiktor snapped.

“I’d do it again.” Anja said.

“Your plea is entered.” Wiktor announced. “Now we will move on to charge number four and the one that is the starting point for why you have been brought before us.” She shifted her data pads around. “The fourth charge is levied against you for depraved acts of a deviant sexual nature while within the palace walls as Queen. These acts were in fact recorded by a Lycavorian Spartan who was the betrothed to Mage Warrior Seanna. As I said earlier, the unfortunate release of the security feeds was made to the Netnews channels, but they clearly show you fornicating with not only the Spartan Rinard, but four other men at the same time. Your actions also indicate that Mage Warrior Seanna was not a willing participant in these acts and you in fact forced her to take part even though she told you she was in love with Rinard and did not wish too. Once more your depraved nature rears its ugly head Queen Anja.”

Anja rolled her eyes and grinned. “Marty likes it when I act depraved.” She said playfully back at Wiktor.

Buonau leaned forward. “Faced with the proof before your eyes that you willingly took part in these vile acts and still you stand there and deny them?”

Anja looked at her now with hardness in her jade green eyes. “This goes back to the fact that you know jack shit about the Lycavorian people Buonau, and you’ve been among them far longer than I have!”

“So you continue to claim the Queen Anja we see in these security videos is not you?” Wiktor asked.

“Do you take this entire body for fools Queen Anja? The entire Hadarian Elder Council for fools?”

“Blivit!” Anja barked.

“Pardon me?” Wiktor asked.

“Blivit.” Anja said again.

“What... what is this word?” Wiktor asked.

“It’s an old Navy SEAL expression that Martin Leonidas and I used quite a bit back in the day.” Anja answered. “It means ten pounds of shit in a five pound bag! It means I think you are all full of shit and I’m tired of tap dancing with you.”

“How dare you!” Wiktor exclaimed as gasps filled the gallery and the chamber.

“Oh I dare Wiktor.” Anja barked. “And I’m going to dare a whole lot more.” She snapped. She turned toward Sivana. “Ceuma would you join me please?”

All eyes went to the cloaked figure with the large cowl drawn up over their head. The figure appeared to be diminutive in nature, not much larger than Anja if at all. The figure glided gracefully out of their chair until they were standing next to Anja.

“You will apologize to this body this instant!” Wiktor shouted. “And you will answer to these charges without fail!”

Anja met her eyes. “I intend too.” She snapped.

“So you do not deny that this is you in these security videos!” Buonau barked. “That it was you who committed these acts?”

Anja shook her head. “No... it wasn't me.” She stated calmly.

“How can you stand there and tell this honored body what is so obviously false?” Buonau barked out. “You lie right to our faces! This is not the action of any Queen!”

“I can stand here and confidently state it wasn’t me.” Anja spoke stepping closer to Ceuma as they had spoken of.

“Because it was me.” Ceuma spoke as she tossed back the hood and revealed her face for everyone to see.

The looks of stunned shock shattered the calm in the chamber and the uproar of voices and shouts and questions began. Anja looked at Ceuma and smiled. "Nicely done." She said softly.

"I thought you were doing a fine job all alone." Ceuma said. "You know of course they are not going to change their minds."

Anja nodded as she turned back to look at Wiktor who was glaring at her. "I know." She said. "I've already put things in motion."

DREAMLAND SHIPYARDS

ULU *ARIZONA*

To say the last few days had been frustrating for E'dira would be an understatement.

It had nothing to do with her new duties on the *ARIZONA*. In fact, that had been going far better than she had ever hoped. At her fingertips she had the most advanced systems to call upon and she had spent hours on the bridge of her new ship marveling in what she could do. The *ARIZONA*'s systems were based in part on the technology of the Mindvoice ship, and all the Union engineers had learned with Avi's assistance over the years. City Ship 41 had nearly two dozen small power generators that Avi had shown Union engineers how to incorporate into current Union advances. These power generators, more aptly called Quantum Resonance Field Reactors, were the core of the *ARIZONA* Class and it's abilities and they were far from small in terms of size. Alone they were far more powerful than even the main power cores on the massive *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruisers, though Zaala Randall and some very promising Nodon engineers had developed a power core very similar to the Quantum Resonance Field Reactors that powered the *ARIZONA* class. This new design was now the staple of *LEONIDAS II*-Class and any new ships coming out of the yards.

E'dira had been in her glory as she ran tactical simulation after tactical simulation, all the while keeping her three hundred member security force on their toes and loving that their new commander did not believe in simply running the same old drills. Her security force was made up of a combination of Spartans, elves, humans and a smattering of Algolians. All of them were former ship bound security troops and they were a no nonsense bunch of fleet men and women. Quite a few of them had families, but since the *ARIZONA* did not allow families to be on board, it also fell to E'dira to make sure she had a rotation that suited these men and women in order for them to see their families. It was definitely the largest command she had ever had, and without question it would fill her time easily, especially considering she was fourth in command of the ship.

All of them had been busy these last days, Steven Randall working his pilots around the clock, and pushing himself just as hard. There were launches and training missions almost every six hours, the *ARIZONA*'s pilots becoming familiar with their new commander and he with them. In the times she had been in the huge mess lounge E'dira had listened to the combination of elven, human and Lycavorian pilots. She could tell from the tone of their conversations that they were loving the training regime and the fact that their new commander took shit from no one as one Spartan had exclaimed. Zaala Randall, like her husband, had practically not left the engineering compartment. She and the Nodon Chief Engineer had become nearly inseparable as they explored and tested each and every new system with meticulous care. It was also quickly made known by the pilots that arrived with them that Zaala Randall was very much off limits. She was the wife of the pilot known as Scar, and E'dira had no doubts no one wanted to get on the bad side of Steven Randall by trying to proposition his beautiful elven wife.

E'dira's frustration was because of her lack of time with Miranda Lorian. Her Drow blood burned for the human woman who had managed to elicit the emotions E'dira thought she was incapable of. Her asian features were surreal to look at in E'dira's eyes, and she wanted Miranda in her bed so that she could claim her. Miranda had been in and out of meetings with Admiral O'Connor, flying with Steven and his pilots and inspecting portions of the ship that fell under Janon's prevue of duties. She had seen her only a few times on the bridge and each time it had seemed as if Miranda had lost the desire for E'dira that she had first shown. She had been very business like and almost unresponsive to the looks of want that E'dira had given her. E'dira began to wonder if this somehow meant that Miranda was no longer interested in pursuing a relationship of any kind and for the first time in her life E'dira felt the pang of rejection in her heart and it did not feel good in the least. In typical Drow fashion however, and after speaking with Zaala Randall, E'dira decided to face the situation head on.

Zaala had become her sounding board and confidant due to her closeness with Lynwe and Aihola and the relationship her sister Tarifa had shared with both of them as 'slave' to a Drow mistress.

E'dira stopped in front of the door and looked up and down the corridor shyly. Part of her did not want others to know of her desire for Miranda, and part of her did not want to embarrass Miranda in any way since she was the Captain of the ARIZONA. She took a deep breath and lifted her hand to the side panel only to see the door slide open quickly and Miranda appear. E'dira hid her intake of breath at the beauty Miranda was, from her exotic features to her exceptionally firm and supple body. She fought down the sudden surge of sexual desire that threatened to overwhelm her as Miranda's beautiful dark eyes went wide and she came to an abrupt halt.

"E'dira!" She gasped quickly looking back into her quarters.

E'dira noticed this and resisted the urge to follow Miranda's gaze, quite sure she would discover a man in her quarters. "Forgive me... I... I know I did not call before coming down but I..."

Miranda Lorian was many things, but lacking in confidence and pride was not one of them. She had worked hard for everything she had gained in this life so far, forsaking almost everything else because of the pain of losing so many friends and family through the years. She had never had the desire to be close to anyone before taking this command. Ben had told her she was a perfect fit for the job, demanding and knowledgeable. If anyone could do it she could. Miranda had taken the duty as another means to escape the pain of her past, not realizing that with every cross section beam and new system that was installed on the ARIZONA as she was built, replaced a little of what she had lost. Not realizing that as every new member of the crew came together, Miranda was forming another family. A family she was drawing closer to with each passing hour. And at the tip of that pyramid was the devastating beautiful Drow woman in front of her.

Miranda had never openly entertained the idea of having a relationship with another woman. She had experienced two instances that occurred during drunken binges, but beyond that nothing. She was not against it, for she had grown up with the incredible openness of this new world she had come in to. Same sex relationships were common within the Union, and they were some of the strongest she had ever known in her life. When this tall Drow female had walked into her life that had all changed. E'dira's dark ebony skin and bright amber eyes caused Miranda's hardness to melt and more and more she wanted nothing else but to submit to this woman. She knew of the Drow propensity for being dominant in their relationships, but she also knew that Aihola had changed the course of their future when she assumed the role of her mother as Queen. The relationships among couples or unions that involved a Drow were perhaps the most solid relationships outside of the Lycavorian people. Drow were intensely committed to those they chose to share their lives with, and while they may have been dominant in the privacy of their bedrooms, that dominance rarely was shown outside of that private area unless like Tarifa and Aihola, it was done with love and respect in mind.

Staring at E'dira now, Miranda knew without question she wanted this Drow female and all she had to offer no matter what it was. She had been working toward that one goal all day. Miranda Lorian wanted to know love and all it entailed, for she knew without it, she would never be able to forget her past and move into the future.

"Forgive me... I... I know I did not call before coming down but I..." E'dira was stammering out the words. "If you are busy with someone I will... I will speak with you about it later."

Miranda blinked several times. "Busy with someone?" She asked. "What? No!" She exclaimed realizing that E'dira saw her look back into her quarters and assuming she had company. "No... E'dira... I was... I was just coming to get you."

It was E'dira's turn to blink rapidly as she looked at Miranda. "I have filed my report for the day." E'dira said. "It is in the computer."

"Your report?" Miranda said. "Why would I want your report?"

E'dira glanced into her quarters once more. "You are occupied yes?"

"Occupied?" Miranda said. "No. I was... I was coming to invite you to have dinner with me."

E'dira's amber orbs widened and Miranda Lorian knew then she wanted to look into those beautiful eyes for many long years. "Dinner?"

Miranda stepped to the side of the doorway and motioned her to come in. "Yes E'dira... dinner."

E'dira stepped hesitantly forward and looked into Miranda's large quarters. She saw the table in the center of the main room set for two people, with a bottle of what appeared to be Spartan Wine in the center and a large bowl of salad. "Miranda... I..."

Miranda stepped around her and moved further into her quarters. "I have been so busy the last few days. I wanted to at least unpack some of my things before I actually had you over. I asked the *ARIZONA*'s Mess Officer to put together a leaf salad for us with beef strips on the side. He cooked it like the Drow but I don't know how good it is."

E'dira looked at her surprised. "You did this for... for me?" She asked.

Miranda nodded. "Yes." She answered. "You seemed surprised?"

"I thought perhaps you were... I thought you were avoiding me." E'dira said.

"Why would I be avoiding you E'dira?" Miranda asked. "I want to discover you as much as you wish to discover me. I want..."

E'dira was a Drow elf, and like the Lycavorian people, the Drow were not shy about making it know they wanted someone. E'dira stepped forward and took Miranda's face in her hands before sealing her lips over Miranda's soft full ones and kissing her with decades of pent up emotion and desire. E'dira heard Miranda groan loudly as her hands gripped E'dira's waist and she leaned into the kiss. E'dira dropped her hands to grasp Miranda's firm ass, pushing her right leg between Miranda's until her upper thigh and knee was pressing firmly against Miranda's pussy. E'dira could feel the heat pulsing from Miranda's pussy, and it was quickly followed by a moistness that E'dira felt and rejoiced at. It told her all she really wanted to know. She pulled her lips away from a gasping Miranda and stared into her dark orbs.

"You... you are my slave Miranda Lorian." E'dira stated confidently then looking at Miranda's flushed cheeks and wide eyes.

Miranda's eyes were wide because never in her life had she become so wet so quickly. It was almost as if E'dira's lips were an aphrodisiac, and her belly was rapidly building with pleasure. "Yes... yes Mistress." Miranda finally stammered out as she let go of all the walls she had built over the last years.

E'dira's amber orbs danced with intense delight as she drew Miranda even closer, wanting to feel every portion of Miranda's lush body against her own. "Miranda... there is something you should know." She said softly.

"I don't care." Miranda stated quickly.

"No... I need to tell you this." E'dira spoke. "The High Coven experiments on me... they made me different."

Miranda looked at her oddly. "Different? Different how?"

"They introduced a chemical into my body." E'dira said. "This chemical... it allows me to..."

E'dira's words were drowned out by the blare of the *ARIZONA*'s intercom.

"Senior officers to the Captain's Ready Room! Senior officers to the Captain's Ready Room! This is no drill!"

"Fuck!" Miranda swore viciously at the interruption when blissful pleasure was so close. Instantly however, both women became all business as was their natures, but not before Miranda took E'dira's hands in hers. "... I will have you Mistress!" Miranda hissed softly.

E'dira drew her close and nodded. "I look forward to that slave." She said.

"...saw the briefing by the Prime Minister." Ben spoke as he walked around the large table with Miranda, E'dira, Zaala and Steven sitting on one side, while Janon and Chuess sat on the other side. Their only vacancy was a Science Officer that would be filled at later time since the *ARIZONA* was built as a warship first and foremost. "Earth is still under a Level Six COM blackout, and Androcles has taken the *SCIMITAR* out of system. Most likely into The Wilds. I spoke very briefly with Riall and he is pretty certain they are going to Kranek."

"Kranek?" Janon asked. "Kranek is nothing more than a mountainous rock. A few scattered settlements, but that is it."

Ben nodded. "According to Riall, it's also where Dysea and Normya are." He said with a grin. "Hold on to your seats folks, you're gonna love this. Cha'talla isn't dead and his tribe of Immortals have been living on

Kranek for over two decades.” Ben saw their looks of stunned shock and he couldn’t help but grin wider. “And the kicker is this. Apparently Cha’talla has been married to a pureblood vampire female for all this time. He has four sons by her, and Normya Leonidas just recently married the oldest.”

“Married?” E’dira gasped.

Ben nodded. “Riall wasn’t able to relate all of the story to me, but from what I understand Cha’talla’s oldest son kept Normya from being captured and killed or worse by mercenaries. She was specifically targeted and we don’t know why. Dysea has been running an investigation into this as well as the disappearance of over a hundred elven females through the last few years. They are pretty close in figuring out what is going on.”

“Why do you think Androcles is going there sir?” Miranda asked.

“Because Androcles is just as down right dirty nasty mean as his father. Probably more so in many respects.” Ben answered. “If he took the Coven dragons and riders with him it is only because he intends to finish their training.”

“What does that have to do with us?” Steven asked.

“Technically nothing.” Ben said.

Miranda tilted her head to the side. She had heard that tone from Ben O’Connor many times before. “And technically... since we don’t exist...” She said softly.

Ben smiled. “The *HORNET* is fully crewed and waiting for her Strike Group to arrive.” He said. “Riall and I agree all of this shit happening now is no coincidence. So... while we wait for the *HORNET*’s group to arrive we are going to play guardian angel.”

“Guardian angel?” Zaala asked.

Ben nodded and reached down to the table activating the star chart. “Mando... I want you to park the *ARIZONA* and the *HORNET* here. Two light years from Kranek. Remain under Shroud and conduct drills, but keep an eye on this planet. If any Coven ships come within a light year of Kranek I want you to blow them out of the stars.”

“Technically wezz have signzzed a Ceasezz Fire with the High Coven Admiral.” Chuess spoke.

Ben nodded. “Which they violated the moment they attacked Zarah Leonidas and Dragon Mountain.” He answered. “Technically they can now kiss my ass!”

Everyone in the room laughed at this and Miranda leaned forward. “And if we have to engage?” She asked.

“Deploy our Penetrator EWs and make sure no one ever knows we were there.” Ben said.

Steven grinned. “So essentially... we’ll be ghosts?”

“Yep.” Ben said.

“Oh... I like being a ghost.” Steven said.

“I want you underway in an hour.” Ben spoke. “I’m heading back to Apo Prime to see my little ones and coordinate a response if one is needed. That’s it. Dismissed.”

Miranda waited while the others got to their feet and quickly exited the room. She also stood up and moved closer to Ben waiting until it was just the two of them. “Admiral... Ben...” She started softly.

Ben looked at her. “This is what you were born for Miranda.” Ben said looking at her. He took a deep breath and turned to fully face her. “I know what Tina and I did, having Isabella change us, I know that pissed you off.”

“I came to understand why Ben.” She said.

“From the first moment I saw you I knew this is what you were meant for Miranda.” Ben said. “You are like me and the Skipper... you are a doer. It’s why you were the only one I even considered putting in command of this ship. This ship and the others like it... they will need very unique captains because of the purpose they were built for. Martin didn’t hesitate when I told him I wanted you. It’s time for you to let go of the past Miranda.”

“Ben... you...”

Ben shook his head. “No. You have a new crew. A new family. The men and women who served under you and died would not want you to destroy yourself. They died doing what they loved.” He said. “They would want you to go on and make this family just as special as they were to you.”

“I don’t know if I can do that Ben.” Miranda said.

“You have already started Miranda.” Ben spoke with a smile to her. “I may be a man and a vampire... but I’m not completely dense. Tina and Endith look at each other the same way I see you and E'dira look at each other.” Ben saw Miranda blush even under her tanned skin. “All I’m saying is this... your life experiences up until now have pulled you to this one point in time. They have guided you and shaped you into who you are now. This ship... this command... this is what you were meant for. Now it’s time for you to leave the past behind and forge ahead into the future.”

Miranda looked at him for a long moment and then she smiled. “You practice that speech with Tina and Endith Admiral?” She asked.

Ben laughed and nodded his head. “How did it sound?”

“Thank you sir.” Miranda said. “Thank you for believing in me.”

“Believing in you was never the question.” Ben said. “You believing in yourself is what was at issue.”

“And the King?” She asked.

“Who Marty?” Ben exclaimed. “Shit... you let me worry about Marty. The saltwater has corroded what brains he does have. He went along with me all the way. You just have to know how to play the game.”

Miranda laughed now and even as she stood there she felt the veil of doubt beginning to lift from around her. “I won’t let you down Admiral.” She said.

“Hell... I know that.” Ben said. “It will be interesting to see them in action together. Send me a secure transmission when you are in position and I’ll update you with any new information I might have when I get back.”

“Understood.” Miranda said.

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBER

Anja and Ceuma stood next to each other as the many ministers and those in the gallery were still murmuring amongst themselves in disbelief. No one's face was more shocked than that of Buonau and Rinard.

“**Order! There will be order!**” Wiktor bellowed banging her rod against the small bell. She directed her eyes back to Anja, glaring at her. “What trickery is this?” She exclaimed as the voices began to quiet. She waited a few more seconds and then turned to glare at Anja. “What trickery is this?”

“Trickery?” Anja spoke. “There is no trickery here. Unless you count the trickery that Rinard was using.” Anja turned to look at Ceuma. “Allow me to introduce Ceuma... and she is a clone. A clone of me.”

Once more roars and muted conversations filled the chamber and Wiktor began tapping her gavel on the bell again and again. “There will be order!” She barked. “Or I will clear this chamber of everyone but the Ministers!”

“No you won’t.” Anja snapped as she moved closer to where Wiktor sat. “This chamber and this gallery will see just how much you are willing to do to see me out of power.”

“You would do well to mind your words Queen Anja!” Wiktor barked. “It is you who are on trial here.”

Anja turned and looked at Rinard now seeing the anger in his face. “You didn’t think we would find out did you Rinard.” She spoke. “Son of Lucvaun.”

“You know nothing!” Rinard snarled at her.

“Don’t I?” Anja said. “You should have done your homework better Rinard. If you had... you would have known it was Torma that killed your father. Not Miath. Not me. I wasn't even bonded to Miath when we broke up your sick empire then.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about!” Rinard barked.

“Don’t you?” Anja said. Anja turned back to Ceuma. “Allow me to relate a little history of the Lycavorian people for the Ministers and the Elder Council. This tidbit of information is little known outside of the Lycavorian people, but it is something you as Senior Elder Healer should have known Buonau.”

“What nonsense do you speak now?” Buonau announced.

“You can do whatever tests you want on Ceuma here to determine that she is in fact a perfect clone of me.” Anja said. “Be mindful though... she is very headstrong and she doesn’t like to be poked and prodded. She will be more than happy to relate to all of you how Rinard bit her in the exact place that Martin Leonidas bit me

when he changed me. She will be more than happy to relate to you the horrors that Rinard put her through, as well as the fact that when he was done with her and had all the security video footage he wanted, he tried to kill her and dump her body at the incinerator near the space port.”

“That is a lie!” Rinard shouted coming to his feet.

Anja looked at him. “Is it now?” She stated calmly. “Would you care to tell this chamber why it is impossible for me to have acted in such a way in these so called security videos of yours. Would you like to tell them or should I?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about!” Rinard snapped.

“You don’t?” Anja said sweetly. “Now that is surprising considering your father was a close personal friend of *Chetak*. I bet you forgot to tell Elder Buonau and Chief Minister Wiktor of that fact didn’t you?”

“Chetak?” Wiktor spoke now. Her eyes cut to Rinard and she glared at him. Everyone within the Lycavorian Union knew who Chetak was and what fate befell him for his actions so long ago. “Is this true?” She snapped.

“So what if it is!” Rinard barked. “It doesn’t change the facts!”

Anja laughed now and shook her head. “The facts?” She said. “The facts Rinard... the facts are I wouldn’t let you fuck me on your best day!”

“Queen Anja you...” Wiktor began to speak.

“***Martin Leonidas is the wolf that turned me!***” Anja bellowed loudly. “It is impossible for me to act in the manner depicted in your so called security videos. My blood calls only for Martin Leonidas, and as long as he lives, no male could ever elicit the types of reaction you see in the security videos. It is a medical and emotional impossibility.” Anja snarled at her.

“What nonsense is this?” Buonau demanded.

“Nonsense?” Anja exclaimed. “This goes back to you not knowing about the Lycavorian people as a whole Elder Buonau. If you did, you would know that because Martin turned me, because his blood burns within me as well as my own, you would know that I am incapable of acting in the manner seen in these videos. It is the same for any female turned by a Lycavorian. Unless Martin dies, my blood would never call for another male. It wouldn’t allow me too. No male but my husband and mate could make me act in such a way. Basically... Rinard has been playing you for fools.”

“There is no medical basis for this ridiculous explanation you give us! Only... only your word!” Buonau announced.

“I can produce several million females within the Lycavorian Union if you like Elder Buonau.” Anja stated calmly. “All of them will attest to this same thing. Or will you dismiss them as well?”

“You can also test both of us.” Ceuma spoke now. “You will find that I was turned within the last eighteen months. You can...”

“Silence!” Buonau barked.

Anja’s face darkened. “Do not tell her to be silent you bitch!” Anja growled at Buonau now startling not only Buonau, but many of the Elders and Ministers as well. “You will not dismiss this Buonau! I won’t allow it!”

“You won’t allow it?” Buonau barked at her. “You are in a position to allow or disallow nothing!”

“I am still Queen of Hadaria!” Anja snapped. “Are you refusing to run the tests? If you refuse to run the tests then you will dismiss this stupid charge outright! If you run the tests you will know the truth!”

“If... if what you say is true... how do we know this is not something you arranged all along?” Wiktor demanded.

Anja looked at her wide eyed. “Are you kidding me?” She declared. “You actually believe I would go to all this trouble to clear my name of false charges? Ceuma was saved from death by her husband. It was she who decided to come here secretly from Apo Prime to help me. I guess she didn’t like being left for dead too much.”

“Her husband?” Wiktor barked.

Anja turned and motioned with her hand. The door to the side of the chamber opened and Joci strode into the main chamber with his head held high and wearing his Spartan uniform. Six rows of vertical decorations adorned his dress uniform and he could hear the many gasps from within the chamber and the gallery as he walked towards Anja. Everyone in the gallery knew who Joci was, for he had been one of the men in the security footage, and he was also supposed to be very dead. Joci didn’t hesitate and marched right up

behind Ceuma and leaned over next to her head. Ceuma's eyes closed in blissful delight when he nuzzled her cheek and neck firmly.

"Hello my wife." He said softly.

Ceuma smiled and pushed back against him. "My husband." She said.

Anja smiled and looked at Rinard. "Fancy that Rinard. I guess you aren't as strong an Alpha as you first thought. Whatever influence you may have had on Ceuma was quickly overwhelmed by Joci here."

"This man... that man is supposed to be dead!" Wiktor shouted.

Anja nodded. "Yep. But he isn't." She said. "You still want to contend that this was me Chief Minister? You have the Netnews here... are you going to dismiss this in front of the citizens of the Union. The Lycavorian people already know this was bullshit to begin with because they know what I speak of. Now that the rest of the Union knows, will you conduct the tests or dismiss the charge outright, in which case you will have to dismiss the charge to begin with. Which also means you will have to dismiss the charges concerning Seanna, which are all bullshit as well."

"Do not tell me what I need to do Queen Anja!" Wiktor barked angrily. "I will decide what I need to do! And your lack of decorum is most disturbing!"

Anja folded her arms under her firm breasts and looked at her. "Fuck decorum!" Anja snapped. "Why don't you inform us of what it is you intend to do Chief Minister, because I grow tired of these games. I have not seen my children in almost three months! I have not seen my husband in almost three months, and my blood calls for him something fierce." She stated with a grin. "I need to conduct some more depraved acts of a sexual nature with him."

"You dare mock this Ministry with your words!" Wiktor shouted.

"My sex life is my business Chief Minister but since you have seen fit to make it the business of the entire Union. I only felt they should know that if the last twenty-five years have been any barometer, I will be howling out my delight thirty minutes after being in my mate's arms." Anja said. "I have quite a bit of time to make up you know."

Wiktor could only clench her teeth in anger as those Lycavorians in the gallery nodded and chuckled among each other. They did in fact know of what Anja was speaking, and to a man and woman, none of them had believed the stories anyway. Wiktor banged her small rod on the bell drawing everyone's attention. "We... we will adjourn for two hours to determine this new evidence and the validity of it." She announced.

"I protest!" Buonau exclaimed. "This is nothing but a ploy on Queen Anja's part!"

"Perhaps..." Wiktor spoke glaring at Anja. "But we must insure all the facts as they have been presented. You will... you will make this woman... this supposed clone available for tests to be conducted."

Anja looked at Ceuma who nodded. "I will do what they ask of me." She stated. "But both Anja and my husband will be present during these tests." She said turning back to Wiktor.

"You do not trust us to conduct these tests?" Wiktor asked wide eyed.

"To be blunt... I wouldn't trust you in any way based on what I have seen so far." Ceuma replied. "I may be a clone of Anja, but I am my own person. And that *nubous igord* Rinard will not come near me!" She snapped looking at him from across the chamber. "I might forget that I am now better than him and decide to gut him where he stands."

"I have a right to be present if my honor and word is being called into question!" Rinard barked.

Anja looked at him. "You have no rights Rinard." She snapped. "Be lucky I don't order you arrested right now for what you have done. And don't think that still won't happen. You will not leave the planet Rinard. Atropos... insure every spaceport security force has images of Rinard and know he is not allowed to leave the planet." She spoke turning to him.

"You have no right to order such things!" Wiktor barked. "All the authority you have as Queen has been suspended until these proceedings are over!"

"I'm not acting as Queen of Hadaria!" Anja barked. "I'm acting as one of the five Queens of the Lycavorian Union. Or do you call that into question now as well? If you do... I'm sure within seconds of you stating that, you will have an incoming message from the King telling you otherwise. Don't doubt for an instant he isn't watching this farce of a proceeding!"

“King Leonidas has no say in the judgment of this Chamber! He has no say in what the Hadarian government rules upon! And these proceedings will determine whether you will be Queen at the end of this day!” Wiktor barked at her.

Anja turned back and looked at Wiktor oddly. She felt a sinking feeling in her gut and Martin’s words to her those months ago resounded in her mind loudly now. Too loudly.

“Anja... you do know you may have to initiate a Shining Path. Can you do that Red? I know... I know it will tear you apart but can you do it?”

“Let’s get these tests over with!” She snapped finally. “Ceuma is doing this for me... and I do not want her to be held up in any way.”

CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

SPARTA

HOME OF ISRA, TARIFA AND AIHOLA

Tarifa moved out of the kitchen carrying the two mugs of steaming tea in her hands. She made her way straight for the couch main room of their home since it was the closest, and that is where Jalersi had finally been convinced to sit until her daughter was able to contact her. She saw Jalersi turn her head as she came up and it was then Tarifa’s sapphire colored eyes went to the two figures on the floor and sitting against the wall under the large mural painting. Karun’s back was against the wall, Ardis sitting sideways between his legs with her head resting on his shoulder and her face tucked into the side of his neck. Karun’s arms and hands were holding her protectively even though he too was sound asleep. Ardis had the most peaceful and content look on her face, a look Tarifa had seen from her sleeping as a child. Jalersi followed her eyes and saw them as well, and then looked back as Tarifa settled to the couch slowly.

“My son... he is different Tarifa.” Jalersi said softly. “He is nothing like his father.”

Tarifa turned her head and looked at her. She held out the tea. “This is a blend of teas that *Nya Istel* makes. It’s quite good, and it will help you to recover your strength faster with its medicinal properties.”

“*Nya Istel*?” Jalersi asked taking the mug.

Tarifa nodded. “My name for Aihola.” She said.

“Your... your Drow...”

“Lover.” Tarifa said with a smile. “Lover. Partner. Wife. Mate. Whatever you choose to call her. She is all of those things to me. And to Isra our husband. There was a time when she was the only point of light in my life at one period and I have called her that ever since.”

“Forgive me. I didn’t mean...”

“Forgive you for what?” Tarifa asked. “Asking a question? You will find that neither Aihola nor I are shy about our relationship in any way. There is not one of us without the other. It’s simply what was meant to be.” Tarifa answered easily. “Just as it appears your son and my daughter were meant to be.”

“Your husband will not approve I take it?” Jalersi asked.

“On the contrary... when he sees the love for Ardis that Karun has shown me, Isra will accept it fully.” Tarifa answered. “We decided long ago to allow our children to make their own lives and future without hindrance from us. It is how we have raised all of them, and continue to raise our young ones.”

“You still have young children?” Jalersi asked.

Tarifa nodded. “Three that are under ten.” She replied.

“They are not with you now? Why?”

“Though we do not bear the surname Leonidas, because of the relationship Martin and I share, our young children go to a bunker with the other children of the family in a situation like this. Since we do not have the *Durcunusaan* protection that Martin’s children have, he went the additional step of insuring the children of those close to him would be protected. They go to a secret bunker.” Tarifa answered.

“An attack on your family you mean?” Jalersi spoke.

“Martin and I... we were lovers a very long time ago. Those few weeks after he first returned to earth were the catalyst for many things, foremost among them was both of us discovering the path both our lives would follow.” Tarifa said. “He is the closest thing to an older brother that I have ever had, and he considers me a sister of his blood though I am an elf. Aihola as well. He and Isra have fought together and shed blood together and that binds them in concert tightly as members of *Mjolnir’s Hand*.”

“The King’s dragon unit?” Jalersi asked surprised. “Your mate... he is a member of this unit?”

Tarifa nodded. “He is a section leader yes.” Tarifa answered. “You did not know this?”

Jalersi shook her head. “The Intelligence we have focuses on you and your *Nya Istel*. There is precious little on your mate.”

Tarifa smiled. “Isra would get a good laugh out of that.” She stated. “He likes to fly under the sensors so to speak.”

“And you have a dragon as well.” Jalersi said. “He is the red one outside?”

“Roluth is bound to both Aihola and I.” Tarifa answered. “It is a unique binding between us and to our knowledge the only one like it in the annals of dragon history.” She smiled shyly. “Aihola and I take great joy in being the only two bound to a single dragon. It gives us a certain notoriety.”

“They terrify me.” Jalersi said honestly. “They terrify all of my people and we have always wondered why. It is almost genetic in nature I think.”

“Your sister did not seem to fear Cemath.” Tarifa said. “On the Netnews... she was upon Cemath’s back and as comfortable as any rider I have ever seen.”

Jalersi nodded. “Yes... and that fact is another reason why my father was so angry with her when she defected. He had hoped to use her as a building block to ridding our people of that inbred fear.”

“He would do this to his own daughter?” Tarifa asked.

“You must understand Tarifa... Kavalian males do not regard our females with any sort of respect or honor.” Jalersi said. “It is the way of our people and has been for millennia.”

“But Pian... he... I’ve seen the way he looks at you Jalersi.” Tarifa said. “That man... he worships the ground upon which you tread.”

Jalersi flushed at her words and she felt her love for Pian grow even more. She nodded her head. “Believe me... I was just as surprised. Pian is unique.” She answered turning to look where he was sitting with Jiss discussing something. “And it took me twenty years to discover that.” She turned back to Tarifa. “Now that I have... I do not want to lose it. Ever.”

“Pusintin?” Tarifa asked.

“He is not the man I thought him to be.” Jalersi answered. “He did not bring about the changes he told me he would help to make. He was like a machine when he took me... I was just too foolish to see it. I was clouded with hopes and dreams. Pian... Pian feasts upon me like I am the only thing in the universe. He respects me and treats me as an equal in all things. Just his touch leaves me...” Jalersi’s eyes grew wide when she realized what she was saying and she blushed a deep cherry red. “Oh my...”

Tarifa chuckled and shook her head. “You are explaining nothing to me that I do not know myself from personal experience.” Tarifa said. “One day I will tell you the story of how Isra and I came together. And believe me... it is not the way I ever expected to meet the man who would claim my heart and soul.” Tarifa looked at her powder blue eyes intently. “Come with me Jalersi.” She said getting to her feet and holding out her hand.

Jalersi surprised herself and didn’t hesitate in taking her hand as she too got up. This was something that Tarifa took notice of immediately and confirmed to her that indeed this Kavalian female had found the path of discovery to her liking and did not want to venture away from it now. Tarifa squeezed her long fingers and began to lead her through their home towards the doors that led out to the patio area where Roluth stayed. They moved through the double doors into the patio area and Jalersi froze in place when she saw Roluth’s massive body resting on the patio and thoroughly enjoying the exam he was getting from Anuk. She wore one of the medical gloves designed for riders to measure and track their dragon’s health and was passing it over his midsection now. Tarifa stopped as well and looked at Jalersi but did not release her hand.

“Jalersi?” She said softly.

“I... I can’t!” She gasped softly feeling the fear almost lock her limbs in place.

“Grab your fear Jalersi’Nruarani.” Tarifa said softly as first Roluth's huge head and then Anuk’s head turned to look at them. “Embrace it and make it a strength.”

“What?” Jalersi gasped.

“Embrace your fear.” Tarifa told her. “It is the only way you will ever be rid of it. Don’t deny it or fight it. Accept it. Take what that fear can teach you and make it part of who you are. Just like your sister.”

“I... I am so frightened I can barely move!” Jalersi gasped.

“There is nothing to fear from dragons Jalersi.” Tarifa spoke softly. “They are the most benevolent creatures you will ever meet.”

“The reports!” Jalersi exclaimed. “I have seen the reports! I’ve seen them fighting!”

“I did not say they were docile or weak... only that they will consider you a friend before an enemy. Your actions will dictate how they view you.” Tarifa said. “You have trusted us... trusted me this far... trust me a little further.”

Jalersi looked at her and saw those sapphire eyes bright in the growing darkness. She was right Jalersi decided. They had trusted them and their trust had been rewarded. These men and women that her father and Pusintin so wanted to conquer, to control; they were not anyone’s enemy until you made them an enemy. Then they would be the most terrible enemy one’s mind could possibly imagine. Jalersi squeezed her hand tighter as she allowed Tarifa to pull her closer to the enormous dragon. Her heart was racing faster than it ever had before, even as Roluth’s red hued eyes watched her with something akin to amusement in them. Jalersi’s eyes were wide then as she suddenly realized she was directly in front of the huge beast, his head lowering down to stare at her intently.

Tell her I said hello sister. Roluth spoke within Mindvoice.

Tarifa smiled. “He says hello.” She told Jalersi. “Embrace your fear Jalersi...” Tarifa spoke. “It is the only way you will ever be free of it.”

Jalersi closed her eyes and reached out with her hand tentatively. Roluth insured she needn’t reach far and moved his head closer, settling his snout under her palm until it was flat against his scales. Her eyes flew open with a start when she felt the smooth coolness of his scales, but she didn’t draw her hand away and only stared at the head of this dragon before her. She spread her fingers out on the scales slowly, marveling in the texture of the scales and that she was actually touching one of the beasts her people so feared.

“His... his skin!” She gasped looking at Tarifa with wide powder blue eyes. “It is so smooth!”

“Not what you expected is it?” Anuk said with a grin.

Jalersi shook her head. “No! Never!” She exclaimed as she spread her palm out further and rubbed a small area on his snout. The longer her hand remained in contact with Roluth’s scales the more Jalersi felt that fear slipping away to nothing.

Change. Everything was changing around her and Jalersi couldn’t believe how easily she was embracing it all. This planet had changed her. These people had changed her. Changed her enough to see the love that Pian carried for her, and she for him. Changed her enough to see that she wanted so much more than what life had given her until now. She had that opportunity now she knew. Her future began the first night that Pian had locked groins with her, professing his love for her and making it clear she was all he desired. It had begun with Athani... and it would continue with her.

“Mother!” Ardis’s voice broke into the moment and they all turned. She saw Jalersi’s eyes were wide in wonderment and she smiled as well. “We are receiving a transmission from Nikkei inside Kavalian space.” She spoke. “It’s coming over your personal Spartan Two Five secure channel just as you directed. You need to accept and approve the transmission.”

Jalersi turned to Tarifa and grasped her hand tightly. “Thank you!” She gushed. “Thank you so much!”

Tarifa smiled and nodded. “I am a mother too.” She said. “Let’s get back inside and you can fill your daughter in on what is happening.”

Anuk patted Roluth’s scales as she turned to follow them inside.

None of them were aware of the decidedly unfriendly eyes gazing down upon them from the mountains above.

“...confirmed.” The Puma Bane warrior spoke softly as he lowered his macrobinoculars. He turned to his senior officer. “It’s her Major Kowe.”

“You are certain Gatha? We must be certain.” The Kavalian Major spoke.

“Positive Major.” He answered. “It was Jalersi’Puat.”

The major nodded his head. “Then Pian, Karun and Jiss will be with her as well.”

“Do we attack sir?” Gatha asked. “We have nine men with us.” He asked.

“How many T19s do we carry?” Kowe asked.

“Two sir. More than enough to kill the dragon before he even gets in the sky.” Gatha answered. “The wind blows into our faces and we are too high to be detected. We can fire down into the patio area, kill the dragon and then advance while they are trying to determine where the attack came from.”

“I will send a transmission to our main force on the other side of Sparta.” Kowe spoke. “Prepare the team to assault them within the hour.”

“Yes sir!”

THERMOPYLAE KING LEONIDAS’S TOMB

“...not a matter of strength anymore Martin Leonidas.” Wayonn spoke gently but firmly from within the transmission. “You and your son have reached the pinnacle of physical power within Mindvoice. You have shaped your abilities to the point that you are nearly unstoppable on the field of battle, you and your son. With Torma and Elynth at your sides there is very little that could stand against you in single combat and you know that. That has now become your main and most glaring weakness. More so you than your son I’m afraid, for Androcles has allowed himself to expand and grow within Mindvoice more than you for the simple reason he has known what he is capable of since he was born and he has taken more of Helen’s schooling to heart. You did not have that luxury before being thrust into the position you now hold, and it is harder for you to concentrate on the mundane when you are King.”

Martin stared at this man’s image in silent contemplation as he had for the last nearly thirty hours. He was unaware of what was happening beyond the walls of his father’s tomb for he had found something infinitely more interesting inside. The horror he had felt at what he had done these last months had dwindled away as Wayonn revealed more and more information to him and he absorbed it like a sponge.

“You have reached this level far more quickly than any Pralor ever did that I know of. I will reason it is because of the bonds you share with your dragons, those magnificent beasts, but you have reached the point where Sumar was and it took him nearly seven thousand years to reach it.” Wayonn told him. “It is a point now where you will need to seek out Helen’s guidance just as your son has. As I said... it is not a matter of strength any longer. You must learn it all. You, your son, Aricia and soon even Sadi.”

“Sadi?” Martin asked softly.

Wayonn smiled and nodded his head as he got up from wherever he was sitting on some faraway planet and moved around a table. “You and your son have quite remarkably chosen the only two women in the universe who descend from the same pure Pralor bloodline and don’t even know it. Just very different ancestors.”

“Come again?” Martin asked.

Wayonn waved his hand. “It is a rather long story and not one that needs to be addressed right now. I will share it with you in the future however, if you do not discover it yourself before you come to see me. The fact remains now however, due to the pureness of her own blood, Aricia has already been able to call and shape and use a psychic knife just as you and your son have done. Given more time and considering her growth already since coming together with your son, Sadi will soon begin to develop abilities all her own. If I’m not mistaken, they have already begun to manifest themselves. It is why your Queens are so different. Why they have evolved so much since becoming one with you. Dysea’s skills with precognition are not focused or controlled, but they are frightening in their power. For’mya’s skills in sensing different tremors of life and death within Mindvoice is also very impressive. Anja’s abilities speak for themselves. Even had she not been mated to you, she would still be the most powerful healer in *all* of the known universe. Because you turned her, because

she like the others is so tightly woven within the strands of Mindvoice with you, her abilities have far exceeded those of even her mother and father. These are all things you have passed down through your blood to your children in one form or another and it has made others reach for and obtain levels that they would not have reached without your existence.”

Martin got up. “Wayonn... you keep telling me I need to come see you.” Martin said. “And believe me... I truly want too...”

“Yes... I can see that in your eyes young man.” Wayonn answered with a gentle smile. “And before you retort with some offhanded remark, compared to me in age Martin Leonidas, you are very much a child.”

Martin’s eyes narrowed. “You get that a lot I take it.” He said.

“You have no idea.” Wayonn answered him. “I understand that events will seem to be propelling you in different directions and to do different things, but you must understand Martin Leonidas, you need to come see me sooner rather than later. And it will not be just so that we can rid you of Xaxon’s dark presence inside you.”

“How is it that Helen knows these things that I need to learn?” He asked. “That my son is obviously learning?”

“It is not a matter of you learning them Martin; indeed... you already have them within you. What you lack is the refinement to use them and focus them.” Wayonn spoke. “You need to learn what Aikiro learned. She knew she could never have matched you in a battle of wills... the instincts within your people... within you are just too powerful. It is why she needed to use deceit and subterfuge against you. Meeting you head on so to speak would have accomplished nothing. As it was... she underestimated Androcles and Helen and the abilities they have when combined with these dragons and ultimately that was her undoing.”

“So Xaxon will teach Yuri what he taught Aikiro?” Martin said.

Wayonn nodded once. “That is what I suspect yes.” He answered. “And since Aikiro’s daughter was already a powerful force... his influence will become even more ingrained in her being now that Aikiro is gone.”

“Wayonn... why are you in such a rush for me to learn all this? All this refinement and focus?” Martin asked.

“The universe is far larger than just the Union, the Coven and those other empires you are currently aware of my boy.” Wayonn said.

“I’ve always believed that anyway.” Martin said seeing him nod. “Why are you telling me that?”

“Your insight is well developed Martin and that is one of your strengths. There are other empires among the stars as I said; much larger empires in size than the Union, and empires that have rejoiced at the demise of my people. Though they are not yet aware of what Sumar and those on City Ship 41 and City Ship 19 did, it will not remain secret for very much longer I’m afraid.”

“You mean merging with the populations like you did?” Martin said. “My people and the vampires?”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. It is not normally something we would have done.” He explained. “Once Canth... once my son relayed back to us what had happened in our own system, and that they were turning back around, we were already nine hundred years into the blending of our peoples. To Sumar’s mind it was the best decision to insure our history and memories never passed into oblivion. He was not aware of what Canth’s son built. To be honest... I don’t even believe Dutkne’s father knew... though based on what he told you before he passed into the next life... he may very well have suspected.”

“What do you mean?” Martin asked. “You are referring to the “Lost Ones” again aren’t you? There are more of my people out there aren’t there Wayonn?”

“You already know the answer to that question Martin.” Wayonn said.

“Shit! A simple yes or no would do you know!” Martin snapped.

Wayonn smiled at his outburst. “Our technology was the most advanced Martin, and our ability to speak and conduct ourselves with our minds made many of these empires very uneasy and distrustful of us. We refused to trade or conduct business with many of them because of their violent natures and because of this many looked down on us. However... this skill of ours was also what they feared and it kept them in check. Xaxon’s fool actions with one such species marked the beginning of the end of our race.” Wayonn said gently as he returned to his chair and sat back down. “Sumar would have been very proud of you. As would your grandfather Resumar.”

“You are starting to ramble.” Martin said. “You’re not telling me everything. I’ve been here for almost two days Wayonn. Why couldn’t you have taught me some of these things you say I need to learn?”

“Canth was the teacher.” Wayonn spoke. “That knowledge and those skills he passed to Helen... not to me. I only know of it because he was my son. Trust me... if I could teach you in such a connection as we have I would.”

“So what aren’t you telling me?” Martin asked.

“Do you enjoy being King Martin Leonidas?” Wayonn asked.

Martin shook his head instantly. “I fucking hate it!” He snapped.

Wayonn nodded. “So did Sumar. So did your grandfather. Yet there are those among the stars who enjoy commanding so many and having those willing to die at their very word. They know that Lycavorians exist but they do not yet know that you exist. Trust me when I say they are not going to be happy when they finally discover the descendants of Sumar are alive and flourishing. Or the descendants of Xaxon either for that matter. They also know that the High Coven as you call them exist. When they discover it though... you must be ready.”

“That doesn’t sound very promising Wayonn, would you care to give me a little more information?” Martin asked.

“I won’t need too.” Wayonn spoke. “Your grandfather’s namesake does that even now. The VORTEX 341 Cruiser you discovered in Kavalian space will have all this information. Your son will return with it after he destroys the ship. To the best of my knowledge that is the only Pralor ship that still remains aside from City Ship 41. Once it is gone... our history... the Pralor history and all we knew will be left with you. That ship houses data and intelligence on the last ten thousand years of my people. It is something that not even Dutkne has. It will be however... it will be something that many will want when it is realized it exists. And they will come to you to get it.”

“How are they going to know I have it?” Martin asked.

Wayonn smiled and shook his head. “How they discover it is an event that has already been set in motion Martin. Nothing you or I do now can alter that. That decision was made by you many years ago, and as it was the right decision then, it still remains the right decision today. You will have several advantages though.”

“Fucking riddles again Wayonn!” Martin out barked loudly. “I told you I hate *nubous* riddles! What decision that I made?”

Wayonn chuckled and he nodded his head. “Yes I know you hate riddles Martin. You have made that abundantly clear on several occasions. This is a riddle that will answer itself in time however.” He spoke. He looked up in the transmission.

“What advantages?” Martin asked.

“Your name for one.” Wayonn replied. “Your name alone is enough to inspire all species with the ears to hear it. When the name Leonidas is spoken in the known universe... people usually listen. Your father’s sacrifice and death is not just revered within the Union Martin. His actions are known to many different species who regard him as a hero. And then there is also your advances in Flat Space technology. It is something unknown to the vast majority of the species you have yet to encounter. And those wonderful Spartan shields you can call from within Flat Space are simply put... amazing. Not to mention that only you and those within the Union have the advantage of dragons and as I have said... their existence will be a shock to just about everyone.” Wayonn smiled. “So you see... the universe is far bigger than you think.”

“Wayonn... why is the little voice in my head screaming to run for cover right now?” He asked. “The more you tell me these things... the more that voice is telling me to pucker up and prepare to get fucked.”

Wayonn met his gaze in the transmission. “I’m not familiar with your more colorful terms and slang Martin.” He stated calmly. “Though I’m quite sure Dutkne will find them flattering.”

“You know... I’ve been cooped up in here for nearly two days listening to you tell me all these things.” Martin said. “And don’t get me wrong... they are incredible things.”

Wayonn held up his hand. “Yet you wish to return to your queens and try to get a handle on everything that has happened in the last three days?”

Martin paused for a moment but then nodded his head. “Yes.”

Wayonn nodded. "Then give me a few more hours and then whatever else we need to discuss can wait until you come to see me."

Martin returned to his chair and looked at the holo image. "What more could we possibly talk about that is more important than what has happened in the last two days?"

Wayonn met his eyes evenly from within the transmission. "Your brother." He said softly.

Martin looked at him as his face became hard and emotionless. "I'm listening."

SPARTA HOME OF ISRA, TARIFA AND AIHOLA

"...tried to arrest me mother!" Nikkei spoke anxiously. "They were going to send me to the brothels on Nefoa! They said father order it! I saw... I saw the order! It had his personal authorization!"

Jalersi held it together and touched the small monitor with her fingertips as she felt Pian's hand squeeze her shoulder gently. He stood just behind her, Karun on the opposite side of her as they looked at the transmission.

"I know Nikkei." Jalersi said gently. "I know."

"Mother... what is happening?" Nikkei continued. "These men. They... they killed the Puma Bane Team sent to get me. They brought us to a ship and I don't know where we are! Tell me what is going on mother!" Her powder blue eyes looked at Karun. "Karun? Please."

Jalersi reached up and squeezed Pian's hand on her shoulder. "Nikkei... there is much going on that you are not aware of." She said. "I can not begin to explain it all to you now... but know that you are safe with the men and women you are with. They will take you someplace safe until we can be together."

"Mother that is..." Nikkei began. She stopped when Pian lowered his face next to Jalersi and she saw his stern Kavalian features on her monitor.

"Do you trust your mother and brother Nikkei?" He asked her.

Nikkei nodded hesitantly. "Y... yes."

Pian nodded. "And you should." Pian looked at Jalersi and planted a soft kiss on her cheek surprising Nikkei. He turned back to the monitor as Jalersi smiled. "Know that your mother has submitted an Edict of Dissolution for her marriage to your father. She is now my wife and mate Nikkei. Your father was not the least bit happy about that among other things as well."

"An Edict of Dissolution?" Nikkei gasped her eyes wide.

Pian nodded. "You are among members of the Nruarani Pride now Nikkei." He said. "And I'm sure you have already discovered we do not adhere to the same harsh rules of those Prides within the heart of the Empire."

"There are... there are many females on this ship." Nikkei said nodding. "They have duties! One even works within the engine room!"

Pian nodded. "That would be Kotania... my brother's oldest daughter. She is turning out to be a fine engineer. You will find Nikkei... you will find that my Pride... Pride Nruarani... we do not subscribe to the same ideals as much of the KFI."

Jalersi gripped Pian's arm tightly, her own powder blue eyes bright. "I have discovered so much since coming here Nikkei." She spoke. "Most of all I have discovered Pian. No matter what you hear... no matter who says it to you... I love Pian with all that I am Nikkei. I love him in ways your father can not begin to understand... and I decided I did not want to fight it any longer. And he loves me with the same intensity Nikkei."

"Mother you..."

"Nikkei... do you remember when you were smaller and I told you that Kavalian females would never really have choice. That we would never be considered equals. I told you I was trying to fix that. Do you remember?"

Nikkei nodded. "Yes."

"Since coming here Nikkei... since coming here I have discovered so much." Jalersi told her. "Your aunt discovered what it was she desired and look at her now. Athani is a Princess of the Lycavorian Union."

Jalersi smiled gently. "Your father was not the man he told me he was Nikkei. I have known that for some time and denied it. Coming here... discovering what I have discovered with Pian... my eyes have been opened."

"You are a member of the Nruarani Pride now Nikkei." Pian spoke. "Is my mother there?"

"I am here Pian." The older voice spoke and they watched as the pure Kavalian female came into the transmission now next to Nikkei. Her dark blond fur was sprinkled generously with gray but her dark blue eyes were bright and intelligent. "And you continue to this day to find yourself in difficult situations Pian'Nruarani."

Pian chuckled softly and nodded his head. "It appears that way does it not mother?" He spoke.

"You are... you are safe there Pian?" Maysi asked.

Pian nodded instantly. "We have found friends and allies here we did not know or expect mother. We are safe for the time being."

"I'm taking her to Rizon Four Pian." Maysi spoke.

"Rizon Four?" Pian asked. "Why there mother?"

"It is where... it is where the Scribe Mother Demahra has gone Pian." Maysi answered. "The moment Athani defected Keleru put a contract out for her death. He says it was her who corrupted Athani with her wild teachings. She went into hiding and I only received her location two days ago."

"Mother... Rizon Four is close to the Consortium border." Pian told her. "Insure Mersh takes every precaution."

Maysi chuckled and turned her head at the sound of the voice. She looked back to Pian. "Your brother says he has been on board ships longer than you and not to tell him how to protect me."

Pian grinned and nodded. "We will try to make our way there mother." Pian said. "I don't know when that will be... for we need to see if we can somehow stop this insane plan of Keleru and Pusintin."

Maysi's eyes grew dark now. "You can not stop it my son!" She said softly. "Demahra has said events are already in motion and now the only thing that can happen is war."

"That is what we want to avoid mother!" Pian snapped.

"It can not be avoided Pian and you know this." Maysi spoke softly. "The actions of our esteemed leaders will serve only to awaken the wrath of those who we should be reaching out to and embroil us in a war that will cost us far too much."

"We can try to stop it!" Jalersi declared. "We... we have to try! Tarifa we..."

Tarifa nodded quickly. "I've passed on the information you gave me." She said. "Right now it should be in Deia's hands and she should be able to stop whatever it is that they are planning."

Maysi nodded within the transmission. "You and your Drow mate are well respected by the Scribe Mother Tarifa of the Elves. I hope... I hope you are right and she is wrong." Tarifa looked surprised at this statement and it showed on her face. Maysi turned back to look at Jalersi in the transmission. "Know this Jalersi'Nruarani... you are my son's wife and mate now and it is his desire for you that has brought about the many changes within our family and Pride. Changes for the better that Pian started to win your affection and continued because he knew they were right. His love and desire for you made him what he is now. On that fact alone I will guard your daughter with my life, as will all of us. Both of you are members of our Pride now... and we will defend you until our last."

Jalersi looked at her face on the monitor. "I will do what I must for our people." She stated proudly.

Maysi nodded. "As will my son." She said. "Now say goodbye to Nikkei, for we need to make several jumps. Pian... Mersh has told me to pass on that he has scattered our Pride by Fleet Groups, whatever that means. No doubt Keleru and his ilk will discovered it was us that took Nikkei eventually, and then he will come for us."

"Mother I am..."

"Do not apologize for following your heart Pian'Nruarani!" Maysi spoke. "There is not a single member of our Pride that does not agree with everything you have done these last years. We will be fine... but you need to return to us with your hide and your bride intact. Jalersi is becoming very popular within our family and it would be a shame to lose her before she has a chance to influence the future of our children or bear you your own sons and daughters to carry on in your stead."

Pian nodded his head. "I will mother."

"Rizon Four Pian." Maysi said. "Demahra's mountain home."

Pian nodded. "As soon as we are able."

“Nikkei... say goodbye to your mother and brother child.” Maysi spoke now. “They have much to do, and now that you are safe, they no longer need worry. Besides... there is much I wish to share with you as well.”

Nikkei had sat silently thought the exchanges between them and now she looked at her mother. “Momma?”

“You are safe Nikkei.” Jalersi said with a smile. “Karun and I will... we will all join you as soon as we are able.”

Tarifa moved closer. “Jalersi... we must close the connection now.” She said. “Anything longer than ten minutes under the blackout at this level and the Kryperia will take notice and begin to ask questions we do not want asked. The fewer that know you are here the better it will be for us.”

Jalersi nodded. “Nikkei... we must go. I love you daughter. We will see you soon.”

“I love you as well Mother.” Nikkei answered right away.

Jalersi reached forward and terminated the conversation before she spoke more words and kept going. She took a deep breath and leaned her head against Pian’s shoulder, pulling his arm tighter. “Pian... I swear by the gods if he hurts my daughter I will use a dull knife to carve his heart from his chest.”

“She will be safe Jalersi.” Pian answered. “We are in more danger than she is.”

Tarifa cocked her head upwards causing all of them to look at her. It was an odd head movement and not one they had seen her make before.

Roluth? What is wrong? Tarifa asked reaching out to her dragon brother.

There are no birds singing in the trees sister. Roluth answered her immediately. *There are always birds and insects singing at this hour.*

Pian got to his feet looking at her. “Tarifa... what is wrong?” He asked.

Roluth are you sure? Tarifa asked.

Yes. Roluth answered. *Something is within the surrounding mountains that are causing the other creatures to be silent.*

“*Sibfla!*” Tarifa hissed.

“Mother... what is wrong?” Ardis asked moving closer to her.

Tarifa looked at her as Anuk came into the room sensing the tension and hearing the conversation between Tarifa and Roluth. “We may have company.” Tarifa stated simply. “Anuk... kill the lights in the main room and make sure the drapery is shut. And stay away from the windows! And Anuk...”

Anuk turned back to look at Tarifa. “Yes.”

“Perhaps now would be a good time to call for your husband.” Tarifa said. “Isra is within the *Durcunusaan* base and I can’t reach him within Mindvoice with the level nine dampeners they have in place. Daniel’s COM channel will be one of only five active in the entire city during the blackout.”

Anuk tapped her finger on her jaw. “Spartan Two One this is Spartan Two One Alpha.” She spoke quickly. Anuk’s cerulean colored blue eyes grew a little wider when she heard the responding static in her implanted ear piece.

“What?” Tarifa asked moving closer to her.

“It’s being jammed.” Anuk said.

“Jammed?” Tarifa hissed as she moved to the wall bookshelf. “I guess that seals it then.” She pulled down on three books in order and the entire upper half of the bookshelf hummed to life and spun in a complete one hundred and eighty degree direction revealing a hidden compartment of weapons. “In order to be close enough to jam our implants they have to be in the mountains as Roluth said.” Tarifa pulled down the K14 and cut down version of the Spartan P190A3. She turned and looked at Pian and Jalersi standing with Jiss and staring at her. “I suggest we arm ourselves my friends. I believe things will start to become difficult in a short while.”

“Why don’t we just run for it?” Karun asked as he moved without hesitation to the shelf to get a weapon.

“If they are close enough to jam the Union implants...” Pian spoke as he too moved to grab a weapon. “Then they are probably watching the house now.”

Tarifa nodded. “Pian... will they have T19s?” She asked.

Pian stopped his actions and looked at her. "If... if they are from the Puma Bane Pride... yes more than likely."

Roluth! Go now brother! Get away from our house! Tarifa nearly shouted within Mindvoice.
What? Why?

They may have T19s Roluth! I won't risk you! Get away from the house and go for help! Tarifa exclaimed. *Do not argue! Just go!*

Tarifa almost felt the flutter of air and heard her bonded brother taking to the sky from inside the house. *I will return sister!* Roluth declared. *I will return with an army!*

Tarifa felt some small relief flood through her as she felt Roluth within Mindvoice pulling away from the villa with powerful sweeps of his wings. *Isra, Daniel and a company of Spartans would suffice Roluth my brother. And tell them to hurry.*

Tarifa jacked back the action on her K14 and looked at them. "I think we should prepare my friends. Something tells me that once they realize Roluth is going for help they will attack in force."

IRARUZU

TWENTY-TWO KILOMETERS NORTHWEST OF FORMER DROW ESTATE

"...still be following us Lu'ria?" Jennifer asked as they lay on the ground studying the path they had just taken to reach this ridge.

"It's that Lycavorian half breed." Lu'ria spoke softly as she lowered her binoculars. "It has to be. He must be following the bitter scent of the root we have been spreading on ourselves. *Vith!*" Lu'ria swore. "Instead of masking our scent we have been giving him something to follow that's just as good."

"I can't see them anymore." Jennifer said using her glasses to sweep the semi thick terrain below them. "How would he know what to follow Lu'ria? The scent I mean."

"I can't see them either. I don't know how he would know what to follow Jennifer. It is obvious that he has had some training in using his sense of smell though." Lu'ria agreed a bit testily. She regretted it instantly and looked at the young human female. "I'm sorry."

Jennifer shook her head. "After the way I treated you initially... you can bite my head off all you want." She answered. "I'm scared Lu'ria. The Deutrino field seems to keep getting bigger and bigger. Every time we think we are close to the edge, it expands more. Or it is following us somehow."

Lu'ria nodded. "That tells me there are more than just this group that is tracking us and those that hit the estate." Lu'ria spoke. "Someone else is controlling the Deutrino field and they are moving it along as that Lycavorian moves and he tracks us."

"Do you think the Patron got an emergency message off?" Jennifer asked softly. "They couldn't have been taken by complete surprise."

Lu'ria shook her head. "I don't know." She replied. "The small security room we were in looked untouched since the last time I saw it. I don't think anyone made it into a secure area to get an emergency beacon off. And we had just reported in... so without that beacon... no one would think to begin making inquires until we did not report in. It has been nearly thirty-six hours since our last report and we are not due to report in for another three days."

"Fuck!" Jennifer swore softly.

Lu'ria nodded. "Yes."

"What about your mother and the Guardian of the Line?" Jennifer asked looking at her. "You told me they were coming here."

"That is what she said." Lu'ria answered. "But our transmission was jammed before I ever found out what ship, where she was or how soon before she got here. And I know she was bringing some male Drow to introduce me too. That was her plan all along."

"If you are referring to the old hag Drow and Walter Carson..." The male voice spoke from behind them. Lu'ria and Jennifer were rolling to the sides even before the words had finished echoing in the air as they came to their feet and saw the five Kavalians standing around them with their weapons leveled at them. Leruk

had his arms smugly crossed over his broad chest as he gazed at the two women. “We destroyed their ship and killed them within moments of them arriving. You are very much alone I assure you.”

Lu'ria's eyes darted back and forth quickly measuring up what actions she could take, none of which would get them out of this situation without grievous injury or death. She cut her eyes back to Leruk when he lowered his arm and moved closer to them.

“I have to say... tracking you has been something of an exercise. Putting the bitter flower on to mask your true scents was an excellent move.” Leruk spoke. “In the end it was futile however. I simply followed the scent of that instead.”

“Why are you doing this?” Lu'ria demanded. “We have done nothing to you!”

“We are simply following orders.” Leruk spoke in reply.

“You will not get away with this!” Jennifer barked. “You'll pay for those you have killed here!”

Leruk chuckled. “Not likely.” He answered. “None of the others survive. After our men got tired of fucking those Drow females we kept alive in the ass over and over, we got tired of hearing them scream and killed them. You two are all that is left. And you...” Leruk pointed to Lu'ria. “You are going to provide entertainment to this man here.” Leruk put his hand on the large Kavalians shoulder. “He did not appreciate the injury you gave to him.”

Lu'ria's amber eyes recognized the Kavalian as the one from the store who she had stabbed with her small blade deeply in his cheek. She could still see the pink skin of the wound though it appeared to be almost entirely healed now. She looked around quickly once more, desperately trying to find a way out of this. She never imagined her life would end like this. She would never know the touch of Androcles Leonidas upon her body, never know the pleasures she would give and receive to Sadi, Carisia and Ne'Veha. She would never know what it was like to fly on the back of...

You will know these things and more! The female voice boomed in Lu'ria's mind causing her amber eyes to go wide.

Who are you? Lu'ria demanded unsure if she would be heard in Mindvoice. She had been trying to learn all she could from books and items, but without another person to Mindvoice with, it was impossible to tell if she was doing it correctly or if anyone would even hear her when she projected her thoughts.

Open yourself to it my sister! I have felt you for so long just as you have felt me! Reach out with your thoughts my bonded sister! Let me in!

Majeir? Lu'ria gasped.

It is I Lu'ria! Please sister... lower your shields! I know you know how! Majeir answered.

Majeir... a Kavalian is about to kill us! Lu'ria sobbed. *If I can hear you... If I can hear you than you must be very close, but not close enough.*

Do as I ask you Lu'ria. I am far closer than you think! Open your mind my sister! Open your mind and let us become what we are meant to become. Majeir spoke with just a trace of humor.

Majeir... Majeir how close are you? Lu'ria asked.

As if in reply to her question Lu'ria felt a slight tingling along the skin of her arm and she looked down quickly. It began at her fingertips and slowly began to travel up her arm. Without further hesitation, Lu'ria dropped all pretense of maintaining the shields she had developed over these last months all on her own. Shields she had somehow known to erect and reinforce with simple exercises that she somehow knew all about and how to do. As Lu'ria allowed those shields to come down, the psychic shield began spreading faster up her arm drawing the attention of Leruk and the others now. Lu'ria was awash in memories and thoughts that were not her own now. Memories of a childhood that was not hers, memories of white skinned creatures and a single Lycavorian. Of a dark red colored dragon and then she saw flashes of a man she knew as Walter. She saw him transform into a wolf with snarling fangs and teeth and saw him leaping out of the darkness of the smoke. She saw the king beating another man on a plateau overlooking a deep blue ocean in the background. She saw war and memories that were not hers, but now had become part of her. Almost without thought Lu'ria returned the entirety of her young life back through that same connection, and she gasped when she felt a surge of power and knowledge course through her.

It was utterly amazing to Lu'ria. Never had she felt such comprehension and knowledge. The sum total of Majeir's equally young life was filling her freely, just as she passed to Majeir everything that had ever happened to her in her twenty-three years of life. She could hear Leruk shouting at his men, but his words were

muffled and broken. They appeared to be moving in slow motion, Lu'ria able to see each and every heartbeat of movement as two of his men began to bring weapons up and Leruk was turning away from her.

I am this close sister! Majeir's voice boomed.

The savagely angry trumpet sounded in the next instant as everything around her came back into complete focus. Lu'ria watched with adoring amber eyes as the dark green scaled head smashed its way through the limbs of the trees just behind the two Kavalians who were lifting their weapons. The men had time to turn, and then they died. Majeir's huge head descended with lightning like speed and her massive jaws clamped shut on one Kavalian before he even had an opportunity to scream. The second was able to scream but then had that scream cut off when her massive talons came up and Majeir slashed downward with a single swipe, severing his head from his body and opening his entire chest cavity to the mid day air as her entire body now pushed aside half a dozen sapling trees and emerged from the timber like some avenging monster.

Lu'ria was not idle by any means. Using her speed as an elf and her fighting skills as a Drow, she found herself charged with energy and new awareness. There was a brief flash of silver white light and then Lu'ria saw Leruk sprinting away from where they were in wolf form. She paused briefly, for he was larger than many of the Lycavorians she had seen, but then Lu'ria was springing into action. The scarred Kavalian had already turned to face Majeir and Lu'ria leaped upon his back with barely a thought. Her K12 appeared in her hand and she rammed the barrel of the weapon into the Kavalians neck as his eyes were open in terror. Lu'ria didn't hesitate and twice caressed the trigger of the K12 sending two kinetic bullets punching through his thick neck. As his body fell, Lu'ria rode him to the ground and looked up as with a flick of her massive head Majeir tossed the Kavalian within her jaws into the air. A short trumpet of anger and then a stream of intense flame erupted from her maw and when the Kavalian's body impacted the ground it was nothing more than a smoking charred pile of flesh. Her head whipped around and she unleashed another stream of blistering fire at the last two Kavalians who were by now running as fast as their legs could carry them away from the small clearing. That stream of flame engulfed a fleeing Kavalian completely and like his comrade, his entire body nearly disintegrated to nothing.

"They are getting away!" Lu'ria exclaimed as she lifted her 190 and tried to sight in the fleeing Kavalian and Leruk's wolf form as it danced through the trees.

Let them go! Majeir spoke as her ruby eyes settled on her Drow sister. She watched Lu'ria turn to look at her and even Majeir was struck by the unearthly beauty that her bonded Drow sister was.

"Majeir we..."

Majeir moved closer to her now, slowly settling herself to the ground in front of Lu'ria and gazing at her intently. She saw a very stunned Jennifer out of the corner of her eye move closer as Lu'ria stared at her, but Majeir ignored her and focused on Lu'ria.

Touch me sister. Majeir spoke. *I have waited so long to feel your touch and know that we are as one. Touch me.*

True to her Drow nature Lu'ria didn't hesitate and she lowered the 190 as she stepped up to Majeir and placed her right hand flat on Majeir's snout. Jennifer gasped when she saw the soft flare of blue psychic light surround them both and the almost orgasmic look that came over Lu'ria's beautiful face.

Oh... my bonded Drow sister! Majeir gasped within Mindvoice.

As with the many different instances and circumstances of the thousands of Bonded Pairs within the Union, Lu'ria and Majeir coming together was not as elaborate or staggering as some others as they would come to learn. Perhaps it was because deep in their subconscious they had always known they were meant for one another, or perhaps it was the influence of Walter and Andro in each of them. Whatever the cause, Jennifer could only stand there and watch in awe as two minds became one.

It was everything her sister Syrilth had told her it could be. As their minds mingled and swam together, both of them saw and experienced the entire scope of each others lives within only a few moments. It was not as telling as the bonding of Malic and Vincix as Majeir had heard from others at Dragon Mountain. Their bonding had been special as members of Mjolnir's Hand, but it was everything and more as far as Majeir was concerned. Soon one set of amber eyes and one set of ruby orbs were gazing at one another with understanding and love.

My... my dragon sister! Lu'ria exclaimed after several moments.

Hurry! Majeir spoke now. *Climb onto my back both of you. We must return to Walter and your mother before these fools come back with help.*

My mother? The Guardian of the line? They are here? Lu'ria asked.

Why do you think we came here Lu'ria my sister? Majeir spoke. *I could no longer deny the draw to you. Walter knew this and... and he insisted he bring me to you. He is a dear dear friend. Now hurry... they are many in number and they have those foul missiles with them. We must return to Walter and make a plan.*

Lu'ria slung the 190 across her back and looked at Jennifer. "We have to go." She spoke.

"Go? Go where?" Jennifer exclaimed. "On him?"

Lu'ria smiled. "Jennifer... this is Majeir! This is my bonded sister! She will take us to where the Guardian of the line and my mother wait."

"Lu'ria... Lu'ria I've never been on a dragon before!" Jennifer spoke.

"Then that makes two of us." Lu'ria said as she moved around to the side and with her elven reflexes scampered up into the saddle. "We will learn as we go. Unless you wish to stay here and wait for them to return."

Jennifer no more wanted to stay here than die and she quickly climbed into the saddle behind Lu'ria. As Majeir rose to her feet the dragon armor clamped down on their thighs as a windbreak and secured them in the saddle. "Shit!" Jennifer stated. "I can think of many less painful ways to die."

Lu'ria looked at Majeir as her head turned on her long neck. "We are not going to die Jennifer. Not anymore."

With a soft trumpet of acknowledgement Majeir cocked her powerful legs and flung them into the sky.

"Where is she Holy One?" Daba asked softly as Walter settled to the ground beside her and Ceneia. "She has been gone for hours."

They had scavenged enough equipment and then borrowed what little they needed from a trader in the city and built their transmitter. Once they had sent the message, Walter moved them several kilometers into the mountains surrounding the city. He did not want to get caught up in a battle with Kavalian troops within the confines of the city, and part of him had no desire to kill innocent people, scum though many of them were. Daba was sitting on the fallen log, Ceneia between her legs while she used a Drow comb to run through Ceneia's shoulder length black hair. It was her way of maintaining her sanity while waiting for word from Majeir about Lu'ria. Daba had three daughters and three sons, Lu'ria being the youngest among them all. In a fashion that was very un-Drow like, Daba had always regarded Lu'ria in a special way because she was the youngest of her children. That was coming out now as she worried about her and was trying to absorb all that was happening. She was tying braids of Ceneia's hair with a peach color satin signifying that Ceneia was now a member of her family and that Daba had made claim to her. This tradition among the Drow had become even more important since Tarifa. There was not a day that went by that Tarifa was not wearing some sort of soft purple silk in her hair telling all who knew what it meant that she was Aihola's 'slave' and lover. She had done this for over twenty-five years now, and it had caught on very quickly among the other Drow on Earth and was now seen more and more frequently.

"I know this is redundant Daba, but you must have faith." Walter spoke. "Majeir will find her, of that I have little doubt."

"Can't you touch her within Mindvoice?" Daba asked.

"Walter nodded. "I could... but she is keeping her shields very high right now as she searches. I do not want to disturb her or pester her. She can be very willful at times."

I heard that! Majeir's voice announced causing both Walter and Daba to spring to their feet surprising Ceneia.

Majeir! Walter almost shouted. *Majeir where are you? Did you find Lu'ria? Did you...*

Daba gasped loudly as the large shadow swept over them and then Majeir was settling to the ground not ten meters away. Again in very un-Drow like fashion tears burst into Daba's eyes as she saw her youngest daughter sitting proudly in the saddle on Majeir's back.

I will always find my bonded sister! Majeir announced with her wings extended fully out to the sides.

Daba watched as the human female released her grip on Lu'ria's waist and dropped quickly to the ground while Lu'ria's amber eyes were focused on her mother as Majeir settled fully to the soft dirt beneath her.

Daba watched as Lu'ria swung her long leg over the saddle and followed suit, dropping easily to the ground without effort.

“Lu'ria!” Daba gasped then dashing forward to crush her daughter in her arms tightly. Ceneia and Walter watched with small smiles now, knowing that this was very unlike Drow behavior and it was something they were honored to witness.

“Mother!” Lu'ria sobbed as she embraced her tightly.

Daba pushed her back and looked at her. “Are you injured? Are you hurt Lu'ria?”

Lu'ria smiled and shook her head, her amber eyes moist from tears. “I am... I am uninjured mother.” She said softly. “I... we... we are lucky. So many of those we cared for were not.”

Daba nodded slowly holding Lu'ria's hands tightly. “We... we saw the store.” She stammered softly. “Those at the estate?”

Lu'ria shook her head and looked at Jennifer. “They... they are dead as well.” Jennifer spoke softly now as she stepped up to Lu'ria.

Daba looked at her. “You are Jennifer.” She said. “You are...”

“I was.” Jennifer answered softly. “My... my mistress is dead as well.”

Daba released one of Lu'ria's hands and took Jennifer's slim hand. “You are strong to have made it this far.” She spoke. “There... there was nothing you could do Jennifer. And as per our custom you may now consider yourself a member of my Drow clan and family.”

Lu'ria looked around and saw only the three dragoon elves keeping watch in different directions a hundred meters away. She turned back to her mother and Walter as he stepped up next to her. “I thought... you did not bring...?”

Daba looked at her and smiled. “No my daughter.” Daba answered. When the Holy One and Majeir came to me in Eden City and said they were searching for you I knew then all you have told me through the years is true. I... I have my doubts still on whether all of what you believe will become reality... but I knew I had to come and help the Holy One bring Majeir to you.”

“It is all true mother!” Lu'ria declared. “All of it!”

Daba drew her tight for another hug. “Right now... right now all I care about is that you are safe and in my arms.”

“Then let us get off this foul world!” Lu'ria stated. “There are more of these Kavalians here and they will be coming after us. We need to warn Armetus and the Krypteria. This could be happening all over The Wilds.”

“Well... that might be a problem.” Walter said.

Lu'ria drew back from her mother's embrace. “What do you mean?”

Walter met her eyes. “The ship we came on was destroyed by the Kavalians in the spaceport. We are kind of stuck here now.”

HADARIA

PRIVATE ROOM OUTSIDE ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBERS

“...are all *rensibfla*!” Sivana snapped from her chair. “Now that we have exposed them as the vindictive witches that they are they can't go forward with these proceedings!”

“I would not put anything past them.” Zaniai spoke from his chair. “They have been waiting and planning for this day for some time.”

“What more could they do?” Fuleos demanded. “We have already shown the entire Union their case is nothing!”

“The fact remains that Anja and Sivana did break our law by going against the Ministry and then dismissing their order.” Eurin spoke. “We all know the charges in regards to Seanna are fabricated, but they still have much they can use against her. They...”

Anja stood by the large window overlooking the capital and not taking part in the discussion. Wiktor had informed them they would adjourn for two hours and that time was almost up. She sipped the mug of coffee, her

thoughts wandering as she let her eyes gaze across the city into the distance. She smelled her uncle come up behind her slowly and she turned to look at him.

“Uncle Vamm?” she spoke softly.

“Anja...” He said stepping up next to her. He lowered his head unable to meet her eyes. “Anja I am ashamed at what is happening. I can not express to you how disgusted I am with what they are doing. I... I have never agreed with it... but it took Fuleos to get me to step up and finally be a man and make a stand for what I believe.”

Anja looked at him with those jade green eyes. She had always considered her uncle to be a quiet man who went along with whatever her aunt wanted. She knew that he was the senior instructor at the Mage Warrior Academy, but even in all this time she and Sivana had been back she had never really taken the time to get to know him. He seemed so distant and timid when he was around Umbra.

“You do not need to explain your actions to me Uncle.” Anja said.

Vamm held up his hand stopping her before she continued. “Yes... yes I believe I do.” He told her. “I... I have always carried a large amount of guilt for the events that transpired after you and Sivana were born Anja. It is our fault that she was lost to begin with. We...”

Anja cocked her head slightly and set her mug of coffee on the window sill. “Uncle you... Sivana and I don’t blame you for that.”

Vamm nodded his head. “Perhaps not... but it is how I feel nonetheless.” He told her. “I have... I have seen this before Anja.”

“Seen what?” Anja asked.

“No one knows of this except a select few. Prime Minister Deia knew... perhaps Eurin and Zaniai but I doubt it.” Vamm said.

“Knew what Uncle Vamm?”

“Wiktor came after your father in such a manner the year before you were born.” He stated. “She did not approve of the direction your father was taking our people. He was on the road to doing much of what you and Sivana have done. Tying our people more tightly with our Lycavorian brothers and sisters. Buonau was part of it against him then as well, but she was not the Elder Healer on the Council at the time. I do not know what it was that made them stop... an agreement of some sort was reached with your mother and father before you and Sivana were born. They ceased all proceedings afterwards.”

Anja looked at him keenly. “An agreement?” She asked.

Vamm nodded. “I don’t know what it entailed. I think Umbra may... she was always at odds with your father... but I only know after this agreement was made they stopped pressing to bring your father up on charges.” He looked at her evenly. “It is my belief that the agreement had something to do with you and Sivana, and that is why I believe they are pressing so hard for custody of Retta and Calyb. I believe they would have tried when Eliani was still small... but they knew there was no way they were going to get her away from her father and you.”

“I’m not sure I am following you Uncle.” Anja said.

“This has to do with the Hadarian Royal Line more than anything Anja.” Vamm stated. “It is only my opinion Anja, but I believe the agreement your mother and father made was to relinquish at least in some form, yours and Sivana’s upbringing so that the Elder Council and Wiktor would retain at least some means of control over the royal bloodline. They feared losing control. They feared that if unchecked, your parents would raise you and Sivana to continue what they were doing and eventually the Arch Ministry and Elder Council would lose whatever power they perceived they should have.”

Anja met his eyes evenly. “You believe they are doing this because their original plan failed?” She asked.

Vamm nodded. “At least in some part... yes.” He answered. “It is why they have pushed for so long to have Retta and Calyb spend more and more time on Hadaria. Why they were so angry when you allowed them to become bonded to dragons as you and Martin are. It is also why I believe they will go to any lengths to insure Retta and Calyb are returned to Hadaria.”

“Uncle... you do know this was all an elaborate plan.” Anja said. “Duewa has confirmed all of it to us on Earth.”

“Duewa?” Vamm asked surprised.

Anja nodded. "I was rather surprised myself to be honest... but it appears Duewa has found something she desires more than power and her mother's approval."

"What is that?" Vamm asked.

Anja smiled. "The love of a certain Spartan soldier who has made her his wife and mate."

Vamm's eyes grew large. "Duewa has... she allowed a Lycavorian to claim her?" He gasped.

Anja nodded. "There is still quite a bit of distrust between her and I... but I do know the man who has claimed her and he is no fool. Rinard brought this to them first. He told them he could set everything up as far as the issue with me was concerned. I don't know how or where he got the means to get a clone of me. Only the High Coven has the unique cloning technology to produce something so perfect. They have known all along this was not me and they have played along with it the entire time."

"Then... then all of this is...?" Vamm gasped.

Anja nodded slowly. "If what you are telling me is accurate... all of this is simply a continuation of what they thought they would receive in the deal with our parents."

Vamm met her eyes. "At least some form of control over the heirs to the Hadarian throne allowing them to influence policy."

Anja nodded. "Yes. See... the only problem with that is they think they are dealing with Deia and the Union Senate. Deia may be Martin's Aunt... but she will always try diplomacy first. Wiktor and Buonau know that and they think Deia will be able to control Martin if they take Retta and Calyb from us. That is the first mistake. The second mistake is they think the men and women protecting us are nothing more than knuckle draggers, when in fact many of them have advanced degrees in one field or another. Any attempt by Wiktor, Buonau or their cronies to remove Retta and Calyb from Earth will be met by some very angry *Durcunusaan* soldiers and half a dozen pissed off dragons. Calyb and Deion are very protective of their sisters. As are their dragons. I am not worried about our children Uncle..."

"Then why are you not at the table with the others discussing what Wiktor and Buonau can and can not do?" Vamm asked.

Anja met his gaze. "Because they are going to succeed no matter what I do."

"You believe they will remove you as Queen?" Vamm gasped.

Anja nodded. "If not entirely... they will certainly cripple my ability to conduct business as Queen."

Anja said. "Any decision I make will need to go through them... and if it does not meet with their superior approval it will never see the light of day. Personally... personally I think there is more going on that we don't know about and none of it is good if it leaves them in charge of Hadaria."

Vamm looked at her intently. "Anja... tell me what you want." He said softly. "I have watched you through the years... and you are far too much like our King. You have something rolling around in that head of yours, I know you do. Order me. I was not lying when I said every Mage Warrior in our ranks supports you one hundred percent. They believe none of what is happening."

Anja met his gaze. "Uncle... how many of your Mage Warriors are on Hadaria right now with you?"

"Forty-seven." Vamm answered without hesitation. "And that does not include the sixty-nine that are currently in training."

"Uncle... get them off Hadaria." Anja stated plainly. "I will not allow our Healers to become political pawns of the Arch Ministry or Elder Council. They will get them killed. Get your Mage Warriors and students off Hadaria tonight. Anyway you can. Wiktor and Buonau will not stop until they get what they want, and they want me out of power. That they did not blink when Ceuma presented herself to them makes me believe there is something far more sinister about to happen."

Vamm nodded. "I will see to it." He stated. "I will take them to our training facility on Apo Prime and we will be gone within the hour."

Anja nodded. "Thank you Uncle Vamm."

Vamm stepped closer to her. "I have remained silent when I should have spoken out. I will no longer do that. You are my niece and I support you and Sivana in all that you do. Not because you are my family... but because you are right in what you are trying to do."

Anja leaned up on her tip toes and kissed his cheek. "You should go." She said softly. "Leave out the back of the Ministry and contact me when you have arrived on Apo Prime."

Vamm nodded and turned for the door, ignoring those at the table even as Atropos moved out of the shadows and up next to the diminutive Queen he so adored. Anja didn't turn to face him as she watched her uncle leave, but instead retrieved her coffee mug from the window sill and stared out across the city once more. Atropos remained silent knowing she would make the decision she had to make. After four minutes Anja lowered her mug.

"Atropos?" She spoke softly.

"Anja?" He answered. He had not called her Queen when they were in private in over two decades.

"Atropos... initiate Shining Path please." Anja said softly.

Atropos nodded his head. "As you order."

"Leave nothing behind Atropos." Anja said. "Nothing."

Atropos nodded once more before bowing and moving for the door just as it opened and Belen stepped in.

"They are calling us back into the chamber." He said.

BELID

As'hia rested on her wolf haunches while her dark wolf eyes gazed at his powerful back. Two days she had remained in that cave alone. Lynom had returned only when he thought she was sleeping to retrieve one piece of equipment or another and then he left her alone again. She could not penetrate his Mindvoice shields for it was like trying to invade a towering black wall. Her dreams were confusing and almost always the same, but they were so very vivid and they were exquisitely divine in nature.

Yes she had been captured and raped when she had first been brought here. Yes the Immortals had broken her, making her act in ways she would never have acted, at least until her wolf blood had purged the chemicals from her bloodstream that caused female elves to become addicted to Immortal semen. She did not remember exactly what was done, and whether this was because of the drugs given to her or simply her subconscious As'hia didn't care. She did not want to know what happened in those few hours for if she did she might never feel what she was feeling now. Yes Lynom had bitten her and fed on her blood, five times in all and the last time it had set her blood to burning. He had done this to protect her she now knew. Protect her so that the other Immortals would not attempt to do what the first one did that caused Lynom to kill him in such a brutal fashion.

As'hia had never imagined she could feel for an Immortal what she was feeling coursing through her body and her blood now. Two days without his scent filling her nostrils was more than she could bear. Consequences be damned As'hia had thought just before shifting to her wolf form and leaving the cave to find him. Now as she stared at his back while he sat on the ground looking out over the treetops with the macrobinoculars, As'hia could do nothing to stem the ache in her heart and the calling of her blood without him nearby.

Lynom was the son of the Immortal Cha'talla and his pureblood vampire wife Esther and As'hia wanted him so badly it was almost painful. That he was half Akruixian Immortal was of no matter to her any longer, for he was physically the most delicious man she had ever set her young eyes upon. The bone spurs along his jaw only increased his rugged handsomeness in her eyes, while the physical definition and superb shape he was in made him a match for even the most beautiful Spartan males she had seen. His long black hair was now braided tightly and pulled into a ponytail that dropped well below his shoulders and As'hia found herself wanting to run her fingers through that hair. His dark eyes could make her wet just staring into them, and she had seen him in all his naked glory when he wasn't looking. The size of his cock even in a flaccid state was enough to make As'hia want to feel him buried so deeply inside her she was howling out her pleasure to the very gods. It was so disconcerting for her to feel this way, but this is what filtered through her blood.

This man... Lynom... he had done everything within his power to protect her and keep her from harm, even while under the impression that she hated him and everything he was. This was something that As'hia had done nothing to dispute, and it had led him finally to leave her alone in that cave for the last two days so she would not have to contend with someone she saw as a monster and blamed for everything bad in her life. The truth of the matter was As'hia could not reconcile her feelings for this man until now. She had wrestled with her

emotions ever since helping him to remove the outer skin he had been wearing to make him appear completely Immortal. Even before then she admitted to herself. As'hia inched closer to him in her wolf form, never taking her dark eyes from him. She watched him lower the macrobinoculars and set them next to the long sleek shape of the High Coven SR9 Sniper Rifle. The weapon could fire a 25mm Kinetic slug over two kilometers away in the hands of an excellent shooter. Lynom was apparently such a shooter for the weapon was superbly crafted to As'hia's eyes and in excellent condition.

As'hia watched him lift a small fruit and take a bite out of it as he looked up at the darkening sky. Her wolf senses were fully alert and taking in all around her on the small mountaintop. She could see thick tree tops and even more towering mountains in the distance on three sides, while a shimmering blue green ocean occupied the distance to the east of them.

"You can not sneak up on me *Ssin'urn 'anon*." Lynom's voice caught her attention and her muzzle turned to see him looking at her over his shoulder. "I smelled your blood the moment you came out of the cave. If you wish to kill me you should have just shot me in the back and been done with it."

In a soft silvery white flash of light As'hia shifted back into her normal form squatting on the ground only three meters behind him. His verbena scent was powerful and pure and once more it tickled her nostrils as nothing ever had. Her mother had always told her that when she discovered the man who she was to spend her life with she would not be able to rid his scent from her brain and since that first night out here in the open air and the mountains, Lynom's verbena scent had filled her mind completely.

"I... I wasn't trying to sneak up on you." As'hia finally said softly. She turned her head and saw the thin bedroll nearby, the portable heating stove and several other items stacked very neatly on the ground next to the bedroll.

Lynom turned back around and looked out over the mountains. "I spoke with Tir'ut early yesterday. Something happened on Earth and they are expecting Androcles Leonidas and his siblings to arrive on Kranek soon. When they do... they will depart with several LRRs and two *STRIKERS* to come here. He estimated four more days at the most. The Union engineers have done some modifications to our Runners and made them faster."

"Why didn't you tell me?" As'hia asked moving even closer.

Lynom looked at her with those dark eyes. "I was under the impression you did not wish to hear from me unless I was telling you they were here. It is not what you wanted to hear so I did not tell you."

"What happened on Earth?" As'hia asked moving closer still, until she was squatting next to him so close she could reach out and touch him. Lynom turned back away from her and took a deep breath. "Lynom... what has happened?" She asked again.

"The Empress of the High Coven and her cronies decided to strike against the King's family." He replied. "They... they assaulted Zarah Leonidas and attacked someplace called Dragon Mountain."

"Assaulted?" As'hia asked softly.

Lynom nodded. "Tir'ut told me... he told me it was a vile assault against her honor and person." He said. "They do not know much other than Androcles is bringing the High Coven dragons and riders to Kranek to complete their training. The Empress of the High Coven is dead... killed by the hand of your *Feravomir* it appears." He said looking at her as she inched closer. "One of Yuri's sons is dead, the other was injured, and it is my understanding that Yuri was gravely wounded by Androcles Leonidas before she escaped Earth. More than that I do not know and I didn't press my brother. He and Normya have much happening and I did not want to inquire further."

"The... the High Coven Empress is dead?" As'hia gasped.

Lynom nodded. "Yes. That has been confirmed by many sources." He spoke. "It could not have happened to a nicer person in my opinion. My mother has told my brothers and me that she was quite the *elg'caress*."

As'hia's eyes narrowed and she shook her head. "*Elg'caress*?" She asked.

Lynom nodded. "Bitch." He took another bite out of the fruit. "Though I should be thanking her I suppose."

"Thanking her?" As'hia gasped in shock.

Lynom nodded. "If not for her actions, my father and mother would never have come together and I would not be here." He answered. "Aikiro is the one who sent my mother away with my father. She had hoped

he would kill her when he got away, but they ended up falling in love with each other much to the Empress's disgust. I will lose no sleep now that she is dead."

"Princess Zarah?" As'hia asked.

Lynom shook his head. "He did not go into great detail." He answered. "Only that they expected them on Kranek within several days. Three at most."

"Why are you looking off back towards the base?" As'hia asked. "There's no way they could have followed us. Is there?"

Lynom held out the macrobinoculars to her. "See for yourself." He spoke. "They are part of the indigenous life on Belid."

As'hia took the glasses and brought them to her eyes. She scanned the area back in the general direction that they had come until she found the large brown furred creatures just making their way out of a small clearing and back into the timber. She could just make out that two of them were smaller than the two others.

"*Guy'ya*." Lynom spoke. "I believe they are called bears on Earth, though the *guy'ya* here are considerably larger. They are docile for the most part unless they have young ones, which those two adults do. They will not come up here, but they provide us a unique early warning system."

"You... you are out here watching bears?" As'hia asked somewhat exasperated as she looked at him. He was out here watching animals when he had all but professed his love for her and would not stay inside the cave with her. Of course her actions towards him did nothing to improve her status in his eyes no doubt.

Lynom nodded slowly detecting the tone of her voice. She sounded almost angry that he had said that. "Yes." He spoke. "I... I was under the distinct impression you did not want me around however. Not with what you have endured."

"I never said that!" As'hia hissed softly looking at him. "I... I don't remember any of it. I don't remember any of it Lynom. All I can remember is my time with you. And you have been nothing but... nothing but wonderful to me, while I treated you horribly."

Lynom could hear the sorrow and pain in her voice and he did not press her on the issue. He could not begin to imagine what it was she felt knowing she had been raped by any number of Immortals and not being able to remember it. He knew of at least four Immortals who had forced themselves on his *Ssin'urn 'anon* before he was able to get Phy'iad to allow him to make her his 'property', and Lynom had every intention of making sure it was he who killed those men when they attacked the base. Lynom looked out over the tops of the timber before them and took another bite of fruit.

"That is good I think *Ssin'urn 'anon*." He finally spoke after several long moments. "It will allow you to go forward into the future and put these past weeks behind you more quickly. I will settle the debt that is owed to you as I told your mother I would."

As'hia stared at the side of his face and in the darkening twilight she noticed that his bone spurs had all but disappeared due to the gathering darkness and the moonlight reflected most invitingly off his tanned skin. She had to admit once more that his features were anything but frightening. At least not to her. Like his brother he had obviously inherited their mother's flawless skin and dark complexion. While they had the Immortal bone spurs along their jaws, they were no where near as pronounced as full blooded Immortals. As she looked at him now, regardless of their predicament and what she knew had happened recently, As'hia still found herself wanting to be wrapped in those arms. His arms.

"You... you will do that won't you?" She asked softly seeing his eyes turn to gaze at her.

"If it is within my power... yes." Lynom answered.

"That may... it... it may explain why..." As'hia turned her eyes on the ground between her legs. "It may explain why I feel the way I do." She stated.

Lynom looked at her. "What do you mean?"

As'hia looked up at him meeting his dark eyes with her own and once again she thought of how beautiful his eyes were. "I don't want to be alone Lynom." She told him softly. "Not anymore."

Lynom's eyes grew wide when As'hia didn't hesitate and shifted her lithe body between his legs. She settled her firm butt to the ground between his legs and pushed back against him. She drew one of his arms around the front of her body, pulling it tight against her full breasts as she leaned back against his chest.

"As'hia... As'hia what are you...?"

"Just hold me Lynom." She said softly. "Just hold me."

Fighting down the new sensations that were surging through him, Lynom could only allow her to pull his arm tighter even as the scent of her blood so close to him caused his head to spin. He had not expected this in the least, and having her body pressed so intimately against his meant it was going to be a sleepless night. Not that it mattered really, for the last few months he had experienced many sleepless nights because she tormented his dreams. If this was as close as he would come to achieving what he so wanted then that is what he would accept. Lynom pulled his arm tighter, feeling her breasts press tightly against his forearm as he pulled her tighter to him reveling in the feel of her lush body so close to him.

Lynom didn't see the look of pure contentment bathe As'hia's face when he did this for if he had there was not a force of nature in the universe that would have kept him from returning to the Immortal base and laying waste to the entire facility at this very moment.

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBERS

The tension in the air was almost a palpable thing Anja thought.

The huge gallery of those citizens witnessing these events was silent as they waited for Wiktor to call the session back to order. She was conversing with Elder Buonau and another aide in soft whispers turned away from the gallery in front of them. Rinard was nowhere to be found and this was an unexpected move on Buonau's part. Anja felt certain that she would have had Rinard present to witness her attempt at bringing Anja down. Umbra remained in her seat with Pcillany, an almost permanent scowl on her face now that her own husband had gone against her wishes and sided with Anja. Anja knew they were scrambling, or at least she hoped they were. They could no longer use the security videos as proof of anything since Ceuma had come forward and been tested. It was confirmed by several different Healers, all of them fully influenced by Wiktor or Buonau, that Ceuma was indeed a clone and had been just recently turned. After some heated protest Rinard had also submitted to testing and it was discovered that Ceuma had been turned by him. Anja saw Eurin and Sivana whispering to each other on the other side of Ceuma, while her clone was watching the different people in the chamber keenly.

Hadarian culture was such that females were considered, if not superior to men, then at the very least holding a slightly higher plane of respect. Over ninety-five percent of Hadarian Healers were females, and while there were thousands of male healers, the females tended to be the more powerful of the Healers who worked in the field. To some Hadarians, mainly the much older or the stridently loyal followers of the Elder Council, this was seen as a status symbol of sorts that afforded the females more political clout. To Anja and many of the more forward looking individuals, this way of thinking was bullshit. Filrian had proven that by being away from Hadaria for so long and being able to use his Healing powers to the utmost.

As her Jade green eyes moved slowly over the crowd Anja noticed that there were far more Elder Militia troops along the walls of the chamber and she knew then that Wiktor and Buonau had something planned. They were standing casually as if they were uninterested in the proceedings, but Anja knew otherwise. She glanced up high into the loft of the Arch Ministry Chamber casually and let her eyes pass over where she knew the small outcropping was. It was a small ledge where an Elder Militia Guard always stood when the chamber was in session. It was a security means that hardly anyone knew about. Anja only discovered it because she could detect the scent of the individual up there and the count did not match those scents that were actually in the chamber. As she let her eyes fall back on where Wiktor and Buonau were nodding to each other she reached out within a shielded Mindvoice connection to the man who she knew would be there.

[Joci?]

[I am here my Queen.] Joci answered immediately.

Anja felt a sense of relief pass through her at his voice. She had seen for herself his devotion to Ceuma and after talking with Atropos she had no doubts about where his loyalty was. *[You have taken note of the additional Elder Militia standing around the chamber as if they are only watching?]*

[They wish to try and blend in, but they are here for other purposes.] Joci spoke.

[Joci... I have a sinking feeling this is not going to turn out as I had hoped.] Anja said. *[No matter what happens... you will cover Sivana and Ceuma.]*

[You are Queen!] Joci protested.

[And Ceuma is your mate and Sivana is my sister.] Anja stated calmly. *[I can handle myself Joci... but neither of them are true warriors. You have the high ground and can cover them better than Belen. You did not kill the man up there did you?]*

Anja could almost feel Joci turn his head to look at the inert form of the Elder Militia Guard who was now unconscious and secured with bindings. *[No my Queen.]* Joci answered. *[He is very much alive... but he will have a unique headache when he awakes.]*

Anja felt the gentle tapping against her shields and she immediately recognized the gentle MV reverberation of Belen. She instantly open their connection to allow him to talk. *[Belen? What is it?]*

[I am in position to the rear of the chambers Anja.] Belen replied. *[There is a small transport shuttle on the pad back here. It has no markings on it and did not receive clearance from Union Control to land. They have no record of it.]*

[A Union ship?] Anja asked.

[No... it is a Limian short range shuttle.] Belen replied.

[Why would they feel the need to have an unmarked shuttle outside their chambers?] Anja said thoughtfully.

[Perhaps they worry that you will not control your temper.] Belen spoke.

[Any signs of activity near it?] Anja asked.

[No. And the cockpit windows are blacked out as well.] Belen told her.

[That can't be good.] Joci broke in. *[They did not want anyone to see who occupied the shuttle.]*

[I agree.] Belen spoke.

[Perhaps the extra Militia troops came from that ship.] Anja said.

[Anja... did you notice the Union Ambassador is in the gallery as well?] Belen asked.

Anja's eyes darted to the gallery until they came to rest on the Lycavorian male. He had a puzzled and bored expression on his face. *[That's odd.]* Anja stated. *[Why have him here if this is supposed to be an internal matter.]*

[Anja... I don't like the feelings I am getting from this.] Belen spoke. *[Something else is going on. Where is Rinard?]*

[I noticed he was missing as well.] Joci spoke. *[A pity... I was hoping you would allow me to shoot him for all he has done.]*

[Have patience Joci... you just may get the opportunity.] Anja answered. *[Miath?]*

[I am ready my sister. Can we get this over with please?] Miath answered immediately. Anja smiled at the calmness in Miath's voice and she briefly thought back on how far they had come. When they were first bonded he had been a brash and reckless young dragon, but through the years with Aelnala and Torma's influence he had become a methodical young dragon. He was completely devoted to her and to his mate Aelnala and he had taken on many of Anja's more humorous traits as his answer suggested.

[Soon brother.] Anja answered.

[We should...] Belen began.

The tapping of the thin rod on the chime cut off his words as Wiktor set the rod on the massive table. "I will now call this session back into order." She announced.

The gallery became quiet once more, the Netnews reporters all hanging on Wiktor's every word while their hover drones recorded it all.

"As we instructed... this woman was tested and..." Wiktor started.

"Her name is Ceuma!" Anja snapped as she got to her feet.

"She is a clone!" Wiktor announced harshly. "A clone created by the High Coven for some devious means no doubt! She is not a Hadarian! She is an object and..."

Even as mild mannered as she was Ceuma came to her feet as well. "I am not an object!" She declared angrily. "I am a person! I think and breathe and feel just like the rest of you! I..."

"You are a clone!" Buonau barked from her chair. "You are not a citizen of Hadaria and therefore you have no rights as a Hadarian! By your own admission you have been schooled as a traditional Lycavorian female by the mother of the man who supposedly took you as his mate!"

“Ceuma is a clone yes!” Anja spoke as she wrapped her fingers around Ceuma’s wrist to keep her from speaking. “She is a clone that was brought into existence by Rinard for whatever nefarious reasons he conjured up! She is a living person now, with a will and mind of her own and that is how you will treat her! However we are not here to determine that Ceuma is in fact an individual... we are here to determine what your findings discovered in regards to Rinard and his actions. Where is Rinard by the way?”

“This body advised Rinard to cease attending these proceedings.” Wiktor stated.

“And why is that?” Eurin asked also coming to her feet now. “He is one of the three individuals who originally brought these charges to this Ministry. Now you no longer need him?”

“After reviewing the information given to us by you... we have determined that there is enough cause to remove charge number four against you until such time as it can be further reviewed.” Wiktor spoke.

Eurin looked stunned. “What we presented to you is more than enough evidence for you to remove all but the last two charges against Queen Anja!” She snapped. “How can you leave these charges in place when the reason, as you state, for Anja’s actions was to conceal what she supposedly had done in charge four!” Eurin lifted the data pad. “Your own findings clearly state that the events we witnessed in the security footage was not Anja!”

“Our findings do not state that.” Wiktor spoke.

“They do indeed!” Eurin barked lifting the pad. “I read from your personal physician’s own words Chief Minister now... *‘It is very likely, given the findings after several tests were conducted, that the subject in question is the sole participant of the security videos presented by the Arch Ministry on behalf of Spartan officer Rinard. There is no trace of the Spartan Rinard’s DNA anywhere within the blood of Queen Anja Leonidas, while significant DNA results were obtained from the bloodstream of the clone called Ceuma’*” Eurin looked at her. “Or was it your intent to not reveal the results of your own tests?”

“You will mind your place Divine One!” Wiktor barked. “You do not dictate to this body even if you are the Divine Healer of our people!”

“I’m not dictating anything but what your own doctor has stated.” Eurin snapped right back.

“The first three charges will remain for there is sufficient evidence to prove the Queen acted in a willfully negligent manner in regards to Senior Mage Warrior Seanna!” Wiktor spoke.

“We have proved that your basis for these supposed negligent acts is false!” Eurin almost shouted. “How then can you leave the other charges in place?”

“We can... and we will!” Wiktor loudly barked out. “By her own admittance she chose to remain and treat less seriously wounded Lycavorian soldiers instead of moving to Seanna’s location and treating her. A fellow Hadarian who she just happened to have an intense decade long relationship with! A relationship that ended for mysterious circumstances.”

“The reasons for ending our relationship are none of yours or this body’s concern!” Anja growled.

“On the contrary Queen Anja... I believe the reasons for ending that relationship relate exactly to the way you acted when notified of Seanna’s injuries!” Wiktor stated. “Elder Healer Buonau agrees with me, as does the entire Elder Council and Arch Ministry!”

“That is bullshit and you know it!” Anja snarled. “I was treating injured soldiers who were fighting a war!”

“You chose to treat them over a fellow Hadarian and former lover!” Buonau spoke from her seat now. “Why is that Queen Anja? Why would you chose others over a young woman who you were intimately involved with for over a decade. Why would you chose others over your own people?”

“What?” Anja asked aghast. “We are all part of the Union and we were fighting a fucking war!”

“Yes. A war begun by King Leonidas and Queen Dysea for questionable reasons to begin with and a war that cost the lives of one thousand three hundred and nine of our Healers!” Wiktor announced.

“All of whom died honorably doing what they were trained to do, beside those who they were happy to fight beside!” Anja snapped with vicious intent. “Do not demean their sacrifice Chief Minister... I won’t allow it! I have spoken to each and every mother, father, wife and husband of those killed in the Evolli War and not one of them ever questioned the reasons behind their loved ones service! And as far as the reasons for the Evolli War... I suggest you turn to the three hundred fourteen thousand Quartari that were slaughtered by the Evolli because they were pissed off that Dysea cancelled our trade agreements with them.”

Wiktor waved her hand dismissively at Anja's words. "We will never know the King's true reasons for that war... only the results! And we will never know the true reasons you let Mage Warrior Seanna die." She spoke cruelly. "Perhaps it was because she knew things that you did not want her to reveal. Things in regards to your behavior perhaps?"

"What?" Anja gasped. "Now you are grasping at straws? Your little plan didn't go as you like and now you'll make stuff up? Is that how it works now?" Anja shook her head sadly. "Now I know why Duewa made the decision she did."

"You will not speak of my daughter!" Buonau shouted.

Anja looked at her. "I'll speak of her all I want." Anja said. "At least she isn't going to turn out like you. At least *she* is smarter than you."

"You know nothing of what you speak!" Buonau nearly screamed. "And I will not listen to you demean my daughter! She would never do the things you have done! The things you have allowed your own daughter to do! Princess Eliani disrespects this sacred body every time she comes to Hadaria by flaunting her vampire lover. And now she has allowed a Lycavorian to claim her? These are the same things you continue to do!"

Anja chuckled. "When was the last time you talked to Duewa Elder Buonau?" She asked. "Last I heard... she had fallen head over heels in love with a senior officer in the *Durcunusaan* and was exquisitely happy when he claimed her as his wife and mate!" Anja tossed out the insult at her.

"You lie!" Buonau did scream now.

"I guess you don't know your daughter very well at all." Anja said.

Enough!" Wiktor barked. "It is the decision of this Ministry and the Elder Council to leave the first three charges in place for there is ample evidence that has been presented to prove them all."

Anja stepped away from her chair, her wolf blood burning with anger now. "You know; why don't we just cut all the bullshit Chief Minister Wiktor!" Anja growled. "I grow tired of yours and Elder Healer Buonau's games!"

Wiktor met Anja's eyes with unpleasantness. "If that is your wish Queen Anja." She stated with supreme smugness. She made a show of straightening up the data pads scattered in front of her and no doubt it played well to those fanatical followers of the Elder Council and others. "This Arch Ministry and the Hadarian Elder Council has fought with the evidence put before us for several weeks now. It saddens us at what has transpired these last months but we feel the actions we take now are for the betterment of our people as a whole."

"The Hadarian Elder Council has no say in the rulings of the Arch Ministry!" Zaniai barked from where he had sat silently up until now.

"I beg to differ Prefect Zaniai." Wiktor said.

"The Elder Council is a religious body and by our own constitution can not take part in the workings of government!" Zaniai declared.

Wiktor nodded. "That was true." She stated calmly. "It is no longer."

"You can not change the constitution Chief Minister!" Zaniai barked.

"With a unanimous vote of the Arch Ministry, according to our constitution, I can. And we have." Wiktor announced. "The Arch Ministry and the Hadarian Elder Council has ruled on these charges and we will now pronounce our findings!"

"This is outrageous!" Eurin shouted. "You can not do this! It goes against everything our people have worked towards for millennia!"

"The Elder Council preached that we were leaving too much of ourselves behind during the rule of King Yelu!" Buonau stated. "We were dismissing too much of our past! We have warned of this for centuries and were ignored! This is what has resulted! Now we have suffered under the rule of a Queen and Princess who show no regard for Hadarian culture and history! A Queen and Princess who have done nothing but throw our most scared values back in our faces ever since they returned to us!"

"You cling to culture and values that do not apply to the real world!" Sivana snapped now as she stood up still somewhat in shock over what was happening. "We can not remain in the past when the future calls us to move forward! That is what happened to our Lycavorian brothers and sisters until Martin Leonidas returned and brought them balance again!"

“Your words fall on deaf ears Princess Sivana!” Buonau stated. “You yourself allowed yourself to be claimed by a Lycavorian without approval or blessing of the Elder Council or this Arch Ministry!”

“When has it ever been the law that marriages must be approved by the Elder Council or Arch Ministry?” Anja shouted. “That has never been law in all of Hadarian history!”

“We will not go into the changes that we have made right now!” Wiktor said.

“Changes you have made?” Anja snapped. “You have no right to make changes to the constitution!”

“With a unanimous vote we do.” Wiktor stated with a smug smile. “As I have already explained to Prefect Zaniai.” She stood up and held up the data pad. “As to the charges against you Anja Leonidas... on Charge Number Six; the willful neglect as mother to the heirs of the Hadarian throne Retta and Calyb Leonidas, you are found guilty. You will surrender custody of Retta and Calyb to Umbra immediately, who will then act in accordance with this Ministry’s guidance.”

Anja’s jade green eyes changed quickly to her wolf eyes and her fangs extended. “Fat chance of that happening Wiktor! You will not touch my children!” She barked.

Wiktor nodded. “Yes... we thought that might be your response... therefore we have instituted actions that will yield the same result.”

“What?” Anja gasped. “Wiktor... are you a fool? You can’t take my children! Martin’s children! He will kill anyone who tries that!”

“He has no choice in the matter... and I will explain why in a short while!” Wiktor stated calmly. “On Charge Number Five; your blatant dismissal of the Hadarian Constitution and the directives of this body on three separate occasions. Three times that we know of mind you... you freely admit these actions... so the verdict is guilty.” Wiktor exclaimed. “Charge Four we have dismissed for the moment... but we reserve the right to reinstate this charge at a later time. Charge Number Three is Neglect of Duties as senior Hadarian Healer on location, and Charge Two is the willful acts of a depraved nature that resulted in the death of a fellow Hadarian. On both these charges we find you guilty. Charge Number One is the charge of murder and on this charge this body and the Elder Council has also found you guilty!”

The murmurs were running rampant through the stunned gallery of onlookers which only seemed to make Buonau and Wiktor even fuller of themselves.

“This is preposterous!” Zaniai shouted moving up beside Anja, his face angry and in shock at what was happening. “As Prefect of the Hadarian Ambassadorships, I am telling you this is illegal and unconstitutional! You can not do this!”

“We *have* done it Prefect Zaniai.” Buonau barked. “And you can either follow us or suffer the same fate as Anja.”

“What?” Eurin gasped her eyes wide.

“By unanimous vote of the Hadarian Arch Ministry and the Hadarian Elder Council Anja Leonidas, your status as Queen of Hadaria has been dissolved.” Wiktor continued. “The Arch Ministry and Elder Council have decided it was time that our people returned to the ways of old.”

“You mean religious rule?” Sivana shouted vehemently. “Even when the majority of people are against such a thing!”

“Call it what you will.” Wiktor stated. “Your status as Princess of the Royal family has also been dissolved Sivana. As soon as Retta and Calyb are returned to Hadaria we will see to their upbringing and education and insure they play the proper role in the future of our people as the members of the royal bloodline are supposed to.”

“You are making a big fucking mistake Wiktor!” Anja growled at her. “The people of Hadaria won’t stand for this!”

“The people of Hadaria need guidance and direction.” Buonau announced. “We will give that to them.”

“At the cost of their freedoms?” Eurin spat. “Because you do not agree with the direction Anja and Sivana have led our people even though over ninety percent of the population embrace them?”

“We will show them that we do not need to surrender to depravity to achieve what it is we all want!” Buonau snapped.

“You have really gone too far this time Buonau!” Anja growled. “You don’t expect me to stand for this do you?”

“You have no choice in the matter!” Buonau snarled. “It is already done!”

“The Union Senate will not allow...” Eurin began.

“The Lycavorian Union Senate no longer has any say over Hadarian property or will!” Wiktor stated. “As of nine a.m. this very morning... the Arch Ministry and Elder Council have declared Hadaria independent of the Lycavorian Union. We no longer are members of the Union and therefore do not need their approval to do anything!”

Anja’s eyes were nearly bugging out of her head. “You must be joking!” She gasped in astonishment.

“Not at all.” Wiktor stated calmly. “As we speak... the Hadarian Ambassador is on Apo Prime delivering edicts to the Senate Leader. Since Prime Minister Deia chooses to spend so much time on Earth, we delivered our decision to the Senate itself. We have ordered that all Union personnel begin leaving Hadaria immediately and have given them a week to comply. All equipment will be impounded by the Hadarian Militia for inspection before it is returned to Union hands.”

“A decision like this must be made by the people!” Zaniai screamed. “We have been part of the Union for nearly four thousand years! We are a founding member! We can not leave the Union!”

“We can and we have.” Wiktor stated plainly. “Anja Leonidas... you will be remanded to the custody of the Elder Militia until such time as Retta and Calyb are returned to Hadaria and final sentence is passed.”

“I don’t think so.” Anja growled in a menacing voice.

“You have no choice in the matter.” Buonau stated. “You will adhere to our directives!”

“I will adhere to nothing you say Buonau!” Anja barked out viciously. “You are nothing but a conniving *upae* that needs to be put out of her misery!” Anja tilted her head as if deep in thought and reached out to Atropos. [*Atropos... are you monitoring?*]

[*Monitoring? Son vada carians Anja... it’s going out live over the Netnews!*] He answered.

[*Martin was right Atropos.*] Anja said sadly. [*Marty was right.*]

[*Shining Path is already in motion Anja! I’m going to order Belen and Joci to get you and the others out of there! We do not know what they are prepared to do!*] Atropos stated.

[*I can fight this!*] Anja declared to him. [*The people won’t let this stand!*] Anja looked at Buonau.

“Have you thought about what you are doing? Who will protect Hadaria? Who will you trade with? Who...”

Buonau’s smile wasn’t a friendly smile and her green eyes were cruel. “Do you think we are fools Anja?” She announced. “We have already secured the future of our people. We have reached out to those who will assist in all that we need and who will allow us to rule Hadaria as we see fit. Of course... it will be much easier with the Union equipment that all Lycavorian forces will leave in place. Our new allies will see to it that we are protected and they will allow us to return to the old ways. They...”

“New allies?” Eurin barked. “Who are you talking of? No member of the Union will let this action stand! They...”

“The Kavalian Federation Imperium is not part of the Lycavorian Union.” The new voice spoke loudly from the door into the Minister’s chambers.

Anja’s eyes grew wide, as did every set of eyes in the gallery as they all turned to see the tall dark furred Kavalian male step from the Minister’s chambers with three Kavalian soldiers next to them. Though all of them were armed, none of them had weapons out.

“What is the meaning of this?” Zaniai screamed now. “Why are they here?”

Wiktor smiled as the Kavalians stepped up beside the large central table where the senior Ministers sat. “The Kavalian Federation has graciously accepted our request for aide and support Prefect Zaniai. They will fill the roles that the Union has played for far too long and they will allow us to rule Hadaria the way it should be ruled. I present Vice Admiral Menot of the KFI. He will be the representative of the KFI to Hadaria.”

Eurin stepped forward quickly. “This is insane! You can not do this!” She screamed.

“As I have already stated... we can and we have.” Wiktor stated.

Eurin let her eyes roam across the faces of the Ministers at the table. “All of you have done this?” She cried. “You have betrayed your people and the Union! You have done this willingly?”

“We have betrayed no one!” Buonau barked. “We will usher in a new era for Hadaria!”

“An era of religious zealot rule!” Sivana barked again. “You will force our people to adhere to ridiculous laws and rules you put in place? You... all of you! The moral conscious of our people!”

“Hadaria needs guidance now.” Buonau stated calmly. “I will give her this guidance as Elder Healer. The Chief Minister will give them guidance as interpreter of our laws.”

“Laws that you intend to change and alter to suit your twisted ideals! You will take away free will?” Anja shouted. “That’s a fucking dictatorship! And then you go to the KFI for the support you knew you would not receive in the Union? You do realize the only reason they are doing this is so that they can have access to our Healers. So they can send them to heal their clone troops in their war against the Coven.”

“Your information is not accurate Anja Leonidas.” Menot stated.

Anja’s jade green wolf eyes cut to him. “I’m not talking to you Admiral Fur ball!” She snarled.

Menot’s dark eyes narrowed and he stepped closer to Anja. “We are here as friends to the Hadarian people. Nothing more.”

“You must think I’m fucking stupid!” Anja growled. “I know exactly why you are doing this! I won’t allow it.”

“I believe you have been removed from power and therefore have no say in what the new government does.” Menot spoke smoothly with a smile. “Elder Healer Buonau came to us with a request for aide and her intention to announce their independence from the Union. Naturally we could not support her in her endeavors until such time as the Hadarian government actually changed hands. Now that this has happened we are very free to offer whatever support the new Hadarian government requires.”

“At what cost?” Sivana barked. “What are you getting in return?”

“That is of no concern of yours.” Menot answered sweetly. “We only wish to assist the new Hadarian government as much as possible.”

“That is so much bullshit and you...” Anja cut her eyes when she saw Wiktor’s aide rush up to her side and whisper into her ear. She saw Buonau’s aide doing the same and both Wiktor and Buonau’s eyes grew a little wider and they looked at Anja quickly their eyes darkening. Anja smiled inwardly knowing what their aides had told them.

“What have you done?” Wiktor barked moving around from behind the polished table to glare at Anja. “Tell us! I demand you tell us!”

“Whatever do you mean Wiktor?” Anja asked.

“You will refer to me as...”

“I’ll refer to you any *nubous* way I choose!” Anja hissed loudly. “I’m no longer Queen of Hadaria, or do you not remember. And I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“You know very well what Wiktor is speaking about!” Buonau shouted. “We have just received word that...”

EARTH SPARTA QUEEN ELIANI EARLY CHILDHOOD ACADEMY SIMULTANEOUS TIMELINE

Duewa sat in the School Administrator’s office and shook her head as she listened and watched the broadcast of what was happening on Hadaria at this very moment. Duewa felt a sense of loss when it came to her mother, but seeing her actions now in how she treated Anja, Duewa saw her real mother coming out. She reached up to touch the sparkling green emerald necklace she wore and let her fingers caress the credit chip sized precious stone encased in the glittering silver and gold bindings. The gem had been a gift from Thoti to her only last night, a symbol of his powerful love and devotion to her. He had given it to her while they rested in the bed of his home, their home now he had told Duewa, their naked flesh touching in all the right places. They hadn’t been taking part in the pleasures of the flesh, but Thoti had told her when they were alone in their bed he wanted to feel only her skin against his. This was something very new to Duewa, but she was rapidly coming to relish it. They simply talked of the future and what that would bring to them. His simple caresses could light her body on fire in a way she had never known no doubt, but even still knowing that he was a master of his male hormones and could simply hold her naked body close meant more to her than anything.

Thoti had practically moved Duewa and her sons into his home with him and his son. Their house on the edge of the royal villa was certainly large enough, each of the boys having a room of their own. Their own bedroom was massive, with double doors that opened up onto a small stream of cool running water that emptied

into the Evrotas River only a kilometer away. The smell of pines and flowers filtered into the home nearly all the time and it was the most peaceful place Duewa had ever been too. During these last three days Duewa had also learned more about herself than she ever knew existed. She discovered patience and control and most important of all Duewa had discovered true happiness. She had begun the plan with her mother in the hopes of keeping her sons from having to fight and die in war. What she had discovered was the complete opposite of what her mother had been preaching for decades. The Lycavorian people were not warlike in the least. The last three days she had truly taken notice of different things as she walked among the streets of Sparta with Retta, Calyb and her own sons. She had discovered laughing and playing children. She had discovered Spartan soldiers in the many parks playing with those same children. Their children. She had seen countless Lycavorian Spartans walking the streets with their wives and mates, unafraid to show emotion and hold their mate's hand or steal a kiss on the streets. Things her mother had said these people did not do and she had been witness to that very thing every day and just had not noticed until Thoti had taken her that first night and essentially rocked her world as Retta had told her the morning after that first night with Thoti.

Oh yes... Thoti had rocked her world. He had made her experience more sinful pleasure than Duewa could begin to describe, yet the most important thing Thoti had done was open her eyes to what was reality and what was fantasy.

"...can't believe this is happening." The administrator spoke drawing Duewa out of her selfish thoughts of what Thoti made her feel.

Duewa looked at the older elven female and nodded. "Yes. It appears the Arch Ministry and Elder Council had this planned for quite some time. My mother among them."

The School Administrator was over a thousand years old, but her elven beauty hadn't changed in the least. She did not look a day over forty years old, and she was sharp as a whip. She knew who Duewa was, and who her mother was, but had accepted her without question. She had been married to the same Lycavorian for nearly seven hundred years now, one of the rare marriages of elf and Lycavorian before the return of King Leonidas. Now it was a common occurrence and those who had hidden their relationships for so long brought them out into the open. It wasn't that those relationships would not have been accepted, just the opposite in fact, it was just that thousands of years of culture and tradition would need to be changed and none of those couples wanted to be the first to make that step. Not until Martin Leonidas had returned with an elven wife who was now Queen did the fear of change crumble away. When he took For'mya as his second wife of elven blood, change was finally embraced by the majority of elven people.

"You are not part of this Duewa." Rel'laria spoke looking at her.

"I was... I was part of it in the beginning Rel'laria." Duewa said as she got to her feet.

"Perhaps... but thankfully you were intelligent enough to see that all that they are saying is not true." Rel'laria told her sitting back in her chair and watching as Duewa went to the large window that overlooked the playground outside.

"If I had not met Thoti... if he had not desired me as intensely as he had... I would never have seen." Duewa answered. "He... he saved me."

Rel'laria shook her head. "No. Thoti may have been the catalyst for that... but deep down had you not been willing... you would not have discovered and accepted." She spoke. "That is what really matters."

Duewa allowed the small smile to play across her face as she let her glittering green eyes drift across the playground and the laughing children. "Perhaps you are right..." She said. "I have to thank you Rel'laria. I have to..."

Duewa's olive green eyes stopped moving across the playground when she saw him. Her eyes narrowed somewhat as her brain began to send impulses throughout her body. He wore nondescript clothing but the motions of his head kept giving him away as something other than a simple civilian. He appeared to be measuring up all the people in the area and continuously looking over his left shoulder at a Heavy Lifter that was parked on the corner of the Lifter lane. He looked so familiar to her and Duewa called on her keen memory, part of why she finished so high in her Healing Academy classes. She could remember the most obscure details and rare ingredients needed to make certain medicines.

"Rel'laria... do you know that man?" Duewa asked.

“Hmmm...” Rel'laria got to her feet and moved to the window and let her hazel eyes fall on the man Duewa was pointing at through the window. “He has walked by the school for the last several days. One of our teachers spoke with him briefly when he showed interest in one of the children as they played. Why?”

“He seems very familiar to me.” Duewa said softly.

“Fat chance of that happening Wiktor! You will not touch my children!” Anja’s voice barked from the monitor.

“Yes... we thought that might be your response... therefore we have instituted actions that will yield the same result.” Wiktor’s voice replied.

Duewa and Rel'laria both turn back to the monitor at the same time when they heard that and Rel'laria met Duewa's gaze. “You don’t think...?”

Duewa’s olive green eyes grew wide. “Of course!” She gasped. “He is Hadarian Elder Militia! A senior officer if I remember correctly! They are going to try and take the children!”

“*Sibfla!*” Rel'laria snapped moving off to her desk and unlocking the lowest drawer. “Not if we have anything to say about it!” Duewa watched as she withdrew two K14 hand weapons and set them on her desk top and moved up next to the desk as Rel'laria withdrew two extra magazines for the weapons. She looked at Duewa. “I may be an elf, but I have learned a few things in the last seven hundred and eight years being the wife of a Lycavorian Spartan.” She picked up one of the K14s and held it out to Duewa. “You have a secure channel to Thoti?”

Duewa nodded as she took the K14. “Rel'laria... I have... I have never fired a weapon before.”

“It’s easier than you might think.” Rel'laria spoke. “Take this and go to the children while I contact *Durcunusaan* Command. And contact your Thoti and let him know now would be a good time for him to make his way here. They will not assault the school, but they undoubtedly will attempt to take them when school lets out in fifteen minutes.”

Duewa didn’t hesitate and lifted the small transmitter Thoti had given her that was linked directly to his personal COM implant. “Thoti?”

His calm voice filled her ear instantly as she moved down the corridor towards the classroom where the children were. “Duewa? What is wrong?” He asked.

“Thoti... I believe now would be a good time for you to come to the school.” Duewa said quickly. “I have recognized a senior officer from the Hadarian Elder Militia lurking about outside the school. I can see no others but given what is happening right now on Hadaria, they must be planning to move against the children.”

“We will be there within minutes Duewa my love.” Thoti answered immediately. “How many have you seen?”

“Only the one... but they would never attempt to take the children without a full squad.” She answered. “The others have to be hidden nearby somewhere. This is part of what my mother’s plan Thoti! To take them when they bring Anja down! They are doing that right now!”

“We are watching it now!” Thoti answered. “Keep your wits about you Duewa. We will...”

“Duewa?” Aricia’s voice broke into the transmission and Duewa realized Thoti must have been with her.

“Aricia?” She spoke in reply.

“Duewa... we have entrusted our children to your care.” Aricia spoke. “You have our full faith and confidence!”

Duewa stopped walking as Aricia’s words washed through her. She took a deep breath and stepped fully into this new life she had found. “I will allow no harm to come to them!” She spoke firmly. “I give you my word.”

“I know. Thoti and I will be there within minutes.” Aricia said.

“We are coming my wife and mate.” Thoti’s voice spoke once more.

Duewa smiled and nodded her head. Her small hand tightened on the K14 and she began moving again with definitive purpose.

SPARTA
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

“...don’t care what they are telling you!” Deia’s voice snapped. “I want to talk to one of them!”

“Prime Minister... I’ve been trying for the last few minutes and their staff is telling me the same thing!” The voice stated. “They are in session and will not be taking transmissions until later. I told them that wasn’t good enough and the person rudely told me to stick it in my ear. They no longer take direction from Union lackeys. Those were the words they used.”

“Sibfla!” Deia snarled as she looked up at For’mya and Aricia. “This is not good!”

“We have to go.” Aricia spoke. “Duewa has recognized a man from this Hadarian Elder Militia outside the school. She is certain he is there to attempt to take the children.”

Deia nodded. “Go!” She exclaimed.

Aricia and For’mya shared a brief kiss. “I will contact you when the children are safe.” She stated. “Try and find out what else is going on.”

For’mya nodded. “Hurry! I trust Duewa... but she is not experienced.”

Aricia nodded. Isheeni... you and Aurith meet us in the courtyard! She reached out within Mindvoice. We are already landing!

Aricia kissed For’mya once more and turned to Thoti. “Let us go!”

For’mya watched as they exited the office quickly and then she turned to Deia. “Deia... can they do this?” She asked.

Deia met her eyes. “Every planet within the Union has its own government For’mya, you know this.” She replied. “We don’t dictate what they do.”

“Anja is still a Queen of the Union!” For’mya snapped. “They can not hold her on these ridiculous charges! Their proof may be sufficient for them, but it is not for us!”

Deia nodded. “Yes... I know. Something I’m going to make clear to them right now.” She touched her desk COM panel.

“Prime Minister!” The voice answered.

“You find the Hadarian ambassador and tell him Anja Leonidas is to be released without pause!” Deia barked. “We do not recognize these trumped up charges they have leveled against her for they have proved nothing! You tell that man, Anja Leonidas is a Queen of the Union and if she is held against her will they will answer to me!”

“Yes Prime Minister!”

Deia looked at For’mya. “And find Armetus!” She continued. “Find Armetus and tell him to discover how the Kavalians were able to do this and not have us detect it!”

“Yes Prime Minister!”

“I want answers!” Deia snapped. For’mya settled to the chair in front of her desk and looked at her oddly. “For’mya?”

For’mya shook her head. “I don’t know Deia.” She said softly. “I sense something.”

Deia leaned forward quickly. She had spent enough time with her nephew and his queens to know that with the exception of Isabella, all of them had developed unique and sometimes unexplainable abilities because of the level of their Mindvoice abilities. Dysea had a gift of precognition, Anja of healing, Aricia of incredible combat skills and For’mya of being able to somehow sense the ebbs and currents of the very life around her. Over the years she had come to accept and rely on these abilities in many cases.

“What do you feel?” Deia asked.

For’mya met her eyes. “I feel death Deia.” She answered.

SPARTA
QUEEN ELIANI EARLY CHILDHOOD ACADEMY
MAIN ENTRANCE

“...are still inside the school!” The Elder Militia Commander hissed softly into his Com unit as he casually made it appear as if he was scratching his thick mustache.

“The Queen’s dragons just landed in the courtyard of the Government Office Building! Just now a dozen Spartans ran from the rear of the building to a Heavy Lifter! If you do not take them now we will lose the opportunity!” The voice answered.

“You are talking of assaulting a school!” The Commander exclaimed.

“Elder Buonau was insistent that we act at the same time they were denouncing Anja! We have to move now!” The voice ordered. “If those dragons or Spartans get there first we will lose our chance! Now attack!”

“Colonel... what if there are *Durcunusaan* inside the school?” The Commander asked.

“You are to kill any adult that attempts to stop you!” The order came down and sealed the fate of him and his men.

“Damn! This is insane Colonel!” The Commander snarled.

“We have our orders! Now act on them Commander!” The voice shouted in his earpiece.

The commander gripped his weapon under his cloak and he heard several gasps as he pulled it from under his cloak and yanked up his assault rifle. “Militia Teams Two and Three! Switch to Plan Gamma and move! I will join you at the door!”

QUEEN ELIANI EARLY CHILDHOOD ACADEMY MAIN CORRIDOR OF THE SCHOOL

“...is happening Duewa?” Retta asked hurriedly as they made their way down the long center corridor of the school. Retta gripped one of her hands tightly, Mara keeping up with them easily now, while Tinyn held his mother’s other hand. Tinrell and Calyb were keeping up with them from behind Duewa’s moving form, Endeem scampering behind the two of them. “Where are Nara and Deion and Bryon?”

“They are not in danger Retta.” Duewa answered without hesitation. “There are some men outside who want to take you and Calyb away from us here Retta!”

“Take us away?” Retta gasped. “To where?”

“They want to take you back to Hadaria to live with your Aunt Umbra.” Duewa replied as she directed them around the corner.

“We don’t want to live with her! She’s mean and stupid!” Retta looked at her with her mother’s jade green eyes. “Where are you taking us?” She demanded.

Duewa met her eyes and stopped at Retta’s question. She squatted down in front of her and reached up to take Retta’s face in her hands. She looked at Calyb, who was watching intently, and then back to Retta. “I... I have found happiness here Retta.” Duewa said without shame or pause. “For myself and for Tinyn and Tinrell.”

“You mean Colonel Thoti?” Retta asked.

Duewa nodded. “Yes.” She smiled as the truth of her words poured out of her. “I will not let *anyone* take you from your parents Retta. Your mothers and I knew this might happen and we have devised a safe route to get you and Calyb out of the school. That is where we are going right now.”

“These men... they are here now?” Calyb asked.

Duewa nodded. “Yes. That is why we are leaving.” Duewa dropped her hands and took Retta’s and Calyb’s. “I will not let harm come to you.” She looked at all four of them. “Any of you! Now come... we must continue to the south entrance where we will meet your mother and Thoti.”

Duewa stood back up and turned to start walking down the corridor when the doors at the far end of the corridor slid open without pause and eight heavily armed Hadarian Elder Militia burst into the corridor. Amazingly, Duewa acted in the one manner she had never thought possible for her. She acted without thinking.

“Back!” She barked. “Go back! To the east entrance! Go Retta!”

Her voice drew the attention of the Hadarians and Duewa’s eyes grew wide as she saw the cruel eyes of the Hadarian officer focus on her.

“There!” The man shouted. “Get them!”

Duewa turned immediately and ran after the children. Her longer legs made it easier for her to catch up to them even as teachers and students began to poke their heads out of individual classrooms to see what was

happening. This served to slow the Hadarians down slightly until the lead officer finally rammed his shoulder into the chest of a female elf, toppling her over without regard. It was then that the screams of children began. As they returned to the large intersection, Duewa grabbed Retta's arm and directed her down to the left.

"That way!" Duewa shouted. "Head that way! Tell Mara and Endeem..."

"**Duewa!**" The male voice bellowed.

Duewa spun around almost by instinct, the K14 coming up in the heartbeat of time and leveling at the face of the senior Hadarian Officer. His eyes grew wide as she imposed her body between him and the children and the snarls and hisses of a very upset Mara and Endeem filled the corridor. "Stop!" Duewa shouted.

"What are you doing?" The Commander yelled. "You are supposed to be helping us, not running and trying to get them away! We must leave now... the Queen and the *Durcunusaan* are almost here!"

He stepped forward and stretched out his hand to grab Calyb and Duewa did the one thing she knew would stop him in his tracks. She pulled the trigger of the K14 and watched his whole body jump as the retort of the weapon in the corridor echoed like thunder! He looked at her wide eyed.

"What are you doing?" He screamed.

Duewa brought both hands up to grip the K14 and at least steady her shaking hands as more Hadarian Militia came up short and were bringing their weapons up. "I won't let you take them!" Duewa shouted. "It is wrong! What my mother is doing is wrong! I won't let you take them!"

"We must go!" The Commander shouted. "The *Durcunusaan* will be here any moment Duewa! Your mother demands it!"

Duewa shook her head vehemently as she backed up slowly, Retta pushing up against her hip while they moved down the corridor. "No!" Duewa snapped. "My mother will not twist their minds as she did mine! I won't allow her too! No more will she poison me or my sons! And I will not allow her to poison Retta and Calyb! I won't! You will have to shoot me to get them!"

"Duewa! Stop this right now! You..."

The single shot that rang out in the corridor was deafening. It caused almost everyone to jump in surprise, none more than the commander of the Hadarian Militia. His eyes grew wide as he saw Duewa's olive green eyes open in surprise and look down. He turned quickly and saw the Militia soldier lowering his rifle. "I told you no firing unless it was an adult or you had a target!"

"I had a target!" The young man snapped.

"Not the Elder Healer's daughter you fucking fool!" The Commander's eyes filled with horror and his eyes cut back to where Duewa was looking down at the growing blood stain in the center of her chest. The solid projectile had been traveling so fast and was fired from so close that it had struck her just above her right breasts and exited below her shoulder blade before anyone had even noticed. The jacketed projectile had not even gone far enough to gain enough momentum to cause Duewa to stagger and zipped by Mara's snout before imbedding in the wall. The Commander watched as the K14 slowly fell from Duewa's hands to clatter on the floor as Retta's wide eyes filled with horror.

"Duewa!" She screamed. "Duewa!"

Duewa staggered slightly then and found she could no longer remain standing as she sank to the floor. "Mother!" Tinyn and Tinrell screamed at the same time as they came to her side.

"No! Momma! You can't leave us!" Tinyn screamed as he tried to hold Duewa's upper body up against him.

"**NOOOO!**"

The male voice reverberated through the corridor of the school with unrestrained ferocity and anguish. The Hadarian Militia Commander turned his head instantly to see a savage looking Lycavorian Spartan walking towards them, his face a mask of pure unadulterated berserker fury. He watched as if in slow motion as that Spartan lifted his left arm extended towards them and there was a soft flare of white blue light as the Shi Viska appeared from Flatspace. Half a second after it had fully materialized, it was launching from Thoti's arm directly at the man who had fired the shot into Duewa. As the Hadarian Commander opened his mouth to cry out a warning the steel head and fully half a meter of *Nehtes* erupted from his chest, splashing blood and bits of flesh outward onto the two men closest to him. This caused half the Hadarian Militia troopers to turn, only to see the raven black hair of Aricia Leonidas whipping back around as she completed the spinning thrust of her *Nehtes* and was bringing her left arm up as she called forth her Shi Viska.

Thoti's Shi Viska struck the man who had shot Duewa just below his jaw line; the razors along the edge fully extended and locked in place. The Shi Viska's sixty-seven inch diameter cleaved cleanly through the man's neck and spine and slammed into the wall behind him nearly half way. His head did a lazy flop through the air, his body still standing there not realizing he was already dead. So enraged was Thoti, that he waded into the mass of Hadarian soldiers with little care for anything other than killing as many of them as he could. The Hadarian Militia Guard were well trained troops, however after their initial training, most of them never set foot inside a training facility again. They were sluggish and unresponsive to the lethal terror that had descended upon them and twenty seconds after that shot had been fired, nine of their brethren lay on the floor dead from hideous wounds with barely any sound. Five of the remaining Hadarian Militia turned and ran in abject terror, throwing their weapons away as they dashed for the doors to the school.

As the sensors activated and opened the doors the Hadarian soldiers could only run straight to their deaths at the hands of two very seriously pissed off female dragons. With roars of savage rage, Isheeni snatched up one Hadarian in her gaping maw and bit entirely through his mid section before he had a chance to scream. Aurith was opposite her mother and her wicked curved talons came slashing down twice in quick succession, one head flying off into the distance while another Hadarian troop fell with his entire chest cavity opened to the daytime air. Isheeni stepped forward and slapped her massive talon equipped foreleg down on the ground completely impaling another Hadarian soldier and pinning him to the ground beneath her as his hands clutched at her steel hard talons while Isheeni placed her other front foreleg on top of his head and crushed it while she pulled her talons free of his now dead flesh. Aurith's tail snapped forward with blinding speed and caught the last Hadarian just as he thought he was breaking free. The sounds of bones snapping and shattering was hideously audible as his body rocketed over sixty meters before slamming into the side of a steel and concrete apartment building with a sickening crunching sound.

Inside the school the screams and moans of the dying were also ghastly noises as Aricia and Thoti used their superhuman strength and speed to shatter bones and crush limbs. The bodies of fifteen Hadarian Elder Militia dotted the corridor of the school now and Thoti snatched up the last one left standing by his skinny throat and glared at him with deep blue wolf eyes, his fangs fully extended in savagery. Thoti barely exerted any effort as he crushed the young Militiaman's throat and flung the body against the far wall of the corridor. He turned to see Retta and Calyb kneeling beside Duewa, their small hands over the bloody wound in her chest desperately trying to save her. He savagely kicked several bodies out of his way before dropping to his knees beside Duewa and gathering her body into his arms.

"Duewa my love!" He sobbed.

"We can't fix her!" Retta sobbed loudly. "We can't fix her!"

Duewa's eyes fluttered open. "Tho... Thoti?" She gasped with bloodstained lips now. "Thoti... I..."

"I have you my mate." Thoti gasped as he brushed her rich red hair from her face. "I have you."

"Thoti... the children?" She wheezed.

"The children are fine." Thoti stated as his eyes drifted over her body and he looked at the wound, pulling her shirt aside.

"Thoti... Thoti I don't want to... I don't want to leave!" Duewa cried as she gripped him with all her remaining strength.

Thoti shook his head as he pulled her tighter. "No Duewa my beautiful Hadarian mate!" He gasped. "I will not... I will not lose you as I lost her! I will not!"

Duewa's olive green eyes fluttered briefly and then focused on him. She smiled gently as she lifted her quivering hand to place her palm on his cheek. "Don't... don't leave me my love" She gasped softly. "Don't... I don't want to lose you and... and my sons."

Thoti felt the small but strong hand grip his shoulder and he looked up into Aricia's azure wolf eyes and exposed fangs. "Turn her Thoti!" She spoke. "Retta and Calyb can not heal her anymore than they have and she does not have the strength remaining. The medics are two minutes away and she will not last. Turn her or she will die."

"My... my Queen..." Thoti cried.

"She is your wife and mate now Spartan and this is not her time Thoti!" Aricia hissed softly. "That is why you are here! Now bite her..." Aricia looked up as she felt the tremors within Mindvoice. "For my Martin and your King is arriving and he is not happy."

Thoti turned and looked at Duewa's beautiful face. He had lost one Hadarian wife so long ago. They had not had enough time together and he had been given a second chance by the gods with Duewa. He would not lose another. Thoti opened his mouth, exposing his long wolf fangs and bent his head to Duewa's neck. Her eyes flew open in pain as his fangs sank deep, and in a knee jerk reaction her arms tried to push him away as she groaned in pain. Tynyn and Tinrell sat there weeping as they suddenly saw their mother's face light up and become animated. Her olive green eyes grew enormously wide and her arms wrapped around Thoti's broad shoulders as the virus raced through her veins. It was a mixture of sweet pleasure and pain as Duewa could almost feel the potent virus racing through her system, Thoti's salvia mixing deeply with her blood stream, carrying the virus to every portion of her body. She groaned softly, clinging to the man she loved as she felt the torn flesh and arteries begin to rapidly heal themselves. She gasped as the entry and exit wounds were the first to close completely and then she felt empty as his fangs withdrew from her neck and he buried his face in her hair.

"You are mine Duewa of Hadaria. Now and forever... you are mine." Thoti whispered into her ear just before blackness washed over her eyes and Duewa passed out.

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBERS

"...received word that the main Lycavorian military base has shut down and expelled all non-military personnel from the actual spaceport!" Buonau barked out. "Union ships are not responding to commands from Hadaria control! And there is a report of transport craft landing at every military facility across the planet!"

Anja's face was impassive as she glared at Buonau. "Yes I know." Anja stated calmly.

"What is the meaning of this?" Wiktor demanded.

"I issued directives to the Union military." Anja stated flatly. "They are following those directives."

"What directives?" Buonau barked. "What have you done? We previously ordered all Union personnel and ships to not move until they received commands from us!"

"The Union military does not answer to you Buonau!" Anja growled. "They..."

The commotion near the entrance caused everyone's heads to turn. One Hadarian Militia officer went sailing backwards from behind the divider wall skidding across the floor until he came to a halt by the rear gallery bench. Eyes lifted and everyone saw Atropos move into view holding the second Hadarian Militia troop by his throat, his eyes changed and his wolf fangs bared viciously, even while his Shi Viska was out and humming on his arm. Several more Durcunusaan followed him into the room as well, moving quickly to surround Sivana, Eurin and the others. Atropos wasted no time and brushed past several civilians still dragging the militia officer by his throat. Even Anja's eyes were wide in shock and she stepped towards him.

"Atropos?" She snapped. "What are you doing here? You are supposed to..."

"I have just spoken to Colonel Fache!" Atropos snapped as his eyes went to where Buonau stood. "He is the Durcunusaan Officer in command of the Royal Villa on Earth! Three squads of Hadarian Elder Militia have just tried to kidnap Retta and Calyb Leonidas!"

"What?" Anja shouted. She whirled on Buonau. "You sanctimonious bitch! You tried to take my children? Our children?"

"They are heirs to the Hadarian throne!" Buonau snapped back unashamed. "You have been ordered by the Arch Ministry and the Elder Council to surrender custody of them to us. We knew you would not comply so we took action!"

Atropos dropped the militia troops he was holding and snatched Anja's arms before she was able to execute the leap he saw her preparing for. She would have killed Buonau without a moment's pause. Her wolf eyes and fangs were very prominent now as she struggled in his grasp. "I will kill you!" Anja screamed. "You *nubous* bitch whore!"

Wiktor pointed at Anja. "This is what we have had guiding our people the last two decades!" She announced. "Retta and Calyb will be returned to Hadaria and..."

Atropos looked at her. "Retta and Calyb are safe within the arms of their family!" He announced. "Your little kidnapping attempt failed! You only succeeded in getting some sixteen of your men killed!" He snarled at

her. “Did you think you could take members of the Royal Family from the *Durcunusaan*? How will you explain that to their families now?”

“You lie!” Buonau snapped.

“I do not lie Hadarian witch!” Atropos barked at her. “Your men were so ignorant of their goal they shot your own daughter!”

“Duewa!” Buonau gasped.

“Yes! She was wounded by one of your fine Hadarian Militia idiots because she was defending the children in her charge!” Atropos popped seeing Anja’s eyes turn to look at him. “She almost died except for Colonel Thoti.”

Buonau stepped off the elevated platform towards him. “Where is she?” She snapped. “You will release her immediately!” Buonau made it half way across the open area towards Atropos before the brilliant flash of white light formed in front of her and the holographic image of Martin Leonidas appeared in the center of the room.

Buonau staggered back as murmurs swept through the chambers and Netnews drones focused on the image of the King of the Union. There were very few Mindvoicers within the Lycavorian Union with the power and ability to activate a Mark II Holographic Neural Booster. Martin Leonidas was such an individual, and he had spent many hours with Helen and Aricia learning ways to smooth the connection to make it unstrained and allow them to hold it much longer. They in turn had passed this knowledge and skill to Androcles, Denali and Lisisa, who along with Dysea were the only other Mindvoicers with sufficient skill and ability within Mindvoice to activate a Mark II NB.

Martin’s image was exceptionally clear, even over the great distance between Earth and Hadaria, and it was very easy to see that his wolf eyes were bright and his dual fangs were exposed. His yellow/gold wolf eyes moved from Buonau to Wiktor to where Menot stood and finally he turned to where Atropos still held Anja in his grasp.

“Retta and Calyb are fine Red.” Martin spoke softly and everyone present could see the relief wash across Anja’s face along with the adoring love. Martin Leonidas’s voice was filled with longing and it was easily discernible to all present. “They just arrived back at the villa with Nara, Deion and Bryon. My mother and Dasha are with them now. The blackout is still in effect over what the Coven did so when you get to the *SPiRiT* contact me and we can talk at length. I miss you Red.”

“I miss you too Lover.” Anja spoke. “I miss all of you so much!”

Martin’s image turned away from Anja and focused on Buonau as by now she had moved back to stand alongside Wiktor. “What you have done this day is beyond anything I had ever imagined you capable of. Your hatred of me and Anja must run very deep for you to act in this manner.”

“We no longer wish to be ruled by you!” Wiktor barked out.

“I have never dictated anything to the Hadarian people Chief Minister. In all the years I have been King, not once have I ever demanded anything from you!” Martin spoke.

“You didn’t need to!” Buonau snapped. “You had her doing your work for you!” Buonau pointed at where Anja was moving back to stand next to Sivana.

“That is a lie and both of us know it.” Martin told them his holographic image walking towards them. “Just as this plan of yours to discredit Anja was a lie! Every bit of it!” As he stopped in front of them Buonau and Wiktor backed up instinctively.

“The Hadarian government has chosen its path!” Wiktor exclaimed. “We are no longer members of the Union! You can not tell us what to do!”

“Did it occur to you Chief Minister to put such a referendum before the people of Hadaria if it was such a concern of yours?” Martin asked maintaining his demeanor.

“We make the decisions for the citizens of Hadaria!” Buonau snarled. “We know what is best for them! We will do what is best for them!”

Martin’s head tilted to the side a little. “You know Elder Buonau... I’ve heard of that type of government before. I’ve had experience with it in my past. It didn’t work then and it won’t work now.”

“You know nothing!” Wiktor exclaimed. “And you can do nothing! The Arch Ministry and Elder Council acted within our constitution! We will guide our people into the future now King Leonidas!”

“You will guide them to ruin.” Martin spoke softly. “But at this moment... after what you have perpetrated... I don’t care!”

“Martin?” Anja barked moving closer to the image of him.

Martin glanced briefly at Anja in the transmission and then turned back to Buonau and Wiktor. “You wish to no longer be part of the Lycavorian Union... so be it. Anja has initiated what we call a Shining Path. It is the complete evacuation of every Union soldier, scientist, doctor and civilian. As we depart your world Chief Minister Wiktor, we will take everything that belongs to us... to include every ship, every building, and every computer. Every scrap of data and information.”

“That material is on Hadaria. It is our property!” Okein exclaimed from his chair now, speaking for the first time as he came to his feet. “Those ships are in Hadarian space! They belong to us!”

Martin looked at him. “If you have the nine hundred trillion Riyal that all of those items cost Elder Okein... I will be happy to leave it.”

“What?” Okein gasped.

“Did you think we were just going to let you take it?” Anja snapped.

“We will stop you!” Buonau shouted.

Martin looked at her. “Do you honestly think your pitiful Elder Guard Militia can stand against soldiers of the Union?” Martin spat angrily. “Sixteen of them are now dead because you attempted to kidnap my children you *igord nubous upae!* Sixteen lives that you have thrown away not a single hour into your so called new government! That is an act of war in case that has slipped your deranged minds!”

“The new Hadarian Government is under the protection of the Kavalian...” Menot began to speak as he stepped forward.

Martin turned to look at him. “Shut the fuck up Kavalian!” Martin snarled. “I’m not talking to you!” Martin turned quickly back to Buonau and Wiktor. “Three days Chief Minister. We will be off Hadaria fully in three days and we will take everything that belongs to us and not one thing more. If that is not acceptable to you... then more of your precious Elder Guard Militia will die and everyone will see just how ignorant you both truly are! After that... you can communicate directly with Prime Minister Deia through your ambassador here on Earth in regards to travel corridors and the use of Union Jump Gates!”

“You can not limit...” Wiktor began to speak.

“Woman... you have tried to take my children from me this day!” Martin growled. “You should be lucky that I do travel to Hadaria at this moment and slow cook your carcass over a hot fire!” Martin hissed. “Do not test me woman! At the very least I could bring you before the Galactic Court for your actions. The only thing holding me back is my respect for the Hadarian people and the history we have. Do not think to press your luck for my patience is already on the edge!”

“You will return my daughter to me.” Buonau snapped. “She does not belong among your kind!”

“My kind?” Martin asked looking at her. “Duewa is my kind now thanks to your actions Elder Buonau. Your fool soldiers shot Duewa and if not for Retta and Calyb sustaining her until her husband could reach her she would be dead! As it is, Colonel Thoti had to turn her in order to save her life!”

Buonau’s eyes went wide in horror. “You lie!” She screamed.

“Do I?” Martin asked. “I will arrange for you to speak with your daughter as soon as she is able. She can tell you herself to get fucked!”

“My daughter will want to return home to her people!” Buonau spoke confidently.

“And you don’t care that she was shot by your own troops?” Martin asked.

“There must have been... she must have gotten in the way of...” Buonau looked at Martin. “She was doing her duty!”

Martin nodded. “Yes she was. I see that now.”

“Anja is to remain here to face these charges against her!” Wiktor stated.

Martin shook his head. “I don’t think so.” Martin answered. “I will not leave one of my mates... one of the women I love in hostile territory. Even if any of your ridiculous charges were truly honest, she would never receive a fair trial in front of you and your cronies.”

“You can not remove her!” Buonau snapped.

“I can... and I will.” Martin stated. “She is a Queen of this Union! And unless you can come up with something far more convincing than the hatchet job of charges you have right now... something you can bring

before the Galactic Court... she will return to Earth on the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*. If she is impeded in any way..." Martin looked at Menot. "By anyone... the *Durcunusaan* will defend her with every weapon at their disposal. Do I make myself clear?"

"You violate your own laws with your actions King Leonidas!" Wiktor shouted.

Martin smiled. "Your interpretation of them perhaps. Not mine. I have also issued a warrant of arrest for Rinard. And you can pass this message on to him for me since I know you are hiding him. It was Torma that killed his father... my bonded dragon brother. And I let him kill Lucuvan. Now if he chooses to face me as a man for this... he is welcome. He will no longer target my mate. If he is seen within Union space anywhere... he will be arrested and executed on sight. I know he has been working with others... and I know he is involved in a myriad of other nefarious deals. If it is discovered you knew of these other things he was involved with Chief Minister... there will be penalties to pay. And they will not be pleasant."

"Are you threatening us King Leonidas?" Wiktor demanded smugly. "I will recall all of our Healers throughout the Union Fleet. Where will that leave you then? You will not threaten us!"

"Actually... the Hadarian Healers are members of the Union military Chief Minister." Martin said. "Therefore they are under Union orders. Those who wish to return home at your call may do so... I will allow that. Those who do not will continue their duties wherever it is they are assigned."

"You will send them to Hadaria!" Buonau screeched.

Martin shook his head. "I will leave that decision up to them." He replied. "You should be pleased Chief Minister... everything we have just discussed has gone out over open and live Netnews feeds." This caused Wiktor and Buonau to realize for the first time that they have allowed the Netnews into the chamber for the hearings.

"Stop recording!" Buonau screamed. "Stop what you are doing! Militia! Confiscate their equipment! Do it now!"

Martin stood in the transmission and shook his head. He turned without speaking and looked at Anja. "Red?"

Anja met his beautiful eyes. "I... I don't want to leave Martin." She said softly. "I don't want to... but I will."

Martin nodded. "Thank you. I didn't want to have to order Atropos to force you." He turned within the transmission once more and looked at Buonau and Wiktor. "I hope you know what your actions have wrought and who you have climbed into bed with to sate your grab and need for power. Now you will reap what you have sowed Chief Minister; now you will reap what you have sowed."

The transmission ended as abruptly as it had appeared and the Arch Ministry's chamber was silent except for whirring of the Netnews drones which were being confiscated by Hadarian Elder Militia without resistance. Anja looked at where Buonau and Wiktor stood glaring at her. She met their gaze for a long moment and then held out her hand for Sivana. Her sister took that outstretched hand without hesitation, and Sivana was holding Ceuma's hand just as tightly.

Two sisters and a clone that would come to be the third sister began their trek out of the Arch Ministry Chambers. Eurin and countless others fell in behind them silently, while Buonau and Wiktor looked on. Though they did not know it then, none of them would stand in this chamber again for nearly a decade to come. And as the former Queen and Princess of Hadaria, so beloved by so many of their people exited out of the Arch Ministry chamber, thousands across the face of Hadaria began the race against time to get off the planet of their birth before darkness fell upon them all.

**FERRANAUS
SECTOR NINE
HIGH COVEN SPACE
112 LY FROM UZU OZEIB 7**

She walked slowly and confidently between the thirty-seven desks, her rich dark eyes keenly watching as the students were deeply involved with the test they were taking. She stood a mere five foot six and a hundred and twenty-one pounds, but it was a lean, muscular figure that was encased in the matt black

conforming jumpsuit. Her breasts were high and firm, straining against the body armor like clothing. Her black hair was silky and very long, falling well past her shoulders to the middle of her back just above the incredibly shaped and firm ass. She had relatively long legs for her medium height; taut legs that many a pureblood wished to have locked around their hips while they pummeled her sweet body into the bed. She was easily the most desired female in their small group, yet in all the nine hundred years she had been among them, none of the soldiers or scholars had ever come close to bedding her. In fact, many believed she had never taken a man into her bed in all her two thousand twenty seven years of life. She could tease and talk as if she was very experienced, but no man or woman had ever gotten close enough to her to experience the pleasures of her flesh.

In many ways she was the ultimate enigma.

Many in their group knew who her father was, but only two out of the three thousand men, women and children in their organization knew who her mother was. It was definitely her father where she got her looks, for she looked nothing like her mother with the exception of the flawless skin and blue/black hair. He was still alive, for she always talked of him in the present tense and she loved him without question. She had joined them over nine hundred years ago at his behest and quickly established herself as perhaps one of the more deadly of their covert soldiers. Her ability to use the shadows, combined with her unique Mindvoice abilities enabled her to strike from the shadows before the target ever knew what hit them. There were many small blades secreted on her person, and she was lethal with all of them. The High Coven P11 Kinetic Magnum was strapped to her shapely right thigh, the long bladed dual knives that were her trademark secured in scabbards at the small of her back where she could draw them instantly with both hands if necessary. She was friendly yet distant; many times you could find her several hundred meters up in the mountain city built into the side of the fourteen thousand meter high mountain, staring into the night sky on Ferranaus as if speaking with the stars and the three moons.

Even given her extraordinary combat skills, she was also superbly well schooled and it was she who often could be found teaching the children of their organization. She could speak over nineteen alien languages, including the Lycavorian ancient tongue which was no small feat. She hated having to take blood, and was one of the very few vampires under the age of ten thousand years that had the will and determination to be able to control their blood lust for nearly four months before succumbing and having to ingest blood to replenish their bodies. She had not taken real blood in over two decades, preferring the fruit juice type cloned blood designed and marketed by the Hadarian Queen of the Union. It was easy enough to come by in The Wilds and considering they were on the border of one of the roughest areas of The Wilds, no one ever questioned when they purchased more. There were thousands of vampires who had deserted the High Coven early in the war with the Kavalians when they saw what was aligned against them and chose to make careers for themselves and smugglers and mercenaries.

She ignored the sounds of the booted feet when they stopped just inside the door to her classroom for several moments as she allowed her eyes to sweep over her students once more. As she turned at the back of the room, her dark eyes found the two men standing just inside the classroom and she hid the racing of her heart at the sight on the older man. He was tall and much older than the other, gray hair dotting his thick dark locks. The second was a much younger vampire of pureblood who was this man's most trusted aide, and one who had been seeking to take her as his wife for more years than she remembered. He was a very competent soldier and aide to the older man, but she had no desire for him as a husband. He did not move her in the way she wanted a man to move her. He was an exceptionally handsome man yes, but he sorely lacked the one thing that was needed to stir her passion and her blood. He was not comfortable or confident with himself and therefore could not stir her ardor for adventurism and exploration. The older man motioned imperceptibly with his head and she nodded as she began walking back towards them through another row. The two men exited the room and would wait for her in the corridor.

She maintained her decorum even though she wanted to run to the older man for she hadn't seen him in over three years now. It was safer for both of them this way, considering the position he still held within the High Coven military. She glanced back once more at her students before stepping into the long corridor where two others waited with the men she had seen. She ignored the man and women and stepped right up to the taller older man.

"*Ilharn.*" She spoke in the ancient language softly as she folded herself into his strong embrace.

Cirith felt warmth flood through her as his arms pulled her tight and he kissed the top of her head while hugging her.

“*Cirith ussta Dalharil.*” He spoke.

Cirith relished in the feel of his arms around her and placed her palms flat on his broad chest before pulling her head away and looking up into his dark eyes. “Why are you here father?” She asked softly. “I did not expect you for another seven months at least.”

Valin Esavorna smiled as he nodded his head. “I know... but something... something has come up that has changed things greatly.”

Cirith looked at him for a moment then turned to the younger man. He stared at her stoically before she looked at her father once more. “Are you going to tell me, or do I need to guess.” She asked playfully.

Valin reached up and took her flawless face in his large hands. “Your mother is dead.” He stated flatly.

Cirith stared at him for a long moment unmoving and unblinking. Valin didn’t know what to expect as he looked at her and finally she blinked. “Do you expect me to mourn her passing father?” She asked plainly.

Valin let out a small chuckle and shook his head. “No.” He answered. “But I expect you to now think of what will happen because she has died.”

Cirith shook her head. “I don’t understand. What do you mean?”

“Your existence will become known.” Valin told her.

“How?”

“Her security files and everything in them will pass to your sister.” The younger man spoke quickly.

Cirith looked at him. “I asked my father Micardo, not you.” She stated flatly.

“He is right Cirith my child.” Valin spoke. “When those files pass to your sister, she will order your death. She will not allow you to live for she will consider you a threat.”

“Why?” Cirith exclaimed. “I have done nothing wrong.”

“You have been working for the *Venorik Elghinn* Cirith.” Valin spoke. “A small group of the *Venorik Elghinn* that is not supposed to exist. Once those security files are seen by your sister she will seek to destroy you and me. Your mother did not because she knew of what information I held against her. She could not move against me and you because of that information. And those we eliminated helped her in many ways.”

“She never knew how large our group is father!” Cirith stated. “Only The General knew that. It is why he let our group assist him through the years.”

Valin nodded. “That is true yes. But your sister will not care.” He stated. “We are leaving now... and the others are following within several days. I have a *BLOODLETTER MARK IV*-Class Cruiser waiting for us in orbit. It is a *Venorik Elghinn* ship. They will not be happy I have taken it... but it will get us where we need to go.”

“Where are we going?” Cirith asked. “Where can we go?”

“There is only one place that will be safe now.” Micardo spoke.

“Micardo is right.” Valin said. “We will make for the closest planet that has Union forces assigned to it. Not to mention it has the man we have been looking for, unsuccessfully I might add, for some time.”

Cirith’s eyes grew wide. “Cha’talla?” She gasped. “You found him?”

Valin shook his head. “We didn’t find him. Normya Leonidas found him. And if reports are accurate she has married his son with Esther Saira.”

“Father you jest!” Cirith exclaimed.

Valin shook his head. “Not in the least.” He replied. “I can tell you more on the way. We will have to cross quite a large expanse of The Wilds and it appears as if events are cascading out of control even for the Lycavorian King. It is the only place I believe we will be safe.”

Cirith nodded. “I agree.” She stated.

“Then you must say your goodbyes to your friends here and we must go.” Valin said.

Cirith gripped his arms tightly and met his eyes. “Who killed her father?” She asked. “Who killed my mother?”

“She was foolish to do what she attempted.” Valin said. “She thought she could go into the heart of the dragon’s den and take what the Lycavorians treasure and protect most of all. If the reports are accurate... and there is no reason to doubt them... the Lycavorian First Oracle and her dragon killed her. Aikiro always did think of herself as indestructible. Apparently that is no longer the case.”

Cirith was silent for a long moment before nodding her head. "Then I hope I meet this woman one day." She said softly. "I would very much like to thank her for what she has done."

"Come." Valin spoke taking her arm. "Our shuttle is waiting."

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

SPARTAN 11

ANDRO'S STRIKER DT

TWENTY-TWO HOURS FROM IRARUZU

Sadi came out of the cockpit of *SPARTAN 11* after leaving Carisia checking the systems and playing with the sensors. She slid easily down the short flight of stairs and saw Ne'Veha standing beside the small counter that served as the food preparation area. She had learned from Arrarn that the *STRIKER DTs* the Leonidas family used were all custom made. Each of them was very different on the inside depending on the dragon and rider that would spend the most time within the ship. This was the case for most of *Mjolnir's Hand* as well, and Androcles's *STRIKER DT* was a single meter wider just behind the cockpit in order to accommodate the extensive food dispenser system that he had had installed. Andro Leonidas was an exceptional cook to the delight of his mother and grandmothers and it was not uncommon at all for him to be able to make a delicious meal out of simple military combat rations. Androcles Leonidas was also completely addicted to his mother's unique blend of coffee and kept a large complement on his *STRIKER* as well as the *SCIMITAR*. When they had first become mated Sadi had added some items to the inside of *SPARTAN 11* at Andro's behest to make it seem more restful and like home for her, but Elynth had excellent taste she realized and she had made sure Andro didn't leave it barren. Sadi didn't change a whole lot, adding only small holoinage portraits. Two of them were of their ceremony with Andro in the armor of his grandfather and looking delicious as far as she was concerned. He complained he looked stiff and Sadi only laughed at him. She had since added holoinages of Carisia and Ne'Veha and all of them together and there were four empty holoinages that would be used later. Sadi had also come to realize that while no one had actually made the decision, the piloting of Andro's *STRIKER* had fallen to her, just as her status as Anome to Andro elevated her within the Leonidas family, even more than the title of Crown Princess. She now knew it was why Arrarn had grilled her so intensely during the weeks and months they had trained the High Coven pilots.

At the moment, Ne'Veha was leaning against the counter and holding a mug of tea in her hands while she stared into the back of the *STRIKER* at where Androcles was sitting on one of the three large couches, seemingly deeply involved in the data pad he was reading. Sadi didn't hesitate and came up behind her silently, leaning forward to brush her lips ever so gently across the back ridge of Ne'Veha's four-inch high elven ear. She felt Ne'Veha shudder slightly and lean back into the caress, a soft sigh escaping her lips. Sadi Leonidas basked in the knowledge of what she had right now and what she knew she would have in the future. Coming back into Andro's life after so long had brought everything together for her. All the horrors of her life, her step mother forcing her to do so many terrible things when she was younger and forced to work with the *Arryadyveluat*. That woman was now serving a life sentence on a prison planet with her sons for their actions as traitors to the Union. Sadi had fought her feelings for so long, even though deep down she knew she had belonged to Andro since that very first time she had seen him and he was only eight months old. Her love for him had opened her to so much more, and foremost among that was her ability to love Ne'Veha and Carisia and Lu'ria almost as intensely as she did Andro. She was a female Alpha wolf, and while she had shared a torrid night with Teeria long ago, it was not until she had come back into Andro's life that she realized there would be other women that were meant to share hers and Andro's life in every way. Sadi and the others loved each other as deeply as they did Andro and there was no competition between them for Andro's affection for they knew Sadi held the title of *Anome* and was first in Andro's heart. As with the Queens of the Lycavorian Union, this was not something that bothered them in the least for Andro loved them more deeply and with such passion that no man could match it.

Sadi had never actively slept with other women until she realized the pleasures she could have with Carisia and Ne'Veha. Now... she didn't know if she could live without them. She and Andro were the center of

it all Sadi knew, but there were others and next to Andro's lavender and pines scent, Ne'Veha's sweet amaretto elven scent was the one she would never deny.

"What are you doing *SirsanGai*?" Sadi asked softly.

Ne'Veha half turned her head with an adoring smile and motioned with one hand. "I'm just watching him." She said softly. "Watching and wondering how all of this has come to be. All of us. I never once imagined I would find love in such a way Sadi. And certainly not with the Crown Prince of the Union." Ne'Veha turned and looked at her. "Or you and Carisia. And Lu'ria in the future."

Sadi smiled gently. "It wasn't exactly something I had thought about until Andro came back into my life either." She said softly. "I don't know what it is *SirsanGai*. I did not believe as deeply in faith and destiny until after those nights on the Island twenty-five years ago. After that it was like my eyes were opened and slowly through the years they have opened more and more. Now I truly believe that everything happens because it is destiny's way of guiding us. I met Andro for a reason when he was only eight months old. I needed to see his gorgeous eyes, to smell his scent back then so that I would know who would fill my future. Yet he had a path to follow until we came back together, and fate's way of making sure I never committed to anyone else was to burn his scent into my brain. In all those years, there were many times when I could almost smell him in the air, and he would not even be on the same planet We became *Anomes* for a reason. We did not discover you and Carisia and Lu'ria until we came back together for a reason. We were older... stronger... more mature... more knowledgeable. I have not told... I have not told Andro but I..."

Ne'Veha looked at her. "What?"

"He so hates being compared to his father." Sadi said with a smile. "I don't know how to tell him that I feel like there will be one more who will join us and complete us and share our lives together." She met Ne'Veha's dark orbs. "You know the star on my... on my tattoo?"

Ne'Veha grinned and stepped closer to her. "Intimately." She answered with a seductive lilt to her voice. "I have committed every line to memory."

Sadi grinned back at her. "A five pointed star has always had significant meaning to me, almost mystical in nature really. It stems from something my mother left for me. It was a five pointed broach that my father said had been passed down through her family. It was the only thing she had left from her family when she met my father. There are five points of our star *SirsanGai* with Andro in the center. We are still missing a single point. Just like his father and mothers, there will be one more that will be with us." She said softly.

"So you think there is one more that will be with us after Lu'ria then?" Ne'Veha asked softly her voice sounding almost agreeable.

Sadi cocked her head slightly at her tone. "You... you believe it... you sense it as well don't you?"

Ne'Veha nodded slowly. "Carisia and I have felt it. It is what we were talking about when Andro was entertaining you in the shower the other evening." She said with a knowing smile for they had heard the cries of pleasure Sadi was filling their room with. "The closer we get to Lu'ria, the stronger our Mindvoice connection and bond becomes, but it still lacks something. We decided that it could only mean that there is still someone who has not come into our lives yet. We did not feel it was appropriate to bring up just yet even though we knew both of you must have felt it as well."

Sadi nodded slowly. "Andro... he tries so hard to be different from his father and I don't want to tell him how close he actually is, at least in some respects."

"I only... I have never met his father... but I have seen him on the Netnews." Ne'Veha said. "Andro... he seems darker in certain ways."

Sadi nodded. "There is a piece of his mind that he keeps locked away even from me. I think Elynth is the only one who knows what resides there, and I think it has to do with all of us. At least in part. He's embarrassed to admit that he feels what we feel. His Lycavorian and Spartan sense of honor."

"Then the part of Carisia and I that feels empty... even now... you feel it also? He feels it but will not speak of it?" Ne'Veha asked her.

Sadi nodded. "Yes." She answered.

Ne'Veha nodded. "I think all of us should speak of it." She said. "You and I... perhaps Lu'ria when we find her... we are not ashamed to speak of it. Carisia may feel somewhat reserved due to her upbringing but even she feels it and will talk of it. We must never keep what we feel from each other my love."

Sadi nodded motioning with her head to where Andro sat. "I know he feels it... but he will never say anything. He feels... he feels like he is betraying us if he does. We will have to work on him. I do know he finds it somewhat overwhelming that we... all of us... that we could desire him and only him and that like his mothers we are not jealous of each other. That is something he doesn't understand."

Ne'Veha turned back to look at him on the couch as well. "What I feel now... for him... for you and Carisia and Lu'ria... it will only grow stronger I know. Even as quickly as things have come together, it feels so natural and meant to be. I can feel the changes inside me Sadi. I can feel the changes growing stronger every day." Ne'Veha spoke softly. "My senses are more acute, I'm stronger, faster..."

Sadi nodded. "That is because of what you share physically with Andro. His DNA... his blood is bonding with yours. The changes are subtle but they do happen."

"Will they continue to change me?" Ne'Veha asked turning back to look at her.

Sadi shook her head. "Perhaps a little more, but nothing like if Andro actually turned you no."

"Will... will he... will he ask me for that?" Ne'Veha asked softly.

"That is not my decision *SirsanGai*." Sadi answered. "We love you for who you are right now. Turning you will not change whom you are inside, only what you are capable of. Andro lives by the same rule as his father, and it is a rule that many of the Lycavorian people have adopted since his father's return. Never without their consent and only in times of life or death."

"But... but what if I choose this?" Ne'Veha asked.

Sadi shrugged. "Then it is different." She answered with a grin. "But it is not something we need to worry about right now."

"My mind has... I was never a very good Mindvoicer Sadi." Ne'Veha said. "Until... until I began to share in your dreams."

"We did not do that on purpose *SirsanGai*." Sadi spoke with an embarrassed look.

Ne'Veha chuckled. "I know... but it was glorious nonetheless. Even more so now that I have experienced it for real. Now... it is like our minds are one Sadi. We can sense each other's thoughts and emotions to a large degree. It is illuminating what we share and I can not think of ever being without it." She said with a shy seductive smile. "I... I have spoken with my mother Sadi." She said after a moment.

Sadi looked up and met her eyes. "How did she take the news?"

"Surprisingly... incredibly well." Ne'Veha answered. "I think much of her distaste for others comes from my father. When she saw me... heard my words... discovered what he did with his own mother, she was very upset. She... she wanted to know if she could meet Andro. Talk with him."

Sadi smiled. "You know how Andro views family Ne'Veha. You can see it within the corridors of his mind. He will never refuse your mother."

Ne'Veha nodded her head. "I know." She said. She sipped her tea and looked at this stunning blond female wolf. She felt warmth sweep through her inside as she remembered the way Sadi had made her feel. Sadi had explored every crevice of her lithe elven body and done so with great gusto, driving Ne'Veha to heights of passion that were only surpassed when she was in Andro's arms. Ne'Veha looked into her jungle green eyes. "Do you remember your mother Sadi?"

Sadi shook her head slowly. "She died when I was very young. I can remember vaguely what she looked like, but we have plenty of images of her, and I know she was very beautiful."

Ne'Veha grinned. "It seems you got her genes in that regard. Deliciously so."

Sadi smiled at her. "My father truly loved her." She said. "I don't think he will ever take another mate now. He... he is gun-shy so to speak after what my stepmother did... and part of him has always loved my mother. Even though she told him to find another woman before she died I don't believe he ever will. Not now."

"What about other family members?" Ne'Veha asked.

Sadi nodded. "My grandparents on my father's side lived on Apo Prime for a time before they passed from this life... my mother never had grandparents. At least not that my father and I ever knew about."

"Did they die?" Ne'Veha asked.

Sadi nodded. "I believe so. He never met them and she did not speak of them very often. I know they escaped from a High Coven prison camp when my mother was very small. I believe they died shortly after. Relatives raised my mother here on Apo Prime when she finally arrived here. It was shortly after Apo Prime

was named as our new homeworld and things were still very confusing. I never really delved too deeply into her history, especially after she died. It was too... it was too painful even when I was older.”

“Forgive me my love.” Ne'Veha said quickly.

Sadi took her hand and squeezed it. “It is alright.” She said. “My father remembers the happy times and that is what he shares with me and my brothers. We...”

“Sadi... you, Andro and Ne'Veha should probably come up here.” Carisia’s voice carried over the intercom.

Sadi looked at Ne'Veha and they both turned and headed back up the small flight of stairs into the expanse of the very advanced and large *STRIKER* cockpit.

“On our way *Enylarcopri*.” Sadi said.

[*You will have to tell us what it is you feel about this fifth and final point of our star Sadi.*] Ne'Veha told her as they moved forward. [*I know I feel it as well... and Carisia as well.*].

[*I will... don't worry.*] Sadi answered. [*When it is just us.*]

The pilot and co-pilot would sit next to each other surrounded by multiple monitors and consoles. A small engineering station behind the pilot could be used for the optional Union engineer when they traveled on the ships. Carisia didn't pause and rose from the co-pilot's seat as Sadi settled into the pilot's huge chair. Carisia was an adequate pilot, but nowhere in the same league as Sadi or Ne'Veha and she moved to the engineer's station as Ne'Veha settled into the co-pilot's seat. The two pilot's seats whirred as they conformed to the two females that now occupied them, all of their bio-signatures having been automatically programmed into the ship's computer.

“Carisia... what did you discover?” Sadi asked as she scanned the instruments all around her.

“Look at the long range sensors Sadi.” Carisia spoke as Andro entered the cockpit now. “Bearing one four seven.”

Sadi touched her console and brought up the long range sensors on the monitor between the seats just as Andro was kneeling between her and Ne'Veha's seats. Sadi's eyes grew wide when the sensor screen came alive with contacts. Lots of contacts. The *STRIKERs* throughout the entire fleet, including the *STRIKER ATs*, had some of the finest sensor arrays in use for their class ship and they had unbelievable range, something that was kept very quiet even within the small family of *STRIKER* pilots.

“Whoa!” Sadi exclaimed as her fingers danced across the console.

“What are they?” Andro asked as Carisia moved up behind him.

Ne'Veha was working her console with practiced ease. While she had never flown a *STRIKER* before, it had almost the exact sensor package of her beloved *DEVASTATOR*-Class Heavy Fighter Bomber and she fit into the role easily now.

“Kavalian.” Ne'Veha answered her dark eyes studying the sensor display. “Looks like an entire Fleet Group plus some. I'm picking up over a hundred and twenty warships. Frontline ships by the look of them.”

“Out here?” Andro asked with some surprise in his voice.

“We are in The Wilds my love.” Sadi told him turning in her chair. “We may adhere to the unwritten rule of no warships in The Wilds... but the Kavalians obviously do not.”

“Course?” Andro asked.

“Heading 67412 point three.” Ne'Veha answered. “Twenty-two light years away and moving on a pseudo reciprocal heading. They are moving oddly... staggered and spread out. As if they do not want to draw attention to themselves.”

“They can't see us right?” Andro asked.

Sadi shook her head. “They have nothing that can penetrate our Shrouds.” She answered. “At least that we know of.”

“Sadi... focus and align the port array and direct it at Iraruzu.” Carisia said. “It's what I was doing when I detected them. I thought I saw something there in orbit before they showed up.”

Sadi adjusted her controls once more. “*SirsanGai*... feed another sixteen percent power to the port array.” She spoke.

Ne'Veha nodded and her fingers slid along the console. “Done.”

All of them watched as the greenish red planet came into view on the holomonitor. Andro leaned forward. “This is Iraruzu?” He asked.

Sadi nodded slowly. "One of the many havens for the scum of the universe." She replied as she recalled the intelligence reports they had on this world. "It has a number of medium sized settlements, and a good sized spaceport, but the only types that go here are those who don't want to be found or those who don't mind breaking the law."

Carisia nodded. "Mercenaries. Slavers. Bounty Hunters. You name your poison and they are on this planet."

"It is also a hub for intelligence gathering." Ne'Veha spoke. "Having the Drow set up a settlement here was ingenious." Andro looked up into her dark brown orbs and grinned widely. Ne'Veha blushed even under her dark tan and turned away quickly. "Swimming in your mind and thoughts while you sleep is..." She spoke in a whisper.

"It's divine." Carisia finished her statement pushing up against Andro from behind.

Andro leaned over to the side and nuzzled Ne'Veha's elven ear and all of them saw her body shiver in delight. "You're right *SirsanGai*." He said finally. "They're moving away from Iraruzu though?"

Sadi nodded. "Yes. There's no way they could catch us even if..."

"There!" Carisia hissed as she pointed at the monitor. "I knew I saw something."

All of their eyes were drawn to the monitor now as the long range array detected and focused on the ship in orbit above Iraruzu. It was a medium sized ship, perhaps a light cruiser in size from the somewhat fuzzy picture. Andro's eyes narrowed considerably. "*KertaGai*... can you tell me what type of ship that is?" He asked.

"It's definitely Kavalian." Sadi said adjusting her sensors. "Got it! One *PURUSIAN*-Class Heavy Frigate. She's maintaining a low ecliptic orbit."

Andro shifted on his knees, his hand going between Carisia's thighs to steady himself as he dropped to both knees. "Why is a Kavalian heavy frigate in a low orbit around an essentially pirate planet?" He asked the question to no one in particular.

"They apparently do not care who they associate with it seems." Ne'Veha spoke.

"Maybe." Andro said softly his mind tossing about different ideas. "Sadi... initiate a secure transmission. Spartan Three Five. *Krypteria* Headquarters."

Sadi reached across her controls. "Why the *Krypteria* Andro?" She asked as she worked.

"Something is not right." Andro said. He held up the data pad. "I've been catching up on intelligence reports since we left. There has been an unusual amount of military activity by the Kavalians in The Wilds over the past four months."

"Who is Spartan Three Five?" Carisia asked.

"Armetus." Andro answered.

Sadi's head turned at the soft beeping. "Return verification says Spartan Three Five is off the grid." She spoke. "Spartan Three Six is available."

Martin nodded. "Do it. Sync it up."

The small holo disc on the center console came to life with the image of the dark haired young woman sitting at a desk. Carisia knew immediately she was a pureblood vampire. The woman looked up as the holo disc on her desktop activated on her end and she was staring at the images of Andro and his three mates in the image on her end.

"Andro?" Marci spoke surprised.

"Marci... where is Armetus?" Andro asked immediately.

"Andro where are you?" Marci asked. "The last anyone heard you and your Strike Wing had jumped out of the system."

"That is not important Marci." Andro told her. "Armetus?"

Marci shook her head. "A lot has happened since you left Andro." She answered quickly. "The *Krypteria* is stretched further than we have ever been. Armetus is leading the investigation into the events on Hadaria himself and..."

Andro's eyes narrowed. "What events on Hadaria?" He demanded.

"You... you don't know Andro?" Marci gasped. She sat back in her chair. "Of course you wouldn't know... there is a level six blackout and you are operating under radio silence yourself." She leaned forward again. "The Hadarian Arch Ministry and The Elder Council have removed your mother as Queen. They have

declared themselves independent of the Lycavorian Union. They even sent three squads of their Elder Militia here to Earth and then they tried to kidnap your brother and sister!”

“What?” Andro gasped in shock.

Marci nodded but held up her hand. “Colonel Thoti and your mother stopped them... and none of the Hadarians survived. Chief Minister Wiktor and Elder Buonau wanted to hold your mother for murder and a bunch of other trumped up charges. Your father used a Mark II NB to appear in the chamber and tell them that would not be a good idea. Anja has initiated a Shining Path and it’s already nearly twenty hours in.”

“The Hadarians are founding members of the Union!” Andro declared. “Have they lost their minds? They can’t leave the Union!”

Marci nodded. “It appears so. They’ve announced a new government has been formed. It is pretty much a religious dictatorship. And they have announced that the KFI has stepped in to provide them full backing and recognition as well as support.”

“The Kavalians?” Andro snarled as another alarm bell in his head began ringing oh so loudly.

Marci nodded quickly. “That came as quite a shock to all of us and Deia ordered Armetus to discover how that escaped our notice. They have at least a full squad of troops on Hadaria along with a senior military officer who apparently is the liaison from the KFI. We are trying to discover just how they got into the Union to begin with. This whole thing stinks to the heavens as Armetus spoke and it has obviously been going on for quite some time. They set your mother up Andro. They set her up and stabbed her in the back sure as *sibfla*.”

“What... what did my father do?” Andro asked.

“He told Wiktor and Buonau if they wanted their independence they could have it. He told them in three days not a single Union Spartan or ship will be on Hadaria. They actually thought they were going to impound all of our equipment and ships can you believe that?” Marci answered shaking her head. “He was pissed off big time. He told them if they attempted to hold Anja he would kick them into the next universe!”

Andro couldn’t suppress his grin. That definitely sounded like something his father would say. He shook his head and looked at Marci. “Marci... without telling you exactly where we are... we are picking up an unusual amount of Kavalian activity in The Wilds close to the Bontawillian border. Have you gotten any reports recently from our Drow outposts in the area?”

Marci shook her head. “No. Nothing out of the ordinary that I’m aware of.”

“There is a Drow outpost on Iraruzu correct?” Andro asked. “Have they reported the Kavalian Frigate that is now in low orbit around that planet?”

Marci looked at him in the transmission. “Iraruzu?” She asked. “No. Hold on a minute.” She turned and pulled a data pad from the side of her desk, reading as a strange expression formed on her face. “Andro... that is where Walter went. He took Senator Daba and several Dragoons with him.”

Andro looked at Sadi quickly as more alarm bells began to go off in his head and they were almost painful. “Marci... we received a transmission on the *SCIMITAR* from Walter on the old AFC channel. The message stated his ship was down and destroyed but that they were alive.”

“Destroyed?” Marci gasped. “Destroyed by what? Why didn’t we get this? What...”

“They obviously did not have access to a long range transmitter, or something else is preventing them from contacting anyone. The AFC channels are very old emergency channels as you know. The only reason we received it is because it was directed solely at the *SCIMITAR* and Sa’sur and I have sharp people working on her.” Andro said. “The message states he is on Iraruzu Marci. That his ship is destroyed. And now we discover there is a Kavalian warship in low orbit above that planet! We are still too far to get detailed scans of the planet itself but we can detect the ship in orbit.”

“I’m also picking up Deutrino particles.” Ne’Veha spoke now. “The moon of Iraruzu mines Deutrino, but there should not be particles of it filling the space around Iraruzu. That is what is blocking long range transmissions. And they appear to be focused somehow. I can’t tell because we are still too far away but it definitely is not normal to the area.”

Marci listened to her finish and then turned and pulled up something on her desk monitor. “They met their report time and nothing was out of the ordinary. All of the Drow outposts have reported the same thing. Business as usual. The last one reported in twelve hours ago.” She explained.

“When is the next scheduled report time?” Sadi asked now as she could feel Andro’s apprehension and anxiousness. All of them could.

“Not for another two days.” Marci replied. “At least for Iraruzu.”

“*Nubou!*” Andro snapped loudly as a light bulb went off and it all came together in his mind. “Marci... contact them all now! Do it now! Get status reports and updates from them and tell all of them to go to high alert!”

“Andro what...”

“Don’t you see?” Andro exclaimed. “Their embassy on Earth! The farce with Lisisa! They have been setting themselves up! The events on Hadaria! The clone of my mother! This attack on Iraruzu! They are moving against the Union and they are doing so from the shadows to take us by surprise!”

“Andro there is no evidence to suggest they are targeting our outposts in The Wilds. All of them have...” Marci began.

“Damn it Marci!” Andro almost yelled. “As Crown Prince I am giving you a direct order to contact all of our Drow outposts immediately. Drop what you are doing and make contact with them yourself! Report back to me and me alone! And make sure no one knows what you are doing! If I am wrong then fine... and I hope I am wrong!”

Marci sat there and stared at the screen. In all her years and experience in the *Krypteria* and dealing with Androcles Leonidas she had never once seen him conduct himself or use the power of his title to accomplish anything. If he was doing so now... it meant something was very bad. Marci nodded. “I’ll take care of it right now Andro.” She stated evenly. “Where are you Andro?”

Andro looked at her image on the screen. There was no point in trying to hide where he was from her... not now. “We are...” He looked at Sadi.

Sadi turned back to her controls and adjusted something on her console. “I can stretch our NAVCOM to max Andro... it will get us within six hours with a full power Hyper Fusion Jump but it will burn out our LSD Fusion Coils in the process.” She stated confidently turning back to him.

“We can replace LSD Coils *KertaGai*.” Andro said softly. “We can not replace Walter or Lu’ria.”

“Ne’Veha... plot the jump!” Sadi spoke.

“Marci... we will be six hours from Iraruzu in minutes.” Andro told her turning back to the monitor. “You have six hours to contact all of them and get in touch with me before we arrive! Use my Spartan Secure Channel. I need to know if we are walking into a trap!”

Marci nodded. “I’ll be back to you in three!” She stated. “Andro... permission to put the... permission to raise Alert Level of the Fleet?”

Andro shook his head. “No. Not yet.” He answered immediately. “We need to know what is happening first! Can you get word to my father?”

“I can try.” Marci answered. “He hasn’t answered his COM in nearly four days. He’s in Sparta and he obviously used the Mark II but no one has seen him in several days. The Level Six Blackout also disables the COMs for your mothers if they are in a secure location which they are.”

Andro didn’t hesitate. “Contact my Uncle Danny.” He ordered. “His COM is one of four that is always active, no matter the Blackout! Have him get in touch with my father once you find out what you can.”

Marci nodded. “I’m on it Andro.” She stated. “Good luck.”

Andro looked at Sadi as the holoimage of Marci faded. “Take us to Iraruzu *KertaGai*.” He spoke. “With all possible haste! Lu’ria is in trouble... I can feel it.”

“Andro what if...?” Carisia asked gently.

Andro rose to his feet now and looked down into her Maya blue eyes. “We would know *Enylarcopri*.” He said softly. He leaned over and kissed her tenderly, taking her face in his large hands. “We must prepare Anthar and Elynth.”

SPARTA OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

For'mya practically cooed out her enchantment as Martin’s arms engulfed both her and Aricia in a powerful embrace of love. He leaned over and firmly nuzzled her elegant elven ears and Aricia’s neck and cheek until their legs were weak and both of them were barely able to stand upright. For'mya knew this was his

apology for what had happened, and what had been happening for the last few months and no one had really taken notice. It was not his fault after all she knew, he had no idea that the darkness had infected him and there was nothing he could have done about it. His simple powerful embrace and gentle caress now, feeling him resonate so brilliantly within Mindvoice as he always did and sensing the shame he felt over his actions made For'mya silently chastise herself for ever doubting his love for her... for all of them. She drew deeply of his minty scent, letting it filter throughout her entire being and seeing Aricia close her eyes in bliss as she did the same thing. Twenty-five years together and all it took was the smell of him nearby and that elicited some of the most divine sensations For'mya and the others had ever felt.

For'mya looked up into his eyes as he drew their heads away from his chest and looked at them. His dark eyes were filled with shame and hurt at what he had done, but For'mya and Aricia both knew it was not their Martin Leonidas who had done these things and they held only love for him in their hearts.

"I... I am so sorry." Martin spoke softly. "I..."

Aricia reached up with a slim finger and placed it to his lips silencing his words. For'mya pressed tighter to him and shook her head as her arm went around Aricia's waist. "That was not you Martin Leonidas." For'mya said softly. "We know that."

"I... I should have been stronger." Martin said. "I should have..."

"Beloved... you are not impervious to everything bad that inhabits this universe." Aricia told him.

Martin looked into her azure eyes. "Our... our son!" He gasped.

Aricia shook her head once more. "Our son is stronger than even we know." Aricia told him. "He knows what happened Martin... for it was he who saw it first."

"He still won't answer his COM." Martin said.

"Give him time Martin." For'mya spoke. "He has discovered much about himself these last weeks as well I think. You will see... things will be fine."

"Beloved... why have you been at Thermopylae these last days?" Aricia asked him. "What have you been doing? Helen said you were... she said you were learning but she would not tell us anymore than that."

Martin nodded. "I have been learning." He answered. "Learning many things. And I have much more to learn when the time comes." He leaned over and laid a blistering kiss of love on For'mya, pulling her tightly against his powerful body. Her supple elven frame molded to his rock hard body like clay and she whimpered in delight, responding as she always responded to his kisses, with equal fervor as she allowed his tongue to claim and dominate her own. When he pulled away after a long moment Martin repeated the event with Aricia. He pulled her firm body tightly as For'mya's flushed face looked on, her arm still around Aricia's waist, until finally he pulled away from her leaving Aricia equally out of breath and worked up. "Have we heard from Anja?" He asked.

"Not yet." For'mya answered as she got her raging hormones under control. She may have been still a week away from fully entering Phase, but with the kisses he had just given her and Aricia, For'mya had no doubts that one of them would be pregnant after this Phase passed and she so wanted to give him a daughter. "Your transmission shocked everyone. Including us. We didn't think you were aware of what was going on."

Martin nodded slowly. "My father's tomb is an excellent dampening field for those of us who can Mindvoice. However... it does not affect Wayonn or the Pralors in a similar fashion. He told me."

"Pralors?" Aricia gasped her eyes wide.

"Martin... you... you have been with a Pralor?" For'mya matched Aricia's surprise. "How... how is that possible?"

Martin nodded. "The last of his kind apparently." He replied. "I will tell you everything when we have time. You will... you will be amazed at what he has shown me. Told me. You will... you will also be frightened, for not everything he told me was pleasant. He..."

Martin's words died as Deia's entrance into the office stopped him from continuing. All of them turned as she walked in, her face angry. Martin knew his Aunt was a passionate woman when it came to the Union. She had sworn to continue what her sister and his grandfather had begun and since Martin's return it seemed that there were far more people who wanted to take what they had away from them. Deia was a career politician, but her great nephew's return to lead their people had made her so very happy and she and him thought alike far more often than most people realized. Martin was her link, her connection to her lost sister and the man who Eliani had so loved. Resumar had made her a powerful voice within Lycavorian culture, and that

voice was one the Coven had taken away from her for a time. It was a voice that she had regained by the actions of Martin's father, and continued to have even to this day. She marched right up to Martin and met his eyes while taking his hands in hers.

"You are fully yourself again *Mandri*?" She asked calmly.

Martin nodded. "I am *Tenna*." He answered.

Deia nodded and reached up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "A fine display with the Mark II. It sent them for a loop and gave us the time we need to discover what is going on and how this happen." She told him as she moved to her desk and turned back to face him. "I've always known Wiktor was a shrewd *upae*, this only proves it."

"We can do nothing Deia?" Aricia asked.

Deia shrugged her slim shoulders. "What could we do?" She asked. "The Hadarians are founding members of the Union. They were one of the first races Resumar approached during our years as slaves. Wiktor would know the Union Constitution just as well as I. She may not have had a hand in writing it, but rest assured to pull this off she had to have studied it very extensively. There is nothing in the Union Charter that says they can not leave whenever they wish."

"How many others are going to follow them?" Martin asked moving to the couch near the window and lowering his large frame into it. Aricia and For'mya dropped themselves onto the couch on either side of him pressing close as his male wolf aura caressed their female wolf senses.

Deia shook her head as she took the chair opposite the couch. "Follow them?" She asked in surprise. "*Mandri* there is not a Union Senator or politician that does not know what Chief Minister Wiktor is, or Buonau for that matter. None of them want any part of a Theocracy with them in charge." Deia leaned back in the chair. "I doubt very much they will even acknowledge them as a legitimate government. Those Hadarians who live here in Sparta practically stormed the Hadarian embassy in a fit of rage when this broke four hours ago." She reached across the small table and handed Martin the data pad. "They are demanding that Wiktor and Buonau cease their activities and announce that Anja is Queen again."

Martin shook his head. "It's gone too far." He said softly. "Even if they were of the mind to listen to their citizens... they couldn't now."

Deia nodded. "I know. Riall reported in as well. Not a single Healer among the Union ranks has requested to return. The Hadarian Elder Militia has severely curtailed the Netnews on Hadaria but they are only so large, and if what has come out in the last few hours is any kind of barometer, not many agree with what is happening."

Martin lowered the pad and handed it to For'mya. "They've been planning this for some time." He spoke. "And the Kavalians have been involved. It is the only way Rinard could have gotten the location of the Coven Cloning Facility. Yuriko has been in command of one of our *OMEN* ships ever since our 'falling out'. One of her tasks was to monitor that facility."

"You mean... you mean all of that with Yuriko wasn't true?" Deia asked in surprised.

"It was the only way to insure she could operate within The Wilds and High Coven space with any kind of freedom." Martin replied. "They were never able to determine who assaulted the facility, but now we know who and why."

"We should send reinforcements to Hadaria." Aricia spoke quickly. "Anja will not ask for them... she is too proud, but after what they attempted with Retta and Calyb I wouldn't put anything past them now."

For'mya nodded. "I agree. Especially if the KFI is openly assisting them."

"It must be tearing her apart to have to leave." Deia said gently. "She has come to love Hadaria and her people almost as much as being wolf and living here in Sparta."

Martin nodded. "I could hear it in her voice." He said. "I do not want to have to force her to leave, but she can't stay there. They won't allow it and she will be in too much danger now that the Kavalians are involved."

"Atropos will see to it she leaves Martin. Even if he has to force her." Aricia said. "He is my brother and he knows how we all view Anja."

"That's what I'm counting on." Martin said. "Resumar has made it to the Mindvoice ship. Wayonn was able to tell me that. He could not breach the Mindvoice shielding of the new ship because of the distance but..."

"Wayonn?" For'mya asked. "This is the Pralor Martin?"

“Wait a moment?” Deia interrupted. “A Pralor? You have been talking with an actual Pralor these past days? *Son vada carians!* I thought they were extinct Mandri! We thought they were extinct. Avi told us...”

“Avi didn’t know.” He said nodding as he leaned forward on the couch. “He... he was Canth’s father actually.” He spoke.

“Canth’s father... he still lives?” Deia gasped. She had know Canth personally, met him on several occasions even. “But that would... that would make him older than even Aikiro!”

“Yes I know.” Martin said.

“*Mandri*... where... where has he been all these years? What has he been doing?” Deia gasped.

“What happen with me has to do with the Pralor brothers that we are all descended from. Aikiro’s family. Our family. It seems the hatred between the two is still very much alive and well even though it is one sided. It is a very long story and at times very confusing. I will need to sit with Helen and try and make sense of it somehow.” Martin got up and moved to the coffee counter and began pouring himself a mug. “Aikiro’s High Coven Commandos succeeded in attacking Resumar’s teams as they were landing. They were able to kill a dragon and the pilots, but Resumar’s team is still intact, albeit very short on explosives. Wayonn told me they have met up with friends of sorts but I don’t know what that means... and...”

“Vonis!” Deia started now.

“What?” Martin asked as they all looked at her.

Deia scrambled to her feet. “It didn’t hit me until you just said friends!” She started to her desk and quickly settled behind the monitor and began pulling up reports. “Armetus told me of Vonis’s last report and that it had sounded strange. He didn’t question it however since Isabella is the one who gave him his orders. The High Coven Insurgency Leader... this General...”

“We know this General was Lucia Moran Deia.” For'mya said. “Helen told us.”

Deia nodded. “Yes... I know. Vonis reported that this General... Lucia we all now know... she sent the bulk of their fleet ships to watch over an important asset that was now deep in Kavalian territory on a special mission. He wouldn’t say what it was... only that they were moving there with all haste. He said Lucia told them they needed to keep her mother from discovering it.”

Martin closed his eyes and sighed. He shook his head slowly. “She has worked toward one goal for the better part of her life, against all odds and in the heart of those who would have killed her without hesitation had they known what her true intent was.” He said softly. “And that goal was to be with my daughter.”

“What do you mean Beloved?” Aricia asked.

“Lucia Moran.” Martin spoke looking up. “She was touched by the same darkness that infected her mother, the same one that almost got me. She reached through Mindvoice and grabbed hold of Zarah’s essence to help her, to sustain her. They were... they were born on the exact day and the exact time to the second, Lucia and Zarah.” He said. “Precisely the same time. It forged a link between them in Mindvoice from across the light years that no one could have detected. It is something Wayonn told me. That is what Lucia Moran reached for that day, for she was terrified by what the darkness... what Xaxon showed Yuri and what she saw. Zarah was the only thing keeping her sane... and now that they are together... nothing will ever separate them.”

“Lucia... she saved Zarah’s life Martin.” For'mya spoke softly.

Martin nodded. “Oh... I know. I have no intention of trying to force them apart. Ever. I owe her a debt I can never repay.” He saw Aricia and For'mya relax and breathe easier at his words and he knew then how badly he had acted these last months.

“Can Resumar still destroy the ship *Mandri*?” Deia asked.

Martin nodded his head. “He is reviewing the information he has right now. I have no idea how Wayonn was able to touch Res over so great a distance, I can only assume he was using something similar to our Mark II NB, but much stronger. He wasn’t able to actually communicate with him because of the MV shields this ship has in place as I said... but he could see things. He knew things that only Resumar could know. The High Coven Commando squads got away pretty much intact, but Resumar also has the help of Kavalian rebels now. The Avatar on this MV ship is working with Avi to come up with a plan. Especially now that we know the Kavalians have been helping Wiktor and Buonau, I wouldn’t trust them as far as I could throw them. Once Res has secured his position enough and come up with a plan I’m sure he’ll contact us.”

Deia met his eyes. “Then I can tell this Ambassador Matuarr to shove it up his *mida* when he demands again to know why we have a warship ship in Kavalian space near Ritaah?” She declared.

“They know?” Martin asked stunned.

For'mya shook her head. “They are reaching Martin Leonidas.” She stated coming to her feet. “I was the one he brought this to. He was trying to probe for the truth of it. Our Shrouds are too good for them to penetrate. They do not know for sure and it was a ploy to deflect from the fact we noticed four of his staff are missing though we have said nothing.”

Martin looked at her. “Missing? What do you mean missing?”

“He was trying to hide that four members of his embassy staff are still missing.” For'mya stated.

Martin looked at her. “Who is missing?”

Aricia nodded. “Commander Pian, Co-Ambassador Jiss and Jalersi. And your nephew Karun.” She stated. “When they finally allowed our crews into their embassy to help them, a very promising *Krypteria* agent was among them. All were accounted for except them. This Matuarr character told us they were dead.”

“*Son vada carians*... I have been such a fool! They have been playing us all along!” He exclaimed. “So where are they then?” Martin asked.

“We are still trying to figure that out.” Deia spoke quickly. “Armetus and the *Krypteria* are stretched very thin Martin. So much happening at once. Most of his agents here on Earth are taking part in the investigation of the High Coven attack and...”

Martin shook his head with confidence Deia saw. Another sign that her nephew was once more the Martin she knew. Decisive and quick thinking. “Contact him and have them pulled off that.” He ordered without hesitation. “Allow the local authorities to conduct that investigation. We know what Aikiro was after and she didn't succeed. She only wanted what was on City Ship 41. She's dead and Andro nearly whacked Yuri... there is no reason to commit *Krypteria* resources to that. They failed and they are gone.”

“Are we certain of that my love?” For'mya asked.

Martin moved to the window in Deia's office and stared out across the expanse of Sparta. He nodded his head slowly. “I saw... I saw in his mind what Andro did to her when we were at SODRAG and...” Aricia stepped up to him when he stopped talking and she took his arm seeing the pain on his face at the memory.

“It is the past and it was not you Beloved.” She said softly. “Let it go.”

Martin turned and looked at her azure blue eyes and saw the love they held for him. He cut his eyes to see that same love and devotion in For'mya's beautiful dark brown orbs as well. He nodded slowly and turned to gaze out over the city once more. “I'm certain.” He spoke finally. “Andro mangled her but good... and unless she got aide within the hour she would have died. That we didn't find her body means she made it off Earth with Moran, but she's going to be out of it for a while if they saved her.”

“We confirmed that Aikiro and this Admiral Tesand are dead.” Deia spoke. “Helen destroyed Aikiro's remains before we could confirm it, but I will not question the Feravomir. Tesand's remains we found among the wreckage of the transport they tried to land near Dragon Mountain. That would leave Moran in charge until Yuri recovers. If she survived at all.”

Martin turned and looked at her. “He's running *Tenna*.” He said. “They are heading back into High Coven space.”

“How do you know for sure? The Commandos are still active on Ritaah. Returning to High Coven space takes them further away.” Deia asked.

“It's what I would do.” Martin said. “Moran is many things but he is a competent military commander.” Martin said. “He wouldn't stick around in Union space any longer than necessary, especially if Yuri was seriously injured. They would need to get her into a Blood Vat wouldn't they?”

Deia nodded. “That... that would be the normal procedure for critically injured vampires yes. It speeds the re-growth of tissue.”

Martin nodded. “The Coven Commandos would be their best troops. And they would have some sort of plan to get back. They had to have known they could never remain on Earth, even if they succeeded in what they wanted. The technology we have gained from CS41 has allowed us to improve our Shrouds well beyond what the Coven has. They would not be able to remain undetected for long that deep in Kavalian space and Moran's knows it. No... his people have another way home once they are done.”

“You think they are after the new MV ship?” Aricia asked.

Martin nodded. "If not the entire ship, than at least data modules or something they can use to weaponize. Res, Athani and I talked of this concern. He knows what to do." Martin looked up quickly. "I... I didn't think to ask." Martin said swiftly. "Duewa?"

For'mya nodded. "She is recovering nicely." She replied. "Thoti bit her with barely enough time before she bled out, but he saved her life. She is at the hospital under heavy *Durcunusaan* Guard."

Martin nodded. "Not exactly what I had envisioned when I told him to try and get her to see us for who we were and not for whom she thought we were." He spoke.

"I think she discovered that the night after Thoti claimed her Martin." For'mya said with a knowing smile. "She has been different since then."

Martin looked at his Aunt. "Make sure she is covered 24/7 *Tenna*. I wouldn't put it past her mother to try a snatch and grab with her fool Militia."

Deia nodded. "Buonau has already demanded through the Galactic Courts to speak with her or have her released." Deia said. "I will let Thoti know and he said he would pass on the information. You are not going to go off and do something totally insane for what Buonau has done are you?"

"No. Anything I do now would only hamper what Anja will try and do as she pulls off Hadaria." He answered. "Though I did consider it very briefly. Let Thoti remain with Duewa for now. She will need his strength to adjust. Keep the little ones at the bunker with Dasha until we are sure this is over."

Aricia nodded. "Already done."

"*Melda Min?* Bella?" He asked.

"We have not heard from Isabella since she left with Andro, Zarah and the others aboard the *SCIMITAR*." For'mya answered him. "I spoke with Dysea yesterday morning very briefly. Normya was very upset and the communication was short."

Martin nodded. "That is where Andro will take them." He said softly.

They all looked at him. "Martin... how do you know this?" Deia asked.

"I know my son." Martin stated confidently. "Andro does not think in the here and now *Tenna*. He thinks as if he is playing Chess or Pysin Squares." He told them referring to the now ancient but still popular Earth game of strategy and the supremely difficult Algolian Tactical Game. Pysin Squares pitted up to six individuals against each other in a test of wits and skill using simulated playing pieces. Andro hadn't lost a game of Pysin Squares in nearly ten years and he had played with his father at least three or four times a month before everything had gone to shit. They both loved the game.

"He is always plotting two or three moves ahead of himself." Martin continued. "If he saw this coming, and he was helping his mother before, then he would have already arranged and spoken with her and Cha'talla to allow him to bring the Coven riders and Dragons there to finish their training."

"I will contact Dysea right away." Aricia said.

"No." Martin spoke quickly. "She has been among Cha'talla and the others all this time and no harm has come to her or Normya. I also know that Normya and Tir'ut have become husband and wife."

Deia's eyes went wide even as Aricia and For'mya gasped in surprise. "*Mandri...* are you... you can't be serious?"

Martin nodded. "Another little tidbit of information that I picked up while Andro and I were fighting. I think all of us are going to have to learn how to shield much better when our emotions run high."

"You... you don't sound upset or disapproving Beloved." Aricia said moving closer to him.

Martin shook his head as he squeezed her hand and drew her closer, reaching out to pull For'mya close to him as well. He looked at them when he answered. "We agreed not to try and direct our children in what they do." He said. "I trust my daughter to know what she feels and to be intelligent enough to know if a male is trying to yank her chain. If she fell in love with this Tir'ut, then he is undoubtedly a fine young man."

"He is... he is an Immortal!" Deia said.

"He's only half Immortal *Tenna*." Martin told her looking up. "And do you think *Melda Min* would have allowed it if she suspected anything was amiss with Cha'talla and his bunch?" Martin shook his head. "No. I trust Normya completely. And if they had any sort of bad ideas towards either of them they would have acted before now."

"We must keep that from the Netnews for the time being." Deia spoke now thinking as a politician once more. "That is not news we need becoming public knowledge just yet."

Martin nodded. "I agree there. Those *nubous* scavengers have enough to report on."

Aricia and For'mya couldn't help but laugh softly at that remark. To them it was the most definitive sign that their Martin was himself once more. His distaste for anything to do with the Netnews was infamous throughout the Union.

"I will contact Armetus and direct him to reallocate his people." Deia said. "First and foremost we need to find our missing Kavalians and discover why Ambassador Matuarr is keeping that information from us."

"Could they... could they have used the Coven attack to hide the fact they wish to defect as Athani did?" For'mya asked.

"A Senior Kavalian Military Officer and Politician as well as Prefect Keleru's oldest daughter?" Deia asked moving from the chair around to her desk. "Not to mention our nephew *Mandri*? I find that to be quite the stretch."

"I'm discovering that nothing is a..." Martin began but stopped when Colonel Fache appeared in the doorway holding his finger to his ear.

"Stand by Spartan Seven, I have the King here." He spoke looking directly at Martin. "Milord... General Simpson on *Krypteria* Secure COM One three."

Martin tapped his jaw instantly. "One Three." He paused and nodded to Fache. "Go Danny." He spoke motioning for the others to do the same.

"Bout time you got your sorry ass back in the game!" Danny's voice boomed in their implants.

"I love you too ya ugly black bastard!" Martin snapped. "What do you want?"

"Marty... I'm with Isra at *Durcunusaan* Command. Roluth just landed as is chattering away about something being wrong at their home." Danny said.

Martin looked at Aricia and For'mya. "Like what?"

"He is telling Isra all the birds and insects are no longer talking in the mountains." Danny said. "And that they have guests in the house."

"Guests?" Martin asked.

Deia got to her feet behind her desk. "Has Ardis been found Daniel?" She asked quickly.

Martin looked at her. "Ardis?" He asked. "What about Ardis?"

"Your niece Ardis is the only one we have not been able to account for since the Coven attacks." Deia replied. "We have searched her apartment in Sparta, pretty much all of the city. We assumed she made her way to a secure facility but has not reported in yet. Tarifa is waiting at her home in case she appears there."

"Anuk is with her but I can't raise her on the COM Marty." Danny said. "The MV bubble around the base keeps me from contacting her that way as well. And if it was Ardis, Roluth wouldn't be so damn vague!"

Martin paused for a moment. He knew Danny hated to Mindvoice even though he was very proficient at it. If he was considering contacting his spunky red haired elven *Anome* via Mindvoice he was worried about her. "Dan... how long since you spoke with her last?" Martin asked.

"Nearly thirty-six hours." He answered immediately. "Since right before all this shit started happening! Something stinks brother! It stinks badly!"

"Danny... you grab Isra and a company of *Durcunusaan* and I'll meet you there!" Martin ordered instantly. "Come in from the west and keep Aelnala and Roluth away from the house."

"What? Why?" Danny demanded.

"If Tarifa sent Roluth for help it was because she was worried for his safety." Martin spoke. "And the only thing that would make her worry for his safety is T19s."

"Shit! Another Coven hit team with dragon killers!" Danny snarled. "We'll be gone in two minutes!"

Martin looked at Deia but Aricia cut him off. "I'm coming with you." She announced.

"I as well." For'mya declared.

Martin shook his head. "No. *Kinsoaurgai*... we can't all be there. Stay with Deia and find out what you can from the Kavalian Ambassador."

"I... I do not care for their kind Martin Leonidas." For'mya spoke. "They look at me... they look at me as if I am a piece of meat."

Martin moved closer to her and kissed her softly. "But at least you won't kill them if you lose your temper." He stated with a grin.

For mya couldn't help but chuckle and she nodded. "Yes... I see your point. Keep an open COM channel Martin. If there is more Coven in the city I will activate the reserves and send them to you at once."

Martin nodded. "Done." He kissed her firmly once more and then turned for the door. "Aricia... let's go!"

Aricia Leonidas had to practically run to keep up with her mate and King who had considerably longer legs.

THE WILDS

16.6 LY FROM BONTAWILLIAN BORDER

ARIZONA STRIKE GROUP

Miranda couldn't help but smile as she sat in her command chair on the bridge of the *ARIZONA* and watched as her crew, most of them hand picked, went about their duties with a sense of purpose and ease. The moment Ben had cut them loose; it had taken her only two hours to get the entire Strike Wing out of Dreamland and into open space. Three jumps later they were in The Wilds and had reached their position only an hour ago. Miranda had chosen this position and not the two light years from Kranek that Ben had wanted because it put them in place to respond to several different locations with only two or three LSD Jumps. As with all Union Military warships, their computers and engines allowed them to make longer jumps and be more precise in their calculations, yet the *ARIZONA* Class ships were exacting in the precision they could execute.

Miranda allowed herself to turn and look over where E'dira sat at her station, her long shimmering white hair pulled into a tight ponytail as she studied the charts from this area and others. She felt a wave of warmth sweep through her looking at the stunning Drow warrior, and Miranda knew she could hardly wait to get E'dira in bed. The tall Drow made her feel things that Miranda had thought she was no longer capable of and Ben's words to her came rushing back now. He was right she knew. This was perhaps the finest crew anywhere in the Union fleet, and they all looked to her for guidance. Steven, Zaala, E'dira, all of them had now wormed their way into her heart no matter how much she tried to hold them back. Ben was right damn him, she had a new family now, and Miranda Lorian was going to make sure that this time she protected them far better than she did the last family. It was almost as if she could feel the smiles and whispers of encouragement from those long dead now. Those she had served with and considered family. They were happy for her. Happy that she had once more rediscovered about herself what everyone else already knew. And they were happy that Miranda had finally allowed herself to love.

Love? Did she love E'dira? If the ache in her body to feel the Drow's touch upon her; to truly want to taste her ebony skin and explore every contour of her taut body; to explore what made her the woman she was; if these things were any indication... then yes, Miranda Lorian was in love. Madly in love. She wondered briefly what it was that E'dira had wanted to tell her before they were interrupted, though Miranda knew that no matter what it was it wouldn't matter or change how she felt. She...

Miranda saw E'dira's head come up suddenly as her consoles began to chime softly. Her amber colored eyes were moving over her triangular shaped control systems as she reached for her consoles. As Chief Tactical Officer, E'dira had absolute control over the *ARIZONA*'s vast weapons array, and as Miranda watched with nothing short of awe E'dira, gracefully took everything in with practiced ease.

"Something E'dira?" Miranda finally asked softly from her chair.

"Aft Lateral Sensors have detected a massive Hyper Matter Fusion spike one point three light years behind us." E'dira answered instantly. "Trying to localize it."

Miranda slid from her chair gracefully and covered the four-meter distance between them in a dozen steps. The CTO officer's stations was closest to hers and slightly in front and to the right to better facilitate communication between the captain and his weapons officer. Three months ago she wouldn't have been so informal, but now she stepped close to E'dira and found she wasn't ashamed of the fact that in essence she belonged to this woman already.

"Cause?" Miranda asked.

E'dira shook her head. "If I had to guess... I'd say a ship." She stated. "But nothing is showing up on the sensors."

Miranda turned to the main sensor operator across the bridge. "Position of that Kavalian fleet?" She barked.

"Maintaining base course Captain." The sensor operator responded. "All one hundred and twenty-three contacts."

Miranda turned back to E'dira. "So it's not one of them trying to sneak around." She said looking at E'dira.

"Not unless they have developed Shrouds and we did not know this. Running a Hyper Matter Fusion Recognition scan." E'dira said as her hands adjusted her consoles.

"You think it's a Union ship E'dira?" Miranda asked.

E'dira nodded. "The spike was too small to be a large ship, but large enough to register on our sensors."

"Well... you do have them tuned a lot tighter than normal." Miranda said. "I doubt the *HORNET* picked it up."

E'dira smiled almost shyly. "Yes... I suppose I do." She answered softly. "If it was an *AUTUMN MOON* the spike would have been larger. No... this is something smaller and the only ones with ships smaller than an *AUTUMN MOON* equipped with Shrouds are us and the Coven."

Miranda nodded. "And the only way that we wouldn't see the ship was if it was running Shrouded." She stated.

E'dira nodded. "Yes."

The panel to her left beeped and they turned to look at the results.

**-HYPER MATTER FUSION RECOGNITION SCANS COMPLETE. MATCH FOUND-
-WARNING! LEVEL TEN COMMAND CODE CLEARANCE REQUIRED-
-ENTER COMMAND CODE AUTHORIZATION-**

E'dira looked at Miranda who had moved even closer to her when she saw the small screen. "Level Ten?" She asked in surprise. "Level Ten is reserved for senior military officers and members of the Royal Family."

Miranda nodded. "Yes it is." She spoke leaning forward. "Enter Arizona one nine four one."

E'dira's amber eyes grew a little wider but she complied and typed in the code Miranda had given her. "*A l'phraktos*." She gasped at what came next. (By the gods)

**-COMMAND CODE ACCEPTED-
-LORIAN, MIRANDA J. CAPTAIN ULU ARIZONA-**

**-INQUIRY MATCH FOUND-
-HYPER MATTER FUSION RECOGNITION SCAN INDICATES INQUIRY IS SPARTAN 11-
-STRIKER DRAGON TRANSPORT ASSIGNED TO LEONIDAS, ANDROCLES, CROWN
-PRINCE OF LYCAVORIAN UNION-**

E'dira looked at Miranda then. "The Prince's *STRIKER*?" She asked. "I thought..."

Miranda nodded. "Yes... so did I." She stated moving even closer. "Can you extrapolate their heading?"

E'dira turned back to her console. "Now that we have confirmed the Hyper Matter Fusion signature yes." Her long fingered hands bounced deftly across all three of her consoles as she pulled up the information. "Their course would take them to... to Iraruzu." She answered turning to look at Miranda.

"Iraruzu?" She questioned E'dira. "That's nothing more than a haven for the scum of The Wilds." Miranda spoke. "Why would they be going there?" She turned away her mind working. "There's no indication that the rest of the *SCIMITAR*'s Strike Wing is with them?"

E'dira shook her head. "If they were, why would we pick up the just the *STRIKER*'s HFM and not the rest of them? And if my knowledge of LSD coils is accurate, in order to leave this sort of signature, they would have to burn out their coils. It would leave the LSD Drive totally depleted upon completion of the Jump. Zaala can confirm that for us, but I'm almost positive that is the case. This was no normal Jump they just executed."

"We should..." Miranda began but was interrupted by her sensor officer.

“Captain Lorian! That Kavalian Fleet has just shifted course and increased their speed!” The operator announced.

“Shifted to what?” Miranda barked.

“Their base course and speed now will take them directly to Kranek Captain!” The sensor officer answered turning to look at her. “They’ll arrive in seven hours and thirty-two minutes. They are burning away at full sublight speed Captain!”

Miranda stepped away from E'dira and looked at her chair. “Oh... I don't like that.” She stated softly. She turned back to E'dira. “Do we have anything on Iraruzu E'dira?” She asked.

E'dira shook her head. “Aside from the Drow outpost there no.” She replied.

“Shit!” Miranda swore. “We can't be a Guardian Angel if the one we are suppose to be guarding goes off on a joy ride!”

“Miranda...” E'dira asked softly. “Admiral O'Connor said we are to be on the watch for High Coven ships.” She said. “He said nothing about Kavalian.”

“Yes I know.” Miranda answered. “I just don't trust them anymore than I do the Coven.” She looked across the bridge. “Chief... I want a constant lock on those Kavalian ships. If one so much as farts in the wind I want to know about it!”

“Understood Captain!”

“And direct the Port Ventral Sensor Array on Kranek.” Miranda said. “Is there anything showing?”

“Negative Captain!”

Miranda nodded. “Which means *NORMYA'S LIGHT* is shrouded. Good.” Miranda stated. “Estimate on when the *SCIMITAR* and her Wing will arrive?”

“If our Intel is accurate Captain... and we don't know if it is... roughly five and a half hours. We don't know for sure since we don't know if they took a direct heading.” The sensor chief answered.

Miranda shook her head slowly. “Androcles wouldn't take a direct course... he would be on Kranek by now if he had.” She said to no one in particular. She noticed that several heads on the bridge turned and looked at her. Many of them knew her history and record, and part of that history and record was her closeness to the Crown Prince of the Union and his brother Resumar and sister Eliani. They had grown up together for almost half a year, Miranda learning and even training under Martin Leonidas himself. It was another reason why she was so well respected and thought of by many people. “He also would not want to interrupt the training of the High Coven riders and dragons for too long.”

Miranda was silent for a long moment as she ran several scenarios over and over in her head. E'dira simply watched her from her chair and could only admire this woman more. That Miranda was hers was not something E'dira questioned anymore. The petite Asian female had already made that very clear to E'dira in her quarters when they shared a sizzling kiss and Miranda allowed her to be the dominant one. Lynwe had been right E'dira thought to herself as she remembered their conversation from several years ago.

“You will know by how she is in your arms E'dira.” Lynwe had told her. “A woman who questions her role or does not truly want to enter into a relationship with a Drow will not surrender all she is to you. There are many who simply seek to say they have bedded a Drow. Now... the woman who melts in your arms, who allows you to be whom we as Drow are in our heart of hearts, they are the ones who will enter into a union with us without question. And they will cherish that Union almost as much, if not more than we do E'dira.”

“There are not many of those women out there Lynwe.”

Lynwe nodded her head. “No there are not. They must be confident and strong within their own hearts to be able to love us as we would love them. Selene is that way, Tarifa and Anuk. There are others... but they come to mind first. They love without question or pause because they are strong of mind and heart already and have no issues with their individuality.”

“Do you think I will find such a woman?” E'dira asked.

“If you truly give of yourself as Selene taught me... yes.” Lynwe had answered. “They will know E'dira. They will know when they look into your eyes. Then you will have what you seek.”

Miranda Lorian made her very first serious decision as Captain of the *ULU ARIZONA* then, and it would be written many years later as the decision that defined her future within the Lycavorian Union.

“E'dira... contact Commander Velnar. I want the *HARBINGER* on its way to Iraruzu in ten minutes.”

“We don't know if that is where the Prince is going Miranda.” E'dira said softly.

Miranda met her amber orbs with nothing but love in them. “That's where he is going.” Miranda said. “That's what my gut tells me E'dira.” E'dira didn't blink and turned to follow her orders as Miranda turned back to the front of her bridge. “Helm, signal the *HORNET* and the rest of the Wing. I want to be ready to Jump at the first sign of anything out of the ordinary!”

SCIMITAR

Lucia Moran stood looking at the rows of pictures that Zarah had along the shelves on her wall. Zarah's quarters were spacious, much larger than she thought, until she realized that Zarah and Normya usually shared quarters. The last week had been one she would have preferred not to have lived through at all, but the only saving grace if one could call it that was that she had finally found what her heart had desired for so long. Lucia Moran had been driven by only one thing for the last ten years of her life and she turned as that purpose walked slowly out of the large bathroom.

Zarah Leonidas wore the standard Fleet uniform of dark gray jumpsuit and black t-shirt just as Lucia did. In Lucia's eyes however, she filled out her uniform much better. Her dark brown hair hung well below her shoulders but pulled into a long ponytail that was draped over one shoulder. Her dark eyes met Lucia's immediately and Lucia saw her face brighten just a bit. Lucia had first awoken in the Med Bay with Zarah curled into her arms and pressed very close to her own body. Lucia remained awake long enough to wrap her arms tighter around Zarah and cry softly for several minutes until sleep claimed her again. The relief that Zarah was alive and recovering was too much for her, not to mention that the aftereffects of Blood Fever was still purging from her system. She had not known that Zarah once had Blood Fever and that Andro had been the one to save her. She had not known this until Zarah nearly drained her blood from her body to heal, stopping only when she felt Lucia's life begin to ebb from her. She clearly remembered Zarah stroking her face, begging her not to leave and then she awoke in the Med Bay. They had not been apart for more than a few minutes since she had awoken fully.

Zarah had taken so much of her blood that a unique bond had formed between them. She knew it was very similar to what Zarah's Aunt Tarifa shared with the Drow Aihola, just far more powerful. They now knew everything there was to know about each other, their minds so closely intertwined that it would be impossible to tell them apart. This connection was only augmented by Lucia's own bond with Seyra, and the three of them had spent the last two and a half days exploring the limits of that new bond. Zarah was growing stronger by the day, regaining her life as each moment passed. She refused to have Lucia sleep in other quarters, and the last two nights they had slept in each others arms and simply talked of their lives and what had brought them together. Lucia avoided any conversation about her brothers, not only for Zarah's sake, but because her own hatred and anger at them and her mother was still fresh in her mind. What they had done to her beautiful Zarah she would never forgive or forget, and given the opportunity, she would kill either of them in a blink if ever she saw them again. If she was feeling extra cruel that day, she would turn them over to Androcles Leonidas, for she had seen the death his mind prepared for Dante or her mother should they ever cross paths and it made her shudder in horror. Zarah had a unique and special relationship with Androcles, and now Lucia shared in that relationship by default.

They had spent many hours here in Zarah's quarters, with her sisters and her mother. Lucia had thought they would try to baby Zarah, protect her and make her feel surrounded and pressed down upon. She should have known better. This family did not compete with one another, they did not try to outdo each other, and they were not false in their sincerity. They loved their sister without question or thought and they allowed Zarah to progress at her own pace, and given the strength of Zarah's will and determination, that was what she needed most of all. Lucia did notice that Zarah flinched ever so slightly when embraced by her brothers, but it was a reaction that quickly passed as the scent of her brothers filled her senses and she knew she was safe. Lucia thought it would be like that with her, but she was the only one that Zarah melted against and touched without

hesitation. Lucia had never been with a man or a woman in her life, yet she desired Zarah Leonidas more than anything she had ever desired. She was also intelligent enough to know that now was not the time. She had waited this long, and Lucia Moran would wait for eternity if need be to discover Zarah in that way.

Lucia turned fully as Zarah stepped up to her. "Ok." She said softly. "I'm ready."

"We... we do not have to do this Zarah." Lucia spoke. "We can eat here in your quarters again."

Zarah shook her head. "No. I can't hide anymore. I can't be frightened anymore Lucia. If I stay here I will never..."

Lucia stepped closer to her and put a slim finger to her lips silencing her words. "You do not need to explain anything to me Zarah Leonidas my love." She whispered gently. "Never to me."

Zarah met her beautiful eyes and smiled softly. No matter the horrors that had happened; no matter the perversions she had been forced to endure at the hands of Lucia's brothers; Zarah could feel nothing but an overwhelming love for Lucia. She was as desirable a woman as any Zarah had seen, and the experiences of her young life had allowed her to grow up and not think of such a relationship as wrong. Her mothers were the most beautiful women in the universe as far as Zarah was concerned, and they shared each other willingly and eagerly. They were the most beautiful at least until she gazed at Lucia. Her angular Asian features were soft, graceful and utterly flawless and very unlike her mother's sharper contours, and Lucia's dark brown eyes gazed at her with unabashed adoration.

"Lucia... I... I don't know if..." Zarah began.

Lucia shook her head slowly. "No... do not say that." She said quietly. "I have spent the last decade hoping and waiting that I would one day be together with you. At times I did not understand it myself, especially when I was younger. It is not easy to understand now. Why it happened this way? I will forever bear the shame and knowledge of what my brothers did to you and because I love you as I do, I can not..."

Zarah was the one to move this time and she stepped right up to Lucia and covered her lips with her own. Lucia Moran was not her brothers. Lucia had saved her at incredible risk of her own life and did so without hesitation. If not for Lucia as her anchor these last three days Zarah was quite sure she would have been unable to cope with what happened. Knowing that Lucia still desired her, still saw her as beautiful, that is what saved Zarah. These were the things she had seen in Lucia's mind, things that she did not hide from her. And Zarah could not deny the overpowering attraction to Lucia now that she knew who she was. She had felt the tremors for months against her Mindvoice shields and only thought it was a man. Had she known it was Lucia, Zarah would have pursued her just as voraciously as any wolf pursued their prey. It was different now... Lucia's brothers had taken away Zarah's innocence... but Zarah's feelings for Lucia were not affected by that. In order to go on with her life Zarah knew she needed to overcome what she had endured. She also knew the first and most important step on that road was the woman in front of her.

Lucia whimpered softly when she felt Zarah's lips and instinctively her arms pulled Zarah tight against her body, their breasts crushing together and Zarah molding her body to Lucia's. Their tongues stabbed forth, tentatively at first as they explored new sensations and emotions and then Zarah's arms wrapped around her waist and pulled her even tighter. Their kiss deepened with Zarah surprisingly taking a more aggressive approach because of her wolf blood. It was an approach that Lucia welcomed as they melted together in the midst of the blistering kiss. Their kiss lasted for what seemed like a glorious eternity to Lucia, but then slowly they drew apart, the tips of their tongues still dancing with each other even as their soft lips finally parted. Lucia stared at her, her wolf eyes and fangs fully changed and extended. She felt giddy when she saw Lucia's cobalt blue vampire eyes open slowly and her own slimmer vampiric fangs poking from under her top lip.

Zarah took a deep breath, her mind rejoicing that her body could still feel what it was feeling even after what had happened to her. She shook her head even as she gripped Lucia tighter. "You will bear no shame for what happened Lucia *ussta sanguine qu'essan*." She said seeing Lucia's cobalt eyes glitter in delight at her words. "*Dos dormagyn uns'aa*. I don't... I don't know how long it will be before I..." Zarah shook her head again. "No. We are together now. I... I love you! I want... I want to go forward with you in my life! I need you in my life now. You are my life! As long as I have you... as long as you are with me I can get through this." (My vampire princess)(You saved me)

Lucia couldn't help the tears that rolled down her cheeks. "I will never leave you Zarah." She said. "Not after all we have been through to get to this point."

Zarah met her eyes and smiled. She reached up and brushed away the tears on her cheeks. "Then let's start right now. I'm hungry... and I can't hide from the world in my quarters for the rest of my life."

Lucia took a deep breath and nodded. "Your mother and sisters are waiting for us."

IRARUZU

Walter reverently lowered the last of the bodies on the ground and stood back up looking at the Dragoon Hval. He was an older Dragoon Walter knew, roughly two hundred years old and he had fought in the Battle for Earth. Walter also knew he was deeply involved with a Drow female on Earth and seeing so many massacred Drow was making him extremely angry, unlike his younger counterpart. The Drow females were especially hard to look at for they had been brutally raped and beaten and that was obvious. Walter knew how Hval felt, for while he considered the elves on Earth his creation, which they were, he felt closer to the Drow for he had made them more like the Spartan people.

"You must hold in that anger Hval." Walter spoke softly. "At least for now."

Hval looked up from the row of bodies. "I have seen battle Senior Polemarch. I have taken life and seen life taken. This mindless brutality is beyond me. They..."

Walter moved closer to him. "They will pay Hval." Walter spoke. "We will stand beside our Prince when he arrives and we will make them pay."

Hval met his eyes. "Will he come sir?" He asked.

Walter nodded slowly. "Ceneia was able to confirm that the transmission was received by the *SCIMITAR*. He will come Hval."

Hval turned and looked over to where Lu'ria sat with her mother, Majeir and Ceneia. "He will come for her won't he?"

Walter nodded. "And when he arrives and he sees what has happen here his retribution will be swift. He is a Leonidas Hval. They don't believe in doing things halfway."

Hval looked at him again. "I have never met any of the Royal family Senior Polemarch. Is he... is he much like the King?"

Walter chuckled softly. "In many ways... yes he is." He answered. "In many ways he is also much harsher than his father."

"He loves a Drow Senior Polemarch... as do I." Hval spoke. "I will take my vengeance for this act beside him. I will not allow this act against Re'sora's people go unanswered."

Walter nodded. "As will we all." He said.

"Why did we come here?" Hval asked. "The Kavalians already destroyed it once."

Walter shook his head. "They executed the Drow but they left the defenses active. It was an arrogant move on their part. We could not remain in the city for there are too many there who do not care for citizens of the Union to begin with." He answered. "Lu'ria went back into the tunnels and activated the emergency power grid. We have ground sensors and turrets."

"Will it hold against over a hundred men?" Hval asked.

"We'll have to make it hold." Walter answered. "At least until Andro arrives."

Hval nodded and bent over to pick up his P190A3. "Then I will insure we are ready when they come."

Walter nodded as he watched Hval march toward the now empty building of the Drow estate. Neither Lu'ria nor Daba wanted to go inside the building and see the horrors again. He turned and began walking towards them smiling for the first time in days as he saw Majeir lower her snout and brush it against Lu'ria's shoulder again. He had to admit, seeing the massive form of Majeir sitting casually on the ground behind the much smaller elf was somewhat humorous, but he could feel the happiness pouring from Majeir at what she had discovered with Lu'ria. As he moved closer he could hear Daba explaining why they had left Earth.

"...did not want to believe what you were telling me Lu'ria." Daba spoke softly. "I didn't believe it until the Holy One brought Majeir to Eden City and she touched my thoughts. She told me she was to be yours. Part of me still can't believe it."

"So you believe me?" Lu'ria asked. "About everything?"

Daba met her daughter's gaze. "I see Majeir here beside you. I have seen you fly on her. The psychic shield you both project. How could I not believe?"

"What about..." Lu'ria began.

"What has happened so far stretched my ability to be open Lu'ria." Daba spoke. "All we know is that Ceneia was able to confirm the Prince's ship received the message. He has many responsibilities and even if what you say is true, I find it incomprehensible that he would abandon his duties to come here."

"You must have faith mother." Lu'ria spoke confidently.

Daba shook her head. "I have faith child... it is just so... it is so difficult to believe that the *Yara Parma* could actually have predicted such a thing."

"Mother... you are the one that schooled me to believe the *Yara Parma* to be the basis for our people and our beliefs." Lu'ria said. "Our very beginnings. They predicted the return of King Leonidas... they predicted that Queen Aihola would come to power! Why is it so hard for you to believe them now?"

Daba looked at her. "You have not read the entire *Yara Parma* as I have Lu'ria."

Lu'ria looked at her. "What do you mean?" She asked. "You made me read all twenty-three books when I was growing up."

Daba looked at Walter and he shrugged as he squatted to the side. "She will discover it sooner or later." He spoke.

Lu'ria's amber eyes went from her mother to Walter and then back. "Discover what?" She asked heatedly. "I am meant for this mother! Majeir is proof of that! I am meant for Andro and Sadi. For Carisia and Ne'Veha! You will not convince me otherwise."

Walter looked at her surprised. "You know their names Lu'ria?" He asked. "How is that possible? Their names were only just released a few days ago. No official... no official announcement has been made with everything that has happened on Earth. Deia only mentioned them fleetingly when she reported Andro had left the system and who was with him."

Lu'ria nodded. "I know their names! I know what they look like. I know their likes and dislikes. And they know mine. I can feel them here..." She placed her hand over her heart. "And I feel them in my thoughts and dreams. I have felt them in my thoughts and dreams for the last three months. Probably before that... but I just did not know what it was."

Daba looked at her daughter. "Lu'ria there is a twenty-fourth book of the *Yara Parma*." She said.

Lu'ria looked at her mother. "I don't care if there is a hundred and twenty-four mother. You will not convince me what I feel is wrong."

Daba shook her head. "No my daughter." She said with a sigh. "Only the senior Elders of the Families have access to the twenty-fourth book. It is not distributed openly as the others are."

Lu'ria's eyes narrowed "Why?"

"It is a list of foretelling." Daba answered. "Prophecies and the like. Many of them have come true as you say... but there are many that have been written about that have not yet come true. If they will at all. Many of them are not pleasant."

Lu'ria cocked her head to the side. "Such as?"

"They don't matter right now." Daba said.

"Why not?"

"Book Twenty-Four of the *Yara Parma*... the last prophecy in Book Twenty-Four was one of the first that was even written after the Sky Fire." Daba said. "It reads... The firstborn of many, the son of *knif'rt kal'daka* eyes and virile manhood. He will have the heart of amber and wrap his hands in white satin. *Yvalm xuil to'ryll euol, uuthli ujoool Lu' charnag d 'olath solen, whol jal draeval orn nind ssinsrigg*."

Lu'ria's amber eyes grew a little wider. "It... mother it says that?" She gasped in shock and wonderment.

Daba nodded. "Yes. It... it also says that one day ... that one day you will be Queen of the Drow."

Lu'ria's amber eyes grew even wider and she came to her feet. "What?" She stammered.

Daba nodded her head as she too got to her feet and looked at her daughter. "Lu'ria we need to..."

All of them saw Walter's head snap around and look towards the mountains to the west. Ceneia took note instantly that the wind was coming from the west. "Walter?" She asked softly as she stood up.

Walter's hand dropped to his Nehtes. "Everyone inside." He said. "Everyone inside now. They are coming."

SPARTA

"Tarifa!" Isra's strong voice echoed as he burst through the front door of his home the P190A3 leading him.

"Anuk baby!" Danny barked sweeping the K12 in front of him like a guided missile launcher.

Behind Danny and Isra came twelve fully armed *Durcunusaan* soldiers even as the sounds of windows shattering from upstairs echoed in the corridor.

"Isra!" Tarifa's voice shouted as she came sprinting around the corner from their large main room, Anuk right behind her. "Isra... we are safe!" She barked out.

Isra didn't question her for he could smell no fear or indecision on her. He tapped his jaw. "All teams take up defensive positions! We are secure down here!"

Anuk smiled as Danny's arms swallowed her up and he lowered his head to firmly nuzzle her elven ears. "Bout time you showed up!" Anuk quipped as she shivered in bliss at his touch.

Isra was doing the same with Tarifa, who had an equally blissful look on her face as Isra inhaled deeply of her peach scent. "You sent Roluth!" Isra stated. "We thought something was wrong! Daniel hadn't heard from Anuk in over thirty hours and you would not reply to my Mindvoice calls."

Tarifa nodded. "I know. Our young ones?" She asked quickly.

Isra nodded. "They are at the bunker as directed." He replied. "Tarifa... why did Roluth say you have guests? What is going on? Where is Ardis? She has not checked in since the High Coven attacks."

Tarifa clung to his hand and arm and pulled him toward the doorway as his 190 dropped onto its quick release straps. "Ardis is here and safe. Come." She said glancing back at the *Durcunusaan* soldiers. "Put your weapons away! There are no enemies here!"

The *Durcunusaan* had learned long ago that when the Lieutenant Governor of their city gave an order she expected it to be followed. It was one of the reasons that the King considered her his most treasured sister even though they were not related in any way. The twelve *Durcunusaan* troops obeyed without question for they too could smell no fear or indecision in the room.

"Baby... what is going on?" Danny asked holding Anuk to him tightly.

Anuk squirmed from his grasp but continued to hold his hand. "Well... if you will let go of me I will show you. We will show you."

Danny looked at Isra. "Are you as confused as me?"

Isra nodded. "More." He answered.

Tarifa and Anuk pulled them towards the opening of the main room and just into it. Both Danny and Isra came up short when they saw six more *Durcunusaan* troops with their weapons leveled at three Kavalians, Ardis and Karun, all of whom were holding weapons but not pointing at anyone. Tarifa saw this and broke away from Isra.

"Put your weapons away!" She demanded once more. "These people are not our enemies nor are they a threat!"

"Tarifa!" Isra hissed. "What is going on?"

Tarifa turned back to look at him but stopped when she heard the voice. "Yes sister... please tell us what is going on?"

Tarifa whirled around and saw Martin standing just behind Karun with his K12 pressed against the back of his head. Jalersi and Pian turned as well, stunned that they did not detect him, or the fact that Aricia stood just to his right with her 190 leveled at them. Jalersi gasped even louder when she saw where his gun was aimed.

"No!" She spoke softly.

"Do not move!" Aricia growled from behind the sights of the 190. "I do not wish to shoot you but I will not hesitate in the least."

"Martin!" Tarifa barked as she stepped towards him. Her daughter beat her to the punch.

Ardis acted as any female wolf would act when she had found the man who she knew was the perfect mate for her, not only physically but emotionally as well. She stepped around from where she stood in front of Karun until she was facing her uncle, her eyes changed and her wolf fangs extended. She reached up slowly, never breaking eye contact with the yellow/gold wolf eyes of the uncle who had bounced her on his knee as a baby. Her hand came to rest on the barrel of the K12.

“Uncle Martin... you would not deprive me of the man who is my mate and husband would you?” She asked calmly.

Martin’s changed wolf eyes cut to his niece quickly but the K12 did not move. “Ardis?” He asked softly.

“Karun is not your brother Uncle Martin. He is nothing like his father and all you need do is give him the chance to prove that.” Ardis spoke. “You have always trusted me Uncle Martin. Trust me now. I am my parent’s daughter Uncle Martin... you and they have taught me well... would I allow Karun to claim me if there was even a hint he was like his father?”

Martin’s K12 withdrew instantly at her words. “No.” He stated flatly.

Martin stepped close to Karun then, leaning over slightly as Ardis lowered her weapon. He could smell Ardis’s sweet scent all over Karun, deeply imbedded in his blood. He also smelled something that he hadn’t when Karun had first come to Earth. He detected the dormant wolf blood within Karun’s veins now pulsing strongly and it was filled with Ardis’s essence. He turned and looked at his niece. “You showed him?” He asked.

Ardis nodded as she reached up and placed her hand on Martin’s arm. “I did Uncle. Just as you did for me.”

Martin turned back to look at Karun who met his eyes unflinching. “Show me.” He said.

Martin couldn’t help but smile as he saw Karun’s eyes change instantly and his dual wolf fangs extended from beneath his lips. Apparently the dual fangs unique to the Leonidas blood still were dominant even with a Kavalian mother. “I guess we learn something new every day.” Martin said softly. “Your father didn’t teach you that boy.”

“My... my father taught me only how to hate.” Karun hissed. “He was too busy bedding other women and making grasps for power to be concerned with me. My brothers... my younger brothers are lost... but I... I found myself when I came here.” Karun blinked several times. “I... I wish to learn about... I wish to learn about my history Uncle.”

Martin holstered his K12 then and looked at Karun. His eyes returned to normal and his dual fangs disappeared and he stared at Karun for a long moment. He could see so much of his hated brother in Karun, but he could also see far more of his beautiful Kavalian mother. As he usually did, Martin Leonidas went with his gut instinct. He stepped forward and pulled Karun into a rib cracking bear hug and Jalersi felt tears come to her eyes when she saw her son hesitate and then return the embrace, his fingers pulling tightly on Martin’s shirt. She heard Martin pound Karun on his back and then push him away to arm’s length. He brought his hand up and grasped Karun’s neck and looked at him intently.

“Welcome nephew.” Martin said with a smile. “Welcome... Karun Leonidas.”

Karun held back the tears he wanted to let flow from his eyes as he stared at the man who his father had cursed and harangued ever since Karun could remember. A man that was unlike anything his own father had taught him, and a man who had just welcomed him into a family that was his blood. Karun gripped his uncle’s arms tightly.

“Blood before all else Uncle!” He croaked out the words. “Blood before all else!”

Martin nodded his head with a smile. “I see my niece has taught you well.” He said.

Karun shook his head. “Ardis has taught me many things Uncle... but grandmother taught me that.”

Martin’s eyes went a little wider and he nodded his head. “Good.” He said. “Good.” He released Karun’s neck and turned around, reaching for Ardis who stepped close to him. His eyes fell upon Pian and Jalersi standing very near to one another and Jiss who stood alone but in close proximity to them. His eyes finally went to where Tarifa stood. “Sister... perhaps you could tell us just exactly what is going on here.” He stated.

Tarifa crossed her arms over her ample chest and looked at him sternly. “I would have if you had given me the chance!” She snapped. “No... you have to come busting into my home, the *Durcunusaan* breaking how many windows in the process? Are you going to replace them Martin?”

“Tarifa... Roluth was very insistent that something was wrong.” Isra spoke up now.

Tarifa nodded turning to look at her husband and alpha mate. “And we thought it was until just before you and my thick headed adopted brother made your grand entrance!” She turned back to find Martin standing directly in front of her. She blinked several times and then slugged him in the arm. “You big oaf!”

Martin chuckled and leaned forward to kiss her cheek in a brotherly fashion. “Now that you have that out of the way... could you tell us why there are three Kavalians in your home who are being listed as dead by the Kavalian ambassador?”

“Dead?” Jalersi asked.

Martin turned to look at her and nodded his head. “Killed in the High Coven attack on your embassy. Or so they told us.”

“They were not killed!” Tarifa hissed. “They came here with Ardis and Karun because they are trying to stop a war! When they were seen trying to escape their own people tried to kill them. This is the only place Ardis could think to bring them where they would be safe for a time.”

“A war?” Martin asked. “What are you talking about Tarifa?”

Tarifa looked at him oddly. “Deia did not tell you?” She asked.

“Tell me what?” Martin asked as he turned back to look at Tarifa. “She told me nothing!”

“I gave the information to Laustinos at least ten hours ago. Perhaps more. He said he would make sure it got to Deia.” Tarifa spoke.

Aricia stepped forward. “Tarifa... we came here from Deia’s office. One of us has been there for the last two and a half days. She told us nothing about you. Only that Ardis was still missing. Then Daniel called.”

“What information?” Martin asked turning to look at Jalersi and Pian.

“King Leonidas we are not part of this!” Jiss began. “We...”

Martin pointed at him. “Ambassador I fucking hate politicians! You are a politician! Now shut up!” He snapped turning back to Jalersi and Pian. “What is going on? Retaliation for your sister defecting and marrying my son? I won’t change my mind about that... Athani is my son’s wife as far as I am concerned. I will not...”

Jalersi stepped closer to him. “She is... she is doing well?” She asked hopefully.

Martin nodded. “Very well.” He replied. “And she’s very happy.”

“Can I see her?” Jalersi asked quickly.

Pian came up behind her and gently took her arm pulling her close to him, something that did not go unnoticed by Martin who looked at Pian with questions in his eyes. “Jalersi has seen who Pusintin is and renounced him.” Pian spoke. “I have taken her as my wife. Something I have wanted to do for twenty years.”

Martin grinned. “Bet that didn’t go over well with my dear brother I take it. Is that what this is all about?” He said.

“He doesn’t know yet.” Pian said. “Well... he may have an idea now.”

“This was a mutual thing I take it?” Martin asked.

Jalersi nodded. “Very much so.” She replied before Pian could. “I was blind to what Pusintin really was. I believed he would change things and all he did was embrace the old ways of my people. Nothing was going to change. Pian made me see that just as much as his own actions!”

“My Pride inhabits the fringes of Kavalian space. We do not adhere to the many more violent traditions of our people concerning our females. To my Pride our woman are to be treasured and respected for they will bear our future. It is not something that we have allowed to become public knowledge since it would not go over well.”

“Yeah... no shit.” Danny spoke. “It’s damn impressive you’ve lasted this long.”

“So tell me why your own people are trying to kill you? Is my brother that vindictive as to come after you for that and start a war with me to achieve that?” Martin asked.

Pian shook his head. “They are not trying to kill us for that. They will kill us for what we know.” He answered.

Martin felt tightness grip his abdomen. “Ok... I’m listening.” He said.

“They are trying to kill us because we know, at least some of the details anyway, we know of a plot by Prefect Keleru and Marshall Pusintin to target and kill as many of your family as possible. Including you King Leonidas. You and at least some of your Queens.” Pian spoke as calmly as he could. “We gave this information to Tarifa when we came here and she passed it along.”

Martin's wide eyes cut to Tarifa. "Laustinos?" He asked.

Tarifa nodded. "I could get no one else on the COM and the MV dampeners are active all over the city. It renders Mindvoicing impossible except for you and Androcles and a few others, you know this!"

"Why didn't you try me?" Martin snapped.

"I did!" Tarifa barked back. "Your shielding was too high you fool! I could get no one! I sent Roluth away because he said the insects and birds in the mountains had gone quiet and I suspected an attack. One did not come and now you are here. I overreacted!"

"Oh... fuck me to tears! No you didn't!" Danny snarled as he looked at Martin. "We fell hard for this one brother!"

Martin Leonidas hadn't survived countless battles by being dense. He knew a trap when he sensed one... and they had just walked into a very well set trap, one that could get them all killed. He looked up as Fache rushed in from the corridor to the front door.

"Milord!" Fache snapped. "I can not raise the two teams we left on the perimeter of the property!"

"*Nubou!*" Danny snarled.

"Fuck is right!" Martin barked. "We just walked into a trap and you were the bait!"

"What?" Pian gasped as he pulled Jalersi closer to him.

"Pian... the Puma Bane Teams!" Jalersi hissed.

"The what?" Danny barked as he un-slung his 190.

"They are... they are like..." Pian was struggling to explain them when Karun stepped in.

"They are Shock Troops Uncle." He spat. "The very best that my father and grandfather employ. They receive the finest training and weapons and they are renown for their cruelty. They take no prisoners and they rarely ever fail. That is what they sent into The Wilds after your Drow bases."

Martin's eyes grew wide. "The Drow?" He gasped.

"Their intent was to cripple your intelligence networks within The Wilds so they could move at will." Pian spoke. "It is why we... it is why we came to Tarifa. The Prefect and Pusintin will plunge our people into a war we can not win with their actions!"

"What actions?" Aricia almost screamed.

"Not only are they targeting your Drow outposts, but they are targeting every member of your family in a scheme to somehow get Pusintin restored as King of Sparta and by default King of the Union!" Pian exclaimed.

Martin opened his mouth to bark an angry question but his wolf ears detected the soft popping noise far off in the distance exactly the same time as Danny, Isra and Fache.

"INCOMING!" Danny and Martin screamed at the same time as they yanked on Anuk and Aricia respectively while throwing themselves onto the floor. Pian and Karun had been under fire enough times to know what that word meant and they were moving half a second after it left two sets of lips.

Jiss stood in the center of the room stunned at what was happening and completely exposed. He saw a flash of a body in front of him before a blinding explosion outside the glass window erupted and the concussive force of the first plasma mortar landing outside the wall of the home only ten meters away first buckled and then ruptured the wall sending glass, steel and concrete blistering across the room at nearly the speed of light. Jiss felt a massive pain in his side and then blackness claimed him into its embrace.

CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

RITAAH

The door to the bridge of the Kavalian Science Frigate opened and the captain of the ship turned in his chair. They had detected the spike of a massive explosion on the surface of this normally uninhabited world and after sending off an inquiry to KFI Headquarters he decided to come and investigate. With the knowledge that KFI was sending reinforcements, the captain set course for the planet. Upon establishing a routine orbit they detected several abnormal readings from the surface and he made the decision to land their atmospheric Frigate on the surface to investigate. Though he was not a scientist, most of the crew was and the senior scientist was

adamant about being able to get up close to the source of their anomalous readings. The Captain relented and brought his ship onto the surface. What could go wrong? They were deep within Kavalian space and Ritaah was an uninhabited world.

It would be the last command decision of his life and the most enlightening unfortunately for him.

The Kavalian Captain's yellow eyes grew wide in surprise as the bridge doors slid aside to reveal not members of his own crew, but a huge pureblood vampire, several Lycavorians and half a dozen Kavalian clone troops. All of them with weapons out and leading them into the room like any well trained soldiers. It flashed through his mind that he had never seen Spartan troops up close before and they looked just as ferocious as any Kavalian clone troops he had ever seen. The last thing that processed through his brain was that they moved as a single unit, as if they had trained together for decades. He saw the huge vampire raise his arm, the large and deadly Union K12 hand blaster in his grip and he saw and heard the flash of light just before the Kinetic round entered above his wide open left eye and blew his brains and bone matter all over the back of his chair and over the shoulders of the young male scientist standing by the sensor station.

Vonis watched with keen eyes as his combined strike team swept across the small bridge barking orders to the crew of the frigate and shoving them to the deck. He lowered the smoking weapon and smiled a warrior's smile. They had entered the same way the Science Team had exited the ship, thirty-seven hand picked Lycavorian and Kavalian troops. As the members of the Kavalian crew looked on in shock, they watched as the lone Lycavorian and Kavalian clone soldier stepped up to Vonis. The Senior Spartan NONCOM knew what Colonel Vonis was capable of and he was not in the least bit surprised they had taken the ship. The senior Kavalian troop had never worked with a vampire however, he had only killed them, and to say he was impressed would be an understatement. This Colonel Vonis was the epitome of a leader. This was the type of man who he had been trained to follow as a clone child and he learned in the military classes. This was the type of man he had never seen among the Kavalian troops. Vonis had been in the front of their file their entire sweep through this frigate. He had even saved two of his men's lives with his incredible ability to blur, and he had done so without a second's thought. It was these actions and the fact that Vonis had asked him for whatever thoughts he had on the best way to take the ship. The Kavalian soldier was impressed with Vonis's obvious knowledge, yet he had asked for help from him. It had astonished him until it dawned on him that this vampire was a member of the Lycavorian Union, and while he may have been the son of the hated and now dead High Coven Empress, he was nothing like her or the cruel vampires he had fought before.

"We are secure Colonel." He stated. "The follow on team is securing the prisoners below decks."

Vonis nodded. "Excellent." He said.

"You... you did not have them executed sir?" The man asked.

Vonis met the Kavalian's eyes. "They are your people Kangam." Vonis told him. "What you do with them will be up to Mican and those among your people. We only needed to secure the ship for our use. Slaughtering the crew would serve no purpose since most of them are scientists anyway. Don't you agree?"

Kangam nodded his head. "I do sir." He replied. "I just did not think it would matter to you."

Vonis did not take offense and smiled. "Well it does." He answered. "As my nephew has told Mican... we are not your enemies and we need each other to get out of here in one piece."

Kangam smiled as he nodded. "Yes we do."

"Besides... my elven wife would be very upset with me if she ever discovered I acted without thinking." Vonis said. "I do not wish to make her upset with me."

Kangam chuckled softly and nodded his head once more. "It is good to see that females are the same no matter the species." He said. "My elven wife would be the same way."

Vonis nodded. "You see... we are not so different Kangam. We are not so different. Let's get these prisoners secured and then start stripping whatever we can off this ship so we can get your people on board."

"Yes sir!" Kangam barked before moving off to comply with his orders.

Vonis turned and looked at the Lycavorian NONCOM. He was a grizzled eight hundred year old soldier and he nodded his head in approval. "They are good Colonel." He said.

"Yes they are." Vonis agreed. "However we have only begun working together so make sure the prisoners are secured properly."

The NONCOM nodded. "As you order."

“I’m going to contact Resumar and find out where they stand.” Resumar spoke. “Stand by for follow on operations Sergeant. We don’t know where or when these other ships are going to appear and we may have to move fast if the *PILLAR OF FAITH* can not react quickly enough for us.”

“On it Colonel.” The man spoke as he moved to follow the Kavalian soldier off the bridge.

Vonis let his eyes move around the bridge as he moved to the side, finally settling on the Kavalian male with gray in his short fur. A *Durcunusaan* soldier was securing his hands behind his back, but the man stared at him with fury in his eyes. As the *Durcunusaan* pulled him to his feet he spat at Vonis.

“Our fleet will be here soon!” He screamed. “Your Union will not stand once all of your precious royal family is dead! You will see!”

The *Durcunusaan* troop yanked on his arm. “Shut up fool!” He snapped as he dragged him from the bridge. “Don’t give me a reason to cut your idiot tongue from your mouth!”

Vonis contemplated the Kavalian’s words silently as he lifted his hand and tapped the implant on his jaw lightly. “Resumar?”

The response was immediate. “Uncle... are you secure?” Res’s firm voice filled his ear clearly.

“The frigate is secure Resumar.” Vonis spoke. “We are locking the remaining crew and the scientists in the lower decks. What about those that were moving to your location to investigate the MV ship?”

Resumar turned and looked at the nine Kavalian troops and scientists that had survived their ambush only a hundred meters from the entrance of the Mindvoice ship. All of them were wide eyed in almost paralyzing fear as Cemath stared at them, doing his very best to look imposing, which in reality was not very hard considering he was a dragon. Resumar held his chuckle in due to the seriousness of the situation. He could see Athani and Na’lia helping to go through the equipment they had been carrying, while Mican and two *Durcunusaan* troops were insuring their bindings were tight. His dark eyes cut to the four bodies that were now covered in dark blankets from the Kavalian packs of equipment.

“They gave us mild resistance Uncle... at least until Cemath showed them the error of their ways.” Resumar answered.

Resumar heard his adopted Uncle chuckle softly. “We will begin stripping everything we can from the interior of this ship to make room for our charges Resumar. Mican was right... it is definitely large enough to carry his rebels as long as they travel light.”

Resumar nodded. “As soon as Dario and Channa bring the last of them to the MV ship I’ll have Mican begin moving them to your location. Can you hold?”

“Asharli has already brought their weapons systems online and we should be able to protect ourselves from everything but a sustained assault.” Vonis answered.

“Uncle... did you see any sign of the Coven troops that escaped?” Resumar asked.

“No.” Vonis answered. “You are concerned about them I take it?”

“Julie returned a short while ago.” Resumar told him. “She says the rendezvous point they were to use showed signs of them staying the night, but they have since moved on. They could be anywhere by now. She also said at least six of them are wounded.”

“This means they will be even more dangerous and bold.” Vonis spoke. “Do you trust her Resumar?”

“Yes Uncle.” Res answered immediately. “If not for Julie we would all be dead by now. They... your mother underestimated the pull of the wolf Uncle. Julie may be a vampire now... but she thinks like a wolf. Her heart is a wolf.”

“I agree.” Vonis said. “Any word from the *FAITH* or Maros?”

“They are holding under Shroud just inside the system.” Resumar answered. “Depending on the size of the force the Kavalians send, they will attempt to ambush them when they arrive. Avi and Avatar 341 have completed roughly sixty-five percent of the core download and that is progressing rapidly now.”

“What do you need me to do Res?” Vonis asked.

“Hold what you have Uncle.” Resumar answered as he saw Avi’s massive form exiting the entrance of the MV ship and begin moving towards him. “I can have Avatar 341 extend a sensor bubble around your location to keep you invisible from sensors, but we are still trying to determine how best to destroy this entire ship. It is nearly seven and a half kilometers long and we can leave nothing that could be studied by anyone.”

“I’ll be standing by here Resumar. We’ll secure the ship and you may begin bringing Mican’s people over as soon as you are ready.” Vonis spoke. “I’m going to send out a small patrol to scout the area around our location. The Coven teams may have seen the ship land and I do not want to be caught by surprise.”

“I will have Julie move to your location before you do that. She can take the patrol out. She has a better chance of detecting them than we do.” Resumar spoke.

“That works for me.” Vonis said. “I’ll standby until she gets here.”

“I have to go Uncle... Avi is coming up.” Resumar said.

“Keep me informed of your progress and what I can do to assist.” Vonis said. “I’m clear.”

Resumar turned as the nearly seven foot tall Avi came up to him. Resumar had grown up with his brothers and sisters with this hulking cyborg around all of the time and Avi’s size didn’t faze him anymore. Avi was holding a data pad in his massive hand and he ignored the Kavalian men and women who watched him with wide eyes.

“Something Avi?” Resumar asked as he stopped next to him.

-Three things Resumar- Avi spoke.

Resumar nodded his head. “Hit me with them.” Res told him with a smile. “Uncle Vonis has secured the Kavalian Science Frigate and I could use some more good news.”

-Five Kavalian warships entered the fringes of this system twenty-two minutes ago- Avi spoke.

“Avi... I said give me good news.” Resumar snapped.

-I have been in contact with *THE PILLAR OF FAITH* and given the information to Captain Antell. Avatar 341 has activated passive jammers so they will not be able to contact anyone outside the system and Captain Antell is moving to engage them. When combined with the ships Captain Maros commands... they will destroy the Kavalian ships relatively easy enough. Is that good enough?- Avi said.

“Ok... that’s good news.” Resumar spoke.

-We will not be able to download the entire VORTEX Cruiser 341 core Resumar- Avi spoke seeing Resumar look at him.

“What? Why?” Resumar barked. “That’s not good news!”

-Several of the portable data core units we brought with us for transferring the memory banks were damaged in the explosion of the *STRIKER*. Micro fissures in their biogel casings that I did not detect with a routine scan-

“How much information are we talking here Avi?” Resumar asked evenly. “And what information?”

-I followed the outline laid out by your father when we copied City Ship 41’s cores- Avi answered.
-All history data cores were downloaded first. Followed by engineering data cores and specs, then shield cores and then the sensor cores. As with City Ship 41, your father was far more interested in defensive modifications and the history of the Pralors. Weapons were not a concern for him, though if there was enough room he wanted them as well-

“Why would my father not want weapons data cores?” Resumar asked.

-Your father is a descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar Resumar Leonidas. Just as you are. Though he was an accomplished and exceptionally skilled warrior, knowledge was his power- Avi replied.

–Your father is no different He once told me he would start no war with anyone but he would damn sure finish any war that someone started against him. Permanently. That is an adequate paraphrase I believe–

“That still doesn’t explain why he would forgo useful weapons plans and schematics for history data cores.” Resumar said.

–The *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser is already the premier ship in the Union Fleet Resumar. You know this. It is much faster and can project more power than any comparable sized ship in either the Kavalian or High Coven ranks- Avi told him. –With the upgrades that they have already begun to undergo, it will increase the combat power of the *LEONIDAS II* to the exact proportions that your father wanted–

Resumar nodded. “You are talking of the Quantum Matter Reactors?”

Avi nodded. **–While not as efficient as the Quantum Fusion Reactors fully based and designed on Pralor technology that the *ARIZONA* Class ships are equipped with, the prototype QMRs designed by Zaala Randall are excellent, if a bit under powered copies. Your father knows this, and he wants to improve on her design. He feels the strength of the Union comes not in her ability to bring power to bear, though our power is quite considerable, but in the ability to project our power and show our allies and friends we are able to stand beside them in times of need–**

Resumar looked at Avi and grinned. “Avi... how much time have you and my father spent together?” He asked.

Avi’s red/orange eyes blinked several times. **–I do not see the relation that has to our current predicament Resumar–**

“Just answer the question Avi?” Res told him.

–Including the times when we have spoken via COM units... total time would equal four years, three months, one week and nine days– Avi answered.

Resumar shook his head. “And here all these years he has led us to believe he never spent any time with you.” Resumar looked at him. “And what did you talk about?”

Avi shook his large head. **–Conversations between the King and I are confidential Resumar Leonidas–**

“So you are keeping his secrets?” Res spoke with a wider grin. “Leave it to my father to tell his secrets to the one person in the universe that would never reveal them.” He shook his head. “Ok... how much are we going to have to leave behind?”

–Avatar 341 and I estimate that we will only be able to complete seventy-five point two percent of the shield data hub download with the remaining memory cores that we have. Mican and his people have been very helpful to the three engineers we brought with us in removing the forty-three Quantum Hyper Fusion Power Cores VORTEX Cruiser 341 had in sealed storage. Avatar 341 is very confident he can adapt them to our current technology and assist us in building our own. The Hyper Resonance Power Cores are several levels more advanced than City Ship 41’s own design. They are packaged and ready to be moved– Avi reported.

“So you told him we will be taking him with us.” Resumar said.

Avi looked at Resumar. –**This was a correct assumption was it not?**–

Resumar nodded. “Indeed it was.”

Avi nodded. –**I told him as much. He had already made plans to remain aboard VORTEX Cruiser 341 when it was destroyed. He may be more advanced than me, but I have had the interaction with other species that he has not. He welcomes the opportunity-**

“Avi why can’t we just yank the remaining computer cores and bring them with us as well?” Resumar asked.

-That is not possible Resumar. The remaining two computer memory hubs weigh in excess of three million metric tons together and are the size of a STRIKER DT. Where would we put them? We have no means to bring them with us- Avi asked innocently.

Resumar looked at him. “I see your point.” He stated nodding his head. “Then we destroy them with the ship.”

-That would be the plausible plan to follow- Avi spoke. –**Avatar 341 and I have been trying to determine what we could do to increase the explosive force of the munitions we brought. Every scenario we run data on comes up far short. We believe the ship needs to be incinerated Resumar and we have come up with a way to do this though...-**

“Incinerated?” Res gasped cutting him off. “Avi... just how are we suppose to vaporize a ship that is almost eight kilometers long and buried in a mountain when we don’t even have enough explosives to do anything but break it into a dozen pieces?”

-If we place eleven of the Power cores we have packaged at strategic points within VORTEX Cruiser 341... combined with the chemical composition of the explosives we have brought... it would be more than sufficient to shatter and incinerate ninety-seven point six percent of the ship. The remainder would be too damaged to be of any use- Avi answered.

Resumar looked at him. “Why do I get the feeling that there is a very large drawback to this idea?” He spoke.

-An explosion such as the one we would create, even underground at the depth VORTEX Cruiser 341 resides, it would annihilate any living creature within a hundred kilometer radius of point zero- Avi answered. –**Including plant life and any animal life that may be living in that zone. It would also destabilize this continent and send a cloud of toxic ash into the atmosphere that would remain for at least seven point three months-**

“*Sibfla!*” Resumar gasped in horror.

-As I said... the plan does have its drawbacks- Avi spoke.

“Yeah... no kidding!” Resumar quipped.

-It is the only way to be sure Resumar- Avi said. –**Anything less and we will risk not destroying it completely. Even a small amount of Pralor technology falling into the hands of those who will use it for nefarious means would be difficult to fathom-**

Resumar nodded his head slowly. "I know." He said softly. He thought about it for a few moments, weighed the pros and cons and came up with the only true method of completing their mission here. "Do it Avi." He stated finally. Avi nodded his head and began to turn back to return to the ship. "You said there were three things Avi..." Resumar stopped him. "What was the third?"

-It is not important at this time Resumar- Avi answered.

"If you were going to tell me about it before it must be important enough." Resumar answered. "You are not just a machine to our family Avi... you are... you are a member of our family when it comes down to it. Speak what you have to say."

Avi turned back and looked at him. **-It concerns Mican and Athani Little One-**

This got Resumar's undivided attention and he moved closer to the cyborg. "What do you mean?" Res demanded. "Has he done something?"

Avi shook his head. **-He has done nothing. Not directly-**

"I don't follow Avi." Resumar spoke.

-You know I am able to conduct deep tissue and DNA scans without having to touch the individual or draw blood- Avi said.

Resumar nodded. "Yes."

-Avatar 341 has similar abilities. I was reviewing his earlier scans of the Kavalians that he allowed on the ship just before we arrived. I conducted a deep tissue scan of Mican and all the others among his group as they came onto VORTEX Cruiser 341 this time to verify his results. They were the same- Avi spoke in that now familiar almost mechanical voice. **-I was able to obtain a DNA match Resumar-**

"I'm still not following you." Res spoke. "A DNA match for who?"

-Mican's DNA strands match those of Athani Little One Resumar- Avi told him. **-If my calculations are correct... and there is little reason to doubt them... they are brother and sister-**

Resumar stared at him in open mouthed shock.

**VANEDI
12,678 LY FROM EARTH
SPACEWARD OF THE PERSEUS ARM
UNEXPLORED SPACE**

Wayonn moved gracefully along the well worn path through the trees, his tan cloak dragging along the top of the hard packed dirt trail. He was used to the slight incline and climb to his great grandson's perch high in the valley. Vanedi was a large planet with a slightly lesser gravity than what he was normally used too, but it made it that much easier for him to traverse the terrain. Twenty-five years they had been here now, Wayonn playing the part of School Master, teaching Dutkne all that he could. The boy was infuriating sometimes, always wanting to contemplate the meaning of this or that, yet he had learned his lessons well. His Mindvoice skills had advanced to a level very near what he felt from Martin Leonidas. Perhaps not in sheer power, but in refinement and ability he was an equal. Dutkne had spent the better part of his five hundred and forty-eight years of life soaking up all Wayonn could teach him, even while continuing to build on the great legacy left to

him by his father and his grandfather. Wayonn couldn't help but smile at the many memories as Dutkne grew. He reminded him so much of his own son Canth as a small boy, always inventive and adventurous. In terms that others would understand, Dutkne was Wayonn's Great Grandson, the first born of Canth's youngest son who he had left with Wayonn when he returned to Lycavore. As far as Wayonn was concerned Dutkne was the last living male link to his beloved son Canth. All of Canth's children had died through the years, either at the hand of the Coven or for other reasons. Only Dutkne, his mother and two sisters remained. Dutkne's mother had never taken another mate and though only several thousand years old and still a beautiful young wolf in their terms of lifespan, none had ever caught her fancy enough though many had tried. Perhaps because with Dutkne gone so much, she had committed her life to insuring the Protectorate continued on in her son's absence. With the help of his two sister's, Dutkne's mother had indeed insured the Protectorate remained true to its core values.

The similarities between Martin Leonidas's path in life and that of Dutkne were far removed from each other but Wayonn knew this would not stop them from forging ahead into the future. If they had a future. Wayonn still concluded that the reserved but sharp tongued and dry humored Dutkne would be more suited as a friend to Martin's son Androcles since they were closer in age and abilities and surprisingly temperament. It would be interesting to see them finally meet when that time came. And it was closing in on them, far faster than Wayonn had first expected.

Wayonn knew of Dutkne's inherent fondness for escaping for long stretches of time, and it drove his advisers mad as they tried to find him. When Wayonn suggested that they get away twenty-five years ago, Dutkne had jumped at the chance. He was an inspiring leader, but he hated the more mundane roles he was forced to take. When Wayonn had seen what Martin had begun to accomplish after discovering the Mindvoice ship, Wayonn knew it was time for him to begin in earnest teaching Dutkne everything he could. The Pralor Wayonn knew without any question that CS41's engine activation would have been detected upon leaving Lycavore that day long ago, and he also knew that they would come eventually. He just didn't know when. The growth in power of Xaxon's tremors within Mindvoice would also be detected eventually, and over the last ten years he had pressed Dutkne hard.

The boy was an explorer like his father, and he had traveled to many different worlds in his five hundred plus years. He had even managed an extended stay on Earth, in Sparta when he was only thirty-nine years old. Long before Martin had any idea who and what he was, and before the passing of the comet. He had wanted to study the history of his people and how the descendants of the man his grandfather had followed lived. It was where he had picked up the many Earth words he quite fluently now espoused. It was slang Wayonn knew, but in many cases it was impossibly infuriating. If they were to survive what Wayonn knew would come, they now had to discover each other. They could no longer remain apart, and Martin Leonidas, his son Androcles and Dutkne would be the beginnings of what they could have. Wayonn rounded the trail around the now familiar boulder and let his eyes settle on the figure before him.

Dutkne stood the same height as his father at two meters even, his form lean and quite muscular. He lacked the definition of Martin Leonidas and his sons perhaps, but the potential was there. Dutkne was a seasoned and lethal fighter, but he much preferred to talk his way out of potential incendiary situations. Many times he had succeeded in this, though he was anything but helpless. His precise control over his Mindvoice abilities was exacting, and aside from himself, Dutkne's MV shielding abilities was unapproachable. It was a skill he would need to pass on to Martin and the others when they met, something that he and Martin Leonidas had discussed. He was shirtless now, wearing only the dark brown fatigue like pants and his combat boots, and sitting lotus style on the flat expanse of the adjoining rock face. His skin was deeply bronzed in color now after two decades on this sun drenched world, his dark hair cut to soft fuzz on top of his head, and his thin beard and goatee meticulously trimmed. His five hundred plus years of life had taught him much, and Wayonn saw the Razer Pulse Blaster in its holster by his right leg. Next to that was another holster of sorts that held Dutkne's weapon of choice. It would have been called a Quarterstaff by others, but this weapon was far deadlier in his hands. It was collapsible, like the *Nehtes* that Martin's elven Weapons Master had designed, and it could be broken into two sections. Each tip was weighted with a coating of thin metal making it extremely deadly. When broken into two sections, Wayonn had seen Dutkne extend his physic essence down his arms and hands to encompass the two sections, turning them into weapons that could kill with a single blow.

Wayonn let his eyes drift out over the view of the valley before them and allowed his wolf senses to inhale deeply of the nearby ocean breeze that filtered through the mountains all around them. Dutkne was looking inland, but just over the ridge above and behind him was an ocean that was vast in its size. He turned back just as Dutkne opened one eye and focused on him.

“Have you decided to continue my schooling grandfather?” Dutkne asked. “You have been gone for three days now and I almost sent out a distress signal to Drey to bring our ship back and begin searching.”

Wayonn chuckled as he moved around in front of the rock slab and looked at Dutkne. “Your schooling is at an end grandson.” He spoke evenly.

Dutkne’s other eye opened quickly and he looked at him in surprise. “At an end?” He spoke comically. “Aren’t you the one who told me, not so very long ago, ‘Your schooling never ends Dutkne’, isn’t that your phrase grandfather?”

“I did say that didn’t I?” Wayonn spoke.

Dutkne snorted. “More times than I care to recall.”

Wayonn grunted in returned. “Perhaps if you had listened the first time I would not have had to repeat myself.”

“Where would the fun in that be grandfather?” Dutkne asked as he got to his feet.

“As I recall... you came on this journey willingly.” Wayonn said as he crossed his thin arms over his chest.

“Anything that gets me away from the insidiously boring realm of politics I will agree to without hesitation.” Dutkne answered dryly. “Life on Etheru was becoming mind-numbing in its normalcy.”

“Your insistence on discovering the unknown will one day clip your tail grandson. You know this.” Wayonn said. “How will your turn on four paws with no tail?”

“Ah... I will discover a way.” Dutkne replied playfully.

“We must talk Dutkne.” Wayonn said. “We must talk of the future.”

“Ah yes... time for riddles. Always a favorite of mine grandfather.” He replied drolly as he pulled on his shirt and began to fasten the straps.

Wayonn snorted and shook his head. “Yes indeed... you will fit in very well in the future providing you learn humility.” He muttered to himself.

Dutkne looked at him. “Grandfather... you are muttering to yourself?” He asked in mock horror. “This is not like you.”

“After three days of speaking with Martin... I’m surprised I am not a raving lunatic.” Wayonn said. “He is quite possibly equally as infuriating as you.”

“Martin?” Dutkne asked as he fastened his staff across his back. “Who is this Martin? Another of your long lost friends... or someone that the Protectorate has newly appointed to drive me mad with the mundane.”

“I have taught you well Dutkne.” Wayonn spoke with a grin. “Perhaps too well. You rarely drop your shields far enough to feel the tremors of Mindvoice outside our simple and limited bubble.”

“Why would I?” Dutkne asked. “What is there outside our bubble as you say?”

“There is the Lycavorian Union.” Wayonn replied softly. “Your people. Our people.”

Dutkne chuckled softly. “Grandfather, the Lycavorian Union is as they have always been. They are our people, yes, but they lack the will and the purpose of our ancestors. They lack what those of us in the Protectorate have kept close to our hearts. They have drawn themselves away from the feral instincts of our people and allowed themselves to try and reach a point that King Resumar and my Grandfather Canth never meant for them to reach. Even Prime Minister Deia walks this path now, and she should be the one to know better as Queen Eliani’s sister.”

“Our feral instincts is one of the reasons the Vanari remain aloof from us Dutkne.” Wayonn told him. “They could be powerful allies.”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes that is true; however I will not be the one to lead our people away from who we are simply to appease another race. The Vanari can accept us for who we are, or things can remain as they are. We are not allies and we are not enemies. They are xenophobic towards others not like them. We do not partake of the insidious slave trade of their people as others do. When we find it, we stamp it out. Besides... the Vanari are more than capable of taking care of themselves.” Wayonn smiled as Dutkne faced him and he stepped off the slab of rock. Dutkne’s faced crinkled somewhat as he looked at Wayonn’s tanned weathered cheeks and

crooked smile. "What? Did I release an explosion of foul smelling air? I did have Kremtar Roots for dinner last night."

"I brought you here almost twenty-five years ago for a reason Dutkne my boy." Wayonn said.

"Truly? And here I thought it was to get me away from the politicians." Dutkne answered him with a grin. "What would that reason be grandfather? Or is this another of your riddles that I am supposed to spend years trying to solve?"

Wayonn smiled. "This is no riddle boy." He stated as his eyes grew bright. "City Ship 41 is no longer on Lycavore Dutkne." Wayonn spoke calmly.

Dutkne laughed and shook his head. "Oh grandfather... now we are resorting to jokes! This is very unlike you!" He stated as his dark eyes came back to rest on Wayonn and he saw that Wayonn's expression was plain and very serious. "Grandfather are you feeling alright? Did you perhaps hit your head in the three days you have been secluded on the other side of the planet? Lycavore is occupied by High Coven forces and has been for nearly eleven thousand years."

Wayonn shook his head. "No. Not any longer. It is no longer occupied by anyone and hasn't been for nearly a quarter of a century. The Coven abandoned it after Martin left it in ruins and the Kavalians refuse to set foot on the planet for some reason."

"Kavalians? This Martin character again?" Dutkne barked comically. "Oh grandfather... I like this new you. You are actually cracking jokes."

Wayonn grinned. "If only that were the case." He stated as he held out the data pads from behind his back. "You should probably read these."

Dutkne took the pads. "What are these?"

"The unedited Intelligence reports that Drey and the others have been delivering here for the last twenty-five years. Surprisingly, even they do not know of City Ship 41's exodus, or what has transpired." Wayonn spoke. "Avatar 41 did his job very well."

"Avatar 41?" Dutkne popped. "Unedited reports?"

Wayonn smiled. "That is what they call him now. Avi. Martin's elven pilot named him within hours after meeting him."

"Martin?" Dutkne barked. "Again you mention this name. Who is he? What does he have to do with CS41? No one could have moved that ship!" Dutkne protested. "You told me Avatar 41 was programmed to awaken only if a descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar or Grandfather Canth entered the ship. Only they would have the level of Mindvoice abilities to activate the ship's systems!"

Wayonn nodded as he turned and settled to the edge of the massive slab of rock Dutkne had been occupying just moments before. "That is very true." He said. "Fortunately for us, both of these things occurred."

Dutkne's face took on an expression slightly of anger and slightly of exasperation. His grandfather had done this to him before in the past in order to test his reasoning and his ability to control his temper. "Grandfather... I am not in the mood for another of your lessons! Why have you altered Intelligence reports?"

"Because they contained items that you were not ready to accept, and our people were not ready to face." Wayonn answered evenly as he looked at him and met his stern gaze. "That needs to change now."

"What items?" Dutkne snapped. "What are you talking about now?"

"City Ship 41 *was* activated Dutkne. It was activated and then flown from Lycavore to the planet Earth." Wayonn explained.

"Earth!" Dutkne exclaimed. "What nonsense is this? Why would it go to Earth? There is nothing on Earth! It is a warring wasteland since the Comet passed between the moon and the planet. The High Coven uses it as a colony for food! Nothing more! Whoever the fool was that created the elves there should be shot for he only made the Coven stronger in its position!"

"Because that is where the descendant of Sumar... where Martin Leonidas directed Avi to guide it. Earth is free now Dutkne. Free and rapidly rebuilding under Martin's guidance and those he put in charge of the planet. And the man you call fool is the Senior Polemarch of the entire Lycavorian Union army of ground troops." Wayonn told him. "Earth is Martin's seat of power half the time, in Sparta. The city of his father. It is where all his children have been born. Every one! The other half of each year he resides on Apo Prime. And the Lycavorian Union is no longer as you once knew it to be Dutkne. Not since he returned and claimed the throne of his grandfather." Wayonn answered calmly.

“Martin...” Dutkne’s eyes grew wide in shock. “Martin Leonidas! As in...?”

Wayonn nodded slowly and took great pleasure in the expression on his grandson’s face. “Yes... the great grandson of Resumar, Elder Pralor Sumar’s first born son. The second son of Leonidas. The child we all thought lost so many years ago. He has returned... and he has taken his place as King of the Union and of Sparta. He has returned to our people the instincts which you correctly stated they had forgotten. Lower your shields Dutkne... lower your shields and allow me to let you feel what I have felt for twenty-five years since his return.”

“Twenty-five years!” Dutkne shouted. “You... you have kept this from me for all this time? Why?”

“To give him time to do what needed to be done.” Wayonn spoke. “What you yourself have said needs to be done. It has taken him twenty-five years to do it but he has done it most effectively and our people have embraced it to their very core. I was wary at first, of who this man was, until I felt him like a burning star within Mindvoice just as I felt Sumar. They are ready Dutkne... he has made them ready... and he will need your help in the near future. Your unique abilities. He has enemies closing in all around him and I am unable to see what will happen any longer.”

“The son... the son of King Leonidas?” Dutkne asked. His voice was soft now... almost in awe of what he was being told.

Wayonn nodded. “He returned to our people in the Union twenty-five years ago and for all of that time he has dragged them kicking and screaming into the future. He and his Queens have finally brought them back to what Resumar and Canth intended. Avi and CS 41 have afforded them advances in their technology that bring them very much on a par with us, though it is still in its infancy. He has led as a Lycavorian and a Pralor Dutkne. As Sumar once led us when we first arrived on Lycavore all those millennia ago. And his oldest son, all his children, they follow in his footsteps.”

“Son?” Dutkne gasped looking at him.

Wayonn nodded with a grin. “Martin Leonidas is quite the ladies man it seems. A typical Alpha Wolf of old. He has five Queens... all of them of astonishing beauty. And he has a total of fifteen children. Two of them are adopted daughters. Only the oldest ten are able to fight and Androcles is the strongest among them. His first born pureblood son.”

Dutkne’s eyes grew wide. “Pureblood?” He gasped again.

Wayonn nodded. “He and his son have sealed the divide between the Lycavorian people with the mates they have chosen Dutkne. His son did so and does not yet even realize it. The female pureblood who is now Androcles’s anome is a descendant of the line of Eliani’s Uncle.”

Dutkne looked at him stunned. “Truly? We thought... we thought they had all been killed grandfather. That is what our history pads tell us.”

Wayonn nodded. “In context... Resumar’s blood was of one line of royalty... Eliani’s of another. When they became mates that bloodline was sealed. When they died we thought it ended. There is not a full accounting of who escaped Lycavore except for Chetak and his scum, you know this, but we do know many did. One of those was Eliani’s Aunt and Uncle. Their daughter escaped with them and the Coven never discovered them. She mated very young and her last child, a daughter, gave birth to Androcles’s *Anome Sadi*.”

“Grandfather... how do you know all this?” Dutkne asked.

“When Martin freed my son, he was able to touch me one last time Dutkne.” Wayonn answered. “For that briefest of moments he was able to relate to me all he had learned through the years about what happened to our people. It appears Veldruk would visit him during his imprisonment and think to torture him with this knowledge. It was this information he gave to me while he passed his wisdom and experienced to Helen.”

“Grandfather... are you saying he... was on Earth when I visited Sparta and stayed among our people there?” Dutkne asked gently. “No one knew who I was, only that I was an eccentric lone wolf.”

Wayonn nodded his head. “He did not yet know who he truly was then and it is unlikely you would have even detected him given the level of your shields and his own natural shielding ability.” Wayonn said as he got to his feet. “There is something else you should know... and then you need to contact Drey and have him come here to remove us from this place.”

“What... what else can you tell me that is more unbelievable than what you have already told me?” Dutkne gasped.

Wayonn smiled. “Canth lives on Dutkne. Martin freed his Mindvoice essence from his prison and he passed all that he was to the Helen... the Lycavorian First Oracle.”

Dutkne’s eyes grew even wider if that was possible. “Grandfather... we have not had... we have not had a First Oracle since the Black Day!”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes we have.” He replied. “She has just been in a different part of the galaxy. When Martin freed my son, all his knowledge and wisdom passed to her. Everything that my son and your grandfather was; it is now held within her. She too is still discovering herself or she would have felt us... you... a long time ago. It is time we stood behind our King and united our people Dutkne. Our King has begun this journey and now it is time we brought them all back together after twelve millennia. Martin Leonidas started it when he saved all those left on Lycavore and guided CS 41 to Earth. He has continued it even now. And together... together we will see it into the future.

“For the future is fast approaching... and it is not as utopian as we had hoped.” Wayonn finished grimly.

RITAAH

The High Coven senior officer placed his hand on the arm of his fellow commando and shook his head as the man lowered his SA80. The man turned his head and glanced at him before turning back to watch the dark green scaled dragon moved further off above the trees, the blond hair clearly visible.

“No Jomar.” He said softly. “We are not equipped to fight dragons and that monster would burn us all before we knew what hit us.”

“He carried that Kavalian whore Captain.” Jomar spoke. “I was going to shoot her. Knock her from the saddle. Our wounded can use her blood to further heal.”

“And when your round bounced from the shield they have around them when they fly and she sent out a Mindvoice warning to her husband then what?” The Captain said. “You would bring that big Spartan and his dragon from west of here, not to mention the other Kavalian whore and the purple scaled beast she rides. Then our mission would be over before we ever got a chance to complete it.”

“Our comrades will die without fresh blood Captain.” Jomar said. “They are moving the last of the Kavalians to the Mindvoice ship even now. We will be unable to obtain fresh blood when they do that, even though the thought of taking Kavalian blood turns my stomach.”

The older man nodded. “As it does mine. The fact remains however... we are very much ill-equipped to fight these dragon beasts Jomar. And the big Spartan that is Leonidas’s cousin is not one we want to discover us. Nor Leonidas himself. We still have a mission to complete and we can not do that if we are dead.”

Jomar lowered his weapon the entire way and nodded his head slowly. “Yes sir.”

“Come... let us move back to the others. We go tonight and I want to be prepared.” The officer said. “We will need to shift to Plan B, and then plot our way to the extraction area. They are intent on destroying this ship and we must retrieve what we came for before they do.”

The two vampire commandos turned slowly before blurring off into the shadows created by the thick timber.

The only thing that Athani Leonidas would have liked to feel is her long hair whipping behind her as she sat low in the saddle on Cemath’s back and they soared above the treetops. The Dragon Armor braces secured her legs tightly to the side of the saddle and she had no fear of falling, even as Cemath executed sharp turns and dives. She had even grown so accustomed to flying on her husband’s dragon that she no longer bothered to hold onto the edges of the Mark IV saddle. Athani could not explain why she did not harbor the fear of dragons that hampered the majority of her people. She hadn’t feared Cemath since that first time on the Union ship where she met Resumar and the more she flew on him, the more she came to understand and relish the feelings as her husband did.

Athani could not believe she was actually back in Kavalian space after trying so hard to escape. She *had* escaped though, and part of her new life with Resumar was acting as a Princess of the Union would act. She

was now the wife of a Prince of the Lycavorian Union and where he went she would follow without question. It just so happened that now they were in Kavalian space attempting to keep a devastating weapon from being discovered by her father. Martin Leonidas had asked her personally to come on this mission and after what she had discovered since defecting, and the complete acceptance and unquestioning love she had received, Athani could not refuse. She did not want to refuse. These men and women they had discovered here were still her people and she would do what she could to insure they were kept from her father's clutches and help them to find what she herself had found. Even Resumar had told her the same thing. Their mission here was important, for Athani knew if her father or Pusintin ever got their hands on the technology from this wondrous ship he would turn it against any who opposed him and make a bid to conquer the galaxy.

She felt Cemath turn sharply as they moved lower across the tops of the trees and his wings flared as they appeared above the small clearing where the entrance into the Mindvoice ship they had been using was. She smiled gently as her keen feline eyes saw her tall husband standing with Mican and Avi waiting for her. Cemath extended his talons with his wings flared out and he touched down lightly, slowly going forward until his front forelegs were on the ground. He lowered himself completely to the soft earth as Athani leaped from the saddle and landed beside him. She ran her fingers along his scales as she moved towards Resumar.

Thank you Cemath. Athani spoke to him within Mindvoice as she moved up to his snout.

Cemath bobbed his head up and down and brushed against her shoulder. *Always Athani.*

Athani smiled and turned her eyes on Resumar as he walked towards her with Mican and Avi. "Why have you called me back Resumar?" Athani asked as she stopped and folded her body into his arms, her long tail wrapping instinctively around his waist. "Dario, Channa and I were almost back anyway with the last group."

Resumar nodded. "I know... but this is important."

Athani looked at him oddly. His tone of voice was apprehensive and she had never heard that from him before. "What is wrong my love?" she asked. "Has something happened?"

"Avi has discovered some information that you need to be aware of. It's... it's personal information." Resumar told her.

Athani looked at Avi and then Mican. "If it is personal then why is Mican here Resumar my husband?" Athani asked. The Kavalian had been looking at her oddly ever since she arrived and Athani was beginning to think he harbored lustful thoughts towards her even though his wife was a beautiful elven female.

"You told me that your older brothers had all been killed *Aryschanne*. Before you were born." Resumar said as he took her hands.

Athani nodded quickly. "Yes. The oldest two in the poison missile attacks by the Coven some nine hundred years ago. The third was killed just a year before I was born. You know all this Resumar."

"And you know of no other brothers?" Resumar asked.

"Others?" Athani gasped. "If my father had other sons, Jalersi and I would never have been the ones to come here to begin with. Resumar what is going on?"

Avi stepped up beside Resumar now and Athani looked at him. **-Athani Little One... you know it is my duty to scan everyone we come in contact with?-**

Athani nodded. "Yes."

-I ran deep tissue and DNA scans on all those with Mican's group- Avi said.

Athani nodded. "Yes... that is procedure like you said. What does this have to do with me?"

-My scans revealed a match to your DNA sequencers. The Synaptic strands indicate a relation to you. A brother-

Athani's blue/green eyes grew wider at this information. She looked at Resumar then. "That's... that's not possible! My father... he told me... he told Jalersi and me that the last of our brothers had been killed in a..."

-My scans were completely accurate Athani Little One-

“He told you I was killed in an explosion at a training base.” Mican said softly as he stepped up next to Resumar now. “Yes... that was the official story.” Athani’s eyes cut to Mican in shock. Her vertically slit blue/green eyes were as shocked as Resumar had ever seen them, and he reached out to take her arms and steady her. “In reality... I led a revolt of a cloning facility. Our father was using me as one of his test subjects, just as he used Jalersi and you Athani.”

Mican felt a weight he had carried for decades beginning to lift from his shoulders. It was a weight that Na’lia coming into his life had all but erased, but a weight that still lingered. Until now. He moved closer to her, looking down into her stunned eyes.

“I did not turn out as he expected.” Mican said. “As he wanted. My eyes. My abilities. He wanted to change me to the point where I could lead his clones in battle and look no different than the vampires he planned to invade. When I did not turn out as he hoped I became a liability to him. As did the clones. He ordered us executed Athani. I... I did not want to die. I led the clones in an escape attempt. We succeeded and this is where we have ended up. We have saved more over the years, and we bring them here.”

Athani stared at him in silence. This was why he had been looking at her strangely since she had arrived here. No matter what she was doing he always seemed to be watching her. And now she knew why. Jalersi had told her he had been killed, and when she asked her father, he had told her the same thing. Was it all a lie? Was her entire life a lie? Athani blinked several times and looked at Resumar. No... whatever had gone on before, whatever lies she had been told before she had met Resumar, they no longer mattered. This was her life now. This is what she was meant for. And her life with this man was no lie.

Athani looked back to Mican. “That... this is why you have...”

Mican nodded. “I have known about you and Jalersi for many years.” He said gently. “I think Jalersi may know more about me than she lets on or speaks of, but when word reached us here that you defected... I was very happy. I... I did not know how to approach you once I realized you were here. Na’lia has called me a coward half a dozen times since you arrived because I would not come forward.”

Athani looked at him. “She... she loves you without question.” She said.

Mican nodded. “As I love her.” He stated moving closer still. “I have always imagined what I would say when and if I was ever able to see you or Jalersi. How I would tell you... if you would even believe me.” Mican looked at Avi and then back to her. “I did not suspect he could do what he can do.”

-I have the ability to...- Avi began.

Resumar shook his head. “Avi... not now!” He hissed. He turned back to Athani and squeezed her hands. She inched closer to him, her long tail circling around his leg as it always did when she was anxious or troubled. “We have time now *Aryschanne*. You and Mican can talk for a time. Dario and Channa will be here shortly with the last group. After that I don’t know when...”

“Yes.” Athani told him quickly glancing at him and then turning to Mican. “If... if you wish to.”

Mican didn’t hesitate. “It would make me very happy.”

Resumar nodded his head. “Stay with Cemath *Aryschanne*. No one will interrupt you then.” Resumar leaned over and kissed her softly, nuzzling her cheek and ear as he did. Mican watched as Athani’s face turned wistful and contented, her eyes closing for the briefest of moments. “You have perhaps an hour before we begin moving everyone to the Coven ship that Uncle Vonis has secured.” He stated before smiling and moving away, dragging Avi by his arm, which was a feat in and of itself.

Mican watched Resumar walk away and then he looked back at Athani. “He is a fine man.” He said softly.

Athani met his gaze steadily. “He is my husband, my mate and my very best friend.” She said proudly. “He saved me. Loved me without pause or regret. Without him... without him I would be nothing.”

Mican nodded. “As it is with Na’lia and me. Ever since she came into my life.” He said softly.

That was the opening and Athani stepped closer. “Tell me.” She said softly. “Share it with me and I will tell you of my life.”

Mican nodded. "It is as good a place to start as any." He said.

IRARUZU

Walter cringed as another plasma mortar smashed into the ground only a hundred meters from the front of the Drow estate. He dashed across in front of several windows, the sound of weapons fire zipping over his head as a barrage of small arms peppered the windows behind him as he moved. Walter skidded to a halt next to Hval, who was squatting behind the corner of the wall clutching his 190.

"Their mortars have moved back out of range of our turrets and are finding the range again!" Hval shouted.

"You noticed did you?" Walter barked. "How many?"

Hval shook his head. "Two at least! Maybe three Holy One."

Walter nodded. "That is what I think as well!" He shouted back. "They are short ranged mortars however! They can get within range of the estate until they take out the turrets! Once they take out our defensive turrets they will move forward, target the estate and begin to pound us into oblivion!"

"They outnumber us ten to one Holy One!" Hval snapped. "Why waste the ammunition when they could simply overwhelm us after they destroy the turrets! It would be faster than trying to realign their mortars!"

Walter nodded. "Good point!"

"We will not be able to hold them Holy One!" Hval barked.

Walter slammed his hand down on Hval's shoulder. "Then die well Dragoon!"

Hval nodded his head, his face a stern mask of determination as he gripped his 190A3. "I intend too Holy One! And I will take as many of these dogs with me as I can!"

Walter looked up and then dashed across the open area in the room and skidded around the corner as he headed down the stairs. He saw Ceneia, Daba, Lu'ria and Jennifer huddled behind some heavy furniture they had piled in front of the main door to the estate. Majeir he knew was occupying the entrance to the underground tunnel and watching the exit which Lu'ria and Jennifer had initially escaped out of. The tunnel entrance had never been meant for a dragon to enter, but it had taken a ten second burst of Majeir's intense burning flame to actually melt the metal and concrete enough for her to squeeze into the much larger tram tunnel. He shook his head as he passed the entrance and saw Majeir extend her head and neck out of the now much larger doorway.

Walter! She exclaimed. I do not like the vibrations of the ground Walter.

Walter nodded and let his fingers brush against her snout. "Be strong Majeir. You can't fly because we know they have T19s."

I can burn them before they fire! Majeir complained.

It was Lu'ria who got up and moved next to her new Bonded Sister. *No!* She barked out within Mindvoice, placing her hands on Majeir's massive head. *I will not risk losing you so soon after I have found you! You are safer in the tunnel!*

I do not want to die in this tunnel! Majeir announced.

You will not die! Lu'ria snapped. I won't let you die!

Walter turned and moved to where the other three women squatted or knelt behind the makeshift barricade. Daba looked up at him as he knelt on one knee.

"He is not coming is he Holy One." She said softly.

Walter met her eyes. "I don't know." He answered honestly.

"We know he got the message." Ceneia spoke.

Walter nodded. "That does not mean he would have put it all together though."

"You... you are saying that what Lu'ria thinks she feels could be very wrong." Daba said looking at him.

"I don't know what to believe." Walter said. "I... I would have thought he would be here by now. Then again I don't know where in The Wilds the *SCIMITAR* was when they got the message."

"Or if he and the others feel the same for Lu'ria as she does them." Daba said looking at where her daughter was stroking Majeir's scales. "You do not have to try and make me feel better Holy One. If we are meant to die here, then we are meant to die here. At least I will be with my child..." She looked at Ceneia and reached out to take her hand. "And the love I have waited many years for."

Walter met her amber eyes. "Do not lose hope yet Daba." Walter said.

"The enemy is on our doorstep Holy One." Daba spoke. "I for one... I intend to make them pay for what they have done before I die."

Walter heard the chambering of a fresh power cell in the 190 and looked at Jennifer. She clutched the weapon tightly, a look of unreal determination set on her jaw.

"For what they did to my Drow Mistress... I will kill as many as I am able before I join her." Jennifer spat.

Daba nodded her head in approval. "*Aovi*." She spoke in Lycavorian.

Walter's head came up when three larger than normal explosions caused the ground to shake and the walls to vibrate.

"They got the turrets!" Hval's voice echoed over their implants. "They got the turrets!"

Walter looked back at Daba and the others. "Prepare yourselves... based on what they have done already they will not leave it to mortars to kill us. They will assault the estate in force with all of their troops to insure their goal is complete this time!"

"Why?" Ceneia asked. "Why do this?"

"Whatever the reason..." Walter told her. "Whatever the reason... let's make sure they know they were in a fight!"

He saw the three women nod and then he turned to look at Lu'ria and Majeir. Lu'ria didn't hesitate and nodded her head, while Majeir's massive head bobbed up and down.

ULU HARBINGER **IN RANGE OF IRARUZU**

The elven commander of the *HARBINGER* was pacing his bridge as they closed on the pirate planet. They were under full Shroud and closing the distance by the second. Velnar had been handpicked by Miranda Lorian to command the *HARBINGER*. Four hundred years in the Union Fleet and countless battles, most recently in the Evolli War where he had earned his commendations for bravery by saving three medical ships that the Evolli decided they were going to destroy out of spite. He hadn't allowed that to happen, and he would be damned if he allowed his Prince to walk into a trap.

"...me a report!" He barked out loudly.

"Kavalian *PURUSIAN*-Class Heavy Frigate!" His sensor operator called out in response. "Maintaining a low Ecliptic orbit. Barely above the outer atmosphere! Picking up what appears to be some sort of battle on the ground just on the edge of the Deutrino field. Getting spikes that appear to be plasma mortars!"

"Centralize the location?" Velnar snapped.

The woman at the sensor station turned to look at him. "The Deutrino field is making our scans fuzzy Commander, but it is definitely in the location of where the Drow base is supposed to be!"

Velnar nodded his head. "The bastards are trying to hide in the atmosphere!" He stated. "The Prince's *STRIKER*?"

"No sign of it Commander!" The woman answered immediately. "But we wouldn't pick it up anyway sir!"

"*Nubou! Nubou! Nubou!*" Velnar swore long and loud causing many of his bridge crew to turn and look at him. Their elven Commander was usually much more reserved and he rarely used profanity of any kind that they knew of, and many had served with him for years. "They jumped before us! They must already be here!"

"They have to detect the Kavalian ship Commander!" She called out. "The *STRIKER*'s sensor array is even better than ours in some ways!"

"Can we burn through the Deutrino field on the surface?" Velnar asked. "Get a message to the Drow base?"

"Yes sir... but we risk exposing ourselves if we do!" She answered instantly. "We'd have to increase power by forty-one percent, and it appears as if the Kavalian Frigate is the thing generating the field! The planet's entire upper atmosphere is saturated with Deutrino particles now!"

“Fuck it!” Velnar barked as he straightened up. “We need to let the Prince know we are here! Communications officer! Spartan 11! Go secure! And do it quickly!”

SPARTAN 11

“...been trying since I spoke with you Andro!” Marci almost shouted. “I can’t get any of them on the board! Not one!”

Andro shook his head as he looked at her holoimage. He had never seen Marci so upset and flustered. This was not something he had wanted to hear. “It’s a prelude to an all out attack Marci!” Andro announced immediately. “It has to be!”

Marci shook her head. “I’ve been trying to raise Armetus or your father as well! Neither of them is answering! Your Uncle’s COM channel is off the grid! When I inquired of the *Durcunusaan* officer at the base he only told me that they had left with Isra and a full platoon!”

“Left to where?” Andro asked.

“The man didn’t know!” Marci stated. “Andro... Andro something isn’t right! Even with the Level Six Blackout I should still be able to get in contact with someone. None of your mothers are answering! Not even Deia! I got Laustinos in his office and he told me he would look into it!”

“Laustinos?” Andro snapped. “Look into it? He is a whimpering idiotic fool! He will do nothing!”

“Andro... I have a bad feeling about this.” Marci said. “I need to increase the alert of the fleet!”

“Do it!” Andro told her without hesitation. “Alert Level Three! All Fleet groups are to stage to their Line of Departure immediately! All ground units on Earth to full battle readiness!”

“What are you going to do?” Marci asked.

“Our main sensors are being jammed or deflected by a massive Deutrino field that is encompassing almost the entire planet Marci! It is coming from this Kavalian frigate in low orbit!” Sadi spoke now from her seat. “We are only getting small breaks in the field and it appears there is...”

The loud claxon overhead sounded three times in quick succession and Ne’Veha’s head whipped around to look at one of her consoles. “Incoming secure COMS on Spartan 11!” She announced.

“Identify that *SirsanGai!*” Sadi barked. “No one knows we are here!”

“It... it says it’s coming from a Commander Velnar aboard the *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser...” Ne’Veha was turning as she spoke, but Andro finished her statement.

“The *HARBINGER!*” He spat. Andro looked at Marci in the image. “I’m going down to Iraruzu and find Walter Marci. I am authorizing you to use whatever means you have to find out what is going on! Any means Marci! Until you have re-established contact with my father or Armetus, you are now in command of the *Krypteria* and the Intelligence arm of the Union military by my order. You report to no one but me in your actions and I have just approved anything you need to do!”

“Andro that... I will get it done!” She barked.

“Until we find a way to stop the frigate from generating this Deutrino field you will not be able to contact me.” Andro spoke. “Get a warning to my mothers on Kranek and Hadaria that something is about to pop and it isn’t good!”

“Consider it done!” Marci replied as she was moving around to the back of her desk and bringing her control console online. “Watch yourself Andro!”

“I will contact you as soon as I am able.” Andro said. “Spartan 11 out!” Andro reached forward and tapped the console. “Bring up Velnar *SirsanGai!* Secure Spartan 11!”

The holoimager flickered once more and then the upper body of the *HARBINGER*’s elven Commander appeared and focused.

“Prince Andro!” Velnar exclaimed as he saw him.

“Commander, explain what you are doing here and do so quickly!” Andro snapped.

“Milord... we detected your emergency Jump six hours ago! Captain Lorian sent us after you in case you needed assistance!” Velnar answered without hesitation.

Andro’s brow furrowed. “Miranda?” He asked.

Velnar nodded his head. “Yes Milord. Admiral O’Connor sent us out into The Wilds to be a Guardian Angel as he called it. We positioned ourselves to be able to respond to several different locations and then we detected your jump. The sensors on the *ARIZONA* are calibrated differently Milord, and we were able to detect your jump even while you were Shrouded. Captain Lorian ordered me to bring the HARBINGER after you.”

“The *ARIZONA*’s Attack Wing is no longer at Dreamland?” Andro asked stunned at this knowledge.

Velnar shook his head. “No sire... we... Milord... we are detecting what appears to be plasma mortar explosions near the location of the Drow estate. There is a Kavalian frigate in low orbit that is generating...”

“Yes I know... it is generating the Deutrino field!” Andro barked. “Velnar... I’m going to the surface! Walter is down there! My Drow mate is down there!” Andro saw Velnar’s eyes grow a little wider. “The Kavalians are trying to kill them and advance their plans against the Union! Every Drow outpost we have in The Wilds is off the board! The Kavalians are moving against the us! It has to be!”

“They... Milord that is... but why?” Velnar gasped.

“I don’t know and I don’t care!” Andro snapped. “Velnar... make that frigate disappear and then stand by to receive further orders from Sadi!”

Velnar stood up straighter and nodded. “It will be done Milord!”

Andro leaned over and laid a blistering kiss on Sadi and then Ne’Veha. “Take us down *KertaGai*! Drop us right on top of the bastards and then provide whatever cover you can to Walter and Lu’ria!”

“What about you and Carisia?” Ne’Veha asked.

Andro turned and saw Carisia pull her matte black helmet onto her head. There were now crimson and gold lines that extended across her cheek guards on both sides as well as along the top of the helmet. The plumed crest was the same color as her raven black hair and stretched well down past her shoulders. He saw her smile, her cobalt blue vampire eyes and the tips of her vampiric fangs very visible. He smiled and turned back to Ne’Veha, nuzzling her elven ear with firmness and love. “We will be fine.” He stated. He turned quickly and nuzzled Sadi’s cheek once more. “Fly like the wind *KertaGai*.” He said.

Sadi nodded. “The Deutrino Field will disrupt our Shroud when we enter the atmosphere my love. Hold on tight!”

Andro nodded. “It can’t be helped.” He said. “Part of our life... our future is down there and I won’t forsake it for anything.”

“On our way.” Sadi stated.

IRARUZU WEST OF THE DROW ESTATE

“Move in from the west now!” The Kavalian commander yelled to his officer as he lowered his field glasses and turned to Leruk who knelt beside him. “Their defensive turrets are down Leruk.” He stated. “I will begin my assault from the west. Take your force in from the south through the timber. Use the depression to attack along the rear of the building. You can make your way right up to the back!”

Leruk nodded. “I have distributed the T19s evenly Major.” He spoke as he came to his feet.

“You are sure you only saw the one dragon?” The major asked.

Leruk nodded. “They must have it hiding in the structure somehow.” He stated.

The major nodded. “The team we sent to the spaceport found the bodies of our missile team. They say one of them was... one of them had begun to get his skin peeled from him! It had to be the older Drow whore! They will know we have T19s and will keep the dragon under cover.”

“It helps us!” Leruk said. “If we are lucky we can bury the creature!”

“Bury the dragon but I want them alive Leruk!” The major snapped. “No matter the cost... I want them alive! I am going to rape and kill that Drow whore myself for what she has done to my men!”

“It will cost us many!” Leruk reminded him.

“Not if we progress quickly!” The major answered. “Now get moving!”

PURUSIAN-CLASS HEAVY FRIGATE

“...attack has begun sir!” The tactical officer called out.

“Good. I am growing tired of this planet.” The captain answered as he looked up from the data pad he was reading. “Prepare our transports to retrieve our ground team and...”

“Captain!” The sensor operator barked out as his vertically slit eyes went wide. “Captain I have a contact!”

“Identify!” The Captain spoke coming to his feet.

“Union ship! *STRIKER* Dragon Class!” The man barked. “She’s making a run for the surface!” The man’s eyes went wide. “Captain! It matches with one of the VF Codes we got from Command!”

“Which one?” The captain asked.

“Sir! It matches to the Crown Prince Androcles!” The operator barked turning in his chair. “The Crown Prince’s *STRIKER* is here sir!”

The Captain’s eyes were wide. Many things flashed through his mind at this information. They had received many Verification Friendly Command Codes from the Lycavorian traitor and until now, they had not picked up any of them. If he destroyed the *STRIKER DT* of the Crown Prince, he would be viewed as a hero since KFI command had never been able to nail down his exact location. He made his decision quickly and without real thought.

“Weapons!” He barked out. “Lock forward Anvil Cannons on the *STRIKER* and prepare to fire! Load tubes one and three with full yield warheads and...”

Captain!” The sensor operator barked out again. The captain of the Kavalian ship turned his head so quickly at the sound of real fear in the man’s voice that he tweaked his neck.

“Speak!” He yelled.

“Captain! *LEONIDAS II*-Strike Cruiser has just de-shrouded off our aft quarter!” The man screamed.

“What?” The captain shouted. “Impossible!”

“Captain... they are powering forward weapons!” The sensor operator screamed.

“Evasive!” The Kavalian Captain roared. “Evasive hard to port! Hard to port! Defensive measures!” It wasn’t in time by any stretch of the imagination.

HARBINGER

“Captain the Kavalian frigate is preparing to fire!” The sensor operator snapped.

“Not on my watch you don’t!” Velnar snarled coming to his feet.

“Forward MK9s locked!” The weapons officer spoke crisply.

Velnar stood just in front of his command chair with his hands behind his back and nodded. “Forward MK batteries fire! Stand by Mark22Bs! Four missiles from launchers one and two! Full plasma matter yield! I want nothing left of that ship but atoms! Fire!”

There were five large MK9 Alpha Series Type One Plasma batteries in the bow of a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Strike Cruiser. The Type One MK9 was the heaviest ship mounted weapon that Union ships carried. A single blast from one of these turrets could rip through the hull of nearly any unshielded or armored ship as if it was paper. The concussive force alone was powerful enough to crush the life from men or women near the impact point. All five of the *HARBINGERS* forward MK9s fired at one time in a blinding flash of yellow/red color. Five single lines of Plasma reached out for the Kavalian frigate and struck the ship dead center of its superstructure.

The *PURUSIAN*-Class frigates were not designed to go head to head with a behemoth like the *HARBINGER* and five concentrated beams of plasma seared through the frigates light shields as if they weren’t there and gutted the Kavalian frigate like a fruit. The forward section of the frigate burst away from the rear section as secondary explosions rocked the two hundred meter section of hull. Flashes could be seen through the hundreds of portal windows as interior decompression ravaged the ship from the inside. As the concussive wave of the five plasma beams smashed into the Tri-Cobalt engine core of the frigate, the force field protecting the core failed instantly and the entire rear section of the ship blossomed into a small sun. Six hundred of the

frigates nine hundred member crew died instantly in the resulting engine explosion which completely vaporized the rear section.

“Missiles locked on forward section Captain!” The weapons officer barked out.

“Reading numerous life signs in the forward section Captain! They have multiple hull breaches!” The sensor operator shouted. “Their atmospheric shields are holding right now. Emergency power has kicked in.”

Velnar shook his head slowly as his dark eyes watched their holoimaging Heads Up Display. “*Nubou* them! They should have thought about that before they decided to attack our Prince and our Union!” Velnar growled angrily. “Mark22Bs! Fire!”

“Missiles away!” The weapons officer called as his finger stabbed down on his control console.

A total of eight smallish missiles launched from either side of the *HARBINGER*'s ventral mounted Mark22B launchers. Smallish in that the missiles were only six meters in length and perhaps four meters thick, yet they packed a horrific punch. Two hundred kilos of pure, refined Pallidium. The most powerful explosive in the Union arsenal. All of it packed into the single warhead the missile carried at speeds that almost could not be tracked. Seven seconds after the missiles launched they impacted the forward section of the Kavalian frigate and detonated. The resulting explosion was not as brilliant in nature, but equally effective. The forward section of the Kavalian frigate appeared to swell from the inside and then almost sixteen hundred kilos of Pallidium exploded and blew what remained of the ship into tiny pieces that would burn up in the atmosphere for the next two months.

Velnar turned his head. “Launch the Ready Squadron!” He barked out the command. “I want a company of Spartans on the surface like yesterday! Full combat load! Anything that even looks Kavalian... kill it!”

“Troop ships are already loaded and powering up sir!”

“Tight beam COM to the *ARIZONA*!” Velnar snapped as he returned to his chair. “Let Captain Lorian know what is going on and tell her to keep her eyes open! Give me a CAP patrol out to ten million kilometers! Anything that enters the system I want to know about and I want an immediate solution for our weapons! Let's move people! The *sibfla* has hit the fan, and our Crown Prince is about to make an even bigger mess than we just did!”

IRARUZU

Andro leaned close to the front of his saddle as Elynth tore across the treetops at nearly two hundred and fifty kilometers an hour. Her wings were folded back and she was expertly using the height they had exited the *STRIKER* from to glide in at a lesser angle and therefore keep her speed constant. They were almost upon the estate and Andro turned his head to see Anthar slightly behind and to Elynth's left, keeping pace and matching her every move. It helped that they were mates and Anthar could simply link his mind to her and know what she was going to do at the same time she did. His azure wolf eyes easily saw Carisia's small form leaning forward much the same as him, her palms spread across Anthar's broad shoulders, allowing him to feed off her own Mindvoice abilities. As with Elynth and himself, it was the perfect harmony of two powerful minds. Their psychic shield kept the skin peeling wind from harming him and he turned his head forward once more, reaching out with his wolf eyes.

Enylarcopri! The mortars! That is where they will have their T19s. Andro barked out within Mindvoice. *Remove them before they fire again or threaten us! Break now!*

There was no hesitation in the least and Anthar peeled away with jaw dropping speed and dipped even lower to the tall treetops, slowly extending his huge wings out to garner lift as he leveled off from their descent. Seeing that they were approaching properly and were as equally prepared as he was Andro turned his attention back to the open field in front of the Drow Estate. At this moment, Carisia was nearest to him in fighting skill, her vampire speed and ability to blur making her the obvious choice to join him on the ground. Sadi's skills were improving everyday, though she worked on her Mindvoice powers more than her unarmed combat skills. Ne'Veha had yet to begin spending time with them training as she had only come into their lives days ago, but Andro knew she would join them as well. The mortars and T19s he would leave to Carisia, and he would tend to the Kavalians dogs attacking the Estate.

Sister! Andro snarled out within Mindvoice feeling her heart beating calm and collected just as his was. Perfectly in tune with each other.

I count sixty-seven still living! Elynth barked out. *Half of them are in the trees to the west and moving towards the structure!*

Torma Two One! Just as we did on Hagnar Three! Those in the trees I will leave to you sister! Walter will know what to do when he sees us! Andro barked.

They did not outnumber us four to one on Hagnar Three Andro! Elynth quipped.

The Evolli expected us! The Kavalians do not! It will work! Andro snapped.

Then here we go! Elynth shouted as she snapped out her wings and rose a few meters higher. Then she rolled over onto her back just as they cleared the trees and appeared in the huge cleared field, dropping until she was only three meters from the ground with Andro upside down in the saddle.

The Kavalian major lowered his macrobinoculars and cursed under his breath as another wave of seven of his men went down under withering weapons fire from the first and second floors of the building. He counted at least one weapon on the second floor and at least four on the bottom floor. Whoever these Drow were, they had cut a killing zone around their main estate building as there was hardly any cover anywhere for his men to hide as they dashed across the open ground and through the thin treeline. Half of them were in the open area using what cover they could to bound past each other while covering each small group. The others were racing through the treeline trying to get the defenders to split their fire in two directions. He lifted his wrist mounted COM unit.

“Mortar teams! Target the roof of the building!” He screamed. “The second floor! Direct fire into the windows where the bastard is killing our men!” The major looked at his COM unit when he received no immediate answer. “Mortar teams! Direct fire into the building’s second floor! Why...”

“Nooo... arggghhh... look... out...!”

The major’s eyes went wide when he heard the unmistakable sound of an angry dragon and the distinctive sound of that dragon unleashing a sizzling stream of deadly flame. He whirled around and lifted his macrobinoculars back to where his mortar teams were set up a kilometer away. His blood went icy cold when he saw them on the face of the ridge, a huge red dragon in their midst and laying waste to their positions with his wings, talons, fangs and searing hot flame while the blurring motion told him a vampire was among their number as well. The Major saw the flash in the sky even through the lenses and he pulled them away from his eyes and looked skyward. He was then able to witness the death of the Kavalian frigate in orbit, just as nearly everyone on the planet did as well. He heard the unmistakable sound of another trumpeting dragon and whirled back around only to see the obsidian scaled beast flying directly at his men from the east upside down. He saw the dragon’s maw open even from this distance and the orange tinted stream of superheated breath blistered across the ground.

“NO! NO!” The major screamed as he broke into a run for where his men were.

It was the most gut wrenching stop he had ever conducted and six months ago it was something he would never had attempted. Anthar didn’t slow down as they tore across the tree tops; if anything he increased his speed somewhat. His magenta colored eyes were narrowed to slits, but they took in all around them. The nerves on his scales fed his brain data on wind and speed and course, and it was the training of the last months that allowed him to bring it all together as one.

Sister! Anthar called out.

I’m ready! Carisia barked.

We go!

Anthar let out a bellow of rage, snapped out his wings to both sides and came to an abrupt and quite heart stopping halt ten meters above the three plasma mortars the Kavalians had set up. Twelve heads came up at the massive rush of air and twelve sets of eyes went wide just as Carisia leaped from her saddle and Anthar cut loose with a stream of nearly four thousand degree flame directly at the mortar crew under him.

Carisia had jumped from higher heights and her small five foot two stature made her an impossible target to hit. In the middle of her leap she drew her dual fighting knives and in another blink her booted feet smashed into the chest of the largest Kavalian, driving him down into the hard packed surface. Even though she weighed barely more than a hundred pounds, her momentum and forward motion was enough to crush every bone in the Kavalian's chest and shoulders as she flexed her legs, adding to the force of the impact. Her vampire hearing detected the sound of his bones snapping and she sprang into motion without thought.

She was a whirlwind of deadly motion, blurring to the next closest Kavalian who stood there astonished at what was happening. His astonishment would be forever etched on his face as Carisia's dual blades flashed in a single instant and both sides of his thick neck were opened to the midday air. As his blood fountained in two arcs away from his body, Carisia was already blurring again. The third Kavalian was struggling to get his weapon unlimbered from his holster and he looked up as he brought the hand blaster up. The blurring motion ceased directly in front of him and the much smaller vampire female appeared. Her hands caught his wrist and twisted savagely and he screamed as his bones burst from his skin and the weapon dropped from his grasp. Carisia stepped towards him, slashing her right blade across his exposed throat while spinning to the side to move around him. As she turned fully, she reached back and buried her left blade into the Kavalian's lower back, using her vampire strength to rip upwards several inches before yanking it free.

The fourth Kavalian had lifted his weapon and targeted her. As he pulled the trigger of his rifle Carisia blurred once more and he sent eight rounds punching into the back of his fellow soldier. Carisia didn't give him another chance, stepped under his arms and brought both her knives slashing down. One blade opened his arm from his elbow to his shoulder, the other burying itself in his chest. With no pause in her spinning motion, Carisia's right hand dropped to her thigh and she yanked the K12 from its holster. As she completed moving she jammed the K12 into the Kavalian's neck and pulled the trigger twice in quick succession. The kinetic rounds blew out the other side of his neck, sending out bloody fur and flesh and showering the ground beside him while nearly decapitating him.

As Carisia whirled to face the last of the mortar crews Anthar was now fully on the ground looming behind her. The four Kavalian troops had their weapons leveled at them, but it was easy enough to see the shimmering blue psychic shield surrounding both of them. Even as they pulled the triggers on their weapons, Carisia and Anthar were moving as one. His right wing slashed forward over the top of his bonded sister as she rolled to the left. The hard bony cartilage that was the front edge of his wings smashed into the first Kavalian's head, crushing his skull and flipping his body through the air like one would kick a ball. As the last three began to pull back on their triggers Carisia extended her hand with the K12 and pulled the trigger. Five kinetic rounds walked their way up one Kavalian's lower body beginning at his groin. As each round struck him he staggered back as if hit by a massive fist. Blood was erupting from four massive wounds before the fifth round entered his screaming mouth and blew out the back of his skull. Carisia was already blurring as she rolled to the side and Anthar brought his left foreleg down in a devastating swipe. The third Kavalian had been trying to track Carisia with his rifle and never saw the four razor like talons. Anthar's talons severed the man's arm and dug six inch deep furrows into his chest and abdomen until his foot slapped into the dirt once more. The Kavalian died silently, Anthar's talons having torn his throat open and sliced through his voice box.

The fourth Kavalian was furthest away and did the only thing his horrified mind could think of. He turned and threw away his weapons as he began to run. True to their feline nature Kavalians could run very fast, nearly as fast as a wolf on four legs. Carisia had the advantage of her momentum and vampire speed however. The Kavalian had gone twelve steps before the shape appeared to his side and he felt an agonizing pain rip through his leg. He lost his balance and slammed hard into the unyielding ground rolling several times before smashing into the base of the tree. His hands reached down to grip his now crippled leg as blood squirted from the four inch long slice in the back of his thigh and knee. Carisia's blade had severed his hamstring and all the tendons and ligaments at the back of his knee.

His eyes were filled with fear as he watched the smallish vampire female blur until she was only a meter away from him. His eyes grew terrified when Anthar's massive head lowered to just above her right shoulder, his magenta eyes burning with anger. Carisia stared down at the man, her blood seething at what she knew had happened here.

"No one hurts my Drow Mistress and those I love!" Carisia snarled savagely, baring her vampiric fangs. "No one!"

“Wait!” The Kavalian screamed. “I didn’t...”

“Burn him brother!” Carisia snapped.

“*NOOOOOOO!*” The Kavalian's screams died with the rush of flame and heat as Anthar didn’t hesitate and cut loose with a short but exceedingly lethal stream of fire.

Carisia stared at the writhing form for only a few seconds before turning and leaping to Anthar’s back. As the dragon armor locked her legs in place she placed her palms on Anthar's sides. She heard the trumpet that announced Elynth’s arrival and both she and Anthar turned and could only watch with awe and adoring eyes as the two they loved most in this universe brought their vengeance to bear.

Walter was the first to notice the dwindling weapons fire as he peeked above the scarred table he was using for protection. As his eyes cleared the edge of the table he heard the dragon trumpet and he recognized it without question for he had heard it many times before. His head came all the way up as the weapons fire peppering the front of the estate had ceased almost completely.

“Make my brother proud boy!” Walter whispered to no one but himself and the thin air around him. “Make my brother proud!”

“He’s here!” Hval’s voice screamed over their COM implants. “The Prince is here!”

Walter turned back slowly and looked at Daba whose amber eyes were focused on him and wide in stunned realization. He smiled. “I guess the *Yara Parma* was right after all.” He stated softly.

Daba’s head snapped around and she saw Lu'ria standing beside Majeir with an almost dreamlike expression on her face. Her amber eyes were wide as for the first time she felt the full force of Androcles’s Mindvoice presence engulf her. Seconds after she felt that, she could feel Sadi and Ne'Veha reaching for her... and then finally the one she most wanted to meet in the diminutive Carisia.

“By the gods Holy One!” Hval’s voice echoed. “I can not believe what I am seeing!”

All of them broke for the front of the building and cautiously peered around and over the shattered remains of the windows and their frames. What Daba saw would forever be engraved into her memory, for this was the man who would claim her daughter as his own. Her amber eyes were wide as she watched.

“*A jal nindel zhah orthae!*” Daba gasped loudly. (By all that is Holy)

Walter glanced at her. “My father once called them, father and son, he called them *Talis rie Annur.*” He told her softly. “Forces of Nature.”

Walter caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and saw five figures rise up from the shattered remains of the window frames and bringing weapons to bear. “Down!” He bellowed. “Get down!”

Walter leaped for Daba just as the weapons opened up and he felt three hot lances of fire strike his side as he threw his weight upon Daba and buried her. Lu'ria reacted to Walter’s warning but much slower than she normally would have because of what she felt from Andro and the others. She was still not skilled with using their psychic shield either and as she turned she released her control of it and the shimmering blue shield dropped from around her body. Daba grunted from the impact of Walter’s weight on top of her and looked up just in time to see Lu'ria take four rounds to her chest and abdomen.

“Lu'ria! Lu'ria no!” She screamed.

Sister no! Majeir’s voice echoed Daba’s even as she winced with the force of the strikes against her psychic shield. ***NO!!! Die! Die! Die!*** Majeir bellowed in anger as her head turned towards the windows and she let loose with a stream of searing flame at the windows while she struggled to bring her body out of the tunnel entrance.

Ceneia and Jennifer whirled before Walter had finished his warning and were bringing their weapons up just as projectile rounds began to dance across the floor causing them to roll away and seek cover. Majeir’s blast of flame slammed into the window frames, igniting it instantly and setting the five Kavalian troops outside the windows instantly on fire. So close were they that two of them were charred to brittle bone within seconds as the others screamed out their agony.

“***LU'RIA!***” Daba screamed as she finally pushed Walter’s groaning body from atop her and scrambled to her feet.

“***DON'T MOVE!***” The voice roared.

Majeir's head snapped around and saw Leruk standing over the top of Lu'ria now, his weapon leveled at her head, the second Kavalian with his rifle leveled at them. She inhaled and prepared to unleash another jet of flame but he held up his hand.

"Open your mouth dragon and she dies!" Leruk barked. "I know you understand me! You will kill me... but you will kill her as well!"

Majeir's rage filled eyes glared at Leruk, but she kept her mouth closed. Daba began moving again and Leruk lifted his other hand.

"I said don't move Drow whore!" He screamed causing Daba to stop in her tracks. "You have caused far too many problems for us these past days! Now it is time for you to make full amends for the lives of my comrades who you have killed."

Leruk motioned with his head at the Kavalian soldier who fired two quick rounds into Jennifer's chest. Her body was blown backwards with the force of the rounds, blood spraying the wall behind her as she slammed into the wall and was still.

"It was me!" Daba shouted. "I skinned your friend on that building! Kill me instead!"

Leruk met her gaze. "I'll get to you Drow whore!" He snarled in reply. "You came all the way to this planet for her and I want to know why before I kill her!" He asked lowering his weapon closer to Lu'ria's forehead as he positioned his body with his back into the destroyed main foyer of the estate home. Her eyes were closed and blood was rapidly pooling on the floor under her from the four bullet wounds.

"Tell me why!" He screamed.

Torma Two One.

It was a relatively simple maneuver that Andro and Elynth had named and mastered when Andro was thirteen and Elynth fourteen. It was a maneuver they could do in their sleep, and it was also a maneuver that could have devastating results if executed properly. During the Evolli War they had tried this maneuver on a company of elite Evolli Shock troops. It had not worked then because the Evolli had been expecting dragons and were prepared for the type of combat that would ensue. The Kavalian troops however, they were not so lucky.

Even upside down Elynth could direct her stream of flame tinged superheated breath with exacting control. As she burned a scorching path towards the bunched together Kavalian troops, engulfing seven of them in the stream's path, Andro released the Dragon Armor braces around his legs and fell away. While Elynth sped over the top of the now burning field, Andro rolled in midair, extracted and extended his *Nehtes* from its holster and then rammed it into the ground as he landed in a cloud of dust and ash. In that split second he channeled all of his considerable Mindvoice power into the *Nehtes* and through it. As the razor sharp spearhead fully buried itself nearly eighteen inches into the ground, a psychic ripple expanded outward with devastating results. The half dozen Kavalian troops nearest to Andro caught the full brunt of this ripple as it pulsed through them shattering bones and pulverizing organs. The force of the ripple dissipated quickly but it allowed Andro the time he needed.

The Kavalian troops who were only staggered by the ripple of enormous Mindvoice power watched as Andro stood to his full height and glared at them from under his helmet. The crested plume, now with five different colors of hair moving slightly, the last one Andro adding only the previous night and was a silvery color that extended past his shoulders. His azure eyes were now wolf eyes and his dual fangs were bared in a snarl. They watched as he lifted his left arm and called forth his Shi Viska from Flat Space and then nineteen Kavalian troops lifted their weapons and sent a furious barrage of kinetic projectiles screaming at the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union.

Andro dropped to one knee bringing up his Shi Viska in front of him even as the rounds began to impact his psychic shield. He clenched his teeth as he concentrated and brought forth more of his MV ability and reinforced his shield. The barrage was tremendous in its intensity, causing the front of his psychic shield to flare a brilliant white color even as many of the Kavalians moved closer and closer to him, confident that they would fell this supposed Crown Prince with unique powers they did not understand. He was without his dragon, and alone and there was no way he could stand against all of them.

Only three of them would survive this confrontation, and two of them would never walk again.

Whether by chance or fate, it seemed as if the power cells on the Kavalian rifles all went dry within seconds of each other. As each of the troops began to reach for a reload the level of fire slackened and as they turned to look at where the Prince was as they reloaded, their eyes went wide in disbelief.

Andro slowly rose back to his feet, his psychic shield still shimmering and his left arm lowered slowly until his Shi Viska was pointed at the ground. His azure eyes were nearly glowing now as he surrendered himself to the power coursing through him completely. His left arm snapped back up in a blink and the Shi Viska launched, humming out its eerie delight as it sliced through the weapons and chests of the three Kavalian troops closest to Andro before speeding off. Andro knew Kavalians were made of sterner stuff than Evolli and as one hand reached back and cleared *Iphan Rie Aellseleum* from its scabbard on his back, his right hand dropped and yanked the K12 from its holster. It was a complete rout from that moment on.

Androcles Leonidas had sat and listened to his father once. He was only ten years old and it was just months before he departed for Sparta to enter his Agoge. Torma and Elynth had flown them to the peak among the many mountain ranges on Apo Prime and as he looked down on Tuya he listened to his father.

“We are different Androcles my son. You and I. You will always be stronger than your brothers and sisters because of the time you were conceived in your mother’s womb. It was a time of high emotion for both of us. We had just discovered each other again, and we let go of ourselves and surrendered to the instincts inside all Lycavorians. We surrendered to our feral instincts. The instincts that so many have forgotten through the years because they thought it was what my father and grandfather wanted.” Martin spoke softly.

“This was not what they wanted father?” Andro asked.

Martin shook his head. “We thought to better ourselves and we pulled away from who we are at our core. We must learn to harness the animal within us; harness and use that strength and power. We are wolves in the form of men Andro. It is what made your grandfather and the Spartans so dominant in their time. They embraced our feral side in battle, but they learned to control it as well. No retreat. No surrender. That was their way.”

“But our soldiers now... they are like this.” Andro said.

Martin nodded. “Yes... because they embrace it more than they ever have. Because of me. Because of your Uncle Danny and all the others who fought with me on Earth.”

“I have this instinct father? Like you?”

Martin turned to look at his azure eyed son. “Oh yes. Your blood is as pure as mine. As your mother’s. This does not make you better than others; never fall into that trap. You are only as strong as the man or women to your left and right. Your blood... it means you must lead them with your heart.”

Andro nodded. “Fight with my head. Lead with my heart. You have taught all of us this father.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes I have... but with the exception of Denali... it will mean more to you in the future because of your blood and the pureness of it. It makes you stronger. Your bond with Elynth makes you stronger. No Lycavorian or elf has ever bonded with their dragon brother or sister while still in the womb. You are special son. Elynth is special. You will know when it is time to fully embrace that feral instinct inside you, but you must learn to harness as I said. It can be your greatest strength. It can help you defend those who need you to defend them.”

“How will I know when it is time father?” Andro asked.

“You will know son.” Martin spoke nodding his head. *“You will feel it inside you, screaming to come out. To act on your instincts! Follow those instincts always! I did not act once and it almost cost me your mother. My Anome. My soul. I swore never to hesitate again Andro. You must never hesitate either son, for in hesitation there is death.”*

Androcles Leonidas did not hesitate that night on Alba Tau, and everything his father told him had come to pass. He embraced the feral side of his blood and unleashed the animal within. They all did that night. It was the only thing that saved them then. Androcles Leonidas did not hesitate now either.

“My turn!” Andro snarled loudly. Androcles embraced that feral side once more. He felt it swell within him, engulf him within its arms and he let it guide his actions. There was no hesitation, no pause and no regret. Androcles Leonidas attacked.

It was a beautiful thing to watch if you excluded the spray of blood and the sounds of screaming and dying men. If you dismissed the crunch of bone and the bark of the K12; if you dismissed the scene of arms and legs and even heads being severed from living bodies. Andro was a tumultuous storm sweeping over a portion of calm land. *Iphan Rie Aellseleum* spun in wide sweeping circles that almost transcended time and space. The Dragon Armor laced blade was impossible to see let alone block or parry, always where it was supposed to be, always with a precision born of countless hours of regimented training and the unique Mindvoice power to encompass everything around him. Every time it struck flesh and bone, it was a fatal wound. Every boom of the K12 Kinetic Magnum spelled death. It was an exquisite choreograph of pure unblemished skill and power.

His psychic shield flared almost to a transparent blue as he moved. It formed around his limbs like a second skin, adding an additional layer of armor to the Mark IV ArmorPly he already wore. His movements as natural, smooth and graceful as any ballet ever performed. It was as if he danced to the sound of some music that only he heard, yet you need only look to where Elynth was to see that two hearts and minds danced to that same tune. Seven Kavalians fell under *Iphan Rie Aellseleum* before Andro's Shi Viska came whipping from behind him just as he ducked down. With the blades fully extended, the shield turned vertical and cleaved a Kavalian soldier completely in two before speeding off once more. Two barks of the K12 and two more Puma Bane soldiers fell. A powerful slash of *Iphan Rie Aellseleum* and a head was sent flying. Blood soaked the ground behind him, as did the bodies of the Kavalian troops. Nothing would stand in his way. Nothing could stand in his way. These men were here to hurt someone who would share his life into the future. Someone who was more than dear to him in many ways. A woman who would share his life and the life of his *Anome*. Androcles Leonidas would never allow harm to come to his *Anome*. Like his mother was to his father, Sadi was the most beautiful and precious thing in the universe to him. Whatever caused her pain then caused him pain. If harm were to come to Lu'ria... it would cause his *Ilythiiri tessai* pain. Lu'ria's pain would be his pain... and his pain would be Sadi's pain. He would never smell Lu'ria's sweet honey melon scent or feel her white satin hair in his hands. This would cause his Sadi pain. (Drow Blossom)

That was something Androcles Leonidas would not allow.

They were here to hurt those he called family and friends. And they would pay for that folly in spades now. Andro completed a final spin, the K12 twirling in his hand until it seated in the holster on his thigh. He faced the last five Kavalians who were scrambling to reload their weapons still. Thirteen seconds and fourteen of their comrades lay dead or dying on the ground around this terrible creature before them. Their eyes locked with Andro's as his motion stopped and he looked at them, his azure eyes as cruel as anything these hardened fighters had ever seen. They saw him twirl *Iphan Rie Aellseleum* in his right hand, the blood stained blade whistling in the air until it was seated in the scabbard on his back. Their eyes filled with confusion at this for he was now unarmed. This false thought only urged them to reload quicker and just as the first man brought his weapon up once more they saw the silvery diamond marquise shaped psychic projectiles form in the palms of both his hands. The shapes appeared to be roughly two inches long and perhaps an inch wide. Seeing these shapes caused all of them to pause once more, so very confused and effectively signing their own death warrants. Andro's hands snapped forward and the two psychic projectiles shot from his hands with uncharitable speed. The chests of two men blew apart instantly, their bodies launching backwards with savage force until they fell nearly ten meters behind the remaining three, gaping wide holes in their chests that appeared to have been fused open. As three heads came back around two more psychic projectiles erupted forward, and two more chests blew apart, throwing their bodies back with incredible force.

The last Kavalian kept his eyes on Andro as fear unlike anything he had experienced in his lifetime gripped his body. There was no compassion in those azure eyes. No reasoning or sympathy or pity. There was only death. He had fought High Coven soldiers and Immortals many times, yet never had he seen such pure, unadulterated death. The Puma Bane soldier did the only thing his limited mind could think of. He placed the barrel of his rifle under his chin and blew his brains over the scorched earth behind him.

"*Nubous* coward!" Andro hissed loudly.

"*LU'RIA!*" The woman's voice reached his wolf ears causing him to spin around and look at the shattered and pocked home with glowing azure blue eyes. That word galvanized him instantly. With a silver/white flash of light the massive raven black wolf appeared racing for the structure.

Sadi alone had felt the tremendous tidal wave of emotions through her mate. Only she was bound to him so tightly it allowed this. She had felt every emotion, seen his mind's eye, and what he felt for her, for all of them, but primarily for her. She turned her helmeted head back slowly from the field after witnessing what he had done and her eyes changed to her wolf eyes, her fangs growing slowly. If Sadi Leonidas had any doubts, questions that resided deep down about what her role in this life was going to be, seeing and feeling what Andro had done quickly lined up those doubts and questions and shattered them for all time. She was his soul, his core, and in being these things Sadi realized he was the same to her. The gods had kept them apart until they were ready, until he was old enough to fully grasp his gifts, and when it was time they had brought them back together. She could feel Andro's blood swirling through her, melding with her own so pure and unblemished, infusing her with his will and determination. And Sadi Leonidas spread her arms and embraced it.

Sadi looked out the windshield of the *STRIKER* and her jungle green wolf eyes grew wide as she saw the ghostly beautiful face of the blond haired woman. Her green eyes glowed brightly even as her misted body drifted before her like an apparition. Her ghostly face was animated and smiling brilliantly.

"Mother?" Sadi whispered softly.

Ne'Veha's head came around from where she was monitoring her instruments. "Sadi?" She asked.

Sadi watched the ghostly figure nod her head and lift a hand to blow a kiss before the mist was taken by the wind and it was gone. Sadi blinked and before her she saw the ground and Elynth's huge body smashing her way through the trees, her flame tinged superheated breath scorching Kavalian troops at every turn.

"Sadi my love?" Ne'Veha gasped again causing Sadi to look at her. Ne'Veha's eyes grew a little wider when she saw those jungle green wolf eyes. They burned with intensity and passion and Ne'Veha felt her own elven blood begin a slow smolder.

Sadi smiled at her, baring her wolf fangs. "Let us end this *SirsanGai!*" Sadi spoke. "Lu'ria is injured badly. Andro is going to her now but we need to end this and land quickly."

Ne'Veha nodded. "Yes."

Sadi turned back to the front of the *STRIKER* and focused her eyes on Elynth. *Elynth!* She reached out within Mindvoice.

Elynth's large head snapped around and looked skyward directly at where Sadi had the *STRIKER* hovering. *KertaGai!* She barked out. *Sadi... I feel it! So powerful! So wonderful!*

I as well Elynth! Your armor! Extend your armor! I'm going to blow those Kavalians bastards to hell! Lu'ria needs us!

Do it! Elynth barked out. *I can not kill them all for they cower and run in fear!* Elynth trumpeted out her distaste. *I am only a female Kavalian dogs! You run from a female!*

Sadi smiled at Elynth's words and turned to Ne'Veha. "*SirsanGai!* Missiles! Both pods!"

Ne'Veha's hands flew over the weapons console activating the pods on either side of the *STRIKER*. She turned back to Sadi. "Extended and locked!"

Sadi reached out and touched her panel. "For *Ilythiiri tessai.*" Sadi muttered before stabbing her finger down on the panel.

Anthar and Carisia landed on the edge of the field, their own Dragon Armor extended at Sadi's silent warning and they watched as twenty-three missiles plowed into the stretch of tree line. The ground heaved up and shook violently as the missiles devastated the terrain. Trees that were burning were torn asunder and shattered into lethal fragments that peppered the air all around. Kavalian troops that were hiding behind large trees were shredded as these same splinters punched into their bodies at lethal velocities. Through it all, Elynth walked calmly towards the edge of the clearing, the fragments bouncing harmlessly off her Dragon Armor encased body and her psychic shield.

Anthar could only watch with unabashed love and pride as his beautiful obsidian mate finally came into the clearing and left the exploding and burning timber behind. He watched her lift her right foreleg and flick it outward, the upper body of the Kavalian troop she had crushed moments ago slipping off her talons and sailing through the air to land many meters away.

Yuck! Elynth announced.

Carisia ran up to Elynth and Anthar extended his snout towards her. "Elynth! Are you hurt?" She exclaimed out of breath.

Ah! Elynth spat. I will need to clean my talons when I am done, but no Enylarcopri, I am not hurt!

Anthar watched as her armor began to retract and he waited until it had retreated full into the saddle before using his snout to firmly rub her neck and wings. *Are you certain Elynth?* He asked her.

Elynth bobbed her head up and down even as the tips of her wings twitched in delight at the touch of her mate. *Yes! We must go to the home! Lu'ria is injured and Andro may need our help!*

Anthar looked back slowly to the field and the bodies that were strewn about from Andro's battle. *Help?* He spoke. *He may need something... but help from us is not one of them. You saw what... what he did?* He asked turning back.

Elynth met his eyes with stunning yellow/gold dragon eyes. *Does he frighten you my handsome mate? He does not frighten you?* Anthar asked.

I will never fear my Bonded Brother. She answered proudly. *Scold him perhaps... but never fear him. Come... we must go. Sadi will land nearby.*

Elynth... is she... Carisia began to speak.

Elynth lowered her head and touched her snout to Carisia's cheek. *Never doubt his love for any of you Enylarcopri. Like his father, he would shatter worlds for you if need be. Come!*

Elynth cocked her powerful legs and flung herself into the sky just as Carisia leaped onto Anthar's back and he followed.

"Tell me why!" Leruk screamed once more.

The coughing sound drew everyone's attention and Leruk's eyes turned to watch Walter lift himself slightly from the floor. "Fool boy!" Walter spat as he rolled himself over onto his back, his hand holding his side. His fingers were bloody and the entire left side of his abdomen was soaked in dark blood. "I see you are just as nubous dense as your father!"

Leruk glared at him from across the room. "You know nothing!" He screamed.

Walter laughed gently as he pushed himself up against the wall. Ceneia didn't care and went to his side, the lone Kavalian shifting his weapon to shoot her in the back, Leruk's hand stopping him in mid-motion.

"I know who you are boy!" Walter barked. "I can smell your father's traitorous stench even through the death you have wrought here!"

"My father is no traitor!" Leruk screamed. "He is a proud Kavalian and leader!"

"Your father is an ignorant fool and a power hungry *ronnus!*" Walter snarled. "He has no idea what he has set in motion this day boy! And neither do you! You have no comprehension at what you have unleashed!"

"Tell me who she is!" Leruk screamed once more. "Tell me who she is and I may spare your lives!"

Walter laughed almost madly and both Ceneia and Daba looked at him as if he had gone insane. He shook his head slowly. "Oh... Leruk, son of Pleistarchus. Your father has abandoned you boy! He has taught you nothing!"

"Do your lives mean nothing to you?" Leruk screamed.

Walter's wolf eyes glared at Leruk from across the room. "It is not our lives that will be lost today!" He snarled. "Your father should have taught you better boy! He should have taught you to never bring harm the mate of an Alpha wolf of Spartan blood."

Leruk's eyes went wide then and he began to twist around. His body was lifted into the air and shot across the room to smash into the opposite wall with a sickening crunching sound. A single shot boomed out and the Kavalian trooper's head snapped back as his brains and fur splashed wetly on the wall behind him. Ceneia and Walter looked up to see Hval step from around the corner of the upper balcony, lowering his 190.

"Fucking Drow killing scum!" He could be heard muttering as he came down the stairs.

Daba didn't see the massive black shape cross behind her as she skidded across the floor to where Lu'ria lay unmoving. "Lu'ria! Lu'ria my baby!"

Leruk staggered to his feet, blood leaking from his mouth and nose, his hand blaster lost somewhere among the rubble. He twisted around and saw Androcles Leonidas crossing the room towards him and his eyes went wide. "You!" He gasped.

Daba looked up from where she cradled Lu'ria in her arms and her amber eyes grew wide. She saw the towering son of King Leonidas Drow his arms to his side and the eight inch long glowing psychic knife extended from his right fist.

Andro's azure wolf eyes were filled with savage rage as he stepped up to Leruk. "No one touches my mates!" He snarled loudly.

Leruk swung at him then, Andro deflecting the clumsy blow with little effort, and he stabbed upward with his psychic knife. Leruk's eyes flew open wide in unimaginable agony as that psychic knife entered just under his jaw and sliced its way into his brain. His whole body went rigid as Andro lifted him off the floor and pinned him to the wall. He stepped forward even closer and glared at Leruk with cruel eyes.

"My father once told me it is forbidden to draw blood from family!" Andro snarled so very loudly. "Blood before all else he taught my siblings and I! You may have the same blood flowing in your veins Leruk my cousin... but you are not my family! You are not my blood! And now I will kill you for what you have done!" Andro leaned closer. "Cousin!"

Andro's eyes flared intensely and he twisted his fist against the underside of Leruk's jaw. His eyes exploded open in torturous agony as Andro solidified his psychic knife while it was still imbedded in Leruk's brain. Leruk's arms and legs kicked hideously as the PK fused his flesh and brain and bone into a single mass of gore and when Andro yanked his hand away there was a three inch wide smoking hole under his jaw that extended into his head. His eyes were frozen open in death as his body dropped to the floor and Andro turned away.

"Walter!" Andro barked.

"I will live!" Walter shouted as Ceneia was tearing open his body armor. "Lu'ria! You have to turn her Andro! We have no medic!"

Andro's eyes went to where Daba held her daughter tightly and he crossed the room in a blink kneeling beside her. He tore his helmet off and tossed it down, Daba gasping in shock at his glowing eyes and handsome features. Andro looked at Daba's tear stained eyes. "Give her to me elf mother!" He spoke softly.

"She... she will not open her eyes!" Daba sobbed.

Andro reached out for her. "Give her to me so that I can love her as my *Ilythiiri tessai*."

Daba didn't resist as Andro gathered Lu'ria's body into his arms. He settled to the floor and brushed some of her strands of white hair from her face. Blood leaked from her lips but his wolf ears could hear her heart beating and he could smell her sweet honey melon scent. His fingers wiped away the blood from her pink lips and he leaned over slowly brushing his lips against hers as Daba watched.

"I am here *Ilythiiri tessai*." He whispered against her lips. "I am here for you now and you will be mine. You will be ours Lu'ria of the Drow."

Daba watched as he opened his mouth and she saw his vicious looking dual fangs fully extended as he lowered his head and sank them deeply into Lu'ria's flesh where her shoulder and her smooth neck came together. Lu'ria's amber eyes sprang open in that instant, her arms whipping around Andro's shoulders and her legs kicking out.

"*ANDRO!!!!*" Her voice pierced them all to their core and Daba could only watch as Andro drew her tighter, sinking his fangs in deeper, the virus within his blood surging through Lu'ria's veins like searing hot liquid. She gasped out in agony as the bullets inside her body were rejected and forced out through her flesh and the wounds began to knit themselves back together. Lu'ria groaned and clutched Andro tighter as the virus spread quickly, altering her body and granting her the gift of life and so much more. It raced through her blood, purging everything that was foul and unknown. It mixed and mingled with her cells, changing them, making them stronger. She could feel her muscles stretching and contorting inside her skin and she screamed out in pain, yet strangely she didn't pull away. She tried to draw Andro tighter, pulling him closer, her hands going to clutch his head and hold him.

Ceneia looked at Walter as she worked on the two rounds that had penetrated his armor. "Walter?" She asked in worry.

Walter nodded reassuringly. "His blood is the purest among us." Walter said. "Like his father. Like his mother. The strands of the virus inside him is more potent and powerful. It will change her quicker, but it is far more painful because of this strength." Walter twisted his head. "Hval... Jennifer?"

Hval looked up from where he was treating Lu'ria's human companion. "Only one round did any real damage Holy One!" He spoke back. "She is unconscious but stable. I sealed the wound but we must get her to medical facilities quickly."

Walter nodded. "No worries Hval. Help is coming!"

As if to emphasize his words, the wall into the home in the main room came smashing down and obsidian black scales along with carmine red appeared in the dust. Three female figures rushed through the dust and made their way towards them as the roar of STRIKER AT's could be heard in the distance.

Daba could only watch in shock as Andro began to withdraw his fangs just as the three women appeared around him and Lu'ria. Her heart was beating out of control as she saw in front of her the words of the *Yara Parma*.

The firstborn of many, the son of *knif'rt kal'daka* eyes and virile manhood. He will have the heart of amber and wrap his hands in white satin. *Yvalm xuil to'ryll euol, uuthli ujool lu' charnag d' olath solen, whol jal draeval orn nind ssinssrigger*

Bound with greenest gems, bluest glass and deepest of dark orbs, for all time will they love.

As Daba watched, history began to unfold. As Daba watched, the future of the Drow was altered forever.

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

HADARIA ROYAL PALACE

"...not enough!" Anja spat angrily as she looked up from the table shoving several data pads onto the floor. "It's not enough damn it!"

Sivana stepped up to her sister, reaching out to place her hands on Anja's arms. Sivana's jade green eyes met Anja's own jade colored eyes and Sivana saw anguish in her sister's eyes. Anguish and anger both.

"Anja... we can only do so much. You know this. You can not torture yourself over this." She stated softly. "Wiktor and Buonau have the Elder Guard Militia watching our every move. They are monitoring everything we take with us. Our hands are tied sister."

Zaniai stood beside Eurin near the door of Anja's old office that had now been stripped bare of anything that belonged to the Lycavorian Union. Every computer and data core within the large palace had been packed up and already moved to the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA* in orbit. Anything that belonged to Anja or Sivana had been loaded and shipped out. The Palace was as effectively bare as it could be. Anything having to do with the Union or their parents was gone. The many dozens of ancient books on the shelves of the study were gone and the shelves were now empty. This was a military withdrawal only and nothing else was being taken if it did not belong to the Union or those who had called Hadaria home for so long. A senior Elder Guard Militia officer had protested when holoimages and items that had belonged to Anja's mother and father were taken down and packed. When he had tried to stop this, he ended up in the nearby infirmary when the *Durcunusaan* soldier who was gently packing the items broke his arm and two ribs. Buonau had arrived to protest this action and Anja had told her that they were mementos of her father and mother and she would be damned if she left them. Then she had closed the door in Buonau's face.

Half a dozen *Durcunusaan* soldiers were standing guard just outside the door to the office, as well as many places on the palace grounds. Many of them were just as angry as the diminutive Queen they protected and adored. They had lived here on Hadaria for years, many had Hadarian wives and friends, yet now they were being forced to leave. It did not sit well with them, having to force their wives and families to leave the only home many of them had ever known. Only Eurin knew that to a man or woman, not a single wife or husband had chosen to remain behind while the one they loved was being forced to leave. They revered their Persian red haired Queen almost as much as their loved ones who protected her. Eurin could not even remember how many times Anja had had those same families and friends to the palace for gatherings filled with food and dance, the palace walls filled with the screams of playing children. It was a testament to the charisma and respect she held not only as Queen but as a person.

Ceuma was sitting quietly in the chair along the wall and she slowly stood up and moved closer to Anja. She had witnessed many things in the last few hours, and though she had only truly been alive for less than two years, she had Anja's memories and many of her same traits. She was very different however, as she had shown over the last hours and days. Like Anja, she worshiped her husband completely, and felt the most happiness and safety in his powerful arms when she was pressed against his ebony skin. Yet Joci's mother, a woman she had come to love and respect strongly, had instructed her in a traditional Lycavorian manner and she was far more reserved than Anja. Like Lycavorian women of old she was more in control of her baser emotions. At least to a point. No matter all that, Ceuma felt sincere heartbreak at something she had absolutely no control over.

"Do you... is what I feel because of you Anja?" She asked softly looking at Anja. "Or is it because of whom I am?"

Anja and Sivana looked at her and in a move that surprised Eurin and Zaniai they drew Ceuma close to them. Eurin shook her head in surprise as she stared at these three women. You would never know one of them was a clone of Anja. At first glance they looked only like a trio of sisters that looked extraordinarily alike, almost triplets even, though Ceuma was a clone to Anja. The similarities in looks between Anja, Ceuma and Sivana were easy enough to see, though Anja and Ceuma had much larger chests. Now Ceuma shared these same traits as Anja and some of Sivana as well and as the three of them brought their heads together Eurin knew where at least a portion of Ceuma's future lay.

Anja squeezed Ceuma's hand as she took it and the three of them stood close together. "What do you think?" She asked softly.

Ceuma's jade green eyes gazed at her. "They... they are my people. I am a clone of you yes but I am still Hadarian and..."

"NO!" Anja snapped surprising Ceuma with the force of her words. "You are not a clone! Not any longer!"

Ceuma looked at her oddly and gave her a gentle smile. "Then what am I Anja?" She asked softly. "I am not ashamed of what I am. I..."

It was Sivana's turn to take her hand now and Ceuma looked at her. "You are our sister." Sivana spoke softly. "You are not Anja. You are your own person Ceuma. You have already proven that to everyone around you. Your blood makes you our sister!"

"My blood is cloned!" Ceuma said with that now signature gentle smile. "It is..."

"Marty..." Anja interrupted her words. "Martin has a saying... I don't even think he remembers how it came to be. Blood before all else. You are our blood Ceuma. No matter how that came to be, it doesn't matter anymore. Not to us. You have our blood coursing through your veins. Sivana's and mine. Our parents. That makes you our sister."

Ceuma stared at these two women for a long moment and for the first time in her very short life, with the exception of her burning love for Joci, Ceuma felt part of something. "Is this why I feel... I feel as if I am deserting them."

"You are not deserting them!" Eurin snapped as she stepped forward now. "None of you! You are still Queen and Princess of Hadaria in the eyes of millions. Those millions do not have a voice and they are being silenced!"

"How do we make those voices heard then Eurin?" Zaniai asked. "There is still time to stop all this."

Eurin shook her head sadly. "No." she spoke in almost a whisper. "We can't stop it. Not any longer. We couldn't stop it the moment Wiktor and Buonau started down this path and aligned themselves with the Kavalians. And we can not stay here."

"Why?" Anja said. "We could..."

"No." Eurin spoke. "If you stayed here it would only bring death to those who support you, and possibly to you Anja."

"I don't have to stay here in the palace. I never liked it here anyway." She said motioning around with her hand indicating the palace all around her. "I can hide among the people!"

"And do what?" Eurin exclaimed. "We are Healers! We do not have yours and Sivana's combat training Anja! Even Ceuma can fight better than most Hadarians because of what Joci has taught her. We can not fight like you! If you remain here... our people will die. Buonau will hunt you! She will hunt you and she will insure she sees you dead. She will use these Kavalian animals as her enforcers and they will not be kind."

“So I just abandon them!” Anja gasped.

Eurin shook her head as she stepped closer to them. “You are not abandoning them... you are saving them! If you are killed on Hadaria... you know very well what Martin Leonidas will do.”

“Martin Leonidas would not attack Hadaria!” Anja snapped. “Marty is many things... but he will never attack a founding member of the Union. It is not in his...”

“In his nature?” Eurin snapped forcefully. “Do not defend the part of him that makes so many fear him with good reason Anja. It is whom he is, and I for one honor and respect that more than you know. It is his greatest strength and he knows just how to use it. He is far more cunning than you give him credit for. I suspect your love for him blinds you in a way to what he is truly capable of. Martin Leonidas is the most powerful Lycavorian walking among the stars. He is wolf... the largest I have ever seen in my near thousand years of life. Do not tell me what he will do Anja Leonidas! I have seen that man when he is angry, truly angry to the point he allows his feral nature to come forth, and it is the most frightening thing in the universe to even witness. I have seen that man deal with those who have wronged him or harmed those he cares for! Martin will come here with every single Spartan and ship at his command and he will lay waste to Hadaria without blinking an eye if you are killed by Buonau or her Kavalian thugs because you chose to remain.” Eurin nearly shouted. “He will burn this planet to a shell until he knew Buonau and Wiktor were dead, and every Kavalian with them! And the cost to our people would be devastating!”

“Martin would not...”

Eurin stepped closer to her. “You don’t get it do you Anja?” She exclaimed loudly. “You truly don’t realize it do you?”

Anja looked at her puzzled. “What are you talking about?”

“You! I’m talking about you and the others!” Eurin stated calmly. “Do you think that those close to you and the other Queens don’t know? That we don’t hear the rumors and whispers in the back alleys and smile because we know the truth.”

“What truth? Stop talking like Helen!” Anja snapped as she began to lose her patience. “You aren’t making any sense Eurin.”

“Aren’t I?” Eurin asked her. “I have seen that man crush the life from an empire to take back what belonged to him. I was there beside you as we witnessed it. Do you not remember Enurrua Anja?”

“Enurrua?” Anja gasped aloud. “You think he will act the same way now? Aricia is his soulmate. His *Anome*. She is of his people. She is his strength and ours as well. You’ve seen the woman she has become since then! That is why he did that?”

Eurin looked at her wide eyed. “By the gods woman... you truly do not see it!” Eurin said.

“See what damn it?” Anja barked angrily.

Eurin smiled softly as she moved closer still. “Everyone seems to think it is Dysea who he favors most of all after Aricia. I know you and the others joke about it when you are alone together. You have said as much to me.”

Anja met her eyes. “Yes... so! It’s true! Eurin what are you saying?”

“Everyone knows it Anja.” Eurin said. “The *Durcunusaan*, his mother, your grandfather Fuleos. Deia. Even Dysea knows it, for she told me herself during the symposium to Elear that I attended with her two years ago. All these years and you have never seen it? Never felt it?”

“*Nubou!*” Anja growled. “Now I know how Martin feels when Helen goes all prophetic on him! Speak plain damn it Eurin! Spit it out!”

“The unquestioning confidence he has in you. The time he, Aricia and For’mya spend on Hadaria when you are here acting as Queen, when he is *supposed* to be on Apo Prime. He never doubts you. He always listens to you. He denies you nothing.” Eurin stated.

“He doesn’t deny any of us.” Anja quipped.

“Yes I know. Yet only you have the same pull on him that Aricia seems to have Anja.” Eurin said. “Only you and she. Oh... it is there with all of you, but it is stronger with you and Aricia because the two of you are most like him.”

Anja looked at her wide eyed. “What? Eurin you don’t know what you...”

“I don’t know what I’m talking about? I did not fully believe it until these past weeks.” Eurin said. “I did not believe it until I saw him in that transmission after Buonau’s security videos were leaked for all to see. I should have seen it much sooner.”

“Seen what?” Anja asked her.

“He never doubted it was not you Anja. He never even questioned it for a millisecond. The love and longing I saw for you in his eyes in that transmission from your ship, even so vast a distance as it was, it was unquenchable. A lesser man... a man who did not love you like he does... a man who was not so secure in the love his mates have for him... he would have had doubts. Not Martin Leonidas. I do not understand or realize the pull that man has over all of you, but it is an almost palpable thing.” Eurin looked at her. “It is not Dysea who he favors most of all after Aricia, nor For'mya or Isabella or even you Anja. As Aricia is his soul... you are his very heart. Dysea and For'mya his will, and Isabella his conscious. The five of you are what makes that man who he is. And in turn he shapes you... makes you who you are. You have played your part since that very first night you spent with him so long ago.” Eurin stepped right up to her. “You are the first woman he ever truly loved Anja, and you continue to have that hold on him even today. Just as he has hold of you.”

Anja chuckled softly. “Eurin you don’t know what you are saying.” She said.

“Don’t I?” Eurin asked calmly. “Atropos... tell me I am wrong.” Eurin spoke turning her head to see him standing in the doorway he had just entered. Atropos seemed surprised that she had detected him and he stammered something unintelligible and shifted his feet. “Tell me I am wrong in what I am trying to express to her? And why she can not stay on Hadaria.”

Atropos glanced at Eurin quickly and then slowly turned his eyes on Anja. “Eurin speaks the truth Anja.” He said softly.

“You are wrong!” Anja declared.

“The *Feravomir* told me long ago when we were on the mission to Lycavore, when we were rescuing Lisisa and Gorgo; she told me why Martin had chosen me as your Captain. She told me it was because of whom I was and the loyalty I had shown to Sparta during my exile. She told me he spoke with Panos to assign me to you for my loyalty. I... learned years later that it was my sister who urged Martin to appoint me as your Captain, though he had already made that decision himself. For my loyalty to Sparta yes, but because Aricia knew I would never allow anything to happen to you and this is what she and Martin wanted. Aricia knew what you meant to him. To Dysea. To her. She learned this during those weeks you two spent with each other in Eden City when he was in Sparta. It is why I was the one to choose Dysea’s Captain, and For'mya’s and then Isabella’s.” Atropos moved into the room.

“Atropos... you are just saying these things.” Anja stated yet her words were soft and quivering.

Atropos shook his head. “No... I am not. Have I ever lied or misled you once in all the years as your Captain? As your friend?”

“No! Never!” Anja declared instantly.

“My King... Martin... he would do everything within his power to defend or rescue one of his Queens. He would go to the ends of the universe if need be, he would forsake everything he knows, for his love of his Queens knows no boundaries. He loves you all more than I can put into words... for there is truly no way to describe it.” Atropos shook his head. “If you remain here Anja and you die, or you are captured by Buonau and the Kavalians, there will be nothing living in this universe that will stop Martin from coming here and glassing this planet into oblivion in his vengeance. Aricia knows what you mean to him, what you mean to *her*, to For'mya, Dysea and even Isabella and it is why I have been your Captain all of this time. Eurin speaks the truth... if he had... my sister may be his *anome*, his soul, but you are all his mates. If there is one thing that I have learned through the years serving you and the Leonidas family, it is simply this. He is wolf... he will destroy, maim, and obliterate anyone or anything that does the five of you harm. Without question, without pause and completely without regard.” Atropos said.

“Don’t say that!” Anja snapped viciously as she glared at him. “Don’t you... don’t you ever say that again! Never!”

“I told you not so long ago to look past the surface when you gaze into his eyes and you will see the truth of this. You will see the possessiveness of an Alpha wolf for all of you, not just my sister.” Atropos said.

“You know it is true Anja.” Eurin spoke again meeting her eyes. “I know you can feel it. You try to hide and mask your abilities in Mindvoice, but you are far stronger than you let on. Stronger than Isabella and

For'mya to be sure. Perhaps even stronger than Dysea. I know he has worked with you in private, Aricia as well, and they are the two most powerful Mindvoicers in the Union with the possible exception of Helen. When you go for your runs in the morning, just the two of you, I know very well he schools you within Mindvoice. And perhaps many other things. Martin saw the spark of what you could do that day on Gellen Station when you rescued Sivana. Do you think Belen did not tell him?"

"*Sibfla!*" Anja snapped turning away and looking out the large bay window. "Stop it! Stop it all of you! You aren't making this any easier!"

"Leaving is the only option." Atropos said. "You know that as well as I my Queen! I will remove you if I have too... but I know you recognize it is the only way to save your people from harm. We must..."

Atropos turned as Joci's ebony bulk filled the doorway and he was barking out orders into his jaw implant. Anja had shocked Joci by reinstating him into the ranks of the Union military and then promoting him into the ranks of the *Durcunusaan*. She even promoted him to a position of some importance behind only Atropos and Belen within her personal *Durcunusaan* detail. He was the first to not have to go through the rigid and sometimes harsh training of the *Durcunusaan*, but Anja reasoned all he had been through up until now was equal to anything he could have learned during the training, and Atropos had agreed. Since that time Joci had thrown himself back into his role as Spartan soldier and now a *Durcunusaan* leader. As his actions became more well known, the *Durcunusaan* troops quickly began to respond to him these last days.

"...negative!" He was almost shouting, his 190 dangling from quick release straps as he moved. "Maintain your position until we arrive! No one is to be allowed near the *STRIKER*! If they attempt to force their way, shoot them! Do not let them reach Belen's position! He only has six with him. And inform the *SPIRIT* that we are inbound back to her in five minutes! I am with the Queen now and I will tell her!"

All eyes turned to Joci as stopped and removed his finger from his ear. "Joci... what is going on?" Anja asked.

Joci moved up next to Ceuma and slipped his powerful arm around her slim waist as her hand went up to stroke his long dreadlock hair. "A Kavalian Fleet Group has just exited Jump Gate Four and entered the system my Queen!"

"What?" Atropos screamed moving closer to him. "How did they get access to our Jump Gates?"

"No one knows! Jump Gate Control on Apo Prime is right now scrambling to find out." Joci answered shaking his head. "I believe I could hear Admiral Riall screaming even from Earth that he would discover how it happened. Kavalian Troop ships are being detected by Admiral Omore on the *SPIRIT* and they are mixed in with the others ships. They are trying to hide them, but they are not doing a very good job. And there are Kavalian troops already on the surface as well my Queen! They must have been snuck aboard civilian ships in order to bypass Hadarian Security at the ports!"

"Where?" Atropos barked.

"At least two full companies at each civilian space port. And that is just in and around the capital." Joci answered quickly.

"Two companies at each port?" Zaniai gasped. "That is over a thousand troops!"

Joci nodded. "And we are down to less than two hundred on Hadaria right now." He spoke. "The Spartan detail at the Domar military spaceport is watching them via ground and motion sensors. They have not tried to seize either of the two Union military ports, but Belen believes it is a only a matter of time. He is holding your *STRIKER* at the Western most pad in Domar Central. Miath is already aboard, albeit unhappily. Belen believes if there are Kavalian troops on the ground already they undoubtedly have T19s and he secured Miath himself. We are out of time! We must go my Queen! Now!"

"That *upae* sold Hadaria out!" Anja snarled as she turned back to the table and began to gather data pads. "I'll kill her! I'll rip her face off when I see her again!"

Joci tilted his head down and jammed his finger into his ear. "Say again!" He barked. Atropos was listening now and both his eyes and Joci's eyes went wide.

"Where?" Atropos growled out causing Anja to look at him. "*Nubou!*" He cursed and looked at Anja as he and Joci listened for several moments. "Very well! Evac from your current position now! Straight to the Domar spaceport! We no longer need you there!"

Anja moved closer to him. "Atropos?" She asked.

“The *Durcunusaan* Surveillance Team I left monitoring the Hadarian Elder Council’s secure communications network just picked up a transmission from this Kavalian Admiral Menot. He has ordered his ships to intercept Union forces as they come into range. Their orders are to seize and board all Union ships in the system. The Kavalian troop ships have been ordered to separate from the rest of the Kavalian fleet and begin landing. He has also ordered that you, Sivana and Ceuma are to be arrested on sight for murder and sedition and this was approved by Chief Minister Wiktor and Elder Buonau. A Kavalian detachment is on its way here now with the Elder Militia and Rinard leading them.”

“Rinard?” Ceuma spat.

Joci nodded looking at her. “Apparently they have given him some sort of leadership role within the Elder Militia. A liaison to the Kavalians.”

“Liaison!” Ceuma declared. “Let that foul man come near me and I will cut off his cock and feed it to him for what he has done!”

“It hasn’t been three days yet!” Eurin exclaimed.

“They never intended to wait three days! They never intended to allow the Queen to leave!” Joci snapped. “They only needed enough time to get troops on the surface to reinforce them!”

“They would risk open war with the Union in their actions!” Zaniai declared. “Wiktor and Buonau know this! Have they gone mad?”

“They must believe the Union Senate and Galactic Court will not allow Martin to act.” Sivana spoke quickly. “And if they have Anja and I prisoner, Martin *will not* attack! They know that! They have planned this for quite some time.”

“Atropos... how long?” Anja demanded.

“Four... maybe five minutes before they get here.” He answered. “The Lifter lanes are jammed with traffic and it will take them that long to clear the lanes. Twenty-nine minutes before their fleet comes within range.”

Anja made her decision then and she pushed away from the table smoothly, turning to pick up the P190A3 that leaned against the wall behind her. “What about the bunker entrance?” She asked.

“Sealed my Queen.” Joci replied quickly. “They will never find it no matter how much they dig.”

“Time to go then!” She snapped. “Initiate a planet wide Broken Arrow! All Lycavorian Union personnel are to evacuate right now! Whatever they can’t take... destroy with plasma grenades! I want everyone off the planet within fifteen minutes.”

Atropos turned to Joci. “Joci... lead us out!”

Joci nodded and clutching Ceuma’s hand he headed for the door. “All teams we are moving to the Domar central spaceport! Stand by to depart!” He barked into his jaw implant. “We are now under a Broken Arrow by order of the Queen. If it does not wear a Union uniform you are authorized to use lethal force!”

Anja took one last look at the office before she turned and followed her *Durcunusaan* captain out of the room, Sivana, Eurin and Zaniai right behind her.

KRANEK

Dysea wrapped her arms tightly around Zarah, her emerald eyes tearing up as Zarah returned her powerful hug without hesitation. She felt her daughter relax slightly in her arms and take in the warmth that Dysea projected. Dysea pulled her back quickly, taking her face in her hands as the tears rolled freely.

“Zarah my child.” She spoke softly. “Oh Zarah... I...”

Zarah shook her head. “I will get through this mother.” She spoke with strength in her voice. “I know... I know you worry for me... but I will get through this.”

Dysea took a deep breath and nodded. “Andro told me to be strong for you and I will.” She stated.

“Then... then don’t coddle me mother.” Zarah said in a whisper. “Please. I was raped... but I am still me.”

“Yes you are.” Dysea said. She leaned over and kissed her softly, nuzzling her cheek. “I am here for you. We all are.” She whispered.

Zarah closed her eyes and reveled in the caress and she nodded. "I know... and that is my strength." She whispered back.

Dysea drew back and looked at her. Her emerald eyes moved to where Lucia stood silently watching and she smiled. "Lucia." She said reaching out and taking her hand. "We can not thank you..." Dysea stopped and took another deep breath. She blinked several times and smiled wider. "Welcome Lucia."

"Lady Dysea I..." Lucia began.

Dysea shook her head. "No. Now is not the time. In the future perhaps... but right now, know you are now part of our family. And that is good enough for me."

Dysea saw Lucia's dark eyes glitter in joy. "That... that is almost exactly what Lisisa and Arrarn told me."

"See... we think alike." Dysea said with a smile.

Zarah looked at Dysea. "Mother... where is Normya?" She asked anxiously. Zarah had worried that her half elven sister, the one she considered her twin, would not be here to greet her. Zarah's heart dropped for only a split second until she saw two blurring motions off to the right and then the enormous Immortal and stunning vampire female came to abrupt halts and the huge arms of the Immortal released her platinum haired sister from his embrace.

"Zarah!" Normya screamed as she broke from Tir'ut's arms and raced for her sister.

The two of them met in the middle in an embrace of sisterly love and affection, both of them now with tears in their eyes as they hugged and nuzzled each other, allowing the wolf in their blood to show through. Tir'ut came over to stand beside Dysea with his mother trying to ignore the fact that the eyes of the Leonidas children were focused on him. He looked at Dysea with questions in his eyes and Dysea nodded. "Have Normya explain it to you later Tir'ut." She said kindly. "She and her sister are very close."

Tir'ut nodded. "Yes elf mother."

Dysea smiled and patted his arm. "We are hard to understand sometimes."

Tir'ut looked at his mother and then back to Dysea. He turned back and saw Normya and Zarah pulling Lucia close to them now. "Yes... I am figuring that out slowly. Someday it may sink entirely into my thick head as mother says. I doubt it however."

Dysea's eyes grew wider as her keen nose detected Isabella's lilac scent and she turned quickly to see her beautiful vampire lover walking towards them. She looked radiant in her new pregnancy and she watched Isabella gaze at her with lust in her eyes as she came up. Dysea didn't hesitate and didn't care who saw and she stepped into Isabella's embrace for a sizzling kiss of passion and desire. She hadn't seen her vampire lover in longer than she cared to recall and Dysea yearned to feel her naked skin beside her.

"Oh it has been too long since I have tasted you *ussta* she-elf." Isabella spoke huskily as their kiss broke apart.

Dysea nodded. "Far too long." She agreed. Dysea turned and looked behind Bella only to see most of their older children standing behind them with smiles as wide as any sun. Lisisa leaned up against Denali with her arms crossed under her ample chest, Eliani and Nyla both leaning up against the large Spartan who Dysea knew could only be Malic.

Isabella laughed when she saw Dysea's eyes. "You know how they follow their brother." She said with a grin. "I could not keep them away."

Dysea very nearly felt overwhelmed as she felt her children crowd around her tightly, sharing the embraces of love and family. It was always the same she knew. The wolf in all of them needed the touch of one another and the sensations that each other's auras brought. It was so soothing and loving. Dysea greeted them all in turn, even as Normya followed on her heels holding Zarah's hand tightly. After several minutes of hugging and nuzzles Dysea ended beside Isabella, her arm around her waist tightly, and holding Lucia's hand.

"Where... where is Andro?" She asked then, not seeing or smelling her oldest son. "Did he stay with the Coven riders?"

"We received a distress call from Walter's ship while coming here." Bella answered.

"Walter's ship?" Dysea asked her emerald eyes going wide.

Bella nodded. "It apparently had been shot down on Iraruzu. The planet that one of our Drow outposts was on."

Dysea looked at her with those wide yes. "Shot down!" She declared in shock. "Shot down by whom?"

“Walter mentioned something about Kavalians in the message mother...” Denali told her. “But we don’t know anything for sure. Andro took Sadi, Carisia and Ne’Veha on his *STRIKER* and they went to investigate. We should know something soon. He’s due to contact us in a few hours.”

“Everyone...” Normya called causing them all to turn. They saw her pull Tir’ut closer to her, though he came reluctantly in the face of so many of Normya’s family here, and Normya pressed up against his side quite intimately. “This is Tir’ut.” Normya stated quite proudly. “This is my husband and mate.”

Denali was the only pureblood left among his brothers and sisters and in Andro’s place it was he who stepped forward and met Tir’ut’s dark eyes, Lisisa right behind him as his wife and mate. He looked at the towering Immortal, easily over a foot taller than his sister and he leaned forward sniffing intently as the others looked on. He could smell his sister’s familiar scent deeply imbedded in this Immortal’s blood, and his ginger scent wafting from Normya’s pores powerfully. He felt his siblings move up all around him as he looked at Tir’ut. That he had Immortal blood in him was obvious by the bone spurs along his jaw, but they were much less pronounced than what many of them expected. His skin was deeply tanned and he had very short hair.

“Can you speak Immortal?” Denali finally asked him.

“Deni!” Lisisa hissed as she poked him in the back while Normya glared at him.

“Denali Leonidas you apologize right now!” Normya barked.

Tir’ut knew right away what Denali was doing and he grinned. It was something that his elf mother Dysea told him would happen. They were very protective of each other and that was coming out now.

“They will test you and your commitment to Normya Tir’ut.” Dysea had told him one evening. “They trust in their sister, but it is still the way of the wolf. Even though most of them are of mixed blood, it is their father’s blood that is so dominant. The wolf in them. They will want to insure your intentions for their sister are pure.”

“My intentions darthirii ilhar?” He asked. “She is my Du’ased ’ranndi. My heart and soul. My intentions are to love her until I pass into the next life.”

Dysea had looked at him then. “Then tell them that.” She stated plainly.

They would test him to see if he was worthy of their sister. In their older brother Andro’s absence it fell to the oldest pureblood to officially greet Tir’ut and that was Denali. It was obvious he was uncomfortable in the position, but he was making an admirably attempt for he knew Andro would expect him too.

“I did not... I did not expect to meet all of my *il darthirii kal’daka’s* family at one time and I am at somewhat of a loss.” Tir’ut said plainly.

“What exactly are your intentions with our sister Immortal?” Denali asked as sternly as his good natured personality allowed.

“Denali!” Normya gasped with blazing emerald eyes. “You have no right to...”

“I intend to love her breathless for eternity!” Tir’ut answered immediately, cutting off Normya’s reply. “I intend to make her sing my name to the moon and only my name. I will love her shamelessly and we will have many children who will carry on for us.” Normya’s eyes were wide as she looked at the husband she adored so completely. She had never heard these things from him and his words made warm shivers course through her.

Denali grinned. “No kidding?” He said. Deni turned his head slightly and looked at Lisisa next to him. “Lisi?”

Lisisa grinned. “I think... given the look on our sister’s face, that her new husband is full of surprises.”

“You think?” Deni asked with his trademark smile. He turned back to Tir’ut. “Be careful, she may be tiny, but she has a mean right cross.”

Normya glared at him. “I am not tiny!” She barked.

Arrarn stepped up next to Denali now, Narice and Toria right behind him. He looked Tir’ut up and down, even while Normya glared at Denali. “*Anse* sister... I don’t suppose you could have picked one that’s not so damn tall could ya?” He declared finally.

Normya Leonidas and a murderous look on her face as she stepped in front of Denali and Arrarn and glared at them. She crossed her arms over her generous breasts and stared daggers at her brothers. “You *ronnus!*” She spat at Denali. “How dare you!”

“Sister...” Zarah spoke from the side where she clutched Lucia’s hand. “Sister... he *is* very large.” She stated.

“Zarah!” Normya exclaimed.

Zarah’s words set off the tide of laughter and Denali scooped his sister up into his arms with a joyful shout, spinning her around as Arrarn stepped forward and gripped Tir’ut’s arm in greeting. The rest of them crowded around quickly as they welcomed their sister’s Immortal husband into their family.

Esther allowed the breath she was holding where she stood next to Dysea and Isabella out slowly and wiped away the beginnings of the tears in her eyes. She saw Dysea and Isabella look at her and she smiled. “Forgive me.” She said softly. “I still worry for how he will be accepted by others. I did not... I did not know how they... if they would recognize him. Receive him as Normya’s Blessed Husband.” Esther stated.

Isabella knew who Esther was and she smiled and leaned over to place a friendly kiss on her cheek. The happiness within her at finally being with Dysea was plentiful and all she wanted was to get her *ussta* she-elf alone in her arms.

“Our children are unique Esther.” She stated. “There has only been one occasion when they did not accept someone one of their siblings brought before all of them. That was many years ago too. All of them have grown since then.”

Esther looked at her. “Really?” She asked in relief. “Dare I ask why they did not accept that person?”

Dysea laughed. “It is probably better if you didn’t.” She answered quickly. “Eliani would never forgive us if we brought that distasteful subject back up. And neither would Andro. It was before she met Nyla, and she has moved on.” She looked at Isabella. “Where are the Coven riders?”

“Bren and Famus were with them as they flew toward the facility Cha’talla reserved for them.” Bella answered quickly. “You will be impressed with what Andro has made them into Dysea.”

Dysea nodded her head. “I’m sure.” She took Esther’s hand in hers as she talked. “Come Bella... I know you are burning to meet Cha’talla. All of them must be.”

Isabella nodded. “It is not everyday you get to meet a man that has an entire shelf in the Apo Prime history logs all to himself.” She said with a smile.

“I would imagine it is not the type of history Cha’talla would be proud of.” Esther spoke softly looking at her.

Isabella met her dark eyes. “His actions so far Esther... they have begun to weave a new history. And that is the one we will build on. Our children already seem to be doing just that.” She said motioning to where Tir’ut was embracing Carina while Moneus pounded him on his back laughing.

Esther smiled at the sight. “Yes we will.”

“...make sure the plasma coupler is seated properly!” Cha’talla barked out. “I don’t want the damn thing popping out if we have to maneuver!” He spoke as he gathered up the towel and began wiping his large hands. Three of their G9 LRR’s occupied the landing pads all around him, Dysea’s *STRIKER* parked on the fourth.

Cha’talla looked at the equally dirty female elven engineer walk up to him carrying a large portable engineering console. The female elf wore the uniform of the famed 1st Elven Engineering Corp, though the upper half of her jumpsuit was down and tied around her waist. Her firm, medium sized breasts strained against her t-shirt but like all the elves that had come down here from *NORMYA’S LIGHT*, they found these Immortals were so unlike those they had read about it wasn’t even right to compare them. Cha’talla looked at her evenly, and though like all elven females she was stunning, no woman could compare to his Blessed Wife Esther now.

“Re’naria?” He asked.

The green eyed elven female looked up at him. “I was able to adjust the power flow on the G9s to increase their LSD range by a factor of four.” She stated. “I just wanted to make sure it was ok with you to install micro cooling cells in the conduits.”

“How long will this take?” Cha’talla asked. “I want to leave for Belid in twelve hours.”

Re’naria shrugged. “Three hours tops.” She answered. “Three of us are going with you so we can monitor the new systems and make any small corrections to power flow and absorption rate.”

Cha’talla looked at her surprised. “I did not know this.” He said.

Re'naria nodded her head. "You don't think we're actually going to send you out with all these improvements without someone to watch over them in case they need to be adjusted do you? What we've done to your Runners is not in any book Cha'talla... and we're going to make sure it doesn't kill you. Or us." She said with a smile.

Cha'talla laughed and nodded his head. "Very well." He spoke. "It will be good to have you."

Re'naria looked at this towering Immortal. She had been skeptical when she first came to the surface knowing who Cha'talla was and what he had done in the past, but after seeing all she had that skepticism quickly turned to trust. She had seen Elven females and their Immortal husbands walking among the streets of the settlements, their children either scampering along around them or in the arms of one of their parents. She had seen Normya Leonidas's new mate actually playing with the small children in the park while Normya sat with her mother over tea. Re'naria had seen many things in her life, more so since the return of King Leonidas, but none so inspiring as what she had seen here.

"May I ask you something Cha'talla?" She asked.

He nodded. "Of course."

"Would you be going to Belid to get your son if those elf females were not there?" She asked.

Cha'talla shook his head slowly. "Lynom... he had his own escape route worked out and established if it became time for him to leave. He would have been able to leave Belid without help from us."

Re'naria nodded slowly. "That's what I thought." She said softly. "I'll get these cooling cells installed and we'll be ready in twelve hours."

"Thank you." Cha'talla said and watched as she turned around and headed back towards the G9 on Pad Two.

"Husband?" Esther's voice echoed from behind him startling him slightly and he whirled around to see his wife standing behind him demurely, her hands behind her back and her dark eyes smiling up at him.

Cha'talla smiled slightly. "I hate when you do that Esther." He stated somewhat gruffly.

Esther grinned. "I know... but it keeps you on your toes." She answered.

Cha'talla swept her up in his arms and crushed her to him then, Esther's arms snaking around his broad shoulders. "I will show you what keeps me on my toes." He growled hungrily at her.

Esther laughed and kissed him, holding his face in her small hands. She rubbed her cheek gently against his and whispered in his ear. "I will hold you to that husband." She said huskily. "But now would not be a good time, unless you wish to take me in front of our guests. Though that does sound kinky."

Cha'talla's eyes grew a little wider and as he held his Blessed Wife in his arms he turned fully around to see a smiling Dysea behind him with over a dozen others, undoubtedly her children, and all of them were grinning. If an Immortal could blush, Cha'talla's bronze skin would have turned the color of ripe Cartlo Roots. Slowly he set his smiling wife down on the hard packed dirt and felt her press up close against his side.

"Dysea?" He said softly.

Dysea couldn't contain the small laugh that escaped her lips as she came up to him and took his hands. "Cha'talla... the expression on your face right now is absolutely priceless." She stated.

"I'm sure." He spoke.

Dysea kept his hand in hers and turned to look at Isabella and her children. "Bella, Deni, everyone, this is Cha'talla."

Cha'talla's dark eyes scanned the single row of Leonidas children and their mates. Elf, Lycavorian, vampire, all members of one family. Children of one man. A man he had tried very hard to kill so many years ago. Though they were no older than Tir'ut who he saw holding Normya close to him, like his own sons with Esther, all of them looked very capable of doing battle.

"I welcome you." He finally said. "I welcome all of you to Kranek. To our home." To say he was amazed when they all surged towards him at one time would be an understatement. That amazement didn't stop the happiness that he felt in his chest though.

Vollenth and Viera were the last to move slowly down the ramp of the *TYPE II DT*, Cinol perched on his back and Caydren on his mother's as they looked around the wide expanse of towering timber and

mountains all around them. They could see the Coven dragons and riders also taking in the cool fresh air and warm sun as they moved towards the portable buildings in the distance.

Papa! The... the mountains stretch so far! Cinol declared from Vollenth's back.

The clouds mama! The clouds reach to the ground! Caydren echoed his brother.

Viera's eyes smiled and she nodded her massive head. *Yes. It is beautiful isn't it? We could hunt for days on such a world.* Her head turned to look at Vollenth. *Vollenth?* Vollenth had remained silent up until now, the closer they drew to their destination, the more anxious he had become. She saw his wings fluttering slightly and she brushed up against him now. He had held nothing back from her since Dragon Mountain, sharing all that he was with her. *[You... you feel your Bonded One don't you? On this world?]* She masked her words from their sons so they could not hear.

Vollenth turned and gazed at her. *[It is so powerful now Viera.]* He spoke. *[It... whoever they are, they are strong and proud Viera my mate. Their shielding is very nearly impenetrable. They... they do not know I am here. They do not yet understand what we are meant for. What they feel.]*

[Then you will need to show them.] Viera stated proudly.

[Me?]

[The Dragon Elder Mother Arzoal and Androcles knew you were meant for someone else Vollenth. They could feel it within you. There are many who do not understand what it is they feel until they meet their Bonded One.] Viera told him. *[The Elder Mother said as much.]*

[Viera... I do not know... I do not know if I am ready.] He said softly.

[You are ready my Vollenth.] She told him lovingly. *[This is the true bond that we dragons hope for. Not that horror Yuri witch forced on you. This will complete you and finally purge the last of what she did from you. This is your future.]*

Vollenth blinked and looked at her. *[You are my future.]* He stated emphatically. *[You are my future. My sons... and the many hatchlings we will have in the future.]*

Viera's eyes filled with love and warmth at his words and she brushed her snout against his lovingly. *[Is... is that a promise of more exquisite encounters to come my handsome mate?]* She asked him.

[Many more.] Vollenth promised her. *[Many more and many centuries together. If you will have me.]*

[I can hardly wait.] Viera spoke. *[And I will have you Vollenth. I will have you for as long as I have years.]*

Vollenth drew his snout down her long neck making her wings twitch in delight. *[I have waited this long.]* He spoke softly. *[I will wait until my mate and children are safe in the facility that...]*

Excuse me? The female voice spoke.

Vollenth and Viera turned to see the elven pilot standing next to them, her helmet under her arm.

Commander? Viera asked shyly.

You are Vollenth and Viera correct? She asked. *And your sons Cinol and Caydren?*

She knows who we are? Caydren gasped from his mother's back. *That is so cool!*

Vollenth nodded his huge head with a chuckle within Mindvoice. His sons had picked up the unique use of slang during their stay at Dragon Mountain and their interaction with the many hatchlings from Earth that were there. *Yes.*

I am Commander De'lia, 1st Elven Engineering Corp. She spoke easily in Mindvoice and the presence of two very large dragons did not faze her in the least. *Prince Androcles told his mother that you would be accompanying them. She had a separate structure set up for you away from the Coven pens so that their training did not disturb the hatchlings at night. It is larger and has room for the hatchlings to scamper about.*

We do not want to be far from our friends. Viera spoke.

De'lia shook her head with a smile. *It's not. Only a hundred meters. Elynth and Anthar are next to you. Jeth and Tharua across from you. We tried to give the mated dragons a little more privacy.*

Vollenth blinked. *You did that?*

The elven engineer smiled once more and reached up to stroke his smooth scales without fear. She knew all about Vollenth's history and this did not stop her from touching him. *My kind is descended from yours Vollenth. In essence, we are you. At least a part of each of us. We will always look out for you. I'd be happy to show you. Elynth and Anthar have a separate pen, as do Jeth and Tharua.*

Thank you Commander. Viera said kindly.

This way. She spoke as she began to walk across the ground towards some dome like rises in the ground. Viera nudged Volleneth as they began walking. *[Perhaps we can start tonight.]* She spoke seductively. Volleneth's eyes glittered in response. *[I believe I will enjoy that.]* He stated confidently. *[Practice makes perfect.]*
[Ah! Just don't become too perfect. Then you won't need to practice and I will be very unhappy!]

RAPTOR IIA3 (ELINT)

ULU ARIZONA

CALLSIGN FALCON ONE FOUR

TWENTY-FIVE MILLION KILOMETERS FROM KRANEK

Hardly anyone knew they existed and the pilots and crews liked it that way.

They were based on the old design of *RAPTORs* from EDEN BASE, with this ship and the others like it known as *RAPTOR IIA3s*. They were the extreme long range eyes and ears of the *ARIZONA'S* Attack Wing. They were designed to operate independent of the *ARIZONA* for long periods of time, sometimes moving into days, and because of this the Raptor A3s were built for stealth and speed. Her double layered outer hull was composed of matte black Dragon Armor rendering her all but invisible to the naked eye, and while she had no Shrouds, thanks to some very advanced Stealth screens improved upon by Avi, she was effectively invisible to all known sensors. The rear of Falcon Four One was like any other Raptor A3 operating. There was a small section with four bunk beds and a small table and chairs bolted to the deck. Aside from that, the entire rear portion of the A3 was dedicated to the four massive sensor stations where the operators sat back to back and the two smaller identical consoles along the wall. Her unique design was unlike anything currently in existence, and the array of sensor pods that dotted her superstructure gave her abilities that no other ships had. With a Nodon JCN Type 71 Tactical Network as the ship's brain, the Raptor A3 had become the perfect Electronic Warfare ship in the fleet. They were able to monitor and track multiple fleet groups whether they be friendly or foe. They could direct fighters and ground strikes, and their sensor arrays gave them the maximum potential of any ship similar in size. As with almost everyone involved with Project *ARIZONA*, these men and women were the crème of the crop from within the Union Fleet.

The crews of these ships were made up of four pilots, two flight engineers and eight technicians. Two complete teams that went out on long missions so they could operate at maximum efficiency all of the time. They were a tight knit bunch, and many of them stayed together even when they were off duty. The crew of Falcon Four One was one of these crews.

The elven pilot of Falcon Four One adjusted her thruster controls just a bit with one hand and then leaned back in her large pilot's seat as she brought the mug of tea up with the other. They were maintaining station twenty-five million kilometers from Kranek using just their thrusters and had just witnessed the *SCIMITAR* discharge the *TYPE II* Dragon Transport and half a dozen *STRIKERS* that headed for the surface of the planet.

"...going to do Falarie?" The female co-pilot asked as she too sat back in her chair. The light red hair of the elven co-pilot shone with health as she turned in her seat and looked at her friend.

"I don't know Qilie." The blond pilot spoke looking at her with soft brown eyes.

"You've been dating him for eight months Falarie." The Lycavorian engineer turned in his chair and looked at her. "There must be something there."

"Be quiet Fausith!" Qilie snapped. "What do you know? You're a man!"

"I know he has been devoting every waking hour to Falarie." Fausith snapped back. "That ought to count for something Qilie!"

"He's a pilot! A human pilot!" Qilie stated.

"What's wrong with that?" The male voice broke in over the intercom. As long as they stayed out on missions and as close as they all had become, it was pointless to try and hide what was happening in each other's lives from their fellow crewmates. Falcon Four One was just too small. And in reality, it made them more of a family since they knew what was going on with relationships and children and such. "I'm human!"

"You and Chloe are different Matthew!" Qilie stated quickly. "You are... you are our family."

“Yes we are.” The female voice chimed in.

“Falarie... let him take you to bed and then make your decision!” The gruff male voice echoed. “If he curls your elven toes then he is a keeper!”

“Bah!” Qilie spoke waving her hand dismissively. “That is a typical wolf perspective. Not all female elves wished to be pawed and licked raw all over Meamo!”

“That’s not what you said last night Qilie.” The voice stated with some humor. “Or were those soft squeals I heard forced.”

“You mean the ones that kept most of us awake last night.” The male voice said.

“Sounded like he was curling your elven toes quite well.” Chloe stated.

“Our relationship does not count in this discussion Meamo!” Qilie protested as soft laughter filtered through the intercom.

“There is something there.” Falarie said finally with a smile on her face.

“Colonel Randall is human!” Fausith pointed out.

“Colonel Randall was turned by the King!” Qilie said.

“Yes... he was. But he and Zaala were married long before that.” Chloe’s voice joined in now. “I’ve seen the way you look at him Falarie. It is the same way Zaala Randall looks at her husband. If it feels right to you then I say go for it. He is a pilot on the rise, and he wouldn’t have been chosen for the *ARIZONA* if he carried any sort of attitude. The Colonel wouldn’t have allowed it and for sure Captain Lorian wouldn’t tolerate it.”

Fausith nodded. “See. Even I wouldn’t want to tangle with the Captain! If she had a hand in choosing him... he is probably a fine man.”

Meamo’s voice came on again. “Has he tried anything Falarie?” He asked with sudden concerned.

“What? No! Meamo... he has been the perfect gentlemen!” Falarie declared.

“What do your parents say?” Qilie asked.

“They adore him.” Falarie answered. “They believe him to be a vanguard to what humans are once more beginning to reclaim.”

“Then as the King says... never fear the unknown!” Meamo spoke confidently. “At the very least... you will outlive him by many hundreds of years! If you tire of him... wait until he dies and then find another!”

Fausith broke out laughing at the joke even as soft laughter once more filtered through their ship wide intercom. “*Carian* Meamo... you are such a pig!” Qilie stated but she had a twinkle in her eyes.

“And that is why you adore me Qilie.” He retorted.

Falarie shook her head with a large grin. This is what she so loved about her crew. Yes they talked a good game and ribbed each other mercilessly sometimes, but they would always stand up for each other no matter the reason. For all intents and purposes... the five elves, five Lycavorians and four humans... they were more her family than her own brothers and sisters.

She sipped her tea and made her decision.

“I will allow him to have me.” She said. “I may have to entice him however. He has been such a gentlemen I think I may have put him off to a degree.”

Chloe laughed now. “Ah! Just shove your naked tits in his face Falarie and he’ll perk right up!”

Falarie’s eyes grew wide. “Chloe!” She exclaimed.

“What?” She answered boldly. “It worked for the wolf I wanted! And it led to some very promising pawing and licking. Something I thoroughly enjoy I might add. And he’s been mine for three years now!”

“Bitch!” Qilie declared with a chuckle.

“*Sibfla!* With tits like yours... I’m not surprised!” Matthew’s voice echoed.

They all heard the soft thud of a fist hitting flesh and more laughter ensued. That laughter stopped immediately with one word and the soft chirping alarm.

“Contact!” Chloe hissed aloud. “Wait... it’s gone! Must have been...” The alarm once more sounded again. “That’s no coincidence! Intermittent contact... bearing seven three four mark six! Distance ten million kilometers!”

Falarie looked up. “One of the *SCIMITAR’S* wing Chloe? A fluctuation in their Shroud from the nearby Nebula?”

“Negative Falarie.” Chloe answered. “This came from just inside the Nebula. Trying to localize it.”

“That is a Protonic Lightning Nebula.” Qilie stated. “Why would a ship be in there?”

Falarie’s eyes didn’t leave the overhead intercom panel. “Chloe?” She asked.

“The distortion from the nebula is making it hard to... there! Got it!” She announced. “Can’t identify it... but there is definitely a ship just inside the leading edge of the Nebula. And it isn’t a Union ship!”

Falarie set her tea down in the holder and was turning in her seat. “Stations!” She barked with the tone of command.

Falcon Four One became all business then.

“Give me one quarter power on the aft thrusters Qilie.” Falarie spoke firmly. “I’ll move us closer.”

“One quarter coming up.”

“All defensive systems online and ready.” Fausith spoke from his engineering seat. “Stealth pods generating at nominal output.”

“Stand by!” Falarie stated as her hands moved across her three consoles. “I’m moving us closer.”

None of them felt the Raptor II move in the least. Falarie could make the ship do loops and they would never know it because of her skill. Falarie had broken her crew into two watch groups so that they could optimize sleep and off time on long missions such as this. The first group, Qilie, Meamo, Matthew, Chloe and Fausith always worked with her. The second group were prepared to move into the seats however as they began to rise and become aware of what was happening.

“Seven percent power on thrusters!” Qilie stated calmly. “Distance is now eight million five hundred kilometers.”

“Chloe?” Falarie asked again.

“I don’t know...” Chloe said softly. “It’s weird.”

“What do you mean?” Falarie asked.

“It’s almost as if I’m getting thirty or forty echoes.” Chloe answered.

“Switch to the paramagnetic subspace transceiver Chloe.” Matthew spoke. “That might clear up the echoes.”

Chloe nodded instantly. “That did it. Fuck me!” She exclaimed.

“Chloe! Chloe what is it?” Falarie demanded when she heard Chloe’s tone of voice.

“Fuck! Fuck! Fuck! I’m sweeping with an inverted nanopulse! I have over fifty contacts! Warships by the size of them! All of them are hiding in the nebula!” Chloe barked.

“Inside the nebula?” Qilie barked. “How?”

“Adjusting the shield modulation to repel the lightning particles.” Fausith spoke from his seat. “It’s easy enough to do... just no one wants to do it because of the draw on main power cores to keep the shields switching between modulations.”

“Can you identify them Chloe?” Falarie snapped.

“Negative!” Chloe answered. “The nebula is scattering the major portion of the signal. Nothing is coming in completely clear!”

“Why does the *SCIMITAR* not see them?” Qilie demanded.

“We’re scanning in three dimensional spatial patterns!” Chloe answered. “They only scan in two dimensional spatial patterns because of the area they must cover.”

“I can do a visual recognition scan!” Matthew barked as he began adjusting his consoles. “I’ll use our database to get a match. If it’s in our database I’ll find them. It will take me a couple minutes!”

“Do it!” Falarie ordered quickly. “Meamo... tight beam COM to the *ARIZONA*! Alpha priority!”

“Alpha Priority is war time Falarie.” Meamo reminded her.

“We have unknown warships hiding in a lightning nebula within spitting distance of where the majority of our royal family is. What would you call that Meamo?” Falarie asked calmly.

“Not good!” Meamo answered. “Not good!”

“We have to let Captain Lorian know about this. And piggyback the other *RAPTORS* in the system in on our signal so we are all on the same page!” Falarie ordered. “We may need to shut down the system.”

“Stand by!” Meamo announced.

**EARTH
SPARTA
HOME OF ISRA, TARIFA AND AIHOLA**

“Uuugghhhhhh!”

Danny surged upward from off the floor, shrugging his broad shoulders as he did and throwing off the large chunks of the now destroyed wall from his back. His dark wolf eyes immediately went to his *anome* Anuk who was beneath him and coughing heavily.

“Anuk... baby!” He barked.

“I’m ok!” She coughed out the words. “I’m ok!”

Danny pushed himself up to his knees, his eyes going to his right where he knew Martin would be. The air was filled with nothing but the smell of burnt plasma, effectively nullifying his sense of smell and he snorted heavily, even as he shook his head and tried to shake away the ringing in his ears.

“Marty!” He screamed as he began pulling Anuk up to a sitting position. His eyes saw the large figure of Martin Leonidas roll to the side a few feet from him, also throwing off bits of the now destroyed wall.

“Stop yelling!” Martin screamed back as he pushed himself up, his hands pulling an uninjured Aricia up with him. “My head hurts enough!”

Martin’s eyes, also now changed, darted left and right and he saw the Kavalian Pian shoving what was once a chair off his back as he pushed himself to his feet. Martin saw the flash of white blond hair shaking back and forth as Jalersi shook her head to a shouted question from Pian that he didn’t hear. His eyes once more moved back and forth and he saw Karun pulling Ardis up while three *Durcunusaan* troops were pulling the remains of a cabinet off of Isra’s back. He had pushed it as far as he could to keep from crushing Tarifa who was under him, her raven hair now almost white from the dust.

“We need to move! Now!” Martin barked as he got to his feet and pulled Aricia up with him. “Before they find their range!” He turned and saw the unmoving bodies of at least half a dozen *Durcunusaan* troops, their body armor peppered and pocked with what could only be savage hits from plasma particles or debris. He saw the fur covered arm move beneath the rubble and body of one troop and he scrambled across the destroyed pieces of wall and pulled the female *Durcunusaan* off the Kavalian Jiss gently. Her dark hair fell across her face, a nasty slice in her scalp right to the bone, and her face peppered with small cuts. Martin cursed under his breath as he moved her gently, her body limp and unresponsive. She was an experienced Spartan female from Apo Prime. Fache had spoke of her when she first became part of his detail and how her father and mother, both senior officers within the fleet, had praised their daughter at her promotion ceremony. She was only two hundred and twenty-eight years old, and now she would never reach another year.

His eyes went to Jiss who was sputtering and spitting out debris. His face was scratched heavily, but her body had protected him from the most damaging effects of the explosion. “Jiss!” He shouted.

Jiss’s eyes were wide as they attempted to focus on Martin’s face. “I can’t... I can’t hear you!” He screamed.

Martin grinned and grabbed his shoulders. “Then you are alive!” He shouted himself as he pulled him up.

Jiss’s eyes went to the body of the *Durcunusaan* female as he came first to a sitting position and then to his legs. He wobbled slightly but quickly got his balance. He turned back to look at Martin with wide, disbelieving eyes. “She... She threw herself in front of me!” He stammered. “She... she saved me.”

Martin nodded. “Yes... she did.”

“But why?” Jiss questioned his eyes confused and disoriented.

“Because you are not the enemy.” Martin exclaimed. “We have to move! Now!”

“The side!” Isra shouted from the other side of the room drawing everyone’s attention. “The patio doors! We can get directly into the timber from there!”

Jiss turned and looked at the body of the female. In all his years of life, no woman had ever done such a shameless act of sacrifice for him. In many ways he agreed with the old ways of their people, but after seeing Pian and how he acted with Jalersi, his views were slowly beginning to change. He could hear and feel everyone beginning to move towards the still intact patio doors and as he began to step off to follow his feline eyes grew wide when he saw the fingers of her right hand twitch.

“Jiss!” Pian shouted as he grabbed him. “We must go!”

“She’s alive!” Jiss barked back as he knelt beside her body.

“She is dead Jiss!” Pian barked grabbing his shoulders.

Jiss shrugged his hands off violently. “I saw her move! She’s alive! I’m not leaving her!” However Ambassador Jiss of the Kavalian people had been raised, as each moment passed, he was changing and didn’t even know it. Pian watched him lift the bloody and inert figure of the *Durcunusaan* female into his arms easily. Jiss may have been a politician, but he was still Kavalian and equally as strong as any other. He held her easily in his arms, her head lolling against his chest and her cheek pressed to the dark fur of his shoulder.

“We go now!” Pian shouted.

TORMA! Martin screamed out within Mindvoice as his right hand reached down and he activated something on the small control panel of his uniform. He looked across at Isra who stood on the other side of the double patio doors.

A tiny yellow light blinked only twice on that small panel and then stopped. The signal it sent would not be traced. It could not be traced. It went to just one location and appeared to vanish into the void of space.

Torma, Isheeni, Aelnala and Roluth had been circling high above the home; staying well out of range of any T19s should they be a threat. Roluth had spent many months training with Torma after first bonding with Tarifa and Aihola. He had tried to plunge on Isheeni in a lustful state when he was only five years old, not realizing that the ways of the dragons had changed through the years. Isheeni had bested him soundly then, and she had been the one to start him on his path of redemption. He had thought Torma would crush him like an insect when he had discovered this, but in reality Torma became like the father Roluth had never had. While he was gone more often than not, Roluth had learned well from the most distinguished dragon of their species whenever he was on Earth. As close as their bonded ones were, it made them close as well, and now Roluth flew only a few meters from Isheeni’s tail as they circled the blue sky. He was one of only two male dragons who were not her children that dared fly this close to her, especially with Torma flying just above her and dwarfing both of them in size. Aelnala brought up the rear of the small vertical diamond formation they were in.

It had been Roluth who had seen the flash of the plasma mortars as they were fired for he just happened to be looking back behind them as they executed another wide sweeping turn.

MORTARS! Roluth savagely announced in Mindvoice causing both Torma and Isheeni to turn. *Mortars on the ridge above our home! They fired Torma! They fired!*

All four dragons practically stopped on a dime and turned in mid-air. The explosions landed very near the home that held all of those they loved within it and all of them saw the entire front and right side of the home erupt in the explosion that caused the both sections to crumble inward.

ARICIA! Isheeni screamed out within Mindvoice.

Split up! We must stop them before they fire again! Torma screamed. *Roluth, Aelnala to the west! Isheeni and I right in! We must not let them fire again!*

They are Kavalians! Isheeni barked out. *I see them massing on the crest! Torma... Aricia is...*

They will be dead if we do not keep them from firing again Isheeni! Torma barked at her. Twenty-six years with Martin Leonidas as his bonded brother had made Torma a superior tactician just like him.

Look! Aelnala barked. *The Durcunusaan convoy from the base is under attack!*

Now! Now! Torma screamed out as he and Isheeni folded their wings back and dove. The flash of red and dirty mustard out of the corner of his keen eyes told him Roluth and Aelnala were doing the same thing.

“Dragons!” The Kavalian shouted from his position near the mortars.

The senior Kavalian Puma Bane soldier on Earth had called all of their Assassination Teams together. He knew who Tarifa was and the moment he saw Roluth take to the sky, he knew that the red dragon would return with help. He had suspected her husband would return with another dragon, but he had not counted on the King and Queen arriving as well with additional ground forces, and now the targets they had been sent here to eliminate were now all in one location. He couldn’t believe his luck. Those members of the Assassination

Teams knew this was more than likely a one way mission. If they were successful, there was no way any of them would leave Earth alive. It was comfort enough to know they would kill the King of the Union and so many other high ranking officials, and he knew their actions would draw all the Netnews media here and allowed his other teams the ability to complete their assignments with at least a better than average chance.

The advance unit of Spartans from the base had been met in their Lifter Transports and all of them lay dead or dying because of the ambush. They had tried to come in over the top of the mountains and this only gave the Kavalians the advantage. He knew it would not have been so easy had the Union troops suspected Kavalians were involved and he kept this information in his head even as he rejoiced at the completeness of their ambush. The only ones to actually make it into the home had been those dozen or so that had accompanied the King and the elf witch's husband down the main road below them. He had not counted on the large ebony skinned Spartan to be anywhere near their location, but it would be another medal to pin to his chest. He would be known as the only Kavalian in history to kill a King, a Queen, a governor and two of the most senior military officers within the Lycavorian Union.

The Kavalian General's head whipped around at that one word. "Missile teams!" He screamed.

As if on cue, like they had been waiting for the call, four teams of two moved quickly out from under the heavy timber where they had swiftly erected a heavy camouflage net. As they brought the short boxy launchers to their shoulders they could see the four dragons diving out of the sky right at the mortar crews only two hundred meters away.

"Kill them!" The General barked. "Kill them all! Do it now! Send in our force! Straight down the hill at the back of the home. Kill anything that moves but make sure the King and the Kavalian traitors die!"

The Kavalian missile teams responded instantly to the order and eight fingers squeezed the triggers of their launchers at the same time. There were eight small flashes of flame and eight dragon killing missiles leaped into the sky while over seventy Kavalian Puma Bane Commandos began racing down the side of the mountain using their feline speed and agility to carry them.

TORMA! Martin's commanding voice erupted in Torma's head.

Not now brother! Torma snapped. *We must remove the mortars before they fire again!*

Torma they are Kavalians! Martin shouted. *They will have...*

DRAGON KILLERS! Aelnala's voice cut off their conversation.

Now brother! We must act now! Before it is too late! Martin's voice screamed out.

All of them, with the exception of Roluth, had faced the dragon killing missile that took the lives of twenty-three members of *Mjolnir's Hand* during the Evolli War. Without so much as an afterthought it took only a miniscule touch of their TK power and Dragon Armor began to extend from their saddles even as they continued their plummet towards the surface. As the last of her armor wrapped around her neck and head Isheeni cut loose with a stream of flame that reached out nearly three hundred meters. Through the years and with the intense regime that she and Aricia had practiced all that time, Isheeni was able to spit out the hottest base stream of flame of any living dragon. She was also able to direct it with unerring accuracy due to her immense Mindvoice skills. Using her power now, she concocted a shield of flame in front of her and Torma as they dove. A shield of flame that reached nearly four thousand five hundred degrees in temperature. The first three of the eight T19s rose directly into this flame shield at nine thousand feet and the small cones of the missiles melted instantly, igniting the explosive warheads. Deadly shrapnel filled the air then, two large chunks slamming into another missile and causing that to veer off course and add its own explosive power to the fray. Exploding so far away as they did caused Isheeni and Torma no harm in the least as the shrapnel and pieces of missile bounced harmlessly off their psychic shields.

It was an elf and a Lycavorian who actually developed the maneuvers to counter a T19 and when added to the wonderful Dragon Armor they all now had, the odds of survival went much higher. Isheeni's maneuver and tactic raised their odds of survival incredibly as now the four remaining T19s locked onto a single dragon.

Unfortunately, that dragon was the largest one airborne at the time. Torma recognized this almost instantly for it had happened before during battle with Martin and he instantly snapped out his wings, turned and dove away from his precious mate at a blistering rate.

Torma! Isheeni screamed out flaring her wings and slowing as she began to turn.

They are locked on me! Torma snapped as he rolled and dove for the ground. *I am the largest their sensors can see! Take out the missiles my mate! Leave the mortars for Roluth and Aelnala! Take out the missiles before they fire again as well!*

Torma no! Isheeni screamed.

Do it Isheeni! I will be fine! Torma barked as he snapped rolled. *Do it quickly or we will leave our children with no parents to mind them!*

Torma I can...

Damn it Isheeni! For once in our lives ... listen to me! Torma barked. *Take out the missile teams! I will be fine!*

Isheeni turned her head back and folded her wings once more, a murderous scowl coming over her dragon features as she trumpeted out her hatred and anger and opened her maw at two thousand meters.

Roluth's stream of flame reaching out for the first mortar crew was the perfect cover Aelnala needed. As the screams of the burning Kavalians reached her, Aelnala rose up, rolled over the top of Roluth who was flaring his wings to land heavily and she let out a savage trumpet of rage as her three and a half metric tons of muscle and weight came down in a huge cloud of dirt and leaves, utterly crushing the plasma mortar beneath her armored body. Aelnala had no flame bursts to use in battle for she was a pure Heavyhorn dragon. What she did have was weight and agility and a tail that could bring down buildings if she so chose it. Her long Heavyhorn tail came whipping from the side; the dragon armor encased flat portion of the tip smashing into the bodies of four Kavalians with the force of a speeding Lifter. Bones shattered, organs burst and four Kavalians were sent hurtling through the trees. As Aelnala turned to move for the last mortar she left behind a twisted and bent mortar with explosive shells scattered all about.

Roluth had not trained with Torma and learned nothing. As his own flame stream licked at the edges of his psychic shield he leaped from where he had just torn open a Kavalian with his talons and landed beside Aelnala with a rustle of wings and together they tore into the last mortar crew with barely a pause making short, bloody work of the terrified Kavalian troops. The familiar trumpet brought their heads up and the both turned to see the azure scaled dragon bellowing out her rage and hate as she dove from above. They could only watch in awe as Isheeni cut loose with another stream of flame at the Kavalian missile teams that were standing in the small clearing. Two of them had reloaded their missile launchers and were turning to fire when the flame engulfed them. Their screams lasted for only a few seconds before the four thousand degree flame and heat seared their throats shut and cooked the flesh from their bones even as they stood there and realized they were dying.

Isheeni landed among the remaining Kavalians with a horrific snarl and gleefully began ripping the burning Kavalian troops to shreds with her wickedly curved talons, her psychic shield and the dragon armor protecting her from the fire she had started. Bunched together as they were, it was over in a matter of seconds and Isheeni launched herself into the sky once more, her azure eyes scanning for her beloved dragon mate.

Torma was nearly four hundred years older than her, yet she had loved his obsidian color scales from the moment he had begun teaching her to fly on Enurrua. His quiet instruction was perfect and Isheeni was now considered the fastest and most maneuverable dragon anywhere. He had schooled her, taught her and the entire time had fallen more in love with her by the day. Many thought dragons were just beasts, unable to feel emotion in a similar manner as humans and Lycavorians. Even to this day, many still believed this, but it was so far from the truth it was ridiculous. Isheeni loved Torma with the same intensity and passion that Aricia loved Martin. And he loved her in passionate return. They were no different emotionally than other species and this knowledge was slow to make its rounds among the Union for they had only been part of the Union for twenty-five years. This was changing slowly Isheeni knew, as did all dragons, and this information was part of the reason they were now so well regarded by other species.

When her mother came to her and told her Torma had asked to join with her, to take her as his mate, no matter her age and how she would not be able to give him eggs for at least two hundred plus years Isheeni had been ecstatic. She felt a powerful draw to that monstrous hybrid dragon from the first moment she laid her azure eyes on him and it hadn't diminished in all their centuries together now. The moment they had come together and coupled in that devastatingly exquisite first plunge Isheeni had been his for eternity. Never could she

replace the feeling of his scales against hers, his enormous maleness filling her or the way his wing wrapped around her while they plummeted from high above locked together in sizzling pleasure. She could not imagine life without him, and this is what drove her as she beat her wings faster than she had ever beat them in an effort to catch up with him. He had drawn the missiles far away, and she could see his huge body rolling and flipping as he dove around mountaintops and even between trees in an effort to fool the T19 missiles. She had seen what the full force of one missile could do, for only Torma and her daughter had ever survived a direct full on blast. Both of them had been injured, peppered with shrapnel, and Isheeni did not care to see what four of these terrible things could do to her beloved Torma.

Husband! She screamed. Turn back towards me!

Isheeni! The missile...

They are dead! Isheeni barked worriedly. I can not lose you! Turn back towards me and I will flame them!

They are too close! I will lose speed if I turn so sharply!

Damn you Torma! I will die without you! Only you rule my soul! Turn towards me and let me help you!

Isheeni exclaimed.

Isheeni blinked in stunned shocked when she saw his massive wings snap out completely to the sides and he executed a one hundred and eighty degree turn that a dragon his size should never have been able to do so sharply. As she sped towards him she saw two of the missiles turn just as sharply but brush into each other at the apex of the turn in a stroke of wonderful luck. She saw his powerful psychic shields flare as one missile exploded and was peppered with hot shrapnel, but he didn't slow and was gaining speed once more with each beat of his powerful wings as the last three missiles completed their turn and raced after him. Isheeni beat her wings faster if that was possible trying to close the distance.

I will not lose you! Torma's voice echoed in her mind. I can not out fly three missiles!

Torma! Isheeni's eyes grew wide as she saw him barreling at her with amazing velocity. Speed she had never seen from her dragon mate in all their years together, the distance between them rapidly shrinking. Torma what are you doing? Turn away now! I can burn the missiles!

It needs to be this way my beautiful Isheeni!

What? Torma turn! They are within my range! What are you doing husband? Isheeni's eyes grew larger as her mate came directly at her but kept his huge body between her and the oncoming missiles.

Saving you and our children. Torma answered as his massive body rocketed over the top of her smaller one. She felt the brush of his front talon against her armor and her azure eyes grew wide as she realized then what he had done. Dragon Cave!

TORMA! NO! Isheeni screamed out just before she vanished in a flash of a silver like vortex.

Torma flared his huge wings and his speed bled off in seconds and he looped around and faced the incoming missiles. He reared back his head and let loose with a sustained burst of his superheated breath. *For the future!*

The three T19 missiles sped directly into the path of Torma's breath, the four thousand degree heat burning through the protective cone of the first missiles with ease. The first missile was only a hundred meters from Torma before the heat from his breath ignited the explosive. The explosion from the first warhead engulfed the second two which were only meters behind the first and set them off. Even as hundreds of men, women and children stood far below in the streets of Sparta and watched, the explosive force of three T19 missiles struck Torma's psychic shields with unmitigated fury. His shields flared brilliantly for a few seconds and then the concussive force of those three missiles and all the shrapnel that accompanied them struck Torma head on. As those same people watched in horror, the explosions were like sonic booms and they became a small sun in the sky above causing many to turn away at the brightness.

When they turned back all they saw was the huge body of the King's dragon plummeting to earth. As Aelnala and Roluth looked on in horror from where they were racing to the scene, they watched Torma's mangled body smash into the side of a building two thousand feet below them as people raced to get out of the way screaming out their own terror.

Ten kilometers away Isheeni reappeared just as she was about to smash into the side of their home on the royal estate. She flared her huge wings to the side and twisted her body to avoid colliding with the top of

Dragon Cave. As her talons brushed the opening at the top of the cave where they had taught their children to fly Isheeni heard her mate's words.

For the future!

Then there was nothing.

The shriek within Mindvoice was deafening as Isheeni's wail of anguish filled the minds of every Mindvoicer with the power to hear her cry as she streaked back into the sky gaining altitude and heading back to Sparta. And this included her most precious and closest friend. Her bonded sister.

Aricia staggered under the onslaught of Isheeni's wail in Mindvoice and Martin turned to face her as they made their way through the timber and broke into the open of the small, quiet neighborhood half a kilometer from Isra and Tarifa's home. The old style homes were actually very reminiscent of ancient Sparta in their design with large concrete flower beds surrounding property and stylish designs on the open windows and doorways. Men and women all around were coming from their homes and looking towards where Tarifa's home burned wildly. They all knew whose home it was that was burning not far away for most of the men and women in this neighborhood had thrown a huge block party type celebration when the female elf they all knew as the King's sister was named Lieutenant Governor of Sparta and moved into their quiet neighborhood. They could just hear the sounds of emergency crews that were rushing to the scene.

Aricia looked at him with wide, pain filled eyes. "Beloved! Isheeni!" Aricia gasped.

"I know!" Martin barked his face stern and unreadable. "C'mon!" He snapped pulling on her hand. "We have to keep moving!"

"GET DOWN!" Pian roared from behind them as he shoved Jalersi to the ground behind a medium sized Lifter car.

Martin whirled just in time to see a dozen Kavalians break from the line of trees behind them, two of them bringing up some sort of grenade launchers. His eyes could detect many more rushing through the timber behind them, moving to flanking positions as he pushed Aricia to the ground behind some concrete flowerbed just as weapons fire erupted all around them. As he dropped to the ground next to her, Aricia was still shaking from the onslaught of Isheeni's cry and she grabbed his arm.

"Martin!" She screamed. "Torma..."

"I KNOW!" Martin roared back as he pulled his *Nehtes* from its thigh scabbard. Two explosions just on the other side of the planter sent clouds of dirt and gravel up into the air, tiny pieces falling all over them as Martin turned to partially cover Aricia with his body.

"The King is over there! Behind the low wall!" He heard someone shout above the din of weapons fire and the sound of projectiles smashing into the buildings and Lifters all around them. "He is the primary target! Kill him! The others are a bonus! Kill Leonidas! Move! Move! Move!"

Her name was Me'alla and this was only her first full day on the job. It was a first full day she would remember for many years to come.

Me'alla had graduated from the prestigious Earth Academy of Arts only two short months ago. In barely twenty years the EAA had become renowned for turning out some of the finest media people in the Union, as well as several up and coming politicians. Me'alla had gotten the job with Netnews Channel 65 only last week and this was her first full day on the job alone in the field with her technical aid. The Netnews reporter gaped in shock at the wisps of smoke that still remained in the air above her. She turned quickly to look at the elven technician who was handling her technical equipment for the interview she was supposed to be conducting with Governor Panos's senior aide. They had been enroute to that aide's home when the explosions from Tarifa's residence only eight blocks away drew their attention. As their vehicle screeched to a halt and they piled out they could see the dragons off in the distance bellowing out trumpets and suddenly and quite spectacularly firing lethal blasts of their flame into the tall, mountainous terrain backstopping the home of Lieutenant Governor Tarifa. They had watched in awe with the several hundred others who now lined the streets around them as the battle in the sky above between dragon and missile took place.

The King's dragon Torma was by far the most well known of the dragons with their Elder Mother and Prince Androcles's dragon Elynth running close seconds. They had witnessed him performing some of the most incredible aerial maneuvers anyone had ever seen from a dragon this day as he tried to outrace the obvious T19 missiles. Me'alla knew immediately what they were for her oldest brother was bonded to a dragon and he had talked of the much hated Evolli designed T19 missiles before. That someone had fired so many at one time at the King's dragon could not mean good things and Me'alla had her driver stop what he was doing as they filmed it all and sent the feed out live to their headquarters in Eden City. They had witnessed Torma speed by the azure scaled dragon and were stunned when that dragon suddenly disappeared in a silver vortex of incandescent light. They had watched him execute a stunning maneuver and rear back to fire his superheated molten breath at the missiles that still followed him only to bear witness to the missiles exploding so close to him they blinded almost everyone on the ground. When they looked back up, the gasps of so many could be heard as they saw the King's dragon plummeting to the earth obviously mortally wounded.

Me'alla looked at her tech now in shock. "Hr'man... please... please tell me we didn't just see the King's dragon blown from the sky?"

The Elven tech could only nod his head just as stunned as she was. "*Carians!* Who would shoot down the King's dragon?" Hr'man exclaimed.

"It has to be the High Coven!" Me'alla declared. "This must be a follow on operation after their attack on Zarah Leonidas and Dragon Mountain!"

Many heads began turning as the sound of weapons fire could be heard in the streets now several blocks away. "C'mon!" Me'alla barked as she began to move quickly with the others in the street as they migrated towards the sounds. "We'll never get there by Lifter! We have to see what is going on!"

Hr'man didn't hesitate as he followed, they were reporters after all. He saw Me'alla reach for the COM unit on her wrist and she activated the connection that would send her broadcast communications out live. He heard her voice erupt in his small earpiece as they started to run towards the sound of the weapons fire.

"This is Me'alla reporting from the outskirts of Sparta!" She gasped out as she ran with the others heading in the same direction. "We... we were on our way to a scheduled meeting with Governor Panos's senior aide Janae when... by the gods... the King's dragon is dead!" She exclaimed as she ran. "We just witnessed Torma being killed by what could only be three T19 missiles fired from a location unknown to us! Somewhere in the mountains around Sparta we think. We stopped enroute to our meeting when three very large explosions originating from what could only be the home of Lieutenant Governor Tarifa shook the quiet neighborhood we were in. As we exited our Lifter to view this we saw the dragons in the sky in the surrounding airspace! No one knows what is going on here and we are moving with many other citizens towards the sound of the heavy gunfire. Some of them are soldiers and they are carrying their weapons with them even though half dressed!" Me'alla turned back and looked at Hr'man. "Hurry up Hr'man!" she barked at him.

EDEN CITY NETNEWS CHANNEL 65 HEADQUARTERS

"...by the gods... the King's dragon is dead!" She exclaimed as she ran. "We just witnessed the King's dragon and Bonded Brother Torma being killed by what could only be three T19 missiles fired from a location unknown to us! We stopped enroute to our meeting when three very large explosions originating from what could only be the home of Lieutenant Governor Tarifa shook the quiet neighborhood we were in. As we exited our Lifter to view this we saw the dragons in the sky in the surrounding airspace! No one knows what is going on here and we are moving with many other citizens towards the sound of the heavy gunfire. Some of them are soldiers and they are carrying their weapons with them even though half dressed!"

The director of the Netnews station was human and his eyes were wide as he listened to their newest journalist and how she had just found herself in the middle of an exploding war zone in Sparta.

"Fuck me!" He swore turning to those in the control room with him. "Get all our people on this!" He barked out. "Is she getting any footage... can she hear us?"

The woman turned from her seat, her ears telling everyone she was only half elf. “Getting the feed from Hr'man now!” She announced.

The five men and women in the control center became silent as they witnessed the very clear footage of Torma’s death. “Oh my god!” The woman gasped. They watched the dragon’s huge body plummet to earth until it was out of sight and then the footage shifted to smoke rising in the distance not so far away over the tops of the obvious civilian area.

“Where is that?” William Moore barked.

“Looks like the Old Sparta District along the mountains!” A man answered quickly.

“She said she was going to meet Major Janae!” Another woman spoke. “That’s Governor Panos’s senior aide! She lives in that area! Star Colonel Isra’s home with Tarifa is in that same district as well.”

The door to the control room slid open and two men came barging in. “Bill... we’re getting information of a running gun battle in Sparta’s old district!”

“We’re also getting reports from assets in Sparta’s Old District of mortars being fired from the mountains overlooking the home of Lieutenant Governor Tarifa.” The second man barked out. “Their home is burning and half of it has caved in according to this!”

“Me'alla and Hr'man just sent a live report from Sparta!” Moore snapped. “They caught the King’s dragon being killed by T19 missiles over the city!”

“The new girl?” One man gasped. “The King’s dragon being killed! What the fuck is going on?”

“Lino... get a full crew into our transport and get over there before they shut down the planet! I need someone to back up Me'alla!” Moore snapped.

“Back her up?” The man hissed.

“Yes damn it! She’s already there and she has the lead!” Moore barked. “Frank... go with him and get to Deia’s office and find out what is going on!”

The two men nodded. “On it!”

“I want all our stations on this people!” Moore answered turning back around. “Someone just killed the King’s dragon live and in color and I want to know who! Keep an open link with Me'alla no matter what! Something is going down in Sparta and I want to know what it is! God bless that elven girl... I knew she was going to be a star! First day on the job and all hell breaks loose!”

They were pinned down but good Martin thought as he brought his K12 back down and slammed in another fifty round Kinetic projectile clip. Danny huddled with Anuk, Jiss and the still inert form of the Durcunusaan soldier he had refused to leave claiming she was still alive. Jiss was firing over the top of the bullet riddled Lifter with Danny’s K12, while his huge ebony skinned brother used short, controlled bursts from his 190. Tarifa, Isra, Karun and Ardis were behind similar concrete flower planters as what he and Aricia huddled behind now. He could not see Pian or Jalersi from his location, but he could certainly hear the 190s burning out ammo from the other side of Danny’s position.

[Milord!] Fache’s voice erupted into his mind. [Martin!]

[Fache!] Martin answered.

[We are thirty seconds away! Coming from the timber! They ambushed our support team sire! I have twenty surviving Spartans with me! Reports are coming in that civilians are moving towards your location from the east! All of them armed! Kavalian troops are everywhere!] Fache gasped out and it was easy to ascertain he was running.

[Call them off Fache! These are Kavalian shock troops! They’ll kill anyone who gets in their way! They’re flanking us on both sides with heavy weapons and grenade launchers! Our people won’t stand a chance!] Martin shouted in reply as he lifted his K12 over the top of the planter and let rip with ten rounds in quick succession.

[Milord! We have to do something or they will overwhelm you from the flanks! There is easily a company of them!] Fache exclaimed.

[They’re after me!] Martin declared. *[They want me dead! This is my brother’s doing! Warn Deia and For'mya! Warn my mother! Keep them safe Fache!]*

[I have men moving there now! Milord I can see your position! We are almost there! We'll hit them from the rear!] Fache screamed.

[No time Fache!] Martin declared. *[They want me and I'm going to draw them away from the others!]*
[Martin no!] Fache screamed. *[No!]*

Martin turned his head and looked at Aricia. She could feel the tremors within Mindvoice of his conversation and she looked at him with wide eyes even as she flinched from the rounds hitting the planter and the grenade explosion that showered them with more dirt. Her K12 was clutched in her hands and she looked every bit the warrior alpha female. Martin leaned over quickly, seizing her sweet lips and kissed her hard.

For the future Saaurano! He spoke. *Stay here under cover Aricia!*
Beloved? She questioned him.

Tell Andro he must meet with Wayonn now! He must meet with Wayonn! Under my uniform on the chair Saaurano! Under my uniform! For the future!

Aricia saw what he intended in his mind then and she reached for him even as he surged to his feet. **“NO! MARTIN NO!”** She screamed as her hands grasped air and he was running away from her even amid the intense weapons fire.

Aricia came to her feet unintentionally as well as she screamed his name, her azure blue eyes wide. She never saw the Kavalian troop who was closest to her or his eyes grow wide at this action, nor did she see him instantly realign his weapon and pull the trigger. Aricia felt the three rounds punch into her side between the plates of armor on the Mark IV ArmorPly. Her eyes flared at the intense pain as her body was physically tossed back and she slammed into the side wall of the home the planter was in front of with enough force to dislodge several bricks from the side. As she slumped to a sitting position Aricia saw her Beloved, the man and mate who held her very essence in his hands, running away to draw their enemy away from them and then blackness claimed her into its embrace.

As the Kavalian Puma Bane soldier stood up with a delighted and cruel sneer to finish the first Queen of the Union, he did not notice the flash of dark brown fur to his right, and as he brought his weapon up, Colonel Fache hit him in full stride in his muscular wolf form. Long flesh shredding fangs and black razor claws shredded the Kavalian's throat and tore one arm from his body before he had an opportunity to pull the trigger. As the Kavalian staggered, blood erupting from his torn throat, Fache was landing on his feet and transforming back to human form. That is when twenty Lycavorian Spartan wolves, extremely upset that so many of their friends had perished in the ambush of their column, descended on the unsuspecting Kavalians from the timber with berserker blood fury in their eyes and murder in their hearts.

Aricia's scream caused Danny to turn his head just as Martin broke from cover and his dark eyes flew open at his brother's actions. He saw Aricia stand up and then get hit and tossed back against the home hard, sliding to a sitting position with her blood staining the outside of the wall, her eyes closing in either unconsciousness or death Danny did not know.

Daniel Simpson felt the rage well within him from deep down for he knew what Martin was doing. He had heard the same shouted commands among the Kavalians. As Danny came to his feet, he didn't hear Anuk scream out and reach for him. He didn't feel the strike of two rounds to his body armor. He didn't see himself lift his P190A3 with one hand and return fire, the un-aimed burst striking the Kavalian Puma Bane troop in the chest and throat. All he could see was his brother Martin running away as fast as his legs would carry him, firing his K12 at the Kavalians, trying to draw the enemy away from so many whom his brother loved. Danny sensed the weapons fire directed at them slackening even as the Kavalians turned to follow the running King of the Union, projectile rounds dotting the concrete and pavement under Martin's feet as he ran and the Kavalians shifting fire completely. His mind's eye saw a similar action many years ago in the heat and harshness of a desert not so very far from here. Danny knew instantly that today would not end so happily as that one did.

He saw Martin's Shi Viska flare into existence and launch with barely a thought, slashing off at some Kavalian's head that Danny couldn't see. Danny was frozen in his spot, held by some unseen force as his wolf eyes detected the two large Kavalians appear from the corner of the building with grenade launchers in their hands. He watched as they tracked Martin slowly, everything now moving as if time was standing still all around them.

It was then that Daniel Simpson moved.

He moved faster than he had ever moved in his life. A flash of silver/white light and the large, dark chocolate colored wolf was bounding towards Martin as fast as his four legs would carry him. Anuk Simpson didn't hesitate and came to a standing position screaming out her own rage, holding back the trigger on her 190 as she sprayed the positions of the Kavalians in an effort to protect the man she so loved. Daniel Simpson ran as if the hounds of hell were nipping at his paws, his chest rumbling in effort and he screamed out within Mindvoice louder than he had ever screamed before in his life.

BEHIND YOU BROTHER!

Danny saw Martin's head turn as he ran and his yellow wolf eyes erupted in agony when he saw the two Kavalians fire simultaneously.

NO! NO! NO!

A piercing howl of anguish filled the air all around as if by some cruel action of the gods Danny watched those two explosive rounds track unerringly on the only man he had ever truly known as brother. Daniel Simpson had brothers, all brothers by his birth parents and he was close with all of them. Yet they and everyone knew the deep relationship that he shared with Martin. They had grown together, fought together, bled together and discovered together. They had been through more battles than they could remember, fought and killed more enemies than either of them could imagine and they had always come out on top. They had saved each other on countless occasions, never leaving each other alone. Even when they discovered who and what they really were, after so many years of not having the answer to that question, this only brought them even closer. Wives, mates, children. They had shared it all. Through no fault of their own, now they would share death.

Danny's eyes filled with tears even as he ran, knowing he would not be in time.

He was cursed to watch as those two explosive grenades struck his brother in mid stride. He saw Martin staring at him and witnessed the most amazing thing. Martin Leonidas smiled at him just as those two grenades blew up one meter above the ground and only half a meter from him.

For the future brother! Those words echoed in the corridor of Danny's mind and would for weeks to come.

Daniel Simpson then endured the supreme torture and agony of watching as his much-loved brother's body was shredded and torn in half by the explosive grenades, the bright silver like center of the explosion tossing his lower body one way while his upper body went another in a ghastly display of blood and bone and flesh.

Martin Leonidas, twenty-ninth King of Sparta and the Agiad Line and the second King of the Lycavorian Union, died as he had lived life.

Saving the lives of those he loved and never fearing the unknown.

Colonel Fache stared in unmitigated horror at what he had just seen; his eyes wide as he felt searing anger and berserker madness grip him. He lifted his hand in the last act of the senior *Durcunusaan* commander of the royal villa estate.

"ALPHA STORM! ALPHA STORM! The King is down! The King is down! Spartan One is down!!" He screamed into his jaw implant before he allowed the madness to engulf him as it had all the other Spartans who had witnessed the events unfold before them.

Unknown to Daniel Simpson or those Spartans who now went completely insane with fury and misery, a lone journalist named Me'alla and her technical aide Hr'man stood only two hundred feet away on the corner of another house with dual expressions of horror and surprise as their video drone hummed away mindlessly behind them recording everything as it took place live and in color. They could only watch as every Spartan turned toward where their King had fallen and they began to systematically kill everything between them and their fallen King in an effort to reach his body.

Ten seconds after the death of Martin Leonidas, it was going out across the Lycavorian Union and would serve as a rallying cry for the son who would now become King.

ULU *HARBINGER*

Daba moved up next to Walter as he stood leaning against the doorframe into the medical bay. He turned to look at her and smiled gently. He motioned into the room with his head. “The *Yara Parma* was right after all.” He stated slowly.

Daba’s amber eyes followed where he motioned with his head and she saw Lu’ria resting comfortably in the medical bed, the three women crowded around her. Carisia sat on one side of the bed, Sadi and Ne’Veha on the other. Sadi held Lu’ria’s hand within both of hers, Carisia’s hands resting on Lu’ria’s other arm. There were no words being spoken between them, but she could see Lu’ria’s bright amber eyes gleaming in happiness as she looked back and forth. Daba turned back to Walter and he saw the question in her eyes.

“They are speaking within Mindvoice Daba. Sadi is beginning to help Lu’ria to adjust to her transformation to wolf.” Walter answered the unspoken question in her amber colored eyes. “The change will be nearly complete outwardly by now. Her senses and her strength will have tripled at the very least. Her abilities in Mindvoice even more so given what Andro is capable of. It will take probably another sixteen to eighteen months for it to fully encompass her entire molecular structure as it did with Anja and Dysea. It is a lot to take in and Sadi will be an excellent teacher for her. She is very much like Gorgo in her demeanor and patience.”

“So fast?” Daba asked stunned.

Walter nodded. “It’s the pureness of Andro’s blood.” He replied. “It is so virulent in its nature that it makes the initial transformation more painful, but it also makes the transformation much more quickly. Sadi and Andro will teach her to use her new senses and abilities. They’ll teach her how to shift and run as a wolf, how to sing to the moon. They’ll teach her all she needs to know Daba. She is his mate now, and she is their Mistress if what I have seen so far is any indication.”

“Walter... there has never... there has never been a Drow who is completely wolf.” Daba said softly.

Walter looked at her oddly. “I thought... Daniel’s father... Melancton... he changed a Drow during their assault of your city in Canada didn’t he?” Walter asked. “Lu’ria isn’t the first.”

Daba shook her head. “Ta’rena was one of the last Drow to be cloned from your work Holy One.” She answered. “She was not pureborn a Drow. And she is very happy as the second mate to Daniel’s father and Mistress to his mother. Aihola our Queen was born part vampire because of the Coven experiments conducted on her mother and father.” Daba looked at him evenly. “Lu’ria... Lu’ria is the first pureborn Drow to be made a wolf. We have known this could happen; our females are drawn to strength and prowess, as you know. Lycavorians have the traits we look for in mates and husbands but we have purposely avoided this circumstance as much as possible until our...”

“Until you had two or three generations of re-populating your species of elf within your own ranks?” Walter asked.

Daba looked embarrassed as she nodded slowly. “Yes.” She said. “I know that it is not right but...”

“Daba... do you think Martin didn’t know that.” Walter said. “He understood it. And he in part believed in what you were doing. He has great personal respect and reverence for the Drow Daba, he always has. Much of that stems from Lynwe and Aihola and what they started with him in Eden City. Andro does as well... but with him it is more spiritual than anything. The Drow are closest to Lycavorians in terms of tradition, honor, duty and culture and general mentality. But now... with Lu’ria and Andro... now you will need to release the last book of the *Yara Parma* and begin letting the Drow choose for themselves. I think it might surprise you just how many remain true to their culture and history. I believe they will see Lu’ria becoming Andro’s mate as a sign that the Drow are meant to be tied to the Leonidas family. Not as a way for them to break free of what you believe.”

“I know.” She stated softly. “Aihola has tried through the years to slowly get all of the Elders to see this. She has succeeded to a degree, but now I think they will see Lu’ria and Andro and they will know it is the right way.”

“Were you able to get a hold of your oldest daughter?” Walter asked.

Daba shook her head slowly and looked at him. “There is still a Level Six blackout on Earth and the ship’s communications officer told me since this ship does not officially exist, I can not call her ship until we are back in Union space.”

Walter nodded. “Yes... the *HARBINGER* came from Dreamland. There would be no record of her status.”

“Dreamland?” Daba asked looking at him. “What is this place?”

Walter chuckled softly. “Welcome to the world of the Leonidas family Daba. I would imagine you would become privy to information that is by no means common knowledge. You might be surprised at what goes on behind the scenes in this family and...”

“Sadi what is wrong?” Ne'Veha's voice barked out drawing their attention into the room. They saw Sadi come to her feet and stagger backwards from the bed, holding her temples with the palms of her hands.

Sadi shook her head back and forth as Ne'Veha gripped her arms and Lu'ria sat up in the bed. “No!” Sadi exclaimed painfully. “No!”

“Sadi... what is wrong?” Ne'Veha almost screamed with worry.

Sadi's usually tanned skin had gone pale now, and her jungle greens eyes were wide in horror and disbelief. “An... Andro my love! Oh no!” Sadi gasped. “Elynth!” She clenched her teeth and squeezed her head tighter as Walter and Daba came into the room quickly.

Walter moved right up to her and took her arms, pulling her close to him. “Sadi! Sadi what is it?” He demanded.

It touched Carisia first, then Ne'Veha and finally Lu'ria. All within seconds of each other and then they were all gripping their heads as if sharp blades were being plunged into their brains and twisted around.

“*Phraktos nau!*” Carisia hissed as she leaned against the bed and held her hands to her head.

Sadi's eyes grew wide as just as suddenly as it had struck, the pain was gone. They heard it then, the woeful trumpet of horrible agony from Elynth as the echo of her cry rolled along the three decks closest to the Hanger Bay where she was, including the deck they were on which held the medical bay. Sadi pushed back from Walter quickly.

“Something... something has happened!” She gasped.

“Something terrible!” Ne'Veha gasped as she shook her head still, trying to shake the intense feelings from her mind.

The shrill alarm cut through all of them like a knife and their heads came up as the voice came over the internal COM.

“*HARBINGER* is now at Condition One! *HARBINGER* is now at Condition One! All on duty personnel report to your combat stations! All on duty personnel report to your combat stations! This is not a drill! I say again this is not a drill! We have received a Alpha Storm alarm from Earth! We have an Alpha Storm alarm from Earth! Stand by for sustained combat operations!”

Sadi looked at Walter as she felt his hands squeeze her arms almost painfully and the air expelled from his lungs in a shocked manner. “Walter what is it?” She demanded. “What does that mean? I have never heard that term before! What does it mean?”

Walter's face was a mask of disbelief as his dark eyes focused on her. “Martin... it... he...”

“Damn it Walter! What does it mean?” Sadi screamed.

Walter met her fear filled eyes. “It means the King has... it means the King has been killed.” He spoke with disbelief.

SPARTA PRIME MINISTER DEIA'S OFFICE

“...find me a fucking *Durcunusaan* officer!” Deia screamed at the image of her aide on her monitor, her eyes filled with tears at what they had just witnessed. She held a trembling For'mya in her arms, the woman sobbing almost uncontrollably from the assault of Aurith's cry within Mindvoice and seeing the man she loved more than her own life blown apart before her eyes.

Deia had experienced many things in her long life. Joy. Sorrow. Anger. Her nearly fifteen thousand years of life had shown her many things that most would never experience in four lifetimes. She had seen and

witnessed the unquenchable love Resumar had for her sister. His actions in reclaiming Eliani from Chetak, no matter what the cost or risk to him, this had caused Deia to love and trust the man utterly. She had been beside her sister Eliani and Resumar when they had succumb to the High Coven destruction of their world and their subsequent rule and slavery of all Lycavorians. She had seen the barely controlled rage on Resumar's face when he agreed to this in order to save what remained of their people. She had stood with them the entire time during their slavery by the Coven, working with them behind the scenes, many not even realizing she was Eliani's sister. She had been one of those working with Eliani and Resumar as they planned the exodus of the ten thousand fetuses to Earth, not realizing that in their actions they were saving the last of the royal bloodline.

When Resumar and Eliani fell beside Canth and their beloved elven concubine that day, Deia had vowed to never let their legacy die. She actively entered the political arena the day Martin's father died, swearing to insure he did not die in vain. It was her will and skill that had finally brought all the different factions together in one voice, completing what Resumar and her sister had begun. It was Deia who orchestrated Apo Prime becoming the seat of the new Lycavorian Union. All this she did as a simple senator of the Union, the loudest and most influential voice among the many thousands who had joined them. When she was elected as Prime Minister, Deia threw herself headlong into the job. Part of it she knew was because she had made that vow so long ago, and part of it was because she truly believed. They had Gorgo back among them and the second son of Leonidas hidden and safe. They simply needed to buy time and fight the Coven until they could be reasonably sure Martin would be safe growing somewhere.

The day she found out that Martin's ship had been destroyed almost ended her desire to continue. The baby who would be their King was lost to them. The last link to her sister and the man Eliani so loved. Deia never knew what it was that possessed her to continue on with what they had started. She didn't know why the fire did not leave her. Something drove her to stay on the path and continue what they had started no matter the cost. Some sense of awe and respect and will to not see their goal die. She was never able to fully put her finger on the invisible force that drove her forward.

Until the day that signal first came to them twenty-seven years earlier.

A signal on a channel reserved for Lycavorian Oracles. A communications channel that had not been used in over two thousand years until it activated that fateful day and announced that Martin Leonidas lived. In that signal Deia discovered why she had never given up hope. Why she had never stopped moving forward and keeping the dream alive. A part of her, so very tiny and miniscule in relation to everything else, that part of her knew Martin had lived and therefore would not let her fail. Through everything that had happened since his return, Deia had never felt such joy and happiness. They thought so much alike, and in Martin Leonidas Deia saw Resumar. The passion, the power and the desire for peace and freedom for all his people. These last years had seen many things happen that tried her patience with him, he was stubborn as a mule, willful and did not seem to take things as seriously as he should even though he was now king to trillions of lifeforms. Only when she stepped back at different times did she see the manner and methodic workings of his mind and how he did things. He loved his Queens just as brightly and unashamedly as Resumar had ever loved Eliani. As his father had loved his mother Gorgo. There was nothing he would not do for any of them. Many considered him politically inept, though Deia knew him to be a consummate diplomat when he wanted to be. Through it all, never once did she doubt that he would lead their people and the Union into a bright future.

Never once did she imagine she would see that future explode in living color.

Isheeni's wail of anguish within Mindvoice was only the prelude to the nightmare when Torma died. As For'mya staggered from the force of both Isheeni and Aurith screaming out their agony, even Deia could hear and feel the pain. She had pulled For'mya to her then, yelling at the open communications monitor to her aides to find Martin. To warn him. Anything. She had never felt so helpless in her life. The large wall monitor in her office had been tuned to this young elven reporter as she ran through the streets of Old Sparta. It was an area she knew well, for like every Lycavorian within the Union, Deia adored coming to Sparta. It was like being able to live in the past and future together with the history that encompassed this city that Martin's father had built. She had no idea she would be there holding For'mya and together they would witness the gruesome death of a man they both loved in different ways. For'mya had screamed out her horror and combined with the assault of Isheeni and Aurith's cry within Mindvoice she was very nearly overwhelmed with grief.

Deia knew that For'mya's latent abilities within Mindvoice allowed her to sense things that were odd. It gave her an uncanny ability to know things were not as they should be, almost like a powerful sixth sense. More

powerful than anything Deia had ever seen before. Several times over the last twenty years this ability had saved her life and the lives of others by keeping them from acting on something that For'mya felt was out of sync as she described it. This ability also made her more susceptible to overwhelming emotions around her. While she was not physically weak by any standard, she did not have the harsh and sometimes brutal upbringing that Martin's other Queens had experienced to some extent. She was not as hardened to outside events as they were, and while she knew Martin adored this about For'mya, Deia also knew For'mya considered it her single most damning weakness.

"I can raise no one Prime Minister!" The aide shouted back from on the monitor. "The moment the Alpha Storm directive went out, all Union communications and security devices went into automatic. I'm having difficulty getting through to the *Durcunusaan* main base! Your own detachment is trying as well and they are unable to get through!"

"Who is leading this?" Deia screamed out. "Find Armetus! Riall! Anyone! The Kavalians didn't get here on their own!"

"I'm on it Prime Minister!" The aide barked.

Deia turned back to look at For'mya. "For'mya... child!"

For'mya's golden blond hair whipped back and forth slowly. "He... he can't be dead!" She sobbed. "Deia! Deia I can't feel him anymore! I can't..."

"Hold on For'mya child..." Deia stammered as she pushed herself to her feet. "I will get you something to ease the screaming in your mind."

Deia knew well the effect on the mate of a male Alpha wolf when they died, especially a powerful Alpha, of which Martin Leonidas was the most powerful. The connection they had to their wives and mates within Mindvoice and emotionally ran very deep, no matter if they were turned or pureblood. When that connection was severed so completely and utterly, and done so quickly such as it had been when Martin died, it could leave the female dazed and confused for days.

As Deia made her way quickly to her desk the door to her office began to open. She stopped and began to bark out an order assuming it was the *Durcunusaan* entering. Her eyes grew wide when she saw Laustinos enter the office with five very large and well-armed Kavalians behind him. Deia's eyes darted out into the anteroom of her office and she saw the bodies of her aide and two *Durcunusaan* soldiers lying on the floor of the outer office with large parts of their heads missing.

"Laustinos... what is the meaning of..." Deia's eyes went wide when she saw him lift his hand and the K12 Magnum appeared.

"Shut up you fucking bitch!" Laustinos screamed as he stepped up to and smashed the K12 across her face sending her sprawling. "I'm helping to usher in a new rule for the Union!" Laustinos shouted at Deia as she held her face and glared at him from the floor, blood leaking between her fingers.

"You *nubous* traitor!" Deia screamed as she scrambled up next to For'mya and taking her in her arms. "It was you! You have done this!"

For'mya glared at Laustinos with fully changed wolf eyes and fangs exposed. "YOU!" She bellowed. "You have helped them to kill my Martin!"

Laustinos's laugh sounded almost insane in its makeup. "Of course I have!" He barked. "This is the only way that Marshall Pusintin can sit on the throne once more. His brother... that stupid brute of a man... he was leading us to ruin! He didn't love you For'mya! You are a fool to think he could love more than Aricia!"

"LIAR!" For'mya snarled as the Kavalian troops slowly spread out in the room behind Laustinos.

"You! Anja! That vampire whore... even my Dysea! He doesn't love any of you! Why can't you see...?" Laustinos continued.

"You... you did all this for Dysea?" For'mya gasped now. "You killed our... you killed Martin to win Dysea? Are you mad? You cannot compare to him! Never in all of eternity! Dysea will kill you horribly for what you have done!"

"See now that is where you are wrong." Laustinos declared. "She is wolf! Her body will sing for a mate now that Leonidas is dead! I intend to be that mate!"

"NEVER!" For'mya growled.

"We shall see! When Pusintin is once more King of the Union... you will see." Laustinos stated.

"We have to move quickly." The Kavalian closest to him snapped.

“Pusintin?” Deia gasped as she came to her feet wiping the blood from her cheek which was laid open nearly to the bone. “He can never sit on the throne of the Union or Sparta! You have betrayed your people for nothing! You have killed Martin! You helped them to kill my... you helped them to kill my nephew!” Deia screeched in unrelenting anger.

Laustinos pulled the trigger twice in quick succession just as Deia was leaping off the floor in mid-change. Those two kinetic rounds punched into Deia’s chest center mass and physically tossed her body backwards with incredible force. Blood blossomed from between her shoulder blades as at least one round punched clean through her midsection. As she slammed into the wall and slumped into a sitting position Laustinos stepped up to her and leveled the K12 at her head. “I hate you!” He screamed. “You overbearing arrogant *upae!*”

Laustinos heard the growl too late and turned just as the golden blond fur of the large female wolf appeared out of the corner of his eye. Those jaws snapped shut on his arm and long flesh tearing teeth sank to the bone.

For'mya Leonidas may have been the most docile of Martin’s queens, but she was by no means helpless. She was a seasoned fighter pilot and the premier pilot within the Union of the *STRIKER* Class ships. She had seen battle before, some of it up close and personal. As her fangs sank deeply into the flesh of his arm, she brought up her right front paw to rake it savagely down Laustinos’s face. The hammer like blow fell upon her skull then causing her to see bright stars. She was vaguely aware of the Kavalian to the side of her drawing his rifle butt back for another blow that she could not stop. The butt of that weapon smashed into her head once more and For'mya lost all control of her limbs as her jaws released Laustinos’s arm and she staggered drunkenly into the side of Deia’s desk. Two other Kavalians lashed out with savage kicks to her sides drawing wolf yelps of pain and surprise as she was launched across the room to crash into the monitor, shattering the glass partition into hundreds of pieces. She fell to the floor, her wolf eyes blinking rapidly and trying to focus on anything but the pain that lanced through her entire body.

“Don’t kill her you fool!” Laustinos screamed out as he held his bloody arm with his opposite hand. “Your Marshall wants her alive to insure completion of the plan! Secure her as she is, but leave room for her to shift back!”

The Kavalian who had spoken earlier removed something from his combat harness. “The charges are set?” He asked.

Laustinos nodded. “I positioned them myself over the last few weeks.” He replied as he tore a piece of his inner shirt away and wrapped it around his bloody forearm. “They will bring the entire building down once we enter the tunnel!”

“It will kill many of your people.” The Kavalian declared.

Laustinos met his eyes. “They are not my people as long as Pusintin keeps his end of the bargain.” He barked.

“Where is this secret entrance?” The Kavalians asked.

Laustinos motioned with his head. “Behind the first bookcase. The touch panel is under her desk chair. Once in the tunnel we can blow the building while we make our way outside the city.”

The Kavalian nodded. “Then let us go!”

ULU *ARIZONA*

Miranda was pacing the bridge of the *ARIZONA* deep in thought. Ever since they had detected Andro’s *STRIKER* make the jump to Iraruzu she had had a feeling of foreboding that was growing steadily as time passed. Velnar had contacted her just before engaging the Kavalian frigate that was generating the Deutrino field around Iraruzu, and now they could get no sensor readings from the planet. That could only mean they had succeeded in destroying the frigate, but also spreading massive particles of Deutrino through the entire system making sensor readings iffy at best. There had been no communications with the *HARBINGER* since. Miranda did not worry for Velnar and his ship. The *HARBINGER*, like the *SCIMITAR* and other newer *LEONIDAS IIA* Strike Cruisers, was the pinnacle of advanced technology. Those ships were closer to the *ARIZONA* than any

other ship in the fleet when it came to technology and weapons, though they lacked the mighty punch that the *ARIZONA* could unleash in so many different ways.

Miranda was a fighter pilot by nature, and her mind was always plotting scenarios and steps to take even before she took them. It was why she and Steven thought so much alike and why she wanted his as her CAG. Miranda turned and looked at E'dira sitting at her station and running one diagnostic or another. She was fastidious in her duties Miranda knew. Looking at the Drow female that she so desired gave Miranda that little extra push and she took a deep breath.

"E'dira... can you run a gravometric spatial sweep of the system around Iraruzu?" She asked moving towards her.

E'dira looked up at her with amber eyes. "A gravometric scan will not allow us to see past the massive Deutrino disruption."

Miranda nodded her head. "I know... but it will detect the Dragon Armor weave of the *HARBINGER'S* hull. It will tell us if she is still in the system."

E'dira's eyes grew slightly wider and she smiled. "Miranda... that is... that is excellent!" Yes... this woman was most definitely going to be hers E'dira thought. Her hands began to move across her consoles as she adjusted her sensors. "Compensating for Deutrino particle emissions..." E'dira looked up at her shaking her head. "No... the *HARBINGER* no longer appears to be in the system."

"Shit!" Miranda muttered. "And Velnar would run dark with the Crown Prince onboard. At least until he returned here and formed with us."

"We could use a tight beam sub space carrier wave and contact Androcles Leonidas on the Spartan 11 secure frequency." E'dira offered.

Miranda shook her head. "No. I want..."

"Captain Lorian... Alpha Priority transmission from Commander Falarie on Falcon Four One!" The female voice barked from across the bridge.

Miranda spun around quickly. "Alpha Priority?" She exclaimed moving back towards her command chair. "Put it up! Holo Station One! And get Colonel Randall up here pronto!"

"I'm already here!" Steven's voice barked out as he strode onto the bridge with Zaala holding his hand. She immediately broke from his grasp and moved to her specially designed Engineering Station next to E'dira.

Miranda moved back to stand in front of her chair and console as Steven came to stand next to her and looked at the large holodisc that was built into the deck at a forty-five degree angle from her chair. There were two such main holodiscs, one to her station's left and one to the right of E'dira's station. "Alpha Priority from Falcon Four One!" She stated to Steven.

Steven looked at her surprised. "Alpha Priority? We aren't at war with anyone *Mando*." He replied.

"Something tells me that is about to change." Miranda spoke. "This whole Guardian Angel thing has been bugging me since we left Dreamland." She turned and watched as the image flickered for a second and then they were looking at the face of Commander Falarie. "Talk to me Falarie!" Miranda barked.

"Captain Lorian... three minutes ago Chloe detected some unusual readings coming from the Protonic Lightning Nebula in Kranek's system. I adjusted course and moved us closer. Captain... we are looking at over ninety Kavalian warships hiding in the nebula! Everything from three *GREAT SOULS* to *PURSIAN*-Class frigates!"

"Kavalians?" Miranda gasped.

"Yes ma'am! Matthew confirmed their configuration from our data banks!" Falarie replied.

"Ninety ships?" Steven snapped. "Falarie... that's almost a complete Fleet Group by the TOE of the Kavalians!"

"Yes sir! They match our Fleet Groups in size if not ability." Falarie stated.

"Falarie have you been detected?" Miranda barked.

"No ma'am!" Falarie answered. "I have cross decked the other *RAPTORS* in on our readings and positioned them in such a way to cover the entire system, including the nebula. I did not feel this was a simple report filing Captain Lorian. That is why I contacted you on the AP channel."

"The *SCIMITAR* and *NORMYA'S LIGHT* haven't detected them Falarie?" Miranda asked.

"No ma'am." Falarie answered. "*NORMYA'S LIGHT* has remained shrouded the whole time we have been here. The *SCIMITAR* is the only ship we show actually visible above Kranek ma'am. Their wing is still

shrouded as well. Due to the overall sensor coverage they must provide themselves, they will only scan in a two-dimensional spatial patterns unless they need to change, as you know. We are not so limited and Chloe found the Kavalians using three dimensional patterns.”

“Shit.” Steven swore. “Miranda... do we warn Sa'sur on the *SCIMITAR*?”

“If we do that... we risk exposing ourselves.” Miranda stated swiftly. “No one knows we are out here except Ben! We need to contact Andro on the *HARBINGER*! COM officer! Lorian secure to the *HARBINGER*! Do it now!”

“Aye Captain... initiating... Captain Lorian!” The COM officer yelled so intensely all heads on the bridge turned to look at her. She was facing Miranda with large eyes and a look of utter disbelief on her face. “Captain Lorian we are...”

Miranda nodded. “Say it Cel'ina.” She spoke.

“A secure Level Nine emergency transmission was just flashed to all fleet ships and all ground units throughout the entire Union Ma'am. The originating signal was Admiral Joarl on the *PROMETHUS* ma'am!” The elven female stammered. “Captain... it is declaring an Alpha Storm. Spartan One is down! They... they are saying he is... they are saying the King... they are saying the King is dead!”

Steven's eyes grew wide. “The King? Martin?” He gasped. “What? How?”

“The transmission doesn't say Colonel... only that...” She turned quickly back to the three triangular patterned consoles that wrapped around her chair as her instruments began chirping insistently. “There's more! All Union Fleet Units are ordered to full alert! We are to report our readiness and preparation for unrestricted combat actions!”

“Jesus! Against the Kavalians?” Miranda stammered as she moved towards the second disc. “Bring the ship to combat alert!” She barked as the plot table came alive with the Kranek System and all Union ships currently within the system. Only the *SCIMITAR* was currently showing, as she was the only ship not shrouded.

Cel'ina turned and looked at her Captain. “Yes Captain!”

“Fuck me!” Steven growled as he moved to the Air Boss station and slammed his hand down on the panel. “This is CAG! I want all ships prepped to Ready Alert with full loads! I want them standing by in the next thirty minutes Senior Chief! Call out all the ground crews if you have too! This is not a drill. No training this time. Everything is to be war shots!”

“On it CAG!” The voice echoed.

“Captain... *HARBINGER* is responding!” Cel'ina barked her eyes wide.

“On the second disc Cel'ina!” Miranda snapped. “Now!”

The image of Androcles appeared, flickered briefly and then cleared. Not one soul on the bridge of the *ARIZONA* would ever forget the way he looked. His face was drawn tight, as if he was holding in so much sentiment and ready to explode, his azure colored eyes filled with a myriad of emotions that were running the gambit all at once.

“Andro?” Miranda gasped. “My... my god Andro!”

ULU *HARBINGER*

Androcles *was* ready to explode.

He could not begin to even describe the emotions churning within him. Dark emotions. Vengeful emotions. He and Elynth had been together in the landing bay when they felt their father's die, and as Majeir and Anthar leaped to get clear of Elynth's thrashing tail, several crates of equipment weighing nearly four tons lifted from the deck of the landing bay and went smashing into three fighters. The echoes of their cries in and out of Mindvoice were perhaps the most painful things anyone on the *HARBINGER* had ever seen or felt. If not for Anthar and Majeir physically throwing their huge bodies on Elynth's thrashing body, her Heavyhorn tail would have injured or killed several crewmen who blundered around trying to get out of the way. It was only after they had pinned her to the deck that they watched as Andro wrapped his arms around her massive head, encircling only part of her snout and touching his forehead to hers between her eyes.

Anthar then witnessed how deeply his mate's bond with Andro extended as he felt them reach for each other within Mindvoice. They reached not for their mates and friends but for each other and it was only this bond that allowed them to finally bring some manner of control back to their actions. Anthar did not know what they had said to each other, for the MV shield he felt around their conversation were more powerful than any he had ever experienced in his lifetime. They were similar in power to what he had once felt the Empress Aikiro generating while she discussed something with the witch Yuri. As Anthar watched Andro slowly make his way away from the dragon pen in the hanger deck, he felt his mate's scales lean heavily against him. His head turned and he saw her azure eyes filled with such pain and sorrow that it nearly broke his heart.

The *HARBINGER* had received the Alpha Storm alert from Admiral Joarl only seconds before the *ARIZONA*, and crewmembers quickly found themselves getting out of the way of the Crown Prince as he made his way to the bridge. Lycavorian, Elves, Algolian, Hadarian, it mattered not what species they were, all of them could feel the slow burning rage that resided just beneath the surface of the young prince, and no one wanted to be in the same galactic system when that fury was unleashed.

Velnar turned as the doors to his bridge opened and he spied Androcles enter. "Milord!" He exclaimed. "Sire I...?"

"Set a course for Earth!" Andro barked. His voice told everyone who heard it that he would brook no opposition.

"I am already doing..."

"Captain... incoming secure from *ARIZONA*!" Velnar's COM officer shouted.

"Put it up!" Velnar snapped as he came up next to Andro and put his hand on Andro's shoulder. "Sire perhaps you should..."

"Andro..." Miranda Lorian's voice filled the bridge intercom. **"My god Andro!"**

Andro looked at the woman in the transmission. "Miranda... I need... I need you to..." Andro stared at her for a long moment unsure of what to say. What did he need her to do? What could she do? His father and Torma were dead. This was beyond anything he could have ever anticipated, especially so soon after the High Coven attacks against his family. He did not think the Kavalians capable of such bold operations. His father and Torma? While they could not communicate within Mindvoice because of the distance involved, every member of his family could still feel each other over great distances. Each of them had their father's blood running through their veins and while Denali, Resumar, Lisisa and Eliani were the strongest of his siblings in terms of Mindvoice abilities Andro knew only Denali and his mothers would be able to actually feel that their father was gone. At the moment, Androcles Leonidas was lost for what to do. His eyes never left Miranda's face. She was only a few years older than him, and she had lived with their family for over six months. She was a familiar face and one he knew well for they had always gotten along easily. Miranda's next words were what spurred the Leonidas blood within him to come raging back to the forefront.

Andro watched as Miranda's head turned at the commotion on her own bridge. "What?" She gasped. "From where? How many?"

There was a pause before she turned back to look at him. "Andro... fuck!" She swore. "Andro... Ben sent us out here to look after you! I have four RAPTOR A3s in position around Kranek and the lead bird is telling me... shit... we are tracking two Kavalian fleet groups currently closing on Kranek Andro!"

Andro's eyes went a little wider as he turned and saw Walter rushing onto the bridge with Daba, Sadi and the others. He turned back to Miranda then. "It's a systematic attack against my family!" Andro snarled. "They are trying to decapitate the Union leadership! They have already succeeded in killing my father! I will not allow them to kill anymore of my family! We will join with you and..."

"No!" Walter barked as he came up next to him causing Andro to glare at him with angry azure eyes.

"Do not presume to tell me what I will do Walter!" Andro growled menacingly. "These Kavalian bastards have killed my father! They've killed Elynth's father! They've attacked and killed countless Drow! I will show them the error of their ways! I will *nubous* kill every one of them and glass their planets into oblivion! What the High Coven did to them will pale in comparison to what I will do! I will..."

"You will not do these things! You can't!" Walter roared out moving closer and raising eyebrows on the bridge as he challenged Andro's orders. "Andro you must return to Earth!"

"My father is..." Andro screamed. He stopped himself the moment he felt Sadi's hands touch his chest and shoulder. He felt Carisia and Ne'Veha crowd around him, Lu'ria not missing a beat, as she pressed close

even though still dressed in hospital garb. Andro felt the burning and consuming anger welling within him lessen just at their touch.

“They have killed my father! Killed Torma!” He continued now with measured but angry words. “They have assassinated the King of the Lycavorian Union! Now they go after my family on Kranek! They are probably moving against my mother on Hadaria! What would you have me do Walter? Let this go unanswered?”

Walter stepped closer to him. “You are a Spartan damn it!” He snapped. “As your father was! As your grandfather was! I expect you to act as a Spartan and do your duty as Crown Prince! You must return to Earth and insure that the glue that holds this Union together is not torn asunder! That glue is your family! You!”

“My family is under attack!” Andro hissed.

“You are King now boy! You are King!” Walter barked poking him in the chest, unafraid of him. He had sworn a vow to Andro’s grandfather three thousand years ago, and while the spirit of King Leonidas may have released him from that vow, Walter had not released himself and he never would. Velnar and many on the bridge looked shocked at how he was talking to Androcles.

“Your father would expect you to act like it, damn you! I expect you to act like it!” Walter stepped close to him and glared into his eyes. “He would expect you to step into his shoes and insure the Union does not come apart at the seams! Only a Leonidas can reign in the military now! If you do not return to Earth and allow men and women to see you, if you do not assume command the Union military will go off on its own and begin killing Kavalians wherever they find them! They will not act as the cohesive force you and your father led during the Evolli Wars. You must set aside your... you must set aside your anger and grief right now and get control of things before it gets worse!”

“It is worse!” Andro screamed. “They are going after my family on Kranek! Two of my mothers! My brothers and sisters!”

[He is right my brother.] Elynth’s voice burst into Andro’s mind behind shields that no one could breach unless they allowed it.

[Sister... sister they...] Andro began.

[We are bound to each other Androcles! More deeply than even our fathers! They would want us to insure their sacrifice was not in vain!] Elynth spoke and Andro alone could hear the pain her own words caused her. *[We... we must act as Walter says, for no one else can!]*

[I do not want to be King!] Andro shouted.

[Yet... yet now you are King.] Elynth spoke. *[The time for our vengeance will come. It is not now however. As much as I want to burn every Kavalian alive and shred them with my talons, we must think of others right now. We are close enough to Denali my brother. Reach out and touch him, tell him he must hold them together. He must insure he protects his brothers and sisters and mothers.]*

“Andro! The Kavalian Fleet Groups are closing on the SCIMITAR!” Miranda’s voice brought him back into reality. “Andro I can help them! They won’t stand a chance without...”

Andro turned and his azure eyes burned into Miranda Lorian with an intensity she had never witnessed before and it caused her words to die. “Manda...” He spoke softly, using the name he and Resumar and the others had called her when they were together. A name that Miranda had not heard in a very long time and a name that even to this day caused shivers to course through her for it told her she always had a family to turn too. “Save our family Manda.” Andro whispered. “Save our family no matter the cost!”

Miranda Lorian’s reply was immediate and resolute. “Count on it!” She spoke forcefully. “ARIZONA is clear!”

Andro turned to Velnar as her image faded from the holo emitters. “How fast can we return to Earth Velnar?” He barked.

Velnar sputtered for a moment before answering. “Sire... the HARBINGER has... our LSD Drive coils are Hyper Matter Fusion Coils.”

“So... what does this matter?” Walter snapped. “We need to move quickly!”

“Wait... Hyper Matter Fusion Coils were supposed to be in only the theoretical stage!” Ne’Veha spoke now with wide eyes.

Sadi nodded her head. “We had not even reached the prototype stage according to the Fleet Journals.” She added.

Velnar shook his head. “That is what those outside of Dreamland think.” He answered. “They were designed by Zaala Randall and others using technology from City Ship 41. They allow us to execute much longer and more accurate jumps. They are similar to the *ARIZONA*’s secondary drive plants.” Velnar answered.

Andro’s brow furrowed. “Her secondary? Velnar... my only interest is getting back to Earth! Like yesterday if at all possible!”

Velnar nodded surprising himself with the calmness he felt facing the Crown Prince of the Union at such a time. “Yes Milord. The *ARIZONA*, the *HORNET* and every ship of her class will be fitted with Quantum Resonance Field Reactors. Avi helped us to design and build them. They are essentially smaller versions of the City Ship’s own drive cores, taken from City Ship 41 itself. We needed to design the HMFC drives to be able to keep up with them. It was... it was your father’s idea.” He finished softly. “He and Admiral O’Connor wanted to be able to... they wanted to be able to project Union influence faster and further than ever before.”

“I don’t need the techno babble!” Andro spat. “How soon can this Hyper Fusion thing have us back to Earth then?”

Velnar turned to a human woman standing off to the side watching what was transpiring on the bridge like everyone else. The rank on her uniform marked her as senior engineer. “My Chief Engineer Milord. Commander Rachel James.”

The woman stepped forward tentatively. “I need an hour to plot the precise coordinates of the jumps Milord.” She answered quickly. “At full power... the HMFC’s can make it to Earth from our current location in three consecutive jumps, compensating for minor course alterations to avoid natural space born phenomenon.”

“In hours please!” Andro asked rolling his eyes.

“If you are authorizing the use of full power Milord...” She spoke. “We can be to Earth in just under twelve hours. We will need at least three days to recharge the coils after...”

“Do it!” Andro barked. “Anything that gets in our way Velnar, if it does not bear Union signatures I want it obliterated it completely.” Andro spun around and marched off the bridge leaving everyone on the bridge staring at where he had just exited.

“Senior Polemarch Dymas?” Velnar asked softly a moment later watching as Walter turned to look at him.

“Yes Captain?”

“Senior Polemarch... forgive me for saying this but...” He looked at Walter intently. “Why do I get the distinct feeling that the Kavalians do not yet realize they have killed the wrong Leonidas?” Velnar asked softly.

Walter tilted his head slightly as he looked at the man taking no offense at his statement even though Sadi and the others glared at him with barely restrained hostility. “I believe your observation would be very accurate Velnar. Very accurate.” Walter stopped Sadi as she huffed and began to walk out.

“Let me talk to him first Sadi.” He said softly.

“Walter we are his mates!” Sadi complained. “He needs us right now. Especially now! We need him!”

Walter nodded as he moved closer to her and looked at the four of them. “Yes he does.” He spoke softly. “I... this is something I need to do.”

Sadi looked at him. “Why?” She demanded.

Walter shrugged his broad shoulders. “You do not fully know the history of Martin and I Sadi. It is something Andro’s father would expect of me, and it is something that I should have done long ago with Martin’s brother.” Walter replied. “If I had... all of what is happening now might not be happening at all. Please.”

Sadi looked at Ne’Veha first and then Carisia and Lu’ria. She saw acceptance in their eyes, at least for the moment and she turned back to Walter. “Protect him Walter.” Sadi said softly.

Walter smiled almost shyly. “That is a job for the four of you.” He spoke gently. “I can only attempt to guide him and keep him from unleashing hell on the Kavalians the likes of which his uncle has no concept of.”

ULU *ARIZONA*

“...count on it! *ARIZONA* is clear!” Miranda hissed just before the transmission faded.

“Jesus Christ *Mando!*” Steven declared.

Captain Miranda Lorian was many things to many different people. As she looked around the bridge of her ship and saw some those people staring back at her the words went off in her head. Captain. Friend. Future lover as she looked at E'dira. Leader. That was the single most resounding word that echoed in her mind.

She was a Leader. She was the symbol of what humans could become, of what they were working their way back to being. They were accepted as equals throughout the entire Union now, where less than a century ago they were considered helpless and unworthy of anything but scorn. Ben, Steven, Tina, Charles Turner, and now her. They were changing the very face of humanity with their actions, and Earth was fast becoming the center of the Lycavorian Union.

Family.

She had lived with them for only seven total months and yet they had accepted her as easily as if she was one of them. In some ways she knew Martin still considered himself human, and combined with his fierce love of Sparta, that is why he spent so much time on Earth. He had fought beside many humans as they reclaimed their world from the Coven, and even as he became King to trillions, he dragged the humans on Earth kicking and screaming into the future with him. He was the reason she was standing here this day when all was said and done.

Save our family Manda! Save our family no matter the cost!

Miranda looked at the faces on her bridge, many of them also fast becoming her family. And like these men and women around her, she would do everything in her power to keep them safe.

“Janon!” She barked out knowing her XO would have entered the bridge long ago.

“Captain!” He snapped coming forward.

“Take a fighter and assume command of the *HORNET* Janon!” Miranda ordered looking at him.

“Miranda... Captain Telson will...”

“Captain Telson has no combat experience!” Miranda told him as calmly as she was able. “We are about to jump into one serious shit storm and I want my best on the job! Do it Janon! I need you on the bridge of the *HORNET* so we can coordinate smoothly!”

Janon nodded without questioning. “On my way!”

“Helm... spool up the QRFs!” Miranda snapped out as she moved across the bridge of her ship. She could almost feel the power contained within the hull and deck plates of this ship, just as the sailors and officers of her namesake must have felt long ago. “Inform the entire Attack Wing to link their navigation with us and prepare to max out their HMFC drives to full power!”

“Captain... we haven’t tested the QRF yet!” The engineering officer turned from his station and replied before Zaala answered.

Miranda looked at Zaala. The elven officer was extremely competent if a little on the sedate side.

“Zaala?” She asked.

Zaala Randall nodded her head without hesitation. “It is ready and it will work!” She spoke. “Chizz and I have been tweaking the QRF with the new specs from Avi ever since we came onboard. I will plot the jump myself!”

“How long?” Miranda asked.

“Fifteen minutes!”

“Do it!” Miranda barked.

Steven took her arm. “Mando... the *SCIMITAR* is going to engage now!” He hissed out. “She’s already outnumbered four to one. And that doesn’t include the Kavalian fighters! The *GREAT SOULS* can carry upwards of a hundred birds and if our sensors are correct there are eight of them moving on the *SCIMITAR* and *NORMYA’S LIGHT*! Let me take some help to her now Mando and then you bring the *ARIZONA* in and wipe the rest of them up!”

“The Micro HMFC’s also haven’t been tested Steven.” Miranda said. “Everything we do now is a huge risk.”

“Life is a fucking risk!” Steven snapped. “I trust my wife! She says they will work... just like the engines on this big beautiful ship! She helped to build them!”

“How many?” Miranda asked.

“We have enough on board for ten squadrons! The ground crews can put them on in three minutes the moment I give the order! I can launch in five!” Steven answered. “I’ll go in *DEVASTATOR* heavy. Seven to three! We’ll target the capital ships and try to take some heat off the *SCIMITAR* and her wing. Knowing Sa’sur like we do... you can bet she has ordered *NORMYA’S LIGHT* to evacuate the planet. The *RAPTORS* already in system can shut it down! No one will ever know we were there!”

Miranda hesitated for only a second and nodded. “Bring as many of them home as you can Steven.” She said softly.

Steven nodded. “I will. All of them if I can swing it!”

Miranda nodded. “Get moving!”

Steven glanced at where his wife stood. Their eyes met and Zaala nodded her head in acknowledgement. She loved her husband, but she knew what he did was dangerous and she accepted that. Steven gave her that lopsided grin and Zaala smiled back as he headed out of the bridge.

Miranda moved to her command chair. “Give me weapons!” She barked out. “Set Point Defense Batteries to zone defense, full saturation fire! All guns ready for salvo fire. As soon as we complete the jump, scramble every fighter we have within two minutes, even if you have to throw them out the fucking hatch!”

“Priority Miranda?” E’dira asked from her station.

“Vector them in on capital ships only!” Miranda ordered. “Any with the ability to turn their Planetary Gauss Cannons on the surface! Have Falcon One Four and the other *RAPTOR’S* coordinate.”

E’dira nodded. “Passing the Intel on!”

“Zaala... plot us between the Kavalian fleet groups closing on the *SCIMITAR*!” Miranda snapped as she moved to her command station and stabbed a small button on the arm of her chair. “How soon?” A small cover slid aside on the arm to reveal an archaic phone like device that Ben had insisted was installed on all the *ARIZONA* Class. It was leftover from an age long dead but when combined with the technology of today it was connected not only to the *ARIZONA’S* internal ship COM, but the rest of the Assault Wing’s internal COMS as well. It was a heavy thing, but she lifted it with ease and brought it to her face, the mouthpiece only millimeters away from her lips as she looked at Zaala.

“I’m adjusting for Protonic particles in the system Captain!” Zaala declared without looking up from her station. “We can jump in... eight minutes!” She declared turning to look at her.

“I thought you said sixteen!” Miranda barked.

“They are my family... just as they are yours.” Zaala said. “I work fast.”

Miranda nodded as she lifted the phone device. “Attention! Attention! This is Captain Lorian. We have just been informed by Lycavorian Union Fleet Command that the KFI has conducted sneak attacks across the breadth of the Union. They have...” Miranda stopped as all heads turned to look at her on the bridge. Many of them knew of her close relationship with the Leonidas family and the familiarity she shared with many men and women they would never meet. “They have... assassinated our King.” Miranda continued with the pain obvious in her voice. This was something she had lived through not once in her life, but twice. And it appeared to be happening all over again.

“All of you know why we are out here, what we were sent here to do. We have detected two Kavalian Fleet Groups moving against Kranek with the intention of killing as many of the Leonidas family as they can. Our orders come from Androcles himself and we are to stop those fleets at all cost. We are outnumbered two to one, but numbers make no difference to a Spartan. I am human! Many of you within this Attack Wing are human. It makes no difference for we are all Spartans!” She paused for a moment searching for the right words and then continued. “I spent over half a year of my life living with Andro and his siblings and their family. They came to regard me as part of their family because I had lost mine. I do not wish to see that happen again and this time I have... we have the ability to stop it! I intend to take this ship and our Attack Wing into harms way, and I intend to do what Androcles has asked me to do. We will kill the Kavalians trying to murder our Royal family, our friends on those ships and our allies! I don’t intend to hold back and I want to insure none of you do either! We will execute a combat jump in eight minutes using our Quantum Drive and may the gods be with us all.”

She replaced the phone into its cradle and moved back to the plotting table and then turned to E’dira. “E’dira... order the 1st and 2nd Attack Squadrons to break from us the moment the jump is complete and execute evasive pattern Bravo Five Two! They will cover *NORMYA’S LIGHT*! Target flanking ships and work their

way in! Channel all power to shields and the Black Sun EW Nodes! Stand by on the Missile Rack Clusters and prepare to launch on my command! Make sure Falarie has shut down the system before we get there and transfer control of the remaining *DEVASTATORS* that we launch to her so she can direct them in on the priority targets! We'll leave Colonel Randall to run amok and do what he's best at! Cause trouble! I don't want those murdering bastards able to fart in the fucking wind without us knowing about it! And spool up the Graviton Wave generator E'dira, it wouldn't be prudent or proper to have any of our guests leave the party early!"

E'dira looked at Miranda with love in her Drow amber eyes. No matter what else was happening right now, E'dira knew Miranda had finally laid the past to rest and was moving into the future. And E'dira knew that future included her.

The mood across the ship had shifted. A majority of the crew was human as Miranda had said, descended from a long ago age of wooden ships and iron men, and it was a quiet rage that took them now. They drove themselves into the preparations as the ship's magazines were opened and the live ordinance was moved into position with both computers and power loaders. In the ship's main hanger bay, it was what military leaders all across history called controlled chaos. Purple armored crews lowered elongated tails onto the ten selected squadrons, quickly locking the portable LSD engines into place as red armored crews loaded anti-ship missiles onto the strike fighters. The different colored armored suits signified which section each male or female worked in, and the partial body armor would protect them from explosions and shrapnel should they come under attack. Pilots could be seen climbing into their cockpits as the Mag-Lift elevators began to lift the first wave of fighters into their launch tubes. They all bore names from long ago that had been reborn along with this ship. The Black Widows. The Jolly Rogers. The Grey Wolves. The Death Jesters. They were names out of Earth's storied flight history and they would be sung once more on the field of battle.

In the space of five minutes after the first fighter was launched, all ten squadrons were taking up formation ahead of the *ARIZONA* with Steven in the lead. He turned his helmeted head to either side seeing the ten squadrons of ships lined up in formation behind him. He saw three *TAUR'OHTAR* Destroyers shifting their position to take the lead in front of the *ARIZONA* as they prepared to make their own jump. The computer between his legs flashed a tone telling him that the micro HMFC was charged and ready for jump.

"*ARIZONA*, this is Scar Lead! All fighters in formation and ready for jump!" Steven barked.

"Confirmed Scar Lead. We'll be eight minutes behind you Steven. Save some for us!" Miranda replied confidently.

Steven laughed. "No promises Captain!" He looked out either side of the cockpit of his *TEMPEST* fighter. "Squadron leads sound off!"

"Black Widow Lead! Let's get some!" That from an elven female.

"Grey Wolf Lead. Time for some hurt!" A human male.

"Death Jester Lead standing by!" The ever calm and cool voice of a Lycavorian.

"Jolly Roger Lead! Let's do this!" Another human voice, this one female.

"Raven's Wings Lead! Let's stop talking about it and kick some ass!" This coming from a normally very reserved elven pilot who was married with nine children. The emotion in his voice was a palpable thing.

Steven waited as the last five echoed within his helmet but he didn't really hear them as he stared ahead into the blackness of space feeling his blood surging and the wolf within him wanting payback. Martin Leonidas hadn't questioned him when Steven went to him that day and asked to be changed so that he could grow old with his elven wife. It may have been that Zaala was Tarifa's sister and Martin would do anything for family, but Steven believed it was because he saw the utter devotion to Zaala that Steven held. If not for Martin Leonidas, Steven Randall would not be here today. He would have aged as any normal human and been on the tail end of a career that Steven valued almost as much as Zaala. Now Steven Randall would be able to live hundreds of years, if not thousands, and with his plan to turn Zaala in the future they would have all the time in the world to explore each other to their heart's content.

First Steven Randall was going to make them pay for killing the man who gave him all this.

"Scar Flight! Grey Wolf Squadron will disperse and cover the moment we come out of the jump! Jam the fuckers' silly! I don't want them to be able to talk with one another even if they are five feet away from each other! Once jamming has commenced... Grey Wolf Lead you are cleared to use your Plasma Matter missiles and take out any sensor signals you detect trying to burn through the jamming!"

Steven heard the Grey Wolf Squadron Commander grunt in reply. “Two seconds after we light one up we’ll kill it Colonel!”

“*Fly free...!*” Steven barked.

“*Die well!!*” One hundred and sixty voices chimed in simultaneously.

“Jump in four seconds!” Steven barked. “Four... three... two... one! Mark! Engage LSD drives!”

The fighters sparkled as their LSD coils flared to life, and then they disappeared in perfect formation as their Jump Drives sent them hurtling across space into the teeth of the Kavalian Fleets.

SCIMITAR

Sa’sur got up from her command chair and downed the last of her mug of tea. “Status?” She spoke.

“*TYPE II* and all *STRIKERS* now on the surface Captain.” The COM chief turned from his station.

“Admiral Thodias of *NORMYA’S LIGHT* sends his welcome and invitation for dinner.”

Sa’sur grinned. “Tell the Admiral I accept as long as he promises not to chase my tail.” She answered. “I don’t think his brother would care for that.”

The Chief nodded with a smile. Everyone knew that Sa’sur’s husband and mate, the Lycavorian that had turned her, was the younger brother to the commander of *NORMYA’S LIGHT*. “I’ll advise him Captain.”

“Have the wing disperse to normal monitoring stations. Everyone to maintain Shroud for now. If anyone is watching let them think we are the only ship here.” Sa’sur ordered. “Keep all sensors radiating passively and...”

“Captain!” The voice came from the sensor Chief and Sa’sur turned to look at her. “I... I have something on sensors sir. I think.”

Sa’sur rolled her eyes. The *SCIMITAR*’s normal Sensor Chief had fallen ill this morning and his replacement was a young Lieutenant fresh out of Fleet Operations where she had been for the last four years. Sa’sur turned her mug in her hand contemplating just telling the young elven woman to log it, but she sighed and knew that would not be the proper thing to do. She crossed the expanse of the bridge and came up behind her.

“We have only just arrived Lieutenant Zeria.” Sa’sur spoke in a calm and even voice. “What exactly could you have picked up that *NORMYA’S LIGHT* did not pass on to us?”

“I’m sorry ma’am.” The Lieutenant said somewhat flustered. She had only been aboard the *SCIMITAR* for a week now. She had been supremely thrilled at being assigned to one of the most sought after Fleet Groups in the Union Fleet, and had bragged to her parents and brothers how she was going to be on board the Crown Prince’s ship. The *SCIMITAR* was widely known as one of the five most powerful ships within the fleet of *LEONIDAS IIs* because of recent upgrades and many even said secret weapons platforms. The *SCIMITAR*, *MJOLNIR’S HAND*, General/Colonel Simpson’s ship *SPARTAN’S SOUL*, Queen Anja’s *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*, *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and Fleet Admiral Riall’s ship *RISING MOON* were all thought to have newer and unique weapons systems. Zeria never thought she would be sitting here on the first watch in only her first week.

Sa’sur placed her hand on the young woman’s shoulder. “Never apologize Lieutenant.” She said. “You are doing your job.” Sa’sur leaned over her chair and looked at the three huge displays Zeria was tasked with monitoring. “What do you have?”

Zeria pointed to one display. “It was here Captain. Along the edge of the Torana Protonic Lightning Nebula. It’s gone now. I was probably just seeing things ma’am. I am...”

“Excited to be on the first watch?” Sa’sur said with a gentle smile.

Zeria turned and looked at her. “Yes ma’am.”

“Don’t worry about it. I did the same thing.” She said turning away and starting for the door as Zeria turned back to her sensor consoles. “XO... I’ll be in my Ready Room. Make sure that...”

“Contact!” Zeria exclaimed loudly as her hands flew over her consoles. “*Sibfla*... it’s gone!”

Sa’sur turned quickly losing her patience now. “Lieutenant Zeria... your enthusiasm is much appreciated but if you can not do the job I will find someone who can!”

“I saw it captain! I swear! It was...” The contact appeared once more on the large screen and this time Sa’sur was standing close enough to her to see it as well before it vanished from her screens.

Sa'sur was beside her in a heartbeat. "What's your name?" She asked looking at the screen.

"Lieutenant Zeria Captain."

"Nothing on the board Captain!" Her XO called out. "Sensor glitch maybe?"

"That was no glitch Captain." Zeria spoke looking at Sa'sur. "I know it! There's a ship there and it's hiding in the Torana Lightning Nebula!"

Sa'sur looked at her evenly. She and Andro had personally selected the senior crew for the *SCIMITAR* for the last five years. They were scary in the similarities they wanted in the men and women who served on their ship. Insightfulness and gut instinct was chief on that list of what they looked for in officers.

"Transfer all primary and secondary sensor functions to the Lieutenant's station XO!" Sa'sur barked. She looked at Zeria. "Find me that ship Lieutenant."

"All secondary systems transferred to primary control!" The XO sounded.

Zeria turned back to her consoles and took a deep breath. "I'm adjusting for the distortion in the Nebula. I'm switching to three-dimensional spatial patterns to try and localize the signal! Particle emissions are very high but I can..." Zeria shook her head quickly. "I need more power Captain."

"Tactical!" Sa'sur barked. "Increase portside ventral and dorsal arrays power output fifteen percent?" She looked at Zeria.

Zeria nodded. "Yes."

"Portside ventral and dorsal sensor arrays increased by fifteen percent!" The voice answered.

"Got it!" Zeria exclaimed. "There! Bearing three nine seven!" Her eyes grew wide. "*Sibfla* Captain! Multiple contacts within the Nebula! Mark as Group One! At least sixty ships that sensors can detect along the perimeter!"

"Identify!" Sa'sur snapped as she stood back up. "Tactical... full power to active sensors! All arrays! Pulse everything within half a light year! Weapons officer... all batteries to standby! Give me full shields! Helm... nineteen-degree turn to port! Unmask the entire dorsal array!" Sa'sur barked out the orders as she returned to her elevated command chair. "Zeria... give me something!"

"Working on it Captain!"

"Get me *NORMYA'S LIGHT*! Now!" Sa'sur growled. "No one knew we were coming here! No one!"

"Admiral Thodias responding Captain!"

The face of the older Lycavorian Admiral appeared in the main holomager and he was smiling. "Sa'sur... I will have to tell my brother you should have married me. You can't seem to stay away from..." His words died when he saw her face. "Sa'sur what is wrong?"

"Thodias! I have multiple unknown contacts lurking just inside the Torana Lightning Nebula." Sa'sur told him.

"What? How did you manage to scan...?" He shook his head. "Never mind! Are you sure Sa'sur?"

"No question. I'm bringing the *SCIMITAR* to full alert and moving to investigate! No one knew we were coming here Thodias! No one knew Queen Dysea and Princess Normya were here! No one knew we were coming here?" She replied. "My wing is still shrouded. We..."

"Captain!" Zeria shouted. "Kavalians! Captain they are Kavalian!"

"Kavalian!" Sa'sur declared. "What..."

"I'm detecting over a hundred contacts!" Zeria turned to looked at her. "Captain... they have detected our active sensors! They're moving out of the Nebula coming right for us!" The loud noise caused her to turn back to her station and every head on the bridge heard what she muttered next. "*Son vada carians*! Full power to all arrays! Give me full power to all arrays!"

Sa'sur didn't hesitate. "Do it! Now!"

"*Sibfla! Sibfla!*" Zeria could be heard swearing. "Kavalian Fleet Group entering Kranek's system! I'm picking up an additional one hundred and twenty-eight contacts! Mark as Group Two! Bearing two seven three mark four!"

"Thodias! It's a trap!" Sa'sur shouted.

"We are not at war with the KFI!" Thodias exclaimed.

"One hundred and thirty-seven Kavalian ships confirmed exiting the Torana Lightning Nebula! We are caught between them!" Zeria barked out. "They are powering weapons and shields! I can pick up the emitters for their main Gauss cannons powering! They are launching fighters Captain!"

“How many?” Sa'sur shouted.

“Multiples of ten!” Zeria barked. “At least ninety from the *GREAT SOULS* alone!”

“Sa'sur... you can not fight nearly seven hundred fighters and two Fleet Groups with just your Strike Wing!” Thodias barked.

The COM Officer came to his feet now. “*NUBOU LAE!*” He shouted. “Captain Sa'sur! Incoming Level Nine transmission from Admiral Joar! Captain... they are issuing an Alpha Storm! They are issuing an Alpha Storm! Kavalian forces have... *son vada carians!* Kavalian forces have... they have killed King Leonidas! King Leonidas is dead!”

Sa'sur stared at the man in open-mouthed shock as his words rammed home. Zeria's words quickly brought her back to painful reality without being able to fully comprehend what he had just told them.

“Captain... Group Two just entering the system will be in weapons range Of *NORMYA'S LIGHT* in twenty-three minutes!” Zeria barked. “Seven minutes before Group One exiting the Nebula can bear on us!”

Sa'sur looked at the holomager as her training took over. “Thodias! We're at war now! They mean to attack us! They must be after the Royal family!” Sa'sur shouted out. “I'm moving to intercept Group One coming out of the Nebula! I will keep them off you as long as I can! Get the Royal family off Kranek! Get them off now Thodias! You have twenty-two minutes before the second Kavalian Fleet Group comes into range!” Sa'sur screamed as she came to her feet and cut off his response. “Get me Wing wide!”

Her XO had already anticipated this. “Go!” He barked.

“Strike Wing to form on the *SCIMITAR!* Execute Attack Pattern Gamma Four Nine! We are weapons free! Protect *NORMYA'S LIGHT* as long as you are able! Target capital ships as priority!” Sa'sur barked.

“Captain!” Zeria called out. “I'm picking up *PROTOSS*-Class Troop ships breaking from Group One! They are diverting for the surface at full sublight speed! Their heading is four nine six point three! Bearing one six four! They're going in lateral to us and breaking for the upper atmosphere!”

“Warn Thodias!” She spat quickly. “Send a Fleet wide distress! All channels, secure and in the clear! *SCIMITAR* and *NORMYA'S LIGHT* under attack! Multiply Kavalian Fleet Groups! *NORMYA'S LIGHT* attempting to evacuate the Royal family! *SCIMITAR* and Strike Wing moving to engage! Send it!”

The COM officer's hands were furiously moving over the console. “Message away! All channels! Secure and open!”

“*Nubou!*” Sa'sur swore. “Deploy missile pods one and two! Power up the Zero Matter Fusion Mark 22s!”

Her XO turned towards her. “Those haven't finished trials yet Sa'sur!” He shouted from across the bridge.

Sa'sur turned to meet his gaze. “Let's finish them now and see if the damn things work then! We need every advantage we can get! They are the longest ranged weapon we have! Zeria how many *GREAT SOULS* are we facing girl?”

“Eight.” Zeria answered instantly.

“Weapons! Target them first! Let's see how many we can take out of the equation!” Sa'sur barked. “Helm! Full power to sublights! Let's take it to them!”

HIGH COVEN *BLOOD REVERENCE*-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PHY'IAD'S COMMAND SHIP

“Union ships are moving to engage the Kavalian fleet.” The tactical officer spoke turning his head to look at Phy'iad in the chair.

“As expected.” Phy'iad answered. “Have we been detected?”

“It does not appear so.”

“Where is that fool Gerald's ship?” Phy'iad asked.

“Maintaining position inside the Shroud grid as ordered. He has come aboard and is waiting with our strike team.”

Phy'iad nodded. “As soon as our Strike Team lands destroy that hunk of garbage! And make sure Gerald does not return! His payment in full for failing the Kavalians. Better yet... disarm him and turn him loose on the

planet. I have heard that Cha'talla has a special death planned for him for some past insult. If Cha'talla lives through this and he finds Gerald... he can have his vengeance.”

“Yes sir.”

“Get me Kr'nak.” Phy'iad said turning to look at the holodisc as it came alive with the face of the grizzled Immortal who had been with him for decades.

“We are ready Phy'iad.” The man spoke.

“Nothing fancy Kr'nak! Enter the settlement and capture the elf Queen. With Kavalian troops landing they will not be able to evacuate her. They will undoubtedly attempt to secure her in the center of the compound so maintain your façade until you have her. And do not let her dragon kill you or your men.” Phy'iad said.

“And if we encounter Kavalian troops who think we are the enemy?” Kr'nak asked as he adjusted his SA80.

Phy'iad shrugged. “Pusintin did not seem concerned so neither will I. Kill them and continue on. They must think you are members of their pitiful settlement and you are fighting the Kavalian dogs for this to work.”

“And Cha'talla?” Kr'nak asked.

“By all means... if you see him or his pureblood vampire whore... kill them.” Phy'iad answered. “Less work for us later.”

“I will succeed.” Kr'nak stated.

Phy'iad nodded. “Contact me when you have her and I will send in the Runner to the extraction point.”

“Understood.”

“Good luck my friend.” Phy'iad spoke. “Succeed in this and I will give you that half elf bitch that Cha'talla's son has claimed as his own. It will be pleasant to hear her howl while you fuck her ass.”

KRANEK

At the moment Cha'talla and Esther were standing and wondering why exactly Dysea, Denali and Isabella had staggered and gripped each other tightly as they dropped to their knees from some imaginary pain. As they looked around Cha'talla saw Denali gripping Lisisa securely, his eyes blinking rapidly in what was obviously shock. Lisisa Leonidas was holding Deni's arms firmly trying to understand what it was that was happening. The other Leonidas children were staring at their mothers and brother with looks of confusion and worry. It had struck them all at the same moment and Cha'talla thought perhaps it was some sort of mind assault by Coven Remnants.

“Esther?” He gasped as his head turned and he saw T'lolt running madly towards them.

Esther shook her head quickly, a look of helplessness on her face. “I don't know.” She stammered. “A mind assault of some kind?” She was thinking the same thing he had.

“Martin!” Dysea cried out as she and Isabella tried to hug each other tighter. “*Nauta Melme! No!*”

“Mother!” Normya exclaimed as she dropped next to her on the ground. Zarah fell to her knees next to Isabella and grabbed her mother's shoulders.

Cha'talla turned as the sounds of trumpeting dragons erupting from the distance where they had built the pens. “What is happening?” He snarled as worry began to fill him and T'lolt skidded to a halt next to him.

Lisisa grabbed Deni's face in her hands and looked into his dark eyes as Carina and Arrarn moved to his sides. “Deni?” She gasped. “Deni what is wrong? What is happening?”

“Fath... father!” Deni hissed shaking his head. “Torma!”

“What about father?” Arrarn barked. “Deni... what about father?”

Deni looked up and met his brother's eyes. “He's... he's...”

Lisisa felt a stabbing pain in her head now, like hundreds of blades were puncturing her head and then Jeth's trumpet resounded even louder across the landscape. Her green eyes went wide as she felt what her Bonded Brother now felt and realization came to her as tears flooded forth.

“No!” She wailed. “No! No!”

“Denali... Lisisa... what is wrong?” Eliani shouted now as she squatted in front of Dysea her voice filled with worry. “Mother what is wrong?”

Cha'talla looked at T'lolt as he slowed and stopped next to him. “T'lolt what is...?”

“Cha'talla we have Kavalian troop ships descending on Kranek right now!” T'lolt barked with some worry. “Two of their fleet groups just appeared! One out of the nearby lightning nebula, the other just jumped into the system. Dysea’s ships are moving to intercept! Admiral Thodius is sending transports to remove Dysea and her family.”

“Kavalian?” Cha'talla snapped. “Why would they...?”

“The Kavalians just assassinated Martin Leonidas and his dragon Cha'talla.” T'lolt told him somberly drawing the eyes and horrified expressions of the Leonidas children and their mates. “On Earth! In Sparta! It’s beginning to break all over their Netnews channels! Some reporter caught it... she caught it all! Fash’ka is watching the feed as we speak! The Kavalians are moving against the Leonidas family and they are here now for them! Somehow they knew they would be here! Somehow they knew his children would be here! Planetary sensors have detected at least a hundred troop ships heading down to the surface. The *PROTOSS*-Class can carry six hundred fully loaded troops Cha'talla... that’s almost a hundred thousand we will be facing!”

Just over seven thousand years of life had instilled in Cha'talla of the Immortals many things. One of them was the innate ability to react quickly to events. “Dysea and the others are under our protection brother! I will not surrender them to these Kavalian dogs and nor now will my son or Blessed wife. We are so deeply intertwined now, what affects one affects us all!”

T'lolt nodded with a grin. “Good. I was hoping you’d say that.”

“Activate the defenses given to us by Androcles! Do it quickly! Bring the settlement to alert. We have planned to defend our homes for twenty years, and now we will have to do just that. I doubt very much the Kavalians know what we have done in the past months.”

“I’ve sent our Runners to the far side of the planet at the abandoned mine.” T'lolt told him. “They will use it to arm and refuel!”

“Anyone who can fight to arms! The children to the underground caves! Inform the other settlements to abandon their homes and head for the mountains. The Kavalian animals will not stop or hesitate to kill them and this is not their fight! Quickly!” Cha'talla turned to look at Dysea as T'lolt turned and headed back towards the settlement in a sprint.

Cha'talla was not an emotional man in many respects, but what he had learned through the years had come from the almost obsessive way that he and Esther loved each other, and her presence improved him on a daily basis. He looked at his wide-eyed Blessed Wife before dropping to his knees in front of Dysea and Isabella and gripping their arms. Tear filled eyes looked up to gaze at his Immortal features.

“I... I grieve with you Dysea.” He spoke softly. “But... it appears as if they are after you and your children as well. We...”

In a display of will power that none of them had witnessed before from Denali Leonidas, he rose to his feet with a guttural sound and shook his head hard several times. Deni could feel his older brother’s presence within his mind and the power which he felt from him was almost staggering just like their... father.

[Protect them Denali! You and Aradace must lead them brother! Hold them together! I must go to Earth and discover what is happening or everything will be lost! This is not random Deni; they are attacking us from all sides! I will contact you as soon as I am able!]

[Andro? Brother they...]

[Our blood is purest of our siblings Deni! You and Aradace must do this! I’m trying to contact mother on Hadaria. Help is coming Denali. Manda is on her way! You must hold and survive. No retreat brother!]

[No surrender!] Denali hissed. *[Kill them Andro. Kill them wherever you find them for what they have done!]* Deni snarled.

[I intend too.]

Deni shook his head once more as Andro’s voice drifted into whispers. Lisisa’s tear streaked face met his eyes as he stood to his full height and she looked up into his face. “Deni... Deni my love what...”

“We are Spartans!” Denali barked out turning his head to look at his siblings. “Andro... Andro is returning to Earth! It is where he belongs! This is happening everywhere and he needs to get control of it!”

“Andro... he spoke to you?” Normya gasped.

Deni nodded quickly as he watched his mothers get to their feet and look at him. “The Kavalians are striking us everywhere, not just here. Andro is... he is sending us help! I don’t know in what form but we must act like our... like our father would expect us to act. As he taught us all to act!”

“Deni...” Lisisa gasped.

Denali took her beautiful face in his hands, staring into those forest green eyes, and Deni was quite sure he could not survive without seeing those gorgeous eyes ever again. He had always thought he would find his *Anome*, just as his older brother had, but looking at Lisisa’s tear stained eyes Denali knew he could never love a woman as he loved her. The day he and Lisisa surrender to their love for each other was the day his life changed and took on new meaning. Perhaps that was what it meant being *anomes*, and Denali was quite sure Andro would tell him exactly that.

“They are coming after us as well Lisi! Just as Cha’talla has said.” He stated evenly. “We must prepare to defend ourselves! We can... we can mourn our father if we survive! Andro will make them pay, you know this!” He turned and looked at them. All of them saw a fire in his wolf eyes now, a fire that they had never seen before this day.

“Deni... Denali is right.” Dysea stammered even as she took deep breaths to get her emotions under some semblance of control. Dysea Leonidas was an elf but like Aricia and Anja she had been with Martin since the very beginning. She had embraced the Spartan lifestyle without missing a beat and made it all her own. She had been a strong woman before she had met her *Nauta Melme*, and having him change her to what she was now had only made her that much stronger. Like all of his Queens, they had spent hours and days with Gorgo and Dasha and learned so much of life back then as a woman, embracing many of those same ideals and values. It was one of the main reasons that so many men and women in Sparta looked at them with respect and awe and love. They had reveled in the history and strength of the Spartan women of old and they emulated them to a large extent.

“We must survive before we can... before we can mourn! We must use all we know to insure that we survive now!” Dysea spoke looking at her children.

It was then that Denali Leonidas took the final step on the long path that would see him become a leader as his father and brother before him.

“Narice!” Deni barked looking at his brother’s vampire wife and mate. “I need you to prepare your Riders! We will need them this day. Split them into groups, Lisisa will command the second group! Arrarn... we have twenty-one *STRIKERS* on the surface! Take command of them and their Coven pilots! Cha’talla’s forces will need the support!”

“Done!” Arrarn answered.

“Let’s do this family!” Denali spoke. “Then we will see about avenging our father.”

VANEDI

12,678 LY FROM EARTH

SPACEWARD OF THE PERSEUS ARM

UNEXPLORED SPACE

PROTECTORATE *CRUSADER*-CLASS CRUISER

TALON OF JUSTICE

The ship was eight hundred meters long and the most advanced warship of their medium sized fleet. They were fierce looking in design, with four long rib-like extensions reaching out from under the rear of the superstructure and one extending from the strangely shaped bow of the ship. These extensions, or arms, as well as the other sharp pointed parts of the superstructure gave the ship a menacing appearance. The *TALON OF JUSTICE* was the flagship of the three-dozen races that made up the Protectorate, and she was impressive in her design and ability. The Lycavorian turned as the double doors to the bridge opened smoothly and a smile played across his face as he saw his childhood friend and the brother of his mate strode onto the bridge, Wayonn on his heels. His name was Drey and he was considered by many to be Dutkne’s closest advisor and friend.

Drey held no real rank within the scheme of things, he was simply known as Dutkne’s right hand. He refused to use any rank that the Protectorate government tried to saddle him with and insisted that everyone simply call him Drey. He and Dutkne had grown together since he was four years old and Dutkne five, practically inseparable in everything that they had done. Only a year separated them in age and both of them had studied more hours than they cared to recall under Wayonn and his often times tedious teachings. They had

gotten into trouble as children; they had gotten themselves out of trouble as children. When Drey reached the age where he became interested in finding a mate, Dutkne's younger sister Caia is the one who caught his eye first and foremost. She was one of a set of twin daughters that Dutkne's mother had given birth to some three hundred years after Dutkne was born. The dark haired beauty Caia was one whom Drey had been watching for several years as she grew into womanhood, always sniffing around when he could, knowing that Dutkne approved of him as a mate for his sister. Caia had taken his interest in stride, even returning it often enough for she felt the same way, and when Drey had finally approached her about courting her Caia had been thrilled and very excited. As with all Lycavorians, you could tell within the first few moments if you were going to be compatible with a prospective mate, and Drey and Caia were very compatible they came to find out. They had been mated now for over a hundred years, a hundred and nineteen to be exact, and their time together had only gotten better and more passionate as each year passed. Caia could do things to him that Drey had never thought of, and he happily returned the favor to her in their bed. Caia accompanied him on the *TALON* wherever he went with her brother and she had even begun working in the small medical bay they had to pass the time.

Drey watched Dutkne stride right towards him as the doors to another entrance slid open and two more individuals entered quickly. Drey recognized their longtime companion Vanari Nirilo Re Mydala immediately with his blue skin and black hair, and he rolled his eyes at the younger Lycavorian that trailed along behind him like a puppy.

Nirilo Re Mydala was a Vanari Commando and had been with them for going on a hundred years now. The Vanari were an introverted species that did all they could to remain outside the sphere of influence of the Protectorate or any other race. They were one of the first species that the Lycavorians had met when they settled in this part of space, and that first meeting had not gone well, leading to a short and violent conflict. It had taken Dutkne's father to resolve that by promising the Vanari that the Lycavorian people had no interest in conquering them. The Vanari were and always had been wary of the feral nature of the Lycan people, and their violent history. Nirilo was one of the very few Vanari who had actually lived and worked with the Lycavorian people and he was their contact back to the Vanari leaders since his father and mother were senior members of their ruling Board of Regents. The Vanari could be very warlike if they needed as they proved during that short conflict and in subsequent conflicts with other races that thought they were weak because of their blue skin and intellectual background. Their territory was far larger than the Protectorate, but not as densely populated. Their blue skin also made them the blunt of many jokes from different species that first encountered them, yet those jokes quickly turned to fear if they riled the Vanari in any way.

The Vanari were close-minded and introverted but they were far from weak. Another cause of their reserved nature, and perhaps the most definitive reason they were reticent to outside species, was that their females were prized as slaves in the very lucrative Black Market that permeated this area of space. Vanari females were exquisitely beautiful and striking with their different shades of flawless blue skin and silver hair. While they were superior warriors, just as their men were, once captured and broken they made extremely docile slaves who were particularly talented in the sexual arts. No one really knew why this was, for in many cases the females were even harsher than the males in terms of competition between each other. It was almost a genetic disposition that their most prominent doctors had determined made them this way, like a switch that would be thrown in order for them to act in any way necessary to insure their survival. It was determined because they had long ago been a mono gendered species; they would do anything to survive, and that meant even becoming docile slaves to those who would subjugate them for nefarious purposes.

Vanari females were very open minded and adventurous, something that was also passed on through their family lines from tens of thousands of years ago. Almost all of their females and many of their men actually studied the sexual arts as a means to better understand different species and be able to interact with them. Vanari females also had the uncanny ability to secrete odorless pheromones from their skin upon command that could make the males of the vast majority of species exceptionally open to suggestion by them. Combined with their docile nature when broken and their sexual prowess, this is the reason Vanari females were so prized among slavers. This was also one of the major issues when the Lycavorians first encountered the Vanari people, for this pheromone had rendered a third of the Lycavorian forces susceptible to suggestion to the Vanari females, which in turn angered the Lycan females to the extreme. As far as Drey knew, there were very few species that were immune to the pheromone in a Vanari female's skin, and that included other females as well, though they were not as strongly affected by it.

Dutkne stopped in front of Drey and the two of them grasped forearms tightly. “Glad to see you finally decided to rejoin the rest of us who actually work for a living.” Drey stated plainly.

Dutkne smiled. “I needed a vacation.” He spoke as many of those on the bridge grinned and shook their heads.

“Twenty odd years is a long vacation.” Drey spoke dryly.

“Not long enough.” Dutkne told him. “You look well my friend. I see Caia is feeding you well. How is my sister?”

“Why don’t you ask her yourself *igord?*” The female voice said causing Dutkne to turn and look at the much shorter dark hair female come walking up behind him.

“Ah... Caia!” Dutkne grinned.

“Don’t ah Caia me brother!” She popped as she stopped in front of him. “Mother has been asking for you to return for years now!”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes... I know. I’ve been contemplating things.”

“And you were so deeply contemplating these things you could not even send us a holo transmission?” Caia spat.

“Well... they were... they were deep contemplations.” Dutkne answered finally wilting under the steely gaze of his younger sister.

“*Rensibfla!*” Caia barked.

Dutkne looked at her oddly. “Your tongue has become much sharper since I last saw you sister.” He stated.

“When mother, Carana and I have to do your job because you are avoiding it... it tends to put you on edge.” Caia told him. “And my mate likes my sharp tongue.”

Dutkne looked at Drey for a moment and saw him shrug broad shoulders in indifference. “Why argue when she is right I always say?” He said.

“Bah... you are just a whipped...” Dutkne rolled his eyes and turned back to face his sister only to find her wrapping her arms around his waist and burying her face into his chest. He smiled then and pulled her tight, inhaling deeply of her familiar scent and sensing her doing the same as he allowed the feelings of family once more wash over him. “He still pleases you I see, since you have kept him around.” He spoke next to her ear as he nuzzled her cheek in a brotherly fashion.

Caia drew back her face and nodded her head with a smile. “Most effectively and as often as I like. We complete each other.” She answered with a bright smile. “Would you care to share why exactly we are here? Wayonn said it was important.”

Dutkne looked at Wayonn. “You had already sent for them when we talked?” He asked.

Wayonn shrugged now. “It seemed like the prudent thing to do.”

Dutkne grunted at him and released his sister turning to Nirilo. They grasped forearms in greeting and Dutkne smiled. “It is good to see you again my friend.”

“Likewise Dutkne.” Nirilo said. “Wayonn made it seem important when he contacted us and I brought your aide from Darom so you do not feel left out.”

Dutkne looked at the fidgeting young male wolf. He was a beta wolf Dutkne could tell immediately, and appeared to be very excitable. “Do I know you?” Dutkne asked.

“I was only assigned to you two years ago Director General.” The man answered. “I am your First Assistant Director General. My name is Eldiet.”

“Director General?” Dutkne asked looking at Drey with questions in his eyes. “What happened to Prime Minister?”

Drey chuckled. “The people voted to change your title ten years ago Dutkne.” He told him. “They apparently didn’t like Prime Minister any longer.”

“They have changed my title six times in less than four centuries!” Dutkne snapped. “Is one title not good enough?”

Caia slapped his powerful and flat abdomen through his shirt. “If you did not go off on these ridiculous trips then you would be there to put a stop to it.” She hissed at him.

“I have brought some items that you need to review Director General.” Eldiet spoke holding up the half dozen data pads. “I have time whenever you are ready.”

“What are those?” Dutkne asked.

“Simple Bills and Legislative Acts that need your approval.” Eldiet answered.

Dutkne shook his head. “Not now Eldiet.” He snapped turning his head to take in all of the bridge crew of his ship. “We will be departing shortly and we may not be back for some time. If anyone would like to contact mates or family members to advise them we will be gone please do so now. We...”

“Grandfather Wayonn?” Caia’s worried voice sounded.

Dutkne heard his sister’s voice and he turned quickly to see Wayonn lean heavily against the tactical console. He stepped towards him but Wayonn lifted his hand and shook his head. “Grandfather?” Dutkne asked.

Wayonn looked at him with wide eyes. “We must hurry Dutkne!” He gasped.

Dutkne gripped his arms tightly now. “Grandfather... what have you felt? Is it Martin? Androcles?” Dutkne had quizzed his grandfather mercilessly over the last hours trying to learn more of Martin Leonidas and his history. To say that Dutkne was duly impressed would have been a sizeable understatement. Wayonn had passed all that he had seen and talked with Martin about to Dutkne over these last hours and his grandson was supremely impressed with Martin and Androcles Leonidas.

“It... it spiked for several seconds Dutkne!” Wayonn said softly. “It is gone now... but I can no longer sense Martin as I did before. And Androcles... all I sense from him is unbridled rage.” He looked up at his grandson. “It has begun Dutkne already. His brother must have moved sooner than I thought. Something has happened and we must hurry if we are to make a difference in what is coming.”

Dutkne nodded without question, the witty humor pushed to the background. After what his grandfather had shown him, the humor would have to wait for the moment. He turned quickly to Drey. “Set course seven three four nine one eight mark six. I have the coordinates and rally points set already.” He stated evenly handing Drey the data pad. “Bring the Quantum Drive online and execute the first jump.”

Drey looked at the data pad with surprise in his eyes, for he thought they were returning to Darom. His dark eyes grew even wider when he saw the coordinates and the course plot that Dutkne had laid out on the data pad. He looked up quickly. “Dutkne... these... these sets of jump coordinates take us coreward of the Perseus Arm!”

“Yes I know.” Dutkne answered.

“Dutkne... we... we have never been coreward of the Perseus Arm.” Drey stated with no small degree of surprise. “This area... it is on the fringe of what is called The Wilds. It is very close to Lycavorian...”

Dutkne nodded his head. “It is close to the Lycavorian Union border yes. In fact it is closer to Kavalian space, but still within what they call The Wilds.”

“Where are we going and why?” Drey asked.

Dutkne looked at Drey and saw everyone’s eyes on him now, including his sister’s and Nirilo.

“Tell them Dutkne my boy.” Wayonn spoke. “They have a right to know why. They have a right to know who it is we are going to meet.”

Dutkne looked back at his grandfather for a long moment and saw him nod. He turned back around and looked at Drey. Drey took a step closer to him. “Dutkne... why do I get the feeling this isn’t going to be one of your normal adventures?”

“City Ship 41 is no longer on Lycavore Drey.” Dutkne told him seeing his eyes go wide along with Caia’s and Nirilo’s.

Nirilo stepped forward now. While many among the Vanari Board of Regents had never taken the time to learn the history of the Lycavorian people, he had delved deeply into their past for many different reasons. Since he had decided long ago to remain and live among them and learn about them it had been the prudent thing to do. When his father had first suggested this course of action to him it was so that the Vanari could gain some sort of a tactical advantage over the Lycavorians. After only a few months among them, Nirilo stayed and learned because he wanted to. He knew about the High Coven, the Black Day, even the Pralors for it was hard to deny when you associated with one on a regular basis. He even had a Lycavorian female that he spent quite a bit of time with, and their relationship was always exciting and adventurous and quite fulfilling. She was a blond haired wolf who adored him no matter that his skin was blue. Their time together, in and out of their bed was always exciting. There were a few members on the Vanari Board of Regents that believed as he did, his mother chief among them, that the Lycavorians could make formidable allies and long time friends. They were a passionate and determined species and exceptionally forward looking in the paths they chose. And they were

very unlike what many of the senior Vanari Regents viewed them as. Nirilo knew well what City Ship 41 was, and also the condition the ship was supposedly in. Now Dutkne was telling them that a ship that was not supposed to be able to fly was no longer where it was always believed to be. A ship that could very well alter the balance of power within the universe itself.

“Come again?” Drey asked stunned.

Dutkne nodded. “City Ship 41 is now on Earth.” He said.

“Earth?” Caia exclaimed taking his arm and turning her towards him. “Dutkne... how is that even possible? We all know that City Ship 41 was buried on Lycavore and the High Coven has been using the planet as a base. A prison in some respects.”

Dutkne nodded. “That is what I thought as well.” He stated looking at Wayonn. “That is no longer the case and hasn’t been for some time.”

“Dutkne... how did it get to Earth?” Nirilo asked. “Are you not the one who said that only a descendant of Sumar or your grandfather Canth would have the MV ability to actually release the security fields and allow the ship to power up?”

Dutkne nodded. “That’s what I told you yes.” He said turning once more to look at Wayonn. “However I was not aware of certain intelligence reports that my grandfather here had altered before he gave them to me.”

“What intelligence reports?” Drey asked quickly. “I have been bringing the reports here since you arrived. I am aware of no altered Intelligence reports. Everything has gone through me!”

“And you would not have been aware of them Drey.” Wayonn spoke. “For I was the one who altered them before you received them because they came from several assets that I alone control.”

“Assets?” Nirilo asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. “I have several contacts within The Wilds and even one within Lycavorian Space. It is I that has hidden the fact that the High Coven abandoned Lycavore after Martin freed his mother and left their garrison there in tatters. It is I who has been shuttling funds to an account in The Wilds for the last two thousand years. That account was established for use by any descendant of Resumar that may have come along. One did come... and his identity was a surprise to many, including me.”

“I will give all of you a full briefing when we are underway.” Dutkne spoke to them. “Right now... right now know that the grandson of Resumar rules the Lycavorian Union and he has for the last twenty-five years.”

“The traitor!” Drey hissed.

Dutkne smiled and shook his head. “No Drey! The one we thought lost when Leonidas died. His unborn son.”

Caia stepped away from her brother. “Wait!” She declared. “Our people know the history after The Black Day just as well as you Dutkne. We know all about King Resumar and the son he sent to Earth with the other Ten Thousand fetuses. We know about Leonidas and what he achieved on Earth. We also know that the son Queen Gorgo carried and gave birth to on that ship while they fled the High Coven after his death, we know that child died in the destruction of his cruiser while he slept in a Cryo Chamber! What you are saying can not be true!”

Dutkne shook his head slowly. “No... it is true.” He stated with a smile. “The great grandson of Sumar lives Caia! Wayonn has talked to him. He has shared their conversations with me.”

Caia’s dark eyes cut to Wayonn. “Is this true grandfather?” She asked him.

Wayonn nodded. “Every bit of it. I set up the secret account for any child of Leonidas’s first-born son Pleistarchus that may have survived the Coven purge and chose not to follow the destructive path of his father. As it turns out, I was notified when the funds were accessed and I discovered it was the second son himself who had accessed them. The son we all thought dead. He goes by the name Martin Leonidas and has since he discovered who and what he was. I have been monitoring events within the Lycavorian Union since that time.”

Dutkne was about to speak again but they watched Drey hold up his hand. “Stop right there!” He barked loudly. “Helm! Come to course seven three four nine one mark six. Engage the Quantum Drive for pre-arranged jumps! Tactical Officer!” He held out the data pad and waited for the Lycavorian to take it. “Follow these coordinates exactly and do not deviate from them.”

“Yes sir!”

Drey turned back to Dutkne. “You have some explaining to do my old friend.” He said quickly.

Nirilo nodded his head in agreement. “That would be the understatement of this century Drey.” He spoke. “If what you say is true Dutkne... the Vanari Board of Regents will want this information. It could mean that our two peoples can finally become closer and become the allies we should be. Especially if Wayonn endorses this man.”

Wayonn nodded. “I do.” He answered. “But I warn all of you now; Martin Leonidas is unlike any man you have ever met. As is his first born son Androcles. They are the most powerful pureblood Lycavorians alive today anywhere. Martin’s *Anome*... his pureblood wolf Queen, she...”

“Grandfather...” Caia gasped looking at him. “He has... he has taken an *Anome*?”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. As has his son Androcles. And though they do not know it just yet, they have brought the Lycavorian bloodlines of our people back together. Aricia and Sadi both are descended from the different lines of Lycavorian blood that existed when Resumar was chosen as King. The royal bloodlines of that time and beyond. Neither of them are aware of it as I said, for Aricia was born in Sparta and they did not know the complete history of our people. Sadi is not aware of it for the very reason we have avoided contact with those in the Lycavorian Union for all these years. They had moved too far from the direction that Resumar and Canth intended for them. Martin has brought that back to them and his son follows his father’s path like the same set of footprints in the sand. And like Resumar they both have taken others as mates and wives, and their beauty matches their skill, which is superior.”

“Grandfather... there has not been a recognized union of *Anomes* since...” Caia began to speak.

“Since King Resumar and Queen Eliani.” Drey finished her statement in a soft voice.

Wayonn nodded. “In some ways they still do not know the significance of their Unions to these women... but we will teach them.” He spoke. “They follow the Spartan tradition and code instilled by Resumar’s son Leonidas while he lived on Earth and they follow it closely. They do not deal in deceit and subjugation between allies. If you are their friend, you will find no more loyal a friend; but if you are their enemy, they will utterly destroy you without blinking an eye.”

“They have more than one mate?” Nirilo asked surprised.

Wayonn nodded. “Martin has five... one of whom is a pureblood vampire. Androcles has four right now, also with a pureblood vampire among them. A young woman that has brought the lines of the two brothers back together again as well. Androcles will have one more, though they just have not found her yet. Two other of Martin’s sons have also cemented this rejoining by taking wives of Xaxon’s blood, but Androcles’s wife and vampire mate is by far the most important.”

“This is... this is unbelievable.” Nirilo gasped. “We can not keep this from the Board of Regents Dutkne!”

Dutkne nodded and looked at Nirilo. “I know what this could mean Nirilo, but let’s hold off on telling them just yet. There are events happening now with Martin and Androcles that we need to assess first. I will fill all of you in on what grandfather has shown me but can we do it over some Olmarian Steaks. I haven’t had decent food in many months and my wolf genes are about to assassinate me for not providing them the nourishment they need.”

“Mess Lounge!” Drey stated taking Caia’s hand.

“You too Grandfather.” Dutkne spoke. “You are more to blame than me for this. There’s no way I’m facing them alone.”

Wayonn nodded with a smile now that he knew they would begin executing their jumps. The wolf within him also told him he wanted meat. It was something that he would never have partaken in before his chosen mate turned him, as Pralors did not need to ingest meat to maintain their health. Since becoming wolf so long ago Wayonn now enjoyed meat almost as much as those who were pureblood wolf.

“A steak sounds rather inviting right now.” He said.

SCIMITAR

“All fighters are away Captain!” Zeria barked out. “All squadrons from *NORMYA’S LIGHT* responded as well! We have Kavalians launching in response! Fighters and missiles! They are dividing Captain... *GREAT SOULS* are remaining to the rear while the *DIATAGAs* and *DIEROYs* are boring right in.”

“Typical! *Nubous* cowards!” Sa'sur hissed.

“I'm also detecting a new type of Kavalian Fighter! It appears larger than the Jaguar but the profile is similar!” Zeria exclaimed.

“Designate them Jaguar Mark IIs and file them Zeria! Weapons what about the Zero Matter Mark 22s!” Sa'sur quipped from her chair.

“Just finishing the reloading Captain!” The man answered turning to face her. “Fifteen seconds and we'll be ready to launch!”

“Target the *GREAT SOULS*!” Sa'sur barked. “Nothing else! We have to take out those ships so they can't use their planetary Gauss Cannon!”

“Captain we have a total sixty-nine warships bearing down on us!” Zeria shouted. “The *DIMERUs* and *PURUSIANs* have broken away and are taking up position on the fringes of the rest of their fleet! The second Kavalian Fleet group has launched fighters and is pushing hard to reach *NORMYA'S LIGHT*!”

Sa'sur nodded her head. “They will use them for hit and runs on our flanking ships!” She announced. “They really need to change their tactics... they've been doing this to the Coven for years.”

“They are winning against the Coven Captain!” Her XO spouted from his seat across the bridge from where hers and Andro's command seats were anchored.

“We aren't the High Coven XO! How bout we show them that!” Sa'sur snapped.

Her XO grinned. “Works for me.”

“The moment all Mark 22s clear their launchers come to course three nine six four one four and reload with conventional warheads! Full spread on the Photonic Torpedoes and ready a port side barrage from the Type One Alpha turrets! Strike Wing to execute Gamma one three and follow suit!”

Zeria turned in her chair and looked at Sa'sur. “Captain... that course will... it will take us directly at the Kavalian Fleet!”

Sa'sur nodded. “Yep!” she announced. “Let's see how quick on the uptake they are.”

“Captain! Zero Matter Fusion missiles are ready!”

Sa'sur's eyes narrowed in a very evil manner, the wolf blood in her coming out now. “All launchers! Fire!”

KRANEK
GREATSOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
DEATHMANE
KFI COMMAND SHIP

“...positioned them between us and the planet Admiral!” The Kavalian Tactical officer barked out. “The elf Queen's command ship has de-shrouded and dropped lower into the atmosphere after launching its fighters! The Prince's command ship has launched fighters as well and is moving to engage with his Strike Wing!”

The Kavalian Admiral nodded. “He is a fool! He cannot stand against our numbers! He should have turned and run and left the others to their fate on the planet! Launch our own fighters! Have the Jaguar Mark IIs cover the Black Soul Heavy Raiders! Send all our normal Jaguars against theirs. We outnumber them four and five to one. Their *DEVASTATOR* is the main concern and I want all of them killed first! They can do the most damage if we allow them to get too close.”

“Yes Admiral!”

“Have the *DIATAGAs* and *DIEROYs* form an attack line and bear straight in! Order the *DIMERUs* and *PURUSIANs* to remain on the flanks and target at their discretion!” The Admiral spoke. “Remind General Gerrum that they are to destroy the Immortal settlement completely and leave none alive! Especially those damn High Coven dragons.”

“Yes Admiral!”

“Send a tight beam transmission back to KFI Command that we are beginning our attack and will advise when it is complete!” The Admiral spoke.

“Message already sent Admiral!”

“Excellent.” The Kavalian got to his feet and looked at the large holoimager plot board. “Hold our position here while our other ships bear in. Let them take the brunt of the first strike from the Lycavorian Command ship and its missiles and fighters. Once they have depleted their stores we will move in and pound them into atoms with our medium Gauss turrets. He is a child compared to me, this Androcles Leonidas, and I intend to show him this.”

“Admiral... the co-captain of the *SCIMITAR* is one of their most experienced female elf commanders.” The XO spoke moving up to him.

The Kavalian waved his large fur covered hand in dismissal. “Even better. Elven females are good for nothing more than spreading their legs and howling out their approval when we lock groins with them. I’ve had half a dozen elven females and once I was filling them with my load they could do nothing but whimper and beg for more as I fucked their brains clean out of their heads! Rub their ears a little bit and they will melt before you!”

His bridge crew began to laugh along with him. At least that is until his Tactical Officer turned from his station his eyes wide.

“Admiral Ocarsh! Missiles inbound! The Command ship *SCIMITAR* has launched missiles directly at us! They... we can’t track them and they are maneuvering through our forward warships locked on us!”

The Kavalian looked at the man. “That is not possible!” He barked moving to the plot station. “How many missiles?”

“Forty-six total Admiral! Six appear to be locked on us!”

“Point defenses now!”

“Admiral... our gun crews can not lock the missiles!” The tactical officer shouted. “They have some sort of stealth coating on them!”

“Switch to manual targeting then!” Ocarsh barked savagely. “Tell our gun crews if they do not destroy all of them I will kill them myself!”

FALCON ONE FOUR

“How long Matthew?” Falarie almost yelled.

“Twenty-six seconds!” Matthew answered immediately.

“Kavalian Troop ships are beginning to land!” Chloe called out.

“We can not stop them from landing!” Falarie barked out feeling almost helpless as they watched dozens of Kavalian troop ships entering the atmosphere on their sensors. “We must hope the Immortals and our people can hold until we are able to send troops down from the *SCIMITAR* and *NORMYA’S LIGHT*!”

“If they are around to send them at all! I have never seen so many ships in one area!” Qilie snapped.

“Missile warning! Missile warning!” Chloe announced. “*SCIMITAR* has fired Mark 22s! Missile profile suggests Zero Matter fusion warheads! The Kavalians won’t be able to track them!”

“Are we clean?” Falarie asked as she banked their ship over to starboard to get a better view.

“No contacts!” Matthew replied deeply involved. “No one can paint us! Sixteen more seconds!”

Falarie reached above her head and stabbed a button on the overhead console. “All Falcons prepare to initiate System Wide Scramble!”

“Falcon Two Three standing by!”

“Falcon One Nine!”

“Falcon Two One ready!”

“On Matthew’s mark!” Falarie snapped.

“Stand by...” Matt spoke now. “Three... two... one! Mark! Initiate SWS! *ARIZONA* squadrons entering the system!”

The *RAPTOR A3s* were set up in a box formation around the edges Kranek’s immediate system. They were well out of the fighting area, now nearly a six million kilometers from Kranek, the ships barely discernible except for the streaks of plasma based weapons and Gauss cannons skittering across the stars. In all four craft the main sensor operator touched a button on their main center console initiating an invisible beam of particle energy. Each beam reached out to connect with their sister ships until it took the shape of a large box. Supremely

powerful particle emitters in the belly bubble of each ship sent out and received these beams of energy, and in quite unspectacular fashion ceased all enemy communications outside of the immediate system of Kranek no matter the type or scope. The connected particle beam also had the secondary effect of scrambling all long range sensors to the point it was impossible to scan anything more than five hundred thousand kilometers in any direction. They had developed and used the tactic in the last two years of the Evolli War and it had given the Evolli fits. The Union ships were all fitted with a special reflective ablative coating within their hull armor and it did not hinder them in any manner.

“SWS active!” Matthew shouted. “Signal is strong and clear! The Kavalians bastards are now blind, deaf and mute!”

In the cockpit of Falcon One Four Falarie nodded her head. “Now... now they will see they should have never embarked on this path!” She muttered.

“*Avoi.*” Qilie stated softly.

SCAR FLIGHT

They appeared almost as one complete entity from their jump, nearly one hundred and sixty fighters and fighter/bombers, each one bursting into existence exactly where they were supposed to be, Colonel Steven Randall in the front.

It took Steven all of two seconds to glance at his sensor board and begin giving orders.

“*Scar to Scar Flight! Grey Wolves break for your positions! Their sensors belong to you! Make each shot count! There won’t be any reloads until the ARIZONA arrives!*”

“Grey Wolf Lead copies *Scar!* Breaking now!”

Steven glanced out his cockpit and saw the Penetrator variant of the *DEVASTATOR* fighter/bomber begin peeling away in formation. Designed primarily as an electronic warfare craft, Steven knew in the hands of an experienced ECW officer, they could be deadly with their homing missiles and drones. He dropped his head once more to his scope and assessed the situation with the speed and experience of a veteran flyer.

“Looks like the *SCIMITAR* has launched missiles!” Steven barked out. “Falcon One Four and the other *RAPTORs* have shut down the system! *NORMYA’S LIGHT* has dropped lower to the planet probably to cover Queen Dysea and the others!” Steven spoke openly in their secure COM link. “The Kavalians will know we are here since we’re on the edge of their active sensor range so let’s get to killing things!”

“Bout time *Scar!*” A voice echoed in his helmet.

“Picking up new version fighter *Scar!*” A voice barked out. “Bearing four nine three!”

Steven adjusted his sensor and nodded. “Looks bigger! It doesn’t matter... it’s Kavalian and we can still kill it!”

“Works for us!”

“Black Widows and Jolly Rogers take the Death Jesters in from three four one and assist the *SCIMITAR*’s fighters! They look to be going after the *DIATAGAs* and *DIMERUs*. The rest of you on me from six three nine! We’re going to bore straight in on them and hit that Fleet Group bearing on *NORMYA’S LIGHT!* We need to keep those fighters off her until the *ARIZONA* and *HORNET* get here! Maintain your spacing and stick with your wingman! We’re outnumbered five to one and we need to have eyes in the backs of our asses!”

“Course six three nine takes us between two of the *GREAT SOULS* Colonel!” A voice chimed in.

Steven nodded. “It sure does!”

“Ah *sibfla*... who the hell wants to live forever anyway!” The same voice bellowed.

Steven grinned. “Once we get into the mix cover your wingman and take it to them! Let’s go people!”

KAVALIAN GREAT SOUL COMMAND SHIP DEATHMANE

“...we are unable to lock them!” The *DEATHMANE*'S Executive Officer barked out. “Seventeen seconds to impact!”

“Track them manually!” Ocarsh shouted.

“We can't!” The officer shouted back. “They are moving too erratically, changing course and weaving in and out among our fighters!”

“Damn our fighters!” Ocarsh barked angrily. “All Firestorm cannons to saturation fire! Half a million kilometers distance! Stop those missiles!”

“Admiral... saturation fire will destroy our own fighters still moving to engage the Union forces!” The XO spoke.

“Then so be it!” Ocarsh exclaimed angrily as he came to his feet. “Fire now damn it! I don't want those missiles to reach my ship!”

Fifty-four quad mounted Light Gauss cannon turrets came alive then, filling the space around the *DEATHMANE* with deadly projectile fire. Each high-density shell from the Quad mounted Gauss cannons reached a certain apogee half a million kilometers from the ship and then a small explosive charge went off, triggering a larger popping explosion that saturated the entire area around the *DEATHMANE* with lethal, hyper-velocity fragments that could shred missiles and ships alike. It was an extremely effective anti-air defense weapon and one of the reasons why High Coven missiles many times did not reach their targets. It gave the Kavalian an advantage in their war with the Vampire High Coven; however against Union missiles it was nowhere near as effective.

A lesson learned in the war with the Evolli was quickly applied to every Union ship and missile across the board. The Evolli had similar weapons that they had used for air defense, and for the first two years of the war it had proven effective. That was until the Union began coating the outer shells of all their missiles with a Crystanium and Dragon Armor weave. Due to its properties, and the near weightlessness of the combination of the two metals, it did little to hinder the performance of their anti-ship weapons. Even still, the sheer force of the barrage the *DEATHMANE* unleashed was enough to destroy the missiles targeted on them. And this the barrage did.

Except for two.

Zero Matter Fusion warheads were developed by a Nodon Engineer who had originally been working on the Quantum Engineering aspects of the *ARIZONA*'s Drive Core. He had discovered the power of these weapons quite by accident, and then with some ingenuity and incredible skill he was able to harness the force of the weapon, which wasn't really a force at all. With the assistance of Avi and several other brilliant technicians, the Union scientists quickly came to understand and harness a new type of weapon. Zero Matter Fusion warheads were just that. They had zero matter for warheads. There was no explosives charge in them whatsoever. What these missiles had was the most destructive power of any missile in the Union arsenal due to the nature of zero matter and fusion.

One missile struck just aft of *DEATHMANE*'s starboard nose wing, the other directly over the top of the *GREAT SOULS*'s drive core.

The moment the tiny fingernail sized computer told the missile's brain it was in the right spot, the missile's brain activated the internal sequence and in seven tenths of a second it was complete. The concept behind the Zero Matter Fusion warhead was actually very simple and had been around since the dawn of time. There was a point when the energy created by matter moving through time and space reached zero and stopped, creating a vacuum of energy. It is at this point where Zero Matter became lethal. When combined with a small fusion reactor, no larger than a person's finger really detonating inside that vacuum, the resulting reaction was catastrophic. The ZMF warhead detonated just as it was designed to, and just as it was designed to, the vacuum of the explosion sucked in all energy in the surrounding area. It didn't matter if it was solid matter or energy matter, the vacuum sucked it all in. This included the power from the *DEATHMANE*'s large shield grid in both those locations, as well as the actual structure of the ship itself. For a split second it appeared as if the hull of the ship buckled and twisted before tearing away, consumed by the ZMF reaction. It was also known that when a zero matter fusion reaction became too much energy and matter to be contained within its small field, it ruptured outward. It ruptured outward like a massive projectile of supercharged matter energy.

As the ZMF reaction absorbed more than its small field could hold, it ruptured outward. It just so happened that this rupture was carefully directed back in a single direction. In this case, right back at

DEATHMANE's hull. All this took place in the time it took to blink ones eyes twice. It was like a massive shotgun blast at point blank range and this matter energy, finally unleashed, punched clean through the hull of the *GREAT SOUL* as if it was punching through paper. A huge chunk of its own hull, plus massive amounts from its own shield grid were sent hurtling through the hull of the ship. The first ZMF tore completely through the one of the front wing like structures in the front of the *GREAT SOUL*, and then passed halfway through into the second before losing its energy. As huge internal explosions erupted from the now severed wing, the force of those explosions was blown back at the ship, engulfing dozens of fighters as they tried to launch. The second ZMF ripped through the LSD Drive Core of the Kavalian ship, disrupting the Tri-Cobalt energy source and pushing the ship's main engines to overload in the space of three seconds. It was a sight to watch really, as the resulting explosion ripped through not only the top of the *DEATHMANE*, but blew out the bottom of the ship's superstructure as well, nearly fifteen decks below.

It would be the only bit of luck that the Union forces would receive this day for when the *DEATHMANE* blossomed into a fireball it took the overall commander of Kavalian forces with it. The Kavalian forces in the system had been told to fight to the death, as was their usual way of things in battle. With the death of Admiral Ocarsh, that order could not be rescinded in any way and the battle now would come down to who had the most resolve and staying power. It also served to incense the remaining ship captains within the Kavalian fleet and they turned their full attention to the ship that had launched the missiles to begin with.

The *SCIMITAR*.

ARIZONA

Miranda looked impatiently over where Zaala was at her station next to E'dira and tapping away at her console with insane swiftness. She could feel the tenseness of everyone on the bridge, and no doubt it was permeating the ship as well. The rest of ARIZONA's fighter group was already loaded and waiting for launch. Their pilots were standing by in their cockpits and waiting for the first group to erupt down the launch tubes. The gun crews were all standing by, live war shots in each and every tube and battery. Miranda could feel it, the pride and determination that filtered to all of them. She moved up next to E'dira slowly and did something that she would never have done weeks or months earlier. She lifted her hand and allowed her fingers to caress the back of E'dira's elven ear. It was a brief touch, only in passing, but in just that simple contact Miranda made claim to E'dira in a way that had the Drow's blood burning with desire. E'dira looked up at her with those amber eyes, so full of emotion and so deep.

"We are ready." E'dira spoke firmly almost sensing the churning of Miranda's emotions.

"I know." Miranda said softly. "I just..."

"Captain Lorian!" The COM officer barked from across the bridge. "Feed from Falcon One Four!"

Miranda squeezed E'dira's shoulder as she turned. "Put it up on holodisc one!" She ordered facing the holodisc closest to E'dira's station.

"Captain Lorian!" Falarie's voice erupted from the transmission as the image of the *RAPTOR* pilot flickered and then cleared.

"Falarie! Give me a report!" Miranda spoke.

"Captain... all of Colonel Randall's fighters made it and they are engaged now! A ZMF missile barrage by the *SCIMITAR* has taken out two *GREAT SOULS* and severely damaged three others, but they are still in the fight! Captain Sa'sur is trying to keep one Fleet Group off *NORMYA'S LIGHT* with her Strike Wing while our fighters engage the second! The *SCIMITAR* is taking a pounding Captain! We must have taken out the Command ship or something because they are seriously pissed! She's lost six ships from her Strike Wing, another too badly damaged to fight and they are adrift! There's just too many Kavalians!"

"Have they landed troops?" Miranda asked.

"Yes ma'am!" Falarie answered immediately. "We don't have any information on the defenses of Kranek Captain. All we know is that Queen Dysea has already stated they are not leaving and she has ordered *NORMYA'S LIGHT* to clear the lower atmosphere and help the *SCIMITAR*. The second Kavalian Fleet Group will be in range of Kranek and *NORMYA'S LIGHT* in just under two minutes. They'll be able to hit her with their heavy Gauss turrets and..." Falarie's head turned slightly and her eyes went wide. "What? No! Captain

Lorian... Chloe is tracking sixty four anti-ship missiles just launched against the *SCIMITAR*. The Kavalians must have coordinated their strike! She..."

"Zaala!" Miranda almost screamed as she turned to look at her. "Zaala we have to go now! We're out of time!"

Zaala stabbed a few more buttons on her console and turned in her chair. "QRFR Drive is online and ready!" She barked. "Give me coordinates!"

"It hasn't been tested Captain!" The engineering officer snapped as he turned away from Zaala and looked at Miranda. "We don't know if it will work!"

Zaala came to her feet then, her beautiful face angry. She grabbed the engineer's shoulder and spun him around to face her. "My husband is there!" She snarled viciously before snapping out with an open heel strike to the male elf's jaw. The blow caught him completely by surprise and he dropped like a limp noodle to the deck. Zaala glared down at him. "That is my husband! And these are my engines! Don't you dare tell me they won't work you pompous fool!" Zaala looked up and directly at Miranda. "Give me coordinates Miranda! Give me coordinates and I will put us there faster than you can say I love you E'dira!"

Miranda blinked several times and glanced at an equally wide eyed E'dira. She turned back to Zaala and opened her mouth to answer when Falarie's voice burst out of the transmission again.

"Captain Lorian! Twenty-six seconds until those missiles hit the *SCIMITAR*! She's maneuvering but it won't be enough! We have to do something!" Falarie screamed.

It was a simple decision for Miranda and one that would propel her into the history books yet to be written for the audacity and bravery of the maneuver. It would be studied and repeated many times over the course of the centuries as a brilliant military decision.

For Miranda Lorian... she was simply saving her family.

"Helm! Plot me a course between the *SCIMITAR* and those missiles!" Miranda barked. "Feed the coordinates to Star Commander Zaala Randall and order the Wing to prepare to jump! We're going now!" She whirled on the holoimage of Falarie. "Falarie... go secure and contact Sa'sur! Tell her we're coming and prepare to execute once we jump in! She'll know what to do!"

"Yes Captain!" Falarie barked. "Falcon One Four clear!"

Miranda didn't hesitate and moved to her command chair. "E'dira... prepare to initiate the Point Defense Batteries to Zone Defense! All guns ready for salvo fire. They will fire on your command! As of right now we are weapons free! Instruct Janon he is to break immediately and cover *NORMYA'S LIGHT* with half the Attack Wing! We'll join with the *SCIMITAR* and take it to the Kavalians!" Miranda was settling into her chair as she barked the rapid fire orders. The bridge crew of the *ARIZONA* responded as well as any finely tuned and oiled machine as a loud claxon began to sound on every deck.

"Miranda... Captain Lorian...!" Zaala snapped. "Coordinates are set!" She announced confidently. "We are ready!"

Miranda paused for a split second for she was about to commit her forces to combat action. This time however, she was in control. This time she would save those she had come to regard as family.

"Let's get sum!" Miranda shouted. "Helm! *JUMP US NOW!*"

It was not spectacular by any means, just a collection of forty odd flashes of white light as experimental Jump Drives became reality and forty odd warships of the Lycavorian Union went into battle.

They would never know their action was detected. Detected by a race of beings who were the epitome of horrific evil. A race of beings that had wiped out the advanced species known as the Pralors with all their sophisticated technology and power. A race of beings who would now stand up and take notice and make plans to finish the job they had started thirty thousand years ago.

They were known as The Scourge.

CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

HADARIA

It was not far from the palace to the Domar spaceport. In normal times, perhaps a twenty minute walk through some of the finer park like settings on Hadaria. Today however, today was very different. The streets were crammed with hundreds, if not thousands of men, women and children who were scrambling to leave while more sat at the outdoor cafés or stood and watched what was going on with blissful ignorance. Anja and Sivana did not really know the level of respect and adoration they had obtained over the last two decades ruling their world, yet they saw it now with the number of people who were trying all they could to get off the planet before Buonau and her Kavalian cronies shut down the spaceports. They knew it was going to happen, and now with little more than what they could carry, they were acting in the same manner as their Queen.

Atropos cursed under his breath as they moved deftly through the throngs of men and women. Only a few hundred meters outside the palace gates they had to draw up their cloaks and cowls to keep people from following them in the hopes they could depart with the Queen. He was moving as quickly as he could, one hand gripping Anja's arm, the other Eurin's. Sivana clung to Anja's hand just in front of her, while Ceuma led them just behind Joci. Atropos was a Spartan of old, born and raised in his beloved city on Earth. His history was well known, as were his acts of bravery and fortitude while in exile. When he was chosen as Anja's Captain he had set about assembling the finest group of men and women he could to be her detail. He knew of Anja's proclivity for getting into trouble, and he needed *Durcunusaan* members who could react swiftly to events and adapt on a whim. He found those men and women in those trained by General's Vengal and Vistr, the two men most responsible for bringing the *Durcunusaan* into existence.

What he had found in the Spartan Joci however was different. After what he had taken part in Atropos was initially loathed to allow the man to even live another hour. After the last few weeks however, Atropos was so very happy Anja had stayed his hand. Joci was a predator through and through. He was a Lycavorian that should have been born in Sparta instead of on Apo Prime, for he would have fit in seamlessly with the men and women there. The man's skills were without question and Joci was utterly committed to his mate Ceuma, and while she may have been a clone of Anja and almost impossible to tell apart from his queen in physical description, Joci had eyes only for Ceuma. Atropos knew what love and absolute commitment was, for he had loved his own mate from the first moment he had seen her. He saw that in Joci's eyes for Ceuma. He wasn't looking at Ceuma and seeing a sexual fantasy involving his Queen as he had before, now he was looking at Ceuma and gazing upon his treasured mate and wife. That was the single most important aspect that made Atropos trust him without question.

Joci was also turning out to be a superior commander and soldier. Though he was large at nearly six feet two inches tall and over two hundred pounds, he moved with the grace of a ballet dancer as he sliced through the crowds, guiding them as they moved closer to the spaceport. His eyes and senses never ceased to take in all around them as they moved and combined with Atropos's own combat senses and dedication, they were moving rapidly and so far unnoticed among the crowds as they made their way to the spaceport. What Atropos knew that perhaps the others did not was simple.

A member of the Leonidas family never stayed unnoticed for very long. It just wasn't in their nature. And it was something Atropos knew they had passed down to their children.

Anja's Mindvoice presence was just too powerful to hide effectively no matter how much she tried to shield herself. And she could shield herself quite well. Her training with Martin and his sister and her deep bond with her dragon brother Miath however, this did not allow her to move totally uninhibited. It also did not help when suddenly she stopped and gripped his arm so painfully Atropos had to suppress a gasp of surprise and sting. They were in the open on one of the wide pedestrian thoroughfares that dotted Hadaria and was surrounded by shops and stores of every description. As with all the cities on Hadaria, Lifter traffic was kept to a bare minimum within city limits unless necessary. Anja came to an abrupt halt and Atropos felt her body go rigid and her head shook under the cowl.

"Anja?" Atropos hissed in a whisper. "Anja... what is wrong?"

Anja tossed her head back and forth under the cowl several times as her fingers dug into his arm. Atropos reached up as the others looked on worriedly and pulled the lip of her cowl back enough so that he could see her face. The expression he saw was one of horror and sorrow and incredible pain, her jade green wolf eyes wide, the black ring around her jade cornea thicker than normal. Atropos stepped in front of her completely, partly to block her face from the causal passerby, partly to try and discover what it was that made her look so terrified. "Anja my Queen!" He whispered. "What... what is wrong?"

Anja grasped his arms tighter. “Martin!” She exclaimed in a gasp.

“Martin? What about Martin? Anja... tell me what you feel?” He declared to her.

“I... I feel... I feel nothing.” Anja gasped as tears began to pour down her cheeks as if someone had suddenly opened a faucet.

Eurin moved closer, instinctively trying to shield this young woman who she had come to adore over the years. “Atropos... we can’t stop here.” She stated. “What is wrong? We’re in the middle of the Domar Promenade. The Spaceport is only a few hundred meters away.”

Atropos glanced at her. “I don’t know!” Atropos exclaimed softly. “Something about the King and not being able to feel him anymore!”

Eurin looked at Anja’s face and saw the tears rolling down her cheeks as Sivana moved up next to her as well. Anja’s fraternal twin sister grasp her sister by the waist as she pressed close to her. They were both wolf now, and Sivana knew well the pull of a powerful Alpha Wolf on its mate for she felt that with her own husband and mate Belen. “Anja... sister what is wrong?”

“He’s... he’s gone Sivana.” Anja whispered softly. “He’s gone.”

“What do you mean gone?” Sivana gasped.

It was Ceuma who saw it first and even though she had never met the man, she did have Anja’s memories up to the point just before the Passing of the Comet and she knew exactly who Martin Leonidas was. As she clung tightly to Joci’s hand, her own eyes were sweeping the crowd around them and trying to detect any danger, her jade green eyes fell upon one of the many large monitors dotting the promenade that displayed Netnews Channels for reports from around the Union twenty-nine hours a day. Her eyes grew wide when she saw the monitor and the picture on it. She recognized the images from Sparta on Earth, for Joci’s mother had always talked of one day going there and walking among the city streets that were home to the King and so many of their people who were just as traditional as she was. She didn’t hesitate and yanked on Joci’s arm.

“Joci... Joci the monitor!” She hissed in a disbelieving tone.

Joci turned his head to the large screen as well and she watched his eyes go wide as he saw what was happening. “Atropos!” He barked out as he moved closer to the monitor which was only a few meters away. Men and women were crowded around it watching the events unfold hundreds of light years away. “Atropos look!”

Atropos lifted his eyes and saw where Joci was going, and his dark blue orbs acted in a similar manner when he saw what was on the screen. He released Anja’s arms to Sivana and Eurin and stepped closer, coming up beside Joci and Ceuma.

“...unimaginable has happened.” The female elven reporter was speaking. That a battle was raging all around her was obvious to even the most idiotic person as they saw weapons fire and the uniforms of *Durcunusaan* troops in the background. There were flashes of wolves in the picture as well as they fell upon what could only be Kavalian troops, tearing flesh from bodies, blood splattering the ground. **“The members of the Durcunusaan protecting the King have gone insane! Just seconds ago they witnessed the assassination of their beloved King and now they have... they are attacking the Kavalian troops responsible for this action in what can only be called a berserker rage!”**

Atropos looked at Joci with stunned eyes and turned quickly to look at Anja, who was still slumped in her sister’s arms and shaking her head slowly back and forth.

“...don’t know if anything else is happening here in Sparta or across the Union, but it appears as if the Kavalian Federation is launching a coordinated attack against the Union government and doing so in a brutal manner. King Leonidas was assassinated only moments ago while trying to draw the attackers away from the men and women with him. There appears to have been some sort of running battle from the home of Lieutenant Governor Tarifa which culminated here in this square with the death of the King. Behind me you can see others who are attempting to save the life of Queen Aricia who was gravely injured in the attack.”

The elven female ducked at the sound of a nearby explosion as the camera shifted its axis and centered on a red haired elf not far from them who was on her knees next to a prone body with raven black hair. Atropos

recognized the biogenically altered Kavalian female Jalersi beside her, helping her in any way she could, while Isra, Tarifa, Ardis and two Kavalian men he didn't know covered them with P190A3s. He saw the larger of the two Kavalians lift his 190 and send out a short burst that the camera followed just as quickly and Atropos saw a Kavalian soldier flung from his feet as the well aimed burst tore apart his chest.

“General Simpson is among those Lycavorians here who have gone crazy. He could do nothing to stop them as the Kavalians killed the King. It is mayhem here! There is... there is blood is everywhere! Screaming and shouting is everywhere! Civilians are pouring into the area, the majority of them armed and in one case we witnessed a Kavalian being beaten to death with clubs in the street! It is chaos! The Kavalians are firing indiscriminately into groups of people before finally being brought down by survivors or some Durcunusaan troop in wolf form! Casualties are very heavy! We will try move closer to where a group of Durcunusaan have gather around the remains of their King and...”

Atropos could only stand there in open mouth shock as they watched. He heard the snorting sound next to him and turned his head to see the older Hadarian male next to him.

“It's about time someone got rid of that brute of a King!” He spoke arrogantly looking at the cloaked Atropos and not realizing who he was talking too. “He would have led us to ruin along with our whore Queen! The Kavalians will make fine allies!”

Atropos was a man who did not often lose his temper. He was known to be like a rock to so many people and the consummate professional in all that he did. Atropos however, he was no different than any others, he just controlled it better. At least up until today. Atropos reached up slowly and drew back his cowl from his head, watching as the man's eyes grew wide in horror as he recognized him. He opened his mouth to stammer something but Atropos didn't give him the chance. His right hand lashed out and his closed fist slammed into the Hadarian's face, easily crushing his nose and splitting his lips open. The power of the blow sent the man to the ground like a rock, his eyes dazed and in terrible pain. Atropos didn't stop there and drew out his K12 from his thigh holster and leveling it at the man's head.

“Can you heal your own death Hadarian?” Atropos snarled viciously leaning over and pressing the barrel of the K12 to the man's forehead and watching his eyes go wide in terror as he gazed up at Atropos's wolf eyes and fully extended wolf fangs. “He... he was my King! Our King!” He screamed as men and women both scrambled away from them in shock. “And my Queen is no whore!” Atropos brought his K12 whipping across the man's face, easily slicing open his cheek and breaking his jaw with a loud popping sound.

In his rage, which Eurin and Zaniai were watching but doing nothing to stop, he almost didn't hear the insistent chiming of his implant and he reached up almost in a dreamlike state and tapped his jaw.

“Atropos!” Admiral Omore's voice erupted into his COM from high above them on the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*. “Atropos are you there?”

“Admiral!” Atropos gasped bringing his hand up. “Admiral is it...?”

“Yes! It's true damn it! Joarl has sent out the Alpha Storm Alarm! He is unable to contact Queen For'mya or Prime Minister Deia at the Senate Building! We have lost contact with Queen Dysea and Queen Isabella on Kranek! Andro and his siblings are off the board! We don't know where they are! This is a systematic attack against the royal family Atropos! You must get to the spaceport and get out of there now! The Kavalian Fleet Group is only nine minutes away from weapons range! They already have troops on the ground! We must get Anja off the planet now Atropos! Now! She may be the only remaining member of the Royal family who is not... who is not dead!”

“We... we are only a short distance away!” Atropos stammered as his emotions churned. He turned to look at Joci who was listening as well, a similar look of horror on his face. “We are moving now!” He spoke as he holstered his K12.

He turned back to the Hadarian man on the ground at his feet, his face bloody and his eyes glazed over. “You are a fool Hadarian! The Kavalians will enslave your people! When we return... and we will return, I hope to meet you *igord!* For I will laugh at you!” Atropos lashed out with his booted foot and kicked the man in the side savagely, hearing the satisfying snap of bone, before turning back and moving to Anja's side. “We must go my Queen!” He spoke gently. “We must... I need you to draw upon your will Anja! We need to get off this planet and I need you able to function.”

Anja's jade green eyes lifted to meet his and she stared into his face. "Atropos... Atropos I feel so... so empty! There is nothing... he's gone. Martin is..."

"This is... this is what happens when an Alpha..." Atropos then did something he would never have considered in his life before this very moment. He took Anja's face gently in his large hands and stared at her. "You are still Queen Anja Leonidas! Our Queen! I need you to call forth the Spartan woman in you Anja, the Spartan woman Martin saw within you, within all of you and I need you to hold in your pain! Martin Leonidas was a true Spartan! He would not have chosen weak women for his mates! I need you to push that pain aside now or we will all die here!"

Anja blinked several times and Atropos saw the light of recognition in her eyes. He had often wondered through the years what it was that Martin saw in the women he had chosen to be his mates and Queens, women he adored and cherished more than anything Atropos knew. All of them were elegantly beautiful; all of them had lush, firm bodies that they were not afraid to display in the clothes that they chose to wear. He knew his King could turn all of them to whimpering fools with just a few simple caresses and his aura, and he also knew they were totally uninhibited when it came to their sexual preferences and they did not care who knew. What he saw in Anja's eyes now, what he saw blossom forth at his words, this is what Atropos knew his King saw in them. The strength of will, of purpose and determination. This is what he knew Anja had, what he knew all of the Queens had, and now he saw it coming forth in the direst of situations as she summoned control over her emotions and the Spartan woman in her came rushing back.

Anja reached up and grasped his arms tightly, squeezing her eyes shut for a moment and nodding her head. "What... what do we...?"

"We know nothing of the others yet!" Atropos spoke quickly. "Only that we need to get off this planet before that *ronnus* Rinard and his Kavalian scum find us."

"Too late!" Joci barked as he unlimbered his 190.

Atropos and Anja both looked to where Joci was turning. Atropos had known if anyone could find them it would be Rinard, the man who had been raised among the vilest of their people, in an empire now long dead for their actions against his sister. And a man who wanted Anja dead almost as badly as Atropos wanted her to remain alive. So while Atropos was angry when it happened, he was not by any means surprised. And judging from Anja's non-reaction in his grasp neither was she. Atropos had to suppress a tight lipped smile even given the situation. He knew what the death of a powerful Alpha wolf could do to his mate, yet this very petite and diminutive five foot three woman; Queen of Hadaria and the Union, with devastating beauty and intelligence; she could be the most lethal, snarling polecat one could cross paths with if she chose to be.

Atropos stopped and rose to his feet pulling Anja with him just as Joci moved in front of them clutching Ceuma's hand and gently moving her behind him protectively. The large ebony skinned Spartan looked out from under his cowl, his wolf eyes sweeping the crowds all around them, sensing some sort of danger just as Atropos and his Queen did. And then they saw them, Hadarian Elder Militia moving in from the sides as well. Rinard was pushing and shoving his way through the crowd, the gasps of surprise and indignation from the Hadarian civilians in his path quite clear as he made directly for where they were standing with a dozen Elder Guard Militia and half a dozen Kavalians behind him. Atropos began to bring his 190 around but felt Anja grasp his arm and shake her head.

[Not yet!] She hissed softly within Mindvoice. [There are too many civilians in the area.]

Atropos met her eyes. *[They are not my concern! You are!]*

[I know.] Anja said. [They are still my people however, and they are innocent in all this. I will not put them at risk Atropos! We must stall them for a few more moments.]

[Stall them? Why?]

Anja met his eyes. *[Miath is coming.]*

[He takes too great a risk in flying! You know that!]

[Who said anything about flying?]

The Lycavorian Rinard came to a halt roughly three meters in front of Joci, with what appeared to be a Kavalian officer and senior Elder Guard Militia Officer on either side of him. "Well... well... it appears you will not escape justice after all." Rinard spoke.

"We are fulfilling the terms of Anja's dismissal." Eurin declared stepping up next to Anja and Atropos. "We are leaving."

Rinard shook his head. "I'm sorry... I can't allow that. The Hadarian Arch Ministry and Elder Council have altered the terms. Anja is to be detained and will stand trial for the original charges leveled against her. They have appointed me as their executor and I intend to see her answer for her crimes."

"What about your crimes?" Ceuma spat viciously as she stood next to Joci.

Rinard looked at her. "Ah... yes. Ceuma you call yourself now is it?" He spoke smugly. His gaze turned to Joci who glared at him with dangerous wolf eyes. "Is she still as tight as I remember Joci? She's a clone of Anja, perfect in every way. Doesn't it ever cross your mind that your precious Queen is just as tight as the pussy you fuck when you bed the clone? For all intents and purposes you are fucking your Queen. You should have heard her howl out her delight when I changed her while I was hammering her tight ass into the bed. I didn't think she was going to let me go!"

Joci maintained his control of his anger which was rapidly building. Rinard was trying to goad him into some action, and he was not going to take the bait. Too much was at stake for him to go after the man who was insulting his beautiful Ceuma. He needn't have worried, for Ceuma pressed close to him with a wicked yet cruel smile and looked at Rinard as her hand dropped over Joci's crotch, surprising even him.

"I howl so much louder for my husband Rinard." Ceuma said sweetly. "He is so much more gifted in the cock department... far more than you will ever have and unlike you... he knows how to use it."

Rinard's jaw twitched in anger. "We will see bitch!" He snarled. "I am placing all of you under arrest by order of Chief Minister Wiktor and Elder Buonau. You will come with us now. Peacefully is preferred, but we are more than willing to take you by force."

"You know what is happening!" Atropos barked. "You must have seen it!"

"I know that *tukannupae* of a King is dead!" Rinard announced. "And I know that pretty soon the Kavalians will control the Union."

Anja stepped around Atropos, her right hand hidden behind his leg and clutching the K12 in her fist. "You knew?" She gasped as realization came to her about so much. "This... this was never about Seanna was it? You never cared for her in the least did you. This has never been about getting back at me. This is about bringing down Martin and the Lycavorian Union!"

Rinard shrugged. "Seanna was a good fuck! That's about it. She loved you too much though. She would never have helped me do what we have done now. She would never have allowed Buonau and Wiktor to bring you down. She would never have taken part in our plans. It was easy to manipulate her mother after she was dead. Pcillany never did care for you. The right words, the right emotion, and pretty soon she was fully onboard. I have waited for the right moment to take from Martin Leonidas what he took from me all those years ago. Now... now I'm going to accomplish that."

"Females are predictable. All females!" The tall Kavalian officer stated in a deep voice that held humor and disgust. "It is why you are fit for nothing more than spreading your legs and giving us more sons."

"You aren't smart enough to have planned all this out by yourself Rinard." Anja quipped, ignoring the Kavalian "You didn't even realize it wasn't me that killed your father, it was Torma. Who is pulling your strings Rinard? Who controls you?"

Rinard laughed softly and shrugged his broad shoulders. "It doesn't matter now. It will no doubt come out eventually." He stated dismissively. "Now that the big bad Martin Leonidas is dead... it opens the door for Pusintin to reclaim the throne of Sparta and the Union."

Anja's eyes grew wider. "What?" She gasped. "Pusintin can never sit on the throne! The Union Senate would never allow it! You are out of your mind!"

"Am I?" Rinard said arrogantly. "Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos is the one who gave them the tools and knowledge of what they needed to do in order to achieve that goal. Now that the King is dead and once they succeed in getting rid of the rest of your putrid offspring that can challenge Pusintin, then it will just be a few of you and Pusintin. And when Pusintin presents his case to the Union Senate... something Laustinos has been helping him to do... they will have to follow your own laws no matter what."

"Laustinos?" Atropos snapped.

"What case?" Anja barked. "He can make no case to reclaim the throne!"

Rinard nodded. "How do you think they got access to Union Jump Gates?" Rinard hissed. "How do you think they knew where everyone was and where to hit you to do the most damage and cause the most confusion? You and your King aren't as smart as you think you are. If you surrender peacefully, I might be able

to keep the Kavalians from killing you.” He stated looking at Anja. “Submit to me... and you may just come out of this alive.”

“Submit to you?” Anja snapped.

Rinard nodded. “It’s the only way to save yourself.” He spoke. “I have the Admiral’s word that if you are with me... you will not be killed.”

Anja’s laugh held no mirth in it. “I wouldn’t submit to you on my worst day, after drinking all the alcohol in the universe and if you were the last man in the galaxy!”

Rinard shrugged once more. “It is your choice.”

“This is what you have chosen over your own people?” Atropos asked in disbelief.

“You are not my people!” Rinard shrieked viciously. “She killed my people! Her and that *nubous igord* of a King!”

“You... you helped them to kill Martin?” Anja asked in a slow raspy voice. Atropos looked at her quickly for he had heard that voice before. It was the voice she used when she could no longer control her fiery temper and was about to spring.

Rinard laughed once more. “It was so easy!” He spat. “The Union believes in freedom so much that it allowed us to use that to help with your destruction! Getting the biogenic clones into Sparta, positioning them just so. Taking out the Drow Intelligence posts you have in The Wilds so they could not warn you about the attack on Kranek. It was all so simple. Now make your decision or all of you will die in the street like the animals you are!” Anja’s head tilted to the side slightly as if she was suddenly detecting a scent on the wind. Rinard saw this and shook his head. “If you call your dragon Anja, he will die the moment he takes to the sky. The Kavalians have T19 Missile Teams set up all around the area.”

Anja brought jade green eyes into focus on him and Rinard watched those eyes change slowly into black outlined wolf eyes. He watched as her fangs slowly extended from beneath her quivering upper lip and he watched her slowly shake her head. “There’s something you should know Rinard.” Anja spoke softly.

“And what is that *upae!*” He snapped.

“The thing about T19 missiles, they *are* deadly to a dragon in the sky, but they don’t work for fucking shit on the ground because their guidance systems can’t track below fifty feet! *MIATH! NOW!*” Anja screamed as her light blue psychic activated instantly.

There were many things that people who were not familiar with dragons did not know. They knew them to be powerful and lethal when flying, devastating creatures when used in ground support of their Bonded Ones. What many forgot was that dragons lived their first few months on the ground until they learned to fly, and they were just as maneuverable and deadly on the ground as they were in the air and in some cases even more so. Miath’s dark green body smashed through the front of the clothing shop only twenty meters from where they all stood. Glass and pieces of stone and thin, shattered steel framework burst forth as his huge body hurtled towards them with a trumpet of unbridled rage at what he felt churning through his bonded sister. What he felt churning through him by default. Something else so many did not know about dragons was that they were just as complex emotionally as any other species, they loved, they feared, they hated. At this moment in time, Miath felt hatred coursing through him the likes of which he had never felt. He knew about what was happening on Earth, he knew everything and his worry for his beloved mate Aelnala, as well as the rage he felt over the agony his sister was experiencing had sent him into a whirlwind fit of destruction. As heads turned to watch Miath with wide frightened eyes, Anja and the others moved.

Anja’s Shi Viska flared to life, appearing from Flat Space a moment after Atropos’s and Joci’s shields. She lifted her arm without thought and launched her shield at the Kavalian officer as she dashed to one side, bringing up her K12. Atropos and Joci, as well as the others of the *Durcunusaan* detachment simply stood in place and shoved their charges to the ground. All of them had been expecting something, and unlike the Hadarian Elder Militia and Kavalian troops they were ready when that moment came. Miath’s maddening trumpet of anger ended when his right wing came whipping forward and smashed into three Hadarian Elder Militia troops from the side. Their screams of pain grew even louder as bones shattered and their bodies were physically tossed into the air. Anja had told him not to hold back in the least through their bond, and Miath put all four tons of his weight into every sweep of his huge wings, the bone like cartilage running along the front edge of his wings like hardened steel as it crushed whatever it hit. The Kavalians began shouting and yelling as

they came face to face with the one thing that their species had a real and uncontrollable inbred fear of. It made killing them so much easier.

Atropos and Joci let their weapons dangle on quick release snaps as *Nehtes* extended and began stabbing microseconds after Miath's trumpet sounded. Atropos stepped into a piercing thrust, driving his *Nehtes* through the chest of the nearest Kavalian who was frozen in his spot while launching his shield in the same instant. The screams of the civilians in the area sounded loudly as they scrambled to get out of the way of the battle. The Hadarian Elder Militia died very quickly. None of them had real combat experience in any sense of the word, and now they were facing a dozen well armed and trained *Durcunusaan* troops whose only goal was to protect their beloved Queen. Most of them fell under the first Shi Viska barrage, heads, arms and even whole bodies cleaved in half or severed completely. The *Durcunusaan* troops guarding Anja were also enraged over what had transpired and now they were letting it all hang out in anger. Blood splashed wetly on the ground all around the *Durcunusaan* troops as they too switched to their *Nehtes* in order to keep from randomly spraying their 190s and possibly injuring innocents. Many of the Elder Militia opted to simply turn and run in the face of such savage anger and skill. Most did not survive.

As Rinard turned back to face Anja, his wolf eyes and fangs now fully exposed, his face took on a look of surprise as the *Nehtes* impaled him through the upper chest, the broad razor like spearhead bursting out his back just below his left shoulder blade. His wolf eyes grew wide as he saw the petite figure holding that spear in front of him.

Ceuma stood in front of him gripping the *Nehtes* tightly in her right hand. Her own jade green eyes were now changed, her fangs bared in a savage snarl. Ceuma may have been a clone, but the moment Rinard had changed her, she became far more than he had ever envisioned. He had never taken into account her Hadarian DNA when he left her for dead that day, and he had never taken into account the love Joci had for her. He could only watch as her grip tightened on the shaft of the *Nehtes* and she ripped it back out of his body, bringing flesh and copious amounts of blood with it. Rinard could only watch in stunned amazement as she twirled the *Nehtes* expertly in her hand and stepped closer to him as he slumped to his knees, his right hand pressed against the gaping wound in his chest, blood pouring from between his fingers.

"Didn't expect that did you Rinard!" Ceuma snarled viciously as the fighting began to ebb around them. "You may have made me what I am Rinard... but my mate shaped me! He made me a true Lycavorian woman! And now this woman is going to kill you for what you have done! To me! To my husband! To my sisters!" She screamed. Ceuma would not know it until much later, but with those simple words she committed herself to one path in this life. And it was a path she and her adoring mate and husband would embrace.

As Ceuma drew back her arm to plunge her *Nehtes* into Rinard's unprotected chest a thick arm wrapped around her waist and pulled her along with their momentum. The male *Durcunusaan* troop ignored her wails of protest as he dragged her with him and began following his fellow detachment members. They had grabbed Eurin and Zaniai after the first few moments of their assault, knowing that they were to be protected at all costs, along with Ceuma. An order from their diminutive Queen they would never think to violate.

The Kavalian officer could only watch from the ground as Miath shredded the last of his men with huge black razor like talons. He was helpless to assist his men, for Anja's Shi Viska had cut through both his legs like a hot knife through butter. He could feel his life ebbing from him, his feline eyes looking down to see one of his legs only a few inches away, the stump still spurting blood. He saw the shadow fall across him and his head twisted up to see Anja step up to him, her Shi Viska returning to her forearm and attaching itself back to the harness she wore on her left arm. Anja looked down at him, her wolf eyes savage, her fangs extended further than even she had ever seen them when not in wolf form.

"Bet you didn't predict that huh motherfucker!" Anja hissed savagely as she brought her K12 up and leveled it at his head. "This is for... this is for taking from me all I have ever loved! I'll find your family you Kavalian bastard! I'll find them and I'll skin every one of them alive for what you have done!"

Anja Leonidas began pulling the trigger on her K12 and didn't stop until four seconds later when the magazine ran dry. The Kavalian's head was no longer recognizable and his broad chest was perforated with twelve plus large caliber holes. She stood above him, her finger still pulling the trigger on the now empty weapon, until Atropos stepped up beside her and his large hand covered hers.

"Anja." He said softly. "My Queen... we must go!"

Anja turned her eyes up and looked at him. His eyes and fangs were still very visible and she saw worry in those dark eyes. Worry for her. Anja felt Miath move up behind her, his talons covered in blood, several long streaks down the left side of his muzzle where he had bitten three Militia troops in half. His psychic shield shimmered brightly, the matching shield around Anja responding to her bonded brother's closeness.

Sister?

Anja's head and eyes turned to look up at him as he dipped his head over her shoulder, his snout close to her, his massive body shielding her as his right wing curled around her and Atropos slowly.

Miath? Anja whispered within Mindvoice.

We... we must go my bonded sister. Miath spoke. Before more of these scum arrive.

Miath I don't know if I can...

Miath leaned his head closer and touched his snout to her forehead. *You must sister. If... if you are all that remains... Martin would expect you to carry on. You know this is what he would want. What all of you have spoken of in the past.*

Anja's eyes closed at the feelings of his smooth scales against her cheek and she nodded as the tears came once more. *You are... you are right.*

Let us leave this place and salvage what we can sister. Miath spoke softly. It is what we need to do now.

Anja reached up and stroked the underside of his muzzle as she blinked several times and turned to Atropos. "The others?"

"Already entering the spaceport!" Atropos answered. "We must go now! Admiral Omore is screaming for us that we are out of time."

"I intend to return Atropos!" Anja stated as her voice lost its soft edge and turned hard. "I will return and take back what is mine!"

Atropos nodded as he took her arm. "And I will be beside you when we do." He stated unequivocally. "For now... let us leave."

Anja nodded slowly and Atropos began pulling her towards the spaceport. Miath turned his head and let his grey eyes sweep across the promenade. Hadarian civilians were beginning to come out of where they had been hiding while the battle raged, wide eyed and still in a state of shock.

Be strong men and women of Hadaria. You will need much strength in the months ahead if you are to survive. Miath spoke softly.

Miath turned and followed Anja and Atropos.

The future of Hadaria had changed in only a few short moments, and that future did not appear to be bright.

RITAAH

Athani found her husband sitting off by himself on the large fallen tree staring off into the stars of the night sky. Her vertically slit feline like blue/green eyes spied him easily even in the darkness. She had been with Mican for the last several hours ignoring everything else that went on around her. Athani's own emotions were running a gambit all their own as she discovered she had a brother who she had never known about. A brother that had been used and discarded by their father just as she had been. She found Mican to be extremely intelligent and protective of her. He had known about her and Jalersi, but because of his situation in leading the escaped Kavalian biogenic clones, there was no way he could contact them and let them know what their father was truly doing. When he had found out she defected and married Resumar Leonidas Mican told her that he had had a party with Na'lia and their daughter to celebrate her escape and to hope that one day Jalersi would also have her eyes open.

Athani had only begun to drift when she felt the churning of Resumar's emotions along his MV shields. They were skills she was still discovering since becoming his wife, but she knew if she could feel them so easily something had to be wrong. Mican had seen this distraction in her and ended their reunion with a bear hug and a promise that they would sit more and try to discover a way to let Jalersi know. Athani had moved quickly now, Cemath telling her within Mindvoice that something was wrong and Resumar was shutting even him out. It was easy enough to find him, for while she had undergone biogenic treatments to rid herself of the

fur that normally covered a Kavalian female's body; she still retained the instincts and skills of their feline species. Her sense of smell was not as acute or developed as a pure blood Lycavorian, but it was enough when combined with her incredible eyesight to find him easily. That and the fact she would always be drawn inexplicably to his male wolf aura now that he had claimed her. Unlike Pusintin, who used his aura on her to elicit actions she could not control, Resumar used his aura to incite her to new levels of pleasure she had never known existed. As Athani came up behind him, she sensed something else radiating from her handsome husband. It was a sense of foreboding and sorrow. Her keen feline like eyes could just detect that he was also shivering, even though the temperature this night was relatively cool for a jungle planet.

"Resumar?" Athani whispered as she came up next to him and rested her hand on his shoulder. Athani's eyes grew wide when his head turned to face her and she saw that he had been crying. This stunned her, for she had never seen a man cry before and she knew immediately that something was terribly wrong.

"Resumar my love... what is wrong?" She gasped as he drew her into his embrace and buried his head in her abdomen. Athani didn't hesitate and she pulled his head tighter, dropping her cheek to the top of his dark hair, while his powerful arms crushed her to him. The tears had already come and gone she decided, for he simply held her body to him drawing deeply of her scent, and letting his love for her flow through the connection they had within Mindvoice. It was not something Athani had felt before this night, and it took her breath away with the intensity. Finally she took his head in her hands and drew his head back, looking at him with wide blue/green eyes. "Resumar... what?"

"My father is dead." Resumar stated flatly.

Athani's eyes grew even wider if that was possible and her intake of breath was very audible in the silent darkness around them. "What?" She finally gasped. "How... how could that be? How? How do you know this?"

"We... my family... we are able to sense one another within Mindvoice." He told her.

"You have told me this." Athani said. "But..."

"Though we can not communicate directly because of the distance I could still feel him. I can feel nothing from him now *Aryschanne*." Resumar spoke softly. "Even if he was seriously injured I would still feel his presence. That is how powerful he is. I feel nothing now. It is empty and... his presence is completely gone. My mothers and brothers and sisters are... they are in turmoil. Especially Andro. It is the only explanation. Nothing else could make them send out the tremors within Mindvoice that I am feeling. Not over so great a distance."

"My love... how... who would, who *could* kill your father!" Athani asked.

Resumar shook his head. "I don't know. He has many enemies."

"Resumar... we are talking about your father here!" Athani protested. "Who would dare attack him? No one is that foolish!"

"Whoever it is... they have succeeded where many have failed." Resumar said. "Which means they are a grave threat to us. I..." Resumar turned his head when he heard the snapping of branches and he saw the huge form of Avi making his way up the slight hill. It was hard not to discern the hulking Avatar, and while he usually moved with a grace many did not think he had, at the moment Avi was obviously not concerned about making noise. Resumar got to his feet holding Athani's arm as Avi trotted up and came to a halt.

-Resumar Leonidas... I... there is something you must know. Avatar 341 and I were monitoring coded transmissions and we intercepted... Avi stopped talking for a brief moment and Resumar thought he looked more human than he had ever looked before.

"My father is dead isn't he Avi?" Resumar spoke.

Avi's small red eyes met Resumar's. **-The Alpha Storm Alert went out sixteen point three minutes ago. You have felt his... his passing within Mindvoice haven't you Resumar Leonidas?-**

Athani looked up at her husband's face as he stood there silently. She could see the turmoil and grief in his eyes, yet behind those powerful emotions she could also see a unique kind of strength that Athani had never seen before. She had seen many strong men in her life, physically strong men anyway, but not until she had

been accepted so completely into the Leonidas family had she come to know the true meaning of strength. Strength of will; strength of purpose; strength of mind and body as well as love. She felt the tears come now for she had only known Martin Leonidas for a short time, yet even in that short time and regardless of the fact that she was Kavalian, he had accepted and treated her better than her own father had for so many years.

“What else did you learn Avi?” Resumar asked in a choked up raspy voice.

Avi looked at Athani for a moment his face emotionless. **–It was a coordinated effort of attacks by Kavalians of the Puma Bane Pride-** He spoke.

Athani gasped in shocked and her hands came up to her mouth. “No!” She hissed.

-Contact has been lost with your mothers on Kranek and Hadaria. Aricia has been seriously injured according to the reports. The Durcunusaan have had no contact with either your mother For'mya or Prime Minister Deia either. It appears right now that they struck in several locations within Sparta and even in The Wilds as well. Over a dozen of the Union's Drow outposts have fallen silent.-

“Andro?” Resumar asked as he saw his Uncle Vonis blurring through the trees towards him, Dario close behind with Mican and the biogenically altered Kavalian female Channa who had become his constant shadow as he taught her everything he could about her new bonded with Mirra.

-Avatar 341 was able to pick up several transmissions from the LEONIDAS II-Class Strike Cruiser HARBINGER only moments before I came up here to you. It appears your brother is enroute back to Earth. He was able to rescue the survivors from the Drow outpost on Iraruzu and was informed of the attack on Earth as he was returning to Kranek. The transmission stated that he would arrive in ten hours and that help was moving to Iraruzu-

Avi paused for a brief moment as Vonis and Dario came up to them, and Resumar saw Channa clinging to Dario's hand now. Mican moved up next to Athani without question.

“Help?” Resumar asked.

-VORTEX Cruiser 341's sensors are calibrated to a different quantum phase than normal sensors. 341 detected a massive spike in the quantum flux dimension field.-

“What... what does that mean?” Athani asked.

Resumar nodded. “How many Avi?” He asked.

-Based on the size of the spike... the entire Attack Wing- Avi answered. **–If this is the case, the circumstances for revealing their existence now must be dire-**

“Andro gave the order.” Resumar said. “And he is returning to Earth because he knows he must step forward.”

“Resumar I...” Vonis stammered.

“Cousin?” Dario gasped.

“Who has done this?” Mican demanded with real emotion.

Avi turned to look at him. **–Members of the Puma Bane Pride of Kavalians. That much has been confirmed from intercepted transmissions by Avatar 341-**

“My father?” Mican gasped with wide eyes of disbelief. “Has he... has he lost his mind? There can... there can be only be one response to...”

-Intercepted Netnews broadcasts have shown the battle live. It clearly shows several Kavalians, including your sister Athani Leonidas- Avi said.

“Jalersi!” Athani gasped. “Avi she wasn't...”

-The footage from the battle that was shown clearly showed General/Colonel Simpson and Anuk. Tarifa, Isra and Ardis. There was also your sister Jalersi and two Kavalian males shown. All of them were seen defending Anuk Simpson as she was treating your mother Aricia. We are continuing to monitor, but once I witnessed... once I saw Martin Leonidas fall I...- Avi stopped talking now and looked at Resumar.

“You can say it Avi.” Resumar spoke.

-I felt the need to come out here and tell you to comfort you- Avi replied.

“Avi... can I communicate directly with my brother on Spartan 11 from here?” Resumar asked.

-A minor adjustment to the transmission node to sync up the encryption I installed in your personal Com units is all that is needed- Avi answered.

“Can it be detected?” Resumar asked.

-Unlikely. It would require that Kavalian...- Avi tilted his head to the side as if hearing something no one could. **-It will be unnecessary now Resumar Leonidas-**

“What? Why?” Res asked.

-Avatar 341 is informing me that there is an incoming transmission from a Mark Two Neural Booster. It is being directed from the PILLAR OF FAITH- Avi told him. **-He is quite excited Resumar. He has not seen this level of Mindvoice power in one place since he left the Pralor homeworld-**

“Andro.” Resumar nodded as he broke into a run for the entrance to *VORTEX* Cruiser 341.

EARTH SPARTA OLD DISTRICT

Pian looked at the *Durcunusaan* soldier as he tore a strip of crimson cloth from the cape he wore and finished tying it around Pian's arm. He looked up at the tall Kavalian, his dark blond fur matted with dirt and stained with the blood of his Queen.

“Don't take that off until you get to a secure location!” The *Durcunusaan* troop shouted at him. “Either of you!” He looked at where another *Durcunusaan* was doing the same thing for Jiss. “We don't know how many Kavalians are here on Earth and we don't want you targeted by mistake!”

Pian nodded quickly, his combat senses still alert and active as his blue eyes scanned the area. “We will do as you say!” He barked. “How do you...?”

“You are killing your own kind with that 190 you got sir. If you were our enemy, you'd already be dead. And you... you are protecting our Queen!” The *Durcunusaan* looked at Anuk as she clenched her teeth and continued working on the inert form of Aricia on the ground. “Colonel?” He shouted at her. “Medivac is inbound!”

Anuk ignored him as intent on her task as she was. She had torn Aricia's upper body armor off her to find three entry wounds. Two of the projectiles had lost almost all velocity after hitting the edges of the body armor where they came together under the arm. They had only penetrated into Aricia's flesh perhaps an inch and Anuk was able to quickly use her fingers to pry them out. The third projectile however, that was trickier. It

had entered just under her armpit, the one area on the side that had no body armor. She must have had her arms in the air at the exact instant the Kavalian fired for him to have gotten this lucky. Based on the blood oozing from between her lips, the projectile no doubt hit at least one lung. Anuk had to move quickly before her healing system began to close the wound and heal her body around wherever the projectile may have ended up. Anuk tossed down the laser scalpel and looked at Jalersi.

“Jalersi... you have to help me!” She snapped.

Jalersi was no stranger to battlefield injuries and she had immediately begun helping Anuk as they took her body armor off. “Tell me!” She barked out, her sensitive feline ears still ringing from the many explosions that had gone off around her.

“I don’t have my normal medical bag! I need to reach in and find the slug!” Anuk yelled her own ears also ringing. “Her Lycavorian healing system will act quickly, so you have to hold apart the incision until I find the slug!”

Jalersi didn’t hesitate and reached out. The incision Anuk had made was almost three inches long and she gently used her fingers to pry open the wound further. Anuk lifted the portable scanner and held it over the wound and Jalersi heard her cuss. “What?” She gasped.

“It’s lodged against her heart wall!” Anuk snapped. “It went clean through one lung and nicked the other. It must have bounced off a rib to end up where it is!”

“Can you get it out?” Jalersi barked.

“If I try it could kill her!” Anuk answered.

“Do it!” The female voice spoke from behind them.

Anuk turned quickly knowing that no one was getting close to them with all the *Durcunusaan* pouring into the area. Her cerulean blue eyes grew wide when she saw Duewa.

“Duewa!” She exclaimed as she watched Thoti help lower Duewa to the ground next to her.

“Perform the procedure Anuk!” Duewa had to raise her voice slightly to be heard over the sounds of weapons fire all around them in the distance. “I will insure any damage that is done is healed.”

Anuk looked at her wide eyed. She knew Duewa had been turned only a few days ago and she still looked somewhat weak. “Duewa... are you sure? You are still weak and...”

Duewa nodded. “Yes. Thoti turned me... he did not kill me!” She replied. “I am weak... but I can still use my healing powers!”

Thoti leaned over and kissed her head, nuzzling her cheek and ear. “Do nothing foolish my mate!” He barked out. “And remain with Anuk and the others until they get Aricia back to safety!”

Duewa looked at him with those beautiful soft green eyes and nodded. “Go! Our children are safe and I am safe here!” She exclaimed. “Fache needs you more than I do right now!” Thoti nodded and in a silver/white flash the large dark furred wolf was sprinting off towards the sounds of the fighting. Duewa turned back to Anuk who was looking at her. “I made him bring me! Aricia may be the only Queen we have left alive and I will not allow her to die!”

“For’mya is with Deia!” Anuk exclaimed.

Duewa shook her head. “There is no answer from either of their details at the Senate Building.” She replied. “A *Durcunusaan* detachment was finally mustered and dispatched there moments ago! The Kavalians hit us in over half a dozen locations Anuk! They targeted many people and it appears they have succeeded in many cases!” Duewa looked at Jalersi who was staring at her. “I only state fact and...”

Jalersi shook her head. “It doesn’t matter!” She barked. “Let us save Aricia and then get her out of here before something more horrible befalls us and we lose the opportunity to make my father pay for his lies and deceit!”

Duewa nodded and looked at Anuk. “I will heal as you enter the wound!” She stated. “Jalersi... you must keep the two edges of the wound open. Anuk... you know what to avoid as you enter her chest cavity. We must be quick about it before her healing factor fully kicks in. With the pureness of Aricia’s blood, it will be three times as powerful as normal and even harder to compensate for!”

Anuk lifted the odd looking instrument with tapered plastic coated ends on seven inch long thin arms. “I’m ready!” She announced.

Duewa extended her hand over the top of where Anuk was going to enter Aricia’s chest and nodded. “Do it Anuk.” She said.

SPARTA OLD DISTRICT

Danny had finally changed back to human form, his uniform saturated in blood and fur from the seven or eight Kavalians he had slaughtered with his teeth and talons. He had never felt the rage seething through him right now before. It was a cold and calculated rage and anger. Daniel Simpson loved his blood brothers, but Martin had been his source of inspiration and strength through all these years together. The ties they had formed would never be broken, and as Danny's yellow outlined dark eyes swept over the area he was in, his wolf fangs fully extended and almost as long as they were in wolf form Danny allowed his eyes to fall on where almost twenty *Durcunusaan* troops were circling the area where Martin's body had fallen. The smell of plasma and burnt cinder and wood filled the air all around them, making it nearly impossible to pick out individual scents. He knew that many of the Lycavorians in the area would spend days trying to get the smell of death and blood from their nostrils. The plasma mortars the Kavalians had used had the nasty habit of rendering the Lycavorian sense of smell nearly impossible to use since it burned the very air around it, singeing the tiny hairs inside noses and such. He also knew from chatter on his implant that a *STRIKER AT* was inbound to their location to gather the remains of his brother's fallen body. He had no doubts they would treat it with reverent care as they took him back to the *Durcunusaan* base.

Daniel Simpson was also a Spartan by birth and upbringing, and like Martin he had embraced their heritage completely when they finally discovered who and what they were. He had lost a beloved brother, but now Danny needed to act as Martin would expect him to act. Officially there were nearly a dozen officers, who all outranked him within the Union, but all of them knew what he could do and that he was considered by the King as his only true brother and no one would dare challenge Daniel Simpson. His wolf eyes spied Fache nearby, kneeling on one knee, his face in his hands. His uniform was also splattered generously with blood, for like Daniel and roughly twenty-five others nearby, when Martin had fallen they had all gone into a terrible berserker like rage. Danny sprinted over to where Fache knelt and put his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Fache?" He spoke softly.

The Commander of the Royal Villa *Durcunusaan* Detachment for the last twenty years lifted his head and looked at Daniel. His own eyes and fangs were still visible and this close up Danny could see he was trembling with rage and shame at what he had allowed to happen. Fache came to his feet quickly. "Gen... General I must request..."

"Stow it!" Danny barked. "This is not your fault! This is no one's fault! The Kavalians have been planning this for some time and they had help!"

Fache's eyes narrowed. "Help?" He asked.

"It's the only way they could have gotten the plans on how we would respond from the main base!" Danny snapped. "If all the shouting on the COM I have been hearing is accurate, they've had teams hit at least six other locations across Sparta! I don't know what for! That is what I need you to find out!"

"General I..."

"Damn it Fache!" Danny snarled loudly. "This isn't over! They've killed... they've killed Martin! We need to make sure they don't kill anymore of his family! You call out the entire division if you have too! Mobilize every Spartan on Earth! I want every Leonidas within the city limits of Sparta covered like a *nubous* blanket five minutes ago! Joarl is reporting he has lost contact with the *Durcunusaan* details of both For'mya and Deia at the Senate building!"

Fache nodded. "Thoti dispatched a company there before coming here!"

"Send detachments to Gorgo and Riall's home first! If they came after Marty... then they probably went after Gorgo as well! Then add another two companies to the bunker where the children are!" Danny ordered. "This was a systematic attack against the Leonidas family and anyone even remotely connected to them! We need to find out how far it extends! Contact Panos, Lynwe, Selene, Tareif... all of them!"

"Who... who would help them to do this?" Fache nearly screamed. "What traitor to their species would take part in this?"

“When you find him or her Fache... you save them for us you hear me?” Danny snarled viciously. “We will show them how Spartans deal with traitors!”

As with all the Spartans, a cold and calculating anger now surged through Fache. He nodded his head and replaced his Spartan helm on his head securely. “Consider it done!” He snapped.

“Get over to the Senate Building and make sure For'mya and Deia are secure! Report to me when you are with them!” Danny said.

“General... Daniel... what are you going to do?” Fache asked.

Danny turned back to look at where the *Durcunusaan* were gingerly placing the remains of their King in a clean white sheet that they had somehow acquired. They were wrapping him tightly, so it appeared as if his body was in one piece even though they all knew it was not. Danny could see dozens of civilians standing around, some of them with bloodstains on their clothes, some of the older women weeping at the scene before them. Many of the older Spartans were keeping a loose perimeter around the *Durcunusaan* and allowing them to conduct themselves with some measure of honor and grace. Danny could see several Netnews people standing among the crowds, their remote drones sending out live footage to their main broadcasting stations.

“I’m going to take... I’m going to take my brother home.” Danny said softly.

BELID

As'hia opened her eyes slowly against the warmth of the sun and as she shifted slightly she felt the powerful arm pull her lithe half elven body closer, pressing her naked flesh against the equally naked flesh that was spooning her from behind. She felt the large hand squeeze her firm breast, her stiff nipple a burning hard point in the palm of the hand and as the memories of the last few hours came rushing back to her, a smile of complete and utter bliss washed over her face. She rested both her hands over that large one and pulled Lynom’s powerful arm tighter around her chest as she burrowed back against his naked body. What had begun as a simple kiss had quickly developed into the most sexual and scorching hot five hours of her young life, and As'hia never wanted it to end.

Six hours earlier

She remembered falling asleep in his embrace so As'hia wasn't surprised when she woke up still wrapped within those powerful arms. She was surprised at the position she was in as her dark eyes opened slowly, but as her eyes focused and she saw his face she didn't move for fear of waking him. It was easy for her to discern he was still sleeping by the rhythmic rise and fall of his broad chest. Sometime during their sleep she had shifted position, turning to face him and burying her face against the side of his thick neck. His verbena scent filled her nostrils and wafted delightfully to every portion of her mind. One of her legs was stretched over the top of his long legs, and she could feel his arm wrapped around her back, his large hand resting on her firm ass cheek. She lifted her head slightly and stared at his face, her wolf eyes easily picking up the contours of his strong jaw and medium sized lips. The bone spurs along his jaw were easy to pick out, but if anything they made him appear more handsome to her. She had seen him when he was angry, and the visage he presented with his vampiric fangs and the Immortal bone spurs was not something she would want directed at her. Yet resting peacefully as he was now, the bone spurs actually enhanced his rugged handsomeness to her. As'hia was half wolf, and since her mother was the Lycavorian, she inherited all of the traits of a female wolf. These traits included knowing when the scent of a male was telling her he was the one. Powerful female Alphas could easily detect this in the scent of the male they chose as their mates. Her mother told As'hia it was something different, sharper and more pungent. She had smelled this in her elven father and As'hia's mother had not hesitated when the confident and well-respected elven officer had asked to court her.

As'hia detected that from Lynom right now. His verbena scent was more pungent than any alpha wolf that had ever shown an interest in her. More distinctive than any elven officer who had asked to court her. No matter what had occurred over the last months, As'hia's wolf instincts were telling her, screaming at her actually, that this was the man who would claim her. Her mother had always told her, her elven father agreeing completely, that her instincts would almost always be right and to follow them no matter where they led her.

As'hia's wolf instincts had led her into the arms of this half Akruxian Immortal, and it had taken this long for those same instincts to beat her natural elven fear of Immortals out of her and allow her to see Lynom was very different. As'hia reached up with her hand and extended her index finger, slowly drawing it across his slightly parted lips. She wanted to taste those lips in the worse way, and she was no longer going to deny her instincts. She shifted slightly; lifting her lithe body further up on Lynom's chest and seeing his eyes flutter open. Before he knew what was happening or could say anything, As'hia lowered her lips to his and kissed him tenderly. Lynom's dark eyes flew open in surprise, his arms lifting off the ground in stunned shock, but he could not deny the seething desire her kiss was bringing out in him. Like his brother Tir'ut, Lynom had never been with a woman. Those on Kranek had returned to the old ways of the Akruxian Immortal society which frowned on sexual relations outside of true unions between partners. It was one of the reasons his father took his mother as his Blessed Wife so quickly after settling on Kranek. Unlike his brother however, Lynom had watched pirated Vid Movies from The Wilds and read books that described the art of kissing as well as many other items, so he at least had some idea of how to do these things. At the moment however, as he watched As'hia lift her face from his, he was very lost about what to do.

“As'hia... As'hia what are you...?” He stammered.

As'hia opened her dark eyes and looked at him while she licked her soft lips, savoring the taste of his lips and committing it to her memory. “Yummy!” She spoke seductively.

“As'hia are you feeling...”

As'hia grinned in the moonlight and Lynom's heart skipped several beats as her beautiful eyes sparkled. “Surprised you didn't I?” She spoke confidently.

Lynom's eyes were wide as he nodded quickly. “That... that is putting it mildly.” He said in response. “Why... why did you do that?”

“I wanted to taste your lips.” As'hia answered.

“Why?”

As'hia leaned her head forward and brushed her nose against his cheek gently, feeling the bone spurs press against her skin and feeling deliciously electric jolts hum through her because of it. “I can smell your desire for me Lynom.” She whispered.

Lynom was also not as dense as his brother. “I have... I have made that perfectly clear *Ssin'urn 'anon*. I do not understand what...”

As'hia took his face in her hands and met his eyes. She used her thumbs to traced his jaw line and rub over the tops of the bone spurs they could reach and she saw his cheeks twitch ever so slightly. “They are sensitive?” She asked him in curious surprise.

Lynom nodded slowly. “Yes... at times.” He answered.

“Like now?” As'hia asked teasingly.

“Yes like now!” He hissed feeling his blood beginning a slow burn. “What... what has gotten into you? This is not what I have come to expect from you *Ssin'urn 'anon*.”

“My mother always told me when I meet the man I will spend the rest of my days with... I will not be able to get the smell of him out of my mind.” As'hia spoke softly. “She said it would stay with me no matter where I went and no matter how far apart we were. It is part of how a female wolf chooses who she will mate with.”

“That is very... that is fascinating As'hia... but what does it have to do with...?” He began to speak.

“Don't you see you big Immortal fool?” As'hia exclaimed cutting off his words. “It's you! Ever since I smelled you that first time I haven't been able to get your scent out of my head!”

Lynom looked at her with wide eyes. “I... I thought you hated me?” He finally was able to spit out.

As'hia shook her two-toned blond/black hair. “That... that was my elven side battling with the wolf within me. Lycavorians are not as reserved as elves when it comes to expressing what they want or need. I was trying to resolve what one part of me wanted and the other feared Lynom.” She explained.

“*Ssin'urn 'anon*... I don't... I don't want one side of you.” Lynom said softly. “I want both sides of you. I don't want you battling your feelings or...”

As'hia put a finger to his lips and stopped his words once more. “My wolf side finally got my elven side to see that we both want you Lynom. I am stubborn and willful, and it took me this long to come to terms with how I feel about you.”

Lynom's eyes narrowed. "Do you make it a habit of interrupting everyone who is trying to talk with you?" He snapped.

As'hia grinned and nodded her head. "My mother says it was one of my most annoying traits when I was a child."

"It is still annoying." Lynom spoke.

"Are you going to complain about my willful attitude Lynom, son of Cha'talla, or are you going to..." As'hia's eyes flew open when Lynom suddenly sat up and his hands clamped on her hips. He covered her lips with his own and kissed her.

Oh... did he ever kiss her.

As'hia whimpered loudly as her arms went around his broad shoulders and she kissed him back. Her wolf blood ignited instantly at the new sensations ripping through her from just his kiss, and she wrapped her legs around his waist as he jerked her to the side and rolled over on top of her.

As'hia groaned as he deepened the kiss and she couldn't help her toes from curling in on themselves within her combat boots. No man had ever kissed her like this before and it was sending every one of her senses into orbit. She felt a familiar surge in her lower abdomen, and she became very wet between her thighs as his hands moved up the outside of her hips slowly, dragging his fingers along the fabric of the shirt she wore.

As'hia whimpered even louder as his hands came together over her chest and he lifted his upper body from atop her and with one powerful pull Lynom shredded her shirt from her exposing her naked breasts. That he did not stop kissing her registered resolutely in her mind and As'hia became even wetter. She began to pull at his own shirt urgently with her hands, basking in the divine sensations his kiss was causing. That was when his fingers dragged along the outside of her breasts and up along her shoulders until they came to rest on either side of her face. As'hia inherited very sensitive ears from her father and up until this moment in time, no male, whether Lycavorian or elven had ever paid enough attention to her elven ears. Lynom obviously had other intentions. When his fingers touched the tips of her two-inch high elven ears As'hia's eyes flew open and when he dragged those same fingers languorously down the outer ridge of her ears As'hia's lips tore away from his and her head flew back as she screamed in an orgasm the likes of which she had never experienced before.

"Aaarghhhhhh! Lynommmmm!" As'hia's voice echoed across the top of the mountain they were on.

Lynom watched her beautiful face as her eyes blinked rapidly in unrestrained bliss, her fingers digging into the back of his shoulders on his bare skin and no doubt leaving marks with the strength she was exhibiting. Her lush body bucked against him and he held her tightly, proud of his power over her and what he could make her feel. Lynom intended for it to be just the beginning. As'hia was the most beautiful thing in the universe to him now, and suddenly he understood what his father and brother saw when they looked at their Blessed Wives. She had already proven her strength of will by enduring what she had endured up until now. Lynom had every intention of erasing any memories of the horrors that had befallen her. He was going to love her with all that he was and not stop until she could scream his name no more. He watched as she slumped back to the blanket they were on, her chest rising and falling and making her firm breasts stand out proudly, her nipples begging for attention.

Lynom dropped his head between those proud mounds and dragged his tongue up between them tasting the sweat of her body and feeling her blood pulsing beneath that same flawless skin. "As'hia?" He spoke when he lowered his face back in front of hers.

Her head turned and her eyes focused on him. "You... you evil... evil Immortal bastard!" She hissed at him. Lynom's eyes grew concerned for a split second before her hands began pulling at his shirt even more frantically and she fastened her lips onto his intent on stealing his breath away. As he maneuvered his body so that she could finally pull the shirt off, he felt her hands drift along his sides and then across his broad chest and he heard her whine in need. "Stand up Lynom!" she gasped out.

Lynom hesitated for only a moment and then slowly got to his feet in front of her. He watched her lift her body to a sitting position and she began to frantically pull at his pants. As'hia was not going to be deterred and Lynom could only watch as she yanked down his pants and exposed his already hard fourteen-inch cock to her mouthwatering lips. As'hia gasped as her hands wrapped around the huge cock's base with barely a pause and she held it pointing straight out at her face. A fire unlike any she had ever felt swept through her as she gazed at all Lynom had to offer her. Her drenched pussy was once more becoming aroused even so soon after the crushing orgasm she had just experienced. Her fatigue pants were beyond soaked, and while she gripped

Lynom's massive cock in one hand she began to unfasten her own pants. Her wolf senses were more alive at this moment than they had ever been before. As'hia had always thought a male Lycavorian would be the one to make her feel these things with his aura, yet as she inhaled deeply of Lynom's verbena scent, the wolf blood in her was going mad. And her elven genes were simply screaming out in delight. She finally was able to kick off her pants and she looked up into Lynom's face, seeing his teeth clenched as she brought her other hand back to his cock and stroked him. She could feel the throbbing veins in his shaft, feel the enormous heat that his cock was putting off, and feel the wetness at the tip when precum oozed from the huge flared head. As'hia bent her head quickly and licked the head of his cock firmly, swirling her moist tongue all around the head tasting him, teasing him, and feeling his powerful legs tighten and go rigid. As'hia couldn't begin to put into words how badly she wanted to taste him completely. The vibrations and emotions she was feeling now were all new to her. The force with which she desired Lynom surpassed anything she had ever imagined she could feel. As she opened her lips to take his cock into her mouth, Lynom's hands gripped the sides of her head. Her eyes grew a little wider when she thought he was going to ram his massive tool into her throat, but his hands kept her from taking him into her mouth with gentle pressure instead and she glanced up at him, never releasing his thick cock from her hands.

"No!" Lynom hissed.

As'hia was all about need right now. "Lynom... Lynom I want... I want to taste you!" She gasped.

Lynom dropped to his knees in front of her quickly, her hands never releasing his or ceasing their stroking of his throbbing shaft and he looked down into her face, her bright eyes wide and staring at him. Even kneeling in front of her, because of his six foot five height he still towered over her. As'hia stared at him and saw the desire in his eyes for her, the need for her, but he shook his head. "Not like that!" He rasped out the words. "Not yet!"

"Lynom I want..." As'hia stammered. She wanted this man more than any man she had ever met and he was denying her. Lynom released her face and quickly reached down grasping her ass cheeks in his hands and easily lifting her into his arms with a yelp of surprise from her. As'hia instinctively wrapped her arms around his shoulders, her eyes wide in heated passion. Lynom looked at her, his normally dark eyes now changed to vampire cobalt blue and gazing at her with possessive fervor. It was a look that caused As'hia's heart to skip a beat with its intensity. Not out of fear or distrust, but because she felt the same thing looking at him. She glanced down between their bodies quickly when she felt the enormous head of his pulsating cock brush against her moist opening. She looked back up into his eyes quickly, the fire in her blood almost unbearable. "Lynom... damn you I..."

Lynom shifted his hips slightly and As'hia's eyes nearly exploded out of her head as half of his massive cock pushed its way inside her and she sank onto him with agonizing slowness. As'hia's head crashed forward into his shoulder as he began to lean forward, every pleasure center in her body now screaming out in unabashed delight. She gripped his broad shoulders as her body convulsed and shuddered in another staggering orgasm, her juices coating his cock in copious amounts. It occurred to her somewhere in her sexually charged mind that because she could not remember being raped by the Immortals when she first came to this place, Lynom was the largest man she had ever seen let alone slept with. Half his wonderful cock filled her more than any man she had accepted into her bed in her young life and she was exploding all over his dominating shaft with only a portion of him inside her. As'hia didn't release him, clinging to his body shuddering in the grips of the breath stealing orgasm, as he lowered her to the blanket beneath them drawing his legs up so that his knees were bent and supporting his weight. He could have released her at any time, impaled as she was upon his enormous cock; Lynom however loved the feel of her supple body and skin against his.

Lynom for his part was struggling to keep his control, but it was a losing battle. As'hia's velvet warmth and the tightness of her pussy around his cock was almost too much. He could feel her pussy seizing around his cock, her sweet juices running down his cock shaft, and it was all he could do to keep from erupting within her right now. She was clinging to him as if her life depended on it, her tightness trying to draw him in more.

"*Ssin'urn 'anon... Ssin'urn 'anon... I can't...*" Lynom gasped into her elven ear.

As'hia was covering the side of his face and neck with butterfly kisses and nibbles from her wolf fangs. Her breasts were crushed against his chest, her stiff nipples burning points against his already hot skin. "All... all of you Lynom... my love!" As'hia gasped finally. "I want... I want all of you! *Nubou lae* Lynom! *Nubou lae!*" As'hia reached down with her hands and grasped his powerful ass cheeks in her hands. She turned her

wolf eyes on him and Lynom swore they were the most beautiful dark orbs he had ever seen. “Make me... make me yours Lynom!” She gasped out.

Lynom remembered then something his father had told him many years ago.

“Never refuse something from the woman who has claimed your heart my son.” Cha'talla had told him and Tir'ut both. *“Never deny them for they will be your strength, your future and your life.”*

Lynom then did as As'hia had asked him.

As'hia's eyes rolled into the back of her head and her lips parted as she howled out her heavenly enchantment in the soul robbing plunge of the remainder of Lynom's massive cock into her depths. The instant she felt his large, swollen balls come to rest against her upturned ass the orgasm started deep in her belly and cascaded outward to every portion of her body. She felt Lynom's vampiric fangs sink into the flesh of her neck and she could do nothing but clutch him in otherworldly bliss as he fed on her blood, increasing the depth and intensity of her orgasm to a level As'hia never thought could exist. She felt his massive cock balloon inside her and then his searing hot come was erupting into her depths with the force of a volcano, adding to her own sinful pleasure.

As his come filled her, As'hia suddenly found herself awash within the confines of Lynom's mind, and she saw everything he was. She saw and felt everything that she meant to him, and this only added to her overwhelming sense that she had found the man who would be the center of her life for centuries to come. This was what her mother had told her she might find someday in the future, only events had insured she found it much sooner than she had ever hoped for. She felt his arms tighten around her, drawing her body even closer if that was possible, and As'hia knew. She knew in the midst of the horrors she had experienced in the last months, As'hia had found her idyllic man, and he had been in front of her all this time.

Present time

As As'hia relived the last few hours and held Lynom's hand to her breast, she decided she had never felt more secure in all her life. He hadn't gotten soft after that first explosion into her, and for the next three hours Lynom had worshiped her like some sort of goddess. By Lynom's third orgasmic explosion into her, her half-elven body had fully adjusted to his enormous size and she felt nothing but perfect pleasure. Not once in that entire three hour lustful period had his thick Immortal cock left the warmth and tightness of her pussy. It was almost as if she had not stopped coming, like she was experiencing one cataclysmic orgasm after another. Her orgasms had all rolled together one after the other and by the time they had stopped and could not continue, no matter that they both wanted to, As'hia knew it would only get better through the years. She had many more things she wanted to do to him, and he had promised to memorize and explore every contour of her body with just his tongue.

As'hia wondered briefly what her family would think if they could see her now. Her mother and grandparents on her mother's side she knew would only be happy for her and what she had found with Lynom. They would be able to smell his devotion and love for her, and Lycavorians were far more accepting of interspecies marriages and unions because they let their instincts and senses guide them when it came to most relationships. Her father and her father's parents, As'hia did not know how they would react. Her father no doubt would see how Lynom treated her, how he adored her, and he would eventually come to accept him. Her traditional elven grandparents however, they were another story. They would probably... As'hia felt Lynom's lips and nose slowly nuzzle the back of her elven ear, and she sighed in utter and complete happiness, thoughts of her grandparents quickly fading away as Lynom's touch ignited her blood once more.

“What are... what are you thinking *Ssin'urn 'anon?*” He whispered into her ear as he pulled her even tighter against his hard, warm and powerful body.

As'hia looked out over the top of the mountain they were on and could just make out the sun as it rose from behind the mountains in the distance. It hadn't yet begun to lift above the mountaintops and it was giving off a light gray like background across the sky. Wrapped as she was in Lynom's arm, it was going to be the most beautiful sunrise she had ever seen.

“I’m trying to determine how I will tell my elven grandparents that I am head over heels in love with a man who is half Immortal.” As'hia replied honestly. “And that he makes my wolf and elven blood sing at just his simple touch.”

“As with Tir'ut and Normya... many will look at us as if we are odd and out of place.” Lynom said softly. “No doubt they will call you names for associating with me.”

As'hia turned in his strong arms until she faced him. She slipped her arms under his, spreading her hands out on his powerful back and making sure her breasts pressed firmly against his broad chest. She curled her leg up over the top of his and felt his thigh press against her deliciously sore but still semi-aroused pussy. The thin strip of black hair above her pussy was matted with their combined juices, but neither of them cared in the least.

“They can call me anything they like.” She told him as she used her fingers to trace his jaw and rub the tips of his bone spurs. “It won’t matter in the least to me. I have you and that is all that matters.”

“They will think you are with me for other reasons.” Lynom spoke.

As'hia grinned wickedly. “Well... I *am* addicted to you now.” She stated in a slow and seductive voice dripping with need and desire. “I’ll never be able to get enough of you... my Immortal Master.”

Lynom rolled his eyes. “*Ssin'urn 'anon*... that is not even funny to talk about.”

“It’s true though.” As'hia stated confidently. “After what you have made me feel... I want no one else. I will need you all the time. I want you all the time. Everyday if I can manage it!”

“Don’t you think that is just a little unrealistic As'hia? Everyday? You will grow tired of me.” Lynom asked with a grin.

“I’m half wolf Lynom. I’m a very sexual and passionate woman.” As'hia answered him evenly. “And I will never grow tired of what you make me feel. What’s wrong Immortal... not up to the task?”

Lynom chuckled now and pulled her closer. “I will show you just how up to the task I am *Ssin'urn 'anon*.” He said.

As'hia was smiling as she took his face in her hands and once more she used her thumbs to stroke his bone spurs as she simply gazed at his features. Yes... he was the most handsome man she had ever met and he was all hers now. As'hia found she didn’t care what others would think... they would never know what it was that had brought them together. They would never know what he had done to safeguard her and the risks he had taken for her. And they would never know what Lynom could do to her in their bed. As'hia decided she may not have been addicted to him as those females elves they had left behind were addicted to the Immortals that had broken them, but she doubted very much after experiencing what Lynom had made her feel, she could ever feel the same for any man.

“You will have to teach me your language.” As'hia finally spoke.

Lynom smiled. “That is simple enough.” He brought his hand up and tenderly stroked her elven ear. “We are connected now *Ssin'urn 'anon*. All you need do is reach out within the many tremors of Mindvoice and touch my thoughts and you will know everything I know.”

“How did you become so strong like that within Mindvoice?” As'hia asked him.

“My mother.” Lynom answered immediately. “She was one of the few who the Empress Aikiro allowed to study Mindvoice extensively. When you combine her skills and the natural shielding ability of my father, all Akruxian really, Tir'ut and I and our younger brothers all have developed this ability. My mother was a taskmaster when she was schooling us.”

“And this allows you to communicate even though we are so far away?” As'hia asked.

Lynom nodded. “To a large degree yes. Tir'ut and I need help to speak as we do, and usually he would draw from my father’s dormant abilities when he did. My father is far stronger in Mindvoice than he lets anyone but my mother see. He is still a traditional Akruxian Immortal to a large degree, and he has not developed his Mindvoice abilities to what they could be. Now that Tir'ut has found Normya Leonidas, it is so much easier for us. Normya is even stronger in Mindvoice than Tir'ut because of who her parents are, and this only makes Tir'ut stronger.”

“So you can feel him even now?” As'hia said.

Lynom nodded. “Like Tir'ut I keep my shields very high most of the time. I have not tried to communicate with him since the day before yesterday. They were preoccupied with what happened to Zarah Leonidas and the others of *Darthirii ilhar* Dysea’s family and I do not want to distract him.”

“*Dar... darthirii ilhar?*”

Lynom smiled. “Elf Mother.” He answered.

“So I can see within your thoughts?” As'hia asked.

“I will hold nothing back from you *Ssin'urn 'anon*.” Lynom stated. His eyes lifted quickly and he looked at the sky before looking back at her. “We have two hours before the sun is fully up. Do you wish to see all that I am *Ssin'urn 'anon* my love?”

As'hia nodded her head quickly pressing her hands tighter to his face. “Oh yes!” She exclaimed.

Lynom pressed his forehead to hers and drew her body tighter to him. “Then let me show you who I am.”

SPARTA

SPARTAN SENATE BUILDING

The Spartan Senate Building was unique in its design. When it was first determined that King Leonidas was going to be spending six months of every year within the City of Sparta, it was also determined that the senior government officials would need to follow him to Earth on a rotating schedule. The Prime Minister and the top four or five officials would come to Earth each time he did, effectively making Sparta and Earth the secondary capital of the Lycavorian Union. When this was decided, it was also decided to build a new large single story addition to the permanent ten stories of Spartan Senate Building already standing. This section would be much more heavily fortified and guarded for it would house the senior leaders of the Union and their offices. It was designed like their offices on Apo Prime and it was done in a single story version to maintain the décor of Sparta.

The six foot three, two hundred and twenty-six pound *Durcunusaan* officer who burst in the front entrance of the Senate Building was a new *Pentekostyes*. His name was Jomann, and he had just recently received his promotion to Captain and completed the grueling eighteen month training course that all new *Durcunusaan* officers went through. He was only twenty-five years old, still very much a child in the eyes of many older Lycavorians, but his rise through the ranks was without question. He was the oldest pureblood son of his parents, his father a Lycavorian Spartan from Apo Prime and his mother a young Spartan woman born and raised in Sparta. Jomann's father was among the eight hundred Spartan Shock troops who had initially come to Earth with Vistr and helped to defend and hold the line with their King. He was a powerful thousand year old Alpha wolf who now held the rank of General/Lieutenant and commanded three complete Divisions based here on Earth. His father had met his mother on his first trip to Sparta, three months after first arriving, and as the saying goes lightning struck instantly. The flowing hair and traditional nature of the proud Spartan females was something that caused many Lycavorians to flock to Sparta in the hopes of finding mates. His father got lucky, as he was among the first able to go there. He had met his mother outside a small café, and her blond hair and stunning blue eyes had caught his attention right away. Her two hundred year old body was still as supple and firm as when she was a child, and she had never taken a mate. At least until his father pronounced he was going to claim her on the first day he met her, and then for the next seven months had courted her endlessly. His persistence, honor and respect was what finally wore her down and won over her family as well as her.

Jomann was the oldest of their four offspring, for they had not wanted to wait to have children. Even to this day, their love for each other was an obvious thing in the manner they treated each other and how they acted together. Jomann had been born here in Sparta, born and raised. There was never a question of the profession he would take, and he followed in his father's footsteps into the Union military. He had started out as a eighteen year old enlisted Spartan, but a single battle at the beginning of that war had seen him granted a field promotion to Junior Lieutenant and Jomann hadn't looked back. By the end of the war he was a Senior Lieutenant and the men under his command had not suffered a single KIA the entire rest of the war even though being involved in every major ground offensive staged. The men who served under him, many of them grizzled older veterans of many battles with the High Coven, would follow him up to and through the Gates of Perdition if he was leading them. King Leonidas had made it a point to instill in his officers that leaders could be made, but leaders of men were born. Like his father before him, Jomann was born to be a leader.

His graduation from *Durcunusaan* Training and subsequent assignment to the Earth was a crowning achievement in his budding career and Jomann fully intended to take advantage of it. He had inherited a powerful Mindvoice ability from his parents and his ultimate goal one day was to hopefully become bonded to a dragon and become part of an even more elite group within the Union Military. He wanted to be part of a Bonded Pair and perhaps one day serve with the famed *Mjolnir's Hand*. Jomann had taken command of the *Durcunusaan* Senate Detail only six short months ago, and even though he did not know it then, that posting would one day lead him to a status and position Jomann had never considered. It was a posting that would see him rise up and steal the heart of a Princess of the Union and become the Captain and closest friend of one who would be King. It would also see him realize his dream of one day becoming a Bonded Pair.

None of that was anywhere in his mind at the moment.

Jomann had rallied part of his DSD force from the barracks and immediately began issuing orders to them as news and frantic calls began to sound over the radio implants about the battles taking place all over Sparta. Jomann was a natural leader, and he knew that each individual person had a role to play in the larger scheme of things. He did not wish to go rushing into battle, though it usually ended up coming to him he had found during the Evolli War. Each part of the whole had a role to play, and protecting the Senate was his role and that of his men. He had found sixteen of his men lounging around the barracks when the alerts began to sound and grabbing them up they began to make their way to the Senate Building to secure whatever Union senators were in residence at the time. Jomann began barking orders immediately upon entering the main lobby entrance even as civilian clerks and many visitors scrambled to get out of his way and that of his men.

“Pheas! Thol! West entrance!” Jomann barked out. “Lior! Mosaic! East side! No one gets in or out!”

The civilian aide to a senior Senator strode up to Jomann as if he hadn't a care in the world while Jomann used hand signals to direct the rest of the men with him. All of them had managed to leave the barracks with their Mark IV ArmorPly, though only a few had managed to grab their 190s from the weapons rack. The rest of them had their K12s out and very visible, including Jomann.

“What is the meaning of this Captain?” The aide barked. “You know weapons are not allowed to be displayed within the Senate Building! You...”

Jomann turned his dark, ocean blue eyes on the aide. “Where is the Prime Minister and Queen For'mya?” He barked cutting off the man. “Have any Kavalians tried to enter?”

“Kavalians?” The man snapped indignantly. “Captain you are scaring those civilians in this building with... urkkhgg!”

His words died as Jomann's hand clamped on the front of his perfectly manicured shirt and he yanked the man closer to him, baring his wolf fangs and his eyes now fully changed. “The King is dead you fool!” Jomann snarled viciously. “He has been assassinated by Kavalian Commandos! Have you no idea what is going on outside these walls? Where is the Prime Minister and Queen For'mya?” Jomann lifted his K12 and placed the large barrel against the man's head. “Answer my questions now and do not waste my time anymore!”

The man's eyes were huge as he pointed to the rear of the main lobby. “In... they are in... her office!” He stammered. “In the secure... in the secure zone!”

“Get everyone out of this building now!” Jomann snapped. “The Kavalian dogs are hitting us all over the city and we don't know where else they will strike! Get these people out of here! This building is a prime target! Move fool!”

Jomann shoved the man aside and motioned to half of the remaining men behind him. “You are with me!” He barked. “Lidias... take the others and begin getting everyone out of the building! Move quickly... an attack could come at any moment!”

Jomann saw his men nod and begin to sprint across the lobby in different directions as he made his way to the other side of the huge lobby entrance behind the main reception area. Six of his men were standing by the large metal double doors which would open into the new addition of secure offices for senior senators and the Prime Minister. One of his men was stabbing the control panel with his fingers as Jomann came up.

“My code is not working Captain!” He barked.

“Try the emergency activation code!” Jomann snapped.

The man stabbed in another set of numbers and digits and shook his head. “Negative!”

“*Sibfla!* That ain't good!” Another of his men spoke as he checked the action on his 190.

Jomann thought quickly. All of them had Level Nine Security Clearances and with few exceptions, they could open any door within the senate building if they so chose too. "Is it not accepting the code?" He asked.

"It's accepting it sir... but the door isn't working!" The man spoke. "It's like the releases have been disengaged or something!"

Jomann blinked. "The doors should have opened the moment the alert sounded for quick exit of any in the office area!" He snapped. "Do a diagnostic?"

The man pounded the console again and shook his head quickly. "The diagnostic shows the lock release is disengaged!" He snapped turning to look at Jomann. "That's the only reason our codes won't work!"

"Anicetus... the only way to disengage the computer Mag locks is from inside the office control center!" Jomann said.

The senior enlisted man looked at him and nodded. He had served with the young Captain since he entered the Union military and when Jomann had told him he was applying for the *Durcunusaan* Lidias had applied as well. The seven hundred year old *Enomotarch* knew an exceptional officer when he saw one. "Yes sir!"

"*Nubou!*" Jomann spat turning to one of the others. "Nusa do you have explosives?" He asked.

The *Durcunusaan* troop grinned and reached into the small knapsack he always wore on his field equipment. "When have you known me not too sir!" He spoke pulling out a several small circular devices.

Jomann nodded. "Blow it! Blow it now!" He snapped.

It took the experienced soldier only fifteen seconds to slap the four disc shaped devices on the double doors at each corner. Each small disc contained exactly one kilogram of the newest explosive substance the Union had. It was similar to C-4 explosive which originated here on Earth many hundreds of years ago. The discs were magnetic and attached easily to the door. He touched the small detonator in the top of each disc until all of them showed small blinking red lights. "Set!" He barked as the all moved back several meters to either side of the door.

"Do it!" Jomann barked.

"Firing!" Nusa exclaimed as he touched the single button on his wrist control.

The four explosions went off simultaneously, each kilogram of explosive NX18 material directed inward by the shape of the disc. Each disc succeeded in severing the sealing control rods for the door that extended into the wall. This was a bunker door, and the sealing control rods were no where near as thick as the rods for a bunker door. As the low rumble washed over the lobby, civilians screamed and began moving even quicker for the main doors into the building. The large double doors were blown inwards, torn from their support rods with little grace or gentleness. Smoke from the explosions mixed with the dust and debris of the door tearing sections of the wall away with it as the now twisted and bent doors came to rest inside the office area lodged against the reception desk for the office area.

"Go!" Jomann barked bringing up his K12 as he turned the corner and led his men through the smoke and dust without hesitation.

What they saw inside the secure office area brought them up in horror as the dust and smoke cleared quickly because of the air circulators operating within this section of the senate building. There were probably fifty offices in this section of the building, most of them for the many senators who chose to maintain such offices here when the King was in residence on Earth. It rotated every six months on which senators would have the offices in this section, but since the majority of them genuinely liked and respected the King, there was no infighting between them. In the twenty years this part of the building had been in use, nearly all of the thousand senators that made up the Union had been here at least once. Depending on how many senators were in residence each day was harder to determine, but there had to be close to a hundred staff members at any given time of the day.

What Jomann and the others saw were bodies. Dozens of bodies sprawled about in death, their blood staining the floors where they had fallen, or decorating the walls around them. Just in the entry foyer here Jomann counted nearly fifteen men and women who had been slaughter like cattle. Many of them were in positions that indicated they had no idea what had hit them, but it was obvious to see all of them had been riddled with weapons fire.

"Left and right! Anicetus take the right side!" Jomann hissed out. "Weapons free! Watch your fire! Sweep back to the Prime Minister's office! Go! Go!"

Jomann started down one side of the foyer entrance with three others while the rest headed down the opposite side. This area of the building was set up in such a way that the vast majority of offices were on the outer wall, allowing many to have windows that overlooked the river or park on either side. The center was a mixture of small gathering areas with couches and chairs and a single indoor water fountain surrounded by flower beds. There were bodies everywhere, some sprawled over the chairs and couches, some half in and half out of office doorways. Jomann's eyes were wide as they moved quickly down their side. Whoever had come through here was lethally trained, for many of the wounds were head shots and instantly critical even to a Lycavorian. Jomann and his team could also see the bodies of at least half a dozen of their *Durcunusaan* brothers and sisters lying where they had begun to put up a fight, most of them reacting and dying with their weapons in hand. They ignored the bodies, not stopping to check for wounded as they had only one goal right now. Secure the Prime Minister and Queen.

Two minutes later they met Jomann's other team by the single door at the very end of the building. It led into the largest office in this section of the building and the door was jammed open by the body of one of Deia's senior aides. It kept attempting the close but would slid back when it struck his body. Jomann felt cold fear grip him as he saw the bodies of Deia's personal two member *Durcunusaan* detail sprawled on the floor in the aide's office by his desk. He stepped gingerly over the body of the aide and into the outer office, his men following quickly and efficiently, spreading out in the large anteroom. The door to Deia's office was open and Jomann motioned forward with two fingers and then pointed at himself and Nusa. They all nodded and Jomann sprinted into Deia's office, his K12 sweeping back and forth around the room. The massive monitor on the west side of the office was tuned to the Netnews and playing in the background, and Jomann's eyes grew wide in horror when he saw the Prime Minister slumped against the far wall, blood pooling the floor around her inert body.

"*Nubou!*" Jomann cursed as he rushed to her side. "Cover!"

The other *Durcunusaan* in the eight member team spread out sweeping Deia's huge office and checking the several rooms that branched off from it. Jomann kneeled next to Deia's body and saw the two projectile wounds to her chest. The front of her tan jumpsuit was saturated in blood, staining it a dark red almost copper color. Jomann reached out and placed two fingers gingerly against Deia's neck. His dark blue eyes grew wide then.

"Lysandra!" He roared turning to look at the lone female *Durcunusaan* in this portion of his team. She also happened to be a qualified medic trained by Colonel Anuk herself. He looked at her as she dashed to where he was. "I have a pulse! It's very weak!"

The female Lycavorian began tearing at the front of Deia's jumpsuit. "Two entry wounds!" She barked. "Large caliber! Look like..." She looked to the side and saw the small glittering casing next to Deia's body. She reached down and picked it up. "Captain!" She hissed holding it up. "Her wounds are from a K12 Magnum!"

"Can you do anything?" Jomann hissed.

Lysandra tossed down the casing. "I didn't have time to grab my bag... but I will do what I can!"

"She is the Prime Minister!" Jomann shouted. "Do more!" He stood up and lifted his finger to his jaw, tapping it urgently. "*Durcunusaan* Nine Four to *Durcunusaan* Command!"

"Jomann!" Anicetus's voice and the tone of it caused Jomann to turn. "The Queen is missing!" He barked out. "Queen For'mya is not here!"

"That's not possible! She was in here with the Prime Minister!" Jomann barked.

"We've swept the entire office! She's gone Jomann!" Anicetus spoke with wide eyes.

"***Durcunusaan Command... go Nine Four!***" The voice burst into Jomann's ear implant.

"Jomann... look!" Lysandra snapped. Jomann turned and looked at where she was pointing next to Deia's body. He knelt down quickly again where there was another few drops of blood and bits of blond fur. He dipped his fingers into the blood and fur and drew them up to his nose.

Every man or woman within the ranks of the *Durcunusaan* were expert trackers, and all of them knew the scents of the King and Queens without question. Jomann drew his fingers back.

"It's the Queen." He announced holding up his fingers. "And she was in wolf form!"

"***Durcunusaan Command to Nine Four!***" Sounded once more.

"Captain!" Nusa's voice caused Jomann to stand up with the urgency in it. He looked at the man.

"You found her!" He exclaimed.

Nusa shook his head. “Captain... the entrance to the underground bunker is open. It has been used recently and there are blood stains leading into the tram tunnel!”

“She’s alive then!” Jomann barked.

“I detected Laustinos’s scent and at least a dozen others Jomann.” Nusa spoke. “None of them Lycavorian or elf!”

“Kavalian!” Anicetus exclaimed. “It has to be! They took For'mya! They took the Queen!”

Jomann tapped his jaw without thinking. “Nine Four to Command! We have a...”

“Bombs!” The new voice rose above his and Jomann whirled to see Deia’s eyes fluttering open.

“Destroy... cover... escape! Took... For'mya... must get out! Betrayed... dog Laustinos! Must...”

Lysandra allowed her to slump against her body armor as she looked up at Jomann. “She’s got severe internal injuries Captain! And I’m pretty sure one of the projectiles severed her spine! She’s dying! We need to get her to King Yulu Hospital!”

“She said bombs!” Anicetus snapped. “Cover their escape!”

Jomann’s eyes went wide. “*Nubou lae!* They must have rigged the building to explode!” He turned back towards the way they had come. “We’re too far!” he turned back to Deia and knelt in front of her. “Prime Minister!” He snarled. “Prime Minister... how long?”

Deia’s eyes fluttered open once more, blood leaking from between her lips. “Must... must hurry!”

The first rumbling brought all of them to their feet and they turned back towards the main entrance of the Senate building. The next explosion made the building shudder violently and then they began to come very quickly.

“Into the tunnel!” Jomann screamed turning to bend over to pick up Deia.

“Captain... if you move her it could kill her!” Lysandra shouted.

“If I don’t we all die!” Jomann screamed back. “Forgive me Prime Minister!” He said as he lifted Deia’s bloody body into his arms. “Go! The tunnel! It’s our only chance!”

Jomann led his team towards the massive wall of bookcases as the rolling thunder got closer and closer. He watched as Anicetus and Nusa entered the tunnel first followed by Lysandra and the rest just as the concussive force of the chain of explosions picked him up and physically tossed him and Deia the last few meters into the mouth of the tunnel. Two more explosions sounded and then the whole of the Senate Office Building, all ten stories of it came raining down on the section they were in.

In covering their escape Laustinos and his Kavalian allies killed over a thousand men and women with the destruction of the Senate Office Building. The death toll would take weeks to compile as the remains were dug through. It also succeeded in burying the only knowledge of For'mya’s fate beneath ten stories of concrete and steel. It would be days before this information was known... and by then it would be too late.

“I have done some things that I am not proud of son. I’ve hurt people I did not mean to hurt. It was not done on purpose by any means, but I did them regardless.”

“Do you regret these things father?”

“You will find there is very little I regret Androcles. That is the same as living in the past and it is something I will not do no matter what. I did what I did because ultimately it saved more lives than it cost.”

“Why are you telling me this now father?”

“Someday in the future, you may have to make those same choices Androcles. I might now be around to ask advise from, and it will be all you. Someday you might have to cause others pain in order to discover the truth of something. Better to end up having to say you’re sorry you did what you did than you’re sorry you did nothing.”

“Why did you decide to do what you did those times father?”

"I hate to lose boy."

CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

KRANEK ULU *SCIMITAR*

"Report!" Sa'sur screamed as she gripped the sides of her command chair to keep from falling out. That last barrage of Gauss Cannon fire had strained the *SCIMITAR*'s shields in their aft quarter as Sa'sur barked orders to maneuver, and the battering they had taken had sent half a dozen crewmen sprawling.

"Aft ventral shields down to thirty-six percent!" The officer who acted as her XO barked from the station he stood at. "We have power disruption in the starboard aft quarter and Type One turrets are offline! Seven blown power conduits have caused main power to fluctuate on decks nine through fourteen! They're beating the *sibfla* out of us Captain!"

"We're buying *NORMYAS LIGHT* the time she needs!" Sa'sur snapped. "What about our Mark 22s?"

Zeria turned her head only slightly from where she was frantically trying to track and direct all of the *SCIMITAR*'s fighters. "Three *GREAT SOULS* destroyed! Two more heavily damaged and out of the fight!" She barked out. "The other three have moved out of Mark 22 range!"

"*Nubous* cowards!" Sa'sur snarled.

"Captain... Captain I'm detecting multiple unknown Quantum signatures! They are appearing all over! Sensors are detecting what appears to be over a hundred Union fighters and fighter/bombers that have just jumped into the system and have begun attacking the Kavalian ships!" Zeria screamed turning to face her.

Sa'sur turned to look at her. "Union Fighters jumped into the system! How? From where?"

Zeria shook her head excitedly. "I'm detecting no ships within ten light years of this system Captain!" Her eyes grew wider and she leaned closer to the three screens arrayed around her. "Captain... I'm detecting over sixty Kavalian missiles inbound! *Son vada carians!*" She whirled in her chair once more. "Captain... all of them are targeted on us!"

Sa'sur's lips curled up into a half smile of fateful events. "Got their attention I guess!" She muttered coming to her feet. "Helm... hard to starboard! Give me aft starboard dock thrusters at seventy percent! Put our port side to the missiles! Weapons... prepare saturation barrage on all point defenses! Recharge and fire at will!"

"Captain!" The XO barked turning to look at her. "We need to move!"

Sa'sur shook her head firmly. "We have to protect *NORMYA'S LIGHT!*" She barked. "I will not allow them to kill anymore of Andro's family!"

"We won't get them all Captain! And they are landing troops as we speak!" The man snapped.

"Then we will go down fighting!" Sa'sur barked. "Just like our King!"

The XO blinked, took a deep breath and nodded his head as he turned back to his duties. "Damage Control Teams at the ready! Let's make sure we stay alive long enough to at least put more of a hurting on them!" He snapped turning back to his station. "How long?"

"Forty-eight seconds until impact!" Zeria shouted.

"Give me full power to port side ventral and dorsal shields!" Sa'sur snapped now. "Over charge them with power from the secondary emitters if you have too! Close all bulkheads and prepare to activate atmospheric force fields! We..."

The COM officer came to his feet and turned to look at her. "Captain I have an incoming Spartan Secure transmission! It's using Alpha Priority War Channel 11!"

"Andro?" Sa'sur asked instantly.

"Admiral Thodias!"

"Put him up!"

The holo imager shimmered to life instantly. "Sa'sur! What are you doing?" Thodias snapped.

"What I'm supposed to do! Make it quick Thodias. Why aren't you evacuating the Royal family?" Sa'sur barked.

“Dysea’s statement to me was simple and clear!” Thodias announced. “We aren’t fucking running! I’m moving back into high orbit and turning to engage the second fleet group! Where did these fighters come from Sa’sur?”

Sa’sur chuckled. “I have no idea, but they are welcome to join our fight! We...”

“Captain! Second incoming on Alpha Priority 11!”

“Thodias stand by!” Sa’sur nodded to the COM officer and the second holo disc came to life. Sa’sur expected someone from Earth but suddenly she was looking at the helmeted face of a young female elven pilot.

“Who the hell are you?” Sa’sur snapped.

“Captain... there is no time to explain!” The answer came. “I am Commander Falarie of the 3rd *RAPTOR* Interdiction Squadron belonging to the 1st *ARIZONA* Attack Wing! We have shut down the system so the Kavalian bastards do not know we are coming!”

“*ARIZONA*? Shut down the system?” Sa’sur asked in shock.

“Captain you must change course immediately to six nine eight four three mark one!” Falarie barked. “There is not time to explain!”

“Listen to me! We are about...”

“Captain Sa’sur!” Falarie shouted through the transmission. “You are occupying space that will be a firestorm in just over twenty seconds! You must turn now! Prince Androcles has sent us!”

Sa’sur didn’t hesitate when she heard Andro’s name. “Helm full power turn to starboard! Six nine eight four three mark one!” She screamed.

“Helm answering!” The shout echoed her voice.

“Captain Sa’sur!” Zeria shouted her eyes wide in disbelief. “Captain... I’m reading dozens of Quantum Fusion signature anomalies directly astern and to port! It’s... by the gods Captain... I’ve never seen anything like it before! It’s enormous!”

Sa’sur looked at the transmission with wide eyes and saw the female commander smile a predatory smile. “Miranda Lorian, Captain of the *ULU ARIZONA*, sends you her regards Captain Sa’sur!” She spoke.

“Ships!” Zeria screamed out now as her sensor station began to sound madly with alarms. “They’re ships! By the gods... they are Union ships and...”

Sa’sur turned and looked at the holographic screen that acted as her window to the stars outside and her ice blue eyes grew wide as the enormous white light flashed just off the aft port quarter and the monstrous ship materialized as if out of thin air.

“The gods preserve me!” Sa’sur gasped.

ULU ARIZONA

She was built for one single purpose.

Captain Miranda Lorian was about to unleash that purpose.

“Three seconds!” Zaala called out. “Two... one... reversion!”

Miranda came to her feet as the three massive displays in the front of the bridge flashed with white light and then reverted to bright single stars in a single blink of her eyes. The Quantum Resonance Field Reactor LSD drives taken from City Ship 41 and adapted to work with the *ARIZONA* and others of her class had worked to perfection and suddenly before them were dozens of ships, hundreds of fighters and a whole lot of missiles bearing down on them as every alarm on the bridge began to go off at once. It had taken only one well calculated jump and here they were. The massive reversion field generated by the *ARIZONA* and her Attack Wing resonated for several hundred thousand kilometers all around them, and the gravity concussive force of such a reversion sent an entire squadron of Kavalian Jaguar Mark II fighters spiraling out of control, two of them not able to stop from smashing against the reversion field gravity well and literally being torn asunder.

“Report!” Miranda shouted.

“Missiles inbound!” E’dira barked. “Bearing six four one point two!”

“*SCIMITAR* turning hard to starboard!” The navigation officer snapped out.

“Multiple fighters! Kavalian ships port and starboard! Picking up Colonel Randall’s attack force heavily engaged!”

The displays were really holographic images of the outside being projected by micro receivers and transmitters built into the hull of the *ARIZONA*. It was like looking out three massive windows and the wondrous thing about that is they could change them to any view they wanted.

Miranda didn't have time to admire the view and she turned half a second after they had fully reverted. "E'dira! Make us sing! Fire! Fire!" She shouted pumping her fist down to the deck in a show of defiance.

The very first Drow Elf Tactical Officer within the Union Space Fleet stabbed her hovering finger down on her control consoles instantly. "Initiating Zone Defense Saturation Fire! All batteries weapons free, repeat weapons free!"

Miranda could almost feel the turrets coming alive, she could almost see them beginning to track and whirring into place, and for years to come she would swear she had even heard the first sounds the guns made as they erupted in a single massive sustained barrage. The ULU *ARIZONA*, named for a warship in Earth's storied past, finally was allowed to let her guns fire in anger.

In each turret, armored gunnery crews began feeding the quad guns a steady diet of plasma based ordinance as the gunnery chiefs zeroed in on their specific zones as assigned by E'dira from her tactical console. Due to the advanced power systems of the *ARIZONA*, this information was transferred in milliseconds to the Gunnery Chief's own computer who then fed the targeting package into the gun itself. The Terra series Quad PDTs were designed to use 'hard shells' that would convert to plasma when lased with a set of harmonic particle beams. The entire shell converted to plasma and propelled down the barrel at the speed of light, but at a cost of losing 25 percent of its explosive warhead. The lost power was made up for in the rate of fire that could be achieved with the shell/magazine/breach guns as opposed to the straight plasma capacitor feed system currently used by a majority of Union warships. Another difference between the *ARIZONA* and other ships was that each gun turret had its very own crew as opposed to one crew having control of three or four guns standard. Due to the high rate of fire the *ARIZONA* could pump out, a single gun crew was needed in case of any problems that might arise. It meant more crew on the ship, but it also meant that repairs and maintenance took half the time in many cases.

Sixty-four Kavalian missiles were targeted on the *SCIMITAR* and in the space of only sixteen seconds; every single one of those missiles was dead. Unlike the turrets on the regular Union warships which were limited by the amount of power they could draw to operate their motors and targeting computers, the *ARIZONA* was not so restrained. While the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class ships were by far the premier ships in the fleet, even their computers and power sources were limited in what they could do. Many of their systems drew off their four HMF main power cores. The most recent *LEONIDAS IIAs* like the *SCIMITAR* and *NORMYA'S LIGHT* also were equipped with nearly a dozen of the small power nodes designed by Zaala Randall and a bevy of other engineers and closely fashioned after the power nodes scattered throughout City Ship 41. This provided them added power without the added bulk of an additional two or three HMF Core Units.

The *ARIZONA* on the other hand, and the ships in her class that would follow, she had a working prototype of CS41's QRFR main drive right down to the biomechanical gel packs that acted as circuits. Avi had helped them solve the problem of power for their version of the QRFRs by using phased quantum physics to break down the molecules of plasma enough to use as a similar power source to CS41's own QRFR drives. While this would never suffice to operate the QRFR drives on City Ship 41 due to power restraints and the ability to de-phase the fuel source, for their version of the QRFR drives it worked exceptionally well. Their two main QRFR cores provided four times the power that the *SCIMIATR* could produce and therefore made it easier for the ships computers to target and fire at a far faster rate than normal. All of the 60 Quad PDTs sat in smooth operating ball joint like turrets and this allowed them to track and fire on targets well outside the normal firing arc of most PDT turrets. As one would look at the starboard side of the *ARIZONA*, twenty PDTs turrets stretching from bow to stern, along with another ten running the length of the top of the *ARIZONA* all opened fire at once and filled the space out to their front four hundred thousand kilometers away into a killing field that nothing would survive.

It was the *ARIZONA's* welcoming to the Kavalian fleet as the spread of her weapons was such that it covered an area the size of two *SCIMITAR* sized ships easily. As Kavalian missiles were shredded into pieces and began to blow up, nearly a dozen Kavalian fighters were caught in the unexpected size of the killing zone and their ships were minced into tiny pieces before the Kavalian pilots even knew what was going on. It was a thing of beauty to Miranda Lorian and one she had every intention of continuing.

“Z-minus ten degrees starboard!” Miranda barked as she moved to her tactical board. “Launch everything that we have left! Kick them out now! Let Falarie know she has to direct them until the *BIG EYE* is airborne... but get them to launching!”

“*HORNET* is breaking towards the planet with 1st and 2nd Wings!” The sensor officer shouted. “Holy shit Captain... look!”

Miranda ignored the excited exclamation and turned her head to the massive monitor on the left as it switched to a picture of the *HORNET* conducting a radical turn towards the planet and spewing fighters from either side as if they were angry hornets swarming from their nest. Miranda watched with glee as Janon held nothing back and the *HORNET*'s main Type One Terra Series Plasma cannons began to blast out at an alarming rate, far faster than anything the Kavalians had ever expected or could compensate for. They were targeting Kavalian ships and scoring hits on every strike, three frigate sized ships actually buckling and imploding from the massive fire he was directing.

“Hah!” Miranda barked. “Stuck your hand in the hornet’s nest didn’t you!” She snarled. “How many *GREAT SOULS* left?”

“Three within weapons range!” The sensor operator exclaimed. “All of them maintaining station outside the cone of fire! Six more that the *HORNET* is turning towards!”

“Fucking cowards!” Miranda growled. “Well hell... let’s not let Janon have all the fun! Sa’sur proved they worked... so let’s really get this party going before we lose the advantage our arrival has caused!” She announced moving back to her chair. “Missile Batteries One and Three! Load Mark 22 ZMF missiles! Helm... come to course four seven eight three one mark two! Weapons! Full yield on the ZMFs and ripple fire twenty per launcher at the *GREAT SOULS*!”

“Aye Captain!”

“E’dira... Graviton Wave Generator?” Miranda barked turning to look at the Drow.

“Charged and standing by!” E’dira barked in return actually getting into the emotion that permeated the bridge. She could feel it all around her now, overriding her normally stoic Drow nature. This is what it meant to be part of something larger she now knew. All of them were part of a well oiled machine that was finally showing what they could do and in the direst of circumstances. The humans and Lycavorians she saw on the bridge were antsy and bouncing about on the balls of their feet as they went about their duties. The elven members like her were much more reserved, but even they were beginning to show their emotions. One glance at Zaala next to her and she saw Steven Randall’s wife engrossed in power distribution panels and usage outputs with Chizz as they monitored it all. Her long black hair was bouncing as she bobbed her head up and down slightly in tune to what could only be a song she heard in her head.

“Pulse them E’dira!” Miranda shouted. “Those fuckers opened this dance and let’s make sure they stick around so we can damn well finish it!”

“Firing the GWG!” E’dira spoke as her long fingers played across her panels like a musical concerto.

The Graviton Wave Generator was a weapon designed and implemented by the most unlikely source and completely by accident. The main designer was an Evolli defector who came over to the Union at the very beginning of the Evolli War. An Evolli that turned out to be a brilliant scientist and was now working at Dreamland with some of the best minds to be found anywhere in the universe. He had not agreed with the Evolli leadership when they decided to react to Queen Dysea pulling their trade contracts by invading Union space and attacking nearly a dozen planets initially. He had escaped with three dozen other likeminded Evolli scientists and engineers and their families and immediately went to the nearest Union outpost and Deia declared them refugees. Within the space of the first year of the war, all of those Evolli were working diligently with the Union to bring about the end of the war in the only way they knew how. In the fields they were trained in. Experimental weapons. The Graviton Wave generator was their crowning achievement and it worked exactly how it was supposed to work in its first full non-testing use.

The moment E’dira touched her panel, four small Theta power nodes in the four corners of the *ARIZONA* sent out a massive pulse of Theta power. This huge ring expanded outward instantly, looking like the waves from a pebble being dropped into a calm mountain pond. The weapon itself did no physical damage in the least, for that was not its purpose. The GWG’s main purpose was to scramble the LSD coils on any targeted ships to the point that they were disrupted by the unseen Theta waves and useless for hours. Essentially, the harmless Theta waves merged with the power cores of the LSD Coils and threw out the delicate balance of

power needed for faster than light operation. As this wave effect passed almost unnoticed by so many, it would come as a lethal surprise to the Kavalians. That their only hope of survival had just been taken away from them by a diminutive human female with Asian features, who at this very moment commanded the most devastating warship in the known universe, did not even begin to register in their minds.

And Miranda Lorian was not afraid to use it.

SCIMITAR

Sa'sur and her bridge crew could really only watch with awe at what was happening only a few thousand meters from their own ship. Though not as big as the *SCIMITAR* in length, the ships they saw before them were much wider, and one of them was spilling fighters from both port and starboard sides at intervals that was making heads spin, even as it conducted a gut wrenching turn that should have been impossible for a ship its size. They watched as the entire side of the new ship in front of them, Sa'sur knew she was the *ARIZONA* for she had been present for the briefing on Earth, became engulfed in a suppression barrage the likes of which she had never seen. Her PDTs were firing far faster than Sa'sur had ever seen Point Defense Turrets fire, and they were covering an area twice the size of the *SCIMITAR*, filling it with lethal plasma laced particles. As Sa'sur watched she saw the ship execute a Z rotation by no more than a few degrees and then it too was spilling fighters from either side. Her launch tubes appeared to sit just under the protective curve of her superstructure on the ventral axis of the ship allowing her main guns on top and three quarters of the PDTs to fire at will without worrying about damaging their own fighters.

“Captain!” Zeria exclaimed. “The fighters that jumped in earlier! They are all squawking as being from that... that thing!”

Sa'sur would not admit it until later, but she would make it a point to lay a big old kiss on Miranda Lorian's lips for saving their bacon this day. And Sa'sur knew she could never repay that debt. “*THAT* thing is the ULU *ARIZONA*!” Sa'sur announced with a smile. “And she just saved our collective asses!”

“*Carians* Captain!” Her XO barked. “Let's buy lots more of them!”

Consummate professional that she was, Sa'sur only grunted as she moved back to her chair. “We have our own teeth XO!” Sa'sur barked. “And Miranda Lorian has given us a second chance to use them! Let's not let her down!”

“No ma'am!”

“Reload all missiles with standard warheads! Maximum payload and deflection! Let's give the Kavalians something to think about!” Sa'sur snapped. “Helm... emergency power turn to starboard! Maintain our ventral shields oriented towards the *ARIZONA*! All batteries free! Gunnery stations to local command! We're still outnumbered three to one people! Let's not get cocky!”

ARIZONA

Almost the same thing was being said on the *ARIZONA* by an equally experienced ship commander.

“Missiles away clean! Good tracks! Time to impact thirty-two seconds!” The *ARIZONA*'s Weapons Officer shouted.

“We caught them flatfooted and overconfident! Sa'sur's initial missile launch came as a surprise! Let's keep that rolling!” Miranda snapped. “Let's not make the same mistakes the Kavs did! They still have us outnumbered three to one! Evasive Pattern Omega One! Full sublights! Come to course six nine seven four mark three! Third Attack Squadron executes Beta One! Fourth Squadron Beta Five! Their guns track slower than ours so let's keep moving and hitting them on the run!”

“Helm answering six nine seven four mark three!”

“Third and Fourth Squadrons acknowledge Captain!”

“Status of launch?” Miranda snapped.

“All remaining birds away clean! *RAPTOR* One Four has directed them to focus on the *DIATAGAs*!”

“*BIG EYE* launching now Miranda!” E'dira barked. “Two minutes until they take up station!”

“All Gun Batteries to Free Roam! Target the capital ships first! We need to knock down their advantage!” Miranda snarled. “If the crews can see it... they can kill it! Get the *STRIKERs* prepped for immediate GS operations and mobilize our Spartan Detachment for immediate deployment! Zaala! Power status?”

Zaala turned to look at her with wide dark eyes. She had never been in sustained combat before and her heart was racing. “Nominal!” She almost screamed. “Everything is operating within more than acceptable parameters! I told you it would work Miranda!” Her dark eyes cut quickly to the engineering officer who she had leveled. He did everything he could to avoid her eyes, his face still smarting from the beating she had given him.

“Very well!” Miranda spoke with a slight grin as she turned back to the front of the bridge. “*SWORD OF DAMOCLES* and *TRIUMPH OF TEARS* to maneuver on us! Straight at them!”

“*SWORD* and *TRIUMPH* signal ready!”

“Let’s follow our missiles in!” Miranda barked.

KFI GREAT SOUL DREADNOUGHT

WERRU

“...do you mean we can’t communicate with our fighters?” The Kavalian Captain shouted angrily.

“We are being jammed Captain!” The man answered. “No long range sensors either! Only short range arrays and no communications! Short range sensors have detected nearly a hundred Quantum anomalies in the last minute but we can not localize them!”

“Anomalies do not interest me!” Captain Pucatacs snapped. “Modulate the frequency and get me communications back!”

“I am Captain! No matter what I do... the jamming is still there!”

“It has to be coming from the *SCIMITAR*!” He barked. “How long until our missiles destroy that ship?”

“Twenty-three seconds to... it can’t be!” The sensor operator hissed. “Captain... short range sensors have just detected a massive surge of quantum particle fields in the immediate area!”

“I told you I do not want to hear about these stupid...” Pucatacs snarled coming to his feet.

“The computer states quantum based engine drives!” The sensor operator screamed.

Pucatacs’s eyes went wide. “That’s impossible! No ship has quantum drives! They do not exist! They...”

“Union ships! Union ships! I’m detecting Quantum Reversion Waves! Union ships decelerating from LSD operation!” The man screamed.

Pucatacs could only stare at the view screen in front of him as dozens of ships began appearing in simple white flashes. “What is this?” He screamed. “Get me identification! Burn through this jamming damn you! Do it now!”

“I’m pushing output to full power already captain!” The sensor operator shouted. “It’s having no effect!”

“I need to know what is...”

Pucatacs’s words died when the entire aft third of his command bridge became a death pyre. The two A22B Anti-Emissions missiles from the M5 *DEVASTATOR* Fighter/Bomber punched clean through the thin outer hull of his command bridge. This was where the large view windows were situated and now covered with thin armor. The sensors in the nose of the missile had zeroed in on the power output of the sensor array easily, and sensing the commands coming from the bridge it had signaled its pilot it had a lock. The single M5, flanked by the two M7 *TEMPEST* Fighters, sizzled along the hull of the *GREAT SOUL* as the explosion erupted behind them and then they peeled away from the massive ship in a graceful, eye popping maneuver. That they were undetected and flying within the shield grid of the massive dreadnought ship was information that would be used in the future. To great effect.

The A22B missile was similar to the Harpoon Radiation missile from the 20th and 21st centuries in Earth’s past. It helped when the man who assisted in running all Fleet Operations with Admiral Riall was a former human who had grown up in those times. Ben O’Connor had brought much to the Union Fleet, including

his old school tactics. They were tactics that the Union Fleet had never really practiced before until Ben brought these issues to light. Now... now there wasn't a fleet officer that did not swear by the new things they had learned. A dedicated fighter/bomber whose only purpose was to kill sensor emissions from enemy ships was one of Ben's brain child's and Miranda's Death Jesters were having a field day. The two five hundred kilo warheads were small in comparison to others that the M5 could carry, but when they went off in the rear of the bridge, it made a very big and deadly bang. The fireball swept forward and methodically incinerated every crew member on the bridge, causing massive decompression as the thin armor could not hold against the concussive force of the warheads going off inside the ship. The armored hull was meant to keep the explosions of missiles from passing through the armor from the outside. It was never intended to keep the explosive force of a missile contained inside its own hull.

DEATH JESTER SQUADRON
JESTER ONE THREE
SQUADRON COMMANDER

“Stick that in your *nubous* pipe and smoke it Kavalian scum!” The senior Lycavorian Commander of the Death Jester Squadron retorted savagely as he twisted his head around in his cockpit and saw the damage he had wrought.

“Clean hit and kill!” The pilot of one of his escorting fighters announced.

“I think you took out the bridge!” The other spoke.

“Good!” *Jester One Three* barked. “I still got three missiles! *Jester One Three* to Death Jester Squadron! Home base has arrived! Find me more targets! Return and rearm as needed with your wingman per Op Plan! Four birds in the air at all times!”

“*DIATAGA* bearing two seven one point three!” The fighter pilot exclaimed. “They’re trying to burn through the jamming!”

Jester One Three yanked his controls to the right. “Rolling!”

“On your wing!”

“Got him!” *Jester One Three* called.

“Shoot him!”

“I got him locked! Hack left!” *Jester One Three* exclaimed.

“Right with you One Three!” The M7 pilot echoed.

“I got good tone! In range! Firing! Missile away!” *Jester One Three* announced cheerily as he mashed down on his firing button.

Another A22B Anti-ship missile ignited and rippled away from the M5's wing mounted pod. Sixteen M5s of the Death Jester Squadron were running rampant through the Kavalian fleet, locking up any source their instruments told them were trying to burn through the jamming. As nimble and low profile as the M5s already were, not a single Kavalian ship commander took notice of them with all the other Union fighters that had now filled the stars, many of them appearing out of nowhere. They were only adding to the confusion of what was going on. A confusion that the Kavalians were having a hard time adjusting and compensating for.

A confusion that more than one senior officer within the numerous Union ships was taking notice of.

ARIZONA AIR WING COMMANDER (AWC)
COLONEL STEVEN RANDALL
CALL SIGN SCAR

Steven jerked his control stick slightly to the left and pummeled the firing button on the upper left corner of the wide tip. His four Kinetic Pulse Cannons ripped out to his left and right and walked up the right side of the Kavalian *JAGUAR* fighter. The pulse rounds impacted along the edge of the Jaguar's dorsal wing and completely severed the wing from the body of the ship. Colonel Randall snarled happily as the ship spiraled out

of control and went careening into the side of the *DIEROY*-Class Heavy Cruiser. The ship was already burning inside from numerous hits from the combined fire of two *NOVA*-Class Attack Cruisers and an *ADMIRAL CENEU*-Class Heavy attack Destroyer. There were no shields on this side of the *DIEROY* to protect it, and the *JAGUAR* fighter slammed into the hull with a massive fireball as Steven yanked back on his control column and turned his head quickly.

“Still with me Ty’coa!” He barked to the M7 *TEMPEST* fighter that was shadowing his every move.

“I’m on you Steven!” The elven pilot responded with calmness in his voice. “Two more from above! Point three!”

Ty’coa was the only pilot who had made the transfer with Steven when he took command of the *ARIZONA*’s Air Wing. He had flown with Steven Randall for five years now, and the two of them were a deadly pair. Steven slammed his throttles to full and pulled his column back sending the *TEMPEST* into a vertical climb to get above the huge *DIEROY* cruiser. None of its air defense batteries were firing, which told Steven they had probably lost main power.

“Where away?” Steven barked.

“Seven o’clock and closing at fourteen KPH!” Ty’coa answered.

They pulled out of the *DIEROY*’S shadow and Steven glanced over his left shoulder. “Got them!” He barked. “Split S! Roll with me!”

Steven yanked right on his control column and sent his *TEMPEST* into a stomach twisting turn down the opposite side of the crippled *DIEROY*.

“They appear to be two of the new *JAGUAR*s Steven!” Ty’coa echoed in his helmet. “They are closing fast and maintaining course!”

“Well... they do still have us outnumbered!” Steven snapped.

“We have disrupted their cohesion!” Ty’coa spoke calmly. “We must continue that!”

“How close do we let them get?” Steven snapped.

“I believe now would be a good time!”

“I’ll take the right one! You got the left!” Steven snapped. “*HACK now!*”

The two *TEMPEST* fighters appeared to pass within millimeters of each other as both Steven and Ty’coa executed inward turns back in the other direction using their powerful Verner Maneuvering Thrusters. The VMTs allowed them to turn far tighter than any known fighter, giving them exacting directional control over how they were fired. This maneuver confused the two Kavalian pilots as the smaller fighters split apart and went in separate directions in a single blink of an eye. They eventually choose to follow Steven’s fighter and both the larger *JAGUAR* Mark IIs rolled into formation and took up pursuit.

“They’re on me!” Steven barked as he wrenched his *TEMPEST* into a twirling turn behind the *MOONLANCER*-Class Battlecruiser that had turned sharply in the direction of several *DIATAGA*’s.

“Coming up on the opposite side!” Ty’coa’s voice echoed.

Steven could picture his wingman as he tore down the length of the *MOONLANCER* no doubt at full burner. “Breaking now!” Steven barked as he erupted from behind the Battlecruiser and executed an almost ninety degree change in course using his VMSs.

“Locked!” Ty’coa exclaimed from his cockpit as he thumbed his cannons.

The first *JAGUAR* Mark II flew right into the lethal storm of kinetic projectiles and the front of his fighter came apart right before his wide eyes. He didn’t have any chance to react as three Kinetic rounds punched through the bubble of his canopy and blew his head and chest into bloody pulp right before his fighter exploded into a small fireball. The second Kavalian fighter banked hard to the opposite direction, the explosion searing the edges of his fighter’s frame as he turned frantically away from the debris. Ty’coa watched as the Kavalian fighter executed a sharp turn and roll and suddenly ended up behind him as he swept out away from the Union Battlecruiser.

“This one appears to have some skill Steven!” Ty’coa spoke as he dipped one wing and sent his *TEMPEST* into a hairsplitting inverted turn.

“It won’t save him!” Steven’s voice echoed.

Ty’coa saw a flash of steel gray and black and crimson and corkscrewed his fighter over as Steven came in from above with all four of his pulse cannons blazing.

“Got you fucker!” Steven’s voice filled his helmet and Ty’coa could only smile under his helmet as the explosion of the Kavalian fighter caused his *TEMPEST* to shudder slightly.

Steven jerked his head around and found no targets in the immediate area, the brief chase and combat having pulled him and Ty’coa away from the main battle taking place above the planet now. He glanced down between his legs at his sensor display as he felt more than saw Ty’coa drop into formation on his right and he quickly gauged what was happening. It had descended to a pitched battle between fighters and ships right now. No one whipping through the stars was concerned or even thinking about what may have been happening on the surface of the planet beneath them. From the dozens of recognition signals he was getting Steven could tell that the fighter squadrons from every ship involved had begun to merge together as the individual battles between pilots played out.

He could see a Hodge Podge squadron of *TEMPEST* fighters from both the *ARIZONA* and *NORMYA’S LIGHT* banking together and turning back towards the Kavalian Fleet Group. They were no doubt talking to one another now since they were maneuvering so closely. As he looked up Steven could see the streaks of Type One Plasma turrets crisscrossing the stars all around them as the *HORNET* and his old ship *NORMYA’S LIGHT* teed off side by side while their escorts maneuvered all around them and they were taking it to the Kavalian Fleet Group something fierce. Steven knew Admiral Thodias commanded *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and had since the ship’s inception. He knew the man to be supremely intelligent and pseudo reckless at times. Martin had chosen him to command Dysea’s ship for this very reason. He was much like his Queen in demeanor and while outwardly they could appear as friendly as anything, both of them could become hissing pit vipers if aroused.

“The Kavalians are confused Steven.” Ty’coa’s voice filled his helmet. “No doubt our arrival has thrown them into something of a fit!”

Steven nodded. “I think Sa’sur’s first volley of Mark 22s took out their command ship!” He echoed.

“That would indicate they have a centralized system of command!” Ty’coa announced. “Kill the leaders and it throws the rest of them into chaos!”

“That could work in our favor!” Steven snapped.

Steven saw brief flashes off to his right and behind him and he turned his head quickly to see the *ARIZONA* ripple fire nearly forty missiles at the three *GREAT SOULS* that had not yet entered the battle. The entire front of the ship was ablaze as the *SCIMITAR* swept over the top of her, her Type One Plasma cannons blasting away as fast as her computers and crew could make them. It didn’t match the speed of the *ARIZONA*’s fire control systems, as not a moment after the last missile cleared the launchers in the ship’s nose; the huge ship turned away slightly and suddenly joined the *SCIMITAR* in pounding the Kavalian fleet with Type One turrets. The *ARIZONA*’s rate of fire was far superior however, and her gun batteries began to obliterate a *DIEROY*, even as that ship began to return fire to no avail. Miranda and Sa’sur both were smart enough to press their gain from the *ARIZONA* Attack Wing’s stunning entry into the battle, and they were using every advantage they could now. They were keeping the pressure on the Kavalian fleet and going after the secondary ships while leaving the *GREAT SOULS* to their many missiles.

The Kavalian ships however, they were giving as good as they got, and Steven could see the heavily damaged hulls of at least three *MOONLANCERS* and four *NOVAs* drifting with heavy damage and fires burning inside. As AWC, Steven’s *TEMPEST* had a single small computer that could track all of his Air Group. As the recognition signals of the fighters came up Ty’coa heard Steven swear.

“Steven?” His wingman barked.

“We’ve lost twenty-eight Ty’coa!” Steven growled angrily. “Fuck!”

Ty’coa’s onboard sensors began to chirp loudly and he looked quickly over his shoulder. “We have problems of our own!” He snapped. “Four more inbound from eleven o’clock! They look like Mark IIs!”

Steven’s head whipped around as well and his wolf eyes quickly found the telltale sign of fighter engines using full burners. “Shit!” He swore. “On me! We’ll duck under and around the *MOONLANCER* again!”

“Rolling now!” Ty’coa exclaimed as both *TEMPESTs* rolled to their left and slashed under the *MOONLANCER*’s main engine with four Kavalian fighters in hot pursuit.

The battle was a long way from over.

THE WILDS

.09 LY FROM KRANEK

BLOODLETTER MARK IV-CLASS CRUISER

BEL'LA D'VENORSH (Honor of Silence)

Admiral Valin Esavorna walked calmly onto the bridge of his personal ship even as he was pulling his shirt on over the wide shoulders and muscular arms. Nine thousand four hundred and nineteen years old he may have been, but he was still in superb physical condition due to the position he had held up until only three days before, and though gray was just beginning to touch the temples of his jet black hair, he was still considered a very handsome man by many female vampires, purebloods and turned females alike.

“Speak to me Micardo!” He barked seeing his long time aide standing beside the ship’s senior Captain. The *BEL'LA D'VENORSH* was his ship.

Valin Esavorna had hand picked the entire crew of nine thousand men and women, and he had not cared that many of them were turned vampires and not purebloods like the crews of the other ships of senior officers within the *Venorik Elghinn*. These men and women were completely loyal to him no matter the reason and they were the very best among the hundreds of thousands within the High Coven Fleet as far as he was concerned. Valin looked at his most senior aide as he walked up. Micardo was an exceptional officer, extremely skilled and highly intelligent. He had been with Valin for eight hundred of his nearly three thousand four hundred years of life. The man was like a machine in what he could remember and dictate and it was a skill that Valin had used many times through the years. Valin also knew Micardo wanted to take his daughter Cirith as his wife. In his limited view of things, Micardo assumed if Cirith was his wife that he would forever be tied to Valin and all that he did. Micardo did not know or understand the closeness of father and daughter, and Valin had long ago decided he would never pressure Cirith into something she did not want. Micardo may have been handsome and an outstanding officer and agent of the *Venorik Elghinn*, but he was obviously not a man Cirith found in the least bit attractive. Valin knew his only child was eccentric in many ways, and he also knew that together they had several secrets that no one but the two of them shared now.

With Aikiro dead, they were the only ones who knew the biggest secret they shared, and it was the one that had allowed Valin to keep Aikiro from killing Cirith the moment it was discovered she was conceived. It had been only a single night between the two of them, a night of superior sex no doubt as the Empress was a lush woman and surprisingly adventurous, but a single night no less. Aikiro had practically ordered him into her bed, and Valin complied not only because he was a man, but because he did not fear Veldruk as so many others did. It was a night that Valin Esavorna would always remember, for it gave him his beautiful daughter Cirith. If not for one of Aikiro’s handmaidens, he might not still be here, and that woman now lived a very safe and comfortable life far from the hustle and bustle of the Coven capital and she had taken a large role in raising Cirith in her formative years. When this woman had contacted him and told him Aikiro had discovered she was pregnant and planned on aborting the child, Valin immediately set in motion a plan that would see him rise to the top of his profession, and put him in a position to insure his daughter’s survival as well as his own. He had given Aikiro a choice essentially; carry the child to term or risk Valin exposing their relationship and what he was for everyone to see. Aikiro knew this knowledge would destroy whatever power base she had, so she agreed to the terms. When Cirith was born, Valin spirited her away within hours and Aikiro never saw her again. Throughout the many years that followed, Valin used his position within the *Venorik Elghinn* to eliminate many ‘problems’ that Aikiro instructed him too, and in recognition of this, his rank within the *Venorik Elghinn* rose steadily.

The moment Aikiro died at the hands of the Lycavorian First Oracle, Valin Esavorna knew they would not be safe. The instant Aikiro’s files reverted to Yuri, she would order a massive manhunt for Cirith in an attempt to kill her and bury her mother’s sins deep. In truth, Valin had already decided that he was going to take Cirith and depart High Coven space as early as next year, and take as many of those who thought like him with him as well. It was why he had so readily accepted and then helped the Insurgent known as The General behind many screens of deception. On the path they were currently going down, Valin truly believed the High Coven would cease to exist in less than a decade. He saw the full lives the vampires within the Union had, the freedoms and influence many carried, and he knew that the Union was their future if they were to have one. Aikiro’s death only sped up his plans by several months.

“We’ve dropped from LSD operation and...” Micardo began.

“Yes... I knew that the minute it happened!” Valin barked. “Now tell me why? We are still four hours from Kranek and had not planned to exit our last jump until we were within the planet’s system radius!”

Micardo nodded. “Yes sir... we...”

He stopped talking when the doors to the bridge opened and Cirith followed in her father’s steps as she moved with consummate grace and elegance onto the bridge, but did so in an urgent matter. Her waist length black hair was pulled over one shoulder and ornately braided. The dark gray fatigue pants conformed to her lush frame like a glove, while the fatigue top strained over the top of her full breasts. Cirith knew she was considered exquisitely beautiful by many. She had yet to meet a pureblood who had not tried to gain her favor in some way in all her years. Unlike many pureblood vampires, Cirith was not one to shy away from pleasure, and she accepted it where she found it regardless of the sex of her partner. She had had several relationships with fellow female vampires, but never something that had meant anything with a man. She was looking for something far more than the men she had met up until this point had ever come close to giving her.

She walked right up to her father and stopped. “What is going on?” She asked. “We have reverted back to normal space before our allotted timeframe.”

“Micardo and Captain Drdanu were just going to tell us why.” Valin spoke.

The man who commanded Valin’s ship was not afraid of his commander as Micardo suspected. The Admiral’s senior aide was just a micromanaging fool. Lirur Drdanu stepped forward. “I have had our people monitoring communications throughout The Wilds as you ordered Admiral. We...”

Valin looked at him. “Lirur... considering what we are all now guilty of, and what you and I have faced through the years... it seems rather pompous of me to expect you to continue to refer to me officially don’t you think?” He stated.

Lirur smirked and nodded his head. He motioned to the communications station as Micardo’s face took on an unhappy expression. “We began picking up open communications several minutes ago Valin. Mostly between civilian settlements on different worlds, but all of them saying the same thing.”

“What’s that?” Valin asked.

“Apparently the KFI has just conducted a rather extensive assassination operation against the Leonidas family. One that appears to be still ongoing.” Lirur answered seeing their eyes go wide in shock. “They have succeeded where the Empress failed. It is being reported that King Leonidas is dead and the Queen Aricia is severely injured and possibly dead as well. Our sensors also told us that there is currently a very large space battle over Kranek where Dysea and Isabella are known to be.”

“*Vith uns'aa ulu krik'vlicss!*” Valin exclaimed. (Fuck me to tears)

Lirur smiled and nodded his head. “I said essentially the same thing. When we began getting these COMS, I tapped into the open Netnews channels broadcasting within the Union. There may be some sort of military communications blackout, but their Netnews channels are still allowed to broadcast. They have confirmed the death of Leonidas; it was broadcast live across the Union by accident it seems. There have been at least six other attacks across Sparta targeting Leonidas family members or assets according to the Netnews with no reports of casualties. And the whereabouts of his children are also in question.”

Cirith stepped forward now. “In question?” She asked softly looking at Lirur. “What do you mean in question?”

Micardo’s eyes narrowed as he nodded his head. He took her question as something more than casual interest. “It appears that, from what some of the Netnews channels are reporting anyway, is that there was a falling out of some sort between King Leonidas and his oldest son Androcles after Aikiro’s failed attacks. There is no way to confirm this however.” He shrugged his broad shoulders indifferently. “There are many unsubstantiated rumors that are beginning to circulate on the Netnews channels, but all of them have confirmed that his son’s ship left Earth’s system with most of his older children as well as Zarah Leonidas, the target of Dante and Javier’s twisted plot. Personally, it does not surprise me. They are two dominant men and regardless that they are father and son, they will clash.”

Cirith shook her head. “No.” She stated confidently. “They are too close, father and son. Nothing my mother could have done would drive a wedge between them. Nothing anyone could do would do this.”

“We don’t know that Cirith!” Micardo spat.

“I know that!” She snarled back at him. “And I have studied them and their family far more than you!”

“What about this attack on Kranek Lirur?” Valin asked as he moved to the plot board on his bridge. “This was our destination.”

Lirur nodded. “It is the reason I ordered us to drop from LSD operation.” He answered. “Long range sensors initially detected two Kavalian Fleet Groups. One coming from the Torana Lightning Nebula here, and the other jumping in to sector six here. Two *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers and a single Strike Wing for the Union.” He explained pointing on the board.

Valin shook his head. “Not good odds.” He said softly shaking his head. “Not good.” He looked at Lirur. “Wait... you said initially?” Valin asked.

Lirur nodded. “We are no longer able to scan directly into the system.”

“What? Why?” Valin asked.

“Something is jamming our sensors.” Micardo answered.

Valin looked at him. “The *BEL'LA D'VENORSH* has the most sophisticated sensors the High Coven has ever developed!” He snapped. “I should know... I helped to procure most of the technology from the Science Division!”

“Micardo is correct however Valin.” Lirur stated. “Exactly four minutes twenty-two seconds ago, the entire system was jammed. We’ve tried spectral scans, phased motion scans, even multilevel tachyon beams. Nothing will penetrate the system. Whatever it is... it is operating on a Hypermorphic Resonation that we have never seen before.”

“Hypermorphic Resonation is not achievable with the current known power sources. That’s impossible Lirur.” Valin spoke.

“Yes I know. The only thing we were able to detect, and only for nine point three seconds the first instance and eleven point four seconds the next were massive levels of quantum particle spikes!” Lirur said.

“Quantum particle spikes?” Cirith asked moving even closer.

“Quantum Particle Spikes are the supposed residual effects of Quantum Fusion LSD Drive Coils.” Micardo spoke looking at her. “They...”

Cirith looked at him with her dark eyes. “I know what they are from Micardo!” She snapped.

“Quantum Drives are only theoretical.” Valin said quickly. “Even our best engineers could not develop anything that would work from the remains of the Mindvoice Ship that Aikiro had on Nauwora.”

Cirith looked at him. “The Union has had a working MV ship to study for over two decades father.” Cirith stated. “Is it not reasonable to assume they have been able to develop this technology?”

“The Lycavorians?” Micardo asked exasperated. “Cirith... you give them far too much credit.”

Cirith met his eyes with obvious contempt. “And you do not give them enough!” She hissed. “You still carry within you the falsehood inbred in many of our people Micardo. That we are better than them somehow when we are not! It is the Lycavorians who have withstood the test of time and millennia to rise to the position they now have and they have done it without help from anyone! And others flock to join them because of what they offer! Their adaptability is without peer, their sense of purpose and honor unmatched. When it came to be that Martin Leonidas returned to them and took his place as King, he returned to them their faith and the desire to act upon their instincts! The one thing that they had let slip during their slavery.” Cirith shook her head slowly.

“If we are so better than them, why is it we could never conquer them Micardo?” She snapped at him. “Even through the thousands of years of slavery to Aikiro and Veldruk they never once let that spark of freedom die! Through everything that has happened they have persevered. And they have been killing our kind for far longer than you and I have been alive! We would be wise to take lessons from them.” She looked at her father. “The Kavalians may have succeeded in killing Leonidas himself, perhaps others of his family as well, but they do not comprehend the wrath they will have unlocked with their actions father.”

Valin looked at the expression on Micardo’s face and could barely hold back his laughter. He had given Cirith access to every piece of knowledge he was able to come by as she grew. No matter where it came from and no matter what it represented, she had studied it. Her mind was like a sponge, and Valin had encouraged her to seek whatever knowledge she desired. One of the side effects of that was her complete distaste for individuals who thought they were superior to others simply because of what they were.

“You’re... you’re joking of course?” Micardo exclaimed finally.

Cirith looked at him again. “For the answer to that foolish statement all I will do is direct you to the millions of our people who call the Union home. At least they had the foresight to look past everything we have been taught to believe and discover the truth for themselves.” She looked at her father once more. “We should not dismiss it simply because we don’t believe it possible father. We have seen much that we did not believe possible, and we have seen it first hand.”

“I don’t intend to dismiss it Cirith.” Valin answered. “At the moment however... we can not see into the system where we are going, and I do not wish to blunder into the middle of a battle and get us all killed.” He looked at Lirur. “Cha’talla’s tribe on the surface Lirur... how large do we suspect they have grown?”

Lirur turned to the female vampire officer standing just to the side. “Neona?”

The officer held out the data pad to Valin. “We had been scanning Kranek ever since coming in range of it with our long range sensors Admiral.” She stated. “There appears to be one major settlement on the northern continent. It is situated between several mountain ranges. There looked to be several smaller settlements scattered about the northern continent as well, but the majority of the Akruvian lifesigns were coming from the largest.”

“How many?” Valin asked.

“There is no way to be certain Admiral.” She answered. “Whoever built the structures within the settlement used materials that have high concentrations of Lactium Ore in them. This type ore scatters sensor quality at greater distances as you know.”

Valin nodded. “Something an old war horse like Cha’talla would do.” He said. “Your best guess then?”

“Cha’talla’s tribe was nearly forty thousand strong when it escaped the Coven.” Neona said. “We can assume they would want to rebuild. Repopulate. I estimate at least a thirty percent rise in numbers since they settled here. And that is just among the Akruvian and does not include the other lifesigns we detected.”

“Others?” Cirith asked.

“Limian mostly.” She answered with a nod. “Nearly all the elves our sensors detected were within the Immortal settlement.”

“Elves?” Valin gasped.

Lirur nodded his head. “Some of the rumors we have heard over the years said that elves live freely among Cha’talla’s tribe. There are said to be marriages between Immortal and elves. That Esther Suira somehow was able to cure them of the effect they have on female elves.”

“There is also the distinct possibility that the intelligence we have stating that Cha’talla and this Esther are Blessed Husband and Blessed Wife is very true. Their children, if they have any, they would be...” Neona stopped as they looked at her.

“They would be what?” Valin asked.

“They would be the perfect combination of pureblood genes from both our species and Akruvian. They would have all the skills of their parents sir.” She said.

Lirur shook his head slowly. “Our ability to blur, our strength and skills combined with the Immortal’s strength and will. Their children would be...”

Cirith nodded. “They would be devastating.” She said softly. “And my mother wanted to kill them.”

“Yes...” He said softly. “I just didn’t... I never thought that could be true.” Valin said. He stood up and turned away swearing under his breath. “Damn! All that we had hoped for is coming true and we are within reach of it!” He looked at Lirur. “Where are the others Lirur?”

“Holding position at the rendezvous as we ordered.” Lirur answered.

“How many?” Valin asked.

Lirur nodded. “All of them made it Valin. Eighty-seven ships.” He stated. “Baleve was the last one to depart and the overall Fleet Commanders were just beginning to realize they had ships and officers dropping off the grid. “Moran will be incensed when he discovers what has happened. He had heard nothing from the *Venorik Elghinn* when he departed.”

“They will do nothing.” Valin spoke with a crooked smile. “Not after the data pad I left First Director Onelala.”

“What did you tell him?” Lirur asked.

“I told him that if any attempt to pursue us was made I would release the name of every High Coven agent working outside the borders of our space to an information broker in The Wilds who would then release it over every public channel he could find.”

Lirur’s eyes were wide when Valin finished. “You... you realize you will have signed your own death warrant by threatening him in such a manner.”

Valin shrugged. “I have no intention of going back anyway.” He answered.

Cirith took a deep breath finally and looked up. “We could always take the direct approach father.” She said.

Valin turned to look at her. “The direct approach?”

Cirith nodded her head. “Our sensors may be jammed, but our secure communications equipment is completely operational. We can localize their channels and use our own *Venorik Elghinn* systems to bypass the jamming. I doubt they would know the frequencies we use or the subspace transmitter signals we have. It would be impossible to jam them. We may not be able to communicate with the Union ships, but we could certainly contact the settlement.”

“And say what?” Micardo spat. “Cha'talla and his tribe have aligned themselves with the Union, that much is obvious! Why else would Queen Dysea and Queen Isabella be here? If they are aligned with the Union, then they will not be happy to talk to us after what that fool Aikiro and her stupid followers did!”

“Micardo is right Cirith.” Valin spoke. “Dysea is the more politically astute of Leonidas’s Queens, but she is by no means a gentle wolf. She is just as skilled and deadly as his pureblood mate Aricia. And she is also a female elf. Isabella is her lover and with only exception for Aricia, perhaps the most militant of his Queens. They would not have aligned with Cha'talla if they detected even a remote chance that they retained any of the ways of the Immortals still under the boot heel of the Coven. If they are there, it could only mean the rumors are true and they have amazingly formed some sort of pact.”

Cirith nodded. “Yes... I know father, yet their presence on Kranek means that they *do* trust him a great deal as well. If you did not... would you allow your first elven Queen to remain among them so freely?” She spoke.

Valin shook his head. “Never.”

Cirith nodded. “Lirur... you said you detected two *LEONIDAS IIAs* before the jamming began?”

Lirur nodded. “Yes.”

“Were you able to identify them?” Cirith asked looking at him.

Lirur nodded. “Dysea’s ship *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and the *SCIMI...*” Lirur’s eyes grew wide as his answer died on his lips. “The *SCIMITAR!*”

Cirith nodded. “Prince Androcles’s ship.” She stated looking at her father. “Now we know where his children came too.”

“What difference does that make?” Micardo asked. “After Aikiro’s attack it would be a sound tactical move to evacuate Earth.”

“The difference is a concept within the Lycavorian people that you constantly fail to grasp Micardo.” Cirith said. “Honor.”

“What does honor have to do with it?” He quipped.

“By all reports... official and unofficial that we have gathered in the years since Leonidas returned to the Lycavorians, the one thing we have heard most about above all else is his sense of Spartan honor.” Cirith said. “When he discovered his true nature and who his father was, he embraced the mentality of the Spartan people his father so loved and guided. The Spartans of Old Earth lived for honor. They lived for each other. They followed a code. That is what he has instilled in his people since he returned.” Cirith choked up for a moment, not understanding why the death of a man she had never met affected her so profoundly. “If... even if he is dead... that honor would live on in his people so profound is the impact he has had on them. And most certainly in his mates and children.” She looked at her father. “If Dysea is there... if his children are there... then something happened between them and Cha'talla’s tribe that brought them together as you said father. Something weighing heavily in their honor based society. And it would fit perfectly with the old ways of the Akruxian people before Veldruk conquered them.”

“That still does not equate to a reason why they would trust us after what Aikiro did Cirith.” Valin said.

“None of you are seeing it?” She asked with a smile.

They looked at her for a long moment and only Valin grinned as the others stood there stupefied. “What is there to see?” Micardo snapped finally.

“They have no reason to trust us.” Cirith said. “However... they would have no reason *not* to trust one who has already gained their confidence and acceptance and embraced a new life as Arrarn Leonidas’s wife and mate alongside my sister Princess Narice.”

Valin’s eyes were smiling. “Toria!” He spoke.

Cirith nodded her head. “Toria Dellion. One of the *Venorik Elghinn*’s most promising young intelligence officers. A young woman who was known within the *Venorik Elghinn* to hold great distaste for Aikiro. And by all accounts now one of Arrarn Leonidas’s wives. She knows us... she knows your father.” She stated. “She also knows of the tenuous relationship between you and Aikiro, though not the reasons for it. We contact her and we ask her to be our conduit. We ask her to convince them we are not part of my dearly deceased mother’s foul bunch of cronies. She would still have her *Venorik Elghinn* implant and I doubt it would be deactivated.”

“You doubt?” Micardo spoke. “She has been among the Leonidas family for months now. By all accounts one of Arrarn Leonidas’s wives for several weeks at least. At least as long as Princess Narice. Why would she not work to have the implant deactivated?”

Cirith smiled. “Because she is a woman Micardo.” She said. “And she is not a fool. She will not toss aside something that might help her in the future protect what she has now found with Arrarn and Narice.”

“What reason would she have to trust us Cirith?” Lirur asked. “Your father, you, many of us are from the very organization she secretly abhorred. Now that she has escaped and found a new life as you say, why would she trust us?”

“We need to convince her our intentions are real.” Cirith said.

“How do we do that?” Micardo spat.

Cirith looked at her father. “We tell her who I am. What I am. That will at least keep them from blowing us out of the stars. And it may very well get us the meeting we want with one of Leonidas’s Queens. Preferably Isabella since I believe she would understand us better.”

Valin shook his head. “That was not part of our plan Cirith.” He stated. “Not yet.”

“If we wish to continue into the future, on the road all of us have chosen, it is the only way father. You know this.” Cirith said.

“It would expose who you are far sooner than we had planned daughter. The plan was to insure you were within the safety of the Union, under their personal protection before revealing this information.” Valin said.

“What plan is this?” Micardo asked. “What are you talking about?”

“We no longer have a choice father, considering what the Kavalians are now doing.” Cirith said ignoring him. “They will not kill me, nor will they kill you. It is up to us to make sure they see we are not the enemy, nor those who follow us.”

“Admiral... you are keeping information from the rest of us.” Micardo spoke looking at Valin.

Valin glared at him. “If it protects my daughter Micardo... there is much I won’t reveal.” He stated. “This was information you did not need to know.”

“If we can make them see we are not the enemy father they...” Cirith began.

Micardo shook his head. “Just how do you plan on doing that Cirith?” He asked keeping his tone level. “After what Aikiro has done they...”

Cirith lifted her left arm, her uniform sleeves extending all the way down to her wrist. No one had ever seen her wearing anything even remotely revealing, and never without sleeves of some kind. The flash of silver/white light caused everyone on the bridge to stagger back and then a millisecond later, the Shi Viska was humming on her arm, and leveled directly at a wide eyed Micardo’s face.

“*Phraktos dormagyn uns'aa!*” Lirur gasped. (Gods preserve me)

Cirith tilted her head slightly as she looked at Micardo. “This is how I know they will not kill me Micardo.” She stated calmly. “I can’t say the same about you.”

“Captain! Admiral!” The young Com Officer turned from his station and looked at them, interrupting the tense moment. “Admiral... I’ve been monitoring the COM channels, trying to detect something from within Kranek’s system!”

“And?” Valin asked meeting his eyes with a small smile at his daughter’s display.

“I’m detecting a very old High Coven War channel being used on a low frequency Beta Wave network, and it’s coming from with the Kranek system.” The man answered. “It... I want to say it is very similar to the old Immortal War Channels used over a millennia ago.”

“Source?” Lirur asked moving to the man’s station his eyes never leaving Cirith and where she stood.

“It’s heavily modified... and mixed in with random space echoes... but it is there.” He stammered his own eyes wide. “If I had to guess admiral... and I think I’d be right on... I’d say it was an old Immortal War Channel.”

Valin stood up. “Immortal War Channel?” He asked surprised. “They have not been used in centuries.”

Cirith looked at the man as she lowered her arm and willed away the Shi Viska. In a simple flash it vanished back into Flat Space and was gone, but leaving many surprised expressions and many questions, especially from the wide eyed Micardo “Is it coming from the planet?” She asked.

The COM officer shook his head. “It’s being directed at the planet Lady Cirith.” He said. “And it’s coming from a ship in the area?”

Lirur looked at Valin. “We know Aikiro was trying to find Cha’talla. She has been for years. Would she have used exiled Immortals for this?”

Valin shook his head. “She barely trusted her own children after what Vonis did. No... she would never allow exiled Immortals to return and work for her. She would think they all worked for him.”

“Then it could only be one thing.” Cirith said.

Valin’s dark eyes grew wide as only one thing entered his mind when he heard his officer and his daughter speak. “Mercenaries!” Valin was many things, but indecisive was not one of them. “Lirur... how soon can our other ships join with us if they jump in the next three minutes?”

“The rendezvous is only two light years away.” Lirur replied instantly. “They can be here in under ten minutes.”

Valin nodded. “Contact them. Order them to jump and use our beacon as their homing guide. I want them here yesterday!” He barked. “COM officer... pulled Agent Dellion’s code from the database and initiate a secure transmission with her.”

“She may not respond Admiral.” The COM officer spoke turning to do his duty.

Cirith stepped up next to her father. “She will answer me.” She said.

KRANEK IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

Cha’talla looked at the Limian and human men standing just outside the massive steel and concrete doors of the settlement, as well as the hundreds of men, women and children who were strung out behind them.

“Contar... Robert?” Cha’talla exclaimed. “Why are you here? We warned you to escape into the mountains!”

“They landed a large force to the west of our settlement Cha’talla and cut us off.” The Limian replied. “It was the only route into the mountains! We had nowhere else to come! They are pushing in this direction even as we speak.”

“Contar... they are coming here. They are after us!” Cha’talla told him. “It will not be safe here!”

“We have lived in peace and cooperation for almost twenty years Cha’talla.” The human spoke. “We are not trained as you and your tribe. We do not stand a chance against these Kavalian animals!”

Cha’talla turned as Esther and Tir’ut appeared next to him. He needed only an instant to make a decision that was only another brick in the path he was blazing into the future for himself and his tribe. “Come inside!” He snapped. “All of you! Esther... take the women and children to the bunker! Any of you who are able to fight... no matter your skills... we will need your assistance!”

Robert nodded and stepped forward. “Give me a weapon! I’ll fight!”

Cha’talla watched as dozens of men and women also stepped forward determination set in their jaws. “Tir’ut... take those who wish to fight to the armory. Get them fitted. How many landed near your settlement Robert?”

“Several thousand at least.” The man answered.

“Did you see any heavy armor? Hover tanks? Artillery?” Cha'talla asked.

“No tanks... but as we crested the north ridge I turned back and saw them setting up what appeared to be plasma cannons.” He answered. “At least four that I saw.”

T'lolt had come up beside his brother and he heard Robert's answer. “Standard artillery battery.” He said watching as Cha'talla looked at him.

Cha'talla nodded. “We must assume they will be set up all around us. Tell Narice and Lisisa Leonidas this must be their first priority T'lolt.”

“They will have the T19 missiles protecting these artillery pieces brother.” T'lolt spoke to him.

Cha'talla nodded. “I know... but it can not be helped. If they are allowed to shell us they could bring down the entire settlement without ever setting foot inside the walls! Risks must be taken, and the Kavalians may be as yet unaware that we have dragons here! Lisisa and Narice will know this.”

T'lolt smiled a predator's smile. “That would be a nasty surprise for them.”

“Get them moving T'lolt.” Cha'talla said. “It only works in our favor if we attack them first.”

T'lolt nodded and began to move off as Esther was ushering women and children past where Cha'talla was standing. He turned back to Contar and Robert. “Come with me to our command center. Show me where you saw them setting up their artillery as best you are able. Dysea and Isabella are there, they are coordinating the overall defense.”

IMMORTAL COMMAND CENTER

“...Don't know where they came from Lady Dysea!” The Immortal soldier sitting at the two small sensor stations barked as he turned to look at Dysea and Isabella who stood around the large plot table that showed the settlement and the surrounding terrain for ten miles. “At least fifty Union ships and hundreds of fighters!”

“What is happening Kr'das?” Bella barked.

“Admiral Thodias pulled your ship into high orbit and joined with these new ships!” The man barked. “Their arrival took the Kavalians by surprise and your forces were able to get a significant first strike in! Many of the Kavalian *GREAT SOUL* Dreadnoughts are damaged or destroyed. The fighters are too numerous to count... and the battle is now ship to ship!”

“Can you tell who is winning Kr'das?” Dysea asked turning to look at him.

“No *darthirii ilhar!*” He answered. “Our sensors were never meant to track a full scale battle above us. I can't differentiate between fighters, only the larger ships!”

“Ground sensors?” Isabella snapped.

“All of them are working properly.” He answered. “You should be getting the feed from them now!”

Isabella and Dysea looked at the plot table as it came alive with numerous white and blue dots which signified friendly forces. The red dots appeared in three different locations and were far more numerous.

“They are massing to the west, south west and the north.” Bella spoke.

“They are the only areas where they could land so many troops.” Dysea said with a nod. “It could also work to our favor.”

Isabella looked at her and came to the same conclusion as Cha'talla had. “Have Lisisa and Narice hit them before they get situated for an assault.”

Dysea nodded. “If we don't... it will only be a matter of time before they breach the settlement walls.” She said.

Dysea knew that both she and Isabella were just barely holding it together, Dysea having even more difficulty for she was also wolf and not being able to sense her beloved mate within Mindvoice was even more pronounced. She was coming into full phase in only two more days, and her wolf blood was already burning for her *Nauta Melme*. It was a burning that would never be sated now and she was distraught over that.

“If these readings are accurate... we are looking at nearly a hundred thousand troops!” Bella spoke.

Dysea looked at her then. “They knew I was here Bella.” She stated plainly. “Who flies around with a hundred thousand ground troops in Troop Carriers? They knew I was here Bella! It is the only feasible explanation. And if they knew that it could only mean one thing.”

“Someone has betrayed us then.” She stated in agreement. “Someone very high up.” Isabella turned her head and cursed long and loud in the vampire ancient language. “I thought we had seen enough of traitors when Armetus conducted his purge!”

“Apparently that is not the case.” Dysea said. “We must...”

They turned as the doors slid open and Cha'talla emerged with the Limian and human man that Dysea had met before. They were the leaders of the next largest non-Akruxian civilian settlement on Kranek. She had met them before and had been impressed by their devotion to their people and the cooperation they and Cha'talla showed towards one another. Cha'talla led them right up to the plot board, standing close beside Dysea himself. Dysea didn't flinch at the closeness of the former Immortal Captain to Veldruk. She trusted the man implicitly, knowing that his life with Esther had changed him so completely. His son and her daughter were now husband and wife, just as devoted to one another as Cha'talla was to Esther, as she was... as she was to her *Nauta Melme*.

“Robert saw artillery setting up on this ridge.” Cha'talla stated as his finger touched the board.

Bella looked at the spot and shook her head. “Same elevation as us.” She stated. “They can lob artillery right into the settlement proper from there.”

Cha'talla nodded. “It is why I have told Lisisa and Narice to search for and destroy their artillery first.” He saw them both looked at him but they said nothing. They too knew that T19 missiles would be protecting those artillery pieces if the Kavalians had any idea there were dragons here. It was a huge risk.

“It can't be helped. We were just talking about that as well.” Bella spoke. “Cha'talla... you have defensive positions set up all along the outer settlement wall I assume?”

Cha'talla nodded. “Building the wall was two fold.” He spoke. “It protected us from the harshness of the northern winds during the winter, and it allowed for defensive positions to be built. Many of them are built right into the wall itself.”

“How thick?” Bella asked.

“Two feet of granite and steel.” Cha'talla replied. “But nothing that will stand against a sustained artillery assault. I never... I never thought it would be needed. We must go on the assumption they will breach the walls in at least one location and Fash'ka is making ready for this.”

Dysea looked at him now. “Forgive me Cha'talla.” She said softly. “We have brought... we have brought this down on you and your people.” She looked at the human and Limian. “We have brought this down on all of you.”

Robert Sutton lifted the Immortal SA80. “It would have happened sooner or later no matter what.” He stated. “Contar and I have built new lives here and we are going to defend it with the friends we have made.” He looked at Cha'talla and nodded his head. “I'll take the South wall.”

“I will take the north.” Contar spoke.

Then both men spun around and exited the command center leaving Cha'talla to watch them for a moment before turning back to Dysea and Isabella.

“When you make friends Cha'talla...” Isabella spoke. “You seem to make very loyal friends.”

“Again I must ask you to forgive me Cha'talla.” Dysea spoke. “We have...”

“Forgive you?” Cha'talla gasped looking at her with wide eyes. “You wish me to forgive you for beautiful Normya loving my son as my Blessed Wife loves me? You wish me to forgive you for her becoming Tir'ut's Blessed Wife? You wish me to forgive you for believing in us and trusting in me when you had no reason to?” Cha'talla shook his head slowly.

“No... I will never forgive you for that Dysea. Your faith in me... in us... Normya's love for Tir'ut. This... these are all things we would not have had without you. My son's *Du'ased 'ranndi* was the *da'urzotreth wun l'et'zarreth* that I needed to make things... to make things as they should be. It was the sign for me to finally let go of our past and embrace our future. I will never look back now! Never! Your enemies are our enemies... for you and your family are now part of my tribe. We are united as family now, and like you, family is everything to us.” (Kick in the ass) Cha'talla took a deep breath for it was the most emotional speech he had ever given in his lifetime outside of Esther's company and he had meant every word. “If these Kavalian dogs want you... then they will have to go through us to get to you. And it will not be as easy as they seem to think.”

Dysea reached out and took his hand in hers, squeezing it. “Thank you Cha'talla.” She said softly.

“There is nothing to thank me for.” He stated. “As my Blessed Wife Esther is so fond of telling me... I’m not as dense as I make myself out to be.”

Dysea couldn’t bring herself to laugh at the obvious intent of humor but she nodded her head and turned back to the plot board. “Denali and Aradace are scouting the north right now with Malic and Nyla. They are staying low to the treetops so that any T19s the Kavalians have cannot track them. Eliani is with Ja’narie setting up the school for trauma cases. It is the largest building in the center of the settlement and the most fortified.” She spoke. “Normya and Tir’ut will maintain the bunker that safeguards the young ones and the civilians. Arrarn and Toria will guide the *STRIKERS* we have once the Kavalians commit to an attack. They are standing by with your Runners on the southern continent Cha’talla and...” Dysea stopped and took a deep breath.

Cha’talla looked at her and noticed she had not released his hand. He squeezed her small hand in his and watched her turn once more to look at him. “Dysea... you are entitled to...”

Isabella watched as Dysea shook her head and reached up to touch his cheek. “We do not have the luxury of mourning right now.” She said. “When... when this is over.”

Cha’talla reached up and covered her hand with his on his cheek. “Be strong through your pain Dysea.” He looked at Isabella. “Both of you. We will need your strength this day.”

Dysea turned and looked at Isabella. “We will be.” She said. “I was able to speak with Andro briefly and let him know everything that is happening here and he was able to tell me what he has heard from Earth. He is talking with Panos, Aihola and Selene since everyone else seems to be off the grid.”

“Aricia?” Isabella asked with concern in her voice.

Dysea shook her head. “He doesn’t know that much and neither did they. Panos is under heavy guard around his home ever since this began. Aihola can speak with Tarifa and Isra, but she has not tried because of the fighting. She does not want to distract them. The *Durcunusaan* has locked down Earth tighter than when we first liberated it from the High Coven. He has spoken with Admiral Joarl and Riall as well but only briefly. Gorgo and Dasha are safe with the little ones at the sanctuary. He is unable to get in touch with Armetus or Marci from the *Krypteria*. They...” She paused and Isabella saw the intense pain flash across her face.

Isabella’s eyes narrowed. “Dysea?”

“The Kavalians destroyed the Senate Building Bella.” She said finally meeting her eyes. “The entire structure was brought down. The casualties will be enormous as it was in the middle of a work day. Deia... Deia and For’mya were inside the Senate Building.”

Isabella’s hands went to her mouth in horror. “No!” She gasped.

“Nothing is known at this time according to Andro.” Dysea said trembling as she spoke. “But he can not feel For’mya within Mindvoice any longer. He is distraught and barely holding it together. Just as we are.”

“Arrarn... the others...” Isabella asked quickly.

Dysea shook her head. “We... we must keep it from them until we survive what is happening around us. Andro agrees. It is... it is too much to expect them to be able to function if they know...” Dysea took a deep breath as tears rolled down her cheeks. “He has heard from Admiral Omore; *Melyanna* and the others made it off Hadaria before the Kavalians began landing additional troops. Since they declared themselves independent of the Union, Andro does not believe it is linked with the attacks underway, though they did try to stop her from leaving.” She met Isabella’s eyes. “Other than that... we know nothing. He was going to try and contact Resumar using a Mark II Booster and he is in direct communication with Miranda Lorian of the *ARIZONA*. They are the ones who entered the system only minutes ago. Thodias informed me that they are heavily engaged, but they are holding their own.”

“They are outnumbered Dysea.” Cha’talla said.

Dysea met his eyes. “We are used to that Cha’talla.” She told him. She turned back to Isabella. “Bella... you should join Normya and Tir’ut.”

“No! I will remain here with you!” Isabella snapped.

“Bella... you are five months pregnant with *Nauta Melme*’s son. Our son. The son you have wanted to give him for so many years. The son whom we all have wanted you to have. I will not see you risk that now. You will go with Normya and Tir’ut and at the first sign that things are breaking down you will use the bunker’s emergency exit and get off this planet.” Dysea spoke.

“*Ussta* She-elf... you...” Isabella began to protest. “I am pregnant not... crippled!”

“*Iglata uns'aa ussta ssin'urn Isabella.*” Dysea spoke in almost a whisper. (Promise me my beautiful Isabella) “*Usstan shlu'ta naut noa dos 'zil al 'zil riluss dkinoss.*” (I cannot lose you as well as everyone else)

Isabella was silent for a long moment before she finally nodded her head. Dysea was right she knew. They had no word from Earth, only word from Anja that they were off Hadaria; they did not know who was alive in their family outside of those on Kranek and Andro who was returning to Earth even as they spoke according to Denali. “Very well.” She stated quietly. “But I don’t like it.”

“Yet you know one of us must survive.” Dysea said softly. “If anything happens to us... Androcles will need brothers to help him avenge us in the future, for you know that is exactly what our son will do.”

Isabella nodded and moved around the table to stand next to her. She pressed close to her elven lover and fellow queen and they shared a soft kiss of great feeling and love. “*Sat dro ussta il darthirii.*” She whispered. (Stay alive my she elf)

“I will certainly attempt too.” Dysea told her as she nuzzled Isabella’s throat.

“Kr’das...” Cha’talla barked. “Escort Lady Isabella to the bunker and then return here to your duties.”

The large Immortal got to his feet without hesitation. “As you order!”

Isabella squeezed Dysea’s hand before turning to follow the hulking Immortal soldier. Dysea turned to look at Cha’talla once more. “I will have Zarah and Lucia here with me. Zarah is an excellent engineer and she can help with routing power where it needs to go. Where will you position yourself?” She asked him.

Cha’talla stabbed the plot board. “Here!” He stated immediately. “I can monitor the three areas most likely to be breached and with you here in the command center directing Arrarn and the others we can at least let them know we will not go down easily. I can assigned more of my trusted men here?”

Dysea shook her head. “They will be needed elsewhere.” She stated. Dysea once more did something Cha’talla never expected, but to him it was only another sign that his future and the future of his tribe was now squarely on the path that would take them well into the future. If they had one after today that is. Dysea wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly, holding in her tears, but taking some measure of comfort from him. Bewildered as to what to do, Cha’talla loosely put his arms around her, and then pulled her tight as a friend would embrace a friend.

“We... we will prevail this day Dysea Leonidas.” He spoke softly. “And when you strike out to seek vengeance for what they have done this day, I will be beside you and your family, for our two families are now entwined for all time.”

Dysea pulled her head back and looked up into his face. Her emerald eyes were moist, but she refused to succumb to the sorrow coursing through her. She needed to be strong for everyone else. *Nauta Melme* would expect her to be strong.

“The day your son saved our daughter you became family Cha’talla of the Immortals.” She said squeezing his arms tightly. “*Nauta Melme* knew this. And he welcomed it. It only showed him that saving T’lolt all those years ago was the best thing he could have done.”

“To the future then.” Cha’talla said.

“Let us insure we have a future to witness my friend.” Dysea said nodding her head.

KRANEK FAR NORTHERN CONTINENT EIGHTY-THREE KILOMETERS FROM IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

“...says they are setting up here on this ridge.” Lisisa spoke as she and Narice knelt before the portable map chart on the ground between them. The other Coven riders were gathered around as tightly as they could while the heads and necks of dozens of dragons were looking in over the top of the riders. If the situation was not so dire, it would have been comical to many people who witnessed it. “We need to eliminate the artillery batteries before they begin shelling the settlement or else all will be lost.”

“Princess Lisisa... is it true what we have heard?” One of the Coven riders asked. “Is the King... are your father and Torma dead? Did the Kavalians kill them?”

“Sebel!” Narice hissed in angry.

The tan scaled head of a dragon butted the rider heavily in the shoulder. *That is not an appropriate question to ask brother.* Everyone heard the dragon speak.

The vampire looked at the dragon. "If they were able to kill King Leonidas and Torma Fanir... we must assume..." The man began to reply.

"Yes!" Lisisa spoke firmly after drawing in a breath. "Yes... it's true!" She looked up and let her eyes sweep along the gathered faces and muzzles of the riders and dragons. "We... we are all threatened here." She continued. "We will... we will mourn my father and Torma if... when we survive this day." Lisisa reached up and placed her palm on Jeth's muzzle. He had remained silent for the most part since feeling the death of his father. "We..."

"Listen to me!" Narice exclaimed rising to her feet. "All of you!" She looked around at the many pairs of eyes now focused on her. "We traveled to Earth not really knowing each other. Not knowing our bonded ones. My mother's only thought was to control us! Make us instruments to further her plans for domination! Androcles, Lisisa, Denali... all of them. They took us in and began to show us what we could be. We... we have become what my mother feared we would become. We have become bonded pairs... but with our own wills and our own values! Many of us have become friends to Athani Leonidas... a Kavalian. A member of the species who have terrorized the Coven for decades. We learned from her that they are not all the same and we became friends with her!" Narice looked all around. "Don't you see... don't you see what we have become!"

"Even after she perpetrated such a heinous act against Zarah... Andro's first thought was not how to punish us, but how to protect us from his father's wrath. I will not apologize for who I have become! I will never regret turning my back on my mother and embracing who I have become! I... I love Arrarn Leonidas and Toria with all that I am! I love Deneth with all that I am!" Narice turned and as Lisisa had done she placed her hand on Deneth's snout. "He was so right in the words he spoke to us on his ship as we left Earth behind, for that day is when our lives began anew! Live our lives he said! Live our lives by our rules and conscious! I think we all made that same choice when we chose to leave Earth. This is our test! Our final test! This is where we begin to make our mark! These men and women, no matter that they are Immortals and elves, they accepted us. Welcomed us! Just as Andro and his brothers and sisters did. This is when we begin to show them they have not been mistaken about what they saw in all of us!"

Narice saw many of the riders and even the dragons nodding their heads as they listened to her words.

"They need us now!" Narice continued. "They need what we can do as Bonded Pairs. This is what we must now do. We must put our lives in danger for those we have never met or know." Narice blinked several times as realization of what she was saying struck her. "We must do this not because we have too... not because we are ordered too... but because it is what we are meant to do! This is what Andro felt we were all meant to do!"

Lisisa came to her feet looking at Narice as every Coven rider and dragon moved even closer nodding their heads. She felt the surge of power through them all within Mindvoice... the new sense of purpose and determination. She reached out and took Narice's hand her eyes moist with tears. Narice looked at her and squeezed her hand. Lisisa looked at all of them. "I know many of you do not adhere to a faith in higher beings. I did not until my father saved me. It is something that he brought back to our people with his return. Have faith in each other. Have faith in what we have taught you." She shifted on her feet. "There is something Andro says every time before going into battle or leaping from the back of a *STRIKER*. He believes strongly in faith and the gods. It is a blessing he wrote as a boy to honor our grandfather. It is a blessing I would like to share with all of you now." Lisisa took a deep breath. "Into the hands of our grandfather's spirit do we commend our souls...?"

Jeth lifted his own head now. *May he guide our actions and thoughts and pick us up if we fall!*

Lisisa lifted her head and looked at them. "Your saddles are all Mark Elevens. If you must use your teleporters... remember that they only carry enough power for two... perhaps three teleportations. This technology is how we finally began to beat the T19 missiles, but only those who ride dragons know of it. You are the first outside the ranks of our own Bonded Pairs to have this knowledge. Be mindful of when and if you need to use it. And be certain you can see where you are teleporting too. My section will come in from the north. Narice will bring her section in south to south west. The artillery is our priority... but do not be afraid to target any Kavalians fool enough to be in your way."

Narice nodded. "Maintained communication via your implants as long as possible and switch to MV if you must. If for any reason the settlement walls are breached and you are nearby, descend quickly and join the

battle. Andro has told us only one Bonded Pair can change a battle. We have forty! I expect to see you all there when we are done!”

Let's do this! Jeth bellowed with Mindvoice and followed that with a long and very loud trumpet. A trumpet which Deneth quickly matched as Narice leaped onto her saddle. Soon forty plus dragons were joining in and Lisisa looked to the sky.

We are coming Denali my love! She reached out just before Jeth cocked his legs and launched them into the sky.

Arrarn stood two hundred meters away with Toria and the Coven pilots and turned back to them as he saw Jeth left into the sky, nearly twenty of the Coven Riders right behind him. He reached out within Mindvoice and felt the powerful presence of his vampire mate. She may not have been wolf, but Arrarn could not think he could love anyone more than he loved Narice and Toria. She was not able to feel the aura he could project so he had learned to do almost the same thing with his mind.

My grandfather's spirit guide you my beautiful mate. He barked out.

Go with the wind Narice our love. Toria's words filtered into his mind as well as she projected her thoughts to Narice.

Be safe my loves... and I will speak with you when we are in the air and try to give you a better idea of where to strike! Narice answered.

You and Deneth mind yourselves! Toria said. *We can not lose you!*

We will prevail. Narice said. *We must prevail. We have too much to live for the three of us! I will see you soon!*

Arrarn watched as the black and white scaled dragon that was Deneth lifted off into the sky followed by the remaining members of the Coven riders. He smelled Toria come up next to him and take his hand and he looked at his stunning red haired second wife. Narice and Toria were almost completely opposite in looks, Narice with flowing black hair and deeply tanned skinned, while Toria had silky red hair and a much lighter tan. He had burned both their scents into his brain from the moment he met them.

“Arrarn?” Toria spoke softly. He turned to look at her, her beautiful blue eyes bright and clear. “We'll... we'll get through this Arrarn.”

Arrarn took her face in his hands and nodded. “I know.” He whispered. He looked up and saw the Coven *STRIKER* pilots standing around behind him and Toria. Their ships were ready, they had seen to that, and now they were waiting for the word from Denali to launch.

“Be mindful of your targets on the ground!” Arrarn barked. “If any Bonded Pair requests to land, pull away from whatever you're doing and give them a platform to land upon! We will be outnumbered more than likely, and we don't know if they will have anti-air missiles that they will use on us. Expect them and plan accordingly.”

Arrarn could tell all of them were hyped up and ready to go. He could smell it in the air, the adrenalin flowing so openly. “Alright! Fire up your engines and let's move to the stand by positions!” Arrarn barked as he pulled Toria towards their own *STRIKER*. Toria clung tightly to his hand as they made their way up the ramp backwards, watching as the other pilots sprinted for their *STRIKERS*. Arrarn knew they had a better than even chance here on the planet even against a hundred thousand Kavalian troops. Between the Immortals, their dragons and the *STRIKER DTs* the Kavalians would only outnumber them two to one. It all came down to how well they did in the stars above. Their mother had told them all via Mindvoice of Miranda Lorian's bold entry into the battle, but they were still outnumber four to one and would be hard pressed to keep the Kavalians from beginning a bombardment of the surface. They needed to win in the stars above if they were to succeed here on the surface.

Arrarn's head snapped around when Toria stiffened in his grasp and her eyes went wide. “Toria... Toria what is it?” He barked.

“Who is this?” Toria snapped shaking her head. “How did you get this code?”

“Toria?” Arrarn shouted once more.

Toria turned to look at him and tightened her grip on his hand as she pulled him to the cockpit of their *STRIKER*. Arrarn followed, he could do nothing else as Toria's strength was nearly equal to his due to her

vampire genes. She guided him to his pilot's seat as she settled into her seat and began flipping switches and buttons on her right console. Arrarn looked up as a strange female voice filled the internal speakers of the *STRIKER*.

"I asked you a question!" Toria snapped once more.

"And I answered your question Toria Dellion. My name is Cirith Esavorna." The female voice answered. "Ah... I understand now... you are undoubtedly with your husband Arrarn Leonidas and you wanted him to hear. Is he listening now?"

"If this is your plea for me to return to the High Coven and come back to work for the *Venorik Elghinn*?" Toria spat. "That will never happen! Not while I draw breath in this life!"

"On the contrary Toria... I am contacting you for the complete opposite of what you think." Cirith stated. "You know of course who my father is?"

"I know of him." Toria spoke.

"We have left the High Coven Toria." Cirith spoke calmly.

Toria snorted in disbelief. "You expect me to actually believe that?" She spat. "Admiral Valin Esavorna leave the High Coven? He was second in command of the *Venorik Elghinn*! What could possibly encourage him to leave? The *Venorik Elghinn* would never allow you to defect! I'm not a fool!"

"The fact remains that we have." Cirith continued. "Right now we are holding position outside Kranek's system. We can't enter because we are as blind as the Kavalians it seems. We are not the enemy Toria Dellion... we..."

"Fuck you!" Arrarn snarled. "After what was done to my sister you expect us to believe anything you say?"

"What was done to your sister was a heinous act Arrarn Leonidas and not something we had any knowledge of." Cirith stated. "My father and I... the others who are part of our group... we have been planning our escape for sometime. We..."

"You'll forgive us if we don't have time for this shit!" Arrarn barked. "We are in the middle of a crisis and..."

"Yes I know." Cirith interrupted him. "The Kavalians have systematically attacked your family throughout the entire Union. We know your father is... we know your father has fallen victim to their treachery and..."

"What do you want?" Toria snarled now. "We are very busy!"

"We want... we want to help!" Cirith spoke. "We can not do that if we are blind. We have been working with the insurgent known as The General for years. We have been feeding him information and..."

"Lucia Moran is The General!" Arrarn snapped.

"Lucia... Lucia Moran?" They heard her gasp out. "But that is... how is that possible? She has been..."

"I'll give you twenty more seconds of wasting my time before Toria pulls the plug on this communication and disables her implant." Arrarn barked. "We have no more reason to trust you than we do the fucking Kavalians! We..."

"We are nothing like those dogs!" Cirith shouted through the COM, displaying the first signs of emotion. "If Lucia is The General as you say... ask her yourself! Ask her about the information she received from us. The lives of her friends that it saved."

"Why should we believe anything you say?" Toria asked now. "We know why Lucia did what she did. I know you... I know your father... and nothing..."

"Right now we are detecting almost a dozen High Coven ships within Kranek's system that are shrouded and maintaining station away from the fighting some five million kilometers. They are communicating using an old High Coven war channel used exclusively by Immortals! All I ask of you is to check with Lucia! She can tell you that we are not the enemy! We have nowhere else left to go. With Aikiro dead... once knowledge of who and what I am gets out to Yuri my life will be useless. I..."

"Why would that *upae* Yuri care about you?" Arrarn asked. "And you are down to five seconds now!"

"*Xsa dos!*" Cirith swore viciously. "My name is Cirith Esavorna... I was born three thousand one hundred and twenty seven years ago. I carry Lycavorian blood in my veins; I was meant to be the second wife to your grandfather Leonidas and lover to your grandmother Gorgo Arrarn Leonidas. All that changed the day he died. And Empress Aikiro was my mother." (Damn it)

Arrarn's dark eyes looked at Toria in stunned silence.

HARBINGER

SEVEN HOURS THIRTY-FOUR MINUTES FROM EARTH

"...then it's true?" Resumar asked.

"I don't know anything more than what I have told you Res!" Andro exclaimed to the holographic image of his brother. "I'm heading back to Earth now... but communications is tenuous at best. They have hit us in more places than... more places than father ever thought they could."

Andro watched his brother pacing back and forth in the transmission as he always did when he was excited or apprehensive about something. Andro flexed his fingers on the transmitting end of the Mark II booster, the pins seated a quarter inch into his skin.

"I can be on my way back in under an hour Andro." Resumar stated.

Andro shook his head. "No!" He barked.

Resumar looked at him wide eyed. "Andro they have attacked our family! They have attacked the Union!" Resumar snarled. "They have killed... they have killed our father! Possibly... possibly two of our mothers! We can not let this go unanswered! I will..."

"You will follow your orders!" Andro snarled back at him. "You will destroy that ship before you leave! And you will stay away from Earth!"

"What? Why?" Resumar was stunned.

"Damn it Res!" Andro snapped. "We both cannot return! Deni and most of our family is on Kranek fighting for their lives! I am returning to Earth! You and Yuriko are the only ones not caught up in this brother! You must stay away! If... if anything happens to me... if they defeat our forces and those of Cha'talla on Kranek! You will be all that remains!"

"Where is Yuriko?" Resumar asked.

"I don't know... I've been trying to contact her but she is not answering her Secure COM." Andro replied.

"You don't expect me to just sit here and do nothing do you Andro?" Resumar barked viciously.

"You must!" Andro stated. "Please don't make me order you Resumar! I will order the captain of the *FAITH* to insure you stay away. Uncle Vonis as well if I have too!"

Andro saw Athani step into the transmission and take his brother's arm as she looked at him. "Andro... Andro I... I did not..."

Andro shook his head. "Do not question it Athani." He spoke quickly. "It never once crossed my mind. If grandfather Riall was accurate... your sister and several others fought beside our parents before my father fell. And they guarded our mother while Aunt Anuk treated her. I need you to keep him away Athani. You must complete the mission... it means more now than it ever did."

"The High Coven team is still out there somewhere." Athani told him.

Resumar looked up at him. "We... we are secure as long as we stay inside the ship. Avi and 341 have insured they cannot breach the interior of the ship!" He said. "Mother made it off Hadaria?"

Andro nodded. "Admiral Omore contacted me only a short while ago. It appears my channel is the only one operating right now."

"What... what will you do Andro?" Resumar asked.

"I... I don't know." Andro answered. "I don't know anything right now. I've ordered all our forces to maximum alert and deployed to their staging areas. More than that I don't know right now. This is a coordinated strike at us... our family. No one is reporting the Kavalians coming across our borders anywhere! They are intentionally staying away except for those that moved to Hadaria. I just don't understand what they hope to accomplish Res. It doesn't make any sense to me. I will not act prematurely and order an invasion of KFI territory... it could very well be what they want us to do."

Resumar nodded as he regained control at least part of his raging emotions. "We pour across the border and they hit us from behind."

Andro nodded slowly. "This... they have planned this for sometime brother considering the success they have had. I will not play into their hands by doing something they are ready for now. How soon before you can destroy the ship and become deployable?"

Resumar shrugged. "Another day... perhaps two." He replied. "What about those moving to Hadaria? We can't let them keep pouring forces there Andro."

"I don't intend too... but I must get to Earth or at the very least speak with Uncle Atropos and our mother before deciding what to do. They must have built a Jump Gate that is tied into our own network somewhere to be able to bypass our measures as they have been doing. It is the only explanation. Omore said they had detected nearly six hundred ships within the system when they left. JGC on Apo Prime has already tried to shut down the Gates around Hadaria with no luck. They planned this well Res... we cannot do one thing for fear of something else happening. This type of action... targeting our family like they have... it has effectively tied our hands for the moment." Andro said. "I don't know what is truly going on... and I won't for at least another twelve hours."

Resumar looked at him in the transmission. "Cut off the head and the body dies." He said.

Andro nodded. "Kill our family and throw the entire Union into disarray." He said. "There is something else going on here Resumar. Something far more sinister that we can not see yet. Why target just our family? No military invasion... no ships, no troops. Only our family. It just doesn't make any sense!"

Resumar nodded his head as what Andro was saying began to take shape in his head as well. They had studied together endlessly with Denali and Arrarn. The four brothers were known to be scholars of history in every form, and as Andro spoke Resumar saw what he was referring to easily. They had fought together more than their younger brothers, and combined with Eliani and Lisisa, the four of them had received the most attention from their father and mothers when it came to military and political happenings.

"No... it doesn't." Resumar said.

"Finish your preparations and standby to hear from me." Andro spoke. "As soon as I get a handle on things I will contact you. Have Avi continue to use the MV ship's systems to monitor the Netnews Channels. You must keep the *FAITH* and Uncle Vonis's friends and their ships hidden. If anything changes or I need something from you I will use the code we designed during the Evolli War. Do you remember?"

Resumar nodded. "Yes."

"Give Julie a *STRIKER* from the *FAITH* and send her back to Earth. She will have much information that I want." Andro said.

"Andro... if not for her we would all be dead! She is not our enemy brother." Resumar answered.

Andro shook his head. "I don't view her as such Res. The information she will have is too valuable to disseminate over the COM link. I will need her on Earth to pick her brain about Kavalian targets and such. Right now she is the most valuable piece of intelligence I have outside of you Athani. And you must remain with Resumar."

"I will transcribe anything I think can help to a pad and send it with her Andro." Athani said. "Anything. My brother Mican might..."

Andro's eyes grew wide. "Brother?" He asked.

Athani nodded. "I have... I have discovered some rather amazing things Andro. The largest being that Jalersi and I have a brother. He leads the Kavalian resistance against my father."

Andro blinked several times at this information. "Resistance?" He said. "We... this was not known to the *Krypteria*."

Athani shook her head. "No. But it will be as soon as Julie arrives back on Earth." She stated confidently.

"He is helping you?" Andro asked.

Athani nodded once more. "They have been helping us since we got here."

"We could not have taken the Kavalian Science ship without them." Resumar spoke now.

"You captured a Kavalian vessel?" Andro gasped.

Resumar nodded. "It's a long story. Julie can fill you in. I'll get her moving ASAP!" He spoke.

Andro shook his head slowly. "So much... so much is happening at once." He stated softly. "Do nothing that endangers your position brother!" He snapped. "Nothing! I need you to stay alive Resumar! You must stay alive in case anything happens to me."

“Andro... Deni is...” Resumar began.

“Denali is just coming to realize what he can do! He will be the first one to admit that!” Andro barked out. “No! If anything happens to me... it will fall to you brother! We have never considered ourselves anything more than brother and sister no matter who our mothers are have we?”

“No!” Resumar answered instantly.

“Then half elf or not Resumar my brother... if I fall... if we can turn back the Kavalians on Kranek... then leadership of the Union goes to Eliani and you!” Andro barked. “Do nothing that endangers that!”

“Andro...”

“I must go now!” Andro spoke. “I will contact you again when I reach Earth and discover more of what has happened. I promise you. Twelve hours Resumar. I have... I have ordered the *Durcunusaan* to be ruthless in securing the situation. We will... we will know more in twelve hours.”

“And if they succeed in killing our family on Kranek Andro? Then what do we do?” Resumar asked.

Andro’s azure blue eyes grew dark and sinister. “Then Resumar my brother... we will not stop until our uncle and the Kavalian Empire is nothing but ashes and a memory blowing upon the wind.”

Resumar’s face became hard and he nodded. “By the spirit of our grandfather brother.”

“By the spirit of our grandfather.” Andro echoed before pulling his hand off the end of the Mark II and watching the transmission fade into nothing.

Andro staggered back slightly, rubbing the palm of his hand and it was then he smelled them. The scents of sugar plum and spice, fresh rose petals, sweet amaretto and soft honey melon drifted to his nostrils. Sadi was the first one to reach him as he dropped to one knee, gathering him into her arms as all strength left him and he slumped to the floor of the communications room by the wall. Sadi slid slowly to the floor under his weight, pulling his head to her chest as his body stretched out on the deck void of any energy or strength.

“We... we have you my love.” She whispered to him, pulling his head to her chest. “We have you Androcles our love.”

“Gone.” Andro gasped. “My father... mother... so... so much lost.”

“We will... we will go on Andro.” Carisia’s voice spoke softly.

Andro turned his head and saw them and he didn’t hesitate. He turned his body on the floor between Sadi’s legs and pulled Ne’Veha to his right side, Carisia to his left side and Lu’ria simply settled between his legs. He felt their warmth flood through him as he nuzzled Lu’ria’s head when she placed her head on his chest, their Mindvoice presence powerful and clear as Sadi’s arms closed around him and them tighter.

It had taken its toll, these last few days. The combat on Iraruzu, the flight from Earth, having to take the life of one who was his cousin. Andro was powerful, far more than they were, but he was still only human as the expression went. They felt his mind surrender to the exhaustion of everything that had taken place in these last hours and his arms only drew them tighter as Andro drifted unwillingly into the realm sleep. The four women who meant most to him in the entire universe simply wrapped their own minds around his, shielding him from the outside world, protecting him from harm and daring anyone to interfere. Only one person on the ship was powerful enough to feel this outside of the dragons on the hanger deck, and he had no intention of interfering.

Walter reached up slowly and flicked off the monitor he had been watching from Velnar’s Ready Room. He felt Captain Velnar rise from his chair behind the desk and come up beside him and he turned. It had taken Walter nearly ninety minutes to finally get Andro to see what he was saying to him and the why of it. During all that time he could barely keep from smiling at how similar Andro was to his father and the conversations he and Martin had had through the years. Indeed, the only reason the smiles did not come out, were because the man who he had a hand in keeping safe and raising to some degree was now dead.

“Senior Polemarch.” Velnar spoke softly. “What do we...?”

Walter met his eyes. “A storm is coming Velnar.” Walter spoke softly. “I have learned something in these last hours and it began when I saw him strike down his cousin on Iraruzu without as much as a blink. Androcles Leonidas is like his father in many respects... and so very different in others. A storm is coming my friend and the Kavalians do not yet realize what they have done this day.”

Velnar looked at him oddly. “I don’t follow.”

“The Kavalians have killed the one person who could control that storm Velnar.” Walter spoke gently. “Without his father to hold him in check, Androcles Leonidas will follow his instincts now. Pleistarchus has no idea the door into the dark abyss that he has opened with his actions today.” Walter shook his head. “I... I sense there is something else going on Velnar. We have not seen it yet... but I can’t shake the feeling that killing Martin is only the beginning of something else. I know Pleistarchus... he is devious yes... but he would not fully commit acts like he is doing unless he had another plan.”

“Another plan for what Senior Polemarch?” Velnar asked.

“Have we detected any other locations within Union space besides Hadaria where Kavalian forces are moving against us?” Walter asked.

Velnar shook his head. “No.”

Walter nodded. “Nothing. Which means Pleistarchus has something else planned. If invading was their purpose, they would be coming across the border from three or four different locations like ants to honey.”

“They are occupying Hadaria Senior Polemarch.” Velnar spoke. “Surely that means something.”

Walter shook his head. “That is something entirely different, and given the players involved, I’m surprised it hasn’t happen before now. Buonau and Wiktor are two of the most conniving female bitches I have ever met. No... the attacks against the royal family are something else entirely. We have much to do before we reach Earth Velnar. I need to speak with the *Feravomir* first and foremost. Can you pull up her Secure COM Channel even with the blackout?”

Velnar nodded still not understanding what Walter meant. “I believe so.”

“Do it. Quickly.” Walter said.

ULU *ARIZONA*

“...have a lock!” E'dira’s voice boomed across the bridge to drowned out the pounding her shields were taking from Kavalian guns.

“All portside batteries fire!” Miranda screamed out. “Full dispersal and yield on Type Ones and Type Twos! Fire! Fire!”

The *ARIZONA* had pulled in alongside the *DIEROY*-Class Heavy cruiser with a single minded purpose that matched her commander’s determination. The *DIEROY*-Class model of cruiser was among the workhorses of the Kavalian fleet. Primarily a heavy gun platform that could go toe to toe with just about any ship in the High Coven fleet. Next to the *GREAT SOUL* Dreadnoughts, these ships were the most dangerous of any Kavalian fleet ship. No Union commander wanted to fall into the trap of exposing their ship to a full on frontal shot from the *DIEROY*’s twin Spinal Mount Super Heavy Mass Driver Gauss cannons. A single shot from those cannons, which fired all at the same time, could break the back of even a *LEONIDAS IIA* with relative ease. The *DIEROY* was known to have killed more High Coven warships than any other during their ongoing war.

The *ULU ARIZONA* however was not part of the High Coven.

As with the suppression barrage that she had initiated upon first entering the system, all of her portside batteries came alive in that single instant. Even as the Hellfire and Anvil series Gauss cannons pounded her port side, ten Type One Terra series and fifteen Type Two Terra series plasma turrets came alive. As two other *DIEROYs* and three *DIATAGAs* had discovered in the last twenty-two minutes, they just could not hold up under a sustained point blank barrage from the *ARIZONA*’s main batteries. Red streaks flashed across the thousand meter open area between the two ships and great swaths of the *DIEROY*’s superstructure began to buckle as each blast of her Type Ones opened up a gaping hole in the hull of the ship. Several of her Gauss turrets were hit directly and these only ignited stores of the mass accelerated shells used by the gauss cannons causing some of them to explode in place while others reach maximum velocity within the structure of the ship itself. Something that was never intended to happen. Explosions began to cause the *DIEROY* to vibrate horribly as the *ARIZONA* was able to reload and fire far faster than any Coven ship the Kavalians had faced. In the time it took them to reload their own cannons, the *ARIZONA*’s gun crews had already pumped three rounds per gun into the Kavalian ship.

As the *DIEROY* lost main power and its engines began to go critical, the *ARIZONA* was pulling away quickly. The last turret along her port axis got off one last charged plasma round and that single round punched

through the armored plating of the *DIEROY*'s bridge armor. In the space of three tenths of a second, the entire command crew for that ship was either incinerated or sucked into the vacuum of space as the hull gave way and caused a minor implosion of massive power. The next explosion occurred in the ship's LSD Coil reactor and as the huge bulk of the *ARIZONA* banked away, the last seven hundred meters of the *DIEROY*'s superstructure blew outwards with the force of the reactor going critical. Huge chunks of the ship's hull smashed harmlessly against the *ARIZONA*'s aft ventral shields as the forward section began to nose over and begin a death spiral into the atmosphere of Kranek.

Miranda couldn't contain the whoop of glee that escaped her lips, but she quickly gained control of her emotions as the need to regain control of her Attack Wing hammered itself home. She sat back in her command chair quickly.

"Status?" She barked out.

"Shields at sixty-three percent but beginning to recharge!" A voice called. "There is some minor structural damage on deck fourteen, but repair crews have already been dispatched. All batteries report standing by!"

Miranda shook her head. "No! Now we have to act like a command ship." She stated. "Where is the *SCIMITAR* and *NORMYA'S LIGHT*?"

"*SCIMITAR* is just finishing blasting a *DIATAGA* into atoms off our starboard aft quarter!" E'dira sounded out. "*NORMYA'S LIGHT* is maneuvering with..." E'dira's amber colored eyes went wide. "Miranda... High Coven ships deshrouding off starboard! Three *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts and nineteen *BLOODLETTER*-Class Cruisers turning to... *sibfla*!" She barked out. "Another twenty-three to port! They're all around us!"

"As if this fucking day couldn't get any worse!" Miranda snarled coming to her feet. "Stand by to engage the nearest..."

E'dira looked up at her with even wider eyes. "Miranda... the Coven ships are firing on the Kavalians!"

"What?" She gasped.

"Confirmed Captain!" The sensor operator shouted. "Sweet gods... they are pulverizing the Kavalians something fierce. *NORMYA'S LIGHT* is turning radically to support! We..."

"Incoming message from Admiral Thodias and Queen Dysea on the surface! It's being relayed through Commander Falarie!" The COM officer shouted. "High Coven ships are friendly! The High Coven ships are friendly!"

"Well shit... we just figured that out!" E'dira barked. "Why didn't they contact us directly?"

Miranda looked at her with wide eyes. "Sonofabitch! They don't have our COM signals E'dira! We didn't pass them on when..."

"When we entered the system!" E'dira finished her statement.

Miranda smiled at her soon to be Drow Mistress and moved to her plot table. "Get me Queen Dysea on the surface!" She snapped. "Open secure COM link! They have to be able to monitor channels if they contacted Falarie! Quickly now! And get Colonel Randall to start bringing our people in for rearming! The odds have just shifted in our favor and we need to take advantage of it!"

"Our fighters are still heavily engaged Captain!" The sensor officer reported. "The second Kavalian Fleet Group is still three quarters intact and putting up heavy resistance!"

"Give me status on our Attack Wing?" Miranda snapped. "What...?"

"Captain! Queen Dysea is responding directly from the Immortal Command bunker!" The COM officer declared.

"Put her up!" Miranda barked turning to face the holodisc. She watched the tall, muscular figure of the platinum haired elf Queen materialize, flicker and then clear. "Dysea!" Miranda barked before catching herself.

Dysea probably would have chuckled at the look on Miranda's face and her lack of protocol; however she appeared to be gripping the sides of a chart table she stood in front of. Light smoke lingered in the background, but Miranda could easily see several Immortals in the background at computer consoles.

"Manda." Dysea spoke kindly. "It is very good to see you... I just wish it was under better circumstances."

"Milady... I... we..."

“I apologize for not informing you directly of the High Coven ships arriving Manda... but we did not have your secure COMs code.” Dysea continued.

“Who are they?” Miranda asked.

“I don’t know just yet... but information they passed to us only someone who was friendly to us would know. I understand they have begun their attack!” Dysea said.

Miranda nodded. “They about scared me out of my shorts!” She answered.

Dysea clenched her teeth as the bunker vibrated again and more dust and dirt dropped from the ceiling. “It appears the Kavalians were able to land more troops than we first thought. Denali and the others have taken out their main artillery, but they brought plasma mortars with them and they are hammering the settlement from positions to our north and west.”

“I will prep our ground units and send them off Milady!” Miranda snapped.

“Any help is greatly appreciated Miranda.” Dysea answered. “Tell your people that Denali and the Coven dragons are sweeping in from the south. If you can land you people at the northern most settlement wall, that is where it appears the Kavalian will attempt to break through. Zarah and Lucia have already moved for that location with a detachment of Immortals and we...”

The loud dull smashing sound caused Dysea and the Immortals inside the bunker to whirl around.

“Someone is breaching the bunker!” Miranda heard one Immortal scream.

“They haven’t gotten through the wall yet!” Another echoed. “Who could...?”

The explosion that followed ripped the door of the bunker free of its thick roller like hinges and sent several large chunks of metal and debris hurtling through the air. Even Miranda flinched as she watched Dysea extend her *Nehtes* in a single blink. The sounds of weapons fire filled the communications and Miranda could only watch in horror as Dysea hurled her *Nehtes* into the smoke filled bunker now. She heard a howl of pain and then the huge Immortal appeared from the smoke. She watched her Queen elegantly leap into the air and hit the Immortal with a vicious front kick that sent him staggering back violently. Even as Dysea landed and began to pull her two knives from their places on her side, two more Immortals appeared from the smoke, one of them already using his weapon as a club and bringing it smashing down across Dysea’s head.

“NO!” Miranda screamed as she watched.

Her wail caught the attention of the second Immortal who quickly lifted his weapon and sent a burst of weapons fire into a computer panel. Instantly the transmission was severed at the source.

“Get her back!” Miranda screamed. “Get her back!”

“Signal is lost Captain!”

“Fuck! Fuck!” Miranda snarled. “*NORMYA’S LIGHT!* Get me Admiral Thodias! Now! Now damn it now!”

Miranda’s warning would not be fast enough.

In the forty-seven minutes since the attacks began against the Leonidas family, the fates of King Leonidas and his two elven Queens had been decided.

What the future held from here on out... what the future had cost so far... no one would ever be able to ascertain.

**** One note... Cirith’s age is three thousand one hundred and twenty-seven, not the two thousand twenty seven as stated when she was introduced in Chapter 43. ****

“YOU SPARED ME WHEN YOU COULD HAVE KILLED ME ANDROCLES LEONIDAS.”

“WE SPARED YOU BECAUSE WHAT WAS HAPPENING YOU HAD NO CONTROL OF VOLLENTH. IT WAS NOT WHO YOU ARE INSIDE. AND AS YOU ALREADY KNOW YOU ARE MEANT FOR SOMEONE ELSE. YOU ARE MEANT FOR GREATER THINGS. I WILL NEVER FORSAKE THAT.”

“I CAN FEEL THEM EVEN NOW MILORD. SWIRLING AROUND WITHIN MY MIND. SO STRONG AND PROUD.”

“I AM NOT YOUR LORD VOLLENTH. I AM NOT YOUR BETTER. WE ARE BROTHERS NOW. YOU WILL KNOW WHEN THE TIME IS RIGHT. EACH DAY IS A GIFT FOR ALL OF US MY FRIEND. IT IS NOT A GIVEN RIGHT.”

“IT IS A GIFT FOR ME SIRE. EVERY DAY I WAKE AND SEE VIERA AND MY SONS IT IS A GIFT.”

“SOME OF US ARE MEANT TO WALK THE PATH LESS TRAVELLED VOLLENTH. YOU, ME, ELYNTH... WE WILL ALWAYS BE DIFFERENT. THERE IS PURPOSE IN THE LIVES WE HAVE LED, THE EXPERIENCES WE HAVE ENDURED UP UNTIL NOW. EVEN THE PAIN WE HAVE SUFFERED. LEAVE YOUR FEARS IN THE PAST MY FRIEND. IF IT IS WORTH THE PRICE, IT IS ALWAYS WORTH THE FIGHT. YOU HAVE ALREADY PROVEN THAT.”

*-Androcles speaking with Volleth in the SCIMITAR landing bay enroute to Kranek-
-Earth Year 2574-*

-Recorded by Dilaen Roan-
- Chronicler -
-Personal Journals of Androcles Leonidas-

CHAPTER FIFTY

KRANEK

Denali whirled as he savagely yanked his *Nehtes* from the chest of the Kavalian Siege Engineer, the spray of blood showering his helmeted face and part of his shoulder. Aradace's trumpet of savage anger filled the air around them as she twisted her armored body around, her viciously sharp talons gripping the severed upper body of the Kavalian briefly before she sent his remains sailing through the morning sky with a flick of her talons. The two artillery pieces lay in twisted ruin all around them, bodies strewn grotesquely around the smashed or blackened pieces of artillery. Their scouting with Malic and Nyla had brought them over this southern mountain ridge and directly in line with two Kavalian artillery batteries and several hundred Kavalian security troops massing near the treeline in the valley below. They found them just as Narice and her section of the Coven riders had appeared on the horizon speeding towards them, just barely skimming the treetops. After ordering her to assault the massed Kavalian security troops, Denali had descended upon the Kavalian artillery battery with a bloodlust in his eyes and a rage gripping him that he had never felt before this day.

Aradace was Torma's daughter and she did not need much to push her over the edge like her bonded brother. They tore into the artillery battery with a rabid glee, as Malic and Nyla struck the second one. Denali was a son of Martin and Aricia, and by virtue of that, his blood was just as pure as his older brother Androcles. He had bonded with Aradace when he was only three, the earliest of the Leonidas children behind only Androcles. Their Mindvoice bond was very powerful, and many suspected it would only grow deeper as they grew older and gained more experience. The difference between the brothers was that Denali Leonidas and Aradace had never really delved into the vast intricacies of their Mindvoice powers, their carefree spirits and infectious attitudes labeling them as the easiest going of the Leonidas children as well as the children of Torma and Isheeni. After the evil events of the last few hours, that attitude and way of thinking would now be changed forever. Denali and Aradace had immersed themselves in their Mindvoice bond far deeper than they ever had before, and the result was simply incredible to behold.

Aradace slammed her armored right foot down upon the body of the injured Kavalian soldier who was trying to crawl away from the insane beast. Two of her talons impaled him completely and he lay still after that, blood erupting from his mouth and nose as the life left his eyes. Aradace tore her talons free; blood and bits of flesh showering the Dragon Armor that now encased her massive body. The only portion that was truly not

covered by the armor were her talons, which were considered diamond hard anyway. Denali's dark eyes swept the field around them, his helmet covering his savage features for the most part. He could see the twenty coven riders and dragons thoroughly decimating the group of Kavalian troops at the bottom of the ridge, and across the small valley, Malic and Nyla had destroyed the two other guns from this battery with relative ease.

Malic! Denali screamed out in Mindvoice.

These guns will never fire again! Malic answered instantly and Deni's keen wolf eyes saw Vincix lift his head from across the valley as Malic spun around to face him from two kilometers away.

Malic... take Nyla and proceed south along this valley! Deni barked. *I will take Narice and her section straight to the settlement! The Kavalians are hitting them from the northwest with heavy weapons and mortars according to mother!*

Mortars! Malic exclaimed. *We did not think of mortars Denali!*

We will deal with them! Deni answered confidently. *Lisisa is hitting the Kavalians that moved up from the south! Join with her group as you complete your run and assist her and the Immortals that are protecting that flank!*

We need air support! Nyla screamed out within the open connection. *We will not be able to hold them for long even with forty of us Deni! They will eventually overwhelm us and bring us down!*

Arrarn and Toria have lifted off and are coming in from the west! They will attack anything you spot for them! So far there have been no Kavalian fighters in the sky above us! Denali answered her. *We cannot allow them to breach the settlement walls! Watch for T19s as you make your sweep!*

We will join you shortly! Malic barked and Deni watched as two dragons lifted off and began streaking south.

Deni turned and looked at Aradace. She moved closer to him, lowering her head so that they were eye to eye. The Dragon Armor that now encased their bodies hid most of her features, but her eyes were bright and clear. And full of anger. *I want to... I want to peel their flesh from their bones Denali my brother. I want to make them pay for what they have done. What they have taken from us!*

Deni reached up and placed his armored hand flat on her snout, stepping even closer to her massive head. He could not feel her warm scales through the armor that protected both of them, but he did not need to touch her to know what she had swirling in her mind. They had bonded far younger than most Bonded Pairs in the Union, mainly because of the blood that swirled within their veins. Neither of them had embraced the power of that blood until today, but both of them could feel the power surging through them now and it was because of that same blood.

I feel it too my sister. Denali spoke. *And we will.*

Then climb on my brother. Aradace spoke. *Let us help Narice finish the scum here and then the real battle can begin.*

Denali wasted no time and easily leaped onto the Mark Eleven saddle. As the dragon arm leg braces tightened on his thighs and calves he nodded his head. *We must set aside who we have been up until now Aradace.* Denali spoke softly his palms going to either side of her thick muscular neck. *We must embrace what courses through our veins just as our brother and sister have. We must become a weapon, just as Andro and Elynth became after Alba Tau. He knew this day would come Aradace. As did our fathers.*

Aradace let loose with a piercing trumpet that echoed across the top of that ridge and announced to all that they were coming.

Then let us embrace that weapon and wield it today! They will pay dearly for taking out fathers from us! She barked out before tensing her powerful legs and thrusting them into the sky above.

KAVALIAN GREAT SOUL CHAOT

"...Coming around on our port quarter Captain!" The Kavalian sensor operator screamed from his chair.

The Kavalian Captain, a cruel man called Pualli, pulled himself to his feet from where the last crushing hits from the *SCIMITAR* had smashed against his shields, overloaded them and then the plasma cannons had punched two neat holes in the already weakened hull on his starboard quarter.

Pualli wiped blood from his mouth where he had hit the side of his chair when he was thrown to the deck by the last barrage. “Where did the High Coven ships come from?” He screamed. “How many?”

“At least sixty!” The reply came quickly. “They just appeared and began attacking Captain! Coven fighters are launching from at least seven of the ships!”

“The Union ships aren’t attacking them?” Pualli barked in disbelief.

“No sir! They... it appears as if they are maneuvering together sir!” The man answered him.

“Fuck! They should be attacking the Coven as well!” Pualli snarled. “Give me a damage report!”

“Heavy damage to decks six through nine! Main power has been cut off to the hanger bays and everything below deck twelve! Shields are down to twenty-one percent. The entire starboard weapons grid is offline! Three Union missile hits and four plasma beam strikes! We are leaking plasma gas from intake three and six! Our...”

“Order the *HUKUAM* to close on our starboard and...”

“The *HUMKUM* is gone Captain! We are the last Command ship!” The sensor operator shouted.

Pualli came to his feet when he realized he was now in command of the last *GREAT SOUL* in the system. “The last one!” He gasped in disbelief. “How is that possible? We outnumbered them five to one!” Pualli shook his head to clear his thoughts. “It doesn’t matter now! Order all remaining ships to tighten up and form on us! Our troops are on the ground and we can do no more!”

Several of his officers turned to look at him. “Sir... we’re leaving?” He asked.

“I will not sacrifice this ship and crew!” Pualli spat. “We no longer have the upper hand anymore. Surprise has shifted to the enemy and now it is time to pull our teeth back!”

“We... we will be leaving our troops without support Captain!” The officer spoke. “Contact the...”

“Communications are being jammed Captain!” The COM officer retorted as he frantically tried to work his console. “We can’t contact anyone!”

“What?” Pualli barked. “What do you mean we can’t contact anyone?”

“No contact across the board Captain!” The COM officer announced once more. “I can’t even raise our own fighters! It’s some sort of Hypermorphic Resonation field! I’ve never seen anything like it before! It’s jamming communications and long range sensors! Only short range sensors are operational, and only out to half a million kilometers!”

“Captain Pualli! Captain! Union M5 *DEVASTATORS* bearing three two one mark six!” The sensor operator screamed. “Coming in on our starboard side! Sonofabitch... I’m reading nine High Coven *BLOODWAND* Fighter/Bombers right behind them, with *TEMPEST* fighter cover! Captain they are teaming up!”

“High Coven and Union ships?” Pualli yelled still trying to comprehend that the Union was taking sides with the Coven after what they knew Aikiro had done. “Impossible!”

“They are almost upon us Captain. It is right here in front of us! They have tasted blood and now they are winning!” The man barked.

“Jump!” Pualli barked then. “Jump right now! Use emergency coordinates Beta! Helm emergency Jump coordinates Beta! Engage now!”

The *CHAOT* was far more damaged than Pualli and his crew knew. Micro fractures had formed all over the hull in the area where they had taken the most damage. Missiles from the *SCIMITAR* and the *ARIZONA*’s main guns had pulverized the starboard aft quarter of his ship badly. They were micro fractures that could not be detected unless done with a multi-thermic imaging sensor and that was not a tool normally used out of a space dock. As the helmsmen began to bring their main engines online and began to sharply turn the *CHAOT*, he set the catastrophic failure in motion. The *CHAOT* banked over hard, trying to put as much distance between them and the incoming fighters as they could, though it would not have mattered regardless. Ships the size of the *CHAOT* do not outrun fighters. In doing so, with the added gravitational stress on the joints and the rising power levels throughout damaged conduits, the Graviton Wave Generator fired by the *ARIZONA* claimed its first combat casualty, a result that was never intended or thought of.

Four large main power conduits fed the *CHAOT's* Tri-Cobalt Main LSD Coil drive. The radical turn and micro fractures in just one of those conduits was near certain death. As power increased in the conduit, the micro fractures became large fractures, and then Tri-Cobalt Matter Gas began to pour from the conduit explosively. Usually a stable ore, when refined into its gaseous state, Tri-Cobalt became very volatile. And most especially when mixed in very heavy concentration with the nitrogen in oxygen. The micro fracture became a crack, and that crack began to spew flames as if from a blowtorch. Most of the senior Kavalian engineering crew that was still alive was attempting to repair damage on the opposite side of the engineering spaces. Only a senior enlisted soldier looked up when he heard the harsh hissing noise of what sounded like flames. His eyes grew wide and the fur on the back of his neck curled inward. He opened his mouth to shout a warning and that is when the conduit blew open completely.

The flash wave of flame incinerated the closest Kavalians, the heat nearly six thousand degrees. Oxygen was ripped from the air, lungs were seared and skin was melted. Those were the lucky ones. The flames quickly overheated and then melted the three undamaged conduits, and in less than twenty seconds the engineering section of the *CHAOT* was a firestorm that would not be stopped.

COLONEL STEVEN RANDALL
ARIZONA AIR WING COMMANDER
M7 TEMPEST
CALL SIGN SCAR

“Lined up nicely!” Steven barked as he kept one eye glued to the massive Kavalian ship they were closing on, and one eye on his bank of screens between his legs. “*BLACK KNIGHTS* in first! Coven *BLOODWAND's* right after on the secondary power junctures! We'll maintain cover in case any *JAGUARS* decide they want to stick their noses where they don't belong!”

It had come, as somewhat of a surprise to say the least, when Dysea had contacted him directly to let him know that High Coven warships and fighters would be joining the battle on their side. That surprise didn't stay with Steven long though. He knew Dysea far better than Miranda and given everything that had happened in the last few hours it stood to reason she would contact only those she knew personally. No matter whom she had contacted first, the moment the Coven ships had lowered their shrouds, their guns and missiles had begun putting a hurting on the Kavalians. Coven *TORPEDO* and *BLOODWANE* fighters were soon spilling from the larger High Coven ships and obviously under orders to respond to Union flight leaders. Steven had picked up this group of *BLOODWANE* Fighter/Bombers almost as quickly as they had launched. Whoever they were, they knew what they were about and they were obviously on the side of the Union for they laid into the Kavalian fleets with undisguised glee.

The three groups of fighters had already taken out one *DIATAGA* Attack Cruiser and Steven had guided them towards this *GREAT SOUL* after watching the *SCIMITAR* and the *ARIZONA* pound the shit out of it with their main guns and over a dozen missiles. The two monstrous ships working in concert had been a sight to see, and it had stunned Steven to see Miranda drive their ship as if she was back in her fighter. He should have known though, she was still a fighter pilot at heart and because of its power matrix; the *ARIZONA* would be able to do many things other ships would not.

The Coven squadrons were obviously made up of only nine planes, and Steven had communicated with the female fighter pilot who was obviously the leader in order to bark instructions. Her voice was soft, but firm and full of confidence as she acknowledged his orders and then directed her own ships in response. They Coven pilots were cool and efficient and it made their small group that much more deadly.

“Oh...oh... she's peeling away!” Ty'coa echoed from Steven's right side causing him to look up completely.

“Stay with her *KNIGHTS!*” Steven barked. “Twenty seconds to range!”

“I got some odd power readings coming from her aft center Steven!” Ty'coa announced.

“Colonel Steven Randall! Pull your people back! Pull them back now!” The female Coven pilot's voice screamed into the intership COM. “Her LSD Coil is going critical! It will explode at any moment! Pull them back now!”

Steven didn't hesitate. "*KNIGHTS* abort! *KNIGHTS* abort!" He snapped. "Break left and right! Rolling away!"

"With you!" Ty'coa exclaimed.

Like insects scattering when a bright light came on in a dark room, the Union and Coven fighters sent their ships spinning and banking away from the massive *GREAT SOUL* and kicked in their booster engines to get as far away as possible.

Steven righted his fighter and looked back over his shoulder at the fast retreating bulk of the dreadnought. His keen eyes saw the red glow begin on her ventral axis and grow brighter as each second passed. "Shit! She's going up!" He barked.

The explosion was spectacular in its makeup. The *GREAT SOUL* dreadnought blossomed with light almost near the center of its length and it spread outward like a wave along the ship's entire length in both directions. Nothing was spared and no one would survive the cataclysmic explosion that sent a circular wave of destruction outward for hundreds of kilometers all around it.

"The *ARIZONA* and *SCIMITAR*'s weapons must have done more damage than we first thought." Ty'coa's voice echoed in Steven's helmet.

"I guess so." Steven spoke. "We..."

"Flagship One to CAG!" The voice erupted in his helmet. "Flagship One to CAG!"

Steven banked his fighter over slightly and looked at the massive bulk of the *ARIZONA* in the distance. "*Scar* here! Go Flag One!"

It was Miranda's voice that came on next and it didn't sound happy at all. "*ARIZONA* actual to *Scar*! Things on the ground are not as good as they are up here *Scar*! Someone just breached the bunker Dysea was in Steven! She's off the grid! She's off the grid Steven!" Steven could easily detect the concern in her voice. "I can't raise anyone on the ground either! Denali! Lisisa! Not even the Immortal Command Center! Get down there with what you have and provide whatever support you can! And make contact with someone! I'm redirecting our *STRIKER ATs* there as we speak! They'll meet you on the ground! Something isn't right! Get down there and find Dysea!"

"Rotating now!" Steven barked without thought turning his *TEMPEST* toward Kranek in the distance. "*KNIGHTS* on me! *KNIGHTS* on me! We're going atmospheric!"

"*BLACK KNIGHTS* lead confirms! Forming on you *Scar*!" The voice answered.

"Nothing leaves the planet that isn't Union!" Miranda snapped over the COM. "Janon is recovering three squadrons to rearm and act as planetary cover! Sa'sur and I will wipe up the Kavalian scum that is left! I'm ordering our fighters to return and prepare for follow on operations! With the Coven ships on our side we can do this quickly! Get down there and find out what the hell is going on! *ARIZONA* clear!"

Steven pointed his *TEMPEST* at Kranek and then looked over his shoulder once more, directing his eyes at the nine High Coven *BLOODWAND* fighters that were still shadowing him and Ty'coa. "What's your name Coven Lead?" He snapped.

"You are... you are the Union pilot they call *Scar*?" The voice answered with a touch of admiration that was not there before. "You... you are human!"

"That would be me." Steven answered. "We need to break off now. Thanks for the assist! It was welcome and you are some fine pilots."

"We... we were ordered to remain and assist you in whatever you needed done Colonel Randall. That is what we will do." She replied.

"What's your name?" Steven asked again turning his head as he saw the *BLOODWAND* move up on his right side, opposite Ty'coa.

"Senior Commander Ardonia Usaro." She answered.

"Our Queen... our friends are down there and it ain't going well for them!" Steven spoke. "We are trained for fighting on the ground as well Senior Commander Ardonia. I intend to land my pilots and attempt to help!"

"Then we will land together Colonel." She answered. "We are trained as well."

Steven blinked several times and then shrugged his broad shoulders. "Fair enough!" Steven said. "I hope you can keep up! *KNIGHTS*... let's get tactical! In we go!"

Twelve Union fighters and nine High Coven fighters rolled once more as a single entity and made for the large planet in their cockpit view windows.

KRANEK SEVEN KLICKS SOUTH OF IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

The Kavalian Ground Commander in the southern operation was barreling along the wide valley trail, his eyes large and filled with horror at what he was witnessing. He gripped the sides of his *CHAOS* Light Lifter, standing in the command hatch as his eyes took in the hundreds of bodies that littered the valley floor. Smoke rose above the trees all around them, many of their bodies still on fire in some manner, and the blackened bodies of his men lay scattered about like rag dolls. The valley floor could easily fit four or five abreast of the Kavalian *CHOAS* Heavy tank, but the plan did not call for them to land their heavy equipment. Only a few Light *CHAOS* Command vehicles had been loaded and brought to the surface to supplement the KFI Plasma Artillery batteries, as it was thought the heavier *CHAOS* MBTs would not be needed. He was a relatively young Kavalian commander, having only fought in three smaller battles with the High Coven at the end of their last conflict. He had never seen destruction and death like what he was witnessing right now. He could see the poorly trained medics trying to attend to the Kavalian biogenic clones with skin that still smoldered, their screams of agony filling the air around him. Many of those who lived were beyond saving he could tell just from looking at them as in most cases their uniforms and even their weapons were melted right to their bodies. He saw what had to be hundreds of blackened corpses littering the valley floor on either side of his *CHAOS* LCV, many of them burned to an unrecognizable state. He banged on the armor plating of the LCV as they moved slowly forward, all of his combat senses screaming for him to turn around and run. They came to a halt near where two Kavalian medics were trying to save the life of two purebloods. Their fur was burn completely off their bodies revealing nothing but singed and melted skin. He pulled himself out of the hatch and leaped to the ground while his driver pulled himself halfway out of his hatch, his assault rifle out and his eyes weeping the area around them nervously. The sounds of fighting could be heard in the distance, echoing along the valley walls.

The Ground Commander sprinted up to the two medics. “What happened here?” He screamed. “What the fuck is going on? Why are all my men dead?”

One of the Kavalian medics looked up and snarled at him, his normally light blond fur now darkened with soot and blood. “What does it look like?” He barked savagely. “We were attacked by the Union and their infernal dragons! They came out of the sun and did this! There had to be at least two dozen of them!”

“There were supposed to be no dragons here except for the elf Queen’s! Where is the rest of the column?” The Commander barked with a sudden and very real look of fear on his face now.

“They ran!” The other medic shouted. “They burned hundreds and then landed and began tearing into our men! They ran to get away from them, what do you think?”

The Kavalian General whirled around when the deep trumpeting sound filled the air and echoed along the valley floor. His eyes grew even wider when he saw the two large shapes barreling at them barely a hundred meters from the valley floor. Two gleaming armored shapes with huge wingspans.

“More of them!” The medic shouted scrambling to his feet. “Run! Run!”

The Kavalian General had never fought dragons. He’d never even seen them before this very day, and the inbred fear inside all Kavalians for these beasts gripped him in its death hold, freezing his boots to the blood stained and burned ground. Not a single Kavalian scientist could ever determine why this fear could freeze a hardened warrior in his tracks, and they had been working for years in trying to discover a way to get rid of this gene somehow. They did not know they were looking in all the wrong places for their answers, turning to medical science and even guesswork, when all they had to do was take the example set by the two pureblood Kavalian daughters of the Prefect who had discovered their fear was a natural thing. It was a natural thing that could be overcome as easily as being close to a dragon, riding a dragon, or being able to communicate with one of the magnificent beasts within Mindvoice.

It was a clue the Kavalian General would never read about or experience.

Vincix let out a bellow of rage and unleashed a powerful stream of flame at the man, as he landed not a hundred meters away. The Kavalian General felt a moment of pure excruciating pain and then the three thousand degree flame melted every information receptor in his brain. As Malic leaped from his saddle extending his *Nehtes*, Nyla and Arydun landed in front of the *CHAOS* LCV. No one would ever know how it happened, for it would never be seen by any living Kavalians, but the driver of the LCV slammed his hand down on the control panel of the LCV accidentally, hitting the accelerator as he reached for his weapon in terror. The *CHAOS* LCV exploded forward just as Arydun began to open her jaws to unleash a jet of flame. The *CHAOS* LCV slammed into her head and she bellowed in pain as the LCV, all ten tons of it continued forward, knocking her body to the side and riding up over her side as she fell. Nyla screamed out as she fell with Arydun, the dragon armor leg braces keeping her pinned in the saddle.

Malic's helmeted head whirled at Nyla's scream and his eyes went wide as he saw the LCV drive up over the top of Arydun's body as she trumpeted in pain. The wonderful Dragon Armor was a blessing and a curse at this moment. The leg braces kept Nyla securely in the saddle, preventing her from leaping clear even as the left side of the LCV came within a hair's breath of crushing her chest. It just so happened that as Arydun fell, her bulk shifted the LCV just enough to cause the ground vehicle to slid away from her armored body, unable to keep traction on the gleaming armor, and it's hover jets igniting and attempting to right the craft. As it was, both of Nyla's legs were broken as the LCV's weight snapped one and Arydun's body weight broke the other as she fell, though the dragon armor also served to keep her legs from being crushed completely. Both Arydun and Nyla bellowed in pain as four of Arydun's large ribs and part of her forward wing were also snapped before the LCV rolled completely off to the side.

"Nyla!" Malic screamed out as he bolted for where Arydun flailed on the ground, trying to regain her footing.

Vincix also turned and saw this and a deep rage filled him as he stepped right up to the LCV and cut loose with another flame jet that essentially turned the LCV into a cooking pyre. The metal heated up to over three thousand degrees instantly as flames ripped through the entire vehicle and cooked the Kavalian driver squirming in pain and screaming out his last sounds until his lungs were seared shut. Malic skidded to a halt next to Nyla as Arydun finally got her talons under her and began to right herself. The dragon Armor braces released Nyla then and she fell to the ground, her face a mask of pain as she tore off her helmet.

"*Vith! Vith! Vith!*" Nyla screamed as she tried to drag herself away from Arydun, her face twisted in a mask of pain.

Malic skidded to a halt next to her tearing off his helmet as well. "Nyla!"

"My legs!" She snapped. "My legs are broken Malic!"

Malic could tell that easily by the off angle they were at. He gripped her upper body tightly, slapping his hand down on her wrist and deactivating her armor. She cried out as the Dragon Armor receded into its casings, forcing her legs to straighten and causing her hands to grip his arms painfully. Malic's eyes grew wider when he saw the bone of her thigh had torn almost out of the skin.

Nyla! Arydun cried in Mindvoice. *Nyla my sister!*

Arydun! Vincix exclaimed moving up next to her after insuring that nothing lived near them.

My ribs are broken! Arydun spoke, leaning to her left side heavily as Vincix came up beside her and allowed her to lean against him easing the pain somewhat. *My wing as well! Nyla!*

"It... it hurts Malic!" Nyla gasped as she gripped him tighter.

Malic looked around them and saw that the small container of cloned blood she always carried was smashed. "Nyla... you need to take my blood!" He snapped. "You need to heal your legs!"

Nyla shook her head. "*Ussta Che...* she..."

"Eliani is at the settlement! It is under attack!" Malic screamed. "She will not get here in time before you go into shock! I don't have the medical training to fix you! Nyla you have a compound fracture of your leg!" He pulled her tighter to him. "I can not lose you Nyla!" He barked out. "I will not lose *YOU!*"

Nyla's green eyes went wide as she looked at him. The strength of his words was easy enough to detect and it stunned her. He stared at her with those deep blue eyes unashamed of what he had just professed to her and she felt her heart ache at his words. "Mal... Malic?" She gasped.

"Take my blood Nyla!" He snapped once more. "Do it now!" He said pulling her head closer to his neck as his own armor began to retract. "If you love me you will do it!"

Nyla blinked several times as the enormity of what he was saying hit her. It was never a question in her mind of whether she loved him, from the moment Eliani had pointed him out to her, she had loved him with all that she was and it was not because she and Eliani were bonded so closely. This was a different feeling and it had been growing ever since their first night together. “Malic... we...”

“Damn you woman! You will die if you don’t!” Malic barked. “Do it! We will deal with the repercussions later Nyla!”

Nyla stared at him for only a few more seconds before lifting her head, extending her vampiric fangs and sinking them deeply into his neck. She felt his arms close tighter around her as his blood flooded her mouth, the pain wracking her body as her wounds knit back together and the tears flooding her eyes at what this would mean to all of them. Her eyes grew wide then as memories and emotions swept through her, and she not only saw the unfettered clarity of his love for her, but she felt it as well. He loved Eliani yes, but he loved her more. Nyla should have pulled away then, she should have stopped, but the totality of his emotion was like a wave that swept her up and she relished in the warmth it sent through her. She pulled him tighter by his broad shoulders and sank her fangs into his flesh deeper, closing her eyes in bliss even though the pain was almost unbearable as her wounds knit back together.

Yes... there would be repercussions of course... but at this moment Nyla did not care about that.

Vincix tore his eyes away from them and looked skyward. The teacher in him allowed him to be calm in the midst of the storm and he reached out within Mindvoice. *Denali... Nyla has been seriously injured... as has Arydun! We need a STRIKER to pick us up!*

Deni’s concerned voice replied instantly. *Is she...*

She will survive but we are out of this fight for the moment! Can you...

I’ll order Arrarn to send a ship immediately! Denali answered. *We have... my mother has dropped off the normal COMs Vincix! We are proceeding to the settlement! We have vampires from the High Coven who are assisting us! I don’t know who they are or where they came from but they are not friends of Aikiro or the Kavalians! I’ll... I’ll make sure Arrarn gets the ship to you!*

Inform Lisisa that the southern route is littered with Kavalian dead! She must keep the pressure on! Vincix reported. *When Nyla and Arydun are safe we will continue our sweep for any who may have survived!*

Understood! Denali answered. *We are almost to the settlement Vincix. I must go!*

Go with the gods Denali! Vincix echoed. *Go with the gods!*

IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

SOUTHERN APPROACH

1.2 KILOMETERS FROM SETTLEMENT WALL

It was reminiscent of several battles she had fought during the Evolli war beside her brothers and father, but the Kavalians were much sturdier opponents. The crush of bodies, the screams of the wounded and dying, it filled all of her many vampire/wolf senses. It wasn’t until the man she called father had rescued her from that life that Lisisa Leonidas had embraced the totality of what she was. Even through it all, sharing in every moment of his life after that day, watching Androcles grow and giving her the name Lisi because he could not fully speak her name as a child. It was a name that stuck and a name she now treasured. Twenty-six years she had shared in the warmth and love of her family, never really doubting who she was. The first moment Denali had professed his love for her, Lisisa knew she was complete. She had fought her feelings at first yes, but after so many years of not knowing whether she would ever find love, she truly did not have the strength to fight for very long when love walked right up to her and slapped her silly. She surrendered to what her mind and heart screamed for her to accept in what she could have with Denali, and Lisisa had not looked back since. Three years they hid their love for each other, three years Andro protected them and they did not even realize he knew. When they finally announced it to everyone, they found nothing but acceptance and joy for what they had found together. It was a testament to him and how he and her mothers had raised all of them. Never fear the unknown.

Now he was gone.

It had not fully settled within her mind that he was gone. Part of her believed he could not die; that he was too powerful for fools like the Kavalians to kill no matter how skilled they were at inflicting death. Seeing

her mothers react as they did however, that is what made it all so very real. As the minutes and hours passed and this moment approached, her anger only grew. The anger of Denali and Jeth and Aradace. They were among the strongest within their family after Andro and Elynth, sons and daughters to Torma, sons and daughters to Martin Leonidas. She could feel the cold calculating anger surging through her beloved Denali. She could feel it coursing through her Bonded Brother Jeth, and she most certainly could feel it rippling through her. This day Lisisa Leonidas allowed that anger and rage and hate to come out. This day she left nothing hidden behind powerful Mindvoice shields. This day... the four of them would take whatever revenge they could before death took them into its embrace.

Lisisa Leonidas had been very forthright in her approach this day. She had led the Coven riders down low into this valley after spotting the Kavalian columns of troops far below. Their ability to not be detected on any sort of sensors when they flew was a gift this day and Lisisa would use every gift she could take. They swept in out of the sun and fell upon the rear of the Kavalian troops with unabashed hatred and rage. One pass along the long lines of fast marching Kavalian biogenic clone troops was all it took to remove nearly two thousand of them from the equation instantly. They came in low, Jeth the first one through, his superheated blowtorch like breath scorching the very ground beneath him, and any Kavalian in the path of that incinerating breath. One after the other they swooped down, adding their own jets of flame to the screaming Kavalian troops in that languorous pass along the bottom floor of the valley. All of them knew they were too low for T19 missiles to be of any use and this added to the time they loitered over the valley. They would not know it until much later, but the Kavalians had a limited supply of T19s on this mission for they did not predict the Coven dragons would be here. Those T19 missiles were destroyed in the first thirty seconds when the *DEATHMANE* met her demise. As the front ranks of Kavalian troops turned to watch the carnage from three kilometers ahead of where the dragons were attacking, many panicked and broke into runs in the opposite direction. Many of those in the front columns would survive, but nearly eight thousand of the brethren would not.

When Lisisa and the Coven riders descended into the ranks of the Kavalian troops the second time, it was going to be hand-to-hand, and unbelievably it was a complete rout. The very inbred fear of dragons had been passed to the biogenic clones through the cloning process, and this fear came out now as twenty-one beasts dropped out of the sky into their ranks and began to kill everything. The biogenic clones were different than their pureblood officers in that most of them had no hair covering their bodies. It wouldn't have mattered anyway as talons and teeth, swords and projectile weapons; none of them discriminated in the least. Blood flew; limbs were severed, heads blown apart. Many different colored furs sailed through the air to mix with the thickening blood on the ground until it was so slick it was as if they were splashing through water. The future of these Coven riders hinged on them helping to stop these Kavalians from destroying an Immortal settlement led by a man many thought dead. They all knew this to be the most important day of their lives. All of the training they had received in the last months came rushing to the forefront now, every hour studying the many books, the blood they had spilled during training. The bruises and scrapes were too numerous to count, but now they knew what Androcles Leonidas was pushing them towards. Now they knew what he had forged them into. Staring out from behind the helmets of their Dragon Armor, their weapons and swords and knives and talons and teeth killing Kavalians at every turn, the Coven Riders all knew their transformation was complete. They had found where they belonged, they had found where they fit in, and they would now die to preserve that at all costs.

All because one young Lycavorian Prince who was supposed to be their enemy had trusted and believed in them. Believed in them even after what many of them viewed as the vilest crime they had ever been witness to was exacted upon his sister by the women who many of them at one point had looked up too.

The Kavalian troops tried to fight. Indeed many of them knew if they wanted to survive this day they needed to fight. Even as they turned and ran, they fired their weapons back, to no avail. Against the psychic shields of Bonded Pairs who were filled with unfettered rage, they may as well have been shooting blanks. Yes... they turned and fought. And they died. In droves they died. Lisisa and Jeth held nothing back, letting all their years together come bubbling forth now. There was a reason that the dragon Elder Council allowed Jeth and Tharua to mate even though they were still so young. That reason came forth now as Jeth called upon all his father and Martin had taught him and Lisisa. Behind only his father and grandmother Arzoal, Jeth was the largest dragon among their species. Behind only his father and sister Elynth, Jeth was considered the strongest in both physical stature and his Mindvoice abilities. He unleashed it all this day; he embraced what he could do

with glee. Every sweep of his massive wings shattered bone and sent bodies sailing. Every tremendous swipe of his talons and blood would fountain into the sky. He lifted whole groups of Kavalian troops into the air with his Mindvoice TK power, smashing them back into the earth with cruel power. His Dragon Armor was already stained heavily with blood, and still he did not stop. Like his sister and Andro, he and Lisisa had trained together for years, and they were a perfect combination of whirling and devastating death.

And as it would come to be, Lisisa Leonidas whirled to look upon her Bonded Brother and suddenly there were no more Kavalians to kill. Her own armor was saturated in blood, her *Nehtes* dripping with the blood of many, her Shi Viska humming on her arm like a living thing waiting to be launched again to claim another life. As her cobalt blue vampire eyes returned to their normal forest green color Lisisa's head whipped back and forth as she saw the riders who had followed her discovering the same thing. Her keen wolf/vampire eyes detected dozens, probably hundreds of Kavalians fleeing into the timber of the mountains all around them and as her eyes fell back to the scene around her, Lisisa suddenly fully understood the horror of what Androcles and her father had experienced not so long ago at a place called Alba Tau. Jeth's wide golden eyes twisted and turned, snarling as he looked for new targets to kill, but like his Bonded Sister he found none. What he did find was death. Death on a scale his young eyes had never seen before. They had fought and killed during the Evolli War, all but the youngest Leonidas children had. What they had experienced then paled in comparison to what they saw now. Kavalian corpses were heaped upon each other, lining the valley floor as far as the eye could see and staining the rich green grass crimson with blood.

And as it was... it had become deathly quiet.

Lisisa kept turning her head, her eyes wide as she looked in every direction. No matter what direction she looked, the scene was the same. Hundreds of dead Kavalians littered the ground around her. It took only an instant for her to fully comprehend the nightmares that her brother spoke of having now. This is what he would see staring back at him from another time and place.

"Jeth!" Lisisa barked.

There are... there are no more. Jeth answered causing Lisisa to turn and look at him. She could not remember how long they had been on the ground. She didn't even remember landing. Lisisa turned as several of the Coven riders sprinted up to where she stood, among them the senior enlisted man in the group. Narice had told her she could trust this man for he had been the one to keep his grip on reality and coach the others at night. His dark red Firespitter stepped over several piles of bodies and came up behind him. Lisisa looked at him and saw the grizzled face of an older vampire. A man nearing a thousand years of life perhaps, and even his face was ghostly white and pale at what he was seeing.

"Princess... they are running into the timber all around us." He told her feeling foolish at stating the obvious.

"Do we pursue them?" Another Coven rider gasped as she came up.

Lisisa shook her head quickly. "No." she stated. "We would lose the advantage we have if we did."

"They fled with terror in their eyes." The senior Coven rider said.

Lisisa looked at him. "What is your name?" She asked.

"Juseb Princess." He spoke. "I am..."

Lisisa held up her hand as she felt the tremors in Mindvoice. She closed her eyes tightly, trying to block the rage Denali felt. She could almost feel the racing of his heart; almost see as he swung his *Nehtes* upon a Kavalian. She could also see the explosions of dirt and ground all around him and the others.

"Denali and Narice are fully engaged!" Lisisa spoke opening her eyes. "We must go to them now! The attack from the Northwest was the main attack!"

"Princess... how... how do you know?" Juseb asked.

"I can... I can see with his eyes!" Lisisa gasped out. "The Kavalians have broken through the north edge of the settlement wall. They are massing troops to surge through! Their mortars and heavy weapons are covering for them."

Juseb turned back to face the other riders as they moved closer to where her stood. "Mount your brothers and sisters!" He bellowed. "Our work is not done!" He turned back to Lisisa. "Lead us Princess Lisisa! Lead us and we shall follow!"

Lisisa turned and used her Mindvoice power to propel her five foot three frame up onto Jeth's back and into the saddle. "Then we go now!"

As the last of twenty-one dragons took to the skies of Kranek they left a valley littered with Kavalian corpses. It would be weeks before the final tally was made, but they left behind a smoking ruin that day. Trees that still burned, grass that was blackened by fire and soot. Dirt that soaked up Kavalian blood on an unprecedented scale.

They also left behind seven thousand dead Kavalians and had effectively broken the back of the planned southern attack force. The surviving Kavalian biogenic clones would spend the next several weeks surrendering to whoever would accept them, outside of a Lycavorian or vampire with a dragon beside them.

IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

Seven thousand four hundred and nineteen years of life he had and for all of that time with the exception of the last twenty-six years he had considered those he fought with now enemies.

As Cha'talla ducked his head at the whistle of another plasma mortar he could do nothing but shake his head and wonder why. He stood behind several layers of steel and concrete in the heavy weapons bunker, the 30mm Kinetic Cannon hammering out death with every burst. One of the amazing gifts given to him and his tribe by Androcles Leonidas without as much as a question. Twenty of these cannons circled the walls of the settlement now, and along with the six older but no less effective 200mm turret based ground batteries his home had become so much safer than it was before. Four months ago they would never have been able to withstand such an assault. In that four months, everything he had ever believed was proven wrong, and everything he had ever hoped for the future became his for the taking. That sunny day Normya Leonidas walked into their lives would be the day that Cha'talla remembered for the rest of his years, however many he had left. As he watched the battle in front of him unfold he witnessed acts of bravery and heroics that smashed aside all the preconceived and fabricated lies he and his people had been told for so long by Veldruk and so many others.

The Lycavorians would consider his people beneath them. They were no better than the ruling vampire socialites who looked down on his people. They could never be trusted to stand and fight. Cha'talla should have known back then that they were all lies. He should have known the first day they stood across that barren stretch of land by the sea and saw the crimson clad Spartans standing at the mouth of that great canyon pass. He had been watching from a ridge beside Xerxes above the Hot Gates when the voice of Martin Leonidas's father echoed along the walls to come and take their weapons. He had watched for hours as wave after wave of their troops had gone crashing against the Spartan Phalanx and he had watched them die. He had watched Xerxes grow angrier at each passing hour. Cha'talla knew then that Veldruk's oldest son was an arrogant ass. If he had been smart, Cha'talla would have turned away then and been a voice among his people that it was time to end their servitude to the High Coven. Three hundred Spartans and some two thousand others slaughtered nearly thirty thousand of Xerxes's best troops in the first two days, among them five thousand of his fellow Immortals. And still they held the Hot Gates. It had ended up being a victory for Xerxes, but at a cost that not even his father could abide and his death was faked and he was pulled off Earth to be replaced by Yuri.

Cha'talla should have taken that as a sign. Instead... for the next three thousand plus years his people fought against the Lycavorians, and for the most part they died. There was never any major battle that they could claim as an outright victory. The Lycavorians were warriors unparalleled in his memory. Leaving Earth behind he wondered if the death of their King would cause them to lose faith and hope. He had been wrong... as had so many High Coven scholars. When he returned to Earth some twenty-seven years ago and discovered the son of the man they had killed so long ago was the upstart who was causing the unrest on Earth, Cha'talla should have known then that the end was near.

He had taken his adopted daughter, the son of his hated brother and Yuri Cha'talla now knew. He had taken her in the hopes of using her superior DNA to somehow improve the lives of his people by making them more pleasing to the eye. Her combined wolf and vampire DNA was the perfect mix for them to base their experiments off. Cha'talla had never intended to hurt the young woman, and known only to him, once they had what they needed from her he was going to release her within Union space to find her way. Veldruk's fool actions and than Aikiro's made that impossible. He had thought Moran someone he could trust, but that quickly proved false. Had he been able to speak with Yuri away from the others, talked to her at length, Cha'talla believed he could have found an ally. He knew Yuri from before she went to Earth, and the Yuri he knew back

then was untainted by her father's lust for more power, Xerxes rape of her or finally her mother's twisted teachings. And then Veldruk attempted to kill him. And he almost succeeded. Cha'talla would have died that day on the lakefront had Esther not found him and given him the one thing he never thought he would have. She gave him hope.

The moment Cha'talla took Esther as his Blessed Wife; he knew he was on the path to the future and redemption. That his tribe would follow him was never in question, it was just the Akruvian way. He was the remaining senior Elder of their tribe, and his word was like gospel. In the last two plus decades he had gotten them away from such old thinking but he knew the final word on everything rested with him, and the Ruling Immortal Council, elves and Akruvian both would never go against his wishes. Cha'talla had worked toward one goal all of this time, and it stemmed from the respect and honor showed to his brother T'lolt on that fateful day on Lycavore. Martin Leonidas had his brother's life in his hands, and instead of killing him he saved him and honored his dead sons by not allowing animals to feed on their remains. It converted T'lolt that very day, what Martin had done, and within weeks of coming here it had converted Cha'talla. Now he would never have the chance to thank the man in person for returning that spark to him. He would never have the opportunity to thank him for his goddess of a daughter who loved his first-born son with every waking step she took. Even after their ceremony, Cha'talla could hear the older Akruvian woman of his tribe speaking of Normya's beauty and how she gazed at Tir'ut with unabashed adoration. An adoration they said, an adoration that came from deep within her heart.

Seeing what he had this day brought it all home for Cha'talla. He knew there were probably dozens more, but with his own eyes he had seen Lycavorians risk injury and death to go to the aide of an injured or fallen Immortal. These were men and women from Dysea's ship that had now lived and worked among them for as long as she had been here. There was no hesitation in their actions, and Cha'talla witnessed his people doing the same thing. Whatever had brought them all together, what was happening now was binding them together in a way nothing ever could. Cha'talla suddenly realized that Androcles knew this would happen. He knew that the first step had to be taken and he had taken it without question, following the example his first elven mother and younger sister had already set on a smaller scale.

Dysea Leonidas.

A woman he had once professed to Moran on that field he would like to have in his bed and under him. Until their world and their battle had been blown apart that day. An elven female who walked out of her *STRIKER* that first day showing no fear, and accepted Cha'talla and his people from the very first moment. An Elven/Lycavorian Queen who believed deeply in fate and faith in the gods. A supremely intelligent woman, and like his Blessed Wife Esther, a woman of unmatched beauty. As she grew more comfortable here, she would often be found mingling with the older Akruvian woman, many of them six or seven times her age. They would be drinking tea or wine and discussing the past and the future. Dysea Leonidas had made fast friends with those older women, learning the Akruvian ways and tradition and culture that they had almost forgotten. It was Dysea who had trusted and accepted them without doubt or worry, and for that trust Cha'talla would forever be in her debt and consider her a dear friend. He felt great pain for her loss and Cha'talla knew that wherever the future led them, it would be in the shadow of the Lycavorian Union. More so than any other species he knew of in the universe, the Lycavorians held honor and duty and love so very close to their hearts. It was a similar path that his people had once followed and would follow again in the future if he had any say in the matter.

The plasma mortar landing a hundred meters away shook Cha'talla back to the present and he gripped his SA80 tighter.

"They are finding their range now!" Cha'talla shouted to his young aide over the din of the 30mm turret. "We must..."

The bulk of the turret saved their lives as the plasma mortar landed directly outside their bunkered position and brought the entire bunker wall crashing inward. Cha'talla rolled to the ground, pulling his aide with him as the pieces of concrete and metal that would have crushed them lodged securely against the now useless hulk of the destroyed turret. Dust and dirt filled the interior of the turret and Cha'talla could just make out the crushed remains of the combined Lycavorian/Akruvian crew of two crushed beneath the many hundreds of pounds.

"Get out!" Cha'talla screamed above the whine of P190s and SA80 assault rifles. He shoved his aide toward the flickering daylight sun, now partially obscured by dirt and dust from the destroyed turret. Cha'talla

nearly threw the young Immortal out of the opening and then followed him out, his body rolling painfully over the shattered remains of the bunker's wall and top which had partially caved in behind the bunker.

His first glance was towards the wall and his eyes grew wider as he saw a large ten meter wide hole in the twelve meter high wall, both Immortal and Lycavorian bodies strewn across the area.

"Vith! The wall is breached! The wall is breached!" Cha'talla screamed into his implant, tapping his finger against his jaw madly.

Cha'talla heard them then and his head snapped up as half a dozen huge shadows passed over the top of them. The trumpeting of dragons could not be mistaken for anything else and Cha'talla scrambled to his feet as he saw and heard what sounded like large blowtorches, followed quickly by the screams of men and the increase in weapons fire.

"T'lolt! T'lolt!" Cha'talla screamed into his implant as he began running to the wall followed quickly by several dozen of his people and the elven engineers who had worked on his ships.

"Cha'talla! You should see this brother!" T'lolt's voice echoed in his COM over the nearby sounds of weapons and dragon no doubt. ***"It is a sight to behold! The Kavalians are running Cha'talla! They are actually running away in terror! Princess Narice and Denali Leonidas just dropped on their main ranks from out of the sky! They are killing them by the dozens!"***

"T'lolt... the wall is breached!" Cha'talla screamed. *"Northwest... sector three! Ten meters wide! Can you shift anyone to cover?"*

"I will try!" T'lolt replied instantly. ***"We must cross the killing ground to reach you brother! We are coming!"***

Several explosions brought Cha'talla's head up again and he saw several Union fighters come screaming over the top of the settlement, leaving blazing trees in their wake. He watched the ground heave up in the distance and the treeline that hid the mortars that were pounding them suddenly became hotter than the pits of whatever hell the Kavalian dogs believed in.

"Union fighters!" His aide screamed from next to him.

"I can see that!" Cha'talla barked. *"Dysea... can you direct the fighters now!"* Cha'talla waited for a moment before turning his head back towards where the Immortal Command Center was set up in the center of the large settlement. *"Dysea respond!"* He barked out. *"Dysea come in!"*

The silence was ominous and then Cha'talla saw the smoke rising from the center of the settlement. *"Cha'talla to all Wall Command posts! Has the perimeter been broken anywhere? Have you been infiltrated?"*

"Post Three negative!"

"Post Two negative! Do you need assistance?"

"Post four is clear! The last patrol came in eight minutes ago!"

"Post five is clear! No breaches!"

Cha'talla turned his head to the southeast corner, not actually seeing the large bunker that sat atop the wall. *"Post Four what patrol?"* He barked. *"We had no patrols out! Everyone was pulled in to prepare defenses!"*

"Lieutenant T'con! He brought his squad in thirteen minutes ago!" The reply came.

"Lieutenant T'con is manning the outer..." Cha'talla was screaming as he spoke but the rise of hundreds of voices caused him to cut his eyes to the now shattered wall. He saw weapons fire impacting the edges of the newly opened breach and the elven engineers using their elf speed to dive for cover, several of them not in time as projectiles punched into their bodies, including the female engineer who had treated him so respectfully.

"NO! NO! NO!" Cha'talla bellowed as he brought up his SA80 and held back the trigger as he began sprinting towards the opening.

VHC SCYTHER-CLASS LR INTERCEPTOR/BOMBER

"...is vithin stupid!" Normya spat. *"We should be on the ground helping my family fight!"*

Cirith turned her helmeted head and looked at her from the pilot's seat of the supremely advanced High Coven SYCTHER-Class Long Range Interceptor/Bomber. *"Your mother did not agree Normya Leonidas."* She stated as calmly as she could. *"When my father spoke with her directly he told her of the ships we detected. I*

was already launched and she agreed they needed to be investigated. I was already equipped to discover what it was they are doing and I landed and picked you and your escort up.”

“We should be down there with them!” Normya hissed.

“Behind only your mother Queen For'mya you are considered the finest pilot in the Union from what I understand.” Cirith answered. “I am an adequate pilot, but not in the same league as you.”

“Arrarn is better than me.” Normya spat but less forcefully.

“Be that as it may be... there is a reason these High Coven ships are not involved with the attack on Kranek.” Cirith stated. “And I doubt very much they are friendly as they have not revealed themselves as we have.”

“Aikiro’s people?” Normya asked looking at her.

“That is a possibility yes.” Cirith answered her evenly. “To be honest... we don’t really know anything since the jamming you have initiated within the system prevents even our ships from using sensors beyond half a million kilometers.”

“I hope so!” Normya snapped harshly. “For what they did to my sister I will gladly kill them!”

Cirith glanced at her once more. “Just so that desire does not translate to all vampires, for we are not all the same.” She stated calmly though her voice quivered just a touch.

Normya met her eyes. “That’s not something you need to explain to me.” She snapped. “One of my mothers and three of my sisters are vampire or part vampire!”

Cirith had never been around Lycavorians; she had never even met one to be honest. And even though she had some Lycavorian blood within her, as a whole they frightened her to some extent. She had not been lying to Micardo when she told him she had studied the Lycavorian people and the Leonidas family far more than he had. Probably far more than any intelligence operative within the High Coven. She felt like she knew most of them deeply. The *Venorik Elghinn* were militant supporters of Aikiro and this blinded them in many ways, but they were an excellent source of information gatherers, and Cirith had used her position within their ranks to discover all that she could. She did not know the full story behind her father’s history, as her father had never felt the need to give her all the pieces of the puzzle. He had never lied to her, but he had also never told her the complete history of his youth and background and how he had passed this Lycavorian DNA to her. He would tell her one-day she knew, and she was content and trusted and loved her father enough to be patient and let him reveal it of his own accord. Cirith knew it was the reason Aikiro had wanted her dead once she discovered what blood flowed in her father’s veins. Her father also knew exactly what her skills were, and he was unafraid to allow her to use them, hence why he approved this mission to begin with.

Cirith did know that Lycavorians were a passionate race, and once riled in a manner like Normya Leonidas was now acting, even with her elven blood, they were rarely ever soothed without some sort of action. She did not blame her really, having her sister raped and brutalized, her father killed and now her entire family under assault by the Kavalian dogs. All this in just the last few weeks, it was a wonder she could even function properly given what was going on. It was only another example of the fortitude that the Lycavorians had as a people and what their now dead father had instilled in his children when it came to duty and honor.

The *SCYTHE*-Class was the epitome of High Coven technology in everyway. A superior Long Range Interceptor with the speed and capacity of a fighter and a bomber put together. It was equipped with advanced sensors and weapons, as well as the finest Shroud generators the *Venorik Elghinn* could design, and she was meant for deep penetration raids into Kavalians territory in order to sever supply lines and cause untold havoc. They had been brought into production when the Vampire High Coven had seen the success the Union M5 *DEVASTATOR* had during the Evolli War in disrupting supply lines and basically giving the amphibian species fits. Unlike the *DEVASTATOR*, when stripped of their interior weapons pods as this one now was, the *SCYTHE* could carry a fully loaded team of five *Venorik Elghinn* Commandos. Cirith’s normal co-pilot now occupied the Flight Engineering station behind her seat and to the right. You could turn and look into the rear of the ship and see where the five pureblood *Venorik Elghinn* commandos and Tir'ut now sat quietly across from each other, but packed rather tightly due to Tir'ut’s size.

Normya looked at her from under her own helmet, and for a moment Cirith saw death in those emerald green eyes. The look vanished quickly, but she had seen it. “No you are not all the same.” Normya spoke. “But Tir'ut and I don’t know you and when push comes to shove... all of you will lose.”

“Brave words Normya Leonidas.” Cirith spoke.

Normya nodded confidently. “Maybe. But truthful.”

Cirith saw the set of her jaw and came to the determination that Normya Leonidas was far more deadly than her elven appearance gave to others. Another glance into the back at the Immortal who had come with her also lent credence to this fact. The Immortal wore the uniform of a Lycavorian, Mark IV ArmorPly and the helmet that covered his features except for his eyes and lips. He carried the Immortal Sword that all Immortals wore after coming of age, and his hands rested comfortably on the Spartan P190A3. His keen dark eyes never left the faces of the Commandos across from him. The beeping caught her attention once more and she turned back to her controls. A quick glance told her what she wanted to know.

“We’re approaching their Shroud perimeter!” She announced as she began to adjust her controls.

“Can you tell how many ships are out here?” Normya asked.

“We detected seven from outside the system, but with the exotic jamming you are using, only short range sensors work now.” Cirith answered her as she adjusted her controls. “This is the ship that was beaming transmissions to the surface. It is a *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought... but we do not know who is in control of it.”

“This can’t be good either way you look at it.” Normya said.

“No... I agree.” Cirith said.

“Not your people?” Normya asked.

Cirith shook her head immediately. “The *Venorik Elghinn* branch that follows my father dealt mainly with Intelligence gathering... and assassination.” Cirith saw Normya’s eyes grow a little wider. “It is and was a distasteful position to be in Normya Leonidas... but considering the makeup of the High Coven... very useful. It allowed my father to keep his activities well away from the scrutiny of others, protect me, and build his own base of power until this moment was upon us.”

“What moment is that?” Normya asked.

Cirith met her eyes. “Given what is happening I suppose there would be no reason to keep it from you.” She said calmly. “My father and I, those who follow him, we were coming to Kranek to ask for political asylum. We discovered through sources that your mother had found Cha’talla, a man we have been looking for ourselves. For quite some time. We have over a hundred ships and nearly three million followers spread out through the High Coven, some in high places, some not. We wanted to break with Aikiro’s oppressive rule and the way she was conducting the war with the Kavalians. Many of us believed the way she and Admiral Moran were proceeding; we believed that the High Coven would be no more within a decade. They would have ground us and everyone else into dust in their drive for more power.”

“Did you know about what she was planning?” Normya asked plainly. “About my sister, the attack on Dragon Mountain?”

Cirith knew what that question was being used to gauge and fortunately for her she could honestly give the correct answer. As could her father. They were both taken completely off guard by Aikiro’s actions on Earth. Cirith feared what any other answer would elicit. “No... we did not.” She spoke with a shake of her head. “And I know your wolf senses would be able to detect a lie from me Normya Leonidas.”

“There are those who can mask the adrenalin dump into their blood when they lie.” Normya said.

Cirith nodded. “Yes... I’m sure there are. I am not one of them however, because I too have Lycavorian blood within me, though I do not know how to use the skills it gives me as you do.”

“Why were you looking for Cha’talla?” Normya asked. “To kill him?”

Cirith looked at her with wide dark eyes. “Kill him? *Zeklet'tau* no! Whether he knows it or not Cha’talla is still revered among his people. Among the Immortals. No matter how many times Aikiro cursed his name or how many books she wiped his name from; she could not kill the man. Many Immortals believe he is still alive; many do not but they still have hope. We had hoped that we could convince him to get his people to renounce the High Coven. To leave them and take away a base of long standing power from them. Contrary to what you and your people may or may not believe Normya, there are pureblood females that have followed in Esther Suira’s path and entered into relationships with Immortals. We know of them... it is a secret that only my father and I know of. And we know what Cha’talla was trying to do when Veldruk tried to kill him. This movement... it is among the younger generations mainly... they look up to Cha’talla and Esther as a sign.” (Heavens)

“A sign of what?” Normya asked.

“What the future could hold for all of us.” Cirith answered. “Mysteries, Memories and Myth.”

The beeping sounded again and she looked up out the view window. “We will penetrate their Shroud in fifteen seconds. Reducing power to one quarter.” She spoke.

“They won’t see us?” Normya asked after a moment of staring at her.

Cirith shook her head with a small smile on her beautiful features. “Fortunately for us, the Shrouds on my ship are much more advanced than theirs. They will not see us.”

It happened slowly, but Normya had experienced it before and knew what to expect. They went from millions of stars all around them outside the Shroud, to something that was completely void of light except for the massive ship in front of them. As with Union ships, the Shroud encompassed an area probably a kilometer all around the ship and as they fully entered the sphere of the Dreadnought’s Shroud field Normya’s emerald green eyes immediately saw the second ship and grew wider.

“Tir’ut!” She gasped out.

The Venorik Commandos had seen many things in their lives since most of them were over a thousand years of age, yet none of them had ever seen an Immortal blur in motion and all of them bolted to their feet reaching for weapons.

“Lady Cirith!” The most senior barked out instantly even as Tir’ut stopped his motion blurring directly behind Normya’s chair.

Cirith’s head turned at the voice of her soldier and her eyes sprang open as she watched Tir’ut appear behind Normya’s chair. She twisted in her chair stupefied and terrified at the same time. “*A jal nindel zha orthae!*” Cirith gasped out. (By all that is holy)

“*Il kal’daka darthirii... what is wrong?*” Tir’ut hissed.

Normya pointed out the view window, Tir’ut’s eyes following her motion and he snarled viciously. “Does that ship look familiar to you *ussta m’ranndii?*” Normya asked causing Cirith’s eyes to grow even wider. (My husband)

“Indeed it does.” Tir’ut answered harshly.

“You... you blurred!” Cirith gasped looking at him. “How...”

Normya grinned. “Take your helmet off Tir’ut.” She stated. “I believe we can trust them.”

Tir’ut looked at her. *Are you sure il kal’daka darthirii?* He asked within Mindvoice.

Normya nodded. *No... but we planned for this as well didn’t we?*

Tir’ut nodded. *We did. And it is done.*

Cirith knew immediately they were speaking within Mindvoice for she could detect the tremors of their conversation. While she was among the strongest Mindvoicers in the High Coven, she had only achieved the skills she had outside the tutelage of the High Coven Adepts and Acolytes that Aikiro had kept so tightly on her leash. The tremors she felt now however, they were some of the strongest she had ever felt before. She watched Tir’ut lift his hands and take his helmet on either side before lifting it completely from his head. Cirith gasped once more as she saw the bronze colored skin, the short dark hair and the much less pronounced bones spurs along his jaw line.

Normya grinned now. “Cirith... this is Tir’ut. He is the first born son of Cha’talla and Esther and he is my *Du’ased m’ranndii.*”

Cirith gazed at her, the shock in her eyes very evident. “Your... your Blessed Husband?”

Normya nodded. “Yes... for many weeks now... and we have seen that ship before.” She stated pointing to the Bontawillian Low Gravity Frigate that drifted off the starboard aft quarter of the massive *BLOOD REVERENCE*.

“You... you are their son?” Cirith rasped out still in shock at what she saw kneeling before her.

Tir’ut nodded. “I am the oldest of my brothers. There are four of us.” He stated proudly.

“We... we suspected that... we didn’t know for sure.” Cirith stammered. “We didn’t... oh my...”

“Lady Cirith?” The senior commando barked from behind them.

All of them turned to see the five commandos standing with their weapons at the ready. Cirith waved them down. “Lower your weapons Lancy.” She directed. “We... we are not in danger.”

The five commandos complied instantly and while the others moved to return to their seats Lancy Dysona moved forward into the already cramped cockpit. His eyes were on Tir’ut, but they did not look at him as a threat. They looked at him as a wonder.

Cirith turned her eyes back to Tir’ut. “You know... you know that ship?” She asked.

Tir'ut nodded. "It is the ship that began all this." He stated. "Under the command of a pureblood like yourself. A vampire by the name of Gareld."

"Gareld?" Cirith exclaimed. "Aikiro's former student?" She asked.

Tir'ut looked at her. "You know him?"

"I know of him." Cirith answered. "He deserted my mother shortly after the war with the Kavalians began. He's scum."

"My father has debt to settle with him." Tir'ut said. "He..."

"It's a debt that will have to be settled some other time." The engineer behind Cirith stated. "That Bontawillian ship is dead. It's been vented to space."

"What?" Cirith asked turning to look at him.

The man nodded. "Sensors indicate nearly a dozen precision holes in the hull. Looks like a laser was used to carve it up. No lifesigns. No power emissions."

"Then why keep it under tow?" Normya asked. "Look..." She pointed to the thin bluish beam that extended from the rear of the dreadnought and attached to the nose of the frigate. "That's a tow beam isn't it?"

"Yes." Cirith stated as her hand danced across her controls. "I'm moving us closer." She stated. "What do you have on the dreadnought?"

The man in the engineer's chair shook his head. "Standard passive scans show nothing out of the ordinary. Their Shroud is nearly as good as ours and I'm guessing they have a pretty good engineer who tweaked it for them."

"Lifesigns?" Normya asked.

"Whoa!" The man spoke. "I'm only reading three hundred and six lifesigns. They must have the majority of systems operated by remote."

Normya looked at Cirith. "Remote? Is that even possible with a ship that size?" She asked.

Cirith shrugged her shoulders. "Apparently so."

"Lady Cirith... your father is hailing us." The man spoke.

Cirith turned quickly and touched a panel on her console. "Yes father?" She spoke.

"Cirith... you must return to the surface immediately." Valin's voice erupted over the COM.

"What? Father... we are looking at this ship right now!" Cirith announced. "It... it does not appear to be a High Coven run vessel! It only has a crew of three hundred! It..."

"The Kavalians have broken through the wall of the settlement Cirith!" Valin snapped. "Our ships are fully engaged and we can not send troops down with all the Kavalian fighters still in the area! Communications with Cha'talla's Command Center have been lost and we..."

Cirith turned as she saw Normya sit forward quickly. "Lost?" She gasped. "What do you mean lost?"

"Who is this?" Valin barked.

"Father... what do you mean lost?" Cirith repeated the question.

"Just that damn it!" Valin barked. "Queen Leonidas is no longer answering transmissions to her. She was directing the fighter support now making its way to the surface and apparently something happened. Reports are coming in that her dragon has gone crazy! I do not know..."

Normya gasped and sat back in her chair drawing the attention of both Cirith and Tir'ut. He gripped her shoulder.

"*Il kal'daka darthirii?*" He asked.

"Cirith... a G9 has just entered the Shroud field!" Her co-pilot spat. "Bearing three two six! Heading right for the landing bay!"

Cirith yanked her controls over and the *SCYTHE* responded instantly. All of them saw the High Coven G9 Runner as it made its way towards the *BLOOD REVERENCE*.

"Mother?" Normya gasped.

"Normya?" Tir'ut spoke gripping her shoulder.

Normya reached up and squeezed his hand painfully. "Mother." She gasped. "She's on that ship Tir'ut!" Normya hissed.

Tir'ut's eyes went wide as he looked at the G9 moving away from them. "*Il kal'daka darthirii*, how can... how can that be?"

Normya looked at him. "I can feel her husband!" Normya said. "I can... I can hear Iriral calling out to her and she isn't answering!"

"Are you sure Normya Leonidas?" Cirith asked quickly.

"We can... my entire family... we can almost sense when we are close to one another in Mindvoice." Normya gasped. "They have my mother whoever they are! I can feel her! And she would never leave Kranek without Iriral! Never!"

Tir'ut looked at Cirith. "That Bontawillian ship is the same one that tried to kill Normya several months ago! It is commanded by this Gareld! He is working with the Kavalians! That much we determined weeks ago!" He hissed out. "If Normya says she can feel her mother on that Runner, then that is where she is! We must go after them!"

Cirith's eyes were wide. "Father... we are tracking a High Coven G9 that just entered within the Shroud field. Trajectory indicates it came from Kranek. Normya... Normya Leonidas says her mother is on that ship!"

"Impossible!" Valin spat. "How could they have gotten her off the planet? Cirith you will follow my orders and..."

Cirith took one look at Normya and stabbed her finger down on the panel cutting off her father's voice. "Normya... you are sure?" She asked.

"Yes." Normya answered without hesitation. "Tir'ut?"

Tir'ut nodded his head, his eyes closed. "Yes... yes I can feel her now as well." He stated. He opened his eyes once more and looked at Cirith. "We are husband and wife! We have tasted each other's blood Cirith Esavorna and our Mindvoice abilities are far more tuned to family members! We..."

"Enough! You don't need to convince me anymore!" She barked. "Writnor?" She turned and looked at her co-pilot. "Do you have the override controls?"

The man nodded. "What for?" He replied. "Let's sneak in when they enter the bay." The man offered. "They only have three hundred crew members Lady Cirith. It's not like it's going to be real busy. As long as we keep a safe distance from the G9... they won't even know we are there."

Cirith looked at him. "Writnor... I have never flown in close quarters like that."

"I have." Normya said looking at her. "I will fly us."

The decision was very easy for Cirith. She and her father had already taken that complete step into the future and there was no going back. Given what history her father and her nanny had related to her through the years, Cirith knew she was meant to be part of this family. She had been meant to be the wife of King Leonidas of Sparta by a higher power, her father and nanny both telling her this was so from the time she was old enough to understand. She was supposed to be the one to unite the two peoples and her half brother Xerxes had cheated her before she had the opportunity to fulfill that role. It was in her blood she knew, and while she did not know the complete history as to how or why, she knew that the wolf within her belonged here. She belonged with these people.

"Take the controls." She ordered quickly. "Lancy... prepare the team for infiltration. Start memorizing the schematics of a *BLOOD REVERENCE!* We're going in!"

IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

"NO! NO! NO!"

Cha'talla's scream of anger echoed across the area even as he brought up his SA80 and began laying down a blistering field of projectiles at the mass of Kavalian troops that had risen up and were surging through the ten meter break in the wall. He felt his aide beside him doing the same thing, fearlessly following his Commander and probably knowing they would die this die.

Everything they had built, everything he had a hand in bringing to his people was being torn asunder. Cha'talla was by no means afraid to die. The old ways of the Akruvian people, which he had embraced so completely upon settling here, said that to die in defense of others was the most honorable way to die. Cha'talla knew his brother would get here, he had faith in T'lolt and what he would do, but Cha'talla knew he would also die here insuring he bought just that few extra seconds until T'lolt appeared. Cha'talla would accept that death. He would accept it for it insured his people, his tribe continued on. It insured the most beautiful light in his

entire seven thousand plus years of existence continued living. What she ever saw in him Cha'talla would never know, but he would die at least knowing happiness and love had once been his for the taking. And he had taken it and never looked back.

As the first wave of Kavalian biogenic clones fell before him, riddled by his SA80, he did not see that light of his life come blurring around the corner of a single story building heading right for him in a desperate attempt to save his life. Of course, she never saw the nearly thirty Immortals come launching over the top of the settlement wall as if they had been shot out of a cannon. It was easy enough to accomplish when you had thirty dragons launch them through the air with Mindvoice TK power as easily as if they were lifting flowers. She never saw them land upright, T'lolt in the lead, and begin moving as fast as their legs would carry them right behind her.

Esther Saira was unique in many ways. She had always been different, and this is what allowed her to see past the exterior visage that Cha'talla the Immortal gave off, and see inside the man's heart and mind. He had not only taken her blood that day, he had taken all that she was. The fever induced delirium may have prompted him to take her that very first time, but Esther would never say it was against her will, for in reality it never was. It was why she made him stop taking the treatments that were altering his outward appearance. She had fallen in love with Cha'talla the Immortal no matter what his appearance was, and while the treatments he had taken softened his normally harsh features, when he stopped they reverted back only slightly. Esther didn't care what he looked like. She loved what was inside him, the way he worshiped the ground she walked upon, the way he doted over her like some precious flower. And she could never feel with someone else what Cha'talla made her feel in the only marriage bed she would ever want, of that Esther had no doubts.

Esther saw the break in the settlement wall, she saw the first rank of Kavalians fall, and she also saw the hundreds more that were rushing the opening in an all out attempt to get inside the many hundreds of buildings where the dragons could not follow. Esther came skidding to a halt when she saw Cha'talla stagger as the first rounds punched into his armor. Her dark eyes were wide in horror, watching as the death of the only man she had ever loved began.

“CHA'TALLA!”

He did not hear his Blessed Wife scream his name, the roar of his SA80 almost deafening as he fired with one hand, stumbling sideways from the impact of four rounds against his body armor. Cha'talla screamed his outrage as his SA80 ran dry and he heaved it at an oncoming Kavalian soldier as he tore his sword from his back. He watched as his aide was blown backwards by no less than ten rounds that perforated his entire chest area and blew apart his head. Cha'talla lifted his sword above his head and with a howl of utter fury he took a step towards the onrushing Kavalian troops. Two of the lead Kavalians both aimed at the lone Immortal in their path and pulled back the triggers of their weapons. Cha'talla took both bursts in the chest area of his armor and it sent his two hundred and sixty-five pound body slamming backwards.

At least nine rounds struck Cha'talla full on, and in what would be later characterized as nothing short of a miracle, the wondrous Mark IV ArmorPly body armor was never penetrated, and Cha'talla's backwards lunge was stopped short as he slammed painfully into something very unyielding but surprisingly soft.

And then the true future and path of Cha'talla the Immortal was born before the eyes of his Blessed Wife, his trusted and loved brother and dozens of Immortals and elves as well as the Kavalians who were pouring through the opening in the wall, only to come up short.

YOU WILL NOT TAKE MY BONDED BROTHER FROM ME! YOU WILL NOT TAKE OUR GIFT FROM US!

Of all who witnessed the event that day, only Esther and those able to hear the bellow within Mindvoice, only they would see what took place and they would remember it for all time.

No one would be able to explain how Vollenth appeared directly behind Cha'talla wearing the Mark Eleven saddle, and no one ever would know how he knew to activate it so that he teleported to this exact spot. What they would know and remember is how every single Kavalian soldier came to a screeching halt when they heard the deafening trumpet that Vollenth released at that moment, extending his huge head out on his neck, snapping his wings to their full extension on either side of his body and letting rip with a noise that sounded like it was rising from the depths of hell itself. The yellowish tint of his wings was bright against the green of his

body in the sunlight, and his blazing yellow/orange eyes held murderous fury in them. As soon as that trumpet ended Vollenth lowered his head and touched his snout to the shoulder of a very dazed Cha'talla.

It was you! Vollenth's voice erupted in Mindvoice. ***It was always you! You are the one! My Bonded Brother!***

Esther was frozen in her spot even as T'lolt and the others came up beside her in stunned shock. It was as if time was standing still for all of them, everything moving in slow motion. They watched Cha'talla's hands come up to grasp either side of Vollenth's snout and his eyes sprang open as a scream unlike anything they had ever heard from him ripped across the small clearing.

Cha'talla's mind was awash with thoughts that were not his own, pain that was not his own, and yet strangely they were his own. Cha'talla's muscular body twitched and convulsed several times as two minds became one, Vollenth's wings trembled madly and the whole of two became one. Cha'talla saw it all in his mind's eye, Vollenth's entire painful life right up until the moment Androcles Leonidas sank that psychic knife into his brain and severed the evil cord that bound him to Yuri. He saw the stunning tan female dragon and the two young hatchlings that were the center of Vollenth's life now. And in seeing all this Vollenth absorbed over seven thousand years of experience, of pain, of successes and defeats. He absorbed the entirety of Cha'talla the Immortal; including the utter clarity and unfettered devotion to the beautiful young vampire female that was his wife. To the sons that she had bore him and his son that remained from before they came here, and the pride he felt whenever he thought of them. Vollenth felt the complete dedication to the future of his people and the purpose he carried upon his shoulders to see them succeed and be free and united once more. That purpose became Vollenth's now, just as all of his desires became Cha'talla's. If ever two different souls had been meant for each other, then Cha'talla and Vollenth were it. They felt it then, the soft light blue psychic shield activated where his hands rested on either side of Vollenth's snout and the consummate ease with which it spread quickly to encompass their bodies and become part of who they were, just as their minds were now one. Cha'talla slowly pulled himself to his feet; the pain he had felt only moments before was long gone now, to be replaced with a surging of unearthly power that he had never experienced before. It was as if he had worn blinders all of his life and suddenly they had been removed and everything was open to him now. Such clarity and focus. Such deep thoughts and benevolence flowed through him and Cha'talla turned slowly to look up into the yellow/orange eyes of the dragon that was now as much a part of him as he was of Vollenth.

How... how is this possible? Cha'talla gasped as his own words filled his mind with an ease he had never been able to achieve until now.

We can discover this after my Bonded Brother. Vollenth answered.

After... after?

Vollenth nodded his massive head. *After we finish protecting those we love and hold dear to us.* He stated as he lifted his head and settled his yellow/orange eyes on the massed group of Kavalians who were staring in abject horror at him and Cha'talla both.

Cha'talla turned slowly then and Esther held back the astonished breath as she saw in her husband's eyes something so bright and intelligent and so very powerful. Cha'talla turned fully to face the Kavalians even as he felt his brother T'lolt move slowly up beside him, for T'lolt would never fear his older brother.

"Bro... brother?" T'lolt whispered softly.

Cha'talla smiled at him and his hand tightened on his Immortal sword. "He knew T'lolt." Cha'talla said. "He knew."

"What? Who knew what?" T'lolt gasped as his hands tightened on the SA80 he carried in one hand and the sword he held in the other.

"Androcles Leonidas." Cha'talla spoke softly. Reverently. "He knew."

T'lolt watched with wide eyes as Vollenth unleashed another body vibrating trumpet that was equaled only by the matching sound that erupted from his brother's lips. Cha'talla lifted his Immortal sword and screaming his outrage and ardent fervor he launched himself at the line of Kavalian troops who were still standing there with looks of panic and fear locked on their feline expressions. As T'lolt watched in mystified disbelief, he saw his brother duck down just as one of Vollenth's huge wings whistled over his six foot five body to smash full force into the front row of dumbstruck Kavalians. As that row of Kavalians toppled over or went sailing, Cha'talla's sword claimed the first of many victims this day. T'lolt had always followed his brother without question for he had always looked up to him and what he was trying to accomplish. He had been the

first to see that their way was wrong, but it had been Cha'talla who truly grasped onto that and moved them forward. With a wail of glee not that unlike something from a party, T'lolt followed his brother forward without question, followed quickly by nearly three dozen other Immortals who had witnessed everything.

Esther stood in her spot dumbfounded and almost didn't see the tan colored scales of Viera step up next to her.

It was foretold long before this day that this would become reality. Viera spoke watching as Esther whirled around to face her and gasped in surprise. *Androcles knew this. He had to have known this. As did the Elder Mother.*

"You..." Esther saw Fash'ka stumble from an alley between the buildings and catch himself before skidding to a halt beside her. His eyes were wide and grew even wider when he saw his Immortal father standing beside the massive greenish yellow dragon and decimating Kavalians by the dozens.

"Moth... mother!" He gasped looking between Esther and his father. "Mother what..."

"It is a miracle!" Esther told him, her voice carrying easily now that Kavalian mortars no longer fell around them. Esther noticed his shoulder and how blood soaked his arm which hung useless. "Fash'ka... you are injured!" She barked.

Fash'ka tore his eyes away and looked at her. Those same eyes grew large with terror as he looked at his mother. "Mother... Immortals... Immortals have taken Dysea *Darthirii Ilhar!* They have killed everyone in the Command Center and taken her!" (Elf Mother)

"What?" Esther shouted. "What... what Immortals?"

Fash'ka shook his head. "They... they were not from our tribe! They had our uniforms on... but I recognized none of them! I tried to stop them mother but there were... there were too many!"

"Take me!" Esther barked.

I will come with you! Viera barked knowing that Esther could hear her easily.

Esther could only nod as the thought of losing Dysea consumed her. "Fash'ka go!" She snapped. "To the command center!"

"They are not there!" Fash'ka retorted. "They were heading for the wall in the eastern corner when I barely escaped!"

"Then take us there!" Esther shouted grabbing his arm. As Fash'ka turned and held her hand and began leading her and Viera back through the maze of settlement buildings Esther reached out to the one who she now knew commanded all Union forces on Kranek and in the space above them as well. *DENALI! Denali... you must meet me on the eastern corner of the settlement! Your mother has been taken by Immortals who are not part of our tribe!*

Esther... what are you... what do you mean taken? Denali answered instantly.

Just meet me there young Denali! We don't have much time!

Esther, Fash'ka and half a dozen other Immortals were inspecting the three bodies by the half opened eastern gate into the settlement. This gate was almost always secure for it opened directly into the timber and mountain terrain that the settlement backed up too. The three Immortals had all been riddled with projectiles, their blood saturating the ground beneath their bodies. Viera stood next to the twelve meter high wall, inspecting the doorway itself and the surrounding wall. All of them whirled when they heard the trumpet and they saw Aradace land only a few meters away, Denali leaping from the saddle before she had fully settled to the ground. He tore his helmet off as he rushed up to where Esther stood.

"My mother!" He demanded. "Where is she? You said she had been taken!" His eyes took in the scene before him and he stopped talking.

"Denali... we..." Esther began.

"Where is she? Where is Iriral?" Denali shouted angrily, his wolf eyes glaring at all of them with pain and death in them. He could not lose one of his mothers when they had already lost his father. They could not lose her.

Fash'ka stepped forward now. "They were Immortals who are not members of our tribe!" He stated. "We don't know how they got in, or where they got our uniforms, but they struck the Command Center and took her from there."

I feel her Denali. I feel Iriral. Aradace spoke as she moved closer. *When she left the battlefield I kept a connection open to her. She is southeast of us and...*

Denali looked at her. "And what?"

Aradace's blue eyes met his. *She is in pain... and she is weeping.*

Denali snarled viciously and jumped back into the saddle on her back. *Eliani!* He barked out in Mindvoice.

Deni... I'm kind of busy! Eliani snapped back surprising her brother with the vitriol she answered him. *I've got dozens of wounded and...*

Denali didn't let her response deter him. *Get on Tharua and carry your ass to where I will be sister!* He ordered. *That is an order! Mother is missing and Iriral is...*

Mother is missing? Iriral is what? Deni... what is going on? Eliani asked as her voice took on a more civil and concerned tone.

Just meet me Eli... please. Denali spoke.

We are on our way. Eliani said instantly.

Esther turned quickly when Viera's snout bumped into her shoulder from behind. *Climb onto my back Esther Suira. I can carry you and your Immortal son easily.*

Esther didn't hesitate and used Viera's front foreleg as a stepping stone to jump up and settle herself into the saddle on her back. Fash'ka looked up at her.

"Mother?" He gasped.

"Get up here!" Esther snapped.

"Up... up there?" Fash'ka gasped again.

"Hurry!" Esther barked as Denali was already lifting into the sky on Aradace's back. She waited while Fash'ka moved forward hesitantly. "We must call your father! He must know what is going on!"

Viera turned her head back on her long neck and looked at Esther. *I have already told my mate.* She said. *Vollenth will bring him.*

As soon as Fash'ka settled behind his adopted mother in the saddle they both felt the Dragon Armor leg braces tighten and secure their legs to the saddle.

"Mother... perhaps this is not such a good..." Fash'ka began to talk.

Here we go! Viera announced as she cocked her legs and propelled them into the sky cutting off Fash'ka's words of caution.

PROTECTORATE CRUSADER-CLASS CRUISER

TALON OF JUSTICE

SPACEWARD OF THE PERSEUS ARM

UNEXPLORED SPACE

7853 LY FROM EARTH

Wayonn turned when the door to his quarters slid open and Dutkne, Drey and Nirilo moved into the main room. He was sitting in the large armless chair in the center of his quarters, and though large and spacious, there was very little in the way of creature comforts. Wayonn did not spend much time in his quarters aside from sleeping. He preferred to constantly be on the move, even within the ship. His excuse was that at his age if he stayed in one place too long he would become a fixture there. Dutkne, Drey and Nirilo knew it to be that Wayonn enjoyed the activity and the events that always took their attention from the mundane. Wayonn watched as they pulled three chairs away from the small table nearby and settled in a semi circle around him.

"We have completed the first jump grandfather." Dutkne said as he settled into the chair. "We will make the next in sixteen minutes."

Wayonn nodded. "Good." He said. "That doesn't explain why the three of you are here now though. Operation of the *TALON* does not need my help or guidance."

"We are here grandfather, because I can feel the tremors within Mindvoice." Dutkne spoke. "You are trying to contact him aren't you?"

Wayonn nodded. "Trying... yes. Having success... no."

“What else?” Dutkne asked.

“What makes you think there is something else?” Wayonn asked him.

Dutkne shook his head. “Not this time grandfather.” He spoke. “Now is not the time to speak in riddles. We have come further outside our own space now than we have since the Black Day grandfather. Nirilo has not passed important information on to the Vanari Board of Regents because we asked him not too. We are taking many risks, all of us and now is not the time to...”

Wayonn held up his hand stopping Dutkne’s words. “You are right.” He said. “I give you my apologies Nirilo.”

Nirilo shook his head. “Unlike my father and many of my people, I trust you and the Lycavorians Wayonn. You have purpose for everything you do, that much I do know. It is why my mother thinks so highly of you.”

Wayonn chuckled. “If there were more Regents like your mother on the Board, we might already be dedicated allies and friends and not neutral antagonists.” He said.

Nirilo nodded. “I believe their differences in opinion are what finally drove my father and mother apart. My sisters agree with me. As for the neutral antagonists... that only applies to the older members of the Board like my father. They fear upsetting the status quo.”

Wayonn nodded. “If we do not embrace the unknown Nirilo, the future will leave us in the past. I wish more of your people would see this.”

“We are trying to change them Wayonn.” Nirilo said. “It is happening slowly... but we *are* having an impact.”

“Perhaps... but it does not happen quickly enough.” Wayonn said gripping his arm. “At least in my opinion. What I fear is this; your Board of Regents will dither and dally when they discover what you know about Martin and his son. I was only able to speak with him about certain items, but in that time I learned several things about him that I did not know before. They... Martin will only reach out for so long...” Wayonn said. “If your people cling to the falsehoods that the older members of your Board of Regents still swear by, he will dismiss you altogether. He will not show respect and honor to those who do not show it in return. And while the Union does have a Prime Minister and a Senate, much like your Board of Regents, it is amazing how many share in his mentality and for the most part they will not go against his wishes. Perhaps it is because they have built what they have with all the odds stacked against them, but they are a proud part of our people.”

Dutkne nodded his head. “And once those Lycavorians in the Protectorate discover that he is alive, they will embrace him as well.”

“Do not discount your influence grandson.” Wayonn said quickly looking at him. “Your path is already determined in this life, and you will walk the same path that I walked. That your grandfather Canth walked.”

Dutkne nodded. “I do not believe in predetermination grandfather.” He stated. “You know this better than anyone.”

“Yes... I know.” Wayonn answered. “It will not matter in the least however. Fate and destiny is almost always predetermined and it can not be denied no matter what you do. In most cases you will not want to deny it.” He smiled and his eyes twinkled. “What do you want to know?” He asked.

Dutkne looked at him oddly for a moment but he continued forward. “You said you are trying to contact him but are having no success?” Dutkne said.

Wayonn nodded. “Not so much as contact him as get a tremor from him. Some sense of his emotions. I can feel nothing from him now and to be honest, I do not know what to make of that.”

“What do you think is happening?” Drey asked softly.

“To be honest... I don’t know.” Wayonn said evenly. “You have to understand... Martin Leonidas is the most powerful Mindvoicer I have felt since Sumar, and Sumar was considered one of the Elder Pralors among our people. Among the elite and most powerful of those who can use Mindvoice. Martin’s son is not so very far behind his father.”

“Why does that matter?” Nirilo asked.

Wayonn looked at him. “As powerful as he is Nirilo... there are only two reasons that I would not be able to detect at least faint tremors from him.”

“And they are?” Drey asked.

“He is either dead... or he has devised a way unknown even to me to shield himself from detection.” Wayonn said. “I mentioned to him that he and his son still had much to learn when it came to shielding their minds. I do not know where he would have learned such skills in only a few days for even Dustha does not have this knowledge even though she carries my son’s memories and essence within her.”

“Dead?” Dutkne gasped out with wide eyes. “Why would you even consider that now grandfather?”

“Because if this is true... then your role in the future becomes that much more important Dutkne. And this trip becomes so much more critical. Not so much for the immediate future for that must play out now no matter what, but for the future to come.” Wayonn said. “Our future and what it holds for our people.”

“My role?” He said.

Wayonn nodded and took a deep breath. “It is your destiny to act as I acted for Sumar. As Canth acted for Martin’s grandfather. As Dustha now acts for Martin.”

Drey looked at Dutkne with wide eyes. “For Androcles?” He said quickly as he looked back to Wayonn.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. As I explained to all of you at dinner, he is very much like his father and he is also very different. And as I told Martin, he has embraced all that he is since the day he became aware while still in his mother’s womb. If Martin is dead... if Pleistarchus has somehow managed to kill his brother, there will only be two things in this universe that will be able to control Androcles Leonidas. One of them is the woman who is his *anome*... and the other is you Dutkne.”

“Me?” Dutkne barked. “I do not know him! And I certainly do not want that sort of duty. I’m not a...” Dutkne saw Wayonn smiling and he pointed his finger at his grandfather. “Don’t look at me like that! Whenever you look at me like that I end up doing something I do not want to do!”

“How do you avoid fate Dutkne my boy?” Wayonn asked.

“I can damn sure give it a *nubous* try!” Dutkne exclaimed.

“It is the way of things Dutkne. With our blood and the many experiences that have been passed to you, you can fight it all you want, deny it even, but ultimately you will come to see it is what you were born for.” Wayonn said. “I honestly do not know what has happened or why I can no longer feel him. I bestowed some information to Martin about plans his brother had when I spoke to him. I learned through my contact in The Wilds that an attempt was going to be made on him personally and most of his family.” Wayonn said.

“His brother would actually sanction his death?” Nirilo exclaimed. “And the death of his family members?”

Wayonn nodded. “You have to understand Pleistarchus and the way he thinks. The only thing that matters to him is power. The more he gains... the more he wants. He has risen to some prominence within the Kavalian Empire by now and...”

“You are speaking of the feline like species in Sector Twenty-three?” Nirilo asked. “The ones at war with the Coven that you mentioned during dinner?”

Wayonn nodded. “Pleistarchus has gained power and prestige with them that he would not have had within the Union because of the style of government. I do know that he has always hated his father for dying on him when he was so young, he hates his mother Gorgo for leaving him alone on Earth. And he hates his brother Martin for the role he now plays and does so well at, for he thinks it was always his to have to begin with.”

“King of Sparta and the Lycavorian Union.” Dutkne said.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. My contact was not able to give me any information as to the how of things, only that Martin and his family were going to be targeted soon. I also know that Martin Leonidas despises his brother with every fiber of his being. That emotion is a powerful one that radiates from him. He will never forgive his brother for betraying their people, for trying to kill their mother, and in his mind, dishonoring the memory of their father which he holds so sacred.” Wayonn got to his feet slowly and moved to the small panel on the wall, entering the code for tea. There was a small whirring noise and then four mugs of steaming tea appeared on the plate and he took them from the dispenser.

“In order to understand where Martin’s hate comes from, you must understand the why of it.” He spoke as he brought the plate over and held it out waiting for each of them to remove a mug. He took the last one and returned to his seat. “As I have already told you at dinner, the first two thousand years of his life Martin spent in a cryogenic sleep chamber either on a Union ship or buried in a mountain on Earth. When he woke, he woke to strangers. He did not know who he or what he was though he could still feel it within his blood. The Comet anomaly changed all that. When he discovered the blood that runs in his veins, he immersed himself in the

history and lore that his father had built in Sparta. He wrapped himself within it, for in reality the honor and code of the Spartans and our people he had already followed and didn't even know why. He thought himself to be the only son of his father left alive. When he found out that his brother was indeed alive and had renounced their people; had even killed their people; that is where the hate began." Wayonn sipped his tea and looked at them.

"He hates Pleistarchus because he has actually been able to touch their father. Talk to him. Look at him. In Martin's eyes Pleistarchus committed the most heinous of crimes when he turned against their father's people. Against our people. It is a hate that will not die or fade away, especially not since Pleistarchus tried to kill their mother when Martin had only just begun to truly discover her."

"And Androcles?" Dutkne asked softly.

Wayonn nodded his head. "Androcles is another story all together." Wayonn said. "As I explained to Martin... while he and his son are incredibly alike, Andro is very different from his father. The resemblance he has to his father is uncanny, but Androcles is different than him in many ways. Some would say darker."

"Darker?" Nirilo asked.

"He's much more serious from what I was able to see within Martin's thoughts." Wayonn said. "He has embraced his history and abilities with far greater ease than his father."

"Wayonn... you said he became aware while in his mother's womb?" Nirilo said. "How is that possible?"

"It stems from the time he was conceived." Wayonn answered. "And it is a direct result of Martin and Aricia being *Anomes*. The emotional stress of what had happened in their lives in the few months before he was conceived, the joining of their minds with their dragons, the moment he was conceived they unknowingly granted him everything they knew up until that point. When Elynth was hatched a short time later and she touched Aricia that first time, he instinctively reached for her and their bond was formed while he was still within Aricia's womb. He became aware of everything around him and Elynth became his conduit. Part of his serious nature is a result of the burden placed on him as an infant in the womb. Being exposed to such a wide ranging field of and often times incredibly potent emotions caused his Pralor blood to react as it did to cope with it. To give him the ability to understand it even as an infant. It is why he is so possessively protective of his siblings and his parents. That part of him only grew stronger when Sadi came into his life, and like his father and mother, they were fated for one another. When he and Sadi became *Anomes*, it sealed the final bloodline of the Lycavorian people, bringing them all back together like it was in the beginning."

Dutkne leaned forward. "You said something like that at dinner grandfather. What do you mean by that? There was only King Resumar and Queen Eliani."

Wayonn nodded. "Resumar and Eliani ultimately became King and Queen, bringing two of the ruling bloodlines together, but it is Martin and Andro who have brought the remaining ruling bloodlines back into the fold."

"Ruling Bloodlines?" Drey asked. "I have never heard of anything like that. What do you mean?" He said.

Dutkne shook his head. "Neither have I." He echoed looking at his grandfather. "This is all news to me grandfather."

"I would imagine it is news to many of the younger generations, and that is not entirely your fault either." Wayonn told them. "Sumar was the one who discovered it after he joined with the Lycavorians." Wayonn began to explain. "He always had a touch for history and learning all that he could. What he discovered is that there were six Ruling Packs if you will, dating back to fifty thousand years before we ever crashed on Lycavore, probably further back than that since he discovered evidence that our people had existed for close to a hundred thousand years, but he never pursued it. The Lycavorian King and Queen were always from the most powerful of the six ruling packs at any given time. Every Lycavorian alive today could trace their bloodline back to one of these packs if you went back far enough and the Coven had not destroyed many of our history scrolls and such. As it turns out, the wolf that turned Sumar was from the most powerful of the ruling packs, and so was the female that Sumar took as his mate. Resumar was then born as their first child and continued that line, making it even stronger with the blood of Pralors. Eliani was from the second most powerful pack at the time, again because many of our people had chosen wives and husbands within her pack family if you will. We surmised that our blood mixed with theirs would ultimately insure that a small part of us

would continue on in them. Pralor blood made these two packs stronger than the others and the other packs recognized it after a time. It was natural for Eliani's blood to call for Resumar as it did, as his called for her. They were fated to be together as *Anomes*. One pack leader did not see it that way and in the end he paid for that mistake."

"Chetak?" Dutkne said.

Wayonn nodded his head and got up to move to the view window and gaze out at the stars. "Chetak." He spoke softly. You know of course what happened to Chetak and his pack..."

"They were banished." Drey spoke. "They were cast out a few years before the Black Day." He answered. "Exiled forever by King Resumar for his actions."

Wayonn nodded. "What you probably don't know is that Martin Leonidas all but wiped out Chetak's pack. There may be a few left among the many billions of our people, but for all intents and purposes, he destroyed one of the original ruling packs because Chetak tried to take Aricia from him."

"How do..." Dutkne began but Wayonn smiled and held up his hand silencing him.

"When Resumar made the decision to send ten thousand fetuses to Earth to safeguard them from the High Coven, among those ten thousand were his last child, Leonidas as we all know. Also among them were the fetuses from the remaining four Ruling Packs of Lycavore. Resumar knew one day the blood from the packs would need to be reunited in order to survive and he insured that at least one fetus from each Ruling Pack was among those removed by the Hadarians to Earth. He insisted upon it even against the wishes of many of his advisors, all except Canth that is and this cemented Resumar's place among all the Ruling Packs as the King who saved our people. Canth went to each of the other three Pack Leaders himself to tell them of Resumar's plan and requested this very thing, and Resumar waited for three years before sending the Ten Thousand off until one Pack leader and his mate were able to conceive."

"Grandfather... Canth... he passed all this to you before his..." Dutkne began to ask.

Wayonn nodded slowly. "Before his spirit truly became one with Dustha. Yes."

Dutkne's eyes filled with comprehension then. "Queen Aricia... this Sadi... they are the descendants of these Packs? These families?"

Wayonn nodded. "Two of them yes." He answered. "I doubt very much they are even aware that, in essence, they are royalty themselves by virtue of their blood. Aricia was born and raised in Sparta. I do not know how Sadi's ancestor made it off Earth and ended up on Apo Prime with our people, but I knew the moment I touched Martin that she was from another of the Ruling Packs. Deia knew of this plan and she may have an idea of what I am telling you now, she probably knows more than I do to be honest for she spent the most time with Eliani and Resumar in those last months."

"You said there were three Wayonn." Nirilo said. "If Martin is a product of two of these Ruling Packs, Aricia from another and now this Sadi from one more...who is the third that escaped?"

Wayonn looked at them. "The third may come as a surprise, considering who she is, but after much research I'm quite certain I am correct in her identity. She is considerably older than Aricia and Sadi, and I have surmised she should have been the first one to rejoin the bloodlines after the Black Day. I believe she was meant to come together with Leonidas and Gorgo so that they could begin the renewal long ago."

"Should have been?" Drey asked.

Wayonn nodded. "She is more vampire than wolf, and if my calculations are correct, she would be just over three thousand one hundred years of age. She would also carry the blood of Xaxon within her veins for Empress Aikiro is her mother."

"Aikiro?" Dutkne gasped.

Wayonn nodded. "When Leonidas was killed, her opportunity was lost. I don't know what she has done since then; my information about her is limited and hard to come by through my contact."

Dutkne, Drey and Nirilo sat there looking at him dumbfounded. "Grandfather... you are serious?" Dutkne finally stammered.

Wayonn nodded. "Oh yes." He said.

"How... how do you know this?" Dutkne asked. "How could you even come close to knowing that? We have had no contact with the High Coven in all the years since we left Lycavore!"

"Nor have I." Wayonn said calmly. "My contact is in such a position to have gained this information for me."

“Your contact is a member of the Coven?” Nirilo asked in surprise.

Wayonn waggled his hand. “In a manner of speaking...”

“Grandfather?” Dutkne snapped tilting his head. “You are doing it again! I asked that you not hold anything back from us! Not now!”

Wayonn shook his head. “No!” He stated firmly. “For the last three thousand years I have protected her identity. She is the last of my kind and I will not risk her.”

“Last of your...” Dutkne gasped.

Wayonn met his gaze. “She is the only Pralor of true blood left alive Dutkne. The only one! We embraced our Lycavorian blood back then to survive. We willingly gave of ourselves to insure that our blood did not die and that was by joining with the Lycavorian people. She is a Pralor Acolyte and in comparison to me in age... still a child. Too reckless a child as she has proven through the years in helping me. She takes too many risks. Her purpose in the circle of things was predetermined long ago when she first revealed her location to me and asked for my help when she woke from her sleep chamber. She found me! She is the one who helped me to establish the account in The Wilds which led to me discovering Martin Leonidas lived. She is the one who has been feeding me information that you and the others are only just discovering because it is now the time for it. She knows all that I know for we have spoken many times since that first day. Everything has a place, a purpose and a time to be revealed Dutkne. I have preached this to you for decades. The Protectorate has grown since the vileness of the Black Day; the Lycavorian Union has grown since the Black Day. What was once torn asunder so many years ago is slowly and irrevocably being drawn back together. Shiira’s place has already been written, she knows that, I know that and now Martin Leonidas knows that. He is the only one who I have told of her existence, and if he is now dead then it will be up to us to meet with Androcles as soon as possible and inform him of her existence so that the cycle that has already started may continue unimpeded.”

“Cycle?” Nirilo asked. “What cycle?”

Wayonn looked at him. “The cycle that began the day Martin and Avi took City Ship 41 from Lycavore and activated her engines to take her to Earth.”

“If... if Martin Leonidas is the one who began this cycle...” Drey asked. “If he is now dead... wouldn’t this cycle have died with him Wayonn?”

Wayonn shook his head. “It is too late for that now. Has nothing I have told you about father and son sunk in?” He barked. “If... if Pleistarchus has succeeded in killing Martin, in killing members of his family, only one thing can come of it. After the smoke has cleared, after the mourning is done...” Wayonn looked at them with bright eyes. “Androcles Leonidas will unleash all that he is upon those who took his father from him. He will be the eye of the storm that will utterly sweep the Kavalian people from existence and in doing so he will unwittingly shatter any hope that we may have for the future.”

EARTH SPARTA

The dozen or so *Durcunusaan* troops moved instantly around Arzoal when she landed and Helen practically leaped from the saddle on her back to land easily on the balls of her feet. The *Durcunusaan* were somewhat taken aback because all of them could easily feel the bond within Mindvoice between Helen and Arzoal. It was something that no one had been made aware of, however it was something that Helen and Arzoal decided they would no longer hide. The *Durcunusaan* made secure the small clearing behind the King Yelu Hospital as Admiral Riall and General Vengal strode quickly from the main lobby of the hospital. Helen could see hundreds of men and women milling about, even as dozens of injured were being brought in through different entrances. She and Arzoal had seen this from the air as they swooped in. The moment she had seen the footage of Martin dying, Helen had felt her heart being torn from her chest. It was all she could do to climb onto Arzoal’s back for the flight to Sparta. Every aircraft within Earth’s system had been grounded or ordered to stay where it was. The entire Earth Forces Command had been activated with a single call from War Master Tareif and backed with the approval from President Charles Turner, and now every unit stationed on Earth was at its highest state of alert in their history.

President Turner was now secure within a bunker three hundred meters beneath Eden City and surrounded by the *Durcunusaan* and Drow security forces that made up his personal security detachment. The very human President of Earth was enraged over what had taken place, and his orders had been very simple. Any Kavalian found on Earth was to be arrested immediately and without question. Selene and Aihola were also now secure in an undisclosed location and surrounded by *Durcunusaan* and Drow security forces. Tareif and Lynwe were advocating an immediate response to events with the support of Admiral Wallace, Riall juggling reports and demands for security from two dozen different parts of their government. The *Durcunusaan* troops assigned to the city of Sparta itself had effectively sealed Sparta away from the rest of the Union with the help of several thousand retired Union Spartans and civilians. Entrance and exit into Sparta had been ceased by all means, and now the only thing seen in the sky above Sparta were hundreds of riderless dragons that Arzoal had immediately dispatched to Sparta the moment she and Helen knew something was wrong.

Riall and Vengal saw that her face was drawn and she looked as if she had been crying. Vengal didn't hesitate and he stepped right up to her and took her arm, pulling him tight to his side and letting her draw support from him. Helen squeezed his hand in thanks at his action for she felt so drained now.

"Tell me what is happening Vengal." She gasped out. "Riall?"

Riall stepped up to her other side and at any other time it would have appeared comical to see the two towering men standing on either side of the five foot one *Feravomir* of the Union and the Lycavorian people.

"We have a conference room set up inside on the third floor." Riall stated quickly. "The emergency crews are just now beginning to bring the wounded in from the Senate Building."

"How many?" She asked immediately.

Riall shook his head slowly. "It was the height of the work day *Feravomir*." He said softly. "Dozens of Senators in their offices. There is no way to tell right now. What you see are just those who are being ushered to one of the five clinics in the area. Hundreds have come forward to volunteer to help in any way and the hospital chief has directed them to begin shuttling the less seriously injured to these clinics. He is refusing entry to anyone who does not have hospital credentials except for the few dozen Hadarian Healers who arrived almost as soon as the reports began coming in."

"For'mya?" Helen gasped. "Deia?"

Riall shook his head slowly once more. "We don't know. At last report they were in Deia's office but..."

"But what?" Helen hissed.

"Most of the building fell into the section that housed her office *Feravomir*." Vengal answered his voice heavy with grief. "There is emergency equipment moving to the site, but the entire first floor is buried under rubble."

Helen shook her head. "I... I felt hers and Deia's anger spike briefly and then nothing." She said softly. "Now... now all I can feel is Deia... and it is so very weak. It is almost as if she is fighting for her life."

"The head of Athens's city workforce was watching and saw the building come down *Feravomir*. He is enroute from Athens with all of his heavy equipment and three quarters of his city infrastructure crews." Riall told her. "There is help on its way from all over the planet."

I will bring down some of the stronger adolescents sister. Arzoal broke in quickly causing Helen to stop and look at her. *Our TK power can assist in moving the debris much faster.*

Helen nodded to her. "Isheeni? Aurith?" Helen asked her.

Isheeni is overcome with grief. She will not answer me within Mindvoice and she is attempting to keep Aurith sane. My granddaughter has never been far from For'mya since the day they fully bonded. It is tearing her apart. Arzoal replied.

"Bring the young ones down Arzoal and then go to them." Helen told her. "I will keep our connection open so that you are aware of all that goes on."

Arzoal nodded her massive head, cocked her legs and with a sweep of her huge wings took to the sky.

"Forgive me *Feravomir*..." Vengal said. "It almost seems as if you and the Elder Mother are..."

Helen met his eyes. "We are." She spoke the answer to his unasked question. "For the last twenty-one years now. We have just told no one until now." She turned to Riall as they began walking again. "Aricia Riall... tell me of Aricia?"

“Anuk and Duewa are in surgery with her now.” Riall answered. “She was in critical condition, but between the two of them they had her stable. We won’t know more until they are done. We have secured a conference room as I said and communications is being set up now. We are expecting Androcles to contact us within a few minutes. Amazingly he is on a *LEONIDAS IIA*, the *HARBINGER* I believe the Captain said, and he must have been close by for he is only a few hours away.”

Helen looked at him oddly. “He is not on Kranek?” She gasped in confusion.

Riall and Vengal both looked at her in surprise. “Kranek?” Vengal finally asked. “Why would he be there?”

“Dysea and Normya are there.” Helen told them without hesitation. It would no longer keep anyone safe if secrets were still kept from those who now needed to know. “They have been there for over three months. Andro was taking the High Coven riders there to finish their training.”

“We are unable to contact either Dysea or Isabella. And none of the Prince or Princesses are responding to COM calls even on secure Spartan channels by the *Durcunusaan*. Why would they be on Kranek *Feravomir*?” Riall asked.

Helen shook her head slowly. “If their brother told them not to answer calls even from the *Durcunusaan*, they will not answer unless he says it is ok. And they are there because they have been working side-by-side with Cha'talla and his Immortal tribe in trying to figure out who ordered the attack on Normya and some other as yet unanswered questions.”

“Cha'talla?” Riall exclaimed instinctively in revulsion. “Cha'talla is an Immortal and he is dead! He was killed by Veldruk over twenty years ago for...” Riall’s eyes grew larger as he saw Helen’s impassive face. “He is not dead?”

Helen shook her head. “Far from it. And he is no longer Cha'talla the Immortal Captain to Veldruk. He is something far more now than even he suspected I would imagine! Where is Daniel?” Helen asked quickly.

Riall looked at Vengal quickly and then back to her. “He... he will not leave Martin’s... He will not leave his brother’s side. He and those *Durcunusaan* that were with them have taken his remains and...”

Helen watched as Riall choked up and she gripped his arms tighter. “I... I feel it too Riall.” She said softly.

“We all do.” Vengal echoed.

“They are refusing treatment.” Riall continued now. “Many of them were injured in some form. Colonel Fache is the worst, but he refuses to leave Martin’s side as well. The Kavalians used plasma mortars and it burned the insides of their olfactory glands. They will heal, but many of them can not smell anything right now and they refuse to leave the... the body of their King.”

“We must keep Daniel away from any prisoners we take that may offer information.” Helen said quickly. “He will slaughter them before we can obtain intelligence about why this has happened. Where have they...?”

“The Western Clinic that Anja works out of all the time when she is here.” Riall replied. “That is where she spent most of her time when she wasn’t here at the hospital.”

“Why would... why would Andro tell his brothers and sisters not to answer calls from the *Durcunusaan Feravomir*?” Vengal asked once again.

Helen waited until they had passed the crowded doorway and the voices had dropped to a more manageable level. Arzoal simply settled to the ground outside the door, her bulk insuring that no one would attempt to use this entrance any longer. “Much has happened that many do not know about Vengal.” Helen spoke gently. “It was not because we did not trust any of you; it was because we did not know ourselves what was happening until only a few days ago.”

“What is happening *Feravomir*?” Riall asked.

“Have there been any incursions across our border by Kavalian forces? Anywhere along our borders?” Helen asked.

Riall shook his head. “None! But it will not stay that way! They will come pouring across the border soon, just as they did at Hadaria.”

“Riall... you are to insure our forces do not initiate anything with any Kavalian ships that come near our borders unless they are sure it is a full invasion.” Helen stated.

“*Feravomir*... we are leaving ourselves wide open for attack if we do not reposition our forces to meet them!” Riall complained.

Helen shook her head as they entered the elevator. “No... you may reposition them if you must, but they are to do nothing until further instructions are handed out!” She stated. “There is something else entirely going on here. I know it. Why have they not targeted others? Why only... why only Martin?” She whimpered softly. “Just Martin and his family.”

“*Feravomir*... we...?”

“No!” Helen barked. “You will follow my direction until the time you get new direction from Androcles! He is... he is now King! Please Riall... trust in me!”

Riall had been mated to Gorgo for over two thousand years and he had learned and seen many things these past two plus decades since Martin’s return to their people. His love for Gorgo had grown more passionate and intense in that time and his faith had grown even more. He looked at Helen for a long moment and then nodded his head. “It will be done.” He said.

Helen turned to look at Vengal. “Your *Durcunusaan* Vengal? Did they... did they capture any survivors from these assassination squads that struck?”

“We have surrounded the Kavalian Embassy if any that may remain attempt to go there.” Vengal answered her. “If I understand Thoti correctly, they were able to keep civilians from killing three that were wounded. Thoti is escorting them here to the hospital through the underground tunnels as we speak.”

“They are assassins.” Helen spat venomously. “Nothing more. They will know nothing about information we need but interrogate them regardless and then execute them Vengal. Have Thoti kill them and give their remains to the incinerators.”

Vengal nodded. “As you order.” He spoke.

“Nothing from Armetus?” Helen asked.

Riall shook his head. “We have been trying, but we get nothing from his personal COM or his equipment at his home or office. Marci has taken a short team of Drow Scouts to Gytheio to check his home in the mountains. Not even his mate is answering and she fears the worst. She ignored me when I ordered her to hold her position. She told me she is following Andro’s orders and only his.”

Helen nodded. “I want to see Aricia!” She spoke. “He will want to know what condition his mother is in, and then we must prepare for I fear what Androcles will do in his wrath.”

GYTHEIO

Armetus’s home in Gytheio was a large one story structure high above the bay below and set back against the mountains. As she lowered her macrobinoculars she looked at the male Drow Scout who lay next to her on the ridge above the home. The vast majority of the half vampire Drow Scouts that Vengal had formed and commanded over two decades ago were now the senior team leaders of this new breed of Drow Scout. As Drow they were utterly loyal to Queen Aihola and King Leonidas. Like their Queen, they had all the strengths of vampires but none of the weaknesses. They did not need to ingest blood on a normal basis to survive, and their bite could not turn someone. Indeed, many of them only took the blood of their husbands or wives now, though blood would heal any wounds they might suffer. There were several hundred of them left from that final fateful battle on Earth at the side of their King, their true numbers never really revealed to anyone but Vengal and Martin. When they took wives or husbands they tried to insure that the skills that made them so valuable remained intact by insuring their mates were either other Drow or vampires. They had become the silent fist of King Leonidas and Armetus, and at this moment many of them burned with anger.

“Lo’ru?” Marci asked softly.

The Drow nodded his head slowly. “He’s here... but his signs are very weak Marci. I can detect nothing on his mate... but there are five Kavalians inside as well. They appear to be ransacking his home.”

Marci nodded. “They must think he was fool enough to keep his work at his home.” She said. “Where are they?”

“Four are in the west wing... in his library.” Lo’ru answered. “One is in the same room as him towards the rear wall of the kitchen.”

“I want them alive.” Marci snarled. “All of them. If they knew enough to come after Armetus then they knew who and what he was.”

Lo'ru motioned to the Drow female that was just behind him and she crawled quickly up to where he was. “The West Wing In'uer. Four of them. Take your team. We want them alive, it does not matter what condition as long as they are alive. Marci and I will get Armetus.”

The female nodded and eased back down the ridge. Lo'ru turned to Marci. “Whenever you are ready.” He stated.

Marci removed the wicked looking Shakur fighting knife from its place on her hip. It was a gift from Dysea and Isabella many years ago and she had carried it ever since that day. “Let us do this quickly now Lo'ru. We need the answers to many questions.”

The Kavalian officer glanced up from the data pad he was reading and glanced at the bloody figure on the floor. Armetus's bloody body lay slumped against the wall, both his legs smashed just below the knee. Deep lacerations covered his bare upper body, and his left eye had been pried out of its socket with the tip of the officer's blade. His left arm hung useless, his nose bent to the side and both his cheeks bearing the marks of the beating. His breath came in wheezing sounds now, harsh and forced. Armetus was dying and he knew it. The bodies of two Kavalians lay on the floor a short distance away, one of them with his head twisted almost completely around and the other with two neat holes above his left eye. They were the only two Armetus had been able to kill before they overwhelmed him. He knew his personal assistant of nearly two thousand years was probably very dead. She would have gone down fighting he knew, but these Kavalians were very good and they would leave nothing to chance. There was no pain anymore, for he could no longer feel his legs. He tried to take another breath and it came out raspy and weak. At least six of his ribs were broken and no doubt one of them had punctured his lung for it was excruciating to try and take a breath, and the blood now coming from his mouth was pinkish in color.

“You should have given us what we wanted old man!” The Kavalian officer spat as he stepped up to him. “You would have saved yourself all this pain if you were not so loyal to your fool King.”

Armetus's one good eye looked up at the young Kavalian. He had obviously undergone the biogenic treatments as had all those with him. There was nothing to outwardly indicate any of them were Kavalian. Armetus's lips were torn open in three places but he forced them into a crooked smile and tried his best to chuckle. He couldn't stop the Kavalian from slapping him viciously, rocking his head back, but he was far beyond pain now. The Kavalian squatted in front of him.

“Your King is dead you know!” The officer said proudly. “Blown apart by our comrades from the Puma Bane Pride. By now we will have taken both his elven Queens, killed his sons and as many daughters as we could and left your precious Union leaderless.” The Kavalian shook his head. “You are fools you know, leaving such a loophole in your laws. Marshall Pusintin will sit on the throne of the Union by this time next year and there is nothing you can do about it for it will be done according to your own laws!” The man tossed the data pad into Armetus's lap and stood back up. “You think we are so stupid, you and your precious King. Now look at you old man. We will show you how stupid we are when Marshall Pusintin is fucking one elf Queen and the other is a slave to Immortals! You will...”

The officer stopped talking when he heard the wheezing noise and he saw Armetus's body vibrating. His eyes grew wider when he realized the man was laughing in a horrid sort of way. He squatted down once more, his face in a vicious snarl. He reached out and slapped Armetus once more.

“What are you laughing at old man?” He shouted. “You will die this day! Do you find this funny in some way?”

Blood spilled from Armetus's lips as he opened them. His wolf fangs were extended, one of the tips broken off. “Not... not before...” Armetus croaked out the words.

“Not before what fool?” The Kavalian barked.

Armetus shook his head slowly. “Not dead... not dead before... before you!” He spat out.

The Kavalian saw Armetus's remaining eye glance up over his shoulder and he began moving instantly. Unfortunately for him he was by far too slow when compared to the enraged pureblood vampire female who unwrapped the shadows from around her body at that instant. A vampire female with death's cold hand riding

her shoulder. The Kavalian officer spun around with practiced ease, his hand weapon coming up in his hand. His eyes bugged out of his head as the searing pain ripped through his wrist and he saw the woman's hands strike his wrist with blinding speed. His hand and wrist went limp as Marci used her vampire strength to snap his thick forearm, her trained hands impacting the inside of his forearm and the outside of his wrist. The force of the blow was astounding, fueled as it was by anger. One end of his forearm bone tore through his skin as his weapon dropped from suddenly unfeeling fingers and the pain caused his eyes to tear up. He opened his mouth to scream but no sound came out as his eyes grew even wider in unimagined agony when Marci buried her Shakur into his lower abdomen just above his groin. He looked at the dark haired female, her vampiric fangs exposed in an almost barbaric and twisted smile as she exerted her vampire strength once more and ripped the Shakur fighting knife upwards with every ounce of strength she had within her body.

The Kavalian could just make out the sound of weapons fire as he dropped to his knees in front of her, trying to hold his intestines inside his body even as his mind registered that he was already dead. Marci simply grabbed his thick head of hair and his quivering jaw and once more used her strength to twist viciously until the popping sound of his neck snapping in the room was like a firecracker going off. She yanked his head to the side, throwing his body down to the floor and spit on his corpse before turning to look at Armetus. Marci had seen death hundreds of times, she seen horribly wounded Spartans during the Evolli war, but she could not contain the gasp of utter horror at she looked at the man who had become her mentor. Regardless of what she saw as she knelt next to him, Marci kept her wits about her and tapped her jaw.

"Lo'ru! Status?" She barked.

"Four dead!" The voice answered immediately.

"Get down here Lo'ru! Contact Kryperia Headquarters! We need a Hadarian Healer here like yesterday!" She barked.

"Already on it!"

Marci looked at Armetus now, reaching down and tearing away part of the lightweight shirt that the Kavalian officer was wearing. She brought it up to Armetus's face. "Help is coming Armetus! Help is coming! You have to hold on!"

Marci saw him shake his head ever so slowly. "Not... not time." He wheezed. Calling upon strength from somewhere deep inside his body and mind he grabbed her hand with his one good arm and saw her look at him. He pushed her hand to his lap where the data pad the Kavalian officer had tossed there still rested. "Warn... others!" He gasped with blood spilling from between his lips. "Warn Martin!"

Marci had tears in her eyes as she shook her head slowly. "I can't Armetus! They... they have killed Martin! They killed him nearly an hour ago in the Old District! Torma is dead as well! The Senate building was destroyed! Hundreds are dead! Deia and For'mya are... they are probably dead too! They were inside the building when it came down! They..."

"No!" Armetus hissed spraying her with blood from his lips. "Warn... others! Kaval... part of their... plan!"

Marci shook her head once more. "What plan? What do you mean?" It was then she felt the data pad in his lap and her head dropped down. Her fingers wrapped around the pad and she simply tucked it into the small pouch on her belt. "Help is coming Armetus! You must fight! You..."

Armetus didn't hear her words any longer as blackness crept up and overwhelmed him finally plunging him into darkness as his single eye closed and his head lolled to the side.

"NO!" Marci screamed reaching for his grizzled and bloody face. "Armetus no!"

THERMOPYLAE

JUNE, 2073

"...are we doing this father? It is silly." Andro spoke as he walked beside his father along the front of the bleachers that were erected facing the monument to a father and grandfather.

"It is not silly." Martin insisted. "I want to see if you have learned anything I have taught you over the years! I ain't going to be around forever boy!"

Andro looked at his father with a grin. "You are too ornery to die as mother says." He spoke.

Martin settled to the bleachers in the front row. "Yeah... yeah! Indulge me will ya!"

Andro looked at his father and shook his head. He saw Torma and Elynth sitting near the edge of the monument about two hundred meters away conversing as father and daughter, the Durcunusaan troops gently prodding the civilians who came to the monument daily in other directions and away from this particular set of bleachers, and the sun beginning to sink lower in the sun. Andro sat beside him in a huff and crossed his arms over his broad chest.

"Oh very well!" He barked.

Martin grinned. "Ulana can wait."

Andro looked at him. "Ulana?" He stated. "She didn't make the trip."

"Why not?" Martin asked.

"I asked her not to." Andro said. "I told her I would be training for most of the time and not able to take her to see the sights."

"You haven't done shit but lay around since we got here!" Martin exclaimed.

Andro nodded. "I saw her father." He said. "Before we left. She was having lunch with her father at Gallais's Retreat. I was stunned she was there. She didn't see me and I left right away, but I can still smell her even now."

Martin nodded his head in understanding. "Sadi." He said. "You really just need to seek her out and make her yours son. Until you do, you are going to smell her at every turn. You were meant for each other by a higher power boy, when are you going to see that?"

"I see it!" Andro said. "It's just not time yet."

Martin shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps. You could have at least found someone who is not so uptight in the meantime. Ulana's jaw about dropped when you brought her to dinner and she saw how casual we are."

"I don't even really like her that much." Andro said. "Her university friends walk about like they are the most knowledgeable people in the world. It is so very annoying."

"Enough about that!" Martin snapped. "You are avoiding my question. You aren't as slick or as beautiful as your mothers and you won't get me sidetracked!"

Andro laughed and looked at him. "They do that quite well you know!"

Martin grinned. "You just wait until Sadi is in phase and she is hitting you with her aura and has got you by your nor. Then we'll see who talks! Enough! Now let's go over it again!"

Andro rolled his eyes. "Sibfla!" He muttered. "Tenna of course!"

"And if she is not around... then what?" Martin asked. "Who fills her shoes?"

"Grandfather Panos... without question." Andro answered.

"Not Laustinos?" Martin asked.

Andro looked at him. "Father please... Laustinos is not even qualified to pick flowers let alone lead the Union. He is a paper pusher to the extreme."

Martin grinned once more. "His deputy?"

"I would try to keep them together but I doubt Aunt Tarifa would allow me too." Andro said. "I would appoint her governor of Sparta and have Janae fill the role as grandfather's deputy."

Martin looked at him. "Janae? Why her?"

"She speaks fourteen languages and has dedicated her life to Sparta." Andro answered. "We went together to that Symposium on Nodon last year. The one you forced me to go too and..."

"Andro... you didn't..." Martin asked.

"Not all of us are as perverted as you father." Andro snapped. "No I didn't bed her... but we did spend every minute together. She has a fascinating knowledge of things and is very poignant in her beliefs. She reminds me of Tenna Deia."

"She's young." Martin said.

Andro looked at him with a stupefied expression. "So am I. And still you force me to answer these ridiculous hypothetical questions about succession."

"Ah..." Martin waved his hand at him dismissively. "The Krypteria?"

"Marci of course." Andro answered. "If there is someone who can lead the Krypteria as well as Armetus it is her and she has been is defacto deputy for the last ten years anyway." He looked at his father and waggled his eyebrows. "And she is young too." He said with a smile.

“You know... you are beginning to wear on my nerves.” Martin spoke.

“Father... we have done this before.” Andro said. “Each time my answers vary only slightly. Ben remains where he is... grandfather Riall remains... I promote Uncle Daniel to Commander Ground Forces... which he will no doubt scream about for months. Eliani fills mother’s role and hopefully tells the Hadarian Arch Ministry where to go and how to get there. Walter becomes Commander of the Durcunusaan, while I shift General Vengal to his new duties as Uncle Daniel’s Deputy Commander.” Andro looked at his father. “This is pointless you know... there is no way you and all of my mothers and Aunt Deia die at the same time. It’s impossible.”

“Nothing is impossible Andro.” Martin said. “The impossible only takes a little longer to figure out. I’ve told you that before.”

“I have absolutely no desire to be King father... none whatsoever.” Andro said as he came to his feet.

“And you think I did? You think I do?” Martin asked with a smile as he rose to his feet as well and faced his oldest son. “A Leonidas must always lead now Andro. It is the destiny that is written for our family, for me, for you, for Resumar, for Denali, for Eliani... all of us. And it began with your grandfather. A Leonidas must always lead and that is why I push you and your brothers and sisters so hard.”

“And here we thought it was because you were just a hard ass!” Andro snapped playfully.

Martin chuckled and reached up to place his hand on Andro’s shoulder, gripping his thick neck and squeezing. “Trust no one more than you trust your own blood and those who have been beside our family all these years. Lisisa is older I know, but it is you that your brothers and sisters look to Andro. All of them... and it is through them that others will look to you. It is why I know should anything happen, you will guide them forward.”

“Blood before all else.” Andro said softly.

Martin nodded. “Blood before all else.” Martin put his arms around his son’s shoulders. “Just make sure you get whoever takes me out ok? I’ll sleep better at night knowing you got payback!”

Andro chuckled. “I promise you father.”

Martin nodded. “Good... now let’s go get drunk before your mothers get back from Gytheio. Then I can blame it all on you and your Uncle.”

Andro laughed. “Like they will believe that!”

HARBINGER

NINETY MINUTES FROM EARTH

*“...pushing them to maximum Captain.” The *HARBINGER*’S Chief Engineer spoke as he stood next to Velnar. “We have already burned out the HMFC’s by taxing them to their extreme limits with the last three jumps. We...”*

“Push them harder.” Velnar snapped not looking up from his chair or from the data pad he was reading.

“Captain Velnar that is not advisable. They could very well fly apart.” The Engineer spoke. “We...”

Velnar had looked up now, and the Lycavorian Chief Engineer saw something in his Elven Captain’s eyes he had never seen before. “Not advisable?” Velnar snarled as he sprang to his feet, startling the Engineer. “Not advisable!” Velnar screamed now causing heads to turn to where he stood. “Our King is dead! Dead do you hear me?” Velnar screamed. “We carry the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union! He told me to get him back home in as short a time as we can so that our Union does not fall apart! The entire Royal family is under attack, hundreds of our people dead in Sparta! Perhaps hundreds on Kranek! One of our Queens is more than likely dead! Buried beneath the rubble of the building that claimed the Prime Minister! Another is near death with her wounds, another taken from Kranek we have just learned and you come to me with... not advisable!” Velnar waved the data pad in his face.

“Captain I only...”

*“I am the *nubous* Captain of this ship!” Velnar shouted heaving the data pad across the bridge in a fit of rage. “If I tell you to push them harder then you push them harder! I don’t care if she flies apart around us! We will push her until her engines are burned out and then we will get out and push! You go to your station and*

push the sublights to one hundred and twenty percent Commander, or so help me I will expunge you out the nearest airlock for disobeying my orders!”

The Lycavorian engineer stammered something, his eyes wide and he rushed back to his control station. Velnar looked around his bridge, his own eyes wide as he took in the faces staring back at him.

“Our Union has suffered a terrible blow this day... a blow not seen since the death of King Leonidas’s father!” Velnar barked. “Back then we did not have a son to carry on in his father’s stead! To guide us in his father’s place! We do now... and I will not allow that son to be surrounded by those not willing to take risks for the future of us all! We will work and fight with our equipment until there is nothing left to give... and then we will pull that much more from it and keep fighting... for that is our duty! If you can not do that then get off my bridge right this instant! I will not have you as part of my crew!”

Velnar turned when the bridge doors opened and he saw Sadi Leonidas rush in walking quickly. She didn’t even look at him as his eyes and the eyes of others watched as she strode to the doors of the ready room where they knew the Prince and Senior Polemarch were. Velnar turned back to his crew and took a deep breath. “If you have suffered more this day... if you have suffered more this day then you may relieved yourself from duty... otherwise we have a job to do.”

Sadi stopped when she entered the ready Room and the doors closed behind her. She saw Andro silhouetted in the view window against the backdrop of stars and she hesitated for just a moment. She had left Ne'Veha with Carisia and Lu'ria in the Med Bay with Lu'ria's mother Daba. The doctor was in the middle of pronouncing her well on the way to perfect health when she felt Andro's emotions spike once more. This was more refined and dark in its essence and she realized that neither Ne'Veha, Carisia or Lu'ria had felt it. Only she was attuned to Andro on that level and after making an excuse that she was going to check on their STRIKER she dashed from the Med Bay and made her way towards the bridge. The closer she got to him, the more she felt the slow burn of fury within the recesses of his mind, and she knew something else must have happened. Sadi could feel the same emotions doing a slow burn within Elynth as well and Sadi feared for what had happened. This was unlike anything she had ever felt from anyone. She alone knew what Andro was capable of, and to feel him trembling to keep his control, to remain in command of himself took will power Sadi did not think she could ever muster. She sensed he was in a deep meditation of some sort, his mind open only to her. They would share this connection they had with the others when it was time and they were together with the fifth woman who would share their lives. She and Andro had already talked of it briefly and that was the decision they had come too.

She turned when Walter stepped up to her. “Walter?”

Walter held out the data pad to her. “We just heard from Denali.” He spoke softly.

“Please tell me that...” Sadi began to say.

“They have taken my mother *Kerta Gai*.” Andro spoke softly.

Sadi cut her eyes and watched him turn to face her. She didn’t hesitate and she moved up to where he stood. Sadi gasped when he snatched her up in his arms and crushed her to him, burying his face into her throat and along the back of her ear. She felt his unshielded aura sweep around her and envelope her in its embrace, setting all her senses on fire. Sadi realized instantly this was not a sexual thing, but more Andro reveling in her female scent and insuring she was unharmed. She reciprocated the sensations then, hitting him with her full female aura and meeting his firm nuzzles with her own, inhaling deeply of his lavender and pines scent. Sadi pulled his head away from her neck where he was nuzzling the back of her ear and she took his face in her hands. His azure eyes were so very bright and alive and she could feel his arms tremble with possessiveness as he held her.

“Tell... tell me what has happen my love.” She gasped out. “Who has taken your mother Andro?”

“Immortals.” Walter answered from behind them.

Sadi’s jungle green eyes went wide and she looked at him as Andro set her down. “No Walter!” She gasped. “No! Cha'talla?”

Walter shook his head. “No. This was not Cha'talla’s doing... in fact he lost four people who were trying to save Dysea.”

“Manda kept her promise *Kerta Gai*.” Andro stated calmly. “They jumped into the system and with the help of some unexpected defectors; they obliterated the entire Kavalian Strike Force.”

“Defectors?” Sadi asked. “From the Coven?”

“I am skeptical as well.” Walter spoke. “But this was Dysea’s decision. Their numbers are what threw the battle in our favor. The Kavalians also did not expect the Coven Dragons to be on Kranek. Lisisa, Narice... they broke the back of the Kavalian assault in the first hour.”

“Having your father killed by these same people tends to give you added incentive in taking retribution.” Andro spoke harshly as he turned back to the view window. “Cha’talla is rabid...” He continued. “Apparently these Immortals are part of some mercenary group that was hired by the Kavalians. By my Uncle Pleistarchus himself as a matter of fact. He hired them to kidnap my mother while his troops slaughtered the rest of my family and all of Cha’talla’s people as well.”

“Kidnap Dysea?” Sadi asked. “For what purpose?”

Walter shrugged. “Perhaps to influence the Elven Parliament in some manner. Hold her hostage in return for political favors. We don’t know.”

Sadi looked at Andro as he turned back. “We’ll know why as soon as he recovers from his injuries in a few hours.” Andro told her.

“Who?” Sadi asked.

“Cha’talla’s son Fash’ka and Denali captured an ex-Coven mercenary a short distance away from where they tracked Dysea to.” Walter answered. “The ship that took her was gone but they found him.”

Sadi looked at Andro. “How... how do we know all this Andro?” She asked.

“Normya and Tir’ut were able to reach out and touch Denali and Lisisa before these Immortals jumped out of the system and they were out of range.” Andro spoke.

“Wait... Normya and Tir’ut are with your mother?” Sadi asked.

Andro nodded. “They managed to sneak onto this ship when the mercenaries brought mother up from the surface. They shot Iriral three times with an Air Defense Ion cannon when she tried to stop them. Normya was in the middle of a conversation with Deni when contact was lost.” Andro turned once more and resumed looking out the view window. “The Kavalians destroyed the Senate Building in Sparta *Kerta Gai*. They buried my Aunt and another of my mothers under tons of steel and granite. Parts of my grandfather’s city is burning because they used plasma mortars in a population center. They have helped usurp another mother with lies and deceit.”

Sadi’s hands went to her mouth in horror. “Andro no!” She rasped out as tears filled her eyes.

“Yet they have not invaded.” Walter spoke firmly. “They are not coming across our borders Androcles!”

Andro turned and looked at him, his azure eyes burning with intensity and intelligence. “No they haven’t.” He said. “They won’t need too. They won’t need to because I will come to them!”

Walter shook his head quickly. “That is not a tactically sound move Andro. You...”

“No!” Andro barked vehemently. “No! You will not tell me what to do! No one will manipulate me as they did him when he first returned to our people! I am King now! I will decide what I will do and I will take my father’s place! And I will fulfill the promise I made to him! I will honor my father by fulfilling the promise... the promise I made to him! I will...”

“Andro...” Walter began again.

Andro shook his head. “No!” He looked at him. “I have always considered... we have always considered you a surrogate grandfather Walter. All of us have... but this is different now. They have taken... they have taken our father from us. They have taken our mothers.” Andro turned back to look out the window. “No. I will return to Sparta... I will... I will bury my family.” He turned back around. “Then Senior Polemarch Dymas... then I will send for my brothers and sisters. And when we are all together... then I intend to enter Kavalian space. And I will not return until I have fucked my Uncle five ways from Sunday and he lies dead at our feet along with the whole of the Kavalian Empire for what they have done! That is what I intend to do... and nothing you or anyone says will be able to sway me in my actions.”

“And if your brothers and sisters refuse!” Walter barked. “If they put the continued future of this Union before their own lust for vengeance... what then?”

“Then... then I will do it alone.” Andro spoke plainly.

Sadi shook her head. “No. Never alone.” She stated emphatically as she stepped into his embrace. “Not while I take breaths will you ever be alone.”

Andro looked at Walter. “You followed my grandfather Walter. You followed my father. Will you follow me? If not... then this is the time to get off the train as my mother says, cause we are on a one way trip to hell!”

Walter met his eyes and in those eyes he saw the same fire he had seen three thousand years ago among those towering black walls. He saw the same fire he had seen twenty-seven years ago on that sprawling field in Southern Utah.

“*Nubou!*” Walter hissed. “Never! I have followed two King Leonidas’s and I will not desert a third when he needs me most. Never!”

Andro nodded. “Thank... thank you.”

“Don’t thank me boy!” Walter barked. “You just might end up regretting it! You must see this through to the very end Androcles! You must not stop! You must not hesitate! You must be as ruthless as death’s right hand! For the moment you let up... death will come for you!”

“I don’t intend to give death a chance!” Andro told him.

PART THREE
THE END OF THE BEGINNING...

CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

KRANEK

“...Too far for them to reach.” Androcles spoke from within the transmission. “Even as strong as they have become together, it’s too far. They must have made a jump. Do you know where they went?”

Cha'talla was pacing back and forth in the remains of the command center. Amazingly, when they blew the door open, while it shattered and destroyed much of the sensor arrays along the east wall, the communications equipment had been left nearly untouched tucked into the west corner as they were. With nearly two hundred Union and High Coven ships now in orbit and patrolling Kranek’s system, they did not need ground based sensor arrays. The standing order had gone out from some woman named Lorian Cha'talla now knew. Kill anything that was not Union and only the Coven ships inside the system were to be considered friendly. And they were friendly that much Cha'talla knew. In the last sixty minutes alone a dozen transports from those same Coven ships had arrived and set up a superior advanced medical facility to treat the wounded. Immortals were also vampires, and Eliani Leonidas could not heal them all with her magical healing skills no matter how powerful she was. Several large Blood Vats were set up for the more seriously injured of his people, pureblood vampire technicians working frantically to set up their equipment, but always under the watchful eye of Eliani Leonidas.

At this point, outside of his Blessed Wife and his own blood, Cha'talla trusted no one but the Leonidas children. Their mother Isabella was maintaining her composure to the best of her ability, primarily to keep from risking the child she carried, but it was obvious having the King killed and then Dysea ripped from her was taking its toll. Her face was drawn and taut, her normally bright brown eyes now dull and listless. Dysea’s female dragon who had been with her for decades had already been transferred up to the SCIMITAR for her wounds to be treated. That she still lived was a testament to their toughness that Cha'talla had never known. The many other Leonidas children were crowded into the command center their dragons in a semi circle around the now blown open doorway, along with this Miranda Lorian and several of her officers, including the fascinating Drow officer who remained very close to the captain and very alert. The vampire Admiral Valin Esavorna was present as well, several of his aides coming with him from his ship which now was in orbit around Kranek.

Union troops were coming down from the ships above in a steady stream to carry out patrols with Immortals of the surrounding terrain. Thousands of Kavalians were still out there in the mountains and Denali had already given the orders they were to be hunted down to the last man and executed. They would take no prisoners this day or into the future and Cha'talla simply had no problem with that, for they were the same

orders he would have given. Over a thousand of his people lay dead, almost twice that wounded in some manner. Of the five hundred or so Union Spartans that had come down from *NORMYA'S LIGHT* and had been living on Kranek these last months, nearly all of them were now dead. Among the Immortal dead were nearly four dozen children that had been caught in the open by a Kavalian mortar barrage. It was T'lolt who had relayed to him the heroics of a dozen Union Spartans who had tried to save them, shielding them with their Shi Viskas until the very end when the mortars overwhelmed them. They were men and women who would live on forever now, held in the highest honor among Cha'talla's tribe of Immortals. The parents of those children, two elven mothers among them were calling for blood in the ancient Akruvian way even as they saw to burying their children.

In reality, Cha'talla knew they had escaped without major loss of life. Lisisa and Narice Leonidas had used their two dragon sections with exacting precision and ruthless efficiency. They had used the inbred fear of dragons inherent in all Kavalians to their full advantage and decimated otherwise well trained and formed troops. The Kavalians had obviously not been told there would be dragons on the surface and it showed in their actions on the battlefield. It also helped that the Kavalians had landed no where near as many troops as initially thought.

Dragons.

Cha'talla turned his head briefly and looked at the gaping hole where the door used to be and saw the form of Vollenth resting on the ground just outside. The large and powerful form of his Bonded Dragon Brother. And still Cha'talla didn't believe it could be true. When they had plunged into the ranks of Kavalian troops it was almost as if they were seeing with each other's eyes, as if they were inside each other's minds. Cha'talla knew exactly what Vollenth was going to do at the exact time he decided to do it, and the same went for Vollenth reading what he was going to do. Together they had carved a path through nearly three hundred Kavalian troops before they had stopped. When Cha'talla looked behind him, his eyes had gone wide as he saw the path of bodies and death they had left behind them in their fury. His brother T'lolt and his thirty Immortals had nearly reached him when Vollenth heard the call from Viera to bring him. Cha'talla had not hesitated in the least as he leaped onto Vollenth's back. It all felt so right, so preordained, as if he had been doing it for years. Then those dragon armor leg braces had closed around his legs and Vollenth had leaped into the sky.

Then Cha'talla of the Immortals knew what true freedom was.

"Normya said it was the same ship that tried to kill her several months ago Andro." Denali said quickly jarring Cha'talla out of his thoughts.

"I will find out where they have taken her! If it is Phy'iad, then we know where he will return more than likely." Cha'talla snarled as he stopped pacing and looked at Andro in the transmission. "And I will get her back! I swear this to you on my very blood!"

"Mother?" Andro spoke softly. Isabella lifted her eyes to look at him, Zarah and Carina standing behind her. "Do not even attempt to go with him mother."

Isabella shook her head slowly. "I made... I made her a promise Andro." She said gently looking at him. "I won't... I won't go back on that promise. I can't... not now."

Andro nodded to her. "I'm less than an hour from Earth." Andro spoke turning to look at his brother. "Time to circle our wagons Deni."

Denali nodded. "Agreed."

"Andro...?" Arrarn began to speak his face tense. "Mother...?"

"Until we know for sure... she lives Arrarn! Do not..." Andro barked at him. "Never lose faith! There is help moving to Sparta from all over the planet!"

Arrarn nodded slowly as Narice and Toria pressed close to him. "You will let us know when..."

"Yes... you know I will!" Androcles answered immediately. "For now we keep our faith and we hope!"

Arrarn took a deep breath and squeezed Narice and Toria. "Keep the faith!" He spoke more forcefully.

Andro's eyes cut to where Miranda stood. "Manda... I... we owe you a debt we can not repay."

Miranda shook her head. "There is nothing to repay. Ever. We aren't finished either. Let me go after them Andro!"

Andro shook his head. "No... I need you for other things. What is your status?" Andro asked.

"We lost sixty-seven fighters between the *HORNET* and *ARIZONA*." Miranda answered. "My Attack Wing is intact with some minor damage."

“Sa'sur?” Andro asked.

The female voice of the commander of the *SCIMITAR* came over the intercom. “We took a pounding Andro.” She answered surprising Valin and some of the others with the familiarity she showed. “Our Wing lost twelve ships and five more that will take months in the shipyards to repair. We’re down a squadron and a half with another seven badly damaged and the pilots injured. It would have been worse if Miranda hadn’t shown up, and then Admiral Valin and his ships.”

Andro’s intense eyes fell on Valin now and even as old and experienced as he was, Valin couldn’t help but fidget on the balls of his feet under the intense scrutiny of those azure blue eyes. “My mother obviously saw reason to trust you Admiral, even for a short time and for the moment I will abide by her judge of character. I thank you for your assistance, truly I do, but do not give me reason to question my mother’s judgment of you.”

Micardo made the mistake of stepping forward and opening his mouth before he thought about what he was saying. “We just assisted in saving you and your family and you disrespect us by...”

Micardo stopped talking when he felt the point of the blade prick the skin under his jaw and his eyes cut to where Zarah now stood beside him holding the custom made Shakur fighting knife in her hand. His eyes saw where flecks of dried blood were still visible on the blade and he realized just how close he was to death at that moment. Her normally dark eyes had changed to the cobalt blue of her vampire blood now, and they looked at him in contempt. Almost directly behind her stood Lucia, whose hands were faintly glowing with psychic power, her own eyes changed as well as she prepared to call her whips to defend her beloved Zarah if the need arose.

“Do not make the simpleminded mistake of thinking you deserve something when you do not pureblood!” Zarah hissed out the words. “We would have won without your help! And you are not exactly at the top of our list of trustworthy people at the moment! We...”

“Zarah my sister.” Andro’s voice was firm and her eyes cut to the transmission. “We need all the help we can get at the moment.” Andro said. “They did not need to announce their presence and help us until *after* the battle was decided. Let’s trust in mother’s reasoning for now. There is a reason she chose to trust them.”

Valin made no move to intervene on Micardo’s behalf, his young aide could be very arrogant at times, something he obviously had not yet learned to let go of. He stepped closer to the transmission.

“My only daughter is with your sister and Cha'talla’s son Prince Leonidas. My only daughter, my only child, and the purpose I started down the road I have walked until now. She was meant to be among your family! Part of your family! I would do nothing to jeopardize that. I was able to tell your mother very briefly what it is I am talking about. She seemed surprised yes, but she didn’t question it. She told me it was too wild a story to not be true. I am not... we are not the enemy.” Valin spoke confidently.

“That does sound like something our mother would say.” Andro spoke. Andro’s head tilted sideways when Valin said that and he noticed that the other Leonidas children in the room look at him as well. “What exactly do you mean by she was meant to be part of our family Admiral?” Andro asked him.

Valin looked around quickly then back to Andro. “My daughter... Cirith... she was meant to be... she was meant to be with your grandfather Androcles Leonidas. She was meant to be with your grandfather and Lady Gorgo. She was meant to be part of their lives and Xerxes took that away from her!”

“What do you mean?” Denali snapped coming to his feet. “Grandfather would never have taken a vampire as a mate! He...”

“She is... she is Aikiro’s daughter as well as mine and she carries wolf blood within her veins. Just as I do.” Valin announced quickly, his eyes never leaving Andro’s gaze in the transmission. “She was to be the first link in bringing the bloodlines of your people and mine... of the brothers back together.”

“What?” Narice and Lucia gasped in complete shock.

Andro moved closer in the transmission. “Brothers?” He asked.

Valin nodded and met his eyes unflinching. “The bloodlines of the Pralor brothers, Sumar and Xaxon. The blood that flows in my daughter’s veins is not only Aikiro’s but it is also wolf blood. A wolf bloodline that can be traced back millennia before the Black Day!”

Andro’s eyes grew a little wider. “Where did you hear those names? What do you know of the Black Day? You are a vampire!” He demanded.

“I have known those names for far longer than you Androcles Leonidas.” Valin answered him in an even voice. “Perhaps even longer than your father. They are names I have shared with no one... not even Cirith...”

but given events happening now... I believe it is time for them to come out. Time for us to come forward. I know you know who Sumar and Xaxon are. Cirith was meant to be part of your grandparent's lives. Xerxes may have taken that away from her but... we both believe that her purpose has only been altered. She is still very important to the future of our people. Your people and mine! Our people together!"

"How do you know that history?" Lisisa asked stepping forward. "How...?"

"My daughter has wolf blood within her, just as I do. Blood from one of the original six bloodlines of the Lycavorian people." Valin spoke evenly.

"What are you talking about?" Denali snapped. "There is nothing like what you speak of!"

"Yes." Andro's voice stopped them before Denali moved closer to Valin. "Yes... there is."

Denali looked at him in the transmission along with all of his siblings. "*Fervon?*"

Andro nodded. "He speaks the truth Deni." Andro said.

"How do you know?" Arrarn asked.

Andro shook his head slowly, his azure eyes far away. "I don't know." He said. "I have heard those terms before."

"Aikiro never knew this. Never sensed it for reasons which I will not go into now. It is how I kept her from killing Cirith when she was first born. No one knew of Cirith's existence. No one!" Valin continued.

Andro looked at Narice in the transmission and saw the incredulous look on her face. "Narice?"

Narice pulled her eyes from Valin and looked at Andro shaking her head. "This is... this is the first I have ever heard of this Andro." She declared. "I... I can't believe my mother would have... she would never have bedded with a man if she knew he had wolf blood in him!"

"Lucia?" Andro asked.

Lucia shook her head quickly. "No." She gasped. "I have... I have never heard anything like this either!"

Valin nodded his head. "And no one would have!" He insisted. "This is not information she would have made readily available even to her own children! If it ever got out that she had given birth to a child that was part wolf, the mystique she had built over the years... the superior mentality she reinforced towards the Lycavorian people... it would have been lost instantly. Not to mention that Veldruk would have had me killed within hours of discovering this. Or at least tried to. Once word reached us that she was dead... I knew then it was time to leave behind the lie we have been living."

"Why?" Andro asked.

"Yuri survived." Valin said. "With her mother's death, all of her mother's personal and most secret files would revert to her. She would have discovered Cirith existed and she would have come after her with a vengeance. I was not willing to risk my daughter and everything I have built through the last three thousand plus years. As my daughter has a purpose even now, I too have a purpose and reason for standing here. I am the instrument that will bring our wolf bloodline back into the fold. This is what I have been told since I was a child by my mother and father, told by her and this is what I have always believed. This is what I have worked for my entire life. I will not risk that now!"

"Told?" Andro asked. "Told by whom?"

Valin shook his head. "I will not reveal that just yet. Not through a COM channel Prince Leonidas. I will tell you whatever it is you want in person... any information you require that I have will be yours. All you need do is ask. But only in person."

"She allowed you to live knowing what you were." Andro spoke. "She allowed you to live and hold the position I have been told you held. How is that possible? Why should we believe that?"

"Part of it... part of it was Cirith." Valin said. "But part of it was because I never gave her reason to doubt my intentions. I did everything she asked of me through the years, even more at times. She may not have trusted me... but she at least did not suspect me of anything. I can relay all this to you Prince Androcles... but I will only do so in person, away from eyes and ears that may still place my daughter at risk."

"You don't trust those in that room you are in?" Andro asked.

"If I told you I did... you would know immediately I was *retlah d'shu*." Valin spoke.

Andro nodded. "You are right about that." He answered. "Very well Admiral... you will leave your Second in Command there and return to Earth on my ship with Captain Sa'sur."

"And my people?" Valin asked. "My ships?"

“We do not turn on those who have proven they are allies.” Andro spoke. “I was hoping perhaps you could have your senior officers help to institute a complete System Wide Defense of Kranek.”

Valin nodded easily. “I have several officers who are very talented in Combined Forces Control. Those who follow me have a great respect for Cha'talla and what he is known for.”

“And your daughter?” Androcles asked him. “You would leave her?”

Valin gave a small smile. “I do not fear for my daughter.” He said. “She has trained for over three thousand years to do what she is doing now. She is even more skilled than I am, though she tends to be more reckless as well it seems.”

“Cha'talla?” Andro asked looking at him.

Cha'talla nodded. “They fought beside us in the stars and are even now caring for my tribe under Eliani’s guidance Androcles. They will be welcome.”

Andro nodded. “I have spoken with Res and they are secure for the moment.” He told his family. “Admiral Omore has gone dark with the *SPIRIT* and will not come back up on COMs until they are within range of Earth.”

“Andro...” Eliani spoke up now.

“Mother is safe onboard Eli.” He answered quickly.

“Andro... the *ARIZONA* and *HORNET* can...” Miranda began to speak.

“No Manda... I know what you are going to say.” He replied quickly. “I have spoken with Ben...”

Andro gave a small smile that was filled with underlying sadness. “I think I have spoken to everyone in the last few hours. The Strike Wing for *NORMYA'S LIGHT* will be arriving in a few hours and her Fleet Group shortly thereafter. I want the *ARIZONA* and *HORNET* to deploy back here to Earth when her FG arrives. Maintain your protocols as if you have gone dark, but let grandfather Riall know when you arrive in system.”

Miranda nodded. “We are going to respond aren't we Andro?” She asked. “We aren't going to let this stand are we?”

“I... I don't know.” Andro answered.

Denali and Lisisa stepped forward as one. “Andro! We can't let them get away with this!” Lisisa spat. “They killed our father! They have killed... they may have killed one of our mothers and they are involved with kidnapping another at least in some way! We can't let this go unpunished! We can't!”

Andro met her gaze from within the transmission. “And I will not leap into something without planning it! We don't know if this is a prelude to an all out attack Lisi!”

“Then let's find out!” Denali barked.

“What do you think I am trying to do?” Andro snarled at his siblings. “Nowhere along our borders are they coming across! Nowhere! I need more time to discover what is going on before I commit us on a path that will lead to all out war! Something is not right about all this! If it is war they wanted, why just target our family? Why not send their troops across the border in locations too numerous to defend? They are plotting something else, and war is not part of it. At least not right now!”

“Killing our father is reason enough for us to respond!” Lisisa shouted at him angrily.

“You don't think I know that?” Andro barked.

“Your brother is right Lisisa Leonidas.” Cha'talla spoke softly from the side. “If we act before we know what is happening, it could very well lead to disaster everywhere.”

“Given what Lu'ria has told me... and the fact that we can not contact over half our Drow outposts in The Wilds, at the moment we are very blind.” Andro spoke maintaining control of his own anger at what had happened. “Our spy drones do not give us the coverage and hands on knowledge that the Drow did, and it will take time to get that back.”

“How much time?” Lisisa snapped.

“I don't know damn it!” Andro barked in the transmission. “He was my father too! My mother too Lisisa! You know as well as I Lisisa, he would not want us to blindly blunder into something that could very well cost us more than it already has! I will not make that mistake! I won't! When I discover what is going on... when I have a clear picture... then I will act! Not before! And neither will you! Is that understood?”

“Andro...” Lisisa began.

“Is that understood Lisisa!” Andro snarled.

Lisisa glared at the transmission but relented under the unwavering gaze of her brother. “Very well.” She said softly.

“Moneus?” Andro spoke watching as his friend turned to look at him. “You and Carina will stay with our mother there. She is now your first and most sacred priority. Where she goes the two of you follow.”

Moneus nodded without hesitation. “Consider it done.” He answered.

“Where is Anton and Cihera?” Andro asked. “They were with you correct?”

Moneus nodded. “They are preparing to return to Apo Prime.” He replied. “Anton... he wants to discover how the Kavalians were able to access and use our Jump Gates from outside the normal channels. They had to have someone inside or operating on remote.”

Andro shook his head. “Have them return here to Earth. Marci is on Earth and... she will need those she is familiar with to help her get a handle on things until we can find out what is happening. I have heard nothing about Armetus at the moment.”

“I’ll let Anton know.” Moneus said.

“Zarah... you and Lucia will return to Earth.” Andro said looking at his younger sister intently. “I... I need you here.”

“Andro... we want to go after mother.” Zarah said softly. “You don’t need to protect... you don’t need to protect me Andro.”

Andro shook his head. “I’m not trying to protect you Zarah. I need yours and Lucia’s combined skills here with me.” He stated evenly. “For reasons which I will explain when you get here. Please *jonía arande*.” (Baby Sister)

Zarah nodded when he used his childhood name for her. It was a name he had given to her after that day on the mountain and it was a name he used now only when he was serious and concerned about something. “We’ll report to you immediately when we arrive.”

“Eli... I need you to return as well.” Andro stated. “Aunt Anuk is the only one I trust on Earth right now to treat mother, but she is not Hadarian and...”

“Of course.” Eliani answered surprising him so much that it showed on his face. Andro looked at her intently for a long moment seeing something in her fern green eyes but he said nothing and his gaze turned to Cha’talla. “Cha’talla?”

Cha’talla looked up at the transmission. “I am here.”

“You take what you need from the forces that remain to guard Kranek.” Andro told him. “You take what you need and you bring my mother back to us!”

Cha’talla stood up to his full height of six foot five and his Immortal face became stern and determined. “I give you my *Vlos Hithern* that...” Cha’talla began. (Blood Oath)

“I don’t want your Blood Oath Cha’talla.” Androcles stated. “I want your word as part of our family... which you now are thanks to my sister. I want your word as a member of our family that you will get our mother back.”

Cha’talla stared at Andro for a long moment almost not comprehending his words to him. It took a long time for that to sink in but Cha’talla’s eyes became bright points and he took a deep breath. “It will be done young Androcles... for our futures are now intertwined with yours and those of the Lycavorian Union more deeply than I had ever hoped for. I will get her back... and I will bring her home to you on Earth!”

Andro nodded his head. “Outside of my family, you are now the only one who has my personal COM channel. Use it for anything you might need and keep me advised of what you are doing. Admiral Thodias will give you whatever you need.”

“It will be done.” Cha’talla spoke.

“Denali? Arrarn?” Andro spoke waiting until his brothers turned to face him. “*Tnobbaf* brothers. *Tnobbaf*.”

Denali and Arrarn looked at each other briefly and then turned back to Andro and nodded.

“*Avoi fervon*.” Denali said.

“*Avoi fervon*.” Arrarn echoed.

Admiral Omore was no fool.

This was by far the most severe crisis they had ever encountered, and he was taking nothing for granted. He knew he could very well be carrying the last Queen of the Lycavorian Union and he was utterly ruthless in his actions. The moment they had cleared Hadarian space he ordered their Strike Wing to make seven radical jumps and after each jump three different course changes. He was working towards the prearranged location where he was to hold in case something of this size took place and they had been here now for almost seven hours. All the ships of the *SPIRIT*'s Strike Wing were shrouded and many of them were crammed full of extra military and civilian personnel that had escaped Hadaria before they left. Omore had served Anja Leonidas since the day he took command of the *SPIRIT* more than two decades ago. He would do anything for the diminutive Persian red haired Queen no matter how outrageous it may have seemed. He knew that Androcles had survived for he had spoken directly to the young Prince who only confirmed his orders. Keep his mother away from Earth until such time as he heard from him. Omore was taking no chances now, and he was on the bridge as he had been for the last thirty-four hours, unwilling to leave anything to chance.

Sivana, Fuleos and Ceuma moved back into the main room of Anja's quarters on the *SPIRIT* and looked at Zaniai, Eurin and Joci. Zaniai and Eurin sat on the large couch, Joci to the side and leaning up against the bulkhead. Belen and Atropos stood near the door into the large quarters and all of them were silent. Eurin came to her feet when she saw them, watching as Fuleos moved to the dispenser to get a mug of tea.

"We... we finally got her to sleep." Sivana said softly. All of them could see she had been crying. "She... she..."

Belen broke away from the door, stepping up to her quickly and wrapping his arms around her frame pulling her tight to him. Sivana sighed heavily as her mate's aura and strength washed over her. Ceuma was already encased in Joci's arms and she pulled his thick ebony skinned forearm even tighter to her chest as he leaned over and nuzzled her ear and cheek pushing the matching Persian red hair aside, the long dreadlocks she so adored caressing the skin of her neck and her shoulder. She inhaled deeply of her mate's spicy pepper scent and her eyes closed in bliss for a moment as well.

"She took everything from her closet." Ceuma said softly as she opened her eyes once more. "Everything that... everything that smelled like him even a little and she is laying on the bed among these items."

"Is there nothing we can do?" Eurin asked.

Atropos moved away from the doorway now. "Unless you can return the King to her... no." He stated flatly. "There is much you don't truly understand of our people Eurin... and that is not your fault. They are things that we do not make common knowledge or speak of openly. The depth of their love for each other, for my sister, for Dysea and Isabella and For'mya... it is beyond the comprehension of most normal people. It is beyond my comprehension at times. They are bound so tightly together with Martin that... it is like... in losing him Anja has lost a part of herself."

"That is how all marriages are." Zaniai spoke.

"If only that was the case Zaniai." Fuleos spoke as he moved up next to Atropos.

Eurin placed her hand on his arm and shook her head before Atropos spoke. "No. It is not." She said. "Yes... we love and we marry Zaniai. And when we lose a husband or wife, it is as if we have lost a part of ourselves. But for... for Lycavorians it is almost a literal thing..." She looked at Atropos. "Isn't it?"

Atropos nodded his head slowly. "You understand more than I thought Divine One." He said. "I thought Fuleos was the only one who studied our culture over these past years."

"She tried to explain it to me before." Eurin said. "Several times through the years, but I don't think I understood it until right now."

"And it is worse now because she is in full phase and her wolf blood is screaming for her mate." Atropos spoke. "It is my understanding that in earlier time... during King Resumar's rise to power if this were to happen she would have been pursued by the strongest alphas until she relented and took another mate or one forced himself upon her. Her scent is peaking, and it will be sweeter now than at any other time because she is in full phase. It will be... it will be instinct for the alphas on the *SPIRIT* to sense and smell this and they may become stupid and let their instincts overpower their brains."

Eurin looked at him horrified. "They would do this?" She gasped.

“Martin’s return to our people brought back much of our instinctual nature Eurin... you know this.” Atropos said. “It is because he embraced his instincts that many of our people are returning to our roots Divine One. They are embracing the instincts of our past, but balancing those same instincts with what we have learned in the years since the Black Day. Just as the King did. Just as he does every day. I do not believe any on this ship, or any who know her would attempt something, but I can not speak for all of our people. It would be instinctual as I said. And her scent is nearly overpoweringly sweet right now. It will be the same for all of them now, my sister, Dysea and For'mya, ever since they began coming into phase at the same time over fifteen years ago.”

“Yet it doesn’t affect you or Belen or Joci.” Zaniai said.

“We can smell it.” Belen spoke now before his father. “But we are committed to our mates and only their scent would affect us in that way. This nullifies any attraction to her even if there was one.”

“It is something that only the females of our people have to be concerned with.” Atropos said. “For whatever reason the Lycavorian male is not affected in the same manner. It is not very fair I know, but it is who we are.”

“Do you worry for her safety?” Eurin asked.

Atropos couldn’t help but chuckle. “Her safety? No Divine One. I worry for the alpha who is not mated and thinks he is superior to others and attempts to entice her with his aura. He will find she will not be receptive in the least. He will become painfully aware of this fact three seconds after he attempts to pulse her with his aura.”

“Why are we holding in this location?” Zaniai asked now. “Shouldn’t we be heading to Earth instead of waiting here?”

“We do not know yet if it is safe to return.” Joci answered.

“And Androcles ordered Omore to follow established protocol and keep his mother safe at all costs.” Atropos said.

“You have spoken to him?” Eurin gasped. “Androcles? He is alive?”

“Omore spoke with him.” Atropos said.

“Then he is alive?”

Atropos nodded. “Yes. And if Omore’s observations are accurate, he has never seen Androcles so overflowing with rage.”

“Thank the gods.” Sivana muttered.

“I would suspect the gods themselves would not be able to harness Androcles when he gets around to retaliating against the Kavalians.” Fuleos spoke as he moved to the couch now. “And make no mistake... that is coming. He will insure the rest of his family is secure and then that boy is going to get some payback!”

“Fuleos!” Eurin barked. “Do not make light of this!”

“I am making light of nothing!” Fuleos spoke. “I am simply stating a fact! I am too old to play these political games! I should already be dead!”

“Grandfather!” Sivana spat.

“No! Your sister’s return to us!” Fuleos stated. “Your return to us! To me. It filled me with new life! With purpose to go on! Now there is Ceuma... who you and Anja have accepted not as an outsider... but your sister! It has given me even more reason and purpose to go on. I will not rest now until my granddaughters sit once more on the throne of my brother Eurin! And I will act in whatever manner I need too in order to see that come to pass Eurin! Just as my granddaughters will!”

Eurin was silent for a moment before looking at Atropos once more. “Atropos... Eliani... the younger children?” Eurin asked. “Retta and Calyb? Deion, Nara and Bryon?”

“We don’t know Divine One.” Atropos answered. “We...”

The internal ship COM began chiming and Atropos crossed to the panel on the wall beside the door. “*Durcunusaan* Colonel Atropos!” He barked.

“Atropos...” Omore’s voice filled the room. “I have an incoming priority transmission from Spartan 49 on Anja’s personal channel. We can’t crack it and it bypassed all the security filters we had in place.”

“Spartan 49 is Princess Yuriko!” Atropos declared.

“We can’t disturb her Atropos... she has been through too much already!” Eurin began to protest. “We...”

“Put her through immediately!” The voice snapped and they saw Anja step into the room. She was clutching one of Martin’s fatigue tops in her arms, her jade green eyes red from crying. “Don’t... don’t you dare keep me from talking to one of our children!”

“Admiral... route it here!” Atropos snapped. “Full security measures and encryption!”

“Anja?” Sivana spoke softly as she went to her sister.

Anja smiled gently as first Sivana and then Ceuma stepped up to her and they pressed tightly to her. She squeezed their arms around her and nodded her head. “I... I must carry on.” She gasped. “If... if I withdraw I will be useless to everyone. I... we can’t afford that right now.”

Anja looked up when the holodisc built into the floor of the main room flared to life and Yuriko’s figure appeared. Her adopted vampire daughter’s surreal beauty was shining through as always, but her face appeared tense.

“Yuriko?” Anja spoke moving closer to the transmission and breaking away from Sivana and Ceuma.

“Mother!” Yuriko gasped. “Finally! I’ve been trying to contact you for six hours! Your COM channel has been blocked! I had to override security protocols to finally get through the *SPIRIT’S* lock out!”

Atropos stepped forward. “How did you do that?” He asked surprised.

“That doesn’t matter!” Anja snapped. “Yuriko... are you safe? Where are you? Can you...”

“Mother... listen to me!” Yuriko interrupted her. “I need you to come to my location immediately!”

Anja’s eyes narrowed. “Yuriko what... where are you? What is wrong? Are you hurt? Is Filrian hurt?”

Yuriko shook her head. “No! Mother... do you remember what you did that day on the Raptor when you discovered what father was? When you were on your way to rescue Uncle Daniel? Do you remember?”

Everyone looked at Anja now in confusion as she moved closer to the transmission. “Ye... yes. Yuriko what...?”

“Deval mother? Do you remember what you did to Deval mother?” Yuriko asked once more.

“Yes!” Anja snapped. “Yuriko what is going on?”

“You are the only one to have ever done that mother! The only one! Even the *Feravomir* has never been able to do that!” Yuriko stated. “I need you to do that again!”

“Yuriko I don’t understand.” Anja said. “Where are you?”

“Do you remember where our family went for vacation the year after Retta and Calyb were born? Where we celebrated their first birthdays?” Yuriko replied.

Anja nodded. “Of course I remember that.”

“I will meet you there in two hours mother.” Yuriko said. “Your position now should allow you to get there quickly on a *STRIKER*.”

“Security Protocol dictates I remain here until we hear from Andro.” Anja spoke. “Then I... then I am supposed to return to Earth. Yuriko you know this. You helped to put these protocols in place with your father and brother.”

Yuriko nodded. “And now I am asking you to do what you do best and disregard protocol and meet me mother. This is more important than you can imagine mother. It has to do with the Kavalian assassination of father. I have information... I have... I have... somebody you need to speak too.”

“Who?” Anja demanded. “What do you know Yuriko? Tell me!”

Yuriko shook her head. “Bring those present with you now if you must mother... but do not delay!” Her head turned as if someone was calling her and then she looked back quickly. “Hurry mother.”

The transmission ended abruptly and Anja stared ahead for a few seconds. “Atropos... have Hal’lia prep the *STRIKER*.” Anja said.

“Anja you can’t leave!” Eurin stated.

Anja looked at her. “I will leave!” She barked. “Yuriko is our daughter and I trust her implicitly. If she says she has information, someone who can give us information as to why the Kavalians have done this, then I will go and meet with her!”

“And if it is a trap?” Zaniai asked softly.

“Yuriko would die before luring any of her family into a trap!” Anja said as some of her old self began showing again.

Eurin looked at Atropos sternly. “Are you going to try and stop her?” She demanded as she glared at him.

Atropos shook his head. "Not in the least."

Eurin glared at him for a moment longer then looked at Anja. "We are coming with you then." She barked.

"We are?" Zaniai asked surprised.

Fuleos got to his feet. "Yes we are."

Anja nodded to Eurin and looked at Sivana and Ceuma. Sivana nodded her head without a question being asked. "You couldn't tear us away now." She said. "We... we are your sisters and we will not leave your side."

Ceuma nodded her head as well. "No... no we will not."

"Then we have a ship to catch." Anja spoke.

RITAAH

Athani entered the large room that they had taken for their quarters. Though they now knew that VORTEX Cruiser 341 was strictly a combat ship, it was obviously meant to hold a crew since there were quarters on the lower decks. Even at half power, as Avatar 341 had told them they were now operating, it was more than enough to supply lighting and even power the food dispensers within the ship. Though none of the Kavalians trusted the new machine enough to utilize the dispensers, the fact that all three hundred odd families had their own quarters only added to the belief for Athani that this wonderful ship was meant for greater things, regardless of the ultimate fate she knew it would suffer. Athani stopped just inside the door as it closed and looked at his back as he sat in the chair, his hands working at the computer station there. Her people, her father had killed his father and countless others they now knew. They had killed a man who had accepted her and her love for his son with barely a thought. Even the discovery of a brother she never knew she had could not dim the despair she felt right now. Nor the concern. She did not know how he would respond to her now. Would he still love her as he had for so many weeks? Would he still hold her in his arms and make her feel so safe and utterly secure and loved. Athani cursed her father in her mind. She cursed him for who he was and what he had done and continued to do even now. Even so many light years away from him and he still sought to ruin all she had ever hoped for.

"Come to me *Aryschanne*." His voice spoke through the air.

Athani's vertically slit feline eyes saw his head turn towards her in the dimly lit room. She hesitated for a moment.

"Resumar my love... I..." Athani began to speak.

Athani felt the fingers of his TK power encircle her and she didn't fight it as he lifted her into the air and pulled her towards him. He leaned back in the chair and she settled into his lap, her hands going to his broad shoulders, as she came to rest with her knees on either side of his hips. Instinctively her long tail slid up the outside of his back and wrapped tightly around his upper arm. Resumar reached up and took her beautiful face in his large hands, brushing some of her blond hair from her cheek and stared into her blue/green eyes.

"I have told you before and I will tell you one more time *Aryschanne*... and then you need to let that fear go." Resumar spoke softly, his dark brown eyes smiling at her. "You are my wife... my mate. No one doubts where your heart is or where it belongs. I do not... my brother does not... and my father did not question it."

"It... it was my father that...!" Athani began to say as tears welled up in her eyes. "My... my father has taken yours from my love!" She sobbed.

"And you are not your father!" Resumar spoke firmly gripping her face tightly. "You have proven that many times over. And it appears so has your sister Jalersi by protecting my mother as she did. I love you! Nothing will change that because I know what you have inside! My brother knows that because he has seen you, seen inside your heart and because he trusts me! My... my father trusted you completely or you would not be here! Let this fear go now *Aryschanne*! You are a Leonidas now!"

Athani's tear streaked face looked at him and her tail instinctively tightened on his thick muscular arm. "I did not believe I could ever love a man as I love you Resumar Leonidas." She said.

“That’s a good thing, for it matches my feelings for you.” Resumar said stroking her arms and never letting his eyes wander from her face. “We have... we have much to do and not much time to do it. Avi and Avatar 341 are almost finished with the download and then we will place the charges and be gone from this place.”

“Back to Earth?” She asked as he turned sideways back to the computer and she shifted her eyes to see what he had been working on.

Resumar nodded. “More than likely... but I will know more when Andro contacts me again.”

“What... what Andro said Resumar?” Athani asked softly. “Will... he...?”

Resumar nodded his head slowly. “As much as he rebels when he is compared to our father... he is more like him than even he realizes. And in many ways... he is darker than our father. Ever since Alba Tau.”

“Darker?”

Resumar nodded. “More intense. More serious in many respects. And like my father, he *will* do what he says he will do. My brothers and sisters and I...” He looked up at her face. “We have joked at times about what it might be like if we ever saw him truly angry. He laughs with us... but... but none of us really want to see that part of our brother. He has protected all of us in some fashion ever since we were babies. Looked out for us, encouraged us. You saw what he did for us *Aryschanne*. He shifted the confrontation with Qurot and the Kavalian Ambassador to his shoulders so that we could leave quickly. That is just how he is. He will contact us when he knows more and then we will decide what to do. In the mean time... how do the preparations with Mican and the rebels go?”

“Many of them knew of this ship but have never been inside it.” Athani answered. “The Avatar frightened them. When the time comes, we will conduct a mass evacuation to the Kavalian Science ship. Moving everyone together better eliminates the possibility the remaining Coven forces on the planet may attack.”

Resumar nodded. “The Avatar’s are rather imposing until you interact with them.” Resumar agreed.

“Do we truly have to destroy it Resumar?” Athani asked.

Resumar looked at her. “It is what my father wanted.” He said. “You don’t agree with that?”

Athani shook her head. “Look at what we have been able to create and develop with just the technology from Avi’s ship.” She told him. “He says this ship is ten thousand years younger. Think of what we could learn and not just militarily. The medical advancements and history this ship carries...”

“We’re taking that with us *Aryschanne*.” Resumar answered.

“It’s not the same thing.” She stated. “After... after spending so much time with Avi... it just seems so unfair that we have to destroy the only home Avatar 341 has ever known and this one ship could be a huge force all by itself. We should use it... use it in such a way that the technology remains with us, but that it benefits others as well.”

“This ship will always be a weapon Athani.” Resumar said. “It is what it was designed for. It is the most powerful ship in the entire universe from what we now know. What we have learned from CS41... can you imagine if even one piece of technology from this ship fell into the wrong hands? Even a minor one?”

“I understand the reasoning my love.” Athani said. “That does not mean I agree with destroying it however. You have had CS41 for over twenty years and while you have developed some advances that benefit the military, you have not tried to conquer other races with the technology you have created. I think it would be safe to make the same assumption concerning this ship.”

Resumar stared at her for a long moment before reaching out with his hand and touching the control panel twice. Athani had followed his movement with her blue/green orbs for she detected something in her husband’s eyes. As the medium sized monitor came to life her eyes grew a little wider. She glanced back at him and then returned her eyes to the screen.

“Resumar this is...!”

Resumar nodded. “I started working on it right after I found out.” He stated. “It is only the beginnings of one... and Andro would have to approve it. He is... he is now... King.”

Athani turned once more at the catch in his voice and her eyes grew wide when she saw his face. He stared at her with those beautiful dark eyes and she could almost feel the pain in them. The corners of his eyes were moist and Athani saw what was coming. “Oh... oh my love!” She stammered.

Athani Leonidas wrapped her arms around her husband's head and pulled him tightly to her just as he buried his face between her full breasts and the tears came. She held him with wide eyes as the sobs wracked his body and his powerful arms crushed her to him. And then Athani's own tears were flowing as well as she used every bit of her inbred strength to hold him as tightly as she could. This was not something she had ever envisioned; yet as Resumar trembled with despair and his tears soaked the front of her fatigued top, Athani knew this would be the moment she remembered for the remainder of her years as the moment when she truly became a Leonidas.

**EARTH
SPARTA
AUGUST, 2564**

"Retire?" Martin quipped as he looked at her. "What is that Tenna... a joke?"

Deia looked at Martin as she held his arm and walked alongside him as they strolled along the boardwalk that extended the entire length of the Evrotas River on both sides. The river ran through the city proper and made for a popular gathering of not only young couples, but families bringing their children out for the day. In earlier times the river would almost completely dry up, but after the Comet engineers had spent a full year rerouting the river and making it twenty feet deeper so that it could flow through Sparta and be a means of power generation if needed. Now the river was crowded with cafés and outdoor shops and at this time of day it was usually lined with people as it was now.

Deia so looked forward to these walks. At the end of every week for the last five years they did this, rain or shine or cold. She had loved her older sister dearly, and Martin was her last link to that sister. He was of Elaini's blood and in many ways he reminded Deia of her, most especially when he laughed, for his eyes would twinkle just as hers did. These walks had started as a way for Deia to teach Martin about the finer art of politics, and they quickly became more of a bonding between Aunt and Nephew than anything else. Yes... they spoke of work, but more often than not the conversation would turn to Martin asking her dozens of questions about his grandparents. Even after all these years, neither of them had tired of the routine. This did not bother Deia in the least for she loved speaking of her sister and Resumar and Martin was a studious listener. They would walk along the banks of the Evrotas River and she would hold his arm as they talked, their Durcunusaan details trailing along behind and in front of them, always with Andreus circling above them on Dorrenth. When these walks first started, the Netnews had jumped all over them, the King and Prime Minister walking together along the river with Deia holding his arm. One young reporter with more imagination than intelligence had once tried to insinuate that they were having a relationship. Not only did he lose his job but also the backlash hounded him for nearly two years. Though they had never officially announced anything, Deia assumed that promising reporters had put it together long ago and just never said anything or reported it.

Deia squeezed his arm. "No Mandri it is not a joke!" Deia protested. "I'm serious!"

Martin looked down into her face with that trademark Eliani smile. "Tenna you don't want to retire." He stated. "There's way too much fun stuff happening. Besides... if you retire, Laustinos will petition to take your place and I'll kill him in the first week."

Deia chuckled. "Don't worry about that." She stated. "I already have it in my mind to recommend to the Senate that Panos step in as my replacement until elections can be held. It will anger Laustinos... but he isn't really what Armetus and I thought he would be."

Martin looked at her. "You are serious?"

"Of course I'm serious. I've been Prime Minister for nearly a thousand years Mandri." Deia stated. "It's time I moved on. I'm dragging you down with my old ways and..."

Martin stopped in his tracks then and turn to face her. "Dragging me down!" He gasped. "What the nubou is that... dragging me down?"

"Watch your language young man!" Deia barked slapping him lightly in the face but doing so with a small smile.

"Tenna you..."

"You are ushering in a new era Mandri." Deia spoke. "Your era. You are returning to our people what I had a hand in taking away. Our instincts. If not for me... if I hadn't blindly led our people along the path that others told me and instead listened to what my instincts told me... what happen with Aricia would never have occurred. What happen with the...!"

"You stop right there!" Martin snapped. "You had nothing to do with that! Nothing! There is no way you could have known Chetak would pull a stunt like that. I have never... we have never blamed you for that!"

"I blame myself." Deia said.

"Well stop!" Martin quipped.

"Mandri you..." Deia began.

"No... listen to me!" Martin interrupted her. "You... you are like a rock for me! You have held our people together all of this time! I had nothing to do with that! That was all you! You have so much still to teach me!"

"Martin you..."

"No!" He almost shouted. "You are... you are the only link I have to my past! The only one who can answer the questions I still have about my grandparents. About so much. I am not going to just toss that aside! You started us down this road Tenna... I won't allow you to get off the train before we have achieved for our people what you set out to achieve."

"You... you don't wish for someone younger?" Deia asked surprised.

"Someone else won't argue with me!" Martin snorted. "Someone else won't tell me I need to be an asshole or be agreeable! Someone else won't tell me I'm acting like a complete igord!"

Deia chuckled. "I know five who don't seem to have a problem telling you that." She said reaching up to place her palm on his cheek.

"They don't count." Martin snapped rolling his eyes. "And they call me far worse."

"I'll bet!" Deia said with a smile. "You can be so very obstinate."

"We have not finished what my grandparents started Tenna." Martin said taking his hands and placing them over the top of hers. "This is not the end of the ride. I know it's not. I can feel it. There is much still left to do and I need you beside me in order to complete that!"

Deia had looked into his eyes then and she had seen hope in its purest form. "I'm tired Mandri." She said softly.

"Then go away!" Martin said quickly. "Take a month! Take six months! Take as much time as you need to recharge but I will not let you set aside this road we have put our people on! We need to see it through to the end! We have work to do! Together!"

"You weave a compelling future Mandri." Deia said.

Martin nodded. "A future that you will have a say in many years from now Tenna and that is why you can not retire."

Deia leaned forward and put her head to his chest. She took a long moment before nodding her head and committing herself happily to the future. "Then I will stay... but I might take you up on your offer of a vacation." She said pulling back and looking at him.

Martin nodded. "Anything." He said. "It's not your time yet Tenna! Wake up! It's not your time yet!"

It's not your time yet! Wake up! It's not your time!

Deia's dark eyes sprang open then.

"Mandri!" She screamed out causing the female *Durcunusaan* medic to practically leap out of her skin from where she sat next to her. She immediately came awake and scrambled to her knees next to her.

"Prime Minister!" She gasped as Jomann skidded to a stop on the opposite side.

"Prime Minister Deia!" Jomann exclaimed. The side of his face was hastily bandaged and almost soaked through with blood from a piece of falling rock that had cut him to the bone as he rolled into the escape tunnel on his side and back, all the while cradling Deia's body in his arms in an attempt to keep her from further harm. It had taken nearly thirty minutes for the dust to settle enough where they could see, and all of them were covered in a layer of the fine gray substance.

“Where... where...” Deia stammered as she tried to focus her eyes. “Mar... Martin! *Mandri!*” She rasped out the words trying to lift her arms to move.

“Don’t move Prime Minister!” Jomann spoke quickly. “You have been badly injured and if you move you could do more damage!”

Lysandra pulled her small medical hand scanner from her belt pouch and let it play over Deia’s chest slowly. “Prime Minister... I know it is instinct to try and shift to heal yourself but you have to fight the urge!” She spoke. “Your spine is broken in two places but it has not completely torn away. The nerves are still intact! As soon as we get a Hadarian down here that can treat you we...”

Deia’s eyes blinked rapidly and she looked around the interior of where she was. “Where... where am I?” She asked finally.

“The escape tunnel below your office.” Jomann replied. “They... they had...”

“Explosions!” Deia hissed. “They set explosives! I heard them... speaking about it!” She turned her head back and forth. “Where is... For'mya? Where is For'mya?”

Jomann shook his head slowly. “She... the Queen has been taken.” He replied. “We did not get here in time! We barely got into the tunnel here ourselves!”

“Tell... must contact Armetus!” Deia gasped. “Laustinos... Laustinos... traitor!”

“The Deputy Prime Minister?” Lysandra gasped in disbelief. “We... we thought perhaps they had taken him as well.”

“*Nu... nubous* traitor!” Deia hissed and began to try and move.

Jomann reached out and held her arms down gently, leaning over and looking at her. “You must not move!” He declared.

“Have... have to warn...” Deia stammered.

“Deia!” Jomann barked loudly. He watched Deia’s eyes clear almost instantly at the sound of his voice and she stared up at him. “Prime Minister... you... who am I?”

“You are... you are Captain Jomann!” Deia groaned out loud. “You were... you were assigned as *Durcunusaan* Captain six months ago.”

Jomann sighed heavily and nodded. “Yes. What do you remember Prime Minister?”

“We saw... we were watching the Netnews! We saw... *Mandri!*” Deia cried out and her eyes flooded with tears and closed.

“No!” Jomann barked. “You must stay awake now. You must stay awake so shock does not set in.” He echoed. “Look at me!” He shouted.

Deia’s eyes opened and she shook her head from side to side. “Let... let me die!” She sobbed. “Oh *Mandri... Mandri* I have failed you!”

“No!” Jomann snarled at her. “You live! It is not your time yet!”

Deia’s eyes flashed open then and though clouded with tears and she stared up at him confused. “What...?”

“You are alive!” Jomann barked. “The gods do not call you yet Prime Minister! You must stay awake! Tell me what happened?”

“Laustinos is... he is traitor!” Deia hissed viciously. “We... we must get to...”

Jomann shook his head. “The entire Senate Building is on top of us Prime Minister.” He stated. “The primary exit is buried under hundreds of tons of debris. It will take days for them to dig it out. The emergency exit is... we cannot remove the debris by hand. It’s too heavy. It will be a few hours before they get to us at least. If they even know we live that is.”

“Rad... radio?” Deia asked. “Implants?”

Jomann shook his head. “Again... too much debris. It is interfering with the signal to our implants and our hand radio was smashed when we rushed in here.”

“I... I can’t feel... I can’t feel my legs.” Deia said.

“There is damage to your spinal column Prime Minister.” Lysandra answered her now. “The nerves have taken a beating. You have a collapsed lung and that is why it is hard to breath. I believe I have got the bleeding stopped... but I cannot treat you for anything. We left our barracks so quickly I did not grab my bag. I’m... I’m so sorry!” Lysandra sobbed now as tears clouded her eyes.

Deia inched her hand over and took Lysandra's fingers in as tight a grip as she could. "I am... I am dying." She gasped. "It is not your fault."

"No!" Jomann barked. "You will not die! You are the Prime Minister of our Union! You cannot die! I forbid it! The King... the King would not let you die and neither will I!"

Deia looked at him oddly once more her eyes gaining more focus and clarity every second. "How... how many inside?" She asked finally. "My... Aricia... my family?"

Jomann shook his head. "We had only just begun evacuating the people inside when the bombs went off." He said. "All I know of Queen Aricia was that they were beginning to move her to King Yelu Memorial." Jomann turned when he heard the scraping on the floor and he saw Anicetus move into the section of the tunnel they were in.

"We got limited power back to the bunker Captain." He spoke evenly. "Enough to power the lights and one food dispenser. The primary bunker entrance is... it's just plain gone." He said. "It could be weeks before they clear enough debris to get to the outer bunker door. If the building came down as you suspect the tunnel is buried under tons of debris. The emergency tunnel... well... we cleared what we could... but..."

"I know Anicetus." Jomann said.

He moved over to Lysandra and placed the large steel case in front of her, her eyes going wide. "Thought you might like this Lysandra." Anicetus said.

"A medical kit!" She exclaimed taking the large case down and popping the latches. She flipped it open and folded the top down revealing two fully stocked sections of just about every conceivable field medical tool. She quickly snatched up the scanner and activated it.

The much older Spartan leaned over his Captain's shoulder and looked at Deia. "Prime Minister." He spoke. "Glad to see you are awake."

Deia looked at Jomann. "How many... how many of your team...?"

"Sixteen... including me." Jomann replied. "Nine of us are here with you... I sent the rest to try and evacuate people when we first arrived. I don't know if they made it out."

"We would all be dead if you did not order us in here." Anicetus spoke.

Deia cut her eyes to Lysandra as she swept the scanner over her upper body. The young woman's face was dusty and streaked with small dots of blood but Deia could see the concern in her eyes. "Tell... tell me." She stated.

Lysandra looked at her. "One... one projectile exited out just below your shoulder blade Prime Minister." She said. "It punctured your lung and tore some of your back muscles, but it is gone. Your healing system has already sealed the puncture to the lung, but it still has fluid in it."

"Blood you mean?" Deia said.

"Ma'am I..."

"Do not keep anything from me young lady." Deia said her voice regaining strength as she spoke.

Lysandra looked at Jomann quickly and he nodded. "Tell her." He said.

"Yes... it's blood." Lysandra replied looking at her. "I can treat that. Give you medicine so that your body absorbs the blood back into its cells slowly but there is still the risk of a bad infection."

"Now... now give me the bad news." Deia rasped.

"The second projectile is lodged against the third and fourth vertebra of your spine Lady Deia." She spoke meeting her eyes. "It... it appears three of your vertebra are fractured but not broken completely. There is extensive nerve damage and that is why you can't feel your legs."

"And with the projectile still inside me I can't shift even if I had the strength." Deia said.

"If you do... it could very well sever your spine completely." Lysandra said. "This... this projectile is very deep and has broken into two pieces. I can repair the damage it did going in but... only a Hadarian could repair the damage inside and remove the projectile without killing or crippling you."

"Where is the other piece young lady?" Deia asked softly.

Lysandra looked at Jomann quickly once more and then back to Deia. "It is embedded in the wall of your heart Prime Minister." She said. "Deep enough to keep the blood loss at a trickle, but..."

"But if it comes out I will bleed out internally in moments." Deia said nodding her head minutely.

Lysandra nodded. "Yes."

“Who shot you Prime Minister?” Jomann asked quickly. “The Kavalians who were here and took the Queen?”

Deia shook her head. “Laustinos.” She replied. “He is... he is a traitor! He had a hand in all this and I never saw it!”

“None of us did.” Jomann spoke quickly. “None of us did. Not even the King or Prince Andro. He was former *Krypteria*... so it should not surprise us. They are masters at subterfuge and disguise. Armetus made them that way. This is not something you can blame yourself for.” He looked at Deia intently. “Why... why would they take the Queen?”

Deia shook her head slightly. “I do not know. For'mya will give them nothing if they think to torture her for information.” She met his eyes. “The young ones?” She gasped.

Jomann shook his head. “Lady Gorgo and Lady Dasha got all of the young Prince and Princes to Dragon Mountain within minutes. They were all together at the estate which made it easier to gather them. They are safer where they are now than anyplace else in the universe.” He turned to Anicetus. “Get me blankets, pillows, anything. If we can not move her then we will make it as comfortable as possible.”

Deia watched as he turned back to her. “You should...”

“We are in this together Prime Minister.” Jomann spoke turning back to her. “And we will leave together. I need to see to my men but I will return shortly.”

Deia watched him as he squeezed her hand and then got to his feet to move off around the corner. She looked back to Lysandra and saw the young Lycavorian female preparing some medical injections. “He is... he is very serious.” Deia said.

Lysandra nodded. “We have not... we have not lost this many members of our team since the Evolli War.” She stated.

“Where?” Deia asked.

Lysandra looked at her. “Alba Tau.” She answered. “It is where he took command. Our entire company was wiped out except for eighteen of us. Jomann took command then and led us back to our main unit.”

“Alba Tau.” Deia said softly shaking her head slowly. “You... you followed him to the *Durcunusaan*?”

Lysandra nodded. “Those of us that were left yes. We got replacements and continued the war but we never allowed anyone close to us afterwards. When he got promoted to senior Lieutenant and was asked to become a *Durcunusaan* officer we all requested transfers to the *Durcunusaan*. He went to his schools... we got our additional training and then they put us back together when he completed his training.”

“That... that foul *nubous* planet is responsible for so much agony and grief.” Deia said softly.

Lysandra nodded her head. “It is also responsible for making many of us who we are today Prime Minister; Jomann among them. And Prince Androcles.”

Deia thought of her great nephew Androcles and she nodded. “Yes... yes it is.” She looked at Lysandra. “You know Andro?”

Lysandra nodded her head. “We conducted our last two missions of the war under his direct command. He is ultimately the one who convinced Jomann to accept the *Durcunusaan* offer.”

“It is odd though that they put you all back together here. That is not normally done is it?” She asked.

Lysandra shook her head but shrugged her shoulders. “Perhaps not... but as Jomann says... fate brought us together and destiny is now writing our path. We only have to deal with the curve balls it throws at us.”

Deia smiled at her now. “Ah... it is so very good to see that faith is still so strong in the younger generations.”

Lysandra smiled as well. “You may be surprised Prime Minister at the role faith plays in many of us. Our faith is what pulled us through Alba Tau ma'am. Our faith in Jomann, each other and the future. That is what Jomann says.”

“Now he sounds like Androcles and his father.” Deia said.

Lysandra's eyes twinkled. “He would be honored that you are comparing him to Prince Androcles.” She said.

“Is he... is he incredibly stubborn... ridiculously laconic and completely able to infuriate you with his common sense?” Deia asked.

“That is Jomann.” Lysandra said quickly with a grin.

“Then he and Andro would get along famously I'm quite sure.” Deia said.

Lysandra held up the hypo. "I'm going to give you several medicines ma'am." She said. "One will fight the infection that is bound to come out because of the projectile still in your body. Hopefully I have got it before it becomes too strong. The second is a blood multiplier that will increase your red blood count and keep it at a high level. It will also help to make your blood a little thicker so that..."

"So that I don't bleed out." Deia said. "I... I have been injured before Lysandra."

Lysandra smiled. "The third is a very mild pain killer. Jomann is right... you need to stay awake as much as possible so that shock does not have time to set in."

"The pain will help to keep me awake." Deia said nodding her head.

"I'm... I'm sorry." Lysandra told her.

"Don't be." Deia told her.

"The last one is to keep your heart rate even." She spoke as she lowered the hypo to her neck and injected it quickly. "When our healing system works overtime it stresses our hearts and makes them work harder. We need to keep your heart rate even."

Deia blinked several times after the injection and then looked at her. "Who yelled?" She asked.

Lysandra looked at her. "Excuse me?"

"It's not my time yet. Wake up. It's not my time yet." Deia said softly. "I heard someone yelling that just before I woke. Was it Jomann?"

"No one yelled Prime Minister." Lysandra told her. "Jomann was dozing and I was trying to clear the ground around you."

"I heard someone yell." Deia said.

Lysandra shook her head. "It wasn't any of us." She answered.

"Oh." Deia said softly. "That... that is odd."

"I'm going to get you some water from the dispenser ... I'll be right back." Lysandra spoke.

"I prefer tea." Deia said softly. "If I am to die... then I will do it on my terms and not someone else's."

Lysandra nodded as she got to her feet. "I'll be right back."

EARTH SPARTA

"...are seeing behind me is the pile of debris three stories high that once was the Spartan Senate Building. We are standing across the street from the main entrance to the King Yelu Memorial Hospital looking westward." Me'alla spoke as she looked at the video drone to her front while Hr'man adjusted the controls from his portable console. She had not changed her clothes after her dash through the Western District of Sparta and unknown to her, many of those watching had switched their Netnews channels to her coverage. She was not speculating about what was happening, she was reporting from her heart and it was coming out in her appearance and how she looked. The Director of Channel 65 had made no move to order her to make herself presentable because she was making an impact as she reported, and making an impact on him as the Director. He had seen many Netnews reporters come and go and not make a large difference, but somehow he knew this female elf was going to make a very large difference.

"The *Durcunusaan* have shut down an area of five blocks around the Senate Building even as emergency crews from across Earth are rushing in. Sparta as a city is completely isolated right now... with not only regular Spartan units manning the numerous Lifter entrances, but retired civilian forces patrolling the lesser used streets and maintaining static positions along the millennia's old wall that will not allow entry or exit." She waved her hand to the background behind her. "As you can see for yourself, there are what appears to be hundreds of dragons circling Sparta even now and we have personally seen several land near the sight of the building in an apparent effort to begin moving debris with their TK abilities. I can confirm that there are Emergency Infrastructure Crews from Athens entering Sparta now to begin working with Sparta's EIC office in removing debris and saving as many lives as possible. This is an event that has not happened in over three thousand years as there is a very large competition between the two cities in regards to the importance of Earth history. It only goes to show how much the Lycavorian Union has grown in recent years, and how much the people of Earth have come together."

The male voice broke in from somewhere and those watching heard the question. ***“Is it... are you able to confirm if what we have been hearing is true Me'alla? Were Prime Minister Deia and Queen For'mya present in the Senate Building when it was brought down?”***

Me'alla nodded her head slowly. “I was able to speak with a Senator’s aide that was one of the first to exit the building before it came down. He did confirm that a *Durcunusaan* detail under the command of a Captain Jomann entered the building in an effort to evacuate the Prime Minister and Queen. No one has heard from them since the collapse and considering that many of the *Durcunusaan* present are from the *Hippies Selda*, we can only assumed that they too were inside.”

“Is there any word on the number of those who may have been inside the building?” The man asked.

“As you know Robert, during the six month exodus to Earth for the Royal family, many of the Senators move their offices from Apo Prime to here. Those who are senior members or members of the several committees. On any given day there could be upwards of ten thousand men and women inside the building. We can only hope that given the relative early hour of the day that many were not inside.” Me'alla answered.

“Is there anything coming out from the Royal family’s spokesmen?” Robert asked and it sounded as if his voice was tense and growing anxious.

Me'alla shook her head. “At this time no.”

“What about the reports we’ve obtained about other attacks across Sparta apart from the assassination of the King and the attack there on the Senate Building?” The man asked her now clearly exasperated. ***“Can you confirm any of that information?”***

“We can confirm that Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Star Colonel Isra are here in King Yelu Memorial hospital at this time. They arrived with Queen Aricia who was immediately transferred to emergency surgery.” Me'alla answered quickly. “This was a coordinated strike against specific targets, and it appears as if the Royal family and those closest to them were the main focus of the attacks. The Kavalian embassy has been surrounded by a full Mora of Lycavorian Spartans, but I do know that no move has been made against the embassy itself.”

“Is that because of some political decision made by someone or simply because there does not seem to be anyone who is in command at this time?” Robert asked. ***“Do we know where the King’s children are? Have they been targeted as well?”***

Me'alla shook her head. “It is my understanding that most of... most of King Leonidas’s older children left Earth shortly after the High Coven terrorist attacks.” She answered quickly. “The *Durcunusaan* undoubtedly have secured the younger children and spirited them off to unknown locations for their own safety. Admiral Riall and General Vengal are present in the area and it is been rumored that the *Feravomir* arrived a short time ago on Dragon Elder Mother Arzoal. There has been no word of the older children or their location and whether or not these attacks have happened wherever they may be.”

“But to your knowledge no one has been speaking of Crown Prince Androcles or his stepping forward to assume power with the death of the King? Is he being considered or will he be passed over for Prince Resumar who is known to be more moderate in temperament and such?” Robert asked.

“No... if that is happening... we have heard nothing in regards to it. However, I doubt sincerely the *Durcunusaan* would allow that information to get out until it is already done, and I do not believe the Crown Prince will be passed over. It is well known that the King has been grooming him for the last few years in political matters, and while Prince Androcles is the hardest to obtain information on, at least for the Netnews, he is by no means inaccessible as our very own Thomas Roan and Dilaen have discovered.” Me'alla said.

“Me'alla is there any truth to the rumors that father and son had a falling out and that is why he left Earth after the Coven attacks?” Robert asked.

Me'alla looked at her video drone and though she could not see the face of the human reporter asking the questions, he could certainly see hers. Her eyes narrowed and the corner of her mouth twisted up in an angry snarl.

“I have not heard these rumors...” She snapped. “But I sincerely doubt there is any truth to them.”

“But we don’t know for sure?” Robert asked once more. ***“These actions could be a prelude to an all out attack couldn’t they? Where is Prince Androcles? Shouldn’t he be here to assume power in such a vacuum? And if he is not on Earth... why not?”***

“No we don’t know for sure!” Me'alla snapped. “And we should not speculate about something like that!”

There was a pause on the other end that caused Me'alla to look to the side at where Hr'man was sitting and those watching didn't see the shrug he gave her as he monitored his console. The new voice to come on was female.

“Me'alla... it is Lindsey Warren now. Bob had to cut to another channel. Are you aware if contact has been made with any of the Queens who are off world? We know for certain now from our sources on Hadaria that Queen Anja has left Hadaria after being overthrown by hostile members of her own government who were supposedly supported by the KFI. Could there be any connection between that overthrow and these attacks there in Sparta?”

Me'alla shook her head. “If there is... no one is saying.” She replied. “The few Senators and government officials that I have seen and tried to question either dismissed me completely or were very vague in their answers. To be honest I don't believe they were even aware of what has happened on Hadaria.” She replied quickly. “The *Durcunusaan* is not allowing them access into the areas they have cordoned off to investigate about family or friends that may have been in the building and they were understandably upset.”

“Have you heard about any sort of news conference yet?” The woman asked.

Me'alla nodded quickly. “We were able to speak with Lieutenant Governor Tarifa's senior aide before leaving King Yelu Hospital behind us. He did say he was authorized to tell us a full briefing will be held within the next three hours at the hospital. It appears as if that has become somewhat of an unofficial command post since these events began. We don't know who will be giving it but I'm hoping they'll be able to tell us more than what we now know. It will allow them to get a better handle on the events that have happened. We were heading back inside when Robert broke in.”

“It has been nearly six hours since... since the assassination of King Leonidas Me'alla. We're getting reports coming in now that several sections of Sparta and even Gytheio have been locked down.” Lindsey spoke. ***“Can you tell us anything about that?”***

Me'alla shook her head. “Well... we know most of the King's older children and Lady Gorgo had homes in Gytheio but aside from that the *Durcunusaan* just are not talking. There is a sense of anger filtering through them that is almost flagrant in nature and Hr'man and I both have been witness to it.” She said. “Getting them to answer questions will most likely be a losing battle.”

“Do you know anything about the four Kavalians that we saw in your footage earlier?” Lindsey asked. “The three men and woman? We know of course that Jalersi'Puat was the emissary from the KFI's leader Prefect Keleru. Press releases handed out when they first arrived stated that the younger man was her oldest son with Marshall Pusintin of the KFI. Another was a co-ambassador to the embassy. They came here to be part of trade talks. The third Kavalian male is unknown to us. They did not appear to be taking part in this attack and in fact we have some clear footage of them protecting Queen Aricia while she was being treated in the field.”

Me'alla nodded. “Yes. I do not know who the larger Kavalian male was but I did see all of them at the hospital. The co-ambassador's name is Jiss and he was standing in the trauma room being treated while two Hadarians were treating a female *Durcunusaan* troop who was seriously injured. I personally witnessed him refusing to leave the room.” She answered calmly. “Jalersi'Puat and this other Kavalian male were sitting in a waiting room with *Durcunusaan* Lieutenant Ardis who is the daughter of Star Colonel Isra of *Mjolnir's Hand* and Lieutenant Governor Tarifa, and another young man. All of them still had weapons with them, so I can only assume that they are in no way involved in these attacks and in fact, as you stated Lindsey, they fought against the Kavalian assassins.”

“Given what has happen Me'alla, it is understandable that the Royal family is in disarray and will not respond to any inquiries, but can you tell us if any member of the Royal family besides Queen Aricia is still in Sparta that you know of?” Lindsey asked.

Me'alla shook her head. “As we are all aware, King Leonidas was very family oriented and the extended Leonidas family is rather small with perhaps a dozen men and women who could actually come and go from the Royal Estate Villa at will. However at this moment, the only two individuals who are considered actual family members are General/Colonel Simpson and the Lieutenant Governor, who the King has always considered his closest brother and sister. General Simpson has sequestered himself away at an undisclosed site with the bodies of King Leonidas and Torma and Lieutenant Governor Tarifa is not taking questions at this time. Even getting

close to her now would be next to impossible for she is bonded to a dragon as well and between the *Durcunusaan* and the dragons that are circling Sparta... well one can reflect on that prospect themselves.”

“*So really... we do not know who is in charge.*” Lindsey asked. Her voice was even with no emotion in it.

Me'alla nodded slowly. “At the moment Lindsey... at the moment I would say that is probably an accurate statement.”

“...is in critical condition *Feravomir*.” Marci spoke from the transmission. Helen stood with Riall and Vengal in the hastily set up command center on the third floor of the hospital. Her image was clear but all of them could see the worry on her face and the anger. “They knew who he was and where he lived. They must have been after information. They... they tortured him horribly.”

“How... how bad is he?” Helen asked softly.

“They... they shattered both his legs and left arm.” Marci answered as her lips quivered. “He has multiple deep lacerations across his entire upper body and severe internal injuries. They... they tore his left eye from his head *Feravomir!*” Marci finished with a growl of fury. “Two of Queen Anja’s doctors are working on him now. They don’t know if he... they don’t know if he will live. It appears the Kavalians have had him for several hours at least.”

“Armetus’s home is not well known.” Vengal spoke stepping closer to Helen. “No one knows who he is. How did they get this information?”

Marci shook her head. “I don’t know.” She hissed. “But I will find out! And I will feed their entrails to the *vithin tonashss orbben* of Uzu Ozeib 7 when I find them!” (Fucking Rock Spiders)

“Marci I need you to initiate a comprehensive review of all...” Riall began to order her but he stopped when Marci shook her head.

“No Admiral.” She stated plainly. “I have already received my orders. I am taking command of the *Krypteria* until such time as Armetus returns... if he lives... or I am replaced. I follow the orders of only one man now.”

Helen looked at her. “Who gave you these orders Marci?” She asked.

Marci met her eyes. “Androcles.” She answered. “I am to report to him and only him until further notice.”

“You have spoken to him?” Helen asked.

Marci nodded. “Just before he went to the surface of Iraruzu and then shortly after he discovered his father had been killed.” She answered.

“Iraruzu?” Helen asked. “Why... why would he go there?”

“It is a long story *Feravomir*.” Marci said gently. “Here on Earth is not the only place the Kavalians have struck. We lost communications with over a dozen of our Drow outposts. Andro’s... one of the Drow assigned to Iraruzu is to be Andro’s mate and... he must have felt something was wrong for he went there instead of to Kranek.” Marci saw Helen’s eyes grow a little wider at this news. “Walter’s ship was shot down there as well. Kavalians had attacked and destroyed the outpost and somehow he got a message to Andro.”

“Dymas?” Helen gasped.

Marci nodded. “I do not know all the details just now but Andro gave me my orders when he first discovered the King had been killed. He is on the *HARBINGER* and he is heading here to Earth now.”

Riall nodded. “The Captain of the *HARBINGER* contacted me directly. They should be here very shortly in fact.”

“Marci... Marci what were Andro’s orders to you?” Helen asked softly.

“Do you really wish to know *Feravomir*?” Marci asked her with a resolute and calm voice. “For you would not approve.”

They all turned when the door to the conference room opened and Tarifa walked in with Isra, Ardis and Karun. Jalersi and Pian entered right after and Helen turned back to the transmission.

“Marci... we may be able to get you more information. Keep monitoring this channel and one of us will contact you as soon as we are able.” Helen said. “And continue with whatever orders Andro gave you Marci, on that you have my blessing.”

“Helen?” Riall gasped as Marci’s image nodded and then faded from view. “Why give her your blessing? We do not know what orders Andro has given her. He could very well have ordered her to send assassination squads into Kavalian space! He could be plunging us into war!”

Helen looked at him. “And he would have my blessing in that as well Riall.” She stated calmly. “And probably every Spartan and Lycavorian under the age of a few thousand years. You know well the loyalty he commands. He is just like his father in that way.”

“That is what frightens me.” Riall said. “I do not fear war with the Kavalians! I welcome it after what they have done! We just need to be...”

“Cautious.” Pian’s voice carried from behind them.

Helen, Vengal and Riall turned to face the new group and Tarifa moved directly into Helen’s arms and hugged her tightly. Tarifa had held back the tears until this very moment and now she let them loose as she sobbed into Helen’s chest.

“I... I can’t believe he is gone.” Tarifa wailed.

Helen held her tightly knowing full well the relationship Martin and Tarifa had. If two people not of them same blood could be closer than Martin was to Tarifa and Daniel Simpson she had not yet met them in person. “He... he is never gone.” Helen rasped out the words even as she felt the tears roll down her cheeks as well. “He is always with us.”

Pian wasted no time and stepped right up to Riall and Vengal. He held out the battered data pad in his hand as they looked at him. “This... this is why we are here.” He stated. “This is why he is dead! Why so many of your people are dead!”

They were looking at him as Vengal took the pad, his dark blond fur matted with dirt and grime and even blood as Jalersi stepped up to his side and pressed her lithe frame against his. Vengal glanced at the pad and his eyes grew wide at what he began to read.

“By all that we hold holy!” He gasped out loud causing Helen to turn slightly while still holding Tarifa and snatch the pad from his hand.

“I will... I will give you any intelligence you wish.” Pian stated. “I will help you in any way you ask of me. My command codes will have been changed by now no doubt, but ask me and I will tell you whatever it is you want to know! They are leading our people to ruin with their actions and I will have no part of it!”

“Vengal!” Helen gasped. “You must contact Dysea and Isabella! You must contact them now! I don’t care how!” Vengal was already moving without a response, his hand coming up to tap his jaw furiously. Helen looked at Pian as Vengal left the room. “He has done this for nothing!” She exclaimed. “There is... there is no way he could ever sit on the throne of the Union! None!”

“He does not believe as you do.” Jalersi stated now. “If he did he would never have started down this path. I did... I did not truly see what kind of man he was until... until I discovered who I was myself when I came here to this city.”

Tarifa stepped back from Helen and looked at her as she reached out and took Jalersi’s hand. “They have... they have proven where their hearts and minds are by standing with us Helen.” Tarifa said.

Isra stepped forward. “And they did so without question or doubt.”

“Karun... he... he has taken Ardis as his wife and mate Helen.” Tarifa said watching her eyes go to where they stood. “Martin... he saw this and he embraced Karun into our family. He saw what was in...”

“Show me!” Helen barked raising her hand to where Karun stood.

Karun looked at Ardis with questions in his eyes and she nodded her head to him. “Open your mind to her Karun. Just as I have shown you. Let her see within Mindvoice what you and Uncle Martin spoke of and shared.”

Karun stepped forward then without hesitation and Helen placed her hand on his cheek, her palm warm against his skin. She closed her eyes and reached out within Mindvoice to catch that small sliver of an imprint she knew Martin would have left on Karun if what they said was true. Her face softened slightly when she saw Martin embrace this young man, and it took on an even calmer expression when she saw and heard what Karun had said to him. As Helen drew her hand away slowly she looked into Karun’s dark blue eyes and saw his father when he was just a boy. As she looked deeper she saw the heart of a Spartan burning within his chest. A heart that had just realized who and what he was and a heart and mind that would forever cherish that one single embrace from an Uncle he would now never get the chance to know.

Helen smiled sadly then and nodded her head at him. “Your... your father has torn apart more lives than you can imagine this day young Karun Leonidas.” She said softly.

Karun took a deep breath. “And I will stand with my family... my true family... and we will take our retribution upon him.”

Helen drew back her hand and squeezed Tarifa tightly. “Retribution?” She said in almost a whisper. “Oh... there will be far more retribution extracted from your father than even I can fathom for what he has done Karun. That I can promise you.”

Karun looked at his mother and Pian puzzled and then turned back to Helen. “What do you mean *Feravomir*?” He asked.

Helen’s eyes closed once more as she felt it growing stronger within Mindvoice. The tremors were staggering in their power and depth and for a moment it reminded her of that moment in the bunker at SODRAG when she had felt the same thing from Martin. Helen had sworn her life to Martin Leonidas from the moment he had returned to Earth. As she should have served his father as his Oracle, Helen had filled that role freely when Martin had come home. Her bonding with Arzoal had been somewhat of a surprise to both of them, but given who they both were it made sense. She had guided Martin to the best of her ability and like his father he had been taken from her far too soon. She had seen the inside of Martin Leonidas for he shared things with her that no one else knew with the exception of the five woman who ruled his heart and soul. Feeling Androcles now, Helen could also feel the power of Sadi and Carisia, and the growing power of this Ne’Veha and now the fourth woman who would share their lives. No... he did not want to be his father, but Androcles Leonidas was more like him than he would ever openly admit. She opened her eyes once more and looked at Karun.

“As he has always done... your father has failed in his task.” Helen told them as she looked at the ceiling above them. “He would have been forgiven you know.” She said as they all looked at her surprised. “Even after that day his brother would have forgiven him. All he had to do was return home and he would have been forgiven. Martin loved his brother... no matter his crimes he loved his brother. It would have taken time... but forgiveness would have come to Pleistarchus.” Helen shook her head. “Now he should abandon all hope. He sought to destroy his father’s family and instead he has awakened the wrath of the one individual who will show him no mercy or pity or love or forgiveness.”

The door to the conference room opened once more and Riall’s senior aide burst in. “Admiral... Admiral... the Crown Prince has just landed at the *Durcunusaan* airfield! Netnews Channel 65 had a crew there and it’s possible they are showing his arrival!”

“Damn!” Riall swore turning to the two large monitors that were set up in the conference room. He pulled up the channel and stopped when he saw a clear image of the Senate Office Building and its remains. “Nothing yet but get over there and shut them down! Contact Fache or Thoti and get to the airfield! Keep him out of the sky!”

“Send them Riall... but I’ve already told him to not fly here.” Helen spoke looking at him. “He understands.”

Riall nodded. “Get Fache or Thoti there like yesterday! I want Androcles and his mates covered like blankets!”

Helen shook her head slowly as she turned back to look at Karun. “Your father has left Androcles Leonidas alive... and he has come home now. Your father has succeeded in killing the one man who could have controlled the storm that will now sweep across the stars and shatter millions in its quest for your father’s blood. Woe unto those who stand in his way now young Karun.” She said. “For there will be no salvation from his justice.”

Karun stood a little taller as Helen spoke and he gripped Ardis’s hand tighter in his. “Then I will stand beside my cousin and I will help him mete out this justice!” He spoke firmly. “That is my path now!”

“We shall see.” Helen said softly. “We shall see.”

DURCUNUSAAN AIRFIELD

The *STRIKER DT* landed with a feather’s touch and the moment the landing struts touched the ground the massed rows of *Durcunusaan* troops rushed forward to surround the ship even as the ramp instantly began

to come down. Nothing was taken for granted as heavy weapons were deployed all along the airfield; two LU94 Main Hover Tanks were stationed on either side of the landing grid while an LU V24 Mobile Command Center was deployed only a hundred meters away. Nearly three hundred *Durcunusaan* Troops swarmed around the large ninety meter long *STRIKER DT* as five figures began to walk slowly down the ramp.

The Netnews crew on the edge of the airfield had been allowed to linger because the area around the base had remained relatively quiet and they were not getting underfoot. While they were set up alongside the civilian terminal of the airfield, they were unaware of the many secrets that were hidden beneath their booted feet. The moment the call came that the Crown Prince was enroute the Netnews crew was forgotten. It just so happened that this Netnews crew was also from Channel 65, the same organization that Me'alla and Hr'man worked for. The human director of Channel 65 was an experienced field reporter who had followed the King in his youth. He felt he knew the Leonidas family very well though he had only met them once. He was also very aware that only his channel had access inside the tight circle around Androcles Leonidas. When Thomas Roan and Dilaen had been chosen to remain with the young Prince they immediately contacted him to ask for employment. After the many leaks from their former Netnews employers, they would not make the same mistakes. He had welcomed them with open arms for he knew as they did, wherever the Prince went, action usually followed.

This Netnews crew had three video drones set up around the terminal to try and catch angles from all sides. They immediately came to life when the *STRIKER DT* roared in over the top of the terminal and began to settle to the tarmac some five hundred meters away. Powerful zoom lenses brought the picture up close to where the reporter and his three member support team had set up their equipment.

“...get an ID on the ship?” The reporter asked as the ship settled in to land. He was a third generation vampire who had been born on Earth after his parents settled here within months of Earth becoming a member of the Union. They had come from Apo Prime with hundreds of other vampires in a bid to show the men and women of Earth that all vampires were not like the High Coven. Upon arriving they discover that many on Earth already knew that and they happily began to build a life here.

“We’re running it through the system.” The elven technician team leader answered quickly.

“I thought all ships were grounded!” The human technician hissed.

The reporter, Bryce Vossen, nodded his head. “They are... which means whoever is on that ship is someone important!”

“Shit!” The human exclaimed loudly. “It’s the Crown Prince!”

“What?” Bryce nearly shouted.

“It’s Prince Androcles’s ship! The numbers match Bryce!”

It was a snap decision by Bryce Vossen, but it was a decision that was made because of his loyalty and love of his planet. He didn’t know it now, but it was this decision among others that would see Union Netnews Channel 65 leapfrog nearly a dozen other Netnews channels and become the premier source of news for not only the Royal Family, but billions of Union citizens.

“Shut it down!” Bryce snapped. “Shut the drones down now!”

“What?” The elf man gasped as he watched the monitor in front of him and saw the tall figure of Androcles Leonidas with two women on either arm walk down the ramp of the *STRIKER DT*. Three dragons followed along behind him. He recognized the Crown Princess easily with her stunning golden blond hair and Carisia Moran with her short but incredibly sensual stature. He could only assume the elf female that held the Crown Princess’s hand was Commander Ne’Veha but he had no idea who the tall Drow elf female was that walked beside Androcles on his left holding tightly to his hand while Carisia clung to hers. “Why? Bryce this is the Crown Prince!”

“Think about it Nal’liot!” Bryce snapped. “The Kavalians have killed the King! Queen Aricia may be dead as well! They have gone after the Royal family! If we broadcast that he has returned it could trigger more attacks! They may have people still here and they’ll come after him!”

The man’s eyes grew wider as realization hit him. “Fuck! I didn’t think of that!”

“Record it!” Bryce said. “Record it and send it to the military only! All channels! Route it to *Durcunusaan* headquarters! They will want it! I will call the Director and let him know what we are doing!”

EDEN CITY COMMAND CENTER

“...Don’t care!” Lynwe snapped angrily at the Dragoon officer. “You tell the Rodnali Ambassador that he can sit his reptilian *et'zarreth* on the spaceport bench and *shu wun ukt rahi* for all I care! We have far more important things to worry about than him and his personal problems!” (Ass)(Shit in his hands)

The Dragoon officer couldn’t help but smile at General Lynwe’s less than diplomatic answer. “As your order General!” He barked with a grin.

Lynwe turned back to her senior Drow aide. “Get me a list of all those with access to the Command Center and make sure the Dragoons and Spartans guarding the entrance have it! No one that does not have the authorization is to be anywhere near this building!” She barked.

“Understood General.” The aide said.

“Find me the Spartan Officer who is leading the EDT Team.” Lynwe continued. “I want to know instantly if he finds anything that looks even remotely suspicious. Have...”

“General...” One of the human technicians turned quickly from his chair and looked at her “We’re getting a civilian feed on an authorized military channel! It’s being beamed from *Durcunusaan* HQ in Sparta!”

Lynwe shook her head dismissively. “I have no interest in civilian feeds!” She barked. “If the *Durcunusaan* needs me then they can contact me directly on a secure channel! They know what is...”

“General... you are going to want to see this.” The Tech spoke adjusting his controls and pointing to one of the large monitors.

Lynwe was about to protest when her amber eyes fell on the screen. Those same amber colored eyes grew enormous when she saw the footage. “*L'Ilythiiri phraktos dumo ussta solen nindel Usstan thun naut kyorlin tajon!*” She gasped. (The Drow gods bless me that I am not seeing visions.)

There was no mistaking what she saw however and to say it filled her with wonder and amazement would have been an understatement. The image on the screen was undeniable to anyone.

“Aihola!” Lynwe almost screamed. “Get me Aihola! Transfer this feed to her bunker! Now! Do it now!”

The COM tech had already predicted this and one press of his console was all it took for Aihola’s tense face to come up on another monitor. “Lynwe... what is going on?” Aihola snapped. “I have been trying to contact Tarifa and...” They watched Aihola turn as an aide moved into the scene briefly and her amber eyes watched. Within seconds they were just as wide as Lynwe’s eyes.

“*Gi ussta yah!*” Aihola muttered out loud. “Lynwe! Lynwe where is this? Tell me this is happening on Earth!” (Oh my god)

“A *Durcunusaan* feed from the airfield in Sparta!” Lynwe answered. “A civilian feed that is being cross decked exclusively to the *Durcunusaan*! Aihola... Aihola the *Yara Parma* speaks of...”

“Is that Daba and the Holy One behind them?” Aihola demanded.

“Yes! You know it is! You are watching what I am!” Lynwe exclaimed. “Androcles has returned and...” Lynwe looked at the monitor once more and saw them standing there. Sadi was on his right holding his hand as well as the young elf female they knew as Ne’Veha. Lu’ria was on his left holding his hand tightly, even while clinging to the shorter Carisia. All of them wore the standard form fitting Mark IV ArmorPly. He clung to their hands tightly and they to him without question; he was whispering to both of them it seemed even as they cleared the ramp of the *STRIKER DT* and Walter and Daba came more into the picture. Lynwe already knew what Sadi and the others looked like and her gaze stayed on Lu’ria. Her long white hair shimmered in health and beauty, wrapped in velvet colored Drow silk of her family and pulled over one shoulder. They watched as he first nuzzled Sadi’s cheek and ear and they saw her eyes close in delight. Then he turned to Lu’ria and did the same. His nose and lips caressed her four inch high elven ear and they could easily see the expression on her face, her amber eyes closing in bliss in a manner that was far more than normal. Elven ears were an erogenous zone yes, but nothing like what they were seeing, and Lu’ria’s reaction to his simple caress could only mean one thing.

“She is wolf!” Aihola gasped as she came to her feet. “Andro has... he has taken Lu’ria as his wife and mate! He has changed her!”

“Aihola are you sure?” Lynwe asked.

“That reaction to such a simple caress is how I know Lynwe!” Aihola said. “Only a female wolf reacts in such a manner! And only to her mate!”

“Aihola... the *Yara Parma*...” Lynwe began to say.

“I know well what it says Lynwe my friend!” Aihola spoke passionately. “Dispatch a full Drow Security Detachment to Sparta immediately Lynwe! The most experienced and well trained that we have! I will authorize their flight!”

Lynwe looked at her. “The only one not deployed is the one you trained yourself with Tareif, Martin and Vengal!” Lynwe said. “They were meant for...”

“I don’t care what they were meant for!” Aihola snapped. “Their mission just changed! The future of our people... the future of the Drow just landed on Earth and I intend to make sure the *Durcunusaan* and Androcles have the additional means to protect that future! Get them airborne within the next fifteen minutes Lynwe my friend! I will let Charles and Selene know and I will contact Panos myself! Quickly my friend... Andro takes after his father in his respect and knowledge of our ways... he will be looking for them quickly to augment Lu’ria’s normal *Durcunusaan* security!”

“I will have them airborne in ten minutes!” Lynwe announced as she looked at her dear friend. “Aihola you are still...”

Aihola smiled brilliantly. “You need not worry for my feelings Lynwe. Through all the horror that is now happening a single star shines through. A star I will be very proud to one day relinquish my title as Queen to. But not just yet!”

SPARTA KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

No one dared speak.

No one dared moved as he walked down the hospital corridor. He walked in front of the four women in his life now, Sadi and Ne’Veha holding hands directly behind him, while Lu’ria and Carisia were just behind them. That the female Drow was now wolf was not something that went unnoticed either. The Prince’s scent was all over her and it was easy enough for the wolves in the corridors to detect that she had been changed very recently. Andro was focused entirely on one scent, one among the thousands that were present and mixed in with the myriad of hospital scents. He hated hospitals... he had hated them ever since recovering in one after Alba Tau, and he had no intention of allowing his mother to remain here one second longer than necessary. The *Durcunusaan* had sealed this floor and the floor above and below it for security purposes. As his mother’s scent drew him around the corner he came face to face with Helen and he stopped in front of her, towering over her petite form. There were few who could bring the Crown Prince of the Union up short, and the *Feravomir* of the Lycavorian people was such a person.

“My mother?” Andro asked softly.

Helen nodded her head and reached up to place her palm flat on his cheek. “She has just finished surgery Andro and she’s sleeping now. She’s weak... but she will recover fully.” Helen answered. “Androcles you...”

Andro lifted his hand and placed it over the top of hers on his cheek. “I will be diligent and wise *Feravomir*. I will not do anything ruled by my emotions only. You and my father taught me too well for that. And there is far more going on than you know.”

“What do you mean?” Helen asked.

“The Kavalians have struck on Kranek as well as in The Wilds.” Andro told her. “They... they have taken...”

Helen’s eyes grew wider. “Taken what?” She demanded.

“They have taken my mother from Kranek.” He stated. “A battle was fought and they lost... but I don’t believe they were there to destroy Cha’talla’s settlement. They knew we were there... or at least they knew mother and Normya were there. I believe their purpose was to take her no matter what.”

“For what?” Helen gasped.

Andro shook his head. “I don’t know... but I intend to find out. Denali and Cha’talla are going after her and...”

“Do you trust him Androcles?” Helen asked.

Andro nodded his head without hesitation. "He is not the man that all of you remember *Feravomir*. He is very different. And he has bonded with Vollenth."

Helen's eyes grew wide in shock. "Vollenth!" She gasped. "Then he is..."

"Where is my father's body *Feravomir*?" Andro interrupted her.

Helen blinked several times. "The... the clinic near the Royal Villa. Torma... Torma as well. Your... your Uncle Daniel has refused to leave him. Isheeni cannot bring herself to go to..."

"My mother For'mya... Aunt Deia?" Andro asked.

Helen shook her head. "I fear the worst Androcles. I can only feel Deia and even that is very faint. I cannot sense your mother at all. You are..."

Andro shook his head slowly. "Like you I can no longer sense the tremors of her within Mindvoice. I will not lose hope *Feravomir*! The walls of the emergency bunker were built with similar material as in Dragon Mountain. If she is unconscious and unable to focus, this could be why we do not sense her."

Helen gripped his arms tightly now and nodded her head. "Your grandmothers and your younger siblings are safe in the Sanctuary. Gorgo is beside herself with grief and Dasha is just holding it together."

"Do my brothers and sisters know?" Andro asked.

Helen shook her head. "They know something bad has happened but they are not yet strong enough within Mindvoice to detect that..." Helen couldn't help the tears now and she lowered her forehead to Andro's chest. "I have... I have failed another Leonidas." She gasped. "It is... it is the curse of my life! I..."

Andro pulled her back and held her arms now. He stared at her and shook his head. "You have never failed my father!" He hissed. "And you will not think that! You will never think that!"

Helen lifted her hands once more and took his face in her hands as tears clouded her eyes. "Androcles... your mother... she will..."

Andro nodded slowly. "I know." He said softly. "She will follow father into death very soon because they are *Anomes*. She... she could not live without him anyway. Her heart would be broken and she would be a shadow of herself with him gone."

Helen squeezed his arms once more. "Enough." She said. "Go to her... sit with her for a time. I will have Riall prepare a full briefing for you in the next hour."

Andro shook his head. "I... Elynth and I will go to see our fathers first. We must... we must see to their remains as Talon Guardians." He stated softly. "*KertaGai*... they will sit with her until I return."

Sadi stepped closer now and gripped Helen's arm. "We are here *Feravomir*." She said gently. "All of us are here."

Helen smiled as Carisia came around to her opposite side and did the same as Sadi, drawing close to her to give her strength and support. Helen looked at Andro as he took a few steps back.

"I will return in a few hours *Feravomir*." He said. "Then... then we will move forward. I want to know instantly if they break through to Aunt Deia or if we hear from Denali. I told them *Tnobbf*."

Helen met his eyes and took a deep breath. She nodded. "*Tnobbf*." She said softly. "I understand."

Andro turned quickly and began to move back down the corridor. Three *Durcunusaan* troops began to turn and go with them but Helen's voice stopped them. "No!" She barked. "He and Elynth must do this alone!"

"*Feravomir*... General Vengal said we are to insure no one gets close to..." The man began to speak.

"Nothing living or dead will ever get close to Androcles or Elynth without them knowing about it now." Helen told him. She looked at Sadi. "He is..."

Sadi nodded with a gentle smile. "Ever since we discovered our *SirsanGai* and *Ilythiiri tessai*." She said holding out her hand to Ne'Veha while Carisia pulled Lu'ria close to them.

Helen looked at Ne'Veha and Lu'ria, feeling the growing Mindvoice power within them easily, and also noticing that Lu'ria was now very much wolf and radiating in her beauty and the newfound power that was swirling through her. Helen said nothing but knew she was looking at history in the making before her eyes. Lu'ria she knew, was a pureborn Drow, the daughter of parents who themselves were children of the original Drow that Walter had created so long ago. Looking at all of them Helen could only shake her head minutely. Like his father, Androcles Leonidas had chosen women who were not only powerful within Mindvoice, but women of near unmatched beauty and grace. She could detect his lavender and pines scent so very deeply embedded within the blood of three of them and no doubt Lu'ria would soon be like them as well. Looking at

them as they gazed at her, Helen knew she saw the future, and no matter the pain and anguish that filled them now, that future held the promise of being so very bright.

Helen reached out and took their hands. "Come." She said. "Aricia will need those who love her when she wakes. It will make it easier for her to endure what will happen."

KRANEK

"Hello Gareld!"

His eyes fluttered open slowly when he heard the deep voice and they focused on the towering Immortal standing over the top of him. Gareld remembered Phy'iad's officer striking him over the head and knocking him unconscious even as he was watching in horror as Phy'iad carved up his ship with a high intensity laser. The Immortal had hit him harder than he had ever been hit before, but looking up into the face on the Immortal before him, Gareld knew he had gone from a bad situation to a much worse one.

As his head and eyes cleared he shifted his eyes and looked around slowly. He could see dozens of Immortals all around him, most of them armed. He could see elves, vampires and Lycavorians standing all around and Gareld quickly deduced he was outside in a large courtyard area. There was still smoke rising into the sky in the background, and the smell of burned metal filled the air. He looked up quickly as the sounds of fighters filled the area and he watched as three Union *TEMPEST* fighters sped overhead heading north. His eyes lowered and grew wider as he saw the lithe figure of Esther Suira step up next to Cha'talla and press close to him, her hand spreading out over his abdomen.

"Ah... Esther." Gareld spoke now. "It is a pleasure to see you again. I see that you were telling me the truth when you said you consort with an Immortal. A pity really... you were delightfully tight and warm!"

Gareld's head whipped to the side viciously as Fash'ka's right hand came from the side faster than he could prepare. His face smashed into the side of the pole he was secured too and the blow carried enough power in it to break off his left fang which he involuntarily swallowed. Blood filled his mouth as the stars and bright lights behind his eyes burst forth and pain once more lit off his nerve endings. He didn't see Esther move closer and kneel in front of him. As his head came back around he saw her he blinked several times.

"I warned you that you played a dangerous game with the wrong people Gareld." Esther spoke softly. "You and all of your friends that raped me could not even compare to the way my Blessed Husband makes me feel Gareld. You should hear me cry out in his arms in our bed... you may have actually learned something... but you are too stupid and too arrogant. Your answers to the questions we ask will determine how you die Gareld... but make no mistake... you will die this day."

"Not even a chance at freedom huh Esther?" Gareld asked. "For old time sake?"

Esther chortled with a humorless smile. "You have killed over a thousand of our people and half that of Lycavorian and elf. What do you think?"

"They are not your people!" Gareld shouted. "You are a pureblood!"

"The moment I tasted my husband's blood I became one of them." Esther spoke. "The first time I screamed his name in bliss I became one of them. And the moment our first born son married Normya Leonidas our tribe became members of their family and they of ours! In your greed and arrogance Gareld... you have no idea what you have taken part in or set in motion do you?"

"I will tell you nothing!" Gareld barked.

Esther shook her head. "Oh... you will tell us everything we want to know Gareld. Only the manner in which it is extracted is in question. It is your choice. The men and women around you have already decided your ultimate fate. I'm offering you a painless and peaceful death and an honorable burial. Something you have never done in all your life. I have used what influence I have among my people to keep you from being crucified and left out in the sun to die of Blood Fever." Esther saw his eyes grow wider, but this time in fear. No vampire in their right mind wanted to die of the Blood Fever.

"You see Gareld... your Kavalian friends have taken someone from us. She has become our most dearest and beloved friend over these last months and many in our tribe look at her and see higher powers at work in bringing us together. They see that her daughter marries our son and loves him with all that she is and they see our future in them. Her children you see standing around you side by side with us; they are wolves and

they want your blood Gareld.” Esther tilted her head slightly, her long dark hair falling to one side. “As I said... it is up to you Gareld, but the alternative is, I give you to my Immortal husband...” She watched as his eyes went to Cha'talla standing behind her. “If that happens Gareld... if that happens you will realize that there are many levels to pain that you have no idea exist. And I will insure that he sees to it that you experience them all before he allows you to die Gareld.”

“Your threats don't frighten me Esther.” Gareld snorted.

“No... I don't imagine they do. You are too stupid to be frightened Gareld.” Esther told him. “However, they are not threats. They are facts.”

Gareld smiled then. “I don't know why they wanted her! I know what they intend to do to her though!” He spat. “They are going to break her! She's an elf and Phy'iad is going to break her to his will! He is going to fuck her in all of her holes! He is going to fuck her so many times that she will beg him to be her Immortal Master! She will do anything he wants... fuck any number of Immortals he tells her as many times as he demands... all so that she gets his load in her pussy, ass and mouth over and over again for the rest of her life!”

Esther let fly with a crushing right cross that snapped Gareld's head around savagely. “You lie!” Esther shouted. “Dysea is half wolf! She is wife and mate to Martin Leonidas! Phy'iad will never be able to do this! She would be immune to this!”

Gareld spit out blood from his smashed lips and looked back at her. “It's no lie!” He growled back. “I only tell you what the Immortals around him have said! He has a female elf who he broke twenty years ago! She's a doctor... a scientist! He got information from someone that his elf wench figured out. It has something to do with her DNA and the fact her parents were cloned! I don't know all of it... only that she is not immune to the effect an Immortal has when he sprays his cum in her elven belly! She will be his for all time! She will suck or fuck his Immortal cock whenever he demands if she wishes to live! She will...”

The yowl of fury that came out was the most frightening sound many of them had ever heard in their lifetimes.

“NO! NO! NO!”

It frightened Esther so badly she stumbled sideways, which actually cleared the way for the person who let loose with that bellow to step forward. Gareld had been sitting on the hard packed ground, his hands secured behind the pole he was sitting against. His eyes grew wide when Cha'talla's six foot five frame leaned over and grasped his head in his large hands. With a feral snarl of unrestrained fury Cha'talla yanked Gareld to his feet. Gareld's scream of pain as both his shoulders dislocated was drowned out by the sound of popping cartilage and bone and the sound of tearing flesh. The plastic hand restraints twisted and strained against the force before giving way to Cha'talla's Mindvoice fueled strength and snapping Gareld's wrist in four places and peeling off most of the skin of his right hand almost to the bone.

Cha'talla lifted Gareld into the air with the ease of one lifting a newborn baby so great was his anger. Charged by his newfound abilities within Mindvoice, he truly did not know his own strength as Gareld's arms flopped useless at his sides and Cha'talla pulled him away from the pole and lifted him two feet into the air. Cha'talla's eyes were now a burning cobalt blue as his vampire side came erupting outward and time stood still once more for all who witnessed what happened next.

“You vile excuse for a vampire!” Cha'talla screamed as he brought Gareld's body down in a body slam into the hard ground. “You twisted motherfucker! I will savage your friends for what you have done!” Cha'talla yanked him back up off the ground and smashed him into the unyielding pole he had once been secured too. The sound of his skull fracturing was like a gunshot in the now silent courtyard and when Cha'talla yanked his body back, blood and brain matter was staining the thick pole.

“Vollenth!” Cha'talla screamed.

A trumpet of equal anger and hate sounded instantly and hundreds of eyes saw the green and yellow scales of the huge dragon as his wings extended to their fullest with a resounding pop. Cha'talla lifted Gareld into the air with one hand clamped on his throat and he squeezed with all that he was. The gagging noise was horrible, but even worse was the popping and cracking of Gareld's spine as his neck was broken in six different places by Cha'talla's berserker strength. Cha'talla brought Gareld's body smashing back to the ground and more popping and cracking was heard as more bones shattered. With a guttural scream of ferocity Cha'talla pulled his hand back tearing open Gareld's throat with simplistic effort.

“NEVER!” Cha'talla howled into Gareld's dying eyes.

Esther looked at her beloved husband with wide eyes. In all their years together she had never seen him so impossibly enraged. She took a hesitant step towards him... reaching out with her hand.

“Blessed... Blessed Husband?” She stammered. Esther gasped when he looked up at her and his cobalt colored eyes were brighter than she had ever seen.

“I will... I will not allow this!” He shouted. “NO! She accepted us! She accepted us as we are with no fear! No doubts!” Cha'talla looked up further and turned slightly to look at the hundreds of faces of Immortals and Elves and Lycavorians that gazed at him in shock. “Look at us! Look at us! Over two decades we have lived here! Two decades and we have changed who we are! We have changed and we have stayed the same! What we have worked for all these years is upon us! Acceptance! Forgiveness! It is ours! Dysea gave this to us! Normya gave this to us when she became the Blessed wife to my son! She looked beyond our appearance and saw what he was inside! Dysea looked beyond our appearance and saw what was inside us! What was inside my... inside my heart!” Cha'talla looked down at Gareld's corpse and then heaved his limp body into the air and with inhuman strength he tossed the body nearly twenty meters to land against the side of a damaged building.

“She sat with me!” Cha'talla screamed. “She sat with me... a man who tried to kill her and all she loved all those years ago! She sat with me and listened as I poured out to her and my Blessed Wife about what I wanted for our future! For our people! She did not look upon me with scorn or doubt or ridicule! She did not look at me and fear me!” Cha'talla lifted his hand. “She took my hand... she took my hand and asked me to forgive her for bringing these Kavalian dogs here! She asked me to forgive her for bringing this upon our people! This woman who came here with no reason to trust me! To trust us! She believed... She believed even when I did not! Normya believed even when I did not!” Cha'talla cut his eyes to T'lolt who stood a short distance away. “My brother believed even when I did not!” Cha'talla lowered his head unable to continue. Esther stood weeping silently with her hands over her mouth and it was left to a green and yellow scaled dragon to take two huge steps forward and butt his newly Bonded Brother in the shoulder.

Finish it Brother. Vollenth spoke. Finish your words and then let us go and retrieve our Queen and dear friend.

Cha'talla looked up into those eyes and that massive head. He looked up and he smiled as he placed his hand on Vollenth's snout.

“No more!” Cha'talla barked out as he turned back to face those gathered in the courtyard of the settlement. “No more will we remain here hidden to all! No more will I keep us from reaching for our future! Our future came to us the moment my son heard Normya's voice on the COM!”

Esther turned when she heard the murmurs of agreement and she saw dozens upon dozens of heads nodding at Cha'talla's words.

“Our future began the moment Dysea Leonidas called me family! The moment her son Androcles told me we were now family! Dysea called me... she called me family! Her family!” Cha'talla screamed. “That makes all of us her family and every Leonidas that lives and breathes members of our family! Our tribe of Akruxian people!” Cha'talla moved away from Vollenth and looked at his people, his friends and family. “Who among you will stand with me? Who among you will stand with me in the old ways of our people? The forgotten ways! They took her from us... from our tribe! Who will stand with me and move to get her back!”

The surge of bodies, Immortal/Akruxian, Lycavorian, elf, Limian, half a dozen races, they all pressed closer to Cha'talla shouting their support and anger.

“We leave in six hours!” Cha'talla shouted. “I will not stop! I will not show mercy or hesitation! I will retrieve Dysea and return her to us! To her family. Any who stand in our way will suffer beneath our wrath!”

The roar of voices grew even louder and rose to a crescendo when first Denali and Lisisa stepped forward next to Cha'talla. Then came Arrarn and Narice and Toria, followed quickly by T'lolt and Fash'ka. Vollenth and Viera moved forward as gently as possible considering their size, their sons still bounding back and forth between their backs and the charged excitement of the air all around them.

“It starts this day!” Cha'talla screamed. “It starts this hour! Let the word go forth to any who can hear my voice! No more will the Akruxian people wallow beneath the boot heel of the High Coven. No longer will we tolerate the oppressive and cruel rule of the High Coven. No more will we live a life that is not of our making and of our choosing. A life that goes against the very soul of every one of our ancestors that came before us! I will no longer be known as an Immortal! I cast aside that name! I am an Akruxian!” Cha'talla pulled Esther into his arms and laid a blistering kiss on her lips which she reciprocated with every ounce of her being

even as the hundreds that had gathered screamed out their approval. After a moment, with a tear filled Esther clinging to his powerful arm Cha'talla looked at his people.

“We are coming Dysea!” He screamed as he looked into the sky. “Your family... your tribe is coming for you! And we will sweep aside all who stand in our way!”

It would stand as the longest and most impassioned plea ever to leave Cha'talla's lips and unknown to him it would reach across the stars and touch over a hundred planets and millions of Immortals scattered across the stars. It would reach them for two reasons. Those two reasons were standing in the back rows of the wildly chanting gathering of Akruxian and Lycavorian. A stunning elf female and handsome human male. It would reach across the stars for the simple reason that Thomas Roan had been directing the video drone for the last thirty minutes while Dilaen walked slowly among the encampment and provided commentary.

Thomas took his eyes off his controls and looked at Dilaen. “I guess this is what you meant by we would always be busy huh?” He asked her.

Dilaen looked at him with a smile. “We are witnessing history Thomas! It's inspiring!” She answered.

“So inspiring that you will marry me?” Roan asked quickly.

Dilaen stepped up to him and pressed her lush elven frame against his firm and muscular human body. “It is about time you asked me that.” She exclaimed. “I did not think you would ever get around to it.”

Thomas Roan shrugged. “I needed to warm up to the moment.” He said with a grin.

Dilaen looked at him with dazzling blue eyes. “I do believe I like how Dilaen Roan sounds.” She said.

“Is that a yes?” Thomas asked.

“Yes Thomas... it is most definitely a yes.”

CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

CABELIR

KAVALIAN HOMEWORLD

“...Kept his word Prefect.” The Commander of the Puma Bane squad spoke from within the secure transmission. “The extraction went perfectly. The ship was exactly where he said it was and we have just crossed the Union border into The Wilds. We should be able to cross the border into Kavalian space in two days and be to Cabelir within three.”

“She is unharmed?” Pusintin asked leaning forward in his chair.

“Except for a bruise on her head where my men had to strike her.” The man spoke very quickly knowing Pusintin's famous temper had crushed more than one aspiring Pride Officer. “She did not come willingly Marshall Pusintin. She shifted and attacked Laustinos at the last moment when she realized it was Laustinos who helped to kill the King. We had no choice. She is sedated now and will remain so until we arrive home. Laustinos has already implanted the device to negate her Mindvoice abilities and her ability to call her Shi Viska. He did the same with the second female as well.”

“She is not to be touched Commander. I'm changing the plan somewhat and I will meet you just after you cross the border and I will transfer her to my ship.” Pusintin spoke.

“Of course Marshall Pusintin.” The man replied.

“You have done very well Commander.” Pusintin told him honestly. “Very well. The Prefect and I will reward you and your team for your fine work.”

“We live to serve Marshall. Prefect.” The man answered.

“Were you able to determine anything useful before leaving Union space?” Keleru asked now.

“There was not much to learn after leaving Earth Prefect.” He responded calmly. “They had a very effective military blackout in affect once we made our rendezvous with the ship Laustinos commands. Before we left Earth however, we were able to ascertain the success of our operations to some degree.” The Commander stated. “The Elf Queen and Prime Minister Deia confirmed what the Union Netnews was already broadcasting on a live feed by their reaction. The King is dead Prefect. Perhaps even the Queen Aricia. Nothing was said in regards to your daughter or commander Pian Prefect. No doubt when we brought the Senate Building down the Prime Minister was finished as well. Laustinos shot her twice in the chest before that.

Outside of that we were not able to confirm much because I adhered to our own Blackout rule for communications. They have a very effective and sophisticated communications network Marshall... much more sophisticated than we thought and penetrating it without the proper codes is nearly impossible.”

“Laustinos did not have these codes?” Pusintin asked quickly. “He is the Deputy Prime Minister!”

“He has most of them Marshall Pusintin... however even he does not possess the codes for the *Durcunusaan*’s communications channels.” The Puma Bane Commander stated. “Those are given out only to *Durcunusaan* members and senior officers.”

“The survivability of our assassination teams?” Keleru asked.

The Commander shook his head. “I fear they are completely lost Prefect.” He answered. “We were able to monitor a civilian channel more than any of the military ones. A Netnews reporter caught most of the action on a live feed as I said. When Leonidas fell, the *Durcunusaan* that remained flew into a fury the likes of which I have never seen. Civilians were attacking our team along with the *Durcunusaan* and I truly do not believe any made it out alive. If they did survive then they have been captured.”

“They accomplished their mission.” Keleru spoke as he rose to his feet. “As you have done Commander. And your mission was far more important.” He moved to the counter behind his desk and began to pour two glasses of strong Kavalian ale.

“Prefect... what do we do with Laustinos?” The Commander asked. “The crew of his ship is loyal to him but they are few in number. We could...?” He stopped his words when he realized he was going to question his orders.

“Speak your mind Commander.” Pusintin spoke coming to his feet now.

“He has betrayed his own people Marshall Pusintin.” The man said. “Freely and in some cases with great glee. He killed several aides of his own Senators as we moved to the Prime Minister’s office. Do we trust him? We could take the ship easily if you...”

“No... we do not trust him Commander.” Keleru answered as he came back to stand next to Pusintin and handed him the glass. “However he has done what he said he would do, even more than what we had hoped. And he may prove useful to us in the future.”

“Is that wise Prefect?” The Commander asked.

“No... perhaps not... but we will honor our agreement with him and it may even entice others in the future to take the path he has chosen and come over to our side.” Keleru answered as he looked at him. “And do not be concerned for your words Commander. I have always allowed the Puma Bane Pride more freedom in their actions because it is you who get the most difficult and dangerous missions. That will not change. However... it might be prudent to be mindful of his actions as we go.”

“Very well Prefect.” The Commander said.

“Keep her sedated but guarded Commander... and she is to be untouched.” Pusintin told him. “I will see you in two days at the same coordinates as planned.”

“As your order Marshall Pusintin.” The Commander spoke just before Keleru touched the panel on his desk and the transmission faded. He watched Pusintin turn to look at him and he shook his head. “Your brother is dead... soon you will have his woman and then in a few weeks you will be able to make your claim to the throne of the Lycavorian Union my friend.”

“We’re close Keleru.” Pusintin said. “We’re so close.”

Keleru nodded. “Indeed we are.”

“With the technology they have, the production capabilities... we will be able to destroy the High Coven in months not years!” Pusintin said. “Once the Coven is dead... once they are dead then we can begin our expansion towards the Perseus Arm and beyond.”

“You will be King of the Union Pusintin.” Keleru stated. “You...”

Pusintin waved his arm dismissively. “Bah! I have no desire to be King of the Union! I am no politician!” He spat. “I will let my son rule. This is my home and my people. I can’t abide the stench of the Lycavorians.”

Keleru lifted his glass up. “This is why you never expanded on your abilities with your senses?” He asked.

Pusintin nodded. "I taught Leruk and Kalis as much as I know." He stated. "It does not scratch the surface of what a full Lycavorian could do if they used their senses daily... but I never felt the need to teach them. They are Kavalian as far as I am concerned."

"And this magical telepathic ability they have? That the elf Queen has?" Keleru said. "This Mindvoicing it is called. You can do this but on a limited level?"

Pusintin nodded. "I would be considered a Tier Two if compared to how they rank men and women with this skill. Barely able to control it in many cases. I certainly cannot direct and use it as they do." He spoke. "I was just discovering it when I defected and I have not received anywhere near the proper instruction in its use."

"Yet the potential is there?" Keleru asked.

Pusintin looked at him and nodded realizing what he was saying. "Yes... it is there with the proper schooling and practice."

"And this elven female For'mya? She is one of the most powerful in the Union correct?" Keleru asked.

Pusintin nodded. "If the reports that Laustinos gave to us are accurate yes." Pusintin answered. "And everything he has given to us has been accurate and truthful."

"We can use her to teach your son this ability? Perhaps others of our people who may have this skill." Keleru asked hopefully.

"If we wish... yes." He answered.

"That could work to our favor." Keleru stated. He moved around back to the chair and held out the data pad to Pusintin before he sat down. "This report arrived four hours ago. You were arriving from Neor and monitoring the assassination teams so I handled it. We have heard nothing from Leruk's Puma Bane unit in over twelve hours. They missed their check in time and I dispatched a Puma Bane Company from the detachment we have hidden on Tupacia Prime to investigate."

Pusintin read the data pad quickly. "The Deutrino fields that we were using there must be jamming their transmissions." He spoke after a moment. "No Drow could defeat my son and a company of Puma Bane Shock Troops."

Keleru nodded. "That was my assessment as well... but I sent the team anyway. They were..."

The chime from his desk interrupted him and he got up once more and moved to his desk. "Yes." He said touching the COM panel.

"Prefect... we are receiving an incoming transmission on the secure COM you told us to monitor." The tech spoke. "Prefect... it's coming from a High Coven ship and not one of our own."

Keleru looked up at Pusintin with questions in his eyes. Pusintin shrugged his broad shoulders and shook his head. Keleru touched the panel again. "Route it here Lieutenant." He spoke.

They waited while the connection was made and then the face of the Immortal Phy'iad became very clear. His Immortal features did not equate to pleasant in the least. Pusintin stepped forward quickly with a snarl of anger. "Phy'iad you idiot... you were told not to use this channel unless it was absolutely necessary!"

"It is necessary you fool!" Phy'iad snorted.

"Watch yourself Immortal!" Keleru began to speak. "You are..."

"I do not fear you or your supposed super soldiers Keleru'Puat!" Phy'iad snapped. He saw the surprise on Keleru's face. "Yes old man... I know your name! Did you think I took nothing when I left the High Coven to strike out on my own! I know all about you and what you do."

"What do you want Phy'iad?" Pusintin snapped. "Is your mission complete?"

"My mission is complete Lycavorian traitor!" Phy'iad spat. "I have the Elf Queen... and I want more than what we originally agreed upon! Double in fact!"

"Do not think to blackmail us Phy'iad!" Pusintin barked. "You..."

"I'm only securing my future!" Phy'iad hissed vehemently. "I will need it after what I have seen!"

"What are you talking about?" Keleru asked.

"Have you tried to contact the two Fleet Groups you sent against Kranek?" Phy'iad asked them. "The troops you put on the ground there?"

Pusintin looked at Keleru quickly and then he turned back to the clear holoimage of the disgusting Immortal mercenary. "The Admiral in command of the operation is not due to report in for another three hours on his success."

“Success!” Phy’iad barked. “He won’t report in three hours! In fact he will never report again because he is dead!” Phy’iad barked loudly. “All of them are dead! Both of your Fleet Groups are nothing more than scrap metal and space particles now! Your troops on the ground, well their blood runs like rivers in the two valleys surrounding Cha’talla’s settlement! Those that survive have escaped into the mountains of Kranek and are being hunted like animals by the forces on Kranek!”

“Impossible!” Keleru exclaimed.

“It is not impossible!” Phy’iad shouted at them. “We witnessed it with our own eyes! Your fleets were attacking when fifty ships I have never seen before, two of them using Quantum Fusion Drive Coils, jumped into the system! These two ships were huge... almost as large as a *LEONIDAS IIA*! And they began spewing fighters from their bellies like a nest of Fever Wasps! They had incredible weapons, incredibly powerful weapons, and they began blasting your ships from the stars one after the other! They were firing faster than I have ever seen a ship fire! When the vampire fleet arrived over Kranek and they quickly added their own firepower to the battle and it was over from then on.”

“The High Coven?” Keleru gasped.

Phy’iad shook his head quickly. “After what the witch Empress did? I doubt it! They must have been part of the insurgents that have been popping up. She was good at hiding the fact insurgents had become a problem for her! They most likely responded to the distress call from the boy Prince’s ship! The Lycavorians had many dragons on the surface too! Three dozen at least!”

“Dragons!” Pusintin panted. “Our intelligence told us there was only the Elf Queen’s dragon!”

“Your intelligence was wrong!” Phy’iad barked out. “The leader of the team that took the Elf Queen said there were no less than twenty dragons outside the settlement’s defensive wall, and from the transmissions he heard before they took her, there were at least that many on the way! They were stacking your vaunted troops up like firewood!”

Pusintin looked at Keleru. “The Coven dragons!” He hissed. “They must have gone with my nephew when he left Earth!”

“You did not tell me the full scope of your plans Pusintin!” Phy’iad snarled angrily. “You did not tell me you were going to attempt to assassinate the entire Leonidas family! You went after the entire family!”

“It was not something you needed to know!” Pusintin barked back at him. “You are a mercenary! Nothing more! You were being paid well for your part in this!”

“You did not tell me because you knew I would not take the job!” Phy’iad shouted back at him. “I am many things... but even I would not have attempted this knowing what you planned! They revere that man and his family! They worship him! Before you did this I would have had just him to contend with because I took his Elven Queen. He is but one man! But since you have killed him and others of his family... now... now the entire Lycavorian Union will begin looking for me once it becomes known what I have done! I will have to abandon my base and go into hiding now! Somewhere far away until the aftermath of what you have started is done! In order to do that I need funds!”

“You agreed to...” Pusintin began to speak but Phy’iad came to his feet.

“You will give me what I want or I will not fulfill the terms of our agreement!” Phy’iad shouted. “I will release the elf wench here in The Wilds and give all the information I know about what you have done to her! I understand she has quite the disposition when angered. And no doubt she will be infuriated at what you have done!” Phy’iad shouted. “I value my life over a broken female elf!”

Keleru placed his hand over Pusintin’s arm before he could answer. “Very well Phy’iad.” He replied quickly. He looked at Pusintin. “What we gain cannot compare to what he will receive. We need him to provide the catalyst for our plan. We will see to the transfer of funds.” He said as he turned back to Phy’iad. “Were you able to observe and record anything on these new ships?”

Phy’iad shook his head quickly. “They shut down the system somehow. Some form of Hypermorphic Resonation Dampening Field. All of our sensors were useless beyond five hundred thousand kilometers until we left the system. I dared not approach closer for there had to be upwards of a thousand fighters in the stars and I did not want to risk one slamming into us when we were shrouded.”

“Hypermorphic Resonation... that kind of technology is not possible. It doesn’t exist!” Keleru stated.

“To you perhaps...” Phy’iad snapped. “Not to the Lycavorians it seems!”

“What else?” Pusintin demanded.

“What else? That is not enough? I did not remain long enough to study the slaughter that was going on!” Phy'iad spat at them. “I am on my way back to my base! I have made several alternate Jumps to throw any followers off my tail if I was detected. I should return to my base within twenty hours! After that you will have three days to complete our business or I will remove the devices you gave me to inhibit her Mindvoice abilities and keep her from calling her Shi Viska. Then I will let the Elf Queen go with all the information I have on your part in this! What do you think the Union Senate will do then huh?”

“You will have your credits Phy'iad!” Keleru hissed.

“Make sure of it Kavalian dog!” Phy'iad spat.

Keleru snarled as the transmission ended and he looked at Pusintin. “What... what ships could destroy two Fleet Groups Pusintin?” He asked quickly. “Do they have that kind of technology?”

Pusintin shook his head. “None that I have been witness too.” He stated. “Laustinos has told us that the majority of the advances they got from this mysterious and magical ship they discovered on Lycavore have gone towards improving the lives of their people.”

“Would your brother have sanctioned development of warships that could do what Phy'iad described?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “He would never be able to get something of that nature through the Union Senate. That I know for a fact. He may have brought the instinctive nature back to the Lycavorians, but the Union Senate is made up of far more species that do not like war and do everything to avoid it.”

Keleru nodded. “Yes... the Folcani among them.” He said turning back to his desk. “It seems Laustinos will continue to be an asset. He would know about these ships or at the very least how they were built.”

“As Deputy to Deia he would have to know.” Pusintin agreed.

“Send a recon ship to confirm what Phy'iad has told us.” Keleru ordered. “They are not to attempt to enter the system, only get close enough to take long range scans.”

“And if they are discovered by a Lycavorian ship?” Pusintin asked.

“They are not to engage.” Keleru told him quickly. “The purpose of what we have done is not to start a war! We must avoid conflict at all times now. We have completed what we set out to accomplish with surgical strikes against his family. Nothing more! Once we have this Elf Queen For'mya and the elf parliament on our side we can negotiate from a position of power. Once we reveal what our ultimate goal is, they will have no choice but to listen to us and forestall any type of military response they may already be planning. That is where Laustinos will continue to be an asset. He can help convince those he has said are not happy with many of the things your brother was doing.”

Pusintin nodded. “No doubt they are already confused because we are not pouring across their borders in three or four locations.” He said thoughtfully. “I would guess that is why our outposts and patrol ships are reporting no unusual activity.”

“Destroying that Immortal pig Cha'talla was never part of the main plan... only an added bonus. Phy'iad has the Elf Queen so that phase is still very much intact.” Keleru spoke. “We did not... we did not anticipate losing two Fleet Groups around Kranek, or the troops on the ground but they are secondary to our main goals.” Keleru looked at him. “You sent older clones and those with questionable loyalty correct?”

Pusintin nodded. “Yes.” He replied. “I don't believe they caught on to that fact... most of them were from the Motershi Pride. They are not the quickest of the Prides and their Pride Leader has questioned you in the past.”

Keleru nodded his head. “Ah... well done Pusintin. Well done indeed. I will inform Dotatu Motershi of the great battle his Pride took part in and how, even in defeat they proved themselves to be formidable and loyal Kavalians.” Keleru moved around his desk to stare out the window in his office. “The first part of this operation we knew would be the hardest. Now we reign in our claws and insure that you are reinstated to the throne of the Union.” He looked at Pusintin. “Speak with Laustinos when you meet with him. Offer him a position within your ruling council or some silly thing like that. I have a feeling he will jump at the chance to remain on the forefront of events and though he is a traitor... his knowledge of the Union Senate and their nuisances could be invaluable.”

Pusintin nodded with a smile. “I will see to it.” He said.

Keleru met his eyes. “What else?” He said. “You have that look in your eye.”

“The Puma Bane teams have been unable to locate Nikkei.” He said. “It is as if she has vanished from KFI space. There are outstanding alerts for her at all spaceports but nothing has been reported in over a week since her disappearance.” Pusintin looked at him.

“She will turn up somewhere Pusintin.” Keleru said. “A young woman of her beauty will attract attention no matter where she goes.” He told him. “It was Athani’s and Jalersi’s curse as well. Sooner or later she will appear and they will take her.”

Pusintin nodded. “You are right.” He said. “I want to bring Kalis into some of our more confidential meetings. He will play a large role when we make our move against the Union and I want him to understand what he will face.”

“Of course. Have him report to me and I will begin instructing him.” Keleru said. “He is my grandson after all.” Keleru moved to his chair and sat down. “Admiral Menot reports that our plans for Hadaria are moving along quite well.” Keleru looked at him. “They have not discovered how we are using their own Jump Gates against them?” He asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “Not yet.” He answered. “I’m only deploying Fleet Groups one at a time to avoid stranding too many ships inside Union space if they suddenly decide to shut the Gates down when they find out. He has half a million troops already on the ground and nearly a thousand ships in the system right now. It’s getting crowded around Hadaria so I have begun shifting some of them back and forth to keep our true numbers from being discovered.”

Keleru nodded. “Tell Menot he is to proceed as planned.” He spoke. “But do so in a somewhat civilized manner. This Buonau woman struck me as the type to do whatever it takes to hang onto power... Menot can use that. The other one... Wiktor... she seemed more hesitant and cautious in her actions. She may need to be broken. Tell Menot he is there for a reason and that is because he is one of our smarter Pride Leaders and officers. He can still be replaced... so he needs to be mindful of his tactics.”

Pusintin nodded. “I’ve already told him this... but I’ll remind him again.”

“I want these Hadarian Healers to begin to move to our main field units within three weeks time.” Keleru said. “When they are not acting as nurses... they can entertain our troops in the field, but they are not to be harmed in any way by some fool soldier in rut! Make that very clear!”

“I will.” Pusintin said.

Keleru looked at him and saw him fidgeting on the balls of his feet. He nodded his head because he knew why. “Go Pusintin.” He spoke. “We can cover the rest after you have checked on your son.”

“Pusintin met his eyes. “I have another son... I can wait.” He stated. “It is not...”

Keleru held up his hand. “They are the only two of your four children with my daughter who have not betrayed you. In part because you have spent more time with them. They are fine and loyal Kavalian warriors of your father’s Pride and they are sons. Go. Whatever we have left to cover can wait until you discover what is going on.”

Pusintin nodded. “Thank you Keleru.”

“I had sons once.” Keleru said softly. “Now go!”

KRANEK IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

Eliani walked toward the rear of the *STRIKER DT* with the senior female medic from Admiral Esavorna’s forces that had come to the surface. She was exceptionally skilled and was very well versed in not only Lycavorian and Immortal anatomy, but also many other species. Eliani had helped her to arrange and set up the Blood Vats for the seriously wounded Immortals with ease for she had plenty of experience with using the same equipment within the Union. It also helped that the medic knew very well who she was and the fact that even within Coven space Eliani Leonidas was widely recognized as the second or third most powerful Hadarian Healer depending on who you talked to.

“...in the tanks for at least another ten hours.” Eliani was saying.

The medical officer nodded. “I was going to say another twelve just to be safe.”

Eliani nodded in agreement. "You'll be here and you can make the call. Most of those seriously injured are stable now. When the Spartans feel they have the strength to shift go ahead and let them, just keep an eye on their vitals."

"Shifting allows them to heal more deeply than what you can do?" She asked.

Eliani shook her head. "It is a pride and honor thing." She stated. "They won't shift unless they feel they are able, but once they do you'll notice their strength will return to them ten times quicker."

The young woman smiled with a glint in her eye. "I have never seen a Lycavorian shift in person." She stated. "It will be fascinating."

"Do not hesitate to contact me on the *SCIMITAR* if you have any questions." Eliani told her. "I can..."

They both turned when the rush of air passed over them and the silvery violet colored scales of Vincix settled to the ground not far away. The young vampire took note of Eliani's eyes as she gazed at the dragon and rider and she knew immediately that this was something else.

"I will contact you if I need you Princess." She spoke. "I hope to work with you in the future."

Eliani nodded and gave her a small smile as she turned and headed off. She turned her head back and watched as Malic's powerful form crossed the distance to her quickly, stopping in front of her and removing his helmet. Eliani had heard everything he had told Nyla when she had been injured, and she knew from experience that he and Nyla would now be connected even more deeply because she took so much of his blood to heal herself. She could feel the sadness of her vampire lover within the bond they shared but she shut it out quickly.

Eliani should have been enraged that Malic had allowed Nyla to feed so deeply on her blood. The wolf inside her should have been screaming out in anger that another woman now had staked a claim to the man she thought was her mate. The man she thought was her *anome*. Malic had bitten her yes, and Eliani hadn't hesitated in the least when she bit him back, sharing blood as he erupted into her body. Yet as she watched him move up to her, she didn't feel anger at him. She didn't feel anger at Nyla. She still loved them... yet for some reason she felt them slipping away from her and she didn't know why. She felt them slipping away from her but she did not feel like she thought she should feel knowing this was happening.

Malic stopped and dropped his eyes to her. "Eliani... what... what are you doing?" He asked.

"Andro needs me to return and treat my mother." Eliani said.

"Nyla needs you here." Malic said softly.

"I checked on Nyla already Malic." Eliani answered. "She is... she is going to be fine. Arydun as well. I need to return home now."

Malic stepped closer and his driftwood scent filtered into her nose. She gazed at him with her fern green eyes but she did not feel what she had always felt when she looked at him and could smell him so close to her. His words to Nyla on that field rang in her head, but once more she did not feel anger or jealousy. She just felt empty.

"You are my wife and mate." Malic spoke urgently. "I need you here. We need you here with us."

"My family needs me now Malic." Eliani spoke softly.

"Eliani I..."

Eliani stepped closer to him, inhaling deeply of his scent, but still not experiencing the familiar sensations sweeping through her as she had before. She placed her small hand on his broad chest and looked up into his eyes. "I heard... I heard what you told Nyla Malic." She said softly. "She was in such pain she couldn't block it from me, and you were so overcome with worry that your shields came down almost immediately."

"I was terrified I would lose her!" Malic said. "I... I was terrified we would lose her!"

"But you cannot deny that she came first in your thoughts." Eliani said.

"Eliani... I... I love you both." He said firmly.

"Do you Malic?" Eliani asked him gently. "Or do you think you love us both?" He began to reply but her fingers came up and went to his lips and she shook her head. "I... I am not angry Malic. I could never be angry with you. Or with Nyla." She shook her head. "I think... I think I just need time to try and figure this all out."

"So you are leaving to do it?" He demanded his voice rising slightly.

Eliani looked at him. "Yes." She stated with conviction. "I feel that with everything that is happening... with my father..." Eliani choked up for a moment and he moved to pull her into his arms but she placed her

hands on his chest and held him away. "I need to be with my family Malic. My father is dead... one of my mothers may be dead as well. Another has been taken from us. It is too much! I need to focus and..."

"You cannot focus here?" Malic asked. "With us... with Nyla and me. Your mates? You cannot focus with us?"

Eliani looked at him and dropped her arms from his chest. "You and Nyla are part of why I feel this way Malic! Your words to her... what happened between you! I can't just dismiss that Malic!"

"Why not?" Malic hissed. "It... it does not change how I feel for you Eliani! You are still my wife and mate!"

Eliani stepped back from him now and shook her head. "Yes... yes it does change things Malic, and you know it. It changes what I feel... and that is what I need to think about. To understand."

"What is there to understand?" Malic asked. "We are soulmates! *Anomes!*"

Eliani shook her head. "We... Malic that isn't possible. If that were true... if that were true then how could you have told Nyla what you did? If you were my soulmate... my *anome*... you could not have told Nyla what you did!"

"I could not let her die!" Malic shouted.

Eliani nodded. "I know." She said softly. "And that is why I need to leave and go home. I need to be with my family and try to sort all of this through. My family needs me... Andro needs me now."

"You can do that here!" He spat. "With us! We can sort through it together! You do not have to leave!"

"No... this is something I need to do myself." Eliani told him as she began backing up towards the *STRIKER*. "Take care of Nyla. I will be back Malic, I will be back. And then we will decide what to do about the future."

Malic reached up to grab her but she sidestepped his hand and turned to run for the *STRIKER* before the tears came. He watched as she moved directly into the arms of her sister Zarah and Lucia as the ramp rose. He watched as the ship's engines grew in power and then it began to lift off.

Malic watched all this and wondered why he suddenly felt relief that she did not stay. Relief that she did not press him more on what happened.

And Malic wondered why her soft willow and peach scent no longer tickled his nose as it had before.

KRANEK ULU ARIZONA

Miranda walked evenly onto the bridge with E'dira beside her as she had been for the last dozen or so hours. After Zaala's outburst it was pointless to try and hide the growing desire and feelings between them. The entire bridge crew had seen and heard this and no doubt by now it had already made its way throughout the entire ship. Within seconds after Zaala announcing that to all who could hear, Miranda Lorian found she was not in the least bit ashamed. She had denied herself too much for far too long. Having Zaala and Steven, Janon and now E'dira all around her had instilled that sense of family again. And it was even deeper than it had been before. Having Androcles Leonidas say what he had said pretty much announced to all where Miranda stood in the larger scheme of things. There were very few men and women who were considered a part of the Leonidas family that were not actually blood related, General/Colonel Daniel Simpson and Lieutenant Governor Tarifa being the most prominent. Miranda Lorian had now been elevated to a similar status by Androcles's words, and it was something she embraced completely, just as she now embraced her growing desire and love for the stunning Drow elf who walked beside her.

While it was the same for E'dira, she still held a large amount of fear in her for what Miranda would discover. Would she accept E'dira as she was, or would she shun her and turn her away? E'dira knew it had to happen soon, for she could not stay on this ship if Miranda turned away her affections. Better to discover it now than to discover it after she had fallen more in love with her than she already was. The problem now was trying to find a few hours alone with her so that they could discover each other.

"We have recovered the last our of aircraft." E'dira was reporting to her. "What minor damage was done to the ships of our Attack Wing has already been fully repaired as well. The *SCIMITAR* and her remaining Strike Wing have departed for Earth and *NORMYA'S LIGHT'S* FG will arrive in two more hours. Admiral

Thodias must have contacted them before the attack. Or Prince Androcles did as he was returning to Earth. Steven reports we have eleven damaged fighters but we are ready to depart ourselves.”

Miranda nodded. “Good.” She stated confidently. “Let Colonel Randall know that I want all the damaged fighters fully repaired by the time we get back to Earth! We...” It was a useless order Miranda knew and one that E'dira probably would not pass on. Miranda was in an angry mood at what was going on around her and she wanted to go with the team to rescue Dysea. She wanted to go with them and take out her anger on those who would hurt the people she now considered her family. She met E'dira's amber eyes. “That was a stupid order wasn't it?” she asked softly.

“You are the Captain Miranda.” E'dira told her. “The Colonel will know this and...”

Miranda stopped walking and turned to face her, gazing into those beautiful amber eyes. “I'm not going to hide what I feel E'dira.” She said softly. “Not for you... not for what is happening now. I've held in my feelings for too long as it is. Too much has passed me by because of it. The others I expect to say what you just said... but not you. I need you to be brutally honest with me.”

E'dira's amber eyes twinkled in the light. “It was a stupid order.” She stated with poise.

Miranda nodded. “Thank you.” She said. “Forget that I...”

“Captain Lorian!” The Sensor Chief turned from her triangular shaped consoles. “Captain our lateral sensor array just detected a concentrated subtronic scan of our hull.”

Miranda and E'dira both turned and looked at her. “Source?” Miranda barked.

“Admiral Esavorna's ship Captain.” The tech answered.

E'dira was already moving to her tactical station and she replaced the Lycavorian who had been sitting there. Her hands danced across the consoles and she nodded. “Confirmed.” She echoed. “A twenty second subtronic scan of our hull.”

“The effects of the GWG have dispersed enough to allow that?” Miranda asked.

E'dira looked at her. “Either that... or the sensors on these Coven ships are stronger and more advanced than we first thought.”

“Your opinion Chief?” Miranda asked.

“They are more advanced Captain! The scan was concentrated and precise. Within five micropulses Captain. Not exactly something you would expect after we scrambled the entire system unless their sensors were more advanced than the Kavalians and shielded somehow from residual effects of the GWG.”

“E'dira?” Miranda asked as she moved to her chair.

“I agree.” E'dira answered instantly.

“Shit!” Miranda swore loudly. “Well... we'd be fools to think they haven't developed good equipment over the last two decades. What is the name of the Captain of the Admiral's ship?”

“Drdanu.” E'dira answered. “Lirur Drdanu. His ship is the *BEL'LA D'VENORSH*. The *Honor of Silence*.”

“Get him on the COM!” Miranda snapped as she settled into her chair. “I don't like people taking pictures of our baby when she isn't expecting it. They'll get her bad side.”

Miranda saw E'dira and several others smile to themselves and she allowed herself a small grin as well. She had to in order to break the foul mood she was in at what was happening around them. It worked she saw and she began to relax a little more.

“The *BEL'LA D'VENORSH* is responding Captain!” The COM officer stated. “Captain Drdanu.”

Miranda watched as the man's face appeared in the holoimager and then expanded to include his body. He was sitting in his own command chair and they could see the rear of the *BLOODLETTER*-Class's bridge.

“Captain Lorian!” Lirur exclaimed. “I am honored! What can I do for you?”

“Captain Drdanu... considering what is going on at this moment you will forgive me if I do not ask pleasantly.” Miranda said leaning forward in her command chair. “Someone on the *BEL'LA D'VENORSH* just conducted a subtronic scan of my ship. You will have to pardon me if I skip the bullshit and demand that you surrender this scan immediately.”

Lirur looked at her from the transmission with an enormous amount of confusion as he came to his feet. “I assure you... I ordered no such scan Captain Lorian.”

“Captain... the sensors on my ship are far more advanced than anything you have ever seen.” Miranda told him. “In fact... my entire Attack Wing is more advanced than anything the High Coven has. You know we

exist now... when most of the universe does not. I could tell you what color your pee is the next time you take a leak if I wanted too. Please do not take me for a fool. The *BEL'LA D'VENORSH* conducted a twenty second subtronic scan of our hull and I must ask you to return that scan to us and delete it from your logs and databases.”

“Captain Lorian... I have no idea what it is you are talking about!” Lirur stated quite indignantly. “I gave no such order and I resent you implying that I did and that I am lying to you.”

Miranda came to her feet now. “I really don’t care what you resent Captain.” She said. “I am not in a particularly good mood right now as you no doubt understand. I will only ask one more time and then I will contact Androcles Leonidas. I can guarantee you Captain... if I have to do that... then Androcles will order your ship destroyed. He is not a forgiving person. And if we destroy your ship... we’ll end up having to destroy the rest of your forces as well. Do not think for an instant we cannot do it Captain. We were already well on our way to beating the fur off the Kavalians before you arrived! I do not wish to do that considering the gains we have apparently made up until now. In fact it would be a downright shame.” Miranda met his eyes. “However... I will do it... and I won’t blink when I give the order.”

Lirur turned to the side in the transmission. “Do a diagnostic of our sensor logs!” He barked. “Full spectrum! Has anyone accessed the arrays since we have returned from the surface?” He turned back to Miranda. “You will find Captain Lorian... I am a man of my word! I would not endanger anything that Admiral Esavorna has begun and...”

“Captain...!” The voice carried through the transmission causing him to turn once more. “The port side dorsal array was accessed six minutes ago from the Astrometric compartment! A subtronic scan was ordered and executed sir!”

Lirur’s face twisted into an angry snarl. “Confirm that!” He barked.

Miranda turned to look at E'dira. She left her chair and came to stand next to her quickly. “He didn’t know.” E'dira whispered to her.

“You’re sure?” Miranda whispered back.

“I have seen enough men and women lie in my lifetime, and then get caught in those same lies.” E'dira said. “He did not know.”

“It’s confirmed Captain.” The voice spoke from within the transmission.

“Who ordered such a scan?” Lirur snapped.

“Captain Micardo sir.” The voice replied. “His command codes initiated the order.”

Miranda and E'dira both saw the look of disdain pass over Lirur’s face clearly as she shook his head and muttered something they could not hear in the ancient vampire language. They watched Lirur turn fully to someone off to his left. “Get Micardo up here immediately! I don’t care where he is! Lock out his command codes from the main computer as well! Did he encrypt the data?”

“Negative Captain!”

“Then delete it!” Lirur snapped. “Delete the main log and every signal trace that it was ever conducted!” Lirur turned back to face Miranda and E'dira. “I must apologize Captain Lorian. It appears the Admiral’s senior aide feels he is above the regulations I have in place on my ship! A situation I will remedy upon seeing him I assure you!”

Lirur’s head turned once more and they heard the voice again. “It’s deleted Captain. I took out the Main Root log and all paths to that file. It never existed.”

Lirur turned back to the transmission and began to speak but Miranda cut him off. “I am indebted to you Captain Drdanu and I sincerely appreciate your compliance with my request. After what we have been through here together it would have been a failure of the greatest sort to lose that.”

Lirur drew himself straighter. “The Admiral is my superior officer and a friend Captain Lorian. I have served with him for nearly nine hundred years. I know why we are here and I know what our future could be like. I will take care of Micardo and I would be honored to fight beside you and your crew at any time.”

Miranda looked at E'dira quickly and then back to him. “As would we Captain Drdanu. As would we.” Miranda said. “*ARIZONA* out!”

E'dira waited until the transmission had faded. “That went rather well.” She stated evenly but with a trace of sarcasm.

Miranda nodded. “Yes it did fortunately.” She turned to look out over her bridge. “Operations Officer... order the entire Wing to engage their shrouds! We have to wait for *NORMYA’S LIGHT’S* FG to arrive... but we certainly do not have to provide anymore peep shows!”

“Aye Captain!”

“I’ll be in my Ready Room.” Miranda said. “Inform me when her Fleet Group arrives so we can get underway to Earth.”

“Understood Captain.”

Miranda looked at E’dira. “Commander... would you join me please. I want to go over the after action reports from the Fighter Groups that arrived before we did.”

E’dira nodded. “Of course Captain.”

PHY’IAD’S COMMAND SHIP ENROUTE TO BELID

It had been a harrowing four hours that was certain.

Normya had taken the controls of the *SCYTHER*-Class Fighter with Cirith acting as co-pilot. As the landing bay doors had opened in the belly of the *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought, Normya had executed a whirling series of maneuvers to get them into position before the LRR arrived. As the doors opened fully, Normya had darted them inside, lifting fully into the bay under full Shroud barely missing the parked hulks of two High Coven fighters. A quick sensor scan determined that no one was in the bay and using the *SCYTHER*’s maneuvering thrusters she moved them quickly into a rear corner of the massive landing bay and set them down. The bay itself was practically void of any equipment except for the remains of several fighters scattered about. As she and Cirith were powering down the engines the High Coven Runner lifted into view and moved towards a far corner. When they had seen two Immortals dragging Dysea between them and laughing as they pawed her body in very intimate manner. It had taken Tir’ut to wrap his burly arms around his half elf/half wolf wife to keep her from leaving the *SCYTHER* and exposing them all. It took her several minutes to calm down once they had dragged Dysea from view, and another twenty minutes before she was thinking clearly enough to try and establish some sort of plan.

That plan had been simple and direct. She and Cirith would remain with the *SCYTHER* while Tir’ut and the five members of Cirith’s Commando team did a reconnaissance of the hanger deck and surrounding area. Tir’ut made her promise to remain on the ship with Cirith until they finished the recon, for if they were caught or revealed themselves in any way, all of them would be killed and all hope for Dysea would be lost. Normya’s conversation with Denali within Mindvoice had been cut off abruptly when Phy’iad’s ship had jumped. She had not been able to tell her brother much other than that they had made it on the ship and would go after their mother. Normya and Tir’ut knew that Denali and Cha’talla would come after them and Cirith had no doubts that her father would send a full force as well. What they decided they needed to do was rescue Dysea and then somehow get off this ship. Normya had to admit Cirith was a godsend to her. The much older vampire female who she now knew had wolf blood within her, had kept her composure and in doing so had reinforced Normya’s confidence as well. Cirith was an enigma Normya decided. If everything she had told them up until now was true, and Normya had no reason to doubt it for she could detect no lie with her wolf nose, Cirith was a paradigm, a model of what should have been many years ago. That she was extremely intelligent was without question in her manner and the way she spoke. Her dark, surreal beauty could easily challenge her mother Isabella in its perfection. She moved with grace and confidence in everything and Normya could not deny the sense of assurance that this brought to her. This confidence and assurance is what kept Normya’s reckless wolf nature in check and she knew it.

The rear ramp was down on the *SCYTHER* and this is where Normya sat cradling the Immortal SA80 in her hands. They had the proximity sensors set to go off if anyone not wrapped within the shadows entered the bay and it allowed them at least some peace of mind. She turned her head when Cirith returned from the cockpit carrying a simple emergency container of water and two ration bars. As Cirith squatted next to her she held out one of the bars.

“They do not taste very good... but they are nutritious.” Cirith explained.

Normya didn't hesitate and tore open the wrapping and took a large bite of the bar, not realizing her own hunger until just then. "I've eaten... I've eaten worst." She said between chews as Cirith smiled and bit into her bar.

"Flight School?" She asked.

Normya looked at her and nodded. "Escape and Evasion School." She told her. "Six weeks of hell with only what we could scrounge together in the field."

Cirith nodded. "Ah yes. I know it well." She stated. "Ours was only a week longer, but no doubt they taught us the same things as pilots about getting captured." Cirith looked at her then. "Forgive me... perhaps not everything. Having to deal with being captured by Immortals is not something I had to face."

Normya allowed herself a small smile. "Cha'talla is changing that." She stated proudly.

Cirith dropped into a lotus position as she got the opening she wanted and was most curious about. "How... how did you... the half elven daughter of King Leonidas become the Blessed Wife to the son of Cha'talla?" She asked with honest amazement. "I know he is... I know he is only half Immortal... and our sources spoke of the possibility of him and Esther having children... but we never thought it could actually happen. And now... now we see you as their first born son's Blessed Wife. It is a position of great influence within not only vampire society but Akruxian as well as I'm sure you know." Cirith shook her head slowly. "How did this happen?"

Normya grinned shyly. "I was about to become dinner for a Bancorik." She said. "If it was not for Tir'ut I would be dead right now."

Cirith's eyes grew a little larger. "A Bancorik?" She gasped in shock. "How... how did you manage that?"

"It's a long story." Normya said. "Suffice to say... Tir'ut saved my life and as the days and weeks went by and I saw what they had built on Kranek... as I saw that they were nothing like what we had been told they were like, I surrendered to the feelings that had been growing within me for Tir'ut."

"You looked beyond their outer appearance then?" Cirith asked.

Normya nodded. "You have never... you have wolf blood in you but you have never used your wolf skills have you?"

Cirith shook her head. "I am more vampire than wolf... but then again I have never really tried to use the skills my wolf blood might have given me. My grandmother was wolf... but she and my grandfather hid this fact from others so that they could be together. She was only able to teach my father small things in regards to his wolf blood even though my grandfather often did encourage her to show him more and more."

"So you can shift?" Normya asked.

Cirith shook her head. "I do not know. I have seen my father do it twice... but I have never tried. I have concentrated mostly on my Mindvoice and vampire skills so that I fit in more easily among those on Usu Ozeib 7 or wherever we were at the time."

Normya leaned closer to her very much welcoming the opportunity to put aside the anxiety and worry she felt for her mother, if only for a few moments. "A female wolf... we have... we have the ability to know if a man will make a suitable mate by his scent."

Cirith nodded. "Yes... I know that." She said. "My father was able to tell me some things about my wolf blood."

Normya nodded. "Sometimes... not all the time but sometimes, a female wolf will realize by smelling a man that he is truly the one. The one they will spend the rest of their days with. They won't be able to get his scent out of their minds no matter what they do. It was like that for me when I met Tir'ut."

Cirith took another bite of the ration bar and looked at the deck. "I have... I have never been with a man." She stated plainly. "In all my years I have never known a man's touch."

Normya looked at her with wide eyes. "But you are... you're over three thousand years old!" She gasped.

Cirith nodded with a grin. "Amazing isn't it?" She said. "My father thinks I have taken a few men into my bed but I never have. I have had four lovers in my lifetime and all of them have been other women... which was taboo within the High Coven under my mother even though she practiced it herself!" Cirith snarled gently. "I have never longed for a man's touch... not since... not since your grandfather and he died before I had the opportunity to meet him and perhaps begin a relationship."

“You said you were meant for my grandfather and my grandmother.” Normya said. “You... you don’t feel that way towards her?”

“I did at one point.” Cirith answered. “Through the years however... that has drifted away. Now I have an enormous respect and admiration for her that was only amplified when we discovered that Veldruk had held her all of those years and she never gave up hope.” She looked at Normya. “I believe we could be fast friends if the opportunity arose and I had the opportunity to show her that we are not like those who victimized your sister. I would truly like that... but it is up to us to now show you and your family that we are not like my mother and sister. I have every intention of doing my best to see that happen.”

“That is why you... why you allowed me to fly us into this ship isn’t it?” Normya asked.

Cirith nodded. “My father does not outwardly show it... but he has a great deal of belief in fate and destiny. He would not have come this far if he didn’t. He has never wavered from the path he is on and he has instilled this in me. We had not planned on coming forth just yet, but when it reached us that my mother was coming here we decided it was time. We did not know what she had planned or we would have stopped her somehow.” Cirith looked at her. “I cannot begin to apologize enough for the horror your sister went through at their hands, all I can do is promise you I will stand beside my sister Narice in bringing Dante and Yuri to justice. She is your brother’s Blessed Wife now, and knowing Narice she has embraced that to its fullest. She always was different.”

“You have never met her?” Normya asked.

Cirith nodded. “Oh I’ve met her before... but she does not know the truth... though I imagine Toria Dellion will change that. As will your brother. I hope to be able to spend time with her and perhaps become as sisters should be. It is a daunting task I know... but I will try regardless. I am not one to shirk from something I want.”

“No... I don’t imagine you are.” Normya said.

Cirith looked at her. “You are... you are holding up very well Normya Leonidas given what has happened in the last few hours. I know... I know how I would feel if my father was taken from me in such a way.”

Normya took a deep breath but no tears came. She had no more tears to shed and now all she cared about was getting her mother back and making the Kavalians pay for taking her father. “My father’s blood runs strong in all of us.” She said softly as she met Cirith’s eyes. “He is...he was a Lycavorian Spartan to his core. He would expect us... he would expect us to go on as he and our mothers raised us. Blood before all else he taught us. It means many things to us... but we all know most of all it means to make sure our family is safe and secure before we take our revenge. We know that is what our brother will do... and that is what we must do as well.”

“What your father did those years ago?” Cirith said softly. “Freeing Canth’s Mindvoice presence and then going to Enurrua and destroying Chetak for taking your mother from him? Rescuing her the way he did? It made quite the stir among the people I associate with. The devotion and love... to destroy an empire for a woman? It is truly amazing.”

“He would do it for any of our mothers.” Normya said proudly. “Just as we do not distinguish who our mothers are... he never distinguished between his wives and mates. He loved each of them with all that he was and that is why we are so close as a family.”

“What will your brother do Normya?” Cirith asked suddenly.

“I honestly don’t know.” Normya said. “The only one of us who could actually come close to figuring him out is Zarah. She might have an idea. No doubt Sadi, Carisia and Ne’Veha know for they are his wives and mates. I know that as much as he always complained about being compared to father and he kept telling everyone how he was not our father, he loved him far more than even we realize I think. None of us have ever seen him truly angry... and I don’t believe even the *Feravomir* knows or can contemplate what he will do.”

Cirith looked at her intently for several moments and then reached over to take her hand. “We will succeed Normya Leonidas.” She said. “Our destiny does not lie on this path and we...”

They both turned at the soft rustle of clothing and they saw the five Coven Commandos and Tir’ut unwrap the shadows from around themselves as they came through the active Shroud shield that was still engaged. They scrambled to their feet as all of them began walking up the ramp and Normya moved quickly to

Tir'ut who wrapped his arms around her tightly. He leaned over and firmly nuzzled her two inch high elven ear, making her melt against him more, and her head against his broad chest.

“Lancy?” Cirith spoke as the senior Commando walked up to her. “What did you find?”

“We moved five decks up Lady Cirith.” The man spoke in reply. “The *SCYTHE*'s sensors were accurate. There don't appear to be more than five hundred or so Immortal's onboard. Our portable sensors did not detect any until just below the detention cells on deck twenty-seven.”

“That is where they have taken my mother then?” Normya asked.

“That would be the safe assumption Lady Normya.” Lancy answered turning to look at her.

“I could not sense her within Mindvoice *Il darthirii kal'daka*. Not even a whisper.” Tir'ut spoke. “They must have placed powerful psychic dampeners around the cell she is in.”

“This means they have been planning this for a while.” Cirith stated quickly. “Your father and mothers were regarded as some of the most powerful Mindvoicers in the universe Normya, even by us.” Cirith said. “They would have to make some serious modifications in order to block out the tremors her presence in Mindvoice would make.”

“Series Nine Dampeners.” Lancy spoke looking at Cirith.

“Yes.” Cirith said. “And the Kavaliens were able to get their hands on the blueprints for the Series Nine when all of those senior officers defected at the beginning of the war. They must have placed them around the cell she is in.”

Normya shook her head quickly. “Even with psychic dampeners Tir'ut or I should still be able to feel something from her Cirith. She helped us to establish a link with Tir'ut's brother on Belid and it made us more attuned to each other. If Tir'ut and I can't feel her then they have done something else.”

Cirith looked at Lancy intently. “There is only one other way that they could hamper her Mindvoice abilities to this extent.” She said.

Lancy didn't flinch from her gaze. “It would explain a lot Lady Cirith.” He stated. “And they did raid our facility on Ugmor Five six years ago.”

“What?” Normya asked insistently.

Cirith looked at her. “The Mindvoice ship on Nuwaroa. It is only a third of the size of the ship your father found on Lycavore, but inside that section were several rooms that prohibited all forms of Mindvoice abilities.”

Normya nodded quickly. “Yes... Dragon Mountain has these rooms as well.” She stated.

“Dragon Mountain...” Cirith exclaimed as her eyes grew wider. “Of course! All these years and we have never been able to pinpoint the location of this ship and your father hid it right out in the open! The mountain on Sardinia, the one where your dragons live. That is the Mindvoice ship itself! That is why she attacked it!”

“Dragon Mountain is the most secure area on Earth.” Normya said. “No one who is not supposed to be there will ever leave the mountain alive. Between the defenses Avi has put in place and the dragons living there it would be an impossible task.”

“Avi?” Lancy asked looking between the two women.

“The ship's Avatar Lancy.” Cirith said. “The MV ship on Nuwaroa had indentations in parts of the hull that appeared to be alcoves of some sort. Alcoves for...” Cirith looked at Normya now her eyes wide. “Wait... if you know of the alcoves then... your ship's Avatar still functions?”

Normya nodded. “Yes... he functions quite well in fact.” She replied. “He had a hand in our schooling as we were growing up.”

Cirith's face was animated and she smiled. “Oh I would like to meet him one day.” She said. “He must be fascinating! To have so much knowledge of the Pralors and...” Cirith stopped and shook her head. “I'm rambling now... forgive me! My mother... she was working on a device that she had constructed from plans she discovered in one of these rooms. It was based on the same concept as these rooms and could completely inhibit Mindvoice abilities and block the unique resonance of an individual until it was undetectable. It also had the side effect of effectively neutralizing a male wolf's aura. That was not foreseen... but for some reason my mother was very pleased about it.”

Normya's emerald green eyes grew a little wider. “Then this device... it acts like the Shrouds on our ships then?”

Cirith nodded her head. “Yes... in essence. It is a tiny capsule inserted into the base of the person’s skull. It acts in the same manner as the rooms on the MV ships. It is unlikely the individual would even know it is there unless they knew of it. It is easily inserted just beneath the skin and leaves no residual presence.”

Lancy looked at Normya. “The Kavs raided our research facility on Ugmor Five six years ago. They stole quite a bit of equipment and research during the raid. Among what they stole were two containers that housed twenty-eight working models of this device. We called them Static Inhibitors.” He said.

“How... how do you know all this?” Normya asked.

“We... all of us were members of the *Venorik Elghinn* Normya.” Cirith answered. “And all of us were very good at our jobs.”

“Can this device be removed?” Tir'ut asked.

“By a surgeon yes.” Cirith answered. “A Hadarian could easily remove it as well.”

“We need to remove it!” Normya exclaimed. “We have to remove it!”

“And we will *Il darthirii kal'daka*.” Tir'ut told her. “We must move carefully however.”

Cirith nodded. “Lancy... they have to be operating this ship on remote. Which means that many systems are probably not working?”

Lancy nodded. “That’s a safe bet.” He answered. “We saw some of their handiwork on decks twenty-nine and thirty. Power transfer conduits running along the floors and down the corridors.”

“Tir'ut... what do you know of this Phy'iad?” Cirith asked.

“He is one that we have an extensive intelligence file on.” Tir'ut answered. “And we have learned much since Lynom infiltrated his base.”

“Lynom?” Cirith asked.

Tir'ut nodded. “My brother. We have been in contact with him since *Il darthirii kal'daka* came into our lives. When the Kavalians attacked we were planning a mission to retrieve him and nearly three dozen female elves they were holding as... as slaves from his base on Belid.” Tir'ut told her.

“That is most likely where he is returning then.” Cirith stated.

“We still don’t know why he would take my mother.” Normya stated.

“*Il darthirii kal'daka* is correct Cirith Esavorna.” Tir'ut spoke. “Phy'iad is many things but he would not come all this way to simply kidnap Dysea *darthirii ilhar* as a slave. We know he is working for the Kavalians. The frigate we saw was Gareld’s ship. Gareld was working for the Kavalians so it stands to reason Phy'iad is as well.”

“So he probably means to turn her over to the Kavalians at some point in the future.” Cirith said.

“The Kavalian attack on Kranek was possibly to cover his actions as well as kill as many of your family as possible.” Lancy spoke.

“What would they want with my mother?” Normya asked.

“Ransom perhaps?” Cirith said.

Normya shook her head. “My... my father... Andro would never allow that.” She stated. “Taking her hostage to try and squeeze something from us would only result in Andro declaring war on them. I know that much about my brother. He is more steeped in the tradition and honor of family than the rest of us. It has to do with the pureness of his blood. If the Kavalians think to use her as some sort of tool to get what they want it will not work. If they knew enough to conduct these operations then they would know enough to realize that. Andro will never deal with them! Never! Not even for our mother. Our father... our father was the same way. And if they harm her he will unleash the Union military on them without question or pause.”

“Then there is something else they want her for.” Cirith said. “They would not knowingly open a second front with the Union while they are still technically at war with the Coven.”

“Let us stop trying to determine what they want Dysea *darthirii ilhar* for and begin to discover a way to get her and ourselves out of here.” Tir'ut spoke.

Cirith nodded. “Lancy... we can’t find her in Mindvoice so let’s go to the old fashion way. Recalibrate the dorsal sensor array to pick up elven blood and let’s find out exactly where all of this Phy'iad’s little toy soldiers are lurking about.”

SPARTA KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

“...have recovered four hundred and nineteen bodies at last count from the rescue team commanders on the ground.” Selene had arrived less than thirty minutes ago, refusing to allow Lynwe to travel to Sparta with Aihola alone, and all three women looked as if they had been up for many hours, which all of them had been. Layna was on board the PROMETHUS with their husband helping him to manage the massive number of forces that were now in Earth’s sector. Helen had asked her to conduct the briefing because no one else was in a condition to deal with the Netnews and their many questions.

Selene had become the consummate politician and as Prime Minister of Earth she was considered inside that very small circle of family of friends of the Royal family. Selene knew this was not something that any of them needed to deal with at the moment, but she also knew it needed to be done to assure the many trillions of citizens of the Union that they were still very much in charge of things. The podium was set up in the huge cafeteria one floor below the ADHOC command center that had been established. Many of the tables and chairs had been pushed aside and rearranged so that several hundred chairs now occupied nearly one half of the room.

Selene looked up at the hundreds of faces and dozens of video drones that fluttered around the room at every angle. “The rescue teams are proceeding at a very slow pace so that no additional injuries are caused if survivors or bodies are found.” Selene took a deep breath. “Nine ERT Teams from both Athens and Sparta are on the scene, along with nearly two full companies of *Durcunusaan* regulars and roughly twenty dragons. To keep from having to use heavy machinery, our dragon brothers are doing most of the heavy lifting and they are rotating their numbers accordingly so that they do not strain themselves. I can not...” Selene stopped for a moment and composed herself, brushing her hand across her forehead. “I can not stress to all of you enough that we are working as fast as possible in our rescue attempts, but we need to balance that with care. At the moment, Prime Minister Deia and Queen For’mya are believed to have been inside the Senate Building with an estimated one thousand two hundred others when it was destroyed. Aside from that... we have no other information and I will not speculate in any way until we know for sure. As I said in the beginning... I will take questions now, but understand this... I will not guess or assume and that is something no one should do. More often than not rumors only hurt.”

Selene’s steel blue eyes searched for and found Me’alla in the crowd of so many and she pointed at her. “Me’alla?” She spoke. “You have a question?”

Me’alla was taken aback for she had not expected to be called on as a junior reporter with a smaller network. She stammered something quickly as she rose to her feet. “Prime Minister... Prime Minister Selene... can you confirm... or perhaps provide information as to why the KFI has perpetrated such a broad and extensive plot against the Union?” Me’alla asked. “And I have a follow up as well ma’am.”

Selene shook her head. “Why the KFI has done this we do not know.” Selene answered. “We are not at war with the KFI in any way, shape or form, in fact to the best of my knowledge, we were conducting trade talks with them right here in Sparta.”

“As a follow up Prime Minister Selene... the Kavalian embassy is now surrounded by upwards of five hundred Union Spartans and a smaller number of *Durcunusaan* troops.” Me’alla spoke quickly. “Are there plans to assault the embassy at this time?”

Selene shook her head quickly. “No such action is being planned and I cautioned anyone who wanders too close to the embassy itself. We have secured the area around the Kavalian embassy for their security as well as our own.”

“Has there been any contact from the ambassadors inside?” Me’alla continued quickly.

“None that I am aware of at this time.” Selene answered. “Anything else?”

Me’alla looked stunned at this direct attention as did many of the reporters who began looking at her in not so favorable terms. “Could this be a response... could this be a response to the defection of Princess Athani?”

“Athani Leonidas chose to defect of her own free will.” Selene spoke calmly. “She found something she desired more than the life she had. She was not forced or coerced in any way. I find it hard to believe the Prefect of the Kavalian Federation would use that as an excuse to conduct the terrible actions they have this day. Here and elsewhere. Thank you Me’alla.” Selene turned to another and pointed to an elven male. “Yes.”

“You... you just said elsewhere Prime Minister.” The reporter said. “Are you saying that the attacks here in Sparta are part of some broader operation by the KFI?”

Selene turned to the side and looked at where Riall stood off to her left. He met her eyes and finally nodded his head causing many of the reporters to press closer in some manner as Selene turned back to face them. “We have discovered the Kavalians struck four other locations here in Sparta. Director of the Krypteria Armetus is in critical condition in this hospital as we speak. He was tortured horribly in an operation that began some hours before the main attacks. Governor Panos’s home was also attacked, but he was thankfully not home and is right now under heavy guard. Head of the Spartan Senate Dilios was injured in an attempt on his life at his home, but he is recovering quickly. It also appears the Kavalians struck the home of Panos’s senior aide Major Janae. She is currently missing at this moment.” Murmurs of disbelief were sweeping through the gathered reporters as Selene took another breath and continued.

“We have also discovered through other means that a systematic attack against our Drow outposts throughout The Wilds was also conducted and the casualties from that we are still trying to determine.” Selene looked across the assembled reporters. “When Androcles took his brothers and sisters from Earth little more than a week ago, they headed to Kranek. This is where Queen Dysea and Princess Normya have been for several months. They have been there, establishing contact and making fast friends with a tribe of Akruxian Immortals led by the former High Lord Captain Cha’talla.” The explosion of questions was expected and Selene simply waited for several long moments as they all tried to shout one another down. She looked at Riall and he shrugged his shoulders minutely. Selene of course had known where Dysea was, and her skepticism had been very high at the beginning. As she read the reports with Lynwe that were coming in over the past weeks, Selene could feel that skepticism slipping away. Dysea was one of the most intelligent and careful woman she knew, and if she had developed a unique trust for Cha’talla and his Immortal tribe then how could she doubt it.

As the roar of questions quieted Selene lifted her hand for silence. “Before you begin to fire off your many questions I will tell you that at this point I know as much as you. This was a very quiet event considering who we are talking about, but from what I have read and seen in just the last few minutes before this briefing I can honestly say it is amazing. Unfortunately... the Kavalians discovered what we were doing on Kranek as well and they conducted a massive attack against the Immortal settlement there. Reports have not yet come in and communications is nonexistent at this time due to some sort of interference. We have dispatched forces there after getting the approval, but until contact is reestablished we will know nothing. Yes?” Selene pointed to a female reporter in the front.

“Prime Minister... this is... this is amazing.” She stammered.

Selene nodded. “Indeed it is.” She responded. “What is your question?”

“The... the Immortal Cha’talla is still alive? The High Lord Veldruk’s Captain?” She asked.

Selene nodded once more. “I believe that is the position he once held... and to answer your question yes he is still very much alive.” Selene pointed to another. “You?”

“Prime Minister... is this prelude to a Kavalian invasion of Union space?” The man asked.

Selene turned as Riall stepped up next to her and leaned over in front of the podium. “There have been no indications that this is the case. Our many border units have reported no incursion by Kavalian forces anywhere oddly enough. This type of action usually leads to an all out attack... but at this time our military is on high alert and nothing we have indicates a Kavalian attack is in progress or even coming soon.”

“But the coup on Hadaria Admiral Riall... that...”

“The coup on Hadaria that unlawfully displaced Queen Anja was done with Kavalian support, but it was driven by political enemies of Queen Anja, not by anything else.” Riall answered. “At least none that we are aware of at this time.”

Riall stepped back quickly as Selene pointed to another. “Yes?”

“Where is Queen Anja Prime Minister?” The man asked. “It was reported that she had left Hadaria over twenty-four hours ago. Is she aware of what has happened here?”

Selene nodded. “Queen Anja is currently in an unknown location as per the protocols established by General Vengal and the *Durcunusaan*. As far as I know she is aware of what has transpired here on Earth. How could she not be?”

“Then there is no truth to the accusations made by the Hadarian Elder Council and the Arch Ministry?” The man continued. “The accusations that ultimately helped them to dispose her. The accusations of her impropriety.”

Selene’s eyes bore into the man, as did many pairs of eyes in the room. “Normally I would not dignify that question by even responding to it.” Selene snarled. “But I will do so now because I need an outlet for my anger at what has happened. You have just become that outlet you stupid little man!” Selene leaned forward as her voice rose in anger. “How dare you sir! How *vithin* dare you! If you were half the reporter you should be, you would not even be asking that question! The accusations made by that *upae* Buonau were never true! Anja proved that and it was broadcast throughout the entire Union! You dare question her love for the King? Even now, when those so called accusations have been proven false? When it has been shown that this was all a part of a plan they began to expose Buonau and Wiktor and all the others who supported them as traitors to their own people?” Selene glared at the man, her normally steel blue eyes changing to cobalt blue in anger now. “My suggestion to you sir would be to sit down and shut the fuck up!”

The room was silent for a long moment as the man sat back down quickly, feeling as large as a peanut and knowing that the eyes of many of his comrades now looked at him in distain and disgust.

“Anja is safe!” Selene spat. “As are the younger Leonidas children who are now with their grandmothers in a secure location!” Selene shook her head. “We have... we have suffered the loss of our King! We have suffered the loss of so many lives this day... quite possibly our Prime Minister and one of our Queens! We can not contact two others, and one lies in this very hospital gravely injured and who will for all intents never recover, for her *Anome* is now dead! All this and you ask me if it is true that Anja Leonidas, quite possibly the Queen who has loved the King the longest, debased herself before other men and cheated on the King with these men.” She looked at all of them. “Is that what we have come to now? Digging for rumor and falsehoods to report when they are not true? I have heard and seen history vids of a Press Corp that did this in the late 20th and early 21st century. Is that what we have come too now? I give you facts and you ask me about lies. Disgusting!”

The two hundred plus chastised men and women were silent for a long moment as Selene stared at them. One of them, a woman who was braver than the rest lifted her hand. Selene’s eyes fell on her.

“Yes?” She growled.

“Prime Minister... if we have... if we have no communication with Queen Dysea and the King’s children on Kranek... how do we know that this is happening there?” The young elven female asked.

“I said we did not have contact with them.” Selene said. “Androcles Leonidas however, he does have contact with his brothers and sisters and his mothers. That is how we know.”

“Prince Androcles is not with them?” Another reporter asked coming to his feet in easily noticeable surprise. “Forgive me Prime Minister Selene... you said the Crown Prince is not with them?”

Selene shook her head. “Androcles is the reason we found out about the attacks on our Drow outposts and the attack on Kranek. Androcles went to Iraruzu to rescue the woman who is now his wife and mate. She is a Drow warrior.”

This brought out much more murmurs among the Press Corp and more hands shot up. Selene took a deep breath and pointed to a young Lycavorian. “Prime Minister... if the Crown Prince is not on Kranek then where is he? Shouldn’t... shouldn’t he be here on Earth and preparing to assume leadership of the Union.”

Selene tilted her head slightly. “Who is to say he is not.” She commented. This caused many to look at each other with wide eyes and then back to Selene.

“Are you saying he is already here Prime Minister?” The same reporter asked.

Selene nodded her head. “Androcles Leonidas is here on Earth yes. At this moment I believe he and Elynth are seeing to the remains of their fathers.”

EARTH

SPARTA

WESTERN MEDICAL CLINIC

Background Music: He lives in you; Lebo M

It was quiet now as night began to fall.

There were hundreds of men and women gathered around the clinic being kept at a safe distance from the building by Union Spartans who had set up barricades of medium sized lifters and makeshift fences. It was quiet as hundreds were holding candles and even praying softly as all of them remembered their King in their own way. There were several Netnews channels on location recording everything that happened, but even they were being respectful and subdued. It was this reason that almost no one spotted the obsidian colored dragon as she swept in from the east just above the tree tops. As the massive shape whisked over the top of several hundred people, many of them began coming to their feet and watching as the dragon flared its wings in the courtyard outside the entrance to the clinic directly in front of General/Colonel Simpson and half a dozen other *Durcunusaan* troops. The Netnews people knew something was happening for they had not seen General Simpson exit the building since they had arrived within minutes of the King's body being brought here. The Western Medical Clinic closest to the Royal Villa had been built specifically so that dragons could enter the building easily. So many hatchlings had called the villa home for so long that it seemed only prudent to be able to treat and examine them as they grew. All of Torma and Isheeni's children had been treated here at one point or another.

Andro was dropping to the ground before Elynth had come to a complete stop and lowered herself to the dirt. He turned just as Danny moved up in front of him and waited while Andro removed his helmet. The hundreds of men and women surrounding the building then saw the two men come together and suddenly they knew something big was happening.

Danny squeezed Androcles in his arms, holding the back of Andro's head as more tears came to his eyes. "I tried to get to him boy." Danny gasped. "I tried to get to him in time but he was too damn fast! He was always too damn fast! I'm... I'm sorry Andro... I was too slow! I loved him Andro! I loved him so much!"

Andro closed his eyes as he felt his adopted uncle's arms embrace him and he squeezed him back just as hard as he could. No matter where in his life he had been, his Uncle Daniel was always there beside his father. His father had always said he had only one true brother, and the man holding him now was that man. Between his father and uncle Andro had gone to his Agoge more prepared perhaps than any man in the entire long history of the Spartan training.

"And he loved you Uncle Daniel; more than you know" Andro said softly. "You... you have nothing to apologize for! Nothing!"

Danny pulled back and took Andro's head in his large hands. "He... he tried to draw them away from us." Danny stammered. "He tried to draw them away from us so we could get away. He was trying to protect your mother... protect all of us."

Andro nodded. "I know."

"We... we emptied the clinic." Danny spoke softly.

Andro looked at him oddly. "Uncle Daniel... you are not breathing through your nose." He looked around at the gathered *Durcunusaan*. "None of you are."

Danny nodded. "There was so much plasma residue in the air from the mortars that it burnt the glands in our noses. I can't... I can't smell shit! It's getting better but right now I can't smell anything but burnt plasma."

Andro looked at the entrance to the building behind his uncle and then back to him. "I need... I need to do this alone Uncle." He said softly. "We need to do this alone."

Danny nodded slowly and stepped back from him. Andro turned back to look at Elynth and he saw her golden colored eyes focused on the doors ahead of them.

Sister? He asked.

Elynth nodded her massive head slowly. *I... I am ready.*

Andro took a deep breath and moved for the door with Elynth directly behind him. Every member of the *Durcunusaan* present could only stand and watch as the Prince and dragon that many of them had seen grow into adulthood enter the building to say goodbye to their fathers. Danny looked around as Elynth's tail disappeared into the building and he could see that not one citizen of Sparta that had been surrounding the clinic for the last few hours was sitting. All of them were now standing as word spread quickly among their ranks that the Crown Prince had just entered the clinic they were watching and praying outside of.

The interior of the clinic was dimly lit. Whoever had been inside was hastily moved to another location when the *Durcunusaan* had first arrived. It was a very simple set up on the interior. The examining rooms were

all in the center of the clinic with waiting rooms and lounges on all sides. Andro and Elynth moved past the reception counter and paused as the large doors slid to the side to allow them entry into the main area. The dividing walls had been torn down so that Martin and Torma could rest as they had lived the last twenty plus years. Together. There were four gurneys in the center of the main examining room, one of which held Martin Leonidas wrapped tightly in white linen. The other three held the remains of Torma, covered in a reverent sort of manner with half a dozen sheets. There was no blood staining the sheets, no blood on the floor, and Andro knew that his Uncle would never have allowed this. As he stood looking at the two most influential minds in his life the tears he had thought long expended came again, albeit on a much smaller scale. He moved closer, Elynth beside him, her huge muscular form comforting to him as it had always been. He could remember Torma lifting him within his talons to gaze across the landscape of the Spartan mountains while Elynth bounced on her father's back or just below him. He could remember the times his father and Torma spent several hours and days bestowing upon them the unique and sometimes utterly impossible maneuvers they had learned as a Bonded Pair. For a dragon the size of Torma, nearly seven metric tons and over twenty meters in length, to see him fly was the most beautiful thing to Androcles when he was growing up.

Andro stopped in front of the gurney that held his father, the linen tightly wrapped around his six foot two frame. They had died protecting those that they loved Andro knew. It was the most glorious way any Spartan could die. Defending life and honor and the future of those who would carry on their names. His father was considered barely more than a young adult by many because he was just over three thousand years old, a drop in the bucket compared to some of the Lycavorians that lived. Torma was still a child in dragon years at less than a thousand years old. Yet they held more influence and awe than anyone Andro could think of. They were spoken of in the same voice, the same breath. In the twenty plus years they had been together Andro did not think they had spent more than a few days apart, with the exception of the several weeks when his father went after his mothers. Even then Torma and him were connected and he knew right where his Bonded Brother was. Andro inhaled deeply of the air within the room as he tried to catch a remnant of his father's minty scent.

Andro's eyes darted to where Elynth's massive head was sniffing the covered remains of her father and he opened his mouth to speak.

Ah my son!

At that whisper within Mindvoice her golden eyes instantly cut to him and they stared at each other. Andro reached for his head in pain just as Elynth's wings twitched wildly and her head dropped to the floor.

Andro! Her voice reached for him as he staggered to her side.

Know all that we are! The deep voices echoed within Mindvoice painfully, battering their shields as nothing ever had. Voices that were joined together as one. *Know all that we know!*

Andro... it... it hurts! Elynth cried.

Elynth! Andro screamed out as he reached for her.

Know all that we know! The litany of two voices bellowed again within Mindvoice. *It falls to you now!*
All of it falls to you both! You know what must be done!

Andro shook his head back and forth, his hands squeezing his temples as he staggered once more against Elynth's side, their minds awash with visions and memories and voices that were not their own. Places and events that they had never seen or experienced yet were now part of them. Andro turned his head from where he leaned against Elynth's side, his wide azure blue eyes falling on the corpse of his father on the table before him.

They... they will... Andro began.

Hate us! Elynth cried.

Only for a time! The voices answered. *It is the way of the Talon Guardians! And it must be done now!*
Why?

It falls to you both to discover that now. Act as Talon Guardians now! Act as you know you must act! We will always be with you, but now we must go!

NO! Andro and Elynth screamed together.

You know what must be done! Make us proud as you always have! Make us proud!

Andro gasped as the pain was instantly gone from his head, and he wobbled on shaky legs leaning against Elynth as her wings fluttered madly. She shook her massive head back and forth, her golden eyes blinking rapidly. She slowly turned her head to look at her Bonded Brother as he rose shakily to his legs and feet. She drew her own legs under her, her muscles contracting with shaky certainty and she too staggered

slightly at the unbelievable surge of power that had just swept through them, brushing aside their Mindvoice shields as if they weren't even there. Andro staggered into the table that held his father, reaching out to steady himself on the gurney and his hand and fingers touching his father's body. His head whipped around to look at the body wrapped in the white satin linen, his eyes wide.

Elynth's head whipped around, her golden eyes wide as well. *ANDRO!!!* She screamed out.

The massive wave of tremors within Mindvoice are what caused Danny and the other *Durcunusaan* troops to turn towards the clinic. Those among the hundreds of men and women who were not Lycavorian could not understand why suddenly every Lycavorian or elf who had sat back down once Andro went inside the clinic now stood up once more, their attention on the medical clinic below them. It began as a mild tremor, almost conversational in nature and it only grew from there. As it grew in power, even those who were among the lower tiers of Mindvoicing ability began to feel it, and it was reaching outward. The explosion was a muffled one, but Danny's eyes grew wide in horror as the entire center of the clinic heaved upwards in a ball of flame and blue heat. As Danny opened his mouth to scream out for his brother's son, the entire structure of the roof appeared to simply blow outward and the massive shape rose into the air as if shot from a cannon. Glimmering Dragon Armor wrapped around both of them, almost glowing in the light of the flames and a psychic shield matched by only one other in the universe, radiant in the myriad of red and orange colors that licked at it and streamed behind it connecting them to the building.

The trumpet that followed was a full throated roar of anger, of hate, of defiance. Elynth rolled over instantly, Andro secure in the saddle on her back, looked at the building below her and with another trumpet she cut loose with a single minded and devastating stream of flame tinged super heated breath. Her aim was unerring and the power unquestioned as nothing below her was left untouched by the scorching stream. Almost immediately, Andro's hands lifted into the air on either side of his body and two basketball sized psychic projections of power formed. This was not something Danny had ever seen though he quickly deduced what Andro was about to do.

"BACK! Everyone back!" Danny screamed to the many *Durcunusaan* troops. "Get back! Get back now!"

As if he was throwing the two psychic projections with great effort, Andro heaved first one and then the other ball of psychic power straight down into the center of the medical clinic. Upon impact it almost appeared as if the entire building lifted up off the ground. Elynth's huge wingspan kept them directly over the top of the clinic and she continued to pour her flame laced breath into the facility. Any glass that remained blew outwards and was instantly melted. Metal twisted and crumbled under the insanely intense heat and destructive power of the psychic projections. The walls of the clinic caved inward, the remains of the ceiling following quickly as Andro sent a third projection hurtling at the clinic.

"*Son vada carians!*" Danny muttered as he skidded to a stop and turned to watch the funeral pyre that Andro was creating. The flames reached high into the sky, licking at where Elynth hovered with powerful and precise sweeps of her wings, but causing no harm against the psychic shield that surrounded her and Andro. The heat from the pyre that was once a building was intense, but all of them were far enough away not to be bothered by it. Many civilians that had been watching backed away in fear at what they were seeing though they were in no danger in the least.

Nothing would survive this.

Danny knew well that Elynth could direct and hold her flame stream almost as long as her mother Isheeni, which was well over an hour. Added to that was the incredible heat generated by her breath and nothing would survive of the clinic but cinders. They were burying their fathers in the way only they could. Danny knew that Martin and Torma had coveted their positions as Talon Guardians of the dragon species, and he had spent many hours and nights just hanging out and drinking beer with his brother, learning of the dragon ways and what these things meant to him. They were the only non-dragons to ever hold the title of Talon Guardian in the entire history of the species. Easily the last thirty thousand years since that was almost as old as Arzoal was, and she knew of none for fifty thousand years before that. It was why Martin and Andro had embraced it so completely. This was the way they were honoring their fathers and what they had done.

This was the way they were saying goodbye.

**PROTECTORATE *CRUSADER*-CLASS CRUISER
TALON OF JUSTICE
TWENTY-THREE MINUTES COREWARD OF THE PERSEUS ARM
UNEXPLORED SPACE
53587 LY FROM THE WILDS**

Dutkne sat in the command chair on the bridge of the *TALON*, his eyes watching the dual view screens intently. This was the first time he had been coreward of the Perseus Arm in his nearly five hundred years of life and he did not want to miss any of it. The stars and surrounding space did not appear as dark as from where they had come and though he knew it was probably a visual manifestation and not real, he still thought it was very profound. As Dutkne sat in his chair he contemplated everything he had learned in the last few weeks and tried to bring it all into perspective. To know that the descendants of the bloodline of Sumar and his first born son Resumar lived was astonishing enough. To learn that this son had fathered many children already and that all of them adhered to the honor and instincts that were inbred in the Lycavorians that followed Dutkne and Wayonn was extra special. Wayonn had been right. Their people were not lost anymore, and the roughly fifty billion Lycavorians spread across some seventy planets that called the Protectorate home would soon be reunited with those trillions of Lycavorians who had fought and forged their way out from under High Coven slavery to live free and proud. Technologically the Protectorate and the Vanari and half a dozen other races that lived within the Outer Perseus Arm of the Galaxy were slightly more advanced in some areas, but after spending the last week studying what his grandfather had given to him, he had discovered that the Protectorate and the other races were behind in others.

It appeared that the Protectorate, the Vanari and many of the other races he knew of had concentrated on making the most efficient engines and shields they could considering the vastness of the space they crossed. Their shielding was far superior in many respects, but they had never devised Shrouds as the High Coven and now the Union used with such expertise and tactical advantage. The Protectorate had fewer weapons on their ships, but they were more far powerful; while the Union and Coven ships had many powerful weapons on huge ships that would dwarf the *TALON* in size and even ability. Dutkne had determined that the *TALON* could stand even with one of these *LEONIDAS II* ships in the data his grandfather had given him, but only for a short period of time. Then the sheer size and scope of weaponry the ship could bring to bear would destroy them. And that did not include the many different styles and types of fighters that almost everyone seemed to have. And if they had developed newer engines and weapons systems as his grandfather suggested, based on intelligence and technology gained from City Ship 41, the Union ships would be very formidable indeed. Still... the *TALON's* unique design and abilities made her a very deadly opponent should it ever come to that.

Dutkne was far more interested in the Flat Space Technology that allowed them to use these so called shields most of them wore on their arms. Flat Space technology was something developed and used exclusively by the Pralors themselves, and even with his grandfather's help, the ability to forge this technology was not something the Protectorate had. When combined with the improbable ability to command these beasts his grandfather called dragons, it was almost too incredible to believe. Dutkne just couldn't believe these animals had the ability to Mindvoice on a sustainable level as Lycavorians nor could he comprehend the fact that they were highly intelligent. He would believe it if he saw it without a doubt, but until that time he clung to his realistic mentality that told him it was impossible.

"Pretty amazing stuff isn't it?" Drey's voice snuck through the fog of Dutkne's own thoughts and he turned.

Drey stood beside Nirilo, both of them holding data pads in their hands, while Nirilo also held a large mug of steaming hot Vanari tea. Dutkne grinned. "You are reading it?" He said feigning surprise. "I will have to inform Caia of this development. Does she know you have taken up reading?"

Drey chuckled and nodded his head. "I even get her to read to me. I'm a very simple man and it's one of the reasons Caia loves me."

"Yes... well I never understood what she saw in you anyway. You are simple." Dutkne replied with a grin.

“You might think differently when you find the mate of your dreams!” Drey stated proudly.

“Bah!! I don’t want to know what your dreams entail Drey!” Dutkne barked. “If it has to do with my sister I would probably end up thinking differently about you.”

Drey grinned and waggled his eyebrows. “You just might.” He said.

Dutkne shook his head but was smiling. “I will need to talk to my sister about what she has turned you into. And yes... it is very amazing information.”

“The Vanari have been trying to develop technology based on something similar to this Flat Space expertise.” Nirilo said. “We have never been successful. And your people wield it on a daily basis!”

Dutkne shook his head. “Not *my* people.” He stated. “The Union wields it on a daily basis. I find it just as fascinating as you do Nirilo.”

Drey looked at him. “The closer we get Dutkne... the closer we get the more excited Caia and I become. To meet... to meet the descendants of Sumar and Resumar...”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes I know. For all the apprehension I feel at entering this area of space, I can’t help but feel the same amount of exhilaration.”

Nirilo nodded. “This is as far as our people have ever come.” He said thoughtfully. “We never traveled beyond this point and I find myself frightened and animated at the same time. We...”

All of them turned when the sensor operator’s station began to loudly buzz. The woman leaned forward in her chair, her face focused on the two screens to her front as her hands danced over her consoles.

“Contact!” She barked. “Bearing one four six three point seven!” She turned to look at Dutkne. “It’s a Vanari V9 Interceptor Dutkne!” She exclaimed.

Nirilo and Dutkne both turned to look at one another at the same moment. Nirilo stepped around the chair and looked at her. “Confirm that!” He barked.

“I already did sir!” She answered. “It’s confirmed. A Vanari Rublinos Engineering V9 Interceptor. Minimal power signature and cruising at point two sublight.”

“Out here?” Nirilo exclaimed.

“This is the only certified safe travel corridor.” The woman answered. “At least up until this point. We have no charted corridors after this. None of our ships have ever been out this far.”

Dutkne got to his feet slowly as Drey moved to the tactical station. “Scouting mission Nirilo?” He asked.

Nirilo shook his head. “Not out here.” He replied. “The Board of Regents has forbade travel beyond the Perseus Arm unless fully vetted and authorized by them. And certainly not with a V9. Those are the most sophisticated Cadre transports we have.”

“Signs of damage?” Dutkne asked.

“Negative sir. She’s running very low power... almost as if she is trying to avoid us detecting her.” The woman answered.

“Open a channel for me Dutkne.” Nirilo said. “I will find out what is going on.”

Dutkne turned to the COM officer without hesitation. “Do it.”

“Vanari frequency 74621.9.” Nirilo spoke. “And you can leave the channel open.”

“Ready.” The COM officer answered.

“This is Cadre Senior Colonel Nirilo of the Seventh Shield Cadre Legion.” He spoke. “I am speaking to the Vanari V9 currently on course 24923.8. State your reasoning for being outside the authorized zone of operation.”

“I could ask the same question of you Senior Colonel.” The female voice replied almost immediately.

Nirilo stepped forward with wide eyes when he heard the voice. “I am attached to the Protectorate *CRUSADER*-Class Cruiser *TALON OF JUSTICE* by order of the Vanari Board of Regents. I doubt you could say the same. Identify yourself!”

“Has it been so long that you do not know the voices of your own sisters Nirilo Re Mydala?” The voice, a different female this time, answered with a touch of humor.

“Arduri?” Nirilo gasped.

“Give me a picture Naesta.” The voice said.

The holodisc image came alive then and in it was the image of two Vanari females. They were sitting behind the advanced controls of the V9, both of them with flowing white/silver hair and stunning green eyes

that contrasted incredibly with their Brandeis blue skin color. They both wore the standard uniforms of the Vanari Commandos, dark gray fatigue like jumpsuits with added body armor across their very prominent chest areas. There were many Vanari females who were amply endowed in the chest department that Dutkne had met through the years, and it appeared that Nirilo's sister were such females. Nirilo stepped even closer to the transmission, his eyes wide.

"It has been many months since we have seen you last brother." The female of the left of the screen spoke with a brilliant smile. "You are looking fit."

"Arduri what... Naesta." He gasped looking at them. "What... what are you doing out here? The... the Board of Regents has forbidden travel out this far."

"Once more we could ask the same question of you Nirilo." The second woman asked from the pilot's seat. Her name was Naesta and she was the youngest of Nirilo's three sisters, two years younger than Arduri who sat next to her and four years younger than Caliria. She appeared to be very young, or at least younger than the one on the left, yet she had the same look in her stunning green eyes. It was very hard to determine the age of any Vanari due to their blue shaded skin, and you could be talking to one who was several hundred years old, or one who was only in their early twenties. This bothered some species but since Lycavorians were no different in trying to determine age by someone's looks, it was only another reason in Nirilo's book why they should be close allies instead of neutral antagonists.

"Do not joust with me Naesta!" Nirilo snapped. "I am fully authorized by the Board of Regents! I am the senior Liaison to the Protectorate! Where they go I go."

"Then the question we should be asking is why *they* are out here?" Arduri spoke once more, her green eyes flashing.

"Why are you not on Austrova preparing for your Joining Ceremony?" Nirilo demanded.

His sister Arduri snorted in a very unladylike fashion. "My Joining Ceremony is still one week away and what we are doing is more important!" She spat. "I am also still an officer in the Sixteenth Shield Cadre Legion Nirilo! I am still a Vanari Commando... as is Naesta!"

"Does your future husband know you are out here and not preparing for the Ceremonies and Celebration?" Nirilo demanded once more.

"Cruor Ahn Vernalo is doing what he does best!" Arduri snapped at him, her green eyes flashing angrily even in the transmission. "He is mingling with the politicians and spreading his seed to all the willing puppet daughters of those same politicians before we are joined! Do not think I don't know what he is doing... for I should be doing the same thing! Besides... he is not authorized to know what I am doing. At least not until after we are joined!"

"I am not aware of any directive of the Board of Regents that allows you to be this far outside Vanari space sister." Nirilo spoke.

Twenty-five year old Arduri Re Mydala, for all her five foot two height, was perhaps the most vocal and outspoken of his sisters and without a doubt the most adventurous when it came to military matters as well as sexual matters. She was not afraid to go after what she wanted, and that included men and women alike. She was well known among the Vanari people as the only Re Mydala daughter who had taken part in the Celebration of Hundreds not once but three times. Every three years an entire week of coming together with strangers in every conceivable sexual situation that could happen, hours of dancing and fine food and wine. All to celebrate their history and tradition. Every Vanari took part in the Celebration when they turned sixteen for it was part of their history and culture, yet Arduri was so adventurous she had done it three times. The Vanari people were not shy about their sexual nature, due in part because at one point in their history they were a mono-gender species. They had relationships with both males and females and it did not matter to them. What mattered to them was the essence of the mind and the commitment of the heart. Whether it be with a female or male, they could reproduce no matter what based on their physiology. Some relationships were politically driven while others were driven by love and emotion. All that mattered was that they reproduced children to carry on the Vanari way of life. All of his sisters had received much more attention than others at the Celebration of Hundreds when they participated, for there were very few Vanari who did not want to join with a Re Mydala. Their family had been on the forefront of Vanari politics and military history for over two millennia and their parents and his sisters continued that history every day. Himself included, Arduri, Naesta and Caliria

were some of the finest trained Vanari Commandos within the ranks. Their name and skill always drove them to leadership positions, and none of them had ever shied away from this.

Cruor Ahn Vernalo had taken Arduri during the last Celebration of Hundreds and had been so smitten by her that he had pursued her for the last three years. With the help of their father Coren, Cruor had finally pressured Arduri enough to agree to them becoming joined. It was an event that was the buzz of their homeworld Austrova and their home city of Nvtia, and had been for several months now. It always was when it involved a Re Mydala.

“We have a directive Nirilo.” Naesta spoke now. “And we are following it!”

“A directive that brings you out well past the borders of Vanari space in one of our most sophisticated ships?” Nirilo stated plainly. “Naesta... you are on the cusp of entering a territory of space that we have never traveled! There is a reason for that!”

“Yes we know the reasons!” Naesta answered. “Our directive is more important!”

“Show me this directive!” Nirilo demanded now. “Transmit it to me now! You are my sisters and I love you both... but I can not believe the Board of Regents would sanction this type of action.”

“We have the backing of the Board of Regents!” Arduri snapped. “That is all you need to know! We are acting with their blessing!”

Nirilo shook his head. “I don’t believe you Arduri. You know as well as I that father and The Committee of Defense Regents would have to approve any travel this far outside of Vanari space. Father would not give that approval!”

“Your father might not Nirilo Re Mydala...” The new voice spoke. “But I did.”

Nirilo’s eyes grew even wider as the new female moved into the transmission. He immediately bowed his head in reverence. “Mother?” He gasped.

Devra Re Mydala looked at her oldest child in the transmission and smiled. She appeared only a few years older than his two sisters, but was in fact nearly nine hundred years old. It was obvious where Arduri and Naesta got their surreal beauty from and she squatted between them now looking just as beautiful.

Devra Re Mydala was the youngest female to ever be elected to the Vanari Board of Regents and one of the most wildly popular Regents in Vanari history. She had joined with his father Coren at a young age, soon after her first Celebration of the Hundreds, where they had coupled for three days straight so taken with each other that they were. Coren had been a much older three hundred and fifteen years when they were joined, but to Devra he was a worldly Vanari and at that point in her life he had shattered all the preconceived ideas she had of Vanari males. She had spent the next several hundred years at his side learning the intricacies of Vanari politics and acting the part of beautiful wife. Coren had encouraged her to take part in the political process when he saw the intelligence she had and the crowds she could draw when they were out in public. Devra had done this to please him, but quickly found she had a knack for weaving through the sometimes muddled arena of Vanari political life. She quickly rose through the ranks and with Coren’s full backing she had been voted to the Board of Regents at the tender age of five hundred and twelve.

What Coren Re Mydala did not realize was that he had opened a new door in his Vanari wife, and it was a door she walked through quite happily. Her popularity grew far faster than Coren’s and part of him resented this. It also didn’t help that on many major policy decisions, Devra chose to vote with the more moderate and open members of the Board of Regents and not the older and more ingrained ones. This was a point of contention for Coren for quite a number of years until Devra decided she wanted to finally have children. It was the female who made the choice to have children and Devra had finally made that decision. Nirilo was the first, followed shortly after by Caliria. Coren relished and loved Nirilo but was somewhat cool to Caliria because of her lustrous black hair. In Vanari culture, females with black or dark hair were looked down upon in many ways though they were not different. Dark hair on males was considered normal, but for a female to have dark hair it was considered a gene defect and had been for millennia. It did not preclude those females with dark hair from anything, indeed many had proven themselves over the years, but it was still an ingrained attitude that females with anything other than white/silver hair were somehow inferior. Even after Arduri and then Naesta were born, Caliria did not receive the same attention from her father that the rest of them did. In many ways this angered Devra and Nirilo and his younger sisters and they went out of their way to include Caliria in everything they did, much to the chagrin of their more traditional father. Ultimately this attitude by Coren is what led Devra to end their near nine hundred year union, and it propelled her to even further heights of political popularity

because of her strength in doing something that was not often seen in Vanari culture, and unheard of within Vanari politics.

Devra looked at her son in the transmission, taking note of the young Lycavorians she knew as Dutkne and Drey standing beside him. She had never met them but she knew who they were from her son, and she knew he held them close to his heart as friends. She knew what role Nirilo played for the Board of Regents when it came to the Lycavorians, yet she did not hold the same fears in regards to the Lycavorian people as they did.

“It has been two years since I have seen you last Nirilo my son.” She spoke with her trademark smooth smile of warmth. “Are you avoiding me?”

“Mother no... you know that is not true!” Nirilo hissed in his defense.

Devra’s green eyes twinkled in love and humor for a few seconds and then her face became serious. “Your sisters are operating with my directive Nirilo. Under my orders as a member of the Board of Regents.” She spoke.

Nirilo looked at her now. “Mother... what could you possibly be working on that would bring you this far out of Vanari space?” He asked quickly. “Does father know you are gone? Your security force?”

“My security force is with me... and I do not need to tell your father what I do Nirilo.” She spoke. “We are no longer joined and haven’t been for over a decade. I go where I want when I want.”

Nirilo looked at her. “Why are you out here mother?” He asked pointedly.

Devra sighed heavily and looked at Arduri briefly before turning back to him. “They have taken your sister Caliria. Your sisters and I... we are going after her.”

Nirilo’s eyes grew wider still and he stepped closer. “Caliria? Who has taken her? Why have I heard nothing about this?” He demanded.

“Orionis Pirates have taken Caliria from Uyama One. She was attending a summit of Cadre officers who have dark hair. It is a group of young officers that is pushing to have a dark haired female appointed to the Lower Board of Magistrates to better represent them.” Devra answered him. “The Board of Regents would not meet to vote on whether to go after them Nirilo. No matter what I did... we were deadlocked. Half of the Board agreed with me... the other half did not want to upset the balance that is struck between the Orionis Syndicate and the Vanari. I... I could not allow them to take my daughter! They... they have broken her by now and you know as well as I she will be sold into slavery. She won’t fight them for it is part of our cursed genetic upbringing not to fight the Orionis once they have broken us with their vile actions and chemicals. They have become so very good at it.” As Devra spoke her anger and distaste at what she was saying was very evident. “I secured the private agreements of thirty-nine board members and I issued a sealed directive to go after her. We have chased them out here, but they...”

“What?” Nirilo demanded even more urgently.

“They knew they could not outrun us... we have been chasing them for three days now and they could not lose us. When we got here, we had them cornered outside an Ion Nebula and... when they determined they could not get away from us they did the one thing I did not expect?” Devra said.

“What?” Nirilo asked.

“They jumped Nirilo.” Arduri answered. “They jumped past the Orion Spur.”

“What?” Nirilo gasped as Dutkne got to his feet now.

“Excuse me... Regent Devra... where did they get the coordinates to do this?” He asked. “No Orionis pirate is going to make a blind jump into unknown space, you know that as well as I.”

Devra shook her head. “I do not know... Dutkne is it?”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes.”

“I do not know.” Devra replied again. “We were trying to determine where they went when you arrived. We...”

Nirilo looked at Dutkne. “Dutkne... they...”

Dutkne didn’t hesitate in the least. “Bring them onboard.”

Nirilo nodded and turned back to his mother. “Mother... plot a course to join with us and use the port docking coupler!” He spoke.

“Nirilo... I can not ask you to get involved.” She spoke. “This... what we have done could very well jeopardize your standing with...”

“Caliria is my sister as well damn it!” He barked. “I have never cared what color her hair is and I will never care! I am not my father in that regard and I do not believe as he does! Now dock with the *TALON* so that we can figure out where these bastards have gone and we can follow them!”

“No one but you has ever set foot on a Protectorate ship Nirilo.” Devra spoke. “I did not think...”

“Regent Re Mydala...” Dutkne spoke stepped closer to Nirilo. “Your son is a friend to me and to the Protectorate. No other Vanari has set foot on one of our ships by Vanari choice. Not ours. It is your Board that has held us at arm’s length, not us. I offer whatever help we can give to you. I urged you to take it.”

“Mother... we have talked of this before. Dutkne and the Lycavorians are not like what father and the others say. At some point we are going to need to let them prove that to us!” Nirilo spoke.

He saw Arduri looked at their mother and smirked. “I told you mother.” She said. “We should have come to him first.”

Devra smiled as she looked at her and then turned to him. “We will see you in a few minutes my son.”

Devra relished in the feel of her taller son’s arms as he squeezed her tightly. She had missed him these last months. They stood in the large room that appeared to be some sort of lounge with several tables and comfortable chairs. One large table dominated the room and it was surrounded by high backed chairs as well. Devra had been amazed when they left the docking ring and were escorted by two burly Lycavorians through the corridors of the ship. For some reason she had expected to see something entirely different. She expected disheveled men with long hair, laughing and gawking at her and her daughters as they walked. Her security team was made up of six Vanari females; all of them superbly trained and exceptionally beautiful even by Vanari standards, but what they received in way of greeting was nothing what she had expected. The two Lycavorians were very well groomed with short hair and clean shaven. Though they were both armed, their weapons were slung across their backs. They did not blink that her security team was armed or that they carried their weapons in such a way that would provide instant use. Devra did not know if that was because they viewed them as friends or whether they simply did not fear the Vanari. The ship itself was not only immaculate in its appearance, it was a marvel of design and sophistication that the Vanari did not think the Lycavorians had yet achieved. Obviously they were very wrong.

Nirilo looked at his mother as he held her at arm’s length and she saw his dark eyes glimmer in happiness.

“You should have contacted me immediately mother.” He stated as he leaned over and first kissed her cheek and then gently rubbed their cheeks together in greeting. He glanced at Arduri and Naesta and turned to face them. “And you two should have made her contact me.” He said sternly.

Arduri chortled at her older brother with a smile and stepped into his arms, followed quickly by Naesta. Nirilo rubbed his cheek against theirs in the traditional greeting among Vanari that were family. He held Arduri’s hand as he turned and faced his mother. “I welcome you to the Protectorate Cruiser *TALON OF JUSTICE*.” He stated. “Allow me to introduce Director General of the Protectorate Dutkne.”

Dutkne stepped forward now and bowed his head to Devra. “It is an honor to finally meet you Regent Re Mydala. Nirilo has spoke of you often.”

Devra looked at Nirilo quickly and the surprise was evident on her face. She turned back to Dutkne and nodded her own head slowly. “Thank you General Director.” She stammered.

Dutkne rolled his eyes and shook his head. “Just Dutkne please.” He said. “My people have seen fit to change my title four times in the last five hundred years and I can not keep track of what my title is. Dutkne is fine please.” He turned and motioned with his hand. “I’m sure you know my grandfather Wayonn.”

Devra smiled brightly this time as the man stepped forward with his own smile. “Indeed I do.” She stated. “There are not many who do not know who Wayonn is, and like myself are in awe of him.”

Wayonn chuckled softly as he took her hand and bent over to kiss her back of her hand in greeting. “Ah... you are looking ravishing as ever Devra.” He said.

Dutkne motioned to the large table. “Please... everyone take a seat. We are... we are in somewhat of a hurry ourselves and perhaps we can help each other.”

Devra looked at Nirilo as he directed her to a chair. “Nirilo... what are you and your friends doing out here?” She asked. “I know that the Protectorate has not come out this far even though they are more daring than the rest of us.”

Dutkne looked at Wayonn as he sat down and he saw his grandfather shrug and nod his head. “They will discover it soon enough and it may be better if they are aware of it before it happens.”

Arduri took the chair next to her mother with Naesta on her left side and she watched as Nirilo took the chair on her right side. She looked first at her brother and then across to Wayonn before her eyes moved back to Nirilo. “What... what des he mean Nirilo?” She asked. “Before what happens?”

Nirilo looked at his mother. “Some things have taken place within the last few weeks... things we have discovered that will change the face of the Lycavorian people mother.”

Devra met his eyes. “What things?”

Wayonn leaned forward in his chair. “Devra... you are among a handful of your Board of Regents that are aware of certain things regarding the history of our people.”

Devra nodded. “Yes... I’m aware of that. You gave us a wealth of historical data scrolls on the Lycavorians and the Pralors to study and read Wayonn and only a handful of us have taken the time and interest to do that. It just goes to show we are not as open minded as many of us would like to believe.”

Wayonn shrugged his broad shoulders. “Be that as it may... our future is about to take a very different course I believe.”

Devra looked at him and then to Dutkne and Nirilo. Finally her stunning green eyes moved back to Wayonn. “Ok... I shall bite on the bait.” She stated evenly. “Would you care to elaborate?”

“Your Board of Regents is aware of the Pralors and what role they played in shaping the course of history for the Lycavorians.” Wayonn said. “I also gave to you information as to what our capabilities were when our ship crashed on Lycavore, and the condition of that ship.”

Devra nodded. “Yes... I know. Your advanced technology and your ability to use what you call Mindvoicing. I believe the technology of your ship is part of the reason the Vanari of the older caste do not trust you. You would not share this technology except for simple devices when you first arrived and colonized your homeworld.”

“The Vanari were far more advanced then they led us to believe Devra and you know that.” Wayonn spoke. “After our initial contact with your species things did not go well for many years.”

Devra nodded. “I know... and I would have counseled against what happened had I even been born. But that is neither here nor there Wayonn. We have gone beyond that now and while we are not friends in the manner many of us wish to be, we are certainly not enemies.”

“Mutually neutral antagonists.” Dutkne spoke from his chair. “Something I have never understood. We are not at war... we do not have adjoining borders... we have even collaborated on several operations throughout the centuries... but still we are not friends. We are neutral antagonists of each other.”

“I do not agree with the majority Dutkne... but that is the problem.” Devra said. “The majority do not trust your people for reasons which make no sense. I and others...”

“They do not trust them because they consider them too savage mother.” Naesta spoke quickly. “Too quick to violence and too quick to use military means to solve the problems they have! The way they dealt with the Alderbaran Raiders is the perfect example.”

“Naesta!” Devra exclaimed turning to look at her.

Dutkne shrugged his shoulders indifferently. “The Alderbaran Raiders were scum of the worst sort! A smaller offshoot of the Orionis Syndicate and fully sanctioned by them. They were capturing our transport ships and stealing trade goods meant for our trade partners. Some of them meant for the Vanari. They killed fourteen of my people! I asked the Orionis leadership to cease this action and stop supporting them. They refused.”

“The Protectorate obliterated thirty-seven ships with nearly two hundred thousand lives on them!” Naesta continued. “Then you destroyed their settlement on Tarkon Three. I’d say that was a little overkill wouldn’t you?”

Dutkne shook his head. “I warned them... they refused to heed that warning. Had they not killed our people I would have probably just added more escort ships to the trade routes to discourage them in their actions. I do not like conflict Naesta Re Mydala... but I will draw the line when it concerns the lives of my people.”

“I still think it was overkill.” Naesta snapped. “There were other ways to deal with them that did not involve wiping them out!”

Dutkne nodded. “Perhaps... but they would have led to only one conclusion and that is the situation the Vanari have with the Orionis Syndicate. It has gotten better through the years I’ll grant you that, but even to this day your Board of Regents turns a blind eye when Vanari females are captured and sold into slavery. I will not allow that to happen to my people! Ever!”

Devra reached over and placed her hand on Naesta’s arm before she could respond. Her daughter hated the Syndicate for their actions and she hated the fact that the Board of regents did nothing to stop it. As with other items, the Board of Regents did look the other way in this regard because the memories of the Vanari people’s bloody history during their escape from the Syndicate oppression was very fresh in some minds. Devra Re Mydala also knew the history of the Lycavorians as given to her by Wayonn in his data scrolls. She knew of the barbaric and brutal oppression they suffered under for so many thousands of years under the High Coven. It was a history that was known by only a few and Devra realized now that perhaps it was time for that history to come out so that her daughter and others understood why the Lycavorians were as quick to violence as she said.

“We have been trying to change that... but thousands of years of habit do not get tossed aside so readily Dutkne. Naesta is very passionate in that regard, but she still does not care for wanton loss of life. No Vanari does.”

Dutkne nodded. “That I do understand.” He stated. “But to demean us for our actions is also not the way to gain any friends among my people either. And if you wish to believe our actions towards the Alderbarans in some way reinforce your idea that my people are barbaric and savage then that is your decision. As much as I hate to resort to violence, even I know that sometimes it is the only course of action left.”

Naesta took a deep breath and nodded once. “Forgive me.” She stated.

“There is nothing to forgive.” Dutkne said. “You are entitled to your beliefs, however wrong I think they may be.”

“So what is happening now that makes you come all the way out here as if you are heading coreward of the Orion Spur?” Arduri asked now wanting to change the subject and keep her sister from losing her temper once more. She and Naesta shared the same distained for unprovoked violence and going further than needed. “That is where you are going isn’t it?”

Devra looked at Nirilo and then Dutkne. Her green eyes shifted back and forth between them and then to Wayonn before she reached into the small belt pouch she wore around her Vanari Commando Armor. She removed the data chip and passed it to Dutkne on the table. “We were able to extrapolate their course. We think.” She stated as Dutkne picked it up. “There have been rumors circulating in the back hallways that the Orionis Syndicate had found new... that they had found new customers for their slaves. Customers that no one could identify. Those same rumors indicated that these new customers were beyond the Perseus Arm. After chasing them out here for the last three days, I believe those rumors may be true.”

Dutkne picked up the data chip and plugged it into the console on the top of the table. A small holo star chart rose from the console and traced a blue line across the chart between the Outer Arm of known space where the Vanari system was, directly to their current location. He watched as the solid blue line became a broken blue line that ended directly where he had hoped it didn’t end. He looked first at Nirilo, then Drey and finally turned to his grandfather.

Devra leaned closer. “What is wrong?” She asked. “Why do you look like that? Nirilo?”

“Grandfather?” Dutkne asked.

Wayonn sat back in his chair. “We would be fools to think that it would never happen.” He stated. “They had expanded as much as possible coreward and it stands to reason they would have started spaceward of the Orion Spur and the Perseus Arm.”

Naesta leaned forward now. “We know this is where the other branch of your people are. The Lycavorian Union it is called. Do you look like this because it is Lycavorians who are trading in slaves now! Trading in our sisters? In our sister Caliria!”

Wayonn got to his feet and turned to look at the large view window behind them. “Martin Leonidas would never allow slavery of any type to take place within the borders of the Union young lady!” He spoke firmly but with a touch of anger in his voice. “Believe me I know. He has squashed more than one group who attempted to partake in the trade of elf females!”

Devra's eyes grew a little wider as she sat back in her chair and items of interest flashed through her mind. "Leonidas?" She said softly. "I have heard that name before Wayonn." She said looking at Wayonn's back. "Where have I heard that name be... the scrolls you gave me?" She gasped. "They spoke of a man... a Lycavorian who fought this High Coven and died. He was a King on some planet... his actions spurred the rebellion against the Coven to new heights." Devra's eyes grew wider as it all came back to her. "He was the son of the Lycavorian Resumar who was in turn the son of Sumar. The Pralor Sumar!"

Wayonn turned back to look at her. "Your memory is as sharp as it has ever been Devra. I applaud you."

Devra looked at her son quickly and then to Dutkne. "Where are you going?" She asked. "Why are you all the way out here?"

Nirilo leaned forward in his chair. "This Pralor ship mother... the one that Wayonn told you crashed on Lycavore?"

Devra looked at him. "What of it?" She asked. "Your scrolls said it was damaged and only a descendant of this Pralor Sumar or your son Canth could activate its Mindvoice powered security measures. The scrolls said..." Devra stopped. "Leonidas? This... this man you speak of... this Martin Leonidas. He is a descendant of Resumar's son isn't he? The King who died?"

Wayonn looked at her. "He is the son of King Leonidas." Wayonn told her.

"The son?" Devra gasped. "The one that..."

Wayonn shook his head quickly. "No... Pleistarchus he is not. Resumar's son Leonidas had a second child... an unborn son who was still within his mother's womb when he died."

Devra came to her feet now. "Your scrolls say that child died Wayonn." She stated. "You told me this yourself. You said the only pureblood descendant of Resumar was this Lycavorian you call Pleistarchus. A man who betrayed his own people!"

Wayonn nodded. "That is what I thought as well up until twenty six years ago. That is when I discovered that the child we thought dead was in fact very much alive. It is he who now rules the Lycavorian Union. And it is he who went to Lycavore, activated City Ship 41 and guided it back to Earth."

Devra's eyes were wide now as she moved around the table to stand in front of him. "This... this Pralor ship is no longer on Lycavore?" She asked in disbelief.

Wayonn shook his head. "It hasn't been for over two decades. It has been on Earth since Martin discovered it and guided it there. Lycavore is now nothing more than a ghost planet. The High Coven prison there is gone, and every Lycavorian that was enslaved there returned with Martin."

Arduri and Naesta looked at one another and then back to their mother. "Mother... what does this have to do with Caliria?" Arduri was the one to ask the question. "If they will not help us we should plot our jump as close as we can and leave."

"That would be a grave mistake." Dutkne spoke now.

"We are capable enough to plot our own courses you know! We have been flying since we were children!" Naesta snapped. "And we have the engines to get there! You do not!"

Dutkne looked at Nirilo. "You never told me your sisters were so forceful Nirilo." He said with a grin.

Nirilo looked at his sisters as they sat there. "Nor did I know they were so disrespectful of their betters." He snapped.

"Our betters!" Naesta barked. "You believe them to be better than us Nirilo?"

"I believe them to be far more accepting of things they do not understand or know!" He barked back at her. "They are my friends! And they are far more advanced than you know sister so I suggest you mind your tongue!"

Dutkne got to his feet now as well. "Enough of this." He stated. "We are not here to argue with each other. Yes we are preparing to execute our last jump that will place us in what is referred to as The Wilds. Here." He stated pointing to a position on the small holo chart.

Arduri and Naesta leaned forward. "The course we plotted takes us directly into this Lycavorian Union." Arduri said now. "Why can't we use our coordinates?" She asked in a neutral voice. "We extrapolated the course of the Syndicate ship down to the meter. They can not maneuver during a jump. No ship can."

"Your coordinates would end our jump in one of the most densely travelled areas of Union space." Dutkne said. "The syndicate ship did not jump there."

"How do you know that?" Naesta snapped. "My calculations were perfect!"

“If the syndicate ship is dealing with new customers as your mother stated, then they will have coordinates to jump past the Orion Spur and into this area.” Dutkne said.

“Yes... so? We know that!” Naesta continued.

“Did your calculations include variances for gravity displacement and the cosmic shift variables of moving coreward?” Dutkne asked calmly.

Naesta looked at him and her eyes narrowed slightly. “Of... of course they did.” She hissed.

“Did you compensate for the passage of time and space?” He asked.

Naesta looked at Arduri and then her mother. “No. Why should I do that?”

“How old are your charts Naesta Re Mydala?” Drey asked now.

It was Arduri who saw first where they were going with their questions. “They are the same charts we have had for centuries.” She spoke. “Naesta... he is right.”

“How do we know that?” Naesta asked.

Dutkne leaned forward and pressed some buttons on the small console. They watched as the broken blue line shifted its end point several degrees. “It is a common mistake Naesta Re Mydala... especially when plotting a jump this far. Had you jumped on the course you plotted you would have ended up inside Union space as I said.”

Devra looked at him. “Why does that matter Dutkne?”

Dutkne looked at her. “It matters because once your ship was detected, and it would have been detected almost immediately mind you, once it was detected, the Union fleet would have localized your position, chased you down and blown you to smithereens.”

“This only proves that Lycavorians are just as my father says!” Naesta spoke. “And in order to destroy us they would have to find and catch us!”

“Enough Naesta!” Arduri barked this time losing patience with her sister’s arrogant attitude now as well.

“I’m right Arduri!” Naesta spat. “What he just told us only proves it! Why would they attack and destroy us if they don’t know us? Unless they were the ones the Syndicate is working with!”

“They would have attacked and destroyed you for only one reason.” Dutkne said with a smile. “Though your attitude would probably have given them enough reason. They would have attacked and destroyed you Naesta Re Mydala because less than thirty-six hours ago the species known as the Kavalians may have killed the King we are on our way to meet.” Dutkne leaned closer to her.

“You would have jumped directly into what could very well be a war zone by now sister. They lost one King over three thousand years ago and they did not have the means to avenge his death. They have the means now and if he is dead, war can be the only result.” Nirilo spoke softly.

Devra looked at Wayonn. “What does he mean Wayonn?”

Wayonn took her arm. “Come with me and I will explain. Our paths lie in the same direction Devra and we may as well pool our resources. This is not the time to be pulling away from each other.”

Drey turned when the door to the conference room opened and the female Lycavorian came him and handed him the pad. He nodded and turned back to Dutkne and held out the data pad. “Quantum Fusion Coils are at full capacity Dutkne.” He spoke. “We can jump whenever we are ready.”

Dutkne looked at Naesta and saw her look of surprise. “We have the engines to get there as well Naesta Re Mydala.” He said with a smile. He turned to Devra. “Do you trust us enough to go together, or should we let you go on your own?”

Devra looked at Wayonn and then back to him. “I want my daughter back.” She stated firmly. “If traveling with you furthers that goal then yes.”

Dutkne nodded and turned to Drey. “Secure the Vanari V9 and then order the jump Drey. We have a lot of territory to cover. Arrange quarters for our guests and make sure our people know they can go where they wish.” He turned back to Devra. “If it is to begin... then I intend to see it begins now. With us.”

Devra nodded her head. “As do I.”

“...calm yourself Pusintin.” Keleru spoke as calmly as he could while looking at the transmission. He was on his ship heading for the rendezvous with the Puma Bane team that had captured the elf Queen. Both of them were monitoring every tidbit of news that was coming out of the Union, most of it being filtered through the Hadarian capital since in their haste to leave the Lycavorians had forgotten to disable the transmitters and receivers that linked the civilian network. They had watched the Union Netnews reporting on the recovery efforts in Sparta and Keleru took great joy in watching as the huge number of dead from the collapsed building rose almost every hour. He had been pouring himself another glass of ale when the scene shifted and another group of reporters broke in. His dark eyes grew a little wider when he saw the burning building and the Netnews began reporting that the Crown Prime Androcles Leonidas had just obliterated the clinic that held the remains of his father and his dragon. Keleru got to watch it live in fact as they showed him upon his own dragon hovering above the burning clinic while his dragon directed a stream of concentrated fire into the structure below. He saw Androcles throw what appeared to be some sort of bombs from his hands down into the top of the clinic only to see the walls and portion of the ceiling that remained to fall inward and crash in upon itself.

Keleru knew Pusintin would have been watching the same intelligence channel and he expected the transmission from him. Exactly thirty-four seconds after he had begun to watch the report begin to repeat itself, Pusintin was calling.

“He is supposed to be dead Keleru!” Pusintin hissed.

Keleru nodded. “Yes... but we *did* factor this possibility into our plans. It may or may not make things more difficult, but ultimately it won’t matter. He can not stop your ascension to the throne now. And if he attempts to... we will eliminate him and make sure we get it right this time.” He stated calmly. “I’m more concerned with the fact that this provides more evidence that Phy’iad’s report was accurate.”

Keleru watched Pusintin take a deep breath and get his anger back under control. Pusintin nodded slowly. “If what he says is true.” Pusintin spoke. “We won’t know that until our recon ship gets close enough to report or Admiral Ocarsh reports in.”

Keleru looked at the timepiece on his wall. “He is seven hours overdue now Pusintin.” He spoke turning back to him.

Pusintin shook his head as he reverted back to military officer. “Even if it is true... the only real damage done will be that they may discover we have taken out their Drow outposts sooner than we had expected.” He spoke. “We planned for at least a week before they recovered enough from Martin’s death to discover this. It really does not hamper our efforts since we are not planning a full scale invasion. With that fool Armetus dead or at least out of the picture temporarily... the *Krypteria* will be unguided and unfocused. They will concentrate on trying to determine if any more attacks are coming, not making contact with the Drow.”

Keleru nodded slowly. “You are right. We can work around that. I am preparing envoys to the Union Senate now in case they attack and destroy the embassy. Matuarr and Qurot are expendable if that happens.”

“We should expect that.” Pusintin said. “If Androcles has survived then he will no doubt want revenge. The first and easiest place to exact that revenge are the people at the embassy.”

Keleru turned when the door to his office opened and his aide came in. He held up his hand to signal silence and to wait and he turned back to Pusintin. “Where will you go when you have the elf Queen?”

“Probably Nefoa.” Pusintin answered. “It’s close enough to Belid to maintain a clear transmission for what we have planned and it will allow me to respond to many different areas if the need arises.”

Keleru nodded. “Reinforce our orders with the commander of Nefoa. No contact with any Lycavorian forces. None! We do not want to instigate a full scale war unless it is necessary. We can do this without it costing us anything more than it has as long as our Pride Leaders follow our instructions to the letter.”

Pusintin nodded. “Don’t worry... I will make that very clear.” He said. “I will contact you when I have her and it is done.”

Keleru nodded and did not respond as the transmission faded. He turned to the young officer now. “Yes.”

“Prefect... the Puma Bane Team you sent to Iraruzu has reported in.” The officer stated softly. “Their commander is standing by to report directly to you.”

“Very well... route the transmission here.” Keleru spoke as he settled into his chair. The aide moved to the desk and manipulated the control panel there. The holo disc came alive with the image of the Puma Bane

officer. He stood in front of what appeared to be a large home and Keleru could see smoke rising in the background. "It was the Deutrino fields wasn't it?" Keleru asked as he poured himself more ale.

"Prefect... Prefect... Leruk is... Leruk is dead. The entire company is dead." The officer answered as Keleru stopped pouring and looked up.

Keleru came to his feet slowly unable to believe the officer's words. "Tell me... tell me you are joking Commander." Keleru said even though he knew the man would never do that.

"Forgive me Prefect..." The officer spoke. "We are still trying to... we are still trying to gather information. There were local scum here at the Drow estate when we arrived. They were stripping the bodies of our men. I killed most of them and interrogated three others. They all say the same thing."

"What do they say?" Keleru roared.

"They say the Crown Prince of the Union came here with others." The officer spoke. "They say he had at least three dragons with him. One local was watching from a nearby ridge and he tells me that the Prince dropped out of the sky above our men as they were assaulting the Drow estate and he savaged almost thirty of them by himself. They say his dragon destroyed the others while a vampire female riding a dragon took out the mortars our team had set up. We have searched the area Prefect, and it... it appears this Limian is telling the truth based on what we have discovered."

"Leruk?" Keleru asked.

"We found him... we found him inside the building on the first floor Prefect." The officer stated. "He..."

"What?" Keleru screamed.

"He did not die well Prefect." The man replied. "Multiply fractures of his body and... there is... there is a hole through his head Prefect. It... it looks as if someone rammed some sort of red hot pipe through his entire head. I could... I could look through..."

"Enough!" Keleru barked.

"We found no Drow dead Prefect." The man continued quickly. "Their store in the city was destroyed and it appears as if the Drow bodies were removed, both here and from the store. We have also found many dragon prints Prefect, at least three different sizes in the area. As well as the scorch marks of a Union *STRIKER DT* and possibly a *MENKLA* Transport. Our ship in orbit of Iraruzu is also missing."

"Leruk?" Keleru muttered softly. He returned to his chair and sat down slowly.

"Prefect what are your orders?" The officer asked.

Keleru looked up quickly. "Burn the bodies Commander! Burn all of them until there is nothing left but ash!"

The commander looked horrified at the prospect of doing this but he nodded his head. "As you... as you order Prefect."

"When you have completed that task return here to Cabelir and report directly to me." Keleru spoke.

The officer nodded. "Yes Prefect."

Keleru stabbed his finger down on the controls and the transmission faded. He stared at the wall for a long moment and then turned to meet the eyes of his aide. The officer was the youngest son of one of his brothers and was fanatically loyal to him and him alone. "Kattu... make arrangements for when the Commander's team returns." He spoke.

"Do we... do we inform Marshall Pusintin Uncle?" The young Kavalian asked.

Keleru shook his head. "No!" He exclaimed. "At least not until after our plans are set in motion! He will go berserk if he discovers his youngest son has been killed by the Union. He will demand retribution!" Keleru came to his feet once more. "No! We need to keep this from him for as long as possible. If what the team has discovered..." Keleru looked at Kattu. "This Androcles... he is like his father Kattu. He has the ability to... to form things that he can throw and extend from his hands. The wound the commander describes can only be something that he inflicted. If Pusintin discovers this he will want nothing more than to go after him. We must insure he does not discover Leruk is dead until after he has impregnated the elf Queen. At least then he will not kill her until after she has given birth to his son."

"That will not be easy Uncle... keeping him from finding out I mean." Kattu spoke.

“I know... that is why I want you to insure when that Puma Bane Team returns you dispose of them quietly and quickly.” Keleru said. “I will not allow Pusintin’s anger to ruin our ultimate goals.” He looked at his nephew. “Ever since his brother defeated him on Earth he has had major issues with controlling his anger.”

“You have allowed him to garner much support and loyalty Uncle.” Kattu spoke. “Was that wise?”

Keleru looked at his nephew. “He is a superior warrior Kattu, never forget that. And he has led us to many great victories. He is loyal to us... we are his family now and he has embraced that far more than some of the younger Pride Leaders. We just need to learn how to focus that anger for our own gains.”

“I will make the preparations Uncle.” Kattu spoke. He held out the data pad. “This is the most recent report from our field teams searching for Nikkei. They have finished their search of Galnti Three, Pride Nruarani’s homeworld. They found nothing. The main Nruarani home was completely stripped bare, the entire city emptied. Our teams said it appeared ghostly.”

Keleru took it from him. “I did not expect they would.” Keleru spoke. “This confirms then that the Nruarani Pride has dispersed? They were a nomadic Pride to begin with... leaving in such a hurry would be nothing new to them. The only regret I have is losing his expertise.”

Kattu looked at him oddly. “Uncle?”

Keleru smiled. “You will come to discover that you may respect a man but not like him Kattu. Pian’Nruarani was and is a masterful leader of men. Something happened that turned him from a haggard nomadic Pride leader into what he is now. He became educated and very well groomed. His fellow officers ridiculed him for it, but he never relented. I suspect it most likely has something to do with Jalersi. He has always wanted her... even before I gave her to Pusintin as a mate.”

“He is a traitor to our people Uncle.” Kattu said.

Keleru nodded. “Yes he is... but he is a supremely dangerous traitor.” He answered easily. “His tactical skill is nearly on a par with Pusintin and unlike many of the other Pride Leaders now, he actually cares for the men under his command.” Keleru moved to the window. “I have been getting reports for some years now that he was allowing females to serve on his Pride’s ship. That he has led his Pride away from the traditions our people have always honored and followed. I was going to move against him sooner or later, now it appears I will not have to.” Keleru looked at him. “If they have abandoned Galnti Three then they have taken to the stars on the fringes of our border near the edges of the Orion Spur. Perhaps even beyond. We will deal with Pride Nruarani... but for now they are not a threat.”

“As you order uncle.” Kattu said.

“I take it nothing has come up on the Scribe Mother Demahra either.” Keleru asked.

“No uncle... I would inform you immediately if it had.” Kattu answered.

“I should have seen what that wench was doing a long time ago.” Keleru spat angrily. “I would not be surprised if she had a hand in Nikkei disappearing. That will teach me to trust any woman who comes to me and says she has discovered new cloning technology.” He turned to Kattu. “Make sure we are ready to receive the Commander. There can be no mistakes.”

Kattu bowed his head. “I will see to it Uncle.”

SPARTA
ROYAL ESTATE VILLA
Earth Year 2564

“...Beloved! Ahhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

Aricia cried out in unabashed ecstasy and shuddered violently in another staggering orgasm. She rested in Martin’s lap, his immense cock buried completely within her depths, his large hands holding tightly to her breasts and crushing her back to his broad and powerful chest as she basked in the glow of her tenth volcanic orgasm this night. Her body was sizzling hot, every single nerve ending screaming out in carnal delight. The nipples of her firm breasts were painfully hard, and standing out proudly on her ample chest. Her legs were quivering in the grip of yet one more titanic explosion, her long raven black hair drenched in sweat and plastered to her face and shoulders. Her lean, flat and powerful abdomen undulated repeatedly in the grips of

her orgasm, the walls of her velvet tightness clamping down almost painfully on Martin's huge cock as For'mya's elven tongue battered her insanely aroused clit endlessly.

It had been a night like no other as his mates.

They did not know what had possessed him that night, but with Dysea and Isabella on Elear and Anja shuttling back to Hadaria the night before, that left only her and For'mya to solely experience the intense passion of their husband and mate. And experience it they did, going on into the sixth hour now of nearly endless explosions and unmitigated passion. Their room was swathed in their combined auras, the full moon filling their room with an dreamlike glow, only adding to the charged atmosphere. Her head fell back onto his shoulders, her eyes fully changed and her lips parted in a breathless cry exposing her wolf fangs, as she rode her orgasm for all it was worth. It was not often that the three of them were alone like this, and he had returned from a meeting with his senior advisors early in the evening. They had been sitting in the main room of the villa going over flight training protocols and planning a trip for all of them when they returned to Apo Prime next month. They had felt his aura even before he landed on Torma, and the moment he stepped through the large double doors to the rear patio, both of their female bodies went crazy. He had such a special talent, able to manipulate his male aura and direct it in such a way as to hit Aricia with the full force of his aura and For'mya with just enough to send her female wolf hormones into overdrive. He had taken Aricia first, right there in the middle of the main room, uncaring if anyone was home besides them. If there were others present they would sense and smell what was happening and avoid the area completely. He had not been patient, tearing their flimsy night robes from their bodies. As Aricia cried out her passion and he pummeled her body the exact way she loved so much, his lips were locked with For'mya in a searing kiss of love and passion. Her lithe elven body, so gloriously firm and tasty, was alive and singing with her desire. The nipples of her smaller, but no less firm and enticing breasts were harder than Aricia had ever seen them. She knew then he must have been hitting her with enough of his aura to take her right to the very edge of control. For'mya's sweet orchid scent mixed with her own lavender and coco scent to saturate the air and inflame their Alpha Wolf husband to even greater heights.

The memories of that night were perfect in their design. He had taken them both with such fervor and desire more times than she could remember. His aura spurred them to new heights and his lips and hands and tongue never stopped. It wasn't the fact that his aura burned only for them that night; it wasn't the fact that he had made them feel things neither had felt before; it wasn't even the fact that he pulled them both tightly to him and they all felt the flicker of life in Aricia's womb as Nara and Deion were conceived. It was the pure, unrestrained and unfettered clarity of his love for them that made that night so special. Aricia and For'mya did not hesitate to reach out within their minds and share that feeling and those sensations with Anja and Dysea and Isabella through Mindvoice. When they were connected with him, they could touch their other lovers with so much ease. Yet it wasn't all of these things that only made them love him more. It was what he had said to them as they cuddled together under the moonlight, their passions still willing, but their bodies exhausted.

Martin had pulled them both tightly to him, Aricia on his right and For'mya on his left. Their heads rested on his broad chest, their raven black and golden blond locks mingled together as they intertwined their fingers as one and gazed at each other with utter blissful contentment in their eyes. The cool breeze swept across their naked bodies, but did nothing to diminish the desire that permeated the air.

Saaurano... the light of my soul. He whispered within Mindvoice as he nuzzled Aricia's head and then For'mya's. *And Kinsoargai... the voice of my heart. Without you I am nothing. Without all of you I am nothing. I will never forsake you, never leave you and I will always come for you. On my father's spirit I swear this to you. To all of you.*

Aricia and For'mya felt the warmth of his aura surround them tightly, they felt him reach across the stars to Anja and Dysea and Isabella and wrap them within that same embrace. They felt the joy and love from Anja and Dysea more since they were wolf as well, but there was no mistaking the feelings from Bella either and the six of them bathed in these feelings and sensations until sleep took all of them into its sweet embrace.

Saaurano! Saaurano! Wake up! It is not your time! Wake up Little Wolf! You must go on!

Aricia's azure blue eyes sprang open then. "**Beloved!**" She screamed, her voice echoing in the room and into the corridor.

"Mother!" She heard his voice. "Mother!"

Aricia's wide eyes blinked several times and she was able to focus them finally and in front of her she saw the handsome face of her first born son. She saw the culmination of the love she and her Beloved shared.

"An... Andro!" She gasped.

Androcles leaned closer to his mother, taking her hand in his tightly. Sadi and Ne'Veha stood on one side of the room, Carisia and Lu'ria on the other. Helen sat in the chair at the foot of the bed watching intently all that was happening. A stern looking Hadarian doctor stood near the door, two Hadarian nurses in the rear corner of the room. Riall stood in the room as well by the window, Danny holding a teary eyed Anuk on one side and an equally distraught Nayeca on the other.

"It is me mother." He whispered softly. "I am here."

"Androcles... your father... Martin... he... Andro no!" Aricia gasped as if in physical pain.

Andro pulled up their hands, squeezing her slim fingers tightly as his other hand came up and he stroked the side of her cheek. "Mother!" He hissed. "Look at me!"

Aricia shook her head slowly. "My... my *Anome* is gone!" She gasped as tears flooded her eyes. "My... my reason and purpose is gone. I... I can not feel... I can not feel *Melda Min* or our *Kinsoaurgai*. I can not feel them Andro!"

"Look at me!" Andro barked loudly, startling everyone in the room except Sadi. It was a reaction... or non-reaction that only Helen noticed and she turned to look at her. Sadi's jungle green eyes fell on her but quickly looked away.

"Andro I..."

"You live mother." He spoke.

"I... I can not be without him my son!" She sobbed softly. "I do not want to be without him. I can not... I can not be without them. Oh For'mya... Dysea..."

"Mother..."

"I do not... I do not want to wither... to wither away without them my son!" Aricia spoke softly. "Without him. It... it would be too painful."

"Look at me mother." Andro said gently.

"Andro... Andro please... I..."

"Look at me... please mother." He asked again in that same soft tone. "Look into my eyes and let me say goodbye to you then."

Aricia's azure eyes focused on the identical colored eyes of her son and she felt him squeeze her hand even harder. She looked briefly at their hands and then back to his face and watched him hold up the small capsule.

"Protrilene mother." He said softly as he lowered it to her lips. Aricia didn't hesitate and she parted her lips to allow him to place it on her tongue. Andro watched her swallow it and she lifted her hand to place her palm on his cheek. She could hear Helen sobbing softly at the foot of the bed and she smiled up at him. "I will miss you mother." Andro croaked out the words. "Tell father... tell father I will carry on in his stead." He watched Aricia nod slowly and he reached up to place his fingers on her eyelids. "You will not wither away and die because you have lost your *Anome* mother. You will die on your own terms and join him just as beautiful as you are now." Andro looked at her face. "Sleep now mother. Sleep."

Andro sat up slowly as Aricia's face lost its tense expression and her breathing became shallow. It took less than a minute for the Protrilene to work. It was a fast acting drug and it was the only drug known to exist that worked far too fast for the Lycavorian healing system to compensate for. Andro glanced up at the monitors that showed his mother's vitals dropping rapidly.

"Remove these machines from her!" He demanded.

The doctor stepped forward quickly. "Milord Prince... this is wrong!" He spoke. "There is no medical evidence that she could not have survived. She would have recovered fully!"

"She would not have recovered from losing her *Anome*." Helen spoke softly. "And she would have died a long and arduous death."

“There is no medical evidence to prove this!” The doctor insisted. “I must remind...”

Andro moved far faster than anyone had ever witnessed and his hand snatched the front of the doctor’s clothes pulling him down to eye level. His azure eyes changed quickly and Andro barred his savage looking dual fangs. “That is because you do not know my people!” He snarled viciously. “That is because you do not have faith! Now you will either disconnect these infernal machines or you will join my mother and father in the afterlife!”

The doctor couldn’t move fast enough then and in less than thirty seconds the monitors that told the story of Aricia Leonidas were disconnected and silent. Andro shoved the shorter doctor out of his way and peeled back the sheet that covered his mother. He bent down and easily lifted her body into his arms just as the sounds of five dragons drowned out all other noise from five stories below them and their trumpets of sorrow cascaded across the ground causing hundreds to look up and take notice, and some to even move away. Andro turned and looked at Helen as she got to her feet.

“I am going to lay her beside my father’s remains at Thermopylae *Feravomir*. She will rest there after her essence flies one last time with Isheeni.” He stated.

Helen nodded. “I will have the *Durcunusaan* clear the way for you.” She said softly. “We will... we will join you there after we retrieved Gorgo and Dasha.”

Androcles Leonidas paused briefly, meeting the eyes of each of the women who he now cherished above all others, and then he turned to exit the room. The two Hadarian nurses began to move to follow him but Helen lifted her hand.

“Leave him be!” She snapped. “There will be enough eyes watching him as he leaves. He needs to do this alone.”

Helen ignored the nurses then and turned to Sadi. She reached out and took Sadi’s and Carisia’s hands without question. They moved closer to her and Helen noticed how the four of them did not release each other. As if they were drawing strength from each other during all this. Helen nodded to herself. They were learning quickly what Aricia and the others had learned long ago when all of them had finally come together. Their unique strength lay in being together, and seeing the determination in Sadi’s eyes Helen knew she was the glue just as Aricia had been. Even Lu'ria of the Drow, so recently turned by Androcles, even she was growing in confidence and strength every hour she was together with them. As her eyes fell on Ne'Veha she felt the desire to be like the man she so loved now and Helen knew Andro would turn her soon if only so that she could experience his love completely. More than likely it would be Sadi who convinced him of this for she held a connection with Andro and she more than anyone would be able to harness and direct the man she so adored. Helen let her eyes settle back on Sadi and nodded to herself once more. Yes indeed Sadi was powerful, almost as bright a light within Mindvoice as Aricia. And like Aricia Helen determined, it would be Sadi’s influence that guided them all.

“Your *STRIKER* is nearby?” She asked.

Sadi nodded slowly, her jungle green eyes moist. “At the *Durcunusaan* airfield.”

“Then walk with me...” Helen spoke pulling them close to her and smiling gently as even Lu'ria stepped closer without hesitation. It appeared as if Lu'ria had accepted her transformation to wolf completely in only a few short days and she was learning quickly that wolves, unlike the Drow in many cases, did not shy away from each other. “I will need to instruct the wives and mates of the new King on what to do. You are Queens now.”

Lu'ria shook her head as she clung to Carisia’s hand. “I... I do not wish to be a Queen.” She stammered softly. “Not in this way First Oracle.”

Helen turned as the doorway suddenly filled with both *Durcunusaan* and newly arrived Drow security officers. The Drow detachment sent by Aihola had arrived only moments ago, their white hair and amber eyes being filmed by the many Netnews crews outside the hospital as they entered in crisp fashion and were not even challenged by the *Durcunusaan* guarding the doorway into the hospital. There was no fight over who would command with the *Durcunusaan* men and women. These Drow elves, many of them, had worked together with the *Durcunusaan* before in providing security while the royal family spent their six months on Earth. Vengal knew well the near fanatical loyalty that Martin commanded among the Drow for his actions towards them, and these Drow security forces were the only men and women outside of normal *Durcunusaan* troops to be allowed anywhere near the royal villa or places they frequented.

There would be no competition here. All of them had only one goal now... and that was to see nothing happened to the new King and Queens of the Lycavorian Union.

Helen turned back to Lu'ria. "Yet you are Queens now. And soon you will need to act it as well."

KRANEK IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

"...depart whenever you are ready sir." The Union engineer on the monitor answered Cha'talla's question.

"What are we taking?" Cha'talla asked.

Vollenth sat outside the still damaged command center, the doorway and part of the wall still missing. He and Viera were conversing with Jeth and Aradace while their children bounded happily across the backs of all the dragons and marveled at Jeth's size.

Denali turned from the console he and Arrarn stood at. "Just *NORMYA'S LIGHT* and her Strike Wing. Admiral Thodias is cramming as many fighters into the ships as he can without leaving the rest of the Fleet Group short."

"We've stripped ten of the *STRIKERS* we brought with us of everything but their weapons and each of them can now carry three dragons and fifty troops." Arrarn spoke as he turned as well. "My mother's Fleet Group had only two *VIPERS* assigned to it and we are taking one. The engineers have finished equipping her with two Shroud generators. They won't be as good as the ones integrated into our warships, but it will get us close enough I think. A thousand of your Immortals..." Arrarn stopped and looked at him. "A thousand of our tribe's Akruxian troops and a thousand Union Spartans are already on board and settling in. How many troops do you think this Phy'iad has Cha'talla?"

Cha'talla met his eyes and found himself smiling at Arrarn Leonidas's correction of himself. It appeared as if they had embraced his tribe just as much as his tribe had already embraced them. His expression quickly changed back to one of seriousness. "He's has had two decades to build his numbers from those Akruxian who have deserted the High Coven. There is no telling how many he could have on his base. Lynom's last report indicated three to four thousand at least."

Arrarn nodded. "So we'll have them outnumbered." He stated. "Cool. That always helps."

Cha'talla's expression did not change this time, but deep down he wondered to himself if these children of Martin Leonidas feared anything. All of them were incensed by what had essentially torn their family apart, yet they were directing that anger and making it work for them and he had no doubts that they had every intention of getting their mother back.

"Normya and Tir'ut were able to communicate with Lynom from here when they had Iriral assisting them." Cha'talla said. "Would you be able to touch him when we got close enough?"

Denali nodded. "More than likely."

"Then we will have updated intelligence once we arrived in Belid's system." Cha'talla said. "He and his *Ssin'urn 'anon* have been outside their base for nearly a week hiding and waiting for us to come get them. He will have the answers for us."

"And that is why we are going too." The new voice spoke and they all turned to see As'hia's mother and father walk slowly into the center.

Ta'lon stepped forward first dressed in a Union Flight suit and pilot armor. "I will fly the *VIPER*." He stated. "You need an experienced ground support pilot to land the *VIPER* as close to the base as you can. I have nearly two hundred years of experience flying Heavy Troop Transports. It is what I did before transferring to fighters. You tell me where to land it and I will put it down."

Danarla stepped up next to him. "The ground plan that we have so far says we strike this mercenary base from three sides. I will take one third of the Spartans and one third of the Akruxian troops, all of them familiar with heavy weapons and move to the northern side here." She moved up to the chart table and placed her finger down on the spot of the blueprint that was showing. "We will be better able to hold a position here while the rest divide and assault the base from the other two directions. When they try to retreat they will walk into a hailstorm that will make it appear as if the *Letha rie Jorbhe* have opened before them."

Cha'talla couldn't help but grin and look at Ta'lon. "I see now where my son says his *Ssin'urn 'anon* gets her will from." He stated.

Ta'lon nodded. "That she does." He said.

"Narice and I will have command of the Coven dragons." Lisisa continued now. "We are leaving half here to help with hunting down the last of the Kavalian animals who escaped into the mountains. Toria and Arrarn will coordinate air support with the *STRIKERS* while we hit the west side. I imagine you and Denali will lead the assault on the east?"

Cha'talla nodded. "It is the main entrance according to Lynom and I doubt very much they will expect a frontal assault. The only question is the thickness of the door. We don't know how much explosive power will be necessary."

The door will not matter. Jeth's voice broke into their minds in Mindvoice and they all turned to see him leaning close to the entrance. *Secure a position around that door for us Cha'talla and then call Lisisa. We will not need explosives.*

Why? Cha'talla asked still amazed at how easily his Mindvoice communication came now.

Vollenth turned his head to gaze at his Bonded Brother. *Because Cha'talla my Brother... Jeth, Aradace and I will melt it into slag.* He snarled happily.

And then some. Aradace agreed.

Denali nodded his head. "Then I suggest we head to our ships." He spoke. "It's time to get some payback."

CURILA 6

4.7 LY from Earth

Background music; Arrival to Earth, Transformers ST

A lush temperate world with towering snow covered mountains and gorgeous green plains and crystal clear lakes. A little known gem of a planet that Martin Leonidas had found during a training exercise some fifteen years ago. Only slightly smaller than Earth, it had an abundance of natural wildlife very similar to Earth and was just what he had been looking for in a planet. A place to bring his entire family and get away from the hustle and bustle of life within Sparta and on Apo Prime. A place where they could run as wolves or walk as men and women and not worry about the Netnews popping up everywhere. A place where they could leave everything behind and just be themselves.

To that end, the *Durcunusaan* had contracted with the 1st Elven Engineering Corp and the Leonidas Retreat was born. Four sprawling kilometers backed up to a massive stand of timber and mountains. Nearly a hundred single story structures built in a fashion that reminded them of Spartan architecture from three thousand years ago. The temperature was always constant and never varying much from eighty to eighty-five degrees during the day and a very pleasant mid sixty degrees in the evening. None of the structures had windows, though all were as modern as they could possibly be. As the Leonidas children grew older they branched out into the empty apartments and made them their own. There were three structures in the center of this sprawling compound; one a fully staffed and operating medical clinic that was set up and run by the most gruff and knowledgeable Hadarian Anja could find. Another of the structures was the building where the family took all their meals. It was set up almost like a restaurant with dozens of large tables and chairs and a full time staff of men and women who cooked for them when they were here and who cooked for the three hundred *Durcunusaan* troops and their families that called Curila 6 home. The last building was a fully equipped staff and school.

This is what Zaniai and Ceuma gazed upon in wonder as they walked down the long granite path from the landing pad. Zaniai had never been here before, he had not known it even existed, and this facility was not in the memories from Anja that Ceuma had inherited through the cloning process. He moved past Fuleos and up next to Eurin as they walked.

"Eurin... Eurin what is this place?" He gasped.

“The Leonidas Retreat.” Eurin answered him moving as fast as her legs could carry her to keep up with Anja and Atropos. “This is where they come to be a family. This is where they come to get away from everything.”

“It’s beautiful.” Ceuma spoke in awe from just behind her.

Joci nodded. “Yes it is.” He answered. “And extremely well defended as well.” He said as his keenly trained eyes were able to just make out the many defensive positions that blended seamlessly with the terrain whether it be flat and green or covered with trees as it was in the distance.

“I... I have never heard of this place.” Zaniai continued as he walked gazing at the large birds circling in the distant sky.

“Less than a thousand people do.” Eurin answered him. “The *Durcunusaan* who are stationed here, their families, the staff and their families and then only those that Martin chooses to tell.”

“You... you knew of this place?” He asked.

Eurin nodded. “I have been here several times. It is one of the most relaxing places in the universe... and that is how Martin wanted it.”

They stopped talking as the *Durcunusaan* troop marched towards them along the path. He didn’t pause and fell in beside Anja between Atropos and Miath.

“We have assigned quarters for those with you Milady.” He began to report. “The staff has prepared a full meal and snacks in case anyone is hungry. The entire compound is on alert and all defensives are active. Admiral Omore will be arriving after he insures the Strike Wing is situated. I see he stubbornly refused to allow you to come on a *STRIKER*?”

Anja rolled her eyes. “Like it matters what happens to me now.” She said in an almost defeatist tone. “Where is Yuriko?”

“The Medical Center with Doctor Emhat.” The officer answered.

“What is going on Colonel?” Anja asked. “Why did I need to come here so badly? I should be on Earth with Andro and my children. That is where I am needed.”

The officer didn’t answer her question and she stopped to look at him. He shrugged his broad shoulders. “Princess Yuriko can explain it better Milady.” He spoke. “I will see to your *STRIKER*.”

Anja watched him move away quickly and she turned to Atropos who had a similar look of confusion on his face. “Atropos?” She asked softly.

Atropos hook his head. “I have no idea.” He told her honestly. He took her arm gently. “Let’s find Yuriko... the more time that passes, the more nervous I become.”

Atropos, Anja and Miath quickly outdistanced the others, though they tried to keep up as best they could. As they drew closer to the Medical Center Anja saw Yuriko standing outside the entrance and she broke into a run towards her. Yuriko met her half way and the two women came together in an embrace of love and family.

“Yuriko... why... why did I need to come here?” Anja finally gasped out between the fresh tears. “We should be... we should be helping the rest of our family!”

Yuriko nodded her head quickly as she wiped her own tears away. “I know... but this is more important mother.”

Anja shook her head. “Why? What are you doing here? What did you mean only I could do this?”

Yuriko took her hand tightly. “Because you are the only one who can mother.” She stated quickly. “I will show you. Come.”

Yuriko began to practically drag her towards the entrance but Miath’s voice in Anja’s head stopped her cold.

Anja my sister?

Anja turned to look at him and saw his muzzle pointed to the distance. *Miath?*

Sister... what is that? He asked.

Anja followed his gaze across the plains and saw the tiny black dot low in the blue sky. A tiny black dot that was rapidly growing larger. Anja stepped away from Yuriko slowly her jade green eyes narrowing. Everyone else saw where she was looking and they turned as well. Anja stepped up next to Miath, looking ridiculously tiny standing beside his massive body and she placed her hand on his smooth scales.

Miath... Miath that...

It... it can't... it can't be! Miath gasped.

Thud

Thud

The black dot was growing larger with each passing second and it was rapidly taking shape into one that could not be mistaken. It was a dragon. A huge dragon with obsidian colored scales. A dragon that could never be erroneously identified.

Thud

Thud

Atropos stepped up next to Anja now his eyes wide as the powerful reverberations in the atmosphere were unmistakable. "By all the gods that we hold holy!" He spoke softly causing Eurin and Zaniai to look at him.

"What is it Atropos?" Eurin asked quickly as fear gripped her. "Are we under attack even here?"

There was only one dragon who could move with the same speed and graceful motion that they witnessed racing towards them. Only one dragon that could push the envelope in every way and always reach beyond. Only one dragon that could elicit the sense of awe and power that this one could.

As Torma rocketed over the top of them at nearly a hundred kilometers per hour and released a trumpet that caused them to cringe Atropos's head whipped around to look at his Queen for he felt the enormously powerful tremors in Mindvoice as well. Mindvoice tremors that could only be from one individual. He saw her diminutive form already running into the clinic heedless of any danger that could possibly exist to her.

"Anja! Wait!" He shouted causing the others to turn. He broke into a run after her when he heard her voice from inside.

"MARTIN!"

Anja's wide eyes cut back and forth as she stumbled into the clinic. He was here! The moment Torma opened his mind to her she could feel him like a burning sun. Staff members of the clinic got out of her way as she ran first in one direction and then another. His wonderful mint scent permeated the building overriding everything else and she could not focus enough to follow it to its source. Her heart was slamming into her chest, her blood on fire and she kept screaming for him.

"MARTIN!! MARTIN!!"

As first Sivana and then Ceuma burst into the clinic right behind Atropos to try and help her they saw her head come up and she sprinted off down the corridor.

"Go! Go!" Atropos barked as he followed.

Sivana and Ceuma were in such a hurry that they slammed into Atropos's body as they came around the corner and found him standing like a tree trunk in the middle of the corridor. Sivana looked up into his face to snarl at him and caught her words.

She saw tears in his eyes.

Her head snapped around to where he was looking and her intake of breath caused Ceuma to turn just as quickly and push up against her as the others came around the corner led by Eurin who was moving with surprising speed for a woman her age. As Eurin moved around and gripped Atropos's arm, her eyes wide in disbelief she looked up at him.

"Atropos is that..."

Yuriko was beside them as she stopped blurring from where she had run in a different direction.

"Yes." She stated confidently. "It is... it is my father. And this is why I needed my mother to come here. Something... something is wrong."

Atropos and the others tore their eyes away from a sobbing Anja as she stood beside the bed he was laying in and could not stop touching him, almost like she was insuring that she wasn't being tortured for something and that he was real.

"What do you mean Yuriko?" Atropos asked quickly.

"What is wrong?" Sivana asked.

"He is... he is stuck in some sort of Mindvoice loop." She told them as tears came to her dark eyes now. "At least that is what I think it is. His injuries... his injuries have healed... but his mind is trapped somewhere and I can't pull him out. I did the only thing I could think of. I disregarded security protocol and called mother."

"Why?" Eurin asked.

Yuriko looked at her. “It is very simple Divine One. There is only one person who has reached within Mindvoice and brought father out of such a condition before. She did it just before father discovered who he truly was. She saved him then. She saved my mother Dysea as well. She is the only one who has ever done this before. Even the *Feravomir* says this. I’m hoping...” Yuriko turned and looked at her in the room through the glass partition. “I am hoping she can do it again.”

CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

RITAAH

Channa had endured more savage beatings and rapes than she could remember during her time in that Kavalian prison waiting for death. She had been cast aside by her family and her Pride because the biogenic experiments she had undergone did not completely alter her outward appearance. She had no part in that decision by her father to make her part of the program, and she had no part in his decision to toss her aside like a piece of meat when the treatments did not take fully. The treatments had removed the fine coat of black hair from her body except for her long silky mane, but they left her with her normal, vertically slit and stunning blue feline eyes and her long and very dexterous tail. And for that Channa had been condemned to death and sent to a prison to be passed around as a whore among the guards and even other inmates while she waited for death to come to her. Mican’s actions had saved her from that fate, and his and Na’lia’s love had brought her back from the brink of despair and turned her life into something. They gave her purpose and reason and freedom to do as she choose; to live her life the way she wanted to. They showed her that what was done to her only made her better, not worse. She owed them so much for what they had given her, and she now owed them for giving her the will and determination to survive so that she could experience and feel what she had just felt for the last magical four hours.

Channa purred reflexively and her mouth curled into a contented smile as she felt his soft lips and warm tongue flutter across the back of her taut thigh and slowly work their way up the curve of her incredibly firm ass. She felt his hot tongue drag deliciously along the contour of her ass cheek, causing her long tail to twitch madly in unabashed delight. When his lips found that supersensitive spot at the small of her back where her tail entered her spine, she sighed in blissful enchantment but slapped his shoulder playfully with her tail as she rolled over to face him. Every time his fingers or lips had touched her there in the last four hours it had ended up with her wailing out her delight, and she was just too tired now. He was diligent in his actions and it amazed her that he was still willing. Her feline blue eyes gazed at him adoringly, but he didn’t pause and he lowered his lips to her firm abdomen, tracing his talented tongue around her bellybutton and using his nose and lips to nuzzle every centimeter of her skin. He was doing exactly what he had promised her that he would do. Channa let her eyes wander over his broad shoulders and powerful arms, the muscular definition exquisite in its detail. Dario was not the largest man that Channa had ever taken, Kavalian men were built much larger, but Channa could not deny the complete rapture that seared her body as his still impressive ten inch cock had caused her to feel things she had never experienced. He didn’t just make love to her; Dario consumed her completely. He had taken her like this the first time, refusing to allow her to be submissive to him. He had stared into her eyes as he sank into her completely, eliciting a groan of utter fulfillment from Channa. He stretched her in such a way it caused her body to vibrate in desire and need. He had not pounded her body into the bed as Kavalian men did, trying to prove their dominance over her. He had stroked into her body with power and slow, sensuous movements that had her crying out his name in short order, clutching him tightly as the first orgasm she had not brought upon herself cascaded through her. And it hadn’t stopped for nearly four hours.

His stamina was superior in every way and Channa relished in using her tongue to give him her version of a tongue bath. She lavished his pulsating cock with attention, using her lips and tongue and her breasts in ways that had Dario squirming on the bed. He allowed her to be demanding and forceful when she wanted, using her long tail to slap him teasingly while she rode him with tight hard movements of her hips. He allowed her to nibble him almost painfully, but he returned this action tenfold on her when he had licked her pussy that first time. Channa thought her muscles would rip through her skin at that first electric jolt when his tongue danced across her clit and with his wolf fangs extended; it sent her pleasure meter through the ceiling. Their

lovmaking had been rough at times, Channa reveling in the pleasure as he took her from behind in such a way as to make her feel in control but still allowed him to dominate her after a fashion. His large hands never stopped moving or caressing her skin and he made it a point to constantly brush his fingers across that spot on the base of her tail.

Whatever pain and humiliation she had experienced in her young life, Channa had felt it all falling away in the last few weeks. Discovering her bond with Mirra and feeling it grow stronger every hour, and then this incredibly delectable man. She watched as he nuzzled her ribcage and her forearms, hitting every part of her body that held scent glands she knew. She lifted her hands to his face as he finally stopped with his chest above hers, his hard, naked body stretched out on top of her but holding his upper body suspended above her. It was just close enough that her rock hard nipples teased his warm skin and sent ripples of delight skittering across her flesh. She lifted her head quickly and kissed him hard, giddiness coursing through her as he returned the powerful kiss with equal ardor. Channa nibbled on his lower lip with her teeth, tugging on it gently as she pulled away after a moment and stared into his soft green eyes.

Dario smiled as he gazed at her. "Hi there." He spoke softly.

Channa pulled him down on her, her hands spreading across his powerful back as she felt his weight press her into the bed and make her feel so secure and wanted. She drew her long legs up along the outside of his hips feeling his scrumptious, semi hard cock press against her opening as her tail extended out and draped across his lower back and tight ass cheeks. "You... you are... you are so very different." She spoke softly.

"Well... I hope that's a good thing." He answered her.

"Am I your woman now?" She asked with a impish smile.

"You are... you are whatever you want to be Channa." He said with a twinkle in his own eyes. "I would prefer to court you in the ways of my people... make you see that I am the man for you."

Channa tilted her head a little and gazed at him. "Why?" She said. "When I already know this to be true. What you have made me feel... it is beyond wonderful Dario."

"You... you have never been outside Kavalian space." Dario said hesitantly. "It would not be fair for me to claim you when you have not seen all that you could have."

"You... you don't want to claim me?" She asked feeling suddenly concerned.

Dario chuckled softly and shook his head. "Woman... I want to scent you so bad it makes my blood burn. My father... my father raised me to be a proper Spartan. A gentlemen. It would not be suitable for me to claim you when you have not seen all that you could have. All that the universe has to offer to you."

"Including other men?" She asked.

Dario nodded and lowered his eyes. "Yes... other men too."

"And they would treat me like you do?" She asked him.

"They would honor you yes. You would be an equal to them... not a piece of property. My people... Spartans... we cherished our wives and mates." Dario replied reaching up with a hand and brushing some strands of long black hair from her face.

"But would they treat me as you do? Would they make me feel what you make me feel?" She asked him.

"You... you are beautiful Channa. You are beautiful and you smell so very good. You would have many alpha wolves after you." Dario said.

"But would they make me feel what you do?" She asked again. "I am not foolish Dario. I know even if we go back with you now, because the Prefect has... because they have done so much to bring harm to Resumar's family... I know we will not be looked upon as you and the others look at us. At least not right away. I do not wish to lose what you have made me feel, even for an instant. So I ask you again... will they make me feel what you do?"

Dario gazed at her eyes, knowing what she wanted him to say because her scent was calling to him without holding back in the least. "No." He stated.

Channa grinned now and she pulled him tighter to her feeling blissfully warm at his words and how her body molded to his. Her blue eyes were alive with happiness and desire. "Then I am very lucky you found me first aren't I." She stated confidently.

Dario looked into her stunning blue eyes and smiled. "I think that makes me the lucky one."

“I have... I have never known what you make me feel Dario.” She said softly. “I... I never thought I would be desirable after all that was done to me. I...”

Dario put a finger to her lips and quieted her words as he leaned over and nuzzled the side of her neck and just behind her earlobe. Her arms tightened around his back as she purred in contentment. “Never question who you are Channa.” He whispered to her. “You are as desirable a woman as I have ever seen and when I am done scenting you, no male will come within a quarter mile of you.”

Channa laughed at his words. “Then you will have your work cut out for you.” She stated. “I can be a handful.”

“Somehow that prospect doesn’t frighten me in the least.” He stated confidently lowering his head to firmly nuzzle her throat.

“Then we should start right...” The muffled explosion was enough to cut off her words and make both of them look towards the door.

“They... your cousin would not begin destroying the ship if we were still on it would he Dario?” Channa asked knowing it was a stupid question.

“No!” Dario barked as he began to rise off the bed.

“Then that is something else!” She echoed as he was scrambling to his feet and reaching for where their clothes lay on the deck.

Resumar burst into what would have been the bridge of VORTEX Cruiser 341 had it been a Union ship, Athani right on his heels. He gripped his *Nehtes* tightly in his hand, Athani clutching the K14 KM expertly.

“Avi... 341... talk to me!” Resumar barked out.

-There has been an explosion in the aft quarter of deck twenty-one- Avi answered almost immediately.

“Well *sibfla* Avi!” Resumar snapped. “Tell me something I don’t know. One of our charges didn’t fizzle on us did it?”

-Negative son of the descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar- 341 answered. **-This was not as large an explosion as one of the charges we have built and put in place. This was something else-**

“Ok... so we can be happy a large chunk of the mountain didn’t blow outwards 341.” Resumar barked. “Now what the hell was it?”

Athani looked at her husband with happy eyes. No matter the pain he was in knowing that his father was dead and possibly one or more of his mothers, he had not lost the will and determination that had first attracted her to him so completely. He had not lost the confidence and purpose, nor his ability to command.

-We have a security breach- 341 answered.

“Security breach?” Res spat. “Who the hell could break into this ship?”

- Section seventeen. Deck twenty-one. Starboard side...grid three four. Incredible- 341 exclaimed.

“What?” Resumar came up next to him.

-Internal ship sensors have been taken offline- He said with what sounded like surprise in his pseudo mechanical voice. **-Avi... transfer power to grid two one-** 341 spoke.

-Transferred- Avi responded instantly.

Resumar leaned closer as the monitor showed a smoking hole in the mountain plateau that was above them. “Is that what I think it is?” He asked.

-Affirmative. I have alternate exterior sensors placed along the entire length of VORTEX Cruiser 341. We are viewing the breach from one of those sensors. Someone has managed to breach the exterior hull-

“341... we are buried in a mountain!” Athani complained as she moved up beside his hulking form. “How could they breach the damn hull?”

-Affirmative Athani Little One- 341 answered. -However... the exterior crust is thinnest in this location as a result of VORTEX Cruiser 341’s design. Only one point six meters thick to be precise-

“The Coven!” Resumar hissed.

Athani turned to face her husband. “How would they have the knowledge of how to breach the ship Resumar? On where to breach the ship where it was weakest for that matter?”

-Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon- Avi replied turning to look at them.

“Impossible!” Resumar barked. “If the time frame you and 341 have told me is accurate this ship is at least twenty thousand years younger than him Avi! How could he possibly know this information? How would he...” Resumar stopped talking and his eyes grew wider as his mind worked. “Sonofabitch!” He swore. “I didn’t think of that!”

“Resumar what?” Athani blurted.

341 turned to face her. **-All Pralor City Ships and Warships were built with the same superior alloy and material Athani Little One. Phased Exogenic Composite Vantronium- He spoke. -Even VORTEX Cruiser 341. It was the most durable and widely used ship building material that we had in Pralor space. It is one of the things other species wanted from us that we did not give. The process by which we made this material. If Chief Elder Pralor Xaxon was able to pass this information to his descendants as he did with other information, by infecting them with his essence, then this would also be included. As well as the means to penetrate the outer hull-**

“Are you saying the Coven is loose on this ship?” Athani declared.

-It would seem so- Avi answered. **-And considering the location they chose to breach the hull, they must have some sort of device that allows them to scan the hull even inside the mountain-**

-Even as advanced as my sensors are... I will be unable to determine how many of them are actually onboard. I cannot see into the shadows as it appears those of your uncle’s species so like to use- 341 spoke.

“They can’t possibly think they can steal this ship will all of us on it.” Resumar stated.

“Could they be going after the explosive packages?” Athani asked.

-Unlikely- Avi answered. **-They will not know where we have placed them-**

“They are damn well here for something!” Resumar barked. “We...”

Avatar 341 turned abruptly and looked at the myriad of control panels around where he stood. Avi moved closer to him noticing this behavior. Resumar also detected the odd reaction.

“341?” He questioned.

-Avi is correct that they will not know where the explosive charges have been placed throughout the ship. The likelihood they are here to steal the ship is remote-

“Then what?” Athani asked.

341 turned quickly and looked at them. **-I have in my Quantum Neural Processors every bit of knowledge that this ship holds Resumar Leonidas. Just as Avi now does-**

“Yeah... so!” Resumar snapped.

-As do the other four copies of myself currently in storage- 341 answered. **-The sealed chambers to the Avatar Alcoves have been breached in the same manner as the outer hull. I can no longer transfer data to the copies of myself. It appears the High Coven is not here to steal the ship. They are here to steal me-**

“Ah... fuck me!” Resumar spat as he began to turn. “*Aryschanne...* stay here with Avi and 341! Seal this compartment just in case! Dario... Mican... the Coven is loose on the ship! They are trying to steal the extra Avatars! Deck twenty-one! Section seventeen! Go! Go! Go!”

LEONIDAS RETREAT

“...how Yuriko?” Sivana gasped.

Yuriko got up from the table they were all sitting at and moved to the dispenser to get more tea. Eurin, Zaniai, Sivana and Ceuma sat at the table, while Atropos, Joci and Belen stood along the wall. Atropos stood in such a way that he could keep one or both of his eyes on Anja in the room across the hall as she was examining Martin with the second Hadarian doctor in the room with her. Filrian pulled the mug out for Yuriko and she smiled at her husband as she took it from him. She hadn't slept in more hours than she cared to recall and it was quickly catching up to her. She took a long sip of the tea as she turned back and returned to the chair and she looked at her adopted aunt.

“Father... he has been putting this plan together for over a year with Avi.” She stated softly.

“Avi?” Eurin asked stunned.

Yuriko nodded as she took a deep breath and finally was able to let go of what she alone had been holding in for so many years. “I don't know all of the details of how it started, but I know that Armetus discovered something at the end of the Evolli War. What happened between father and I seven years ago was staged Divine One. It wasn't real. We did it so when I took command of my *OMEN* ship I would have complete freedom and not have to be concerned with the Netnews hounding my every step as they do the rest of my family. Initially I was tasked with monitoring the High Coven but that quickly became monitoring the Kavalians as they conquered more and more of High Coven space. Armetus discovered something at the end of the Evolli War, something that linked the Kavalians to the reason the Evolli War started.”

“Wait... the Evolli started the war by invading Union territory and capturing Divruih and Ucurua.” Zaniai spoke quickly. “They slaughtered over four hundred thousand men, women and children! That is and has always been the reason the war started.”

Yuriko nodded. “That is what almost everyone thinks Zaniai, but the Evolli were only the front people. The fodder for the Kavalians to gain their goals. Whatever Armetus found proved that the Kavalians were behind it. They were the ones who financed the Evolli effort from behind the scenes. They were the ones who provided the Evolli with much of their initial intelligence in regards to the Union. It is why they were so successful at the beginning of the war.”

“Yuriko...” Belen spoke now. “We all fought in that war. Every part of it. We never saw anything that indicated a Kavalian influence.”

Yuriko nodded. "I know. They were very careful to not have anyone discover how deep their involvement was. What I do know is that they began a brand new criminal organization that became their front company so to speak. Through this criminal organization they were able to channel funds and intelligence to the Evolli and keep their involvement covered behind layers of criminal practice and dozens of pirates and mercenaries. The Kavalians did not want father discovering their actions because they knew he would have come after them without hesitation and they could not fight two wars on two fronts no matter how many clones they created."

Eurin looked at her. "That... that doesn't explain all this." She said motioning with her hand to where Martin laid in the bed across the corridor.

Yuriko leaned back in the chair. "My father is not the senseless brute that many people take him for Divine One. You of all people should know this. Many consider him politically inept and he has done nothing to dispel this attitude. He prefers to work behind the scenes and many of those he has worked with have appreciated his involvement. Aunt Deia would often use him as the one who worked the back channels while she or my mothers took point on the political stage. In some respects it was her way of protecting father... keeping him out of the lime light and doing what he does best. Talking bluntly and giving his word."

"Believe me... I know that first hand." Eurin stated. "Those of us who looked behind the surface of the agreement with the Chuvoui ten years ago and we saw his imprint all over it. It took some masterful negotiations to convince those rock headed people to do what he wanted them to do, and he did it in a way that his involvement was never brought up."

Yuriko nodded. "And now one part of our border is forever secure and no one would dare attempt to cross our borders there. The Chuvoui are supremely loyal to father... and not even the Kavalians would dare cross them."

Eurin lifted her hand and waved it around. "And this?" She asked once again.

Yuriko sipped her tea slowly. "Whatever it is that Armetus discovered at the end of the war caused father to come up with the idea of this plan. He has always felt that he bore at least some responsibility and shame for the actions of his brother Divine One, especially since he is the one that let him go."

"He bears no shame for not killing his brother under the eyes of their mother!" Atropos barked loudly. "To Spartans... that would have been an even more grievous crime!"

Yuriko nodded. "He feels he does however Uncle Atropos... because he is King." She said softly. "He did nothing for years because he did not want it to appear as if he was being vindictive or allowing his feelings for his brother to make his decisions for him. If... if things were different, Pleistarchus would be King of the Union Uncle, you know this. He is the oldest. Father has always fought with how to balance his own guilt and shame for letting him go and ways to keep the Union safe from his influence."

Atropos looked at her with surprise in his eyes. "I... we... we never knew that." He stated softly.

Yuriko nodded. "Only Andro, me and our mothers know that." She said. "He told no one else... not even grandmother Gorgo."

"But Pleistarchus has no claim to the Union throne." Sivana spoke heatedly. "Not after what he has done through the years! He abandoned the Spartan people three thousand years ago, not the other way around!"

"I am only telling you what I know to be true. My father is ... he is a very complex man and only my mothers can truly understand him." Yuriko said softly. "At the end of the Evolli War he ordered Armetus to confirm as much as possible of what he suspected. He wanted firm, irrefutable intelligence that the Kavalians had indeed had a hand in the Evolli War. When Armetus brought it to him a little more than a year ago, father began setting this plan in motion with Avi."

"What plan?" Joci asked as he moved up behind Ceuma and placed his large hands on her shoulders.

"Faking his own death." Yuriko answered confidently looking at them. "He was going to fake his own death... and those of my mothers For'mya and Aricia. He had planned for them all to die in a *STRIKER* accident. With a team of Drow that have been specially trained by Lynwe and Aihola and a squad of *Durcunusaan* troops trained by Uncle Andreus, he was going to go into Kavalian space, find his brother and kill him along with the Kavalian Prefect and as many of their Pride Leaders as possible."

"*Tukannupae!*" Joci gasped softly with wide eyes.

Yuriko nodded. "Yes... that is what I said when he first came to me and told me about it. No one else knew... not even Andro... and that is why I knew I would play a part in it."

“Yuriko... that doesn’t explain how he is here.” Sivana spoke. “We... we watched him die as we were leaving Hadaria. It... it was broadcast live across the Union. We watched him and Torma die in Sparta! Anja... Anja could no longer feel him within Mindvoice! It affected her physically!”

“I will come to that part... but first... seven years ago... shortly after I took command of *OMEN THREE*... we received reports of a secret High Coven Cloning facility. Armetus had known it was there for sometime and so did my father and they knew what its purpose was, but until the *OMEN* ships came into being we never really had the ability to get close to it.” Yuriko explained. “It was the very first mission we had back then and while we suspected what its true purpose was as I said... we did not know for sure until more recently when the Hadarian Arch Ministry called mother back to Hadaria to face those ridiculous charges. Well... we did not know for sure, but I now believe father did know and that is why he ordered Filrian and I on our mission.”

“What do you mean?” Eurin asked.

“It was a cloning facility Divine One.” Yuriko told them seeing their eyes go wide. “A very advanced cloning facility that was using procedures and advanced technology that the High Coven gained from the section of the Mindvoice ship that crashed on Nuwaroa. They were making clones. Clones of my father’s old SEAL Team... clones of my mothers... and they were trying to make clones of Uncle Daniel and... of father.” She looked at Ceuma. “That is... it is where you came from Ceuma.”

“By the gods!” Eurin gasped as she sat back.

“We had an idea of what they were doing there, just not the entire scope and complexity of it.” Yuriko continued. “Father knew I think and he contacted me before they left for Hadaria and gave me new orders. Pirates or mercenaries had assaulted the facility just after we began to actively monitor it seven years ago. We did not know what they had taken until we ourselves destroyed the facility several months ago, but after the Chief Minister demanded mother return I think father figured it out completely. Filrian and I only confirmed it for him when we attacked and destroyed the facility. They...”

“These pirates? They took me.” Ceuma said softly.

Yuriko met her eyes and nodded. “Yes. It appears that was the case.” She stated. “The clones were all in sealed Cryo chambers, so your chamber must have been kept somewhere that they could maintain it all of this time until their plan was ready for full implementation.”

“Kavalian space probably.” Filrian spoke now as he moved up behind Yuriko and placed his hand on her shoulder. “Aside from the High Coven they are the only ones with the cloning capabilities to maintain a Cryo chamber for any length of time. At least until they were ready to use its contents.”

“They... they had me all that time?” Ceuma asked softly.

“It would appear so. When Buonau and Wiktor were ready to move against mother they woke you up.” Yuriko said.

“Damn that woman for defying nature and everything holy by delving into such things!” Eurin snarled. “We are not gods and we should not act like it!”

“Father came up with this plan over a year ago as I said.” Yuriko said continued. “The Coven had improved their cloning process through the years Divine One. Far in advanced of what they did with grandmother Gorgo. Armetus and father determined after talking with Avi that they had somehow managed to make some discoveries from the remains of their Mindvoice ship. Looking at the data after we destroyed the facility, we discovered they had devised a way to clone a Lycavorian and insure that his or her scent would match almost exactly. Mother believed they had somehow tapped into the genetic code of the actual scent gland itself and discovered how to replicate it. Then they were implanted surgically into the new clones and acted as any normal scent gland would.”

“Yuriko... this would explain the exacting nature of Ceuma perhaps... why she is so nearly perfect in every way to Anja, but...” Eurin started.

Yuriko looked at the near identical twin to her mother. “According to the data cores we got from the facility prior to its destruction, you were from an earlier batch of clones Ceuma. Before mother was turned by father and before they had mastered implanting the new scent glands.”

“Lucky me.” She stated disdainfully.

“There is no way Aikiro could have cloned your father Yuriko. It was determined long ago that your father’s blood is too pure. Too powerful. The cohesiveness could not be sustained in a clone. Your mother Aricia as well... not too mention Daniel Simpson and a handful of others.” Eurin said.

“That does not mean she did not try Divine One.” Yuriko said. “That is what Filrian and I took from the facility before we destroyed it. An incomplete clone of father.”

“Incomplete how?” Sivana asked.

Filrian nodded now. “Exceptionally deformed... both physically and mentally but with the exact proportions we needed.” He answered. “How he knew there were clones of himself there I don’t know. To be honest I don’t know if I want to discover that.”

“He spent far more time with Avi than most people realize. Andro as well.” Atropos said. “He... Avi seemed to gravitate to them quite a bit. Perhaps this is where he determined it. By speaking with Avi.”

Sivana nodded her head. “That would fit with things Anja has told me through the years about Avi and the vast knowledge he held.”

“You said exact proportions. Exact proportions needed for what?” Joci asked now thoroughly enthralled.

“To use the SGT.” Yuriko answered. “The Ship to Ground Teleporter.”

“Ship to ground teleporter!” Atropos gasped. “That never... that program never left the test phase! Your mother deemed it too dangerous! Only the short range teleporters in the Mark Eleven saddles made it past her scrutiny enough to be put into service.”

Yuriko met his eyes. “Atropos... you more than any of us should know that my father is stubborn to a fault. He had Avi and Ben continue working on the program and they obviously got it to a working prototype because that is what we have on *OMEN THREE*. After everything went down at SODRAG, father contacted me. I don’t know what he found out but he ordered me to standby in orbit under Shroud and wait for his signal. We had the clone, and while it was deformed it still carried enough of a mint like scent similar to father to pass muster at least initially.”

Sivana leaned forward in her chair. “You... you teleported Torma Yuriko! How... what did you put in his place?”

Eurin looked at her from across the table. “Your father cloned him didn’t he?” She spoke disapprovingly.

Yuriko shook her head. “Actually... we have Andro and Elynth to thank for that.” She stated.

“I don’t understand.” Eurin said. “I thought they did not know of this.”

“They didn’t.” Yuriko said. “The original plan was to have the *STRIKER* accident as I said. After SODRAG father changed it. He had us remove the body of Naruth from SODRAG. Javier Moran’s dragon. The one Andro and Elynth killed during the battle there. We... we dyed his scales with an irreversible obsidian color to match Torma’s scales and...”

“Wait... I saw this Naruth!” Atropos spoke. “He did not match Torma in size. He was not even close!”

Yuriko nodded. “Torma was going to die in an explosion at SODRAG.” She explained. “We were going to teleport Torma out just as we teleported Naruth’s corpse in. The explosion would account for... it would account for why not all parts of him would be discovered. It would certainly pass a cursory inspection. At least until Isheeni or Aurith realized it wasn’t him. By that time... father would have already made contact with them via Mindvoice and let them know what was going on. It just so happens that it was Andro and Elynth who discovered it at the same time they realized it wasn’t our father that was killed. Isheeni hasn’t left Aurith’s side at the remains of the Senate building waiting for the rescuers to find Aunt Deia and our mother but by now they both know that Torma is alive.”

“Anja... Aricia... none of them knew this?” Eurin gasped.

“Oh no... they knew what father’s plan was. He would never keep something like this from them. Two of my mothers were to be part of it.” Yuriko answered. “I don’t think they knew to what extent he had advanced the plan though. He didn’t foresee that his brother would strike so soon and he did not have time to inform them of what was happening. He thought he had months to continue planning before Pusintin would come after him directly. He made the decision obviously during the battle by Aunt Tarifa’s home when things looked their worst. He more than likely deduced they would slack off their attack if they thought they had killed him. This would give Colonel Fache and Uncle Danny enough time to mount a counterattack and get those he loved to safety.” Yuriko grew silent for a long moment. “He underestimated just how far Pusintin... how far his brother would actually go to kill him obviously.”

“You said his injuries were healed?” Eurin asked.

Yuriko nodded. “The timing had to be perfect or else others would detect what happen.” She explained. “Once father activated the signal we maintained a constant sensor lock on his position. The grenades that were fired hit at the exact time we were teleporting him which we didn’t plan for. We actually teleported eight pieces of shrapnel along with him. He suffered severe abdominal lacerations and one large piece of shrapnel punched through his thigh cutting his artery when he rematerialized here on *OMEN THREE*. Filrian was able to stabilize him immediately... but ever since we brought him on board he has been comatose like you see. I can feel the tremors of his resonance within Mindvoice but I have never experienced or seen shields like he has up now... if they are even shields at all.”

“What do you mean?” Atropos asked.

“They don’t feel like shields Atropos.” Yuriko said looking at him knowing he would have more knowledge of Mindvoice than the others. “It... it feels like a large seamless wall. Smooth... unblemished. Polished.”

“Torma cannot help him?” Eurin asked.

Yuriko shook her head. “Torma is just as confused as we are. He is conscious inside his mind... but he is not retreating out of Mindvoice for some reason. Even Torma cannot draw him out. That is why I sent for mother. She has drawn him out of something similar in the past. I only hope... I only hope she can do it again.”

“Your brother Yuriko!” Eurin gasped as her eyes went wide. “He...”

Yuriko looked at her. “What Divine One?”

“We saw it on the Netnews just before we arrived.” Sivana spoke softly knowing what Eurin was going to say. “He... he destroyed the clinic where the clones of Martin and Torma were. The reports said there... there was nothing left of the building.”

Yuriko nodded. “Father touched him then.” She said confidently. “Father said Andro would be the first to realize it and Andro would not have allowed anyone to examine the bodies once he discovered the truth.”

“Yuriko... your father and mother are *Anomes*.” Zaniai spoke now. “The Netnews... the reports say he... they say Andro...”

“He gave her Protrilene.” Sivana said softly. “To speed her death because her *anome* was gone.”

Yuriko nodded once more. “Yes I know *Tenna*.” She said. “Andro contacted me via Mindvoice using a Mark II booster as you were landing. Mother is on a *STRIKER* and will arrive here in five hours.” She said to the stunned looks of almost everyone.

“Yuriko... who else knows all this?” Atropos asked while the others looked at her in shock.

“Aside from those of us in this room and Andro... no one.” She replied. “He will more than likely tell Sadi if she does not know already. Like father he will keep nothing from his *anome* or his other mates. The *Feravomir* too. We did not speak for very long...”

“Does he know what is wrong with your father?” Ceuma asked.

“I gave him a short description... but I was not able to go into as great a detail as I was with all of you.” Yuriko answered. “When I told him mother was arriving he only nodded and said she was the one who would bring him out.”

“Yuriko... we must let everyone know!” Eurin said suddenly. “They must know your father lives!”

Yuriko came to her feet slowly. “No.” She stated plainly. “Androcles will agree with me on this Eurin. These attacks against our family... they were well planned and executed. The Kavalians had inside knowledge of our movements, our schedules, what we would do. They knew where our mother Dysea was, and with her Normya as well. No one outside of our family and the *Durcunusaan* had that information. And the *Durcunusaan* would never betray us. Not to mention that we do not know if what occurred on Hadaria is in some way tied together with these attempts. I believe they are in some manner and I think Andro does as well.” Yuriko shook her head as she moved to the glass next to Atropos and looked across the corridor at where her adopted mother was standing beside her father’s bed holding his hand tightly within both of hers. She finally turned her eyes to look at Atropos. “Father must remain dead for now. If only to give Andro the time he needs to find out who among our own people have helped the Kavalians, and to make sure that no Kavalians remain hidden, waiting to strike again. Next time they may very well succeed.”

“*Aovi*.” Atropos spoke softly.

“It will not look odd if mother does not return to Earth right away. She is the only Queen who is not dead, injured or out of touch.” Yuriko spoke turning back around. “The Netnews knows Andro will want to keep her safe until things return to some form of normalcy.”

“Then you believe that For'mya is...” Sivana spoke softly.

“I believe what my brother believes.” Yuriko said softly in a pained voice. “We can no longer feel her within Mindvoice Aunt Sivana. If... if she was alive we should be able to detect even the barest tremors of her aura within Mindvoice as we do with all our family no matter the distance. We cannot feel her... and that does not bode well.”

“Will she be able to help him Yuriko? Can she pull him out of this state he is in?” Eurin asked finally.

“She has done it before Divine One. She is the only one to have done this. Andro believes this as well.” Yuriko said. “All of you consider her to be the most powerful Healer in the Union and she is, but what you don't realize is that behind only my father, my brother and my mother Aricia, she is perhaps the strongest Mindvoicer in our family. Certainly on a par with the *Feravomir*. Not many realize that. She has saved him before and that was before she was turned and had all the training and experience she does now.”

Yuriko turned back to look at Anja through the glass. “She will save him again. She has too... for if she doesn't, my brother will unleash a living hell upon the universe on his path to retribution for all the wrongs people have committed against our family. Nothing will stand in his path and he will not stop until our uncle lies at his feet for what he has done and the High Coven and the Kavalian Federation are nothing but vague memories floating on the wind. And believe me when I say that is something none of us want to experience, for if you believe my father has a temper...” Yuriko turned back and looked at them. “You have not experienced anger like I have felt coming from my brother these last hours. He is holding it in... controlling it now and Sadi is helping him. Father being alive has curbed that anger somewhat... but we do not want to see it come out Divine One. Ever.”

“Yuriko you must...” Eurin began to speak.

Yuriko's eyes narrowed and she shook her head. “No Divine One... I will not control it! The Kavalians have attacked us personally! They have killed nearly a thousand of our people! They have helped to usurp my mother from her rightful place as Queen! If the Kavalians have killed our mothers... if they have killed our mothers then there is not a force in this universe that will stop my father and brother from making them pay! And there is not a Leonidas alive that will not stand with them! That is what you should fear Divine One. That is what you should fear and pray does not happen.”

TALON OF JUSTICE

THE WILDS

NEAR THE CONSORTIUM BORDER

“Helm... position report!” Dutkne asked from his command chair as the last vestiges of their final jump passed and the stars became normal again as they looked out the two view windows at the front of the bridge of the *TALON*.

“Six three nine four one point seven! Exactly as we plotted!” The man answered.

Dutkne got to his feet. “Then we are in The Wilds?” He stated softly.

“Yes sir! The Lycavorian Union border is 19.2 light years from our current location! The Kavalian border is 36.9 light years to starboard, and The Consortium is 64.1 light years to our port!”

“How... how do you know that?” Devra gasped from where she stood.

Devra stood with Nirilo and his sisters off the left side of where Dutkne stood in the right center of the bridge. Wayonn stood slightly behind Dutkne to his right next to Drey and Caia. The last few hours had been quite eye opening for Devra and she was still trying to catch up with everything that was happening. Just a week ago she would never have imagined she would be aboard a Lycavorian ship in an area of space that no Vanari had ever been to before. She had to say; the professionalism showed by the men and women on Dutkne's ship was somewhat of a surprise to her. They had treated her and Arduri and Naesta with the utmost respect and honor, something that her former husband and others on the Board of Regents said they did not possess or display. Even Naesta, who was more militant towards the Lycavorians because of her father Coren's influence,

was much more subdued by what she saw. Naesta had spent more time with Coren than Nirilo, Caliria or Arduri while she grew. It was only after she became a member of the military and a Vanari Commando that her ideals had begun to change. The Vanari military had a much higher level of respect for the Lycavorians and what they had accomplished as well as what they could do. Those teachings had affected Naesta and now they were beginning to come out.

Dutkne looked at her. "Grandfather was given the charts of this area of space some years ago. He has had a contact here feeding him information about the Union. It was Martin who gave him updated charts when they spoke last within Mindvoice."

Devra turned with wide eyes to where Wayonn stood. "Wayonn is this true?" Her stunning green eyes narrowed as she saw the look on Wayonn's face. "Wayonn... are you alright?"

Dutkne turned to look at his grandfather. "Grandfather?" He spoke in a worried voice as he moved up next to him. "Grandfather... what is it? Androcles? Martin?"

Wayonn reached out and grasped Dutkne's shoulder tightly and looked at him with a grim smile. "He is alive Dutkne." He stammered as Drey and Caia also came up next to him. "Martin is alive."

"You are sure grandfather?" Caia spoke her voice filled with renewed hope as she moved up next to him to provide him the support of her body if he needed it.

Wayonn nodded. "Yes. He has... he is deep within Mindvoice Dutkne and there is some sort of shield he has risen. I've never seen or felt anything like it. It's so powerful I could not sense him until we entered the system. I doubt... I doubt I would have detected it if I had not been actively searching. It is almost as if he is in one of the..." Wayonn's eyes grew slightly wider. "Oh Martin my boy..." He exclaimed softly. "Oh that... I would never have thought you could do that."

Dutkne shook his head slowly looking at him. "I feel nothing grandfather." He said. "I can feel nothing but..."

Wayonn looked at him. "Reach out boy. Your shields Dutkne... bring them to my level." He stated. "We are close enough now for you to feel Androcles at least. I am more attuned to Martin because I have already touched him and I can sense Canth's imprint as well as Helen's on him. Follow what I taught you and you will feel him. He is not as angry now... he's more focused... but still burning brightly with emotion."

"You can... you can feel them... even from here?" Arduri asked in surprise. "How can you do this?"

Caia looked at her. "It is possible for those with powerful strands of Pralor blood to sense one another across great distances within Mindvoice Arduri Re Mydala." She explained to all of them. "It is stronger between family members with the same blood, just as it is for Lycavorians. When you combine the two... yes... it's very possible for those with my grandfather and Dutkne's advanced abilities within Mindvoice."

Devra looked surprised and she glanced at Nirilo and then her daughters before turning back to Caia. "We... we did not know this ability of yours was so strong."

Caia nodded. "The purer the blood... the stronger the individual. Martin Leonidas and his son are descended directly from Sumar and another of the six bloodlines... so not only is their Pralor blood purest of all... but their Lycavorian blood is the purest of any Lycavorian who lives today. They will no doubt be much stronger. My grandfather has said they have the ability to focus enough and bring their psychic abilities into physical manifestation. It is what Sumar was able to do... and King Resumar."

Dutkne closed his eyes and lowered his shields to the same level as his grandfather and his face grew semi tense as he felt the myriad of tremors within Mindvoice as he reached out tentatively. He let his grandfather lead him past the minor ones until he too saw the dozen plus burning points within Mindvoice and his forehead relaxed as he allowed the essence and resonance of the minds he felt to course over him. Three or four of those minds were easily as powerful if not more so than his own and his grandfather which stunned him as he realized for the first time that he and Wayonn were no longer the strongest Mindvoicers. He could also detect the lack of focused ability to shield from many of them, and while that may have been sufficient against those they had faced up until now, it would not do against some of the more powerful Mindvoicers within the Protectorate. Without thinking Dutkne began to run through the skills he could teach Androcles and the others in regards to this. "Grandfather... there are... so many."

Wayonn nodded his head slowly and drew on Dutkne's own powerful presence within the tremors of Mindvoice to steady and focus himself as well. "Yes... Aricia, Sadi and Helen are three of them. The others..."

we are still too far away for me to determine who they are for I have never felt them before. More than likely their Bonded Ones and their other mates if I had to guess.”

Dutkne opened his eyes and looked at Wayonn. *[Should we tell them grandfather? About their Bonded Ones I mean?]*

Wayonn shook his head slightly. *[No. Nirilo knows and that is enough for now. They will discover it soon enough. I may trust them to a great extent... but I do not wish to reveal too much too soon. It protects them as well as us.]*

[Why?]

[I have told you what type of man Martin is Dutkne. Androcles is very similar. They will need to make their own impression and decisions. I have no doubts they will get the help they need to find Caliria but...]

Wayonn spoke confidently. *[How Devra and her daughters act will play a large role in that. We need the Vanari on our side... but I will not dismiss my people or our history because of them.]*

Dutkne nodded. *[Neither will I.]*

Wayonn smiled slowly. *[You are beginning to feel it aren't you? The closer we get the stronger it will become you know.]*

[I may feel it grandfather, but that does not mean I have to accept it.] Dutkne said with a shake of his head.

Wayonn smiled and squeezed his shoulder. *[We are strangers in a strange land Dutkne. They know this area of space and the species in it. We will need to tread very carefully while we are here grandson.]* Wayonn said. *[I am fine. Feeling Martin once more was abrupt. I am not as used to his aura as I am yours.]* Wayonn squeezed his shoulder once more. “I am fine.” He stated out loud this time. He turned to Devra then. “Do you have an idea where the Syndicate ship has gone Devra?”

Devra looked at Nirilo and her daughters and then turned back to him. “No.” She stated sheepishly.

Naesta took a deep breath. “I did not factor in the time variable and the corresponding quotients.” She admitted. “The trail we were following would not have been the correct one once we jumped here.”

“I will not give up looking for her!” Devra snapped firmly. “I don't care where we are! Give us the updated charts that you have of this area of space and we will make our own way Wayonn.”

Wayonn shook his head. “Coreward of the Perseus Arm is unlike anything you have ever experienced Devra. And many of the races here make the Orionis Syndicate appear as children when it comes to violence and their treatment of others. Trust me on this... I have visited this area of space several times through the years. We need help.”

“We can take care of ourselves.” Arduri stated confidently.

Dutkne turned to face her now. “No one doubts your skill Arduri Re Mydala. Or yours Naesta.” He stated. “You have come here with us and for me to just let you go off on your own is not only stupid... but tactically unsound for any number of reasons.”

Nirilo nodded. “He's right mother.” He said. “Father will discover where you have gone eventually and if something happens to you or my sisters while you are with us he will blame the Protectorate. He may even send a force here looking for you.”

Devra met his eyes for a long moment and then finally nodded. “What... what do you propose Wayonn?”

Wayonn stepped forward. “Come with us.” He said. “You will find that the Lycavorian Union has an exceptionally foul disposition towards slavery of any kind Devra. They always have and it only grew more intense when Martin reclaimed the throne of his grandfather. Two of his mates are elves and there are many who consider female elves great prizes. For some of the same reasons as Vanari females.”

“They learned this distaste from the millennia under the thumb of the Coven didn't they Wayonn?” She said softly.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. If it is help you need Devra... help you will find with them. They will not turn you away.”

“Dutkne!” The woman barked from her station turning in her chair. “We're picking up an open transmission from within Lycavorian Union space! One of their Netnews channels! You and Wayonn need to see this!”

Dutkne looked at Wayonn who nodded. He turned to the female. "Put it up on the main holomonitor!" He ordered. "What is it?"

"Some sort of news transmission." She answered.

"Let's see it." Dutkne said.

The main monitor on the right shifted its view to that of a single story structure. They could see hundreds of men, women and children milling about as darkness began to fall on wherever this was being transmitted from.

"Where is this from?" Wayonn asked quickly.

"The origin of the signal is Sparta on Earth." She replied quickly. "It's being bounced between repeater beacons but if I have the time distortion right it took place only a few hours ago."

"...was the scene at the Western Medical Clinic near the Royal Estate Villa only a few moments ago." The female voice spoke in the background. "Hundreds have gathered here where General Simpson brought the bodies of the King and Torma. As you can see below us, there is an active and very heavy Durcunusaan presence around the entire facility as the Crown Prince landed only moments ago on Elynth. He spoke briefly..."

Devra moved up next to Wayonn. "Durcunusaan?" She asked him softly.

Wayonn nodded to her. "Wolves of the Blood in our ancient language. The Lycavorian Spartan *Hippies Selda* is part of their ranks. The Royal Guard." He told her. "Those with the purest Lycavorian blood within the Union as they measure it; combined with the strongest of the turned species. Elves. Human. Of all the Union forces they are the most well trained and led and they are who you do not want angry at you. For any reason. If what I saw in Martin's mind is accurate there are even many vampires in their ranks."

"Vampires?" Arduri asked quickly. "I thought... I thought your people hated vampires. Of any kind."

Wayonn shook his head. "Many millions of former High Coven citizens deserted them over the years. They were accepted into the Union as friends and allies and are trusted. They have built homes and futures where before they had none within the Coven. There have been many interspecies marriages between Lycavorian wolf and vampire through the years as well. One of Martin's five wives and mates is a pureblood vampire named Isabella. His first born son Androcles's second mate is a pureblood vampire. They are much more accepting of others than their ancestors and this has made them stronger through the years."

"Five?" Devra asked softly.

Wayonn nodded. "Martin has five mates; his son Androcles three when I last touched Martin."

"Are they not satisfied with just one?" Arduri quipped.

Wayonn looked at her. "They would be if that is what destiny dictated they have Arduri Re Mydala. Martin and his mates have been together for over twenty-five years and their love for each other as well as Martin is famous within the Lycavorian Union."

"Each other?" Naesta asked as she moved up beside her sister. "His wives... they...?"

Wayonn nodded his head. "They love and share each other without question. Just as they do Martin. They are bound to each other in ways it is hard even for me to understand. Androcles and his new mates as well. Do not judge them by the number of mates they have Arduri, for it is not the norm among our people. For Martin and his sons and some of those close to him it is preordained though."

"I just don't see how they could truly love more than one woman." Arduri said her voice neutral.

Wayonn smiled at her. "They can... and they do. Intensely." He stated turning back to the monitor to watch.

"...been roughly six hours since the attacks began and those of us here in Sparta are still trying to come to terms with what has happened. For many of us who are younger, King Leonidas is the only King we have ever known. We have grown with him since his return to our people. We have lived his life with him. I dare say he has surpassed even the popularity of his father's memory, a man who is revered across the entire Union for his sacrifice and for being the catalyst that finally forged the Union into what it is today. We have watched the birth of all his children with his beloved wives and mates and many of the men and women you see around me arrived here crying. They have come here to say their goodbyes to a King that was perhaps the

most approachable leader in history, of any society. We all remember his walks among the streets of Sparta with Queen Dysea or Queen Aricia. Playing with children in the street or simply shopping with the Feravomir. We remember the few times he and Queen Anja were caught arguing in public about one thing or another as cherished mates will always do, and how it always seemed that she won the arguments handily and we would laugh as our King bowed to her will. We remember the times he would chase his children through the streets of Sparta in wolf form, giving the Durcunusaan fits as they tried to protect him. We remember all these things and now we must say goodbye to a King who has been taken from us far too soon. We...

They watched the picture shift quickly back to the building and they paid rapt attention.

“...don’t know!” The female voice echoed as she was talking to someone out of their picture. “Something is happening at the clinic! The Durcunusaan are running away from the building! We can not hear what is being yelled, but General Simpson is waving his arms frantically. I am only a Tier Four yet... yet I can feel the incredible power within Mindvoice building! I have never felt anything like it... it SON VADA CARIANS!”

Wayonn and the others on Dutkne’s ship stood frozen in their spots as the scene shifted to the single story building again just as nearly the entire roof of the structure blew outwards and they watched the massive monstrosity rise from the flaming pyre below with huge flaps of a dozen meters long wingspan. Wrapped in some kind of gleaming armor they could only watch in awe as the armored leviathan stopped in mid air above the structure and began to direct a stream of flame tinged superheated breath back into the facility below. They watched as the armored shape of the man lifted his hands and as the focus shifted they could see two glowing azure blue eyes as two glimmering silver balls of incredible psychic power formed and then he sent them hurtling back earthward to smash into the building below. The explosion that followed was devastating.

“By the Grace of the Four Prophets!” Devra gasped as she watched, moving closer to the main monitor.

“...vada carians! Crown Prince Androcles has just destroyed the clinic holding the remains of his father and Torma!” The female voice shouted. “He used... he used huge Mindvoice balls of power to obliterate the entire structure while it still burns from his Bonded Sister’s flame stream! Nothing... nothing could survive that!”

The transmission stopped abruptly and Dutkne turned to her with wide eyes. “Chief!” He barked.

She was trying to adjust her consoles but shook her head. “It’s gone!” She announced. “It was an old transmission Dutkne! Bouncing between different repeater stations! I...”

Dutkne turned to Wayonn. “Grandfather! They said Androcles destroyed the remains of his father! They are speaking as if he is dead!”

Wayonn shook his head. “I don’t know what is going on Dutkne!” He spoke quickly. “I can feel him! He is not dead! You felt it yourself! I swear to you!”

Devra looked at Arduri and Naesta as they stepped up to her. “What was that?” Arduri gasped looking at Wayonn. “What manner of beast was that? It breathed... it shot fire from its mouth! What... what did he throw from his hands? Who was that?”

Dutkne stepped up to his grandfather ignoring Arduri's questions. “Grandfather?” He asked as Caia took his arm and looked at him.

Wayonn shook his head once more. “Martin Leonidas is not dead Dutkne.” He stated firmly.

“Then why do our people believe him to be?” Caia asked softly.

“I don’t know.” Wayonn answered. “Something must have happened since I touched him last and that is why his condition is such. Why I felt intense anger and hate from Androcles before we departed.”

“Answer my sister’s questions!” Naesta barked now.

Nirilo moved up next to Dutkne and Drey now. “Could what happened before be why you staggered earlier Wayonn?” He asked.

Wayonn looked at him and nodded. "It must be. I gave Martin some information in regards to his brother and plans against their family but I thought he had months before anything happened. My contact... Shiria... she told me she expected any sort of action was months away!" Wayonn turned to Dutkne. "Apparently it has already happened. We must make all haste to Earth Dutkne."

Dutkne didn't hesitate and turned to his crew. "Helm plot a course to Earth! Engage Trans-Quantum drive and increase speed to maximum! And spool up the Spatial Distorter! I don't want anyone to know we are coming! At least not yet!"

Drey grabbed his arm. "Dutkne is that wise?" He asked. "The SD will render us invisible to their scanners, but once we enter Union space that could be taken for hostile action if we are seen by one of their ships." Drey said.

"Grandfather?" Dutkne said.

"He's right." Wayonn spoke. "How long until we reach the border?"

"Seven hours." Dutkne answered.

"The closer we, get the stronger our connection will be with them." Wayonn said. "When we reach the border we can attempt to contact Androcles or Helen and let them know we are coming."

"Will they listen?" Dutkne asked.

"I hope so." Wayonn replied.

"Excuse me!" Devra exclaimed loudly causing everyone to look at her. "Will someone explain to me what we just saw? What was that creature? And how was that man able to do that?"

RIZON FOUR

OUTER EDGE OF KAVALIAN SPACE

.07 LY FROM BORDER OF THE WILDS

She stepped from the large bedroom onto the balcony and gazed across the land beneath her dressed only in the light blue floor length robe. She was naked underneath and as she lifted the finely crafted mug to her lips and sipped the tea, the cool morning breeze felt good on her skin. This had been her home on and off for the last ten thousand five hundred and six years though she appeared to be no more than her late twenties or early thirties in age. Her skin was smooth and flawless in nature, deeply tanned and supple. Her flowing dark brown hair fell to the middle of her back, cascading around her face and accenting high cheekbones and full, soft lips. She let her dark eyes reach out across the landscape before her to the west, taking in the towering thousand foot waterfall that stretched across one side of her mountain retreat. Steam rose in the cool air from the waterfall as the sun began its lazy journey up into the sky. The edges of the waterfall stretched for six hundred meters on one side of her ancient palace and for a thousand meters on the other. Trying to scale the cliffs would be a suicide mission considering their height, the vegetation growth and the hundreds of creatures that lived along the precarious outcroppings. None of them were very friendly in the least and anyone who attempted to climb the cliffs would not survive. For ten twisting and turning kilometers in either direction the valley stretched with no portion of it less than a thousand meters across. Essentially, it was the perfect natural barricade to any kind of assault by men or machine, and she had defenses for any assault from the air. Any ground attack would need to come from the east, and she had defenses for that as well.

This mountain retreat had been here when she first arrived, nothing but animals and insects with her. She had been happy at first to escape the slaughter of her people, but soon she grew lonely and sought out others. It was the Kavalian people she discovered. So barbaric and cruel in their practices. She had convinced Keleru's father before him, and then Keleru himself that she was some sort of Scribe Mother, hence the name they gave to her.

Scribe Mother Demahra.

She guided them in many endeavors over the years, offering advice and even some of the technology she had to maintain her intricate façade that she was something much more than just a female. Through the years however she had gathered many to her cause. A cause and path she had settled upon after witnessing the violent gang rape of a Kavalian female by six rutting males as a means of punishment. She had counseled Keleru's father against allowing such a thing to take place but he ignored her. They had savaged the poor female because

she had refused the attention of one, and while her father and brothers looked on as she cried out for them to help her, they had raped her repeatedly for her actions. When they were done her body and mind were destroyed and she had watched as the young woman's father killed her in the street like some animal.

She knew then what she had to do, and through the many centuries she had chosen her followers covertly and well. Many of those same individuals had taken part in the biogenic treatments started by Keleru and his cronies and scores of them were now situated within the corridors of power. While they were not many in numbers, they were secreted away within the fabric of Kavalian society armed with knowledge as well as a few powerful surprises.

She knew the end game was approaching when Athani'Puat had come to her so many years ago. A young woman who wanted more than the life she was born into. The youngest daughter of the Prefect. She had prepared for years for this day, and the moment she was informed that Athani'Puat had defected and married the half elven son of Martin Leonidas she knew it was time. She knew who Martin was of course. She had known from the first moment she had sensed him come to Apo Prime. The pureness of his Pralor blood surpassed even her own and she was herself a pureblood Pralor. The pureness of his Lycavorian blood was without question, and when mingled together she doubted very much that anyone would supplant him. That mindset was only reinforced when she discovered who he had taken as his Lycavorian bride, and the pureness of her Pralor and Lycavorian bloodlines was also without equal. She knew there were other females who shared his life, and those he turned were exceptionally powerful in their own right because of him.

It was her that contacted Wayonn and helped him to set up the account in The Wilds. She knew of course who Pusintin was, and the blood he carried within his veins, and he was the reason she had helped Wayonn. When they saw what kind of man he was however, they knew he would not fulfill the destiny that both of them foresaw. It was the unborn son that eventually came to power, the child that everyone thought dead. It became apparent to her when Martin came back to his people that it was not going to be an easy feat to kill this man, and that gave her renewed purpose for what she hoped to accomplish. She felt him once more, as she had the last time they were together and she wondered what would have brought him out of his area of space so brazenly.

Those who followed her now, nearly five complete Prides numbering several million, they held different ideals that the Kavalians of old. They knew that in order to survive the future they had to change and adapt. The Nruarani Pride being the largest and most highly regarded. Maysi, the mother of the leader of Pride Nruarani and Pusintin's own daughter Nikkei resided here with her now, and she had no intention of allowing harm to come to them. She had been schooling Nikkei almost everyday since she had arrived, allowing her to see what most Kavalian women knew instinctively. She had been protected most of her life because of who her parents were, and upon discovering what Demahra had told her, Nikkei and rapidly pulled her pure Kavalian female friends that much closer in an almost protective manner. She was the image of her mother in her natural beauty, and after learning what she had, Nikkei had grasped the fact that her mother now loved a man who treated her as she should be treated.

They called her Scribe Mother Demahra... yet her given name... her Pralor name was Shiria.

She turned from the flocks of birds that orbited the river below looking for food as she heard the soft whine of the door open and then close. She watched as the six legged metallic drone moved across the stone floor of her huge bedroom beside the lithe frame of the Kavalian female. This drone was one of nearly forty that she had taken from VORTEX Cruiser 341 when she left that ship buried in the mountains on Ritaah. They had helped her to rebuild this palace into what it was now. The one that skittered across the floor was her personal drone and the female was one of two sisters who knew who and what she really was. They were her most promising students and now her most experienced agents and they had proved their loyalty to her and the cause they had all fought for countless times in the past. Shiria trusted them with her life, and after so many years depending on no one but herself and her own wits, Shiria was so very happy she finally had those she could call friends. Ckaoa and Poysha'Miatt were as close to her as anyone had ever been in her nearly eleven thousand years of life, and to Shiria that meant more than anything else. Their father had given them to her some four hundred years ago as a gift to her position as Scribe Mother of the Kavalian people. He was a traditional Kavalian male, but he was one of only a few forward thinkers back then. He had given them to her as a means to save them from the life he knew they would have to endure. Ten years ago, he had been assassinated by

members of the Puma Bane Pride for speaking out against Prefect Keleru and the course of the war with the High Coven.

The biogenic treatments they had undergone had altered their appearance from when she had first seen them as young Kavalian females of six and seven years of age, but it had not altered their dedication and loyalty to her, especially since the death of their father, mother and many members of the Miatt Pride. Ckhoa' Miatt was the more cerebral of the two sisters while Poysha was one of the most skilled fighters Shiria had ever seen. They both were exquisitely beautiful for Kavalian females even before the biogenic treatments had removed all the hair from their bodies. Now they were downright breathtaking. They were as opposite as sisters could get, but the deaths of their parents and so many members of their Pride made them love each other that much more intensely. There was nothing that they would not do for each other.

The young woman bowed her head in reverence. "Good morning Scribe Mother." She said softly with a touch of humor. "Forgive us for disturbing you."

Shiria heard the small, half meter high drone emit several high pitch whistles and squeaks in its greeting to her and she chuckled. "Good morning to you as well Tantra One three." Shiria answered. "What brings you and my sarcastic young aide Ckhoa here at this early hour?"

"Forgive me... Shiria." The young female spoke shyly. "I'm still somewhat tired."

Shiria smiled and waved her hand. "You were up late last night with Nikkei going over the Scrolls of the Chief Elder Ckhoa. I want to know why you are awake so early now."

"Tantra 13 did not want to disturb you initially Shiria so he came to me." The young woman spoke.

"Did not want to disturb me in regards to what?" Shiria asked.

Ckhoa held out the data pad. "It appears as if Prefect Keleru and Marshall Pusintin have made their move against the Union. Poysha received this from an intercepted transmission to the Prefect's nephew Kattu."

Shiria took the pad and began reading, her eyes going wider as she read. She turned back to Ckhoa quickly. "This... this is why I felt him!" She gasped.

"Felt who Shiria?" Ckhoa asked.

"Wayonn!" She announced in a loud whisper. "He has returned Coreward of the Perseus Arm Ckhoa! I felt him very briefly only a short time ago and then his shields went back up!" She stated. "I was confused because he was not trying to touch me. This is why!"

"If those reports are accurate Shiria then it would explain why he is here." Ckhoa spoke. "If they have succeeded in killing..."

Shiria lifted her hand dismissively. "Pusintin and Keleru' Puat could not kill Martin Leonidas if he himself loaded the weapon for them and then stood like a mountain right before their eyes!" She barked.

"Poysha says it was shown live all over the Union Netnews Shiria! The Federation run Information Bureau is beginning to run it as well." Ckhoa said. "Tantra 13 tapped into the open military channels and confirmed this."

Shiria shook her head. "No!" She stated. "I refuse to believe they were able to kill him! Wayonn has told me he has too much of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar in him to be caught off guard by idiots like Pusintin and Keleru! Something else entirely is going on!"

"Can you feel him now Shiria?" Ckhoa asked.

Shiria shook her head. "No... and I have never tried. I gave my word to Wayonn I would not. If I lowered my shields enough to touch him... even fleetingly... Wayonn said he would detect me instantly."

"He is that powerful?" Ckhoa asked.

Shiria nodded. "He is the descendant of Sumar Ckhoa. As is his son. You and Poysha are the only ones I have allowed to know this. To know all that I know. It is... it is because you lost everything just as I did. That is why I did this."

Ckhoa moved closer to her. "We have known why for some time Shiria." She stated softly. "We do not need to dredge up painful memories now."

"There were none stronger than Sumar and Xaxon Ckhoa... my own teachings to you and Poysha explained this. It is why the Council of Elder Pralors allowed Sumar to try and redeem his brother in the fashion they did, with the City Ship Mission. Wayonn is right in that regard... Martin Leonidas would have detected me almost immediately. When he did... he would have tossed caution to the wind to try and retrieve me, rescue me and keep me safe. His damnable honor would have made him do this." Shiria smiled and shook her head.

“There are days when I curse Dustha for choosing the Spartan people to be the ones to bring the Ten Thousand to. And then there are days I bless her every action. She may not have Pralor blood in her, but she has the essence of Canth and it is just the same. If Martin were to have discovered I live, he would have invaded Kavalian space to come and get me and it would have caused a war much sooner than we anticipated.”

Ckhoa shook her head. “War may already be upon us Shiria. Poysa said there were more reports coming in. She spoke of attacks in The Wilds on Drow outposts. An attack against a planet called Kranek that apparently held the first elven Queen Dysea.” Ckhoa said. “She was moving very carefully... but she said she would have more for us this evening. And there is more.” Ckhoa said.

Shiria looked at her. “What else could there be?” She gasped. “This... this tells me that Keleru and Pusintin have put their plan into action. Whatever that plan is! And we did not see it coming! He is obviously more devious than I gave him credit for all these years.”

“Tantra 13 has lost the homing signal he was monitoring for you Shiria... the one from VORTEX Cruiser 341.” She spoke.

Shiria looked at the drone quickly. “Lost? What do you mean lost?”

“The signal was lost twenty-eight minutes ago.” Ckhoa told her. “We checked to make sure our receiver was operating and it is. When he came to me I immediately ran a diagnostic of all the ship’s systems and I discovered they were all active!”

“Active?” Shiria asked stepping closer to her.

“For the last week.” She said with a nod.

“A week!” Shiria exclaimed. “Why didn’t the security protocols activate? Why didn’t you come to us with this sooner Tantra 13?”

The drone bounced up and down on its legs and the room filled with more whistles and beeps. Shiria gasped.

“341 told you not to!” She called out. “You have been in touch with 341? When? For what purpose? I forbade you to contact him.”

The drone continued to beep and whistle and Ckhoa looked even more confused. She turned to Shiria. “Protocol Nine One?” She asked seeing Shiria’s eyes grow even wider. “What is Protocol Nine One?” Shiria turned away quickly deep in thought and Ckhoa drew closer to her. “Shiria?”

Shiria turned back around and met her eyes. “Protocol Nine One was... it is only to be used if someone of sufficient Etheric abilities and bloodline enters the ship.”

“Bloodline?” Ckhoa asked.

“Before I left Ritaah... I programmed Avatar 341 to not allow activation of the ship’s systems unless someone of Sumar’s bloodline or I entered. It is similar to what Sumar himself did before they sealed City Ship 41 according to Wayonn. Only... only someone of Sumar’s bloodline could activate VORTEX Cruiser 341 Ckhoa. The Avatar would never have responded to anyone else!” Shiria told her trusted aide.

Tantra 13 beeped and whistled more and she turned to face him. “Tantra 13... are you certain?”

Confirming beeps and whistles followed.

“Shiria?” Ckhoa asked.

“It appears as if the Avatar 341 took it upon himself to act. Somehow he detected that a descendant was coming and he took it upon himself to work around the security protocols he is programmed with.” Shiria stated.

“Worked around?”

Shiria nodded. “There are Kavalian rebels on Ritaah Ckhoa.”

“Yes we knew that.” Ckhoa answered. “Keleru’s oldest child. The son he tossed aside and the band he leads.”

“Well apparently... Avatar 341 discovered someone of sufficient Etheric abilities within that group of rebels. He used her to activate small portions of VORTEX Cruiser’s core systems. Enough to allow him to contact the descendant through another avatar as they approached.”

“Another Avatar?” Ckhoa gasped.

Shiria nodded. “It must be Avatar 41... from Sumar’s ship! It makes sense now!” She exclaimed with wide eyes. “When Martin Leonidas discovered that ship on Lycavore he must have activated Avatar 41 when he entered. That would explain how he was able to move it so easily and quickly back to Earth!”

“What does that mean?” Ckhoa asked. “Are you saying someone with the blood of Leonidas is on VORTEX Cruiser 341?”

Shiria looked at her and nodded. “Yes. It means that one or more of Martin Leonidas’s children... perhaps Martin himself... is on VORTEX Cruiser 341 and the Avatar will no longer accept my orders. By his very programming he will follow the commands of the senior Pralor.” Shiria answered. “Somehow he discovered the ship existed!”

“But... you would be senior to any descendant of Sumar! Wouldn’t you?” Ckhoa asked surprised.

Shiria shook her head. “When I left I was only an acolyte Ckhoa. Any descendant of Sumar would immediately trump my authority in 341’s programming.” She replied.

More beeps and whistles sounded from Tantra 13.

“Breached?” Shiria asked quickly. “Who could breach it? There are only three of us who know it even exists!”

“There has been unusual activity in the region over the last few weeks and Marshall Pusintin just deployed a Squadron of Destroyers to that sector.” Ckhoa told her quickly. “That information came in just last night from Poysa as well. A different contact that she has within the military. Contact was lost with a Kavalian Science Ship not far from Ritaah some twelve days ago as they moved to investigate a strange explosion, and it seems the Marshall is finally getting around to checking it. Perhaps it is they who have discovered and breached the ship now.”

Shiria looked at her. “After two weeks?” She spat. “That is not like Pusintin.”

“I found this odd as well.” Ckhoa told her. “Perhaps if you are correct... perhaps he has been focused on whatever plan they are currently conducting.”

“Do you still have contact with 341 Tantra 13?” Shiria asked the drone.

The drone bounced on its legs as more whistles and beeps followed while Ckhoa and Shiria gazed at him. Shiria’s eyes narrowed when he finished. “The other Avatars have been activated?” She spoke. “But why?”

Tantra went on another barrage of beeps and whistles for a good twenty seconds before he stopped.

“The Elder Mystics preserve us!” She gasped.

Ckhoa looked at her with that same confused expression. “They came to destroy it?” She spoke.

Shiria nodded her head slowly. “And now someone is attempting to stop them or steal whatever knowledge they can from its data cores! It is the only reason all the Avatars would be activated at once. Security Protocol dictated that only one Avatar would be active at any one time. If the other three are now active it could only mean that someone else is on that ship with them.”

“How would they have...?” Ckhoa began to ask.

Tantra 13 beeped more and Shiria’s eyes grew wider still. “According to the data he has exchanged with 341 in the last week, it appears as if it was a joint mission with the High Coven. I... I can’t believe he would have trusted her.” Shiria said as she listened to the drone’s series of whistles and beeps. “The Coven attacked them as they were landing but they fought them off. It seems they did not leave however. It must be them! No Kavalian science team would have the knowledge to breach the ship!”

“The High Coven?” Ckhoa asked. “But only Empress Aikiro would have such knowledge wouldn’t she? And she is dead!”

“Yes... which means Xaxon’s vile presence has somehow overpowered her daughter Yuri and given information to these Coven troops on what to look for and how to breach the hull when they find it.” Shiria said as she turned and moved back to her balcony but remained just inside the door as she stared out over the terrain far below. She finally spoke after a long moment. “Ckhoa... how long would it take for us to reach Ritaah from here if we took my ship?”

“Your ship?” Ckhoa asked in shock. “Shiria... you haven’t used your ship in over three hundred years. And they almost caught you the last time when you went to meet with Wayonn in The Wilds!”

Shiria turned to look at her. “That was because I tried to plot the course myself and you were not with me. One of Pride Nruarani’s ships perhaps?”

Ckhoa shook her head quickly. “It would take a full twenty-four hours at least, even on one of their new fast destroyers. Probably two since every Federation ship would be looking for them now and a direct course is

out of the question. Keleru no doubt knows that it was Pride Nruarani that took Nikkei and they will be looking for them.”

“My ship it is then.” Shiria said.

“Shiria... this is a great risk!” Ckhoa spoke. “As advanced as your ship is... if it is captured or tracked it will...”

“And if the High Coven or Keleru gets their hands on even a small part of VORTEX Cruiser 341’s advanced technology, it could change the face of the universe. Martin Leonidas knows that and that is why he risks discovery to destroy it! We must take risks as well. The High Coven or Keleru would not use this technology for peaceful means as the Union has... you know that Ckhoa.” Shiria said. “It could very well bring them here that much quicker! My ship will mean little then!”

Ckhoa paused for only a moment for she knew who Shiria meant. “I will prepare the ship. We can depart in ten minutes.” She stated softly.

“Have Maysi choose six of Pride Nruarani’s finest to accompany us with Nikkei.” Shiria said.

Ckhoa looked at her. “Nikkei? Why?”

Shiria smiled. “I have studied all the information Wayonn has passed to me about Martin Leonidas and his family. I have studied it extensively. Unless I miss my guess... the only one of his sons that he would trust or that would have enough experience in this sort of mission behind Androcles, is Resumar. And if it is Resumar Leonidas... then Athani will be with him as well. He would not leave her behind.”

“She would return to Kavalian space! Knowing the danger that act posed to her?” Ckhoa gasped in surprise.

Shiria nodded. “Athani is many things Ckhoa... timid is not one of them. You should know that. She spent too much time with us to cower before anything. She left us to find love and a future and she has found it with Resumar Leonidas! She will never allow that to slip from her fingers now. Not even if it means returning to Kavalian space knowing there is a death sentence on her head.”

Ckhoa nodded her head after a moment. “I will see to it. I will meet you in the launch bay in ten minutes.”

“How long?” Shiria asked turning to meet her gaze. “We must leave quickly Ckhoa. I feel... I feel our place is with them now. The balance is shifting and we need to be with them to insure it maintains some semblance of order.”

Ckhoa shrugged her shoulders. “A single Phased Quantum Fusion Jump plotted precisely will put us there in less than thirty minutes.” She said easily. “We’ll cross through a portion of The Wilds and what used to be Consortium Space before Keleru annexed it, but we will remain out of the main Kavalian travel corridors for the most part.”

Shiria nodded. “Quickly Ckhoa.” She said.

RITAAH

VORTEX CRUISER 341

Dario ducked back behind the edge of the corridor as rounds from High Coven weapons ricocheted by his head and began reloading his P190. His eyes fell on Channa as she lay on the deck in front of him, her own hands filled with two K12 KMs as she was ripping shots down the corridor.

Dario tapped his jaw and activated his implant. “Res... we got big problems here cousin! The High Coven has come to visit!”

“It’s worst than that!” Resumar’s voice filled both of their implants. Dario’s eyes dropped to Channa as Resumar continued. **“Somehow they have activated the other four Avatars Dario! Avi and 341 believe they are here to steal one or all of them!”**

“So what?” Dario barked as he reached out and stuck the barrel of his 190 around the corner and let loose a long burst. “We have 341!”

“The other four avatars were connected to 341!” Resumar’s voice snapped. **“They’ll know everything he does! About everything! Including this ship and everything we have talked about!”**

“Sibfla!” Dario snapped.

“Mican is moving down an adjoining corridor parallel to your position!” Resumar’s voice echoed. ***“I’m moving up behind you and Channa!”***

“The corridor here is too small for Sorran or Mirra to maneuver!” Dario exclaimed as Channa reached around and fired once more.

“I’ve sent Cemath to their entry point! They won’t be going out the way they came in!” Resumar declared. ***“There are only two ways out of that section of the ship now! We’ll have both of them covered in seconds!”***

“What about the avatars?” Channa screamed out after tapping her own implant. She Mican and all the other rebels had been very excited to get the advanced COM implants and use them. They had them implanted within the first two days for the ease of communication with everyone and it also showed them that Resumar Leonidas was very serious about what he said. “Do we destroy them too Resumar?”

Avatar 341’s deep mechanical voice broke into their implants now.

-The other Avatars must not be allowed to leave the ship Channa- His voice spoke. -The followers of Xaxon must not gain the knowledge we possess-

“341... considering your size and the material used to build you... how exactly do we stop the other avatars?” Dario snapped.

-Your projectile weapons will not suffice to penetrate the outer shells of our bodies Dario. You must take very careful aim and shoot them through the eye sockets. This will be sufficient to fully penetrate the core motor functions in our processors and cause them to cease operation- 341 answered.

“That’s the *only* way?” Dario barked.

-Affirmative-

Dario looked at Channa. “Shoot them through the eye!” He barked. “No problem! And I’m sure they will just let us shoot them in the *nubous* eye!”

“It could be worse!” Channa announced as she ducked back behind the corner just as a fusillade of weapons fire impacted the wall where her head had been milliseconds before. She looked up at Dario with a brilliant smile and beautiful blue eyes.

“Yeah? How’s that?” Dario snapped back at her.

“You might not have had me here watching over you if you hadn’t decided to finally assault me while I was studying with Mirra!” She yelled over the sound of weapons.

“I did not assault you!” Dario screamed.

“What do you call it?” Channa quipped back.

“Making my intentions known!”

“By sticking your tongue down my throat?” Channa gasped.

“It worked didn’t it?” He snarled back with a grin. “Can we just kill these fools and get back home please! I would like to introduce my new mate to my mother while I am still alive!” He lifted his left arm and called forth his Shi Viska. Channa watched in some amazement as the gleaming shield appeared almost magically and she could hear the unnatural hum as if it was alive. *Sorran! Our shields my brother!*

Mirra! Channa called out as well within Mindvoice.

It took only a second for both of them to watch as the light blue psychic shields activated and engulfed their bodies. Channa scrambled to her feet and fell in next to Dario as she finished reloading.

“Ready?” He barked out.

Channa nodded. “Ready!”

“Here we go!” He screamed just before bringing his Shi Viska up in front of them as a shield and sprint walking down the corridor with Channa crouched low behind his taller and wider body, her hands holding the two K12s on either side of them as she sent projectile rounds sizzling down the corridor at an alarming rate.

The High Coven sergeant swore as he worked on the inert figure of one of the Avatars. Weapons fire was still as intense as it was since the first Lycavorian arrived several minutes ago and he was working as fast as his vampire speed allowed. He turned as the senior officer left alive blurred into the room.

“How much longer?” He hissed the question.

“I don’t know *xsa ol!* This is the last one and it seems to have more data than the others, but it also is downloading slower!” The sergeant barked. “I’ve never done this before and I’m only following the instructions given to us by the Empress!” (Damn it!)

“What were they?” The officer barked.

“To plug the data pad in, initiate the signal and wait for the download to finish!” The man snarled back. “They never said how long it would take for each one! And they didn’t say we’d be under fire while I was doing it! This is a delicate operation! These are the most advanced pieces of machinery I have ever seen and we were supposed to have killed all the *vithin* Lycavorians by now!!”

“We can’t hold them forever!” The officer complained as he reloaded his assault rifle. “The extraction ship is already inbound! We’ll only get one shot at this!”

“I can turn the other three back on!” The sergeant offered. “Their secure data cores have been breached and the Empress said they will go into defensive mode. They should attack anything that it deems a threat!”

“That means us too!” The officer shouted.

The sergeant shook his head quickly. “The Empress said the download also included a small program that would be uploaded at the same time that marks us as friendly. It’s why the other three didn’t attack us when we unhooked them from the main core! It will still be active! Turn them back on and let them go!”

“Are you sure?” The officer screamed.

“No... I’m not fucking sure! It may just buy us the extra time we need though! These things can’t be killed by regular weapons! And they might be able to clear us a path out of here!” The sergeant barked.

“*Shu! Xun ol!*” The officer barked. (Shit! Do it!)

The coven sergeant turned and took a small console from the floor, his fingers dancing across the control pad. They heard several beeps and turned as the near seven foot avatars sat up instantly.

**-Systems Core Security Breach! Activating defensive monitoring-
-Multiple targets confirmed-
-Engaging protection mode-
-Eliminate infiltrating lifeforms-**

The officer and sergeant watched as the three avatars got to their feet, split up and exited the alcove room on either side.

“I told you!” The sergeant barked. “Now let me finish!”

Avatar 341’s head came up so abruptly that Athani turned to look at him from where she stood between the two huge cyborg avatars from different ships.

“341?” She asked quickly. “341... what is wrong?”

-Someone has activated the defensive protocols of three of my fellow avatars-

Athani’s eyes grew wider. “What? What does that mean?” She demanded.

341 moved to a different console. **-It means they will eliminate anything they perceive to be a threat. By any means possible-**

“Well... well shut them down!” She snapped loudly.

-I am trying Athani Little One- He answered instantly. **-An evasive program has been introduced into their Quantum Neural Processor nodes-** He dropped his hands and looked at her. **-I am unable to override it but I have slowed the download of the last avatar-**

Athani reached up and tapped her jaw. “Resumar! Resumar three of those avatars have been turned loose in full defensive mode!” She hissed. “341 says it is some sort of evasive program! He can’t shut them down from here!”

“*And? So?*” Resumar’s voice filled the large bridge area.

-They will target anyone they have been programmed to perceive as a threat Resumar Leonidas- 341 spoke out loud. **-I hypothesize that would not include the High Coven personnel currently infecting VORTEX Cruiser 341-**

“*Nubou! That’s just nubous wonderful!*” Resumar’s voice declared. “*Any other good news I ought to know 341?*”

-There is no alternative now Resumar Leonidas. You must destroy the avatars in the manner I described-

“Avi?” Athani turned to look at him.

-341’s logic is accurate Resumar- Avi answered. **-There is no longer an option to save them. This program is of a coalescing nature. It will continue to infect the Quantum nodes of the avatar processors until the entire network is destroyed-**

“*341?*” Resumar spoke. “*Will you be infected?*”

-There is a possibility of feedback Resumar Leonidas- 341 answered.

“*Then disconnect yourself from the network!*” Resumar ordered. “*Both of you Avi! Take yourselves out of the network until we have destroyed them!*”

-Resumar Leonidas... if we do that we will be unable to provide you and Mican’s team vital information except for our internal sensors. Even at maximum output our internal sensors can not cover all of VORTEX Cruiser 341- Avi replied. **-Essentially you will be half blind-**

“*Screw it!*” Resumar snapped loudly through the bridge COM. “*Losing even one of you is not worth the risk Avi! Disconnect yourselves now and feed us whatever information you can via your internal sensors! Aryschanne... once they are disconnected... take them and get down to the deck where the Kavalian rebels are. Keep them from leaving the area! I don’t want to risk their children being injured!*”

“On our way!” Athani replied.

“*Mican?*” Resumar barked out.

“*Na’lia has begun gathering the children and older ones into several rooms and forming a defensive perimeter!*” Mican’s voice answered. “*Thank you Resumar.*”

“*Thank me when we get the hell off this rock!*” Resumar answered. “*Mican... shift your team to Dario’s position! We’re going to come down the opposite corridor and move in behind them!*”

“*As you order. Athani?*” Athani’s head came up from where she was pulling data pads from slots. “*Insure... insure my family is safe sister. And that includes you. I do not wish to lose you so soon after discovering you.*”

Athani felt concern and warmth spread through her at his words. Her brother. A brother she never knew she had until coming here. “And I don’t wish to lose my brother either.” She answered. “We will be fine.”

Athani turned as Avi and 341 unhooked several cables from their arms and shut down their two consoles.

“We’re moving now!”

341 moved to the door first and after scanning the immediate area with his internal sensors he turned back to Athani.

-This way-

Their combined shield was strong enough to deflect and rounds thrown at them as they advanced behind Dario's Shi Viska. Both of them could feel Sorran and Mirra concentrating intently on them from the deck below them which was much larger and wider, allowing them to move along unimpeded. So unimpeded in fact that they both walked right through an area of VORTEX Cruiser 341 that did not allow for Mindvoice communication. It did not shut down their body shields, but it kept Sorran and Mirra from realizing that four High Coven soldiers burst from an open doorway under full blur and slammed into Dario and Channa at full speed.

The collision separated them completely with one High Coven soldier picking Channa up and continuing into another large room and two lodging Dario between them as they blurred into the same room. All the Coven troops came to abrupt halts while releasing Dario and Channa, who continue to fly through the air. Dario smashed into a half dozen piled metal crates and flipped over the top disappearing behind them with a loud grunt of pain.

Channa slammed full force into the far wall and only a flick of her long tail kept her from crushing her skull by turning her body in midair. She fell to the floor dazed as she staggered on her knees and shook her head to chase away the fuzziness.

“Kavalian whore!” The voice roared.

Channa looked up just in time to catch the full brunt of the punch to her face. The blow impacted against her jaw and sent her head snapping around to smash into the wall causing stars to fill her eyes. She gasped at the pain but maintained enough sense to reach down with her tail and snatch the small blade she always kept secured in her boot top. The Coven soldier pulled back his hand to hit her again, fury stretched across his face, but leaving himself exposed from the neck up. This is where Channa struck. She had endured far more pain at the hands of her own people to allow this fool vampire to best her. She had survived and found more than she ever hoped for in a future that had yet to be written with Mirra and Dario. This fueled her and caused her mind to clear instantly and the knife flashed up at unbelievable speed. The Coven troop stopped in his tracks as the blade whistled through the space between them held only by her tail and opened his neck to the air as it sliced through muscle and arteries. As he gagged on his own blood flooding his mouth he staggered back grabbing for his neck as blood erupted from the mortal wound in powerful squirts.

The second Kavalian trooper was more experienced and he didn't hesitate. He snapped out with vampire speed and caught her tail before she could bring it whipping back around. Using his abnormal strength he heaved Channa off the floor with a cry of pain and surprise and whirled her around to slam violently into the wall once more. The impact knocked the knife from her tail and caused her to cry out as several ribs broke. He didn't pause and dropped on top of her and began pummeling her with his fists.

“Whore!” He screamed. “I'll kill you! I'll kill you.” So intent upon his rant he did not hear the savage animal like snarl or the cries of his fellow Coven soldiers from the other side of the room. “Bitch! You Kavalian bitch!”

Channa attempted to block as many blows as she could, but the impact against the wall had truly knocked the wind out of her and her strength was fading fast. Her blue eyes were wide as another punch hit her in the mouth. She saw the flash of steel and brought her hands up to catch the wrist of the Coven trooper as he tried to bring the blade ramming down into her heart.

“Die bitch!” The Coven troop screamed only inches from her face as his superior weight began pushing the blade lower to her heaving chest. “Die you Kavalian bitch!”

Channa began whipping her tail back and forth striking the trooper with wicked blows, each one carrying enough force to break the skin of his face and neck and bring blood. Fear and anger fueled her own strength now. Anger at what had been done to her without her voice. Anger that her family and Pride had so

quickly tossed her aside through no fault of her own. Fear of dying and losing all she had gained up until this point.

“No!” Channa screamed fighting back with renewed strength, her fingers tightening on the troop’s wrist and exerting more pressure back. The point of the blade rose a few centimeters from her chest but the energy she had expended during her hours with Dario had weakened her. The incredible impacts had stunned her, and now her broken ribs were sending searing pain through her chest and stealing her breath away.

“Yes!” The Coven soldier screamed back leaning forward even more and his spittle flying into her face. The veins in his neck were bulging in effort, his cobalt blue eyes wide in savage anger. “You will die!”

Channa felt it then. Mirra’s own mind reaching out to her, fueling her with added reserves and in doing so she felt Sorran as well, powerful, and clear and dominating. And then she almost gasped as she felt the warmth and influence of his aura surround her, course through her and becoming part of her. She relished in the strength it sent surging through her and her blue eyes narrowed as she gazed into the Coven trooper’s face. Her fingers tightened even more on the man’s wrist, his eyes going a little wider as he felt her fighting him back with renewed strength. “I... I will not... die this day!” Channa snarled viciously. “But... but you will.”

The deep rumbling growl that came next only seemed to reinforce that and the Coven soldier looked up to stare directly at the huge muzzle of the dark blond haired wolf. Blood dripped from its long flesh shredding fangs, its lips curled back to expose gums and even more teeth further back. Its yellow eyes, sprinkled generously with green, held nothing but horror in them.

“My mate does... my mate does not like you being on top of me!” Channa shouted happily. “That... that is a position... only he uses!”

The Coven soldier looked down at her with wide eyes and then back up to the snarling muzzle. “Mate?” He gasped.

It would be the last sound he uttered as Dario’s jaws opened wide and snapped shut on his face. Channa sat up quickly as Dario’s two hundred and forty pound wolf body propelled him forward and with one motion swept the Coven soldier from atop her. She heard the muffled cries of the Coven troop and saw the madly twitching legs as Dario’s jaws sawed back and forth until Channa heard his skull crack open. She felt hands grab her from behind and she turned quickly and saw a wide eyed Mican and several other Kavalian rebels behind them as he pulled her further away.

The silver/white flash of light startled all of them and then Dario was standing over the Coven soldier in human form.

“No one touches my mate!” Dario screamed savagely. “No one you Coven bastard!”

Channa watched him turn around quickly as he detected the other scents. She felt Mican’s hands leave her arm as they saw Dario’s wolf eyes and fangs exposed for all to see. Blood coated his lower jaw and the front of his uniform and Mican would later say he looked like something from a child’s worst possible nightmare. He turned his head quickly and saw two Coven bodies a short distance away that looked as if an animal with great power and razor sharp claws had shredded their bodies. Mican looked back to Dario and realized one had. He stood slowly as Channa got to her feet and moved cautiously forward, holding her arm tightly to her side over her broken ribs. To Channa his wolf features were a thing of unequaled beauty and as she stepped up to him she smiled for she knew they belonged only to her. Mican and the others watched as Dario drew her close and leaned over to nuzzle her neck and cheek. They saw Channa’s tail quiver as it wrapped around his waist possessively.

“It... it took you long enough!” She spoke as she pressed her face into his chest.

“Sorry.” He whispered.

“I will... I will let you make it up to me later.” She purred.

“I will do that and so much...”

They all whirled around when the door at the opposite side of the huge room they had been thrown into burst inward under what could only be something with massive strength. The two seven foot tall avatars marched through the smoky doorway, their red eyes focused on them completely.

“Shit!” Dario snapped. “Shoot it! Shoot it!”

Mican and five other Kavalians began to unload their weapons at the oncoming horrors that were out of control avatars. Their projectile rounds slammed into their bodies with deep thuds, chunks of the false flesh

erupting away from the bodies to expose the shiny exoskeletons beneath and still the avatars kept coming. One lifted its arm and they saw its hand fold back and the small cylinder appear.

“Cover!” Mican screamed as he dove for the crates that Dario had been tossed behind. Three of the men with him made it as well... but the single red pulse of light erupted from the avatar’s hand and caught the last Kavalian full in the chest. He didn’t scream, didn’t cry out. His body was flung back against the wall with a sickening crunch and a gaping hole in the center of his chest that still was smoking. The two avatars now directed their fire at the crates Mican and his men were behind and the red flashes began to impact the crates with increasing frequency, blowing huge holes in them and whittling them down to nothing. It took only a dozen or so shots from those weapons before there was no more protection for Mican and the others and they watched the two avatars moved closer and begin to raise their arms to target them intently even as they pumped projectile rounds into them at an alarming rate.

They would never know which one fired the shot, but the head on the avatar to their right snapped back viciously just as he was about to fire. There was a loud sizzling sound as the projectile tore through the unarmored eye and drove deep into its Quantum Core. Sparks flew out of its now destroyed eye socket and quickly moved to both as the left eye blew outwards in a ghastly display and the avatar fell backwards and flopped to the floor stiff as a board. The second avatar paused to watch his counterpart fall and then turned back to face Mican and the others. He lifted his arm to take aim and sent the command to fire.

The avatar never saw the two hands grasp his own and with a powerful heave yank his firing arm upward sending two energy blasts into the ceiling of the massive storage room. He turned his head to look at Dario gripping his arm and brought his other arm up to smash him in the head when Channa used her tail to propel herself around Dario’s tall body. She gripped the Nehtes in her hand tightly and with all of her remaining strength and ignoring the pain ripping through her from her broken ribs she rammed the Nehtes into the left eye socket of the avatar. She depressed the extension button just as Dario released his arm and grabbed her around the waist to throw them away from the monstrous machine. The Nehtes followed its own command and extended. The Dragon Armor coated spear erupted from the back of the avatar’s head, punching out armor and circuitry in front of it and rendering what was once a sophisticated computer brain into a mass of wire and oozing liquid. Channa fell on top of Dario as they dropped to the floor, their eyes on the avatar as it crashed to the deck just like the other. It’s second eye blew outward as well, showering both Dario and Channa with bits of false flesh and reddish white blood.

The room fell silent and all they could hear was the muffled hammering of other weapons fire from somewhere else. Mican and the others rushed forward to where they lay on the deck, Channa’s head resting on Dario’s chest, both of them heaving in exertion.

“You know...” Dario gasped as Channa lifted her head and looked at him. “This is not exactly how I had envisioned meeting and spending the first few days with the woman that has claimed my heart.” He looked at her stunning feline blue eyes. “Fighting giant machine people and dodging the High Coven is really beginning to piss me off!” He barked loudly.

Mican looked at him as the others kept watch for any other dangers. “You will come to find out... as I have over the years with Na’lia... nothing ever goes the way you want it to go.” He stated plainly. “Now let us move out of here before we have more company.”

Dario looked at Channa and saw her smiling at him. “I told you I would keep you on your toes.” She stated.

“Yeah... yeah...” Dario spoke as he got to his feet and helped her up gingerly watching her face wince slightly at her broken ribs. “Promises... promises! Let’s get the hell gone from here. Then we’ll talk about that.”

“Something is slowing the download!” The sergeant screamed out.

“What do you mean slowing?”

“There’s new security walls up! The program is having to fight through them in order to get to the last bit of information!” The man barked out.

“Can’t you bypass them?”

“I can’t do anything.” The sergeant snapped. “It’s a self modulating program!”

“How much do we have?” The officer asked.

“One pad per avatar! Star charts and sensor designs! Weapons and tactical systems! Medical advances and data on some species that I have never even heard of before! This pad has shields and propulsion but it’s moving slower! The last avatar must have initiated a reverse algorithm.”

“Fuck it!” The officer snapped. “Our ship is six minutes out and we need to go! Pull the pad right now!”

“We don’t have everything!”

“We won’t have anything if we don’t leave now! Yank the pad and tell this machine to smash us a hole in the hull or something so we can make it to the landing zone!” The officer demanded. “Do it now!”

The sergeant turned back and entered several commands into the control panel before gripping the sides of the data pad. He waited several seconds and then yanked it out. “I hope it works!” He barked.

The last avatar sat up quickly, its red eyes sweeping the room around him. –**Security Protocols altered. Main programming changed. Initiate emergency debarkation of VORTEX Cruiser 341-**

The two vampires stepped back as the massive machine got to its feet.

-Internal sensors off line. Three of five VORTEX Cruiser 341 avatars are offline. Initiating evacuation sequence 491. Proceed to emergency exits and blow the hatches-

The vampire officer watched as the avatar turned and headed for the door. “That’s more like it!” He lifted his wrist mounted COM unit. “Fall back! Fall back to the control room! We are leaving!”

“...killed two of them!” Dario’s voice sounded in his implant. *“I don’t know where the third one is! Mican’s portable motion sensor has the Coven falling back to the Avatar Control Room! We’re following... but it’s slow going. We lost one man and Channa and I are banged up pretty good! Mican has the lead... but we need to be cautious Res. These things can fire some pretty powerful energy beams from their hands!”*

Resumar held up his hand to the five *Durcunusaan* troops that followed him and they spread out quickly on either side of the huge corridor.

“Energy beams?” Resumar gasped.

“Yeah! And they are four times as strong as us!” Dario continued. *“Channa and I barely killed the one... and someone got a lucky shot into the other’s eye socket! They dropped... just like 341 said they would... but it wasn’t fucking easy I’ll tell you that!”*

“Are they headed back for their entry point?” Resumar asked.

“Negative! The complete opposite direction! Headed to port!”

“We are one section over portside from the Avatar Control Room!” Resumar barked.

“Then they are coming right for you cousin!”

“Hold what you have Dario!” He barked. “Can you give me numbers?” Resumar began motioning with his hands, positioning the *Durcunusaan* troops. The moment the first one stepped away from the wall, weapons fire began whizzing by their heads, bouncing off the bulkheads and ricocheting along the empty corridors.

“Well... we killed four for sure! Maybe two more! We don’t know how many survived though! Or how many got on the ship!”

“They’re here now!” Resumar screamed as he dropped to one knee and began firing down the corridor.

Through the millennia Union Spartans had learned how to keep the vampires from wrapping the shadows around them in the middle of a firefight and disappearing and this was a tactic that they employed now in the confines of the corridor. Controlled bursts were sent downrange at measured intervals on different degrees of trajectory. Any vampire that was wrapped in the shadows would be hit by the concentrated fusillade of weapons fire, and many of the more experienced vampire troops had long ago forgo using the shadows when facing the Union in open conflict. Resumar was able to count nearly seven of them at least between bursts from his 190 and he was rapidly trying to determine how to adjust their position while keeping the Coven from leaving the ship.

Cemath! He screamed out within Mindvoice.

I am coming to you! His Bonded Brother’s familiar voice filled his head now.

Their entry point! Resumar barked.

I have sealed it with boulders and fire! Cemath answered. They are not leaving that way! I will enter on the port side lower hatch Resumar!

Come up to my level by the entrance! There is plenty of room for you to maneuver! See if you can't move in behind them!

Resumar... Vonis is moving with a small team from the science ship! He will be to your position...

Resumar's head snapped around just as the large form of his adopted uncle skidded to a halt next to him and four rebel Kavalians took up positions by the *Durcunusaan* troops and immediately began pouring fire down the corridor.

He's here now! Hurry Cemath!

Vonis scrambled to put his back to the wall and look at his nephew. "I thought you might need some help!" He screamed over the din of weapons fire. "Apparently I was correct!"

"They're trying to steal data from the avatars uncle!" Resumar barked. "I think they got what they want and they've turned loose those avatars on us! Dario and Channa killed two but they are injured!"

"We entered from the port hatch above the trees!" Vonis exclaimed. "We saw nothing moving here!"

"If the plans of this ship were accurate... there is a large escape hatch only two hundred meters down that corridor!" Resumar motioned with his head to the one they sat across from. "We need to keep them away from there!"

"How many?" Vonis asked.

"We don't know!"

Vonis shifted his 190 and ducked his head around the corner for what was only an single instant. He sat back just as quickly and looked at his nephew. Fifteen hundred plus years of training and fighting within the shadows gave him an insight his nephew did not have. He looked at Resumar. "Nine!" He barked. "Four on the starboard side and five on the port! They have wrapped the shadows around them only partially, to keep from being detected on sensors but also to keep from being caught by your weapons fire while in the shadows!"

"Are you sure?" Resumar asked.

Vonis nodded. "It is a standard tactic for the Elite High Coven Commandos Res!" He replied calmly. "Where is Dario now?"

Resumar shook his head. "They lost one man and he and Channa were pretty banged up! I told him to hold position!"

Vonis nodded in approval at the order. "We should..." His words were drowned out by the screeching of metal and the cracking sound of a door being smashed from its hinges. Their eyes shifted down the corridor to starboard and the lone figure of the massive avatar appeared from an adjoining corridor.

-Unauthorized lifeforms detected-

-Initiating Cleansing Protocols-

-Eliminate all non-Pralor lifeforms-

"*Nubou!*" Resumar screamed with wide eyes. "The head! Shoot at his head! Aim for the eye sockets!"

A total of nine *Durcunusaan* and Kavalian rebels turned the full force of their weapons on the advancing seven foot tall avatar without hesitation. As when Dario and his team fired upon the two avatars, the projectiles began to impact the avatar's body, quickly shredding the false skin around his head and exposing the gleaming armor alloy underneath. The avatar's gray coveralls quickly became soaked with blood from the living tissue over his armored form, and still the machine continued to advance.

"It's not stopping!" A *Durcunusaan* troop screamed.

"Keep firing!" Resumar bellowed. "Don't stop!"

The avatar had slowed somewhat but continued its advance. Its head was now almost void of any covering skin, its red eyes gleaming in the corridor and making aiming easy. The only problem was that the eye socket was sunken in and not an easy target in the least, even for the skilled marksmen that the *Durcunusaan* were. As the avatar came up next to one of the Kavalians that had come with his uncle, Resumar Leonidas did the only thing he could think of. In the blink of an eye he reached down, grabbed his *Nehtes* from its position on his right thigh, extending it in that same motion as he cocked his arm back and let fly with all of his strength. As with all *Nehtes* made by the great elven weapons master, Resumar's was coated with a micro layer of Dragon Armor increasing its durability to untold portions. The spearhead drove right through the center of the avatar's

chest, penetrating the armor alloy with little pause and exploding out his back bringing with it wiring and circuits. This action caused the avatar to stop in its motion of reaching down to grab the Kavalian and instead it lifted its arm. Resumar and the others watched as if in slow motion the entire hand folded back and inward and the small cylinder extended slightly. The avatar raised its arm and leveled the energy weapon at Resumar and then stopped. It's red eyes were centered on Resumar, its armored head tilting sideways somewhat.

-Error. Internal Protocol conflict. Error-

-Unit 341 A is targeting sub species Lycavorian and Elf combination-

-Deep tissue scan of target lifeform indicates molecular DNA and blood composition comparable to Chief Elder Pralor Sumar-

-High Etheric Levels of target lifeform detected. Echelon Thirteen. Scanning. Main ship sensors offline. Internal sensors indicating presence of four Echelon Eleven lifeforms within scanning radius of sensors and one Echelon Twelve. Additional Echelon Thirteen, Cretvore Draconius species lifeform closing rapidly. Scans indicate Cretvore Draconius species with Etheric connection to target lifeform-

-Probability that target lifeform is Third Generation Descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar 99.7%-

-Supposition that descendant of Chief Elder Pralor Sumar has returned to claim VORTEX Cruiser 341 97.3%-

-Activating Secure Protocol One-

-Activating Secure Protocol One-

-Purging all commands entered into Neural Processing Central Core after unit 341 A was awaken-

-Internal sensors indicate Unit 341 is active. 341 A Terminating function at this time-

Resumar and the others watched as the avatar's red eyes went from bright points of light to totally void of anything. The avatar's arm remained locked in position, extended upward however, and Resumar breathed deeply as he stepped out of the way of the energy cylinder that was aimed at his chest.

Vonis lowered his weapon slowly, his own cobalt blue eyes wide in shock. "Ok... what just happen?" He stammered.

Resumar shook his head slowly. "I don't know."

"Resumar!" Dario's voice burst over their implants. "Better get out here quick cousin!"

Resumar and Vonis heard the enraged roar of not one, but two dragons and the sound of weapons fire. "*Sibfla!*" Resumar swore. "Now what?"

He and Vonis and the other members of their combined team turned to see that the corridor where they had pinned the High Coven troops was now very empty. Resumar's eyes grew wider then.

"*Nubou lae!*" Resumar cursed even louder as he broke into a run heading for where he knew the large escape hatch was. The Coven troops had slipped out behind them while their attention was focused on the avatar, and now they were gone. And with them was a wealth of information that could very well tip the balance of power in this quadrant.

Resumar Leonidas sprang from the top of the ten meter high ramp completely changed and not in a very good mood. His wolf eyes immediately detected Dario and Channa standing with Mican and several other Kavalian rebels, all of them holding weapons on the group of men and women Resumar didn't recognize. Six Kavalian soldiers and four females who were wearing civilian clothes. As his two hundred and sixty pounds of wolf muscle and teeth touched the ground below, quickly followed by four other wolves and five Kavalians. In five very fast flashes of white/silver light five wolves became men before the wide eyes of all the men and women who were held at weapons length by Dario. Resumar's changed eyes swept across the clearing and saw the seven bodies of Coven troops laying sprawled on the ground their bodies cooling quickly. Sorran and Mirra were crouched on the ground behind Dario and Mirra, their heads and eyes directed at the newcomers and their legs cocked under them as if waiting to pounce.

"Dario?" Resumar barked.

“I have no idea!” He echoed back. “We were trying to cut off the Coven troops and headed out here. Just as we got to the top of the foot ramp we heard weapons fire and then we found them. They whacked seven of the Coven, but two made it off into the timber. Probably headed for whatever ship was supposed to be picking them up!”

Resumar’s eyes were focused on the solitary figure that was dressed all in ivory and earth tone brown garb. The hood was drawn up over the figure’s head but considering the way the clothes hugged the very lush frame, it was obviously a female. He turned quickly to his senior Durcunusaan enlisted *Hyperetes*. “*Janez hel!*” He spat. “*Cuia!*” (Track them. Go.)

The equivalent to his First Sergeant nodded, pointed to two others and they immediately shifted back into wolves before plunging into the timber surrounding them. The eyes of the ten newcomers were wide as they watched and then slowly returned to where Resumar stood. His eyes returned to the lone figure and he took a step closer. Vonis grabbed his arm quickly.

“We don’t know who they are Res.” He spoke quickly.

“Not to mention they whacked the Coven commandos pretty easily.” Dario agreed never taking his eyes off the dark haired Kavalian female who held the blade in her hand still, but palm up with the knife resting in it.

“Yet he knows that he does not need to fear us.” The female voice spoke gently, but loud enough for her tones to carry. “Don’t you Resumar Leonidas?” Resumar watched as she lifted her hands slowly and drew back the cowl to let it drop on her shoulders. “You can feel it deep within your mind.”

Resumar watched as she stepped towards him but her eyes grew wider when Resumar felt Cemath swoop in low over the ground and flare his wings at the last possible moment, landing behind his Bonded Brother. This caused the Kavalians wearing KFI uniforms to back up quite voluntarily, their murmurs of concern very audible. All except the young Kavalian female next to the woman who stood still without an ounce of fear in her eyes. Resumar continued to stare at the woman intently. Something inside him was screaming out, almost rejoicing and Shiria smiled as she noticed it.

“Your blood can feel who I am.” She stated softly. “You... you are far more skilled than I ever thought... but I can still feel your blood rejoicing Resumar Leonidas. Just as mine is now doing the same thing!”

“Resumar... we should secure them in a cell somewhere!” Mican spoke quickly stepping up to him. “Just because they kill Coven troops does not make them friends of us. They wear the uniforms of the KFI Fleet! They kill Coven soldiers too!”

“He’s got a point Resumar.” Vonis spoke holding himself ready to spring into action at the first hint of trouble or a threat to his nephew.

Shiria watched this exchange in surprise for the man she knew as Mican was deferring to Resumar without question and she looked between the two men. “Mican’Puat... it certainly has been a long time.” She stated finally.

Mican’s eyes cut to where she stood. “I do not know you woman!” He snapped.

“But I know you.” Shiria stated calmly. “I counseled your father to not discard you as his son. I told him he was being a fool for such an action. He did not listen to me... not that I ever expected him too. I sincerely hope you have revealed to Athani who you are.”

“What do you know of my father?” Mican snarled.

Resumar reached out and took Mican’s arm. “Wait.” He said softly.

Mican looked at him with wide eyes. “They wear uniforms of the fleet and they know my father Resumar. This does not bode well for us.”

“We do not serve the Kavalian Federation!” Maysi barked out stepping forward. “We follow one Pride... and that is Pride Nruarani!”

“Scribe Mother!” Athani’s voice hissed from behind them as she rushed down the ramp to come up beside Resumar. She too had heard Dario’s transmission and after leaving Avi and 341 to insure the defensive were set she took off to find her husband, two Durcunusaan soldiers trying very hard to keep up with her. “Scribe Mother Demahra! Ckhoa! What... what are you doing here?”

“Athani!” The second female voice broke the silence of the clearing and Nikkei pushed her way between two of the Kavalian troops from the Nruarani Pride that had been assigned to protect her. “Aunt Athani!”

“Nikkei!” Athani gasped again as her eyes fell on her niece. Resumar’s eyes never left Shiria’s as he held Athani’s arm tightly. “Resumar my love... it is Jalersi’s daughter Nikkei! It is my niece!” She spoke turning back to him when he would not release her arm.

Resumar looked at her slowly his wolf eyes still very prominent. They were eyes that Athani would never be afraid of. [*Aryschanne you are certain?*] He spoke within the heavily shielded Mindvoice connection that only the two of them shared.

Athani looked at him oddly her eyes narrowing in confusion but she nodded her head. [*I am sure my love.*] She answered. [*I would know her anywhere.*]

Resumar nodded to her after a moment and then released her arm to watch her run over to the younger woman and embrace her tightly within her arms. Resumar turned back to Shiria and stepped closer to her. “Who are you?” He asked.

“Who do you think I am Resumar?” Shiria asked with a gentle smile.

“Do not fence with me women!” Resumar barked. “I am not in the mood!”

Ckhoa stepped closer to Shiria. “This is the Scribe Mother Demahra!” She popped. “You will show respect to her for she is...”

The sound of the Nehtes extending was nearly deafening in the silence of the clearing with nothing but birds singing and insects chirping in the background. Ckhoa’s words were cut off when she felt the tip of the Nehtes press against the underside of her throat and Resumar’s wolf eyes turned to look at her with something akin to hunger in them.

“I show respect where it is earned! Not because you say so woman! I asked her who she was!” Resumar snarled. “If I had wanted your voice I would have asked for it!”

Shiria lifted her hand with a smile and placed it on the shaft of the Nehtes. “We... we are not your enemies Resumar Leonidas.”

“So you say.” Resumar snapped.

“And what does your blood tell you son of Leonidas?” She asked softly. [*Your blood tells you who I am even without your words Resumar. And I can not begin to tell you how happy that makes me. I had thought... I had thought I was all alone out here for so long.*] She spoke within Mindvoice.

Resumar’s eyes widened at the ease with which she spoke to him and how her words seemed so very soothing and filtered across the shields he had up without actually trying to penetrate them. Only a very skilled Mindvoicer could do what she had just done, allowing her voice to appear as if it was an echo against his shields and therefore speaking directly to him.

[*You can feel who I am without me answering can’t you Resumar.*] She spoke.

[*I can... I can feel it. It’s... it is very familiar... but I have never met you.*] He answered her.

Shiria turned and looked at Ckhoa. “Stand down Ckhoa.” She said softly.

“Shiria they...” Ckhoa began to protest but felt the tip of the Nehtes against her throat press ever so closer.

“I am in no danger here Ckhoa.” Shiria said. “And even with all the training I have given you and your sister, you would not stand a chance against Resumar... and even less of a chance against his brother Androcles. Stand down.” Shiria looked back to Resumar. “We are among friends.”

Ckhoa kept her eyes on Resumar as she slowly stepped back. She tried not to show the relief she felt when Resumar instantly depressed the button on the shaft of the Nehtes and it contracted back to its portable size instantly. She watched him as he stepped closer to Shiria and leaned over beside her, inhaling deeply to catch her scent. She watched Shiria stand there with a small smile on her face; a smile of discovery and happiness that she had never seen before. It appeared there was more to this trip here than Ckhoa realized. She had never questioned Shiria on anything; she was so wise and understanding and calm. What she had not realized until this very moment was that Shiria was lonely. For so long she had thought she was the only Pralor alive and then when she discovered Wayonn lived she appeared more animated and happy. Yet now it was so very apparent. Right here in their own quadrant of space were descendants of the most powerful and respected Pralor to live according to Shiria, and their blood was so strong and pure that she could freely detect that without any effort.

Ckhoa cut her eyes when she saw Athani step up behind Resumar holding tightly to Nikkei’s hand but with an odd expression on her face as she looked at her husband sniffing who she knew as the Scribe Mother.

“Res... Resumar?” She asked softly. Resumar turned immediately and looked at Athani and she saw his relaxed face was bright and his expression almost disbelieving in nature. “What is... what is wrong?” She asked.

Resumar stepped back and moved up next to her, drawing her tight to his side with one arm while Nikkei looked on. “Do you know... do you know who this is *Aryschanne*?” He asked as he leaned over and nuzzled her neck drawing a small gasp of delight from her.

Athani looked at him holding his arms. “This is the Kavalian Scribe Mother Demahra. I have told you about her before.” She stated.

Resumar nodded with a smile. “You are wrong *Aryschanne*.” He said softly. He turned to look at Shiria who wore a brilliant smile herself. “She is not your Scribe Mother.” Resumar told her softly. “She is from a race my father and Helen thought long dead.”

Athani looked at Shiria and then back to Resumar. “Resumar... you aren’t making any sense.” She said. “What do you mean?”

“Her true name... the name of her blood is Shiria.” Resumar spoke as he looked at Shiria. “And she is a Pralor *Aryschanne*. A living and breathing Pralor.”

EARTH

SPARTA

ROYAL ESTATE VILLA

“...it’s true?” Riall asked with a stunned expression.

Gorgo was pressed close to him, her dark eyes red from too much crying and not enough sleep. The last few hours she had spent with Dasha and their grandchildren, trying to keep them calm and shielded from what was happening even though all of them could feel something was not right. It had been especially hard for Gorgo since she had gone through this very thing once before when she thought she had lost him as a baby. This time had been different in that she did not let the sorrow totally overwhelm her as before. This time she had Riall’s love and support to lean upon, but knowing she had lost her only son from Leonidas once more was horribly painful.

That was until Helen had contacted her within Mindvoice and told her to come to the Estate Villa immediately.

“Dustha... please don’t...” Gorgo gasped out referring to her by the name she knew her as so long ago in Sparta. Another Sparta; another time; another era.

Helen moved up in front of her from where she stood between Carisia and Ne’Veha and took her hands. “This is not something I would joke about Gorgo. You and I have too much history together for me to do that.”

Gorgo felt a huge wave of relief sweep through her and the two women embraced tightly as fresh tears clouded her eyes. “Oh... praise be to the Gods!” Gorgo sobbed. “Where... where is he?”

“Curila 6. The Retreat.” Helen answered.

Gorgo’s eyes opened a little wider. “Curila 6?” She asked. “How... how did he get there?”

“It is a long story.” Helen replied. “He was injured but physically he is fine.”

“Physically?” Riall asked.

Helen nodded slowly. “Andro has spoken with Yuriko; it is Yuriko who directed Anja there from the holding area. I don’t know all of it... but according to Yuriko he is either trapped or refusing to leave some sort of Mindvoice loop.”

“Mindvoice loop?” Riall asked. “Is that... is that even possible?”

Helen nodded. “For someone of his abilities... yes.” She stated.

“Aricia!” Gorgo gasped. “Androcles... he...”

Helen squeezed her hands tightly. “He knew the moment he went to the clinic.” She stated. “He gave Aricia Lopezine Gorgo.”

“Lopezine?” Gorgo said.

Helen nodded. “To mimic the effects of Protrilene. To make it appear she had joined her *anome* in the afterlife. She is on a *STRIKER* right now on her way to Curila 6. Anja is already with him as I said.”

“Then the feed from the Netnews at Thermopylae...?” Riall asked her. “It showed him carrying her into King Leonidas’s tomb with a golden urn. If this was not his mother and father than who was it?”

“Oh it *was* Aricia... she was just unconscious.” Helen told them. “The urn was simply for show.”

“Dustha... he destroyed the clinic.” Gorgo said. “We watched it! There was nothing left!”

Helen nodded. “He also destroyed the remains of a clone of his father and the remains of Javier Moran’s dragon Naruth.” She said.

“A clone?” Riall gasped.

“I don’t know all of it.” Helen said. “Only Martin does and he can’t talk right now. I believe... and this is only my opinion... I believe he is trying to contact all of them within Mindvoice to assure them he is alive and well. Why he remains I don’t understand.”

“He remains because he cannot touch our mother For’mya.” Andro’s voice carried to them.

They all turned to see Andro walked through the large double doors onto the patio, Sadi holding one hand and Lu’ria clinging to his arm on the opposite side. Gorgo and Riall could detect Lu’ria’s scent immediately and they knew she was a new wolf. The sensations and needs of a female wolf would be exceptionally powerful so soon after being turned they both knew and that is why she was remaining so close to him, touching him whenever she could. Gorgo didn’t hesitate and moved to him. Andro hugged her tightly while Sadi and Lu’ria looked on. Gorgo pulled back and took his handsome face in her hands as she stared at him her eyes moist. At this moment looking at him, Gorgo was thrust back in time and as when she looked at Martin she saw her once and always beloved Leonidas staring back at her.

“Androcles... so much... so much is...”

“I will sustain grandmother.” Andro said softly. “I have a *STRIKER* standing by to take you and grandmother Dasha to Curila 6. I want you to take my brothers and sisters with you. He will need as many people around him that love him as possible.”

Gorgo met his eyes and saw sadness in them. “You... you don’t believe For’mya survived do you?” She whispered softly.

“I cannot sense her or my first elven mother.” He said. “I know she still lives, taken from us... but she is still alive. My mother For’mya, I am not... I am not so sure.”

“Taken?” Gorgo gasped. “Taken by who?”

“It is not important right now grandmother. I do not worry for her return. Deni, Lisisa, Arrarn and Cha’talla will retrieve her. No matter the cost.” Andro said.

“Andro... you trust... you trust this Immortal?” Gorgo said.

Andro nodded without blinking. “Yes.” He told her. “We are family now grandmother.”

“Family?” Gorgo hissed softly.

“My sister is now the Blessed Wife of Cha’talla’s oldest son with his pureblood vampire wife Esther.” Andro said. “They are not who they once were grandmother and when you see the love Tir’ut holds for Normya you will not doubt it either.”

“Your father... your father knows?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“Andro... Andro what is going on?” Gorgo asked.

“Just what has happened grandmother. We have been attacked... our family has been targeted specifically.” Andro answered. “Father does not know about what happen on Kranek or here in Sparta at the Senate Building, all he knows is he can’t touch his elven mates. I believe; based on what Yuriko has told me, and after talking with the *Feravomir*, I believed he has locked himself in a Mindvoice loop as she said. He will not leave until he touches all of my mothers, not knowing that one may very well be dead and the other is most obviously being blocked in some manner. It is why Yuriko sent for our mother Anja. She has pulled him from something similar in the past and with two of them there with him they may succeed.”

“We have to let everyone know he is alive!” Riall spoke quickly. “They need to know their King still lives.”

Andro shook his head. “No.” He said firmly. “The Kavalians have attacked us at our heart grandfather. They have attacked our family directly! In order to do that... they needed help. If they knew father was still alive they would stop at nothing to finish what they started. There was reason and purpose to what they have done and I want to know what that is.”

“Andro if your father is alive... according to our constitution and the Rules of Ascension you cannot be crowned as King.” Riall spoke.

Andro nodded. “I know... and that is why my father will remain dead.” He stated. “At least for the moment.”

“You believe there is more that will happen don’t you?” Riall asked.

Androcles nodded. “Yes.”

“Who else... who else do we tell?” Riall asked. “We will need to prepare Androcles.”

“Right now grandfather... no one outside this room.” Andro answered.

“Andro... we must tell our family!” Gorgo exclaimed passionately. “We cannot let them go on believing your father is dead. I know you wish to be very conscious of who knows... but these people are our family Andro. Daniel, Tarifa, Aihola, Selene... your grandfather Panos... these are all people who are part of our family! You know this... and like your father you hold family closest to your heart.”

Andro turned his head slowly and looked at Sadi. “*KertaGai?*” He spoke softly.

Sadi stepped up to him quickly and pressed her lithe frame against his. “If we cannot trust our family Andro my love... who are we to trust?” She said softly.

Gorgo looked at Helen and they watched as he looked at each of his mates. Lu’ria moved up beside him as she was before and nodded her head while pressing close to him as Sadi had done. Ne’Veha pressed close to Sadi and also nodded while Carisia moved around and scooted close to Lu’ria while nodding her head. Gorgo knew then that, as with her son and his wives and mates, no one would have more influence on her grandson than the four women before her right now. Looking at them, the way Ne’Veha pressed so close to Sadi and Carisia to Lu’ria, Gorgo knew that Andro would turn Ne’Veha soon. Her amaretto scent called for him powerfully even though she was not yet wolf, and he would not be able to ignore that for very long. Sadi was his *Anome* and as his soulmate she would never be far from his side. Her Mindvoice essence was so entwined with Andro’s now that it was very hard to tell them apart. It was very hard to tell any of them apart now, and it was growing more powerful. Carisia was a vampire yes, but even for her very diminutive size, she had a much stronger Mindvoice connection to Andro than Isabella did to his father for some odd reason Gorgo did not understand. The stunning Drow elf female that stood beside him was the first who Andro had turned and looking at her now, Gorgo could tell that she had accepted without question or doubt who and what she was now. Gorgo knew the special loyalty that Martin had with the Drow, and now that Andro had turned and taken as a mate a Drow female, that loyalty would only grow stronger. She watched him turn back to Riall.

“We must be mindful grandfather.” Andro spoke. “No one who does not need to know outside of our family.”

Riall nodded. “Never.” He said.

“I believe it will look odd if I continue to work out of the Royal Estate Villa.” Andro said. “My every move will be watched and not just by those who are concerned for my welfare. There is no way to avoid that. I will leave it to you to direct others to use part of my villa on Cranae Island and make a temporary Command Center there as my father’s office is here.”

Riall nodded. “I will see to it.” He said. “If we... if we are to follow established protocols already in place for this type of incident and maintain the façade you have begun we will need to have a meeting of senior officers within the next few hours. As well as the remaining Senate, even if it is by HoloConference.”

“I will arrange that with Panos.” Helen spoke now. “We can feel Deia, albeit very faintly. It’s almost as if she is fading in and out... but it may be just the materials used to build the bunker. Lausintos is off the grid and we do not know if he was in the Senate Building as well. Until we know more it will not look odd if Panos assumes the largest visible role politically as Governor of Sparta.”

“I want him blanketed with Durcunusaan grandfather.” Andro spoke. “His senior aide Janae is missing and we do not know if she was in the Senate Building or lies dead somewhere. They went after him once and I would not put it passed them to try again.”

Riall nodded. “Of course.”

“Grandfather... a word alone?” Andro asked motioning to the patio doors.

Riall nodded without hesitation and moved for the doors. Andro quickly nuzzled his four mates and then followed his grandfather. Sadi turned to Helen and Gorgo. “We have coffee and tea made.” She spoke. “We’ll get some for all of us. I know Tarifa and Aihola are coming here and there will most likely be more.”

Helen nodded as Sadi held to Lu'ria's hand and led them toward the kitchen area. She felt Gorgo take her arm gently and hold her back for a moment until they were out of earshot. "Dustha... do you feel it?" She asked softly.

Helen watched as Ne'Veha was the last to move into the kitchen and she nodded. "It is incredible isn't it?"

"First Sadi... who burns within Mindvoice nearly as bright as Aricia. Then Carisia... who is a daughter of our hated enemy." Gorgo said softly. "Now... a Drow warrior who is bonded to a dragon and Ne'Veha... whose scent and blood burns for him stronger than I have ever felt from a female not yet turned."

Helen nodded slowly. "I do not know how it could be Gorgo... only that it is. It feels as if finding each of them was preordained somehow, for some higher purpose... it all fits together just as tightly as with Martin and his mates. Your son and grandson, Aricia, Sadi... there is something about all of them that I cannot see or I do not understand."

"When he hesitated... he looked not to you or to me... but to Sadi and them." Gorgo said.

Helen looked at her. "As only you commanded Leonidas's unquestioned and absolute attention and trust and love Gorgo... so it is for Martin and his son." She said softly. "They will always value the wisdom of the women who hold their hearts and souls over all others. Just as you did with Leonidas."

Gorgo met her eyes. "That is what I fear Dustha." She said softly. "My voice is what put Leonidas on his path. Look where it led him."

Helen shook her head slowly. "Your voice is what drove that man to be as great as he was Gorgo. Your voice and your love. Never question that he did not know what he was doing when he did it. For you. For others. Your words and your love only confirmed to him what he already knew needed to be done."

"And Martin? Andro?" Gorgo asked.

Helen looked to where they saw Andro and Riall speaking together on the patio. "We were together once at Gallais's Retreat. Myself, Dymas, Demetrius, Dilios and Panos. We were reminiscing of the old days. Panos... he referred to them, father and son, he called them forces of nature." She said. "I fear that we will begin to see what he meant very soon."

"...been receiving reports for the last several hours from every border station and remote outpost we have. Some of them even I had forgotten we still control." Riall spoke as they moved along the walkway in the garden which Andro knew his mother Dysea loved to work in. "They have moved nothing within range of the border Andro." He looked at him as he stopped walking. "Nothing!"

"And that confuses you?" Andro said. He looked at his grandfather. A man who had hundreds of years of combat experience to pull from and a man his father said he could trust unequivocally.

"You don't come after the leader of another empire, try to kill him, and try to kill his entire family. Not unless you plan on sending massive numbers of troops and ships swarming across the borders in a full scale invasion." Riall said.

Andro nodded. "That is my reasoning as well." He said. "The question remains however, why aren't they doing just that?"

Riall looked at him. "Hadaria?" He asked.

Andro nodded. "I believe that is part of it yes." He answered. "They have always wanted the support of Hadarian Healers. Support my mother denied them because she feared for the safety of her Healers. Athani has told us what it was like for females within the KFI. They have achieved that now in a political manner with the help of Buonau and her cronies."

Riall nodded slowly. "Yes." Riall said.

"This was systematic grandfather." Andro spoke firmly. "They were trying to wipe out our entire family! There was no subterfuge here! This has my uncle's mark all over it... and he had help from someone within Sparta! I want that person found!"

Riall turned his head and looked toward the rising sun. "Armetus is still unconscious." He said shaking his head. "They don't know if he will even survive. It is all Marci can do to keep control of things now. Half our intelligence network is in shambles and soon Aihola and the Drow will begin screaming for blood for what the Kavalians have done."

“Lu'ria will keep them in check for the time being.” Andro said softly.

Riall looked at him. “Andro... you know of course that your union with her... with this Lu'ria. It is the first of its kind. In all the years since Earth became a member of the Union no Drow has ever been mated to a Lycavorian. They have avoided this for reasons I don't myself understand. Now... now you have taken one as your mate, you have turned her, and made her a Princess of the Union. The Netnews will be all over this.”

“Let them come.” He answered. “I killed Leruk grandfather.” Andro said softly turning to look at him. “He... he was the one leading the Kavalian forces on Iraruzu. He was the one who shot Lu'ria. I violated the one rule my father drilled into our heads as we were growing. I took the blood of family.”

Riall shook his head immediately. “Your uncle's children are not our family Androcles. The moment he betrayed his people he stopped being family. Karun... he has proven where his heart is according to your grandmother. He has embraced the wolf within him... taken Ardis as his wife and mate and his scent and blood burns only for what he has found here. He is family. He is a Leonidas. The others do not count because they have forsaken everything we stand for. You did not kill family Androcles. You defended and then took vengeance for harm he inflicted on your mate. You did what any Spartan would do and that is why you are right!” Riall reached out and placed his hand on Andro's shoulder. “We have so much work to do.”

Andro looked at him. “Why go after grandfather Panos?”

“He is the Governor of Sparta.” Riall said with a shrug. “Whether you and your father want to admit it or not, much of the Lycavorian Union knows that your hearts lie here in Sparta. They know that Sparta is your home. It has become the unofficial capital of the Union now. With that recognition, Panos's role is very important as Governor to the King's city. The leader of the one city that all the Leonidas family calls home. It's a symbolic thing Androcles... a military decision to demoralize and sow fear. You know this. You and your brothers learned this at the Advanced War College on Elear. Strike fear into your enemy where they least expect you to strike.”

Andro nodded slowly. “Yes.” He said. “I remember.”

“We need to gather Vengal, Vistr, Ceneu, Tareif and your father's war cabinet.” Riall spoke now. “The Defense Minister as well as Marci. We need to show that you are in charge, but we also need to let them know your father is alive.”

“No.” Andro said causing his grandfather to look at him. “I will acquiesce to telling our family... but beyond that no. There are too many unknowns grandfather and I will not risk my father or my mothers because of it. They must believe I am King.”

Riall stared at him for a moment but knew he was right and he nodded after a moment. “Very well. We will move carefully then. We...” Riall looked at Andro as he staggered back slightly and his face twisted into a mass of confusion. “Andro?”

“Androcles!” Helen's voice sounded shrill and confused as she burst onto the patio at nearly a dead run.

“*Fera... Feravomir!*” Andro hissed.

Helen stepped right up to him and gripped his arms. “You... you feel it?” She gasped as Gorgo and Sadi and the others came rushing onto the patio.

Andro nodded quickly. “Yes... yes!” He stammered.

“We must focus!” Helen spoke gripping his arms tightly. “Concentrate... but do not lower your shields! I will do the same. Elynth! Arzoal! Add your shields to ours quickly!”

Sister... I am here! Arzoal's voice sounded in their heads.

I am here as well Feravomir! Elynth's voice echoed her grandmother.

“Something is trying to communicate with us... something very powerful... but I... it is not your father or any of your mothers. It is familiar... it is familiar to me though.” Helen said as she felt both her bonded sister and Elynth join their connection adding to the strength of their Mindvoice shields. “Do... do you feel it Androcles?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.” He answered instantly, his eyes closed tightly. “It... it is focused and clear but it is probing softly... looking for something. Not forcing its way.” His azure eyes sprang open in surprise and he looked at her. “*Feravomir...* it is looking for me! For us!” He declared.

Helen nodded slowly and she began to feel more at ease. “I have... I have felt this before Andro.” She said softly opening her eyes. “I have felt this when I have spoken with Canth.”

“Canth?” Andro asked. “How can that be? He... he would not be able to maintain such an essence after father released him. Would he?”

Helen met his eyes evenly. “I suggest we find out... you and I.” She stated. “You will remain in the background. Your helmet... put your helmet on to conceal your features.”

“What?” Andro asked. “Why?”

Helen looked at him intently. “To protect your identity! You are the Lycavorian Union now Androcles. The face of our Union! I will not risk you unnecessarily.”

“Helen...” He began to protest.

“No! Do as I ask you now.” She spoke. “Please.”

“Very well *Feravomir*... but I don’t like it.” Andro told her.

“I know.”

“And how will we do this?”

Helen turned to Sadi. “Sadi... a Mark II from Martin’s office. Quickly!” She turned back to Andro. “We are going to do it the same way your father did it when he first contacted the Union on Apo Prime. We’ll trace that Mindvoice probe right back to its source.”

TALON OF JUSTICE

EDGE OF LYCAVORIAN BORDER

Wayonn and Dutkne turned away from the large view window where they stood side by side. Devra sat at the table with her daughters and Drey while Nirilo stood near the door into the conference room.

Dutkne looked at Wayonn as they turned. “Grandfather... I have... I have never felt shields so strong.” He gasped. “Not even yours! We should have pressed harder.”

Wayonn shook his head. “No. I was reaching mainly for Helen as she is called now. He was in the connection Dutkne... you must have felt him.”

Dutkne nodded quickly. “I did. And two other minds as well. Powerful minds... but none with the raw command as him.”

Wayonn nodded. “I told you he is much like his father.” He said. He turned to the others. “We tried to initiate contact with them but they would not allow us. Their Mindvoice shields are some of the strongest we have ever felt.”

“So where does that leave us?” Drey asked from his chair. “Do we enter their space and take our chances about being discovered. That would not be a recommendation I make based on what you have told us Wayonn.”

“Nor I.” Nirilo said pushing away from the door.

“What choice do we have?” Dutkne asked now. “We can not turn back now! And we risk even greater danger if we attempt to move closer through the territory of these Kavalians. We have to take our chances!”

“***That would not be the best course of action.***” The soft female voice spoke from the opposite end of the room. “***I assure you!***”

Devra rose from her chair in an instant her green eyes wide in disbelief. “By the Grace of the Prophets!” She gasped.

Arduri and Naesta also rose just as quickly. “What trickery is this?” Arduri snarled.

The internal COM unit within the room burst to life now.

“Dutkne! Dutkne something just penetrated our hull! Some sort of probe! It’s coming from a Neural Booster of some sort and its generating a holo graphic image into the ship! We’re trying to localize it and...”

Dutkne stepped to the table quickly. “That... that won’t be necessary. We are... we are looking at it right now!”

“What?”

“Stand by!” Dutkne ordered as Wayonn moved around him slowly to move within two meters of the woman’s form.

“Dustha!” Wayonn said with a smile.

Helen's dark eyes focused on him and all of them could see her wolf fangs protruding from under her lip. "You... you are familiar to me... but I have never seen you." She spoke evenly. "I do not know who you are sir... but attempting to attack us through Mindvoice will not work."

"Attack you?" Wayonn gasped. "No! No... we were trying to contact you!"

"As I said... we do not know you and..."

Wayonn moved closer. "Search your feelings Dustha. You know who I am."

Helen stared at him for a long moment. "You do... you do seem familiar to me." She said. "However... I have never seen you."

Dutkne stepped forward now to stand next to Wayonn. "How did you... how did you find us?"

"It was a simple matter when you leave a trace to follow." Helen answered.

Wayonn looked at Dutkne. "You left a trace?" He asked in surprise.

"I exited the connection so fast I... I must have forgotten to cover my resonance." He answered sheepishly.

"Who are you people?" Helen snapped. "And be mindful of the fact that I am not in the best of moods and I will know if you are lying to me!"

"You know what my grandson and I are just by looking at us." Wayonn said. "We are only but a few of those we left behind to make contact with you. We are... we are The Lost Ones that Canth told Martin he would need to discover."

"You lie!" Helen spat angrily. "We discovered those Canth spoke of on Lycavore over two decades ago!"

Wayonn nodded. "They were only but a fraction of those that remain from the days before and just after the Black Day." Wayonn spoke calmly. "It is part of our history as well you know. Events are propelling us forward and now it is time Martin let our people know we thrive. Where is he? I need to speak with him."

"He is... he is dead." Helen spoke sorrowfully.

"Dustha... we are not your enemy." Wayonn spoke with a gentle smile. "Martin and I talked of meeting while we spent those days in his father's tomb. We know he is alive. We can feel him within Mindvoice."

"Impossible!" Helen snapped. "He is dead! You could not possibly feel him now. He..."

"Dustha... we are the same as you!" He insisted. "I know you can feel I speak the truth even there on Earth. And I know he can feel it as well from where he stands just out of our line of view."

Wayonn watched her turn to her right and then they saw the tall heavily muscled figure move into view next to her. The plumed helmet he wore held four different colors in the horse haired crest and it covered almost the entirety of his facial features with the exception of those burning black ringed azure colored eyes that all of them saw very clearly. They could also see the tips of the dual wolf fangs that protruded from under his upper lip and both Wayonn and Dutkne both knew only one bloodline of Lycavorians had that unique distinction. They watched that head tilt a little to the side.

"Androcles." Wayonn spoke softly.

Those azure eyes gazed at him intently as if he was looking into his soul and then they turned to Dutkne and they grew a little wider. He cut his eyes back to Wayonn. "I know what... I can feel what you are." He spoke softly. "Both of you... but you more." Andro spoke turning his eyes back to Dutkne.

Wayonn turned and looked at Dutkne who wore a similar expression of wonder on his face for he could feel it too. He could feel the pull that was sounding off within his blood loudly and it was the strangest sensation. Wayonn smiled and turned to look at the transmission.

"Then you know we could never be enemies." Wayonn said.

"I have heard that before... Wayonn." Andro spoke.

"I'm sure you have young Androcles... but you know when I speak it... it is the truth." Wayonn said. "There is something wrong with your father... what is it?"

Andro ignored him and turned to look at Dutkne. "It is your ship?" He asked.

Dutkne looked quickly at his grandfather before nodding his head and turning back to him. "One of many that the Protectorate has... yes." He answered.

"You... you are their leader?"

Dutkne shook his head. “They follow me... but I am not their leader.” He answered. “Your father is their leader. Just as he is King to those of you there in the Union, he is King to those of us outside the Perseus Arm as well. It has always been this way.”

“*Idee alad pen taine forn?*” Andro asked him. (Why do I trust you?)

Dutkne answered before the words had truly formed in his mind and though it surprised him, he found he meant every word. “*Breve pen taine forn.*” (Because I trust you)

“Do you speak for your guests as well?” Andro asked.

Dutkne looked back at where Nirilo stood beside his mother and sister snow. He nodded as he turned back. “I do. They... they need your help in finding someone of their species that has been brought to this quadrant of space by slavers. A daughter and sister.”

“Slavers?” Andro snarled so savagely it startled Devra and Naesta, while Arduri’s eyebrows went up in interest. “Within Union space?”

“We don’t know.” Dutkne answered.

Naesta took this time to step forward. “We know she is here!” She snapped.

Andro’s eyes turned to her. “As much as we detest slavers of any kind... we are... we are embroiled in a crisis all our own. I do not know what help we will be.”

“So we came all this way for nothing?” Naesta barked. “They told us you would help! She is our sister! They told us you would help and now you are saying you can’t! I knew we should have struck out on our own Arduri!”

“Naesta shut up!” Nirilo barked at his youngest sister.

“I said I do not know what help we could be...” Andro spoke sternly. “I did not say we would not help!”

“What is the difference?” Naesta snapped.

“The difference woman... is I will do as I say!” Andro barked. “And you would do well to leave the arrogance you wear on your sleeve outside the borders of Union space. Your beauty aside... you will surely piss someone off and they will *upae arven* you!”

Naesta’s mouth slammed shut so quickly at his words that she bit her tongue and the pain kept her from replying. Devra stepped up next to Naesta and took her arm. “Are all of your people as uncouth and coarse as you?” She snapped.

“Mother!” Nirilo barked.

“Enough!” Andro snapped. “I have not the time to banter with you!” His head and eyes turned back to Dutkne. “I will send a ship and someone to meet you to escort you here. Proceed to coordinates 54692.1. They will meet you there in two days.”

Dutkne nodded quickly. “We will be there.” He said. “You will... you will not come?”

“I will send my aide... Admiral... Admiral Andro. He and the Feravomir will meet you.” He answered. “They will guide you here to meet with me. Do not deviate from the corridor I have given you Dutkne. Not even by accident.”

Dutkne nodded. “We won’t.”

“And if we do?” Devra asked.

Andro turned those eyes on her. “Then I will interpret that as being hostile to me and to my people and I will ventilate your ship to space.”

“Androcles... your father?” Wayonn asked quickly before something else was said.

Andro met his eyes. “We will... we will discuss my father when you have arrived here.” He said. “Not before.”

“I can help.” Wayonn said. “I...”

Andro looked at him. “I can feel what you are Wayonn. You have the blood of a Pralor within you just as... just as my father does. But I will not place my family in danger for anyone... for any purpose. Not now. We will speak more when you get to Earth. We are finished here.”

Wayonn began to speak but the transmission ended abruptly. He turned to look at Dutkne for a long moment.

“That went well.” Dutkne announced with a grin.

“It must be worse than we thought.” Wayonn spoke softly.

Arduri stepped forward now. “What does... what does *upa... upae arven* mean?” She asked.

“It’s probably better if you don’t know.” Drey said from his seat.

“Tell us!” Devra demanded.

Dutkne turned to look at her. “It means bitch slap!” He replied.

“What... what does this mean?” Arduri asked. “This... bitch slap!”

Wayonn shook his head. “It is an ancient Earth slang that was used commonly many hundreds of years ago. Apparently it did not die out as changes occurred. It means you should watch what you say or someone will beat you up.”

Nirilo shook his head. “Excellent job sister!” He snapped angrily. “The one individual who can help us to find Caliria and you make them angry with us before we are even formally introduced. Excellent job!” He stepped up to his younger sister. “I advise you keep your tongue within your mouth or I will... I will bitch slap you!”

“I do not fear Lycavorians!” Naesta boasted.

“But you should fear these Lycavorians.” Wayonn spoke causing all of them to look at him. “True... compared to the Protectorate they are children in many ways. However, they are very dangerous children, for they have been fighting for their very existence since the Black Day. And they grow and learn every day. Do not underestimate what they can do... and if you wish their help do not assume you are their betters.” Wayonn met Devra's gaze. “There is one thing they can do far better than even the Protectorate and the Vanari.”

“What is that?” Devra asked.

“They can wage war.” Dutkne told her now.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

CRANAE ISLAND

“...we know at the moment is that Crown Prince Androcles has secluded himself and most of his family away here at his large island home in Gytheio after a brief stay at the Royal Estate Villa in Sparta. The *Durcunusaan* are understandably keeping everyone far away from Cranae Island, and we are set up along the boardwalk some 1.5 kilometers away.” Me'alla spoke as she walked along the edge of the boardwalk. Hr'man kept two of the three video drones he now controlled focused on her while the third zipped back and forth overhead with dozens of others that were focused on the Island in the distance.

“The excavation, rescue and recovery continues in Sparta at the site of the decimated Senate Building, now well into its second day. The death toll is nearing seven hundred and fifty confirmed dead, among them nearly sixty children that were visiting from a local school and perhaps seventy-six sitting Union Senators. Since operations began, only thirty-nine have been pulled from the rubble alive and hope is rapidly dwindling for those that may be trapped still, including Prime Minister Deia and Queen For'mya. Dozens of experienced Structural Engineers have descended on the site from all over Earth, including three from Nodon who were already here for an Engineering Conference in Eden City. Of the four that I was able to interview very briefly, the consensus is that this was not a random bombing. Whoever conducted this heinous act had intimate knowledge of the buildings structure in order to bring it down as they did. As with the Senate Offices on Apo Prime, special consideration goes in to construction of these facilities and not just anyone would have the knowledge of where to plant explosives that could do this and bypass the many security devices used in both buildings. It has become known to us at Channel 65 that three other locations throughout Sparta are now blanketed with dozens of *Durcunusaan* troops and it is my understanding that the *Krypteria* also has a presence at these sites despite their established Charter that states they are not authorized to operate within Union space without direct Union Senate approval. The home of Governor Panos, the apartment of his senior aide Colonel Janae and where this all started, the home of Star Colonel Isra with his wives and mates Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Vice President Aihola. The many dead bodies of the Kavalian attackers have already been removed to the *Durcunusaan* base in the mountains surrounding Sparta for investigation.”

Nearly every Netnews Channel that had an office on Earth, which was a hundred and nineteen of the hundred and thirty throughout the Union, had their own people covering the island. They had people covering the excavation of the Senate Building that was proceeding even through the night hours. There were Netnews

reporters blanketing the entire city of Sparta as well as Gytheio with some even reporting from Eden City and trying to obtain interviews with Queen Aihola of the Drow, or even General Lynwe. As was her usual self, Lynwe gruffly told the Netnews reporter who had asked for a conference where to stick his interview in the ancient Vampire and Drow language. Many were still trying to ascertain what it was she had told him, for they had never heard some of the words she used.

Me'alla's co-worker, the one who had asked the questions about Anja, had yet to make a return to broadcasting on the Network Channel and many wondered if he had been picked up by the *Durcunusaan* for belaboring the point too much. Even some of the more liberal of his fellow reporters thought what he had done was in very bad taste. The facts had already come to light in regards to the events with Anja on Hadaria and those same facts exonerating her had made the broadcast rounds all across the Union. That the Hadarian Arch Ministry had still chosen to oust her from power even though all the facts pointed to the undeniable conclusion that it was all contrived to begin with had anger many millions across the Union. Why the man had chosen to attempt to make an issue out of it was beyond them and no one supported him for his stupidity. There were many reporters and Netnews Channels that were often critical of the King and some of the things he had done and continued to do. However... none of those channels slanted their reporting to make people believe something that had been unequivocally proven not true. They reported, gave their opinions and why, and then let the people of the Union make up their own minds.

"...know that several *STRIKER DT* transports have landed over the last few hours and even from the boardwalk here, we could see Star Colonel Isra and Lieutenant Governor Tarifa landing on the beach on their dragons Aelnala and Roluth. The Lieutenant Governor and Vice President of Earth Aihola have long been recognized as dear sisters to King Leonidas because of the history and battles they fought together, though his half sisters and brothers with Lady Gorgo and Admiral Riall have begun to move into the public arena more in recent years at his request and the behest of Tarifa. Vice President of Earth and Queen of the Drow Aihola was seen landing in a *STRIKER AT* two hours ago under heavy escort. It is rumored that the younger children of King Leonidas and his Queens have been escorted here to be with their brother and the rest of their family. It is impossible to tell how many dragons are now on Cranae Island at this time, due to their numbers the fact they keep landing and taking off which makes it nearly impossible to keep track." Me'alla was seen lifting her arm into the air.

"As you can see there are easily seven or eight in the sky above the island and we can only assume that Prince Androcles's status as a Talon Guardian of the dragon species is playing some role in that action. We have seen Elynth of course, the Dragon Elder Mother Arzoal, the dragon of Princess Carisia whose name we believe is Anthar and several other Dragon Elders on the ground moving about, but for the most part they are remaining hidden. It is well known that Prince Androcles covets his privacy and there is a large wall made up of tall, thick pine trees that surround the massive patio area of his villa where Elynth is known to reside when she is here. The only way we could surmise who is on the island with him now is if we detect them walking along the sands near his home. There are even several Patrol Lifters in the waters near his villa to keep inquisitive people away." Me'alla stopped walking and looked directly at the video drone with the villa far in the background.

"Much has been said up until now and more will be said in the future no doubt in regards to his actions concerning his mother Queen Aricia, and we even watched it here as he reverently carried her body into the tomb of King Leonidas where he laid to rest the remains of his father only hours ago. We have also heard from the very outspoken Hadarian physician who treated the Queen and his insistence that she was well on her way to recovery. I can now tell you that doctor is no longer working at King Yelu Memorial Hospital by order of the *Feravomir*. By his very own admission he had never studied the history of what the term *Anome* means to the Lycavorian people. He asked for a transfer and was granted it immediately. Some of us may be asking; based on what this doctor has said, why then did the Prince do what he did?"

Me'alla paused for a moment before she went on. "I am considered a very young elven female by our standards, and I only moved here from Elear when I decided to come to school here. During my time at the Academy of Journalism right here on Earth in Eden City, I also earned a secondary degree in Lycavorian Studies. My father is an Admiral within the United Lycavorian Union Fleet and he has fought with Lycavorians for the better part of three hundred and fifty years. He has been led by them, fought with them and now he commands them, and never once has he had anything but praise for them and the honor and faith that drives

them. My own brother's loving wife is a Lycavorian female from right here in Sparta. It is because of this that I... I found their species, their history and their culture to be fascinating. While I may seem biased to some because of that, I can tell you that I know what the term *Anome* means to them and to their tradition and culture. It is not a term that is used very often and in fact, during all of my studies of their history, I have found only two other instances where there were universally recognized *anomes* in Lycavorian culture. That was King Resumar and Queen Eliani and now Prince Androcles and Sadi. We have seen through the years the abilities our King and Queens have... and now his son as well with Crown Princess Sadi. In the nearly ten thousand years since the Black Day passed, there have been only three sets of *anomes*. *Three*. We have been blessed to witness two of them.

"Many of us do not, and will never, truly understand or comprehend the power that King Leonidas, his son Androcles, Queen Aricia or any of the Royal Family commands. We can not understand it for we will never experience it." Me'alla continued slowly. "What I do know is that Lycavorians cherish life and love perhaps on a plane of understanding many of us will never feel. Yes... Queen Aricia may have physically survived without her *anome*, but if what many Lycavorians, indeed the majority of them believe, her death would have come in the slow and painful fashion of never being able to feel her *anome*'s aura wrapped around her ever again. They believe she would have withered away to nothing, even with the love of those who remain behind with her. Prince Androcles did not want that for his mother, and he did what he knew she would have wanted him to do. What right do we have to judge him on what the majority of Lycavorians believe to be true? It is one of their most sacred beliefs, and we are nothing if not an accepting collection of species and races within this great Union. All of us with different beliefs. Let us concentrate now on how we can recover and go forward, for surely our new King and Queens will need our support.

"This is Me'alla, Union Netnews Channel 65, reporting from Gytheio outside Prince Androcles's home on Cranæ Island. We will break in should any new information become available."

CRANÆ ISLAND ANDROCLES'S VILLA

"...break in should any new information become available."

"This is the one?" Lynwe asked Selene from where she stood next to the monitor with Tareif and Riall. Selene nodded from her seat. "Until Dilaen returns with the *SCIMITAR*... Helen and Andro want all press releases going through this young woman and Channel 65." She said evenly. "Androcles has appointed Dilaen as his defacto Press Administrator and she will coordinate everything when she returns."

"When is the *SCIMITAR* due back?" Tareif asked.

"They should arrive within twelve hours if I know Sa'sur." Riall answered. "Androcles has already given the order and all of our ships that are equipped with the new HMFC Drives will be able to use them freely. I have sent that order out to every fleet ship. There will be no more hiding the gains we have made."

Lynwe nodded. "As it should be." She stated.

Riall handed them each a data pad. "I will leave you to deploy what forces you feel are necessary to cover Earth. Each of you have your own Spartan Com Channels, and should anything come up that needs your attention I will contact you directly. Colonel Nestor has already begun dispersing his forces I understand Lynwe?"

Lynwe nodded her head. "Tareif and I felt it was prudent to do. They are the finest and the most experienced Reactionary Division we have on Earth and they are the most skilled in many ways. Nestor has seen to that. Earth is large Riall... and much of it has not seen a return of population. There are thousands of places Kavalians could hide. Thousands! We just don't have the manpower to do a thorough search."

"We could cover perhaps one continent at a time." Tareif agreed. "No more. And even that is stretching it."

"As with the ones that struck in Sparta, they will appear no different than us." Riall said. "Their biogenic cloning process has been refined through the years of war with the Coven and they are getting very good at it."

"So they could have people in Sparta still?" Selene asked. "Just waiting to attack at the first opportunity."

Riall nodded slowly. “Jalersi’Nruarani gave us a sample of her blood and DNA to use as a base search measure. Pian as well. Admiral Wallace and Joarl are realigning their sensors to detect similar patterns.”

“We can trust them Riall?” Lynwe asked.

“They risked their lives and stood in the middle of the worst of it to protect Aricia. They brought the information that the Kavalians were going to strike to Tarifa when they discovered it. They were unable to get it to us sooner for they were being hunted as well. We could have avoided the deaths had we known, but...” Riall paused in his answer. “That is something they did not have to do. Tarifa trusts them and apparently Martin did as well.” Riall nodded his head. “If they trusted them... that is good enough for me.”

“*Aovi.*” Tareif spoke softly.

“It must appear as if Martin is dead so there will be changes to command structure... but nothing that will affect your overall jobs or be permanent.” Riall said. “It’s a distinct possibility they could have people in Sparta and perhaps Eden City as I said and we must consider that when making our plans.” Riall told them. “That they have not come pouring across our borders in force lends much support to the reasoning that something else is going on. Androcles was originally intended as a target because they thought he went to Kranek with the others and they may very well come after him again if this is the case, knowing they did not kill him there.”

“The *Durcunusaan* will have just as much difficulty protecting him as they do his father.” Selene spoke shaking her head. “How do you protect two men who don’t want to be protected and in many cases are better at fighting and killing than the men assigned to protect them?”

Riall and Tareif nodded. “That is their issue.” Riall told them. “It is not one I am to be concerned with as Martin once told me. I am the commander of Union forces and that is what he wanted me to concentrate on. That is what I intend to do.”

“And no one outside of us here at the villa knows?” Tareif asked.

Riall shook his head. “For the moment... no. Martin has always considered those of you here as family. As Andro does. As we all do. No one outside of our immediate family knows at this moment, and most of those in our extended family will know within the next twenty-four hours. It will not appear odd for us to surround him with family and that is exactly what we are doing. The younglings have been moved here where they are more comfortable. Gorgo and Dasha are settling them into the East Wing of the villa for now. When the time is right in the next day or so, we will put them all on a STRIKER and send them to Curila 6. I don’t think Andro knew how big this villa was when he bought it. There are two wings that he has never even used. One is being used for the Command Center and the other for his siblings right now.”

“Andro has asked that I continue to give the updated briefings every few hours *ussta ssinsrigg.*” Selene spoke now as she looked at her Drow Mistress and lover for over twenty-five years now. Twenty-six years of blistering passion and excitement and intense love that still burned as brightly now as it did when they first discovered each other. It was a love that many who knew them could attest to, and more still saw on a daily basis. Selene and Lynwe knew just how to incite the other to rapturous pleasure when in their bed, and they knew each others deepest thoughts and moods almost better than their own. Lynwe’s beautiful Drow cock was the only thing that could make Selene howl out in mindnumbing bliss, and she knew that only she could cause Lynwe to truly sing out her own pleasure. Though they both loved Layna and Joarl dearly, it had started as just the two of them during a time of emotional distress and discovery and they would always feel that pull towards each other first and foremost. Their long and loving Mistress/Slave relationship, combined with Aihola and Tarifa’s and Nayeca and Anuk’s had become the basis for all female/female relationships among the Drow and those they chose as their lovers no matter where they now lived within the Union. “Charles has agreed to remain sequestered away at the Safe Site until such time as we have determined it is secure and he is in no danger.”

Lynwe looked at her with bright amber eyes of love. “How exactly did you and Aihola accomplish that?” She asked.

“We appealed to his more refined nature.” Selene said with a smile. “And he guaranteed us that if anything happened to us he would order a full mobilization of Earth Forces and kick the Kavalians in the ass by himself if need be. It is added incentive for us to remain safe.”

“Bah!” Tareif echoed dismissively. “He knows you will not listen to him. He is probably already planning to invade if I know Charles.”

Riall chuckled for the first time in nearly three days. "Charles continues to impress me even after all these years." He stated. "What is he... nearing eighty?"

"Seventy-six next month and still as spry as a twenty year old." Selene answered. "We were preparing a large birthday party but I suppose that is off for now."

"Someone should talk him into letting one of us turn him." Riall spoke. "He has made the humans strong again with his leadership and it will be a shame to lose that. They have truly an inspiration to many now."

Selene shook her head slowly. "I still... I still can not believe that this is happening Riall. Where is he?"

Riall motioned to the doors opposite the large main room they sat in. "On the patio with Sadi and Carisia. He and Helen are leaving in a few hours to meet with this Wayonn person and those with him."

Selene looked at him from the couch. "Riall... who is this person?"

Riall shook his head slowly. "I don't know and I don't begin to understand most of it. Gorgo has tried to explain the history of these Pralors to me. As much as she knows anyway. Helen knows much more than she lets on. Martin and Andro as well. It has to do with Avi and City Ship 41 and when they discovered it. And if my understanding of it is correct, events that happened nearly thirty or forty thousand years ago on Lycavore. Even before where Resumar became King in our history. It is all very confusing... at least to me. It is part of the reason why our people are able to use Mindvoice. It has to do with what Canth, the very first Oracle of our people told Martin on Ukwav. How he would need to find the Lost Ones as Canth referred to them. And amazingly it ties very tightly together with the history of the Vampire High Coven as well."

"The High Coven?" Lynwe gasped. "How so?"

Riall shrugged his broad shoulders. "That I don't know... but it is part of the reason that Carisia is now one of Andro's mates. Why she is bound to him almost as tightly as Sadi. And it is also part of the reason why Zarah and Yuri's daughter Lucia are now together. Why Lucia risked all to save Zarah. As I said... it is all very confusing."

"Can we... can we trust them?" Tareif asked.

Riall looked at him. "That is something I believe Andro and Helen will discover quickly, but I don't believe they would be going if that was not the case."

"...*Ilythiiri tessai* is with Aihola and her mother Daba and *SirsanGai* is speaking with her grandmother and uncle." Sadi Leonidas spoke softly as she pressed close to Andro on one side and Carisia Leonidas pressed snugly to him on the other. Two of his wives and mates.

"We felt it was the right time to speak with you." Carisia said.

Andro looked down into Sadi's jungle green eyes and then shifted his gaze to Carisia's Maya blue orbs. He lowered his mug of strong coffee to the nearby table, using his TK power to let it settle the last three meters to the top. The cool breeze coming from the ocean and the smell of salt water in his nose had done more to calm him than anything in the last few hours. Having Sadi's sugar plume and spice scent combined with Carisia's sweet rose blossom scent filtering powerfully to him now relaxed him even further.

Androcles was very nearly overwhelmed with everything that was happening and it was moving so quickly that he could barely keep up. He had moved into a realm that only his father had been in up until this moment. So many men and women hinging on his every word and order. All of them, while knowing and conducting their duties, all of them looking to him for guidance. Now he truly knew what his father meant when he said he hated being King and how he just wanted to take his mothers and disappear for months on end. Andro also knew it was something his father had never done out of his sense of duty and commitment to their people and it was something Androcles would not shirk either.

"Speak with me about what?" He asked softly.

"With everything that is happening... we felt... we felt perhaps you may have forgotten who you are." Sadi said softly.

Andro chuckled gently. "Trust me... I have many people who remind me every hour of who I am." He answered. "And who I am supposed to be."

"That is not what we mean." Carisia said softly.

Andro looked back and forth between them several times. "What is going on here?" He asked.

“We are speaking of Lu'ria and Ne'Veha.” Sadi said. “You need to finish what you have started my love.”

“Excuse me?” Andro asked.

“You know what I am talking about Androcles Leonidas.” Sadi told him sternly but with a touch of playfulness in her voice.

“Sadi... now is not the time...”

“It is the time!” Carisia told him pressing closer to him. Her lithe five foot two frame looked almost ridiculously small against his muscular six foot one body, but it never ceased to cause her blood to surge with desire. “You have turned our *Ilythiiri tessai*. Ne'Veha feels the changes that sharing your bed have caused within her Andro.”

“You need to finish it.” Sadi told him. “You need to make them ours completely. You need to love Lu'ria as you have loved *Enylarcopri* and I. You need to turn Ne'Veha completely and love her as you have loved us.”

“*KertaGai*...” Andro began.

“No... listen to us.” Sadi said shaking her head. “We are meant for each other Androcles. You know this. All of us are meant for each other. You have known this since you were only eight months old! I have known as well... though I tried to deny it until you returned to me. *Enylarcopri* has known almost her entire life. As we have found each of them we have grown stronger together. *Enylarcopri*... *SirsanGai*... and now *Ilythiiri Tessai*. The stronger we become...” Sadi paused for a moment and rested her forehead against his chest. “The stronger we become my love, the easier it will be for us to face whatever the future brings to us. And that includes discovering the last piece of the puzzle that we all are.”

“Sadi I can't...” Andro began to speak again.

“They are right!” Gorgo's voice spoke from behind them.

Andro turned and saw her come fully onto the patio holding the mug of tea in her hands. He shook his head as he looked at the stone floor of his patio. She was very different from only a few hours ago when she thought she had lost her son yet again. Now she was the strong and so very confident woman she normally was. “Grandmother I...” He began to speak.

Gorgo stopped as she came up in front of him. “You what?” She asked him quickly. “Do you think that if you hold in what your blood and your instincts demand that you do; do you think that if you hold this in, it will make you a better leader somehow? That our people will somehow look at you differently?”

“No. It's just...”

“Your father learned the hard way that this is not the case Androcles. He almost lost your mother because he did not follow his instincts.” Gorgo said softly as she looked at him. “The clone of me encouraged him to ignore the instincts he had followed for so long, and she did it in an insidious manner; by telling him our people came first and to shield his instincts. He almost lost your mother Aricia because of that. He almost waited too long before turning your mother For'mya. If he was here what do you think he would tell you? He would tell you to follow what your instincts and your blood clamor so loudly for you to do. Without hesitation. And without question. Just as he now does. That is what makes you leaders of men! You have turned Lu'ria Andro... and her Drow blood sings for you to the heavens. Every single female wolf within five kilometers of Craneae Island can smell her. Her scent now filters on the wind just as strongly as Sadi's does. She is the first you have turned Androcles, and like your mother Dysea her scent will be nearly as strong as Sadi's. Ne'Veha... well even Helen and I commented about Ne'Veha. We agreed that in all our years we have never smelled an elven female whose very essence announced so loudly that she wanted the man who claimed her to finish making her his. Not even For'mya's blood called so strongly for your father before he turned her.” Gorgo said softly. “You have turned Lu'ria and now you need to finish turning Ne'Veha. And then you need to make them utterly yours as they both want so badly. It is what their blood wants. What their minds want. You are the only one to not see this you know.”

“Everything that is happening is...”

Gorgo shook her head slowly. “We can not change what has happened young Androcles. It is times like these where I curse my Spartan blood, for it tells us this is what happens in life and we need to move forward no matter what.” She looked at him. “As... as cruel as it sounds yes, your mother For'mya may well be dead. Deia may join her. We may also never recover your mother Dysea. We may never recover from what your uncle has

wrought upon us... but if we *are* to recover then you need to be as strong as you can be. As with your father, the women who hold his heart and soul make him who he is. They make him as strong as he is. Just as your *KertaGai* does. Just as your *Enylarcopri* does. Lu'ria and Ne'Veha are part of that now... they are part of what makes you who you are, just as you shape them. Do not deny it... do not resist it. Your father will need you to be the strongest you can be if and when the time comes. If your mother is dead... if we can not get your mother Dysea back... your father will need that strength." Gorgo smiled up at him.

"They are what give you that strength Androcles, just as your mothers are your father's strength." Gorgo reached up with one hand and placed it flat on his cheek. "Your father did not have the luxury of knowing what he was... even who he was when he first returned to Earth. To me. You have known who and what you are since you were still being carried in your mother's womb. You have never denied that Androcles Leonidas, in all the years I have known you and watched you grow, you have embraced every portion of what you are completely. Do not deny that now."

Carisia reached up and stroked his opposite cheek with her fingers as Gorgo's hand fell away and he looked at her. "Sadi is your *anome* Andro." She spoke with bright blue eyes and a brilliant smile. "I know that... Lu'ria and Ne'Veha know that. She will always be the one that calls to you strongest of all. Lu'ria is the first you have turned and just as Gorgo has said, like your mother Dysea she calls for you almost as intensely. But we also know that you love us just as intensely as we love you. That Sadi loves us just as we love her. This is the purpose we were all meant for. And we will be complete when the last piece of that puzzle comes to us."

"Take Lu'ria and Ne'Veha with you my love." Sadi told him with a loving smile. "Finish what you started so that they will know you as *Enylarcopri* and I know you. Trust me... we will have enough here to keep us busy making sure they do not rearrange our entire home and acting as we would be expected to act."

"Listen to them Androcles. Trust in their love for you." Gorgo said as she turned to go back inside. "They will never guide you in a direction you don't wish to go. And they know we need to be ready to face anything in the future. You leave with Helen in three hours... Arzoal and she will see you on the *HARBINGER*."

Andro watched her until she had re-entered his villa completely and then he turned to look at Sadi and Carisia. "You two planned that." He said finally.

Sadi looked up at his adoring azure blue eyes. "We figured we might need an assist to make you see our point."

Andro lowered his head and nuzzled Sadi's cheek and neck firmly causing her to sigh in delight. He repeated this action with Carisia and though she was not wolf and could not feel the aura of unabashed love he was projecting, she could still feel his powerful Mindvoice resonance ripple in much the same fashion through her.

"I will do as you ask me." He whispered.

"It is what you want as well my love..." Sadi said softly.

"You are just too stubborn to admit it." Carisia finished.

They felt his arms wrap around their waists as he pulled them tightly to him and they knew he would do what they both knew all of them wanted.

"No!" Andro snapped shaking his head as he got to his feet. "Absolutely not! I already have one brother, his mate and an Uncle in harms way inside Kavalian space! As well as countless others! I will not risk my father's dearest sister and one of his favorite nieces as well! No!"

"You... you have people in Kavalian space already?" Pian asked in shock.

Tarifa looked at Isra next to her and then let her sapphire colored eyes drift Aihola's amber orbs and then to where Pian and Jalersi sat on the second couch with Karun and Ardis. She turned her eyes back to him. "Andro..."

Andro turned back around and glared at her. "You want me to give you a ship to take you into Kavalian space so you can find and rescue Jalersi'Puat..." Andro stopped and looked at her. "So you can find and rescue Jalersi'Nruarani's daughter! You don't even know where she is!"

"She is on Rizon Four." Pian spoke up still somewhat surprised that he was here at all. What Pian did not realize or understand just yet was that his actions in standing with Jalersi and Jiss and protecting Aricia

would make him somewhat of a cult hero within Union Space. He would become known as the first who broke away from the old oppression and moved into the future. His feline eyes were even more surprised when Androcles corrected himself when he spoke Jalersi's name just now.

Andro looked at him. "Rizon Four?" He gasped looking at him. "Pian that's on the far edge of Kavalian space beyond the Orion Spur and almost to the Perseus Arm! A three to four day trip at least!"

"It is where my Pride calls home Androcles Leonidas." Pian spoke calmly as he got to his feet. "It is what has allowed me to bring about the change in my Pride I have wanted. Turning my Pride away from the old ways of our cultures and traditions. Much like your grandfather did so many thousands of years ago with your own people."

Andro tilted his head and looked at him oddly for a moment before turning to Tarifa and Aihola. "Did my *tennas* tell you to say that?" He asked looking at him quickly. Pian looked at him sheepishly and Andro turned back to Tarifa. "*Tenna*?"

"So what?" Tarifa barked softly. "Yes... I told him to say it! Andro it's the truth! Pian's Pride is nearly five million strong! It's one of the larger Prides within the Kavalian Federation! And now because of what Pian and Jalersi have discovered together, what they have embraced just as Athani did; now his Pride will be the largest force for good and change within the entire Federation."

"They will be hunted *Tenna*!" Andro snapped. "They will be hunted for choosing the path they have! After what they have done for my mother do you expect me to put them in grave danger by allowing them to go back into Kavalian space?"

Pian snorted loudly and gripped Jalersi's hand tightly. "Let them hunt for us. We know the border areas of the Federation better than any other Pride. We have lived there for centuries. They will not find us unless I wish them to find us." He stated confidently as he rose to his feet. "I need to do this. I promised Jalersi we would not abandon her daughter and I will not go back on that promise!"

"Andro... do you doubt me?" Tarifa asked.

"I'm not doubting you *Tenna*!" Andro answered. "Nor do I doubt Pian or Jalersi... not after what they did to protect my mother."

"You doubt me then?" Karun asked from his spot next to Ardis.

Andro looked at him intently. "You are the one who concerns me least cousin." He spoke quickly. "Ardis would have gutted you long ago if you were not sincere in your heart. And if she hadn't... my father would have."

"Then what is the problem?" Tarifa asked.

Andro returned to his chair. "Problem? This whole idea is insane... that is the problem! My father would never allow you to do this *tenna* and you know that! Why do you ask it of me?"

Tarifa nodded. "Yes I know what your father would say... but you are not your father." She said.

Andro's eyes bore into her as they narrowed. "No... I am not." He stated firmly. "And the answer is still no. If this is to work... if we are going to discover why the Kavalians have done this then we need to make this façade last as long as possible. Part of that pretense is I promote grandfather Panos and you become Governor of Sparta!"

Tarifa's eyes grew wide at this information. "What?" She gasped in shock.

Andro nodded. "As sick as it sounds... my father made me go over this at least half a dozen times when I was younger. This very scenario! Aunt Deia's resonance within Mindvoice is very weak... and it grows weaker by the hour. My mother... my mother For'mya may very well be dead and buried in that pile of rubble. Father may not be dead... but we could still lose so many more! Even if Aunt Deia survives... she will be unable to conduct her duties as Prime Minister. Before I leave I will appoint grandfather Panos as either her successor or her deputy while she makes her recovery. That makes you Governor of Sparta. What do I tell the Netnews if this happens?" He spoke. "That my Aunt Tarifa, who is now Governor of Sparta, that she is somewhere within Kavalian space on a secret mission?"

"Then send us." Ardis spoke leaning forward. "I will certainly not be missed Andro."

"I forbid it!" Isra snapped.

"Papa... would you expect me to leave one of my brothers or sisters in danger? Would you or my mothers leave me?" Ardis asked. "How can you ask my husband and mate to do the same? How can you ask Jalersi to do this after what she and Pian have done?"

“You do not need to go!” Isra almost shouted beginning to come to his feet.

Tarifa gripped his arms with Aihola and kept him from getting to his feet. “Isra... sit.” Aihola told him. “This does not help.”

“She is our daughter!” Isra snapped.

Aihola nodded. “Yes she is... and she is also a woman who loves her mate Isra.” Aihola turned to Andro. “If you need to do this Androcles... can you not say Tarifa has gone to Apo Prime or to Elear for a meeting of some sort and that she will be confirmed when she returns. This would not look odd in the least considering what has happened.”

Andro looked at her slowly as the wheels in his head began to turn. “*Tenna* Aihola... I... you support this?”

“I support this because I trust my mates.” She stated. “And I trust those who they have come to call friend.”

Karun came to his feet then surprising everyone. “She is my sister!” He snarled. “The Nruarani Pride risked much to keep her from my father’s clutches! She is only twenty years old... and she is innocent to all that is going on around her! She does not understand what is happening! She does not understand why our father wishes to make her a whore on Nefoa! I will not sit by and wait for my brothers Leruk or Kalis to find her and take her to Nefoa to be a whore for my father’s men! If he does not kill her outright for what my mother and I have done! Nikkei is innocent and... we have found new lives! New lives and new meaning to our lives! Nikkei deserves just as much a chance! I *will* leave... even if I have to steal a ship!”

Andro’s eyes lifted slowly and he gazed at Karun. He turned after a moment and looked at Jalersi and she met his gaze as she slowly came to her feet. “What?” She asked softly. “What do you know?” Her hands came up to her mouth as she gasped. “He... he has already found her hasn’t he?”

“Impossible!” Pian spoke looking at her and then back to Andro. “My mother... my Pride would not have let that happen! No!”

“Then what?” Jalersi demanded.

“Leruk.” Andro said softly.

Karun stepped closer to him. “What about Leruk?”

Andro turned back to him. “He was on Iraruzu.” Andro said softly. “He was leading the forces there that were attempting to find and kill... they were trying to kill Walter and Lu’ria.” He told them the pain in his voice very evident. “They had already destroyed the entire Drow settlement and killed the Drow that were stationed there. Over forty of them. When I arrived... when I arrived they had the last of them trapped in the remains of their home. Lu’ria was... *Ilythiri Tessai* was badly injured and...”

“He is dead isn’t he?” Jalersi asked.

Andro met her eyes. “He was trying to kill my wife and mate! He had already shot her four times! ” Andro said forcefully. “He and those he was leading... they had killed over forty Drow who... I killed him!” Andro said finally. He looked at Karun. “I killed your brother for what he was attempting to do.”

Jalersi took a deep breath and shook her head slowly. “I lost Leruk many years ago.” She said softly seeing Andro turn back to look at her. “Just as I lost Kalis. They... they embraced their father’s nature completely. The cruelty and hate. The lack of compassion for any female. Only Karun and Nikkei have remained outside his influence.” Jalersi looked at him. “I did not realize it until... until I found Pian... but they were dead to me the moment they fell into their father’s realm of corruption and hate. That is why... that is why I must find her before they do. Karun is right Androcles... she is innocent! Pure!”

Andro turned slowly and looked back at Karun as he stepped closer to him. “When I came here... when I came here I discovered far more than I ever expected.” Karun spoke. “Everything my father told me as I was growing was a lie. Everything! I have embraced my blood Androcles! The blood that makes me a Leonidas! Grandmother Gorgo... my sister Lisisa, Ardis... they have opened my eyes. After what I have discovered I will never dishonor that name as my father did! Never! I would gladly die before I did that! Kalis and Leruk... they are not my brothers... they never really were. My family is here! This is where I belong! Would you leave one of your sisters in danger if there was even a slim hope of saving her? Would you leave Lisisa? Or Eliani? Or Zarah? Would you desert them if you had a chance, no matter how small! Would you...?”

Andro turned away from him suddenly closing his eyes. Karun made to reach out and grab him but Ardis quickly took his arm and shook her head.

“Ardis... I...” Karun began to protest.

Ardis put a finger to his lips and stopped him. “I know.” She said softly. “I know. And I will follow you wherever you go... but we can’t do it alone.”

They all turned when the massive double doors opened and Elynth’s huge head and obsidian shoulders entered. Jalersi and Pian didn’t flinch much to their surprise. They had no reason to fear dragons any longer, and neither of them understood why they ever did to begin with. To Jalersi... they were now the most majestic creature she had ever seen. It had taken Pian a little longer to be able to reach out and touch one, but as with her, when he did whatever fear he may have held quickly slipped away. They watched Andro step up to Elynth as she lowered her huge body to the floor in front of Andro and his hands reached up to press against the scales of her muzzle. They watched her butt him in the chest gently in a show of affection and love.

[*He speaks true Andro my brother.*] Elynth said. [*Neither of us would leave one of our siblings behind. It is not in our nature.*]

[*I know.*] Andro said softly.

[*You feel guilty for killing foul Leruk when you should not.*] Elynth told him. [*But I do understand why. You must do what your heart and mine tells you my Bonded Brother. It will make our family that much more special. And stronger. We need that now.*]

[*Yes we do.*] He answered. He looked up at her snout. [*What would I do without you sister?*]

[*I have told you before... you are a man. You would do nothing. And that is why you need four breathtaking females to guide you.*] Elynth answered with a trace of humor in her voice.

Andro couldn’t help but smile and nod his head. “You are right Karun...” He spoke out loud as he leaned his forehead against Elynth’s snout for a long moment. “I would do anything for any of my sisters... no matter the danger. No matter the odds.” Andro turned and stepped right up to Karun and gazed at his blue eyes. “I have taken a brother from you cousin... I have taken a brother from you and now I offer myself as your brother in return if you will have me. A commitment of Blood washes away a crime of Blood.” Andro held out his hand to Karun. “Brother.”

Karun didn’t hesitate and he snatched Andro’s hand and arm tightly. “Then that is what I pledge as well!” He stated without pause fully embracing the new life he had found without a moment’s hesitation, no matter where that life took him. “Brother!”

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “And we do not leave our family in danger.” He said. He turned quickly to Isra. “Are they ready Uncle?”

Isra came slowly to his feet now as he looked at him. “Durago and Aelnala believe they are. So do I.” He stated confidently as Tarifa and Aihola looked at him oddly. “It has been a *upaee* hiding them from your father and Arzoal though. Especially for three years.”

“We will not need to for very much longer. There is a new *VANGUARD MARK III*-Class Cruiser in orbit.” Andro told him. “The *RAGE OF ACHILLES* I believe she is called. The first of the new *VANGUARD* line that will take the place of the older *LEONIDAS I* as escorts in our Fleet Groups. She has the new HMFC engines, a Shroud, plenty of firepower and she can carry twenty-five dragons with ease. She can go places a *LEONIDAS II* can’t. She also has a human female captain cut from the same mold as Miranda Lorian and Sa’sur.”

Isra grinned. “Ahhh... bigger *nor* than me then. Excellent.”

Andro laughed a genuine laugh now as Tarifa and Aihola both punched Isra in each of his arms. “Have a *staette* of them deployed to her immediately. You just may need them. You and Aelnala will lead them Uncle.” (Section)

Isra nodded instantly. “Done.”

“Then... then you will allow us to go?” Jalersi asked quickly her voice filled with hope.

Andro looked at her and nodded slowly. “Karun is right... I would never leave any of my sisters in harm’s way if it was within my power to change. You will join with my brother and Athani on Ritaah.” He said.

“Athani?” Jalersi gasped.

Pian’s eyes grew wide. “Ritaah?” He gasped as he came forward. “Then you *do* have people inside Kavalian space already?”

Andro nodded his head. “From there you will find the best way to bring Nikkei home safely, but Resumar will have the final say on how you do it. He should be almost finished with his primary mission there

but his mission takes priority no matter what.” Andro looked at Karun quickly. “You know and understand what I am saying Karun, at least in a military sense. Find Nikkei and do whatever it takes, but Resumar’s mission is more important until it is complete. You will fully understand why when you get there and see for yourselves, but you must promise me that, for his mission could have ramifications that will resound across the universe.”

Karun nodded. “I give you my word.”

Andro nodded and slowly turned to look at Tarifa. “If anything happens to you *tenna*, my father will hang my *nor* out in the sun to cook slowly. You know that.” He stated firmly. “Do nothing stupid or reckless please.”

Tarifa grinned at him and nodded. She turned to Aihola. “*Nya Istel?*”

Aihola nodded. “If both of us were gone the Netnews would detect something was awry.” She said. “I need to remain here to maintain the illusion and also to help Lu'ria when they return the day after tomorrow. Daba, Sadi and I will need to assist her in what her status now is thanks to our *Mandri*.” Aihola looked at Andro with her bright amber eyes. “Like his father... he tends to bite before he thinks.”

Andro looked at her sheepishly for a moment. “She... she does smell very good *tenna*.”

“Good!” Aihola barked humorously. “When you return... Daba and I will have a short ceremony prepared until such time as a proper and full Drow wedding can be held. It must be done Andro, even with everything else that is happening this must take place. I’m sorry.”

Andro nodded. “I know. And I am not sorry, so no one else should be either.”

“I sincerely hope you realize what you have gotten yourself into Androcles. Her father and her family have never met you *mandri*. You have turned her without them meeting you. There has never been a pureborn Drow who has been turned or taken as a mate by a Lycavorian. This is new territory for all of us.”

“I know what I did. I could not let her die.” He answered. “And I have no regrets or fear about it. We were meant to be together just as Sadi and I. We...”

Aihola lifted her hand and shook her head. “It is not me you need to convince *Mandri*. You have Daba on your side which is unbelievable to say the least... but now you will have to convince the rest of her family. And the Drow as a whole.”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders laconically. “So be it.” He turned to Karun. “I need to leave for a meeting. My uncle has my personal Spartan COM channel. He will see to it that you are assigned one as well. If you need anything before you depart or arrive on Ritaah contact me directly.”

“We will not fail.” Karun said looking at Ardis with her Elven and Lycavorian beauty. “I have far too much to live for now.”

Andro pulled Karun into a powerful embrace gripping the back of his head as he did. “*Cuia fas vada carians fervon.*” (Go with the Gods brother)

“*Forn aen fan fervon. Forn aen fan.*” (You as well brother. You as well)

PHY'IAD'S COMMAND SHIP EIGHTEEN HOURS FROM BELID

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhh... noooo!”

“You like our Immortal cocks don't you elf Queen!” The Immortal barked loudly as he rammed his hips forward again, sinking his huge cock into the silky depths of her pussy as the Immortal behind her withdrew his huge cock slowly from her bowels. She was sandwiched between the two hulking men, her breasts crushed against the naked chest of the Immortal in front of her and her tattooed body being pummeled with more Immortal cock than she ever had thought possible. “*Vith Dysea... you are so fucking tight!*” The Immortal gasped as he lowered his head to her chest and he ground his thick, fifteen inch cock into her clenching pussy.

Dysea's body was on fire. Had been on fire for hours now.

Her senses were screaming in blissful abandon as these two Immortals used her as they wanted. She didn't have the strength to fight them when they had come into her cell, her sweet luscious body already exposed to their gazes. She had been stripped naked before they tossed her in this cell, her jaw sore and her body aching from the blows it had taken to knock her out. She had not gone down without a fight, impaling one

Immortal with her *Nehtes* even as she dropped to the ground stunned by the hammer like blow to her face. Even with all her strength and skill she had finally succumbed to their repeated blows.

Dysea had awakened to the burning of her wolf blood and the painful yet totally glorious feeling of being completely stuffed with Immortal cock. She didn't know how long they had been fucking her, but the pain in her anus had rapidly been replaced by divine sensations as their two huge cocks had sawed in and out of her lithe and muscular elven body. Her nipples were searing points of wanton hardness, the silver studs through both of her nipples only serving to magnify the immense satisfaction that ripped through her. Only Martin had ever penetrated her so completely in that most private of places and the enormous pleasure she had gotten from that experience had led to many more similar to it with her *Nauta Melme*. Yet now, the Immortal cocks stretching her body were larger and thicker than Martin, and they were driving her utterly insane with rapture. Their Immortal bodies were so hugely powerful and they now held her balanced between them, impaled on their dominating cocks as their large hands discovered her body in a way only her beloved *Nauta Melme* had ever done. Their skin was a dark gray in color and the disparity between them and her deep tan only served to enhance their passion as they drove their cocks into her. She had never been so staggeringly filled before, her warm, tight elven pussy and ass quickly stretching to accommodate the pulsing hot Immortal cocks buried in her body even as her wolf blood screamed for more. She had tried to fight them at first, but the battering she had taken had served to weaken her considerably. When that first Immortal had erupted deep in her pussy after only a few brutal strokes she knew all was lost. That Immortal was shifting positions as the second man was erupting into her bowels with savage glee. The first one had wasted no time in twisting her around on the small bunk, and taking hold of her head, laughing hysterically as he forced his slick and still very hard cock into her mouth. She tried to push him away as he drove his cock into her throat causing her to gag, but the second Immortal only grabbed her arms and held her with his cock still buried in her sore ass. The moment the Immortal began exploding into her throat and belly Dysea could only think of one thing. With his entire cock in her throat she tore her hands free from the second immortal and wrapped her arms around his powerful ass cheeks holding his dominating cock in her throat as he filled her stomach with his seed. She could feel the effects of his addicting come racing through her as he withdrew his cock from between her lips. The need to have him fill her over and over again beginning to grow stronger by the moment. Dysea knew she was all but gone when she did not fight him as he lifted her off the small bed, twisted her body around once more and impaled her one more time with his Immortal cock, which amazingly was still hard as iron and ready for more.

Dysea could not feel her *Nauta Melme*'s aura or his Mindvoice presence and through the fog of delight coursing through her mind and swiftly overwhelming her senses, she remembered that he was gone forever. He had been violently killed protecting those he so loved on Earth. Those that she had loved so completely as well. Dysea's wide emerald eyes blinked rapidly and she realized through that fog that these Immortals had already filled her with their blistering hot come at least once, and they had only shifted positions. She had no concept of time and didn't know how long they had been using her, or how many times they had emptied their seed in to her, all she knew was that she was beginning to covet the sinful pleasure she was experiencing. It was unlike anything she had ever felt before and she felt her resistance crumbling ever so rapidly. This should not be happening to her now, she was too powerful, and Esther had given her the serum before the battle on Kranek. She should not feel anything but immense pain and humiliation at what these monsters were doing to her, but the wicked pleasure was undeniable and her being well into phase now made it even worse. It amplified all of her pleasure receptors to the extreme and no matter how she fought against it she could feel a monstrous orgasm building inside her.

"Phy'iad... Phy'iad will kill... will kill us if he finds out!" The Immortal driving his cock into her ass once more groaned against the side of her elven ear.

"Fuck Phy'iad!" The second Immortal exclaimed between clenched teeth. "Osiri said she wouldn't become immune to Immortal come!" He gasped as he slammed his cock into Dysea again and again. "She is... she is mine now! I... I emptied my load into her throat and pussy once already! She is mine now! When I fill her with my come again she will be my slave! Look how she... look how she holds us as we fuck her senseless! She will do anything I want her to! She is my Elf Queen bitch now!"

"Shit! She... her ass is too tight! I'm... I'm going to... Aaargh!"

The Immortal rammed his cock as deeply into her ass as he could, his throbbing balls pressed tightly to her ass cheeks and Dysea felt his searing hot come filling her bowels. It was too much then and the walls of her

control came smashing down like children's building blocks. The magnificent Immortal cock slamming into her pussy was the final catalyst to her fall and her head flew back, her lips opened in a soundless wail of defeat and wonderful acceptance. Long, silky platinum blond hair flew in all directions as her head slammed into the jaw of the Immortal behind her causing him to fall away spent, his immense cock still spewing his seed all over her skin, covering portions of her tattooed body. It didn't matter to her as her hands flew to the Immortal's shoulders as he increased his fifteen inch plunges into her lush body to mind numbing speed. She could feel every splendid inch of his cock as he speared her, every thick angry vein pulsing in dominance over her. Her mind was unable to resist the sensations that told her she belonged to this Immortal now.

"You... you are mine now Elf Queen!" He snarled. "Mine! I'm going to fuck you every day for the rest of your life!"

The last vestiges of who she was reached out and Dysea Leonidas shook her head only slightly, all resistance falling away. "N... no... please!"

His laugh was harsh and demeaning and he gripped her firm ass cheeks tightly as he rammed his cock into her completely, the bulbous head slamming into her far deeper than anyone had ever reached before and she gasped in unabashed enchantment as his volcano hot balls pressed tightly to her upturned ass cheeks.

"Tell me what you want Elf Queen!" He barked loudly. "Tell me what your body craves Dysea my bitch! Tell me now! I want to hear you scream for me as I dump my come into your womb!"

Dysea's will broke then. It snapped as cleanly as a board would snap when struck by such an overwhelming force. Her head flew back once more and she let go, surrendering to the utter supremacy of the orgasm as it cascaded through every minute portion of her body. Her pussy clamped down on the entire length of the Immortal's massive cock as she clung to his arms and howled out her delight.

"YES!!!! Ahhhhhhhhhhhh... fuck yes! Break me my... break me my Immortal Master!" Dysea Leonidas screamed out. "Break me to your will! Fill... fill me with your Immortal come! I beg you... Master! Break meeeee!"

The Immortal groaned at her words and her incredible tight body and with his hands holding her hips firmly he began to spew his hot come deeply into her convulsing elven body watching with a twisted grin as she shuddered violently in the grips of her own massive orgasm. The tattoos that adorned her sweaty skin only increased the intensity of his orgasm because of the sultry nature of the coloring and he continued to empty his load into her for several long minutes, each blast of his hot come further erasing who she was and making her his slave for all time.

Then his head snapped forward and his vampiric fangs sank deeply into her exposed neck and she began screaming yet again in another earth shattering orgasm as he fed deeply on her blood, sealing her fate as she clutched at him in wanton need. Her pussy was milking his cock for every drop of his Immortal come, unwilling to allow any to escape her body so that she could sate the burning of her blood and mind. As he leaned back, pulling her shuddering body up tightly to his he withdrew his fangs slowly from her neck, licking the two puncture holes so that they sealed instantly. Never had he tasted such sweet blood and he would taste more of it soon. So much more. He could feel her pussy muscles clenching and unclenching on his cock, taking every drop of his come and he knew she was his forever now. Her head flew up and she gazed at him with sizzling emerald green eyes.

"Kiss... kiss me my... my Immortal Master!" She gasped loudly. "I am... I am yours! Kiss me I beg you!"

The Immortal felt his cock thicken almost immediately at her whimpering words even as it still leaked his come into her body. He grinned viciously as he slammed his cock upward into her and he saw her face contort in a delighted expression.

"I may kiss you Dysea my Elf Queen!" He growled. "I have three more hours before my relief comes and I intend to pump my seed into you until it spills from your openings. Then you will be mine forever! Perhaps then I will kiss you! After you have cleaned our Immortal cocks with your tongue!"

Dysea nodded her head quickly and without reservation. "Oh yes... oh yes my Master! Anything! Anything! I need your Immortal come Master! I need it!"

"Then fuck me Dysea! Fuck me like you used to fuck your wolf King!" He laughed at her. "Fuck me like you fucked him and I might just give you what you want and need! Sling your tight Elf Queen pussy on your Immortal master's cock now bitch!"

Without hesitation or pause Dysea Leonidas began to do just that. With unabashed glee and energy.

NORMYA'S LIGHT THIRTEEN HOURS BEHIND PHY'IAD'S COMMAND SHIP

Cha'talla turned when he smelled Esther's sweet blood waft into the large lounge area on *NORMYA'S LIGHT*. It was usually a place where the crew would come and joke and relax, but now they were only talking amongst themselves quietly, the usual banter gone and in its place a deadly seriousness. The crew of *NORMYA'S LIGHT* had long ago accepted Cha'talla and now when he walked the corridors there were no longer looks of suspicion and concealed fear and hate. He had been on board many times over the last months to meet with Admiral Thodias and Dysea on one thing or the other. While she spent most of her time on the surface of Kranek to show her trust and support of what they were building, there had been many days where they met late into the night and Cha'talla would remain on board. He and Esther had their own large quarters only a few doors down from Dysea, and this more than anything showed them that he was sincere in not only his words but his deeds. Since his impassioned speech on the surface of Kranek had been broadcast throughout the entire Strike Wing, now when they looked at him he saw respect and honor in their eyes.

Esther walked with Lisisa, Narice and Denali Leonidas as she strode across the lounge area, her dark eyes focused on him entirely. She stopped in front of him and looked up into his face. A face that could not have been more handsome to her now, but a face that would change and become even more desirable to her in the future.

“Speak to me my *Du'ased 'ranndi*.” Cha'talla spoke softly.

Esther slowly held up the data pad. “The ship's doctor and I researched everything within the data banks that I have worked on; everything that Anja sent to me. We even contacted four senior Hadarian Healers that worked closely with Anja on many of her projects. They work out of the research facility she built on Apo Prime.”

“Do not delay the news my wife.” Cha'talla spoke. “Is what Gareld said true?”

Esther forced herself to nod. “Yes.” She spoke ever so softly.

Cha'talla closed his eyes tightly and exhaled slowly before opening them again. “How... how is this possible?”

“You know that the Senior Polemarch of the Union is...” Esther began.

Cha'talla nodded. “His Spartan name was Dymas. He was one of Leonidas's Captains at Thermopylae. I do not know what name he goes by now, but I do know that since the Battle for Earth he is responsible for the deaths of more Immortals than the King he followed so loyally. The High Lord had a price on his head almost as high as your father.” Cha'talla spoke looking at Denali and Lisisa. “He created the elves that were on Earth. Yes... I know this. Dysea's mother and father were two of his original clones. She is called a second generation Earth Born Clone I believe she told me was the name that is now used.”

Esther looked at him surprised. “How...”

“We talked of many things we did, Dysea and I, on the nights we were up here Esther. After you had gone to bed.” He spoke softly. “Not everything was focused on the present and future. She told me many things of herself, how she and your father met Denali and Lisisa and I spoke of how I was finally blessed when you came into my life. We spoke of our children and our parents... a great many things.”

Esther nodded slowly. “When... when Dymas created the clones his work was almost perfect for the equipment he had to use. The EBCs are an almost perfect genetic match to the elves on Elear. However all of the Earth Born Clones lack one chromosome that the elves on Elear have. They lack a Telomere Chromatin Chromosome. When an elven male or female is turned by a Lycavorian, that Telomere Chromatin chromosome is part of the molecular bonding structure that unites their wolf DNA to their elven DNA. It is part of the molecular structure that relates to their ability to heal and resist disease and foreign bodies that enter their body and their blood.” Esther looked at him and took his large hand in hers. “It is also the single chromosome that allows a turned elf born on Elear, or born to parents from Elear, to eventually fight off the affects of the Eukaryote cells within Akruxian males. Without that chromosome she will be just as susceptible to the

addicting nature of the chemicals in Akruxian semen as any normal female elf who is not turned. It will not matter that she is also half wolf now. Without that chromosome she...

Cha'talla lifted a hand and put a finger gently to her lips and stopped her from continuing. "I understand *Du'ased 'ranndi*." He said softly.

"There is more I discovered *Du'ased M'ranndii*." Esther told him softly.

Cha'talla shook his head. "Little else matters now." He said in reply. "Little else matters. You can... you can cure her of this my wife?"

Esther nodded. "Yes. It is different than the serum I gave to her weeks ago, but I can easily synthesize the correct one with the equipment on this ship." She saw his confused look and placed a hand on his chest now. "You know that her gift within Mindvoice has to do with precognition."

Cha'talla nodded. "Yes... she has told me of some of the visions she has had. Several helped the Union to win battles against the Evolli with little or no loss of life."

Esther nodded. "She had a vision that she was captured by... by Immortals several weeks ago. She was very... she was very calm about it and simply pulled me aside and asked that I give her a dose of the serum we have developed for those Phy'iad is holding prisoner. At the time I did not know the serum would not work because she is missing the chromosome that interacts with the particular serum I developed."

Cha'talla looked at her stunned. "She knew... she knew this might happen? Why did she not..."

"She did not want you to blanket her with additional security." Esther said. "She knew you would fawn over her protection and it is not what she wanted."

"I could... I could have prevented this!" Cha'talla gasped.

Denali stepped forward a little bit, Lisisa holding to his hand. "No." He said. "You can not plan for everything Cha'talla and if your enemy has an equally excellent plan, the forces to execute it and the element of surprise, they will more than likely always succeed. This was not something you could have prevented. The Kavalians and those with this Phy'iad had to have been planning this operation for some time. There was nothing you could do. Nothing any of us could do."

Cha'talla shook his head once more. "If this has happened... if they have debased Dysea in such a manner, then all is lost for my people. We will never be able to regain our honor in the eyes of so many."

"There is more *Du'ased M'ranndii*." Esther said again.

"What more could possibly matter?" Cha'talla asked softly.

"I discovered... I discovered some things while I was working." Esther spoke. "Things in the Union medical database that you need to know. It relates... it relates to the Akruxian people as a whole my love."

"What could be more important right now than rescuing Dysea and begging her for the forgiveness that she may well not grant." Cha'talla asked softly.

Esther squeezed his arm. "You need to... you need to know this Cha'talla." Esther said. "You need to know that this is not your fault!"

"Whose fault is it then my Blessed Wife, if not mine?" Cha'talla asked.

"It is our fault." Narice spoke softly. "More specifically... my father's fault. A blame I share as his daughter."

"No you do not Narice!" Esther snapped looking at her. Esther took the pad from his hand and typed in a single command before giving it back to him. "It's the High Lord's fault and Aikiro's fault! And it is theirs alone! You bear no shame for something that happened long before you were ever born Narice! Before any of us were ever born!" She stated pointedly as she turned back to Cha'talla. "It's been the High Coven's fault since the day they began to assault the Akruxian homeworld."

Cha'talla looked at her evenly, unwilling to read the pad. "I don't understand most of what is on this pad my wife. You know that."

Esther snatched it back out of his hand now. "Veldruk and Aikiro ordered the use of a unique biotoxin they invented and that was then introduced into the upper atmosphere of your homeworld six months before they invaded!"

"A biotoxin?" He asked.

Esther typed madly on the pad and then held it up to his face. "This is from the data banks of the Lycavorian City Ship Cha'talla! The ship where most of the new advances in technology that the Union has come from. That ship held data cores of information and the history of this quadrant of space dating back nearly

three hundred thousand years! This is what the Akruvian people looked like before Veldruk introduced the toxin into your atmosphere! Look at it husband!”

Cha'talla took the pad from her and looked at the image on the small screen. His eyes grew wide when he saw the tanned like skin of the obvious Akruvian male. The bone spurs were there yes, the eye sockets not so sunk in but this Akruvian had long black hair and bright blue eyes. His body still had the same powerful and imposing build common in all Akruvians but his skin was deeply tanned, a deep bronze color not unlike that of his sons. The wrinkled and gray mottled skin of common Immortals was completely non-existent. The skin was smooth and unblemished like that of his sons. Cha'talla looked up at her.

“I don't understand Esther.” He said. “This can not be right. My... my people have never looked like this.”

“That is what your people looked like before Veldruk came along!” Esther hissed rather vehemently.

Cha'talla shook his head. “The plague struck our planet before Veldruk came my *Du'ased 'ranndi*.” He said confident in his words. “That is what caused our physical condition. That is what caused us to look as we do!”

“No it is not!” Esther exclaimed. “They used a biotoxin my love! Six months before they invaded they released this into your atmosphere! They knew they could not defeat your people in a stand up fight on the ground. You are too powerful... too durable. There was no way they could stand and win a slug fest with the Akruvian people! Veldruk wanted your people as his slaves! This is how he and Aikiro made it happen!”

“Esther... millions... billions of my people died!” Cha'talla protested her words. “Our history scrolls...”

“Your history scrolls are wrong!” Esther snapped pulling the pad away from him again. “The toxin warped your DNA! The contaminant they released into the atmosphere *was* the plague! It mixed with the oxygen in the atmosphere and caused mutations in your people! The mutation that makes you look as you do! Veldruk knew what he was doing! He waited until the contagion had swept across your planet killing Akruvians in droves! When he finally came, you fought him for a short time... but then he offered your elders a choice. He could cure the plague if they allowed him to turn a hundred of your strongest warriors into vampires. He would then allow those hundred to turn a hundred more! It was a cycle Cha'talla! A cycle that sick monster started and kept going! He wanted your people as his slaves. His shock troopers!” Esther turned quickly and looked at Narice before taking a deep breath. “Forgive me Narice.”

Narice shook her head holding her hands clasped behind her back. Narice knew the type of man her father was, she had heard all of what he had done in the years after his death simply by listening to Yuri and her mother rant what a fool he was. The only problem Narice saw was that they never talked of themselves in the same way for the deeds they had committed and they should have in Narice's mind.

“Do not apologize for stating the truth Esther.” She spoke softly.

“Esther... the Tomes of my people...” Cha'talla began.

“They are my people too *Du'ased M'ranndii* and I have read them as well.” Esther said. “The earliest Tome is dated three months after the plague began. Three months Cha'talla! Why is that? It is said that the Tomes of the Akruvian people went back thousands of years before the Coven ever showed up! What happened to them?”

Cha'talla's dark eyes met hers. “My... my father said they were destroyed by the Coven during the invasion.” He said.

Esther nodded. “Of course! So your people would not know what your history was before the plague and so that they would never discover it! How many Akruvians that lived before the plague still draw breath Cha'talla? Think about it husband! Within the first few hundred years after Veldruk enslaved your people, nearly anyone who had lived before the plague was gone. Veldruk either had them killed secretly or they died because they refused to be turned and the plague killed them!” Esther thrust the pad at him, pressing it against his broad chest. “This very image is dated before the plague began Cha'talla! Before! Why would the Lycavorians have this in their databanks if it was not the truth? They have nothing to gain by having false information in their computer cores!” Esther pressed close to him now, spreading her hands against his chest and looking up into his eyes.

“This is why our sons are different Cha'talla my *Du'ased M'ranndii*.” Esther gasped. “I did... I never thought to scan their embryonic DNA molecules for reversion.”

“Reversion?” Cha'talla asked.

Esther nodded slowly. "I am immune to this toxin that infected your people Cha'talla. All vampires are... elves and Lycavorians as well. The first time... the first time I tasted your blood husband, the DNA strands of the toxin were destroyed instantly by my blood. When..." Esther looked sheepishly at Denali and the others before turning back to Cha'talla's stunned face and continuing. "When I first conceived... my blood destroyed the DNA strands of the toxin in your bodily fluids. It left nothing but pure Akruvian strands and that is why our sons look so different than others Cha'talla! That is why the children of the Akruvian and elven marriages look so different!" She was speaking excitedly now. "This is why Aikiro exiled me. Exiled you. Why she tried to kill us! She knew what our sons would look like. She knew we would discover the truth! She has always known vampire blood would destroy the toxins that have been passed down through your people for hundreds of generations. It would reveal to your people what was done! It was why Veldruk tried to kill you when you came to him about Lisisa!"

Lisisa moved up next to Denali now. "You were getting too close Cha'talla. Too close to discovering the truth and you didn't even know it. When Veldruk found out you were the one who had taken me... he knew that it was only a matter of time before you discovered what he had done. He couldn't let you live. You would have discovered the truth."

"Don't you see my love?" Esther exclaimed as she took his face in her hands. "The serum I made for you was not the reason you began to change! The reason you began to change is because you were taking my blood while we made love and it was killing the toxins! It is why you look as you do now! Every time you have taken my blood it has only reinforced what is already inside you! That is why you have not reverted back! If I scanned your DNA right now I know I would find that these toxins are so much less than they were when I fell in love with you."

Cha'talla stood there dumbfounded by what they were telling him. Thousands of years of servitude to the High Coven. Thousands of years believing it was Veldruk and the Coven that had saved his people from extinction. Millennia serving and dying at the whim of a man who had wrought this upon them to begin with.

They are not beyond these things my brother. Vollenth's voice filled his mind clear and strong. I have experienced their twisted methods just as you have.

Vollenth?

As we have discovered each other my bonded brother and our future is now united, perhaps it is time that the future came to your people. Just as it has mine. Just as it has us. Vollenth spoke.

Narice stepped closer to him. "Esther can make an antibody Cha'talla. She can synthesize a drug that will kill the toxins within the blood of every Akruvian Immortal alive. She can give all of you your lives back! The lives my... the lives my people took away. You can start again! And I will stand beside you as a friend and ally to try and make amends for what my mother and father did if you will allow me."

Cha'talla looked at his beautiful vampire wife. His goddess and the one thing he would sacrifice all he was for. "Esther... you can... you can do this?" he gasped.

Esther nodded quickly. "Yes!" She stated instantly. "With the medical equipment on *NORMYA'S LIGHT* I can synthesize enough doses for everyone we have with us. It will be a concentrated dose and the reversion will be very uncomfortable initially but it will happen within a minute as soon as the toxins are destroyed. I will need Anja's material support when we return to Kranek, but I can make enough to distribute to the entire population of our settlement within a week. In a month we can make enough to supply to the entire High Coven!" She took his arms in her hands. "We will free Dysea Cha'talla! No matter what it takes! And then... then we will free our people from the Coven oppression they have been under for so long."

Denali stepped forward then drawing Lisisa close to him and taking Narice's hand. "We need to contact Andro with this information." He said. "We need to let him know what is going on Cha'talla. With the lock down... only he can cut loose the equipment and medicines Esther will need."

"Your mother Denali, I will do nothing until after we have taken back your mother and returned her to her family!" Cha'talla hissed. "I swore this to your brother and I will not break my vow to him after what he has done for us."

Denali nodded. "Then let's get that ball rolling shall we."

Cha'talla nodded. "I have been thinking that with Vollenth and all of you here, if we combine our abilities within Mindvoice and with you and Lisisa keeping us steady... I want to see if I can touch my son Lynom. He can provide us with a wealth of updated information that we do not have right now."

Deni looked at Lisisa and nodded. "It's worth a shot." He said.

PHY'IAD'S COMMAND SHIP EIGHT HOURS FROM BELID

"...tapped into the main internal sensor system here." Lancy was speaking to Normya and Cirith as they sat in the pilot and co-pilot's seat. He was pointing at the small monitor, one of four that they had set up between the two seats. "It took an extra two hours because of their patrols but we got it done."

"Patrols?" Cirith asked. "How many?"

"Three that we could count." Lancy answered as he turned when Tir'ut moved into the cockpit. "Tir'ut?"

Tir'ut moved up behind Normya as Lancy made room for him. "If they have three, then we must assume they will have more. We only saw three as Lancy said." He stated. "And the three we marked were patrolling these sections of the ship, but doing so in a random way." He indicated three different points on the schematic of the ship.

Cirith nodded. "Engineering of course." She said. "This is where you said they have routed all their power conduits Lancy?"

Lancy nodded. "And most of their remote access cables."

Cirith touched the last spot Tir'ut had indicated. "And this is the brig." She stated looking at Normya. "Where they are holding your mother."

Tir'ut nodded his head in agreement. "We used the shadows to get as close as we could. We had to move slowly but we swept through the area four times before moving as close to the detention area as we dared. As near as we can determine with the portable sensors... Dysea *Darthirii Ilhar* is in this cell. It is on the starboard side all the way in the back."

Cirith nodded. "Maximum Security Cell." She said.

Lancy nodded. "Yes."

Normya looked at them. "What? What does that mean?" She asked.

Cirith looked at her. "Maximum security cells are tied directly into the bridge's tactical console. They operate on an entirely different power grid than the rest of the prisoner holding cells. The moment the cell is breached externally, an alarm will go off on the bridge and they will be all over us."

"Can't we reroute the power somehow?" Normya asked.

Cirith shook her head. "Unlike the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class ships of the Union Normya, the High Coven wanted to insure their prisoners did not escape. While your cells would deactivate so whoever was inside them would not die in an emergency, the Maximum Security Cells on a High Coven dreadnought warship will not. And any attempt to tamper with their direct power source will result in us being discovered... and our mission will be over."

"There has to be a way!" Normya growled. "I will not leave her to..."

Tir'ut dropped his hand on her shoulder and squeezed gently. "No one has given up yet *Il darthirii kal'daka*." He looked at Lancy. "Tell them."

Lancy nodded with a smile. "There is another way." He spoke quickly. He pointed with his finger to the print of the ship. "We use the maintenance shaft that runs under the cell block and burn our way through the floor into her cell. It completely bypasses the security in the walls and corridor."

Cirith looked at him. "You can do that?" She asked.

Lancy nodded. "On a normal ship, with a full crew, I would say no way. There would be too many maintenance people in and out of the shafts. With the skeleton crew they are working on... it will be easy. Conlar will connect our portable power supply to the cables just beneath the cell block. We use two torches cutting in opposite directions and we're in. We grab her... and then we blur back here and get the *vith* off the ship."

"How long?" Cirith asked.

Lancy met her gaze. "That's the tricky part." He said slowly. "If the sensor readings are correct we are moving at one hundred and five percent on the Sub Light Drives. This Phy'iad is obviously in a big hurry to get

home. At this speed we'll be arriving at Belid in under ten hours. If that is where he is going... and the sensor logs back up Tir'ut."

Cirith nodded. "We detected a long range transmission that lasted approximately thirteen minutes." She said. "It was right after that when they increased power to the SLDs."

Lancy and Tir'ut nodded. "My guess is they spoke with whoever hired them... Kavalians by the look of their attack on Kranek."

"How long will it take you?" Cirith asked quickly.

"Getting there isn't really a problem." Lancy said. "All of the strike team fits in the shafts easily enough. Even Tir'ut here. Figure three hours to get into position and then Conlar will need a minimum of four hours to infiltrate the system and connect our portable power generator without it being detected as a power surge on the bridge. Another ten minutes at least to find and remove the Static Inhibitor so she can talk to Normya and Tir'ut in Mindvoice... and then we blur and shadow our way back through the Brig area. They won't expect us to be coming out. You and Normya have the ship ready to go and the moment we are on board we blast a hole in the dock doors and get the hell out of here."

"Three hours to get there?" Normya asked.

Lancy nodded. "The portable generator is nearly two hundred kilos Lady Normya. Two of us will have to carry it... and it isn't exactly made for moving in the shadows."

Normya looked at him sheepishly and shook her head. "Forgive me." She stated.

Lancy brushed it off. "If it was my mother I would be acting the same way." He said. "We will get her back."

"We do not know how close they will be to Belid when they drop from SLD operation Lancy." Cirith said.

Lancy nodded. "It's a risk we will have to take Lady Cirith. And we have Tir'ut here... which is another plus. None of us would be able to hold up for long in a stand up fight with an Immortal. Tir'ut can and will."

Cirith looked at Normya. "Normya?"

Normya nodded without hesitation. "Yes."

Cirith nodded. "I will go with you." She said.

Lancy looked at her and shook his head. "That is not needed Lady Cirith. And it is too dangerous. Your father would cut my throat if I allowed harm to come to you. He is already going to beat me for allowing you to fly us onto this ship to begin with."

"My father knows risks must be taken." Cirith said. "And I can shave off seven of those ten minutes at the end in finding and removing the Static Inhibitor. We may need them. I will help Normya prep the ship and when you are nearly ready to enter the cell I will move to your location."

"Cirith you..." Lancy started.

Cirith looked at him. "Normya is by far the better pilot between the two of us and... if they still followed standard doctrine they will have striped her of all her clothing in an attempt to degrade her. I will not have you searching Dysea's naked body for the Static Inhibitor Lancy!"

Lancy's eyes showed that he had not thought of that and he nodded slowly. "I didn't think of that." He said.

Cirith smiled. "Make your preparations and inform us when you are ready to depart."

Tir'ut leaned over the back of Normya's chair and kissed her hard, her hand coming up to stroke his cheek. Cirith and Lancy watched this with a mixed order of emotions, more so for Cirith since she had never experienced the physical contact with a man that Normya obviously had. They were Blessed Husband and Wife and Cirith had no doubts that they had partaken of the pleasures of each others flesh. Cirith knew her wolf blood craved physical contact and through the years she had learned how to fight it down and resist that call. Watching Normya Leonidas, who had far more powerful wolf blood running in her veins, watching how she and Tir'ut were constantly touching one another was making it infinitely harder for Cirith to fight down the powerful urges of her own wolf blood.

"Be prepared *Il darthirii kal'daka*." Tir'ut spoke. "We will be moving very fast when we return to the ship."

Normya nodded confidently. "I'll be ready. Don't worry."

Tir'ut nodded and turned to Lancy. He nodded and they both headed into the rear of the *SCYTHER*. Normya looked at Cirith and saw her staring at her intently. "What?" She asked.

Cirith shook her head slowly. "The... the love you and your husband share Normya." She said softly. "It is almost... it is a overt thing."

Normya blushed. "I'm sorry." She said.

Cirith shook her head. "Don't be. Perhaps one day I will have something just as intense and passionate." She said turning back to her instruments. "Perhaps one day."

TALON OF JUSTICE **SIX HOURS FROM RENDEZVOUS**

Devra placed the data pad down on the table and looked up as her daughters settled to the table across from her with small trays of food. Devra had been pleasantly surprised at first when she discovered that the *TALON* had several Vanari food selections, and then she remembered that Nirilo almost always traveled with Dutkne. That they would stock food on this ship for him as a normal course of action was a sign Devra knew. It was a sign that what she had believed for many years was indeed true. These Lycavorian men and women were not the savage and cruel men and women the older members of the Board of Regents thought them to be. Ever since she and Arduri and Naesta had come on board they had been treated with the utmost respect. The six members of her Vanari security detail, four of whom were females, were treated as equals in everything without question. There was a buzz among the crew for all of them and what they were doing and where they were. Devra found that Dutkne and Wayonn did not keep things from the crew and the excitement of what they were doing and who they were going to meet had everyone talking animatedly whenever she saw them.

She watched as Arduri took a small bite of the Vanari specialty food and began chewing. Her stunning green eyes opened slightly wider and she stabbed another piece of the Avian Spice Stew. It was a delicacy on their homeworld of Austrova and it was the finest Devra had tasted in many years and apparently Arduri felt the same way. Her daughter Arduri was the more free spirited of her daughters, always open to new things and new experiences. Her actions during the three Celebration of the Hundreds that she had participated in marked her as one of the more progressive of the younger generation. She made no bones about her sexual openness and her free nature and it had surprised Devra when she agreed to join with the son of one of the more conservative members of the Board of Regents. She sensed that it was not truly what Arduri wanted and part of her heart was not in it. Cruor Ahn Vernalo was a rising star among the young generation of politicians on Austrova, due in part to the influence of his family, but while he clung to the past as his father and others within his family, Arduri did not. Devra knew that Arduri no doubt screwed his brains out during the Celebration of the Hundreds and he had been hooked on her ever since. Though she was only five foot two, Devra knew her daughter was a package of skill and ability rarely found even among their males, and her beauty was exquisite even for a Vanari with her short stature but large breasts that strained against almost any clothes she wore. She had powerful legs and a supremely toned ass that went to with those legs. Arduri had rapidly ascended through the ranks and at only age twenty-one she had obtained the rank of Cadre Leader. Devra also knew Arduri to be completely uninhibited sexually, and willing to try many things. Arduri kept nothing from her mother in that regard. She was just as passionate, sexual and comfortable with men as she was with women and Devra did not doubt that if she wanted too, Arduri could have any male on their homeworld. Why she had accepted Cruor Ahn Vernalo's proposal Devra didn't know, for the last time she had talked to Arduri, her daughter had unwittingly revealed to her that while Cruor Ahn Vernalo was well equipped he was also considerably under skilled in the art of pleasing a woman. He did not take the time to incite true electric passion within her and in Vanari society this was not considered the basis for a lasting relationship that would produce strong and fruitful children.

Naesta Re Mydala was far more sedate than her sister, but she was no less skilled. Her piloting talents were without question and while she was just as stunningly beautiful as Arduri, Naesta preferred to let the many males come to her. Naesta was just as open sexually as Arduri; she just chose to utilize her passion and skills in a more passive role by allowing the men to chase her. Devra knew of at least four young males that pursued Naesta on a regular basis when she was home. In a unique twist, Naesta was the only one of Devra's daughters who did not want or wish for the company of other women. She wasn't against it, indeed she had several very

passionate encounters with other women during her own Celebration of the Hundreds, but she much preferred men. As the youngest Re Mydala child, she had also had more interaction with her father, which in turn had made her less accepting of the Lycavorian people as a whole. Since being on this ship however, Devra could see that those long held beliefs and false attitude were changing rapidly. She had been spending quite a bit of time with Dutkne's young sister Caia, and her green eyes were slowly being opened.

"This stew is... it is excellent mother." Arduri spoke as she swallowed the last bit of stew she had been chewing.

Devra smiled and nodded. "Yes I know... I had a portion before you arrived." Devra leaned forward in her chair. "So tell me..."

Arduri and Naesta looked at her knowing what she meant. The Vanari were a naturally inquisitive species and this was the most interaction they had had with the Lycavorian people in decades aside from the occasional trade convoy that came to Austrova every few months. Those Lycavorians were essentially confined to the spaceport area of the capital city and not allowed to wander the streets as so many other species were. There had never been an instance where the traders had violated that rule and the many dockworkers that Devra had spoken to through the years had all told her the same thing. The Lycavorians were friendly yet very cautious; they adhered to the rules on them without question and they never complained that they were treated differently. It was almost as if they didn't really care.

Naesta played with the food on her plate before looking at her mother. "I would say that I don't know yet." She spoke.

Arduri snorted softly and shook her head. "They have refused us nothing mother." She said. "Not one piece of information or one question we have asked them. Nirilo is considered a valued member of this crew and they know we are his family. You know how they view family mother and I believe they consider him family. You know he has a Lycavorian lover and he has not returned for the Celebration of Hundreds since they have been together."

Devra nodded. "Yes, I know. Family *is* very precious to them. And do not remind me about your brother not returning. Every time I see your father he reminds me and tries to place the blame on me that your brother prefers the company of a Lycavorian female more than his own kind."

"Father believes it is your fault?" Arduri asked surprised.

Devra nodded. "Because I have not participated in the celebration since we ended our Union." She replied. "He believes I have influenced Nirilo because of this. That is neither here nor there. Your father's concerns about who shares my bed are none of his business. And nor is it his business who shares Nirilo's. Let us get back to the Lycavorians."

"They have not shared everything they know with us mother!" Naesta protested gently. "We did not know about the advances they have made in their engine designs. Nirilo never passed this information on to Vanari Intelligence. We did not know that Wayonn has been coming to this quadrant of space regularly enough to have up to date charts. And we certainly did not know that this ability they have... this Mindvoice. We did not know it was so prominent or powerful."

Devra nodded. "All good points." Devra said.

"Perhaps if we had not shunned them for so long and treated them as if they are beneath us it would not be this way. Perhaps we do not know these things because we have not asked the right questions!" Arduri spoke.

"You just say that because the men look at you like they want to eat you!" Naesta spat but with a playful tone to it.

Arduri smiled brightly. "Well... there are several that I have seen that I would not mind taking into my bed, or letting them eat me, but that does not change the fact that they have been very forthcoming with us since we came on board. And they kept us from coming into this area of space completely blind with no idea of where to begin looking for Caliria. If what they say is true and those in this quadrant of space are nothing like we have seen before... we just may have been in over our heads."

"I would have figured out my mistake!" Naesta snapped.

Arduri reached over and placed her hand on her sister's arm causing Naesta's eyes to lift and meet her own. "That was not meant as a critique of your skill sister. Far from it in fact. You are a much better pilot than

I.” She spoke with a soft tone. “Nirilo is right though... we need them right now. Once we have Caliria we can make our way on our own. But we need their help to find her.”

Devra looked at her youngest daughter. “Naesta?”

Naesta nodded her head with a sigh and leaned affectionately into her sister. “Arduri is right.” She said finally. “I have asked a hundred questions about their weapons and engines and shields. They have not refused to answer one of them. The Chief Engineer of this ship even gave me a tour of their Phased Quantum Drive Units.”

“And?” Devra asked.

“They are very advanced mother.” Naesta said. “In some cases even more efficient than our own engines. The technology that they use is... I have never seen...”

Devra slid the data pad across the table to them. “Is something none of us have ever seen before?” She stated confidently.

Naesta nodded as she looked at her mother. “Yes.”

Devra tapped the pad gently. “Wayonn gave this to me. It relates a part of their history and path that up until now we have never known. A sometimes violent history that they and their ancestors have fought and clawed their way out of in order to make themselves better as a people. And this pad tells of a history that dates back at least thirty thousand years before what the Lycavorians call The Black Day. That is as far as I got in reading anyway, and I only read perhaps half.”

Arduri nodded. “That was the time when the Coven conquered their original planet and enslaved them.” She said.

“I have always wondered why Wayonn is different somehow.” Devra said softly as she nodded. “He does not seem to have the same feral instincts that any of the others do. This data pad explains why. You both remember the history cubes of our own people and how at times through our own development and rise to our current level, they spoke of interaction with a strange and stately species of men and women?”

Naesta nodded as she lifted the pad. “Yes. We called them the Travelers. They flew huge city sized ships and were always benevolent in their actions. We encountered them half a dozen times during our exploration years but contact was never really made except for one time. The meeting was difficult for they were highly advanced, they did not want to share their technology with us and they only used their...” Naesta stopped talking and looked at her mother.

Arduri’s green eyes were wide as well now. “They spoke only with their minds.” She gasped.

Devra nodded slowly smiling at how quickly her daughters put it together. “We have always thought of Wayonn as a statesmen of sorts. A more refined version of the Lycavorians. He is in fact one of these Travelers our own history speaks of sparingly. He was turned by a Lycavorian that he made his wife. They were known as Pralors. The ship he was on... one of those City Ships... it crashed on Lycavore nearly thirty-five thousand years ago. Over the course of the next thousand or so years the survivors of this ship were turned and blended into the population of the Lycavorians. This began the stimulation of the Lycavorian people into what we see with the Protectorate and the Union. I do not know how their people became separated... I can only assume it has something to do with the High Coven and the Black Day. There are some large gaps in this information and I believe it is information Wayonn does not want us to have. At least not just yet.”

“Does not want us to have mother?” Naesta asked. “Or information he is intentionally not giving to us.”

Devra shook her head. “I don’t believe it is that. I think the gaps in this information will be filled in when we meet with these men and women from this Lycavorian Union. Or at least they will begin to be answered.”

“It has to do with that man we saw in the transmission doesn’t it?” Arduri asked. “The one who rode that beast. This Androcles Leonidas?”

Devra nodded. “I believe it does yes.” She replied. “With him and with his father and family.”

Arduri looked at her inquisitively. “Then there is more about this King Leonidas from Wayonn’s history... more to this Leonidas family than what our Board of Intelligence has?”

Devra nodded again. “Much more I believe.” She stated. “The ship that crashed on their original homeworld Lycavore, it was led by what is referred to as a Chief Elder Pralor. His name was Sumar. At the time he was considered to be one of the three or four most powerful of these Pralors in existence. The King Leonidas that died on this planet Earth... the one we have in our own intelligence journals and the one Wayonn

has told us of, he is the direct descendant of this Sumar. The men we will be meeting are also his direct descendants, and if what Wayonn says on this pad is accurate, they are nearly as powerful as this Sumar once was.”

“This... this is all very fascinating mother...” Naesta spoke softly. “But how does this help us find Caliria? That is what drives me now.”

Arduri nodded in agreement. “I as well mother.”

Devra shook her head slowly. “I don’t know exactly... but somehow I feel our futures will become intertwined deeply. The way we should have embraced those in the Protectorate we will now have to embrace these men and women in the Lycavorian Union.”

“Do you believe they will help us find Caliria mother?” Arduri asked.

Devra met her daughter’s gaze. “I believe they are the only way we will find your sister.” She answered. “And when we do it will bind us together in such a way that nothing will ever come between us.”

Arduri looked at Naesta who met her eyes. They both turned back to their mother. “There is one thing that could come between us mother.” Arduri said. “All those stuffy old Regents who now sit on the Board with father.”

HARBINGER

4.3 LYs FROM BEKLAN TWO

Whatever Lu'ria and Ne'Veha had expected when they departed Earth, it was certainly not this.

As elves they were very sensitive to the fact of everything that was happening around them. They did not expect the man they both loved so completely would have any interest in anything that resembled pleasure. They were both still learning about Androcles Leonidas and the connection they all had. Lu'ria never imagined she would have three women of such beauty that would call her Mistress as Sadi, Carisia and Ne'Veha had almost from the time she woke on this very ship as they were heading home. She never believed she could desire three women as much as she desired them, nor did she imagine that they would be so deeply intertwined within Mindvoice as they were. It was only another sign, like so many others before, that they were all meant for one another.

It was no different for Ne'Veha. Raised to dislike Lycavorians by her father, his actions almost took from her a part of her life that she had never known. All the silly moments feeling about Tarren as she did had only been part of the obstacles that she now knew were put in front of her so that she would ultimately meet Androcles and know what true love and devotion were. She could not imagine herself without him and the three women who she had bonded with so completely now. Having shared Andro’s bed enough times to now be able to sense the changes within her elven body made Ne'Veha so very happy. She so wanted him to turn her fully so that she could feel what Sadi felt. She could feel it now yes, but it was muted to a large degree because she was not fully wolf. Ne'Veha wanted him to change her completely for it would seal them together for all time.

Neither Lu'ria or Ne'Veha expected to see much of him on this short trip and they had immediately gone to the quarters assigned to them. It hadn’t taken them long to find their way to the large bed and collapse onto it. It had taken less time before they were locked in a sizzling kiss of passion and discovery and pulling at each other’s clothes. This was how the man they loved found them. Their bodies were covered in a fine sheen of sweat and Ne'Veha was nestled quite happily between Lu'ria’s thighs feasting on her Drow Mistresses delicious center. Ne'Veha was so intent on exploring the wondrous dark skin and inviting honey melon scent of Lu'ria’s dripping pussy while Lu'ria squirmed in her hands that neither of them smelled Andro when he came into the room. Neither of them knew he was even there until Ne'Veha’s beautiful face, slick with Lu'ria’s sweet nectar, came up from between those satin like dark thighs in a wail of utter bliss.

Lu'ria watched with wide craving amber eyes as Ne'Veha’s face twisted into a mask of divine pleasure. Ne'Veha could do nothing but sing out her glee as Andro’s exquisitely chiseled body lowered to her back and he sank every scorching hot inch of his thick twelve and a quarter inch cock into her spasming pussy in one marvelous plunge. She began coming the moment she felt his large balls press tightly against her divinely shaped ass and her fingernails dug into his forearms as his face lowered to the side of her head, firmly nuzzling the back of her four inch high elven ear and sending her into cataclysmic heaven.

“You... you are mine *SirsanGai!*” He hissed into her ear, his deep voice raspy and filled with passion and desire. “And now I will... I will insure you know that!”

Ne'Veha's desire quickly slipped past molten need as Andro began to stroke into her with incredible twelve inch thrusts. Lu'ria could only watch in awe and lick her lips for she knew without question she was next. She could smell his lavender and pines scent permeating the air all around them, and mixed in with Ne'Veha's sweet amaretto scent it was quickly sending her back to where Ne'Veha's tongue was driving her. Ne'Veha's face was pressed to her abdomen, her gasps of blissful delight blowing warm air across Lu'ria's own engorged clit and supremely aroused pussy. Her long dark brown hair was whipping back and forth, the sounds of his hips slapping into her upturned ass almost deafening in the small bedroom. Lu'ria had never been with a man before and watching the man who had turned her take Ne'Veha in such a way was driving her wild with desire of her own.

“Please... please Andro!” Ne'Veha screamed out. “Make me... ma... make me yours forever my love!”

Lu'ria watched as his hands filled with Ne'Veha's firm cone sized breasts and he pulled her up against his broad chest. As she sank even further onto his wonderful shaft Ne'Veha began coming again, every nerve in her elven body singing out for him and feeling his powerful chest press against her back and shoulders. Her hands went to his hips, her nails dragging along his skin as she shuddered in her orgasm. Then she felt his lips next to her ear once more and her dark eyes flew open at his words.

“It... it is time *SirsanGai!*”

Ne'Veha had no time to blink or utter a sound before she felt his dual fangs pierce the flesh of her lower neck and sink in deeply. Gripped as she was in orgasmic bliss, the pain was barely felt as the virus raced through her veins and blood. Her arms flew up to grip his head tightly, his face locked in an expression of dreamlike bliss, as the most powerful orgasm of her life smashed aside all she was and began to reshape her. She felt his huge cock swell within her depths and then his explosion shattered the remnants of who she had once been. As his hot come flooded her body, the virus scorched through her lush elven body. In the grasp of the volcanic orgasm tearing through her, Ne'Veha could actually feel her muscles thickening and contorting, bringing her to the pinnacle of the threshold of pain and pleasure unlike any she had ever experienced. She could feel the virus spreading to every millimeter of her body, cleansing it of everything that could ever harm her and forging her into the woman she so wanted to be. The utter completeness and torturing pleasure overwhelmed her quickly and Andro crushed her to him as her eyes rolled into the back of her head and she went limp in his arms.

Andro held her tightly to him, his dual fangs still anchored deeply in her flesh, as he lowered her supple frame back to the softness of the bed and his come continued to empty into her velvety depths. His breathing came in great heaves of his chest as he slowly withdrew his fangs, lovingly licking the angry marks in her otherwise flawless skin. His black ringed azure eyes watched as the wound sealed instantly and he drew back to nuzzle and lick her delicious ear.

“For eternity *SirsanGai!* All of us... for eternity!” He huffed softly.

Lu'ria gasped softly as his eyes lifted to gaze at her and she saw the burning desire in those black ringed azure orbs. She could feel his aura reaching out for her, caressing her own, and she attempted to direct her female aura back towards him as Sadi had told her only a few short hours ago. She would have to punish her beautiful green eyed wolf slave for not telling her that Andro was planning on doing this all along.

You will feel it when the time comes Mistress... as surely as his hands fluttering across your skin... you will feel it. It is like a blanket that wraps around you, touching every nerve, every single part of you that elicits even a simple sensation of pleasure. All at the same time.

Will... will I feel it like you do Sadi my... my slave? Lu'ria had asked with a seductive smile.

Oh yes. SirsanGai as well. I have only discovered this since he came back into my life and I have spent time with the Feravomir. Andro's blood... his father's blood... it is so utterly powerful that even SirsanGai will be able to feel his full aura. Sadi said as she stroked Lu'ria's arm lovingly. His father has not unleashed it on his mothers For'mya and Anja because I don't think he realizes just how potent his blood is. Normally... normally if an alpha turned more than one female, only the first he has turned could tolerate his unshielded aura. With Andro and his father it is different.

I... I have never been with a man Sadi. Lu'ria admitted.

Sadi pressed close to her, brushing her lips against Lu'ria's cheek. He will stretch you in a way that makes you cry for more Mistress. When you feel him inside you, the throbbing of his manhood, it will be all you can do to keep from exploding continuously. No matter... no matter how many times he has taken me since we became mated, it is always like the first time. Do not be frightened Mistress... just allow yourself to surrender all you are to him and he will do the same.

Lu'ria watched him slowly withdraw his huge cock from Ne'Veha, shifting his body on the bed and moving towards her. Lu'ria's black ringed amber eyes were wide as she watched his head lower to her flat muscular abdomen and his tongue came out to drag gloriously across her quivering skin. Her large breasts were slightly bigger than Sadi's and Carisia's and they stood out proudly, the nipples surrounded by dark areolas and standing out begging for attention of any kind. She was wolf now and Lu'ria of the Drow was quickly discovering that his aura was like an aphrodisiac. Sadi had been so right as every nerve ending in her body was screaming out in gleeful joy.

Andro let his tongue draw across her dark satin like skin, her honey melon scent filling his nostrils completely now that he was so close to her center. Her skin tasted as she smelled as he moved closer to her. The color of her beautiful dark flesh was driving him insane with want, and Androcles Leonidas suddenly realized that like his father, he needed each of these women in his life. They were his center and his power. As his lips grew closer to her engorged center, he could feel her aura pulsing him strongly. She was learning quickly Andro thought as his lips brushed the softness of the thin strip of shimmering white hair above her throbbing clit. Her juices coated the outside of her labia, no doubt in part because of Ne'Veha's oral talents, and this only served to enflame Andro's instincts that much more. Oh yes, as with Sadi and Carisia and then Ne'Veha... Andro was going to enjoy exploring every millimeter of her treasures. Her dark skin was a deep pale brown and like his other mates, it was flawless in its texture. Her skin was closest to Sadi's in touch as his tongue licked her sensuously. Yes... he was going to take his time very soon and explore her lush body for hours. Now however, now he wanted his Drow wife and mate. And he wanted her badly.

Lu'ria gasped when she felt his warm breath blow ever so gently across her throbbing clit, closing her amber eyes for a split second in unabashed pleasure and anticipation. She expected to feel his tongue taste her in the next moment and when it didn't she opened her amber eyes and gasped even louder when she saw those azure orbs staring at her with lustful want and pure, unblemished love. He had shifted his powerful body once more and Lu'ria glanced down swiftly between their bodies to see his huge cock poised to enter her. The flared head of his cock was only millimeters away from her craving pussy. The lips of her center had parted like a flower and were slick and glistening in the dim light. Her eyes cut back to his face as her hands came up to his shoulders. "Andro... Andro my love... I... I have never..."

"My... my exquisite Drow mate... now I will truly make you ours." Andro gasped before driving his hips forward and plunging the entire length of his pulsing cock into Lu'ria in a single and absolutely will crushing plunge.

Lu'ria's head flew back on the bed as she felt each gloriously powerful inch of his superb cock penetrate her body and propel her into a world of ecstasy she had never known could exist. She wailed out her fantastic satisfaction as his large balls came to rest against her tight ass and she was connected to him in a way she was only just beginning to comprehend. As his pulsing aura swarmed around her tightly and his throbbing twelve inch shaft reached inside her silky tightness far deeper than she had ever imagined a man could, Lu'ria could no longer hold it in and she howled out her sheer bliss, oblivious to who might hear her. The power of her orgasm gripped her like a raging hurricane and she exploded all over his massive shaft while she shivered in uncontrollable delight. She felt his arms pull her tighter and lift her into his lap and then he began to make love to her with deep, driving strokes. He lifted her easily, slamming her back down on his thick cock, heedless of her juices which were rapidly soaking both of their lower bodies. Her pussy had opened completely to him, as if it had been carefully crafted just for his pulsing cock.

Lu'ria quickly grew accustomed to his huge size, her tunnel literally drenched in her own juices and easing her initial feelings of slight discomfort at being so utterly filled with throbbing cock. His warm lips engulfed her left nipple and he suckled her breast hard, nibbling on her eraser hard nipple, as one hand came up to hold her full breast and his other thick arm wrapped around her waist. This was far beyond anything her mother and sisters had ever told her to expect the first time she gave herself to a man and all Lu'ria could do was wrap her

arms around his broad shoulders and hold on for dear life as she began to come continuously. Wave after devastating wave of wicked pleasure; so different and so pure, surged through her lithe Drow body, her hips now moving of their own accord as Andro slid from the bed holding her tightly. Lu'ria locked her heels behind his powerful ass cheeks as he stood up and moved to the bulkhead to press her fiery skin against the cool metal. This did nothing to dampen the fire of passion that seared her veins and when he began to pummel her tight body against the wall, cushioning her by wrapping his arms around her back, Lu'ria began to respond as a Drow and a female wolf would respond to the glorious fuck her husband and mate was giving her.

Lu'ria rubbed her cheek against his, nibbling hard on his ears as she began to meet his commanding thrusts into her with equal fervor. Each time he rammed home into her Lu'ria gasped in delight, her clit being tortured by the base of his cock and his powerful abdomen. She instinctively began squeezing him with her inner muscles every time he moved to draw out of her silky warmth, drawing hisses of bliss from him. She could feel his aura wrapped around her, and as he began to speed up his driving strokes into her, she found herself floating within the confines of his mind. Lu'ria saw then the utter depth of his love and desire for Sadi, for her; for Carisia and Ne'Veha. She saw and felt the utter fidelity to them and his overwhelming need to be everything they had ever desired in a man. As Lu'ria's belly undulated in the rapid fire orgasms that were hitting her, she knew he was possessing her as a Drow woman wanted to be possessed. Drow females were not afraid of rough displays of affection during lovemaking; it was one of the reasons the Drow were considered so close to Lycavorians in many respects. They held to their instincts more closely than other species and one of the ways a Drow male would show his commitment to his Drow wife was to make love to her with every ounce of power and total determination at his command. They gave all of themselves and held nothing back, and that is certainly what Andro was doing right now.

It smashed into her with a force that stole her breath away, her fingers gripping his thick neck as the crushing orgasm shattered every boundary of reality she had ever known. If Lu'ria thought she had screamed when he first sank into her velvet depths, she was quickly proven wrong as every nerve, every pleasure receptor, and every strand of who she was erupted at the same instant and she wailed like a banshee. She felt him slam into her one final time, his hands gripping her hard, firm ass cheeks and pulling her down on him until he had no more to give her of himself. His long, thick shaft impaled her totally, his large lava hot balls were pressed against her ass cheeks and Lu'ria felt his huge cock swell even more in size. When that first wondrous, molten detonation of his come rocketed into her depths, Lu'ria Leonidas began screaming in pure unadulterated ecstasy. Her head whipped back and forth, her long shimmering white hair wildly flailing from side to side, her black ringed amber eyes dilated in pleasure as everything her green eyed slave had told her came true. Three times... four times. Five. Six. Seven huge explosions of his seed filled her, each eruption triggering yet another staggering orgasm within her body that rippled incessantly along the edges of cosmic harmony. It was all she could do to simply hold on to him as their auras mingled and combined and became one with three others.

Andro staggered slightly, catching himself as he pulled her away from the bulkhead, his chiseled body now covered in sweat from exertion. He turned back to the bed and slowly, his lips and cheek firmly nuzzling her elven ear; he lowered her quivering body back to the bed without a sound. Lu'ria did not released her legs from around his waist or her arms from around his shoulders and his full weight came to rest on top of her making her coo out her absolute enchantment. With the last remnants of his come leaking into her from his still hard and pulsing cock, his lips claimed her soft pink ones and Lu'ria submerged herself completely in the wholly unreal heaven of his kiss.

This is what we are my Ilythiiri Tessai. His warm voice filled her mind even as his kiss caused her toes to curl inward in delight. This is what I am. KertaGai. You. SirsanGai and Enylarcopri. We have been guided to one another Ilythiiri Tessai. We will always be together now, until we move into the life beyond this one.

Lu'ria knew instinctively he did not expect her to say anything in return and she simply released her female aura, slipping it tightly around his essence and deepening their ardent kiss. The single tear of rapture rolled from her eye as his arms crushed her even tighter to him and they both reached for Ne'Veha to draw her within their embrace. They did not have much time until they arrived, Lu'ria knew, but now they would simply lay together in a manner that was more dear and intimate than any she had ever known.

And it was only the beginning.

TALON OF JUSTICE

The bridge was crowded now with Devra, Arduri and Naesta remaining out of the way as the crew went about their duties. Nirilo manned an extra large sensor station next to the Tactical Sensor Officer, all of the *TALON'S* eyes reaching out and searching. Dutkne stood next to Wayonn near his command chair, while Drey stood behind the weapons station Caia slightly to his left.

“Report!” Dutkne barked.

“Holding at the established coordinates.” The helm officer replied instantly. “Two point seven light years from the planet known as Beklan Two.”

“Tactical?” Dutkne turned to the female officer.

She shook her head. “Nothing within ten light years.” She answered immediately. “A lot of activity... if these charts are accurate... a lot of activity near their border with The Gellen Asteroid Belt.”

Dutkne’s eyes cut to where Nirilo was sitting. “Nirilo?”

Nirilo nodded. “Long Range Translinear Arrays are detecting over two dozen ships. Most of them appear to be warships of some kind ranging in size.” He turned to look at Dutkne now. “Several of them are equipped with a type of Hyper Matter Fusion Coil Dutkne.”

Dutkne glanced at Wayonn who only nodded. “They’ve developed their own type of engines based on those from City Ship 41?” He asked.

Wayonn nodded. “It was only a matter of time before they discovered this technology Dutkne. Especially if Avatar 41 has been helping them as I suspect he has.”

“If they have developed these types of engines then they can not be far from discovering Phased Quantum Drives like those our peoples use!” Naesta spoke as she stepped forward.

Dutkne nodded as he looked at her. “If they haven’t already.” He stated. “Naesta... your expertise would be appreciated.” He told her pointing to the sensor station with her brother.

Naesta looked at her mother quickly and Devra nodded. “Go.” She said.

Naesta moved swiftly, striding across the bridge to stand beside her brother at the sensor station. Nirilo pointed to one side of the tri-portioned console. “Start cataloging the types of ships that we pick up.”

“Detronal output?” Naesta asked.

“Keep it below point five.” Nirilo told her. “If they have developed these engines than it’s a good bet their sensors are much improved. We don’t want to give away our position and have multiple warships coming down on us.”

Naesta nodded as she settled to the second chair that was beside her brother.

Dutkne turned back to Wayonn. “Grandfather?” He asked softly.

“We must be patient Dutkne.” He spoke.

“Patience has never been one of my virtues grandfather.” Dutkne answered.

“Yes I know.” Wayonn answered with a grin.

Dutkne snorted and turned away from him. “What is the composition of these Shrouds that they use?” He called out.

“It’s some form of Spatial Displacement.” The sensor officer answered him. “I have been looking at the specs of their larger ships that Wayonn gave to us. It’s similar to the Flat Space technology that they use.”

“Flat Space technology?” Devra asked quickly looking at Wayonn. “Our scientists are only just beginning to research this Wayonn. Are you saying that these men and women have this technology already?”

Wayonn nodded. “Let’s just say it was a gift of Pralor technology to them from a young woman who should have remained far away.” He spoke sternly.

Devra moved closer to him. “The Pralors had this technology?” She gasped.

Wayonn nodded. “We did.”

“Flat Space technology is supposed to be lethal to those caught within its Geometrical Tensors.” Devra spoke. “It is one of the first things we discovered about it. It distorts the Scalar and Vector space around an object.”

Wayonn nodded. “True... unless you have hyper regenerative healing particles within your body as all Lycavorians do. It negates the negative covariant of the vectors and allows them to use it without harm.”

“What... what do they use this technology for?” Arduri asked now. “Is it some sort of weapon?”

Wayonn shook his head. "Not in the true definition of the term weapon, but something similar. It will be easier to explain when you see it. I am not a Metaphysics Engineer or Quantum Mechanics scientist and my knowledge of those things is limited."

"Then who gave this to them?" Devra asked.

"A Pralor Scientist." He replied meeting her gaze. "And that is as far as I will go with that information for the moment."

Dutkne turned back to his sensor officer. "Can you localize the displacements?"

"I can try." She answered. "But without the correct Spatial Displacement Gradient and Deformation Frequency that they are using the chances are infinitesimal that we will find them. The best we can hope for is to detect the change in the Vector Frequencies. That would at least give us an idea that there is a ship in the area."

"How long to make the adjustments?" Dutkne asked.

"Three or four minutes." She replied. "I will need to realign the Translinear Deflector Grid."

Dutkne nodded. "Do it." He told her. "Make sure all of our weapons are offline." He added quickly. "Navigational Shields only but put the Refractive Shielding in standby."

Wayonn looked at him. "They are not enemies Dutkne." He stated.

"I know that grandfather." He replied. "However... we have no idea what their weapons are capable of. I do not wish to lose any of my crew because of an innocent mistake."

Wayonn nodded his head after a moment. "You are right."

"This branch of your species appears to be more technologically advanced than you first led us to believe Wayonn." Arduri said.

Wayonn met her gaze. "I lead you to believe nothing." He stated in a slightly humorous tone. "What you perceive I have told you is completely different. And they are not a branch of our species Arduri Re Mydala... the Protectorate is the branch. This is where over ninety-five percent of the survivors of the Black Day and the rebellion came too. The men and women we are about to meet are *the* Lycavorians. This is where our people have come and where they now call home."

"And the Protectorate?" Devra asked.

"We are the branch." Wayonn said. "Part of what my son Canth told Martin Leonidas twenty-five years ago was that he would need to find the Lost Ones. We... the Protectorate... we are who Canth meant."

"But the Protectorate has you." Devra said. "You were a Pralor before you were turned. It is why you are the strongest."

Wayonn nodded his head to her. "Perhaps among the Protectorate... but that will not be so within the Union. Martin Leonidas and his children all carry the blood of Sumar in their veins. And while his children not of pure Lycavorian blood are indeed powerful, he has four children that *are* pureblood Lycavorian. I was Sumar's friend and mentor and as I told Martin I could be known by any number of names, but my Pralor blood was no where near as strong as Sumar's. In terms of sheer force of will and raw power, Martin and his son Androcles far dwarf me in what they are capable of. In terms of being able to focus their power to abilities... that is what they lack. At least right now."

"And you will teach them this?" Devra asked.

"That is my place in the scheme of things." Wayonn answered.

"There is much you have not told me." Devra said softly.

Wayonn nodded. "I know. And there are reasons for that Devra Re Mydala... none of them having to do with a lack of trust. I assure you... as events begin to unfold... you will learn more and you will understand."

"Understand what?" Arduri asked.

"Why it is so important for us to come back together with our brethren." Wayonn answered.

Devra nodded her head. "In the hundreds of years I have known you Wayonn you have never been deceptive." She said softly. "It is the main reason the Board of Regents trusts you as much as they do."

"Then trust me now." Wayonn said. "Trust me and you will..."

The sensor officer's voice interrupted him. "Ah... Dutkne?"

All heads on the bridge turned to look at her because of the tone of her voice. Dutkne moved closer. "Have you found something?"

"Umm... you could say that." She said.

“What?”

“A four hundred percent increase in Vector frequency variance from the surrounding space.” She stated.

“What?” Dutkne gasped. “Where?”

“Ohh... is right above us too close?” She stated.

“Above us?” Dutkne almost shouted as he turned. “Ship dorsal view!” He barked. “Now!”

All of them watched as the two large view screens shifted their image to a visual of the top of the *TALON*. All they could see were stars however. Dutkne turned back to his sensor officer. “There is nothing there!” He snapped.

“*Nubou lae!*” She gasped as she read her console. “Radical particle shifts! Something is... something is materializing directly above us! Something really *nubous* big!”

Dutkne turned back to the view screens along with everyone else’s eyes and they could only watched as the shape of the massive ship began to form not five thousand meters above them.

“*Son vada carians!*” Drey stammered.

As Dutkne watched the shape of the *HARBINGER* became clear and focused. As he gazed at the lines of the ship, and the numerous weapons turrets Dutkne came to realize that this ship was completely unlike the *TALON* in every respect. The *TALON* was one of the newer class ships within the Protectorate and only one other ship was larger. This ship before them however, this ship was built for fighting with a long angular hull design in the shape of a spear head. As they watched, smaller objects began bursting from either side of the ship like angry hornets.

“*Sibfla!* Fighters!” His sensor operator called.

Dutkne tore his eyes away from the view windows and looked at her. “*Hannae?*” He asked.

She glanced at him before looking at her consoles. “Four thousand three hundred meters! Multiple turrets of a plasma design! At least fifty... with what appear to be heavier turrets mixed in! Hull is... the hull is comprised of Depleted Laminate Crystanium and some metal I’ve never even seen before! Detecting a Hyper Matter Fusion Coil Reactor power signature. *Carians* Dutkne... this ship is...”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes. It is built for war.” He stated softly.

“Multiple fighter contacts port and starboard!” Nirilo barked out. “Twenty either side! Fast moving and heavily armed! Comparable in size and maneuverability to our *STILETTO* fighters Dutkne!”

“Incoming transmission hail!” Another voice chimed in from the opposite side of the bridge. “Narrow beam and focused!”

“Let’s see it!” Dutkne barked. “Activate main holodisc!”

All of them turned as the main communications holodisc flared to life with the image of a young man sitting in the chair. He was tall and obviously very well built under the strange almost armor like uniform he wore. His hair was cut short and he had a meticulously trimmed mustache and goatee. Dutkne felt a powerful fluttering within Mindvoice. It was focused and controlled and he stepped closer to the transmission as the young man’s brown eyes remained unwavering. Dutkne began to turn but stopped when the young man began to speak.

“This is the ULU *HARBINGER*. I know you are receiving this transmission and it is not polite to have a one way conversation. Please activate your own communications array or I will consider you hostile. You would not like my response.”

“Do it!” Dutkne barked before anyone could stop him. He knew this young man. He did not know how but he had seen this face before, but it was a face with azure blue eyes.

“Transmission open!”

“I am Dutkne.” He spoke moving closer as he saw those brown eyes open just slightly wider. “I command this ship. The *TALON OF JUSTICE* from the Protectorate.”

“*TALON OF JUSTICE?*” The young man said. “A fitting name for a fearsome looking ship. My name is Admiral Andro and I have been tasked by the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union to take a number of you onboard my ship and return to Earth.”

Dutkne’s eyes narrowed and he began to turn his head to look at Wayonn but stopped when he felt his grandfather reach out to him in Mindvoice.

[Do nothing Dutkne.] Wayonn spoke.

[Grandfather that is...]

[Yes... it is Androcles. I wondered why he wore his helmet when we contacted Helen. It was to hide his features from those who were not wolf. His father taught him well.] Wayonn said.

[Why?] Dutkne asked.

[He knows that we will know who he is.] Wayonn spoke softly. *[And what would you do if someone had just attempted to kill most of your family and a new group of people you have never met contacted you and told you we had to meet.]*

[I would be skeptical to say the least.] Dutkne answered.

[Yes.] Wayonn said. *[Play along with him for now Dutkne. And rest assured he can feel us as strongly as we can feel him.]*

“I am the Director General of the Protectorate.” Dutkne spoke again. “I am very happy to finally make your acquaintance Admiral Andro.”

“We need to return quickly.” Andro spoke from the *HARBINGER*. “Do you have a transport that can bring you here?”

Dutkne nodded. “A small one yes. Total capacity is eleven. I was... I was hoping to bring more.”

They watched as Andro got to his feet from the chair he had been sitting in and his head tilted to the side slightly. “For what purpose?”

“I represent the Lycavorian Protectorate... but I also have several representatives from the Vanari Empire on board as well.” Dutkne held out his hand for Devra and she stepped up beside him without hesitation. “This is Regent Devra Re Mydala of the Vanari Board of Regents. They have a party of nine who accompanied us and they have come to ask for the Lycavorian Union’s assistance. I would like to select perhaps a dozen more of my people to accompany us as well. I would understand if this is not acceptable.”

There was no hesitation in Andro’s response which surprised Devra to some extent but she said nothing.

“Do you have a universal docking clamp?” Andro asked.

Dutkne nodded. “Yes.”

“I will send a *MENKLA* transport to dock with you.” Andro answered as his eyes shifted to Wayonn.

“No more than twenty. And no large weapons please. We do not have the space to accommodate more than that in what guest quarters we do have on board.” They saw him turn and type something on the arm of the chair.

“Your ship will proceed to these coordinates and wait there.”

Dutkne turned as Hannae pulled the data pad from the slot and tossed it to him. He looked at the small screen and then back up to who he knew to be Androcles Leonidas. “May I ask why?”

“An attempt has been made on the Royal family by Kavalian assassins.” Andro answered calmly. “They have managed to kill the King and quite possibly one of his mothers. The Crown Prince does not wish to bring an unknown ship to Earth because there may still be Kavalian agents hidden among the populous. It is for your protection as well as our own.”

“So you do not trust us?” Devra asked him in a neutral voice. “These men and women are your people Admiral.”

Once more Andro’s head tilted and he gazed at her. “If you do not like my terms Regent Re Mydala is it...?”

“Yes.” Devra answered.

“If you do not like my terms Regent Re Mydala, than you can turn your ship around and carry your asses back to wherever they came from.” Andro stated bluntly.

Devra opened her mouth to reply but stopped as she looked at the young man in the transmission. “You appear... you appear quite young to hold the rank of Admiral.”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “I am what I am.” He told her with a small smile. “It’s all in the genetics. Do you agree?”

Dutkne nodded his head without question. “We will be waiting.” He replied.

Andro pointed at Wayonn. “Is he coming with you?”

Wayonn stepped forward next to Devra and nodded. “I am Wayonn Admiral... and yes.”

Andro gazed at them from within the transmission for a few moments longer and then nodded. “My transport will be there in six minutes. Be ready. *HARBINGER* out!”

HARBINGER

Ne'Veha's dark eyes fluttered open slowly and she blinked several times to try and focus through the myriad of colors she had never seen before. Her four inch high elven ears were tingling at sounds she had never noticed and her nose twitched as if she needed to scratch it at the smells that assailed her senses. She felt a momentary flash of fear fill her mind and she sat up quickly unable to comprehend what was going on, the thin sheet falling away from her still gloriously lush and naked body. She blinked half a dozen times trying to focus on the figure she saw in front of her and then the voice she had come to adore listening to these last months sounded in her ears.

"Well now... breathe deeply child." Na'rnoas spoke from where she sat on the side of the bed holding the glass of liquid.

"Grandmother!" Ne'Veha exclaimed reaching out with her hands. "Grandmother it is... it is too much!"

Na'rnoas reached out with one hand and grasped Ne'Veha's fingers. "Breathe Ne'Veha. I know Sadi has been instructing you since the small changes started. The principle is the same child. Breathe and focus until you feel calm. Categorize everything and let your mind and senses do the work."

Ne'Veha shook her head back and forth quickly. "I can't... it is too much!"

Na'rnoas nodded. "I thought as much when I was first turned. It will come naturally in only a few hours Ne'Veha. Just focus and let go of your fear at all the new things you smell and hear. This is what you wanted child... everyone could smell it."

Ne'Veha squeezed her hand hard and let her words filter into her head. She concentrated on the single image of Andro holding her in his arms at his villa. Their villa as he had told her so often. How his aura swept around her and made her feel so safe and secure. She took deep breaths as her grandmother had said and slowly she could feel his aura reach for her and swarm around her. Her dark eyes flew open at the intensity of it, the power and clarity that was Androcles Leonidas. He was reaching out to her from wherever on the ship he was, feeling her anxiousness and fear, and using his aura to caress her into calmness. Na'rnoas smiled as she saw Ne'Veha's expression and she knew that Andro was reaching for her, speaking with her on a much higher plane of Mindvoice than she was capable of.

Do not fear SirsanGai. Andro's voice filtered into her mind so warm and inviting. *I am with you always. We are with you.*

How could we not be, as much as we love you? Lu'ria's voice was like sweet music in her head.

I am sorry SirsanGai... we should have been there for you when you woke, but by the time we awoke we were almost to the rendezvous. I am lucky that your grandmother offered to come. Andro spoke. *As it turns out... she was needed.*

I want... I want to be with you! Ne'Veha gasped within Mindvoice.

You are too weak right now Ne'Veha. Lu'ria's voice interjected with love. *As it was for me... it will be several hours at least before you have the strength to move about. Rest now my beautiful she-wolf slave.*

We will come to you after we meet these people SirsanGai. Andro told her. *We will come to you and take you to the Mess Lounge. Your new wolf blood will new food.*

I need you! Ne'Veha protested.

And you will have us SirsanGai. Andro told her confidently. *And we will have you. Let your grandmother help you to begin to adjust and then I will finish what she starts. A few hours my Elven Heart. Only a few hours.*

Promise... promise me. Ne'Veha spoke.

With all that I am Ne'Veha. He answered. *With all that I am.*

Ne'Veha felt sadness when they ended the connection but it lasted for all of a split second. She was wolf now... she was truly wolf now and she wanted to scream out her joy in that. Now she would feel Andro's full love for her. For all of them and she looked at her grandmother with a giddy expression.

"You see." Na'rnoas told her. "Androcles blood is so pure that you are adjusting far quicker than most who are turned." She held out the glass. "Drink this."

"How... how did you know?" Ne'Veha asked as she took the glass.

"He told me what he intended before we left Earth." Na'rnoas explained. "He wanted me here to support you if he could not." Na'rnoas chuckled softly. "That young prince does not know his own strength and the

power he has over you and the others. Since Lu'ria is with him I will teach you what you need to know as a female wolf.”

Ne'Veha looked at her with a stunned expression. “You are...?”

Na'rnoas nodded her head with a smile. “Since the year after we married.”

“You... you didn't tell me.” Ne'Veha questioned.

Na'rnoas nodded. “Because the decision needed to be yours completely. You needed to make that decision out of love for him and what he felt for you. And trust me when I say Ne'Veha... that young man loves you with every waking step he takes. He loves Lu'ria and no doubt I would sense the same from him for this Carisia you have told me of... and his *anome* Sadi. I have never felt anything like it before and I have seen many alphas claim their brides and love them totally. What he feels for the four of you is as powerful as a burning star.”

“It is... it is no different than what I feel for them grandmother.” She stated.

“Yes I know... I could smell that even before you were fully turned.” Na'rnoas inched closer on the bed and touched the glass Ne'Veha still held. “This is a concoction that the *Feravomir* gave to me just last night. It will not ease the pounding of your head... but it will take away the sensations of wanting to vomit. It is common in the first few hours after being turned. All of the symptoms will be gone by later today... but you will need to ease into what you do granddaughter.” Na'rnoas pointed at her. “And certainly no fooling around for at least several days. Your body will not be up for it.”

“Grandmother!” Ne'Veha exclaimed shyly.

“Don't you grandmother me!” Na'rnoas told her. “When my mate takes me even after all these years together, it still takes my breath away, and most Lycavorian men are built like bulls in the cock department.” Ne'Veha looked shocked at her grandmother's use of language and Na'rnoas chuckled. “I may be your grandmother child, but I am still a woman. If the smile on your face that I have seen these last weeks is any indication, the smile on all your faces, then I will assume Androcles Leonidas is quite gifted and he knows exactly how to use it, unlike so many others.”

Ne'Veha glanced at her timidly once more and nodded her head. “Yes.”

Na'rnoas nodded. “I thought so.” She stated. “Now drink that up. Then I will show you some simple exercises to make the transition to wolf so much easier.”

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

HARBINGER

STARBOARD LANDING BAY

Dutkne walked down the center aisle of the *MENKLA* transport as it began easing its way into the cavernous landing bay of the enormous ship. The pilots, a female wolf and a female elf from what he was able to smell, had said nothing to him while he stood in the cockpit with them while they flew. Elves were a new race to the Protectorate. They had heard of them of course, even seen holovids of them in their history archives, but no one had ever met any living elves. Both of the pilots filled out their uniforms quite nicely if Dutkne was any judge, and he liked to consider that he was. He was an Alpha, and as such he had had several relationships through the years, but none that lasted for any length of time. The two pilots hadn't been rude or unfriendly, just indifferent, and Dutkne knew why. The Lycavorian Protectorate was an unknown entity to them and the last time the Union had encountered a separate Lycavorian society, that society led by the exiled Chetak, had wrought horrible sins upon one of their beloved Queens. They were not going to let that happen again. It was not a concern for Dutkne or any of those with him or within the Protectorate. They clung to the history and tradition of the Lycavorians of old, those started by Canth his grandfather and King Resumar. Drey, his sister Caia, all of them were very excited and ready to meet the men and women that their history only told them about in data pads and scrolls. As the other members of those who had accompanied him were glued to the windows on the transport, their eyes wide in wonder and speaking amongst themselves quietly, Dutkne let his eyes fall to the father of his grandfather.

Wayonn's dark eyes were fully focused on him. His grandfather had taught him so much through the years, guided him in a singular direction, as if he knew this day would come. The closer Dutkne drew to him, the stronger it became inside his mind and heart. No matter how much he tried to fight it, he could not refute that the pull had been there for many years now and he could no longer deny it.

[He is much like you Dutkne.] Wayonn's voice filled his mind easily as it always did.

[Grandfather?]

[When I spoke with Martin for those few hours, he allowed me to see things within his mind. Much of it in regards to Androcles. He is a great deal like you. He is resilient, intelligent, and so very passionate about the things he believes.] Wayonn spoke.

[You knew, didn't you grandfather?] Dutkne said as he stopped next to where Wayonn sat. *[You knew this day would come.]*

Wayonn shrugged his broad shoulders and nodded. *[It was only a matter of time my boy. Shiria helped to speed it along with her actions, disapproving of them that I am, but it would have happened regardless. You have spent so many years fighting what your blood and heart knew your station was to be, that all you succeeded in doing is making it happen that much sooner.]*

[Grandfather...?]

[No... for once I want you to listen to me and see what I am saying.] Wayonn spoke. *[All of us have a purpose... a reason for drawing breath. It was one of the things we as Pralors so loved about our lives. The drive to find what our purpose was. The path to what you are meant for is sometimes much more enjoyable than actually finding that station Dutkne my boy. Sumar and I had many adventures along the way. He will not attempt to change who you are Dutkne... how do you change part of yourself grandson?]*

[What do you mean?] Dutkne asked. *[And please grandfather... no cryptic talk now.]*

Wayonn shook his head from where he sat. *[Something that you have in common with him already. No... there will be no more cryptic talk from here on out. I promise you.]* Wayonn looked at him. *[You and he are as Sumar and I were when we were young. We complimented each other Dutkne. We made each other better. No... he will not attempt to change you, because in many respects he is just like you. And like you... there are times when he drives his father absolutely insane. He walks a different but parallel path with his father. He is like him and he is not. Just as you are like your father and different in the same breath. You will see how closely you mesh after you have been around him for a time. He will teach you much Dutkne... and you will also teach him. I told you before that there will be two people in the future who will hold more influence over him than any others. Two individuals that he will most always turn to for guidance and to use as a sounding board. One of them is the green eyed wolf Sadi, who is now his anome and the one that holds the core of his heart within her hands. The other is you Dutkne.]*

[He does not even know me. Or I him.] Dutkne protested.

Wayonn smiled. *[Are you so sure about that grandson? Or do you just try and deny what I know your Pralor blood feels. Why do you think he directed all of his conversation to you and no others. He can feel it as well, though unlike you, he doesn't know why.]*

[And what of the future?] Dutkne asked.

Wayonn met his eyes. *[The moment we step into their world, the future will begin to play out Dutkne. How that future turns out will be dictated from decisions that start today.]*

[That isn't cryptic?] Dutkne asked with some exasperation.

Wayonn chuckled. *[I thought it was one of my most revealing statements to be honest.]*

Dutkne shook his head in disgust, but he couldn't help but grin as well.

"Dutkne!" The male voice called and he looked up to stare at the Lycavorian man that was one of his long time team members. He was a hundred years younger than Dutkne and was considered very much a ladies man as the expression went. Warem could charm the pants off many females, and he had done so through the years. His extreme good looks and chiseled body had female wolves chasing him whenever they were home, and he knew just how to talk to them. He was also one of the finest soldiers Dutkne had ever seen and a complete whirlwind in battle. "You have to see this! There are dozens of gorgeous females walking around! Elves too Dutkne! I have only seen elves in holovids! They are said to be very open and extremely sensual. I have died and gone to heaven!"

“*Forn wen sraap Warem!*” One of the females on Dutkne's team spat playfully. (You are a whore Warem)

Dutkne chuckled softly. “Warem... this is not the Protectorate!” He scolded. “Just insure you keep your *celie* in your pants! We don't want you to offend anyone! These people follow a code of honor that we do not fully know yet.”

“Where is the fun in that?” Warem exclaimed waving dismissively at him and returning his gaze out the window.

Dutkne shook his head with a small smile as the ship shuddered gently and he turned to look out the closest window. He could see dozens of fighters parked side-by-side or positioned in what appeared to be launch tunnels of some kind. The fighters were sleek and lethal looking; all of them carrying pods of varying size under their wings or fuselages, which he could only ascertain were for weapons. Dozens of male and female crewmembers moved deftly among the fighters and many other obstacles without a pause. He could tell by their actions that they were all supremely well trained and knew what they were about. The ship itself was a marvel. It was easily twice as large as the principal Protectorate or Vanari ship he had ever seen, though its design spoke of speed and maneuverability that a ship this size should not have. As Dutkne watched, he could see men and women scurrying around where their ship had touched down on the deck. He looked back to Wayonn. [*They will not like that the Vanari are armed grandfather and nor do I.*] He said.

Wayonn nodded slowly. [*I know... but it is also why I did not press the issue with Devra. They need to learn that they can trust us and that we are not an enemy. We never have been. I think Devra knows this... and allowing them to keep their weapons... well as twisted as it may sound, a confrontation with the Durcunusaan will open their eyes to what we have been trying to tell them for centuries.*]

[*You think there will be a confrontation?*]

Wayonn nodded his head. [*Devra and Arduri seem to be much more open to what is happening, but Naesta is still clinging to the teachings of her father. Coren may well be a good politician, but he is closed minded and does not like our people. He never has. After what has happened recently, the Durcunusaan will not allow them to keep their weapons unless Andro approves. And if they won't surrender them, the Durcunusaan will take them.*]

[*Vanari Commandos are not to be trifled with grandfather.*] Dutkne spoke. [*What they lack in size and strength, they more than make up with guile and cunning and superior skills.*]

Wayonn nodded. [*All true... but they have never confronted a Durcunusaan either.*]

Dutkne turned when one of the pilots, the Lycavorian female, stepped out of the cockpit and looked at them from the small step landing. As she moved down the steps closer to him, the others turned and watched her. She stepped right up to Dutkne.

“The ground crew is securing the ship.” She stated evenly. “A *Durcunusaan* detail will be entering shortly and they will escort you off the transport through the rear ramp once they have surveyed the situation.”

Dutkne nodded at her professionalism. “I understand.” He said. “Will this Admiral Andro be waiting?” Dutkne saw the slight twitch of her jaw and he knew then that the crew of this ship would protect the identity of Androcles at the cost of their lives if need be. He watched her eyes and how they gazed at him steadily. Eventually she nodded her head slightly.

“He will greet you.” She stated as the side door of the *MENKLA* hissed slightly and the massive internal locking mechanism shifted. “A word of advice if I may?” She asked him.

Dutkne nodded. “Of course.”

“Be honest in all that you do and say.” She told him softly, so that only he could hear him. “Given what has happened in the last few days it may be the difference on whether you live or die.”

Dutkne did not take offense in the least at her words and he nodded his head. “I thank you for your words...”

“Commander Rekia.” She told him.

“... Commander Rekia.” Dutkne nodded. “Thank you... and I will take them to heart and keep them in mind.”

“We'll see.” She stated as the side hatch opened and four heavily armed *Durcunusaan* team members entered the transport. “You and he will exit down the ramp first.” She indicated Wayonn.

Dutkne tilted his head. “Protocol?” He asked.

Rekia shook her head. "Insurance." She answered.

"I don't understand... insurance?" Dutkne said.

Rekia's smile was anything but friendly. "If this is a trap then you and the old man will die first."

Lu'ria felt utterly divine.

The scents and sights and sounds were still all very new, but Sadi had been a fine teacher in only the few hours they had together. She had not shown her anything about shifting her form just yet, for until this morning she had still been weak. Recovering quickly but still very weak. The last few hours had helped to change that.

As each hour passed it became so much easier to file away a unique new scent to her mind knowing that her wolf blood would remember it even years from now. It was part of their nature as wolves and one of the things that was so very distinctive about the Lycavorian people. They would remember you five or six hundred years from now, even if they hadn't seen you in that long, simply by your scent. At the moment, the only scent that appealed to her was the one of lavender and pines and she relished in that scent as it swept around her. It permeated her very being just as Sadi said it would. Before just a few short hours ago, Lu'ria had never been with a man in her entire life. Females yes, but never a man, because even then she knew only one man could make her feel what she wanted to feel. And feel it she did last night as Androcles molded his flesh to hers and filled her with his essence. He had loved her in such a way that surpassed anything she had ever even fantasized about, and now Lu'ria knew why Sadi and Carisia and Ne'Veha looked at him with that unique glint in their eyes. He had loved all of them just as completely as he had loved her only a few hours ago, and now nothing would ever compare to his touch upon her body or the feel of him filling her. Nothing would compare to the touch of Sadi, Ne'Veha or Carisia on her body, and while she cared not for the traditional Drow terms of Mistress and slave, Ne'Veha had told her last night before Andro arrived that it had a certain thrill to it that all of them loved.

Lu'ria stood slightly forward of the two Drow and two *Durcunusaan* members of her security detachment and waited for Andro to move over to her. He was talking with the captain of the *HARBINGER* only a few meters away, and her wolf nose sniffed the air slightly drawing in his delicious scent deeply. Lu'ria knew she would not always have this many *Durcunusaan* or Drow security personnel, but given what had happened no one was taking chances. Lu'ria had opted against wearing the Mark IV ArmorPly uniform for the more comfortable Drow Scout Uniform that she was accustomed to. Even before she had made her way to Cranæ Island, the word had apparently gone out among those whose job it was to take care of the royal family. The uniforms had appeared in their villa as if by magic, and she discovered they all fit her to perfection. The matte black leather like material conformed to her lithe five foot nine frame like a second skin, with additional protection across the front of her large chest and abdomen. The tightness of the uniform in all the right curves and places reflected the strong sensual nature of many Drow, and it left almost nothing to the imagination with the way it layered across her supple body. While Lu'ria may have been wearing a pair of red thong underwear, the material of her uniform did nothing to hide the outline of her mound between her legs. Normally she would have forgone any underwear at all, and even as Androcles had protested while he watched her get dressed with hungry eyes, she had worn the underwear. This meeting was not a meeting of family or friends, and none of them knew just how open a society that this group of Lycavorians had. She felt the slight tug at her shoulders and glanced sideways to see the clips where the gold trimmed, crimson colored cape fell behind her back to brush gently across the deck. Another sign that she was not dreaming. Within the inch wide gold strip that ran along the edge of the crimson cape were sentences and phrases written in the ancient Drow language proclaiming to all who read them just who she was.

At first Lu'ria had been hesitant about her status and if people would accept her as one of the wives and mates to their Crown Prince. She was now wolf yes, but there had never been a Drow who was fully wolf as she was and she thought perhaps that might be a stumbling block. It had been a silly worry as Sadi had first told her on Earth, for when she had been walking here with only her detail accompanying her, almost everyone she passed in the corridors had nothing but smiles and pleasant greetings for her. The further she walked the more comfortable Lu'ria became in this new world she had desired for so long. She looked out of the corner of her amber eyes and saw Majeir sitting only a few meters away, her massive bulk resting easily on her four legs and her front talons occasionally tapping the metal deck. Elynth sat beside her and Lu'ria could tell they were deep

in conversation within Mindvoice about one thing or the other. Lu'ria began to wonder what that was when she felt his aura sweep over her. She closed her eyes in delight when she felt him step up behind her and press his hard, powerful body against her back. Lu'ria's hands dropped discretely to her sides and her slim fingers gripped the front of his thighs and squeezed as he leaned against her and nuzzled her four inch high pointed elven ears.

"You look delicious my *Ilythiiri Tessai*." His voice rasped.

Lu'ria turned her head and looked at him with adoring amber eyes. "I did not want to leave our bed and Ne'Veha this morning Andro." She said softly.

Andro moved up beside her and took her hand within his, his azure eyes now covered in brown contacts but never leaving hers. "Nor did I." He answered honestly. "Na'rnoas is with *SirsanGai* right now and we will join them in the mess lounge after we meet with our guests."

Lu'ria reached over with her other hand and placed it flat against his abdomen. "I... I have not yet thanked you for saving my life."

Andro smiled at her. "You can thank me when we are all together once again." He said. "This is not the way..."

Lu'ria reached up and put a finger to his lips. "Do not apologize to me for what you have done my love." She whispered. "You have made me like you and I could not be happier. It is how it was meant to be and I embrace that. I embrace all of it!"

"I make you this promise now Lu'ria of the Drow." Andro said. "You will have the Drow wedding you deserve. As Ne'Veha will have the elven ceremony she wants. I just don't know when that..."

Lu'ria shook her head. "I know that. And so does *SirsanGai*. For the moment however, I will be very content to lay within your arms, within Sadi and Carisia and Ne'Veha's arms and partake of the joy that gives me. I have yet to experience the pleasures of my beautiful slaves and *Enylarcopri*... her eyes make me shudder."

Andro grinned and placed his forehead to hers. "Well... I believe they look forward to it too." He said leaning over and nuzzling her elven ear. "Can I watch?"

Lu'ria laughed softly and reached up confidently to slap his face lightly. "You will do more than watch!" She growled. "You will make us howl out your name!"

Andro turned when he heard the clicking of the ramp on the *MENKLA* transport indicate it was about to start coming down. "I look forward to that." He said softly.

Lu'ria's eyes followed his and she pressed closer to him. "Who are these people Andro?" She asked softly.

Andro watched as the ramp began to come down. "We're about to find out *Ilythiiri Tessai*. But... something tells me that they are part of what my father started many years ago and we will not need to fear them."

[*We still must remain on our guard Andro.*] Elynth's voice filled both their minds and they turned back to look at her beside Majeir. [*Too much has happened so fast. Everything that is going on is being driven outside our control.*]

[*Remember Vile One Maraud.*] Majeir echoed.

Andro nodded. [*I remember Majeir.*] He answered. [*It was one of the first things Torma and my father shared with Elynth and I when we were old enough. Do not worry... my father taught me how to see men like that for what they are.*]

Majeir nodded her huge head. [*Then I will say no more. But I will burn whoever attempts to injure you or my Lu'ria.*]

Elynth nodded her head as well. [*As will I.*] She echoed. [*KertaGai would be very upset with us if we did not.*]

Andro turned back to the ramp. [*We will not need to burn anyone.*] He said softly. [*What exits this ship is part of our future. And we must embrace it.*]

[*And we will.*] Lu'ria said. [*And we will.*]

"I must play my role now *Ilythiiri Tessai*." He said turning back to look at her. "At least for a short time."

Lu'ria nodded. "I know. I don't like having to play this game my love. How long will it have to be done?"

"If all goes well... only for a few hours." He stated. "If these men and women are who I think they are... they will know who I am almost immediately and I will know their intent just as quickly."

Lu'ria squeezed his hand. "Then we need to discover their intent quickly. I do not want *SirsanGai* to have to hide the love for you that we both feel."

Andro nodded. "I promise."

PHY'IAD'S COMMAND SHIP FOUR HOURS FROM BELID

Dysea dreaded what would walk through the door of her cell yet she yearned for it as well. She felt the enormous shame wash over her as her body called for her Immortal Master. She was a slave to Immortal cock now, and she would do anything he asked of her. She would fuck any of these monsters, she would fuck all of them, she would let them ravage her body senseless and fill her with their Immortal seed so that she could receive only what her master could give to her. How could she have fallen like this? Her *Nauta Melme* was dead, the man who was the spark of her entire life and yet now her body only craved her Immortal Master and what he could give her. The shame was a crushing weight upon her heart and soul, yet even through that shame and pain all she wanted now was to feel her master's Immortal cock filling her again and again.

Her emerald eyes focused on the huge form of the Immortal who now entered her cell, an Immortal that was not her master, and behind him the stunning blond haired elven female. She watched as the Immortal turned and spoke gruffly to the two others in the corridor and they nodded before sealing the door shut. She watched as the Immortal moved along the wall oddly until he came to a single section, the elven female staying just inside the door with a small bundle in her arms. Dysea watched as the Immortal opened a hidden section of the wall that she would never have found and he pulled several blue cables out slightly. He attached something to them, waited for several seconds and then turned to look at the female.

"It is done Osiri." He spoke.

Dysea watched then as the elven female broke from in front of the door and crossed the room to where she sat naked on the cold floor. As she drew closer Dysea could make out the tense lines in her face, lines that made her appear much older from a distance than she actually was up close. She watched the female kneel down in front of her and place the bundle on the floor, removing something from within the layers. Dysea flinched when the woman lifted the small, portable medical scanner.

Osiri's blue/green eyes looked at Dysea then. "I will not hurt you my Queen." She stated in a soft voice. "I am here to try and help you."

Dysea's eyes darted to where the Immortal stood beside the wall, his eyes not looking at her. Osiri followed her gaze and saw where she was looking and turned back quickly. "Kr'nak will not hurt you my Queen." Osiri spoke.

"He... he is the one from Kranek!" Dysea hissed softly. "He is the one who struck me with his weapon!"

"Osiri... give her the blankets so that she can cover herself and regain a small amount of her dignity." The Immortal spoke gruffly.

Osiri set the scanner down with a sheepish look on her face. "Oh... forgive me." She stated quickly and unwrapped the thick blanket, holding it out to her and draping it over her naked form.

Dysea clutched the blanket tightly to her, covering herself as the Immortal turned then and came over to squat beside Osiri. She picked up the scanner again and activated it, sweeping it slowly over Dysea's body. "Have... have you come to see if I have been broken?" Dysea snarled.

Osiri looked at her oddly. "I... I am checking you for injuries." She said.

"Injuries?" Dysea snapped. "I... I have been injured! In the most vile of ways!" She said unable to meet the woman's eyes. "I should not have been affected... it should not have happen to me! I am wolf... I..."

"Osiri... what is she talking about?" Kr'nak asked. His Immortal features were lighter in color than most, not as gray toned and though they were fearsome in many ways there was something different about them.

Osiri shook her head. "I don't know." She answered as she adjusted the medical sensor.

Dysea's head snapped around and she glared at them. "Have you come to gloat?" She spat. "Have you come here to see me grovel before you and beg for the Immortal who broke me?"

Osiri looked at her shocked. "Broke you my Queen? What are you speaking of?"

"Do not mock me!" Dysea snapped. "And do not play to be my friend when you are not! Two of the Immortals you serve were here! They used me for hours! They broke me! I can feel the need burning inside me even now. The need to..."

Osiri looked at Kr'nak and saw him shake his head. "Impossible." He told her. "My men guard her cell. No one has been inside this cell since she was brought aboard!"

"You lie!" Dysea shouted. "I begged him to break me!" She sobbed now as the tears came. "I... I betrayed my *Nauta Melme*! I begged that monster to break me to his will! I... I wanted nothing more than to feel him inside me! I..."

"Osiri...?" Kr'nak gasped.

Osiri adjusted her sensor once more and shook her head. "No." She stated. She looked at Dysea. "This did not happen!"

Dysea cut her eyes back to her. "You think me a fool!" She barked. "I... I would know if I have been raped! Two of your pig masters were here! They used me like a common whore! They..."

Osiri turned the sensor face towards Dysea so she could look at the data. "No!" She barked now. "These readings show no sign that you have been violated my Queen! You have been alone in this cell since Kr'nak brought you here!"

"You lie!" Dysea snapped. "You think to trick me! To use my need... to use my need against me!"

"Osiri *ussta 'chev*... we don't have time for this." Kr'nak spoke causing Dysea's eyes to cut to his face. (My Beloved)

"Dysea!" Osiri exclaimed loudly making Dysea turn back to her. "Look at the readings! This did not happen to you my Queen! I would not lie about that! It is..." Her voice grew soft and she looked at the deck. "I know what... I know what it means to be broken Milady and to need as you say!" Her eyes came back up to Dysea's face. "This did not happen to you... I give you my word as any elf would swear to their Queen!"

Dysea's emerald eyes looked at the information on the scanner. Having *Melyanna* in her life and then having a friend such as Esther gave Dysea quite a bit of medical knowledge and she could read the data scrolling across the screen easily enough. And she also could understand what it all meant. She reached out and began to take the scanner from Osiri's hand only to have the blanket fall away from her ample chest. She flinched when the Immortal's hand snapped out and caught the edge of the blanket, holding it up away from her skin but doing so in a way that she was not exposed to his eyes. She snatched the corner of the blanket from him and pulled it tighter, her eyes darting back and forth between the two of them.

"Who... who are you?" She spat quickly. "What... what do you want with me?"

"My name is Osiri." She answered hastily. "And we are here to insure you are physically unhurt my Queen. I am... I am Phy'iad's..."

"Osiri..." The huge Immortal spoke softly.

"No Kr'nak... she must know." Osiri said quickly looking at him. "I am strong enough Kr'nak."

"I don't doubt that *ussta 'chev*... but why speak of it if you do not need to." He asked her in a soft voice that caused Dysea to look at him oddly.

"Because in order for this to work there can be nothing but truth." Osiri said. "We have talked about this."

"I know... I just..."

Dysea watched as she reached up and placed her hand delicately on his weathered cheek. His small dark eyes gazed at her with something akin to what Dysea had seen from Cha'talla when he gazed at Esther.

"You have made me strong *ussta daxunyrr*. And that is why I go on every day." She stated.

Kr'nak nodded slowly. "We must be quick."

Osiri nodded and turned back to a confused Dysea. "I... I am Phy'iad's slave." She stated then. "I know what it feels like to need my Queen. I know what it feels like to desire his vile touch when my mind screams for me not to." Osiri shook her head. "This has not happened to you Dysea Leonidas." She touched the scanner

with a finger. “Your body is completely void of the chemicals in an Immortal’s semen. What you... what you believe has happened to you did not occur.”

“Then... then why do I...”

Osiri took the scanner back from her. “You have been injected with several chemicals my Queen. One to keep you from being able to shift to your wolf form. Another to keep you unconscious for a long duration and a third to keep your body temperature lower than normal so you feel sluggish and unresponsive.”

Dysea shook her head. “It was real!” She gasped. “I... I felt them. I felt them and all they did to me.”

“It did not happen!” Kr'nak growled now. “The two men outside your cell are my men! They are loyal to me! They would not have allowed it!”

Osiri placed her hand on his arm to calm him and looked at Dysea. “I suspect your power within Mindvoice is playing a large role in this my Queen, combined with the mixture of the drugs they gave to you. There is a capsule under the skin at the back of your head under your hair. It is tiny and you would never notice it unless you knew it was there. It basically inhibits your Mindvoice powers almost completely. It is like a dead space around you.” She watched Dysea reach up and feel along the back of her head. Osiri reached out and guided her fingers to a miniscule bump at the base of her neck. “There.” She stated. “I... I suspect without your abilities in Mindvoice to allow you to focus, you are reacting instinctively to some sort of dark dream or vision you may have had.

“Remove it!” Dysea exclaimed. “Take it out of me!”

Osiri met her eyes. “Your powers within Mindvoice... the powers of the King and the other Queens... it is well known Milady. I will remove it... but first you must hear us out. If I remove that now you could kill us both easily, and that is something I do not want. I want to be free... just like you. If I am right... and what you have described to us is accurate... than I believe this capsule is the reason you perceive something happened when in fact it did not.”

“Why should I trust you?” Dysea said harshly. “Why should I believe anything you tell me?”

Osiri glanced at Kr'nak briefly and then back to her. “You should believe me Dysea; you should believe me because your body lacks the chromosome that makes elven females turned by wolves immune to Immortal semen. You are the daughter of clones Dysea, not pureblood elves. This chromosome is passed within the DNA structure from generation to generation. Even though you are now wolf, your body lacks this particular chromosome, and you are just as susceptible to Immortal semen as I was when Phy'iad broke me.”

“How... how do you know this?” Dysea gasped.

“I was a molecular scientist before Phy'iad captured me.” Osiri told her. “I was married and I had children. All of whom are now dead because of Phy'iad. He thinks I do not know... he thinks I believe them to still be alive but I discovered several months after he captured me that he had them butchered. I hate... I despise him with every breath I take.”

“Phy'iad met with the Kavalian Marshall Pusintin... several months ago.” Kr'nak spoke now. “He wanted Phy'iad to capture several elven females, among them a half breed. He wanted to learn how Immortals would affect a turned elf.”

“You are speaking of As'hia.” Dysea said.

Osiri and Kr'nak looked at her surprised. “You... you know of her?” Kr'nak asked shock in his face.

“Of course she does.” Osiri said. “Just as we know of Lynom.”

Dysea’s eyes darted to her face just as equally shocked. “You...”

“We have known about Lynom for over a year.” Osiri told her. “There are no Immortals that I know of that can blur in motion like a vampire. Unless of course they are the children of an Immortal and a vampire and have those skills when they are born. Namely the children of Cha'talla and his Blessed Wife Esther.” Osiri set the medical scanner down. “We have kept his secret safe all of this time Dysea. Even during the times when Phy'iad is rutting like an animal above me and using all of my openings and I am at my weakest, I have never exposed his secret to him.”

“Why?” Dysea asked more quickly than she intended.

“Because our goals are the same... we have just been going about trying to achieve them in different manners. We are only four hours from Belid and we need to make our plans on what to do from here on out.” Kr'nak spoke now.

Dysea Leonidas may not have been able to Mindvoice, but she was still wolf and she still had her other senses. The first thing she noticed was that she could smell no lie coming from either of them. The second was that she caught the faint scent of ginger on the air and knew immediately what it was. She remained as calm as she was able wondering how in the heavens Tir'ut was able to get on board this ship and wanting to cry in relief that he was. She caught the slight movement out of the corner of her eye as the wall panel began to shift silently. It was in the corner of the cell, behind and to the right of the direction Kr'nak and Osiri were facing. She kept her eyes on Kr'nak as he spoke.

"... tired." He told her, soft his voice causing her attention to focus on him once more. "Phy'iad promised us riches when we deserted. A return to the old ways of our people where honor was foremost among our ideals. Instead he makes us into mercenaries, selling our many services to the highest bidder! I followed him for six hundred years before we deserted... and I followed him when we left the Coven. I followed him... I embraced all that we were doing because I believed it would lead us to what he had originally promised. I followed him and all that he made us do until ten years ago. I discovered something then that changed me."

Dysea's heart was racing as she listened to him. She had to keep them talking to her so they wouldn't notice. She glanced quickly to Osiri and then back to him when he said that.

"Yes." Osiri said. "Phy'iad left on some mission and he gave me to Kr'nak while he was gone."

"Gave you to him?" Dysea gasped.

Osiri nodded. "I am a slave." She stated almost nonchalantly. "He has given me to many of his men through the years. And if I wanted what only he could provide to me I had to comply with what he said I must do."

Dysea glared at Kr'nak. "So you raped her?" She spat.

"Kr'nak didn't touch me in that way." Osiri said softly. "Not for the entire month that Phy'iad was gone. Oh... I was willing to do whatever it took to insure that I got what Phy'iad had left for me. Kr'nak simply gave it all to me the first day and allowed me to rest and eat and for the first time in a decade, feel like a woman again. At least as much as I could." Osiri looked at him with blue/green eyes and Dysea saw an adoring love in them. The same look she saw in the eyes of Esther for Cha'talla and the eyes of all the elven females on Kranek who had taken Immortal husbands. "I got him to talk to me after the first week... at first it was just a few small sentences... but as the days passed it became more and more." Osiri turned to look at Dysea once more.

"And then the dam broke and he was telling me of what Phy'iad had promised them, what many of them had hoped for. I discovered that Kr'nak and half a dozen others were the only ones left who still clung to their original goals and ideals. It was quite the shock to me." Osiri told her.

Dysea looked at him. "But you are the... you are the one who took me from Kranek!" She gasped. "Why... why not just disregard what this scum wanted you to do? Cha'talla would have accepted you without question!"

"And leave Osiri behind? Leave behind my future?" Kr'nak said softly. "Never."

"Why didn't you leave before now?" Dysea demanded not really wanting to believe them.

"And go where?" Kr'nak asked her. "There is... Osiri would have died within a week without..."

Osiri squeezed his arm again gently. "How exactly would you propose I tell Phy'iad that I need enough of his semen so that I can survive without him Milady? At least until we could somehow develop a serum to at least curb the need enough that I could lead a reasonable life far away from him. Think about it Dysea. You are an extremely intelligent woman... how exactly would I have Phy'iad do this? He is not a fool or stupid. He is the most cruel and savage and cunning man I have ever met in my lifetime. He would see right through this and know that there was something wrong."

"What does this have to do with me?" Dysea demanded once more.

"This idiot Pusintin met with Phy'iad and had us do what we did for a reason." Kr'nak spoke. "He sent us to capture you for a reason and now they have targeted not only your King and mate, but your entire family. You are here for a reason Dysea Leonidas. Pusintin and Phy'iad have something planned for you. When I told Osiri of this... of what I knew, she told me we could not let it happen. She said we had to help you and then we could be free."

"And taking me from Kranek advances your freedom how?" Dysea snarled.

"I am not a fool Queen Leonidas." Kr'nak spoke. "Taking you was the only way to insure that I could accomplish my task. Taking you from Kranek was the only option. Once he told us of the plan I made sure I

was the one leading the assault team. Another Immortal among those of Phy'iad's men that he trusts would not have insured nothing happened to you. I knew that if we had you, then I could successfully take Osiri and the five others that feel as I do and escape with them and you once we returned to Belid. Once in The Wilds you would have been set free. I only needed you to insure I was able to escape with Osiri."

"You expect me to believe all this?" Dysea growled.

"It is the truth." Osiri said.

"What you believe does not matter to me Elf Queen." Kr'nak spoke sternly. "I am three thousand six hundred and seven years old. I have seen war and bloodshed on a scale that would stagger your mind. What I am doing helps not only us, but you as well. It will reveal what plan that Phy'iad and this Pusintin have designed. It will help your people. You are nothing more than a pawn Dysea. This is not about you... it was never about you! What we have done in taking you has a different purpose! A larger purpose... and it will allow you to discover that purpose and why the Kavalians have suddenly begun attacking you."

"And I ask you again... why should I believe anything you have to say?" Dysea barked at him. "I am a prisoner! Your prisoner!"

"You are not a prisoner Milady." Osiri stated. "I know that is hard for you to believe right now, but we had no intention of holding you I swear."

"Why are you doing this?" Dysea demanded.

Kr'nak met her eyes. "When we left the Coven, Phy'iad told us we would be able to make lives for ourselves! That we would return to the old ways! I had no wife! No children! The High Coven refused this to us! Only they decided when and who we could marry and have children with! Phy'iad told us we could make our own decisions when we were free of the Coven! I only traded one form of control for another! I made the decision ten years ago to work towards my own goal then!"

Dysea's eyes grew wide and they darted back and forth between him and Osiri. "Wait... you..."

Osiri nodded with a gentle smile. "I have been Kr'nak's wife for the last seven years yes." She said. "It is... it is the only thing that has kept me sane all of this time. It is the only thing that saved me."

Dysea looked stunned. "But... you..."

"Yes." Kr'nak spat. "Do you know what it could possibly feel like to know your Blessed Wife has to fuck other men to survive Queen Dysea? Can you even imagine how that feels to me? Having to be in the same room as a man you have come to hate more than anything in this twisted universe treats your woman like a whore and she can not control herself and screams for him to take her! Screams for two and sometimes three men to take her because that is what that deranged fuck Phy'iad wants? And then listening to him laugh through it all? Given the first opportunity... the first chance and knowing that my Osiri would be free of him forever, I will cut that man's cock off and shove it down his throat. That is before I peel the skin from his foul body and allow the sun to cook him slowly."

"Kr'nak my husband..." Osiri said looking at him. "You know I don't like it when you speak like that. And especially not in front of the Lycavorian Queen."

Kr'nak met her eyes and incredibly he seemed to flush with embarrassment Dysea saw. He bowed his head slightly. "*Evagna uns'aa ussta Du'ased 'ranndi.*" He said softly. (Forgive me my Blessed Wife.)

Osiri smiled brilliantly and leaned over to kiss the top of his head tenderly. She turned back to Dysea and saw her expression. "I never imagined I would find love again Milady... and certainly not with an Immortal... but I have. For seven years now we have hidden our marriage and our love. We have snuck moments to be together through that time, and when Kr'nak makes love to me I feel reborn each and every time. And this time... this time I need for it to last my Queen."

"This is... this is all so unbelievable." Dysea gasped. "Why... why would this Phy'iad work for Pusintin? Why... what does he want with me?"

"Whatever it is for... it can't be good Milady." Osiri spoke.

"Phy'iad does not reveal much of anything Queen Leonidas. Not even to those he says he trusts. Like me." Kr'nak spoke. "From what I know... as I said, you are only a key part of some larger plan of the Kavalian dogs."

"Why would he get involved with the Kavalians?" Dysea asked now thoroughly focusing her attention on Kr'nak and Osiri.

“Profit.” Kr'nak spoke. “Profit and the promise of as many elf females as Phy'iad wants over the next years. He has not confided in me or anyone else why taking you was necessary. Only that... only...”

“What?” Dysea asked.

“I know that Phy'iad is to break you while someone watched via a secure channel from our base. Then he is to hand you over to someone when his task is done and not tell this person what he has done.” Kr'nak spoke.

“He knows?” Dysea asked in shock. “He knows about me?”

Osiri nodded slowly unable to look at her. “That is my fault. I did not know what he intended and I inadvertently told him of my discovery when discussing the results of this As'hia you spoke of. He contacted someone within the Kavalian command almost immediately after. I don't know what was talked about.”

“But if... if he did this and then gave me to this unknown person I would...” Dysea asked them her eyes wide.

Kr'nak nodded. “You would be dead within the week without receiving additional....” He said shaking his head. “This is something I think they... the Kavalians I mean... something they want after your usefulness to them is done.”

“What could they possibly need me for?” Dysea asked holding the blanket tighter.

“I do not know.” Kr'nak spoke. “And I would tell you if I knew Lady Dysea.”

Osiri had been working with some items that were in the bundle while Kr'nak spoke and she lifted the high pressure injector. The shadow out of the corner of her eye caused her to turn and her eyes grew wide when she saw the hulking figure unwrap the shadows from around his body and the savage face appeared.

“Kr'nak...!”

He was moving before the words finished leaving her lips but he was far too slow. The large hand clamped around his throat with brutal power and lifted his six foot four and two hundred fifty pound body clean off the floor. Osiri tried to move to protect her beloved husband but was caught by several pairs of hands as Lancy and another vampire also unwrapped the shadows from around their bodies and held her.

“*Ilhar vith'rell! Nin Usstan orn elgg dos whol vel'bol dos inbal xunor!*” Tir'ut's voice was savage in the cell and Dysea felt enormous relief wash over her as she watched the man who had claimed her daughter lift the Immortal as if he was a child and ram him brutally into the bulkhead. Esther had told her of the strength her son possessed and Dysea was witnessing it first hand now. His combined vampire and Immortal strength was far more than what Kr'nak was used too and he grunted painfully as his body was smashed into the unyielding metal wall. (Motherfucker! Now I will kill you for what you have done!)

Another odd but extremely pleasant vanilla/berry scent filtered to her quickly along with the beautiful scent of delightful orange cloves she was so familiar with.

“Mother!” Normya's voice rasped softly and Dysea turned to see her scrambling from the opening into what appeared to be some sort of access shaft.

“Oh Normya my child!” Dysea wailed softly as she scrambled to her feet.

Mother and daughter met halfway across the cell in an embrace of love and relief. Cirith had unwrapped the shadows from around her and Normya just before exiting the shaft and now she stood to her full height of five foot eight and simply watched as mother and daughter were reunited. Cirith was struck by the uncanny resemblance that they had, though Dysea was several inches taller than her daughter. The platinum blond hair and firm physical builds were almost exactly the same, and Cirith found herself admiring the parts of Dysea's flesh that were exposed from under the blanket. She shook her head quickly to dismiss these thoughts and turned to watch as Tir'ut tightened his death grip on Kr'nak's throat, slowly beginning to kill him.

“No!” Osiri screamed. “No! Let him go!” She struggled against the two men holding her trying to get to her husband. “Let him go! I can not lose him! Let him go!”

Her voice caused Dysea to pull away and look at Tir'ut's back. “*Tir'ut... sut ukta ussta Rinovdro dalharuk.*” She spoke quickly. (Release him my Immortal son.)

“Let...uurkkk... let her go!” Kr'nak hissed out the words even with the hand crushing his throat.

“I will kill him for what they have done to you and our family *Darthirii Ilhar!*” Tir'ut snarled without looking back at her.

Dysea broke away from Normya's embrace and moved up beside him. She reached up and placed her hand on his shoulder. “No Tir'ut.” She said. “I... I don't believe they are the enemy.”

Tir'ut turned his head and looked at her. "*Darthirii Ilhar?*" He questioned.

Dysea nodded as her confidence rapidly began to return to her now that the scents of Tir'ut and Normya filled her mind. She did not know who the others were, but if they were with Normya and Tir'ut then they must be trustworthy. "Release him." She said. "There is... there is not much time and..." She turned to Normya. "Your brothers and sisters? How did you get...?"

Normya stepped up to her, embracing her once more as Tir'ut released Kr'nak and he dropped to the deck gasping for breath. "It was you mother." Normya told her.

Dysea hugged her tightly. "What... what do you mean?"

"Your order to put Tir'ut and I in the ship with Cirith." Normya said. "We were closing on some unidentified ships when the ship carrying you came from the planet. Cirith..." Normya motioned to the stunning raven haired vampire female. "Cirith got us close to the ship. Tir'ut and I could feel you on the transport. We..."

Cirith stepped forward now. "Normya flew our heavy fighter into the landing bay when it opened to receive the transport. We have been slowly working our way towards you once we discovered your location."

Dysea looked at Cirith intently; taking in the way the dark uniform fit her lush figure and conformed to her large breasts and flat abdomen. Her long black hair framed a face of unearthly beauty with glittering dark eyes and soft full pink lips. Dysea nearly groaned as she looked at Cirith, suddenly realizing that she was in full phase now and her body was craving the touch of her lovers and mate. Touches that she would not be receiving anytime soon and never again when it came to her *Nauta Melme*. Dysea choked back the tears and shook her head turning back to Normya. "Deni, Lisisa, the others?" She asked.

Normya shook her head. "I don't know." She said softly. "Once we jumped out of Kranek's system, Tir'ut and I were just not strong enough to reach anyone." Normya met her eyes. "I don't know what..."

"You... your forces crushed the Kavalians!" Kr'nak gasped as he got to his feet. "Phy'iad contacted Pusintin as we were returning here. Your forces annihilated the Kavalians. When the Coven ships jumped into the system you overwhelmed them. When we left the planet... when we left your dragons were just beginning to enter the battle and slaughtering the Kavalian troops." Kr'nak looked at where Lancy and his soldier were still holding Osiri's arms. "Release her!" He snarled beginning to move towards his elven wife.

Tir'ut began to try and grab him, but Kr'nak batted his arm away. Tir'ut blurred then and wrapped his arm around Kr'nak's chest. Exerting his great strength he lifted the Immortal off the floor again, slamming him painfully to the floor.

"Stop it! Leave him alone!" Osiri screamed. "My Queen... please! We only came to help you!"

Dysea turned from where she held Normya and looked at the two men. "Release her." She said.

Lancy and the man did so immediately and Osiri rushed to where Kr'nak was flat out on his back. She shoved at Tir'ut, knocking him out of the way. "Get away from him!" She snarled. "Get away!"

Tir'ut looked at Dysea confused as he stood up to his full height. "Elf mother?" He asked softly.

"They... they came to insure I was unhurt." Dysea said. "I think. They..."

"Lady Dysea we have to go." Cirith spoke now. "We don't have much time before we arrive at Belid. We can force open the bay doors and depart the same way we entered. We can return through these shafts but if we don't leave now, we'll have to fight our way back through the corridors."

Dysea looked at her. "You are... you are Valin's daughter?"

Cirith nodded. "Yes."

Dysea turned to look at Osiri as she stroked the skin of Kr'nak's face and helped him to sit up. "We can't leave." Dysea stated.

Cirith looked at her stunned as did Normya and Tir'ut. "Queen Dysea... you can't... you can't be serious!"

"Mother!" Normya protested. "This is the only chance we will get! We... we worked so hard to get here!"

Dysea turned back to Normya. "The Kavalians have taken your father from me Little One! Possibly one or two of your mothers!" She spat angrily. "They attacked Kranek as a diversion to get me! They have gone after our family and I want to know why!"

"Mother you..." Normya looked distraught as Dysea turned back to Osiri.

“Prove to me that you are telling me the truth!” Dysea snapped. “Prove that to me by taking this thing from my head!”

“Do it Osiri.” Kr'nak spoke rubbing his head. That he said it first almost sealed her decision for her regardless of what Osiri did in Dysea's eyes. “As you have said my wife... nothing but truth!”

His words caused both Normya and Tir'ut to look at him with wide eyes. Cirith shook her head unable to believe what she had heard. Tir'ut watched as Osiri went to the small bundle she had brought into the cell and took a small device from the folds of the blanket. Lancy and Cirith both gasped in surprise.

“A Static Inhibitor!” Cirith almost barked out as her hand came up with the small hold out Kinetic Magnum in her grasp. She leveled it at Osiri's head but felt Dysea's fingers wrap around her hand quickly. Cirith almost gasped at the touch of Dysea's hand upon hers and she looked at those incredible emerald eyes. “Dysea... that is...”

“She has told me what it is.” Dysea said. “This thing is already in my head. She has shown me. I want her to take it out Cirith. Put your weapon away. There is far more going on here than we know and I have every intention of finding out what is going on. And then I will take my vengeance on those who have hurt my family. And I will not stop until they are all dead!”

Osiri bravely stepped right up to Dysea, ignoring Cirith altogether. She reached up to push Dysea's silky hair from the back of her neck and Dysea grabbed it with both hands not caring that the blanket fell away revealing her naked body. Of everyone present, only Cirith and Normya did not look away instantly, for much different reasons. Normya because she grabbed the blanket to return it to covering her mother and Cirith because the sight of Dysea's naked flesh caused a raging warmth to cascade through her unlike any she had ever felt. It passed quickly as Normya covered her mother back up, but it didn't fade as it normally did when Cirith looked upon an attractive woman as a prospective bed partner. Osiri placed the Static Inhibitor on the back of Dysea's neck, found the tiny bump with her fingertip and then placed the angled end of the device over the tiny bump.

“It will sting for a few seconds.” She stated before pressing the red button and not giving Dysea a chance to prepare herself.

Dysea's eyes flew open in unequivocal shock and she opened her mouth to cry out before collapsing into Normya's arms.

“Mother!” Normya echoed. “Mother!”

CURILA 6

Anja stood beside Aricia and they simply stared at Martin's form on the bed in front of them. The stark white sheet covered just his lower body, leaving his chiseled upper body bare. The scars from the shrapnel Anja had long since made to vanish and now the only scars that remained were the ones they were all accustomed so well to, for each of them had explored his body as intimately as he had explored theirs.

“There is risk Anja.” Aricia told her softly. “You know that.”

Anja nodded. “He's been like this for hours Little Wolf.” She said using the name they had called her so long ago. A name they now only used to express their undying love and devotion to her. “I did a light probe as Helen taught me, and it is very much like it was when Walter first had me bring him and Dysea back on the Raptor.”

“You were not wolf then my love.” Aricia said looking at her. “He is wolf and now so are you. If you are successful and you pull him out of whatever is trapping him, he will smell that you are in full phase. He will not know it is you initially and he will unleash his full aura upon you. You will... you will be helpless before him.”

Anja met her azure blue eyes. “If you had told me that at any other time Aricia, I would be so wet it wouldn't be funny. Helpless before Martin does not frighten me Little Wolf.”

“You have never experienced his unshielded aura Anja.” Aricia said.

“Then maybe it's time I did.” Anja said. “Do we know it will affect me for sure? He has always held back Aricia. He turned me... just as he did Dysea. How do we know I won't be able to tolerate as she does. As you do?”

Aricia blinked several times as she looked at her. “We... we do not.” She said.

“Does that... does that bother you Little Wolf?” Anja asked.

“*Carians* Anja... nothing would please me more than to have you and For'mya be able to share what only Dysea and I can feel. His aura is so... so pure and so powerful! When he wraps us within it, at its height it is the most divine feeling in the universe.” Aricia told her squeezing her hands. “To know that you and For'mya could feel that too... it would make us... it would make us so complete.”

“I can do this Little Wolf.” Anja said.

Aricia nodded. “I will be monitoring from the next room.” She said. “If I sense you need me I will join the connection but you will have to guide me for I have never done what you are going to do.”

Anja chortled. “Well... it isn't like I do this all the time either.” She said. She squeezed her hand again. “For'mya? Deia?”

Aricia shook her head slowly. “Nothing yet.” She answered. “Sadi will contact me immediately if they discover something.”

Anja's eyebrows rose a little. “Sadi?”

Aricia nodded. “Apparently this Pralor that Martin spoke of before all this happened contacted Andro and Helen. They went to meet with them.”

“Pralor?” Anja gasped. “Avi said all of the Pralors were... he said they were extinct!”

Aricia nodded. “That is not the case it seems.” She said. She pressed close to Anja and drew her tight with one arm. Anja's arm slipped around her waist as well and they looked at each other intently. None of the Queens were afraid to show affection for each other, no matter if they were in public or not. “I will be in the next room. If I see... if I see you are successful and... I will seal the room so no one can disturb you. If he starts... neither he nor you will want to stop.”

“You are in phase as well Little Wolf.” Anja said. “Even in the next room it will affect you. It is a need for all of us... a real need Aricia. Don't deny it. We never have before and we should not now.”

Aricia smiled and nodded. “Very well.” Aricia leaned over and they shared a deep kiss of love and feeling. She drew away after a long moment and nodded her head before turning and leaving the room.

Anja turned slowly and looked at Martin on the bed. Even had she not been wolf and tied to him so deeply, Anja would still have thought he was the most delicious man she had ever laid eyes upon. She knew it that first night they were together so long ago. Martin had loved her so thoroughly that night, so utterly captivating her senses and every pleasure receptor in her body. And he had done the same thing for the last twenty plus years as well. No matter how many times, no matter how intense, he could still steal her breath away with just a simple caress. He needed her now, and Anja didn't hesitate. She began to pull her uniform off, quickly striping away the layer of Mark IV ArmorPly. That was quickly followed by the t-shirt she wore underneath, her large breasts proud and firm, and the nipples hardening ever so slightly in the cool air. She stripped off her thin pink panties and began pulling the sheet from Martin's body, easing her petite frame onto the bed and stretching out her five foot three body onto his deliciously chiseled six foot two frame. Her blood began a slow burn for her handsome wolf mate but Anja knew she had a task to do first. She situated her body on top of his, the sheet now covering their lower bodies only and she began to lick and nuzzle her way up and across his broad powerful chest.

Her four inch long tongue explored flesh she knew so well and she did it slowly and delicately. As she moved upwards she made sure to shift her hips slightly every few moments against his flaccid cock. She needed him to know she was here with him; she needed him to feel her flesh against his. As she came level with his head, she took his handsome face in her small hands and dropped butterfly kisses all over his cheeks and lips. She was careful to rub her cheek against the stubble of his face and the softness of his beard. There were powerful scent glands behind the ears and Anja made sure to drag her ears directly across his nose so that the only thing he smelled was her sweet honey scent filtering to him. Almost thirty years of sharing him with the other women she loved, and they all knew exactly what each of them did to him that could set him off. Anja was the smallest of his Queens, the most petite in physical stature, and she knew he loved to feel her small form spread across his body with his beautiful cock filling her. He could hold her impaled on his shaft with one arm, leaving his other hand free to explore her body in invigorating ways. When in the midst of passion Anja would often talk dirty to him while she nuzzled his cheek and nose making sure all he could smell was her. He loved it when she did that and Anja did that now.

Anja used her thumbs to stroke his cheeks as she stared at his face. “I need... we need you to come back to us Marty.” She whispered softly. “We... we can’t live without you. I’m... I’m coming in there with you Martin Leonidas my mate. Whatever it is holding you I won’t allow it to keep you any longer.”

Anja closed her jade green eyes and pressed her forehead to his, dropping any and all pretense of Mindvoice shielding and reached out with tiny fingers of Mindvoice as Helen had instructed her. The Mindvoice shields of Martin Leonidas were the most powerful of any being in the universe and any attempt to enter his mind without his permission would result in an attack that no one would survive. When he came together with Torma those skills only grew in power and it was Helen and Arzoal who guided them in what they learned. Anja concentrated harder than she had ever concentrated on one thing and began to skip across the outside of those dominating shields looking for the one crack she needed to ease into the threads of his thoughts. She found it after only a few moments, the backdoor so to speak, that only his wives and mates and his first born son knew of. She found it and Anja Leonidas she leaped without question or pause from the prepace of those shields into the realm of the single mind in the universe that so many lifeforms feared.

Eurin turned to look at Aricia as she came into the small room with an over abundance of medical monitoring equipment. Sivana, Ceuma and Yuriko stood silently watching Anja as she began to disrobe. Aricia glanced at Atropos and Belen where they stood in the back of the room with Zaniai.

“Aricia my sister...” He spoke softly as Aricia came up to him. “I don’t like this. It is dangerous for her. Too dangerous. The King... Martin... he is ten times more powerful than even the *Feravomir*. If something... if something goes wrong he could shred her mind and not even know it.”

“Do you believe he would do anything to harm us Atropos?” Aricia asked. “Any of us?”

“Not knowingly... no.” Atropos answered. “He would cut his own arm off in order to keep any of you safe. But this... Aricia... I have heard what Daniel and For’mya have said about the day he came from that place on Ukwav. He pulverized two slabs of black granite with his mind alone. The slabs weighed two or three tons apiece! He pulverized them into dust! And he has grown far stronger since then.”

Aricia reached up and placed her hand flat on her older brother’s cheek. “I love you brother.” She said softly. “And I need you to have the same faith in Martin that we do.”

“I do sister.” Atropos said. “That does not mean I will not worry for my charge.”

Aricia smiled and reached up on her tip toes to kiss his rough cheek. “She will succeed.” Aricia said. “Take Zaniai and Belen from here brother. This is not something I will allow them to witness.”

Atropos nodded his head instantly. “Belen... Prefect Zaniai... we must go.” He said looking at them. “Now!”

Belen didn’t hesitate and grabbed Zaniai’s arm and pulled him from the room. Atropos leaned over and kissed his sister’s cheek. “I will be waiting your word.” He said.

Aricia nodded and waited for him to leave before turning to Sivana. “Sivana... seal the door to Martin’s room and this room as well.”

Sivana turned and moved to the control console in front of her as Aricia settled into the chair next to Eurin.

“Aricia... what is she doing?” Eurin asked.

“She is going to attempt to do something that only she has ever done before.” Aricia said. “Enter our beloved’s mind when his shields are still up.”

Eurin blinked several times. “But I thought... aren’t you all connected within Mindvoice already?”

Aricia nodded slowly. “Yes we are. We have free reign within Martin’s mind...” She answered. “But there are places that even we do not go and things we do not attempt with him Eurin. He is just too strong.”

“Then I... I don’t understand what is going on.” Eurin said.

“Many years ago there was a pureblood vampire named Deval.” Aricia said. “Anja was angry at the time and she... somehow she was able to reach through another’s mind and touch this Deval across a thousand kilometers Eurin. The *Feravomir* believes it is because she is a surgeon by nature and she is very exacting in her skill. Her anger gave her added focus and she was able to follow the strands of Mindvoice through this third person back to the one who she sought. He was responsible for hurting a dear friend of ours and ultimately he

was responsible for turning her into a vampire. The skill needed to do something like this only Anja possesses. It takes a finely tuned mind used to working under delicate conditions.”

“You could not do this?” Eurin asked.

Aricia shook her head. “Neither I nor Dysea are capable of such precise control as is needed for this. We are too passionate. Only Anja has the ability to master her emotions in this way, though she hardly ever shows it. We believe it is because she possesses this skill that most of the time she is the one who guards her emotions least when in public or private with us.”

Eurin looked at her. “What happened to this Deval?” She asked.

Aricia didn’t take her eyes off where Anja laid on top of Martin in the next room, their heads touching. “Anja shredded his mind into nothing.” Aricia said softly.

“Oh wow!” Anja spoke as she stood among the towering black rock walls all around her.

She turned in her spot, seeing nothing but these walls reaching to the blue sky above. She wore her Mark IV ArmorPly, which was surprising for she had stripped out of her uniform and underclothes before getting into the bed with Martin. As she completed the full circle she did, she realized then she was within Martin’s mind, yet now it was so much clearer than it had ever been and utterly focused. She had seen this terrain before and immediately she knew where she was. This was Thermopylae on Earth. This was where his father had died. She had been here before, many times with him, as all of them had. He had brought them here within the realms of his mind so that they could know who he truly was. She recognized the trail he usually led them down and she began to scramble across the worn path between the skyscraper high walls all around her.

It had never been so vivid before. She could actually smell the scent of the sea nearby, feel the whisper of the ocean breeze as it swirled through the canyon, and she could... she could smell the faint traces of burning wood. Anja quickened her pace, almost slipping on the smooth rocks, as she made her way towards where she knew the entrance to The Hot Gates would be. Yes he had brought them all here before, and he had shared his father’s memories of those few days with them. None of them had been the same after, and none of them were able to hold back the tears of what he had allowed them to see. The scale of brutality and death was far beyond anything any of them had seen as they witnessed those terrible battles as if they were there with them. Every thrust of a spear, every slash of a Spartan sword, every clang of a Spartan shield on steel. The screams of the vampires disguised as Persians as they fell. The horrible howls of the wounded wolf Spartans as they battled beside their King in what was, even to this day, the greatest show of courage and determination ever displayed in the history of the universe. Three hundred Spartans and their allies. Three hundred Lycavorians and their human allies had stood here and fell to the last man for the right to be free of oppression. This was the turning point of the Lycavorians and their rebellion Anja now knew. This single event had caused them to finally unite under one banner and throw off the High Coven yoke of slavery for all time. He showed them this as a means to convey to them what he would resort to if the need ever arose. What he could and would do if he was ever called upon to do it. It had terrified all of them to know that he was capable of such violence, but coming here allowed them to understand why and it gave them a closeness to him that they had not had before.

Anja, Aricia, all of them knew he came here often when his mind wandered. He would sit on the cliffs high above where his father had fallen and simply listen to the ocean and inhale the scent of the sea. They knew it was his way of being close to the father he never knew. The father he had only seen in visions. Anja caught his minty scent on the wind and this stunned her for it was just as powerful now as it was when she was near him in the physical realm. The potency of his scent energized her now as her wolf blood surged with the knowledge that her mate was so close. Anja scrambled up the last steep portion of the path that would lead her to the opening of the Hot Gates and she came to an abrupt halt at what she saw, her eyes wide.

She expected to see the ocean stretched out before her as they always did, the sun slowly crossing the horizon in the distance. Martin had pointed out to them once where each of them had a doorway into his mind and soul. Each of them represented a spot on the horizon that made the scenery complete. He had told them that when For’mya had finally become Queen and they were all truly together, the scenery of the horizon had calmed to the most tranquil bit of perspective he had ever seen. Four sections of horizon were simply serene while the fifth wavered ever so slightly, like ripples of a pond when one tossed a rock into the center. It was not something any of them had ever asked him about after the first time. He never told them which one of them

generated that ripple on the horizon and he never volunteered it. He told them this was what it all meant to him. They were the ones who allowed him to come here and not see the savagery of the place where his father had died, but the almost majestic sight of beauty that the place had been before that first day so long ago. He told them this is where he had spoken to his father on several occasions, something all of them hadn't believed but kept to themselves.

What Anja saw now were two angry black sections of the horizon that touched the cliffs and led to the ocean far below. What she saw now were two towering black portions of the horizon that should not have been there. And at the base of one of those black walls of nothing was Martin Leonidas. Anja blinked several times in shock for the Martin she saw now was nearly feral looking. He wielded his Nehtes and a sword not unlike the ones that Androcles had forged and he was smashing those weapons against the unyielding black wall screaming out his rage. He was naked, his entire body covered in sweat and dirt and sand from the hard packed ground beneath his feet. He looked like some angry god from the story books her human father had showed to her as a child.

Anja hesitated for only a moment before moving forward again, this time at a dead sprint. She covered the distance quickly and soon was able to hear what he was raging at the blackness and it brought her up short once more.

"...will not take them from me!" He bellowed. "Give them back! They are mine! I won't allow you to hurt them! Give them back!"

As each sentence passed from his lips he added another crushing blow against the shimmering black shield. It was almost as if it was made of liquid, yet no matter how much strength he hammered this wall with, it left no mark. Anja knew what her Martin could do with a Nehtes, and every time he swung his weapon it could cleave a fully grown wolf in two, yet now it left not even a scratch.

"Martin?" She heard her voice squeak out softly.

Anja gasped when his yellow/gold eyes snapped around to look at her. His features were angrier than she had ever seen them, his dual wolf fangs so unique to the Leonidas line, were now fully bared and exposed in all their ferocious beauty. She moved forward without fear, her jade colored eyes taking in his dominating physical body. Anja would never fear him, no matter the cause or reason; she would never fear this man. His wolf eyes focused on her and his face lost a small portion of the angry swell to it.

"Lover? It's me..." Anja spoke.

"They won't give them back to me!" Martin snarled. "To us!" She watched him turn once more and slash out with the sword, watching as it remained unblemished against the blow that would undoubtedly be a devastatingly fatal wound on a living person. "I want them back do you hear me!" Martin screamed. "You will give them back to me!"

"Martin... what..."

"I can't feel them!" Martin raged. "It is a blackness! They..." He turned back to the wall. "Return them to me damn you! They do not belong to you! They are mine!"

Anja stepped closer. "Marty... lover... who... who has them? Who are you talking about?"

"My Melda Min!" Martin barked. "My Kinsoargai. He is keeping them from me! He won't give them back!"

Anja looked at the towering blackness. "Who?"

"Can't you see Red?" He barked. "Look... look at the threads of blackness! It is that... it is that medwawnubous Xaxon! He won't give them back to me! He's pissed because I told him to go nubou himself and now he has taken them from me!" He looked up at the towering blackness. "Fight me you nubous coward! You want me... fight me! Be a man!"

Anja stepped closer to him, reaching out with her hand and placing it on his arm. Her eyes grew wide as she realized that he felt so real, his flesh hot to the touch, the blood pulsing through his veins. As she moved closer and his head turned to look at her, Anja was very nearly overwhelmed with his powerful minty scent. She felt his wolf aura then, so powerful and pure, and it caused her knees to become weak. Her own wolf blood began to burn hotter than it had in all the time they had been together. Her mind began to lose focus, his image beginning to blur out of clarity as the nipples on her breasts became painfully hard, shoved against the material of the inside of the ArmorPly she wore. Her center became instantly drenched in her sweet honey scented juices

and every nerve ending in her body was sounding off as if she was submerged in a stadium of magnificent pleasure. So overpowering... so deliciously, wonderfully overwhelming.

Anja summoned the last dredges of the incredible willpower she possessed. She called upon all of her reserves of command and her strength of will. The resolution and strength of will that was the reason so many people within the Union considered her second only to Aricia in Mindvoice power and ability.

“Martin...” She gasped raggedly. “Marty... you have to come... you have to come back to us!”

“I will not!” Martin shouted. “Not until this dog faces me and gives me back what is mine!”

“Martin!” Anja barked now as her own eyes shifted and her fangs burst from her gums. The tone of her voice made his head snap around and glare at her once more. “Little Wolf... I... we need you Martin! So... so many need you!” Anja met his eyes now, seeing the feral glow in them and needing to be wrapped in that savage and wild aura. “You... you must come back! You must leave this place!”

“I will not abandon those I love!” Martin snarled.

“Martin... we...”

“They are not dead!” Martin screamed. “I would know! You would know! I will not leave until that ronnu gives them back to me! I will not!”

Anja shook her head back and forth, tears beginning to fall from her eyes. “You... you can not help them in here!” She shouted. “I... I can’t stay in here! It’s... it’s too much Martin. I can barely... I can barely...”

She staggered forward against him and without hesitation his weapons dropped and he gripped her arms. “Anja!”

She whimpered loudly as his naked flesh touched her and he drew her close. The burning was almost too much to bear... it felt so divinely breathtaking... yet the burning was almost truly painful now. “Lover... Martin... you are unshielded here! Your aura... I can’t...” She shook her head back and forth. “It’s too much... I...” She lifted her head and looked into his wolf eyes of yellow/gold. Eyes that she had loved from the very first moment she had discovered what he was. Eyes that had always made her feel safe and desired like no woman ever had. “We... we need you Martin Leonidas! You can not help them in here... and we need you!”

The blackness closest to them suddenly shimmered violently, a terrible sound like metal flapping in the wind reverberated all around them and then it vanished completely before their eyes. Once it was gone both of them could see the serene horizon once more and they both felt the whisper of love and passion caress their skin, along with the faint scent of fresh wildflowers. Martin’s eyes grew wider as he faced that horizon.

“Melda Min!” He gasped still clinging to Anja and holding her close.

As immersed in his mind as she was, Anja felt it as well, and the added threads of Dysea’s powerful mind no matter where she was reinforced her own and she dug her fingers into his shoulders. She could feel Dysea’s life force, her very essence filtering through him and by default her as well, and suddenly Anja realized just how important they all were to him. How important they all were to each other.

“You... you see!” She gasped. “We... we can fight this! We can fight this... but we need to be together! We need to be strong!”

Martin closed his eyes and basked in the feeling of Dysea’s essence, wrapping it around himself tightly, entwining it even deeper with Aricia and Anja. He turned slowly to look at her shivering in his arms.

“Please... please Martin!” Anja gasped. “Come back with me! Come back with me and we will fight this! All of us! I can’t stay... I can’t stay here any longer! I want to... I want to surrender... I want...”

Martin lifted her into his arms and crushed his lips over hers causing Anja’s mind to explode in bright beautiful lights. “All of me Red!” His thoughts reached for her. “All of me! I will hold nothing back any longer! The old me... the old me is dead and gone! My own son has taught me something and I will hold nothing back any longer! The old me is gone and you are stronger than you know!”

Anja’s mind screamed in unadulterated harmony and she wrapped her arms around his head and poured forth her entire essence in returning his volcanic kiss.

“...gods!” Ceuma gasped as her fingers danced across the console in front of her. “Her vitals just went through the ceiling!”

“Her endorphin levels just spiked at three hundred percent!” Sivana stammered. “Her heart rate has tripled and all of Martin’s vitals just blew off the chart!”

Eurin looked at Aricia who had an almost dreamlike expression on her face. “Aricia! What is happening? What’s wrong?”

Aricia turned slowly and looked at Eurin, easily feeling Anja and their beloved Martin pulling themselves from wherever they had been. Anja would tell her all about it in time. They never kept secrets from each other. “She is... she is experiencing all Martin has to give her Divine One.” She stated gently. “He is holding nothing back now and it is so wonderfully glorious.” She rose to her feet pushing back from the small console she had been sitting at. “I... I must go to them.”

“Aricia...” Sivana asked moving closer to her. “Anja... she is...”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!” The female voice echoed through the small monitoring room drawing all of their attention to the room on the other side of the view window. Anja rose up on top of Martin’s body, her eyes fully changed and her fangs extended to their full length as she tossed off the sheet that covered their bodies. They watched Martin sit up suddenly and his powerful arms engulfed her petite form, rolling her over beneath him and covering her gasping lips with his own.

Eurin’s eyes were wide in shock as her hand went to her throat. “Oh... oh my!” She gasped softly. She turned back to Aricia and inhaled sharply as she saw Aricia’s eyes had fully changed now as well, her long wolf fangs exposed from beneath her lips. “Aricia?” She rasped.

“Forgive me... forgive me Eurin. I must... I must go to them.” She stammered before moving quickly for the door.

Eurin turned to look at Sivana and Ceuma, her eyes wide. She watched as Ceuma touched several controls on the console and the large view window became darkened and they could no longer see inside the room. She saw something on their faces, understanding and contentment and realization finally began to wash over her.

“Sivana?” She asked softly. “Ceuma?”

“I believe it is time we find something to eat and discover where we will be staying while we are here.” Sivana said.

Ceuma nodded. “Yes... for I need my husband and mate to...”

Sivana looked at her and took her hand quickly knowing exactly what she was going to say. “Yes... so do I.” She said with a smile as she nuzzled her clone sister’s cheek. “So do I.”

PHY’IAD’S COMMAND SHIP

Dysea collapsed into her daughter’s arms even as Cirith reached for her as well. Osiri staggered back unable to understand what was happening. Normya dropped to the deck, Cirith’s hands helping her to steady Dysea as she shuddered almost violently. Cirith’s eyes grew wide when she felt the tremors coming from Dysea’s body and the heat that raced up her fingers and into her arms from where she held Dysea’s arms. She felt an enormous surge of uninhibited sexual energy and Mindvoice power rise through Dysea and it rippled through her unlike any sensations she had ever felt. It was very nearly overwhelming her own control and had Lancy not stepped forward behind her to take her shoulders and support her, she would have surrendered to the magnificent vibrations completely.

“Mother?” Normya gasped fearfully strangely unable to sense what Cirith was feeling. “Mother... what is wrong?”

“*Nauta Melme!*” Dysea sobbed. “My... my *Nauta Melme* is...”

Normya stroked her mother’s head as tears flooded her eyes. “I know *Amille*. I know.” She whispered. “I... I miss him... I miss him terribly too. He...”

Dysea’s head pulled away from Normya’s chest and she looked at her daughter with wide emerald eyes. “He lives Normya!” She gasped. “Your father is not dead!”

Normya’s eyes grew wide. “What?”

“I can... I can feel him within me daughter.” Dysea spoke with a brilliant smile on her face. “I can feel him... and he is so beautiful now!”

“Mother... they... Andro said...” Normya couldn’t believe her words yet the vibrations coming from her mother were unmistakable.

“Andro knows... lower... lower your shields Normya.” Dysea said turning to where Tir'ut stood with an expression of disbelief on his face. “Lower them Tir'ut. You... are tied together now and you must lower your shields together.”

Tir'ut moved up behind Normya quickly, putting his hands on her shoulders and completely ignoring the fact that his elf mother was exposed to his eyes. Once he was touching his Blessed Wife, he dropped all of his Mindvoice shields without hesitation and he heard and felt Normya gasp out and shiver, one of her hands reaching up to grip his hand tightly.

“*Alvva!*” Normya cried gripping her mother's arm. “*Alvva!*” (papa)

The tears were pouring from Dysea's eyes now and she basked in the tremors she felt. The distance was too great for her to communicate directly, but she could feel him easily, like a luminous star on a dark night. She could feel Aricia and *Melyanna* as well, and the joy all of them felt at being able to feel her once more. She felt Bella's presence and the happiness that was coursing through her and it was very nearly overwhelming. Dysea also felt something else, another mind; a powerful mind within their connection but remaining just on the fringes and then she sensed that For'mya was not with them and her attention went to reaching for her.

“Stop!” Cirith barked quickly pulling on Dysea's arms. “Lady Dysea you must stop!”

Dysea looked at her. “Wha...?”

“Someone on this ship might detect you!” Cirith exclaimed.

That simple sentence caused Dysea's mind to refocus and she clamped her shields down once more, but not before sending her warmth and love to the ones she desired most in the universe and not before she felt the commanding pulse of love and passion from her *Nauta Melme* for her. She almost whimpered out loud in need but controlled her reactions. As her shields began to drop into place she felt the warm fingers of their oldest son as he caressed her and sent a sudden throb of happiness and reassurance to her. Dysea closed her eyes tightly, gripping Normya's arm and nodded her head as she turned and squeezed Cirith's hand on her shoulder.

“Thank... thank you.” She gasped opening her eyes and looking at the beautiful vampire female. A female that she suddenly realized was not completely vampire. Her eyes grew a little wider as she looked at her. Her vanilla/berry scent was far more pronounced than any vampire scent she had ever smelled. Even more than Isabella's soft Lilac scent and it tickled her wolf nose deliciously. “You... you are not entirely...”

Cirith shook her head. “No. But that is a discussion for another time.” She said quickly. “Immortals have incredible natural shielding ability within Mindvoice, but there is the distinct possibility one or two could have enough strength to detect us even at our advanced level.”

Dysea nodded her head once more. “You... you are correct. I forgot... I forgot where we were for a moment.” She said.

“We really need to leave!” Cirith stated. “Now!”

Dysea shook her head again. “No.” She said as she got slowly to her feet and pulled the blanket around her tighter.

Normya scrambled to her feet as her mother turned to look at Kr'nak and Osiri. “Mother this is crazy!” She exclaimed. “We have to go!”

Dysea moved closer to where Kr'nak held Osiri tightly to his body, even as the second Coven troop held his rifle on them. She looked at Osiri and reached up to brush the spot on the back of her neck where the Static Inhibitor had been. “Thank you Osiri.” She said softly. “Thank you both.”

“You... you should listen to your people.” Kr'nak told her. “Get out while you can. We will be arriving on Belid in a few hours and I can't guarantee what will take place once we do.”

“How much time do we have before they come for me to take me to the surface?” Dysea asked.

Kr'nak met her eyes. “We'll arrive in perhaps two hours. Phy'iad will want to depart the ship immediately upon arriving. As it stands now... I was to take you to the transport fifteen minutes before we arrived.”

“Then we have ninety minutes to try and figure something out.” Dysea said.

“Mother...” Normya spoke coming up beside her. “What do you mean?”

“Your father's brother intended this for a reason.” Dysea said turning to look at her. “I am not a major piece of whatever he is planning... only a pawn as Kr'nak has said. For what purpose I do not know, but I do not like being a pawn of anyone.”

“This is not wise *Darthirii Ilhar* Dysea.” Tir'ut spoke moving up beside Normya. “My father would not approve.”

Dysea nodded looking at him. “Yes... and I'm quite sure neither would my *Nauta Melme*.”

“Then why?” Cirith asked.

Dysea turned now to look at her. “Because whatever is happening is larger than just me. Pusintin came after our family for a reason. He set out to kill all of us for a purpose and I want to know what that purpose is.” Her emerald eyes narrowed. “And I want to meet this traitor of Lycavorians... for when I do, I will end his miserable life myself.”

“*Shu!*” Cirith swore. “Then we'd better come up with a plan quickly.” (shit)

Dysea's tilted her head slightly as she looked at her. “You understand?” She asked in genuine surprise.

Cirith met her gaze. “I'm half Lycavorian.” Cirith stated proudly. “Yes I understand. And I would do the same thing.”

Dysea felt a powerful warmth cascade through her at this news but she fought it down and turned to Tir'ut. “I know my sons Tir'ut and they will be coming after me. And I have learned a great deal of your father over these last months.”

Tir'ut shook his head. “My father is coming.” He stated unequivocally. “We only need to survive until he arrives.”

“Lynom!” Normya gasped. “We should contact Lynom! We are close enough now to do this without being detected. Iriral taught us much mother!”

Dysea's eyes grew wider. “Oh my Iriral?” She gasped beginning to reach out for her Bonded Dragon Sister.

“No... if you reach for your dragon in Mindvoice it will be like a beacon!” Cirith stated grabbing her arm once more. “Even an Immortal with no training will detect it!”

Dysea kept her shields clamped in place and nodded. She turned to Kr'nak and Osiri. “Will you help us?”

“That is not a question you need to ask.” Osiri answered immediately.

Dysea looked at her and then to Kr'nak. “Then I have to know why?” She asked.

Osiri looked at Kr'nak with adoring eyes before dropping her hands to her abdomen and rubbing it gently. She looked back to Dysea. “We want our child to grow up free.” She stated.

Dysea stepped closer to them now, surprise etched on her face. “You carry his... you carry Kr'nak's child?” She asked.

Osiri nodded with a bright smile as she pressed back against Kr'nak. “I am... I was a scientist Milady Dysea. I know enough to insure I do not become pregnant unless *I* want to. Kr'nak gave back to me something I never thought I would have again when Phy'iad killed my first husband and my children. This is what I need to insure our future. I... we want this child Milady. More than anything.”

Dysea looked at Kr'nak and saw him nod his head without a moment's hesitation. “I will do anything to see my son born! To see my Blessed Wife free” He stated. “And I will not allow Phy'iad to take that away from me. Command me Queen Dysea. Command me and I will follow you without question to achieve this goal.”

HARBINGER

Dutkne and Wayonn walked down the ramp first, Drey and the others following directly behind them. The buzz of work and machinery did not stop as they reached the bottom of the ramp, their eyes going to where the dark skinned elf female stood a few meters away. They could see nearly two dozen heavily armed men and women like the ones that had come onto the transport, and though their weapons were not pointed directly at them, they were within easy reach for well trained troops. And something told Dutkne these men and women were far more than well trained troops. All of them wore similar uniforms with crimson coloring down the outsides of their arms and legs. Dutkne knew without being told that these were the soldiers that Wayonn had told Devra about. The *Durcunusaan*. The Wolves of the Blood. The elite force that guarded the Lycavorian Royal family and all those they considered important to them.

They watched as the tall figure of the Lycavorian broke from the rank and stepped up to them. His helmet hid almost all of his features, crimson paint streaked down the sides of his helmet in angular design. His dark eyes were looking not at Dutkne and Wayonn but at the blue skinned Vanari security detachment of four females and two males. All of them were armed still and they stood around Devra in a loose formation that provided them excellent opportunity to respond to almost any threat.

“You were told no weapons would be allowed.” The *Durcumusaan* officer spoke gruffly to Dutkne, but his eyes remaining on the Vanari security detachment.

“They are members of Regent Devra’s Vanari Security Detachment.” Dutkne spoke calmly. “I will vouch for them.”

The officer cut his eyes back to Dutkne. “You will vouch for them?” He asked him indifferently. “What makes you think I care what you vouch for?”

Wayonn stepped forward slightly. “I am...”

The officer turned to him. “I know who you are *Val’istar*.” He said gruffly. He turned his head slightly until his eyes fell upon Lu’ria where she was standing. He saw her nod her head and he motioned with his hand. “Confiscate their weapons.” He barked out as he turned back.

“No!” Naesta barked bringing up her hand weapon as she moved closer to her mother. The rest of the Vanari detachment moved with blinding speed in forming a tight circle around Devra, Arduri and Naesta, their weapons coming up into ready positions.

Vanari Commandos were the finest of the Vanari Defense Forces. The finest trained and the most skilled; the strongest and the fastest. Even as they settled into stances that would allow them to protect their Regent from harm, the *Durcumusaan* troops had already moved. The Vanari suddenly found themselves surrounded by no less than ten Lycavorians that had moved with a speed unlike any they had witnessed, and their P190A3s were now leveled at them from less than twelve inches away. Devra’s eyes were wide at this incident, while Naesta and Arduri were shocked that the Lycavorians had gotten so close so quickly. Any firing now and they would all die, while taking perhaps only one or two of the Lycavorians with them. The Vanari were not as tough as they knew Lycavorians to be, and at this range they were at a decided and quite obvious disadvantage and they knew it.

Dutkne blinked several times himself, never having seen any of his kind move with such speed, and he turned slowly from where the officer was remaining in front of him with a very confident smile on his face.

“If you vouch for them... I suggest you inform them to lower their weapons.” The officer spoke calmly watching as Dutkne turned back to him. “I will not ask again.”

Wayonn turned now and looked at Devra. “Devra... order your people to lower their weapons!” He said firmly. “We are in no danger here!”

“No one disarms us!” Naesta barked. “We will decide if there is danger or not!”

“Naesta is right!” Arduri snapped. “We will protect our mother!”

“Protect her from what?” The new voice spoke loudly. “No one here has any intention of doing her harm. I believe you came to us.”

Dutkne and Wayonn smelled him first and they turned quickly as Androcles moved around from under the side on the *MENKLA* transport, his fingers tracing the smooth belly of the ship. He moved a few meters away from the ship and stopped with his hands clasped behind his back, looking at Dutkne and Wayonn intently. Dutkne and Wayonn were the only ones who noticed that Andro now wore brown contacts to hide his true eye color and Wayonn was struck by how much he looked like Resumar and his father. The resemblance was unnerving.

Without thinking about it, something that Dutkne would not even realize until many months later, he stepped away from the others and moved right up to Andro. Drey, Nirilo and Caia were the ones who took notice of this fact more than anyone and Caia’s hands gripped Drey’s arm tightly. Wayonn noticed their reaction and hid his small smile. Androcles was shielding heavily, allowing only a small portion of his aura to escape from around him, though Drey and Caia sensed something was awry. Nirilo had been among their people and worked with Dutkne enough to know his grandson very well and though he could not feel a Lycavorian aura as other wolves could, he also knew something was amiss when the *Durcumusaan* did nothing to stop Dutkne from moving.

“The Protectorate and the Vanari have a... tenuous relationship.” Dutkne spoke as Andro met his eyes. “We are not enemies... but nor are we allies. I ask... I ask that you allow them some leeway... Admiral.” He finished emphasizing the Admiral.

Andro’s eyes stared at him for a long moment. He could feel the power in this young man in front of him, he could feel the blood pulsing through his veins and oddly enough, it made him relax ever so slightly. Not in any sort of defensive manner, for Andro could tell this Dutkne and all of the Lycavorians now standing on the deck before them would side with them in any sort of confrontation. It was more an overall sense of calm that Dutkne exuded and in turn, passed on to him. Andro turned back to where the blue skinned Vanari were standing with their weapons up and surrounding the three females.

“I will allow them leeway when they lower their weapons.” He finally said. “Greeting me with weapons drawn is not the way to invoke my good nature. They are in no danger here.”

“So you say!” Naesta spat from where she stood.

Dutkne rolled his eyes and turned back to look at her his own patience with Naesta’s attitude wearing thin. Nirilo beat him to the punch though.

“Naesta... for once shut your mouth and be still!” Nirilo barked. “I grow tired of your inability to see beyond what our father has taught you!”

“I will not!” Naesta snapped. “You have been among them too long Nirilo! You are blind to the past!”

“I am not blind to the past! I simply do not choose to live in it!” Nirilo snarled at her. “Dutkne and the Protectorate have done nothing but help you... help all of us since you joined with us!”

“We can find Caliria on our own!” Naesta snapped.

“And you would have blundered somewhere you should not have been and gotten mother captured or killed. And Arduri and the others as well!” Nirilo popped.

“Naesta...” Arduri spoke softly. “Perhaps Nirilo is right.”

“Naesta... stand down.” Devra told her daughter. “I do not believe we are in any danger here.”

“Mother... how do we know that?” Naesta hissed. “Father has said they are cunning and just like the animals they can become! We should...”

“If I had wanted you dead or captured...” Andro spoke now moving closer to the group of Vanari. “It would already be done.”

“Hah!! We are not as helpless as you think!” Naesta snapped turning back to him.

“Yes... actually you are.” Andro spoke.

The combined trumpets of two dragons in the landing bay echoed painfully around the walls even as cavernous as it was. The snap and pop of Elynth and Majeir extending their wings out to their full extension was deafening as well. The sound caused everyone but those from the Union to cower and drop to the deck in real fear as first Elynth and then Majeir lowered their huge heads over the shoulders of the *Durcunusaan* that they had come up behind.

“*Nubou!*” Drey exclaimed as he pulled Caia close to him.

Devra’s eyes were wide in terror as she gripped Arduri’s arms where they had dropped to their knees on the deck. “By the Grace of the Four Prophets!” Devra almost screamed.

Elynth’s golden eyes and Majeir’s ruby orbs glittered in the light of the landing bay, giving both of them an extra fearsome appearance. When a dragon extended its wings out to their full span, it made them appear much larger than they may have been, and it was an extremely intimidating visage. Wayonn, who knew of the existence of dragons within the Union before coming here, even he was taken aback by their size and savage looking appearance now that he stood before them. The pure Lycavorians from the Protectorate, while better able to control the fear they felt, still moved closer together amongst themselves. Naesta and Arduri were holding their weapons on Elynth, their eyes wide as their hearts raced in fear. Even Dutkne was frozen in his spot, his dark eyes wide as he looked on.

“Your weapons will not harm us.” Andro’s voice stated.

Naesta spun around, her hand wrapped around the small Pulse Blaster as she attempted to bring it to bear on Andro’s head. His right hand snapped out with lightning like speed and he slapped the weapon from her grasp before she was able to complete her turn. One of the male Vanari Commandos began to bring his smaller Pulse rifle up but Andro’s right hand snapped out again and his closed fist smashed across the man’s jaw with enough force to spin him around and send him to the deck unconscious. Arduri was turning now, bringing her

own pulse weapon up and she saw the light blue shimmer around this Lycavorian's body. A flash from the side and she saw a mane of glittering white hair zip past her with a similar shield around her figure. It was the strange dark skinned female with white hair she had seen standing a short distance away. Arduri, Naesta and Devra could only watch in shock as Lu'ria used her inbred elven speed, now augmented by her wolf blood, to move in front of a Vanari commando. The light blue shield around her flared briefly as she slapped away the barrel of the pulse rifle and impossibly used the body of the commando to walk up the front of his chest. Just before she used her legs to push off his shoulders and flip a hundred and eighty degrees backwards, the toe of her combat boot connected with his jaw and snapped his head back viciously. The blow carried enough power in it to physically lift him off the deck and drop him back down to the hard surface completely dazed and only half conscious. As Arduri began to bring her weapon up Lu'ria's hand snapped out, now filled with a gleaming Drow Glaive. The two blades were four inches long from the base and the tip of one end of that glaive pressed to her throat.

"I wouldn't." Lu'ria stated calmly.

"*ENOUGH!*" Devra screamed as she stepped away from Arduri and looked at Andro as he tossed a Vanari pulse rifle to the deck. Devra's lips snapped shut as Elynth stepped closer to her and breathed heavily through her nostrils, the sound very nearly a growl. "We surrender to you! Do not hurt my people!" She turned on Wayonn with evil green eyes. "You lied to us Wayonn!" She snarled. "Curse you... you have led us into a trap!"

Nirilo stepped forward. "Mother that is not..."

"This is no trap." Andro's deep voice sounded from behind her. Devra turned around quickly to see him standing right in front of her. She watched as he held out his hand and gasped as Naesta's pulse hand weapon leaped into his grip from six meters away. Andro flipped it around in his hand so that the grip was facing her. "I just do not care for weapons that are pointed at me when I have made no threatening actions. I imagine you would feel the same if our roles were reversed?"

Devra met his dark eyes intently. There was something about this young man, something that she could not place her finger on. He was far too young to be an Admiral in any fleet that she knew existed, yet he spoke with the words of someone who had great wisdom and inner peace. Devra looked down at how he held the weapon out to her and she reached up slowly to curl her fingers around the grip. That tightness of fear she had felt in her gut only moments ago was slowly drifting away. "Yes... yes I suppose I would." She said softly.

"Lieutenant?" Andro barked without taking his eyes off her.

"Milord!" The officer responded before thinking. He shook his head at his stupid mistake and cursed under his breath. "Sir?"

"Have our Hadarian medic inspect our guests for injuries." Andro said with a smile at the man's self admonishing tone of disgust at his slip of the tongue.

Devra continued to stare at him. "You are no Admiral." She stated confidently. "I have been around enough of those pompous fools to know the difference. You do not have... you do not have that sense of superiority about you."

"Actually... Admiral *is* my military rank." Androcles told her.

Devra glanced quickly at where Elynth still stood ready to spring into action to defend her Bonded Brother. She looked back to Andro and it all clicked into place. "You are him." She spoke softly her eyes wide.

Andro's eyes narrowed in confusion. "Him?"

"The one we saw in the transmission." Devra spoke trying to keep her voice low so that no one heard her speak even with their heightened wolf ears. "You... you are the Crown Prince. You are his son!"

Andro looked at Dutkne as he came up beside them. "We intercepted some of your more recent Netnews feeds before we left. One of them... one of them was when you destroyed some clinic in Sparta." He said just as softly. "You were... you were riding that beast and..."

Beast! Elynth exclaimed as she moved closer. *I am no beast little man!*

Dutkne's eyes grew wide as he stepped back, all of the Lycavorians from the Protectorate able to clearly hear Elynth's words. All of them would be considered low Tier Six Mindvoicers in the Lycavorian Union since the Protectorate had never stopped using this ability. "He... he understood me?" Dutkne gasped.

He? Do I sound like a male to you fool? Andro my brother... who are these Lycavorians that they can not tell the difference between a male and female? And yes... I understood you! I am not as unintelligent as you seem to be! Elynth demanded.

“*Sibfla!*” Drey spoke from where he stood next to Caia staring at Elynth. Caia was barely able to hold in the snicker of humor along with several of the Protectorate troops that had come with them.

Andro couldn't help but smile as he looked at Dutkne. He stepped away from Devra and moved over under Elynth's head as she lowered it down. His arm reached up and he slid it along the side of her muzzle. “This is... this is Elynth.” He said. “She is my Bonded Dragon Sister, and yes... she understood you Dutkne.” Andro saw Lu'ria still standing with her blade to Arduri's throat and the two women staring at each other. “*Ilythiiri Tessai...* there is no danger here.”

Lu'ria stared at Arduri's stunning green eyes for a few moments longer before she deftly pulled back the glaive and it disappeared into a hidden sheath at the small of her back. She bowed her head slightly, blinked her amber eyes and using her newly discovered TK power leaped up and back nearly seven meters to land catlike next to Majeir. As Majeir lowered her head, Lu'ria pressed her cheek to her snout and wrapped as much of her arms around Majeir's head as she could. It looked almost comical, but they got the message. Lu'ria turned back to face the group as well.

“And this is Majeir.” She said with warmth as Majeir closed her ruby eyes and brushed her snout against the back of Lu'ria's shoulder.

Wayonn moved forward from where he had stood allowing things to play out. “Perhaps it would be better if we did not hide what we are from each other any longer Andro. Truth is our tool now.” He spoke gently. “Dutkne and I know who you are, reveal it to the rest of us so that we can move forward past this point before someone ends up getting hurt! I did not come all this way for a conflict!”

Caia looked at Wayonn. “Grandfather... what are you talking about?” She asked him. “If he is not an Admiral in the Lycavorian Union... then who is he?”

Wayonn continued to stare at him. “Andro?”

Andro met his gaze for a moment longer and then turned to Dutkne. He stepped away from Devra and slowly nodded his head. “It is what we have come here for.” He stated. “What we have waited many years for.”

Wayonn smiled to himself when Andro simply turned to Lu'ria. “*Ilythiiri Tessai...* take them out.” He stated.

Wayonn clasped his hands together in knowing retrospect. He was much stronger than Wayonn had first thought, much stronger than Martin had led him to think. Even then he had been protecting his son from a potential threat Wayonn realized. A son that did not need as much protection as his father thought, considering the untapped ability Wayonn felt within him. He had acted without question after Dutkne's words, and this only served to confirm for Wayonn what Dutkne's role would be moving into the future. He watched as the dark skinned elf female, a Drow Wayonn knew them to be called, moved right up in front of him and reached up to his face. Wayonn inhaled deeply and he could smell the Drow's honey melon scent deeply imbedded in Andro's blood, mixed in with the dominant scent of sugar plums and spice. In her blood he could detect the heavy scent of lavender and pines. He could feel the tendrils of Mindvoice connecting the two of them and three others together, one of them on this very ship somewhere. They were unbreakable strands within the fabric of Mindvoice, much like those he felt from Martin and his connection to his Queens. He watched as Lu'ria delicately used her index finger to remove first his left and then his right contact, exposing his azure blue eyes for everyone to see. Wayonn heard Caia and several of the female members of the Protectorate gasp after he blinked several times and then they were clear and focused. Wayonn stepped closer to him now, coming up beside Devra.

“Our Vanari friends will not be able to feel it Androcles.” Wayonn said. “But we will... now show us who you are boy!”

“Androcles?” Caia hissed in shock. “Grandfather... are you...”

“It is not something my father looks upon as appropriate *Val'istar.*” Andro told him. “We are not better than those who follow us. He has taught this to me... to all of my brothers and sisters since we were babies.”

Wayonn nodded. “I know this Androcles. But it will allow us all to see that we have not come here to this new area of space for nothing. That our hopes for the future still live on brightly, and that our people are once and for all finally reunited.”

Andro glanced at Dutkne quickly before lowering his Mindvoice shields almost entirely and allowing his aura to cascade outward so that every Lycavorian nearby could feel it. Devra turned quickly as first Dutkne and then every member of the Protectorate dropped to one knee and bowed their heads. She looked at Arduri and Naesta as they came up to her wide eyed as well and Wayonn basked in the aura of the direct descendant of his dearest friend and the man he had sworn to himself would live on in his descendants.

Wayonn didn't hesitate and he crossed the few meters to stand in front of Andro with a smile. He reached out and gripped Andro's shoulders. "You don't know how long I have waited for this day Androcles." He said softly. "And when I stand before your father, all I have worked for these past millennia will come together. Our people will be whole once more... the first time since the Black Day that we will be united again and the five Bloodlines will be one once more."

Andro drew Lu'ria close to him as he looked at Dutkne once more. "Five Bloodlines?" Andro asked.

Wayonn smiled and squeezed his shoulders again. "You have felt it within you... and I will fill in the unanswered questions... but now... where is Helen? Where is the First Oracle?"

Andro looked at him oddly. "She waits for us in the conference room." He answered. "Why?"

"Because it is time she realized her own bloodline." Wayonn spoke with a warm smile. "And then my family will be whole once more as well."

Andro's head tilted to the side. "Your family?" He asked.

Wayonn nodded his head. "Oh yes... you see... Helen... Dustha... whatever you wish to call her... she is of my bloodline. She is my son Canth's great granddaughter. She is of my blood Androcles." Wayonn spoke proudly.

PHY'AD'S COMMAND SHIP

[...is insane brother!] Lynom's voice filled the heads of Dysea, Normya, Tir'ut and Cirith as they sat in the cell.

[Can you do it Lynom?] Tir'ut asked.

[Yes... but father will have our heads if we fail!] Lynom replied. *[It is too much of a risk Darthirii Ilhar Dysea. You should have left before. You should get off the ship now!]*

[If what you and Tir'ut believe Lynom, if what I know of my children is accurate, your father and my children will not be far behind us. Perhaps twelve hours.] Dysea answered. *[And no doubt they will be coming in ready to do battle.]*

[This I do not doubt.] Lynom answered. *[It is doable Darthirii Ilhar, but not without great risk. I must think of As'hia as well now.]*

[We will do it.] The gentle female voice echoed within the highly shielded connection. Cirith knew as Dysea did, that no Immortal could detect their conversation on the level they were speaking. She was amazed at the ease with which Dysea manipulated the tremors of Mindvoice in order to do this. Her strength was rapidly returning due to her elf and wolf genes no doubt. Normya and Cha'talla's son Tir'ut were also incredibly skilled Mindvoicers, and they shared a unique connection which nearly tripled their individual power. Tir'ut's brother, this Lynom, obviously was of similar strength and the hybrid female she sensed within the shielded connection appeared to be growing in ability even while they spoke.

[As'hia we...] Lynom began to speak.

[We will do this Lynom my love.] The voice answered. Her reply caused Tir'ut to look at Normya and Dysea to smile.

[Phraktos belbau uns'aa z'ress!] Lynom muttered softly. *[Brother... we will begin to make our way back to the main Immortal base. We have moved a hundred and sixty kilometers away but with As'hia leading us we can be back within six hours after you arrive. There is a cave two kilometers west of the southern entrance to the base. It is secluded and we can meet there.]* (Gods give me strength)

[I told you I was a handful!] As'hia exclaimed brightly, her voice teeming with love and happiness. *[And you are stuck with me now! Forever!]*

Tir'ut nodded his head with another smile and looked at Kr'nak. "There is a cave two kilometers west of the southern entrance. Do you know it?"

Kr'nak nodded immediately. "Yes. It sits a hundred meters above the valley floor. It is a good vantage point to watch the entrance and none of Phy'iad's people will venture out to it."

"Why?" Dysea asked.

Kr'nak could not meet her eyes. "They... they will be otherwise involved Lady Dysea." He answered distastefully.

Tir'ut nodded. *[We will meet you there Lynom.]*

[Then we will pack our equipment and begin moving. We will see you shortly.] Lynom answered and then he and As'hia left the connection.

"Will you be able to communicate with Cha'talla when he arrives?" Kr'nak asked Tir'ut.

"The moment they enter the system." He answered.

"You must show no mercy Tir'ut, son of Cha'talla." Kr'nak spoke somberly. "You must tell your father this. I will direct those men who feel as I do to gather the elf females into one location and remain there when the attack begins. Your mother... she has... she has truly made this serum you speak of?"

Tir'ut nodded his head. "Our tribe has many happy Immortal and elf marriages." He said. "Once my mother discovered what it was that caused this within our males, they lined up for three days to get the serum. If your heart is true Kr'nak... you can start a new life with our tribe."

Kr'nak looked at Osiri and saw the love written on her face and he nodded without a moment's hesitation. "No doubt your father and the Union will have a multi-pronged attack planned. I will gather what information I can before you meet with your brother and you can pass this to your father when he arrives. We are supposed to make contact with the Kavalian scum within twelve hours of arriving. It is an open communication on an Immortal channel for some reason and Phy'iad already has the men on the base preparing the main control room."

"Open communication?" Cirith asked. "Why would they request that?"

"I would imagine to keep their involvement secret for as long as possible." Kr'nak said. "No doubt Union Communications Experts are scanning every known Kavalian frequency to try and figure out what is going on."

"But if it is intercepted... this would only indict Phy'iad." Dysea said.

"He does not care." Kr'nak answered. "As soon as the communication is complete, we will begin breaking down the base to depart." He looked at Tir'ut. "That is why you must show no mercy Tir'ut. These men... and I count myself among them... they are a blight upon the honor of what our people once held dear. They can not be allowed to escape."

"Kr'nak... you are not like them!" Osiri protested taking his hand. "Stop thinking like that."

"She is right you know." Dysea told him. "After all this time has passed and knowing what Osiri must endure and still you love her... that tells me you are not like those others Kr'nak."

"I once was Lady Dysea." Kr'nak spoke honestly.

"And as my father is fond of saying, once you step through that door of change, whatever happened in the past remains in the past." Normya spoke proudly. "And your future begins with each step forward that you make."

Kr'nak looked at each of them and finally his eyes settled on where Lancy squatted next to Cirith. The grizzled vampire commando nodded his head. "I have killed far more innocents than you ever will Immortal." Lancy spoke. "If I can change... then there is hope of redemption for anyone."

Osiri moved closer to Dysea and lifted the medical scanner once more, passing it over her body. She nodded her head after a few seconds. "Your healing system has purged the drugs that were affecting your body temperature and keeping you unconscious... but the Lilzin will need several more hours to wear off completely. I do not recommend shifting and most certainly do not let Phy'iad or any of his men sense that you have this ability back or that you can Mindvoice again."

"Will he notice that the inhibitor is gone?" Cirith asked with concern in her voice that caused Dysea to look at her.

Osiri shook her head. "He would not know what to look for either way." She said. "I may be his sex slave... but I am by no means as stupid as he seems to think. He knows what the Static Inhibitor does, but not how."

"Osiri... I..." Dysea began.

Osiri moved closer to her and held out her hand, unfurling her palm. Dysea looked at the small yellow pill. "Irixtol." She said softly. "It is not as refined as what this Esther has designed but it will do the same thing. Unlike her creation however, it will not work on those who are already infected."

Dysea took the pill without hesitation and popped it into her mouth. "We will succeed." She said finally. "I promise you this... we will succeed and your child will be born free."

HARBINGER **ENROUTE TO EARTH**

Helen had stood up from the massive table in the *HARBINGER'S* main conference room when Andro led them in. She hated meeting others for the first time in such surroundings like those in the landing bay and that is why she had chosen to come here and wait. It was a quirk of hers that Martin and the others had quickly discovered and learned to get around through the years. She had to admit to herself that Martin, his Queens and Gorgo had learned how to cater to her without it seeming like they were. They had also learned how to manipulate her almost as well as she manipulated them she thought with a smile. They would never be as good as she was however, something that Helen found much easier once she and Arzoal bonded together. From the day they had first met, there had been something between them. Helen was the First Oracle of the Lycavorian people and Arzoal the Dragon Elder Mother. Throughout the entire Union these two positions and the females that held them were revered by all, no matter their species. After that day in Sparta when Martin had defeated his brother and Gorgo had truly returned to them, it seemed that no matter where they traveled, Arzoal and Helen ended up with each other. It reached a point after a few years where one would not travel without the other. With the ships that Martin had built for the dragons, it was a simple matter for Arzoal to request a ship to take her somewhere. As the Elder Mother of the Dragon Species, she would always be shuttling back and forth to Apo Prime and to Earth, and when she did they always seemed to end up together. When Helen wanted to go somewhere it was no different, and soon they were visiting different planets and meeting people together. Their friendship grew, and as it did so did their bond; and soon they could deny it any no longer. There were many things they shared with each other that no one else knew about them. There were secrets that Helen held inside her heart about her Bonded Sister, and there similar secrets that Arzoal held about Helen. Secrets that would shock even Martin Leonidas if he knew, though Helen had a sense that the King she served so willingly knew far more than he let on to anyone but that infernal cyborg Avi and his son.

Helen had watched them walk in while returning her mug of tea to the massive table top, seeing the strange blue skinned male and females and the healthy looking Lycavorians that wafted of tradition and culture and honor. She could feel the touch of Androcles's aura upon them, for she had felt it even here, nine decks above the landing bay when he lowered those powerful shields around his aura. The tall, deeply tanned young man she knew as Dutkne that entered just behind Andro and Lu'ria seemed vaguely familiar for some reason she could not place. Andro had passed to her the images of everyone from the landing bay to her within Mindvoice almost without thinking. The next male and young female she knew immediately were mated and the female was of the same lineage of the first young man Dutkne, so she was his sister. The young woman's mate was a handsome young wolf who just by his scent Helen could tell worshiped the ground upon which his wife and mate walked. Helen could barely keep the joyous feelings from overtaking her as she felt the vibrations of excellent Mindvoice control and the natural instincts of their people burning deeply within these young people.

When he entered the room Helen stiffened considerably as she looked at him. His face... his eyes... they were so very familiar to her. His almond spice scent tickled her nose and Helen found herself rapidly trying to determine where she had met him before. She was over four thousand three hundred years old and if he seemed familiar to her then she should know who he was. She watched his eyes sweep across the room and finally come to settle on her. She then watched him cut behind where Andro stood, and when Andro did nothing to stop him or the young man Dutkne and woman when he followed, Helen knew these men and women were no threat. She blinked several times as the came to stand in front of her, much taller than her and close up the lines of age etched deeply in his face. Yet his features... and those of the young Dutkne and his sister... they were so very

familiar. Their scents drifted to her as well, Dutkne's a warm Ambrosia spice scent and the young woman an enticing Gardenia Spice.

Wayonn's heart was racing as it hadn't raced since the birth of his first child with his beautiful wolf mate so long ago. He stood in front of Helen and it was easy for him to see the face of his son. She had his eyes, so very bright and intelligent. It appeared that Canth's eyes were the one thing that had been passed to all of his descendants as both Dutkne and Caia bore his eyes along with their sister.

"I can not... I can not put into words what it means to finally see you standing in front of me Dustha." Wayonn spoke softly.

Helen's eyes were confused as she glanced between him, Dutkne and Caia. "I... I feel as if I should know you... but I have never met you. Any of you." Helen said.

"But we have spoken. Many times through the years." Wayonn said with a smile.

Helen's eyes grew a little wider. "You must be mistaken." She said. "I am not one to ever forget a face..."

"Wayonn. I am Wayonn. And this is Dutkne and Caia." He told her.

Helen stared at him for a long moment. "You are the Pralor." She stated. "That much I can sense from you. That is easy enough to determine... but I have never met you."

Wayonn reached down and took her hands. "It is I who has been communicating with you all of these years Helen, using the face and voice of Canth because that is who made you most comfortable."

"You!" Helen gasped pulling her hands away. "You must think me a fool. How would... how would you know this?"

"I would know... I would know because Canth... Canth was my son." He stated looking at her and seeing her eyes grow wider. "He was my youngest son."

"Your... your son!" She gasped.

Wayonn nodded and motioned to Dutkne and Caia. "Yes. This is Dutkne and his sister Caia. Carana, who is Caia's twin, is not with us right now. They are Canth's grandchildren. Two of his three remaining descendants. My descendants. My grandchildren." He turned back to look at her. "We have waited many years to discover the last member of our family. We have known whom she is; we have just not been able to come forward until now."

"What are... what are you saying?" Helen gasped.

Wayonn smiled. "You are that third descendant Dustha." He stated. "You are my son's third generation granddaughter."

Helen's heart was now beating out of control and she staggered back slightly against the table. "That's... that's not possible." She gasped. "Canth... that's not possible."

Wayonn moved closer and took her hands once more. "But it is possible... and it is the truth." He stated confidently. "Canth's mate, her name was Dalena, she was believed killed at the beginning of the Black Day. Killed in the bombardment of the capital on that first day. He could not find her body or the bodies of his children at their home and he searched for three days among the rubble. When the Coven began landing troops he had to stop searching for them or be killed himself. He felt he abandoned them and that is why he never took another mate the rest of his life. Dalena did perish on Lycavore as they were executing our people in the streets over the next week but she died saving their youngest children. A boy and girl. She gave them to a family she didn't even know, that were making their way into the mountains. They were later picked up by High Coven patrols, but by then the executions had stopped and they were enslaved like the rest of our people." Dutkne reached out and placed his hand on Wayonn's shoulder.

"Grandfather you do not..."

"Yes I do!" Wayonn hissed softly. "Yes I do! I need to speak it! I have held it in for far too long Dutkne! And she needs to know! She needs to know where she comes from for it is a question she has asked all of her life!" He turned back to Helen who had a look of astonishment on her face. "Isn't it Helen?"

"How... how do you know that?" Helen gasped.

"My granddaughter died in the first year." Wayonn spoke. "Leftover affects of the poison missiles that the Coven used. My grandson lived on. He married while enslaved and had three children. The oldest was a boy. When the Coven burned the School of the Oracles and ordered all of them killed, that boy and his mate, who were both students at one of the Academies, they escaped into The Wilds. You are their only child."

Helen shook her head. "That can't be!" She said. "I... I spoke to Canth! I was the one who told him the Spartan people on Earth were..."

Wayonn nodded. "The perfect fit for our people." He said. "Yes I know. It is one of the things I saw before Canth passed all he was to you during the *Tuarvomir*." Wayonn smiled brightly at her expression when he said that and he nodded. "Yes... how many people know that Dustha? What are there... perhaps a hundred... perhaps a hundred that know it was Canth who conducted the *Tuarvomir* with you that day. How could I know that if what I am telling you is a lie? And tell me... who recognized it first?"

Helen's dark eyes grew even wider. "Deia?" She gasped.

Wayonn nodded. "The sister of Queen Eliani. She recognized it for what it was for she had seen it before. My son thought his family dead Dustha... he had no reason to suspect that you were of his blood when you spoke with him. By that time he had committed himself to making sure those Oracles that had survived the Purge remained alive and in hiding, and planning the rebellion with Resumar."

"How... how do you know all this?" Helen asked shaking her head.

"That is a question I would like an answer to as well." Andro spoke moving further into the room while holding Lu'ria's hand. "Union... Union history says that all records that were kept during that period of the rebellion were destroyed by the Coven when they assassinated my great grandfather."

Wayonn nodded. "Lycavorian records *were* destroyed." He said. "Not the records kept by the High Coven."

"The Coven?" Helen gasped.

Wayonn nodded. "Yes. The Coven kept detailed files on anyone of importance within our society and of many events that took place. It is how I know of my grandchildren and your mother and father Dustha."

"And how would you have obtained these records if you have never been to this quadrant of space before?" Andro asked.

Wayonn met his eyes. "I have never said I haven't been here before. I said I haven't been inside the Union. If I had entered Union space you would have detected me before the time was right Dustha."

"My name is Helen!" She snapped pulling away from him now. "You expect me... us to believe you got these records by just walking up to some Coven officer and taking them?"

Wayonn shook his head. "I never said that either." He stated. "I received them roughly thirty five hundred years ago. I received them from the descendant of the Lycavorian Fifth Ruling Bloodline."

"That is a lie!" Helen snapped. "You..."

"No *Feravomir*." Andro spoke stepping forward next to Dutkne and looking at her. "He... he speaks of Cirith. Her father Valin."

"What?" Helen stammered.

Andro looked at Wayonn. "Don't you?"

Wayonn smiled warmly. "Your insight is just as keen as your father's my boy." He said with a nod. "Yes... Valin is the one who gave me the records. I was able to track him down using the DNA sequences of the Five Bloodlines that we have in the Protectorate medical labs." Wayonn looked back to Helen. "I can prove it to you Dus... Helen. Do you remember what I said to you after Sadi left that day in your garden? Do you remember my words to you?"

"How... how do you know that?" Helen stammered her eyes wide.

"It is beginning." She said softly.

We knew this day would come eventually. The male voice spoke in reply inside her mind like the whispering of the winds through the pines.

"Will it be enough Canth?" She asked softly.

Only time will tell Dustha. Only time will tell. The male voice filled her head as she looked up into the sky at the bright sunshine. It is a start however. Androcles is very much like his father and grandfather... but he is more like Resumar than either of them and that is our advantage. He has taken the best of all three and blended them into one person Dustha. We can not hope to stop what is coming... but it will be the defining moment for all of them. Androcles especially. We must trust in what you and his parents have taught him and all their children. What you continue to teach them. You have accomplished far more than even I could

have dreamed in teaching both of them Dustha. Trust in that training and be there for them when they come to you for council. And they will come to you Dustha.

“I thought we would have more time.” Helen said.

The first son’s existence has changed events. Canth spoke. We must adapt and respond or all will be lost.

“I hope you are right.” Helen said. “I hope you are right.”

Helen shook her head and looked at him as he projected the words from that conversation into her mind. Words that only she and he could have known. Her dark eyes blinked several times and became moist as the truth of what he was saying began to wash over her like the warm spray from a sun shower. Those eyes cut to Dutkne who stood there looking at her with a smile. Caia had tears rolling down her cheeks as she squeezed her brother’s arm. And then Wayonn stepped forward and wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into his powerful embrace.

Helen whimpered loudly as the vibrations of truth rumbled through her and one of those secrets that only her Bonded Sister knew came true. As her arms slowly wrapped around Wayonn’s waist and Dutkne and Caia stepped closer to press their bodies against them, Helen surrendered to the one feeling she had always lacked and never thought she would experience. The one sensation that had always escaped her.

The feeling of blood and family.

CURILA 6

The bed had not lasted long at all; especially not after Aricia joined them. By that time, Anja was beyond caring about anything. By the time Aricia had gotten her clothes off, Anja was impaled on Martin’s beautiful twelve inch cock and coming continuously. There was nothing she could do to stop it, not that she would have. Every single nerve in her body was screaming out in rapturous abandon, her pleasure receptors working in overload. Each glorious stroke of his dominating shaft and she clawed at his shoulders and back as a kaleidoscope of illuminating colors and agonizing pleasure seared her very being. It was so very passionate, so exquisitely breathtaking. His minty scent permeated her senses, filling every crevice of her mind, and even though she barely had the ability to draw a breath between her howls of delight nothing else mattered to her in the least. She wanted nothing more than to be wrapped around Martin’s large chiseled body for the rest of her life, yet even though she could not deny the supreme pleasure she was experiencing, Anja had control. She had not lost her cognitive reasoning, her mind was just as sharp as it was before, only now it was processing the pleasure every thrust of his cock made. It was registering every stroke of her skin by his fingers, every nibble of his dual wolf fangs, it was collecting all of this information and returning it to her brain and body as the most inconceivable vibrations of pleasure Anja ever believed could exist. When she felt the burning of Aricia’s lips upon the flesh of her neck, the press of her firm breasts against her back, Anja Leonidas howled long and loud.

It hadn’t ended there.

As she shuddered almost violently in an unearthly orgasm, while her mate filled her to overflowing with his essence and seed, the tremors didn’t die. They only grew stronger and when Martin kissed her as the last of his seed filled her womb, Anja shivered in explosive bliss as she was rocked by another orgasm even more powerful than the last few. Then the sweet lavender and coca scent of their beautiful raven haired mate caught their senses. As her sizzling azure eyes told them she was ready... the pleasure began anew. Within moments they had Aricia joining in their howls of enchantment as their lips and tongues explored every contour of her body, rediscovering familiar flesh as if it was the first time. They lavished the pink scars of her recent wounds with soft, butterfly kisses, Martin paying extra attention to them for he deemed them his fault.

Anja didn’t know how long they had pleased each other, as she had lost all track of time. All she knew now was that her deliciously sore petite figure was molded to Martin’s left side while Aricia’s svelte muscular form was molded to his right. The fingers of their hands danced lightly across his rippled abdomen, delighting them as they saw the clenching of his stomach muscles and the control over his body that they had. Anja knew she had not lasted as long as Aricia, but given the fact that he had not lowered his shields back into place and she still basked in the brilliance of his unshielded aura, Anja doubted he would ever use them again. It took her

many minutes to focus and regain the clarity under the dominance of his aura, but Aricia had helped her without hesitation and soon they were both laying with their heads on his chest simply listening to him breath as the aftermath of their encounter strummed through them.

“Dysea and I...” Aricia whispered to her as she entwined her fingers with Anja’s. “We always hoped that one day you and For’mya would be able to feel what we feel when he takes us. It is divine isn’t it?”

Anja smiled brightly as she tightened their finger grip. “Divine doesn’t begin to cover it.” She said blissfully. “Will... will it be like that every time?” Anja asked wistfully.

Aricia nodded with a seductive grin. “Every time.” She answered softly.

Anja rolled her eyes and dropped her head to his chest, her Persian red haired wild and unkempt. “*Carians*... I will need to start working out again.” She said gleefully.

“You two can stop talking like I’m not here now.” Martin’s voice grumbled. “Given our current position that seems kind of ridiculous don’t you think?” Anja lifted her head and looked at his face just as she and Aricia brought their fists down on his granite like abdomen as hard as they could. “Owwww!” Martin barked at the sharp pain, sitting up quickly and holding his stomach while Aricia and Anja sat up as well heedless that they were both quite naked. “What the hell was that for?”

“For almost dying on us you *nubous* rock head *rensibfla!*” Anja barked right back.

“I didn’t almost die!” Martin snapped.

“If Filrian and Yuriko hadn’t saved your tight ass, you would be!” Anja barked right back. “Were you crazy or something? You should have told us this is what you were planning!”

“I didn’t make the decision to do it until the last second!” Martin said pulling himself up off the floor, also heedless of the fact that he too was completely naked. “We had spoken of doing this before! All of us!”

Anja and Aricia moved closer together as they watched him. One set of azure blue eyes and one set or jade green eyes watched him get to his feet, both of them shuddering with renewed desire. No matter how many times either of them saw him naked, no matter how many times he made love to them with passion and love, gazing upon his chiseled body never ceased to make their own wolf blood churn in need. He was the largest man either of them had ever taken into their bodies, the largest man any of them had ever had in their lives, yet for all his size and stamina he was the most skilled and gentle lover they knew. He could turn all of them to putty just by having his huge tool buried inside them and flexing it while his hands explored their flesh and his lips dotted their skin with kisses and nibbles. Of course... neither Aricia or Anja had many experiences to compare to him. Aricia much less so than Anja for other than Martin, only that barbaric animal Joric had ever partaken of her womanly delights and that had been far from mutual, but neither of them would have it any other way. Of all Martin’s Queens, Bella was the most experienced in terms of partners she’d had, but even she couldn’t imagine herself with any other now. Between Dysea and For’mya, there had been only five men who had shared their beds in their combined lifetimes, three for Dysea and two for For’mya. None of them compared to Martin in the least.

“I didn’t have time to tell you before I did it!” He spoke forcefully. “The Kavalians were closing in around us! They would have overwhelmed our position before Fache got there! I had to do something!”

Anja became serious then and looked at his face. “Lover... do you know what you did to us?” She asked. “Do you have any idea how it affected us?” Martin turned and looked at her with his dark brown eyes, eyes that all of them could stare into for hours and never tire of what they saw, full of questions and concern for them. “Marty... it was like a piece of our souls were just ripped away in that instant. I... when... when you shut us out Martin, I felt it on Hadaria. I felt it like I had been right next to you and Aricia when it happen.” Anja said softly.

“I didn’t mean... I didn’t mean for it to happen as it did.” Martin said. “Once I got up to Yuriko’s ship I was going to touch all of you immediately. I wouldn’t do this and leave you not knowing... none of you! When I found... when I found I could not touch *Melda Min* and *Kinsoaurgai* I panicked. When I saw those two black... I thought I had lost them.”

Aricia held out her hand for him and he didn’t hesitate. He returned to the floor next to them and both Aricia and Anja pressed their bodies close to him as his arms went around their waists and held them in a near crushing grip.

“You concentrated so hard Beloved... you concentrated so hard that you cut yourself off from Anja, Bella and I.” Aricia said softly. “We couldn’t feel you... couldn’t sense you. It was like... it was like you *were*

dead.” She pulled her head back and looked at him. “How... how did Andro know? Where... where did you learn to erect shields so powerful?”

Anja pulled her face back and looked at him as well now. “I’ve never felt... in all the years we have been together Lover, I’ve never felt shields like you had up.”

“It was... it was something Torma and I did several months ago.” Martin told them. “Sort of a preprogrammed message to Andro and Elynth. We had made them for all of our family and they would activate when we raised our new shields. I never... I never intended for any of this to happen. For some reason only the one to Andro and Elynth got out. I think maybe the one to Deia as well. I can’t remember now.” Martin looked at Anja. “How did you get here?”

Anja stroked his cheek lovingly. “Yuriko contacted me on the *SPIRIT*.” She said.

“Andro touched me in the hospital.” Aricia said. “He showed me what he knew and then he gave me medicine to fake my death as well.”

Martin looked at her wide eyed. “Why?”

“We are *anomes* Beloved.” Aricia told him reaching up to touch her cheek. “If you were truly... if you were truly gone... I would have followed within a short time. He knew you were alive and even though my mind thought otherwise, my body would have known you were still alive and it would have been very hard to explain why I was not reacting as history tells us *anomes* react to the death of their soulmate.”

“And the shields you erected?” Anja asked.

“Something we learned from Avi.” Martin told them.

“Avi?” Aricia gasped.

Martin nodded. “He was Sumar’s constant companion... aside from Wayonn that is. He stumbled across several programs in his central data core modules. Teaching programs. He brought them to me when he discovered them and between the three of us we determined they were core teaching elements of a system that Sumar had been designing to teach my grandfather when he got old enough. Apparently he never finished them, but there was enough for Torma and I to learn how to erect shields based on the electrical impulses of our brains. These skills are like a modulating frequency shift for Mindvoice.”

“Lover... is what... that wall... it was this Xaxon?” Anja asked softly.

Martin nodded. “The blackness... the emptiness. I don’t know why he released *Melda Min*, but For'mya is not dead. I would know if she was. We all would. He is... he is keeping her from me.”

“She was... she was with Deia at the Senate Building Martin.” Anja said as he looked at her evenly. “The Kavalians... the Kavalians brought the building down. Hundreds are dead. They are still trying to recover all of the...”

Martin shook his head. “She is not dead and neither is Deia.” He stated. “Deia is weak... very weak... but she is too strong to die like that.”

“Is *Kinsoargai*... is she injured perhaps Beloved?” Aricia asked.

“I don’t know.” He answered in a whisper dropping his head to Anja’s shoulder.

Anja reached up to stroke his long black hair. “You need... you need rest Martin.” She said. “You need normal sleep and then food.”

Martin pulled both of them tighter. “Don’t... I don’t want you to leave.” He said softly.

“We have no intention of leaving Beloved.” Aricia whispered. “Not now...”

“Not ever...” Anja finished.

HARBINGER

Andro stood by the large monitor on the wall watching on the screen as Wayonn, Caia and Helen walked along one of the interior landing bay decks of the *HARBINGER*. He could see Helen walking between them and they were all holding hands. The walkway was high up near the ceiling and circled the entire length of the landing bay below and many of the crew used it to run on or to simply come and chat when it was quiet. There were several sets of benches set up along the walkway for just this purpose.

“I’ve never seen him so animated.” Dutkne’s voice echoed softly next to him and Andro turned to look at him. “She is in no danger Androcles.”

“Her being in danger is something that never crossed my mind.” Andro spoke. He turned back to the monitor. “She has been like a grandmother to me... to all of my siblings for as long as we can remember. Yet in all that time... there was always a sadness within her that we could sense.” Andro smiled. “I don’t feel that from her anymore.”

“That’s good.” Dutkne said.

Andro turned fully and looked at him evenly. “Would you care to explain why I feel as if I already know you? Why I already trust you to the extent that I do?”

Dutkne rolled his eyes. “My grandfather would say it is all in the blood.” He said. “He was Sumar’s First Oracle and best friend. Canth was Resumar’s; my Aunt there was meant for your grandfather and instead became your father’s closest confidant in many ways. It has to do with our Pralor blood and our roles. It’s all been pre-determined according to Wayonn.”

“I don’t believe in pre-determination.” Andro said. “Nothing is ever set until it happens and becomes part of the past.”

Dutkne’s eyes grew a little wider and he smiled as he looked at Andro. “I’ve been trying to tell him that for years!” He stated. “Finally... someone who agrees with me. I don’t suppose my Aunt believes as you do?”

Andro couldn’t help but smile. “No.” He answered shaking his head.

Dutkne swore under his breath, but he was smiling as he did. “Well... we can work on her.” He said finally.

Andro looked over Dutkne’s shoulder at where Devra and the others sat at the massive table looking at data pads or talking softly. *[Who are these people you have brought with you?]* He asked.

[The Vanari?] Dutkne answered. *[They are an advanced race within our quadrant of space. As I said... we are neither allies nor enemies. We have agreed to mind our own business and they have as well. One of Devra’s daughters was taken by pirates and they tracked them here. We stumbled across them before making the last jump.]*

[Pirates?] Andro asked.

Dutkne nodded. *[They call themselves the Orionis Syndicate. A particularly nasty group of humanoid pirates and mercenaries. We have tangled with them in the past. That ceased when we eliminated one of their bases of operation. They have been around for millennia... and they have quite the history with the Vanari.]*

[How so?] Andro asked as they both, turned almost reading each other’s thoughts and faced the table.

[Vanari females are highly prized as slaves.] Dutkne told him. *[They are a very open race and much like us they do not shy from expressing their openness. Every Vanari, whether male or female, learn the arts from a very young age.]*

Andro looked at him, his eyebrow going up. *[Arts?]*

Dutkne nodded. *[Let’s just say... they have an oil they can secret through their pores. It is an extremely powerful oil, odorless unseen and it can make a person very open to suggestion if you get my meaning. This Orionis Syndicate learned very early on how to break Vanari females and turn them into willing slaves.]*

[No one is a willing slave Dutkne.] Andro spoke.

Dutkne nodded. *[The Vanari are. Their species began as a mono-gendered species. They could take whatever form they wanted given the situation. Through the centuries that changed as their numbers grew. They are a female dominated species. The ratio is like three to one. They are like this in order to continue to produce children. Apparently this Orionis group learned how to cause their bodies to alter their chemical makeup forcibly. They are very successful in doing this. It causes the female’s body to believe they are male and while their outward appearance is not altered, their internal composition is changed somehow at the genetic level. The Vanari government has some sort of ongoing agreement with this Syndicate. They will not attempt to wipe them out, if the Orionis Syndicate does not take more than a few dozen Vanari females as slaves per year.]*

Andro looked at him horrified. *[You are joking?]*

Dutkne shook his head. *[No. If this Orionis Group is interfered with in any way, they have said they will unleash a systematic attack on Vanari colonies and pour this chemical into the atmospheres of these colonies. It will essentially make all Vanari females sterile. If this were to happen...]*

[Their species would die out.] Andro said.

Dutkne nodded. *[They are taught from a very young age to resist capture and slavery to a point... but then give in for the continued survival of their species.]*

[Their government allows this?] Andro said.

Dutkne nodded. *[Not willingly... at least not the younger members of their Ruling Body, the Board of Regents. Grandfather has spent more time with them than I have. They know he was a Pralor before he was a wolf, so they trust him more than the rest of us. Many of their older Regents believe we are nothing more than animals.]*

[And that is why this one at the table... this Naesta. That is why she acts this way?] Andro asked.

[I had thought when she came onboard the TALON that she was beginning to see that what her father raised her to believe is not true. Apparently based on her actions that is not the case.] Dutkne replied.

[The male does not seem to harbor the same feelings.] Andro spoke.

[Nirilo has lived and worked among us for nearly a hundred years.] Dutkne explained with a smile. *[He has a Lycavorian woman who worships him and who he adores in return. No... he does not harbor the same sentiments about our people. He knows they aren't true for he has seen it himself.]*

[The other two females?] Andro asked.

[Devra is their mother.] Dutkne said. *[She is one of the more progressive Regents on the Board and her interaction with grandfather has given her some trust of us. Arduri... Arduri I don't know. She is the middle daughter, again one of the more progressive generation, but from what Nirilo tells me she is going to be married soon to the son of one of the backwards Regents like her father.]*

[An arranged marriage?] Andro asked in disgust.

[No... she accepted the proposal after the last Celebration of the Hundreds.] Dutkne said.

[Celebration of the Hundreds?] Andro asked.

Dutkne grinned. *[A topic for another time perhaps.]* He said. *[As I was saying... they have apparently tracked an Orionis Syndicate ship into this Quadrant of space. Somewhere in what you call The Wilds. This ship had Devra's oldest daughter on it. She was captured sometime last week from one of their colony worlds. We...]*

"It is very rude to talk about others in the manner you are doing right now." Arduri spoke from the table as she was looking at them.

Andro and Dutkne turned to look at her. Andro took in the petite figure with very large breasts that, incredibly, looked like they fit her body perfectly. Her silver/yellow hair fell far past her shoulders and her green eyes were bright and very intelligent. Her Brandeis blue skin was flawless in every way, her full lips a soft amethyst color. The uniform she wore conformed to her petite figure like a second skin and showed off all of her supple curves, of which there were many, to include an incredible ass that almost matched his *KertaGai's* amazing backside. Andro looked at Dutkne who broke away to return to the table and he turned back to Arduri and bowed his head slightly.

"You are right. Forgive me for being rude." He stated as he came up to the table and settled into the chair facing the doors into the huge conference room and across from them. He reached out and poured himself a mug of his mother's coffee from the urn and then sat back in the chair.

"What were you talking about?" Arduri asked with an even voice.

"Arduri?" Devra gasped.

"It is alright." Andro spoke gently. "I have nothing to hide. If you must know, we were talking about why you are here." He said. "I know now why Dutkne and Wayonn have come but considering the distrust Dutkne has told me that you have of my people, I find it odd that you would come to a new society of Lycavorians asking for help. A society of people that you neither trust or call friend. We may be separated by thousands of light years, and until this day we may have had no contact, but we are still the same species and I dare say we will have many of the same mannerisms and traditions."

"I told you they wouldn't help us mother!" Naesta popped. "We should have come on our own and found her!"

Devra glared at her daughter. "Naesta that is enough!" She spat. "We..."

"Over the last three long weeks I have seen my younger sister brutally raped by the High Coven as a means to obtain information she has within her head." Andro spoke softly his azure eyes turning to look at Naesta. "I have seen the Kavalian Empire systematically try and butcher my entire family. They have tried to kill one of my wives and mates. They have come very close to killing my father and now he is in hiding because they think him dead. They have quite possibly succeeded in killing one of my mothers and my favorite Aunt

and their agents have also captured and are holding another of my mothers. My brother and his mate and several friends and other family members are deep within Kavalian space on a very dangerous mission that could very well tip the balance of power within this quadrant. More of them are on their way to him even as we speak. With everything I have going on right now, do you believe for an instant that I give a *nubous sibfla* about how you view my people!” Andro finished his sentence with an angry growl. They watched him get to his feet slowly. “I agreed to listen to you because Dutkne and Wayonn asked me to. I do not have the patience or desire to listen to you berate me or my people when it is obvious that you don’t know shit about us!”

Andro stabbed a button on the console in front of him. “Captain Velnar?”

“Milord?” The response was immediate.

“Prep the *MENKLA* to return our Vanari guests to where the *TALON* has gone.” Andro spoke. “Inform Admiral O’Connor they are to be put on their ship and then escorted out of Union space. If they attempt to deviate from course while they are within Union space their ship is to be destroyed immediately.”

“Understood Milord.” Velnar answered immediately. “Captain Sa’sur contacted me as well sire. She and the *SCIMITAR* will be joining with us in three hours.”

“Thank you Velnar. We will transfer to her when she arrives and then you can rejoin with Miranda’s command.” Andro said.

“As you order Milord.” Velnar answered.

Andro looked at Devra then. “The *Durcunusaan* outside the door will escort you back to the landing bay and you can depart and make your own way since it appears that is what you want.” Andro turned from the table. “I wish you all the best.”

“Androcles you...” Dutkne began to speak.

“Wait!” Devra shouted as she came to her feet interrupting Dutkne. “This... this is my daughter we are talking about!”

Andro looked at her. “And this matters to me why?” Andro asked her. “The Lycavorian Union is on the cusp of a war that I will have to start because of what the Kavalians have done. I have neither the time nor the desire to stand here and listen to you or your daughters speak about my people as if we are somehow inferior to you. I do not care where you have come from or what you want. I will have Captain Velnar give you copies of the star charts for this quadrant of space and you can make your own way. Given your attitudes... I estimate you will last about two days in The Wilds. The *Durcunusaan* will be along shortly. Good luck in your endeavors.”

Devra was speechless as Andro turned and without further pause walked out of the conference room. She turned quickly and looked at Dutkne. “Dutkne... can you do nothing?”

“My grandfather and I warned you Regent Re Mydala.” Dutkne said gently. “We told you the men and women of the Lycavorian Union were not like us. We have lived with your distrust and your feelings of superiority over us for millennia. We have learned how to accept it for what it is. The Lycavorians here now... as Androcles has just expressed to you... they are not like us and they have no desire to tolerate or help a species that looks down upon them with one hand while asking for their help with the other.” Dutkne shook his head slowly. “No, there is nothing I can do. You can thank Naesta for pissing off the one man in this quadrant of space who would have helped you and asked for nothing in return. The Lycavorians here... they were slaves once. They were slaves to the High Coven for over ten thousand years. They despise any kind of slavery. They would have helped you based on that fact alone. No... even if I could do anything I would not. To be honest... I have been tired of your people’s attitude towards mine for some time. I have just not voiced that displeasure because of my grandfather and how he feels about you. If you will excuse me...”

Even a stunned Nirilo could do nothing but stand there in shock and watch Dutkne follow Andro out the same door.

You are sending them away without helping them Andro? Elynth asked as she watched the *Durcunusaan* troops leading the Vanari delegation into the landing bay towards where the *MENKLA* transport was being readied.

Andro turned from where he was inspecting Majeir’s flank and how she was adjusting to wearing one of the Mark Eleven saddles. He followed her gaze and then faced her. “Yes.” He answered finally.

Because they have this complex with the Lycavorian people? Elynth said.

“That’s not the only reason sister... you know that.” Andro answered. “So much... so much is happening right now. We do not have the resources to help them.”

We do not have the resources... or they angered you enough with their fool attitude that you will not give them the resources? Elynth asked.

“Both.” Andro said.

So you will send them into The Wilds knowing full well they will more than likely be dead or enslaved themselves within a week. Elynth blinked her golden eyes. *That is not my Bonded Brother speaking.*

“Elynth we...” Andro began.

Who was the first to visit the Evolli homeworld after the end of the war? Elynth asked. *Who was at the forefront of giving them the means to rebuild what war took from them. Who remained on their homeworld for three months even though we both find them distasteful and hold a great dislike for them in our hearts for what they perpetrated?*

Andro looked at her. “We did.”

Do you know why men and women follow you my Bonded Brother? Why they follow you and your father without so much as a second’s pause? Elynth asked him. *They follow you because they believe in you. Your father and you, above all your father’s children, adhere to the saying of your grandfather.*

“Fight with your head. Lead with your heart.” Andro said softly.

Whatever may have happened between them and Dutkne’s Protectorate did not happen between us. Majeir spoke now. *And given their attitude towards your people, it does not seem like it would take much to make them such. Especially if what Dutkne has told you is true.*

The Lycavorians. My kind. Elynth spoke. *We have tossed aside the bonds of slavery and oppression and crushed them under our talons and claws. Perhaps what is needed for these Vanari... perhaps what is needed is for someone to show them that it is not something they must live with.*

“And if we help them and it changes nothing?” Andro asked. “If we help them and it costs us blood and sweat and tears? Resources that could be used against the Kavalians!”

Then we will be the better for it. Elynth said. *For we will have acted in the superior manner... and they can wallow in self pity and wail over the opportunity they let pass them by. And you have said yourself... the Kavalians are up to far more than we know right now. And think of the allies we could gain.*

Andro shook his head after a long moment. “I hate it when you are right.” He said.

Elynth laughed softly within Mindvoice. *That means you hate it when you are right.* She said with some humor, reaching out with her head and butting him in the chest with her snout. *For you and I speak with one voice and one heart.*

Androcles? Majeir said.

Andro turned to look at her and she motioned with her large head. Andro followed her gaze and saw Devra striding purposefully towards him, the *Durcunusaan* officer trying to catch up and stop her. She stopped in front of Andro, her green eyes passionate and clear. She held out the data pad in her hand to him. “Look at it!” She snapped.

The *Durcunusaan* officer finally reached them. “Milord... I apologize! The Regent caught me when I wasn't looking. I...”

Andro held up his hand as he took the pad from Devra. “Stand down Lieutenant.” He said. Andro held up the pad. “What is this?”

“The technical details on refining your Hyper Matter Fusion engines.” She snapped. “I will... I will give you anything you want. I will beg if that is what you require of me. I only ask that you help me find my daughter. She is... she has been through enough in her life because she is different and I will not allow her to believe we have just dismissed her.”

Andro met her eyes and his head tilted slightly. “Different?” He asked. “Different how?”

“My people... the Vanari... the majority of our females are born with the features you see in me. Green or blue eyes; silver/white or blond hair.” Devra told him. “There is a much smaller percentage that are born with black hair. These females are most often looked down upon and considered genetically defective in some ridiculous manner because of this gene they are born with. Caliria... my daughter has this gene. Her hair is as

black as night and she has ice blue eyes. She is beautiful... but because she has black hair, her father and many others do not treat her the same way.”

“I take it you do not conform to this way of thinking.” Andro said.

“She is my daughter. The oldest of my daughters. I have loved her no less because she is different.” Devra stated. “Nor do Nirilo, or Arduri or Naesta. She is their sister, and the way they have treated her has given their father fits for years. Coren... Coren is not a bad man... he is just too entrenched in the past.”

“This Coren is your husband?” Andro asked.

Devra shook her head quickly. “We haven’t been married in almost thirty years. Nirilo is our oldest child at almost five hundred years old. Caliria is the next oldest at just over three hundred. Arduri and Naesta are still considered extremely young, for they are less than a hundred years old. Like your people we are a long lived species. Caliria is part of the Vanari defense Cadre and a strong advocate for those females with dark hair who aspire to other duties within our society that right now they are not granted.”

“Why did you come here Regent Re Mydala?” Andro asked.

“Wayonn... he told me you would help us to find her.” Devra replied. “He told me that if she was within this place you call The Wilds, your people could find her. I love my daughter Androcles Leonidas. I love my daughter and I will not abandon her to this fate. I will give you anything you require. Anything.” Devra stepped closer to him. “Just please help me find my daughter.”

Andro held out the data pad to her without even looking at it. “Take this.” He said.

“Please... I’ll give you anything!” Devra almost shouted. “Name your price.”

Andro took her hand and placed the data pad back in it. “My price?”

“We have... we have technology you could use... we have...” Devra began.

Andro stepped closer to her, his azure eyes bright and glittering. “I have eight sisters Devra Re Mydala, eight sisters and five brothers with another brother who will join us in a few months. There is no price in this universe that is worth any one of them. How do you put a price on blood?”

Devra blinked several times at his words and the closeness of him. “You can not.” She stammered. “That is why I will give you anything you ask for.”

Andro smiled warmly and squeezed her hands within his. “My price? My price is an open mind.” He stated. “An open mind Regent Re Mydala. An open mind and we will find your daughter. That is my price.” Andro released her hands and looked at the Lieutenant. “Tell the Commander the trip is no longer necessary Lieutenant. The Vanari will be accompanying us to the *SCIMITAR* when she arrives.”

The *Durcunusaan* officer nodded. “As you order Milord.”

Andro looked at Devra once more. “An open mind.” He said softly. “And an opportunity to show you that my people are not what the Vanari think we are. Something I believe Dutkne and Wayonn have been trying to show you for centuries.”

“That... that’s it?” Devra asked stunned.

“You have nothing that I want Lady Devra.” Andro said with a smile. “I invite you to sit with us for dinner when we transfer to the *SCIMITAR*. Aside from that... we’ll begin to figure things out when we return to Earth. The Wilds is a very large area and we will need all the information you have on this Orionis Syndicate.”

“I... we have several pads of information.” Devra spoke slowly.

Andro nodded. “Good. If you will excuse me... I need to find my new mates and nuzzle their elven ears for a time.” Andro bowed his head to her and then turned and began walking away leaving Devra standing there completely astonished.

This was not what she had expected. Not in the least.

CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

RITAAH

“He... he has entered Union space.” Shiria said softly.

They were all gathered in the control room of VORTEX Cruiser 341, Avi and 341 just off to the side while the others sat on the make shift chairs and crates or within the actual chairs of the bridge stations

themselves. Resumar looked up from where he was sitting next to Athani, who clung tightly to Nikkei's hand in her lap. The last few hours had gone by quickly, everyone ending up here in the control room. Dario and Channa stood slightly behind Resumar, Channa leaning casually against the front of Dario's body, her tail curled several times around his left leg the tip twitching absently against his knee. Vonis stood next to Mican and Na'lia, Ckaoa standing just behind where Shiria sat. It had been awkward at first, no one really knowing what to say as they took stock of the aftereffects of the Coven assault. Shiria had remained out of the way for the most part, talking with Ckaoa, Athani and Nikkei as they listened to Athani relay to them all that had happened to her in the last months. Athani had been stunned to hear that Jalersi had finally had her eyes opened to the truth, and even more stunned at who exactly had shown this to her. A man Athani had suspected for some time who held more than just a passing fancy in her sister. Nikkei was the confused one, Pian's mother and Shiria beginning to make her see how things truly were, but it wasn't until she was beside Athani that she saw that all they were telling her was true. Nikkei saw how Resumar treated her Aunt Athani, as if she was some precious jewel, and she saw how her Aunt looked at this Lycavorian Prince. She had been far too shocked that Athani was now a Princess of the Union for it to set in right away, but as she saw others take directions from Athani and not question her orders or status, it had begun to sink in quickly.

Resumar's *Hyperetes* and his two *Durcumusaan* troops had tracked the remaining two High Coven troops through the dense timber. They managed to bring one of them down before they reached the clearing where the Coven G9 LRR was waiting. They could do nothing as the G9 lifted off and engaged its Shroud before it was even five thousand meters into the sky. As quickly as everything was happening there was no way to inform the *PILLAR'S* captain in time for him to act. Doing so would expose his position and Antell would not do that. He and Maros had split their ships to cover as much of the area around Ritaah as they could. With the Coven ships on the other side of the planet, the G9 was able to slip right between the two groups of ships without ever being detected. The *Hyperetes* stripped the body of the High Coven troop, an officer, and they left his carcass for the beasts of Ritaah as they headed back to the cruiser. He had carried several data pads, which they gave to Avi and 341 when they returned.

Resumar looked at her as she spoke. "Who has entered Union space?" He asked.

Shiria met his eyes evenly. "Wayonn." She replied. "Sumar's Oracle. He has entered Union space."

"How do you know?" Athani asked.

"I can feel him." Shiria answered. "I can feel his happiness within Mindvoice. He is not shielding very well." She said with a knowing smile. "I will have to scold him about this when I see him again." She met Resumar's eyes. "He has met with your brother and they are returning to Earth."

"How do you know that?" Resumar asked.

Shiria smiled. "It is a skill that takes time to develop, but you have it. Just as your father and your brother have it, truly your entire family. Anyone with the blood of Sumar or Wayonn in their veins. Any Pralor who had obtained the rank of Elder. It is a unique skill that only the most powerful Pralors, our Elders, had. Just as you are able to sense your family even over great distances, though you may not be able to communicate with them directly within Mindvoice. It is similar to this, but much more focused. If the target individual's shields are low enough or they allow you, you can sense emotions and in some cases, you can even see with their eyes. It is how I knew you were here. That and the fact that I lost contact with Avatar 341. No one in your family is very adept at fully shielding themselves, especially from someone like me or Wayonn."

"So you felt us?" Athani asked still trying to comprehend that this woman was the Scribe Mother. Demahra had looked so much older when Athani knew her.

Shiria nodded. "Yes. And you are now wondering how I could be the same person that you knew as Demahra aren't you Athani." She said with a smile.

"The thought had crossed my mind." Athani said.

"She altered her appearance." Resumar spoke looking at his striking Kavalian wife. "She altered her appearance just enough not to reveal her true nature."

"Why?" Athani asked.

"Senior Polemarch Dymas did the same thing." Dario spoke. "It was a way to hide his true age from those elves he associated with most on Earth. Before my Uncle Martin returned. The *Feravomir* did so as well, though not on as large a scale."

"And again I ask why?" Athani asked.

“Athani my child... if your father knew what I was from the outset, do you believe for an instant that I would be sitting here now with you?” Shiria asked with a soothing smile. “If I was not in one of his wretched labs somewhere while his unskilled scientists dissected me I would be dead. He would not seek to learn what I know... he would seek only to discover how I can do what I can do so that he could have it as a weapon. It is his largest fault, yet his greatest asset and it makes him somewhat predictable.”

“But you... you have hid yourself out in the open all of these years. He even consulted you on several occasions.” Athani said. “Many of our people look to you as a... as...”

“A symbol of what could be?” Shiria asked. “Yes I know. It may have appeared that way to you, but in fact your father severely limited what I could do and where I could go. Well... he tried to anyway. He was attempting to put on a good front for you and your sister and others so that he could use you how he saw fit to advance his plans. He knew how you both felt and if he played to your weaknesses he could control you. It suited my overall plans regardless. While he may have thought he was keeping me in check as some sort of spiritual advisor, he never took my advice by the way, while he thought this I was setting up my own underground so to speak.”

“Underground?” Mican asked now.

Shiria nodded. “Ckhoa and her sister Poysa are only the tip of the mountain. Many of the border Prides help me and they adhere to new ideals and values that your father would find most traitorous. Ideals and values that I showed them, and they have advanced through the generations. The Nruarani Pride is only the largest and most powerful Pride that has sided with me. Pian’s love for your sister drove him Athani and in order for him to win your sister’s heart he knew he had to change. He embraced it willingly and in the process he brought his entire Pride along with him and they embraced it. When he realized the knowledge and freedom what I taught brought them, Pian saw the future not as something to fear... but something to hold on to tightly.”

“How many?” Mican asked.

Shiria looked at him. “Far more than even Keleru suspects or would believe. Many of those like you secretly follow us Mican. You are an inspiration to them you know. Your actions through the years.”

“Me?” Mican gasped in disbelief.

Shiria nodded. “Your refusal to give up. Fighting and saving biogenic clones that your father and Pusintin dismissed and simply threw away when they had outlived their cycles.” Her eyes cut to Na’lia. “And you Na’lia of the elves.”

Na’lia pressed closer to Mican. “Me?”

Shiria nodded her head with that ever present smile. “There have been rumors for months that a way to keep the clones alive after their cycle is over exists and that you and those elves with you here are the ones who developed it. A superior effort and even larger breakthrough and I commend you. I too am a scientist of sorts... not within the genetic field... but I know good work when I see it and from what I have seen... you do excellent work.”

Na’lia couldn’t help but blush slightly and smile. “Thank you.” She said.

“How did you get here?” Resumar asked causing Shiria to turn back to him. “Within Kavalian space I mean?”

“I came with VORTEX Cruiser 341.” Shiria answered without pause. “I was one of the last Acolytes of the Elder Pralor Scientific Council. A junior scientist working on the Pralor homeworld. When it was determined that our species would not be able to win the war we were embroiled in, the decision was made to put me on the cruiser and send me away with all of the knowledge of the Pralors stored on this ship. Our entire history. All of our main library archives and data cores. It was... it was meant only as a safeguard for we did not think our end would come.” Shiria paused and Ckhoa took her hand in hers and squeezed.

“Shiria you don’t...” She began to say.

Shiria nodded. “Yes I do Ckhoa.” She stated with a smile as she looked at her. “All we have done... you, me, your sister... it was all meant to bring us to this point. The End of the Beginning. From here... from here, now that we are finally beginning to come together... now anything is possible.” She turned back to Resumar. “The Chief Elder Pralor, the senior Pralor, our President is a term you could use. He was elected after Sumar was lost on CS41. He made the decision to send VORTEX Cruiser 341 into this quadrant of space for two reasons. This is where he knew Sumar’s ship had crashed and he hoped perhaps I could find them, and he knew our enemy would never think to travel this far to look for us. The second was that we have had a presence in

this quadrant of space for many thousands of years. VORTEX Cruiser 341 was the first in a class of ships that ultimately were never built. Our most advanced warship and he did not want it falling into the hands of our enemy. I was chosen in a lottery to travel with this ship and attempt to maintain a link with the homeworld. Fully five years into our voyage the homeworld stopped responding and all we received after that was the same repeating message that said all was lost and... and to pray for redemption.”

“Wait a moment!” Resumar spoke getting to his feet quickly. “You said you’ve had a presence in this quadrant for thousands of years. A Pralor presence?”

Shiria nodded her head looking at him. “Yes. You caught that didn’t you?”

“Who?” Resumar asked. “Someone on Earth? Apo Prime?”

Shiria smiled and shook her head. “I’m sorry but I will not reveal their identity to you Resumar Leonidas. I cannot. It is something only I know and my duty would be to deliver this information to the most senior descendant of Sumar. I’m sorry but it is something I can only tell to your father. Wayonn knows of them, but I would not tell him who this individual was either. They were embroiled in troubles of their own at the time and they did not need any additional, perhaps harmful distractions. I will happily tell your father however... though considering the abilities your father has and continues to show, I would not be surprised if he has not already figured it out. From what I have been able to witness and read about your father since his return, he is perhaps the most intelligent and cunning individual I have ever known.”

Resumar drew silent and stared at her for a long moment. Athani saw the look on her husband’s face and she got to her feet and moved to him, pressing close to him and using the small female aura that she possessed to wash over him. She turned to Shiria after a moment. “You do not know?” She asked softly.

Shiria looked at her. “Know what?”

“My... my father is dead.” Resumar spoke the words with a pained expression on his face. “He was... he was killed several days ago by Kavalian assassins sent by Keleru and my uncle.”

Whatever anyone expected from her they did not foresee Shiria breaking out in genuine and hearty laughter. There were gasps from everyone present and eyes flew open in stunned shocked. Athani’s expression of disbelief rapidly turned to one of intense anger and she stepped closer to Shiria.

“How dare you!” She snarled angrily. “How... dare you laugh at this knowledge? How could you?”

Shiria glanced around the room and could see that perhaps they did not understand why she was laughing. She got to her feet quickly and faced Resumar her face becoming serious. “You misunderstand my actions Resumar Leonidas... Athani. I...”

Vonis was the one to step away from the wall. “Then perhaps you’d better explain them!” He growled viciously.

Shiria looked at Vonis and her dark eyes narrowed. “Do not bark at me young man!” She snapped. “You do not frighten me Vonis, descendant of Xaxon! Though you may not have been touched by that fool as your mother and sister were, you are still descended from his foul line! I have seen more in ten millennia than you could possibly imagine and your tone of voice to me is disrespectful!”

“Disrespectful?” Vonis snapped. “You insult...”

Shiria waved her hand almost casually and Vonis went sailing back across the bridge by some unseen force to impact the control console that Avi was working next to. As he grunted in pain and slumped to the deck Avi’s head turned to look at him.

-Colonel Vonis may I suggest you do not anger the Elder Pralor in the future. She is a Category nineteen Elder Pralor and there are only ten others in the known universe that would have the ability to defeat her if a conflict ensued. You are not among those ten I’m afraid Colonel-

Vonis looked at Avi sternly as he pulled himself to his feet. “Thanks you for the vote of confidence Avi!” He barked.

-Always Colonel-

Shiria turned back to Athani and Resumar, her face back to normal as if nothing had just happened and she hadn't tossed Vonis across the bridge. "As I said... you misunderstand the source of my laughter and the reasons behind it."

"You laugh at the news that Resumar's father has been killed Scribe Mother?" Athani gasped. "How... how could you?"

Shiria shook her head and looked at her. "Martin Leonidas is no more dead than you or I." She spat vehemently. "It will take far better men than your father and Pusintin, that fool lap dog of his, to kill your father Resumar."

Resumar looked at her with wide eyes. "I felt... I felt it." He gasped softly. "My brother Andro, he..."

"When was the last time you spoke to your brother?" Shiria asked quickly.

Resumar looked at her. "We are not... we are not due to communicate for another eight hours." He replied.

Shiria nodded. "He is dealing with much right now Resumar, more than he should have to shoulder for one so young, but he is holding up far better than I had thought possible. He is aware you do not know and he will not violate the safety of you or your mission here to inform you of this. You know as well as I every communication has the chance of being detected, no matter how good the equipment you use. Your father is not dead Resumar Leonidas. He still burns very brightly within Mindvoice, just as he always has, though lately he has shown the ability to understand and utilize the many tremors and threads of Mindvoice with consummate skill. No doubt in part because of his relationship with Avi. Something that Wayonn and your *Feravomir* will no doubt change when they join with him, if only to keep him safe. Lower your shields and let me guide you."

"How do you know this?" Athani demanded.

Shiria turned once more. "When you get to be my age, you do learn how to do things that others cannot. Avatar 341?" She barked.

-Elder Pralor Shiria- 341 turned from the station he was standing at.

"341... activate a holochart display and overlap your most recent quadrant wide Etheric Scan." Shiria ordered. "Give me the details. Category sixteen and above only 341. And do not include any Cretvore Draconius or other species in your calculations since any of them that are bonded with a rider will be Category sixteen or higher to begin with and other species will only alter the conclusions I am trying to reach."

Avatar 341 looked at Resumar. **-Resumar Leonidas?-**

Shiria smiled and turned to Resumar. "I had forgotten that he is now programmed to respond only to a descendant of Sumar since you have activated this ship. Please Resumar... allow me to prove to you that what I say is true."

"How?" Resumar asked the hope in his voice very genuine.

"Every Pralor ship to leave our homeworld in the last fifteen thousand years leading up to our end was equipped with a separate Etheric Sensor Array." Shiria told him. "It runs the entire length of the ship and because it does not work on the consumption of power as we know it, it runs continuously even though the ship may be powered down. It is basically the same principle as when Channa first entered this ship. Her level of Etheric skill, though she did not know of it at the time, it allowed 341 to activate many of the ship's other systems until you and the others arrived and your Etheric abilities were sensed by the internal ship sensors and full power could be obtained."

"Do it 341." Resumar snapped without question.

"Won't this scan be detected by the Kavalians?" Dario asked moving closer.

Shiria shook her head. "Not unless they have discovered a way to scan for those who can Mindvoice. The Kavalians do not have this ability naturally; only through certain circumstances can it be obtained."

"Like me being Resumar's wife?" Athani asked.

Shiria nodded. "That and the fact that his dragon touched you. Cretvore Draconius seem to have the ability to stimulate the certain synaptic tendrils in an individual's mind that allows them to Mindvoice. And

your continued physical relationship with Resumar has triggered the L-stereoisomer cells in your body to the point that any changes are now permanent.”

Athani nodded. “Resumar’s mother Anja explained it to me when they discovered we had married. She said the same thing.”

Shiria nodded. “Anja Leonidas is the foremost medical mind in the universe. I dare say she could hold her own even against some of our senior physicians were there any left. She is utterly brilliant.”

“Tell me about this sensor array.” Resumar spoke.

“Only Pralor ships had this sensor ability. It is a low power automated sensor sweep that takes place every twenty-four hours. It is also probably one of the ways 341 discovered you were coming here.” Shiria explained. “And it will also pinpoint the majority of Mindvoice users in this quadrant when keyed to a certain level.”

“The majority?” Channa asked.

Shiria nodded. “It will not pick up those like Wayonn and myself when we are shielding our minds with our complete focus.”

-Overlapping most recent Etheric Scan. Five point three hours ago- 341 announced quickly. -Scans indicate eighteen contacts at Category Sixteen or higher. Adjusting scan for Etheric variance by point two. One Category Twenty-one... one Category Twenty... nine category nineteen... five category eighteen... and two category seventeen contacts have been found-

“Locations?” Shiria asked.

-One category twenty, two category nineteen and one category eighteen currently in transit within Lycavorian Union space. Supposition. Based on Etheric resonance levels, probability that this is Androcles Leonidas, Elder Pralor Vizier Wayonn and Lycavorian First Oracle known as Helen is 98.3%. Fourth contact is unknown at this time however the scans of Etheric resonance variables indicate that the Lycavorian First Oracle and unknown contact are related to Elder Pralor Vizier Wayonn-

“Related?” Shiria asked surprised. “Are you certain 341?”

-My calculations are accurate Elder Pralor Shiria. Resonance variables indicate that the First Oracle is a third generation descendant of Vizier Wayonn. The unknown contact is fourth generation descendant-

“His grandchildren.” Shiria said softly. “No wonder he has spent so much time using the Mark II Boosters since your father returned. And he is not focused on his shielding which is very unusual.”

“Who is this Wayonn?” Resumar asked.

Shiria looked at him. “He is a Pralor. Or he was. He still is. It is very confusing when one tries to think about it. He was Sumar’s Oracle... like Helen is to your father. He is one of the original members of City Ship 41. A pureblood Pralor. I discovered him... or he discovered me actually... roughly fourteen thousand years ago give or take a century. He saved my life to be honest.”

“And this Wayonn is with my brother now?” Resumar asked.

Shiria nodded. “Yes... it would appear so. Continue 341.”

-One category twenty-one and two category nineteen Etheric contacts currently located on the Lycavorian Union world known as Curila 6. Most likely hypothesis... based on current resonance levels; this is King Martin Leonidas, Queen Aricia Leonidas and the Hadarian Queen Anja Leonidas-

Shiria looked at Resumar and saw the stunned expression on his face. The stunned but joyous expression. “You see Resumar. Your father lives. I did not lie to you.”

-One category nineteen currently located in The Wilds on the planet known as Belid with two category eighteens in transit and approaching the same location. Based again on resonance levels this appears to be King Leonidas's Elven Queen Dysea Leonidas and his children known as Denali and Lisisa Leonidas. Another category nineteen is also located on Belid. Identification unknown at this time- 341 continued.

-One Category eighteen contact currently in transit within Union space. Closing on the position of Androcles Leonidas. Contact is unknown-

“Interesting.” Shiria said softly. “Two unknown contacts that I had no knowledge of. Discovering who they are will be most fascinating.”

-One category nineteen currently located on the Union world of Earth. Most likely analysis of resonance levels indicates that this is Androcles Leonidas's Lycavorian *Anome Sadi Leonidas*-

-One category nineteen and one category eighteen currently located on Kavalian Federation world of Ritaah-

Shiria looked at Resumar. “That would be us. I am purposely not shielding so that you can see I am telling you the truth.”

-One category nineteen and one category seventeen currently in transit in High Coven space. Based on previous scans this indicates the vampire female Yuri and one of her offspring-

Resumar stepped forward quickly, moving right up next to Shiria while holding Athani's hand tightly. “That bitch Yuri!” He snarled.

Shiria looked at him. “More than likely yes. They escaped Earth after their attack on your sister did they not?”

Resumar nodded. “That is what Andro told me.”

-Remaining category seventeen currently located in The Wilds on the planet known as Kranek. Based on current data, analysis would indicate that this is the vampire Queen Isabella Leonidas-

-Error-

-Current scan is not accurate with previous versions-

Shiria moved closer to him. “Explain.” She ordered.

-Previous Etheric Scans indicated nineteen total contacts. There is a Category Nineteen not listed in the current scan or the two previous sweeps. Odd. The category nineteen Etheric resonance of Dysea Leonidas did not register on the previous scan as well-

“But she is a positive contact now?” Shiria asked confused.

-Affirmative-

“Last location of the lost contact?” Shiria asked.

-According to previous scans... plotted location was Sparta on Earth. Mostly likely deduction is that this is the Elven Queen For'mya Leonidas-

“Why are you not picking her up?” Shiria asked as both she and Resumar moved closer to 341.

-Unknown at this time. Running a systems diagnostic. I will need four minutes and thirty-three seconds to complete the diagnostic-

Shiria turned to Resumar and saw his still wide eyes. “Your father is alive Resumar Leonidas. Something that your brother Androcles more than likely would have told you when he contacted you next.”

“Why not right away?” Resumar asked gently, not directing the question at Shiria.

“I don’t know but as I told you before, there is much going on back on Earth and he is having to deal with it alone.” She said swiftly. “We know that Keleru and Pusintin have begun moving against you and your family. I warned Wayonn that this might take place and he would have passed this information on to your father.”

“Wait! You knew?” Athani gasped.

Shiria shook her head. “I knew of something thanks to Ckhoa’s sister Poysa. Her current position allows her to gather much needed pieces of intelligence for me, but not all of the pieces unfortunately. She warned me that there was talk and rumors of an direct attack against the Union and its Royal family several months ago. I did not have the opportunity to pass this on to Wayonn until only a few weeks ago.”

“Why not contact my father directly?” Resumar asked.

Shiria shook her head. “And risk your father starting a war to come and retrieve me from Kavalian space and destroy this ship? No. And you know as well as I that is exactly what he would have done. Ckhoa and I had this very conversation before we left Rizon Four. As the direct descendant of Sumar, his combined Lycavorian and Pralor blood would have drove him to come into Kavalian space at any cost. To retrieve me. To the best of my knowledge I am the only remaining pureblooded Pralor. Wayonn and I agreed many years ago once your father returned to us that we needed to keep my existence secret from him for fear of what he might do as he discovered knowledge of the past from Avatar 41.”

“Avi?” Resumar asked.

Shiria smiled at him. “Do you think your father would dismiss the knowledge that Avatar 41 holds within his memory cores?”

“Avi.” Athani said. “His name is Avi. He is not just a machine.”

Shiria looked at her and smiled. “Forgive me... Avi then. I should have known he would have developed his own behavioral parameters once he was reactivated, especially being around your father. It is what the avatars were supposed to do.” Shiria turned back to look at Avi and 341. “No doubt he has passed this independent behavior to 341 by now since they have been connected within the systems of this ship for the last few days.”

“If this Wayonn was on Lycavore... how did he not fall during the Black Day? Or get captured by the Coven?” Resumar asked.

“Wayonn and approximately twenty thousand of your people, many of them now with Pralor blood in their veins, attempted to return to Pralor space millennia ago.” Shiria explained. “This is how he explained it to me when we first discovered each other. They succeeded, but they arrived in the middle of the beginning of the war that eventually led to the death of our species. They escaped but did not make it back to Lycavore. They settled on a world in the Beta Quadrant of space and...”

“The Beta Quadrant?” Dario exclaimed. “That is... that is like a hundred thousand light years from here! It would take us decades to get there!”

Shiria nodded. “Not anymore.” She looked at Resumar. “Why do you think your father made it a priority to take from City Ship 41 the intricacies of Quantum Fusion Drives Resumar? And our Multiphasic shields. Why not try to develop weapons to protect the Union? Avatar... Avi would have done whatever your father asked of him.”

-King Leonidas was very specific in his requests of knowledge and how it was to be applied Elder Pralor Shiria- Avi broke in from his spot. -Conquest of others is not in his nature and it did not interest him in the least-

Shiria nodded. “Your father could feel it then Resumar. He could feel the call of his pure Pralor blood and he used the advances from CS41 to further the gains you had already made in engine technology. What did Martin Leonidas tell you the goal was Avi?”

-He never specifically stated a goal Elder Pralor Shiria. Only that he wanted to go very far and see new places, and he wanted the ability to get back- Avi answered.

“Your supposition?” Shiria asked him.

Avi paused for a long moment and Resumar turned to him. “You can answer her question Avi. Now is not the time to keep my father’s secrets.”

-I will not violate operational plans or concepts that King Leonidas was working on without his order. However... analysis would support that your father’s goal was to one day return to Pralor space- Avi answered honestly. **-The development of the HMFC Drives of the *LEONIDAS IIA* Strike Cruisers further support this. In their current configuration designed by Zaala Randall, and with the new Quantum Resonance Field Reactors of the new *ARIZONA* Class, with proper coordination and accurate star charts, this task could be accomplished in only two years-**

“Two years!” Resumar gasped.

“Exactly how far away is Pralor space?” Mican asked.

-The far fringe of Pralor space is not marked in any way- Avi stated. **-341 would have more accurate data-**

“341?” Resumar asked.

-The nearest border of Pralor space at the time VORTEX Cruiser 341 departed was exactly five hundred thousand, six hundred and fourteen point three light years from our current location-

“*Nubou lae!*” Dario spat.

Channa turned and slapped him hard in his chest. “Your language Dario my mate!”

Dario looked sheepish and smiled. “Sorry.”

-Travel to the Beta Quadrant would require accurate calculations and current star charts, but with the existing drive configuration as given to me by Avatar 41, such a trip would only require three, possibly four targeted jumps- 341 continued. **-Factoring in Jump Drive recharging rates... and Light Speed Drive Coils... time to complete this transition would be two days at most-**

“The Lost Ones!” Resumar gasped causing everyone to look at him.

Athani looked at his face as he stepped away from her deep in thought. “Resumar? What do you mean?”

Resumar turned back to look at her. “It is something... when my father destroyed Ukway, when he released the Mindvoice essence of Canth, my grandfather’s Oracle... Canth told him he would have to discover the Lost Ones.” Resumar looked at Shiria. “That’s who these people are! The ones that remained on Lycavore! These ones that follow this Wayonn! That is what he meant isn’t it?”

Shiria smiled knowingly. “You share the incredible insight and keen mind of your father and brother Resumar Leonidas. Yes... Canth was Wayonn’s son.” She said. “And until right now I did not realize that your First Oracle... Helen... she is of his bloodline as well. I always thought she just received Canth’s essence during the Change of Oracles. It appears that is not the case at all. So there is much that Wayonn has not shared with me, and much I have not shared with him because of the situations we were both in. That will need to end very soon in order for us to understand all that is happening right now.”

“What do you mean?” Athani asked.

“Everything that is happening now... all of it... it was set in motion by actions that we as Pralors took thousands of years ago. We did not understand them at the time for these Pralors were acting out of what they thought was in their best interests at the time.” Shiria said. “I only arrived after these things were already in motion and I tried my best to offset the awkward balance of things. Why do you think I chose to remain here

among the Kavalian people? Who do you think it was that gave the knowledge and technology to the Lycavorians of how to utilize your Shi Viskas?"

"You?" Resumar gasped.

Shiria nodded. "I did it as a means to balance the advantage that the essence of Xaxon gave to the Coven in other ways. Wayonn did not approve I tell you, but I knew it needed to be done and this technology was not something Wayonn had access to. I gave it to the Lycavorian people and I made sure it made its way to Earth so that those Helen had brought there could be balanced."

Resumar stepped closer to her. "Who is the third Pralor?" He asked. "They are here in Kavalian space aren't they? They're Kavalian. That is why you have remained here isn't it?"

"Resumar that isn't possible." Athani said. "My father would not allow this person to exist or act without his permission."

"What if he doesn't know about them?" Resumar asked looking at her.

Shiria shook her head. "I'm sorry Resumar... but I will not reveal that knowledge to anyone but your father. This... this Pralor has had far too long to contemplate the results of their actions and I tell you it has not made them very willing to reveal things. They harbor a deep seated regret for what their actions have wrought throughout the millennia and they have been trying to atone for that equally as long."

"But we..." Resumar began.

-Resumar Leonidas... my diagnostic is complete and my conclusions are... odd- 341's voice interrupted them.

Resumar tore his eyes from Shiria and looked at him. "Odd how?" He snapped.

-I am detecting minute trace levels of the negative Etheric Resonance of City Ship 19- 341 answered.

Vonis stepped forward now. "City Ship 19." He asked. "That's... that's the ship that crashed on Nuwaroa. How is that possible... it lost all power over ten years ago."

-My calculations are accurate Colonel Vonis- 341 answered.

Shiria stepped forward. "341... you said the negative resonance." She stated. "Are you certain?"

-The data is 99.2% accurate Elder Pralor Shiria-

"What is negative Etheric resonance?" Resumar asked.

Shiria looked at him. "Every Pralor ship had a room or rooms, libraries if you will, that were used for meditation, contemplation and study without the constant battering of Mindvoice resonance against one's shields. They were designed with material that blocked all Mindvoice abilities and communications. All of it. Completely. A negative resonance chamber if you will."

"There are rooms like that on CS41." Resumar spoke. "The largest one is used as a nursery for dragon hatchlings so that they do not get overwhelmed in their first few weeks of life."

Shiria looked at him oddly for a second. "An interesting use." She said softly. "That does not explain how trace levels of this negative resonance chamber from CS19 got to Earth. It..."

-I am also detecting trace levels of a similar design surrounding a High Coven ship now in orbit around Belid. They are nearly identical in composition Elder Pralor Shiria- 341 was working quickly at his console. **-These trace levels of negative resonance were not present on Earth four days ago, nor anywhere in the sector of space surrounding Belid. Avatar 41?-**

-Adjusting previous scans and then overlapping them with the trajectory of travel corridors in The Wilds- Avi's hands also were a blur of movement. **-The negative resonance anomaly was activated on**

Earth approximately 91 hours ago and on the High Coven ship approximately 83 hours ago. When activated on the High Coven ship, the ship was holding station 4.8 million kilometers from Kranek-

“Kranek!” Resumar exclaimed. “That is when the Kavalians were attacking the Immortal settlement there! That is where they took my mother from.”

Shiria looked at him. “What do you mean took your mother?” She asked quickly.

“Immortals.” Athani spoke now. “Immortals that are in my father’s employ. They took Dysea... kidnapped her during the battle there! Denali and Cha'talla have gone after her from what Andro told us during the last contact with him, but we do not know what has come of it.”

“Why would they take your mother?” Shiria asked softly.

“I don’t know.” Resumar answered. “It is something that has occupied my thoughts for many hours now. At least until you arrived.”

“With your shields at the level they are can you feel your family?” Shiria asked. “Use me as a continued guide if you must!”

Resumar closed his eyes and reached out gingerly within Mindvoice using both Athani and Shiria as anchors. Almost immediately he was able to detect his brothers and sisters and once more his father. He could feel his aunt and the Feravomir as well as all of his mothers except for For'mya. He opened his eyes after a moment. “Yes.” He answered swiftly. “All but my mother For'mya. We... she was with my aunt in the Senate Building when the Kavalians destroyed it with explosives. Andro... we believe the explosion...” Resumar took a deep breath. “We believe she may have died in the explosion.”

-I do not believe that is the case Resumar- Avi’s voice spoke now.

Resumar looked at him. “What do you mean Avi?”

-Reviewing the data from the Etheric scans and when they activated coincides to almost the exact time frame when your mother’s disappeared from the sensor array- He looked up at him. **-Activation points of these negative Etheric anomalies are eighteen point nine percent higher than the trace levels we are now detecting-**

“I’m not following you Avi.” Resumar spoke.

Shiria’s eyes grew a little wider. “But I am.” She stated firmly. “Avi... 341... what is the percentage that someone with knowledge of Pralor technology could take minute portions of the interior of a negative resonance chamber and make it portable?”

-There would be no purpose in such an endeavor Elder Pralor Shiria- 341 answered.

“Indulge me.” Shiria spoke.

-With the proper schematics and knowledge of Pralor technology the probabilities are 82.5%- Avi answered. **-However only certain sections of a negative resonance chamber would be useful in such a device. The molecular structure of the bio-mechanical properties within a chamber would be begin to degrade after only a few hours leaving miniscule amounts that were useable. Certainly not enough material would be left that could effectively hide a ship-**

“I’m not taking about a ship Avi.” Shiria said urgently. “Would there be enough material left to effectively eliminate someone’s Mindvoice essence? To block it from being detected by others?”

-With the proper adjustments to negative coefficients and resonance variables. Yes. Such a device could be built to hide an individual as well as completely inhibit their Mindvoice abilities- 341 answered.

“And how big would it be?” Shiria asked.

341 held up his hand and looked at it. –**No larger than my fingernail-** He responded. –**If not smaller-**

Shiria looked at Resumar then. “Your mother isn’t dead Resumar Leonidas.” She stated. “You cannot feel her because her Mindvoice resonance is being blocked. And if I had to guess I would say she is no longer on Earth either.”

“What?” Resumar exclaimed. “Why?”

Shiria turned to Ckhoa. “Ckhoa... what time is it on Cabelir?”

“Four hours after sunset.” Ckhoa answered immediately. “The main meal time would have finished thirty minutes ago.”

“Then Poysha would be back in her quarters?” Shiria asked.

Ckhoa nodded. “More than likely preparing a burst transmission to send to Rizon Four yes.”

“Use the communications array here.” Shiria ordered quickly. “It will not be detected by Kavalian Intercepts. We need to talk with her now!”

“Avi... help her!” Resumar snapped moving closer to her. “Shiria... what do you think is going on?”

Shiria turned back to him. “The timing is too precise.” She stated. “The attack on Earth, on Kranek. The attempts on your father and your family. The Drow elf bases you have in The Wilds. Now this use of Pralor technology that the Kavalians should not have. You and your brother are right to think something else is going on Resumar, but I cannot for the life of me figure out what it is! They accomplish nothing by killing your father and members of your family. If they think this will not lead to war they are more insane than I first thought. To do this and not follow up with a full scale invasion? You are more of a military officer than I... does this make sense to you?”

Resumar shook his head. “No. And neither does it make sense to Andro.”

“Hadaria then.” Vonis spoke. “To insure they had a secure footing on Hadaria?”

Resumar shook his head. “That was a political coup against mother.” He stated. “They only supported it. They know the Union Senate would never approve of forcibly returning my mother to power and they gain what they always wanted without any bloodshed. Hadarian Healers in their ranks. Hadaria is a founding member of the Union. The Union Senate would never allow us to attack it; my father would never attack it.”

Shiria looked at him. “Would your brother?”

Resumar met her eyes for a long moment before slowly nodding his head. “If he deemed the Kavalian presence there a threat yes.” He stated confidently. “Andro is not our father and I do not believe he would hold the same convictions as our father in some respects. If Andro sees the Kavalian presence on Hadaria becoming a threat to the Union or to others within the Union yes, he will attack without hesitation. He will go after that Kavalian presence until there is no more threat.”

Shiria shook her head. “It isn’t Hadaria. As you said Resumar... why use force when they have gained what they wanted politically.”

“Then why attempt to kill my father?” Resumar asked. “Why attempt to kill my mothers and my siblings?”

“I don’t know.” She stated softly. “That is why I’m hoping that Poysha can give us some clues to what is going on.”

SCIMITAR

FOUR HOURS FROM EARTH

The slap was hard enough to echo slightly even in the landing bay of the *SCIMITAR* and Andro reached up to rub his cheek for the second time in less than ten seconds. Wayonn was walking down the ramp of the *STRIKER DT* with Helen when he saw this, Dutkne and the others as well. Devra stood with Arduri and Naesta at the bottom of the ramp while Elynth and Majeir had already exited and were sitting on the deck watching with what would amount to an amused expression for a dragon. Wayonn looked quickly at Helen.

“I take it this is normal?” He whispered.

Helen smiled and nodded her head as she saw the burgundy red hair of Eliani Leonidas. "Oh yes... quite normal." She stated looking at him. "Eliani shares the sharp tongue and quick temper of her mother Anja." They turned back to watch as Andro lowered his hand and moved his jaw back and forth while Lu'ria looked on with a humorous glint in her amber colored eyes and Ne'Veha couldn't help but giggle while holding Lu'ria's hand.

"Are you quite through?" Andro asked his sister as he towered over her five foot three frame.

"*Forn igord riad aulved!*" Eliani hissed staring at him with her fern green eyes blazing in anger. "You should have touched us! You should have told us!"

"And if I had done that when you were not in front of me you would have rejoiced to the stars and allowed everyone in three systems know our father was alive." Andro spoke calmly. "That is something he didn't want."

Eliani glared at him for a moment longer before throwing her arms around his shoulders and burying her face into his neck and hugging him tightly. Andro smiled and returned the embrace, feeling the tension leaving his sister but also feeling something heavy weighing on her mind that had nothing to do with their father. He squeezed her tightly and Eliani relished in the feel of his arms around her. Eliani was strong, she knew that, but Andro had the unique ability to calm her and sooth her wilder nature. It was something she always loved about him and why she did not want to be very far from him. She could tell him anything, no matter how personal and it had always been that way.

Andro pulled his face back and stared into her tear stained eyes. *[Eliani what is wrong?]* He asked her.

[I need... I need your opinion of something Andro. I'm... I feel torn up inside.] She answered him.

His eyes narrowed and he held her tighter. *[What? Tell me!]*

Eliani kissed his cheek. *[Soon. I know we have much to do first.]*

[Eli...?] He began.

Eliani shook her head as she touched his face. *[Soon.]* She spoke. *[Zarah is busting to...]*

[You are just as important to me as Zarah sister.] He spoke. *[I am here for you... always. You know that.]*

Eliani nodded. *[I know... and when I gather my thoughts enough where I don't ramble I will come to you. I always do.]*

Andro nodded and set her back on the deck. *[No matter the time.]* He told her.

Eliani nodded. *[I will... right now I want to immerse myself in the happiness that I feel that father is still alive and meet your new mates.]*

Andro leaned over and kissed her cheek once more before nodding. Eliani squeezed his arms before turning to Lu'ria and Ne'Veha and reaching for them. Andro turned and looked at Zarah's beaming face. Lucia was beside her looking equally as happy and Andro knew that they were slowly growing closer and closer. He stepped forward quickly and crushed Zarah in his arms, squeezing her tighter than he had Eliani because of the bond they both shared. Zarah exerted all of her combined vampire and wolf strength and squeezed him back just as tightly as she rubbed her cheek against his. He set her down and brought his hands to her face.

"You are...?"

Zarah nodded. "I am fine Andro." She whispered. "I am... I am healing."

He closed his eyes and touched his forehead to hers. "Zarah I..."

Zarah shook her head. "Don't... you dare apologize to me." She hissed softly. "You saved me Andro... you saved us."

"Yes you did." Lucia spoke softly causing both of them to look at her. Her vampire features also beamed with happiness as Zarah reached out and pulled her close to them. Andro didn't hesitate and encircled Lucia's waist with his arm.

"You brought us together." Zarah whispered as her head dipped and she touched Lucia's cheek. "You made it so we could find each other. As it was meant to be. That is the gift you have given us."

Lucia nodded as her arm snaked around Zarah's waist and pulled her closer. "And it is a gift." She spoke softly. "A gift I would never have found without you."

Andro chuckled. "Alright... enough you two." He said pulling back and kissing both their cheeks. He reached up and traced their skin with the back of his knuckles.

"Andro I wanted to go after mother." Zarah said. "Why did you make us come back?"

“Janae is missing Zarah. The Kavalians hit her apartment at the same time they attacked Grandfather Panos’s home.” Andro told them. “Marci is holding things together very well... but she needs skilled operators that know Sparta and Earth. That is why I had Anton and Cihera return as well. I think Janae is still on Earth and I don’t believe she is dead. I need you and Lucia to find her for me, using Anton and Cihera as your backup. I need you to use your skill to find her. With Lucia beside you it will be even stronger now.”

“Father does not want me using that skill Androcles, you know that.” Zarah said. “He thinks it is a severe invasion of someone’s privacy.”

Andro nodded. “I know... but I am not father.” He answered. “Janae has been trained by our mother, Aunt Aihola and Armetus. She knows her importance and if she was attacked she will drop off the grid completely and not resurface until father returns. And if she was attacked and is being held somewhere because they could not get her off Earth, I want her found. Our father can’t return; he needs to stay dead for now in case the Kavalians have a follow on attack planned. That is why I need you to find her.”

“What of our mother and Aunt Deia?” Zarah asked.

Andro shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“I can’t feel her presence at all Andro. None of us can.” Zarah said softly. “That... that could only mean one thing.”

“I will not believe that until we know for sure.” Andro said.

“And if it’s true?”

Andro met her eyes evenly. “Then as I told Res... the Kavalians will rue the day they ever started down this path.”

Zarah nodded. “We will do it.” She said. “We’ll find her.”

Andro nodded. “Good.”

Zarah looked around his shoulder and saw Eliani step away from embracing Helen and she began to introduce her to the men and women gathered around. Zarah’s dark eyes fell on Dutkne lastly and she felt an involuntary shiver course through her. “Why is it that these people feel so familiar Andro?” She asked looking back to him. “It is almost as if I feel I should know them for some reason.”

Andro gripped her hand. “Come... I’ll introduce you and you can discover it for yourself. But you are right to a degree. We should know them. They are... they are the true Lost Ones that father has been searching for all these years.”

RITAAH

VORTEX CRUISER 341

“... This secure Mistress?” The dark haired Kavalian female spoke from within the secure holotransmission.

Shiria nodded her head with a gentle smile. “I would not put you in danger Poysha... you know that. We are on VORTEX Cruiser 341. No one will be able to detect this signal let alone intercept it.”

“The VORTEX cruiser?” Poysha gasped. “Why? How did you get there? Where is Ckaoa Mistress?”

“I am here sister.” Ckaoa spoke stepping up beside Shiria. “We are safe so do not worry for us.”

“I was... I was just preparing a report to you.” Poysha spoke still somewhat confused at what was happening.

“Poysha... you can tell us what you were going to report now.” Shiria said. “And then I have some questions for you.” She reached out and held her hand to Resumar who took it and moved up on the opposite side of her. “Poysha... you know who this is don’t you?”

Poysha’s blue/green feline eyes grew slightly wider and she nodded her head quickly. “He is... he is Resumar Leonidas. Mistress... he is there with you? What is going on?” Her eyes grew even wider. “If he... the Union has discovered VORTEX Cruiser 341!” She gasped.

“We always knew it would happen sooner or later. Let’s just say that Resumar is here with a separate mission, but one that is necessary and vital.” Shiria said. “I have...” She looked at Resumar. “I have told him who I am... and he can feel it within his blood.” She looked back to Poysha. “Tell us what you were going to report?”

“There is a standing low alert among Kavalian forces.” She said quickly. “There is rumor among the officers here that it has something to do with a report from a field team that Prefect Keleru received two days ago. He cancelled all of his meetings after this report, including the daily military brief which is very unusual, and his nephew Kattu has been seen several times at the main Military Headquarters.”

“Kattu?” Ckhoa said coming forward. “Are you sure sister?”

Poysha nodded. “I saw him once myself.”

“Who is this Kattu?” Resumar asked.

“He is my father’s enforcer.” Athani spoke now. “His oldest brother’s son. He makes... he makes people disappear that do not agree with my father. He’s very strong, very cruel and very good at what he does. He usually remains in the shadows but if he is being seen by others then whatever this rumor is...”

“What are the rumors?” Shiria asked.

“Something to do with Pusintin’s youngest son Leruk.” Poysha said. “No one is speaking openly of it for fear they will draw Kattu’s attention... but the consensus among many of the military is that he has been killed by someone while operating within The Wilds against one of the Drow outposts. It is being kept very low key Mistress... almost as if they do not want Marshall Pusintin to find out. The consensus is that it wasn’t a Drow but someone else who killed him. I think... I think that frightens them. To kill Leruk was no small deed.”

Shiria looked at Resumar when she felt him fidget next to her. “You know something of this Resumar?” She asked.

“I know it’s no rumor.” Resumar stated calmly meeting her eyes. “Andro killed him on Irazuzu. He was the one that was leading the attack on the Drow settlement there. He almost killed Andro’s Drow mate Lu’ria.”

“Your brother did this?” Shiria asked.

Resumar nodded. “Yes.”

Shiria shook her head slowly. “I am not as familiar with Spartan customs as I should be. This is not a good thing I take it? Attempting to harm the wife and mate of a Spartan?”

“Not if you wish to remain living a long and prosperous life.” Res answered. “Going after a Spartan’s mate is a singularly stupid thing to do. It has no honor to it and it shows that you are weak and cowardly and afraid to act as a man. At least to a Spartan.”

Poysha looked stunned. “Leruk was no mere soldier Mistress. He was a fully trained Puma Bane Commando. One of their best by all accounts.”

Shiria nodded still looking at Resumar. “Yes well... not trained enough it seems if he is now dead.” She said turning back to Poysha to answer and then cutting her eyes back to Resumar. “I take it your brother will act as your father has acted in the past when his wives and mates are threatened or harmed. As you would act?” She said.

Resumar shrugged laconically as he drew Athani closer to him and her face beamed as her hand rested on his abdomen. “It’s a pretty safe bet.”

Shiria smiled and turned back to the transmission. “What else Poysha?”

“The Union still has not been able to stop the flow of forces to Hadaria it seems.” She told them. “My guess is that the Prefect had a single Jump Gate built somewhere close to the Union border and somehow was able to connect it to the Union Jump corridors. How I don’t know... but it is the only reason I can think of. The Union Jump Gates are all controlled and operated from a secure facility on Apo Prime. I find it hard to believe he was able to penetrate that facility.”

“Resumar?” Shiria asked.

“She’s right.” Resumar spoke. “It’s a secure facility... no effort has been made to keep it secret, but I disagree with her in that it could not be penetrated. Someone did only a few months ago, for they hid an attempt on my sister Normya by hiding the fact that one of our Gates had been destroyed. My mother believed it was linked to this Rinard and his success at getting my mother removed as Queen of Hadaria.”

“Rinard?” Poysha said quickly causing them to look at her. “I know this name Mistress. A Lycavorian. He was here on Cabelir several times nearly a decade ago.”

“What forces are on Hadaria?” Resumar asked now.

“Upwards of five million biogenic clone ground troops and at least a thousand warships.” Poysha answered. “If it comes to it Resumar Leonidas... the Prefect will not give Hadaria back easily. If at all.”

“Poysha tell me... has there been any unusual activity concerning Keleru or Pusintin?” Shiria asked.

“Unusual how Mistress?” Poysha asked.

“Abnormal behavior perhaps.” Shiria stated. “Meetings that may have took place that are not normal. Any out of place activity around either Keleru’s or Pusintin’s homes. Anything of that sort?”

“Not that I can recall Mistress.” Poysha said. “Everything they do is abnormal to me. I could ask... wait...” She turned from the transmission and appeared to be searching through a short stack of data pads. She turned back quickly. “I don’t know if this is what you mean... but in the last seven weeks the requisitions officer has seen a significant increase in Class Nine Mindvoice dampeners. He did not have any on hand and he had to purchase them in The Wilds.”

Shiria looked at Resumar quickly and then back to her. “Why is that significant?”

“The cost of a Class Nine MV dampener in The Wilds is outrageous Mistress. Upwards of twenty million credits. For some reason the pirate and mercenary scum believe this will shield them from being detected by an individual who can Mindvoice. The fool idiots don’t understand that we can detect that as well.” Poysha answered her. “The Requisitions officer was instructed to purchase thirty of them.”

“What were they to be used for?” Shiria asked.

“Ten of these dampeners were installed in Marshall Pusintin’s home while he is offworld, ten were installed in the Prefect’s home and five were installed in a single examining room within the secure Medical Center near the Prefect’s office. All within the last three days. I know this because I was the technician who made sure they were active and working.” Poysha replied.

“The medical facility?” Shiria asked. “Why? Aside from yourself no one on Cabelir has the Mindvoice ability that a Class Nine Dampener would be needed for.”

“I don’t know Mistress.” Poysha spoke.

“And you say Pusintin is not within the capital?” Shiria asked.

Poysha shook her head. “He left aboard his ship two days ago.” She answered. “No flight plan was filed, which is usually the case with him. I don’t know where he has gone. And I dare not press too hard.”

“Can you get into this medical facility?” Shiria asked.

Poysha nodded without hesitation. “Easily Mistress. My clearances extend to the medical facility. I have been tasked with maintaining the dampeners. The better question is why would I want to?”

Shiria looked at Resumar once more. “Your mother isn’t dead Resumar.” She said with some confidence. “She has been taken from Earth and they are bringing her back to Cabelir. More to the point, Pusintin is bringing her back to Cabelir.”

Resumar’s eyes were wide. “What? Why?”

“That I do not know.” Shiria stated. “There would be no reason to install such powerful dampeners at their homes and in this medical facility unless they plan on holding a powerful Mindvoicer prisoner. Someone like your mother For’mya.”

“How would they... there is no way they could have gotten her off Earth! Why would they want to?” Resumar protested. “That’s just not possible. They would have needed help from the inside. Someone close to my family that could...” Resumar stopped as his eyes went even wider.

“What?” Shiria asked.

“Someone who would know the *Durcunusaan* and how they would react to an attack on my family.” Resumar answered. “Someone who had working codes to get them into secure areas that are not accessible to normal people.”

“A traitor.” Shiria said softly.

Resumar nodded. “Yes.” He replied as his jaw hardened and the look in his dark eyes made Shiria shiver; and not from the chilly air in the cruiser. He looked at Poysha in the secure holotransmission. “I need you to find out what you can!” He barked the order. “Everything that you are able!”

Poysha looked at Shiria. “Mistress Shiria?” She asked.

Shiria placed her hand on Resumar’s arm just as Athani stepped closer and took his hand. He turned to look at his wife and pulled her close, leaning over to inhale deeply of her sweet tangerine scent and nuzzle her cheek. It had the desired effect and Shiria could feel the tension and anger leaving his body, more from the touch and scent of Athani than anything she did and it only proved to her that indeed they were on the path to the future. She nodded to Poysha.

“We knew this day would come Poysha.” She said softly. “It is what we have worked towards for many years. Can you accomplish what we need without endangering your position and cover?”

Poysha nodded immediately. “Yes.”

Resumar looked up and took a deep breath. “Forgive me for sounding rude.” He spoke. “Do nothing to compromise yourself no matter what you may think you can discover. If you are as deep as I think you are... you are a far greater asset to us than anything we have and I will not risk you no matter what.”

“You... you believe Pusintin has taken your mother from Earth?” Poysha asked. “He cannot be that insane. That is an open and unquestioned act of war.”

“I don’t know what he thinks to accomplish...” Shiria said. “But this action would give some explanation to why they have done what they have. Perhaps they intend to use her as a bargaining chip of some sort. To keep your brother from attacking. Perhaps that is why they haven’t invaded. When do you think you will have something Poysha?”

“It will look odd if I try to enter the facility at night.” Poysha responded. “I will go there tomorrow and contact you on this same channel at this hour tomorrow night.”

Shiria nodded. “As Resumar has said Poysha, do nothing to risk yourself. I would never be able to forgive myself.”

Poysha nodded. “I will be careful Mistress. I will contact you tomorrow.”

Shiria and Resumar watched as the transmission faded and then Shiria turned to Resumar to talk. “I’m sure you have many questions.” She said.

Resumar met her gaze evenly. “And you would be correct.” He stated calmly. “First and foremost is who is she and how deep is she? The next is how did you accomplish that with her being a female?”

Ckhoa stepped forward slightly. “She is my sister and she is helping you!” She hissed softly.

Resumar nodded. “Considering the way females are treated within the KFI, her being a tech that has access to this type of information is extremely out of place isn’t it? How exactly is she able to know all that she knows?”

Athani squeezed his arm gently and looked at Shiria. “Is it what I think it is Scribe Mother?” She asked softly.

Shiria looked at Ckhoa for a long moment and then back to Resumar. He saw the look on her face and then turned to Athani. “*Aryschanne*... what do you mean?”

“There is only one way she would have the secure access that she does Res. The technical training that she seems to have, as well as the ability to move within the senior ranks of those close to my father.” Athani said softly. “Isn’t that right Scribe Mother? Ckhoa?”

“Would you care to fill me in?” Resumar asked softly.

Athani looked at him. “When my father discovered that the biogenic clone treatments could alter the appearance of females so that we lose the coat of hair that we normally have, make us look like those females within the Union, many of the Puma Bane Pride leaders and officers found them to be very pleasant to look upon.”

Resumar’s dark eyes narrowed. “Please don’t tell me what I think you are going to tell me.” He stated.

Athani nodded. “There is a small group of females that were given the treatments. Some are the daughters of senior Pride leaders and military officers. They were given the treatments and then additional training not usually afforded to our females.”

“In exchange for what?” Resumar demanded.

“The men who walk the power corridors with my father are very vain men Resumar.” She stated. “They feel most everything is beneath them. What better way to stoke this feeling of superiority than make females do the jobs that they won’t do themselves, make them all look like me and Jalersi and Ckhoa here, and then be able to fuck them at their leisure!” She finished the sentence with a harshness in her voice.

Resumar looked at her with wide eyes. “That’s a joke right?”

Athani shook her head. “It is a status thing for the Prides. It gains them my father’s favor to commit their daughters to such a life. And you know how they view females.”

Resumar looked at Shiria. “You allowed this?” He asked.

Ckhoa stepped in front of Shiria. “Mistress Shiria had nothing to do with this!” She snapped. “This was a decision that Poysha and I made together. Shiria tried to stop it when she discovered it, but by then Poysha

was already within this inner circle. She is... she is more of what those foul men desire in her appearance and she is... she is better at responding to them in ways that pleases them.”

Shiria watched Resumar’s face for a moment. “Resumar you...”

Resumar ignored her and turned to look at where Mican and Vonis stood. “Mican, Uncle Vonis... prepare a plan to move to her location and extract her if need be. Mican... you know the capital well enough?”

Mican nodded. “Perfectly.” He answered.

“We are closest to her and if she needs our help I want to be able to give it within hours.” Resumar spoke. “Use Avi and 341 to assist.”

Vonis stepped closer to his nephew his vampire blood beginning to churn with incentive as he was a former Intelligence officer and operative. “Objective?” He asked.

Resumar looked at Ckhoa. “Pulling Poysha out of the Kavalian capital if we need to and any of those females who want to go with her.” He stated turning back to him. “*Aryschanne?*”

Athani nodded without question. “Between Mican and myself... there should be nothing about the capital that we will forget.”

“You cannot do this!” Ckhoa spoke moving up to him. “Think... think of the intelligence you will lose!”

Resumar turned slowly and looked at her. “I will not leave your sister... any of them to sell their bodies or their dignity for information! Not for you, not for us... not for anyone!” He snarled. “It is one of the most vile things I have ever heard of and I will not let it continue one moment longer than necessary. And if my father and brother knew of it they would act in a similar manner!”

Ckhoa looked at him stunned at his words. They were filled with such conviction and anger over what he had discovered. “You must.” Ckhoa said softly. “If you do not... if you do not you will condemn all of them to die.”

“What do you mean?” Resumar demanded.

“All of them... all of them have been implanted with a micro explosive device in their heads.” Ckhoa told him. “It can be triggered by anyone with a detonator or if they leave the planet.”

Athani’s eyes grew wider. “You must be joking!” She exclaimed. “Who... who would do such a thing?”

Ckhoa met her eyes. “Your father ordered it after you defected Athani Leonidas.” She said softly. “Poysha believes none of the others know of it. She discovered it after the medical exam given to her after your defection. All of them had one. It was fused into the base of her skull at the juncture of her spine and her brain under the guise of tests. If you... if you remove them from Cabelir, they will all die.”

“*Vith!*” Vonis swore. “That is... that is...”

Shiria looked at him and nodded. “Yes... unconscionable.” She said softly. “Yet this is the enemy we face, and they are children compared to others I have witnessed.”

Resumar turned now and looked at Shiria. “What do you mean by that?”

Shiria shook her head. “A discussion for another time perhaps young Resumar. We are here... and it would be foolish of me to return to Rizon Four. You need me here. At least right now. What can we do?”

“I must contact Andro and let him know what we have discovered.” Resumar said instantly.

“We don’t know if what we think is actually true Resumar Leonidas.” Shiria said.

“If you are who you say you are... who I believe you are... then Andro will not question what you and I think.” Resumar answered. “He will act on discovering if it is true. Something we cannot do from here.”

Shiria nodded after a moment. “Of course. It would also allow me to speak with Wayonn since he is with your brother now.”

“Avi... Spartan Secure 11!” Resumar barked as he turned away. “Find my brother and let him know we need to talk. Like yesterday!”

NORMYA’S LIGHT **SIX HOURS FROM BELID**

Cha’talla stared at himself in the mirror of the quarters they had been assigned, unable to truly comprehend what had taken place in the last seven hours. That is when Esther had finished developing the agent to counteract the biotoxin present in his body as well as every Immortal soldier that had accompanied him. It

had truly been a miraculous event. The initial pain of the transformation, the toxin being eradicated from within his body, was minor compared to the joy and euphoria that he felt when he looked upon himself in the mirror several hours later. What he saw... it was the epiphany that he had been waiting for all of his life.

His skin was no longer drawn tight, no longer wrinkled and grayish in color in some spots. Now his skin was a deep bronze color, as if he had spent all of his waking moments in the sun. His bone spurs, beginning to grow back since he had stopped filing them down, they were now a healthy white color and set against the bronze color of his skin they were nowhere near as fearsome looking. His forehead was no longer sunken and his eyes appeared so much brighter and clear because they were no longer set back into his skull. His face still bore the scars of over seven thousand years of life, but he now had short dark hair beginning to form a beard around his strong jaw and short dark hair quickly growing in on top of his once bald head. It was a miracle unlike any he had ever witnessed and now when he stroked the flawless skin of his Blessed Wife he would no longer see the large grayish colored hands. Now he would see strong hands and fingers that danced across her flesh with love and honor.

Cha'talla turned when he heard Esther enter and he looked at the vampire pureblood who had first saved him and then altered the course of his life. She was over six millennia his junior in age, yet she had utterly rewritten everything about him from the first moment he had taken her blood to save himself. It was not a question of whether he loved her, but only how much. He startled her when he moved faster than a man his sized should have been able and he scooped her into his powerful arms and covered her sweet lips with his own. Esther whimpered in total, unrestrained delight and wrapped her arms around his head as she returned the blistering kiss with all that she was. She hadn't known before what he would look like if he continued with the treatments she had thought were changing him. She had fallen in love with an Immortal and she did not want him to look different. He was beautiful to her no matter what his outward physical appearance was. Seeing him now, Esther cursed herself for not thinking about it sooner. It was not something she had expected, but it was a miracle for lack of a better word. She knew that he would look something of what their sons looked like, but Esther had no idea he would be so ruggedly beautiful. She could feel her body call out for him in a way that it never had before and she allowed her fingers to caress his face as he drew back from her and she saw for the first time what the man who had claimed her heart and soul justly looked like.

Cha'talla grinned at her, baring the tips of his vampiric fangs. "Do I... do I meet with your approval my Blessed Wife?" He asked.

Esther could only shake her head as tears filled her eyes. "Oh... my Blessed Husband." She said softly running a finger across his thin lips as she stared into his eyes. "You... you are the most... the most delicious man I have ever laid my eyes upon. You always have been no matter what you looked like."

Cha'talla pulled her close, burying his face in her dark hair and spinning her around. "I feel... I feel reborn Esther!" He gasped. "I feel... I feel reborn!"

"You are Cha'talla." She cried with a smile. She pulled his head back again. "You... you do realize that I will... I will need to spend days rediscovering you in our bed."

Cha'talla laughed and squeezed her tighter. "That is a time I look forward to!" He spoke. "And perhaps it will be time to give our sons the daughter that you want so badly and they have been badgering us to have."

Esther smiled brilliantly and kissed him hard. "I will definitely hold you to that Cha'talla my Blessed Husband!" She said.

"A promise I look forward to fulfilling." He spoke.

"Come with me. I want to show you something." Esther said taking his arm in her hands.

Cha'talla didn't know how she had memorized how to get to the landing bay so easily, only that several twists and turns and an elevator ride down and suddenly Cha'talla was standing in the port landing bay of *NORMYA'S LIGHT*. As he stepped off the elevator with Esther, his eyes took in not the dozens of fighters that were being prepped in the background, or the hundreds of crewman that scurried about with a singular purpose. No... what caught Cha'talla's eyes were the several hundred Akruxian Immortals that were mingling with the Spartan troops, all of them preparing their equipment for battle.

And all of them looking exactly as he did.

Cha'talla knew it wouldn't have mattered to the Lycavorian Spartans what his people looked like. The majority of them had stood together on Kranek and thrown back a superior Kavalian force soundly forging a bond of brotherhood that would now never be broken for it was part of Spartan and Akruxian honor, yet

Cha'talla didn't doubt it made things so much easier. No longer did the Spartans see the gray skin of their once vaunted enemy, now they saw the tanned flesh of new allies and friends. Cha'talla heard the laughter and saw two of his people standing with a group of Spartans, all of them holding their weapons and discussing one thing or the other. Not one of his people had refused the anti-toxin produced by Esther. She was well known as Cha'talla's wife and considered by many as their Matriarch Mother and they would never question her skill or heart. He saw dozens of his people with dark hair just beginning to grow on their heads, blond hair, brown hair, many of them like him with facial hair beginning to form. No doubt this was taking place on the opposite side of the ship in the starboard landing bay Cha'talla thought. He would never have thought six short months ago that he would be standing here on a Union ship and considered an ally and friend.

"Brother?" T'lolt's voice from the side caused him to turn and look at his brother. They were equal in size and build, but T'lolt had light brown hair beginning to grow on his head, and his eyes were light brown instead of dark brown.

"T'lolt!" Cha'talla gasped.

They embraced each other tightly and then held each other at arm's length. "Never did I imagine a day like this brother." T'lolt spoke. "This is beyond what we had ever..."

Cha'talla nodded slowly. "Yes it is."

T'lolt looked at him. "I wish... I wish he was here Cha'talla." He said. "For the first time in centuries I wish he was here among us. Beside us as we used to be. It would be different then."

Cha'talla squeezed his brother's arms. "That may be too much for us to hope for T'lolt." He answered. "But... I wish the same thing."

T'lolt nodded and took a deep breath. "We are ready." He stated as Denali and Danarla walked over from where they had been standing beside the *STRIKER DT*.

Denali looked at Cha'talla as they stopped beside him and T'lolt and shook his head. "As my sister Eliani would say, this is going to utterly freak people out." He stated with a smile as he took Cha'talla's hand in a firm grasp and shook it. "I was able to talk with Andro briefly and he sends his regards and his happiness at what you and the others have discovered."

"He... he approves of the plan we have?" Cha'talla asked.

Denali shook his head. "He didn't ask about it." He said. "My brother is no fool Cha'talla. He is not going to second guess us from halfway across the universe." Denali grinned broadly. "My father is alive Cha'talla."

Cha'talla's dark eyes grew wide and he gripped his hand tighter. "Alive? But... we saw... how is this possible Denali?" He glanced at Esther and saw her smiling brightly. No doubt she knew this when she had come to their quarters.

Denali shook his head. "Andro didn't go into details... only that our father is alive and no matter what we hear or see on the Netnews it is only a façade to protect that knowledge. He has linked up with the *SCIMITAR* again and is returning to Earth from some meeting he had but he wanted us to know."

"Your mother? Does she know?" Cha'talla asked quickly.

"Andro was able to feel her very briefly." Denali spoke quickly. "Whatever was blocking her Mindvoice resonance is gone and no doubt she would have been able to feel him. She is heavily shielded now, as are Normya and Tir'ut, but they know we are coming. I imagine once we arrive in Belid's system we'll know more for we'll be able to touch them easily, as well as your son Lynom, without worrying about someone among Phy'iad's group detecting us."

T'lolt nodded his head with a large smile as well. "Then I will be able to finally thank your father in person for the life he gave back to me on Lycavore." He stated. "That is enough reason to obliterate these fools under Phy'iad and return Dysea to our tribe and family."

Cha'talla nodded. "Indeed it is." He said. "Indeed it is. We are ready?"

Danarla nodded her head. "We were just going to start shuttling our forces to the *VIPER*. Ta'lon is already onboard and prepping the troop areas." She stepped forward closer and looked at him, imagining a young half Immortal half vampire that looked like him loving her daughter. Danarla found that if his son was half the man that Cha'talla had proven to be, she would never have need to worry about As'hia again. "I... I speak for my husband as well Cha'talla... I speak for us both when I say we were wrong. We were wrong about so many things."

Cha'talla shook his head. "I have dwelled in the past for too long." He spoke. "I will not do so any longer. Nor should any of us. It is a new beginning for all of us..."

Danarla nodded. "Yes it is."

"My orders still stand." Cha'talla spoke straightening up to his full six foot five height. "These animals that follow Phy'iad are not AkruXian. Unless they throw aside their weapons and surrender, we will take no prisoners. They are beyond any hope of redemption and I have neither the time nor the patience to try and make them see things our way. We will execute our plan... we will remove the threat in any way possible... and we will return Dysea to her rightful place with her family. Our family."

Denali nodded his head. "Best damn news I've heard in the last hour." He stated. "Oh... one more thing. According to my brother... you've been frocked."

Cha'talla looked at him confused. "Frocked?" He asked. "What... what does this mean?"

Denali grinned even wider now. "Until this mission is over, and unless you refuse, you are now a General of Lycavorian Union forces." Denali spoke seeing the look on his face go from one of confusion to total astonishment. "Overall command is yours... and I am your second in command with T'lolt."

"But you are... you are a Prince of the Union." T'lolt gasped.

Denali nodded. "And I've never commanded anything larger than a company in battle." He stated. "Something that both of you have done more times than me. I wanted Andro to do this. It is customary for our people, Lycavorian Spartans... it is customary for us to learn all we can from those who have more experience than us. I don't have a problem with this." Deni turned to Danarla. "Colonel?"

Danarla shook her head immediately. "Not a one." She stated.

"There you have it." Deni answered. "My time will come soon enough, and until it does I intend to learn all I can."

T'lolt laughed now. "Hah!!! You have never been a General brother! This ought to be good!"

Cha'talla looked at Esther and saw her face beaming with pride. He turned back to Denali and nodded his head. "So be it." He spoke. "Begin shuttling our forces to the *VIPER* and let's go get back our Queen."

SCIMITAR

NINETY MINUTES FROM EARTH'S HOME SYSTEM

"These are his women Dutkne?" Arduri asked as they sat at the single large table in the mess lounge of the *SCIMITAR*.

Dutkne looked up from his food and glanced over to where the two female elves were sitting with who they now knew were Andro's sisters. He turned back to face Arduri, who sat with Devra on one side and Naesta on the other. Nirilo sat across from his mother and Drey and Caia were sitting on his opposite side. Dutkne turned back to Arduri and nodded. "His two elven mates yes." He answered casually. "Sadi his *anome* and Carisia his vampire wife are on Earth keeping up appearances."

Arduri looked at him. "I thought your people hated vampires." She asked.

Dutkne put his fork down and dropped his hands to either side of his plate. "Many thousands of years have passed since that day Arduri Re Mydala." He stated. "While it is true that those in the Protectorate have a profound dislike of vampires, we have lived away from our brothers in the Union. I have discovered through the years that millions of High Coven citizens defected to the Union. If what I have seen is accurate, the vampire population within the Union is over fifty million now."

"What you have seen?" Devra asked softly. "I thought you said you've never been here."

Dutkne nodded. "I haven't. Androcles has shown me."

"Showed you?" Naesta asked. "Showed you how?"

"Within this Mindvoice that your people use?" Devra stated as she looked at him.

Dutkne nodded. "Yes."

"So passing knowledge and such is possible with this skill? You can read minds?" Devra asked.

Dutkne shook his head quickly. "No... nothing like that. It is more being able to pass images and certain visual things to men or women that you are able to connect with. Reading a person's thoughts as you suggest is

strictly taboo within the Protectorate and from what I have been able to see... it is severely frowned upon within the Union. It is just not done.”

“But it is a skill you possess?” Naesta pressed.

Dutkne looked at her. “Anyone with the ability to Mindvoice can sense another’s surface emotions and thoughts.” He said. “It’s in our blood because of our Pralor ancestors. The Pralors used Mindvoice exclusively to communicate. Actually going deeper than surface thoughts and emotions is something we are raised and taught to avoid at all costs. As I said... it is simply not done.”

“But you can?” Naesta pushed him.

“If you are waiting for me to say yes Naesta... then yes. It is an ability I have.” Dutkne answered. “Using the system that the Lycavorians here in the Union use, anyone who is a Tier Six Mindvoicer, with the proper instruction and schooling could do this.”

“And how many of these Tier Six men and women are on this ship right now?” Naesta asked.

Dutkne tilted his head to the side for a moment. “Including Wayonn, myself, Drey and Caia... thirteen.”

Arduri looked surprised. “Only thirteen?” She asked. “I thought all of your people could do this.”

“We can... but to achieve the level that would require a Lycavorian to read someone’s thoughts takes years of training.” Dutkne said. “The vast majority of our people do not bother to get that schooling because quite frankly... it is extremely boring and tediously annoying.”

Devra and Arduri couldn’t help but smile at the disgusted way he answered the question but Naesta continued to press him. “How many of these... these Tier Six people are within the Union?”

Dutkne sipped his drink and then lowered his cup to the table. “If you include those bonded to a dragon... less than five thousand.” He answered.

“That is a significant number.” Naesta insisted.

“Perhaps to you...” Dutkne said. “But when you consider that the population of the Lycavorian Union, at its last census, was well over thirty trillion lifeforms... five thousand is microscopic”

“Thirty trillion!” Arduri gasped. “That is more than double the Vanari Empire!”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes... I know.”

“So there is no one higher than this Tier Six?” Naesta asked.

Dutkne met her green eyes. “Why the intense interest in how many there are Naesta?” He asked with a grin. “Are you hiding something you don’t want anyone to know?”

“Certainly not!” Naesta popped. “I am... I am curious. That’s all.”

Dutkne smiled. “At the moment there are ten individuals who cannot be labeled as Tier Six.” He answered. “They cannot be charted... or are close to the point where they can’t be measured.”

Devra looked at him. “Androcles Leonidas is one of them isn’t he?”

“Why?” Dutkne asked her softly.

“I looked into his eyes Dutkne. There is... there was wisdom and power within those eyes. Wisdom and power that one so young should not have yet he wields it as if it is second nature to him.” Devra said.

Arduri turned to look at her. “How did you convince him to let us accompany them mother?”

Devra smiled. “I don’t think I did.” She replied.

“But they allowed us to come with them at the last minute mother. While you were talking with him.” Arduri said.

Devra nodded. “Yes I know. Yet I don’t believe it was anything I said that changed his mind. I believe... I believe it was his dragon.”

“What did you offer him mother?” Naesta asked.

Devra looked at her. “Anything he wanted.” She answered quickly. “Engine technology, weapons, anything he wanted.”

Naesta’s eyes grew wide. “Mother how could you?” Naesta rasped.

Devra looked at her. “Because I want your sister back with us and they can help us to achieve this goal.” She answered sternly. “I do not care what it takes or what I have to do. I will not abandon your sister as so many outside of us at this table have done!”

“And I suppose he took it all?” Naesta spat.

Devra looked at Dutkne then and she shook her head. “He refused.” She said softly. “I was willing to give him anything and he refused.”

Naesta's eyes grew even larger and she looked at her mother. "If... if he refused what you offered him... then what... what did he want?"

"His price was that I keep an open mind." Devra said gently. "That was it. To keep an open mind. And to give him the opportunity to allow him to show us that what we fear most about the Lycavorian people is something that we fear for no reason."

"That by itself should show you..." Dutkne began.

The loud smashing sound and the skittering of utensils across the metal floor drew their attention quickly. Dutkne's eyes went wide when he saw Warem on the deck on his back and the female elf standing over him.

"Are you mentally defective?" She barked at him loudly. "I told you to stop that!"

Warem shook his head to clear his thoughts. Her punch to his jaw had carried quite a bit more power in it than her body appeared to be able to hold. He looked up at her as he pushed himself up on his elbows. "But... your scent... it..."

Dutkne shook his head and got to his feet. "If you will excuse me ladies. I need to save one of my men before he gets his *mida* handed to him."

The female elf, a Commander in the *SCIMITAR*'s fighter wing, had long blond hair and stunning gray eyes Dutkne noticed as he moved across the room quickly. She filled out her flight suit exceptionally well, and her four inch high elven ears were almost turning red in anger. "Just because my scent tells you that I find you attractive does not give you the go ahead to come up to me and start playing with my ears or hit me with your aura you arrogant fool!"

Warem began getting to his feet. "But it said... it said this was the way to see if your species are interested!"

The elf looked at him with wide eyes. "What? My species? You *are* mentally defective! *Vada carians rhin jar!* Who told you that?" (The gods save us)

"I read it!" Warem exclaimed as he got to his feet. "You speak the ancient language!" He spoke surprised.

"Of course I speak the ancient language! Do you think I am stupid? Over half the Union speaks the ancient language and almost all of the elves who are pilots in the fleet!" She spouted back. "And my name is E'yarna *igord!*"

"I am not a fool!" Warem protested.

"Coming up to an female when you are not their mate or involved with them and fondling their ears is not the way to get her interested in you! Nor is it wise to hit them with your aura when touching their ears doesn't work! Some of us elven females have been around Lycavorian males enough to know when you're doing that." E'yarna shouted. "It's a good way to piss them off and get your ass kicked though! Now what does that make you?"

"You did not kick my ass!" Warem barked.

"And what do you call it where you come from *matus haro?*" E'yarna asked him smugly as she folded her arms under her medium sized chest, purposefully lifting her firm cone shaped breasts upward. (Big boy)

"I am not... I am not from this quadrant of space!" Warem spoke.

"*Vinn' sibfla!*" E'yarna snapped. (No shit)

"You do not have to use foul language!" Warem popped right back.

E'yarna looked at him stunned. She then executed a perfect front side kick that caught Warem unprepared and sent him sprawling once more. E'yarna used her elven speed to pounce on him and slap his face as he turned to look up, his own eyes angry now. "I will use whatever language I deem fit!" She snarled at him as she grabbed the front of his uniform and jerked him upwards as much as she was able. Warem was not a small man and E'yarna only managed to get his upper body an inch or so off the deck, but it had the desired effect. "And if you so much as touch me or hit me with your pathetic aura without my permission one more time I will gnaw off your arm at the elbow *igord!* And then I will give it back to you! Do I make myself very clear?"

"Yes!" Warem barked. "Now get off me!"

E'yarna released the front of his shirt and stood up to her full height of five foot two. She brushed back her hair and turned to go back to her table. She picked up her mug from the deck and sat back down next to the other two elf females who were watching. She leaned close to the dark haired female.

“How did I do?” She whispered.

“I don't know E'yarna.” Her friend answered. “You may have scared him off.”

“He's a wolf!” E'yarna spoke. “They don't scare easily. And he's so handsome I almost jumped his bones right there on the floor!”

The three of them shared a female laugh as Dutkne stepped up to Warem and looked down at him. “I distinctly remember telling you to mind your manners Warem.” He said with a knowing grin. “I told you the females here in the Union are more traditional.”

Warem pulled himself to his feet. “I didn't know she could feel my aura!” He growled. “And I only touched her ears because they looked tasty and she smells delicious! She tickled my nose.”

“Tickled or not... I'd say she doesn't want anything to do with you.” Dutkne spoke. “For once can you try and keep it in your pants.”

“I will now!” Warem snapped. “I will also stick with females of our own species!” He said rubbing his jaw. “She hits harder than you Dutkne. I'm a lover not a fighter.”

They heard the soft laughter behind them. “She likes you Warem.” The voice spoke.

Dutkne and Warem turned and saw Andro standing beside the *Durcunusaan* officer in the doorway. Warem bowed his head quickly. “Forgive me Milord... I did not...”

Andro stepped up to him and slapped his shoulder lightly. “Don't bow your head to me Warem. I'm still a man just like you.” He said. “E'yarna likes you.”

“Likes me Milord?” Warem gasped. “More likely she wants to kick my ass.”

“She's been on the *SCIMITAR* for three years now and in all that time I think every single Lycavorian on this ship has hit on her at one point or another.” Andro said. “You are the first one to get that much of a reaction out of her. Normally she just cusses them out... but she actually knocked you around. That's a good sign.”

“You are jesting Milord.” Warem said with wide eyes. “Aren't you?”

Andro looked at Bren. “Bren?”

Bren nodded his head. “It's the truth.” He stated. “She has also never crossed her arms and stuck her chest out at any of them like she did with you.”

“Milord... surely you are joking with me.” Warem said. “She was angry. She wanted to kick my *mida*.”

“Trust me on this Warem.” Andro said. “You want her to become interested in you... put aside the ladies man routine and show her that she is worth the effort you put forth. Most elf females will not arbitrarily sleep with any male unless they believe that a relationship will ensue and be sincere. If that's what you want... then show her this. If it isn't... stick with females of our kind Warem. They will know exactly what you want and they won't expect something more in return.”

Warem looked at Dutkne quickly and then back to Andro. “Thank you Milord.” He spoke.

Andro smiled and looked at Dutkne as Warem turned and headed back to his table. “Dutkne... this is Bren. He is the senior *Durcunusaan* officer in my security detachment.” Andro said.

“So then you do have security?” Dutkne said as he and Bren shook hands.

Bren laughed. “If that is what you want to call it.” He chortled. “I haven't been able to *protect* him since he was sixteen. He won't let me. Besides... when you have four tons of teeth and tail wherever you go, you can't get much more secure than that.”

Dutkne grinned and nodded his head. “I see your point. Where are Wayonn and Helen?”

Andro pulled him along as they began to walk further into the mess lounge. “They are eating together in one of the smaller lounges on the deck above us.” He replied as he directed them back toward the table Dutkne had just left. “Probably devising more ways to drive my father and I completely insane with their cryptic talk.”

Dutkne rolled his eyes. “Ah yes... cryptic talk. Sometimes I wonder if that is an inbred trait among our Pralor ancestors. It is an incredibly taxing method of teaching; for those poor slobs doing the learning that is.”

Andro grinned. “I take it you get that quite a bit from Wayonn?”

“You have no idea.” Dutkne said. “Though I would hazard a guess and say that since Helen is also descended from my grandfather, our Aunt it would seem, I would say that you and your father know exactly what I am talking about.”

“In that you would be a hundred and ten percent accurate.” Andro stated.

“Then you know of the mind twisters they can hit you with?” Dutkne said.

Andro chuckled again. “Only too well.” He said as they came up to the table where Devra and the others sat. Nirilo and Drey started to get to their feet but Andro waved them down. “You will find that on this ship we do not stand on protocol.” Andro said. “I hate protocol in fact. Gives me a heat rash.”

Neither Drey nor Nirilo could keep from smiling broadly as they returned to their seats and Andro looked at Devra. “Regent Re Mydala... I would like to introduce you to Commander Bren of the *Durcunusaan*.”

Bren bowed his head as Devra came to her feet. “Regent... it is an honor.” He said.

Devra looked at this dark haired man intently. He was easily six feet plus and looked to be well over two hundred pounds of chiseled muscle. His dark eyes twinkled with something that Devra had never seen in before and it caused her to shiver slightly. “Commander.” She said in reply.

Andro looked at her. “I have arranged for you to stay at my villa on Cranae Island in the port city of Gytheio once we arrive on Earth. All of your party actually. Dutkne and the others, with the exception of Wayonn, will be staying at my brother Resumar’s villa a short distance away.”

“That is not necessary Prince Androcles.” Devra said. “We would be more than satisfied with guest quarters.”

Andro smiled. “They are guest quarters.” He replied. “We are close enough to Earth now that I have already spoken with Sadi within Mindvoice and she is arranging it as we speak. I did not want to use the communications array so that the signal is not picked up by just anyone.”

“In Mindvoice?” Arduri asked now. “We are still... we are still over an hour from Earth are we not?”

Andro looked at her and nodded. “Yes.”

“You are strong enough to talk to her from here?” Arduri asked.

“Sadi is my *anome*... we have a much deeper connection that allows us to do many things that others cannot.” Andro said. “It is no different than my father and my mothers.”

“And do you share this type of connection with all your wives and mates?” Arduri asked.

“To a somewhat lesser degree right now... but yes.” Andro said.

“And later?” Naesta asked.

“Eventually yes.” Andro said.

“Who don’t you want to know we are coming?” Devra asked calmly.

“There is a possibility that there may still be Kavalian assassins on Earth.” Andro spoke. “Someone of importance is still missing and she is not one who would simply just disappear without reason.”

“Will we be in danger?” Devra asked.

Andro shook his head. “No. I’ve assigned Bren as your personal security and he has several other *Durcunusaan* team members waiting at my villa to remain with your daughters.” Andro looked at Nirilo. “Between the *Durcunusaan* and your own security there should be no issues.”

“So we’ll be confined to your villa?” Naesta asked with a tenseness in her voice.

Andro met her eyes. “It is my home Naesta Re Mydala. Not a prison. I don’t imagine you will want to do much sightseeing, but if there is anything you desire you only need to ask Bren and he can arrange it. Gytheio is a beautiful city and you can go there if you wish. I do not want you going to Sparta at this time for obvious reasons.”

“So you are dismissing us then?” Arduri asked with a very neutral voice.

“Not hardly.” Andro spoke. “Based on what I have already studied of the information that your mother gave to me, I have many questions for you. This is my home you will be staying at. It has become the... temporary headquarters for me since my father must remain dead for now and I am... I am in charge so to speak. At least that is what everyone thinks right now. It will not look odd if I choose to work out of my home for a time.”

“How much time?” Devra asked.

“Until such time as I discover why the Kavalians have attacked my family in so many locations and what their ultimate goals are.” Andro answered. “That does not mean however that we will do nothing to attempt to find your daughter. I gave you my word and I intend to keep it. Our intelligence division is taxed right now and The Wilds is a very large place, but we will find where these men have taken your daughter.”

“And you are going to do this all for nothing?” Naesta asked.

“Naesta!” Devra snapped turning to look at her. “Enough of this... please!”

“You have nothing I want Naesta Re Mydala.” Andro said calmly. “You seem to have some preconceived notion of who and what my people are. Whatever the history you have with Dutkne and the Protectorate does not widen to include us, though I believe this attitude extends less from Dutkne and the others and more from what you fear and what you don’t seem to understand. Or what you don’t want to understand. As I told your mother... if you will allow me and others to show you, I think you will find that we are not so different from you and your people in what we desire. We just go about it differently. If your sister is in The Wilds... then we will find her. It is not a matter of if... it is a matter of when. You just need to trust us.”

“Trust is a relative term Androcles Leonidas.” Naesta said softly. “It is not something very easily earned.”

Andro nodded. “You see... something we agree on Naesta Re Mydala. We are starting already.” He said with a smile. “There is hope for us yet.”

Naesta met his gaze and for the first time since coming here with her mother, she allowed the genuine smile to crack her soft violet lips. “Perhaps.” She said softly.

Andro turned his head and his eyes found Lu'ria and Ne'Veha watching him expectantly. He turned back to Devra. “Regent Re Mydala... you will be joining us on my *STRIKER DT* when we leave the *SCIMITAR* once she is in orbit but if you will excuse me now... I have neglected my *SirsanGai* for too long since I turned her.”

Devra opened her mouth to reply but her choice of words died in her throat as in two incredible bounds Androcles Leonidas had leaped across thirty meters of mess lounge and gather Ne'Veha into his arms. She watched as the elven female wrapped her arms around his shoulders and they shared a blistering kiss of passion right there in front of everyone as Lu'ria and his sisters looked on with beaming faces. She turned slowly back to Bren and saw his own dark eyes gazing at her and she felt that shiver course through her once more.

“They are... they are quite passionate.” She stammered.

Bren smiled. “Wait until you see him greet his *anome* Sadi, but it has been like that for anyone who spends much time around the Leonidas family. They have a very unique and quite unquenchable passion about them. It is contagious.” He answered as he settled into the chair next to Nirilo and Dutkne pulled one from another table.

“What he just said.” Arduri asked. “What does it mean?”

“*SirsanGai*?” Bren asked.

Arduri nodded. “Yes.”

“Elven Heart.” Bren answered.

“And she is like him?” Devra asked as she reached for her own chair. “She is wolf?”

Bren nodded. “Yes... Lu'ria he turned in order to save her life and Ne'Veha he turned because she wanted it and he loves her.”

“But this Sadi... she is his...” Arduri began.

“His *anome*... his soulmate.” Bren answered. “Yes that is true.”

“And yet he can still say he is in love with these others.” Arduri said softly. “That doesn’t seem... that doesn’t seem possible.”

“It is.” Bren spoke. “He is much like his father in that regard... and to this day no one is able to explain it. No one tries anymore. As with our Queens, Lu'ria, Ne'Veha, Carisia and Sadi love each other just as much as they love him. Sadi is his *anome*, and she will always have a larger pull over him based on that fact, but never doubt they don’t love each other.”

“Are there many relationships like theirs and his father?” Devra asked.

Bren shook his head quickly. “No. They are very rare... though the most well known among them happen to be close to the Leonidas family which should tell you a lot. The man the King considers his brother has two mates, both elven females, one he turned and the other he did not. She is also a Drow like Lu'ria. I’m sure you will meet them all at some point if you remain among us for any length of time. One of the things we

cherish as a people is family.” He waited for Devra to return to a sitting position as he gazed at her. “I imagine you do as well or you would not be here.”

Devra met his eyes evenly. “Yes.”

“Good... another thing that we have in common it seems.” Bren said looking at Naesta. “We may not be that different at all.” He turned back to Devra. “I’d like to ask some questions if I may.”

Devra nodded. “Certainly. What sort of questions?” She replied.

“Andro and Dutkne here have given me some idea of the history of your people.” Bren spoke evenly. “I’d like to hear in your words about the history of your people with this Orionis Syndicate.”

It didn’t take Andro long to pull Ne’Veha and Lu’ria out of the mess lounge and walk with them back to the large Ready Room he shared with Sa’sur. She was on the bridge and he just wanted to spend time with his elven mates before his duties took him away once more. He rested on the floor with Ne’Veha sitting on one side, Lu’ria the other. Their heads rested on his shoulders, the fingers of their hands entwined with his and they basked in the feeling of his aura swirling around them and his physical presence beside them.

[You will grow stronger... both of you.] Andro’s voice filled their minds. *[Sadi and I will always help you, but do not be afraid to ask anyone within my family about something that seems odd or out of place to you.]*

[These new Lycavorians?] Ne’Veha asked. [Are they our friends?]

[Lu’ria asked the same question.] Andro replied. [And I believe they are. They are part of the Lost Ones that my father has been searching for. And this Dutkne... he is somehow different than the others.]

[In what way?] Lu’ria asked.

[There is a connection I have with him.] Andro answered. [Like I know him... like I have always known him. It is very strange... but it is comforting at the same time.]

[Andro...] Lu’ria drew her head back and looked at him. *[I spoke with my mother. She says... she told me that my entire family is waiting to meet with you at the villa.]*

Andro nodded. *[I knew this Ilythiiri Tessai. It doesn’t frighten me.]*

[My father... he may not be happy my love.] She told him. *[He is a very traditional Drow and he wanted me to marry a Drow warrior that he thought could...]*

Andro reached up and touched her cheek, loving the way his tanned skin contrasted against her dark caramel colored skin. *[You let me worry about your father Ilythiiri Tessai. No one will separate us now that we are all together. I won’t allow it.]*

Lu’ria’s face beamed at his words and she rested her head on his shoulder again. *[We are not yet all together Andro.]* Ne’Veha spoke softly. *[Not as we should be.]*

Andro smiled. *[You have been talking with KertaGai.]* He said.

[Yes... but I feel it as well Androcles.] Ne’Veha said. *[It is like an echo... an empty thread in Mindvoice that is supposed to be filled.]*

[SirsanGai is right qu’ess d’ussta xukuth.] Lu’ria spoke. *[I feel it too.]*

Andro nodded. *[I know... I feel it too... but I have only just discovered you Ilythiiri Tessai and SirsanGai is newly wolf. I want time to explore all of you.]*

[Destiny sometimes does not wait for us qu’ess d’ussta xukuth. You know that better than us.] Lu’ria said.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. *[How well I know this.]* He stated. *[We...]*

The internal COM shattered their moment and Andro’s eyes darkened at the unwanted interruption as Sa’sur’s voice broke into their time together. “Andro... we’re receiving a Priority Alpha communication on your Spartan 11 channel. It’s from Resumar and it’s coming in on an odd frequency.”

Andro nuzzled both Lu’ria and Ne’Veha’s elven ears as he got to his feet quickly. “What do you mean odd?” He asked as he stood completely.

“Very high frequency and incredibly focused on a narrow beam.” Sa’sur answered.

“He’s using the MV ship’s COM array.” Andro said as he moved for his desk. “Route it here to my desk Sa’sur. And have Helen and Wayonn join me as soon as they can. Dutkne as well.”

“We are here already.” Helen’s voice broke in as Lu’ria and Ne’Veha turned. They saw Wayonn and the vampire officer Valin but ignored them both and held out their hands for her. Helen didn’t hesitate and took their hands as they drew her close. “Wayonn, Valin and I were coming to speak with you anyway.”

Wayonn stopped just behind Helen, Valin moving to the side as they all turned to look at Andro as he tapped on his command console and the holodisc on the floor activated, flickered and then cleared instantly with the image of Resumar.

“Res!” Andro barked. “What is wrong? Have you been compromised?”

Resumar shook his head. “No. Andro... we think... we think we know why we can’t feel mother within Mindvoice. Why there is nothing but a void there... as if she is gone.”

“We?” Andro asked.

They watched as Resumar reached to the side and the female hand took his and he gently pulled Shiria into the transmission. Wayonn gasped and stepped forward instantly. “Shiria?” He almost shouted.

Andro looked at him quickly and then back to the transmission as he gazed at the very attractive and exotic looking female. He moved around the desk slowly his azure eyes focused on her, alarms going off in his head and in his blood that this was another person he should know.

“It is very good to see you again Wayonn.” Shiria spoke with a dazzling smile. “It has been too long in my opinion.” Her dark eyes fell on Androcles and her smile grew more brilliant. “And you are Androcles Leonidas no doubt. Your eyes give you away you know.”

Helen stepped forward quickly after glancing at Wayonn. “Andro... Andro she is a...”

“Pralor.” Andro said softly as realization dawned on him.

If it was possible Shiria’s smile grew even wider and her dark eyes shone with happiness. Wayonn stepped closer to the transmission. “Shiria what are you doing? You should not be there! It is dangerous!”

Shiria looked at Resumar and then back to Wayonn. “I am quite safe Wayonn... I doubt very much a descendant of Sumar would allow any harm to come to me. I now have twice the security I normally have thanks to Resumar and we have information that Androcles needs to hear. I decided it was time to stop playing this hiding game that you have insisted I play for ten millennia. When I received the signal that Avatar 341 had been activated and would no longer respond to my directives I came here immediately. It’s a good thing too.”

“If The Kavalians discover you are there...” Wayonn exclaimed.

“They won’t.” Shiria stated. “At least not yet.”

“Shiria...”

“No Wayonn... you have protected my existence for ten thousand years! I know why this needed to be done and I accepted it... but not any longer!” Shiria spoke calmly. “All of us... all of us with Pralor blood can feel the call now Wayonn. We can no longer deny it... not even you. I will no longer deny it. I want to be among my people... those who have the same blood pumping in their veins.”

Andro looked at Wayonn his eyes wide. “She is... she is a pureblood Pralor?” He gasped.

Wayonn nodded slowly. “For lack of a better term... yes.”

Shiria chuckled in the transmission. “I actually like the term pureblood.” She stated with a grin. “It sounds so feral.”

“She is the last of the Pralor species. I was going to wait and tell your father when this business with the Kavalians was over.” Wayonn spoke softly. “I did not expect she would do something so foolish though.”

“She has done nothing foolish old man!” Resumar snapped angrily. “She and those she came with kept the Coven from escaping this planet with detailed plans of VORTEX Cruiser 341 and if not for her we would never have discovered what we have in regards to my mother! Now be silent and let me speak to my brother old man!”

Wayonn took his words in stride and he even felt the small smile cross his face. He hadn’t expected so forceful a reaction from Resumar, but he was very happy he got it. It gave him a great deal of peace that Resumar Leonidas would defend Shiria no matter the cost. Helen did not let it slip however.

“Resumar Leonidas... that is not the way you have been raised to speak to your elders and your betters!” She barked loudly. “We will have words when I see you again young man!”

Resumar blinked several times but looked properly chastised and he bowed his head to her. “Forgive me *Feravomir*. This man... he is not you.”

“Enough of this!” Andro snarled. “I am tired of not knowing what is going on and who all the players are! Everyone be silent and let me speak to my brother!”

“Androcles we...” Wayonn began to speak.

Helen turned quickly and held up her hand, shaking her head just enough to get her point across. *[We do not want to interfere grandfather. Not when he is like this. We would not like the reaction we get.]*

“Brother... talk to me! What have you found out! Is the ship...?” Andro started.

Resumar dismissed everyone around him and looked at Andro. “We devised a way to complete our mission with what we have on hand as I told you before. That is nearly complete. Another day at most. The Coven survivors hit us yesterday Andro. They knew how to breach the ship in a way that suggests that either Yuri or Aikiro gave them the information from Xaxon’s dark influence.”

“*Sibfla!*” Andro swore. “We did not think of that!”

“We did not know of it at the time brother.” Resumar said. “They did not go after the cores as we expected Andro. They were almost empty anyway. They went after the other Avatars.”

“Other Avatars?” Andro said.

Shiria nodded from her spot next to him. “VORTEX Cruiser 341 had five avatars Androcles. Only one is ever operating at a time.”

“Had?” Andro asked.

“We had to destroy three of them Andro. And one just stopped operating when it detected me.” Resumar answered. “The Coven however, they made it off the ship with six data pads worth of what they downloaded from the avatars. We were able to neutralize all but two of them.”

Andro moved closer to him in the transmission. “What did they get Res?” He asked.

“I’ll let Avi answer that.” Resumar replied.

Andro saw the familiar hulking form of Avi come up behind his brother. “Avi... talk to me.”

-As Resumar stated they were able to download six data pads Androcles. Essentially every bit of knowledge held within the avatars themselves about this ship, its systems, the history cores, and countless star systems-

“What was on the pads they did get Avi?” Andro asked.

-Quantum Drive Propulsion Schematics. Sublight Engine Designs and Base Core Fields- Avi’s red eyes focused on him. –Androcles... they were able to secure several different types of advanced weapons designs. Many of them for this very ship... but the principle variants can be adjusted easily with the base plans-

“*Nubou!*” Andro growled viciously.

Resumar stepped forward. “I’m sorry Andro.” He stated.

Andro looked at his brother. “This is not your fault Resumar!” He insisted turning back to him. “None of it! We were unprepared for the existence of this ship and the mission happened too quick! *Sibfla!* Avi... how long before they could have working prototypes of what they stole?”

-Six months at a minimum for the weapon designs Androcles. A year at most for the Propulsion Plants- Avi answered. –The Coven engineers are equally as skilled as Zaala Randall but will not have her sense of safety-

“The machine is right.” Valin interrupted now causing them to look at him.

“Admiral Valin?” Andro said.

“The Empress had a special shipyard built for just this purpose. The thing is massive and it orbits the third moon of Usu Ozeib 7.” Valin spoke. “I have seen it. If they got away, this is where they will go with the new data to begin work immediately.”

Andro turned back to Resumar. “Narice and I will speak of this when she returns with Arrarn.” He said quickly. “You said something about why we can’t feel mother. What have you discovered Res? Tell me!”

“Andro... I don't think we can feel mother not because she may be dead... but because her Mindvoice Etheric resonance is being blocked.”

Andro's head drew back and his eyes grew a little wider. “Blocked?” He asked. “How is that even possible?”

“It is possible.” Valin spoke now moving even closer to Andro. “It is not only possible... it is a fact.”

Wayonn looked at the man he had know only as a boy many years ago. “You can not completely block a Mindvoice resonance.” He said. “Even the Pralors never managed to do that.”

Valin looked at him. “Oh but you did Wayonn.” He said seeing Wayonn's eyes grow larger. “Yes... I remember you Wayonn. I was only a boy, not yet ten years old when you came to see my parents. A vampire father and Lycavorian mother. You came to see them and you told them who my mother was. The last descendant of the Lycavorian Fifth Ruling Bloodline. That you had made it so deep into High Coven space impressed my father enough to listen to you. My father... he loved my mother with all that he was and he did not care that she was wolf and so very different from him. And she adored him equally. So much so that he made her to look like a vampire so that at first glance she would not be noticed. My father's last words to me were to honor my mother's bloodline just as you had asked them to do so many years before. When Cirith was born they told me... they told me she would be the key. To keep her safe, for one day a time would come when that bloodline... our bloodline would be needed. That time is coming, isn't it Wayonn? It is why I felt the need to lay with that wench Aikiro and hide who I was. It is why I forced her to give birth to Cirith, and it is why I have protected my daughter, trained her to be perfect all of these years.” Valin moved closer to him. “That is why we both felt the need to leave the Coven now, isn't it? We discover something new about ourselves every minute... is that not what you told my father?”

Wayonn nodded slowly. “It is.”

“You are the one he gave the Coven records to, isn't he?” Valin spoke. “The records of the Black Day and the slavery after?”

“Yes.”

“Then you should know that the Pralors did invent the technology to do what Resumar Leonidas says.” Valin spoke. “It was not intended for this task as you built them, but you did develop the technology.”

“Explain yourself Admiral! Quickly!” Andro barked.

Wayonn's eyes were wide now. “The negative resonance chambers” He said softly.

Valin looked at Andro and moved closer. “Yes... the rooms on the ships!” Valin told him. “You must know of them! If City Ship 19 had them... then City Ship 41 had them.”

Andro nodded. “I know of them!” He snapped. “Why would...” His eyes grew larger.

“Of course!” Wayonn exclaimed moving up to Andro as Dutkne came rushing into the room now. “Shiria... did you...” He began to speak to the transmission.

“Yes Wayonn.” Shiria answered. “341 detected trace levels of residual components from inside the negative resonance chambers of CS19.”

Valin nodded. “It was something she worked on for decades.” Valin spoke still looking at Andro. “We called them Static Inhibitors!”

“Xaxon!” Wayonn spoke. “He was a technical genius with negative resonance waves! If his Mindvoice essence is as intact as I think it is, then he could pass this information to Aikiro easily. Even Yuri. Almost anyone!”

Valin moved closer to Andro still, right up next to him. “An entire developmental batch of these were taken during a Kavalian Raid on one of the High Coven Research facilities near Pe'Iohagro. She had many senior officers that defected to the Kavalians Androcles. Several of them that are still alive and had knowledge of this facility and what these Static Inhibitors could do.”

“But why?” Andro asked no one in particular. “Why attempt to kill my father... all of us? Why take her? It doesn't make any sense! None of it!”

Dutkne moved up beside him. “Then they intended to use her as a tool.” He stated. “To force the Union to do what these Kavalians wanted.”

Andro shook his head. “My mother would never betray the Union! Never!” He stated. “And she would never allow anyone who remained to concede anything for her return! She would take her own life first!”

“Even if they thought you were all dead except for your mother?” Dutkne asked softly. “Your entire family? They... the Union Senate would do nothing to avoid a full scale war?”

Andro met his eyes. “This is crazy.” He said. “What could they hope to accomplish?”

“To keep the Union out of the war with the Coven.” Valin said. “It has to be! Why else go to these lengths? They must have known you were training the Coven dragons long ago in order to plan things this well. This way... if they held your mother prisoner... they could guarantee you would not interfere while they took the Coven apart!”

Andro looked at him. “They could do this?” He asked.

Valin nodded. “Yes. Not within the next few years... but they can breed their clones in cycles. Each cycle is bigger. In ten or fifteen years they would have worn the High Coven down enough to eventually wipe them out by sheer numbers. If they held your mother... and the rest of your family was dead... they could guarantee that none of you would attempt to rescue her and that you would remain out of the war as they destroyed the Coven.”

“Pusintin is not that smart.” Helen snapped.

“Perhaps not Dustha.” Shiria spoke once more from the transmission. “But Keleru is. I have had someone inside their network for over thirty years now... and even we did not see this coming. These attacks against the Union now. It all makes sense though, the way your vampire friend just explained. It also ties in with the way they assisted the overthrow of your mother on Hadaria as Resumar has explained it to me. The Hadarian Elders... this Buonau and Wiktor, they kept trying to take your siblings Retta and Calyb did they not?”

Andro looked at her. “Yes.”

“Which means Buonau and Wiktor must have had some idea what the Kavalians were planning all along.” Helen said as she put it all together. “Why else continue to try and take Retta and Calyb from your mother and father? They wanted what they thought belonged to them before the Kavalians acted as they have, knowing they would kill Retta and Calyb as well as the other young ones.”

Shiria nodded. “And it is why they continue to pour troops towards Hadaria via this Jump Gate that you cannot find!”

“Andro... according to Shiria’s contact, they have over five million troops on Hadaria right now. And nearly a thousand ships in the active system.” Resumar spoke. “If we are ever to take Hadaria back we need to stem that flow now. Andro... we must execute Command Order Nineteen.”

Helen glanced between the two brothers her eyes wide. “What... what is this?” She demanded. “What is Command Order Nineteen? Resumar?” She looked at Androcles. “Andro?”

“*ENOUGH!*” Andro shouted as he snarled angrily. He moved to his desk once more and stabbed his finger down on the console. “Sa’sur?”

“Go!” She answered immediately.

“My grandfather Riall! Get him on a secure COM right now!” Andro demanded.

“Stand by!”

Helen stepped forward slowly. “Andro what... what are you going to do?” She asked softly. “What is this Order Nineteen?”

Andro looked at her. “Something my father would have expected me to do a long time ago.” He stated. “Sa’sur... how long until we reach Earth?”

“We’ll be entering the system in eighteen minutes.” Sa’sur answered. “I have Admiral Riall. Routing it to you now.”

Andro watched as the face and shoulders of his grandfather appeared in the holoimage projected from the desk. “Grandfather?”

“Andro... Sa’sur said it was urgent. What is wrong? Where are you?” Riall demanded.

“Eighteen minutes from entering the system and an hour from Earth.” Andro answered. “Where are my brothers and sisters?”

“I did as you instructed me. I just put them on an *AUTUMN MOON* with Gorgo and Dasha not an hour ago.” Riall said. “We got them out under cover of night and they are on their way to Curila 6 as we speak.”

“Our façade is holding?” Andro asked.

Riall nodded. "For now... yes." He answered immediately. "The Netnews people are beginning to reach out to their own contacts within The Wilds however, to try and discover what is happening with your mother Dysea on Kranek."

"They will get no where near Kranek." Andro stated confidently. "Anyone who tries now will be killed instantly by the forces still there."

"I warned them of that." Riall stated. "They chose not to listen."

"Nubou them!" Andro snarled. "Grandfather... what are the estimates from our drones and contacts on what the Kavalians have put on Hadaria?"

"You... you won't like it?" Riall answered.

"I'm sure." Andro spoke looking at Helen directly.

"The last report came in an hour ago." Riall stated. "At least a hundred divisions of ground troops and nearly a thousand ships in the Hadarian system. No one at JGC can say how they are operating our Gates and they've tried everything they know to shut them down. Our only guess is they built a Gate close to the border somewhere and then somehow got their hands on our codes and have linked into our system in and around Hadaria."

Andro looked at one of them men who had guided him as he grew. A man whose total knowledge of fleet operations and ship to ship combat was nearly unmatched by anyone. A man who commanded the whole of the Union Fleet and military for that very reason. "Grandfather... I need you to do something by my order and my order only."

Riall nodded his head slowly. "Command me."

"Grandfather... Admiral Riall... I need you to execute Command Order Nineteen on my authorization, transfer the command overrides to me here on the *SCIMITAR* and I need you to do so immediately." Andro said.

"Andro... we..." Riall began to speak but shook his head. "I will do it." He said finally.

"No... this is my decision and mine alone. Transfer the overrides here." Andro spoke.

Helen moved forward now. "Riall... what is this Command Order Nineteen? I demand you tell me right now!"

Riall seemed to be working at his console and he finally looked up and nodded. "It is done." He said.

Andro watched the display on his console light up with several lines of code and he nodded. "Thank you."

"Andro... you don't have to do this." Riall said.

"Is there another way to stop the Kavalian reinforcements?" Andro asked.

Riall shook his head. "Not that we have discovered so far. No one's command codes work Andro, it's like they have all been locked out of the system somehow."

"A traitor." Resumar spoke from the main holotransmission.

Andro nodded. "Then it must be done." He said softly. He looked first to Lu'ria and Ne'Veha and saw in their beautiful eyes unquestioned trust and love. "Sa'sur... realign the subspace deflector array please. Coordinates 75639.4 and lock."

Sa'sur's voice was soft when she replied only a few seconds later. "Coordinates 75639.4 confirmed and locked."

Andro looked at his brother in the holotransmission. "Res... I have help coming your way. Once you complete your mission... you'll have a new one. Send me whatever data you have so far, everything from the ship."

Resumar nodded. "Avi is standing by to transmit." He stared at his brother. "There's no other way Andro."

"I know." Androcles answered. "I will confirm what you believe when we reach Earth Resumar. You know that our father lives."

Resumar nodded somberly. "Yes. What of 341 Andro?"

"He is no different than Avi." Andro answered. "He goes with you. He is too valuable to us as a teacher to let what he knows die with that ship."

Resumar nodded. "I'll make it so."

“I will contact you in six hours Resumar. Be standing by.” Andro said. “*SCIMITAR* out.” Andro turned as Dutkne came up to him and stood directly in front of him. “I can’t let it happen again Dutkne.” He said softly.

Dutkne nodded. “I know.” He whispered back.

Androcles Leonidas turned back to his control console and without pause he stabbed his finger down on the blinking green light. There was a confirming beep and then he looked up at Helen. “I’m sorry *Feravomir*... but I will not let it happen again.”

“Let what happen?” Helen gasped. “What did you just do Androcles?”

“If everyone will excuse me... I need to tend to my bonded sister.” Andro spoke before turning on his heels and walking out.

“Andro?” Helen called to his back. “Androcles Leonidas *anse forn!*” She whirled around and stabbed her own finger down on the control console. “Sa’sur?”

“I am here *Feravomir*.” Sa’sur’s soft voice answered.

“You will tell me what just happened Sa’sur!” She snarled. “What did Andro just do?”

“The only thing we could do to stem the flow of Kavalian troops to Hadaria *Feravomir*.” She answered.

“And that would be what?” Helen nearly shouted.

“Androcles just sent the automated signal that will command the four Jump Gates leading to Hadaria’s home system to self destruct.” Sa’sur told her not seeing Helen’s eyes go wide in horror and shock. “In twenty seconds the four Gates will implode.”

“Sa’sur... that will... that will kill anything traveling in those Gates as well as anything within half a light year!” Helen exclaimed. “There could be... there could be refugee ships moving for those Gates!”

“Yes *Feravomir*... we have been tracking everything within the system.” Sa’sur said softly.

“How many?” Helen shouted.

“Twenty-three *Feravomir*.” Sa’sur answered. “Nineteen of them will be caught within the blast radius of the four Gates.”

“How... how many people?” Helen gasped.

“*Feravomir*...”

“How many of our people damn it!” Helen snarled.

“If the ship classes are accurate and they are fully loaded... nearly three million four hundred thousand.” Sa’sur answered painfully.

Helen staggered back as if she was in physical pain and Wayonn and Lu’ria caught her as she shuddered in agony. “*Son vada carians*.” She whispered. “No!”

CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

HADARIAN SYSTEM

JUMP GATES 13-16

1.4 LYS FROM HADARIA

It was not as dramatic as one would think, though no less deadly in its affects.

The subspace signaled arrived just as it was intended. And it triggered the self destruct on all four of the Jump Gates, again just as it was calculated too. Essentially, since all of the Jump Gates around Hadaria were newer and more efficiently designed, the signal reached all of them in a cascading order by virtue of where they were. The small explosive charge built into the Polarion Matrix Core frame activated upon receiving the signal. It was just enough explosive to cause a small rupture in the Polarion Matrix Core Chamber only three centimeters wide. Three centimeters may have well been three light years as the Polarion Core began to leak, flooding the entire Core Chamber with toxic and highly volatile gas. As the gas swirled around the chamber, the pressure built against the outer casing which was built to protect the core from the outside. The reaction took only seconds to reach critical status and then the Core Matrix Chamber blew outward. As the heavily armored pieces of the chamber were sent hurtling into the Jump Gate Power nodes, a series of catastrophic explosions followed in almost perfect order. The resulting main explosion was not large but enough to rupture the active

end of the Jump Gate causing the Jump Corridor, essentially a man made worm hole, to close prematurely. As the worm hole closed prematurely and without precise control it caused the entire Gate to implode upon itself, instantly crushing steel and armor that could have withstood a sustained bombardment from a heavy cruiser for hours. As the imploding Gate reached terminal velocity inward, it suddenly reversed course and blew outward. The Polaron particles increased the explosive force of the wave outward to hyper velocity and anything within the half a million kilometer radius of the explosion was caught in the wave of destructive expanding energy and instantaneously vaporized. This included the nine colossal civilian transport liners that had been making their way towards the furthest Gate from their home planet in order to escape Hadaria. Each of those ships carried twice their normal capacity of civilian souls, and none of them had time to react or contemplate their deaths. A million and a half died among those nine ships, another million at the next Jump Gate, and nearly three quarters of a million between the last two, including the one closest to Hadaria. A Jump Gate that could be seen with powerful telescopes on clear nights from many of the cities on the surface.

A Jump Gate whose death did not go unnoticed by those on Hadaria.

What would go unnoticed by many people for months to come were the nearly six and a half million Kavalian Clone troops that were eradicated in the destruction of the four Gates, and the four hundred and sixty-three Kavalian warships that died as well. As the four Hadarian Jump Gate Corridors prematurely ceased operation, the many Kavalian ships, and the troops on those ships, came out of the Jump Corridors at the speed of Light. Two separate Fleet Groups collided with several large moons two systems away from Hadaria their final destination, and the majority of the *PROTOSS*-Class Troop carriers exited their Jump Corridors directly into a radioactive nebula that cooked most of them alive within minutes.

With this single act, and unbeknownst to him at the moment, Androcles Leonidas had forever sundered the one and only Kavalian supply line to those troops and ships that were already on Hadaria. They were now alone.

At least for a time.

EARTH

SPARTA

SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

The Commander of the two ERT teams from Athens stood with the ERT Team Leader from Sparta. Millennia ago these Greek cities had been dire enemies here on Earth, yet through the years since and more so since the passing of The Comet, they two cities had become like brother and sister in their closeness. The Governor of Athens had his ERT Teams moving to Sparta before the last images of the Senate Building crumbling had filled his screens. Within hours, doctors from medics and plain ordinary men and women were flocking to assist their sister city in whatever they needed. Like Sparta, since the return of King Leonidas, Athens had grown and prospered greatly. A rapid transit system was nearly done connecting the two large cities to better allow them to share their ancient Greek and Lycavorian culture, and allow their citizens to travel back and forth quicker for work or entertainment. While many of the citizens of Athens were human, a growing number of Lycavorians and others species were beginning to move to Athens because of its diverse population and its adherence to the same deep traditions as Sparta, and they were welcomed with open arms.

Both of them were stunned when the *STRIKER DT* had roared overhead and within minutes Androcles Leonidas was striding towards them with a purpose. Elynth dashed to where Aurith sat on the ground nearby refusing to move from where her bonded sister was buried. The Netnews crews that were set up all around the area were quick to notice Andro and Elynth and they directed their video drones on him from the moment he left the *STRIKER*. They noticed Eliani Leonidas trying to keep pace with her brother's much longer legs while her dragon Tharua followed Elynth. This was very unexpected as the video drones zoomed in and filmed it all. Andro and Eliani walked right up to the two men as they crowded around the portable table with computer monitors on it.

"Milord! Princess Eliani!" The senior commander spoke quickly. His name was Raeus and he was a grizzled Lycavorian with nearly five thousand years of life behind him. He had been married to the same woman from Athens for over three millennia, a human woman of Greek heritage that he had turned and whose

scent still made his wolf blood churn in delight. He had called Athens his home for over a millennia now and was forming his men up before the Governor had called him to issue his deployment orders. He had never met the Crown Prince in person and was struck by how much he looked like his father. Or how much Princess Eliani resembled her fiery haired Hadarian mother. “Sire... I can have a full report ready for you in moments.”

Andro waved his hand dismissively. “We are not here for a report... we are here to help.” Andro stated evenly.

Raeus looked quickly to his counterpart and friend from Sparta. “Sire... we already have several hundred men and women working on site. It is very dangerous work and we can not risk you and the Princess.”

The Spartan ERT commander Nascal shook his head slowly. “Raeus is right Milord.” He said in agreement.

Andro stepped closer to them so that only they could hear him. “There is a possibility that my mother was taken from the secure bunker before the building came down.” He stated softly seeing their eyes go wide.

“The Kavalians?” Nascal gasped.

Andro nodded. “Yes. If that is the case it means there was a traitor among us that helped them. I need to know for sure if this is the case before I can do anything. The interior of the bunker was coated with a material almost exactly the same as the meditation rooms in Dragon Mountain. We would not be able to and we can’t right now, feel her within Mindvoice at all.” Andro looked at them. “That leaves only two possibilities. She is either dead or she has been taken. I need to find out as quickly as possible. How is the work proceeding and what can we do?”

Raeus looked at Nascal stunned and then back to Andro. He turned quickly to the monitor on the table. “We’ve cleared away the majority of the debris where we know the tunnel exited, but the top floors fell directly onto the last hundred meters of the tunnel and have flattened everything.” He started. “Our dragon brothers and sisters have helped us clear a section further back and then we chose to go in from the side!” Raeus spoke.

“The side?” Eliani asked. “Why not from the top?”

“We risk puncturing either the damaged power conduits or whatever means they are getting their oxygen from if we do Princess. There are many pockets of air that are formed in a collapse like this and the vast majority of them are formed over the top of the debris area.” Nascal said now.

Raeus nodded his head. “We have breached the emergency tunnel a hundred meters closer to the foundation of the building and we are in the main evacuation tunnel now. I have two dragons and thirty-six men and women inside this tunnel. We have reinforced the ceiling above us so that it does not trap us, and now we are digging sideways through the debris to the actual bunker door. Infrared scans reveal a gap of about seven meters from the door itself until the debris begins.” He spoke pulling up the plans on the small monitor on the table and showing them the detailed seismic scans. “We are perhaps ten meters of digging from this gap. It is slow going Milord, as we are not digging a very large entrance of our own to keep from disturbing larger debris above us.”

Andro touched the screen. “The bunker door looks to be either gone or pinned open.” He said.

Nascal nodded. “It is... and the stairs down into the actual bunker space are crushed. It is a six meter drop to the floor where our rescue tunnel will come out, but it is as low as we dare dig. We have moved two laser drills into the tunnel to carve out a path down to the bunker itself but we need to stop every few hours to allow the dragons to clear what we cut away. Most of it they pull out with their TK power and some of it they have to melt into slag before it can be moved.”

“How long until you actually breach the bunker itself?” Andro asked.

Raeus met his Prince’s eyes. “If we double our shifts and...”

“No.” Andro said. “I will not take unnecessary risks with your people’s lives. Moving as you have been now maintaining safety for your crews and those who may be trapped... how long?”

“Another six hours Milord.” Nascal spoke. “Raeus?”

Raeus nodded. “Six hours should do it sire.”

Andro nodded. “Eliani and I are here to help. Put us where we can be of use.”

Raeus nodded. “This way.”

Eliani grabbed Andro’s arm as they began to follow the ERT Commander. “Andro... I don’t know jack about this type of work.” She hissed softly.

Andro nodded. “I know... neither do I.” He stated.

“Then why are we going in there?” Eliani asked.

Andro looked at her as they walked. “Because behind mother and Aunt Sivana you are the most powerful Hadarian Healer in the universe Eliani. We can’t feel mother... and the more time that passes the more I believe what Resumar and Shiria told us is indeed what has happen. As I put all the pieces together... what they said makes perfect sense.”

“Then we should be preparing for that.” Eliani said.

“And leave *Tenna* Deia to die?” Andro said. “Never.”

Eliani’s eyes grew wider. “You can feel her?”

Andro nodded. “The closer we are yes. I... Elynth and I are getting flashes from within the Bunker from her. Nothing we can focus on entirely which leads me to believe the inside of the bunker is damaged and the material used to coat the inside to hide Mindvoicers is broken in a way that allows us to catch these glimpses. There is another in the bunker with her, one of the *Durcunusaan*, that is much stronger than normal. If we get closer to them, Elynth and I might be able to focus on him. *Tenna* is fading Eliani.” Andro said softly. “She has perhaps a few more hours before she is lost to us. I have just had to kill... I have just had to kill over three million of our people sister... our father’s people. Your people. I will not let *Tenna* die if it is within our power to save her!”

Eliani stopped and gripped his arm tightly. “You did... you did what you needed to do Andro.” She told him gently. “What only you could have done. I know our history too Andro; I know it took over a hundred million of our people to free Hadaria from the Coven. If you had let them keep bringing troops there, we would never have been able to free the planet. You did... you did the only thing you could have done.”

Andro looked at her for a long moment. “Perhaps.” He said softly. “Right now I need to find out about mother and get *Tenna* out of that hole.”

Eliani nodded. “Then let’s stop talking about it and do it!” She spoke, happy to be rid of her own problems right now and not have to think about Nyla and Malic and wondering why it was that she did not miss them as much as she thought she should have.

Andro nodded and taking her hand he began to follow Raeus and Nascal once more towards the opening in the tunnel and debris spread all around them.

SPARTA SENATE BUNKER

“A few more hours at most Jomann.” Lysandra spoke softly. “I can do nothing more for her with the equipment I have. Without food... without water... but most of all without the medication to treat her.”

“We cleaned her wounds!” Jomann protested softly.

Lysandra nodded. “And if she had the strength to shift to wolf form, her wounds would not be an issue. But she can’t and they are!”

“*Nubou!*” Jomann cursed. “We have not survived this long to die! I won’t let her!”

“You have... you have no choice.” The raspy and soft female voice spoke from the side.

Jomann turned quickly, his own face still bloody and dirty. The slice on his cheekbone was beginning to scab over; Jomann discarding the bloody bandage for it was helping nothing. He crossed to where Deia was laying in three steps and knelt beside her once more. “There is always choice Prime Minister!” He hissed.

“I... I have lived... I have lived a full life Jomann.” Deia spoke with a weak smile. “It did not turn out as I had liked... but I will join my sister and so many others who I have missed for so long.”

“You can... you can choose to fight!” Jomann snarled. “They will come to us!”

Deia shook her head slowly and reached up to place her palm on his injured cheek. “My... my *Mandri* is gone. Your King. For'mya... For'mya has been taken. And I will die here in this hole for all the mistakes I have made in the past. It is my punishment. My burden to bear.”

“I refuse... I refuse to believe that!” Jomann barked as he covered her hand with his own. “I won’t believe that!”

Deia forced another smile. “You... you are so very proud and strong Jomann. I feel your blood is... it is so pure and clear. Do you know... do you know your bloodline young man? I would have... I would have liked to see you become part of my family young wolf.”

Jomann nodded slowly. “I do Prime Minister. My father has told me that we descend from Ontar and Koval. He and... he and my mother both.”

Deia’s smile was warm now. “I remember them.” She said softly. “Sons of Pavalera and Humal. The only reason they were not included among the Six Ruling Packs was because they were a new pack and their numbers were not yet large enough. Resumar and my sister... they tried to change the laws to allow them to participate but he was overruled. Instead... instead he made them permanent Council Members which was more than acceptable to them and the other Ruling packs. Their blood was so pure like yours. They were... they were fine Lycavorians. Did you know that?”

Jomann looked at her with wide eyes and even Lysandra had moved closer. “Prime Minister... they... you knew them? How?” He gasped.

Deia smiled. “I will tell you a secret that I have told no one in my lifetime Jomann. Not even your King who is of my blood. I am over twenty-two thousand years old Jomann.” She said seeing his eyes grow even wider. “Yes... many of our people who do not know me, they believe me to have been born after our slavery began but that is not the case. I was there with Resumar and Eliani almost from the very beginning.” She smiled again. “You even look like Humal... and he would be very proud of what you have accomplished. You shield very well Jomann... and that tells me you are more gifted than you allow others to see. Go after what it is you want young wolf Jomann.”

“What... what I want Deia... is for you to hold on!” Jomann spoke. “Draw what strength you need from me if you must. As... as the King was the heart of our Union... you are the mind! We can not lose both of you! We can not!”

“It is my time.” Deia said softly.

“NO!” He almost shouted. “I...”

“Captain!” The voice echoed in the bunker causing all of them to turn and watch as Anicetus skidded around the corner. “Captain... you’d better get over here.”

Jomann turned to Deia quickly. “I will be back!” He snapped. “I forbid you to die on my watch Deia! I forbid it!”

Jomann got to his feet and followed his senior enlisted man as he headed back through the dust and shattered remains of the interior of the bunker to the rear wall that once was a door. It stood ten meters high now of nothing but solid debris.

“Anicetus what is going on?” Jomann demanded seeing Nusa and others of his team standing before the huge wall of debris as if looking for something. “The Prime Minister...”

“Listen!” Anicetus barked holding up his hand.

Jomann became silent instantly at the tone of his senior sergeant’s voice. He trusted the man implicitly and always had. He reached out with his wolf ears trying to find anything that was different from the sounds they had heard for the last three plus days buried in this hole. Then he heard it. A soft whining noise almost like...

“A cutting laser!” Jomann gasped.

Anicetus nodded quickly. “And close!” He stated confidently. “They are cutting their way to us! They know we are alive!”

Nusa placed his hands on a piece of debris, a massive slab of granite that had collapsed above the doorway. He drew his hands back quickly. “*Sibfla!*” He swore. “It’s hot!”

“There!” Anicetus shouted pointing about seven or eight meters above their heads where a small whisper of smoke was pouring from the slab of stone as it grew redder in color.

“They must have got a drone sensor cable through the debris!” Nusa exclaimed.

“Back!” Jomann shouted. “Get back!” As the words left his mouth the spot on the slab of stone grew larger in the shape of a circle perhaps a meter across and then the entire circular laser drill cut through the stone showering them with small pieces of molten rock which quickly fell away. Within seconds of the laser drill stopping a white gas began to pour through the opening.

“Coolant!” Anicetus barked.

“Clear what you can away from the opening!” Jomann barked as he began to pick up large chunks of stone and steel and toss them to the side. “Hurry!” Even as they were doing that Nusa looked up and saw the half a meter wide camera drone exit the newly created hole and begin to sweep downward.

He stopped and grabbed at the drone, bringing it right up to his face. “Hey! How bout a little help here!” He shouted into the drone’s camera.

Jomann turned and saw what he was doing and snatched the drone from him. “This is Captain Jomann of the *Durcunusaan* Senate Detail! I am...”

“...solves nothing Androcles. You are accomplishing nothing by being there.” Panos spoke from where he stood next to Walter in the transmission from the *Durcunusaan* base.

Andro looked at the man he called grandfather and brushed his sleeve across his dusty and sweaty face. “I can not go into details on an open line grandfather.” Andro answered. “You must trust that I know what I am doing.”

“It is not a matter of trust boy!” Walter snapped. “Your father is dead! You are King now and you must start acting like it! Panos and I have been calling for Daniel for hours and he will not respond! Anuk and Nayeca will not tell us where he has gone! Tareif and Lynwe are mobilizing half the Spartan forces on Earth and sending them across the planet. Nestor and his entire Reactionary Division have dropped off the grid and no one will tell me what is going on! We need to come together... not pull apart!”

Andro’s eyes narrowed. “Have you not talked to grandfather Riall?” He asked.

Panos shook his head. “We have only just returned from Eden City where Tarifa sent us for our protection! Aihola’s Drow were very insistent and they threatened to force us if we did not go willingly! I will have words with her when I find her! Where is she now? Where have you been for that matter? Lynwe told us you were off world!”

“Grandfather there is much going on that you do not know.” Andro stated. “I need your detail to take you to my villa. I will join you there in a few hours. Sadi and the *Feravomir* are already there.”

“Andro... what in the hell is going on?” Walter demanded. “I am the Senior Polemarch of the Union Army and I don’t know what is going on!”

“I will...”

“Milord!” Nascal’s voice echoed in the tunnel causing Andro to look up and face where all the digging was. “We are through! We are through!” He screamed waving his arm.

Andro looked at the monitor. “I must go! We have breached the bunker to Aunt Deia and my mother.”

Andro didn’t wait for a response and sprinted to where Nascal was waiting. Nascal took his arm and led him past tons of debris and equipment until they stopped by where Raeus and Eliani were looking at the monitor.

“This is Captain Jomann of the *Durcunusaan* Senate Detail! I am the ranking officer within what remains of the Senate Bunker.” The young man’s face appeared injured but his eyes were very clear and alert. **“I have six members of my detail with me and the Prime Minister. She is badly injured and we need medicines and an immediate evacuation out of her. She is... she is very close to death and we...”**

Andro grabbed the monitor in his hands. “Captain Jomann!”

The officer’s eyes grew wide. **“Milord Prince?”** He gasped.

“My mother!” Andro barked. “Is my mother...?”

Jomann shook his head quickly. **“She was taken from the bunker Milord. Taken by the Kavalians and helped by Laustinos!”**

“Laustinos?” Eliani snarled from the side.

“I do not know all of what happen prior to us arriving before the explosion.” Jomann told him. **“Deia... the Prime Minister knows but we...”**

Andro tossed the monitor down and began looking all around them. “A cable!” He barked. “Give me a cable! Long enough to reach them!”

A member of the ERT team knew what he was thinking almost instantly and he quickly unhooked the safety line around his own waist and moved up beside him beginning to buckle it around his waist. “A thousand meters Milord.” He spoke. “Secure it when you get down there and we can then use it to transfer equipment!”

“Andro?” Eliani exclaimed.

Andro looked at her. “Follow me sister!” He spoke before moving to the front of the tunnel the laser had drilled and without thinking swung his feet over the lip and dropped into the smooth opening. He disappeared almost instantly because of the twenty-five degree slope that they had drilled.

Eliani didn’t pause either and snatched the large medical kit she had brought with her from the *SCIMITAR* and pulled it onto her back. “Shit!” She swore softly. “I hate dark tunnels!” She hissed before diving head long after her brother.

The only mistake she made was not putting on a safety cable.

Jomann threw down the camera drone in disgust. “*Nubou!* We must have lost the feed!” He snarled.

“I... I don’t think so Jomann!” Anicetus stated looking at the dust coming from the opening above them. “Something is coming down that tunnel!”

As if to emphasize his words, the large body of their Prince came shooting out of the tunnel above them and they watched in amazement as he adjusted his position in midair and landed between them in a squatting position.

“Milord!” Jomann exclaimed.

Andro’s eyes adjusted instantly to the dimness of the bunker and he rose to his full height as he unhooked the cable from his waist. “My Aunt!” He snapped.

“Through there sire!” Jomann answered.

Andro didn’t pause and began walking. “Catch my sister Captain.” He spoke as he disappeared around the corner.

Jomann looked confused. “Milord? Your sister? What...?”

“*Siibbbffflaaa!*” The female voice echoed from above them.

Jomann looked up just in time to see the burgundy red hair and the petite form of Eliani Leonidas explode from the tunnel above them at very high speed. He stepped directly under her without thinking and caught all one hundred and eighteen pounds of her tightly muscled body square in the chest as she fell. He could have caught her easily had she not been falling head first and picking up speed as she went and he went down awkwardly, falling first to his ass and then onto his back where he slammed his head hard on the stone floor. Eliani was only a couple of inches taller than her mother’s five foot three frame, but much like her mother she was very solid in a distinctly muscular way. She grunted in pain as her forehead impacted the front of Jomann’s Mark IV ArmorPly painfully but aside from that her landing was surprisingly far softer than she had predicted it would be as she cursed herself for not doing as Andro had done and hooking herself to a safety cable. In her dazed state she heard the loud and decidedly male groan of pain and her head snapped up quickly until she was looking into the most incredibly scrumptious eyes she had ever seen in her young life and the delicious scent of jasmine coffee beans filled her nostrils. Eliani realized she had collided with and landed on the very muscular form of the male *Durcunusaan* officer from the monitor they had been watching above. Eliani also suddenly realized that her taut, lithe frame was practically molded to his in an extremely intimate way as she straddled his hips with her legs and her large breasts were crushed against his broad chest.

She watched as those eyes blinked and then opened fully and then the most delightful sexual rush surged through her as she looked into the deep, dark ocean blue depths of those eyes and that jasmine coffee scent spiked even stronger. She heard the man groan softly, his chiseled body shifting under her and causing vibrations of forceful enchantment to sweep through her frame.

“It... it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance Princess...” Jomann stammered as he too could feel every succulent portion of her firm body pressed against his. “But do... do you think you could get off me now!”

Eliani sprang up cat like, her fern green eyes flashing angrily and she glared at the officer for several seconds with those eyes before stepping over him and moving into the next room. Nusa and Anicetus stepped up to their captain with huge smiles of humor and happiness now that they knew help was here and they would be leaving this hole soon. Jomann took the hand that Anicetus offered.

“An excellent first impression sir!” Nusa spoke as he helped Jomann to his feet.

“Indeed.” Anicetus agreed. “A princess of the Union splattered across you and you tell her to get up.”

Jomann groaned in pain as he got fully to his feet. “That hurt.” He said softly as he bent over to stretch out his back. “She is more muscle than she looks!”

Nusa nodded. “And she looks tasty as always! A shame she is now mated.”

Anicetus grinned. “I always preferred Princess Lisisa myself.” He stated. “Her dark hair is so...”

“Enough!” Jomann barked as he shook his head at their antics. “I will make sure I tell your wife that old friend.” He said as he turned his head towards the next room and began moving in that direction. “Prepare to get a stretcher and other equipment from the tunnel that they might send down!” He spoke as he moved around the corner and slowed his gait as he saw the Prince and Princess kneeling beside the Prime Minister.

Deia’s face was almost radiant now as she gripped Andro’s hand and Jomann could feel the tremors of a very powerful Mindvoice connection with shields unlike any he had ever felt before. He could see tears pouring from Deia’s eyes, almost as if she couldn’t catch her breath and she kept nodding, opening and closing her eyes. His eyes turned to look at the Princess as she listened to Lysandra and lowered her small hands to her aunt’s abdomen and a soft white light began to pulse outward from those hands. Jomann watched with some fascination as that soft white light pulsed several times across Deia’s abdomen and then her chest. He had seen Hadarian Healers perform their work before, but watching Eliani Leonidas, it almost seemed like he was watching a riveting play from the Sparta Opera House. Jomann suddenly felt those powerful shields dissipate within Mindvoice and then he heard Crown Prince Androcles speak openly.

“What... what happen here *Tenna*?” He asked softly.

“Laustinos!” Deia gasped and Jomann noticed that her breathing had become far less labored as Eliani continued to use her healing power to treat her aunt. The color was returning to her face quickly as well and her strength seemed to be returning albeit to a much lesser degree. “We were... we were reeling from seeing... seeing your father. We never saw them coming! They took your mother Andro! They took For’mya!”

“Laustinos... he was helping them?” Andro asked with wide eyes.

Deia nodded and squeezed his hands. “You... you must get her back Andro!” Deia spoke. “I fear... I fear what your... what your uncle will do.”

Andro nodded and brought her hands to his lips and kissed them gently. “We will *Tenna*. We will. Now you must rest... you must rest and let Eliani treat you! I will see to getting you out of here.”

Eliani leaned forward and looked at Deia, her fern green eyes moist with tears. “*Tenna*... I must put you to sleep now. When... when you wake you will be in the hospital.” Eliani spoke in a voice that was like chimes on the wind in their beautiful sound Jomann thought. Deia nodded slowly, her face relaxed and at peace Jomann saw. He watched her turn to look at him with clear eyes.

“Androcles.” Deia spoke softly.

Andro looked at her. “I’m here *Tenna*.”

“If ever... if ever there was a Captain for you. As Andreus is to your father...” Deia told him softly. “He... he stands there my *Mandri*.” Her eyes shifting to where Jomann stood behind them.

Andro nodded his head. “I will heed your words *Tenna*. I will.”

Eliani caught herself once more looking at the *Durcumusaan* Captain she had fallen upon and she could not suppress the shudder of desire that she felt ripple through her. He was utterly gorgeous even with the injury to his face, from his tall, powerful body to his incredible ocean blue eyes. She found herself comparing him to Malic almost immediately and wondering why he made her tremble with such feelings when Malic could not. She shook her head slightly, unable to comprehend why she felt so forcefully drawn to this man when she still loved Malic. She watched as Andro got to his feet slowly and she placed her hand over Deia’s forehead. “Sleep now *Tenna*.” She whispered. “Sleep now.”

Jomann watched as Deia’s eyes slowly closed and Eliani drew her hand back after a moment. She looked up at Andro, his eyes already focused on her.

“Eli?”

“It’s bad Andro.” She said softly. “I’ve healed the most damaging wounds, but Lysandra here had nothing to treat for infection. That has taken its toll on her body. All of her internal... organs are at or near collapse. There is a projectile lodged next to her heart that I can’t remove here and one appears to have clipped her spine. Andro... I don’t know if she will ever walk again.”

Jomann saw his Prince take a deep breath at this news. Nothing was more horrible to a wolf than never being able to walk again. It meant that they could not run in their natural forms, something that they both knew

Deia loved to do; something any wolf loved to do and to lose that ability had seen many wither away into nothing and finally die.

“Laustinos!” Andro snarled softly. That single word came out as a curse to Jomann and he shuddered for he could feel the savage anger and hatred pouring from him. He took a deep breath and looked at his sister once more. “Do what you are able to stabilize her Eli.” He said. “We will see to getting a stretcher down here to remove her from this place. I will have Thaura lift her out using TK to keep from jarring her.”

Eliani nodded. “It won’t take long.” She said.

Andro nodded and turned to look at Jomann who tore his eyes from Eliani and looked at his Prince. “She... she showed me what you have done these last days.” Andro said softly. “You... you kept her alive you know.”

Jomann bowed his head. “I was only... I was only doing my duty Milord Prince.” He said.

Andro looked at Eliani quickly and then back to Jomann. “Perhaps.” He said softly. “Leave your men here with my sister. We need to return to the surface and speak of what has happened. Then we need to make a visit.”

Jomann looked at him. “A visit Milord?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. I’m going to visit the Kavalian embassy and find out what they have done with my mother and where she is. And if they do not tell me... if they do not tell me then I will bring the remainder of that building down upon them as they brought this one down upon our people!”

Jomann nodded without question. “As you order.”

[Protect him Jomann... descendant of Humal.] Deia’s voice entered his head so smoothly and warmly that his eyes grew a little wider as Andro began to walk away. *[Protect him for this has become a precarious time!]*

[Prime... Prime Minister? Deia... how...?]

[You are very different Jomann.] Her voice continued warmly. *[You were put here with me for a purpose Jomann. A purpose I have not discovered yet... but I will. Protect him now Jomann. That is my directive to you. We will talk in the future young wolf. We will talk in the future.]*

I WILL BURN THEM ANDRO! Aurith screamed out within Mindvoice. ***I WILL BURN THEM ALL!***

Her savage outburst did not go unheard as every dragon and Lycavorian within half a kilometer turned to watch as she lifted her body off the ground. Any thoughts she may have had of shielding were tossed to the wind as her sapphire colored scales rippled with tension and muscles as she snapped her wings out to the sides with a resounding pop, hissing loudly enough that everyone that was even close to her began to scatter in all directions. Reaching out with her TK power, refined over the years with her bonded sister For'mya, Aurith snatched up a three quarter ton lifter with her mind and brought it smashing back down to the earth in her rage. It was said that Aurith was the conduit for For'mya’s more refined and patient nature, but also for the vicious anger that could grip her. Almost anyone knew that to truly anger For'mya Leonidas, you also angered her bonded sister Aurith, and no one wanted a three ton snarling dragon with superheated breath angry at them.

Only three stood before her rampage and did nothing. Jomann held no fear of these great and powerful creatures and though he had never seen an angry dragon before in his life he stood beside his Prince and didn’t move a muscle. He felt such power within Mindvoice sweep over him, such power and control that he could not help but reach out and touch it with his mind and allow it to swirl around him unchecked. Jomann had always been considered a high level Tier Six Mindvoicer, but as the tremors of three that were so staggeringly powerful cascaded totally unchecked around him, those tremors swept him up in their embrace and allowed him to feel and experience the marvelous connection of those that were bonded to dragons. Jomann trusted his Prince without hesitation, and if he would not move from in front of the raging dragon, then nor would he.

They have taken my sister from me! Aurith shrieked. ***Why have they taken my bonded sister! Why can I not feel her! I will go to their embassy... I will find them and I will tear the flesh from their bones until they tell me!***

That is when Andro stepped forward without hesitation and lifted his hands to touch her broad chest. He did not fear being stomped by her razor like talons or batted aside by her huge wings. Andro knew who she was, knew who he was, and he reached out with all the power at his command.

NO! His voice rose amid the echo of her cries in Mindvoice like a fog horn in the night and Aurith's head snapped around to look down at him with wide golden eyes.

Andro... no! Aurith cried. ***I must get her back! I must...***

Andro looked up into her eyes and lifted his hands up. Aurith lowered her huge muzzle without hesitation until his warm palms touched her scales, pressed tightly and she could feel his power, Elynth's power, skitter across her shields and her mind like a soothing balm.

[If you do that Aurith we will never discover why they have taken her.] Andro spoke. *[If you start killing their people they may even hurt her.]*

[NO!] Aurith cried out.

Jomann stood just behind them with wide eyes as he was hearing every word they were speaking and it shook him down to his boots how easily he was able to remain within their shielded connection.

[I will go Aurith. Elynth, Jomann and I.] Andro told her as his hands rubbed her snout.

[You want to hurt them!] Aurith said. *[I can feel it within you Androcles!]*

Andro nodded his head slowly. *[I do Aurith. I do. But I know I can not.]* He said. *[So much is happening Sapphire Scales...]* Aurith moved closer to him and settled to the ground once more when he used the name that only he and Elynth had called her for many years.

Elynth extended her head out and touched her snout to her sister's scales. *[Our... our fathers would want us to move carefully my sister. They would want us to be strong and act in such a way that does not harm your bonded sister and Androcles's mother or others of our people.]*

[So we let them do this?] Aurith gasped.

[We don't know where she is Aurith. Where they have taken her, or if she is even still here on Earth.] Andro spoke. *[We can not feel her within Mindvoice. They have... somehow they have learned to block her resonance so that we can not feel her.]*

[If we act in a manner that they find threatening... they could hurt For'mya.] Elynth said softly. *[Even take her from us for good. That is why we must harness our anger and hate and then channel it into ways of finding her.]*

[You have seen how Athani is Aurith. You saw how her sister and the others protected my mother. Not all of their people are bad.] Andro spoke. *[Resumar and Cemath are even now among Kavalians who hate their leaders just as much as we do. She is... she is your Bonded Sister... and she is also my mother! I will not put her in danger by my actions. I can not. It is also the vow we have taken as Bonded Pairs.]*

Aurith blinked rapidly several times and Jomann watched those golden eyes soften considerably after Andro had spoken. Her next statement made his eyes grow very wide. *[What will your father do Androcles? They have taken his Kinsoargai. He will be crazy with anger.]*

Andro nodded. *[My mothers will calm him just as Elynth and I have calmed you. No matter what happens I know he will do nothing that could cause her pain.]*

Aurith met his eyes and nodded. *[And nor shall I.]*

[Go to Cranae Island sister.] Elynth spoke. *[Grandmother and the Feravomir are there now. Spend time with them. Speak with them.]*

[Anything you discover!] Aurith announced. *[Anything at all...]*

Andro nodded. *[You will be the first I contact Aurith. On that I give you my solemn oath as a Talon Guardian.]* Andro said.

Aurith nodded. *[And like your father you have never broken your oath.]* She said. *[I will do as you ask of me... but know this Elynth... Androcles... if they harm my Bonded Sister... if they...]* Aurith blinked, closed her eyes and took a deep breath. *[I will take my vengeance upon them. And I will not stop until those who have done this are all dead before my talons!]*

Androcles leaned forward and placed his forehead to the tip of her snout. *[As will we all Aurith.]* He stated. *[As will we all.]*

Andro stepped back as Aurith turned and leaped for the sky without another word. Elynth turned and looked at Andro without pause for she could sense the seething rage building in her Bonded Brother.

[We must tread very carefully Andro.] She stated softly. *[One wrong step and it could cost For'mya her life. It could cause everything to spin completely out of control.]*

Andro nodded his head slowly. *[I know.]*

[When word of this breaks... and it will... we must hold them all in check.] Elynth stated as she leaned closer to him. [If we do not... all will be lost in an instant.]

Andro reached up and placed his hand on her long neck as his mind raced with options and scenarios. None of them were very good right now. The concentrated attack against his family, the Drow outposts, the Immortals taking part in the attack on Kranek and taking his elf mother Dysea from there. Now the kidnapping of his elf mother For'mya and possibly Janae. What those with Resumar had discovered. Androcles was a student of history, Lycavorian history and Spartan history both. He could rattle off every battle fought by the Spartans here on Earth in their rise to greatness under his grandfather, and he could spew out forces and numbers and objectives of nearly every battle the Lycavorian Union had fought to get to the prominence they had now. None of them compared to what was happening here. Not even the penetration of the High Coven agents so deeply into Union society that his father and Armetus had swept aside twenty-six years ago could match these events. Now... now everything hinged on *his* words and *his* orders as long as they maintained the ruse that his father was dead. Now that was the most important thing they had to maintain, for if the Kavalians discovered that his father was still alive they would undoubtedly order his mothers killed and begin pouring across their borders in more locations than they could respond to. In the confusion of everything that was happening at this moment, that would be a fatal blow from which they would never recover.

"I must speak to Armetus." Andro said finally as he looked at Elynth. "And we need to find Uncle Daniel. When my father discovers they have taken mother... only Uncle Daniel will be able to control him. Keep him from doing something stupid."

[I agree.] Elynth spoke. [And my father will not question him or council against it. They are too tightly bound together as you and I are.]

Andro turned and looked at Jomann who stood there still injured but not bowed. His blue eyes were wide at what he had heard the last few minutes but he had said nothing. "My Aunt... she said if ever there was a Captain for me it was you. Why would she say that?"

Jomann blinked several times and shook his head. "I... I don't know Milord."

Andro inhaled deeply allowing Jomann's jasmine coffee scent to filter through his senses and smelling the pureness of his Lycavorian blood easily as well as the trembling power within him. He turned to face him fully now. "You are... you are different Jomann." He said softly.

"Sire?" Jomann asked him puzzled by his statement. It was almost the exact statement that Deia had made.

It felt right. It felt somehow like it was always supposed to be. Androcles Leonidas made his decision without further thought and following only his instincts. It would be a decision that many would question in the beginning... but Andro didn't care. This is what his instincts called for him to do.

"Do you think you can hang with me Captain Jomann?" Andro asked him.

"Milord... I am a junior Captain of the *Durcunusaan*." Jomann replied knowing what he was asking. "There are far more experienced officers who should hold the position of your Royal Captain."

Andro shook his head slowly. "No... I don't think so." He said softly. "You've just been promoted Jomann."

Jomann could not help but feel his heart racing at this unbelievable news. There had not been a Durcunusaan Captain permanently assigned to Androcles Leonidas since he came of age for the expressed reason that no officer could guarantee his safety. He was often too reckless and did things that drove officers trying to protect him crazy. Jomann knew of the Commanders Bren and Famus acting as his Durcunusaan detail commanders, but no permanent officer had been assigned as Star Colonel Andreus was to the King or Atropos and Lexi to Queen Anja and Queen Dysea. This was not the path Jomann had foreseen himself taking in his life and even though he knew it could very well lead to the demise of his career, his own instincts screamed for him to speak the words.

Jomann drew himself to his full six foot three height. "As you order Milord!" He snapped loudly.

Andro nodded his head. "Good."

"Milord... you said... I could hear you within Mindvoice sire. You said the King was not dead." Jomann stammered.

Andro shook his head. "He isn't." He answered. "Right now however... given all that is happening... as far as the Union is concerned he *is* dead."

“Who knows this sire?” Jomann asked.

“My family.” Andro answered. “And now you.” Andro turned and used his TK power to propel himself up into the saddle on Elynth’s back. “Do you have a fear of heights Jomann?”

“No sire.”

“Then get on.” Andro spoke. “We have an embassy to visit. And then I need to speak with Armetus at the hospital.”

With nary a blink or pause of hesitation Jomann slung his 190 and began climbing onto the saddle behind his Prince.

SPARTA KAVALIAN EMBASSY

“...nothing since we learned he landed at the site of the Senate Building.” Matuarr spoke as Qurot paced back and forth in front of his desk. “The Netnews have stopped transmitting a live feed from there since he arrived with his sister and I can only assume it was at the order of the *Durcunusaan*.”

“The only reason he would be there is if they have discovered the truth!” Qurot barked as he turned back to him. “Our plan called for a least a week before they discovered about the elf wench! It has been barely four days!”

Matuarr nodded. “I know how long it has been Qurot!” He spoke. “I am more concerned with the fact that his Hadarian sister is with him. She was reported as being among his siblings that went to Kranek. If she has returned as well that can only mean that the attack failed. She was not supposed to be alive let alone back here on Earth. Can we find out from our Puma Bane team if they have heard anything from the Prefect or Marshall Pusintin?”

Qurot stopped pacing and looked at him. “I can inquire of them when they make contact next in eight hours. We should not reach out to them from here however. We can not trust the Lycavorians who are helping us even if they are part of Laustinos’s group.”

“They are all that is keeping our people hidden Qurot.” Matuarr said getting to his feet. “Laustinos was correct in that they hate the Leonidas family enough to betray them and help us. I would like to know why though.”

“Their hate is why we should not trust them.” Qurot spoke. “Hate is unreliable.”

Matuarr looked at him. “Hate has served you well through the years.” He stated. “Or do you expect anyone to believe you did not order that attack on their colony. The Prefect and Pusintin do not believe it and nor do I. Why do you hate them so Qurot?”

“My reasons are my own!” Qurot hissed in reply.

“Indeed... and that hate increased when Resumar Leonidas took Athani’Puat from you.” Matuarr said.

“Athani’Puat was mine!” Qurot snarled. “She is still mine! And when we discover her I will take her and make her mine! No matter how much she fights me! She will be mine Matuarr mark my words!”

“If you survive Qurot I have no doubts you will make this so.” Matuarr spoke.

“He will come here you know.” Qurot spoke. “If they have discovered she is gone he will come here.”

Matuarr moved to the large window of his office and gazed out over the once pristine gardens on the embassy grounds. “Then we will stick to the story that Prefect Keleru told us to use. It is half the truth anyway.”

The grounds had been destroyed when the Coven nearly destroyed their building, the fire and debris that rained down on them from the explosion blackening the ground all around. The Lycavorians built their buildings well though and the interior of the embassy was almost back to what it had been when they arrived. The damage had not been as extensive as they first had thought, only a portion of one of the floors collapsing, and the Lycavorians and their lackeys had rushed to help them put things back together. That was until four days ago when the Prefect put his plan in motion and all of the Lycavorians and their workers were refused entrance as the embassy was surrounded by what could only be an entire regiment of Spartan troops. Eight of their superiorly designed S94 Main Hover Tanks could be seen from every corner of the embassy, two of the MHTs at every turn in the road. A complete battery of their MP9 Plasma Artillery was situated in a small clearing that had once been a park half a kilometer away. He had seen one of the V24 Mobile Command and

Triage Centers pull behind on five story building on the first day and at least a dozen of their SID75 Armored Scout Vehicles scurried about all of the time now.

The Hadarian embassy, the next embassy building closest to theirs, had men on its roof twenty-four hours a day now. Matuarr had been the one to suggest they get Buonau and Wiktor to place an ambassador in their embassy here that was sympathetic to their cause. They had refused this advice believing they had the will of the people behind them and within hours of the new government taking power on Hadaria, the Hadarian Ambassador to Earth had made a very public and impassioned statement condemning this action and all those who had taken part in it. He had renounced the new Hadarian government and then proclaimed that the embassy on Earth would now be the conduit from which Queen Anja would continue to legally govern. It was nothing more than a symbolic gesture, but a powerful one nonetheless.

Matuarr turned back to Qurot. “Frankly I’m surprised we are not all in shackles already.” He said. “This only shows me that they cling to their ridiculous laws more so than I thought. Once the plan is fully in motion... it won’t be stopped.”

They both turned when the enlisted soldier came running down the short corridor and came to a stop outside the office door.

“Ambassador!” He gasped.

“What is it?” Matuarr asked.

“We just received an emergency burst code from our team on the outside.” The soldier rasped out. “They have been monitoring the events at the dig site. The elf Queen’s dragon took off moments ago headed south and Prince Androcles...”

“Spit it out man!” Qurot exclaimed.

“They say he took off as well.” The soldier stammered. “They said he was headed here!”

As if it had been perfectly timed, the moment the words left his mouth they heard the horrible sound of a trumpeting dragon and the front entrance of the Kavalian embassy, untouched by the High Coven attack, blew inward. The massive double doors splintered under the impact and the grand foyer, so immense in its size, suddenly became a very small area as a massive obsidian colored dragon now filled that space with two extremely well muscled young men launching themselves from the saddle that dragon wore.

EARTH GYTHEIO CRANAE ISLAND

“Wayonn...?” Helen spoke as they walked along the white sands of Gulf. Since arriving back here to Cranae Island they had spent little time apart, Helen listening in rapt fascination as Wayonn relayed to her all that had happened in the years the Protectorate had been apart from the Union. He was hitting the high spots she knew, but just being around him and knowing that she did have a history and a family, that knowledge alone had returned to her a passion that had waned through the many years turned her toward regarding Martin and his family as her own. Helen would never change that, the Leonidas family was too much within her blood now, but now she was discovering that she too had her own blood and family and to know that the two were so uniquely bound was only an added bonus. Arzoal felt this within her Bonded Sister and she shared Helen’s joy as if it was her own. Wayonn looked down at her as they walked and he admired her beauty and poise. He knew immediately that Helen carried far more influence among the Lycavorians than even she knew. And without a doubt, she was perhaps the single strongest anchor for Martin Leonidas outside of his wives and mates.

They had come here immediately after leaving the SCIMITAR and even Devra had been struck by the beauty of the island and the villa itself. To impress a Vanari in such a way was no small feat Wayonn knew. The Lycavorian called Bren had immediately taken the Vanari to the south wing of the villa where he could show them where they would be sleeping and to begin putting together information that would help them find Caliria. Dutkne, Drey and Caia were very quickly introduced to the dark skinned elf that Helen called Lynwe, and the exquisitely beautiful vampire half elf she introduced as Selene. They had apparently been permanent fixtures in Martin’s life since he had returned from the moon so long ago and they were both considered family. As far as

Dutkne and the others were concerned this was what they had hoped and wished would happen for so many years and now that it was, they were going to make the most of it.

“Yes.”

Helen looked up at him. “Why... why did Canth pick me?” She asked softly.

Wayonn smiled gently. “It began with you Helen.” He stated. “You were the one that picked the Spartans. You were the one that shaped the future for all of us whether you knew it or not. And no... it was not because you were the last Oracle. If my son so wished, when Martin freed his essence he could have passed his knowledge and abilities to Dutkne. To Caia. Any number of others. He chose you because of who you were.”

“My actions almost cost us our future.” She stated.

Wayonn chuckled. “Isn’t it Martin who says almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades?”

Helen looked at him with wide eyes. “Where did you hear that?” She gasped with a small laugh.

“It was something he said to me when I first spoke to him at the tomb of his father.” He answered.

“What are horseshoes?”

Helen laughed and was about to say something when her head snapped back around towards the villa and the color drained from her face. “No!” She gasped.

“Helen... what is it?”

“Arzoal... are you certain sister?” Helen gasped.

Wayonn felt the immensely powerful shielded Mindvoice connection as Helen spoke with the dragon knew as Arzoal. He had talked to the Dragon Elder Mother through Mindvoice on many occasions through the past years and he had rejoiced when Martin had gone to Enurrua and finally freed them from their misery there. He had not expected what those acts would bring but given that dragons were now a revered member of the Union, he could feel noting but joy for them. Their numbers were growing quickly as they used City Ship 41 as their primary nursery here on Earth, and each years the numbers of men and women that bonded to dragons was growing. It was something that Arzoal and Martin monitored very closely for they knew even one bonded pair that went astray could cause untold misery, but from all he had seen so far, that was not an occurrence they had dealt with yet and given their strict guidelines it was something that should never become an issue. He had met Arzoal on the *SCIMITAR* and was taken aback by her size and majesty but the three of them had talked as much as possible and Wayonn felt he had gotten to know her quite well in only a few short hours. It was odd though that he felt he should know her from somewhere else and he had decided to sit with her some time in the future and discuss such things. He wanted to know if it was possible for the many Lycavorians in the Protectorate to bond with dragons first and foremost.

Wayonn looked at Helen as she squeezed his arm tightly. “What is it?” He asked feeling the tension in her body and smelling the worry drifting from her pores. He turned when he saw Dutkne running across the sand in wolf form towards them and a sudden feeling of dread began to fill him. “Helen what is going on?”

“We will return right now sister.” Helen finished speaking and looked at him just as Dutkne shifted back and came to an abrupt halt beside them.

“Grandfather! First Oracle!” He gasped.

“Aurith has returned from Sparta! They breached the bunker. Deia is alive but badly injured. Eliani is taking her to King Yelu Hospital! Wayonn... the Kavalians have taken For'mya.” Helen said.

“Taken her?” Wayonn gasped.

“It’s on the Netnews now!” Dutkne gasped out. “Andro and Elynth... they just broke down the front doors of the Kavalian embassy and there is a battle going on inside.”

Helen nodded. “Neither Arzoal or I can breach the shields of Elynth or Andro when they don’t want us too. And there is another person with them who is also adding to their power.” She said. “We must get back to the villa!”

Jomann had never flown on a dragon before this day, and no matter what else happened in his life, he decided that this was to be his destiny in the future. He rode behind his Prince without a flicker of fear filling him, their legs securely anchored behind the advanced Dragon Armor braces, and their hands on their thighs. Though the psychic shield that surrounded them kept the vast majority of the wind from their bodies, it could not keep out the sensations of the blistering speed that Elynth was using to swerve among the tops of the

buildings of Sparta, her wings and tail propelling them into dizzying maneuvers. Jomann also sensed that she could go even faster if she so desired. His keen ocean blue eyes picked up the Kavalian embassy along Embassy Row in Sparta and without thinking he reached out within Mindvoice to touch his Prince.

Milord... our forces have the embassy sealed. Jomann spoke. *They have seen no one except in the windows. How do we know they will even acknowledge us when we arrive? They would not be fool enough to keep your mother in their embassy.*

They'll acknowledge us. Andro said confidently.

How do you know that sire?

We are going to knock. Andro answered.

Jomann blinked several times. *Knock Milord? They will not receive us if we knock.*

Andro chuckled. *Elynth my sister... would you be so kind as to show Jomann here how we knock?*

Elynth turned her head back to look at them between great sweeps of her wings and Jomann was certain he saw a glint of savage glee and mischievousness in them. *Why certainly Andro my brother.* She answered.

Jomann felt his stomach drop as Elynth folded her wings and dove for the ground. He could barely keep track of the myriad of buildings that whistled by or the people that were shouting and scrambling to get out of the way of the massive dragon that was rocketing along the streets barely fifty feet off the ground. Jomann saw the Kavalian embassy loom in front of them and begin to focus and take shape. He also felt Elynth increase her speed somewhat and suddenly he realized how his Prince intended to “knock” on the Kavalian door. Jomann couldn't help the wicked grin that came over his face as he reached back for his 190.

No killing Jomann. Andro's voice carried a cautionary tone in it and Jomann sensed it was for their enemies. *Stay within twenty meters of Elynth and our psychic shield will protect you. No blades on Shi Viskas either. I do not want to make them overreact and kill my mother. I want them to know that we know what they have done and perhaps show their hand a little more as to why.*

Can we hurt them Milord? Jomann asked as his hand came back down.

That you can do. Andro spoke just as Elynth released a savage trumpet of anger, folded her wings inward even more and flew directly into the massive double doors of the Kavalian embassy.

All of the embassies on Embassy Row as it was called were elegantly built structures that kept with the look of ancient Spartan décor because of the area of the city they were in. Almost all of these embassies had massive double oak doors frame in gold steel that opened into a huge Grand Foyer where Ambassadors or their agents could greet visitors and hold their many parties and gatherings. It was into this Grand Foyer where three and a half tons of dragon moving at nearly seventy kilometers an hour by the time she struck splintered those double oak doors like so much firewood. The right side door was torn completely off its automated steel hinges and propelled across the foyer like a missile where it impacted the far wall and shattered in half. The left side of the door broke in half instantly under the impact of Elynth's muscular body, half of it smashing into three Kavalian soldiers who were rushing towards the door and sending them sprawling and out of the fight immediately with a multitude of broken bones and lacerations. As Elynth dug her curved talons into the polished marble and granite floor Andro leaped from her back with barely a pause, followed quickly by Jomann who leaped in the opposite direction of his Prince.

Jomann felt an unusual rush of energy and power filter through his body and in an instant his left arm came up and his Shi Viska burst into existence leveled at three Kavalians who were rushing at him from down a corridor. Jomann didn't hesitate or blink and launched his Shi Viska with merely a thought. Even without the razor like blades that could extend and slice through most anything known, the Shi Viska was still a devastating weapon. The Kavalian in front of the other two caught the brunt of the launched shield full in his chest and it lifted him up and dropped him to the floor withering in agony from his shattered ribs before speeding past him.

Jomann was an equal in size to almost any Kavalian at six foot three and two hundred and twenty plus pounds of chiseled muscle. As the two soldiers reached him and began bringing up shock sticks, his hand snapped out and he grabbed one Kavalian by his fur covered throat before the man could bring the shock stick forward. The shock sticks were the weapons allowed to all the embassies because no deadly weapons were authorized. Basically an eighteen inch staff with power cell and exposed end, they could render a fully grown Lycavorian helpless with one or two well placed hits. Jomann had no intention of allowing the Kavalians to hit him with them. As the Kavalian's eyes bugged out of his head and he was lifted into the air by Jomann's wolf strength and used like a shield. The second soldier was slower to react and the end of his shock stick slammed

into his comrade's back just as Jomann released the first Kavalian. His body danced with the electricity cascading through him, until he dropped to the floor useless and quivering in helplessness. The third Kavalian turned with wide eyes at what he had done just as Jomann hit him with an open heel strike to his chest directly over where Jomann knew the Kavalian heart was. The soldier's eyes bugged out of his head as well, as his heart skipped a beat from the power of the impact and he lost control of the shock stick. He was unprepared for the crushing uppercut that impacted just beneath the right side of his jaw and lifted him a good three inches off the floor before sending him sprawling. Jomann whirled around prepared to defend his Prince and found it was unnecessary.

Two Kavalians were already slumped at Andro's feet and he was taking great pleasure in beating the much larger third Kavalian with his bare hands. Jomann watched as blow after blow struck the midsection of the Kavalian soldier, Andro's hands moving in almost a blur with the speed he was using. His Prince was perhaps two inches shorter than him, but just as equally thick and chiseled as any true Lycavorian Spartan was. The return of King Leonidas and the supremely defined body he had, along with that of Daniel Simpson and those who followed him had brought a renewed surge of pride within the ranks of the Lycavorians. Now, even those men who had long retired and were no longer soldiers and even thousands of years of age, had taken to becoming just as physically fit as possible to show the standard that their King himself lived by. This stress on physical fitness had even begun to expand to other species and races and now it was common to see male elves who sported solid, muscular forms whereas before they may have been lean and fit. The Algolian members of the fleet were now seen much more often within the many gyms and centers on the ships and had become the favorite workout partners of many Lycavorians for the immense strength and keen minds. Watching his prince in action filled Jomann with a sense of surreal honor that he was here with him.

The movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention and they shifted up to see the two Kavalians move to the railing just above where Androcles was and leap without hesitation. This set Jomann in motion as well... and given who his prince was... it was really no contest.

Qurot thought to leap over the railing and drop on Androcles from above while he was occupied and pummel the young prince into the ground. If he been more versed in fighting on the ground than from in space from the safety of his ship he would have known this would not work on a Lycavorian. He also made the mistake of completely ignoring Jomann who was on the other side of the huge room. Qurot was a large man, nearly six and a half feet tall and well over two hundred and forty pounds. He was cruel and violent, and had beaten more than one Kavalian into the ground beneath him. Andro detected his scent the moment he entered the building. As Qurot was about to land on him from above Andro stepped back from beating the soldier in front of him, rotated his body forty-five degrees and cut loose with a Mindvoice fueled punch right to Qurot's jaw while he was still in the air. Qurot's dark eyes went wide just before the blow landed and then pain lanced through his jaw and neck as his body was propelled through the air by the force of the blow. Right into a waiting Jomann.

Jomann had seen all his prince was going to do within his mind and he leaped into the air just as Andro landed his punch and sent Qurot reeling. Jomann used all of his body weight and incredible strength and plowed into Qurot's body while he was still airborne, turning slightly and driving the heavier Kavalian into the unyielding floor with crushing power and then Jomann began to pound Qurot while he was dazed. Andro was turning towards them and he sent a clenched fist into the soldier's face with savage anger, the Kavalian spinning away, his fur bloody and matted; his midsection a mass of welts and bruises. Jomann grabbed Qurot by the collar of his uniform and without even thinking used the small amount of TK power he had used before to throw Qurot hard into the nearby wall. He grunted in pain, his eyes wide and his fur covered face a mask of feral anger, and he surged off the wall with renewed strength and rabid anger. He whipped out with his hand extending his claws from his fingertips as he did, bringing them down across Jomann's face and opening up three deep angry slashes and causing him to spin away in pain.

"I will kill you Lycavorian dog!" He bellowed.

As he brought his other hand forward to slash him again Jomann twisted his body even more, turning outside the wild sweep of Qurot's hand and then stepping into a punch directly to the side of his face that staggered Qurot. It was then fell Andro upon him, grabbing the front of his shirt and viciously sending his forehead into Qurot's face. Qurot bellowed in pain as his nose splintered and gave way. He brought his hand up and raked his claws across Andro's lower jaw and neck before Andro sent his forehead smashing into Qurot's

face once more. The combination of the force of the blow and the pain already coursing through his body caused Qurot to stumble and stagger back falling to the ground. As Andro stepped forward to pounce on him again the voice brought him up short.

“ENOUGH!” Matuarr’s deep voice echoed against the walls in the grand foyer as an even dozen Lycavorian troops poured in through the now shattered doors.

Andro’s head snapped around and he saw Matuarr standing in the open corridor that led back to the offices. He leaped without thinking, his hand closing around Matuarr’s throat and ramming him into the wall.

“WHERE IS MY MOTHER?” Andro’s voice carried over everyone in the foyer.

Matuarr was digging at the iron like vice that gripped his throat, unable to get his fingers under the crushing grip and tangling in his fur. “Re... release me boy... or... you will... never see her alive again!” Matuarr rasped out as his eyes looked at Andro with distain.

Andro did release him, but as he did the psychic knife exploded from his right fist and the tip came to rest just under Matuarr’s jaw freezing him on his tip toes. His black ringed azure eyes were wide in ferocious anger, his duel wolf fangs fully extended and giving him a crazed look of sadism.

“MILORD!” Jomann screamed his eyes wide.

ANDRO NO! Elynth shouted within Mindvoice as they both moved towards him.

Andro stared at Matuarr with killing eyes, holding the tip of that psychic knife ready to plunge into his brain. “Where... where is my mother?” He snarled. “You took her from the bunker with that *nubous* traitor Laustinos! Where is she? My Aunt lives Matuarr! She told me this! Tell me or I will...”

“You will do nothing!” Matuarr barked viciously. “If you kill me she dies! If you do not leave this place she dies! What will you do whelp? Release me now and leave this place! You stand on sovereign Kavalian territory! You...”

“THIS IS SPARTA!” Andro screamed spraying Matuarr with saliva. “You have attacked my people! You have killed hundreds of citizens of the Union! You have killed my father! Taken my mothers! WHY HAVE YOU DONE THIS?” Andro screamed leaning forward until his burning azure eyes were inches from Matuarr’s. “WHY?”

Elynth had never seen her Bonded Brother so incensed with a killing rage as he was now. Not even during their hours on Alba Tau had she seen him pulse so powerfully within their bond in Mindvoice. She knew he was capable of so much than he had already shown, they both were, but he was so close to the edge of the abyss now and she could not allow him to fall with such anger and hate eating away at him. She moved closer to him, the injured Kavalians madly scrambling to get out of her way.

[Andro my beloved Bonded Brother!] Elynth’s voice surged into his mind. *[You must not do this! This is not what we came here for!]*

[So many dead!] Andro cried out to her his facial expression never changing. *[So many dead Elynth! Dead by my hand! My order! Because of them!]*

[I feel your pain my beautiful Androcles.] Elynth spoke. *[We are one... you and I... I feel the agony within you for I share it as well! This is not how our fathers would want us to act in their stead! You know this! Especially not now!]*

Andro’s head turned quickly to look at her golden eyes and she stepped even closer to him. *[Fight... fight with your head.]* He spoke more softly now.

Elynth nodded her massive head now. *[Lead with your heart.]*

Andro turned back to Matuarr. “Where is my mother?” He snarled.

“I will tell you nothing boy!” Matuarr growled. “We are only insuring our future as a people!”

“Your people have no future!” Andro snapped. “Not after what they have done!”

“You were training the High Coven dragons to fight the Kavalian Federation! Even as you used deceit and guile in public to lull us into a sense of friendship!” Matuarr shouted. “We are not fools boy! This alone is an act of war! We took actions that insure the survival of our people! As is our right!”

“Your right?” Andro screamed. “Hundreds of my people lay dead! You have attacked my family! Killed my father and taken my mothers! How does this insure the survival of your people you fool! What did you think we would do? Tell me where my mother is! Tell me now and you may yet live to see another sunrise!”

Matuarr grinned viciously. “Kill me and she dies!” He said again. “I do not know where she is but rest assured she is no longer in Union space! Your father is dead! The Hadarian witch you call mother is no longer

in power! What we have done is secure the future of the KFI by eliminating threats to us! Now release me whelp! Release me and leave this embassy for this is Kavalian territory by order of your own government and the Galactic Court!”

“Fuck the Galactic Court!” Andro shouted.

“So now you will dismiss the rule of law young Leonidas?” Matuarr snapped. “Just as your father did. The law you uphold so valiantly when it suits you and dismiss when it doesn’t!”

“You hold a Queen of the Lycavorian Union prisoner! My mother!” Andro shouted in his face. “You...”

“Your father is dead! Therefore she is no longer a Queen of the Union! And she is not your mother!” Matuarr barked. “A Queen of the Elves she may be perhaps... and we will deal with them to entertain her release! And you will not be King for very long boy! Now you will release me and leave this place! Or she will die just as surely as I will!”

“Tell me what you hope to accomplish by this?” Andro growled but more subdued now. “These are nothing more than acts of terrorism! Terrorism! Who will believe anything you say after what you have done?”

“What we have done?” Matuarr snapped. “We have done what we needed to do to survive as a species! As a race! Something your father was working very hard to insure did not happen!”

“You lie!” Andro snarled.

“Do I?” He answered. “We will make our case before your Galactic Court concerning our actions! We have not invaded your precious Union! Our forces ready to continue our war with the vampires animals! We have done what was necessary to keep you from helping them! If you kill me... there will be war! And we will sweep your pathetic Union aside like so much fodder beneath our might! You will be responsible for the death of your people as well as the one you call mother! Now release me you fool child! Before you start something you can not finish!”

Andro glared at him for a moment longer before willing away the psychic knife and stepping back from him. Matuarr reached up and rubbed the fur under his chin his eyes cruel and filled with hate. He glanced quickly at Jomann as he came up beside Androcles and then his eyes went to where Elynth held her own anger in check as she stared at the him.

“Do not think to hinder us boy King.” Matuarr snapped. “I have already demanded a setting before the Galactic Court where I will present our case. Until that time... we will hold Queen For'mya of the Elves to insure you do nothing stupid!”

Andro took a step forward but it was Jomann who gripped his arm. “No Androcles.” He stated softly using Andro’s name and causing him to turn to look at him. To Jomann it was the most natural thing in the world to speak his name, as if they had been friends for years, and this knowledge struck him as odd. Jomann shook his head. *[Another time. Another place. We are at the disadvantage here now Androcles.]*

Andro’s face was sweaty and bloody. The second head butt he had given Qurot had opened up a nasty split in his own flesh just above his eye and blood leaked from the wound down the side of his face. He turned back to Matuarr and saw Qurot beginning to get to this feet under the watchful eyes and barrels of two Spartans and their 190s. He lifted his hand and pointed at Matuarr.

“Mark my words carefully Matuarr.” Andro growled. “The day will come when there is a reckoning. And when that day comes... your blood and your life are mine!” Andro spun around and lashed out with one last devastating punch that struck Qurot directly in the cheek and lifted him up off the floor and dropped him unconscious. He leaned over and spit on Qurot’s form then and walked out into the center of the foyer. “*That is for my brother and Athani!*”

Andro turned to the Spartan officer that was behind them. “Pull your people back to their positions Colonel! Do it now! This may be Kavalian territory inside here, but out there it is Sparta. No one comes or goes without direct communication with me or Captain Jomann.”

The Colonel nodded his head. “As your order Milord.”

“Do not think to restrict us!” Matuarr barked.

Andro turned and looked at him. “As of this moment you are a hostile race and terrorist government to the Lycavorian Union. I will insure no more of my people die at the hands of your assassins. Your movements outside this embassy will be monitored and tracked! Any of your people found outside this embassy will be arrested and immediately imprisoned to await execution as terrorists!” Andro pointed at him once more. “And I

will find Janae as well Matuarr. That I promise you.” Andro saw the flash of recognition in Matuarr’s eyes but said nothing before turning and looking at Elynth’s beautiful and sleek form.

Andro moved up to Elynth and put his hands on her chest as her head came down and curled around his back until her head rested on his shoulder. *[Thank you sister.]* He whispered.

[Without you I am nothing.] She told him.

[I am nothing without you.] Andro repeated the words.

[Let us leave this place Andro. Before I lose what little control I am maintaining and burn it all down.] Elynth said.

Andro nodded and leaped the two and a half meters on her back and into the saddle. He looked at Jomann to see him staring at him. *[You are my Captain now Jomann. You go where I go.]*

Jomann didn’t hesitate and followed suit and settled into the saddle behind Andro. Andro turned to look at Matuarr who was leaning over an unconscious Qurot. “Remember my voice to this day Kavalian.” Andro growled seeing Matuarr turn to look at him. “Remember it well for it will be the last thing you hear before you die! Sister go!”

Matuarr watched as Elynth turned and moved gracefully out of the foyer and back into the sunlight. His eyes remained on the doorway until all the Lycavorian troops had exited out the remains of the shattered doorway and then he smiled.

“Young fool!” He hissed softly. “In several weeks you will no longer be of any importance to anyone. And the KFI will rule the Union.”

BELID

“Brother!” Tir’ut almost shouted as they turned and watched Lynom unwrap the shadows from around his body to reveal the petite half elven female clinging tightly to his shoulders, her two toned black and blond hair wildly unkempt.

They had found the cave easily enough with directions provided by Lynom after they had landed the *SCYTHE* Heavy Fighter. It was half kilometer away still under Shroud and carefully hidden. The cave was also well hidden given its close proximity to the actual Immortal base, both of the two entrances concealed behind thick brush that could easily be brought back into place in seconds. The interior was dry and cool and dimly lit by several beams of sunlight that came in through cracks in the cave ceiling. Normya and As’hia could do nothing but watch as the two brothers, equal in size and build in almost every way, embraced tightly and held each other. It had been nearly two years since they had physically seen one another and no matter their current situation, they could not deny themselves the joy of seeing one another again in person.

Tir’ut pushed him back and looked at him. “I see you have let your hair grow again!” Tir’ut spoke with a smile. “Mother will not approve you know.”

Lynom nodded. “And you as well. Last time I saw you, your head was as smooth as our brother’s *et’zarreth* when he was born!” (ass)

Tir’ut chuckled and nodded his head. He held Lynom’s arm and turned holding out his hand for Normya. “Lynom... this is my *Il Kal’daka Darthirii*. This is Normya... my Blessed Wife.”

Lynom looked at the platinum blond hair and dazzling emerald green eyes and smiled as Normya stepped right up to him. He bowed his head to her as was the Akruxian custom when greeting another’s wife and he took her hand in his. He lifted it to his cheek and placed the back of her knuckles against his cheek.

“It is a blessed honor to meet you Normya Leonidas.” He spoke softly.

Normya smiled brilliantly as well. “And to finally meet you.” She said in reply.

“I had often wondered if my brother, as ugly as he is, would ever find a wife.” Lynom spoke with a smile. “Did he drug you perhaps in order for you to allow him to let beauty such as yours grace his miserable life?”

Normya couldn’t help but laugh and she shook her head in happiness. “You are one to talk.” She said cutting her eyes to where As’hia stood shyly.

Lynom turned quickly and took As’hia’s hand, pulling her to him. Normya noticed that As’hia immediately pressed close to him, still unsure of everything around her, but knowing that Lynom was her

anchor. Normya could smell Lynom heavily in her blood, and she in his and this only confirmed to her that As'hia had allowed him to scent her in the ways of her wolf blood and the Lycavorian people. It was not something done without the consent of the female and the acceptance by her of his scent within her blood would announce to any wolf around her that she had been claimed by another. "Brother..." Lynom said softly. "This is... this is As'hia. She is who I wish to make my Blessed Wife, if she will have me."

Tir'ut looked at the female elf with two toned hair and could not deny her beauty or the strength that permeated from her. The simple way she held to his brother, one hand around his waist and the other holding his abdomen told him all he needed to know. He smiled and looked at his brother. "It appears she has already made that decision for you Lynom." He stated. "I can detect your foul stench within her blood brother. Now... who drugged who?"

As'hia couldn't help but laugh now as she looked at Normya and she watched as the young Princess of the Union reached for her hands. As'hia didn't hesitate and took those hands as Normya drew her into an embrace.

"Your mother and father will be here soon." She whispered. "And we will leave this place shortly after so that you and Lynom can begin a life together."

As'hia hugged her tightly. "We have... we have already done that Princess." As'hia said. "And I do not fear what anyone else says. Not anymore."

Normya nodded and pulled back to look at them. "Lynom... As'hia... this is Cirith and Lancy." She spoke motioning to where they stood a few meters away. "They have been helping us and they are our friends."

Lynom and As'hia nodded to them as they came closer. "You are purebloods." Lynom stated.

Cirith shook her head. "Lancy is... I am not." She said.

Lynom looked at As'hia quickly before turning back to Cirith. "That is not true." He stated.

Cirith looked at him confused and Lancy smiled from his spot next to her. "He can smell the wolf in your blood Cirith." Lancy spoke looking at her. "Technically... you would be considered a pureblood since you can't get much purer than Aikiro and your father."

"Aikiro?" Lynom hissed. "She... she was your mother?"

Cirith met his eyes. "Yes." She said sternly expecting some sort of rebuke or snide comment.

Lynom looked at Tir'ut and Normya before turning back to her and nodding his head. "Then it is excellent you have decided to use your bloodlines for the purpose of good." He spoke. "It shows that you are considerably smarter than your mother."

Cirith chuckled now as well as she relaxed. "Yes... well I guess it does considering she is dead now." She said.

Tir'ut took Lynom's arm. "Father and Denali Leonidas will be here in the system in a few hours. Six at most. We must prepare. What do you know of an Immortal called Kr'nak?"

Lynom nodded as he moved to where they had heated the small boulders in the pit in the center of the cave. As he and Tir'ut squatted across from each other Cirith saw Normya and As'hia settle to the ground in front of them as both Cha'talla's sons drew their women close to them. For a fleeting moment Cirith felt a slight tug of pain at never having experienced this same sense of devotion from a man, but she dismissed it quickly. They had too much to be concerned with and could not worry about what hopes and dreams she had for the future.

"Phy'iad's right hand. One of them." Lynom spoke. "I did not spend much time with him in the two years I have been here. He is very private for an Immortal though Phy'iad trusts him more than the others I think."

"Why do you say that?" Normya asked.

Lynom looked at her. "When Phy'iad would leave on certain missions within The Wilds there were times he would not take Kr'nak."

"What missions?" Tir'ut asked.

Lynom shrugged. "From what I understand from those he did take it was to meet with new suppliers from a criminal organization that was moving into The Wilds. Word is that they were being funded in part by the Kavalian Federation, but Phy'iad did not care."

"Why would this make Phy'iad trust Kr'nak more?" Normya asked trying to direct him to the answer she wanted to hear.

“He would leave his elf... his elf slave Osiri in Kr'nak's care and no one else's.” Lynom spoke. “He went twice in the two years I have been here and both times he was gone for at least a month. This has been going on for some time from what I understand. He trusts no one else to look after her while he is gone. Some say that Kr'nak wants her for himself but he knows Phy'iad will never give her up. She is too valuable to him as a scientist. She is the one that was able to discover the information about As'hia.” Lynom looked at Tir'ut and Normya. “Why do you ask about him? Phy'iad has many captains so why would this Kr'nak interest you so?”

“I doubt all of Phy'iad's captains can claim Osiri as their Blessed Wives as Kr'nak does.” Tir'ut answered.

Lynom's eyes grew wide. “Blessed Wife?” He exclaimed. “Is that... is that a joke?”

Normya shook her head now. “Far from it. They were with us when we contacted you and As'hia from Phy'iad's ship. They were there to check on my mother's health and plan their escape with her.”

“Escape?” Lynom said.

Tir'ut nodded. “Osiri... she has been the Blessed Wife of Kr'nak for seven years now.” He told his brother. “There was no mistaking this brother... *Il Kal'daka Darthirii* and I... *darthirii ilhar Dysea*... we all saw it.”

“We did as well.” Cirith spoke.

Lancy nodded. “There was nothing fake about they way they looked at each other.” He said in agreement.

“And she carries his child.” Normya said softly.

Lynom's eyes were wide now in disbelief. He shook his head slowly and pulled As'hia close to him. “I never... I never suspected. No one did.” He said.

“And they have known about you for over a year.” Tir'ut said.

Lynom gazed at him with wide eyes. “How?”

“Osiri told us she saw you blur away from the communications room one evening.” Tir'ut spoke. “She knew then that you were not who you said you were. She told Kr'nak and he went ahead and secretly installed a monitoring device in the room. It is how they knew your name. They must have heard you talking to one of our parents or me at some point.”

Lynom looked at his brother. “Tir'ut if they have known that long and never...”

Normya nodded. “Yes... that was our deduction as well. Nothing could have given more truth to what they were telling us than that.”

“How soon before father arrives?” Lynom asked.

Tir'ut looked at the timepiece on his wrist. “*NORMYA'S LIGHT* should be arriving in the system in just under an hour. Another two to reach the planet. The plan is simple but it will be effective if Kr'nak can provide us with what he says he can. He was to meet us here but he...”

“He is here.” The voice spoke.

They all turned to see the hulking Immortal move into the main portion of the cave with one of Lancy's men beside him. His eyes were on Lynom and held genuine surprise in them as he moved up. He tore them away from Lynom and looked at Tir'ut as he stood. “I wanted to make sure I was not followed.” He spoke.

“Phy'iad?” Tir'ut asked.

“Things are moving more quickly than I thought.” Kr'nak spoke. “Phy'iad contacted the Kavalians and they will be in range for the transmission in roughly four hours.” He handed Tir'ut the data pad. “These are the codes to the main base doors and can be opened remotely. Osiri will have all the elven females gathered in one room.” He turned to Lynom. “The slave quarters. Four of my men will be guarding the outside of this room when you attack but your medical people will need to move quickly with the serum your mother has developed for them.”

Tir'ut met his eyes. “Why?”

Lynom looked at As'hia before rising to his feet as well and looking at his brother. “Kr'nak is right. Over half of the elven females that are here have been held for at least two years or more Tir'ut. If they believe we are here to kill the only thing keeping them alive... well it will not...”

Tir'ut nodded. “I did not think of that. I will tell mother.” He looked at Kr'nak. “Where will you be?”

“I am to escort Queen Dysea to the main chamber when the communication begins.” Kr'nak answered. “I do not know what will happen once we are in the main room or how things will proceed... but you will need

to move quickly.” He looked at Normya. “I will not allow Phy'iad to... to dishonor your mother Normya Leonidas... but I will need help.”

Cirith stepped forward. “That is where we come in.” She stated. “This main room... can you get us into it?”

Kr'nak nodded immediately. “If you are wrapped in the shadows yes.” He reached behind him and pulled out the two matching blades that Cha'talla had given to Dysea when she had first arrived on Kranek. Normya’s eyes grew wide when she saw them. “Your mother... forgive me but she will be without clothes Normya Leonidas. It is how Phy'iad thinks he will break her down in part... having her exposed and being leered at by so many. There will be no place for her to hide these. If you are wrapped in the shadows with Tir'ut then at the right moment one of you could return these to her and give her back a small portion of her honor and dignity until she is once more fully clothed. If she is as skilled as the forger of these blades that she carried suggest... then no doubt any she faces will be more concerned with staying alive then looking at her nakedness.”

Normya took the blades from him slowly and saw his embarrassed eyes by what he had just told her. She nodded and touched his arm gently. “Remember what we told you.” She spoke softly.

Kr'nak nodded and looked at her hand. “I intend too.” He turned to Tir'ut then. “Come... let us go over the plans of the base and where the main number of the Immortals will be. It should make it easier for your father when he arrives.”

EARTH

KING YELU HOSPITAL

“What the *nubou* was that?” Eliani barked at him in the corridor. “It’s all over the Netnews!”

“It was a tactical decision.” Andro spoke.

Eliani wore surgical garb and she stepped right up to Andro and slapped him. “Tactical decision my ass! You *piegn igord!*” She hissed before throwing her arms around his shoulders and hugging him tightly. “Don’t you dare do something like that again Andro! Not now!”

Andro nodded and squeezed her back as she brought her hands to his face and the warm soft white glow bathed his neck and lower jaw healing the marks from Qurot’s claws. “I had to know for certain.” He said softly.

Eliani looked at him. “They have mother don’t they?” She asked.

Andro nodded slowly. “And because they believe father is dead, they acknowledge her only as a Queen of the Elves and will not discuss anything concerning her with me. Only the elves.”

“Andro... why?” Eliani asked. “It doesn’t make any sense.”

“I know.” He said. “*Tenna?*”

“She’s resting.” Eliani said. “We were able to remove the projectile lodged against her heart and repair the damage it did. Part of one projectile did clip her spine, but thanks the gods it didn’t severe her spinal column.”

Andro looked at her. “Will she be able...”

Eliani squeezed his hands and nodded quickly. “It will be a long time before she is fully healed. Months before she will be able to run again... but yes... she will be able to run.”

Andro closed his eyes and placed his forehead against hers. “*Avoi.*” He whispered.

Eliani caught the sweet scent of jasmine coffee and she turned quickly to see Jomann come walking forward with Nusa and Anicetus. She disguised her gasp at his wounds as a grunt and turned to him as he came up to Andro.

“I have assigned Nusa and Anicetus to the Prime Minister Androcles.” Jomann spoke. “No one gets close to her without our approval.” His eyes went to Eliani and her willow and peach scent engulfed him once more as it had in the bunker when she fell on him.

Eliani looked at Andro quickly, surprised at the informal tone of voice he spoke to her brother with. Andro nodded. “I have made Jomann my Captain.” He said.

“Your... your Captain?” She gasped stunned. Eliani felt a blissful rush surge through her at this news but it was tempered and confused as well. Part of her... part of her reveled in the scent of this Lycavorian and the strength she felt from him, but the other part of her couldn't understand how that could be. She was Malic's mate, he had bitten her at the peak of their lovemaking, making her his soulmate for it happened by instinct alone. She should not be so aroused by the scent of this man, or so giddy that she would now be around him.

Princess Eliani Leonidas did the only thing she could think of at the moment. She lashed out. “Isn't... isn't your Captain supposed to keep you from doing such stupid things then!” She barked as she glared at Jomann. He blinked several times at the suddenness of the verbal attack and glanced at Andro who had a look of surprise on his face as well.

“Eli... what's wrong?” Andro asked her.

Eliani turned back to him. “If he is your captain... if he is your captain... then he needs to keep you from doing stunts like you just pulled.” She hissed. “He can see the medics around the corner. They'll fix him up. I have more important things to take care of. I'm going to make sure Aunt Deia is set for the night and then I'm going back to Cranae Island.”

Andro stood there in shock as Eliani spun on her heels and marched away down the corridor. Stunned as he was, Jomann could not tear his eyes from the way her medical garb clung to her lush body or the way her willow and peach scent caused his blood to churn in a way he had never felt before.

“Jomann... I must apologize for...” Andro stammered.

Jomann turned back to him and shook his head. “It is alright Milord.” He said softly. “It would not be the first time I have angered a woman.” He spoke with a forced smile. “I will go and see the medics.”

Andro nodded slowly. “I'm going to see Marci. She is in with Armetus and I need to ask her some questions. That is where I will be.”

Jomann nodded. “I will join you shortly.” He said.

Andro looked back down the corridor where his sister had disappeared and then turned to move in the opposite direction. It took him all of thirty seconds to find Marci by her scent and she was still in Armetus's room, now talking with several *Krypteria* analysts. Andro's eyes went to the bed where Armetus lay and he was taken aback by the bandages that wrapped around his head and those of his arms and chest. Both of his legs were wrapped in purple tinted gel packs that were only used on very critical patients. He moved slowly to the bed as Marci nodded to the two men she was conversing with and then dismissed them to do whatever task she had assigned. She moved up next to him, her face drawn and tired. She had yet to change out of the uniform that still bore Armetus's blood.

“Marci?” Andro asked not taking his eyes from Armetus's face.

“They have him in a medical coma.” Marci answered. “They took his eye Andro! The *vithin* bastards tore it out of his head and left it dangling because they thought it was funny! They shattered his legs and his left arm. Near as I can tell they had him for at least five hours before the attacks on your father and the rest of your family even started.”

Andro reached out and touched the cool gel packs that encased Armetus's legs. “His legs?” He asked.

“The doctors were able to repair his legs.” Marci said. “I think every Hadarian on Earth has volunteered to come here and work. Riall gave the authorization for them to come even from Eden City. I don't think I've seen so many Healers in one place since Alba Tau. Even those who aren't Healers are swarming around acting as nurses... whatever they can do to help.” Marci moved closer and took Armetus's good hand in hers and squeezed. “They were able to save most of his arm, but it was so long before they got him here that he will never have full use of it again.” She brought his hand to her cheek and held it there. “He has been like a grandfather to me Andro. Everything I know I have learned from him.” She placed his hand gingerly back on the bed and looked at him. “I want blood. I want someone's ass for this and if you don't let me get it I will find it on my own!”

Andro met her eyes. “They took my mother Marci.” He said softly seeing her eyes go wide. “Laustinos helped them. He's been helping them all along. For how many years I have no idea.”

“Laustinos!” She exclaimed. “That fucking weasel bastard!”

Andro nodded. “I went to the Kavalian embassy before coming here.”

Marci stepped closer. “That was the commotion I heard about a hour ago. Everyone was dashing to the holo/monitors?”

Andro nodded. “Matuarr fed me some line of *rensibfla* about how they did all this to protect themselves because we were training the Coven dragons to fight them.” He said meeting her steady gaze. “My father isn’t dead Marci. He’s alive and when I tell him they have taken her he will fly into a rage.” Marci’s eyes were wide but she had enough control to not rejoice to the heavens about what she had just heard. “We must tell no one Marci. If they know he is alive they will undoubtedly kill her instantly. They know what he will do. They say because he is dead she is no longer Queen of the Union and they will deal only with the Elven Parliament for her release. Matuarr told me he has demanded a hearing before the Galactic Court to explain why they have done this and to present their case for the reasons why.”

“That is so much...” She stopped herself and held onto her temper. “Bullshit!” She spat.

“Matuarr told me if I do anything to retaliate for what they have done they will kill her and send the forces they have ready to invade the High Coven pouring across our borders.” Andro said turning away from her and moving to the end of the bed. “Marci... I activated the self destruct on the Jump Gates around Hadaria.” He stated turning back around to face her.

Marci nodded. “My people told me.” She said softly. “Andro you had no choice. We couldn’t find how they were accessing our Gate system! It had to be done!”

“Tell that to the nearly three million lives that were lost because of my actions.” He stated. “Our people.”

Marci stepped closer. “And if you had not... what would it have cost us to retake Hadaria when the time came. If you had not done this... they could have put millions more troops on the ground and thousands of ships. The price would have been infinitely higher if you did not do this.”

Andro met her eyes. “If Laustinos is helping them then we now know where they got the knowledge to access our Gates. The knowledge of where my mother was on Kranek. Armetus’s home. All of it. He was Krypteria before becoming Deputy Prime Minister wasn’t he?”

Marci nodded. “An analyst. One of the very best according to Armetus.”

“The intelligence on the Drow outposts and their locations. No one but the Krypteria knew this. Did he still have access?” Andro asked.

Marci shook her head. “Armetus would have pulled all his access when he went to work for Deia.” Marci reached out. “Gods Andro... Deia... your mother Dysea... I... how is she?”

Andro nodded. “*Tenna* will recover fully according to Eli.” He replied. “But she will be out of it for several months. I’m going to be announcing that grandfather Panos will step in as acting Prime Minister. Denali and Lisisa will get our mother back from these Immortal pirates that much I do know. We obliterated the Kavalian forces sent to attack Kranek and when they took mother it sent Cha’talla into a berserker rage.” Andro looked at her. “They will retrieve her and hopefully discover why she was taken in the first place. Why would the Kavalians want both my elven mothers taken alive but try to kill the rest along with my father?”

“They already have Hadaria... maybe they figured with you, your father and your siblings dead they could deal strictly with the Elven Parliament and get concessions.” Marci said. “They know what your response would be to this. Any of your father’s children. There would be no negotiations and your mothers would tell them to get fucked. They must think the elven parliament has more sway over the Union Senate than they do.”

“If they believe that then they do not know how our system works. And if Laustinos is helping them he would have told them this.” Andro said. “It just doesn’t make any sense.”

Marci turned back to look at Armetus. “None of this makes sense.” She said softly. “The only drugs they found in his system were to keep him from shifting. No interrogation drugs, no mind altering drugs, nothing. They tortured him for hours for no reason. They had to know he would never reveal anything. Armetus would die first! I don’t know if they even asked him any questions.”

“The more we discover... the more questions are revealed and the fewer answers we have.” Andro stated. “My Aunt Tarifa has left with a tactical unit to link up with Resumar in Kavalian space but she will be promoted to Governor of Sparta. I will say she has left for Apo Prime and the *Durcunusaan* facility there for her own protection until we get a handle on matters here.”

Marci nodded. “Makes tactical sense.” She stated. “No one will question that.”

Andro looked at her. “Janae is missing.” He said. “Whether because the Kavalians have taken her or she has gone underground I don’t know. Did Laustinos know of her significance?”

Marci stepped closer to him shaking her head. "I don't see how. The only ones who know who she really is are members of your family, me and Armetus." She replied. "Even I don't know all of it; only that she is important to your family and that she holds some very heavy clout. Armetus trained her himself along with Aihola and Lynwe."

Andro moved to the chair at the foot of the bed and sat down. "And now you must know. Our history states that the last Elven King was assassinated by the High Coven during the Slave Years, you know this?"

Marci nodded. "Yes."

"His two surviving children were brought to my grandfather Resumar. The daughter... the last female of elven royal blood at the time... she became Resumar's elf concubine." Andro explained.

Marci nodded. "And his son and his elven wife had one son before they too were killed by the Coven during the purge just before the Ten Thousand were sent to Earth. Their son, he was Minister L'tian's father. Your mother For'mya's grandfather. That left your mother, when she was born, as the only living female descendant of elven royal blood."

Andro nodded. "The last surviving member of elven royal blood." He said looking at her. "Or so everyone thought."

Marci stepped closer with wide eyes. "Andro... are you saying..."

Andro nodded. "My grandfather's elf concubine had two children with him. Twin boys. Children that the High Coven knew nothing about for that is how Resumar, Eliani and their concubine wanted it."

"They survived?" Marci asked.

Andro nodded his head. "Armetus is the one who discovered them actually. When he was researching the records here in Sparta, just before my father fought my uncle that day, he found the information about them buried in some mundane agriculture report. After things with my uncle were over he went back and continued his research and discovered the information about them. Only one still lives and he resides on Elear in a very secluded estate close to Dragon Mountain with his much younger mate and wife. A Lycavorian. Janae is his last child." He said with a sly grin.

"Wait!" Marci said. "That would mean he is an uncle to your father! To you! Andro this is... that is incredible!"

Andro nodded once more. "My father went to see him many years ago with both of my elven mothers and Aunt Deia and they have seen them often since. In reality he and my mother For'mya are related as uncle and niece as well. He did not want Janae to come forward and take her place among our family openly, but my father and Deia told him it was her birthright to be here among us... the rest of her family. As it was his. She is just as much a relation to my grandfather as any of us. And this man was my grandfather Resumar's son. Janae's father did finally relent but he made my father and Deia swear that we would watch out for her and insure that she was protected for she is his only child. We have done so for nearly ten years now, pretending that she is just an aide to grandfather Panos and a close friend of our family. She is far from helpless and some would say she is almost as skilled as my sisters in many respects." Andro looked at Marci. "I will not go back on the promise my father made to him Marci." He said coming to his feet. "I need two things from you."

"Name them." Marci stated instantly.

"I have brought Zarah back with Anton and Cihera to find Janae. If she is here on Earth hiding then Zarah will find her." Andro said.

"Using her Cognitive Empathic abilities?" Marci asked softly.

Andro nodded. "Yes. Now that Lucia is in her life and they share a unique bond, her own skills with this ability will be nearly tripled with Lucia helping her."

"Your father wouldn't approve Andro." Marci said. "He feels it is an invasion of an individual's most private thoughts."

"My father is not here." Andro answered her. "I will tell him when I contact him after speaking with you. I doubt he will disagree with me... and even if he does... I am here and he is not."

Marci nodded. "True enough. What do you need from me?"

"Complete and utter access to everything for Zarah, Anton, Cihera and Lucia." Andro said. "I need them to be able to go anywhere they need to and do anything they need to with no questions and that includes *Krypteria* operations."

Marci nodded. "Done. What else?"

Andro stepped closer to her. “You pull as many people as you need. Suspend ongoing operations if they are not critical to assist your people, but I want to know what Laustinos knew. I want to know the size of his cock and what color he shits. He may be the main player in this, but he didn’t help these Kavalian assassination teams get on Earth and hide out all of this time here in Sparta. You find me those people who are working with Laustinos and those that have been helping these Kavalians.”

“That may cause me to step on some toes Androcles.” She stated.

“Then step on them. Crush them if you have too.” Andro stated harshly. “I want those people found.”

“And when we find them?” Marci asked softly.

“Then you interrogate them... drain their brains of every bit of information they might have in regards to these Kavalian dogs and Laustinos.” Andro snarled.

“Then I give them to the *Durcunusaan* for trial right?” Marci asked hopefully.

“No.” Andro said shaking his head. When he answered Marci detected only the finality of death in his voice and it made her shiver right down to her boots. “Then you make them fucking disappear! Forever!”

KAVALIAN GREATSOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PUSINTIN’S COMMAND SHIP *PRIDE OF PUMAS*

“...no one has touched her?” Pusintin asked the Puma Bane Commander as he watched the two Puma Bane troopers lower For'mya’s inert form to the bed in the specially designed personal quarters.

“No Marshall.” The officer answered instantly. “She has been kept sedated just as you ordered. The implant is in place and she has been given the injections. I did them myself.”

Pusintin nodded. “Excellent work Commander. You are to be commended.”

“We serve the Prefect Keleru, you and the Prides, Marshall Pusintin.” The man spoke.

Pusintin nodded. “I have arranged for some down time for you and your team.” Pusintin spoke. “The port lounge is now yours for the duration of the rest of our trip. You will find as much ale and food as you can eat and drink as well as some amicable company.”

The Puma Bane officer’s eyes grew a little wider. “Altered females Marshall?” He gasped.

Pusintin nodded. “The only requirement is that you don’t mark them or hurt them.” He stated. “In any way Commander. I have been in the field just as you and your men and when you return you have much energy built up. Use them as much as you want but do not injure them in any way.”

The officer smiled. “I will inform my men sir.” He stated. “And what of Laustinos?”

Pusintin looked at him. “Your opinion?”

“It is strange Marshall Pusintin.” The man spoke. “When we first came on board I did not trust him in the least. Over the past days however...”

“Speak your mind Commander.” Pusintin said.

“He seems to harbor a deep seated hatred for his own people Marshall. Some would say in a manner similar to your own dislike of your people.” The man said.

“They are not my people Commander.” Pusintin spoke evenly. “I became Kavalian when my father took me from Earth and brought me into his Pride. In truth... my people abandoned me long before that even when I was on Earth.”

The commander lowered his eyes. “My apologies Marshall.”

Pusintin shook his head. “No need. As Keleru stated... we allow you and the others of Puma Bane Pride much more freedom to speak and do things because of your loyalty and your intelligence. You get the hardest missions and you go through the hardest training. We *should* allow you more freedom.”

“Thank you sir.” The man answered. “As for Laustinos... I did not trust him when we first began this mission. Now however... now he may turn out to be a larger asset than I first thought.”

Pusintin nodded his head. “And there may be more like him who didn’t care for my brother’s rule. They could help us in the future as well.” He spoke moving up to the bed and looking down on For'mya. He reached out and ran his fingers along the outside of her thigh and across the curve of her ass. “But this one will play the largest role. She will help us bring down the Lycavorian Union and she will do so willingly.” He moved his

hand to For'mya's left arm and drew back the cuff of her sleeve to reveal the Shi Viska bridle. "All because my now dead dear brother turned her."

"I would keep the power dampeners at point seven electrojoules or lower in this room in order for her not to be able to use that." The voice said. They turned to see Laustinos enter the room slowly. "That is the lowest setting for your Tri-Cobalt Reactors. Anything higher and she may still be able to call it from Flat Space."

Pusintin looked at him. "I was under the impression that point nine was satisfactory." He said. "That is what all of our scientists have said."

Laustinos nodded. "Point nine would be sufficient if you were not dealing with someone who can Mindvoice on her level. Many tests have been done since Queen Aricia was taken by Chetak and he did much the same thing Marshall Pusintin." He came fully into the room now. "Most of your brother's family can still call their Shi Viskas even at point nine electrojoules. There are documented studies that have been recorded where your brother and his son were able to call their shields even when the power levels were at point five. This is due to their command within Mindvoice however, and while For'mya's is powerful, she will never be on the same level as them."

Pusintin turned to the Puma Bane officer. "See to it." He said. The officer nodded and headed out of the room as Pusintin turned back to Laustinos. He waited until the officer was gone before moving closer to Laustinos. "Perhaps now you can tell me why you are doing this."

Laustinos met his gaze. "Would it matter to you?" He asked calmly.

"It will help me to understand you better Laustinos." Pusintin answered. "This way... you will not end of very dead by accident."

"You do not want to kill me." Laustinos said.

"Do not overestimate your worth to us Laustinos." Pusintin spoke in a menacing tone.

"I'm overestimating nothing." Laustinos spoke. "You still need me."

"And why is that?" Pusintin asked. "I spoke with Prefect Keleru just before we arrived here. It appears that they have discovered For'mya is missing, that we have her and that you helped us. If that is the case... no doubt whatever access you may have thought you had is now gone."

"I know Lycavorian law. I know which Senators supported your brother's rule and which did not. And I know who among them wavers like a reed in the wind." Laustinos continued unhindered by this knowledge. "I know things that your brother did that will help you complete this goal you have. Knowledge is power in many respects Pusintin."

Pusintin motioned with his head to For'mya's inert form. "She will help me complete our goal Laustinos, not you. Why should we trust you after your part in this? Indeed... you failed to kill Deia and no doubt you will be the most wanted man in the universe shortly."

Laustinos looked surprised at this news. "Deia isn't dead? I... I shot her twice in the chest!"

Pusintin shook his head. "You should know by now that woman is very tough to kill. Many have tried through the years and like you... all of them have failed."

Laustinos shook his head. "It does not matter. If she still lives then I am a bigger asset than you realize. I know Deia. I know what she will do and what she won't."

"So you say." Pusintin said.

Laustinos shook his head. "Then give me what you owe me and I will be on my way." He stated.

"I could just toss you out an airlock." Pusintin said with a grin.

Laustinos nodded. "You could. But then your new business partners would come to realize that you are not as trusting as you have led them to believe. What do you think they would say about that?"

Pusintin's eyes narrowed and he stepped closer. "What are you talking about?"

"You didn't actually think you could hide your numerous dealings with this new criminal organization did you?" Laustinos asked calmly. "An organization I might add that you and the KFI helped to fund and get off the ground, not to mention an organization that you channeled weapons and funds to the Evolli government through during their war against the Union. An organization that has outgrown your ability to monitor and control by the way since they have somehow developed a working relationship with an outfit called the Orionis Syndicate. Another mercenary group that does not reside in this quadrant of space it seems."

"Bullshit!" Pusintin declared.

“Then you know where they are getting these new slaves that are appearing in The Wilds in select and very secluded places. These blue skinned females that have the ability to influence men by secreting an oil through their skin. Not many of them mind you... I know of only three at the moment.” Laustinos spoke. “They are certainly not from any world I am familiar with within this quadrant of space. How exactly did they obtain these females? And you know that they are branching out and even dealing with established mercenary and pirate organizations in The Wilds contrary to what you directed them to do. Among them Phy'iad and his ilk. I assume you know all this then?”

“How do you know this?” Pusintin demanded.

“As I said... information is power Marshall Pusintin.” Laustinos spoke.

“Why don't I just have you hooked to a pain drone and extract this information from your head myself?” Pusintin snapped.

Laustinos shook his head. “I am not a fool Pusintin. You can do this of course... but my Mindvoice abilities are far superior to yours or any Kavalian. The moment this happens and I become your prisoner with this intent; I will simply activate the small explosive charge I have in my head. Since I will die anyway... why should I give anything to you for free? You will know nothing more than what you do now, which is far less than what I know, and in the end you will gain nothing.”

“You play a dangerous game Laustinos.” Pusintin spoke. “A very dangerous game. Very well... I will talk to Keleru about what you have told me. He will be very interested in this information you say you have about this organization. He will also want to know why. Why do you do this?”

“Does it matter?” Laustinos asked.

“It does if you want to live.” Pusintin told him.

“If you must know then... it is because of the Ten Thousand.” He stated.

Pusintin looked at him oddly. “The Ten Thousand? Those that were sent to Earth?”

Laustinos nodded. “Yes.”

“What about them?” Pusintin asked.

“My grandmother was chosen as one of those who would send a child to Earth when the time came.” Laustinos spoke. “My father.”

“So?”

“At the last minute before the last transport left King Resumar altered the selection and took another unborn instead of my father.” Laustinos spoke. “The child of parents who were not even ruling members of the council. He took them over my father. My grandmother was about to give birth when the Coven came to assassinate all those who had taken part in this scheme. She was killed seconds after my father arrived. I have hated everything about your bloodline and the one chosen over my father ever since I was a boy.”

Pusintin looked at him. “Your family has held this hate for over ten thousand years?” He asked.

“It is a deep seated hatred Marshall Pusintin.” Laustinos spoke.

Pusintin chuckled for a moment and shook his head. “So it would seem. And I thought I had issues.” He stated as a Kavalian officer came into the room. Pusintin turned to him. “Yes... what is it?”

“We have plotted our course and will arrive at the designated coordinates in two hours Marshall Pusintin.” The officer spoke holding out the data pad. “Sensors indicate there is no activity near Nuc-Quli Beta. Nearest ships are hovering along the Icalro Alliance border and Talbor Seven. Transport ships mostly... a few civilian carriers but nothing that indicates a warship of any kind.”

Pusintin nodded and took the pad. “Very well.” He stated. “You may return to your duties.”

Laustinos looked at him. “I thought we were going to Belid.”

“A slight change of plans.” Pusintin spoke. “Now that the Union knows we have her, we need to move more quickly... at least initially. Don't worry Laustinos... I have already made arrangements for Dysea's transfer to Kavalian custody when her part in this is done. You must be patient.”

“I have waited many years.” Laustinos said. “I have no problems waiting a few more days. I estimate I have at least two more weeks before my window of opportunity passes. And I trust you to uphold your end of our bargain.”

Pusintin nodded. “Then allow me to show you to your quarters.” He stated. “And we can talk to Keleru about this information you have.” He said motioning towards the door. “This may prove to be very interesting indeed.”

**EARTH
GYTHEIO
CRANAE ISLAND**

Sadi and Carisia had not been very good hostesses when everyone arrived for both of them could feel the turmoil in Andro the moment the SCIMITAR entered orbit. Lu'ria and Ne'Veha only confirmed it for them when they arrived on Majeir, and while they were both giddy with happiness that Ne'Veha was now wolf and Androcles had made them both his completely, this was tempered by the fact that their husband and mate was angry and in pain over so many things. When they felt him land outside on Elynth, it was Helen who kept everyone inside as Sadi and the others sprinted for the double doors that led to the patio and the dragon landing pad that was now seeing quite a bit of action.

The smell of sugar plums and spice swirled around his head as Andro crushed his *anome* in his powerful arms and kissed Sadi with more passion and feeling than he had ever kissed her before. Emotions driven by his mental state, but also by his feelings for her and what she meant to him. Sadi could do nothing but whimper in delight and bask in those feelings as his heavenly lavender and pines scent tickled her wolf senses like no other could. After a long moment he set her down and she held his face in her hands.

“Andro my love!” She gasped finally as she rubbed his cheeks.

“Lu'ria and Ne'Veha told you?” He asked softly.

“Yes... and Aurith confirmed it when she arrived.” She answered. Sadi stepped back and drew Carisia close and Andro scooped his lithe vampire wife into his arms and laid a blistering kiss on her as well. Carisia cooed out her delight and then Lu'ria and Ne'Veha were next until finally he drew Sadi back to him tightly. To those many who did not know the Leonidas family, Andro or his father intimately, they would wonder how four women could love him as they did, or how he could love them in return. They would wonder the same thing when they saw the king and Queens, yet there was no doubting the emotion in any way. Even as Andro drew Sadi firmly to his right side, Lu'ria pressed close to his left, Carisia against her and Ne'Veha against Sadi.

“Why have they done this Andro?” Carisia asked softly.

“They... they say it was because we were training the Coven dragons but I don't believe them.” Andro answered quickly seeing her maya blue eyes go wide.

“How can they block her Andro?” Sadi asked. “We should be able to at least feel her tremors within Mindvoice yet there is nothing?”

Andro nodded. “Valin... he told us they got their hands on something that Aikiro had engineered using parts from the Mindvoice ship on Nuwaroa.” He said. “It operates in much the same way as the rooms on CS41. Negative Resonance Chambers they are called. It is why we couldn't feel my mother Dysea and why we can't feel my mother For'mya.”

“But Dysea...” Carisia said. “We can sense her now.”

Andro nodded. “Somehow... this device was either removed or it malfunctioned with her.” He answered. “Valin is here yes? I need to find out more about this device before I contact my father.”

Sadi nodded quickly. “The South Wing of the villa is nearly empty and that is where we put everyone. The Durcunusaan have turned the East Wing into their Command Center.” Sadi looked at him. “Andro... these new people...? They are Lycavorians... but they are different somehow.”

Andro nodded. “I will tell you everything I know.” He said. “The Vanari delegation?”

Sadi nodded. “The South Wing as well. There is... there is something about them as well Androcles. Not sinister in any way... almost hypnotic and extremely alluring. I have never seen their species before, even in the databases.”

Andro nodded. “They come from the same Quadrant of space that Dutkne and the others come from. Eighty thousand light years from here by my reckoning.”

“Andro that's beyond the Perseus Arm!” Carisia exclaimed.

“I will share everything with you. All of you... but I need...” Andro shook his head. “I need to do so much. First and foremost I must explain to my mother and father how I am responsible for the deaths of nearly three million Hadarians.”

Sadi reached up and pulled his face towards her until she was looking into his azure blue eyes. “You had no choice Androcles Leonidas.” She stated firmly. “There were no other options and it was the only thing you could have done. It had to be done... and your father would have made the same decision in your position. You know this.”

“Some will call me a butcher of innocents.” Andro said softly.

Sadi nodded her head. “Perhaps. But they fail to see it is your actions that allow them to keep their freedoms and say such things.”

Andro leaned his forehead to hers and closed his eyes inhaling deeply and allowing her dominant scent and the scents of all his mates to permeate his body and sooth him. “My father knew *KertaGai*.” He whispered.

“What do you mean?” Sadi asked him softly.

“When Elynth and I entered the clinic.” Andro said. “He and Torma touched us there! They told us we knew what needed to be done. He knew I would have to do this. We told him... we told him they would hate us.”

Sadi squeezed his face and pulled him even closer. “What did he say my love?”

“He said... he said only for a time.” Andro whispered.

“Then that is what you must believe.” Sadi answered. She kissed him hard on the lips and drew back after a moment. “The others wait inside. Where... where is this Jomann that you have made your Captain?”

“He will return in the morning.” Andro said. “He was going to see his parents and then check the villas of my siblings to make sure no one has attempted to enter them.” Andro turned to Lu'ria. “Your father and...”

“They have left but will return in the morning.” Lu'ria said. “They are staying in Gytheio at Queen Aihola's villa.”

“I will greet them first.” He said.

“Andro it is not necessary.” Lu'ria spoke quickly.

“Oh but it is *Ilythiiri Tessai*. For me as well as for them.” Andro said pulling her closer and kissing her softly on her soft pink lips. A kiss of passion and love and desire. He nuzzled her elven ears lovingly and saw her amber eyes close as her face basked in the attention. He drew back slowly. “Let me go receive my tongue lashing from the Feravomir for going to the Kavalian embassy and doing something so utterly stupid as she would say.”

All of them chuckled gently at his words and Andro looked at Sadi.

“I won't tell you what she said when we saw it on the Netnews.” Sadi spoke as she kissed him. “Better that you go in and face her unprepared. It will be easier on you.”

Andro rolled his eyes and shook his head as he released Sadi and Lu'ria and began to walk through the double doors into the villa. Sadi stepped closer to Lu'ria and slipped her arm around her waist. Lu'ria reciprocated this action as Carisia and Ne'Veha drew closer to them as well.

“I told you Mistress.” Sadi said softly leaning over to nuzzle her elven ears and cheek.

The slap carried quite a bit of power to it and Andro felt the heat and stinging on his cheek. He turned his head back and looked down into Helen's dark angry eyes. Wayonn and Dutkne stood to the side watching with Selene, Riall and Lynwe while Bren stood with his arms across his chest smiling broadly as he stood next to Devra Re Mydala, Arduri and Naesta, all of whom had looks of astonishment on their faces.

“I... I take it you do not approve of my actions Feravomir?” Andro spoke as he reached up to rub his cheek.

“Approve?” Helen almost screamed. “*Wen forn nubous malda?*”

“*Feravomir*... I don't believe I have ever seen you this upset where you start using foul language right from the start.” Andro said with a hint of a smile.

“Foul language!” Helen shrieked. Helen's hand snapped up and she slapped him again across his other cheek. “You are just like your father!” She shouted. “Have you completely lost all command of your senses or have you and Elynth flown too high into the atmosphere where there is no oxygen and it has affected your rational thought just as it has your father and Torma? Do you know what could have happened?”

“I was in complete control of all my actions *Feravomir*.” Andro said as he rubbed his other cheek.

“Then you have gone crazy!” Helen screamed. “I should have you committed somewhere in a padded cell! You could have been killed Androcles!”

“The Kavalians are not fool enough to kill me here on Earth.” He stated.

“No!” Helen snapped. “They have kidnapped For'mya! They have attacked our family! They have attacked the Drow! They almost killed your mother and father! They were behind Anja being usurped on Hadaria and they are responsible for your mother Dysea being taken from Kranek! These are not things done by people who are fully cognizant of their actions and what they will wrought! These are not things that are done by people who *care* what their actions will wrought! What could possibly make you believe they wouldn't kill you? They have already tried fool boy!”

“And they failed.” Andro said. “*Feravomir* you...”

“And this Jomann who you have appointed as your Captain!” Helen continued her rant ignoring him. “He followed you into this ridiculous action, when it is his duty to keep you from doing such utterly stupid things! He is no better than Andreus!” Helen declared. “I will have words for him when I see him! I did not work so hard and wait for so long to see the return of your father to his rightful place among us; I did not work to see the joy on his face and that of your mothers when you came into this world; I did not work to watch as his oldest son... the Crown Prince of our Union, act in such a wholly and completely asinine way and laconically risk his life as your father does so very well! *Son vada carians*... every time you or your father does something like this I feel as if my head will explode! Have you and Elynth listened to nothing I have taught you through the years?”

“Of course we have *Feravomir*.” Andro stated.

“Then why do you insist on conducting yourselves in this way?” Helen screamed. “And do not think that Elynth is not hearing this exact speech from Arzoal!”

“I'm sure.” Andro spoke.

“Then why?” Helen screamed. “It is not enough that they have taken For'mya from him! He will be insane with rage because of that alone and you know this... but if they had taken you from him he would have gone off the deep end and plunged the entire universe into chaos in a blood rage unlike anything I can begin to imagine! It would make the Black Day of our people pale in comparison! Even your mothers would not have been able to control him! No more than Sadi or your wives would have controlled you when you thought he was dead! I felt it within you Androcles Leonidas! Do not deny it! You came within a hair's breath of unleashing that... that hell!”

“What do you want me to say *Feravomir*?” Andro asked softly. “Do you wish me to tell you that when I see a tactical decision that will reveal information to me... do you want me to tell you I will not take that action? They took my mother!” He roared now. “I needed to be sure!”

Helen glared at him. “Do not raise your voice to me young man!” She popped just as loudly. “I am not one of your soldiers! And you are not too big for me to turn over my knee and give you the lashing you deserve!”

It was Bren and Riall who finally broke the tension that was rising in the room and had been rising for hours now as more and more information came in on the extent of what was happening. Neither of them were able to contain the laughter that picture in their heads caused no matter how much they tried and they both lost it. Helen's head snapped around and she glared at Riall but also noticed that Wayonn and Dutkne were also on the verge of losing their ability to contain the laughter and then they were laughing as well.

“This is not in any way funny!” Helen snarled.

“*Feravomir*...” Andro spoke now stepping closer to her. “You have not disciplined me since I was five years old.”

“I should have done it more!” Helen exclaimed turning back to him. “It's obvious you needed it!”

“*Feravomir*, if you are waiting for me to remain here in the safety of my villa surrounded by my mates and respond to such things by my words alone I think you know what my answer to that will be.” Andro spoke as he reached out and took her hands in his. “Elynth and I have... we remember it all *Feravomir*. Everything you have taught us... and continue to teach us. It is part of what has made us who we are. But I am my father's son.”

“That is not something you need to remind me of.” She snapped but with much less force now.

“Then you of all people should know that I will act as my father will act. I will do what is necessary to get answers. I will do what is...” Andro lowered his head. “I will do what I must to keep our people safe. To keep my family safe.”

Helen saw the pain in his eyes now and she reached up and took his face in her hands pulling him down so that he was bent over to be near her five foot two height.

“Do not allow... do not allow what you did, what you *had* to do, do not allow this to make you reckless Androcles.” She whispered to him. “Too many people rely on you now.”

“Almost three million relied on me.” Andro said softly. “And I let them down *Feravomir*. Now I must tell my father that they have taken his *Kinsoaurgai*. I... I could have prevented this if I had not left him alone here.”

“Don’t say that!” Helen snapped. “Don’t you ever say that Androcles! Your father would never blame you for what has happened! Never! And nor does anyone else!” Helen shook her head slowly. “Promise me... promise me that you will at least think before you act! You are not alone... ever! And there are situations where you and Elynth can not do it by yourselves. You must allow others to help you! Promise me this Androcles... you are like your father and you have never broken a promise you have made... promise me this for I could not stand to bury another Leonidas. Not after... not after what you and your father have come to mean to me.”

Andro stared at her for a long moment, his azure eyes soft and bright. He leaned over finally and placed a kiss on her forehead as she closed her eyes. “Then I will make you that promise *Feravomir*.”

Helen nodded slowly and opened her eyes, dropping her hands to his where he held her waist. “Good. Now release me.” She stated.

Andro looked at her. “Does this mean you will not attempt to turn me over your knee and lash my bottom?”

Helen couldn’t help but smile as Bren, Riall, Dutkne and Wayonn and now everyone else began laughing once more. “No... I will leave that duty to Sadi and your other mates! They would probably enjoy it and I have no desire to see your hairy *mida* after all these years. It would not be as cute as it was then.”

“His *mida* is many things *Feravomir*... hairy is not one of them.” Sadi’s voice carried from the open double doors where she stood with Carisia, Lu’ria and Ne’Veha. This statement caused more laughter to ensue.

Andro laughed gently as even Devra, Arduri and Naesta began to laugh. He pulled her into an embrace and her arms went around his shoulders. [*I will keep my promise to you Feravomir.*] He spoke to her within Mindvoice.

Devra leaned close to Bren reaching up to put her hand on his arm. “Is it... is it always like this?” She asked softly.

Bren turned his eyes on her. “Like what?” He asked noticing that her daughters were listening intently.

“The... the emotion.” Devra asked softly. “The passion in their words? The commitment to each other. You can almost feel the loyalty and dedication in the air.”

Bren nodded. “This is what King Leonidas brought back to our people when he returned. And this is what his children continue without even knowing it. Yes... it is always like this. It cannot be any different than the Protectorate. We are all Lycavorians and it is very hard for us to keep our emotions contained for very long. We are passionate about everything we believe.”

Devra blinked her sea green eyes and looked away shyly. “It is... it is not something we ever thought to discover. We always... many of my people consider Lycavorians to be...” Devra couldn’t finish the statement and Bren smiled.

“Too much like the animals we can become?” He said softly.

“Forgive me.” Devra said.

Bren shook his head. “Nothing to forgive.” He said. “Perhaps your time among us will show you that what you may believe could not be further from the truth. Especially if you spend much time around the Leonidas family.”

Helen reveled in the embrace for a long moment and then kissed Andro’s cheek. [*I know you will.*] Helen answered as she patted his shoulders. [*Now put me down and let us work to discovering why your uncle and these fool Kavalians have done these things, and how we will get your mother back.*] Andro did as she told him and looked at her. “When will you contact your father?” She asked.

“In the morning.” He answered. “I want to have as much information as possible for he will surely fly into a rage as you said. I need to talk with Resumar first and possibly try and raise Denali.”

“You must keep him where he is Andro.” Helen said. “If he reveals that he is alive, that could very well get your mother killed.”

Andro nodded. “I know. But how do you control a building storm *Feravomir*?”

Wayonn stepped up to them now. “You don’t.” He spoke. “You can only attempt to guide it in the direction you want.”

Andro grinned. “Have you ever tried to guide my father Wayonn? Moving a mountain has better odds.”

“We need to try.” Wayonn spoke. “And I need to see him soon.”

Helen looked at him. “Xaxon?” She asked.

Wayonn nodded. “The darkness is still within him... and in order for me to help him remove it I must be in physical contact with him. As passionate as he is about things, when he discovers this it would be a perfect opportunity for the darkness to reemerge. I’m not saying it will... just that it is a possibility.”

Andro nodded. “Then we will make it happen sooner rather than later.”

NORMYA’S LIGHT THIRTY MINUTES FROM BELID

Admiral Thodius stood on the bridge, his dark eyes staring at the main view windows as Belid became easy enough to see with the naked eye. Twenty-six years he had served as the commander of Queen Dysea’s Strike Wing and not once in all that time had his Queen ever been in such danger. Even during the height of the Evolli War, when she stood beside him on this very bridge, had she been in such peril. Three times in the past two decades he had turned down promotion to command a Fleet Group and remain here. Not out of any secret agenda or hopes, he had been married to the same Lycavorian female for over a thousand years and there was not a day that went by when he did not talk to her. Six months out of every year when they resided on Apo Prime, his wife and mate would stay with him here on *NORMYA’S LIGHT* and they would dine with not only Dysea and Queen Isabella, but so many different members of her family and different species. No one had ever hurt his elven Queen before... no one had dared do such a thing. Until now.

And now Admiral Thodius was just plain pissed off. The damage to *NORMYA’S LIGHT* was now repaired, her fighter wings full for she had taken on many of the *SCIMITAR’S* fighter to complete her complement, and as he had heard Queen Anja state on so many occasions, now it was time to get low down and dirty mean.

“Report!” Thodius barked.

“Detecting one *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnought! Two *REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts, six *BLOODLETTERS* and four *DARKBROOD*-Class Heavy frigates!” His sensor operator called out.

“How many ZMF missiles do we have left?” Thodius asked.

“Twelve sir!”

“That’s it then! Four per Dreadnought! Maximum yield! The first one should take down their shields and the other three will do their job! Disperse the rest of the Strike Wing to engage the remaining ships at will. Have Captain Drdanu cut away and come in from coreward of Belid. We’ll catch them between us!”

“Transmitting orders now!”

“Get me Denali and Cha’talla!” Thodius snapped. He turned to one of the two main holodiscs on the floor of his bridge and he saw the figures of Denali Leonidas and Cha’talla come into focus. He had to blink for a moment at Cha’talla’s new look, but while the gray skin was gone and replaced with the natural bronze and tanned skin of the Akruvian people, there was no mistaking those eyes. They burned with intelligence and new found power and ability as he saw Vollenth and Aradace in the background on the *STRIKER DT*. Whatever doubts Thodius or anyone might have had about Cha’talla and his Immortal tribe vanished when they watched him kill the vampire Gerald for taking part in the kidnapping of Dysea. His impassioned speech right after washed away thousands of years of distrust and hate in one fell swoop and put their two peoples on the road to a deep and abiding friendship that the marriage of Normya and Tir’ut had only cemented for all time. That Esther had discovered and been able to reverse the millennia long curse inflicted on the Akruvians by the High Coven,

returning them to their natural physical state and not the deformed and fearsome one they had been forced to carry for so long only added to the new mystique that surrounded the Akruxian people. That and the fact that Cha'talla of the Immortals was now bonded to a dragon.

“Admiral?” Cha'talla spoke quickly.

“We’re twenty-six minutes out.” Thodius spoke. “I’m going to hit their big ships with our Strike Wing and have Captain Drdanu move in from coreward. Denali, you and the rest of the *STRIKERS* launch in nine minutes! Go in under full Shroud and don’t release until you are at less than five thousand feet. If what Tir’ut and Lynom have told us is accurate, they don’t have any ground based sensors that can scan below five thousand feet. Their contact inside the base is suppose to disable their exterior sensors anyways, as well as all automated defenses.”

“Nothing more from Tir’ut or Normya?” Denali asked.

“Not since they contacted us once we entered the system.” Thodius said.

Cha'talla nodded. “Then our plan is intact. They would let us know if something had changed. Colonel Danarla... Major Ta’lon... Narice... you are monitoring?”

“No changes!” As'hia’s mother answered crisply. “Got it!”

“*VIPER* Command acknowledges.” As'hia’s father answered from the *VIPER*-Class Heavy Troop ship currently docked on *NORMYA*’s *LIGHT*’s port side.

“Toria and I acknowledge Cha'talla.” Narice’s voice was calm as she answered.

“Watch your asses you two.” Arrarn’s voice filled the COM.

Thodius and everyone who heard Arrarn’s comment to his wives chuckled and felt the pre-combat jitters lessen just that little bit.

“We would much prefer if you watched our asses.” Toria’s voice broke in causing more soft chuckles.

“However we do understand if you are too occupied at the moment.” Narice finished. “So we will watch each other.”

Thodius saw both Denali and Cha'talla shake their heads and smile. Cha'talla finally turned to him once more. “Admiral... we will keep an open COM.”

Thodius nodded. “Eight minutes and we start!”

“And we don’t stop until we have my mother back!” Denali growled.

CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

CABELIR

KFI MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

“...did this happen?” Keleru roared as he threw the data pad across the conference room and let it shatter against the far wall. None of the twelve senior Pride leaders presently in the room wanted to speak for fear of being on the receiving end of Keleru’Puat’s legendary temper. “Will none of my Military Council answer me and make me understand?”

The darker furred Kavalian near the end of the table looked around and finally stood up. As with all Kavalians he was tall and heavily built, but the years were beginning to show on his body in the gray hair that dotted his fur and the slight paunch of his midsection underneath his uniform.

“I... I believe several of us in this room voiced this very concern Prefect.” He stammered softly. “Including Marshall Pusintin and Admiral Menot himself.” The man spoke motioning to the holographic figure of Admiral Menot who was speaking from Hadaria and did not appear happy in the least.

Keleru glared at the older man for a long moment before finally taking a deep breath and getting his anger under control. He nodded his head slowly as he returned to the table. “You are correct Admiral Nykow. You are correct.” Keleru pulled up the chair he had shoved aside and thrown to the floor and righted it in his usual spot. “Our plans have gone almost perfectly and I have no one to blame but myself and the decisions I have made for the two failures that we have sustained.” He settled into the chair and took a deep breath. “Very well gentlemen...many did we lose?” Keleru asked keeping his voice calm.

“Six million three hundred thousand clones Prefect.” Another Pride leader spoke from across the table immediately. He was one of the youngest men in the room and one of the most inexperienced. “The majority of them were in their final stage of life and were no longer counted within the active forces.” He tried to put the spin on it.

“I counted them!” Menot barked angrily from the holodisc transmission that was active along the wall. “I needed those men and ships!”

Keleru held up his hand quieting Menot from within the transmission. “And how many ships?”

“The last group we were sending Prefect. Two Heavy Fleet Groups. Almost four hundred and fifty ships. Over half of them were front line warships Prefect, among them some forty-one *GREATSOUL* Dreadnoughts.” The Pride leader answered.

Keleru looked at the man intently. “Do we know who gave this order Admiral Kama?” He asked.

“There are only a handful of Union officers that would have the ultimate authorization to order the destruction of the Gates Prefect.” Kama answered him. “Fleet Admiral Riall of course. General/Colonel Simpson... perhaps one of the Elven Generals on Earth... this Tareif or Vengal.”

“I checked with our Intelligence Division before coming here Prefect.” Nykow spoke once more as he remained standing and took the lead again. “They believe it was the son we failed to kill. Androcles Leonidas.”

“He would never order such a thing!” Another Pride leader hissed. “The Hadarian wench is one who he regards as mother and we know she escaped and is still alive somewhere. Over seventy percent of those killed on the civilian ships were no doubt Hadarians attempting to escape the blockade we were putting in place subtly. He would not order the deaths of so many of his mother’s people!”

Nykow nodded his head. “That is true Ugant, however in many respects Prefect he is a near duplicate to his father. There are many who were alive in the time of his grandfather some three thousand years ago that still live in Sparta and they believe he is closer to *that* King Leonidas in his overall demeanor. He would not hesitate to give such an order, he may weep while doing so, but he would give the order prefect. I concur with our Intelligence people. It had to be the son.”

“And risk his mother’s wrath?” The same man spoke again.

“Through all the contacts we have had with the Hadarians in the last eighteen months, helping them to plan their little coup, we have learned a great deal about this Anja Leonidas who spit so happily in our faces be refusing us access to their Healers.” Nykow continued. “The most diminutive of his Queens she may be... but she is the most like Leonidas. Even more so than the child Queen Aricia was, who we all know was extraordinarily vicious in battle with the Evolli. The Hadarian witch’s own history lays out quite a list of events where she chose the greater good of the Union over her own people, which upset many on her homeworld. The Queen of the Hadarians she may have been, but like all of his Queens, she thinks like a Spartan before and above all else.”

“Taking Hadaria back from the High Coven cost them over a hundred and fifty million lives three millennia ago Nykow.” Kama spoke now. “If the history of the Union is accurate, the High Coven had only a third of the numbers we had planned to put on that planet. Half of what we *now* have there. Do any of you in this room think they have the stomach to lose so much again?”

“Given that the son ordered this when we did not expect him too...” Nykow spoke. “I suggest we do not underestimate what he is capable of. His father would never have gone after Matuarr at the embassy as he did. We must remember this one important fact... he is not his father and he is responsible for more Evolli deaths during that war than any other.”

“Evolli?” Kama declared. “We are not Evolli Nykow!”

“We supported them, supplied them and trained them.” Nykow spoke calmly. “No matter where he fought them, in the stars or on the ground, he slaughtered them. Even with some of our most advanced weapons at their disposal.”

“No... Nykow is right and he is not his father. And we didn’t kill him when we had the opportunity!” Another Pride Leader spoke now as the others began to relax knowing Keleru was not going to execute them all. He turned and looked at Keleru. “We recommended that we deploy more experienced forces to Kranek and Hadaria Prefect. Instead we sent what were essentially second level ships and troops and they were obliterated.”

“The new batches of clones will replace those we lost within weeks.” Kama spoke again dismissing the man’s comment.

“How do you propose we get those new batches of clones to Admiral Menot on Hadaria Kama?” Another older Pride Leader called Kaomi spoke from down the table. “Hadarian space may be ours but the Union is not going to just let us transport hundreds of thousands of troops openly across their territory to reach Hadarian space. The nearest gate to Hadarian space now is only hours from Apo Prime. Without the use of their Hadarian Jump Gate corridors we would have to send them on a near three day trip across Union territory... and that is from our nearest border with them. They would never allow this.”

“After what we have done they wouldn’t dare challenge us.” Kama snarled in reply.

“Do not underestimate them Kama.” Nykow spoke again. “The Lycavorian Union is not the High Coven and they will challenge us no matter what we do.”

“They have grown weak since his return and now that he is dead they will be confused and unable to act quickly enough to counter our moves!” Kama continued to press the issue.

“Perhaps now... but that will rapidly not be the case.” Another Pride Leader chimed in now. “They will begin mobilizing their forces as soon as the boy King regains his focus. Yes... Matuarr has given them a warning that will hold them in check right now. But not for very long I fear once the truth is revealed.”

Nykow looked at Keleru who had remained silent so far. “Prefect... do we have anything further on what this Phy’iad reported? He spoke of some sort of ships that jumped directly into the planetary system at Kranek.”

“That’s not possible!” Kama exclaimed. “No ship has the engine power to jump directly into a planet’s system let alone within its gravitational well. Phy’iad is an Immortal and a scum mercenary! He is wrong!”

“An Immortal he may be... but he has decades of experience fighting both the Union and us.” Nykow spoke even handedly. “How do you explain that they were able to annihilate two complete Fleet Groups Kama? Older ships they may have been... but they were battle tested and experienced men.”

“We can not see past their Shrouds!” Kama snapped. “They must have had more ships hiding around Kranek than we thought. It’s the only explanation!”

“And the Coven ships Phy’iad says jumped into the system? Do we just dismiss them as well Kama?” Nykow asked. “After what the vampire witch Aikiro perpetrated against them, attacking his daughter as they did, why would they allow upwards of sixty High Coven ships to provide assistance to them? No... something else entirely happened there and we do not know what it is.”

“Do you have an idea Admiral?” Keleru asked interested now in what his leaders thought.

“No Prefect.” Nykow answered. “I have never heard of ships that could do what Phy’iad says in his report. The most any of our *GREATSOUL* Dreadnoughts could carry in the way of fighters is far less than what Phy’iad said these two ships emptied into the space around Kranek. Their size alone would indicate some sort of heavy cruiser but to carry this many fighters and be as well armed as his report states... I find it hard to believe. Without having seen it myself I can only speculate and that would do us no good.”

“Then speculate Nykow.” Keleru asked leaning forward. “You have my attention.”

“If you must know Prefect... this could only mean they have developed some new type ship that we have not seen before.” Nykow answered.

“A ship that can jump directly into the gravity well of a planet and begin fighting instantly and launch so many fighters?” Kama complained. “That is beyond anyone’s ability to do.”

“How do we know that?” Nykow asked.

“Laustinos and this Lycavorian Rinard on Hadaria did what they told us they could do Nykow!” Kama snapped angrily. “Hadaria is ours and it cost us naught except information and logistical support that means nothing to us. That dog Leonidas is dead! Many of his children are dead as well? We have hurt them Nykow! Hurt them badly! So the son lives... so what? Once Marshall Pusintin completes his plan the Union will become a non-factor and the son will not matter! We have eliminated the Union as a threat!”

“We may have hurt them badly, but they are by no means toothless Kama.” Nykow spoke calmly. “You seem to forget the High Coven could never conquer them. And Martin Leonidas was only King for twenty-five of the last three thousand plus years while that war raged!”

Kama turned to Keleru. “Prefect... the Marshall’s plan will work won’t it?”

Keleru nodded confidently. “The beginning of the plan is almost near completion, a few more hours at most... but yes. The Ascension Laws within the Union constitution are very clear and have never wavered in any way.”

Kama nodded his head. "And the fools love their laws!" He hissed. "You have seen it yourself Nykow. The Union Senate and Galactic Court did not allow Leonidas to exterminate the Evolli. And even the elven Queen Dysea was approving of that plan! With Hadaria under our control, we already have one judge in our favor."

"That judge went against our attempt to get the Marshall's daughter declared a Kavalian citizen." Nykow spoke.

"That is not a battle we expected to win given the circumstances." Keleru said. "Menot... what does this Buonau bitch say?"

Menot nodded. "The Hadarian judge will follow her directives or she will be replaced." Menot said. "She has already warned her of such a decision."

"You see Nykow! With the information that Laustinos has given us we can prod and intimidate enough others to see things our way even if they are already part of the Union. And once the Marshall makes his claim to the throne the Union will ultimately fall under our control and save us the effort!" Kama said.

Nykow shook his head slowly and looked directly at Keleru. "Our military plans are not something I doubt Prefect." He stated confidently. "I am only concerned that we are putting too much faith in what this Laustinos has told us about how they will react. His information is based on what they would do without Leonidas or the oldest son. In truth, with the exception of his time in the Evolli War, nothing is known of the son. Where he lies along the political and military spectrum of things. This is what I believe we should discover... for if he is the one who ordered the destruction of the Gates then that gives us our first insight into his mentality. I am only concerned that perhaps we are moving too fast too soon."

Keleru nodded now. "These are concerns for me as well Nykow." He stated. "We will know more once Pusintin contacts us when it is done... however what do you suggest we do now?"

"The son... Androcles... he is the largest unknown and he must be removed. In a military sense alone, he will be all the spark that is needed to keep the Union willing to fight. Politically he will not have as much influence as his father, that much we can reasonably be accurate on and he will be weaker there, but militarily he could rally them easily. He is a proven motivator and superior tactician as well as a savage warrior." Nykow shook his head slowly. "Ordering the destruction of the Jump Gates was his doing Prefect. I'm sure of it. Only he would make such a radical decision." Nykow spoke.

"That is nonsense!" Kama declared.

Keleru shook his head. "No... Nykow may be right." He said slowly.

"Prefect you can't believe that?" Kama rasped.

"What I believe is irrelevant." Keleru stated. "I'm only judging these events on fact. You all know that Pusintin's youngest son with Jalersi graduated the Puma Bane training last year. Leruk was one of the finest trained Puma Bane Warriors we have ever turned out along with his brother Kalis. All of the instructors said as much. Many of you were there the day he graduated. He was... he was butchered on Iraruzu and all the information we have indicates it was this Androcles. Leruk died violently and missions reports from a follow on team state that it was not even much of a fight."

"Then the rumors are true?" Kaomi asked softly as other heads turned and eyes grew wider.

Keleru nodded. "Pusintin does not know yet... for you all know how he will react. That information does not leave this room on pain of death. If the son was able to defeat Leruk so easily then he is a threat to any future plans we may have."

Nykow nodded. "I do not believe we will succeed in manipulating him Prefect. Based on what we now know if we can not directly go after him ourselves, then let us use our contacts in The Wilds and turn them loose Prefect." Nykow offered hurriedly. "Fleet Admiral Riall and the others we can predict what they will do Prefect... but the son... he is a viable threat to us and our plans. Our organization has the ability and the means to get within the Union and even on Earth, we trained most of them. Sanction them through third parties to eliminate Androcles Leonidas Prefect. Let them go after him, after his wives since they seem to covert their females so. With him dead or mourning the loss of one or more of his precious mates, not only does it make the Union more predictable, it will make what you and the Marshall have devised proceed much easier."

"And what of the support for Admiral Menot?" Keleru asked.

“We may be able to infiltrate large numbers of our clones into Hadarian space via civilian cargo ships.” Kama interrupted. “We have several dozen Limian transports with all sorts of exquisitely forged documents that we had planned to use in an assault if needed. Let’s use them now!”

“That is a very risky option.” Nykow said calmly. “But it may be the only option open to us right now.”

“Nothing is without risk!” Kama snapped.

Keleru turned to the transmission. “Menot... are the spaceports still open?” He asked the man who had remained silent so far.

Menot nodded. “Yes Prefect. The Union forces were only concerned with getting off the planet, not with destroying anything. The thirteen main cities are now under our complete control. The fool woman Buonau is drunk with the power she perceives she now has. This other woman Wiktor, she is more reserved but they continue to pass the most ridiculous edicts to their people. We are spreading out into the surrounding communities but that is what I needed those troops for! To do it more quickly. I can not send them too far for fear of leaving the cities without enough troops.”

“How many Healers can you send to us?” Keleru asked. Menot didn’t answer right away and Keleru looked at him intently. “Admiral?”

Menot shook his head. “Barely a handful Prefect.” He replied. “None of the Hadarian Healers off world have returned as Buonau ordered them too. Indeed... many of those currently involved in their training courses have refused to continue them. They have been arrested and confined but it will take time for Buonau and the others to gather enough support to force others into service.”

“You have none?” Keleru asked.

“A hundred that are two weeks from completing their schooling Prefect.” He answered him. “I have not learned much of this ability that they possess, but I do know that it is not something all of them have Prefect. It takes time and effort to learn the skills needed to become a Healer Prefect. And then the individual must be able to what they call Ascend every six months.”

“Then learn what you must and make it happen sooner.” Keleru demanded. “Without those Healers we will have to delay our planned invasion of the Coven by several months at least. That is not something I want to do. Not now.”

Menot looked at his Prefect. “That may require I resort to... other means Prefect.” He spoke. “Methods you told me to avoid.”

Keleru shook his head. “Use them now.” He stated firmly. “We did not foresee that the active healers would disregard the orders of Buonau and this other wench and follow the witch Queen’s directives instead.”

“Will you question my methods Prefect?” He asked.

“Not if you succeed.” Keleru answered.

Menot nodded. “Then I will get Healers for you Prefect and I will leave the logistics of getting me more troops to others.”

They all watched as the transmission ended and Keleru turned back to them. “I think we are in agreement then for right now.” He stated. “I will send word to our contacts and do as Admiral Nykow has suggested. Admiral Kama... you will see to getting the Limian transports ready and getting Menot the troops he needs.”

Kama smiled. “As you order Prefect.” He barked happily.

Keleru looked at Nykow as he returned to his seat. “You don’t approve Admiral?” He asked.

“Of killing the son yes Prefect! Wholeheartedly!” Nykow answered. “Of the means to provide more troops to Menot... no.”

“Nykow why do you...” Kama began to berate the older Pride Leader.

“Mind your place Kama!” Nykow snarled at the younger man now as he lost his patience. “I was fighting the Vampire High Coven with your father before you were a dark spot on his balls! I know your father well and he would cuff you in your head for speaking in a such a way to your seniors!”

Kama opened his mouth to retort but Keleru stepped in then. “You are young Admiral Kama.” Keleru spoke. “Young and very bright, but do not overstep your bounds at this table as the leader of your Pride as Nykow has said. Your father may have passed leadership to you, but that does not mean you will disrespect those who are your seniors. And your betters.”

Kama bowed his head. “Forgive me Prefect.” He stammered.

“Nykow... what is it that bothers you about this plan of Kama’s?” Keleru asked sifting in his chair.

“Prefect... you have always asked... you and Marshall Pusintin both... you have always asked us, demanded from us honesty above all else in this room.” Nykow said.

Keleru nodded. “Yes.” He spoke. “If we can not trust and rely upon our military leaders we are nothing. With very little exception there is nothing I nor Pusintin have not shared with you.”

“My apologies Prefect... my statement was not directed at you or the Marshall.” Nykow spoke. “While Kama’s plan is a good one... I do not debate that and I have already said it is the only option open to us right now. I feel the better course of action long term is to find another way to tap into their Gate Corridors again. Sending Limian transports across their borders with no support for three days will take too long and is far too precarious. Yes they are in turmoil... yes they are confused... but this will not last! I have studied the Union and their tactics Prefect and if they discover we are shuttling troops across their borders it will be all the excuse they need to declare immediate war given what we have done. They are holding back now... holding back because we have the elf Queen and their chain of command is shaken. If we give them a reason to unite... well... we all know what will happen.”

“Finding another way to tap into their Gate system would take too long and they will be expecting a move like that!” Kama declared.

“I don’t think they will be.” Nykow spoke shaking his head. “They *will* be expecting to catch us trying to move men and equipment to Hadaria in whatever way we can and the only thing working in our favor is the openness of their travel corridors. They would not expect us to continue to use deceit and subterfuge.”

“Admiral Menot needs the men!” Kama protested.

“Yes he does.” Nykow spoke. “But Menot is an old soldier like me. Like you Prefect. He will make do with what he has until reinforcements arrive. Ambassador Matuarr has told the son Androcles that we will kill his mother and invade if he retaliates against us. For now that threat will hold. But what about after Prefect, when the full scope of the plan with his elven mother becomes known. He already has shown he will not wholly cling to the sayings of this Galactic Court they so honor. If we provoke him in any way... he *will* attack Prefect. Without hesitation.”

“Then let him!” Kama spat.

“And fight a war on two fronts against the Coven *and* the Union?” Another older Pride Leader gasped. “That would be suicide!”

“We must move quickly and divisively!” Kama snapped.

“That does not mean we should abandon caution to the wind!” The same Pride Leader spoke again.

Keleru shook his head. “No... for the moment we will go with Kama’s plan.” He spoke confidently ending further debate about the issue. “I don’t believe they are as organized and unified as you may think Nykow. Not with what Laustinos has told us about those who oppose the Leonidas family.” He got to his feet. “We will stick with the current plan that we have and proceed from there but I will direct our people to begin actively searching for another way to tap into their Gate system Nykow. As you say... that could be invaluable. Now... if you will excuse me.”

All of the men came to their feet as Keleru left, and then they began to file out of the room slowly talking amongst themselves. Nykow looked at the two other Pride Leaders that were close to his age and had voiced caution as they moved close to him. They had seen the same battles and horrors as he had.

“Nykow?” The oldest one asked.

“This does not feel right Latteo.” Nykow spoke softly. “We are moving too fast. Things are happening almost faster than we can keep track of them. Ever since they hatched this plan months ago we have charged ahead heedless of the cost it could mean for us. For our Prides and for the KFI.”

“You have said it was a good plan Nykow.” The second man spoke.

“I do not question the plan itself Kaomi. It is an excellent plan.” Nykow said. “Only the means and speed with which it is being implemented make me question it. We are overlooking too much as we grow closer to the moment we think it will all come together. We are trusting too much to chance.”

“What do you mean?” Latteo asked.

“Qurot is trapped at the embassy on Earth now. The Union will never let him leave.” Nykow said. “Pian’Nruarani has betrayed us and his entire Pride has just vanished. Two of our finest leaders of troops and one of our largest Prides and they are out of the overall equation instantly.”

“Pian is a traitor to his people! To us!” Latteo spoke harshly and loudly. “As are all his Pride members.”

“And I agree.” Nykow spoke. “That does not mean he was not one of our finest leaders and tacticians.”

“The Nruarani are a nomadic Pride Nykow.” Kaomi spoke evenly. “They always have been.”

“So nomadic that they strip everything bare as they leave?” Nykow spoke. “So nomadic that we can find no sign of them at all? None! We have scoured the outer edges of our borders and we find nothing! Where did they go? How did they just up and disappear? No... they have gone somewhere and we don’t know where. In another incident; on the edge of our space with the Union near Ritaah, one of our science vessels reports an unknown explosion on Ritaah and then goes to scrutinize this. That ship has not been heard from since. A squadron of destroyers sent to investigate can find no trace of the ship anywhere in the system or the outlying sector! It too has just vanished! I fear there is much going on that we do not see or do not know enough about to just dismiss it as unimportant. And Kama’s thirst for battle with the Lycavorians is becoming boorish.”

Latteo looked back towards the door then back to his friends. “He will not be so brash when a Lycavorian commander hands him his ass in battle. He has grown too used to fighting the Coven.”

Kaomi looked at him evenly. “You have something on your mind Nykow my friend... say it.”

Nykow looked at him. “We are hurtling towards a finish that we believe we have shaped irrevocably in our favor my friends. What we have not taken into account is how others might alter that finish. And not to our benefit.”

“Do you fear the Lycavorians Nykow?” Latteo asked.

“Don’t you my friend?” Nykow asked in reply. “They are not the High Coven and you know this. They will not throw aside their weapons and run like cowardly dogs in the face of overwhelming odds as the High Coven did. They will stand and fight and they will die, kicking and screaming out their rage as they kill as many of our men as they can before they go. We faced them once before millennia ago, and they sent us scurrying back to our planet with our tails between our legs. We have grown since then and learned and prospered. But so have they. I do not dismiss this Immortal’s reports as Kama does. An Immortal he may be, but he is also an experienced commander of men and ships or the High Coven would have disposed of him long before he deserted them. These ships he speaks of... they give me pause and concern. Why have we heard nothing about them? If they exist, and I’m not saying they do, but if they exist it means there are things that Laustinos did not tell us or does not know. I believe it is the latter, and if it is... then what else have the Lycavorians been up to that we are not aware of? If we... if we continue on this path of recklessness... I fear we invite the same outcome if not something far more terrible. And that is what I fear most of all.”

KAVALIAN GREATSOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PUSINTIN’S COMMAND SHIP *PRIDE OF PUMAS*

Her head hurt so badly.

She could feel the coolness of the pillow beneath her head, and the military style stiffness of the mattress. She deduced that she was most definitely not in their bed in Sparta. The scents were so very different, and she could not detect the minty smell of her beloved Martin Leonidas nor the honey, lilac or wildflower scents of Anja, Bella or Dysea and not a trace of the lavender and coco scent of her lovely Aricia. Her head throbbed deeply; the ache feeling like someone was inside her skull with a hammer and bashing away incessantly. For'mya was face down on the mattress so that ruled out any hospital that she knew of. Her keen wolf nose could detect a multitude of heavy male scents, none of which she could place or quantify as even being Lycavorian though the strange and pungent peppermint like scent seemed somehow familiar. She moved her head only slightly and For'mya groaned in agony as pain shot through all of her senses. Her hands came up and she gripped the pillow until the wave of pain passed and then her dark brown eyes began to flutter as she tried to open them. The light was not bright which was a definite plus but it hampered her vision. Slowly For'mya blinked several times trying to bring things into focus and just as slowly her vision cleared. She began to make out the sterile furniture of whatever room she was in. Two gunmetal gray dressers built into the obvious ship bulkhead, one just below the view window which showed her nothing but stars. So she wasn’t on Earth anymore which meant Deia and the Senate *Durcunusaan* Detail had evacuated them. For'mya Leonidas then did

the one thing she always did when waking from sleep and she reached out within Mindvoice for those she loved.

And she felt nothing.

For'mya's eyes grew slightly wider as the memories came rushing back to her. Deia's office and watching the monitor as the running battle from Tarifa's home was broadcast live on the Netnews. And then... then she remembered everything and she sat up quickly, the pain in her head now nothing as she remembered she had watched the death of the only man she had ever loved in her entire life.

"*MARTIN!!*" For'mya Leonidas screamed louder than she had ever screamed in her entire life. She reached out once more in Mindvoice hoping beyond hope it was all a lie but she felt nothing but blackness. She could feel nothing and she staggered from the bed, all her balance and equilibrium shattered. Nothing. Aricia's musical resonance; Anja's constant drumbeat of confidence; Dysea's ripples of balance and Bella's calm and collected whispers. She could feel none of it. For'mya banged into the bulkhead, shaking her head and the combination of pain and lack of balance made her whole body throb in agony. "*MARTIN!!*" She screamed again. "*NO! MARTIN MY LOVE!*"

"They are gone! Almost all of them!" The deep male voice spoke. "And you need to stop screaming like a stupid elf bitch!"

For'mya's head snapped around which caused her enough pain to begin with and her brown eyes found him and went wide. He was sitting in the chair, his legs stretched out in front of him casually as he held the mug of liquid in his hand. His dirty blond hair was cut very short, his dark blue eyes cruel, but there was no mistaking his tall, muscular body or that scent now. She had smelled it on Martin faintly as they all laid together in Sparta for a week after the battle in the streets between the two brothers. It was the powerful and pungent scent of his brother.

"Pusintin!" For'mya snarled as viciously as any she wolf could and her first reaction was unfortunately the most painful one. She willed the change on herself just as she leaped into the air towards him.

In mid jump For'mya's eyes went wide as she didn't change and instead crashed painfully into the chair beneath her. Her jaw hit the back of the chair as she fell and it went spinning away as she tumbled to the deck in utter torture. The pain in her head was misery and now the added sharpness of the pain lancing through her jaw and neck from the impact. Her eyes had changed, her fangs had extended, but that was the extent of her transformation and she pushed herself to her feet heedless of the shrieks of anguish her body was sending through her nerves. She staggered back from him, waving her hands in front of her almost as if she was blind.

"*NO!*" She screamed. "*NO! MURDERER!*"

Pusintin chuckled at her words even as he admired the way she filled out her clothes. She still wore the simple jumpsuit she had worn when they took her from Sparta, blood from her head injury dried into the fabric of her shoulder. Her golden blond hair was stained with blood as well, but with the exception of the cut along her hairline, she was uninjured. Pusintin got to his feet slowly his eyes taking her in. He had never cared for female elves, he found them too haughty and arrogant, and the two that he had raped through the years were simply dead fucks as far as he was concerned. He didn't understand what his brother had seen in them enough to have two of them as mates. For'mya was not as full figured as Jalersi, her five foot seven height lean and muscular. She did not have much in the way of breasts Pusintin saw, but the jumpsuit she wore conformed to an ass that looked delicious even on an elf and was far tighter and tauter than Jalersi's.

"I told you to stop screaming bitch! You are hurting my ears!" Pusintin snapped.

"*AARRGGHHH!*" The sound that came from her throat was anything but a refined elven female. Pusintin saw the black ringed brown eyes and the flash of white fangs before For'mya fell upon him.

For'mya dashed at him surprising Pusintin with her incredible speed until he remembered that she was an elf and a wolf and would have the speed of both. He was unable to stop her hand from whipping out and landing a solid heel strike to his cheek. The pain he felt was real and he glared at her while holding his jaw even as she staggered and began to bring her hand back for another blow. Had she not been so disoriented Pusintin didn't doubt the blow would have been much more painful. She had surprising strength and the force of the poorly throw strike would have been severe if she had connected fully. At least his brother hadn't chosen weak females to fuck.

Pusintin's left hand lashed out and caught her square in the jaw, turning For'mya around as stars burst into her head and she fell once more to the deck holding her face as more pain wracked her tortured head. "Stupid wench!" He growled. "You ever raise your hand to me again and I'll break your fucking arms!"

For'mya held the side of her face, tears streaming from her eyes and blood leaking from between her lips as she lifted her head and stared at him. "Are you mad?" She gasped. "Why have you done this? What have you done to me?"

Pusintin grinned. "Oh... you mean your little problem within Mindvoice?" He asked her sarcastically as he moved back to the chair. "Wonderful little tool don't you think?"

For'mya snapped her left arm up and called for her Shi Viska, her eyes going wide when nothing happened and she heard Pusintin laughing. "You can't call your toy either elf bitch!" He growled twirling his finger around the room. "Power dampeners set up in this room to just the right frequency that it blocks whatever powers your toy. It's too bad it doesn't work in open areas and is only focused enough to be used within individual rooms. That technology is very interesting and I'm sure we'll find out how it works so that we can use it."

"I'll tell you nothing murderer!" For'mya shrieked at him.

Pusintin laughed. "Oh we'll see." He stated confidently. "My brother is dead... my Aunt is dead. Almost all of your pathetic children too! It's a wonderful thing you know."

"Liar!" For'mya screamed.

Pusintin laughed at her. "You saw your precious Martin die before your eyes wench! It was shown on every Netnews channel across the Union. That isn't something we had planned on, but it was such a nice touch!"

For'mya threw herself at him again uncaring. She surged with strength that blocked the pain from her mind intending to shred his face to ribbons with her nails as she bared her fangs. He moved fast for such a large man and came to his feet, his hand clamping around her throat in mid air as he caught her and began squeezing.

"I told you about trying to strike me bitch!" Pusintin barked. "I thought you elf females were supposed to be smart. You are acting just as dim witted as any female I have ever come across." For'mya clawed at his fingers around her throat, her air slowly being cut off as he leaned his face closer. "I'll give you one more chance bitch! Don't make me kill you." Pusintin heaved her across the room and watched as she sailed several meters through the air and impacted the bulkhead hard enough to hear the rush of air leave her lungs. "I got plans for you elf Queen."

For'mya crashed to the deck gagging as she sucked in air to her lungs. Once more pain washed through her and this time she could not block it out and she pulled her legs in tightly as she laid in the deck. "I... I will never help you!" She rasped out the words. "They... they will come for you!" She hissed. "They will come for you and you will die for what you have done."

Pusintin laughed. "I doubt that." He laughed at her. "My brother is dead. The child Queen is dead. The Hadarian witch is dead. No one knows where the pieces of the vampire whore ended up. Almost all of his children are dead..."

"No! No!" For'mya sobbed out the words.

"I have no reason to lie to you now woman!" Pusintin declared. "I have won! The Union is in disarray and our troops and ships stand ready to pour across your borders and slaughter your people. I've cut you off from your abilities in Mindvoice... taken away your ability to use your Shi Viska." He stated as he moved back to his chair. "I've won!"

"The Union... the Union will... they will never surrender!" She cried.

"Probably not!" Pusintin agreed. "And they will die by the millions because they won't." He said with a grin.

"They are... they are your people!" For'mya screamed out. "You... you betray your own people!"

Pusintin turned on her now, his face angry as he crossed the room in three strides and slapped her once more, rocking her head back and dropping her to the deck again. "They are not my people! They were never my people! They left me to die bitch!"

For'mya held her cheek where he had slapped her and lifted her head from the floor to glare at him. "That... that is a lie!" She hissed. "You know it is!"

Pusintin glared at her for a long moment before shaking his head. “You just go right on and believe that.” He stated.

“I will tell you nothing *forn ronnus!*” For'mya snarled. “Nothing!”

Pusintin chuckled as he turned and moved away from her. He picked up the glass where it had fallen and went to the counter along the wall and refilled the glass from the pitcher there. “It isn't information I want from you For'mya.” He stated calmly as he sipped the liquid and turned back to look at her. “Whatever information you have between those pointed ears is not what I want from you. What could you possibly know that could help me... you are a female. My brother and the Union puts far too much effort into treating females as more than what they are. Inferior in every way.”

“You are a sick, demented man!” For'mya spat. “This is how... this is how you view your own mate Jalersi?”

Pusintin met her eyes with an angry glare but kept his temper in check. As much as he wanted to beat her for the way she was speaking to him he knew he could not. He inhaled deeply and could smell her sweet orchid scent filling the room and recognizing it for what it was. “Jalersi... Jalersi was an excellent fuck with big tits! She's a whore though, just like the rest of them. I hope Pian enjoys her while he can. When I find them... I'll hang his hide on my wall and send her to the brothels on Nefoa to join our daughter and be fucked to death.” He finally said with a shrug. “She gave me two sons at least who are worth the effort and know their place among our people. Karun... he was always different. I had hoped the trip to Earth would change him but it only made him weaker. Ah well... I have two other sons that have the strength to be men among our people.”

For'mya gazed at him in shock at his callousness. She knew Pusintin to be a heartless man; she had seen it enough times while floating within Martin's thoughts even months after their fight in Sparta. And now she understood what Martin had told her that night and why. And now she could do nothing but agree.

“Why have... why have you done this?” For'mya asked once more. “I will... I will tell you nothing you know that! You may... you may torture me all you want... you may rape me all you want... but I will tell you nothing! Ever!”

Pusintin laughed again at her words. “Rape you? Torture you?” He chortled. “You think too highly of yourself she-elf. I'm not going to rape you bitch; and I'm not going to waste my time torturing you. You are going to help me claim the throne of the Lycavorian Union. And your ridiculous inbred elven sensibilities will make you to do it willingly.”

For'mya's eyes went wide in disbelief. “You must be joking?” She gasped staring at him. “You can't be serious!”

Pusintin nodded. “Oh... I'm very serious.” He stated.

“You can not sit on the throne of the Union!” For'mya barked. “You know that!”

Pusintin took the data pad that was sitting on the counter and he looked at it with a grin before beginning to speak. “You are going to order the Elven Parliament to renounce that elf bitch Dysea as queen and install you as the only Queen. You are the only pureblood elven female with the blood of the elven King in her veins. Dysea is no Queen of the elves... she's a fucking clone! A good looking clone... but a fucking clone regardless. You will order the elven parliament to renounce her and give full power and authority to you as is your birthright.”

For'mya couldn't believe what she was hearing. “You... you are insane!” She declared.

Pusintin laughed. “So I've been told.” He stated. “Once the Elven Parliament does that, they will immediately open negotiations with the KFI for Exclusive Trade Rights and total and unrestricted access to what you call Dragon Mountain for the purpose of scientific research on any and all dragons there. They will then sever all diplomatic ties with the Lycavorian Union and declare them as a hostile government. They will then recognize me as rightful heir to the throne of the Union based on the fact I am the oldest son of Leonidas.”

“You... you *are* mad!” She exclaimed in shock. “They would never do that! The Elves are... they are founding members of the Union! They would never turn their back on the Union! Never!”

“You'll make them do that.” Pusintin spoke evenly.

“*Son vada carians! Forn wen malda!*” For'mya gasped. “I... I am wolf now you *igord!* My blood is mixed now! I will not do this!”

Pusintin laughed again. "Your elven blood is still pure For'mya; please don't take me for a fool." He stated evenly. "It still carries the pure strands of the elven King within them even though my brother has polluted you with his defective blood. I am the first son and I should be King of the Union!"

"You deserted them!" For'mya screamed. "You deserted them and left them to fend for themselves! They thought you dead! When it was discovered you had given your allegiance to the Kavalians and killed your own people in The First Kavalian War, your name was stricken and cursed. No one will allow you to take the throne! No one! And certainly not me! Not after what you have done! I will not help you!"

Pusintin continued unimpeded. "Once they have recognized me as the rightful heir to the throne of the Union they will have no choice but to support me." He stated. He tossed the data pad to her on the floor as he settled back into his chair. "You see... we have spent a lot of time researching this little problem. The Union Ascension Laws haven't been changed since the time of The First Oracle's Declaration. An oversight on Deia's part no doubt... but then again she is dead now and she was never very bright to begin with. I suggest you read that last paragraph for it concerns your part in all this."

"*Nubou forn!*" For'mya snarled. "I will help you do nothing! You have... you have killed my mate! My children! Those I love! I will never help you! You can rot for eternity in the pits of hell for all I care!"

Pusintin released another of his infuriating and condescending chuckles. "Ah... For'mya you stupid elf bitch!" He stated calmly. "You must be a really good fuck in order for my brother to keep you around because you are one brainless wench!"

For'mya snatched up the data pad in her hand and threw it back at him in the chair with all her strength. "And you are nothing more than a butcher of innocents and an egotistical weasel! Martin Leonidas should have killed you that day! He should have torn your throat open and let the insects feed on your putrid remains!"

Pusintin caught the data pad in one hand while he got to his feet with a cruel smile. He crossed over to where she sat on the floor and savagely grabbed her by her golden hair causing For'mya to cry out in pain. He shoved the data pad in her face. "Read it you arrogant elf whore! Read it" He roared. "Take it now and read it!"

Tears sprang to her eyes as his grip on her long golden hair sent seething pain through her already throbbing head and caused her to try and lift off the floor to give herself reprieve from the lances of pain shooting through her. She grasped for the data pad, anything to stop the pain and the moment she took it he released her hair. She slumped back to the floor, tears streaming down her cheeks now. "I will... I will never help you!" She stammered. "Just... just kill me now and get it over with!"

Pusintin stood back up to his full height. "You'll help me." He stated confidently. "You'll help me if you ever want to see Dysea and your son again." For'mya's head came up at this and she watched him return to the chair and sit down. "I told you almost all of the wretched brats you called children were dead. That little device we implanted in your thick head makes it so you can't reach out to them or feel them." He touched the control on the arm of the chair and the monitor over the counter came alive and he watched For'mya's head turn towards it. "Maybe you should watch this..."

"...is Channel 36 Anchor Arida outside the remains of the home of Lieutenant Governor Tarifa and Star Colonel Isra, where only days ago the battle began that has tragically seen the devastating loss of nearly the entire Royal family." For'mya could clearly see and recognize the smoking and shattered remains of Tarifa, Aihola and Isra's house in the background for they had been there enough times in the last years for family gatherings or parties. "Information is still coming in from Prime Minister Selene of Earth in her daily briefings, but what we know so far is catastrophic. King Leonidas was killed by Kavalian assassins nearly four days ago now, not four kilometers from this location. Queen Aricia died a few hours later during emergency surgery at King Yelu Memorial Hospital. Queen Anja's personal ship, The SPIRIT OF HADARIA, is now confirmed lost with all hands after being attacked by Kavalian warships hiding within Union space as they were enroute back to Earth. Crown Prince Androcles, his four wives and mates, Princess Eliani, Prince Denali... all of the King's children who left with Prince Androcles have been confirmed killed on Kranek along with Queen Isabella. Their bodies and those of their dragons... they..."

For'mya watched as the woman choked up and tears began to roll down her cheeks. She shook her head and wiped the tears with the sleeve of her shirt and looked once more at the video drone that was filming her.

“They were killed attempting to protect civilians at the Immortal settlement. Queen Dysea is confirmed as MIA right now but she is also presumed lost, killed in the destruction of the Immortal settlement there. None of the Immortal settlement on Kranek remains as Kavalian ships subjected it to an intense two day orbital bombardment. There were almost no survivors among the civilian Immortal people there according to the reports that we are getting. Prime Minister Deia is confirmed dead, her body removed from the rubble of the Senate Office Building only late yesterday and the status of Queen For'mya is unknown at this time. The Durcunusaan believed she was either forced from the bunker before the building was destroyed or left freely.”

For'mya could not contain the tears that poured down her cheeks as her entire life, the most joyous part of her over one thousand years of life, had been washed away in a matter of hours and days. The ache she felt was too much to describe in words, her chest hollow and empty now as her heart was shred to pieces by every word this reporter spoke and continued to speak.

“As we have learned this morning there are confirmed reports that even King Leonidas’s young children were not spared. The bodies of Nara and Deion Leonidas were pulled from the remains of an underground bunker outside of Sparta where they had retreated with both of their grandmothers.” Arida continued. ***“It has been confirmed by the ranking Durcunusaan officer that the bunker was attacked by Kavalian assassins as well. Retta, Calyb and Bryon Leonidas were removed from the Bunker according to the Durcunusaan and taken by unknown ship off of Earth. It is not known how the location of the secret bunker was leaked or discovered by the Kavalians though we are getting reports that Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos is somehow involved in this plot against the Royal family. Traces of his blood were found in the Senate Bunker with Prime Minister Deia’s body when it was discovered that Queen For'mya was and still is missing. We do not know at this time if...”***

The transmission went dark and For'mya’s head snapped around to glare at Pusintin with nearly uncontrollable rage. “You bastard!” She hissed through her tears. “*Forn nubous ronnus!* They... they were children! My children!”

Pusintin nodded. “They were a threat.” He stated plainly. “You should actually be happy bitch! We didn’t kill your son!”

For'mya’s eyes grew wider. “What?”

“The two half breed Hadarian brats were given to that Hadarian witch Buonau.” Pusintin spoke as he leaned forward in his chair. “We still have your son however.”

“Bry... Bryon?” For'mya gasped. “Where... where is he? What have you done with him?” She snarled as she pulled herself to her feet now, the mother in her surging forth even through all the pain and agony that racked her body.

Pusintin looked at her and smiled. “Don’t do anything stupid For'mya.” He spoke using her name for the first time. “If you do... your precious brat will end up with his throat cut and being fed to Sheol Blood Rats in the sewers of Cabelir. And your fellow Queen and sex partner will end up being a whore for Immortals.” His words brought For'mya up short.

“Dysea?” She gasped. “She’s... she lives?”

Pusintin nodded his head. “She’s alive. For now.” He spoke arrogantly. “We hired an Immortal mercenary group to kidnap her from Kranek during the assault there. I figured we would need something to prod you into going along with us. Her life and that of your son now reside in your hands. You’d better read that last paragraph now For'mya.”

For'mya lifted the pad in her hand and began to read. Pusintin saw her eyes grow large with disbelief as she did and he smiled as he admired how she looked standing there. She finally looked up at him. “You... you can’t be serious?” She stammered the words. “I would never do this you sick bastard! You... you must think I am a fool!” She threw the pad onto the floor at his feet.

Pusintin leaned over and picked the pad up. “If you don’t... I will make sure your son never sees another sunrise. If you don’t... your fellow whore Queen will be fucking Immortals the rest of her life and loving every

second of it! You do realize that elf females who become addicted to Immortal semen will do anything to get it? They'll fuck ten or twenty Immortals just so that they get their fix!"

"Liar!" For'mya snarled. "Dysea is wolf! This could not happen to her!"

"See now... that is where you are wrong." Pusintin spoke as he got to his feet. "We are not as stupid as my brother thought For'mya. We've been making clones for decades and Dysea is the child of clones... that is common knowledge you know." Pusintin told her as he walked around her slowly. "When that backstabber Dymas made the elves he forgot to include one little chromosome that elves like yourself have. A chromosome that is only indigenous to elves born on Elear of pure elven blood because of something in the atmosphere of the planet. That simple chromosome is what allows the healing factor of a turned female elf to make her immune to Immortal semen once she is exposed to it the first time. Why do you think I made sure Phy'iad and his group kidnapped a turned female elf? So I could test this theory. Once the Lycavorian healing cells destroy the chemicals in an Immortal's semen it makes them immune to further addiction. Your precious Dysea doesn't have that particular chromosome in her body." He spoke as he ended up in front of her now and sneered into her face. For'mya turned her face to the side to keep from having to look at him. Pusintin chuckled at this.

"The moment an Immortal unloads into her tight elven body she'll be just like any other elf female and she'll be begging her Immortal Master to fuck her every day." Pusintin shrugged. "Who knows... she might even like it! I hear those Immortals are hung pretty well and from what I understand your Dysea is a screamer! I don't think you can live with the fact you turned Dysea into a whore for whatever Immortal wants to fuck her and I surely don't think you will let your son die!"

"You... you are a vile excuse for a man!" For'mya hissed viciously. "Why... why would you do this? You have... you have killed your own blood! Your brother! What could you possibly hope to obtain from such madness?"

"I want what is mine." Pusintin spoke. "My brother had it... and now you are going to help me get it back."

For'mya turned back to look at him with determination in her jaw. "I will never do what you want!" She exclaimed. "You disgust me!"

"Last chance to put your thumbprint on that pad and we do things in a civil manner." He spoke sarcastically.

"*Nubou forn!*" For'mya snarled viciously. "I will never do what you ask! Never!"

Pusintin nodded. "See I figured you would say that." He spoke calmly. "So I've arranged a little show for you." His hand snapped up quickly and he grabbed her hair viciously yanking her head to the side as she cried out in pain and reached for his arms. "You won't do what I want now... but I'm guessing that after you see your precious Dysea broken to the will of an Immortal and shrieking for him to fuck her senseless you'll change your tune! I've seen this process you know and it is quite entertaining. Phy'iad and I have it all arranged for you. And if that doesn't work... then you can watch while my men carve up your son in front of you and feed him to the rats! I'm guessing that your ridiculous elven sensibilities, the sacredness of life and family and those you love, I'm guessing those will kick in before that. If not... then after you watch them break Dysea and your son is killed in front of you, I'll make sure that you witness every single battle as we crush your dear Union under our heels. You'll be responsible for the death of millions For'mya. Millions!"

Pusintin dragged For'mya towards the wall by her long hair and she had no choice but to follow to keep the pain from making her pass out. He stabbed the console on the bulkhead. The face of the Kavalian appeared. "Captain!"

"Marshall?"

"We are in range correct?" Pusintin asked.

"Standing by sir!"

"Establish the communication Captain. And broadcast it all over the ship." Pusintin sneered. "There's no reason why our men can't enjoy the show as well. How often will they see the debasing of a Union Queen?"

The Kavalian grinned. "Stand by Marshall Pusintin."

Pusintin turned his head and looked at For'mya who had tears in her eyes but was trying very hard not to cry out. He saw hate in those brown eyes as she glared at him, but he didn't care. If what Laustinos had told him was true and the feelings between all of them ran as deep as he said they did, For'mya would break before Phy'iad finished his task.

EARTH
GYTHEIO
CRANAE ISLAND

It was one of the biggest reasons he had purchased this island and the villa on it, and as he stood on the warm sand and watched as the sun began to just break the horizon of the mountains in the east, he remembered why. Not only did Greek legend say this is where Paris of Troy brought Helen of Sparta to profess his love for her, it is where they consummated that love. He bought this island and villa because that is how he wanted to profess his love for Sadi. And he had done it. That first night with Sadi had been beyond anything he had ever imagined it could be. He knew that night on the island twenty-six years ago as an eight month old infant that she was meant for him and they would be together one day. Her sugarplum and spice scent was like a drug to him from that day forward. When she came back into his life it was as if the one place inside his mind and heart that had been dimmed as he grew became illuminated to brilliance. Her body was like a temple that he had explored so intimately that he knew where every curve and supple line ended and the next began. Her scent, the taste of her passion and her lips, these were things that he could no longer live without and that was why they were now *Anomes*. As with his father and mother, they would never doubt each other, never question one another and always desire each other. They would have their disagreements as his parents did, but there was no power that existed that could part them now.

It was only after Sadi came back into his life that the dreams began to make sense. As his father was meant to love more than one, Androcles now realized he was as well, though he had tried for years to break the shadow of his father that always seemed to surround him. While Sadi could and always would elicit the most telling reaction from him, there was no denying that Carisia, Lu'ria and Ne'Veha each held a part of him within their grasp. They were in his blood just as he was now in theirs and this only added to the power and connection all of them had. That they were meant to love each other as well as him was also something that, as with his father and those he called mother, made them so very unique. It was not something he had thought about as he was growing, something he knew Sadi did not think about, but once they had come together it was too powerful an urge for either of them to deny. He did not know when they would discover that last piece that would make them complete as his father and mothers were complete, but Androcles knew it would happen sooner rather than later. The draw was too strong now and he could no longer deny it. Sadi and the others had already accepted it completely and he knew better than to argue with them. Laying in their bed last night, Carisia stroking Lu'ria's flesh and Ne'Veha pressed close to Sadi as their passions cooled; Sadi had told him she felt that this person was close now. Androcles also knew that in order to be as strong as possible he could hold nothing back from Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. It was something that his father had not done at first and Androcles knew that had been one of his weaknesses at the beginning. That would change for his father would know as he knew that they had to know all of him, feel all of him, and from the outset Andro had held nothing of his aura back from either of his turned elven wives.

So much was happening now, it was very nearly overwhelming. Amazingly... though he barely knew him... Dutkne's powerful presence within Mindvoice soothed him and gave him focus. These men and women that had come with him, their scents were so pungent and wild, as if they had never let go of the instincts of their people. He knew many believed that his father had returned the instinctual nature to their people with his return, and in many respects Andro didn't question that. Perhaps not so much returned them, as freed them once more. Instinctual and savage they could be yes, but Lycavorians were a passionate species. Passionate about life and love and so many things, and Andro knew that is why the decisions he had made weighed so heavily on his mind. He knew his role and one day he knew he would be King, but he never expected to have to make such decisions now. Decisions that would end lives on such a massive scale. Decisions that would...

Andro turned when her scent drifted to him on the slight wind and he felt the soft tremors of her gait through the sand. Her huge bulk moved with confident grace as she came from the shadows that still resided on the island and her near crimson red scales glimmered slightly in the dawn that was rising. Arzoal's flame colored eyes were always bright and those eyes were fixed on him as she moved within a few meters and settled to the warm sand beneath her.

[You are awake very early young Androcles.] Arzoal spoke in the shielded conversation. This fact alone told Andro that this was not to be an open discussion. When it came to MV shields there were few on the level of Arzoal and Helen. He and his father among only three or four who could project shields like theirs. Though he did feel this ability within Wayonn and Dutkne, even more really, they had not exercised it yet.

[As are you Elder Mother.] He answered.

If a dragon could smile then Arzoal's expression would have been it. Her lips drew apart slightly exposing her razor like teeth and her flame colored eyes did an excellent impression of rolling in her head. *[Helen has not been able to sleep well since she discovered her past with Wayonn. She is too excited and filled with wonder to sleep for very long. She just drifted off.]* Arzoal answered. *[I felt you out here and I came to see if everything was alright.]*

Andro nodded and looked back towards the mountains across the gulf. *[I have not been able to sleep well since all this began.]* He answered. *[There is much I can not understand or see. It is disturbing.]*

[The gift of foresight is not one that is often given Talon Guardian Androcles.] Arzoal said.

Andro nodded. *[I know... but I could certainly use it right now.]*

[Do you know why we as Dragon Elders chose you and your father to be our Talon Guardians Androcles?] Arzoal asked as she settled her massive body to the sand.

[You said it was for our actions on Alba Tau.] Andro answered turning to look at her.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *[That was a large part of it yes. But the deciding factor for all of us on the council was not what you did there.]* She said evenly. *[It was for what you showed every day before and every day since... and that is your potential for compassion and trust. You and your father... from the two of you we felt limitless potential for compassion. From the two of you we sensed not one iota of greed or jealousy or arrogance. That was the deciding factor Androcles. Our total trust you had already earned because first your father and then you... you have never broken a promise you have made to our kind. What your father and I started has evolved into something far more than we had ever foreseen Andro... and even now it continues to grow. You and your father are the reason for that.]*

[I don't follow you.] Andro said.

[Faith Androcles.] Arzoal answered. *[No matter the odds or the task before you, you and your father never lose faith. Faith in yourselves... faith in others... faith in what is right and just. It is what you taught the dragons and riders from the High Coven. A task that many of us on the council did not think you could do. We did not have the faith in you and Elynth that it could be done. Yet you did it. And in only a little more than three months. You spared Vollenh when it was within your right to take his life as a Talon Guardian for what he had done. Why did you spare him Andro?]*

Andro met her eyes. *[There was something... there was something burning within his heart that had not been corrupted by Yuri and the blackness. A spark of bright light. It felt so... it felt familiar somehow. Elynth and I reached for that spark.]*

Arzoal nodded her huge head slowly. *[Look at what has become of that faith now. He has discovered the one he was truly meant for in Cha'talla of the Akruasian people. He worships Viera and his sons and he has grown stronger for it. His sons will grow stronger now as well, for they have a path that has already been predetermined. Just as the path you and Elynth follow is predetermined. It is a path that Elynth and you insured without even knowing why.]*

Andro looked at her. *[They are meant for Sadi and Ne'Veha.]* He said thoughtfully after a long moment. *[Aren't they Elder Mother?]*

Arzoal nodded once more. *[I felt it from them the moment they came into this world. And there is reason behind that as well. They will not feel the pull for at least another year but yes. That decision you and Elynth made... that decision will now echo among the stars for millennia. And because of it... they will grow stronger and we are now that much stronger as well.]*

[What are you trying to tell me Elder Mother?] Andro asked.

[That you must let go of this hate you feel for yourself... for the decision that you had to make. The decision only you could have made.] Arzoal said softly. *[It has no place within you Androcles Leonidas. It was the only conclusion you could have made... the only decision any one of us could have made. That you feel dishonor and hatred towards yourself for having to make this choice speaks volumes to others of the man you*

are but you had to choose between the few and the many. It may not seem like it now... but you made the right choice.]

[Then why do I not feel that way Elder Mother?] Androcles asked her.

[For the very same reasons your father still carries the burden of a similar decision he had to make many years ago. Long before you were born. He had to choose to save a few or save many. He made the same decision as you. He chose to save many.] Arzoal spoke again. [Compassion is a very vacillating thing Androcles. There is a balance that must be kept in order for someone to truly be compassionate. It is a balance that you and your father maintain almost without thinking... but it does not mean you will not feel regret or question the decisions you make. What you must do now is learn to accept it as your father has learned to do... as I have learned to do.]

Andro looked at her. [You?]

[Androcles... Androcles I am responsible for far more misery and death than you and your father could ever imagine to obtain.] Arzoal spoke softly. [There are scores of things that have occurred within my many years that I have only shared with Helen for she is now my Bonded One and I can not keep these things inside me any longer. There are also many things that I still have yet to learn. I know what you are...]

[Elder Mother... are you referring to the fact that you are... or were a Pralor?] Andro asked softly tilting his head as he looked at her. [The Pralor that Shiria now thinks she protects with her silence?]

Arzoal's head came up, her flame colored eyes wide in disbelief. [What? How... how is it possible that you know that? I have... I have told no one but Helen in all my years! How...] She moved her head closer to him extending her neck out and her eyes grew even wider. [Your... your father?] She gasped.

Andro nodded his head with a smile. [Yes.]

[But... but how?] Arzoal gasped. [When? I was so careful!]

[Part of it is because you were so careful Elder Mother. He put it together completely about ten years ago. I did not fully believe it until just now.] Andro answered her with a smile. [Mostly from discussions he's had with you and your innate ability to speak but not really reveal anything of substance unless you truly wanted too. The Feravomir does it all the time, and Dutkne tells me Wayonn is even worse. It must be a Pralor trait of some sort.] Andro said with a smile. [And then there was Avi helping him.]

[Avi?] Arzoal exclaimed loudly shaking her massive head back and forth. [But he is... he was... he was Sumar's avatar! Of course! Oh why did I not think of that? How could I forget that?]

[My father may act like he can't stand computers and machines Elder Mother, but in truth he is just as gifted with them as my sister's Normya and Zarah. More than likely you did not notice the interaction that he has had with Avi over the years.] Andro told her with another smile. [He suspected there was something you were not telling him many years ago, even back as far as when I was newly born. I think he began to believe there was something about you that did not add up a few years after Avi brought CS41 here to Earth. Even as the other dragons scurried about in wonder among its decks, you were reserved and calm, almost as if you had been on a ship like this before. During their time together Avi told him that once Sumar was changed he could detect other Pralors just by the scent of their blood. There was always a pull between Pralors. There would always be a pull among them. It is why I can feel it with Wayonn and Dutkne and even in small part Shiria over the distance. It is what Shiria meant when we spoke to her on the SCIMITAR. He never came to you with it because he could never truly prove it and he concluded that when you felt the time was right for us to know you would tell us. I read Resumar's report fully Elder Mother. You are the Pralor Shiria is protecting aren't you? And I think I know why my father, me, none of us could detect this scent of Pralor blood within you.]

Andro stepped closer to her and reached up to put his hands on her snout. Arzoal didn't budge when he did this for outside of Helen, Andro and his father were the only ones to ever really touch her in such a way. No one outside of the immediate Royal family would ever dare touch her because of who she was. As Andro's hands went flat against her scales, she closed her eyes slightly and allowed the warmth of his hands on her cool scales to filter and run through her wonderfully and as it was with Helen, it felt so very soothing.

[You have been able to hide this from us, from others for so long because you did as Canth did.] Andro spoke softly. [Only you didn't just separate your mind from your body, you actually transferred your entire consciousness to a dragon didn't you? I will not tell my father if that is your wish Elder Mother but you do not need to hide this from us anymore.]

Arzoal shook her head. *[I have... I have wanted to reveal it for so long. Ever since your father came to Enurrua and I realized for myself who he was. It has been so long since I have felt the call of my Pralor blood as strongly as I feel it within me now, even if it is just within Mindvoice and not a physical thing as it is with others. With Wayonn and Dutkne and now Shiria so close and aware... I did not want to hide it any longer.]*

[Then do not hide it grandmother. Not anymore. Share it with us.] Elynth's voice entered their connection and they both turned to see Elynth move from behind Andro and settle to the sand almost touching her Bonded Brother.

Arzoal looked at Andro. *[You called her?]*

Andro smiled and stepped back between Elynth's front legs. *[She has always been there Elder Mother. She will know all that I know... I will know all that she knows. This is how you and my father wanted it to be with those of us bonded to dragons.]* Andro stated. *[You more than anyone should know that.]*

Arzoal nodded her head as Andro settled to the sand between Elynth's front talons and leaned against her foreleg. *[It is time.]* She said softly. *[I can not hold it in any longer. I do not want to.]* She looked at them blinking her flame colored eyes. *[My ship came into this quadrant in 37,467 in search of the others that had been lost. Sumar's ship among them. I was the senior medical and science officer on board. It was not a large ship as you know CS41 to be. A crew of only seven hundred and perhaps two kilometers long. We were passing through the Orion Spur when our ship struck a subspace anomaly that our sensors did not detect. It destroyed our main Quantum Drive and we had to set down on Elear to attempt to make repairs.]*

[Elear?] Andro spoke.

Arzoal nodded her huge head. *[Cretvore Draconius was the dominant species there when we arrived. They had been for millennia. They were benevolent and beautiful creatures for the most part and so very inquisitive and intelligent. We discovered that they Mindvoiced almost immediately upon landing and they offered to help us just as quickly. It would end up being for naught. Whatever the anomaly was, it had succeeded in destabilizing our Quantum Drive to the point it could not be repaired. We were stranded there on Elear.]* Arzoal lifted her head and looked up into the few stars that could still be seen in the brightening sky. *[Our Commander decided that we would attempt to rebuild the drive core and we established a settlement to do this very thing. Dragons were our constant companions and we taught each other so much. We shared so much. They showed us the other two dominant lifeforms on Elear in the sixth year of our stay. One was humanoid in description, bipedal in nature and covered in a simple coat of hair. As with Cretvore Draconius, we knew of their existence for it was within our databanks from the many probes we had sent through this quadrant of space. These probes were like Avi in many respects... avatars that could transmit data and images back to us.]* Arzoal noticed that both Andro and Elynth's eyes grew wider.

[Kavalian?] Andro gasped.

Arzoal shook her head slowly. *[Not... not as you know the Kavalian species now no. The Kavalian species as you know them are the abomination that I created.]*

[Created?] Andro exclaimed.

Arzoal nodded. *[I told you I was the senior medical and science officer of this ship.]* She stated. *[My specialty field was genetics. Now the second dominant species on Elear was also bipedal in nature but reptilian in their makeup. They were much more primitive than the first and also much more species oriented. They lived in large pods where male and female worked together in harmony, but their level of intelligence was not very high. At least not then. In some ways it is much like the lives of Lycavorians and other species who work together toward a common goal, shelter their young and simply relate better in larger groups. The dragons had no issues with the second group but many with the first. The feline like species had begun raiding caves and lairs of dragons and stealing their eggs. They would use them as food and also as trophies. Up until we arrived this species had limited itself to small raids and such, but that changed when our ship landed.]*

[Changed how grandmother?] Elynth asked completely enraptured and fixated on Arzoal equally as much as her Bonded Brother.

[This species saw our ship land and...]

With all of the men and women who were now staying or working out of their villa, Sadi had dispensed with not wearing undergarments beneath her near see through robe that she wore in the mornings. Now the

plain white brassier covered her firm breasts while the plain white semi thong panties were also plainly visible. It was at these moments when Sadi loved being a female Lycavorian. While their people were exceptionally open in regards to their sexuality, once a female had been claimed by a male, she could parade around naked in the streets and only a man who was not wolf would be stupid enough to stare or gawk at her. And that would normally get them slapped in the head by the nearest male or female wolf who took notice of it. Any Lycavorian would be able to smell Andro's powerful Alpha wolf scent all over her body and so deeply imbedded within her blood that they would know instantly that she was mated to perhaps the second most powerful alpha wolf in the Union. That sanctity of being mated was not a dignity or dishonor that any Lycavorian would ignore or violate, and it was far truer here in Sparta and Gytheio Sadi had discovered after Andro had claimed her. As she walked calmly into the main kitchen area of the villa sipping the large mug of Aricia's coffee she saw three *Durcunusaan* troops leaving the area, two of them turning to look back at where the Vanari female Arduri sat at the counter. None of them gave her a second glance when they bowed their heads and continued past her.

Sadi glanced over quickly to the double doors leading on to the patio when she scented Helen and she saw her leaning up against the doorframe dressed in a floor length solid crimson robe. Sadi looked back and saw Arduri's green eyes watching her intently as she walked up and she smiled at her. Blue skinned they may have been, but Sadi could certainly not deny the very exotic and exceptional sex appeal that the Vanari women exuded outward. It was almost as if they did it naturally without even knowing it. She had not seen much of them since they had arrived; they had spent most of their time in the guest wing with Bren and Dutkne's friend Nirilo. This was really the first time that Sadi had an opportunity to speak with one of them or be close enough to truly gaze at one. Sadi drew in a deep breath as she grew close and the sweet scent of apricots floated to her. Arduri now wore a form fitting dark gray jumpsuit that showed off her obvious female assets, including her large and very firm breasts. It was one of the sets of clothes delivered to the Vanari when they first arrived so they did not have to walk about in their version of the Mark IV ArmorPly.

"Good morning...?" Sadi spoke as she stepped up into the kitchen area.

"Arduri. Arduri Re Mydala."

"Well then... good morning Arduri Re Mydala." Sadi spoke as she went to the counter taking notice that her mug wasn't filled with anything. "Would you care for something?" Sadi asked.

Arduri played with her empty mug and smiled. "I did not know... I did not know where to look or what to choose." She answered with an embarrassed look.

"Do you care for coffee or juice?" Sadi asked.

"We have... we have something similar to coffee on my homeworld I believe." Arduri said. "I had some of this coffee on your ship and it was excellent! Do you have any of that?"

Sadi smiled and pulled the large mugs from within the dispenser. "You were on the *SCIMITAR*." She said. "Then you had Androcles's mother's coffee. She made it with a very unique blend of coffee beans and it is all he will drink now." Sadi handed her the mug and Arduri took it from her with a smile. She sipped it quickly and her face lit up.

"Yes! This is it." She spoke quickly. "His... his mother made this?"

Sadi nodded as she sat across from her at the counter and sipped her own mug of coffee. "All of his mothers are fantastic cooks. They gave love of this skill to their children. I'm very lucky really... I can not cook to save my life." She held out her hand. "I'm Sadi."

Arduri didn't hesitate and she took the offered hand. As their fingers closed around each other's, two sets of dazzling green eyes met and connected. Sadi's face took on an expression of deep contemplation as she gazed at the silver blond hair and the full, almost violet colored lips. Arduri Re Mydala was just as affected, but she felt her skin become warm and flushed and the pleasure receptors along the back of her shoulders and down her spine were beginning to sing out. The erogenous zones on Vanari females extended across the backs of both shoulders and down the center of their backs, essentially tracing their spines. The most sensitive areas were just on the outside curve of their breasts and under the elegant bend of their jaws. Arduri pulled her hand back reluctantly, but if she had held on too long, she would have instinctively released the oil in her pores that acted as an aphrodisiac and influencer to other species, because she found herself drawn to this female Lycavorian. Not in an overtly sexual way, but drawn to her nonetheless.

It was this oil that Vanari females could release from their pores when they became very interested and aroused in a male of their species for possible marriage. Since Vanari men were immune to the influencing affects of the oil, to them it was a similar sign that they were being tasked to please the female who had released this oil and possibly make her choose him as a long term partner. The only time that it was not viewed in this way was during the Celebration of the Hundreds when every Vanari female would secrete this oil through their pores while engaged in sexual activity with whoever occupied their attention at the time, male or female.

“You... you are his ano... *anome*.” Arduri stammered.

Sadi nodded slowly as she pulled her hand back reluctantly as well. There was something about this Vanari female that struck her as different, and very interesting. “Yes.” She answered as she wrapped her hands around the mug and sipped her coffee.

“When did you... when did you know this?” Arduri asked. “That you would be with him like this?”

“When did I know it... or when did I finally accept it?” Sadi asked with a smile.

“Both.”

“I knew it when he was eight months old. I accepted it about six months ago when he came back into my life as a man.” Sadi answered.

“You are older than him then?” Arduri asked.

Sadi shrugged. “That depends on what you mean by older. If you are referring to years, yes, I’m twenty-three years older than him. If your definition takes into account wisdom and experience and knowledge, then no... Andro is far older than me.”

“How so?”

“He shares the memories of his father and his grandfather before him. He shares the memories of his mother and her parents. Their lives. It is very hard to explain really.” Sadi said. “Lycavorians can imprint certain things on their children before they are born. Images and such. With Andro however, because of the emotional state of his parents when he was conceived, it went much deeper than normal. He became aware of all around him even while still in Aricia’s womb. He bonded with Elynth while still in the womb. He spoke to me through her when I first met him. Much of it is because of his blood and the potential of his Mindvoice abilities and those of his parents, but he knew what he wanted when he was only eight months old.”

“And he wanted you?” Arduri asked.

Sadi blushed slightly. “Yes.”

“That... that is fascinating.” Arduri said with wide eyes. “It is so unlike how my people make these decisions. It is really only physical with us.”

“And how do you?” Sadi asked. “Choose a husband and mate I mean?”

“Vanari have... we as females have an oil we can secrete through our skin when we are physically attracted to a man or very aroused.” Arduri explained. “My people are very... we are very open about ourselves. If we feel the man is attractive and we could be compatible together we secrete this oil to signal to him that we are ready. If we are compatible then the oil will be absorbed into his skin and affect him as it does males of other species and we will couple for hours. If we are not compatible then the oil will not be absorbed and after we couple we will go our separate ways.”

Sadi tilted her head slightly confused. “There is no... there is no emotion involved then? No feelings of love before you decide to marry?” She asked with a neutral voice.

Arduri nodded her head. “Oh yes... but that usually comes later in the relationship.” She said. “The emotions come after you have decided you are compatible with each other. That is when the courtship begins and you begin to know one another before you are joined. I know it sounds strange to you but it has been this way for my people for millennia.”

Sadi shook her head. “It doesn’t sound strange at all.” She spoke. “It is different... but then we are all different. That does not mean we can not be friends and allies.”

Arduri canted her head as she gazed at her. “I take it that you know of the distrust that exists between the Vanari people and Lycavorians.”

“I am Andro’s *Anome*.” She stated proudly. “His mate and wife. As are Carisia, Lu’ria and Ne’Veha. We alone have free reign within his thoughts and he in ours. He shares almost everything with us and us with him.”

“Almost?” Arduri asked and she saw Sadi smile brightly.

“Well... there is no fun if you know *everything* about a person.” She stated. “Lycavorians crave physical contact with those we love and care for... it is part of our nature as wolves. But that does not mean we are not playful and adventurous in our relationships.”

“Then you... you and his other wives...?” Arduri asked shyly.

Sadi nodded without shame. “Oh yes... quite happily in fact. But Androcles is the only man any of us will ever crave or want to touch us now. He is in our blood, just as we are in his.”

Sadi scooted closer on the stool. “I understand we are helping you and your mother to find your sister.”

Arduri nodded quickly thoroughly enjoying the company of this woman. “My older sister Caliria. She was taken by slavers and we believe brought to this quadrant of space. At least that is where we tracked them too before we joined with Wayonn and Dutkne.”

“Is this prevalent where you come from?” Sadi asked. “Slavery?”

“As disturbing as many of the younger generation find it... yes.” Arduri said with a touch of sadness in her voice. “My species began as mono-gendered individuals. We could choose to become male or female in the early days of my species. That is what our history archives tell us. Through the centuries we began to be born as either male or female but the chemical compound in our bodies that decides our sex is still present. It is part of the oil we secrete through our pores. The Orionis Syndicate discovered a way to use that chemical against us. They have... they have a weapon... a gas that they can introduce into the atmospheres of our planets that will cause a reaction within those who have chosen to be female. It will cause the chemical in our bodies that determines sex to short circuit so to speak. It will... if it is breathed into our bodies it will cause our bodies to suddenly think we are not female any longer. It will change the makeup of our bodies internally and essentially make all females sterile. Our species would die out within perhaps a few dozen generations.” Arduri took a deep breath. “It is a vile weapon but one that the Orionis Syndicate has said they will employ if they are not allowed to take a certain number of Vanari females prisoner each year. They are sold into slavery and used by others as tools.”

“Tools?” Sadi asked.

Arduri nodded. “The oil we secrete has very powerful compounds mixed in with the ones that are considered an aphrodisiac. These compounds can make someone very susceptible to suggestion.”

“Mind control?” Sadi asked.

Arduri shook her head quickly. “No... not in the true sense of the term. Just very willing to act in ways suggested to them. The pirate scum use it as a means to extort more credits from customers or get information from politicians that they deem important. It allows them to have a certain power within the Beta Quadrant. The Orionis Syndicate is extremely large and ruled by a group of six individuals. In a technical sense they could be considered a government unto themselves and many of us believe that is their ultimate goal. To be recognized as a legitimate entity. The Vanari Board of Regents has nearly a thousand members and many of them are much older than my mother. She is considered one of the more progressive Regents, but they are almost always overruled by the senior Regents in large decisions. The younger Regents, many like my mother, wish to fight the Syndicate. They wish to discover a way to counter this threat by the Syndicate but the older Regents are too cautious and do not want to give the Syndicate a reason to unleash their weapon on us. There are eleven other governments within the Beta Quadrant besides the Vanari and the Protectorate. Five of them do not care for my people in the least because we will not help them to make more advanced weapons and ships. They take great pleasure in purchasing our females who are taken and then debasing them in any number of ways.”

“Yet your mother, you and your sister came after Caliria because she was taken?” Sadi asked.

“The majority of Vanari male and females are born with hair like mine and Naesta’s, silver blond or like my mother’s silver golden. That is a status thing among my people as ridiculous as it sounds; it is something within our DNA. Black or dark brown in hair color in a male is considered distinguished and honorable but in a female it is not. Caliria has lush dark brown hair.” Arduri said softly. “My people... my people consider this a genetic defect for some ridiculous and ancient reason. Vanari females with dark hair are treated as second class citizens. They can join the military, hold jobs and such, but none of them will ever be allowed to hold positions within the government on any level. Many of them are never even able to have children of their own because Vanari males avoid them like the plague. Caliria was a leading proponent of trying to make things different. Our name... Re Mydala... it is a lineage among the Vanari that dates back to the very beginnings of our people. We are a powerful and wealthy family among the Vanari. Caliria was using our name as a means to draw attention

to the fact that they are not inferior in any way. The vast majority of the Vanari females that the Syndicate takes have dark hair. There have been some with hair like my mother but even then..." Arduri stopped talking and took along sip of her coffee.

"Even then... once a Vanari female has been broken... it is very rare for them to return to the person they were before they were taken." Devra's voice spoke from the side as she came up beside Arduri and pulled her daughter's head to her chest.

"Why?" Sadi asked before thinking.

"The chemicals that the Syndicate uses to break them results in the slow breakdown of neural brainwave patterns. If it is caught early it can be reversed with minimal damage but if their captivity goes on for any length of time the damage done is permanent. It takes many years, but eventually the synaptic patterns degrade to the point where the person becomes a mindless husk." Devra explained.

"Surely... surely with the medical knowledge available today something can be done?" Sadi gasped in horror.

Devra shook her head slowly as Naesta appeared and stepped up beside her sister. Arduri met her eyes and Naesta leaned over to kiss her softly on the lips. "None of our scientists or medical people have been successful and believe me we have tried in the past. That stopped two thousand years ago when the Syndicate discovered that we were attempting this and destroyed one of our small colonies and sterilizing the nine hundred and thirty-seven Vanari females that lived there in the process. Any further attempts were outlawed by the Vanari Board of Regents. They did this to save our people I know... but as centuries pass and more of our young women are taken, people are beginning to want to fight back no matter the cost." Devra told her.

"I asked Wayonn many years ago if there was something perhaps he or the Protectorate could do, but he has no knowledge in medicines and genetics. The Lycavorian Protectorate's medical knowledge is very similar to ours but unfortunately it does not extend to what we truly need." Devra said. "I was hoping... one of my hopes was to perhaps speak to these Hadarians that Wayonn told me of as we traveled here. He says that they are Healers, with medical knowledge that is vast and far outreaches our own in many respects. When we arrived and discovered what was happening that hope was dashed. These Kavalians... the ones who have attacked your people... they now control this world do they not?"

Sadi nodded. "They helped to assist some fanatics in usurping the rightful Queen yes. But Anja and the others with her made it off the planet safely." She answered.

"They live?" Devra gasped.

Sadi nodded. "Eliani is here at the villa. She is nearly as powerful as her mother and Aunt. Some say she will exceed her in skill one day."

"Would she... would she be willing to look at our data?" Devra asked.

"I don't see why not. I'm sure of it." Sadi answered. "Do you have an image of Caliria to give to her?" Sadi asked softly.

Devra nodded. "Yes. Naesta do you have..."

"Yes." Naesta answered instantly reaching up to the silver chain that dangled from her neck. She pulled it up from under the jumpsuit that was similar to her sister but only dark blue in color to reveal a small credit chip size medallion which she instantly touched and activated.

The small holoimage was very clear and Sadi contained her gasp at the beauty of this Caliria Re Mydala. Her dark hair flowed around her shoulders, highlighting her flawless facial features and incredibly bright dark green eyes. Her majorelle blue lips contrasted greatly with her supple cornflower blue skin which nearly matched the azure color of Andro's eyes. Sadi looked at them for a moment and then reached for the medallion. It was her. It had to be her. Sadi and Carisia had talked extensively of the flashes they had received within Mindvoice. The color of the hair and skin. Soft, sensuous lips that were exploring their flesh as they explored her unique blue skin and then the gentle tone of the laughter in the images. Lu'ria and then Ne'Veha had only confirmed it for them when they returned, saying they had seen the same things in the few hours of sleep they had gotten after Andro had turned Ne'Veha.

"May I borrow this for a moment?" She asked. "I will be right back."

Naesta looked at her mother and Devra nodded. "It is alright Naesta." She spoke running several options through her mind on what it could mean to the Vanari if these Hadarians could solve this age old riddle.

Naesta released the chain and Sadi stood up and began walking towards the double doors. "Wait right here." She said as she past them, all of them with confused looks in their eyes. Sadi walked right up to where Helen was standing her eyes staring out onto the beach. "*Feravomir?*"

Helen held up her hand. "Look at them?" She said softly.

Sadi followed her gaze and saw them on the beach. Andro was sitting between Elynth's front forelegs and they appeared as if they were enraptured by whatever Arzoal was telling them.

"Watch them now." Helen said softly her face smiling. "Her right talon will lift and come to rest on his thigh and she will turn her left over and Andro will begin stroking the inside of her fore claw."

Sadi continued to watch and her eyes grew wider as she watched Elynth shift her position on the sand so that her right leg lifted and came to rest with her massive and wickedly curved talons draped over Androcles's upper right thigh. As soon as that was done she lifted her left talon and turned it over to rest in the sand just as Andro lifted his hand and began to use his fingers to stroke the inside of her clawed foot.

"Now that is something I have not seen in many years." Helen continued. "They would do that all the time when listening to me or their fathers as they grew. It began right after they met you on the island. It was automatic when they were enthralled by what we were saying and teaching and it never failed to happen. It told us we had their complete and undivided attention. That right there tells me that they know the learning never ends and that my lessons to them were well received and now remembered." Helen said with a smile as she turned to look at Sadi. "Whatever Arzoal is telling them, a bomb could go off next to them now and they would barely notice. It makes me warm inside to see this after all these years." She lifted her mug of coffee and looked at Sadi who was still watching them. Helen chuckled and shook her head. She could see the passion and desire in Sadi's eyes as she looked at the half dressed Andro on the beach. "Close your mouth Sadi my child... you are drooling over your mate. It is unbecoming a Crown Princess."

Sadi blinked quickly and turned to look at her blushing as she smiled. "I'm sorry." She said.

Helen smiled. "Never be sorry for wanting your husband and mate. What did you need child?"

Sadi turned to face her fully her thoughts once more focused. "*Feravomir...* remember when you told me those months ago to follow what our instincts told Androcles and I in regards to *Enylarcopri?*"

Helen nodded. "I remember them well. You followed them as you should have and look what doors it opened for you. You found the others that were meant for you. I do so love it when I am right."

"*Feravomir...* your words are what allowed us to find Lu'ria and Ne'Veha yes... but also one more." Sadi said. "As each of them came into our lives we only grew stronger and another piece fell into place within our lives and hearts and our minds."

"Yes... many have commented on that." Helen spoke.

"*Feravomir...* there is still one more piece. All of us have felt her... and when Lu'ria finally joined us we saw images of her. Brief images... her hair... her skin." Sadi said. She lifted the small holoimager and activated it in the palm of her hand. Helen's eyes grew a little wider as she looked at the image.

"A dark haired Vanari female. Interesting. I did not think there were any of them. She's very beautiful." Helen said looking into Sadi's face. "What does she...?" Her words died in her throat when she saw the look on Sadi's face and she instantly threw up exceptionally powerful Mindvoice shields which she felt Sadi reinforcing with her own.

[*This is Caliria Re Mydala Feravomir.*] Sadi continued. [*This is who Devra and her children came here for. This is the one that has been taken by mercenary scum! She is the one who will complete us!*] Sadi snarled angrily. [*And she has been taken by scum... no matter what part of space they come from.*]

[*Sadi are you certain?*] Helen gasped.

[*There is no question Feravomir. Enylarcopri, SirsanGai and Ilythiiri Tessai are right now scrambling to put clothes on and join me out here if you need more confirmation.*] Sadi told her.

Helen gripped her arm tightly as she shook her head. [*That is not necessary. You are far more attuned to Mindvoice than they are right now.*] She spoke and turned inward back towards where Devra, Arduri and Naesta were watching them with odd expressions of wonder on their faces. [*Androcles has not seen this?*] Helen asked.

Sadi shook her head quickly. [*No. He knows there is another that will be part of our lives and he has accepted that but he has been so busy and so worried about what is going on that we have kept the images to*

ourselves. I do not think he has relaxed his thoughts or his MV shields enough to see images of her yet. Even when he sleeps.]

[Oh thank the gods!] Helen exclaimed.

[Feravomir... you know what he will do if he discovers this.] Sadi said.

Helen nodded. [All too well.] She stated. Sadi felt her open their MV connection a small fraction and reach for the others. [Carisia... none of you must reveal this when you come out here! Act as if nothing is wrong.]

[Feravomir! This is her!] Ne'Veha was the first to declare.

[I am Drow Feravomir. This is... we cannot let this stand.] Lu'ria spoke.

[I understand that Ne'Veha!] Helen spoke. [And you also know Androcles far better than I do now Lu'ria and you know what he will do if he discovers this! We can not allow this... not yet! It could destroy everything!]

There was a moment of silence and then Carisia's voice answered. [Sadi?]

[We must do what the Feravomir says Enylarcopri. We must! All of us! At least for right now. Too much resides on Androcles staying focused until we discover what the true purpose of the Kavalians are.] Sadi answered her. [That does not mean we need to be idle.]

[No it does not.] Helen told them instantly. [And we will not be.] All of them felt Helen expand their connection even more and search for and find one other mind. [Wayonn?]

The response was immediate and concerned. [Helen... what it is? Your tremors... they are frantic.]

[We need your help grandfather.] Helen spoke.

[Anything?] Wayonn answered. [You know that.]

[I need you to meet me on the other side of the island Wayonn, at Paris's Point. Grab Bren when you leave the villa. He will know exactly where I mean.] Helen spoke. [Ten minutes Wayonn.]

[We shall be there.] Wayonn answered.

Helen turned back quickly and looked at where her bonded sister was still holding the total attention of Andro and Elynth. She nodded and turned back to Sadi as they moved further back into the villa and up to where Devra, Arduri and Naesta stood now.

Devra stepped away from the counter now a concerned look on her face. "What is going on?" She asked softly.

"They will be occupied for a time longer." Helen spoke to Sadi. "Arzoal is... she is telling them her history as she told me when we became bonded."

"Her history?" Sadi gasped. "But I thought..."

Helen nodded and squeezed her arm. "It is time now. She has waited for millennia for this moment and she can no longer hold it in. We must deal with this now however."

"Deal with what?" Arduri asked getting to her feet as well.

Helen looked at them. "Devra Re Mydala... do you trust me?" She asked.

"I trust Wayonn." She stated immediately. "You are his granddaughter and you carry his blood within you so yes. Everything Androcles Leonidas has told us he would do he has done so far. If what Bren has told me in the last thirty-six hours is the truth, then I believe he will do everything within his power and we will find Caliria. I believe that more now than I ever did."

"Then come with Sadi and I." Helen spoke reaching for and taking her hand. "Your daughters as well."

"Where are we going?" Devra asked.

"To keep everything from spiraling insanely out of control. Trust me Devra Re Mydala... you do not want to see the extent of Androcles Leonidas or the power he could wield. If Andro discovers what Sadi has just told me... let me just say one Leonidas storm we may be able to weather, albeit barely. Both of them? Never." Helen answered. "Come."

BELID

"Father?" Tir'ut gasped in complete shock even as he watched the enormous form of the green and yellow scaled dragon move into the cave behind him.

“Uncle T’lolt?” Lynom gasped just as loudly looking at the bronze and tanned skin of his father and uncle.

Cha’talla was not by nature an emotional man but he crushed Lynom into his powerful arms for a rib cracking embrace. It was an embrace that Lynom returned for it had been two long years since he had seen his father and it appeared many things had changed. “Lynom my son.” Cha’talla rasped as Volleneth settled to the cool dirt of the cave and watched with twinkling eyes.

Tir’ut held his uncle’s arms tightly while gazing at him with wide eyes. “Uncle... Uncle what has happened?” He asked reaching up to touch his uncle’s tanned cheek.

“A miracle has happened boy.” T’lolt spoke softly. “The miracle that is your mother and the Lycavorians we now call family.” T’lolt released Tir’ut and turned to Normya who had a similar look in her emerald eyes. He opened his arms for her and Normya didn’t hesitate to step into his embrace with a brilliant smile. “Now we are certain you will not confuse us with the enemy we have come to fight!” T’lolt laughed as he pushed Normya away from him and stared at her. “You are unhurt?”

Normya nodded quickly still holding his arms in wonderment. “T’lolt... how...?”

T’lolt chuckled, his brown eyes bright. “I know... it has improved my looks a hundred fold and now you question your decision to marry my nephew don’t you?”

Normya couldn’t help but laugh and then both she and Tir’ut were embracing him once more. Cha’talla grabbed Lynom’s shoulders as they drew apart and he looked at his second son with Esther. “Lynom... I have... I have worried for you every day since you have been gone. We all have.” Cha’talla said. “Forgive... forgive me for risking you in this way my son. I... I am ashamed for my actions.”

Lynom shook his head quickly. “I chose this father.” He stated confidently. “I came of my choosing and you have no shame to bear. None!” He reached up and touched his father’s face, now so much like his own. “Father... this... how?”

“Your uncle speaks the truth.” Cha’talla said. “It is a long story and we can discuss it later my son. Right now we need to begin getting our men into position. Your mother and Denali are right behind me and...”

Lynom gripped his arm tightly and turned. “Father... father this is As’hia.” He stated with a touch of pride in his voice Cha’talla saw. Pride and devotion. He watched Lynom pull the petite half elven female forward and he watched how her body molded to Lynom’s perfectly without a moment’s pause as she looked at him. Silently Cha’talla could only feel pride that his oldest sons had the same taste in females that he did. This As’hia was a stunning young woman and that could be denied by no one.

Cha’talla stepped up to her and saw she did not back away even though he towered over her. He held out his large hands and took her more delicate ones in his palms. “Greetings to you As’hia.” He stated.

“Ilharn... il zhah vel’uss Usstan daewl ulu morfeth ussta Du’ased ’ranndi. Ka il orn inbal uns’aa.” Lynom told him. (Father she is who I wish to make my Blessed Wife. If she will have me.)

“Usstan’bal jal’yur inbalus dos. Lu’Usstan hass’l ulu inbal mzilt mzild ich!” As’hia spoke. (I’ve already had you. I mean to have a lot more too.)

Cha’talla looked at the way As’hia clung to Lynom possessively as she spoke the ancient vampire language and he smiled. “I believe she has already made that decision my son.” He stated taking note of Lynom and his embarrassed expression.

“Leave it to my nephews to pick the two most obstinate and outspoken half elf females in the universe.” T’lolt spoke as he watched from where he stood. He grunted as Normya punched him lightly in the gut.

Cha’talla smiled once more and turned back to look at As’hia. He looked behind her and saw Danarla and Ta’lon moving quickly towards them with Esther and Denali right behind them. “I believe you should probably make your desires known to your parents.” Cha’talla said as he motioned with his head.

As’hia spun around instantly and her dark eyes went wide. “*Medwaw! Medwan!*” She almost screamed.

Danarla did scream. “As’hia!” She exclaimed as she gathered her youngest child into her arms and burst into tears as Ta’lon gathered them both into his arms, his own eyes moist with tears.

“Lynom!” Esther shouted as she blurred the last few meters to her son and practically leaped into his arms just as Normya passed her and darted to her brother.

Denali crushed his elven sister into his arms, nuzzling her cheek and neck furiously in a brotherly fashion as she did the same to him back. He grabbed her head and looked into her face. “Normya... father is...”

Normya burst into tears. “I know! He’s alive! We were with mother when she felt him!”

Denali's eyes grew a little wider. "Then she is... I could feel her once more Lisisa and I, the others, but she would not answer our calls."

Normya nodded quickly. "She is shielding heavily to keep anyone from discovering that she can MV again. They were using some sort of device to block her resonance. Our family Deni? Why can we not feel our mother For'mya? She isn't..."

Denali pulled her close. "Zarah and Eliani have returned to Earth. Andro needed them. Carina and Moneus are with mother on Kranek. Lisisa, Arram, Narice and Toria are with us." He told her feeling her relax slightly in his arms. "I did not want to risk a long transmission to Andro once we entered the system so I only sent a three second burst. Once we have mother I will contact him directly. Right now we take things one step at a time and we free our first elven mother. Then we return home and go from there."

Normya nodded her head quickly and pushed back away from him. "You are right." She stated. They turned and watched as Esther ran her hands down Lynom's dreadlocks and her face was bright and happy as her son held her suspended off the ground a good eight inches.

"You... you have grown." Esther gasped.

Lynom chuckled. "I have not grown mother." He spoke. "I stopped growing when I was fourteen."

Esther laughed and kissed his cheek. "We will need to get you a haircut when we return." She said.

Danarla wiped the tears from her eyes as she held As'hia at arms length. "You are... you are unhurt?" She asked.

As'hia nodded her head quickly as she wiped her own eyes. "Yes *Medwaw*." She spoke with a smile.

"As'hia..." Ta'lon began to speak.

"I am fine *Medwan*." As'hia told him as she squeezed his hand. "I am... I am not the person I was when I came here. I am different and I have embraced that because it gives me such happiness."

"Where is he?" Danarla asked.

"*Medwaw* please... you must..." As'hia began to speak.

Danarla looked over her and saw Lynom just putting Esther down. She took in the immense physical proportions of him that matched his father and brother in every way. The long dark hair was pulled into dreadlocks and gave him a fierce visage to those who did not know him, but his tanned skin was no different than Cha'talla's was now. Danarla could detect the heavy scent of sweet verbena wafting from her youngest daughter and it was coming from him. Danarla didn't hesitate and stepped around her daughter and marched right up to stand in front of him. Esther's face went neutral as she looked at Danarla but she kept her arm around Lynom's waist as the others looked on.

"Lynom... this is Danarla." Esther said softly. "She is..."

"*Ssin'urn 'anon*'s mother... yes I know." Lynom spoke confidently. "I wish to..."

Danarla surprised everyone but Ta'lon when she reached up and took his face in her soft hands and pulled him down. Ta'lon and his wolf wife had talked for many hours through these past weeks and months, perhaps more than they had ever talked in all their married life and it had brought them infinitely closer to each other. After what they had seen on Kranek, after what they had heard of this son of Cha'talla and all he had done to safeguard their daughter, neither of them could deny the fact that this half Akruixian Immortal worshiped As'hia as only a wolf or an elf could worship their mate.

"Lynom... son of Cha'talla... you have returned to my mate and I something that is more precious than our own lives and we can never repay that debt to you." Danarla spoke softly as she gazed into his face.

"There is no debt that is owed to me *kal'daka ilhar*." Lynom answered immediately. "I followed my heart and my soul... nothing more."

"You love... you love our daughter?" Danarla asked softly.

"*Medwan*... could we talk about this another time?" As'hia spoke as she stepped between them and pressed up close to Lynom in the protective manner of a female wolf shielding her mate.

"With my every waking breath." Lynom answered Danarla's question as his arm curled around As'hia's waist.

Ta'lon saw how his daughter pressed back against Lynom without indecision or an instant of doubt. He was an elf who was married to a wolf and he knew well the signs his youngest daughter was now displaying. He stepped up beside Danarla. "There will be courting rules you must conduct... meetings of our family..."

"Papa!" As'hia gasped.

Danarla looked at her mate and smiled. “And they will be just as honored as we are to have you as a member of our family. And we of yours.” She stated.

“This is not the...” As'hia began to speak but stopped as what her mother had just said hit her. “You... you are giving us your blessing?” She gasped.

“Isn't that what you wish?” Danarla asked her with a smile knowing the answer before it came because of how deeply Lynom's scent wafted from her daughter's blood.

As'hia's smile seemed to light up the dimly lit cave and she could not nod her head fast enough. “Oh... oh yes mother! So very much!”

Ta'lon looked at Lynom and held out his hand. “Then let us do what we came here to do and you will have it.”

Lynom gripped his hand. “Yes.”

Tir'ut was the one who got everyone's attention then. “Everyone here!” He barked seeing them all turn to him. He and Normya stood near a makeshift model of items made up from their equipment packs. “This is what we have.” They all crowded around quickly. “Father, Denali... Cirith and Lancy are already inside the base with their team of three. Cirith is remaining very close to elf mother Dysea, she is a woman and she has developed an affinity and friendship with her. Once her MV powers returned, she and Cirith have been talking endlessly, more to keep Dysea calm I believe, but trust has built between them now.” Tir'ut spoke.

Denali looked at Normya. “Sister?” He asked.

Normya nodded her head immediately. “We have spoken Deni... but we become too emotional and it risks mother. There may be Immortals who could pick up the tremors however faint they may be. Cirith gives her balance and they speak of other things.”

“This is Valin's daughter?” Deni asked.

Normya nodded. “Yes... how did you know?”

“Admiral Valin and his forces helped us to pound the Kavalians and then he ordered a dozen Blood Vats removed from his ships and brought to the settlement to treat any injured Immortal.”

Cha'talla nodded. “It saved many lives.” He said.

“He returned with Zarah and Eliani to Earth. I think Andro wants to pick his brain. It has something to do with the bloodlines of our people.” He said.

Normya nodded. “Cirith spoke of that as well while we were coming here.” She stated. “Do you know what they mean?”

Denali shook his head. “No clue... but Andro does.” He stated. “We'll discover it soon enough I'm sure.” He turned back to Tir'ut. “Forgive me Tir'ut... please continue.”

Tir'ut nodded without annoyance at the interruption. He had learned in the last months that this was common in their family, going off on odd tangents at odd times. They all did it according to Normya, for some reason it allowed them to focus more clearly which Tir'ut did not understand. “Normya and I have laid out the interior as best we can based on what Kr'nak has told us and the plans he delivered.” Tir'ut pointed to one section on the dirt. “Mother... Kr'nak's four men and two of Cirith's commandos will be here to secure and protect the female elf prisoners once the battle begins. We will need you to make your way there immediately and begin treating them so they don't react in a way that will bring more harm than good. Osiri will be with them but the sooner you get there the better.”

Esther nodded her head. “I have half a dozen medics with me from both the settlement and Dysea's ship. Once we have injected all the elves we will set up a triage center in the same room.”

“I will lead her in.” T'lolt said leaning forward. “I will break from our main thrust once we are inside and take her there. We'll leave additional security and then converge on this main communications room from the west to cover Denali and Cha'talla.”

Tir'ut nodded. “I understand you and Denali will be going straight in father?”

Cha'talla nodded. “Direct line to this room. I will not allow Phy'iad to debase Dysea at any costs. Two hundred Lycavorians and Akruvian will be directly behind Denali and myself. We will not fail.”

“The base has over three thousand in it father.” Lynom spoke. “And this main corridor to the communications room is wide and defensible from many locations. Most of the secondary tunnels branch off it.”

Cha'talla nodded. “I know.”

This Kr'nak has given us the code to the main entrance Lynom...yes? Aradace asked from where she stood behind Denali and Normya.

Lynom looked up surprised when her voice sounded in his head. He nodded slowly. "Yes."

Then we will not need to burn through it. Vollenth spoke. *It will save us time and the main corridor is high enough and wide enough for Aradace and I to move through with relative ease.*

Which means Lisi and Jeth can remain with Narice and the other Coven dragons while they assault the south entrance. Aradace continued. *Their psychic shields are stronger than ours and they can withstand more concentrated fire. And they will think the main attack is coming from the south.*

"Why... why would they think that?" As'hia asked for she had heard every word within Mindvoice as well. The moment Lynom had first taken her blood and talked to her within Mindvoice her own skills had begun to increase because he had touched her. Now she was able to talk easily on the same level as dragons, something she was not able to do before all this had begun.

"Because that is what we will make them believe, and in truth that *is* where the main attack will come from. Just not in the form they think." Her mother answered with a sly grin. She leaned forward now. "We have a phalanx of heavy weapons setting up now all along this lower ridge that parallels the southern entrance. The dragons and riders will suck them out since they are not Kavalians and they will have no fear of dragons and they will be secure in the knowledge that they have T19 missiles."

Lynom nodded his head now. "And when they do... you will hit them while they are massed together."

Danarla nodded her head as she once more fell into the role of Lycavorian troop leader and warrior. "I intend to make it a mass grave is what I intend."

Cha'talla nodded. "And then you will lead our main force directly into the south tunnel and fight your way to the communications room Lynom. You know the inside of this base and you can direct them quickly."

Lynom nodded without question. "Of course." He stated.

"We will lead the assault." As'hia spoke looking over her shoulder at him.

Danarla looked at her daughter as she sat on the ground between Lynom's legs and spoke with confidence. She felt immense pride in her daughter at her words but the natural worry of a parent. She opened her mouth to speak but Cha'talla beat her to it.

"You are part of the reason we have come here As'hia." He stated. "To risk you in this..."

"I may have been part of it in the beginning but no more." As'hia stated confidently. "Our Queen is more important than me and I will not leave my husband to be fight alone. I will be at his side for I have much to make up for." Lynom said nothing as she spoke but she could feel his arm tighten around her waist in support.

"As'hia... there is no room for revenge now." Ta'lon spoke.

"This is not about revenge *medwan*." As'hia answered quickly turning to look at him. "I do not remember what was done to me papa! None of it! This is about justice for our Queen! For what you have told us they have done! Whatever was done to me was washed away the first time Lynom made me his!" Several sets of eyes grew wider at her statement and Lynom could do nothing but try to hide his face behind her two toned hair.

"*Ssin'urn 'anon*... perhaps now is not a good time to inform everyone of what we were doing before they informed us they were coming." Lynom said softly.

"No... please continue." Tir'ut spoke now. That comment earned him a half power slap from both Normya and his mother.

Ta'lon looked at his wife. "Perhaps we will forgo the courting rights and meetings." He said softly.

As'hia couldn't help but smile now. "This is not about revenge." She said finally. "This is about getting our Queen back from them and I am perfectly capable of fighting. I do not need to be protected."

Cha'talla looked at Danarla who met his eyes and nodded. He turned back to As'hia. "So be it." He stated. "Let us make our final preparations and then move to our kick off points. Admiral Thodius will begin his attack in forty-one minutes."

[I am frightened Cirith.]

Dysea spoke softly in the heavily shielded connection. It was a connection she now shared with only one person and it was this connection that was giving her the strength and confidence she usually had. It had been

Dysea's idea to establish this MV bond because it would be Cirith that remained in the shadows wherever she went now. It was a type of MV connection she had either made or been involved in with others before but, the moment it was initiated, Dysea knew it was far more than what they had intended it to be. Dysea knew it was the wolf blood within Cirith that reached out instantly, just as her wolf blood did, and the tendrils of Mindvoice came together and wrapped within one another in a fashion similar to the MV bonds she had with *Melyanna*, For'mya and Aricia. The strength of the connection was nearly as deep as with them, deeper even than the one she shared with Bella for Isabella was not wolf, and this confused Dysea to some degree.

In order to hide that Dysea had her MV abilities back, they had to establish the connection on a much higher level so that no Immortal would be able to detect it. To do that they had to open themselves to each other completely, and this had been far easier than either of them had expected. Almost too easy, though within a few moments they both knew why, and then they both embraced it without hesitation. The wolf blood within Cirith was refined and so very pure. This blood she got from her father was easy for the blood within Dysea to detect and recognize as one of the five ruling packs of Lycavorians that had been heavily infiltrated so many thousands of years ago by the Pralors. It reacted instantly with her blood which was *Nauta Melme's* pure blood and the blood of Kings. They had talked for many hours about many things, mostly having to do how both their lives had been altered because of the blood they now had in their veins. Blood both of them had fully embraced and could now not do without.

She sat on the small metal bunk with thin mattress, her knees draw up to her chest and her arms wrapped around her shins as she tried to conserve her body heat. They had not given her any clothing after bringing her here and Dysea knew it was a way for them to try and break her down. Without clothes they assumed she would feel naked and vulnerable, though they did not know her very well. Dysea Leonidas had never been uncomfortable without clothes, even before her *Nauta Melme* had come into her life and turned her. Once she became wolf it came even easier to her. Of all his Queens, Dysea was usually the one with the fewest clothes on whenever they were in their home. Only Anja could challenge her for that, and often times they both just walked around naked when they knew the young ones were finally asleep. It had led to many intimate moments initiated by one or both of them at the same time, and it usually flowed over to the others as well. The cool dampness of the cell however, that was beginning to sift through her and make her cold even with her wolf blood.

[As am I Dysea.] Cirith answered instantly. *[I will not allow anything to happen to you Dysea. I give you my word.]*

Cirith stood in the corner of the room close to the door watching her, the shadows wrapped around her body expertly. Her father and many of those within the Intelligence arm of the High Coven were supreme experts at using the shadows and she had learned from the very best. It helped that she had Aikiro's blood within her veins as well for her half sisters Yuri and Narice were superior shadow walkers, as were Yuri's children. Those that still lived that is. Her dark eyes had been unable to pull away from Dysea for very long. Cirith had never felt such a surreal attraction to another woman in such an openly sexual manner. She wanted Dysea Leonidas, she wanted all of them, for she could smell their blood in Dysea's as well. She wanted to explore their bodies and taste their blood and immerse herself in the emotion and pleasure of it all. And it pained her because she knew it would probably never happen.

[Cirith... I have never... I have never been taken against my will.] Dysea told her.

[And that will not happen now!] Cirith spoke forcefully. *[I won't let it. I will free you first and we will die fighting before I allow that to happen!]*

[In all the years since Martin came into my life, I have never desired another man. Never! How could I... he is all I have ever dreamed of and so much more. He leaves me shivering in his arms no matter how many times he takes me. I scream his name until I am hoarse. He makes me laugh and we can discuss philosophy or education without missing a beat.] Dysea said. *[Yet... I keep having these dreams or visions or whatever you want to call them.]*

[Dysea...]

[No... listen to me.] Dysea stated insistently. *[They are the same all the time Cirith. The same Immortal who broke me in these dreams is in all of them. With others or by himself. I... I do whatever he asks of me Cirith. Anything! He is vile and disgusting in his actions but I do what he wants in these dreams. No matter what it is! And I love it! I scream for him to take me! Whether it is just him... or another as well. I act depraved*

and... and I act like a whore for his Immortal cock and I love it! Everything he does to me I love it! I can... it feels so real when they... when they fill me!]

[Dysea... Osiri told you that it is a reaction to the combination of drugs they gave you and your level of Mindvoice powers.] Cirith said. *[It is not you Dysea. You do not wish these things. You have not fully recovered your sense of balance and clarity because of the drugs.]*

[How can you be so sure?] Dysea asked. *[How can I be so sure? How do I know that this is not some kind of sick secret fantasy of mine? How do I know that this is not what I want?]*

[Have you ever had these thoughts before?] Cirith asked.

[Certainly not!] Dysea exclaimed.

[You have no fantasies Dysea?] Cirith asked.

[Of course I do... but... we have never been afraid to do these things with each other Cirith. And none of these fantasies ever include a male other than Martin.] Dysea spoke. *[He is... he is not as unimaginative in our bed as you might think because of who he is.]*

[Dysea... you are also in phase.] Cirith said. *[Osiri might not have been able to tell this but I can smell it plainly. You are in phase... you have been drugged and beaten... you are weak and they blocked your MV powers for a time. You desire your mate and husband Dysea. There is no woman alive who could withstand all this and not be affected in some manner.]*

[But why dreams like this?] Dysea asked.

[Because you have spent the last months building a friendship and bond with Cha'talla and his people. A friendship and relationship that goes against everything you have ever been taught about them.] Cirith spoke. *[Now you have been captured by Immortals who are exactly like those you have been taught about. Combine this altogether and it would be too much for anyone to comprehend, especially given the circumstances and what they have done to you.]*

[You sound so sure.] Dysea spoke. She looked up quickly when Cirith unwrapped the shadows from around her body and leaned over to kiss Dysea. A powerful kiss of passion and want and need. A kiss that set both their bodies afire with desire. And just as quickly it was over and Cirith wrapped the shadows around herself once more.

[I am sure of who you are.] Cirith stated. *[I am sure of the pureness of the blood that runs in both our veins. And mostly I am sure because we are not alone.]*

Dysea could have switched to grayscale vision and possibly detected where Cirith was in the room but she chose not to. The heat of Cirith's lips ran deep and sent incredibly delicious shivers throughout her. Shivers that Dysea should not have felt, but shivers that she felt none the less. She lifted her hand and touched her fingers to her lips softly. *[Why... why did you do that?]* She asked.

[Because I wanted too.] Cirith answered gently. *[I've wanted too since I first met you and I don't know why. And... and because I know it will never happen again.]*

[Cirith we... I...] Dysea began to speak but the sound of the door unlocking made her head turn. Dysea watched as the door to her cell opened and Kr'nak's huge form filled the doorway easily. He looked no different than he had a few hours ago but Dysea could smell the anxiousness in him now.

Kr'nak walked right up to her holding the magnetic restrainers. "The drugs are still at work." He called over his shoulder. "Tell Phy'iad I will have her there in moments and as docile as a lamb."

Dysea saw the second Immortal nod his head and turn to move away. She looked back to Kr'nak; saw his eyes and suddenly fear gripped her that she was being betrayed. Kr'nak's words then stopped this fear in its tracks and whatever fear Dysea may have still been feeling were shred.

"Everyone is ready." Kr'nak whispered to her. "Your Admiral will launch his attack in seventeen minutes. Osiri is with the other elf females in the main slave chamber. I received the signal from Tir'ut that they have infiltrated the base in the same manner as Cirith and the others. Cha'talla and your children wait for the attack. Dysea if anything... if anything should happen to me..." He stared at her intently. "Tell Osiri that she has been and always will be the light in the darkness for me. I will die knowing what love is. Tell her... tell her to love our son for both of us."

Dysea shook her head as she came to her feet, heedless of the fact she was completely naked. Kr'nak's eyes never left her face however, and she knew they never would. "You will tell her yourself Kr'nak." She

spoke just as softly. "You can not die... for it would destroy all that you have given back to her. Fight if you must... and fight savagely and well... but do not die for now you have something to truly fight for. A future."

Kr'nak took her hands in his and brought her knuckles to his lips and he kissed them softly. "Cirith is nearby?" He asked.

Dysea nodded. "Yes."

"Then know that I will act with her and allow nothing to harm you ever Queen Dysea of the Lycavorian Union." Kr'nak said. "As I was forced to swear my allegiance to others in the past, I now swear my allegiance to you willingly."

"That is not something you need to do Kr'nak." Dysea spoke. "You will be free."

"And that is why I do so." He answered. "Because I will be free."

"Let us... let us talk about that later." Dysea spoke.

Kr'nak nodded and held up the restrainers. "I must put these on you." He spoke. "Mag Restraints. Contact has already been made with the Kavalian ship that this Pusintin is on and he wants to proceed immediately and Phy'iad grows concerned that he was followed. I so wanted to tell him that death resides at his doorstep even now."

Dysea felt a surge of confidence return to her and she smiled. "He has no idea." She spoke softly.

Kr'nak secured the restrainers around her wrists and then pressed a small cylinder into her right hand. "The key." He said. "If... if things begin to move too quickly then press the button. You will hear a faint beep and the restrainers will release three seconds after that. That is how much time Cirith will have to move and put your blades in your hands."

[It is more than enough.] Cirith spoke.

Dysea nodded. "She will be ready."

"Strike quickly and without remorse Dysea Leonidas. Just as your mate and husband would strike." Kr'nak spoke. "One behind the ear and the other wherever it suits you. Just make it a killing blow. Once Phy'iad is down... there will be six others in the room with us including myself... once Phy'iad is down we will eliminate them and wait for your son and Cha'talla to reach us."

"And you still have no idea why he is doing this?" Dysea asked.

Kr'nak shook his head. "None. The communication that was initiated is only one way. Whoever is on that Kavalian ship can see and hear everything but only Phy'iad can hear them through his implant."

"Can we trace it?" She asked.

Kr'nak shrugged his broad shoulders. "Probably... but the priority is insuring you are safe and then destroying this base. Are you... are you frightened?"

Dysea met his eyes and nodded her head honestly. "Terrified."

Kr'nak nodded. "Good. It will make your acting that much better." He said. "He will taunt you and... and touch you... but you must not act until your Admiral begins his attack. And insure that you do nothing that gives away that you have your MV abilities back."

Dysea nodded. "I understand." She spoke.

Kr'nak nodded. "Then let us begin."

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

[... nothing left for us to do but help our dragon friends.] Arzoal spoke as she had spoken for the last thirty minutes. *[Within five hundred years of our arrival this species... their official name in our databanks was Kavgart... they had grown in number and their attacks against our settlement as well as the dragon lairs was becoming almost weekly. Even with our superior technology their numbers were too great. In just over nine hundred years they almost equaled the dragons in population size. All attempts at repairing our drive system quickly fell to the wayside as we tried to develop ways to counter their aggressive attacks.]*

[You did not... you did not make weapons?] Androcles asked.

Arzoal shook her head. *[Our people... Pralors... we were seeders of life Androcles. We wanted nothing to do with war. The scars from the war Xaxon had brought upon us were still fresh in our minds. We had*

destroyed all our ships of war by that time and all that remained were the City Ships and scout vessels like mine. We went back to our normal way of life. Even CS41 and the others were only equipped with defensive lasers and nothing more. In part I am glad that was the case. Our commander forbade us to make weapons even though we could have easily and the dragons understood this. We provided them with advanced Mindvoice skills, knowledge and training and they did the fighting even though it went against their benevolent nature. They were protecting their young.]

[So what changed?] Elynth asked.

Arzoal looked at her. [Artre happened. I happened.]

[Artre?] Andro questioned. [The First Elven King?]

Arzoal snorted loudly. [Artre was no King and he was no elf.] She stated with some disgust. [He was a Pralor. One of the legion that followed Xaxon we discovered some time later. How he ever got through the screening process is something we never discovered but he was a geneticist like myself, however he had a dark streak within him. No doubt fermented by Xaxon and his crazed ideals.] Arzoal shifted on the sand. [Artre convinced our Commander that he had discovered a way to make the Kavgart more docile by altering their genetic makeup. He... he even had me fooled and I should have known better. I helped him to make a compound that when injected into Kavgart females, would bring out their nurturing instincts. He told our Commander that all he needed was his own lab on the far side of the planet away from the main Kavgart settlements and a hundred dragons to help him collect enough Kavgart females so that he could do his testing and then reintroduce them into the Kavgart population. I was the one who reviewed all his work and told our Commander that it would do what he said it would, even though I knew...] Arzoal looked at him. [Even though I knew it would not. I... I wanted to believe him because... because I was in love with him. I should have known better.] Arzoal said shaking her head.

Andro looked up at Elynth and saw her golden eyes blink in shock at what she was telling them. He turned back to Arzoal. [What happened Elder Mother?]

Arzoal lifted her head once more and looked at him with sad eyes. [It took us nearly ninety years before we came up with a compound that worked. I loved him for all that time and I was blinded to what his true goal was. That was domination. We even discovered that the second species on Elear, the less developed one, they were they result of the natural course of dragon evolution. They were the result of the embryonic cells on the interior of hatched dragon eggs mixing with the residual dragon seed from the mating process, and over the course of thousands, perhaps millions of years, these cells eventually became viable lifeforms. The ones we saw when we arrived on Elear. This first cycle of Elven evolution ended eleven hundred years after we arrived. During this time I also discovered that the next cycle of evolution for this new species would take place within the next five thousand years. All of my data models indicated that when this took place they would become the dominant species on Elear within a millennia. Artre did not care about any of this. He got his own lab and he got his hundred dragons. All of them volunteered without question because it would save their lairs and their eggs. Artre took them to the other side of Elear, deep into a mountainous jungle and it is there that he conducted his vile experiments.]

[But you knew the truth! Why... if this compound could not do what he said it could and you finally realized all this why did you do nothing?] Elynth asked.

Arzoal looked at her. [Oh the compound would work. It would alter their genetic makeup yes... but not in the way he told everyone. When I finally came to my senses and I realized he held no love for me I could not allow him to do this. Ninety years we spent developing this compound and right in front of me he twisted it into something dark and sinister. I confronted him in a secret dragon cave that we had set up years before to hide our technology from the Kavgart. On the night before he was given everything he wanted I confronted him alone in this cave.]

[Wait... if you exposed him... how was he able to complete his work?] Andro asked.

[I was never able to expose him Androcles.] Arzoal said. [He killed me.]

[Grandmother!] Elynth exclaimed as her wings snapped out to the sides in disbelief.

[He stabbed me through the chest and nicked my heart, leaving me for dead.] Arzoal told them softly. [As I laid there dying, I contemplated my actions and all the misery that I knew he would now unleash. I couldn't allow it to happen for it would also be my fault since I helped him create it. This cave had all of the machinery and technology that we had taken from our ship and either built through the years or which we had

carried. Among the items there was what we called a Psionic Transferal Chamber. We called them PTCs. This is what allowed us to transfer the conscious minds of Pralors who were critically injured or near death to Psionic Pods until they could be returned to our homeworld and their bodies healed or their consciousness was released into the Rift of Time.]

[Rift of Time?] Andro asked.

Arzoal nodded. [A nebula that surrounded our homeworld was made up totally of Psionic energy and when our people died, many would chose to have their conscious minds removed from their bodies and set adrift in this nebula so that they could live on for many thousands of years more as energy. It was a great honor and gift that our people had.]

[But... but you are here.] Elynth said softly.

[Yes... I am here.] Arzoal spoke. [I am here because in the next chamber were seven thousand dragons eggs. I was able to take one of those unborn eggs... eggs with the embryos of dragons that were in their first stage of development and not yet aware. I took one of those eggs and I placed it in the PTC. I activated the machine and used it to transfer my conscious mind to the embryo before my body died.] Arzoal looked out to the ocean now which was beginning to sparkle with beauty because of the rising sun. [To my knowledge something like this had never been attempted before and never since. It worked...] She told them turning back to face them. [The only problem was the dragon embryo, the body I now occupy, was only three weeks old. It would not hatch for another hundred and fourteen years because of what I had done. The massive influx of Psionic energy caused the embryo to remain in a state of growth flux and it took that long before it had settled enough to continue its natural growth potential. A fellow worker found my body four days later and based on all of the blood she deduced what I had done. Our Commander and the Dragon Elder Council immediately hid me away until such time as I hatched. By that time Artre was gone and it was another two years before they saw him again. By then it was too late.]

[Too late for what?] Andro asked.

[Too late to stop his diabolical scheme.] Arzoal answered. [He had what he had wanted all along. He altered the compound he and I created even more than it was. He combined it with samples of Kavgart DNA and the nearest sample of Kavgart DNA that we had in our data banks and specimen cores. Lycavorian. He injected it into the dragons that went with him. It changed them.]

[Lycavorian!] Andro gasped.

[The Pralors were seeders of life Androcles Leonidas. We would take life forms from other worlds and introduce them into the reforming systems of worlds that had once been dead to all life.] Arzoal spoke. [Your species... Lycavorians... they were one of the most adaptable and hearty species we had ever come across. We have used your species to repopulate many worlds.]

[Wait a minute!] Andro came to his feet. [Are you telling me you took others from Lycavore? That there are other Lycavorians out there among the stars?]

[Five planets.] Arzoal spoke. [Each several million light years apart so that the chances of discovering each other were miniscule. None of them were as advanced as the Lycavorians on your homeworld at that time but the last information I had then was nearly thirty thousand years old.]

[Grandmother... you said this compound changed the dragons Artre took. Changed them how?] Elynth asked.

[Not only did it alter their physical nature, it destroyed their minds and turned them into mindless machines of death.] Arzoal spoke. [The pain of the transformation was too much for their minds to tolerate and they became monsters. Monsters that Artre controlled.]

[What transformation?] Andro asked leaning forward now.

[It made them humanoid in appearance Androcles.] Arzoal answered. [Over a period of six weeks their dragon bodies shrunk to the equivalent size of a very large Lycavorian. Have you never wondered why the genetic code of Kavalians and Lycavorians is so close in so many ways? He used your genetic sequencer codes for part of his experiments because of the massive healing properties naturally in your bodies. These monsters he created still had scales and claws and teeth, but they were no longer completely Cretvore Draconius. They were something else.]

[Son vada carians.] Andro muttered.

[These dragon/humanoids that Artre created... these abominations... they became the distant ancestors of the Kavalian species as we know them now.] Arzoal spoke softly. *[Artre conducted his experiments but he went well beyond what he had originally intended. He had these sadistic monstrosities take Kavgart females and mate with them so he could twist the gene pool even more. More often than not it killed the Kavgart female for they birthed babies that were more monster than anything else, but that did not deter Artre in his goals. Eventually... and I don't know how and I do not care... eventually he was able to alter their genetic structure enough where the Kavgart females began giving birth to relatively normal children and it did not kill them. This next generation were the fathers of the Kavalian people now. All this happened in the span of the years before I hatched. When I finally did hatch... our Commander and perhaps three dozen out of our crew remained. Artre and his minions had either killed or taken the others. We never saw any of them again.]*

Andro got to his feet then and shook his head as he began to pace back and forth in front of her. *[So the Kavalians... they share similar patterns of DNA with us?]*

Arzoal nodded. *[It is why Athani Leonidas and so many others were able to alter their natural appearances with the biogenic process Keleru's scientists developed. In truth... the biogenic process worked on them because of the Lycavorian cells in their bodies. The biogenic treatments only awakened these cells from dormancy.]*

[Why would the Kavalian scientists not detect this?] Androcles asked.

[I do not know the answer to that... but I can make an educated assumption and say they were not interested in dormant cells that would not show up on any medical scans they did. Only in those cells that were active and they could manipulate.] Arzoal answered. *[Just as I had with Artre.]*

Andro stopped pacing and looked at her once more. *[What happened after you hatched Elder Mother? How did the... how did the Kavalians get from Elear to Cabelir?]*

[Our ship.] Arzoal answered. *[Once my egg hatched I was fully aware of all around me. I already had nine thousand three hundred years of life behind me when the egg hatched and I am actually older than Wayonn by roughly four thousand years I believe. Please sit Andro... I know what you must feel towards me knowing all this but...]*

[Feel towards you?] Androcles spoke looking at her and meeting her flame colored eyes.

[You... you have every right to hate me.] Arzoal said softly. *[If not for me... if not for me what is happening right now would not be taking place.]*

Andro reached up without hesitation and placed his hands on the side of her muzzle. *[Yes it would.]* He stated. *[Are you not the one who has told Elynth and I that fate will always find a way? That nothing happens without cause and affect. What is happening now is not your fault... you were only trying to do what was best at the time.]*

[How can you say that when I am responsible for the loss of so many lives?] Arzoal asked softly. *[Twice now... twice my actions have directly resulted in pain for your family and yet...]*

[No!] Andro and Elynth echoed together but Andro continued. *[What is happening now is not your doing! We... we all have choice Elder Mother! We all have the freedom to choose the paths we take in this life! You may have had a hand in creating the Kavalian people... but you are in no way responsible for their actions some thirty thousand years later! I don't accept that! I don't accept that and neither will my father!]*

Elynth moved closer. *[Grandmother... what took place after you hatched?]* She asked wanting to hear it all.

Arzoal met her eyes. *[War happened.]* She stated simply. *[We could no longer sit by and just react to what Artre was doing. Too many dragons were dying. Too many Kavgart were dying. My physical body was only nine years old when they chose me to be a member of the Council of Dragon Elders. I protested vehemently because I did not feel I deserved such a position and in my mind I was still a Pralor. They did not see it that way. Two years after this I told them the only way to stop Artre and what he was doing was to take the fight to him. To go after the bases he had established. To show no mercy. The Kavgart... even the new Kavalians were beginning to target the first generation elves. Essentially even more of dragon children since they were directly descended from us by way of natural evolution. The Kavgart were breeding so fast, something within the DNA Artre created caused their offspring to be fully grown within five years, and I would... I could not let Artre corrupt and destroy another species. So we went to war. We went to war and we held nothing back.]*

Andro tilted his head to the side and looked at her. *[This is why the Kavalians have such an inbred fear of dragons!]* He gasped.

Arzoal nodded. *[Yes. I told them we needed to be the most fearsome creatures we could be and we were.]* She answered. *[We burned their settlements, we slaughtered their people. We spared no one. Not even their children. It got to the point that the older Kavgart and the new Kavalian species were so terrified of us that they would not even come out into the open if there was any sign that a dragon had passed through the area recently. This fear and the fear of the abominations that Artre had created was so deeply imbedded within their psyche that it became part of them. In the eighty-second year of the war we found where Artre and his remaining original dragons had taken refuge. It... it is where Dragon Mountain now resides on Elear.]*

Elynth gasped within Mindvoice. *[That is why mother told me you refused when the Elven Prime Minister first told you of it.]*

Arzoal nodded. *[Yes. There... there were too many memories there. But... it was your father Elynth who told me that no matter the past it was up to us now to change the future. Just as he was doing with Andro's father. And your mother with Aricia. And now you with Andro.]*

[And when you discovered the mountain?] Andro asked her.

[We... we attacked.] Arzoal answered solemnly. *[Forty thousand of us attacked... and at the end of three days we breached the inner defense perimeter. Artre was inside with the nine remaining abominations that he had created. They fought... and they died until it was only Artre. He was... he was mad by then. Insane with power and the need for more and more. It was a pitiful sight really. He didn't believe it was me at first... until...]*

[Until what?] Andro asked.

[Until I impaled him on my talons and stared into his eyes until the life left them.] Arzoal answered. *[We left the bodies within the mountain and burned it. We burned everything. For two weeks the mountain burned until all that was left was nothing more than ash. That is why I told your mother Artre could not be alive Andro, when she came to me on Elear during the time of that fool cult. They had no idea what they worshiped and I was not about to let it continue for one moment longer after she told me.]*

[And the survivors grandmother?] Elynth said.

[Our ship.] She answered. *[Our Quantum Drive was inoperable but our sublight engines were still operating. We gathered the Kavgart and the new Kavalians and we removed them from Elear. It took several years... for we had to strip our ship even further to allow dragons to accompany the remaining Pralors and protect them... but once it was done it was as if a huge collective sigh of peace released from the planet herself.]*

[You took them to Cabelir?] Andro said.

Arzoal nodded. *[It was sufficiently far enough away where we knew they could not return and it allowed us to insure they did not have the opportunity or the means. For the next four thousand four hundred years we returned every half century to insure that they had not developed the means to leave Cabelir. We lived in blissful peace with the new species on Elear which we called Elves. In the dragon language Elf meant Reborn. We were being reborn as evolution was allowed to take its natural course. Forty-one years after that, my prediction came true and the first of the elves that we know today was born. A boy. Two years after that I was chosen as Elder Mother to the Dragon species and placed in charge of the Elder Council. I made the decision to use our ship with a newly built partial Quantum Drive, to take the remaining Pralors, four of them, and as many dragons that wanted to leave Elear and find a habitable world to settle on. We needed to leave Elear to the elves to find their own way as evolution demanded. Five years after the first group left he contacted me via a communications beacon and told me he was sending the ship back on remote for the rest. They had found a planet some ninety thousand light years from Elear in a new system and it was perfect. Our ship arrived on schedule two years later and I sent another thousand adults and all of our remaining eggs. It was scheduled to return in three additional years but it did not keep to that schedule.]*

[What do you mean?] Elynth asked.

[It did not return for nine thousand years.] Arzoal spoke. *[By this time... the elves had grown so much and we were so proud of them. Their expansion had pushed us deeper into the mountains and jungles, but we did not care. When our ship returned it looked battered and beaten, but all of its systems were still very much working. We never did come to find out why so much time passed before it returned, but once it did we had*

already chosen a place to go ourselves. A planet that looked so promising from the data cores that we had kept hidden.]

[Enurrua.] Andro said.

Arzoal nodded. [I could not bring myself to leave this quadrant. To leave the elves. After I had caused so much death and pain I wanted to see them grow into something great. I was with the last group that left Elear in 20,943 B.C. as we relate time now. Almost six thousand years we lived on Enurrua in peace. I... I became the mate of your grandfather... and believe me... after so many years as a Pralor and then all we had done on Elear I had forgotten what it was like to be a female.] Arzoal looked at Andro. [You wish to know why Vollenth's sons now walk the path they do and why they will become bonded to KertaGai and SirsanGai. It is because Vollenth's father is my grandson. He is of my dragon blood Androcles.] She spoke seeing both of their eyes widen. [Our first clutch of eggs as mates had four eggs in it. An earthquake took one of them from us before it ever hatched. Our oldest was a male, a beautiful flame red dragon like me. He mated young as we did back then before the war with Chetak began. The second clutch of eggs with his mates was one of the first taken by Chetak after they arrived on Enurrua. Vollenth's father was the only egg to be saved. Our... our son died. He and his mate killed by Chetak and his men, just as my mate was a thousand years later. Just as so many of my people were. I often wondered why the gods had left me alive after all I had done. They had taken so much from me as a Pralor and then a dragon. I often wondered why they continued to torment me through the years having to endure what I did. Watching my kind die all around me. Those I loved and cared for.] Arzoal reached out her head and put it within inches of Andro's face. [It was to see the streaks in the stars above as your father gave me my redemption. It was so that I could see the gods when they finally forgave me. That forgiveness was the hand of your father when he came to Enurrua and reclaimed what was always his in Aricia, but also set us finally and truly free.]

[I was a Pralor... and though I now occupied the body and mind of a dragon... I would know the blood of Sumar the moment I met him.] Arzoal said. [Destiny guided my hand and my decisions all of those years because those decisions led me to your father. And that is why our blood... our minds... will always be drawn to each other and connected in a way no others can explain. As I forgave myself for my decisions Androcles... decisions made just as your father's were... to save more than those that were lost... now you too must forgive yourself. I will never know love again and I have accepted that. But I will not accept it for those who I consider my family.]

Andro looked at Elynth then and her golden eyes met his for a long moment. Andro turned back to Arzoal as he tried to absorb the enormity of what he had just been told. He reached up and put his hand on her snout.

[Love is never lost to you Elder Mother.] He spoke. [It is never lost to any of us and for you... it is closer than you think. At times we just don't see it.]

Arzoal's eyes grew a little wider at this pronouncement but she said nothing. She blinked after a moment. [Perhaps... but my position now... it precludes me discovering love again.]

[So you may think. I will... I will tell no one of what you have spoken to us this day Elder Mother.] Andro spoke. [On that I give you my word as a Talon Guardian.]

[As do I grandmother.] Elynth spoke.

Arzoal laughed softly within Mindvoice and shook her head. [I knew it would someday need to be told. The next time I see your father I will pull him aside and I will share with him all I should have told him so long ago.]

[And now?] Elynth asked.

[Now?] Arzoal spoke. [Now... now we have to deal with the true followers of Artre and his vile creations though they don't know or understand it. I had hoped that without someone to dominate and oppress they would eventually outgrow this lust Artre bred into them. I was very wrong it seems and once more one of my sins returns.]

[No... this is not your sin Elder Mother.] Andro said firmly. [This is Artre's sin. And not all of the Kavalian follow the instincts he bred into them. And that is how we will stop him. Together.]

Arzoal nodded her head. [Always together.]

CRANAE ISLAND PARIS'S POINT

“... Found so far Bren?” Helen asked.

Paris's Point was on the extreme eastern tip of Cranae Island, a large finger of soft white sand that extended out into the Gulf of Laconia. On this tip was a massive open air pavilion with comfortable chairs and tables underneath. According to legend it was where Paris of Troy proposed marriage to Helen of Sparta and where they plotted their escape. It was also a lookout point of sorts and had the hundred foot high lighthouse on the very tip of the stretch of land. It no longer worked of course, but Andro had the structure redone and repaired to match what he had done with the villa itself and to keep that little bit of history from tumbling into the Gulf.

Bren was very confused but he lifted a single data pad from the table, one of half a dozen he had grabbed before leaving the villa. “There is not much information to go on *Feravomir*.” He spoke. “I have taken what Lady Devra gave to us, combined it with what Nirilo, Arduri and Naesta all gave to me from personal knowledge on things they have heard and then meshed it with our own intelligence from several different areas of The Wilds and what the Drow have submitted from different outposts over the years.”

“And?” Sadi asked.

“Using different key words, I had the computer search for reports that have come from the Drow, the *Krypteria* and even Elven Intelligence since they are active in The Wilds.” Bren said. “The scan was still running when you called for me but it has kicked out three possible connections so far. Devra and I were going through them last night before she retired.” He held out the data pad to Sadi and both she and Helen began to read it. “There was mention in several intercepts out of the Icarlo Alliance of a blue skinned female and two different instances of the word Syndicate that were mentioned in a Drow report two years ago from Talbor Seven.”

Devra stepped closer to Bren. “Bren has said this Talbor Seven is a resort moon of sorts?” She asked.

Sadi lifted her eyes and looked at her. “In a manner of speaking.” She replied. “It caters to many different people, many of them not the most respectable if you get my meaning. It is very plush, over indulgent and disgustingly opulent.”

Devra nodded. “The Syndicate and its members are very vain.” She spoke quickly. “This is exactly the place they would go.”

“It's also very close to Nefoa.” Bren spoke. “If we go there and start poking around about a group we believe may or may not be involved with them there's a good chance the Kavalians will find out and come to Talbor Seven to find out what is going on if they are in fact working with this Orionis Syndicate. Which could also endanger the life of Queen For'mya if they have told us not to retaliate in any way or they will kill her. They will see it as a threat and they will act.”

“Talbor Seven is too public. The only way they would act on something there is if was from the shadows. Sadi is right and many of their clientele are not the most respectable of people, but there are many who are. And they are citizens of the Union.” Helen spoke softly.

“I can contact someone there.” Sadi said softly turning to Helen. “I know... I know someone who may be able to help us. There will be a price but I will take care of it.”

“Why has this suddenly become... why has finding Caliria become so urgent for you?” Arduri asked softly as she looked at Sadi. “It is disconcerting all of a sudden.”

“Yes it is.” Devra echoed.

“I would like to know as well.” Wayonn asked. “And what it has to do with me?”

Helen looked at Sadi and then back to Devra. “Regent Re Mydala...”

Devra held up her hand. “Please... I think... I think given what is growing between our people and what you are doing for us that there is no need to maintain such formal tones First Oracle. Devra... please call me Devra.”

Helen smiled. “Devra.” She said nodding her head. “You have some sense of Mindvoice and what it allows us to do.”

Devra nodded slowly after looking at Wayonn. “Yes... I believe so.” She answered her. “You are able to speak with your minds... like telepathy. It allows you to do things that we... that others cannot. The more

powerful of your people, and those bonded to these dragon beasts, they can manifest these psychic powers into the physical realm in some manner.”

Helen nodded her head. “Simply put... but essentially accurate.” She stated seeing the look on Devra’s face of distaste. She continued quickly. “Do not take that as a statement of insult Devra for it was not meant as such. What you just described is completely accurate and for someone with your lack of knowledge and exposure to those who can Mindvoice it was very well spoken. The scientific name for what we can do is something I myself almost never use. It sounds like some sort of disease if you ask me.” Devra relaxed and smiled as she read the sincerity of Helen’s words. “Much of it depends on the pureness of our Lycavorian blood... our Pralor blood.”

Devra nodded now. “Wayonn has explained some of it to me as we traveled here.” She said. “Many of those Pralors who survived the crash of this ship on Lycavore merged with the largest and strongest packs of your people as he described.”

Helen nodded. “There is much that even I still have yet to learn of those days as I was born well after the first merging began. There are those of us... the strongest Mindvoicers because of the pureness of our blood as you said... we are able to sense things. See images and feel emotions from others who we... who for lack of a better term will be part of our lives in very intimate manners. This is not something we can control or predict, it is more instinctual, the same as how our people discover *Anomes*.”

Devra nodded her head very interested. “I understand.”

“It grows stronger as two individuals who are gifted within Mindvoice to begin with, are drawn to one another and then finally come together as one.” Helen said. “As they become one within Mindvoice it increases their own abilities because they feed off of each other. We... our people believe destiny and fate play a large role in our lives Devra.”

“That is something we strongly believe in as well.” Devra stated. “Perhaps not on as large a scale as Lycavorians, but we believe in it and do not dismiss it.”

Helen nodded. “Androcles and Sadi... they were meant for each other in ways even our own people have yet to understand fully. They both knew this when he was but an infant and even though many years have past since they first discovered this, when enough time had gone by that they both were ready, fate and destiny brought them back together as one. When this happened and they were finally together it allowed them to make sense and discover what the images of Carisia they both were having meant. She was meant to be with them and share in their lives in every way. When Carisia became one with them, this allowed them to then see Ne’Veha, and in turn then Lu’ria. Are you following me?”

Naesta stepped up next to her mother. “I do. As they have come together they have grown more powerful within this Mindvoice and it has allowed them to see each of his wives before they actually join with them.”

“Not more powerful in the true meaning of the word Naesta but you are very right.” Sadi spoke now in reply. “Carisia, Ne’Veha, and then Lu’ria. As each one has come into our lives it has expanded our awareness of ourselves and other things around us. It has made us far more focused and able to see things with better clarity whereas before the images and emotions that we sensed were fleeting and we could not understand them.”

“What does this have to do with us?” Devra asked.

“Since Androcles and I came together we have been able to sense that four others would share our lives... four others that we would love and who would love us in turn.” Sadi said. “He has denied it at times; he thinks he betrays us in some way by having these feelings...” Sadi motioned to the others. “But we... we have embraced it as what fate has planned for us.”

“Sadi is his *Anome*.” Ne’Veha spoke softly. “She will always be the one who has more pull over him simply because she is wolf. A pureblood wolf, unlike Lu’ria and I. But each of us love Androcles just as deeply as Sadi does... we love each other just as deeply as we love him. And all of us know Andro loves us with every fiber of his being.”

“I still do not see what this...” Devra began.

Sadi stepped closer to her. “We have known there would be four others who shared our lives. As we found each other we grew more aware within Mindvoice, able to see more and understand. When Andro finally turned Ne’Veha and made her what she is now... the four of us saw the last who would be part of our lives. We

had seen fleeting images and emotions up until then, but now we can see her clearly within our minds. We can even feel her in a way. She has dark brown hair and beautiful dark green eyes... and..."

Lu'ria moved up next to Sadi now. "She has cornflower blue skin Devra Re Mydala." Lu'ria stated bluntly.

"Caliria!" Arduri gasped in shock. "You are talking of Caliria!"

Devra's eyes flew open and she looked at them. "How... how can that be possible?" She stammered. "You have... you did not know our people even existed until we arrived here with Wayonn."

"We did not know of Lu'ria or Ne'Veha until the time was right." Sadi said quickly. "This is not some sort of joke or false hope Devra Re Mydala. This is fate and destiny telling us what we feel and guiding us to each other. We can sense Caliria within us. She belongs to us... and we to her. We can sense the confusion and the sadness and the humiliation... almost all she has endured recently. She misses you and her sisters... her brother Nirilo... she curses that she was born the way she is... and she cries because her father does not love her as he does Arduri and Naesta."

Devra's hands went to her face in horror as tears erupted from Naesta's eyes and she buried her face in Arduri's neck and sobbed as Arduri let the tears pour from her own eyes. Devra stepped forward quickly and took Sadi's hands, tears rolling down her cheeks. "These... these were her words to me... almost exactly; these were her words to me four months ago. Just before she was taken! Can... can she feel you? Talk to you?"

Sadi shook her head. "No. Not this far away... not without Andro within the connection. He is the one who is the focus point for all of us, the most powerful of us and we all emanate off of him as our center. He has not dropped his Mindvoice shields low enough to feel her because of everything that is happening around us. Not even during sleep... which he has had too little of to begin with."

Helen stepped forward. "And that is something we can't do. At least not yet." She said gently.

Naesta turned her head quickly, her green eyes angry. "Why not!" She demanded. "If our sister means to him what you say... why... why would you not tell him?"

Devra's eyes never left Helen's and realization began to wash over her face. She looked at Wayonn as he stepped closer to Helen. "Because if he does... if he does detect her..."

Helen nodded her head slowly. "Then he will kill everything in his path to get to her and forsake everything else. He will abandon his duties here, just as his father may well do when he discovers that his For'mya has been taken, and he will carve a path of destruction across The Wilds until he saves her. Or avenges her."

"That is what you meant about the storms earlier?" Devra asked.

Helen nodded her head. "When I chose and then recommended the Spartan people on Earth to Canth as the ideal place to send Martin's father and the Ten Thousand, it was because they were the closest to the Lycavorian people that I had ever come across. Strong and proud and steeped in honor and tradition. Among that honor and tradition was the almost sacrosanct way that wives were regarded within Spartan culture. They were regarded as the mothers of future generations and unlike many others on this planet when I arrived, the Spartan females were granted far more in the way of freedoms and voice in the community. Wars had been fought over insults to Spartan wives Devra. Martin knew the call of his blood before he came here, he did not understand it, but he knew the call of his blood. When he finally discovered the Spartan history that was his heritage, he embraced it completely. As all of his sons have wholly embraced it, none more completely than Androcles. It is within their blood now."

Sadi moved closer to them. "He will discover it Devra. He will probably discover it very soon. Sooner than we want him too. The moment he lowers his shields far enough he will sense her. Myself and Carisia, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria, we will not try to hide it from him then as we do now, for we want her among us as much as he will want her among us." She said.

"That is why we must do as much as we are able now." Helen spoke insistently. "Before he discovers that he can feel her and what she is going through."

"What... what must we do?" Devra gasped. "Tell us!"

"Mother they could..." Arduri began to speak but stopped.

Devra shook her head slowly. "No. I understand what they mean Arduri. Naesta. If we are to find your sister alive, if we are to have a chance at this then Androcles Leonidas must be focused and clear minded." She turned back to Helen and Sadi. "What must we do? Anything you need that I can give you is yours."

“You must remain here with Bren.” Helen told her. “Send Naesta or Arduri with Wayonn and Martin’s brother to him on Curila 6. If only to show you that this distrust for our people that is so rampant among the Vanari is not true. With either Naesta or Arduri there with Martin and the others, there is a link between father and son. They are the only two people in the universe who can control the other. Wayonn needs to see Martin anyway and I can not go. I must remain here to assist Andro, Deia and Panos as we continue to discover what is happening and why the Kavalians have acted in this way.”

“I will go!” Naesta spoke immediately.

Nirilo stepped up beside her now and spoke for the first time. He had remained silent throughout the exchange for he alone knew what the Lycavorians were capable of and while discovering that his sister would one day be the wife of Androcles Leonidas shook him down to his boots, he did not doubt that they would find her. “Naesta that...”

“No.” She stated looking at her brother. “I am the only one among you who did not trust them when we arrived here Nirilo.” She said. “I am the only one who has clung to father’s fool ideals for so long. After what I have seen and witnessed... what they have done for us... this is my way of returning the trust they have shown in us.”

“You must keep him from telling his father until after we arrive Helen.” Wayonn spoke. “If he goes off and...”

Helen nodded. “I know grandfather. I will send Andro to find Daniel Simpson. He still believes Martin dead for he will not lower his MV shields far enough for anyone to tell him any different. Behind Andro... he is the only one who has any chance of controlling Martin once he discovers what has happened. They are brothers in every sense of the word except blood. And even blood could not bring them any closer than they already are. Then Andro must begin making his “appointments” to make it appear as if he is establishing control over the Union as the new King.”

Sadi turned to Bren. “Bren... Ne'Veha and I will return to the villa with you, Devra and Arduri. We will make contact with this person I know on Talbor Seven and discover if there is anything he can tell us.”

“Carisia and I will go with my mother to see Queen Aihola.” Lu'ria stated. “She will have access to any reports from Drow outposts that were not destroyed or that Bren could not acquire through normal channels.”

“We must move quickly and efficiently.” Helen spoke. “Androcles is no different than his father and I fear both of them have many plans and operations up their sleeves that none of us know about. We must discover all we can before they begin setting these things in motion for I fear much will burn when they begin. In more ways than one.”

Sadi took Devra’s hands once more. “We will find her Devra... for she means just as much to us now as she does to you and your family.”

Eliani walked out of the room she normally stayed at when she was here at Cranae Island. Thankfully the scents of Malic and Nyla within the room were very faint and did not keep her from sleeping at least somewhat easily. She wore a simple dark blue robe that fell to just below her knees around her body, tied tightly at the waist, so as not to reveal that she wore nothing underneath. She had returned from the hospital late, not wanting to have to deal with other people in her mood. Eliani knew she could be a complete bitch when she was in a foul mood, and even little things could set her off. Being back on Earth and able to feel Andro so close by helped to sooth her to a large degree, and the love and calmness she felt from Thaura always seemed to keep her volatile temper in check. She had immersed herself in work at the hospital and this served to make her not think about what had happened between her and Malic, or what was said. What it did do was increase her awareness of what else was happening and cause her worry for her mother For'mya to increase more and more as she treated men and women who had been injured in the battles on the streets of Sparta as well as those injured in the destruction of the Senate Building. Eliani knew without question that she was passionate about things; it was a trait she had inherited from her mother. She also knew she could snap at people with relative ease if she was upset and confused.

Right now... Eliani Leonidas was so very confused.

How could all this be happening now? She thought all she had ever wanted had come to her when she and Nyla found Malic. He had bitten her, made her his, yet if that was the case how could he love Nyla more

than he loved her. Neither of them had been shielding at the time and Eliani had felt and heard everything they said to each other. What she could not understand was why a part of her rejoiced at this knowledge and yet a part of her felt saddened but not as saddened as she should feel. And then there was her reaction when she found herself perched on the body of Andro's Captain Jomann. Not only had his delicious jasmine coffee scent ignited her body, for the moment that she rested atop his powerful frame and looked into those stunning ocean blue eyes, she had forgotten all about Malic and Nyla. And that is what confused her the most for that should not have happened if she and Malic were *anomes*. Seeing him later in the hospital and remembering what he had made her feel caused her to act defensively around him and treat him badly, shocking not only Andro but herself with her reaction to him. After turning the corner in the hospital she had stopped and took deep breaths not understanding why she had acted as she did. By the time she worked up the nerve to turn around and go back so that she could apologize, he and Andro were already gone.

The Battle on Kranek, what happen between Malic, Nyla and her, thinking that her father was dead, having one of her elven mothers taken by Immortals and learning that her second elven mother was now the prisoner of the Kavalians and they did not know why, it had all taken its toll on her. The six hours of sleep she had gotten last night were the longest stretch she had been able to sleep since leaving Kranek. She was still so very confused, but at least she was not dead tired. Now she needed to get some coffee into her and then talk with Andro. He was the only one outside of Thaura who would understand what she was feeling.

Eliani came around the corner into the main foyer of the house and saw Zarah and Lucia sitting close together at the large counter in the kitchen area. Their shoulders were touching and Lucia's head was leaning against Zarah's arm. Zarah looked up when she saw her and her face took on a large smile. She left her coffee on the counter, kissed Lucia delicately on her lips, the kiss of two lovers Eliani saw with happiness, and she got up to come greet her.

"You look better than you did when you got back last night." Zarah spoke as she hugged her tightly.

Eliani nodded her head as they kissed each other's cheek. "I haven't... I haven't slept very well since we left Kranek." She said. "I worked myself to death last night and my body didn't give me much choice."

"Eli... what is wrong?" Zarah asked softly.

"I need... I need to think some things through." Eliani answered. "I will be fine."

"Talk to Andro Eli." Zarah spoke. "He has always been able to help us put things in perspective."

Eliani nodded. "I intend too." She stated confidently. "I've been so wrapped up inside myself I haven't checked on you Zar." She said lifting her hand to stroke her younger sister's cheek.

Zarah smiled. "I am... I am doing better than most people think." She stated. "Better than I thought I would be doing."

"Zarah?" Eliani prompted her.

"No really." Zarah said. "I won't... I won't lie that I don't feel different Eli. I do. I feel violated and dirty... but when I start to get like that I draw from Lucia. I... I love her Eli. I truly love her."

"Have you...?"

Zarah shook her head. "No. We sleep in each others arms, we cuddle and we talk. I don't know if I am ready for that yet and to be honest, I don't know if Lucia is either. She was raised in a society where it was taboo Eli, and we both have to come to terms with what happened and with the attraction we have for each other. It is almost overwhelming at times, but usually if we hold each other, it is enough to calm down. It will happen I know... but it will happen on our terms when we both are ready. We have only just gotten comfortable when it comes to kissing each other."

Eliani kissed her cheek once more. "Just the fact that you can feel what you feel for her. The desire and the trust... that is..."

Zarah nodded. "I know." She said with a smile.

"Where is Andro?" Eliani asked.

"He was out on the beach with Elynth and Arzoal when we came out here. Whatever they are talking about... it must be very important for I don't think father could breach the shields they have up." Zarah answered.

Talon Guardian business more than likely. Thaura's voice filled their heads. *I have felt similar shields from Sylrith and the other Elders when they talk.*

Good morning sister. Eliani stated happily as she felt Thaura's essence fill her.

I will be ready when you wish to depart Eliani. There is much we need to talk of. Thaura said.

I know. And we will.

Let me get some coffee in her first Thaura. Zarah spoke with a small laugh as she took Eliani's hand and pulled her towards the counter.

Yes... please do. Thaura answered with a snicker. *She is a bear without her morning coffee.*

"Sadi and the others left for Paris Point rather quickly earlier. The *Feravomir* was with them. And that Wayonn." Zarah spoke as Eliani settled at the counter and kissed Lucia softly on the cheek.

"Lucia." She spoke.

"You look better this morning Eliani." She stated.

This caused Eliani to laugh and shake her head. "I was that bad?" She asked.

Zarah turned from the opposite counter and came over sliding the mug in front of her. "What do you think?" She said.

Eliani sipped the coffee gratefully, allowing the strong pleasant smell of her mother Aricia's coffee to sift through her nostrils and the liquid to warm her as she swallowed. Zarah settled back to her seat next to Lucia. "Sorry." Eliani said sheepishly. "You don't like Wayonn?" She asked.

Zarah sipped her coffee as she shook her head. "It's not that." She said. "He is... he was a Pralor Eli. He knew grandfather Resumar's father! All of them... their scents are so pure and powerful. Almost like those in Sparta who were born here."

"I only met them very briefly on the *SCIMITAR*." Eliani said. "They seemed..."

Eliani stopped talking when she caught the distinct scent of jasmine coffee and her head turned very quickly to the side as she heard the main double doors to Andro's villa open. Given what was happening all around them, Eliani Leonidas knew just anyone would not be able to come through those doors without a *Durcunusaan* escort. Her eyes confirmed what her nose was telling her as she watched Jomann enter through the doors holding a data pad and talking with the man Andro had introduced to her as Dutkne and Jomann's scent filled her head even more. She felt her body become flush and the nipples of her breasts hardened as she looked at him. He wore a two toned black and dark blue shirt with black pants and combat boots. His shirt was not overly tight, but it certainly did not hide the incredible definition of his chest, abdomen and arms. His *Nehtes* was strapped to his right thigh, the K12 KM to his left. As her eyes lifted to his face they grew a little wider as she saw him for the first time not covered in dirt and grime and blood. The two by two bandage covered his cheek, but his skin was deeply tanned and his face relaxed. She saw his nose twitch slightly and his head came up and those incredible eyes came to rest on her for a brief moment and then dropped back to the pad. Eliani Leonidas was not shy by any stretch of the imagination, not with parents such as hers. The Hadarian in her said to let it drop at that, but the wolf in her felt snubbed in an odd way as he and Dutkne continued into the main sitting room of the villa. Eliani tightened her grip on her mug and turned back to her sister and Lucia.

"Excuse me for a moment." She said as she got up and headed towards where they had stopped.

Lucia looked at Zarah confused. "I thought... Zarah I thought she was mated to Malic and Nyla." She spoke.

Zarah nodded her head slowly as she watched Eliani walk away. "Something happened on Kranek." She stated. "Something she discovered about Malic and Nyla. That is why she has been so distracted and not like herself."

"What do you mean?" Lucia asked.

"When a male wolf takes an *anome*... a soulmate... his scent will stay within her blood no matter how long they are apart." Zarah said. "And hers will remain in his. Just like my father and mother... just like Andro and Sadi. You will always be able to smell them on each other no matter if they are apart a day... or a year. Malic and Eliani thought they were *anomes* because he bit her."

Lucia's eyes grew a little wider. "That... that is not the case?" She gasped.

Zarah shook her head. "My sense of smell is not as developed as say Andro or Deni or our father... but it is strong enough to know that Malic's scent is no longer in her blood. On her body maybe... but not within her blood. The more time she spends away from him, the more his scent will dissipate until it is gone completely."

"What does that mean exactly?" Lucia asked her.

“It means I know why my sister is acting so strange.” Zarah answered. “She is trying to figure out why that is. And she is trying to figure out why Andro’s new Captain makes her blood churn.”

“What?” Lucia asked.

Zarah nodded. “Just now... when she saw him.” Zarah looked at her. “Her scent spiked more pungent and pure than anything I ever smelled when she was with Malic and Nyla. She is attracted to him something fierce and she is fighting it.”

“...have assigned two *Durcunusaan* that will accompany you with Princess Zarah and Princess Lucia to this Janae’s home.” Jomann spoke. “There will be a Heavy Lifter arriving in an hour to take you and the others by ground while the princesses will no doubt fly on Seyra, Princess Lucia’s bonded one.”

“The others?” Dutkne asked.

“They are Anton and Cihera Simpson and an elven female named Las'elh.” Jomann told him. “I believe she is... I believe she is the lover and wife to both of them. She is a member of Elven Intelligence who is on loan to the *Krypteria*. They have been working together for several months now. It appears their separate missions ended up being the same one and they have been together ever since. Anton’s scent is deeply imbedded within this Las'elh’s blood and Cihera is half Drow, half vampire and this Las'elh’s scent is in her blood as well. I can only assume that they have mated with her and taken her as their wife. It isn’t uncommon... especially among the Drow here on Earth.”

“Will there be...” Dutkne began to ask before the female voice cut him off.

“I thought I told you to get your injuries treated last night Captain.” Eliani spoke causing Dutkne to turn around and look at her.

Dutkne was a pureblood Lycavorian and he was also no fool. He detected the sparks between Andro’s sister and Jomann the moment he looked up when they entered and he saw her. He could detect the faint smell of a strong alpha on her but it would fade within the next day or so by his estimation, and he doubted even at its strongest it couldn’t match the pureness of Jomann’s blood and scent in any way. He had learned quite a bit from the data banks on the *SCIMITAR* when he wasn't sitting with Androcles and simply talking of whatever came to mind. They hadn’t had much time to do this... but it seemed like hours to Dutkne... which only served to confirm what his grandfather had been trying to tell him. No matter how much he tried to run from what his blood was telling him, he was not going to escape it. He felt more comfortable around Androcles than he did anyone but his grandfather and within a few hours they had been conversing as if they had known each other for decades. Androcles Leonidas was a voracious seeker of knowledge he had learned in that time and Dutkne found himself in the role of teacher without even knowing it. They spoke in serious tones and moods, punctuated by small bouts of laughter when either of them discovered how close their lives and experiences had paralleled each others. Those who were always around Androcles accepted him almost from the outset Dutkne realized this morning when a *Durcunusaan* officer had arrived to escort him to the villa. Not out of the need to protect him, but because of the position all of them had seen him assuming even before he did.

Dutkne discovered that those who had been born and raised in this city of Sparta had a much stronger and pungent scents than those who had been born on Apo Prime. That told him the Lycavorian Spartans accepted their nature from birth, following their instincts for the most part without question, where those born on Apo Prime had only just begun to return to their instincts. Dutkne also knew from the way Eliani Leonidas stood and her body language that she had quite a bit more than a passing interest in Jomann. Her willow and peach scent spiked the closer she came to them and her fern green eyes were entirely focused on Jomann and ignoring him completely.

“I... I think I’ll go get some coffee. We’ll talk later Jomann.” Dutkne stammered just as Eliani came up and stopped. He bowed his head to her before moving off rather quickly wanting to avoid the confrontation he felt coming.

“Princess Eliani.” Jomann spoke bowing his head slightly as well and trying very hard to keep his own emotions and scent in check. “Can I help you with something?”

Eliani looked up into his face and couldn’t help but inhale deeply, drawing his jasmine and coffee scent deeply into her lungs and feeling her body call out for his scent as it never had for Malic. “I thought I told you to get your injuries treated last night at the hospital Captain.” Eliani finally was able to get the words out.

“I did Princess.” Jomann spoke.

“Then why are you wearing a bandage?” Eliani asked.

Jomann took a deep breath. “All of the Hadarian Healers present in the hospital were rather busy treating those who actually needed treatment. Men and women that were far more injured than me. I had an elf medic clean and bandage my injury and then I left to conduct my duties.”

Eliani reached up quickly and snatched the corner of the bandage, pulling it off his face swiftly before he could stop her and dropping it to the floor. His eyes flared for a moment in anger but he simply glared at her. It was a glare that bounced off Eliani for he knew she could smell the adrenalin dump into his system from the lie. The wound was still puffy and red, but it had been cleaned and three strips of tape held the edges together. It was going to leave a nasty scar perhaps three inches long and there was something else that Eliani knew right away as well.

“No medic my mother or Aunt Anuk trained treated this wound Captain.” She stated firmly. “You did this yourself didn’t you?”

Jomann took the bandage from where she had tossed it to the floor and lifted it back to his face pressing it over the wound once more and tracing the edges so it sealed. He looked at her then, her fern green eyes causing his stomach to do flips. “It has been treated.” He said. “I did not feel the need to bother anyone with something so insignificant.”

“You lied to me.” Eliani spoke.

“And you smelled it.” Jomann spoke adjusting the data pads in his hand. “Does that make you feel better Princess? I have duties to perform... so if there is nothing else I need to see Androcles.” He began turning away but her next words stopped him.

“You lied to me Captain!” Eliani snapped.

Jomann turned back around and stepped closer to her, his immensely powerful six foot three body truly dwarfing her diminutive frame. Three inches taller than her mother she may have been, but Eliani was still only five foot six and she had to look up into his angry ocean blue eyes. “If you were so concerned about my injury Princess Eliani, you would have treated it last night!” Jomann hissed angrily.

“I didn’t treat you last night because you acted stupidly in following Androcles to the Kavalian Embassy!” Eliani snapped. “Your job is to protect him! Not go along with him when he does something insane like that!”

“Your brother’s protection is my responsibility now! Do not tell me how to do my job for I don’t tell you how to do yours!” Jomann snapped.

“If you were doing your job my mother would not be a prisoner of the Kavalians Captain Jomann!” Eliani snarled. “She would...”

[Eliani Leonidas!] Thaura’s voice bellowed in her head loudly. *[Sister! That is wrong my sister!]*

Eliani’s mouth snapped shut as she realized what she was doing and she looked at Jomann. She could see the hurt that her words caused even though it wasn’t evident in his expression and she could smell the anger in him as well.

Jomann glared at her as he stepped closer, her peach and willow scent threatening to overwhelm him. “Do not take whatever anger you have building inside you towards someone else or something that happened to you... do not take it out on me Princess! I answer to your brother now! Not you! I would die to protect him! Just as I would have died to protect Queen For'mya and Prime Minister Deia! Seventeen of my men died in that bombing Princess Eliani! Seventeen! They died doing their jobs! Unless you have something constructive to say to me, and not some snide comment or derogatory statement, I will take my leave of you and get back to my duties!” Jomann began to walk away but stopped and turned back to her again. “My duty is to protect your brother as his Captain. Part of that duty *is* acting just as insanely as he does *because* it protects him in the end. And... and because I feel the same thing beating in my chest as he does his. I do not know why that is... but Deia told me I was put there with her for a reason. That reason I have found... is your brother. What you think of me it doesn’t matter to me. I have found my calling and that is to be beside your brother in whatever he decides to do. You can accept that... or you can get the hell out of my way!”

Eliani Leonidas stood there dumbfounded as Jomann turned and headed out the double doors. She didn’t know what to say or do and she blinked several times before turning back and moving to the counter where Zarah and Lucia sat just as astonished as she was.

“Eli?” Zarah asked softly. “What... what was that all about?”

Eliani looked up and met her sister’s eyes. “I... I don’t... I don’t know Zar.” She gasped as tears began to roll down her cheeks.

Zarah stood up without question and moved to her sister where she wrapped her arms around her and pulled her tight.

CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

KAVALIAN *GREATSOUL*-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PUSINTIN’S COMMAND SHIP *PRIDE OF PUMAS*

“...syncing the transmission Marshall Pusintin.” The COM officer said. “It should be coming up on your monitor now.”

Pusintin held For'mya by her hair tightly, her hands grasping at his wrists while she was up on her tip toes to try and alleviate the pain that throbbed in her head. Her eyes were tightly shut as she tried to channel the savage pain into anger but it was a losing battle. The left side of her face and jaw where she had struck the chair was beginning to swell and no doubt would be badly bruised if she could not shift to heal the injury. His slap to her face had been like a punch and it had succeeded in causing her wolf fangs to cut the inside of her cheek. Blood leaked from between her lips and her eyes were tear filled. For'mya heard Pusintin laughed heartily and her eyes fluttered open to stare at his cruel face.

“Now that is quite the picture!” Pusintin snarled happily as he looked at the monitor in front of them. “That almost makes me wish I was there to help him.” He yanked her face closer and looked at her. “You should watch this For'mya. You might get turned on.”

Another burst of anger surged through her and she spit blood mixed with spittle into his face with a hiss and snarl. “You fucking pig!” She growled at him.

Pusintin reached up quickly with his hand and wiped the spittle away and then slapped her viciously. She could not move her head back with the blow because he held her in the iron grip and the slap sent twinges of intense pain shooting through her neck and face bringing more tears to her eyes. “You don’t listen very well do you bitch!” He snarled at her. “Look at the monitor For'mya! I want you to see your elf Queen lover about to get her Immortal cherry popped!”

“NO!” For'mya snapped trying to yank her head away from his grip. “You fucking *ranne saric ronnus!*”

Pusintin laughed at her then. “Such language! Look at the monitor For'mya or I will pin your eyelids open with needles!” Pusintin growled at her. “Look at the monitor *upae!*” His other hand grabbed her jaw and more pain cascaded through her body as he viciously turned her head toward the monitor. She closed her eyes tightly. “Open your eyes or so help me I will carve your son into tiny pieces right in front of you wench! And I will make sure you hear every fucking wail he makes! Open your fucking eyes!”

For'mya’s eyes sprang open then and she looked at the monitor. What she saw made her eyes go wide in horror and shame. “Dysea!” She whimpered loudly upon seeing her.

There was no mistaking the platinum blond hair of her fellow Queen and elf lover. There was no mistaking the exquisite and exotic tattoos that adored her powerful body. Tattoos that only added to the passion and desire when they shared each other for For'mya loved to trace those tattoos with her tongue. For'mya could almost smell the sweet wildflower scent, the curve of her wonderfully tight ass and the firmness of her breasts. The memories of their last morning together were so vivid and special. They had ended up feasting on each other while Anja and Aricia devoured Isabella next to them. They knew the right spots to touch and lick and nibble and within moments both of them were screaming out their pleasure. Pleasure they had not stopped giving to each other for two more hours. For'mya could not breathe right now, she could not think straight as she saw her beautiful dear friend, one of only four who were so close to her, her elven lover and fellow elven Queen bent over some strange table completely naked. She was struggling against the bonds that held her, struggling terribly for sweat adorned her body from the effort. She could see four Immortals in the transmission, all of them with sadistic looks of demented torture on their faces, and then the largest of them standing behind

her using his large hands to stroke her skin and areas of her supple body that only Martin or they had ever touched.

“You fucking bastard!” For'mya screamed when she saw this. “You sick fucking bastard! I will... I will kill you!” She felt the anger surge forth once more, but even as she struggled against Pusintin’s grip on her she knew she was too weak to fight him.

Pusintin cluck clucked and shook his head. “Such language from a refined elven Queen!” He hissed mockingly. “She looks pretty good don’t you think! Want to put your thumb on that contract now?” He asked.

“May you... may you rot for all eternity in the fires of *Dori*!” For'mya screamed as her face became a mask of barbaric hate and anger.

“Wrong answer For'mya!” Pusintin snarled. He reached over and stabbed the control panel. “Phy'iad... you may proceed! And take your time! I’ll leave the channel open so we can enjoy the show!”

“NO!” For'mya screamed even as he took his hand away and grabbed her jaw once more holding her head in place in front of the monitor.

“I wonder how loud she will scream!” Pusintin asked as the Immortal on the screen took a position behind Dysea and unbuckled his pants. For'mya could see Dysea’s head whipping back and forth and then her voice filled the COM.

“STOP! DON’T! NO! AARRGGHHH!!!! NAUTA MELME!!”

For'mya tried to close her eyes but his fingers came up and roughly pried her eyelids open. “Open your eyes For'mya you whore! I want you to watch the pain and humiliation that you are putting her through! Here it comes!!”

For'mya’s eyes were tear stained and red but she could not help but watch as the huge Immortal stepped behind Dysea, paced his hands on her smooth hips and rammed himself forward. She watched Dysea’s body jerked brutally and her head came up as her scream of shame ripped For'mya’s heart and will to shreds.

“NNN0000000!!!!”

“Shit!” Pusintin shouted. “I think he just sank his whole cock into her in one stroke! How about that!”

“You... will die!” For'mya sobbed. “You will die such a horrible death!”

“I don’t think so bitch!” Pusintin barked. “Let’s watch for a bit shall we!”

BELID

“NNN0000000!!!!”

Dysea’s emerald green eyes were wide in pain and utter shock as Phy'iad buried almost his entire cock into her in one plunge. Tears filled her eyes as the pain of the sudden intrusion caused her fingers to open and drop the key that Kr'nak had given to her to open her restraints. She heard him grunt uncontrollably as he leaned over her muscular back and ground his thick cock into her causing stars to explode behind her eyes as the pain grew.

“Fuck... fuck Elf Queen!” Phy'iad grunted in her left ear. “I’ve... I’ve never had... had anything so tight! Scream for me elf bitch! Scream for me!”

Dysea shook her head back and forth, her hair whipping wildly from side to side as she tried to fight the pain and humiliation of this rape. “**NO! Ahhh! Bastard!**” She screamed. “**It... it hurts!!**”

Phy'iad laughed in her ear. “Get used to it elf Queen!” She growled. “You are going to be mine forever!” He grabbed her hips painfully and began to stroke into her without regard.

Dysea Leonidas was recognized as a consummate politician and through the years under Deia’s expert tutelage she had learned all there was to learn of the many species within the Lycavorian Union and the differences between them. She had even learned to speak a total of eight different languages fluently so that she could communicate better with those she was supposed to rule. She was considered the most politically active of Martin Leonidas’s Queens especially when it came to education. Dysea could not stand a poorly educated individual who desired to learn and could not due to lack of funding or materials or teachers. Within two years of becoming not only the First Elven Queen and a Queen of the Union she had begun to reform the educational system within the Union with her mother Normya and Isabella at her side. They had traveled to dozens of planets inside the Union and outside their borders in The Wilds, and her mother continued to still do this as

mother to the Queen. Dysea's mother was well known and she had powerful friends throughout the Union not because of who her daughter was, but because she was just as beautiful and equally active as her daughter. They had procured funding and materials and teachers for those people who wished to learn but could not. They had helped half a dozen fledging planetary governments to set up standards of education for all their people and then donated their time and credits to the efforts as they got their systems up and running. Dysea was revered on the elven homeworld of Elear as the Queen who had willingly given up half her power so that For'mya could be named co-Queen because of the royal elven blood that ran in her veins. For the first time in millennia an elf of royal blood once more sat on the throne of Elear and it was due to Dysea's actions.

Dysea and her mother were in the forefront of elven females on Elear not shying from any attraction or course that their lives took them down. It was commonplace to see Dysea out walking the streets with Bella most of all, but with any of her fellow Queens really, and be unashamed in any way to stop and share a blistering kiss of love with them for all to see. Her physical beauty was also the topic of stories and countless conversations in the cafés on Elear. Not only was she just as exquisitely beautiful as any elven female, her mother matching her in every way and everyone seeing where she inherited that beauty from, the muscular definition of her lithe body was now famous. Dysea Leonidas made it a point to keep herself in peak physical condition. She trained every day rain or shine, she ran in her wolf form three times a week for fifty miles at a time, more often than not with Martin at her side. It was common to see her sparring with Bella in the courtyard of the palace on Elear or going through the rigid training regiment with Iriral that all Bonded Pairs went through.

Dysea Leonidas was also known for something else throughout the Lycavorian Union. It was not her physical beauty, nor her political savvy; it was because she was widely considered the most indomitable of Martin Leonidas's Queens. She was afraid of nothing and intimidated by no one. Not long after For'mya had become the official concubine to Martin and the rest of them, Dysea had caught wind of a snide comment made by a junior parliament member in regards to For'mya's status among them. Against the advice of nearly all of her advisors except her mother, Deia and *Melyanna*, who went through the same things with the Hadarian Arch Ministry almost monthly, Dysea had marched into the Elven Parliament that day and let them have it with both barrels. When she was done dressing down parliamentary members who were three and four times her age and making them feel no bigger than worms, the junior member found himself assigned to the most remote outpost the Union had, and from that day forward no one had ever questioned the strength of her will and determination.

Dysea drew on that indomitable spirit and strength of will now.

She clenched her fists and filled her mind with thoughts of her beloved *Nauta Melme*. The man who could make her wolf blood sing with just a simple caress. A man who had never loved her or any of them any less even though Aricia was his *anome*. A man who would often times when they were on Elear alone together or with any of their lovers, simply wrap her within the embrace of his powerful arms and overwhelming aura and they would simply talk. Of their children. The past. The future. Not only could her *Nauta Melme* stimulate her body to the point of blissful abandon and beyond, he could arouse her mind to new heights. As she shut her eyes tightly, she quickly slammed supremely powerful Mindvoice shields around herself to keep her *Nauta Melme* from discovering what she was enduring. Even as she did this she could feel equally as powerful shields reinforcing her own and she knew it was Cirith. Shields that mingled and blended with hers so effortlessly, so smoothly. It was something she would not even come to realize until later, but Dysea would be the first to notice that this should not have happened for one they had only just met. Cirith should not have been able to so completely blend her shields with Dysea's own, yet she did.

[*Dysea!*] Cirith cried out in anguish. [*I will kill him! I will slit his foul throat right now!*] She snarled as she began to move and came close to unwrapping the shadows from around her body.

Dysea's high pitched scream of terror pierced her soul to the core and even wrapped in the shadows as she was Cirith began to sob openly. She cried for what was happening to Dysea and she cried for what she had found. Her father had been wrong. She had been wrong. All these years they had been wrong. Cirith was not meant for the first King Leonidas and his wife Gorgo, destiny was not that accommodating. No... it all came home in this moment of brutal violence. Cirith Esavorna was meant for Martin Leonidas and his Queens.

[*No!*] Dysea screamed out. [*How... how long?*]

[*Dysea... he is... he is raping you!*] Cirith cried.

[He... he may use my body... but he will never have my mind! Never my... never my mind or will!]
Dysea echoed loudly. [Tell... tell them to hurry Cirith! Tell them to hurry!]

“Uuughhhhhhh!!” Dysea screamed out loudly as Phy'iad speeded up his crushing strokes into her supple body.

KAVALIAN GREATSOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PUSINTIN'S COMMAND SHIP PRIDE OF PUMAS

“*Uuughhhhhhh!!*” Dysea's loud scream of shame and anguish coming from the large monitor shattered any further resistance that For'mya may have had.

“Damn...” Pusintin gasped. “He's pounding the shit out of her! Look at that For'mya! I think she's beginning to like it! You think he already blew inside her? This is great stuff!”

“Stop!” For'mya gasped in defeat.

Pusintin turned his head and looked at her. Her face was a mask of horror and pain, tears streaking her cheeks and mixing with the blood that leaked from between her lips. “What did you say?”

“Stop this.” For'mya rasped out.

“What was that?” Pusintin grunted.

“Stop this I beg you!” For'mya screamed now. “I... I will... I will do what you wish! Just stop this and leave her be!”

Pusintin reached out and touched the panel. “Phy'iad! Step back!” He barked.

For'mya saw the Immortal's head come up slightly and then he obediently withdrew his cock from Dysea and turned to face a hidden video drone somewhere in the room he was in. His cock dripped with juices and he had a feral look on his face, his vampiric fangs showing clearly beneath his upper lip.

Pusintin turned back to For'mya and loosened his grip on her hair so that she could drop to the deck flat footed. “Don't play games with me elf bitch!” He growled. “I'll make sure Phy'iad fucks her in every hole while you watch! And then you'll watch as his men have their way with her!”

“Stop this!! I... I told you!” For'mya screamed. “I told you... I would do as you say, damn you to hell!” She stammered. “You... you must let her go! You must let... you must let my son go!”

“No deal!” Pusintin snapped.

“I will do as you want *forn ronnus!*” She screamed hatefully. “I will... I will do these things! Let Dysea go! If you have... if you have any shred of decency in you... you will not shame her in this way! Let Bryon go! He is... he is all I have left! You have no need of them! You have... you have taken everything from me that I have ever loved!”

“I'm no fool For'mya.” Pusintin snapped.

“What do you want damn you!” She screamed.

Pusintin held up the data pad to her face. “Read it!” He growled.

“I... I already read it!” She barked.

“Not all of it!” Pusintin said. “Now read it! The last paragraph! And then put your thumb there to make it official! Do it!”

For'mya looked down at the pad once more and read it, the dread and shame filling her even as all hope disappeared as the words flashed in front of her eyes. She glanced up at him with horror in her dark brown eyes and saw only the sneer of contempt and hate staring back at her.

“You... you putrid excuse for a man!” For'mya snarled at him with vicious hate. “Your... your father would... he would disembowel you where you stand for...”

Pusintin yanked on her hair savagely causing her to yelp once more in pain. “I don't care what you think of me you stupid wench! You are a whore to me! Nothing more! And do not attempt to tell me what my father would do! You didn't know my father! My brother didn't know our father elf bitch!” He put his face inches from hers, his eyes filled with savage anger. “Now what will it be *upae!* I grow tired of these games!”

For'mya glared at him with equal savageness. “How... how do I know you will keep... keep your word?”

“I’m not giving you my word you dumb bitch!” Pusintin snapped. “You will do it... or you will watch the only two things left in your pathetic life that you care about die slow and painful deaths! And it will be your fault! All of it! Now what is it going to be? No more games For'mya!”

For'mya Leonidas looked at the monitor as more tears streamed from her eyes now. It was all gone now. Martin Leonidas. Her beloved fellow Queens and their children with him. She had nothing left of herself, nothing left except the chance to save all that remained of their family. She shuddered in shame and disgust even as she spoke the word. To save Dysea... to save her son... her words to Resumar only a few months before filled her head.

“There is nothing I would not do to safeguard those I love Resumar. Just as your father and any of your mothers would do. I would endure a life of solitude and pain to insure that those I love were safe. We all would and that is where our power as a family lays my son. We have our disagreements and arguments, no family is without them, but in the end... what has your father instilled in all of you... in all of us?”

“Blood before all else.” Resumar stated softly.

For'mya nodded slowly. “Blood before all else. No matter the pain that may be caused, no matter the reasons behind it, it is never intentional and must always be forgiven.”

There would be no forgiveness for what she was about to do. No forgiveness and nothing would remain but the pain, shame and misery.

“Yes.” She whispered.

“Say it louder wench!” Pusintin shouted in her face.

“Yes! Yes damn you to hell! Yes!” For'mya bellowed even as the tears erupted from her eyes.

Pusintin held up the pad. “Sign it!” He snarled.

No... there would be no forgiveness For'mya knew as she pressed her thumb to the pad and effectively altered her remaining years forever. There would be no forgiveness... but perhaps there would be revenge for all that this foul man had taken from her. Vengeance for what he had done and what he was forcing her to do to save those that remained of her once beautiful family.

Pusintin pulled the pad back and shoved her to the floor where she curled into a ball and let the tears flow even more freely. He reached out and touched the control panel with a sneer of contempt.

“Phy'iad?” He barked.

“Yes.” The voice filled the COM.

“I have what I want.” Pusintin spoke. “Do as we agreed and then release her to Laustinos when he arrives.”

“My credits?” Phy'iad demanded.

“Already transferred.” Pusintin told him. “Spend them well Immortal scum. And pray I never see you again.”

Pusintin touched the panel once more and it went dark before Phy'iad could reply. He looked at For'mya on the floor as she gazed up at him. “You bastard! Laustinos! You... you gave her to that traitorous dog! You were to set her free!”

“And she will be free!” Pusintin growled. “She’ll be alive and she’ll be Laustinos’s mate! With my brother dead... once he knocks her up she’ll be bound to him forever just as our old laws say it should be. At least until she kills him.” Pusintin laughed. “If you think I’m stupid enough to allow her to go free and begin to plot against me you are sorely mistaken.”

“And my... and my son?” For'mya barked.

“I’ll hang on to him until you complete your end of our bargain!” Pusintin spoke. “Don’t worry... he won’t be harmed. It’s not his fault his parents are too fucking weak to die with a little honor.”

“Honor! What do you know of honor?” For'mya screamed. “You strike against children and innocents! And you call yourself a man?”

Pusintin sneered at her. “We’ll see how much a man I am when I’m sitting on the throne of the Union!” He spat.

“How... how do you... how do you live with yourself? After all... all the innocent men, women and children you have butchered?” For'mya sobbed.

Pusintin laughed. "Quite well actually." He stated. "You have an hour before I return. I'll have everything else you need to sign and then we'll complete our agreement. Clean yourself up while you're at it. You're bleeding all over my deck! One hour For'mya."

For'mya Leonidas watched as he turned from her and exited out the door of the quarters without so much as looking back at her. That is when For'mya Leonidas, the Second Elven Queen of the Lycavorian Union and Elear broke down completely. Her wails of anguish could be heard by Pusintin as he walked smugly down the corridor. He had half of what he wanted and needed and when he returned she would give him the other half.

Pusintin grinned. It might even be fun.

BELID

Phy'iad turned back as the transmission ended and he looked hungrily at Dysea's naked and sweaty body and ass. She was by far the finest elf female he had ever fucked and he grinned savagely as he stepped closer. Perhaps he would keep her and just kill this Laustinos fool when he arrived. The image of Dysea and Osiri on their knees begging for his Immortal cock made him even harder. Dysea's body heaved with effort, her ass and back covered in sweat, most of it his from having to force himself into her depths. He stepped closer to her and placed his hands on her hips once more.

"Now that my business dealings are done... it's time to enjoy myself Elf Queen!" He spat loudly. "I'm am going to enjoy breaking you Dysea. I think I will just kill this Laustinos when he arrives! I will enjoy listening to you beg for my cock everyday for the rest of your life far more than any credits I could spend! How often do you have a Queen begging you to fuck her everyday?"

Dysea's head came up now, her face a visage of rage even as her lips trembled in fear and doubt. "I... I will kill you!" She screamed.

Phy'iad laughed heartily as he positioned himself to slam into her once more. "You will beg for my Immortal cock is what you will do Elf Queen!" This brought laughter from the other six Immortals in the room as they looked at each other and enjoyed the show their commander was giving them. "You are so tight Dysea... and I was close elf bitch! This time... this time Pusintin isn't barking in my ears for me to stop! This time I'm going to dump my seed into you and watch you beg for more!"

Cirith Esavorna had waited long enough watching as this putrid Immortal slob defiled her beautiful Dysea. She could no longer stand by and watch. She took a step forward, beginning to will away the shadows when someone beat her to the punch.

"Phy'iad!" Kr'nak bellowed stepping forward almost too fast for an Immortal and stopped in front of Dysea's head.

Phy'iad looked at his most senior commander as he readied himself to shove his cock into Dysea once more. "Kr'nak my friend!" He laughed. "I will share her with you for your loyalty to me! As soon as I have broken her you can have her!"

"Before you break her Commander... I wish to look into her eyes and watch as her will dwindles away!" Kr'nak barked. "If you will allow me!"

Phy'iad laughed. "So be it!"

Kr'nak dropped to one knee in front of Dysea, her wide emerald eyes staring at him in shock and the beginnings of betrayal. She watched him as he bent over and quickly retrieved something from the floor and pressed it into her palm. "Strike well Dysea Leonidas." He softly whispered to her. "Strike well."

Dysea looked down into her hand and saw the restraint key and a powerful surge of hate and anger and glee rushed through her. Never again would Dysea Leonidas doubt the honor or fortitude of the Akruxian people. Cha'talla had made her see that nothing is out of reach with what he had built on Kranek. Cha'talla taught her that even the most hated of enemies could become the very closest of friends and family. Cha'talla had taught her all this, made her see that it was all possible, and Kr'nak's actions had just reaffirmed all that Dysea had come to believe and honor these last months. She didn't hesitate in her actions and pressed the blunt end of the key to the small indent in the restraints. She heard the soft beep and looked up instantly and saw Kr'nak smile.

“*CIRITH! NOW!*” Kr'nak screamed as he rose to his feet, pivoted toward the door while bringing up his SA80, and he pulled back on the trigger with unrestrained glee.

Phy'iad looked up with wide eyes from where he had been staring at Dysea's ass and saw a flash of shadow movement directly to his front. His eyes took in his most trusted commander as he sent a blistering barrage of concentrated fire at the three guards nearest the door, watching as their unsuspecting bodies began to do a macabre dance of death as they absorbed the full force of an entire two hundred round magazine of heavy caliber kinetic projectiles. As his head twisted around to follow the flashes of shadows his eyes grew even wider when the tall vampire female unwrapped the shadows from around her taut body, the distinct flashes of steel easy enough to discern as she set upon his other three men. Phy'iad had always prided himself on his ability to prepare and never be caught off guard. He was always one step ahead of those who either wanted him dead or whom he wanted dead. He had never been defeated in single combat by anyone he had faced, Lycavorian, Kavalian or even fellow Immortals, though he would never admit that he had never fought fair. He had grown to incorrectly consider himself totally indestructible. As he watched with wide eyes, the first lethal downward slash of those dual blades that purebloods so favored, Phy'iad saw the throats of two of his men begin to fountain blood high into the air in arcs so lofty they reached a full meter across the floor. As weapons clattered to the ground and dull like sounds of explosions and alarms began to sound in his base Phy'iad turned back to push himself away from the restrained elf Queen.

What he found however, that was something completely different.

What he found was the image he would take to the grave, for it would be the last thing he saw in this lifetime and it was fitting in an ironic sort of way for all he had done. What he found was not a restrained Dysea, but a fearsome she-elf wolf with evil black ringed emerald eyes glaring at him with a crazed lunacy he had never witnessed before.

The pain was almost non-existent his brain told him as he turned and saw those black ringed emerald eyes of fire staring back at him. He saw a wild mane of platinum blond hair that curved elegantly around four inch high elven ears and flawless facial features. He saw soft lips now curled back to reveal the most vicious set of wolf fangs he had ever seen on a female. Long, wolf thick, flesh piercing fangs with smaller but no less sharp and lethal fangs on the inside of those larger ones. His wide eyes saw that mask of undeniable savagery and for the first time in his thousands of years of life Phy'iad of the Immortals felt fear. It would be all he felt except pain before death took him.

“I told you... I told you I would kill you!” Dysea's voice sounded strange even to her as she spoke those words with evil glee and twisted her right hand with all of her combined elf and wolf strength.

Phy'iad of the Immortals felt the sharp tug on his body and his wide eyes looked down as his large cock separated his from body and dropped to the metal floor covered in blood. He watched as blood spurted out of the newly created opening in his body and it was then that the horrific pain reached his brain and he opened his mouth to scream. The sound never came out as Dysea lifted the second of the blades Cha'talla had crafted just for her. They were perfectly balanced and weighted just for her, and over the last few weeks Dysea had quickly discarded the dual Shakur fighting knives she had carried for years in favor of these exquisitely forged blades. She lifted the second of these blades and drove it through the bottom of Phy'iad's jaw and deeply into his twisted brain.

“*No man touches me but Martin Leonidas!*” Dysea screamed into the dying Phy'iad's face, spraying spittle across his cheeks and open eyes. “*No man!*”

The first plunge of the blade into his chest severed his Immortal heart in two cleanly, but Dysea did not stop there as she leaped upon him in the grips of a berserker rage, using all of her strength to plunge that blade into his chest and abdomen over and over again even as his body fell over backwards to the floor beneath him and she rode him down.

Cirith turned towards the sound even as she twisted the jaw of the third Immortal brutally to the right and drove her blade into the back of his head behind his ear. As she twisted the shaft of her knife cruelly his body went limp instantly, the expert knife thrust completely severing his brain stem and then the blade mangling the entire rear portion of his brain. Cirith stepped back as he joined his comrades on the floor of the room, his blood mingling with theirs as it spread rapidly across the ground from the mortal wounds that no amount of blood they could ever ingest would heal. Her cobalt blue eyes fell on Dysea and she watched for a

few seconds as Dysea plunged her blade into Phy'iad's body over and over, blood gushing from his chest in half a dozen locations and showering her naked flesh.

"Dysea!" She sobbed as she began to move for her.

Kr'nak grabbed her arm however and held her back. "No Cirith Esavorna." He spoke firmly. "Let her... let her be!"

"Kr'nak she..."

"She is exercising the demons inside her Cirith... for what he *was* able to do!" Kr'nak spoke softly, his own face splashed with blood from the wounds of the men he had killed. "*Orthagyrrh* Cirith. *Natha k'olahin d'ilta quortek lu'ilta shar.*" (Redemption. A cleansing of her soul and mind.)

Cirith tore her eyes from Dysea and looked at him. "*Orn il tlu...?*" (Will she be...?)

Kr'nak nodded. "In time." He stated as another explosion sounded, this one shaking the interior of the base. "Come. We must secure the door to this room before they make their way here and discover Phy'iad is dead!"

Whatever thoughts were running through the minds of Phy'iad's men, not one of them was concerned with finding out why their commander was not storming out of the main control room and fighting with them.

They were far more concerned with staying alive in the face of a concentrated attack by individuals who not only knew war... but were masters at it. The twenty-seven Immortals that were occupying the area near the reinforced steel doors at the main entrance to their base and laughing as they watched their commander fuck the elf queen were confused. Confused by the sudden loss of the feed from the main communications room and the sounds of explosions and weapons fire. They turned from the monitors to watch as the massive doors opened without a command from them. The main entrance to the Immortal base opened into a wide expanse of flat prairie like grounds. There were an even dozen defensive positions from which they could get behind and hold off an attacking force three or four times their number for hours.

Of course, those positions had to be manned in order for them to actually work.

With over half their number of three thousand six hundred Immortals actively loading equipment and supplies aboard the many smaller shuttles within the three hanger bays of the base and shuttling that equipment to their ships in orbit, none of the exterior defensive positions were occupied. As the main doors swung to the sides and completely opened the twenty-seven Immortals saw two things.

The first thing they saw caused whatever smiles they had on their faces to vanish in an instant. They saw a single Lycavorian Spartan in full armor standing proudly beside a strange looking but easily identifiable Immortal because of the bone spurs, but this one had a head covered with dark hair. An Immortal that had deeply tanned skin and not the normal grayish pallor of death color. A Immortal that wore similar body armor as the Spartan but no helmet. That Immortal held only two swords and the Spartan a single *Nehtes*. Behind them stood two massive dragons, one with scales that were deep blue in color and the other with greenish scales and yellow wings. Behind those first four figures the Immortals saw the second thing and this made their blood go cold in fear. What could only be described as two hundred pairs of eyes that burned with determination and bearing no mercy or pity in them in the least. A combination of Lycavorian Spartans and these odd looking Immortals. All of them staring at Phy'iad's men as if they were the main course of a fine meal.

"Knock... knock motherfuckers!" Denali Leonidas called out loudly, echoing the words of a game his mothers Anja and Aricia would play with them as children.

Denali Leonidas had changed over these last days. The second of Martin and Aricia's pureblooded Lycavorian sons had always been the one to make the others express amusement with some comment or joke. His bravery and skill were without question, but he was also the most playful of them. The easiest going and the one who could make everyone laugh with their brother Arrarn. That still remained inside him, but Denali had grown through the horrors of the last few days. He had grown and it was because Androcles had given him command without question. He realized this not only because he was his brother, but because Androcles knew that Denali Leonidas was capable of so much more. As Cha'talla and the Immortals had discovered so much about themselves in the last days, so had Denali. He had discovered what his father had already known, what Andro had already known. Denali was a natural leader. One of those leaders that was born and not made. Denali would never take anything for granted ever again. He would not waste one moment of life and he intended to

live and to lead just as his father did. With all that he was. He had shown this to Lisisa his beautiful cousin, now his precious mate and wife just the night before. He had taken her with more passion and desire and instinctual nature than he ever had before and it had her howling out his name in heavenly abandon. Now he would rescue his first elven mother and then they would return and he would stand beside his brother and father as they exacted Spartan justice on those who had done these evil things to their family.

The Immortals sensed that Denali's words must have been a cue of some sort, for both the Spartan and the strange looking Immortal stepped to the side and the eyes of the Immortals went wide in horror as all of them realized what was coming next. Aradace and Vollenth each inhaled deeply and unleashed their own version of Spartan and true Akruvian justice. A single stream of superheated breath and one of pure flame erupted from their maws with impeccable control and merciless power. Nearly three thousand degree heat combined with fifteen hundred degree flames caught the twenty-seven Immortals in the heart of the conflagration and twenty-seven Immortals died within six seconds. Skin peeled from bone, flesh melted from the pure incinerating heat, internal organs burst and this was followed and dwarfed by the roar of two hundred men and women as they lifted their weapons and roared out their combined anger and battle cry. Denali Leonidas and Cha'talla were the first to sprint forward without pause, Aradace and Vollenth following without a moment's hesitation and then the rest surged forward after them.

“NO MERCY!” Lisisa screamed as she ran an Immortal through his thick chest with her *Nehtes*, her voice reverberating among the valley walls and rising above the sounds of steel and weapons fire. That a shout could come out of such a diminutive figure was amazing in and of itself, but it was unmistakable and utterly clear.

“WE STAND HERE!” Narice's voice echoed equally as loud, blood already staining her helmet and uniform as she twirled around next to Lisisa, her dual blades already saturated with Immortal blood.

It would have been almost comical to look at and witness had the blood and body parts not been flying. Jeth and Deneth plunged directly into the mass of bodies right behind their Bonded Sisters, their psychic shields flaring brightly as projectile rounds bounced harmlessly in all directions. Jeth's massive body crushing several Immortals beneath his nearly eight tons of muscle and power. Jeth looked nothing like his mother Isheeni, growing to be almost identical to his father in every way. What he had inherited from his beloved mother were the wickedly curved and savagely sharp talons so common to Firespitter dragons. It was these talons that he used with utter devastation. And while Deneth lacked Jeth's years of training, he did not lack for bravery or skill. He simply used his talons to cripple and his wings as armored battering rams that crushed bone instantly. He also had no problem with snatching Immortals up within his powerful jaws and crushing their bodies before flinging them through the air. One he even used to batter two of his comrades into pulp using his TK power before flinging the lifeless body nearly a hundred meters away into the trees.

Four hundred pounds of high explosives had rendered the rear southern entrance to the Immortal base nothing but a gaping hole. The combined team of Lycavorian and Akruvian engineers had worked feverishly to set the explosives and then they had intentionally triggered the proximity alarms to warn the Immortals inside the base that there was someone outside their base that wanted in. Just as the doors began to open, the Lycavorian Chief Engineer triggered the explosives with a glint of evil madness in his eyes as he turned and looked at his six fellow Spartans and four Immortal warriors who had been part of his team. Denali and Cha'talla had insured that all the units were integrated so that they could build cohesion and further the bond that they had already begun to form. Six Lycavorians and four Immortals had carried four hundred pounds of explosives between them with nary a problem and they now watched with pride as their work paid off.

The southern entrance was closest to the three hangers in the base and as the alarms began to sound, nearly a thousand Immortals under Phy'iad's command had massed near the doors. The ensuing explosion killed nearly a hundred outright, crushing or shredding their bodies and injuring just as many. The remaining seven hundred plus Immortals, assuming they were under attack by Lycavorian forces, rushed from the base into the newly created cloud of dust and dirt to do battle. And that is when Lisisa and Narice brought them screaming out of the sky with the rising sun at their back. Jeth and Deneth were the only ones to get blasts of their breath and flame off before the two very petite but highly skilled women plowed into the first ranks of the Immortals without pause and twenty additional High Coven dragons followed suit with piercing trumpets of anger and

pride less than ten seconds later. They had their baptism under fire on Kranek, led by a pureblood vampire Princess they all knew and respected and a half breed Union Princess who had helped to forge them into what they were now and fought with ferocity unmatched. As they traveled here they talked among each other, plotting and planning, merging what they had learned about each other and their success and mistakes on Kranek with what Androcles Leonidas and his siblings had taught them. They were no longer untested or unsure of themselves and as they roared out of the sky and fell upon the Immortals without hesitation behind the two petite females who led them, they unleashed that knowledge and skill now.

Talons ripped open flesh, wings snapped forward and crushed bones, psychic shields flared but did not fail and the slaughter was on from there. This fight was not about survival anymore. This fight was about the criminal Immortals and their actions. These male and female vampires had gone to Earth unfocused and without purpose. Yes... they had bonded with their dragons, but had no idea what they could accomplish together. Androcles and his siblings had taught them that. They taught them they could be so much more than what the Empress had planned for them to be. This battle was about the Immortals attempting to take the elven mother of the man they all revered now. This battle was about choice and how they had all chosen to live the lives that first Androcles and then his brothers and sisters showed them they could have. This battle was about retribution for what the Immortals had a hand in perpetrating. Now they would learn the folly of their actions and it would forever seal the paths of almost eighty souls moving into the future.

Danarla stood on the ridge to the west of the small valley watching impatiently as the battle waged below them. She had three hundred Spartans and Immortals manning nearly a hundred and twenty heavy weapons emplacements on the ridge she physically stood on, and on the opposite ridge across the small valley from where she stood. Heavy weapons that they had muscled to their locations together without complaint and with practiced ease. She had Chain Cannons which fired 40mm projectile shells from belt felt drums that rested on the ground. She had Plasma Pulse turrets that were powered by the cumbersome battery cell packs that rested next to them, and she had automatic Plasma Grenade launcher turrets which were a newer weapon only now making its way into the Union inventory. In truth Danarla had never seen so many heavy weapons emplacements lined up in the lethal manner they were right now. Decades of fighting the High Coven and Immortals and now she found herself commanding Immortals who followed her orders without question. Immortals that looked to her for leadership. How sardonic were the gods of fate and war she thought. Danarla knew the difference however, and these were Immortals that no longer looked or even thought like those she had fought or seen. These Immortals were led by a man many had thought long dead and who now followed a path of honor, pride and deed she could not deny. A man whose two oldest sons were now married or about to be married to half elf females that they worshiped more than their own lives. One of whom was her very own daughter.

Whatever doubt that may have resided in her body, whatever worry she may have had for As'hia, it quickly evaporated the instant she held her youngest child in her arms once more. Whatever discord or doubt she may have had about As'hia's future was irrevocably erased when she saw the way Lynom gazed at her, the way his scent spiked with her next to him and the way As'hia, her youngest, most reckless but the most skilled of her three daughters cooed out her eternal delight in his powerful arms. As'hia had not been a very powerful Mindvoicer before all of this had occurred, certainly not on the same level as her mother who was considered a high level Tier Five Mindvoicer. What As'hia had shown her within her mind and the simple ease with which she now projected her thoughts was shocking to say the least. As'hia was now easily a Tier Six if Danarla was any judge. As'hia had shown her all that had happened to her and the way Lynom had protected her and saved her and then finally surrendered to her all that he was. Seeing this and then As'hia doing the same, that was something Danarla could not, something she would not deny. Danarla had watched as her daughter sat between his legs, leaning back against him intimately as they finished making their plans. She saw the way Lynom absently nuzzled her elven ears without thought, the way her hands stroked his forearm or thigh. Danarla had glanced at her elven husband who she so loved and knew he could see the same things. She knew her husband was stubborn and as obstinate as any elf, but he had pursued her with a single minded determination that had finally won her over. Her elven mate was not the largest man who had ever shared her bed, but he was the one that had burned her senses more than any other in her life and that included Lycavorians. He was larger physically than most elves, tall and powerfully built, and Danarla had burned his wonderful scent into her brain within the first hour of meeting him. In the time on Kranek, dealing with everything and worrying for their

youngest daughter, it had brought them far closer than they had ever been before and they had rekindled the passionate lovemaking that their duties had caused to slip in these last years. A new day was being born all around them on this foul planet, but a new era had already been well underway with first Tir'ut and Princess Normya and now Lynom and her daughter. It was an era that Danarla and Ta'lon had every intention of embracing completely.

The flash of movement from the dust shrouded entrance brought her attention fully back to the present and she watched as dozens of Immortal teams began pouring from the entrance carrying what could only be T19 Dragon Killer missiles. Right behind them were hundreds more Immortals preparing to fall upon the survivors of the missile barrage they thought they were about to unleash. Danarla had other plans however.

“All placements!” She barked into her implant. “Targets acquired! Prepare to engage!”

Danarla felt a sense of pride as she heard both Immortal and Lycavorian respond to her orders and weapons were charged and locked. She was about to become the first Lycavorian to ever lead Immortals in battle and that simply made her flush with pride. Danarla saw the first missile team stop and bring their missile launchers up.

“**FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!**” Danarla screamed. “**KILL THEM ALL!**”

The first rank of missile toting Immortals had dropped to their knees in preparation of targeting and then firing the T19 missiles they had. The missile team commander was barking out orders at the top of his lungs as some five hundred more charged their weapons behind them and waited to throw themselves into battle and kill the survivors of what they knew would be a slaughter with so many T19 missiles. No dragon would be able to survive the barrage they were about to unleash. As his head turned to check on all of his teams he thought he heard a female's voice in the distance to the side rising above the din of dragon trumpets and the screams of the dying. His eyes darted to one side of the valley entrance and grew wide when he saw dozens of figures moving about within the treeline above them. He could almost hear the clatter of heavy weapons as they were locked into place. His eyes cut to the opposite side of the valley and he saw her then. Some four hundred meters away, dressed in Spartan armor and standing beside what could only be a plasma turret. He saw her mouth move, heard her words carried on the wind and he swore he could see her look right at him as the entrance to hell opened and reached for him and his men.

One hundred and twenty heavy weapons opened up at the same time, large chain cannon turrets, plasma turrets, even plasma grenade launchers and the cacophony of sound drowned out even the dragons as they trumpeted out their glee. The hundreds of Immortals had made the mistake of massing their troops together tightly as they exited the base. They had forgotten their training in the years since leaving the Coven and becoming mercenaries and slavers, and that simple fact would spell their eternal doom today. The plasma turrets and 40mm chain turrets did not discriminate in the least and in seconds that small valley was running red with bright red blood as Immortals were literally chopped into grisly bits of flesh and bone. They were mowed down as if some great invisible hand swept down and crushed them into oblivion. T19 missiles exploded from direct hits and added their own explosive force to the conflagration, not one of them leaving the launchers. It wasn't really fair by any standard of warfare, but then again war was never about being fair, and the pirate Immortals of Phy'iad's group learned a harsh lesson that would be taught many times in the future when it came to the Lycavorian Union and those men and women who led their troops.

A fair fight was only fair in the eye of the victor.

To the Immortals behind the weapons emplacements, it was about the future. All of them had been present for Cha'talla's speech after they had won on Kranek. All of them had willingly embraced the path Cha'talla had set them on more than two decades ago. On Kranek they had been free to chose their own paths and lives and they all had done just that. They witnessed the acceptance they received from the elves and others they had rescued or helped once these men and women realized that their Immortal tribe was very different. Many had Akruxian Immortal wives and based on what their Matriarch Mother Esther had done for them, many were inspired to return and see their wives. To show them the true Akruxian people. The younger Immortals, those that were not married, were now stirred to discover all they could about their people of old. They would no longer be afraid to go out into the stars and interact with others without fear and hate in the eyes of those they wanted to befriend. Now they knew they would no longer be looked down upon by others. Cha'talla had

given this back to them, this sense of duty and pride and history. Now they were being led by a Lycavorian female with excellent experience whose own half elf daughter would soon be the Blessed Wife of another of Cha'talla's sons. Her elven husband had moved among them without fear as they traveled here, talking with many of them as an equal and with respect and even sharing laughter despite the circumstances they found themselves in. These Immortal scum before them had chosen the wrong path in life and now they would extinguish that blight upon their species and their history forever. Word had already gone out among all of them from both Cha'talla and Denali Leonidas. They would take no prisoners this day. Any among the millions of their people still within the High Coven who chose to stand against the future would fall before them. That is what they all swore this day.

Danarla kept careful watch on the valley before them, listening to her implant as well and waiting. That single word sounded over her COM implant and every single COM implant worn by Lycavorian or Akruxian in the valley.

“EXECUTE!”

One hundred and twenty heavy weapons shifted fire just as some twenty dragons soared skyward, many lifting their Bonded ones directly out of the mass of bodies with TK power and depositing them in their saddles as they screamed skyward.

Lisisa felt the dragon armor close around her legs and she looked behind her as Jeth's massive wings propelled them skyward. She saw Narice and Deneth on her right, and even from the distance between them she could see Narice's cobalt blue eyes alive and bright. They watched as those heavy weapons altered their fields of fire with unerring accuracy and as they cleared the tree tops of the mountains around them, leaving battered and broken bodies of hundreds of Immortals on the ground below, that single-minded wave of death obliterated whatever remained.

It was here that Lynom, Tir'ut, Normya and As'hia and the nearly eight hundred Spartans and Immortals came charging over the top of the ridge they had been hiding behind and plunged through the gore and blood. Danarla caught a quick picture of her youngest daughter as she stood beside Lynom and then they led that combined force into the Immortal base without hesitation.

EARTH EDEN GROUND COMMAND SOUTHERN UTAH

It was truly abandoned now.

From the looks of it, no one had been here since Ben and his tech heads had striped it bare almost twenty-six years ago. Most of the buildings still stood and that is where Daniel Simpson now sat. On top of the administration building looking out over what had once been the base they called home so many years ago. Scrub brush and dust now covered most of what had once been a thriving Air Force Base with a hidden secret beneath it. Danny couldn't bring himself to enter that portion of the base, there were far too many memories and it was painful enough as it was. Danny caught his scent on the wind even as the soft flutter of Elynth's wings disturbed the still air. He heard the soft scraping of two sets of boots on the sand blasted tarmac below and then the shift of air as Andro used his TK power to lift himself to the roof where he sat. Danny didn't want to turn because his son looked so much like his father that it would make the pain of loss return even harder. Danny reached out across the space in front of him, holding the neck of the beer bottle in his hand.

“This is where... this is where it all started for us.” He spoke softly. “This is where we discovered what we could do. It sure as shit scared the hell out of us!” Danny spoke before he downed the last of the warm bottle of beer and then tossed it to the side to join the nearly six cases of others in the pile. He turned and reached inside the case that was beside him and pulled out two more, using his strength to twist off the tops. He held one out behind him. “Beer?”

Andro walked up behind the man he called Uncle Danny. The man who had taught him almost as much as his father. About being a Spartan, a wolf, a warrior and a man. He squatted down next to him, taking the beer without question, his eyes drifting to the pile of empty bottles and then to his uncle who took a long pull of the tall bottle. The beer was cold surprisingly and Andro lifted it to his lips and took a long drink as well. It had

been a long time since he had tasted beer, they only pulled it out for very special occasions, and it felt immensely refreshing as it went down. He glanced over at the pile of empties once more and then out over the tops of the buildings as his uncle was doing.

“How much have you had?” He asked. “You’ve been out here for almost four days.”

Danny chuckled. “You know... Anja says it would take nearly three hundred bottles of beer before a Lycavorian got really drunk.” Danny lifted the one in his hand. “Three hundred and nine and all I got is a fucking buzz. Ain’t that a bitch?”

“Aunt Anuk and Aunt Nayeca are worried about you. You won’t answer them.” Andro said softly. “You won’t answer anyone... and you are not known for using the full power of your shields Uncle. You have been working with the *Feravomir* I see.”

“Yeah... well... I ain’t real good company for anyone right now.” Danny answered. “No sense in them having to deal with that.” He looked at his nephew. “How’d you find this place?”

He asked and then held up his hand quickly. “Never mind. You knew where I’d come... you have his memories.”

“Yes.” Andro said softly again. “The Kavalians have... they have taken my mother For'mya Uncle Danny.”

Danny cut his head sharply and looked at him. “What do you mean taken? She was in the Senate Building with Deia!”

Andro shook his head. “We pulled *Tenna* from the rubble nearly thirty-six hours ago. She’s badly injured but alive. They... they took my mother before they brought the building down. Laustinos was helping them.”

“Laustinos! That *nubous* pencil dick creeper!” Danny snarled.

“I went to the Kavalian embassy... they told me they would kill her if we attempted to retaliate against them for what they think they have done.” Andro continued evenly. There was nothing he would keep from this man who had a part in raising him. “What was I supposed to do? Denali, Lisisa and Cha'talla are going after the Immortals who took my first elven mother and Resumar is so deep in Kavalian space with his ass hanging out it isn’t even funny. Janae is missing and...”

“Janae?” Danny rasped out.

Andro looked at him and nodded. “I brought Anton and Cihera back to help Zarah find her.” He said. “I don’t believe she is off world. She was either taken by another Kavalian team which I strongly suspect, or she has gone into hiding.”

Danny shook his head. “If she went into hiding she would have contacted you by now. That was the plan. Seventy-two hours and she reports in.”

Andro nodded. “Which leads me to believe that she has been taken and they have done the same thing to her that they did to my mothers. They have blocked her Mindvoice abilities.” He said. “Quite a bit has happened since you have been here Uncle Danny and now I need you to help me.”

Danny looked at him for a long moment and then turned back to the horizon. “I... I let your father down. He should be here... not me. He... I have other brothers... blood brothers... but he was...”

“The brother of your heart?” Andro said softly.

“I let him down Androcles.” Danny spoke nodding his head. “I let him down and now he is... now he is gone. I wouldn’t be any good to you or to anyone. What you and Elynth did that night... that was fitting. He would have... he would have liked that.”

Andro took another long pull from the beer and smiled. “Actually... he chewed my ass for destroying the clinic like that.” Andro saw Danny’s eyes whip around once more to look at him wide eyed. “What did you *nubous* do that for? Do you know how much it cost to build that clinic? How many people it served? Your mother will have your *mida* for that!” He said trying his best to imitate his father’s deep voice. He met his uncle’s eyes. “My father isn’t dead Uncle Danny. And neither is my mother.”

“Ah... don’t you start with that *sibfla* about how they will always be with us!” Danny spat looking away once more. “I got that from my mother and sisters before I left Sparta! It drives me nuts!”

“No Uncle Danny... they *aren’t* dead.” Andro insisted seeing his uncle turn to him once more. “They are on Curila 6. He... he was hurt... but he’s recovered now. He... you know him as well as I do Uncle. He always has plans within plans in his head... faking his own death was one of them. He had discussed it with my

mothers, but the plan was not even close to being complete. When he saw what was happening... he made a split second decision and had Yuriko use the SGT system to teleport him and Torma off Earth.” Andro got to his feet as Danny rose to his full height of six foot four and stared at him with wide eyes. “He was injured badly... but Filrian healed him. He did not expect the enormity of what my bastard uncle Pleistarchus and the Kavalians would do. He was locked in a Mindvoice loop for two and a half days because he could not feel my elven mothers. Yuriko called for help.”

Danny’s eyes were wide as a litany of emotions smashed through him. “Not... not dead?” He finally was able to stammer.

Andro shook his head. “Yuriko called my mother Anja and she went there. I... Elynth and I discovered this when we entered the clinic. For lack of a better description it was some sort of delayed Mindvoice recording from our fathers. That is why I destroyed the clinic. To protect this knowledge. What you saw that day... it was a clone of my father and the remains of Javier Moran’s dragon made to look like Torma. It came as... it came as quite the shock to us as well.”

“Why... why didn’t he tell me? Why didn’t you tell me?” Danny growled angrily.

“He couldn’t... he was locked in this loop within Mindvoice as I said. It took my mothers to bring him out of it. Perhaps thirty-six hours ago.” Andro said evenly not taking offense at the tone of Danny’s voice. “And I have been dealing with far more than you know Uncle. While you may not consider yourself a very good Mindvoicer and you do not use the skill as much as you should, penetrating your shields would require that I concentrate and focus intently. I haven’t had time to shit let alone concentrate on anything except what the Kavalians have done. I’m sorry.”

“Arrgghhh!” Danny screamed as he turned and heaved his beer bottle far out into open space watching as it curved downward and shattered on the ground some three hundred feet away. “What a fucking idiot I am!” He swore loudly now. “I should have known! I should have known Pusintin couldn’t kill him no matter how good a plan he had! I’ve been around your father since we were knee high to god! I should have known he’d have some slick plan up his sleeve! Fuck!”

“If it makes you feel any better... he had us all fooled initially.” Andro spoke. “It’s not the way he planned it... and it got away from him for a time.”

Danny whirled around. “Curila 6? He’s on Curila 6?” He gasped.

Andro nodded. “Yes. With my mothers and Yuriko... and all those who made it off Hadaria before the Kavalians took it.”

Danny’s eyes grew wide. “Kavalians? Hadaria?” Danny stammered. “Andro... does he know about...?”

Andro shook his head slowly. “Not yet. I haven’t told him yet for fear of what he will do Uncle Danny. We only found out early yesterday. He can’t feel her within Mindvoice but he refuses to believe she is dead. I must be the one to tell him she is not and that the Kavalians have taken her.”

“Fuck Andro! He’ll go nuclear!” Danny hissed. “Jesus... it will be just like it was with your mother twenty-six years ago! He’ll start killing shit... and he won’t stop until he gets her back!”

Andro nodded. “I know... and that is why I need you to go to Curila 6 and make sure he doesn’t do this.”

“What?”

“The entire scope of the Kavalian plans have not been made known.” Andro said. “They wanted my elven mothers for a reason and we don’t yet know what Laustinos has told them or what information he has given to them. We are still trying to determine how badly he betrayed us. Marci has nearly half her people working on that. You need to go there and make sure he stays dead. If the Kavalians discover he is alive, they will undoubtedly kill my mother and then come after him again. They may even launch a full scale invasion. There will be no stopping him then. He will lay waste to everything and there will be nothing we can do. I can’t let him do that. Too much is at risk right now.”

Danny reached out and grasped Andro’s shoulders. “I need a ship! I need... shit... I need my gear! I...”

“Uncle Danny... there are others going with you.” Andro spoke. “You know of the Pralor people and what... how our history intertwines?”

Danny looked at him oddly. “Yes. Your father and I talked about it several times. What does that have to do with what is happening?”

“Well... the Pralor that my father has been talking too... his name is Wayonn and he is here now.” Andro said.

“Here? On Earth?” Danny stammered. “Wait a minute! I thought the Pralors were all dead and gone.”

Andro shook his head. “Ummm... no.” He stated slowly. “He was... he was my great grandfather’s Oracle Uncle Danny... this Wayonn. He is a Pralor who is wolf... just as our ancestor Sumar was and he is here now with about a dozen representatives of the Lycavorian Protectorate.”

“Lycavorian who?” Danny gasped.

“The Lost Ones that Canth told my father he would need to find.” Andro said.

“The Lost Ones?” Danny said shaking his head trying to process all this information. “I thought... I thought we got them off Lycavore a long time ago.”

“They were only a small part of what Canth meant.” Andro spoke with a small smile on his face. “A very small part. No... the Protectorate is... well they are pretty fucking big for lack of a better description. This Wayonn... he needs to see my father... talk with him. There are some others that are going as well that need to speak with my mother Anja and Aunt Sivana. They are... they are different but they are our friends. At least I do not sense anything nefarious from them. I do not know if they speak for all of their people however. I need you to take them. You and I... we are the only ones who are capable of holding him in check Uncle Danny. You know that.”

“No one holds your father in check boy!” Danny said quickly. “You of all people should know that.”

Andro smiled. “You have more influence over him than you think Uncle and that is why you have to go. I have one of the new *TAUR’OHTAR*-Class Escorts in orbit waiting for you. There’s a *MENKLA* on the other side of the base waiting to take you up to her.”

“Shit!” Danny spoke looking around. He bent over quickly and picked up the half empty case of beer and practically tossed it into a surprised Andro’s arms. “Take this.” He snapped as he turned back around and squatted next to where there was a pile of equipment. “I know... I know your father.” Danny was saying as he pulled something from the small belt pouch. “He’ll want someone’s ass Andro!” Andro turned and dropped the case of beer back to the roof as Danny stood back up. “Hey... that’s the good stuff! You know how long it took me to gather those cases from across the country?” He complained.

“No.” Andro replied. “And you have drunk too much. You won’t need it where you are going. None of you will.”

Danny met his eyes. “None of us?”

“Leave your gear here Uncle Danny.” Andro spoke. “I’ll have someone collect it. Ben has sent some new equipment and the others are waiting.”

“Others?” Danny asked as he saw Elynth’s huge form swoop down out of the blue sky and settle lightly to the roof of the building.

Andro nodded. “Yes... others.” He spoke as he leaped up into the saddle. “Time for you to meet them.”

The *MENKLA* transport and *STRIKER DT* sat quietly on the worn landing pad, nearly twenty men and women gathered near the lowered ramp of the *MENKLA* and talking amongst themselves and with Anuk and Nayeca. Wayonn stood with Dutkne, Naesta, Jomann and three of the Vanari security detail about fifty meters away from the *MENKLA*. Wayonn turned from watching those men and women interacting and looked at Jomann.

“Jomann... do you know these individuals?” He asked.

Jomann nodded his head. “Indeed I do *Val’istar*.” He answered. “But only from history books that I studied as in school as I was growing.”

Naesta looked at him. “History books?” She asked.

Jomann nodded. “They were the original members of the King’s Guard when he returned to Earth.” He spoke. “They were part of what was once called SEAL Team Twelve. It was an abbreviation for Sea Air and Land. They were the premier Special Operations forces of the time on old Earth, before the Passing of the Comet as it is called. That unit of the King’s, it was the most successful and decorated unit of old Earth time. And the most feared. Those men and women you see there had a hand in training the first hundred or so

Durcunusaan with General Vengal. They are... they are perhaps some of the most lethal men and women anywhere in the universe if the history is accurate.”

Wayonn looked at Dutkne quickly. “Why is Androcles sending them to be with his father Dutkne?” He asked.

Dutkne met his eyes. “I do not know grandfather.” He replied. “Company perhaps?”

“Company?” Wayonn gasped. “Company my...” Wayonn began to stammer as Dutkne smiled. The sound of Elynth’s trumpet silenced him as she swooped in low and flared her wings only a few meters away. They watched as she settled to the ground and Andro leaped casually from her back followed by the huge black skinned Spartan. He landed just as gracefully as did Andro and it was obvious he had flown and been around dragons for some time.

Danny stood wide eyed as he looked at the men and women gathered around the rear of the *MENKLA* transport. “Well dip me in *sibfla* and call me fucking stinky!” He gasped as he saw them and didn’t hesitate in his actions. Androcles smiled as his uncle broke into a run and was met halfway across the distance separating them by Anuk and Nayeca. He stepped up next to Jomann and Dutkne as Danny laid a blistering kiss on first Anuk and then Nayeca, crushing both of them in his arms.

“Androcles... these men and women that you are sending with us?” Wayonn spoke to Andro as he walked up with the small pouch in his hand that held three data pads. “Why are they going?”

“They are my father’s friends *Val’istar*.” Andro answered. “What more reason should there be?”

“Your father has many friends... the majority of them not as lethal as Jomann tells us these men and women are.” Wayonn answered.

Andro looked at Dutkne and Jomann quickly and then back to Wayonn. “Perhaps.” He said softly.

“You know something you are not telling me young man.” Wayonn spoke sternly. He looked at Dutkne and Jomann. “All three of you do.”

“Do you not wish to go now *Val’istar*?” Andro asked.

Wayonn looked at him. “Helen told me that you and your father could be infuriating at times. She said you both could be incredibly deceitful and utterly ruthless.” He stated. “I see she was correct.”

“My father does not know about my mother yet Wayonn.” Andro spoke. “When I do tell him, the more people around him who know him and that he trusts the better. We can’t have him going off on a killing spree to get her back.”

Wayonn met his eyes. “Why do your words fill me with a sense of dread and not relief young Androcles?”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. “It must be my charming personality.” He stated nonchalantly.

“*Rensibfla!*” Wayonn spat. “What are you going to do?”

“After we see you off, Dutkne is going to meet my sister Zarah and Lucia and help them to find Janae. You know who she is and the importance of her to our family and our history.” Andro answered.

Wayonn nodded. “Helen has shown me within her thoughts yes.”

“While Dutkne is doing that Jomann and I are going to meet with Marci, she is in charge of the *Krypteria* for the time being, our Intelligence organization and some others and we will try to determine how much damage Laustinos has done and what he may have told the Kavalians. There is also the burial arrangements for those that were killed. The *Feravomir* wants me to be visible for the next few days so that we can further the façade that my father is dead.”

“Your elven mother Dysea?” Wayonn asked.

“I haven’t spoken to my brother Denali yet... but if something had gone terribly wrong I would have felt it by now.” Andro said confidently. “Their attack was to begin two hours ago and I expect to hear from him soon.”

“Resumar must complete his mission Androcles.” Wayonn spoke stepping closer. “That ship can not fall into the hands of the Kavalians.”

Andro nodded. “I agree *Val’istar*... and now that Shiria is with him I have complete confidence in my brother to complete his mission. They will be delayed for a few days until my Aunt and Uncle reach them, and then all of them can return here.”

Wayonn nodded. “Good.” He stated. “I will feel much better knowing Shiria is safely out of Kavalian space.”

Andro stepped closer to him. "Can you rid my father of this Xaxon's presence Wayonn?" He asked softly.

Wayonn nodded confidently. "Yes. His darkness is not part of your father's foundation Androcles. His experiences and memories and his blood have allowed him to grow without a corrupt bone in his body. No matter what he has had to do in the past... no matter the greed and temptation that he has been confronted with... he has always remained true to who he is. Just as you have. I will grab onto that and use his own pureness to purge Xaxon's essence from within him."

Andro nodded slowly. "Good." Andro turned to Naesta and held out the pouch with the three data pads to her. "Naesta... this is from your mother. You left before she was able to finish them."

Naesta looked at him as she took the three data pad pouch. "What is it?" She asked.

"I believe that one pad has your mother's official request to open diplomatic relations with the Lycavorian Union on behalf of the Vanari Empire and the Board of Regents. She wanted you to present it to my father. It is just a formality really, since I have already done this very thing." Andro said with a smile. "The second pad has my personal command Com channel on it, as well as that of Jomann here. I have assigned official designations to you, your mother, brother and sister, as well as their own COM channels so that you can speak with them privately whenever you wish. Just enter your code into any COM panel and it will automatically encrypt the transmission between you and whoever you are trying to reach."

Naesta glanced at him and gazed into his eyes intently. "Why would you do that?" She asked softly.

"It is a sign of trust Naesta." He spoke. "I believe for you to begin to truly trust me and my people, despite all you may or may not have heard and been told about us, then we need to establish trust. This is how I will begin building that trust. You seem to be the only one who still wavers in indecision and while I understand that, it is up to me to prove to you otherwise. This is the beginning."

Naesta looked down at the pouch in her hand and then back up to his eyes. "They... they say you and your father... they say that you have never broken a vow or promise that you have made to someone."

Andro's lips curled up slightly and he tilted his head to the side. "That depends on who you ask." He answered.

"Promise me you will find and rescue my sister." Naesta spoke.

"Naesta that..." Wayonn began to speak but Andro's words stopped him.

Andro took her hand in his and brought it up to his lips. Naesta saw the intensity of his eyes, how they burned with intelligence and wisdom and determination unlike any she had ever seen. "That Naesta Re Mydala... that is a promise I will gladly make... for I intend to keep it."

Naesta saw the spark and twinkle in those azure eyes and something inside her... some small little voice told her that Androcles Leonidas already knew who her sister was even if Sadi and the others did not think he knew. "What... what is on the third pad?" She stammered finally.

Andro released her hand and smiled. "Reading material for the trip and when you are not busy with other things. Your mother told Sadi that you like to read and she asked me to give it to you. It is a non-fiction audio and holonovel of some historical significance to the Lycavorian people, written by one of our most renowned playwrights. He was alive during the years after The Black Day and has chronicled historical events throughout our history. He teaches now at the University and updates this particular novel every few years and releases a new edition. Sadi had this from his classes at the University and she thought it might give you a perspective you have not had before."

"Have you read it?" Naesta asked him.

Andro chuckled and shook his head. "Oh no." He replied with a smile. "It is not first among my reading preferences. Not since I got out of school."

"What is it called?" Naesta asked.

"*Pascius izou shyron for bara alee.*" He told her in the ancient language. "Peace unto Death and Back Again." Andro spoke.

Danny held Anuk in one arm, Nayeca in the other and he stared at the men and women in front of him as a rush of feelings and emotions swept through him. Some of them he hadn't seen in more years than he cared to remember. He watched the tall Hispanic looking man step up to him.

“Jesus XO... you damn sure ain’t got any better looking through the years.” Pablo spat playfully. “I’m better looking than you now and that ain’t no joke!”

Danny burst out laughing and the two men embraced as the others crowded around quickly. Danny felt an overwhelming feeling of brotherhood wash over him as he grabbed hands and embraced those men and women who had survived with them through those first years and went on to build their own lives here on Earth once they had discovered their true nature and who Martin was. Kenneth, Cody, Pablo... all of them that had returned to Earth and survived that High Coven attack outside Mountain City. It was as if he was swept back twenty-six years and it felt so right. Those men and women who had survived had gone about building their own lives, the majority of them right here on Earth. They had maintained contact through the years, but as with the natural course of things, they had drawn apart as events and their lives went in different directions.

Danny held Cody at arm’s length and looked at all of them. “How... how did Andro find all you guys?” Danny asked.

Kenny chuckled. “He didn’t.” He answered. “She did.” He stepped to the side and Danny followed his gaze to see the vampire clone that was Julie Collins rise from a squatting position on the ramp of the *MENKLA* transport, Colin Walsh next to her. She had a sheepish look on her face and held up the small transmitter.

“I got... I got back early last night and my... my parents gave me my old gear back.” She stammered. “I found our Team Transmitter in the stuff and since I knew what Androcles was going to do I activated it. Seems it still worked... even after all these years.”

Danny looked down as Anuk held up the identical transmitter in her hand. “We heard it going off in our closet. It woke little Melancton.”

Danny took the transmitter and turned back to Julie. He moved up closer to her and noticed she didn’t back down and nor did Colin.

Julie Collins. That was her name and those were the memories she carried within her. She had fought emotions and feelings all of her life, knowing that she was a clone and not really understanding why she felt she should be something else. She had felt the call of the wolf even though she was now a vampire, for those were the memories she carried. This is where she had come to find out who she was, and before she had left with Resumar Leonidas, that is the vow she had made to herself and to the man and woman who were her parents. When she returned early last night, they had been waiting for her, without question or pause. They had stayed with her while she talked with Androcles at his villa and then they had gone back to their home in Sparta. Her home now they had told her. They had not slept at all, refusing to let one moment slip by since they had rediscovered her. The warmth of their home and their arms was a feeling that Julie had found she could not live without and it was these sensations she had been lacking all of these years. These sensations and emotions that had finally been the catalyst for all of the memories she held within her head to come rushing back. They knew what she had to do, but knowing that she would be among men and women who she had regarded as family so long ago made it easier for them to accept for they knew she would be safe and among those who would protect her.

Julie stared at the man she had once considered a dear brother, a man she had once had a scorching physical relationship with. “I... I may be a vampire now after what that foul bitch did to me... but I am *me*. I *am* Julie Collins. I have my parents back... my family and I will get my life back eventually too. I don’t intend on losing that ever again.” She looked at Colin and then back to Danny. “We... we are still the same people inside Danny. We... we were part of this team... this pack once and we want to be again. It will... it will finally bring us back home because you... Martin... all of you... you are our family.”

Danny didn’t hesitate and drew her into a bear hug of an embrace, pulling her head to his chest and reaching out to grab Colin by the shoulder. “Then... then welcome home Jules.” His growl sounded suspiciously like a sigh of happiness as Julie let the tears flow at the name they had called her so long ago.

Anuk and Nayeca held each other close their eyes moist as they watched. Both of them knew Danny had taken Julie’s death hard, feeling as if somehow he had not been there for her. They also knew this was a second chance he would not let slip by.

“So what’s the OP Danny?” Kenny asked as Danny pushed Julie away from him and he used his fingers to wipe away the tears on her cheek. “We know the Skipper ain’t dead. All of us can feel it despite what everyone is saying. He’s too ornery to die so easily. What the hell is going on?”

Danny held Julie tight as he turned to look at them. “No... Marty ain’t dead.” He stated. “Your mates know you are going to be gone for a time?”

Kenny laughed. “Ah... Ti’ara couldn’t kick me in the ass fast enough!”

“Kind of hard to miss that fat ass too!” Cody declared with a snort.

“You’re one to talk Cody.” Julie blurted out almost without thinking. “We had to carry your lard ass out of Pakistan. Or did you forget that?” Her eyes were wide after she said it but it brought a round of laughter from all of them.

Cody nodded his head. “Sure enough!” He stated. “If I recall... you pampered me so well too. Told me I was shit sorry for getting shot in the ass.”

“It was the only thing sticking out!” Colin popped. “They couldn’t miss it!”

Danny roared with genuine laughter now, feeling better than he had in days and shook his head as the others joined in and first Cody and then Kenny gave Julie long heartfelt embraces while the others crowded around. He looked around quickly. “Where’s the Master Chief?” He asked.

“Watching all you pansies swapping spit like it’s old home week!” The gruff deep voice sounded and they all turned to see the ebony skinned man come walking through the group and right up to Danny. His head was still as bald as ever, but he hadn’t changed in years, nearly the equal in size to Danny in every way.

“Jesus!” Kenny muttered. “Twenty-six years and he’s still a fucking prick!”

Tony laughed as he held out his hand and Danny grasped it. “The Skipper’s boy gave us all new goodies to learn about on our way to Curila 6. He ain’t no shit Danny... that boy is too dangerous.” Tony said motioning to where Andro stood. “Take’s after the skipper.”

Danny nodded. “That he does.” He said.

“Well... it’s all loaded no thanks to these slack asses!” Tony said. “We’re ready to go... just give the word.”

Danny turned to Anuk and Nayeca. He drew his elven *anome* tightly against his right side while pulling their Drow Mistress just as close to his opposite side. “I... I have to do this.” He stated softly.

Anuk lifted her hand and placed a finger to his lips. “You do not need to explain anything to us Daniel.” She spoke.

“Without Martin and what he did that day on Lycavore... we would not have you today.” Nayeca spoke softly. “He is your brother... if not by blood then by everything you have shared through the years. He needs you now.”

“Until Anja returns I am the senior medical officer on Earth.” Anuk spoke. “I need to meet with Eliani and begin planning Asset and Recovery Operations. There... there are still many we have not recovered from the Senate Building and some may still be alive.”

“Just promise us that you will not do anything stupid Daniel.” Nayeca said. “We need you and so do your children.”

Danny nodded. “I promise.”

Anuk snorted very unladylike and reached up on her tip toes to kiss him hard. She gripped his face tightly and nibbled on his bottom lip as they parted. “Like we believe that.” She stated with a smile. “Just come back to us.”

Danny leaned over and nuzzled her elven ear and jaw seeing her eyes close in bliss. He repeated this action with Nayeca as well, drawing both of them even tighter against his body. “That is not something you ever have to worry about.” He said softly.

“Good.” Anuk spoke. “Now go.”

Danny nodded and turned as Andro walked up with several men and one women he didn’t know. A young woman with medium blue skin and stunning green eyes. Danny detected the scents of Wayonn and Dutkne and he could smell the pureness of their wolf blood and something else that was equally as strong. It was... it was vaguely familiar to what he smelled in Andro and Martin and he realized this must be the Pralor blood that ran in their veins. Danny looked at Andro.

“This... this is Wayonn I take it? The Pralor.” He said.

Andro nodded. “And Dutkne.”

Danny looked at Dutkne. “What was that?”

“Dutkne.” Dutkne told him.

“Du... dutk...” Danny struggled with pronouncing the name, or made it seem so as Andro was smiling.

“Dutkne!” Dutkne told him again.

“Ah fuck it... I’ll just call you Duke.” Danny snapped holding out his hand while Kenny and the others laughed gently in the background.

Andro chuckled softly and Dutkne smiled. He instinctively knew that this man Andro called Uncle was not being disrespectful in any way. It was how he was and in fact he was trying to break the tension during their first meeting. He gripped the offered hand and shook it firmly. “Close enough.” Dutkne answered.

Danny looked at Wayonn then and held out his hand respectfully. “Sir?” He stated.

Wayonn looked surprised as he took the offered hand. “Daniel Simpson.” He spoke. “The man who Martin deems his one and only true brother. A sincere pleasure to finally meet you in person.”

“Yeah... well... when I catch his skinny ass I’m going to knock him upside his corroded Spartan brain for pulling a stunt like this without telling me!” Danny snapped.

Andro motioned to Naesta now. “Uncle this is Naesta Re Mydala. She is a member of the Vanari Empire from the Beta Quadrant. Naesta carries her mother Devra’s offer to open official diplomatic relations with the Union and some important questions for my mother Anja. Take good care of her.”

Danny bowed his head to her slightly. “Count on it. Master Chief!” He barked.

“Yo!” Tony echoed from near the ramp where he was sharing a handshake with Colin Walsh. He covered the distance to where Danny stood in a short sprint.

“Get our guests settled into their seats will ya.” Danny spoke. “I want to get gone.”

Tony motioned to the ramp and stepped to the side. “Right this way.” He spoke.

Danny turned to Andro as the master chief led the others towards the *MENKLA*. He saw Jomann step up behind Andro and looked at the three of them standing there. “You’re sure about For’mya?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “The Kavalian Ambassador admitted it to me. It hasn’t yet become public knowledge... but it will I’m sure.”

“Why Andro?” Danny asked. “Why would they do this? They have to know how we will respond.”

“They will use every advantage they can to insure we *don’t* respond in that way. The Ambassador said taking my mother was to insure this but I don’t believe him. He tried to tell me all of this was because we were training the High Coven dragons and they wanted us to remain out of their war against them. Personally I think it’s all a bunch of rensibfla... but my hands were tied. I won’t risk mother’s life.” Androcles said. “They are planning something else but I don’t wish to do anything until Denali contacts me and Resumar tells me his mission is complete.” He said in reply.

Danny nodded. “I’ll tell your father when I get there.” Danny spoke softly. “You need to focus on keeping things together here, finding Janae and keeping our people on their toes. You know what he will want to do Andro?”

Androcles nodded. “And you must keep him from doing it Uncle. You know that.” Andro answered. “At least for a time. He will know that he must remain dead for now or they will surely kill my mother and he will not risk that either. I don’t know fully what it is they plan but I’m reasonably sure that it has something to do with my bastard uncle trying to claim leadership of the Lycavorian Union in some way.”

Danny looked at him with wide eyes. “You have got to be kidding me?” He gasped. “He can’t do that! The Union and Spartan Senate would never allow that after what he has done. He can’t be that vain and stupid Andro. Can he?”

Dutkne chuckled now. “I have found that those who crave power are perhaps the most vain and stupid individuals in the universe.” He stated. “And it seems our species has our fair share of them.”

Danny looked at him and nodded his head. “True enough.” He stated. “These new toys are for us to use when the time comes I take it?”

Andro nodded. “You know Uncle Ben would not send you into the void without new toys to play with. We have them too and I intend for Sadi and the others to become very proficient in their use as well.” Andro stepped closer to him. “They have hurt us Uncle Danny and as much as it burns my ass to admit, they caught us flatfooted and unprepared. Now we have to react to what they do... at least for a time anyway. Tell my father he needs to give me time, the time I need to discover what it is they are after before he goes off the deep end.”

“And then?” Danny asked.

Andro met Danny's dark eyes with azure orbs that burned with deep anger and revenge. "Then? Then Uncle... we are going to erase even the memory of the Kavalian Empire and my traitorous, cockbreath, sorry excuse of an uncle Pleistarchus from existence forever."

Danny smiled savagely. "Yep! Like father... like son."

BELID

It was certainly a sight that would forever be remembered, at least by those who were present to witness it. A tall and muscular Spartan Prince standing beside an even taller and muscular Akruian Immortal. Where once stood enemies now stood allies, fellow warriors and family. And a sight to see it was. What lay behind Denali and Cha'talla and the men and women who had followed them was nothing short of total devastation. Scorched walls and corridors, blood stained floors and countless bodies heaped upon one another like stacked wood. As if some unseen hand had guided them, the two hundred Spartans and Immortals had formed a phalanx around Aradace and Vollenth in the main corridor. The outer row of the phalanx was comprised of Lycavorians with Shi Viskas extended and forming the impenetrable shield. The inner row was comprised of Akruian Immortals who used their superior height to extend their SA80 rifles over the top of the shields and rip out one lethal burst after another. When an enemy got too close he was impaled upon a *Nehtes* or had body parts hacked off by the powerful swings of the Immortals wielding swords. In the center of this phalanx Aradace and Vollenth moved with measured steps, using their TK power to fling attacking Immortals about like broken rag dolls or send a searing blast of flame or superheated breath down a corridor they moved past, usually succeeding in killing dozens of Immortals who thought themselves safe. There were no orders tossed out, no question about what they would do, Cha'talla and Denali at the point of the phalanx and leading them relentlessly down the corridor at a fast but even pace. To some of the older Immortals among Phy'iad's band of mercenary thugs who had fought on Earth with him three thousand plus years ago as well as a quarter century ago, the horrors of those times came rushing back when they saw that phalanx relentlessly moving down the corridor and massacring everything that came at it. Many of them remembered the vicious bite of the Spartan blades and spears and how they had died in droves flinging themselves against such an daunting and unyielding force. They remembered watching a quarter century ago as those same Shi Viskas lopped off heads and limbs of their fellow Immortals without as much as a pause. It was even more of a slaughter this time around as Aradace and Vollenth gave them a devastating force that the Spartans of old did not have.

And now, as then, they died.

T'lolt was the only one paying attention to where they were in the main corridor and as soon as he came to the corridor that would take him where he needed to go, he reached down, grabbed Esther's arm and barked the order that would send them forward.

"Break now!"

Fully half the Phalanx turned instantly and as if once more they were guided by some higher power, Aradace broke with them and she became the center of the smaller Phalanx once more. Esther Saira was completely out of her realm here and she knew it as she clung to T'lolt's belt as they moved. She had fought before; she had killed before, but never on such an colossal and concerted scale. Her Blessed husband knew he would not keep her from this battle and he had insured that short of a bomb dropping on her she would be protected. She wore a complete Mark IV ArmorPly black body armor suit with full Spartan helmet. The helmet was almost too large for her head and she found the Mark IV suit to be cumbersome and uncomfortable. She had never worn more than the lightweight Coven Scout armor into battle and she felt very much out of place. She had never seen death on such a scale as this now and every meter they advanced down the corridor, the complete awe she felt towards her husband, his brother and every one of the men and women surrounding her grew by leaps and bounds. She had been talking with many of them only hours before this battle, and now she saw nothing but resolute determination in their eyes and a deadly killing rage.

They moved much faster now, almost a sprint really, Aradace's nearly four tons making the metal floor shudder under her weight. The phalanx was much looser in shape, but still very deadly as the dozen or so Immortals who rushed from an adjoining corridor discovered all too quickly. They fell against the tidal wave of anger and pride surging forward. As they rounded the corner and saw four Immortals and three vampires firing

their weapons down either side of the corridor from the short hallway and door they were guarding T'lolt sounded off once more.

“Left and right! Secure!”

The Immortals and vampires guarding the doors turned quickly as the rush of nearly forty bodies and one very large dragon came at them. As they reached the corridor intersection, six Lycavorians slammed their shields into the floor and six Immortals squatted behind them and unleashed blistering rates of fire down either corridor at any who were fool enough to show their heads. A third wall formed behind them covering them from the way they had come as T'lolt practically dragged Esther up to the large door and glared at the Immortal soldier who stood there wide eyed.

“What is your name boy?” T'lolt snarled.

“R... R'vorl.” The young Immortal gasped in shock when he looked upon what was very obviously an Immortal, but one with deeply tanned skin and even hair.

“Well R'vorl... I am T'lolt... brother to Cha'talla and Second Commander of the Tribe of Cha'talla.” T'lolt shouted. “I have brought the Blessed Wife of Cha'talla and Matriarch of our Tribe to work her magic on the female elves that *srow s'xor go'h* of an Immortal Phy'iad has been holding. They are inside?” (Scum sucking pig)

“Yes... yes Second Commander.” The young Immortal stammered.

“Then open the door young AkruXian!” T'lolt snapped. “I do not wish to let my brother destroy this entire base by himself! Between him and his sons there will be nothing left for us honest AkruXians!”

The young soldier turned quickly and punched in a code on the control console. The door began to lift quickly and Esther removed her helmet as she began to see female body parts huddled together wearing very skimpy clothing. As the door rose completely, her dark eyes narrowed in anger at what she saw. She saw many of the younger elf females crowded around the older blond one who was talking to them. Esther could see the anxiousness on some of their faces and she knew immediately what it was. The sounds of the battle no doubt was carrying to them inside this room and their only thought would be that if the Immortal that had broken them died, they would die as well. The scientist and doctor in Esther surged forward and she lifted the helmet from her head tossing it to the floor as she strode into the room.

“Who is Osiri?” She snapped out.

Osiri scrambled to her feet quickly as the pureblood female vampire walked confidently into the room, three very large Immortals and only slightly less larger Lycavorians slightly behind her and carrying large packs. At least Osiri thought they were Immortals. They had the bone spurs of the Immortal people, and the somewhat sunken eye sockets, but their skin was tanned almost bronze in color and two of them had dark hair while the third had dark blond hair.

“I... I am Osiri.” She stuttered.

Esther marched right up to her. “I am Esther Suira... Blessed Wife to Cha'talla.” She stated. “I have brought the medicine. Which ones are the most affected?”

Osiri couldn't help but gasp in relief as tears came to her eyes. She motioned quickly to the seven females who she had pulled close to her. “These seven here.” She stated confidently. “They have been prisoners almost as long as myself. This... you can cure them Esther Suira?”

Esther nodded her head. “Yes I can.” She motioned to the six men assigned to her. “Spread out and begin injecting the others. Be patient and soothing as I told you. If you have difficulty call for me or Osiri.”

The three young Immortals and three Lycavorians nodded without hesitation and began spreading out. Esther turned her pouch around in front of her and drew out the hypoinjector. “Roll up your sleeve Osiri.” She stated.

Osiri hesitated and her hands went to her abdomen. “It will not... it will not hurt my baby?” She asked.

Esther looked at her wide eyed. “You are with child?” She gasped.

Osiri nodded. “Almost sixteen weeks.” She answered immediately.

“Phy'iad's...” Esther began to ask angrily.

Osiri shook her head quickly. “Never!” She hissed in revulsion. “I would not bear that monster a Gangorian slug to call his own!” She brought both hands up closer and held her abdomen as only a loving mother could. “No... this is the strong AkruXian son of Kr'nak. My... my own Blessed husband.”

Esther looked at her in shock for a moment and then she stepped closer. “That is a story I would very much like to hear one day.” She said as she held up the injector. “And no... this will not harm your child.”

“Esther?” T'lolt called from the doorway. She turned quickly and looked at him. “The serum Esther!”

Esther did not hesitate and drew out the second injector tossing it to him. She turned back to Osiri as T'lolt caught it. “Let’s get you and the others taken care of.” She stated. “The battle is not yet over and we may have to move quickly.”

T'lolt looked at R'vorl and held up the injector. “Hold out your arm Immortal.” He spoke gruffly.

R'vorl looked at him hesitantly. “Second Commander I... I am not sick.”

T'lolt reached up quickly and slapped him. Not hard, but with enough force to get his attention and that of the others who were watching. “This skin is not Akruvian boy!” He barked. “This... this twisted skin is what the Coven cursed us with!” He rubbed his palm on his cheek and held it out. “This is who we are! Now hold out your arm so that you can fully leave the past behind and grab onto our future! All of you do it now! Besides... before this day is done... any who look like you will be executed and we wouldn’t want that to happen to you by accident now would we?” The four Immortals stepped right up to T'lolt then and he grinned. “Welcome to the future of the Akruvian people!”

T'lolt pressed the injector to their arms and as he finished the third one he looked up and saw Aradace watching intently. He saw her nod her massive head in what he could only ascertain was approval and then she moved back towards the three protective walls of bodies they had formed.

As with Denali Leonidas and Cha'talla, the scene at the southern entrance to the base was different but no less awe inspiring. Two huge brothers, both half vampire and half Immortal, leading a charge of nearly eight hundred Spartan and Immortal soldiers that would have caused Spartan warriors of old to smile in unrestrained glee. Beside them were two half wolf and half elf females that they called their Blessed Wives, clearly half their physical size but no less lethal it seemed. Normya was a pilot by nature and by choice, but she was also a Leonidas and as such she was as lethal a fighter as any Spartan ground soldier.

Lynom and Tir'ut split their forces upon entering the Immortal base, the brothers taking prearranged routes and the brutal rout was on. Those Immortals who were still scrambling for weapons or to discover what was happening outside their base were fell upon with no mercy and no hesitation. Even those that were not armed in any way were struck down without pause or compassion. For As'hia it was a revelation really. She had seen Lynom angry before, and she had seen what he could do, but this day As'hia discovered just what the man who had stolen her heart and soul could truly do. She and the others were hard pressed to keep up with Lynom, for he was a whirlwind of death unlike anything they had ever seen. Using both his ability to blur and his precise use of wrapping the shadows around himself, Lynom was devastation to all who stood or attempted to stand against him. Already he had chopped down nearly forty Immortals, his cobalt blue eyes filled with killing rage and the moment As'hia spied that look she knew why. He was making them pay for her pain and humiliation. He had held it in for so long, held that burning brutality back by force of will alone and now given the free reign that he had, Lynom was intent on making them pay for the perceived crimes against his soon to be Blessed Wife that As'hia did not even remember. It must have been the Lycavorian blood within her, but coming to discover this made As'hia want him more intensely than she had in their short time together. Even splashed with blood as they all were, her wolf blood had begun a slow burn for the man who had made her his, and she promised herself that the moment they were alone together again she would show her handsome mate just where he stood in the corridors of her heart and soul.

The twin columns of death had swept along either side of the Immortal base like a cleansing wave. In their wake they left broken and shattered bodies. No Immortal who followed Phy'iad was spared the wrath of the tribe of Cha'talla. All of them knew this was to be their coming out party as it was called. This is where they would make their path known to all, and their Lycavorian Spartan brothers and sisters would stand with them to the end. They fought as one entity, meting out death and injury to those who stood against them.

Though they would not know it for many years, Veldruk had known what he was doing when he released the toxin into the air of the Akruvian homeworld. Even then he had been plotting to take the Lycavorian homeworld as well, yet he knew that at all cost he could not let these two peoples form an alliance. They were two species too entrenched in a code of honor and tradition. They were far more alike than anyone

knew except Veldruk. He knew that he could not allow them to come together for it would mean the end of the High Coven. No matter their ability to blur and wrap the shadows around themselves, if the Akruvian and Lycavorian people had ever come together, the High Coven would never have been able to stand against them. The combined force of will and determination and the honor with which the two species lived their lives would have made them unconquerable by the Coven if they had ever joined forces. Veldruk knew this and he acted in such a way to insure that this never happened.

Yet destiny and fate could only be denied for so long before two irresistible forces of the known universe finally collided. This day on Belid would see that collision and it would witness the birth of something that had been delayed for nearly twenty-three millennia. An event that had been barreling toward its culmination for that entire time unseen and unknown. This day it would no longer be unknown or unseen. This day that collision would scream out its birth as any newborn leaving the womb of its mother and that scream would send chilling shockwaves throughout all of known space, nowhere more loudly than within High Coven space.

Yes... that day of reckoning was finally and irrevocably upon them.

The two brothers came together as they sprinted around the corners of the large main junction in the corridor and skidded to stops. As Immortals and Lycavorians took up positions all up and down the corridors Tir'ut and Lynom moved close to one another with the women who were their lives.

"This is the main corridor!" Lynom announced with wide cobalt blue eyes. "The main command and control center is a hundred and fifty meters that way." He spoke pointing down the corridor.

"Why are we not meeting more resistance?" Tir'ut almost shouted.

Lynom shook his head. "The east landing bay was almost empty." He stated. "If they were already beginning to shuttle up to their ships..."

Tir'ut nodded. "We found only three transports in the west bay."

"They were closer to leaving than we thought brother." Lynom declared.

Tir'ut turned and motioned for the burly Lycavorian to come forward. Though over a thousand years old, the Lycavorian had volunteered to be Tir'ut's second in command. He had smelled something in this half breed that made him trust Tir'ut. "Garna... have we heard from Admiral Thodius?"

The Lycavorian shook his head. "Not since he reported that he had taken down the two *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts and was blowing the *sibfla* out of the rest of their ships. He sounded pretty pleased with himself." The man answered with a grin.

"Have him break a ship away to low orbit and scan the surrounding terrain of the base." Tir'ut ordered. "We must be sure they will not come in behind us if they are outside."

Normya took his arm. "Wait Tir'ut." She declared squeezing his arm and closing her eyes. *Lisisa?* She reached out within Mindvoice.

Sister! Lisisa's voice filled their minds as Normya expanded the connection to those of them gathered together. *Normya... have you gotten to mother yet?*

We are close Lisi. Normya answered not bothering to shield anymore. It didn't matter anymore with the attack underway. *We have not met as much resistance as we thought. Are you circling the base? Can you see anything?*

Narice and I are circling above the others. Denali contacted me and he and Cha'talla are almost to the door to the command center and T'lolt has secured the prisoners. We have been burning those who attempt to escape through what appear to be hidden tunnels and Arrarn has made three ground support passes into the valley, but not many have attempted this. Danarla is beginning to move her heavy weapons to the actual entrance to keep anyone from coming in behind you! Lisisa answered instantly.

Lynom looked at Tir'ut when he heard this and he nodded. "We caught them as they were moving their troops up to the ships." He stated. "It is the only explanation."

Tir'ut looked at Garna. "Break off three platoons Garna. Have them begin sweeping back to gather any of our people who may be wounded or have fallen. Get them away from these scum."

"Done." Garna spoke before moving back and barking orders.

As'hia nodded. "I will tell those following us." She stated getting to her feet clutching the *Nehtes* in one hand and the K12 in the other.

Lisisa... can you and the others burn an area large enough for our STRIKERS, G9s and MENKLA transports to land at or near the southern entrance and begin taking off wounded? Normya asked.

Give us ten minutes and we will make it so. Lisisa spoke. *Then Narice and I will join you.*

Tir'ut and Lynom looked up when they heard the nearby trumpet of a dragon. "That was either Vollenth or Aradace." Tir'ut snapped.

"Close too." Lynom echoed. "They must have reached the main door."

Tir'ut nodded. "Then let us join them brother."

Cirith came up behind Dysea cautiously as she saw her wiping blood from her face and neck with the remains of Phy'iad's shirt that she had torn off. She was still completely nude, blood saturating her entire upper as she knelt next to the now very dead and mangled body of the once formidable Immortal Commander. Cirith knelt just behind her and quickly stripped out of the body armor she wore and nearly tore the separate fatigue top off herself.

"Dysea?" She spoke softly watching as her black ringed emerald green eyes turn to focus on her. She held out the top to her and watched as Dysea took it with a nod. "Dysea are you...?"

Dysea tossed aside the blood stained rag and pulled the top on over her nakedness. As she turned to look at Cirith once more she nodded her head. "I am... I am ok." She spoke softly.

Cirith reached out and placed her hand on Dysea's shoulder. The wolf blood in Cirith did surge a little as she touched Dysea's skin, but she controlled it easily for she had never allowed that part of her to fully come out for fear of being discovered. Cirith watched as Dysea reached up and took her hand, squeezing it tightly.

"I... I told him not to touch me Cirith." She stammered.

Cirith glanced over to Phy'iad's body and then back to her. "Yes... yes you did."

Dysea squeezed her fingers tighter and took a deep breath. "I will be fine." She stated quickly reaching up to caress her cheek. "Are... are you injured?" She asked spying the blood on Cirith's cheek and neck.

Cirith shook her head quickly. "No... no it's not my blood." She answered. "I am..."

The sound of the main doors beginning to open caused both of them to turn. They watched Kr'nak begin to back up towards them in a hurry, keeping his SA80 leveled at the door. "I did not open it!" He exclaimed.

Dysea snatched up the blades that Cha'talla had forged for her and watched as Kr'nak got down in one knee in front of her. "Stay behind me, both of you, as long as possible!" He barked over his shoulder. "I will draw their fire and then..."

Dysea gasped loudly over the sound of the door opening and they looked at her as a warm smile began to spread across her face. "No." She whispered.

"Lady Dysea it could be..." Kr'nak began to say.

Dysea felt the warmth of family and love wash over her, first from Denali and then Normya and finally Lisisa. She almost broke into tears as her children reached for her without pause and she reached up to put her hand on Kr'nak's shoulder as soon she could feel Cha'talla's now powerful presence within Mindvoice. "No Kr'nak... it is my family." She said slowly.

They turned back to watch as the main door rose about halfway up and continued to rise even as two large bodies rolled under the door and they could see the massive, talon equipped feet of the dragon just beyond. Denali was the first one to his feet, his senses causing him to center and focus on his first elven mother instantly. He didn't hesitate and sprinted across the short distance as she stood up to her full height of five foot nine and allowed him to sweep her into his arms. The tears flowed freely for Dysea now and she cried out in joy as her son's arms crushed her to him and lifted her off the floor heedless of the blood that still stained her arms and small parts of her neck. Denali instinctively shifted his body around, putting himself between any threat that could still be present and his first elven mother. There was commotion outside the room once more as the door fully rose and locked into place and then Normya burst into the room with Tir'ut on her heels.

"*MEDWAH!*" Normya screamed as she darted forward and both Deni and Dysea helped to lift her up into their embrace.

Cirith stood beside the trio with a smile of happiness on her face as Cha'talla came up to her. She turned to face the huge and famous former Immortal Captain to Veldruk of the High Coven with wide eyes as she gazed at him. Gone was the warped gray skin that all Immortals had and in its place was the smooth bronze colored skin of a deep and healthy tan. Her eyes darted to those Immortals she could see setting up positions just by the door and they were all the same. That they were Akruxian was easy enough to discern with the prominent bone spurs along their jaws and the edges of their hands and wrists, but Cirith had never seen an Immortal without the grayish and sometimes deathly pallor of skin. She turned back to look at Cha'talla as he gazed at her with a smile.

“It seems much is not as you left it Cirith Esavorna.” Cha'talla said.

“You... you are Cha'talla!” Cirith gasped.

Cha'talla nodded as he saw the single Immortal who stood just behind her stiffen and his eyes grow wide. “That would be me.” He said gently. “Of course... I no longer look as I once did. None of my people do.”

“How... how is that possible?” Cirith stammered.

“A tale for another time perhaps.” Cha'talla spoke. “You have stood with Dysea Leonidas who is considered a precious member of my tribe Cirith Esavorna. In our eyes that makes you a member of our tribe as well.” Cha'talla took her hand in his. “I ask that you remain at her side for now. Normya tells me that you have a connection to her and no doubt she will need that.”

Cirith looked quickly to where Dysea and her children were still entangled in the embrace and she nodded her head. “That is not something you need to ask of me.” She stated looking back to him.

Cha'talla nodded. “Good.” His dark eyes cut to where the body of Phy'iad was on the floor nearby and he winced slightly when he saw the injuries he had suffered. His eyes took in the part of Phy'iad that was no longer attached to his body and he turned back to Cirith with narrow eyes. “He did not...?”

Cirith shook her head. “He tried... but he did not listen to her when she said not to touch her.” She answered. “It made her upset.”

“So it would seem.” Cha'talla said with wide eyes. “She is herself though?”

Cirith nodded knowing what question he wanted answered. “As much as she can be herself after someone tried to brutality rape her.” She answered. “I know what you are asking Cha'talla and the answer is no. Kr'nak made sure that did not take place. He is the one who released her restraints so that she could take action.”

Cha'talla looked at Kr'nak once more and nodded as he turned back to her. “I must see to our defenses but our medics will be along shortly to see to any injuries you might have.” He stepped up to Kr'nak as Cirith turned back to where Dysea was and moved closer to her and Cha'talla took notice that Kr'nak stood firm and did not back down from him. “And what do I do with you Immortal?” Cha'talla asked.

“I will not... I will not beg for forgiveness of my past sins!” Kr'nak spoke firmly. “Nor will I espouse my actions this day! I would dishonor myself if I did and I will no longer do that for anyone's sake.”

Cha'talla nodded his head. “Good.” He spoke. “We cannot however live in the past and let our sins dictate to us how we live our future Kr'nak. We can only change and attempt to make things right in the eyes of the powers that look down upon us.”

Kr'nak looked at him for a long moment. “Are there... are there higher powers that look down on us Cha'talla? As our people used to believe.” He asked softly. “Or have they forsaken us because of the choices we have made?”

Cha'talla reached around and removed the injector from the belt pouch at the small of his back. He held out the injector to Kr'nak. “They were not our choices Kr'nak.” He stated holding the injector up. “They were choices forced upon us by others. This is our choice. This is our choice to throw off everything of the last millennia and begin again. As our people once were. As... as Dysea and her family have shown we can be again. You have already started down that path with an elven female you have taken as your Blessed Wife. Would you kill for her? Would you protect her with every ounce of blood in your body?”

Kr'nak's chest puffed out at the mention of Osiri. “Without a second's thought.” He spoke firmly.

“Then take this Kr'nak and once and for all throw off this foul skin that the High Coven infected us with. Throw it off as so many of us have thrown it off and begin your life again as a true Akruxian Immortal.” Cha'talla stated.

Kr'nak didn't hesitate and brought the injector to his neck and held it there. He triggered the hyposyringe, felt it pierce his skin and Cha'talla smiled as another of his people was saved. He turned back to see Dysea watching him. He felt a surge of intense anger when he saw the blood on her body and the state of dress she was in, but a quick glance at where Phy'iad's cooling body lay reminded him that Dysea had made him pay for his crimes. Cha'talla stepped closer to her and then she was hugging him tightly in happiness. He returned the embrace as modestly as he could for Cirith's top did not cover a whole lot and then held her at arm's length.

"You... you should not have come!" She scolded him gripping his arms tightly. "But I bless the gods that you did."

Cha'talla smiled. "I do not abandon my tribe members in need." He stated softly. "Just as you would never abandon any of your pack. Is that not true?"

Dysea nodded her head. "Yes."

"Then we must get a ship down here and get you off this foul planet." He snapped.

"NO!" Dysea exclaimed.

"Mother we must!" Denali agreed. "We must get you off this planet now!"

Dysea looked at her third oldest son and once more even she could do nothing but marvel at how they had raised their children. Not one of them had ever considered her or For'mya or Anja or Bella anything but a mother to them. It was not something that any of them had ever questioned or thought about and it was strictly taboo to even mention something of that nature in a joking matter. Dysea had never heard any of her children talk in such a disparaging way to one another for it would be an insult of the highest order to any of the Leonidas children. Dysea doubted she ever would hear of such a thing.

"I was fighting beside your father and mothers before you were a spark in anyone's eyes Denali my son." Dysea spoke gently. "I can take care of myself. That *ronnus* Phy'iad mentioned something of Laustinos coming here to claim me as his prize for helping Pusintin." She looked at Cha'talla. "We know the Kavalians began all that has happened?"

Cha'talla nodded. "We have not spoken to Andro since just after entering the system but that is what he told us. He also said..." Cha'talla stopped and Dysea's eyes narrowed.

"What? What did he say Cha'talla?" Dysea looked at Denali. "Deni?"

"They have taken our mother For'mya." Denali answered. "They are holding her prisoner as we speak and we don't know where or why. They still believe that father and our mother Aricia are dead and they believe Phy'iad has you still. I was going to contact Androcles as soon as I knew you were safely off this world."

Dysea shook her head. "No." She stated. "Taking... taking For'mya makes no sense in the least. Even if all of us were dead she would never betray the Union or our values. It is not in her nature. If she believed us all dead she would never help the Kavalians."

"Andro believes our uncle is making a play for the throne of the Union and he is going to use our mother as some sort of launching point." Normya told her.

Dysea looked at her daughter. "That does not make any sense either." She stated.

Cha'talla took her hands. "What is it you want to do Dysea?" He asked her.

Scathing emerald eyes met his. "I want to be here when Laustinos shows up. I want to be here to question him in the most painful way I can imagine while I look into his eyes, for then I am going to lay him next to Phy'iad."

Cha'talla nodded his head. "Then so be it." He stated.

CHAPTER SIXTY

BETA QUADRANT

AUSTROVA

VANARI HOMEWORLD

CAPITAL CITY OF MYDALA

Coren Re Mydala stared out the large window of his expansive Regent's office over the Uparn Waterway and watched as the water skiffs navigated the river far below and the planetary transports skirted about in the skies above. The Vanari Regent's Hall was a massive building that extended across the Uparn River and was held up by four colossal columns, two each on either side of the river, with ten meter wide anti-grav platforms spread along the underside of the structure. Every member of the Vanari Board of Regents had an office in this building, though only a few dozen of the twelve hundred member Board had offices as large and plush as his. He held the long thin pipe in his right hand, the small curls of smoke lifting around his head and putting of a pleasant floral aroma. At nearly fifteen hundred years of age, Coren was one of the members of the Vanari Senior Board of Regents, the Re Mydala family having been the one to found and help begin to build this city of Mydala into the metropolis that it now was. Due to that fact the Re Mydala family would always be one of the thirty-one permanent seats on the SBR, yet though he held a seat on the Senior Board of Regents, he was technically still a junior member of this elite group. The thirty men and women senior to him had served on the Senior Board of Regents for at least a millennia while he had only been part of the SBR for a rather measly three hundred and nineteen years, taking his father's place when he had retired.

The Senior Board of Regents, or SBR as it was called by many, would decide the issues that were brought to its attention by the full Board of Regents. There were thirty-one members of the SBR so that whatever issue came to be before them would have a decision on it. There would be no ties in voting on the SBR. Coren had never been the deciding vote for an issue, always making sure to throw his vote behind the majority and following the most senior of board members in their views. The members of the SBR who were not grandfathered in were chosen for lifetime appointments, while the many normal Regent seats were voted on every fifty years. Coren was a very traditional Vanari, and he was well liked and respected among his fellow Regents. He was also the only Vanari male serving on the SBR that was unmarried. His marriage to Devra had been extremely well publicized in the Vanari media, her dazzling beauty and sharp wit highly popular among the populace. Unfortunately this fact also made their subsequent annulment thirty-four years earlier even more of a media event. While the parting had been amicable in many respects, Devra's decision to remain in politics had been seen by some of the much older Regents as a slap in the face to her former husband when they had ended their marriage. She had won her election by a virtual landslide when she first ran for the open seat on the Board, and then each subsequent election over the past three hundred years she had won with almost universal support among those districts that she represented. Coren had gotten her into politics, and a part of him wanted to be happy for her popularity and the respect she garnered even from many on the SBR, but he resented the strong recognition she held and continued to hold. She almost never voted with him on the issues and while he was proud of her for holding to her convictions, it was a slight that many of the older Regents would not forget. Her reputation was growing as well, since Devra was more attuned to the younger generation of Vanari due to her own relatively young age when compared to other Regents. She was often considered a spokesperson for many of the three hundred and nine Regents who were under a thousand years of age and who believed in maintaining tradition but not at the cost of change that could only help their people moving into the future.

Coren had no doubts that they would still be married had his appointment to the SRB not driven a final wedge into their relationship, though it had taken three hundred years for the end to come. Devra was beyond beautiful even by Vanari standards, and she was adventurous and open minded in their bed. Her beauty is what first captured his attention and her intelligence and quick wit is what made him marry her. Devra had bore him four children, three daughters and a son. He often bragged about Arduri and Naesta to others, as well as Nirilo though not as much lately because he had chosen to remain on the Lycavorian Protectorate homeworld. He could not bring himself to talk of or even acknowledge Caliria in public. Her dark hair had set her apart from others the day she was born and while he loved her as his daughter, the ancient taboo and gene defect that caused dark hair in Vanari females kept him from treating her in the same fashion as Arduri and Naesta. A large part of Coren knew this was stupid and wrong, but the politician in him had always won out in regards to publicly acknowledging her which had been cause for great anger from Devra and his other children. At least until the last three years when Caliria had begun using her name as a means to rally support and people to her cause of equal rights for dark haired Vanari females. She had several dozen other Cadre Officers had been pressing hard and pushing openly for a dark haired Vanari to at least be elected to the Lower Board of Vanari Magistrates. Just because they had dark hair did not make them any different was the rallying cry they used. They were not cursed or infected by this supposed defective gene, and even studies done by doctors and

scientists among their growing following had produced many reports that indicated the gene was completely random in their people. Caliria had begun using her name and the power her family name could generate to bring attention to the fact that they were no different, yet they were almost without question always the ones taken by Syndicate slavers. She was fighting for equal rights for all of them and demanding that the Board of Regents take action against the Syndicate for their deeds. Caliria had become a vocal opponent to the policy of the Board of Regents that allowed several hundred Vanari females to be taken each year during raids by the Orionis Syndicate on Vanari colonies or planets. Coren Re Mydala found the practice distasteful himself but he had always gone with the majority who did not want to anger the Syndicate enough that they would use their terrible weapons again. Now Coren Re Mydala was torn.

He was torn because his own daughter was now one of those who had been taken and it left a foul taste in his mouth.

“How many were taken with her?” The male voice he knew as Eyon Ahn Vernalo asked from behind him and Coren turned to look at the four men who occupied the chairs around the knee high table on the opposite side of his huge desk. All of them had long stemmed glasses of Vanari Brandy in their hands.

“Seventeen.” Ardan Vu Lamurrion replied. “They were returning from a student trip to Uyama One. Their transport was captured as they were transitioning from Quantum travel in Sector Twelve if their data cores are accurate.”

“So close?” Cruor Ahn Vernalo gasped.

Ardan nodded. “They are becoming bolder, moving deeper into Vanari space each time they take prisoners. Devra brought a petition to the Lower Board to go after them but they would not even bring it to vote.”

“How many stood with her?” Eyon asked.

Ardan met his eyes. “Nearly every Regent under the age of five hundred.” He answered. “I believe they were showing their solidarity with her.”

“The Syndicate is doing this because our females are traveling less among the outer rim planets now.” Alrerin Sha Harael spoke softly. “Especially so close to the next Celebration of the Hundreds.”

“That makes four mass kidnappings this year alone.” Ardan spoke. “Nearly eighty of our young females.”

“All but two were dark haired.” Eyon spoke once more sipping his brandy. “It is the agreement we have kept to for millennia now. They have already made reparations for those two who were not with dark hair.”

“How do make reparations for having a child taken Eyon?” Ardan snapped. “You know what they do to our females!”

“Yes I know!” Eyon responded just as bitterly. “What would you have us do Ardan... forfeit all that we are to them? They could unleash their weapons on us and then where would we be?”

“It is the way of things.” Alrerin spoke now as he got to his feet and placed his empty glass of brandy on the table. He looked at Coren. “You have my condolences Coren, but you know there is nothing we can do. We risk too much if we try.”

Coren met his eyes and nodded. “I know First Regent.” He stated softly. “She is still my daughter however.”

Alrerin nodded. “When the SBR meets again next week I will introduce a motion to the Syndicate Ambassador to provide compensation to you and Devra for taking Caliria. I have been told she has retreated to her cottage on Semina Three.”

Coren nodded. “That is what I was told as well yes.”

“Compensation will not bring Caliria back Alrerin!” Ardan spoke.

“It has been this way for millennia Ardan... you know this as well as I.” Alrerin told him. “We can not respond for they will unleash their weapons upon us as Eyon has said.”

Eyon Ahn Vernalo got to his feet as well. “I will direct my company to begin using more highly traveled corridors. I... I feel responsible in some fashion for it was my company’s ship and our pilots.”

Coren looked at him and shook his head. “It is no one’s fault Eyon.” He spoke softly. “It is the way of things. Do not berate yourself or your pilots for this.”

Cruor Ahn Vernalo stood up as well. “How is Arduri taking it?” He asked.

“She and Naesta have joined their mother on Semina Three. It is the Semina family estate and a place she will always go to for comfort.” Coren answered him. “Nirilo is aware and I have spoken with him briefly. He will be returning here in a matter of days as soon as his duties with the Lycavorian Protectorate allow him.”

“Does he still insist on laying with that Lycavorian female?” Alrerin asked now trying to change the subject tactfully. “He is well past the age to marry and I know many young females who would throw themselves at his feet.”

Coren nodded. “I... I believe it is just a phase Alrerin. He will return home in a year and we will appoint another to take his place.”

Alrerin nodded his head. “Good. We will need to appoint a more conservative officer to replace him this time. I feel he has been among them for too long as it is. And I hope he takes the proper precautions when he shares her bed. We do not need blue skinned animals running around our cities as the Protectorate allows their children to do. It would be embarrassing.”

“The color of our skin is not something that would be transferred in such a union Alrerin. You know this.” Ardan said. “All of our doctors and scientists agree.”

“Yes well... better to be safe than regretful.” Alrerin spoke.

Coren nodded in agreement at his words and looked at Cruor. “It might be advisable to postpone your Joining Ceremony for a few weeks Cruor Ahn Vernalo, at least until Arduri is finished mourning.”

“But everything is planned and all of the...” Cruor began to speak but his father took his arm.

“A few more weeks is acceptable Coren.” Eyon spoke cutting off his son’s reply. “Say... the day after the Celebration of the Hundreds six weeks from now?”

Coren nodded. “That is satisfactory.” He stated.

Eyon nodded. “Then so it shall be.” He replied. “I have a meeting and Cruor and I must return to our offices. If you need anything Coren... you have but to ask. Our families will be one soon and we must pool our resources and look out for each other.”

Coren nodded. “I will speak with you tomorrow or the next day in regards to the financial contracts we must finish before the Joining takes place.”

Eyon nodded. “Whenever you feel you are ready.” He replied. “There is no rush now.” He looked at his son. “Cruor... we must go.”

Coren moved around his desk and up to Eyon and they shook hands. “Thank you for your support my friend.”

“Always Coren.” Eyon told him.

Coren watched him turn and lead his son out of the office and then Alrerin stepped up to him. The First Regent was the senior member of the SBR and his words carried more weight than others among the Regents. He was a powerful force in Vanari politics. He grasped Coren’s hand as well.

“Take as much time as you need Coren.” Alrerin said. “I will inform my assistant to leave an open channel for you alone if you need anything.”

“Thank you First Regent.” Coren said. “I will endure.”

Alrerin nodded his head. “As must we all for the good of our people.” He stated softly. He turned to leave and Coren waited until the door had slid shut behind him before turning back to the older Ardan Vu Lamurrian.

The one man Coren considered a mentor outside of his father and who had directed him to politics and also had been a friend of the Vanari family for centuries. His youngest daughter had married Coren’s oldest brother nearly two thousand years ago, tying their families together forever in Vanari fashion, combining the wealth and power of two influential families into a single entity as the Joining Ceremony always did. It would be the same when Cruor took Arduri as his bride, for it would combine the assets of the Re Mydala and the Ahn Vernalo families together and give Eyon a say in what they invested in and where they directed their wealth. The Ahn Vernalo family led by Eyon was very well off, not on the same level of Coren’s family in political stature by any means, but they held majority assets in the three largest ship building companies within the Vanari Empire as well as majority stock in the largest Research and Development Company within Vanari space. Eyon was a very influential man on Austrova, and while he was not a member of the Board of Regents, he was very active in helping to write and establish policy. Many of the older members of the Board respected and trusted him. It had surprised Coren somewhat when Arduri had agreed to marry Cruor, but they must have

been more sexually compatible than anyone realized. He looked at Ardan as the door closed behind the men who had left.

Ardan rose to his feet looking at Coren as he did. "I know that look Coren Re Mydala." Ardan spoke. "I have known you for too long to not recognize that look."

Coren turned and moved back to his desk where he touched the control console. "Jokros you may bring him in now."

Ardan turned when the section of wall to Coren's office parted and two men entered. The first was Jokros Aht Tulyk, Coren's most senior, secretive and trusted non-political aide. A man whose family had been tied to the fortunes of the Re Mydala family since the beginning and had served beside and followed them for millennia. Jokros was a man in his late forties, tall for a Vanari at six foot three and his many years within the Vanari Commando Cadres had honed his body to a finely tuned machine of physical perfection. Ardan knew immediately that something was amiss when they entered through the escape tunnel that all of the SBR offices had installed in them. Each tunnel was private and led to and from a private and heavily secure landing pad. The second man wore a cape and cowl over his tall form and that he quickly drew back as he entered the office. Ardan's blue eyes opened wider in surprise when he recognized the long haired but well groomed Lycavorian Ambassador from the Protectorate.

Coren stepped in front of Jokros and gripped the outside of the man's arms. "Thank you my friend." He spoke. "You have the other information?"

Jokros nodded his head. "Everything you wanted me to gather... as much as I was able to find anyway. No one saw us enter or leave." He spoke in reply. "I have someone watching her apartment just in case."

Coren looked at the impassive face of the Protectorate Ambassador and stepped closer to him but not quite too close. Coren had never cared for the Lycavorian people as a whole. He considered them to be barbaric in many respects, extremely violent and quick to anger, and not exactly on a level as the Vanari. It was an attitude that most of the Board of regents shared as well, with the exceptions being the younger generations of Vanari. While the embassy here in Mydala had several hundred employees, the Lycavorians among them were limited in where they could go and what they could do. The Ambassador was a young Lycavorian; far younger than Coren himself and the other senior members of the SBR and Coren had no doubt that he was appointed by the young Director General simply to slight the Vanari Board of Regents for they preferred to deal with some of the older Lycavorians they had come in contact with. Coren knew the leader of the Protectorate was young himself, barely five hundred years old according to his son's reports, and he himself had only met with Coren once when he had traveled to see Nirilo. Their visit had been cordial, but this Dutkne appeared not at all intimidated or interested in speaking at length with Coren. Coren kept his distance and did not hold out his hand in greeting.

"Ambassador Lilonus." He spoke.

"Regent Re Mydala." The man answered. Lilonus was three hundred and fourteen years old and took great pleasure in the fact that his age pissed off the Vanari regents. He found quite a number of their politicians, both junior and senior to be exceptionally arrogant and pompous, while many of the normal Vanari like those who worked in their embassy were quite friendly and open.

"Thank... thank you for coming." Coren stated.

Lilonus nodded his head noncommittally. "It is not often I get a summons from a member of the SBR, especially one that intentionally avoids the normal means of communication that your people insist on using, and brings me into their offices via a secret entrance."

Coren motioned with his hand to the comfortable chairs that had been occupied by others only moments ago. "Please... take a seat." He spoke.

Lilonus turned and saw Ardan standing by the chairs still somewhat surprised and he bowed his head slightly. "Regent Ardan." He spoke as he moved to one of the chairs.

Ardan ignored him and looked at Coren. "Coren what is this about?" He demanded.

Coren stepped up to him. "Ardan... perhaps now would be a good time for you to depart these offices." Coren told him. "I do not want to involve you in these affairs."

"What affairs?" Ardan snapped indignantly. "If it concerns your family it concerns mine as well. You know this Coren. You have brought the Protectorate ambassador into a secure area of this building secretly Coren. My interest is peaked." He saw the look in Coren's eyes. "This is about Caliria isn't it?"

“Ardan... you are my closest friend and my mentor... but now I must ask that...” Coren began to say.

Ardan shook his head. “Not going to happen Coren. I helped your father bring you into politics and we share many of the same values just as your father and I did and still do. The marriage of your brother to my daughter has forged a unity together of our families and I will not forsake that now after over two thousand years. I am just as angry about Caliria as I know you are whether you will admit it or not. She is still your daughter Coren.”

Coren nodded. “Yes she is. Very well...” He said. He turned to his aide. “Jokros you may begin.”

The former Vanari Commando went to the console on Coren’s desk and inserted the data scroll he took from his sleeve. “As you know Regent, Caliria has been enrolled at the Austrova Advanced Physics University for the last four years. It is from within the ranks of students here that she has been garnering much support and backers for her cause. I have been working at the University since we knew Calira was taken and I have quietly questioned those that we know are in the group she helps to lead and support. All of them have dark hair themselves or they have lost dark haired sisters. All of them are students with degrees that...”

“Jokros please tell me...” Coren asked.

Jokros nodded his head. “Your fear was well founded Coren.” He spoke softly. “Caliria was taking advanced Physics classes as we all knew during the day however, at night and in secret, she and a dozen others were studying Advanced Genetic Engineering. It took me several hours to pry it out of her friends and then find the lone instructor that was teaching them. His younger sister was taken a hundred and seven years ago. They have been working on different ways to counter the chemical imbalance in our people and take away the advantage the Orionis Syndicate has held over our heads for millennia.”

Coren swore under his breath and turned away from them as Ardan moved to a chair and settled into it slowly. “They... they were violating the law!” He gasped. “No one has... no one has violated that law in over two thousand years!”

Jokros nodded. “Until now.”

“Coren... we must shut down this illicit action quickly!” Ardan exclaimed. “If the Orionis Syndicate finds out what they are doing...”

“I believe... I believe they already have.” Jokros spoke. “At least to a point.”

Coren turned back to look at him. “What do you mean?”

“We have suspected for many years that there are Orionis Syndicate agents among those who regularly travel here Coren. Men and women that we live and work with on a daily basis.” Jokros told him but directing his words to all of them. “We welcome many from the Empryeon people as well as the Antares Alliance and Darboli Republic. If you add their number with the high amount of Terran Eridiani from the EPG that come here to be educated at our schools, there are nearly a hundred thousand non-Vanari students enrolled at the University just here in Mydala alone. We know for certain that a large portion of the Syndicate is made up of Terran Eridiani and we have also suspected that at least one of their Grand Masters is Terran Eridiani and there could possibly be more than one. We have no real proof to back up this information and the Eridiani Provincial Government continues to insist they have no knowledge or contact with the Syndicate or their leaders.”

Coren nodded. “Yes. I’ve read those intelligence reports.”

“That is rubbish as we all know!” Ardan exclaimed. “The EPG is rife with corruption and the Orionis Syndicate has many of their government’s top people in their pocket! The EPG is essentially the political arm of the Syndicate.”

Coren nodded. “But their size gives them clout and we have many trade agreements with them and our borders touch along several thousand light years as well. I agree that the EPG is a front for the Syndicate, but publicly they do nothing to garner our distrust.”

Lilonus leaned forward in his chair. “Are you saying that one or more of the Syndicates Grand Masters is human?” He asked clearly surprised.

Jokros nodded his head and turned to the man. Unlike Coren and many others he had a healthy respect for the Lycavorians as a whole. “That is the old term to refer to their species, from before they left Earth but essentially yes. Our intelligence points us in that direction. The humans here in the Beta Quadrant are far more advanced mentally and physically than those who stayed behind.”

“Yes... but their live under a dictatorship.” Lilonus said. “That is what the Eridiani Wars were about. Those that wanted to break away.”

“True... but those that left only made those that remained far stronger. A few thousand returned to Earth, the planet of their birth, but many more remained here.” Jokros said.

“How does all of this relate to Caliria?” Coren asked insistently.

“Two of her friends remember seeing her with one of these humans from the EPG just days before she was taken.” Jokros spoke. “They knew him as Adam and they were having what appeared to be a pleasant lunch together on the Quad according to her friends. He had been showing quite a bit of interest in Caliria recently it seems.”

“That could be coincidence.” Ardan spoke. “Terran Eridiani are very susceptible to our females. They always lean towards our females with dark hair because they know no Vanari female with normal colored hair would have anything to do with them.”

Jokros shook his head. “It was no coincidence Ardan. According to her friends Caliria was very adamant about not being interested in him or any other male. She told her friends she was meant for something much more, whatever that means.” He stated confidently.

Coren nodded slowly. “She always was very spiritual.” He stated.

“This... human Adam...” Jokros continued. “He has disappeared from the University and when I checked with admissions every Terran Eridiani enrolled at the University is accounted for. I had my men confirm that.”

“They... they set her up?” Coren asked in astonishment. “But... why?”

Jokros typed on the console of his desk and pointed to the monitor as it rose from the side. “This is why.” He stated. The men saw a mass of numerical formulas and medical terms on the screen.

“What is this?” Ardan asked.

Lilonus shocked them both when he answered. “They are Genetic Sequencing Equations and DNA base code modules.” He answered.

“How do you know this?” Coren gasped.

Lilonus looked at him. “My first degree was in Biomechanical Genetics.” He replied. “We were trying to make certain plant life hardier so that it would grow on other planets.”

Jokros nodded his head impressed. “He is right.” He spoke. “Two of the other females I questioned said that Caliria felt they were close to developing some form of counter to the Syndicate’s chemical weapon.” Jokros told them. “When I escorted them to their apartments in order to obtain this information we found both of them broken into and ransacked. All the data they had been compiling and keeping secretly was gone. I now have anyone who worked with Caliria in protective custody. We conducted a complete sweep of Caliria’s apartment on the city limits Coren... it too had been ransacked. We found nothing.”

Ardan looked at him. “Why does that make a difference?”

“You misinterpret the context of my words Regent Vu Lamurrion...” Jokros spoke. “When I say we found nothing... I mean we found nothing. Her apartment had been cleansed and stripped bare of anything that might have told us what she had been doing or who she had been associating with. The same with those who worked with her. Her co-workers told me they shared the locations of this information only with those in their inner circle. It means they got the information from Caliria.”

Coren met his eyes. “She... she found a cure?” He gasped.

Jokros shrugged his shoulders. “Whatever she found... it apparently made others sit up and take notice. I ran a Flight Log Check on the transport from Uyama One. The ship missed its last two COM checks and the flight data cores suggest that these were missed *before* the ship was taken. The company impounded the ship yesterday morning and I was no longer able to access it without someone taking notice.”

Ardan came to his feet now. “Jokros are you implying that Vanari had a hand in helping whoever took Caliria and the others?”

“I’m implying nothing Regent Ardan. I’m merely stating facts.” Jokros replied calmly. “It seems rather convenient that those on the transport with her were half of those working closely with her on whatever project it is they were secretly conducting at the University don’t you think?”

Coren looked at him. “Devra and my daughters?” He asked.

Jokros nodded. “It appears they may have put it all together much sooner than I did, if they did not already know what she was doing, which I find more plausible.” He stated. “They are not on Semina as

everyone thinks either.” Jokros turned to look at Lilonus his eyes neutral but filled with knowing. “Are they Ambassador?”

Lilonus met his eyes without fear. “What do you mean?” He asked casually.

“Jokros... what are you trying to say? If they are not on Semina then...” Coren began to speak but Jokros held up his hand.

“My men and I tracked their V9 Interceptor Ambassador Lilonus!” Jokros spoke evenly in a very neutral tone. “We followed them all the way to the edge of the Orion Spur! They were using Devra’s V9 transport so it was easy to track when you have the right transponder codes and they were chasing a Syndicate ship it appears. The Orionis ship jumped coreward from there!”

“Coreward?” Coren gasped. “They made a blind jump coreward?”

“I don’t think it was a blind jump Coren.” Jokros spoke looking at him. “We detected the trace elements of an advanced design Protectorate Fusion Drive Core. A drive core that we did not know that your people possessed Ambassador. A drive core that also jumped coreward of the Spur. And a drive core that swallowed up the trace elements from the Vanari V9 Interceptor before that took place. Your ship took our V9 aboard and then conducted a jump coreward of the Orion Spur didn’t they?”

Lilonus met his eyes without regard. “Yes... I believe that is what took place. I only spoke briefly with General Director Dutkne mind you.”

“On one of your ships?” Jokros pressed him.

Lilonus nodded his head. “The *TALON OF JUSTICE*. One of our newest ships actually and the General Director’s personal command ship.”

“You have developed new engines?” Ardan asked now.

Lilonus nodded again. “Yes.”

“Why were we not informed?” Coren demanded.

Lilonus looked at him. “I do not believe our Mutual Non-Aggression Pact dictates we must tell you when we develop new technology Regent Re Mydala. In fact I know it doesn’t since I have read it four times.”

“Nirilo did not report this!” Coren spat.

Lilonus nodded. “I believe the General Director asked him not to.” He replied. “Your son is friends with General Director Dutkne and he did this because of that friendship. If he had chosen not to abide by that, he would have been asked to leave Protectorate space. Your people have a rather boorish habit of overreacting to things because of your ingrained feelings towards my people Regent. All you need do is look at how those who live here on Austrova are treated and it becomes obvious to even the dullest individual. We are not allowed to enter certain areas of your cities; we are not allowed to travel to certain merchant markets; I could go on but you already know this. There is no logical reason for us to inform you of anything since you do not reciprocate the same. We are not allies and we are not enemies, and that is the choosing of the Board of Regents and not the Protectorate. We have made it very clear we would like nothing more than to be allies and friends and be prosperous together. The Vanari are the ones who are not willing to do this for reasons which I can not fathom. The Protectorate has never done anything to the Vanari people to earn such distain and harsh treatment, and in fact we get along famously with those Vanari who we *are* allowed to mingle with at our embassy. You have only to ask them to discover that.”

“We were at war!” Ardan roared.

Lilonus came to his feet now. “That war took place over ten thousand years ago Regent Vu Lamurrion!” He barked angrily. “And it was a war that your people started with us, not the other way around as is so often believed among your people and even taught to some degree in your schools! Is that not true? I am a keen student of our history Regent Vu Lamurrion and we are far more intelligent than you believe my species to be! The events behind First Contact are very well documented Regent! Talks were proceeding very well until your ship’s captain chose to use his six Vanari Cadre Commando officers as intelligence gatherers. They used their considerable influence over the males of any species with the oil they secret from their skin to attempt to gain information that was not theirs to have! When it was discovered by our females what you were doing and your actions were exposed, that same captain chose to attack our delegation ship and kill three hundred of our people instead of allowing his actions to be revealed. When we attempted to present this information to you along with the evidence and proof of what he had done, you chose to dismiss it and take the word of your captain. That is

what started the war Regent! Your people's insistence that you are somehow better than my species simply because we can alter our forms to that of which you consider to be nothing more than savage animals!"

"That is not true!" Coren snapped.

Lilonus stared at him. "Isn't it?" He barked right back. "That man is still serving in your military if my memory serves me right! Is that not true?"

"We did not..."

"Is that true?" Lilonus growled.

"Yes! The Board of Regents... they did not deem he had done anything wrong." Coren said in reply.

Lilonus nodded his head. "And there you have it. We have accepted the Vanari as they are Regent, it is simply who you are as a species... but do not stand there and demand from me, accuse me, when your Board of Regents has treated us as no more than animals for centuries." Lilonus looked at Jokros. "Do I go out the front or will you escort me back the way we came so that I am not seen since I am considered beneath you? I am done here."

"Where has your ship taken my wife and daughters?" Coren roared.

Lilonus looked at him. "She is not your wife anymore Regent Re Mydala and she has not been for thirty-three years. I believe you have even moved on with your life have you not? You are courting a female several hundred years your junior."

"This is not about me!" Coren snapped stepping closer to him. Jokros moved closer, more to keep Coren from doing something stupid. He was not like many of his people. He had a healthy respect for the Lycavorian people and what they could do. In a one on one fight, Jokros doubted he could stand toe to toe with a Lycavorian soldier. Their healing factor and ability to take huge amounts of punishment made them very durable opponents and when combined with the skills that many of them possessed, they were a very lethal species. Jokros had no doubts Lilonus could kill Coren without breaking a sweat, ambassador and politician though he may have been. "You have taken Vanari citizens and equipment aboard one of your warships and then conducted a blind jump coreward! We do not go coreward of the Orion Spur Ambassador! It is unexplored territory that is inhabited by other Lycavorians and species far more violent and uncompromising than the Protectorate! And it is forbidden by Vanari law!"

"Forbidden to you perhaps..." Lilonus told him. "And there was nothing blind about the jump the *TALON* executed. They knew exactly where they were going for they are on a mission of their own. Regent Devra and your daughters accompanied them willingly because if they had followed the Syndicate ship on their own they would most likely be dead or enslaved in the Alpha Quadrant by now!" He said with a small smile.

Ardan saw this look on his face and his eyes grew a little wider. "They went... they went to the Lycavorian Union?" He gasped.

Coren looked at Ardan quickly, his own eyes wide in disbelief and then he turned back to Lilonus. "Is this true?" He gasped.

Lilonus met his gaze. "Have you never wondered why the Orionis Syndicate seems to be gathering strength, getting bolder and becoming larger?" He asked softly. "Do you think we do not know that they are coming further into Vanari space to take the females you so willingly allow them to?"

"We have no choice in this matter!" Ardan almost shouted.

"There is always choice Regent Vu Lamurrion. You have simply made the wrong one for many thousands of years now." Lilonus told him gently. "I surmise that your vaunted Vanari Intelligence Agency has not discovered that the Orionis Syndicate has expanded their many elicit operations and contacts to a considerably larger area than what you believe they have in just the last half century alone. Including coreward of the Orion Spur."

"What are you talking about?" Coren demanded.

Lilonus shook his head. "Your people are so insular and inflexible Regent Re Mydala." He said. "The Orionis Syndicate has expanded their operations into the Alpha Quadrant. Into what is known as The Wilds. Not very much at present, but they have several groups that they do business with it seems. Your ex-wife and daughters were following the same ship that was carrying your daughter Caliria. It seems they are not as inflexible as you and the other members of the Board of Regents for they were able to discover this all on their own. Our purpose for going to the Alpha Quadrant had nothing to do with their mission, but there is always

strength in numbers, and they were much safer with the General Director on our ship as opposed to going alone.”

“The Alpha Quadrant has been strife with war and death for millennia!” Ardan exclaimed loudly. “That faction of your people and the vampires have been battling for all of that time with no end in sight! Ever since the Vampires crushed your homeworld and enslaved your people! That is why your faction of Lycavorians settled in the Beta Quadrant! To escape that!”

Lilonus shook his head. “If only that were true.” He said.

“Instead you bring your violence and savageness towards others here! This is part of the reason we view you as we do!” Ardan continued. “Your Protectorate annihilated an entire planet and every living thing on it!”

Lilonus looked at him. “It was a Syndicate planet and they were using it as a staging area to launch raids against our ships coming here to trade within Vanari borders.” He spoke calmly. “We advised the Eridiani Alliance, since they are the only government it seems that has a close relationship with them, and we advised them that we would take actions if this did not stop. We asked them twice. Then we acted.”

“Your ships destroyed a colony of nearly nine thousand!” Coren shouted.

“All of whom were part of the Syndicate in some fashion and they have not attacked one of our ships or any Protectorate outpost since.” Lilonus said in reply. “Sometimes... sometimes you must use brute force to get your message across.”

“Where was your ship going?” Coren demanded now. “Where have they taken my son and daughters?”

“Regent Vu Lamurrion was correct in his statement.” Lilonus said. “They have gone to the Lycavorian Union. Recent events have... recent events have revealed that what we once believed about our brothers and sisters in the Union was in fact wrong. You see, we can admit when we are wrong Regent Re Mydala, something your people seem to have a large problem with. General Director Dutkne and *Val'istar* Wayonn are leading an expedition there to finally bring our people back together.”

“Wayonn?” Jokros spoke with wide eyes. “You allowed... you allowed the Pralor to go on this mission?”

Lilonus looked at him and smiled. “I see that at least some of you have studied the history we provided to you when we signed the MNAP two thousand years ago.” He stated. “Yes... the *Val'istar* went with General Director Dutkne. It was essential that he go and no one dictates to him what he will do and not do. He may have been a Pralor, but he has been wolf for longer and he is even more obstinate and stubborn than the General Director. They are of the same blood so it makes sense they would have some of the same traits.”

“Why have you gone there?” Coren asked. “I was under the impression that the General Director and your people made it a point to distance yourselves from the faction of your people that remained in the Alpha Quadrant because of their violent tendencies and disregard for the order of law and agreements.”

Lilonus laughed now as he shook his head and returned to his chair. “You don't actually believe that drivel the Board of Regents has been stating for thousands of years do you?” He said.

“It is what your former leaders told us!” Ardan snapped.

Lilonus shook his head slowly. “No... it is not what they told you, it is what you chose to take and believe of what they told you. Dutkne's father told you we had decided not to reunite with our brothers and sisters within the Lycavorian Union because their years of slavery and oppression took them away from the instincts and traditions that Sumar and then King Resumar his son began to instill in them. He told you when the day came that they returned to the core of what our species is, than we would unite with them without a second's hesitation. When they lost the father of us all, Sumar, and then his son King Resumar we thought all was lost, but with Wayonn's help we discovered that this is not the case. The day my people have waited and hoped for is rapidly approaching.”

“What are you saying?” Jokros asked softly.

Lilonus met his eyes. “The grandson of King Resumar returned to the Lycavorian Union nearly twenty-seven years ago and took his place as King. He returned to our people within the Lycavorian Union what they had lost through the years of slavery and rebellion. And now, he and his children and those within the Union have once more embraced everything that Sumar and then King Resumar began to teach us. Everything that they forgot during their struggles to escape the oppression of the High Coven. That day has come gentlemen and now it is time for us to reunite as a species and our people within the Protectorate will be overjoyed when this information becomes known to them. That is why they have gone there, because the General Director is

only a caretaker of sorts. The King of the Lycavorian Union, the blood grandson of King Resumar, he is our leader and he always has been. It has just taken this long for them to realize that. These are all things you would have known Regent Re Mydala, had you and so many others let go of your ingrained premise that my people are nothing more than animals in the shape of a men. You would have known this if you had read the history we willing provided to you. Unlike you our Intelligence Agency... and Wayonn... have kept a close watch on events in the Alpha Quadrant for many years. The United Lycavorian Union is not as backwards as you have been led to believe by your own people. They were very advanced even before they found City Ship 41 on Lycavore..."

"They discovered the ship?" Coren gasped in horror.

Lilonus nodded his head with another smile. "Yes... and now they are almost on a level with the Protectorate and the Vanari Empire in terms of technology. You would have known all this had you taken the time to fully come to know us a species and you would have known that those species who call the Union home have much to offer in the way of rich culture. They have different and diverse species aligned with the Union because they saw their future in them. The Hadarian species for one, they are the foremost healers and medical minds in the entire universe bar none, in some ways even more inventive and knowledgeable than Vanari physicians."

"Nonsense!" Ardan exclaimed.

Lilonus smiled. "And that is the attitude that permeates the vast majority of the Vanari people thanks to your Board of Regents. Apparently... your ex-wife is far more open minded and intelligent than you give her credit for and at least she has the *nor* to act when others will not."

"Where are they going?" Coren demanded moving closer to him. "Where has your ship taken them?"

"I imagine they have gone to Earth." Lilonus answered seeing their eyes grow wide.

"The Terran Eridiani's old homeworld?" Coren gasped.

Lilonus nodded. "The city of Sparta on Earth to be exact. That has become the unofficial seat of power it seems since the King's return. Something to do with the King's father and the people he was raised among, Spartans I think they were called. The General Director told me that they would be meeting with the King's son... the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union. Androcles Leonidas I believe his name is."

"Leonidas?" Jokros hissed softly looking at him. "Your King Resumar... the son he sent to Earth... that was his name."

Lilonus met his eyes. "It appears you have studied more than the Regents here Jokros." He said. "I commend you."

"Jokros... send word to prepare my Frigate." Coren snapped.

Ardan looked at him. "Coren... you are going after them?" He gasped.

"I will not leave my children in the hands of the Lycavorians!" Coren snarled angrily. "Especially ones we have been led to believe are nothing more than savages by their own kind." He snapped motioning to Lilonus.

Lilonus shook his head again becoming bored with the atmosphere that these men kept projecting. "That is not something we have ever led you to believe Regent Re Mydala... but you will believe what you will."

"Coren... the Board will never approve this!" Arden rasped.

"I'm not going to ask them!" Coren snapped. "I'm going to go there and get my children and my ex-wife back before they do something entirely foolish! They risk our entire species with their actions!"

Ardan thought quickly and nodded his head as options and scenarios ran through his keen mind. "I will inform the SBR that we are taking a few days to mourn and we will be using my ship to do so. They will not question me and they know how close our families are."

"Ardan I can not ask this of you." Coren said quickly.

"You aren't asking me... I'm offering it to you. You can not go coreward in a Heavy Frigate and we do not know what we will find on the other side." Ardan told him. "We will take my Command Cruiser."

"Ardan..." Coren began to speak.

"Do not say anything!" Ardan barked. "You are as much a son to me as my own children and I told your father I would look out for you. We will do this together!"

Coren nodded and turned to his longtime friend. "Jokros... use your contacts within the Intelligence community to get as much information as possible in regards to the Alpha Quadrant and do so quietly. We..."

“This is inadvisable.” Lilonus spoke getting back to his feet.

“I did not ask you!” Coren snarled at him.

“What do you think you are going to do Regent Re Mydala... jump directly into Union space, travel to Earth and take back Devra and your children?” Lilonus asked.

“That is exactly what I intend to do!” Coren barked.

“What if they do not wish to return?” Lilonus asked.

“They will do as I tell them!” Coren shouted.

“And you think entering Lycavorian Union space in a Vanari warship will somehow allow you to accomplish this?” Lilonus said. “The Union has ships as well you know. Ships that are far more capable than you give them credit for. Given what is currently happening there... you could trigger an incident and unlike the response you received from the Protectorate all those years ago, you will not like the response you get should you arrive in Union space and begin to make demands.”

“I do not fear this Lycavorian Union and I will do what is necessary to get my children back!” Coren growled at him. “And hopefully do so before the rest of the Board of Regents realizes what they have done!”

Lilonus shrugged. “Very well. It is your *sorwyk*.” He said. “I will be returning to our embassy then?”
(Funeral)

Coren shook his head. “No Ambassador... you are coming with us!” Coren said. “To make sure these Lycavorians know I am not playing games with them.”

Lilonus laughed now. “You have no idea what you are going to attempt Regent Coren Re Mydala.” He stated with a smile. “But I will accompany you... if only to see what your attitude and the reaction it gets will result in. That will be most entertaining I believe.”

**EARTH
SPARTA
EASTERN DISTRICT
APARTMENT OF COMMANDER JANAЕ**

Zarah looked slowly around the interior of the apartment. It appeared as if there had been a fight inside, with overturned furniture and several smashed lights. Zarah had been here before on several occasions. While Janae and her father did not want her to become publicly known just yet, all of the Leonidas children had been to her apartment before at some point through the years. She was very close in age to all of them, and this interaction had not been questioned because she was a senior aide to Governor Panos of Sparta who all of them considered to be a surrogate grandfather. They all knew they reality however, and Janae had always been close to their hearts and minds because she was blood. While she had elf blood in her, because her father had married a Lycavorian woman, she did not have the tell tale pointed ears of elves and was never mistaken for anything but pure Lycavorian. This had worked to her advantage and theirs more often than not, but now it was a blessing in disguise. While her presence within the fabric of Mindvoice could not be detected like it was with her elven mother For'mya, like her mother she still left an imprint within Mindvoice wherever she went because of her abilities. Zarah's unique skill, one of two that manifested itself after she had fed on Andro's blood, was that she could track and follow this imprint. It wasn't a trail so to speak, but more a feeling and sense of balance that Zarah could follow. The only issue anyone had with this skill was that it allowed her to see many private thoughts that were not normally touched during normal Mindvoice communication because they were shielded and this is why her father did not want her using the skill. He considered it a breach of a person's sacred privacy and he frowned heavily on it.

“There was a battle here *ussta libh'iahin*.” Lucia spoke softly from the doorway into the next room causing Zarah to turn and look at the ravishing vampire beauty who had saved her life and stolen her heart. Lucia's lightweight Mark IV ArmorPly conformed to her supple body like a second skin as her keen vampire eyes looked over the area. It was a body that Zarah had spent every night lying next to since she had saved her.
(My joy)

As Zarah gazed at her she felt a flush of sexual passion and delight surge gently through her at the name Lucia had begun calling her. She had thought after what had happened to her that she would never be able to

feel the desire for any type of sexual relations. Having fed as deeply as she did on Lucia's blood had the added affect of essentially minimizing the emotional damage that had been done to her during her ordeal. They had talked to no one but Andro and the *Feravomir* about this fact, and both of them had told them to not rush anything but to let their new feelings for each other and the relationship both of them now wanted to develop and grow on its own. Her Aunts Tarifa and Aihola had also been huge influences on them both since they had shared a similar beginning to their now legendary love for each other. Lucia would never leave Zarah now, and nor would Zarah ever forsake her. As each day passed and they slept within each other's arms their bond only grew, and the more time they slept naked beside each other, the desire to taste and explore grew harder to resist and almost without conscious thought Zarah had coined a name for Lucia as well. It would happen Zarah knew and as each day moved forward she found herself looking forward to that moment.

"*Vel'bol xun dos kyorl 'Chev?*" Zarah asked as she stepped closer to her. (What do you see Beloved)

Lucia shook her head slowly. "It is not so much what I see, but what I smell." She stated looking at her.

Zarah nodded for she too could smell it. While her father's wolf genes were the dominant ones within her body, she had still inherited the ability to smell and track blood just as any pureblood vampire could from her mother Isabella. "She marked two of them at least." Zarah said.

Lucia nodded as she moved into the next room. It was a medium sized living area off the apartment's main room and held a desk and comfortable chair as well as a fireplace and low back couch. The desk had been ransacked and overturned, the couch tossed to the side. Lucia moved to the mass of paper that had been strewn on the floor near the couch and squatted down, using her fingertips to pull aside several groups of paper to discover the large pool of dried dark red blood. "This one she marked good *ussta lilbh'iahin.*" Lucia spoke thoughtfully as she stared at the blood soaked rug. "The scent of the blood tells me it came from an artery."

Zarah turned back to the open door to the outside and looked at the *Durcunusaan* soldier that stood there. "No one has been inside correct?" She asked.

The *Durcunusaan* troop shook his head. "Not since we first came here Princess." He answered her. "It was roughly twelve hours before a detail arrived however, before we first realized the Commander had been targeted as well as the Governor."

Zarah turned back and looked at Lucia. "How old is it?" She asked.

Lucia shook her head. "It is no longer moist... the rug soaked up much of it... but I would say no more than five days."

Zarah nodded. "Just about the same time as when they attacked the rest of my family, give or take a few hours."

Lucia stood back up and faced her. "Can you... can you sense anything?" She asked.

Zarah met her eyes. "I haven't tried yet." She answered sheepishly. "I'm so used to father telling me it is wrong to use this particular skill."

"Difficult times sometimes require difficult choices." The male voice spoke causing both of them to turn and watch as Dutkne entered the door of the apartment, the *Durcunusaan* troop not even bothering to question him. They watched as his dark eyes swept across the interior of the apartment and then finally settled on them. "Androcles thought... he thought I might be of use to you. My name is Dutkne and..."

Dutkne looked at them staring at him and stopped talking. He knew all about what had happened to Zarah Leonidas and the role Lucia Moran had played in saving Andro's sister. There was not much that Andro and he had not talked off over the last hours, and what they didn't talk about Andro allowed him to see within his mind, just as he had done the same. He had not really taken notice of Zarah Leonidas or Lucia Moran at the villa, but standing there now looking at them he could not help it. He knew Zarah was the daughter of Martin and Isabella and that she was half vampire, but he was not prepared for her very pungent scent that filtered to his keen wolf nose. A sweet apple and sage scent that was very potent and pure and while until just recently he had never thought vampires had their own unique scents; he could detect Lucia Moran's soft basil spice scent filtering to him mixed in heavily with Zarah's. Looking at them standing close to one another Dutkne also felt something he had not felt in all his near five hundred years of life for any female. He felt intensely drawn to them, both of them for as Andro had told him, there was not one without the other any longer. He found himself measuring how they filled their clothes, for both of them had supple and lithe bodies and he marveled at how their unique scents mingled so completely. He shook these strange thoughts from his mind as he moved deeper into the apartment towards them.

“He sent you to watch over us?” Zarah asked defensively.

Dutkne shook his head quickly. “On the contrary... I offered to come. This ability that he tells me you possess is something I have never come across even having my grandfather around to question. Being able to track or sense someone else’s imprint within Mindvoice and not their resonance is very unique.”

“It’s also very wrong.” Zarah answered. “At least that is what I have been raised to think. It... it allows me to see things you would not normally see and my father considers it a breach of that person’s privacy.”

Dutkne stepped closer to them. “Perhaps it is... but coming to know your brother as I have... I get the sense he is willing to use almost any means to protect and safeguard those he loves and cares for.”

Zarah looked at Lucia quickly and then back to him. “Yes.” She answered softly.

Dutkne nodded. “He does not question your abilities Zarah... if I may call you both by your given names?”

“Everyone else does.” Zarah quipped taking Lucia’s hand in hers.

Dutkne nodded to her, the sarcastic answer lost on him. “He does not question that you can do this... especially now that you and Lucia have...” Dutkne paused for a moment and then bowed his head slightly to them. “Discovered each other.” He told them diplomatically. “He tells me that both of you have the ability to draw on one another now for strength and support as well as Seyra your bonded dragon sister. Your Mindvoice abilities have nearly tripled and...”

[Oh please my sisters...] Seyra’s voice filled their minds. *[His rattling on is beginning to hurt my ears!]*

Dutkne didn’t understand why Zarah and Lucia both began to smile as if they had heard a joke of some kind and he looked at them oddly as he stopped talking quickly. He had felt the Mindvoice tremors readily and knew Lucia Moran’s dragon had spoken to them, but he could not hear the words. As he had discovered with Androcles, the potential for shielding was there, enormous potential... but it was just not as focused as it was among the high level Mindvoice users within the Protectorate. That was something Dutkne had already begun working on with Androcles and it was paying off quickly. It was also something that Andro wanted him to show Zarah and Lucia as well. “Did... did I say something funny?” He asked.

“No.” Zarah answered quickly.

“You... you heard her? My Bonded sister?” Lucia asked also shocked.

“Not what she said no... only that she *did* say something that made you both smile in the fashion you reacted. I must have said something funny.” Dutkne said. He saw their looks of surprise and now he was the one to smile. “Both of you have beautiful smiles by the way, but part of the reason Andro sent me here was to assist you in any way I could as well as shield whatever it is that you will do. So no one else can sense it and think that this action is now acceptable.”

Dutkne turned when he saw Seyra’s light green scaled head push open a side window and extend into the apartment several feet. She was just barely able to squeeze her huge head into the window and she gazed at him intently.

How will you do this? Seyra asked him.

“It’s simple really. When Zarah is ready... I’m going to skirt along the edges of hers and Lucia’s shields and provide a smoke screen.” Dutkne answered Seyra without any hesitation. He had been talking with Elynth since they first arrived on the SCIMITAR and he found all of the dragons he had come in contact with fascinating. “Random thoughts spinning around the outer edges of a person’s MV shields does wonders to confuse and hide what someone is really doing. It is a distraction of sorts. Only someone as powerful as they or myself would be able to focus enough to actually sort through all the distortions.”

“We... we are not that strong within MV.” Lucia spoke softly.

Dutkne stepped closer to them. “On the contrary Lucia... now that you and Zarah have shared blood... both of you have Androcles’s blood within you. I know what he did when you were younger Zarah... and I know it is because of this that you are able to do what you can. He loves you both very much and coupled with your bond with Seyra here, now you both can begin to realize your full potential together.”

“You... you sound like the *Feravomir*.” Zarah stated softly.

Dutkne chuckled and nodded his head. “Yes... so he has told me. It is a disturbing habit I seemed to have picked up since coming here and meeting your brother. Androcles wanted me to instruct all of you in advanced shielding techniques as I have started with him. Apparently it is in my blood to assume the role of teacher among other things. Something that I’m not entirely comfortable with I assure you.”

“Can you fight?” Zarah asked.

Dutkne looked at her. “I would prefer to avoid conflict if necessary.” Dutkne stated. “So no... it is not my first choice of actions.”

Zarah looked at Lucia who met her eyes for a brief moment at his words. *[He is powerful ussta lilbh'iahin, you can sense this just as well as Seyra and I can. We could learn much from him.]*

[That also means we will have to protect him.] Zarah said with some distaste in her voice. She was not used to having to protect Lycavorian men though there were plenty of politicians and scholars among their people who were not fighters. Having grown up among her father and brothers, none of whom needed protecting, had given her a stereotype of Lycavorian men that she would have to shake now.

[I've never had to protect a man.] Seyra stated from her place in the window. *[That might be fun.]*

Zarah and Lucia looked at her and watched her blink rapidly and they both smiled. She turned back to Dutkne. “I will need to move into the main room. That is where we usually gathered when we came here.” She said.

Dutkne nodded his head feeling the tremors of their conversation within Mindvoice but not questioning them on what they said. Looking at the two of them he felt somewhat strange to be honest. There was definitely interest from him as a male wolf that much he knew. They were both dreamlike in the beauty they possessed, more so than any female he had ever been around and that gave him pause. He didn't know what to make of it... at least not yet. He would talk to Andro when they returned. He watched carefully as Zarah turned and moved fully into the main room with Lucia right behind her. Seyra's head disappeared from the window with one last look at Dutkne and then he followed them.

Zarah walked slowly around the center of the main room, quietly taking in everything the way the first *Durcunusaan* troops found it. Dutkne watched as Lucia settled to the floor lotus style and kept her eyes on Zarah as she moved slowly around the room. Androcles had told her it was a gift that she had received for being so strong after the events that had bound her to him to completely. Her ability to wrap psychic power around her hands and arms during a fight was the active and most noticeable gift, but her ability to read the imprints of others was the true gift. It was a gift that she had experimented on with her brothers and sisters when she was younger, trying to determine the extent of what she could do. When her father and mothers discovered what they were doing they scolded all of their children in the strongest language they knew. All of them felt it was a deep invasion of a person's privacy to do this even though they were allowing Zarah to experiment. She hadn't used this skill since except to track and detect her own imprint of places she had been just to keep her ability from waning. Now she reached out within Mindvoice slowly, expanding her awareness and almost without thinking she drew Lucia's bright essence with her, wrapping her around her essence and drawing from her own considerable power. As she did this, Zarah could feel the staggering presence of her brother's new friend Dutkne. He was like a burning star within Mindvoice, pulsing with power and control. His raw essence did not equal her brother or her father, but his control was exacting and precise and extremely focused. There was no outward strain on his face or his abilities as Zarah felt him raising Mindvoice shields that expanded outward and encompassed the entire apartment until they shut off everything on the outside and allowed her to concentrate solely on within the residence. There were no distractions, no surface thoughts from the *Durcunusaan* that surrounded the apartment and no distant echoing voices from those civilians who were still surrounding the area that was cordoned off. This amazed Zarah to some extent and she could feel Lucia's surprise at this as well. She shook her head quickly and returned her concentration to what she needed to do.

As she concentrated more, the light blue psychic power burst into existence around her hands, surrounding her forearms all the way up to her elbows. As Dutkne watched this with intense fascination he also saw Lucia's hands flared softly and while her psychic whips did not extend fully, he could see where this power she could wield came from. He could see it and he could feel it. It was a darkness within both of them, a darkness that they shared so completely it was as if it was the same darkness. It was also the same darkness that Dutkne could feel deep down within Androcles. Dutkne knew that Lucia's darkness came from Xaxon and the small sliver of him that had touched her when he engulfed her mother. The darkness within Zarah came from her brother, and like her brother, it was buried deep down and tightly controlled. It was a darkness that the earliest of the Lycavorian people had. A savage and horrific darkness that each Lycavorian had buried deep within them, but it was only detectable in those who were close to their instincts and embraced that darkness as part of whom they were. Andro, his father, those close to them, they were close to this darkness inside them just

as Dutkne and those within the Protectorate were. It was part of the reason that they were so indomitable when it came to so many things. It was this darkness that many species feared about the Lycavorian people here and within the Beta Quadrant, for if that darkness was ever truly set free upon others, the devastation that could be wrought would be immeasurable and Dutkne knew that only what Sumar, his grandfather Wayonn and the other Pralors had bestowed and taught on and too the Lycavorian people kept that power within check. Zarah now shared that small part of her brother deep within her because of the bond they had after that day and she had learned quite well how to manipulate it to her favor. Dutkne was also able to sense something else within her consciousness, something that was not her, something that was foreign but also mingled within her deep down within her psyche. He quickly forgot to concentrate on that to discover more when she began to speak softly.

“She was reading...” Zarah spoke as she circled the room slowly her dark eyes far off and her hands and fingers touching the different pieces of furniture. “She is... she is seeing a wolf but she is... she was annoyed with him when he left. His imprint is faint but angry. There were... there were five of them that entered.” Zarah looked around the room and turned her head towards where they had found the pool of dried blood just inside the next room. “She made it into the next room and that is where she shifted and attacked.”

“They knew who she is.” Lucia said softly canting her head to the side slightly and looking up at Zarah.

Zarah nodded. “I can feel their restraint.” She said. “They... they wanted to kill her for what she did but something held them back.” Zarah turned into the next room and stood completely still as her mind formed shadow figures and placed them in different locations. Janae on the floor unconscious and two Kavalians frantically treating wounds she had inflicted on them.

Dutkne stood there not quite in awe, but very impressed. For a skill that her father did not want her to use she showed remarkable talent manipulating it. Detecting someone’s imprint within Mindvoice was far harder and much more personable than sensing their Mindvoice resonance. Anyone who could Mindvoice left a resonance within the fabric of Mindvoice, a unique scent if you will. Unfortunately... unlike a normal scent which a skilled wolf could follow and track even days later, a Mindvoice resonance did not leave such a trail when it was cut off. Zarah had learned how to influence the many threads of Mindvoice and instead detect the imprint of a person. This was different than their resonance for it was the part of a person that was underneath their MV shields. A part of a person that they did not reveal with just the surface thoughts and emotions that skittered along the outside of their shields. An imprint could be tracked and followed, for it allowed the tracker access to a person’s mind that they normally would not have. As with the Union, this type of action was deeply frowned upon by those within the Protectorate. Not many had shown the ability to do this, but it was not something they would willingly use because it was such a violation of a person’s inner thoughts and feelings.

Zarah turned and headed for the rear of the apartment Lucia and Dutkne following without question. “They took her this way.” Zarah spoke as she walked through the small kitchen area and to the rear door of the apartment which opened into a small courtyard area which held outdoor tables and chairs situated around a flower garden and immaculately kept grounds. Zarah stood still once more, her eyes still far off but seeing where she was going. The courtyard had three *Durcumusaan* troops stationed in it at different points keeping others from the apartment complex from coming into the courtyard. They all turned to watch Zarah move into the center of the sitting area around a small water fountain and stop. She turned and looked at Lucia with that far off gaze. “Two... two others joined them here.”

Lucia looked surprised. “Kavalian?” She asked.

Zarah shook her head. “Lycavorian.” She answered softly. “Not very... not very strong within Mindvoice but enough for me to detect a small imprint. It ends here...” Zarah looked around. Lucia and Dutkne both began to look around the area as Seyra’s huge form settled lightly onto the edge of the three story apartment building above them. “It can’t end here... it is like tracking a scent... it doesn’t just go away!” Zarah said beginning to get excited.

Lucia reached out without hesitation and took her hand and arm squeezing them. “Stay calm *ussta libh'iahin*.” She spoke.

Dutkne looked skyward and allowed his eyes to take in the edges of the roof of the apartment building. *Seyra do you detect anything on the roof that could have held a transport?* He asked her openly. Using a shielded conversation with a dragon that was not your Bonded One was something that was just not done.

Seyra’s head shifted to look at him quickly surprised that he would somehow know this and then lifted her eyes to scan the top of the building from her location. Her keen dragon eyes could detect no scuff marks of

landing struts showing where a transport might have landed. *There is nothing to indicate a transport landed on the roof.* She answered.

“We don’t have anything that small.” Zarah spoke looking at him. “The smallest personal transport we have is a two person *MENKLA* Light Lifter. And even that would not be able to land on the roof. It weighs too much.”

Even if they had a transport of some kind... how did they get out of the courtyard without moving through one of the other apartments? Seyra asked. *The courtyard is not open to the public and has no entrances to the outside ring.*

“They went somewhere!” Zarah spoke confidently. “Her imprint fades to almost nothing right here and...” She spun around and looked at the ground around where they stood. She stepped up to the large table, gripped its edge and heaved. Her combined wolf and vampire strength tossed the metal and marble outdoor table aside easily while Lucia and Dutkne pushed aside the four chairs. Beneath the base of where the table had been was a one meter wide sewer tunnel cover made to look exactly like the carved granite floor of the courtyard. Zarah’s action had caused the three *Durcunusaan* troops to move closer until they too were standing around the sewer cover.

Dutkne knelt next to the cover and studied it intently. “It has been used recently.” He said as he dragged his finger along the top seam where it fit in with the surrounding carved granite patio. “It’s vacuum sealed from the inside.”

Dutkne looked up as Zarah’s hands flared with bluish psychic power and she knelt next to him. She lifted her hand and drove it down with immense force, the combination of her vampire/wolf and Mindvoice fueled strength punching a fist size hole in the one inch thick steel cover. There was the sound of escaping gas and Dutkne grabbed the edges of the cover as she drew her hand back and lifted with his own strength tearing it away from the vacuum seals along the edge with little difficulty. The escaping air brought to them the scent of death and all of them groaned and moved back from the edge of the sewer cover covering their noses.

“*L'gow d'streea!*” Lucia hissed. (The smell of death)

Zarah turned to one of the *Durcunusaan* troops. “Do you have a thermal scanner?” She hissed.

The soldier nodded. “In our lifter!” He answered as he began to turn. “I’ll be back in three minutes!”

Dutkne nodded. “The thermal scanner will give us an excellent map to go by.” He stated just as the implant he now wore cackled softly in his ear and he saw Zarah turn slightly and lift her head.

“**Zarah?**” The male voice echoed in the implant.

“Anton... what have you discovered?” Zarah asked.

Dutkne looked up at her. Anton Simpson. He had met him very briefly before leaving the villa, as well as his two mates, one of whom was a Drow. The oldest child of General Simpson and his two mates, Anton’s mother being Anuk Simpson. Dutkne was still rather hesitant around these dark skinned elves known as Drow. Even Lu’ria gave him pause in his actions and words because of her eyes. Those amber orbs were very disarming and they concealed the potential for great violence and anger. Dutkne knew that the Drow had been created by the Guardian of the Line to be most like Lycavorians, and just from what he had discovered in the last few days, that was very true.

“We just got done reviewing the logs for both EDEN Base and the PROMETHUS Zarah. No ship, whether authorized or not, left Earth from the beginning of the attack until three days later. Those that have left in the last two days have been thoroughly searched and cleared by Durcunusaan and there have only been nineteen of them.” Anton’s calm voice spoke. **“She is still on Earth Zar! She has to be!”**

“Anton... we found sewers beneath her apartment complex that appear to have been used recently. And not by normal workers.” Zarah spoke. “Where do the sewers for this district of Sparta empty?”

“Stand by... Cihera?”

“I’m on it!” The female voice chimed in.

Dutkne saw the *Durcunusaan* troop sprinting back from wherever their vehicle had been parked just as the female voice came back through the implants. “Zarah according to the plans I am looking at, all of the sewer channels end half a kilometer outside the city limits at the Eastern Sanitation Control Center.” Cihera told her. “But it employs nearly a thousand workers around the clock, there is no way someone would not have seen them if this is where they exited.”

“There are no dead ends tunnels or open entrances between here and there?” Zarah asked.

“No... everything was sealed when the new plant went online nine years ago.” Cihera answered her. “I can’t... wait...”

“What is it Cihera?” Zarah asked.

“The Sanitation plant is only nine years old!” Cihera answered her again. “It must have gone somewhere before that. Here! Zarah... the old plant is still functioning as a back up! It is in standby mode and is operated by remote drones. The sewers were rerouted to the new plant when it opened, but the old tunnels still exist! It rests almost at the base of the Taygete Mountains, completely out of the way!”

Zarah looked at Lucia. “A sewage plant.” She hissed. “Who goes to an old sewage plant ‘Chev?’”

“No one if they value their sense of smell.” Lucia replied.

“Cihera... Anton... grab a *Durcunusaan* detail.” Zarah ordered. “No more than a dozen for we don’t want to raise suspicions. Come in from the other side of the mountains. We will follow the tunnels from here.”

“We’re moving.” Anton’s voice answered.

Zarah turned back to Dutkne who was standing beside the *Durcunusaan* troop and looking at the portable thermal scanner over his right shoulder. “The tunnels are four meters wide and three meters high. More than enough room to move about freely. The images are clear and precise.”

Lucia turned her head and looked at Seyra sitting on top of the roof. *Sister... fly high above this facility and tell us what your eyes see. Do not make it appear you are looking for anything though.*

Seyra didn’t hesitate and launched herself skyward. *I will let you know.* She answered as she climbed into the cloudless sky.

Zarah looked at them now as she stepped closer to the hole and looked down into it. “Are we ready? Normal people don’t do these things you know.” She asked.

Dutkne looked at her eyes and couldn’t help the surge of passion that coursed through him. He watched Lucia step up and take her hand. “When has anything we have done since discovering each other been normal *ussta libh’iahin*? Should we consider this our first date then *ussta libh’iahin*?” She asked with a smile.

Dutkne shook his head. “My grandfather told me that my life would become so very interesting when we came here.” He stated slowly. “We are about to leap into a sewage tunnel with little or no light which could possibly be crawling with these Kavalian assassins that would like nothing more than to kill us in the most horrible of ways. You can’t get much more interesting than that.”

Zarah and Lucia looked at him. “That’s about the size of it.” Zarah said. “These things are normal for my family.”

Dutkne met her eyes. “Normal. Of course... this is normal. How much more normal can you get?”

Zarah and Lucia watched him take the scanner from the *Durcunusaan* troop and then step off over the tunnel entrance and drop out of sight without hesitation. Zarah looked at Lucia with wide eyes then quickly followed him. Lucia was next, followed by the single *Durcunusaan* troop who was muttering under his breath about how crazy the royal family was as he stepped off into nothing.

CRANAE ISLAND

Devra Re Mydala stood beside Bren as they used the data pads she had brought with her and those they had obtained from Lycavorian Intelligence to plot different information on the Star Chart. Every preconceived notion or bit of intelligence the Vanari people had gathered over the years on the Lycavorian people was rapidly being tossed onto a very large garbage pile. These Lycavorians were not the unintelligent animals so many on the Board of Regents thought them to be. There were very few who had read the history of the Lycavorian people as given to them by the Protectorate and Devra counted herself among that handful, yet nothing she had read had prepared her for what she had seen in the last few days. She had never considered the Protectorate arrogant or aloof, they were simply acting out in a way that matched the way they were treated by members of the Vanari people. There was never anger or distaste, only a sad acceptance that things would never change. Things were now changing before Devra’s eyes and she knew that the history between Vanari and Lycavorian was now irrevocably altered and a new path was being chartered even as she stood here. Devra had come here for help in finding her daughter and what she had discovered was far more than she had ever dreamed. She

glanced over to the side of the room where two of the four women who claimed her daughter was to be part of their lives stood with Arduri. Sadi and Ne'Veha Leonidas.

Devra knew a little of the Lycavorian history behind that name. The Protectorate had been able to provide a great deal of information on their brothers and sisters within the Union. She now knew Wayonn had been coming into this quadrant of space for far longer than Devra had been alive, keeping an eye on what was happening. The name of Leonidas was synonymous with hope and courage she knew. She read about the ten thousand and what the Lycavorian named Leonidas had done to finally set his people on the path to freedom from the High Coven. His sacrifice here on Earth had sent ripples among those that remained out among the stars and was the final catalyst for bringing all of them together to form the Lycavorian Union. She had learned quickly the significance of that name within hours of arriving here on Earth, and as each hour passed by Devra could feel her confidence growing. Sadi's long golden blond hair was long and silky, her green eyes stunning in their own right and holding great power within them. It was a power Devra would never know, but one she was rapidly learning of the longer she stayed here. Ne'Veha's dark brown hair shone equally with health and softness and her dark eyes spoke of playful exuberance and exceptional intelligence. They stood close to one another, and it was obvious to the dullest individual that these two women were far more than friends to each other. This was not something Devra was concerned with, for female relationships among the Vanari were very common and any of them were just as powerful as those that had a man and woman in them. What stunned her was that they were only two of four, and all four of them were bound to one man and loved that same man as well as each other. A man who loved them all just as intently in return. A man who she now understood loved her daughter as well, even though he had never met her, just as these four women had told her they loved her.

And then there was this man Bren.

Devra glanced back and looked at him as he plotted different points on the chart intently. He was taller than her five foot nine by almost five inches and his body appeared to have been chiseled from a mountain. Though she had only seen small portions of his arms and hands, Devra did not doubt that he was equally as defined everywhere else on his body, and he moved with the confident grace of a ballet dancer. Bren was exceedingly intelligent and gifted. He was one of those who was able to use that incredible ability the Lycavorians called Mindvoice, a Tier Six individual as Helen had told them. The highest you could obtain within the ranks of Mindvoice and he was a senior commander within the ranks of these *Durcunusaan* that Devra had seen all over the villa they now stayed at. Wolves of the Blood they were called, men and women with some of the purest blood known to exist and all of them able to trace their lineage back to the original Lycavorians according to Wayonn. She knew he was roughly a hundred and fifty years older than her nine hundred and twenty-nine years, and Devra could not deny what she felt coursing through her being so close to him. Devra had never denied or suppressed the sexuality that was normal for Vanari, especially the females. She had only taken part in one Celebration of the Hundreds and that is where she had met and coupled with Coren Re Mydala and been smitten right away. He had been the first Vanari male to reach her and he was the only man who had shared her bed in all these years. She had been very adventurous in their married bed, and their love making had been fulfilling, yet it did not have what Devra thought it should. She had had to release the oil within her skin far more times than she felt was needed in order to stir Coren to passion and make him respond to her. Towards the end, she had to do this just so that she could enjoy herself for it had become boring and tedious. He was more concerned with politics and advancing his influence among the SBR, not to mention the fact that he had all but disowned Caliria because of her lush dark hair. Looking at Bren now however, Devra Re Mydala felt her body tingle at what she imagined it would be like in his arms. Something she had never done with Coren in all the years they had been married. Nirilo had confided in her the last time he had been home on Austrova; confided to her about how the passion and feeling and the pleasure that he had with Lycavorian woman that shared his bed. He also confided in her that he was very much in love with her and that was the main reason he chose not to return home as often. He did not want the way the Vanari people treated Lycavorians to affect her in any way for she had accepted him completely as had her family.

"Devra..." Bren's voice jolted her out of her thoughts and she looked at him blinking rapidly.

"Huh... what?" She stammered like a besotted schoolgirl as she looked at him. "Forgive me... I was... I was distracted."

Bren nodded. "You are worried for your daughter." He said. "That is very understandable to say the least."

Devra looked at him. “Do you have children Bren?” She asked softly.

Bren nodded. “Two sons.” He stated. “They are both fully grown. One serves as a ship’s captain and the other is an artist.”

Devra couldn’t hide the surprise on her face. “An artist?” She asked with a small smile. “Then you are... you are married.” Devra felt the tug on her own heart, a tug of disappointment and that surprised her.

Bren shook his head. “His work is on display in several prestigious galleries across the Union.” He said proudly. “Mostly paintings done in the old way with oils and brushes. I have three of his pieces on display in my quarters aboard the *SCIMITAR*. His mother was very proud of him. Of both of them.”

Devra tilted her head slightly and looked at him intently. “Was?” She asked.

Bren nodded. “She joined our ancestors forty-three years ago.” He answered her. “She was captain of one of our *AUTUMN MOON*-Class Attack Frigates.”

“She... she died in battle?” Devra asked hesitantly.

Bren shook his head with a smile. “We have not always been at war, though at times it does seem like that to others. Her ship was caught in an Ion Storm as they were evacuating a small mining colony struck by seismic instabilities. She got most of her crew and civilians off before the storm overwhelmed them and caused her ship to tumble into the upper atmosphere of the planet. The hull had been compromised by then and those that remained died very quickly due to decompression and heat.”

Devra’s hand went to her throat in sadness. “I’m... I’m sorry Bren. I didn’t mean too...”

Bren shook his head again and stood up fully and looked at her. “Do not be sorry Devra Re Mydala. We were mated for four hundred and nineteen years and she lived a full life and blessed us with her presence in ours. She died doing what she loved and my sons and I do not mourn her anymore. We rejoice in what she gave to us.”

While saddened by what he told her, Devra was very happy that he was not married, for the more time she spent with him the more attracted to him she became and it was a powerful attraction indeed. “No... there has been no one since then?” She stammered the question.

Bren shook his head. “No.” He stated flatly.

“I thought... I thought your people craved physical contact with others.” Devra spoke. “I mean... Wayonn told me that Lycavorians as a whole are a very passionate species and that you need physical contact.”

Bren nodded his head. “We are a passionate people.” He stated. “And we do crave and need physical contact with those we love.” He told her. “Unlike what your people believe about us Devra Re Mydala... we do not take mates simply to fulfill this desire we have. We are an emotional people who have strong faith in a higher power. Many of us have seen things that only reinforce this to us. Marriage is something we regard as one of the most sacred of things Devra and while there are some among my people who do not put as much respect on this as others, the vast majority of us do not simply run around from partner to partner.”

“Bren... I didn’t mean to imply that...” Devra began to speak.

Bren reached out and his strong fingers encircled her arm gently as he shook his head. “I know this.” He stated with a smile. “I’m only giving you a window into the passions and desires of my people so that you may view us as we are.” He nodded his head. “It is true that we crave physical contact with those we love... but I get that with my sons and my grandchildren. I also get it from within the Leonidas family. If ever there was a family that is closer together I have never seen them. It is part of what makes them so strong. The King and Queens, and now Androcles and his mates... the others within their family feed off of that passion and love they have and it strengthens them as a whole. If you are within the small circle of those they call family and friends... then you will never lack for the feeling of family... for essentially you become part of their family. All of the *Durcunusaan* that protect them... or try to protect them anyway...” He said with a smile. “Those of us within the immediate Royal Details... our families... we come together with Andro and the King and their family several times a year and have huge gatherings. This is one of the many reasons that they are so loved throughout the Union. They do not consider themselves better than anyone... and I have seen the King and Queens toss protocol to the side and roll up their sleeves to help build a clinic or a store or a home here on Earth or Apo Prime. They garner this love and respect because of who they are. If you step back a ways and allow your eyes to expand into a different horizon, in many cases you will see that they consider every member of this Union as part of their family and that is why they are revered.”

Devra looked at him for a long moment. “You are trying to tell me something aren’t you Bren.” She said.

Bren smiled. “What would that be?” He asked.

“I don’t know... but I think it has something to do with my daughter.” Devra answered.

“Does your daughter... does Caliria have anyone back on your world?” Bren asked.

Devra shook her head immediately. “No. The vast majority of Vanari males will not even attempt to enter into any sort of relationship with her. Dark hair in Vanari females is not seen as realistically conducive to long term unions. Our males fear that their children will be somehow tainted by the gene for dark hair even though the male is usually the one who carries the gene. I know she believes in the tradition of our Celebration of the Hundreds, but she refuses to attend any of the ceremonies and just be an object of pleasure in a mass of bodies. This is another point of contention between Caliria and her father. Coren believes if she is to find a husband she needs to attend the Celebrations. Caliria does not.”

“What do you believe?” Bren asked her.

“I believe there is more to her decision to stay away but I have never questioned her beyond what she has told me.” Devra said. “She has been even more insistent about not going this last decade now and it has angered her father greatly. She even told him if he wanted her to attend so bad that he could go in her place.”

Bren chuckled. “Strong willed I see.” He said.

Devra nodded. “Very much so.”

“Let me ask you a question Devra Re Mydala.” Bren said meeting her dazzling green eyes. “Do you believe in predetermination?”

“In what sense?” She asked him.

“Do you believe one person could be meant for another before they are even born and because of that predetermination they will not acquiesce to what others feel they should do?” Bren said.

Devra smiled a little. “I don’t know if my faith in a higher power extends to something like that Bren.” She stated. “That seems a little far fetched.”

Bren nodded. “Indeed it does.” He said. “But you have seen it yourself this very morning by virtue of what Sadi told you in regards to Caliria. A woman she has never met. Now I ask you to apply that train of thought to everything you know about your daughter and her history. Her decisions and the path her life has taken... and see if there is not some correlation there.”

“Why?” Devra asked tentatively knowing what he was trying to say and not really believing it could be true, yet she could not come up with any other explanation.

“I have protected, or tried to protect Androcles Leonidas since he was only nine years old.” Bren spoke. “I have watched him grow into the man he is today. I have watched him turn aside many beautiful females who have vied for his attention and those few who have shared his life before Sadi, they were exceptionally brief. I have seen him working towards one goal in his life and that was to rediscover Sadi.” Bren motioned with his head to where she was standing with Ne’Veha and Arduri. “Nothing else mattered to him. Not wealth, not power, not control. Everything he had done up until the point she came back into his life was to move on a singular path that would see that day materialize. He knew they were meant for each other and nothing was going to keep him from achieving that. Now... I was not here the night of their marriage but some of my men have told me Sadi’s howls of pleasure whispered across the gulf like the sounds of musical charms in the heavens. As Sadi told you earlier, when he and Sadi came together it allowed them to discover each of those in turn who would share their lives as their power grew. It is my guess that Caliria is only the last because of the distance involved. It is also my belief that she has not accepted another in her life because some part of her, something within her inner being knew that she was meant to be with Andro and the others just as Carisia knew, just as Lu’ria and Ne’Veha knew and could feel it. She may not have truly known what it was, or even understood it. That they have been able to see images of her, no matter how brief since they are all together now, only lends creditability to what I am telling you. I can see it in your eyes as well. You want to believe... but whatever you were raised to understand and believe is keeping you from making that last jump.”

Devra blinked rapidly and looked at him in shock. Everything he had just said made perfect sense and as realization washed over her she knew it was true. “How... how do you know that?” She asked.

“What I know is not more than you Devra... I simply do not constrain myself to think along one particular path.” Bren answered. “As Queen Anja is fond of saying, more often than not, our people tend to

think outside of the box. If we believe something could not be true, we don't simply accept that, we try to find something that proves that we are wrong. We usually end up proving to ourselves that what we thought could not be true is in fact very possible and true."

"Bren... why are you telling me this?" Devra asked.

Devra didn't back away when he stepped closer to her, so near in fact that she welcomed the closeness and warmth she could feel projecting from his body and she could feel her own body tingle profoundly with delight. Devra was a worldly woman, and she did not shy from anything, yet the intensity with which she found herself wanting this tall Lycavorian man stunned even her.

Bren smiled. "I am telling you for two reasons." He said softly. "I am telling you because in all the years I have known and served the King and then his son, I have discovered there is one thing that the two of them share completely. They are the two most devious and cunning minds I have ever known. It would not surprise me in the least if, unlike what Sadi and his other mates think, Androcles already knows all about Caliria and is at this moment plotting to rescue her. Even while we do the same thing in the belief he does not know."

Devra's eyes grew a little wider. "If... if that is the case... why... why has he not acted?" She spoke the question.

"How do we know he is not already acting?" Bren told her. "There is a reason he and his father are the foremost tactical minds in the galaxy. They are always three or four steps ahead of their enemies. Do not worry Devra Re Mydala, we will bring your daughter back to you... and as I stand here before you now, I can tell you with the utmost certainty that every vile scum who has laid hands on your daughter will suffer beneath the wrath of the Spartan Prince who loves her."

Devra did not back down from his piercing eyes and for some reason his words filled her with renewed hope for the future. She blinked and continued to stare at him before speaking again. "You said... you said there were two reasons." She said softly.

Bren nodded. "Yes."

"What is the second?" She asked.

Bren reached up and touched his nose. "The Lycavorian sense of smell is perhaps our most powerful asset. We use it for many things... yet there is one thing we can always smell in others no matter their species."

"I... I don't follow." Devra said with a raspy voice.

Bren smiled again and his dark eyes glittered in the light causing Devra to shiver in delight. "You have come here now... at this point in both our lives for a reason Devra. It was only months ago that my sons told me I needed to start searching for another mate. To get out and begin to experience life beyond the *Durcunusaan* once more. I have been out with three females since they told me this... two Lycavorians and an elf female. When you arrived here I knew my search was over. When I saw you... when I detected your scent on the SCIMITAR... I knew it was you that I wanted. I will make you mine Devra Re Mydala and I will pursue you until you see this for yourself for your scent tells me you want me as well, but your mind is still fighting with that knowledge. You will come to understand and know what you want soon..." He stated confidently. "And then I will love you as you have never been loved before Devra Re Mydala."

Devra's soft intake of breath caused his smile to widen ever so slightly. Never in all her years had she had a man state he was going to have her with such firm confidence and resolve. His words caused her heart to skip a beat and she almost became wet at her center. She opened her soft lips to reply but the beeping of the COM unit saved her from making an utter fool of herself. She watched him turn quickly at the sound and Devra realized her hands were shaking. They were shaking not in fear or anger, they were shaking in anticipation of the moment he did as he stated he would. She took several deep breaths before turning and watching as Sadi stepped towards the COM unit and the figure of the *Durcunusaan* soldier appeared.

"Yes?" Her voice said.

"Milady... we are receiving the transmission that you ordered us to be monitoring for." The figure of the officer in the holoid image spoke.

Sadi turned from Ne'Veha and Arduri. "Is it secure?" She asked.

"Very much so Milady."

Where is it originating from?" Sadi asked.

“That is the surprising thing Princess...” The man answered. “It is originating from within the Icalro Alliance Traverse.”

“The Icalro Traverse?” Sadi asked surprised.

“Yes ma’am.”

“It is secure though. No repeaters or traces detected?” Sadi asked.

“Nothing that our instruments can detect and no one has communications equipment such as we do Milady. You know this.” The officer said.

“Then patch it through here.” Sadi spoke moving closer to the chart table.

“Transferring now.”

As everyone moved closer to the table they watched the image of the officer disappear only to be replaced by the image of the much older Kochab male. His hairless face was natural for his people, the dark brown skin moist. His lamprey like mouth was filled with small sharp teeth and his large eyes were yellow in color.

“My dear Sadi... or should I call you Crown Princess of the Lycavorian Union Sadi now? This is quite the surprise to say the least.” The Kochab spoke. “How long has it been? Ten years now.”

“More like twelve Uache.” Sadi answered.

“Imagine my surprise when my people told me they had a encrypted transmission from within the Union.” He continued. “They thought it was a joke of some kind considering what is now happening where you are. Distasteful business what these Kavalians are doing.”

“And how much of what has happened did you know?” Bren snarled from his spot.

“Bren!” Sadi growled.

“Tsk. Tsk.” Uache shook his head. “I am many things *Durcunusaan* Commander... stupid is not one of them. Events within your Union have thrown those loosely acquainted business partners here in The Wilds into disarray. None of them want to be seen as helping the Kavalians in their actions for they know well what will happen now that word is reaching us that Sadi’s young mate is very much alive. The smarting that Androcles Leonidas gave to many of them eight years ago still stings, and he was just coming into his own then. There are quite a few of us who refuse to do business with the Kavalians because it is bad for our health in more ways than one. What has befallen your Union is not something we predicted or wished to see happen Commander.”

“Uache... that is not why I contacted you.” Sadi spoke again regaining his attention.

“Yes I gathered that.” Uache answered with a smile. “A tight beam, highly encrypted transmission that only I would know the decryption algorithms for? I see not everything I taught you went to waste, though from what I have heard you are making quite the name for yourself now. Crown Princess of the Union who is being compared to the King’s mother, a woman who holds respect and awe even here in The Wilds. I must commend you Sadi, you have come a long way and surprisingly I find myself happy for you.”

“I... I need your help Uache.” Sadi said softly.

The Kochab tilted his head slightly. “Help that your vaunted *Krypteria* could not give to you? Now that is surprising... and somewhat troubling.”

“The *Krypteria* does not have the contacts you do.” Sadi told him.

Uache smiled. “Well... there is truth to that statement.”

“Uache... why are you within the Icalro Alliance Traverse?” Sadi asked.

Uache looked at her for a moment and then smiled again, exposing more of those small, sharp teeth. “I should have known you would have determined where I was transmitting from. This is the only place left to me that is safe. When I refused to do business with the Kavalians they ran me off of Nefoa and put a bounty on my head. That spineless government in place there capitulated to those animals without so much as a whimper. It was pitiful.”

“And you went to the Icalro?” Sadi asked.

“I had no where else to go.” Uache told her. “At least here they allow me to do some business though they take a very generous cut, and I am allowed to keep my estate and servants out of the hands of others.”

“Your slaves you mean?” Ne’Veha hissed.

Uache chuckled and shook his head. “Hardly. Slavery is a despicable business and one I will not participate in no matter the profit. It also has the predisposition for those involved in such activity to have very short life spans thanks to your former King. I have a dozen servants and I pay them very well Princess Ne’Veha.

I provide for them all that they need and they remain in my employ willingly.” Ne’Veha looked surprised that he knew who she was and it showed on her face. Uache grinned and it was a frightening visage to see. “We do get your Netnews out here, and the Crown Prince’s actions are very well followed, as well as those who he taken as mates. Unlike his father, he has the inclination to come into The Wilds and disrupt what he deems as unsightly businesses on a whim. He has yet to learn the delicate intricacies of how criminal organizations work and the vacuum of power it leaves every time he destroys one group or the other. Those in my line of work tend to be very wary of Androcles Leonidas. He is even more unforgiving than his father and his father is a bastard.”

“Uache... I am looking for someone.” Sadi spoke now.

“Indeed? And who might this person be?” Uache answered.

“A woman.” Sadi answered. “A woman who is not from this quadrant of space and who would have been brought here by those who are also not from this quadrant. Our information tells us that they are from a criminal organization within the Beta Quadrant and they have been making inroads into The Wilds for at least a decade now and possibly longer. They are called the Orionis Syndicate.”

“Finding a single female within The Wilds is next to impossible Sadi... you know this.” Uache told her. “What makes you think I would know?”

“Because you are an information broker and you have ears everywhere Uache. If it is happening in The Wilds then you know about it.” Sadi answered him confidently. “Any new contacts made from outside The Wilds would find their way back to your ears, especially ones that come from the Beta Quadrant.”

“The Beta Quadrant you say?” Uache spoke in a tone of voice that caused Sadi to look at him intently. The interest that he showed in this new knowledge was less than what she had expected. “If they have come from the Beta Quadrant then that would suggest these individuals have much more advanced engine designs than those of us here in The Wilds, and we have been trying for years to steal the plans for Union or Coven engines. No one seems to want to help us in that regard. There are many groups who would jump at the opportunity this provided.”

“And you would not?” Bren asked in a much more subdued voice.

“I am not stupid Commander and I am also not greedy.” Uache answered. “I have built my network on principles of trust and reliability. King Leonidas knows all about me, and I operate with his knowledge because I do not dabble in such practices that are repugnant to him. If I did... do you think for a moment your Crown Princess would be talking to me? We have a history together that I doubt you are aware of Commander, a history and a debt I owe to her, so please... remain out of this conversation from now on.”

“Uache... this is important.” Sadi told him.

“Yes I am sure it is.” Uache spoke. “Sadi... you have been out here... you know how hard it is to find groups of people let alone a single individual. The Wilds is a huge area and I am not as well connected as I used to be.”

“She would be unique Uache. And there are probably more of her species with her as well. Unless she and the others were being sold in private auctions there is no possible way word would not begin to filter out.” Sadi said. “She...”

Arduri stepped up next to Sadi now and well into the viewing cone of the transmission. “She would look like me except with dark hair!” Arduri blurted out.

“Arduri!” Devra exclaimed beginning to move forward to pull her out of the transmission quickly. Bren’s hand on her arm stopped her.

“She is my sister!” Arduri snapped softly. “She is my sister and she is to be...” Arduri looked at Sadi. “She is to be wife to Androcles! She was taken by slavers in the Beta Quadrant and brought here! We want her back!”

All of them saw Uache’s yellow eyes grow slightly wider at this knowledge as he came to his feet staring at Arduri. His eyes went to Sadi now. “Indeed.” He spoke as calmly as he could. “Sadi?”

Sadi nodded her head as she wrapped her arm around Arduri’s waist. “Arduri is correct Uache.” She spoke. “They are called Vanari... and in the Beta Quadrant their females are considered prize slaves when they are captured. As the elves were for so long here. We have reason to believe that Arduri’s sister Caliria and several others were brought here to the Alpha Quadrant to be sold as slaves by this new organization. You owe me a debt Uache... and if you can discover where she is I will forgive this debt to you forever and I will even offer you freedom to live out your years here within the Union.”

“Princess!” Bren gasped. “You cannot!”

Sadi ignored Bren’s words and continued to stare at Uache in the transmission her gaze unwavering. “Uache? You do not break any of our laws with your actions now... and I know that. You deal only in information. You can settle here within the Union or on the border if you wish and you can still conduct your business as it is, but I want this knowledge Uache.”

Uache looked at her evenly. “And can you insure I am not tormented by your Union authorities?” He asked her.

“As long as your business dealings are in information only... yes.” Sadi answered. “And as long as you break no Union laws.”

Uache looked as if he was contemplating what she was telling him. “And how do you foresee getting me and my people out of Icalro space Sadi? I have no ships anymore... and the Alliance and the Union are not exactly on speaking terms. In fact... they hate you and I imagine the feeling is mutual. Not to mention that my species is not very well liked within Union space either.”

“You cannot get yourself out?” Sadi asked.

Uache shook his head. “I could... but my people are loyal to me for a reason and I will not abandon them to their fates.”

“Then... then you *can* get this information?” Ne’Veha asked.

Uache looked at her and then turned his eyes back to Sadi and nodded slowly. “I already have this information Sadi. I was able to procure it for someone else who was very interested. So interested in fact that he offered much more than you do now.”

“Another?” Sadi demanded harshly. “Who is this person? I will...”

“Perhaps you should speak to your young mate Sadi.” Uache said.

Sadi stood straight up her eyes wide. “Andro?” She gasped.

Uache nodded his head. “Androcles Leonidas contacted me three days ago while he was still on the *SCIMITAR* returning to Earth. Your husband is quite the frightening young man when he wants to be Sadi and he is viciously protective of you and his other mates. He explained to me in very simple terms why it was in my best interests to cooperate with him. I would have gotten the information for half of what he offered to me Sadi and he is also very trustworthy. I transmitted the data to him yesterday morning and I am even now preparing for the ship he is sending to pick up myself and my employees.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this right away?” Sadi snapped.

Uache smiled. “You did not ask.” He stated.

“Then I suppose I will see you soon.” Sadi barked angrily. She stabbed her finger down on the control panel and the transmission died. She looked at Ne’Veha first and then at Bren. “Bren... where is Andro now?” She asked with a touch of concern in her voice.

“He and Jomann should be meeting with Marci and Deia at the hospital.” Bren answered. “You don’t think he would...?”

“No. He knows there is too much going on for him to leave right now... but we must go there anyway to insure this.” Sadi said quickly.

Bren nodded. “He is no fool and he would insure a thorough check of any information this Uache gave to him before moving. And then he will have a recon done if he has a target.” He said.

“I know.” Sadi said. “I’m more concerned about his mental state though. If he contacted Uache then he knows of Caliria and what she means to us. If he knows this then he will already have reached out to touch her for he does not need us within the connection as we need him. He can simply draw off Elynth. If he has talked to her then he will know what she is enduring and he will...”

“He will act as he did on Iraruzu.” Ne’Veha spoke softly as she took Sadi’s hand.

Devra looked at them and stepped closer to them. “What do you mean?” She asked them softly. “What did he do?”

Sadi turned and met her eyes. “Iraruzu is where our Drow Mistress Lu’ria was.” Sadi told her. “She was being hunted by the Kavalians and she had... she had been shot and was gravely injured by Andro’s cousin. He... Andro killed his cousin for what he had done to Lu’ria. If he has been able to touch Caliria and he knows where she is, then the only reason we have not left to get her is because he intends to be very methodic and obliterate everyone that had a hand in her capture and her imprisonment.” Devra glanced quickly to Bren as his

own words to her filled her mind. She turned back and watched as Sadi tilted her head and reached out within Mindvoice. *Lu'ria my Mistress?*

Sadi... what is wrong?

Will you and Enylarcopri meet us at the hospital? We have discovered some information that is very useful. Sadi told her.

As have we. Lu'ria answered. *We will see you there soon.*

Sadi turned to Bren. "Have a Lifter meet us on the bridge to the villa Bren." She ordered. Devra and Arduri will be coming with us."

SPARTA

KING YELU HOSPITAL

"...Zarah, Lucia and Dutkne are very close to finding Janae, within the next few hours at least."

Androcles was sitting in the chair next to Deia's bed holding her hand in both of his. Marci sat at the foot of the bed quietly while Jomann sat in a chair near the door with his back to the wall and facing the door into the room. Panos sat near the window, several data pads in his hand, the heavy curtains drawn shut.

Deia had most of her color back and she looked better than she had in almost a week. Eliani had performed two surgeries in two days on her back injury to insure her spine was repaired and she was strong enough to make a full recovery. Her husband and mate had been beside her from the moment she had come into the hospital and he had only left so that they could talk. Deia took a sip of the tea she held in her other hand and looked at him. "You have not leaked word of my condition then?" She asked.

Andro shook his head. "The *Durcunusaan* have the floor above and below this one sealed completely. The only medical people allowed on this floor are Eliani, Aunt Anuk and those *Durcunusaan* medical people treating you and several Senators that were pulled from the rubble. The other patients were moved to different floors. We do not need to give the Kavalians any more information than they already have."

"Hold nothing back from me now *Mandri*. Nothing! You are certain they have For'mya Andro?" Deia told him. "The Ambassador, this Matuarr, he didn't just say this to keep you from killing him?"

Andro shook his head. "Everything we have discovered points to the truth of his words *Tenna*." He said. "And it is not good. I... I need your guidance Aunt Deia. I am out of... I am out of my realm here and nothing father and I went over through the years covered this exact possibility. I'm... I'm lost."

"*We* are lost." Panos spoke from his chair in support of his now dead son's namesake. "You are not alone boy. Never."

Deia shifted her body slightly on the bed and nodded her head. "You are not lost... we just can not plan for everything *Mandri*... you know that. It is a fault that your father has as well. Events like these... they have not happened since the Black Day. Tell me everything Androcles. This is Laustinos's doing isn't it? Does your father know about For'mya?" She spoke.

Andro nodded. "Uncle Daniel will tell him when he arrives on Curila 6. I fear only Uncle Danny will be able to control him once he discovers this." Andro said. "Denali, Lisisa and Cha'talla have rescued my first elven mother." Andro spoke evenly looking up to meet her eyes. "They wiped out the Immortal mercenaries that had taken her at the behest of my uncle and the Kavalians. Denali and mother did not know for certain, but they are reasonably sure that she was to be Laustinos's payment for helping the Kavalians do what they have done."

"That *nubous temorvana saric!*" Deia swore heaving the mug of tea against the far wall and watching it shatter loudly.

Andro nodded. "My sentiments exactly. They believed he was making his way to Belid to collect his *reward* and they are going to try and capture or kill him. This Immortal mercenary Phy'iad he..."

They all turned when the door to the room opened and Eliani rushed in with large eyes. "*Tenna!*" She exclaimed as she looked at her Aunt.

Deia shook her head and held out her other hand for Eliani. "I'm sorry Eli." She spoke quickly. "I let my anger get away from me."

Eliani went to the bed and took her hand without question as Panos got to his feet and moved his chair forward for her to sit down. Eliani settled into the chair without question and held Deia's hand to her cheek. "I told you not to get excited *Tenna*. It will not help your healing if you insist on throwing things across the room."

Deia chuckled and felt a surge of warmth through her as Eliani settled into the chair holding her hand. Eliani Leonidas may not have looked like her older sister in any way though she bore her name, but she certainly had her manner and soft spoken voice when she wanted too. When Martin told her they were naming Eliani after Deia's sister and his grandmother, it had brought her to tears and try as she might not too, she had always held Eliani a little closer to her heart because of this.

"Andro... please tell me he did not..." Deia spoke turning back to him.

"He... he began to rape her yes." Andro answered seeing her eyes close in sadness. "Apparently Deni and the others had help on the inside from several Immortals that were not part of Cha'talla's tribe. One of them managed to free her and she killed Phy'iad before it went further while this Immortal and Cirith disposed of the rest. My mothers are strong..." Andro told her softly. "Killing Phy'iad made her feel better, but she will not be completely healed until she is back within my father's arms."

"Then you must make that happen." Deia said quickly.

Andro nodded. "She refuses to leave Belid without at least trying to capture Laustinos but one way or the other they will be leaving within twelve hours and returning to Kranek. I have already told Cha'talla to put her and my mother Isabella on a ship and send them to Curila 6 to be with father."

Deia shook her head. "In all my years, never did I believe we would discover what we have about the Akruxian people." She said softly. "What Eliani has told me is true then?"

Andro nodded. "All of it." He stated. "Cha'talla's wife Esther has already injected the Immortals who took part in the rescue of mother and returned them to the true outward appearance of their species. Deni was not able to go into great detail but apparently Veldruk introduced some sort of toxin into the atmosphere of their planet before he attacked it. This is what caused them to look as they did. When Esther discovered this she was able to fashion a serum that was able to eliminate the toxins in their bodies and return them to normal. She will finish this when they return to Kranek. I have not seen them... but Deni and Lisisa said it is a wondrous thing to behold."

"Much has happened it seems." Deia spoke as she looked at him. "These High Coven deserters? We can trust them?"

Andro nodded his head. "Yes." He stated confidently. "Valin and his daughter carry the blood of the fifth Lycavorian Bloodline within them *Tenna*. You have... you have kept the knowledge of the five Bloodlines secret for too long *Tenna*. And now it is time for everyone to know exactly who you are and how old you are."

Deia nodded her head. "Perhaps. But it was with good reason I did these things Andro and your father understood. And it was even more important when we discovered Janae." She answered looking at him.

Andro met her eyes. "Father knew?" He asked with some surprise.

Deia smiled. "There is far more knowledge hidden within your father's thoughts than many people expect or know. He has shared some of it with me." She said. "And I suspect there is far more hidden within yours. That is why the two of you are so much alike."

"No more." Andro said shaking his head. "Canth's father Wayonn is among us now as are those Lost Ones that Canth told father about on Ukwav. He did not mean just those left on Lycavore *Tenna*, and now that we know that, it needs to come out. Our people... we are finally reunited *Tenna*."

"As it should be." Deia spoke softly. "Canth spoke of his father often. We knew that they lived but never where. He wouldn't tell us." Deia said thoughtfully. "We can speak of that later. Right now you need to tell me what is happening. Resumar?"

Andro nodded. "They are ready to act. I sent Uncle Isra and Aunt Tarifa to Ritaah to assist him as well as help Jalersi and Pian find her daughter." Andro answered her. "Karun is... father welcomed him into our family before all this began *Tenna* and he has shown where his true heart of hearts is. It burns with the blood of a Leonidas. Grandfather Riall and General Vengal have our entire military on full alert. War Master Tareif and General Lynwe have Earth locked down tight and Colonel Nestor is sweeping from continent to continent looking for any Kavalians that may still be hiding. All of our Fleet Groups and ground divisions are standing too and holding their positions."

Deia shook her head and brought her hand up to stroked his cheek. “The military I will leave to you without question. There is a reason your father trusts Tareif and Lynwe as he does and a reason they rely so heavily on Nestor. I will not question or intrude upon that.” She spoke. “How... how badly did they hurt us *Mandri*?”

“As best as we can determine there were one thousand four hundred and twelve in the Senate Building when it came down.” Andro said softly. “The crews are still digging and trying to find survivors but the chances now are remote.” He looked at her. “Aside from you... only two hundred and twelve have been pulled from the rubble alive.” He watched Deia’s eyes close in pain and she shook her head slowly. “Of the four hundred and nineteen Senators who were in the building, four hundred have been accounted for. Nineteen are still missing. None of them made it. One of the explosive charges was set in the center of their offices on the fifth floor and it vaporized everything within two hundred meters in all directions. The respective districts on Apo Prime that they represent or their homeworld governments have already held special elections and nearly all those seats are now being filled by appointees until new elections can be held. Many are already on their way here.”

“I will greet them when they begin arriving.” Panos spoke now as he moved up to the bed and held out the data pad. “Here is a preliminary list of replacements.”

Deia took the pad. “And they believe your father to be dead?”

Andro nodded. “And our mother Aricia. I have had nothing released on our mother Anja other than she is at a secure location with my younger brothers and sisters and our grandmothers Gorgo and Dasha. Aunt Selene has been handling all the Netnews conferences with Aunt Aihola and President Taylor. We have not released much information and the Netnews people are becoming more persistent.”

Deia nodded. “Understandably so.” She stated. “If we are to maintain this façade you will need to begin appointing people to positions Androcles. The Kavalians may be animals, but they are not stupid. Our government is set up in a such a way as to quickly recover from losing your father. He pressed this issue even more after you were born. Laustinos will know this.”

“I was not suppose to survive their attack.” Andro said.

“But you did.” Deia corrected him. “And they will expect us to act politically to fill the vacuum.”

Andro nodded. “I have chosen Dilaen Roan as my Netnews Representative. Tomorrow she will begin taking over the briefings and such though she doesn’t know it yet.” He finished with a small smile.

Deia nodded. “The one who discovered Carisia? She impressed me with her strength and wit.” Deia looked at him. “Roan? She married the human?”

Andro nodded. “They were married on the *SCIMITAR* by Sa'sur as they were returning to Earth.” He answered. “They didn’t want to wait.”

Deia nodded. “Gorgo and I could smell that on both of them. Good.” She stated. “Since you have not released reports of my condition I assume that is also part of the plan you and your father devised.”

Andro nodded. “I will appoint grandfather Panos as interim Prime Minister. When Zarah and Dutkne find Janae, she will be appointed as his deputy. To cover her absence I will say Aunt Tarifa has been named Governor of Sparta and I will say she has gone to Apo Prime for her protection and to complete all of the legal requirements.”

Deia nodded. “That will suffice for now.” She said. “What do you intend for me?”

“Dilaen will report that you are in a medically induced coma to better facilitate your healing. Your condition will be critical.” Andro replied. “I let it slip out that you had survived when I visited the Kavalian embassy, but not to what extent. My anger got the better of me. I do not need them coming after you again however so you will be moved in two days to my villa on Cranæ Island. The *Durcunusaan* have turned it into a fortress and they would need an orbital bombardment to breach the defenses set up. This will also allow you to better assist grandfather Panos in his role since it will not look odd if he spends the majority of his time there now. Jomann has already assigned a full *Durcunusaan* detail to you since your original detail was among the casualties in the Senate Building. I... I would like it if... if you would advise me from the shadows for now *Tenna*. I know this is not your way... but I need to know you are safe and that the Kavalians believe you are no threat. If Laustinos is still working with them he will undoubtedly inform them to target you if it is discovered you are still active.”

Deia looked at Jomann and nodded her head. “I will do as you ask me... yes. I see you took my advice.” She said. She turned back to Andro. “Though from what Eliani has told me, your first act together was rather

ill-advised. You and Jomann must not act as your father and Andreus act when they are together Androcles Leonidas.”

“I will act however I need to act to discover information.” Andro replied glancing at his sister sternly. “And it is better that I have someone like Jomann watching my back along with Elynth. He can go places she can not and we make a good team.”

“A *riadcon* is what you are! Both of you! I did not mean for you to follow him blindly in his craziness Jomann.” Deia hissed softly turning to look at him now. “You are there to protect him!”

Jomann looked at her from his chair and rose slowly to his feet. “I was protecting him Deia.” He stated. “I was pummeling everything that got close to him.” This got a snort of small laughter and approval from Panos in the corner.

“*Son vada carians!*” Deia exclaimed. “*Benee piegn igords!* Both of you!”

Eliani met Andro’s eyes and stuck her tongue out at him. “And that is being pleasant in her choice of words from earlier!” She snapped.

“I have already been scolded by the *Feravomir* in the strongest of terms.” Andro said now turning back to Deia. “Both of us have. We will not act as rashly as we did going into the future.”

It was Deia’s turn to snort. “I’ll believe that when I see it.” She snapped. Her face became serious and she squeezed Andro’s hand. “Tell me.” She said softly. “Tell me how badly he hurt us Andro.”

Androcles turned to Marci. “I should let Marci explain that.” He answered. “She has spent the better part of two days discovering just what he has done.”

Marci stood up slowly and nodded her head to him. “None of it is good and I don’t think we have discovered all of it either.” She stated moving up next to Andro and holding out the pad for Deia to take. “Armetus is still sedated and will remain so for the foreseeable future according to Eliani.”

Deia looked at her favorite niece. “Eli?”

“He will recover *Tenna*... but the Kavalians injected him with Morphic Tellurite to keep him from shifting while they were torturing him. It also served to minimize the ability of our healing factor to treat the wounds they inflicted. It is why he was in such horrible shape when Marci finally reached him.” She spoke. “I have consulted with my mother and Eurin on Curila 6. They both agree with me that keeping him sedated until his healing factor is back to full strength is the best thing to do. Foreign Substance Intrusion was my best class in medical school *Tenna*, and even my mother doesn’t question me in that regard.”

Deia nodded slowly and squeezed her hand. “I will trust in your judgment Eli. How can I not when your mother and Eurin agree with you.” She said.

Eliani smiled and squeezed her hand back. “He will survive *Tenna*. I know how much you rely on him but he will survive. It will just take time.”

Deia nodded and looked back to Marci. “Continue Marci please.”

“Well... for starters... part of this is our fault.” Marci said.

Deia looked at her. “What?” She gasped in shock.

“It’s our fault in the sense that when he was appointed to be your deputy we were still involved in the Purge.” Marci said. “No one... and I do mean no one... none of us remembered to remove his Krypteria status and codes. He had First Tier access as a senior analyst Prime Minister... and when he discovered this access had not been revoked six months later he made sure it could not be revoked. Ever. He used several encrypted programs to bury his access so deeply that no one would look past his clearance as Deputy Prime Minister. He set up a Ghost Account and has been getting status reports on nearly every operation the Krypteria has been running for the past twenty-five years. This allowed him to stay two or three steps ahead of us and always insure he was safe from discovery. He built several backdoors into the Intelligence Database Core Drives, ones that only a full coded entry check would discover, and then only if the person checking was looking for something odd. We have been able to read many of his files, they were only partially secure really, he was not very careful in his personal files once we were past the many layers of security he built around them.”

“But... but why?” Deia asked. “He was Deputy Prime Minister... he could have been involved first hand on almost anything he wanted.”

Marci held up the data pad. “Queen Dysea.” She stated.

Deia looked at Andro quickly and then back to her. “Dysea?”

“It appears Laustinos has a very sick obsession with her.” She stated. “We discovered chronological entries for the last twenty-three years on pretty much everything she has done or places she has gone. Thousands of entries on everything from diplomatic trips she has taken to...”

“To what?” Deia demanded.

Andro looked at her. “He was watching her *Tenna*.” He said softly. “On *NORMYA’S LIGHT*... at the royal estate on Apo Prime. The only place he does not have holo entries for is the villa here in Sparta. He was never allowed access into the *Durcunusaan* Command Center on the Villa Estate thanks to Fache. And he tried several times. He must have tapped into the *Durcunusaan* security feeds from those other locations for he even has entries for the times she was alone with father or one of my mothers in their room on Apo Prime. He has entries for...”

“Enough!” Deia barked. “That is... that is...”

“Disgusting.” Eliani finished her sentence for her.

“I had Chief Mage Thr’won do a psyche profile on him quickly, given what we have discovered.” Marci said now. “She says it is the most severe case of obsessive perversion that she has ever seen or read about in all her years. And that was only a cursory evaluation. She says this is how he discovered her likes and dislikes about nearly everything. This is how he was able to get away with his open interest for her for so long. We are still going through the entries for there are thousands as I said, but in many respects, as vile as it sounds, Laustinos knows Dysea almost as well as Martin.”

Deia shivered in unmitigated revulsion. “By the gods.” She muttered.

Marci nodded her head in agreement. “It appears he has been leading a dual life for close to two decades now and we have only gone through the entries for the last two years. He is the one that has been feeding information and support to Rinard on Hadaria in regards to Queen Anja, he is the one that arranged for the attempt on Normya’s life and he has amassed quite a fortune in Black Market dealings for elven slaves and any number of things, to include the sale and purchase of T19 Dragon Killers.”

Deia looked at her. “The Evolli War?”

Marci met her eyes and nodded slowly. “He is the one that gave the Evolli bastards the intelligence about Alba Tau.” She stated softly. “He mentions his failure there to kill Martin Leonidas by Evolli proxy several times. He had been working occasionally with the Kavalians up to that point, providing them intelligence about the High Coven at different times but nothing directly related to the Union until after Alba Tau. That is when he began working with them exclusively.”

“Why?” Deia rasped out the words.

“In his twisted view of things he determined that if the King died on Alba Tau he could step in and fill Queen Dysea’s life. It is one of the reason he had all of the holo footage of her. To learn as much about her as possible so when he approached her a suitable time after Martin’s death it would appear to her as if he was somehow a perfect match for her. When he failed to accomplish that apparently he decided to help the Kavalians in their plans.” Marci answered. “That is what Thr’won believes anyway... and I concur with her.”

“That is just too perverted!” Eliani hissed from her spot next to Deia.

Marci nodded. “I agree.” She stated.

“You found... you found these entries in his logs?” Deia asked. “How?”

“That is the scary part.” Marci answered. “I believe he expected us to find them at some point, but his reasoning was that by the time we did, he would already have Dysea in his grasp and it would not matter.”

“That... that is crazy!” Eliani said. “Even if it all happened as he had planned, he had to have known we would tell mother all of this when we discovered it.”

Marci nodded. “Yes... but...”

“But what?” Deia asked.

“It is my belief and Thr’won agrees with me, that he assumed Dysea would already be his mate by the time we discovered these logs and would have already produced a child for him or at the very least be pregnant with his child. He mentions this several times in his entries in fact. If she gave him a child she would be bound to him no matter what... and even if she found out while she was pregnant, he knew that as an elven female she would never terminate the pregnancy. It goes against their every sensibility and inherent instinct to protect the lives of children. Even during the time of the Morlari Conflict millennia ago, when the elves were first building their society, elven females that were captured and raped by Morlari pirates refused to abort any pregnancy that

resulted. They began to issue contraceptives to their pilots and soldiers in case any of them were taken prisoner for just this reason.”

Eliani looked at her stunned. “You’re kidding?” She stammered.

Marci shook her head. “No I’m not. In the few years I worked directly for Dysea and Isabella on Elear, I had the opportunity to speak with Arzoal many times about their connection and history. She was still on Elear when the elves were dealing with the Morlari and this was being done and it was she who helped them in a manner of speaking to develop Sirtin.” She looked at Eliani. “At the time elves were still few in number and they knew that each and every life was sacred to their growth and strength as a species. In the first few thousand years after their birth as a species the ingrained instinct to protect and nurture children was pounded into their heads. They would sacrifice all that they were to protect their children, and though it is not spoken of now, it is still imbedded deeply in their psyche. How many elven females have you treated coming to you to abort a fetus Eliani? Your mother? Anuk?”

Eliani’s eyes grew wide. “I’ve... I’ve never heard of any.” She gasped.

Marci nodded her head. “Because there never has been.” She answered softly. “I checked before coming here. In over nine millennia, ever since records of this sort were kept, there has not been one elven female who has requested to abort a pregnancy that was unwanted. As Lycavorians consider the rite and union of marriage sacred above all else, elves consider the life of a child sacrosanct. It is not spoken of openly because of the many differences in cultures within the Union. Dysea, For’mya and the elven Parliament ratified this very mindset thirteen years ago when they unanimously voted to keep the verbiage in the Elven Declaration of Rights, and in every poll conducted on Elear since then, this mindset is vastly followed though not spoken of openly as I said.”

“That is neither here nor there now.” Andro finally broke in. “It will not happen, and if he escapes the trap she has laid for him by some chance his only options are to run or return to the Kavalians.”

Deia shook her head finally. “He won’t run.” She stated. “If he has carried this arrogance within him all of this time he will not run.”

Andro nodded. “That is what Jomann and I predict as well.”

Deia looked at Marci intently. “Ok... now tell me why this is important?” she asked. “He is gone... why can we not simply void his command codes and be done with it?”

“For the same reason that we could not shut down the four Gates surrounding Hadaria.” Marci stated. “Laustinos installed a trap program into every Union system that he had access too. As with the Gate Control Center, the moment they attempted to shut the Jump Gates down, this program activated in the system and locked everyone out completely. The program he apparently designed and installed is a three thousand character, mutating computer algorithm. Every time we try to shut down a system, the program mutates, making it harder to hit the correct series of characters. We found this program buried in the programming code of PDP control, many of the main Apo Prime Planetary Defensive Systems, as well as several dozen other major Union planets. If we attempt to shut the systems down, the program activates and we lose complete control of them.”

“Laustinos did this?” Deia gasped.

“Not entirely alone no.” Marci said. “You know of the Utopian Movement?”

Deia looked at her. “The group that professes peace and love for all and that we should destroy all of our weapons and arms and reach our hands out in friendship to everyone? I know of those idiots yes. They have tried to enter the Senate Building on different occasions through the years. They are all *malda* if you ask me.”

“I agree.” Marci said. “However... they do have many brilliant minds either working with them directly or advising them privately. Laustinos used them to create this program but did not tell them the entire reason behind it. They only knew what he told them, which that at the right time it would be used to disarm the entire Union. He catered to their arrogant peace loving sermons and they did not see past his smooth exterior.”

“So we have no control over our own military?” Deia gasped in horror.

Andro shook his head quickly. “No *Tenna*... nothing so terrible as that.” He stated without hesitation. “All of our Fleet Groups and ships and ground forces operate with the command codes of whichever individual is in command. He either did not have or never bothered to obtain those command codes. We are by no means defenseless, but our Command and Control will be severely curtailed until Marci’s people develop a new algorithm to either bypass or shut his program out completely.”

“We are working on it now.” Marci said. “But our people will not be able to complete anything and install it for at least another two to three weeks.”

“In the meantime we will use local sector control routed through our secure Repeater Stations.” Andro said.

“And if the Kavalians attack in a particular sector or cross our borders somewhere we will not know about it for several hours at least, or until that local commander can contact us.” Deia said.

Andro nodded. “It’s the only way to be safe.” He told her.

“What about other systems?” Deia asked. “Non-military systems. Government systems? Transportation? Manifesting? Maintenance? Communications?”

“As far as we can tell communications is clear.” Marci said. “We’ve shifted all military traffic to backup channels that only command officers know about. All civilian communications is still on the main hubs, but it is being monitored closely.”

“How did we find out about all this?” Panos asked now as he stepped closer.

Marci looked at him. “We picked up the three individuals from this Utopian Movement that have met with Laustinos most in the last two years and questioned them. We got lucky with one of them as he was part of the group that designed the computer program.”

“Where are these traitors now?” Panos growled.

“When we were finished wringing them for information they were put against a wall and executed.” Marci replied.

“Who ordered that?” Deia hissed.

“I did *Tenna*.” Andro spoke coming to his feet. “Marci is doing exactly what I told her to do and she will continue to do this until I say otherwise. This Utopian Group have conspired with Laustinos and that makes them traitors!”

“Androcles they should be tried in our courts!” Deia said. “You know this!”

“And have the Kavalians discover what we now know about them?” He said shaking his head. “No. That could very well put mother at risk even more than she already is and I will not do that. The nine individuals who were named as leaders are being watched now by Drow. We will take no more for the moment and accidents were arranged for the other two to make it appear as they passed into the next life randomly. It is no different than what you ordered with Brean just before the purge isn’t it?”

Deia met his eyes and said nothing for he was right. She shook her head. “Why... they have given you no idea as to why they hold your mother?” She asked finally.

Andro shook his head as he returned to his chair. “No. Matuarr was very vague in what he told me. Only that it was in retaliation for us training the Coven dragons. He said they did this out of a need to protect themselves.”

“*Rensibfla!*” Deia snarled. “This is an act of war and they know it! Specifically targeting the Royal family and removing the Drow outposts in The Wilds was not done to protect the KFI! It was done to hide something... something that has to do with your mother!”

“Whatever that may be it still escapes me.” Andro said. “If they wanted my second elven mother, then why order an Immortal mercenary group to capture and hold my first elven mother. It makes no sense!”

“For’mya would never betray anything to the Kavalians!” Deia spoke. “Never!”

“We know that *Tenna*.” Eliani said.

“Up until five days ago Laustinos would have been able to give them plenty.” Marci said evenly. “We have confirmed that it was he who gave the Kavalian dogs Dysea’s location. No one outside of your family and Armetus knew that.”

“Mother is keeping her shields very high.” Andro spoke. “More than likely to keep father from finding out what she has gone through before she has an opportunity to gather herself. I do not want to contact her just yet. I will wait until they return to Kranek before communicating directly with her. Valin Esavorna is working with the Krypteria in trying to find some way to bypass these negative resonance implants that the Kavalian stole from them.”

“That is how they are keeping her from using Mindvoice?” Deia asked.

Eliani nodded now. “I studied the specs he gave to us. Injected directly into the base of her skull near her cerebral cortex it would effectively neutralize her Mindvoice skills. This is why we can’t feel her even a little.

The inside of the Negative Resonance Chambers is nothing more than a large void within Mindvoice. Aikiro and her scientists discovered how to use these chambers to create these implants. We suspect it is why we could not feel our first elven mother for a time. Somehow... somehow she must have removed it.”

“Or someone did it for her.” Andro said. He shook his head. “We have no idea where mother might be. They would be fools to remain within Kavalian space, and no matter where they take her they would need some potent power dampeners to keep her from calling her Shi Viska. We are essentially at their mercy for the moment. Any attempt by us to find her would result in them killing her outright... Matuarr made that very clear to me. He...” Andro stopped talking and turned away from them memories racing back through his head. He turned quickly to look at Jomann.

“Andro?” Eliani asked softly as she looked at her brother and slowly came to her feet looking between him and Jomann.

“Jomann... do you remember what that fool Matuarr said to us?” Andro asked.

“Of course. He said your father was dead and she was no longer a Queen of the Union.” Jomann answered. “He said they would deal with the elves when it came to her release. He said she was not your mother and that...” Jomann’s eyes grew a little wider and he stared at Andro.

“He said you...”

Andro nodded. “Yes. He said I would not be King for very long.” Andro stated.

Marci’s dark eyes grew a little wider now and she stepped closer to him. “He... he told you that?” She asked.

“Yes.” Andro said turning to look at her. “I found it odd at the time and didn’t think anything of it.”

Marci moved to the wall and typed in several commands before stabbed her finger down on the panel. “Praylro?” She snapped.

“Go Marci!” The male voice answered immediately. “I am here with Nesa. Armetus is...?”

“Armetus will be out of it for some time but he will survive.” Marci said. “Nesa?”

“Yes.” The older woman spoke from Krypteria Headquarters within the mountain base to the west. Nesa had been with Armetus for over four thousand years and was the senior most analyst within the entire Krypteria. Only the most important items went across her desk.

“Nesa... Armetus gave me a data pad when we got to his home. Just before he lost consciousness. I put it into my uniform and forgot all about it. It is in the closet... get it right now!” Marci said.

“Hold on.” Nesa spoke as Andro moved up next to her.

“Marci?” He asked.

“Armetus said something to me before he passed out Andro.” Marci said looking at him. “I was so angry and worried seeing him like that I forgot all about it until just now. He said to warn the others, that the Kavalians... it was part of their plan. I thought he was talking about the assassination attempt on your father and the others. I *vithin* forgot all about it!”

“What plan?” Andro asked.

“Marci...” Nesa’s voice echoed. “I have it. Gods child... it still has his blood on it!”

“Nesa... is it encrypted?” Marci asked. They heard a soft intake of breath. “Nesa?”

“No... no... it is not encrypted.” Nesa answered quickly. “It’s not even a standard Union data pad Marci! It’s Kavalian! By the gods... where did you get this?”

“Armetus gave it to me!” Marci snapped. “What is on it Nesa?”

“Dates. Times. Names. Places. How they got here. How they were going to get off.” Nesa answered slowly. “*Carians* Marci... this is a gold mine of information! All of it unencrypted! Wait... *son vada carians!*” Marci looked at Andro once more. “Nesa... what is it?” She asked urgently.

“I have... we are looking at what appears to be one part of some plan they were working on.” Nesa spoke. “Praylro... plug it in and send it to her pad! Do it now!”

“Transmitting!” The voice spoke.

Marci pulled her personal data pad from her belt and looked at the small screen as Andro stood next to her and looked over her shoulder. Andro pointed to the small screen. “Sparta Reborn?” He said. “What the hell?”

“Andro it lists... you... Eliani... Resumar... Denali... all of you in order by age.” Marci said looking at him oddly. “It even has Sadi’s name next to yours as your mate. The same with Lisisa and Denali.”

Andro's eyes grew a little wider as he took the pad from her hand. "Not... this is not by age!" He gasped aloud.

Eliani moved closer to her brother when she saw the look on his face. "Andro?"

"Andro what is it?" Deia demanded as she sat up further in the bed.

Andro turned to the wall panel now. "Nesa?" He barked.

"We are here Milord." Nesa answered.

"Cease what you are doing for the moment and go to the archives at the University here in Sparta. Then have someone do the same on Apo Prime." Andro said.

"What are we looking for Milord?" Nesa asked.

"Find whatever we have on the Ascension Laws of Sparta and the Lycavorian Union." Andro stated.

"The Ascension Laws sire?" Nesa asked.

"Yes Nesa. I'm moving my Aunt to my home in Gytheio today. When you have the records from Sparta bring them there." Andro told her. "Once they have the records from the University on Apo Prime put them on a ship and get them here to Earth as fast as possible. Tell no one what you are doing!"

"As... as you order Milord." Nesa said.

Eliani moved closer to him. "Andro... what is going through that head of yours?" She asked softly.

Andro looked at Deia. "My uncle is making a play for the throne of the Union *Tenna*." He stated.

"What?" Deia gasped. "Impossible! There is no way he could ever assume the throne of the Union! Or Sparta for that matter!"

"Deia is right Andro." Panos spoke moving forward next to the bed. "I was alive back then remember. He was first labeled as killed in 458 B.C. When it was discovered that he was alive and working for the Kavalians his name was stricken from the roles of Spartiates. He..." Panos stopped in mid-sentence and his eyes grew wider. "*Nubou!*" He growled savagely.

Andro nodded. "Yes. Father reinstated him and even had a statue of him built among the others on King's row. He is officially listed as killed in 458 B.C., but he has been reinstated to the Spartan Roles thanks to my father and his love of a brother. His words to me the day he did that were... *'He may be a backstabbing bastard, but he was a Leonidas and a King'*. And since he is not dead..."

Deia shook her head. "Androcles that is not possible." Deia spoke firmly. "He could not possibly hope to claim the throne of Sparta. He may have been reinstated to the roles of the Spartan Peers but he is regarded as a traitor to his people!"

Andro moved to the bed and held out the data pad. "Then why is there a list with all of our names on it *Tenna*? Look at it! This is not a list of my brothers and sisters by age! This is a list of us by order of Ascension to the Throne of Sparta, and by virtue of that to the Throne of the Lycavorian Union!"

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

BELID

"... many survive?" Cha'talla asked Denali as he stood in the Command Center looking at the star chart table.

"Sixty-nine." Denali answered from the chair he sat in with his arms across his broad chest. "They all surrendered Cha'talla."

Cha'talla turned from the chart and looked at him. Tir'ut and Lynom also sat in chairs they had procured from the shattered remains of the base somewhere, his brother T'lolt standing directly between them, his hands on their shoulders. Arrarn Leonidas stood against the far wall, Narice and Toria leaning up against his powerful body. As'hia stood with her mother and father off to the side, relishing in the attention they were showing her and filling them in on everything that had happened. That she was completely and utterly in love with Lynom was easily seen as she kept looking back at where he sat next to his brother. Danarla could barely keep her hands off her youngest child as happy as she was. Ta'lon looked at Lynom with increasing respect as As'hia told them of all he had done at considerable risk to himself. Even as an elf he could not deny what he saw in his daughter's dark eyes when she looked at him. Ta'lon was used to being different in his life; he was much taller

and more muscular than most elves, and he was also among a very few hundred elven men throughout the entire Union who had Lycavorian wives. It was very common now for elf females to enter into long term relationships and marriage with Lycavorian men; it was part of the elf female nature to seek out strong males so that they could reproduce. It had become much more common with the King's return and his well known love for both his elven wives, but elven men who had married Lycavorian females was very rare and to Ta'lon's knowledge all of the two hundred and sixty-three marriages like his and Danarla's throughout the Union were dedicated and loving. All of them turned at Cha'talla's next words.

"Does this... does this grant them some sort of reprieve from us after what they have done Denali?" He asked softly. "After what they have taken part in... what your mother has had to endure at their hands? What Phy'iad did to your mother is a blight upon my people and I..." Cha'talla shook his head. "The suffering they have put others through is unforgivable? They only surrendered because they knew they were beaten and were too cowardly to die with honor." He turned his head and looked at Kr'nak who was still marveling over the complete transformation that had come over him. He kept staring at his hands. "Kr'nak... you know these men... what do you say?"

Kr'nak looked at Cha'talla with wide eyes. His gray skin, once the pallor of death, was now a lightly tanned bronze color. His once bald head was now covered in short dark hair and while the bone spurs along his jaw clearly marked him as an Immortal; his skin was free of blemishes and the mottled look from only two hours ago. The transformation had not been pain free, expunging the toxins in his body had taken its toll on his energy reserves, but seeing the result was beyond miraculous in his mind and he only wished for one thing now. He blinked several times and Cha'talla's question finally registered in his mind. He looked at Cha'talla then. "Most of them... most of them have known only one thing in their lives and that is the way of life Phy'iad gave to them. Those five who followed me... all of us have over three thousand years of life... we have seen and experienced things they have not. Phy'iad... he twisted them Cha'talla... he made them just like him, for he was no better than the High Coven masters we once served. I know what is in the hearts of my men... I know what they feel and what they want for themselves going into the future. It is the same thing as what I want. I can not speak for the others."

Cha'talla turned back to Denali. "You spoke with your brother Denali. What does he wish done with them?"

"I spoke with him only briefly. I told him we had several dozen prisoners but he was more concerned with mother and how badly we were hurt." Denali said.

"What would he do Deni?" Tir'ut asked now.

Denali turned and looked at him for a long moment. He turned back to Cha'talla and took a deep breath as he stood up. "Andro is very much like my father, but he is also much darker in many ways. I believe... I believe my father would speak with them... perhaps offer them a choice at making a new life for themselves or die here. Androcles... for what they have done today and in the past... for what Phy'iad did to our mother, Andro would have already executed them. If he had even accepted their surrender at all to be honest."

"As it should be." T'lolt spoke with a nod.

"My Spartan blood... my Spartan blood tells me there is no redemption for them." Denali said. "Yet there are many within the Union who have been redeemed and atoned for their past actions." Denali shook his head slowly. "My father and the *Feravomir* have always told us that our first instinct is usually the correct one." He looked at Cha'talla. "My first instinct is to insure they never hurt another being again."

Cha'talla looked at Narice next. "Princess?" He asked.

Narice met his eyes with a shocked look. "Cha'talla... I am... I am no longer a Princess of the High Coven." She stammered.

"No... but you *are* a Princess of the Lycavorian Union." Cha'talla spoke softly. "Unlike Denali and the others, you have lived among my people. Served with them."

"That fact does not qualify me to make a decision on whether the prisoners live or die Cha'talla." Narice told him. She looked at Toria and Arrarn for a long moment and then back to him. "I have found more than I had ever dreamed I would Cha'talla. I have started a new life. It would be unfair for me to weigh in on such a decision."

"Execute them father." Lynom spoke now looking up at his father. "I *have* been among them, for two years and I have seen what they are capable of. They do not deserve to live... not after what they..."

As'hia stepped away from her parents quickly and moved to his side. He looked up at her face and she reached up to stroke his cheek. "You can not make a proper judgment Lynom my love. It would be unfair." She said softly. "You... I know you found those who...?"

"I did." Lynom told her as he pulled her close to him.

"Then your vow to me is fulfilled." As'hia said softly as she wrapped her arms around his head. "Now we move into the future, whatever it may bring."

"Execute them!" The female voice spoke from behind them.

Kr'nak recognized that voice immediately and spun around to look at Osiri as she came in and stood beside Esther. Her beautiful eyes fell on him when he moved and they grew wide in disbelief. "Osiri... you..."

Osiri stepped away from Esther and moved closer to him with wide eyes. She had feared the worse, for Esther would not tell her what had become of Kr'nak. That her heart ached for him and any word of him even now that she was free of Phy'iad's vile possession, this told Osiri that she had no doubts what her future held. She had been rubbing her pregnant abdomen as they moved down the corridor, hoping beyond hope that he was alive and she would not have to go forward without him now he stood in front of her. So tall and so powerful and so utterly handsome. She had fallen in love with an Immortal regardless of what he looked like, for he had treated her as a precious object to be worshiped and adored, and he had shown her that his heart was pure. All the times he had made love to her flooded back to Osiri as she stepped up to him, her hands shaking horribly. He had been so tender and gentle, exploring every portion of her body with meticulous attention. Even with his size he had never hurt her in any way, always mindful of her body within his powerful arms, and to think she would never feel his fangs pierce her skin at the peak of their pleasure made her ache for him even more. Looking at him now Osiri knew that miracles indeed did exist.

"Kr'nak?" She gasped softly reaching up to touch his cheek and seeing his eyes close as she did.

His hand came up and covered her smaller one on his cheek. "I... you are free Osiri?" He asked softly.

Osiri nodded her head quickly as she moved closer to him. "Yes. Oh... I worried for you Kr'nak! Why didn't you..." She pressed her other hand to his face as tears rolled down her cheeks. "Look at... look at you my..."

Kr'nak opened his eyes and stared into her beautiful face. "You are free now Osiri. I did not know if... if you would still feel the same for me."

Osiri stepped up against him then and pressed her lush body to his while wrapping her arms around his waist. "I am... I am your Blessed Wife." She sobbed. "I... I carry our child! I love you with all that I am."

Kr'nak choked back his own tears as his arms encircled her petite elven body and he held her tightly. He looked up as Esther moved up next to Cha'talla and slipped her arm around his waist with a smile. Kr'nak bent his head and inhaled deeply of Osiri's hair as happiness filled him. "Our... our son?" He asked softly as he lowered his lips to her elven ear and brushed them ever so gently across the outer ridge of her ear. He felt her shudder in delight at his touch as she always had and this more than anything told him he was still the center of her love, just as she was his.

Osiri smiled blissfully as he brushed her ear with his lips. "I think... I think all the loud noises disturbed him my husband. He made himself known this day by kicking rather strongly for the first time."

Kr'nak smiled and pulled her even tighter to him. "He will be a strong boy." He said in a soft whisper. "Just like his mother."

"Osiri?" Cha'talla's voice broke their moment up and she turned her head to look at him without releasing her arms from Kr'nak's waist. She did not want to let go of him for fear that this was all still a dream and she would lose him forever.

"Yes?" She stammered.

"Do you speak... do you speak for the other elf females that we have rescued?" Cha'talla asked.

Osiri blinked several times, clearing the tears from her stunning eyes and she looked at the legendary Cha'talla standing only a few meters away. "They... it will take them a long time to recover from what they have experienced here." She said in reply. "They have not had Kr'nak to be their anchor and their lifeline Cha'talla as I have. Your people..."

"They are not our people!" T'lolt hissed softly seeing her eyes turn to look at him. "They have betray all that our people were raised to embrace so many thousands of years ago. We have returned to this way of life and they have not!"

“For... for what they have done... my first reaction is to kill them all.” Osiri said turning back to Cha'talla. “I... I do not know anymore.” She looked up into Kr'nak's face. “I... I have my freedom now and I have a new life with one that I love.” She cut her eyes back to Cha'talla. “I just... I just don't know.”

“They will be held and tried.” The voice all of them recognized spoke from the rear of the large room. All of them turned and those who were sitting came to their feet when they saw her walk slowly into the Command Center.

Dysea Leonidas had spent an hour under a shower of water as scorching hot as she could make it to wash her body of the blood and the vile touch of Phy'iad. While Normya and Lisisa waited with a new set of Mark IV ArmorPly and clothes for her in the room, Cirith had actually gotten into the shower with her and helped Dysea to wash the matted blood from her hair and shoulders. Normya and Lisisa knew this was something that their mother needed to do and it was something they could not do as her daughters. They had quietly exited the small bathroom and allowed Cirith to comfort her. While under the spray of that water Dysea had finally broken down and let the tears come, pulling Cirith's naked body to hers and sobbing in her arms under the spray of water. Cirith had held Dysea's head tightly to her chest during this whole process as she purged the vileness of what had happened from her with her wracking tears. There had never been a question in Cirith's mind that she would do this, for what she now felt for Dysea was beyond anything she had ever felt before. Even having her supple, tattooed body pressing against hers under the spray of water, Cirith felt only love and passion for her. There was nothing sexual about her feelings and this only proved beyond a doubt that she belonged to Dysea and the others. When they exited the shower and Normya and Lisisa saw them together, holding one another, neither of them said a word. Even half wolf as they both were, both of them could smell the desire for their mother that Cirith held and even more surprising was the desire that their mother held for Cirith. Whatever had occurred between them, it had brought them far closer than Normya and Lisisa could truly understand, and it was obvious to them that their mother was not going to let that go. In some strange way, seeing them together like that, it seemed so natural and right. Normya had shared a look with her sister, a look that both of them understood. No matter what happened in the future, Cirith Esavorna had just become a large portion of that future they both knew.

Dysea stood now with Cirith on one side and Normya and Lisisa on the other. She held tightly to Cirith's hand and also Normya's. Her platinum blond hair flowed down around her face and her bright emerald eyes, the ArmorPly conforming to every curve of her body. She carried her *Nehtes* once more, as well as the dual blades that Cha'talla had gifted her with that first day on Kranek. Her face was calm but her eyes were not as bright as Cha'talla remembered. He suspected they would not be the same until she could once more hold her mate and husband in her arms and have him remove whatever taint she still felt remained on her. Dysea stepped away from Cirith and her daughters and moved up in front of Cha'talla. She held her hands out for him which he took without question and then she was hugging him tightly.

“I will... I will never forget what you have done here today Cha'talla. For me... for all of those held here.” She spoke softly as she pulled away slightly and looked up into his dark eyes. She could feel his commanding presence within Mindvoice now, and the touch of a dragon. A strong and proud dragon. This surprised her but it was something she would investigate further at a later time.

Cha'talla shook his head immediately. “We... we are family now Dysea.” He said softly. “There was never a question of what we would do.”

Dysea smiled and reached up on her tip toes to place a soft kiss on his cheek. “Yes we are... and that fact fills me with hope and joy.”

“As it does all of us.” Cha'talla said.

Dysea nodded her head and turned back to Cirith and Normya returning to stand between them and taking their hands once more. “We will take them prisoner and put them on trial. Any of them who took part in the rape of those elves we have freed will be executed according to Spartan law. Those who have not will be given a choice... imprisonment for life in a Union prison or a chance to redeem the honor they have forsaken.”

“That will... that will not be an easy task Dysea.” T'lolt told her softly.

Dysea looked at him and shook her head. “No it will not be an easy task T'lolt.” She stated. “But it is a chance we must give them.”

“Why mother?” Arrarn asked from where he stood against the far wall. “After what they have done, why do we owe them anything?”

“Because it is what your father would do Arrarn.” Dysea told him immediately. “Those who choose to regain their honor will have a long road ahead to do such a thing, but in doing so they will prove that redemption is possible for everyone. That is my decision...” She looked at Cha'talla. “If you will abide by that Cha'talla?”

Cha'talla nodded without hesitation. “You are now just as much our Queen as you are a Queen of the Elves and the Lycavorian Union.” He stated. “That is not a question you need ever ask.”

Dysea nodded. “Then that is what we will do.” She stated calmly. “Now tell me if we have learned anything of Laustinos?”

Denali moved closer to her. “Admiral Thodius has gone dark with our wing and those ships from Admiral Valin’s command that accompanied us.” He reported to her. “None of Phy’iad’s ships survived his attack... in truth... he didn’t give any of them the chance too. We have two *AUTUMN MOON’S* on the edges of the system monitoring any ship traffic, but so far no unknown ships have come close.”

Dysea turned to look at Kr'nak now, smiling as she saw the gleeful look on Osiri’s face and the way he held her tightly to him. “Do you know how long it was to be before Laustinos was supposed to arrive Kr'nak?” She asked.

Kr'nak lifted his weathered face from Osiri's hair and met her eyes and Dysea could see the happiness and new resolve in those dark eyes. “Phy’iad... he wanted to leave within twelve hours of competing his plan. I can only assume it would have been before that.”

“Mother... Andro was very insistent that we get you off of this planet and back to Kranek and then on to Curila 6 to be with father.” Denali spoke. “He made me promise him that is what we would do.”

Dysea nodded. “We will wait for six more hours and then we will leave.” She stated in a firm voice. “If Laustinos comes here I want him... and I intend to extract every single bit of information in his traitorous head before he suffers the same fate as Phy’iad. He has... he has betrayed his people and helped the Kavalians to do what they have done. I can not sense your mother For'mya within Mindvoice and I can only assume she has been taken and had a similar device implanted within her so she can not use Mindvoice.” She looked at Cirith. “Cirith?”

Cirith nodded. “If you are unable to sense her then more than likely yes.” She stated. “My father knows more about these devices than I do... how they work and such... but I do know they were made from salvage from the Mindvoice ship on Nuwaroa.”

“The Kavalians have taken her!” Arrarn snarled viciously. “Andro... he says they have threatened to kill her if we do anything in retaliation! What more proof do we need? We should invade Kavalian space and go after her!”

Dysea moved quickly to where her son stood and she took his hands in hers and pulled him close. “*Kinsoargai* is strong Arrarn... you know this.”

Arrarn nodded his head. “I know mother... but that does not give me much peace right now.” He said softly meeting her eyes. “I don’t know... I don’t know why Andro doesn’t go after her!”

“You must trust in your brother Arrarn. If he has not already gone after her than there must be reasons for this. There must be far more going on than we know here. We don’t know why they have taken her Denali?” Dysea asked turning to look at Denali once more as he moved up next to her. She felt sudden warmth wash over her as the pulsing auras of both her sons filtered around and through her as they always had and she felt herself relax even more. As with all of the Leonidas men, whether they be purebloods like Denali and Andro or half elf like Arrarn and Resumar, all of them had powerful auras. Dysea was safe once more, safe and back with family and dear friends.

Denali shook his head slowly. “Only that they have admitted to having her and they would kill her if Andro attempted anything to retrieve her.”

“She can’t feel us!” Arrarn snapped. “She can’t sense any of us within Mindvoice and she will not know that we are all alive! They could be telling her anything! She could already be dead!”

Dysea squeezed his hands and drew him closer. “Listen to me Arrarn.” She said softly. “We will retrieve her. You know your father and Androcles will never abandon her! You know this! None of us would! Just as she would never abandon us!”

Arrarn nodded his head after a long moment and he took a deep breath. “I know mother.” He stated finally as Narice and Toria placed their hands on his arms and stepped closer to him to provide him comfort.

“When we leave this place Arrarn I want you to return to Earth with Narice and Toria.” Dysea said as she stroked his hair. “Your skills will be better suited to helping your father and brother to get her back.”

Arrarn nodded. “Thank you mother.” He said softly squeezing her in his arms.

“Does... does your father know?” Dysea asked drawing him into a tighter embrace as she looked at Denali once more.

Denali shook his head. “No... not yet.” He answered. “Uncle Daniel should be arriving on Curila 6 soon and he will tell him.”

Dysea nodded as she loosened her grip on Arrarn. “Daniel may be the only one who can control him when he discovers this.” She said. “The Kavalians do not know your father still lives I take it?”

“No.” Denali answered once more. “Andro... Andro believes it is the only reason they have not already killed our mother or invaded the Union in mass numbers. He was not able to tell me a whole lot for they don’t know a whole lot... but the Kavalians wanted her for a reason. He suspects it has something to do with her elven royal blood but he has nothing to back up that theory.”

“Her elven royal blood?” Dysea said softly in a confused voice.

Denali nodded. “He thinks it is also part of the reason they wanted you out of the way.” He said. “Like I said... he doesn’t know much mother. They are still trying to make sense of everything on Earth. Marci and the *Krypteria* are working on it, but with the attacks on the Drow outposts and Armetus severely injured, even the *Krypteria* is dazed and confused. Zarah and Lucia are moving as we speak to find Janae with Anton and Cihera and he is attempting to keep the façade of father being dead as believable as possible.”

“They took Janae as well?” Dysea gasped. “But how... how did they discover the...” She fell silent as her eyes grew a little wider. “Laustinos?”

Deni nodded. “If what Andro told me is accurate, Laustinos has been working with the Kavalians for quite some time. They are certain Janae is on Earth and that is why Andro wanted Zarah to return. He needed her unique ability to track Mindvoice imprints to find her. We can not sense or feel Janae, but that doesn’t impede Zarah’s skill since it allows her to follow their unique imprint and not an active Mindvoice resonance. Quite a bit has happened in the last ten days it seems mother. We have made contact with what appears to be a very large segment of our people from the Beta Quadrant led by Canth’s father Wayonn.”

Dysea’s eyes grew wider. “Canth’s father?” She gasped.

Denali nodded. “That is what Andro told me. One of the Pralors that first discovered and then merged with our people on Lycavore almost forty thousand years ago. He helps to lead a government of our people in the Beta Quadrant... the Protectorate they are called.”

“The... the Lost Ones.” Dysea gasped softly. “The ones Canth told your father about on Ukwav?”

Deni smiled slightly and nodded his head. “That is what Andro said. A large group of them have come into Union space, among them this Wayonn and they have brought others as well. A blue skinned species called the Vanari. Andro didn’t go into great detail but I’m sure we’ll find out more later. Father remains on Curila 6 with our mothers and the rest of our family. Though once he discovers what the Kavalians have done I don’t know how long that will last.”

Dysea turned to look at Cha’talla. “Cha’talla... we must...”

The panel behind Cha’talla began to chirp madly and he turned quickly and stabbed down on the console. “Yes.”

“We are detecting an incoming transmission on the Immortal’s secure channel General Cha’talla.” The female voice spoke. “It appears to be coming from a Union issue COM array on an older *KADEN*-Class Military Fast Attack Transport.”

“Nothing on sensors?” Cha’talla asked.

“Negative sir. They must be using a Shroud. Our picket is not detecting anything either.” The voice answered.

“It has to be Laustinos!” Dysea exclaimed loudly turning to face him. “Get one of the prisoners up here! Now! Hurry!”

.05 LIGHT YEARS AWAY FROM BELID'S SYSTEM

Laustinos stood on the small bridge of his ship staring at the view window full of stars. The *KADEN*-Class FAT was an older model ship, well before the time of the *STRIKER AT*, but it was still widely used within the Union and Laustinos had upgraded his personal ship much more than any other that still was active. The *PROGENITOR* had an advanced sensor array as well as a military grade Shroud Shield that he had obtained legally through different shipping contacts. He was the Deputy Prime Minister of the Union and no one questioned why he wanted a Shroud for his personal ship. Most believed he was just a political coward and would use the Shroud to escape danger if it ever came to that. Laustinos looked at the man who commanded his ship. All of the crew had been hand picked by him and all of them had shown some degree of loathing of the royal family for whatever reason. He paid them very well and their loyalty was to him now and not the oath they had sworn to the Lycavorian Union.

“Anything yet?” He asked.

The Lycavorian captain shook his head from his chair and looked at him. “No. We’ve been hailing the Immortal base for the last nineteen minutes and no response. I don’t like this Laustinos. By now... every ship in the Union will know what we have done and they will be looking for us. This obsession you have with the elf Queen could very well get us all killed.”

Laustinos looked at him. “I am paying you well Captain Diclo.” He spoke.

“Yes you are... but I want to be alive to spend what you are paying me.” He answered.

“There are no Union ships this far out into The Wilds Captain.” Laustinos said in a very confident voice. “Not now... not with everything that has happened.”

“So you say.” Diclo spoke. “I’ll feel better when we have the bitch and we can make it to Icalro Alliance space.”

“You are worrying for...” Laustinos began.

“Captain... our hail to the Immortal base is being answered!” The young woman barked from her COM station.

Diclo perked up. “It’s about time.” He snarled. “Put it up on the holodisc!”

They watched as the image burst into existence and cackled for a moment before clearing and focusing on the hollow face of the Immortal soldier. It was a narrow beam transmission and showed nothing but the soldier himself. Laustinos straightened up and met his stern gaze. “We have been trying to contact you for nineteen minutes.” He spoke quickly. “Where is Phy’iad?”

“The Commander is seeing to our evacuation from this base Lycavorian dog.” He spat viciously. “What do you want?”

“I’m enroute to collect my payment for services rendered.” Laustinos spoke firmly. “Is Queen Dysea unharmed? Is she ready for transport?”

“What is your location?” The Immortal asked. “We do not have you on sensors! The Commander does not like unwanted quests showing up out of nowhere!”

“My location is nearby.” Laustinos answered. “Is Dysea ready for transport?”

“She is. How soon before you arrive?” The Immortal pressed. “The Commander wishes to be gone from this place as soon as the transfer is complete.”

Laustinos stepped forward slightly. “I would like to speak with Phy’iad to finalize the details of the transfer.” He spoke causing Diclo to look at him oddly.

“As I said... he is overseeing the transfer of our personnel and our equipment to our ships above.” The Immortal spat. “He is too busy to come and speak with you! Tell me how far away you are and I will insure she is ready.”

“That is the third time you have asked for our location in some way.” Laustinos spoke slowly. “Why does this concern you so?”

The Immortal paused for a moment, his eyes darting to someone or something outside the cone of the transmission. He turned back to Laustinos. “I have just been informed that Phy’iad has ordered that you tell me where you are or the deal is off! He... he does not want you to bring any Union or Kavalian forces down upon him as some sort of trick!”

Laustinos looked at Diclo. “He’s lying.” He spoke softly. “Something isn’t right.”

Diclo turned to the side. “Do a wide sweep passive scan and tell me what is in orbit of Belid!” He hissed. “Quickly!”

Laustinos moved closer to the transmission. “I have a message for Phy'iad from Marshall Pusintin. It concerns his payment and I was to deliver it to him directly.”

“Nothing!” A man rasped from the sensor station. “There is nothing in orbit!”

Diclo turned to Laustinos. “They wouldn't transfer equipment under Shroud.” He stated. “Too much chance of shorting out the Shroud itself with the power surges from transports.”

Laustinos's eyes narrowed. “I am tired of playing games Immortal scum!” He snarled. “You will tell Phy'iad I wish to speak with him now! I am coming to collect Dysea and I want to insure she is there and he has not betrayed Pusintin!”

The Immortal's eyes narrowed as well and he took a deep breath. “Phy'iad is dead fool!” He barked. “And you will be soon as well! You had better...”

There was a deafening echo from within the transmission and the Immortal's head blew apart right in front of them, blood and matter spraying out of the transmission cone as his body fell from view and they heard the loud thump of it hitting the ground. Laustinos felt a sinking feeling in his gut. “Phy'iad! Who is there? Phy'iad!”

The transmission cone widened suddenly to encompass six individuals, three towering men that were Immortals but unlike any Immortal he had ever seen. All of them with short dark hair and deeply tanned skin, but the bone spurs equally prominent. He watched one of them lower the K12 KM and turn to look at him with angry dark eyes.

“Hello Laustinos... you vile excuse for a Lycavorian male.” The female voice Laustinos recognized immediately came through the ship's speakers causing his eyes to grow wide in shock and disbelief. Laustinos watched with those wide eyes as Dysea Leonidas stepped into the cone of the transmission, flanked on one side by a strange, dark haired vampire female and her son Denali on the other.

“Dysea!” He gasped.

“I sincerely doubt you have been properly introduced Laustinos.” Dysea spoke calmly, but her voice fairly trembled in unrestrained savagery. “Behind me is Cha'talla of the Akruixian people, Immortals as they are more commonly known. With him are his brother T'lolt and his oldest son Tir'ut. You of course know my son Denali Leonidas... and this...” Dysea took Cirith's hand in hers. “This is Cirith Esavorna. They are my family and my dear friends and they have succeeded in removing the affliction upon the Akruixian people that Phy'iad represented. In doing so they have also freed me and put a slight crimp in your ridiculous plans to somehow claim me for yourself.”

“Dysea...” Laustinos began to speak.

“Do not speak to me you putrid man!” Dysea screamed out. “You slink in the shadows doing your vile, traitorous deeds and now hundreds of our people lie dead! My mate lies dead!” Dysea stepped closer to the transmission now causing Laustinos to involuntarily step back on his ship. “I would never allow you to look upon me let alone touch me in person! I should have killed you long ago Laustinos! You have taken from me the man I will love until the day I pass into the next life and for that I will kill you in the same manner as I killed that animal Phy'iad! Only with you... I will cut off your cock and stuff it into your mouth *before* I feed you to the Bontawillian Fire Mites! You could never hope to compare to Martin Leonidas in any way Laustinos! You may run now coward... but know this! I will find you one day... I will find you and you will pay for everything you have done to my family and friends! On that you have my vow as a Spartan woman!”

Diclo turned quickly. “Cut it!” He screamed. “Cut it before they trace it!”

Laustinos turned in shock as the woman brought her finger down on the console and severed the transmission.

BELID

Toria brought her hands down on the communications console. “Damn!” She swore. “Ten more seconds and we would have had them!”

Dysea took a deep breath where she stood and turned to place her hand on Toria's slim shoulder. "You... you did you best Toria. Do not worry."

"Mother he..." Lisisa began to speak.

Dysea shook her head. "He may escape now..." She said turning to look at her. "But he will not be able to hide forever. When he raises his rat face once more I will be there. Now..." Dysea turned and took Cirith's hand. "Now I wish to return to Kranek and hold Bella in my arms again. And then I wish to go to your father and feel his embrace. Only then will I be whole once more." She looked at Cirith with those emerald green eyes. "And we can share with the others what I have discovered in these last few days."

Cirith smiled warmly at her words and nodded. "... I look forward to that." She said softly.

Cha'talla nodded his head from the side. "Lynom... the charges are set?" He asked.

Lynom stood next to As'hia's father Ta'lon, both of them working in the last few minutes to finish.

"They are set father. Nothing will remain."

Cha'talla nodded once more. "Then let us leave this place and insure the horrors that took place here are buried for all time."

"*Avoi.*" Dysea whispered gently.

EARTH

SPARTA

KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Devra Re Mydala watched as Sadi and Ne'Veha greeted Lu'ria and Carisia just outside the elevator lift that had brought them to this floor of the hospital, and she watched carefully. These were the women who had told her that Caliria was meant to be with them. These were the women who said they had seen her in their minds, felt her emotions and what she was going through. These were the women who all shared a single man, and from what Devra had seen so far, they shared him and each other without a single ounce of jealousy contained by any of them. Devra knew Bren had tried to explain it to her only recently, but even still watching them together or with him, it made her shake his head. She had come out of her room the night before in the early morning hours, her guest room opening onto an elegant patio that overlooked the ocean water that surrounded the island on all sides. She had seen them because of the soft white/blue flashes that signified they were shifting. As her keen eyes looked out across the beach she could see them in the sand, and she could do nothing but marvel at the size of the raven black wolf she saw. Androcles Leonidas dwarfed any Lycavorian she had ever seen in wolf form by at least half. It was easy enough to tell them apart really, the golden blond fur of Sadi, the shimmering white coat that was Lu'ria and the lush dark brown hair that was Ne'Veha. It appeared as if Androcles and Sadi were instructing Lu'ria and Ne'Veha in the art of being a wolf for it appeared as if they were putting them through certain exercises of some sort. She could hear Carisia's soft laughter once when Lu'ria couldn't stop her movement fast enough and she tumbled into the larger and muscular form of Androcles as a result. This went on for over an hour as she watched, finally the three female wolves pouncing on Carisia in a playful fashion as they shifted back to their normal forms while Androcles looked towards the stars in the night sky. He too soon shifted back and all of them were naked then. They crowded around him as he settled to the white sand, their bodies touching in a most intimate manner and their many limbs entwining, but there was nothing sexual to it. They simply laid back on the sand, content to have their bodies in physical contact, as they stroked each other's skin and were silent listening to the soft wind in the air. No doubt they were speaking in this Mindvoice that they used, but it was a sight that Devra would never forget. And this is what her daughter Caliria would take part in willingly.

Devra had started by not understanding how four women could all love the same man so completely, or how that same man could love them all back. She did not think it was possible to feel for so many what they obviously did feel for each other. It happened quite naturally really, without any of them even thinking about it from what she could tell by watching them. Sadi was always to Andro's right and next to him, while any of the others could be on his opposite side while the other two pressed close to all of them. Devra did not witness any jostling for position on his left side, every movement seemed just as natural as breathing. More often than not it was Lu'ria who took his left side with Carisia beside her and Ne'Veha beside Sadi, but no matter who was

where, there was no hesitation or doubt in their mannerisms. She had seen them kiss each other in a way only very intimate lovers would do, and Androcles would kiss them all in the same fashion, though she could detect the slight difference when he kissed or held Sadi. They were the kisses of those who were deeply in love, just as she had once kissed Coren her husband before he allowed his role as politician to override his position as husband. Devra realized the slight difference in Androcles's actions and reactions to Sadi were because she was his *anome*, and to a Lycavorian this was a most sacred thing. Lu'ria's and Ne'Veha's words to her just this morning about how they felt were now beginning to make so much sense. This is what her daughter would experience. This is what Caliria would become part of according to them.

As she watched them once more, Devra did not know if she believed Caliria would be willing to accept such an arrangement, but she finally began to understand what had perplexed Vanari historians and researchers about the Lycavorians for centuries. They had always looked at what the Lycavorians in the here and now did; never spiritually, never instinctually, and they almost always viewed them in the same fashion as they viewed their own people. They failed to fully comprehend that the Lycavorians were so much more, and it was this very conspicuous thing that drew others to them, that made others want to follow them. Their belief in faith was unflinching, their belief in destiny unwavering, and while much of it had only returned to those within the Union because of the King's Spartan heritage, these different things are what defined the Lycavorian people and it was this that fueled the indomitable spirit that powered them. As Devra truly grasped this knowledge for the first time, she realized that it was what Caliria had grabbed hold of so many years ago, and her green eyes filled with the sudden knowledge that yes, her daughter would embrace this.

Lu'ria's words brought Devra out of her thoughts as she, Arduri and Bren stepped closer to them.

"We came as soon as we talked to you." Lu'ria spoke softly leaning over to plant a tender kiss on Sadi's lips. "He is still upstairs with Deia and Eliani. What have you found out?" Lu'ria asked.

Sadi shook her head. "You first Mistress. Perhaps then it will all make some sense." She stated.

Carisia held up the data pad. "Queen Aihola and Lu'ria's mother have given us access to every Drow report from The Wilds for the last decade. We ran it through a filter made by one of her aides and there have been nine instances where a blue skinned female was mentioned. Two of them in the last six months alone... and one only four days ago!"

"Caliria!" Arduri gasped looking at Sadi. "It has to be!"

"I made contact with a former associate I worked with in The Wilds!" Sadi stammered. "An information broker if you will. I wanted him to obtain any and all information on just this very thing. He contacted us back only an hour ago and..."

"What?" Carisia asked.

"He told me he had already obtained the information for someone else." Sadi told them with a knowing glint in her jungle green eyes.

"Andro?" Lu'ria gasped.

Sadi nodded her head quickly. "I know all that he knows Mistress, and he knows all that I know. We shared our memories, our experiences when we became *anomes*. All that we were... everything about our lives up until we came back together entwined." She said swiftly. "He must have seen it somewhere within my thoughts and it appears he remembered and is just better at shielding what he is doing." She finished sheepishly.

Lu'ria took her hands. "Sadi... three days ago... three days ago a senior Drow Scout Team was released from Aihola's operational control on Beklan Two and then sent into The Wilds with sealed orders that were given to them by *Durcunusaan* courier. These orders... they were not issued in the standard manner."

Sadi looked at her with wide eyes. "How do you know this?" She asked her.

"It was my brother Am'uur's Team Sadi." Lu'ria answered with bright eyes. "They are part of the Drow Queen's Elite Guardforce, the same ones who now shadow me wherever I... wherever we go. Only the Drow Queen can release them from her operational control. It was an organizational measure that King Leonidas put in place so that no matter what happened Aihola would always be protected. Who but your father or Androcles would Aihola release control of a Drow Scout Team from her Elite Guardforce too?"

"Are you sure?" Sadi asked.

Lu'ria nodded. "I am positive." She stated confidently.

"Do you... do you know where they went?" Ne'Veha asked.

“They went to the Kepler Traverse.” Andro’s voice spoke from behind them causing all of them to whirl around. Androcles stood behind them with his arms folded across his broad chest and looking at them sternly with those bright azure eyes. “How many times must I tell all of you that even in a secure area you must never let your guard drop? You should have smelled me coming from three floors up.”

They stared at him for a long moment before Sadi stepped forward and slid her arms around his waist. Though he attempted to keep a stern look on his face, Sadi’s touch caused that to fail miserably as they others pressed close to him as well now. “When... when did you know Androcles?” She asked.

“The moment I met Devra and her daughters.” Andro replied as he moved closer to them dropping one arm to pull Sadi tighter and the other to curl around Ne’Veha’s waist. “I saw her almost immediately upon meeting Devra but I was unable to focus clearly enough until Dutkne taught me several techniques that first night on the *SCIMITAR*. Having him... having him around *KertaGai*, he has shown me things that have increased my focus and concentration to the point where... it would be like putting rockets on Elynth and increasing her speed ten fold.”

Something you will certainly not do! Elynth’s voice exploded into his head and theirs from her spot on top of the hospital with Anthar and Majeir.

Andro smiled. “No sister...” He answered as if speaking to thin air. “That is not my intention, do not worry.” He reached out and took Sadi’s hands. “These techniques he showed me... I will show all of you... but it allowed me to reach across the stars from where we were at the time and touch her. It is similar in a way to how Wayonn was able to touch the *Feravomir* and Arzoal through the years without actually using a Mark II Neural Booster.”

“You... you spoke to her!” Devra gasped moving closer as she held Arduri’s arm in shock.

“Not in a direct sense no.” Andro said looking at her. “Mindvoicing does not allow such a thing over so great a distance. If Sadi or one of the others were on Apo Prime for instance... I could probably concentrate enough where we could actually carry on a conversation for a short time without the need for a Neural Booster. The distance between Caliria and I was too great to do this however. I had to rely on other things.”

“Other things?” Arduri asked confused.

Andro nodded. “Images. Emotions. It is much easier to project these over great distances. I was able to connect with her this way.”

“Andro... how?” Carisia asked looking at Devra. “The Vanari... they do not have the ability to Mindvoice. Do they?”

Devra shook her head. “No. Never in our recorded history has something even remotely like this come up or been seen.” Devra answered.

Andro looked at Devra intently now. “How much contact have you had with Wayonn or Dutkne through the many years that you have been a Regent Devra?” He asked.

Devra looked at him oddly before shrugging her slim shoulders. “Since I became a junior Regent.” She answered. “He was on Austrova for a conference when I was appointed and he came to the acceptance ceremony with the First Regent. Many know what he is and this gives him a certain status among our people. We spoke for quite a long time and this was noticed by others. Since that time... I have been the sole contact on the Board of Regents for Wayonn to pass information or conduct business through.”

“This was before Caliria was born?” Andro asked.

Devra nodded. “Yes... several years. Why?”

“I have no information to reinforce my thinking because I can’t ask my father or Dutkne right now. I can’t ask Wayonn because I don’t think he will give me a straight answer and I certainly can’t ask the *Feravomir* without her wanting to know why... and I can’t tell her why I want that information, not without risking that she *will* turn me over her knee in her anger.” Andro stated.

Bren stepped forward. “Anger?” He spoke. “What is it that you are planning Andro?”

Andro looked at Devra. “I believe that somehow... being in such close proximity to Wayonn through the years altered your ability somewhat Devra Re Mydala. Not so much that you would notice, but enough that you would pass on these changes within you to the children you had after being around Wayonn so much.”

“I don’t understand.” Devra said defensively. “I was under the impression this ability to Mindvoice was passed along to ongoing generations within the blood of their birth parents. I certainly have never bedded with Wayonn!”

“Did you ever allow him to touch your mind?” Androcles asked. “Perhaps show you things in the history of our people or the Pralors that...” He saw Devra’s eyes go wide and he moved closer. “What?”

“It was so very brief.” Devra answered in shock. “I was pregnant with Caliria ... Nirilo had just been assigned to the Protectorate homeworld. Wayonn... he was giving me a tour of a museum of some sort in their capital. I asked him... I asked if he was able to show me of their flight from Lycavore so that I could understand your people better. He smiled and asked if he could touch me so that I could see... it was so brief... I saw images and people but then Dutkne came in and they were gone.”

Andro nodded his head thoughtfully. “Then that is where the door was opened.” He stated. “And I suspect that is also why you look at my people in a different light than the others of your species. Just that one fleeting touch left a sensitivity on you that became part of you. It was this sensitivity that you passed on to Caliria. It is why I Elynth and I were able to touch her from such a distance once Dutkne showed us how to focus.” He looked at Sadi and the others. “It is also why we could not sense her until all of us were together. We were not strong enough yet.”

Bren shook his head and took Devra’s arm gently. A motion that did not go unnoticed by Andro, especially when she did not look at him or even attempt to pull away. “This is all... this is all way beyond me Andro. I’m still not past the part about you making the *Feravomir* angry. What exactly did you mean about that part?”

Andro looked at him. “It is why I sent Lu’ria’s brother into The Wilds.” He answered. “I gave him the information that Uache gave to me and told him to find out if there was any truth to it.”

“The Kepler Traverse is within Icalro Alliance space Andro.” Bren spoke.

“Yes... I know.” Andro answered.

“We have a standing agreement with them not to enter their space for any reason. They don’t exactly care for us if you recall.” Bren said. “You in particular after what you did. It took your father two years to hammer out that deal.”

“Yes... I know that too.” Andro stated calmly. “And the only reason they accepted it was because my father threatened to obliterate their entire planetary defense network if they so much as targeted any of our ships or citizens again. Even by accident. They agreed to operate only within their space.”

“And if that is where Caliria is... then they have kept to their word.” Bren stated.

Andro nodded. “The only problem with that is that they also agreed not to transport any kind of slaves through any part of Union space or that of our allies.”

“And they haven’t.” Bren said. “Have they?”

“If the coordinates that Naesta plotted before moving to the *TALON* are accurate...” Andro began.

“Which they weren’t.” Bren stated.

“They were not accurate enough to follow the Syndicate ship into Union space.” Andro corrected him. “However, the Syndicate ship was not coming into Union space and Naesta’s original star coordinates were very accurate on following them 1.2 light years into Bontawillian space, which is exactly where this Orionis ship exited from their jump. Naesta’s charts did not reflect the shift of borders when the Bontawillian finally joined the Union as full members fifteen years ago. Since the Syndicate ship did have updated star charts and Naesta did not, that means they knew exactly where they were jumping and the Icalro Alliance has been sticking it to us for at least a decade and probably longer.”

Bren’s eyes grew wider. “*Sibfla!*” Bren gasped. “You’re sure?”

Andro looked at Devra. “Yes... I’m sure. If Am’uur confirms this... and he discovers a Black Market slave operation that involves Vanari females, then the Icalro Alliance brought them into this quadrant through Bontawillian space and the agreement they had with my father becomes null and void.”

“What... what does that mean?” Arduri asked.

Andro’s eyes narrowed somewhat and all of them saw them change to black ringed azure points and his vicious dual looking wolf fangs protruded from under his top lip. “That means I will be entering Icalro Alliance space to retrieve something that belongs to us. And to you.” He spoke looking at Devra.

Devra glanced at Sadi and the others and saw that their eyes had changed as well, their fangs extended slightly beneath their upper lips. Carisia’s vampiric fangs were not as long or as thick, but they were no less menacing to gaze upon with her cobalt blue eyes. She shivered and turned back to Andro. “If they are in league with the Orionis Syndicate, they will... they will not just admit all this and return my daughter Androcles

Leonidas. The Orionis Syndicate will fight you. Though many of them are what you call human... there are far more races within the Syndicate than even we know. The Eridiani are simply the intelligence behind it all. And many of them are very skilled and physically enhanced as well. The Eridiani are advanced enough to use enhancement drugs on their soldiers. It makes them very hard to defeat.”

Andro smiled, baring his fangs even further. “Yes they will admit it.” He stated. “If they wish to continue to exist they will.” He looked at Sadi. “Jomann is bringing Deia down and I want all of you to go with her as he takes her to Cranae Island. She will...”

Devra and Arduri stood there as Andro turned and with Sadi on one arm and Lu'ria on the other, Ne'Veha and Carisia wrapping their arms around their waists, they began to walk back down the corridor. Devra turned to look at Bren.

“What does he mean Bren?” She asked.

Bren met her green eyes. “Remember what I told you he would do Devra?” He told her softly. “How badly do you want your daughter back? What are you willing to do? I can tell you what he will do if you have the stomach for it.”

“He... he would do this Bren?” Devra gasped in surprise. “He would start a war? With everything happening around him he would start a war for Caliria?”

Bren snorted. “It would not be much of a war I'll tell you that. It may last several hours if they are lucky.”

“Why does this Icalro Alliance hate him so?” Arduri asked.

“Four years ago the Icalro Alliance leaders thought they would make a profit off of the T19 missiles that the Evolli created during our war with them. They like to fancy themselves a government. They were buying up these missiles by the hundreds towards the end of the war.” Bren told them. “They sold a batch to a group of Kochab pirates that were raiding colonies along the edge of the Limian border with the Union. A member of Andro's section of *Mjolnir's Hand* was dispatched to discover where the missiles were coming from. That Bonded Pair flew into an ambush by the Kochab pirates and both of them were killed. They made the mistake of taunting us by putting their bodies on display and sending images out across The Wilds. At the end of the Evolli war, Andro and Elynth disappeared for nearly six months. No one with them, no *Durcunusaan*, no security, nothing. Only his father and Armetus knew where they were. During that entire six month period the Netnews kept reporting about the destruction of Icalro Alliance bases along the border of The Wilds. Not just destroyed either... but wiped out totally. Taken right down to ashes. It had the Icalro Alliance screaming in outrage and finally it took the Icalro Alliance to practically bribe three Union Ambassadors before the King gave them an audience and it was only after that meeting that the King called Andro off.”

“He discovered... he discovered that this Icalro Alliance supplied the pirates with these missiles?” Devra asked.

Bren nodded. “He tracked down each and every one of the Kochab bastards who took part in the raid, discovered where they got the missiles and then he went there to fulfill a promise he made.”

“A promise?” Arduri asked.

Bren nodded. “A promise he made to that young woman's mother and father the day they buried her and her dragon together. A promise to find out who had done it and make them feel the same pain they were in.”

Bren looked at Devra. “At the end of that six month period Andro had taken out a third of their organization. And he was just winding up when his father called him off. That is when they made the deal with the King.”

“And if they have broken this deal?” Devra asked softly.

“He made you a promise didn't he?” Bren asked her.

“Yes.” Devra answered.

“Then if Lu'ria's brother finds what Andro thinks they will find... then I expect we'll be taking a small trip.” He said.

“And this trip will be to keep the promise he made to me?” Devra asked.

“Your daughter is meant for him Devra. Meant for Sadi and the others.” Bren said. “If she is within Icalro space, then not only will his promise to you be fulfilled, but there will be precious little of the Icalro Alliance left after he is through, that much I can guarantee you without question.”

CURILA 6

“Motherfucker! That is for not telling me!”

The first punch sent Martin Leonidas staggering back down the ramp of the transport trying to maintain his balance. Anja stood at the bottom of the ramp off to the side with Aricia and Gorgo next to her. Their arms were folded across their chests and they viewed what was happening with some humor. It actually felt good to smile in the light of what was happening all around them, and witnessing this was indeed humorous for they had seen it several times in the past. They looked up and saw Wayonn standing with wide eyes next to the blue skinned female with looks of utter disbelief on their faces, while the remaining members of Martin’s old SEAL Team stood looking on at the top of the ramp with shit eating grins.

Naesta glanced at Wayonn quickly. “Wayonn?” She questioned.

Wayonn turned to one of those that had come with them. “You have to stop this!” He declared.

Kenny and Pablo looked at him and snorted. “Stop it! They been doing this for years and the last person who tried to stop them ended up in the Med Clinic for a week because he got in the way of one of those punches. No thanks!”

“Not healthy!” Pablo agreed.

Wayonn turned back to watch just as Danny connected with another haymaker right cross that staggered Martin even more and sent him crashing down to the bottom of the ramp. “That is for making us think you were dead cockbreath!”

Martin looked up at Danny, blood leaking from his between his lips now, and Wayonn and Naesta were stunned to see a smile on his face. A smile that was quickly erased as Danny hit him once more. A punch that struck his jaw square and snapped his head back and dropped him to the green grass of the landing field. Danny yanked his right hand back as if in pain and shook it back and forth as if trying to get the feeling back into it.

“And that is for making me cry like a baby and drink nine cases of beer!” Danny barked. “Fuck!” He swore shaking his hand more. “You insensitive rock head sonofabitch! I think I broke my knuckles on that thing you call a fucking brain!”

Wayonn turned now to two *Durcunusaan* soldiers that were standing along the edge of the ramp and watching as well. “Make them stop!” He barked.

The two men looked at him. “Ah... not me... no.” One replied.

The second man agreed. “Not the smartest thing a person could do. Getting between the King and his brother when they are arguing is not a recommended course of action if you wish to remain healthy.”

“Arguing?” Naesta exclaimed. “This is what you call arguing?”

The two men looked at each other and then back to her. “What would you call it?”

“He... he is beating your King!” Naesta stammered.

“Beating the...” One *Durcunusaan* spoke with a smile. “Forgive me for laughing Miss... but those are love taps. The King and General Simpson have done this probably six times in the last twenty-five years. The last time was a Gallais’s Retreat. They tore the place up too. Gallais just stood by until they were finished and then she made them fix the entire building. Took them three days. No one... not even the Queens... no one gets between them when they have to clear the air so to speak.”

Naesta looked at Wayonn then and they both turned back to watch as Martin slowly got to his feet, wiping the back of his hand across his mouth. He spit blood on the ground and looked at Danny as he continued to shake his hand.

“Are... are you done?” Martin asked.

“Fuck yes I’m done!” Danny barked loudly. “I think I broke my hand! Shit!”

Martin stepped up to him slowly then. “You... you don’t know how much it means to me that you are here brother.” He spoke in a whisper so that Danny was the only one who could hear him.

Daniel lifted his eyes and stared at the man who he had been through hell and back with on more occasions than they cared to recall. He reached up and snatched Martin’s head in his hands as Martin had done so many times before. “You are my brother!” Danny hissed. “And you... you are never alone!”

Wayonn and Naesta watched with wide eyes as the two men embraced and then everyone around them began to move again. Kenny nudged Wayonn in the arm with a knowing grin. “See... it doesn’t usually last very long. It’s safe now.”

Danny drew Martin's head back, his hands still holding his head and he stared into his brother's eyes. "Marty... I need... I need to tell you something." He spoke softly as men and women moved around them still giving them a wide area. "Andro... he..."

Martin nodded his head slowly and gripped Danny's shoulders. "They... they have taken For'mya haven't they?"

Danny stared at him for a long moment. "You... you know?" He gasped.

"We've been monitoring the Netnews too Dan." Martin told him. "When they pulled Deia out of the rubble and not For'mya I knew. I... I felt Andro's emotions spike clear off the charts before he slammed his shields down. She's not dead Danny... we would feel that... and that means the only other option is that they took her."

Danny took a deep breath and nodded his head, hearing the trembling anger in Martin's quivering voice. He could feel the anger wafting from him just as he had on Ukwav all those years ago, only this time it was different. This time that anger was being channeled and directed and harnessed and exceedingly more deadly. This time when Martin unleashed that anger, it would not be unfocused and wild and nearly out of control as it was then. This time it would be methodic and concentrated and it would sweep aside any who stood before him. "Andro... he almost killed the Kavalian bastard when he told him. He said they would kill her if he tried anything... he... do Anja and Aricia know?"

Martin shook his head slowly. "I think they suspect... they saw the same reports as me." He answered.

Danny stared at him for a long moment, looking deep into his brother's dark brown eyes. "You are scaring me Marty." He said softly. "You aren't acting like... like I thought you would act. Like everyone thought you would act. Now... now you are acting like your son... and he is one scary sonofabitch when he gets like this."

"The old me is dead and gone Danny." Martin said softly in reply. "For too long I have tried to be someone I am not. Ever since... ever since Alba Tau. I allowed everything that has happened to take place because I changed then. I became... I became frightened Danny. I was scared. I began to think too hard and..."

"Martin you..."

Martin shook his head. "Don't sugarcoat it for me brother." He spoke. "You of all people I know had to see it. I... let the Aikiro and the Coven get too close and look what they did to my daughter! I let my brother live that day and look what it has wrought? I almost killed my own son Danny! My firstborn!"

"That wasn't you and you know it." Danny snapped.

"Maybe not... but part of it was." Martin said. "No more. I'm not going to try and be something I'm not anymore Danny. I taught my son... all of my children... I taught them to be low down, evil and dirty mean when they had to be. The old me is dead and gone brother... now it's just me... just like I taught them. Like I used to be before all this shit. I'm going back to being the man I raised my son to be."

Danny grinned. "You are planning to go get her." He said.

"As soon as Andro tells me where she is." Martin answered softly. "She is my mate... my wife... and the Kavalians have gone too far this time. I intend to make them pay dearly for this. All of this... it is my brother's doing, I know it is. Though why they want For'mya is beyond me for the moment. I'll find out why though... and I'll find her. I will never abandon her Danny you know that. Never!"

"I thought... I thought that might be what you would plan." He said. "So I brought some help. A few people who sort of excel at making trouble and kicking ass."

Martin grinned as he looked over his shoulder. "So I see." He said turning back to look at him. "We... we drew too far apart brother. All of us did. I became complacent and now my *Kinsoaurgai* is paying for my mistakes."

"We began this wild ride together Marty. We were always strongest when we were all together." Danny said. "Maybe it's time for us to let the *Durcunusaan* take care of everyone else for a change. Maybe it's time for the old team to get back together like it used to be. And this time stay together."

Martin met his eyes and nodded. "I believe you are right brother. I believe you are right." He turned back to where the others were standing... waiting. His eyes fell on the clone of Julie Collins. "She's Julie isn't she?" He whispered.

Danny nodded. "Minus a few years of memories... but yes. Right down to her many little quirks. She's actually the one who triggered our old Team Transmitter."

Martin looked at him. “We have been given a second chance brother. An opportunity to atone for letting her die that day. So many of the others. The... the big man or woman upstairs has given us a second chance Danny.”

Danny nodded. “I don’t intend on letting it go. Not this time.”

Martin smiled. “Neither do I. Team Twelve back in action huh?”

Danny chuckled. “Wait till you see the shit Ben sent us. They ain’t going to know what hit them when we start rolling. Then we go get For’mya and get her back!”

Martin nodded slowly and his eyes cut to where Wayonn was standing with the blue skinned female. “What’s he like?” Martin asked. “You talk with him at all?”

“As little as possible.” Danny replied with a smile. “He’s worse than Helen and you know how she gives me headaches.”

“Helen didn’t come with you?” Martin asked.

Danny shook his head. “She is staying on Earth to help Andro. If I understand correctly, Zarah and Lucia are damn close to finding Janae and she felt it would be better if she remained with the new King if you get my drift.”

“I can feel Andro... something is bothering him.” Martin said thoughtfully. “He’s working very hard to stay in control.” Martin looked at Danny intently. “Are there other things I don’t know about happening Danny?”

“Shit... we don’t have enough happening now?” Danny gasped shaking his head. “Not that... nothing that he told me about before we left, but he’s like you and he keeps everything hidden inside.”

“Something is bothering him.” Martin said. “Something personal.”

“Can’t you contact him?” Danny asked. “Find out what you think is wrong.”

Martin shook his head. “We’re trying to keep contact to a minimum in case there are others on Earth trying to listen in. I’ll speak with him again in twelve hours and find out what is wrong. Put the team up in the west barracks. The *Durcunusaan* cleaned out a floor for you guys. I’ll be over in a bit.”

Danny nodded. “Will do.” He stated.

Anja and Aricia looked at Wayonn as he stopped in front of them. Wayonn had to admit they were far more beautiful in person than from Martin’s visions and thoughts and he could smell the wolf blood and Pralor blood pulsing through both of them heavily. He could smell the heavy scent of mint wafting from them and Wayonn smiled inwardly. Their essences called for only one man and did so in quite the dominating way. This could only mean that Martin hadn’t held back in the least and Anja had now felt his unshielded aura, and she had come away that much the stronger for it. Aricia pulsed with potential and power, the pureness of her blood very similar to many of those he had smelled shortly after being changed himself so long ago. He turned his head and watched as Martin came up to him slowly. As Wayonn shifted his body to face Martin he couldn’t help the sensation that he was once more beside his dear friend Sumar. The resonance within Mindvoice felt so staggeringly similar, throbbing with life and power and knowledge. He met Martin’s eyes and he recognized the same things he had seen when looking into Androcles’s eyes; wisdom and compassion and love. But as it was with Androcles, he also saw what he now knew was the Spartan sense of values and morals and the potential for sheer, unmitigated violence against those who stood in opposition to him. A way of life that had become part of the Lycavorian people the moment Martin’s father had been born among those proud people on Earth over three thousand years ago.

When Sumar had made the decision to become part of the Lycavorian people so many millennia ago, he knew of their capacity for violence, but Sumar also saw within them a great potential for good. Wayonn had not recognized this until after he had been turned and his mind had been opened to the possibilities of what could be. Within the first hundred years of the survivors of CS41 beginning to merge with the Lycavorian people, the oftentimes brutal and unforgiving way of their lives had begun to change. Until that moment, Wayonn had never really held out much hope that they could become as they were now. Until those first years after he had been changed he could never see what the other Elder Pralors had seen in the Lycavorian people that made them choose their species to repopulate worlds across the stars. Once he was fully wolf he had understood why, and from that moment on he had embraced his new life with everything that he was.

Wayonn held out his hands to Martin and he smiled when Martin didn't hesitate in the least and took them. It told Wayonn that Martin Leonidas had finally and irrevocably accepted all that he was, just as his son Androcles had from the moment of his birth.

"I can not tell you the happiness that courses through me to stand beside the descendant of my dear friend Sumar. I honestly never thought this day would come." Wayonn spoke softly. "Through all that has happened Martin, you have renewed my faith in the reasons we did what we did all those years ago."

Martin looked quickly and Anja and Aricia confused and then back to Wayonn. "Ok. I think."

Wayonn laughed and nodded his head. "One day in the future I will share with you what I mean. And then you will know why I said that. Discovering my own blood and finally being able to see Helen in these last days has restored my hope for the future. My family... my blood is finally whole again and I have you to thank for that."

Martin continued to look at him. "If... if you say so." He said sheepishly.

Wayonn looked at Aricia and Anja. "The descendant of the Endelme Line, Third of the Five Ruling Bloodlines." He stepped up to her slowly and embraced a very surprised Aricia, holding her tightly for several seconds and then releasing her. "You and your son have brought the Ruling Bloodlines back together in a way Sumar didn't see you know."

Aricia and Anja looked at Martin. "Ruling bloodlines?" Aricia asked. "What does he mean Beloved?"

Wayonn smiled. "It is a very long story, but I will give you the very short version if you don't mind Martin?"

Martin nodded. "Be my guest." He answered. "I sure don't understand it."

Wayonn smiled. "When Sumar made the decision to merge with the Lycavorian people, all of the Pralors that remained on City Ship 41 chose the six largest packs to merge with. The six packs that commanded the most respect and were the largest on Lycavore. Martin is the product of two of those packs because of his grandparents and his parents. Resumar and Eliani were from the two largest packs and the ones that held the most power and influence if you will. Resumar of the Bloodline of Sumar and Eliani of the Bloodline of Ormvor. Martin's father had the blood of those two packs within him when he came to Earth. Martin's mother Gorgo was also a member of the Ormvor bloodline and she and Leonidas continued this pairing without even knowing it." Wayonn looked at him. "Though I doubt your mother knows that part of our history."

Martin shook his head. "No bet here." He stated.

Wayonn turned back to Aricia, his face animated and happy. That he was thrilled to be able to relate this history was obvious to anyone who looked at him. "There were three other Bloodlines that were among the Ruling Quorum. You Aricia... you and your ancestors are of the Endelme Bloodline. In Androcles, Denali and Deion you and Martin have given your sons the blood of three of the Ruling Bloodlines. When Androcles took Sadi as his mate it became four since Sadi's mother was of the Sayid Bloodline, the fourth bloodline. Their son will have four Bloodlines within him."

"Son?" Aricia gasped. "Sadi... Sadi is with child?"

"No way!" Anja snapped. "I'm too young to be a grandma!"

Wayonn shook his head quickly with a small laugh. "Oh... no! Forgive me. No. Their first born will be a son however, when they do decide to have children."

"How... how do you know that?" Aricia asked quickly.

"Let's just say I have a hunch." Wayonn answered with a grin. "The fifth bloodline is... it is slightly more difficult to explain, but they have returned to the Union and the Lycavorian people."

"Why is it more difficult?" Anja asked.

"The Esavorna Bloodline is now half vampire." Wayonn nodded. "The last surviving descendant of that bloodline as near as I can tell was a daughter. At some point during the latter years of slavery to the Coven she met and fell in love with a vampire officer. He kept her safe when the rebellion began, refusing to allow anyone to discover her true nature. Their first born was a son."

"Valin?" Martin asked.

Wayonn looked at him and nodded. "Androcles filled you in to some extent I see." He said.

Martin nodded. "As much as he was able."

"To the best of my knowledge Valin's only child is now with Dysea." Wayonn spoke. "A daughter by the name of Cirith. She is unique in many ways."

“Unique how?” Aricia asked.

Wayonn looked at her. “Not only does she carry the blood of the Fifth Ruling pack in her veins, but also the blood of Aikiro.” He saw their eyes go wide at this knowledge and he held up his hand. “Do not judge her based on what I alone have said. Valin has raised her on his own without Aikiro’s input.”

“Aikiro... she knew?” Anja gasped.

Wayonn nodded. “It is my understanding that Valin plotted very carefully to accomplish this. It is something that he worked out with his parents during the fledging years of the rebellion. Valin is not a man to have standing against you. I do not know all the details to how he accomplished what he did, only that if Aikiro did not have the child she conceived with him, she would not be able to control the ramifications. She has had no contact with Cirith, and now that she is dead it no longer matters. Valin, Cirith and all those who follow them have defected to the Union.”

Anja and Aricia looked at Martin and saw him nod his head slowly. “According to the reports from Andro and Deni, they were instrumental in defeating the Kavalians on Kranek and it was Valin who told us of the implants Aikiro had built from City Ship 19. He’s working with Marci and our teams of researchers to try and find a way to defeat them.” He told them.

“And this is what blocked our *Melda Min* from us before?” Aricia asked. “This is what is blocking our *Kinsoaurgai* now?”

Martin nodded his head slowly and shifted his feet as he looked down. “Yes.” He said softly.

They had been together for far too long to not notice the Mindvoice tremble that washed through the man they both loved so much. They felt the anger and the hate surge through him even as controlled as it was. Anja and Aricia stepped closer to him.

“What aren’t you telling us Martin?” Anja asked gently.

“Beloved?” Aricia echoed her words. “You promised to never hold back from us again. Do not do so now. What is going on? This has to do with For’mya; we can feel it pulsing from you as surly as we stand here. You can hide much from us, but not your love for her or any of us.”

Martin took a deep breath and looked at them. He glanced quickly at Wayonn and then back to them. He reached out and took their hands in his. “*Kinsoaurgai* wasn’t pulled from the rubble of the Senate Building with Deia because she was kidnapped and taken prisoner by the Kavalian strike team that hit the building.” He told them seeing their eyes go wide. “I... I had an inkling that something like this had happened when the Netnews reported Deia was pulled from the rubble but the search for For’mya was continuing. Danny... Danny confirmed it a few minutes ago.”

“NO!” Aricia screamed pushing away from him. “No!” Wayonn watched with wide eyes as her psychic shields flared up around her and suddenly there was a psychic diamond formed in the palm of her hand glowing in its intensity.

Martin and Anja acted quickly and both of them stepped closer to her, Martin wrapping his arms around her lithe body while Anja pressed close to her, her arms sliding around her slim waist. Aricia and For’mya shared a closeness that was unmatched by any of the others. While it was true that Martin’s Queens loved each other unequivocally, Aricia and For’mya shared a bond that had been forged during those trying months twenty-seven years ago. The emotional state of Aricia and Martin and For’mya had brought them so close with one another, and once those events had passed, it had been For’mya and Aricia who had bonded in a manner similar to what Dysea shared with Isabella.

“Where is she?” Aricia snapped. “We must... we must go to her! Find her!”

Martin pulled both of them closer, inhaling deeply of Aricia’s lavender coca scent mixed with Anja’s sweet honey scent. He pulled her head to his chest even as the tears began to come. “We don’t know where she is.” He whispered softly as Anja began to cry softly as well. “Our son... Andro confronted the Kavalian ambassador when he discovered this and they threatened to kill her if he did anything.”

“Why?” Anja sobbed. “Why would they take her?”

Wayonn moved closer to them, Naesta standing beside him with wide eyes as she looked on. Androcles was correct in that she was a voracious reader, and during the five and a half hour flight here Naesta had done nothing but read. She could normally finish a good data novel in a few hours with her ability to read and process information swiftly, yet this book had held her attention like no other. She looked down quickly at the data book she held in her hand.

Peace Unto Death and Back Again.

If ever there was a book that had totally changed Naesta's outlook on something, this would be the one. Some of it was written from a first person perspective and in many ways it told the story of how the Lycavorian people had first risen to prominence here in the Alpha Quadrant and then been enslaved by the vampires of the High Coven. She had read about heart gripping events that had altered who and what these men and women valued most. Their time as slaves to the Coven was not pleasant by any stretch of the imagination, forced labor camps, the almost daily rape and beating of their women, the executions. It had made her shudder in horror as she read, yet she could not bring herself to stop. This man's words flowed across her small screen with an elegant and cohesive message. He did not put his people and their history up on a pedestal as if they could do no wrong, instead he often times went into depth about mistakes they had made as a species and was very critical of things their leaders had done once they were free of the Coven oppression. He had written extensively about what was known as the Flight of The Ten Thousand to the Lycavorian people. The taking of ten thousand babies from their mother's wombs and sent to Earth in a last ditch effort to insure their species did not die if their rebellion failed.

Once more the man had been outspoken in his writings, stating that most of his abundant information came from speaking with Lady Gorgo as he referred to her, since until he had been able to travel to Sparta and Earth himself, she was his only source of information. Naesta found that from his words and writings, he held a great deal of respect for Lady Gorgo, and working at the University together had given him opportunity to truly be accurate in everything. He had combined the information given to him by Gorgo as well as several trips he had made to Earth once the planet had been discovered and joined the Union, to release a widely anticipated and popular revised version of his book three years after the grandson of King Resumar had taken the throne. All that information was in the copy she now held and it was here that Naesta truly learned about the Lycavorian people.

The Spartans had been a ruthless and unforgiving people, but a people deeply steeped in honor and tradition and culture, traits that brought out the true instincts of the Lycavorian people within their population. Though those ten thousand could have quickly gained control of Sparta when they were grown, under the leadership of King Leonidas, they became a staple of Greek and Earth history. Often times through those years they sacrificed so that humans could grow and their secret remained hidden. The Lycavorian Spartans became prominent members of Sparta and their society and as time passed here on Earth they were widely recognized as not only warriors unequalled, but forward thinkers and believers. They clung to their deep history and culture yet adapted easily to the future, blending it all together to make themselves stronger as a people. The Lycavorians in Sparta remained closer to their base instincts than those who now lived off Earth and were building the Union. While their lives were harsh and brutal in the beginning, they changed as time went by, yet they also remained the same. They considered their females to be the holders of their future and they were honored and respected, even though a good number of them were just as equally deadly as the men. Marriage and relationships were sacrosanct, rape of any kind was considered a high crime, and the true concept of honor only became part of their instinct and psyche even more. In many ways, a verbal commitment to another was a binding agreement that Lycavorian Spartans honored without fail. Though the first King Leonidas died in a battle that even now, some three thousand plus years later, was considered a revered day in Sparta, his son carried on all that he had begun.

This latest edition that Androcles had given her was only a year old and whether he knew it or not, it contained much about him and his father both. Naesta had seen the look on his face when she asked if he had read it and he had told her no, his face twisted distastefully in a mock grimace. Naesta fully believed he did not know what he had given her and he struck her as the type of man that would answer any question asked of him no matter the reaction it elicited. A sentence from the writer came back to her as she stood there.

"He would probably be angry at what I have written about him given how unassuming he is..." The writer had said. "The King equally so, but a decision made long before either of their times has blessed us as a people now. Blessed us with two men who have within them the very best of our of species and all our potential could be. Two men who follow the words of the first King Leonidas without fail; eight words whose meaning can not be measured in any way... Fight with your head, lead with your heart."

Naesta stood there and watched as Martin Leonidas held two of his five wives and mates and she saw the love and devotion to them in those dark brown eyes. The same love and utter devotion that she had seen in Androcles's eyes when he mentioned her sister. These were part of the emotions that her father and so many of her people said the Lycavorians did not possess. A week she had spent among them now, a week to tear down everything her father had taught her about these men and women and to show her that not everything was as she was raised to believe. Wayonn's soothing voice broke her out of her own thoughts and she watched as he moved closer to them.

"Helen and your son believe he will attempt to use her to regain the throne of Sparta and the Union." Wayonn spoke softly. "After discovering what I have about many things since I came here to be among you and our people, I believe they may be correct."

Naesta watched as the three of them turned slowly to look at Wayonn and she saw in their eyes what she now believed her people lacked. She saw faith and trust and the Queen with Androcles's eyes, her next words confirmed that for her.

"You... you are Wayonn... the *Val'istar*." Aricia stammered as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

Wayonn nodded. "That is one of the names I have been called in the past yes... but I much prefer Wayonn."

"You're the one that... that helped Martin?" Anja asked now. "The Pralor?"

Wayonn looked at Martin for a long moment and then back to her. "I see he does not keep anything from his Queens..." Wayonn said nodding his head. "Yes... I am that Wayonn... though now I am far more Lycavorian than I am Pralor, and I have been for more than thirty thousand years. Something I am thankful for every day."

"There is... there is no way my brother could hope to regain the throne." Martin said. "He... the Senate would never allow him too."

Wayonn nodded. "Nevertheless... that is what they believe. It has something to do with your For'mya and this Janae that they keep talking about."

"Janae?" Anja gasped looking at Martin. "Marty... they took Janae?"

Martin looked at Wayonn sternly before nodding his head and looking back at her. Of all of them, Anja and Eliani had developed a closer relationship with Janae through the years and were able to use her position as Panos's aide to go out into public and shop and do things that Janae would not have been able to do otherwise. Her identity was a closely guarded secret and only a few *Durcunusaan* knew her true bloodline. Eliani and Janae were close in age and it was not uncommon to see them together with Nyla in the stores and shops of Gytheio or Sparta.

"If Andro's last report is accurate... she is still on Earth and he brought Zarah back from Kranek to find her." Martin said. "They are using the same type of device to block her as they are For'mya."

"Then how..." Aricia looked at him quickly. "Zarah is going to track her imprint isn't she?"

Martin nodded. "Yes."

Wayonn looked at them with interested eyes. "Track her imprint?" He asked. "I have never heard of this."

"It's a long story and I'll fill you in later... but Zarah has the ability to track someone using their passive Mindvoice imprint." Martin explained. "Andro taught her... and when we discovered it, we forbid them to ever use it because..."

"A person's most private thoughts would be exposed." Wayonn spoke. "Fascinating. I never suspected this."

"Yeah... well I suspect my son has a lot of things up his sleeves that he hasn't filled me in on." Martin said with gruffness in his voice. "Something I'll make sure I discuss with him when I see him again."

Wayonn met his eyes. "Your son Martin... he is dealing with far more than someone his age should have to deal with. In many ways he is you... but in more ways he is not. His goals... his two main goals, he wears them on his sleeve and they are the goals you instilled in him as a boy while he was growing. Protect his family. Protect the Union. At all costs... even of his own life. Do not fault him for how he does things... just know that he will do what is necessary to fully accomplish these goals while adhering to the values and morals you and your mates gave to him."

"I see he's got you on his side too huh?" Martin said.

Wayonn grinned. “No... I am on your side... it just so happens that when I look at him, I see you.” He answered. He turned then and held out his hand for Naesta pulling her closer to them. “Allow me to introduce someone who is probably very confused.” He said drawing her closer still. “This is Naesta Re Mydala, the youngest daughter to Coren and Devra Re Mydala and a member of the Vanari Empire. She has come as a liaison of her mother who is a member of the Vanari Board of Regents. Their ruling body so to speak. Her mother, sister and brother accompanied us from the Beta Quadrant in the hopes of recovering their sister who has been taken by some rather surly individuals that call the Beta Quadrant home and delve into slavery and things of the like.”

Naesta saw Martin’s jaw twitch at the mention of that word and this only confirmed what Wayonn had told them as they were coming here. She bowed her head slightly.

“It is... it is an honor to meet you King Leonidas.” Naesta spoke with heartfelt sincerity.

Martin looked at Wayonn. “Exactly how much is Andro *not* telling me?” He asked.

Wayonn met his eyes and smiled. “Probably quite a bit given your propensity for doing things in an unorthodox manner.” He stated. “Remember my boy... I have touched your mind and I have seen some of the things you have done. What I do know for sure and I agree with them completely on, is that you and Aricia must remain dead for now. While I understand the anger you have within you over this knowledge that they have taken For'mya and the need to go to your mate, we all agree that if it becomes known that you are still alive, your *Kinsoaurgai* becomes expendable. You know from Andro’s reports that we still do not know how deeply entrenched the Kavalians are within Earth, who is helping them, or what they ultimately hope to accomplish. If you were to suddenly come back to life, we will never know and it very well may cost For'mya her life.”

Aricia looked up at Martin. “Beloved... we can not risk...”

Martin nodded. “I know.” He said softly. “And I won’t.”

Wayonn reached out and took Martin’s arm. “With our presence here our people are once and for all finally reunited Martin. Dutkne and I... we are but the Vanguard to a much larger force of pure Lycavorians that will follow your orders as their King without question or pause. We have waited for this day for millennia and now that it is here... we will not let it slip away. Dutkne is already falling into the role destiny and fate has meant for him with your son. Naesta and her family, the Vanari, they are part of that future and I believe she is beginning to see that now.”

Naesta nodded. “More than I ever dreamed.”

“She is a liaison for her mother as I said, and she brings a request for you Anja.” Wayonn spoke.

“Me?” Anja gasped.

Wayonn nodded. “You are Queen of the Hadarians and the medical skill and knowledge of your people surpasses in many ways even the Vanari. There is much that we need to discuss and explore...” Wayonn looked at Martin. “And things we must purge...”

“*Avoi.*” Martin whispered.

“Is there someplace where we can talk?” Wayonn asked. “Someplace quiet where we won’t be disturbed. I have much I need to tell you and I wish to meet your mother.”

“My mother?” Martin asked. “Why?”

Wayonn nodded with a smile. “Why? Your mother is a figure that is revered among the Lycavorians of the Protectorate Martin.” He saw his eyes go a little wider. “Yes... we know all about Gorgo and all she has done in her life as well as what she has endured. You might be surprised how much of our brothers and sisters here in the Union that we know of. As much as I have tried through the years to keep us separate... for reasons which I will explain later... one of the things that I found I could not suppress is the role your mother has played in our history. For right now I urge you to have faith in your son and what he is doing. Allow him to tackle the problems we face from one side, while we address them from another.”

Martin nodded his head after only a moment. “This way.” He stated gripping Aricia’s and Anja’s hands tightly.

UNDERGROUND SEWAGE TUNNELS SOUTHEAST OF SPARTA

It amazes me that with all of our technology and knowledge we still can not remove the foul stench of the waste we produce. I am simply overjoyed to be walking through eighteen inches of things I can't begin to imagine and do not want to think of. Dutkne's calm voice filled their heads as they moved slowly down the sides of the sewage tunnel.

Zarah and Lucia looked at each other and could not help but grin. The *Durcunusaan* troop was leading them down the tunnel with confident talent, his 190A3 leading his movements with measured skill. Zarah and Lucia were next, Dutkne behind them and the last *Durcunusaan* troop bringing up the rear. By Zarah's estimate they had traveled nearly three kilometers so far, the stench nearly unbearable to their wolf senses. While Lucia also attempted to hold her breath as often as possible, it wasn't nearly as bad as what Zarah and the other Lycavorians were smelling she knew.

[So not only can he not fight, he complains too ussta libh'iahin.] Lucia said with a grin.

Zarah shook her head. *[My brother is testing us.]* She spoke in reply. *[I can't believe he sent him here. We could do this without him and Andro knows that.]*

[I have found in a short time that everything your brother does has purpose Zarah.] Lucia told her.

[Maybe... but I'm not seeing it right now. I...]

Zarah stopped talking when she saw the *Durcunusaan* troop in front of them hold up his hand quickly clenched in a fist. She held her breath until she saw that fist explode open into five fingers and Zarah snatched her K12 from the thigh holster and scampered soundlessly up beside the man as he lowered himself to one knee. Lucia remained at her side as Dutkne dropped into a crouch and the *Durcunusaan* behind him turned to their rear.

"Haeis?" Zarah whispered softly.

The *Durcunusaan* soldier motioned with his head to their front about ten meters and their eyes followed his gaze. Lying face down and half in and half out of the rancid water that ran down the center of the tunnel was a Kavalian soldier. Lucia's K12 came up now as well and Zarah tapped Haeis on the shoulder. He nodded and motioned them forward once more. They made they small ten meter dash to where the body lay, quickly taking up positions around it as Dutkne dropped to one knee beside the inert figure. Zarah and Lucia watched as he knelt on one knee in the vile water and carefully inspected the body for any kind of booby trap. Once he was certain there was none he rolled the body over. The Kavalian must have been one of their biogenic clones, for he looked no different than any human or Lycavorian from a difference. He wore civilian clothes with a combat harness secured to his upper body, most of the pockets now empty. Dutkne's keen eyes detected the decay beginning to set in from lying in the foul water for an extended amount of time and he also noticed the savage tear in his thigh. A hasty attempt had been made to treat the injury, given to him by a wolf claw it appeared, and Dutkne quickly ascertained this was the Kavalian that Lucia had said was seriously injured within Janae's apartment. He looked up at where both Zarah and Lucia were looking at him.

Haeis touched Zarah's arm. "I'm going to scout ahead Princess." He whispered. "We should be close to the old plant."

Zarah nodded towards him. "*Tur kalamma* Haeis." She told him.

"*Innyne* Princess." He stated before moving off like a ghost.

"This must be the one you said had an arterial injury." Dutkne stated softly. "This Janae caught him good. From the size and depth of the tear in his flesh, I surmise she struck him with her front paw while in the middle of a leap. The injury was treated quickly, but he must have bled out before they reached their destination or shortly after. I estimate he's been dead for at least five to six days. It's hard to tell with the amount of bacteria and decay that has already set in because of this diseased water."

"How do you know that?" Lucia asked.

Dutkne smiled at them, flashing white teeth and they could see that his wolf fangs were extended about a quarter of an inch. This caused Zarah to blink in surprise for being able to see a Lycavorian's fangs without his eyes actually having changed was usually the sign of a large wolf when that person shifted. "I read quite a bit." Dutkne answered her. "I have done little else for almost the last half century. I may be the General Director of the Protectorate, but things run so smoothly that I don't usually have anything to do."

“The General Director?” Lucia asked.

Dutkne nodded. “A position similar to your *tenna* Deia.”

Zarah’s eyes grew even wider. “Wait a minute... are you saying that you are the leader of this Protectorate?” She asked.

Dutkne nodded. “Yes.”

“How big... how big is this Protectorate that you come from?” She asked.

Dutkne looked as if he was doing some fast figuring in his head and then he met her gaze. “If I’m not mistaken... at last count the Lycavorian Protectorate encompassed one hundred and forty-seven worlds with a population of just under six hundred billion. Compared to the Union in size we are but a drop in the proverbial bucket.”

“Hold on...” Lucia spoke now. “You are the Prime Minister of almost six hundred billion Lycavorians?”

Dutkne shook his head quickly. “The Lycavorian population is roughly three quarters of that total. The rest is made up of those who have become friends and allies and live within the Protectorate.” He saw the looks of astonishment on their faces and he grinned again. “Well... we have had over twenty millennia to grow to that size.”

“How... how old are you exactly?” Lucia asked now.

“Five hundred and forty-two healthy years.” Dutkne asked. “Of course... the healthy part will be determined by how long we remain in this putrid tunnel sloshing through rancid water in our quest to find your Janae.”

Zarah opened her mouth to snap back at him about what they were doing when Haeis reappeared and settled next to her on one knee causing her to turn.

“I have found where they exited Princess.” He spoke in a soft whisper. “There is a small view window in the actual door and I can see into a small maintenance hallway. It is empty. If I had to guess... I would say we are beneath the old sewage plant even now.”

Zarah looked up at the ceiling. “That would account for the distance between the ceiling vents becoming shorter.” She stated. She turned to Lucia. “Does Seyra see anything?” She asked, forgetting that with the unique bond that she and Lucia now shared Seyra could hear her just as easily as she could hear and speak to her Bonded Sister Lucia.

They heard Seyra’s soft chuckle in their minds in acknowledgement of this fact and Lucia grinned. *I swept over the old plant twice Zarah my second sister, the second time with a large stag in my claws to make it appear as if I was hunting. There is nothing obvious to indicate activity outside the plant, but I did see several sets of footprints leading to and from the main facility which is deserted. My dragon eyes also detected heat signatures from inside the second floor of the main processing plant if that is what it’s called. Six of them to be exact.*

Lucia looked at Haeis. “Seyra has detected six heat signatures inside the main facility. Nothing between us and them.”

It is becoming dark outside sister. Seyra continued. *It would be a good time to exit the tunnels you are in. They can not see your exit point from the facility.*

“Dusk is coming...” Zarah said. “We can’t contact Anton and the others from inside this tunnel and I truly want to get out of this foul stench.”

Dutkne nodded quickly. “I whole heartily agree.” He stated.

Haeis pulled the small portable data screen from his small pack and looked at it quickly. He nodded his head. “If they are all in the main facility as Seyra says then we can exit where they did and make contact with Anton. Six heat signatures... and taking into account that Janae is one of them... we have them outnumbered.”

Zarah grinned at him. “Yes we do.” She stated.

Dutkne held up his hand. “Just to remind everyone... we have just spent the last two and a half hours trudging through the remains of several hundred metric tons of excrement and waste from Sparta. Even a person with the dullest sense of smell in the known universe will be able to detect us coming from quite a ways away. Unless of course... you are planning to force them into submission with our stench.”

“*Yutri et'zarreth!*” Zarah hissed softly.

Dutkne smiled. “I have yet to master the delicacies of the ancient vampire tongue as your brother has not shared that with me yet. May I take for granted that is a derogatory comment?”

Lucia snarled at him. "Yes you may!" She spat.

Dutkne nodded. "Yes... I assumed as much."

Lucia turned to Haeis. "Take us out into this maintenance tunnel. Once outside we can contact Anton, find their position and request that he conduct the assault while we provide cover from another location."

Haeis nodded. "This way."

"...hit them in six minutes Zar." Anton's calm voice filled her internal ear implant. It had to be a combination of his Drow and Spartan blood and to someone who did not know him; his voice was a nonchalant as if he was discussing the weather.

"We've moved into what appears to be some sort of offices across from the main facility. We are on the third floor and have a clear view of both entrances to where they are. It looks like the main control room."

Zarah spoke as her dark eyes scanned the control room in the growing darkness, easily picking up the metal catwalk leading off in both directions from the doors on either end.

"I've split us into two teams." Anton told her. "Cihera and Las'elh have one and I'm leading the other."

"There appear to be only five Kavalians." Zarah said. "But the venting system of the plant is still active and throwing off large heat pockets that foul up Seyra's infra red vision as well as Lucia's and mine. There is no way to be sure they don't have more helping them Anton so you need to be careful. For some reason I can't believe they would hope to take and hold her with only six individuals."

"You think there are more?" Anton questioned.

"It... it feels wrong Anton. If you were the Kavalians and you thought you had taken out the King and who knows how many of his family... if you apparently knew who Janae was as these bastards seem too... would you attempt to hold her and hide with only six men?" Zarah asked softly.

Dutkne heard Zarah's question and looked at her intently. Yes... Andro had shared with him what he had done in order to save the life of his sister, but even he did not realize just how much it had affected her. While this bonding of sorts had given Zarah the gifts she now had, it also had given her a cerebral view of things in a tactical military fashion, something that Andro exhibited quite frequently. Watching her and Lucia next to her, Dutkne felt another surge of attraction. Lucia was on her back propped up against the wall next to Zarah, watching her face intently and holding the K12 in her hands. The windows in the office area were large and still intact, though most of the furniture had been removed and the rest piled against the far wall leaving them in a fairly large open area.

"I see your point." Anton's voice replied.

"This plant may no longer be in use Anton, but they had to have gotten the plans for it somewhere." Zarah continued. "And you can't just walk into the Office of Zoning and Planning and request them."

"No they couldn't." Anton spoke. "We'll watch our corners. I'll signal you thirty seconds before we enter."

Lucia stared at Zarah. "What is it *ussta libh'iahin*?" She asked.

Zarah met her gaze. "Andro is right Lucia... they have Lycavorians helping them. There is no way they could have gotten the location of this facility let alone gained access without help from the inside. It may be a decommissioned facility, but it is still part of the reserve core and not accessible to unauthorized individuals."

"We have detected no other infra red signatures in the area." Lucia said. "Unless they are hiding within the excess heat fields put off by the venting systems."

Zarah met her eyes. "In which case we wouldn't detect them." She said matter-of-factly. She turned her head quickly. *Seyra... how many different locations where the excess venting preventing you from seeing through the heat?*

Three. Seyra answered immediately from the small ridge she waited on only a quarter mile away. *Two just north of the control room where they are holding Janae and another directly above the building you are in.*

How big are they?

Large enough to hide several bodies as long as they stood within the affected area of the vent. Seyra answered. *What is it my Second Sister?*

Too easy. Zarah hissed. *It's too easy.*

Dutkne moved closer to them soundlessly. *It may be they just did not believe anyone would follow them Zarah.* He stated.

Zarah shook her head. *My father and brother do not believe in chance Dutkne. Not when it comes to military operations. Three locations where the venting system is active. If these Kavalians were good enough to do what they have done then it stands to reason that they are not stupid and they would know they could hide within the cone of these vents. Neither dragon or Lycavorian could see through the excess heat generated by the venting system in order to detect individual bodies.*

Kavalian eyes are similar in many ways to ours Princess. Haeis spoke. *They have fine night vision. They will detect us if we attempt to move outside this room along the catwalks.*

Detect you yes. Zarah said.

But not us. Lucia echoed as she realized what Zarah was saying. *Your HE grenades... give them to us. We can wrap the shadows around us and get close enough to see if there any Kavalians there. If there are, we can throw grenades at them just as Anton conducts his attack to retrieve Janae.*

Haeis was pulling several oval shaped grenades from his harness before she had even stopped talking. Dutkne watched as Zarah and Lucia took one grenade apiece and began to get to their feet. Dutkne did not understand why such thoughts raced through his mind at that exact moment, but as Zarah leaned over and helped Lucia to her feet, Dutkne's eyes fell upon her extremely shapely ass. A single instant was all it took for his mind to register that Zarah had the most divinely sculpted backside on any female he had ever seen and Lucia was not that far from perfection. Dutkne shook his head quickly as they turned to look at him, almost as if they were sensing his eyes upon them.

You should remain here. Zarah told him. I don't wish to explain to my brother how you were injured or killed.

Dutkne grinned and nodded his head. Of course. We wouldn't want that would we?

Zarah snorted softly at his sarcastic reply and turned to Lucia. "I will take the North catwalk 'chev.'" She whispered.

Lucia nodded. "I will take the south and we will meet on the opposite end." She spoke.

As Dutkne watched, they leaned close to one another and shared a soft kiss before wrapping the shadows around their bodies and disappearing completely into the gathering darkness. He turned to look at Haeis.

"That particular skill is very unnerving." He stated softly.

Haeis grinned. "You get used to it." He stated. "Let us get ready in case they discover something we do not want them to discover."

All of what they had taught her came to the forefront now.

Zarah Leonidas was the youngest of her father's children that were of fighting age, yet there was no question she was the most lethal behind her brother Androcles. Between what her father, mothers and uncles had taught her through the years and the skills that Andro had trained her in when it was just the two of them, she possessed a combination of grace and power that was unmatched among her other siblings. Even her mother and uncle Vonis had commented on how smoothly and effortlessly she could wrap the shadows around her and blur in motion. Her mother had told her that one day she would surpass her in skill and that was stating a lot since her mother Isabella was widely regarded as the most lethal and skilled pureblood vampire in all of the Union. Zarah knew her mother trained almost everyday with her first elven mother Dysea and her father whenever she could. She also accepted training and knowledge from any who she thought could make her better, and for several years she had trained under the tutelage of her Aunt Aihola and General Lynwe, two Drow warriors who were feared for their skill.

Zarah Leonidas loved her brother without question or thought for he had given to her a part of himself that day on the mountain in order to save her life. Andro had done this without hesitation or pause even when the unwritten laws within the Union would have condemned her to death. Zarah more than anyone but Sadi and their father understood the way her brother thought, how his mind worked and what he could do. He never doubted her as they grew; he always was there to give her as much support and encouragement as she needed. He did it with all of them, but more so with her than their other siblings. That day on the mountain had created a

bond between them that would never go away now. They had learned through the years how to tightly shield their private thoughts from each other, but no matter how much they shielded they could always detect a simple mood or ambiance from each other that they could not from their other siblings. Andro had pushed her, supported her and been her best friend outside of Normya. Bringing her back here to Earth and turning her loose to find Janae was the ultimate show of confidence and support for her that he could have ever made and that unequivocal decision had done more for her than anyone but Lucia knew.

What Dante and Javier Moran had done to her she would never forget. It still made her shudder in revulsion and at times cower in fear inside her mind when she saw someone that looked like them and those memories came rushing back. Yet now... with the realization of what Lucia meant to her and her intense and growing love for the breathtaking vampire female that had captured her heart... Zarah was irrevocably moving forward one step at a time and putting that moment of her life far behind her. With each kiss from Lucia, each touch, she restored a little bit of Zarah Leonidas as she once was. She had taken so much of Lucia's blood to heal herself that now she was now and forever tied to Lucia in a way that only served to give her strength and purpose. Waking up in each other's arms was the most soothing and healing balm that Zarah could ever have. Destiny and fate may have brought them together from across the stars, but their rapidly growing love for each other was driving them forward. And her brother only encouraged and embraced this for her and for Lucia. He had accepted it completely for what it was even though Zarah knew that her other siblings were still skeptical of Lucia. Neither of them cared about that for they had the support of the one man who mattered right most to them right now. None of her brothers and sisters would go against Androcles, for they all trusted him completely. He had done more for each of them as they had grown and it was impossible for them not to trust in Andro's decisions. He had protected all of them at one point or another in their lives and did so without question and that is why they loved him so. He had done things without others knowledge that shielded his sisters mainly, things that only Zarah knew of because of what they shared, and she knew it was why none of them would hesitate to go to him with any problem no matter what it was or how personal it could be.

Zarah stopped moving along the catwalk as she grew nearer to the location that Seyra had pointed out. Her cobalt blue vampire eyes were alert and focused. Wrapped within the shadows as she was, Zarah was completely invisible to the naked eye and even most portable sensor arrays. Moving with the shadows wrapped around her had taken some training to master; being able to manipulate even the smallest amount of darkness in a room was a skill that took training and time. She had an advantage that many did not because of who her parents were but she had worked hard to be able to do this. It was like moving with a swirling cloud of black around your body, being able to shift it to hide yourself and draw it in tighter to your body or expand it outward to encompass another person. She had inherited the Spartan will to master something from her father, and combined with her own confidence, it had served her well so far. Zarah looked up along the catwalk above her head and froze as she saw the tip of the combat boot from behind the mass of pipes and channels. She saw the boot shift and then the thigh came into view between the pipes. Zarah leaped the four meters to the top of the building with little effort and no sound and then she was level with the mass of pipes. She moved three feet to the side along the edge of the building and then she saw them.

Three Kavalians in civilian clothes and carrying heavy assault rifles. Lucia had been right. The three of them were standing directly in front of the vent as Zarah shifted to her infra red vision with a blink. Their body heat was lost within the larger concentration being expelled from the vent. As she shifted her eyes back to normal vision she could see them easily. One was sitting in a chair they must have brought up to this location, the other two standing. All of them were heavily armed and in perfect position to ambush any teams that tried to assault the control center.

Anton! Cihera! HOLD! Zarah rasped out within Mindvoice.

Holding! Cihera responded instantly.

Zarah what do you have? Anton asked.

Zarah shifted her eyes and stared across the wide expanse of open air between this long catwalk she was on and the one where Lucia was. *'Chev?* She spoke. *You were right.*

Yes... unfortunately. Lucia replied instantly. *I am looking at four Kavalians in civilian clothes and obviously biogenic clones. They are in perfect position to ambush Anton's team as he approached from the east.*

I would guess that this confirms the imprint you followed is in fact this Janae and this is where they are holding her. Dutkne's voice filled their minds.

I would say that. Zarah answered.

Then there is quite likely more of these Kavalians near the vent above the building we are in. Dutkne continued.

I would say that is a safe bet as well. Lucia answered. *I can't tell from here, too many pipes and it's too dark. Ussta libh'iahin?*

I am not in a position to see. Zarah answered. *Haeis... can you move into a position to take them out if you exit the way we came in?*

Give me two minutes. Haeis answered immediately.

Zarah pulled the grenade from her belt and thumbed the small button magnetizing the grenade so that it stuck to any metal surface. She heard several grunts over her implant COM and her head whirled towards the office they had come from when Haeis's voice barked out not within Mindvoice but for all to hear.

"Fuck! Do it now Princess! Do it now!"

Zarah heard a smashing sound coming from that building and she whirled back and heaved her grenade. *"Lucia, Anton, Cihera! NOW!! Execute now!!"* She screamed out seeing the three Kavalians turn towards the sound of her voice confused because they saw nothing. Just as their eyes shifted to the soft thump of the grenade landing and magnetizing to the pipe just above their heads a muffled explosion sounded from the building Zarah and the others had come from. Zarah was leaping from the top of the building just as the grenade exploded, cutting off the warning they were about to shout and announcing to everyone else that the game had begun.

Then all hell broke loose.

Janae had been sheltered for most of her life. Living on Elear with her mother and father had been anything but interesting. Though her father was half elf, her mother was Lycavorian and her father's genes were dominant. She possessed all the natural beauty of the elven species, their incredible speed and reflexes and natural strength, but her ears were only slightly pointed and not the normal two inch high pointed ears that half elf children normally had. Her ears were almost normal in size, but still elegantly pointed allowing her elven heritage to show outwardly. Her childhood was filled with lessons and training, but her father steadfastly refused to allow her to enter into her own Agoge, even though it was what she most wanted to do. It wasn't until he had showed up at their home one day that the reasons and purpose to everything her parents had done rang true. Janae knew something was going to happen the moment the King of the Lycavorian Union and his two Elven Queens came to their door. She had only been eleven years old at the time, but somehow his presence resounded within her like a fog horn. She stood next to her mother holding tightly to her hand as her father stood before the King and shook his head. She remembered his words vividly that day.

"I knew it was only a matter of time before you discovered me." He had said. "I'm surprised you waited this long."

"I... I didn't know how to approach you." The King had said. "I..."

Janae had watched as her father, always so stern and Spartan like, how he lifted his hand and placed it on the shoulder of the King that day. How his dark eyes were moist with tears that Janae had never seen her father shed.

"I believe... I believe fate decided it was time Mandri." He had spoken causing Janae's eyes to go wide. It was the first language besides the normal Basic tongue that she had learned to speak fluently, followed quickly by the Elven language and then the ancient Vampire Language. By age ten she was the only one among the two hundred plus students in her class that could speak all three languages fluently. "You have led well these last years and you have made my father and your grandfather very proud in your actions."

"Do you... do you speak to him?" The King had asked.

Janae's father smiled wistfully. "Only in my dreams now. Only in my dreams."

Janae had watched then as her father and the King embraced tightly, more tightly than she had ever seen her father embrace another man and as the next days and weeks and years passed, Janae discovered the wonderful answers as to why.

That day had unlocked the history and blood that her father had hidden so completely from so many people, including his beautiful Lycavorian wife. She was the granddaughter of King Resumar and his beloved Elf Concubine Sar'ia. She was a first cousin to the King of the Lycavorian Union and they were not just any cousins, but the only grandchildren to King Resumar that still survived. That day had begun a wondrous life of discovery and exploration that Janae had willingly embraced with all that she was. She understood that her true heritage had to be kept secret at the time, but Martin had done all that he could to insure that she was part of the future going forward. Even against her father's wishes, he brought her to Earth to live among the many people of Sparta so that she could learn everything there was to know about her past and hopefully shape her future. Her parents had moved here to Earth as well, living in a large villa not far from the Royal Estate. The *Durcunusaan* knew at least in some part what she was, and they would never question their King or Queens. She was present with her parents for the majority of the family functions that were kept private from the prying eyes of the Netnews, playing with Androcles, Resumar and Eliani and all of her cousins as they grew.

She was granted her wish to take part in her own Agoge, primarily in part because of Martin and the agreement he had made with her father about her safety. Her cousin knew the attention she would garner if it was known who she was, and in many ways he was just as protective of her as her own father. All of her cousins were. Yet when she expressed the desire to Martin to conduct her own Agoge, to take a more active role in a destiny that was hers as well, he didn't hesitate as she thought he might. She had commanded an elite company of *Durcunusaan* Scouts for three years, earning the position on her own merits, and then had shifted to her current role as senior aide to Sparta's Governor Panos. This was a man who considered Martin a son and who they all referred to as grandfather. He was a man who had taught her the intricacies of politics in Sparta and exposed her to so much more. The last five years of her life had been filled with knowledge and exciting events that she had played a role in. She was highly respected as his senior aide and was also known as a woman not to be trifled with even at only twenty-four years of age. She was steadfastly loyal to Panos and would shield him from everyone if she deemed it necessary. Janae and the Union Netnews had an erratic and sometimes rocky relationship for she was blunt talking and brutally honest.

Janae had been devastated when she learned of what had happened to Martin for she had grown so close to her cousin and like him had embraced the legacy that their blood gave them. It was this fact alone that had allowed the Kavalian bastards to take her by surprise, though she had severely wounded one of them during the raid. A man that was now dead she thought with some satisfaction. She had heard them speaking amongst themselves as she was kept secured to the chair in this old refuse plant, some of them taking different opportunities to paw her supple body and make crude comments about what they would do to her. Only their senior officer kept them in check where that was concerned Janae knew, as he kept the remaining four men from raping and beating her for what she had done to their comrade she had no doubts. They must have done something to her while she was unconscious for she could not reach out within Mindvoice to touch anyone. It was as if a large black void had been erected around her mind and no matter what she did she could not penetrate it. She had grown in her Mindvoice abilities and skill since coming to Earth, working with her cousin and the Feravomir on a regular basis and always able to sense her cousins and marking their many scents within her mind. Janae was of medium height at five foot seven, but she had taken after her Lycavorian mother in the shape and numerous curves of her body. She had svelte legs that ended with a perfectly shaped ass and a small waist. She inherited her amply endowed chest from her mother as well as the regal cheekbones and full lips. Her hazel/green eyes were bright and alert, and her skin was naturally flawless thanks in part to her elven genes. She was a stunningly beautiful female; one who had smaller pointed ears due to the fact that three quarters of her blood was Lycavorian, but they were elven ears nonetheless and only added to her beauty. Janae had drawn the attention of many young handsome wolves and elves who wanted to court her through the years, until they found out how headstrong and intelligent she was and the fact that she was far too close to the Leonidas children to just be a simple aide. She could trade one-liners with the best of them, having spent far too much time around her cousin Eliani and her mother Anja to not pick up their quick wit and sharp tongues.

Janae's head snapped up when the first muffled explosion sounded and her eyes darted to where the Kavalian commandos reacted as the well trained troops that they were. Once more she tried to reach out within Mindvoice but was stifled by that black wall, and then she inhaled deeply trying to catch any scent on the wind that she recognized. It was there, though so very faint, and a slow smile began to play across her lips. Two more explosions sounded, louder and much closer than the last and obviously outside, the screams of horribly injured

Kavalians now filling the air. Janae snarled and silently hoped that they died horrible deaths for what they had taken part in. It was readily apparent that Kavalian biogenic clones did not possess the same sense of smell that their pureblood comrades did with their feline genes. Kavalians had a very good sense of smell, just not on the same level of a Lycavorian. None of the five men in the room with her paid her any mind now, their complete attention focused on looking on the front row of windows and trying to determine what was going on and they did not smell the distinct scents approaching. One of them Janae recognized instantly and her head whipped back and forth trying to find cover to drop her chair behind. Finally she gave up and simply leaned over to the side and toppled herself over drawing the attention of the Kavalians in the room just as the doors on either side of the office they were in blew inward and her adopted cousin Anton Simpson led a charge of *Durcunusaan* Commandos into the room.

Janae grunted in pain as she tried to make herself as small as possible on the floor tied to the chair as she was. It wouldn't have mattered she knew, not with the skill Anton possessed, but better to be safe than sorry. Anton and the six *Durcunusaan* that followed him into the room all carried chopped down versions of the P190A3, the P191K, with integral silencers built into them. They fired an immensely powerful 12 mm kinetic shell called a Hammerhead round that was tipped with a single eye drop of liquid C9 explosive. As she watched, Anton's weapon cut loose first, a short five round burst taking the Kavalian commander dead center in his chest as he was turning to face the door. Janae watched as five small popping explosions dotted his chest and blood and flesh sprayed into the air as his body was flung back. The second entrance blew inward and Janae watched as the shimmering white hair of a Drow elf led a blond haired elf and three more *Durcunusaan* into the room, their weapons singing out death without pause. Janae had learned many things upon coming here to Earth to live among her newly discovered family. One of the most important things she discovered was that the *Durcunusaan* were broken down in to three different sections. There was the Protection Detail, those *Durcunusaan* who were tasked with actually shadowing the Royal family wherever they went and securing their safety. These were the men and women who guarded those the King and Queens considered high value targets. The Protection Detail was the largest of the *Durcunusaan*, numbering nearly eight thousand across the Union in various jobs. After them came the much smaller Analyst Detail; men and women who were perhaps the most unassuming group of men and women she had ever met. Talking to one of them on the street, you would never know that they were probably the most intelligent and introverted of the three sections. All of them had been trained by the *Krypteria* and were experts at discovering details about people and places that the Royal Family might encounter. All of them were analysts yes, but all of them had served in the normal *Durcunusaan* first, and every single one of them had combat experience. The third section of the *Durcunusaan* was the smallest of the organization at only two hundred and fifty strong but they were without the doubt the most lethal group of men and women that Janae had ever met.

The Reactionary Detail were the ones who conducted operations of just this nature. All of them had been trained by General Vengal or General Vistr personally, who in turn had trained under Martin Leonidas and several others who were the most superb small unit operators in the entire Union. This is what they trained for every day, and they had no intention of allowing any of the Kavalians in the room to survive or any harm to come to her. She felt a huge weight of relief being lifted from her shoulders as two of the *Durcunusaan* RD moved instantly to where she lay on the floor and shielded her body with their own. It was really an unnecessary move on their part; the *Durcunusaan* Reactionary Detail had conducted twenty-seven operations like this since their inception nineteen years ago, and not one of them had ever failed. No one knew they even existed Janae was sure for they often worked tightly with the *Krypteria*, and it was not surprising to see Anton leading them in.

It was over in nine seconds; only three blinks of her eyes really, and the smell of death and relaxed bladders filled the room. She watched as Anton moved to her side quickly as the two RD troops finished cutting her bindings.

"Zarah... we have her! She's unhurt!" Anton announced as he dropped to one knee and allowed his P191K to dangle on the quick release straps. He turned his head. "Secure the room and report!" He barked before turning back to Janae. "Long time no see cuz." He told her with that trademark grin that his father always sported and he continued.

Janae almost broke into tears and hugged him tightly as she laughed in relief. "It's about time you got here." She spat loudly. "I don't know how much longer I could have tolerated their foul stench."

“Janae... cousin!” Zarah’s voice echoed in the room and suddenly she was unwrapping the shadows from around her body.

Janae came to her feet quickly and the two women embraced without question as Lucia appeared next to her, the K12 clutched in her fist. Anton got to his feet and looked at her. “What happen?” He asked. “Why the last minute change and order?”

“We discovered additional Kavalians hiding in the heat vents where our infra red vision would not pick them out.” Lucia explained quickly. “Haeis was moving to dispatch a third group when he ordered the assault. *Ussta libh'iahin* and I threw our grenades and moved here!”

Zarah was holding Janae’s face in her hands, stroking her hair and smiling. “You are unhurt?” She asked.

“Nothing a hot shower won’t cure.” Janae answered as she squeezed Zarah’s arms tightly and pulled her close. “Zarah... they did something to me. They... I can’t Mindvoice or sense... I can’t feel anyone!”

Zarah nodded. “They implanted a device into you Janae. Most likely just under the skin of your scalp somewhere. It is something we have never seen before, developed by the High Coven. It completely blocks a Mindvoice resonance. They did this to my mother Dysea as well until it was removed.”

“Then... then how...”

Zarah smiled. “I tracked your imprint.” She answered.

Janae gazed at her. “But Martin... he forbid you to ever...”

Zarah nodded. “Well... my brother has made it a habit of disobeying our father through the years. You know that.” She said.

“Andro... Andro sent you?” She gasped.

“You did not think we would leave you?” Zarah spoke. “Never!” She turned quickly to Anton. “We must move back the way we came quickly Anton. Haeis and the others are not responding to our calls over COMS or within Mindvoice. Not since that muffled explosion. Get the transport in here to take Janae back to Andro’s villa and you, Cihera and Las'elh go with her. Send for a tech team to sweep this scene and the bodies for any intelligence.”

Anton didn’t hesitate and turned to where Cihera and Las'elh watched him expectantly. “Cihera... you and Las'elh are with me! We’ll take half the RD Squad and get Janae back to Gytheio, the other half will remain here with Zarah and Lucia.”

Zarah turned back to look at Janae who watched her with wide eyes and the way she so effortlessly had given the orders. “Go Janae. We will see you back on Cranæ Island soon. It is where we have all gathered.”

“Zarah... Martin... I...”

Zarah leaned over quickly and kissed her on the cheek. “My father lives Janae.” She whispered softly into her ear. “My father lives. The *Feravomir* and others can fill you in, but now let Anton get you out of here. Lucia and I have to collect someone that we have lost.”

“Thank... thank you cousin.” Janae said gently hugging her.

“Thank Andro.” Zarah replied quickly. “It was his sense that something was not right almost immediately and he had me return home to find you. Go now! Before the shooting and explosions bring the Netnews swarming here like ants!”

Lucia moved up next to Zarah as Anton wrapped his arm around Janae’s shoulders and he led her out. “We must hurry *Ussta libh'iahin*; I do not sense Dutkne any longer. He is not a fighter and if something has happened to him your brother will be very upset with us.”

Zarah nodded her head and turned to the second half of the RD team. “All of you on us!” She barked.

Lucia and Zarah did not sense Dutkne any longer because he had raised Mindvoice shields that were nearly impenetrable the moment the early explosion above them had sounded. He and the second *Durcunusaan* soldier had looked up to the roof above them just as Haeis’s voice sounded over their COMS and then the entire roof blew downward from the force of the grenade. One of the reasons this sewage plant had been phased out was because of its age. It had seen better years and was now over a hundred and fifty years old, many of the buildings not retaining the solidness of years past. The force of the grenade Haeis tossed had shattered the roof supports instantly and Haeis joined the four Kavalian soldiers as they were swallowed up and their footing

disappeared. The second *Durcunusaan* troop wasn't as lucky as Dutkne or Haeis and he caught the full force of the downward explosion directly into his face and upper body killing him instantly. As Haeis and four Kavalians fell into the room, the floor beneath Dutkne shuddered and then the added weight of the five additional bodies and the force of the explosion caused the floor to fracture and give way. In the split second before his feet fell out from under him Dutkne caught a glimpse of Haeis and the injuries he had sustained. He attempted to reach for him as the floor gave way and closed his fingers around his limp arm, pulling him close as they plummeted down. It was a three story drop to the bottom of the building, and during that fall Dutkne was able to draw Haeis close and twist his body in such a way that they slammed into the floor with him providing some semblance of a cushion. His entire body screamed out in pain as Haeis's added weight caused several of his ribs to crack and a sliver of metal stabbed upward through the body armor he wore to impale his side.

Dutkne was no stranger to pain, and while this was not the most pain he had ever felt, it surely ranked up there with the top. The impact had stunned him, Haeis's added weight driving the air from his lungs, but without question saving the unconscious man's life. Dutkne blinked several times, shutting out the pain as best he was able, ignoring the pounding against his shields of both Lucia and Zarah because they could no longer sense them. The much larger and stronger pounding was coming from Androcles in Sparta, for he had felt the sudden spike of emotions from him and outside of Wayonn was now the only one who could sense him when he slammed his shields closed so tightly. Their rapidly growing friendship was not something he could explain fully, but as his grandfather had often stated and Dutkne was coming to believe more and more each day, it was preordained somehow. He knew Andro would not attempt to breach his shields for fear of putting him at greater risk so he simply sent an image pulse out that let him know he was alive and would contact him as soon as he was able. This seemed to satisfy Androcles for the insistent pounding against his shields stopped immediately and allowed him to concentrate more. Zarah and Lucia were fast approaching and hammering his shields as well, but this he could ignore for the moment. Dutkne groaned loudly as he shifted Haeis's inert body off of his own and he clenched his teeth against the searing pain in his side as he gently laid the limp *Durcunusaan* soldier to the side. He sat up quickly and looked down to see the point and about three inches of the metal sliver protruding from his side perhaps two inches from the edge of his waist. It had stabbed fully through the muscles of his side and hit no vital organs, that he could feel right away and without thinking he reached down and gripped the slick part of the shaft that was sticking out of his body. He clenched his teeth and yanked quickly, his dark eyes going wide as a wave of hot pain lanced across his senses and then he tossed aside the thin and bloodstained sliver of metal, cursing himself for doing something so stupid.

Dutkne's head whipped around when he heard the other groans and through the thinning dust in the air he watched as two Kavalians began to stir. He could see the grotesquely twisted body of a third Kavalian, now fully impaled upon a half meter thick steel rod that had once been part of the floor. Another Kavalian's upper body was protruding from under a massive slab of concrete, his eyes open in death and his upper body utterly crushed. Dutkne's hand dropped to where he was wearing the K12 KM and he yanked up the weapon only to see the barrel of the sidearm bent upward by perhaps half an inch. He pulled the gun back and looked at it.

"Of course... why make this easy on me." He snarled as he tossed the gun away and watched as the two Kavalians staggered to their feet and turned to look at him. Dutkne gathered his feet under him, ignoring the screams of protest from his body as one Kavalian bent to pick up the assault rifle that laid near him. He snatched it around and lifted it towards him, quickly realizing that the firing mechanism was shattered beyond repair. The second Kavalian reached for a sidearm that was no longer there, and then they both were staring at him with murder in their eyes. Dutkne's hand dropped to the slim quarterstaff holster he wore on his right thigh that held his weapon of choice all these years. "Surrender... surrender is still an option." He barked out. "Enough of your comrades have died this day."

"Lycavorian pig!" The Kavalian screamed madly. "I will kill you!" He broke into a sprint towards him followed quickly by his partner.

Nearly three hundred years of constant practice had made his quarterstaff an extension of his mind and body. In a single blink the weapon was in his hand and extended fully to its seven foot length. Forged and carved from Carnubian Oak that had been aged for a thousand years, Dutkne's quarterstaff had been hand crafted especially for him by the Lycavorian Protectorate's ageless weapons maker. Carnubian Oaks were the oldest and sturdiest trees on Cantra, the largest planet and population center of the Protectorate. They grew to

three hundred meters in height in some locations on the planet and they surrounded the Parliamentary Building in the capital of Lorent. It was an amazingly supple wood when first harvested, completely resistant to heat and impossible to set on fire, and as hard as any metal known to exist. When harvested and dried properly it was used in the construction of many buildings on Canetra due to its resistance to all forms of heat and its immense strength. It could be shaped by a forger during many hours of tireless work, just as his quarterstaff had been. Dried, smoothed and then coated with the same Carnubian sap that the tree excreted when alive. It returned the color to the wood almost instantly and also served to harden it to the density of metal. Each end of the staff was then layered with very thin metal plates that gave it a total weight of two point two kilograms. This particular quarterstaff was unique in that Dutkne could separate the complete shaft into two equal lengths and imbue it with his psychic power, making it a supremely lethal weapon while looking very innocent indeed.

At the moment however, Dutkne extended his *Ishon* and jammed one end into the ground in front of him and leaped upwards, using the balance of the *Ishon* and his MV ability to propel himself over the top of the two charging Kavalians to land lightly three meters behind them. The Kavalians skidded to a halt when he lifted himself from in front of them and whirled around to see him land and twirl the *Ishon* expertly until its length was folded along his side, one hand extended towards them.

“We can end this peacefully.” Dutkne spoke once more. “I have no desire to kill you. I give you my word you will not be executed.”

“Arrgghhh! Bastard!” The Kavalian who had spoken rushed at him once more.

Dutkne snapped the end of his *Ishon* up with a simple twist of his wrist. The tip of the *Ishon* slammed viciously into the jaw of the Kavalian, snapping his head back and bringing him to an abrupt halt as Dutkne spun away to the side and the *Ishon* extended out along the length of his arm. The Kavalian spit a huge gob of blood and saliva from his mouth, his teeth having bit completely through his tongue, and the tip joining that pile of blood on the dirt at his feet.

“This is not necessary!” Dutkne barked. “You need not die today! Surrender!”

“We are Puma Bane!” The Kavalian screamed as spittle mixed with blood was sent flying across the distance between them. “We do not surrender! We conquer!”

Dutkne tilted his head to the side slightly. “That has not worked out well for you today has it?” He asked calmly surprising himself with the serenity that filled him.

Dutkne had faced men in battle before, and no matter the number of times he had faced an opponent he had always felt a sense of trepidation that he would not succeed and be killed. This time however he did not feel this coursing through him. He felt confident and powerful and Dutkne realized that it was the influence of Androcles filling him now. Not in a physical or controlling sense, but the total confidence in his skills and complete knowledge that he was right and would not fail. Another item that only confirmed what his path was to be in this life now.

The second Kavalian stepped up next to his partner and held out the jagged metal rebar section he had yanked from the debris in the room. Dutkne watched as the man took it and they faced him now just as armed as he was.

“We will... we will kill you before we are brought down Lycavorian scum!” The first Kavalian snarled.

Dutkne’s persona changed then and he blinked, his wolf fangs extended, a black ring extending around the pupils of his eyes and he snarled back. “I will not ask again.” He growled menacingly.

“Die Lycavorian pig!” The Kavalian screamed before launching himself at Dutkne, followed instantly by his fellow Puma Bane warrior.

“So be it! It is your funeral!” Dutkne answered, not really knowing where that statement came from but knowing it sounded surprisingly accurate at the moment.

Two things happened in that moment.

Dutkne shifted the *Ishon* closer to his body and twisted the center of the staff breaking it into two equal lengths in a single blink. As he did this, the ends of the *Ishon* began to glow with an almost white/blue like light, tightly wrapped around the ends where the metal was encasing the ends of the two staffs now.

And then Dutkne attacked.

Zarah and Lucia came skidding to a halt just inside the now destroyed doorway of the building Dutkne and Haeis had been in. Their eyes grew wide as they saw the massive hole in the floor of the room and the Durcunusaan RD troops that had remained with them spread out covering what was left of the room. The darkness did not hamper their vampire or wolf eyes and all of them could see the bottom of the newly created shaft and the light from several fires that were now burning.

“*Dalharuk d'natha elg'caress!*” Lucia muttered the curse as they gazed into the pit.

“Andro is going to be so pissed off at me.” Zarah echoed Lucia’s words.

“We must...”

“***Die Lycavorian pig!***”

Zarah and Lucia looked at each other with wide eyes. It took only a split second before they both registered the same thing in their minds and they took hands as they stepped off into the large crater and pit.

The senior *Durcunusaan* RD officer left reacted by trying to reach for them but failing. “*Sibfla!*” He cursed loudly. “Now I know how our comrades in the Protection Detail feel! Follow them!”

Zarah and Lucia landed on the balls of their feet still holding hands. The fifteen meter drop was something they could both do in their sleep. They saw Haeis’s inert form first and moved quickly to his side as the Durcunusaan RD troops began landing behind them.

“So be it! It is your funeral!” They heard Dutkne’s deep voice and whirled around, their K12s lifting by second nature. They saw three figures moving through the tangle of shattered steel and concrete and instantly they blurred into the fire lit area that opened into the large area that Dutkne had purposely led the Puma Bane troops. They were on the bottom floor of the building, the entire side of the structure now opened to the outside. Fires were burning in three locations within the facility and providing an eerie backdrop to the battle they had just stumbled into. Both of them saw Seyra’s massive form landing outside the now destroyed building, but neither Zarah nor Lucia could tear their eyes from Dutkne. He held some sort of short staff weapon in either hand, the end of the weapon glowing faintly with a white blue light just as Zarah’s fists and arms did, just as Lucia’s whips did when she called them. Their eyes were wide and they were both frozen in their spots as they witnessed Dutkne moving with a combination of speed and power that could only be described as beautiful.

Dutkne did not take notice of Zarah and Lucia, focused entirely as he was on the two very large and angry Kavalians attempting to kill him. His wolf eyes were calculating and cold as he stepped to the side of the Kavalian on the right, the *Ishon* in his left hand snapping up with wicked power. The MV imbued end of the *Ishon* smashed into the side of the Kavalian’s head with staggering power, causing the man to lose his balance and tumble into his partner as he shifted to turn toward Dutkne. Dutkne was not built like a Spartan, his six foot tall body lean and muscular in the fashion of a world class athlete. Indeed, he had taken part in many of the entertaining sports events while on Cantra that were held every year. He was Lycavorian however, and their people were always more muscular and defined than most. He had trained for years with Drey and even recently with Nirilo, always looking to hone his skills. His wise cracking style and attitude almost always fooled the people he met for the first time. While it was true he would always look for a non-violent solution to a problem first, Dutkne was more than capable of defending himself in a very brutal fashion. Once he reached that point in a situation, Dutkne became like Androcles Leonidas and fought only for one purpose, and that was to win.

As Dutkne spun once more to his right, the first Kavalian staggering to the side from the wicked blow from the *Ishon*, Dutkne whipped his left hand over the top of his body and sent the *Ishon* in his left hand crashing into the second Kavalian’s face with tremendous force. The second Kavalian screamed in pain as his nose and cheekbone shattered in that instant, blood blossoming into the air and down his face as he fell backwards, the rebar section falling from his grip. Dutkne turned to face them, the *Ishons* held in his hands in a cross pattern in front of his head and shoulders, his wolf eyes ablaze and his fangs fully extended and looking quite ferocious.

“End this now!” He barked. “You need not die!”

The first Kavalian had regained his balance and shook his head while he raised the section of rebar in his hand and screamed out his rage. "Die!" He screamed.

Dutkne shifted his weight to his right foot and shook his head. "Not today Kavalian!" He snarled in return as the Kavalian attacked.

The Puma Bane soldier brought the rebar down with tremendous strength, intending to smash it right through the flimsy looking sticks that Dutkne held in his hands. He had a savage smile of glee on his face, his face contorted into a mask of hate. Dutkne brought the *Ishon* together in front of his face just as the rebar connected with the twin staffs and came to a surprising stop in mid-motion. The Kavalian's eyes grew wide at this but he was a Puma Bane Commando after all and he reacted quickly. He lashed out with his left hand intending to smash it into the side of Dutkne's head. The blow never connected, and in truth it never really got past the halfway point of motion. Dutkne twisted the *Ishons* in his hands, trapping the section of rebar with the indestructible short staffs and wrenching downward. The Kavalian's eyes bugged out of his head in agony as his entire shoulder shattered and was yanked out of joint. The tendons and joints could be heard popping like twigs and tearing like paper. As the rebar section fell from suddenly limp fingers the Puma Bane soldier looked back at Dutkne, tears of horrible pain filling his eyes and that is when the *Ishon* in Dutkne's right hand cracked viciously into his unprotected throat. The sounds of his larynx shattering was grotesquely loud in the air, as was the sudden gagging sound and blood bubbling from the Kavalian's mouth. Dutkne didn't pause and swept the *Ishons* behind the Puma Bane soldier's legs in the same motion and ripped his legs out from under him. As the first Kavalian fell heavily to his back, his large hands holding his destroyed throat as he began to choke to death, Dutkne turned to the second Kavalian who was just pulling himself to his feet and attacked without hesitation.

The first *Ishon* blow struck just below his left ear, followed almost instantly by the *Ishon* in Dutkne's right hand that punched into the center of his chest. As his mouth opened to try and take a breath, Dutkne brought both *Ishons* down on his arm just above the wrist. The bones snapped like dry sticks, and in the same motion Dutkne reversed the direction and sent the *Ishons* battering into his face. The sound was sickening as the Kavalian's jaw and other cheek shattered in the same instant, his face taking on the look of loose jelly. Dutkne took one step back and then snapped out with a front side kick that struck the Kavalian dead center of his thigh and his femur bone was instantly broken. Still unable to draw breath to scream at the terrible pain ripping through his body, he reached for his leg with his good hand only to lower his face unintentionally. He lowered it directly in Dutkne's knee as it was coming up in a knee strike. His head snapped back with such force that the sound of his neck breaking in four places was like four rapid fire gunshots. It didn't matter regardless; the moment Dutkne's knee struck his already crushed nose it sent splinters of cartilage hurtling deeply into the Kavalian's brain, shredding the organ completely. The Kavalian was dead before his pulverized brain could transmit the message to his body, and he dropped immediately to the floor, his left foot twitching madly in death.

Dutkne stepped back quickly, sweeping the *Ishons* to the side until they were tucked along his forearms and he was in a defensive stance. This is when his focus on the battle relented and he detected the delightful scents of Zarah and Lucia. He turned his head quickly and saw them standing to the side gazing at him with awe struck eyes and complete shock. The RD commander reacted first, motioning his men forward to secure the area as he looked at Dutkne with a respect he reserved for men and women he considered his betters. And there were few of them.

Lucia and Zarah moved forward, their eyes moving from the two dead Kavalians back to him. Zarah was the first to speak as she watched him reattach the ends of the *Ishon* together and them collapse the staff.

"You... you said you could not fight." She stammered.

Dutkne looked at her, his wolf eyes prominent and his fangs bared as he smiled. "If I am not mistaken I said I preferred to avoid conflict. I never said I could not fight."

"You... you lied to us." Lucia gasped.

Dutkne looked at her as he replaced the *Ishon* in its sheath on his leg and turned to go to where Haeis lay. "I didn't lie to you." He stated with a one-sided grin. "You did not asked the right question."

Seyra's huge head extended out and through what remained of the wall of the building. *It was a magnificent display Dutkne.* She spoke with some awe. *Truly magnificent!*

Seyra! Lucia and Zarah exclaimed simultaneously.

Her eyes lifted to them and if a dragon could smile, Seyra was doing that very thing. *What? He is right... and it was a brilliant display of close combat!*

Dutkne smiled as he knelt next to Haeis. *Thank you Seyra.* He stated.

“*Sibfla!*” Zarah snarled. “Call the transport Commander! We’re leaving!”

The man looked at Zarah as she snatched Lucia’s hand and they marched through the opening in the building and out into the darkness right past Seyra. He turned back to Dutkne who was lifting Haeis over his shoulder as gently as he could and met his eyes. “You told them you couldn’t fight?” He asked softly.

Dutkne looked at him and smiled once more. “Well... my answer may have implied that I was unskilled.” He answered him.

“So you *did* lie to them.” The Commander stated.

“In a manner of speaking perhaps.” Dutkne answered.

“A manner of speaking?” The Commander asked.

“Many things can be inferred from the context of words in a sentence Commander.” Dutkne told him. “I may not have used the right words.”

“No kidding.” The Commander said shaking his head. “Haeis?”

“He will live.” Dutkne spoke quickly. “I suggest we move right to the medical center in Sparta so that he can receive treatment.”

The Commander nodded and motioned to his men. “Let’s move! We don’t want to be here when the Netnews assholes show up!”

Dutkne grinned and shifted Haeis’s weight on his shoulder before moving through the decimated side of the building and into the darkness. The Commander watched him move and turned as his last man darted past him.

“Context my ass.” He muttered.

CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

VANGUARD MARK III-CLASS INTERDICTION CRUISER

RAGE OF ACHILLES

SEVENTEEN HOURS FROM RITAAH

Commander Dayiu Fang sat in her Ready Room and listened once more to the report Captain Lorian had sent to her via secure COM. While she had no prior connections to the royal family like Miranda, she and the others under Miranda’s command would always understand what was going on, for that was what Miranda had promised. Dayiu and her senior officers had viewed the report within hours of Miranda transmitting it to them. The outcome of the Battle of Kranek were just the results they had been trained to expect and many of them were just a tad bit upset that they had not been part of that battle. It wasn’t until the end of Miranda’s report that she reinforced their part in what was happening. Dayiu and her senior officers, many of them human, were utterly loyal to Miranda, Ben and the Lycavorian Union. They had worked hard to prove to all who witnessed what they did that humans could and did provide a vital part within the Union’s massive defense network, and the once prominent arrogance was long gone from human culture. They were all handpicked by Captain Lorian to become part of the Union’s secret Fleet, most were veterans of the Evolli War, and a few were even selected right out of the academy on Apo Prime.

The crew of the ULU *RAGE OF ACHILLES* had been training since their ship slipped its moorings at the Nodon shipyards after receiving the upgrade to the *MARK III* variant, and their dedication and training had won them the privilege of becoming the new lead escort for the *ARIZONA*. The *VANGUARD*-Class Mark III ships were slotted to replace the older *LEONIDAS I* Attack Cruisers going into the future. Dayiu knew all of the other commanders chosen by Miranda and Ben to command these ships, and together they had practiced both picket defense and wolf pack tactics for months before the *ARIZONA* finally slipped its moorings and was commissioned in a private ceremony at Dreamland. A defective power coupling in their LSD Drive Core had kept the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* from deploying with the *ARIZONA* just days ago, and then their orders were changed at the last minute. None of them had been happy to discover what their new mission was; at least not

until after Miranda's personal After Action Report and short comments directed to them arrived via secure COM. It was a testament to the woman they had all come to respect and hold in the same light as Admiral O'Connor and the King himself. Miranda Lorian cared about the men and women under her command, no matter their role or position within the fleet, and she made it a point to insure they were fully in the loop on all intelligence.

“...know you all expected to be here with us and that you are upset that you weren't. I don't like splitting my command and you all know that, but rest assured the mission you are on now is of the greatest importance. I'm sure by now you have all read the reports about what is going on and what you are doing is now paramount to Androcles being able to formulate and execute a plan.” Miranda's holoimage spoke. Dayiu had watched this three times already, but as they grew closer to Ritaah, she felt the urge to view it one more time.

“The RAGE OF ACHILLES is the first of a new class of ship that will eventually become a mainstay within the Union Fleet, you all know this. Once the Dragon Brigade is fully formed and deployed the ACHILLES and others like her will be carrying the teeth of our Combined Fleet Forces, and I mean that literally. This is your first test, and I assure you, this will not be a gravy mission. All of you know me, you know how I regard you, and if there are doubts in your heads as to why you pulled this mission put them aside now. When you arrive in the Ritaah system, not only will you become the overall command ship for Resumar Leonidas, but orders have already been transmitted to the PILLAR OF FAITH that she is to return to Earth after transferring her STRIKER's to your bays. Half of the Insurgent Coven ships will remain under your command while Colonel Vonis and the Coven Commander return with the FAITH. Androcles feels having the FAITH remain in Kavalian space is a risk that we can not take, and the information that the Coven insurgents may have has now become invaluable. Andro wants our best out there with his brother and that is why you are going. Most of what you will be doing is perfectly suited to all you have trained for and this is the time to get the experience all of us need. Dayiu... by Androcles's order and with my recommendation you are hereby promoted to Star Commander. I expect you to adjust your personnel accordingly and promote by rank as you see fit. Document your promotions and they will be filed as soon as you return. You carry the future and a vital part of the new Lycavorian Union's military potential and now is the time to be at your finest.

Dayiu... this is the time to show what the VANGUARD can do and I can think of no one better suited to display that. Good luck all of you and we will see you all soon.”

Dayiu flicked off the holoimager and leaned back in her chair further. Like most of those officers Miranda pulled for the Dreamland positions, she was a former fighter pilot. She shared a similar cultural background as Miranda; many of the female officers Miranda had chosen did as well. They carried what used to be known as Chinese blood within their veins and all of them had come from traditional families that had survived on Earth after The Great Fire. Though different countries no longer existed on Earth, all of them considered themselves Earthers first, as they had come to be called. A name they wore proudly. Men and women, some humans and some elves, that saw themselves as citizens of Earth and the Lycavorian Union, not the often times ridiculous cultural divisions of ancient times on Earth. Dayiu had many humans on her ship, but she also had many elves as well and perhaps a hundred Lycavorians and vampires. Dayiu Fang did not harbor the misgivings that Miranda appeared to show in regards to elves, Lycavorians and vampires. She was guarded around others if they were not part of her crew because she did not know them, but unlike Miranda, Dayiu had also not lost her entire family twice to the High Coven vampires. Dayiu also had a hunch that Captain Lorian's tune may have been changing. The scuttlebutt beginning to seep out among the ARIZONA's Strike Wing was that there was something very powerful and telling going on between Captain Lorian and the ARIZONA's Drow Tactical Officer E'dira. The rumors had started when they had first arrived at Dreamland several months ago and it was only growing in popularity. Dayiu nodded and smiled to herself as she sipped her tea. She knew of Miranda's history, they all did, and if anyone ever finally deserved to find love and happiness it was her. That it was with a female was of no consequence in the least. That age old stigma about same sex relationships had long been tossed to the wayside by nearly everyone on Earth. Dayiu knew there were some who still clung to

the idea that it was wrong, but now they were few and far between. The Queens of the Union made it that way with their intense and very public love of each other as well as the King.

The chime on her door sounded pulling her out of her thoughts and she glanced at the timer on her wall. They were here right on time. Dayiu reached forward and pressed the console on her desk as she stood up.

“Enter.”

The door opened immediately and two men and two women entered. Dayiu knew who Star Colonel Isra and Lieutenant Governor Tarifa were instantly as there were not many citizens of the Union who did not know who they were. Tarifa held tightly to Colonel Isra’s hand and arm as they entered and the affection and need for physical contact between mates was very obvious to Dayiu. The story of the love they both shared with the Queen of the Drow was well documented and always a best selling romantic holonovel no matter where you went within the Union. Their story was one of heartbreak and discovery and then total love when Isra finally claimed both Tarifa and Queen Aihola as his mates. They made a striking couple she decided as her eyes went to the towering Kavalian male and the stunning blond female Kavalian who entered just behind them.

Dayiu had been introduced to them before when they first came on board and even sat with them in the mess lounge the previous evening, but the knowledge that the Kavalians had caused all that was going on right now still stuck in her mind. The dinner last night had begun to change that mindset as she found both Pian and Jalersi extremely intelligent and passionate about their beliefs. The Kavalian Pian’Nruarani was a giant of a man, the soft dark blond fur covering his body meticulously well groomed. That he was powerfully built under that coat of fur was easy enough to see, and even with his size he moved with confident feline like grace which Dayiu knew was a hallmark of the superbly trained Kavalian troops they had dozens of reports on. Jalersi’Nruarani she knew was a biogenically altered Kavalian female and the oldest daughter to the Kavalian Prefect. Her white blond hair was very long, fully extending almost to the top of her sculpted ass cheeks and surrounded a flawless set of facial features highlighted by her incredible blue eyes. Her simple fleet gray jumpsuit appeared as if she had been poured into it and looking at her standing beside Pian was almost comical in nature due to the difference in their height. Jalersi’Nruarani apparently had begun to take on somewhat of a more free nature in her time among the men and women of the Union and her choice of how to dress was starting to become revealing and exotic in nature. This attitude had also begun to rub off on Pian it seemed for she had seen him cuddling with her on several occasions which was something Dayiu knew Kavalian males just did not do. Jalersi’s ample breasts were large and very firm and they were the most noticeable physical attribute on her lush figure. Dayiu knew this had turned the heads of many of her male crew members over the course of the last three days, but Jalersi’Nruarani only had eyes for the man whose arm she held. Word had spread quickly that she was off the market so to speak, and while she was not always in the company of Pian, it was quite obvious that she had found in him what she desired most of all and she would brook no unwanted advances.

Dayiu had sat with Isra and Tarifa for nearly three hours just after leaving Earth and they had told her of what these two Kavalians had done during the battle there. It appeared that the KFI had a much larger problem than they realized if the daughter of the harsh Kavalian Prefect would simply forsake all she had been raised to believe and follow for the love of one man. And it was a powerful love Dayiu knew, one that was easy to see just by looking at them. Pian did not treat her as Dayiu knew Kavalian females were treated according to all of their intelligence reports. He treated her with respect, admiration and unrequited love and Dayiu thought she also could detect a small sense of pride in his eyes when he looked at her and knew that her beauty was turning heads of other men but that she only cared about him.

“Good morning everyone.” She spoke easily as she motioned to the chairs situated around the small table. “Please... sit down.” She moved to the dispenser and quickly ordered three mugs of the Queen’s coffee and one mug of spicy green tea. These were given over to her guests, Pian passing Jalersi the tea before taking his mug of coffee. By all accounts, Pian drank gallons of the coffee and he had also been seen smoking from a sweet smelling pipe while in the lounge, the cinnamon tobacco scent filtering pleasantly in the area around him. While tobacco smoking had almost disappeared among citizens within the Union, it was still popular among other species and she had heard her crew talking of how this Kavalian seemed to relish the pipe he carried with him and the small pouch of tobacco.

Dayiu returned to her desk, but pulled her chair around to the front and next to where Jalersi sat by the table. “I just received an updated reported from Prince Androcles via Admiral Ceneu.”

“Please don’t tell us it’s more bad news.” Tarifa spoke softly. “We’ve had far too much of that in the last few days.”

Dayiu met her sapphire blue eyes evenly. “Unfortunately... it’s not all good.” She stated. “Denali, Lisisa and this Immortal Cha’talla have rescued Queen Dysea. She is... she is battered but still herself.”

“Thank the gods!” Tarifa gasped.

Isra nodded. “*Avoi.*”

“Unfortunately, it is now confirmed that Queen For'mya has been taken by your father’s forces Jalersi.” Dayiu spoke turning to look at her and seeing those ice blue eyes go wide in surprise. “It appears that Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos assisted them in taking her from the Senate Building before they destroyed it. We have no idea where she is being held, they can not contact her via Mindvoice and any attempt to find out where she is and retrieve her will result in her death according to the statement the Kavalian ambassador Matuarr gave to Prince Androcles when he *visited* the embassy after discovering this.” Dayiu watched the angry snarl pass over Pian’s face in an instant, his feline eyes narrowing slightly.

“Matuarr!! I should have killed him when I had the chance!” Pian growled.

Jalersi looked at him and placed her small hand on his thick arm. Dayiu watched as that inner rage was quickly channeled away at her touch. “That would have left Qurot in charge Pian. Who would be worse?” She spoke softly.

“Every gain I...we make...” Pian protested gently. “Every time I think we have moved into the future we could have even a little bit, Pusintin or your father send us hurtling back to the beginning! They will be the downfall of our people Jalersi!”

Jalersi nodded. “That is why we can not stop what we have begun.” She stated. “What my sister has begun.” She turned back to Dayiu. “I... I assume Prince Androcles has ordered that we be confined.”

Dayiu sipped her tea as she saw Tarifa and Isra look at her quickly. She shook her head with some confidence. “Quite the contrary...” She stated. “His order to me through the Admiral was quite clear and I intend to follow it for I believe it. Pian and yourself... Princess Athani... all of you have now become a central part in what is taking place. He has unofficially declared that there is a Kavalian resistance and he wants you to devise a plan to mark whatever ships and people that are part of this resistance. That includes the members of your Pride Pian... that is how you refer to your family and such correct?”

Pian nodded. “Yes. Much the same as Lycavorians call their families packs.”

Dayiu nodded. “We will understand more when we arrive on Ritaah from what I have been told, but it has to do with your brother Jalersi.”

Jalersi’s head snapped up and she looked at her with wide eyes. “Brother!” She gasped. “I... I have no brother.” She stammered quickly. “The last of my father’s male children, his last son was killed in a training accident when I was twenty-seven, a year before Athani was even born.”

“You never met him?” Isra asked surprised.

Jalersi shook her head quickly. “No.”

Pian looked at him and saw the questions in their eyes. “It is not uncommon for the older Prides to keep the male and female children separate from birth. Pride Puat, Pride Nruarani, this was done for many of the original and larger Prides. My father was the first to change this, and that was only because we were consider a nomadic Pride despite our size.”

Dayiu nodded. “Well... apparently he is very much alive and has been commanding a small rebel force of Kavalians made up of mainly biogenic clones that have discovered a way to extend their lives naturally and not die after the ten year period your scientists put on them. They made contact with Resumar and your sister shortly after they arrived on Ritaah.”

Jalersi’s eyes grew larger. “Extend their lives?” She spoke. “I... I had heard rumors of such a thing but I did not think it was possible.”

Dayiu nodded. “Well it seems it is.”

“How?” Pian asked keenly interested now.

“I wasn’t given that information.” Dayiu replied to the question honestly. “Only that an one of our *Krypteria* Intelligence Operations was investigating the mysterious disappearance of female elves over the course of the last few years. Most of them researchers of some kind. It appears this was your brother’s doing Jalersi, and those elves are the ones who were able to finally discover this information. According to the

information submitted by Prince Resumar and passed to me, your brother has taken an elven female as his wife and they have a child together as well. A daughter if the report is right.”

“Daughter?” Jalersi gasped. Her eyes were wide now and she looked back and forth between Pian and Dayiu. “I don’t even... I don’t even remember his name.” She said softly. “It was a strong name... Mi... Mic... Mican! His name was Mican!”

Dayiu smiled and nodded. “That would be him.” She turned back to her desk behind her and took the data pads from the surface, spinning back around and handing one to her. “This is what Prince Resumar and your sister have sent back... and I’ve also been informed that the second part of your mission has been canceled.”

“Canceled?” Pian came to his feet now. “Androcles promised us! He promised Karun! He said we would be able to search for Nikkei!”

“Commander this is unacceptable!” Isra stated coming to the defense of Pian and Jalersi. The last few days had seen him and Tarifa become very close with Pian and Jalersi. Much of it had to do with Karun and Ardis now being mates, but surprisingly they had quite a bit in common with Pian and Jalersi that they would not have discovered had they not come on this mission. Karun and Ardis were keeping a very low profile, spending as much time together as they could, as any new mates would and Isra found this did not bother him as much as he thought. He was very protective of his daughters simply because of the way he had seen his own mother and sisters treated, but he knew that his daughters also inherited the toughness and smarts of their elven and Drow mothers, but Karun treated Ardis in much the same way he treated Tarifa and Aihola and put him at ease. “Andro made it very clear that...”

Dayiu held up her hand to stop any further protesting. “Let me rephrase that statement.” She spoke quickly. “That part of the mission has been suspended because your daughter Nikkei is on Ritaah right now with Athani and your mother Pian.”

Jalersi came to her feet then with shocked eyes. She dropped the data pad she had been reading and her hands went to her mouth. “She... she is on Ritaah?” She stammered.

Dayiu nodded. “She arrived several days ago with the Pralor Shiria. Prince Resumar’s last report was thirty-six hours ago and he stated that she and Athani were hardly ever apart and they were discovering all that they could about each other and Mican.”

Jalersi turned to look at Pian, her eyes wide. “She... she is safe Pian!” She gasped. “She is safe!”

Pian nodded and pulled her into his arms as tears began to roll down her cheeks in relief. As he held Jalersi he looked at Dayiu. “This information... it is confirmed Commander?” He asked.

Dayiu nodded. “Yes. The *PILLAR OF FAITH* is returning to Union space and the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* is going to become the Command Ship for Prince Resumar. At least on a very temporary basis. Prince Andro feels we are better suited to be operating within enemy space than the *FAITH*. At least for the time being. Plus... since much of the *ACHILLES* technology is based on designs from CS41, my people will be better suited to help Prince Resumar’s techs and Avi in making sure we got everything we can get from this MV ship before we blow it into pieces.”

“Nikkei!” Jalersi stated pulling her face from Pian’s chest. “She is unhurt?”

Dayiu nodded quickly. “Yes. She was with Pian’s mother when they apparently met up with this female Pralor. I don’t know what drew them to Ritaah, but something happened on the MV ship that brought them from where they were on Rizon Four.” She held out the data pads to Isra and Pian and watched as they took them and Pian and Jalersi settled back into their chairs to read. “This is everything from Prince Resumar’s last report thirty-six hours ago and some of what Prince Androcles wants us to do when we arrive.”

Tarifa was reading over Isra’s arm, her sapphire eyes going a little wider as she read. “This... Commander... this is accurate?” She gasped looking up at her.

Dayiu nodded. “It is Prince Resumar’s idea but Androcles wants us to insure it is feasible and then report back to him with objectivity as he put it.”

Isra looked at her. “Why us?” He asked.

“It is my understanding that Lieutenant Governor Tarifa is Zaala Randall’s sister and because of that fact, Avi thinks very highly of her. The *ARIZONA*’s Attack Wing is back within the Sol System and remaining hidden, so if needed we can initiate a highly secure tight beam transmission to your sister and others if needed.”

“To Zaala?” Tarifa asked. “I haven’t seen Zaala in over six months. She only told us that she and Steven were going on an extended deployment that he was asked to do.”

Dayiu smiled. “Your sister is a member of the *ARIZONA*’s crew ma’am. And Colonel Randall is now the Air Wing Commander for the 1st Arizona Attack Wing.” She told them seeing Tarifa’s eyes grow wide. “She is the foremost mind in the Union when it comes to the technology we have developed because of CS41. She worked very closely with Avi and others in developing most of the systems currently in use on the *ARIZONA*.” Dayiu spoke.

Tarifa looked at her in shock. “We... we never knew what she was doing.” She spoke softly. “Only that it was classified and she would never tell us. It drove our father crazy.”

Dayiu nodded. “Well now you know.” She stated. “Once we arrive on Ritaah I believe Avi is going to initiate a transmission with her regardless to cover areas that we may improve with the information we have obtained from this VORTEX Cruiser 341. I wish I could allow you to speak with them now...” Dayiu said looking at Jalersi and then back to Tarifa. “But we don’t want to risk our transmission being detected even by accident. When we arrive over Ritaah it will be much easier to mask our transmissions using this new MV ship.” Dayiu came to her feet. “Please... allow me to refresh your coffee and tea and then there are some things that we need to go over.”

“Like what?” Isra asked.

Dayiu smiled. “How we will deploy the detachment from the Dragon Brigade that we are now carrying for one.” She answered. “This is all very new to us Colonel Isra. I have never carried dragons on my ship, nor have I ever deployed them from said ship. It will be interesting to hear how you intend to do this.”

VANARI ELITE HEAVY COMMAND CRUISER

CITADEL ONE

EDGE OF THE ORION SPUR

Two thousand four hundred meters long and the pride of the Vanari Fleet, The Vanari Elite Heavy Command Cruiser was the most powerful ship within the Vanari Military. It’s official designation was *VEHCC*-Class Heavy Cruiser, though everyone simply called them Command Cruisers. Each member of the SBR had a Command Cruiser at their disposal that was not part of the regular fleet, allowing them to go where they wished, and crewed almost entirely by Vanari who were selected by that particular SBR member. Ardan Vu Lamurrion had left the choosing of his crew to his nephew who was also the ship’s commander. The *VEHCC*-Class was the most advanced and powerful warship that Austrova Engineering had produced in centuries. Crewed by nearly eight thousand five hundred men and women and home to three squadrons of G1 Stiletto Fighters, the *VEHCC*-Class also sported an assortment of heavy and light Phased Energy Turrets and a dozen Fusion Torpedo Launchers divided fore and aft. The ship was sleek and built for speed and maneuverability, its shielding allowing it to remain in battle for an extended period of time and still be able to fight. The *VEHCC*-Class was designed along the Vanari mentality of quick surgical strikes and overwhelming power, similar to how the Vanari Cadre Commandos were trained.

Ardan and Coren stood on the bridge of *CITADEL ONE* gazing at the multiple colors that made up the clouds of the Orion Spur. The bridge was in a self contained section that rose above the main hull and was designed in an almost oval shape. Along either side of the bridge were all the stations that allowed for ship control, the captain’s command chair situated to the right side near several consoles and within easy access to the small office he maintained directly off the bridge. The sectioned view windows that surrounded them were open, allowing them to see the majestic sight of the Orion Spur to their front, but armored hull plates could be dropped in place in milliseconds. The crew was at their stations and doing their duty with little fanfare. Ardan’s nephew had been very careful in choosing those that would serve aboard his Uncle’s ship, many of them coming right out of the two largest Fleet Academies. It was a great honor to serve on the personal ship of an SBR member, and many chose to remain on board the ship instead of joining the regular Fleet. This often caused strife with the regular military officers who deemed the crews of the SBR *VEHCC*-Class ships as nothing more than private citizens with little or no military training in tactics and fleet operations. While this was true for the most part, *CITADEL ONE* was crewed by many ex-fleet officers that Ardan’s nephew had

recruited. Men and women who had chosen to retire for whatever reason and then shifted to the SBR Fleet to continue to serve.

Ardan looked at Coren as they stood there now, both of them having changed into more relaxing clothes as opposed to their standard Regent clothing and robes. Unlike many of the ships within the small SBR fleet, Ardan's nephew maintained a uniform code of sorts when on duty which consisted of a light gray jumpsuit for those technicians and operators and a dark red jacket over the jumpsuit for those who were considered command officers and those in charge of departments on the ship.

"You do realize Coren that we could lose both our seats on the SBR for this." Ardan spoke softly.

Coren met his eyes. "Given what Devra and my children seem to be attempting to do, I doubt that. Going against the order of things when it comes to the Syndicate is not something the SBR views as acceptable. There are reasons our laws are in place Ardan. Devra and my children know that and should accept that."

"Oh... I agree." Ardan said. "So you will not try and rescue Caliria if they have somehow been able to discover where she is?"

Coren shook his head slowly. "I can not. We can not. We are doing this to stop them from trying to rescue Caliria and perhaps cause the Syndicate to take action against our colonies and people. I can not allow them to put our people in danger over one person. Even my... even my daughter." He turned back to the view window. "I believe Alrerin would acknowledge this and be on our side. We..."

"It's beautiful isn't it?" The female voice spoke from behind them causing them to turn and look at the stunning young Vanari female who stepped up behind them.

Tastia Dal Vesch was a hundred and twenty-three years old and a recent graduate of the Vanari Cadre Commando ranks. The gray jumpsuit encased a five foot six frame that looked as if it had been sculpted to fit the uniform. Long lean legs, high firm breasts and a small waist were the traits of every Dal Vesch female, including her mother, and Tastia had the perfect proportions in every area. Her silky white blond hair contrasted incredibly with her sky blue skin and stunning sea green eyes, her facial features flawless in nature, her lips a soft pink in color instead of the darker blue of many Vanari females. Tastia Dal Vesch was from a less prominent Vanari family, but one that was well known for their stunning daughters and their incredible intelligence. Tastia had two advanced degrees to go with her Cadre Commando status among the Vanari, one in Astrometrics and the other in Advanced Propulsion Design, so not only could she fight with the best of them, she could talk circles around most of the senior eggheads as well.

Tastia looked at Coren with those sultry eyes and he remembered why he had chosen her during the last Celebration of the Hundreds. Those eyes had captured him completely; much like Devra's had so many years ago. Tastia was full of energy and excitement, and even before he had begun coupling with her, she was secreting oil and inflaming his passion. She knew who he was of course, he was well known among the Vanari people, and he was also very available. Tastia had released the oil from her pores almost before he was positioned, desiring to know if they were compatible, and to her great joy they had been. They had coupled for several hours after that, ignoring all those around them and even several other females who tried to join them. It was Tastia's hope that he would soon ask for her hand in Union as they had been together for nearly four years now. Their coupling had diminished over the years and was not as vigorous and exciting after the first year as the demands on his time as a member of the SBR were great, but Tastia still hoped for the best even though a small part of her knew that he was still in love with Devra and cared more for his position on the SBR than anything.

Coren smiled and leaned over to kiss her cheek as he drew her close. This act perturbed Tastia to some extent as it was well known they were together and why he would not kiss her in a more intimate way in public in front of others was something she did not understand. She let it slide once more, attributing it to the pressure of what was going on around them and what they were about to do.

"Tastia... you look dazzling as always." Ardan spoke.

"Thank you Regent Ardan." She spoke with a smile before looking into Coren's face. He nodded his head and squeezed her hand.

"You do look dazzling." He stated half heartedly.

Tastia kept her face neutral and smiling and she reached up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek. "Thank you Coren." She said softly as her heart sank just a little bit. She had many of her clothes tailored recently to accent

her many curves in a way to draw his interest more than normal, but it seemed no matter what she did he never really took notice.

They turned as the middle aged Vanari man moved up beside them. “Lyrew... are we ready?” Ardan asked his nephew.

The man nodded his head. “Our course is plotted and our Quantum Fusion Drive is standing by.”

“Good.” Coren spoke turning away from Tastia. “Where will our jump take us Captain?” He asked.

“I have plotted a jump that will...” He began to speak but stopped as the doors to the bridge opened and Jokros exited the elevator with the Lycavorian Ambassador Lilonus. He waited until they had moved up beside them before continuing. “As I was saying... our jump will terminate point three light years inside the Sol System using the coordinates and charts that you supplied Regent Re Mydala and...”

“Excuse me... wait a moment!” Lilonus interrupted him with a stunned expression. “You plan on jumping directly into Earth’s home system without contacting anyone?”

“Our engines are more than capable of this Ambassador. As it appears yours are as well now. Engines you failed to inform us you had built.” Lyrew answered.

Lilonus rolled his eyes. “I see the Vanari arrogance so prevalent on the Board of Regents extends to its military officers as well. You have no idea what you are doing Captain. Jumping directly into the Sol system so close to Earth is a mistake.”

“It is my understanding we want to be as quick as possible.” Lyrew spoke. “This is the fastest way. We jump into the Sol System, move to Earth, collect Regent Re Mydala and her children and jump back home. It is quite simple Ambassador.”

Lilonus looked at Coren. “You haven’t told him?” He gasped.

“Told me what?” Lyrew asked.

Coren shook his head quickly. “Nothing of importance that you need to know Lyrew. The simplistic mannerisms of the political realities within this Lycavorian Union are of no concern to me Ambassador.” He stated turning back to Lilonus. “We are on board a Vanari Command Cruiser and we will get what we want. By force if necessary.”

“Force?” Lilonus stated. “Oh that’s brilliant.”

“Coren... I have been speaking to the Ambassador...” Jokros spoke now. “Perhaps we should be more cautious and approach this differently.”

Coren shook his head quickly. “I have no fear of this Lycavorian Union or any other of the inferior and violent species within the Alpha Quadrant. They could not stand against us in this ship regardless. I wish only to retrieve Devra and my children. What they do amongst themselves is not my concern. Let them kill each other for all I care. It is what your people are so good at isn’t it Ambassador?”

Jokros thought for sure that snide comment would invoke a response from Lilonus, but once more he saw nothing but restraint from the tall Lycavorian. In fact he was surprised when he saw the small smile split the ambassador’s lips.

Lilonus folded his hands behind his back. “Oh... by all means Regent Re Mydala... I will allow your unsurpassed knowledge and experience with my people take the lead on this matter. If you will excuse me... I will just sit here out of everyone’s way and watch as your arrogance becomes your downfall.”

Tastia looked from the man back to Coren. “What does he mean Coren?” She asked.

“It is of no concern Tastia.” Coren answered. “Captain... you may conduct the jump with Ardan’s approval.”

Ardan glanced at Coren quickly before looking at Lyrew. He nodded. “Begin Lyrew.” He said. “Coren is right... this Lycavorian Union does not have the technology to stand against us in *CITADEL ONE*. And we need to move quickly.”

Lyrew nodded his head confident in his uncle’s answer and turned to face his bridge crew as he moved to his chair. “Helm? Jump coordinates plotted?”

“Helm answers affirmative!”

“Very well! Spool up the Quantum Drive! Sensors at full radiation and bring shields to full power. Stand by all weapons! Just in case!” Lyrew called out watching with pride as his crew sprang into action. “Helm on my mark execute preprogrammed jump!”

“Standing by sir!”

“Mark!”

The stars flashed out of focus, the multicolored clouds of the Orion Spur blurred and the Vanari ship *CITADEL ONE* leaped into the pre-plotted Trans Light Jump Corridor. And very nearly started a war.

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

Janae relished in the feel of Andro’s arms around her and she squeezed him back just as hard as she could as they stood in the center of the main living area of the villa. His aura surrounded her as only the aura of family could and Janae felt the fear and anxiousness of the last few days finally bleeding away completely. She leaned back without releasing him and stared into his azure eyes.

“Took you long enough cousin!” She snapped playfully. “I thought I was going to have to spend the rest of my life with those smelly fools.”

Andro laughed and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek and ear in affection and Janae’s eyes closed in happiness. “Forgive me.” He said with a grin. “After wading through the sewage like you did, it took Zarah longer to fix your imprint because of the stench.”

“It was ripe too!” Zarah exclaimed from the side where she stood with Lucia and Dutkne. Devra, Arduri and Bren occupied one couch, Sadi standing just behind Andro, while Carisia, Lu'ria and Ne'Veha sat together on another couch. Helen stood next to Eliani to the side with Anton, Cihera and Las'elh.

Janae laughed now and nodded her head. Her face became serious quickly and she squeezed his arms. “My parents Andro?” She asked.

“Already on a ship moving to Curila 6.” Andro answered her. “Uncle Jo’lant had some choice words for me when the *Durcunusaan* plucked them from their beds on Apo Prime, but he apologized when I informed him why and again when I told him that Zarah and Lucia had found you safe.”

“I can’t... Andro I can’t feel anyone in...” Janae began.

“Rest easy child.” Helen spoke quickly as she came up next to her. “We will fix that soon enough.”

“Eli?” Andro said looking at Eliani.

Eliani stepped up to her rapidly and hugged her tightly. “Shopping is much more fun isn’t it?” Eliani asked as she lifted the small device and began scanning her cousin.

Janae laughed and nodded. “Yes it is. What did they put inside me Andro?” She asked looking at him again.

“It is something that the Coven developed from the remains of the City Ship on Nuwaroa. They call it a Static Inhibitor... built from the interior of the Void chambers like on CS41. They are Negative Resonance Chambers in reality and are able to block all Mindvoice abilities and make it impossible to track or detect someone within Mindvoice.”

The device in Eliani’s hand beeped softly as she passed it over Janae’s left arm. “Here.” She called. “Janae... take off your shirt and lift your arm.”

Janae did so and Eliani brought the sensor module closer as the beeping quickened. Eliani nodded her head as Janae made no effort to hide her half nakedness. She was among those who were family to her, and there would be no lewd stares or comments. Devra glanced at Arduri when Janae did this without hesitation and both of them could not help but think how these men and women were so much like the Vanari in so many ways.

Eliani lifted another tool, a thin tubular device with tweezers like ends and two distinct buttons on the thin casing. “This will sting for about three seconds Janae but Valin says it will deactivate the device and remove it completely.”

Janae nodded her head. “Just take it out Eli.” She spoke.

Eliani pressed the end to Janae’s flesh and depressed the button. Everyone saw her face winch slightly for several seconds and then Eliani pulled the tool away and lifted her hand to Janae’s skin. There was a brief flash of soft white light and then Janae’s grimace vanished and her face relaxed. Devra watched amazed as Janae’s face lit up brightly as if she was suddenly filled with euphoric bliss and she realized that whatever was

blocking this connection she had to Mindvoice was now gone and it was all flooding back to her. She watched as Helen took her hands and steadied her so that it did not overwhelm her and then her face relaxed once more and she looked joyous and at peace. Janae looked at Eliani as she lifted the tubular device and they all saw the tiny casing with microfilaments dangling from one end of the tool.

“Ugly *nubous* buggers.” Eliani grumbled as she gazed at it holding it up higher as Andro drew closer to her and they both stared at it.

[*Eli?*] He asked within the shielded conversation which caused everyone who could Mindvoice to look at them. It was not often that Androcles shielded a conversation from family, and the fact that he was doing so with Eliani was even more puzzling.

[*I'll get with Valin now that we have one.*] She stated.

[*You will have two once Arrarn returns with Narice and Toria.*] Andro told her. [*Find out all you can about them and then find out how to defeat them Eli. Valin did not work on developing them but he has studied them extensively and he is very knowledgeable of such things.*]

Eliani looked at him. [*We might not be able to Andro.*] She said.

[*I have faith in you sister.*] He spoke. [*And we have a date tonight as well.*]

Eliani looked confused. [*What?*]

[*Meet me tonight at the Point. We need to discuss some things.*] Andro told her.

[*Andro... it isn't...*]

Andro leaned over and nuzzled her cheek, Eliani's eyes closing as his aura washed over her like only a brother's could. [*We need to talk sister. You can't hold it in any longer or it will end up hurting you.*] Eliani opened her eyes and looked at him as he drew his face back. She nodded her head slowly.

[*You are right.*] She said.

[*Good. Ten tonight. And you bring mother's coffee.*] He said pulling back completely. As he stepped back he saw Helen nod her head minutely in approval. She could not hear what they had said, but she too had detected Eliani's demeanor since returning and knew that something needed to be done.

Andro turned back to Janae and smiled. “I will send you to Curila 6 if you want Janae.” He said. “I know...”

Janae shook her head quickly. “Zarah and Anton have told me what has happened.” She stated confidently. “No... you need me here doing what I should be doing as Panos's senior aide. Especially now that you have made me deputy to the new Prime Minister. Did you have a short circuit in your brain when you made that decision?”

Andro grinned. “Some would say yes.” He told her.

“Me included!” Janae popped. “I'm no politician Andro!”

“You are a Leonidas!” Helen quipped. “All of you are politicians in some form. You are just one of the Leonidas's who do not shoot first and worry about consequences later!” She finished looking at Andro.

“Thank you for the vote of confidence *Feravomir*.” Andro said.

Janae looked at Sadi and broke away from Andro to stand in front of her with a huge smile on her face. “You are *KertaGai* I take it?” She asked holding out her hands which Sadi took without hesitation.

Sadi nodded. “That would be me.” She said.

“Wow cousin...” Janae spoke with a smile. “How exactly did you manage to confuse this woman enough to become your mate? She is too beautiful to settle for someone like you.” Janae drew deeply of Sadi's scent, her eyes going a little wider as she detected the three other scents and she turned to see Carisia, Lu'ria and Ne'Veha on the couch with beaming smiles of their own. She turned back to Sadi and then looked at Andro once more, who crossed his arms over his chest. “Ok... I sense brainwashing techniques somewhere along the lines here. What could possibly possess *four* beautiful women to let *you* claim them?”

“My charming personality probably.” Andro replied with a snort.

Janae made a fake gagging sound. “*Carians*... you don't honestly think anyone will believe that load of gibberish do you cousin?” Janae turned back to Sadi and pulled her closer. “You can tell me Sadi. How did he trick you?” She said.

Sadi chuckled as she played the game. It was a welcome distraction for all of them after the last few days and she leaned over and whispered in Janae's ear. Andro saw Janae's eyes go wider and she looked at where Carisia and the others were sitting. They all nodded and Devra could not help but laugh quietly at the

look on Andro's face when Janae turned back to stare at him with wide eyes. "Well... in that case... I guess it's ok." Janae finally said.

Eliani took her arm and grasped Sadi's as well. "Come on Janae." She spoke as Carisia and the others came to their feet. Arduri was surprised when Ne'Veha reached out and took her hand. "Your room is ready and I brought some of your clothes from the Royal villa. Let's get you out of here before Andro swallows any more of his pride and then sticks his foot in his mouth."

"Come Arduri." Ne'Veha said. "What follows will most certainly be quite boorish and you have not seen the family wing of our home."

Arduri looked at her mother as she stood up and Devra nodded her head. "Go on Arduri, I will remain here with Bren and the others."

Arduri glanced at the huge Lycavorian man who had not been away from her mother's side since they had arrived. His interest in her mother was obvious to Arduri, but what was very surprising to Arduri was that her mother was equally as interested from what she could tell. It was easy enough for one Vanari female to see that another was excited about the prospect of being in a man's company, for they could detect the flush in their blue skin that was invisible to others, but the look in her mother's eyes when she gazed at Bren was different and much more involved. Arduri smiled as she allowed Ne'Veha to begin leading her away, Lu'ria and Carisia holding hands as they followed. Arduri knew that her mother had not taken any lovers into her bed since the union to their father had ended over three decades ago. Perhaps with everything that was happening it was a good diversion for her mother and the more time Arduri spent in the company of these people, the more she wanted to learn and know about them. It appeared her mother was well on the way to discovering much more than she had thought when they first arrived.

Helen watched as Eliani, Sadi, Lu'ria, Carisia and Ne'Veha led Janae away with Arduri in tow and she stepped up to Androcles just before they went through the doors, taking his hand in hers. Andro turned to look at her. "She was putting on a brave front." Helen said softly. "But you could feel the relief she was at being here and how happy she is."

Andro nodded. "I know." He spoke. "And you of all people should know that I will never forsake my family."

Helen nodded. "I know you won't." She said. "Just as I know you won't forsake your mates... or those meant to be your mate." She finished raising her eyebrows at him.

Andro's azure eyes turned to stare at her for a long moment. "*Feravomir...*" He began to speak finally.

Helen shook her head and took his face in her hands. "No... you listen to me now young Androcles. I was with Sadi when she realized that Caliria was the one from your mind and your dreams. I know what she means to you, to all of you. I believe even Devra is beginning to see it as well."

"Far more than I ever imagined when we first came here." Devra said softly from the couch.

"I will not tell you to not go and retrieve her Andro... in all honesty I would be angry if you dismissed your instincts and you did not do this. All that I ask is that you make sure you have a plan and you stick to it and return with her and not get yourself killed. You are too valuable right now." Helen said.

"I intend too *Feravomir*." Andro said firmly. "And what of the Icalro Alliance?"

"*Nubou* them!" Helen hissed harshly causing his eyes to go wide as he looked at her. "They witnessed once before what you and Elynth could do. If they are too stupid to realize that your father meant what he said when he gave them their agreement, then they deserve whatever it is you do to them!"

"*Feravomir...* it is... it is not often you use such language." Andro said still surprised.

Helen smiled and leaned up to kiss his cheek. "Arzoal told me the same thing just this morning." Helen gazed at the son of the man she had chosen and vowed to never hold back her council and love. "I am tired of reacting to things." She said finally. "We want only to live in peace and be happy and so many want to take from us what does not belong to them. I'm tired of reacting to events done to us and soon... soon I will demand that we make events happen to others! The Empress Aikiro learned this the hard way and if I have too, I will show others as well."

Andro gazed at her with wide eyes for a long moment shocked at her words. There had been many rumors circulating about what had happen to Aikiro in Dragon Mountain. Arzoal and the dragons that were there and witnessed the events said nothing to anyone and would never break that trust, and Helen had all but

admitted she was the one responsible for Aikiro's death as was widely being reported. "You... you need not show me *Feravomir*. I believe I have some sense of it already." He said softly.

Helen nodded. "Good. Then soon you will have to explain to Arzoal and I just what this Dragon Brigade that you have kept hidden from us for so long is." Andro's face remained impassive but Helen saw the sudden glint in his azure eyes before it too quickly vanished. "I can see how easy it was to keep from your father, sometimes he is as dense as granite but you didn't possibly think you could keep it from the Dragon Elder Mother did you? We know they left with Isra and Tarifa. Twenty-five dragons that you, Elynth, Isra and Aelnala have trained to fight as a cohesive force? Androcles Leonidas... you of all people should know you could not keep that from us."

Andro blinked several times and then focused his eyes on her. "Perhaps... perhaps it is time to tell you everything *Feravomir*. There is... there is slightly more to it."

Helen nodded. "Yes... it would be. But first, Deia and Panos are arriving and we need to cover quite a bit of other information and then make decisions. Dilaen is about to give her first Netnews Conference I understand?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

Helen smiled and patted his cheek. "Then when we are finished with that we can go over things with Deia and Panos. Then you can tell Arzoal and I about this Dragon Brigade that you have come up with."

"It... it would probably be better if I showed you." Andro said.

"That is fine as well." Helen said. "We look forward to it." She turned as the double doors opened and Panos skillfully guided Deia's lifter chair into the room and she moved toward Deia.

Andro watched her and reached out to his bonded sister within their heavily shielded bond. *[Elynth?]*

[We knew this day would come Andro my brother.] Elynth's voice answered him.

[I know... I was just hoping Uncle Isra and Aelnala would be here to help break the knowledge to them.] Andro explained.

[It was our creation Androcles. We were the ones who devised it and then brought Isra and Aelnala into the fold. As well as Elder Durago.] Elynth spoke her voice sounding as if she was exerting herself. *[Only we can bear the burdens and consequences of those decisions my Bonded Brother.]*

Andro tilted his head slightly to the side as he felt her excitement and desire through their bond.

[Sister... are you talking to me when Anthar is cleaning your scales?]

[You did interrupt me remember!] Elynth exclaimed. *[I am enjoying quality time with my dragon mate and husband!]*

[You could have told him to stop for a moment!] Andro protested.

[Why? It feels so good!]

Andro shook his head. *[I will see you after all of these meetings sister. I think we need to fly high for a time.]*

Andro could feel her excitement about that through their bond and he smiled. *[Oh yes we do. It has been too long Andro my brother.]*

[Come with me tonight.] Andro said quickly. *[It may be a good thing to fly with Eliani and Thaura as we did when we were younger. For all of us.]*

[Just call when you are ready. You know I will never refuse that freedom we have together.] She answered.

[Enjoy yourself sister.] Andro said.

[I intend too.] Elynth answered while projecting her love and support to him through their bond.

Andro turned to greet Deia and Panos.

KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

There were nearly five hundred of them jammed into the large cafeteria, all of them with their own Vid/Drones hovering above their heads and dozens of light poles along the wall. There were a total of four hundred and eighty-seven Netnews Channels within the Union, some of them strictly concerned with political themes, some reserved for sporting events and such across the Union and others that dealt only with the news

from around the Union. These larger Netnews channels had reporters and journalists in every corner of the Union doing different things, and Dilaen Roan had been among their number only a few short months ago. Gazing at them now as they began to settle into their chairs and she waited patiently she realized that the events of the past month had forever altered her life and how she viewed things.

The first and most telling event was her marriage to Thomas. In all her years of growing up Dilaen Roan had never imagined she would fall so completely and utterly in love with a human. Thomas was everything she had ever dreamed for in a man, more so than even she had contemplated. She had been attracted to him from the outset, his rugged good looks and the dedication to his work and to his son. She had returned home to her apartment on many nights and wondered what he would be like in bed or how he would treat her. Their first night together after they had been married had surpassed everything she had ever imagined. Within moments of pressing his naked body to hers, Dilaen was experiencing what would be the beginning of an incredible night of total rapture. He did things to her that had her quivering in his arms, every caress, and every butterfly kiss he lavished her body with. He knew just how to nuzzle her elven ears in a way that caused ripples and waves of pleasure to surge through her, and these were just the things he did while he made love to her. His body was lean and muscular in an athletic way, his cock slightly above average in size for a human she knew and while he was not the first man she had ever slept with he was the first human male and he was the first who fit inside her body like the fingers of a form fitting glove. His size was enough that she was experiencing powerful orgasms almost from the start, while not having to worry about being pummeled into the bed. He made love to her with gentle grace or urgent need depending on what they both were feeling at the time, and each time was better than the last. They had spent nearly six hours that first night pleasuring each other and Dilaen yearned for him in a way she could not really put into words. He had been beside her from the start of her career and as she looked out the corner of her eye and saw him conversing with several Netnews people looking for exclusive interviews she knew he would always protect her. Her leap in position and title also jumped Thomas into a position of importance as he was still her lead Tech and the man everyone would now have to go through to get to her.

As for her new position... it was the culmination of a dream that had come almost too quickly for her.

The Chief Netnews contact for anything and everything having to do with Androcles Leonidas. She was his voice among the Netnews and the people of the Union, and it would be up to her to finally give people an insight into the Crown Prince of the Union who people knew so little about. Dilaen turned and looked quickly at Selene and saw her nod her head in support. The vampire half elf Prime Minister of Earth had been a godsend to her when they had returned, and Dilaen had spent almost as much time with her and Lynwe as she had Thomas. Selene was highly thought of and respected by everyone associated with the Netnews for she was blunt and honest and genuinely willing to assist them in their need to report the news despite her position as the second most powerful political person on Earth. She was also perhaps in the top dozen or so politicians across the Union that garnered respect and trust across the political spectrum. She was one of the King's most trusted friends and considered part of the extended Leonidas family due to their long association and what they had accomplished together over two decades before right here on Earth in throwing off the High Coven's oppressive rule. No one took anything Selene said to them lightly if they knew what was good for them. Turning back to the gathered members of the Netnews, Dilaen quickly took count of who she knew and whom she did not know. Many she had worked with before, and she knew what kinds of questions they would ask and in what way. Though she would not figure it out for many years, Andro had appointed her to this position not only for her obvious abilities, but also because she was very good at reading people and their tone.

Dilaen saw Thomas's discrete hand signal and she nodded and lifted the small gavel, banging it on the top of the podium. Not only was she going to be answering questions, but she was also going to be selling a product as Selene put it, and she needed to be on top of her game in order to sell that product to those who were watching and who were not their friends.

It didn't start off well and Dilaen glared at the dozen or so Netnews reporters who were chatting among themselves as they took their seats at their own pace and did not care they were disrupting her carefully crafted schedule. Dilaen remembered then what Andro had told her during their last communication as they were returning to Earth.

“You are my voice now Dilaen. Our voice.” He told her from the holoimage. She could see Sadi and the others sitting in the background and talking quietly amongst themselves. “When you speak I want

everyone to know that you are speaking for me and with my authority. With Sadi, Carisia, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria's sole authority. The Feravomir and my father have told me I need to have a public persona and I want you to shape that persona. To give people an idea of whom I am. My private life is just that... and as I will not ask you to expose your private life I want you to make it clear I will not bend on that issue either. If I or Sadi or Lu'ria, any of us, if we feel we want to answer a question we will. If we do not... we won't. I need you to make what we are doing believable Dilaen. To all those who are no doubt watching."

"Why me?" Dilaen asked him.

"You had an opportunity to expose Carisia at a time when she could have been taken from us and you did not." Andro answered honestly.

"That information... the information Thomas and I gathered... it still made it to the public Androcles." She stated.

"Not by anything you did." He corrected her. "And by acting with your conscious you earned a friend for life for what you did. I am not good at this Dilaen, none of us are and I will need people who can help me in that regard. You will be one of the most important pieces if you accept."

"I'd be a fool not too accept." Dilaen said and she saw Andro laugh and shake his head.

"I would call you a fool for accepting." He spoke.

Dilaen looked off to the side where Thomas was sitting and listening as he munched on a biscuit. She saw him nod his head slowly and she turned back to Andro. "Then I accept." She said. "I have fallen in love and married a human who was right in front of me for years and I didn't see him. You can't get anymore foolish than that."

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "I will forward to you some sensitive information and leave it to you how you wish to present it. We will meet when you return to Earth. Since most everyone close to me has now become a target, I took the liberty of moving Thomas's son here to my island. The Durcunusaan have been quite busy building a new wing in only a few days. So much for my privacy I guess. You will be staying there for the time being. I hope that is ok?"

Thomas moved closer and came up next to her. "Is he safer there with you?" Roan asked.

"The moment I believe he is not I will move him offworld myself to where my father is." Andro answered instantly. "I will not put him or anyone who is close to me at risk unnecessarily Thomas."

Thomas nodded. "That works for me." He stated flatly kissing Dilaen's cheek before going back to his chair and his breakfast.

Dilaen looked at Andro in the transmission. "How much will you tell me Androcles?" She asked.

Andro's eyes narrowed slightly. "As much as I feel I am able. But know that when I do... it could possibly make you a very tempting target for those who don't like me as well."

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Dilaen stated. "I'm in. We are in. One hundred percent."

Dilaen's blue eyes narrowed now as she watched her fellow reporters bustle about and intentionally disrupt her very first Netnews Conference. She turned her head to the severe looking *Durcunusaan* Commander who had been assigned to her and Thomas and had been their shadow for the last four days. She motioned with her head at the Netnews reporters, a signal that was seen by half the gathered men and women in the room and they all turned to watch as the *Durcunusaan* Commander stepped up to the row of seats where the dozen reporters were fussing about.

"Park your *nubous* Netnews asses or get out of here!" The man barked loud enough to echo across the room drawing the attention of nearly every set of eyes in the cafeteria and it became deathly quiet in the large room.

The twelve Netnews reporters who were the focus of his wrath turned quickly to stare at him in utter shock, their eyes huge. The three human men and two human females were just as equally stunned as the two elf men and two Lycavorian females and the single Limian male. The *Durcunusaan* Commander Andro had assigned to her and Thomas was a giant of a man, and standing there in his black ArmorPly Mark IV body armor, the P190A3 dangling from a quick release strap, he was not a man who looked as if he would tolerate his order being disobeyed. He waited as they plopped their butts in the chairs and let the embarrassment of the moment sweep through them. When he was satisfied they would no longer be a distraction he turned back to

Dilaen and nodded. Everyone in the room saw the return nod of thanks from her and she gently banged the gavel once more and the *Durcunusaan* soldier stepped back to stand against the wall.

“I call this Conference to order.” Dilaen spoke quickly her eyes lifting to look at the men and women gathered in the rows before her. “As you have just seen I will not tolerate what many of you are used to doing so consider this your first and only warning in that regard. I will make several important announcements that relate to recent events and then I will give a short prepared statement and try to cover everything that I have been asked to cover. Once that is completed I will open the floor to questions from you.” Dilaen looked out over the gathered men and women representing nearly a quarter of the species that called the Union home. “Let me be very clear on something right now before I begin. I have only recently been chosen for this position and since I have been where you are sitting now I will make every effort to answer all of your questions in regards to anything you may want to ask. Make no mistake however, Androcles Leonidas chose me for this position and I will not barter or be cajoled by men and women I once called associates because some of you may think I will give you the inside scoop on him or any of those he calls mate and wife. It will not happen and I will take it personally if it is even suggested to me, and then I will have your Netnews credentials seized from you and you will never attend another briefing of the Royal family ever again. Andro... Andro put his trust in me and I will not betray that trust. Ever!” Dilaen saw the looks of many of her former comrades when she mentioned his name with such informal rhetoric and she smiled inwardly. It would keep them on their toes and guessing. She knew there would be those who would challenge what she had just said, and then she would make an example of them.

“Very well... I have five announcements to make. Four of them pertain to appointments that the Crown Prince has made in the wake of what has happened. Prime Minister Deia, as you all are no doubt aware, was pulled from the rubble of the Senate Building three days ago and brought here immediately. As of right now and as a result of her injuries, she is in a medically induced coma and will remain that way until her doctors deem her fit to be brought out of it. Because of this fact, Androcles has appointed Panos, Governor of Sparta as Interim Prime Minister until either Prime Minister Deia recovers or a new election will be held. If an election is deemed necessary, I will inform all of you in regards to that decision. Right now Panos will assume all duties of the Prime Minister and execute them as such.” Dilaen allowed them the shock of this announcement and the murmuring that she knew would come with it. “In harmony with this appointment is also the appointment of Colonel Janae as his Deputy Prime Minister in an Interim status. This may shock some of you I know, but Janae has been Panos’s aide for nearly five years and separating them now is not conducive to a smooth transition. The rumors that are running rampant in regards to former Deputy Laustinos are true. The overwhelming evidence that has been gathered up until now indicates that the Kavalian attack was partly planned and assisted by Laustinos. He is therefore declared a traitor to the Lycavorian Union and military arrest warrants for him and any who helped him are now in force. Any individual who is found to have helped him in any way will be subsequently charged with not only High Treason, but also seven hundred and nineteen deaths, all those who were lost in the Senate Building. That does not include the charges that will be brought forth at a later time in the matter of the death of a sitting King of the Lycavorian Union.” Dilaen shifted her three data pads and looked up.

“The second announcement is in regards to the Union Senate. Four hundred and six Union Senators were among those lost in the destruction of the Senate Building and currently all but twenty-three of those seats have been filled by Interim appointees chosen by either Emergency District Elections or the governing body of the world they were representatives of. Most of them are already enroute here to Sparta in order to establish a working order of business with Prime Minister Panos.”

“The third announcement in regards to appointments concerns the *Krypteria*. Director Armetus was captured and tortured horribly by Kavalian assassins as their brethren conducted their heinous attacks against our King and the Royal family. He is currently recovering, but as with Prime Minister Deia, he can not return to his duties. Colonel Marci, his second officer, has been appointed to head the *Krypteria* until such time as Armetus returns to his position or a new Director is appointed by Androcles.”

“The fourth announcement concerns Lieutenant Governor Tarifa. Androcles has decided to appoint her as acting Governor of Sparta since Panos will be filling his new role. Tarifa has been Lieutenant Governor of Sparta for over a decade now and she holds the respect and trust of everyone she has dealt with. Governor Panos sanctioned this decision wholeheartedly. On the basis of this appointment, Androcles has put Governor

Tarifa and her mate Colonel Isra on a ship to Apo Prime under heavy *Durcunusaan* guard to be kept at an undisclosed location where she will be sworn in and then remain to keep the leadership apart in case of additional attacks. Queen Aihola, their mate, will remain here on Earth as Drow Queen and assist President Taylor and Prime Minister Selene as she has for the last six years.”

Dilaen looked up for a long moment and let her blue eyes sweep across the gathered men and women, many of whom were typing furiously on their data pads and taking notes. “Now let me address the fifth and final announcement I need to make as it has several issues involved so please bear with me. It is also the most painful to make by far. It concerns an ongoing operation on the planet Kranek and involving the majority of the Leonidas children. As you are all aware by now, Kranek has been the home of the former Immortal Captain to the Coven High Lord Veldruk for the last twenty plus years. Cha'talla is very much alive contrary to every military and intelligence report we have had in that same time span and it is my understanding his entire Akruxian Tribe is also with him, as well as several hundred non-Akruxian species, including elves. Queen Dysea and Princess Normya have been on Kranek for the better part of six months now, establishing a firm and bountiful relationship with the Akruxian people there. At the same time as the attacks began here, a coordinated and vicious attack also began on the Immortal settlement on Kranek and Queen Dysea was taken prisoner by mercenaries in the employ of the Kavalians. Mercenaries who were also Immortals that had defected from the High Coven many years ago. We received word roughly thirty hours ago that Queen Dysea has been rescued by a combined Lycavorian, Akruxian Immortal and Insurgent High Coven Strike Force. She is currently enroute back to Kranek with this Joint Task Force and will remain there with Queen Isabella until such time as Androcles deems it safe for them to return here to Sparta. Also... Queen Anja is alive, also contrary to some other rumors and she is in an undisclosed location pending Androcles’s decision to bring her home as well. The younger Leonidas children, Lady Gorgo and Lady Dasha have joined with Queen Anja for their own safety.” Dilaen took a deep breath and looked up. “This brings me to the painful part of my announcements... it has now been officially confirmed that Queen For'mya has been taken prisoner by the Kavalian forces that attacked here in Sparta, on Kranek, and those Drow outposts we have established in The Wilds. Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos had a large role in this evil and traitorous action, the extent of which we are still learning. Prince Androcles has confronted the Kavalian Ambassador as I’m sure was reported only a few days ago, and he was told any action with the intent of discovering the whereabouts or the rescuing of his mother would result in her immediate execution. In essence she is being held hostage.

“The Kavalian Ambassador informed Androcles that his people took these actions because we chose to train forty High Coven dragons that had arrived here on Earth with the High Coven Empress Aikiro. They are accusing us of training the High Coven dragons to fight the KFI and to them this was an act of war. In retaliation for our actions they conducted these vile attacks against the Royal family and Union outposts within The Wilds and they have also demanded a session with the Galactic Court to present evidence that allegedly supports their claims. With the death of King Leonidas, they no longer recognize Queen For'mya as Queen of the Union, and therefore they have told us they will communicate with no one but the Elven parliament in order to obtain her release.”

Dilaen set aside the data pads and looked at the gathered men and women, all of them stunned into silence, which was saying quite a bit since they were reporters and they never shut up.

“The statement I have is on behalf of Androcles Leonidas and I will play it for you now.” Dilaen turned and motioned to Thomas who quickly tapped on the control pad he held in his hands. The holo image of Androcles appeared in front of the podium wearing his standard Mark IV ArmorPly, the crimson cape draped over his shoulders.

“Good day to you all.” Andro’s image began. “I am neither a politician nor a very good public speaker so I will be very brief. By now, Dilaen Roan has given you everything that we have currently discovered in regards to the actions by the Kavalian Federation Imperium, and she will answer your questions to the best of her ability when I am finished. I will address only one issue and that concerns the Union’s actions in regards to the High Coven dragons. Empress Aikiro and her daughter came to Earth with a completely different plan in their heads than the one they came to my father with; they only used the guise of us training their dragons to get close to us. These dragons they brought with them were taken from a Union Dragon Transport that crashed nearly twenty-four years ago in The Wilds. I’m sure many of you

remember this as it generated quite a bit of attention while we searched where this ship had crashed. Many of these dragons were not even hatched. They were forced to hatch by Coven scientists well before they were ready and many years before the Dragon Elder Council would allow within Union space they were bonded with riders. The Empress made a mistake however, and she failed to take into account what those of us here in the Union know of our Dragon brothers and sisters. Once bonded to each other, they begin to take on certain traits of their bonded one, and in this the Coven riders took on an air of benevolence no matter what they were being asked to do.

Aikiro thought this to be a defect in how they were training them and she brought them here to us thinking we could change that. She was wrong again, for everyone knows that while we train intensely with our bonded ones, we do not train for conquering or oppression. We stress in our training that two become one and begin to see what they can do together. My siblings and I did just that with the Coven riders. We opened their minds to all they could be as a Bonded Pair, to what they could experience and do together. Had Empress Aikiro and her daughter not conducted their vile attack against my sister and Dragon Mountain, they would have found that not one of those riders or dragons they had brought here would be returning with them. Whatever goal they had hoped to accomplish was destroyed the moment they chose to depart Earth with me and continue their training free of the Empress's influence and eyes. My father... my father and I... we are... we were Talon Guardians of the Dragon species. I will not go into the importance of this role but I'm sure you will discover what it is. As Talon Guardians it was... it was our solemn duty to protect all dragons, no matter where they came from. It is what Talon Guardians were tasked with many thousands of years ago within dragon culture, and it is what the Dragon Elder Council bestowed upon us after Alba Tau."

They watched Andro pace several steps in front of the desk that appeared to be in his father's office where the King had given many statements through the years from. "To dismiss the Coven request, no matter that it was secondary to what Aikiro was truly after, that would have been paramount to condemning those dragons and riders to death. That is not something we could do. Yes... we trained them... we trained them just as we trained our own Bonded Pairs, but it was never intended or designed to be directed at the Kavalian Federation no matter what they accuse us of. What they have done in supposed retaliation and defense of their people is unconscionable. They have killed almost a thousand citizens of the Union, including my father. They have forced me to allow my mother to take her own life for she would never have been the same without her Anome even had she recovered. Whether any of you believe as strongly as Lycavorians in regards to what Anomes mean to each other within our culture I could care less. I did what my instincts told me to do. What my mother would have begged me to do. Now they hold my second elven mother hostage and threaten to kill her should we do anything. In response to this threat I have frozen all Union Fleets in location and suspended all training exercises. When we have repaired the Union Senate, when we have had a memorial for my father and those lost, there will be official Crowning ceremonies and we will go forward. I will not risk our Union, not even for one who I call mother. I can not. Dilaen Roan will be my voice to you and as events move forward she will continue to keep you informed so that the citizens of the Union are informed as well. Thank you for you time and patience in these trying times."

The image faded and it was deathly quiet in the room for several long minutes. Dilaen looked at Thomas once more and saw him nod his head again. Dilaen lifted the small gavel and tapped it twice on the podium.

"I ask for a moment of silence for us to remember those we have lost in these last few days and then I will begin taking questions." Dilaen said as she lowered her head.

**KAVALIAN GREATSOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
PUSINTIN'S COMMAND SHIP
PRIDE OF PUMAS
TWELVE HOURS FROM CALIBER**

"I ask for a moment of silence for us to remember those we have lost in these last few days and then I will begin taking questions."

Pusintin laughed as the elf female lowered her head and he stabbed the control panel ending the transmission. He looked up at his aide who stood beside the large conference room table.

“Weaklings!” He barked. “You see Ngundo... they are weaklings! A moment of silence! A memorial to honor the dead criminals! Bah!”

“Things will change when you have assumed the throne Marshall Pusintin.” The older Kavalian spoke confidently.

“Yes they will!” Pusintin snapped happily. He had been full of himself for the last few hours and Ngundo detected this.

“I take it the plan goes well Marshall?” He asked. “You were successful in getting what we needed from the elf Queen?”

Pusintin looked at him. “Indeed it does! Indeed it does! And yes, I was very successful. I may just keep the elf wench around after she has fulfilled her part of the contract. She is very... entertaining!”

Ngundo grinned as well and held out the data pad. “The Prefect wished you to contact him when we were within twelve hours. That fool idiot Laustinos contacted us as well while you were preoccupied and demanded to speak with you. Something about his payment not being received and how Phy'iad failed.”

Pusintin looked at him as he took the pad. “Phy'iad didn't fail Ngundo. He did exactly as we planned for him to do. That he could not properly safeguard himself and his assets from a rag tag bunch of children and outcast Immortals is not our problem. I'm more concerned with the forces we sent to Kranek. It appears they were defeated if what this Union elf bitch says is true.” He spoke.

Ngundo nodded his head. “According to the intelligence reports that we have received Marshall, the forces there were obliterated.”

Pusintin nodded. “That is a matter of some concern.” He stated. “The Prefect and I will need to address that. What else did Laustinos want?”

“He did not elaborate Marshall... but he seemed very irritated and to be honest, very frightened. He is probably inside Icalro Alliance space by now, but he said he would be monitoring the COM channel and he expected you to contact him or he would contact Union authorities and tell them everything.” Ngundo spoke.

“That traitorous fucking weasel!” Pusintin growled as he sat back in the chair. “Very well Ngundo... set up the link with him first. Then I'll contact Keleru and make sure all is ready. Tight beam transmission Ngundo... no sense in allowing him to see more than he needs to and I don't want the transmission traced back to us easily.” He watched as his aide moved to the control console sunk into the large table and activated a secure communications link. It beeped softly for several moments before syncing up with another COM signal and then Laustinos's face and shoulders appeared in the holimage.

“Pusintin!” He gasped.

“Speak quickly Laustinos!” Pusintin snarled. “Our dealings are done and I have no desire to talk with you any longer than necessary!”

“Our dealings are not done!” Laustinos exclaimed. “Phy'iad failed Pusintin! He failed! Dysea is not his prisoner and I barely escaped Kranek's system with my life! You have not kept your part of the bargain!”

“We most certainly have!” Pusintin barked.

“Do not play with me Pusintin!” Laustinos snapped right back. “Phy'iad is dead! His forces here on Belid are destroyed and Dysea is free! You guaranteed to me that Dysea would be mine for what I have done!”

“I do not control the Union military yet Laustinos!” Pusintin snarled once more. “It is not my concern that Phy'iad was such a fool to allow them to track him back to Belid and then kill him. We kept our end of the bargain, it was Phy'iad that did not!”

“Phy'iad worked for you!” Laustinos shouted. “They know it was me who helped you to do all that you have done! My life is worth nothing now! They will hunt for me until they find me!”

“And this is my problem why?” Pusintin asked. “You chose the path you took Laustinos, we did not force you to help us!”

“I have given you years worth of information and intelligence!” Laustinos continued. “I have helped you to gain things you did not have! Without me... without me you would never have accomplished what you have done! You owe me Pusintin!”

“We owe you nothing!” Pusintin roared.

Laustinos glared at him from within the image and finally nodded his head. "Then you will not care when I transmit every bit of information I have given to you through the years to Union Fleet Command? You will not care when I transmit every conversation we have had? Every deal I have helped you to broker and every bit of information I have on how you got your Puma Bane assassination teams onto Earth."

"Do not threaten me Laustinos!" Pusintin growled at him.

"It is not a threat Pusintin... it is a fact." He answered. "I'm quite sure, since you failed to kill Androcles Leonidas, that once he discovers what you intend for one he calls mother, you will not live more than a few weeks. Not to mention that the ridiculous notion that you did all of this in order to protect the Kavalian Empire will be believed by no one since they will know the truth. You do not know him as I do Pusintin. He is like his father in many ways, your nephew is, but he is far more unforgiving and violent than your brother Pusintin."

Pusintin snorted in disgust. "It is already done!" He snapped. "There is nothing any of them can do about it now! It would go against the precious laws they hold so dear, as you have said yourself so many times before!"

"I will also spread the word that the Kavalian Empire does not keep its word to those they do business with." Laustinos stated quickly. "How do you think your new business partners will react to that information Marshall Pusintin? And since I am now within Icalro Alliance space, I am much closer to them than you!"

"You think to threaten us?" Pusintin roared in anger.

"Do you take me for a fool? You... you owe me Pusintin." Laustinos barked. "You owe me for what I have done for you! What I can continue to do! My only requirement in order to help you was that I get Dysea. You have not kept your end of our bargain and now it will never happen! In essence you have broken our agreement! This will not sit well with the organizations that you do business with Pusintin! And whatever funds you get from your dealings with them will dry up and go away!"

"You are playing a dangerous game Laustinos!" Pusintin hissed. "I could just as easily order that you be killed. I could make you disappear and no one would be the wiser."

"The information I have would still reach the eyes and hands of those within the Union Marshall Pusintin." Laustinos answered. "I am not so inexperienced as to *not* have contingency plans should my death come about unexpectedly as you say. Dysea was to be mine! Mine!" He screamed. "You have failed in keeping your end of our agreement, if you ever intended to keep it to begin with and I will insure everyone knows it! I may be a wanted man now... but before I am done... every citizen in the Lycavorian Union will be screaming for your blood and the blood of your Prefect!"

"What do you want?" Pusintin snarled.

"I can not remain in Icalro Alliance space... you know this." Laustinos stated. "I will be discovered here eventually, and the Icalro Alliance is not on good terms with the Union to begin with. Allow me to enter into Kavalian space. I can still help you Pusintin and you know this. With your failure to kill Androcles and his siblings, it will be harder for you to convince others that your claim to the throne is correct. I have contacts... people who will help me... politicians and others... in ways that your Puma Bane soldiers can not."

Pusintin sat back in the chair and was silent for a long moment staring at Laustinos's image in the transmission. Finally he leaned forward again. "Remain where you are!" He snapped. "I will contact Prefect Keleru and discuss what you say. I will get back to you."

Laustinos stared at him for a moment. "Do not take too long Marshall Pusintin. You may find that it is too late if you do."

"Do not threaten me Laustinos." Pusintin barked.

"It is not a threat Marshall... it is a promise." Laustinos hissed right back before reaching out and ending the transmission from his end.

"Fucking coward!" Pusintin almost shouted.

"But an intelligent coward nonetheless my friend." Keleru's voice echoed. Pusintin turned to where Keleru's full image appeared from the disc in the floor of the conference room. He didn't look surprised in the least and moved right into a conversation with him as if he had been there the whole time.

"Yes." Pusintin agreed. "Ngundo contacted you I see."

Keleru shook his head. "I contacted you. I asked to be connected into your conversation with Laustinos in order to learn what I could."

Pusintin nodded his head. "I have nothing to hide from you Keleru, you know this." He spoke.

“I know my friend. You and I have far too much invested in this plan and others.” Keleru answered. “My trust in you has not and never will waver Pusintin, of that you can be assured. As for Laustinos, as much as I know it pains you, based on events of the last few hours, he has become somewhat of a rather rare commodity. A person with intimate knowledge of the Union and their leadership who is willing to sell this information.”

“Events have not gone well?” He asked.

Keleru shook his head slowly. “In some areas no... in others they are still very much salvageable.” He replied. “The control officer for our team on Earth that took this Janae female sent a coded message only three hours ago. Your brother’s son must have figured out that we had taken her and unleashed his *Durcunusaan* upon them. They discovered where our team was holding her and then conducted a commando raid that freed her and eliminated our entire team. I assume you have this live report up and were monitoring it?”

Pusintin nodded as he glanced at the muted monitor and saw the female elf still talking with the several hundred Netnews reporters. “Yes... but they made no mention of the fact she was being held. We are sure of this Keleru? She was to be an integral part of our plan down the road.”

Keleru nodded. “Yes... I am certain. This really only confirms the information Laustinos gave to us about her status and bloodline Pusintin. As far as Laustinos is concerned... give him what he wants for now. He could be an invaluable piece of intelligence over the coming weeks simply for the knowledge he holds in his head. As for our future plans concerning this female, we will have to think of something else over the next few weeks. This position she has been appointed to by your nephew does allow us some options but it does not hinder our immediate concerns or degrade the foundation of our overall objectives however. And besides... it will be at least a year before our original plan for her would have played out. The added time may be what we need. Tell me... you have succeeded?”

Pusintin leaned back in his chair once more and grinned broadly like a man pleased with himself. “It took me several attempts but yes... I was successful.”

“Her condition now?” Keleru asked.

“The drugs administered to her before she woke will do their job Keleru. By the time we return things will be well on their way.” Pusintin spoke. “She was not happy about it I can tell you that, nor have I ever seen a woman weep so much. The contracts are signed however, and she is bound to me now. I may just keep her around after all is said and done Keleru.”

Keleru’s eyes narrowed slightly and he tilted his head. “For what purpose?”

“She was very entertaining as I told Ngundo.” Pusintin answered.

“If that is your decision.” Keleru spoke. “If you go down that road however, insure the weapon she carries on her arm is surgically removed. I would rather she did not use it to remove your head at some future point.”

Pusintin chuckled. “Yes... of that you can be confident.”

“I have more news Pusintin.” Keleru said quietly. “You... you will not be happy my friend.”

Pusintin sat forward when he detected the seriousness of his voice. “Bad news I take it?” He spoke.

Keleru nodded slowly. “I’m afraid so.” He looked at Pusintin intently. “Leruk has been lost to us old friend. The entire Puma Bane Section that was tasked with eliminating the Drow outpost on Iraruzu was destroyed.”

“Leruk...” Pusintin said softly as he rose to his feet from the table. “But... how? Their last report said they had eliminated the outpost and all of the Drow there. They were only chasing some stragglers. Keleru... how...?”

Keleru nodded. “The team I sent to discover why we lost communications interrogated some of the scum from the settlement there. It appears as if one of the stragglers that they were chasing was a young Drow female whose mother is a member of their Senate. She arrived with their Senior Polemarch...”

“Dymas?” Pusintin gasped.

“You... you know him?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin nodded as he began to move around the table his anger bubbling just beneath the surface. “I know him. He was one of those tasked with helping to raise me after my fool father went and got himself killed. After my mother abandoned me.” He looked at the transmission. “He is the one who did this?”

Keleru shook his head. “No. Though it appears as if they were able to somehow call for help even with the Deutrino field surrounding the planet.”

“Who killed my son Keleru?” Pusintin asked.

“It was... it was your nephew Pusintin.” Keleru answered. “Leruk was killed by your brother’s son Androcles. His... his wounds matched those of many Evolli that our intelligence reports say he killed during the war. It... from what I understand from our intelligence and the statements from the scum we interrogated one of the Drow... the Drow female they were chasing is your nephew’s mate.”

“Androcles’s mate?” Pusintin growled softly. “He... he killed my son because of a woman?”

“Pusintin... Pusintin my friend I need you to control your anger.” Keleru spoke. “I swear to you that you will have your vengeance, but now is not the time. There is too much at stake. I must...”

Pusintin looked at him in the transmission, trembling in savage hatred but his mind as clear as it had ever been. He shook his head slowly drawing in deep breaths. “Does Kalis know?” He asked the question causing Keleru to stop talking in mid-sentence.

Keleru shook his head. “He has not returned with his team from their patrol to Chofen in search of Nikkei. He is due back a day after you return. Pusintin you...”

Pusintin held up his hand and silenced Keleru’s words. He shook his head slowly and turned finally to look at him in the transmission. “We... we knew there could be casualties in this operation. We knew there would be danger involved. Leruk and Kalis knew... they knew the risks. They knew what was at stake.”

“We did not expect to lose Leruk my friend.” Keleru spoke softly. “He was my favorite as well Pusintin. Kalis is a superior warrior but Leruk... he was a superior warrior and he was going to be a fine leader of our men.”

Pusintin nodded slowly. “Not... not good enough it seems.” Pusintin declared gently. He moved closer to the transmission. “My... my nephew is that good Keleru? Good enough to beat a fully trained Puma Bane soldier?”

Keleru shook his head slowly. “I did not think so... but it seems I was wrong.” He took a deep breath and exhaled heavily. “I fear we pushed Leruk too soon Pusintin. We... we pushed him too hard and he paid the price for it. We did not know about the Drow elf bitch and...”

“Kalis will want blood.” Pusintin said. “He will want blood for Androcles killing Leruk Keleru. You know this.”

Keleru nodded. “And we must channel that anger Pusintin. Kalis may very well be able to defeat him in battle... but we must bide our time now.”

Pusintin looked at him. “I want blood.” He stated plainly.

“Which would satisfy you more Pusintin my friend... killing Androcles and forfeiting all that we have planned to happen in the future or taking heart in the fact that you have killed your brother?” Keleru moved closer on his end of the transmission. “Killed your brother and stolen his elven Queen, fucked her senseless and will now use her to propel yourself to the throne he stole from you? Then you can dismantle all that he built piece by piece Pusintin and savor in this knowledge as you watch all that he was burn.”

CABELIR

Keleru stood in his office and stared at the transmission in front of him. He was waiting for Pusintin’s answer to his question and from that he would decide what to do. As he stared at Pusintin within the transmission he thought for a moment that he would not give the answer Keleru was looking for. He thought for a moment that he would surrender to that Lycavorian blood within him and sacrifice everything on his lust for revenge. Keleru truly hoped not for he genuinely cared for Pusintin and trusted him completely. The man had become like a surrogate son to him and he silently prayed he did not throw it all away. Pusintin could be utterly ruthless and barbaric when he wanted to be, displaying that same trait when he ordered his own daughter captured and taken to Nefoa to be used as a whore in the brothels there for what her mother had done. As the seconds ticked by Keleru began to lose hope that he would respond and he began to lift his hand to signal his nephew when he saw Pusintin nod his head.

“No Keleru... I will not forsake everything we have worked for.” Pusintin said. “You know I won’t. There is far too much at stake.”

Keleru exhaled slowly, tremendous relief filling him and he nodded his head. Pusintin had come a long way from that young Spartan man they had captured all those years ago and this decision renewed the faith he had first put in the man. He nodded his head slowly. "You will have your blood Pusintin my friend. I promise you... you will have your blood."

Pusintin shook his head. "No. The blood I wanted, I got that when my brother was blown to pieces before the eyes of the Union and his precious Queens. I will let Kalis deal with my dear nephew Androcles. Kalis is far better trained physically than Leruk was, and he has a mean streak in him. He will take great pleasure in taking everything from Androcles before he skins him alive for killing his brother."

Keleru nodded. "And so he shall." He stated. "The compound is secure and her cell is ready. I have appointed one of the female whores that we use as technicians to maintain the systems. My personal physician will tend to her as time passes."

"The technician?" Pusintin asked.

"A biogenic female... one of the ones that works within the compound. Poysha I believe her name is. She has been fully vetted and cleared and she learned the technical aspects that we taught her very quickly." Keleru answered. "I questioned the officers who have had contact with her and all of them say she is obedient and insightful, but that she knows her place. They also say she is quite good in bed."

"Her Pride?" Pusintin said.

Keleru nodded. "Her father gave her and her sister to us many years ago. The sister is dead now; she was killed in a transport accident nearly a decade ago. You need not worry about her Pusintin my friend; I will personally vouch for Poysha. She has a particular dislike of the Lycavorian people and that is why we have allowed her such access."

Pusintin looked at him in the transmission. "Why?" He asked.

Keleru grinned. "Her father instilled a hatred for them after his parents were lost in our war with the Union a millennia ago. She does not care for them in the least."

Pusintin nodded. "I will trust your judgment Keleru. You know those who work within the compound far better than I."

"You will transfer her to the compound when you return I take it?" Keleru asked.

Pusintin nodded. "Yes. I imagine she will be very surprised at the speed of what will now take place and the compound is the best place for her until she acclimates to it."

Keleru nodded. "Your arrival will put you here at 0230 hours. Place her in the compound and then get some rest Pusintin. You need it my friend and I want you to be fresh when we meet with the Pride Leaders tomorrow morning. After our meeting with them we will gather to... to honor Leruk."

Pusintin nodded slowly. "Everything else is proceeding as planned?"

Keleru nodded. "With the exception of the loss of this woman Janae yes. I have several of our people monitoring the Union Netnews continuously now to try and determine if it will be possible to take her at a later date considering the position she will now hold."

"Is it still advisable to try and take her now?" Pusintin asked.

"We shall see." Keleru spoke. "I have heard back from our contacts in The Wilds as well. I have given them authorization to attempt what we discussed before you left. They will use their own contacts and contract out to other sources. Our usual source says he has a new group that is perfect for the job and getting them onto Earth will be child's play."

"How so?" Pusintin asked. "All points of entry will be under heavy surveillance now."

Keleru nodded. "Yes. Apparently however, these individuals have been coming and going to Earth for many years now."

Pusintin's eyes went a little wider. "Really?"

Keleru nodded once more. "I will tell you more when you arrive and I see you in the morning. Pusintin..." He waited until he looked at him evenly. "We have had some setbacks and some losses my friend but we are well on the way to accomplishing our goals. Have someone contact that fool Laustinos and tell him we agree to his terms. We will set up a plan when you return and advise him of it, but for now he remains within Icalro Alliance space. Having him discovered anywhere within Kavalian space within the next few weeks would be disastrous."

Pusintin nodded his head. "I'll have Ngundo advise him. I will see you in a few hours Keleru."

**EARTH
SPARTA
KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL**

“...any idea why they are holding Queen For'mya?” The reporter asked above the sounds of his fellow reporters, nearly all of them with their hands in the air and waiting to get selected.

Dilaen shook her head. “At this time we do not know why they are holding her or what they hope to accomplish by doing so. As I said earlier... they have stated that they no longer consider her a Queen of the Union with the death of King Leonidas and they will deal only with the Elven Parliament in regards to her return.”

“What about their request for a Special Session of the Galactic Court?” Another reporter in the front blurted out.

“Acting Prime Minister Panos will be meeting with the Chief Justice in order to address this demand of the Kavalian government.” Dilaen answered the question. “It does not however excuse their actions or the fact they are holding a Queen of the Union against her will. Whether they recognize her as such does not matter to us, she is a Queen of the Union and is therefore being held prisoner under threat of execution. If they wished to have friendly negotiations, I dare say this is not the way to conduct them.”

“If they are granted a Special session... will they be allowed to attend it with those from their embassy or will others be allowed to enter Union space and represent them?” Another asked.

Dilaen shook her head. “That is a decision for Androcles and I believe everyone here knows how difficult it is to predict what he will do.”

“Is there any truth to the rumors that we have not gone after her because the military is in disarray and no one knows who is in charge?” Another human reporter in the front row shouted out.

Dilaen looked intently at the man for a long moment. “What would give you that false perception Paul?” She asked the human.

The room became much quieter just before he answered. “There have been rumors within the military that no one knows who is in charge.”

Dilaen turned to look over her shoulder at General Vengal who had entered the hall very quietly after the press conference had begun. She knew who he was immediately for he was one of the three officers that Andro told her she could go to for answers to any questions she might have.

“General Vengal... would you care to address that?” She asked seeing the grizzled elven General’s jaw twitching in response to the question.

Vengal met her eyes quickly and confidently and he took three steps forward from where he stood beside Selene. “Any rumors that you may or may not hear that are supposedly coming from within the Union Fleet or Ground forces are false.” He stated. “The Union military is far from in disarray... and each and every officer and soldier knows exactly who is in charge. Our readiness has not been altered from what it was before these events.”

“So no one within the military questions that Prince Androcles is now in command?” Paul asked.

“Our chain of command is established in such a manner that should anything happen to the King, overall command of all Union forces resorts immediately to Androcles. All of you know this.” Vengal answered. “From the moment he... from the moment he learned of his father’s death Androcles Leonidas assumed full command and control of all Union forces. There has never been a moment where we did not know who was in charge as you say. Admiral Riall, myself, Admiral Ceneu, War Master Tareif, we all get our orders from him and that has never been in doubt.” Vengal stepped back beside Selene as Dilaen pointed to a Limian reporter in the third row of seats and he stood up.

“Dilaen... broadcasts from Hadarian controlled networks have been reporting that Prince Androcles ordered the destruction of all four Jump Gates in the Hadarian home system resulting in the deaths of over three million men, women and children, most of them civilian. Is this accurate? And a follow up... this also has effectively isolated the entire Hadarian system and they are reporting Union ships are keeping any civilian traffic away from the area right now. Would you care to comment on why this was done if the Hadarian system

is now independent of the Union with the dissolution of Queen Anja's rule and the election of a new government and did Prince Androcles in fact order this blockade as well?"

Dilaen took a deep breath. "First off the new Hadarian government was not elected by the people of Hadaria. It came to power unlawfully by creating and manufacturing false charges and statements in regards to acts that *they* say Queen Anja committed while in power. These acts were subsequently proven false as seen pretty much across the Union in a live broadcast and when their scheme was exposed the Arch Ministry and Hadarian Elder Council acted unilaterally without the approval of the majority of their citizens." She replied evenly. "They consequently attempted to engineer the murder of Queen Anja before she was able to leave the planet peacefully and endorsed an operation right here in Sparta that attempted to kidnap Retta and Calyb Leonidas. They tried to take them from their parents and return them to Hadaria against their will. Hadarian Elder Council Militia troops assaulted the school that the children attend in an effort to kidnap them as you are all aware. This was not some random thing, this was an operation planned and approved by Elder Buonau and Minister Wiktor."

"Those very same broadcasts state that Queen Anja was given several opportunities to surrender Retta and Calyb without violence." The reporter continued without missing a beat. "These attempts were reported as actions that would insure that the Hadarian Royal Bloodline remained safe."

"I'm sorry... but when did children become assets to be bartered and traded?" Dilaen admonished the man. "Retta and Calyb are the children of King Leonidas and Queen Anja. They are not property of the Hadarian Arch Ministry or the Elder Council or anyone for that matter. They certainly did not want to leave their parents, and now they will have to deal with the loss of their father. Who are the victims here?"

"The new Hadarian government did not have anything to do with what the Kavalian Federation has perpetrated." The Limian reporter continued. "Did Prince Androcles order the destruction of the Gates and if so why?"

"We have not found any information to date that implicates them in knowledge of what the Kavalians have done." Dilaen corrected him. "And believe me we are looking. The four Jump Gates into the Hadarian system were compromised by Deputy Laustinos among his many other crimes. A unique and very powerful computer virus he had made and installed essentially took all control of these four Gates from the JGC. With these four Gates intact the Kavalian Federation was illegally pouring troops and ships into the system through a separate Jump Gate that they had built within Kavalian space somewhere. They were doing this and circumventing known Lycavorian Union space and also bypassing all of our defensive measures. That act can not be construed as a friendly action by even the dullest individual that I am aware of." Dilaen spoke calmly.

"The Kavalian Federation has sent out several broadcasts from Hadarian space as well and they say they were only moving personnel and equipment to Hadaria at the request of the new Hadarian government." The Limian continued even as his face and name were being taken down by several *Krypteria* agents secretly in the room exactly where Dilaen had placed them expressly for this purpose.

"If they wish to do that, then they can do so just as everyone else does. They can ask permission to transit Union space legally and not use an illegal Jump Gate that they built to tap into our system to bypass our space and all of our security measures, which is exactly what they were doing, let's not forget that." Dilaen answered.

"So Prince Androcles did order the destruction of the Gates?" The Limian asked.

Dilaen nodded. "To protect the sovereignty of the Lycavorian Union and to eliminate free and unhindered access to any potential future Kavalian military operations into Union space... yes." She answered.

"Do we know if any operations like those you speak of were planned?" The Limian asked her.

"I will not go into any particular details of Intelligence Operations at this time." Dilaen answered.

"Isn't that very mindset what caused the events of the last weeks?" The Limian asked.

Dilaen tilted her head as she looked at him. "No... the Kavalians caused the events of the last three weeks not Union policies... and to imply or give credence to this notion is not only wrong, but completely inappropriate sir. If you wish to report on the news I am giving to you, then report the facts and not your suppositions and twisted realities of the facts I present!"

"Does the Lycavorian Union recognize the new Hadarian government?" The Limian asked more timidly this time.

“At the moment... the Lycavorian Union is focused on recovering from a vicious and devastating attack against our people by the Kavalian Federation that has been very costly in terms of life.” Dilaen answered.

“Will the Union Senate recognize the new Hadarian government when it has reformed?” The Limian pressed.

Dilaen shook her head. “I don’t know. That will be up to the Union Senate once those that have been murdered by the Kavalians have been replaced and our new King and they have time to meet and discuss outside events. At this time I can not speak to that other than to say it may be several months before they have an opportunity to address it.”

“So the Union will not abide by the new Hadarian government’s official request to return Retta and Calyb Leonidas to their custody and open free travel corridors between the Hadarian system and other governments?” He continued.

Dilaen met his eyes. “You seem to have been monitoring the broadcasts from within the Hadarian system much more closely than we have.” She stated quickly.

“I’m... I’m only doing my job.” The Limian answered.

“Indeed.” Dilaen answered. “So am I. As I said before I can not speak to what the Union Senate will do when they are reorganized and reformed. My guess would be no to opening free travel corridors based on recent Kavalians actions. As for returning Retta and Calyb to Hadarian custody and taking them from their family... that will not happen ever... even on a very good day for them.” Dilaen turned to another reporter in one of the rows further back. It was an elven female. “Yes?”

“As spokesperson for Prince Androcles... can you comment on how these events would not have happened if we had open borders and open communications with all beings within the universe?” She asked.

Dilaen blinked. “Excuse me?”

“The Free Utopian movement has stated for decades that actions such as this would not take place if we simply communicated more openly with our brothers and sisters from different species and worlds and did not have so many secrets.” The female said. Dilaen could see a great deal of eye rolling and the shaking of heads going on among the reporters near where the woman stood.

“Can I infer from the “we” in your statement that you are part of this particular Utopian movement?” Dilaen asked.

“Yes. Proudly.” The female answered.

“Well... then let me say this.” Dilaen spoke firmly. “The Free Utopian Movement is nothing more than a congregation of individuals who are so far out of touch with reality that it is not even funny.” She said seeing the woman’s eyes go wide in shock and anger. “Now... I won’t address the obviously ignorant question you just asked, but if you have another question that is grounded in reality I would be happy to answer that.” Dilaen pointed to another human male. “Victor from Channel 43.”

“Dilaen... can you comment on the operation that took place on Kranek and the now public knowledge that the Immortal Cha’talla is still alive?” He asked.

“The operations on Kranek and within The Wilds are still ongoing to the best of my knowledge and I can’t comment on them at this time.” Dilaen replied. “What I can tell you is that Queen Dysea has been rescued and is currently being transported back to Kranek where she will then return to Earth.”

“Does she have any comment on the Kavalian insistence that they will only deal with the Elven Parliament to release Queen For’miya?” Victor continued quickly before Dilaen moved on. “Do you have any idea why they are requesting this and what her reaction will be as Queen of the Elves?”

“To the best of my knowledge, Queen Dysea is currently being briefed on everything that has happened by her aides and I’m sure she will have some statement when she returns.” Dilaen said honestly. “Beyond that I can not speculate Victor.”

“What about Cha’talla?” Victor asked.

“What do you mean?”

“Will he be detained by our government and charged with crimes against the Lycavorian Union for his actions while Captain to the High Lord Veldruk?” Victor asked with a neutral voice.

“While I’m sure there are probably people who would like to see this happen... it will not.” Dilaen replied confidently. “The Cha’talla that Queen Dysea and Princess Normya have been forming a relationship with is not the same Cha’talla that we knew as the Immortal Captain to Veldruk. He is very different, as is his

entire tribe of Akruvians, and if the recent information I have received is any indication we will not even recognize them. Cha'talla's Blessed wife, a vampire pureblood by the name of Esther Saira has apparently discovered a toxin of some sort within the genetic code of the Akruvian people that was put there by Veldruk many thousands of years ago. Using equipment and information she obtained from our ship databases she was able to create a serum of sorts that results in the Akruvian people returning to what they looked like long before Veldruk introduced this vile toxin into the atmosphere of their planet and proceeded to conquer them. I believe there are images and information in the packets you were given when you entered the room that may shed some light on what you are asking, including images of Cha'talla and two of his sons taken two days ago as they were preparing to retrieve Queen Dysea."

"Conquer them?" Victor asked surprised.

Dilaen nodded. "There is much that we do not know about the Akruvian people or what they endured before we fought them in battle as they served the High Coven. Considering what they have done in helping Denali Leonidas and his siblings in freeing Queen Dysea, do we not owe them the benefit of the doubt?" Dilaen smiled brightly. "I have met Cha'talla... and I have seen what he built on Kranek. I think you will be very surprised to discover what I discovered while I was there. Androcles has also informed me that I can announce that his sister Normya is now the Blessed Wife to the first born son of Cha'talla and Esther Saira." This brought a wave of murmurs and questions from the reporters and she raised her hand. "I'm sure they can answer your questions much better than I, and I do believe Cha'talla will be holding a conference like this either from Kranek or when he arrives here."

"He's coming here?" Victor gasped.

Dilaen nodded. "He will return with Queen Dysea I'm sure. She has become very close friends with him and his wife Esther." Dilaen turned and let her eyes scan the crowd and she pointed at a Lycavorian male. "Yes?"

"Donlar, Channel 71." He stated evenly. "Can you shed any light on what exactly Prince Androcles and others were doing training High Coven dragons? Did the King know of this? Did the Senate know and approve of this? Is there any truth to the reports coming out of the new Hadarian government that Queen Anja in fact refused the Kavalians access to Union Healers in their conflict with the High Coven and does not training High Coven dragons breach the Non-Interference clause of the Union Constitution and give some weight to the Kavalian's argument on why they have done this?"

"I don't see how massacring innocent Union civilians, killing our King, kidnapping two of our Queens, destroying nearly a dozen Drow outposts in The Wilds and attempting to kill every child of our King can be construed as anything but a heinous act." Dilaen answered calmly.

"I was... I was not trying to justify their actions in any way Dilaen." The man spoke defensively.

"I know... and that is why you are still in this room." She answered plainly. "I will take each of your points in turn if I may?"

CITADEL ONE

.03 LIGHT YEARS INSIDE SOL SYSTEM

FIFTEEN SECONDS AFTER REVERSION

SIXTY SECONDS FROM ENTERING SOL SYSTEM DEFENSE NETWORK

"Give me a status! All systems!" Lyrew barked as he came out of his command chair.

"Engines go!"

"Sensors and tactical online!"

"Shields and weapons check!"

Lyrew looked at his female XO. "Position!"

"Point zero three inside Sol System! Nominal strain on engines!" She answered with some excitement.

"We just jumped almost seventy thousand light years!"

"Time to recharge on the Q Drive?" Lyrew barked.

The woman's hands flew across her console. "Wow!" She exclaimed. "Q Drive cells are nearly depleted. We won't be able to jump back for nineteen hours six minutes!"

Lyrew looked at her and his eyes narrowed. "What? Why?" He demanded.

"We've never jumped this far before Captain!" She replied as she worked her console. "The Q Drive cells were only at sixty percent capacity when we jumped. We're down to nine point six percent now. We did not know how much this would strain the capacitors sir."

Lyrew did some fast figuring in his head and finally nodded. "So we need at least fifty to jump back." He spoke. "Fair enough! Sensors... full active sweep extending out to one light year! Tell me what we have around us!"

Lilonus stepped forward quickly. "I would not recommend that Captain." He stated. "It could be taken for a sign of hostility considering how jumpy the Lycavorians will be."

Lyrew ignored him and turned to his uncle and Coren. He smiled. "We are here." He stated confidently before turning back to Lilonus. "And perhaps you overestimated your fellow Lycavorians Ambassador. No one is here waiting to greet us and blast us from the stars!"

Ardan smiled. "Excellent work Lyrew! Excellent!"

"How soon before we can arrive at Earth?" Coren asked quickly.

"Sensors?" Lyrew turned his head to where his sensor chief was sitting at his station. "Sensors?"

"Ah... Captain... maybe you should see this sir!" The man stammered.

"How long to Earth damn it!" Coren snapped.

The sensor chief looked up. "I don't think we'll be getting to Earth Regent Re Mydala." He stated.

"What are you talking about?" Lyrew snapped as he moved up behind the man with Ardan and Coren. "Why not?"

"Sir, sensors... sensors are detecting nearly four hundred ships in the system!" The chief told him as he pointed to the screen. "Numerous sizes and some of them are huge! Twice the size of *CITADEL ONE* Captain!"

"Scan them!" Lyrew snapped.

Lilonus shook his head. "I wouldn't do that." He stated, only Jokros looking at him when he did.

The sensor chief worked his controls. "Energy based weapons! Plasma turrets mostly... but damn big ones! Power output is off the charts at nearly a hundred terra watts!"

"A hundred terra watts?" Lyrew gasped.

"Yes sir! I'm detecting what appear to be Kinetic Missile launchers of some nature, some sort of heavy Photonic torpedo launchers as well! Hull composition is..."

"What?" Ardan asked.

"It's some kind of metal I've never seen before." He stated. "I'm reading Crystanium and this unknown type of metal in some sort of reinforced weave. It's incredible!"

"What about Earth?" Coren asked.

"I'm detecting what look like multiple planetary heavy defense platforms!" He answered Coren quickly. "Close to two hundred of them in an overlapping field surrounding the planet at a range of three million kilometers from the upper atmosphere! There is also some sort of space station in orbit... and by the grace of the prophets it's massive! Detecting nearly a million and a half lifeforms on the station alone! Same types of weapons! Population of Earth is over three billion! Another half a million on what appears to be some sort of station on the moon!"

"So few?" Ardan asked softly.

"The Passing of the Comet depopulated Earth by over half when it passed between the Earth and its moon." Lilonus stated coming forward slightly. "It is a testament to human engineering that more did not die."

"The engineering skills of the Eridiani do not impress me ambassador!" Coren hissed.

"These humans are not the Eridiani Regent Re Mydala, and it would behoove you to take that into account going into the future." Lilonus berated him, causing several sets of eyes to widen at his disrespectful response to a member of the SBR.

"Captain... passive sensors are detecting something." Another officer called out from the other side of the bridge.

Lyrew turned to him across the bridge. "Speak plainly Lieutenant!" He barked. "That is not proper protocol!"

"I don't know what it is sir!" He announced. "I only picked it up by accident because one of the Vector Variance nodes spiked!"

Lyrew turned back to his chief sensor operator. “Rorga?” He asked.

The man shook his head slowly as he transferred his screens to the passive arrays. “He’s right.” He stated. “It’s a Spatial Displacement of some sort! I’ve never seen anything like it before.”

“Explain!” Lyrew demanded.

“It is a Vector Frequency Variance of some sort as he said.” Rorga answered.

“A weapon of some kind?” Coren asked.

“Spatial Displacements are not a weapon regent.” Rorga told him as he worked his controls.

Tastia stepped up next to Coren and took his hand. “Coren... it is similar in many ways to holo technology. It is more closely related to the Flat Space Technology our scientists have been working on. It is the ability to phase items in and out of real...” Tastia eyes grew a little wider as she stopped talking. “By the Grace of the Prophets!”

Coren looked at her. “Tastia... what is... what is wrong?”

Tastia turned to the sensor chief. “These spatial displacements? How large are they?” She demanded.

“Scalar and Vector space variation is up nearly a thousand percent Lady Tastia!” Rorga answered. “Aft quarter and off our port bow!”

Tastia’s eyes were wide now and she turned to Lilonus quickly. “They have Spatial Displacement Shields?” She gasped.

Lilonus shrugged his broad shoulders. “I do not know Lady Dal Vesch.” He answered. “I am just an un-intelligent humble Lycavorian observer!”

Tastia turned back to Lyrew with a snarl of anger. “Captain you must stop the ship!” She exclaimed.

“What? Why?” He demanded.

Tastia pointed to the sensor screens. “Those are not normal spacial anomalies Captain! They are ships!”

“Impossible!” Lyrew hissed. “We know of the High Coven Shroud shields! Our sensors could easily penetrate this technology!”

Lilonus snorted. “You are not dealing with the High Coven.” He spat. “Perhaps you will take my advice now and stand your ship down.”

Tastia turned back to Coren. “Those are ships Coren!” She snapped. “These Lycavorian knew... they knew we were coming!”

Coren looked at Lilonus quickly and he raised his hands. “Don’t look at me.” He stated. “I have no means to contact them. Perhaps they are not as un-intelligent as you seem to think!”

“Captain?” Coren questioned turning to him.

Lyrew shook his head quickly. “Impossible Regent Re Mydala. Our sensors are far more advanced than anything this Lycavorian Union can field. Our intelligence is...”

“Your intelligence is wrong.” Lilonus stated causing everyone to turn and glare at him. He raised his hands once more. “Very well... I will just stand over here and watch you make fools of yourselves.”

Tastia’s eyes narrowed as he stepped to the side and crossed his arms over his chest and looked at them confidently. She turned back to Coren. “Coren... we will... inferior that they may be, we need to proceed cautiously based on what our sensors have picked up. Even we can not fight three hundred plus ships!”

“I will prove it to you that nothing is there!” Lyrew barked. “Weapons! Forward Portside batteries. Turrets one and three. One volley! Fire!”

“NO!” Tastia screamed too late.

They could only watched as *CITADEL ONE’S* portside weapons turrets swiveled around and unleashed a single barrage into space. Instead of racing off into the stars as it should have, they watched as the nine beams of intense power slammed into something unseen only half a million kilometers from their ship.

Lilonus shook his head. “I told you it was a bad idea.” He said.

STRIKE GROUP TALON

ULU LEONIDAS II-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER

ULU RAVEN’S WINGS

Captain Imror steadied himself as the *RAVEN'S WINGS* shuddered heavily under the barrage of the new ship. It's powerful shields took the brunt of the volley of energy based turrets but still caused his ship to roll ever so slightly to the side. Sparks flew from a secondary tactical station and Imror looked at his mug of coffee, now on the deck instead of in his hand where it was only seconds ago.

"*Rensibfla!*" He snarled savagely and pushed himself out of his chair. "Are you *nubous* kidding me? They just fired on us! Report!"

"Shields down to seventy-three percent but recharging!" The voice sounded off instantly. "Energy based weapons! Eighty Terra Watt range! Comparable to our Type One turrets in power but tighter beams and more focused! Nice spread!"

"Is the Shroud active? Did they see us?" Imror barked.

"Shroud was active Captain!" Another voice echoed. "They must have fired randomly at the spatial distortion the Shroud generates!"

"Fired randomly?" Imror gasped. "Are they idiots! They made me spill my coffee!" He spoke as he bent down to lift his mug. He slammed it down on the arm of his chair and turned his head. "Casualties?"

"A Power conduit overloaded on deck thirteen! Three reported injured... one seriously! Medical team is already enroute!"

"*Nubou!* The Prince sent us out here to wait... not to get fired upon! Flash a report to Fleet Command! Tell them to let Androcles know what is happening here now! Power up the weapons and drop the *nubous* Shroud! They want to play tag... fine by me! Bring the BIP to alert and order them into BIP plan Omega Three! How close are they to the SSDN?"

"Already inside the outer perimeter sir!"

Imror smiled savagely. "Fine! Let's introduce ourselves to our Vanari guests! Launch the Ready Flight! And find me their communications channel!"

"Firing solution locked in for starboard Type One Batteries! M22As are loaded in all launchers! Fusion torps at full yield!"

"Their shields?" Imror asked.

"If scans are accurate... same category as the Type 90s. Looks similar to the Refractive Shield schematics that we got last week."

Imror nodded. "Fine! Give them something to think about! Full barrage to port across their bow! Every battery! Wake them up Weapons Officer!"

CITADEL ONE

"What was that?" Lyrew demanded. "What did they hit?"

"Captain! Massive scalar and vector flux particles are being generated in the location we just targeted! All around us! Something is... something is materializing! Many... many things are materializing!"

"Materializing!" Lyrew exclaimed. "What does that mean?"

"The Prophets preserve me... it's a ship! A huge ship! Ships materializing all around us!" The man shouted.

Lyrew spun around. "Shields! Shields!" He screamed. "Lower the bridge hull plating! Let's see what we are facing!"

"Captain Lyrew! One ship off our port quarter! Sir, it's over four thousand meters long!" Rorga shouted. "Another off our aft quarter! Over two thousand meters long! Smaller ships appearing all around us and beginning to maneuver!"

They all looked to the left to see the immense battle gray hull of the monstrous ship. Even at half a million kilometers distance they could easily tell the ship was twice their size and it was built for only one purpose.

"Prepare weapons!" Lyrew barked as he settled into his chair his eyes wide at what he saw. "Damage on that ship?"

Rorga turned in his chair to look at him shaking his head. "Minimal sir! And their shields have already returned to full power!"

“So quickly?” Ardan asked no one in particular.

“Detecting massive power surges all along their hull! Their weapons! Their weapons must be powering!” Another voice shouted.

“Fighters!” A third voice echoed. “Fighters are launching from the largest ship!”

“How many capital ships?” Lyrew barked.

“Twenty-four are maneuvering around us now Captain!” Rorga answered. “They vary in size from that dreadnought to destroyer class. They just appeared out of nowhere!”

“Captain Lyrew... long range sensors show that more than half the ships in the system have turned toward our location and are on intercept courses! Estimate they will arrive in under thirty minutes!”

Tastia clung tightly to Coren’s arm, her eyes wide and anxious. Coren and Ardan also looked very much in shock and Lilonus simply stood to the side shaking his head.

“Targeting sensors!” Rorga screamed. “They are locking us! They’re firing Captain! They’re firing!”

“Evasive! Evasive to starboard!” Lyrew screamed.

They could do nothing but watch as the entire left side of the colossal ship, fully twice their size, flared brilliantly with a combination of red and yellow light as every battery on the port side of the *RAVEN’S WINGS* opened up at once. None of them had ever seen anything like it so close and they stood transfixed as twenty-five Type One Terra series turrets and fifteen Type Two Terra Series sent forty sizzling beams of destructive power ripping across space to pass so close to *CITADEL ONE*’s hull that the ship shuddered violently just from the enormous concussive power. Tastia clutched Coren tightly as they held one another to keep from falling while Ardan gripped the side of the station he was next to.

“They missed!” Rorga exclaimed. “They missed!”

“They missed intentionally you fool!” Lilonus spat.

“Captain Lyrew! We are being hailed!” A new voice chimed in. “It’s the Lycavorian ship!”

Lyrew turned to Ardan and Coren quickly. “We can make a run for it.” He stated with more confidence than he felt.

“And go where?” Lilonus barked. “You are inside Lycavorian space! Within the most heavily defended system outside of their capital planet of Apo Prime! Where will you hide? You have no Shroud!”

“Uncle?” Lyrew asked ignoring him. “Regent Re Mydala?”

Coren nodded. “Let us hear what he has to say.” He stated. “Ardan?”

Ardan nodded. “Yes.”

Lyrew turned back to his communications officer. “Put it up on the main monitor.” He stated.

They turned to look at the huge communications monitor on the right side of the bridge as the scene appeared. A large bridge with numerous species on it sitting calmly at their stations and the single Lycavorian in the chair sitting slightly above the others in the center of the bridge.

“I am Captain Imror of the United Lycavorian Union Strike Cruiser *RAVEN’S WING*!” The Lycavorian spoke harshly, anger clearly visible on his stern face. They knew enough of Lycavorians to know that this one was very upset. “You will identify yourself immediately or my next volley will not be across your bow! And I will leave nothing but pieces of your ship floating as space debris for firing on me unprovoked!”

Coren took the lead now as it was he who had gotten everyone involved in this mission. “I am Coren Re Mydala, a member of the Senior Board of Regents for the Vanari Empire, and I demand passage to Earth so that I may retrieve the members of my family that you are holding against their will!”

“Are you also the *nubous eache* that ordered your ship to fire on mine?” Imror barked out.

Coren turned to Lilonus swiftly who shook his head, refusing to translate. “What did he say damn it?” Coren snarled.

“He called you a fucking moron Regent Re Mydala.” Lilonus snapped right back causing Coren’s eyes to go wide. “A phrase that fits quite well at this moment.”

Coren turned back to Imror’s image. “We did not know... we did not know your ship was there!” Coren barked. “You were hidden from our sensors!”

“*Joa sibfla!*” Imror snapped loudly. “I will give you ten seconds to tell me why you have jumped directly into Union space without permission and then fired upon my ship Regent Re Mydala of the Vanari Empire!” Imror spoke sarcastically.

“I told you!” Coren barked back. “I have come to retrieve the members of my family that your government holds!” He answered. “I demand passage to Earth so that I may facilitate that. Then we will be gone and leave your kind to kill each other all you want.”

They watched Imror slowly get to his feet on his bridge, his face showing his surprise at Coren’s word. He could no doubt see Lilonus in the rear of the transmission shaking his head in disbelief. “You demand? Is that so?” Imror finally managed to say. “So you decide to jump from wherever the hell you came from directly into Union space and then you expect to travel all the way to Earth all without being challenged in the least so you can make demands? And you respond in this way when I ask you what it is you want, *after* you have fired on my ship unprovoked and I did nothing! That’s extremely arrogant and stupid of you don’t you think?”

“You were hidden from our sensors! What do you expect?” Coren snapped.

“This is Union space you *nubous ronnus!* I can run around hidden from view in my *anse* underwear if I want!” Imror screamed at them from his ship. “Speak quickly fool before I come to the conclusion that you are hostile and blast you into atoms!”

“Lycavorians from the Protectorate have kidnapped my... they have kidnapped another Regent of our government as well as three of my children!” Coren snapped detecting Tastia looking at him out of the corner of his eye. “We tracked them here! Did you think you could hide them from us? We have come to get them back!”

“I don’t know what you have been told fool...” Imror stated seeing Coren’s eyes go wide at his statement. “But what I do know is that you have entered Lycavorian Union space illegally in an unknown warship; you have fired upon my ship without reason or warning and put three of my crew in the infirmary, one of them in critical condition! That woman has a mate and three children Regent Re Mydala and if she dies, I will blast your ship into so many pieces that even the gods won’t be able to find them all!” Imror roared at him from the transmission monitor. “Now move your *monsene mida* out of my sight and let me talk to that Lycavorian you have standing behind you or you will regret the day you ever came up with this *malda* idea to begin with!”

“We will do no such thing!” Ardan chimed in now moving up next to Coren. “He is an Ambassador to the Vanari and not a member of our government!”

“Ah... another country heard from!” Imror popped.

“I am Regent Vu Lamurrion! Also a member of the Senior Board of Regents!” Ardan snapped. “This is my ship and we will remain on our course to Earth in order to conduct our business! I suggest you put us in touch with your commanding officer and then provide us an escort to this planet so that we may conduct our business!”

Imror looked taken aback by the answer and they watched him look off to the side of the monitor for a moment. He turned back to them on the monitor and shook his head. “There is only one reason I do not blow you out of the stars and that is because we have expected you. I may just forgo I ever saw that report considering your arrogant attitude!”

Coren moved closer to the monitor. “Expected us?” He asked in shock.

Lilonus had heard enough and he stepped forward quickly. “Captain Imror... *Pen brol Sarnathi Lilonus rie vada Protectorate. Alad forn pera rie Gundal Caoire Dutkne? Vin cedaur sey olynna usiden cayle blon?*”

Imror nodded his head slowly. “*Jainn.*” He answered.

“*Bejar forn duetoth tye reyna?*” Lilonus asked.

Tastia was the only one who paid close attention to the exchange between the two Lycavorians and she noticed the difference in tone and stance of the Lycavorian officer as he spoke to Lilonus. It was one of respect and confidence even though she knew they had never met before. It was no different than how she had seen Lycavorians from the embassy treat others of their species as well as everyone else. Tastia was the only one onboard who had actually spent any time around those from the embassy on Austrova and she had picked up more than a few words listening to them talk in their native language. She considered herself something of a language expert and could speak seven different languages fluently. It was not an easy language to learn she knew and the number of Vanari who had tried and mastered it she could count on one hand, but those who could speak it fluently she was very impressed by. She tugged on Coren’s arm gently.

“He’s... I think he’s asking to speak with General Director Dutkne of the Protectorate Coren.” She whispered softly.

“Are you sure?” Coren asked just as softly.

“No... not completely... but I think that is what he is saying.” Tastia answered as Lilonus and Imror continued to speak. “We gain more now from corporation Coren. Not conflict. I think we have already seen we do not stand a chance against this one ship let alone the others.”

“We do not know that!” Lyrew spoke.

It was Jokros who came forward now. “Are you blind man?” He hissed softly. “We are surrounded and outnumbered and a full barrage from our forward turrets did not even scratch the shields on that ship!”

Tastia turned her attention back to the monitor when this Captain Imror nodded his head and finished their conversation. “*Pen gur atle pen bejar! Indalfrid Androcles gur ter clodoca Sarnathi Lilonus.*”

Lilonus nodded his head. “*Pen pera.*”

Imror settled back into his chair and looked at Coren once more. “Exactly three and a half minutes ago you crossed into what we call the Sol System Defense Network.” Imror stated quite plainly. “It is a little scheme that one of our Fleet Admirals thought up while on vacation. It’s quite ingenious actually. If you adjust your sensors to frequency 456.7 you will find that there are now exactly thirty-five planetary defense platforms locked onto your ship from different locations within this system. In another ninety seconds you will cross the threshold where those PDPs will open fire automatically unless they receive a signal from a Union warship. Each PDP is armed with twenty-five Kinetic Missile Launchers and an assortment of Plasma based turrets and Photonic torpedoes. Each PDP is completely independent of the other and fully automated. In seventeen minutes this entire area will also be swarming with Union ships who are under the impression you are an enemy Regent Re Mydala, or whatever your name is, and they will be coming for blood. Your blood. Our King was taken from us less than two weeks ago and you will forgive us if we are just a tad bit jumpy. *RAVEN’S WING* is the command ship for this system Regent Re Mydala. If you do not shut your engines down immediately and hold your position I will not send that signal and those PDPs will scatter your ship to the four winds. The decision is yours, make it quickly!”

Lyrew was beside Rorga in an instant as his hands worked his console. They grew even wider when they found that this Lycavorian had told them the truth. Rorga nodded quickly. “He speaks truthfully Regent Re Mydala. Thirty-five automated defense platforms are tracking us even now. We...”

Tastia nudged Coren once more. “Do you wish to die here Coren?” She asked forcefully. “I do not! And we accomplish nothing in regards to Devra and your children if we do.”

Coren looked at Ardan. “Ardan?”

“What choice do we have?” He spoke. “Lyrew... full stop!”

Lyrew nodded and turned to his helm officer. “Helm! Full stop! Station keeping thrusters only!”

“Helm answers full stop!” The voice called. “Station keeping thrusters engaged!”

Coren turned back to look at Imror on the monitor. “You have the Ambassador there to thank for your lives.” Imror stated as he touched the arm of his chair several times. “You will maintain this position while I contact my superiors. The PDPs will remain locked on your ship until further notice. I will get back to you.”

Coren and Ardan turned to Lilonus as the monitor went dark. “What did you tell him?” Coren demanded.

“I asked that he contact the General Director on Earth.” Lilonus replied.

“Ambassador you are a guest on this ship!” Coren spat. “You do not make decisions on behalf of the Vanari people! That is what Ardan and I are here for!”

Lilonus met his gaze evenly. “Then by all means Regent Re Mydala... continue your path to Earth but before you do... please give me a shuttle so that I can remain here. I do not wish to die among people who are too arrogant and unbelievably stupid to not realize just how close to death they came!”

Tastia looked surprised at this. “What do you mean?” She asked.

“It does not matter!” Coren snapped.

Tastia looked at him. “It does to me.” She barked right back unafraid of Coren. “What do you mean Ambassador?” She asked turning back to Lilonus.

“When the General Director left to come here to Earth he told me there were several events happening within Union space that they did not have all the details too.” Lilonus spoke gently with her. “Word is spreading rapidly among the Lycavorians within the Union that the Protectorate exists according to Captain Imror, especially among their military, and it will spread quicker when news reaches the Protectorate itself.

General/Director Dutkne told me they did not know exactly what they were heading into but they would advise me when the first opportunity arose. Captain Imror has just given me the short version.”

“And?” Tastia asked.

“The Kavalian Federation... a very warlike and brutal feline species... they conducted several vicious and horrific attacks against Union targets two weeks ago.” Lilonus told her.

“Lycavorian politics mean nothing to me!” Coren snarled.

Lilonus met his eyes. “The Lycavorian King was killed you *nubous igord!*” He shouted in anger causing many sets of eyes to grow large at this knowledge and his lost of temper and protocol. The Lycavorian Ambassador was known as a man who remained cool even through the treatment many among the Vanari people knew he received. None of them had ever seen or heard of the man becoming angry. “One of his Queens has been kidnapped! His children were targets as well and several of them nearly lost their lives! Almost a thousand of their people were killed in a terrorist bombing of a government building and nearly half of that number were small children on a field trip! The entire Lycavorian Union is at its highest state of alert and you come blasting in here thinking that you will drive your ship right up to where the majority of the royal family remains and make your ridiculous demands! These Lycavorians are not from the Protectorate and they do not know you or your inbred arrogance! They will swat you and your mighty ship from the stars if you do not do exactly as they say! At least until we can speak with someone from their government!” Lilonus stepped right up to Coren and jammed his finger into his chest causing Jokros to step forward in order to protect his charge.

“You and your fool actions almost got your ship and your entire crew killed Coren Re Mydala. Captain Imror would have blown you into oblivion without so much as blinking an eye had I not stepped in and tried to explain things to him! These Lycavorians are not like those of us in the Protectorate Regent Re Mydala, and they will not abide your superior attitude or your callous dismissive treatment of them. Now... now Imror will at least contact Earth and find out what to do, but he can not guarantee that Prince Androcles does not order your ship obliterated. According to Imror he is not as understanding and forgiving as his father once was!” Lilonus shook his head as he got his anger under control and inhaled deeply.

“Excellent work Regent Re Mydala... excellent work. I just saved your blue skinned Vanari backside and everyone else on this ship and still you smell of the arrogance born of blissful ignorance! You just go right ahead and act in this manner with the Lycavorians and they will not only send you home, they may very well send you home in a box!” Lilonus turned and looked at Tastia quickly and bowed his head in respect. “Lady Del Vesch, if you will excuse me I am going to return to my quarters now. It is becoming increasingly difficult to breath among all the *sibfla* that permeates the air.”

Tastia’s green eyes were wide as he spun on his heels and left all of them standing there in disbelief after absorbing his verbal tongue lashing as if they were nothing more than children. Tastia turned once more and looked at Coren as Lyrew moved up closer to them as well. Jokros stepped up behind Lyrew, who did not have a very pleasant expression on his face and it was Lyrew who began to demand answers.

“I understand I serve at your behest Uncle...” Lyrew stated calmly. “But you chose me to command this ship and now I have nearly ten thousand men and women who look to me for guidance. I need to know what exactly we have gotten ourselves into and I need to know now.”

CRANAE ISLAND

“Oh... I knew there was a reason I liked her that day in my office!” Deia exclaimed as they watched and listened to the broadcast from Sparta. “She is utterly fearless!”

Helen nodded her head. “Indeed.” She stated. “Andro... you made an excellent choice in Dilaen Roan.” She turned her head to look at him but found him standing up from his spot between Panos and Devra as Jomann stood behind him with a data pad in his hand. The harsh and angry expression on Jomann’s face did not bode well. She began to rise to her feet when Devra spoke.

“I must say... your people... your society is so open.” Devra stated. “Those who work in a similar capacity within Vanari controlled territory would never think to ask such questions.”

Deia turned to look at her. “You don’t allow this?” She asked.

Devra shook her head quickly. “No... it’s not that... I believe our reporters as you call them, I believe they are afraid to ask such questions. Those who have been on the Board of Regents for centuries tend to think of themselves as above those they are supposed to govern. It is an attitude that I have tried to change since being elected... but millennia of tradition and culture is hard to go against.”

Deia nodded her head. “Yes... we know that well.” She said softly. “Millennia of culture and tradition that we took too far guided us away from what Resumar and Canth wanted us to embrace.” She looked at Devra. “Martin’s return is what gave that back to us. In a quarter century he has done more by his own actions and examples to return our people to our instincts than thousands of years of policy and rules.”

“What is he like?” Devra asked softly. “Is Androcles like him?”

Bren chuckled beside her and she looked at him. “If only that was the case.” He said.

Helen nodded her head with a smile. “They are alike in many respects...” She said. “Both of them are far more intelligent than they let on to others. They are closer to their instincts than most of us; they worship the ground their mates wake upon, a trait that has swept through the Union to affect all species to be honest.”

Deia smiled gently. “My *mandri* is an enigma Devra Re Mydala, and because of when Androcles was conceived, he has become just as big an enigma as his father.” She said softly. “They... they know things that others do not. They feel things others do not. They are deeply entrenched in faith, but you would never know it by how they talk or act in many respects. They...”

“Forgive me... what do you mean when you say when he was conceived?” Devra asked politely.

Deia looked at her for a moment. “He has not told you?” She asked.

Devra shook her head. “It... it never has come up... why?”

“It is not a time that many of us reflect on.” Deia replied. “Perhaps...”

“Tell her Deia.” Panos said softly everyone turning to look at him.

“It is private Panos... you know this.” Deia said.

Panos nodded. “Yes it is.” He answered. “But it also concerns Sadi and Elynth as well and soon her own daughter. I know Martin... he has been like a son to me from that first day of his return and Androcles like a grandson, you know this. Devra has a right to know Andro and his father as well as we do. Her daughter will share the lives of our family going into the future and better she hear it from someone who knows and loves Andro than from random people who will only emboss what they have done and make them appear to be something they are not. He and Elynth would not appreciate that. Nor would Martin.”

Helen nodded her head. “Panos is right Deia and he knows them better than most.” She said looking at Devra. “Whether you believe it or not Devra, Caliria *will* be a Leonidas one day. Much sooner than you might think if I know Androcles as I do and you, Arduri, Naesta, your son... all of you will be connected to us in a way that can not be broken.”

Devra looked at Bren quickly and then back to Helen. “I have only been among your people for a few days and after what I have seen so far... well my belief in the preordained is increasing more and more each day.” She looked at these two women. “Would he truly start a war with this Icalro Alliance to retrieve her?”

Deia nodded slowly. “To answer that question I will give you some history of his father Devra Re Mydala, for his father destroyed an empire to retrieve Androcles’s mother Aricia. And if nothing else, Androcles is his father’s son.” She saw Devra’s eyes grow a little wider at this knowledge. “It began the day we realized Martin still lived...” She began to speak.

“... Imror’s BIP is covering them now.” Jomann spoke. “But he wants guidance.”

Andro lifted his eyes from the pad. “They actually fired blindly?” He asked in disbelief. “Are they stupid?”

Jomann nodded. “Stupid and arrogant according to Imror. Three injuries... one critical. They have the woman stabilized but the *RAVEN’S WINGS* Hadarian medical officer is on leave with her husband on Elear. He is requesting a Hadarian to deploy to the ship and treat her and he wants to know what to tell them.”

Andro shook his head slowly. “Imror seems to be the one to always stumble into these situations.” He said. “He is the one who discovered the Coven when they first approached the border.”

“He is seriously pissed off Andro.” Jomann spoke. “He didn’t look happy at all.”

Andro nodded. “I don’t blame him.” He said. “You know him?”

Jomann shook his head. "Only by reputation." He replied.

Andro held out the pad to him. "Well... that will change soon enough. I will get Devra... you get Sadi, Ne'Veha and Eliani and meet me..." Andro looked at him and saw the look on his face. "What?"

Jomann shook his head. "Nothing."

Andro crossed his arms over his chest. "Jomann... don't try to bullshit a bullshitter as my father and mother say. What is wrong?"

"Your sister... she does not care for me Andro and I would prefer to stay away from her as much as possible." Jomann answered.

Andro met his eyes evenly and knew Jomann wasn't telling him the truth. He could also detect the severe attraction to Eliani that Jomann had even though he was doing a very good job of burying that deeply. "I do not wish to make it difficult for you Jomann... but I will never get rid of her. For some reason she has appointed herself my personal caretaker and it has been like that for years. I couldn't change it even if I wanted too. Eli is just very..."

"Short tempered?" Jomann offered. "And linguistically gifted when it comes to cursing someone out?"

Andro chuckled. "That's a nicer description than I would have used... but yes." He said. "Eli is the most passionate of my sisters in many ways Jomann... don't be afraid of her. You are my Captain... so technically if it is not a medically related issue... you are the boss. She'll respect you more if you put her in her place."

Jomann looked at him and his eyes smiled. "How much blood will that cost me?" He asked with a smile.

"Probably more than you are willing to lose... but it will be worth it to see the look on her face." Andro answered.

"Your family will not be angered?" He asked.

Andro laughed. "Angered? *Sibfla*... they'll get a kick out of it! To this day no one has ever made Eliani back down. She's as tenacious as the Coltarian Measles."

Jomann winced. "I've had the Coltarian Measles Andro." He stated. "It wasn't pretty."

"I know it too." Andro answered with a smile. "Had me in bed for three weeks. I thought I was going to die."

"I think I did die. And then came back to life." Jomann replied with a grin.

Andro slapped his arm. "Get them to the pad in twenty. I'll meet you there." He said.

Jomann nodded and Andro watched him walk off towards the villa. He felt the rush of air behind him but didn't turn as Elynth settled gently to the sand behind him and folded her wings to her body as she moved up behind him.

That man is smitten by Eliani in the worse way. Even I can sense his blood boiling for her. Elynth spoke as she settled to the sand and Andro turned to face her.

Andro reached up as she extended her snout out to him and he placed his hands on either side of her huge head, her golden eyes closing in happiness and love for her bonded brother. *Yes he is.*

Elynth opened her eyes and pushed against his chest with the tip of her snout. *Eliani is confused Andro. And hurt because she does not understand why she is confused or why it does not seem to bother her that she has discovered what Malic and Nyla feel.*

Andro looked at her. *Zarah told me what happened on Kranek. Have you spoken with her?*

Elynth shook her head. *Thaura. She is worried for her Bonded Sister. Eliani is almost as good as you at keeping your feelings inside. She does not understand why she does not feel pain at what she now knows, and she does not understand why her wolf blood burns when Jomann is near her.*

Andro looked at her surprised. *Eli desires Jomann?* He asked surprised. *She has been... she has been so filled with vitriol when she is around him.*

Elynth nodded her head. *Desires him far more intensely than she ever did Malic... and she does not know why. She thought Malic and she were anomalies because he bit her, but his scent is all but gone from her blood now. She does not understand it and that is why she treats Jomann as she does. She is... she is frightened of the feelings he brings out in her.*

Andro lowered his hands but continued to stare at Elynth. *Tenna told me he is descended from one of the original packs on Lycavore. A smaller pack that was left out of the Ruling Hierarchy only because of their size. She said they were given Council seats instead, and they...*

Elynth saw his eyes grow larger. *What?*

Sister... Tenna Deia told me their line was one that my grandfather chose to include in the Ten Thousand because they could not be members of the Ruling packs. She said... she said that grandfather was close friends with the head of this bloodline. Jomann's mother... she was born here in Sparta! Andro said. His father was born on Apo Prime, but his grandparents survived the Black Day and the years of oppression.

Elynth's eyes grew a little wider now as she understood what he was leading up too. You think... you think...

Andro met her eyes once more. What else could it be? Eliani was born after me, but she was still conceived at a time when father was still affected by what happened with my mother.

Elynth nodded. And your mother Anja would have fully become wolf and fertile at the time and it would have been her first phase.

Andro nodded. And the first one is always the strongest one. My mother's Hadarian bloodline is powerful and when combined with my father's bloodline, this would have only augmented both to much larger proportions. Eli is powerful Elynth... far stronger than she lets on to anyone but Thaura.

Elynth nodded. I have felt this and Thaura has told Jeth this as well. What do you think it means?

Sister... what if the sixth ruling pack was not supposed to be of Chetak's bloodline... but Jomann's ancestors? Andro said.

That... that would account for the attraction they both feel. Elynth answered. The blood of a Leonidas would always be drawn to the most powerful of the other packs. If this is true... and the more I think of it the more I believe you are right... if this is true Andro, then that would explain why she feels what she does. Why Jomann feels it as well.

Andro nodded. I believe it is time for Eliani to discover some things of mother's past. He said. It may help her to understand why she feels as she does.

But will she accept it as your mother did? Elynth said softly meeting his eyes. Or fight it as she has.

Andro looked at her. Well... if I continue to keep them together...

You must not tell her what we suspect tonight when you meet with her. Elynth spoke. Tell her of Anja's history and such, but do not push her toward Jomann Andro. If it is meant to be their blood will do it for them when they are ready no matter how much they fight it. Just as it did with you and KertaGai.

Andro nodded. I know. And I won't. I will be back in a few hours sister. I must go and deal with this fool who is Caliria's father.

As long as you don't hurt him brother. Elynth spoke. That would not be the best way to endear yourself to your future mate.

Spoilsport. Andro spoke with a smile.

Elynth laughed within Mindvoice and butted his chest gently. I will see you tonight my Bonded Brother.

“... never did hear clearly what they were talking about.” Janae said as she came out of the shower and into the room. “They always spoke in whispers and that damn inhibitor thing in my head kept me from probing them.”

Arduri stood by the dresser and watched as Janae dropped the towel revealing her lush nakedness while Eliani and Sadi held out different items of clothing. Zarah and Lucia sat at the head of the bed, while Lu'ria and Carisia occupied the chairs near the large patio doors that led onto the white sand of the beach. Ne'Veha was rummaging through several different bags that had been brought for Janae. Arduri couldn't help but think of how it had always been with Caliria and Naesta as they did these very same things. It was obvious that Lycavorians held almost no reservations about their sexuality and while they would dress provocatively in public and private, this was a situation where only the females of their species would gather. They had included her without thinking because she was Caliria's sister and they considered her a friend and a member of their family already. Like her mother, Arduri was learning with every passing hour that all they had been raised and trained to think about the Lycavorians was being swept under the rug as either ridiculous or flat out untrue.

“Well... you certainly got that one *ronnus* good.” Eliani stated. “Zarah says you opened his leg so badly it severed the artery in two places.”

Janae nodded. “He was the one that copped a feel when he had me on the floor right after they hit me. It pissed me off something fierce. Sick puppy is what he was.”

“These biogenic clones they have made are strong and durable.” Lucia spoke from the bed.

Janae nodded as she pulled the thong panties on over her full hips. “You know... one or two of them were actually quite handsome.”

Eliani looked at her. “Janae!” She exclaimed.

“What... I’m simply stating fact!” She replied quickly. “I didn’t say I was interested Eli! If they weren’t clones and they lived longer than ten years and we saw them walking down the street in Sparta you couldn’t tell they were Kavalian! All I’m saying is they could accomplish so much more if they simply talked to us and stopped trying to conquer the *nubous* universe!”

“After what they have done... I don’t think Andro and father are going to give them the chance to conquer anything but a grave.” Zarah spat.

Sadi nodded. “*Avoi*.” She muttered.

Janae looked at Sadi as she pulled on the jumpsuit pants. “So Sadi... you were serious when you said he was that big?”

Sadi looked at her and nodded her head. “Very.”

“And he actually knows how to use it huh?” Janae asked.

“Oh yes... exquisitely.” Sadi answered with a beaming smile.

“Not to mention he can make us sing with his tongue!” Lu’ria spoke with a bright smile of her own. As a Drow female Lu’ria was not afraid to express to others what Andro and her female lovers made her feel in their bed, or how she returned the pleasure with equal if not more enthusiasm.

“Stop Mistress!” Carisia exclaimed now blushing somewhat. While She was completely uninhibited in their bed, Carisia was still becoming comfortable with being so open about what went on behind closed doors.

“What is wrong *Enylarcopri* my beautiful slave?” Lu’ria said with a loving smile and leaning over to nuzzle her cheek and neck. “You and *SirsanGai* squeal the loudest you know.”

“Actually... I think that is me.” Sadi spoke with a grin.

“Hey!” Eliani almost shouted. “We are getting into the realm of too much information here!”

“Yes please... he *is* our brother!” Zarah echoed. “Eewww! Yuck!”

“Well at least we know all the Leonidas men follow in their father’s footsteps in that regard.” Janae said with a smile. “Not only do the Queens walk around with permanent smiles on their faces but so do my cousin’s mates. We...” Janae stopped herself and cursed under her breath at her stupidity.

Eliani reached out and took her arm. “Don’t do that Janae. Don’t berate yourself. We will get her back Janae.” She said softly. “Father will never give up on her. Ever.”

Janae nodded her head. “I know. And neither will we.”

Arduri turned to look at the holoimages arrayed on the dresser and her green eyes blinked several times when she saw the image of the tall, smiling dark haired young man and the exotic looking raven haired female who was leaning up against his side with a beaming smile and bright dark green eyes. He looked a great deal like Andro from what Arduri could tell and the woman was breathtakingly beautiful as she reached out to lift the framed holoimage. She looked up at where Eliani was.

“Is this a relative?” She asked. “He looks like your brother.”

Eliani turned and saw the image she was holding. It was another welcome distraction from the reality they all faced with their second elven mother taken from them. Eliani nodded. “Unfortunately yes.” She quipped trying to push the sadness and worry away. “That is Denali our brother. And a bigger pain in the ass you will never meet!” Eliani moved up next to her and took the framed image. “This is Lisisa our sister. Well... our cousin really, but we have known her as our sister for so long nothing will change there. This was taken a year ago at a conference on Apo Prime...” Eliani shook her head. “I still can’t believe we didn’t see it.”

Arduri looked confused. “See what?”

Zarah moved from the bed now and took the picture. “It’s a very odd but interesting and romantic story really.” Zarah spoke. “If you have several days for us to tell you we will... but the short version is that they are now married and none of us saw it when it was right in front of us.”

“Almost none of us.” Eliani corrected her. “Andro saw it. He was protecting their secret for the last two years.”

Zarah nodded and looked at Arduri. "He and Lisisa were on Kranek with our mothers. If I know Andro like I do... Deni and Lisisa will return with Arrarn and Narice when mother goes to Curila 6. You can meet them then. It should only be another day or so before they return."

"Deni is the comedian among our family." Eliani said. "No matter what he has always been able to get us to laugh."

Zarah gave the picture back to Arduri who dropped her eyes to it once more when Eliani turned back as well to face Janae. No one saw her stare longingly at the photo or lift her fingers to pass them through the images of both their faces.

"You know... you get your very own *Durcunusaan* detail Janae." Zarah began to speak. "Now that you will..."

The chime on the door sounded and Janae finished zipping up the jumpsuit jacket. She was closest to the door and she turned to move for it. "I know... and I'm not looking forward to it either. I don't need to have four..." She touched the door controls and turned back as it was sliding open to reveal the very tall and extremely wide Lycavorian male in the doorway.

Jomann bowed his head to her. "Lady Janae... forgive me for interrupting." He stated.

Eliani watched Janae turn her head quickly back towards them and her eyes showed her interest right away as they were wide and swooning. Eliani felt a flash of anger and intense jealousy when Janae did this and she stepped forward toward the door and responded in a fashion that caused Sadi and Janae to look at her in puzzlement. "What do you want Captain?" She asked in a stern and uninviting tenor.

Jomann cut his eyes to Eliani and felt heat within his veins when his eyes came to rest on her. He kept his own emotions in check however and answered. "Andro asked that I collect you, Sadi and Ne'Veha. We are needed somewhere immediately."

"And where would that be?" Eliani snapped.

"Andro will tell you when you see him Princess." Jomann answered. "I just came to let you know you are needed by the pad."

Sadi stood up from the end of the bed. "Are we going somewhere Jomann?" She asked moving closer to the door. Sadi realized she was the only one in the room sensitive enough within Mindvoice to notice it. Eliani Leonidas's Mindvoice resonance spiked incredibly high into a realm that only a few women she knew of went, and all of them were Andro's mothers and herself. There was only one reason for that and Sadi moved quickly in order to keep Eliani from saying something that would suddenly end what she felt was building quite powerfully between Jomann and her, whether she realized it or not.

Jomann took his eyes off Eliani and looked at her, his gaze softening quite a bit when he looked at Andro's *anome*. Sadi had been very accepting and respectful of his position now and she had gone out of her way to make him feel at home here in the villa. "It appears a Vanari ship has entered the system and..."

Arduri's eyes grew wide and she turned to face him. "Vanari?" She gasped.

Jomann nodded. "There was a slight confrontation when the Vanari ship refused to yield and fired on Captain Imror's Strike Cruiser. Three of his crew were injured, one seriously and his Hadarian Medical officer is on leave. Andro wishes to go there now." Jomann looked at Arduri. "He is gathering your mother and Commander Bren as we speak."

"My mother?" Arduri asked moving closer. "Why?"

"It appears your father is the one in command of the Vanari ship." Jomann answered her. "We must go quickly."

Sadi grabbed Ne'Veha's hand and kissed Janae's cheek. "We will speak more when we return." She said as Lu'ria and Carisia were already heading out the door.

Eliani kissed Janae's cheek as well, and then moved for the door stopping in front of Jomann. "You could not tell me that when I asked you Captain?" She hissed softly as his wonderful jasmine coffee scent filled all of her senses and her head and made her body tingle.

Jomann pushed Eliani's delightful maple and wheat scent to the back of his mind as he looked into her burning green eyes. "I could have Princess." He answered.

"Then why didn't you?" Eliani snapped.

Jomann shrugged his broad shoulders. "I chose not to." He stated before turning away from her and heading down the corridor.

CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

1.4 LY FROM ONTAHE

ONE AU INSIDE ICALRO ALLIANCE SPACE

INTERDICTOR-CLASS DROW GUARDFORCE CORVETTE

VLOS VELVE

They were built by Tareif's order.

Tareif wanted to insure that the Drow he now called daughter could go anywhere unseen and quickly and well protected. Aihola was as much a daughter to him and Palina as Tarifa and Zaala and he would see to it that they were protected. The design of the ship was quickly put to the side as both Tarifa and Aihola now had a single *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser that was dedicated solely to them by the man who called them sister. To insure that the design did not go to waste Tareif conferred with Lynwe and it was decided that they would become the ships that the new *Ilythiiri KyorlFashka* would use exclusively. True to the nature of the Drow as fighters, the *INTERDICTOR*-Class Corvette was sleek, extremely deadly and nearly invisible to known sensors. When the *Ilythiiri KyorlFashka* went somewhere, this is the ship they now used. Two dozen were built and they would remain exclusively under the control of the Drow Queen, seven of them having undergone extensive refit in the last two years and outfitted with City Ship 41 based computers and weapons as well as propulsion systems. In some respects they were nearly as deadly as the *AUTUMN MOON* Attack Frigates.

He stood to the side of the dimly lit room; his amber color eyes narrowed to slits but absorbing far more light than was being put off as he watched one of his men conduct the interrogation. His arms were crossed over his broad chest, his shimmering white hair shoulder length and tightly braided along the edges of his four inch high elven ears. His name was Am'uur of the Family Antalya, and he was now the older brother to a Drow Elf Princess of the Lycavorian Union who was also now the first pureborn Drow wolf to ever live. Am'uur let his mind wander to his younger sister by a good twenty-two years, but her face and curious nature always made him smile. He alone among their brothers and sisters felt that Lu'ria was meant for far more than the normal life of a Drow warrior, and he had been very right. King Martin Leonidas was revered among the Drow, nearly as much as their Queen Aihola, for it was by his actions and his faith alone that the Drow still continued to exist. He could have destroyed them so many years ago for what a few foolish leaders had done, but no matter what had stayed his hand, he alone was responsible for the resurgence of the Drow as elves and truly a species all their own. They had paid back that faith he had in them in droves and now the Drow had three thriving cities on Earth they called their own, their population was booming and they had fully come into the future with the guidance of Queen Aihola. She had shown them what they could have with her love of the High Elf Queen and now established Governor of Sparta. Aihola had shown them what corporation and trust and respect could bring to them, and the Drow as a people had accepted that with open arms. They were no longer an insular people or faction of elves that so many feared. Now they were well respected members of an immense society with a reputation of tradition and culture that was tremendously respected and admired throughout the entire Union.

They were also held and feared in the same light as the *Durcunusaan* everywhere within the Union when it came to being warriors. The Guardian of the Line had created them to be most like the Spartans of old, and they continued that mystique even now. Species came to the Drow from all over the Union to train and learn the skills that the Drow were masters of. Many knew that over the course of the last twenty five years the Drow had been at the spearhead of every operation King Leonidas took part in. His faith in them was unwavering, and his sense of Drow culture was unmatched. Perhaps it was because he considered their Queen a Blessed sister as he made so well known, but there was much more that drew the Drow to revere him as they did. And now his son, a young man that was rapidly gaining the same respect and admiration among the ranks of the Drow had taken his sister as his mate. Androcles had changed Lu'ria, saving her life by making her wolf, and in the process forever sealing the connection between the Leonidas family and the Drow. They all knew how Lycavorians viewed their mates and wives, especially those who were born and raised on Earth, and were referred to as Lycavorian Spartans. When his mother Daba had contacted him and advised him of what had taken place, of what she had witnessed and heard Androcles Leonidas say and do in order to save his sister

Am'uur knew. That he had three other mates besides Lu'ria and he was out here looking for the fourth woman who would share his and Lu'ria's life mattered not to him. His mother had told him how Sadi, Carisia and Ne'Veha treated Lu'ria, what they called her. She was their Drow Mistress and they made no bones about that to anyone. The question of whether Androcles could love them all never entered his mind, for Am'uur was well aware of how King Leonidas viewed his Queens and the utter devotion and love he showed all of them.

The moment Aihola had come to him with Androcles's request Am'uur hadn't blinked an eye. Within an hour of her request he had loaded his team into *VLOS VELVE* and they were racing into The Wilds. A two hour long briefing by Androcles himself had told them what they needed them to do. A mission similar to many they had conducted before and that all of them were superbly trained to perform. There was no hesitation on the part of any of his men or women, the love they all carried for King Leonidas was rapidly spilling over to his oldest son for his actions were no different than those any Drow would take. That he had spoken to them personally, in the ancient Drow language, these were the things that instilled trust and loyalty in the Drow. He knew far more of Drow culture and tradition than Am'uur realized as they spoke and this impressed not only himself but his entire team, including the four hundred year old grizzled Drow Master sergeant who was his second in command and had fought beside Andro's father on Earth.

Am'uur watched as that sergeant pushed back the head of the Kochab mercenary that they had captured just inside the Icalro Alliance border, his JAL-14 Limian transport was docked under *VLOS VELVE*'s ventral hull and hidden by the Shroud they operated. They had detected the mercenary ship from outside the border, and knowing that the Kochab were among the most numerous pirates and slave runners, they realized that he must have just off loaded whatever cargo he had been carrying. His slave ship was rigged for just such a mission with a dozen six by six cells secured in his cargo hold and the data pad they had discovered showing his personal account on Talbor Seven now overflowing with twenty-five thousand credits. They had quickly eliminated the four other crew members, two Evolli and two other Kochab, Am'uur knowing they needed only one to get information from and that was the pilot and captain. Am'uur saw his sergeant turn to look at him and he motioned into the corridor with his head. He crossed to the door, punched in the code and then stepped into the corridor, followed by the sergeant with short white hair. Am'uur was at the taller spectrum of elves with his five foot eleven height, his body a solidly built two hundred and ten pounds of Spartan like definition. He wore the Drow scout armor that all of his team wore and preferred and it conformed to his powerful frame as he turned and looked at his sergeant.

"Talk to me Ledok." Am'uur said as he turned and the door closed behind his sergeant and locked.

"We will get no more out of this scum Am'uur." The equally tall Drow warrior stated plainly. "Kochab are notoriously weak minded and this one is no different. He is useless to us now."

"So it's Ontahe?" Am'uur asked.

Ledok nodded. "I asked him the same question six different ways Am'uur." Ledok spoke. "The answer was always the same. Ontahe."

Am'uur nodded. "Makes sense... relatively close to the border and harsh enough to scare most curious individuals off. What exactly did he say?"

"He just delivered twelve Limian females to Ontahe. The southern continent has what he says is a large slave redoubt buried within a mountain." Ledok answered. "It has holding pens, an auction center and even a large resort area for buyers. He didn't know exact numbers, but probably at least three hundred guards and an equal number of slaves either being held for the next auction or who are forced to work within the two brothels this resort area operates. The man who runs the operation is a former Overseer of the Tranicon Criminal Empire Am'uur. One of those that ran The Wilds before King Leonidas laid waste to their organization."

"Did he know which one?" Am'uur asked.

Ledok shook his head. "According to this fool... he rarely makes appearances unless it is for large auctions. And then only briefly."

"Did he see any of these Vanari females that Androcles asked us to find Ledok?" Am'uur asked.

The Drow sergeant nodded his head. "At least four but he has heard rumors of probably a dozen more that are kept in this Overseer's personal stock."

"*Vith uns 'aa!* That many?" Am'uur exclaimed.

Ledok nodded. "I made sure the number he stated was correct. Like I said... he has seen four but he knows that the Overseer has at least a dozen more kept within his residence that he uses to bribe and extort

wealthy visitors. The ones he saw all had dark hair Am'uur and there is no way to confirm if one of them is this Caliria.”

“Still... if there are that many then Androcles was right and they have been using this route through Bontawillian space for some time now.” Am'uur said.

“It would appear so. They are very popular according to him, these Vanari females, and they command six figures for an evening.”

Am'uur looked at him wide eyed. “Six figures?” He gasped.

Ledok nodded. “Only the Overseer owns them right now and he is very careful about whom he allows to use them. According to this Kochab *wael* the Overseer utilizes them as the entertainment within his personal resort. Forces them to dance and pleasure one another in front of hundreds and he charges preposterous amounts to view this, but people pay. Am'uur... he says there are three Lycavorian Business people there now. They arrived just as he was leaving and he got a good look at their ship. They are part of Acamarian Engineering Corporation.”

“AEC?” Am'uur stated. “Didn't they just sign a new Defense Contract?”

Ledok nodded. “How do you think the Prince will respond when he discovers that bit of information?”

Am'uur nodded. “I do not want to begin to guess.” He said.

He motioned with his head and they began walking down the short corridor to the double doors which slid aside as they approached. They walked into the expanse of what could only be described as a Command and Control area. Two other Drow on his team were standing at a star chart, another one sitting at the computer station. The tall Lycavorian male and female were leaning over the holographic chart of the planet Ontahe. Ancheo and Emulia were his flight team. Since there were still a large number of Lycavorian mercenaries wandering about within The Wilds, Ancheo and Emulia not only flew the *VLOS VELVE*, but they acted as forward support and observers when Drow operators could not go into a place because there were no elves. They had been his flight team since he had taken command of the *VLOS VELVE* and they had pulled him and his Drow team out of many tight spots in the past.

Ancheo looked up from the plot board as they came up. “Ontahe is one foul place.” He stated.

Am'uur nodded. “No doubt why these particular scum chose it.” He said. “What do you have Ancheo?”

“The northern continent is almost uninhabitable.” Ancheo began as he pointed to the board. “The temperature averages minus fifty degrees Celsius on a warm day, minus ninety on a bad day. The southern continent is better, between minus 5 and minus 3 during the day. Nights are in the minus ten to minus twenty range. There are a couple of medium sized settlements on the southern continent near the equator according to long range scans, but nothing very big.”

Am'uur nodded. “The better to keep the facility hidden.” He said.

“No one in their right mind would take a vacation here.” Emulia spoke as she reached across the board. “If the Kochab's info is right... the secondary entrance is here inside this supposed tavern inside the southern most settlement...” She stated pointing to the image of the single story building on the end of the desolate looking settlement. “While the main entrance and where they receive their cargo and ships comes in through a massive ice plate that they remove when contact is achieved and payment is made to enter the facility. That is three clicks northwest of the settlement. That is where the base of the mountain begins.”

“How old are these images from our Intelligence probes?” Ledok asked.

“Nine months.” Ancheo answered immediately. “Best we could find. The probes move along Shrouded but they are very slow so there is less chance for them to be detected. Takes one almost two years to do a programmed circuit.”

“Considering the weather conditions I doubt they will have moved much within the settlement.” Am'uur said as he leaned over the board. “There does not appear to be any heavy equipment parked around the settlement buildings.”

“I concur.” Ledok spoke.

“We can't just use this Kochab's codes and ship Am'uur.” Emulia said. “And rolling up in our ship is bound to raise more than a few eyebrows. It's not everyday you get a visit by a Union warship. I'm thinking that wouldn't go over well.”

Am'uur chuckled. “No it would not.” He said. “Did we get anything on thermal mapping sensors?”

Ancheo nodded. "A lot." He stated changing the configuration of the plot board. "The facility itself is huge. Four square kilometers and at least five to seven different levels within the mountain."

Am'uur looked at him with wide amber eyes. "Four square?" He asked. "Ancheo... this is no way station facility then."

Ancheo shook his head. "No... it's a very large and well organized operation. This Kochab *midaeus* says there are only three hundred guards? No way they could cover the entire place with three hundred. And if what he told Ledok is accurate about resort facilities, it fits with what our sensors have detected."

"He could not lie under the drugs Ancheo." Ledok spoke.

"And he probably didn't." Emulia stated. "Three hundred is more than likely all he saw. If this operation is as big as this facility tells us it is... then there are going to be a whole lot of guards and security. More than we can handle anyway. Ancheo and I could go in as AEC big wigs maybe. Do a recon mission." She offered.

Am'uur shook his head thoughtfully. "Androcles told me not to risk our team no matter what we found. There may be Kavalians here since it appears they have had illicit dealings with some of these groups through the years and he does not want us to endanger Queen For'mya." He said softly. "Besides... if there are already Lycavorians inside this facility who are AEC, and word reaches them that you are present, they will make you immediately. AEC is not that big of a company and very few buyers could afford the initial entrance costs to even get this close."

Emulia looked at him. "Did he... did he tell you anything about the Queen?" She asked.

Am'uur met her eyes and shook his head slowly. "Only that they have made clear they will kill her if any attempt to find her is made."

Ledok shook. "There may be Kavalians here... but they would not bring the Queen here." He said. "Queen For'mya is too well known."

Ancheo looked up now. "Am'uur they wouldn't bring her... they wouldn't sell her to this Overseer would they?" He asked.

Am'uur met his eyes and quickly shook his head. "I know what it is you are thinking my friend... both of you..." He glanced at Emulia. "And you need to put it out of your heads. No one in their right mind would try and turn her into a whore just for profit. They know who she is and it could not be done."

"No one ever said the Kavalians were smart." Emulia snapped softly. "And there are a lot of people out there who would love to get their hands on any of the Queens as their plaything and they would pay anything."

"No... they took her for some other purpose." Am'uur said thoughtfully. "It is the only tactical move that makes any sense. To keep Prince Androcles and others from retaliating for what they have done. I... the Drow... all of us... we adore all the Queens Emulia, but in this circumstance we must stay focused and conduct our mission. It is equally as important. When we find her... then we can get our retribution for the Kavalians believing they can take her."

Emulia nodded. "*Avoi.*" She muttered.

"Why would these AEC people be here?" Ledok asked now. "They could not bring these Vanari females into the Union; slavery ranks right up there with rape as far as Lycavorians and our elven brothers and sisters are concerned. And word would spread quickly if they were within Union space. There are many who dabble in illicit activities in the Union, but even they would not dare attempt slavery. And there are far more citizens of the Union who adore the King and Queens than those who do not. If all they were interested in is finding bed mates, why come here when Talbor Seven is far more inviting and has many beautiful females of every species?"

Emulia snorted. "Then they are involved somehow." She stated with distaste in her voice. "Involved with this Overseer who is in charge."

Am'uur nodded. "That would seem to be the most logical answer." He said. "The next question would be... knowing how the King and we view slavery of any kind as Ledok has said why would they risk discovery and come here all at the same time? That seems rather odd if they are trying to keep a low profile."

Ancheo looked at him. "We know that look Am'uur." He said. "You think they are part of the leadership don't you?"

Am'uur nodded his head. "Or they are here to do more than just dabble in flesh peddling and admire the arctic view of the planet."

“If this Vanari we search for is going to be the mate and wife to Androcles... then she will be a mate and lover to your sister Am'uur.” Ledok said evenly. “You know how he views Lu'ria... I saw it in his eyes when he briefed us Am'uur. He is like his father in that regard and he views all of them as precious gems. His gems! And they see Lu'ria as their Drow Mistress. This Vanari female, this Caliria, if she is to be part of that with them, part of their lives, you know how they will respond?”

Am'uur nodded his head in agreement. “Yes I do Ledok.” He stated evenly as he looked at his team. “I also know he will not allow the other females the Kochab scum referenced to remain there either. The Icalro Alliance have most definitely broken the agreement with the King by bringing these Vanari females into this quadrant through Union space and they will pay. Androcles will also want to know about these AEC people for it appears now as if they are involved somehow.”

“So what's the plan?” Ancheo asked.

“Get *VLOS VELVE* as close as we can to Ontahe and run every sensor scan that we have the ability to run Ancheo. Right down to Seismic Level and Deep Graphic Thermal sweeps.” Am'uur spoke. “He will not want us to risk trying to enter this base so I will contact him and tell him what we have learned. I imagine within a day or so after that he will be here with more than enough force to destroy this facility and make the Icalro Alliance regret ever having allowed this to happen.”

“*Sibfla!*” Ancheo blurted. “No bet against that here.”

“What about our Kochab guest?” Ledok asked.

Am'uur looked at him. “You have gotten everything from him yes?”

Ledok nodded. “His brain will be *d'naubol* now Am'uur.” Ledok replied. “No better than a vegetable.”

“Then execute his pathetic ass and give his remains to the cold of space.” Am'uur stated calmly.

CITADEL ONE

Coren paced back and forth on the bridge of *CITADEL ONE* angry at himself that they got caught and he was responsible for the position they were now in. Fully a hundred warships were now within five million kilometers of *CITADEL ONE* and no contact had been received from this Imror person in almost an hour. Arden and Lyrew were standing beside the sensor operator as he tried to get a better picture of the ships that had arrived in the area, one of them a sister ship to the colossal *RAVEN'S WINGS* that remained in position half a million kilometers above *CITADEL ONE*. Lilonus sat quietly at an unused engineering station, the look on his face one of amusement on their current situation while Jokros seemed intent on something at the computer station he was monitoring. Coren turned to continue his pacing and found Tastia standing directly in front of him.

“I can't believe you and Ardan actually authorized this mission and then didn't give Captain Lyrew the entire story of what to expect Coren.” She said softly.

“Tastia... now is not the time.” Coren spoke looking at her.

“When is the time Coren!” She snapped at him. “Your actions could have very well cost everyone on this ship their lives!”

Coren glared at her. “Devra and my children went behind my back in coming here! The SBR would never have approved this and you know it!”

“They came here after your daughter Coren!” She hissed at him. “Doesn't that mean anything to you?”

“Our laws have been in place for centuries!” Coren stated. “Any attempt to retrieve a Vanari female taken by the Syndicate will result in the Syndicate taking punitive action against our colonies! My wife knows that! As do my children!”

“Devra is no longer your wife Coren!” Tastia spoke harshly. “And the more I see who you really are... the more I understand why.”

“I know who she is!” Coren hissed back at her angrily. “And do not presume to know me Tastia! We have only been together four years... that is all!”

Tastia looked at him with wide eyes at his statement. “Excuse me?” She gasped. “Those four years together does not grant me some measure of respect and knowledge of you Coren? Perhaps... perhaps my mother has been right all along.”

“There... there is much that you do not know or understand yet Tastia. You are still very young and...” Coren stammered knowing he had slipped in his tone and words. “Please... forgive me my words.”

“What... what if that was me Coren?” She asked quickly. “What if I was the one who had been taken instead of your daughter? Would you come for me or leave me to my fate in order to keep appearances with the SBR?”

“Tastia...”

“Answer me damn it!” Tastia barked.

Coren’s eyes narrowed and he was silent for a moment. “I will not answer that question!” He snapped right back after a moment. “It has no bearing on our current situation!” Tastia’s eyes filled with a sadness that Coren had never seen before and he stepped closer to her. “Tastia you...”

Tastia reached up and placed her small hand on his chest to keep him from getting closer. “No.” She said softly. “I... I knew this side of you existed Coren, even before we joined, I had just never seen it before. Now I am not so sure I want to see anymore.”

“You would never be in this situation Tastia because you do not assume and act without thinking and you don’t act irrationally!” Coren spoke.

“Irrationally?” Tastia said.

Coren nodded his head. “What Devra and my children have done is irrational and the repercussions could be very wide ranging. They have placed our people in great danger Tastia, you know this!”

“Wanting to rescue your child is not irrational Coren. That is what I do know and I am not even a mother.” Tastia said.

“You know what I mean!” He hissed.

“Do I?” Tastia said looking at him. “You just told me I don’t know you Coren. Or was that a different you that spoke those words?”

“Coren... come here!” Ardan spoke urgently from across the bridge.

Coren glanced over at him and then back to Tastia. He reached up and stroked her cheek. “We will talk about this at a later time.” He stated. He leaned over and kissed her cheek and then turned to cross the short distance to where Ardan stood. “What is it Ardan?”

Lyrew looked up. “We have intercepted some sort of briefing going on right now from Earth.” He said quickly. “It is going out all over what they call their Netnews so it is on an open frequency.”

Coren looked at him. “They didn’t jam our communications?” He asked surprised.

Lyrew shook his head. “No. And we have been scanning the ships in the area since they began arriving without hindrance. It’s almost as if they want us to know these things.”

“What is this briefing about?” Coren asked.

Ardan tapped his nephew on the shoulder. “Lyrew... put it up on one of the monitors.” He said.

Lyrew nodded and touched his COM officer on the arm. “Do it. And put it on speakers!”

They all turned as the large monitor towards the front of the bridge came alive with the image of the elf female and what appeared to be hundreds of others, some from species the Vanari had never seen before.

“...under the impression the Cease Fire between the High Coven and the Union was very legitimate.” The elf female spoke eloquently. **“As Talon Guardians it was within the prevue of the King and Crown Prince Androcles to accept the Coven request to train their dragons without the knowledge of the Union Senate. While the entire Union Senate was not aware of this, Prime Minister Deia and the members of the Union Senate Security Council were aware of this. As all of you know, our Bonded Pairs are not trained in offensive tactics. This is not something that the Elder Mother or King Leonidas would allow after what took place on Enurrua. Everything they learn is defensive in nature and this is the knowledge we passed on to the High Coven dragons.”**

“Dilaen we have seen hours of footage from the Evolli War that clearly shows they were involved in active military operations.” The male spoke evenly. **“We have seen Mjolnir’s Hand engaged in fighting as well as countless other Bonded Pairs.”**

Dilaen nodded her head. **“Yes... their skills and abilities as Bonded Pairs gives them unique support skills to our forces on the ground, and as with any portion of our military, they do not train to conquer others.”** She lifted her hand. **“I will not debate the details of their training regimes since they are public**

knowledge. *All I will say is that not since they became respected and honored members of our Union have any of them acted in a manner that goes against what the majority of our citizens believe and follow. In many cases they have gone out of their way to uphold what we hold dear. As for the Kavalian claim that we were training the Coven dragons to engage them in combat, they certainly have no proof to support their claims, only conjecture, false rumors and lies.*”

“And the reports of Queen Anja’s decision to not grant them healers...”

“Queen Anja made her decision based on the known history and factual intelligence of the Kavalian Empire and their record concerning females of their own species and many others. We have seen reports of what they have done to High Coven females and civilians and we know first hand what they are capable of from their attack on Gamji twenty-five years ago.” Dilaen answered. *“The vast majority of Hadarian Healers are all female as you know... and based on how Kavalians view females of any species... she was not willing to put Union citizens at risk given that history.”*

“Did she consult with the Hadarian Arch Ministry or Elder Council in this decision?” The man asked. *“The Ancient Hadarian Medical Oath, signed after declaring themselves free of the Coven and becoming members of the Union, this clearly states they will not deny treatment to any injured individual no matter the species.”*

Dilaen nodded her head. *“Yes I’m quite sure she is aware of what it says Donlar. She made this decision as Queen of the Union, not the Queen of Hadaria.”*

“So there is truth to the claim of Elder Buonau that she was putting the policies of the Union before the policies of Hadaria.” Donlar spoke.

Dilaen met his eyes sternly. *“If you wish to infer that putting the lives and the welfare of Union citizens, namely our Hadarian Healers before a Medical Oath, that this position is somehow wrong Donlar, then I challenge you and Channel 71 to defend that position. As well as anyone who agrees with you.”*

“I’m not trying to infer anything Dilaen. I’m only asking a question that many people will want the answer too.” Donlar spoke.

“Then I suggest Donlar... that you and Channel 71 carry your collective asses to the Hadarian Embassy and ask those men and women there these same questions! Ask the Hadarian people who live here on Earth and within the Union how they view Queen Anja’s decisions! I understand that Channel 71 is a Hadarian funded channel Donlar, but you will not use this forum to question the policies of Queen Anja.” Dilaen barked loudly stunning many of the gathered reporters with her burst of anger. *“For the last two weeks they have been fielding urgent requests from family and friends to find a way to get other family members off Hadaria and out from under the theocratic rule that the Arch Ministry and Elder Council have instituted. They have been fielding countless offers of support and help from every Hadarian Healer within the ranks of the Union Military as they establish and maintain Queen Anja’s government here on Earth. Why don’t you ask these questions of the over three million Healers within our ranks, none of whom answered the demand and order by the Arch Ministry and Elder Council to return to Hadaria by the way. Why don’t you ask the Hadarians how they view their own Queen and the unlawful actions that have now made her exiled from her own planet!*

I am here to give you answers to what is happening within our Union right now. I am not here to give you or anyone a public voice to extol your discontent or disagreement with policies that Queen Anja or anyone within the Royal Family or the Union Senate have instituted for the benefit of our people. And I will certainly not allow you to infer there is truth in something when there is not. Everything I am telling you now is solid fact! It was Androcles’s decision to allow this so that our citizens know what is happening and what their government is doing in response. I will not deal with the hypothetical and I will not allow you to either. If you have a question that is based in fact then ask it and I will answer it, if you wish to deal only in conjecture and rumor then sit your mida down and shut up or I will yank your credentials and have you thrown out of here so fast it will make your head spin!”

Everyone saw the elven female who had caught the initial battle and assassination as it was happening stand up and raise her hand. Dilaen caught the motion and turned to her. *“Yes Me’alla?”*

“Dilaen... I... I was there in Old Sparta. I noticed that all of these Kavalians assassins were very similar to Princess Athani in appearance.” Me’alla asked. *“They did not have the usual physical similarities to Kavalians as we know them. They look... well they look like us! Could you discuss this in detail and as a*

follow up... do we know if there are any more of them still here on Earth? And will these actions in any way reflect on her status?"

Dilaen shook her head immediately. *"I will address the last part of your question first."* She stated. *"The actions of the KFI in no way reflect on Princess Athani. She is a Princess of the Union now, wife to Prince Resumar. Her life is just as threatened as any among the Royal Family, perhaps more so because she chose to defect and lead a life free of the oppressive treatment of Kavalian females. If this issue came up Androcles was very clear on what my response was to be. Athani is now a Leonidas, a member of the Royal family. She is in no way involved or associated with these actions and anyone who implies this, no matter the manner in which it is done; they will answer directly to Androcles and his family."* Dilaen took a deep breath. *"Now... as to the other parts of your question, we know that..."*

Ardan looked at Coren. "Coren? What do you make of all this?"

Coren met his eyes. "I think it shows us exactly what many of us have believed from the very beginning." He answered. "They are a violent and unpredictable species Ardan... and we need to be extremely cautious in our dealings with them."

"Forgive me Regent Re Mydala..." Lyrew spoke. "But from what I can see they have just been attacked and had thousands of their citizens killed to include their King. Did you know of this before we departed Vanari space?"

"Lyrew?" Ardan snapped.

"No uncle... I need to know now! This is my ship and my crew and I need to know if they are at risk!" Lyrew stated firmly. "Did you and Regent Re Mydala bring us into this situation knowing the current atmosphere?"

"No they did not." Lilonus spoke from behind them watching as they turned to face him. "They knew only that events were precarious within the Union Commander Lyrew. It is all any of us knew... and that is why I was waiting for the Director General to contact me. As I stated earlier, Captain Imror informed me of what has taken place, and this is the only reason that they are reacting to our arrival in this manner."

"Do you know what they were talking about Ambassador?" Tastia asked moving forward to stand next to Lyrew. "The elven female was speaking of dragons and Hadarians and Bonded Pairs. What does all this mean?"

Lilonus shrugged his broad shoulders. "I have no idea... and that is why I have counseled caution every since leaving. Advice that has been ignored I might add and that is why we are in our current situation."

"The Director General... our intelligence..." Lyrew spoke. "All of it has led us to believe that the faction of your species here in the Alpha Quadrant were far less advanced than they are. That they were not as refined as your people within the Protectorate."

Lilonus shook his head. "That is a fallacy that your Board of Regents has embraced and nurtured through the centuries Captain. It is not something we have ever endorsed. And we, those of us within the Protectorate, we are the faction not the other way around."

"What do you mean Ambassador?" Tastia asked.

"Just what I have said." Lilonus spoke. "They have not limited your computers or sensors Captain. Have one of your many technicians tap into their public Network and discover for yourselves." Lilonus said.

"Discover what?" Lyrew asked.

Jokros turned from the station where he sat and stood up holding up the data pad in his hand. "Discovered what I have discovered, by doing exactly what the ambassador suggested we do Coren." He announced as he moved towards them. "The United Lycavorian Union, as it is called, encompasses two thousand three hundred and fourteen very diverse worlds in at least a hundred and eighty-five different planetary systems! Their population at their last census was in excess of thirty-one trillion lifeforms!" He held the data pad out to Coren.

"By the Grace of the Four Prophets!" Tastia exclaimed in stunned shock as Coren took the pad.

Ardan looked at Lilonus who appeared just as astounded as everyone else. "Did you know this?" He demanded.

Lilonus shook his head quickly. "No. We knew... we knew they were large... but this is beyond anything we ever imagined."

“They... they dwarf the Vanari Empire by more than half!” Lyrew stated in shock.

“This King Leonidas that was assassinated...” Jokros continued on looking at Coren and not so sure of their mission anymore. “He is the great grandson of the Pralor Sumar Coren. The man Wayonn has told some of our people about, to include Devra. This is knowledge that we had from Wayonn since he was friends with this Sumar, but knowledge we never thought to discover because of what we have always believed the Lycavorians to be. This King Leonidas is the grandson to King Resumar of the Lycavorian people that we are also familiar with Coren, the one who led their people before and during the time of what they call The Black Day. The one who was their leader during the time of their slavery to this High Coven. This comes from Protectorate history as well as from the history cubes Wayonn first gave to us. This information we have had for millennia and no one ever thought to discover it!”

“I never have read about the history Wayonn gave to us, it didn’t seem important and Wayonn never told us of this! The actions of the Lycavorians within the Protectorate speak for themselves Jokros!” Coren snapped as he looked at Jokros. “Wayonn never told us that this man had come to power!”

“Perhaps he did not know.” Ardan offered. He looked at Lilonus. “Ambassador?”

Lilonus shook his head again. “I did not know this.” He said. “If I had... I would have been more vocal in my attempts to tell you to use caution.”

“He has only been in power for twenty-seven years if this data is correct.” Jokros said. “He has fourteen children from five different Queens... and if everything I have read in the last hour is accurate Coren, all of them are revered by the vast majority of the people in this Union and respected by everyone else.”

Tastia looked at Coren. “This Androcles the elven female referred too several times. He must be the oldest son...” Tastia looked at Lilonus now. “The one you said this Lycavorian Captain would contact?”

Lilonus nodded. “That is my guess.”

“How many of these broadcasts can we monitor?” Coren asked.

“There appear to be several hundred channels that are available.” Jokros answered.

“We should have people monitoring them.” Coren suggested. “Find out as much about them as we can. Everything from how their government is formed to the size of the military. This may be information that is vital to how we act and respond.”

“Respond to what?” Lilonus asked in disgust.

“If they refuse to return Devra and my children!” Coren snapped.

“Are you...”

“Captain! The Lycavorian ship is hailing us!” The COM officer barked as he turned in his chair.

Lyrew turned. “On the main screen! Now!”

They watched as Imror’s face once more appeared on the large monitor. “I have been told to inform you to select eight individuals to accompany you, Ambassador Lilonus among them. You will board a transport and then transit to my ship immediately.” He spoke.

“For what purpose?” Coren asked.

“To discuss your unwelcome incursion into Union space fool!” Imror growled. “You will bring no weapons Regent Re Mydala. None. Is that clear?”

“Are Regent Devra Re Mydala and my children on your ship now?” Coren snapped.

“That is not a concern of yours!” Imror barked.

“And if we refuse?” Ardan asked.

They watched him shrug his broad shoulders. “You can do that if you choose.” He said. “In that event however, your ship will be impounded and your crew detained until such time as we can return you to wherever it is you came from.”

“We will not surrender to you!” Coren hissed.

“That is your choice of course.” Imror stated plainly. “In which case the same scenario as I mentioned before would apply. You should feel lucky Regent Re Mydala, after what has happened I was surprised that the Prince would offer to take you prisoner should you refuse. We do not normally take prisoners.”

“You... you don’t take prisoners?” Tastia asked in shock.

Imror’s face and tone softened considerably when he answered her. “No... we do not Milady. We have found for the most part that they are more trouble than they are worth. It is harsh I know, and perhaps even barbaric by your standards whatever they may be, but it is who we are.”

Jokros stepped forward. "Coren... Regent Ardan... we could gain much by cooperation now." He stated swiftly. "We are no match for them militarily... not with the number of ships that surround us. If you wish to see Regent Devra and your children again Coren I suggest we do as he says."

"They could take us prisoner!" Ardan exclaimed now. "Just as they have Devra and her children!"

"By the Prophets Ardan!" The female voice sounded from the monitor and they turned to see Devra's stunning face and figure step up next to Imror in the transmission. "Stop being such a politician and get on a ship and come over here! We have much to discuss Ardan and we are discovering more every day!"

"Devra!" Coren exclaimed looking at her. "Devra... are you hurt? Have they touched you?"

"Coren Re Mydala you be silent! You have already recklessly risked the lives of the men and women on that ship with your ignorance." Devra snapped harshly. "These people are not our enemies and nor have they ever been. If you would open your eyes even a little you would see that!"

"Devra..." Coren began.

"Ardan Vu Lamurrian... I ask you to utilize the wisdom and demeanor you are known for and come here so that we may talk with Androcles." Devra said. "There is much going on that we are not aware of as I said and it now concerns our people as well as the Lycavorians. Please."

Ardan had always held Devra in high regard and that was something that would not change regardless of the Vanari laws she had broken. She was extremely intelligent and very insightful. "You speak of this man as if you know him Devra?"

"I do. I have seen him every day since we entered Union space. I have sat with him and talked of many things." Devra answered. "Ardan... they are not our enemy and they never have been."

Ardan was silent for a long moment before nodding his head. "Very well Devra." He stated. "We will come over."

"Thank you." Devra said.

Lyrew stepped forward. "Captain... your crewmember who was seriously injured? How is she?"

"Princess Eliani is here now treating her." Imror spoke his tone now more neutral in its demeanor. "She will recover. I thank you for asking about her Captain."

"With your permission I would like to accompany those who transit to your ship Captain. I wish to apologize to her personally for my actions." Lyrew spoke. "They were ill-thought out and we were unaware of the current situation with your Union."

Imror stared at the man for a moment. "That is not necessary." He said finally.

"Perhaps... but I would like to do it regardless." Lyrew stated. "With your permission of course."

Imror looked to the side as if he was talking to someone else and then he turned back and nodded. "Very well." He spoke. "Your ship will be locked the entire time so please do nothing foolish. *RAVEN'S WING* out!"

Coren looked at Ardan then. "Ardan... what are you doing?" He asked.

"If this is how we must get Devra and your children back then so be it Coren." Ardan said. "It is the only way and you know it."

Coren was silent as he stewed in his own anger before looking up at him again. "Who do we take with us?" He asked.

Ardan looked at Lyrew. "You have Cadre Officers aboard?" He asked.

Lyrew nodded. "Yes."

"They will go with us for security." Ardan stated. "We must hurry! Every moment that passes the chances grow that either the Syndicate or someone from the Board of Regents will discovered that we are gone and where we have come."

RAVEN'S WING

"Thank you Captain Imror." Devra said.

Imror bowed his head to her. "Lady Devra."

Devra turned to Arduri as the transmission ended and Arduri stepped close to her mother. "I've never seen father so angry mother."

Devra nodded. "Neither have I. And I question where that anger is coming from. And why?" She answered as she took Arduri's hand. "Come... we will wait for them with Androcles and the others in the conference room. He said there was a transmission coming in that we should see."

"You saw Tastia mother?" Arduri asked as they began to exit the bridge.

Devra nodded. "Yes I saw her." She stated as they entered the lift that would take them to the lower decks. These ships were easy to navigate in the manner they were laid out and when she and Arduri arrived on the *RAVEN'S WINGS* they found that they would not need an escort to go places on the ship. It appeared Androcles Leonidas trusted both of them completely now that they had been among them for these past days and seen who they truly were. Devra had no intention of betraying that trust. "Why?"

"It... it is an insult to you for father to bring her." Arduri said quickly with some heat in her voice.

Devra smiled. "Why?" She asked.

"She... she is not any older than me mother!" Arduri announced.

"Your father is a grown man Arduri." Devra said. "Who he chooses to share a bed with is not my concern and it hasn't been for many years. Besides... I have my own prospects."

Arduri looked at her mother. "It is Bren isn't it mother?" She asked.

Devra met her daughter's eyes. "Is it that obvious?" She asked.

Arduri smiled. "Yes... to me."

"I don't know what it is Arduri." Devra said softly shaking her head. "Just being... just being near him is exciting. He exudes power and confidence but also compassion and devotion. He told me..."

"What?" Arduri prodded her.

"Arduri... he told me he was going to make me his Arduri. That he was going to make me his mate. His wife." Devra said with an almost wistful and excited tone in her voice that was easy for Arduri to detect. It was something she had never seen from her mother and it made her very happy. "He told me he would pursue me until I saw for myself that I wanted him just as badly as my scent told him I did."

"Do you mother?" Arduri asked. "Do you want him?"

Devra looked at her. "Arduri... for the first time in my life I have to consciously insure that I do not secrete any Alkay near him. Just being next to him excites me in a way I have never felt before. Even more powerful than when your father and I first married. It is... it is almost frightening."

"You fear him?" Arduri asked surprised.

Devra shook her head. "No... that's just it. I... I fear the emotions and desires he brings out in me."

Arduri met her eyes. "There is something I have heard several times since we came here mother. First on Androcles's ship and then again on Earth. Never fear the unknown, for you don't know what treasures it could bring to you."

Devra leaned over and kissed her daughter's cheek. "Thank you Arduri." She said softly squeezing her hands. "Thank you."

The short range Vanari could carry twenty people easily and was used primarily for ship to ship and ship to surface traveling. All of them had been glued to the side windows as they were guided into the cavernous Starboard landing bay on *RAVEN'S WING*. They could see dozens of *TEMPEST* and *DEVASTATOR* fighters lining the sides of the bay, as well as several extremely capable looking craft that could only be ground support ships. They were all very surprised at the advanced design of the different fighters as well as the completely smooth and efficient operation of duties within the landing bay. Coren and Ardan sat together while Jokros sat with Lilonus. He alone was beginning to see things that the others did not because of his years of experience and he found Lilonus very willing and open to talking with him. Lyrew sat with three of his senior officers, all of them female Vanari and extremely easy on the eyes. They were Vanari Cadre Officers, the best trained and skilled when it came to intelligence operations, but it seemed that Lyrew was giving them orders they did not like. When their ship was finally secured, the side hatchway was opened and the stair ramp lowered and they saw the dozen or so armed Lycavorians in matte black body armor the likes of which they had never seen before. The body armor was like a uniform and conformed to their bodies almost like a second skin. Their weapons were not pointing at them, but you could tell by their stern expressions that they would not tolerate any

problems. As they all stepped down onto the deck they saw Director General Dutkne step between two of the soldiers as they moved aside for him without pause, bowing their head slightly as he passed.

“Director General Dutkne!” Lilonus almost shouted as he stepped forward cautiously.

Dutkne greeted him with a smile and an extended hand which grasped Lilonus’s forearm. “Ambassador Lilonus... I should have expected they would involve you in this.” Dutkne spoke. “Welcome to the Lycavorian Union.”

“Sir... I... we had no idea you were on this ship!” Lilonus spoke.

“I wasn’t until about thirty minutes ago.” Dutkne answered. “This is a little side trip that we did not intend to make.”

Lilonus looked at him. “We?” He asked softly. “Wayonn? The others? They are not with you?”

Dutkne shook his head. “We all have a purpose to serve.” Dutkne spoke. “As much as it burns my *mida* to say that. My grandfather and the others are doing what is intended for them to do. I came with Androcles.”

“The... the Prince?” Lilonus asked softly.

Dutkne nodded as he turned and looked at Coren and Ardan. “Regent Re Mydala. Regent Vu Lamurrion. So very good to see you both. How was your trip?” Dutkne spoke stepping up to them.

“Where are Devra and my children?” Coren demanded.

“Always charming I see Regent Re Mydala.” Dutkne spoke sarcastically.

“You kidnapped a Regent of the Vanari Empire, my daughters and son and several other Vanari citizens Director General Dutkne!” Coren snapped. “Then you brought them half way across the galaxy into an area of space that is forbidden to us! You do nothing for the relations between our governments that you say you so want sir!”

Dutkne nodded. “Yes... I’m quite sure that just breaks your heart. It is almost the same as you firing on a Lycavorian Union warship without provocation Regent Re Mydala! Whose brilliant idea was that might I ask?”

“Enough of this!” Ardan snapped. “Where is this Captain we are supposed to meet so that we can gather what we came for and leave?”

Dutkne ignored him and looked at Lyrew now. “You are the Commander of *CITADEL ONE*?” He asked.

Lyrew nodded his head. He had other ideas moving through his brain and none of them concerned what Coren and Ardan were here for. Like Jokros, he was beginning to see that perhaps if they opened their eyes a little more they would discover that these Lycavorians could be powerful allies and friends. “Yes. It was my order that was followed and caused us to fire on this ship and I am sorry. I am Captain Lyrew.” Lyrew said.

Dutkne nodded and turned his head to the young *Durcunusaan* soldier directly behind him. “Lieutenant Peus will you escort Captain Lyrew here to the medical bay. I believe Captain Imror is already waiting there for him.”

The *Durcunusaan* nodded his head without hesitation. “As you order Ephor Dutkne.” The soldier stepped forward and motioned with his hand towards the starboard doors that lined the bulkhead.

Lyrew looked at Coren and Ardan for a moment before Dutkne stepped in once more. “Captain Lyrew... if we had wanted any of you dead you would already be dead and your ship a smoking hole in space.” Dutkne spoke. “You asked to see the woman your actions injured and the Lieutenant will take you there.”

Ardan nodded his head finally and Lyrew turned to follow the *Durcunusaan* officer. “I will hold you personally responsible for my nephew’s safety Director General Dutkne!” He snapped.

“I’m sure.” Dutkne spoke rolling his eyes.

Lilonus looked at him. “What is it that he called you Director? Ephor?”

Dutkne nodded slowly. “I don’t know exactly how it started but the *Durcunusaan* began calling me that several days ago. It is the name of ancient Greek advisors from the time of Andro’s Spartan ancestors.”

“*Durcunusaan*?” Lilonus said softly. “Wolves of the Blood.”

“The Royal Guard.” Dutkne answered nodding his head. “Some of the finest trained and experienced men and women I have ever seen. This way please and be quiet when you enter the briefing room... there is a communication already in progress.”

Dutkne waited for them to start across the deck and then moved in front of them leading them to a large Pilot’s Briefing Room on the bottom level of the bay just off to the side of two rows of *TEMPEST* fighters.

There was a brief moment of adjustment as their eyes focused in the dimmer light of the briefing room and then Dutkne directed them to a row of comfortable seats behind where several women already sat. As Coren got closer to the front row of seats he saw Devra and Arduri easily by their hair and the color of their skin and he came up short. They were sitting between an unknown blond woman and a dark skinned female with long white hair and long pointed ears that marked her as an elf of some sort.

“Devra! Arduri!” He exclaimed loudly moving past Ardan and Tastia without thinking and pushing both of them slightly to the side. Ardan did not take offense at this motion, but the look on Tastia’s face said she did.

Andro had been sitting on the edge of the large table closest to the holographic image of Lu’ria’s brother Am’uur and he turned his head at the interruption of their conversation and Am’uur’s report.

“Stand by Am’uur.” Andro said as he got to his feet and watched Coren push his way past two *Durcunusaan* soldiers and come around to the front row of seats as Devra and Arduri stood up. Coren looked at them oddly, seeing them dressed in the same type body armor uniform that all of the guards and Dutkne seemed to be wearing. He embraced Arduri quickly, squeezing her in his arms even though she did not seem particularly happy about his embrace.

“Are you hurt?” Coren exclaimed holding her at arm’s length. “Have they injured you?”

“Injured us?” Arduri exclaimed. “No father... they have not injured us! Why would you ask such a thing?”

Coren pushed Arduri fully to arm’s length and let his eyes fall to Devra. “This was an insanely foolish act Devra! What were you thinking when you did this? Do you realize what I have had to go through to come here?”

“No one asked you to come here Coren. I certainly did not need you to come here... I’m doing quite well on my own thank you.” Devra told him. “And I tried to discourage Arduri and Naesta from coming but they would not hear of it. They care about their sister.”

“Arduri and Naesta are too young to make that sort of decision and you know it!” Coren snapped.

“I came of my own free will father.” Arduri spoke up quickly as she pushed away from her father’s embrace and brushed his hands away. “Naesta did too. And I do not like that you imply we are not intelligent enough to make that decision for ourselves.”

“I said you were too young to make that decision!” Coren barked. He glared at Devra. “Do you realize what you have done? You have put our entire species at risk with this foolhardy action Devra!”

“I know exactly what I have done.” Devra snapped right back as Bren began to rise to his feet from where he sat directly behind her.

No Bren. Andro reached for him within Mindvoice. *Let her handle this... she is more than capable.* Bren met his eyes and nodded his head slowly returning to his seat.

“I came in search of our daughter Coren Re Mydala! Something you were obviously not willing to do! And I do not intend to leave without her.” Devra snapped at him.

Coren shook his head. “It is too late for Caliria and you know it! The... the drugs they use to break our females will have already begun to work their hideous side effects! We can do nothing to save her Devra.”

“We do not know that!” Devra exclaimed passionately. “There are people here who can help us! They are called Hadarians and they are almost magical in what they can do medically! They can heal her and so many others!”

“It is not possible Devra!” Ardan spoke coming forward now. “And we risk too much in order to try!”

“Ardan and I came to retrieve you and our children Devra! We must leave now and return to Vanari space before it is discovered by others on the SBR or the regular Board of Regents where you have gone and why.” Coren said.

“I have no intention of leaving Coren! Not until Caliria is safe and back with those that love her. Not until she is back with us!” Devra answered firmly standing her ground. “I will not abandon my daughter to her fate as you so easily do! I refuse too!”

“Devra... you risk your seat on the Board of Regents!” Ardan stated. “Your son and your daughters risk their careers and their futures with these actions. Nirilo may be forgiven... he can say he was forced to accompany the Lycavorians here because of his position as liaison. You and your daughters were not. You came with them willingly.”

“I care nothing for my seat on the Board of Regents!” Devra growled. “I wish only to retrieve my daughter and I will do just that regardless of the consequences! Our people have been insular and distrustful of others for too long, and this is why the Syndicate knows they can get away with their hideous actions. They know we will do nothing! I am done doing nothing Coren!”

“This is no time for games Devra!” Coren growled. “We have already risked more than we should have by coming here! We can force you to return! We...” Coren stopped and looked around quickly. “Where are Naesta and Nirilo?” He asked. “They are not with you?”

“No they are not.” Devra answered calmly. “They are doing whatever it is they can to help in getting their sister back! And you can not force us Coren... remember that!”

“Where are they?” Coren demanded. “Are they being held prisoner?”

Devra looked at him and shook her head. “You are such a fool Coren.” She stated plainly. “You dismiss your own daughter for most of her life for some supposed defect in her genes because of her dark hair and when she is captured and then broken by Syndicate scum and sold into slavery, your first thought is not for her life but your status on the Board of Regents! You make me sick Coren! What I ever saw in you is beyond me.”

“You are breaking our laws!” Coren almost screamed. “By coming here you could very well set the Syndicate upon our colony worlds and they will unleash their poison missiles on them. They will...”

“Perhaps you should be more concerned with how this syndicate has found its way into this quadrant of space sir!” Sadi spoke now as she got to her feet. “They seem to be far more wide ranging than you first thought.”

Coren looked at her. “I do not need political advice from a Lycavorian female! Sit back down whoever you are!” He barked.

“Coren... how dare you?” Devra exclaimed as she reached up and slapped him squarely in the face rocking his head back with the suddenness of the blow and the force it carried. “Sadi is a Princess of the United Lycavorian Union. How dare you speak to her in such a manner of disrespect? She is the *anome*, the wife and mate to Androcles Leonidas!”

“I will speak to her however I deem necessary to get my children back so that we can leave them to their wars and violence!” Coren snarled as he rubbed his cheek and looked at Sadi. “You know nothing of my people or what we endure!” He snapped at her again causing Sadi to raise her hand and stop the three *Durcunusaan* soldiers standing along the back wall from shutting Coren up in their own way while shaking her head sadly.

“Your arrogance is unbecoming sir.” Sadi spoke evenly unfazed by his outburst. “And very insulting towards your daughter and Lady Devra. As for me... I have been called much worse by far better men than you.”

“I do not care what you or your kind think of me young lady!” Coren growled. “Where is this Captain Imror? I wish to find out where my children are and leave this area of space as soon as possible!”

“Captain Imror is in the Medical Bay with the woman your fool actions injured Coren.” Devra snapped at him, her green eyes blazing with anger.

Coren ignored her and turned around looking for someone else to shout at and his eyes fell on Andro where he stood beside the table watching everything that was happening with a slightly annoyed expression on his face. “You there boy!” He barked out. “Find me the Captain of this ship or someone in authority who will act on my demands.”

“Father stop this!” Arduri shouted as her eyes went wide. “You do not know who you are...”

Coren ignored her and moved closer to the tall Lycavorian with oddly colored blue eyes. “Did you hear me?” He snapped when Andro didn’t move.

“Oh... I heard you.” Andro spoke now his voice calm. “It’s kind of hard not to hear you sir! You sound like a Folcani mud hog with a broken limb bellowing like a baby. You don’t honestly believe all this screaming and shouting is accomplishing anything do you? Aside from giving me a growing case of *vada readur mida* that is.”

Coren’s head whipped around when he heard the Lycavorians within the room chuckle at this young man’s words. He turned back to Andro and glared at him, the look bouncing off him with little effort. “I demand that you put me in contact with someone in a position of authority!” He barked. “I will not abide citizens of the Vanari Empire being held against their will by people with whom we have a non-aggression pact with.”

Andro turned his head and looked at Dutkne as he moved towards him. "*Forn intus regovar.*" He said.

Dutkne shrugged his shoulders as he stepped up beside him. "Don't say I never warned you about anything Androcles." He stated as he looked at Coren. "Excellent job Regent Re Mydala, insult the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union and his *anome* all within minutes of each other! That type of arrogance takes a lot of practice you know."

Coren's eyes grew wide in disbelief when Dutkne mentioned the name and he looked quickly between Dutkne and Andro before his eyes remained on Andro. "You are... you are Prince Androcles?" He stammered.

Andro smiled at him though his smile held no humor to it. "Last time I checked." He stated. He leaned over to Dutkne. "How long ago was that?"

"Ten seconds maybe." Dutkne answered. "Twelve if you really stretch it."

"Is this humorous to you in some form young man?" Coren demanded as his eyes grew wider.

"The events of my life in the past few weeks have been anything but humorous Regent Re Mydala." Androcles stated crossing his arms over his chest. "However, your petty arrogance and blowhard skills are providing an exceptional distraction right now."

Devra could barely hold back the yelp of laughter she wanted to release, while Tastia, Ardan and Jokros looked on in disbelief at his statement, all of them for different reasons of their own. Lilonus simply shook his head and moved to one of the pilot's chairs and settled into it happy to watch the show and filled with pride that he was here among their people who they had thought lost so long ago.

"You dare disrespect me?" Coren gasped.

"You will find sir, that I will treat you exactly as you treat me and others. Among my people Coren Re Mydala... for what you said to my *anome*, it would be very acceptable for me to stomp you into the deck of this ship." Androcles said stepping closer to him now. "That is something I won't do right now however. Perhaps several lessons in manners from your former wife are in order."

"You do nothing right now with your threats of violence but reinforce the knowledge my people have of yours Prince Androcles." Coren snarled.

"I don't particularly care what you or your people think of me or my species Regent Re Mydala." Androcles stated. "I have many people a lot more fearsome than you who don't like me very much... and trust me when I tell you that list is going to get much bigger in the coming months. You can take a number and get to the end of that line if you like, or you can start acting like the even minded politician and diplomat that Devra and your daughters have said that you are! Or were they wrong when they said that about you?"

Coren's coarse reply never came out as his eyes grew a little wider and he stared at Andro. "What?" He finally asked.

"I do not care what history you have with the Protectorate Regent Re Mydala." Androcles said evenly as he looked at him without blinking. "If what Dutkne has told me is accurate, then it was a mistake of monumental proportions on the side of the Vanari that started the war you had with them. And it is my understanding that the man who started this war still serves among your military. I can overlook that however, for that war took place over ten thousand years ago, long before you or Dutkne or I were ever born. Long before any of us in this room were born I believe. It is not our history and it does not have to be our future moving forward. Unless you wish it to be."

Ardan moved up beside Coren now, his eyes on Andro. "What are you saying?" He asked softly.

"I'm saying that you and the Vanari can cling to the preconceived notions that you have obviously made and adhere to of my people, most of them formed long before our time... and in many cases very wrong..." Androcles dropped his arms and folded his hands behind his back casually. "You can cling to these notions sir, in which case I will do two things. Dutkne has informed me that as soon as the Protectorate Parliament discovers that the Lycavorian Union has returned to the way my grandfather intended us to be, they will dissolve their government within a week and they will be absorbed into the Union."

Coren and Ardan looked at Dutkne. "This is true?" Ardan gasped.

Dutkne nodded. "The Protectorate was never the true collection of our people." He stated softly. "We have always been the faction that escaped the Black Day and the oppression that followed. I have tried to make that very clear for many years, and it has been ignored by you and the entire SBR. It is within our constitution that when our brothers and sisters here within the Union had finally returned to the instincts and passions of our

past while balancing the future of our people, the Protectorate would be no more and we would be united as a people. So yes... it's very true Regent Vu Lamurrion."

Coren looked back at Andro. "And... and what will you do?" Coren hissed softly.

"It's quite simple really, the Vanari and the Protectorate have upwards of thirty-six major Trade Agreements that are equal to roughly four trillion in profit annually for the Vanari when converted from the Lycavorian Riyal to the Vanari monetary currency of Kanari, is that not correct?"

Coren looked at Dutkne quickly and then back to Andro. "Yes, the figures are somewhere near that." He answered.

"Even with how you regard my people you still conduct trade with them for it benefits the Vanari. A substantial trade I understand. That's very convenient for you Regent Re Mydala since the Protectorate needs your trade goods." Andro asked.

"Yes." Ardan said haltingly.

Andro nodded his head. "If you do not wish to associate with Lycavorians... then we will not associate with you since that is what you seem to want. If you are not willing to look past what you think you know about my people, as wrong as it is, then I have no use for you and nor do my people." He said. "When the Protectorate is fully part of the Union, which will take only weeks from what Dutkne has told me, I will buy out the remainder of these Trade Agreements with the Vanari Empire and I will cancel them. Permanently. You will have what you so want it seems, and we will go forward since the Union can more than adequately replace what you trade with them for."

"You wouldn't dare!" Coren hissed.

Androcles smiled. "Ask anyone you care to Regent Re Mydala... I am not a politician and I will do what is in the best interests of my people and those who call the Union home." He answered. "If that means negating every agreement we have with the Vanari I *will* do it. And I won't think twice about it. The Vanari will still be able to travel freely within Protectorate space and I will even allow them entry in Lycavorian Union territory, but we will not be trade partners in any way shape or form."

"You... you would end thousands of years of open trading and partnership?" Ardan gasped.

"I will end a one sided friendship sir." Androcles corrected him. "Dutkne has told me how my people are viewed by many on your Board of Regents, and the brief conversations I have had with Wayonn only confirm this. As my father and mothers would not have tolerated it... nor will I."

"You... you threaten us?" Ardan gasped.

Andro shook his head. "Not at all. I'm merely telling you how it will be."

"Unless we bow to you?" Coren growled.

"I only want you to listen to me. Listen and perhaps take the blinders you wear off for a moment and see that we are not like you believe us to be." Androcles said. "That perhaps there is more to my people than what you have always believed."

"And if we choose not too?" Coren snapped. "What will you do? Kill all of us?"

Andro's smile was anything but pleasant. "If I had wanted you dead Regent Re Mydala... you would already be dead as Dutkne has already stated once." He spoke. "If you do not wish to listen to me then I will return you to your ship. You will then be escorted to the border of Union space where you can jump back to the Beta Quadrant or remain within The Wilds. I don't care which. But if you attempt to enter Lycavorian Union space uninvited again for any reason, that will be seen as a hostile action and I will act accordingly. You would not like my response."

"Then you are threatening us?" Ardan spoke.

"You may call it a threat... I call it a choice." Androcles spoke.

"You will return Devra and my children immediately?" Coren asked.

"Lady Devra and your children are welcome guests within the Union and they are under my protection while they are here. They have come to me asking for assistance in a certain task, assistance which I am providing to them. The choice will be theirs, but I promised to give them that assistance and I will do just that." Andro answered.

"I will not leave Coren!" Devra spat. "I will not leave until I have my daughter back and you will not force me too!"

"Nor will I!" Arduri exclaimed.

Coren turned to look at them. "You risk everything you have Devra!" He shouted. "Your seat on the Board... your status among our people!"

"Caliria's life means more to me than any of that Coren!" Devra barked at him. "And if you were any kind of father it would mean more to you as well!"

"I must think of all our people!" Coren shouted back. "Your actions could well mean the Syndicate will retaliate against us! Against our people! Not against these... these Lycavorians! Do you wish that on your head?"

"Why would they retaliate against you Coren?" Dutkne asked now. "We are no longer in the Beta Quadrant. The Orionis Syndicate has expanded their operations here to the Alpha Quadrant and they have enlisted the aide of several Criminal Organizations that already have a long history with the Union. That is a risk they took by coming here and dealing with these organizations, and now the one that holds over a dozen of your females and quite possibly your daughter Caliria, they have violated an agreement with the Union about transporting slaves through Union space. How does this affect the Vanari Empire in any way?"

"They could blame us for any action you take!" Ardan exclaimed now. "They have eyes and ears everywhere within Vanari space! Even on Austrova! And the damn Eridiani protect them religiously."

Andro looked at Dutkne. "Eridiani?"

"Humans." Dutkne told him. "Humans that left Earth long before the Comet ever came. They settled in the Beta Quadrant and have built a considerable empire of their own with dozens of planets and a thriving economy. Protectorate and Vanari Intelligence agree that they are also the true power behind this Orionis Syndicate. Or vice versa."

"Humans Dutkne?" Andro asked surprised by this information. "Humans control this Orionis Syndicate?"

Ardan Vu Lamurrion prided himself on being able to read people and the look on this young Lycavorian's face told him that this Androcles had no idea of what they were talking about, and if he ability was any good it also told him that he did not look pleased at this information. He stepped closer until he was beside Coren, his eyes never leaving Andro's face.

Dutkne nodded his head. "They are technologically very advanced. They have managed to genetically enhance their people to survive and live among the stars. They are no different than those humans here on Earth, they have just adapted themselves better to life off of a single planet. Something the humans within the Union are just discovering. There are probably some here on Earth who are descended from the Eridiani that returned to Earth two hundred years before the Comet came. This Admiral O'Connor and his wife Tina that you have told me of are the mostly likely candidates and after seeing President Taylor on the Netnews I would say he is as well. I was going to brief you about them before we got sidetracked with Janae and rescuing her."

Androcles looked at the deck for a moment. "Interesting." He said finally. He turned back to the holodisc where Am'uur stood waiting patiently, a small smile on his handsome ebony face. "Am'uur can you get close enough to focus your sensors sufficiently and then tell me how many humans are on Ontahe?"

"Stand by!" Am'uur spoke turning to someone off the transmission grid.

Andro turned back to Coren. "The choice is yours Regent Re Mydala." He said softly. "I suggest you make it now."

"Yes." Ardan spoke suddenly causing Coren to look at him as he stepped forward further.

"Ardan... what are you doing?" Coren exclaimed.

"If he can provide us information that we did not have before then it is worth the risk to remain here and discover what we can." Ardan replied thoughtfully. "He is right Coren... this can not be turned back on us. We are not within Vanari space and we have no control over what they do. He will do it anyway." Ardan looked at Androcles. "Won't you?"

Andro nodded. "Yes I will."

"Then we should see what he can discover." Ardan spoke.

"It is too great a risk!" Coren protested.

"We are not within Vanari space and the risk is not ours." Ardan said. "I believe it is acceptable."

"Thank you Ardan." Devra spoke.

“Do not thank me Devra Re Mydala.” Ardan spoke sternly as he looked at her. “Your actions will not be without consequence and neither will your children’s. At the very least you will lose your seat on the Board of Regents and at the worst, you will be imprisoned and your children with you when you return.”

Devra didn’t blink an eye and nodded her head. “Then so be it.” She said softly.

I have no intention of returning regardless. My future is here. She thought to herself and made the decision easily and it filled her with peace. She did not need to turn to look at Bren to know what was going through his mind or feel his powerful presence behind her.

“Ancheo is realigning the sensors Androcles.” Am'uur spoke again. “In the meantime you should know that the Kochab we captured and interrogated was very helpful. He saw four of the Vanari females himself and is certain of at least a dozen more hidden away here. He says the facility is controlled by a former Overseer in The Wilds.”

Andro’s azure blue eyes grew a little wider. “Which one?” He asked.

“That he didn’t know. Apparently he does not appear very often.” Am'uur stated. “They were all cowards to begin with.”

“With the price your father put on their heads my love I’m not surprised.” Sadi spoke as she came up next to him and took his arm in her hands.

Andro nodded as he looked at her. “No doubt.”

Tastia watched as this stunningly beautiful blond haired Lycavorian pressed up to the side of Androcles Leonidas in a very intimate manner regardless of who was in the room watching.

“This place is where my daughter is?” Devra asked coming up beside Sadi now.

“Given the coordinates your daughter Naesta had that you were going to originally jump to Lady Devra... I would say yes.” Am'uur said. “We picked up a faint fusion traces at these coordinates and it could have only been made by a ship with a Fusion Drive of some sort. They appear to be similar to our new Hyper Matter engines Androcles.”

It was Tastia who spoke next causing everyone to turn and look at her. “What sort of fusion trace?” She asked.

Am'uur’s amber eyes lifted to gaze at her and even from within the exceptionally clear image of the holotransmission their amber color caused Tastia’s breath to catch softly. Tastia had never seen eyes like his, nor a man with shimmering white hair that fell past his shoulders, and she found herself staring.

Am'uur tore his own eyes away from the Vanari female and looked at the data pad in his hand. “A Quantum Particle fusion trace Lady...”

“My name is Tastia.” She answered without thinking.

“Tastia!” Coren hissed at her. “Be silent!”

“Then it was a Quantum Particle Fusion Drive Lady Tastia.” Am'uur finished. “And do not tell her to be silent fool! She obviously knows what she is talking about and you dishonor her with your words! Is this the way you treat all of your females? We should send them back now Andro...” Am'uur stated. “They will only end up getting hurt with the arrogance that oozes from their pores.”

Coren turned to the image and opened his mouth to reply looking at Andro. “Who is this man that he thinks he can talk to you in such an informal manner and refer to us as he does? He does not know us!”

“He is the brother to Lu'ria Leonidas Coren Re Mydala.” Dutkne spoke shaking his head and stepping over in front of Lu'ria and Carisia who were rising to their feet in reaction to his words. “Another Princess of the Union and mate to Androcles. You are simply working wonders with your political skills Coren. Perhaps you should quit while you are still standing.”

Lu'ria stared at Coren as she stepped up to Andro. “We are going to the Mess Lounge my love.” She spoke turning to look at him and Sadi. “I do not think I can stand the pompous attitudes any longer.”

“Nor can I.” Carisia snapped.

Andro nodded to both of them and he leaned over to kiss both of them softly, nuzzling their ears. “We’ll see you soon.” He said. Sadi shared a brief kiss with both of them and then Lu'ria and Carisia left the briefing room holding hands, Ardan and Coren watching them with wide eyes. Ne'Veha stood up now and perched her firm bottom on the table closest to them and Sadi smiled and responded to the obvious taunt. She stepped between her legs and felt those legs curl around hers and pull her close as Ne'Veha slid her arms around Sadi’s waist and she leaned against her.

You are so bad SirsanGai. Sadi whispered within Mindvoice.

I know... but ever since my father I thoroughly enjoy acting in this manner around those who think they are better than us. Ne'Veha answered.

Tastia was the one who spoke and brought them all back to the present after witnessing what Ne'Veha had done. "The Orionis Syndicate ships use a Quantum Particle Fusion Drive Coren." She stated calmly looking back at this strange and exotic man in the transmission with new interest. "They either do not have the resources to build a Hyper Matter Phased Quantum Drive like ours or the Protectorate's or they lack certain pieces of required technology. Their technology is not as advanced as ours when it comes to propulsion." She looked at Coren. "If this is what they followed then it is definitely a Syndicate ship."

Coren turned his eyes to Andro then. "Do all your people act like this?" He barked.

Andro shrugged his shoulders. "Within the Union you are treated as you treat others Regent Re Mydala." He said honestly. "If you act like an *midaeus* to others, that is how you will be treated." He turned to look at Devra. "Devra... this is the ship you were tracking when you came across Dutkne. The one that carried Caliria?"

Devra nodded. "Naesta was certain." She said.

Andro turned back to Am'uur. "It's still there Am'uur?"

Am'uur nodded. "Our sensors can not penetrate the shielding of the docking bay area but there are no trace particles leading away from Ontahe as they were coming in."

"Nine!" The male voice called out and they watched the Lycavorian man come into the transmission. "We're detecting nine human lifeforms Andro!"

"That is the standard crew complement of a Syndicate transport ship." Jokros spoke now moving forward as well.

"Andro we've moved close enough to the planet to intercept common chatter from within the underground facility to the secondary base on the surface. They have been talking about a large slave auction in three days time, which fits with what the Kochab told us."

"Where is this Kochab person now?" Ardan asked. "Can... can we ask him further questions?"

Am'uur shook his head. "I'm afraid not. He had a bit of an accident."

"An accident?" Ardan asked.

"Yes... it seems the drive coils on his ship were not properly aligned and they exploded shortly after he left our dry dock connection." Am'uur answered. "A pity really."

Sadi was the one who could not hold in her snicker. "You have not changed from how our Drow Mistress describes you Am'uur." She spoke.

Am'uur smiled at her and shook his head. "No... it appears not."

"Three days?" Andro said thoughtfully.

"Yes."

"Am'uur... retreat back to the border and formulate a plan." Androcles stated. "I will leave tomorrow night under the cover of darkness. We will meet on the border at twenty-three hundred hours three nights from now."

"Personnel?" Am'uur asked.

Andro turned and looked at Bren. "Bren? One company of RD?"

Bren nodded immediately. "That should be sufficient." He stated. "By then Denali and Arrarn will be back and since we can not take Elynth or Aradace to the surface because of the cold, their skills will be needed. Elynth and Aradace can remain in the *STRIKERS* that will provide support."

Andro nodded and turned back to Am'uur. "One company of *Durcunusaan* RD Am'uur." He said. "My brothers Denali and Arrarn, Lu'ria and Carisia with us on the ground, Sadi and Ne'Veha in the air with Arrarn."

Am'uur nodded. "I will have it ready for you. Androcles... there is something else."

Andro met his eyes at the odd tone of his voice. "What?"

"Three senior executives from AEC are here Andro. Lycavorians. They arrived several hours ago." Am'uur spoke. "I do not believe it is a coincidence."

"Why?" Andro asked and both Ardan and Coren watched him move even closer to the transmission with a serious expression on his face.

“Emulia ran them through the database.” Am'uur answered. “Two of them are from the R&D Division of AEC and the other is an Executive VP. Not the types of individuals who would come here.”

Andro nodded his head slowly. “I will have Marci look into it.” He stated. “Be ready Am'uur.”

Am'uur nodded. “Always.”

Androcles turned as the transmission went dead and he looked at square at Coren and Ardan. “Decision time.” He said. “We are going to rescue those Vanari prisoners and I will fulfill a promise to Devra. You are either going to come and observe or you will be sent packing right now.”

“The Syndicate men there?” Ardan asked. “What do you intend for them?”

“I don't care who they are... they broke our laws and they will be punished. Period.” Andro answered. “After some extensive questioning of course.”

Ardan nodded his head. “We will accompany you.” He said.

Andro stepped up to him and Coren then and nodded his head. “Very well... but know this both of you. I am unlike any Lycavorian you have ever come in contact with. If you betray me, there will not be enough left of you for anyone to find. If you endanger this mission I will insure that you are ventilated out of the nearest airlock never to be seen again. If you wish to work together in partnership you will find no more loyal a friend. If you attempt to do to me what you have done to Dutkne and the Protectorate in the past, what you did to his father before him that started a war, you will earn an enemy that you do not want gentlemen.”

“Again you threaten us!” Coren snapped.

Andro shook his head. “No... I'm simply stating fact. We will be returning to Earth in twenty minutes. You are either on my *STRIKER* or you will stay behind.” They watched him turn and reach for Ne'Veha's hand, Sadi going back to holding his arm. Bren chuckled as he stepped up next to Devra and they all looked at him as Dutkne moved to his right side.

“There is a reason that in many ways he is more feared than his father ever was.” Bren said. “And most were petrified of King Leonidas. Martin Leonidas would have given you a second chance... his son will not.”

“How many... how many wives does he have?” Ardan asked with surprise.

“Four right now.” Bren spoke. “The fifth will become part of their lives in a short time and then they will be complete.”

“Five wives?” Tastia gasped. “Is that not a bit too much? A different form of arrogance?”

Bren did not take offense and looked at her. “In answer to that Lady Tastia I suggest you speak with them. I think you will find that arrogance is not a word that enters into the equation.”

CURILA 6

Wayonn drew his hand away from Martin's chest slowly, breathing deeply and opening his eyes as the ebb of Mindvoice power and influence began to fade from all around them. He lifted his head and saw Martin's dark brown eyes gazing over his shoulder behind them at the door of the empty room, gazing off into some place that Wayonn could never reach. It was something he had seen Sumar do quite often and it appeared that Martin and his son did the same thing as well.

“It is done.” He said softly.

Martin blinked and brought his eyes back into focus and looked at him. “I don't... I don't feel any different.” He said softly.

Wayonn shook his head slowly. “And you will not. With the skills I taught you through the neural booster you managed to shrink the taint to miniscule proportions.” He smiled gently. “You are nearly as powerful as your ancestor Martin Leonidas, as is your son. I haven't felt... I haven't felt such a presence since the day I left Sumar on Lycavore. It is... it is inspiring to say the least.”

Martin looked at him. “Will... Wayonn will I ever act like that again? I... I almost killed my son... I struck two women that I love more than my own life.”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes I know.” He stated. “I don't know how Xaxon is able to transfer parts of his essence back and forth, but he was the equal to Sumar in many respects and he had millennia to discover these things during his entrapment on CS19. No Martin... I do not believe it is possible anymore. You have grown in your focus and ability to concentrate, even in the short time since we last talked, and this only enhances your

natural Mindvoice shields. You and Androcles... you have the unique ability to pull from your emotions to enhance your shields. If I tested Aricia... no doubt she would have this same ability. It is why it is so prevalent in all of your children, but more pronounced in Andro, Denali and the twins." Wayonn leaned back fully and got to his feet. "I sense a much more reduced form of this skill within Anja as well, and it is probably why your children with her will have more focused abilities and skills as they grow within Mindvoice. Her Hadarian genes; they must have taken the virus our people transmit and reshaped it in some form within her body. Combined with the blood and genes of her parents it is undoubtedly why Eliani, Retta and Calyb will be closest to your children with Aricia in skill. Though from what I have felt and seen from Helen and Andro all of your children are uniquely gifted. Zarah's skills are a wonder."

"That is because of what Andro did to save her life. Letting her feed on his blood like she did." Martin spoke rising from the chair.

Wayonn nodded. "The majority of the reason yes, but all of your Queens are individually quite gifted within Mindvoice and while these skills may have been dormant somehow until they joined with you, when combined with your blood and genes, you have passed this unique strength to all of your children."

Martin looked at him. "What are you saying?"

"In essence Martin, you and your Queens have created several new species of Lycavorian with the children you have produced." Wayonn said.

"Come again?" Martin asked confused.

Wayonn smiled. "No matter who they take as mates, even of different species, your blood will always be dominant in every way. Anja could probably explain it better for I think she has some inkling already, but it is almost as if they have taken the best of their mothers genes and somehow merged this with their blood and genes from you. No matter who they have children with, this pattern will continue and your blood will never lose its dominance no matter how many generations pass."

"And that's a good thing?" Martin asked.

"Well... to me it is. To others perhaps not." He replied.

"What about... what about Aikiro and Yuri's children?" Martin asked him. "Narice and Lucia? What about them? Can Xaxon influence them as he did me? Will they put my children at risk because of their blood?"

"In Lucia's case I would say no with confidence." Wayonn answered. "Lucia... she was able to harness that part of her that was Xaxon, control it by force of her will alone until she came together with Zarah. Once that happened, once they shared blood as they did, whatever influence Xaxon may have had was washed away." Wayonn stepped closer to him. "They are meant for each other Martin, by some force or higher power beyond our understanding. You don't intend..."

Martin shook his head immediately. "No." He stated with firm resolve. "She... she saved Zarah's life... and almost died doing it. No... that is something I will never try to interfere with now. I don't believe Andro or any of my children would let me now."

Wayonn smiled. "Whether you choose to openly admit it or not, you have always been one to follow a path that embraces the belief in a higher power. Do not dismiss it now." He said. "As for Narice, if Xaxon had held any sway over her, it was lost the moment she tasted Arrarn's blood and realized all she could have and be."

Martin met his eyes. "I still need to kill Yuri Wayonn. None of them will ever be safe as long as she lives." He spoke in a harsh voice.

Wayonn nodded his head in full agreement. "It is my understanding that we have heard nothing from the High Coven since Aikiro's death and Yuri's escape from Earth. I have seen in Andro's mind the injuries he inflicted upon her, and if she has recovered, yes there will come a time when you will need to end her and the threat Xaxon poses forever. Androcles has told me that Intelligence Intercepts from within High Coven space indicate much confusion and power struggles among the senior leadership."

"It won't remain like that." Martin said. "If she is alive... she'll assume control again eventually. Yuri is a hard bitch to kill Wayonn. I've been trying for years."

"Just as she has with you no doubt." Wayonn said. He moved close to him now his face becoming serious. "What *malda* ideas do you have swirling around in that head of yours Martin Leonidas?"

Martin met his gaze evenly. "It's probably better that you don't know." Martin answered him.

“Martin I... I will not say I know what you are feeling because I don't.” Wayonn spoke. “I do know that you must not act rashly. There is far too much at stake... much of it even I do not understand yet.”

“She is my *Kinsoaurgai* Wayonn.” Martin said softly. “Part of why I am who I am. There was a time... there was a time when I thought that I could survive if I lost one of them because I have Aricia. Now... they all make up a part of me Wayonn... they all hold a piece of me in their hands. We are all part of a whole and I can't let that go. I will never let that go.”

Wayonn nodded. “That whole is going to get larger Martin.”

“What?” He asked looking at him.

Wayonn shook his head. “You will discover it in time.” He said. “It has already begun really, and those closest to you will accept it fully before you do.”

“What has begun? What are you talking about Wayonn? Don't go all cryptic on me now Wayonn.” Martin said.

Wayonn chuckled. “It does not matter right now.” He said with a smile. “And I will not be cryptic with you. I know that it drives you and your son insane. Just as it does Dutkne. No... now is the time for truth in everything we talk of. What I will tell you is that you can not go off on a rampage to get her back and I believe you know that or you would have already acted in this manner.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “Anything I do must be carefully planned or my brother will kill her. I know that and I can't take that chance. I won't take that chance. I will not give him reason to make her suffer. If she... if she believes I am dead then she will not try and fight him or try to escape. Pleistarchus would make her suffer before he killed her and I could never forgive myself.”

“Martin... the women you have chosen to share your life with are powerful in their own right.” Wayonn said. “If they were not, they would never have been drawn to you in the first place or you to them. I have seen in your mind and that of your son what you all mean to each other. What you draw from each other. That very same thing is happening with Androcles and his mates as well. It has happened with several others around you. You must put aside the part of you that is wolf and calls for your brother's blood and embrace the man within you. At least for the moment. I know you can do this for you passed this skill to your son. Even now he is holding back the part of himself that wishes to strike out and destroy those who have hurt his family. To annihilate those who have violated his fifth and final wife and mate.” Wayonn saw Martin's eyes grow wider at this knowledge. “He is holding it back and so are you, for it pulses within both of you like a burning sun. I truly do not wish to see it when he releases it. Nor do I wish to see you when you unleash it. Panos was right when he said what he did... you and your son Martin... you are forces of nature when you get rolling and there is very little that can stand before you. For'mya is an essential part of who you are, as all of them are, and you must not do anything to risk that. Not now. No matter how much anger or rage you have seething through you Martin Leonidas; it must be channeled no matter what.”

Martin looked at him. “Wayonn... do you know something?”

Wayonn shook his head quickly. “No... and I would not keep it from you if I did. Not now... now that our people are finally reunited. Something is happening and your brother is behind most of it, driving it, but your brother is not like you and I and your son and others. You know this Martin. He will do things we would never entertain or tolerate or even think of doing for there is too much honor inside us. I believe Androcles is correct in that he is making a play for the throne of the Union and Sparta. Your throne. The one that was intended for you all along this path you have walked. How he intends to achieve this I do not know.”

“What?” Martin said. “What do you mean intended for me all along?”

“Why do you think the events in your life have progressed as they have?” Wayonn spoke. “Everything... all of it... it has been guided and shaped to insure that you sit on the thrones of your grandfather and father and not your brother.”

“Why?” Martin asked softly. “He's my older brother Wayonn. The first of my father's sons. If he hadn't turned traitor he would be leading the Union and Sparta. Not me. Why is it so important that it be me as you say?”

Wayonn turned his head away and stepped away from him to the window that looked out across the green plains. Wayonn could see Torma and Isheeni off in the distance enjoying each other's company as they sat in the lush grass.

“Wayonn?” Martin asked as he stepped closer.

“I believe events are being shaped Martin... have been shaped for millennia... your life, my life, all of it. It’s being shaped for a single purpose Martin. Androcles bonding with Elynth while still in Aricia’s womb. You finding Canth on Ukwav... me discovering Helen still lived. Finding Avi and City Ship 41 on Lycavore. What happened to both you and Andro on Alba Tau? Now the discovery of this ship on Ritaah? The Vanari becoming part of events now at a pivotal time. It’s all part of a larger cycle Martin. A much larger cycle that is coming to a close soon.” Wayonn said softly. “I can’t fully explain it to you for I don’t truly understand it all myself. What I do know... what I feel with all of my being...” He turned and looked at him. “I am still alive for a reason. My mate... my children... they are all gone, yet I remain to guide those who are my descendants. The descendants of Sumar. Shiria is with your son for a reason Martin. It may seem like it to you, that you made a tactical decision to send Resumar to seek out this new ship and take Athani because of whom she was, but something else drove you to send him and not another.”

Martin looked at him. “You’re saying that somehow I knew they would discover what they have. The ship... the rebels?”

Wayonn nodded. “Of all your sons, Resumar is the one who is more politically sensitive yet still tactically sound Martin, an insight passed to him by Dysea. When you combine his gifts with the skills of Athani, which are driven by everything she has discovered since becoming his wife, you have a tandem that can seal any deal but still be strong enough to defeat all but the largest threat. Shiria knew this; she could feel it in him and regardless of what happened on that ship, she would have revealed herself to him no matter what.” Wayonn faced him and moved closer. “The throne of your grandfather Resumar and the throne of your father’s in Sparta... they were always meant for you Martin. Not for your brother. I also believe your father knew this when he appeared to you that day at Thermopylae. There is a reason for all of it Martin. A reason Androcles is almost as loved as you by our people, but feared by so many more. A reason that so many consider Sadi a reincarnation of your mother in many ways, just as Helen has told her. A reason that we have discovered Arzoal is a Pralor... so many different things.” He looked at him. “And there is a reason that the ruling bloodlines of our people from long ago are all returning to be as one now.”

“Wayonn... you are beginning to scare the *sibfla* out of me.” Martin said.

“Then you are not alone Martin Leonidas.” He said. “For I am scared as well. Something is coming Martin and everything that has happened in the past and everything that is happening now plays a part in all of it. Whether it be to discover new allies... whether it is your son coming out from under your shadow or you finally being free to see all around you as you should, it is all happening for a reason.”

“What reason?” Martin asked.

Wayonn shook his head slowly. “That I don’t know and believe me I would tell you if I did.”

“What do you think it all means?” Martin asked.

“I truly don’t know.” Wayonn said.

“Then indulge me with your feelings Wayonn, because you of all people must have some idea.” Martin said.

Wayonn looked at him and took a deep breath. “I believe a war is coming Martin.” He said softly. “A war that will shape the very foundation of whatever future we will have. The pieces are beginning to fall into place Martin... all of them... and soon they will all be in place and a war unlike any of us have ever seen will be upon us. That is what I believe as terrible as it sounds.”

“Ok... now I’m really scared shitless.” Martin said softly.

Wayonn nodded his head. “I as well. You are the only one I have told this too Martin. I believe... I believe Androcles may have some sense of what I tell you now. He is incredibly perceptive and he hides his thoughts better than anyone I have ever known. His bond with Elynth gives him an edge that even you do not have.”

Martin moved closer to him. “I take it... I take it there is no way to avoid this? This war that is coming.”

Wayonn shook his head. “No matter what we do... no matter how we do it... I don’t believe it will matter in the end. That is why everything we do now... we must return to the true instincts of our people Martin... as your son has. All of your children really. We must be very methodical and cunning and not take anything for granted. We must discover what your brother plans with his Kavalian allies, and then we must stop it. No matter the pain it may bring you... For'mya is meant to be with you. She is part of who you are just as you have said.”

Martin's head tilted to the side and his eyes narrowed. "Why do I not like the way you say that Wayonn?"

"Just remember what you and your Queens have instilled in your children since they day they were born. What you will continue to instill in them." Wayonn spoke. "Even those children you have yet to father." He said seeing Martin's eyes widen. "No matter the pain... no matter the reasons... you will always do what is necessary to safeguard those you love. Blood before all else Martin. Blood before all else. Remember that in the days and weeks ahead." He reached out and placed his hand on Martin's shoulder. "You have no idea how it makes me feel to stand here now. With you. With family. I once thought all was lost and now I see that for everything that was lost during the Black Day and after, so much more was gained. Now... we have much to do."

Martin looked at him intently for a long moment and then nodded his head. "You know... what you just said... it is eerily similar to what Canth told me on Ukwav." He said softly. "That kind of gives me the creeps."

Wayonn nodded his head. "Who do you think taught him what he knew?"

"And Helen?" Martin asked.

"Helen was to be your father's Oracle if you will." Wayonn said. "Events took that away from her... took your father away from her because it was you she was supposed to serve and guide all along and not him. Why do you think it just happened to be Helen that you were returned too as a child? At least that is what I believe. Just as it is my grandson Dutkne who will now serve and guide Androcles. He has already begun that and as each day passes he grows into the role more and more, though I doubt Dutkne and Andro will allow themselves to act in a similar manner as you and Helen. As a pair they are... they are quite unorthodox. You see... everything is coming together Martin. Everything."

Martin took a deep breath and shrugged his shoulders. "Well fuck it! I'll do what I have always done and take it as it comes. Never fear the unknown." He said laconically.

Wayonn smiled and nodded. "Never fear the unknown."

Naesta sat quietly in the chair and watched fascinated as Anja, Ceuma and Sivana worked at the three computer consoles within the spacious infirmary of the Leonidas Retreat on Curila 6. Her eyes kept returning to the long dark blond hair that the clone of Queen Anja had and then kept darting between the three of them. The computers were arranged in a large circular pattern around what appeared to be some sort of receiving station. Naesta had been frightened and very intimidated at first of Martin Leonidas and what she had seen when they had first arrived. She had never had much interaction with any of the many Lycavorians at the embassy on Austrova and in reality the actual physical size of many of them was very imposing to her. It did not help that her father's arrogant and superior attitude and teachings in regards to them had also permeated her mind and she never went out of her way to talk to any of them. Now however, Naesta saw them in a completely different light because of the book Androcles had given her and she had read while coming here and it was eye opening to say the least.

When she had discovered Caliria had been captured, Naesta was beside herself for hours, unable to act or to think rationally. She had looked up to her older sister for her inner strength and courage. Caliria may have had dark hair, but she never once considered it to be a defect of any kind and she fought for the rights of all dark haired females. It was not until her mother and Arduri had arrived that she found her center once more. As she looked at Anja, she remembered her reaction at realizing that her fellow Queen and lover was a captive. She had watched her and the raven-haired mother of Androcles together. They had held each other tightly, wrapped in his arms and they nuzzled Martin Leonidas and each other and then they had set about other tasks. Tasks that would keep them focused and prepare for what Wayonn had told her would take place. They would go after her of that he had no doubt. The wolf within them would never forsake her no matter the reason. While Aricia had gone with their children and her mother to another portion of the massive compound, Anja had come here with Sivana and Ceuma to work on what Naesta had brought from her mother in regards to Vanari physiology and finding a way to cure the Vanari of their curse from the Syndicate.

It was here that Naesta learned that, while Ceuma may have been a clone of the fiery Persian red haired Queen, she was most definitely her own person with her own personality and her own likes and dislikes. She also discovered that Queen Anja and her sister Princess Sivana considered Ceuma their sister by blood. There was no question in either of their minds about whom she was. It amazed Naesta that a clone could be so utterly

perfect in every way and she found herself looking upon Ceuma in a fashion that she had never looked upon another woman. Naesta had bedded with other Vanari females during her lone Celebration of the Hundreds and she found it very pleasurable, but since that time she had never even entertained the thought of being with another female. Whatever the reasons for that, Naesta found she could not push the thoughts of being with this clone from her mind.

“Naesta?” Anja’s voice pulled her out of her thoughts.

Naesta blinked several times and shook her head. “I’m... I’m sorry. Yes?” She asked as she came to her feet quickly.

Anja looked at her and smiled. “I’d like Ceuma to give you an examine if that is alright. The information your mother gave to us is an excellent base source, but it would be even more helpful if we could examine you.”

Naesta nodded her head. “Of course... anything I can do to help.” She answered quickly.

Anja pointed to a nearby bed as Ceuma got off her chair. “If you could disrobe and lay on the bed.”

Naesta moved to the side of the bed and quickly began to strip out of her Cadre uniform as Ceuma came over holding a small data pad. Her jade green eyes were focused on the pad and she typed into it quickly as she stopped next to Naesta.

“This is actually my first examine and I...” Ceuma looked up and stopped talking as a heated flush surged across her skin while looking at Naesta standing completely nude in front of her. Ceuma blinked several times as her eyes caressed Naesta’s body. Her denim blue skin was totally flawless without a mark on it. Her breasts were high and firm with small areolas and nipples that protruded upward proudly as if they were begging for attention. Her five foot seven frame was lean and muscular, with a tattoo of a strange blue flower on her right hip, very close to her heated center. A center that was at the moment puffy and fully exposed and was giving off a very enticing banana kiwi scent. Ceuma dragged her eyes back up Naesta’s body quickly. “I... I might take a little longer than Anja or Sivana.” She stammered the last words and part of her sentence. It was Anja who noticed it and she lifted her head to look over at her cloned sister. “If you could... if you could get on the bed.”

Whatever the events surrounding Ceuma’s creation, there was no denying the pull both she and Sivana had toward her and the protectiveness that came from a connection only sisters could have. A clone she may have been, but she was certainly her own person in every aspect. Her healing skills were rapidly increasing with the amount of time they spent with her and Eurin’s prediction that she would not be as strong in her abilities was falling to the wayside quickly. Ceuma was turning out to be a very strong healer and she absorbed information like a sponge. While the amount of healing power she could generate right now was limited because she had not actually ascended like Sivana and herself, Ceuma was definitely showing the signs of being able to do what only Anja, Sivana, Eliani and Retta showed right now. That was to draw from the very life all around her to power her healing ability. Anja Leonidas had also been sharing the bed of four other women for the last twenty-six years of her life and thoroughly relishing in every moment she spent with her fellow Queens and lovers. She was also easily able to detect the spike in Ceuma’s scent. While clone’s did not have natural scent glands when they were created, it appeared because Rinard had turned her so soon after waking her from the chamber she was created within, she was developing scent glands within her body in all the usual spots. Whatever had happened, the fertilization of her clone genes had not fully matured when Rinard bit her and this had caused the more advanced Lycavorian cells like her scent glands to develop at a much slower rate. Since Joci had claimed her with his own bite, his purer blood was speeding up the growth of these glands and Ceuma was developing her very own Basil and lime scent which Anja and Sivana had already committed to memory. Anja knew it was also a scent that was able to drive Joci insane with the sweetness of it because he knew Ceuma was his mate and loved only him. Since Sivana had never been with another woman, she did not notice the spike of arousal in Ceuma’s scent that Anja did. Ceuma had experienced another woman before when Rinard forced Duewa upon her, but it was not by choice and in one of their hours of speaking Ceuma had told Anja she did not enjoy it in the least. That is why Anja’s jade green eyes filled with interest.

Naesta complied with Ceuma’s direction and stretched her lithe frame out on the medical bed as Ceuma stepped closer. Naesta’s green eyes watched her carefully, filled with interest she had never had before, and she found herself having to consciously keep from excreting her oil. She watched Ceuma stretch her hand out over

her abdomen and it began to glow with a soft white color and dropped to within an inch of her skin. Naesta watched this with incredible fascination.

“Ready sister...” Sivana called out.

“Yes.” Ceuma answered.

“Call off your findings as you process the information.” Anja stated turning back to her screen.

“Female... categorized as Vanari.” Ceuma spoke as she got control of her own feelings and set the pad on the bed beside Naesta and began to type with her left hand initiating the bed’s medical sensor into operation beneath where Naesta lay. “Internal organ structure 99.3% comparable to bipedal humanoid species. 1.7 meters in height, 58.9 kilograms. RHR is 55, calculating MHR as 225. Blood flow is 98.2 percent of maximum efficiency. Lung to blood Oxygen Saturation is 103%. Bone density is eighty-three percent of the established Lycavorian and Hadarian standards. There appears to be an extra Parotid Salivary Gland that resides beneath the 10th thoracic rib structure approximately 3.3 centimeters in length and 75 grams.”

“Focus on that Ceuma.” Anja called out.

“Enhancing the spectral ratio.” Sivana spoke. “Wow!”

Anja nodded. “Yes.”

Ceuma turned from the bed back to Anja. “Did you find something?” She asked.

“Yes we did.” Anja spoke as she adjusted the imaging on her monitor. “Come see.”

Ceuma turned back and looked at Naesta. “Would you care to see?” She asked.

Naesta nodded. “Very much so.” She answered.

Ceuma motioned with her head and without bothering to reach for her clothes Naesta got off the bed and padded across the cool floor to stand beside Ceuma as Anja adjusted the monitor. Ceuma leaned closer and her eyes narrowed somewhat. “Those are Vibramal cellular compounds!” She said finally.

“Very good sister!” Anja exclaimed. “Yes they are... Level Five Vibramal cells to be exact.”

Naesta looked between them quickly. She was learning that Lycavorians, or those turned by Lycavorians were very open minded and because of how their culture was, they were not as intensely modest as many societies. The females dressed to accent the curves and figures of their bodies and were not worried about having how they dress dictate a reaction from a man. In her short time in Gytheio and at Androcles’s villa she was well aware of his mates and sisters wearing little in clothing, or simple robes with nothing underneath them. They were open about their sexuality because their culture did not tolerate lewd remarks or inappropriate action by males of any kind. Naesta had always hated being stared at by the Eridiani men who frequented Austrova for they would often gawk at the Vanari females and make vulgar comments or gestures towards them. Standing completely naked among these other women did not make Naesta feel uncomfortable in the least.

“I have heard my sister refer to these cells before.” Naesta spoke watching as they looked at her. “My medical knowledge is not as extensive as it should be.”

Anja looked at her. “Vibramal Cellular Compounds are very rare in Union space. Only one species has them, the Sulfar, and they are used in a similar manner as the Vanari. This extra Parotid Gland that you have... this is what regulates the oil you secrete through your pores isn’t it?”

Naesta nodded in the affirmative. “Yes... we... my people call it our Alkay.” She said somewhat sheepishly. “Our level of attraction to someone.”

“And you can regulate what you secrete correct?” Sivana asked.

“It would depend on...” Naesta stopped suddenly feeling embarrassed speaking about this with them.

Ceuma detected this in her and reached down to take her hand causing Naesta to meet her eyes. “You are among friends now Naesta Re Mydala and you are considered a friend or you would never have been allowed to come here.” She said softly. “You do not need to be embarrassed or afraid among my sisters and I.”

Anja watched Naesta stare at her sister and then saw her face relax as she stepped closer to Ceuma. She turned back to Anja. “It depends on how attracted we are to a person.” She said more confidently now. “The more attracted we are to an individual, the more potent the Alkay we secrete. It is more pronounced and persuasive in Vanari females than males, but they can secrete Alkay as well.”

Sivana nodded. “That makes sense; this extra PSG is larger in the females than the males according to the anatomy charts your mother sent to us.”

Naesta nodded. “That is why the Orionis Syndicate holds the sway over my people that they do!” She said quickly. “Our scientists and doctors can not determine what it is about our bodies that this chemical the

Syndicate threatens to use can alter in such a way! We tried many centuries ago but were never able to find out. When the Syndicate discovered what we were doing they attacked one of our colonies. They... they sterilized over a thousand Vanari females! Caused their bodies to somehow tell them they were now male, altering their internal chemical balance in some way and essentially sterilizing them! After that we stopped trying to discover a way to cure ourselves! Our leaders... the Regents are too frightened to take action. The Eridiani are very well connected and they have spies everywhere. The Regents fear angering them and they will not allow us to do anymore research!"

"Eridiani?" Sivana asked.

"Humans." Anja answered for Naesta. "Humans who have evolved much more than those who live here on Earth. Higher brain function, heightened physical endurance and abilities. I read all of that part of your mother's report."

Naesta nodded. "Yes. Many of them seem harmless... but they are not. Caliria was... she was seeing one of them before she was taken. She had been seeing him for several months and seemed taken with him for some reason but Arduri and I never trusted him. Eridiani males target dark haired Vanari because they know those of us with features like me will have nothing to do with them. I think Caliria was drawn to him because he paid attention to her, but Arduri and I saw right through it. He was... he has disappeared as well and we do not know if he is the cause or if he was simply killed for being in the way."

"And you believe your sister was close to discovering a cure?" Anja asked gently.

Naesta nodded slowly. "Caliria is three hundred and twenty-six years old and for the last hundred years she has dedicated her life to discovering a way to counter the Syndicate's hold over my people and gain equal rights for those Vanari females like her. With dark hair. She has spent the last decade going back to school for different things to try and learn all she could. My mother believes that the Syndicate... she believes somehow the Syndicate discovered Caliria was doing this work and they took her because she was close to finding a cure."

Sivana moved up beside Anja. "We're not even going to touch that little tidbit." She stated. "The color of someone's hair does not make them who they are. We saw that in the information from your mother. That is simply disgusting."

Naesta looked at them, her eyes finally going to Ceuma. "You can help us can't you?" She asked turning to Anja. "Wayonn... he said your people are almost magical when it comes to medical science and research. Androcles... your son... he promised us he would find my sister."

Anja's jade green eyes grew a little wider. "Androcles promised you that?" She asked softly.

Naesta nodded quickly. "Yes..." She saw the look on Anja's face. "He... he was not telling us the truth was he? I think I would understand... it must be very hard for him right now and he told us what we wanted to hear didn't he? He will not be able to find her will he, even if she is meant to be with them as they say?"

"Meant to be with them?" Anja asked gently.

Naesta nodded. "Sadi and the others that are his wives. They told us... they told us that they could feel my sister and that she was meant to be with them."

Anja's jade green eyes grew a little wider and she shook her head and reached out to take Naesta's hand. "Then if what you say is true young lady..." She replied. "If Androcles Leonidas promised you he would find and rescue your sister then you can rest assured he will do just that. Androcles is like his father in that regard. He has never broken a promise he has made. To anyone."

"That... that is impossible isn't it?" Naesta asked. "To never break a promise?"

Anja chuckled. "I don't think he or his father know how to spell the word impossible." She answered. "No... if that is what he told you then that is what he will do. And if he sent you here then he meant for us to help you and we will."

Naesta felt a great weight beginning to lift from her shoulders and she squeezed Ceuma's hand tightly without even realizing it. "Can you?" She asked. "The chemicals that the Syndicate uses to break Vanari females, it degrades the Neural Synaptic patterns of our brains with extended use. If we do not find her soon... find a cure soon... my sister will become nothing more than a shell and then... then she will die."

"We won't let that happen!" Ceuma exclaimed now catching Anja and Sivana by surprise with the passion in her words. "I promise you we won't let that happen!"

Anja smiled and looked at Ceuma and then to Naesta. "My sister speaks for all of us." She said. "We are stuck here for the time being and working on this will keep my mind off other things. We'll need you to remain with us so that we can run tests and such if that is alright with you."

"To save my sister I will do anything." Naesta said.

"Good... then so will we." Anja said. "We should probably..." Anja's words were cut off by the sound of the doors to the examination rooms opening and they all turned to see Joci moving into the large room his eyes focused on the pad in his hands.

"Lady Anja... Atropos wanted me to insure that you know what the new codes are for..." Joci looked up and his dark eyes went wide at what he saw and he came to an abrupt halt spinning around in a blink so that he faced the other direction.

"Joci my mate... stop!" Ceuma exclaimed as she instinctively moved in front of the very naked Naesta and held her against her back with one hand on her naked hip.

"*Sibfla!*" Joci barked. "Forgive me! I didn't know... the doors were..."

Naesta found herself incredibly aroused with just Ceuma's hand on her naked flesh and she had to concentrate very hard to keep from releasing her Alkay. As she shyly looked around Ceuma's shoulder at the Lycavorian's back she could not help but take in the powerful ripples of his muscles under the thin shirt, or the incredible dark dreadlock hair that he sported. He was very tall, easily almost two meters in height. Ceuma grabbed the sheet from the nearby bed and wrapped it around Naesta before moving to stand beside her husband and mate. Naesta watched as Ceuma curled her arm around his waist and she looked ridiculously small compared to him.

"Ceuma... the door wasn't locked!" He hissed softly. "I'm so sorry!"

Ceuma smiled up at him and the horror filled look on his face and she leaned up on her tip toes to nuzzle his shoulder and chest. "You didn't know and I forgot to lock the door." She stated softly feeling his aura reach for and wrap around her and relishing in the feelings that gave to her.

He held out the data pad to her. "The new codes for the Command Center." He said sheepishly.

Ceuma took the pad and pulled his face down to hers. "Kiss me." She said seductively, staring up into his handsome face.

"Ceuma... there are..." He protested.

"Better do what she says Joci." Sivana spoke from behind them with a smile as Anja was grinning. "She's really coming into her own lately!"

Joci looked at his mate's jade green eyes and smiled at her beauty. He leaned over further and kissed her deeply, savoring the taste of her full lips and inhaling deeply of her newly discovered and increasingly powerful scent. Ceuma closed her eyes in bliss and squeezed his powerful arms until he drew back slowly. He leaned over even more and nuzzled her cheek and ears. "I will see you tonight my beautiful mate." He whispered.

Ceuma grinned. "Yes you will." She stated confidently. "And I intent to feast on you my handsome mate."

Joci grinned. "Promise?"

Ceuma nodded. "Yes I do."

"Since you are all here... then I no longer need to find you. The codes for you and Sivana are included with the pad. As well as codes for Naesta so that she may move around freely. Her biometric signature has already been entered into the database." Joci stated. "I will leave you to continue your work. Until tonight."

Ceuma nodded and pulsed him with her aura as he was leaving and she waited until the doors had slid shut before she walked over and locked them. She turned back to look at Anja and Sivana who were smiling at her knowingly.

"What?" She asked as she came back over to them.

"So much for the reserved and controlled sister we thought we had uh Anja?" Sivana spoke.

"Really Ceuma... you must control yourself when Joci is around. Your desire for him makes you breath too fast. We are afraid you might hyperventilate or go into shock!" Anja added.

"As if Martin and Belen don't affect you in the same fashion!" She stated defensively. "You and Aricia practically wet yourselves when you are next to Martin Anja! And your heart rate doubles because of your desire for Belen Sivana. You have no right to comment on how I act when my husband and mate comes into the

room.” She said tossing the data pad at Anja and moving back to stand next to Naesta who was looking at her with wide eyes because of what she had felt when Ceuma touched her naked flesh.

“He... he is your husband?” Naesta stammered keeping a tight lid on her emotions as she asked. Ceuma’s touch had ignited something within her and then seeing her powerfully built husband and his long dreadlocks had only made it stronger.

Ceuma nodded. “Yes.”

“He is... he is very large.” Naesta commented.

Ceuma looked at her almost dreamily. “You have no idea.” She said playfully.

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

The *Durcunusaan* had pushed the Netnews teams surrounding Gytheio and Cranae Island several kilometers back by now and the nearest Netnews crews had to set up their equipment on mountain plateaus above Gytheio. These perches afforded them little more than very long distance images which were grainy and practically unusable due to heavy interference being put off by surveillance inhibitors that now surrounded the entire area. Netnews drones were not allowed in the air within five kilometers of Cranae Island and after the first one to violate the order had been shot down, no one else dared disobey it.

While the outer shell of the villa had always been there, Andro had never renovated the entire structure for he never intended to use it all. It had taken *Durcunusaan* engineers only two and a half days to not only renovate the two huge, remaining wings of the villa, but also install furniture, decorations taken from Andro’s apartment on the Royal Villa Estate and items that Sadi and the others had picked out but not gotten around to purchasing just yet. There was also a high level Command Center that Andro could use to talk with any ship or planet or military unit within the Union easily, as well as many that were not inside the Union since the exact range of the facility was classified. Now the villa was broken into five different wings, one used exclusively for Andro and his mates with five additional rooms to accommodate any of his siblings when they were there, two that were being used for the ever growing number of men and women who were staying at the villa for security purposes, and one that held a barracks type structure.

The main circular section of the villa, which housed the kitchen and living space and greeting area, was where Coren now stood with Ardan and Tastia staring with wide eyes as Andro, his sister and his mates greeted the four massive dragons on the outdoor patio. The sheer size and enormity of the creatures was hard to take in, but watching as they interacted as if they had nothing to fear from them was unbelievable. The sun was getting low in the sky as they had landed on the new pad near the beach and made the short walk to the villa. Coren and Ardan could see the extremely heavy security that surrounded the island as they circled, counting well over fifty heavily armed men and women who made up this *Durcunusaan* as Androcles called them. There were half a dozen large water going craft anchored around the island on three sides and Coren could not guess what they were for since he saw no personnel on them as they landed.

Coren turned when he heard voices behind them and he saw the large Lycavorian he now knew was called Bren standing very close to Devra as they talked softly near the counter by the large kitchen and appeared to be pouring drinks. He was standing far too close to Devra for Coren’s taste and he was going to move and say something when his daughter’s voice stopped him.

“Amazing isn’t it?”

Coren turned back around and looked at his daughter, seeing where she was looking on the patio at Andro, the others and the dragons.

“These... these creatures are pets Arduri?” Ardan asked.

“Pets?” Arduri asked turning to face him. “No Regent... and please don’t let them hear you call them pets. Elynth is particularly sensitive.”

“Elynth?” Tastia asked.

Arduri didn’t look at her on purpose and motioned with her head outside. “The obsidian colored dragon.” She told them.

“Dragon?” Ardan gasped. “They... they are dragons? They breath fire and fly and...”

Arduri nodded with a smile at his reaction. “Yes Regent... just as we read as children. They are very real however. Elynth is Androcles’s Bonded Sister. They became connected while he was still in his mother’s womb.”

“Connected?” Coren asked. “What do you mean?”

Arduri turned back to face him. “You have heard of this skill that Lycavorians possess? They call it Mindvoicing.”

Ardan nodded his head. “Yes... of course. It is one of the reasons the SBR and many of the other Regents do not trust them. This skill allows them to read the thoughts and minds of others.”

“That is a falsehood that has been perpetrated with rumors started by our people who did not know any better Regent Vu Lamurrion.” Arduri answered quickly.

“Arduri you will watch your tone of voice!” Coren snapped. “Ardan is correct and our own Intelligence confirmed this knowledge.”

Tastia saw Arduri’s greenish blue eyes darken at her father’s order and her own green eyes grew a little wider when Arduri answered forcefully.

“Our intelligence is wrong father!” She hissed softly. “It has always been wrong because we chose not to investigate fully. While Mindvoicing does give them this ability, it is strictly forbidden in their culture to do such a thing. It is considered an enormous breach of honor within the Protectorate and a high crime here in the Union.” Arduri told them. “And there are only a handful of Lycavorians who even possess the necessary skill to do it. Androcles is bonded within Mindvoice to Elynth... they can speak to one another, do amazing things when they are flying...”

“They... they ride on these cre... on these... dragons?” Tastia gasped.

Arduri finally looked at her but it was a look of contempt. “Androcles and almost all of his brothers and sisters, they are all bonded to dragons. His mothers as well... and his father was too. There are almost a thousand of them within the Union... Bonded Pairs they are called. And the dragon population increases every year. Where they once stood on the brink of extinction, they now number well over ten thousand. Dragons are a member of the Union and their Elder Mother even holds on seat on the Union Senate.”

“Then they... they are intelligent?” Coren asked softly.

“Very much so.” Bren’s voice carried to them now and they turned as he walked up with Devra beside them carrying glasses. “More intelligent than many who walk on two legs Regent Re Mydala.” He held out the sterling silver glass to Tastia first as Spartan custom dictated the woman was served first. “Spartan wine... very strong but aged to perfection. Sip it slowly.”

Tastia took the glass slowly and looked into the deep cup to see it was only half full with a light reddish color liquid. Her green eyes glanced up and she watched as Devra took a sip of the glass she held, looking at her over the rim of her glass. Bren held out another glass to Coren, who took it much more slowly. Devra handed Ardian the second glass she held just as Coren turned and saw Tastia lifting the glass and sipping.

“Tastia!” He rasped.

Tastia’s eyes grew a little wider as the flavor of the wine spilled across her tongue and set her taste buds to screaming for more. She lowered the glass and looked at it. “Oh my... it’s delicious.” She said.

“You should not have drunk it Tastia!” Coren hissed.

Arduri and Devra watched as Tastia intentionally lifted the glass and took another sip and they looked at each other and shared a surprised glance at her obvious defiance of what Coren wanted her not to do.

“You know Regent Re Mydala, sooner or later; you are going to have to discard this idea you have that we are enemies to you and take a leap of faith.” Bren spoke calmly. “We do not invite our enemies to our homes.”

Ardan looked at him as he held the glass. “Your homes?” He asked.

“Where do you think you are?” Bren asked. “This is Androcles’s home. He bought this island when he was much younger and has spent his spare time rebuilding the building we now stand in. This area and his personal wing he restored and rebuilt himself, the events of the last few weeks have caused the *Durcunusaan* to fully complete the other wings.”

“If this is his home... where are his servants?” Coren asked.

Bren blinked several times in surprise. “Excuse me... servants?”

“He is royalty isn’t he? The Crown Prince and now the King of your Union. Surely he has servants to tend to his wants.” Coren spoke. “Isn’t that how your form of government works Commander Bren?” Only Tastia and Arduri saw Devra roll her eyes and shake her head at his comment.

“Do you... do you have some sort of manual that you have been reading that tells you these things in regards to my people Regent?” Bren asked. “There are no servants in the Union. None of the Royal family has servants. Anyone who works for them is very well paid and they do so because of who the Leonidas family is. The men and women who have tended the gardens at the Royal villa in Sparta have done so for nearly three hundred years. They live on the villa estate, and they move about freely within the many buildings there. The King and Queens know the names of all their worker’s children and when they reside in Sparta, once a month they sit down to dinner with those that work there. I would suggest that you begin to take in all around you Regent Re Mydala and learn quickly for if you continue to conduct yourself following this intelligence that you supposedly have of my people you will undoubtedly end up insulting someone. In Sparta that could be a painful venture.”

“What are your duties?” Ardan asked as he sipped the wine now and like Tastia was very surprised at how smooth and delicious it was.

“I was the Commander of Androcles’s *Durcunusaan* Detachment until just recently.” Bren answered the question. “When he choose Jomann as his *Durcunusaan* Captain, he then assumed that duty. Androcles asked me to assist Devra in combining our intelligence on these Syndicate fools since my knowledge of The Wilds is extensive.”

“So you are a foot soldier.” Coren asked with a touch of arrogance as he looked at Devra quickly.

Bren chuckled and lowered his glass of wine to the table they stood next to. “Yes... I am a soldier Regent Re Mydala.” He said softly. “If you will excuse me... I have duties to attend to. Your demeanor is beginning to grate against my self control.”

“Bren...” Devra spoke reaching for his arm as he turned and headed across the room towards the Guest Wing. Her fingers brushed his exposed arm before he was gone and she turned back to Coren, considerable heat in her stunning green eyes. “I swear by the Prophets Coren Re Mydala, if you continue to open your mouth and insult these people I will shoot you myself!”

“Perhaps you will now see that they can not help us!” Coren snapped as he put the wine down. “These Lycavorians are nothing more than brutes with manners! They can not help you find Caliria and more than likely they are only using you to either steal technology from us or simply sell you and our children into slavery!”

“Coren that is enough!” Ardan snapped.

Devra Re Mydala stepped up to Coren after placing her wine on the table. She reached up and stabbed her finger into his chest quite forcefully causing his eyes to widen. “Commander Bren has an Advanced Degree in Mechanical Sub-Atomical Theory Coren! He is a qualified pilot on six different types of ships within the Union and he speaks five different languages!” Devra snarled at her ex-husband. “And that man we spoke to today on that ship Coren? He is following orders from Androcles to find my daughter! Our daughter! It appears Androcles has already kept part of the promise he made to me and he has found Caliria!” Devra stepped closer to him her eyes burning. “You know... I offered him anything he wanted Coren. Technology! Weapons! Engine designs! I didn’t care!”

“Devra how could you?” Ardan gasped with wide eyes. “You... you have given them our most valued secrets!”

“To get my daughter back... I would have given him anything.” Devra stated calmly.

“Devra... you will be imprisoned for this!” Coren exclaimed. “Do you realize what you have done?”

“What I have done is open my eyes!” Devra snapped. She motioned with her head onto the patio. “He refused you know.”

Ardan stepped closer. “What is this?”

“Androcles... he refused all that I offered him.” Devra stated. “His price... his price was far more than you are willing to give Coren. Far more than many of our people are willing to give.”

“Devra what have you done? What did you give him for this help? What did he want?” Ardan pressed.

“An open mind.” Devra said.

“An open... what?” Ardan questioned.

Devra nodded and looked at him. “That was his price Ardan. That is all he wanted. An open mind and a chance to prove to me that what we have believed about Lycavorians is so very wrong and has been for centuries.”

“Impossible!” Coren said. “I don’t believe that.”

Devra looked at him. “No... you aren’t capable of believing Coren. You aren’t capable of stepping outside the tiny little world you have created and seeing things for what they are. You should return to *CITADEL ONE* Coren. If you remain on this world for any length of time you will offend a Lycavorian who does not have the self control that Bren does.”

“I am not leaving without you and our children!” Coren snapped at her.

Devra drew back from him then. “Then you will be waiting for a very long time Coren. I have no intention of returning to Austrova. With you or with anyone.” Devra turned sharply and moved off quickly in the same direction that Bren had gone.

“Devra Re Mydala you will...” Coren began to follow her but Arduri’s words stopped him.

“Do not follow father.” She said. “You will not be allowed where she is going. You, Tastia and Regent Vu Lamurrion will be staying in the new guest wing that was just recently finished. You do not have access to the wing we are staying in.”

“I will not lose your mother!” Coren barked.

Arduri shook her head slowly. “You lost mother a long time ago father.” She said softly. “You will never get her back. Not now. It’s far too late for that. She has discovered something far more important to her here.” Arduri turned and walked away from her father just as Andro and the others were moving back inside.

“Bren!” Devra called as she burst into the corridor that held their sleeping quarters and the large room they had been using as a planning center. The corridor was empty and Devra moved to where Bren’s door was and stabbed her finger on the panel. “Bren... answer me damn it!” She barked slamming her hand down on the panel.

“Devra?”

Devra whirled around catlike as her heart leaped from her chest and she saw him standing behind her. “Bren! Damn you... I asked you not to do that!”

Bren grinned and stepped closer to her. “But you smell so very inviting when your heart is racing Devra.” He stated.

Devra looked up into his eyes and could barely contain the intake of breath that almost escaped. His eyes were blazing with desire and want and she clenched her fists trying to fight down the rising desire in herself.

“Bren... Bren I want to apologize for Coren. He is... he is a fool and...” Devra couldn’t help but stammer as fast as her heart was racing.

“Do you honestly believe what he said bothered me in any way?” Bren asked moving even closer and reaching up to run a finger across her cheek. A move that caused exquisite shivers to race along her nerves and ignite parts of her body that she had never known were so sensitive.

“Well... I... it wasn't... it wasn't proper and...” Devra’s words were stolen away as Bren lowered his soft lips to hers and kissed her. Her stunning green eyes went wide as her entire body exploded with new and wonderful sensations that she had never felt before and then he was lifting her into his arms like a feather and pressing her against the door as he deepened the kiss, his tongue probing and searching and demanding entrance. His kiss was stealing her breath away and there was nothing she could do to fight it.

And then Devra Re Mydala, Regent to the Vanari people, surrendered to the staggering emotions that were surging through her like a rising storm and she wrapped her arms around his broad shoulders and granted him what he so desired. What she so desired as well. The whimper that escaped her lips as she accepted and returned his kiss was a sound unlike any she had ever made as he pulled her tall, lithe body against his and molded her frame to his. She returned his kiss with every iota of passion and pent up desire she had been holding in for so many years. The emotions and feelings that only Bren had been able to get to come bubbling to the surface. Not even Coren had set her body ablaze as it was now, but she was not frightened about what she felt. She would never be frightened again. Devra clutched his head as he kissed her more passionately than she

had ever been kissed before and she could no longer keep her Alkay from seeping through her pores as her body became so aroused she momentarily lost her senses. The oil seeped lightly through her fingertips first as she brought her hands to his face and she felt him flinch ever so slightly as the Alkay soaked into his own skin immediately. She gasped loudly when he pulled his face from hers quickly, Devra feeling suddenly very empty as his lips drew away from hers and she tried to capture them once more. Her green eyes lifted and she panted like a schoolgirl when she saw his black ringed wolf eyes staring back at her and the tips of his fangs protruding from beneath his upper lip. The look was almost feral but to Devra it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen before. He kept her pinned to the door as he slowly brought his hand up and took her fingers from his face, turning it to look at her palm and fingertips, her skin moist with her Alkay. He looked at her then and the wild, smoldering look in his eyes nearly caused Devra to have an orgasm right there. His hard, powerful body was molded to hers and it was driving her insane with need.

“Do you think... do you think you need this to make me desire you Devra Re Mydala?” He asked softly.

“No!” Devra gasped loudly. “But our Alkay... it is also a sign of how much we desire someone as well Bren! How much... how much I desire you!” She cooed as she looked at him her own eyes burning with hunger.

Bren took one of her fingers into his mouth and suckled on it, the Alkay tasting almost as good as she smelled. Devra watched him do this and her passion jumped several levels into the realm of dangerous need. He kissed her fingertip and smiled. “What do you think we should do about this desire we both share Devra?” He asked her in a husky voice.

Devra’s eyes narrowed and she pulled her hand free of his grasp and returned it to his handsome face. “Don’t you dare tease me Bren... you Lycavorian beast,” She stuttered nearly out of control. “Make me... make me yours Bren! Love me as I have never been loved before! I don’t... I don’t want to wait any longer!”

The growl that escaped his throat should have frightened her immensely but as his lips came back down on hers Devra felt nothing but happiness and wanton desire. She slapped her hand down on the control panel on the wall and the door to his quarters slid aside. As she wrapped her arms around his head once more, Bren stepped into his quarters and the old Devra Re Mydala vanished forever.

In a few hours, the new Devra Re Mydala would emerge like a butterfly from a cocoon and a whole new world and future would be open to her. A future she had every intention of grasping onto and never letting go.

Eliani leaped from Thaura’s back with a smile of happiness and contentment. She moved quickly around to the front as Thaura lowered her head down and Eliani placed her palms flat against her smooth copper colored scales.

Thank you sister. Eliani whispered. Thank you so very much!

Thaura’s eyes blinked several times and she let loose a small puff of hair through her nostrils that scattered the hair in Eliani’s face. *We have not done this enough in the last months and it was long overdue my beautiful Eliani. It is something we both need.*

Yes it is. Thaura I...

Thaura shook her huge head slowly. *He is your brother Eliani. You have never held back from him and to start now would be foolish. In many ways you have become a fixture in his life that gives him balance.*

Eliani looked at her. *What?*

Why do you think he keeps you so close? You and he share something that even Zarah does not share with him sister. Thaura spoke softly. *All of us have seen it at one time or another Eliani.*

What do you mean?

Thaura blinked and gently butted her head into Eliani’s shoulder as they heard Elynth swoop down and land a few meters away. *Share with him everything my Bonded Sister. He will know what to do.*

Eliani turned and saw Andro jumping from Elynth’s back. “You cheated!” He exclaimed as he walked towards her.

Eliani crossed her arms over her chest. “We did not cheat!” She stated proudly. “I’m just not as fat as you! We can turn tighter around the clouds!”

“Fat!” Andro barked. “I am not fat!”

They heard Elynth laugh softly within Mindvoice as she came up closer to them. *You do love everything KertaGai cooks Andro my brother. And she feeds you very well.*

Andro stopped in front of his sister and turned to look at Elynth. *Well thank you for being on my side sister!* He snapped.

Elynth brought her wing forward and tapped him gently in the back of his shoulder. *It was heaven flying high again.* She said. *Next time we'll go higher.*

Elynth... we can't go as high as you and Andro. Eliani protested.

Yes I know... that is what allows us to cheat! She replied with another soft laugh. *Come Thaura... let us return to the villa. Anthar calls for me and we promised to clean your scales for Jeth's return tomorrow.*

Thaura flapped her wings lightly. *Not soon enough if you ask me.* She stated. *I have missed by mate, even if he is rather clumsy at times.*

Elynth chuckled. *But he is your clumsy one.*

Yes he is.

Andro... we will see you in the morning. Elynth said as Thaura leaned over and butted Eliani softly.

[Remember what I told you sister.] She said just before cocking her powerful legs and propelling herself into the night sky. Elynth followed quickly and they watched for a moment before Andro turned back to Eliani.

"Let's walk Eli." Andro said bending down to remove his boots. Eliani followed suit and soon both of them were barefoot in the cool white sand. Leaving his boots where they were on the sand Andro reached out and took her hand and started them along the shore towards the point. "So... would you care to tell me what is happening inside you sister."

"Do I have too?" Eliani asked as his brotherly aura filled her senses and put her at peace.

"Well... I think perhaps you have outgrown me putting you over my knee and spanking it out of you."

Andro said. "That might draw unwanted attention as well. They will think we are *malda*."

Eliani laughed and squeezed his hand. "I... I can handle it Andro... really." She said.

"You aren't doing so stellar a job up to now Eli." He said. "You are moody... snapping at people for no reason... and you have nearly bitten Jomann's head off three times that I can remember in only the last four days. Now... tell me what has gotten you torn up inside or I *will* spank it out of you." He looked at her as they walked along the beach and the ocean water swept across their feet. "It's Malic and Nyla isn't it? What happen on Kranek?"

Eliani looked at him with wide eyes. "You know?"

Andro shook his head. "I am guessing." He stated. "But I am relatively certain it has to do with why his scent is nearly gone from you. Now what happened?"

"Andro... am I so terrible?" She asked softly.

"Terrible? I don't follow." He said.

"Nyla... Nyla was injured on Kranek." Eliani started. "She was injured and Malic... he thought he was going to lose her and he said... he said something that I heard within Mindvoice and I don't think any of us really wanted to admit it."

"He loves Nyla." Andro said softly. "You heard him tell her he couldn't lose her. That he loved her more than you."

Eliani stopped walking as they got to the water line and she watched the ocean tide wash across the sand gently. "How... how could you know that?" She asked.

"Eliani... you are perhaps one of the strongest woman I know. There is very little that will put you in such a foul mood as you have been in. I know you sister... I know what makes you tick and it is the only thing that would make you react as you have. Especially towards Jomann." Andro said softly. "Am I wrong?"

"He bit me Andro... our first night together." She told him quietly. "I... we... we thought it made us *anomes* like you and Sadi. Like Father and mother. It just seems that whenever I find... whenever I think I find love... something happens to end that." Eliani turned to look at him. "He loves Nyla more than me Andro." She sobbed now as the tears finally came bursting forth. "He loves Nyla more than me and I don't know what to do because... because I think I still love him but then something happens that makes me question that with all that I am!"

Andro pulled her to him quickly as her tears came and he held her head tightly to his chest as her pain and sadness filled him through Mindvoice. He lowered his cheek to the top of her head and stroked her hair as

the sobs wracked her small frame and her arms crushed around his waist. He knew exactly what she was talking about when she said something made her question her feelings, and it had to do with one six foot three Spartan that was now his Captain.

“I want to tell you something Eliani Leonidas.” He said softly as he pulled her head away from his chest and looked into her eyes. “I want to tell you something that I hope will help you to understand.”

“Understand? Understand what? That I’m destined to be the only Leonidas child to never find love?” She gasped.

Andro smiled gently. “You will be the only Leonidas child to find the same kind of love our mother Anja found with our father.”

Eliani blinked several times. “What... what do you mean?”

“Mother never told you did she?” Andro asked.

“Told me what?”

“Told you of her and Uncle Daniel?” He said.

Eliani reached up and wiped away the tears from her eyes. “What the hell are you talking about?”

“She never told you that when she and father first came back together here on Earth she was in a relationship with Uncle Danny and Julie Collins.” Androcles explained seeing her eyes go wide in disbelief. “That she was just as confused and torn up inside as you are now. She loved father, loved him just as brightly as she loves him now, but she cared deeply for Uncle Daniel and Julie as well.”

“Andro is this... is this a joke?” Eliani snapped. “You are saying mother and Uncle Danny were lovers?”

Andro smiled. “No... it’s no joke.” He stated. “I would not do that to you now sister. Yes they were, for several months at least. You know that I have father’s memories because of the time I was conceived. The turmoil and huge emotional stress that they were both under at the time?”

“Yes.” Eliani answered.

Andro nodded his head. “I have seen this in father’s memories Eli. You are so much like our mother Anja that at times it is frightening. You are an enigma, just as she was back then. The more time she spent with father as they built Eden Center, the more she came to realize she was a catalyst for something very different. Her relationship with Uncle Danny and this Julie Collins ended but she was also the method for Uncle Danny finding Aunt Anuk because all of them had found paths of their own that they needed to follow. Their relationship ended because it was mother who made them all see what they could have going into the future. Once that was done, mother and father came back together as it was always meant to be.”

“Andro... I don’t... I don’t understand.” Eliani said.

“Have you ever stopped to consider for a moment that perhaps you were never meant for Malic and Nyla and that is why events have occurred as they have? That Nyla and then Malic... that they too were only avenues for you to discover what you really wanted?” Andro asked her. “Just as they occurred with mother.”

“Wait... you are saying that I was just a vehicle so that Malic and Nyla could come together?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “Because you are meant for someone else.” He said softly. “Someone who...”

[Do not tell her Andro my brother. Allow her to discover and accept for herself what it is she feels for Jomann. It will only help her, help them both going into the future, because they both are fighting it.] Elynth’s voice popped into his head.

“Someone who is just as intensely passionate as you sister.” Andro continued without missing a beat. “Someone who will worship you and love you until it takes your breath away. Someone who even now is out there searching for you.”

“What... what about how I feel in here *now* Andro?” She asked touching her hand to her chest over her heart. “How do I get over that?”

Andro placed his hand over the top of hers. “Is what you feel in here, in your heart, is it because of what you truly feel inside Eli... or is it simply the desire you have within you to feel it. To experience what you so desperately want to experience.”

“That’s... that’s a stupid question.” She spat defensively.

“Is it? Or is it an honest one.” Andro told her. “This is me you are talking too Eliani Leonidas. Have we ever held back from each other about anything? You knew how I felt about Sadi before everyone else. You told me what Nyla made you feel long before anyone else in our family knew.”

“But you... you made it happen so Malic was there Andro. So that he could become a member of *Mjolnir's Hand*. So that he would be in my life!” Eliani said.

Andro nodded. “Yes I did. Malic is walking the path meant for him sister, and while I did not know *this* would happen, I knew you were to be part of that path in some fashion. I thought it was as his wife and mate like Nyla, but it appears that your true destiny lies along another avenue now and I sincerely apologize for being responsible for the pain and turmoil you feel inside you now.”

Eliani shook her head slowly and squeezed his arms. “It’s not your fault. You were only doing what you thought was best.” She said. “What you sensed we all wanted.”

“You are meant for a different path Eli. One that does not include Malic and Nyla and one that seems to mirror what our mother Anja experienced. Just because our brothers and sisters have found those that they will go into the future with now... it does not mean all of us will.” Andro told her.

“You have.” Eliani said softly meeting his eyes.

Andro smiled and lowered his forehead to hers. “I will tell you a secret Eli... something that only Elynth knows. I am so *nubous* overwhelmed right now I don’t know which way to turn. Finding all of them so soon after Sadi came back into my life, it scares me too death. And I’m still trying to come to grips with the fact that my life has played out so much like father’s life and that isn’t what I wanted.”

Eliani looked at him with wide eyes. “You’re serious.” She gasped softly.

Andro nodded. “In regards to this... yes I am. I am learning as I go here and Sadi is the only one that provides me focus and clarity so that I don’t go insane.”

Eliani wrapped her arms around his waist again and buried her face in his chest. “*Carians* Andro... why does everything have to be so difficult for you and I? Why can’t it be easy like it was for Deni and Lisisa? For Arrarn and Normya?”

“Because of who we are and when we were born.” He answered softly. “Remember, even though you were conceived almost a year later, father was still in the grips of discovering who he was and recovering from what happened on Enurrua. Our mother Anja had just come into her first Phase, and it is usually the strongest as you can no doubt attest too. That combination of emotion within them... it affected you in the same fashion it affected me in her womb, albeit not on as large a scale. It is why we have always been able to talk to one another about anything and everything, no matter how personal it may be.”

“I just want someone who will love me for me Andro! Someone who won’t try to change me! Someone who will hold me and make me feel wanted and desired and blissfully happy. Someone who will take my breath away.” Eliani inhaled deeply of her brother’s scent and took from that scent and his aura the strength and support he was projecting to her. “I thought it was Malic Andro, it felt like it was. But it wasn’t real.” She looked up into his face. “That’s not so much to ask right?”

Andro shook his head. “No it’s not.” He told her. “It’s out there Eli... it’s out there and it may be closer than even you think.”

“I know... I just hate being lonely. And I hate not knowing.” She said softly. “It’s just so depressing.”

Andro smiled and draped his arm over her shoulders as they began to walk again her arms around his waist. “C’mon Eli... you want depressing... let me tell you some stories of father. There are several advantages to having his memories you know. There was this time when he was in a place call Bangkok and...”

Jomann stood within the dimly lit Control Center that was now the heart of Cranae Island and the surrounding area, not to mention the entire Lycavorian Union and sipped the steaming mug of Queen Aricia’s coffee as he watched Androcles and Eliani on one of the two dozen monitors that filled the main room and the wall in front of him. They were walking on the beach a kilometer and a half away on the other side of the island, Andro’s arm draped over his much shorter sister’s shoulders and her arms around his waist. It had happened so very quickly, and it wasn’t until the last day or so that it was catching up to him that he was now the *Durcunusaan* Captain to the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union. His small team of *Durcunusaan* troops, to include Lysandra and the others, were now bunked in a fortified villa overlooking Cranae Island. This would

be their base of operations and where he would stay when he wasn't here. It also allowed him to be able to see his mother and father more often as they had moved lock stock and barrel to Gytheio many years ago. They owned a small café on the main street of the shopping strip in Gytheio and did quite well in fact. His father ran his command from the space station *PROMETHEUS* in orbit and was home almost every night to be with his mate when he wasn't in the field with his men. The love his parents felt was a powerful thing and it influenced all of his siblings as well as himself. They were always touching at home, nuzzling and kissing each other. They had preached to their children to always be open and willing to speak with them about anything and it was the reason he had gone to their home before returning here to Cranae Island and insuring everything was set for the night. He needed advice that only his father could give to him.

"So tell me why you sat through your mother's dinner like a Potarian Sloth boy." Josoric spoke as he leaned against the granite beam on the front patio of the villa. "You are going to hurt her feelings if you don't compliment her cooking."

Jomann looked up at his father from where he sat on the steps. "Father... did you have any doubts at all when you first saw mother that she was the one?"

"Uh oh..." Josoric spoke moving to sit beside his oldest son. "Female troubles. I had better sit down for this." He looked at his son and saw the seriousness on his face. "No." He stated. "From the moment I saw her, the very first moment I caught her scent on the wind I knew."

Jomann nodded. "Then that is what I am experiencing right now."

"Then why aren't you out there pursuing her right now instead of sitting here with your father?" Josoric asked. "She doesn't feel the same way?"

Jomann shrugged. "I don't know." He answered. "Her scent drives me mad! When I look at her eyes I just want to lose myself within them. Her hair is the color of burgundy... her body is perfection... everything about her is perfect."

Josoric grinned. "So what is the problem then?" He asked. "Announce your intentions and then caress her with your aura."

Jomann looked at him. "That would probably not go over very well." He stated.

"Why is that?" Josoric asked. "Our females are independent and strong, but that does not mean they do not like it when a man makes his interest and intentions known to them. Your mother thought I was malda when I did it."

"Father... you are malda." Jomann said.

Josoric waved his hand dismissively. "That's beside the point." He stated.

"Father... it is Androcles's sister Eliani." Jomann said softly. "And she is mated... I think."

Josoric became quiet and looked at his son. "You think?" He said. "She either is or she is not boy. And if she is... then there is nothing to pursue."

"Father I would never dishonor you or mother or our family by violating that sacred law of our people. You know that." Jomann said. "The man who is her mate... who I think is her mate. His scent is nearly gone from her blood father." Jomann looked at him. "What does that mean?"

"Gone?" Josoric asked. "Once mated... his scent would never leave her blood Jomann. Not unless she purges it intentionally if they part ways or he dies."

"I know father." Jomann said.

"Do not pursue this son." Josoric said softly. "She is a Princess of the Union and it could never be. You are Prince Androcles's Captain Jomann and it is your duty to be at his side and protect him. Not to covet his sister."

"Even if every part of me screams out for her father?" Jomann asked.

Josoric nodded his head. "Especially if every part of you screams out for her. She is mated Jomann and a Princess of the Union. It could never be."

Jomann nodded slowly. "She hates me anyway." He said softly. "She thinks I am too reckless and that I should not follow Andro wherever he goes and do as he does."

"Your duty is to your Prince." Josoric said. "He will be King in a matter of weeks now and your duty is to him."

Jomann nodded as he got to his feet. "I should probably get back and check the positions before everyone retires for the night."

"I will get your mother." Josoric said as he moved back into the villa. Jomann gathered his equipment from the chair beside the door and turned to see his mother already outside holding the container in her hand.

"Mother!" He said.

Herolia moved up next to her first born and looked him in his ocean blue eyes. He had inherited his father's physical stature, but he had gotten her eyes and she smiled as she held out the container. "Some food for your team." She said.

Jomann smiled and took it. "Thank you mother."

Herolia reached up and took his face in her hands suddenly and she saw his surprised eyes look at her. "You follow your heart Jomann my son... you follow your heart no matter where it takes you do you hear me?" She said softly.

"Yes... yes mother." He answered looking at her oddly.

"Promise me Jomann."

"I promise you mother." He said.

Herolia smiled. "Good. Now go before the Prince begins to wonder where his Captain has gone! That would not do."

"I will see you soon mother." He said kissing her cheek and then nuzzling her skin with his own.

Jomann's eyes scanned the huge wall of monitors from the perimeter cameras and motion sensors. The island's defenses were now state of the art, the most advanced monitoring systems that the *Durcunusaan* and the *Krypteria* could come up with. Many of the cameras did not even look like cameras, some of them twigs on the sand, or fruit hanging from the trees. The myriad of sensors could detect body heat, motion, heartbeats and in some cases even breathing. The five sleek looking water craft anchored around the island were actually automated sensor and defense platforms, their sophisticated systems continuously sweeping the sky and area around the island for any threats. Jomann knew all this and that is why his eyes stopped and came to rest on the five camera slots at the bottom of the huge wall that were blank with no picture.

"Phicia... why is the bottom row of cameras not on line yet?" He asked.

The *Durcunusaan* female turned in her chair and faced him. "Those are to be the lowlight L79 underwater cameras that cover the inlet closest to the pier Captain."

"We asked for those cameras three days ago Phicia." Jomann spoke.

Phicia nodded. "The procurement officer said it would be another day before they came in on his normal shipment from Apo Prime."

"It was a special request Phicia." Jomann told her. "He should not have waited for his normal shipment. That should have been conducted on a *Durcunusaan* ticket... not a normal one. How much of the inlet is not covered by surveillance?"

She turned back to her console and typed quickly. "Only a two hundred meter section that extends out on either side of the pier until the western sensor net kicks in. We have a dozen *Durcunusaan* stationed on the pier itself Captain and that doesn't include the team at the Gate entrance."

Jomann came up behind her. "These Kavalian dogs have proven to be quite resourceful Phicia and we do not yet know how far that pig Laustinos was able to infiltrate and pilfer our intelligence. The remainder of the sensor and camera nets are fully operational?"

"Yes... everything is online. Elynth and the dragons are in their outdoor pen; our new Vanari guests have settled in for the night it appears, Arduri Re Mydala is in her room studying more history cubes and Zarah, Lucia and Janae are staying on the *SCIMITAR* for the night with Prime Minister Deia and the Feravomir. They left just before you returned. Sadi and the others are in their master bedroom and Dutkne went to stay with Nirilo and Drey in Gytheio." Phicia answered.

"Where are Androcles and Eliani?" Jomann asked quickly.

"North end of the island just walking along the beach." Phicia answered. "Everyone is accounted for Captain and all of our teams have reported in on schedule."

Jomann let out the breath he had been holding and placed his hand on her shoulder. "I am sorry Phicia." He said evenly. "I am still... I am still new to this."

"I think we all are sir." She answered honestly. "I've never been this close to so many of the royal family before."

"Well... as Androcles likes to say... it's on the job training." Jomann spoke.

"Sir?"

Jomann smiled. "A phrase he said his father speaks all the time. It means we are learning as we go. And since we are on the same team now, my name is Jomann, not Captain. If we are going to be together most of the time, there is no need to stand on formality."

Phicia looked up into his handsome face and nodded. "Yes sir." She said. "I mean... yes sir Jomann."

"The surveillance and listening devices in the Vanari quarters are deactivated yes?" Jomann asked.

"Just as the Prince ordered." She replied with a nod.

"You did not mention Lady Devra before... why?" Jomann asked as his eyes scanned the bank of cameras and sensors.

"She... she and..." Phicia stammered and Jomann looked at her.

"What?"

"She entered Commander Bren's quarters about three hours ago. Just after everyone arrived for the night. She hasn't come out since." Phicia answered. "Something tells me they were not sharing intelligence."

"Truly?" He spoke.

"Forgive me... but I could feel the heat of the kiss they were sharing outside his quarters from in here." She answered with a grin.

Jomann smiled. "Yes... I'm sure. Bren has been fawning over her since she arrived. I thought there might be something there."

Phicia smiled as well. "Oh boy was there something there." She stated. "Ephor Dutkne says the Vanari are even more open than Lycavorians and Elves when it comes to what they wear and what they want. And she definitely wanted him by what I saw."

Jomann nodded. "Yes... so I hear that about them." He said.

Phicia looked at him. "You don't find Arduri attractive Jomann?" She asked. "I know she's looked at you a few times with a lot more than causal interest."

Jomann chuckled softly. "Yes... she is attractive... but I have no interest in her in that way." He replied.

"Maybe it's just me then." Phicia said. "I'm a woman and I find myself wanting to eat her up!"

Jomann laughed softly again. "Yes... I understand they are like us in that regard as well and do not draw a distinction between sexes when it comes to relationships. It is a pity their leadership is not as open as the rest of their culture seems to be."

Phicia nodded. "No arguments here." She said. "You know... maybe it's the island itself and it's history." She spoke.

"What do you mean?" Jomann asked.

"Well Cranae Island is a part of romantic Greek history." Phicia answered. "A lot of the *Durcunusaan* agree that Prince Androcles bought this island for Princess Sadi and that he had planned everything just as Paris of Troy did when he brought and seduced Helen of Sparta here on this very island."

"Really... did this Paris accomplish his task as the Prince did?" Jomann asked with a smile.

Phicia nodded. "He sure did... right before they escaped through the underground sea tunnels and returned to Troy. If the history is right they..."

"Tunnels?" Jomann asked turning to look at her. "What tunnels?"

"Legend has it that the entire island is honeycombed with tunnels that exit to the ocean." She answered. "Some of them even within Gytheio itself. They..." Phicia stopped talking as her eyes grew wide. "Oh... *sibfla!*" She exclaimed.

"What?" Jomann demanded.

Phicia turned back to her console and began typing madly. "The tunnels! It is said they are how Paris and Helen escaped the island when her husband showed up!"

"So?" Jomann hissed as a feeling of dread began to fill him.

“Jomann... if the legend is true then the tunnels will be part of historical fact!” Phicia spat. “If they are part of historical fact... there will be maps! Public maps! The island was a tourist attraction in the 20th century!”

“*Nubou lae!*” Jomann exclaimed. “And they are not within our security preparations!”

“*ANSE!*” Phicia barked slamming her hands down on the console. “They are listed in Sparta’s main library!”

“Has anyone accessed these files?” Jomann asked moving closer to her. “Has anyone accessed these files in the last month?”

“Checking!” Phicia spoke urgently. “*Aur carian!* Two days ago!” She gasped. “It was a written book with maps Jomann! It was accessed two days ago and it has not been returned yet according to library records!”

“Who Phicia?” Jomann spat. “Who accessed it?”

Phicia looked up at him. “Tarren! A Captain Tarren from the 57th Division!” She gasped.

Jomann looked at her. “The 57th is based out of Eden City!” He spoke. “The library in Eden Center is five times larger than the one in Sparta... why would he come here to get this book?”

“I can pull his file...” Phicia barked.

“Forget it right now! Is there a computer map?” Jomann asked.

“Stand by...” She asked as she punched keys on the computer. “Got it! Bringing it up on the big board!”

Jomann turned to the table in the center of the room and watched as the holoimage layout of Cranae Island appeared and then changed several times. Phicia appeared next to him quickly, touching the table and the holographic screens. “Is this is?” He gasped.

Phicia nodded. “Yes.”

Jomann’s eyes studied the large map, taking in the dark lines that made up the myriad of tunnels under the island. Two that went all the way to the mainland and one that stretched up into the mountains themselves. “Phicia... eliminate the ones that are too small for people to move through. The sewage tunnels and drainage canals!” She was typing before he finished speaking and the image shifted again leaving five thicker lines that crisscrossed under the island and came together in what looked to be a large center ring. “What part of the island is this circular cavern under?”

Phicia looked at him with wide eyes. “The main villa.” She answered.

“Fuck! Where do these exits come out?” He asked pointing to the four tunnels leading straight up.

“One exit appears to be directly under the new dragon pen. The Prince must have laid the patio foundation directly over the entrance.” Phicia spoke quickly. “Another exits within the treeline on the northern section of the island near the beach! One is under the floor in the kitchen area and the last...”

“What?” Jomann demanded.

“*Son vada carians* Jomann. It comes out in Princess Eliani’s room in the family wing! The stone fireplace!” She gasped.

“Phicia is there any way to detect movement or lifeforms in these tunnels?” He demanded of her.

Phicia shook her head. “No... none of the sensors we have in place cover these tunnels Jomann!”

“Then we must do it the hard way!” He spat.

“Wait!” Phicia exclaimed. “The biometric motion sensors within the villa itself!”

Jomann looked at her. “How are they of any use?” He snarled. “They are designed as interior sensors! They will not pick up anything moving under the villa!”

Phicia looked at him. “Not with main power activated! If I shut down the villa’s power grid, I can realign the sensors to eliminate any know biometric signatures and set them for wide subsurface dispersal movement.”

“You can do that?” Jomann asked.

“Yes... but it takes the entire defensive grid off line Jomann! The power grid has its own internal moving parts! The main conduits fluctuating the power through the system. If I don’t shut it down, the sensors will not give back accurate readings!” Phicia told him. “Jomann... we’ll be completely blind except for the villa’s internal sensors and they only have a range of fifty meters!”

Jomann tapped the implant on his jaw. “Anicetus!” He barked.

The response was immediate as Jomann knew it would be. His senior *Enomotarch* would not rest until he knew his Captain was settled for the night.

“Jomann?”

“Anicetus... Phicia and I have discovered tunnels beneath the villa and the island. She is uploading the map to your DP! Stand the detachment to... I want them in these tunnels from every entrance you see like yesterday!” Jomann ordered.

“Hostile contacts?” Anicetus asked his voice wavering, which told Jomann that he was already moving to comply.

“I don’t know!” Jomann declared. “We did not know about these tunnels until moments ago, and because of the historical facts on this island they were listed in the library in Sparta! They were accessed two days ago by a Union Captain from Eden City Anicetus!”

“Eden City?” Anicetus questioned. “For what?”

“I don’t know!” Jomann spat. “Anicetus... the only way we can detect anything in these tunnels is if we shut down the main power grid and realign the villa’s internal sensors! Phicia is setting that up now! You need to move quickly *Enomotarch!*”

“How much time?”

Phicia looked up. “I’m shutting the grid down now Anicetus!” Phicia barked out.

“If you kill the grid we’ll be blind!” Anicetus yelled.

“If we don’t kill it... we’re blind to the tunnels!” Phicia declared. “Anicetus... there could be bad guys in those tunnels right now!”

“*Nubou!*” Anicetus swore. “Do it Captain! I have the maps! I’m moving the men now!”

Jomann turned to Phicia. “Do it!” He snapped.

Phicia nodded and typed in several commands. As she touched the last sequence, Jomann heard the main power core shut down and power was lost across the entire villa and the grounds except for the Command Center. “Realigning the sensors!” She hissed.

“Quickly Phicia!” Jomann urged her moving closer to the table and the image it was projecting.

“Got it!” She announced looking up. “I reversed the annular confinement beam! The villa’s internal sensors should begin... oh fuck me!” She declared.

“What?” Jomann almost screamed.

“Movement! Movement in the tunnels! I can’t detect any individual heat signatures but there is definitely movement in the tunnels!” She barked.

That was all Jomann needed to hear. “Anicetus we have intruders in the tunnels beneath the villa! We have intruders in the tunnels! Set General Alarm! All stations to posts! This is no drill! ***Soul Slayer! Soul Slayer!***”

Those were two words that Jomann had chosen. It was the name the Evolli had given to Androcles and Elynth during their war because of their actions at Alba Tau and the number of Evolli that had fallen before them during the war. It was a curse in the Evolli language, but when translated to any other language it was a name that many had come to fear. It was the name that Jomann had chosen to alert the *Durcunusaan* all across the planet that there was a threat to their Crown Prince.

Two words that would cause every *Durcunusaan* within a hundred kilometers to drop what they were doing and converge on Cranae Island. Considering how soon it was after the supposed ‘death’ of their King and the other attacks against the Royal family, exactly twenty-three seconds after those two words hit the *Durcunusaan* channel in the open, four hundred and nineteen *Durcunusaan* were moving south.

Cranae Island was about to become a warzone.

CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

NORMYA’S LIGHT

THREE HOURS FROM EARTH

To say that it was not awkward at first would have been an understatement, but Isabella Leonidas was not the same person she was more than two decades ago. She had grown far more mature than even she had ever thought she could, as a person and in her beliefs. The moment Dysea stepped off the *STRIKER DT* on Kranek and was in her arms Isabella knew something was different about her. It was different because of the

stunning female who exited just after she did and the events that had taken place on Belid which Dysea shared with her in only a few seconds of Mindvoice connection. Isabella could also sense Cirith within Mindvoice, and not just in a general sense, but tied together with her *ussta* she-elf in a way very similar to how she herself was. The old Isabella, before motherhood and Martin and discovering her true self; long before her love for Martin Leonidas and Dysea and Aricia and Anja and For'mya and all that it had brought to her; that Isabella would have reacted almost insanely possessive of Dysea in every way. She would have been horrified and savagely angry at the feelings she could feel pulsing from her Dysea for this Cirith. Powerful feelings that Dysea was trying to understand within herself, but in no way dampened the undeniable love and happiness that she felt for her Bella.

That was not the Isabella Leonidas that greeted her *ussta* she-elf.

Though nearly seven months pregnant now, Isabella was still a powerful woman not only in a physical sense, but in the demeanor she projected. The son she had wanted to give Martin was growing within her womb and if his kicking within her womb and his clear presence within Mindvoice was any indication he would be a strong and proud addition to their beautiful family. With Moneus and Carina beside her always, not to mention the two Immortals that Cha'talla had ordered shadow her wherever she went, Isabella led Dysea to the home that had been hers for several months before all of this had begun. Once the happy greetings were all finished, once everyone had departed for their own homes to prepare to leave once more the next day, that is when Isabella sat down with Dysea and Cirith and learned it all. She learned what her *ussta* she-elf had endured, the part Cirith had played in everything and even the sizzling kiss they had shared, they held nothing back from her. Even then Isabella knew, as Dysea knew deep within herself, that Cirith was meant to play a huge and faithful role in their lives. Her years with Martin and her fellow Queens and lovers had bestowed upon her a great belief in faith and destiny, and this was not something Isabella would turn away from now. If Cirith was here, among them now, then it was because she was meant to be, and Isabella embraced that just as completely as she embraced her *ussta* she-elf. A testament to this is when the three women fell asleep on the couch together, their bodies touching and both Cirith and Isabella with their faces buried in Dysea's platinum hair. As the next two days progressed slowly and they returned to *NORMYA'S LIGHT* for the trip to Earth and then on to Curila 6, they were never apart for a moment and they learned all there was to learn of Cirith Esavorna, just as she learned of them and the life she would now have.

Now Cirith stood beside them as they greeted Cha'talla and T'lolt in the private lounge on *NORMYA'S LIGHT*, for that is where she belonged as far as Isabella was concerned. Esther had remained on Kranek to institute the distribution of the serum that would return all the Akruxian people to their original appearance and forever cement them on a path into the future. Cha'talla would remain on Earth for one or two days with Tir'ut, Normya, Lynom and As'hia and then return to Kranek with them to assist his wife and to begin solidify their planet and home with the Union ships and troops that were arriving nearly every day.

Dysea hugged Cha'talla tightly, relishing in the unlikely friendship she had cultivated with him and Esther and all those on Kranek. It was a place she would return to soon with her *Nauta Melme* to show him what Cha'talla had built.

"Return to him Dysea..." Cha'talla whispered in her ear so that only she could hear him. "Return to him and find your center again. Then you will be whole once more."

Dysea nodded her head as she squeezed his thick arms. "He is what I need now Cha'talla ... I know."

Cha'talla drew back while holding her hands. "I will meet with Androcles and establish the perimeters for Kranek's inclusion in to the Union. It is what my people want and it is what I shall give them." He reached to his side and removed the small data cube from his belt and held it out to her. "This is what you asked for Dysea. I did as you wanted, but I don't know why. I do not hold out much hope."

Dysea took the cube from him and looked at it. "There is always hope Cha'talla." Dysea told him still holding one of his hands. "And if this..." She held up the cube. "If this brings hope to even one of your people, is that not worth it?"

"Perhaps... but a large part of me does not believe it possible." He replied. "I made it regardless with Esther at my side as you suggested. Tir'ut and Normya as well. I am not much... I am not a skilled speaker."

Dysea nodded and tucked it into the pocket of her flight suit. "Then leave it to me." She said. "As long as I have your permission to try."

Cha'talla nodded. "As you say... there is always hope."

Dysea looked at T'lolt. "Are you ready T'lolt?" She asked.

"Lady Dysea... I have been ready for this moment since the day he saved my life on Lycavore." T'lolt replied proudly.

Dysea flipped her hand to the side. "Enough T'lolt! We are family now... all of us... and I expect you to leave the formality behind." Dysea took Cha'talla's hands once more. "I will walk with you to the bay... Iriral is returning and I want to be the first to see her."

Cha'talla nodded and looked at Isabella and Cirith. "Until a future time Isabella, Lady Esavorna."

Isabella and Cirith smiled and nodded their heads before they watched Dysea walk out with them. Isabella looked at Cirith then. "I should probably give you an extended tour of *NORMYA'S LIGHT*." She spoke with a smile. "You will need to know where everything is and Dysea will be with Iriral for several hours at least."

"Isabella..." Cirith spoke turning to face her. "I... I know this is very awkward but I... I don't want to be known... I don't want you to think I am trying to replace you in Dysea's life. I can't do that. I could never do that! I..."

Isabella stepped closer to her and took her hands. "Stop Cirith." She stated. "If there is one thing that I have learned more than anything since I met Dysea and married Martin is that everything happens for a reason." She smiled. "You were sent here to be with us for a reason Cirith Esavorna. You carry the blood of a Ruling Lycavorian family in your veins for a reason. These answers will come over time you know. They will come eventually."

"I do not want them to come at the expense of friendships and..." Cirith began.

"Lovers?" Isabella said lifting her eyebrow.

"Isabella... I am not Dysea's lover." Cirith said quickly. "I remained in the shadows almost the entire time I was with her you know this. I..."

"But you wish to be don't you?" Isabella said softly.

"If you expect me to lie I will not." Cirith said. "I will not live a lie any longer. It kept me safe all these years I know... but not anymore."

"I expect you to be truthful." Isabella answered with a smile. "I've tried that lie bit in the past as well. Long ago in the past and it didn't work out then either. Before I met Dysea... a relationship of the kind she pursued, the kind I have now with her and the others, it was not something I ever dreamed of. Something I had never imagined. Now Look at me. I relish the taste of her, her blood, her passion. I relish the taste of all of them just as much. As strange as it sounds Cirith we love each other almost as much as we do Martin Leonidas."

"That does not sound strange to me." Cirith stated.

Bella smiled. "Dysea and I... all of us, we worry every moment that someone will come to us and tell us For'mya is gone forever from our lives. We support each other totally and without question, out of our bed as well as in."

"My... my father has said as much about your family." She said softly.

"You are meant to be part of our family Cirith. With us." Isabella said.

"You sound so sure." Cirith stated.

Isabella nodded. "I am sure. We are sure. Dysea, myself, Aricia, Anja, For'mya... we are far more accepting of things that are meant to be than Martin. He can be very obstinate at times. You want to taste her Cirith; I can see it in the way you look at her for it is how I look at her. How we all look at her, and each other. It is also how she looks at you."

Cirith gazed at her with wide eyes. "What?"

Isabella laughed softly. "You mean to tell me that you are half Lycavorian and you can not smell her desire for you?"

Cirith shook her head quickly. "My father... there were never any Lycavorians around to teach me how to use my wolf skills Isabella. My father would only teach me so much to keep me safe from discovery."

"Well... that will change very quickly." She said with a warm smile. "You were meant to be part of our lives Cirith Esavorna, in every way possible, including in our bed. I do not fear that... nor does Dysea and nor will Anja or Aricia or For'mya when we get her back. Then you will have to taste all of us."

Cirith met her eyes boldly. "That prospect does not frighten me in the least." She said softly.

"Then why do you hold back?" Isabella asked her.

“He frightens me Isabella. What he will do? What he will say? And I... I have never been with a man before Isabella. All these years and I... I always thought I was meant for his father and mother. Ever since I first knew he lived and I saw images of him I imagined what it would be like and that frightens me.” Cirith answered.

Isabella stepped closer to her and pulled her tight against her pregnant body. It was a move that Cirith did not shrink from as she slid her arm around Isabella’s waist for she did find her just as delicious looking as Dysea. “He frightens everyone who first meets him.” Isabella said with a smile. “He absolutely terrified me when I first met him on Earth all those years ago and up until then; I thought I could never be scared by anyone having fought Immortals, and my father’s High Coven assassins. It will be harder for him to accept, not because he does not want too for he will see and feel it much quicker than you think, but because he is too honorable a man. Don’t worry Cirith... you have come home. And here is where you belong... with Dysea, with me, with our lovers and fellow Queens and our children. As it happened with me, it will now happen with you.”

“What will happen?” Cirith asked as her fears about coming here began to slowly drift into the mist of the past.

“You will be reborn.” Isabella said. “And you will not regret one moment of it in the least.”

RITAAH VORTEX CRUISER 341

Shiria entered the large room that they were using as a mess lounge of sorts and found them leaning up against the far wall. Athani sat between Resumar’s legs, her long tail flipping absently against his arm as she leaned against his chest, her lengthy blond hair splayed out to the side. He was holding a half eaten fruit in one hand, while stroking her arm with the other. Shiria simply stood there for a moment watching them, though she was sure at least Resumar and the other Lycavorians in the room could and did smell her easily. Athani Leonidas was unaware of her presence as she leaned over and took a bite out of the fruit they were sharing and then leaned back against him once more. She grabbed Resumar’s free arm and pulled it across her chest, holding it tightly as she got comfortable. Seeing her like this made Shiria very happy. She had been the one to set Athani to thinking about her future and what it held. How she could have so much more than what her father and others could offer to her. When she got word that Athani’Puat had defected to the Union it made her toast with Ckaoa and when they discovered the reasons she had done this, because she had actually fallen in love and then married Resumar Leonidas, Shiria had almost decided to throw a party. Athani Leonidas may have been close to thirty years older than Resumar but you wouldn’t know by looking at them. She could tell just from the way they intimately sat on the floor together that they were highly possessive of each other, Athani even more so of Resumar, though Athani knew she had no need to be.

Shiria was a Pralor after all and just from the simple surface tremors within Mindvoice that Resumar generated she knew he would never need anything more than what Athani gave to him. Unlike his father and brothers, Shiria didn’t sense that another was meant to share their lives. Their devotion to each other was almost a palpable thing and she doubted very much that their devotion to each other could be directed to another woman or man no matter how much they tried. Athani had found in Resumar all she had ever dreamed of in a man she would never need anything more, and she would guard that with typical Kavalian ferocity. Resumar was part Lycavorian and part Elf, and the combination of these two genes meant he would be devoted to her as long as they both lived. It was simply in the genes he carried.

Jalersi’Puat... or Jalersi’Nruarani now Shiria corrected herself; she had come as quite the surprise to her for Shiria always took Jalersi to be a traditional Kavalian woman no matter her altered appearance; a woman who would never go against what her father told her. She was wrong of course and as she saw Jalersi sitting lotus style next to Pian’Nruarani on the bench, her slim hand absently stroking the fur of Pian’s exposed neck, Shiria realized that Jalersi too had found something that meant more to her than her father’s words and false deeds. Shiria had seen how Pian’Nruarani had thrown his traditional Kavalian upbringing to the wind in the way he treated Jalersi as something to be worshiped and cared for. In only the few short hours since they had arrived here and had their reunion, she saw happiness in Jalersi’s eyes that had never been there before and the reason for that was Pian. Nikkei sat between her mother and Karun on the bench, her face bright and full of youth.

Pian's mother had already begun to make Nikkei see things in a different light and being as young as she was; Nikkei had no trouble accepting it in the least for the truth of what they were saying was right in front of her.

Mican sat on the floor as well, Na'lia sitting behind him on a portable chair with her arm draped over his shoulder. There had been many tears on the part of Jalersi when she greeted the brother she never knew she had, and they hadn't been more than a few feet apart since she had arrived. Colonel Isra and Tarifa she knew only from transmissions and reports, but there was no denying the love for each other they had. Their oldest daughter sat in a similar fashion to Athani across Karun's lap next to Tarifa.

Shiria took a deep breath and reflected on the role she would now play. All the pieces of her future were finally in place and once more she was back among those with Pralor blood in their veins. Through the threads of Mindvoice she could almost touch and feel all of Martin Leonidas's children and know that the foundation for their futures was being laid right now as the hours drifted by. Arram Leonidas had found the two women who he would go into the future with, an uncertain future when it came to the High Coven for Shiria felt their roles for dealing with the High Coven were still being shaped. Denali and Lisisa she felt would find one more before being complete, and that discovery would open their minds to many things that neither had contemplated before and make their relationship and love all powerful. The most troubled of Resumar's siblings at the moment was Eliani, for Shiria could feel her doubt and self pity within the many threads of Mindvoice. She too would find her center soon; first in the form of a man who would be her eternal *anome*, something that she coveted more than anything else. It would also mark a first in history for the Lycavorians, for no half breed Lycavorian had ever found an *anome* to the best of her knowledge, and this was only another of the things the Leonidas family was truly discovering about themselves. Their ability to set precedent in almost everything they did and not even realize it. Eliani and her *anome* would then would find love in the form of a woman who would mean the world to both of them. For now however, Eliani Leonidas was taking comfort and strength from the source that had always been there for her in her brother Androcles. Zarah was the one that Shiria no longer held any concern for. The young woman Lucia Moran, who would be Zarah's pure and total strength, she was already with her and the man who would become both their anchors and give them total completeness had also become a fixture in their lives though they did not know it just yet. Nor did he for that matter she felt.

Shiria smiled to herself for she very much enjoyed this new burden she now carried as a spiritual figure to all of them. It was a burden that she carried willingly for it meant she would always be with her people and the Pralor memory would never die. She took a deep breath then and moved forward into the room so that Athani and the others could see her as she walked towards them. It was Pian who saw her first and in another sign he had shed the old ways of the Kavalian males he immediately came to his feet and motioned for her to sit down. Shiria looked up at him and squeezed his arm.

"Thank you Pian." She said softly as she settled onto the bench next to Jalersi.

"Of course Scribe Mother." He stated.

Shiria watched him move around to sit on the floor in front of Jalersi, and in a move that surprised her somewhat for it was very un-Kavalian like nature, Jalersi draped her long left leg over Pian's shoulder and continued to stroke the fur on the side of his neck with the tips of her fingers without missing a beat. Shiria looked over to where Resumar sat. Considering the way everyone was sitting around him, it was obvious they considered him the leader. Another trait that the name and blood of Leonidas instilled in those around them, and a trait that would forever be their calling.

They were natural born leaders.

"I hope I am not interrupting." Shiria said.

"That is not possible Scribe Mother." Athani told her from her spot.

Shiria smiled. "I must say... Androcles does not crimp when he says he will send aide does he?"

Resumar chuckled gently. "My brother does not crimp when he says anything."

"Why did he send so much if your mission is to destroy this ship Resumar?" Shiria asked the question she had most wanted to ask since everyone had arrived. "An experimental ship based off Pralor technology from CS41, twenty-five of those wondrous armored dragons, three hundred of your famed *Durcunusaan* and enough supplies to last several months if I am any judge of weight and tonnage."

"Andro wants us to establish a Kavalian resistance." Resumar told her. "Pian's Pride and as many biogenic clones that Mican tells us we can rescue with the forces we have now. The more we gather, the more supplies Andro will send."

“A resistance?” Shiria stated nodding her head with approval. “An excellent idea indeed. I suggest Rizon Four as our base. It is not well known, it is well outside normal Kavalian travel corridors and...”

“Our base?” Isra said. “Forgive me... if I may call you Shiria?”

Shiria nodded her head. “That is my name and Helen already rightfully carries the title of *Feravomir* of our people. As she should. And yes... I may be a Pralor, but the Lycavorians and the Kavalians both are *my* people.”

“May I suggest Ephor?” Resumar offered from where he sat. “The senior *Durcunusaan* officer has told me that is what many were going to begin to call Dutkne, Wayonn’s grandson. It is my understanding he is becoming somewhat of a sounding board to Andro.”

“Ephor... as in those advisors from ancient Greece?” Shiria asked.

Resumar nodded. “Not all of them turned into corrupt men and if the *Durcunusaan* feel a person merits that title, who am I to debate them.”

Shiria smiled and nodded her head. “Very well... Ephor Shiria. I like it.”

Isra looked at Resumar. “I’ll let you tell her then.” He stated.

“Tell me what?” Shiria asked.

“Androcles’s orders were clear Ephor Shiria...” Resumar stated. “We are to put you on a *STRIKER DT* and return you to Union space tomorrow morning. You are too valuable to too many people now to be lost.”

Shiria lost her smile and looked at him. “For what purpose?” She demanded.

“Your life is too valuable to lose so soon after finding you Scribe Mother. Just as Resumar has said.” Jalersi spoke from beside her. “If we are to do this... having you as our spiritual support and guidance is going to be very important.”

“Which I can do far better from right here!” Shiria snapped. “I will not be coddled or kept safe! This is my fight just as much as it is yours and I have been doing it for far longer than any of you!”

“It is Andro’s order Shiria.” Tarifa spoke calmly.

Shiria looked at her with large dark eyes. “He allowed you to come here and I know you are one Martin considers a dear sister!”

“We came because we would not allow Karun and Ardis to search for his sister alone.” Isra spoke. “And Jalersi and Pian have become not only family but friends.”

Resumar leaned forward, nuzzled Athani’s neck and cheek and looked at her. “Shiria... you may think you know my brother and my father, and I’m very sure that you can feel them even now within Mindvoice to some degree and you believe this gives you an insight to how they think.”

“Yes.” Shiria agreed.

Resumar shook his head slowly. “Everyone in this room... with the exception of Nikkei because of her age thankfully, all of us have seen war up close and personal Shiria. You have on the other hand have not.”

“That isn’t true!” Shiria protested. “I... I have seen...”

“You have seen it from afar Shiria.” Resumar continued. “You are far wiser than any of us in this room, except when it comes to war. I know my brother better than you Shiria, at least when it comes to the realms outside of Mindvoice. The realms of war. I know how he thinks, how he fights, he has taken everything my father has taught him, everything my grandfather knew as the King of Sparta and he has molded it into himself. Andro is utterly relentless, almost a machine really. You have not seen the images of Alba Tau after we got there Shiria. It was... it was horrific. The Evolli blood ran like a river all around them. He will attack until nothing lives, he will defend to the last man and woman if necessary, he will not take prisoners, and if Keleru or my uncle have in any way hurt our mother he will not rest until all of them lay dead at his feet after suffering the same agony and pain she may have endured. And that is just Andro... for I can not predict what my father will do.”

Shiria was silent for a moment and then she met his eyes again. “I know all this Resumar Leonidas. No... I have not seen these images but I have seen flashes from his mind. From your father’s mind. I may not know all they are capable of but I know enough to be very frightened of them.” She replied. “I know all this and I am still willing to take the risk.”

“And if we are not Scribe Mother?” Athani asked.

“You will have to accept it then!” Shiria snapped loudly and with considerable passion. “I have not lived for over ten thousand years and learned nothing! The only way you will put me on a ship to Union space is if

you drug me somehow! I refuse to leave you! All of you! I will not... and you will not find it so easy to force me young man!"

Resumar stared at her for several moments and then looked at Isra. "I told you Uncle." He said. Isra nodded. "Yes... yes you did." He said.

Shiria looked back and forth between them. "What do you mean? What are you talking about?"

Resumar returned his eyes to her. "Androcles knew you would refuse Shiria." He said.

"What?" Shiria gasped. "Then why... why this charade?"

"To make sure you knew how valuable you are to us. Just as Wayonn now is." Resumar answered. "And to make you understand we will not risk you in any way. No one in this room will. We have already decided that among us here."

Shiria looked around the room slowly touching each set of eyes and seeing the truth of Resumar's declaration. "I... I am just a small portion of whatever the future holds for us and so many Resumar Leonidas." Shiria said looking back to him. "I do not wish to be thought of as such."

"Perhaps not Shiria." Resumar stated calmly. "But you *are* thought of as such. You are the only remaining pureblood Pralor that still exists. A guiding hand now to all of us just as the *Feravomir* is. If any point comes during what we are going to do where you are at risk I want your promise you will put yourself on a ship and retreat to Earth as quickly as you are able to move."

Shiria could not help the warmth that spread through her at his words and she nodded her head slowly. "I promise this to you Resumar. To you and your brother."

Resumar nodded. "Good. Then we will speak of it no more." He said. "Pian has already suggested using Rizon Four as our base by the way."

Shiria nodded. "It is an excellent location." She agreed. "My... castle... for lack of a better word is state of the art. It is built directly into a mountain and..."

They all turned when Avi's heavy footsteps entered through the doorway, a data pad in his hand. Resumar got to his feet as he approached and stopped in front of him.

"Well?" Resumar asked.

-It can be done Resumar- Avi spoke handing him the data pad. -It will take time... but this is not our mission Resumar. You know this-

"How much time?" Res asked as he looked at the pad.

-Resumar... this is not why your father sent us here- Avi said again.

"I know that Avi." Resumar told him. "Now... how much time?"

-Avatar 341 estimates three weeks four days and sixteen hours. Give or take an hour- Avi answered.

"Why so long?"

-It is not the same as downloading all this information to portable drives Resumar. We must catalog it and then upload it to the proper ship's systems. If we can use some of Captain Fang's technicians we may be able to decrease that by three or four days. They will have some knowledge of how we will proceed- Avi answered.

"Then do it." Resumar said. "You and 341 begin immediately and I will have Dayiu send down as many tech heads as she can spare."

-Resumar, while I do agree with the assessment that this is a sound tactical move... this is not the mission your father sent us on. You know this- Avi stated.

“Avi... when my father is out of the loop... who is in command?” Resumar asked him.

-Androcles of course- Avi answered immediately.

“It is my idea Avi. My plan... but I would not do this without Andro looking at it and weighing the overall risks. I know the risks that this brings with it, but it is not something we can simply dismiss. Andro reviewed my plan and approved this. If you connect with the *RAGE OF ACHILLES*'s computer you will see for yourself.” Resumar told him. He waited while Avi's eyes moved rapidly back and forth as he established a remote connection and then those red orbs grew wider and he looked at Resumar.

-A bold plan indeed Resumar- He said. **-Your father would not approve of you and Andro disobeying his orders but Androcles's calculations of the implied risks are only off by 2.7 percent. Impressive. He must have had his *KertaGai* Sadi helping him. Relative Variable Computations were not his strong point in school or during the lessons you had with me-**

Resumar chuckled. “No they weren't.” He said.

Avi met Resumar's eyes for a long moment. **-He is preparing for something isn't he Resumar?-**

“What do you think?” Res asked.

-I think trying to outthink your father or Androcles uses up too many of my internal processing input nodes. Their decision making processes do not always fall within what many consider normal perimeters- Avi answered as he tried to imitate humor. **-I will informed 341 and we will be making the necessary modifications-**

Resumar chuckled again. “I'll agree with you there.” He stated. “Thank you Avi.”

Avi nodded his head and then turned gracefully to exit the makeshift mess lounge. Resumar turned back to the others and saw all of them looking at him. It was Shiria who asked the question.

“Resumar... what exactly was that all about?” She asked getting to her feet. “What does Avi mean when he says you are disobeying your father's orders and he would not approve. I certainly hope you are not going to attempt to use VORTEX Cruiser 341 in any way. This ship and everything on it needs to be destroyed Resumar. It's very existence is a threat to every species in the universe if it falls into the wrongs hands somehow. We need to destroy it.”

Resumar nodded. “I know Shiria.” He stated.

“Then what is going on?” She demanded. “What are Avi and Avatar 341 going to do?”

Resumar stepped up to her. “Avi and 341 are going to try and blend a good portion of the information and equipment from this ship into the *RAGE OF ACHILLES*.” He answered. “It's an idea I came up with a few days ago.”

Shiria looked at him. “Can... can you do that?” She asked.

Resumar nodded. “Avi and 341 say so. At least... at least to a point.” He answered. “I have a feeling that we are going to be out here for quite a while, and having the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* equipped with systems from this ship would only benefit us and our mission.”

Shiria nodded her head slowly. “The logic is sound.” She said finally. “Why couldn't you have used my ship?”

“I have plans for your ship.” Resumar said. “That is why. And right now... the only people who are fully qualified in flying your ship are you and Ckhoa.”

“What plans?” Shiria asked him.

“A rescue mission.” He stated.

“A rescue mission? Who are we...?”

“Resumar!” Ckhoa’s voice filled the room as she sprinted into the large room. “Resumar! Scribe Mother!”

They turned to face her as she ran up to them. “Ckhoa my child... what is it? What is wrong?” Shiria gasped as she reached for her.

“I just... I just received an encoded burst from Poysha!” Ckhoa exclaimed.

“Poysha? She wasn't due to report again for another ten hours.” Resumar spoke.

Ckhoa looked at him. “Resumar... your mother!”

“What? What about her?” Resumar demanded as his face grew concerned.

“They have... they have brought her to Cabelir! She is on Cabelir right now... within the Command Compound!” Ckhoa gasped. “Poysha saw her! She said... Poysha said she is bruised but... but she’s alive Resumar!”

Athani stepped up to him quickly and took his arm as she pressed close to him. “Breathe my love!” She told him. “Control... control your anger.”

Ckhoa looked confused as she gazed at him. “Anger? I thought you would be happy.”

Shiria reached out and took Ckhoa’s hand. “He is happy Ckhoa... however... having his mother For'mya on Cabelir is not good news.”

“But why?” Ckhoa gasped.

Resumar looked at her. “Because the only way to reach her now is to invade the Kavalian Empire.” He hissed softly. “And my uncle would kill her before we got anywhere near Cabelir.” He turned away from them and looked at the blank wall. “She is out of our reach now... out of our reach and on her own.”

EARTH

CRANAE ISLAND

It had been beyond divine. It had been celestial.

Her mind screamed for more, yet her body trembled in exquisite exhaustion, and no matter what happened in the future she knew what she was feeling now would never end and she would always have it. Six or seven times in just the last three and a half hours Devra Re Mydala had exploded in mindnumbing and totally consuming orgasms. She was not sure which was the correct number for they all seemed to run together and to be honest, she had been his before the first orgasm had ever stolen her breath away. He was every bit like the fearsome animal he could change into, for Devra had looked into his dark eyes and seen the beast within him, yet with every brush of his lips upon her, every caress of his fingers on her skin, he lit the fires of passion within her that only he could quench. Her Alkay was seeping from her pores in copious amounts before they had ever touched the bed, inciting him even more than he already was, and she was not even trying. His hard body must have been sculpted by some masterful artist in its definition and as she tore at her own clothes and watched him disrobe in front of her, a slow burn began deep in her belly. A burning need and passion that she had never experienced with Coren no matter how many times they made love. Devra had had only one lover in her lifetime and that was Coren, and no matter how passionate their first encounters had been, what she was feeling now surpassed those sensations a long time ago. Her Alkay may have incited him further, but Bren in no way needed any additional assistance in wanting her, Devra could see that just by looking into his eyes.

Twelve glorious minutes it had taken him to fully sink into her velvety depths, his lips and hands never idle as he stroked and kissed nearly every portion of her body and she could only gasp in unabashed delight as each delicious inch conquered her body and made her his. She remembered hearing several young Vanari females who worked at the embassy discussing what it might be like to bed with a Lycavorian. It was said many of them were built like bulls but that they were concerned only with their own needs. Devra was discovering just how wrong they were. By the time his searing hot balls had come to rest against her upturned ass cheeks, Devra Re Mydala had already experienced two shattering orgasms, the force of which had robbed her of her senses. He had simply held himself there above her, pleased with himself as he watched her beautiful face contort into divine release. She could not stop from wrapping her arms around his shoulders and washing his handsome face with her tongue as she cooed out her ecstasy in his ear. Those moments were quickly swept aside when he began to make love to her with long, gentle strokes and then Devra’s body truly sang out its

eternal glee. She knew from his strokes that he would not last long and she had been right, yet the moment his huge eruption within her depths took place and his scorching hot come filled her womb, Devra Re Mydala's doubts about everything were forever erased from her mind. As they held each other in the grips of their mutual pleasure, Devra knew where her future lay. She knew where the future of her people lay. Devra knew it was a future she had embraced the very moment she stepped aboard Dutkne's ship and came here to this place after her daughter, though she was only just now beginning to realize what else coming here had allowed her to discover. Bren was intent on showing her just that as each minute passed.

Coren had always gone soft quickly after his first explosion and it would be several long minutes before he was ready again, but as Bren drew his face from where it had been tucked into the side of her neck, Devra realized his thick cock had lost none of its steel like hardness buried inside her as it was. When she saw his beautiful wolf eyes staring at her, the tips of his fangs just protruding from beneath his lips, Devra Re Mydala was forever hooked.

She watched him intently now as he crossed the room carrying two large glasses of liquid, watched how the moonlight entering his room struck his delicious body in just the right light. The dim light globes in the corners of the room made for a very romantic setting as well, something she had no doubts that he had been planning since her arrival here. Her green eyes hungrily went to where his flaccid but still immensely impressive cock dangled and she felt the shivers of need flutter across her skin once more. Her long blue legs weren't covered by the thin sheet, only her perfect ass cheeks and a small portion of her lower back, and she pulled it tighter to her waist and he settled to the bed and she sat up. There was no sense in trying to hide her body from this man; he had explored every portion of her tall, lithe frame more intimately in the last three hours than Coren had ever done in centuries of marriage. She saw his eyes take in her full breasts exposed for him as they were, eyes that said she was now his in every way possible, and that single look told her she was now his mate and wife. A prospect that Devra found to be wonderfully fulfilling in every way. She belonged to him now in the Lycavorian fashion, and no matter where she went or who she would interact with, that knowledge filled her with pride and happiness. Physical contact was important to Lycavorians she knew and the moment he settled back to the bed, Devra scooted over next to him and pressed her lush, naked body against his, drawing her long leg over the top of his in a very seductive way as he held out the glass to her.

"What is this Bren?" She asked taking the glass from him with a dazzling smile. "More Spartan wine? You don't need to get me drunk to desire you. I do that now with every waking breath."

Bren chuckled softly. "Spartan wine is not something a male of my species serves to a woman after he has claimed her Devra. It would be considered an insult to her and to what she means to him and their future together."

Devra looked at him with sultry eyes that were filled with an adoring love. "I didn't... I didn't know that." She said softly.

"I would imagine there is much about my people that yours do not know." He said very calmly. "And much about you that we do not know. We will teach each other now." Bren said. "It is called Tangerine juice. A fruit that is abundant in the southern hemisphere of Earth. It is largely considered a fruit of binding love to those Lycavorians here on Earth, something that the Lycavorian Spartans of ancient Earth began and a tradition that continues to this day."

Devra didn't hesitate in the least and she took a large sip of the juice, surprised at the sweet taste and how it made her taste buds tingle in delight. She saw his eyes smile and then he too took a long sip from his glass.

"So... where... where do we go from here Bren?" She asked him.

"What do you mean?"

"I have already broken more Vanari laws than I could possibly imagine and if I... if I do return, no matter the outcome, I will probably be sent to prison for my actions. For a very long time." Devra told him.

"Then you will remain here. You are my mate and wife now and you will stay here and we will build our own future together Devra." Bren answered confidently. "If that is what you want as well."

"I think you know it is Bren." She told him softly. "But Coren and Ardan will demand that I return and face Vanari justice." She stated calmly. "They will not let it rest, especially Coren when he discovers about us and that will only make matters worse between our people. He will no doubt think you forced yourself on me, he will scream and bellow and..."

“He still loves you in a very odd way you know?” Bren said interrupting her.

“What?” She gasped. “You can... you can smell that?”

Bren shook his head with a smile. “No... but I can see it in his eyes. Does him knowing about what we have shared bother you?”

Devra shook her head. “He may still have feelings, but whatever warmth and love I had for him died a very long time ago. And his actions now only serve to remind me why I chose to leave him. I do not care what he thinks about us for I intend to explore and experience many more moments like those we have shared if you are up to the task.” She told him with a husky voice.

Bren chuckled. “I think you will find that I will be quite up to the task.” He told her. “What do you want to do Devra?” He asked.

She looked at him and reached across his powerful abdomen to set her glass on the table by the bed. She pressed closer to him, her large breasts pushing hard against his ribcage and she reached up to stroke his cheek as she gazed at him. Her fingers danced across his jaw and his lips and she smiled. “I want to remain here.” She said confidently. “I want to remain here and discover a new life with you Bren. What I feel... what I feel for you is beyond anything I ever felt for Coren... for anyone. And I don’t just mean what you make me feel in our bed.”

Bren placed his glass on the table next to hers and took her beautiful face in his hands, using his thumbs to caress her flawless blue skin. “Then that is what you will do.”

“It will... it will cause a great deal of strife between our people.” She said. “Especially if Caliria chooses to remain as well.”

“Are you so sure?” Bren asked. “Do you believe after being among us these last days, after seeing the man that Androcles Leonidas is and what your daughter obviously means to him and Sadi and the others, do you believe he will care in the least about what Coren and this Ardan say?”

Devra couldn’t help but grin now. “He is willing to start a war to retrieve her Bren.” She said letting her fingers absently stroke his powerful chest. “No... I don’t think how Coren or Ardan view him will bother him in the least. I think he actually finds it amusing.” She said. “Nor do you care how they view you I think.”

“She is your daughter Devra... what do you think Caliria will do?” Bren asked.

“The more... the more I think back on how she has acted these last years, the more I am coming to believe she knows where she is meant to be, who she is meant to be with and she will not forsake that for anything or anyone to be honest. She is very stubborn and strong willed.” Devra answered.

“Like her mother no doubt.” He said with a smile. “You see... your belief in destiny and fate and the preordained is growing.” He stated.

Devra met his eyes. “Yes... I suppose it is.” She said.

“My king is fond of saying never fear the unknown for you don’t know the treasures that could await you.” Bren said. “We will move forward one day at a time and face each moment as it comes to us Devra. Without fear. Without regret.”

Devra looked at him. “And you are never afraid?” She asked.

Bren smiled. “I am always afraid Devra. There is always fear... my people though... we embrace that fear. We choose not to let that fear keep us from acting. From doing what we feel is right *when* it feels right.”

Devra smiled and leaned forward to kiss him softly and passionately. A kiss he returned without hesitation. “I will so enjoy spending the next dozen or so centuries of my life exploring that mind of yours Bren. It...” She stopped talking when she saw his eyes move to something behind her. “Bren?”

“The light globes.” He stated softly motioning to them with his head. “They have lost power.”

Devra turned to look at the now dark light globes in the corners of the room. “A power failure?” She asked turning back to him.

Bren shook his head. “Andro designed the villa’s power core in such a way that there is always a backup that would kick in instantly when the main generators fell below a certain level point. No... this is something else. Someone has shutdown main power.”

Devra looked at him now seeing how alert he had become. “I take it that is not a good thing?”

Bren shook his head as he rose from the bed. “The Mindvoice dampeners installed in each room are on a different grid and are still active. I can’t reach anyone outside my room here in this wing.” He was speaking as

he reached for his pants on the floor beside the bed. “Quickly Devra my love... put something on. We must discover what is happening.”

Devra didn't hesitate and she glanced around looking for something to put on over her body. The jumpsuit and body armor she had been wearing was scattered over the room, the top of the jumpsuit shredded from Bren's strength. She reached down to the floor and found his shirt among the pile of clothes and pulled it on over her naked form. As she rose to her feet completely and turned, Bren came up to her holding the matte black sidearm. He held it out to her.

“You know how to fire a weapon?” He asked.

Devra nodded and took the K12 KM from him. “Yes.” She answered confidently.

Bren took her hand in his, hefting his *Nehtes* in the opposite hand. “Come. We must move quickly!”

Speaking with her brother like this had always been able to set her at ease and it was no different now as they walked along the beach. Eliani knew there were many people within the Union who considered her father and Andro to be unintelligent brutes because of their actions and the way they talked bluntly and honestly. Eliani knew, as everyone who knew they also knew, under that guise of brutishness they both cultivated were two of the keenest and most intelligent minds she had ever come across. Andro had always been the one they had gone to when they were growing... whether it was because of his bond with Elynth or just his ability to read people so well... he always knew when something was wrong with one of his brothers or sisters and he always made time for them. Eliani knew Zarah was closer to him than most because of what she now knew he had done to save her, but he had always been there for her as well. And she had never kept anything from him, even when it came to the men in her life, or lack thereof as she often said. His presence alone soothed her in a way that very little could, and this is what she relished. He could make her laugh with the simplest of comments even in one of her fouler moods and it was no different this night as he shared with her stories of their father that she had never heard before. It brought them closer together and that closeness is what Eliani needed now because she could not talk to her one true confidant. Her mother.

Andro's arm was draped over her shoulders, one of her arms around his waist and her opposite hand holding to his fingers on her shoulder as they let their laughter die down from relating the trouble their father had gotten into when he was younger.

“Now I know where Arrarn gets it.” Eliani said with a soft chuckle.

Andro nodded. “Yes indeed.” He said.

Eliani looked up at his face. “You truly believe he is making a play for the throne don't you?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “Pian and Jalersi gave Aunt Tarifa a pad of information before all this happened. A small piece of the much larger puzzle that we are trying to unravel.”

“What was on it?” She asked.

“Union Ascension laws copied directly from the Chronicles of Lycavorian Law and the First Oracle's Declaration.” Andro spoke. “Laustinos must have copied them and given them to the Kavalians. The pad had a Cabelir source code, so we know it came from their homeworld. It's the only way they could have gotten the copy.”

“We've gotten slack through the years Andro.” Eliani said softly.

“Yes we have.” He agreed. “And that needs to change rather quickly. The only problem is how do you change an open society without infringing on the liberty that is the basis for that society?”

“After what has happened... I think our people would understand if changes needed to be made Andro.” Eliani said.

“Probably... but the person who institutes those changes will not be popular for very long.” He told her.

“As if you ever cared about being popular.” She said bumping her hip against his as they walked.

“That is true.” He said with a smile.

“There are far more people within the Union who are enraged over what they have done then there are people who don't care Andro.” Eliani said thoughtfully. “Maybe... maybe you should institute Spartan Law for the time being. Until we get a handle on everything that is happening and find out what our uncle is doing.”

“I’ve thought about it... I won’t lie to you about that.” Andro said. “I’m still not sure I am convinced though.”

“Andro they tried to kill father! As far as everyone outside our inner circle is concerned they *did* kill father. And our mother Aricia is dead too. They have taken our mother For'mya and tried to enslave our mother Dysea. They tried to kill all of us! The only reason they would do that is to make it easier to support whatever claim our uncle makes. The information we discovered on the Kavalian pad of the assassins who went after Armetus only confirms this.”

Andro nodded. “I agree but what do they accomplish by kidnapping and holding mother? It doesn’t make any sense Eli. Declaring she is no longer a Queen because father is dead and saying they will only deal with the Elven Parliament in order to negotiate her release. What kind of *sibfla* is that?”

“If the Immortals that took *medwaw* Dysea had succeeded, *medwaw* For'mya would be the only Queen of elven blood left Andro.” Eliani said. “You know how the elven parliament views *medwaw* For'mya. Perhaps the Kavalians believed if that was the case, it would make it easier to turn members of the elven Parliament to their side as they did with the Hadarian Arch Ministry and Elder Council.”

“Perhaps... but with *medwaw* Dysea still alive then no matter what...” Andro began to speak.

“But she is not of elven royal blood Andro.” Eliani corrected him. “She is the daughter of two clones from Earth. She is Queen of the elves because father is King of the Union. Don’t forget that even grandfather L'tian would not support her as Queen until father rescued *medwaw* For'mya and she initially became his concubine.”

Andro nodded his head. “I remember... but that line of thinking has long been put aside through the years Eli. Even grandfather does not adhere to that train of thought anymore and he verbally dressed down that aide several years ago who even mentioned it. I find it very hard to believe that Laustinos would not have informed the Kavalians of that. He has given them almost everything else. Besides... with Arram and Bryon you have the same bloodline as grandfather Resumar. A combination of both royal families and...” Andro was jerked to a stop by Eliani pulling almost painfully on his waist. “Eli... what’s wrong?” He asked as he looked into her wide eyes.

“Andro... Andro that’s it?” Eliani exclaimed.

“What’s it?”

“Why he wanted mother! Why he wanted all of us dead!” Eliani almost shouted.

“Eliani... what are you talking about?”

Eliani gripped his arms tightly. “Don’t you see?” She exclaimed. “Removing father from the picture... *medwaw* Aricia... even you! Most of all you! We’ve been playing right into their hands all along and didn’t know it!”

“I’m not following you Eli.” Andro said.

“It’s his ticket to a legitimate claim to the throne!” Eliani shouted.

“What is? Eliani... you aren’t making any sense!” Andro barked.

Eliani opened her mouth to answer but was interrupted by Jomann’s Mindvoice shout within their heads completely unshielded.

Andro! We have intruders beneath the villa! In tunnels under the villa! Jomann nearly screamed.

Tunnels? Andro barked. *There are no tunnels under the villa Jomann!*

Andro damn it... historical fact states there are tunnels that run under the villa! Someone named Tarren removed the maps from the library in Sparta and now we have intruders under the villa! I am moving the Durcunusaan to several different locations but one of the exits comes up in Eliani’s room within the family wing!

WHAT? Andro shouted. *KertaGai! My... my mates!* Andro turned and in a soft burst of silvery white light he had shifted into wolf form and was sprinting off towards the villa.

Andro wait! Eliani screamed just before she too shifted into wolf form and followed her brother.

There were seventeen of them.

The very finest the Orionis Syndicate had to offer in the way of assassins. They had been traveling back and forth to Earth for the last decade, taking advantage of the complete openness of the society on Earth now

and taking notes. It was only in the last five years that the Orionis Syndicate Group as they called themselves had begun doing business with the Kavalian Empire and other groups within the Alpha Quadrant when it came to criminal activity. They had come to the Alpha Quadrant to learn and discover the intricacies of doing business here. What they had found was a veritable wealth of windfall opportunities in this place called The Wilds. The opportunity to become very wealthy and to use that wealth to grow their organization back in the Beta Quadrant as well as here. The vast majority of the Orionis Syndicate Group was made up of generations of humans who had once come from Earth, or to be more specific, those who had settled Earth and then returned to the Beta Quadrant. Eridiani was their official species designation, but they were now most often referred to as humans. Something that true Eridiani and those in the Orionis Syndicate Group hated.

The Orionis Syndicate Group was broken into four different divisions that made up their actual organization. The OSG political arm was made up almost entirely of Eridiani Alliance government officials. Men and women who answered to the OSG while maintaining their separation from the actual operations side of the organization to give the Eridiani deniability. There was the transportation arm of the OSG, those that did all of the heavy lifting so to speak. They trafficked in slaves and drugs and anything that could make a profit for the Syndicate and the Eridiani. There was the Intelligence arm of the OSG, men and women whose only purpose was to gain knowledge of potential business partners or rivals in whatever way they could. And then there were the OSG Operators. Those who conducted the actual raids and attacks and the assassinations and whatever dirty operation the OSG Division heads determined needed to be done. These were the physically enhanced men and women, those whose ancestors had been undergoing centuries of gene therapy to improve their physical attributes enough to compete on a galactic scale with many of the species that were either larger or stronger than the Eridiani themselves, just as others had enhanced their brain power and capacity. In reality, the OSG was a political entity all itself, with laws and rules that needed to be followed. The Eridiani Alliance was only their front operation so to speak. While there were billions of Eridiani who had no idea what the OSG did or how they operated, those within the corridors of power on their homeworld were very aware.

The Vanari Empire was only their latest ongoing operation. The Vanari females had unique abilities that the OSG Board determined they could use for profit and power. The oil, or Alkay as it was called, that they secreted from their pores had powerful influencing properties that the OSG wanted to use. That they had been using for centuries. With surgical precision the OSG had utilized their contacts and political will in order to gain the upper hand when it came to knowledge of the Vanari and their medical makeup. Once they determined how to manipulate the Vanari psyche and physical makeup, they were able to essentially control the Vanari. The only fly in the ointment so to speak had been the Lycavorians of the Protectorate. They were infinitely more stubborn than the OSG had first determined, and they had access to technology that not even the Vanari had. Technology that gave them the ability to make ships and weapons that were incredibly efficient and powerful, even more so than the Vanari in some ways. This was technology the OSG wanted. Unlike the Vanari however, the Wolfen bastards had not been so easy to control. They had retaliated savagely against the OSG after several of their trading ships had been captured. The OSG Intelligence arm had hoped to discover something about this technology from within the ship's computers but all they had managed to do was piss the Lycavorians off. They were notoriously unpredictable and not as easily manipulated. After the Protectorate destroyed one of their budding colony worlds, the OSG decided it was not within their best interests to come into direct conflict with the Wolfen bastards of the Protectorate, but they would attempt to get the technology through other means. So far they had been totally unsuccessful, but upon discovering the resurgence of Earth and the humans there, they made the decision to go about their goals differently. The Wolfen bastards that called Earth home and those within the Union itself also had access to this advanced technology somehow, and they had gotten a large part of it recently. The Flatspace technology that allowed them to utilize their shields was something even the Protectorate didn't have, and this was something else the OSG wanted to get their hands on. Considering that only those Lycavorians who were active parts of the military had these weapons, great care had to be taken in order to somehow secure this technology for it was a closely guarded secret along with their sudden development of advanced engine designs and weapons.

Entering into a partnership with the Kavalian animals seemed like a good idea. They were ruthless and powerful, and on the verge of ending the reign of the Vampire High Coven in this part of the galaxy. This fact made working with them a promising venture to say the least. If they worked with the Kavalians, eventually the feline beasts would turn their attention to the Lycavorian Union, and the OSG could get what it ultimately

wanted. They were nothing if not patient. So they began working within the Alpha Quadrant, working with the Kavalians and the many different outlaw organizations that operated within The Wilds. When the request had come from the Kavalian leadership that they use their unique abilities to target several different individuals within the Union government the OSG had reviewed the request and what the Kavalian Empire had already accomplished. If they supported this rogue Lycavorian in his bid to return to the throne of the Union, they could get what they wanted and the risks would be very minimal to say the least. They had already been transporting Vanari females through this Union space for several years now with no repercussions. The Union was massive and even they were not able to patrol all of their territory all of the time. It was easy enough to learn the patrol patterns of ships in a certain sector with time and patience, and then begin using this corridor to bring their slaves into The Wilds. When the Kavalian leadership had gotten word to them about this operation it was determined it could only help in the OSG's ultimate goals and they agreed.

This Deep Operator Team was the only group on Earth at the moment. Their small size allowed them to go places and learn things that a larger force could not. They had been on Earth for the better part of ten years now, living among the many human cities and actually holding jobs. While they had been unsuccessful in discovering anything in regards to the technology the OSG wanted, it gave the OSG a pulse on life within the Union. These operators lived, worked and interacted among the many Lycavorians that resided here, enough that they had been able to get the information for this island through one of their many sources.

Their mission had been simple, infiltrate the island of the Lycavorian leader now, and kill as many of his females as they could, most importantly the blond one and any of his sisters that may be on the island. The OSG agreed with the Kavalian leadership that this would cripple the young prince emotionally in a way nothing else could. They knew from their contacts within the Union Netnews that while the barracks on the island was nearly complete, it did not house the sixty or so Lycavorian soldiers tasked with the defense of the island during the day just yet. They stayed within the port city of Gytheio at night and that building was easily watched. The entire team had moved to Gytheio when the order came, more to watch the island from within the city and try to determine patterns. The *Durcunusaan* as they were called were incredibly well trained and extremely smart. Past experiences with the Lycavorians in the Protectorate had proven violently bad for the OSG and trying to assault them head on was suicide, especially with the dragon beasts that stayed on the island. Once their Netnews contact had gotten the plans for this island from the library however, it was a simple matter to assemble his team and wait for dark. The dragons almost always hunted at night in the mountains inland and it was easy enough to see them leave the island as they so often did. When that moment came, the leader of the Deep Operator Team made the decision to go.

The entrance to this main tunnel been buried beneath the main floor of a trinket shop in Gytheio run by an elderly Lycavorian couple. They were now dead in their bed, both of them shot with silenced weapons while they slept. Wearing uniforms and body armor designed in the OSG's many research labs, whatever scent the assassins put off was absorbed and hidden by network of scent maskers built right into the body armor over the areas of the body that held the most potent scent glands. Those glands behind the ears were neutralized by filters worn within the COM implants that each of his team members wore. He turned to watch as his two men continued to use laser cutters to slice through the granite and concrete at the back of the fireplace in what was supposed to be his sister's room.

"How much longer?" He hissed softly.

"Almost through Major." Came the reply. "Got it!" This followed ten seconds later.

The USG Major watched as his two men muscled the three foot thick circular section of stone out of the way, soft light pouring into the dimly lit tunnel from the room.

"Stay with the plan and stick to the timetable! Main targets only unless someone gets in the way!" He spoke urgently. "We got four minutes max before they realize what is going on and those Wolfen bastards come pouring across the bridge pier! Brendi?"

The deep brown eyes of the slim figure turned to look at him front the rear of their group. The black balaclava hid the facial features, but the uniform and body armor could not hide the very curvy figure it protected. "Major?" The female voice spoke.

"You, Piotr and Tomar cover our rear and advise us if anything comes through the tunnels!" He hissed softly.

The woman nodded. "Major... I am an Intelligence Analyst... not a Commando!" The voice spoke.

“We needed the extra body and that is why you are here! You are not part of the assault; you are only covering our exit!” The major snapped. “Now do as you’re told Lieutenant!”

“Yes sir!” The woman answered.

The major turned to his lead two men and opened his mouth to speak when the lights coming from the room went out suddenly.

“Shit! The power just died!” One of his men spat.

The Major nodded. “Better for us! Go! Go!”

The two OSG assassins ducked through the circular hole they had cut, followed quickly by fifteen others, all of them with deadly intent.

“Is he always the one they turn too Sadi?” Arduri asked from where she sat on the huge bed.

She had joined Sadi, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria and Carisia in their master bedroom after changing in the room she shared with her mother. She had striped down to nothing but her undergarments and wrapped the dark blue robe that had been purchased for her by someone she had never met around her petite but powerfully packed body. She knew Andro's mates would be dressed in a similar manner for she had already seen it. The Lycavorians and Elves that populated the Union were like the Vanari in many respects, and they had no qualms about wearing less clothing. She knew her mother would not be back to their room before the morning, not if what she had sensed from her was nay indication, and that knowledge made Arduri very happy. Arduri sat next to Lu'ria on the bed, Carisia kneeling behind her and using a brush to pass through her long white hair.

Sadi turned from the open double doors onto the patio holding the mug of coffee and nodded as she moved back to the bed to settle next to Ne'Veha who was studying a data pad of information given to her earlier in the day while on the *SCIMITAR*.

“Yes.” Sadi answered as she leaned over to nuzzle Ne'Veha's four inch high elven ear and Arduri saw Ne'Veha close her eyes in bliss at the attention. “It's been that way ever since he completed his Agoge. He is the one that kept Denali and Lisisa's secret; he kept them on the *SCIMITAR* together so that they could cultivate their feelings and discover what they have. He encouraged Arrarn to pursue Narice and Toria if that is what his heart dictated... he also was the one who brought Malic into Eliani's life. He feels it is his responsibility to make things right if he can.”

Arduri nodded as she sipped her own mug of coffee, falling in love with the delicious liquid ever since having her first mug of it on the *HARBINGER*. The flavor was incredible and when she added a little sweetener to the steaming coffee, it never ceased to make her taste buds come alive. “Caliria was like this for Naesta and I.” She said softly. “We could go to her for advice no matter what the topic. It would drive our father crazy.”

“Because she had dark hair and was outcast?” Carisia asked.

Arduri nodded. “I think... I think he loves her in his own way...” Arduri said. “But he could never get past Vanari tradition and culture. He treated her as a second class citizen, just like everyone else, often times not even acknowledging her Birth Ceremony.”

“She is his child...” Lu'ria said softly. “It is wrong to disavow your child no matter the reasons.”

Arduri nodded. “It's even worse to do it because you are more concerned with a political position than anything. It is what ultimately led to him and mother separating and then severing their Union. He could not abide her popularity among the younger generation of Regents and how she almost always voted against him, and he hated when she would visit Caliria all the time and invite her for events and such. I've never seen him so angry as he is now though... at us... at Caliria.”

“He does seem to hold a much more pronounced distrust of our people.” Sadi said softly. “Do you know why?”

Arduri shook her head. “No.” She replied. “It's very strange really... even Regent Ardan is willing to allow Andro to retrieve Caliria and learn what we can about the Syndicate and their agents. Father is not... not to mention that he is incredibly incensed that Naesta is offworld by herself.”

“Naesta does not strike me as a woman who could not handle herself in a situation. Nor yourself Arduri.” Lu'ria said. “You were willing to stand against us on the *HARBINGER* even though heavily outnumbered. That tells me you are confident in yourselves and your abilities.”

“Many of us... the younger Vanari generations like Naesta and myself... we hate that the Syndicate is allowed to capture our females and we can do nothing once it is done.” Arduri said. “Many of us are willing to fight them and make them stop regardless of the risks involved. In our minds it is better than being fodder. The SBR and most of the older Regents think otherwise and ultimately it is their decision.”

“They only take dark haired Vanari?” Ne'Veha asked looking up.

Arduri nodded her head. “There have been times when they have captured those like me and Naesta, with silver or white blond hair.”

“And what happens then?” Sadi asked.

“If they are not broken within the first few hours by their captors, the Syndicate demands an enormous sum of credits and arranges for them to be returned.” Arduri replied. “Most are returned relatively unhurt, some are not. Those like me are worth far more credits in the Orionis Syndicate’s Slave Markets and their many brothels.”

“We will rescue all of them Arduri.” Sadi told her. “Do not doubt that.”

Arduri shook her head. “I don’t.” She answered. She looked at Sadi. “It is not common among your males to have multiply mates is it?”

Sadi shook her head. “No.” She said quickly. “It is not common, it is very rare actually. Aside from Andro’s father and his Uncle Daniel and Uncle Isra, there are only a handful that I know of within the Union and if I’m not mistaken, all of them are members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* or are Bonded with dragons.”

“Is that significant?” Arduri asked.

“No... I don’t think so.” Sadi answered. “Those that I know, Andro’s father, his uncles, they are perhaps some of the most powerful and influential Alpha males within our species. I believe a lot of it has to do with their bloodlines, but nothing like that has ever been studied. I do know that all of them are a different breed of man. Andro. His father... all of them.”

“What do you mean?” Arduri said.

Lu'ria laughed softly. “If they are like Andro... all of them are built like bulls and they have the rare ability to actually know how to use it!”

This brought laughter from all of them and Sadi nodded her head. “Well... there is that to consider.” She said. “It is very true.”

“How... how big is he?” Arduri asked shyly.

“Well... I don’t...” Sadi began.

“Thirty-one point one centimeters exactly.” Carisia answered quickly.

“*Enylarcopri!*” Ne'Veha gasped.

Carisia looked at their stunned expressions. “What?” She exclaimed. “I wanted to know so I measured him while he slept! It didn’t take much effort to...”

Her words were drowned out by the laughter that followed from all of them and then Carisia was laughing as well. That laughter ceased immediately when the light globes in the room went dark.

“A power failure?” Lu'ria asked warily as she turned on the bed and began getting to her feet.

Sadi was already standing, all her wolf senses alert now. “Not here.” She stated firmly. “Not on Cranæ Island.”

Carisia blurred to another part of the room and was pulling open a normal looking cabinet on the wall. “This is not good! Sadi...the Mindvoice dampeners are still active!” She exclaimed loudly.

“What does that mean?” Arduri barked as she scrambled off the bed.

Sadi moved up beside Carisia as she opened the cabinet and revealed several K12 KMs and an assortment of *Nehtes* and smaller blades. Carisia handed Sadi a *Nehtes* while she took the dual blades from the pegs. “It means someone killed the internal power intentionally but not the grid that controls the dampeners. They are on separate grids!” She spoke. She turned to see Ne'Veha beginning to step onto the patio to get outside the dampeners that surrounded their room. “*SirsanGai* no!” Sadi exclaimed reaching for her. “Don’t go outside! Close the doors quickly!”

Lu'ria claimed the dual blades from Carisia as Sadi held out the K12 to Arduri while Ne'Veha closed and secured the large double doors, pulling the drapes closed as she did. When they were locked and the drapes shut she moved back to where Sadi was and took the K12 from her.

“Sadi?” Ne'Veha gasped moving closer to her while clutching the K12. “Why do I suddenly have a very bad feeling?”

“Mistress?” Sadi barked softly to Lu'ria who had moved up to their master bedroom door and was using her elven and wolf hearing to try and detect any noises from outside.

Lu'ria held her hand up as she began to back up quickly, folding her dual blades under her forearms in the traditional Drow attack mode. “Someone is outside the door.” She hissed to them as she stopped and poised herself in a combat crouch next to Carisia.

Sadi depressed the button on the shaft of the *Nehtes* and it extended to its full length of seven feet three inches. “You can rest assured that it is not our mate coming through that door!” Sadi hissed. “And if it is not our mate... then they die!”

The OSG Major split his team into two groups when they entered Eliani's empty dark room. Seven of them slipped silently out the open window in her room and began making their way around the family wing of the villa like ghosts, the loss of power killing the external lights that were atop the villa. The major stayed with his primary team as his point man connected a small box to the door control on the wall. There was a soft chirp as the secure connection was made and power was fed to the panel and then another chirp that caused the door to slide open.

“Piece of cake.” The man hissed.

“Tom?” The major whispered.

The man with the portable infra red heat and motion scanner looked at him. He held up five fingers indicating targets and pointed down the hall, then held up five fingers twice more indicating ten meters. The major nodded.

“Go.” He whispered.

The seven men broke into the corridor, their weapons at the ready and trained down the corridor towards the double doors that led into the main room of the villa. The hall was dark, and the brick colored walls did not reflect the moonlight from above well, giving them shadows to move within. There were five doors in the hallway, but they were only concerned with one and that is the door they moved to and set up positions. The OSG man Tom looked at his sensor and nodded his head which caused the point man to open his kit again and then pry a plate off the control with the knife in his hand. Once the plate was off he connected the two wires from his kit to the internal panel. He looked at his Major and saw him now his head.

“Do it!” The major hissed.

The OSG Commando Teams were expertly trained and had in some cases hours upon hours of actual experience in such missions. This team was among the most experienced in the entire organization and before the words were fully out of his mouth the door was sliding open and they were rushing into the room, their weapons coming up and beginning to belch flame as the first three men into the room began firing before they were four steps into Andro's master bedroom.

And that is where everything began to fall apart.

The OSG Commando teams were used to being the best at what they did. No matter the mission they undertook, they always seemed to have the upper hand when they struck. Their prey was caught unaware and usually ill-prepared for the speed and ferocity of their attack. Their first mistake was not taking into account who it was they were attacking. These were not untrained men and women, these were Lycavorians and elves and vampires, all of whom had far greater senses and abilities to fall back on besides just their eyes. The first OSG Commando into the room was firing at the bed as he stepped to the left several feet. The movement out of the corner of his eye caused him to begin turning immediately, his enhanced reflexes propelling him with blinding speed. It wasn't fast enough as Carisia unwrapped the shadows from around hers and Lu'ria's body in a single blink, and Carisia buried her dual blades into the man's torso and unprotected neck from the side. His eyes went wide at the intense pain he felt and his finger came off the trigger of his weapon as he instinctively began reaching for where he felt the pain. It wouldn't save him as Carisia kicked his now silent weapon upwards with a powerful front kick, and ripped her blades free of his flesh. He dropped to the floor like a rag doll when the blade in his neck severed his spinal column at the base of his neck and he didn't have to worry about feeling ever again.

The second OSG commando who burst into the room got off died even quicker. He got off ten rounds from his weapon, rounds that were beginning to walk themselves along the left wall when he suddenly lost control of his trigger arm. His brain was telling his hand to pull the trigger, but his eyes grew wide when he looked down and nothing was happening. He had time to look up and see the burning amber colored eyes as Lu'ria drew back her dual blades; both of them now covered in blood, and execute a back flip kick. The top of her foot connected expertly with his jaw, snapping his head back with violent force and the sound of his neck shattering was like a gunshot over the whisper of the silenced weapons. The third, fourth and fifth OSG Commandos actually made it fully into the room and were beginning to track the three women that they saw when the thrown *Nehtes* entered just above the fourth man's clavicle and burst out his back in a shower of blood and bone, propelling him back into the third man and causing him to stagger directly into a hail of K12 rounds from Ne'Veha and Arduri that perforated his upper body with at least nine holes, each round slamming into him and tossing him back until he slammed into the wall and was still. The fifth man's eyes were wide and they grew wider as he lifted his weapon to fire but saw the blond haired female lift her hand and simply flick her wrist forward.

While the Mindvoice dampeners prevented them from talking or sensing anyone that was outside their room, and vice versa, they did not prevent them from using their skills in their bedroom. It was here that they practiced with each other and Andro, Andro mostly, teaching them to focus hard enough to actually be able to use their new Mindvoice skills as an extension of their will. Sadi had discovered quite by accident what she was capable of at SODRAG, and she had spent the last weeks and months honing that new and deadly skill with both Andro and the *Feravomir* whenever possible and mostly just learning to focus enough by herself. Her anger and worry fueled her focus now, anger at these men for attacking her and those she loved, and her worry for her beloved Andro who was still out there somewhere. The wave of psychic Mindvoice power caught the fifth OSG Commando in its path, literally lifting him off the floor and shattering every bone in his body as he went careening against the far wall with devastating speed and power. The edges of the Mindvoice wave also served to physically throw the OSG Major and the seventh man back into the corridor outside their room none to gently as they were just beginning to follow the rest of their team into the bedroom.

The OSG major slammed hard to the floor, rolling with the tremendous force of something he had never experienced before. As he began to scramble to his feet he looked up the corridor as the double doors burst inward and his eyes grew wide when he saw the two towering Lycavorians and the silver/blond hair of a Vanari female clad in little more than a large man's shirt and holding a black sidearm.

"Vanari?" He gasped. "Here?"

Jomann and Bren were both seasoned warriors and reacted with lightning like reflexes. Bren extended his *Nehtes* in a single blink and was launching it down the corridor before the OSG major fully knew what was happening. He saw the belch of flame from the second Lycavorian's weapon and the chest and head of his fellow commando blew apart like an overripe melon showering him in blood and pieces of flesh just as the thrown *Nehtes* entered just below his right shoulder blade, impaling him clean through and lifting him off the floor to be savagely speared to the granite portion of the wall behind him. He groaned loudly in agony, as the two men and Vanari female moved forward without thought, his vision unfocused as pain wracked his body.

Jomann stuck his head into the door of the bedroom for he knew they would smell him coming. "Sadi! Lu'ria! All of you this way!" He hissed.

Sadi and the others didn't hesitate in the least. "Jomann... who are they?" Sadi exclaimed as he ushered her out in to the corridor.

"I don't know!" Jomann spoke taking her arm along with Ne'Veha's and propelling them forward down the corridor. "It doesn't matter now! I must get you to the panic room!"

"Andro!" Sadi shouted. "Where is Andro?"

"We aren't going without Andro!" Ne'Veha barked loudly.

"Bren?" Jomann called physically moving all of them in front of him whether they wanted to go or not. He was perhaps the only *Durcunusaan* alive who would be allowed to handle them in this way because of his position as Andro's Captain, and Jomann was taking no chances.

"Go! I will cover you from the rear!" Bren stated as he wrenched his *Nehtes* from the body of the OSG Major and heard the man groan and then fall unconscious. He turned to Devra whose eyes were wide. "Come Devra!"

“OSG!” Devra exclaimed as she looked at the bodies. “Bren... they are Orionis Syndicate Commandos! Assassins!”

“Are you sure?” Bren asked with wide eyes.

“Yes. Positive!”

Bren looked at the wounded man and drove his *Nehtes* down once more, directly through the major’s hip and seeing his eyes open in horrible agony and scream. “Stay there fool!” He snarled at the man. “We’ll be back for you!” Bren took Devra’s arm and called forth his Shi Viska as they backed down the corridor, using it to shield them as they followed Jomann. “We will worry about it later!” He snapped. “We must go with Jomann and the others. You and they are the priority now!” Devra’s wide eyes looked at him, his eyes fully changed and his fangs on display for all to see. She should have been horrified at the callousness he had just used but Devra found all she could feel towards him was undying love.

Jomann led them into the main room just as Coren, Ardan and Tastia were exiting the guest wing in sleeping clothes and barely awake.

“What is happening?” Coren shouted seeing the large Lycavorian herding those who he knew were mates of Androcles in front of him. His eyes grew wide when he saw the way Arduri was dressed, and they almost exploded out of his head when Bren and Devra came out of the corridor a second later and he saw what she was wearing and the state of her hair. He knew immediately from the healthy deep blue color of her skin that she had been having sex, her Alkay giving her skin a beautiful sheen to it.

Jomann blinked several times and then pushed Sadi and Ne’Veha towards the kitchen area. “Go! The secondary entrance!” He barked.

“Devra!” Coren hissed. “What... you...”

Devra glared at him as she allowed Bren to pull her gently along. “Now is most definitely not the time Coren!” She snarled at him as she moved past him clinging tightly to Bren’s hand and holding the K12.

They had made it halfway across the expanse of the main floor to the kitchen area when the double doors to the patio area burst open and seven more black clad figures rushed into the room with weapons out. In a single motion, Bren moved up beside Jomann as his Shi Viska exploded into existence, followed a second later by the one Sadi now wore and three shields came down in front of the group for protection.

“Stop!” The OSG Commando roared. “Stop right there or we fire! We’ll kill the Vanari Regents!”

Jomann and Bren looked back to see Ardan and Coren standing in full view, frozen in their spots, Tastia clinging to Coren’s arm with wide eyes. Bren had pulled Devra in behind his body and she huddled with Arduri and the others behind those three shields and Sadi prepared to unleash another wave of Mindvoice power when the OSG commando’s words halted her action and they all turned around to look at Coren and Ardan.

“*Nubou!*” Jomann cursed in a vile raspy voice.

“Drop your weapons!” The Commando screamed as his seven person team spread out around him, their weapons leveled and ready for instant use. “Do it now!”

Sadi’s eyes grew wider as she looked at Jomann and he saw the same thing happen to Lu’ria and the others, their eyes growing large in disbelief and... and adoring love. Jomann smiled to himself as he realized what they felt and then suddenly he felt it as well because of the connection he now shared with his prince and turned to Bren quickly.

“He’s here!” Jomann hissed to him.

Devra’s wide eyes looked at him. “Who is here?” She gasped.

“Drop your weapons damn you!” The OSG Commando screamed again from across the room. “I’ll shoot those bastards dead and the Vanari whore with them! Drop them now!”

It was Sadi who spoke now... raising her voice enough to be heard by all of them. “You should have come in firing!” She growled at them, her eyes changed and the tips of her wolf fangs fully exposed. Something that gave her an especially ferocious appearance for a female wolf. “Time to die now mercenary scum!”

The moonlight was pouring in through the doors to the side that opened onto the entrance walkway that moved up to the long bridge that connected Cranae Island to the mainland. The manned *Durcunusaan* guard post at night was on the opposite side of the bridge, four of the five guards now sprinting back across the bridge as fast as their legs would carry them. They did not staff the guard post on the villa side of the island at night because Andro refused to have so many additional men and women underfoot and intruding on his life even in the evening. That policy would change after this evening, as would many. Among the many changes that would

come of this night was the number of large glass doors that would no longer exist. They existed now however, and all of the OSG team saw the massive shadow pass in front of the double glass doors and they began turning just as those same glass doors imploded under the three hundred pound weight of a very large and very pissed off raven black wolf. Not since Alba Tau had Androcles felt such raging and savage anger. These men and women, whoever they were, they had come to harm his beautiful Sadi and his other precious mates. They had come to take from him what he had waited all of his life for and from deep within his chest came the full power of a Talon Guardian in wolf form. What everyone witnessed next was something they would take to the graves with them. It was both horribly brutal and savage, but it was also strangely the most beautifully choreographed chain of physical action any of them had ever seen. It was most profound to Devra and Arduri Re Mydala, for Devra realized then just how precious his mates and wives were to this young Prince, and she realized that soon Caliria would be among those that this young man would shatter worlds for. She also understood instantly what it meant for her now as Bren's wife and mate and no matter the blood and gore she witnessed, the feelings of devotion to him knowing he would do the same thing for her nearly tripled within her heart. For Arduri Re Mydala it only increased her belief that like her mother, she was meant to be here among these people, and she could only hope beyond hope that the two others she found herself desiring now more than anything would feel the same thing she did.

Coren, Ardan and Tastia could only stand there and stare in unabashed awe. None of them had ever seen a wolf of such size and majesty before, and all of them had seen dozens of Lycavorian men and women from the embassy in their natural forms before running within the embassy grounds on Austrova

The OSG Commando closest to the door was turned halfway around when three hundred pounds of muscle and flashing teeth landed on him like the force of a boulder, shards of glass peppering the ground all around them. Huge paws drove him to the floor and the incredible weight above him splintered the entire left side of his rib cage. He would not get the opportunity to scream for those huge jaws snapped down on his throat and tore upward with barely any effort. The commando saw his blood and flesh erupt into the air and then that monstrosity leaped upward as he began to die. Andro's right paw ripped out with savage power as he leaped forward through the air, four razor like talons slashing across the face of another OSG Commando and sending him spinning across the room. He snapped his tail to the side and his massive jaws flashed open once more, clamping shut on an OSG commando's shoulder and using his weight and momentum he completed the spin and launched the commando through the air, his screams of agony filling the room as the flesh of his shoulder and neck tore away from his body. Four more commandos.

Andro twisted sideways and intentionally fell to his side and skidded forward, all four of his paws free to strike and strike they did as they shredded the backs of the legs of a female commando into ribbons and she fell screaming out in agony. No matter the circumstances, Andro would not kill a woman unless absolutely necessary and as he righted himself once more he slammed full tilt into another commando, ramming his shoulders into the man with as much speed and force as he had left. He heaved upwards, throwing his head and shoulders back, and tossing the man in to the air as he rose up on his hind paws and suddenly there was a silver/white flash and then he was standing there as a man. His azure eyes burned brightly and his hands flared with psychic power and two Mindvoice diamonds shot from the palms of his hands and impacted two more OSG commandos in their chests, the psychic weapons blowing gaping holes in their upper bodies and tossing them back nearly ten meters out onto the patio. He reached out and snatched the man he had tossed into the air as a wolf and used his body as a club, tossing him with all of his considerable strength at the remaining commando and sending both of them sprawling into the back wall of the kitchen area. Another psychic diamond formed and launched from his left hand, tearing through the neck of the commando he had thrown and then Andro was upon the last man, his right hand clamping around the stunned man's throat and heaving him off the ground a good twelve inches as he began to choke the life from him.

“YOU COME TO MY HOME!” Andro screamed his voice like a foghorn on a quiet night and his dual fangs fully exposed and the most terrifying thing Devra or the other Vanari had ever seen. His next words however, his next words would earn an unlikely friend that he would not discover for several days. ***“You come to my home *ronnus*, with the intent to kill *MY MATES! MY WIVES! MY VANARI FRIENDS!*”*** Andro leaned closer to the man as he gagged horribly and clawed at the hand that held his throat. Even his enhanced physical strength was no match for this enraged Lycavorian and he slowly felt the life being squeezed from him. ***“I am Androcles Leonidas of the Lycavorian people...”*** Andro roared. ***“And you have chosen to take the side of my***

uncle with this action tonight. Do you think I can not see who directed you on this mission by the surface thoughts that swirl within your mind! Now you have made an enemy of me for as long as I have years! Now... now you have made your vile conduct with the Vanari people my conflict! And now you join your ancestors scum, and you will die knowing that more of your people will follow you to hell very soon for they hold my Vanari mate and I will get her back no matter how many of your kind I have to send to *Vada Lethadori* in the process!”

Andro squeezed even tighter and he rammed the commando back into the unyielding wall hard enough to crack the granite exterior. The man’s larynx splintering and his neck snapping was a ghastly sound in the now quiet room, his legs twitching several times before death took him into its embrace. With a final scream of anger Andro whirled around and heaved his body as hard as he could out onto the patio, smashing what remained of his double doors from their frame and he unleashed a howl unlike anything they had ever heard from him. A howl that even Bren shivered from as the sound rippled through him.

Andro turned instantly then. “*KertaGai! SirsanGai!*” He gasped just as Sadi and the others broke from behind the shields and ran to him. Sadi’s Shi Viska vanished as she was enveloped into his arms and he pulled all of them to him, nuzzling them furiously, his kisses full of devotion and love. Devra rose slowly to her feet, gripping tightly to Bren’s arm and not the least bit worried who saw it. She looked up into his face as he pulled her tighter against him.

“*Vada Lethadori* Bren?” She asked softly. “What... what is that?”

Bren met her eyes. “The Gates of Hades!” He answered. “The Gates of Hades!”

“...telling you it’s gone bad and we need to move!” Brendi exclaimed as she glanced into the hole once more.

“Shut up Brendi!” Piotr snapped softly. “We wait for the Major to come back!”

“The shooting is over!” Brendi hissed. “The shouting is over! Our team is dead! We need to get out of here now!”

“They are our team... not yours!” Tomar snarled at her whirling to glare at her face. “Now shut the fuck up and wait!”

Brendi reached up and yanked the balaclava from her head, her deep red hair falling all around her face and well past her shoulders. “I told the Major this was a bad idea!” She snarled right back unafraid. “I am the Intelligence Officer here and I told him this was a bad idea! Why wouldn’t he let me contact the Regional Commander?”

“Just watch for him and the others!” Tomar snapped.

“This operation wasn’t sanctioned by the OSG Council was it?” Brendi barked right back.

“Shut up bitch!” Piotr spat.

“It wasn’t!” She gasped with wide eyes. “You did this without authorization from the OSG Home Council?” She gasped. “Are you fucking crazy?”

“The Regional gave authorization!” Tomar snarled at her.

“The Regional Commander can not authorize an operation against a foreign government without approval from the Home Council you moron! The major knows that!” Brendi’s brown eyes were very wide now. “Shit... you took a side job! You stupid idiots! How much were you morons paid for this job?”

“Shut your hole Brendi!” Piotr barked.

“How much damn it? You do realize what you have done don’t you?” Brendi exclaimed. “How much?”

“Ten million.” Tomar answered quickly.

Brendi looked at him incredulous. “You compromised the integrity of the OSG in this quadrant for ten million credits!” She almost screamed. “And you involved me now too! You fucking stupid fools!”

Tomar and Piotr turned to face her now, neither of them friendly. “Listen you arrogant bitch! We’ve been out here for three years now! You just got here six months ago! The Big Alpha Quadrant Expert! Three years we have been operating out here! We know what we are doing!”

“The Home Council will find out about this!” She snapped. “They’ll find out about this and we’ll all be dead!”

“They aren’t going to find out about it.” Tomar hissed. “At least not from you.” He leveled his weapon at her. “The major should never have added you to our team. The only reason he did is because we needed your supposed expert Intel on the Lycavorians. Your job is done! No one is ever going to know on the Home Council... cause you ain’t going to be alive to tell them!”

“Indeed!” The deep voice growled from behind them. “That seems to be your problem now as well!”

Brendi’s eyes went wide when she saw the tall Lycavorian behind them. Tomar and Piotr were turning quickly, bringing up their weapons when she heard the tearing sounds of flesh and saw the wicked looking spearheads erupt from the backs of both men. Her brown eyes were wide and she tossed aside her silenced weapon and began scrambling back through the hole that had been cut into the wall as fast as she could push her legs. She wasn’t aware of how far she had gone until she felt a powerful hand grasp her long lush hair and yank savagely. Brendi howled in pain and reached for the hand that was pulling her out of the hole with strength she had never felt before. As her body cleared the interior hole that hand released her hair and tossed her to the floor with no regard. Brendi rolled several times and came up to her knees only to have two very large guns stuck in her face by two very angry looking men. Her brown eyes darted to the burgundy colored red hair of the female that walked up to her.

“Nice hair!” Eliani spat viciously, her much less pronounced dual fangs fully extended and her fern green eyes outlined with a thick black ring. “Welcome to Earth *upae!* You aren’t going to enjoy your stay!”

Eliani snapped out with her right hand and a palm strike that connected directly with Brendi’s jaw. Her brown eyes rolled up into her head and her body went limp as a noodle as she collapsed on the floor of Eliani’s room. Eliani looked at the two *Durcunusaan* troops who had linked up with her outside the open window of her room and entered the villa just as Andro had gone smashing through the front.

“Tie the bitch up and lock her down here!” She snarled. Eliani turned as the head and shoulders of the *Durcunusaan* senior non-com appeared in the hole at the back of her fireplace.

“The tunnels are clear Princess.” He stated quickly. “Two dead.” He looked at where the woman lay on the floor. “You didn’t kill her?”

Eliani glanced at the unconscious woman and shook her head. “It will be nice to have someone to question who isn’t half dead.” Eliani answered as she watched the man pull himself out of the hole and stand.

“Yes... I imagine Jomann will have some very pointed questions he will want to ask.” He spoke.

Eliani looked at him at the mention of Jomann. “You know my brother’s Captain?” She asked.

“Know him? Milady... we have served with Jomann for seven years now.” Anicetus answered looking at the diminutive Princess. “Since before Alba Tau. If not for him... we would not be here.”

“He was... he was at Alba Tau?” Eliani asked softly.

Anicetus nodded his head. “Eleventh Spartan Shock Division. We were part of the 19th Advanced Scout Legion.”

Eliani’s eyes grew a little larger. “The 19th Scout Legion suffered almost ninety percent casualties.” She stated from memory. “I... I helped to treat most of those survivors. You... you stormed a forward Evolli Command Center and...”

Anicetus nodded. “It needed to be done. They were directing artillery fire on our people and killing our friends.” He replied softly. “I will have my men sweep through the tunnels again and find every entrance Princess. We’ll insure they are sealed permanently.”

Eliani watched as he turned and headed back into the hole in her fireplace. She glanced quickly at the unconscious woman again, briefly admired the way her uniform clung to her curves and then headed out of her quarters towards the main area of her brother’s villa.

RITAAH

“...arrived two hours ago.” Poysha told them from within the image in VORTEX Cruiser 341’s main bridge area. “They had her arms secured in a strange way... wrapped close to her chest and her fists just under her chin but...”

“To keep her from calling her Shi Viska.” Isra spoke softly. “In that position... if she called it from Flat Space she would have probably killed herself.”

“They took her immediately to the room they have been building.” Poysha told them. “She was bruised somewhat as I said... but she appeared unhurt Resumar. Almost... almost listless really.”

“Listless?” Shiria asked gently.

Poysha nodded. “She was not fighting them at all... and they were treating her more gently than they would normally treat prisoners. She looked as if she had been crying. I saw her face close up before they took her into the room. Her eyes... her eyes held no emotion in them.”

“Drugs?” Ckhoa asked.

Tarifa shook her head. “Never.” She gasped.

“She has been wolf for over two decades now.” Na'lia spoke from her spot next to Mican. “The only drugs that would have any affect on her are those used to halt her ability to shift.” She told them. “No mind-altering drug of any kind would work; the Lycavorian healing system would purge them almost instantly.”

“The attack on the Senate Building took place shortly after the Netnews carried Martin’s death on it.” Tarifa spoke. “If this was the last thing For'mya saw... if this is all she remembers and they have one of these Static Inhibitors implanted on her somewhere, that is why she looks and act as she does. She has lost her mate, her husband, and only the gods know what else they have told her. They could tell her whatever lies they wanted and she would have to believe them at least in some fashion, especially if they present false evidence to support these lies.”

“I still do not understand why they have taken her.” Jalersi spoke softly. “What possible help could this be to Pusintin in attempting to gain the throne of the Union? By holding her he only makes people hate him more than they already do. He must see that!”

“There was nothing more on the pad that our father downloaded to you at the embassy Pian?” Athani asked coming up beside him and reaching out to place her hand on his arm. Pian looked down at her and shook his head. Athani was the one who he feared would not believe his transformation. She had escaped the horrors and fear the moment the opportunity presented itself and after becoming wife to Resumar Leonidas and then a Princess of the Union, she was the one he thought would be the most skeptical. As it turned out, this was not the case, and she was absolutely thrilled that her older sister had found what she herself had found.

Pian looked briefly at Jalersi and shook his head. “Jalersi and I spent hours trying to determine what it was they were doing. We wanted to try and stop it because we knew it would only mean death and destruction for our people.”

“All that Keleru allowed Matuarr and the others to see was the part he sent to them. Not their overall plan or how they thought it would succeed.” Jalersi told them.

“What about Jiss?” Athani asked.

Pian looked at Jalersi once more and couldn't help but smile. “Jiss has seen little more than a dark haired Lycavorian female for the last week or more.” He answered. “A female *Durcunusaan* officer saved his life inside Tarifa's home. Everyone else thought her dead from her injuries but Jiss refused to leave her behind. She was alive, and he carried her for the better part of three hours in a running fight with Puma Bane Commandos. He has sat beside her bed every day since then.”

Athani looked at him surprised. “You are serious?” She asked.

Pian nodded. “Yes.”

Jalersi laughed softly. “It is a sight to see really.” She said. “I think he is smitten by her and what she did for him. And I believe she may be interested in him as well. Time will tell really.”

“They can't possibly hope to influence the Elven Parliament with these actions.” Tarifa stated getting them back to the topic at hand. “The elves are founding members of the Union. There is nothing that would make them turn their back on the Union. Nothing!”

“But there are Elven Ministers who privately do not agree with the policies that Dysea and For'mya have instituted. Nor do they hold the Lycavorians in very high regard anymore.” Isra spoke now. “Androcles's SirsanGai Ne'Veha... her father is among them and he demanded Andro rescind his claim to her after the fact.”

“I take it this is significant?” Shiria asked.

Tarifa looked at her. “Demanding that a pureblood Lycavorian male rescind his claim to a female who has quite willingly become his mate is paramount to calling him several very foul names.” Tarifa said. “Ne'Veha's father would have known this... should have known this... and to demand it of Androcles? Well...

he is lucky he still has lungs to breath from. It is my understanding Ne'Veha herself called him some very choice things and then renounced him as her father right there in front of everyone in the mess lounge.”

“The Elven Delegation to the Senate is the largest behind only the Lycavorians. They hold two more seats than the Hadarian Delegation and three more than the Algolian, all of them permanent members of the Senate.” Isra spoke once more. “Perhaps he wishes to influence them in this way.”

Resumar shook his head now. “No.” He said softly. “Grandfather L'tian would never allow it to happen.” He said.

“Resumar... he is the one who made such a commotion when Dysea first came to the Union with Martin.” Tarifa said.

“His reasons for doing that were well known *Tenna*.” Resumar answered. “No... even since *medwaw* For'mya was named a Queen of the Union... even before then back to when father turned her... he has embraced her status and role. The elves role in the bigger picture. He has worked tirelessly through the years to bring us even closer together and now... now he would never do something to undermine that.”

“She is his daughter Res.” Tarifa said.

Resumar nodded. “Yes... but unlike *Tenne* Tareif who was raised to passionate in all that he did, grandfather L'tian was raised to believe in his station. When mother... when mother fell in love with father all that changed. When she became first concubine and then Queen... it changed even more. He saw there was more to life than just a simple station and title... that all of us serve the greater good in our actions and he has held to that conviction ever since. He will not allow anything to take place that will force the elven people away from the Lycavorians as the Kavalians have done with the Hadarians. And there are far more who believe as he does than do not.”

“Are you so sure Resumar?” Isra asked.

Resumar nodded. “Yes.”

Shiria turned to the image of Poysha. “Poysha... are you able to get close to her? Talk to her perhaps?”

Poysha shook her head quickly. “I have been placed in charge of monitoring all the electronics and devices that are monitoring the room she now occupies, but I just certified the equipment as in peak condition and it would look very odd for me to suddenly have to go and fix something.” She said. “Even if I was able... why would she believe me? Part of my cover here is my inherent hatred for Lycavorians because of what I believe they did to my parents. I must act that part to perfection for it is part of the reason I am in the position I am now Resumar Leonidas.”

Res nodded. “And I don't want you to put yourself at risk.” He stated.

Poysha thought quickly. “Perhaps in a day or so I could insinuate a small power surge or something in one of the systems that would allow me to get close to her. Pass her a message maybe that only she would understand and allow her to believe what I tell her. A few words Resumar... words that only those who know her and love her would know. Something to make her believe me.”

Resumar looked up at her image. “You would do that?”

Poysha looked at him. “You are there now... you call a Kavalian your wife and mate. You and Mican, all of you are going to risk everything to build a resistance that will fight to free my people. Getting a message to your mother is exactly the purpose I have endured what I have up until now. So that a time would come when I could help to set my people free of what Prefect Keleru and Marshall Pusintin have done. You know what I should say?”

Resumar nodded slowly. “It is the name my father gave to her. *Kinsoaurgai*. Voice of my heart. My mother Aricia is *Saaurano*. Light of my soul. If you... if you can somehow put these words in the same sentence it will give her pause. It will give her pause enough for you to give her a longer message.”

Poysha nodded. “Then I will come up with something to use these words while you inform your brother and others that she is here and devise your message. It must be short Resumar, for I doubt I will be alone with her for very long. She is somehow important to what Keleru and Pusintin are doing and a lowly tech will not be allowed to remain within this room for long.”

“What makes you think I'm going to tell my brother?” Resumar asked her.

“You will tell your brother to keep him from starting a war Resumar.” Poysha said. “Ckhoa has told me how you and your siblings view your parents... your family. And she has told me that the one person all of you fear more than your father is your brother. I have spoken with you these last days and I feel a trust has built

between us. You will tell your brother Resumar... and then you must tell him to not act as many think he will. It could cost both of us more than we are willing to lose.”

“If you know all this Poysha then you know Andro will never put our mother at risk. Not for anything.” Resumar said.

“Then perhaps what I have heard in rumors spoken about him here is wrong.” Poysha said. “I hope so... and I will put my trust in you in that regard.” She looked at something out of the image and then turned back. “I must go now. I will find a way to tell your mother these words Resumar... trust in me. I will contact you back on our normal schedule in two days.”

The image vanished and Resumar looked at Shiria. “Do not judge her too quickly Resumar. Her life there has not been easy and she has taught herself not to trust anyone outside of Ckaoa or myself.”

“I don’t judge her.” He stated quickly. “I don’t intend to judge her! What I intend is to find a way to get her and all those others with her, including my mother, out of that vile place and away from the life my uncle forces upon them if it is the last thing I do!” Resumar snarled angrily. “I... I must speak to Andro alone. If you will excuse me now.”

They watched him stride out of the bridge area, the anger floating around his aura very easy to see even to those who were not wolf. Ckaoa stepped up to Shiria. “What does he mean Scribe Mother?” She asked softly. “How will he get Poysha and the others out of there? There is no way?”

Shiria looked at Athani and smiled before she answered. “I believe there is very little he or his siblings can not do if they put their minds to it.” Shiria spoke taking Ckaoa’s hand in her own. “Just as we need to put our minds to our task now. And that is making sure Mican, Isra and the others know every portion of the castle on Rizon Four before we move there. Come... Ckaoa.”

CRANAE ISLAND

“...did not expect us to be here.” Devra spoke. “I saw that Eridiani’s face. I heard him. He was shocked that we were here.”

The bodies were gone, the glass swept up and the doors removed completely as a swarm of *Durcunusaan* had descended upon Cranae Island within moments of the battle ending. The Netnews crews were screaming for information and being told that it had all been a drill to see how well they responded to anything that might happen on Cranae Island. That story was not going to wash for very long and they knew it, but they announced it to buy them the time they needed. Neither Devra or Arduri had changed out of the clothes they had been wearing when the attack began, and even Tastia was wearing only a lightweight robe over her undergarments. Coren and Ardan had been speaking within Coren’s room and while they wore clothes that had been brought to them, they had not begun to get ready for bed. Devra had shared a look with Arduri when they saw what Tastia was wearing and that told them that perhaps Tastia was not as wrapped up within Coren as everyone first thought.

Ardan looked at her. “Devra are you sure?” He asked.

Devra nodded. “Yes, absolutely.” She answered. “I was only a few meters away from him Ardan. I heard what he said.”

“What are you doing Devra?” Coren snarled at her as they sat in the main area of the villa now.

“What do you mean Coren?” Devra asked as she sipped the large glass of tangerine juice Bren had gotten for her before moving to the Command Center with Andro and the others.

“You know very well what I am talking about!” Coren snapped. “You were with him weren’t you? We are not fools Devra and we can detect the flush in your skin! You actually laid with that animal!”

Devra’s eyes narrowed and she glared at him. “I don’t particularly care what you can or can not detect Coren Re Mydala! Perhaps you should be less concerned with who I choose to share a bed with and more concerned with the Orionis Syndicate Assassins that just attacked us here!”

“Then you did sleep with him?” Coren asked wide eyed.

“By the grace of the prophets Coren...!” Devra exclaimed. “Yes... alright... are you happy now?” She hissed viciously. “I slept with him... and if you want the details, he fucked my brains clear out of my head for

over three hours! My Alkay was pouring from my body so much that it soaked the sheets in seconds! And I adored every pulsating moment of it... and I intend to continue to enjoy it as often as I wish from this night on!”

“What?” Coren almost screamed. “You can’t be serious?” He moved closer to her. “You have compromised your objectivity by doing this!”

“I have compromised nothing!” Devra screamed back at him. Arduri reached across the couch and grasped her mother’s arm.

“Mother.” She said softly.

“No!” Devra stated getting to her feet. “For over ten millennia we have looked upon these men and women as beneath us because they are able to change their forms.” Devra spat. “We have considered them animals, nothing more than the predators they can become and in doing so we have brushed aside a friend and ally. They are more like us than you will ever know Coren, for you refuse to lift the veil of stupidity the SBR has covered your eyes with!”

“How dare you!” Coren barked at her.

“Oh... I dare!” Devra barked right back at him. “I dare because I love my daughter more than you it seems! I dare because I am willing to do whatever it takes to get my child back! I came here and I saw what we had forsaken so long ago! I came here and saw men and women willing to help me no matter what the majority of our people thought of them! I came here and found... I found my future!” Devra snarled. “I found they are no different than us in what they desire! What they worked towards! They are just more open about how they go about getting what they want!”

“What nonsense is this?” Coren snapped.

“You won’t see it because you are blind Coren. Blind to the future we could have for some reason!” Devra spoke. “I don’t understand why you think and act the way you do... but I will no longer be like you.”

“Devra you saw what they did here! You saw what that Prince did! He slaughtered that defenseless man! He killed him in cold blood! How can you even tolerate their presence much less share a bed with one?” Coren exclaimed. “They proved it this very night that they are no better than the animals they can change in to!”

“That man Androcles killed would have executed Sadi and the others father!” Arduri spoke now. “He would have executed all of us. What was he supposed to do? Allow these assassins to kill his mates and all of us?”

“I saw a man protecting those he calls wives.” Tastia said softly.

Coren snapped his head around and glared at her. “This has nothing to do with you Tastia Dal Vesch! I would appreciate it if you kept your council to yourself!” Tastia’s soft green eyes opened wide in shock at his statement to her, her hand lifting to her chest in amazement. Even Ardan’s face showed his shock at Coren’s treatment of her, but only Arduri really noticed the pain and sadness that filled those eyes instantly.

“Tell me Coren... where does this vitriol for a species you don’t even know come from?” Devra asked him, her eyes wide at the way he was treating a woman who shared his bed and his life. “Why do you refuse to see them for who they are?”

“I see them for exactly who they are!” Coren barked. “They are not like us! There is a reason the SBR has kept them at arm’s length Devra! They are violent and irrational! They act without thinking... they take what is not theirs!”

Devra blinked several times. “If you are referring in some offhand way to Bren I will have you know that he did not have to take me as you say Coren Re Mydala. I gave myself to him quite willingly and with far more passion that you could ever elicit from me!” She snarled and taking some perverse pleasure from the astonished look on his face at her words as she stuck the dig to him. “Your issues with the Lycavorians are your issues Coren and it is wrong for you to make others adhere to yours and the SBR’s shallow views of them. They saved our lives tonight Coren. My life! Your daughter’s life! This means nothing to you?”

“The assassins were obviously here for them... not us!” Coren snapped. “Whatever problems this Union might have with the Orionis Syndicate is not our dilemma! Our presence here is a risk our people can not afford. They will not help you Devra... they are using you! You are the one who is blinded... not me! By allowing this Lycavorian... this Bren person... by allowing him to use your body as you have; by doing this you have violated the sanctity of our species! The future of our species! Our forefathers never meant for us to go outside our own race! It is part of the reason we have built what we have!”

Devra looked at him with wide eyes, disbelief written all over her face at his words. “By the Grace of the Prophets Coren Re Mydala... I have never heard you make a more ridiculous statement!” She exclaimed. “The sanctity of our species? The Orionis Syndicate violates the sanctity of our species every day and you do nothing! The SBR does nothing! How can you... how can you even stand there with a straight face and expound these preposterous ideals to me Coren when our daughter, our flesh and blood, is violated every day by the same beasts that attacked us here? Prophets know what else she has had to endure! You and the SBR are so ingrained in your ways, so frightened of what you don’t know or understand that you dismiss anything that does not fit within your little world!”

“Enough of this!” Ardan barked loudly stepping between them. “We are not here to fight amongst ourselves!”

Devra turned to look at him. “No... we are not Ardan.” She stated. “We are also not here for the same things either it appears.” She turned back to Coren. “I have found what I have been looking for all of my life Coren. I have found it here. I will not be returning to Vanari space when you leave. I will be remaining here with my husband to build a new life for myself! My Lycavorian husband Coren! A man who worships the very ground I walk upon... and a man I now view in the same fashion!”

Coren’s eyes nearly exploded out of his head. “Your... your husband!” He screamed. “You can’t... you can’t be serious! You will return to Vanari space with us! You have much to answer for Devra!”

Devra turned and set her glass down on the table before turning to look at him once more. “You have already lost me Coren.” She stated calmly. “And as soon as Androcles Leonidas finds Caliria, you will lose her as well, or are you too dense to not realize who he meant when he spoke the words he did to that assassin before he killed him?”

“What?” Coren snapped.

“You have three other children Coren.” Devra stated calmly. “If I were you... I’d worry less about my seat on the SBR and more about whether you will lose them as well. Your track record up until now has not been very good.” Devra looked at Ardan. “Regent Ardan... if you will excuse me.”

Devra didn’t give him a chance to reply before spinning around and moving towards where the entrance to the *Durcunusaan* Command Center was now taking up one complete wing of the villa.

“Devra we are not finished!” Coren barked as he began to follow her.

Two *Durcunusaan* troops stepped out of Devra’s way as one opened the doors for her and she passed through without question. Both of them had entire the entire conversation that had just taken place and both of them could detect Commander Bren’s scent deeply imbedded within Devra’s blood. The doors slid shut just as Coren came up and both men moved back to their original positions directly in his path.

“Get out of my way!” Coren snapped.

There was a clicking sound and then Coren felt the barrel of a K12 placed just under his chin, and the spearhead from a half extended *Nehtes* pressed to his cheek.

“You will step back now Regent Re Mydala.” One of the *Durcunusaan* growled. “We are not in the mood for your antics.”

“That is my wife!” Coren snarled.

“Lady Devra *was* your wife Regent Re Mydala.” The second *Durcunusaan* spoke. “*Was* being the operative word here. She is now the wife and mate to Commander Bren... and she is untouchable to you. Untouchable to any male except her mate. Step back sir... we do not wish to hurt you but we will. You have won no friends here with your words this night.”

It was Arduri who stepped up now, taking her father’s arm and moving her body between him and the *Durcunusaan*, something that Ardan noticed they allowed without question as they lowered their weapons.

“Move back father.” Arduri told him gently. “You have caused enough trouble already.”

“Arduri...”

“Move back father!” Arduri snapped. “Or I will move you!”

Coren looked at her amazed at the tone of voice she had taken with him and he saw her green eyes now alive with anger. “Do not talk to me in such a tone!” He snapped at her.

“I will talk to you just as you deserve father!” Arduri stood her ground. “Mother is right you know! You are blinded by your views father... and all you will accomplish now is to get yourself hurt! Now step back!”

“So now you turn your back on me!” Coren snapped.

“No father... you turned your back on us.” Arduri answered. “You turned your back on all of us when you refused to do nothing to help us recover our sister. You turn your back on us when you refuse to acknowledge Caliria as your daughter. These men and women, they are our friends, and it is they who will help us to retrieve our sister, without your assistance father. My suggestion is to stay out of the way father, this attack by the Orionis Syndicate against Andro’s wives will not go unanswered, and you just may learn something.”

Arduri turned now and the *Durcunusaan* troop who held the K12 pressed his hand to the panel opening the doors for her. Arduri didn’t look back and followed her mother in the CC wing of the villa. Coren stepped back to where Ardan and Tastia stood, his anger simmering openly and he finally turned to look at Ardan.

“It was a mistake to come here Ardan.” He hissed. “I should have known better.”

Ardan met his eyes, looking at the young man he had nurtured for so long. “He called us his friends.” Ardan said softly.

“What?” Coren asked.

“Did you not hear him Coren?” Ardan asked. “He called us his friends. He told that man his actions had made our conflict with the Orionis Syndicate his conflict now for what they have done.”

“Ardan... you can’t possibly believe anything he said!” Coren gasped. “They tried to killed his women! They tried to kill him!”

Ardan nodded his head. “Yes they did. And if what Devra has told us is true... then he considers Caliria his wife as well.”

“That is nonsense!” Coren growled. “I will not allow it!”

“It would appear we have very little choice in the matter now.” Ardan spoke. “And if I am any judge of character... we are going to discover many things about the Orionis Syndicate that we did not know before this night.” He looked at Tastia. “You said they took prisoners Tastia?”

Tastia nodded her head slowly. “I heard them talking as they were cleaning up the main room here. Two of them, a woman and the man who was apparently the leader of this Syndicate Assassination Squad.”

Ardan looked back to Coren. “Prisoners Coren.” He said. “They have prisoners! Do you know what information we could obtain?”

“They will give us nothing!” Coren snapped. “They will probably use it to manipulate us into doing what they want!”

Ardan looked over to the two *Durcunusaan* troops by the door. “Perhaps.” He said. “I am not so sure anymore.” He said softly. All of them turned when they saw the group of men and women walk into the villa unchallenged and move right to the door into the villa’s Command Center. There were three men and four women, one of the men being incredibly tall and equally muscled with bronze like skin and what appeared to be white spurs of some sort along the edge of his jaw. Ardan watched as they approached and once more they were not challenged as the *Durcunusaan* opened to the doors instantly and they disappeared down that corridor. “I’m just not so sure anymore.”

“...are fine *Tenna!*” Andro told the image of his aunt from the *SCIMITAR*. “All of us.”

Four of the huge bedrooms originally built into this wing had been refurbished and since combined to establish a sophisticated Command Center along the west side of the wing. Outside the glass enclosed conference room they were in sat dozens of *Durcunusaan* techs at different stations. In the two hours since the attack, Jomann had ordered the C&C to be fully staffed around the clock and all command operations transferred from the base outside Sparta to here. The sixty *Durcunusaan* who had been staying in Gytheio until the barracks was complete were now camping out inside the unfurnished wing and would remain so from this day forward. Their bunks and other furniture would come in a matter of days while engineers finished installing different security systems in the barracks style east side of the wing. Jomann was no longer taking chances with the life of his Prince and the man who was rapidly becoming a very close friend, and he had already screamed his way up one side of a procurement officer and down the other in a fit of anger over what he perceived as laziness in obtaining items. The most advanced ground and thermal sensors, similar to those used to protect the Royal Villa Estate and the palace on Apo Prime, were now enroute to Cranae Island and would be installed before the end of the day.

“Who were they Andro?” Panos asked sitting beside Deia in the transmission, with Helen on her other side, Zarah and Lucia to her left.

“According to Devra and Arduri... they are Orionis Syndicate.” Andro answered. “A Hit Team.”

“A Hit Team?” Helen gasped.

Andro nodded his head. “Hired by the Kavalians if the surface thoughts I was able to sense are any indication *Feravomir*.”

“They are human Andro?” Deia spoke.

“Eridiani actually Prime Minister Deia.” Devra spoke from where she stood next to Bren now. It had amazed her to some degree that she had been ushered into this highly secure area of the villa with barely any question. When Bren had opened the door for her and Arduri, no one already in the room had even bat an eye at this action. An aide had come up and offered her more of the tangerine juice that Bren had given to her only a few hours ago, while another gave Arduri a mug of the coffee she enjoyed so much as she sat next to Carisia and Lu'ria at the huge table they all sat or stood around. Devra would come to learn over the next weeks what being Bren's wife and mate meant, for he was one of the most senior and well respected *Durcunusaan* officers within the entire Union. It was knowledge that Devra would embrace completely in her new role, a role that would hold far more power and influence in the future than she had ever thought possible.

“Eridiani?” Deia asked.

“They are human yes... but they have evolved much more than those here on Earth as you know them.” Devra explained. “Well... at least the majority of them. I believe there are several you believe are Eridiani and do not know it Androcles?”

Andro nodded. “Yes... but that is a topic for another conversation.” He said.

“You have prisoners I hope.” Deia said.

Andro nodded. “Two of them. A woman that Eliani and Anicetus captured in the tunnels and a man that Bren injured during the attack. The man appears to be the leader of this team.” He explained. “Marci flew in from Eden City with Lynwe and they will conduct the interviews. Eliani will supervise. Jomann is with them.”

“They... they were after you Andro?” Zarah asked softly.

Andro shook his head. “I was not the primary target.” He said his voice trembling with anger. “Sadi was. Carisia, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria. My uncle sent them after my wives *Tenna*!”

“*Son vada carians!*” Helen gasped. “Has he fallen so far to resort to such tactics?”

“It would appear so.” Andro growled. He felt Sadi's hand cover his and he turned to look at her where she sat closest to him always.

“We handled ourselves quite well my love.” She stated proudly.

“*Xsa ditronw udos xunus!*” Lu'ria hissed from her chair. “*Udos ph'naut nauxxizz!*”

“No... you are not helpless Lu'ria.” Helen spoke with a gentle smile. “Far from it in fact, as your actions have shown. However... like Andro's mothers it seems... you will need to learn you are not invulnerable. *Carians*... I spent ten years trying to pound it into their heads and now I must do it all over again with your wives and mates Androcles! I swear... do you and your father actually search the stars for the most obstinate females in the universe and make them your mates just to cause me sleepless nights!”

“Do you really want him to answer that question *Feravomir*?” The new voice spoke.

Androcles turned quickly and felt a small portion of the weight on his shoulders lifting. He stepped up to Denali in two strides and the two brothers embraced as if they hadn't seen each other in decades. The power of their embrace could almost be felt by everyone around them, and when Andro grabbed the back of Arrarn's head and pulled him into the embrace it became very pronounced. Arrarn reacted just as Denali had and they gripped each other with strength that would injure others. Andro brought their foreheads to his and held them there.

[*You... you don't know how happy I am to see you both.*] He spoke to them. [*Mother?*]

Deni nodded quickly. [*On her way to father.*] He answered.

Andro looked at Arrarn and squeezed the back of his neck harder. [*You keep the faith fervon. We will find medwaw... and we will bring her home.*]

[*Promise me Andro.*] Arrarn said.

[*That is a promise I make with all my heart.*] Andro answered without hesitation.

Arrarn nodded his head. *[Then I will keep the faith.] He told him. [But when the time comes... do not expect me to show mercy or hesitate.]*

[I won't.] Andro said. *[For when that day comes neither will I fervon. Neither will I. And nor will our father.]*

[Avoi.]

Arrarn took a deep breath hearing these words from his older brother and he nodded his head once more. It was what he needed to hear for he knew his older brother had never broken a promise to anyone, and that was the support he needed now.

“What happen here Andro?” Denali asked then. “We heard that there was a lock down in place when we entered the system.”

Andro nodded. “You arrived just in time to discover everything.” He said. “Grab a chair.” Andro turned and looked at Narice and Toria who stood just behind Arrarn and he leaned over to kiss both their cheeks and nuzzle then in an affectionate manner reserved for family.

“We have much to talk about Narice.” He whispered to her. “I need your counsel on many things.”

Narice squeezed his hand and nodded. “I know... I expected as much. Whenever you are ready.”

Andro nodded. “Thank you for what you both did.” He said.

“This is our family now Androcles.” Toria spoke with a brilliant smile and bright blue eyes. “Never thank us for doing our part.”

Andro nodded and looked up, seeing Lisisa embracing Sadi and Carisia tightly. He shifted his gaze and saw Normya then, hanging back from the others beside the towering young man he now knew as Tir'ut. Andro stepped away from Narice and Toria and moved over in front of Normya while she looked up at him shyly. It became quiet in the room as everyone turned to watch. It was a natural thing within the Leonidas family... for they all knew if Andro approved of something... then more than likely their father would approve. Normya's emerald green eyes were still hesitant as she gazed up into his face and then she saw that smile and those azure orbs glowed as he lifted her into his arm sand buried his face in her platinum colored hair and practically crushed her to him. The tears flowed easily for her then as she hugged him back with every ounce of strength she had, something she hadn't done in nearly half a year since she left Earth. An amount of time that seemed like eternity now.

Andro pulled his face away as he looked at her, holding her off the ground now. “I see that married life agrees with you sister.”

Normya laughed and nuzzled his cheek even harder then, her fingers digging into his shoulders. “You... you are one to talk *fervon*.” She gasped into his ear happily. Andro set her down and looked at Tir'ut then feeling weeks of pressure and worry being swept away. Normya clung to his hand and arm as she stood next to him. “Andro... this is Tir'ut.” She spoke with conviction and joy in her voice. “He is...”

“Your Blessed Husband.” Andro finished. “Yes... I can smell that quite clearly sister.” Andro stepped closer to Tir'ut, almost eye level with his six foot four frame. “My family... we owe you a debt that can never be repaid Tir'ut. I thank you with all that I am... my father thanks you as well.”

Tir'ut glanced at Normya's beaming face and then back to her brother. The closer they had drawn to Earth, the more nervous he had become. Androcles Leonidas had a reputation nearly as well known as his father, and it was common knowledge he was possessively protective of his siblings, especially his sisters. “There is no debt owed Androcles.” Tir'ut said. “The moment *Il Kal'daka Darthirii* filled my days with her beauty I was complete. The moment I tasted...”

“Tir'ut!” Normya exclaimed with wide eyes.

Andro laughed now and reached out to place his hand on Tir'ut's shoulder. “The details we can do without... but I do get the picture.” He spoke. “It is an honor to welcome you into our family and call you *fervon* Tir'ut.”

Tir'ut nodded his head to Andro. “No more than it is for me.” He stated. “And when the time is right... I will abide by your customs and I will present myself to your father Androcles.”

Andro nodded. “Of that I have no doubt.” He said. “Where is your father?”

“He and Vollenth went to Dragon Mountain first Andro.” Lisisa answered as she came up and embraced him tightly. “To fulfill a promise Vollenth made to Arzoal before he left.”

Andro nodded as he squeezed her tightly. “Then we will see him in a while.” He said. “For now... we should get back to what is happening right now.”

Devra had watched the pseudo reunion with wide eyes as she clutched Bren’s arm for the level of trust and love and confidence that permeated the air between the Leonidas children was felt by everyone in the room. To Devra it felt incredible.

For Arduri Re Mydala however, it felt utterly different.

Arduri gripped the sides of her chair when she saw them enter holding hands and her green eyes darted back and forth between the two of them. The images she had seen in no way did them justice, and from the moment she had seen their images and the way they appeared so happy and content, Arduri knew. Like her mother before her, Arduri found herself having to consciously keep from secreting her Alkay as she gazed at them. The height and incredible muscular definition of Denali and the exquisite exotic beauty of Lisisa was almost too much for her. Lisisa was not much taller than Arduri’s five foot one, yet she was built almost exactly like her with large firm breasts, a small waist and firm buttocks and legs that were encased by the ArmorPly as if it was painted on. She tried to control her breathing as Denali settled to the table two chairs away from her, his dark eyes gazing upon her for several seconds. Dark eyes that made her shiver in delight. She watched as Lisisa came up, dragging her fingers along the back of his shoulders as she settled between them at the table. When her forest green eyes turned to look at her, Arduri had to keep from gasping at the sensations that coursed through her.

“I’m Lisisa.” She spoke holding out her hand to Arduri.

Arduri almost didn’t reach for her hand afraid that her touch would cause her to excrete Alkay unwillingly, but she took a deep breath, reined in her raging emotions and gently took Lisisa’s hand.

“Ar... Arduri.” She stammered.

Lisisa was half wolf and half vampire, but her wolf genes were the more dominant of the two and she had worked very hard to master all the skills she had. While she would never have the keen sense of smell of Denali or Andro or their father, she had a very sensitive nose and she caught the scent of vanilla almond in the air easily. A scent that teased her senses in a way that only Denali ever did. She gazed at this blue skinned female for a long moment until Andro’s voice caused her to turn back to see him move to the head of the table near the image of Deia, the *Feravomir* and their grandfather Panos.

“We can talk more later... all of us.” Andro spoke to his siblings. “But for now we need to continue this briefing.”

“...sure this one is the leader?” Marci asked as she looked at the OSG Major who was now tied to the chair in front of her.

Anicetus nodded from where he stood by the door of the small room, Jomann leaning against the wall. It was meant to be used as a storage room for equipment, but for now held only a table and four chairs. The Major sat in one, his arms secured around the back of the chair with plastic bindings, his ankles also secured to the metal chairs legs. Brendi sat in the other, her ankles also secured to the chair’s legs, but her arms bound at the wrist to the arms of the chair.

“The female mentioned him several times in the tunnel as we approached. He is a major that we know of... and he was directing the others in the assault of the Prince and Princesses Master bedroom according to Bren.” He replied. “They were so intent on arguing in the tunnel that they did not sense our arrival.”

The OSG major blinked several times, surprised that he was even still alive. He glanced down to where that large Lycavorian and stabbed him with that long spear and his eyes grew wider when he realized his wounds were completely healed. He looked up once more and saw the dark haired female standing beside the much taller ebony skinned elf. He knew immediately what she was by her amber colored eyes and the flowing white hair that cascaded all around her shoulders. Another much shorter female with burgundy red hair stood to the side of the table her arms crossed over her ample chest and looking none too happy.

“I don’t think you realize the kind of situation you are in.” The dark haired female began to speak as she settled into the chair on the opposite side of the table. “We have quite a few questions for you, and how you answer the will determine whether you live or die.”

“I will tell you nothing bitch!” He snapped.

His advanced gene therapy treatments granted him the ability to see the blow coming, but whatever they had secured him to the chair with prevented him from moving to avoid it. Lynwe hit him with a straight heel strike to his jaw that rocked his head back and almost tipped him over in the chair. He snapped his head back around and looked at her with evil eyes as he spit blood onto the floor.

“That all you got elf bitch!” He snarled at her.

Lynwe grinned and allowed her vampire fangs to become exposed, watching as his smile vanished quickly when he realized what she was. “Actually... that was rather mild.” Lynwe answered him.

Marci leaned back in her chair and looked at him. “Your gene therapy treatments will not help you here.” She spoke seeing his eyes go a tad wider when she mentioned that. “Yes... we know you have undergone gene therapy to increase your endurance and strength and many of your physical skills.” She tossed the data pad onto the table. “The Princess retrieved it for us as she healed your wounds. Not without some complaining however. You see... you tried to kill her brother’s wives and mates... and that has not put you at the top of her list of good people. And straining and flexing your hands and arms will only cause the restraints to tighten. Your enhanced strength will not allow you to break the bonds sir, I assure you.”

They heard the soft groan from the female and suddenly Brendi’s head came up, her eyes wide as everything came rushing back. She groaned loudly as pain filtered through her head. The left side of her face was badly bruised from where Eliani had hit her, and the pain throbbed along her jaw and the side of her head. Her dark brown eyes focused on Marci and Lynwe and then darted to Eliani. “Oh... shit.” She hissed softly.

Marci smiled. “Oh shit doesn’t begin to cover it.” She spoke. “I’m glad both of you are awake now. It will make this much easier.”

“I demand to be treated as a prisoner of war!” The major barked.

“A prisoner of war?” Marci said. “Why would we treat you as such when we are not at war with anyone? At least not yet.” She answered.

“I know your laws!” The Major shouted. “We don’t have to tell you anything and you can’t torture us! I demand that you extradite us to the Vanari government!”

“The Vanari?” Marci asked. “Why would they accept you I wonder?”

“We are trained to resist torture!” The major spat. “You will get nothing from us so you may as well kill us now!”

Brendi looked at him with wide eyes. “Major!” She exclaimed.

“Shut up!” He snarled. “We wouldn’t be in this mess if it wasn’t for you Brendi, you stupid cunt!”

“I told you not to do this!” Brendi barked at him. “You didn’t listen to me you asshole! This is your fault!” She turned back to Marci about to speak.

“Don’t say a thing bitch!” The major growled.

“Both of you shut up!” Marci shouted at them causing both of them to look at her as she got to her feet and moved around to sit on the table in front of them. “I’m going to explain your situation to you right up front.” She stated calmly. “You are in the Lycavorian Union illegally... you are agents of either some government or organization that gave you the assignment to come here and target the wives and mates of the Crown Prince... and you are also responsible for the deaths of two citizens of the Union.” She saw their eyes widen just a little. “Yes, we have found where you staged out of and the man and women you killed in their sleep in order to access the entrance to the underground tunnels beneath this villa. The rest of your men are dead and my recommendation is that one of you talk and talk quickly or you will be joining them in the most painful way that General Lynwe can imagine. And she is a Drow elf mind you; her imagination truly knows no bounds.”

“Fuck you!” The Major snarled.

Marci smiled at him and it was not a nice smile by anyone’s definition. “Yes... that is what I thought you might say.” She spoke. “General?”

The OSG Major couldn’t stop the knife in Lynwe’s hand from coming down with speed that exceeded even what he was capable of. He couldn’t stop that blade from piercing his right thigh and driving deeply into the flesh until it was buried completely in his leg. He also could not stop the wail of agony that exploded from his lips as molten fire raced up his leg and began to spread throughout his entire lower body within seconds. His eyes glared at Lynwe as she smiled and stood back up.

“The fire in your veins that is racing throughout your body right now... it is a Drow poison.” Lynwe spoke. “Very potent... and very lethal. It also has the remarkable ability to make you answer everything we ask you truthfully. The burning will fade in several moments but enjoy the pain while it lasts for...”

“No!” Brendi screamed trying to struggle against her bonds. “Stop it! Hurry! That’s what he wants! You have to stop it!”

Lynwe looked at her oddly, her amber eyes flashing to Eliani who was suddenly very alert. “What do you mean?” Lynwe barked.

“Look at him! He’s feeding off the pain! Every OSG Team is conditioned to resist any form of torture! They are injected with a serum that accelerates their body’s physical functions to incredible levels when poisoned is introduced!” Brendi shouted.

All of them turned to see the Major’s face turning a bright red, the strain on his face very evident, the veins in his neck and cheeks almost bulging outward as if they were going to explode. Eliani stepped right up to him, reaching out with her hand as it began to flare a soft white.

“NO!” Jomann screamed as he reached for her too late.

The major released a savage growl and wrenched his arms up, the two plastic bindings on his arms snapping even as they tore the skin from his wrists. Eliani’s eyes grew wide as his hand clamped on her wrist with savage pain and he pulled her to him as he ripped the bindings from his ankles and came to his feet. As he pulled Eliani towards him with one hand he lashed out with the other, catching Lynwe across the face and sending her flying across the room to crash against the wall. Jomann had his K12 in his hand and leveled at the major’s head as he stepped up even with both Marci and Anicetus. The major yanked Eliani in front of him, his hand across her throat.

“Go ahead! Shoot me!” He screamed. “I die but I take this bitch with me! I’ll tear her throat out before you shoot me!”

“Release her!” Jomann barked out moving closer to him.

“Fuck you wolfen bastard!” The major snarled.

“You have survived this day... release her and you will live even longer!” Jomann barked at him. “Harm her... harm her and I swear to you... you will spend many long hours in agony which you can not imagine before I allow you to die.”

Eliani’s jade green eyes grew wide as she looked at Jomann and what he had just said. The major laughed almost hysterically as he brought his other hand around and fondled Eliani’s right breast.

“You got the hots for this bitch don’t you?” He snarled. “Does this piss you off wolf boy! Nice... nice and firm!” He tightened his grip on Eliani’s throat when her own anger flared and she started to struggle against his grip. “Don’t move sister... even your healing power won’t help you if I tear out your entire throat before I die!”

“Let her go!” Jomann hissed once more his K12 never wavering from its point of aim on his face.

“Shoot the intelligence cunt first!” The major barked loudly.

“Jomann don’t!” Marci snapped.

“She knows more than me anyway! Kill her and I’ll release the Princess bitch here! It’s a win win for both of us!”

“Jomann no!” Marci screamed far too slow to stop him from altering his aim and sending a single round into Brendi’s upper body in a split second. The chair Brendi was sitting in flew backwards from the force of the round impacting and the legs shattered as she fell, rolling over as blood soaked the front of her shirt.

Jomann shifted his aim back in another blink and looked at the man. “It is done ok.” He said. “Release her now and you will live!”

“Wow... you are either the stupidest motherfucker I have ever met, or you got the serious itch for this little bitch I am holding.” The major snarled. “Which one is it big boy?”

Jomann stared at the man his blue eyes holding nothing but painful death for this pig who held Eliani. “She... she is a Princess of the Union.” He spoke. “It is my duty... it is my duty to protect her!”

“Bullshit!” The major screamed spittle flying away from his lips. “I’m a nobody! You just whacked an OSG Intelligence Agent! She could have told you everything you wanted to know!”

“You will be alive!” Jomann spoke.

“I’m just a soldier!” He laughed. “You got nothing! I know nothing!” He shoved Eliani forward towards Jomann who caught her easily with one arm and pulled her tightly to him. “Take the bitch! You are all the same! All you Lycavorians are stupid as rocks! You killed the real prize here!”

Jomann’s arm curled tighter around Eliani and he felt her hands encircle his waist, his K12 still maintaining its spot on the major’s forehead. “Then it is a very good thing I only shot her in the shoulder!” Jomann snarled at him seeing the major’s eyes go wide. “And this is for laying your filthy hands on the Princess! You can’t feed off of anything if your brain is dead fool! Never touch her! Never!”

Jomann pulled the trigger and the single shot echoed in the soundproof room just as his first shot had. The KM round entered just above the bridge of his nose and blew the upper half of his head open, spraying the wall behind him with blood and brains. The major’s body stood there for several seconds before his legs got the message he was dead and then he appeared to fall over in slow motion. Jomann glared at his body as he fell, his legs quivering as the nerves stopped receiving signals and then were still.

“Now who is the stupid motherfucker *midaeus*?” Jomann growled angrily. He turned away from the corpse and pushed Eliani away from his body and looked at her. “Eliani?” He gasped. “Are you... are you hurt?”

“I wanted him alive!” Marci barked at Jomann.

“The female still lives!” Jomann snarled back at her as Anicetus helped Lynwe to her feet and looked at him.

“Shit!” Marci spat with wide as she moved to where Brendi lay on the floor unmoving.

Jomann turned his attention back to Eliani and holstered his K12 before taking either side of her head in his hands and turning her face upwards to his. “Eliani... are you...” Jomann’s words died in his throat when he saw those jade green eyes open and focus on him. They were the most exquisite eyes he had ever seen in all his life and their brightness took his breath away.

Until Eliani shoved him away with surprising strength and her eyes changed to an angry glare. “Marci’s right!” She spat as she backed away from him.

“He was... he would have...” Jomann gasped in shock.

Eliani pushed his hands away and stepped away from him fully. “Then you should have shot to wound him!” She growled. “It was stupid and it cost us intelligence!” She whirled away from him and moved quickly to settle next to Marci on the floor beside Brendi.

Jomann stood there for a long moment watching as she began to treat Brendi. Anicetus and Lynwe came up beside him after a few moments.

“You... you did the right thing Jomann.” Anicetus spoke softly.

Lynwe nodded her head. “If what the female said is true then yes you did.” She told him. “I must report to Andro what has happen here.”

“No.” Jomann said looking up. “I will do that.” He blinked several times and turned to Anicetus. “Insure she does not leave the island Anicetus. And post a detail around the prisoner at all times.”

“Done.” Anicetus said.

Jomann looked at Lynwe. “I will report what has happened General. You should remain with Marci and continue when the... when the Princess has healed her.”

Lynwe and Anicetus watched as he turned quickly and moved to the door.

DRAGON MOUNTAIN

“I should... I should not be here brother.” Cha’talla spoke softly as they walked side by side through the massive corridor and into the main center chamber. His eyes lifted and high above him he could see dozens of dragon hatchlings flying in the air in tight circles. “I do not... I do not deserve to be here.”

Oh... but you do. The female voice filled Cha’talla’s head and caused him to turn as the colossal flame red body of the dragon moved deftly from the side towards him and Vollenth. Very few things could frighten Cha’talla for in his years of life there was not much he had not seen. However, seeing Arzoal move towards him made him involuntarily step back, almost as if by instinct seeking the protection and defense of his Bonded Brother.

Arzoal settled to the deck in front of them and allowed her eyes to gaze upon something she never thought she would see in her lifetime. An AkruXian bonded to a dragon. It was a sight to behold really, and Martin's words that they were headed into the unknown when they first formed *Mjolnir's Hand* came back to her.

All of the newly bonded pairs come here Cha'talla of the AkruXian Immortals. Arzoal told him as she extended her snout closer to him. *For this is the place here on Earth where you can come to be at peace and to study and to be safe. When Volleneth left I made him promise me that he would return when he found his true Bonded Brother and I am very happy that he has returned with such news.*

"Dysea has told me much about you... Elder Mother." Cha'talla spoke.

Arzoal's musical tones filled his head and she blinked at him. *I'm sure she has. It is my understanding that we owe you a great debt Cha'talla. For helping to return Dysea to us. And please... allow me to hear your voice inside my head.*

There is no debt owed. Cha'talla spoke. *If there was one it would be a debt I owe her. A debt I owe her for believing in my people and I when no one else would.*

That is the past now Cha'talla. Arzoal spoke calmly. *And you must leave that past behind you.*

There is a reason others feel as they do Elder Mother. Cha'talla spoke. *My people... we do not have the best of reputations.*

Something you have already begun to change if I understand. Arzoal spoke.

I am trying. Cha'talla told her.

And now you will have more of us to help you. Arzoal spoke. *You are a Bonded Pair now Cha'talla of the AkruXian people. One of us... and you will always be welcome here. Come... let me show you the world you have entered Cha'talla.*

"...all this proves is that the KFI is working with criminal organizations." Panos spoke from the transmission. "Only they would have come after Andro again after failing the first time. And only they would specifically target Sadi and the others."

"This is what we have assumed for quite some time now. The Kavalians have amassed far too much wealth in so short a time to not be involved in some way. Strong arming their *allies* and controlling criminal traffic does not surprise me." Deia said nodding her head in agreement. "The question remains... how many and to what extent?"

"Does that matter *Tenna*?" Denali asked.

"It does if we want to discover who we will need to worry about if war breaks out." Deia answered. "Many of the criminal organizations will jump at the chance to sweep in and divide up what they consider to be Union space at the first opportunity."

"Are any of them even large enough to pose a risk?" Lisisa asked.

"Having to protect our space from pirates and mercenaries uses up resources that would be needed in any war." Andro said. "*Tenna* Deia is right... we have never really attempted to discover anything about them. Not since father scattered the Overseers."

"And not since you and Elynth sort of danced on their heads." Arrarn chimed in.

Andro spun in his chair and looked at Devra who had taken a seat beside Ne'Veha. "Can you tell us anything about this Orionis Syndicate Devra? Anything at all?"

"Not very much I'm afraid." She answered with a shake of her head. "Vanari Intelligence has never been able to get anyone inside their organization for obvious reasons and the Eridiani government protects them almost religiously. We do know they have broken their organization into at least four different parts to better protect themselves. These are the parts that work with the Eridiani government individually and behind the scenes."

"And these Eridiani protect them Devra? But why?" Deia asked.

Devra nodded. "They protect them fervently. And we don't know why. It is also why many Vanari have begun to believe that there is no distinction between the Eridiani and the Orionis Syndicate. And part of the problem is that we continue to trade with them and allow their citizens to come and go to Austrova without any supervision or checks."

“Are all of them involved somehow?” Helen asked now. “Do all of their people agree with how this government runs things?”

Devra shrugged her shoulders. “No one knows.” She stated. “They are very insular and even our trading ships do not go beyond markers set up just inside their borders. All equipment is traded on the outskirts and then they transport it to their planets.”

“Devra... forgive me for asking... but if they treat your people like this, why do you allow them such freedom of movement within Vanari space?” Deia asked. “Why do you trade with them and allow them to come onto your worlds.”

“Trust me Prime Minister, if it was up to me and several other of the younger generation of Regents... things would be different.” Devra answered. “The SBR... the older Regents who reside... they are very anxious about disturbing the flow of things.” Devra looked at Bren who stood behind her. He reached out and put his hand on her shoulder and she lowered her cheek to his knuckles and basked in the touch of his skin. She looked back up at the transmission image of Deia. “It will not matter for me now.” She stated. “I will no longer have any influence within the Board of Regents. I have made my choice and it is here where I wish to be. Once Coren and Ardan return and it is discovered what I have done, the tenuous relationship between the Vanari and the Protectorate will only get worse.”

“And it won’t improve when they receive this.” Dutkne’s voice caused all of the to turn as he entered the room without fanfare.

Andro rose to his feet as Dutkne came around next to him at the table and held out the data pad he was carrying. “What’s this?” Andro asked.

Dutkne smiled. “I have just finished a communication with the Protectorate Council.” He spoke. “I have told them what is happening here... what my grandfather and I have discovered. I have never seen those bunch of political *riad aulveds* slobber with glee as they were doing.” He looked at Deia in the transmission. “Forgive me Prime Minister.”

Deia shook her head with a small smile. “Trust me Dutkne... we have plenty of our own *riad aulveds* within the Union. What did they say?”

Dutkne looked at Andro. “I tried to tell them to move things along slowly because events here are fluid. As usual... they did not listen to me. In two weeks time they will issue an edict dissolving the Protectorate and merging it with the Lycavorian Union.”

“Two weeks!” Andro gasped his eyes wide.

“I told you the weight your family name carries even within the Protectorate Andro. We know all the history of your ancestors before you and everyone from the Black Day after. We have always known... grandfather has just not revealed the significance of it. I decided it could no longer be kept from them.” Dutkne said. “It would have been discovered by traders or something of that nature sooner rather than later. Better that it comes from me and then us... that way we can direct and control the wave of Lycavorians who will want nothing more than to come here and see what we have only read about in our history books. I felt it needed to be done and I apologize for not telling you first.”

Andro shook his head. “No... you do not apologize to me.” He said.

Dutkne grinned. “I will hold you to that.” He said.

Andro turned and looked at the transmission. “*Tenna* Deia... this... this is far outside my realm.”

Deia took a deep breath and looked at Helen briefly before turning back to Andro. “You are your father’s son Androcles Leonidas. There will come a day when you will be King for real *mandri*. As with your father, better that you learn it now than later. Better that you all learn it now.” Deia spoke looking at all of the Leonidas children. “The yoke of leadership is something all of you will bear for the rest of your lives because of the name you carry. Your mates and wives as well. It is not something you can dismiss any longer.”

“Andro... something is guiding what is happening all around us.” Helen spoke looking at him. “Arzoal and I have spoken of it. We have felt things... fleeting things across our senses. Everything we do now... everything... it will have a direct impact on our future. The future of us all.”

Andro looked at her and rolled his eyes. “*Feravomir*... if you know something why can’t you just tell us?” He gasped.

Dutkne chortled. “Where would be the lesson in that?” He muttered and saw those closest to him who heard him smirk and hide their smiles.

“If I knew something I would tell you *mandri* Dutkne!” Helen barked in a stern voice as she looked at Zarah and Lucia who were trying very hard not to laugh. “It is not something we can put into words... it is merely a perception.”

Deia leaned forward. “Androcles... if we are to make this façade work? If we are to hide the fact that your father lives still... then we all need to work together. We need to work to discover what it is your uncle is planning and how he plans to do it. There can be no secrets between us. We must find out what we can so that your father can retrieve your mother as I know that is his intention. No one will deter him from that path now. I am not so old as to not realize why you sent Daniel and the others to Curila 6 Andro. They are and always have been his spear. His fist. And he intends to unleash them very soon I know.”

“What are you saying *Tenna*?” He asked softly.

“This attack by these Orionis Syndicate people.” Deia said gently. “There... at your home. Targeting those you and those you love dearest of all. It was meant to kill you and Sadi and the others yes... but it was also a message as well.”

“A message?” Andro spoke.

Deia nodded. “A message that they can reach you no matter where you go. Andro... about this mission you are going to conduct? The mission to retrieve Caliria. You must...”

Andro shook his head. “If you are going to ask me to not go *Tenna*... your request will fall on deaf ears. She is meant to be with us... with me. Part of us... just as my father and mothers are. I have tried... ever since I was a boy I have tried to be unlike my father in almost every way, yet no matter what I did... what I do... I always end up following in his footsteps without even realizing it. I fight it... and still it happens no matter what I do.” Andro turned and looked at Sadi first, then Lu'ria and Ne'Veha and Carisia. His eyes finally went to where Arduri sat next to Lisisa and then to where Devra had come to her feet gripping Bren's hands on her shoulders. He turned back to Deia. “I have seen the pain and humiliation she has endured *Tenna* Deia. Almost as if it was my own.” Andro shook his head slowly. “No... I made her a promise two nights ago when I touched her...”

“You... you have spoken with her!” Devra gasped loudly, her hands going to her mouth.

Andro turned and looked at her. “I... I was able to make a very brief direct contact using a Neural Booster Devra. It was only seconds... but I made her a promise.” Andro turned back to look at his Aunt. “I told her I would come for her *Tenna*. I told her I would come for her and bring her home to be with us.”

Deia nodded slowly. “I was not going to tell you not to go *mandri*.” Deia spoke gently. “I was going to tell you to give them a message *mandri*. A message that will sound throughout The Wilds. I know what you have planned Androcles. You are too much like your father for me not to know.”

“Then you know I will not be deterred.” Andro said.

Deia nodded again. “Yes. I was going to tell you to retrieve Caliria and leave nothing alive in your wake Androcles. Not for what they have done.” Deia took a deep breath. “That pig Kavalian Ambassador has contacted us through their Zaleisian lap dogs. They have requested... demanded an audience with the Union Galactic Court, the Elven Parliament and an official from the new Hadarian Arch Ministry is also sending a representative.”

“About mother?” Arrarn asked coming to his feet.

Deia nodded. “Yes... and many other things as well.” Her dark eyes bore into Andro. “You have four days *mandri*. Four days to retrieve her and send a message to everyone else who thinks to manipulate us! I have reached the end of my tolerance Androcles... and like your father I will not sit by any longer.”

Andro looked at her for a long moment. “And what about the Icalro Alliance Aunt Deia?” He asked.

“*Jenylar vada nubous ronnus!*” Deia snarled savagely. (Bury the fucking bastards!)

CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

CRANAE ISLAND

TWO HOURS BEFORE DEPARTURE

“...could have gotten more possibly, but the second female died from some sort of poison before anyone got to her.” Marci spoke as she handed him the data pad across the table of the conference room in the secure wing of the villa and saw him shake his head slowly. Marci knew he did not like killing women and he was one of many Lycavorian men who would avoid it if at all possible. “You didn’t kill her Andro and based on what we saw with this OSG man Andro, it’s probably better that she did die.” She spoke confidently. “Eliani healed this Brendi woman quickly, but with only two hours I wasn’t able to extract much. The drugs did not have time to fully set in and Eliani said her injuries dictated I did not press as hard as we wanted too. Lynwe agreed. I think... I think Jomann acted rashly in killing the man. We may have been able to get something from him.”

Sadi was the only one of Andro’s mates who had come to this meeting with him and she sat directly to his right as she always did, and now she was dressed in a flight version of the Mark IV ArmorPly Body Armor, her long blond hair pulled entirely over to one shoulder and wrapped in the amber and violet colored strips of satin that were the colors of Lu’ria’s Drow family. Lynwe sat beside Marci at the table drinking a mug of Drow tea while Eliani sat on Marci’s opposite side. Jomann stood in the corner of the room, just behind Andro and to the right while Dilaen Roan sat in the corner beside the door into the corridor that led to the main room, taking everything in and remaining quiet. Androcles had told her she would be privy to information very few people would have and he was being true to his word and showing a total faith in her and Thomas. The amount of *Durcunusaan* that had flooded the area around Cranae Island had allowed for almost all of them to slip out of the villa relatively easily and meet up with several *STRIKERS* that were parked and hidden some distance away. A *TYPE II* Dragon Transport now occupied one bay of the *SCIMITAR* in orbit above them, flown up by Arrarn and Toria. Denali and Lisisa would be accompanying the attack force to the surface and they were now working with the *Durcunusaan* RD Team as they checked and rechecked their weapons. Bren, Devra and Arduri had accompanied them up to the *SCIMITAR* on the *STRIKER* flown by Normya. Helen and Panos had returned to Sparta while Deia had returned to the island and now sat with them in the conference room, Dutkne beside her.

Andro lifted the pad in his hand looking at it briefly before his eyes went to Marci. “If you are expecting me to somehow place blame here Marci... I have no intention of doing so. And I certainly have no intention of reprimanding Jomann in any way for his actions. He saved Eliani’s life. Period.”

Eliani glanced over to where Jomann stood and she squeezed her palms tightly together under the table as she fought to beat down the incredible emotions she felt within her. Even in the midst of her fear about what was happening when the OSG major was holding her, ready to end her life; Eliani somehow knew it wasn’t going to happen. It wasn’t going to happen because Jomann was there and he would not let it happen. When the major had shoved her forward into his arms and Eliani felt his arm pull her tightly against his powerful body, she couldn’t help but slide her arms around his waist. It was almost instinct for her to do this and feeling the warmth of his body against hers, feeling the press of his muscular frame against hers and the force of his aura burning in the room, Eliani Leonidas had experienced a sexual rush unlike anything that had ever surged through her veins before. And that feeling, those sensations that he had caused within her... they had frightened her terribly.

“I think we could have talked him down Andro.” Marci said quickly.

“While he held my sister by her throat, was affected by something that allowed him to snap plastisteel bindings like they were nothing and while Jomann allowed him to feel Eliani up as if she was some sort of brothel whore?” Andro said shaking his head. “If I had been in the room I would have killed them both. There is no blame to place here Marci, with Jomann or with you. He acted as any *Durcunusaan* would have, even as you were doing your job.”

“I know but...” Marci began to speak and stopped as she leaned forward in her chair and exhaled heavily.

Andro watched her carefully and then set the pad on the desk. “Where is she now?” He asked.

“She’s locked down in the *SCIMITAR*’s medical bay under 24/7 guard. Leaving her here on Earth is taking too much of a risk. She’ll be out of it for ten to twelve hours according to Eli and then we can question her more.” Marci spoke softly. “Her gene therapy treatments were directed more to increase the efficiency of her brain, that is why she is an Intelligence Agent and not an operator like the others.”

“Increase the efficiency of her brain by nearly fifty percent!” Eliani spoke cutting her eyes back to her brother and getting her raging hormones under control while reverting to the supremely skilled Healer that she was. “It’s incredible really Andro.”

“Her brain is fifty percent larger?” Andro asked looking at her oddly.

“No you dope!” Eliani spoke leaning forward at the table as she spoke animatedly. “She uses fifty percent more of the capacity and ability of her brain than normal humans. She can store more information, and she can process that information much quicker. She is essentially a living and breathing genius! I didn’t want the drugs affecting her adversely and that’s why I had them stop.”

“We should have pressed her harder.” Marci spoke.

“Andro... Andro I don’t think the drugs are necessary.” Eliani spoke softly. “She said some things in the room... and just before I yanked her out of the fireplace in my room. I could hear her arguing with the men that Anicetus killed in the tunnel. She said some things that make me believe she did not want to be here.”

“We can not interrogate a prisoner based on feelings Eliani.” Marci snapped softly.

“How did she get here?” Andro asked before Marci angered Eliani enough that his sister tore into her.

“She’s been here for seven months as near as we could tell from what she gave to us so far.” Marci replied. “She goes by the name Brendi Faith, she owns a small trinket shop in the Old District of Sparta and she migrated here from Edolus. It sits on the edge of the Union’s outer border within Bontawillian space, relatively large sized settlements on the surface that are primarily human. The others have been here even longer, the longest being four years and they come from similar backgrounds. We did traces on them, which were ridiculously easy for some reason and all of them have come into the Union and here to Earth through the different human settlements inside the Union and the two within The Wilds. Primarily through Edolus and Imaneya on the Limian border. The trail on all of them ends there.”

“It doesn’t end.” Dutkne spoke now. “It begins. And it was easy to trace them because they wanted it to be. It lends credence to their background information. If they are an OSG Hit Team, and I have no reason to doubt what Devra says...” Dutkne looked at Andro and he nodded.

“Neither do I.” Andro stated immediately.

“If they are an OSG hit team then there is no way of telling how many more of them there are here on Earth and even on the many human planets you say are out there.” Dutkne finished. “They obviously have connections offworld and that is the information we need from this woman.”

“They did not just arrive in the last few days or weeks Andro.” Jomann spoke. “They knew enough to establish themselves in productive positions. They knew enough to find a way to get the plans of Cranae Island and the tunnels beneath us that even we did not know about. That only comes with months and years of patience and study.”

Andro nodded. “We know how they got the plans to the island.” He stated. “*SirsanGai* and Famus will take care of that problem.”

“Unfortunately...” Dutkne continued. “It also means that they may have contacts within the Union as well, as much as it burns my *mida* to admit that.”

“Why would you say that Dutkne?” Deia asked.

“Their number Deia.” Dutkne answered. “I can see them putting three, perhaps four of their agents here on Earth to monitor things, but fifteen men and women? That seems a bit much don’t you think?”

“Four years ago is about the time that Armetus began hearing rumors of the Kavalians working and supporting new criminal organizations within The Wilds Andro.” Marci spoke. “It is how they were able to channel funds to the Evolli and help them to fund their war effort.”

“If they have been working with the Kavalians for as long as we suspect, could they not have learned these things this way Dutkne?” Sadi asked softly. “Since all of this began we have discovered Laustinos has had his hand in many nefarious things, and it would not surprise me if he is the one who got them set up within the Union at the behest of the Kavalians.”

Marci nodded. “She has a point Andro.” Marci said. “We should not jump to conclusions about anything. Or assume anything until we are sure. I’ll have Nesa and Praylro broaden their searches to include the human settlements on Edolus and Imaneya.”

Dutkne nodded slowly. “A sound move. As you no doubt noticed they do not care for our species, and once word reaches back to the Beta Quadrant that we have destroyed one of their Hit Teams, they will not be happy.”

“He called me... us... wolfen bastards.” Jomann said now moving up closer to the table as he spoke.

Dutkne nodded. "That is a result of something my father did before I was even born." He answered. "Two thousand years ago the OSG tried to claim a part of Protectorate space for their own. There was a small moon right on our border with the Vanari and they thought to use this moon as a base of operations for their forays into Vanari space to kidnap females. As expected my father took exception to this boldness and he led a force of three thousand of our fighters to this moon. For the next four months they did nothing but harass and attack the OSG forces there and they did so mainly in our wolf forms. It truly frightened them and that is the name they gave us. Wolfen Bastards."

"This is why we need to press this Brendi woman harder Andro." Marci stated as she met his eyes. "We need what is in her head. If what she gave us in just two hours is any indication, think of what she could give us under a full interrogation."

"It will also more than likely kill her!" Eliani hissed softly. "We don't know what our drugs will do to her! Or how they will affect her because of the gene therapy she has undergone with these OSG assholes."

"You were there Eliani! You heard her answer the questions! They came here to kill Sadi! All of your brother's mates if they could! They came here to kill him! To kill you!" Marci snapped. "That doesn't mean anything to you?"

Her reaction caused Andro to lean forward now. "Marci... how long has it been since you slept?" Andro asked her.

Marci shook her head. "Thirty-six... maybe forty hours." She answered. "I don't have time to sleep Andro. We are trying to discover just how far Laustinos's treachery goes, and the mass of information we are gathering takes time to go over. Everyone is working double hours, sometimes triple. Now with this happening... we..."

Andro got to his feet then. "You need to sleep!" He snapped. "And you will do so if I have to order you too."

Marci looked at him from her chair. "Andro..."

"General Lynwe ... you will insure Marci sleeps for at least a full day once we depart." Andro said. "And that includes all of the people working for her, Nesa most of all."

"You're relieving me?" Marci gasped looking at him with wide eyes and coming to her feet.

Andro shook his head quickly and moved around the table to stand in front of her. "No Marci... never! You know me better than that. I'm keeping you from killing yourselves when I need you the most. Especially with what I'm going to have you do."

Marci looked at Andro. "What... what do you mean?"

Deia inched her hover chair back and reached over to place her hand on Marci's arm. "We want you to implement Storm Shadow Marci." Deia said softly.

Andro watched Lynwe sit up in her chair and Marci's eyes got large as she looked back and forth between Androcles and Deia. "Storm Shadow?" She gasped finally. Her dark eyes settled on Deia. "Prime Minister... you... you have been against that program since Armetus and I put it together. You and the King both."

Deia nodded. "Yes... I have been." She stated. She looked at Andro. "Recent events have brought me to the conclusion however that we need to change how we do things. It is part of why these things have happened and why we did not see them coming."

"What... I don't understand." Marci said.

"I am at fault for this... both Martin and I... but more me than him." Deia said softly as she looked down slowly at her chair and her healing legs. "I have been willing to do almost anything through the years to prove that our people can change. Even after Martin returned and began to give back to our people what I had taken away, I have always counseled him to be accommodating so that we would be seen as something other than what we are. He resisted at times, but in the end he almost always saw things my way, because I believe he wanted the same thing." Deia looked up at Marci again. "After what has happened now... he will no longer be the man he thought he should be. Now he will be the man he is inside, the one he was before he returned and took his place as King. We are Lycavorians! We are wolves in the form of men and women! Your father told me there is so much more that we had to do together and I finally understand what he meant now." Deia said.

“It is why he would not let me retire when I wanted too.” Deia continued. “It is why he drove me forward. He knew this day would come... I know he did. He knew that one day I would need to decide who we are as a people and he knew I would come to the decision I have come too.”

“*Tenna?*” Eliani asked softly.

Deia smiled and held up her hand. “Oh... I am not going away my sweet Eliani, you who bear the name of my sister.” She said with a smile. “No... I am going to follow the instincts of our people from this day forward. The instincts Resumar and Eliani meant for us to follow. As I always should have from the beginning. No... from this day forward the Lycavorian Union will once more be the Union that Resumar intended at the very start. We will become once more what the Elves and Hadarians and the Algolian people saw when they agreed to form the Union with us in the beginning. We are who we are...” Deia said her face radiant and proud. “We are proud... we are strong and loyal to those who are our friends and we are cunning and brutal to those who would be our enemies. We are wolves... and *son vada carians* we are going to start acting like it again!”

Dutkne sat there with pride swelling through his chest. This is what his grandfather meant for him to be part of. This is what he knew was coming and Dutkne now thanked every god in the stars that he was here to witness and experience it all first hand.

“This is only the beginning and Panos will be announcing other changes as well at his speech tomorrow afternoon.” Deia spoke as she maneuvered her hover chair away from the table. “We are going to embrace what we are...” She looked up at Andro. “Just as you have always done without question no matter the doubts inside you Androcles.”

“*Tenna...* you...” Andro began.

“No. You don’t see it do you?” She spoke with a gentle smile. “It was you Androcles; it was Eliani, Denali... Lisisa, it was all of you. You have embraced who and what you are at the core and you do not question it. I am truly ashamed that so many of our people had to die for me to finally see what it is your father truly brought back to our people. What he instilled in all of you. But I intend to make sure they did not die in vain. I will appear with Panos tomorrow, he will do most of the talking, but we spoke at length last night with Helen. To think the man who should have been my deputy all these years has been so close and I did not see it...” Deia shook her head. “No more. He has agreed to help me, to help your father make sure our people achieve what it is we are suppose to achieve. In truth... we were not going to tell you until you returned... but after last night I will no longer hide or cower. We must continue with our façade that Martin is dead... I will not risk For'mya for anything... she is one part of what keeps your father in check. Until we discover what the Kavalians are up too we can not take the risk they will kill her for it will send your father and mothers over the edge. We will discover where she is and we will get her back!”

“And then?” Dutkne asked as he got to his feet.

Deia looked at him and her dark eyes filled with a coldness that reminded Dutkne of the winters on Lorent. “Then Dutkne... then I am going to turn Androcles and his father and every Spartan within the Union loose and make sure that our enemies know that we will tolerate no one that *nubous* with the Lycavorian Union!”

Deia spun her chair around and left the conference room without another word.

“Oh... I really like her now Andro!” Dutkne exclaimed.

Andro took a deep breath and turned back to Marci. “Rest for a full day. All of you. And then implement Storm Shadow Marci. Deia will inform Grandfather L'tian and he will shuffle the oversight committee around and bring them up to speed.”

“Many of them... the politicians... they will not like it Andro.” Marci said.

Andro nodded. “Probably not... but they will have to live with it.” He stated. “We can no longer be the open society that we have thrived on for so long. There are others who want what we have and they will go to any lengths to achieve that as we have seen. Have Nesa continue with Laustinos... have Praylro shift to this Syndicate thing and you begin pulling files and making choices. The Krypteria is yours to run until Armetus is well enough and then you will need to run it together.”

Marci looked at him. “Storm Shadow was built around three of us Andro.” She spoke. “Three separate branches all reporting to Armetus who then reports to L'tian.”

Andro nodded. "I know." He said. "You have Operations... Nesa has Analysts... and the third has Intel Gathering. I believe I have the perfect choice for that part. Four of them actually if you take into account they are couples."

Marci looked at him oddly. "Who?"

Andro looked at Lynwe whose amber eyes were wide and bright. "Why don't you let Lynwe fill you in since I'm pretty sure by the look on her face she knows exactly who I'm talking about?" He turned back to Marci. "And she can insure you follow my orders as well."

"Andro you..." Marci began.

"No. This is too important and you need to be at your best." Andro said. "There is a *MENKLA* waiting for you in Gytheio. I will contact you when we are on our way back."

Marci stared at him for a long moment and then nodded her head. "I won't let you down Androcles."

"I know." Andro spoke. "I'm going to keep this Brendi woman on the *SCIMITAR* for now. I want to try and see if Eli's approach works. If it doesn't..."

Eliani came forward. "If it doesn't... I'll be the one next to you Marci sticking her so that she tells us everything."

Marci nodded as Lynwe came up to her. "We'll be set up in the first stages by the time you get back. I promise."

Andro nodded. "Get going!" He said. "All of you. I want a moment with Sadi before we leave for the *SCIMITAR*."

Sadi's green eyes grew puzzled as she stood up and everyone headed for the double doors out of the conference room. She moved around the table as Andro went to the door and locked it with a wave of his hand over the panel. "Andro my love what is...?"

Andro spun around, one hand going behind her neck and the other arm encircling her waist as his lips came down on hers and he crushed her body to his. Sadi was momentarily taken aback by the ferocity of his passion, but only for a split second and then she surrendered to the feelings his aura was pulsing through her. She wrapped her arms around his waist and returned his sizzling kiss with equal fervor, basking in the sensations his aura was bathing her in. She lowered all her own shields and poured her female aura at her beloved Androcles and their minds touched as he picked her up and backed up slowly to the large table where he set her firm butt down on the edge without breaking their kiss. Sadi Leonidas was almost beside herself as she clutched at him, trying to pull him closer and draw his probing tongue even deeper into her mouth. He hadn't kissed her like this since their first night together here on Cranae Island and Sadi's blood was beginning to burn like it had when she was in phase only a few months ago and their lovemaking had been plentiful and exquisitely zealous. She could almost feel every pulse of his mind, every beat of his heart against her chest even through the body armor they both wore, and once more Sadi could only revel in the knowledge that he was her *anome*. Her soulmate, no matter how many others shared their lives. It was almost as if he saw what she was thinking for he pulled his lips away quickly, Sadi trying to grab them once more as his other hand came up to take her face in his hand.

"I *am* your *anome*!" He rasped out the words and she opened her eyes with a slight gasp. His dual wolf fangs, so ferocious looking to those who did not know any better and so utterly beautiful to her, were fully extended. His azure orbs were fully changed, with the thick black ring surrounding the striking blue pupils. Sadi's eyes changed in that instant and her own wolf fangs extended fully below her lips as she stared at him. When he had bitten her, it had made her his *anome*, but it also served to send the virus within his blood racing through her own veins to mix with the virus in hers. This interaction, and all the times they had made love since, all this had altered her fangs somewhat, moving her canine teeth ever so slightly so that a second, much smaller dual set of fangs appeared next to her main ones. Sadi had rejoiced when this had begun and then fully completed and she had made it a point to expose her fangs whenever she could for only the line of Leonidas or those they called wives shared this trait. She stared at his handsome face and wrapped her legs around his waist as he stood there in front of her while she sat on the table. "I... I could not go forward without you Sadi Leonidas. It is you who hold the center of my heart. All that I am. You are my *KertaGai*."

Sadi drew him closer to her, reaching up with her hands and drawing his face down to hers so that she could nuzzle his cheek and neck. This she did with ardent bliss, his lavender and pines scent filling her every pore. "Why... why do you tell me something that I already know Androcles my love?" She whispered to him.

“You show me this every waking moment of every day simply in the way you gaze upon me. The way your aura caresses me, the way your mind touches mine.” She drew back and looked at his dazzling azure blue eyes.

“What is wrong Androcles?”

“I... I am not my father *KertaGai*.” He said softly.

Sadi smiled seductively. “I know this and that is good for your father does not make me scream his name to the moon every time he takes me. Your father does not make my blood burn for him with a simple caress. He does not stimulate my mind as I swim within your thoughts. Now tell me... tell me what it is that occupies your mind Androcles.”

“I... I came close to losing you last night.” He spoke softly.

Sadi shook her head quickly. “No... it is me you are talking to now Andro. You know full well that I am very capable of protecting myself and those we love. I have been working diligently at the exercises the *Feravomir* gave me to focus and refine my control. Those OSG fools would not have harmed me. Or any of us. Now tell me...” Sadi saw his eyes then and she tilted her head to the side and felt her heart swell with love for him. “Oh my love... I can see it in your thoughts. You... you still struggle with all we have found. Carisia... Ne'Veha... Lu'ria and now Caliria. You still carry within you the feeling that you are betraying me because of your feelings for them? Don't you?”

“You... you are my *anome*.” Andro said softly. “I don't... I don't understand why I feel for them what I do. Why I can not just have you?”

“But you do have me Androcles. You have every part of me.” She told him. “Andro... do you love them?” Sadi asked softly.

“Yes.” He answered softly. “Not... not in the way I love you *KertaGai* but yes.”

“And so do I my love. But because of who you are... the honor within you... it leaves a bad taste in your mouth that you could feel for them what you do?” She said.

“Yes.” He answered.

“We have had this discussion before my handsome mate and husband.” Sadi spoke. “I am your soulmate Androcles Leonidas... and you are mine. I could never love any man or woman as I love you. But that does not mean we can not love others if that is the plan the gods have for us. I know you feel it my love... just as I do. Do you think Carisia and Ne'Veha care about this? Do you think Lu'ria cares? Do you think Caliria will care? Having even a small part of your heart is more than any of them could have ever dreamed for. For that is how big your heart is. They know you will love them breathless... just as you love me. Just as we love you! And like your mother Aricia loves your other mothers, I love them all as well. And like your mothers... we could never feel for another man what we feel for you. We could never feel from another man what you make each of us feel. And when being in your arms is not possible, we can take solace in our love for each other and the pleasure that brings to us. Now that our Drow Mistress has come into our lives, we have become very inventive and...”

“*KertaGai*...” Andro began.

“No.” She spoke firmly. “You will listen to me and let these feelings you have go and you will do so now! This is what we are meant for Androcles Leonidas and we have accepted it completely. I do not harbor any feelings of misgivings because I know your love for me knows no bounds. That it never will. Just as my love for you knows no limitations. If we are meant to love others as well then that is the way of things. I will not deny what I feel for them... for all of them... because it is just as much a part of me as my devotion and love to you. It is who we are Androcles Leonidas! You are our *Saradasaar* Androcles and are we are the points of that beacon. Just as it is on my tattoo.” (Beacon of Light)

Andro blinked several times as what she said struck him. “That is why you got it?” He asked softly.

Sadi nodded with a dazzling smile. “I didn't know it at the time why it struck me so... but I do now. The star is all of us together Andro; the flames are you holding us up as you do so easily.”

“And the word?” Andro asked with a smile.

Sadi leaned up and kissed him hard, their fangs clicking against one another as she did. “The word is how I feel about you fool! How I have always felt about you!” She told him pulling back after a moment. “I am *malda* in love with you!”

Andro pulled her up into his arms and buried his face in her long hair as she wrapped her arms around his shoulders and clung to him with all of her strength. “This is what we are meant for *Saradasaar*... this is who

we are now. Let go of these foolish feelings of dishonor you have inside you and let us go retrieve our *Inamarno*. Then we will be complete. All of us.” (Lady Blue)

“*Elly for emanur KertaGai.*” Andro whispered in her ear as he nuzzled her skin. “As my father will never forsake my mothers, I will never forsake any of you *KertaGai*. I promise this to you.” (Forever and Eternity)

“And we will never forsake you Androcles my love. *Elly for emanur Saradasaar.*” Sadi whispered back as a look of pure bliss occupied her face and she nuzzled the side of his head and cheek.

47TH SGD HEADQUARTERS THREE KILOMETERS OUTSIDE EDEN CITY

Ne'Veha stopped in the doorway of the huge mess lounge that was filled with men and women of the 47th Spartan Ground Division. It was the unit of her grandmother Na'rnoas's husband Jonout, and it had taken one transmission to discover where Tarren was. Now Jonout and Famus stood on either side of her as several *Durcunusaan* troops entered through the other two entrances into the mess lounge.

“There.” Jonout spoke pointing to a large table filled with officers on the other side of the room. “He is sitting there with two others that befriended him when he arrived.”

Ne'Veha looked up at him and her brown eyes shone from under her matte black helmet, now displaying a crested plume of her dark brown hair color that fell to the middle of her back. “Why did you bring him here Jonout?” She asked.

“By all accounts he was a good officer... if somewhat arrogant.” Jonout answered. “He needed to be removed so that you could find your way.”

“Did grandmother Na'rnoas put you up to this?” She asked him.

Jonout shook his head. “Seeing her around you Ne'Veha... it was like a light in a dark room. I love her with all that I am and what you were going through was bringing pain to her.” Jonout stated. “That I could not allow to happen. I am an old wolf and I since I have been here on Earth I have seen how the royal family is with one another. How the King treats his mates and Queens. How they view and treat him and each other. Once you made your decision, Tarren should have stayed away. He did not. I made the correct choice in my actions. You needed to discover yourself and them.”

Ne'Veha reached up on her tip toes and kissed him. “Thank you.”

“Do not thank me Ne'Veha.” Jonout said. “I should have done more if what you say has happened is true. You are certain Ne'Veha?”

“It is true General.” Famus spoke now. “I confirmed the records with the library myself.”

Jonout nodded. “Then let us get this over with.” He hissed. “I can't abide a traitor in my unit or within the Union. We will wait in a room off the kitchen while your men collect Tarren.” He said taking her arm gently.

Tarren laughed as he shoveled another forkful of meat into his mouth and chewed. “You know... maybe we should go to Sparta tonight and hit that place Gallais's Retreat again.”

“Isn't that where you lost that female elf Ne'Veha to Prince Androcles?” The man asked with a grin.

Tarren looked at him. “I didn't lose her.” He snapped. “She was taken from me by the Prince! He didn't act with honor!”

“Better watch what you say Tarren. You didn't scent her... and you can't go around and say stuff like that about Prince Androcles when it isn't true.” The second man spoke. “It will get back to our senior officers and most of them fought with the King here on Earth and it will get back to him. And then the Prince.”

“You are scared of him?” Tarren asked surprised.

“*Nubous* right I'm scared of him.” The man said. “I've seen him training with his dragon. And I've read the after action reports from Alba Tau. And how many living Spartans wear the Shield of Valor Tarren? That is

not an award the Union gives to just anyone! In order to receive that decoration you must have gone through some kind of hell and survived.”

“She was sharing my bed Logit.” Tarren snarled at him. “I was in her blood. Just because I hadn’t scented her yet doesn’t mean she wasn’t mine!” He stopped talking when he looked up and saw his fellow captain staring behind him. “Logit... what is wrong?” He asked.

“*Durcunusaan*.” The Captain answered softly.

“What? Where? Here?” Tarren gasped.

The man nodded as his eyes grew wide. “Yes... right behind you.”

Tarren sat up straighter and then his eyes grew wide when the face of the man appeared over his shoulder slightly. A man who wore the uniform of a senior *Durcunusaan* Commander. “Captain Tarren?” Famus asked. “Would you come with me please?”

Tarren turned as Famus stood back up and he saw the two additional *Durcunusaan* troops standing behind Famus. “What is this about?” He asked.

“We should probably go somewhere else Captain.” Famus said. “We have a room just outside the lounge and...”

“I just asked you a question *Commander*.” Tarren spoke as he came to his feet. “I expect an answer!”

“And you will have your answer Captain... if you come with us now.” Famus said with calm resolve. “Or do you wish to make a scene in front of your fellow officers? That is not something we wish to do.”

“I don’t have to go anywhere with you *Commander*.” Tarren spoke. “In case you haven’t noticed I do outrank you.”

Famus’s eyes narrowed ever so slightly and he stepped closer to Tarren. “Perhaps I was not clear in my words Captain Tarren.” Famus spoke softly so that only he could hear. “I am a *Commander* in the *Durcunusaan*... and what you think was a request is in fact not a request at all. It is a statement of fact. You have two choices really... do not make a scene in front of your fellow officers and come with us... or choose to make a scene. In which case I will break both your *nubous* legs and drag you out of here in disgrace! Sir! My patience is very thin at the moment considering recent events so make your decision now please.”

Tarren looked at the man for a long moment before turning to Logit. “I’ll be back Logit. Keep the coffee hot.”

Tarren was steaming by the time they came to the small senior officer’s lounge off the main mess lounge. The *Durcunusaan* officer hadn’t responded to any of his demands for answers as they walked and he was not used to being ignored. The moment the door to the senior officer’s lounge opened the sweet scent of amaretto filled his nose. He entered quickly and saw Ne’Veha standing next to General Jonout and the fourth *Durcunusaan* officer. She looked delicious as he always remembered her to look, and now that she was wolf, it brought out the pungency of her scent even more. She looked physically fitter than when he had last seen her, dressed in the matte black Mark IV body armor that appeared as if she had been poured into, and her dark brown hair shiny with health and even longer than he remembered it to be. Then he saw the flowing crimson cape that adorned her shoulders, as well as the gold trim that encompassed the entire outer edge of that cape. The gold clasps that attached the fabric to her shoulders shimmered in the light where the cape was held and signified to all that she was a Princess of the Union and member of the Royal family.

“Ne... Ne’Veha?” He stammered as he moved up closer to her.

“Surprised to see me Tarren?” She asked glaring at him with those large dark eyes.

Tarren looked at General Jonout his commanding officer as well as the *Durcunusaan* officer quickly before looking back to her and slowing to a stop, his anger bleeding away very quickly. “I... I suppose.” He stated.

“Yes... I’m sure.” Ne’Veha said. “Did you expect me to be dead perhaps?”

“What?” Tarren exclaimed. “Why... why would I expect something like that?”

“Tarren... I am in a hurry here and I have just a few questions to ask before I leave. You checked a book out of the library in Sparta’s Old District several days ago.” Ne’Veha told him moving closer. “A unique history book. A book that has not left the library in Sparta in roughly three thousand years. A book that you conveniently checked out. Why were you in Sparta and why did you check this book out?”

“Ne'Veha... what is going on here?” Tarren asked.

“You will address her as Princess Leonidas or Milady... Captain Tarren!” Jonout hissed. “And you will answer her questions!”

“The library at The Grand Center didn't have the book!” Tarren replied quickly as it began to sink into his mind that there was something very wrong with this visit. “I don't see the problem with requesting it from the library in Sparta.”

“You don't see the problem in flying over three thousand kilometers to check out a book from the Library in Old Sparta. A book that no one has touched in all of this time and a book that had three thousand year old plans for tunnels that ran beneath our home on Cranae Island that even Androcles didn't know about? You don't see a problem with that?” Ne'Veha hissed softly.

“Perhaps the Prince did not study the history of the island before he purchased it.” Tarren said his voice carrying more sarcasm than he realized.

Jonout made to step forward but Ne'Veha beat him to it. She had been fully changed less than a complete week, but the strength of the virus in Andro's blood gave her the abilities and power and speed of a wolf who had been changed for years. Combined with her own natural elven speed and strength, Tarren never saw the slap that rocked his head back and staggered him to the side several feet. The stinging blow split his lower lip and turned his face red as he brought his hand up to cover the spot and turned back to glare at her, his eyes changed and his fangs fully extended. He did not expect what he saw looking back at him in the black ringed brown eyes or the dual wolf fangs that extended beneath her lips. This was not the Ne'Veha he remembered. This was an Alpha female and she was extremely pissed off.

“I will not play with you Tarren?” Ne'Veha snarled. “You will answer my questions or I will turn you over to the *Krypteria* and let them get the answers in any way they can! And that will take place after I let Famus and his *Durcunusaan* beat you into submission for what you have done!”

“What... what are you talking about? I haven't done anything” He snarled at her. “I don't have the book!”

“It was you who removed it from the library Tarren!” Ne'Veha barked angrily. “Do not lie to me! I am wolf now... turned by an alpha more powerful than you could ever hope to be... and I will smell if you are lying before the words even leave your foul lips!”

“I don't have it!” Tarren barked right back at her. “Yes... I took it out... but I gave it to her!”

“To who *anse* you?” Ne'Veha screamed.

“The Netnews woman!” Tarren answered. “The human female from Channel Eighty-three! She wanted me to get it! She said...”

“What?” Ne'Veha demanded.

“She said... she told me they found out about the tunnels and they were going to use the them to install hidden cameras and mics in the villa!” Tarren growled. “So they could get all the good gossip on the Prince and...!”

Ne'Veha looked at him with contempt then. “And his mates!” Ne'Veha growled. “On us! And you went along with it Tarren? This is what you have become now? You are so arrogant and full of yourself that you agree to this because I dismissed you for a wolf who is more man than you will ever be?” She hissed at him.

“You were mine Ne'Veha!” Tarren snapped.

Ne'Veha stepped right up to him then. “I was never yours Tarren!” She growled. “Even on your best day you could not do to me what Androcles does to me! And that was even before he turned me! You are a pathetic excuse for a man compared to him Tarren!” Ne'Veha stepped closer to him still. “They used those tunnels to try and kill us Tarren!” She snarled. “They used those tunnels to infiltrate our home and attempt to kill my mate Tarren! My lovers!” She saw his face go wide in undisguised shock and she knew that was no act. “The only reason you are not lying dead in front of me is because they did not succeed!”

“Ne'Veha I...”

Her hand flashed forward again in anger and she smashed a vicious slap across his face once more. “Do not speak to me Tarren! Never speak to me again! Famus...?”

“Princess?” Famus barked stepping up to her.

“You will take Captain Tarren here and wring every bit of information from him that you can.” Ne'Veha hissed. “And when you think you have it all... question him again!”

Famus nodded. "As you order Princess."

"Don't resist Tarren... and don't try to protect anyone if that is crossing your mind." She told him. "It will only make it worse."

"I did not know!" Tarren shouted as Famus took his arm.

"No... you did not know. You are nothing more than a perverted peeping tom looking for a cheap thrill. Did you think you would be able to see us as we moved about our home? As we made love with him and each other? You make me sick Tarren... and how I ever allowed you to take me to bed is beyond my comprehension. Be very grateful it is me here and not Androcles Tarren. If you had told him what you just told me, he would have you strung up by your entrails for what you have done! Take him out of here through the kitchen!"

Ne'Veha turned away from him as Famus led him out of the room and she looked at Jonout as he stepped up to her. She took a deep breath and looked at the man who had stolen her grandmother's heart so many years ago, and the one who still made Na'rnoas's elven and wolf blood burn even now after so many years as his wife and mate. "Jonout?" Ne'Veha asked softly.

Jonout shook his head. "I have no doubts that your men will get the information you want. Tarren is arrogant... but he is not stupid. The question now... what do you want done with him Ne'Veha?"

Ne'Veha looked at Jonout. "These men and women Jonout... they could have taken all that I have gained since coming here. All the love that I have found. The purpose. A new life as Andro's mate and a female wolf. What do you think I should do?"

Jonout shook his head. "I can not answer that question for you Ne'Veha. You are still adjusting to being turned child... but by now your wolf instincts will have begun to guide your actions. You must now walk the line between the instincts of the wolf inside you and the calm intelligence of the elf inside you. What do your instincts tell you to do?"

Ne'Veha was silent for a long moment and she looked down at the floor taking long, deep breaths. Finally she looked back up and met his eyes evenly. "They... they tell me to kill him horribly."

"And your elven half? What does this tell you?" Jonout asked.

"That he was stupid and vindictive and not aware of what he was doing. That he is an arrogant fool and nothing more! That he only did this as a way to try and embarrass us because Andro took me from him. Not that Andro had to try very hard at that." Ne'Veha told him with an impish grin.

Jonout nodded. "And now you face the same dilemma that every Lycavorian faces daily Ne'Veha. Do you follow your instincts in this situation, or do you follow what your mind tells you? Or do you find some middle ground? You are a Princess of the Union now Ne'Veha... and the decision is yours."

Ne'Veha met his eyes. "Then I want you to observe the questioning of Captain Tarren." She told him. "Find out everything you can... all of it... everything he knows. He is not willful enough to resist drugs. Once that is complete and it appears he is what I think he is, a fool who feels he has been slighted, reduce him two grades in rank and then allow him to start over and try to correct his path in life."

"And if it is determined that he did know what they intended Ne'Veha?" Jonout asked her.

"Then insure Captain Tarren has had a filling meal, a hot shower, dress him in his finest uniform and strip his rank from him. Then execute him for treason against the Union." Ne'Veha growled softly. "Publicly."

Jonout nodded his head slowly. "It will be done." He said impressed by the conviction in her voice. It was exactly what he would have done.

SCIMITAR

SECURE CONFERENCE ROOM

"... is nearly as bad as what your mother has done!" Coren barked at Nirilo as he stood by the large view window. "Your career will be over if you continue down this path Nirilo!"

"Caliria is my sister!" Nirilo barked right back at his father. "Am I just supposed to accept what has happen to her?"

"Yes!" Coren spoke. "It... it has been the way of our people for millennia! We must do this or the Orionis Syndicate will punish us!"

Nirilo shook his head. "No. I will not just accept it." He stated. "Would you just accept it if Arduri or Naesta were taken father? Would you just accept it if Tastia was taken?"

"That... that is not the issue here!" Coren snapped.

"Isn't it?" Nirilo spoke. "No... they have taken my sister. I will do everything I can to find and bring her back home. Her new home here. The SBR and the entire Board of Regents can kiss my ass if they think to stop me!"

"Where is your brother?" Coren demanded as he turned to look at Denali who sat at the table. "He is the one in charge here isn't he? He has done this! He has encouraged this rebellion in my own children."

Denali nodded with a smile. "Yes he is in charge." Deni answered. "He and our brother Arrarn were receiving a report from our brother Resumar. He will be along shortly." He leaned back in the chair. "Perhaps you should consider that your children have come to these decisions based on their own feelings and values."

Denali didn't see Arduri look at him from her seat with something akin to adoration in her eyes at his words. It was something that Lisisa noticed quickly however.

Coren looked back at his son exasperation written all over his face at the offhanded way Denali answered him. "Your time among these... these people has changed you Nirilo. You are not the son I remember."

"It hasn't changed me." Nirilo said. "As with mother... it has opened my eyes!"

Coren cut his eyes to where Devra sat quietly at the large table, Bren beside her on one side and Arduri on the other. Her hand rested atop Bren's arm on the table almost possessively and this only served to fuel Coren's anger, for Devra had made no attempts to hide her new relationship with this Lycavorian. Denali leaned back and folded his arms across his broad chest as he watched Coren. Lisisa sat between him and Arduri, fiddling with the mug of coffee that rested in front of her, amusement showing on her face.

"To what?" Coren snarled as he looked back to Nirilo. "You... you of all my children I thought would have used reason. You willingly share a bed with one of their females Nirilo. Do you know how much gossip and talk that generates in the capital? The questions I have to field nearly everyday because of this?"

"This is not about Jodae!" Nirilo spat. "And you will leave her out of this father for you do not know her in the least!"

Coren turned away from him exasperated. "Arдан... Tastia... please can you help me try to talk some sense into my family!"

"As you have made abundantly clear to me on several occasions since undertaking this journey Coren..." Tastia spoke with a tightly controlled anger in her voice as she looked at him. "I do not know you... therefore I am unqualified to comment either way on what your children or Regent Re Mydala are doing."

Coren hissed softly at what she had said and looked at Arдан. "Arдан... please?"

Arдан looked at him from his seat. "While I do not..." He began to speak but the doors to the conference room opened and Andro strode in carrying a data pad, Arrarn and Sadi right behind him.

Denali and Lisisa knew immediately that something was wrong because both Andro and Arrarn's scents were filled with underlying anger. Lisisa was the one who came to her feet, reaching out to put her hand on Deni's shoulder as she did.

"Andro... Andro what is wrong?" Lisisa asked.

Andro met her eyes across the table. "We... we have just finished a brief report from Res." He told her.

"And?" Lisisa demanded.

Andro looked at Arrarn whose normally handsome face was a mass of confusion and anger. "Resumar has... he has discovered where mother is." Andro said.

Deni got to his feet slowly now. "Why don't I like the way you just said that Andro?" He asked softly.

"She's on Cabelir Deni." Arrarn spoke in barely a whisper. "They took her to Cabelir."

"No!" Lisisa exclaimed gripping Deni's arm her eyes wide.

Devra looked at Bren as she felt his body tense and he turned his head and cursed in the Lycavorian language. She turned back to Androcles quickly and stood up. "What... where is this Cabelir?" She asked turning to Bren. "Bren?"

Andro stepped up to the table. "It is... it is the Kavalian homeworld." He stated. "It is deep within Kavalian Federation space and..." He shook his head. "We were hoping that they... that they were holding her on a ship somewhere and..."

Sadi moved up to the table beside Devra. "In order to reach... in order to reach her Devra we would have to launch a full scale invasion of Kavalian space." She explained gently. "Even if we threw the entire might of the Lycavorian Union at them, it would still take us several days to reach Cabelir."

"They would kill her." Arrarn finished. "They would kill her within hours of us crossing the border."

Lisisa moved around the table swiftly and stepped right up to Arrarn, wrapping her arms around his waist. "Arrarn you..."

Arrarn met her eyes and pulled her close to him as he shook his head. "She is alive Lisi." He said with firm confidence. "That is what matters. We can not do anything to put her at risk, I know this... no matter how much I want to charge across the border and get her back."

"You will not lose hope *fervon!*" She told him firmly. "I won't let you!"

"I'm not losing hope *arande.*" Arrarn said. "Mother is strong and she will endure. She must endure until we or father can reach her. I know this... and I will endure as well. Until we get her back, we must take things one step at a time."

"Resumar says they may have a way to get her a message." Andro told them. "There is a Kavalian female within the compound she is being held at. She is the sister of one who has been serving Shiria for many years. They both have. She is going to try and get a message to mother. She is under tight security but this woman has the means to reach her. Resumar says... he says this woman, Poysa is her name, she says mother looks tired and mildly bruised. She says she looks lost."

"That has to be the static inhibitor they implanted her with Andro." Lisisa spoke quickly. "*Medwaw* Dysea said that is how she felt before it was removed. Lost... unable to feel any of us, anything."

Andro nodded. "That is what Shiria said as well." He said. "It also means they could tell her anything and it will only serve to confuse her more since she can not feel the truth."

Arduri looked at him. "What do you mean Andro?" She asked.

Andro looked at her. "Those of my family... we are connected deeply within Mindvoice. While we may not be able to communicate across great distances, there is always a spark of each of us within Mindvoice that the rest of us can sense. This thing that they have put inside our mother, it prevents us her from feeling us. No doubt she still truly believes father is dead, not to mention many of us. If she is unable to feel us within Mindvoice then they could be telling her anything and she would not be able to know they are lying to her, especially if they were doing other things to fool her or make her doubt."

"I thought... I thought your wolf senses could detect if someone was lying?" Devra asked.

Ardan looked up at him from his chair. "This is a trait that our people know you have." He said.

Andro nodded. "And they can for the most part sir." Andro answered him respectfully which did not go unnoticed by Ardan. "But if a person is a skilled liar, one who can control their emotions very well, then it would be next to impossible to tell. And the Kavalians are naturally a very emotional and angry species, and it makes it harder to detect a lie from them in their scent." Andro took a deep breath and looked at his brothers and sisters. "Given this new information I will understand if any of you want to remain on Earth and prepare for this meeting with the Kavalians. I need to go... *Inamarno* calls for me and *KertaGai* and the others but none of you need..."

"And what will we do?" Arrarn spoke. "Sit on our hands and wait? We can do nothing and without more information anything we do try could very well put mother at even greater risk. I am not willing to do that... and I will not remain here and do nothing but imagine what horrors they are inflicting upon her. You need us *fervon*... and we work better together."

Andro looked at Denali and Lisisa. "Deni... Lisisa?"

"Arrarn is right." Deni spoke. "Without something to do we all would be snapping at people for no reason. No... I'm in."

Andro looked at Lisisa. "Lisi?"

"Andro of course... you know that." She replied.

Andro nodded his head. "Zarah and Normya have already told me where to stick my suggestion that they remain if they want too." He exhaled in relief knowing they were stronger as a family. "Then we will go and retrieve *Inamarno* and the other Vanari the Icalro and these OSG idiots hold."

"This action you are going to undertake puts our people are huge risk!" Coren barked.

“It is a risk to them Coren... not us.” Ardan spoke now and he turned to look at Andro. “And I believe it is something you would do whether we were here or not correct?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“Ardan... you heard what Devra said!” Coren hissed. “The OSG Commando saw her! You know what this could mean if the Orionis Syndicate discovers we are here working against them.”

Ardan nodded. “Yes he did see her. And the man was dead within hours of seeing her with no way to transmit this information to anyone off the island we were on.” Ardan said confidently. He looked at Andro. “Is that not also correct?”

“Unless he was some sort of magician... he did not get any kind of communications off before he was killed no.” Andro answered.

“I demand to know where my daughter Naesta is!” Coren barked now. “Why is she not here?”

“Naesta is with my father and mothers in a very safe location.” Androcles answered him. “She is assisting my mother Anja and my Aunt Sivana in discovering some way to eliminate this hold over the Vanari people that the Syndicate has.”

Coren’s eyes grew wider. “This is madness!” He barked loudly. “You did not even know the OSG was on your planet! In your city! How do we know that they do not know of us being on your backwater world?”

“That is quite enough Coren!” Devra barked at him.

“How do we know that even as we speak a message has not already been sent telling the OSG we are here and what you are doing?” Coren snapped. “How do we know that they are unaware of what you are attempting?”

Andro met Coren’s eyes and moved over slowly to stand in front of him. “You know sir... with all the belly aching you have done since you have been here, I am beginning to wonder if perhaps you are not helping these scum in some way.”

Coren’s eyes grew wide. “What?”

“Since you have gotten here you have done nothing but complain about the Syndicate somehow discovering you are here. What you are doing.” Andro spoke. “As a leader of your people, I would think you would be more concerned about finding a way to break free of the hold the Syndicate has over your people.”

“How dare you insinuate that I am helping them? I am far older and wiser than you boy! I will not be talked down to by an ani...” Coren hissed savagely.

“Coren!” Ardan barked now as he came to his feet. “Enough!”

Andro’s face remained impassive and he smiled at Coren. “By an animal?” He spoke. “Is that what you were going to say Regent Re Mydala?”

Coren glared at him. “Yes.” He stated finally.

Devra came to her feet outraged only to be stunned when Tastia’s voice filled the room from where she had also stood up. “Coren how dare you!” She snarled loudly.

Coren stared at Andro ignoring them both. “You know nothing of the Vanari people! Of our ways and what we have had to endure through the millennia at the hands of the Orionis Syndicate! The decisions we have made insure our people remain strong and continue to thrive through the decades and centuries!”

“I don’t know... but I would think that nearly fifteen thousand years as slaves to the High Coven have given my people a unique insight on freedom and the costs of that freedom in both life and history. The labor camps, the rape of our females, the murders and being used in some cases as a food source for the High Coven. I would think experiences like that would somehow give us a kinship, just as it has with the elves, the Hadarians and the Algolian people. We all have endured these things, yet we worked together through the years to finally throw off the repression of the High Coven to be once more be free.” Andro answered calmly. “But then again... we are not walking around with this chip on our shoulders declaring we are superior to you in every way. And you just might be surprised at what I know of your people sir.”

“You know nothing!” Coren snapped.

“I know of the building of Mydala City by your ancestors.” Andro spoke softly meeting his eyes. “How Ryand Re Mydala laid the first stones of what is now called Regent Center on Austrova.” Andro saw Coren’s eyes go wide. “I know how your ancestors first began to chart the stars and how they formed the Re Mydala Shipping Company. And then how your great great grandfather branched off and built the Mydala Engineering Corporation. You are the largest Engineering Corporation within the Vanari Empire now if I’m not mistaken. A

family that many look up to and hold in high regard. And I know of the pride felt by your children for the name they bear.”

“How... how do you know these things?” Coren snapped.

“I know that when your older brother married Ardan’s daughter, your families became tied together forever. Just as it was when you took Devra Lan Semina as your wife. Just as it is with all Vanari who conduct the Joining Ceremony isn’t that right? Semina... that is your family retreat isn’t it Devra?” Andro turned and looked at her. “I understand it is very beautiful there in the spring.”

Even Ardan came to his feet now with wide eyes. “How... how do you know that?” He gasped. “Devra?”

Devra shook her head quickly. “I... I have never spoken of that with him.” She said quietly.

Andro smiled as he looked back at Coren. “Guess I’m not so stupid as you first thought huh?”

“Caliria!” Devra gasped her eyes wide.

Ardan and Coren turned to her. “What? Devra... what are you saying?” Ardan asked. “Caliria is a prisoner of the Syndicate! How could he know these things?”

“These are things... these are things only a Vanari would know Ardan!” Devra told him. “These are things that only our families would know. Androcles has touched her Ardan. He has touched her within Mindvoice. These are things Caliria as shown him! With her mind!”

Andro’s eyes never left Coren’s face. “Our... my *Inamarno*... she wonders why her own father does not love her. She wonders why the color of her hair makes it so he has forsaken her and why he never looks upon her with pride at all she has accomplished.”

“You... you don’t know these things!” Coren snapped. “You... you are either making them up or you and your kind are working with the Syndicate and that is how you got the information!”

“Coren you fool!” Devra shouted.

Andro chuckled. “Stay tuned Regent Re Mydala... and you will see how closely I am working with the Syndicate!” He began to turn away and stopped. Tastia gasped loudly when she saw his eyes suddenly change and his wolf fangs extended fully. “There is something else you should know Regent Re Mydala.” Andro spoke turning back around.

Coren never saw the head butt coming, and he was in no way prepared for it not that it would have mattered. Andro’s forehead smashed into his cheek with enough power that it sent him reeling back into the bulkhead, savage pain lancing through his face and head and stars crisscrossing in his eyes as he slumped to a sitting position. The natural bones of a pureblood Lycavorian were much denser and harder to break than most species, including the Vanari, and the blow felt as if someone had hit him with a piece of stone or board. Coren’s hand came up to the side of his face immediately and his light blue colored blood seeped between his fingers.

“You will know this Coren Re Mydala!” Andro snarled as he stood over him. “I will go to this planet and I will take my *Inamarno* from them! And I will love her until it takes her breath away! We will love her until she knows nothing else! And every single individual who has had a hand in defiling her in any way will answer to me! I do not care what species they are or what color their skin is! I will find them... and I will leave them to rot in their own blood in a sewer somewhere, be they Icalro Alliance, Orionis Syndicate or even Vanari if that is what I discover!” Andro reached down and yanked Coren up by the front of his shirt, hauling him up and pinning him to the bulkhead so that he dangled six inches off the deck. “And make no mistake Coren Re Mydala, what I told that fool before I killed him I meant with every ounce of who I am!” Andro glared at him with wolf eyes as Coren tried to pry his fingers from his shirt.

“Release me!” He growled.

“You... you are a poor excuse for a father Coren Re Mydala.” Andro hissed at him. “You dismiss your own blood because of the color of her hair! What parent could dismiss their own child? Devra risks all... Arduri, Naesta and Nirilo risk all that they are to help me and all you are concerned about is yourself and how it will look if you are discovered here.”

“Androcles... please!” Devra spoke moving closer to him. “Release him please!”

Andro turned and looked at her for a short moment before turning back to Coren. “You have no conception of the strength within her Coren Re Mydala. The passion. A strength and passion she got from you! And you dismiss her!”

Devra stepped up next to him and placed her hand on his arm unafraid of him. She would never be afraid of the him, not after what she now knew. Not after falling so hopelessly in love with Bren. She would never fear them again. “Androcles... please.” She said softly. “Release him. This... this accomplishes nothing.”

Andro pulled his hand back and let Coren drop to the floor. “One day Coren Re Mydala, one day you will wake up and discover that your arrogance has robbed you of everything that you care about. And you will have no one to blame but yourself.” Andro stepped back from him and took a deep breath. “A word of advice from a lowly Lycavorian to a superior Vanari like yourself... call me or any of my people animals again Coren Re Mydala and I will show you just how insignificant you truly are.”

Andro turned and moved back to the table, Arrarn holding out the data pad to him. He took it and held it out to Ardan who stared at him with wide eyes. “Regent Vu Lamurriion, you will find all the information we obtained from our interrogation of the OSG prisoner we have on this data pad. Her injuries prevented further questioning at the time, but once she is fully healed we’ll discover more. She is locked down in our medical bay right now and if you wish, you can provide me a list of questions you might have to ask her.” Ardan watched as his eyes returned to normal and his fangs slowly retracted until they were once more normal. He reached out slowly and took the pad. “My intent is to try and take as many of these OSG *midaeus* that we find alive, but given the actions by the others, that may not be possible. I would advise against questioning her directly since she did not see any of you and keeping your presence here secret for now is the better tactical decision.”

“You... you are just giving this to me?” Ardan asked stunned.

“Regardless of what Regent Re Mydala may believe, we are not your enemy, nor have we ever been.” Andro told him. “Feel free to roam my ship sir. We will arrive at our destination in roughly thirty hours, and I have given you access to all but our sensitive systems. If you have any questions or you would like to talk, feel free to contact me at any time. If you will excuse me now.”

Ardan watched as Andro took Sadi’s hand and they exited the conference room without hesitation. Arrarn followed him, Deni and Lisisa right behind him. Bren had come to his feet now and he waited patiently as Devra stepped up to Coren.

“Your... your incredible stupidity astounds me Coren.” She hissed at him angrily. “It truly astounds me.”

“As if you care about me.” Coren said softly.

“Oh I don’t Coren.” Devra popped right back. “I stopped caring about you many years ago because that is when you stopped caring about me, but if you in some way endanger this mission to get Caliria back and Androcles doesn’t kill you himself... I will!”

Coren watched her with wide eyes as she turned and reached for Bren’s outstretched hand. She grasped it tightly and moved with him out the door of the conference room. Coren watched as Nirilo shook his head and he took his sister’s hand and they followed their mother. Tastia even looked at him with contempt before she too exited the room.

“Coren... perhaps we should talk.” Ardan spoke as he settled back into the chair.

CURILA 6

Naesta entered the research lab holding the mug of tea and feeling more rested than she had in weeks. The nights here were wonderfully quiet and pleasantly warm and comfortable. The quarters she had assigned to her allowed her to open the entire ceiling above her bedroom to the stars in the sky and she had spent the first hours here under those very stars contemplating everything that had taken place so far. She was entering her third day here and already her level of hope had risen higher than it had ever been. Anja, Sivana and Ceuma were nearly tireless in their work, and between the three of them Naesta doubted if any Vanari medical doctor could possibly compare. It helped that they had the skills they did, the metaphysical radiation that surrounded their world enabling them with incredible healing powers that they could call on demand, but their knowledge was superior to any Vanari doctor she had ever witnessed. Naesta had no doubts they were closer to finding a way to remove the hold the Orionis Syndicate had over her people than any scientist had ever been.

At least until Caliria.

Naesta firmly believed that she had been targeted on purpose by the OSG because she was so close to finding the answer. And if that was the case, then Caliria had been betrayed by their own people, for very few Vanari knew what she and the others had been working on and only one of them could have told the OSG. Naesta found she was not as trusting as her mother and sister, and she was far more pessimistic about the manner in which her sister had been taken. Her time here had been eye opening as well to say the least. There was a serious cloud hanging over everyone here because they all now knew that their fellow lover and Queen was being held hostage. Yet even with this cruel knowledge she could not help but be amazed at how they continued forward. She had sat with them for dinner the previous two nights, Wayonn and her listening to them speak of their children and intentionally avoid all talk of their Queen and lover For'mya. The younger children made them laugh at their antics with their dragons as they scampered about the huge dining room. She heard stories of all their children growing up, but the ones that interested her the most were the stories of Androcles and his father. As each hour passed, Naesta came to firmly believe that he would rescue Caliria no matter the cost and she would become his wife and mate. If he was anything like his father, who she had watched constantly nudge Anja and Aricia during all hours of the day and night, Naesta knew her sister would finally know true love. She knew Wayonn was spending a great deal of time with Martin Leonidas, and that he was nearly always with the men and women who had come with them to this planet. While she may have been very young by many standards, Naesta was still a Vanari Cadre Commando and her experience and knowledge told her that these men and women were training for something. And their skill and confidence far outstripped her own. They would disappear for hours on end, returning at odd hours of the night for the last two days, and this was the biggest factor in her suppositions.

After the display they had seen when they first arrived, Naesta was taken aback by the way Martin Leonidas greeted the ebony skinned vampire clone. All the pain the vampires of the High Coven had caused him through the years, yet he greeted this one as if she was a lost sister. Their embrace was heartfelt as she watched the tears fall from the woman's eyes and her once tense face became peaceful and sedate. Naesta knew she had much to learn still about these men and women, but now she actually looked forward to obtaining this knowledge. They gave of themselves without question and asked for nothing in return, just as Androcles had done on his ship when he first brought them to Earth. They were most definitely a different breed as her father had said once, but Naesta Re Mydala found herself coming to realize that was not such a bad thing at all. As she lifted her green eyes, she saw the two reasons why these things were becoming easier to believe every minute.

Ceuma sat at the U shaped work station, medical computers and databanks all around her. She was talking to the tall ebony skinned Spartan who Naesta knew was her mate Joci and he was paying rapt attention to her. Naesta's time these last two days with Ceuma had given her much pause in her thinking, for that single touch when Ceuma had pulled her close and shielded her nakedness from her husband had sent such blissful tremors through her body. She had tried to spend as much time with her as possible over these last two days to see if perhaps it had been nothing more than a fluke, yet no matter how many times Naesta had brushed against her, the same thing had occurred. What was even more startling was the fact that Ceuma's husband only caused these feelings to increase and become stronger. His dominant presence, the confidence and possessive way he treated Ceuma made Naesta even more excited. When she sat with them for dinner, she made sure she sat beside Ceuma, but she found what she really wanted was to be sitting between them. She wanted to be sitting between them and be the focus of their attention. That she was drawn to Ceuma's beauty was without question, and because she was Vanari, this did not bother her even though it was not something she had actively considered before coming here. What surprised her more than anything was the strong attraction she also felt for Joci. His ebony colored skin and powerful muscles were almost too much to gaze upon and just last night Naesta had begun to imagine what it would be like to be in bed with them both, something she had never done before with anyone. As she moved closer they both smelled her as she knew they would and looked up.

"Naesta!" Ceuma called. "Good morning!"

Naesta gripped her tea tightly in her hands to help in keeping her emotions under control as she walked up to them. "Good morning." She spoke with a smile. "You... you are here very early."

Ceuma nodded. "Joci and I went running." She answered. "I am still learning how to do things as a wolf and I practice whenever I can."

"And you are learning very well." Joci told her with a smile.

Ceuma chuckled as she looked at him. "You are bias husband." She said turning back to Naesta. "I lost my footing making a sharp turn this morning and took an unexpected bath in the river." She said sheepishly.

"Drying you off with my tongue was very pleasant though." Joci said leaning over and nuzzling her cheek and neck.

Ceuma's eyes closed briefly as she reveled in his caress and his aura. "Yes... yes it was." She stated blissfully. "Very pleasant indeed."

Naesta couldn't help but smile at their interaction with each other. It was the same with the King and Anja and Aricia, and she saw it as well with Sivana and Belen and they had been together for over two decades she knew. It appeared that no matter how many years passed, it was true that Lycavorians never lost their desire for their mates or the need for physical contact with them. Naesta moved closer to Ceuma and her jade green eyes opened once more to look at her. That is when Joci detected the small spike in his mate's basil and lime scent. His dark eyes glanced quickly at Naesta and realized that she was the cause. Her banana kiwi scent was sweet and it to was spiking as Naesta stood next to Ceuma. He felt Ceuma's hand drop to his thigh and she squeezed tightly to try and center herself as this Vanari female moved close to them. Their combined scents were swirling around him and he had to admit, it was a very intoxicating combination.

"Anja and Sivana are not here yet?" Naesta asked surprised.

Ceuma shook her head. "Anja is with Martin and Aricia and I doubt we'll see her today. Dysea arrived early this morning with Isabella and they went to greet them."

"She is the elven Queen who was captured by those Immortals?" Naesta asked.

Joci nodded his head. "She was rescued by other Immortals and her children yes. They destroyed the base of the pirate scum that were holding her and she came here to be with the King and her fellow Queens. Queen Isabella is nearly eight months pregnant with the King's son and she and Dysea are very close."

"Sivana and Belen are spending the morning with their younger children, but she will return in a few hours." Ceuma told her staring at her with those jade green eyes. She blinked several times and then turned to her instruments. "We had the computers running a Cellular Composition Breakdown program during the night." She answered quickly.

"A breakdown of what?" Naesta asked.

"We are isolating the empirical formula of the different compounds in the Syndicate's weapon." Ceuma replied. "If we can isolate all of them, then we can determine what chemicals are best used to either negate them or destroy them completely. Once we have that, it is just a matter of devising a reverse empirical formula and making our own compound."

Naesta looked at her. "That's it?" She asked surprised.

Ceuma laughed. "Well... it's not as easy as it sounds... but essentially yes. The medical equipment and computers you see here were designed by Hadarian Scientist and Engineers and they used technology from the Mindvoice ship to base their construction. Anja says that Avi, the Avatar of City Ship 41 downloaded billions of data modules into the computer cores that are under this facility. It is the most advanced medical computer anywhere in the universe and..." Ceuma's head turned as the panel in front of her began to chime insistently. Her eyes grew wide at the information that was scrolling over the screen and she began to type furiously. "By the Gods... it did it!" She exclaimed.

Naesta's heart nearly leaped from her chest as she pressed closer. "What?"

"It did it!" Ceuma retorted again. "It found the exact formula!"

"Formula for what?" Joci asked.

Ceuma looked at him. "The formula that we need to manufacture an antidote to counter the Orionis Syndicate weapon!" She gasped. She turned back to Naesta whose eyes were wide in disbelief. "Naesta... this..."

Naesta looked at her. "Please... Ceuma... please tell me this is not a joke."

Ceuma shook her head. "It's no joke!" She exclaimed. "I must get Anja and Sivana down here to confirm the data but I know I'm right! Your sister's calculations on the mutating mitosis isotope structure of the compound is what did it... but it's very real!"

Naesta stared at her for a long moment. "Thousands... thousands of years!" She gasped. "For thousands of years... we have suffered the fear! In... in only three days you do this?"

“Well... your sister did do quite a bit of the work and...” Ceuma’s words were cut off as Naesta stepped forward and covered her lips in a sizzling kiss. Her eyes flew open in surprise, but to Joci’s disbelief she did not pull away. Ceuma’s scent spiked incredibly and she actually felt her body become flush and extremely aroused. As Naesta deepened the kiss Ceuma’s eyes closed almost dreamily and she responded to the kiss with equal fervor. It lasted for several moments before Naesta got control of her emotions and pulled away quickly, her eyes wide in shock at what she had just done.

“Ceuma!” She gasped. “Oh... please... please forgive me!”

Ceuma’s eyes opened slowly and she looked at her while leaning back against Joci for support. She reached up to touch her lips with her fingers as she shook her head slowly. “No... it’s...” Ceuma’s hand dropped once more to Joci’s thigh and she squeezed even harder than the last time. “I should... I should call Sivana so she can... so she can verify the information.” She got up from her seat and moved across the room to the COM panel. As she entered the code for her sister, Ceuma once more reached up to touch her lips and wondered why she was feeling what she was feeling.

By the Gods this is what she had needed for so long.

Their bodies were covered in sweat, their naked flesh glistening in the sunlight that came into their room from the open ceiling. Their bed had no sheets on it; they had lost them in the first minutes of Martin carrying her into their room and stripping her uniform from her. Dysea was in phase yes, but her *Nauta Melme* knew what she needed, what she wanted without any words passing between them. She hadn’t even gotten completely off the ramp before she could smell him in the early morning air, twilight just beginning to creep away. Even with Anja and Aricia waiting at the end of the ramp, Dysea had shifted and was sprinting into the distance, her nose honing in on his powerful mint scent. She discovered him standing outside the door to their private home waiting for her, and in two final bounds she was in his arms and he carried her here.

It was here that all the horror and humiliation of the pain she had endured was finally washed away. She had thought perhaps he would be different knowing what she had suffered through at Phy’iad’s touch. Dysea she have know better, for the moment his lips came down on hers; he did as he always did and he stole her breath away. Her lithe elven body was on fire for her mate and he did not hesitate for an instant and he never disappointed her. He could make her sing to the heavens with just his exquisite touch, and as his fingers and hands explored her body once more, the memories began to fade away. When he sank his wonderful cock into her completely and just held himself there, all that had happened to her disappeared, leaving only Dysea Leonidas. And then he made love to her as if his very life depended on it. The passion was beyond what she had felt in their twenty plus years together, the desire and adoration more than she could process, and exactly sixteen minutes after she arrived Dysea Leonidas was lost in a realm of pleasure only her *Nauta Melme* could make her feel.

Their lovemaking in the last four hours had been urgent and demanding as well as soft and so very gentle. Each massive orgasm he caused her to feel restored more and more of who she was. Each sweet kiss he gave to her, each sensual nuzzle of her elven ears; every single caress of his fingers on her skin restored her soul and her being. Cirith had been so right when she said that he was what she needed to fully be herself once more. Even Cha’talla had known this, and while Dysea never questioned it herself, she did not know how he would react. She should have known better. They had been together for too long, all of them; they had been through too much as husband and mates, as lovers and friends. Whatever fears she may have had before returning here were gone before the sensations from his first kiss had waned and the full power of his aura engulfed her in its beautiful warmth.

Dysea breathed deeply of his minty scent, his lips and nose nuzzling the hollow of her throat, his beautiful cock twitching with the final spasms of his own orgasm deeply buried within her depths. Her limbs tingled in delight, her heart and senses raced with desire, and her mind sang with love. His weight above her, her long legs wrapped around his hips, always made her feel blessedly safe and secure and that had not changed. He lifted his handsome face and stared into her emerald eyes, leaning closer to nuzzle the front ridge of her elven ear before he claimed her lips again for a kiss filled with commitment and love. When he finally pulled away he stared at her, reaching up to brush some stray strands of her platinum colored hair from her cheek.

“It has been too long *Melda Min*.” He spoke softly leaning his face close to nuzzle her cheek again. “Tell me what you want from me *Melda Min*. What can I do to...?”

Dysea took his face in her hands and kissed him hard. “You... you have already done it *Nauta Melme*.” She answered him with a bright smile. “Just feeling your arms around me... what you make me experience... that is what I needed.” She rasped out the words to him. “I am myself again my handsome husband and mate.”

“I have missed you *Melda Min*.” He said. “I have missed your scent and aura swirling around me.”

“Am I... am I still sweet to you *Nauta Melme*?” She asked him wanting to hear the words that always ignited bliss in her veins.

Martin smiled and used his tongue to trace the hollow of her throat once more, dragging the tip up to her chin. “As sweet as cherries in full bloom *Melda Min*.” He whispered back and watched her smile in happiness.

“You... you are so good to me *Nauta Melme*.” Dysea said. “So good to all of us.”

“You are my life *Melda Min*... you know that. All of you.” He told her. “Nothing could make me forsake any of you. Ever!”

“I know.” She said bringing her hand up and stroking his cheek and the scar that ran vertically over his right eye. “*Kinsoargai* lives *Nauta Melme*. She lives and you must never lose hope.”

Martin nodded his head. “I haven’t lost hope *Melda Min*. It’s troubling not being able to feel her within Mindvoice. I have... I have grown so used to having all of you within my mind and always being able to touch you. I know it’s because of these things they made... these inhibitors they put inside you and her but I...”

“What?” Dysea asked him.

“I blame myself for what has happened.” Martin told her. “I should have taken the High Coven out a long time ago. I should have taken every ship we have and finished them years ago. I should have killed my brother that day in Sparta. All of this... everything that is happening is because of the my indecision *Melda Min*. Because I did not do what I should have done. What my instincts called for me to do.”

“You can not blame yourself for others actions *Nauta Melme*.” Dysea told him.

“I can and I do.” Martin said. “Zarah, Andro, you and now For'mya. Everything bad that has taken place is because of what I failed to do even though I knew then I should have. We have... we have raised our children to not do the one thing I have always done. I have held back. I almost killed my son *Melda Min* and now he alone bears the burden of what I should have done long ago. I didn’t see past the veil of darkness that Aikiro created and look what they did to our daughter. And now... I allowed a traitor to do to me what a traitor did to my father and For'mya is enduring god knows what because I failed.”

Dysea took his face in her hands firmly and stared at his delicious dark brown eyes. “You listen to me Martin Leonidas. Yes... you have made decisions in the past. Decisions that you felt were the correct path to follow. Do not doubt or second guess those decisions for they are what has made you the man you are. All we want... all we have ever wanted is to leave in peace and watch our children grow. To have more children and watch them grow as well. There are others who do not wish to leave us alone *Nauta Melme*. They want what we have... what we covet. You are not like them... and because you are not like them... because your Spartan blood is honorable and wise and pure, you will never be able to predict what these monsters will do.”

“That doesn’t... that doesn’t bother you *Melda Min*?” Martin asked.

Dysea shook her head with a smile. “Not in the least.” She answered. “For the man that claimed me so long ago and the man who still makes my elven and wolf blood scream out for him, that man is you *Nauta Melme*. The man you are now. The man all of us love without pause or regret. You may think you have failed, or that you are responsible in some way, but you are not. What you need to do is acknowledge this my love. Acknowledge that you are not like them and then act as the man you are. I will tell you... the man you are... that man is more cunning and savage than they could ever be, but he is also compassionate and loving and filled with wisdom. That is what gives you your strength *Nauta Melme*. That is the man we love... and that is the man every Spartan alive would die for.”

Martin stared at her for a long moment in silence, taking in the curve of her four inch high elven ears and the slope of her neck and the outline of her soft lips. “*Carian*... you are just too beautiful and smart to be my wife and mate.” He said finally.

Dysea laughed then. She laughed and it felt so very good as she wrapped her arms around his head and squeezed him tightly. He drew back after a moment and looked at her. “Who is this woman you brought with you *Melda Min*. A woman who I can smell quite prominently all over you.”

“Her name is Cirith.” Dysea answered. “And she is meant to be part of our lives as surely as the sun rises in the morning *Nauta Melme*. She carries the blood of the fifth Ruling Bloodline in her veins Martin. She... she saved me my love. She saved my sanity. Bella and I have spent the last three days discovering all there is to know about her, but we both can feel it strongly. No doubt Anja and Aricia will feel it as well. I didn't... I didn't know how Bella would react at first... but they have become quite close in only three days.”

“Dysea... I...” Martin lowered his forehead to her chest between the valley of her large firm breasts.

“No *Nauta Melme*... you will discover it in your own time, but we can not dismiss her coming into our lives now.” Dysea told him. “She has believed for so many years that she was to be your father's second mate and wife, but when she came with her father and was finally among us she knew the truth of it. We knew what her place was. That place is with us.”

“Have I no say in this?” Martin asked looking at her.

Dysea's emerald eyes shone back at him and she smiled brilliantly. “No.” She stated confidently.

“That is not...”

The COM panel burst into life then and Anja's voice filled their room. “Martin... Dysea, you had better come to the SECURE conference room in the main living area.”

“What is it Red?” Martin asked.

“It's Andro Lover.” She answered him immediately. “He's contacting us from the Secure Conference Room on the *SCIMITAR*.”

“The *SCIMITAR*?” Martin asked looking up.

“*Melyanna*... it's not Resumar or...” Dysea began.

“No... not directly. Get here as quick as you can both of you. He was going to gather some others and then reestablish the connection before they go dark.”

Martin's combat senses came alive then. “Why are they going dark Red?” He asked.

“Something to do with the Icalro Alliance lover.” Anja answered. “And if the look on his face is any indication, I don't think it's going to be a vacation visit either. Someone associated with the Icalro Alliance tried to kill him and Sadi and the others on Cranae Island last night Marty. And lover... he says he has found out where For'mya is.”

Martin looked at Dysea beneath him and he began to extract himself from her arms. “Red... we'll be there in five minutes!” He spoke quickly.

SCIMITAR **EDGE OF EARTH'S SYSTEM**

“...talk to me boy! This is a big risk we are taking by talking like this.” Martin spoke from within the transmission image of the holodisc. “Where are they holding your mother?”

Outwardly the Secure Conference Room was nothing more than a smaller version of the main conference room near Andro and Sa'sur's Ready Rooms. There were many differences however, and very few men or women knew of the real differences. The entire room was laced with dragon armor inside the walls, providing an additional layer of reinforced armor combined with the bulkhead armor. There were Mindvoice dampeners set up within the corners of the room, power dampeners in the floor, and the most sophisticated communications network that existed except for on Earth or Apo Prime. Each *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser had such a room, though only those ships that carried the Royal Family were equipped with technology added by Avi himself. Powerful emitters that were beyond most normal means carried by ships for communicating because they were actual Pralor Communications Nodes conformed to act within the holotransmission making them the most secure means of communicating anywhere in the universe. The range of these rooms was somewhat limited due to the dragon armor that encased the bulkheads surrounding it, but speaking from within Earth's system to Curila 6 was relatively easy.

Devra and Ardan were among the people Andro had included in this transmission, much to Ardan's surprise but not to Devra. It could seat twelve people at the table, and among those sitting down with Devra and Ardan on one side were Sadi and all of Andro's mates. On the opposite side of the table, Arduri sat with her brother and Dutkne. She had refused to join her father at his request and instead now sat beside Normya and

Tastia, Denali, Arrarn, Jomann, Bren and Tir'ut stood along the back of those sitting, all of them facing the large holo projection of Martin Leonidas and their mothers from Curila 6. They could see all of their mothers in the background, including Wayonn as well as Cirith sitting beside their mother Isabella on the couch.

Andro sat on the edge of the table directly in front of the image of his father. Devra, Ardan and Tastia were struck by how much he looked like his father, and not just the physical proportions which were nearly identical. Martin Leonidas... a man they had heard of before and a man who was supposed to be dead. At least for the moment.

"It's a risk that needed to be taken father. Resumar and Shiria apparently have a deep contact within the Kavalian..." Andro started.

"Don't dance with me son..." Martin said softly. "Just tell us Andro."

Andro looked at his father. "Cabelir." He replied. "Their contact has reported she arrived on Cabelir sometime last night their time. She appeared in good health though mildly bruised and very confused." Andro watched as his mother Anja reached for Aricia on the couch, and his other mothers clutched each other and his grandmother Gorgo. His eyes went back to his father who did not appear to be surprised.

"We figured a ship or something within Kavalian space." Martin said shaking his head. "Not the Kavalian homeworld."

Andro nodded. "It took all of us by surprise as well." He said.

"Your brother and Athani are still secure? Shiria and Dario as well?" Martin asked.

Andro nodded. "Yes. They are proceeding with the orders I gave to them to establish a resistance. Uncle Isra and Aunt Tarifa are with them as well. Jalersi, Pian, Karun and Ardis went with them. Pian's Pride has always been on the outside of the Kavalian government, they are considered nomads and wildcards. His... his love for Jalersi and hers for him now... it has made them enemies of the KFI. His Pride stands behind him and they are ready to help build this resistance."

"Androcles..." Wayonn began as he moved closer. "Shiria... she must be protected at all costs!"

Andro nodded. "I have already made that very clear to Res and Uncle Isra *Val'istar*. If anything that endangers her becomes too serious they will put her on a ship for Earth. She may not like the way they do it... but it will be done."

"What else?" Martin asked.

"The Galactic Court is convening a special session demanded by the Kavalians." Andro said slowly. "They intend to explain their *rensibfla* actions and how it is all our fault and they were only protecting themselves because we chose to train the Coven dragons."

"That is their reasoning?" Martin asked him wide eyed.

Andro nodded. "That is part of it father... the other part I believe is so they can officially announce our uncle's claim to the throne of the Union and Sparta now that you are supposedly dead. Eliani had a theory on this but she is currently with a prisoner and I felt that is where she was needed most."

"What's her theory?" Martin asked.

"We didn't get around to discussing it." Andro replied. "We became... preoccupied with other more pressing matters. I will ask her about it soon but *Tenna* Deia is going to resume her role as Prime Minister and grandfather Panos will be appointed her deputy. They..."

"Andro... that is not what we had agreed upon!" Martin spoke.

"I know... but it is the decision I have made. Given that what has happened is not what we had expected... I'm changing things around so that it better suits us. Having *Tenna* in her role better suits us now... especially with what she has discovered about herself." Androcles answered his father. "Besides... when have you ever been able to tell *Tenna* Deia that she can not do something?"

"She'll become a prime target!" Martin protested.

"She knows this father." Andro told him. "As do I."

"You're changing the plan son!" Martin said.

"Isn't you who taught me that contact with the enemy always changes the plan. Even the best laid ones." Andro said. "You can not go after her father. I see it in your eyes, and you can not go after her. Not yet."

"I know that damn it!" Martin snarled. "Don't tell me..." Martin caught himself quickly and shook his head. "*Nubou!*" He swore.

“Res’s contact is going to get mother a message.” Andro said quickly trying to reassure his father. “She is a tech with access to the area of the facility where she is being held. She will get her a message and give her hope father. To tell her not to do anything to provoke our uncle or this Prefect Keleru. To let her know that things are not as she has been told. If you attempt something now, you know as well as I they will kill her.”

Andro watched as his mother Aricia stepped up to Martin and took his arm. He knew she was pulsing him with her aura, calming him as only she could as his anome. Martin looked at her for a long moment before leaning over and nuzzling the top of her head and her cheek. He pulled her to him then, reaching out to take Anja with his other arm as Dysea and Isabella moved up to them as well and pressed close. Andro gave them a moment to sooth each other and then continued.

“Laustinos has compromised us far more than we ever anticipated being compromised father.” Andro spoke softly. “Nesa and the others of her team are working diligently to find out how deep his treachery goes... but I have... I have instituted Storm Shadow as a result.”

Martin looked up then. “Storm Shadow? Androcles Leonidas... I gave Armetus strict orders about that plan. He was to destroy it and insure it never came to light!”

“Yes... I know. However... Armetus is still recovering and Marci is in command of the Krypteria now.” Andro answered.

“It is wrong Andro!” Martin spoke.

“No father... it is not wrong. What is wrong is us believing that others will not want to take from us what is ours.” Andro spoke. “What is wrong is us doing nothing to protect all we have come to care about. Storm Shadow will take the steps towards what we should have done a long time ago and even *Tenna Deia* agrees with me now. Our people... the Union... they will not bat an eye because they know it is what we need to do.”

“Andro... there are those in the Netnews who will crucify you.” Martin said.

“*Nubou* them!” Andro snarled. “They can move to the KFI if they don’t like it that much father!”

“King Leonidas... there are already people within the Senate, even the Netnews, people who are beginning to question how this could have happened.” Sadi spoke from her seat. “I think because it has they are beginning to question how and why. I believe they will demand something be done so that this never occurs again.”

“Sadi damn it... what have I told you about doing that?” Martin snapped. “You are my son’s *Anome*!”

Sadi looked at Andro with bright jungle green eyes and smiled. “I’m sorry.” She finally said. “But what I speak of is true... Martin. Lu’ria has told us of whispers her mother has heard among men and women on the Senate who question how this could have happened. They all say the same thing.”

“Damn it Andro... this is how it was back then!” Martin exclaimed loudly. “This is why everything went to *sibfla* back then!”

Androcles nodded. “Perhaps father... but we are not the United States of America and there are far too many species within the Lycavorian Union for that to happen. There are too many checks and balances that are already in place. Besides... I have already spoken to the one person who knows what grandfather would have done in this circumstance and she told me he would do exactly what I am going to do. I did that several years ago.”

“What?” Martin gasped as he turned to where his mother sat on the couch.

Gorgo looked up from where she sat with Retta on her lap. “He’s right Martin. This is what your father would have done and in my opinion it is long overdue.”

“Mother you are talking about...” He began to speak.

“What we are talking about is the safety and future of our Union!” Gorgo spoke. “Had your father not died at Thermopylae he would have done the same thing in Sparta because of the High Coven. We had already talked about it then and Androcles is only doing what needs to be done.”

“Papa... you said it wasn’t nice to use bad language.” Retta spoke from Gorgo’s lap. “You and Andro aren’t being very nice.”

Martin Leonidas looked at his daughter then. Like Eliani she was all Anja in looks, with the exception of her eyes. They had started out as dark green orbs and now they were turning as dark brown as his were. Retta was also showing an aptitude and interest even at ten years of age for everything that went on around her and that is why she and Mara always seemed to be present now.

“I’m sorry Retta.” Martin said finally. “We’ll try to do better.”

“Yes we will sister.” Andro said with a smile. He watched his sister cross her arms in front of her and stare at them. Even from within the transmission the glint in her eyes was very visible.

“*Rensibfla!*” Retta finally blurted out.

The burst of laughter from both ends of the communication was loud and numerous. It also served to sooth everyone as Gorgo squeezed her granddaughter tightly and whispered in her ear.

Martin turned back to his son and looked at Andro from Curila 6. “If you are going to do it... make sure you do it right boy!” He spoke.

“I intend to father.” Andro answered. “I’m also going to send a courier to you with some other changes I have made or am going to make. Since you are dead, you can’t scream at me about them until you are officially back alive... so save it for then.” He said with a smile.

“Why would I need to scream?” Martin asked.

Andro met his eyes. “Trust me father... you are going to scream to the moon.” He said with all seriousness. “But since I am ‘King’ now, I have already set things in motion... and it will do you no good.”

“Why do I get the feeling I’m not going to like these things you have set in motion?” Martin asked. “I assume it has something to do with your blue skinned guests.” Martin spoke. “The ones like Naesta?”

Ardan’s eyes grew wider. “Is that where Naesta is?” He demanded. “Is she there? Is she safe?”

Ardan watched as Naesta moved into the cone of the transmission. “I am here Regent.” She answered. “And I am perfectly safe.”

“That is part of it yes.” Andro replied to his father.

Martin ignored Ardan and maintained eye contact with Andro. “I’m guessing Wayonn’s report was completely accurate?” He said.

Andro nodded. “Disgustingly so... though more from an unexpected source to be honest with you.” He replied.

“Figures. Expect the unexpected is becoming the norm for us and it sucks!” Martin spat. “And this group... these ISG idiots... the Kavalians hired them?” Martin asked.

Androcles nodded. “That is firm.” He answered. “Marci was able to get some information from the woman we took prisoner and...”

“Wait a minute...” Martin spoke quickly. “The initial report from Famus said you had two prisoners. A man and a woman.”

Andro nodded his head. “We did. The man... well let’s just say he made some rather unsavory comments about Eliani and thought he could feel her up in the process while he was threatening her life.” Andro spoke seeing his mother Anja look at him and press closer to his father.

“Andro she...” Anja began.

“She is fine mother. Jomann showed this man the error of his ways” Andro answered motioning to Jomann.

“How did you do that?” Anja barked at him.

Jomann stepped closer to the transmission. “I asked him politely to release her Queen Anja.” He spoke harshly. “He did. Then I shot him in the face for what he had done.”

Anja’s jade green eyes grew a little wider in the transmission when she heard the force with which he answered the question and the vitriol in his tone for what this man had done to Eliani. “*Cyn forn Jomann.*” Anja said softly.

“*Innyne* my Queen.” He replied without thinking and he quickly lowered his eyes when he realized it so he didn’t see Anja’s eyes gaze at him with something more than mere gratitude.

“And these are the same scum who are holding this chemical thing over Naesta’s people? The Vanari?” Martin asked.

Andro nodded. “One and the same.”

“So now these assholes have come here. And they took a contract on you and your mates put in place by the KFI?” Martin said. “They have involved themselves in something they had no right to involve themselves in.”

“This Orionis Syndicate Group is simply a branch of this Eridiani government father.” Andro said. “A shadow branch of their government. We don’t actually know how it all works but we know this is the case.”

“I can understand why the Vanari have never done anything to counter this.” Martin said softly. “I don’t agree with their thinking but I understand it.”

“That is no longer an issue.” Anja continued from beside him. “We... Ceuma actually... she discovered a medical counter for this chemical that they use this morning. I’ll send Eliani a coded sub space transmission with the formula to replicate a viable counter until such time as we can mass produce it Andro. It should be simple enough with the medical equipment you have on the *SCIMITAR*, but we’ll need to talk to the Sulfar to get an ample amount of what we need.”

Devra and Ardan came to their feet slowly now both of their faces showing disbelief. “Wait... you have found... you have found a cure?” Devra asked.

Anja nodded her head. “Yes. My sister Ceuma discovered it this morning.”

“Naesta... is this true?” Ardan asked looking at her in the transmission.

Naesta nodded from where she stood. “It’s very true Regent.” She answered animatedly. “I witnessed it myself! I have seen it!”

“But how?” Devra asked. “So... so soon!”

“Your daughter Caliria discovered the final component really.” Anja said. “All we did was to bring the compounds together in a viable molecular structure once we determined what the needed ingredient was.”

“Caliria?” Devra said softly. “She discovered it?”

Anja nodded. “Looking at the information you sent me in regards to her work I have to tell you... she is a brilliant researcher Lady Devra. Brilliant! I’d work with her anytime! I’m surprised your people did not discover this much sooner.”

“This... this thing you have developed?” Ardan asked quickly. “You can mass produce it?”

Anja nodded her head. “Once all the needed components are together yes.” She answered confidently.

“How... how is that possible?” Ardan gasped.

“The how doesn’t matter.” Androcles spoke quickly now. “Mother... will Eliani be able to fabricate say two dozen doses of this?”

Anja nodded. “Relatively easily as I said. Why?”

“We’ll need that many.” Andro spoke.

It was Naesta who spoke now as she moved forward. “You... you are going to get her aren’t you Androcles?” She said softly.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes I am Naesta... and everyone else that they hold.” He told her confidently. Naesta’s eyes were bright. “Thank you Androcles.”

Martin looked between the two of them and then settled his eyes back on Andro. “Care to fill me in Andro?”

“It is why... it is the other part of why I needed to speak with you father.” Andro replied. “I’m about to do something else that you probably will not be happy with...”

“*Sibfla*... that’s nothing new!” Martin popped. He looked quickly at Retta who simply stared back at her father with an impish grin. “Sorry Retta.” He turned back to Androcles. “Hit me with it... I just love bad news.”

“Father... the Icalro Alliance has been bringing Vanari into the Alpha Quadrant through Bontawillian space for at least three years, possibly longer.” Andro told him seeing his father’s eyes narrow and darken. “Naesta’s sister... Devra’s daughter... her name is Caliria father. She is my... our *Inamarno*.” Andro took a deep breath. “She is... she is meant to be with me... with us. She was captured several weeks ago and they brought her here. It is how the Vanari came to be among us. They arrived with Dutkne. I didn’t... we didn’t see it until they came here father, it was then that I could finally touch her within Mindvoice, albeit only through images because of the distance involved between us.”

“Androcles... the Vanari are not able to use Mindvoice.” Wayonn spoke coming forward again. “There is no known case of a Vanari ever being able to Mindvoice. It is almost as if they are unable to feel the threads of life within Mindvoice.”

“That *would* be the case *Val’istar*, had you not touched Devra and shown her what you did of our people while she carried Caliria in her womb.” Andro answered him calmly. “That connection...”

Wayonn’s eyes were wide. “I... I only did that in the hopes that it would allow her to see us for who we were and not who they thought us to be. I never meant... Devra you must believe me I had no idea it would...” He gasped.

Devra shook her head. "I relish that you showed me that Wayonn... without it I would not have found what I have?"

"It... it affected Caliria as well?" Wayonn asked. "While you carried her?"

Andro nodded his head. "However it happened *Val'istar*, because of your powerful presence within Mindvoice, your connection with Devra stirred and then formed a very strong Mindvoice ability within Caliria. That is how I have been communicating with her these last days."

"And Devra?" Wayonn asked.

Devra looked at him and shook her head. "I don't... I don't have these abilities Wayonn but that touch allowed me to see beyond the surface just as you had hoped." She looked at Bren behind her. "It has also allowed me to find un-requiting love." She turned back to him. "I don't regret it for a single moment!"

Martin held up his hand in the transmission and everyone stopped talking as he looked at his son. "You are sure Andro?" He asked him. "She is to be your wife and mate? All of you are sure?"

Andro nodded his head. "Yes." He answered.

Martin Leonidas finally made that last step into the future. He shoveled that final pile of dirt onto the man he had been and completely embraced who he should have been all along. He met his oldest son's eyes from within the transmission.

"Then why are we having this conversation Androcles Leonidas?" He asked finally.

"Because I am about to do what my blood calls for me to do father." Andro answered. "And I don't intend to hold back father... or let you call me off like you did before. Not this time."

Martin nodded his head. "Then don't." He stated bluntly. "I don't want you to hold back son! Not one *nubous* iota! You go there Andro and you take back what is yours and you make that sorry collection of oxygen stealing cockbreath *ronnus* rue the day that they decided to cross me!"

"Martin!" Gorgo exclaimed as she held her hands over Retta's ears.

"Thank... thank you father." Andro said softly.

"Don't thank me boy!" Martin said. "You are going to piss off a whole lot of people and make yourself an even bigger target."

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. "As if that isn't the case already."

"You know where this special session is going to be Andro?" Martin asked him. "The Galactic Court and I aren't exactly on the best of terms you know. They are the largest bunch of Universe First assholes that I have ever met! Makes me sick! How I ever got talked into letting them get power is beyond me." Martin turned to stare at his mother on the couch and she squeezed Retta tighter but then looked away sheepishly.

Andro shook his head. "Then that makes two of us father and no... we don't know. Not yet." He replied evenly. "I doubt very much the Kavalians will want to come into the Union. I'm guessing they will request it be held on Hadaria with the stipulation that they be allowed to enter Union space unhindered to travel there since I destroyed the Gates around the system. They will undoubtedly demand that Retta and Calyb are there as well, no doubt to show that they and the new Hadarian government are working hand in hand."

"Hand in hand my ass!" Martin snapped. "Wherever it is, I want you hardwired Andro." Martin spoke. "I want to see and hear everything. And they aren't even getting a whiff of your brother and sister so you can tell them to go fuck themselves on that issue."

"Take Duewa with you when you go Andro." Anja spoke now. "I want Buonau to pull her raggedy old hair out of her traitorous head knowing that Duewa has found a new life with Thoti and us."

Andro nodded. "I thought as much mother and I agree. I doubt a supernova could get her away from him now." He said. "Father... we are almost to our Jump Point. I need to go. I will contact you when I return and I have any additional information to pass on to you."

Martin nodded. "Good luck son."

Andro paused for a moment. "Father... I..."

Martin stepped closer within the transmission. "No my son." He said softly. "Don't say it... the blame lies with me and me alone. I can not... I can't put into words the shame I feel Andro... for what I did to you. I can only hope... I can only hope you can forgive me one day."

Andro met his eyes and took a deep breath. "There is nothing to forgive." He stated finally. "There is nothing to forgive because that was not my father. You are my father and you defeated the demon that was

controlling you and your actions. You defeated that demon and now it is my place to destroy her and the rest of her vile children. Another loose end that I will attend to shortly as well.”

Martin looked at his son with questions in his eyes but he did not press the issue. “It does not absolve me of my sins son.” Martin said.

Andro moved closer to the transmission as well. “Aren’t you the one who once told me we all have sins father. And it is these sins and mistakes that are part of us and make us who we are as long as we move past them and learn from them?”

“I... I did say that didn’t I?” Martin said.

“Forgiveness is also what you and our mothers taught me and my brothers and sisters and it is time to forgive and move past it father.” Andro said. “Seeing you there... talking to you now, it is time father. It is time.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes it is.” He stated softly. “Yes it is.” He drew himself up to his full height and looked directly at Androcles. “*Molōn Labe* son.”

Andro nodded his head. “*Molōn Labe* father.”

DREAMLAND SHIPYARDS UNION NAVAL SPECIAL PROJECTS DIVISION

Ben O'Connor moved with confident grace down the corridor of the main station facility built into the largest of the asteroids in this system. He had been busy enough the last few days insuring that those Special Projects that they were working on here and they could actually field were being ramped up and transferred to other secure facilities within the fleet to begin mass production. He had kissed Tina and Endith goodbye nearly a week ago as they took the single new *STRIKER DT* Mark II upgrade to Curila 6. It was Martin’s personal ship and had several features that the standards ones would not. Each *STRIKER DT* Mark II that went to the Royal Family had these special features and Ben didn’t doubt that the pilots in the Leonidas family would be in their glory. After they had left, Ben threw himself into his work as he always did, while he cared for the two youngest of his children with his two wives. Tatiun was his half elf half vampire five year old son with Endith and the more active of the young ones. Roland was his six year old son with Tina and he was the more cerebral of the two. His boys occupied his time when his wives were gone, and though they hated to be apart, their reunions were always very promising. They love they had nurtured and allowed to grow between the three of them was more powerful now than it had been in the beginning, another side affect of being friends with Martin Leonidas no doubt. No matter the events that had brought them here, no matter the friends they had lost and buried along the way, there was no other place Ben O'Connor would rather be than right where he was.

Ben entered the secure lounge and saw all of his department heads sitting at the table chatting back and forth as they shared coffee and Danishes since it was still very early. Ben did not stand on formality here, they all knew who he was, how close he was to their King and how laid back he was in his command style. Until you screwed up that is.

“Morning people.” Ben spoke as he entered and moved directly to the counter where he poured himself a large mug of coffee. He added cream and turned to look at the men and women. He didn’t add sweetener to his coffee anymore, not after becoming a vampire anyway; it just didn’t sit well with his taste buds. It took a long while to get used to it, but Endith and Tina had commented on how much the cut back in sugar had improved his physical stamina and appearance. After hearing that, it was gravy.

Ben moved back to the table and tossed his data scroll to the polished top. “Sorry to get everyone out of bed so early... but I spoke with Andro last night about an hour after a new group of assholes tried to take him and Sadi and his other wives out in their home. Needless to say he was not a happy camper.”

“They were not hurt I take it?” The elven female asked.

Ben shook his head. “No... but he’s not happy like I said.”

“I wouldn’t be either Ben... not with how his wives look!” A human engineer threw out the comment. “Jeez! Imagine what someone would pay for one night with just one of them. And he gets all four!”

Frank Paulson was the Electrical Engineering Developer and one of the most brilliant minds Ben knew. He had been with them on EDEN BASE, and it had actually been his plan that allowed Admiral Wallace to

retake the base in the way they had. He was crude at times, used foul language quite a bit, didn't care who he pissed off and he could get power from a rock if it was truly needed. It was his way of coping with the stress of everything and everyone knew he was fiercely in love with his half Lycavorian and half elven wife and only acted as he did to keep his friends and those he worked with from snapping. He could make anyone laugh.

"I'll make sure I let Itr'aas know you said that." Ben spoke with a grin. "But he does take after his father in that regard no doubt!"

The elven female at the table hissed softly and completely for show. "Frank... you are such a pig!" She spat.

Tanel'ha was the second finest weapons researcher that Ben had on his staff and she could make a kinetic cannon from bamboo reeds. She really came into her own when the person to Ben's right joined their team. Juque was the only Evolli on Ben's inner staff, the designer of the T19 Dragon Killer and countless other weapons. What he thought up in his mind Tanel'ha put into practical application and they made a good pair. The nineteen other Evolli scientists that had defected with Juque also worked in one department or another here in Dreamland and none of them would trade their lives now for anything. The Union had shown them mercy and then provided them a new life and security. A life free of hate and death and they were among the most tireless of designers and workers as well as some of the most fanatically loyal. They had been accepted here in Dreamland for their work and none of the one million men and women of any species who worked within Dreamland's huge borders looked at them in any other way except friend and colleague.

"What did Soul Slayer want Benjamin?" Juque asked softly, his amphibian features slightly damp as they always here. He had taught himself to speak perfect English as well as the ancient Lycavorian language and was a fierce lover of history. Using the name the Evolli had given Androcles during the war was a sign of the ultimate respect and honor he held for Andro and Elynth as far as he was concerned and he steadfastly refused to speak the name in his native language for obvious reasons.

"We aren't going to like this are we Ben?" The Lycavorian that served as Ben's second in command spoke from his seat to Ben's left. Star Colonel Ymus looked at Ben from his chair. He had been Ben's second officer since the birth of Dreamland and it was exactly that to him as an officer and a propulsion expert. A dream.

"Like is such a relative term." Ben said.

"Cut the shit Ben... what's going on?" Frank spoke. "You didn't pull us all out of bed this early to trade war stories."

"No... I didn't." He said. "What is the status of the Block One *ARIZONA*-Class ships that are still here?" Ben asked.

"*BISMARCK* and *YAMATO* have returned from trials and the *MISSOURI* will be back in two weeks." Ymus answered immediately. "The data will be collected and disseminated and all the quirks in the systems will be worked out. Same as the *ARIZONA* and the *HORNET*."

Ben shook his head slowly. "No." He said softly. "Transfer all the data received from the Captain Lorian and align the Block Ones to the exact battle parameters of the *ARIZONA* and the *HORNET* during the action at Kranek. Recall the *MISSOURI* and do the same. Ymus have Captains Carstairs, Lucas, and Navierre prepare to embark on the *BISMARCK*, *YAMATO* and *MISSOURI* respectively when they return. I want all the remaining Fighter Wing selections that are slotted for us pulled from their normal duty rotations and brought here within the next two weeks. The *YAMATO* will join with *ARIZONA*'s Attack Fleet wherever she is when the time comes while the *BISMARCK* and *MISSOURI* will form the 2nd Attack Fleet. I've already done the job of informing docking control at the Nodon shipyards and the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers *REIGN OF FIRE* and *STAR'S QUEST* will be departing with their Strike Wings of Block One ships in two days for Dreamland. I realize that these ships were not slated to be their permanent commands, but things have changed."

"What has changed?" Ymus asked.

"Ben... what is going on?" Juque asked.

Ben leaned back in his chair slowly. "Andro wants the Block One *ARIZONA*-Class ships ready." He said.

"Ready?" Tanel'ha asked. "Ready for what?"

“Well... knowing his father like I do... and knowing that Androcles is not very different from his old man no matter how much he tries to be. My guess... my guess is that Andro is very close to doing a tap dance on someone’s face and our ships are going to be the ones doing the dancing.” Ben replied. “How long people?”

“Seven weeks at best.” Frank answered immediately. “More like nine even if we push it.”

Ben shook his head. “You have five weeks.” He said sliding the data pad out into the center of the table and tapping it gently.

“That isn’t possible Benjamin!” Tanel’ha told him leaning forward at the table.

“Ben... there are two dozen computer cores of information that need to be uploaded to the other Block One ships just from the Kranek engagement! We have to realign half the power conduits in the starboard landing bays just to bring it into line with the *ARIZONA* and *HORNET* specs that Colonel Randall sent to us. And those are the easy tasks. The weapons calibrations and power drain factor equations will take weeks just by themselves. That doesn’t include the fine tuning of the Quantum Drive. Or the LSD coils for intersystem travel!” Frank clamored.

Ben leaned forward in his chair. “Listen to me all of you.” He said gently. “Andro has not made me privy just yet to what he is planning but that boy is like his father in every way when it comes to tactics. Some say he is even more cunning and a whole lot less forgiving. He’ll let me know soon but whatever he is planning it will be completely off the fucking wall, it will come out of left field and you can damn well bet it’s going to kick off a war! The Kavalians bastards have taken his mother, they damn near killed another and they almost got his father. They’ve tried to kill him twice and the last time they went after his wives and mates. Androcles is way pissed folks. He hides it well but when he starts to use cuss words I have never heard of, and he does it in nine different languages, I know he is pissed. I know him people; I’ve watched him grow up! He is like a surgeon folks, and when he starts slicing and dicing I want him to have the very best!”

“Jesus!” Frank hissed softly.

Ben nodded. “His father may have started this program... but Miranda and him are very close. This is going to be Miranda and Andro’s project from now on and I don’t doubt he’s going to turn our toys loose with glee. I’ll do what I need too... I’ll get you whatever you need to do this... but we’ll get this done in five weeks.” Ben got to his feet. “In five weeks Androcles Leonidas is going to let the hammer fall... and it isn’t going to be pretty for whoever gets hit with it. Let’s get this done!”

SCIMITAR

NINETEEN HOURS FROM ONTAHE

Brendi Faith’s dark brown eyes fluttered open slowly, squinting against the bright lights of the room she was in. She didn’t move at first, not wanting to reveal to anyone who could be watching that she had regained consciousness. She flexed her fingers and toes, relieved that they still responded to commands from her brain and then she tried to move her legs and arms. They wouldn’t budge, feeling as if a large weight was on them.

“Don’t try and move.” The female voice said.

Brendi’s head turned to the side on the bed and she groan as pain lanced through the side of her neck. She blinked several times and saw the figure of the woman moved up next to the bed she was lying in.

“I told you not to move.” The voice said again. Brendi saw her hand reach out and then a brief warm sensation touched her neck and the pain vanished. “I have to deactivate the restraints or you will hurt yourself more.”

Brendi remained still as the woman lifted the data pad and typed quickly onto it. Instantly she felt the weight disappear from both her arms and legs and she turned her head quickly to see the long, silky burgundy red hair of the woman who had hit her initially and knocked her out in the bedroom of the villa. Eliani Leonidas stepped back a little and looked at her. Brendi’s mind clicked and the memories of the last few hours came rushing back, this particular woman hitting her incredibly hard and then the tall Lycavorian male shooting her without blinking his large blue eyes. She tried to sit up, groaning softly at the ache that filled her upper body. It felt like she had slept in an uncomfortable position for hours.

“That is the aftereffect of the drugs.” Eliani stated evenly as she leaned against the main computer station behind her. “It will wear off in a few moments now that you are awake.”

“Where... where am I?” Brendi asked as she continued to blink and focus her thoughts.

“The *SCIMITAR*.” Eliani answered. “My brother’s ship?”

“Ship?” Brendi asked looking at her still lying on her back.

“You can sit up if you want.” Eliani spoke.

Brendi did just that and was going to come off the table bed ready to defend herself. As she swung her legs over the side and sat up she saw the two Lycavorians by the door, both of them watching her with something akin to a predator watching its prey. She turned her head back and watched as Eliani stepped closer to her and lifted the medical sensor probe.

“Don’t move or the readings will be off.” Eliani stated as she lifted the probe sensor and passed it over Brendi’s upper body. The medical gown fit loosely and for some reason made Brendi very self conscious. “Good...” Eliani said. “Damn... I do good work.” She finished as she lowered the probe.

Brendi looked at her. “You’re... you’re Hadarian?” She asked softly.

Eliani met her eyes. “I’m half Hadarian.” Eliani replied to her question. “But you already knew that didn’t you?”

Brendi reached up to her shoulder where she had been shot and pulled aside the off white colored gown. There was not a mark on her from where the kinetic round had punched into her flesh with terrible agony. She turned back to Eliani as she went back to leaning against the computer station. “You healed me?” She said.

“You’re no good to us dead.” Eliani said. “Something your partner didn’t understand too well.”

“He wasn’t my partner!” Brendi snapped. “You drugged me?”

“Yes. You were questioned for several hours before I had them stop.” Eliani answered. “You needed to heal.”

Brendi met her eyes. “I am... I am trained to resist drugs!” She stated.

Eliani shook her head. “Not the drugs we use.” She said.

“Why... why didn’t you kill me?” Brendi hissed then. “Isn’t that what your people do best?”

Eliani chuckled softly. “You come to my brother’s home and try to kill him and the women he loves and you have the gall to stand there and accuse us of being killers? We didn’t even know who you were until you attacked us.”

“That wasn’t me!” Brendi snapped. “The job against your brother was not sanctioned by...”

“By your Home Council?” Eliani asked seeing Brendi’s eyes go a little wider. Dark, sultry eyes that were very appealing. She smiled. “You did tell us quite a bit in the two and a half hours that Marci questioned you.”

“You’re Eliani Leonidas.” Brendi said softly. “Your mother is Queen Anja and you are widely considered to be one of the five strongest Hadarian Healers in the entire Union. You have an attitude, a temper that is almost as famous as your mother’s, and you just recently were mated to a Lycavorian, but you returned to Earth recently without either of them. Before him you were heavily involved with a vampire female and you don’t have a problem going both ways it seems.”

“Both ways?” Eliani asked her eyes narrowing.

“You sleep with both men and women!” Brendi snapped.

“Ahh... both ways.” Eliani said with a smile as she understood the statement. “I see. Well it does have its advantages.”

“It’s disgusting!” Brendi popped.

“Don’t knock it until you have tried it sister.” Eliani quipped right back.

“No thank you.” Brendi spoke seeing Eliani shrug her shoulders. “Why am I here?”

“As I said... you are no good to us dead.” Eliani told her. “And you are safer here on this ship than you would be on Earth.”

“It doesn’t... it doesn’t matter.” Brendi spoke softly. “I am... I am already dead.”

“You don’t look dead to me.” Eliani said.

“Your boyfriend is a lousy shot.” Brendi spoke reaching up to rub her shoulder.

Eliani blinked several times. “He... he isn’t my boyfriend.” She answered watching as Brendi looked at her oddly. “And he hit you exactly where he was aiming.”

“Where... where is the Major?” She asked.

“No one else from your team survived.” Eliani told her.

“They are not my team damn it!” Brendi snarled. “I am not an operator like them!”

Eliani nodded. “Yes... we know. And that is the only reason why you are still alive.” She said moving up to her and reaching out with her hand, the palm beginning to glow with a soft white light. Brendi leaned back quickly, reaching up to snatch Eliani’s wrist. She heard two clicking noises and then was staring down the barrels of two P190A3 assault rifles from ten feet away. The two Lycavorian guards had moved far quicker than she had ever seen anyone move and the look in their eyes was anything but pleasant. “Let go of me.” Eliani stated softly. “I’m going to help you. If we had wanted you dead you would already be dead.”

Brendi met the gaze of her fern green eyes and slowly removed her hand. Eliani placed her palm on Brendi’s shoulder and the throbbing ache that was still there disappeared almost instantly. She watched her step back then and pick up the data pad and she began reading. “You are in excellent physical shape...” Eliani said. “You have a tad too much salt and caffeine in your diet...” She turned looking at her. “But you are in superior health otherwise.”

Brendi looked down at the floor. “I like my bacon and coffee.” She said softly.

“Yes... so do I.” Eliani said. “Would you care to tell me why you and your cohorts tried to kill my brother and his wives?”

“You questioned me!” She snapped. “Don’t you know?”

“I would not allow them to question you for more than they did because you were injured and needed further medical attention.” Eliani explained. “Marci only asked simple questions. Most of them in regards to who you were and how long you have been on Earth. Things of that nature.”

“You wouldn’t allow?” Brendi asked.

“Well... I am a Princess of the Union and the senior Medical Officer when my mother is not on Earth.” Eliani replied. “I do have some pull.”

“And what if I choose to not answer your questions?” Brendi barked. “Are you going to kill me too?”

“No... Marci will pump you full of enough drugs that you will tell us your most intimate secrets. You will tell us everything we want to know... unfortunately when she is finished you will spend the rest of your days in a mental hospital because there will be precious little of your cognizant brain left.” Eliani answered her. “I... I heard what you were arguing about with the others just before I pulled you out of the tunnel. I saw the way you reacted before...”

“Before your boyfriend put a bullet in me?” Brendi said.

“He is my brother’s *Durcunusaan* Captain!” Eliani snapped. “Not my boyfriend!”

“Whoa! Touchy subject I see!” Brendi popped. “The way he reacted to how the major was feeling you up and I would have guessed he was your boyfriend. He looked like he wanted to skin the major alive.”

“It is not a touchy subject!” Eliani stammered. “He is *Durcunusaan* and he will act that way with any of my family!”

“If you say so.” Brendi spoke not believing her for a moment. Her training had taught her to read people very well. “So he was *Durcunusaan* huh? Wolves of the Blood? The most feared troops in the Lycavorian Union. Outside of those members of *Mjolnir’s Hand* of course.”

Eliani crossed her arms under her ample chest and smiled. “Changing the subject will not work you know.” She said. “We already know that you have been on Earth for close to seven months. We know where you live; we’ve talked to those neighbors who knew you from your apartment building. According to them you were fitting in pretty well considering that you were living in a predominantly older section of Old Sparta and the men and women who choose to live there are usually men and women who were alive when my grandfather was King. Pretty bold of you really.”

Brendi shrugged. “I’m confident in my abilities.” She said.

“But you did not agree with what your team was doing.” Eliani said.

“Jesus Christ!” Brendi snapped. “They were not my team! How many times do I have to say that?”

“You were with them.” The new voice spoke from behind her. A deep male voice and Brendi whirled around quickly gasping in fear as she saw Androcles Leonidas behind her. She hadn’t heard him come into medical bay, or sensed him come up behind her. She staggered back her eyes wide as he drew closer to her.

“Shit!” She gasped in fear as she backed herself against the bulkhead while he stepped right up to her. Brendi heard a sizzling sound and her brown eyes grew wide in terror when he lifted his right hand and she saw

the eight inch long psychic knife extended from his closed fist. "Fuck... what is..." Her words died in her throat when his opposite hand snatched her slim throat in its grasp and pressed her back against the bulkhead.

Andro leaned close to her... his azure blue eyes surrounded by a solid black ring and the tips of his dual wolf fangs visible from under his upper lip. He brought the psychic knife within two inches of Brendi's left eye and she froze in his clutches, her hands gripping his left arm which held her throat. "You were with them." Andro said once more. "You came with them to my home to kill my mates! My wives!"

"I didn't know what they... what they were going to do until we got into the tunnels!" Brendi almost screamed. "They pulled me out of my apartment to go with them! They almost compromised my cover! I only provide intelligence! I'm not an operator!"

Andro glared at her. "Do you want to know what will happen if I shove this into your brain?" He growled at her. "I can do one of two things really... I can make it burn as it goes in, melting the surrounding flesh and bone and then fusing a very large hole in your skull. Or... I can make it so it sears the nerve endings in your brain and it will feel as if your blood is on fire. You won't be able to stop it or make it go away and eventually you will go insane while you peel the flesh from your own body trying to get it to stop. Which do you prefer?"

"Jesus! Neither! I'm only an intelligence gatherer and analyst!" She screamed. "I don't do operations! I'm telling you the truth!"

"Why should I believe you?" Andro snarled. "After what you have done... I should just carve you into tiny pieces and listen to you scream."

"I'm telling you the truth!" Brendi screamed. "Please... I don't want to die! You have to believe me!"

Andro stared at her for a single long minute and Brendi thought for sure her life was over. In the seven months she had been living on Earth among the older men and women of the Old Sparta District she had learned many things just listening to them talk among themselves. First and foremost of what she had learned was that King Leonidas and his sons Androcles and Denali had perhaps the most sensitive sense of smell of any Lycavorian living and they could smell a liar from three kilometers away. Brendi assumed that was an exaggeration of some sort, but staring at those azure eyes, she was no longer so sure.

"My sister believes you." Andro spoke finally, his words soft and barely heard. "And I trust my sister." Andro released her slim throat and stepped away from her, the psychic knife disappearing like magic and he watched Brendi reach for her neck and leaned heavily against the bulkhead for support. "You have a choice to make now. Tell us what we want to know freely or I will not hesitate to have you pumped so full of drugs that you will spend the rest of your days believing you are a fairy with wings and a wand."

Brendi looked up at him. "It doesn't matter... I'm dead already." She stated. "As soon as the Home Council of the OSG discovers I have been captured my life will be forfeit."

"Why?" Eliani asked moving closer.

"I'm an Intelligence Gathering. An analyst. We are not suppose to be used for operations! Especially not for ones that aren't sanctioned by the Home Council. We are inserted to a place and all we are supposed to do is report back on what we discover. That is all!"

"You had the weapons." Andro spoke. "The training to make it into the tunnels beneath my home!"

"We get rudimentary assault training!" Brendi barked. "Our real training is how not to get caught! How not to be discovered! How to fit in! I was specifically trained to be able to fit in among Lycavorians! To gather information on the Union."

"Why?" Andro asked.

"Information is power." Brendi spoke. "It can be used in any sort of ways!"

"Yet your Major accepted a contract on me and my mates posted by the Kavalians." Andro spoke. "Why?"

"Because he got greedy!" Brendi barked. "He wasn't satisfied with the money he was being paid to transport and then sell the slaves in The Wilds. The OSG established a working relationship with the Kavalians almost a decade ago. I don't know how they met or began to communicate. I wasn't told any of that. It wasn't in my training. The Kavalians used us because we were unknown and we are efficient!"

Eliani moved up next to him and touched his arm. Brendi watched him look at her and after a few seconds of some conversation she could not hear he nodded his head. Brendi knew then she had said something to him within that realm of ability that all Lycavorians seemed to possess. Androcles stepped back out of the

way and Eliani held out her hand to Brendi. “Get back on the table bed Brendi.” She said softly. “Nothing is going to happen to you.”

Brendi looked at her for a long moment before reaching out and taking her hand. Eliani guided her back to the table bed and as she sat down Eliani once more pulsed her neck with a surge of healing power and took away the discomfort from having Andro’s hand on her throat.

“Your life is forfeit right now. It belongs to me. To my mates. Answer every question I or anyone asks you and perhaps you may live.” Andro told her. “As I said... the choice is yours.”

“How... how do I know you won’t kill me anyway?” Brendi snapped.

“You don’t.” Andro told her. “But if you have been on Earth as long as you have then you must know something about me? About my family?” He moved closer to the bed. “Tell me what I want to know and I give you my word that no harm will come to you.”

“You... you can’t protect me. I’m dead anyway.” Brendi said softly.

“You keep saying that.” Eliani spoke. “Why?”

“Once it is discovered that I am alive the OSG will declare me a liability. A contract will be put on my head.” Brendi spoke. “I’ll be dead in days.”

“Nice people you work for.” Eliani said.

“It wasn’t by choice I’ll tell you that!” She snapped.

Andro turned and pulled over a chair which he offered to Eliani. He turned and motioned with his head to the two *Durcunusaan* at the door and they exited immediately. He turned back to Brendi as Eliani was settling into the chair and saw her eyes on the door as it shut behind the two men. Andro the data pad from the nearby work station and set it on the bed next to her and activated it.

“What makes you think they will find out?” Andro asked.

“They’ll find out... they probably already know.” Brendi said.

“And how would they know that?” He asked her.

Brendi looked at him for what seemed like an eternity without saying a word. “You’re right...” She said. “I do know about you and your family. I know a lot. I know that you and your father have never broken a promise you have made. You promise me that I will be kept secure, that I will be protected and I will tell you whatever you want to know.” She spoke finally.

Andro crossed his arms over his chest. “Why should I believe that?” He asked.

“You can smell when someone is lying... I know you can. All of your people can. We may undergo gene therapy, but even the Eridiani can’t hide the adrenalin dump into our systems when we lie. Am I lying to you?” Brendi asked.

“No.” Andro answered immediately.

“Why would you make this deal?” Eliani asked reaching up to put her hand on Andro’s arm before he continued. “If you are willing to turn traitor to the Eridiani then...”

“I’m not betraying the Eridiani!” Brendi snapped back at her. “I would never betray the Eridiani! But I don’t give two shits about the Orionis Syndicate! How do you think they got to be so large? They come to your home at night... they *encourage* your mother and father to offer you up for service to the OSG in return for protection and support in the future. Protection and support that never comes! If you refuse they are very polite... but the next week your business or your home might be destroyed by a *mysterious* explosion... or someone in your family might die in an *accident*! It’s all very subtle and non-intrusive, but their meaning is clear. Help them or suffer the consequences.”

“And this is how you got involved?” Andro asked.

Brendi nodded. “My older brother and I both.” She said. “He was sixteen and I was ten. They took us the next day... they promised to leave our younger sisters alone if my parents did this. They were only three at the time. They took us the very next day and we went to a training facility to begin our treatments. My brother... Corbin... he embraced the life. I found it harder... I didn’t like being away from my parents. I finally showed an aptitude for Intelligence and that is where I finally ended up. I spent twelve years in training schools and another four years training to come into the Union. Another eighteen months to learn my cover and get my background established.”

“The trinket shop you run in Old Sparta?” Eliani asked.

Brendi nodded. “Yes.”

“That seems like an awful lot of work for the Syndicate.” Andro said. “Why go to so much trouble?”

Brendi looked at him. “Because of your father.” She answered. “The humans on Earth aren’t like the ones before the comet. What happened afterwards... with the High Coven and then your father discovering who he was... it has made them more cautious. And then when they elected Charles Taylor as President...”

“He’s one of the Eridiani that left isn’t he?” Andro asked.

Brendi looked at him with surprise on her face. “You know about that?” She asked.

“Dutkne and Devra told me.” He said.

“Devra? Devra Re Mydala. The Vanari Regent?” Brendi asked him. “Wait... how do you know her? She’s one of the most influential Regents on their Board, at least for the younger generation of Vanari. How do you...?” Brendi stopped quickly talking and looked back and forth between Andro and Eliani. “You’ve met her haven’t you? You’ve made contact with the Vanari haven’t you?”

Andro made a decision that would either hurt them or help them in the long run but his senses told him that it was a good call. He turned and pulled another chair over and settled into it beside his sister. “Devra’s daughter Caliria...?”

“The dark haired one?” Brendi asked.

“You know of her?” Andro asked interested.

Brendi shook her head quickly. “No not really. Just field reports from other Intel people. I know she was becoming very vocal on Austrova in regards to equal rights for the dark haired Vanari and that she had been in school for some sort of Physics research. I stopped getting those reports when I came to Earth. How do you know about her?”

“Devra and Coren Re Mydala and their three children are at this moment eight decks below you.” Androcles told her watching as her eyes grew wide. “Some of your OSG cohorts made the mistake of kidnapping Caliria Re Mydala from Vanari space and they brought her here into the Alpha Quadrant. Caliria Re Mydala is to be my last mate and wife. I’m going to get her as we speak.”

Brendi’s eyes grew even wider. “Those idiots!” She nearly shouted. “I knew there had to be more to it!”

“More to what?” Eliani asked.

Brendi looked up at them. “If you go to get her... wait... you know where she is?”

Andro nodded. “She is within Icalro Alliance space. A slave world within their borders. They violated an agreement they made with my father many years ago about bringing slaves of any kind through Union space. All the Vanari your people have brought into this quadrant have traveled through Bontawillian space. A Union member and ally.”

“If... if you go to get her... the OSG isn’t aware that you have made contact with the Vanari people.” Brendi spoke. “If you show up there to get her... they’ll automatically assume that I am alive and you got the information from me!”

“I told you I would see to it that you are protected.” Andro said. “I will.”

Brendi shook her head. “My mother and father! My sisters! The OSG will kill them! They will automatically assume I was the one who gave you this information and they will kill them!” She spoke heatedly. “The OSG Regional Commander will send a hit team after them, he’ll order them tortured for any information they have! Then he’ll have them killed! I know he will! He’s a bastard!”

“You sound like you know him.” Eliani stated.

“I do! He’s my brother Corbin!” Brendi hissed. “And he’s an evil and cruel bastard who won’t think twice about killing our parents and sisters! Especially if he thinks it was me who gave you the information! You have to pull them out!”

“I’m truly sorry... I don’t have the resources to go into the Beta Quadrant after four individuals. And I will not wait to rescue Caliria. I’ve waited too long as it is.” Andro said. “I’m sorry.”

Brendi shook her head. “They aren’t in the Beta Quadrant!” She exclaimed. “They are on Edolus! They moved there during the last months of my training so that I could spend more time within them before I entered the Union. They are part of my cover... to make it seem real! They don’t know it but it’s true!” She nearly shouted. “I won’t tell you jack shit unless you get them out of there!”

“Miss Faith... you are in no...”

“Shut up!” Brendi barked. “I’ll tell you anything you want to know! I’ll give you names! Places! Events! I’ll even give you Vanari names! Anything that I know will be yours! You just get my family off Edolus before

my brother kills them! I won't help you otherwise! You'll have to use your drugs on me because I won't say shit willingly! And I will use every skill I have to get away from you and escape! They are innocent! They have done nothing wrong and I will not let them be the brunt of my brother Corbin's twisted anger!"

Andro sat there for a moment and then got to his feet slowly. Eliani looked up at him. "Andro we could..."

"We won't arrive in Icalro Alliance space for another twenty-six hours." Andro said. "I will let you know what I decide."

"Andro you..." Eliani got to her feet.

"That is my decision Eli!" Andro barked at her. He turned quickly and left the medical bay without another word.

Eliani looked at Brendi and reached out to touch her arm. "I'll be right back." She said. She turned and followed Andro out into the corridor. "Andro?" She shouted as she saw him enter the next room adjacent to the medical bay and she increased her pace. She got there just before the door closed and she saw Devra and Ardan standing in the room he had entered. Eliani ignored them and began speaking to her brother. "Androcles we..."

Andro looked at her. "Eli... you really need to learn to keep your emotions in check." He said with a smile.

"What... what is going on?" She asked coming up beside him.

Andro turned back to Devra and Ardan. "Devra? Regent Ardan?"

"If she is an Intelligence asset like she says... what she knows could be invaluable to our people." Ardan spoke softly. "Can you do this?"

Devra looked at him. "Ardan I thought you were of the same mind as Coren?" She said.

Ardan nodded his head. "I was." He stated. "Not anymore."

"What... what made you shift your feelings so quickly?" She asked.

Ardan met Andro's eyes. "You did." He said softly. "You called us friends just before you killed that man. Even with how Coren has treated you since he arrived... even with how you know the majority of our people view Lycavorians... you called us your friends."

"Yes I did." He stated.

"Did you mean that young man?" Ardan asked him. "Or is it simply because you believe Caliria will be your wife?"

"Yes sir I did mean it. And it has nothing to do with Caliria. You don't believe she feels the same thing sir?" Andro answered.

"I don't know what to believe anymore." Ardan spoke. "With the exception of Devra here, no Vanari female has ever become the wife of a Lycavorian. Vanari females aren't drawn to Lycavorian males."

Devra chuckled softly. "Ardan my friend... you must really get out of the Regent Center more. I hear our younger females talk about it all of the time. And that is just with the Embassy personnel the Protectorate has. It is consider so taboo by the SBR and other Board members that it is only mentioned in whispers. And no one knows why."

Ardan looked at her for a moment. "Perhaps you may be right Devra." He said softly. "But what he speaks of... fate and the preordained? We have a strong faith Androcles... but what you speak of is almost impossible to believe. Caliria has never met you, never seen you. You say that you have somehow touched her within this Mindvoice ability your people have, but I can not bring myself to believe it."

"Let me ask you a question sir?" Andro asked him.

"Yes of course."

"Do you believe that the possibility exists that what I am telling you is the truth." Andro asked him. "That everything happens for a reason."

Ardan nodded his head slowly. "I can not deny that belief with everything I have seen in my life." He said.

Andro nodded. "Then I will open your eyes sir. As long as you have that belief... leave the rest to me. Before we return to Earth, you will acknowledge everything I have said and a new door will open before you. It will be up to you whether you choose to walk through it. Now... back to this Brendi woman."

"What she knows... what she knows could be precious information." Ardan said. "With the knowledge that your mother has discovered a counter, a cure for their vile hold on us... she becomes even more valuable."

And if she has names of Vanari... my people... names of those who are actually helping the OSG in some way I want them!"

"As do I." Devra growled softly.

"You can do this? Get her family off this planet Edolus?" Ardan asked.

Andro nodded. "Yes. Easily."

Ardan nodded. "Then let us make this the official first venture between our peoples Androcles Leonidas. And know that whatever happens I will lend my full weight behind a new beginning and a new relationship between our peoples. I do not know how many minds I can change but perhaps it will be enough."

Andro nodded his head. "Very well." He spoke. He turned to Eliani. "She seems to relate to you better Eli. Tell her I will do what she asks."

Eliani breathed a sigh of relief. "Who goes?" She asked. "We can't make a lot of noise with this Op Andro? And the *Durcunusaan* are already stretched pretty thin."

"I know." He said. "Get everyone together in Astrometrics and let's have a quick head session. Tell her first."

"Better yet... allow her to come to it." Devra said.

Andro looked at her and nodded. "Good idea." He said.

"That's a big risk brother. She would see some pretty sensitive stuff." Eliani said.

Andro nodded. "Yes... but if she turns out to be leading us on a wild goose chase then the last thing she sees will be my face as I vent her out of an airlock myself. I won't matter what she sees then."

Eliani nodded. "True enough." She said. "I'll get her and meet you in Astrometrics."

Andro looked at Ardan and Devra. "Follow me." He said.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

EARTH

SPARTA

ROYAL ESTATE VILLA

"What do you think of their reactions Deia?" Panos asked as he held out the glass of juice to her.

Deia took the glass from him. "About what I expected from many of them." She replied as she sipped the juice and then pulled her face back with a disgusted look. "What is this?" She demanded looking at him.

Panos chuckled. "Eliani's orders." He spoke. "No Spartan Wine until you are fully back on your feet. I have no desire to anger my adopted granddaughter either... she is worse than her mother at times." Deia shook her head as she sipped the juice again and Panos settled to the couch. "It is... it is strange being here when they are not." He said.

Deia looked around the main room of the Royal Estate Villa and took a deep breath. "It gives me balance and their scents will always fill this place." She spoke softly. "And next to Cranae Island right now this is the most secure position on Earth I imagine. There are over two hundred *Durcunusaan* just on the grounds alone."

"Not to mention the twenty odd dragons that Arzoal has assigned to patrol the skies day and night." They heard Helen's voice speak as she came through the double doors of the patio. They saw the flash of flame red scales outside and then the small blast of wind that ruffled her clothes as she came in, something that always took place whenever Arzoal took to the skies because of her immense size.

They watched her move to the counter and pour herself a half glass of Spartan wine and then turn to look at them. "I wanted to inquire of Armetus's health so I stopped at the hospital before returning here. Anuk says he is improving rapidly but is still many weeks from being able to fully walk again. He will never have complete use of his arm, but he will be able to shift."

Deia nodded her head slowly. "Thank the gods. I check on his condition nearly every day." She said gently becoming slightly choked up. "We have been through so much he and I. In some ways I feel responsible for bringing him into all this."

“You both have survived Deia... no matter how hard the Kavalian dogs tried to kill you, both of you have survived.” Panos spoke. “Build on the strength and purpose that kept you both alive.”

Deia took a deep breath and nodded. “I intend too.” She stated.

“Getting to know him as much as I have these last years has taught me one thing. You will never get that man to do something he dose not want to do. He was here... beside you Deia because he wanted to be. Because he believes as you do.” Panos continued. “Dismiss these thoughts you have Deia for they are not true.”

She looked at Panos again and nodded with a smile. “You are very correct Panos my friend.” She stated with sincerity. She nodded once more and took a deep breath. “The final group of new Senators arrives shortly. We should meet with them individually before calling the Union and Spartan Senate back into order.”

Panos nodded his head. “I have already arranged meetings with them two hours from now. There are seven of them and they’ll be escorted here.”

“Why didn’t they arrive with the last group?” Helen asked as she settled into the chair facing Deia and Panos.

Panos shook his head. “Apparently their new status is already going to their heads.” He said with no small amount of disgust. “They kept delaying their departure from Apo Prime because of other commitments they said they had. I understand they were having their own private parties in recognition of their victories and elections. It wasn’t until the *Durcunusaan* officer in charge on Apo Prime told them he would physically force their departure that they finally decided to grace us with their presence.” He looked at Helen. “I believe you and Deia know one of them already?”

“We do?” Helen asked.

Panos held on one of several data pads to her. “Her name is Ulana. Androcles’s former female companion from what I understand.”

Deia’s eyes went a little wider. “That pompous little *upae*.” She exclaimed.

Helen nodded. “Yes I remember her.” She stated softly. “Her father was an Apo Prime University Scholar when he ran for election to the Senate eight months ago. He won the seat from his district quite handily if I recall.” Helen looked at Panos. “He was among those killed in the Senate Building?”

Panos nodded his head. “Yes. He had just arrived a week before the attack and was in his office. A Special Election was held back on Apo Prime and Ulana was chosen to fill out the rest of his eight year term. I believe more from the grief over her father’s death than from her actual political qualifications for the position.” He said. “Of course that is just my opinion.”

Deia nodded. “The Northern Region Constituency of Tuya City is well known for their eccentric attitudes and arrogance.” She spoke calmly. “It does not surprise me that they elected a University Scholar. Gorgo told me the man was a brilliant teacher, if somewhat overbearing and always trying to get students to see that his point of view was the best. The man he replaced was one of only twenty-nine Senators who voted against the Evolli War. And in the years prior to that he was a consistent voice in calling for a Peace Treaty with the High Coven. He was what *Mandri* called a Universe First *midaeus*.”

“That does sound like Martin.” Panos said with a grin.

“Should we be concerned?” Helen asked.

Deia shook her head. “No. While their numbers have grown through the years, those who think and vote like him are still very much in the minority. A very small group of some sixty-three Senators I believe. Out of over three thousand. They have no real power as a group.”

“Yet they have still chosen a young woman with no political background to take his seat on the Union Senate.” Helen said thoughtfully. “A young woman who used to share Andro’s bed and will no doubt believe that this fact gives her some advantage over others when it comes to dealing with him. Ulana is a strong Alpha female, albeit one who is rather full of herself. The few times I have met her she struck me as being willing to do anything to get her way. And the few rumors I have heard said she was very upset when Androcles dismissed her. Angry that he would do such a thing and choose Sadi over her. She believes Sadi to be rather common when compared to her.”

Deia snorted in disgust and shook her head. “Common?” She gasped. “Sadi Leonidas is many things but she will never be common! There are times when I believe I should question the action of our younger Alpha females more than our young Alpha males. Ulana is a child compared to Sadi and if she wishes to foolishly attempt to once more win Andro’s affection let her. She will only make a complete and utter fool of herself.

Androcles worships the ground Sadi walks upon, the ground all of his mates walk upon, just like Martin. If he does not rebuke her publicly, I'm quite sure Sadi will put her in her place very quickly. Have any of you seen the way she looks at him?" Deia shook her head. "Reserved and polite she may be, but try and take Andro from her and I believe you will see a completely different Sadi Leonidas emerge. Ulana does not hold a candle to Sadi in my opinion, either in looks, intelligence or common sense."

Helen's smirk was easily seen and she nodded in agreement. "Or Mindvoice ability for that matter." She stated. "And Sadi grows more powerful by the day. Both of them do. I was speaking with them nearly every day before all this began and they were telling me what they had begun to be able to do. It is utterly amazing."

"What do you mean Helen?" Deia asked.

"Their power within Mindvoice is still within its infancy. Just as it is with Martin and Aricia." Helen said softly. "Wayonn and I spoke of this as we returned to Earth. We have not seen it outwardly, but they have been practicing and refining skills the likes of which I have never seen before, and they are beginning to pass this knowledge on to his siblings. We have not seen Sadi act as an Alpha female in regards to her mate, and I shudder at the anger she could unleash if Ulana decides she wants to play games about Androcles."

Panos nodded his head with another lopsided grin. "While I do not begin to understand the competition between female alpha wolves, there is a reason many in Sparta regard Sadi as the second coming of Gorgo." He said. "You don't think she will actually attempt something do you Deia?"

Deia shrugged her slim shoulders. "As far as everyone is concerned Androcles is the new King. There has been no talk of a coronation because of everything that is happening right now, but most everyone is already beginning to refer to him as such. That is good."

"It also means our façade is holding for the moment." Helen said.

Deia nodded. "It also means Ulana will no doubt try to insinuate herself as closely as she can within his life. Something I sincerely doubt Sadi or the others will allow. Andro will simply ignore her... that is the Alpha way when a female doesn't interest him... but Sadi and the others may very well take offense at her actions and physically put her in her place."

"It would not be much of a conflict." Panos said. "Ne'Veha appears to be the weakest link among them but even I could sense she was growing in both determination and confidence. I doubt Ulana would be able to even defeat her."

Deia shook her head. "No... it will be Sadi. She is the only pureblood... and the only one among them that would have a chance against her in wolf form. Lu'ria and Ne'Veha are too soon from being turned and Carisia is a pureborn vampire. I would not worry about Ulana and let Sadi handle it how she sees fit."

"Agreed." Helen said.

"Has the Krypteria been able to discover just how badly Laustinos's treachery goes?" Panos asked now.

"I spoke briefly with Marci before she complied with Andro's orders." Deia answered. "She will give us a full briefing this evening when the *Durcunusaan* guarding her allow her to leave her home."

Panos nodded. "He is doing exactly as his father would do." He said softly. "He is pulling to him those he trusts completely and..."

"Do not, for one second, believe he does not trust us Panos!" Helen spoke forcibly.

Panos shook his head quickly. "That is not what I was going to suggest *Feravomir*. We are part of his family and there is nothing more important to him than his family. Just as his father and mothers taught him. No... I was going to say that there will be very few who could influence him now. He will follow his instincts and what his father and mothers have taught him in regards to safeguarding this Union. And he will not care who he upsets or has to squash to do that."

Deia nodded. "That is where we come in." She said. "Helen and I spent over a decade teaching Martin to be at least diplomatic in his mannerisms. He is a rock head no doubt, it runs in the family for Resumar was no different and Gorgo has told me his father was the same, but we were able to at least teach him to be somewhat subdued. We will not have that time with Andro and that could work to our favor initially."

"What do you mean Deia?" Panos asked.

"Androcles is an unknown entity." Deia said. "He has always been the most private of Martin's children. The Prince that everyone wants to know the most about, but the one about which subsequently the least is known. They know of his actions at Alba Tau... that he won the Union Shield of Valor, they know about his actions after the war but they do not know anything else about him."

“And this is good for us.” Panos agreed sitting back as what she was saying came to him. “They will not be able to predict what he will do. Though I doubt any of us could predict that either.”

Deia nodded her head in agreement. “That is true Panos but it means our enemies will focus more on discovering who he is and what he is doing than trying to discover why we are not pushing for an immediate transfer of power and planning a coronation.”

“And if they are focused completely on Androcles then they will not notice immediately when Martin begins to strike.” Helen spoke. “And if what I saw in regards to what Ben sent to him is anything, who Andro sent to Curila 6 with Daniel to be with him, you can damn well bet Martin will strike very quickly, very hard and completely without mercy.”

Deia nodded at her. “Which keeps the Kavalians off balance because they will be dealing with us. And in that regard I have sent for Thr'won, Dilios and Arete.”

Panos looked at her oddly. “Why?”

“I believe Andro is correct in that Pusintin is going to make a play for the throne now that everyone believes Martin dead.” Deia said evenly. “This latest attack against Cranae Island only confirms it for me. They failed to kill him because he did not go to Kranek with the others, not that they would have succeeded anyway thanks to Cha'talla and his people. Once they realized he was not killed they then decided to sanction another operation against him using these OSG Syndicate fools from the Beta Quadrant. Androcles is Martin's first born son with Aricia. He has the blood of three of the Lycavorian Ruling families within him. If he is alive there is no way that Pusintin can rightfully make a claim to the throne.”

Panos nodded. “Yes... so?”

Deia looked at Helen and then back to Panos. “Unless there is another way.” She said softly.

Panos stared at her for a long moment and then looked at Helen. “What other way could there be Deia?” He gasped.

“That is what we need to find out.” Helen spoke. “That the Kavalians are going ahead with this ridiculous notion of why they have done these things only confirms to me that they believe they can do this even if Andro is still alive. If they did not believe this why are they not pouring across our borders in a full scale invasion? We need to find out why they think this and then we need to find out how.”

“How do we do that?” Panos asked.

“Like you... Dilios and Arete were here in Sparta when the Senate rewrote the Ascension Laws to the throne after Martin's return.” Deia explained.

Panos nodded. “Yes.” He said.

Deia nodded and leaned forward in her hover chair. “I was alive when The Oracle's First Declaration was written Panos and The Chronicles of Lycavorian Law came into being. My sister Eliani consulted me on many things as they were crafting them. Helen has the memories of the First Oracle Canth who also helped Resumar to craft these things. We need to put our heads together and discover what it is the Kavalians dogs think they have discovered in order to combat it.”

“We know they received a copy of all three items from Laustinos many months ago.” Helen told him. “Marci was able to confirm that almost immediately. They obviously found something within those documents they think they can use and we will need to find out what it is in order to fight it.”

“And we need to do it before Androcles and his father go off the deep end.” Deia said softly.

“What? I don't follow you? Off the deep end?” Panos exclaimed. “What is that?”

“It is an expression Anja has said on many occasions through the years and I have taken to using quite frequently myself. While you can not feel it within them because you have never truly developed your Mindvoice skills to their level Panos my friend, Deia and I can feel it very strongly.” Helen spoke.

“Feel what?” Panos asked.

“The all consuming rage.” Deia answered softly. “The vitriol and the anger. It is building slowly within both of them Panos. It is building because of what has been done to their family and to the Union and soon they will unleash it.”

“Why do we want to stop that?” Panos growled. “I for one have no desire to stop them! Not after what the Kavalians have done.”

“We don’t wish to stop it Panos my friend.” Helen spoke once more. “No one can stop it now. As you have said in the past, they are forces of nature. We only wish to make sure they are focused on the correct enemy when it releases.”

Deia looked at him evenly. “We want to make sure all the right people die Panos.” She snarled.

Panos smiled a toothy wolf grin then. “I knew there was a reason I have always liked you Deia. Let’s get to it.” He stated.

SCIMITAR

“...home is here.” Brendi spoke pointing to the structure on the high resolution image of Edolus. “The two story structure at the end of this cul-de-sac. It backs up to the Lifter corridor that runs north and south between the next two settlements.”

Brendi Faith had remained in the medical bay when Eliani left, pacing back and forth like a caged lioness. Unlike her brother Corbin, Brendi didn’t take pleasure in what she did. She was very good at her job, one of the best Intelligence Analysts the OSG had ever turned out in fact, but the driving force behind her actions was the goal to keep her family safe. Her mother and father and her twin nineteen year old sisters were all she had in this universe. Everything she had done up until this point was to keep them safe and keep them from having to suffer. They received extra credits and small perks because she and Corbin were part of the Syndicate, a way the OSG kept their people in check for none of them wanted their families to lose these perks and go back to living in squalor and poverty as most of the Eridiani did on the many worlds they controlled. While the vast majority embraced their new lives, Brendi knew of a few who felt as she did. Some of them had been discovered and now they were dead, their families torn apart and any siblings or parents murdered without regard. Brendi had always maintained her front of loyalty, never speaking of what she felt inside her with anyone for she did not want that happening to her family.

When Eliani had returned Brendi hit her with a barrage of questions and vile statements about what she would do. Eliani Leonidas had simply stood there and listened to her rant for nearly three full minutes before she ran out of steam. Then Eliani had told her what her brother Androcles had decided, and for the first time in her life she felt embarrassment. Which was very quickly followed by shock as Eliani took her hand and began to lead her through the corridors of the ship with the two *Durcunusaan* troops close on their heels until they ended up here in this large room. A room that appeared to be some sort of unique room sized map. All around them Brendi could see stars and planets and then the close up images of Edolus began filtering across the ceiling and walls around her and she was able to pinpoint places she had been, right down to within a meter or two. It was incredible and upon seeing this, a small doubt began to creep into her gut. A doubt that the OSG would not be able to operate and conduct business within the Union in the same way they did everywhere else once these Lycavorians actually woke up and took notice. Putting agents on Earth and hiding them among the millions of humans was one thing, but actually trying to establish and run a large and ruthless criminal organization within Union borders was not looking so promising.

“How many of your OSG people?” Andro asked.

“Ah... nearly the entire planet.” She answered. “I told you... this is an OSG staging area. Fully half and probably more of the men and women who live here work for the OSG in some way. This is one of the planets they established as a control point when they came to the Alpha quadrant.”

“The local government does nothing?” Lisisa asked from her spot next to Deni.

Brendi shook her head quickly. “As long as no laws are broken, they will remain out of the way and they don’t ask questions.” She answered them. “The OSG won’t violate that silent agreement because Edolus is so close to the Union without actually being inside the Union. Nothing that the Union considers illegal is practiced on Edolus because of its proximity to the border. The local government values their trade with the Union too much. Not to mention the protection that being so close to the border gives them. The OSG has to abide by what they tell them or the local government will not hesitate to call for assistance. It’s mostly the families of the agents who work for the OSG anyway. Like mine.”

“Makes sense *fervon*.” Denali spoke. “We’ve never got anything from the Bontawillian Intelligence Service. Don’t make waves or draw attention to yourself and no one starts asking questions.”

Andro nodded. "First rule of being a spy. Blend in." He looked at Brendi. "I'm assuming your brother will not adhere to this rule?"

Brendi shook her head without hesitation. "Corbin is a bastard! He's completely loyal to the Orionis Syndicate. If he thinks for an instant that I am alive and I am being interrogated or that I am helping you he'll kill them without thinking. He will try to arrange an accident of some sort I'm sure... but he will want them dead within hours of him discovering that I was captured."

"I still don't understand how they could know you are alive?" Eliani asked. "It's not like we broadcast the attack of your..." Eliani saw Brendi look at her with narrow eyes. "Of the OSG Hit Team." Eliani corrected herself quickly. "Just the opposite. We officially called it a training exercise."

Brendi looked at Andro when Eliani had finished. "There are sixty-five OSG Intelligence Agents on Earth." She spoke quickly. "How long do you think it will be before they put it all together? Half of them work for your Netnews because it provides the best Intelligence and gets them places they would not normally be allowed."

"Sixty-five?" Devra gasped with wide eyes.

Brendi nodded. "I know half of them by name and the rest you can get when you round up the others and question them."

"He could just as easily stick you with enough joy juice that you'd be spilling your guts in minutes." Zarah spat from where she stood next to Lucia. That she didn't care for Brendi was obvious to even the casual observer.

Brendi nodded. "But he won't... because he gave me his word." She stated looking at Andro.

Andro didn't took his eyes off her for a good half a minute and Brendi began to feel very uncomfortable. It was as if he was looking at her like she was lunch or something. "Deni?" He spoke finally.

"Simply enough really." Denali answered immediately. "One team... land a Shrouded *STRIKER DT* here... two clicks away by the edge of this treeline that extends up the side of the valley. Then we beat feet to the home, extract them the same way we come in. In and out in under thirty minutes as long as nothing goes wrong."

"Tir'ut and I will fly the *STRIKER fervon*." Normya piped in right away looking at Andro evenly. "You will need Arrarn to fly the *TYPE II* and Sadi and Ne'Veha to fly the second *STRIKER* over Ontahe Andro."

Tir'ut nodded his head. "It is a sound plan Androcles." He spoke in agreement. "Put one of your *Durcunusaan* in the dorsal turret and I can remain in the shadows while securing the ship from the outside. No one will discover us."

Andro nodded. "Ok... who leads the team in?"

"I'll go." Lisisa spoke then.

"I need to go." Brendi spoke quickly.

Androcles looked at her. "Not happening." He said.

"They are my parents! My sisters! They know me and will listen to me! They..." Brendi began to protest.

"Do you honestly take me for that much of a fool?" Andro said looking at her. "You are not going. I will not compromise anyone I send by allowing you to endanger them. You could very well be identified not to mention I don't trust you."

"We are talking about my family here!" Brendi barked.

Andro met her eyes. "Yes... and I will keep my word to you and I will extract them... but you are not accompanying the team."

"I won't help you any further then!" Brendi barked.

Andro stood up fully and nodded his head. "If that is your decision so be it. Deni... escort her back to the medical bay, Eliani will sedate her and then Lu'ria will question her. Once we have gotten all the information we can, take her to the nearest airlock and vent her into space."

Deni nodded and stepped over to Brendi and her taking his arm. "Let's go." He spoke with a harshness in his voice.

Brendi wrenched her arm away from Deni's grasp when she saw no one was going to argue with him. "You would just let everything I know die with me?" She gasped in disbelief. "I don't believe that!"

Andro looked back to her his eyes unforgiving. “Miss Faith... you were part of the team that came to my home and tried to kill me and my wives and mates. I don’t trust you any more than I’d trust a rabid dog. If you think I am going to allow you to go with the team and possibly jeopardize their lives you are sorely mistaken. If you chose not to help me then I have no use for you any longer. And what you believe is of little concern to me.”

“They will think... they will think you are there to kill them!” Brendi hissed. “If I don’t go they won’t believe you!”

Andro shook his head again. “No.” He spoke softly. “It is too much of a tactical risk.” He moved closer to her and saw her back up slightly in fear just as another idea came to him as quickly as he dismissed her ridiculous request and demand. “However... I will allow you to record a message to them.” He spoke seeing her eyes narrow. “If you are truly worried about them then I will allow you to record a holo message to them letting them know why we are there and to cooperate with us in order to get them offworld for their safety.”

Brendi nodded her head instantly and more than anything that told pretty much everyone in the room that she was sincere in her concern. “Yes.” She said without pause. Brendi didn’t really have any intention of trying to double cross the team going to save her family, there was no way she could protect them by herself but deep down she understood Androcles’s stance. “Yes... I will do that.” She spoke.

Andro nodded. “Very well.” He said. “Lisisa?”

“I’ll take Zarah, Lucia and five of the RD Detail. With Jeth and Seyra flying in support we should be pretty much covered.” Lisisa answered.

Andro shook his head as he looked at her. “Not enough.” He answered. “I want you to have at least seven in your team and another two in support.”

“I will go.” Arduri spoke up quickly.

Brendi’s eyes grew wide when the Vanari female spoke up and the surprise showed on her face.

“Arduri no!” Devra spoke.

“Mother... Andro needs the majority of this RD team to rescue Caliria and the others.” Arduri said. “It is a sound decision and I have trained for these types of operations before.” She looked at Andro. “It is part of our Advanced Cadre Training Andro.”

Andro shook his head. “I need you, your mother and Nirilo to go with us so that your people know we are there to help them.” He said. “The more of you there are the better. We do not know what condition they will be in.”

The voice from behind them caused all of them to turn. “I will go with you in Arduri’s place.” Tastia spoke from beside Ardan. “She is right that we can not pull more from the Ontahe mission and I am a fully trained Cadre Commando just as she is.”

“Tastia... Coren will not allow you to do this.” Ardan said softly his eyes wide in stunned shock.

“Coren be damned!” Tastia snapped at him. “He has shown me where I stand in his life and it was not where he led me to believe it was. I am not his wife and I will never be his wife now. I refuse to be! And he will not dictate to me what I will do and not do! I will not stand by and let others risk their lives rescuing our people when it should be us!” She moved closer and looked at Androcles. “I will go with your team and take Arduri’s place. If... if Lady Devra will allow me.”

Devra herself was stunned into silence and it was Nirilo who came forward. “Arduri has more recent practical experience in such operations with Lisisa Andro.” He spoke calmly. “It is better to have Tastia take Arduri’s place with us and send Arduri with Lisisa as she said.”

Andro looked at Devra. “Devra?”

Devra nodded as she turned to meet his eyes. “I agree.” She said finally. “And Tastia is right. We can no longer remain on the fringes of things. We must begin doing for ourselves and making allies with other species.” She looked at Ardan. “Ardan?”

Ardan met her eyes for a long moment and then looked at Androcles. “For the better part of five millennia I have never trusted your people Androcles Leonidas. The last few days have begun to show me the error of my ways. Devra is right... no matter that she is now wife to a Lycavorian. She has always been right. It is time the Vanari stopped being so insular and began to trust others. Arduri and Tastia are extremely well trained... Naesta and Nirilo as well. We have made it a point to train our people in this way and now it is time

to start using them in a way that utilizes their skills. I have no protests against this action... though I suggest we do not tell Coren until just before you depart.”

“He won’t stop us Ardan!” Tastia snapped.

Ardan shook his head quickly. “No... I don’t think he will. I do not know where his complete distrust comes from, but there will be less shouting if he does not know until the last moment.”

“You need one more.” Dutkne spoke smiling at the events that were transpiring all around him. “I have a man... you met him Andro... Warem. He has participated in several operations of this type.”

Andro nodded. “Fine.” He said. “Lisisa... pull what you need and get moving. Eliani... take Miss Faith back to the Med Bay, have her record her message and then get it to Lisi. I want your team gone in two hours Lisi.” Andro turned to face her. “No killing unless it is absolutely necessary *arande*.”

Deni looked at him. “Andro... *fervon* these people sent assassins after you and Sadi and the others.” He said.

Brendi began to open her mouth to reply but she felt Eliani grab her arm and shake her head slightly. Brendi was intelligent and quick enough to keep her mouth shut for this Eliani knew what her brother’s response would be and she had been the most understanding and calm of everyone she had encountered so far.

Andro shook his head at Denali’s comment. “No... the OSG sent them. I will not retaliate against innocent men and women because of this.”

“She has said most of the planet is OSG Androcles Leonidas.” Ardan spoke now. “You could very well be walking into a trap.”

Andro met his eyes. “Yes sir... but she also said many are the families of those the OSG drafts into their employee. They are using the families and loved ones as a control measure sir. It is something that some of the human governments on Earth have done in the past and it is a vile practice.” Andro said respectfully. “I will not arbitrarily kill civilians to obtain my goal. I am not like them, nor is anyone in this room.”

Lisisa nodded her head and looked at Zarah and Lucia who had moved up next to her with determination in their eyes. “We’ll take care of it *fervon*.”

Andro nodded his head. “Very well. If everyone will excuse me... I have a transmission to Miranda Lorian that I need to make.”

Lisisa looked at Deni as Andro turned and began to walk out, questions in her eyes. Deni shrugged his broad shoulders indicating he didn’t know what that was all about. Lisisa looked at Zarah as she and Lucia stepped even closer, Arduri moving closer as well. “What... what is that all about?” She asked Zarah softly.

Zarah shook her head. “I have no idea.” She answered. “But if he is contacting Manda it is for a reason.”

“Who is this Miranda Lorian?” Lucia asked now.

Zarah looked at the door Andro had exited and she allowed a small smile to slip across her face as she gripped Lucia’s hand tightly. She knew her brother better than most because of the special bond they shared. She turned back to Lucia. “If I had to guess, I’d say one edge of a very sharp blade that our brother is planning to use.”

Lisisa nodded in agreement. “The question remains... who or what is the other edge and who is he going to stick that blade into.”

“Better that we don’t know.” Denali said. “It is going to hurt whoever it is.”

ULU ARIZONA LOCATION CLASSIFIED

E'dira’s powerful Drow body collapsed back onto the bed, her ebony skin slick with a sheen of sweat and her firm breasts heaving upward as she drew in ragged breaths. Her amber eyes were wide, her shimmering white hair damp with exertion and her long legs still quivering in the exquisite sensations of what her slave had just made her experience. She blinked several times as she felt Miranda’s deliciously talented tongue drag languorously along the outer folds of her hairless pussy and begin a delightful trek up her flat abdomen. It seemed E'dira of the Drow had created a monster and she was basking in the incredible attentions that her new slave was lavishing upon her. It had begun that first night upon returning to Earth’s system, the desire to be together stronger than both of them could resist any longer. Both of them had finished their assigned shifts and

then retreated to Miranda's quarters where they shared a small dinner and then began the discovery that had continued nearly unabated since the first hour. E'dira hadn't been back to her own quarters except to change into new uniforms, those uniforms now occupying space in Miranda's quarters.

Lynwe had been so right in her words to E'dira. There were few women anymore who could enter into a relationship with a Drow. They had to be powerful women in their own right, exceptionally confident in themselves and their own abilities, for male and female Drow were not drawn to weakness. E'dira had seen it in Miranda, and this is what had drawn her to the long dark hair and eyes from the very beginning. E'dira had thought she would forever be alone and never find someone to share her life with. She had thought she would never find a woman as Lynwe and Aihola had. A woman who would give of themselves without question; who would plunge themselves into the role of slave to a Drow Mistress and not be turned off; and a woman who would cherish her role and position within her Mistress's life. It had taken time, Lynwe had told her as much, but E'dira had discovered that very thing in Miranda Lorian. Her own life and the events that had made her who she was today had denied Miranda so many of the simple pleasures in life. The loss of her parents, then her adopted parents, and finally her entire Union Squadron during the Evolli War. Men and women she had allowed into her heart and who had been torn away. E'dira knew that if not for Miranda's relationship with King Leonidas and his son Androcles and their own experiences at Alba Tau, Miranda may well have lost herself in the hurt and despair that followed. Thanks to them and their belief in her, Admiral O'Connor's total and unmoving belief in her, thanks to all of these things E'dira of the Drow now had the life and mate she had sought for so long. She would have been simply giddy at the thoughts of her slave as she kissed her way back up her taut body.

Thoughts that Miranda Lorian was rapidly embracing with each passing second.

As she used her tongue to trace her Drow Mistress's ebony skin, she pressed her own naked flesh against E'dira's, making certain to touch their bodies together in the most intimate of ways. Where her tongue departed, Miranda insured she dragged the nipples of her own firm, cone shaped breasts cross that same area. The sensations she had begun to feel the moment she had met E'dira on earth had brought both of them to this culmination. Miranda never had a desire or interest in other women, in truth she never really cared for men either. Yet that had all changed when this stunning Drow warrior had come into her life. The way her amber colored orbs gazed upon Miranda, the way dreams of her would fill the nights, and the way just being in her presence made her feel. She had been tentative at first, until her Drow Mistress had brought her to several shattering orgasms that first hour, orgasms that grew stronger and more fulfilling as the days went by. She may have been Drow and therefore dominant in all that she did, but E'dira was most certainly not afraid to make her slave scream her name in pleasure over and over again. Something that Captain Miranda Lorian did quite often now and something that she was completely unashamed about in the least. E'dira brought out a different Miranda Lorian, a person that she had thought died a long time ago.

E'dira's fingers danced across her naked shoulder as she dropped butterfly kisses across the sensitive area just under E'dira's firm breasts and then used her tongue to tease the dark nipple of her left breast before lifting her face to stare into her gorgeous amber eyes. E'dira wasted no time in pulling Miranda's lips down to hers and kissing her with possessive need and love. A sizzling kiss that surged through both of them with overwhelming love and passion for each other. E'dira rolled them over, easily tucking the more petite form of Miranda under her own body and pressing their flesh together in every place that was possible. She felt Miranda's hands grab tightly to her firm ass cheeks and draw her closer as they deepened their kiss. While she was definitely the more dominant in their bed, E'dira never took it too far. Miranda Lorian was a willful woman in her own right, and while she happily played the role of slave in their bed, E'dira had no intentions of ever allowing that to extend past the privacy of their lives. Miranda could sense that she knew, and it was this emotion that allowed her to drop all of her walls when they were together alone and hold nothing back from E'dira. As E'dira drew back reluctantly from their kiss she decided this would be the night she told her slave of the secret she still kept from her.

E'dira reached up with her hand and traced Miranda's sweet tasting lips with a fingertip as she gazed at her. "You... you are coming quite proficient at causing me to lose control my slave." E'dira rasped huskily.

Miranda grinned and E'dira felt her heart jump yet again at the twinkle in those dark eyes whenever they fell upon her in such a way. "Well... practice makes perfect." She said. "But I don't intend to ever become perfect Mistress. You won't let me practice any longer."

E'dira laughed softly then and closed her eyes as Miranda delicately stroked the outer ridge of her elven ear. "The... the gods have blessed me with you Miranda Lorian." She said in barely a whisper.

"I'm pretty happy about that myself." Miranda answered her. "Never doubt that."

E'dira shook her head. "I do not." She told her. "Not now."

Miranda's hands tightened on her firm ass unwilling to release her. "I have... I have had so much pain in my life Mistress. So much loss." She said softly. "I never believed I would ever be happy again. Not like I am now. Andro and his father, his family, they saved me. I certainly never imagined I would find what I have found with you when I took this job."

E'dira met her gaze. "Lynwe... she always told me that one day I would discover what she has with Selene. The pure love and commitment."

"She has that with Layna and her husband too." Miranda said.

E'dira shook her head slowly. "It is not the same thing. They love each other, all of them, but Lynwe and Selene share something with each other that they do not share with Layna and Joarl. Ultimately I believe this is why they have grown apart physically but remain the very closest of friends." E'dira looked at her. "It is what I have found with you. Nothing could ever come between us now. No person. You feel this as well don't you?"

Miranda nodded without hesitation. "Yes." She answered. "I didn't before I came to know Andro and Martin. All of them. They were the ones who got me past the fact that love drove Ben and Tina to have Isabella turn them. So they would not lose what they found with Endith. They were the ones who helped me to heal after Alba Tau. They were the only ones who could for they experienced it just as I did. Whatever... whatever the course of my life now it was meant to have you in it."

E'dira stared at her for a long moment knowing now was as good a time as any. "Miranda I must tell you something." She said. "There is one thing I have not shared with you and I..."

"I already know Mistress." Miranda said softly seeing E'dira's amber eyes go wide even as Miranda held her ass cheeks tighter. "I don't care."

"But... how... how did you..." E'dira stammered.

"I woke up early the other night and I heard you talking... I heard you speaking in the other room to Lynwe." Miranda answered. "I didn't mean too... but as silly as it sounds I was jealous that you were talking on the Vid COM and not in our bed."

E'dira stared at her for a long moment marveling at the strength of this woman to know what she knew about her and still act as if it made no matter. "This... this does not bother you?" She finally asked.

"E'dira... if I cared in the least do you think I would still be here?" Miranda asked her.

"No." E'dira answered.

"It is part of you Mistress." Miranda said softly. "Part of who you are. I'm not afraid of that. I will never be afraid of that. I will never be afraid again... because too much passed me by while I was afraid."

"It does not... it does not lessen your desire for me?" E'dira asked.

Miranda looked somewhat embarrassed for a moment and she bit her bottom lip. "To be honest Mistress... I think it has made me desire you more." She said. "I don't want you to be afraid to show me this side of yourself E'dira. It is part of you as I said. Does... does the change hurt?"

E'dira shook her head quickly. "It is... it is uncomfortable for a few seconds... but it is not painful. The chemicals that are released in my brain are nearly instantaneous."

"And this is a result of the experiments by the High Coven when they controlled Earth?" Miranda asked.

E'dira nodded. "Lynwe and others were the first generation if you will." She answered. "The first attempt at warping our DNA. I was part of the last generation... what they originally intended to produce."

"There are other Drow like you?" Miranda asked.

E'dira nodded as she slid off her and lowered her body to the bed beside her. Miranda didn't move until she had settled and then they pulled each other close, their limbs entwining as E'dira pulled the sheet up around their lower bodies. "There were sixty of us in the last batch of altered clones if you will. After their failure with Queen Aihola and the others like her, actual babies birthed by Drow, they decided to stick with clones. There are roughly thirty or so of us left. The King's acceptance of Lynwe, that she became the lover to Queen Aihola and Tarifa for a time, these things showed us we could lead normal lives if we chose to. Most of them have taken female wives and mates who know what they are."

"E'dira... why haven't you showed this to me before?" Miranda asked.

“I become... I become much more dominant in my nature Miranda.” E'dira told her. “I am not violent or forceful, but I will take if the individual is willing.”

Miranda chuckled softly. “So you act more like a man in your desires.”

E'dira looked at her for a moment before she too laughed. “Yes... I suppose that would be accurate.” She said. “Unfortunately the pheromone that I release into the air around me will affect any female in the same room with me for as long as I remain stimulated. It is like... it is like a powerful aphrodisiac... and they can not say no. And I become more dominant as I said. More demanding I guess.”

“It sounds as if the Coven experiments only increased the natural draw that any female has towards female Drow elves.” Miranda spoke softly. “It is well known that many female Drow have female lovers even if they are married.”

E'dira nodded. “Yes... I never thought of it like that but I suppose you are correct.”

“But not violent?” Miranda said.

E'dira shook her head quickly. “No... never. The Drow in me would never allow that with one who shares my bed. As with the other generations... this inbred Drow trait caused the Coven to think of us as failures. Relationships are sacred to us... they always have been. It is how the Guardian of the Line wanted us to be when he created the first Drow.”

Miranda looked at her with renewed desire. “So... when do I get to experience this part of you?” She asked with a sexy and sultry voice and smile.

“Have you no shame my slave?” E'dira asked with mock astonishment.

“Nope. My shame went out the door when I found you!” Miranda said. “If I can get the best of both worlds from you... then I never have to worry.”

E'dira couldn't help but laugh and she leaned over to whisper in Miranda's ear. She saw Miranda's eyes grow wider and she looked at her with surprise on her face. “Mistress... you aren't joking are you?” She gasped.

“No. I am reasonably certain that is accurate.” E'dira answered.

Miranda scooted even closer to her, making sure their bodies rubbed against each other deliciously. “Ohhh... what do I have to do?” She asked.

“It's not that simple.” E'dira stated. “I have to start out that way.” She said. “It's easier to transform when my slave does not exhaust me as she has now.”

Miranda blushed now and she smiled. “Well... that would not be the case if my Mistress didn't taste so damn good.”

E'dira stared at her and reached up to brush some raven colored hair from her face. “You are not the same person with me Miranda Lorian.” She said softly. “You are more open and bubbly. More relaxed.”

Miranda smiled. “I've denied myself too much through the years trying to forget those I lost.” She said. “This ship... finding you... I have got to the point in my life where I needed to decide what I wanted. Seeing how Janon interacts with his wife, Steven and Zaala together, I realized I lacked the most important thing. Love.” She pressed closer to E'dira and kissed her soft pink lips with devotion and love. “I've found that now... with you E'dira... and I don't want to lose the way it makes me feel ever again.”

“And you will not.” E'dira told her. “I give you my word you will not.”

“Isn't there some sort of ceremony that the Drow perform when you have... when you chosen a partner?” Miranda asked her.

“Yes there is...” E'dira replied. “And as soon as we return from this operation I intend for us to go through with it if that is acceptable to you.”

Miranda's eyes shone with adoration as she smiled. “It is very acceptable.” She said. “I do not...”

The internal COM chirred once and the OTD's voice filled their bedroom. “Officer of the Deck to Captain Lorian?”

Miranda didn't hesitate and reached behind her on the table next to their bed. “Go ahead Lieutenant.”

“Captain Lorian we are receiving a Priority transmission from Spartan One One on the *SCIMITAR*.” The voice told her. “Secure Protocol Crimson One Three. Eyes and ears only compartmentalized.”

E'dira was already sitting up as Miranda turned to face the blank vid/monitor and touched the control panel quickly. “Authenticate Lorian, six four nine Beta Gamma. Patch it through to my quarters.” She spoke as she sat up.

“Understood ma’am.”

“Miranda... I am...”

Miranda got to her feet and grabbed her robe from the chair. She looked at her as she pulled it on over her naked body. “You are part of my life now and I guarantee you Androcles will not blink an eye.” She secured the robe and turned back to the panel on the desk, entering in a code.

The holodisc transmission disc built into the floor of her quarters in the corner flared briefly and then cleared to a perfect image of Androcles Leonidas. He appeared to be standing in his Ready Room on the *SCIMITAR* and he turned to the transmission.

“Manda I was...” He stopped when he saw Miranda’s state of dress and the fact E'dira was in the room and dressed in a similar manner. “Forgive me for interrupting Manda.” He said as a smile formed on his lips. “I have to say though... it’s about damn time!”

“*Nubous* comedian!” Miranda spat but her eyes told the story as she glanced at E'dira’s wide and very stunned eyes quickly. She was obviously amazed that Androcles hadn’t blinked an eye just as Miranda had told her. “And everybody thinks Denali is the comical one in their family.” She turned back to Andro and crossed her arms over her chest. “You used Crimson One Three Protocols Andro, so I know this is not an official transmission. We are already in position and standing by... so why the secrecy between us?”

“Manda... I have something I want to send to you.” Andro spoke.

“Miranda I will leave you alone now so that...” E'dira began to speak.

“No E'dira.” Andro spoke seeing the surprise in her eyes once more that he even knew her name. “If you are sharing her bed then you are part of Manda’s life now. Since she saw fit to include you in this transmission without a second’s thought neither will I. You stay right where you are.”

Miranda looked at E'dira as he moved to his desk and plugged a data pad into the console on the *SCIMITAR*. “I told you Mistress.” She said softly.

“You should be receiving this now Manda.” He stated from the transmission.

Miranda moved to her own desk and activated the internal monitor, watching as the information he was sending came over her screen. Her dark eyes grew very wide as it finished and she quickly pulled the data pad out of the slot so she could move around the room. “Holy shit Andro!” She exclaimed loudly. “Holy fucking shit Andro! Where... where did you get this information?”

“It’s included in the transmission, but needless to say it is from sources I have no reason to doubt.”

Andro answered. “Look on the last page.”

Miranda scrolled down and saw the list of five names and lifted her eyes back to him again. “Oh man!” She gasped.

Andro nodded. “You see now why I trust it?”

“Yes.” Miranda spoke.

“Manda... I have sent the beginnings of a plan I began putting together several days ago. I want you to look at it... refine it... change it to fit your likes or dislikes.” Andro went on. “But I need the answer to one question now. Can you do it with five ships?”

“Full load out?” Miranda asked him first.

Andro nodded. “Whatever it is you need yes.”

Miranda looked at the data pad again. “Target one with no problems. It’s pretty straight forward. Three ships should cover it if this information is accurate. They won’t be staying to visit that’s for sure.” She answered. “Target two will require fast acting ground forces and it will leave us exposed for longer than I would like, but yes it’s doable with two ships. We want to move fast with Target two anyway.”

“The ground forces to be involved are already slated to become part of your command anyway.” He told her. “They will just be joining you sooner than you had anticipated, along with the new Type Ones.”

“The Dragon Brigade?” Miranda asked.

Andro nodded. “Yes. They fast enough for you?”

Miranda nodded. “Hell yes.” She stated. She looked at him. “Andro... Andro who else knows about this?”

“Outside of you, me and now E'dira you mean?” Andro asked.

“Yes.” Miranda answered.

“One of the women in that list of names I gave you. That’s it.” He replied. “For right now at least. I have sent the information to my father and he will undoubtedly inform Uncle Danny and Cha'talla’s brother. Cha'talla will get the information as he returns to Kranek this evening since it does include the Immortals in an operational sense. Unless it is absolutely necessary no one else will know until the last moments. I will leave informing Ben up to you, so once all is said and done less than ten. Until we act that is.”

“Why?” Miranda asked.

“How many people can you name that truly think outside the box Manda?” Andro asked her.

“Quite a few actually.” She answered him. “Ben and your father to name two right off the bat.”

“Ok... let me re-phrase my question.” Andro said with a smile. “How many people do you know that think outside of that proverbial box with just a touch of insanity and far more than their share of recklessness?”

Miranda grinned now. “Ok... that narrows it down some.” She answered. “Two come to mind then. Me and you.” She answered.

Andro nodded. “Exactly. No doubt my father will about shit his pants when he sees this, but since he is supposed to be dead, he can’t stop me.” He spoke with a small smile. “Maximum damage... minimal casualties Manda. We’ll need them later.”

“Androcles... you know this will... this will start an all out war.” Miranda said.

“It’s very likely yes.” Andro said nodding his head somberly. “Pretty much a given I’d say. What they have done can not go unanswered Manda, you know that as well as I. They will only continue to push and do these same things until they have insinuated themselves in all the places we do not want them or their influence.”

“Is that what we want to do?” Miranda asked.

“No Manda. I think you know me better than that.” Andro answered her. “I would much prefer to lounge on Cranae Island with Sadi and my other mates and do nothing but nuzzle and devour them all day. That is not something I think my uncle and the Kavalians will allow me to do. They have destroyed nine Drow outposts in The Wilds; they have attacked and nearly killed my father and my mothers. They have helped to usurp one of my mothers from her rightful place and they hold one of my mothers prisoner in the hopes to use her in the future in some way to advance their nefarious goals. They have tried to kill me twice now. This last time they targeted Sadi and the others intentionally.”

“I see your point.” She said.

“My father saw this coming Manda. He saw this coming and he did nothing because he did not want to fight. He wanted peace and prosperity. He wanted to finally lay aside the tools of war. He will not make that same mistake again and neither will I. This operation will at least buy us the time to fully refit our ships and men with Ben’s new toys and deploy them where they need to be. No one knows the technology we have obtained from Avi and CS19. No one knows what we have given to our people except what my father has allowed them to see. He has never endorsed a First Strike mentality Manda, but times are different now.” Andro said as he looked at her in the transmission. “Get together with your people and give me a Pre-Op Briefing when we get back.” Andro said. “We’ll work out the final details then.”

Miranda nodded. “Understood.” She answered. “I’ll give the Icalro Alliance a big kiss for you while I’m out here. They won’t know what hit them.”

Andro smiled at her with a nod. “I know you will. No tongue allowed though.” He stated as he reached for the control panel on his desk. “Oh... and one more thing Manda.” He waited for Miranda to look at him in the transmission. “You are hereby promoted to the rank of Admiral/Lieutenant and placed in overall operational command of the 1st ARIZONA BatDiv. Once the Block Twos begin to come online they will fall under your command as well. Congratulations Admiral. SCIMITAR out!”

Miranda Lorian now stood there as the one in shock.

CONSORTIUM SPACE

VAMSHI

OSG REGIONAL COMMANDER HQ, ALPHA QUADRANT

“We may have a problem Corbin.” The man spoke as he held out the information scroll to his superior officer who sat behind the desk.

Corbin Faith looked up from the information he was reading and looked at his senior aide. As the Regional Commander for all OSG operations within The Wilds and Union space he had obtained a position of incredible importance and weight at only thirty-three years of age. He had a reputation of a man not to be trifled with and one who would quickly drop you into a deep dark hole if you crossed him. The OSG Home Council gave him extraordinary leeway in how he went about things because of his past successes and his ability to get the job done.

Corbin sat back in his chair with a small smirk and shook his head. “That is what I like about you Wendall; you always are the harbinger of doom.”

“With good reason Corbin. You’d better read this?” Wendall spoke continuing to hold out the scroll.

“What is this?” Corbin asked finally taking the scroll.

“The latest report from our senior asset on Earth.” Wendall answered as Corbin waved him to a chair. “It appears the job we sent our team on for the Kavalians was a complete failure Corbin.”

Corbin began to read the scroll, his face becoming hard and emotionless. “Failure?” He gasped.

“The Union is playing it down as some sort of training exercise, but it appears no one from the team survived.” Wendall answered him. “At least that is what the asset is reporting to us.”

Corbin looked at him. “What do you mean?” He asked.

“We’ve managed to infiltrate one of their Netnews Channels pretty heavily and they have been covering this Androcles extensively since his father was killed.” Wendall spoke. “They have people set up everywhere... some of them not even working for this channel... and one of these Netnews teams detected activity at a private Spartan airfield outside Gytheio shortly after the attack was to take place. They stayed out of sight, but they were able to confirm that there were seventeen bodies brought to this airfield and then taken off Earth.”

“Fuck!” Corbin swore as he came to his feet in a rage. “Were... were they blown?”

Wendall shook his head. “Unlikely.” He stated. “If I had to guess I’d say we were led to believe by the Kavalians that they were far less skilled than they are. Especially the females... his wives. They couldn’t hide it if one of them had been killed or injured for all of them have been pretty active lately and we have received nothing to that affect. Quite the opposite in fact since none of them have been seen around Cranae Island for several hours now. That leads me to believe they have either gone to ground or are somewhere else and have been since the attack. Probably the latter since his ship is off the grid now too.”

Corbin looked at him. “Off the grid to where?”

Wendall shrugged his shoulders. “They engaged those Shroud Shields they have before leaving Earth’s system. They could be anywhere by now and we have never been able to get anyone into place in their military.”

“There are human officers who are very high ranking.” Corbin stated.

Wendall nodded. “Yes... hell a quarter of their senior officer core is human now, we both know that, but they are all extremely loyal Corbin and turning one is not a project we want to undertake.”

Corbin nodded. “I know... it puts us at too much risk.” He stated. He looked at Wendall. “Brendi?”

Wendall got to his feet. “That is where I think our problem is.” He stated. “Look further down on the report. Only seventeen bodies were counted. You gave them permission to take Brendi on the OP because of her knowledge of the Lycavorians Corbin and assuming they did, there is still one individual unaccounted for.”

“Why do we think this is Brendi?” Corbin asked.

“Because if she had been among the dead, the Krypteria would have been crawling all over her apartment in Sparta by now.” Wendall answered. “It’s untouched and the proximity sensors she always activates have not tripped.”

“Perhaps they haven’t got around to going there yet?” Corbin spoke.

“The Krypteria?” Wendall spoke. “After an assassination attempt on Leonidas and his wives? Doubtful Corbin.” He moved closer to him and reached out to touch the scroll. “Then there is this.”

Corbin looked at the scroll and his eyes narrowed at the grainy image of half a dozen men and women moving into the rear of one of their *STRIKER DT* ships, several dragons in the background as well. A hooded figure was sandwiched between the red haired Princess they knew as Eliani Leonidas and another soldier

wearing the uniform of a *Durcunusaan* troop. The individual in the image was hooded and being helped up the ramp of the ship under heavy security.

“I ran the specs on the image and the height and approximate body size match Brendi perfectly.” Wendall spoke. “The Major wouldn’t have used her in the direct assault, and it’s obvious they have a prisoner based on this image.”

“It’s awful hard to tell Wendall.” Corbin spoke staring at the image.

“Yes it is.” Wendall answered in agreement. “But what if it is her Corbin?”

“She could be lying low.” Corbin spoke quickly. “Waiting for the right time.”

Wendall looked at his commanding officer and friend. “Corbin... you know as well as I do that we have strict Operational Procedures that are to be followed. It is why we are able to do what we do so well. Your sister, even with her knowledge and ability, has never been one to adhere to those rules Corbin. Putting her on Earth to freelance was a risk and you know it.”

Corbin looked at him for a long moment before nodding his head slowly and returning to his chair. “She has not fully embraced her place within the OSG and what that means.”

Wendall nodded. “She never has Corbin. If anything... she has purposely rebelled.” He stated. “And she just happens to be one of the best Intel Operatives that the OSG has. How she ever got as far as she has is beyond me.”

Corbin met his eyes. “It was because of me.” He said softly. “I carried her along in the hopes that she would accept her place.”

“If the Lycavorians have taken her Corbin, if they question her, interrogate her, she could hurt us bad with what she knows.” Wendall spoke. “I’ve never held to the fact that our Intel Operatives have as much knowledge as they do Corbin you know that... it’s too much of a risk if they are blown.”

Corbin nodded. “I agree... but the Home Council unfortunately does not.” He stated.

“If they find out about this unsanctioned operation Corbin, both of us will be in a world of hurt. Especially if they have taken Brendi.” Wendall said. “We did this for extra credits and to try and get in deeper with our Kavalian contacts. The Home Council will not be happy about the way we have done this without their approval.”

Corbin shook his head. “I can handle the Home Council.” He stated. “They have allowed me a great deal of discretion in what I do.”

“Authorizing an assassination on a Lycavorian Prince and his wives is not something they would have approved Corbin. You know that.” Wendall spoke.

“Not all of them no.” Corbin stated calmly. “But there are those on the Council who think beyond the barriers of how we normally operate. I have their complete support Wendall. I am not worried about the Home Council. I’m more concerned about Brendi possibly being taken prisoner and then these Kavalian fools. Their intelligence and assets were fucking wrong!”

“That is not as big a surprise to me as it is to you.” Wendall spoke softly. “They are, for the most part, unintelligent brutes who think they are important. There again, that may not be their fault either. This Androcles Leonidas is the best kept secret of the Leonidas family. Sure... we can pull up his military records and such on the Netnews, but when it comes down to it, very little is known about him. It stands to reason that the Kavalians are unable to get solid Intel on him as well. Even with their biogenic cloning processes they can’t get agents into the Union in any serious positions. They have to rely on traitors and outcasts. It’s the biggest reason they reached out to us a decade ago when we first came into the Alpha Quadrant.”

Corbin looked at him. “Could they break her Wendall? If they have captured her, could they break her?” He asked.

Wendall met his eyes. “That depends on how you want me to answer Corbin.” He spoke. “Do you want an honest answer, or one as a fellow OSG officer?”

“Both.” Corbin told him.

“As an OSG officer I will say that anyone can be broken.” Wendall spoke. “It’s only a matter of time and we know the Krypteria uses some very advanced drugs. I doubt she would be able to hold out for very long at all.”

“And as a friend?” Corbin asked.

Wendall leaned forward in his chair. "I don't think they will have to work very hard to make her sing like a bird Corbin." He answered honestly. "Brendi has never been on board with the entire OSG Council thing." He stated. "She isn't like you Corbin... and she's made it very clear that the only reason she remains is to protect your family so that your twin sisters aren't drafted for service."

"She's killed for the OSG before Wendall." Corbin pointed out.

Wendall nodded. "Yes she has... when her own life was in mortal danger." He said. "She has never embraced the OSG mentality however and you know that. Sending her to Earth was a mistake old friend. Not only did you send her into a situation with the assassination team that puts her at huge risk because the Lycavorians aren't as stupid as the Kavalians, they would have figured out who she was eventually, she's in a position of power." He got to his feet now. "She knows far too much Corbin... and if they have her, she needs to be eliminated. I'm sorry."

Corbin leaned back in his chair. "Do not be sorry." He said softly. "Can this senior asset confirm that they have her?"

Wendall shrugged. "The right question should elicit the response we want."

Corbin nodded. "Do it." He stated. "And put another Team on standby." Wendall looked at him. "Why?"

"If she is captured and they offer her a deal... part of that deal will be to get our parents and sisters off Edolus." Corbin said. "I want to make sure that doesn't happen."

"Their targets?" Wendall asked.

Corbin met his gaze. "My parents and sisters." He stated coldly. "If Brendi has been captured, I want them taken into custody. It will be the only thing that will keep her quiet."

"You're sure Corbin?" He asked.

Corbin nodded. "Yes." He replied. "Make it happen Wendall... and inform me instantly when you have found out what we need."

Wendall nodded. "I'll see to it." He stated before turning and leaving the room quickly.

Corbin turned to look out the large window behind his desk. His eyes were dark and brooding and filled with vitriol towards the sister he had done so much for. If he had to kill her to keep their secrets, if he had to kill their parents and siblings, Corbin Faith would do just that.

Without hesitation.

CURILA 6

Cirith stood along the far wall of the command center on Curila 6 and simply watched. She had spoken to her father, who was now on Earth and working diligently to discover a way to render the Static Inhibitors inactive, and she marveled at how he animatedly explained what was happening. His total acceptance by everyone around him had stunned him at first, until he came to realize that his wolf blood gave him a certain status among the Lycavorian people. A status and recognition and trust that would not have come had he been completely vampire. He had scolded her for acting so recklessly in going after Dysea, but Cirith could hear the pride in his voice even as he scolded her. His reaction and demeanor coupled with her own feelings and emotions only brought home the fact to Cirith that they indeed had come to be where they had always belonged.

Cirith had planned to have her own quarters when she arrived, never expecting what had actually taken place. Isabella and Dysea both had told her that she would be accepted by Anja and Aricia immediately. They would smell it in her blood, and sense it within Mindvoice just as they did, and they had not been wrong. The feeling that she had come home and she was where she was always intended to be filled Cirith to overflowing and their acceptance of her only spoke of the truth of these feelings. Even that first night here, when Dysea was off with Martin, Anja and Aricia had brought her into their lives as completely as Isabella and Dysea had. She did not have her own quarters because she stayed with them in theirs and they talked until the early morning hours when sleep finally claimed them all. When Cirith awoke later it was to the feeling of Anja's long Persian red hair against her face, and Aricia's lithe body spooned against her from behind. Isabella lay on her back, Anja's arm draped across her pregnant abdomen and her face content and at peace. Cirith had relished in the sensations as she laid there, and she also marveled at the strength of these women. None of them questioned that

For'mya was still alive, or that she would be back among them. Their commitment to each other was a palpable thing, as well as their commitment to Martin. She also learned that his dedication to each of them was without question or hesitation.

He frightened her Cirith realized as she leaned against the wall and watched him from across the room. Though she had been around many Immortals that were taller and much wider than him, Cirith could not remember a man who was more physically imposing than Martin Leonidas. It wasn't just his physical proportions, which were exquisite in every detail she decided, it was the aura he radiated to everyone around him. An aura that she doubted he even realized he exuded. It was an aura of confidence and command. An aura of a man who had done and seen more than most people would ever experience in their lifetimes. A man who had killed in defense of others and a man who was exceptionally skilled at it to say the least. A man who would not hesitate to kill if need be but also one who could be compassionate. A man fiercely devoted to his ideals and a man who would not compromise his values for anyone. He moved like a great predator, stalking and cunning, ready to pounce and end your life in an instant. Then she had seen him with his children just yesterday, how he played with each of them and all of them together. How he sat with them, reading to them before they retired the evening before. He did not question that she was among them later that evening, but she could sense his indecision and questions. Twenty-five years they had been together and never once had another woman joined them in their room, yet now all of his mates had accepted Cirith without question and this more than anything confused him. He could smell her blood her knew, the strands of the fifth Lycavorian Ruling family that flowed in her veins, and Cirith thought she could detect his acceptance that she belonged to him as equally as did his other Queens, but his honor kept him from readily acknowledging this fact even though she knew his blood called for him to.

Cirith turned slightly when she saw Dysea and Isabella enter from behind and to her right and moved up to her silently. Dysea stepped close to her, pressing her tall, lush figure against her without reservation or doubt. An act that sent shivers coursing through Cirith. This was a very different Dysea than had arrived here two days ago. The brightness in her emerald eyes was back, the flush in her skin very noticeable. Cirith knew it was because she was back among those who she loved and who loved her. Cirith watched as Bella came up on her other side and slipped her hand into hers.

[What are you doing Cirith?] Bella asked softly within Mindvoice.

This was another thing that Cirith had not expected, but something that she embraced completely. Her Mindvoice skills were not as powerful as they should have been when she first met Dysea, but they were as strong as she could train them to be considering the control which Aikiro had placed on all Mindvoice users. Since coming here however, her skills and her sense of awareness had grown beyond anything she could have imagined. They had opened their minds to her without hesitation Cirith had basked in the knowledge and emotions coursing within all of them. All the practical skill had been given to her within moments and now it was just a matter of focusing and learning to do the small things that her new abilities granted. The one mind she could not touch however was Martin's.

[I was just watching him.] Cirith answered sheepishly. It was one of the first things they had told her. No Lycavorian or anyone within the Union for that matter would try to intrude on their shielded conversation. While there were very few that could actually make an attempt to breach any shields they had up, it was a matter of honor and purpose that this was not done. *[He just... he just accepted him with question.]*

Dysea and Isabella glanced over to see who she was referring to and they saw T'lolt standing between Danny and Martin as they pointed to different things on the star chart In front of them.

[Ah yes... T'lolt.] Dysea said. *[There is a history there Cirith.]*

[History?] Cirith asked her.

Dysea nodded. *[When he was on Lycavore rescuing Lisisa and his mother he saved the life of an Immortal. Cha'talla's brother to be exact. They had just killed T'lolt's sons and left him for dead because of Cha'talla's betrayal of the High Lord.]*

Cirith looked at her wide eyed. *[He spared an Immortal?]* She gasped. *[After all they are responsible for through the years he spared one?]*

Dysea nodded. *[It was a matter of honor.]* She stated softly. *[He gave T'lolt blood and a weapon so that he could bury his sons and take his revenge. The Nehtes that T'lolt has worn all these years is the same weapon that Nauta Melme gave to him then.]*

[For every action there is an affect and reaction.] Bella spoke now. *[T'lolt was leading the Immortal team that finally rescued Normya, Tir'ut and Esther.]*

Cirith looked at them with wide eyes. *[You are kidding.]* She gasped.

Dysea shook her head. *[Even then the gods of fate were laughing hysterically as Nauta Melme spared the man who would save his daughter some quarter century later and be part of the reason the Akruxian people have begun their resurgence.]* Dysea squeezed her hand. *[He may not often show it, or even address it really, but Nauta Melme is a man who believes deeply in fate and purpose and destiny.]*

Isabella took her other hand. *[Come Cirith... Anja wanted us to bring you to her office so that she can finish your exam. Then we will gather with Aricia and our children for lunch.]*

Cirith nodded as she allowed them to pull her towards the door, taking one last longing glance at where Martin stood.

T'lolt leaned over and stabbed the chart in another spot. "Another small garrison here on Pressha numbering perhaps a hundred."

"Damn, that's twenty-three so far." Danny spoke quickly. "So much for the major powers staying out of The Wilds."

Martin nodded his head, his eyes on the star chart. "We should have guessed it. Seen it coming, but we ignored it. Not anymore." He stated softly. He reached for a pad by his hand and held it up for them to see. "As it stands right now, four people know what I am about to show you. We will make seven. Cha'talla will be eight since this involves the Akruxian people and his input will be needed as well as your own T'lolt." He plugged it into the console and tapped in a coded decrypt command while T'lolt looked at Danny across the table and saw him shrug. "Danny... you always said you wanted to look into Andro's head and see what swirls around in there." Martin motioned to the star chart. "There you go brother."

Danny and T'lolt could do nothing but lean closer and look upon the information with what amounted to disbelief.

"*Orthae shu!*" T'lolt gasped after several moments.

Danny looked up at him with wide dark eyes. "Jesus Christ Marty... what he said!" He stammered. "Andro devised this?"

Martin nodded his head as he turned and walked along the edge of the chart table slowly. "It began as a means of vengeance in his head, but quickly warped into what you see right now in front of you. A Tactical First Strike on two different fronts."

T'lolt looked at Martin. "You... you can do this?" He asked. "Your forces can do this?"

Martin nodded. "Ten years ago no... but a lot has changed in the last decade and my son and I are the reason it has. You've seen some of it with the new equipment that Ben has sent us."

Danny looked at him. "You... you were working on something similar to this Marty?" He asked.

Martin nodded. "The core principles for this operation I designed six years ago. I shelved the idea after deciding it would be too risky and costly in terms of our people. Andro apparently took it upon himself to resurrect it after what happen to Zarah. He has fine tuned it a great deal and added some things I would never have thought of but it is essentially the same plan."

"Zarah?" Danny asked softly. "No... no offense intended Marty, but we don't need to act with revenge because of what happen to Zarah. It's falling apart all by itself. Our Intelligence reports from within the Coven state that there is a massive amount of in fighting and back room deals for power. Apparently Yuri has not reestablished control and they are bumbling about like a bunch of kids."

Martin nodded. "I agree Danny... and I told him that very thing when he sent this to me brother. Until he showed me what it was he fully intended."

"You two are talking with each other a whole lot more than you are telling everyone else aren't you?" Danny asked.

Martin nodded his head. "Nearly every night whether it be via secure COMS that Avi gave to all of us or using a Mark Two Neural Booster. And no... he is not asking for advice. He is doing exactly what I should have done many years ago. What I raised him to believe and to do. I haven't approved of some of the things he

is doing, going after the Icalro Alliance for one, but I taught him to worship those he calls wife and mate and now I have to watch as he does the same thing I did twenty odd years ago when Chetak took Aricia.”

“I’m guessing the Icalro Alliance ain’t going to be too happy.” Danny said.

“When my son is done with them, the Icalro Alliance will cease to exist as an entity for what they have done and what they have endorsed.” Martin stated confidently. “Wayonn’s grandson Dutkne is now Andro’s closest advisor, the leader of this Lycavorian Protectorate that will soon become part of the Union. This Dutkne is following the same path as his grandfather Canth. The same path Wayonn followed with my grandfather and the path Helen follows with me. It is all coming together Danny. Our history is finally and irrevocably catching up to us and becoming part of who we are *fervon*. And a large part of that history is where Cha’talla and the Immortals that followed the two of you come in T’lolt.”

T’lolt nodded. “So I see.” He stated softly.

“I believe Veldruk knew what he was doing.” Martin said softly. “He was a vile fucker but he was smarter in many ways than that bitch Aikiro. He knew all along he was going to come to Lycavore and he knew all along he had to eliminate the Akruxian people as a threat.”

T’lolt looked at him. “What do you mean?”

“He needed to keep us apart. To pit us against one another.” Martin said. “I think he knew that if we ever joined forces, the inbred honor and dignity that our two species shared would overcome any differences we had. He knew he could never fight both of us and win, so he targeted the Akruxian people first. He turned your people into something he could use against us in the hopes it would keep us apart. He succeeded.”

T’lolt met his dark eyes. “You believe... you believe that we would have been allies?” He asked with some surprise in his voice.

“I believe what my instincts tell me.” Martin said confidently. “The very same instincts that caused me to save your life that day on Lycavore. We were never intended to be enemies in the grand scheme of things. I think Cha’talla knows that now as well. Wayonn told me that all of this, everything, it is happening now for a reason.”

“What reason?” Danny asked.

Martin shook his head. “That I don’t know... and neither does he. At least not that he is letting on. At the moment it doesn’t matter. I raised my son to trust his instincts in nearly all that he did. Just as you raised Anton and Moneus and your children Danny. What he is doing now is what I should have done. He’s covering my ass while I atone for my mistakes. Getting For’mya back is the biggest mistake and the most important. I need her in my life just as I need all of them. My brother won’t kill her... he knows what will happen if he does. But he is not above using her to get what he wants.”

“Control of the Union it seems.” Danny said.

Martin nodded. “I don’t know how he intends that and Deia is working with Helen and others to try and figure out what he thinks he has found that will allow him to do that now that I am dead. My son, my children, your children *fervon*... I have complete confidence in what they will do. I’m not afraid because just as we have always looked after each other, so will they.”

Danny shook his head as Martin’s words sunk in and he leaned over, tracing his fingers across several different sized symbols of ships on the board as well as the accompanying text and operational plan. “Oh man Marty... this will... this will rip some serious new assholes.” He glanced up at him. “And it will undoubtedly be the opening shot of a war with the Kavalian Federation.”

Martin nodded his head. “Yes.” He stated softly. “But what are we doing here right now brother. We have been standing here for the last three hours marking definitive targets for us to take out. Kavalian targets.”

Danny nodded. “The difference is that you are dead and these are possible locations that they might shift For’mya too once Deia tells them to get fucked.” He said. “And I know that is what she is going to tell them. Plausible deniability for Andro and Deia. They won’t kill her because that *will* trigger a full scale war just as you are implying and every Union citizen will call for blood. What we are planning are rescue ops.” He tapped the board. “This... this is some scary and risky stuff though *fervon*. We’ve never conducted offensive operations on this scale Marty! *Sibfla*... I knew Andro was devious... but this is beyond anything I ever thought.”

Martin smiled gently. “He is not me Danny.” He said with no small amount of pride in his voice.

“No shit! He’s scarier than you *fervon*... and you are downright terrifying!” Danny snapped.

Martin looked at T'lolt. "T'lolt?"

T'lolt looked up from the board. "I came here... I came here to fulfill an oath and debt I made to thank you for what you did all those years ago."

"A debt that was never owed T'lolt." Martin told him calmly. "Even if it was, you more than reciprocated when you and Cha'talla saved my daughter." Martin said. "I've told you that."

T'lolt nodded. "Yes I know, though Tir'ut actually gets the credit for that." He answered with a small smile. "All that aside Martin Leonidas... what you did that day opened my eyes to many things I would never have considered. Just as finding love with Esther opened Cha'talla's eyes." He turned back to the star chart now and leaned over next to Danny. "This is why Dysea had him put together that transmission isn't it?"

Martin nodded. "Androcles didn't tell her the full scope of what it was meant for, but yes. I imagine once Cha'talla reads this it will come to him as well."

T'lolt nodded. "We will not know the reaction until after it is broadcast." He said. "You and your son would do this? Even after all the history we have of fighting one another in service to the Coven?"

"T'lolt... if you look deeply enough... and I have had nothing but time to do this since being here... if you look beyond the surface of that history you will see that your people, the Akruxian Immortals, they are no different in many ways than my people." Martin said turning slightly to look at the star chart. "We were both enslaved as a species by Veldruk and the High Coven. Twenty-seven years ago when I first discovered who and what I was, no, I would never have believe any of this. My hatred of your people for the death of my father would have prevented me from looking past the surface." Martin turned back to him. "I'm not the same man anymore. The more I thought about it, the more I saw Veldruk's foul hand in what happen to your people and that is why I believe what I told you only a few moments ago. And once... once Cha'talla and you and those of your tribe were free of the Coven you began to look past the surface just as I have done."

T'lolt nodded slowly. "Yes we have." He said softly. He met Martin's eyes. "What about Narice?" He asked.

Martin allowed the smile to split his face. "Narice is a Leonidas now." He spoke with a large measure of joy. "The moment she look past what she had been raised to believe and then fell in love with my son she became a Leonidas. I've seen the way she looks at my son. Aikiro must be rolling over in her grave knowing that Narice shares my son's bed. His life. And that knowledge makes me quiver in joy. I won't even get into how it just tickles me pink that Carisia is a Leonidas as well."

T'lolt couldn't help but chuckle at his appearance now. "It shows in your expression the perverse happiness you get knowing that their daughters love your sons doesn't it?"

Martin smiled. "You have no idea."

"When will Cha'talla see this?" T'lolt asked.

"He has spent the last two days at Dragon Mountain with Vollenth." Martin answered. "He's taking a *STRIKER* back to Kranek today along with some other equipment that I ordered delivered there. If we are going to pull this off he needs to be there and he needs to be ready. I imagine he will read it as they return. You should be heading back soon as well."

T'lolt shook his head. "No... I will remain here with you." He stated. "Cha'talla and I talked of this before leaving Kranek Martin Leonidas. I will remain here, among you, until we have returned your Queen to your arms and the arms of your mates. What your son did... the equipment he gave to us that allowed us to defend what we have now, your people fighting beside ours against the Kavalians without question or pause. These things have earned the trust and respect of our tribe Martin Leonidas. This is how we shall repay that faith in us."

Danny grinned. "It might be helpful having someone who is larger than Tony around too." He stated. "The Master Chief has lost some of his harder edge. Radama seems to have tempered him somewhat after all these years."

Martin continued to stare at T'lolt and finally he nodded his head. "Then let's get back to work." He stated.

Eliani moved down the corridor confidently, her eyes focused on the data pad she held in her hand. The *SCIMITAR* was equipped with a similar medical facility to that on the *SPIRIT OF HADARIA*. It was larger than most medical clinics on the *LEONIDAS II*-Class ships because of the added research labs and equipment onboard. Essentially they had taken one of the most advanced medical and research labs from the centers on Hadaria and installed them on these two ships. Eliani had everything she would ever need at her disposal, whether it be related to medical issues or research issues. She was reviewing the information sent to her by her mother in regards to the Vanari and the counteragent they had designed. Eliani had not met this Ceuma just yet, but clone or no clone; she apparently had rapidly improving skills that were getting better by the day as she spent time with her mother and Aunt Sivana. If they could consider her a sister without question, then Eliani had no problem referring to her as Aunt. Within an hour of getting the information from her mother on Curila 6, Eliani had pulled the *SCIMITAR*'s stock of Tryptophan from storage and with Devra and Tastia watching in amazement, she fashion thirty-two self injector doses of the counter agent. This also left Devra with far more questions than she had before, especially considering the main ingredient of the counter agent.

Eliani stopped walking when she heard the muffled voices as the door opened and closed near her and she realized she was on deck fourteen where all the *Durcunusaan* work out gyms were located. She saw two men exit the gym once more talking to themselves and she heard the voices again. She moved to the door and entered the vast gym to see dozens of the RD team on the many mats honing their skills as all *Durcunusaan* did. They were just hours away from a very dangerous operation and none of them could sleep. That was not only human nature, but the nature of every species before battle. Her fern green eyes quickly found the source of the loudest voices and she came to an abrupt halt even as her wolf blood began a slow simmer.

Jomann was shirtless on the large mat as he spared with another of his team that she now knew as Anicetus. He was the oldest of Jomann's team, following him since the day he was given his officer's title. They were sparing with the wooden staffs that simulated *Nehtes*, the speed and power with which they were moving a marvel to behold by anyone. Eliani watched as the muscles in Jomann's upper body rippled in effort, his tanned skin glistening with sweat from the exertion. Anicetus was obviously overmatched, but he was putting on a fine display of defensive skills as Jomann attacked again and again. Eliani found herself moving closer without even thinking about it and suddenly she was beside the mat and watching the incredible display with rapt attention. Jomann's movements were so fluid and controlled, as if he was participating in a ballet. There was no wasted motion, no hesitation on his part in any way. Every movement was seamless and blended perfectly into the next. Eliani was considered second only to her father and brother when it came to skill with the *Nehtes*. Her grandfathers Riall and Panos had often commented and agreed that she could have been born with *Nehtes* in hand considering the skill she displayed for one so diminutive in nature. It was something that Eliani was very proud of in fact, yet her natural confidence in her abilities was oftentimes taken for arrogance. No one on the *SCIMITAR* would challenge her anymore because of this though she didn't know that. As Jomann's jasmine coffee scent rushed into her nostrils, and his powerful Alpha male aura filled the air around her Eliani could barely control the desire surging through her for this man.

She had desired Malic yes, desired him badly, but what she felt coursing through her as Jomann's scent filled the air around her was so much more potent and dominating. His scent called to her wolf blood in a way that she had never felt for Malic, any man who had shared her bed for that matter. It was consuming and very nearly overwhelming. These were sensations that Eliani had never felt before and they were so very confusing to her. How could she desire this man so completely when she loved Malic? Andro's words from the beach only a few nights ago came rushing back to her.

“Have you ever stopped to consider for a moment that perhaps you were never meant for Malic and Nyla and that is why events have occurred as they have? That Nyla and then Malic... that they too were only avenues for you to discover what you really wanted?” Andro asked her. “Just as they occurred with mother.”

“Wait... you are saying that I was just a vehicle so that Malic and Nyla could come together?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “Because you are meant for someone else.” He said softly. “Someone who is just as intensely passionate as you sister.” Andro continued without missing a beat. “Someone who will worship you and love you until it takes your breath away. Someone who even now is out there searching for you.”

“What... what about how I feel in here now Andro?” She asked touching her hand to her chest over her heart. “How do I get over that?”

Andro placed his hand over the top of hers. “Is what you feel in here, in your heart, is it because of what you truly feel inside Eli... or is it simply the desire you have within you to feel it. To experience what you so desperately want to experience.”

Eliani Leonidas was nothing if not extremely confident and of all the Leonidas daughters she was perhaps the one most closely tied to the wolf blood within her. Nara had not yet come to the age where her wolf blood would sing for a man, but Eliani had no doubts when she did that they would be very close. Andro had been right Eliani realized. She was conceived while her father and mother were still riding an emotional high from events that had propelled them forward, conceived when her mother had come into her very first phase as a female wolf. A full phase that would always be the strongest she would ever experience and the one that had brought her closer to her father in every way. As Jomann’s delicious jasmine coffee scent surged through her blood and the sparring match came to a close on the other side of the mat she did what she had always done in her life. She acted. She leaned over and picked up the staff that rested on the floor by the mat and spun it expertly in her hand. What Eliani failed to realize was that this attitude and confidence she exuded was often times taken for arrogance. As it was right now.

Eliani quickly pulled off her combat boots and stepped onto the mat moving up behind where Jomann and Anicetus were talking and smiling with the three other members of their team.

“You left your right side open for attack during that last flurry Captain.” Eliani Leonidas announced loudly.

Jomann had smelled her the moment she came into the gym, her willow and peach scent maddening to him in every way, and through force of will alone he had pushed it to the back of his mind as the match with Anicetus came to a close. Jomann had never envisioned himself in the position he was now in, Durcunusaan Captain to the Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union, but from the moment Androcles had named him to his new position he had embraced all there was about it. It felt like he had reached the defining moment of his life, the pinnacle of all he could be, and as each day passed he grew stronger and wiser. Since that first day he had sat with Androcles religiously for two hours every day, exploring the boundaries of Mindvoice skills he had never known he had. Even when Andro was busy with other things, he always found a way to break away and they would meet. He now knew more about Androcles Leonidas and what made him tick than anyone in the universe save his father and his wives and mates. Andro had expanded his awareness within Mindvoice to proportions that Jomann never imagined he could obtain. The potential was always there Andro had told him, buried within the pureness of his blood just as it was with Andro; Jomann had just never taken the opportunity to explore it. He had learned so much in only two short weeks, yet it felt as if he had served Andro for decades. He learned of his bloodline dating back to long before the Black Day thanks to Deia who had taken a personal interest in him since their time buried in the senate building. And with Deia and Androcles came the Feravomir and all she knew. It came with the vast knowledge that the Elder Mother held within her and the complete and utter faith and loyalty that everyone who knew Androcles now gave to him as his Captain.

Everyone except his sister Eliani.

Jomann turned slowly and looked at her, suppressing the intake of breath that nearly escaped his lungs from looking at her beauty. Her willow and peach scent filtered all around him like a fog and it was the sweetest thing he had ever smelled. Jomann had never demanded the respect that others gave to him, he allowed his skills and actions to speak for themselves, but since that first day Eliani Leonidas had treated him with contempt. It made it that much harder because of the way he felt for her, but he had dealt with pain before and he would deal with it now.

“Thank... thank you for your expert analysis Princess Eliani.” Jomann spoke his voice firm but with an edge to it that Anicetus and the others noticed right away.

Anicetus had been with his young Captain since his joining the ranks of *Durcunusaan* officers and he knew him very well. He also knew when he saw an Alpha male and an Alpha female of the power and skill of Jomann and Eliani Leonidas square off it could only mean one thing. That they desired each other in the worst possible way was without question for whether they knew it or not, and Anicetus didn’t think they did, both their scents were filling the room with pheromones and their wolf auras were pulsing for each other like living

things. He looked at the other members of their team and discretely motioned with his hand for them to back away even as just about every head and set of eyes in the gym turned to watch. Those eyes included a pair of azure blue orbs, maya blue and amber colored eyes as Andro, Carisia and Lu'ria looked on from one of the two private sparing mats situated above the massive gym area. Andro was shirtless and watching with interest as Lu'ria and Carisia pressed up against his sides, all of them sweaty from hard training.

"You should really work on that." Eliani continued. "In a real fight a skilled person will exploit that opening." Eliani felt ridiculous after speaking those words for Jomann was part of a handful of survivors of Alba Tau and telling him about a real fight could just as easily be taken for an insult. She saw the slight narrowing of his eyes at her words but aside from that he did not react to her comment.

Jomann twirled the staff in his hand slamming the end to the mat and he remembered the conversation he had with Andro only a few short days ago.

Andro held out the pad to him. "Well... that will change soon enough. I will get Devra... you get Sadi, Ne'Veha and Eliani and meet me..." Andro looked at him and saw the look on his face. "What?"

Jomann shook his head. "Nothing."

Andro crossed his arms over his chest. "Jomann... don't try to bullshit a bullshitter as my father and mother say. What is wrong?"

"Your sister... she does not care for me Andro and I would prefer to stay away from her as much as possible." Jomann answered.

Andro met his eyes evenly and knew Jomann wasn't telling him the truth. He could also detect the severe attraction to Eliani that Jomann had even though he was doing a very good job of burying that deeply. "I do not wish to make it difficult for you Jomann... but I will never get rid of her. For some reason she has appointed herself my personal caretaker and it has been like that for years. I couldn't change it even if I wanted too. Eli is just very..."

"Short tempered?" Jomann offered. "And linguistically gifted when it comes to cursing someone out?"

Andro chuckled. "That's a nicer description than I would have used... but yes." He said. "Eli is the most passionate of my sisters in many ways Jomann... don't be afraid of her. You are my Captain... so technically if it is not a medically related issue... you are the boss. She'll respect you more if you put her in her place."

Jomann looked at him and his eyes smiled. "How much blood will that cost me?" He asked with a smile.

"Probably more than you are willing to lose... but it will be worth it to see the look on her face." Andro answered.

"Your family will not be angered?" He asked.

Andro laughed. "Angered? Sibfla... they'll get a kick out of it! To this day no one has ever made Eliani back down. She's as tenacious as the Coltarian Measles."

Jomann winced. "I've had the Coltarian Measles Andro." He stated. "It wasn't pretty."

"I know it too." Andro answered with a smile. "Had me in bed for three weeks. I thought I was going to die."

"I think I did die. And then came back to life." Jomann replied with a grin.

"And I suppose you are offering to instruct me or somehow show me that you are correct and that you are the better with a *Nehtes*?" Jomann spoke as he looked at her.

Eliani grinned as her blood sang with the prospect of sparring with Jomann and putting him on his ass. "Something like that yeah."

Jomann stared at her with those ocean blue eyes and nodded his head. "It is said you are second only to your father and brother with a *Nehtes*." He spoke.

Eliani grinned once more. "That's what they say."

"Then let us test that theory!" Jomann snarled before he attacked with lightning speed that very nearly caught Eliani flatfooted.

Carisia and Lu'ria looked at Andro as the sounds of two staffs meeting reverberated all across the gym. His eyes were focused on the two below them watching with the eyes of a Nehtes Master.

"Andro my love..." Carisia spoke. "Wouldn't it be less... painful... if they just admit what they both feel for each other instead of fighting it?"

Andro smiled at her words and turned to look down into her maya blue eyes. "Yes... but it wouldn't be nearly as fun to watch." He said.

Carisia slapped his hard abdomen. "*Bunjiro!*" She cursed at him as Lu'ria chuckled.

Andro unfolded his arms and drew both of them tighter to his body. "Eliani is confident. Perhaps too confident. She has always been the Leonidas sister that has gone after what she wanted. She is fearless in all that she does and her skill with the *Nehtes* is unmatched. It has also led her to have something of an arrogant attitude. Jomann... Jomann burns for her just as brightly as I do all of you because of the pureness of his blood. Eliani's blood is drawn to that like a moth to a flame. She was never meant to be with Malic and Nyla... though that is what she thought. Her blood... because of when she was conceived... it is more potent than any cross breed Lycavorian and Hadarian. She knows what Jomann makes her feel, but she has to come to accept it and understand it herself."

"This is why Malic's scent is no longer within her blood?" Lu'ria asked thoughtfully.

Andro nodded. "He was a strong Alpha... no Bonded Pair could not be... but he can not compare to the pureness of Eliani's blood and that is why her body rejected his scent. That is why her wolf blood sings for Jomann so intently. Because his blood is far purer than Malic's will ever be. I tried to explain to her why she feels as she does, she understands it, but now she has to accept it on her own."

"And if she doesn't?" Carisia asked softly. "What if she truly does love Malic?"

Andro shook his head slowly. "She was intensely attracted to Malic... but the love she thinks she feels for him I believe is being channeled from Nyla. She is the one who truly loves Malic and because of the connection they share it overwhelmed Eliani's own persona for a while. At least until Jomann came into her life and now her true blood is recognizing it. I think she knows, but she is so terrified of being alone."

"Alone?" Lu'ria asked. "Does she know how many young men are out there that would kill for the opportunity to take her as their wife and mate? Males who will worship her?"

Andro nodded. "She knows... but she doesn't want that. She is a Leonidas. She wants a man to love her, worship her, and be every bit her equal in everything. She has found that in Jomann, only now she needs to let go of everything she believes and go with what her instincts are screaming for her to do."

Carisia looked down onto the floor and could only shake her head at the display of incredible skill taking place. The staffs were moving far faster than even her vampire eyes could follow, and while she knew small blows were connecting, neither of them had given any ground yet. "Will she?"

Andro chuckled and nodded. "Yes... even if Jomann has to beat her stubbornness out of her. At least enough to get her to see what she wants."

Eliani was backpedaling quickly, even as she parried each and every blow that Jomann was raining down upon her. No one had ever taxed her abilities like this, only Andro or her father could and that was because they were even better than her. Jomann was like a whirlwind of power and speed. His six foot three height gave him an added advantage, but one that Eliani knew how to compensate for. She had hit him several times with short, powerful blows, shots that grew grunts of pain and would no doubt leave large welts, but it didn't seem to slow him down. He had caught her several times as well, causing her to yelp in pain which only fueled her anger and strength. Eliani Leonidas did not yelp, and not since she was nineteen had she ever gotten a beating like this. That day she had made the mistake of making fun of Andro and his love for Sadi and he had made her pay for her thoughtless words. She had healed her injuries, but it had taken a week for the ache to go away. They had been going at it for several minutes now, circling each other while she looked for that opening he had shown her in his match with Anicetus. She leaped into a whirling five hit combo that saw the end of her staff snap against his shoulder twice, bringing a loud groan of pain, but the last three blows he deflected with the end of his staff matching her incredible speed and causing her to step back from him eyes wide.

As she stepped back he thrust his staff out between her legs and she tumbled to the mat hard, rolling away from him cat like and coming up to her feet with a snarl of anger on her face at having fallen. She watched him grimace as he stood to his full height and lower the end of his staff to the mat.

“We are done Princess.” He spoke firmly.

“We are not done!” Eliani snapped.

“We are accomplishing nothing.” He spoke looking at her. “And we have a mission to prepare for.”

“I will say when we are done Captain!” Eliani snarled. “You have not beaten me! Are you quitting now because you can’t beat me?”

Jomann looked at her intently, memorizing the contours of her face and the way her breasts rose and fell as she breathed deeply. Her scent was driving him mad and he needed to get away from her. “You will believe what you will Princess, as long as it suits you.” He told her. “I am done however.”

“You can’t just walk away!” Eliani shouted.

“I need to walk away.” Jomann said softly. He turned to his left looking at Anicetus as he did and he never saw the blow. The end of Eliani’s staff slapped against his cheek viciously, causing stars to burst into his eyes and his cheek to split apart, blood splashing onto the mat as he dropped to his knee holding his hand over his cheek.

“You... don’t you dare ignore me!” Eliani screamed.

Anicetus turned quickly and looked up at where he knew Androcles stood. He saw his Prince shake his head quickly and hold up his hand keeping him from intervening. Anicetus turned back as he saw Eliani move closer to Jomann.

“Get up!” Eliani barked. “We are not finished! A Spartan would stand until he could not stand anymore! A Spartan never quits!” She brought her staff up with blinding speed for a short, slashing blow to his shoulder only to have his hand come away from his cheek and grab the end of her staff in its downward motion. Eliani’s fern green eyes grew wide as he turned his body back towards her, and brought his own staff around at knee level. She saw the maneuver too late and as he wrenched her staff from her hands with his superior strength Eliani felt his staff smash into the back of her knees and topple her over onto her back with a resounding thud. She grunted in pain as she banged her head hard on the mat, trying to roll away and come to her feet. She suddenly found herself pinned to the mat by his weight as he pounced on her and jammed the staff down on her shoulder, using the back of her neck as leverage and effectively negating any movement on her part. She turned her face to look at him, her wolf fangs bursting forth in anger and the black ring surrounding her fern green eyes only to find herself staring into the ocean blue eyes surrounded by the thick black ring and the long vicious looking fangs of a pure blood Lycavorian male.

Jomann snapped his jaws together loudly, the click of his fangs loud enough to freeze her in her spot as he lowered his face close to her. “You know nothing of me!” He snarled at her. “Since I became your brother’s Captain you have looked down upon me and I will tolerate it no longer!”

“You will get off me or I will...” Eliani began to growl at him.

Jomann snapped his fangs together once more, even closer to her face this time and Eliani’s eyes went wide and cut her words off. His weight above her kept her firmly beneath him, the training staff keeping her upper body pinned painfully to the mat, both her hands gripping the end to keep it from digging further into her shoulder.

“I do not know why it is you hate me so...” Jomann growled in a low voice. “I would die for your brother in an instant. I would... I would die for you.” Jomann’s heightened anger and the aura flooding off him kept him from detecting Eliani’s aura as it wafted from her. An aura of intense desire and passion, and all of it directed completely at him whether she realized it or not. It was something that every Lycavorian within thirty meters, male and female, could detect. “Never... never question my commitment Princess. I have seen and lived through far worse than you could possibly imagine and I have brought my people home.” His handsome face then softened considerably. “Almost all my people.” He spoke softly. His wolf eyes looked at her. “I am not... I am not your mate Malic and I do not ride a dragon, but I am and always will be a Spartan! For you... for you to question that is an insult to not only me, but to my mother and father as well. Debase me if you wish Princess Eliani... but do not question the honor of my bloodline that you know nothing about.” Jomann lifted the staff from her shoulder and tossed it across the mat until it landed ten meters away. His eyes never left hers as he lifted his body off her to a kneeling position and watched as she placed her hand on her shoulder to rub it and

try and return the feeling to it. “My... my blood burns for you like acid in my veins Princess Eliani Leonidas.” He spoke softly seeing her eyes go wide at his words. Words that Eliani knew only she could hear so softly that they were spoken, like a whisper that resounded in her head as loud as any thunderstorm she had ever heard. “It... it burns in my veins because you are all I want. All I will ever want... and I can not have you. That is why I need to leave.”

Jomann got to his feet and without another word he turned and headed for the shower area of the locker rooms. This time it was not the male that Eliani Leonidas left alone gaping in astonishment at her confident words to him. This time it was Eliani who was utterly speechless for even as he spoke those words to her, her wolf blood was singing in unadulterated bliss at their sound and the sensations and emotions that those words caused to ripple through her. They were demanding most prominently that he claim her right there in front of everyone if needed for that is how badly Eliani realized she desired him. A desire that made what she felt for Malic and even for Nyla pale in comparison.

And it was that unmatched desire that frightened her so terribly.

CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

SCIMITAR

THREE HOURS FROM THE ICALRO ALLIANCE BORDER

“...don’t know *fervon*.” Resumar’s worried voice filled the Secure COM Room causing all of them to fidget in their seats. “Poysha said she almost didn’t react. She looked at her oddly but that was all.”

Andro turned from looking at the wall of the SECOMROM and his azure eyes fell on the crystal clear image of his brother. Eliani, Sadi, Ne’Veha, Carisia and Lu’ria occupied the seats around the large table with Denali, Arrarn, Narice and Toria. Jomann stood quietly to the side of the room by the door, his face still showing the fresh, two-inch long scar from the vicious blow Eliani had landed during their sparring match in her anger. He had shifted when he returned to his quarters and the scar was still pink, but healed completely. He had been standing in the same spot when Eliani entered the SECOMROM and had to force his eyes away from her when she looked at him. She was very subdued it seemed, and kept stealing glances at him even during Resumar’s report until it came to do with their mother. Then her attention was riveted to the holo image of her brother.

“Drugs?” Andro asked.

Resumar shook his head. “Poysha didn’t think so. She seemed to think it was more like she was... disconnected in a way. Lost.”

“Res... can we trust this woman?” Arrarn asked.

Resumar nodded his head instantly. “Shiria and her sister are here with me Arrarn.” He stated. “She has been working within the framework of the Kavalian High Command for several years. Shiria trusts her implicitly and she has been very forthcoming with me when I have spoken with her about odds and such. Yes... we can trust her.”

“Is there any word on whether they intend to bring her to the meeting?” Andro asked.

Resumar shook his head. “No... but you were correct in guessing that Hadaria is where they are going to insist the meeting take place.” He answered quickly. “Poysha was able to get information that confirmed they are planning on leaving tomorrow afternoon. I already passed that to *Tenna Deia* and she was probably going to contact you at a later time. She would have only just received it.”

“Where did she get this Intel?” Denali asked.

Resumar shifted uncomfortably in the transmission. “She is part... she is...”

All of them saw Athani stepped into the transmission now and grip his arm. “There is a small control group of females Andro. They remain within the confines of the Kavalian High Command Compound. All of them have been biogenically altered like myself and Jalersi. They do the mundane tasks that the Kavalian officers think beneath them. They also serve as...” Even Athani paused for she knew how Lycavorians regarded any kind of forced labor or sexual slaves that were used for that purpose alone. “They also serve as bed partners for those officers who are so inclined because they like the way we look.”

“I take it that is not by choice.” Andro said.

Athani shook her head. “No... in most cases the Pride they come from has given them in service to my father and his officers.”

“Athani that is...” Sadi leaned forward.

Athani nodded her head. “Yes... it’s horrible I know. Even more horrible is that they are implanted with an explosive chip that kills them should they leave the compound.”

“Poysha has been inside this group for the better part of six years now Andro.” Resumar continued. “Shiria trusts her completely.”

“Resumar... can she find out if they intend to bring mother to this meeting? We have enough people in place to pull off a snatch no matter where they are on the planet.” Andro asked.

“What if they keep her on a ship?” Arrarn quipped shaking his head. “It’s too dangerous Andro.”

Resumar shook his head. “Not without putting herself at great risk.” He stated ending the ideas forming in Andro’s head. “She acts as a technician Andro. If she starts to ask questions about mother someone will catch on. She is already planning on doing some modifications to the instruments in her room if they do take her and that is as much as I want to risk her given she is our only connection to mother right now.”

“Instruments?” Eliani asked now.

Resumar nodded. “They room they are holding her in is very spacious and completely surrounded by power inhibitors so she can not call her Shi Viska. The power inhibitors have been installed extensively throughout the building she is in. There are also countless medical monitors as well Eli. Poysha does not know why.”

“Is she injured? Sick?” Arrarn gasped.”

Resumar shook his head. “Not that Poysha can tell outwardly Arrarn no.”

Eliani glanced at Andro quickly but kept her mouth closed as what she was going to tell him on Cranæ Island suddenly stormed back into her mind. She looked back to the image of her brother. “Can she find out what type of medical equipment Res?”

Resumar nodded. “That is what she is going to do next. Her next contact with us is tomorrow evening. Hopefully we’ll know more then.”

Eliani Leonidas kept her silence and wanted to speak with her mother before telling Andro, but she had a sinking feeling inside her gut she knew what the monitors were for. If that was the case, she shuddered at what the outcome would be.

Arrarn turned and looked at him. “We can’t put her at risk Andro.” He stated urgently. “We have to be certain anything we try is one hundred percent going to work!”

Andro nodded his head. “Don’t worry Arrarn. I will not risk her either.” He said as he stepped closer to the table. “Insure this Poysha does not put herself at risk *fervon*.” He stated evenly to Resumar. “Right now we need her where she is.”

Resumar nodded. “I have Avi and 341 working on a way to deactivate this chip in their heads. Uncle Isra and I have the rudimentary workings of a plan in place that will allow us to extract all of them including mother when the time is right, but we need to be able to deactivate these chips.”

“The status on what we talked about?” Andro asked him.

“Proceeding as planned.” Resumar answered simply causing all of them to look back and forth between the two brothers. “We have begun shuttling Mican’s resistance forces back to Rizon Four and Shiria’s fortress there. It is distant and well hidden and Pian’s tribe has been using it as a staging area. Pian and Mican are working on different plans to free more of the biogenic clones in the last years of their life and bring them into the fold. Na’lia and the other elves here can alter their DNA in such a way as to allow them to lead full lives.”

“Is that wise Resumar?” Eliani asked.

“You have not seen the settlement they have here Eli.” He answered. “Many of these biogenic clones have taken the elf researchers as their wives and husbands and mates. They have children and they are very protective of each other. Knowing that you will only live ten years and then discovering a way to extend that beyond what you were meant for is a strong motivator.” Resumar explained. “The elf researchers here are revered by the biogenic clones and they would die to protect them.”

“You sent your request to Ben like I asked?” Andro spoke.

Resumar nodded. "All of it yes. Na'lia gave me a list of medical supplies and equipment that they could use Eliani. I sent that along to Ben, but most of it is controlled and you will need to approve its release since mother and *Tenna* Sivana are on Curila 6 and out of the loop so to speak."

Eliani nodded. "I'll burst him a transmission as soon as we are done here." She stated without question.

"The platoon of the Dragon Brigade that you sent as been working daily with the Kavalian people here and with Athani and Jalersi's help they are losing their fear of dragons *fervon*." Resumar said. "Uncle Isra and Aunt Tarifa are gaining many friends."

Andro nodded his head slowly. "Based on the history of why that fear is there it is good that they are beginning to overcome it." He said causing everyone to look at him once more because he obviously knew something none of them did in regards to the Kavalians and dragons and their history together. "And the more friends we have the stronger we will be."

Arrarn leaned forward. "Res... can you have her... can you..."

Resumar looked at his brother. "She will get her a message from us Arrarn." He stated. "I promise you she will do this."

"Time." Andro said softly. "We need more time to discover what it is they are planning and then we and father can act. How soon before what we discussed is ready?"

"Avi and 341 assure me they can be finished in ten days. Fourteen at the most." Resumar answered him. "Uploading everything to the correct servers is a more tedious process than simply emptying the cores. The *ACHILLES* will be ready. Captain Fang already has half her engineering crew helping with the upload and the other half are installing Shroud generators on a small force of Pian's Pride ships that arrived two days ago."

Andro looked at him. "You made that call?" He asked.

Resumar nodded. "Yes. You must have noticed the difference in Pian when you spoke with him before he left Andro. I believe it was a wise move on our part and a sign that we are not simply going to abandon them as so often happens to resistance forces."

Andro nodded. "True enough." He spoke. "I won't second guess your actions Res. We are three hours from meeting with Am'uur and finalizing our own plans. Continue with what you are doing and I will contact you before we make our way to Hadaria."

Resumar nodded as he gripped Athani tighter to him. "Go with the gods my family." He spoke softly.

"*Cuia fas vada carians*." All of them answered immediately as Resumar's image faded away.

Andro looked at his siblings and their wives and mates. "We have final preparations to make. Eli... be quick with mother. I do not want to get close to the Icalro border and be using our most advanced and secret communications array. Whether or not they are smart enough to detect it."

Eliani nodded. "I'll be quick." She answered. "But I need to clarify some things on the counter agent she sent."

"Let's get to it folks." Andro said.

EDOLUS

FIVE HOURS FROM SUNRISE

Lisisa lowered the powerful macrobinoculars from her forest green eyes and handed them to Arduri who lay beside her on the soft grass of the ridge three kilometers from the large town before them. She turned to look at Zarah and Lucia who lay on her opposite side as Arduri lifted the binos to her eyes.

"Looks quiet enough." She stated.

Zarah looked her own field glasses. "Looks can be deceiving." She stated matter-of-factly.

Lisisa nodded. "Tell me about it." She whispered. "Jeth and Seyra are circling at ten thousand feet. The settlement is slightly larger than this Brendi told us, but they were able to pinpoint our target house quickly enough. It's right where she said it would be."

"Very little activity on the streets themselves." Arduri spoke softly and they turned to look at her. "I see no signs of patrols or peace officers. One stretch perhaps a kilometer long that is very well lit to the west, but other than that it seems very quiet. Our approach should be very smooth."

“That will most likely be their entertainment sector.” Lisisa replied. “Clubs. Hotels. Things of that nature. Humans are nothing if not predictable in that regard.”

Arduri lowered the glasses and looked at her. “So if there is security it is probably within this sector?”

Lisisa nodded. “More than likely.” She turned back to Zarah. “You and Lucia take point and do your scout mission.”

Zarah looked at her slightly surprised. “Lisi I...”

Lisisa leaned over and nuzzled her sister’s cheek firmly. “You are behind only father and Andro when it comes to close quarters combat Zarah. Now that you and Lucia have come together it only enhances both your natural strengths. Besides... you and she can use the shadows far better than me. Conduct the sweep and then take up position and contact us.”

Zarah looked at Lucia and then turned back to her and nodded. “Give us fourteen minutes.” She stated just before both she and Lucia wrapped the shadows around themselves and vanished into the night.

Lisisa turned back to look at Arduri who was staring at her. She felt her heart skip a beat at the intense gaze of those beautiful soft green eyes but she quickly got her emotions under wraps.

“She still harbors some doubts of her skills since what happen doesn’t she?” Arduri said softly.

“You know about that?” Lisisa asked surprised.

Arduri nodded her head slowly. “Androcles felt it necessary for us to know in case we saw behavior in her we did not understand. What he told us and the reports we reviewed from your Netnews were very vague, but we understood the implication. She is... she is remarkably strong willed to have come this far so soon.”

Lisisa nodded. “Part of that is her own determination, part of it is Andro and the biggest part is Lucia.” She answered.

Arduri nodded in agreement with her. “My mother and I have noticed how they look at one another. How they act. They are completely devoted to each other. All the Lycavorians that we have seen are extremely...”

“Passionate about their wives and mates?” Lisisa finished. “Their relationships?”

Arduri smiled slightly. “It is not something that our people as a whole have gone out of the way to discover. It is one of the reasons we have been at such odds with the Lycavorians in the Protectorate. My mother told me... she said Bren... just the way he looks at her... it makes her warm inside. To know that she is first in his thoughts always, it makes her shudder in desire for him.”

Lisisa smiled. “That is how it always is.” She stated.

“That is how it is with you and Denali?” Arduri asked looking at her.

Lisisa nodded quickly. “Yes.”

“How long have you been together?” Arduri continued to press her.

“It will be four years soon.” She answered softly. “The four most wonderful years of my entire life. He’s not always a comedian you know.” She said with a smile. “And what he makes me feel is beyond anything I ever thought I would find.”

Arduri looked away and her eyes lifted up into the sky to stare at the stars. “That is something I wish I could find.” She said wistfully.

Lisisa watched her from the darkness, her vampire and wolf eyes easily able to pick up every movement of her face. She admired the cheekbones and the shape of her lips as well as the way her jaw curved elegantly into her neck. The blue color of her skin did not hide the sensual beauty and Lisisa shook her head quickly as carnal thoughts began seeping into her head.

“You are going to be married soon aren’t you?” Lisisa asked quickly to chase away the odd feelings looking at Arduri gave to her.

Arduri gave a mirthless chuckle. “Unfortunately yes.” She answered.

“Unfortunately?” Lisisa asked her.

Arduri turned back to face her. “After seeing what I have seen in just the few weeks we have been among your people Lisisa, Cruor Ahn Vernalo in no way matches up. He is well equipped for a Vanari...” She stated bluntly and she saw Lisisa smile at the reference. “And we are compatible in order to have children, but aside from that... he does not stir me as Denali stirs you. As Sadi and the others stir your brother. Part of me has always asked why I agreed to join with him and I think it was because I was lonely.”

“Lonely?” Lisisa asked. “Somehow I don’t see you as being lonely Arduri. You are the most outspoken and open of your sisters from what I can see.”

Arduri smiled. “You have not met Caliria yet.” She said.

“It just strikes me as odd that you would be lonely.” Lisisa said. “You are... you are very beautiful Arduri. You have a figure that most Lycavorian females would kill for, not to mention our men would worship you for days on end.”

Arduri tilted her head as she looked back at her. “That is the difference between our peoples when it comes to relationships.” She said. “Once joined... the physical portions of Vanari relationships lose the excitement and luster of the Celebration of the Hundreds. It almost becomes machine like. It is the largest reason my mother and father are no longer together. She could no longer tolerate his time away from her, or his lack of interest. It is not done very often mind you, my mother was the first to end a marriage in our family in over a thousand years, but she wanted more than what father gave to her. She has found that with Bren... ten fold more than what she desired to find.”

“You will not find this with...” Lisisa asked.

“With Cruor?” Arduri said. She shook her head sadly. “No. As I said... the physical portion of the Celebration of the Hundreds with him was very pleasant. The rest of it...” She shrugged her shoulders. “I can not back out now however. I am committed.”

“If you don’t love him why go through with it?” Lisisa asked.

“It is not a matter of love now. I do not love him... that much I do know. Not in the way my mother loves Bren.” Arduri said firmly. “I have agreed to become his wife and I did so in a moment of passion thinking, hoping there would be more to come. There was not. When Vanari marry, their families are joined in more ways than you might realize. We combine financial assets as well as material belongings. It makes the families stronger. More influential. I would bring quite a bit of dishonor to my father and our family if I refused to go through with it now. It is just the way of things.”

Lisisa could detect the sadness in her voice easily and she shifted on the ground. There was far more to this Vanari woman that Lisisa had first realized. Not only was she incredibly beautiful and enticingly desirable, which was saying quite a bit since Lisisa rarely ever looked at a woman in such a way, there was far more to her inside busting to get out.

“There is no way for you to bow out of this without losing honor?” Lisisa finally asked. “It seems so unfair. Even among our people... the Lycavorians... we regard honor above all else in many ways yet we would never force someone to become married to save face. It would be considered... *carrians*... it would be considered a crime.”

Arduri looked at her. “And that is one of the many differences between our peoples.” She said. “And one that in my opinion makes you better than us. Something the vast majority of Vanari would never admit.”

Lisisa watched her again for a long moment. Something about this woman pulled at her and she did not know what it was. She watched her as she lifted the binos to her eyes once more and decided she would discover what it was when they returned from this mission. She turned back to where the rest of the RD team waited patiently at the bottom of the ridge, her eyes falling on the man Dutkne had chosen to come with them. The tall, powerful Lycavorian was alert and his eyes kept scanning the area around them. They had discovered him in the quarters of the elf female who she had heard dropped him in the landing bay for pulsing her with his aura. Whatever he had done to get back into E’yarna’s good graces seemed to have worked, for in all her years on the *SCIMITAR* Lisisa had never seen E’yarna even allow a Lycavorian to court her. When they had arrived at her quarters on the *SCIMITAR* to collect Warem, the room smelled heavily of sex. She and Denali had watched as Warem collected his things quickly but then he stopped to draw E’yarna into his embrace and nuzzle her cheek and neck passionately, not to mention her elven ears. She had cooed out her delight in his arms, and both Lisisa and Denali could smell that she had allowed Warem to *Cado Forn*. It seemed he had turned into a very different man if what Andro and Dutkne told her was true. He had been a ladies man, an Alpha male wolf who enjoyed the company of females. That apparently was no longer the case as he did not even look at another female with so much as a passing interest. Dutkne had softly commented with a smile how it seemed they were discovering far more than any of them had ever hoped for since arriving within the Union. Dutkne had known Warem since they were children, and he had never seen him smitten so intensely by a female that he would scent her. It appeared E’yarna had done just that to him, and as with any Lycavorian alpha wolf, he would

happily go into the future with her at his side. And it didn't seem to bother E'yarna in the least either judging by how she gazed at him and clutched his arms.

"Lisisa?" Arduri spoke softly snapping her out of her thoughts. "Look. There is some unusually air activity to the west of our target house."

Lisisa turned back instantly and her combat senses came alive. She settled to the ground next to Arduri, intentionally laying close enough to her that their bodies touched without even realizing she had done this. "Where?"

For her own part, Arduri suppressed the shudder of desire that swept through her at the physical contact and handed her the binos. "One point six kilometers west of the home." She answered.

Lisisa Leonidas lifted the binos to her eyes and didn't even realize she had just made a very clear statement in regards to Arduri Re Mydala. A statement that would become much bolder in the weeks and months ahead and would eventually involve her beloved Denali as well. It was a statement that would alter Arduri Re Mydala's life in a way she had never imagined and it would ultimately bring her what she most desired in all the universe. Only she would find it with two.

"Five hours until the sun comes up." Lisisa said. "Let's get this done and get gone from this place."

SCIMITAR SECOMROM

"...What is this all about Eli?" Anja asked from the transmission. "You don't normally call and question my work."

Eliani looked at her mother from the transmission from Curila 6. She could see that she had thrown on only a lightweight robe that covered her body, and she held a large mug of coffee in her hands, but the huge bed behind her was ruffled and appeared as if had been used recently.

"Momma... I'm not... I'm not questioning your work." Eli answered suddenly unable to put the words together that she wanted too.

"Then I take it this is about Malic and Nyla and... Jomann." Anja spoke with a twinkle in her jade colored eyes.

Eliani looked at her shocked. "You... you know?" She gasped.

"Eli... do you honestly believe that your brother does not talk to your father nearly every day since this all began?" Anja asked. "Do you think your father would not share with all of us what was discussed?"

"Well... no... but..."

"Androcles would do anything for you Eli. He would do anything for all of you. He has appointed himself the guardian of all his siblings for some reason that only he knows." Anja said. "When something bothers one of you... it bothers him."

"So... what he told me?" Eliani asked. "It's true?"

Anja nodded as she sipped her coffee. "Yes it's true."

"Why... why didn't you ever tell me? Tell us?" Eliani asked.

"What was there to tell?" Anja asked her simply. "Your uncle Danny and I shared a few months together with Julie Collins before I came to my senses and realized my blood burned for only your father. It made us closer as friends and now family since Carina and Moneus are mated."

"Does father..."

Anja chuckled. "Yes your father knows Eli. And so do your other mothers." Anja told her. "We don't keep secrets from each other Eli, you know that. It was a very tumultuous time for me Eliani... my life was headed in a direction I did not want to go. When your father came back into my life after so many years it sent me into a tailspin because I loved him so. I treated him badly at first, angry at times, because I fully did not understand what it was I felt for him. Just as you have done with young Jomann I understand." Anja looked keenly at her oldest daughter in the transmission. "Danny and Julie were there as support for me." Anja continued. "I think we all knew it wasn't going to last. They both knew my blood burned for your father alone. And that was even before he changed me completely."

“But... but you were fully Hadarian before this mother.” Eli said. “How could he have such a pull over you?”

“You forget that one night we shared before we came back together. Our first night together ever.” Anja said. “It was that night that initially started to change me Eli. Enough so that my blood would only ever call for your father because that is what I wanted most of all as well. Because I utterly accepted it that night. Even your father did not know that is what he did to me... he was still trying to grasp what he was. He had no idea the effect it had on me, not until after Danny and Julie and I went our different ways.”

“Momma...?”

“Does your blood burn for him Eli?” Anja asked.

Eliani looked up at her. “Like it is lava in my veins.” She answered in a soft sincere voice that even she could barely hear.

“And Malic’s scent no longer permeates your blood?” Anja asked.

Eliani shook her head. “No. It hasn’t for days now.”

“Then you know how I felt after Danny and right up until your father changed me and claimed all that I was.” Anja said. “Took him long enough too.” She quipped playfully.

“It was the same... it was the same for you?” Eliani asked surprised.

“Eli our Hadarian blood may be strong, but your father’s blood will always be dominant.” Anja said. “I was not yet changed and I felt it burning in my veins, the desire for your father. The love I have for him. You are half Lycavorian Eli, but you have the blood of a Leonidas in your veins and because you were conceived during my first Phase, it will always be stronger than it is in your sister Retta. Any of your sisters really. I know what it feels like for you Eli because it is exactly what I feel.”

“So I... I never loved Malic?” She asked.

Anja shook her head. “No... I believe you cared for him deeply. I imagine you still do in some small way... just as I care for Danny. Like me however... you are so compassionate that many times you will mistake what you feel as love when it truly isn’t.”

“Andro... he said the same thing.” Eliani spoke. “He said I want to feel love so badly that I don’t truly know what I feel at times.”

“Your brother is wise beyond his years Eli... you know that. He’s downright frightening at times with the things he can sense. Your father is as well. Malic needed you at the time he came into your life Eli. He needed you to set him on the path he follows now. That path was to discover Nyla and that is why things happened as they did. It also set you on your path. Just as Danny needed me and I needed him at that particular time of our lives. He found Anuk and Nayeca and I rediscovered your father and mothers. Where I was always meant to be from the very beginning.”

“Mother... I... I look at him... I look at him and I want to...” Eliani stammered.

“You want to feel his arms around you.” Anja said almost wistfully and with a knowing smile. “You want to surrender all you are to him. You want to feel his aura pulsing through you unchecked and unabated. To feel his skin against yours and so much more.”

Eliani looked at her. “Yes.”

“How do you think I feel with your father Eli?” She said softly. “And it has grown even stronger since he touched me with his unshielded aura now. My blood burns even hotter for him in so many ways.”

Eliani looked at her with wide eyes. “His unshielded...”

Anja smiled. “It was beyond glorious Eli.” She said wistfully. “And it has brought me that much closer to him. To Aricia. To Dysea. All of us together.” She sipped her coffee again. “Is he... is he handsome?”

Eliani looked at her. “He is... he is beautiful momma.” She stated softly as Jomann’s face appeared in her mind. “So tall and powerful. His eyes are like oceans of blue and he smells like sweet jasmine coffee.”

“Then do not fight what you feel Eli.” Anja said softly. “Do not do what I did and fight the feelings inside you. Do not fight what your blood calls for you to do. As your purpose was to bring Malic and Nyla together... perhaps what happened was also intended for you to find Jomann. Because that is what fate has ordained.”

“I do not want father to be angry with me momma.” Eli said. “I know how he views you and my other mothers. How he views marriage and...”

Eliani stopped talking when she saw her father move into the transmission. He stepped up behind her mother and slipped his hands around her flat abdomen, pulling her back against him and leaning over to nuzzle Anja's cheek and neck. She saw her mother's eyes close in bliss and she knew. His deep brown eyes lifted to look at her in the transmission.

"You are the strongest of your sisters Eliani Leonidas." Martin spoke to her. "Just as Andro is the strongest of your brothers. Never deny what your blood tells you because you may think I do not approve. Never. None of you have ever feared talking to me about anything Eli, and I have always cherished that. If this man calls to you as he does, if he makes your blood burn so, then I expect you to act as you have always acted Eliani Leonidas. You are my oldest and my strongest daughter and you go after what you want. If what Andro has told me is true, this man... this Jomann, he is descended from one of the original packs on Lycavore and he burns just as badly for you as well."

"He... he said what he feels for me... it is like acid in his blood papa." Eli said softly not afraid to tell him. He was right and she had never been afraid to tell him anything no matter what it was. None of them had and she wouldn't start now. That closeness was part of the well known strength and mystique they had as a family.

Martin smiled. "Then I like him already. It tells me he will be devoted to you as no other could be. As I am to your mothers."

"Act as your blood and your instincts call for you to act Eliani." Anja spoke as she dropped a hand to stroke Martin's arm. "You may be Hadarian... but like me... we are also wolf. And that calls to us even more."

"What about Malic and Nyla?" She asked.

"I think you might be surprised." Martin said. "Being bound to dragons as they are will always allow them to see things others can not. Do not worry about them now Eli... you must do what your blood tells you or you will be distracted and confused and it may have results you do not want. There is too much happening around us and whether he will admit it to you or not... Androcles relies on you more than any of your siblings for you are closest to him in age and temperament and what you have experienced."

"He... he told me that." Eliani said. "Because of when I was conceived. So soon after him and what happened during that time."

Martin and Anja nodded together. "Yes." Martin said softly. "I had always thought he would be closer to Denali... but it seems you and Zarah know him in a way that his brothers do not. At least not yet. That will shift in the future somewhat I think... but you will always need each other." Eliani watched him lean over again and firmly nuzzle her mother's neck and cheek, whispering to her before he released her and left the transmission. Anja looked at her after a moment and moved closer.

"Do not deny what you so desire Eli." She stated softly. "That would be a crime."

Eliani Leonidas smiled slightly as she felt her spirits lift higher than they had in several days. "I won't mother." She stated confidently. "I promise you I won't."

"Good. You have a mission to go on, but I want you to contact me when you return." Anja said. "I want all the steamy details. About everything."

Eliani chuckled gently feeling a weight lifting from her shoulders and her heart. "You always want the steamy details mother." She stated.

"Of course! Those are the best kind!" Anja declared. "I love you Eli. We all do."

"I love you too mother. All of you." She answered. "*SCIMITAR* out." Eliani waited until the transmission had faded before taking a deep breath and feeling acceptance and peace at what she felt. She knew what she had to do now, for Jomann's sake as well as hers. She could not let anything happen to him because of her, because he was distracted.

Eliani Leonidas turned and headed out of the *SECOMROM* on a mission. And she would not be denied.

She looked miniscule compared to the *SCIMITAR*, but *VLOS VELVE* had teeth of her own and everyone knew it. She was tucked under the port side of the much larger ship and many crew members had moved to one of the dual port observation lounges to get a look at her because so few of them had been built and they were known to be a powerful ship for their class and envied by many for their speed and ability to disappear.

Am'uur hugged his younger sister in the other lounge adjacent to the one crowded with crew of the *SCIMITAR*; admiring the incredible strength she squeezed him with. Something he knew he new wolf blood gave to her. Lu'ria looked far more radiant than he had ever seen her, and he also was quick to notice that Sadi, Ne'Veha and even Carisia had strips of satin in their hair that matched the color of their Drow family. This signified that they were the lovers of their Drow Mistress, but seeing their beauty and how they entered the room had still struck him. He pulled back from Lu'ria and held her at arm's length for a log moment staring at her amber eyes and beautiful face.

"I have... I have never seen you so happy and vibrant sister." He spoke softly.

Lu'ria smiled at him brilliantly. "You have... you have no idea Am'uur." She stated softly as she squeezed him. "I wish to tell you so much... but it needs to wait for now."

Am'uur nodded his head as he looked up and saw Androcles entering the lounge with the two Lycavorians beside him and two blue skinned females behind him with two blue skinned males. These were the Vanari he knew. He watched as Andro came right up to him, leaning over to nuzzle Lu'ria's cheek. He saw his sister's eyes close in delight and he smiled to himself as Andro looked at him.

"Am'uur." He spoke.

"Milord... it is an honor." Am'uur answered.

Andro chuckled. "Please Am'uur... you are Lu'ria's brother and family. We do not stand on formality with family."

Am'uur smiled even wider. "Did you tell our father that sire?"

Andro nodded his head. "I tried too. I don't think I convinced him." He replied with a grin.

Am'uur smiled as well. "Good luck with that." He stated.

"So what do we have?" Andro asked.

Am'uur turned to the large table in the center of the lounge, the bow section of *VLOS VELVE* just barely visible in the large window. "We have a layout of the base and where we think the prisoners are being held according to the information from the pirate scum that we captured." He spoke as he moved over to the table. A portable holodisc had been set up and the schematics of the mercenary base were slowly rotating in a circular motion. "We have some new information that we received just before we left that may allow us entry into the base unopposed."

"New information?" Andro asked him as he studied the holo image of the base, no one but Jomann paying attention as Eliani came into the room late.

Am'uur waited until they had all gathered around the table and his amber colored eyes shifted quickly when he saw the Vanari female he had defended in the earlier transmission. He kept his face neutral, but Lu'ria and Andro detected the spike in his scent immediately when he looked at Tastia. She was standing beside Devra, her incredible green eyes focused entirely on him.

For her part Tastia Dal Vesch had never seen eyes that were so striking. The amber color was slightly different from his sister, a lighter amber shade, and they glinted in the direct light of the overheads that shone down on them. Tastia had not gotten a good look at this man in the transmission before, knowing only that he had stuck up for her when Coren had snapped at her. Regardless of that, he was an incredibly captivating man in her eyes, the likes of which she had never seen before. His ebony skin was the color of dark umber, and from what she could see it was stretched over a tall and powerfully built lean body. His white hair was long, well past his shoulders, but it looked exquisitely soft and was tied tightly with several strips of the same soft amethyst colored cloth that she saw Sadi and the others wearing. Tastia found she could not tear her eyes from this man, his four-inch high elven ears curved to points and slanted back towards his head, the tips just poking out from under the hair.

Am'uur tore his own eyes away from her and looked at Andro with a nod. "Yes. The three executives from AEC that we reported? It appears they are not there for the reasons we thought."

"Explain?" Andro said.

Am'uur motioned with his hand to the side of the table and they all watched as the Lycavorian plugged a data pad into the control slot on the table and the images of the three came up in separate holoimages. "All of them are AEC internal Security Andro." He stated. "Our mother has done business with AEC in the past and she developed a relationship with the President through their dealings for advanced inertia capacitors for Drow field generators. I thought perhaps she might be able to help, perhaps determine why these men and women

were there, so I contacted her on the way here. She in turn made contact with the President of AEC and discovered that they were AEC Internal Security and they are undercover acting as AEC executives willing to sell new technology to the highest bidder. It appears they have been investigating another individual employee for many months and they were coming to meet him or her to discuss terms of a large transaction.”

“How does that help us Am'uur?” Lu'ria asked now.

“Just before we left Icalro space the senior agent sent a coded transmission to my COM unit.” Am'uur answered. “The only way he could have got it is through mother. She would never have given it out unless she trusted the information the President of AEC gave to her.” Am'uur rotated the schematic of the mercenary base around and pointed to the main landing bay. “You have a *MENKLA* transport correct?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“The AEC agents have set it up that we are an independent mercenary team of former Union soldiers working for them and that we will be bringing in a shipment of experimental weapons and shields for the traitor to use as selling points.” Am'uur said. “Twelve of us total.”

“This Overseer is just going to allow this?” Andro asked.

“When he is getting forty percent of the initial profits... yes Milord.” Am'uur spoke.

“Forty percent?” Lu'ria gasped.

Am'uur nodded. “That was his stipulation. Any future contacts or transactions and he will accept only three percent to cover his overhead. The man who runs this base is not a fool.” Am'uur looked at him. “He’s also an Unsaar.”

Andro’s eyes grew a little wider. “The one that escaped my father’s purge?” He asked. “The one who was responsible for putting the hit on *Tenna Sivana*?”

Am'uur nodded. “Cyngi is his name. And yes... we believe it is the same individual. If what the AEC operatives are telling us is the truth.”

“How do you know any of this is true?” Coren barked from where he stood next to Ardan. “Everything they told you could be a lie! A trap!”

Am'uur stared at him from across the table, the distaste in his amber eyes obvious. “I do not know how the Vanari treat each other Regent Re Mydala... but for the most part, there are very few Lycavorians or elves that work as mercenaries or that betray the Union. Any of the founding races actually. They simply do not need too since they can achieve whatever it is they want with hard work and patience. A trait that runs very deep in both of our species. Those Lycavorians or elves who do choose to become mercenary scum do so for the love of violence and death and because they do not care. These are traits that the vast majority of us do not possess.”

“Don’t possess?” Coren spoke with wide eyes. “I have seen firsthand the violence you say your people don’t possess!”

“I said a love for violence and death Regent. No species is perfect and we have our bad apples as well as the next species. But Lycavorian and elf mercenaries are very rare, even within The Wilds. If you are referring to the attack on the Prince and Princesses that you were witness too Regent Re Mydala...” Am'uur continued. “Then you saw first hand how we value our lives and the lives of our loved ones. We will do what is necessary to defend those we love and those not able to defend themselves.”

“And what do you propose?” Coren asked. “That we simply waltz right in the front door of this supposed base?”

Am'uur smiled. “That is exactly what we are going to do.” He stated turning back to Andro. “One of the other AEC operatives will meet the RD Team here at the refuse hatch.” He explained pointing to the large vent like structure near the top of the mountain. “He will bring them in through the ventilation system to this point on level four. It is where the majority of the Vanari are being held.”

“The majority?” Tastia asked now. “They are not altogether?”

Am'uur shook his head. “Normally yes... but when high profile clients arrive several of the are chosen to provide...” Am'uur looked at Andro. “Personal attention.”

“Personal attention?” Lu'ria snarled barely able to keep the anger and contempt from her voice.

“It is part of what our young females learn as they grow Lu'ria.” Devra said completely unashamed. “The many arts of pleasure. All of them do so willingly for it leads to better unions when they discover their husbands during the Celebration of the Hundreds. It is not something we shy away from.”

“I can vouch for that.” Bren whispered as he leaned over and nuzzled Devra’s cheek.

Everyone saw her blush a darker blue, but she pushed back against him without any hesitation. "Hush Bren." She whispered back with a wistful smile.

Andro's eyes narrowed somewhat at the expression of disgust on Coren's face at this display of true affection and love from his former wife and Am'uur saw Lu'ria stiffen slightly beside him but he looked back to him and nodded. "Continue Am'uur."

"They are brought to his personal chambers here on level five. Just above the east side of the landing bay." Am'uur spoke. "His chambers take up a large portion of this section of the base and access is severely limited but this is where he entertains the most important clients."

"How did we get all this information Am'uur?" Lu'ria asked moving closer to her brother.

"Some of it came from the pirate scum that we interrogated, but most of it comes from the senior AEC operative." He answered. "This is his third time here in the last four months trying to close this deal with the AEC traitor."

Andro stepped closer to the table. "My mother Isabella knows the AEC president as well Am'uur." He spoke. "Once inside the base we will allow their operatives to secure him and return him for whatever it is they plan? The AEC president will not let his traitorous actions go unpunished."

"We don't know which group she will be among, but these are the only two locations where they will be." Am'uur spoke. "The Unsaar keeps them under very tight control because of their obvious abilities."

"You mean the Alkay we secret from our pores." Devra said.

Am'uur looked almost ashamed but nodded his head. "Yes."

Andro looked at Devra. "I'm still somewhat confused how that helps them if you can control it Devra." He spoke.

"Do not tell them!" Coren spoke quickly looking at his former wife. "It only gives them the advantage over us Devra!"

Devra rolled her eyes and was about to reply when Tastia beat her to it. "The chemical that they use to break Vanari females... it makes us very susceptible to outside stimuli. Any kind of stimuli. Normally we can control it just as other species do... but once this chemical is in our bloodstream we will react to the environment around us. If it is one of a sexual nature... then we will release our Alkay regardless of whether we want to or not."

"Tastia be silent!" Coren snapped.

"It takes away our ability to control how much we release and it will essentially drain our bodies of everything just to produce the Alkay." Devra stated softly looking at him and completely ignoring her former husband. "It is also the reason if the females are not treated quickly the chemical causes them to go insane and lose their minds. They become shells of who they once were."

Andro turned quickly and looked at Eliani. "Eli?" He asked.

"I have thirty-nine doses already prepped." She answered. "Based on everything mother sent to me, as long as there is even a minute amount of Alkay still within their bodies, it will negate the effects of the chemicals the OSG use and begin to allow their bodies to rebuild their immunities." She looked at Devra. "It will begin working almost instantly, those who have been held prisoner longer will take longer to react, but they will eventually return to who they were."

"What of those who have been held for many months or even years?" Ardan asked hopefully.

Eliani turned to him. "My mothers and Aunts are still doing analysis of the compounds Naesta and Lady Devra provided to them. If they have been held for less than a year then I can say with complete accuracy that we can cure them. Longer than that I don't know but they continue to work on it."

Andro looked at Ardan now. "How many Vanari females have been taken in the last year Regent Ardan?" He asked.

"Eighty-nine." Ardan answered instantly.

"How many are here Am'uur?" Andro asked. "Besides Caliria."

"If we are to believe what we have been told, at least thirty." Am'uur answered. "We will not know exactly until we reach them and discover this."

Andro nodded slowly and looked at the holoscreens of the base again. "Very well... I will lead the first team. Jomann and his personal team, Denali, Bren, Carisia, Lu'ria, Narice, Eli and Devra. Sadi will fly the *MENKLA* with Ne'Veha and one of the RD Team acting as engineer. Arran... you will have the new *STRIKER*

DT Mark II with Elynth, Anthar, Aradace, Thaura, Majeir and Deneth orbiting the base once you drop the second team. Once I signal you that we have all the prisoners I want you and Toria to blast yourselves an entrance along the west side of the landing bay here. The layers of rock are only two meters thick and the actual doors are thin.”

Arrarn nodded. “Two missiles should do a nice job.” He answered immediately. “The Mark II *STRIKERS* are six meters longer Andro so once inside I’m going to spin her in midair and set down with our nose facing out. We’ll drop the ramp and that will allow Elynth and the others to provide support if needed.”

Andro nodded. “Works for me. I will have Devra lead the prisoners back from our group with Narice and Bren providing security. Tastia can lead the others back from their objective with Am’uur and his team as security. The rest of us will cover their evac to the ships in the landing bay.” He said. “Dutkne... I want you to lead the second team with Am’uur.”

Dutkne looked at him. “Understood.” He nodded his head unsure as to why.

Andro tapped the side of his head. “Next to my mates and Jomann, you and I have the strongest possible connection within Mindvoice and I don’t want to use radios unless absolutely necessary.” Andro continued explaining his reasoning. “We’ll try and keep all communications between teams via Mindvoice. I know you can fight Dutkne, and very well. Zarah and Lucia told me.”

Dutkne looked at him sheepishly. “They told you about that huh?”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

Dutkne shrugged and nodded. “It makes sense.” He spoke. “Then they won’t actually know how many teams are assaulting them.”

“Tastia... you and Nirilo will be with Dutkne’s team and you will need to get a handle on any prisoners quickly.” Andro said. “We don’t know what kind of condition they will be in, but if we have to carry them all out we will, I just don’t want you to spend a whole lot of time trying to either console or calm them. We can do that when we are clear.”

Tastia and Nirilo nodded. “I don’t think we will have many issues.” She said confidently. “The OSG chemicals alter the balance of our Alkay... but it doesn’t strip away our senses until much later. I doubt we will have any trouble convincing them it’s best to leave.”

“I agree.” Nirilo said.

“I wish to go on this mission.” Coren stated bluntly looking across the table to where Andro stood. No one spoke as Andro lifted his eyes and looked at him keenly. Androcles Leonidas was very nearly the equal to his father when it came to being able to use his sense of smell, and it was widely known that his father’s sense of smell was unlike any Lycavorian ever born. Andro could detect no adrenalin dump into Coren’s bloodstream from a lie, not even a miniscule one, but his nose told him that Coren was holding back. He knew something that he was not sharing with everyone else, not even his good friend Ardan and that made Coren a wildcard Andro could not predict. A circumstance he did not like.

“Why?” Andro finally asked him. “You have done nothing but berate this mission from the outset. You seem more concerned about political blowback among your fellow Regents even though this has nothing to do with the Vanari Empire. Why the sudden interest Regent Re Mydala?”

“Caliria is my daughter as well!” Coren snapped.

Andro’s azure eyes narrowed slightly and everyone in the room who had even a small portion of Lycavorian blood in them took notice of Andro’s defensive body language. “You will forgive me if that is not a good enough reason to allow this given your actions these last few days and what you obviously feel for our species.” Andro told him. “As early as yesterday you were dead set against us even conducting this mission. Caliria was still your daughter then. I question your motives now.”

Coren’s face looked as if it was about to explode in anger and he stepped closer to the table. “Why you arrogant young...” He began to speak.

“I do as well.” Devra spoke then cutting off his statement and looking at him before he finished his sentence and found himself on the receiving end of Androcles Leonidas’s temper. It was something Bren had told her Coren did not want to be on the receiving end of.

“I am her father!” Coren barked.

Devra took a deep breath and shook her head. “You have never been a father to her Coren Re Mydala.” She stated plainly and completely without fear of reprisal. Coren’s famous temper no longer gave her pause

because what she had found here in the Lycavorian Union with Bren surpassed anything she had ever had with Coren. “You have been against this from the very beginning! You were content to just let Caliria become a statistic for the sake of politics and policy! Now you wish us to believe you actually care what happens to her?”

“I have been trying to look out for the best interests of our people Devra!” He popped right back at her. “Something that you and our other children no longer seem to care about.”

“You are wrong Coren.” Tastia spoke now before Devra could reply. “We have suffered under the OSG and their actions for millennia and you and the others on the Board of Regents, specifically the SBR, have done nothing to stop it.” She shook her head. “We have a chance here and now to change all that and you are against it. We have an opportunity to break the hold they have on our people and you resist. The SBR resists...” Tastia looked at Ardan. “Forgive me Regent Ardan... all but you it seems. But that is because you are here and you have seen what Androcles and his people have done for the Vanari. In less than a week... less than a week Coren... they have given us the means to break the chains around our feet! And they have asked for nothing in return! Nothing!”

“He is going to take my daughter!” Coren barked loudly thrusting his hand at Androcles. “What is that Tastia? So instead of her being with slavers... she is with him! What is the damn difference I ask you?”

“The difference is that you do not have faith!” Devra spoke. “The difference is that you do not know your own daughter! She and Androcles were meant to be together! She is meant to be part of his life! Of Sadi’s life! Lu’ria... all of them! You are just too blind to see it!”

“What I see is my daughter going from one life of slavery to the other!” Coren snapped. “All of you speak as if this is somehow preordained! What if she does not want this? What if she does not wish to be the plaything to a Lycavorian and his women? Have you thought of that Devra? Any of you?”

“This is not the time to speak of this Coren.” Ardan spoke now.

“Why not?” Coren snapped looking at him. “I can not believe you actually are going along with this Ardan. I thought we were friends? I thought we were of like minds?”

Ardan nodded. “And we were until I came here and saw what I have seen.” He answered. “All the centuries we have considered them beneath us... inferior to us... look what they have built Coren. A Union twice the size of the Vanari Empire with hundreds of different species who all live in harmony! They advance in leaps and bounds, not only in a technological sense but a morality sense, while we remain stagnant. They are accepting of others without question and...”

“They are extremely violent and have no qualms about unleashing that violence on those who do not agree with them!” Coren barked.

“Why do you fear my people so much Regent Re Mydala?” Andro’s voice broke into the exchange once more. His question caused every head to turn to him. “Dutkne has shown me everything that took place between our peoples all those years ago... and he did so from both perspectives. From your very own history scrolls even. We reached out to you in friendship and your people stabbed us in the back, and then denied it all.”

“We did no...” Coren began to answer.

“Do not think you can change history to suit your views Regent Re Mydala.” Dutkne snapped at him. “The Vanari feared us even then and to this day we do not know why. We trade with you... extend the hand of friendship to you and you turn your noses at us unless it suits the needs of the Vanari people. Or do you wish to deny that is exactly what the SBR does when it comes to the trade agreements. We...”

“Dutkne?” Andro interrupted him, waiting for him to turn and look at him. “Now is not the time as Regent Ardan has said.” He said softly. He turned back to Coren. “I do not know what it is that drives you to hate my people so... and to be honest I don’t really care. You can suffer with your hate as far as I am concerned. We will rescue those Vanari females that these mercenary scum hold. Once they are free... once Caliria is among us... you can see the decision she makes all for yourself Coren Re Mydala. We will certainly not hold her against her will if she does not wish to be with us, regardless of what you may think.” Andro moved around the table slowly until he was standing in front of Coren and looking at him. “Very well sir... I will allow you to accompany us on this mission. You will remain on the *STRIKER* with Regent Ardan, Arrarn, Toria and the support team. I will not allow you to endanger the mission by being part of one of the ground teams. Once Arrarn has landed and is standing by within the mercenary base, if you do anything that endangers them, those on the *STRIKER*, or either of the ground teams I will have Elynth burn your body to ash where you stand.”

“Now you threaten me as well?” Coren hissed softly.

Andro shook his head. “Not at all. I’m simply stating fact sir. Elynth will decide if your actions put anyone at risk and then she will act.”

“So you put a beast in judgment of my decisions?” Coren barked.

“Elynth is far wiser and more patient than me Coren Re Mydala.” Andro stated. “Be lucky that is what I’m doing... she will at least pause to consider things before cooking your flesh from your bones. I would simply kill you at the first sign of betrayal.” He turned away from Coren before he could respond and looked at the others.

“We have ninety minutes before we reach orbit. Once our attack begins, Manda will bring the Icalro Alliance to an end. Grab a combat nap or some extra food now. We will not have the opportunity once we arrive in orbit.” Andro finished.

They watched him walk out of the room, Lu’ria following close behind. There was silence among everyone until Devra turned to Denali and Arrarn. “Who is Manda?” She asked softly. “What does he mean that he will bring the Icalro Alliance to an end?”

Denali’s grin looked almost feral in nature and he met her eyes. “Manda is a she... Miranda Lorian... someone who is close to our age and lived with us for a time during a rough period in her life. She is now the commanding officer of the most advanced warships in the Union fleet. And it means just what he said Devra. Once this day is done, the Icalro Alliance will no longer exist as a working entity.”

SCIMITAR

PORT LANDING BAY

Eliani shifted her medical bag on her shoulder as she watched him securing a large crate with Nusa and Anicetus while Lysandra was strapping another to the floor of the *MENKLA* inside. She could smell him so prominently, her blood burning even now as she watched him, his jasmine coffee scent filtering to every portion of her mind. Her mother had been right of course, Andro had been right. What her body was telling her about what she wanted was far beyond anything that she had ever felt for Malic or Nyla. Her father’s blood within her was far more potent than it was in either Resumar or Arrarn or any of her half breed siblings. It had been like this from the very first day when she had dropped on him in that tunnel. It had taken her mind this long to come to terms with it however, come to terms with the fact that he was the one that she was meant for. It may have seemed odd or wrong to some species, how many Lycavorians chose their mates, but when their wolf blood called for another as Eliani’s did for Jomann there was no resisting it for very long. The desire and passion that coursed through her held more love in it than she had ever felt before and she needed to curb that burning. She needed to make him know she was sorry and that she wanted him just as terribly as she knew he wanted her. She had hurt him Eliani knew and she did not know how he would react now. She had to do this though... she could no longer wait... for she feared she would lose him forever if she did.

Jomann stood up slowly and ran the portable scanner over the crate. “We want to make sure they are heavy enough to make others believe they are full of weapons.” He nodded his head as the scanner chirped several times. “Excellent. Two hundred kilos and the small jammers are working. They won’t be able to see it’s just junk metal.”

Anicetus nodded his head as he too stood up fully. “I wish we could drop these crates on some of those *ronnus*.” He hissed. “That would be nice.”

Jomann chuckled. “I have noticed since joining my team that your violent nature has become more prominent Anicetus.” He stated.

Anicetus shrugged his broad shoulders. “Perhaps the Vanari Coren is right.” He stated with a smile as he mocked the man’s statement from earlier. “We are all violent creatures after all.” Anicetus turned his head when he saw Jomann’s body stiffen slightly and his eyes came up from the scanner. He saw and smelled the reason why just as quickly as Eliani Leonidas stepped up behind Jomann. Anicetus was an old wolf and he breathed a sigh of relief when he sensed her female aura pulsing madly as she stood behind Jomann. As it was in the gym, the scent of her desire for Jomann was saturating the area around them, only now it was much clearer and pronounced and without any doubts. She had accepted what her body and heart were telling her completely.

Finally. Anicetus thought to himself. Perhaps now we can go forward without all the hormones filling the air.

Jomann finally turned slowly and looked down into her face, her willow and peach scent maddening in every way to him. “What... what can I do for you Princess?” He stammered out the question.

Eliani knew after what she had done and what she had spoken to him she would have to be the one to act. He still believed she was mated to Malic and Nyla even though his scent no longer touched her blood in any way and while that was true, she did still have ties to them as far as property and such. None of that mattered to her right now... all she wanted was to feel his aura wrapped around her, pulsing through her. She tossed her bag to the ground at his feet.

“Would you load my bag for me Captain?” She asked in a voice that carried just a touch of arrogance in it. Enough though that it caused Jomann to react exactly as she hoped he would. Eliani had always been a good actress.

Jomann looked down at her bag as his anger grew. “I am not you personal...” He began speaking as he returned his gaze to her. His words were cut off as at that very moment as Eliani Leonidas unleashed every bit of her powerful female wolf aura right at him. Jomann acted as if he had been slapped in the face and he staggered back a step his eyes wide as Eliani leaped into his arms and covered his lips with her own while wrapping her arms around his shoulders.

The instant her lips touched his Eliani Leonidas lost the battle that had been raging inside her and she surrendered to what she felt so deeply. She had cut loose with every portion of her considerable female aura directing it completely at him and the effect had been so very telling. The instant his body reacted as it did Eliani knew what she had always desired to find, what she had thought she found with Malic, it was standing right in front of her. At the exact moment she felt his male aura respond Eliani jumped into his arms and kissed him. It was completely and utterly instinctive, the first time in her young life where she had ever allowed her instincts to rule her actions so prominently. As she felt his lips against hers and she stabbed her four inch long Hadarian tongue between his lips demanding entry, Eliani knew. Her blood surged with heat and desire unlike anything she had ever felt as his arms closed around her in reaction to her display. She could feel his aura hesitantly, unsure of what was happening, but wanting to wrap around her tightly. She pulled her head back then, realizing that he was holding her off the deck of the ship, still holding back because he was fearful and unsure and she looked into those wide, ocean blue eyes. Eliani whimpered in unrestrained bliss when she saw those eyes. So deeply blue and filled with a burning need and desire. A need and desire for her and for her alone. Eliani brought her hand forward and placed it on his cheek, over the top of the new scar she had given him, and in a single moment her hand flared a soft white and the scar was gone forever.

“For... forgive me Jomann.” She gasped softly.

“Princess... Princess what are you...” Jomann stammered unable to even form coherent sentences it seemed. His own blood was raging out of control now, feeling her body against his, her aura swirling around him.

Eliani shook her head and placed a finger to his lips stopping his words. “I am not... I am not mated Jomann.” She whispered to him so that only he could hear her words. “I know you can smell that. I was never meant for Malic and Nyla. I was... I was meant for you. I know you can smell how my blood burns for you, for I can smell your blood burning for me. I have... I have never felt this way before. My... my blood has never called for a man as it calls for you. I can't stop it... I can't control it.”

“Eliani...” He whispered trying to speak.

She shook her head quickly. “No. Listen to me. I am willful... I am stubborn and I have a sharp tongue! I have never... I have never desired a man as I desire you Jomann. It... it scared me to death! I have treated you... I have berated you and hurt you because I did not know what I felt scorching my veins. I know what it is now and I don't want to ever lose that. I don't want to lose you... I don't...”

The growl that escaped his throat didn't frighten her so much as surprise her. She felt his arms crush her body to his and then his lips came down on hers and silenced her words. When his tongue slipped past her soft lips Eliani Leonidas knew what it meant to be loved. She then tightened her grip on his shoulders and met his kiss with every ounce of fervor in her lithe body and her mind exploded with bright lights and passion. She felt him spin her around, felt them tripping over the crate and falling to the deck of the ship, but she didn't care. He cushioned their fall as she knew instinctively that he would. And then he was rolling over on the deck, pulling

her with him until he was above her and then Jomann stole her very essence with the ferocity of his kiss. His aura, so staggering in its intensity to her, wrapped around her entire being like a thick blanket. Her leg curled up along the side of his hip, one arm around his broad shoulders, the other hand pressed tightly to his handsome face. He was tentative for a split second realizing just how long her tongue truly was, but that quickly turned to dominance. His arms pulled her close to him, one hand going under her head to keep from banging her skull against the hard deck, the other dropping to her hip and her firm ass drawing her ever closer to him.

It was a kiss unlike anything Eliani Leonidas had ever experienced and it caused the fire in her blood to burn all the hotter. Every nerve ending in her body had come alive, every single pleasure receptor firing all at the same time. It caused her to become moist at her center, her pungent scent driving Jomann to deepen their kiss even more. No man had ever done this to her, and Eliani's mind was screaming out its delight. He was an alpha wolf, almost on a par with her father and brother as far as Eliani was concerned, and he was making her his. It seemed like hours before he pulled his lips away slowly, Eliani trying to keep them fastened on hers and she felt his nose and soft lips drop to the side of her neck and just behind her ear to nuzzle her skin firmly. The area behind the ear was one of the most prominent scent glands on the body of a Lycavorian or anyone who had been turned and he was inhaling deeply as he burned her scent into his brain. This caused even more sensations of cascading delight to rock her senses and she gasped loudly as he lifted his face once more to stare into her fern green eyes. His fangs were fully extended now, his ocean blue eyes changed and instantly this caused Eliani to change as well, the wolf in her surging forth as her dual fangs extended and her eyes shifted to their wolf nature. His eyes captured her, held her frozen in their gaze and she basked in their beauty as she lifted her hands to either side of his face.

“Wow! Oh... wow!” She gasped softly her eyes wide.

“You... you are a vision to me Eliani Leonidas.” Jomann whispered as he brought a hand up and used his fingers to push some of her red hair from her face. “I will... I will love you as you have never been loved before.”

Eliani's natural born defiance reared forth playfully and she stroked his cheeks with her fingers. “You... you think you can handle me?” She asked him softly with a brilliant smile of adoration on her face.

Jomann growled again in his throat and it sent vibrations of delight through her body as his eyes flared possessively. “I will tame you Eliani. But not completely. I will claim you here and now if that is your wish!” He rasped, leaning over to kiss her softly, their fangs keeping them from fully kissing as they banged together gently, but the sensations and feelings were no less ardent.

Eliani couldn't help but smile as her body hummed in response to his words. “Now that sounds inviting.” She cooed out the words as her arms wrapped around his back and tried to pull him even tighter. “And kinky.”

“*Ahem!*” The deep voice they both recognized broke into their reverie and Jomann lifted his head quickly as they shifted and turned on the deck looking up and behind them.

Androcles stood behind them, Sadi and Ne'Veha leaning up against his sides, with Carisia and Lu'ria on either side of them. Devra and Bren and all the others were standing around as well looking at them with knowing smiles on their faces.

“Milord!” Jomann gasped.

“While the thought of watching you claim my sister in the landing bay is not one I care to imagine... perhaps you could wait until the mission is over and you two are someplace more private.” Andro stated very calmly as he looked at them trying to hold back the smile that was forcing its way onto his face.

“I don't know *fervon*.” Denali spoke with a huge smile stepping up next to him. “It might be worth it. He's the only one who has ever gotten her to shut up like that.”

Jomann climbed quickly to his feet, unashamed of his actions as he pulled Eliani up and drew her close to him. Eliani pressed against him very tightly, equally unashamed of their actions and her beautiful face beaming, even as her aura swirled around him announcing to every Lycavorian female in the landing bay that he belonged to her now just as Jomann's aura did the same to any nearby male. They stood there looking at Andro, neither of them allowing their wolf fangs to retract which was a clear sign to Andro of their feelings for each other and their intent.

“Forgive me Milord.” Jomann spoke quickly.

Andro chuckled. “Don’t ask me for forgiveness.” He stated. “As long as I can order you to kiss her whenever she starts to run off at the mouth and annoy everyone.”

“Piss off Andro!” Eliani barked at him.

“See!” Denali barked.

Andro looked at Sadi. “Oh... this is going to interesting.” He said. “Eliani Leonidas has finally met her match.”

Sadi’s green eyes narrowed slightly. “I don’t know Andro my love... on the deck in the landing bay with a crowd watching sounds rather exciting. Perhaps we should...” She told him. Eliani burst out laughing at the look on her brother’s face and it served to relax everyone at least to some degree. Yes they were going on a very dangerous mission, but they were prepared and exceptionally well trained and ready. The laughter simply accomplished removing the last of the butterflies from everyone’s emotions. They watched as Andro chased Sadi up into the *MENKLA* transport, her voice yelping in surprise as they all followed.

ONTAHE

We are coming Inamarno. Be strong... we are coming for you and you will be with us. Soon Inamarno.

Caliria Re Mydala smiled in her sleep as those beautiful azure eyes blinked and began to fade along with the deep voice. She didn’t want them to go; she didn’t want those sea green orbs, those amber colored eyes or those stunning brown and maya blue sets of eyes to disappear as they always did. She never wanted them to fade away. She found such solace and love in those eyes and every time she dreamed of them she woke feeling just a little better. At least until her reality settle in.

Caliria Re Mydala was three hundred and twenty-two years old and nothing in her life had ever been easy. She was the outcast daughter of a very powerful Vanari politician father and a very popular Vanari politician mother. She had been born with what had been considered a genetic defect among the Vanari people for millennia. She had been born with long, silky raven black hair. This fact alone instantly made her an outcast among her own people in many ways. Vanari females born with black hair were considered second class citizens, unable to hold political office of any kind and in some parts of the Vanari Empire, unable to go into particular shops and even restaurants. Her name at least had made it easier in some ways for her, as well as the love shown to her by her mother and siblings. None of them had ever done anything to adhere to the normal practice among the Vanari when it came to dark haired females, and she knew this angered many of their people as well as her father. Her mother Devra and her siblings didn’t care, and they would often join her for lunch or shopping or just about anything one would do with a daughter or sister. She had even traveled to the Protectorate homeworld to visit her brother and she met the Lycavorian female that held his attention so completely. They had always supported her in any endeavor she chose to undertake, even going so far as to publicly show that support at rallies Caliria had arranged and attended. She was a vocal proponent of fighting to get equal rights for all Vanari females with dark hair, for the medical evidence was very clear that it was not a defect in any way. The only thing she lacked... the one thing she had always wanted more than anything... was the love and support of her father.

She had gone through the Vanari Cadre Commando training and served nearly three decades in their service, finally leaving them with a stellar record and many decorations for outstanding work and loyalty. She had gone back to school three different times now for one degree or another, all in the hopes that her father would recognize her accomplishments and at least show her that he cared for her even a little bit. That support and love never came, even privately, and above all else that is what hurt the most.

Now however, now she would never know that again. She would never see her family again and she would live out the remainder of her days as a whore for aliens who only wanted to use her for their sadistic pleasure. She remembered clearly the day she had been taken, led into a trap by a man she thought actually cared for who she was and not what she looked like. She should have known better the moment the Eridiani male began to show interest in her that it was not real. She had gotten too close with her research to discovering how to counter the Orionis Syndicate’s hold over her people with their chemical agent. She should have known right away he was only there to discover what she had found. Instead, she so desired to be wanted by someone that she let him inside the walls she usually kept around her heart and mind and he betrayed her. He led her

right into the trap that got her captured and taken prisoner and then turned into what she was now. Her dreams were all she had left now, and they were such exquisite dreams. A beautiful man, with short black hair and breathtaking azure blue eyes, a stunning blond woman with sea green eyes and a delicious tattoo over her luscious center. An ebony skinned female elf with shimmering white hair and another elf female with long, flowing brown hair and a diminutive raven haired female with maya blue eyes. She had dreamed of them so vividly these last weeks, being with them, sharing in their love and lives. She had seen so many things when she was with them in her dreams, heard their voices and shared so many images from her mind. She didn't know who they were, figments of her imagination most likely, but they were all she wanted to see anymore and she went through each day solely to return to her dreams in the night. She...

"Caliria!" The female voice broke into her thoughts suddenly and Caliria's stunning honeydew green eyes popped open as she came fully awake in an instant. "Caliria wake up!"

Caliria Re Mydala blinked several times as her eyes focused on the blond haired Vanari female in front of her kneeling next to the hard bed. She groaned softly and drew the back of her hand across her face.

"Yssyla?" Caliria spoke softly. "What is it?"

"You were... you were speaking in your sleep." The young woman answered. "I thought maybe something was wrong."

Caliria focused her eyes clearly and shook her head as she slowly sat up. The soft yellow wrap barely covered her supple five foot seven, hundred and twenty pound figure. Her breasts were of above average medium size and exceptionally firm, her nipples small but very rigid. Her long blue legs curved slightly to encompass slender hips and an incredibly firm ass. Her skin was like satin in its texture, the cornflower blue color soft and contrasting greatly with her raven black hair.

Caliria shook her head and smiled slightly as she looked at the young woman. "No." She answered. "They were only... they were only dreams Yssyla. Wonderful dreams... but dreams nonetheless."

"They must have been more than wonderful... you have goosebumps all over your body Caliria." Yssyla told her.

Caliria smiled and looked at her arm seeing the goosebumps as they were beginning to fade. "Yes... they were." She said finally. She looked at her again. "Is something wrong? You are awake earlier than normal."

"I heard the guards talking Caliria." Yssyla spoke. "The ugly ones. They said there are some powerful people coming soon. They said we would be the ones to entertain them and they would be coming to take us to the... to his personal quarters. They were very vulgar. They said they wanted to watch as the daughter of a powerful Vanari Regent was..."

Caliria took her hands and squeezed them. "They have said these things before Yssyla." She stated.

Caliria had fallen into a role of sorts since coming here only weeks ago. She was by far the oldest female to be here, though age really did not matter to the Vanari since they lived for thousands of years, but her name was what garnered the respect the other twenty-nine females showed to her. All of them were dark haired Vanari with the exception of Yssyla and two other young females. Three of the females were very nearly lost to them forever, their minds all but destroyed by continued use of the chemicals that the slavers used to force them to excrete their Alkay. They had been here the longest, two of them over a year, and Caliria was surprised they had lasted this long. She had only been here in this place for just short of two weeks, prior to that on an OSG slaver ship where she had been broken and used by the Eridiani men there. The first day she had arrived here the other females had begun turning to her for comfort and any kind of support. She was well known among the dark haired Vanari females and all of them had seen her face at some point on the Vidnews channels within the Empire. It was almost natural that they turn to her now and Caliria did her best to comfort them as much as she could and to remain positive though she knew their lives would never be the same again. She had lost count of the men who had used her since she had been taken, but she remained strong despite what they did to her and forced her to do. Twice now she and Yssyla had been forced to pleasure each other in front of paying customers, and while the men or sometimes women who witnessed this got their sick gratification from these acts, Caliria and the others also took comfort from how they could make each other feel. Yssyla Bon Tiarr was a stunning young woman of only twenty-one years old, her father a powerful businessman and member of the lower Board of Regents. She had been here for three months now and she was using the sexual favors she had to perform or endure as a means to keep her sanity. Caliria determined this after the first time they were forced to

pleasure each other in front of customers. While the other Vanari females had gone out of their way to avoid her, thinking she was just whoring herself out to gain favor, Caliria knew differently and had become very close friends with her.

“It is different this time Caliria.” Yssyla said softly. “They are very nervous about these new people.”

Caliria looked at her. “Nervous? Why?”

“I heard them talking outside the door. The people coming here are Lycavorians from this Union that they so fear.” Yssyla told her.

“If they are coming here Yssyla then they are not like those who are in the majority.” She told her.

“Vanari Intelligence and my brother have told me they do not abide slavery of any kind in this Union. If these Lycavorians are from the Union then they are no better than the others who have forced us to do what they want.”

“We can always hope.” Yssyla said. “I always thought many of those who worked at the embassy on Austrova were very handsome. They would make strong husbands. I have heard they worship their wives like they are goddesses.”

Caliria smiled gently at her. “Yes I have heard that too.” She said reaching up to stroke Yssyla’s long blond hair. “But even if you were not here... you know as well as I your father... your entire family would never approve of that. You know how our people view Lycavorians and your family as well as mine have much political influence. They would never... your father would never allow it.”

Yssyla looked at her evenly. “After... after what we have been made to do here Caliria... if by the grace of the Prophets we ever do return home... I will not care what my family or my father wants. I will do as I wish.” She spoke firmly.

“Then hold onto that hope.” Caliria said.

“At least it will be with you.” Yssyla said softly moving to sit next to her on the bed and pressing close. “Many of the others simply go through the motions. At least with you we can take whatever pleasure we can gain from what we have to do and share it.”

Caliria nodded. “Yes we can. It will help to keep us strong and sane.” She answered.

“Do... do you think we will ever see home again Caliria?” Yssyla asked her as she took her arm and snuggled closer.

Caliria looked at her. “I have spent my life fighting odds...” She replied. “There is always hope Yssyla. There is always hope as long as we keep it alive.”

They both turned as the door to the large room unlocked and the rat faced Bo'yak guard pushed his way into the room with the same feral disgusting look on his face as he always had. Caliria sincerely hoped none of them would ever have to tolerate the attentions of these vile creatures.

“Time to go bitches!” He snarled at them. “You are going to entertain some Lycavorians this night, and all of them are hung like bulls! It will be fun to hear you squeal!”

Caliria rose to her feet and kept hold of Yssyla’s hand. “Be strong.” She whispered. “Be strong.”

They didn’t look at the grinning Bo'yak mercenary as they moved into the hallway and began to follow the second one down the steel gray corridor.

MENKLA TRANSPORT

TWENTY-TWO MINUTES FROM LANDING

“Eli... are you sure?” Andro asked her.

They stood apart from the others on the ship, Jomann standing behind Eliani, his body pressing against her back to provide support to her, and Eliani leaning back against him as if it was the most natural thing in the world to do. Sadi stood next to Andro with a look of horror on her face at what Eliani had just told them. Andro had called her from the cockpit only moments ago when she felt his emotions spike. They were standing towards the front of the transport; away from the others who occupied the passenger section of the *MENKLA*. The false crates were loaded and secured near the end of the ramp that would drop when they were on the ground.

Eliani nodded her head slowly. "I tried to tell you a few nights ago... just before the OSG assholes attacked." She stated softly. "And then after we talked to Resumar but with everything that was happening I forgot all about it. I'm sorry Andro. It is only a theory... it may very well be nothing at all."

"Do not be sorry *arande*." Andro told her gently. "You were unfocused and confused for a time as you sorted out your feelings. And you are right, it is only a theory, but it is the most feasible one I have heard or have been able to come up with myself and I have been making them up and tossing them out for over a week now within my head. *Son vada carians*... if it is true father will fly into an uncontrollable rage! He'll want to kill every Kavalian within the universe."

"It's not the Kavalians who would do it my love." Sadi spoke clutching his arm. "This is... this is your uncle."

Andro looked at her then. "You... you are right *KertaGai*. They are just a tool he is using to fulfill his perverse desires."

"Andro... could this be what they have been working towards all along?" Eliani asked softly. "If you think about it, and I have, trying to kill all of us... believing that they have killed father? And then sanctioning an attack on you by Brendi's OSG people. Why do that unless this is something like what they were planning all along?"

"Why use your mother Eliani?" Jomann asked now. "He has the blood of a Leonidas in his veins. Why would he need your mother to do this? If it is true."

Andro looked at Eliani, their eyes meeting for a long moment of silence and then she turned her head and looked up into his eyes. "She is the only remaining female heir to the last Elven King. The only remaining blood of original elven royalty." Eliani said finally.

"Yes... but your mother... Anja is also royalty Eli." Sadi spoke quickly.

Andro nodded his head. "But she is capable of insuring that it never happens because of her healing abilities and other skills." He said looking at Sadi. "And she does not harbor the same inbred morality that all female elves do. Since the time they first became a species under the Elder Mother's gaze."

"What... what do you mean Andro?" Jomann asked.

"It is one of the things that the Elder Mother showed me recently that even I did not know at the time." Andro said. "It is part of her history and it goes all the way back to when the elves first came into being on Elear. They were embroiled in a conflict with another species on Elear and that is where it was born in the beginning."

"What was born?" Jomann asked softly.

"The overpowering instinct to never take the life of a child growing within you." Eliani said softly as she leaned back against him even more in sorrow and looked at Andro. "This is when it started Andro?" She asked.

Andro nodded his head. "Arzoal... let's just say that Elynth and I are now privy to a part of the Elder Mother's history that no one has ever known. And it confirms some things that elven historians have been saying for decades. The elven people as a species have not been around as long as everyone thinks." He looked at them. "Throughout elven history this instinct has always been the case, and this is why so many species have taken elven females prisoner during the many millennia they have existed as a species. They knew they would never destroy a life that was also part of them. The elves that Walter created on Earth would not have this inbred instinct because it was something they never experienced and Walter only used the gene sequences and DNA that the Coven had which was completely pure, with no emotional connection."

Jomann's face grew dark as realization of what Eliani and Andro were saying came to him and he looked at Andro. "Your uncle is a Lycavorian!" He growled. "He would resort to this... this vile action?" He asked with savage anger in his voice.

Andro met Jomann's eyes. "My uncle stopped being Lycavorian the moment he betrayed his people. His own blood. Athani and Jalersi have already said he is willing to do anything to achieve his goals. Their father as well. Eli is right... as depraved as it is... I can not... I can't put it past him. It all makes sense as horrible as it sounds. It is why he would take *Medwaw* For'mya and not any other. He could combined the royal bloodlines of two founding members of the Union."

"But Arrarn and Byron... they already have done that. They are the sons of your father and For'mya. They have already sealed that bond of blood." Sadi spoke.

Andro nodded. "Which means my uncle may have found a way to use this and bypass whatever laws regarding ascension are in place already." He said.

"Trying to kill Andro..." Eliani said shaking her head slowly from side to side. "The oldest and next in line if father ever was killed. Trying to kill all of us... it would only make it easier to do what he wants to accomplish. That is the list we saw in *Tenna's* hospital room Andro."

Andro nodded. "Yes." He hissed softly. "I... I can't believe I didn't see this before now!" Andro rasped louder.

"There is no way you could have imagined this *Saradasaar*." Said spoke grabbing his arm. "You don't think that way... in such despicable manner."

"Sadi is right Andro." Eliani said softly.

"Jomann... initiate a SecureCom to Earth! I have to speak with *Tenna* Deia or the *Feravomir*!" Andro said.

"Andro... the transmission disc is in the passenger area." Jomann spoke. "Everyone will be able to see it."

Andro looked at him. "It doesn't matter now! I need to speak with one of them quickly! They must know this! They have to find out what it is my uncle is going to do! It is the only way to..."

"Andro... we don't even know for sure that this is true." Eliani stated.

Andro looked at her with wide eyes. "It is true *arande*! It has to be! Why else would she act in the manner as this Poysha says? Like she is without hope! Like she is lost! He must have done something to her... drugged her or something to get her to go along with this!"

"Regardless... what he did it is still rape! Your father still lives!" Jomann hissed quite viciously. "It would never stand up or be recognized!"

Andro looked at him. "Not if she believes all of us are dead!" He stated. "He can control everything she sees and hears!" Andro's eyes grew wide all of a sudden. "That's it! That is why he had the Immortals take *Medwaw* Dysea! He didn't want to give her to Laustinos as a prize... he was using her as leverage against *Medwaw* For'mya! A reason to submit to him if she thought father and all of us were dead! If she did it thinking she was saving *medwaw* Dysea... if she did it willingly... then it is not rape!"

Eliani's hand came up to cover her mouth as she gasped. "Andro no!" She stammered as she realized exactly what he was saying now. "If she... if she thought we were all dead. If she thought father was dead. She would do anything to keep mother from becoming a slave to Immortals! To protect those she loves! She held this dearest to her heart!"

"And he knew that!" Andro snarled savagely, his fangs bursting from his gums in barely controlled rage as he spun around and slammed a large fist into the unyielding bulkhead of the ship. "He knew that... and he must have discovered about the elven morality of never taking a life growing within you! He used it against her!" He turned to Jomann. "I need that uplink now!" He snapped.

Jomann nodded without hesitation and moved into the passenger area of the *MENKLA* as everyone's eyes began to turn towards where they had been standing, Lu'ria and Carisia sensing the emotions from both Eliani and Andro rising. Denali turned from where he was talking with Bren and looked at his brother and sister as Jomann began to stab his fingers down on the control panel for the communications array. He turned and began moving towards them quickly knowing that something was wrong.

Something was very wrong.

EARTH SPARTA ROYAL ESTATE VILLA

"...can not be serious Androcles!" Deia exclaimed.

Colonel Fache had woken her and Helen in an urgent haste and ushered them half dressed to the secure communications room in the King's office.

"I am deadly serious *Tenna*." Andro replied. "The more I run it through my head, the more it makes perfect sense. It fits exactly with everything they have done." He shook his head in the transmission, Deia and

Helen both able to see nearly everyone in the background of the transmission, all of them watching intently. “Take out the Drow outposts so they can not warn us what is coming or discover the connections he had made with the Immortal scum acting as his mercenaries. With the contacts many of the Drow leaders had made, they would never have been able to get so many ships close to Kranek without us knowing about it. Laustinos told them to remove our eyes and ears first to make things easier. With the Drow eliminated, if it had gone as they must have planned, they could have killed us all and no one would have been the wiser for several days at least. Then there is Laustinos helping their agents there on Earth. Setting the explosives in the Senate Building. How did they know mother was with you in your office *Tenna*? They have had people watching her since they came up with this twisted plan! It is the only plausible explanation. They knew exactly where she was when they began their attack on father. Killing father was only part of their plan. Taking mother and killing you was the other!”

“They have contacted us about where the meeting is to take place Andro!” Deia said suddenly unable to truly believe what her nephew was saying.

“It’s on Hadaria isn’t it?” Andro asked her seeing her eyes grow wide.

“Yes. How did... how did you know that?” Deia asked.

“Because that is also part of their plan and Resumar’s contact informed him. He told me the last time we spoke.” Andro spoke. “Usurping mother from her rightful place and installing a government favorable to them was always their intention. A government that would give them a foothold within Union space. Their actions on Hadaria have been well thought out for some time. They were patient and they provided only peripheral support to that bitch Buonau until the time to act was upon them. I do not know how long the plan with mother has been in place. Several months at least.”

“We have been going through the Ascension laws already Androcles.” Helen spoke now. “We have found nothing that could help him so far. Nothing. Even if he has done what you think.”

“He has done this! I can feel it within me *Feravomir*!” He looked at her. “There has to be something *Feravomir*! A simple word or sentence... a single paragraph buried in the mundane.” Andro told her. “There are seventeen Chronicles of Lycavorian Law! Each of them is nearly a thousand pages! There must be something!”

Deia rose slowly to her feet, steadying herself with the arm of the couch and Fache moving closer to assist if she needed him to. “*Mandri*... you are alive.” She spoke. “After you there is Eli and then Resumar. Then Denali. All of you are still alive. That is the order of Ascension should anything happen to your father and mothers. That is written in the Chronicles. There is no way he could accomplish this with all of you still alive.”

“And that is why he has tried to kill us *Tenna*.” Eliani spoke now. “Andro twice now! But even though he has failed in that he is still pressing forward so there must be something he is going to use!”

Helen stepped closer to the transmission. “Have you told Arrarn?” She asked.

“*Feravomir*... I will keep nothing from my brothers and sisters!” Andro stated. “This is not something I could keep from him even if I wanted too. And I don’t want too. He would see it... he would see it in my eyes. You know this.”

“Arrarn Leonidas!” Helen spoke louder.

There was a long pause before Arrarn’s voice came into the transmission from the *Mark II STRIKER* he and Toria were flying shrouded right next to the *MENKLA*. “I am... I am here *Feravomir*.” The rage in his voice was nearly a palpable thing and everyone could feel it. You didn’t need to be Lycavorian to sense that.

“Arrarn... I can hear the hate in your voice.” Helen spoke gently. “The rage and the need for vengeance.”

“What... what am I supposed to feel *Feravomir*?” He asked. “She is... she is my mother! Our mother! I will carve a path of death across the Kavalian Empire if this is true *Feravomir*. I will not stop until he is dead. Until everyone behind this is as dead as dead gets!”

“I will be beside him *Feravomir*. Without pause or question.” Andro spoke.

“As will I.” Denali spoke coming up next to him.

“Me as well.” Eliani chimed in. “All of us *Feravomir*! You know this!”

“This is not what your mother would want!” Deia snapped moving closer as well. “Your father will be bad enough... if it is true, once he discovers this he will be uncontrollable! We can not have the entire Leonidas family seeking blood retribution! We have a entire Union to think of and...”

Deia stopped talking on her own as her words echoed in her head. What she was saying clashed with everything that was burning in her own Lycavorian blood. Her mind filled with the images she had seen while she faded in and out of consciousness buried beneath that building. She had shared them with no one... not even her beloved mate... they were images and voices that were so very near and dear to her heart. Faces and voices she had not seen in millennia and that she had missed terribly for so long. She turned and looked at the much younger Helen, a woman not even close to her in age, but a woman that held the hopes and values of thousands upon thousands of years within her because of the memories and values of Canth. The two words she heard most prominently were two words that a man had spoken to her and others nearly four thousand years ago. Two words that had reverberated throughout all of them at the time and two words that now filled her mind. Spoken by a man who she had come to adore and respect as not only King, but the beloved mate of her beautiful sister.

"No more." Deia whispered looking at Helen.

"*Tenna*?" Andro questioned from within the transmission.

Helen moved closer to her. "I remember them as well Deia. He remembers them." She spoke softly.

"No more." Deia spoke more firmly as she looked to her *Mandri's* oldest and strongest child. Fate had taken so much from her, from all of them throughout the many years, but fate had returned what it had taken ten fold with the young man standing in that transmission, his brothers and sisters and their father and mothers. "No more!" She hissed out the words now. "No more!"

"*Tenna*?" Andro asked again.

"We will react no more!" Deia barked. "It is not our way! It is not the Spartan way! We are done reacting!"

Helen nodded her head in agreement and turned to look at Andro in the transmission. "It begins now Androcles." She stated. "It begins now!"

"*Feravomir* we can not... father must..." Andro began to speak but stopped when she shook her head.

"Listen to me young Androcles Leonidas! Pain and fear comprise the forge in which the finest living weapons are created. This holds true for both wolves and dragons. You and Elynth have survived this crucible Androcles Leonidas. Alba Tau was where you were truly born and forged. And it is where your father almost lost himself. He has left you to carry on in his stead for now, for he knows this will not be the war the decides the fate of us all."

"*Feravomir*..." Andro began.

"Now it is the time to turn the weapon you and your bonded sister have become loose. And woe unto those who stand in your way." Helen said.

"*Feravomir*... what you and *Tenna* are saying. It..."

"No more!" Helen spoke firmly. "Two words spoken by your grandfather when he made the decision we would no longer suffer under the oppression of the High Coven. *No more!*" She moved closer to the transmission now, almost touching it. "Do you truly believe that you and your father could hide what you have learned and taught yourselves from Arzoal and I young Androcles? What you have learned and then taught your siblings and your Bonded brothers and sisters? What you have taught all those with the purest of blood that surround you? Your father has rediscovered himself once more Androcles... rediscovered the man he was and he burns brighter within Mindvoice than he ever did. Just as you now do. You and your father, Elynth, Torma, all of you have obtained a level of power and ability that Arzoal and I could never hope to match or achieve. You have done so in secret, teaching each other. Learning from each other. And you have passed this knowledge on to your family. This is not something you could hide from us for very long Androcles."

"*Feravomir* we..."

"You must hide it no longer! You, your father, your siblings! Now you must unleash it!" Helen snapped. "No More Androcles! It begins now! It begins with the actions you are about to take part in! And the actions your father will begin in a matter of days! This is what your grandfather Resumar deemed necessary and it is what is necessary now. The Kavalians... the Icalro scum... everyone in the galaxy must now be made to know we will not stand by any longer! No more Androcles! No more!"

"Do what your blood calls for Androcles!" Deia spoke again. "Be as ruthless as death itself and make them see! No mercy! No retreat! Helen and I will do what we must here! We will find what it is your uncle is going to use. And if what you believe has happened is indeed true... if it is true... then I expect... your father

and grandfather will expect... our people will expect you to unleash the *Sirogus rie Jorbhe* itself! And burn the vileness clean!”

Andro stood there for a long moment in silence staring at them in the transmission. His head canted slightly to the side and he was undoubtedly speaking with Elynth in the *STRIKER*. His azure eyes grew a little brighter and then he turned those orbs back on them.

“So be it.” He said simply.

The transmission ended abruptly and Helen gripped Deia’s arm as she turned to Fache. “Colonel... call everyone here now! Everyone! We must discover what Pusintin is going to do before Andro goes to Hadaria!”

Fache nodded his head without question and sprinted from the room as Helen turned back to Deia.

“Will he do it Helen?” Deia asked her.

“Deia... we have just removed the chains of bondage from the two most powerful forces of nature to ever exist in our combined lifetimes.” Helen said softly. “It is no longer a matter of if Androcles or Martin will do it. Now it is a matter of what will remain when they are finally finished.” She moved closer and took much of Deia’s weight from her still very weak legs onto her side. “Come... we must find what it is Andro believes Pusintin has found that he is going to use when they arrive on Hadaria.”

“Martin will... Martin will go into a berserker rage Helen. If it is true he...” Deia said as they began moving across the room. “She is his *Kinsoaurgai*.”

Helen shook her head. “No. Martin has transcended that now Deia. I know you have seen it. If this is true... if it is true you will see a different Martin I believe. You will see... you will see the cold, calculating and savagely lethal warrior that his father could become. The man I saw on so many occasions. That is what we will see Deia. And nothing will stand between him, nothing will stand between Aricia, Anja, Dysea and Isabella until For'mya is once more back within their arms. Androcles is the anvil... his father the hammer. Nothing between them will survive when the hammer falls and strikes the anvil. Nothing.”

“...so be it.”

The transmission ended and left Androcles Leonidas standing there in silence. Not one set of eyes on the *MENKLA* removed themselves from where he stood. Even Devra, who had only truly just come into her own when she had come to this place and discovered all that she had, was riveted in place and unable to move. The emotions wafting from Androcles were so very easy to detect. The only one brave enough to move was Sadi. She stepped right up to him, pressing her body tightly to his front, Lu'ria and Carisia quickly following suit and pressing against his sides. They all watched as their heads touched together, only Ne'Veha missing because she was still flying the ship, but with them in that moment nonetheless via Mindvoice. It was easy enough for them to hear Elynth’s voice as it filled Andro’s mind lie musical chimes in the wind.

[The Feravomir is right my beautiful Bonded Brother. Events are happening so fast... and we can no longer hide what we have become. None of us can.]

[We knew this day would come didn't we sister?] Andro spoke as his arms curled around Lu'ria and Carisia bringing them closer against him as his lips brushed against Sadi’s cheek.

[Yes we did.] Elynth spoke. *[We can no longer deny it Andro. Alba Tau is where we were truly born! Just as the Feravomir has said. We can not let what happened to our fathers happen to us. We have never tried to deny what we are and it has always made us stronger. Our fathers Andro... they are once more themselves my Bonded Brother... and they are stronger for it. As strong as we are now. Our brothers and sisters are stronger. The Feravomir and Deia are right Androcles. No more.]*

Andro stared into Sadi’s jungle green eyes more deeply than he had ever looked into them before. He could see into his *SirsanGai*’s eyes even as she flew the ship. He turned his head slightly to stare into amber and maya blue eyes for brief seconds. Those sets of eyes, so utterly beautiful to him, they filled him with purpose and love. And soon the final set of eyes would be with them, part of them, honeydew green and full of life and love.

Andro took a deep breath and stepped back from the women he loved slowly. They nodded their heads and immediately Sadi moved back for the cockpit. Andro looked at Jomann and nodded his head. Jomann turned quickly and grabbed Anicetus’s arm. “Come Anicetus... you are going to get your wish.” He stammered.

Andro wanted everyone to hear what he was about to say and he tapped the implant on his jaw to activate his COM. On two ships ear implants came alive and got everyone's attention.

"Arrarn. Am'uur. Dutkne." He spoke clearly and without a hint of hesitation. "Be advised we are moving to Plan B. We are moving to Plan B. Adjust load out and time table and inform me when you are ready. Am'uur... let your contacts on Ontahe know and have them arrest the traitor and hold him in a secure location outside the LZ."

"Understood." Am'uur's voice echoed.

"Andro..." Dutkne's voice broke in. "Rules?"

Andro paused for a moment remembering that Dutkne had not been among them for very long even though he was now one of his closest and most trusted friends. "Spartan rules Dutkne my friend." He answered. "We fight and we succeed. Period."

Andro heard him chuckle. "Ahh... I am going to have to do some serious history review about these Spartans and your grandfather. I'm beginning to like their mentality more and more."

Andro moved to the small window on the side of the *MENKLA* and even though he could not see the *STRIKER* flying next to them five hundred meters away, he could almost sense it there. "Arrarn... switch to secure Three."

"Switching." Arrarn's voice answered.

Andro tapped his jaw once and the chatter from the background was gone as the two brothers linked into a single secure channel. "Arrarn?"

"I'm here."

"Arrarn I..." Andro paused for a moment looking at the stars outside. "You are not alone Arrarn. We may not be completely blood brothers... but she is my... our mother too. We have never viewed her in any other way *fervon*. Not even for an instant. You are not alone."

"I know Andro." Arrarn spoke softly in reply.

"No matter what has happened... whether it be true or not... we will not forsake her Arrarn. She is part of me... part of all of us." Andro spoke. "Our father will... he will retrieve her Arrarn. She is part of him as well. Part of all our mothers."

"I have never doubted this Andro." Arrarn said.

"But you do now." Androcles said. "I can hear it in your voice *fervon*."

"I... I hurt Andro." Arrarn spoke.

"You think we do not?" Androcles said quickly. "That is not how our family survives Arrarn. You know this as well as I. We are all one. Whether we have different mothers or the same. We all feel it just as you do. It is why we are so strong." Andro heard him sigh over the COM. "Is Toria there?"

"I sent her back to check on the turrets." Arrarn answered.

"Have I ever broken a promise to you Arrarn?" Andro asked him. "Have I ever broken a promise to any of you?"

"No." Arrarn answered instantly.

"Then hear me now Arrarn... no matter what happens *fervon*... no matter what it takes... I give you my solemn word as your brother that whoever has taken part in this action, if it turns out to be true, they will die by our hands. Yours and mine. Father will rescue her... he will find her and bring her home to us... but I swear to you as your brother and a Spartan... not one of them will escape our justice Arrarn. A son's justice. Not a single one will live a moment longer than necessary for what they have done to our mother." Andro looked across the stars and placed his hand on the glass in front of him almost as if he could see Arrarn gazing out of the window of the *STRIKER* at him. "That is my oath to you."

"Then let's hit these *midaeus* where it truly hurts, get your mate, and then leave." Arrarn said. "I want to go to Curila 6 and see father before he leaves."

Andro nodded. "You can remain with him if you wish *fervon*. I would understand if you did."

"No." Arrarn spoke. "Narice has told me what you spoke of with her Andro."

"I know. I told her to share it with you." He said.

"She will need me. I am her husband. Her mate. And we both love and need Toria with us as well."

Arrarn spoke. "No... you will need me more *fervon*."

"Then let's get this done so when can return that much sooner." Andro spoke.

“Androcles...” Arrarn actually was looking out of the window of his *STRIKER* though he knew Andro could not see him. He placed his hand against the glass of his pilot’s window and nodded his head, just barely able to see his brother’s outline across the distance. “Thank you *fervon*.” He said in a whisper. “Your words mean more to me than you will ever know because I know they come from your heart.”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes they do.” He spoke. “Break formation now and proceed to your first DZ. I will meet you on the inside of this mercenary hanger in thirty-seven minutes.”

“I’ll be there.” Arrarn said.

Andro watched for a moment longer imagining the *STRIKER* peeling off and diving for the planet that was rapidly become larger and larger below them.

Devra watched from her seat as Androcles moved away from the window and made his way forward into the cockpit. She had heard nearly all of his side of the conversation and she realized he did not know this. His words had made her shudder inside at the heartfelt emotions in them, but they also made her cringe thinking of the men who had pulled these words from this young man. Devra knew at that moment, more than anything else that had happened up until now, she knew her daughter Caliria would never be safer than when she was with him and those who loved her. He would move worlds for her, for any of them she knew, just as he was prepared to bring down a government to take Caliria back. She turned quickly once he was out of sight and looked at Bren as he was making adjustments to their weapons and equipment. “Bren?” She spoke softly causing him to pause and look up at her with his gorgeous eyes.

“My wife and mate?” He answered with just a touch of pride in his voice. He could not remember the last time he felt this type of happiness in him and he knew it was because of what he felt for this breathtaking blue skinned woman who was now forever his.

“Bren... forgive me... but what is this Plan B?” Devra asked. “Will it... will it effect getting Caliria back?”

Bren stopped what he was doing and inched closer to her on the deck. He held up the K12 KM she would be carrying as well as the new Pulse Lance that all of them now carried in holsters on their thighs. The first of many new ‘toys’ that Admiral O’Connor had begun covertly shipping to them from the wizards at Dreamland. The N71 *Nehtes II* was its official designation Bren had discovered, but most of those Spartans of the Durcunusaan who had been using them for the last week in secret training facilities had nicknamed them *Stiletto*s because they were so thin and exceedingly lethal.

“No.” He answered her. “There will be little change to what *our* part of the plan is.”

Devra looked at him. “I saw what they told him Bren.” She spoke lifting her hand and placing it on his handsome face. “I am your mate and wife now Bren... you do not need to keep anything from me because you think it will horrify me in some way. I have no intention of ever leaving you. Not after what you have made me feel and what I know we can have together. What is Plan B?”

Bren took a deep breath. “As I said... there will be little change to what our part of the plan is.” He told her. “We will follow Androcles and the others and hold position in the landing bay while one team moves to the second location of where they are holding Vanari females and Andro retrieves Caliria.”

“Now tell me the difference Bren.” Devra said.

Bren met her eyes now. “Before we would have tried to remain unnoticed for as long as possible. Now however... now we will be the diversion while Am’uur and Dutkne’s team enters the base and moves to the main location. We will pull as much of their security force as we are able to us allowing the others to move more freely and with less resistance.”

“How?” Devra asked.

Bren smiled despite himself. “Though it goes against everything I have been trained for as a *Durcunusaan* officer, it’s really quite simple. We exit the transport... Andro walks up to whoever greets us, reveals who he is, and then kills him.” He saw her eyes go a little wider at this news. “It should set off a sufficient chain reaction of events that Dutkne and Am’uur can sneak right in while we push towards the second location which is much closer to the landing bay.”

“But... won’t they... won’t they kill their prisoners?” Devra asked.

Bren shook his head. “They will not know why we are here Devra my love.” He said. “They will believe Andro is there to continue his rampage from many years ago. They will be trying their level best to kill him... not kill their means of income.”

“Bren... that sounds so suicidal.” Devra said finally.
He smiled. “That’s why it will work.” He stated.

His name was Cyngi.

The only surviving Overseer of The Wilds. The only one of six Overseers that had escaped the wrath of King Leonidas over twenty years ago. Part of that was his skill at disappearing and manipulating people and events, but the larger part he knew was completely luck. He had been in the right place at the right time when King Leonidas attacked his personal estate, and that had been nowhere near his home. He had been on business in Icalro Alliance space when he received word that the Union King was rampaging through The Wilds searching for the six men who had condemned his Hadarian mate’s sister to death. They had agreed in part that they would leave her alone after she was finally taken by Union forces, but one of them had gotten greedy and given the High Coven knowledge of where she was and then facilitated the members of the assassination team that had gone after her. They had failed in their mission and it had sent the Union King into a rage. One of them had brought their entire operation in The Wilds down with his greed. Luckily... he had been the first Leonidas killed.

Cyngi had escaped here. He had escaped and rebuilt his holdings in the following twenty years. Rebuilt them better and stronger than they had been back then. At least he thought they were. Safely within the Icalro Alliance he had been able to secure this deserted base, expand it and then turn it into one of the largest slaver and smuggling centers in the galaxy, and he did not have to worry about Union interference in the least. The Icalro Alliance made sure of that, giving him protection and support for a very modest monthly credit transfer. Credits that he made up within three days of paying them. His profits had only grown with his expansion into the Beta Quadrant using these Orionis Syndicate people and the blue skinned females they brought to him. Vanari they were called, trained in the arts of pleasure and able to make any man or woman talk just by excreting a simple oil from the pores of their skin. He had twenty-nine of these females in his stables, and he charged hideously high amounts for their services. Services that were very well received and very much in demand. In the year since he had begun using them in his harem he had been able to secure mounds of information and favors that he never would have gotten without them. Most of this information he kept in a hidden vault so that he could use it in the future, some he had used already to garner protection and profit from many different individuals within the many different governments across the Alpha Quadrant. Species of all types came to him to indulge in their twisted sexual fantasies, their errant attempts at Black Marketing and dozens of different reasons. He even had contacts within the Lycavorian Union itself, though he used them very sparingly. He had witnessed the wrath of the Lycavorian King once, and he was no fool. He did not want to see it again.

He stood just behind the four Lycavorians now as their eyes were on the two Vanari females who danced slowly and quite erotically on the small stage in his private office and quarters. The Lycavorian male paying the most attention to the females and sporting a sexual excitement that even the Unsaar could detect it was his main contact. The other three were AEC executives that he had thoroughly checked out before allowing onto his base. With these three men and one woman he would secure himself some of the most advanced hand weaponry that was available in the known Universe and take it right from the people who made it for the Union. That would be a victory in itself since Cyngi still harbored a deep and abiding hatred for the Lycavorian King and what he had done. For hundreds of years The Wilds had worked one way, assassination, the lucrative slavery of elven females, all of it regulated and endorsed or ignored by the governments that existed at the time. Even the Union did nothing as long as it remained outside their borders. Then this upstart Lycavorian King arrives and takes power and gets upset over a simple business decision to conduct an assassination of one of his Queen’s sister, and he goes on a rampage of revenge destroying a foundation that had been in place for centuries. Destroying Cyngi’s base of power and influence. It was not something he would soon forget, and using these fools who worked for AEC to get back at him was almost poetic in a way.

Cyngi turned his head from the show when his Kochab Lieutenant moved quietly into the room and stepped up to him. “The Lycavorian *MENKLA* transport is landing.” He reported.

Cyngi nodded. “The men are in position?” He asked.

“Yes. I have two dozen in various positions throughout the landing bay. Are we really going to take the prototype weapons by force Cyngi?” The Kochab asked.

“Only if the Lycavorians don’t keep their bargain.” Cyngi answered quickly. He turned back to see his contact enraptured by the Vanari females even still, the others seemingly intent on their actions as well. “He could not lie under the influence of their oil... so there should be no issues. It never hurts to be prepared though.”

“No sir it doesn’t.” The man spoke.

“Have Captain Kre’al greet our guests and insure they follow the rules we have in place.” Cyngi spoke. “I don’t want a dozen or more Lycavorians running around my base unmonitored and unchecked.”

“As you order.”

Cyngi watched his lieutenant depart and he turned back to the four Lycavorians in front of him. He stepped forward, towering over them at over seven foot in height. “Your ship has arrived.” He spoke. “May I suggest that we complete our transaction and then you may return here to finish the show?”

They all looked at him and he saw the looks of amazement on their faces at what they were witnessing. The woman was the one who spoke first. “Of... of course” She stammered obviously excited by what she had seen.

Cyngi smiled a false smile, making his reptilian features even more imposing. If he could get additional information or leverage over these other three AEC executives, he could rapidly build himself the most powerful non-government army in the galaxy. It was an enticing thought as he motioned with his hand towards the door.

Kre’al was a Kochab warrior through and through and had been a mercenary for the better part of his four hundred and nineteen years of life. The scars he bore on his face from a plasma grenade fighting Bo'yak scum, the four times he had been shot by Lycavorian soldiers on raids within Union space, all these attested to his experience and skill. No one challenged him anymore for he was as devious as he was skilled. Since taking this job two decades ago he had lived a good life, all the credits and females of any species he wanted. A secure place to live and not keep running from one patrol or the other... this is what he had worked for all of his life and now finally achieved.

As the ramp to the *MENKLA* transport began to lower and he saw the combat boots of the individuals waiting to walk down he knew something was wrong. His hardened instincts had not deserted him as they had done to so many of his fellow mercenaries. His dark slit eyes narrowed even more when he realized all of them wore dark cloaks over their Union issue Mark IV ArmorPly body armor. It was without a doubt the finest body armor made anywhere in the galaxy and a rare find indeed outside Union borders. He counted six figures in front, all of them with the cowls of their cloaks drawn up around their heads hiding their faces. They wanted to remain anonymous no doubt, this he understood for traitors to the Lycavorian Union were treated no better than rodents in the streets, if they were not killed outright. He could see five additional figures behind the first six, all of them dressed in a similar fashion as well and standing beside one of four large metal containers he saw on the deck of the transport. They were being careful he figured; wanting no one to know who they were or that they were selling Union weapons technology to known mercenaries and criminals. Two of those in the front rank he determined to be females based on their height and their slighter dimensions. This was also not surprising since the females in the Union military were equally as lethal as the men. He took a step back as the ramp touched the floor of the landing bay and they began coming down the incline. The second rank followed and the first of the four crates with them on hover bars and gliding between their figures.

As Kre’al watched them, his sense of foreboding grew by leaps and bounds. Whoever these Lycavorians were, they were not acting as they should have been. He expected them to be looking in all directions for threats of any kind or those who could turn them in to Union authorities. What he saw were men and women not concerned with who saw them and this did nothing to settle his concern. He caught glimpses of the jaws of the two lead men, seeing the facial hair of one. Each step brought them closer and the alarms in his head began to grow louder. His experience told him this was natural and they had been cleared by Cyngi himself. His instincts were telling him something was very wrong and his life was in severe danger. He watched as they reached the bottom of the ramp and began to spread out, not like they were looking for threats, but as if they were getting

ready to attack. That could not be... no one would be foolish enough to enter their base and start something. With nearly three hundred and fifty security personnel alone all over the base, any attack would be suicidal from within the base itself. He watched as one of the figures broke away from the others and crossed the ten steps to where he stood. He was slightly taller than Kre'al and this did not give him good feelings. Every nerve in his body was actually screaming for him to attack, but whether he would admit it or not, this life had dulled his finely tuned survival instincts just enough to hold himself in check.

He would never know that it would not have mattered either way.

Kre'al looked at the hooded figure. "You... you brought the crates I see. Excellent." He stated. "I have been instructed to tell you that we will take possession of the weapons now and that you will be restricted to one section of the entertainment rotunda. You..."

"Where is our contact?" The voice asked firmly interrupting his prepared statement.

Kre'al blinked several times in surprise. "The Overseer Cyngi is bringing them down from his personal quarters." He answered.

"So the Unsaar Cyngi *is* the man behind this operation?" The voice asked.

Kre'al nodded as the others directed the four crates to the side of the ship and parked them alongside one another. "Yes. He escaped the purge by the dog of a Lycavorian King and came here to rebuild."

"And the Icalro Alliance knows he is the one in charge here?" The voice asked.

"Of course they do." Kre'al snapped. "Why..." He stopped talking and lowered his hand to where he wore his sidearm. "Remove your hoods... all of you!"

"Is there a problem Kochab?" The voice snarled.

Kre'al pulled his weapon from the holster, his men suddenly on edge as they watched their commander bring his weapon out of its place and hold it at the deck. "I told you to remove your hoods! Do it now! All of you! You will not be allowed to proceed further if you do not!"

"If that is your wish." The voice answered.

Kre'al watched him turn slightly and motion with his hand. Kre'al watched as the red haired female lowered her hood followed by several other men and women, among them a female Drow elf and a vampire female with raven black hair. In a moment only two stood without their hoods down and Kre'al turned back to the obvious leader who was one of them.

"I said all of you!" Kre'al spat. "Do it now!"

"Devra?" The voice spoke the name turning slightly.

Kre'al's eyes cut to the figure in the back and grew even wider when he saw the silver blond hair and incredible blue skin revealed as the Vanari female lowered her hood and stood there unafraid. He glanced back to the leader once more.

"You have... you have a Vanari! How is that... how is that possible? I thought..." He exclaimed in shock his eyes going even wider as Androcles lifted his hands and tossed back his cowl revealing his face. "Soul Slayer!" He hissed in revulsion.

"That dog of a Lycavorian King is my father!" Andro snarled viciously as his fangs burst forth and his eyes changed. "And I have a message for Cyngi from him little man!" Andro's right hand dropped in the blink of an eye and a *Stiletto* appeared in his fist. He jammed the end of the pulse lance into the Kochab's midsection with little regard and less finesse. The air left Kre'al's lungs in a single rush and his wide eyes looked up at Andro's face. "My father never forgets!" Androcles hissed before his thumb depressed the button.

Kre'al never saw or felt the lance of energy for it sliced right through his abdomen sending a bloody spray out the middle of his back, along with large bits of flesh and most of his spine, before launching his body into the air and sending it sailing through the air from the force of the concentrated blast of energy. Andro looked at the pulse lance in his hand with wide azure eyes as Denali and the others began to move.

"*Saoi sibfla!*" Andro hissed in shock looking at the lance. "I *like* this weapon!"

"**Andro!**" Jomann's screaming voice shook him out of his stance and he turned just as dozens of Kochab, Bo'yak and Evolli mercenaries began to bring their weapons up.

Andro dove behind the closest crate they had brought out of the *MENKLA* landing next to Jomann and his brother just as weapons fire began to erupt towards them, as well as screaming voices. He put his back to the crate and looked into the rear of the *MENKLA*. *Now SirsanGai! Now!*

In the cockpit of the *MENKLA* Ne'Veha stabbed her finger down on the control panel to her right and from the nose of the *MENKLA* dropped an ominous looking gray single barreled cannon. It swiveled on the turret it was attached to and sent one extremely large kinetically charged slug the size of a man's fist whistling off into the distance. Ne'Veha had targeted the cannon perfectly of course, and that single slug punched into the control panel on the opposite side of the landing bay after passing through a fuel container and two very unlucky landing bay security guards blowing their bodies into small pieces in the process. The control panel that operated the oversized landing bay doors facing the east side of the mountain. The single round succeeded in obliterating the entire control panel as well as punch through the exterior of the steel wall behind it. The cannon was meant to target warships and the side of the mountain base was really no match for it. Her action also served its major purpose and the huge doors began to open.

The four crates were large enough to provide cover for them as weapons fire slammed into the reinforced containers not really doing any damage in the least. Andro sat on his butt, his back to the container and holding the pulse lance, Denali and Jomann looking at him as he counted off something in his head.

"Now?" Deni screamed.

Andro shook his head quickly. "Not yet!"

"We can *nubous* kiss them as it is!" Deni screamed again.

"He has a point Andro!" Jomann barked.

"Not yet!" Andro snapped.

Eliani turned her head from where she cowered on the opposite side of Jomann. "Hey... lug head! They are moving closer!" She shouted. "I don't want to swap spit with these scum!"

Andro turned his head and looked at his sister. "Perish the thought *arande!*"

"Now... now would be a very good time for you to do whatever it is you are going to do Androcles!" Bren shouted from where he crouched behind another crate only meters away.

"A few seconds more!" Andro shouted.

"*Saradasaar...* this is insanity!" Lu'ria barked from where she sat on the opposite side of Eliani.

All of them heard the roar of engines then and they turned to see the *STRIKER DT* Mark II rise into view. Andro grinned. "Now!" He screamed as he rose up and lifted his left arm, launching his Shi Viska in a single blink while bringing the pulse lance to bear. The others followed suit without hesitation just as the *STRIKER* drifted expertly into the massive landing bay, the heavy chain gun under its nose beginning to spew out death.

"Toria! Port thrusters!"

Arrarn barked out the command as he yanked the DT into a hairpin one hundred and eighty degree turn, his finger still mashed down on the firing button of the chain cannon. Toria had already read his mind in that regard and before the order had left his lips completely, she was stabbing her control panel and engaging the port docking thrusters. The added power caused the *STRIKER* to turn that much quicker and Arrarn reached over, taking his hand off the cannon control and slapped the controls for the DT's main ramp. Arrarn didn't turn his head from his instruments but he took a deep breath and shouted out what six fully grown dragons had been waiting to hear.

"Elynth! Ramp coming down!"

We are ready Arrarn! Her voice responded in his head and Arrarn Leonidas grinned a cruel grin.

"Time to open the hurt locker you *nubous ronnus!*" He spat out loud.

Toria Leonidas smiled from her co-pilot's seat and could only shake her head. No doubt about it, life with Narice and their new half elf half Lycavorian husband was going to be so very interesting and fulfilling.

Elynth and Anthar hit the steel floor first, before Arrarn had even dropped the *STRIKER* completely to the deck. With roars of rage and glee, both of them cut loose with dual streams of death as they snapped their wings to the side with bone shattering claps of thunder like noise and moved to the side. A stream of three thousand degree, flame tinged super heated breath and pure scorching flame caught a full squad of Kochab and

Evulli mercenaries just as half of them were reloading their weapons. None of them survived the skin melting heat or charring flame. Deneth and Aradace were the next off the *STRIKER* and with a flick of her huge head Aradace snatched up two Bo'yak scum and sent them hurtling back towards where Deneth was just unfolding his wings. He snapped his right wing forward with bone crunching power and speed and the two Bo'yak mercenaries collided with that rigid front, steel like cartilage, the sound of their bones shattering audible even over the din of weapons fire and the screaming that was echoing around the landing bay. Majeir and Tharua were last off the DT and they broke to the left just as they were instructed. Majeir's green scales and Tharua's copper color skin was brilliant in the light of the landing bay, and the two dragon sisters stood side by side like the majestic creatures of numerous legend and unleashed twin streams of searing flame directly into the control room of the landing bay. The combined streams melted the glass that separated the control room from the bay itself and within seconds, the five mercenaries inside the control room were screaming in agony as they ran back and forth within the confines of the small room, their bodies pyres of flaming death.

Elynth snapped her head around to where Andro and the others waited.

Go my Bonded Brother! Go now Andro! We will hold them!

Do it sister! Andro's voice echoed.

As beautifully choreographed as any dance move in a grand ballet, six dragons reached out to their bonded ones, snatched them up in the embrace of their powerful psychic power and proceeded to throw them through the air directly at the catwalk running along the side of the landing bay that led to the upper levels. None of the mercenaries were prepared for this maneuver and fully half could only stand there and gawk as three men and four women were launched into the air over their heads, one of the men with a look of utter horror on his face.

"Here we go!" Andro screamed out to the others.

Denali, Carisia, Lu'ria, Eliani, Narice and Andro relaxed their bodies and were lifted into the air instantly. Jomann's eyes grew wide when he rose with them, and he flailed somewhat as he had not been prepared for this. His eyes were wide as he suddenly found himself rocketing across the top of the mercenaries below him, following closely behind Andro and the others. Given Carisia's diminutive size, it was a simple enough exercise for Elynth and Anthar her dragon mate to combined their skills together and throw all three of them through the air just as Androcles had planned. Andro detected their surprise at how easily they had done this and he smiled as he guided his body right where he wanted to go, feeling Jomann's anxiety and shock filling him clearly. His *Durcunusaan* Captain adjusted almost immediately as he knew Jomann would and as Andro saw the five mercenaries look at them from the catwalk below with stunned expressions he rotated and drove his booted feet down into the face of the Evulli scum beneath him with all two hundred and twenty plus pounds of muscle and bone. His wolf ears detected the snapping of bone as Denali landed next to him in much the same way, driving the Kochab beneath him and killing him instantly as his head was smashed into the floor.

Andro turned immediately even as he dropped into a combat squat, just in time to see Jomann land somewhat awkwardly next to him, his armored knee fracturing the skull of the Kochab mercenary and sending him sprawling heavily into the wall. Carisia and Lu'ria made short work of another mercenary, their lithe frames working in tandem as Drow Mistress and Slave as they landed cat like, both of their blades flashing in the light of the landing bay. A single shot rang out from a K14 KM and Andro saw the last mercenary's head practically implode from the near point blank shot of Eliani's hand weapon as she nimbly landed on the opposite side of Jomann, Narice beside her, fighting knives already out and preparing for battle.

Jomann got to his feet instantly and whirled on Andro with wide changed eyes and his fangs exposed. "*Nubous* warn me next time *mideaus!*" He screamed at his Prince in shock and feigned anger. It had been a thrilling experience to say the least and not something that Andro had taught him in their training sessions over the last few days.

"No time!" Andro shouted back his eyes and fangs also changed now. He spun around lifting his arm as his Shi Viska came whizzing back from the distance to become reseated on his arm and looked at Denali, who was already moving to the door on that level that would take them into the interior of the base and to the Unsaur's personal quarters. "Deni!"

"Clear! Let's move!" He barked back lifting the *Stiletto* pulse lance and ducking into the corridor.

Andro followed his younger brother immediately, Lu'ria and Carisia right behind him with smiles on their faces and blood dripping from their blades. Narice moved next with Eliani pushing past Jomann and making it a point to bump her firm ass cheek against his broad shoulder.

“If you keep up I’ll let you have your way with me when this is over!” She barked at him pausing to lean over quickly and nibble his ear with her wolf fangs as she moved past.

Jomann couldn’t help but smile and growl at her obvious invitation and willingness to make it known she desired him so much and he didn’t hesitate in following her. Deia had told him serving as Andro’s Captain would be the most interesting and taxing time of his life. He shook his head at what he had just done and now her words echoed so truthfully in his head.

Damned if he wouldn’t have it any other way though.

Cyngi stopped walking at the first sounds of gunfire and then the screaming began. His head whipped around instantly and he opened his mouth to order his guards to kill the four Lycavorians but he stopped when he saw three of them holding weapons on him and his men. Instantly one of the men and the female fired at almost point blank range, their rounds impacting the Kochab lieutenant and the second Kochab who had joined them as they walked. The third man was dragging their contact back down the corridor unceremoniously, his opposite hand filled with a large hand weapon.

“You have betrayed me!” Cyngi hissed savagely.

The man and woman leveled their weapons at him as more explosions shook the base. “I’d say you have a problem Unsaar.” The man snarled... wolf fangs exposed and his eyes changed.

“We’ll take the traitor thank you very much.” The woman echoed.

Cyngi took a step towards them but froze once more when they both drew down on him. He was an Unsaar yes, but even he could not defeat two fully grown Lycavorians in a stand up fight.

“His son is here Unsaar!” The woman snapped. “And I think he’s here to collect on a debt you owe his father from twenty years ago.”

Cyngi’s eyes grew wide. “The son?” He hissed.

“If I was you... I be making my way to my emergency ship.” The male spoke as they began to move back down the corridor. “If you want to live of course.”

“You think you will escape here?” Cyngi growled.

“Oh... we’ll escape. The question is... will you be alive to see it.” He answered.

Cyngi’s wrist communications band began to crackle with the shouting voices of dozens of his security forces. He turned away from them without hesitation and lifted his wrist. He looked at his two dead security men and then began walking towards the landing bay. “This is Cyngi... all security personnel head for the landing bay!” He barked. “Overwhelm them!”

“They have dragons in the base!” A voice screamed. “They’re burning us down!”

“Use heavy weapons damn it!” Cyngi screamed. “Where is Kre’al?”

“He’s dead!” The voice responded. “Soul Slayer killed him first!”

Cyngi stopped and turned back around to see an empty corridor. “Soul Slayer is here?” He stammered.

“Upper levels!”

“Have half a dozen men meet me by the armory!” Cyngi barked. “Now! Move! And get the heavy cannons set up on the upper catwalks to fire down into the bay! Do it now!”

The entrance to the refuse room was never guarded even though it had a main junction of tunnels that led out to the icy mountain and plains within it. Cyngi wrongly determined that no one in their right mind would slug through half a kilometer of bodily feces and week old garbage to reach inside the base. The tunnel exit was on a plateau that you could only reach by air, and he never expected the Union to use a Shrouded ship to drop troops there. He was an excellent criminal mind, but a very poor military planner. The control room for the refuse center was now filled with Dutkne, Am'uur and the others, stripped out of their hazard suits to survive the walk through the tunnels and protect their senses.

Tastia was a fully trained Cadre Commando with several missions under her belt, but never had she seen such precision and training than she was witnessing now. She stood very close to Am'uur now, as his amber eyes searched the corridor outside the main door down one direction and Dutkne stood on the opposite side of the doorway looking in the other direction. This Drow elf male had not released her hand as they moved through the mangle of refuse and garbage, twice keeping her from falling headfirst into the sludge and vile liquid. She found herself staring at his chest now as they stood by the door waiting for the signal to exit and move to the main chambers where they were keeping the Vanari females hostage. The body armor she wore was identical to what the others wore and quite a marvel of construction in her opinion. The Vanari had nothing like these combat suits and even their heavy troops were not so well protected. Standing close to him as she was, she could see the rhythmic rise and fall of his chest under the body armor, as he was a good seven inches taller than her own five foot five frame. His long white hair was pulled into a tight pony tail, and draped over one shoulder, similar in fashion to the other two Drow who had accompanied them. Tastia looked up at his face and took in the contours of his jaw and cheek and how his elven ears curved elegantly inward. He had spoken up for her when Coren tried to shout her down, and since first meeting him only ours ago, Tastia found herself captured by his eyes. She looked away quickly when he turned his head to glance at Dutkne, but didn't back up from her position of almost touching him with her body as she too looked out the glass partition.

"Get ready." Dutkne said softly. His eyes were seemingly off in some far away land, but there was a distinct smile on his face. "He does not believe in being subtle."

Am'uur snorted with a smile of his own. "Subtle to Prince Androcles is asking what you want written on your tomb. Before he sends you to the gods."

Dutkne turned and looked at Nirilo Re Mydala. "Nirilo?" He asked.

Nirilo looked at the portable sensor console he wore on his right forearm. "Once we exit this room... sixty meters down the corridor to the right and take a left. Another twenty meters and we'll be at main chamber where the Vanari are held."

Dutkne looked at the first few members of the RD team that waited patiently. "Once we get the signal... four of you break first. If it is not wearing one of our uniforms then kill it." He ordered. "Be watchful for other Lycavorians. They are working for this AEC and will be in civilian clothes. They are friendly."

"As you order *Val'istar*." The lead RD officer replied without question. Word had spread quickly among the *Durcunusaan* that this Dutkne now held a position to Prince Andro similar to that of the *Feravomir* for his father. A spiritual and political advisor with little equal. It also was moving among their ranks from those who participated in the mission to free Lady Janae that he seemed very interested in Princess Zarah and Princess Lucia, and that no matter what she had said to him, the interest from them for him was there as well.

"What is the signal?" Tastia asked looking at Dutkne. "Will we know it?"

Dutkne was about to answer when a massive explosion shook the base and the floor vibrated beneath their feet. He couldn't help but grin. "Ah... I think that is our cue." He stated. "Go! Go!"

Four of the RD team rushed forward and exited the room, Dutkne and Nirilo right on their heels. Am'uur looked at Tastia. "Remain attached to my hip Tastia Dal Vesch... I am sworn to protect you and I will." He stated. "Move with me and do not hesitate. Hesitation is death right now."

Regardless of their situation, his words to her were sincere and heartfelt and Tastia found herself looking at him in a whole other light as he reached down and took her hand in his before following Dutkne and Nirilo. The remainder of the RD team fell in right behind them without hesitation.

The main chamber where the Vanari females were kept was actually very large, though not very well kept. It was the Vanari females themselves who managed to keep it as clean as they were able and in some manner of neatness. Their different cots were spread out in the room, which served as not only their living area but also an auction like area. Cyngi had brought potential customers walking through the room to gaze at them and allow them to choose which Vanari they wanted to entertain them. There was a self feeding water fountain in the center of the room and several layers of thin material that hung from the ceilings and walls to provide at least some manner of privacy when they slept. At the moment, all of them were pressed close together in a small group around the two females who were nearly gone. Though the chemical that broke them also made them docile, they still retained their senses enough to know that something was happening outside of their

chamber. Caliria and Yssyla had been taken two hours before, and while they missed her encouraging words and inner strength, they still were in this together.

Four Kochab and two Bo'yak mercenaries were in the room with them, all of them standing nervously by the main double doors into their chambers as another much softer explosion echoed and made the floor shudder. They were chattering to themselves about what was happening and trying to determine what it was from the frantic transmission on their COM units. Their attention was focused solely on that and for several seconds none of them even realized that the double doors had someone been bypassed and slid open. Five Vanari females were closer than the others and trying to listen to what the mercenaries were saying as well as pick up what was coming over their wrist COM units.

“Dragons?” One of them spoke softly looking at her fellow prisoners, all of whom had begun referring to each other as sister. “Such beasts do not exist! They can not exist.”

“They sound as if they are terrified.” Another spoke.

“Why would Lycavorians be attacking them?” Yet another asked causing the others to look at her. “They have never shown favor to the Vanari... the Protectorate would not come all this way to attack them.”

“She’s right... it doesn’t make any sense.” Another spoke. “What...”

All of them grew silent as the main double doors sparked and sizzled from an electrical power override of some sort. The Kochab and Bo'yak mercenaries began turning far too late as the door slid open. They could only watch in unmitigated awe as four figures burst into the room with wicked looking weapons and dressed all in black. The two Bo'yak died first as two members of the RD team shifted direction instantly upon clearing the doorway and brought their P190A5s up as extensions of their bodies. The integrated silencers built into the shorter model of the main assault weapon of Union forces coughed out death in quiet snorts. The Bo'yak mercenaries both died in a hail of fire that pulverized both their chest cavities into a mess of mangled flesh and blood. Even as the Kochab were turning and reacting, Am'uur and two other RD members fell upon them with lethal results. Like his younger sister Lu'ria, Am'uur preferred bladed weapons to bulky firearms, but his time in the Drow Queen's Elite Guardforce had taught him the value of being proficient with firearms as well. His right hand filled with a new K14 KM that had been fitted with a silencer as well. The kinetic rounds flew from the barrel of his weapon punching into the throat and chest of the nearest Kochab and physically tossing his body back from the powerful force of the weapon at such close range. In that single instant Am'uur also brought the wicked looking Drow fighting knife up in a vicious cross body slash. The seven-inch blade bit into the unarmored chest of the Kochab mercenary and sliced open his chest and abdomen from groin to sternum. His suddenly numb fingers could not even pull the trigger on his weapon as it dropped from his grasp and the horrific pain reach his brain and he began to scream as he fell. His hands tried futilely to hold his internal organs inside his chest cavity, but it was a losing battle as he fell backwards and dropped to the floor.

The three RD troops took things a little easier and dispatched the remaining two Kochab with fatal bursts of fire from their weapons until both joined their comrades on the floor. Tastia burst into the room right behind Am'uur, Nirilo right on her heels as was the plan, all of the Vanari females being held prisoner seeing them immediately and coming to their feet in stunned shock. Tastia moved forward to the small group that was closest without hesitation.

“I am Tastia Dal Vesch. This is Nirilo Re Mydala!” She hissed. “We are friends and we have come to get you out of here and take you home.”

Many of the females turned to look at Nirilo in shock. “Re Mydala?” One of them stammered. “You are... you are Caliria’s older brother?”

Nirilo nodded as he dropped the small pack he was carrying to the floor. “Yes. Another team is going to secure her.”

“They... they are Lycavorians!” One of the females gasped softly as Dutkne and more of the RD team began to secure the entrance.

Dutkne came up to them and smiled. “Ladies... I’m very happy we have found you.”

“General Director Dutkne!” One of them gasped. “You... the Protectorate has... you are working with the Vanari?”

“It’s a very long story I assure you.” Dutkne said as Nirilo handed him and Tastia several injector guns and three small clips apiece. “At the moment so you are not surprised.... we are not in Protectorate or Vanari space.”

“We... we assumed as much.” One of them said. “We do not know these species.” She motioned with her hand to the now dead Kochab and Bo'yak.

“As I said... it is a long story. One which you will discover I'm sure... but right now we need to inject you with a cure for the OSG chemical and then get you out of here.” Dutkne told them. “Tastia... tell them.”

Tastia nodded and held up the injector gun. “We have enough for all of you.” She stated confidently. “It will counteract any symptoms or side effects of the Syndicate control drug and begin working instantly. It will also begin to restore your body's Alkay and return your basic hormonal levels and balance to normal. Which of you has been here the longest? We need to treat you in that order and quickly.”

“Sama and Norena!” One of them gasped. “They have been here over a year and both are too weak to even rise from their beds! Over here!”

Nirilo held up his injector. “Dutkne and I will begin injecting the rest of you. We must move quickly, so once we have done that gather only what you can carry. If you have anything at all. We need to make our way to the main landing bay where you hear the explosions coming from. That is our ride out of here.”

Am'uur stepped up to Tastia as she finished injecting the comatose dark haired female and turned to inject the other. She looked at him and despite the situation felt her body react to the way his eyes gazed upon her. The sensations were exceptionally pleasant to her.

“Tastia we must be quick and silent.” He told her quickly. “The less attention we draw to ourselves as we depart the better. I fear many of them look at me in fear because of my ears and my eyes. Tell them they must remain as silent as possible. At least until we get close enough to landing bay that my sister and their bonded ones can cover us.”

“I will tell them.” Tastia spoke quickly. She reached out and took his arm. “I never... I never thanked you for defending me in the transmission before.” She stammered.

“You are very welcome... but now is not the time.” Am'uur answered.

Tastia then did something she had done only once before in her life. She took a leap of faith. Fortunately for her... this time the leap of faith would pay blissful dividends to her for centuries to come. “Am'uur... I find your ears delicious.” She stated quite plainly. “And I would very much like to explore them more intimately.”

Am'uur's amber eyes glimmered in the light of the room, almost as if they were alive and Tastia saw his lips curl into a smile. “I believe I would like that as well Tastia Dal Vesch. As long as I am able to return the favor.” He leaned over next to her and dropped his nose to her cheek. “Let us work on that when we return.”

Tastia shivered in delight at the way his words danced across her flesh and she nodded. “I look forward to that.” She stated.

“Good. Let me know when you think they are ready to move.” Am'uur spoke. “We should begin to head to the landing bay as soon as possible.”

Caliria and Yssyla huddled on the floor behind the large stage as another explosion shook the room they were in. The first, much larger explosion had caused many of the more expensive items in the room to teeter and fall over shattering into hundreds of pieces. Caliria knew how cruel this Cyngi could be and it was something he would hold against them when he returned.

“Caliria... I am frightened.” Yssyla stammered softly gripping her arm as they huddled on the floor.

“As am I.” Caliria told her with real fear on her lips.

“What is happening?” Yssyla exclaimed.

“I don't know... I think someone is attacking the base and...”

They both turned when they heard the door open and three Bo'yak mercenaries came rushing into the room. These foul creatures had always been the ones who were most demented with her and the others, forcing them to bed with them on several occasions. They were vile beasts and smelled horribly, and while their equipment was below average in size, they made up for this lack of manliness by being violent and brutal with many of the girls. They did not go so far as to mark them in any way, for their leader would have flayed them alive for that, but they managed to hurt many of the girls and not leave any signs physically.

“Find them!” The first Bo'yak into the room snarled. “They have to be in here!”

“Cyngi will skin us alive if he finds out!” Another snapped.

“The dark haired bitch almost bit my cock off!” The leader growled. “I want to make her pay! Fuck Cyngi!”

Caliria’s honeydew green eyes grew wide at this. The Bo’yak all looked similar to her, but she did remember this one. He had been particularly harsh with her and she had lost control of her anger as he abused her and had almost cleaved his tiny cock from his body with her teeth. He had spent three days in the infirmary and then Cyngi had docked his pay for mistreating her to begin with. Apparently he was going to use this time now to take his revenge. She pulled Yssyla closer, trying to make themselves smaller against the back of the stage and shaking her head slightly. They watched the three Bo’yak split up and begin to move around the room, leaving the door open in the process. Caliria’s eyes grew wide at this and she gripped Yssyla’s arm tighter.

“The door!” She whispered to her. “We must run for the door!”

Yssyla nodded without question. “Yes.”

“Now! Go!” Caliria hissed pushing her to her feet and following her.

They had made it halfway across the expanse of the main room before the Bo’yak reacted. In normal times, they could never have compared to the reflexes and speed of a Vanari Cadre Commando, but these were not normal times. The OSG chemicals dulled not only their senses but their physical reactions as well.

“There!” A male voice rang out.

A shot thundered in the room and Caliria heard Yssyla cry out and then tumble over as a single round punched through her thigh. Vermillion colored blood splashed on the floor as Yssyla dragged her down unwilling to release her hand. Caliria turned and saw her blood covering the floor, Yssyla’s tears filling her eyes as she clutched at her leg. She didn’t hesitate and dropped to her knees, trying to help staunch the flow of blood.

“Leave me!” Yssyla screamed. “Caliria go!”

“No!” Caliria snapped.

“Damn you go!” Yssyla barked. “He will kill you! Please... go!”

“Never!” She barked right back.

“I got you now bitch!” The Bo’yak voice broke into their minds and they looked up and saw the mercenary Caliria had injured leaping over the stage and moving towards them with rage and hate in his eyes.

It was a futile gesture she knew but Caliria curled her arms under Yssyla’s armpits and began to try and drag her into the corridor. At least in the corridor they might be seen and other security people would stop what she knew this Bo’yak would do to her. Yssyla screamed in pain and Caliria was only able to take two staggering steps before she slammed into something quite unyielding and dropped to her bottom off balance. Her head whipped around and her eyes grew wide in stunned shock when she saw the huge form of the black clad figure behind her. There was a strange sound then, almost like a heavy box hitting the ground and sending clouds of dust and dirt into the air, and something that looked almost like blue flame burst from this figure’s entire body. She barely noticed others dressed in a similar manner as they were darting into the room, captivated by the dominantly powerful male in front of her. She watched him reach out with one hand and instantly a bluish orb of some kind of energy formed and launched from his hand in that split second.

Their ordeal on Alba Tau had opened a doorway for Androcles and Elynth. A doorway to a power and skill that only their fathers knew about for it happened to them as well. Their bond was so deep and their very thoughts and minds so intertwined as one that it provided them the launching point for what they had been teaching each other and learning by experimenting for the last three years. They had deemed if Andro could form psychic knives from his fists, and he could toss psychic diamonds from his hands while Elynth could toss things about with just her mind, then there was much more for them to learn and be able to do. All they had to do was concentrate enough to delve past the barriers that only their minds put in their way. Alba Tau had opened that doorway, and their constant training and belief in each other is what finally broke down the barriers completely, just as it had with their fathers.

It could no longer be called Mindvoicing and still be accurate in any sense of the word. They had evolved far beyond simple communications with their minds. Martin had coined the phrase Psychokinesis as a humorous explanation, calling themselves psycho, but it actually went very well with the term some of them already used in the PK or TK power. At it’s peak, they could wrap themselves in a shimmering blue field of PK power not unlike the psychic shield that surrounded them when they flew and draw from the powerful bonds with their dragons to do so many new and wonderful things. It was no longer just being able to toss about psychic diamonds anymore; they had far outgrown that. Now they could manipulate their PK power in such a

way as to use it as a weapon in every meaning and definition of the word. It was not something they had intended, but it was how the discovery had finally been brought to fruition. It was not something they would let slip them by. After a solid two years of learning and teaching themselves what they could do, Martin and Andro turned and began to school all those who meant more to them than anything in the universe. Though many of them were half breeds, they all still bore the blood of a Leonidas in their veins and it was dominant above all else. The purer the blood, the more powerful they were, and the entire Leonidas family took to these new skills like fish to water. To all of them it was a unique blessing and a gift that they would not let go to waste.

That orb of energy engulfed the Bo'yak mercenary completely and lifted him into the air as if he was a rag doll, his eyes wide in shock. As Caliria's wide eyes watched in utter awe and amazement, another ball of the bluish energy formed almost before the first one was gone, and then it too went sailing forth from his opposite hand with lightning like speed and reflexes. Her head whipped around and she saw the Bo'yak mercenary now suspended upside down in the air, encased in that first ball of energy when the second struck him center mass of his chest. His body was propelled with bone crushing speed across the room to impact the far wall of the room hard enough for her to hear his bones splinter and crack from across the twenty-meter distance. As the Bo'yak's body dropped limply to the floor Caliria's head turned back around and she looked up into the wonderfully handsome face of this overwhelming man and saw the stunning azure blue orbs from her dreams staring back at her.

It was at that single moment when Caliria Re Mydala's heart found its center and her purpose in this life was revealed to her in one tidal wave of feeling and emotions she could not deny and only embrace. Something she did without question or pause.

Caliria was so focused on those eyes that she did not see the second Lycavorian male, so similar in looks to the first, his body also encased in that bluish flame as he sent a shuddering tremor of blue energy skipping across the floor like a relentless landslide towards the second and third Bo'yak mercenaries. They were both frozen in place, horrified as that all-powerful shockwave reached them, lifting their bodies into the air like porcelain dolls and shattering bone and cartilage with the concussive force. Two single, thunderous shots rang out then and Jomann lowered his P190A3 from its firing position, two neat holes through the backs of the two Bo'yak scum, both rounds shattering whatever remained of their spinal columns and killing them both instantly. She didn't see the burgundy red haired female dart around her to kneel next to Yssyla, nor did she notice the other three females take up defensive positions around the small group. All she could focus on were those incredible azure blue orbs, the most divinely handsome face she had ever seen and the ferocious looking dual fangs that protruded from beneath his lips. She shivered in blessed anticipation as Andro lowered himself to one knee in front of her waiting for the word she had heard so many times in her dreams.

"I told you we would come for you *Inamarno*." Andro said with a smile.

Caliria reached up with her hands then, which were shaking horribly to say the least, her honeydew green eyes wide in disbelief at his magical words to her. She was holding her breath, unable to believe what he had said; still believing this was all some kind of horrible joke on her. Tears were beginning to roll down her cheeks as she gazed at him wanting desperately to touch his face but afraid it would disappear as it always had.

"You... you are in my dreams." She stammered out the single sentence. "You... you can not be... you can not be real."

Andro lifted his hands and covered hers, bringing her palms to his cheeks and covering the backs of her hands with his. He heard her gasp in shock once more and he smiled. "Does this feel like a dream to you *Inamarno*?" He asked. "Can a dream do this?"

Caliria didn't resist in the least when he pulled her tightly to him and covered her soft light violet lips with his own. Her eyes grew wide for a single instant and then the truth of the reality hit her and what she was feeling became so very genuine. His hands dropped to her waist and he deepened the kiss, Caliria practically melting into his arms as her eyes closed in utter bliss and every nerve ending in her body sang out its unabashed delight. Her eyes sprang open when she felt other hands and arms grip her and she tore her lips unwillingly from his and turned her head quickly to see the amber and maya colored eyes from her dreams as well as the long white hair and the raven blacks locks.

Carisia leaned closed and brushed her lips against Caliria's cheek first. "We have waited a long time for you to join us *Inamarno*." She spoke softly.

"Far too long." Lu'ria agreed leaning close as well.

Caliria could not keep the brilliant smile from her face or the outpouring of emotion from her heart. She glanced back to Andro whose eyes were still focused on her. “By the grace of the Prophets... you are real! It is... what I feel is real!”

“It certainly is.” Andro told her. “And now we must get you out of here. *KertaGai* and *SirsanGai* wait for us in the landing bay.”

Caliria felt warmth fill her as those names sounded in her head. “Sadi. Ne'Veha.” She spoke softly. She looked at Carisia and Lu'ria tears streaming down her cheeks unchecked. “Carisia. Lu'ria. Our... our Drow Mistress. I have seen all of you... been with all of you in my dreams! You are real!” Caliria didn't hesitate and laid a blistering kiss on first Carisia and then Lu'ria as if not believing anything until she felt it physically. Each searing kiss was filled with newfound passion and incredible desire and Carisia and Lu'ria responded just as ardently as they did with each other as well as Sadi and Ne'Veha.

Caliria's heart was ready to burst as she pulled away from Lu'ria's delicious soft pink lips and she felt the fervent need pulsing through all of them. A simple strand of salvia connected their lips for a split second before Androcles took her face in his hands and kissed her again, causing her to whimper in shameless enchantment.

He pulled away once more, long before she wanted him too; her breath coming in short delighted gasps and saw him turn his head. “Eli?”

Eliani turned from where she was holding Yssyla's upper thigh in between both her hands, the blond haired Vanari staring at her in shocked silence as she felt her leg healing and knitting itself back together right there in front of her.

“Thirty seconds.” Eliani told him. “I'm still adjusting to the slight adjustments in their metabolisms and it takes a little longer.”

“Carisia... give it to her.” Andro spoke. “We must be ready to move.”

Carisia lifted the injector she held and showed Caliria. “This is a serum developed by Eliani's mother and aunts *Inamarno*.” She spoke. “It will counteract the effects of the OSG chemicals in your body and return your hormonal balance back to normal. You will begin regenerating your Alkay at a normal pace and you will be yourself within moments.”

“A cure?” Caliria gasped.

Lu'ria nodded. “Based in part on your research *Inamarno*.” She answered squeezing her arm.

“My... but how?” Caliria asked as Carisia lifted the injector, pressed it to her slim neck and depressed the trigger. The pinprick sting caused her face to grimace but as she brought her hand up she looked at Andro who hadn't stopped looking at her. “How?”

“It's a rather long story to be honest.” He replied. “But one I will let your mother relate to you.”

“My... my mother?” Caliria gasped. “She is... Androcles... she is here?” Caliria blinked several times as she realized she had just said his name without the slightest hesitation and she grabbed his arm in response to this knowledge. She had always known his name. All of their names. Caliria realized now what she had experienced were not dreams... they were visions of the future she had so desired for so long. She knew each of them intimately though she had never seen them before this day.

Andro nodded his head with a smile. “She is waiting on our ship in the landing bay as we speak. Nirilo is helping to secure the other Vanari and move them to the bay. Arduri and Naesta are helping other members of my family at odd things, but you will see them all soon *Inamarno*. I promise you.”

Eliani lowered the injector from Yssyla's neck and returned her gaze to her leg. The wound had healed itself quite nicely and Eliani felt a sense of pride sweep through her. She had only been studying the Vanari medical databases for two days. “Damn... do I do good work or what?” She muttered to no one in particular.

Yssyla looked at her leg in awe. “It... it is like I was never shot.” She gasped.

Eliani looked at her. “Pretty cool huh?”

“How... how did you do this?” She asked.

Jomann leaned over and grabbed Eliani's arm before she began to reply and pulled her to her feet. “Perhaps another, much more secure location can be obtained before you have this conversation. Preferably somewhere in Union space.” He told Eliani.

Eliani looked at him with those fern green eyes and felt his gaze on her as well as his aura sweep around her lovingly and she soaked up the attention and love and returned it to him just as intently as he was projecting it to her. “You don’t like a little danger Jomann?” She asked him sweetly.

Jomann finished helping Yssyla to her feet and turned to look at Eliani with those eyes that made her quiver in need. “I don’t mind danger in the least Eliani. I do have somewhat of an issue with reckless stupidity however. Something that we are beginning to display by remaining here longer than we had planned.” He answered towering over her. “Andro we need to go!” He spat.

Eliani stepped close to him and inhaled deeply of his jasmine coffee scent feeling it filter through her senses deliciously. “Spoilsport.” She whispered playfully.

Jomann looked down at her and grinned. “I will remember you said that in a few hours when you are screaming my name to the many moons that we pass as we return home.” He said seeing her fern green eyes light up in delight.

“Ohhhhh... I’ll hold you to that.” She said with a sultry voice.

Andro pulled Caliria to her feet, drawing her close as Lu'ria and Carisia stepped closer to her. She felt a little lightheaded and dizzy, but otherwise she could feel her body returning to normal even as she stood there.

“How... how did you get in?” She asked looking at Andro and refusing to release his arm for fear that this wonderful dream would come to a bitter end.

Andro grinned. “Getting in was the easy part.” He stated.

Denali turned from the doorway where he and Narice were watching for any mercenary scum. “We have perfected getting in.” He stated laconically. “That’s our specialty. We never have problems getting in... getting out... well that’s another story. We never have got that part down very good.”

“Something we will no doubt have to change if we want to live for very long.” Narice spat from her position next to him. “I have not spent enough time with my husband and Toria to die just yet.”

Caliria turned back from looking at him and stared into Andro’s eyes. “What... what do they mean?”

“He’s my brother.” Andro replied. “And he likes to talk too much. We are leaving now *Inamarno*. I need you to stay close to Lu'ria and Carisia as we make our way back to the landing bay.”

“I... I can fight.” Caliria said more forcefully than normal. “I need... I need to fight.” She said.

Andro held out his K14. “Then don’t hesitate to shoot if you have a shot.” He stated with a smile. “Time to go. Then we will have a proper introduction.”

EDOLUS

Richard Faith held in wife close to him, their twin daughters just in front of them as they watched the Lycavorian, vampire and Vanari moving about their small home with precision he had only seen from superbly trained Eridiani Strike Teams. These men and women made them look like school children in comparison. The sun had not even broke the horizon before they were yanked from their beds by these men and women. They were ushered downstairs quickly in silence, but they were not harmed in any way. Richard could sense right away they were not going to be harmed, at least initially, but then again he had never seen Lycavorian Commandos in action before. Nor had he witnessed before this day vampires as they unwrapped the shadows from around their bodies, the two females appearing as if out of the mist. He knew now why they were considered so dangerous; you would not know they were upon you until it was too late. The diminutive Lycavorian and Vanari females seemed to be the ones in charge, even the much larger men taking their whispered orders without question. They were moved into the living room in their nightclothes still, and made to sit all on the same couch. They watched as the dark haired woman nodded to the Vanari female and then they turned back to face them, covering the few steps until they reached the edge of the couch.

It was then Richard Faith spoke up. “My wife and daughters have done nothing.” He stammered. “Whatever you must do... do it too me!”

“Richard no!” His wife exclaimed.

“Father be quiet!” One of the twins spat her face angry. Lisisa had to admit they were identical twins and they looked incredibly similar to their sister Brendi.

“We are not here to harm you in any way Mister Faith.” Lisisa began setting the small holo disc on the table. “Just the opposite in fact.”

“We are supposed to believe you?” The twin who had spoken snarled at her. “You are a Lycavorian. And you travel with a Vanari Cadre Commando. There is no love lost between our peoples.”

“Actually I’m only half Lycavorian.” Lisisa told her calmly not put out by her defensive attitude in the least. “I’m also half vampire.” Lisisa saw the expression of recognition on their faces and she moved closer.

“We have done nothing wrong.” Elenor Faith spoke quickly. “We are not even within the Union borders.”

“I know. However... several days ago your daughter took part in a mission to kill my brother and his wives.” Lisisa said.

“Brendi!” The second twin exclaimed.

Lisisa nodded. “Yes.”

“You... you killed her didn’t you!” Elenor snapped as tears began to form in her eyes. “You killed my child!”

Lisisa shook her head quickly and knelt in front of her. “Forgive me... no!” She spoke quickly. “No! Brendi is very much alive... she is the reason we are here.”

“What... what do you mean?” Richard asked.

“Your OSG has some...” Lisisa began.

“They are not our OSG.” The first of the twins spat venomously. “They are murderers and...”

“Tasha!” Richard hissed. “Mind your tongue!”

Lisisa nodded her head to the young woman. “I stand corrected.” She stated. “The OSG then... they have become involved with a rather unsavory group of mercenary and privateer scum here in the Alpha Quadrant who deal in slavery and drugs among other things.”

Richard looked at Arduri then and she nodded her head and came forward to stand beside Lisisa. “Yes... it concerns the practice of kidnapping Vanari females sir.” She told him.

“Our daughter is in Intelligence.” Elenor snapped. “She would not take part in something like that! She...”

Lisisa nodded once more. “Yes... that is something she made very clear to us.” She told them. “However your son does.”

“Corbin?” Richard asked now. “We have not spoken to him in nearly eight years. He won’t even acknowledge us as his parents anymore. All he does is keep trying to recruit Tasha and Nicolle into the OSG ranks.”

“They are genetically modified as well?” Arduri asked.

“Almost... almost all Eridiani children are modified in some manner.” Richard answered. “What is this all about? Why are you here? Where is Brendi?”

“Currently she is on my brother’s ship the *SCIMITAR*.” Lisisa answered. “She is quite safe... but her actions have put you at risk and Androcles gave her his word he would see to it that you were removed from harm’s way.”

“Androcles?” Elenor spoke softly fear in her eyes now. “Androcles Leonidas? He is your brother?”

Lisisa nodded. “Yes.”

“Then your father is...”

Lisisa nodded again. “King Leonidas. Yes.”

“He is dead!” Tasha spoke quickly. “We saw it on the Netnews! He was killed several weeks ago!”

“That is what most people think yes.” Lisisa answered. “However that is not entirely accurate.” She held up her hand before they could ask her anymore questions. “We are working within a time frame I’m afraid. I would be more than happy to answer questions... but right now just listen to this. After you have seen this message from your daughter we need to depart with considerable haste.”

Lisisa turned to the small holoimager and activated it before stepping to the side. The small image of Brendi Faith appeared and Lisisa saw her mother gasp in surprise.

“Papa... mother... if you are viewing this then Prince Androcles has kept his word to me.” Brendi’s image began. “The men and women there... they are not there to hurt you in any way. They are there to take

you off Edolus. The OSG... the OSG took part in an operation to kill Prince Androcles Papa. I did not know what it was they were going to do until it was too late. I thought I was only to provide background information, not actual Tactical Intelligence. Well... the mission failed from the outset. All of the OSG assassination squad was killed. All of them but me. Prince Androcles was not happy as you can no doubt understand... and they had intelligence of their own that the OSG had kidnapped a Vanari female. A Vanari female that was meant to be his wife and mate. They know where she is and they are going to rescue her as we speak. They will leave nothing alive Papa and the moment the OSG assets at this place they are going are destroyed, Corbin will assume I am still alive because only I know they are there, if he has not already figured it out with other intelligence assets on Earth. I'm done with the OSG Papa... I have a chance to break away. Prince Androcles... I told him I would help him with any information that I have if only he would get you, mother and the twins out of there and protect you. I know how Corbin will react and so do you. He will be savagely angry and he will take it out on all of you. Do not be angry with me Papa but I can't work for these people anymore. The more I discover, the dirtier I feel and become. I don't like it and I want to stop. Go with them... they will get you off Edolus safely and we can talk more if you are not angry with me for deserting the OSG. They are there to help you... please Papa... go with them. I love you. I love you all."

The transmission ended and Lisisa looked at them as they sat there silently for a long moment. Richard Faith was the one to speak first and Lisisa smiled at his words.

"It's about fucking time!" He spat rising to his feet. "Tasha... Nicolle... go and change into traveling clothes. You as well Elenor. We are leaving."

"Richard... we..." Elenor looked at him.

"If we do not leave with these people you know as well as I that Brendi is right." Faith told his wife. "Corbin will have us killed and he will get what he has always wanted and that is Tasha and Nicolle in the OSG."

"He is our son." Elenor said softly.

"He has not been our son for many years Elenor and you know that." Richard answered. "Our daughter has given us the opportunity we have secretly desired for decades. I for one will not let her risks be for naught."

Elenor stared at him for a few seconds and then nodded. "You are right. He will... he will try to find her. Kill her." She said turning to look at Lisisa. "Can you... can you protect her if we leave?"

Lisisa moved closer. "I'm thinking she will remain on Andro's ship for quite a while for exactly that purpose. The *SCIMITAR* is my brother's ship... and there is not one crewmen on that ship that would not die for him. She will be safe."

Richard stood up and pulled his wife to her feet. "How long do we have?" He asked.

"The sooner the better." Lisisa answered. "Our ship is not far... but we need to be gone before your city here fully wakes up."

Richard Faith nodded. "Give us five minutes." He stated.

Lisisa turned and looked at Arduri as he ushered his wife off. Zarah and Lucia moved closer as well.

"That went better than I expected." Lisisa said softly.

"A little too smooth if you ask me." Zarah said.

Arduri shook her head. "Vanari Intelligence has gotten many reports through the years about this very thing. The common citizen is not happy with how their children are taken or chosen to serve the OSG. I believe their desire to leave is very genuine."

Lisisa nodded. "So do I... but just to be safe... Zarah, Lucia do your magic and make sure we are not being set up."

Zarah and Lucia nodded and once more wrapped the shadows around their bodies and disappeared.

Lisisa turned to Arduri once more but staggered slightly, reaching out to grab Arduri's shoulders.

"Lisisa?" Arduri asked with a worried tone in her voice. "What is it?"

"Deni." Lisisa said softly.

"What? Is something wrong?" Arduri asked with far more anxiousness in her voice than she intended.

Lisisa shook her head. "No... but he has opened the floodgates." She said softly.

"The floodgates... what do you mean?" Arduri asked.

Lisisa looked at her. “The floodgates to the power he can command but has shied away from for so long. He has thrown them open completely. I can feel it surging through him Arduri Re Mydala, through me. And it feels wonderful.”

“Is that good?” Arduri asked.

Lisisa looked at her with a smile. “It depends on who is on the receiving end of that power.” She stated.

CONDARL CAPITAL PLANET OF ICALRO ALLIANCE

Roughly the same size as Earth with a similar atmosphere, Condarl was no where near as advanced as other planets. There was a massive space facility in orbit of the planet which served as their shipyards and the primary base of operations. Slowly but surely with the money they were making they were building themselves an empire. Or so they thought. The vast majority of power lay within the framework of ten criminal leaders that called the Icalro Alliance home, and they were not willing to share that power. Most of the civilian settlements were spread out and did not associate with one another since most of them were criminals of one nature or another. There was really not even a capital city, only a sprawling ten story structure and estate that was five kilometers square and housed all of the criminal leaders. It was also situated in one of the most lush sections of the planet, denying those on Condarl the rich mineral deposits and other trade items. It was here within the main meeting room of the ten story building where the ten men who called themselves leaders sat around the table and were going over the reports that were coming in of the attack on Ontahe.

“Are we sure it’s Union forces?” One man asked.

“Cyngi’s man seemed certain.” Another spoke. “He specifically mentioned Lycavorians and dragons. The union is the only entity that has dragons fighting on their side.”

“Why would they attack Ontahe?” Another man asked. “What would be the purpose of targeting Cyngi?”

“I don’t know... but his people are calling for whatever support we can give them.” Another spoke. “It appears all they have attacked with is a *MENKLA* transport and a *STRIKER DT* that is nearly twice the size of their normal ones.”

“A surgical attack?” Another asked. “Is he involved in illicit activities that we are not aware of? Something that would anger the Union in particular?”

“Have they discovered somehow that we are shielding Laustinos?” another spoke from the side.

“Impossible!” The first one announced. “The Kavalian Federation guaranteed that no one would discover it was they who were paying for his safety.”

“Laustinos is on Ontahe.” Another said. “That is where we told him to go. As well as our partners from the OSG. It will not appear good if they are injured or killed.”

“So we are in agreement then?” One of them stood up from his chair. “We will send our destroyers and frigates to assist Cyngi in defending Ontahe?”

“What choice do we have?” a second man said. “They are intentionally violating our sovereign territory with this attack.”

The thin man entered from a side door and walked up to one of the senior leaders, handing him a data pad. He was very mousy in appearance and looked as if he hadn’t eaten well in decades.

The man read the data pad quickly and looked up. “We are receiving an active COM transmission from a Union warship.” He spoke. “The Captain... the Captain wants to speak with us.” He said hesitantly.

“Speak with us? For what purpose?”

“Does it matter? We can file an official complaint with this captain for their attack on one of our worlds.” Another spoke.

The man with the data pad turned to the aide and nodded. “Establish the link.” He said.

They watched the aide move to the far wall where their massive communications monitor was. He pressed several buttons on the control panel and built in holoimagers came to life with the full-bodied image of the Asian human. She was sitting on the bridge of a ship that was easy enough to see, though the transmission was focused entirely on her body and they could barely make out anything around her.

“Ah... gentlemen.” She began as she rose to her feet. “It was good of you to take my transmission. I didn’t want to have to do what I’m about to do without seeing the looks on your faces.”

“We wish to file an official complaint with the Galactic Court in regards to an obvious violation of our sovereign territory. Lycavorian Union forces are at this moment attacking our planet of Ontahe!” The man who was usually the spokesmen for them began.

“My name is Admiral Miranda Lorian.” She spoke calmly. “And we are attacking the mercenary base you have allowed to exist on Ontahe. Blowing the shit out of it if the reports are accurate.”

“You admit this!” The man declared.

“Of course.” Miranda said. “Why wouldn’t we? We are removing a blight upon the galaxy by destroying that slavers hub. Something I am about to do myself.” Miranda lifted the data pad she held in her hand so that they could all see it. “Gentlemen... and I do use that term loosely mind you... you made an official agreement with King Martin Leonidas several years ago that you would not traffic slaves through Union space. Because of that stipulation, he agreed to not interfere in your affairs and did not blow your sorry asses into oblivion then. It usually is not a very healthy thing to cross a Leonidas after making a deal as you are about to find out.”

“We have done no such thing?” The spokesmen snapped. “What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the Vanari females that you or your cronies have been trafficking in for the last two years at least.” Miranda told him. “Did you think bringing them into the Alpha Quadrant by way of Bontawillian space somehow made it ok?”

“We have... we have done no such thing!” The man growled.

“Your face and your voice tell me you are a lying sack of *sibfla*... but we already knew that didn’t we?” Miranda growled right back. “See... you made the mistake of taking one of Androcles Leonidas’s wives and mates gentlemen. Yes... she is a Vanari... and when he found this out he wasn't in the least bit happy. He’s pretty much tearing the asshole from your friends on Ontahe while he gets his woman back and then I have this.” She spoke holding up the data pad.

“What... what is that?” The man snapped. “We protest this false action!”

“This?” Miranda grinned widely. “This gentlemen is an order signed by King Leonidas himself not two days ago giving me directives and permission to send all of you straight to hell. Which I plan to do right now.” Miranda turned in the transmission. “E’dira... batteries three through seven! Full ecliptic depth on the guns! Full yield on plasma generators! You may commence firing when ready.” Miranda turned back to the wide-eyed men who were now all standing and looking at her image. “Make peace with whatever gods you believe in gentlemen, for you are about to join them. Have a nice day.”

“Sir!” The aide barked. “Sir... our officers on the station and the ships in orbit are reporting ships de-shrouding all around them. Union military ships like they have never seen before. They are...”

The aide never finished the sentence as five Type One Plasma beam shots from orbit impacted with unerring accuracy dead center of the ten-story structure and obliterated it along with the ranking members of the Icalro Alliance and its fledging government. A second volley followed only five seconds later, further adding to the maelstrom that had become a burial pit for those self proclaimed leaders of a mercenary and outlaw government. None of them would survive.

As men and women who lived in the surrounding settlements began running from their homes following the sounds of thunder and earthquakes they turned towards the direction of the Icalro Alliance Headquarters and saw nothing but a rising black cloud and flames that rose hundreds of feet into the air. As they looked further up in to the morning sky, they could see bright streaks of light in crisscrossing patterns filling the twilight. Most of them knew what it meant and they darted back into their makeshift homes and huts to begin packing their meager belongings to flee in whatever way they could.

The Icalro Alliance as they knew it was about to become a thing of the past.

ULU ARIZONA

“Sensors indicate target has been destroyed Miranda!” E’dira called from her tactical station as Miranda settled back into her command chair.

“Excellent!” She spoke. “Weapons free all batteries! Stick to the target list and do not stop firing until there is nothing left! Have Janon and the *HORNET* break to a polar orbit and begin systematic bombardment of the northern continent. That is where the reports say their weapons research is going on. Glass the entire continent! Don’t leave anything standing!”

“Alliance ships are beginning to maneuver!” E'dira called out. “Sensors are picking up twenty-six frigates and seven medium cruisers!”

“Have the Second and Third Wolfpacks engage the Alliance ships!” Miranda ordered. “Launch Colonel Randall and the Ready Squadrons for fighter support runs! Helm come to course 3456.89! Bring the main batteries to bear on the station!”

“Admiral... there could be civilians on the station.” Zaala called out from her engineering station.

Miranda glanced at her quickly slightly annoyed. That emotion swiftly passed as Miranda knew Zaala was acting just as Janon would have acted as her executive officer. It was their duty to inform her of these things even though Miranda knew exactly how Zaala Randall felt in regards to anyone associated with the Icalro Alliance. Since Miranda had not appointed anyone to take Janon’s place, Zaala took it upon herself to act in his stead. Being the elven wife of the most famous fighter pilot in the Union probably had something to do with her knowing how things worked.

Miranda nodded her head as she turned back to look at the main view windows as the *ARIZONA* was turning. “If they are working on that station then they are not innocent.” She stated plainly. “Androcles said to vaporize everything and leave nothing in our wake. I intend to do just that.”

“Targeting solutions complete and weapons ready!” The *ARIZONA*’s Weapons Officer barked.

Miranda nodded. “Payback is a bitch!” She muttered. “Commence firing!”

ONTAHE

Am'uur held up his hand stopping everyone behind him as they came to a length of corridor that was little used according to the schematics. There was a chest high barrier to guard against engine blow back and as he moved to the end of this barrier, everyone put their backs to it along with him. Tastia had remained very close by his side during the entire dash from the Vanari chambers, the RD team mixed in and helping Vanari females along or covering their retreat towards the landing bay. Dutkne settled with his back to the wall on the opposite side of Tastia and his eyes counted off the number of Vanari with them, making sure they had not lost anyone. The level of weapons fire from within the landing bay itself was deafening when combined with the angry trumpets from the six dragons who were laying down searing blast after searing blast of flame in order to keep the heads of the mercenaries down. Am'uur could also make out the deep boom of the kinetic cannon in the nose of the *MENKLA* as if fired at targets of opportunity. He lifted his head slightly until just his eyes were peering over the top of the barrier and they grew wide at what he saw.

Several of the civilian transports that had already been in the cavernous landing bay were now laying on the deck completely and burning intensely. Those must have been the large explosions they had heard and felt throughout the entire mountain base. He could just barely make out Bren and Devra near the ramp of the *MENKLA*, alternating between slipping out for an extended burst from their weapons and hiding behind the thick crates they had positioned around the rear of the ramp as cover. The three members of Jomann’s personal team were also doing the same thing with exceedingly lethal results. The six dragons had taken up positions between the two ships, and Am'uur’s eyes grew wider when he saw all of them engulfed in a ghostly bluish like flame that encompassed their entire bodies. Whatever small arms fire that was directed at them impacted that bluish flame and the normal psychic shields they all had and did no damage in the least. Between the dragons, they were easily covering the rear of the Mark II *STRIKER DT*, it’s ramp down and Am'uur seeing two Vanari alternating between cover and ducking out to fire their weapons. Arrarn Leonidas was obviously still within the cockpit and directing the lone sniper turret on the top of the *DT* which was equipped with a heavy single fire cannon. Every time this cannon fired, Am'uur saw a body or crate explode. Whoever was in the turret and operating that main gun was extremely skilled in its use.

They were behind the mercenaries, all of whom had taken up defensive positions facing the DT and the *MENKLA*. Am'uur stopped counting their number at a hundred and seventy and he dropped back down and looked at Tastia.

“What now?” She hissed at him over the din of weapons fire.

“We wait.” Dutkne answered for Am'uur causing both of them to look at him.

“Wait for what?” Tastia snapped turning to look at his face which caused her to become even more desperate because it was so damn calm. “We are behind them! We can not wait here for long! How do we get to the ship with over a hundred of these scum between us?”

“Have faith Tastia Dal Vesch.” Am'uur spoke causing her green eyes to turn back around and focus on him.

“We can't have come this far just to be stopped!” She snapped. “I refuse to believe that Am'uur!”

“Who said anything about being stopped?” Am'uur told her. “We are simply waiting for the signal.”

“Signal?” Tastia demanded. “What signal? Androcles said nothing about a signal.”

“Not to you perhaps.” Dutkne spoke loud enough so that his voice carried over the sound of the weapons fire. “You saw the same transmission from the *Feravomir*, the Lycavorian First Oracle as we did. You heard what she told him.”

“Yes. So?”

Dutkne nodded. “Then we wait for the signal.”

Elynth!

Andro barked out her name within Mindvoice as they piled onto the catwalk where they had entered only minutes before, staying beneath the solid metal shield that wrapped around the entire elevated walkway.

These little men and their big guns are beginning to irritate me my bonded brother! Elynth snarled back. *We can not fully concentrate unless they are removed from the same catwalk above us that you are on!*

Where?

Across the bay from your location! Three teams of two!

Give me an explosion or something to distract them sister! Andro barked turning to look at Jomann. “Jomann! Three and two! Opposite side of the bay! Take them out!”

Jomann nodded without hesitation and adjusted his P190A3 slightly. Eliani had turned when she heard Andro call out his name and as her fern green eyes fell upon Jomann they went wide as she saw the bluish flame burst from around his body and he rose to his feet almost as if he was in slow motion.

“Jomann no!” She screamed out beginning to reach for him.

Elynth snapped her head around to her handsome carmine scaled dragon mate. *My husband! A distraction is needed!* She shouted to him.

Anthar's huge head turned to her instantly, his magenta colored eyes wide and clear. *A big distraction my beautiful mate?*

The bigger the better! Elynth laughed back at him before turning and cutting loose with another stream of flame tinged super heated breath. Anthar didn't dither and whipped his head back around to eye the huge fuel bladder he had spotted moments ago. Yes that would do nicely he thought. He snatched up a screaming Kochab mercenary within his TK power and turned loose a wicked stream of flame, engulfing the screaming man in brilliant fire. While still in the grips of that TK power Anthar flung him across the bay like a blazing arrow, his screams rapidly dying out as his lungs cooked from the inside. His burning and flailing body smashed into the large fuel bladder with stunning strength. Enough to crack the tank and allow hissing white gas to pour out, gas that tasted the flame of the burning body and quickly became a small inferno. The ensuing explosion shattered the landing bay once more and sent all those not prepared staggering back and forth. This is when Jomann acted.

Eliani was frozen in her spot, more correctly Jomann was moving far faster than anyone she had ever seen before in her life. Seeing the bluish flame burst from around his body stunned her for she did not think Andro could have taught him anything in such a short time. She would later learn that Androcles and Jomann simply advanced the skills that were already there, and teaching Jomann to utilize the dormant power within his blood to simply speed himself up so that others appeared slow to him was a simple matter.

Six shots rang out, and just as it had happened in the room where they had discovered Caliria, six targets went down. None of them had anything that even resembled a head when Jomann ducked back beneath the barrier. His eyes fell on her as he squatted back down and Eliani nearly wet her panties right there as she tasted his aura once more.

[I will make you mine Eliani Leonidas!] His voice echoed in her mind like a trumpet. So completely confident and powerful. *[I will make you mine and you will never desire the touch or smell of another for I will always be in your blood.]*

Eliani Leonidas shuddered at his words, but reveled in the truth of them as they echoed within her mind.

Andro dropped next to where Caliria huddled between Carisia and Lu'ria. "Go with *Enylarcopri* and *Ilythiiri Tessai* now Caliria!" He spoke. "They will take you to the ship and you will be with your mother. Your brother will join you shortly."

"I don't want... I don't want to leave you!" Caliria complained.

"You are not leaving me *Inamarno*." Andro answered her with a smile. "You are simply moving locations. Sadi and Ne'Veha wait for you as well. I must do something first. Before we can finally be free of this place and put it behind us."

"What?" Caliria exclaimed.

Andro smiled and kissed the knuckles of her hands. "I must keep a promise I made to your mother." He stated proudly before standing up completely.

The fuel bladder that Anthar had destroyed had brought all firing to an end as over a hundred mercenaries scrambled for cover somewhere. The explosion also caught Cyngi in its concussive shock as he was coming out into the lower bay carrying a large assault rifle. It was silent except for the echoing of flames licking outward and then the single voice broke that silence and all heads turned towards the sound.

"Niob aur fervon mornar arandes!" Androcles Leonidas screamed just before that flame like Psychokinesis power flared around his body even brighter than it had up until now and he leaped from the catwalk, followed a single heartbeat away by Denali and Jomann.

Straight into hell's inferno.

CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

RITAAH

Resumar stood silently in what could be construed as the main engineering room of VORTEX Cruiser 341 staring at one of the four dormant Quantum Fusion Drive Cores. It was an enormous circular machine, the globe in the center much wider in circumference, and then slimming on the top and bottom as it fit into the many conduits and connections leading out of the core. It extended nearly fifty meters up and down in height, as well as an additional two hundred and fifty meters back from where he was standing in front of the three-panel control console. The cores themselves, when combined together, were larger than the main engineering room of a *LEONIDAS II*-Class Striker Cruiser and Resumar could not begin to imagine the power they could generate if ever they were activated. As he let his dark eyes drift up and down gazing at just this one core, Resumar decided that what he and Andro were doing was certainly the correct thing to do. It needed to be done to insure the technology of this ship never fell into the wrong hands, and that it wasn't lost to them.

Resumar turned when Avi and 341 entered the empty engineering room and walked directly up to him. Had he not grown up with Avi a constant presence in his life, Res would have been just a little intimidated by

the two seven foot tall Avatars in front of him. Though they were almost identical in how they looked, even without the different clothing they wore, Resumar could easily pick out Avi. Avi had been an integral part of their education as they were growing up. It was Avi who had schooled him and Andro and all of their siblings in regards to the Pralors and the knowledge on City Ship 41. Their father and mothers wanted them to know about their history and how their blood came to be. It was not information that was available to everyone for his father did not want their enemies to know just how much knowledge and technology inhabited CS41. If the entire Lycavorian Union knew the real origins of CS41 then every criminal and aggressive species in and out of the Union who had a grudge against them would find their way to earth in vain attempts to take it, as well as put many lives in danger for those who knew that the information and knowledge existed.

“Ok...” Respoke his arms crossed over his chest. “Why did you want to see me Avi?”

-We have finished running the simulations that you and Androcles devised- Avi answered him.

“And?”

Avatar 341 tilted his head slightly and looked at him. **-If I may ask Resumar Leonidas, what would be the purpose of this simulation be if it was to actually take place?-**

Resumar met his red eyes. “It would send a message 341. A message my father, my brother and I want to be heard loud and clear.” He answered flatly. “I know it was thrown together quickly and we don’t have accurate and up to date Intel, but is it possible? That is what we want to know.”

-The variables are too numerous to list in a final report...- Avi answered him evenly. **-However... the overall scope of the plan is rather ingenious-** He looked at Resumar. **-With the proper deployments yes Resumar, it is very possible. Androcles created the base plan from what I can ascertain?-**

Resumar nodded. “He sent it to me once we originally talked about what I wanted to do. I added the additional elements to the base plan he sent to better accommodate the priority of the objectives.”

-I can deduce that since we are the only ones here discussing this, that this operation is not common knowledge- 341 spoke.

“The only ones who know about it right now are Andro, Athani and the three of us.” Res answered him. “Until we finalize the details and discover what it is my Uncle and the Kavalian leadership is trying to accomplish, that is the way it will stay.”

-Shiria has inquired of me what it is you have us working on outside of the normal information upload and download- 341 said.

Resumar looked at him. “I assume you have not told her anything?”

-My programming does not allow me to violate the internal security protocols in place in my neural network Resumar Leonidas. A descendant of Chief Elder Pralor, any descendant, is whom I answer too. I tried to explain this to her- He replied without pause. **-She found this very frustrating Resumar Leonidas-**

Resumar grinned. “I’m sure she did.” He said. “The emergency protocols for her are active correct?”

Avi nodded now. **-I have installed a bypass into her ship’s main computer core. If our position here is compromised in any way or there is a significant risk to her life either 341 or myself will initiate this bypass. She will be removed, forcibly if necessary, and her ship will immediately obtain orbit and conduct a maximum FDC jump into Union space. From there she will be taken to Earth or Apo Prime**

depending on current security concerns and put into protective custody. I have already dispatched an encrypted Crimson Storm Security Level Nine message to General Vengal on Earth to be prepared should this need to happen-

Resumar nodded. “Good. Uncle Vengal will be ready in any case.” He said. “How much longer before everything is operational?”

-Downloading everything into the Data Cores you brought was far easier than uploading Resumar Leonidas- 341 stated. -Captain Fang and her engineers have been invaluable, but incorporating unaltered Pralor technology into your ships is not easily done-

“I realize this 341.” Resumar said with some anxiousness in his voice as he turned away from them. “I was just asking.”

-You are worried for your mother For'mya aren't you Resumar? - Avi stated moving forward slightly.

“Worried. And a whole lot of pissed off.” Resumar answered turning back to look at him. “And knowing that I can not do anything about it makes me insane! I keep hearing in my head what she told me on *MJOLNIR HAND* Avi. How she would do anything to protect those she loves. I truly fear what she would submit too if she thought she was protecting one or more of us.”

-She is willing to do this because of her emotions for her family- Avi spoke. -That is not something to doubt Resumar-

“That’s just it!” Resumar hissed. “I don’t doubt it! I don’t doubt it in the least! And I fear what she would submit herself too in order to save one of us. Thinking that the Kavalians... my Uncle... believing that they killed father. She can’t know he is still alive! We’ve told only those in our family and we cannot feel her within Mindvoice to tell her this. My uncle could be telling her anything he wants and her emotional state will cause her to believe him because she cannot sense any of us! Any of us!” Resumar shook her head. “My mother is very smart... and the only reason she would be able to come up with for this is because we are dead. She doesn’t know about the implants or what they do Avi.”

-So you are saying she is helping them because she believes one or more of you is alive? And she is trying to keep it this way- 341 asked. -This would make the most logical sense-

Resumar nodded. “If she thought we were all dead she would never help him! She would die before lifting a finger to help him in any way.” He shook his head. “No. My uncle... he has to be manipulating her somehow in order to obtain her assistance. Whatever that assistance may be.”

-Can the Kavalian female Poysha determine what this assistance is? - 341 asked him. -It may help to know this and better formulate a plan to return her to our fold-

Resumar looked at him now. “341... did you just say our fold?”

-That statement is accurate- 341 answered. -Avatar 41... Avi... his neural patterns and microprogramming networks are now part of me as well. My personality programs have shifted considerably since linking our Neural Processors. I am taking those patterns and sub routines and forming them into my own database-

“So you are becoming like Avi?” Resumar asked.

-No. My neural network patterns are still my own, but I am forming my own unique suppositions to many of the events and the information I have processed in the last ten days. Technically I believe the term brother would be more accurate- 341 answered evenly. **-Avi does not view reactivation as a prudent measure where as I do. For many reasons that he does not support. I believe that is because of the influence of your father on him, where as my primary influence since reactivating has been yourself primarily and your brother Androcles from afar-**

“It’s not a competition 341.” Resumar spoke.

-Nor do I regard it as such- 341 answered. **-It is simply how we were designed to be Resumar. As the Avatars of our respective ships we were designed to take on personality traits from those ship commanders. It is programmed into our neural networks for it allows us to grow. Chief Elder Pralor Sumar for Avatar 41 initially, and then your father. VORTEX Cruiser 341 never had a commander and thus my interaction has not been as cognizant and complete as it should have been. At least until you arrived and now I have interacted with you and your brother on a regular basis-**

“Your thoughts on my plan?” Resumar asked.

-Unlike Avi... I am fully cognizant of what VORTEX Cruiser 341 is capable of- 341 told him. **-I am this ship Resumar. When you call on me... on us... we will be ready. And despite the logical odds that Avi has stated numerous times, he is, or was the Avatar of a City Ship. The most very advanced of our seed ships yes, but a City Ship nonetheless. VORTEX Cruiser 341 is a warship. It has been since its inception. I am the avatar of a warship, and as such, I will think differently in regards to odds and what I and this ship are capable of-**

“So you think and process more like my brother and I?” Resumar asked.

-You are Spartans. And warriors. Based on the information I have obtained and processed from Avi in regards to the Spartan history and the history of your father and grandfather I believe fate as you call it and believe in... I believe fate put VORTEX here for you to find and to use- 341 answered.

Resumar stepped closer to him. “That sounds like a very human belief 341.” He said.

341 shook his head. **-It is logical considering the events that led to you discovering this ship and what has occurred since you found us-** He answered. **-Perhaps the remaining Pralor leaders who dispatched us here knew this... perhaps they did not. Calculations of the odds and all variables suggest they knew exactly what they were doing by sending us to this sector of space. They knew it would be Sumar’s descendants who found it. They would be the only ones who truly knew how to discover it outside of Xaxon’s descendants. And because of that... they did not fear how it would be used-**

“It was Xaxon’s descendants who discovered it.” Resumar said. “Aikiro and the Coven found it.”

341 turned slowly and looked at Avi. He turned back to Resumar who had witnessed the almost human exchange of facial expressions and waited for one of them to say something. It was 341 who finally spoke. **- That is not entirely true Resumar Leonidas-**

“What do you mean?” Res asked. He looked at Avi. “Avi?”

-Your father and I discovered that VORTEX Cruiser 341 existed twelve point three years ago Resumar Leonidas- Avi answered him. **-He has known of its existence this entire time-**

“What?” Resumar gasped. “But... why didn’t he... why did he act like this was all new to him then? Like it was a new discovery?”

-Once Aikiro revealed to him that they had detected something, he acted in the manner he did to keep them from realizing exactly what it was they had discovered- Avi answered. –Aikiro may have been many thousands of years older than your father, and considerably more refined in her Mindvoice skills, but she was not a blood descendant of Xaxon. Elder Pralor Xaxon bestowed upon her father a large portion of his mind and abilities when CS19 was discovered because his essence is what existed on CS19 while his body was on CS41. In turn she passed on this skill to her children, but it was never as strong as the bloodlines that descend from Sumar. You know as well as I that the purity coefficient of one’s blood is what measures the strength of Mindvoice and psychic ability. Xaxon descendants would never be as powerful as Sumar’s because they lacked the one thing that carried the core of that power within it Resumar. The blood flowing in their veins. Aikiro knew this and that is why she acted as she did. She was well aware that no amount of training or control would allow her to defeat your father-

“What else does my father know that he hasn’t shared with the rest of us?” Resumar asked.

Avi shook his head. **-I will only say that he is unlike the persona that many have of him. Your mother Anja once stated that those who choose to label your father as just another ignorant soldier without truly knowing him were ‘Some dumb motherfuckers’ I believe her exact words were- Avi looked at him. –This pronouncement... while crude... is very accurate. Your mother Anja enjoys her colorful metaphors-**

-A request if I may Resumar Leonidas- 341 asked now.

Res looked at him. “Yes?”

-I would like your permission to alter the registry of VORTEX Cruiser 341- He said.

“What do you mean?” Resumar asked.

-VORTEX Cruiser 341 is the name given to this ship when it was launched because it was the 341st ship of its class- 341 answered him. –I have studied your history, that of Sparta, the Lycavorian people and many customs. I would like your permission to alter the registry to reflect a sense of purpose and remembrance that is customary of your people-

-He wishes the name of this ship to strike fear into your enemies when you go into battle- Avi said with an almost disgusted look on his Avatar face.

-It is customary- 341 protested looking back to Resumar. –And it would allow your father to see that your course of action. Your brother’s course of action. That this is the right thing to do-

“If I didn’t know any better 341 I would say there is some emotional reason in your voice for wanting to do this.” Resumar said.

-While it may appear or sound that way to your ears Resumar... it is not possible- 341 answered. – Your decision; Androcles’s decision to not destroy this ship... it is only fitting that it receive a name worthy of its rebirth so to speak-

“What name did you have in mind?” Resumar asked.

-SPARTA’S WRATH- 341 answered.

Resumar stared at him for a long moment. “You’ve given this a lot of thought huh?”

-Sixteen point two seconds- 341 answered. **–And that is an eternity for my neural processor-**

Resumar chuckled. “Very well. *SPARTA’S WRATH*. I like it. I think Andro will too.” He said. “And you believe the plan is solid?”

-For lack of a more descriptive or technical description- 341 spoke. **–We will go through them like goose through shit-**

Resumar broke out into a genuine laughter, the first in several days and he shook his head. “That’s shit through a goose 341! But I get what you are trying to say. Good... good... Andro and I want to make sure it’s heard loud and clear too.”

ONTAHE

The bellow of Andro’s voice in the ancient Lycavorian language served two purposes really. One was intended; the other unexpected. The unexpected portion was that every single mercenary under Cyngi’s command stopped firing and turned at the same time to see him leap from the metal catwalk above with two other Lycavorians close behind. They were a mixture of Kochab, Bo'yak and Evolli scum, most of them never having seen sustained combat of any kind with the exception of several of the Evolli. Many of them were no more than harsh bullies and murderers. For years many of them had oppressed and killed and maimed their way through life and the galaxy without ever once crossing paths with a Lycavorian. Cyngi had brought the scum and villainy of the universe here to this frozen rock. Though they had no idea or thoughts of it at the time, for they were witnessing what appeared to be Androcles’s suicidal leap to the main deck, the vast majority of them would be very dead within the next hour for what they had taken part in.

The second purpose had been planned, and it was the one that Dutkne had been waiting for. He had known all along what Androcles planned, for since he had arrived in Union space, truly since he had met Androcles, everything his grandfather had told him through the years was coming true. There were now only seven men and women who were as close to Androcles as his father and siblings. He would keep no secrets from them no matter what it cost. Just being around him, watching him, and seeing how he thought Dutkne realized that his grandfather had known all along that this is how things would play out. Within days they had become as close as any friends could be. Dutkne was accepted without question among the *Durcunusaan* as one of the very few who could get close to him and not be watched every moment. He had even accepted them referring to him as *Vali’star* now, almost as if he had fallen in to the role without even realizing it. He also could not keep his thoughts from the dark hair of Zarah Leonidas and Lucia Moran, their sultry eyes, or the lush figures they both had. He had never been attracted to any female as he was to them, both of them, and it was only another sign that this is where fate had decreed he belonged. He knew what Zarah had been through, knew what role Lucia now played in her life, but he also knew nothing was ever without challenge.

The moment they heard Andro’s voice rise above the sporadic weapons fire Dutkne began a silent count in his head as the others strained to see what was happening. He lowered his Mindvoice shields just enough to detect her as was the plan and moments after he did he heard her voice loud, clear and strong.

Dutkne we are in position! Tharua’s voice barked out. *Bring them now! Now!*

Dutkne surged to his feet then without pause. “Am'uur! Break for the *STRIKER!* Go now!”

Am'uur looked at him with wide eyes but was well trained enough to not hesitate. “We must go!” He barked as he too sprang to his feet.

“Am'uur the mercenaries!” Tastia screamed at him. “They are blocking our way!”

Seconds after the words left her mouth the huge emerald scaled head of Majeir snapped around the corner and glared at them.

Dutkne! Now! We will not be able to cover you for very long once they regain their senses! She barked out in Mindvoice.

Dutkne grabbed Tastia's hand, shoved it into Am'uur's grasp and pushed them toward the corner. "Go damn it!" He snarled. He turned back to the RD soldiers. "Bring them to the ship! Go! Go!"

All of them surged off the floor at his orders and Am'uur gripped Tastia's hand tightly as they broke from cover and came to screeching halts. Thaura, Majeir, Anthar and Deneth had imposed their massive bodies at twenty meters intervals and what could only be described as a shimmering light blue barrier connected them all, effectively cutting off the mercenaries from firing at them and giving them a straight shot to the back of the *STRIKER DT* Mark II where the Vanari Ardan and Devra were waving at them frantically.

"By the grace of the prophets!" Tastia gasped when she saw the barrier.

She let out a small scream of shock and fear when six bodies landed in front of her and she was staring at two of Androcles's mates and his sister as well as his brother's wife Narice. Between them they were supporting two Vanari females, one of whom was Devra's daughter Caliria. Her head whipped around and up and she gazed at the catwalk above them that they had leaped from. Am'uur pulled on Tastia's arm as they began running for the ship in front of them.

"Time to move your asses!" Eliani barked back at him as she and Narice supported Yssyla between them and began sprinting towards the DT as quickly as they could helping the young woman between them.

"Tastia... perhaps we should follow them!" He barked yanking on her arm this time and beginning to drag her forward as Dutkne led the RD soldiers and other Vanari females from around the wall barricade in a mad dash for the ramp of the *STRIKER*.

Caliria Re Mydala had watched him leap from the catwalk above with wide eyes. She felt Carisia and Lu'ria's hands tighten on her as they pressed close and then they too were leaping from the catwalk in another direction. Seeing the huge beasts below her gave her pause for only a second since she had seen them in her dreams as well. As silly as it was at a time like this she chastised herself for referring to them as beasts as they landed on the landing bay floor twenty meters beneath the catwalk. They were so beautiful and graceful and utterly ferocious when they wanted to be. Caliria didn't hesitate in allowing Carisia and Lu'ria to lead her, clinging tightly to their hands as they began to run the hundred and twenty meters between the catwalk and where the rear of the *STRIKER* was open. Her eyes detected another Vanari female in front of them and she gasped when she realized it was her mother. Her lean, beautiful frame and luscious silver blond hair were unmistakable to Caliria. Her mother was gripping a large hand weapon and standing without fear beside the tall and powerfully built Lycavorian soldier as they took up positions on the ramp. Her wide eyes also saw Regent Ardan standing on that ramp and a strange looking rifle in his hands, something that she never in her life thought she would see.

Caliria was amazed at the time it took them to close the distance from where they landed to the ship and then she remembered that Carisia was a vampire and Lu'ria a Drow elf female. Both of them were naturally far faster than a Vanari in every sense of the word and with Eliani and Narice pressing them from behind it was not surprising they covered the distance in a what seemed like only a few heartbeats.

Devra had spied them from the minute they landed on the landing bay floor and her heart was racing as she watched Carisia and Lu'ria practically carry her between them. Devra's heart soared as suddenly she was embracing her daughter once more and even with the heavy sound of weapons fire all around them, the tears began to flow as they hugged each other tightly while Devra pulled her further into the ship.

"Caliria my daughter!" Devra sobbed as she crushed her in her arms with all of her strength. The fears of never seeing her again, of the agony she had had to endure, all these things faded as she held her daughter once more.

"Mother!" Caliria basked in the feeling of her mother's arms around her even as she could feel the other Vanari being ushered onto the ship and up the ramp. She felt stronger arms embrace both her and her mother and she turned her head to see Nirilo pulling both of them to him.

"Nirilo!" She cried as his arms embraced them both and the warmth of her older brother's body filled her as well.

Nirilo squeezed her tightly, including his mother in his embrace and he held his cheek to her soft black hair for a long moment before pulling back and looking into her tear filled honeydew green eyes.

"We never lost faith sister!" He gasped softly. "Mother never lost faith that we would find you!"

"I never... how... how did you...?" Caliria stammered unable to find the words.

“He did.” Devra spoke immediately. “Androcles found you. He found you far quicker than I ever thought possible.”

“Andro?” Caliria gasped as she turned her body and looked back down the ramp. Devra wasn’t the only one who noticed the familiarity with which she spoke his name and she glanced at Nirilo quickly. A small part of them still did not believe what Androcles told them about Caliria. “He jumped from...”

“Devra my wife!” Bren’s voice pulled her back to the present and she turned to look at him. “We are not out of this yet! Get your females secured in seats! The Mark II is not made to carry six dragons and it will be a tight fit once Elynth and Aradace return!”

“Androcles is still out there Bren!” Devra shouted back at him. “Sadi and Ne’Veha haven’t come over from the *MENKLA!*”

“Things will come together very quickly and we must be prepared!” Bren barked back.

“What is he doing Bren?” Devra screamed now wanting to get her daughter off this planet more than anything else in the universe.

Caliria took her hand quickly shocked at the words the Lycavorian had spoken. He had called her his wife and she looked at her mother with wide eyes. “Mother... he said... Andro said he was fulfilling a promise.” She spoke softly as Devra turned to look at her and Ardan watched from behind her.

“What do you mean?” Devra asked her.

“He said he was going to fulfill a promise he made to you.” Caliria told her.

Devra’s eyes grew wide when Caliria told her this and she turned to stare out the back of the *STRIKER*. All of them did in fact, for almost all firing had stopped completely as Tharua, Majeir, Anthar and Deneth took up positions at the bottom of the ramp now. Dutkne, Am'uur, Tastia, all of them stood at the bottom or mid way up actual ramp itself as they witnessed something none of them had ever expected or imagined. Carisia and Lu'ria clung to each other for they could feel it surging though them more powerful than anything they had felt before and it was divine. Carisia turned when she felt the hand grip her arm and she saw Eliani step up to her, her fern green eyes wide and her body flush with a shimmering bluish light.

“Carisia!” She gasped.

“We feel it!” Carisia exclaimed. “Eli... Eli what is it?”

What swept through Eliani was a tidal wave of emotion, from different sources yes, but primarily from Androcles in his brotherly fashion and the unambiguous and distinct emotion of resolute love and yearning from Jomann for her. She glanced at Carisia then. “Something... something wonderful.” She said softly.

“By the grace of the four prophets!” All of them heard Devra exclaim in a voice of astonishment and they turned to see what she and everyone else was watching.

He embraced it now.

Denali Leonidas had never been one to truly reach for the power his blood could give him. He had listened intently and learned everything his father and brother had taught to him. What they had taught him and Aradace. Denali knew he would never be as powerful or utterly as commanding as Androcles but he felt no jealousy towards him. His older brother made it a point to include him in nearly everything he did, he insured that Denali and others got the credit that was theirs to have, and Androcles avoided the spotlight as if it was the plague. He was the only reason that Lisisa and him had the time to discover what they now shared. By keeping them together to explore and nurture their blossoming love, Denali and Lisisa had found what many never do, and Andro had forever sealed the loyalty of his younger brother no matter the odds. This was part of the plan Deni knew and if what he sensed was happening all around them was indeed taking place, it was working to perfection. He landed beside Andro on the floor of the landing bay, Jomann only three steps behind them, and two seconds after that they had dropped into crouches as Elynth and Aradace were upon them in a blink, wrapping their massive wingspans around them like some protective cocoon, their heads and necks twisting and turning, their long tails curling up along their talon equipped feet and effectively creating a bubble. Their position within the center of the mercenary lines had the desired effect of drawing the attention of all of the pirate scum to them. The two dragon sisters, combined with their bonded brothers and Jomann’s powerful and growing presence within Mindvoice merged their power together and created a shimmering light blue bubble of psychic power around them.

The shock wore off for Cyngi almost immediately and he turned the huge assault rifle he carried toward the blue bubble. "The sons!" He screamed. "It is the sons! Kill the sons!" His finger drew back on the trigger and he sent a burst of withering sustained fire at the cocoon of dragon scales that encircled the Lycavorian King's two pureblooded sons.

At the sound of his command, nearly one hundred and twenty rifles or hand weapons shifted direction and began to unleash a maelstrom of kinetic propelled death at the huge cocoon that now resided on the deck of the cargo bay.

Andro knelt on one knee within that cocoon, Deni and Jomann facing him a similar position, their arms intertwined on each others shoulders and Elynth and Aradace's huge muzzles staring at them from either direction. All of them could feel the sensations of the kinetic rounds hammering their psychic shields; they could just barely make out the screaming voices of the mercenaries as they tried their level best to kill them.

They were the Bonded Sisters of the only two pureblood sons King Martin Leonidas had of fighting age, and in a number of years Deion Leonidas would count himself among them, and their younger dragon brother Jeru would be beside them as a warrior as well. They were silent staring at the three young Lycavorian males, the three of them with perhaps some of the purest Lycavorian blood to exist in the Union today. Elynth and Aradace knew well the history of the Lycavorian people as well as the Pralors and the immense role they had played. They knew that the purity of a Lycavorian's blood was the measure of the power they could wield. There were perhaps less than a hundred thousand Lycavorians who could count themselves as direct pure descendants of the original Ruling Packs on Lycavore. While every Lycavorian could trace their bloodlines back to those on Lycavore in some way, very few remained alive that could trace it uninterrupted back to one of the five Ruling Packs, untainted by mixture with other packs or families. Androcles knew the significance of the role Jomann played now; and he also knew the history of his bloodline thanks to his *tenna* Deia and what she had told him. At the time it had been only a matter of simple numbers that kept his ancestors from being among the ruling packs during the days of his grandfather Resumar. If his blood was measured by using the Purity Coefficient Content system, which was the normal means in this time to measure the purity of ones blood, Jomann's blood and that of his parents and siblings and family would be only several fractions less pure than Andro and Denali. It was something that many would never know for most did not delve into the true history of the Lycavorian people anymore, but it allowed Jomann to stand here now, unafraid and in a position that destiny had meant for him to have. A place among those Lycavorians with the purest of blood and the most advanced skills and ready to do battle.

Jomann stared at Androcles and the enormity of what he had experienced in just the few short weeks he had been his *Durcunusaan* Captain began to finally ring within him. All that Andro had allowed him to see and the training that Androcles had given him within Mindvoice. Skills and training he would never have received anywhere else. Jomann knew well the history of his bloodline and he was immensely proud of it, as were all of his siblings and his parents most of all. He had never expected to be in such a position, never in a lifetime, yet here he was. He was fulfilling a role that even Deia had told him should have been done many thousands of years ago. Jomann was bringing his bloodline into the forefront, their size now qualifying them as a ruling family if they had still followed the old ways. What his blood and fate also brought to him was Eliani Leonidas, and Jomann knew without question she was the goddess he had always wanted to find. Soon his bloodline would join with the Leonidas bloodline in a way that only members of the ruling family had done and forever secure their place in history. None of this mattered to Jomann however, his wolf blood burned for Eliani like no other and he did not care how pure their blood was, he only wanted to pleasure her until she could scream his name no more. He only wanted to be beside Androcles, who in a few short weeks knew more about him than those who had know him for years.

He would serve his prince and he would love his prince's sister Eliani until it stole her breath away. That is all that mattered now.

Sister? Andro's voice filled their minds.

Tharua and Majeir have dropped the last of their barrier! They wait at the end of the ramp! Elynth answered him. *All the Vanari are aboard the STRIKER! It is time we ended this place Andro! Ended it forever!*

Andro looked at Deni, his azure eyes meeting his brother's dark orbs. Denali nodded his head as he squeezed Andro's shoulder. He would follow his brother anywhere Denali knew, not only because he was his brother, but because Androcles inspired others to greatness just like their father. He had protected all of his siblings through the years, helped them to grow and face obstacles with a positive attitude. To never give up, never surrender. It is what their father always taught them, and Andro continued it easily. He had known about him and Lisisa for two years and his only actions were to insure they would not be separated so they could discover their love for each other and allow it to grow. In the last weeks Denali had begun to embrace his abilities a little more each day. He had seen far more than he would have cared too, even fought beside Immortals, and seen his sister mated to a half vampire Immortal. Denali absorbed it all and still tried to maintain the humor he was known and loved for. It wasn't always easy, but it was his way of facing and dealing with issues and it usually resulted in making others laugh as well.

And so we shall sister! Androcles spoke bringing his arm up and poising his finger over the small, one by one control panel near the bridle of his Shi Viska. *KertaGai?* He reached out within Mindvoice in a connection that included many others.

We are here my love! Sadi's voice was calm with just a touch of anxiousness.

You and SirsanGai activate the detonator and move back to the STRIKER now. Andro spoke. *Anthar and the others will cover you but use the new PSGs that Ben sent to us. Set the timer for ten minutes.*

Moving to the side now! Anthar's voice echoed within the open connection.

Timer is set Saradasaar! Ne'Veha's voice rang out.

Then activate it and go. Andro told them.

Andro... ten minutes is not much time! Sadi protested.

It is enough for what we have planned KertaGai. Now go! Inamarno waits for you both on the STRIKER and Arrarn is becoming restless! Andro told her.

Nubous regovar! Arrarn's voice sounded now. *Scum sucking rensibfla ronnu shooting at my ship tend to do that to me! Kinetic Shields are holding easily but it's becoming boorish brother! Finish these midaeus and let's go home!*

Bren... a wall if you will please. Andro spoke calmly. *To protect against any stray or dangerous material.*

Sibfla Andro! Bren's voice echoed. *I'm on it!*

Ten minutes my family and friends. Ten minutes and we will have done the universe a favor. Andro stated. *Excuse us while we go to work.*

Andro severed the connection with everyone else except for Denali and Jomann. He watched as they brought up their arms and nodded. "Let's nubous do this!" Jomann snarled stabbing down on the small identical panel. Andro saw Deni nod and do the same thing and he followed suit.

Devra and the others watched as members of the RD team pushed past them quickly and Devra's eyes grew wide as she began to see Shi Viskas appear on their arms from Flatspace. Ardan moved up next to her quickly his eyes equally as wide as he witnessed their use of Flatspace technology for the first time.

"The Prophets bless me Devra!" He gasped. "They use Flatspace effortlessly!"

Devra watched as two ranks of RD troops extended their Shi Viskas along the width of the ramp effectively making a shoulder high barrier of shields that nothing would penetrate. Her eyes dropped to Bren who was the center of this immovable wall now. Her eyes grew wider, and she could hear the gasps of shock from Ardan and many of the Vanari prisoners they had captured as suddenly gleaming bronze colored armor began to extend from hidden locations on the Mark IV ArmorPly. They could only watch as this glimmering armor extended down arms and around heads and down waists and legs until what stood before them was a wall of men and women in Dragon Armor and in position to repel any attack.

"Bren!" She screamed down the ramp at him.

His head turned back to her as her words echoed and Devra gasped when she saw his changed eyes and his fangs between the open slots on his helmet. The Dragon Armor covered nearly every exposed portion of his body and caused him to look almost mythical in nature.

“Remain there my beautiful mate!” He barked at her while smiling beneath the helmet spaces that she could see. “We will be gone soon.”

“Bren what is going on?” Devra snapped.

“Justice.” Bren answered. “Spartan justice.”

And with that pronouncement two deafening trumpets drowned out everything else in the landing bay and hundreds of pairs of eyes could only gaze on in awe as two huge dragons reared their massive heads back, their giant wings snapping out to the side fully as gleaming Dragon Armor began to extend across their broad backs and around their necks and heads. It only took a matter of seconds and then it was done and nearly one hundred and twenty of Cyngi’s men were then staring at two armored behemoths and three men before them, also now wearing that strange armor. Devra felt Caliria’s hands on her arm tighten and she turned to look at her daughter thinking she was frightened. Instead she saw Caliria’s face was bright and relaxed and so serene.

“Mother... mother it’s wonderful!” Caliria spoke softly. “It’s... I can feel him mother! I can feel him and the others so strongly!”

Devra saw Carisia and Lu’ria come up beside Caliria now, their hands reaching for her but not pulling her away as they pressed close to her instead. Seeing them pressed so close to her daughter looked so very natural to Devra and that reaction surprised her somewhat. Eliani moved up on Devra’s opposite side between her and Ardan.

“There are two things some people just never seem to learn when it comes to our people.” Eliani spoke excitedly as Devra and Ardan turned to look at her.

“Eli?” Devra asked quickly seeing the radiance, the almost flame like blue light radiating from her body. “What do you mean?”

“What... dare I ask what they are?” Ardan spoke now tearing his eyes from her to gaze out the back of the ramp.

Eliani looked at him with a grin, her wolf fangs and eyes fully changed and prominent to all who saw as he looked back. “We almost never go seek out conflict. We will go out of our way to avoid a fight but that does not mean we can’t fight. We are Spartans and we’re actually pretty damn good at it. Better than most really.”

“And... and the second?” Ardan asked.

“Never... and I do mean never... never fuck with the wife and mate of a Spartan.” Eliani said calmly turning her gaze to Caliria who was also now looking at her with Carisia and Lu’ria beside her. “Especially not those of my father and brothers. It’s the surest, quickest and most excruciatingly painful way to insure you never see another sunrise in this lifetime.”

There were perhaps three-dozen Evolli among the ranks of Cyngi’s mercenary army of guards. All of them had seen combat in the Evolli war and all of them had faced exactly what they saw before them right now. They had watched hundreds, perhaps thousands of their fellow Evolli cut down by the might of a Bonded Pair, and while they had early successes against them with the T-19 missile, once the armor they now wore was developed, those success became almost non-existent. None of them ever thought they would see it again, and of the hundred plus security force under Cyngi’s command, they would be the only ones who survived. They were the only ones who did the right thing, and though they would survive this battle they would not survive the ensuing storm that was fast approaching.

They turned and ran as fast as their amphibian legs would carry them.

Elynth was the first to act as she cut loose with a horrible, angry trumpet and spit a stream of flame tinged super heated breath along one side of the bay. It set everything aflame, along with the half dozen mercenaries caught in its blast as Aradace responded in kind. Metal crates and even several heavy loaders began to burn out of control. Unlike her sister’s flame tinged breath; Aradace’s breath was like her father and brother Jeth’s. It was simply put, nothing but three thousand five hundred degree heat that left her maw in an almost grayish stream and melted anything in its path. She extended the width of her spread to several meters and this blackened everything that was within that arc and caused several containers and one loader to explode. It also served to effectively cut the mercenaries off from moving to the left or right and flanking them.

NO MERCY! Elynth screamed out.

NO SURRENDER! Aradace echoed her sister’s cry within Mindvoice.

Now our brothers! Do it! Elynth barked.

As the last of Elynth's words echoed within Mindvoice, Androcles brought the blunt end of his traditional *Nehtes* down with a thundering clap on the metal floor of the landing bay. The ripple of devastating Mindvoice PK power that exploded outward was not as powerful as the one he had unleashed on Iraruzu, but it served to give them the advantage right away. The first two dozen or so mercenaries caught within that ripple were hit with a shuddering force that easily lifted them up from the deck and dropped them all quite unceremoniously on their collective asses. Denali broke to the right of his brother and extended his hand, a pulse of blue like flame bursting from his palm and then that shockwave of PK power swelled outward like a relentless hurricane. The screams of dozens of mercenaries filled the air as their bodies were literally lifted off the deck, the shattering power of the PK shockwave crushing bones and tossing them about like rag dolls.

Andro's left hand flared and he sent a pulsing blue field whisking across the distance to three mercenaries who were crouched beside a broken loader. Their eyes grew wide as that blue field lifted them into the air as if they were children, suspending them ten meters up where they saw the third Lycavorian level his rifle. Three shots rang out, adding to the screams and the weapons that were already firing. Three perfect holes appeared in the heads of the two Kochab and one Bo'yak mercenaries, each one's head exploding and their bodies flipping over to fall to the deck one by one. Andro's right hand secured the *Nehtes* and came up with the *Stiletto*, three accurate and efficient pulses of yellow energy and three more Kochab fell to the deck their chests now smoking as each of them had their hearts blown out the backs of their bodies right through the simple body armor they wore.

Jomann broke to Andro's left, unwilling to move very far from his Prince, but enough to give him room to use his own ability to its fullest extent. The light bluish flame engulfed him completely now and he felt a surge of incredible power as everything around him slowed to almost a crawl. It wasn't that he was slowing time; it was that he was moving far faster than everything around him and they appeared to be moving in slow motion. With unmatched clarity Jomann took in everything around him and began picking his shots with lethal accuracy. He used short, controlled bursts or single shots, and in the space of ten seconds nearly twenty Kochab and Bo'yak scum fell dead. Androcles told him they were going to be pushing their abilities and endurance to the very edge and he needed to measure himself as best as he was able for he could not tap into the bond of a dragon for added strength as Andro and Deni could. Even so, Jomann felt a huge surge of power within him still, infusing him with strength and confidence and fueling his own abilities. Once he felt this, he began to pick his shots more carefully, ducking behind a large burned crate for cover, and then using his ability in short three-second spans. Even in that three seconds he was able to find and lock and then kill at minimum four targets for each span, always ducking back down before anyone was able to lock on him and shoot back.

Denali used his PK power to sweep aside half a dozen mercenaries, knocking them sprawling with a psychic wave, before plucking two of them off the floor and tossing them into the air towards Aradace. With a trumpet of glee she brought her right wing whistling forward, catching both the Bo'yak scum with the armored edge of her wing and hearing the satisfying crunch of bone and sinew tearing as their bodies were sent rocketing through the air to impact high up on the wall of the landing bay before falling back to the deck, landing with sickening thuds.

Andro brought his left arm up once more and with barely a conscious thought his Shi Viska flared from Flatspace and leaped from his arm. A pair of Kochab were too slow to get out of its way and they lost their heads to the shield as its razor edges were extended and locked in place. The shield decapitated both of them with barely a pause as it sped off into the fray. There were only two known Lycavorians that had the Mindvoice ability to launch their Shi Viskas and then control them via Mindvoice almost as an afterthought. Andro was one of them, his father the second. The Shi Viska provided a wonderful distraction as he sent it hurtling at several groups of mercenaries and watched as almost all of them were ducking down and screaming and not paying attention to him as they tried to avoid getting hit by the deadly shield. This allowed Androcles to dash forward, while drawing *Halize Rie Aellseleum* from behind his back, and landing in the middle of a group of seven mercenaries. It was simply a devastating move as

Halize Rie Aellseleum impaled a Kochab clean through his upper body, the first eight inches of the sword erupting from his lower back in a spray of blood and bits of flesh. Andro's left hand came up, filled with his *Stiletto* and he fired twice, the thin yellow beam of searing energy piercing the head and throat of two more Bo'yak scum as he was wrenching *Halize Rie Aellseleum* free from the Kochab's body. He spun in the opposite

direction, twisting away while *Halize Rie Aellseleum* whistled through the air of the landing bay and cleanly removed the head of a Bo'yak who was bringing his weapon up to fire. As he completed his turn he was facing the other three and saw two of their heads erupt into bloody mist from Jomann's weapon off to the left before he had fully stopped moving. The last one fired his hand weapon point blank into Andro's chest and watched in horror as his kinetic rounds impacted that light blue barrier and went no further. He looked at Andro in horror, expecting him to stab him or shoot him. He never saw Andro's Shi Viska come in from the side at a blistering speed. He never felt the shield's razors slice through his thick neck muscles, and he never saw the Shi Viska whisk off to the right once more. He never saw these things because his head was on the deck and his brain was no longer receiving impulses from the body.

Andro looked up from where he was squatting and saw him then. He saw the Unsaar that has escaped his father's retribution. The man who had put a contract on his beloved Hadarian *Tenna Sivana* so long ago. The man who would not escape this day. With a snarl not unlike a rabid animal Androcles Leonidas leaped into the air directly at where the seven foot tall Unsaar was bringing his weapon to bear on Denali. As he leaped from the floor, his body shifted, there was a flash of white/blue light and the three hundred pound raven colored wolf was leaping through the air, it's coiled muscles intent on the kill.

Sadi and Ne'Veha were unseen as they scampered down the ramp of the *MENKLA* and activated the controls, watching as the ramp began to rise with the firing in the background. The PSGs that Admiral O'Connor had sent to them; the equipment that Andro had been referring to, were active and doing exactly what they were designed to do. Anyone watching the scene from afar would have only viewed the ramp of the *MENKLA* beginning to rise. They would not have seen the two females at the base of the ship watching as the ramp rose, for they were wrapped in a Personal Shroud Generator that was attached to each of their arms. The PSGs as they were built were not designed for extended use in full combat, but rather brief stints that allowed the user to be invisible. Ne'Veha gripped the K14 KM in her right hand as Sadi finished inputting her command code. Weapons fire and screams all around them, the occasional explosion, these are things Ne'Veha Leonidas never thought she would experience first hand as the pilot of a Union Fighter/Bomber. That had changed the moment she became a Leonidas and wife and mate to Androcles.

Ne'Veha wouldn't have it any other way.

Ne'Veha had spoken to her mother back on Elear in regards to what she had discovered since becoming part of Andro's life. Even though she had promised to come to Earth right away, Ne'Veha didn't know if she remained blissfully ignorant of her father's actions or truly did not know of them completely. What Ne'Veha did know however was that her grandmother had opened her eyes to so many things that Ne'Veha had embraced, not because she influenced her, but because they felt so very right. She shared a bed with Sadi, Carisia, and Lu'ria and would soon share that bed with Caliria as well. Their times together up until now had been exquisite and Ne'Veha knew this is where she belonged. Now that Androcles had changed her completely, it meant even more to her. She could feel the same power surging through her that Sadi felt, albeit not on as large a scale because she was not fully Lycavorian, but she was still wolf now and feeling her beautiful mate's male aura pulsing through her was a sensation that was simply divine. Having him stroking into her body while Carisia or Lu'ria or Sadi nuzzled her elven ears was beyond glorious and as the years past Ne'Veha knew it would only grow more passionate and exciting. Sadi had told her and Lu'ria that once the change had fully taken effect right down to the molecular level, once that was complete, they would feel every tiny nuance that any pure Lycavorian female would feel. And the bond they all shared would only grow deeper as the years went by. Yes... they all shared one man... but there was never a competition between any of them for his attentions and given his stamina and his exceptional size, Ne'Veha knew he would neglect none of them. Of course, they also had each other if Andro was occupied she thought devilishly to herself, and now that she was wolf she could taste the differences in her lovers and it was fabulous.

These were not the things that filled her head now as she waited just behind Sadi and covered her. Now she was all wolf, and helping to protect one of her lovers and mates as they put the final touches on the plan they had devised together. It had been Ne'Veha who suggested they use the *MENKLA* transport as the trigger for a much larger and devastating role in their assault, and it had been Sadi who devised where to put the charges on the ship to deliver the maximum effect inside the mountain base. Though she could not see her blond haired

lover, her wolf sense of smell could detect her easily and determine how close she was and almost exactly where she stood. Ne'Veha's dark eyes caught movement to the left and she saw three Kochab mercenaries trying to flank Denali and getting far too close to where they were.

Sadi! She barked within Mindvoice. *We need to go now!*

Timer is set SirsanGai! Sadi declared.

Then let us leave before more of these scum get too close and discover us! Ne'Veha snapped.

Anthar! Sadi called out.

Come to me! The carmine red scaled dragon echoed within their minds and they saw his massive bulk heading towards them at a measured pace, his head turned towards where the fighting was happening and ripping out streams of lethal flame.

Anthar was a pure Firespitter, capable of releasing searing flame from his maw that could stretch out from his body nearly a hundred meters. Since coming to Earth and discovering all he could be with his bonded sister, since discovering his beautiful dragon mate Elynth, Anthar had become somewhat of a celebrity with the High Coven dragons as well as others. Many of the Union dragons knew Elynth, in truth there were very few who did not know who she was or who she was bonded too. That he had secured her love and was now her dragon mate made him something special for all of them knew how introvert she was with dragons and others she did not know.

On our way! Sadi declared as she turned and began to sprint for where he was, sensing Ne'Veha almost right beside her.

The majority of the attention was focused on where Andro, Denali and Jomann were tearing into the ranks of the mercenaries, and almost no one paid attention to the single dragon who was working his way back to the *STRIKER* slowly, his streams of flame lethal and carefully directed as to protect two females none of them could see. Sadi and Ne'Veha made the eighty-meter dash unopposed and were touching the *STRIKER* ramp before they deactivated their PSGs. The row of RD soldiers parted instantly to let them by and then they were staring at Caliria and she at them.

"Inamarno!" Sadi declared rushing up to where she stood.

Devra could only watch in fascination as her oldest daughter didn't hesitate in the least and enveloped Sadi in an embrace that should have been reserved for lovers. They shared a very quick but no less sizzling kiss before Caliria repeated the action with Ne'Veha and Devra turned her head and looked at Ardan.

"Never would I have believed it without seeing it myself Devra!" Ardan spoke stepping closer to her. "We have... we have held our people apart for too long it seems and that needs to change now."

"I will not be returning Ardan." Devra told him firmly. "My husband... my mate... my future is here now."

Ardan shook his head. "I know. We will work on that when we have finished our task here."

Devra met his eyes and nodded her head. "I will do what I must but I will not leave my future behind me. I will not let it go."

Ardan nodded. "And I do not expect you too." He stated. "We will worry about it later. We still need to get off this planet. We will talk of these things later. We..."

"By the grace of the prophets!" Caliria cried causing Devra and Ardan to turn just in time to witness the white/blue flash of light among the many mercenaries and then they saw the massive black wolf leaping through the air.

Bren saw this and turned his head screaming back towards the cockpit ninety meters to his front.

"Arrarn!!! The end game is coming!!! Get ready!!!" Bren screamed.

SCIMITAR

"Small transports fleeing the surface Captain!" The sensor chief called out. "Five of them!"

Sa'sur nodded her head in acknowledgement and continued to read the data pad she held in her hand. "We expected them to begin bugging out once Andro went ballistic on them. Let them go... we do not care who they are. They will never return here."

"The AEC transport is aboard and secure." Another voice spoke.

"The traitor?" Sa'sur asked looking up.

“The AEC agents have secured him in the brig. And none to gently I’m guessing. They have called for a medic.”

“Get one down there to treat his *mida* before Eliani returns.” Sa'sur ordered. “She’ll kill the *ronnus*! Or vent him out an airlock!”

“Captain new signature!” The sensor chief barked. “Unknown power readings! No ID from the computer!”

Sa'sur came to her feet. “Cross reference the files we got from this Brendi woman and Devra Re Mydala!” She snapped quickly. “This may be the ship that brought them here!”

“Stand by! Sixty-seven meters in length... seven lifesigns on board!”

“Species?” Sa'sur asked.

“Human by the looks of it.”

“It has to be them!” Sa'sur exclaimed.

“References match Captain!” The sensor chief barked. “Power readings and drive core emissions match those given to us by the Vanari! Fusion drive plant within point three variable of established Vanari Intelligence. It’s an Eridiani transport! Their heading is 35678.9! Gaining speed as they depart!”

“They’re running Captain!”

“They aren’t going to run far! Androcles wanted a word with them!” Sa'sur snarled out the statement “Drop the Shroud! Hard to starboard! Full power to the tractor emitters! Get me that ship!”

“Helm answers hard to starboard!” A voice shouted.

“Weapons officer... can you target their power core without destroying the ship?” Sa'sur barked out the question as they all felt the SCIMITAR begin to turn very sharply for a ship of its enormous size.

“Low yield Type Two turret shot should do it captain.” The answer came instantly. “Their hull does not appear to be reinforced over their drive core or LSD coils.”

“Do it!” Sa'sur barked. “I don’t want them to escape! They made their bed and now I intend to see they lay in it!”

Cyngi had always prided himself on being prepared.

In over four hundred years of life he had never once been caught with his guard down as the saying went. He alone had escaped the Leonidas purge of the Overseers those many years ago because he had been prepared. He had survived up until now because he had been prepared. This base and these men were his crowning jewel. He had made more credits in the last decade alone running his operations here than he had over a century as an Overseer. He purchased the best and he expected the best. Those mercenaries and pirates who worked for him were the very best credits could buy.

The Lycavorian Spartans that were slaughtering his men were far better.

Cyngi had seen the blue skinned Vanari females as a boon to his profits and how they would allow him to branch out into the information business. The oil they secreted from their skin was a powerful influencer and he had seen it work first hand. His partnership with these Orionis Syndicate people had been quite prosperous. Their obvious distaste for alien species did not keep them from working with him or taking his credits. Though the thought flashed through his mind that he should have taken more time in discovering what exactly they were trying to accomplish. The Lycavorians had come here for the Vanari females that much was obvious. He had seen them extracting those he kept within his personal harem through the fire and smoke of the landing bay and they were all now on the *STRIKER* that resided in his base’s landing bay. A large *STRIKER DT* with four dragons and a host of *Durcunusaan* soldiers now protecting it from behind that damnable armor they always wore. Those men were content to watch the three Lycavorians and two dragons tear into his mercenary army without mercy.

Cyngi had seen a few vid reports from the Evolli war and other places about Androcles Leonidas. None of them had ever showed the Crown Prince of the Union in such a fury. None had ever showed him wrapped in that shimmering blue flame that did not burn him, but granted him abilities that even Cyngi had never seen before. Abilities that apparently even his younger brother and the towering Lycavorian with them shared. Even kinetic rounds strikes against their shields and armor served only to stagger them somewhat, and did even less against the psychic shields of the two dragons that were burning and thrashing their way through his men with

surgical precision. Cyngi made his decision instantly, as he always had after reviewing the facts, and he sprang to his feet to make a sprint for the remaining unblocked corridor and his escape ship. His reptilian eyes grew wide as he came to his feet and his full seven-foot height. He hadn't survived this long by being slow, and his rifle began snapping up the moment his eyes detected what was coming at him. The immense black wolf was in mid air, dropping towards him with bared fangs and extended claws of black steel. He managed to chop out four rounds before he felt the searing agony of those black, razor like claws slicing through his hard skin as if it was butter. His eyes grew even wider as he felt the weight strike his chest, three more sets of claws slashing into his flesh, as the three hundred pound weight of muscle, black fur, razor like teeth and bone drove him downward. His large skull cracked against the metal floor hard and more pain joined that already firing off in his brain. His head snapping back actually saved his life as Andro's jaws slammed together millimeters from where his throat had been only microseconds before. It only prolonged his life a few seconds however.

Cyngi was no stranger to combat however and as he fought the pain searing his mind, he brought his hands up to throw off the huge beast, except that beast was no longer there as it used his body to propel itself off him painfully to land several meters away. Cyngi rolled over and came to his feet swiftly, belaying his near five hundred pounds. There was a white/blue flash and then Androcles Leonidas stood in front of him, his azure blue eyes nearly glowing behind that helmet, his dual wolf fangs exposed for all to see behind curled back, almost feral lips.

"I'll kill you!" Cyngi screamed now as his blood soaked the front of his shirt and pants. "I am Cyngi! I am Unsaar!"

"You are a pig!" Androcles hissed back at him. "You peddle in the flesh of others! You enslave those who are weaker than you!"

"You... you have violated the treaty with the Icalro Alliance by coming here!" Cyngi screamed at him reaching for anything to give him time to escape. "They will not look kindly on this attack! They will send warships!"

"As of three minutes ago the Icalro Alliance ceased to exist!" Andro snarled as he circled the huge Unsaar, every combat sense fully alert, for while Unsaars were large and formidable, they were far faster and stronger than most gave them credit for. "I have removed their blight from the face of the universe for what they turned their backs too and allowed to happen! Just as I intend to remove your vile stain!"

Cyngi moved closer to the circling Lycavorian Prince, his rage building. "Why have you done this?" He screamed. "Over... over some blue skinned females! If you so desired them I would have given you one or two for nothing!"

"You know nothing!" Androcles shouted at him. "You escaped my father Cyngi! You will not escape me!"

"Arrggghh!" Cyngi released the bellow and charged, all reason gone from his mind now in his anger. He lifted his rifle, forgetting its design and prepared to smash the young prince of the Lycavorians to death with it.

Andro had no intention of slugging it out with the much larger and stronger Unsaar. It was a battle he would not win and he didn't have the time. He lifted his hand in a blink and sent a baseball sized burst of PK power ripping outward. The ball of bluish energy struck Cyngi over the joint of his right leg like the force of a sledgehammer blow. The leg buckled inward and snapped in two, the lower bones tearing through Cyngi's hard reptilian skin. The Unsaar screamed in agony as he went down, his hands releasing the rifle to try and break his fall. He never saw the Shi Viska come speeding out of the distance and shoot by his falling body. His mind could not register this fact because he was smashing into the hard deck with no arms to stop his fall. The Shi Viska had removed both his limbs from just above the elbow down and went speeding off once more. His cheekbone shattered as it hit the deck, his full weight behind the fall and pain became Cyngi's constant companion then. Andro moved quickly as his Shi Viska returned to his arm and vanished into Flatspace. He got behind him as Cyngi tried to use the stumps of his arms to lift himself off the deck, pain the only thing throbbing in his mind now. Andro bent over and grasped his large head in his hands and leaned over close to the Unsaar's small ear.

"My father pronounced sentence on you over twenty years ago Unsaar scum!" Andro growled savagely. "For what you did to my *tenna* Sivana! The life you forced her to live! I will fulfill my father's orders now Cyngi, for Spartan Justice does not know the boundaries of time! Taste that justice now and be an example of what happens when individuals fuck with my family! My father will be pleased when I tell him you have finally

passed to the dregs of *jorbhe*. And my Aunt will finally and forever know peace from your betrayal and attempted murder of her!”

Cyngi’s eyes were glazing over now as his blood was spilling onto the deck in copious amounts, but those eyes grew a little wider when he heard Andro’s words through the fog of pain. They registered a small flash and then he saw a glowing psychic knife explode from the right clenched fist in front of his eyes. The glimmering armored hand confused him for a moment, the psychic knife appearing unreal. And then all thought process died as Andro plunged that psychic knife into Cyngi’s skull just in front of his right ear. His azure eyes flared even brighter and he severed every nerve ending that connected Cyngi’s brain with his body instantly. Just before he twisted his fist and solidified the psychic knife within the confines of the Unsaar’s head. Cyngi’s one good leg twitched madly for several seconds and then was still. Andro wrapped his arm tighter around the head and twisted viciously with all of his enormous wolf strength just as hard and savagely as he could. The killing movement snapped every single bone in the Unsaar’s neck and spine and twisted his head nearly ninety degrees to the side before Andro slammed his face down into the deck and stood up. He turned quickly, his eyes glowing ever brighter and he lifted his hands calling upon the PK power within his body.

Elynth and Sadi were the first to feel it and her obsidian scaled head turned from where she was spraying a group of mercenaries and Sadi’s jungle green eyes grew wider from inside the *STRIKER*, Caliria held tightly to her body as they witnessed the event.

Denali and Jomann had worked their way to the side until they were fighting next to each other when they felt it. Denali turned his head quickly seeing his brother rise to his feet and those azure eyes blazing even from thirty meters away.

“Fuck! Time to go!” He screamed out, shifting instantly to his wolf form and sprinting for the *STRIKER* in a split second.

Jomann was following a heartbeat later, shifting instantly to the dark blond wolf who almost rivaled Denali in size.

Aradace! To the STRIKER! Now! Elynth screamed out to her sister in Mindvoice.

There was no hesitation in either of their actions and within a second two enormous dragons were chasing the two large wolves as they sprinted for the *STRIKER*, swatting aside any mercenary or piece of broken equipment that was in their way.

Unleash the Sirogus rie Jorbhe! And burn the vileness clean!

That is what his *Tenna Deia* had told him to do, and that is exactly what he was going to do. Here and now. And into the future if need be.

With a howl unlike anything anyone had heard before Andro thrust out his arms and unleashed a wave of PK power that hurtled outward in overwhelming form. Mercenaries who still lived were tossed carelessly into the air like stuffed animals as the domination in that wave shattered bones and crushed organs. To many of the mercenaries it was as they had been hit by the concussive force of a fusion explosion going off next to them. Small pieces of burning equipment were tossed through the air adding to the maelstrom that was occurring, and when the wave of bluish power finally swept over the smoking battleground in the landing bay, no living thing was still standing. Andro gazed upon the devastation they had wrought for only a second before shifting back into wolf form and sprinting for the *STRIKER*.

It was time to leave this place before it joined its owner in *jorbhe* and the vileness was burned clean.

Devra and Ardan were speechless at what they had just witnessed; all of the Vanari were actually, though the Lycavorians hesitated for only a few seconds before beginning to act once more. The ranks of the armored *Durcunusaan* soldiers parted quickly as first Deneth, and then Majeir and Thaura and finally Anthar rushed past them and moved for the four harnesses built especially for dragons on either side of the ship. Half a dozen of the RD team broke from the wall they had formed and began to help them secure themselves in the harnesses. They could feel the engines in the ship gaining power as Arrarn’s voice filled the internal ship COM.

“Time to leave people! Get everyone secure!” Arrarn ordered.

Sadi took command effortlessly. “Bren!” She waited until his armored head turned to look at her. “Have the *Durcunusaan* insure the Vanari females are secure and calm in their seats! We are leaving!” She barked clinging tightly to Caliria’s hand.

Bren didn't hesitate and patted the *Durcunusaan* troop close to him as they began to peel back from the ramp and move into the ship. Denali and Jomann skidded to halts, their clawed talons clicking on the steel deck just before they shifted back and turned to watch as the black wolf deftly maneuvered through the bodies and wreckage at amazing speed, moving back towards them and dancing among the rubble and the bodies.

"Aradace! Elynth! Get on the *STRIKER*!" Denali barked as the two dragons rumbled up next.

Andro? Elynth questioned.

Right behind you sister! His voice answered causing her to turn her head and see his imposing wolf body only thirty meters away as he sprang over the shattered remains of several loading cranes.

Elynth nodded her head without pause and maneuvered her bulk up the ramp as Sadi and Eliani came closer to the bottom. The *STRIKER* Mark II was designed to carry only four dragons, and while the engines could easily accommodate for the additional metric tons that Elynth and Aradace added, there was no place to secure them. Elynth moved immediately off to the side and settled to the deck in front of Anthar. His front talons draped over the saddle she wore, adding some of his own weight to keep her stationary and he dipped his head next to hers, using his snout to caress the back of her head and neck. Tharua used her own talons to help add additional weight to Elynth while Deneth and Majeir did the same for Aradace on the opposite side of the ship.

Denali and Jomann were the last ones not yet on the ramp as Eliani and Sadi moved closer while Ne'Veha and the others guided Caliria toward seats. Jomann saw him first and was the one to react with reflexes enhanced by his new powers. The Kochab mercenary, bloodied and missing his weapon made one last desperate attempt to kill the Lycavorian Prince before he died. He leaped from the side just as Andro skidded to a halt at the rear of the *STRIKER*. He did not come even close. The metal club he was intending to smash into Andro's head skittered from his grip as he was coming down from his leap for he had come to an abrupt halt only inches from the ground. The shock of the instant cessation of his forward movement was only overridden by the feel of the large hand that was now clamped around his throat and held him suspended a good half a meter off the deck. Jomann's armored hand tighten as the bluish PK power swirled around his body and Eliani looked on from the ramp with something akin to total adoration in her eyes.

"Going somewhere Kochab scum!" Jomann snarled.

He exerted only slightly more strength and then rammed the Kochab mercenary to the deck with all of his power. The sound was not pleasant but was quickly dismissed as Andro shifted back to human form and looked at his captain while Sadi moved up to him and wrapped her arms around his waist.

"If you are finished toying with them Jomann..." Andro spoke with a smile. "We need to leave."

Jomann returned to his feet and looked at Andro with a lopsided grin. "I am done now." He stated moving back and stepping onto the ramp with Denali and Sadi.

"Three minutes twenty-two seconds my love." Sadi told him.

Andro nodded. "We will be long gone by then *KertaGai*." He stated. "And we will have burned the vileness clean. Or at least gotten a good start at it."

Sadi punched the panel near the ramp, not releasing his hand. "Arrarn! We are all aboard! Take us out of here!"

"Jeez! It's about time!" Arrarn snapped. "Toria... thrusters! We have a bomb to beat!"

Andro turned as the ship began to rise and the ramp began to come up. As they cleared the landing bay doors the bluish energy that had surrounded Andro's body began to fade away slowly and his emotions began to subside.

"Forgive me grandfather." He whispered softly so that he thought no one would hear him. "Forgive me for the innocents that may still be here and whose blood will forever be on my hands."

"Our hands *fervon*." Denali spoke in a similar whisper moving up next to his brother. "You do not stand alone."

"Never alone." Jomann followed suit as he stepped up next to him.

"We must insure that those who are innocent... that those we left behind... we must insure that their memory is served properly." Andro spoke.

"And we will." Jomann spoke. "And we will."

ULU ARIZONA

Miranda sat silently in her command chair as the last of the Icalro Alliance Command station broke apart into thousands of pieces under the continuous battering of superior weapons and missiles. The wreckage in this system would drift for months, making it hazardous to any ship not a cruiser or larger to pass through it.

“Admiral... Commander Janon reports all Icalro Alliance ships destroyed.” The elven female spoke from her COM station. “He reports that several corvettes escaped, but per your orders they did not pursue.”

Miranda nodded her head slowly. “The station?”

“Nothing larger than a sleep chamber remains.” E'dira spoke up now, her amber eyes never leaving her tactical screens.

“Status of the facilities on the surface E'dira?” Miranda followed up that question with another.

“Colonel Randall made three passes with his fighter wing Admiral.” E'dira answered her formally. “He reports that nothing remains. The first volley from the Type One Batteries obliterated the headquarters and surrounding estate. The follow on shots only reinforced the destruction.”

“Collateral damage?” Miranda asked turning to look at her.

“It appears the leaders of the Icalro Alliance did not believe in living among the people they governed Miranda.” E'dira replied less formally this time. “Their ruling estate was large and well defended, but they allowed nothing of a civilian nature within ten kilometers of their territory it seems. Unless there were civilians within the estate grounds itself, the attack would have removed their entire command and governmental institution in one fell swoop. Based on over flights and sensor scans, nothing remains.”

Miranda nodded. “As was the purpose.” She stated as she got to her feet slowly. “Ground team status?”

“Enroute back as we speak.” E'dira replied quickly. “All data and intelligence from their encrypted computer cores has been collected. They suffered no casualties.”

“Very well! Excellent work people.” She called out. “Give me an active sensor sweep of the system, and then let's pull our teeth in. Once all craft are recovered inform the Attack Wing to reengage their Shrouds and form on the *ARIZONA*. It's time to go home. We have bigger issues coming in the future that we need to prepare for.”

E'dira nodded. “Yes we do.”

“COM officer... initiate Crimson Storm Security Protocols and get me Androcles on the COM.” Miranda declared. “Patch it to my Ready Room when it comes through. They should be just about done on Ontahe and we need to find out if he wants us to continue to Hadaria with him.”

“You don't actually think he will go there do you Miranda?” E'dira asked as Zaala moved over from her engineering station.

“They have over a thousand ships in the Hadarian system.” Zaala spoke now. “It's no wonder they requested the meeting there. They will undoubtedly try to kill him again. He can not possibly think they are trustworthy.”

Miranda nodded. “I don't doubt they would try something like that.” She said looking at E'dira.

“Trusting anything that they tell us now would be stupid.” E'dira spat.

Miranda grinned slightly and looked at her. “Do I detect a slight prejudice against them Mistress?” She asked softly. It was really pointless to try and keep their relationship secret. The entire ship pretty much had already figured it out. If that was the case Miranda was not going to be coy about how she felt for her Drow Mistress.

“They have butchered countless Drow in the last weeks Miranda.” E'dira answered her. “The numbers are still coming in from the different outposts. Some of them... most of the female Drow were brutally raped before they were massacred. Yes... I find myself being prejudice.”

Miranda and Zaala nodded their heads in agreement. “They are elves and members of the Union.” Zaala spoke. “I care not that they were Drow E'dira... they were our people! Our Union citizens!”

E'dira moved closer to the two women, leaving her station for a short time. It appeared Zaala's sister's relationship and love with Queen Aihola had erased any and all prejudice that many elves had for the Drow. E'dira noticed it more and more as she opened up and became part of what they were building on Earth. Old hatreds often died slow and hard, but it seemed that the old prejudices and hate of the Drow were disappearing much faster because of the trust and love that so many Drow had built and continue to build. It would go a long way to ending prejudice against them forever now that Androcles Leonidas had taken a pure born Drow female

as his wife and mate and made her wolf. The future was what you made of it and E'dira and many others intended for it to be very bright.

“We’ll discuss all that later.” Miranda spoke. “Senior Officers in the Port Lounge in one hour. I need to contact Andro first and give him a report.”

ONTAHE

They thought it was over.

The Lycavorians were gone. Cyngi was dead. They thought they could take over and rule the mountain base as they saw fit. They even had a Lycavorian *MENKLA* transport to use as their personal shuttle. The Union *MENKLA*'s were known for speed and comfort as well as being very well armed and shielded. So as the Evolli who had fled the battle began to return, most of them headed right for where the *MENKLA* rested. They could not imagine their good fortune. The Lycavorians were more concerned with saving the blue skinned females that they left one of their military transports. As they began to wander back in and gaze at the ship, none of them really understood that death was going to reach out and touch them so soon.

Inside the *MENKLA*'s cockpit the counter reached zero and sent out its message of death to the four large crates they had brought with them. Inside each of those crates was the heart of a half-kiloton fusion reactor core. The most explosive part of one of the older drive cores in the Union fleet. As that timer reached zero and the signal went out, each of those cores detonated. Those closest to the blast were instantly vaporized. They felt nothing; saw nothing and heard nothing. They were simply gone.

As Androcles watched from the internal monitor on the *STRIKER* as they obtained orbit, the entire northern face of the mountain heaved outward and erupted very much like a volcano. Several million metric tons of rock and metal and stone were blown outward from the mountain face leaving an enormous gap in the side of the mountain that could not defy gravity for long. As he reached up and turned the monitor off, the upper three thousand five hundred feet of mountain collapsed downward onto what had once been a very advanced mercenary base. Nothing even remotely living would survive the crushing force of a mountain that once stood nearly twenty thousand feet tall. Future scans would show that it had dropped a total of six thousand meters once it settled, and buried within that rubble and stone mountain were the remains of nearly six hundred mercenary scum and their cohorts.

It was quiet in the *STRIKER* as Andro turned from the station along the side of the ship and the monitor went dark. Almost every set of eyes were on him as he still had a bluish flame encompassing his body, though it was virtually gone now. His azure eyes quickly found where Caliria was standing with Devra and Sadi and the others and he crossed over to them in four long strides. Devra watched as he stopped in front of her and Caliria turned to look at him. She dropped Sadi's hand and Devra's arm fell from around her waist as she gazed up into his eyes. Such beautiful eyes Caliria thought. Eyes that looked upon her not with shame or horror at what she had been forced to endure... but eyes that gazed upon her with a desire and happiness that made her skin tingle in delight. As Sadi and the others watched with joy and desire in their own eyes Andro reached out and took Caliria's hands in his.

“Allow me to... allow me to introduce myself *Inamarno*.” He spoke softly. “I am... I am Androcles and I... we... we have been waiting a very long time for you to join us.” He looked at her as he stepped closer. “It is our hope that you...”

Devra gasped in both surprise and outright happiness when Caliria simply jumped into Andro's arms and covered his stammering lips with her own. She couldn't help but laugh at this display from her usually reserved daughter, nor could she deny the heat that kiss was generating between the two of them. Andro's arms closed around her waist, her legs curled up along his side and Caliria surrendered all that she was to this man. Everything she had endured through the years, the ridicule and disdain, even from her own father, all of it had been driving her to this one point in her life. The dreams she had been experiencing these last weeks, getting stronger as the days moved forward, these were the final catalyst to her realizing all she had ever wanted was now hers. As her body pressed and melded to this Lycavorian Prince who held in her his arms Caliria knew this is where her future lay. As she felt Sadi, Ne'Veha, Lu'ria and Carisia press close around them Caliria knew she had found her place in this universe.

Ardan stepped up next to Coren who was watching from the small four-step catwalk into the cockpit and engineering station. He turned back to watch as Androcles broke the kiss he was sharing with Caliria and his wives and mates pressed even closer, drawing Devra and Nirilo with them as a family was reunited and then united with another. He turned back to Coren Re Mydala whose face remained impassive throughout it all.

“It is for the best Coren.” Ardan spoke. “You know this. We would never have been able to accomplish this without them. We would never have been able to bring Devra and the others back let alone rescue this many of our females. We did not even know the OSG had extended out this far from Eridiani space.”

“Is it for the best Ardan?” Coren asked softly but without a hint of anger or malice in his voice as he looked at his friend.

“You are not happy even a little that your daughter is free once more?” Ardan asked him. “That we saved so many of our young females and because of what these Lycavorians have done... because of what they have done they will now be able to lead normal and happy lives? Coren... they have given us the means to end the hold the Orionis Syndicate has had over our people!”

Coren met his eyes. “Have they?” He asked softly so that only he could hear him. “Do not get me wrong Ardan... whether you choose to believe it or not I thank the prophets that my daughter is free once more.” He said softly. “She may hate me... but I am happy she is free again.”

“Then what?” Ardan asked him.

“I question what this venture will cost us in the end Ardan.” Coren spoke.

“What do you mean?” Ardan asked him.

“I question what they will demand for this cure of theirs. I question if we have just open the floodgates to so many of our females choosing to find happiness outside of their own race. I question Ardan Vu Lamurrion... I question if we have just traded one form of slavery for another. That is what I question.”

“You didn’t tell me.” Eliani’s voice filled his ears and he turned quickly from securing the ramp’s hydraulic compensators.

Jomann turned and looked at her as she walked up to him. “Tell you what?” He asked.

“You did not tell me what you were capable of!” Eliani spat. She was trying to act angry at him, but it was failing miserably because she desired him so intensely. Watching him as he was in action, the confidence, the power and skill, this had inflamed her desire and passion to heights she had never felt before.

“I didn’t know until today.” Jomann told her, moving closer to her, her willow and peach scent swarming all around him.

“You... you should have told me!” She spat once more barely able to contain the urge to wrap her arms around his shoulders and have him take her right there.

Jomann didn’t hesitate however and leaned over to lift her into his arms. As her face came level with his, Eliani tossed her arms around his broad shoulders and leaned forward to firmly nuzzle his neck and behind his ear with her nose and lips, basking in the feel of his warm skin against hers and burning his delicious jasmine coffee scent into her brain.

“*Son vada carians* Jomann!” She gasped into his ear. “You... you have to stop this! My blood burns so! I don’t know how much more I can resist!” Eliani felt his aura and power beginning to mingle with hers and the bluish flame that she had seen surrounding him inside the mountain reappeared, though very muted in nature and wrapped her within its embrace just as his aura did.

Eliani had been around many men in her young life, quite a few of whom had hit on her or tried to entice her to choose them. Yet none of them had ever come close to making her feel what she did now, and that was without even sleeping with him. He was so very confident, in himself, in his abilities, but not to the point of arrogance. He was a typical true Alpha Wolf, proud and very intelligent and so dominating in his aura but also reserved and calm. This is what Eliani had balked at throughout her life. Whoever she had chosen to spend time with had always been needy in a way. They had needed her help, or been intimidated by her ability and who she was. Jomann however... he was neither needy nor intimidated by her or her status and that all by itself was nearly enough. Yet it was his dominance that so appealed to her, the true Alpha in him. He could snap his wolf fangs together and put her in her place as he had done in the landing bay of the *SCIMITAR* when she had

stepped over that imaginary line or he could love her until she could take it no more. Eliani had searched for so long to find it and now that she had, she could barely contain her desires.

She had finally found an equal.

Jomann stared into her beautiful eyes as her hands came up to take his face in their grasp. “You... you must tell me something Eliani Leonidas.” He spoke softly looking into her eyes so very deeply. “You must tell me something from within your heart. I do not question what I feel coursing through my blood for you. I need to know... I need to know if I am... if I am what you truly want. Not just the part of you that is wolf but also the part of you that is Hadarian Eliani, because there is not one part of you without the other. And... and I do not want only one part of you. I want all of you.”

His words almost caused her to break into tears. No man that had ever shown interest in her had ever made the distinction of the two different sides to her persona. Even Malic, who Eliani had thought she loved, even Malic had never asked this question. She *was* two different people, and even though the wolf blood within her was far more dominant, she was still Hadarian as well. A single tear rolled down her cheek as she nodded her head without any hesitation in the least.

“As sure as every breath that I take.” Eliani answered in a whisper.

Jomann’s eyes glittered in the light and he kissed her then. It wasn’t a possessive kiss, but more one of longing and respect and love. It was a kiss that Eliani returned with all that she was for it meant that to her just as deeply. She pulled back and looked at him once more, a small smile turning the corners of her mouth up.

“When I am... when I am done feasting on you... you will not have the strength to look at another female.” She said with a sultry twinkle in her eyes.

Jomann chuckled softly and pulled her tighter. “Why would I need to look at another female when I have perfection in my arms already?” He said. “Though I am curious as to how you will accomplish this task.”

Eliani laughed now as well, wrapping her arms around his shoulders once more and simply basking in the feelings and emotions that swarmed through her because of it. Yes... she was going to feast on him. She was going to feast on him for many millennia to come if she had her way.

And Eliani Leonidas always got her way.

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT

INQUISITOR

HIGH COVEN SECURE SPACE

COREWARD OF SCUTUM-CENTAURUS ARM

“...Sketchy at best.” The High Coven Colonel spoke to Robert Moran’s back. “Our loyal people on Uzu Ozeib 7 say that everything is about to break open completely. There are several power plays within the senior politicians and even some military officers have chosen to come down on sides. Aikiro’s death sent everyone into a tizzy and they are scrambling to keep their hold on what power they have.”

“Yuri is in charge!” Moran spat turning away from the view window. “You make sure those shit sorry fuckers know that! I’ll cut the balls from anyone who attempts to make a play against her!”

“She has been in and out of consciousness for going on three weeks Admiral Moran.” The Colonel spoke. “Even... even some of our own crew are...”

Moran took a deep breath and stepped closer to the table. The Colonel had been with him since he had taken over as Supreme Commander and he had been a trusted and valued aide. “What are they saying Asant Voneri?” He asked. “Speak your mind. We have known each other too long and fought the Kavalians side by side too many times for you to hold back from me now.”

The Colonel looked up and down the table at the other senior officers. Many of them had come to this meeting in secret, their ships arriving over the last three days to this very secret and secure area of High Coven space. They were perhaps the most senior and most loyal of the High Coven officers that supported Aikiro and by default would now support Yuri as her successor.

“Her injuries were severe Robert.” Asant spoke softly. “Aikiro is dead... Admiral Tesand as well. You own son too! People are beginning to wonder why we provoked the Lycavorians as we did. Many... many of them are thoroughly disgusted and horrified with how the daughter of Leonidas was treated. Raped and beaten by your two sons and their friends Robert? Some of them are even beginning to question you for allowing this

to happen.” He questioned looking at the man. “Yes... we are enemies... but even we do not treat helpless prisoners like that.”

Moran shook his head and moved to his chair. “That was Aikiro’s decision. Even Yuri did not agree with it at first. It was done because it was the only way to get the information we needed from her head. Breaking down her Mindvoice shields in this way was the only choice. She would never have given us the information otherwise.”

“Many of us... many of us think it was the wrong way to go about it.” Asant said. “It only makes us no better than the Kavalian fuckers we are fighting now.”

“What you think does not matter! It worked didn’t it?” Dante Moran snarled from the chair he sat in. “And it was a decision my grandmother made. She was Empress!”

Moran looked at his son. Since escaping Earth Dante seemed more on edge, more prone to getting angry. Perhaps it was because he had witnessed his own sister kill their brother in a particularly vile way, but whatever the reason, his son had changed.

“Yes it worked.” Asant growled back. “And now your brother and the Empress are dead! And we have tossed away twenty plus years of relative peace with the Lycavorians because of it!”

“So what?” Dante barked. “They are nothing more than animals!”

Asant nodded his head. “Perhaps to you Prince Dante... but while they may be animals to you... we have never been able to conquer them in all the years we have fought them. And now we have given them reason to hate us even more than many of them already did. And make no mistake... they do hate us. You and your brother Javier violated one of the laws they hold most sacrosanct. The crime you committed will now reflect on everything we do in the future!”

“We have the information that grandmother wanted!” Dante snapped loudly. “The overall mission was a success! And that is how she would have seen it! You should mind your place Colonel!”

Asant flipped a data pad across the table at him watching as it slide to a stop in front of Dante. “She is dead because she chose to conduct the mission in a non-military fashion Prince Dante! She let her emotions decide her course of action. Her hatred for the Lycavorians and Leonidas was her downfall.” Asant growled angrily. “And you do not frighten me young man! I was fighting these Lycavorians before your father was even conceived and I will swat you down like an insect if need be! You are too young to understand why what you and your brother did is the worse possible thing that we could have done! The very manner in which the mission was executed was foul beyond description and many of us agree with that! And none of the most senior officers were consulted before this decision was made I might add! Men and women who have supported the Empress for millennia and sit here now!”

“My grandmother did not have to consult you for anything Colonel!” Dante snarled back. “You would do best to remember that! We succeeded or did you forget that. Both parts of the mission succeeded!”

“And she is now dead as I said because she didn’t consult us and get our advice!” Asant snarled right back. “And according to that pad there... you will not be far behind if Androcles Leonidas has his way!”

Moran leaned forward now at his words. “Asant? What are you talking about?”

Asant turned back to look at him. “We still have two or three assets on Earth and perhaps a dozen more across the entire Union. The mixed results of this foul mission and the Kavalian attacks against the Leonidas family... the killing of Martin Leonidas... then the attempts made against his children and his wives being targeted and kidnapped... it has made many of those who may have helped us in the future... it has caused them to turn their backs on us in a heartbeat.” He answered.

“Perhaps they are not as invulnerable as you believe colonel.” Dante spoke quickly. “A bunch of Kavalian animals did this. They killed the Leonidas swine... the one who raped my mother. And they did it with relative ease!”

“Martin Leonidas did not rape your mother Dante Moran...” Asant spoke to him in a cold and calculating voice. “It was his brother Pleistarchus. If you would actually read reports that are given to you perhaps you would not still cling to falsehoods and these perceived wrong doings. And every Kavalian that took part in that mission is now dead! Dead! The general populous helped to kill them! Civilians helped to kill them! Fighting in the streets alongside the Durcunusaan! I would say that is not so successful as you might believe!”

Dante turned to his father. “We secured the data from the Mindvoice ship father!” Dante spoke. “Even now our scientists are beginning to work so that we can use that technology against our enemies!”

“We did not retrieve all of the data Dante.” Moran spoke correcting his son. Moran was very quickly growing upset with his son’s continued disrespect to men and women who were his superiors and his betters. This is not how he had raised Dante to act and he was beginning to worry if perhaps Dante was suffering from some sort of mental and emotional trauma that had occurred on Earth after witnessing what he had. “The team escaped with barely a third of the technology that we were seeking from the ship. And they also failed to return with one of the Avatars to facilitate helping to implement this technology.”

“But it was the important parts they retrieved!” Dante protested his father’s statement. “They got weapons and propulsion systems technology! Surely that means something.”

Moran looked at his son. “Yes they did and in the process we lost one of our most senior Deep Strike Covert Teams Dante. They were decimated and only two survived. Two out of twenty! We have had better odds fighting the Kavalians.”

“All of their Internal Security Apparatus has gone to its highest level.” Asant spoke once more. “Androcles Leonidas has instituted many security changes that his father would never have considered.”

“Like what?” Moran asked.

“Personal scanners at all spaceports. A thorough review of all current high-level officers within the military and their Krypteria. They have gone to Biometric security measures now as well. No one gets near the private villa of Androcles, his father’s villa in Sparta or any sensitive military installation without matching a biometric scan from several different locations. Some of which are hidden.” Asant answered. “The people are accepting it... hell... they are clamoring for more to be done. We have miscalculated the loyalty and respect the family has among the many people of the Union again. You know that sir.”

Robert nodded. “Yes.”

“That report came in two days ago.” Asant spoke. “It lists some of the measures taken and some of the orders he has instituted since stepping in for his father. This is not Martin Leonidas we are talking about.” Asant said turning to look at Dante. “This is not a man who had to discover who and what he was nearly three thousand years *after* he was born. The son has been indoctrinated in the Lycavorian Spartan way of life since he was born. He has embraced it, lived it wholeheartedly if all the Netnews intercepts are accurate. And on top of that comes the enormous power being bonded to a dragon brings to him. None of us ever saw that coming once the original Leonidas was killed over three thousand years ago.” He mumbled shaking his head. “And to prove that he is serious...” Asant came to his feet. “For your actions and what you took part in with his sister, there is now a standing bounty on your head Dante Moran. A bounty of one billion Lycavorian Riyal!”

Moran’s eyes grew wide. “A billion riyal!” He gasped.

Asant nodded turning back to him. “Apparently the young Prince will cash in his entire inheritance and whatever else of personal value he has to the person that brings him you. And brings you to him alive. If he does not find you first that is. If you leave High Coven space from this day forward there is no guarantee you will ever return. Hell... given the circumstances now happening... that many credits does not guarantee your safety *within* High Coven space.”

This news seemed to quiet Dante, as he said nothing now.

“There is also a substantial reward for any information leading to the capture of Princess Yuri.” Asant spoke looking at Moran.

“How substantial?” Moran asked.

“Half of what is being offered for your son.” Asant replied.

“Fuck!” Moran gasped.

“Robert... many of us are beginning to believe that we should have approached this differently.” Asant said. “Our war with the Kavalians has changed us. We are beginning to resort to the same methods that the damn Kavalians use against us. The Empress and even Princess Yuri were becoming far more ruthless than they ever were before. Over twenty years and the Lycavorians went out of their way to avoid conflict with us. It is confirmed through some of our different sources that many of them actually hoped the Peace Accords to be a true thing. Then we go and do this.” Asant shook his head. “With the Lycavorian Union on our side there are some of us in the military who believe that with them fighting with us we could have ended this Kavalian threat many years ago.”

“What you speak is treason!” Dante barked jumping to his feet.

“What he speaks is logical boy! Now sit back now and be silent!” Another officer spoke now. He was an older man, and he wore the uniform of a High Coven senior Admiral and spoke with the tone in his voice of one not to be trifled with. “The Empress has known for some time that there are many of us who feel this way.”

Moran looked at the man. “Admiral Nelul?”

The man turned and looked at him. “According to the information we have the Kavalians are pushing hard at the Union. Intercepted Union Netnews broadcasts say they are holding one of the elven Queens prisoner for some purpose. The last one... For'mya I believe her name to be. There is much speculation as to why they are holding her but the fact is no one knows what they are doing. Leonidas is dead yes... his child Queen as well... but there is no word on the Hadarian Queen, and only bits and pieces on the first elven Queen Dysea and then Isabella. We know most of their children survived but his mother and the younger ones have not been seen in weeks. Our people are reasonably sure they have left Earth. There are also reports, rumors really, of a large-scale battle in The Wilds. Two of them actually... one that we are only just now getting information on.”

Asant held out the pad to Moran now. “Two hours ago we received word from several of our assets in The Wilds. The rumors are rampant and no one seems to know exactly what has happened, but the Icalro Alliance no longer exists.”

Moran took the pad. “What do you mean?”

“I mean they are gone. Someone has destroyed their entire command structure and their fledging political system.” Asant answered him. “If we are to believe the rumors, their entire government, if you wish to call it that, it is gone. Eliminated. With the defection of General Esavorna and many of his top people the *Venorik Elghinn* has been severely hampered. They are scrambling to find their way and cannot be counted on right now for accurate intelligence. What Intel we are receiving is from broadcasts from civilian sources... but they are all saying the same thing.”

“The Lycavorians?” Moran asked surprised.

Asant nodded. “Many of the reports are saying it was the Lycavorians but there is no way to be sure. The attack was devastating according to these broadcasts.” He replied.

“What does the Icalro alliance have to do with us?” Dante snapped. “Why do we care what happen to them?”

“We care Prince Dante... we care because these same reports speak of phantom ships and immensely powerful weapons.” Nelul spoke again. “This would indicate... if true... this would indicate that the Lycavorians have already fielded ships and weapons based on the technology they have obtained from their Mindvoice ship. The one taken from Lycavore.”

“You think an attack is coming?” Moran asked.

“Androcles Leonidas would never attack us!” Dante snapped. “He is nothing!”

Nelul looked at him. “He killed your brother; very nearly killed you and your dragon, and he severely injured your mother Dante Moran. And he did this alone. I would not exactly call that nothing. He is the Crown Prince and the natural order of succession for the Lycavorians means he will become King. This does not bode well for us no matter how you boil it down, particularly so considering that three of his wives and mates have reason to hate us as well.”

Moran nodded as he got to his feet. “Especially the Drow.” He said softly. “We did not treat them well at all when Yuri ruled on Earth.”

“Our actions are beginning to fracture our people as more and more discover why and how Aikiro was killed.” Nelul spoke evenly as he ventured into territory that no military officer would have ever gone if Aikiro was alive. “We have enough problems fighting the Kavalians and many of our people believed the trip to Earth, the false Peace Accord... many believed that was signaling a new day. That it is now coming out it was nothing more than a ruse to cover our real intentions is not sitting well with some.”

Moran turned quickly and glared at him. “You are suggesting we become allies with them!” He barked.

Nelul shook his head. “I despise them just as much as many my age Admiral Moran.” He answered. “We have seen the horrors they have inflicted on our people through the millennia. Granted... we brought it upon ourselves in many ways... but we have seen it. The younger, more liberal if you will generations of our people, they see how the Union accepts vampires into their ranks. They are a trusted and respected branch of the Union. Many of them hold high positions within their military and government. A pureblood is even Queen.

That is what the younger generation sees. I doubt the Lycavorians would entertain any sort of peace treaty now... but this is what is happening.”

“Can our people on the homeworld hold power?” Moran asked.

Nelul nodded. “We are fairly certain they can yes. But we will need to do something soon to insure it remains this way.” He said. “And our doctors need to find out what is wrong with the Princess. She is the key. Aikiro’s bloodline. You may be her husband sir... but your are not pureblood... and only she will be able to rally those older and more established purebloods to strengthen our support.”

Moran nodded. “I figured as much which is why we will be heading back by the end of tomorrow.” He stated. “I’ve already ordered that work begin on developing this new technology and incorporating it into our current ships and systems. The main facility near Pelatus has begun work and I’ve ordered three other secret shipyards and research facilities involved as well. They tell me they can have something within six months.”

Nelul nodded. “Just before the Kavalians finish their clones.” He said. “We will need it then for surely they will come in the hopes of finishing us off.”

Moran returned to his chair and looked at the men at the table. “All of you are the senior officers loyal to Aikiro and Yuri.” He stated. “You all know me... what I stand for. I suggest we begin to formulate plans in case we need to act sooner than we expected. Whatever has taken place in the past... we need to move quickly into the future now.”

They all turned when the door to the conference room opened and the junior Lieutenant rushed in.

“Supreme Commander Moran!” He stammered. “Sir... you will... you will want to see this! It’s being broadcast across all of High Coven space. We are unable to jam the transmission using any means we have!”

Moran nodded. “Let’s see it!”

“... The same as she was yesterday.” The deep older voice spoke, causing Pa'cour to turn from where he stood at the foot of the bed. His arms were folded across his broad chest and his face was unreadable as it always was.

The *INQUISITOR*’s medical bay was one of the finest of any shipboard medical clinics in the fleet and this doctor, while not military, had been treating Princess Yuri since she was only thirteen years year old. Nalavi Vicele was very well respected and very well known for his outspoken views and his mannerisms; some of which rubbed his fellow purebloods the wrong way no matter what he did. He was given quite a bit of latitude in how he did things because he was such a skilled doctor and surgeon.

“Yes... I can see that doctor.” Pa'cour answered. “Her scars... they have not faded as you said they might.”

Nalavi moved up next to the bed and looked at the cruel scars that dotted the smooth skin on Yuri’s otherwise flawless neck and throat. Four jagged looking tears where Androcles’s fangs had sunk into her neck and began to rip outward. Her shoulder and chest also bore the scars of his wickedly powerful paw and where he had raked that paw down her front as he bit into her throat. There were also three lesser scars that streaked her right cheek and were three inches long. They started just below her eyes and down past her jaw. They were the result of another swipe of his paws that nearly cleaved her head from her shoulders.

“They will fade more in time but I fear only a Hadarian could remove them completely now.” Nalavi spoke softly. “She was foolish to face off against a Leonidas by herself. She knew that a pureblood Lycavorian is too powerful, even for her. Especially those of the Leonidas family.”

“She was trying to protect her children.” Pa'cour spoke softly. “It was... it was foolish yes... but it was also very admirable of her.”

Nalavi looked at him his dark eyes filled with questions. “You know Colonel... I have been treating vampires for the better part of ten thousand years now. Yuri’s injuries were some of the most severe I’ve ever seen one survive. Most vampires would have died without a massive infusion of blood within seconds of these injuries occurring.”

“What are you saying?” Pa'cour asked him.

“Do not play coy with me Immortal.” Nalavi spoke sternly. “No vampire or Immortal carries enough blood with them on missions to repair the damage that was done to her before returning to this ship.”

“She obviously did.” Pa'cour spoke. “She is remarkably strong willed and...”

“Why does she whisper your name in the middle of the night Pa'cour?” Nalavi asked as he moved from the side of the bed to stand next to him.

“What?” Pa'cour gasped.

Nalavi nodded his head. “Four times that I have heard myself.” He told him. “Half a dozen other times that my staff has told me about. Not her mother’s name... not the Admiral’s name... but yours. Why is that?”

Pa'cour turned back to look at her sleeping on the bed. “I do not know.” He stated softly.

“I think you do.” Nalavi said. “The medic who treated you when you returned with her. He said your injury looked as if someone had bitten you but didn’t seal the wound properly. Now I saw you briefly when you first returned and I know what I saw. No Lycavorian bit you Pa'cour. Your whole shoulder would have been shredded if that was the case.”

Pa'cour turned back to him. “What are you getting at doctor?”

“There is only one way she could have lasted long enough for you to get her to the ship.” Nalavi spoke. “Somehow you got her to feed on you Pa'cour... and not only feed on you... but take enough of your blood to heal her wounds, at least the major internal ones, and damn near kill you in the process.” Nalavi spoke. “Only she forgot to seal the wound in her dazed state and you were still bleeding when you got her back here.”

Pa'cour forced a smile and chuckle. “Doctor... that is... that is insane.” He said.

“Is it now?” Nalavi said.

“Princess Yuri would never have taken the blood of an Immortal.” Pa'cour spoke. “Even if it meant it would save her life. It is a crime for purebloods to do this.”

Nalavi snorted. “I’ve been her doctor since she was thirteen years old Pa'cour. I know her almost better than she knows herself. Over three millennia and I think I know something of her mindset Colonel.” He said. “I know she would have if you offered. Now how did you get her to do it? You are the only Immortal that she trusts enough to violate that law Pa'cour. How did you get her to do it?”

“Trusts?” Pa'cour said. “She trusts no one.”

“Contrary to what you may believe Colonel.” Nalavi spoke. “She trusts you implicitly. To be honest... I think you are the only one she truly does trust.”

“You... you jest doctor. She trusts Admiral Moran completely for he is her Blessed Husband.” Pa'cour said. “I am not foolish enough to admit to such a thing knowing it goes against the law of the purebloods. I will never betray her!”

Nalavi stared at him for a long moment. “Moran?” He finally said. “Ah... Yuri no more trusts him than she does her own mother!”

“What?” Pa'cour gasped.

“She learned one thing from her father Pa'cour. One thing more than anything else. Trust very few with who you really are... and then only those who risk everything to safeguard you. You saved her life what... twice on Lycavore and then once more while she carried Javier. Where was her precious husband then?” Nalavi shook his head. “You have been here every day since you brought her back Pa'cour.” He stated. “You saved her life and you have been here every day since then until my staff runs you off at night. Then you return during the day and remain with her. Why is that?”

“I am her Immortal Guard.” He stated quickly. Too quickly. “It is my... it is my duty.”

“Your duties as her Immortal Guard do not extend to reading to her when you think no one is watching or monitoring her presence.” Nalavi said. “Your duties do not include giving her updated intelligence reports every day when you think no one is watching even though she may or may not hear you. And your duties do not extend to making her as comfortable as possible when you think no one is watching Colonel, or holding her hand when she has one of her thrashing incidents.”

“You do not know of what you speak.” Pa'cour snarled at him.

“Do not bark at me boy!” Nalavi snarled back at him without fear. “You may have close to seven thousand years of life but I am over twelve thousand years old and I do not fear you! I am not your enemy Colonel... and I can see quite plainly that your feelings for Yuri extend well beyond the realm of her Immortal Guard Captain.”

“You... you are mistaken.” Pa'cour stated.

“Am I?” Nalavi asked. “Do you know how many times Moran has been down to see her Colonel? Twice. Do you know how many times her own son has been here to see her? Once.” He moved back up to the

side of the bed. "I have never liked Moran to be honest. What she ever saw in him is beyond me. He isn't a pureblood... hell... he isn't even a naturally born human. He is a genetic creation. And no matter what she thinks... he has used her to gain what he has now."

"The Admiral is a skilled warrior doctor." Pa'cour said.

"Oh... I'm not saying he isn't skilled. I'm saying if not for Yuri he would never have had the chance to prove that. He would be dead." Nalavi said. "Veldruk would have killed him the moment he returned if not for Cha'talla. And Yuri's obvious feelings for him."

"Why has he not come down to see her more?" Pa'cour stated. "She is his Blessed Wife."

Nalavi met his eyes. "Moran is more concerned with holding onto his power." Nalavi said. "The first thing he asked me when he saw her... will I be able to heal the scars? He grunted something in response when I told him she would need more than I am able to give in regards to that and then he left moments later. He came down two days ago, watched her for several minutes and then left once more. He is nothing if not a creature of material wants. He wanted Yuri's beauty to be his... and in his eyes she is no longer beautiful. I saw it in his face and in his eyes. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he is already lining up some young officer to fuck on the side."

"That is not true!" Pa'cour snapped unable to hold back his anger at such treatment. "She is..." He stopped talking and looked at Nalavi with wide eyes.

Nalavi shook his head slowly. "Physically she is fully recovered and should be awake. Something else is keeping her from regaining consciousness except for the few times she has been lucid and then slipped back under."

Pa'cour looked at him. "What could do this?"

Nalavi shrugged his shoulders. "I'm sure you've noticed she has become darker over the last decade or so. Harsher... more prone to fits of anger?"

Pa'cour nodded. "Yes. I thought it was due to the stresses of the war with the Kavalians." He said.

Nalavi shook his head. "I don't think so." He stated. "I think it is something else but I don't know what." He looked at Pa'cour. "Taking as much blood as she did from you will create a subconscious connection within Mindvoice Pa'cour. You know this."

Pa'cour nodded. "Yes... but I have sensed nothing like this. Would I not know if this was the case?"

Nalavi shook his head. "Possibly but I doubt it. You have had no Mindvoice training and the natural Mindvoice shielding of your people has never been fully understood." He looked at him. "How much did she take Pa'cour?"

Pa'cour met his eyes and was quiet for a long moment on whether he could trust this man. "I had to take nearly two liters when I returned to the ship." He said finally. "Given how my body regenerates, I estimate she took nearly two and a half liters before she was sated enough that I could pull her off me. She did not forget to seal the wound doctor; I removed her before she could. I... taking my blood is one thing, but having her seal the wound after she is done is not something I could allow her to do. It would imply something that is not there."

"Xsa!" Nalavi gasped. "She took nearly half your blood? Pa'cour... you know what that will do don't you?"

Pa'cour nodded. "I will deal with the consequences when she wakes. I fully expect her to have me executed."

"How did you...?" Nalavi asked.

"Does it matter?" Pa'cour asked.

Nalavi shook his head quickly. "No... not really. But you... you know what her skills are Pa'cour. You know she will be able to see all your memories. All of them. Including how you feel for her."

"What do you know of how I feel for her?" Pa'cour asked. "You are a pureblood and you will report me regardless of what I tell you."

"I may be a pureblood Pa'cour but I do not come from that same arrogant mold as many purebloods." Nalavi answered. "Hell... the non-purebloods are very close to making up the majority of our citizens now! All I care about is Yuri. The medic who treated you brought this to me. He said we should let Moran know and he kept pressing me on this until I arranged his death seven days ago because he was going to tell him regardless of what I told him."

"Why?" Pa'cour looked at him as he asked. "Why would you do this?"

“I’ve watched her grow Pa'cour. I’ve watched her grow from a small child into what she is now and I am not happy with how things have gone for the last decade and a half. She is a changed person now.” He stated. “Changed from the young, idealistic Yuri that went to the Academy and then on to Earth to try and fix all Xerxes had fucked up! If you ask me, Moran is the worse possible thing that she needs in her life. The man is power hungry and always has been. I’m sure he loves her in his own twisted way... but that is not what she needs.”

“What do you believe she needs doctor?” Pa'cour asked.

“She needs someone to be there for her.” Nalavi answered him. “Someone who does not want something from her. Don’t get me wrong Colonel... she can be a bitch when she wants to be... and very violent if need be... but she used to believe in something greater than what she has now. Until she discovered her father had Xerxes rape her on his orders. He was using her... trying to shape her into something she was not. Having her own brother abuse her was part of how he did it. Veldruk was no better than Aikiro in my opinion... they both used Yuri for their own purposes. Everyone but you.” He said watching, as Pa'cour’s eyes grew a little wider at this pronouncement. “You never wanted anything from her and she told me that a few times through these last years. That is why I can tell you she trusted you more than anyone in her life. You never wanted anything from her.”

Pa'cour turned back to look at her on the bed. “That... that is not entirely true Doctor but it will not matter now.” He stated softly. “As I said... she will have me executed when she wakes for what I have done, but I am willing to accept this as long as she lives on. That is all that matters now.”

“You...”

“Doctor Vicele!” The young assistant barked from the nearby terminal. “Doctor you need to see this!”

“What is so important Lieutenant?” Nalavi asked frustrated at the interruption.

“Sir... there is an announcement happening across all of High Coven space.” The man spoke. “You need to see this. You too Colonel!”

“I have no desire to leave the side of Princess Yuri.” Pa'cour spoke.

“You’ll want to see this sir!” The man retorted. “It’s from Cha’talla!”

“... Much I would like to say but because of time constraints I can not. Look upon me my fellow Immortals! My fellow AkruXian! My appearance is not a mistake or some trick of the light and transmission. This is who we are... who we were before the High Lord Veldruk took it upon himself to conquer our world. This skin you see on me... on my sons... this is our true skin.” Cha'talla's face was animate in the transmission, his dark eyes bright and alert. **“The High Coven has misled us, betrayed us for millennia while we did their bidding. How I looked before, how many of you look now, it is not some disease or deformity. It is the result of genetic tampering by the High Lord and the Empress Aikiro! This is our true appearance!”**

“They used us my AkruXian brothers and sisters! They have used us for millennia all the while knowing that they did this to us! I know this to be true and I have the proof!” Moran was watching with Asant and the other officers in the huge conference room, the transmission up on the entire wall section behind the table. **“Twenty-seven years ago I was saved! Twenty-seven years ago I was given a second chance. I will tell you now what many of you do not know. I was trying to make things better for our people and the High Lord became aware of this. He killed me that day... or he thought he did. He ordered my entire family butchered. My AkruXian Immortal woman... all but one of my children. My brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews. All but one of them died because of me. Because of my desire to make our people better. I was saved that day... saved by the very pureblood vampire you see next to me. I made her my *Du'used 'ranndi* not long after that and I have not looked back since.”** Those watching saw the dark haired pureblood female stretch up on her tip toes and whisper something into Cha'talla's ear before dropping back to the balls of her feet and placing her hand on his abdomen as she pressed closer to him.

Cha'talla was smiling they could all see as he spoke again. **“Esther has reminded me that it was she who had to beat me to get me to see this.”** He glanced at his wife and kissed her head quickly. **“She is right. Esther Suira is now my Blessed Wife and she has bore me four strong and proud sons to raise along with my surviving son Fash'ka. We will have daughters one day too! She is now Matriarch to our tribe! Look**

at them..." Cha'talla motioned with his hand to the side where Tir'ut and Lynom stood. **"My two oldest sons behind Fash'ka... they have half elf and half Lycavorian Blessed Wives. All of you must know Normya Leonidas... daughter to King Leonidas and sister to Androcles and she is now Tir'ut's wife with the blessings of her family and their First Oracle! Our families are now joined for all time. My son Lynom and his beautiful and proud wife As'hia!"** Cha'talla bent over and lifted his younger sons into his arms. **"My youngest! Look at them! They look different because we are different!"**

Cha'talla set his sons down carefully. **"Our people were proud once! We held honor and respect and family above all else! Just as the Lycavorians do! Veldruk knew this... and changing us and turning our people into his personal army was part of his hideous plan to keep us from joining our Lycavorian brothers in their struggles. Instead they used us to quell instead of help! They used us to conquer instead of establish peace. And we followed blindly because we thought they had saved our people."** Cha'talla shook his head slowly. **"How wrong our elders were back then my fellow Akruvians. How wrong."**

They watched as the others in the transmission moved closer, as if to provide him support and strength as he spoke. They watched Normya Leonidas reach out and squeeze his arm, her face brilliant and her platinum blond hair so much like her mother. Cha'talla looked up once more at the recording device.

"We no longer have to suffer under the boots of the Coven!" Cha'talla spoke as his rose and gained power and emotion. **"The hideous events against the daughter of Leonidas has shown how low the Coven has fallen. A mere child in terms of years and Aikiro and Yuri and Moran sanctioned that she be savagely raped and beaten to obtain information that was not theirs to have! They could have turned their backs on us then... but they embraced us. Only days ago we stood here on Kranek... we stood side-by-side with our Lycavorian and Elven brothers and sisters and we fought a glorious battle! Lycavorian warriors died without hesitation defending Immortal children! Akruvian Immortals fought beside many of the Leonidas children and alongside many purebloods. Princess Narice and Princess Carisia among them! Wives now to Leonidas brothers! We have begun a new chapter in the history of the Akruvian people! A chapter we will write, as we see fit, not others! Join with us! Leave the Coven behind and join with us! Let us return to the ways of our people from millennia ago. The path of honor and values! Give up your lives there and come here to begin anew! Esther and so many others have worked long and hard and we can give you back what the Coven took from us. You can be what our people were always suppose to be! How we were suppose to look! Leave it all behind... and come here with an open mind and hope! The tribe of Cha'talla... my tribe... we have aligned ourselves with our brothers and sisters in the Union. Just as it was meant to be. The sins of our past have been forgiven if we act now! It will take time and hard work but we have already begun this... and with each day we earn back the trust and respect of the galaxy again. Non-Akruvian Immortals walk the roads and streets of our settlement here on Kranek unafraid of our people! This is what I offer to you! Join with us and you can begin again. A new life where the decisions are yours to make! The path you wish to follow is yours to make! The battles we choose to fight are because we choose to fight them!"** They watched Cha'talla step away from Esther and move closer to the source of the transmission.

"But hear me closely now!" Cha'talla spoke. **"If these are things you do to want... if this offer is not good enough for you... then remain where you are. Continue to serve the High Coven, and when the day comes that Androcles Leonidas brings the mighty High Coven down because of what they did to his sister, you will fall with them. We will not hold back. We will show no mercy to those who stand against us. Against justice. The time is short my fellow Akruvian brothers and sisters. You need to decide and do so quickly. Aikiro's vile actions have unshackled a storm unlike any I have ever seen and I do not wish for my people to be swept aside by that storm for choosing the wrong side. Come now! They will not stop you! They can't stop you! They are splintered and fractured! This is our time after millennia under them! You must choose quickly as I said my brothers and sisters! And if you choose to remain... if you choose to continue life as you know it now... then that storm will crush you just as assuredly as it will crush the Coven. We... we can start again! We can live again! We can leave the past behind us and come together again! Brother... if you are out there... hear me now! We can..."**

"Shut it off!" Moran snarled as he came to his feet. "Fuck! Shut it off!"

The aide stabbed down on the control panel ending the transmission. "Transmission terminated sir."

“How is that getting through all of our filters?” Asant demanded. “Why can’t we jam it?”

“Kranek is in The Wilds sir. The signal is being bounced off several different repeater locations and it is being broadcast on a frequency we have never seen before.” The aide answered quickly.

“He’s using communications technology the Lycavorians got from their Mindvoice ship.” Moran spat. “It’s the only explanation.” He turned around and looked at the gathered men. “Which means that everything he is saying is true isn’t it?”

“Sir?” Asant asked.

“Is what he said true?” Moran snapped. “The way he looks? How the Immortals in our ranks look? Did Veldruk do that? Did he tamper with their genetic code like Cha’talla says?”

“Yes.” Nelul answered softly as he looked down at the table. “There is no sense in trying to hide it now. Not if he knows.” He looked up at Moran. “I don’t know all of the details but yes... it’s true.”

“Fuck!” Moran practically screamed.

“Can’t we say it’s all propaganda? Cha’talla is supposed to be dead!” Another Admiral asked quickly.

Moran shook his head now. “We discovered he was alive during the lead up to the fake Peace Accords.” He told them. “Aikiro had her suspicions for years but when she saw a secure transmission at Leonidas’s home in regards to his daughter Normya, Esther Suira was in that transmission as well as their son. Dysea left Earth hours later to meet with them. Presumably that is where she has been all this time.”

Asant shook his head as well. “Cha’talla has taken on sort of an iconic figure status among the Immortals. Especially many of the younger ones. There have been rumors about what he was trying to do for years circulating among the Immortals. Some of them very wrong, some embellished quite a bit, but quite a few of them very true. They were never able to confirm any of it however.”

“Until now.” Moran said softly.

“How many Immortals in the active ranks?” The same Admiral asked excitedly.

“If you include the ones serving onboard warships... including this one... nearly two million.” Asant answered. “And that does not include those who are either just finishing their training, or just starting it. Another hundred thousand just at the training bases on Uzu Ozeib 7 alone. Roughly the same amount at the six mother main bases.”

“Three million Immortals.” Nelul spoke softly looking at Moran. “They could decimate our ranks before we ever had a chance to quell any uprising. It would be no different than what Leonidas did on Earth Admiral Moran, only our casualties would be far more severe than what you suffered there.”

Moran nodded. “One Immortal could kill an entire squad before they were able to bring him down.” He agreed. “What a fucking lash up!”

“Release them from their service to us.” Nelul quickly followed up his statement.

“What?” Another admiral cried. “That is insanity! We all have Immortals stationed at our personal estates! They guard what belongs to us! They are our Shock Troopers!”

Nelul nodded. “If we do not release them... and do so quickly... our personal estates will no longer be ours.” He said. “You must step in now Admiral Moran... before this transmission sparks a riot we will not be able to control.”

“I agree.” Asant spoke. “Allow those who want to leave to go. Hell... give them stripped down ships to go! Those that want to stay can stay.”

“Why would any chose to remain?” The first Admiral asked.

“Because there are many who have grown to like the power they wield within our ranks.” Nelul said. “They are trusted and respected by many Pureblood and non-pureblood vampires alike.” He looked around the table. “What Cha’talla suggests... he would have more trouble organizing that than we would trying to quell uprisings from within the Immortal ranks.”

“You are suggesting that we just release some of our finest troops from our service!” The second man to protest spoke again. “Just let them go!”

“The alternative is civil war.” Nelul spoke. “And that we will not survive. Whether you choose to admit it or not, there are many among our people who view the Immortals as friends. Many of our officers and troops have fought beside them against the Kavalians and formed solid friendships in the midst of war. To ask them to turn around and fight them, it will split the ranks of our troops and plunge us into chaos.”

“This is... this is madness!” Another spat.

Moran looked at Nelul. "How many will leave?" He asked.

"There is no way to answer that question sir." He answered.

"Your best guess then." Moran told him.

"Given how Cha'talla is viewed among many of the younger Immortals... now that they know for certain he is alive... I would estimate over half depart." Nelul answered.

"That will include their families and tribes." Asant said. "If the Tribe Elder leaves... the entire tribe goes with them. It is the basis for their society Admiral. We also have to consider that if we move against the Immortals, we will need to move against their tribes as well. Just as Veldruk did against Cha'talla's tribe."

"Veldruk failed in that." Moran said.

"Yes sir... but only because Cha'talla had planned for that eventuality." Asant replied. "If we move against the Immortals, we need to move against their tribes. If we move against their tribes we will lose all support from even those who do not want to leave."

Moran got to his feet and moved to the view window. He stared at the stars for a few seconds before turning back around. "Fuck it." He spoke. "If the technology that we have taken turns out to be useful we won't need them. Put out an announcement. Any Immortal soldier who wishes to leave will be given free will to depart. If they don't want to be here... I don't want them here."

Asant nodded and rose to his feet. "I'll make it happen sir."

"Get it out quickly Asant. I don't want them to think we are holding them back and they start to do stupid shit." Moran spoke.

"I'll have the order drawn up and issued within the hour." Asant answered as he turned and headed for the door.

Moran looked at Nelul and the others. "Gentlemen I suggest we put our heads together and start working on how to keep the Coven from fracturing. I want facts and figures. I want the names of those who want to think they can take charge and push Yuri out. I want the loyal politicians to know we stand with them and the disloyal fuckers to know I'll skin them alive if they try anything." He moved back to the table. "Once that is complete... we can start to head home."

"We can leave the past behind us and come together again! Brother... if you are out there... hear me now! We can forgive! We have forgiven! And we can be as father meant us to be! Join us now! Help us to build our future!"

Nalavi shook his head slowly as the transmission began to repeat itself. "I would have never imagined it." He spoke. "Cha'talla is alive. That is unbelievable!"

Pa'cour nodded his head slowly. "Indeed." He stated softly.

Nalavi looked at him. "And he has..."

"Changed how we look?" Pa'cour said. "It would seem so. Is what he says possible doctor?"

Nalavi nodded his head quickly. "Oh... very much so. A virus that mutates only certain genes to alter outward appearance. That's basic genetic coding."

Pa'cour looked at him. "And it can be changed back even on older Immortals?"

Nalavi nodded. "I'm no geneticist... but apparently so since it has worked on Cha'talla. He is even older than you isn't he?"

Pa'cour tilted his head to the side. "By several years yes. You seem to know quite a bit about Cha'talla doctor." He said.

Nalavi nodded. "I met him on many occasions." He answered meeting Pa'cour's eyes. "I was suitably impressed with him. I never did believe he betrayed your people and it seems I was right."

"So... so it would appear." Pa'cour said softly.

Nalavi looked at him intently for a long moment. "Why is it you are not reacting as I think you should be reacting to this news Colonel?" He asked. "I understand many of your younger Immortals consider Cha'talla as somewhat of an icon. This information... this is not going to sit well with them."

"No it will not." Pa'cour spoke. "If it turns out to be true."

"You don't believe it?" Nalavi asked. "What possible reason could he have for lying now?" Nalavi said.

“I believe many things doctor... but without proof that is all they are. Beliefs.” Pa'cour answered.

“Then perhaps you need to evaluate what those beliefs are Colonel.” Nalavi spoke. “And then decide if you wish to pursue them.”

“A wise bit of advice sir.” Pa'cour spoke. “We...”

“**Noooooooooo!**”

They both whirled around to see Yuri sitting straight up in the bed, her face a mask of horror. The thin sheet covering her while she laid there had dropped away to reveal her naked body, a fact that caused Pa'cour to drink in her beauty even as he moved amazingly fast to grab the edges of the sheet to cover her.

“Princess!” Pa'cour hissed softly. “Princess... you are safe!”

Nalavi moved well for a vampire of his advanced years and he immediately began to take readings with his medical instruments.

The dreams were not hers, but they were so very vivid.

The high black rock walls, the screams of the dying and the injured. The flash of crimson and bronze, steel glimmering in the light of the midday sun.

You are weak! You failed me!

No!

They shifted again to a planet with a purple hue about it. Towering massive trees and still the screams of the dying and injured persisted.

You failed me! Your mother failed me! You are weak!

No! It was wrong!

I say what is wrong! The voice bellowed. I am superior!

I know what you are now!

You know nothing! You are a fool woman! No better than your mother! She was a fool for she allowed her feelings for him to made her weak!

You lie! She was not weak!

You are no different! Too weak to admit what is within your inner self! The fool uses you and you are too stupid to know this!

You lie!

Too stupid and foolish to accept what you want! To take what you truly want! You cling to feeble emotions when I could have given you everything!

The scene shifted to a lush green timber. Three crumpled Immortals, two younger than the third, as their blood soaked into the ground around them. The flash of explosions, the castle like estate, the images of wolves and immense dragons. The pull of the hand that saved her. The face and eyes of the Immortal that would become her Captain.

I meant to punish you by having you feed on him! I meant for you to kill him and be forever cursed by your own people for tainting yourself! The voice snarled. Only to discover you are even weaker than your mother! Your desires buried deeper than hers! I should have known this would be the case!

You will not control me! She screamed. No more!

Bah! Fool woman! I have already left you! You failed me... I do not accept failure! I have already moved on and taken the last vestige of your former life!

No!

You will be cursed now! You have tasted his blood and now you will not be able to deny what your pathetic emotions tell you! You are useless to me! What you discover in the future will break you! And I will laugh as you destroy yourself in your woeful mourning!

I... I will fight you!

The voice laughed. A cruel sinister laugh that sent shudders of fear through her. ***I have found someone stronger than you! Darker. Crueler. He is like this because of you and now I will use him as I used you. Where you have failed... he will succeed!***

You are a monster! I see what you want to do! You will destroy us all!

My body is no more! I have nothing else! And I will have my revenge!

Nooooooooo!

SCIMITAR

ENROUTE TO HADARIAN SPACE

ELIANI'S QUARTERS

It had been perhaps the most utterly exquisite three hours of her young life and what made it even more superb was that Eliani Leonidas knew that this is what she would experience for the rest of her years.

Eliani's lithe body was currently stretched atop Jomann's powerful form, their sweaty, naked skin and flesh touching in every possible way as the last of their mutually orgasmic explosion shuddered through them both. His incredibly thick cock was buried fully inside her still clenching pussy and she used her inner muscles to squeeze him even tighter, wanting everything he had to offer her. Her head rested on his chest, for she looked ridiculously small splayed across his body as she was, her burgundy colored red hair sticking to his shoulders and chest in many places because of their combined sweat. His hands stroked the outsides of her satiny thighs, his fingers dancing deliciously along her tanned skin, sending shivers through her continuously. Eliani could not begin to describe how this moment had come to be for there were no words. They could barely contain themselves through the two hour debrief once they were back aboard the *SCIMITAR*. Once outside of the conference room Eliani had grabbed his hand and practically dragged him down three decks to her quarters. She had every intention of having him in every way she could think of, but as soon as the door closed to her quarters, Jomann showed her the nature of a true Alpha Wolf.

With a growl of need and barely contained desire, he had pinned her to the bulkhead in her quarters and virtually tore her uniform from her body. This was unlike anything Eliani had experienced before, even with Malic, and by the time his strong hands had torn away her thong panties, his aura had made her so wet that she was trembling in need. He kissed her deeply as he stripped out of his own clothes, Eliani helping whenever she could with trembling hands, and then he was lifting her into his arms and her cries of blissful enchantment began as he speared her in one heart stealing, breath robbing plunge. His cock was not as long as Malic's her dazed mind told her, but it was so much thicker, divinely so, and as his full ten inches sank into her tight depths and his large balls came to rest against her upturned ass Eliani Leonidas began coming. He had taken her there against the bulkhead urgently, driving into her with power and need, as she sang out her delight the entire time. His explosion came quickly, exactly as her second orgasm rocked her senses, and Eliani accepted all that he had to give her with gleeful abandon. This was the man she wanted, the man she had waited so long for, and she accepted and allowed him to scent her right there against the bulkhead. Instinctively she commanded her body to absorb all he was, to let his very essence fill and merge with hers.

As she trembled in his arms, he held her impaled upon his still steel hard cock and carried her to the bed in her sleeping chambers. He lowered her to the soft sheets and Eliani descended into a world of rapture as he proceeded to explore every crevice of her lush body with his lips and tongue, leaving no area unexplored or untouched. He even found places that Nyla had never discovered and this only confirmed to her that he was indeed the one. Twice more in very quick succession he had caused her tremendous, muscle stretching orgasms and she could only clutch his head and shoulders and cry out her glorious wonder as he drank her passion down. He was holding nothing back from her, his full unshielded aura wrapped around her and keeping her senses alive and singing out in joy. She could barely think about what was happening, before he turned her onto her stomach and plunged into her depths once more like an eager child. It was here that Eliani Leonidas had truly discovered what it would be like in his bed. He held nothing back... giving her all that he was... as he whispered words of devotion and love into her ears. His nuzzles along her neck and the backs of her ears were like electric shocks that sent jolts of luscious pleasure surging through her veins. She could hardly move with his weight above her, so Eliani did the only thing she could think of, and she began to fuck him back as hard as she could while he stroked into her from behind. It became too much for him and he flipped her over once more, never leaving the prison of her warmth and tucked his head into the crook of her shoulder and began to dominate her. Eliani could only scream in heavenly pleasure as one climax followed another like waves crashing onto a beach. She had locked her ankles together on his tight powerful ass and wrapped her arms tightly around his broad

back as much as she could and she simply held on. Her fern green eyes were changed completely, her wolf fangs fully extended in joyous rapture and his powerful aura wrapped around her like a blanket.

It happened without warning, without even thinking, and the moment his fangs pierced the skin of her shoulder Eliani sank her own fangs into his shoulder. Her blood boiled over as the virus in his saliva and the eruption of his essence into her smashed aside all she had ever known and reshaped her. She had long ago healed the scars of where Malic had bitten her on her breast, something that she hadn't even thought about, but Jomann's bite would remain with her forever. She would wear the scars proudly now, for it signified something to Eliani that she had always craved. Something she had always hoped to discover even as a little girl.

Eliani Leonidas had finally found the Soulmate that she knew had been out there looking for her. She had discovered the *Anome* that would forever hold her heart in his hands. And just as Jomann's searing come filled her, the tears of happiness spilled from her eyes as she shook in the most powerful orgasm of her life.

The next two hours had been nothing more than exploring each other's bodies, something that they did with unrestrained relish. Eliani swelled with happiness and love as Jomann's scent permeated her blood more deeply than anything ever had. The virus that had transferred from him to her was powerful and potent, not as potent as a pureblood Leonidas, but close to it and the female wolf inside her basked in the glorious sensations. When he had finally allowed her to take control, Eliani had given back to him every bit the pleasure and love he had given to her. Using all of her imagination and skills, she had feasted on him, just as she had promised she would and she was absolutely giddy to do it. He tasted sweeter than he smelled and this caused Eliani to coo out her delight as she snuggled between his thighs and drank down what he gave to her with joy.

When she climbed onto his powerful body and lowered herself onto his dominating cock, feeling his thickness stretch her and make her feel things she never had before, all pretense of doubt was forever washed away. He let her dominate him now, taking control of their love making, rotating her hips in hard tight circles on his throbbing cock. She wanted her prize and as an Alpha female she was going to get it from her chosen mate. Just before his fourth eruption he lifted himself off the bed, sitting up and making her sink even deeper onto his throbbing cock and he covered her lips with his. His hands grabbed her ass and pressed her down tightly onto his cock and for the next ninety seconds Eliani howled out his name over and over as he pulsed within her velvety depths like an erupting volcano. They had collapsed into this very position several minutes ago, and reveled in the sensations and emotions as their minds mingled and came together and they saw all there was to know about each other and truly became *anomes*. He hid nothing from her as she swam within his thoughts, and Eliani reciprocated this, sharing all she was with him.

He had finally grown soft inside her, but he still filled her quite deliciously and Eliani had no intention of moving from her spot for just feeling him anchored within her as he was sent tiny slivers of pleasure coursing through her body. As she regained control of her breathing and her heart rate she lifted her head from his chest, using her four inch long tongue to drag across his skin tasting the salty flavor of his sweat and teasing his right nipple. She felt one strong hand tighten on her firm ass and he chuckled softly as he brought the other up and took the side of her face in his palm. His fingers entwined in the hair that dangled over that side of her face and she lifted her eyes to his.

"If your intent is to excite me... you are succeeding." He said with a soft smile and bright twinkle in his ocean blue eyes.

Eliani scooted upwards on his chest and body, groaning in disappointment as he slipped somewhat from inside her and she placed her hands on either side of his handsome face and stared into his eyes.

"Do you... do you realize how utterly happy you have made me?" She whispered to him, using her thumbs to stroke his cheeks.

"I believe I should be asking you that question." Jomann told her gazing into her fern green eyes.

"Ever since I was small... I have seen how my father... how my father loved my mothers so completely." Eliani said. "It did not matter to him... he loved them all equally... until it took their breath away." Eliani lowered her head and used her nose to nuzzle his throat. "You... you have given that to me Jomann. All I have ever desired or hoped for in a man, you have given it to me and so much more."

"Eliani Leonidas you are my *anome* now." He spoke softly. "Even amidst all we are now dealing with, I will give to you anything your heart desires."

Eliani smiled as she gazed at him. "I'm actually very easy." She told him.

Jomann laughed now and shook his head. “You are anything but easy Eliani. You are my *Iannalocara*. My delicious flower. And you only blossom when you have found what you desire most of all. Thankfully... that is me.”

Eliani grinned as she looked at him. “Damn straight it is.” She hissed before kissing him hard on the lips and squeezing his face.

Jomann surprised her as he sat up quickly and pulled her even closer as he looked up into her eyes. She had no choice but to wrap her arms around his broad shoulders and stare back at him. “On my blood as a Lycavorian and a Spartan Eliani Leonidas, I will honor you always. I will never hurt you, never betray you, and never forsake you. You are my *anome*, and I will love you breathless until I pass into the next life. However long that may be. I swear this to you *Iannalocara*, as your *anome* and your mate.”

Eliani blinked back tears and moved her hands back to his face. “Are you done professing your love for me?” She asked.

Jomann smiled shyly. “At the moment yes. I have... I have run out of original things to say.”

Eliani laughed happily and kissed him once more pulling back after a moment. “You forget my beautiful Jomann... I have seen into your mind and I know how you feel. I see it every time you gaze at me with your eyes.”

“That is only because I wish to throw you to the ground and take you where you are because you smell so damn good.” He said.

Eliani laughed again and pressed her forehead to his. “That sounds like fun.” She stated playfully.

“Eli...”

She dropped a finger to his lips and shook her head. “Enough.” She said. “You do not need to convince me anymore than you already have my love. And I swear the same to you Jomann, with every waking breath I take.”

Jomann’s face showed his happiness and he leaned forward and nuzzled her throat, drawing a sigh of excitement and delight from her. “If we return to Earth in time... my family is giving a celebration for his graduation from the Academy. I would... I would like to introduce you to my family Eliani.”

“My father will want to speak with you.” Eliani said. “He is still protective of us even though we have Come of Age. And I will tell my mothers what you have done to me and made me feel.”

Jomann’s face scrunched together in surprise. “Everything?” He asked shocked.

Eliani nodded. “Everything.” She answered him with a beaming smile.

“Then perhaps I should continue to work on my technique so that they are suitably impressed that I have tamed their daughter.” Jomann spoke.

“Tamed?” Eliani gasped. “I will show you tame!” She announced before dropping her hand between their bodies, grasping the thickening part of his cock that was not inside her and pushing him back onto the bed. “You have a long way to go before you tame me mister! We still have fourteen hours before we arrive in Hadarian space. You just try and tame me by then.” She ordered before lowering her lips to his and kissing away his retort.

CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

SCIMITAR

“... started almost six months ago.” Caliria spoke as she rested on the end of the huge bed within Andro’s quarters. She had taken a long, steaming hot shower and now was wrapped only in one of Sadi’s light terrycloth robes. She had come out of the bathroom with the robe wrapped tightly around her body not really knowing how they would react to her having been a pleasure slave and having to endure what she did. Her fears were quickly brushed aside as first Sadi and then Ne’Veha had come up to her, drawing her to the bed while nuzzling her very affectionately. When Carisia and Lu’ria came into the bedroom portion of the huge quarters they immediately came over and did the same and Caliria knew that whatever had happened did not factor into how they felt for her.

Devra sat behind her on the bed now, brushing out her lustrous black hair, while Sadi sat to her right side on the bed and Ne'Veha to her left. Lu'ria sat on the two person couch they had pushed closer to the bed and she and Carisia were alternating between listening to Caliria speak and fussing with one of the pieces of clothing they had obtained for her to wear. Caliria quickly noticed that Carisia and Lu'ria seemed rather possessive of each other while Sadi and Ne'Veha were drawn more to each other and to her. While she found this interesting, Caliria took note that it certainly did not stop them from showing affection for all of them together as a whole.

“What started *Inamarno*?” Sadi asked.

“The dreams.” Caliria answered.

“What dreams Cali?” Devra asked her looking over her shoulder and using the childhood nickname she had coined for her oldest daughter.

“The dreams of all of you.” Caliria answered looking first at Sadi and then Ne'Veha. “All of you.”

“You have been dreaming of us for six months?” Lu'ria asked softly as she looked up from the couch from where she was working on the black outfit they had gotten for her.

“Yes Mistress. I have...” Caliria stopped and couldn't help but smile at her as the others grinned knowingly. “You see... I have known... I know what to call all of you. I thought they were just dreams... very erotic dreams to be honest, but just dreams. I was seeing that human Eridiani man from the University and...”

“Wait!” Devra exclaimed. “You were seeing an Eridiani?” She asked somewhat taken aback. “Cali how could...”

“He was nice to me mother.” She replied. “He showed me attention and he listened to me when I spoke. Perhaps not for the reasons I would have liked, I know that now, but at least he didn't treat me like I have the plague simply because of my hair color.”

“But you knew the Eridiani target females such as yourself because no other with normal hair will even acknowledge them.” Devra said.

Caliria nodded slowly. “I knew... but I didn't care at the time. Franklin was nice to me mother, he treated me like I was someone important. He gave to me what I knew I would never have with a Vanari man. He was... he was sufficiently tolerable in bed as well. Not really very imaginative or particularly gifted... but adequate.”

“You stopped seeing him I take it?” Sadi asked her.

Caliria nodded her head quickly. “Shortly after I began to have the dreams. I didn't know what it was... I still don't understand it all to some degree... but he no longer interested me. In some way I felt like... like I was betraying something. I now know that it was all of you I felt and that is why I felt as if I was betraying someone. He wasn't happy about it.”

“Never think that *Inamarno*.” Ne'Veha said quickly reaching out to take her hand. “You could not betray us... just as we could never betray you.”

“*SirsanGai* is right.” Carisia spoke. “We all were... we all were leading different lives before we came together. None of us knew what the dreams and feelings intended until we came together and were able to see what it all preordained for us.”

“Six months ago?” Sadi said softly. “That is shortly after Carisia came into our lives and then we began to have dreams and visions of Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. The more we came together the stronger it became. Once the four of us came together with Andro the dreams and visions of you became almost overpowering.”

“It was him wasn't it?” Caliria asked. “It was Androcles. The dreams became so much more vivid and real when we arrived in this quadrant. At first it was just images and such that were flashing through my mind and in my dreams, but then after I arrived here in this quadrant of space I thought I could actually hear his voice in my head. Talking to me. It was so soothing and caring and warm.”

Sadi nodded taking her hand and squeezing it. “Yes... it was him. The moment he met your mother and sisters on his ship after they arrived in the Alpha Quadrant he was able to focus enough to reach out with Elynth's help. I'm guessing it is because he was able to actually pinpoint your Mindvoice imprint on your family.”

“Mindvoice imprint? I don't understand Sadi; I can not Mindvoice as your people do.” Caliria said.

Can't you? Sadi reached out quickly in Mindvoice. *Or is it that you simply have never used the skill before.*

Caliria reacted as if she had been shocked with a stun rod and Devra instantly became worried. "Cali... Cali what is it?" She gasped gripping her shoulders.

"I... I heard you!" Caliria gasped in stunned surprise.

Try it Inamarno. Ne'Veha reached out now.

Caliria's eyes darted to where she sat with a smile on her face. *But I can not! I...* Caliria brought her hands to her face in amazement as Sadi and the others smiled upon hearing her soft voice in their heads.

You see. Sadi spoke. *You have just never used this skill before... but it has always been inside you.*

"But how?" Caliria asked looking at her. "How can I do this?"

Devra finally understood what was happening and she lowered the brush to the top of the bed. "I understand what is happening now." She said softly. "She has just discovered she can Mindvoice hasn't she?" Devra saw Caliria turn to look at her.

Sadi nodded looking at Devra. "Yes."

"I think... I think it may be my fault Cali. Actually I am pretty sure it is because of me." Devra stated.

Caliria twisted around on the bed now and looked at her mother even more. "What do you mean mother?"

"You did nothing wrong Devra Re Mydala." Lu'ria spoke from the couch. "And what has happened is not a crime."

Devra nodded her head with a smile. "I know Lu'ria. The prophets bless me, I know that now. Bren has shown me so much in such a short time." She said with an almost wistful voice of her own.

"Mother... what are you saying?" Caliria asked again.

"When I carried you in my womb." Devra said softly looking at her. "I was visiting your brother on the Protectorate homeworld and I visited with Wayonn while I was there. The one we know as a Pralor?"

Caliria nodded. "I have heard of this Wayonn." She said.

"I asked him if he could show me the history of his people. The Pralors and Lycavorians. I had hoped to be able to understand them better. He had given us scrolls of information over the years to help us understand them, but it seems only I really took the time to study them. He took my request seriously and touched me with his mind. I saw images and flashes of history that stole my breath away Caliria. Apparently when he did this however, it also extended to you while you were in my womb and it imprinted the inherent ability to Mindvoice within your developing genetic code." Devra looked at Sadi. "At least that is how Eliani has explained it to me."

Sadi smiled in reply. "She is almost as smart as her mother and they know what they are talking about." She said. "You did nothing wrong Devra, just as Lu'ria said."

"Oh... I don't think I did." Devra answered. "Since... since Bren took me that first night, I have discovered I have this ability as well. He has been slowly developing it with me so that I'm not overwhelmed. Being able to see within the mind of your... of your husband and mate is such an overwhelming thing. I have only know him for a few weeks, but now that I am his wife and mate, I can see within his mind all that he has ever experienced. He holds nothing back from me. It is almost... I know Bren better than I ever knew your father Cali... and it is such a wondrous feeling."

Caliria reached out and took her mother's hand. "Thank you mother." She said softly. "If you... if this had not happened I would not be here."

"You would not have endured what you have had to endure either." Devra spoke harshly of herself looking down at the bed.

Caliria smiled. "Me being born with dark hair is not your fault mother. It is a gene passed down from the father. I have told you this... and all our medical data proves it. You could not have known this would happen." She said.

"If I had done more when you were small... if I had done more than you would never have been taken and forced to..." Devra stopped unable to continue.

"You are not to blame mother!" Caliria stated forcefully. "You will not hold blame for this. I won't let you! The Prophets meant for this to happen and they meant for you to be that instrument of initiation. I did not... I did not have to endure as much as some of the others. The men... they preferred to pay to see Yssyla and I together. The others... they had it worse than I mother." Caliria looked at her mother with a smile.

"Bren... he is that man who called you his wife on the ship?"

Devra nodded with a smile and looked at her again. "He is the one who has taken me as his wife and mate yes. He has claimed me as many Lycavorians call it. It is... it is wondrous Cali. What he makes me feel is so; it is amazing."

"*Inamarno*... did this Eridiani male... you said he didn't take it well when you ended it?" Sadi asked.

Caliria turned back to her and shook her head. "He wasn't happy about it no. He was very interested in my work... always asking questions about what I was doing. I was flattered at first, thinking he really was interested in me for who I was. I didn't put it all together until after I was taken but now I believe he was the one who set me up."

"Did you care for him *Inamarno*?" Carisia asked.

Caliria nodded her head slowly, almost embarrassed to admit it. "In some way I believe I did. Very much in fact. I don't know if you would call it love... but there was something there." She answered honestly. "I don't know for sure if he is the one who set me up or if others were watching him and they used him to get to me and my work." She looked up at Sadi. "It doesn't matter now." She spoke firmly looking at Sadi. "I know where I belong. The dreams were... they were telling me where I belonged and now you are all here and I can touch you and... and feel you." She glanced at Ne'Veha and then to Carisia and Lu'ria on the couch before turning to Sadi with a warm smile of happiness. "What is he like?" She asked.

"Andro?" Sadi asked.

Caliria nodded eagerly. "Yes."

Sadi chuckled. "Well... now you are asking us a question that we will all be bias about *Inamarno*." She said.

"But I am bias as well Sadi." Caliria told her quickly. "My dreams... he has filled my dreams for the last months. Him and all of you. I feel love and passion and desire for all of you pulling at me with such strength and I have never met you before now. If that does not tell me where I belong... nothing ever will. I feel... I can feel all of you within me. I feel so... so warm and at peace with all of you so close. With him so close. These things... I have never felt these things and yet they pull at me all of the time now. They are telling me I have found my place in this life. When I first saw him... touched him on that planet... it was as if a veil covering my eyes suddenly came off and my future was right there for the taking."

"Why does that sound so familiar?" Carisia asked softly.

Caliria looked at her. "What do you mean Carisia?"

"It's how all of us felt when we came together Caliria." Ne'Veha answered her question. "We know exactly how you feel."

"What is Andro like?" Sadi asked rhetorically with a small smile repeating Caliria's question. "Well... to us he is the most beautiful man in the universe. He's proud and strong. His body is; it is as if he was sculpted from the gods of ancient times on Earth. He tastes very good too I might add." Sadi said with a brilliant smile. "He is exceptionally smart and not just book smart either. He has two different advanced degrees and he can talk Astrophysics in one single sentence and then switch to adolescent history classes in the next. And he is so incredibly gifted in our bed *Inamarno*, in size and talent equally." She said unashamedly.

"That is the truth. By the gods that is the truth." Ne'Veha spoke rolling her eyes in a sexy and provocative manner.

Caliria looked at her, smiling at her words and the swoon she saw from all of them. She may not have known him for more than a few hours but she so wanted to experience that. "And you are his *Anome*? His soulmate." She said.

Sadi met her gaze. "Yes... but he does not love me anymore than he loves Carisia or Lu'ria or Ne'Veha. Or you *Inamarno*."

"I think the proof of that is in his actions." Devra spoke now. "I certainly did not expect him to do what he has done in order to retrieve you. Nor do what he has done in the last weeks in the search for you. He never faltered, never questioned that he would find you Caliria. And when he did find out where you were, he would have left everything behind in order to come to you if that is what it required. All of you would have." She said. "At a time when your people need you the most."

Caliria looked at her for a long moment. "Left everything behind? What do you mean mother?"

"Devra it is not important right now." Sadi said softly. "She will discover it in time and we don't want to overwhelm her right now."

“But it is important Sadi, for it shows his commitment and love to her. To all of you. It was something I questioned at first... but no longer.” Devra said passionately. “To be willing to toss it all away as he was... I can not think of a more boisterous announcement of his feelings towards Caliria and all of you.”

Caliria looked back and forth between her mother and Sadi. “Ok... would you tell me what exactly you are talking about now?” She said.

Devra took her hand and squeezed it tighter. “You are now considered a wife and mate to a Lycavorian Caliria. Just as I now am and quite happily I might add. But the difference is... your husband is recognized as the Royal Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union. The first born son of the King and next in line for the throne of the Union.” Devra smiled at her with green eyes. “You are a Princess now daughter.”

Caliria stared at her for a long moment with those honeydew green eyes, unable to truly believe what she had just heard. Sadi, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria detected a slight spike in her scent. Honeydew melon scented and so very enticing, just like her eyes. Caliria blinked several times and then turned to Sadi. “*KertaGai*... Sadi... is this... is this true?” She gasped.

Sadi nodded. “Yes.”

“But why... why did I never see this in my dreams?” She asked softly.

“Does it matter?” Sadi asked her with a smile. “Does it matter that he is a Prince of our people? It does not change how he feels for you *Inamarno*... for any of us. And there are times when he absolutely hates being Prince. There is much going on that you do not yet know about. You will learn what is happening as the days pass, but coming to get you was never a question *Inamarno*. It was only a matter of how much he would leave standing. He is very possessive of us as you no doubt have seen... as we are of him.”

“But to risk...?” Caliria asked softly.

“There is much more involved than just what those men allowed to happen with regards to you Caliria.” Devra spoke quickly.

Sadi nodded. “Your mother is right. There is also the matter of agreements and treaties between governments. And the consequences should those be broken. They facilitated in your abduction, they allowed it to happen within their borders. That is a violation of the agreement they had with Andro's father. The Union tolerates no slavery! None! For any purpose!” Sadi spoke forcefully with real anger in her voice. “They went back on an agreement with his father knowing what the consequences could be if they were caught. They have since paid the price for their folly. The Union... Lycavorians within the Union are unlike those you know from Dutkne's Protectorate *Inamarno*. We have known slavery at its worse under the High Coven, for so long. So many generations. The Union and all those who reside within its borders... most of them were touched by this slavery in some manner and they despise it *Inamarno*. They will squash it wherever it may reside if it is within their power. Andro, he would have done it alone if needed... but it just so happens that wasn't necessary. You have... you have captured part of the heart of a man who is so very complex *Inamarno*. Just as we have. He has so many sides to him, so many responsibilities. We are his strength... just as he is ours. I have been in love with him since he was eight months old *Inamarno*. That is when I first met him. When he first spoke to me. I have had other relationships in the time before we discovered each other again, as he grew into a man. None that were ever very serious and until I saw him once more as a man, well I never thought or believed I would find what it was I was seeking.” Sadi's eyes were bright as she remembered that day. “When I saw him again... well... it all fell into place. Just as it has for you.”

“I am... I am over three hundred years old Sadi. Older than him... older than all of you put together.” Caliria said.

Lu'ria laughed softly and leaned forward on the couch as Caliria looked at her. “You must understand something about Lycavorians *Inamarno*. Those ones who are truly powerful within Mindvoice... Andro, his father, any member of his family really, as well as a few hundred thousand across the Union. They have the unique ability to imprint their children with memories and images and even knowledge.” She said. “Andro's father Martin is over three thousand years old but he did not truly know who he was until only three decades ago. He could not understand the many images that were passed to him from his father within his thoughts and dreams. Planets. Worlds. Battles. So many images that were passed to his father, the first King Leonidas, by his father before him, King Resumar. He is even today still learning to understand much of it. In essence... Androcles is far older than any of us simply because of the memories and the vast knowledge that has been passed to him within his blood. Knowledge that even Martin Leonidas still is trying to understand as King.”

“You are saying he carries the memories of his father and grandfathers within him?” Caliria asked in disbelief.

Sadi nodded. “In a manner of speaking yes. They are not active memories... but more like data storage cores. If he needed to... he could meditate and possibly bring those memories up. It is not a skill all our people have... just those of us who are truly gifted within Mindvoice. Those who are above what we call a Tier Four Mindvoicer. It is how we measure ones skill in Mindvoice really, by tiers.”

Devra nodded. “He certainly does not act as someone who is only twenty-six years old.” She said. “I noticed that when I first met him on his ship. His eyes hold wisdom that he should not have for one so young.”

It is a lot to take in Inamarno I know. Sadi reached for her within Mindvoice. Is what you feel wrong? Do you think it is wrong? Do you question what your heart tells you?

Caliria looked at her with wide honeydew green eyes. *No... never! Never!* She exclaimed easily this time, stunned at how casual it seemed to her to speak with her mind now. She shook her head slowly. *I just... I don't want these feelings to go away Sadi. I want to... I want to bask in them. I want to wrap myself within his arms and have him take me as many times as he wants to. As many times as I can stand it! I want all of you to do the same. I want to feel you all... taste you. I want these things too and I...*

[And we will have these things Inamarno.] Andro's deep voice filtered to her suddenly causing her eyes to go wide. The same voice she had heard in her dreams and then in his arms. So deep and soothing and filled with passion and love. It was slightly different somehow though and she didn't understand right away. *[First however... we must insure you know how to shield your thoughts. KertaGai... if you would please... Denali started gagging when Caliria began to describe the more intimate of her desires. Help her with her shields or none of us will be able to show our faces on our own ship.]*

Sadi looked horrified that she hadn't thought of it while Ne'Veha and the others couldn't help but smile as well. *[Oh my!]* She said finally, her voice sounding like Andro's just had Caliria noticed. Almost like an soft echo. *[How much did...]*

[Enough KertaGai.] Andro answered with a chuckle. *[I will need several months at least to live it down now.]*

[What did I do?] Caliria asked in shock now. She was smart enough to take notice that her words seemed to be more focused and channeled than before even with that soft echo and she realized that somehow they had erected some sort of barrier around their minds to shield what it was they were speaking of.

[You did nothing wrong.] Sadi told her. *[I forgot... we are so happy to have you with us we forgot to shield what we have been speaking of. It is so others do not pick up our surface thoughts even by accident. We forgot to do this and those who can Mindvoice on our level and were paying attention heard every word. We will teach you so that it is second nature.]*

[Who heard us?] Caliria asked shocked.

[The dragons and Andro's brothers and sisters if they were paying attention. Bren as well perhaps and maybe some of the RD soldiers if they were keen enough to detect the new presence your imprint makes.] Sadi told her. *[We are shielding now... that is why our voices and words are more focused and directed, and why it seems there is a very soft echo.]*

[I will be able to do this?] Caliria asked.

Sadi nodded. *[We will make sure of it.]*

[Inamarno... your... your father has asked me to pass a message to you.] Andro spoke again.

“Father?” Caliria gasped looking at her mother. “Father is with you? He came with you mother! I did not see him on the ship we left on!” All of them could detect the slight elevation in her heart at the prospect that he had come to help rescue her. Devra could not bear to tell her daughter the truth, that her father had been against her rescue from the outset. She would find out about it soon enough on her own.

“Yes he is here.” Devra finally answered after she glanced at Sadi quickly.

[He would like to meet with you Inamarno. I have reserved the private officer's lounge on deck three KertaGai. He will meet you there in thirty minutes.] Andro told her though he was not unwilling to explain it to her even further. *[Caliria... I do not want you to hope for more than is there. I know... your mother has told me about this foolish ideal that your people have because of the color of one's hair. Just do not expect... just be prepared.]*

Caliria's face took on a more serious look and she met her mother's eyes. "He didn't come with you to get me did he mother?" She asked finally.

Devra would not lie to her daughter and she shook her head slowly as she realized Andro must have told her. "No... no he did not." She finally said.

"Then I do not want to see him." Caliria hissed softly.

"He is still your father Caliria." Devra spoke softly. "You can not change that no matter what you do."

"He has never done anything to acknowledge or make my life easier. He has never had one word of praise or love for me in over three hundred years mother! It is as if I don't even exist! Why should I care what he wants?" Caliria said. "He was with someone else within two years of you and him parting ways mother! As if what you had with him meant nothing at all! He does nothing unless it suits his advancement within the SBR! You know this!"

"He is your father *Inamarno*." Sadi said. "*Enylarcopri* and *SirsanGai* have issues as well with their fathers, but you must put it to rest as they have. If you do not it will stay with you for years."

[Meet with him Inamarno. If only for a few moments to let him know what you feel inside you. Then I will meet all of you for dinner.] Andro spoke.

Caliria took a deep breath and nodded. "Will all of you be there with me?" She asked. "I do not wish to be alone with him."

"If that is what you wish *Inamarno*." Sadi said. "You are part of us now... our mate as well as Andro's. We will always be with you."

"Very well." Caliria said softly.

[Good. After dinner... my sister Lisisa and your sister Arduri will be returning and we can greet them.] Andro spoke. *[Your mother has the details to their arrival and she can fill you in on what Naesta is doing with my mothers. I'm sure my sister Eliani will want your time as well considering you are the one who did the majority of the work on the counter agent to the OSG chemicals.]*

[I will... I will see you soon?] Caliria asked anxiously.

[Very soon. I need to address an issue before I meet you but it should not take me very long.] Androcles told her. *[One hour Inamarno. And then we can talk of the future we can have together. All of us.]*

Caliria smiled. *[One hour then.]* She said.

Andro turned away from the wall he had been staring at and looked at Denali. "Don't say another word *fervon!*" He barked.

Deni laughed and shook his head. "See... now I get to hold this over your head." He said. "And in Sadi's own words! Wow... you are finished."

"Bah!" Andro spat dismissing his brother with a wave as Sa'sur and Ardan walked up. They turned to face the two. "How are our guests settling in?" He asked sarcastically causing Sa'sur to grin widely.

Sa'sur held out the data pad as she smiled at him. "We're lucky I decided to gas the ship before we attempted to board it. All of them had poison capsules situated in a false tooth in their mouths. One bite and they would be dead just like that idiot on Cranae Island."

Ardan nodded and looked at Andro. "We had heard this through rumors and such..." He spoke. "I guess this confirms it."

"Ardan... do you possibly recognize any of them? From around the capital area perhaps. I understand that there are quite a few Eridiani that go to schools on Austrova." Andro asked him. "That has to be how they are obtaining some of their intelligence and keeping track of your people."

"Surprisingly that is why I wanted to see them." Ardan said. "I do not recognize any of them individually... but I do recognize this." He held out the strip of cloth to Andro and waited for him to take it.

"What's this?" Andro asked taking it.

"Andro... I need to coordinate with Admiral Lorian before we get to Hadarian space." Sa'sur spoke. "And your grandfather is screaming epitaphs that you are even considering going there."

Andro looked at her. "It is the only way to be sure Sa'sur." He spoke.

Sa'sur nodded her head. "I know. We should be hearing back soon on our condition that all Kavalian ships pull back to the edge of the system. They are only allowed to have a number equal to our Strike Wing. Do you think they will agree?"

Andro nodded. "Oh they'll agree." He stated. "They hold all the cards right now because they have my mother. They know that or at least they think that. They'll agree. But that is why Manda will be there as well. Just in case."

Sa'sur nodded. "Good." She said. "I'll let you know when we receive word back."

Andro nodded and watched her turn and head down the corridor before he turned back to Ardan. "You were saying Regent Vu Lamurrion?"

Ardan looked at him. "I think after everything that has happened I would prefer if you called me by my name young man. You have earned it."

Andro bowed his head slightly. "You honor me sir. I insist upon the same then."

Ardan had figured as much and nodded in response. He pointed to the cloth Andro held. "It is a Vanari fabric... similar to what your people call silk." Ardan answered. "It is only used in the clothes of the very wealthiest of Vanari. There are several different fabrics that look and feel similar, but this is the real thing."

Andro looked at him. "I'm not following." He said.

"This fabric is only available in one part of Austrova." Ardan told him. "Because the different materials needed to make it are very rare, only three manufacturers are licensed to make this. All of them in Mydala our capital city... all of them near the Central Government Building and all of them with contacts within the Vanari government."

Andro tilted his head to the side. "That would mean..."

Ardan nodded his head and crossed his arms over his chest. "Yes... this confirms, at least in part, that the OSG has spies within our government or they are at the very least working with those in our government."

"That would mean whoever it is they are working with or for... that they know all about the OSG and their kidnapping of Vanari females." Denali said.

Ardan nodded his head. "Yes. It also implies that they are giving them information as well. Whoever it may be. Perhaps even giving them detailed Intelligence on what ships or what locations to target and initiate their vile kidnappings." Andro saw the much older Vanari's face scrunch up in anger, his blue skin unable to hide the flush that spread across his cheeks. "I... I never wanted to believe this!" He snarled. "I never wanted to believe Vanari would sell out their own people for profit but this is too much of a coincidence and can not be ignored!"

Andro looked at Deni before turning back to him and answering. "We do know how that feels sir." He said softly. "And we can sympathize with you in that regard."

"No argument here." Deni said.

"This is going to be very difficult for others to accept Androcles." Ardan said honestly. "I would have a hard time believing it if I did not see it for myself." He looked at Andro. "I would like your permission to question the female OSG agent. Brendi Faith I believe her name is. Just myself and no one else in the room. You can monitor from outside the room if you wish... but I..."

"You're going to try and get names aren't you?" Andro said.

Ardan met his gaze. "Without names I can not begin covert surveillance." He answered. "As a member of the SBR I do have some leniency and access to various skilled assets. But in order to use them I need names. I can not use them if the very people I must target are the ones who I must request their use from. Anything I do would be defeated before it even began. I must be careful in what I do."

Andro nodded his head. "I don't have a problem with that." He replied immediately. "I do however recommend waiting until after Lisisa and Arduri return with her family. She will be more open to speaking with you then I think."

Ardan nodded. "Yes... I see your point." He said. "Your sister did not have to... they did not...?"

Androcles shook his head. "Lisisa and Zarah can be very discrete when they want to be." He said. "In situations like that it pays to be half vampire as my mother says. They tend to have more patience than what Deni or I would have."

“What will you do now that you have these men and they have violated your laws? They obviously entered this quadrant through Union space regardless of where they ended up. You have already proven that.” Ardan asked.

“Actually I was coming to see you to inquire if you would like to be present for a secure transmission I am going to initiate.” Andro said. “You would need to remain out of sight during the communication, I don’t want anyone to figure out how closely connected we are with the Vanari now, at least not until we want them too. And it will give you time to return to Vanari space and implement plans to disperse the compound Caliria and my mothers perfected to all of your people. Especially your females.”

Ardan met his eyes. “You are just going to give it to us?” He asked taken aback.

“Ardan... why would I keep this knowledge?” Andro asked him. “What possible reason would there be for that?”

“My people as a whole do not have the best track record of dealing with your species Androcles.” He said. “You know this.”

Andro nodded. “That may well be the case yes... but I would never hold back anything that would hamper another species or government if they were not outright enemies of my people. The Vanari are not enemies of my people as Dutkne has tried to tell you for so many years. This medical data is vital to your people Ardan; vital to your future. If however, your government still does not wish to change their views, if they choose to continue to live in the past and believe lies and falsehoods about my people, then I will simply do what I said I would do in the very beginning. I already have what I desire Ardan... and even her father will not be able to keep Caliria from me or change her mind about what she feels. We can do many things to alter the future and the path in front of us, but no matter what we try, you can not change destiny. It is part of my destiny to call Caliria wife and mate. Part of her destiny. I accepted this long ago and Caliria does as well. Now that we are finally together... it would be better if no one tried to change that.”

Ardan nodded his head, understanding the implied threat and surprisingly he could not be upset about it. He would make it a point to let the SBR know that to try and take Caliria Re Mydala from this young man would not be among the wisest decisions they have ever made. In fact, it would be downright suicidal.

“If the Vanari persist in their ways, they will simply have to find other trading partners. I will not allow my people or the Union to trade or conduct business with those who regard us as nothing more than animals.” Andro finished his statement. “But this... I would never demand concessions for something like this.”

Ardan looked at him quizzically as his words sank in. Ardan had been around many different people and he considered himself an excellent judge of character. Nothing that Andro had just told him was a lie of that he was certain. And he was right... the loss of the Lycavorian Protectorate as a trading partner would be devastating in terms of financial means. And if the Protectorate moved to merge with the Lycavorian Union as Dutkne had already said... then it would be this young man who would make that decision. And Ardan did not doubt for a second that he would do as he said.

“Just who do you plan to contact?” He finally asked.

Andro grinned. “I’m going to go right to the source.” He said. “Come.”

CONSORTIUM SPACE

VAMSHI

OSG REGIONAL COMMANDER HQ, ALPHA QUADRANT

Corbin looked up from his desk as Wendall came in with a frown on his face that could only mean one thing.

“What?” Corbin asked.

Wendall dropped the pad onto his desk. “Our people were too late.” He stated. “They got to Edolus too late. Your parent’s house was empty... both your parents and your sisters were gone. It appears as if they left rather quickly too. There were clothes and other items tossed about their rooms like they were packing very light and only taking what they needed.”

Corbin took the pad and rose to his feet his anger boiling over. “Fuck!” He swore using his arm to sweep all the items off his desk in one stroke. As the pads and light and two plaques smashed against the wall he

turned to face the opposite wall and gain control of his anger. "Shit! Shit! Shit! These bastards move fast!" He snarled. "This is Brendi's doing! She's helping them! She has to be!"

"How can you be so sure?" Wendall asked.

"There is no way they could have got to my parents first unless she told them where to go." Corbin stated turning to face him. "You found nothing?"

Wendall shook his head. "Whoever came and got them were like ghosts. We found the pressed site of four landing struts in a small field about four clicks outside the city. Bunch of really big prints of some sort... like claws or something."

"Dragons." Corbin spoke turning back to the wall and moving to the counter. "Jesus... they move fast." He said to no one in particular. "Either their Drow scouts or possibly their *Durcunusaan* themselves. No one else has the skill to pull this off without getting noticed by our people on Edolus."

"If it was their *Durcunusaan*... then that would mean one or more of their Royal family was involved in the snatch." Wendall spoke. "They wouldn't get involved otherwise... and we don't know of any Drow who are paired with dragons except his new wife and the Drow Queen Aihola."

"Which means it had to one or more of them." Corbin said turning back to face him. "We need to negate the damage she could do with what she tells them Wendall. I want our people to go through all of her access and change whatever needs to be changed. Command Codes, any and all Access Nodes and Codes. Everything."

"I'll see to it." He said. "What do we tell the Home Council?"

"I'll inform them of what has happened." He said in reply. "My sister is not the first OSG agent to defect. We have procedures in place."

Wendall nodded. "Liquidation at any cost of all family members." He said. "This isn't going to put you in a very good light my friend."

Corbin shook his head. "I have no reason to be afraid Wendall. The Home Council trusts me for a reason. They know where my loyalties lie. I will need to contact them..."

They both turned towards the door as it slid open and an OSG officer walked in. He faced Corbin smartly. "Colonel... we are receiving a transmission on an encoded channel reserved for your sister. You might want to see this sir."

"Brendi is contacting me?" Corbin asked stunned.

"No sir." The aide spoke. "The Lycavorian Crown Prince."

Corbin's eyes grew even wider. "Jesus... put it up." He stated.

The aide moved to his desk and keyed in several sequences of numbers to allow the holo disc in the floor to flare to life. It shimmered briefly before locking in on the image of the tall and very powerfully built young Lycavorian man. He turned to face them in the transmission. It was obviously a narrow band transmission as all they could see was him and nothing in the background. They must have been somewhere he did not want them to see, or his sister was watching from the side.

"You are Colonel Corbin Faith I presume? Colonel Corbin Faith of the Orionis Syndicate Group. A known criminal organization within the Beta Quadrant of galactic space. Is that not correct?" The young man asked his azure eyes bright and focused.

"Who the hell are you and how did you get this secure channel?" Corbin snapped rather forcefully.

"I have no doubts that you already know the answer to that question but if you wish to play that game... my name is Androcles Leonidas, Crown Prince and soon to be King of the Lycavorian Union." Andro answered.

"Where is my sister and how did you get her COM channel?" Corbin barked continuing to play dumb. "What is this all about?"

Andro shook his head slowly. "You are not much older than me Colonel Faith so please do not presume to play stupid with me. You will find I do not respond well to individuals who play games with me."

"Ok... I'll go along with you!" Corbin spoke in reply. "Yes I'm Colonel Corbin Faith... and the Orionis Syndicate is a legitimate Intergalactic Commerce Consortium. Now where is my sister?"

"I am treating you as an intelligent person Colonel Faith so I ask that you do the same in return. Let's be honest shall we... your organization is nothing more than a large, well funded and well trained group of petty criminals." Andro spoke. "As to the whereabouts of your sister, if I am not mistaken, the transport that I sent to

collect your family is arriving and she is no doubt greeting them as they disembark even now.” Andro answered. “She was quite insistent about that.”

“What exactly is the purpose of this communication again?” Corbin asked him.

“This communication has two purposes really. The first is a greeting.” Andro told him. “Just a short communication to advise you that I know exactly what you and the OSG are and to let you know that I am aware of what you are doing within the Alpha Quadrant.”

“Is that a fact?” Corbin spoke.

“Yes it is.” Andro said. “The Icalro Alliance no longer exists Colonel Faith.” Andro told him. “Their government died just over five hours ago.”

“The Icalro alliance?” Corbin spoke. “I don’t believe I have ever heard of them.” He said with a smile. “As you said... we are kind of new to this quadrant of space.”

Andro chuckled. “Yes... so very new.” He said sarcastically. “Since you will not take me serious I will come right to the point of my second reason for contacting you Colonel Faith of the OSG. That is to give you a warning.”

“A warning?” Corbin asked.

“I know exactly what you are... what your people are.” Andro said. “Those five men and three women operating your transport that were on Ontahe are now in my custody. They have been arrested and detained for trafficking in slavery within Union territory. They will be tried under these charges and be executed if that is their case.”

“You can’t be serious!” Corbin barked. “They... they did not come anywhere near Union space!”

Andro grinned at him. “And you just admitted to the crime as well.” He said. “Thank you Colonel Faith... now I will not have to work to get you to admit it. I will not feel so bad when I have your men executed either.”

“Slavery is not against the law in The Wilds!” Corbin snapped.

“It is however against several laws within Union space... which is where your ship ended its FDC jump from the Beta Quadrant before continuing into The Wilds.” Andro told him. “If you were as smart as you are arrogant you would have known that the Bontawillian Republic became part of the Lycavorian Union a little over fourteen months ago. Your ship jumped into BFR space carrying sixteen Vanari females, I believed they are called that. At least that is what Dutkne told me when he arrived in Union space shortly after your ship. Blue skinned Vanari females which were then sold to the Unsaar slaver Cyngi on Ontahe. Sold to him because of some powerful oil that they can supposedly secrete through their pores when aroused naturally or forced with chemicals such as you produce and inject them with. That oil makes whoever they touch when aroused compliant to them in some way, willing to do almost anything for their attention. Including divulging secrets of every form. The Unsaar Cyngi also happens to be very dead now by the way.”

“Dutkne?” Corbin asked his eyes going a little wider.

“Ah... you know Director General Dutkne of the Lycavorian Protectorate?” Andro said. “Then you should also know that in a few short weeks the Protectorate will be folded into the Lycavorian Union and our law will extend to Protectorate space as well. Into the Beta Quadrant of space.” Androcles told him. “I bet that just puts a crook in your ass doesn’t it. If your spies on Earth have told you anything it is that we do not tolerate slavery of any kind within Union territory. What you have done in the past by skirting Protectorate space or hiding in remote areas within their space will no longer be an option for you.”

“You assume an awful lot Prince Androcles.” Corbin snapped.

“Perhaps in your eyes but not in mine. Dutkne and those with him informed us of this ship and we did a little investigating and discovered that the Vanari females are quite popular among the OSG in order to make a profit. Oh... we of course rescued those Vanari females that Cyngi was holding and using against their will. And then we found your ship and crew trying to escape the area as we lay waste to that little haven of scum. It was quite a catch.” Corbin turned to look at Wendall quickly his eyes filled with questions as his senior aide and friend was typing furiously at another terminal trying to get information. “And no... the crew of this slaver ship was not able to commit mass suicide as was their plan no doubt. We discovered the poison capsules in their teeth and removed them before they were able to use them. They are all in cells right now... they will be interrogated quite thoroughly and then executed for their actions as I said.”

“You can’t be serious!” Corbin snarled. “Those are my people!”

“Yes... I know.” Andro spoke in response. “You should also be aware that we destroyed the OSG assassination team that you sanctioned and sent against my mates and I, but you probably already knew that given your spies here on Earth. The assassination team that you paid for and funded with resources given to you by the Kavalian Federation in order to kill me I might add. Getting them to Earth and then supporting them? That must have cost a pretty penny as my mother says.”

“I have no idea what in the hell you are talking about!” Corbin snapped as his temper continued to rise.

Andro smiled once more and shook his head. “Colonel Faith you have taken sides against the Lycavorian Union, without really knowing what you were doing. You should never have taken that contract Corbin Faith. I don’t know why you have done this... for profit perhaps. It is the only thing I can think of other than to perhaps cause unrest or confusion within a sovereign government because you have allied yourselves with our enemy. It does not matter now though, and because you have taken it upon yourself to do that, it makes your organization move from the realm of simple criminals and murderers to the role of terrorists. We know how to deal with terrorists Colonel Faith.”

“You have no proof of anything!” Corbin barked.

“Actually I have all the proof I need. I have your sister Brendi. She was and is a valuable piece of information Colonel Faith, and she does not care for you in the least it seems. Thank you for her. It was not a wise tactical move to send her on the mission to kill me but thank you for her services nonetheless.” Andro said. “I will utilize them well... and perhaps she will find happiness here in the Union.”

“Where is she?” Corbin snarled. “You tell her I will see her dead! I’ll hunt her as long as I have too for betraying me!”

“She said as much... and that is why we removed your family from Edolus as well. It appears you have a rather nasty habit of using them as leverage against her and making her do things she does not want to do.” Andro stated. “She has asked for asylum within the Lycavorian Union and I have granted it. Your parents and sisters as well. If my sister is accurate in her brief report to me, your father said some rather unsavory things about you as well.”

“You are fucking with the wrong person boy!” Corbin growled at him. “She’ll betray you just like she has betrayed me! And I’ll find her!”

“Actually Colonel... it is you who are fucking with the wrong people!” Andro told him calmly. “Your willingness to side with the Kavalian Federation without all of the facts is a case in point. Your decision to transport slaves through Union space is another. This is what I will offer to you and your cohorts... unless of course you wish to be declared an enemy right now. In which case I will order the Protectorate to begin targeting any OSG base they know of in the Beta Quadrant and begin destroying them.”

“You’re threatening me?” Corbin snarled.

“You may call it a threat if you so choose.” Androcles said. “I call it a choice. Do you wish to hear what I have to say or can I just declare you and your friends enemies and go back to my dinner?”

“I’m listening aren’t I?” Corbin snapped.

“Then listen very good Colonel Faith.” Andro spoke. “Your sisters and parents are now under the protection of my family. Any attempt to come after them will result in consequences you cannot begin to comprehend. I also know the OSG has agents on Earth. I know how many and what their names are thanks to your sister Brendi. I will give you three days to contact each of these agents directly and have them deliver themselves to the *Durcunusaan* Command Base outside Sparta. If and only if they do this... they will be treated as guests of the Union... they will not be interrogated or incarcerated and they will be returned to Eridiani space unharmed within a week. If not... they will be arrested, interrogated and then they will be executed in the most efficient manner that we can come up with.”

“The Eridiani are...”

Andro held up his hand before Corbin could finish speaking. “Do not attempt to distance yourself from the Eridiani government Colonel Faith. I know from what Dutkne has told me that their current administration wholly supports your organization in practically all that you do. I also know that many of the senior members in their Parliament, such as it is; those men and women also answer to the OSG.”

“The Eridiani Republic is a autonomous government and entity!” Corbin snapped. “They are recognized by every working government within the Beta Quadrant!”

“Yes they are. And their regime supports a terrorist organization such as yours, which in my own opinion makes them no better than you.” Androcles answered. “I have more to say if you don’t mind... and my food is getting cold.”

“You’re an arrogant prick aren’t you?” Corbin snapped.

“Some people have referred to me in that fashion.” Andro said. “I have never been one to care what others who don’t know me think of me however. Anyway... Dutkne has informed me that the Protectorate has a Mutual Non-Aggression Pact with the Vanari Empire. Buried in that treaty, there is a simple clause in Paragraph Twelve I believe... that clause relates to commerce between the Vanari and the Protectorate. Since the Union will be absorbing the Protectorate we will also be absorbing any contracts and treaties they have with other governments and species. All of these treaties will be reviewed and altered to the needs of the Lycavorian Union as a whole by our Senate, but that clause in regards to commerce will remain in place for the time being. Your kidnapping of innocent Vanari females for your sick perversions forces the Vanari to alter their usual shipping traffic and scheduling in order to avoid places you strike at their ships and therefore it then impacts the free commerce between our two peoples. This will cease immediately Colonel Faith, and all Vanari females that you have recently taken will be returned to them immediately or the locations where they are handed over. If this is not done it will force me to respond to protect Union interests in a manner you will not like.”

Corbin’s eyes grew wide and he stepped closer to the transmission. “Listen to me you snot nosed punk dog!” He snarled viciously. “You can’t threaten me! You can’t threaten us! Fuck you Lycavorian pig!”

Androcles nodded his head slowly. “Very well Colonel Faith.” He said. “Then as of this moment a state of war exists between the Eridiani Republic and the Lycavorian Union. I will order Protectorate ships to begin targeting their military facilities and command and control centers.”

Corbin’s eyes grew even wider. “What? You can’t do that? The Eridiani Republic has nothing to do with the OSG!”

“They support you Colonel Faith. They shield you and what your organization does to the Vanari and any non-Eridiani species from what I understand.” Andro spoke evenly. “In essence the OSG is the Eridiani government and you have a decidedly anti-alien policy at the forefront of your interaction with other species. Therefore I will act accordingly. Within eighteen hours we will be at war and full-scale operations will begin. I will crush the Eridiani Republic and in doing so... I will destroy your putrid organization. I will be killing two birds with one stone so to speak. You have been within the Alpha Quadrant long enough to know that we will do exactly as I say we will.”

“You’re fucking crazy!” Corbin shouted.

“So I have been labeled before.” Andro said calmly. “And since you also attempted to assassinate my wives and mates and myself by accepting a working contract with the Kavalian Federation, now an avowed enemy of my people after what they have done, I will make it a point to put a bounty on your *nubous* head so large that every piece of *sibfla* bounty hunter in ten sectors will try to collect on it!” He finished that statement with a snarl. “The Consortium will have no choice but to kick you out of their space and I will make sure you are taken alive so that I can kill you myself. In the most painful way I can devise.” Andro’s eyes had changed now and his vicious dual looking fangs were fully extended. “Do not make the mistake of thinking I will not do this Colonel Faith. That would make you even more fucking stupid than you already appear!”

“The Eridiani won’t sit still for this!” Corbin barked. “They’ll fight!”

Andro nodded. “Yes they will. And they will lose.” He stated simply. “The Vanari people may not be willing to fight you because of something you hold over their heads, but I am not so limited. I will move to protect Lycavorian Union interests and if that means in the process that I have to protect whom Dutkne refers to as pompous and self-righteous Vanari to do it I will! I suggest you make a decision and do so quickly.”

“I can’t make that type of decision!” Corbin snarled at him. “I’m only one... one arm of the OSG!”

Andro stared at him for a long moment and then nodded his head. “Very well. I will give you twelve hours to contact whoever it is you need to contact. In that time the Protectorate will be mobilizing ships to fulfill my orders. Twelve hours Colonel Faith. Not one minute longer. After that all bets are off and I will see to it you, the OSG and the Eridiani cease to exist just as quickly as the Icalro Alliance.” Andro’s eyes and fangs retracted quickly and he forced a smile. “It has been a pleasure... and I expect to hear from you within the next twelve hours. Goodbye Colonel.”

Corbin opened his mouth to speak but the transmission was cut off from Androcles's end. He spun around quickly, rage etched into his face now. "Fuck!" He swore as Wendall moved closer to him.

"What... what do we do?" He asked.

"I need to talk to the Home Council." Corbin spoke as numerous scenarios were playing out in his head. "Have an emergency meeting called. Get all the Council members in attendance Wendall!"

"Man they are going to be pissed." Wendall spoke.

Corbin looked at him. "That may be putting it mildly." He stated.

SCIMITAR

"Pompous and self righteous?" Ardan asked as Andro turned to face him.

Andro shook his head with a small smile. "The longer that we keep them in the dark of our interactions sir, the better it will be. It buys us time to move assets into place. As my father says... "What our enemy doesn't know will only hurt them.""

Ardan grinned. "I would like to meet your father one day young Androcles. I truly would. Now what assets were you referring too?" Ardan spoke.

"Assets to protect outlying Vanari colonies along your borders in case they decide not to take my offer." Andro spoke. "Dutkne already has ships moving to do this right now, but it will be several days before they get into position to cover your remote colonies in case the OSG decides to act and use their chemical weapons. They can't really do this however because right now they do not know that any Vanari know what is going on, and such an attack would cause the Vanari to respond with full scale war as well."

"Androcles there is no such clause in the trade agreements or the MNAP that we have with the Lycavorian Protectorate." Ardan continued. "Is there?"

"Not in the normal interpretation of the agreement sir but the OSG doesn't know that. It is a matter of context." Andro said. "And I doubt they will want to sift through the thousands of pages of different agreements you have with the Protectorate to discover it before they give me my answer."

Ardan tilted his head slightly. "You have thought this through young man." He said.

"Somewhat... yes sir." He answered.

"All because of Caliria?" He asked softly.

"She is a big part of it sir... but I also believe that we could be powerful allies and friends to each other." Andro answered him. "All that is required is that your people come to see we are not animals and inferior to them."

"You speak of changing thousands of years of mistrust and questionable motives Andro." Ardan said softly.

"Have I succeeded with you sir?" Andro asked.

Ardan didn't even hesitate in his response. "Yes."

"Then there is always hope." He spoke. "I will allow you access to our computers sir. Download from them whatever it is you think will help you make your case to the Board of Regents. Once you have done that I will have a ship return you to *CITADEL ONE* before we enter Hadarian space. You will need to return quickly."

"I will... I will do my best." Ardan said.

Andro nodded. "I know. If you will excuse me... right now I have a date with five very beautiful women and I do not wish to keep them waiting."

Ardan nodded as Andro smiled and then turned to begin walking down the corridor with Denali right beside him. Deni resisted the urge to look at his brother as they walked but reached out within Mindvoice instead.

[Do you trust him enough to give him access to our computers Andro?] Deni asked.

[He won't have complete access Deni; I think you know me better than that.] Andro said in reply.

[So you don't trust him?] Deni said.

[Right now fervon... the only people I trust are my family and blood.] Androcles told him. *[Inamarno and her mother and siblings and the other females we have rescued aside... the Vanari have done nothing to make me want to trust them. Ardan is right... they have people within their own government who are working*

closely with the OSG and probably making a tidy profit in selling their own people. Whether Ardan or Coren are involved in that in some way is still up in the air in my opinion. Call me a pessimist if you will but Dutkne feels the same way and outside of our family, I trust him the most.]

[Sibfla... I'd call that good instincts.] Denali answered.

[We are treading within waters that I am unsure of fervon.] Andro admitted. *[I don't know what is going to happen in the future. And even though father tried to prepare us to deal with the unknown... it truly frightens me.]*

Denali nodded. *[Me as well.]* He stated. *[So what do we do?]*

[Right now... all we can do is react to what is happening around us.] Andro answered. *[We are not controlling the events for the moment. Others are. Once everyone shows their hand then we can begin to formulate our own plans.]*

Denali looked at him as they turned the corner in the corridor and left the sight of Ardan. He stopped then and looked at his older brother as Andro came to a halt and faced him. "We're talking about war aren't we Andro?"

"Given what we think is happening Deni... I don't think there is a way for us to avoid it." He replied softly. "No matter what they have done to our mother... what he has forced her to do I fear... I will not allow our uncle to keep her. Nor will father. That would be a total betrayal of her *as* our mother. She may not have been the one to birth us... but she is still our mother in every sense of the word. All of them are and always have been."

Deni nodded his head. "I have never questioned that. None of us have Andro... you know that."

"Then I fear I will need to do what needs to be done. What father would do but can't because he must maintain the façade that he is dead. They have killed hundreds if not thousands of our people Deni. Many of them in our very own city! Father's city! The place we call home! I will do what I must brother... but they will not get what it is they want and that is not going to make them very happy." Andro said shaking his head. "No matter how much I try Deni... all that I do... everything that is happening, it is pushing me towards that decision Deni. I can't see any other alternative no matter what direction I look in. And it is not a decision I wish to make but it is a decision I will make."

"Have you talked to father?" Deni asked.

Andro shook his head. "Not until tonight before we enter Hadarian space. All of us need to be there Deni. Let Lisisa and the others know when she returns. I will inform Eliani and Jomann as soon as I am able to pull them from each other's arms."

Deni nodded. "I'll take care of it." He said.

"We must be strong as a family in the coming weeks Deni." Andro said. "That is when our faith will be tested the most."

CURILA 6

Martin Leonidas extracted himself from Dysea's embrace slowly so as not to wake her and lifted his upper body off the bed. He watched her immediately roll over and fold herself into Anja's arms, her face tucking neatly into the crook of Anja's neck and shoulder. Their scents filtered to him, passing through him and invigorating him but he fought down the urge to take one of his Queens. Bella slept between Anja and Cirith, her head resting gently on Cirith's slim shoulder.

Cirith.

She had joined them in their bed at his Queen's insistence, and when they all ganged up on him he knew there was no winning the discussion. He had to admit though; Cirith was a very striking woman. Her lithe body was firm and muscular in one sense, but also had lush curves. She smelled of light cherry vanilla and even in the few days she had been here he was finding it harder and harder to ignore her. The single area within his mind that Anja had seen that day, the one that rippled softly and was unlike the others in their calmness, that area was now calm and smooth just as those that represented Aricia, Dysea, Anja and For'mya. The one that he thought represented Isabella no longer rippled and was as serene as the others and he did not know why that was. It had only changed after Cirith had arrived and he was reluctant to go there very often now for he did not

want to see that it was Cirith who that window represented and not Isabella. Her firm and inviting breasts were exposed for his eyes to see while the sheet covered her lower body but he frightened her Martin knew. He could smell that from her. Yet he could still also smell the desire wafting from her, and that was stronger. It was quite obvious from the way their scents mingled together that she had already shared sexual pleasure with Dysea, Anja and Aricia when he had been training away from their home. Her cherry vanilla scent was mixed quite provocatively with the scents of his other wives and their combined scents filtered from Cirith easily. He shook his head slowly. They were so much better than him at seeing past walls and barriers of emotion and reaching right for the core of an issue. They had fully accepted that Cirith belonged with them, and they were making it a point to insure she knew it as well.

Dysea he knew, she needed the attention and love after what she had endured, and he had made extra time for them to be alone, though it was hardly enough in his eyes. Even being dead did not relieve him of the duties he had to perform. At times he loved his *Melda Min* until she was crying out his name, other times he simply held her tightly in his arms as they watched the sky and stars like they used to in Eden City, the others curled up with them, their skin touching in some manner. Her natural psyche was very nearly back to her old self and the sharpness and confidence of her mind was returning more and more each day. A large part of that, the larger part was him he knew, but the second part was the love she received without question from Cirith and the others. He had thought perhaps Bella would be jealous of her but he had been very mistaken. It was Bella who encouraged Cirith to be among them more than the others, and it was Bella who finally tipped the scales when it came to her staying with them in their bed. It was as if she knew what role Cirith would play in their future, and it had been her who had told him that Cirith had never been meant for his father and Gorgo, but for him and the rest of them. Martin still harbored some doubts and questions in that regard, but he could not deny the growing attraction to her, or the love she had already shared with his other Queens.

Looking at them as he knelt between their bodies on the bed, Martin Leonidas wondered how he had ever come to love so many different women in the same way and with such emotion and power. Aricia was his *anome* yes, and she would always have that extra part of him that the others did not, but his love for each of them knew no bounds. Every day that his *Kinsoaurgai* was away from them, every single moment that she endured whatever horrors his brother was submitting her too, Martin Leonidas died inside. With a soft but heavy sigh, Martin slipped from the bed and reached for his pants. They had long ago stopped sleeping with clothes on for they craved the touch of each other's skin against one another and the warmth of their naked flesh. As he turned to move into the main room he didn't see Aricia's azure blue eyes open and follow his movements.

Martin maneuvered his six foot two; two hundred and thirty-eight pound frame as nimbly as someone half his size. It was amazing to many people the physical power he held within his sculpted body, as well as the known Mindvoice power. There were very few who could really stand in his presence without being uncomfortable in some way, and that bothered him to the extreme. He had no idea of the swoons of thousands of Lycavorian females who would throw themselves at his feet if he so wanted as desirable as he was to them. His Queens made certain that no female wolf would ever attempt that. All of them were extremely possessive of him and on more than one occasion had slapped down the advances of other females without him even knowing it.

Martin needed no light to navigate to the kitchen area of their Master Quarters easily and he turned on only a soft sidelight in order to pull a mug of coffee from the large pot that had finished brewing only moments before. He sugared his coffee lightly and left the small light on as he moved around the massive kitchen table and through a set of double doors into a large spacious room with several couches and chairs. The room had bookshelves lining the rear walls to either side of the double doors and the entire west facing wall was empty. He crossed to a huge desk that occupied one corner of the room and typed quickly on the desk console. A soft whirring sound alerted him to the fact that the overhead Dragon Armor shields were retreating along with the layered glass partitions and exposing the entire west wall to the rising dawn and cool morning breeze.

Curila 6 was a temperate planet, always remaining in the low to mid seventies during the night and never reaching higher than the low nineties during the day. There was never humidity and they were still two months from the rainy season which would last four months. It would rain for several hours nearly every day before the sun broke through the clouds and chased the dreariness away and it would remain sunny and warm for the rest of the day and well into the evening where the cycle would start again.

Martin moved to stand in the center of the window, the Dragon Armor shield and glass full retracting and he stared out into the darkness as the first fingers of the rising sun began to stretch across the horizon. The coolness of the morning breeze danced across his skin and allowed him to smell her before he saw or heard her. He didn't turn as she padded up behind him confidently and completely naked, her delicious lavender and coco scent filling his nose. The somewhat shy and inexperienced woman he had met over twenty-five years ago was long gone, to be replaced by the confident and powerful woman that was his *anome*.

"What is troubling you Beloved?" Aricia asked as she slid her arms around his waist and maneuvered her supple, five foot seven frame to his front, pressing close against him. "It is something to do with our *Kinsoaurgai* isn't it?"

Martin looked down into her face and her beautiful eyes. Aricia Leonidas had an uncanny knack for sensing his many different moods and recognizing them for what they were and then informing her fellow Queens so they could address it. No one followed her out of their bedroom and Martin knew she had deduced this was a pureblood issue and only the two of them would truly understand. He reached up and stroked her cheek watching her eyes close in delight at his touch. Aricia was the youngest of his Queens in actual age yes, but since the events on Enurrua, she had changed. She was so much tougher now, both physically and mentally, and Anja and Dysea and the others instinctively looked to her when it concerned him. She had a way of knowing what he was all about, sometimes even before he did. Her lavender and coco scent could and did always excite him; perhaps more than any of them, and his other queens knew Aricia had touched a part of him that only she would ever see.

"I... I can't help but feel that every day she is their prisoner, every day she has to endure my brother she... I am losing her *Saaurano*." Martin said softly.

"Then you believe..." Aricia began to ask the question but stopped herself because of the vileness it made her feel.

Martin nodded. "Yes. I believe what Eli and Andro believe but will not tell their brothers and sisters fully. It is the only thing that makes sense *Saaurano*, the only thing that would give him reason to think he can reclaim the throne." He lowered his forehead to hers. "And it is my fault."

Aricia's azure eyes grew wide and she pulled back and looked at him. "How can you say it is your fault?" She exclaimed louder than she had intended. "You are not doing these things Beloved! You could never do these things!"

"I struck you and her both Aricia." He stated softly.

"Don't you dare hold that action against yourself, I forbid it!" Aricia spat. "That was not you Martin Leonidas. That was never you!"

"It was part of me." He said. "They were brothers *Saaurano*, and their blood is also in my blood."

"No!" She snapped. "No matter the blood that flows in your veins Beloved... your mind is your own. He was controlling you before... the blood you share allowed him to do this without you knowing. Once you recognized this... you took actions to stop it! *That* is who you are!"

"It was still me." Martin said.

Aricia shook her head. "Martin Leonidas you are the most *simparrayr matha con* man I have ever known!" She spoke pulling on his hand and drawing him to the couch. She pushed him down into a sitting position and then lowered her body onto his lap.

"He is my brother *Saaurano*." Martin said. "He is my brother and if I had killed him when my instincts told me too, we would not have to deal with this now. For'mya would not have to endure what she is enduring. She can't feel us within Mindvoice... we can't feel her! She thinks I am dead... he would have told her Andro took your life to save you the pain of living without your *anome*. That is what she believes! Who knows what else he has told her? Lied to her about? He is using her for his own foul purposes and goals Aricia! Manipulating her to do what he wants! There is only one way he could possibly make an attempt at the throne and if she has had to do this she must be lost!"

"You are no murderer Beloved! You could no more take the life of your brother in full view of your mother's eyes than any man could!" Aricia exclaimed. "We have always taught our children to never draw blood from family! That is what gives us our strength my love! We may argue and fight and be prideful for a time, but never have our children drawn blood from each other. It is a sin to all of them."

Martin nodded his head. "I know that *Saaurano*." He said softly.

“And no matter what our Kinsoargai has had to endure... no matter what she has been forced to do... this does not make us love her any less!” Aricia said.

“I know this *Saaurano*... but because of my failure so long ago, our son has now had to take the life of his cousin! His blood! Because of my failure For'mya has...” Martin shook his head unable to say it. “I know what burden he carries for that Aricia! I see it in his eyes every time I talk to him! Yes... he was rescuing Lu'ria and she was to be his wife and mate... but he still feels shame for doing what he did! And it is because of what I have taught them. What I could not do myself!”

“Martin you must stop this self flaying.” Aricia said. “It is not you Beloved. It has never been you.”

“All of my skill... all of my power and abilities... and I have never felt so utterly helpless *Saaurano*.” He spoke. “I should have seen all this coming!”

“Are you a god my love?” She asked.

Martin looked at her with wide dark eyes. “What?”

“Are you a god?” She asked again.

“What kind of question is that? No... I'm not a god! Jeez!” Martin exclaimed. “There are enough of our people who think I'm something more than I am... I don't need you to start believing that too.”

Aricia took the mug of coffee from his hand and used her PK power to move it to the knee high table on the side of the couch. Once it was lowered completely she brought her hands up and took his face between them. “This is what I believe Beloved.” She told him, tossing her head back and her long raven black hair flipping to one side of her face. “I believe that you are something more. I...”

“Aricia...” Martin began to speak.

“Shut up and let me speak!” She snapped playfully leaning forward to nibble on his lips and keep him from talking. “There are... there are men and women throughout history my love, Spartan history, Earth history, Lycavorian history. Men and women who have risen above the norm. They have been scholars and leaders. Your father, your grandfather. Canth. Sumar. So many in our history alone. You are not just a man my love... you are a symbol. A burning light for so many others to see and to follow. You are a god Martin Leonidas... to me... to Anja... to *Melda Min*, all of us. You are a god because no one in the universe could make us feel what you do. You are our god.”

Martin looked at her. “Well I'm glad you feel that way *Saaurano* but...”

“*Son vada carians* Martin... will you just shut up and let me finish!” Aricia's soft voice echoed in his ears. Aricia smiled as she caressed his face. “Have you never wondered why we love you so?” Aricia continued.

Martin turned his smiling eyes back to her. “I had hoped it was because of my charming personality.”

Aricia smiled. “There is much to love about you Beloved. Aside from the fact that you are incredibly handsome, so very powerful and so uniquely gifted in a way most females will never experience...”

“Aricia...”

“You are an inspiration Martin my love.” She continued cutting off his reply. “You have an indomitable will to succeed in all that you do... but you will not sacrifice your values and morals to accomplish this goal. This is why so many follow you, look up to you. In many ways they may view you as a god because you can do things that most can not, but they see in you the best and brightest hope for their future more than anything.” She said. “Just as people believed these things about your father and your grandfather. You exude hope to so many Beloved, and compassion and reason. And the power and strength to reach out and grab onto that and keep it safe.”

“Yet I can not keep a woman that I love safe from the horrors she is enduring now. How do I know she will not hate me for letting her go through these things because I am here and I am alive when she thinks me dead.” Martin said.

Aricia shook her head. “You give our *Kinsoargai* far too little credit my love.” Aricia spoke softly. “You are her center, the core of her being, just as you are with all of us. She will not be angry with you Martin, she will be ashamed for what she has been forced to do if what you think has happened is true.”

Martin nodded his head. “And because she feels this way about me it causes her pain. Because she loves me... it causes her pain *Saaurano*. Because I failed to eliminate my brother when I had the perfect opportunity, she is now experiencing pain by what he is forcing her to do. What I fear he has forced her to do.”

“Do you think for a moment she would do things differently even if she knew you were alive, if it protected you? Protected our family? Those that she loves?” Aricia asked. “She would endure any pain, any hardship if ultimately it protected you and us. Any one of us would do the same thing... just as you would. You know this Martin!”

“She is my mate! Our mate! And while she endures agony I am hiding here!” Martin hissed angrily. “I should be out there! I should be out there finding her and bringing her back to us!”

“And if they knew you were alive... she would be dead Martin.” Aricia said. “You know this as well as I. Your brother would not hesitate to kill her if he knew you were alive. You are not forsaking her Beloved... you are protecting her from certain death with your actions. Will you love her any less if what you believe has happened?”

“NO! *Saaurano* no!” He exclaimed. “She is a part of me! A part of us!”

Aricia nodded. “You must trust in our son Martin. If she is on Hadaria at this meeting... then Andro will find a way to tell her that you are alive.”

“And what if her grief over having to do what my brother has forced her to do is too much when she discovers that I am still alive?” Martin asked softly. “Then her love for me will have killed her as surely as if I pulled the trigger myself.”

“She is stronger than you know Beloved.” Aricia said. “You did not choose weak minded females to share your life and your bed Martin Leonidas. And if she knows that your love for her, that our love for her still burns just as brightly as it always has, do you honestly believe she would throw it all away in grief?”

Martin was silent for a long moment before finally shaking his head “No.” He said softly. “No... that is not her.”

Aricia smiled. “You know us better than you think you do my love.” She said. “But you must leave this pity and these feelings of hopelessness behind you. They are not who you are Martin. They have never been who you are. You are an Alpha my love. A man of action and power but also intelligence and patience. When the time comes we know you will act. We will all act Beloved. We did not choose a weak man to share our bed either you know, despite how easily you turn us to putty in your arms.”

Martin looked into her azure eyes for a long heartfelt moment before speaking. He then reached up and caressed her cheek. “*Saaurano* I...”

Aricia placed a finger on his lips and shook her head. “No.” She said. “I already know how you feel of me Beloved. Now... enough of this... take me in your arms and let us return to our bed. Our son’s heartbeat within Bella’s womb will calm you and return the focus to you. And we want you to begin to show more of yourself to Cirith as well.”

“Aricia...” He spoke as he wrapped his arms around her and stood up easily, feeling her ankles lock behind his ass cheeks.

“She belongs with us Martin. And that is part of why you are feeling these things. You are questioning your growing feelings for her. I can smell it deeply within you my love, the others can not because they are not pure as we are, but I know it is there.” Aricia said leaning forward and nuzzling his neck. “She belongs with us Martin Leonidas... among us... sharing our lives and there is no doubt about that and I know you can feel it. All of us do. That is why you feel what you feel. Part of it does not sit well with you. You must get past this. If you fear Bella will think badly of you than you can dismiss that as well. This woman was meant for us by a power beyond our ability to understand and Isabella knows that. She embraces that because she knows you love her. As do we all.”

“You know... I really hate it when they send you to talk to me.” Martin spoke with a grin as he walked towards their bedroom. “It’s not fair you know. Ganging up on me like that. I never win any arguments when you do that.”

“You don’t seem to mind too much when we lavish you with attention though.” Aricia said with a twinkle in her eye.

“Well... that’s different.” He said.

Aricia chuckled as they entered the bedroom. Martin looked over and saw all of them awake on the bed, Dysea and Anja with their heads on Isabella’s swollen abdomen and listening to the heartbeat of the child growing within. Isabella’s face beamed, her hands resting on both Anja’s and Dysea’s shoulders. Dysea looked up and held out her arm for them.

“Come *Nauta Melme*.” She said softly. “Listen to our son’s heartbeat and let us plan how we will retrieve our *Kinsoaurgai*.”

Martin looked at Aricia and then let his eyes go to Anja. Her Persian red hair spilled over Cirith’s shoulder for Cirith was spooned against her from behind. Her jade green eyes met his and she lifted her head. “What... did you think we don’t have plans to bring her back to us just like you do?” Anja said with a predatory smile. “Get over here so we can talk about how we are going to skin some cats!”

Martin Leonidas carried his *Anome* to the bed and into the embrace of the women that he loved so much. As he released Aricia and lowered his head gently to Isabella’s abdomen to listen for his unborn son’s heartbeat he didn’t see the look that Isabella gave to Cirith as she drew her closer. Bella’s face was beaming as Cirith scooted closer to her and they shared the look of two women who knew.

As he listened to the strong heartbeat within her womb Martin knew that between them they would devise a plan to return their *Kinsoaurgai* to them.

Of that Martin Leonidas had little doubt.

CONSORTIUM SPACE

VAMSHI

OSG REGIONAL COMMANDER HQ, ALPHA QUADRANT

“How bad is it Colonel Faith?” The man in the center chair asked.

“I will not lie to you Chief Executor Wynn. It’s not good.” Corbin answered slowly and with great care.

“Colonel Faith you may dispense with the hesitation on your part.” The older woman spoke from her chair. “Your loyalties are not now and have never been in question. You long ago proved that. You are our most experienced Regional Commander and we value your insight in everything. You were only following orders Corbin.”

“Executor Rall is correct Corbin.” Wynn spoke again. “It appears we made a mistake in associating ourselves with these Kavalian dogs. The consequences of our actions were not fully revealed to us by the Kavalians and are only now becoming apparent.”

“No sir they were not.” Corbin agreed as he breathed easier knowing he wasn't going to be blamed for what had occurred.

“These Lycavorians... they are vastly different than those we are familiar with here in the Protectorate.” Wynn spoke. “They are far more militant in many ways.”

Corbin nodded his head. “Yes sir.” He answered. “I believe it stems more from human history than anything else. Spartans to be exact. When they came to Earth that is where they resided. They are the reason the Spartans had such a reputation in Earth’s history. And since King Leonidas returned to the Union, that Spartan tradition and heritage has spilled outward across the Lycavorian Union in hundreds of different ways. It makes them... it makes them far more dangerous sir.”

“Indeed it does. We are certain the Union has your sister?” Rall asked.

Corbin nodded. “Yes ma’am.” He replied. “Prince Androcles admitted it openly in his communication with me. He is also holding one of our transport ships and the crew. His overall intention with them is unclear but he has said he will interrogate them and then execute them for slave trading and transporting slaves through Union space.”

“And your sister?” Rall prodded.

Corbin shook his head. “I do not know what his intentions are ma’am.” He answered honestly. “If he had simply planned to kill her after interrogating her he would not have gone to the trouble of evacuating my parents and my twin sisters from Edolus.”

“And there is no way we can strike back at her for this?” Rall asked.

Corbin shook his head slowly. “She had no real friends... no one she cared about with the exception of our parents and sisters ma’am. She has betrayed us, there is no question about that, but aside from sending Kill Teams after her within Union space I see no way we can hurt her. And if we do that... we risk him retaliating regardless of what we do.”

“How did we miss that these Bontawillian fools became part of the Union so long ago?” Another man asked from his chair.

“I have my own people working on that Executor Timmons, but it appears they kept it out of the main stream of their Netnews reporting and we do not have people high enough within their military and government to advise us of these types of things.” Corbin answered.

“Will this Androcles Leonidas do as he says he will do Corbin?” Rall asked.

Corbin met her eyes and nodded slowly. “I believe he will ma’am.”

“Do we know anything more about him than the standard Intel Profile?” Wynn asked. “There is not much information in the file.”

Corbin shook his head. “Getting information on any member of the Leonidas family is a tricky proposition sir. If you delve too deeply into information that is not public, their Krypteria will immediately take notice of you. They are not an organization that we want after our agents Executors. Our agents on Earth have lasted this long because they are careful not to invite any undue attention to themselves and their questions about the Royal family fall within normal public speaking or news announcements. Any kind of information on Prince Androcles and his wives is at a premium right now because of what has happened and that is why we were able to obtain the plans to the tunnels beneath his estate even with the close watch on them since his father was assassinated.”

“I find it interesting that he picked this one clause from their Mutual Non-Aggression Pact to use.” Wynn spoke evenly. “The Protectorate has twenty-six Trade Agreements with the Vanari and yet only this one paragraph in the MNAP mentions this language. Using military means to secure Cross Border Commerce? Which Vanari SBR member helped to forge this agreement?”

“Regent Re Mydala.” Corbin answered. “It is one of the first things I looked up before contacting you. Coren Re Mydala, not his former wife.”

“Truly?” Wynn said thoughtfully. “I was under the impression he was a vanguard of the anti-Lycavorian movement among the SBR and the regular Board of Regents.”

“Re Mydala... didn’t we just give approval for an operation which involved someone of that name?” Timmons asked.

Corbin nodded his head. “Yes sir. Regent Re Mydala’s oldest daughter. She is a very gifted researcher and was conducting secret experiments outside the realm of the Vanari SBR to find a counter to our chemical weapon.”

The woman Rall nodded. “Ah... yes I remember now. We’ve had her under surveillance by several different assets and when we felt she was getting too close to actually discovering a way to counter our Chemical Enhancement Serum we acted. She was taken in a monthly raid as she was returning from a University trip.”

Corbin nodded again. “Unfortunately she was among those transferred here to the Alpha Quadrant and sold to this Unsaury Cyngi. If she is still alive, she will be one of those rescued by the Lycavorians.” He said. “Though I doubt they will discover who she is right away, there is always that possibility. Director General Dutkne of the Protectorate seems to have garnered a position of high importance within the Union and this is allowing them to facilitate a quicker transition of power.”

“If he orders this, can the Protectorate respond?” Wynn asked.

Corbin nodded. “Easily Chief Executor.” He answered. “Their military fleet is more than a match for the Eridiani even with their Dreadnoughts. And we all know how they fight on the ground. Even our genetically enhanced soldiers would be hard pressed to stand against a full assault of Lycavorian troops Chief Executor. The chances would drop to nothing if any Union troops were deployed to the Beta Quadrant to help them enforce this action. Lycavorian Union ground troops are, for lack of a better term sir, they are game changers. Even a single company of Lycavorian Spartans could wreak havoc among the Eridiani.”

“And the Vanari are not involved in this?” Timmons asked.

Corbin shrugged his broad shoulders. “I don’t have enough information to determine that sir.”

Wynn sat slowly back in his chair. “No... if the Vanari were involved in this in any way we would know about it.” He said. “I checked before coming to this meeting. All of the Senior Regents are accounted for. Coren Re Mydala and Ardan Vu Lamurrion departed aboard Vu Lamurrion’s ship roughly two weeks ago. Our contacts within the SBR say he is grieving the loss of his daughter and Vu Lamurrion is his closest friend and

ally. Regular checks on their position have turned up nothing abnormal. They are still out along the border region.”

“None of the older members of the SBR or the normal Board of Regents really trusts the Protectorate or Lycavorians.” Rall spoke as she sipped a large glass of wine. “Quite a few of their younger Board members are beginning to think otherwise, but we have done much to keep this at a status quo. None of them will vote against the older and senior members of the Board and any veto of the SBR’s directives needs to be by two thirds of the Normal Board of Regents. They would never go to the Lycavorians in order to ask for their assistance.”

Wynn nodded. “And every year we gain more slots in their schools and soon we will be able to move against their government as a whole and take them all down. Once we control those senior people... we’ll control how many females we can take and when. And we will not have to limit ourselves to the dark haired ones either.”

“It will also give us access to their abundant supply of Lanthium Ore.” Rall said.

“It is troubling that the Protectorate was able to design and manufacture advanced fusion engines without us discovering it however.” Wynn said. He looked at Corbin. “Are our reports on Union technology accurate Corbin? Do they have access to some sort of advanced alien ship that their core discoveries are derived from?”

“That is what our intelligence believes Executor Wynn?” He said.

“I asked if there is any proof of this?” Wynn spoke.

Corbin nodded his head slowly and carefully. “There are some indications Executor Wynn... however nothing that can be firmly proven beyond a doubt.”

“So let’s find out.” Timmons snapped. “Get someone inside their military in a position to discover this. Or within their scientific community perhaps.”

“That would be infinitely harder than you suggest sir.” Corbin spoke.

“Why?”

“There are very few humans that are within the *Durcunusaan* ranks Executor Timmons.” Corbin told him. “The physical demands to provide inclusion into their ranks are very nearly impossible for a human to achieve as they stand right now. There are perhaps a dozen or so who have achieved this goal and that is only because they have either been trained from a young age or raised by Lycavorians or vampires to be able to perform at optimal levels for a human.”

“Can we recruit them?” Rall asked.

Corbin shook his head quickly. “Attempting that would be a mistake Executor Rall.” He told her. “Members of the *Durcunusaan* are ruthlessly vetted. Those humans who have been accepted into their ranks would be impossible to turn because of what they went through to obtain that status. Any new influx of human candidates that were able to complete the training would invite interest and then their genetic improvements would be found.”

“So?” Timmons snapped.

“Genetic improvements such as we use are strictly forbidden within Lycavorian Union space Executor Timmons.” Corbin said. “They have no issues with using genetic altering or means to advance their many medical abilities, but to use them to actually improve physical and mental endurance, strength and such, no. That is not something they practice or allow. There are humans here who were among those who broke away from the original Eridiani during the time of The Schism, and they hold relatively high positions in many fields. One is even President of Earth, but they would neither support nor protect us in any way should we go to them.”

“They are humans!” Timmons protested.

Corbin nodded. “They are humans who have endured centuries of slavery and oppression under the Vampire High Coven. They are humans who watched Leonidas come to power and then gave back to them what the High Coven took away. Importance. There may be some who collaborated with the Coven who would accept our offer, but they are becoming fewer and fewer in number through the years. Leonidas choosing to have Sparta be the unofficial seat of power within the Union showed them that humans are equals to him and the other non-human species. They embraced that. I think you will find that behind the Lycavorian people themselves and then the elves, humans have become the most tenacious when defending the Union and what it does.”

“Traitors!” Wynn snarled. “They are all traitors to their kind. They were traitors then and they are still traitors. We do not need them. We will find other ways to gather this Information. We always do.”

“What about Leonidas’s demands?” Rall asked.

“Corbin... what do you propose?” Wynn asked.

“You are asking me sir?” He responded very surprised.

“You have been within the Alpha Quadrant for nearly three years. You have a better understanding of events and people there. And you need to begin to take more responsibility since one day you will sit on this Council with us.” Wynn said. “What is your assessment? Will he follow through with his threats?”

Corbin thought quickly, looking down at the floor and then back up to the faces in the transmission. “All the intelligence we have suggests that it would not be conducive for us to oppose what he is demanding. There have been very few in the last years that have survived for very long when they have gone against his father if he considers you criminal in nature. All of the intelligence we have now, as little as it is, this suggests that Androcles Leonidas is even harsher when it comes to those he considers criminals. In order to stop the influx of troops and ships moving to the planet Hadaria he ordered that the Jump Gates there be destroyed. Nearly three million civilians who were fleeing the planet at the time were killed by the resulting detonation. Yes... I believe he will do exactly as he says he will as much as I hate to admit it Executor Wynn.”

“So you believe we should placate him?” Wynn asked.

“He is demanding only that we give up the agents and assets that my sister Brendi knew about sir.” Corbin spoke. “There are several she has no knowledge of. I took the initiative and placed them myself.”

“And the Vanari?” Rall asked. “His request does not seem odd to you in any way Corbin? That he would do this?”

“As you said ma’am... there is nothing to suggest he is involved with or working with the Vanari. In fact... given his tone of voice when he spoke to me in regards to them, and the way Director General Dutkne described them to him, I do not think he cares for them in the least. The Leonidas family is quite famous for not tolerating any kind of arrogance and the Vanari are nothing if not arrogant. The Vanari do alter their shipping traffic because of our activity in any given sector. In my opinion it is simply a means for him to target us if we refuse. Disruption of commerce.” Corbin answered. “And it is only a few dozen prisoners that we will be giving up isn’t that correct?”

Rall nodded her head. “Yes... three or four at most. But we will have to make reparations to those we take them from.”

“Then to buy ourselves time I believe we should heed his demands.” Corbin told them. “If not... we must be prepared to face the fact that he will do exactly as he says he will and war will be upon us.”

“Even though they are on the verge of facing down this Kavalian Empire as we speak?” Wynn asked.

“The Protectorate is more than large enough to sustain a war against the Eridiani sir. A war against us. Especially if they receive aide and supplies from the Union.” Corbin answered. “Is that what we really want?”

“No... of course not.” Wynn answered him quickly. “Very well Corbin. We will forward the information on those Vanari most recently taken and you may direct your agents on Earth to do what he has instructed. Do however tell those your sister does not know about to remain ready should we need them.”

Corbin nodded. “Of course sir.” He replied. “Chief Executor... what about my sister?”

“What about her?” Wynn asked. “She is now a traitor to the OSG and the Eridiani. As are your parents and twin sisters. A standing order for their execution will be put in place and acted upon should the opportunity arise.”

“May I also attempt to conduct this liquidation if the opportunity presents itself here in the Alpha Quadrant?” Corbin asked.

Wynn nodded. “If there is no risk to OSG assets and it does not expose the Eridiani to this loose cannon of a Prince.”

Corbin nodded. “Thank you sir. I will advise you as soon as contact has been made and the details worked out.”

“Do that.” Wynn spoke. “And Corbin?”

“Sir?”

“I want all the information you can gather on this Lycavorian Prince.” Wynn spoke. “No matter how trivial it may seem. His interests. The interests of those he has taken as wives. His friends and family. Everything.”

Corbin nodded. “May I ask why sir?” He spoke.

“If his father was so easily assassinated by those Kavalian idiots, perhaps he is not as invulnerable as you suggest.” Wynn answered. “I want others to look at the information who have not been in your position and see if any ideas come up that you may think would work to rid ourselves of this young fool.”

Corbin grinned a very savage grin. “I will send it to you myself sir.”

“Good. Keep us informed. That is all.” Wynn reached out and touched something on his chair and the transmission ended.

Corbin turned slowly to look at Wendall who had been present for the entire exchange. “Start sending out the signals to our people on Earth. I’m going to contact that arrogant fuck and let him know we agree to his terms.”

Wendall nodded. “I’ll take care of it.” He said.

“And Wendall?”

“Corbin?”

“Send for Tomas.” Corbin spoke. “I want my backstabbing sister dead and I want her to die painfully. While my parents and sister’s watch. Then I want them dead. Tomas is the best we have. If anyone can come up with a plan it’s him.”

Wendall nodded. “Consider it done.”

SCIMITAR

Caliria looked at her father in front of her, no emotion on her face in the least. Her void expression matched his as he watched Devra and the others move into the room behind her and take up positions almost as if they were protecting her. Coren stared at his daughter, dressed in the exotic looking jumpsuit that was matte black in color and hugged her many curves in every possible way. Several slits that were along the outside of each leg allowed easy viewing of her cornflower blue skin; her slim shoulders were bare, the top made of the same material and very tight, and conforming to her high, proud breasts. The top had a choker like collar but then an almost transparent satin like material that encased her arms and was tied lightly at her wrists. Coren couldn’t help but admit she was a stunning young woman, and for several moments he forgot that her hair was as black as night. He stepped closer to her slowly.

“I am... I am very happy you are safe Caliria.” He stated watching her honeydew green eyes follow him.

Caliria’s eyes held no mirth in them and her head canted to the side slightly. “Why did you want to see me father?” She asked. “Androcles told me that you were against any attempt to rescue me from the slavers, yet now you wish to see me? Why?”

“Androcles told you? Caliria... I was not against it!” He hissed softly, his eyes flaring in anger. “I was against... I was worried for the impact that it would have for our people if we attempted such a thing.”

“You mean the impact it would have on you.” Caliria told him. “What political fallout would affect you?”

“That’s not... that’s not true!” He snapped. His eyes went to where Devra stood behind her and leaning against the edge of the table and then back to Caliria. “Is that what your mother told you?”

“Mother didn’t have to tell me anything!” Caliria snapped back at him. “She tried to stay away from having to tell me my own father did not wish to see me rescued. That he cared more for his political career than his own daughter. But the man who loves me has no qualms about telling me... he would keep nothing from me! You can not blame her for anything father, not this time. I knew... I have known you hold no love for me father... but to not even want to see me rescued? That is too much.”

“That is not the truth!” Coren barked. “There are... there are bigger issues at stake here Caliria! Our people could not be connected to this type of action in any way! The ramifications if the OSG discovered this would be horrible!”

“Yet you knew that the Lycavorians, that Androcles’s people would be the ones actually conducting any mission.” Caliria said. “That the Vanari would not have any ties to this in the least and still you resisted! Why father?”

“Caliria you must understand that...”

“No!” Caliria said. “What I understand is this; you care more for your political career than you do for me! That has always been the case! Over three hundred years father... not once in all that time have you ever shown me the slightest bit of love! The same love and nurturing that you show Arduri and Naesta! Not once! All because my hair is a different color! A stigma that is your fault to begin with, since the gene for black or dark hair comes from the father! I have accepted that father... and I have lived with it my entire life! Now if there is nothing of importance that you have to say to me I wish to go and see Androcles!”

Coren stepped forward. “No!” He spoke. “I don’t want you to do that!”

Caliria looked at him. “You are joking of course.” She said. “He risked all that he was to come and retrieve me!” She snapped. “All of them did! And they did it because they love me! Just as I love them!”

“You don’t know what it is you are talking about!” Coren snarled. “You have never even met them before! How can you love them? How can you say that?”

“Unlike you father... I believe in fate and destiny.” Caliria spoke. “Just as many of our people do... a fact that you and the SBR, and many of the Board of Regents refuse to accept. I began seeing them in my dreams six months ago father. Six months ago!” She hissed softly. “That was long before I was ever taken by the OSG! I knew their names... what they looked like! I will not allow you to keep me from them when you have never cared enough to even recognize me as your daughter or come to my graduations!”

“It is a political ploy Caliria... can’t you see that?” Coren snapped. “A move by them to insinuate themselves into our society and our government!”

Sadi snorted quite unladylike and shook her head. “Please...” She spat. “Is that what you truly believe?”

“Coren... you are so out of line now it is pathetic to even hear you speak.” Devra rasped at him.

“None of you see it!” Coren barked. “None of you!”

“Because we don’t see everything in your view does not mean we are less intelligent or aware father.” Caliria spoke.

Coren looked at her. “You were illegally researching a Counter Agent to the OSG Serum Caliria!” He almost yelled.

“I was trying to help our people!” Caliria barked right back at him. “The SBR and Board of Regents is content to let the status quo continue! To let the OSG continue to take our females for their slaves and to sell us as pieces of meat! Many of us are not! I am one of them!”

“Do you have any idea what they will do to you when we return?” Coren asked.

Caliria met his eyes. “What gives you the impression I will even be returning with you to Austrova father?” She snapped at him. “And even if I do choose to return, it will be to finish my schooling and they will do nothing! They will be unable to do anything!”

Coren blinked several times and shook his head. “They will arrest you Caliria!” He told her. “They will try you for treason!”

“They will arrest a Princess of the Lycavorian Union?” Carisia spoke from where she leaned against the wall next to Lu’ria. “Wow... now that would be a singularly stupid thing to do.”

Lu’ria smiled and looked at her. “Yes... it would.” She echoed.

Coren looked at them for a long moment and then back to Caliria. “What... what do they mean?” He asked.

“I am Androcles’s mate and wife now father.” Caliria stated and the touch of pride in her voice was very unmistakable.

“What?” He snapped. “I forbid this!”

“You have no authority to forbid it Coren!” Devra growled at him now. “Just as you have no authority to forbid me from being Bren’s wife and mate! We are an open people Coren, but even we do not intrude and make demands of our people’s free will when we do not have the right! You will not start!”

“I will not allow this to happen Caliria!” Coren snarled.

“You have not been a father to me since the day I was born.” Caliria stated. “Do not presume to think you will tell me what to do now! I will do as I wish father! It is my life and I will live it as I choose! And this is how I choose to live it!”

Coren watched with wide eyes as she stepped up to where Sadi stood and crushed her within an embrace of their lips that simply blistered with passion. Sadi molded her body against Caliria’s, drawing her tightly against her as their tongues danced a sweet tango of discovery and love. Ne’Veha could barely contain her laughter at the look on Coren’s face, while Carisia and Lu’ria openly snickered and Devra could only shake her head slightly. It was several moments before Caliria and Sadi parted, both of their faces flush with excitement and desire. Sadi simply stared at her with scorching jungle green eyes. Caliria tasted just as she smelled... just as her eyes were the color of honeydew green melons... her scent was like sweet honeydew on the wind and this is what her lips tasted of.

Caliria turned and looked at her father now, not releasing Sadi from her grasp and reaching out with the opposite hand to draw Ne’Veha to her, something Ne’Veha did without a single hesitation.

“I will live my life how I choose father.” Caliria stated confidently. “And you will have no say in what I do. Goodbye father. I have more important things to do.”

Coren could only watch as Caliria turned and marched for the door with Sadi and Ne’Veha clinging to her hands. He saw Carisia and Lu’ria fall in behind them quickly and then he was alone with Devra in the large conference room. His eyes darkened and he looked at her.

“This is your fault!” He hissed.

Devra couldn’t help herself and she laughed. “My fault?” She spoke. “I believe you were the one who provided the seed in order for me to give birth to her. Now... because she told you to stick it in your duplicitous ass... now it’s my fault?” Devra moved to the door. “Coren... you grow more hypocritical with each passing day. It is no wonder you can not keep a woman happy. Or did you not happen to notice that the way you have treated Tastia has driven her right into the arms of that very handsome young Drow elf Am’uur. And she seems quite please about that if I do say so myself.”

“What?” Coren snapped his eyes wide.

Devra touched the panel and the door opened. “One day you will need to wake up and see that everyone you supposedly care about no longer cares about you Coren. What will you do then Coren Re Mydala? You will be so very alone.”

Devra exited the conference room before Coren could retort, leaving him staring at the door and not really understanding what had just happened.

SCIMITAR

EIGHT HOURS FROM HADARIAN SPACE

“...forgive me Chief Magistrate Sel’ke, if after what has occurred I do not take anything the Kavalians say at face value.” Andro spat venomously. “They have killed my father... tried to kill me twice, kidnapped my mother and hired a mercenary band to kidnap another! They have helped an illegal government come to power on Hadaria, usurping my mother the rightful ruler, and you expect me to believe they will not attempt to kill me again the moment they get the chance?”

“Of that I have little doubt Milord.” Sel’ke answered. “However, I was selected by your father twenty years ago to fill this seat. His words to me were clear that day. He expected me to do what was right no matter what world I came from. I will do what I must in order to defuse a potentially explosive situation.”

“I understand that Chief Magistrate.” Andro spoke. His eyes narrowed and he got to his feet slowly. “What has happened?”

“The Kavalians are balking at the conditions you set for the meeting. We have only been here twelve hours and already they have moved against you after a fashion.” Sel’ke spoke.

“I only set one condition!” Andro snapped. “Remove their warships to the outlying star clusters of the system. They can keep the same amount of ships as my Strike Wing has in and around Hadaria. Twenty-two ships total.”

“They point out that Union ships can Shroud and therefore they would not be able to tell how many ships are really in the planetary corridors of Hadaria.” Sel’ke spoke. “It is a valid point Milord. As Chief Magistrate I cannot simply dismiss it. Also... shortly after we arrived they moved almost immediately to have Magistrate Galia removed from the bench because she does not represent the Hadaria interests as they are now. At least that is what they told me.”

“We saw that coming after the debacle with my sister.” Andro spoke.

Sel’ke nodded. “I told them that she was a member of the court and could not be removed without a unanimous vote by the other judges. Her status as a Hadarian citizen has since been revoked by the new Hadarian government. They have lodged a formal complaint but Galia will remain on the court.”

“Fuck them!” Andro snapped.

“No Milord... because somehow they forced the Bontawillian Magistrate as well as the Folcani Magistrate to step aside and recuse themselves from the proceedings.” Sel’ke answered him. “According to our Union Charter, that allows the world that we are hearing the case on to replace those two Magistrates from a pool of alternates which are chosen before we arrive. They have been replaced with a local Hadarian Religious Judge and a member of the Senior Limian Judiciary Council.”

“The Limian Judiciary Council?” Andro barked. “What the hell is a member of the LJC doing there?”

“Apparently he has been a citizen of Hadaria for some time now and is a member of the Hadarian Sixth Circuit Trade Court.” Sel’ke answered.

“Sixth Circuit Trade Court?” Andro gasped. “Is that a fucking joke?”

“I’m afraid not Milord.” Sel’ke answered. “These are the guidelines by which we are bound to follow.”

“Why did they recuse themselves?” Andro asked.

Sel’ke shook his head. “I have no idea.” He answered. “It happened within two hours of us arriving here. They both came to me and said personal reasons were driving their decisions. I was left with no choice but to choose the two alternates from the local pool.”

“Do you suspect something?” Andro asked.

“That is not for me to say.” Sel’ke answered. “Milord... I must have your assurance that no matter what evidence is presented or how we rule on whatever this information is, you will abide by our decisions.”

“Excuse me?” Andro said.

“Your father gave me his word that he would not interfere or try to overrule our decisions unless they directly impact Union security.” Sel’ke asked.

“This fucking meeting doesn’t meet your criteria for Union security?” Andro snarled. “You have no problems with me coming into an area saturated with Kavalian ships after what they have done in the last six to seven weeks? That doesn’t meet your criteria for Union security Chief Magistrate?”

“Not in the same sense as they way you are viewing it Milord.” Sel’ke spoke. “We are trying to prevent anymore bloodshed from happening and see the reasoning for the Kavalian’s actions. I fear that is not your intent.”

“So you are reading my mind now Chief Magistrate?” Andro asked.

“I am simply making an observation based on your most recent interaction with this court and previous ones in years past.” Sel’ke spoke. “You must allow us to do our jobs Milord. We may be servants of the galaxy, but we are citizens of the Union after all.”

Andro nodded his head slowly. “Very well Chief Magistrate.” He spoke. “I will honor my father’s commitment to the Galactic Court. But my condition for this meeting will not be removed. The Kavalians must withdraw all but an equal number of ships to outlying Hadarian star clusters or this little get together will not take place and I will return to Sparta and declare open war between our peoples. You can pass that information onto the Kavalian and Hadarian watchdogs who are no doubt monitoring your transmission right now. I will arrive in the Hadarian system in eight hours and stop at the border where I will wait for ten hours. I will not proceed until I have seen the Kavalian ships retreat to the outlying star clusters. Good day Chief Magistrate.”

Andro stabbed down on the control panel before the man could answer, ending the one-sided conversation and transmission. He turned slightly to his right and looked at the two holographic images that stood to the side between Sa’sur and Dutkne who leaned against the counter. One image held two women, the second a single woman in uniform.

His first comment went to the dark haired woman on the far right. “Manda?” He asked.

“It’s about as obvious a trap as one can set.” She crossed her arms under her ample chest as she spoke from the bridge of the *ARIZONA*. “They must think we are completely ignorant.”

“Or they want us to think that they think that.” Marci spoke from Earth where she stood next to Deia in the second transmission.

“Come Marci... no twists or puzzles in your verbiage.” Dutkne spoke shaking his finger at her. “We are far too stressed to try and decipher them.”

Marci grinned and nodded after glancing at Deia who stood beside her. “Sorry.” She said. “Andro... they don’t want war. They want your father’s throne.”

“That’s doesn’t give me warm and fuzzy feelings Marci.” Andro spoke.

“It is fact though *Mandri*.” Deia spoke.

“I get that part *Tenna*.” Andro spoke.

“I know what Marci is trying to say.” Sa’sur spoke now. “They are poised for war against the Coven Andro. They do not want war with us because it would open a second front. No force has ever won a war on two separate Galactic fronts. Never in anyone’s history. There have been battles in Earth’s past where this has been accomplished, but never on a Galactic scale as Marci is trying to say.”

Andro shook his head as he came up next to Dutkne. “The High Coven is in disarray.” He spoke evenly. “With Cha’talla’s message going out across their space, they will have even more problems. The Kavalians will know this. They can concentrate nearly all their forces on us. The Coven will... they will pose no threat to the Kavalian Federation soon anyway. They will have their own problems to contend with.”

Deia’s head tilted slightly at this news. “What do you mean Andro?” She asked.

Andro shook his head. “It’s not important right now *Tenna*.” He stated.

Marci shook her head as well. “You are missing their goal Andro.” She said. “We’ve been going through many of Laustinos’s personal logs. Nesa broke the encryption two days ago. The last seven to eight months of entries have been devoted to assisting the Kavalians in a way where they could just waltz right in and assume power under Pusintin.” She explained to him. “There is no mention of war anywhere Andro. Taking your mother Dysea... trying to kill you and your brothers and sisters... it was all part of the plan. None of it included open war. The attacks against the Drow yes, but never open war. But the ultimate prize and goal never altered and that was your mother For’mya.”

Andro turned to look at her fully. “Her elven royal blood.” He said nodding his head.

Marci nodded slowly. “Yes.”

“*Mandri*... we believe we have found the reason that he is doing this.” Deia said quickly. “It is a simple phrase buried within the Chronicles of Lycavorian Law. The Twenty-Third Law Scroll to be exact.”

Andro’s eyes narrowed. “*Tenna*... the Twenty-Third Scroll does not deal with the Law of Ascension. The Fourth Scroll does. The Twenty-Third Scroll references only bloodlines and the line of...” Andro’s eyes went a little wider. “The line of grandfather.”

Deia nodded. “Yes... the line of Leonidas and his father Resumar.” She said softly. “And that is why we did not find it until now. We were trying to find something within the Ascension laws themselves when we should have been looking in the Laws of Bloodlines. Something your father only affirmed even more when he returned to power and told Autolyucus what he did. That only someone of the Leonidas bloodline would ever rule Sparta again.” She spoke softly. “We also believe... the *Feravomir* and I believe that what you and Eliani initially feared is probably very correct as much as it pains me to say.”

Andro closed his eyes as fresh anger surged through him. “What does it say *Tenna*?” He asked. “It has to be clear enough in interpretation for them to even attempt this.”

Deia nodded. “Taken in the context it was written... no Lycavorian would misinterpret it. The Kavalians and your uncle however, well I fear they are going to use it in their own twisted context. And if I know the Galactic Court... they may very well get their way as long as your father maintains the façade that he is dead.”

“How is that possible Deia?” Dutkne asked now.

Deia lifted the scroll. “Just listen.” She spoke. “Where as it be known and made to order this day that only the line of Resumar will bear fruit to the Union. No divergence will be drawn within the bloodline wherein the senior, most pure son is of Resumar *and of royal blood*; it is he who shall rule without question.” Deia looked up from the scroll and settled her eyes on her nephew. “Do you follow?”

Andro nodded slowly meeting her gaze. “Yes... I believe so... but this could not apply to him *Tenna*.”

“Your father pardoned him Androcles.” Deia spoke. “He returned all rights and privileges as a Spartiates to him.”

“Yes... I understand that... but it still could not apply to him.” Androcles said. “Father already fulfilled that portion of the Scroll by taking my mother as his mate. She is of one of the original Ruling Lycavorian Bloodlines. Royalty in anyone’s definition. And also of the purest of blood. My uncle... he could not assume power once they have a heir. Me.”

Deia nodded. “Unless he challenges this.” She said.

“How? He can not make a claim to the throne... he gave up that right when he became a Kavalian citizen by his own admission.” Andro said.

“He can not... but a son of two royal bloodlines can.” Deia said. “He needs your mother for this. If... *son vada carians* I can’t believe I am even going to say this... if he forces For’mya to give him a son... that son could challenge you for the throne for it would fit exactly into the last sentence of this law. Joined with the elven royal bloodline... elven royal blood such as For’mya has running in her veins, his son could challenge you not only for rule of the Union but also the elves.”

“It’s why he wanted you dead Andro.” Marci broke in now. “Why he wanted all of you dead. His claim would go unchallenged if you were dead.”

Andro shook his head. “It still doesn’t make sense!” He said quickly. “He had to take into account that I would survive his attempts. If not me then Denali or Arrarn or Resumar. Any of us would be senior to any heir he produced now. And he has to assume that many of our people will consider what he has done as rape of a sitting Queen! They will never allow him to get away with this!”

“No *Mandri*... he could get away with this because he is the older brother and if he somehow forced For’mya into agreeing to do this of her own free will, then no one could say it was rape.” Deia said softly.

“She would not do this willingly!” Andro snapped. “No... I refuse to believe she would submit to him willingly and...” Andro stopped talking as his eyes grew wide. “That would... that would mean what Eli and I believed is true. That he had the Immortals take *medwaw* Dysea for a purpose. A sinister purpose!”

Dutkne looked at him. “Submit to him or he insures your mother becomes a slave to Immortals.” He said softly.

Andro nodded his head. “And with the Static Inhibitor implanted in her head she would be unable to feel everything he is telling her is a lie.”

Deia nodded. “Any heir of his and For’mya’s would take full and final precedence within a certain context of the wording of this Chronicle of Law. And if this son was of two recognized royal bloodlines within the Union, then it makes his case all the more stronger in that very same context. We as Lycavorians recognize the royalty of Aricia in a pure blood sense if you will, but it could still be argued that the law meant two completely *separate* royal bloodlines. If this was the case then his son could challenge for the throne.”

“A certain context?” Andro gasped. “What kind of *sibfla* is that?”

“Do not raise your voice to me young man!” Deia snapped. “I am just as angry and even more distraught than you!”

Andro lowered his head quickly. “Forgive me *Tenna*.”

“For’mya is a citizen of the Union.” Marci spoke quickly now. “Therefore any child she has is automatically a citizen. Which would clear the way for a son of your uncle and her to make a claim on not only the throne of Resumar and the Union, but the elven King’s as well. They could conceivably usurp your mother Dysea in this way.”

Deia nodded. “And should this challenge be successful... Pusintin would rule for his child until he came of age. He would then kill your mother and his son eventually and retain authority over the Union as Steward.”

Dutkne looked at Andro and then back to Deia. “That is quite a stretch Deia.” He said. “But like Andro has said... what if he did not succeed in killing Andro. With him and his brothers gone I can see how the context of the wording could be used by him... but not with them living.”

“Janae.” Deia said.

Andro turned his head quickly and met her eyes. “Of course!” He exclaimed.

Dutkne looked back and forth between the two of them. “Care to fill me in?” He asked.

Andro looked at him. “Janae... she is the direct blood descendant of grandfather Resumar and the elven King. Even more direct than *medwaw* For'mya. Janae's father is... he is the son to grandfather Resumar and his elf concubine. My mother is two generations behind Janae's own bloodline.”

Deia nodded her head. “That is why she was taken.” Deia spoke. “You went after her because she is family to us... but in doing so you unknowingly kept from them what they would have needed to make Pusintin's claim irrefutable. If he had somehow forced her to marry this hypothetical son with For'mya then it would have brought the two surviving bloodlines of the elven King back together as one with Resumar's bloodline. Pusintin is not just thinking of the immediate future here Andro... he is thinking many years down the road as well.”

“Janae is still in danger then.” Andro spoke urgently. “She must be blanketed at all times *Tenna*. Her father as well!”

“I've already taken care of it.” Marci told him. “She wasn't happy about... she said some very descriptive things about what she would do with anyone who tried to force her to have a child. It made *me* shudder.” She explained. “I put them both on a ship to Curila 6 an hour ago. I also coordinated with Riall and had him dispatch another Shrouded Fleet Group into the system as support. They will not reveal themselves to anyone unless it is necessary.”

“*Tenna*... did Laustinos know about our family retreat on Curila?” Andro asked.

Deia shook her head. “Not that I ever told him.” She answered. “That is not to say he did not discover it at some point. He was able to obtain far more information than we ever thought just by patience and putting things together logically. He was not on Ontahe I take it?”

Andro shook his head. “If he was... he escaped moments after he discovered it was me attacking. Sa'sur detected perhaps a dozen ships escaping Ontahe that were of Union design, but I left no orders for her in regards to them.”

“If he was even there to begin with.” Deia said nodding her head. “He will run back to the Kavalians Androcles. They are the only ones who can protect him now, and he is still useful to them in many ways. Do you believe Pusintin will reveal all this with your mother to you on Hadaria?”

Andro nodded his head. “Why else request a hearing with the Galactic Court?” He said. “First Minister Alocgeid has already publicly announced that the Elven Parliament and people as a whole will not abide by anything decided by the Galactic Court until such time as mother is released and returned to her rightful place as queen of the Union. They have already said they do not regard her as such anymore since they believe father to be dead. What other reason is there to make such a statement and to do it on Hadaria, the world that has tossed aside my mother and broken from the Union.”

Deia nodded. “I saw that announcement. Alocgeid will still have to contend with those in the Elven Parliament who have never cared for Lycavorians. Though they are few in number, they can still cause trouble, especially if they begin giving interviews with the Netnews. It is something they have already started doing in regards to you and your action in destroying the Hadarian Jump Gates and the loss of civilian lives.” She said.

Andro nodded. “I saw that coming already *Tenna*.” He spoke.

“When do we speak to your father?”

“In four hours.” Andro replied. “We will hold at the border until I have confirmation that the Kavalians have withdrawn their ships.”

“And you think they will?” Deia asked.

“What choice do they have?” He answered her. “They can not risk killing me in public *Tenna*. Now that I think about it... if everything we have talked about is true, killing me in public would be a huge mistake. It would destroy any chance they have of convincing those members of the Union Senate and our people who have never liked father to side with them and their ridiculous ideas. If they kill me publicly now... even those who don't like father will rally behind us. Besides... I don't intend to be here long.”

“Who is going with you?” Deia asked.

“Just Sadi, Eliani and Jomann.” Andro answered. “I will not risk anyone else.”

“Buonau could still make an attempt to take Eliani.” Deia said.

Andro grinned savagely. “Then I hope she does. Jomann will gut her and leave her in the street.”

“Jomann...?” Deia looked at him. “Then...”

Andro nodded. “Yes... just as you had hoped.”

Deia smiled and nodded her head. "Good. I knew I smelled something in that blood of his." She stated. "He is a superior young man and he will worship Eliani. He is cut from the same mold as those who followed your grandfather when he broke from our more barbaric ways so long ago."

Andro nodded. "Yes he will." He took a deep breath. "You will be ready when I initiate the transmission?"

Deia nodded her head. "Helen and I both will be there... as well as Marci and Riall. We will take the transmission from within Dragon Mountain since it is the most secure place and has the most powerful transmitters."

Andro nodded. "Resumar will join us from VORTEX Cruiser 341 with Shiria and the others there."

Deia nodded her head. "You have a few hours *Mandri*. Try to enjoy your new wife and mate's company before all of this begins."

Andro nodded his head. "We will talk again soon *Tenna*." Andro said just before ending the transmission. He turned slowly to Dutkne. "Dutkne my friend... you and the Protectorate may have come at a bad time. Darkness is approaching... and nothing I do seems to be able to stem the tide. I do not wish to involve our people in the Protectorate in this."

Dutkne moved closer to him. "Perhaps there is no way to stem the tide Androcles." He said. "And it is like this for a reason."

"What do you mean?" Andro asked.

"Perhaps everything is happening just as it has been preordained." Dutkne spoke. "As much as it burns my *mida* to say that."

"For what purpose though?" Andro asked.

Dutkne shook his head. "That I don't know." He spoke. "To be honest... I think only one person really knows what is coming. Or has an idea anyway, and that is grandfather Wayonn. Though for some reason he is just not talking. At least not yet."

It had been the most magnificent few hours yet in her life and Caliria Re Mydala never wanted it to end. The most wonderful thing about it was that there had been no sexual contact involved in any way. Not even a hint of it. Whether by design or simply because of who he was, Androcles Leonidas was making her see that her dreams of the last few months had been so very correct. All of them were reserved in some fashion, Caliria knew it was because of what was happening around them, but they relaxed almost completely when it was just them in the bedroom of the large quarters. And what did they do?

They talked. And they listened.

Androcles wore only a pair of soft white pants with crimson trim, and none of them had anything on besides undergarments that left little to the imagination, but all of them were very content just to be in the same room with each other. They shifted positions many times as they talked and ate, each of them always remaining in physical contact somehow. They thought nothing of resting a head on Andro's chest or the firm breasts of a fellow wife and mate. They would drape legs and arms over the most intimate parts of another's body and simply bask in the warmth of the contact. They would feed each other, giggling at times because of some grimace or face that Andro would make. Caliria noticed one thing right away; Carisia and Lu'ria gravitated heavily to each other, while Ne'Veha and Sadi did the same as well as to her. They didn't hesitate to touch each other, but it always seemed that Carisia and Lu'ria somehow remained in constant contact. As did Sadi with Ne'Veha and both of them with her. There was no jealous jockeying for position next to Andro no matter what position he sat in, and he did not show any sign of preferring one over the other. She did notice that he and Sadi shared several looks that only they understood and Caliria realized that this was because they were *anomes*.

They listened intently as Caliria told them about herself while opening her mind to them. She had to concentrate at first, but it became easier as each minute passed, and within an hour she was speaking within Mindvoice and sharing memories as if it was second nature to her. Unlike her mother, who was proceeding slowly with Bren and this new found gift, Caliria had five exceptionally powerful minds that were aiding her in learning and teaching. Their nuzzling of the back of her neck or her cheek, and Carisia's tiny nibbles on her shoulders were their way of expressing to her what she meant to them and within the second hour she was returning these displays of emotion to them without question. Lu'ria had been so right when she explained to her

about Androcles. His beautiful azure eyes held wisdom in them that you would not see in a Vanari that was a hundred times his age and any lingering doubts about their differences in age were quickly tossed to the wind.

Caliria listened with rapt attention both vocally and with her mind as she learned how each of them came to be with Andro. They held nothing back from her, allowing her to see even the most intimate of details. She trembled in his arms as he told her very briefly of Alba Tau and she saw the stark images within his mind of that foul place he would always remember as a nightmare. She saw his father, Sadi's father, Lu'ria and Ne'Veha's family at different points in their lives. And she shared this back with them without hesitation.

Caliria could feel their burning desire for her within their minds. That was something she did not question after the first hour. Yet they knew she was still weak and her Alkay was slowly rebuilding itself after her ordeal and no matter how much they desired her, they would not do anything to put her at risk or spoil what they would soon enough share. It was simply enough to be with them Caliria thought. She was aroused yes, and her Alkay sometimes seeped through her pores, but it did not last long on her skin as one of them would quickly kiss her on that spot or delicately lick her skin. It had a definite effect on all of them, but Caliria realized that unlike many different species to include most Lycavorians, they were able to easily control the desire and extreme want it could inflame in a person.

Now they sat entangled on the bed wonderfully content. Andro had his back to the large headboard; Caliria pressed tightly to one side and Sadi the other. Ne'Veha spooned her from behind, her soft, satiny dark brown hair spilling over one of Caliria's shoulders. Lu'ria rested on her back with her head using Sadi's hip as a cushion and her shimmering white hair splayed out over her deeply tanned leg. Her long legs were tossed over one of Andro's and Carisia was nestled quite snugly between Lu'ria's legs with her head on her well defined abdomen. Lu'ria's long fingers absently stroked Carisia's shoulder and the outside of her breast in an almost possessive manner.

Caliria lifted her eyes to Andro's face, taking in the chiseled features and neatly trimmed goatee, as well as the most relaxed expression she had yet seen from him. She drew her leg up ever so slightly and used her fingers to trace the Talon Guardian brand over his heart. Sadi watched her with bright jungle green eyes and finally spoke.

"What are you thinking *Inamarno*?" She asked.

Caliria smiled. "I am thinking of how so very wrong my people have been for so long." She answered. "About Lycavorians and other species. We are such a reticent species and we trust no one who is not like us."

"Do you think it will change *Inamarno*?" Lu'ria asked from her spot turning to gaze at her with bright amber colored eyes. "You... your mother... your brother and sisters..."

"My sisters?" Caliria asked.

Carisia giggled. "Even I can see it..." She said. "And I am not wolf and can't smell it."

"Smell what?" Caliria prodded more.

"Arduri... she desires my brother and Lisisa." Andro spoke opening his eyes and stroking her shoulder and Sadi's back.

"You can smell that in her?" Caliria asked.

Andro nodded his head. "Quite prominently too. And it is not something that is just a passing interest either."

"Your sense of smell is that acute?" Caliria asked.

Andro laughed softly and looked down into her honeydew green eyes. "My father once tracked my mothers across two thousand kilometers of barren planet. They were angry with him for something and he thought he had lost them. He went after them, they led him on quite the chase across the Union, but he finally found them on a planet in The Wilds. As with all of you, I have burned your scents into my brain. I could track you across a planet easily, no matter how populated it is. And your Mindvoice imprint is easy enough to follow even through the stars of the galaxy. At least to me."

"I never understood why she agreed to marry Cruor Ahn Vernalo." Caliria spoke softly. "He is such a pompous ass. No different than his father." She looked at Andro. "Are you sure Androcles?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"Do your brother and sister know?" Caliria asked.

"I spoke with Lisisa briefly when they returned." Andro said. "I think she has an idea of this. At least that is what her scent tells me. Deni is oblivious right now but Lisisa will fill him in. I don't think it is

something that is just random. I have a feeling your family and ours is meant to be bound together in many ways *Inamarno*. Everything happens for a reason.”

“Why can’t we go to the surface of Hadaria with you and Sadi Andro?” Lu'ria asked the question that had been eating at all of them.

“It is not because I don’t want you there *Ilythiiri Tessai*.” He answered quickly. “It is more for security reasons than anything else.”

“What security reasons?” Lu'ria kept at him.

“They will know by now that my cousin is dead.” Andro told her. “They will know I am the one who killed him and they will know why. Bringing you to the surface and allowing them to see you, the reason my cousin died, that could very possibly cause them to do something in anger that they had not planned on and ultimately hurt my mother.”

“*Nindyn l'puul fuer'yonii! Nind zhahen galla ulu elgg uns'aa!*” Lu'ria hissed. (Those foul beasts! They were trying to kill me!)

Andro nodded. “I know this *Ilythiiri Tessai*. They will not see it that way.” He told her reaching out and placing the back of his hand to her cheek. “Carisia is not going because she is a vampire and again that would only inflame tensions. *Inamarno* is not going because we do not want our ties to the Vanari to become known just yet and *SirsanGai* is not going because she will be flying the Mark II that will be orbiting just outside the city and fully Shrouded. Carrying all of you.”

All of them looked at him with wide eyes. “What?” Lu'ria and Carisia gasped turning slightly and looking at him.

“You didn’t honestly think I was going to go to the surface of a hostile planet and not have someone ready to come pull our asses out of the fire did you?” Andro told her with a smile. “Majeir and Anthar will be with you and should the need arise, I will expect you to come tearing across the skies to get us.”

“That is something you need never question!” Lu'ria exclaimed. “We...”

The COM unit on the table beside their bed chimed loudly, cutting off her words. Andro rolled his eyes and reach over to stab the panel.

“Yes?”

“Milord... Duty Officer here. Captain Sa'sur told me to inform you when we received confirmation that all Kavalian ships have pulled out of the planetary sector.” The male voice spoke. “The Kavalian bastards screamed about for sure, but the only remaining ships in range of Hadaria are equal in number to our Strike Wing.”

“Very well.” Andro spoke. “Is everything ready for our secure COM?”

“Standing by sire. We will initiate the transmission in forty-three minutes and link all signals together then.” The voice answered.

“Thank you Lieutenant Commander.” Andro spoke.

“Sire.”

The COM went silent and Andro looked first at Sadi and then each of them. “As much as I hate it my beautiful and delicious mates, it is time to go to work. For all of us.”

“Wait!” Caliria exclaimed. “What... what do I do?”

“Eliani asked for you to join her in the Med Bay.” Andro said. “She would like for you to take command of the Med Bay while she is on the surface with me.”

“Me?” Caliria gasped.

Andro nodded. “Eliani’s words were very simple and to the point as my sister usually is.” He stated with a small smile. “*Next to me she is the smartest tool on this ship when it comes to medical treatment. Hell... she cured her people. Not withstanding her decision to fall in love with you that is. Damn straight she should be in charge when I’m gone. Now stop bothering me... Jomann and I are having too much fun!*” Andro grinned. “I did not press her on what she and Jomann were doing that was fun... but yes.” He leaned over and kissed her softly. “My family will grow on you *Inamarno*. Most of them are deficient in some way and they will think you utterly insane for falling in love with me. Especially my father.”

Sadi chuckled. “You should have heard what he told me at our joining.” She said. “It was hysterically funny and I was laughing for a full hour.” She reached for Caliria’s hand as they began to rise. “Welcome to our world *Inamarno*. You’ll fit right in. Don’t worry.”

EARTH
DRAGON MOUNTAIN
MINDVOICE HOLOGRAPHIC PROJECTION ROOM

“... sure know how to piss people off don't you boy?” Martin spoke gruffly to the crystal clear holographic image of his oldest son.

This unique and specialized form of communication was developed by Avi and Admiral O'Connor. It combined the powerful transmitters built into capital ships and certain ground installations, all linking back to the massive Mindvoice Neural Boosters built into City Ship 41. When linked together and operating at full power, the huge storage room within CS 41 acted as a colossal Mindvoice receiver and holographic generator. Avi then programmed the emitters to link with historical databases and design a scenario that combined ancient Spartan design and modern architectural creations. It was here that the Leonidas family, and others with sufficient Mindvoice ability had met through the years to discuss matters. The last time they had used this was during the Evolli War to formulate the last parts of the battles that ended that war. Each individual would simply sit in certain rooms either on the ships or in the ground installations and the neural boosters did the rest.

It was an incredible means of communications and one of the most strictly guarded pieces of technology that the Union possessed. The room they were in was a massive gathering hall with walls and ceiling, holographic in nature of course, but the walls were partially made of glass and you could look out on the Gulf of Laconia. Couches and chairs were also part of the room and the holographic projections of everyone could be seen occupying these pieces of furniture or just standing around the huge room. Even the bonded dragons of everyone in the family were present, all of them sitting along the walls of the huge meeting hall. Caliria was still trying to get used to the incredible fact that she was sitting in a chair on the *SCIMITAR* but her Mindvoice projection was here in this room with so many different people. She knew the others were helping her, but it appeared that only Sadi was unfazed by what was happening. She had apparently used something of this nature before. Her mother sat in a chair with an equally stunned expression on her face, Bren standing to her left.

It was, simply put, the most amazing thing she had ever experienced.

Andro smiled at the projection of his father and shrugged his broad shoulders. “I learned from the best.” He stated.

Martin stared at his son's image from the room on Curila 6 and couldn't help but feel the pride swell within his chest. He finally chuckled and nodded his head. “Yeah... I do have that ability don't I?” He spoke.

“One of your less endearing traits my son.” Gorgo spoke from where she sat in the chair next to a smiling Aricia.

“Introductions first father, so you know who it is you are speaking too and their grasp of the situation.” Andro stated turning and motioning to where Devra sat. Her green eyes grew much wider when she saw this. “Allow me to introduce Regent Devra Re Mydala of the Vanari Empire. This is *Inamarno's* mother. Naesta, Arduri and Nirilo as well.”

Martin bowed his head to her without hesitation. “It is an honor Regent Re Mydala.” He spoke.

Devra rose to her feet quickly. “It is... oh my... it is my honor Milord King Leonidas.”

Martin turned quickly to Andro. “You didn't tell her?” He asked.

Andro shook his head. “There really hasn't been a whole lot of time for small talk father. I haven't had the chance.”

Devra looked horrified. “Tell me what? Oh... what have I done Bren?” She exclaimed turning to look at Bren and her image shimmering in and out of view.

Bren smiled and moved up next to her. “You have done nothing Devra my mate.” He said.

Devra looked down at her hands which were fading in and out of sight. “What is wrong?”

“Avi designed the program for all us to be sitting. The more relaxed our physical bodies are, the easier it is for the emitters to compensate.” Martin said with a smile. “I'm guessing you just stood up because you think you have done something wrong?”

“Put your mind at ease Devra Re Mydala and please sit back down.” Wayonn spoke from near one of the massive windows. “Martin is not one to stand on formality, especially from those who are now part of his family.”

Devra’s image stopped fading in and out and once more became clear and seamless as she looked at where Caliria sat. “Forgive me.” She said quickly. “This is... this technique of communication is so very... it is utterly amazing.”

“The Vanari don’t have this?” Martin asked surprised.

Devra shook her head. “Holographic communications yes... but nothing of this advanced technology and utter clarity.”

Martin smiled. “Pretty cool huh?”

“It is astounding.” Devra exclaimed.

“You’ll get used to it.” Martin said with a grin. “You can make your projection do just about anything you want from where you are as you get stronger in Mindvoice. I’m sure Bren will make sure he works with his new mate every day.”

Bren nodded. “Without question sire.” He replied.

Andro moved in front of Caliria and his image reached out to pull her to her feet and he held her hand. “Father... mothers... this is *Inamarno*. Caliria Re Mydala.”

Caliria looked up into the eyes of Andro's father. Even his holographic image was imposing she decided. She watched as he reached out and took her holographic hand in his and his dark eyes almost twinkled.

“This is not exactly how we like to meet new additions to our family.” Martin told her with warmth in his voice. “I must apologize that we can not meet you and Lu'ria and Ne'Veha and Carisia in person.” His eyes drifted to each of them, finally coming to rest on Carisia. “And I want you to know that we will make up for it. Especially to those who I have caused pain with my words.”

Carisia choked back a reply and ended up only smiling at him for an apology she never thought she needed. “I look forward to that day.” She finally said.

Martin bowed his head to her with a smile and released Caliria’s hands. He looked at Andro. “Maybe someday you’ll fill me in on how you got all of them to fall in love with you. Doesn’t seem natural.”

“Certainly father... as soon as you tell us how you tricked our mothers into falling in love with you.” Andro stated with a smile.

That brought laughter from most everyone in the room and caused Martin to blush red under his tanned skin. “He’s got a point father.” Lisisa spoke from where she sat.

Martin looked at his oldest son. “Wise ass.” He muttered. The movement to their right caused them to turn and watch as Anja rose from her spot next to Cirith and Gorgo and she crossed the room to stand in front of where Eliani and Jomann stood by the huge window. Anja gazed at her daughter, took in the glowing face and eyes, not to mention the smallish bruises and the two puncture marks in the crook of her shoulder.

“Eli?” Anja asked softly. “Is this...?”

Eliani nodded quickly and her image stepped closer to Jomann, taking his thick arm in her hands. “This is Jomann momma.” She said.

Anja looked up at the tall Spartan. “He is... he is very tall Eli.” Anja finally muttered.

“Everyone is tall to you Red.” Martin spoke as he stepped over in front of Jomann who seemed to take a deep breath.

Anja turned her head and looked at him. “Watch yourself lover.” She warned using her hand to slap him hard in the abdomen. “You just might wake up one morning shorter than you are now if you get me drift.”

Martin winced. “Ouch! Check fire! Check fire!”

Anja smiled brilliantly and turned back to Jomann. “My first bit of advice Jomann... we can be a devious bunch. Careful.”

Jomann’s eyes darted back and forth between Anja and martin and he nodded. “Thank you my... my Queen.”

Martin looked down into his daughter’s beautiful beaming face and reached out with his hands. Jomann watched as she placed her palms in his and looked at him. “Did he steal your breath away Eli?” Martin asked her with a soft smile.

Eliani smiled and nodded her head quickly. “Yes poppa!” She answered. “And so much more. He...”

“I don’t need details!” Martin barked quickly. He looked at Jomann. “Not from you! I’ll get them from your brothers when I see them.”

“You sure will!” Denali chimed in.

“And all the complaints as well for keeping us awake for ten hours straight!” Arrarn offered up.

“Or never letting us get to sleep to begin with.” Normya Leonidas added her two cents from the couch where she sat with Tir’ut.

Tir’ut leaned closer to his beautiful half elf Blessed Wife. “*Il kal'daka darthirii...* we were not sleeping.” He whispered.

Normya poked him in the ribs with her elbow, looking ridiculously small sitting next to him. “They don’t need to know that.” Normya hissed drawing smiles from everyone.

Anja’s eyes grew a little wider now. “Ten hours straight?” She said. “Wow... I’m very suitably impressed.”

“Momma stop!” Eliani exclaimed as Jomann’s face flushed and became red. She turned to where Arrarn sat between Narice and Toria. “And it was eleven hours you *riad aulved!* You can’t even tell time!”

“Oh... pardon me!” Arrarn snapped right back.

All of them heard the snort of mirth and turned to see Devra barely holding the laughter in. Deia leaned forward from her seat next to Helen with a smile on her face. “You should see them when they are actually together.” She stated.

“Every minute I spend among your people... it alters everything the Vanari have been led and brought up to believe.” Devra told her. She looked at Wayonn. “You told me this all those years ago and I just never believed.”

Wayonn nodded. “It just took a little longer than I had anticipated for you to discover it yourself.” He stated. “No harm done. Though... this action is not precisely what I meant for you to understand.”

“I do not understand this!” The female voice erupted causing all of them to turn and look at Shiria. She sat on the couch with Athani and her face showed her confusion and even some anger. “How can you act this way with everything that is going on? We should be making plans! Discussing tactics! Not having this ridiculous sexual banter back and forth between all of you!”

Martin and Andro turned and looked at Resumar now who simply shrugged his shoulders in helplessness. “I tried to explain it to her father, but I obviously didn’t do a very good job.” He said.

“Then perhaps I can.” Arzoal’s voice spoke. It was not surprising to those who had experienced it before, but to those who saw it for the first time it was truly a wonder. Arzoal’s muzzle actually moved with the words she spoke and Shiria looked stunned. “You forget that there are almost no restrictions within this type of communication my sister Pralor. When Avi first developed this I told him I wanted it so that our muzzles and lips could move like we were actually talking. It is less shocking for those when they come here for the first time.”

“Arzoal... we have so much to...” Shiria began to speak.

“Yes we do... however... much of the strength and power behind the Lycavorian people as a whole and the Leonidas family in particular is their ability to adapt.” Arzoal spoke. “No matter how dark it may appear... they use laconic humor to keep their grasp on reality. When they lose that ability Shiria... then it will be time for us to worry. They have a missing mate and mother... but to not acknowledge the love and sense of family that has got them this far would be betraying For'mya and all they stand for. All that she helped raise them to acknowledge.”

Shiria looked at Resumar briefly and then back to Arzoal. “Forgive me.” She said softly.

“You have done nothing wrong so forgiveness is not needed.” Helen spoke now rising to move next to the projection of her Bonded Sister. “We are very different from what you have experienced with most of the Kavalian people Shiria. You have been away from those who are like you as well... for far too long. It is time for you to see what your actions through the millennia have wrought. And then perhaps you can teach those Kavalians who are actually on our side and want nothing more than to live in peace and prosper.”

Shiria looked at her and smiled. “I was very happy when I felt Canth pass his memories and knowledge to you Helen.” She spoke. “He made a superior choice.”

Helen laughed softly. “Some would debate that with you.” She said. “I will not.”

Martin turned and moved to the center of the room. “Alright... let’s get started.” He spoke.

“Father... where is Uncle Daniel?” Andro asked.

Martin met his eyes. “He’s filling out the last of our gear and loading Yuriko’s OMEN.” He said.

“Why?” Andro pressed his father further.

Martin’s eyes hardened into small points. “Because I’m done waiting. Once your meeting is over I’m going hunting. I may not be able to kill my brother but...”

“**STOP IT!**” Gorgo screamed as she came to her feet startling everyone.

They all turned to look at her with looks of astonishment and Martin took a step towards her with a worried expression on his face. “Mother what...”

Gorgo looked at him, her still beautiful face twisted into what appeared to be a mask of pain. Riall stepped towards her reaching for him with one hand.

“Gorgo my love... now is not...” He began to speak.

“No my mate!” Gorgo spat turning to look at him. “I can not let this continue anymore! I won’t let this continue anymore! I cannot!”

Martin looked from his mother to Riall and then back again. “Mother... mother what is going on?”

Gorgo turned back to face him. “Do you think I don’t know my son?” She rasped. “Did you think I would never discover it?”

“Discover what?” Martin asked his face a mask of confusion.

Gorgo moved closer to him, looking up into his face. “Your Queens and I speak of so much when you are not around Martin Leonidas.”

Martin turned and looked to where Aricia and the others were sitting. He watched his anome slowly get to her feet and move closer, her azure blue eyes focused on Gorgo. “Gorgo... we do not have to discuss this now.” She said softly. “Truly... it...”

“When will we discuss it Aricia?” Gorgo spoke looking at her. Her eyes drifted over Anja, Dysea, Isabella and even Cirith. “I can not allow this to go on any longer. Not after what has happened.”

“Allow what to go on?” Martin asked quickly. “What’s going on?”

Gorgo moved closer to him and inhaled deeply of her son’s minty scent. The same scent he had when he was only three months old. She could remember vividly that day she lost him on that ship and what she felt as she saw it explode. She could remember exactly what emotions tore through her when she thought her last connection to her beloved Leonidas was lost forever. She could remember with utter clarity the day he came into that cell on Lycavore and wrapped her within his arms because he knew who she was. She had thought it all some sort of twisted dream meant to torture her mind while a prisoner. On that day Gorgo had been reborn. The baby she had thought gone forever returned to her fully grown, a proud and intimidating Spartan. The image of his father and it took her breath away. Through these past years she had seen the man he had grown into with the initial guidance of Dymas the Guardian of the Line and then later with the gentle hand of William Wallace watching over him. There was some truth to the rumor among the citizens of the Union that if you wanted something from King Leonidas you needed to go to his mother and she would get it for you. He never refused his mother and Gorgo knew this was right. The day he had brought her home to Sparta had been the happiest day of her life and to know that he was allowing suffering to those he loved because of her was not something she could live with anymore.

“It must end Martin.” Gorgo spoke reaching up to place her palm to his cheek. “It must end now.”

“That would be good... I’ll end it... if I knew what in the hell you were talking about.” Martin told her.

“Do you think I don’t know why you can not kill him?” Gorgo asked. “Do you think I don’t know why you did not kill him that day so long ago? Why you have let him cling to a life that is not his all of these years?”

Martin’s face softened somewhat as he realized what his mother was talking about now. “Mother you...”

“Have you never wondered why I did not support your action in reinstating his Spartiates status so you could rise a statue to him on King’s row?” Gorgo spoke. “You did this out of love for a brother you never knew and even then I knew it was wrong.”

“Your reasons were your own mother.” Martin spoke. “I will never...”

“Why didn’t you kill him Martin?” Gorgo asked him suddenly cutting off his words.

“What?” He gasped.

“You had him between your jaws!” Gorgo continued. “You had beaten him because you fought for more than power and wealth! You fought for love and honor and...”

“Mother this...”

“Why didn’t you kill him that day damn you?” Gorgo screamed out causing his eyes to grow wide.

Riall took another step towards her, reaching out once more but stopped in his tracks when Andro lifted his arm and pointed at him. “No grandfather Riall.” He said sternly shaking his head as he held out his other arm, keeping his brothers and sisters from moving forward as well.

Martin stared at his mother not even hearing his son’s words. “How... how can you ask me that mother?” He stammered.

“Answer my question!” Gorgo snarled at him.

“Mother...”

“Answer me *anse forn!*”

Martin’s eyes flared angrily. “He is your son!” He barked out. “My brother! I would not take his life before your eyes! I would not...!”

The slap was resounding and even in the holographic generated scenario, because of the Mindvoice power of both Gorgo and Martin, it connected as if it was a real blow. Martin Leonidas staggered back slightly, his hand going to his face where her hand had struck him his eyes wide in disbelief. He glanced at her again, only to have another slap connect to the side of his face; Gorgo’s face a masquerade of pain and anguish.

“Your brother Pleistarchus is dead!” Gorgo screamed out. “He is dead! He died the day he betrayed his people and his blood! All these years I have lived with the knowledge that you did not kill him because of me! Because I was there witnessing it! Because in your mind I had suffered enough in my life! No more Martin! No more do you hear me!”

“It... I would be dishonoring you to do such a thing! Dishonoring our father!” Martin hissed softly. “To take his life before the eyes of our mother! No! I will...”

“He is dead!” Gorgo barked angrily. “Do you hear me? He is dead! Daniel Simpson is your brother! He has always been your brother! If not by blood then by all the two of you have experienced and lived through together!” Gorgo moved closer to him and reached out to take his face in her hands. He shrunk back initially fearing she would hit him again but Gorgo was too fast and her hands took his face in their grasp. “Ritaro and Clelon and Ciuss are your half brothers and they love you knowing no distinction! Just as you have raised your own sons!”

“Mother I can’t...”

“You will not do this anymore!” Gorgo spat at him. “You will let go of this false emotion you have! I will not let you allow harm to come to those who you love because of some silly vow you made to me.”

“It is not silly!” Martin growled.

“This man has taken your mate! Your *Kinsoargai!* A woman who is part of who you are my son!” Gorgo hissed at him.

“You don’t think I know that?” Martin barked angrily. “I see her face every time I close my eyes!”

Gorgo gripped his face tighter pulling him down slightly until their faces were only inches apart. “For years since that day I have gone to your father’s place. Do you know why I go there Martin? I go there because I carry a burden that only he and I can carry and I carry it for both of us!”

“Mother you...”

“Be silent!” Gorgo snapped. “For years I have gone there in the hopes that one day he would appear to me as he appeared to you. To give me guidance and tell me what to do with this burden I carry for both of us! I have not asked that question of him in over a decade Martin, because it was not needed and we have gone on with our lives and lived happy and free.” She shook her head. “I had hoped perhaps... I had hoped that it would never need to be spoken of again. I am not so lucky it seems.”

“Mother this is not your fault!” Martin told her pulling her close to him.

Gorgo met his eyes. “But it is Martin.” She said softly. “It is my fault because your vow to me has kept you from following your Spartan and Lycavorian instincts. Had you done what your blood told you to do that day, your *Kinsoargai* would not be suffering as she is now. Believing you are dead! Believing all she loves is dead!”

“I don’t... we don’t know that.” Martin said softly.

“Don’t we?” Gorgo told him. “It ends now Martin my son!”

“Mother I can...”

“Your father came to me Martin my son.” Gorgo said her face animate and bright and she watched Martin’s eyes grow wide. “Your father came to me in my dreams in this very place where we are not two days ago!”

Martin looked up at Riall quickly and he nodded. “She would not let me tell anyone.” He stated. “I was... I was beside myself. She levitated off the bed and...”

Gorgo smiled brilliantly. “We walked along the Evrotas river Martin, just as we used too so many thousands of years ago. He felt my anguish and pain and the gods of time and mystery allowed him to come and see me one last time. Just as he appeared to you. He finally was able to tell me himself what he did not that day he left. What he told you to tell me.”

Martin’s eyes were wide and his face bright as he listened to her. “What did he... what did he tell you mother?”

“He lives in you Martin. He lives in me. In all of us. Just as you showed me... he sees everything we see.” Gorgo spoke softly enrapturing everyone in the room. “We talked of many things my son... the pride he feels for you. For how you and your wives and mates have raised your children. All of them, especially your sons. He gave me his blessing to do what I am going to do now Martin.”

“His blessing?” Martin gasped.

Gorgo nodded her head. “His blessing to tell you to let go!” She spoke. “Your brother died over three thousand years ago Martin Leonidas. Your father and I will no longer have you allow him to cause harm to others because of us.”

“What?” Martin gasped.

“Hear me Martin Leonidas.” Gorgo spoke. “I speak with the words of your father as well as my own now. We release you from this false vow you feel you must carry. This man... this Pusintin... he has taken your mate. Your *Kinsoaurgai*. He has hurt her... caused her pain. It is your duty as a Spartan and King to stop this.”

“I will mother.” Martin said. “I will and I...”

Gorgo shook her head. “You are not hearing me!” She snapped loudly. “We release you Martin! If this man has... if he has defiled your mate... if he has forced himself upon her then there is only one thing we want of you my son.”

Gorgo stepped back from him and straightened the jumpsuit she wore before taking a deep breath. Martin stepped towards her but she held up her hand. She lifted her head and met his eyes.

“If this man has done these things you fear... if he has gone against the very blood that runs in his veins then it proves he died long ago.” Gorgo spoke. “If he has done these things Martin... then you have only one mission. You do what it takes... no matter the risk or the consequences... and you return your *Kinsoaurgai* to her place here with her family. Where she belongs. You remove the chains that bind you my son and you do what must be done. As a Spartan and a Lycavorian.”

“I will mother.” Martin said. “I swear to you I will.”

“And this man who has done these things.” Gorgo spoke softly looking up into his face. “This man... you bring your father and I his vile head on your shield!” Gorgo spoke those last words with more vitriol than anyone had ever heard from her in their lifetimes. Her words drew gasps of stunned shocked from many people in the room with them as she glared at her son.

“You bring us his head on your shield Martin Leonidas... for only then will it be truly over. Only then will he atone for the crimes he has committed.” Gorgo spoke harshly. Her image took a deep breath and she stood up to her full height. “I have said my peace and now I am going to go and play with my grandchildren. Remember Martin my son, He watches over everything we see. In your reflection he lives in you.”

CHAPTER SEVENTY

STRIKER DT MARK II *STRIKER 11* ARRIVING HADARIA CENTRAL SPACEPORT

It was quiet in the rear of the Mark II *STRIKER DT* as Arrarn Leonidas easily guided the ship down through the atmosphere, the three Hadarian Defense Forces Interceptors trying to keep pace with the much larger ship with a pilot who could fly circles around them in his sleep. Toria Leonidas kept looking over at her half elf husband, none of the Leonidas children having spoken a whole lot after what had taken place during their communication. Lady Gorgo's words and emotional display had taken everyone by complete surprise and even several minutes after she had departed the linked communication it still came as quite a shock. Toria gazed at Arrarn and his beautiful handsome face from the side, her large, clear blue eyes never tiring of looking at him. Just as they never tired of looking at Narice. Toria Leonidas blessed the day she was chosen to go on the mission to Earth, for it had brought her first to Narice and then it gave them both the chance to discover the man they worshiped in Arrarn Leonidas. He was without a doubt the most handsome of the Leonidas sons, and both Toria and Narice knew that there were many young Lycavorian and elf females who were now disappointed that he was no longer available. He belonged to her and Narice body and mind and he made no bones about that in the least. They had spent three more hours within the transmission, different parts of what they would do being discussed, but it was very obvious to even the casual observer that everyone's minds were now elsewhere. Especially that of the King himself.

She and Narice had discovered early on that there was a special connection between all of the Leonidas children, a connection that no one else could understand. A place where they could talk amongst themselves whenever they wanted within Mindvoice. A special place that wasn't accessible even to those they loved and called wife or husband. They would share whatever was spoken of with those that they loved Toria knew, but this particular instance had rattled all of them and it was going to take some time before they began to share what they had spoken of she knew.

"Arrarn?" She spoke softly.

Arrarn's dark eyes turned to look at her. "Ummm?"

"Are you..." Toria began to ask.

Arrarn reached over knowing instantly what she was trying to do and took her hand from the control panel. He leaned over and brought it to his lips where he kissed her soft knuckles and then nodded his head. "I am fine." He told her.

"She is your mother Arrarn." Toria said softly. "I don't think anyone would expect you to not be savagely angry at what has happened. What the Kavalians have done. What we may have to see."

Arrarn nodded his head. "And in order to help her... in order to help her Toria my wife, I need to maintain my calm so we can do what we came here to do."

"Androcles and your father did not say much after your grandmother's display." Toria spoke. "He has not said much since the end of the transmission to be honest. Many of us were... we were wondering if he was ok?"

Arrarn turned his head back and adjusted their course as they broke through the clouds and the landscape of Hadaria filled their cockpit windows. "Yes... he has spoken." Arrarn told her. "He just hasn't spoken with words Toria. He is the most private of all of us Toria, far too much like our father when it comes to holding in his feelings. He speaks with Elynth and his mates in Mindvoice when he becomes contemplative like he has been. Andro is... he is the rock we all lean on. Next to my father and my Uncle Danny, I don't think I know of a man who has more willpower and utter determination than my brother."

"Is this why he refused to let Narice come with us?" Toria asked.

Arrarn looked at her again. "He didn't let Narice come with us because of who she is Toria, you know that." He answered her. "The Kavalians are still at war with the High Coven and the moment they saw her exit the ship she would have become a prime target no matter what else was happening. They know who she is and they would have come after her. Andro is not about to let that happen and neither will I. Besides... she does not have your analytical skills and that is why Andro wanted you here." He told her. "Because not only can you help me to fly the *STRIKER*, but your other skills are invaluable my beautiful wife and mate. Primarily your skills of observation because of your training."

Toria nodded. "I know... take note of everything I see and file it away."

"He trusts you Toria." Arrarn told her. "You are my mate and wife. Never doubt he does not trust you completely. You would not be here if he did not."

“There are just times when your brother frightens me *Du'ased m'ranndii*.” Toria said as she adjusted their thruster power. “I know that it is silly after all he has done to save us but I can’t help it. Many of us can’t.”

Arrarn smiled warmly at her. “There are times when he frightens all of us Toria.” He stated. “Just remember that you are a Leonidas now. Part of our family. Andro more than any of us takes that very seriously.”

“Hadarian Flight Leader to Union *STRIKER*. Respond.” The male voice broke in over the COM.

Arrarn turned and looked out his cockpit window at the fighter that was flying off to their side. “*STRIKER 11*. Go ahead.”

“You are directed to land at the Western Continent Elder Militia Compound.” The voice told them.

“Negative Flight Leader.” Arrarn replied tersely. “The stipulation as stated in our earlier communications to us was to land at the former palace of my mother on the East Field. That was the plan.”

“Your routing has been changed *STRIKER 11*.” The pilot of the fighter answered with a large amount of sarcasm in his voice. “You are now directed to land at the Western Continent Elder Militia Compound where your ship and anyone on board will undergo a thorough search for weapons or elicited material.”

Arrarn turned as Andro came into the cockpit. “By whose order?” He snapped.

“By order of Elder Healer and Prime Minister Buonau.” The pilot answered in a tone that seemed to ask if Arrarn was stupid.

“That is not the procedure we agreed too.” Arrarn spoke again.

“The Prime Minister is changing the procedure, or did you not understand me the first time?” The pilot snickered.

“She’s pressing... trying to see what we will let her get away with. She knows how badly we want this meeting... if only to see mother.” Andro spoke.

“So?” Arrarn asked.

Andro nodded. “We will play their game for now *fervon*.” He said. “How soon until we get there?”

Arrarn’s hands were moving over his control console. “Twenty minutes. As soon as I dust these idiots.”

Andro grinned. “By all means.” He said leaning over to kiss Toria softly on the cheek and watching as her eyes turned to him in surprise.

“You have no reason to fear me Toria Leonidas.” He said softly reaching up to place his hand on her shoulder and squeezing gently. “Always remember that.”

“*STRIKER 11* acknowledges your transmission Flight Leader.” Arrarn spoke as he smiled at his brother’s words to his wife.

“Fall into formation behind me.” The pilot ordered. “We will escort you...”

“We know the way Flight Leader.” Arrarn interrupted him. “And we certainly don’t need you to escort us!”

“I have my orders *STRIKER 11!*”

“*Nubou* your orders!” Arrarn barked out stabbing down on his console. “And have a nice day!”

The Mark II *STRIKER DT* executed a near ninety-degree turn and its powerful engines lit the sky brightly as it accelerated away from the chasing Hadarian fighters with little trouble. The *STRIKER DTs* were all designed for speed and maneuverability first, combat second, and the Hadarian fighters could not match either. Andro pounded Arrarn on the shoulder with a smile before turning and moving back into the rear section of the *STRIKER DT* Mark II. The interior layout was almost identical to the old *STRIKER DTs*, but now four slightly smaller dragon pens occupied the rear of the ship instead of two. The center of the ship had a somewhat larger star chart table and an additional couch, while all the quarters were now set in the back of the ship. Since these ships had been designed specifically for different members of the Royal Family, much of what they had done to their old *STRIKER DTs* showed in the color and design of the interior on the Mark IIs. There were only two quarters on Andro’s *STRIKER*, one for the pilots and then one for Andro and his mates. The pilot’s quarters were far smaller than usual because Ben knew Sadi and Ne’Veha would now be doing most of the flying and they would have no need for a third pilot.

At the moment... only Elynth and Tharua occupied the dragon pens, while Sadi, Eliani and Jomann sat on the couches in the gathering area of the *STRIKER*. Andro moved back to where they were sitting as they looked up at him.

“The Western Continent Elder Militia Compound.” He told them.

Eliani snorted derisively. "Right smack in the middle of the area of the planet that most supports her." She snarled. "Why doesn't that surprise me? *Carians*... she is so *nubous* obvious it is pathetic!"

Andro smiled and settled onto the couch next to Sadi. "I concur." He spoke. "I wouldn't doubt if she was getting her directives from the Kavalians though. Any word on what ships are in orbit or the immediate system?" He asked looking at Jomann.

Jomann nodded quickly. "Pusintin's command ship is here. *PRIDE OF PUMAS* it is called. Sa'sur was able to pass that on just after we left the *SCIMITAR*." He answered. "Holding its station five million kilometers from the planet itself. I didn't want to scan too deeply even though they most likely can not pick up our passive array."

Andro nodded and looked at Eliani. "Eli... are you sure you can detect where this Static Inhibitor is positioned in mother if you get close enough?"

Eliani nodded. "General Esavorna was quite specific." She replied. "He explained to me exactly what I would feel when I felt it. He tested it with Duewa on Earth before passing the information on. It radiates a very low frequency humming that can only be picked up by the sensors from CS41 and I know we don't want to reveal that. I have already practiced with the inhibitor we have on board and to my abilities it will appear as a shadow of sorts. Just as Duewa explained. A void where something should be but is not. The General said it should not be very far beneath her skin, but still deep enough where it will not appear as if something is there outwardly. More than likely that is why she doesn't even know it is inside her."

"And there is no way to block it?" Andro asked.

Eliani shook her head. "He has been working with the team trying to discover a way since he arrived on Earth Andro. Doctor Olemi says he has been working twenty hour days to try and discover something we can use, contacting Avi when he needs help." Eliani shrugged her shoulders. "They are close... but nothing that we can use right now."

Sadi looked at him. "If she thinks we are all dead and they have not told her who will be here at this meeting... she is going to be an emotional wreck when she sees us *Saradasaar*. She may not even believe it because she can not feel us within Mindvoice."

Andro nodded his head. "I know." He said softly looking at her. "Thirty seconds. That's all I need. Thirty *nubous* seconds." He looked at them. "Whether she can feel us or not... thirty seconds is all I need to let her know everything she needs to know."

"And she will not try to harm herself?" Sadi asked gently looking at him. "Knowing that your father lives and what she has no doubt been forced to do? She will not attempt to harm herself?"

Eliani shook her head slowly. "Not if what we fear is true." She said softly. "Her elven blood... the very basic instinct ingrained in all elves back to the time that the Elder Mother told Andro about will not allow her to. It is only a matter of if she will believe what Andro will tell her. To grasp onto that and believe."

"You fought with her all those years ago on Apo Prime *KertaGai*." Andro said. "On the island there. Did she strike you as weak minded?"

Sadi shook her head quickly. "No! Never!"

"Our mother has endured much that many people outside of our family do not know the details to *KertaGai*." Androcles said. "You have seen some of it within my thoughts... but I have seen what my father saw. I have seen his memories of what she has endured and how strong she truly is. I keep them hidden away because they are his memories... but she..." Andro shook his head. "I don't know what she will do *KertaGai*. Our second elven mother is strong... and she has endured almost as much as my mother did on Enurrua but Eliani is right. It will be up to her to believe."

"Can't we just *not* tell her some things until the time is better?" Sadi asked. "Until we learn how to disable this inhibitor?"

Andro shook his head. "No... I will pass to her what my father and mothers told me to tell her and she will know what do to. She has to know everything in order for her to keep hope. Then all I can do is pray she does not hate me for doing it."

Even Eliani looked at him when he said that. "Andro... why would she hate you?" She asked.

Andro shook his head quickly. "It is a figure of speech." He said dismissing it. "Let's worry about what *Tenna Deia* and the *Feravomir* gave to us so we can be prepared when we meet with the High Court this afternoon. We will need to fill Grandfather L'tian in when he arrives later."

“Androcles... why can't we just reveal what these inhibitors are?” Jomann asked now. “They are High Coven made... why can't we demand the Kavalians prove she is not being affected by one?”

Eliani looked up at him and smiled brightly as she reached out and took his hand. “If we reveal what they are Jomann my love, we reveal information that we are not supposed to have.” She spoke.

“I don't... I don't understand.” He spoke.

“There are many who still don't believe our abilities are natural Jomann.” Andro told him. “Even Aikiro thought we were somehow training our Bonded Pairs with some sort of machine from CS41 that increases Mindvoice power and she should have known better. Many Hadarians accept that my mother can do things that others can not... but if you press them on the issue they will begin to revert to their scientific nature and dismiss most of what we know to be true.”

Eliani nodded as she drew him down onto the couch with her, leaning into his body with no hesitation. “Especially Buonau and many of the Elder Healers.” She said. “Add to that the fact that they have hated my mother and father ever since she returned because they could not control her.”

“Most people believe the Bonded Pairs can do what we can do because of our dragons.” Andro spoke. “They don't take into account that Mindvoicing is a natural progression for our species as we grow. And since most do not advance this skill past a Tier Three level... most can not to be honest... they do not see what we can do.”

“They saw you obliterate the Western Clinic in Sparta in living color on the Netnews.” Jomann said. “I saw that! How do they explain two psychic balls of power coming from your hands and destroying the building! Even after that they don't believe?”

Andro smiled and shook his head. “They will believe what makes them comfortable.” He said. “The inhibitors are based on Pralor technology that Empress Aikiro recovered from CS19. Technology that the Kavalians got their hands on when certain High Coven officers defected. I sincerely doubt Aikiro meant for them to acquire this technology. It was meant... designed to be used against us. To be honest... I doubt the Coven officers who helped to steal it even knew where it came from... only what it could do. General Esavorna is relatively certain that no one outside of the actual control group of who built these inhibitors knew where they came from. Aikiro kept the knowledge she gained from CS19 among only a few people. Those who General Esavorna had questions about...” Andro shrugged his shoulders. “He eliminated them over the last few years.”

Sadi nodded. “To reveal *what* we know about the inhibitors Jomann, that would mean we have to reveal *how* we know about them.” She said. “In order to do that we would then have to reveal that they are based on an advanced alien technology that the Union has complete access too. A fact that would not please many people in the galaxy to be sure. It will only balloon from there.”

Andro nodded his head in agreement with Sadi. “Our technological advances right now are carefully crafted to appear as if our scientists have developed them on their own. While the practical applications we did set up, the technology was already there on CS41. We didn't need to discover it... just how to use it. And we have had Avi to help us do that. If we revealed this, it would lead to the Kavalians and every other scum out there wanting to discover it themselves. And then it could very well lead the Kavalians to discover Resumar and Athani and *Tenna* Tarifa and what they are doing.”

“But Laustinos knows all this doesn't he?” Jomann asked. “He would have told your uncle and the Kavalians this already.”

Andro shook his head. “The data files concerning how CS41 arrived on Earth and where it is now are kept on a completely different and wholly secure network tied into Dreamland. When my father first brought CS41 to Earth, Avi brought the ship in very quickly. Father had already chosen where the ship was going to go. Those men and women who still lived in the area were sworn to secrecy and offered positions either within the military helping to secure CS41, or actually living on the ship. That is why you will see many hundreds of men and women the next time you go there. They live and work beside the dragons helping to care for the eggs and to keep the systems at peak operating efficiency. When you come right down to it, they are perhaps the most loyal of Union citizens. In order to access the systems you would need to go to Dragon Mountain itself and enter the main computer core there.” He answered him. “Laustinos never had access to that, only eleven of us do, and any attempt by him to discover this information even if he did get wind of it somehow, would have been detected and dealt with in a matter of minutes. You have never met our Uncle Ben... and a more vicious and security oriented human turned vampire you will never meet. He and the Elder Mother devised all the security

systems within Dragon Mountain and most of those at Dreamland. She is just as protective of the technology as we are. She is a Pralor after all.”

“This puts us at a tactical disadvantage immediately.” Jomann said.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes it does... but the alternative is too terrible to contemplate.” He spoke. “It is why our father ordered that VORTEX Cruiser 341 be destroyed.”

Eliani nodded now as well not seeing the look that Sadi gave Andro out of the corner of her eye. “To keep the technology out of the Kavalian’s hands.” She said in agreement. “Though mother and I would have really enjoyed getting in there and seeing the medical bay.”

Andro nodded his head. “We will have to make due.” He said. “Eli... you do realize that once Buonau discovers you are with me, she is going to be incensed. She may even attempt some fool thing regardless of the Kavalians being here.”

“Let them *nubous* try.” Jomann growled menacingly. “I will bury them.”

Eliani beamed brilliantly and leaned even further into Jomann’s body, quite intimately in fact, and her skin and blood flushed excitement at the possessive words of her new mate. This is what she had not felt from Malic. The desire and possessive tone of his voice when he spoke of her in any way and it only confirmed for her that Jomann had always been the one she had been meant for. Just as Andro had told her. “Wow, we are so very possessive of me my love.” She said looking at him with adoring fern green eyes and smiling.

“Just keep your sharp tongue and your temper in check and don’t do anything stupid Eli.” Andro said. “I would prefer your new mate and I did not have to kill anyone in order to pull your ass out of the fire.”

Eliani looked at him and nodded. “I won’t.” She said. “But I am also not going to be bullied by Buonau’s Elder Militia Guard assholes either.”

Andro smiled. “Fair enough.” He said. He looked at Jomann. “I told you she had a sharp tongue.”

Jomann chuckled. “I like her tongue Andro, sharp though it may be.” He stated proudly.

Eliani grinned like a Cheshire cat and stuck her tongue out at her brother. All four inches of it.

CURILA 6

Martin stood on the edge of the thousand foot cliff looking out over the blue/green ocean water in front of him. The sun was shining brightly in the cloudless sky and he watched as the waves splashed onto the beach far below. Torma rested on the ground behind him, his massive wings folded along his obsidian back, and his talons drawn up under his seven metric tons of muscle and bone so that he was prepared to launch himself into the air or an attack if needed. He had lost a few hundred pounds over the last weeks training nearly every day with his bonded brother and he felt better now than he had ever felt in his seven hundred plus years of life. Martin wore the standard Mark IV ArmorPly bodyarmor, with the indicative sections on the backs of his shoulders and legs where the Dragon Armor would extend from if he called upon it. He wore a shoulder holster with a new K14 KM secured in it, his combat harness worn tight and secure. The thin holster on his right leg carried his *Stiletto*, the new version of the *Nehtes*, and with its added dimension it was even deadlier than it was before. His original *Nehtes* he carried in a similar holster on his left thigh for he would never part with that. His helmet rested on the saddle Torma wore on his back, the five different shades of horse hair blowing gently in the ocean breeze. Raven black, Persian Red, Platinum Blond, Golden Blond, Midnight black. The hair color of all his Queens. And now he would need to add another shade of black to his helmet for his Queens were not going to let him dismiss what Cirith now meant to all of them, him included. He had just not come to accept it completely yet.

Martin smelled him before he saw him and he didn’t turn as Danny moved up alongside Torma and let his fingers draw along Torma’s muscular side. Torma turned his huge head and blinked his golden eyes at him, reaching out with his snout and brushing Danny in the shoulder. Danny patted Torma’s scales firmly and nodded at the massive dragon that had been his brother’s constant companion for over two decades now.

Martin didn’t turn to look at him. “We ready brother?” He asked his eyes still looking at the ocean before him as far as the eye could see.

Danny walked up next to him, dressed almost identically and nodded his head. “Waiting on go.” He answered quickly. “Jules has got everyone up to speed on the COMS, and she even installed some nice new

toys Ben sent us. It's... man it's really good to have her back Marty. Even if she is a vampire now, it's definitely the Jules we all knew. Right down to her snide one liners."

Martin nodded his head with a smile. "Yes it is. She was never meant to be taken away from us in the first place Danny. I truly believe that now... and this is how she was brought back to us."

Danny nodded. "Avoi." He whispered softly. "The Master Chief and T'lolt have been inseparable since he got here. Discussing which heavy weapons to bring in which scenario. I think Tony is thrilled to have someone who can actually carry the heavy shit as easy as he can. We're ready Skipper."

Martin turned to look at the ebony skin and dark eyes of the only man he had ever really called brother. The man who had been there beside him through the mud and the blood, the fires and the shrapnel. The laughter and the tears. "I don't deserve to call you my brother you know." Martin said softly.

Dan grinned broadly. "No you don't." He said. "You're too pale you know. And you fucking snore too loud!" Martin laughed as Danny stepped closer to him and put his hand on his shoulder. "Listen... about what your mother said Marty." He shook his head not used to being serious in anything that did not concern Anuk and Nayeca but knowing this was something he had to do. "He is your brother and..."

Martin shook his head now and reached up to grip Dan's arm. "No." He said. "My mother is right Danny. Until she... until she hit me and made me see, I just never wanted to admit it. I always thought there could be hope."

"That's not a bad thing Marty." Danny spoke.

"Hope is not bad no... what I was hoping for was." Martin said. "Mother is right... my brother Pleistarchus died a long time ago. The man who occupies his body is my enemy and he has taken someone that belongs to me. Now I'm going to get her back and I will have the only brother I have ever known beside me."

"Behind you being the key phrase there!" Danny piped in quickly. "You stop bullets much better than I do."

Martin laughed and squeezed his arm. "I will do as my mother asks of me. I will take his head Danny... and I will end the dishonor he has brought to my family."

Danny nodded. "Sounds good to me. I never liked his sorry ass anyway."

Martin looked at him. "We can't seem to get away from conflict can we? You and I? We will always be fighting one battle or another."

"Without something to fight, Anuk and Nayeca would have carved me up and spit me out a long time ago." Danny spoke with a grin flashing his perfect white teeth. "I would have driven them insane until they got rid of me. Same goes for Anja and the others with you, cepting Anja and your mates are much more devious about it. It's in our blood brother. Ain't nothing ever gonna change that."

Martin nodded. "I know... I just didn't want this for our children as well."

Danny moved closer to him. "You know... Andro, Moneus, Anton, all of them... did you ever stop to consider that what they are doing is because they want too. Not because they feel they have too." Danny looked out over the ocean with his dark eyes. "Moneus said something to me that nightmare night on Alba Tau Marty. Something I have held close to my heart since that night and it's the reason I don't question what they decide anymore. Not that they would listen to me anyway..." He muttered.

Martin chuckled. "Yes... I know that feeling well." He said.

Dan turned back to face him with a serious expression. "When we were pinned down six hundred meters from Andro and you and all of us were hit, I was snarling mad because we had been stopped so close to reaching you and that if you died it would be my fault for failing. For allowing you and Andro to die, for allowing Moneus and the others to die. Moneus leaned over and looked me right in the eye, just like his mother does when she is about to drop a bomb on me." Danny smiled. "He told me... *"This is the life we have chosen father. This is the life we wish to lead. The life of a Spartan and a Lycavorian. Do not question our decision because we do not. If we die here this night... we will die proud and happy to have lived as we have. As our fathers have lived."*" Danny looked at Martin and squeezed his shoulder. "I about shit my pants that this was my son saying this. That this was the boy I had a part in bringing into this world. I haven't questioned anything any of them have wanted since then."

Martin turned his head and looked out over the horizon now as well. *"In the fury of this darkest hour we will be your light! A lifetime lived... we are meant for this destiny! For we are Spartan born! And in this moment... we will not run! It is our place to stand! We few shall carry hope within our bloodied hands! And in*

our Dying, we're more alive than we have ever been! We've lived for these few seconds! For we are Spartan born!" He spoke the words softly, almost reverently.

"You come up with that?" Danny asked.

Martin nodded and looked at him. "Me and Andro. That same night." He said.

Danny stared at him for a long moment. "That night... it was a turning point for a lot of us Marty. You included."

"I know." Martin said.

"You gave him the order didn't you?" He said.

Martin nodded once more. "He would have done it anyway... but technically since I'm still alive... I'm still King."

"Sucks doesn't it?" Danny spoke with a large smile.

"You have no idea brother." Martin spoke shaking his head.

"So... did he give this plan of his a name?" Danny asked. "It's gotta have a name or it ain't for shit."

Martin chuckled. "Actually... it was Sadi and Carisia who came up with the name." He said. "Simple but catchy."

Dan shrugged. "Well at least we know he takes after his old man and picks mates who are smarter than him." He quipped. "Hit me with it."

"Tsunami of Retribution." Martin said.

Danny's brow furrowed just a little. "Wow... remind me not to piss them off. They just may be worse than Anja and Aricia." He said. "I like it though."

"We have our first target?" Martin asked.

Danny nodded. "Kavalian listening post in the Erebus Expanse of The Wilds." Dan told him. "One of their forward LPs according to Yuriko. It will give us the access to their defense network that we need but not set any major alarms off within Kavalian space. At least not initially anyway. It only reports in every month and we are going to hit it three hours after their call in time."

Martin nodded. "I'm not going to stop this time Danny. I'm not going to stop until I am dead or For'mya is back in my arms. Our arms. If they aren't part of my son's Kavalian rebels then they are dead."

"Works for me. No paperwork that way." Danny said with a grin.

No fuss no muss. Torma's voice echoed in both their heads and they turned to look at him as he moved his massive body closer.

Danny grinned and shook his head. *Man... Torma you've been hanging around this joker far too much. You are starting to sound like him too.*

Martin reached up as Torma's snout came within reach and his hand looked ridiculously small against those obsidian scales. *You ready?* He asked.

Torma's huge head bobbed up and down. *Always.*

Martin nodded and moved around to his side, vaulting himself into the saddle. He looked at Danny. "Time to get this party started *fervon.*" He said holding out his hand.

Dan shook his head and took the offered hand. "Just so I don't have to ride him or Isheeni too often ok." Dan spoke as he settled into the saddle behind Martin. "You know I get air sick."

Martin turned in the saddle and laughed. "Yes I know. Torma... go!" He barked.

"Asssholleeeeee! Danny's voice echoed across the cliff for several moments after Torma launched them into the air.

"... Don't understand why I can't come with you?" Anja spoke as she looked up into Martin's dark brown eyes.

"You know why Red." He spoke pulling her closer to him as Torma was making his way into the Mark II *STRIKER* behind them. "You are the only one that can feasibly return to Sparta without too many questions being asked."

"That doesn't make me feel any better Martin." Anja said. "I should be with you."

"I have Aricia and *Melda Min* with me." Martin said. "You need to remain with Bella. She's about ready to pop and..."

“She’s got two more months before she gives birth you ass!” Anja declared looking up into his face.

Martin reached up and took her beautiful face in his hands bringing his forehead down to touch hers.

[Right now Anja... right now you are the one who will have the most influence over Andro. I have told you what he feels for having to destroy the Jump Gates?]

Anja nodded slowly. *[He did the only thing he could have Marty. He is our son and I would have done the same thing in his position! Any of us would have! It was the only option! I love him more for making the decision no one else would have.]*

Martin nodded. *[I know that. I know you know that. We all would have... but he still feels like he has shamed himself in your eyes in some way for having to order the deaths of so many Hadarians. They are your people and until he sees that you would have done the same thing... it will eat away at him every day. Especially now, because you know that bitch Buonau will make sure to construct his actions as central part of this phony meeting.]*

[You know... sometimes his sense of honor is almost as irritating as yours.] Anja told him.

Martin smiled and kissed her softly. *[I also know that if I call... you will move heaven and Earth to get to us. And that is the other reason I want you back here.]*

[Damn straight I will!] She snapped. *[You just make sure I am there when we get her back!]* Anja demanded.

Martin nodded. *[That is a promise.]*

They both turned as Aricia, Isabella and Dysea moved up beside them and pressed close. Martin closed his eyes and let both his aura and his Mindvoice shields envelope the women he loved. He opened them quickly when he realized Cirith was not among them, something that his wives and mates noticed with knowing smiles.

“Where is Cirith?” He asked.

Aricia smiled. “She is stowing her gear in our quarters.” She answered. “Bella believes she will be more valuable helping us than watching over her.”

Martin turned to look at Isabella. “Bella...”

She moved closer, as much as her pregnant abdomen would allow anyway, and put her hand on his face. “I do not need her to protect me *Du'ased m'ranndii*.” She said. “I already have *Melyanna* and I have put a request in to General Vengal to have him assign me two scouts from Colonel Norris’s Elite *Sanguine* pureblood unit. They are the finest trained purebloods from across the Union. Not to mention that Carina and Moneus will not let me out of their sight thanks to our son. I will be fine.”

“Why...” Martin began to speak.

Isabella shook her head. “She is part of our lives now Martin my husband. And I believe she will play a large part in our future. She has already shared all of herself with us... your wives and mates... and we have welcomed her most pleausurably I might add.” She said with a seductive smile. “Right now however... right now she needs to be with you.”

Martin let his eyes move to each of the women who had claimed a piece of his heart and finally he shook his head. “Ok... I see I am not going to win this fight.” He said.

“It is not a fight you should be having.” Anja told him. “Bella is right lover... and the sooner you come to realize that the better. We know you feel it too Marty... so deal with it will ya.”

Martin nodded his head slowly. “Yes... I feel it too.”

Isabella smiled and squeezed his hand. “Then claim her soon *Du'ased m'ranndii* and keep your focus on returning our *Kinsoargai* to us.” She said.

Martin crushed her to him as much as possible and laid a sizzling kiss of love on her lips that Isabella returned with all that she was. A similar kiss was bestowed on Anja and he nodded his head to them before Aricia and Dysea stepped forward to say their goodbyes and Martin moved to the ramp of the *STRIKER*. His eyes grew a little wider when he saw Wayonn moved down the ramp dressed in full Mark IV ArmorPly and his hands running up and down the new body armor that encased his form.

“Wayonn?” He questioned as he moved up to him. “What are you doing?”

Wayonn grinned at him. “What I’ve been doing for far more millennia than I care to remember.” He stated quickly. “I’m stepping off into the unfamiliar... *to hopefully guide those who blunder aimlessly to and fro in the darkness of the unknown.*” He pantomimed the last part of his sentence sarcastically.

Martin smiled as he looked at him. “I take it Sumar was like this.” He said.

Wayonn rolled his eyes. “Please... the man had no fear. He would do anything no matter how dangerous or idiotic it seemed in one second and then could be logical and reflective in the next. You are almost as confusing as he was. A trait that he has passed down to those with his blood I now see. And a trait those in my blood are rapidly picking up because of the time we spend with you.”

“I assume you have spoken with Dutkne then?” Martin asked him with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Did you know that he went with Androcles when they attacked that mercenary base?” Wayonn told him. “He didn’t question the insanity of the attack or what they were going to do. He just went with him. I have spent the better part of three hundred years schooling that boy to look before he leaps. A few weeks in the company of your son and all I ever taught him is tossed to the wind. Your son is just as bad an influence over Dutkne as you are of me. As Sumar was of me.”

Martin chuckled softly. “Sorry.” He said.

Wayonn smiled brightly. “*Son vada carians!* Don’t be sorry! I wouldn’t have it any other way!” He exclaimed. “Like you, I have grown tired of hiding who we are as a people. And if my guidance can help us to end this more quickly... then so be it.” Wayonn touched his right arm with his fingers. “This body armor your brother gave to me is utterly amazing. It actually conforms to us when we shift?”

Martin nodded. “Neat huh?” He said. “It’s the latest series... Mark IV C ArmorPly. You can activate the dragon armor extensions with a simple Mindvoice nudge on the inner control panel of your wrist.”

Wayonn nodded. “I see now why the Coven was never able to fully conquer our people.” He said. “Lycavorian scientists designed this?”

Martin nodded. “Yep. A lot of our newer stuff is based in some way on technology from CS41 that Avi helped us to understand. We didn’t go in the direction Aikiro did obviously but...”

“Do not compare yourself to her Martin Leonidas, for there is no comparison.” Wayonn said softly looking at him with bright and excited eyes. “You inspire others... guide others... and so many listen to you because they know you don’t want the job that you have. They find it refreshing.”

Martin chuckled. “They’re right about not wanting the job.” He said. “Man they are so right about that.”

“You are the leader we need moving into the future Martin my boy.” Wayonn said. “Do not doubt that.”

Martin stepped closer to him. “You are still having those feelings aren’t you?” He asked softly.

Wayonn nodded. “Not as strong or as frequently since coming here but yes.” He said. “I do not know how to explain it... but I feel as if we have gained time for some reason. How I do not know... but my perceptions have altered somewhat and I do not feel the urgency I did just before arriving here. It is still there... but I think something has happened that at least is buying us more time to deal with everything.”

Martin nodded. “Good. So we deal with it and then go from there.” He said. “Just like we always do.”

Wayonn looked at him. “Do you never take anything serious Martin Leonidas?” He asked him.

Martin shook his head. “Hell no! Taking things serious gives me a headache.” He retorted before moving up into the back of the *STRIKER*.

Wayonn shook his head with a smile before turning to follow him.

HADARIA

HADARIAN ELDER MILITIA COMPOUND

Andro gripped Sadi’s hand tightly as the ramp in front of them began to lower. Bright sunlight burst through the crack but their eyes quickly adjusted and they began to walk down the ramp as it lowered. Andro couldn’t help but smile when he saw nearly fifty of the Hadarian Elder Militia standing around the rear of the ramp. Though none of their weapons were pointed in their direction, all of them looked very nervous as the ramp finally lowered all of the way and they stepped off the edge onto the tarmac. That is when Andro saw the Kavalian officer making his way towards them from the terminal entrance, the Elder Militia Colonel beside him.

[*What... do they think six of us are going to ravage the planet?*] Arrarn snapped within Mindvoice.

[*What a bunch of cowards.*]

[*They’re treating us like criminals.*] Sadi commented.

Eliani shook her head. [*No. They are treating us like the enemy.*]

Andro didn't say anything as he watched the two men move closer and finally stop in front of them. The Kavalian officer looked to be a Colonel of some sort, his light layer of fur a dark sienna color. *[Interesting.]* Andro said.

Eliani glanced at her brother. *[What?]*

[Eli... what do you notice that is out of place from the last time we were here?] Andro asked her.

Eliani scanned the area all around them slowly, letting her eyes take everything in. At different points she could see Kavalian officers standing among groups of Elder Militia and a few Kavalian troops.

[An Awful lot of Kavalian troops.] She finally stated. *[And all the defenses we had in place are gone.]*

Andro nodded. *[It would seem that Buonau's government is not wholly hers. There are far too many Kavalian officers just standing around, and they have removed the defenses put in place to actually guard this facility. This tells us quite a bit.]*

The Elder Militia Colonel finally stepped forward close enough to speak and stared right at Androcles, the Kavalian colonel beside him, his eyes filled with total contempt and outright hatred. "I am Colonel Tydan of the Hadarian Elder Militia." He spoke. "You broke formation with our fighters and came here without an escort!"

"We were never in formation with your fighters Colonel." Andro stated calmly before Arrarn could retort. "And we followed their directives. Because they cannot keep up with our ship is not our fault. Now if you could explain to me why we were directed here when we were supposed to go to my mother's palace?"

"The Hadarian Royal Palace is now the residence of Elder Healer and Prime Minister Buonau." Tydan spoke.

"She calls herself Prime Minister now does she?" Eliani snapped. "What a joke!"

Tydan looked at her before turning back to Andro. "We have been ordered to search you and your ship for illegal weapons that you may have brought with you." He stated formally. "Once that is complete you will be escorted to the old Lycavorian Embassy. The Elf Minister L'tian is already there."

"No." Andro told him.

Tydan looked at him surprised. "Excuse me?"

Andro met his gaze. "I said no." He spoke again.

The Kavalian officer stepped forward now his face angry. "You will submit to a search or you will be arrested!" He snarled. "If you resist... then you will be shot where you stand!" He reached out and motioned with his hand and directed half a dozen Hadarian and Kavalian troops forward. "Search them thoroughly!" He barked. "The rest of you search their ship!"

"I said no." Androcles spoke again causing the Hadarian troops to waver in indecision while the Kavalian troops moved forward more slowly. He looked at the Kavalian. "Did the Kavalian delegation have to undergo a search of their persons and ships?"

"Certainly not!" The Colonel exclaimed.

"Then nor will we." Andro stated. "We are representatives of a sovereign government and I will not allow you to treat us as common thugs!"

"You will not allow?" The Kavalian hissed at him. "I am Colonel Qussa'Siat and I have my orders! You do not have a choice! You will submit to a search! All of you! Including your females! Especially the vampire whore in front of me!"

Toria gripped Arrarn's arm tighter, keeping him from doing anything stupid. His eyes turned to her in shock and she grinned. "I have been called much worse my husband." She whispered to him.

Sadi looked at the Kavalian who had stepped up to her, his dark eyes filled with gleeful lust as he reached out. Sadi batted his hands away easily. "Touch me and I will give you your hands back gnawed off at the elbow fool!" She snarled now her eyes changing and her fangs extending in a heartbeat.

"Seize her!" The Kavalian officer snapped.

"Elynth!" Andro barked out as his hand dropped to his *Stiletto*.

Two trumpets of anger followed causing all of the Kavalian and Hadarian troops to come up short as Elynth and Tharua came barreling down the ramp to the bottom and flared their wings menacingly. Many Kavalian troops were unmoving in their tracks by the sight, while the Hadarian troops were looking for any kind of cover they could find.

“NO!” Tydan barked out the order freezing all of them in their places. He glared at Andro angrily and pointed at Elynth and Tharua. “You were instructed not to bring your dragons!” He screamed.

“That directive must have slipped my mind.” Androcles spoke. “Especially since it came *after* this meeting and its terms were already agreed too. By both your governments and mine.” He took two steps closer to Tydan. “I will not allow you and your Kavalian handlers to treat us in this manner. No civilized government would subject visiting dignitaries to this type of action regardless of what was happening or has already happened. And I certainly have no intention of letting these Kavalian pigs search my wife and mate, nor my sister or brother’s wife!”

“You refuse to allow us to conduct our search?” The Kavalian Colonel growled turning to look at him though one eye he kept on the dragons.

Andro looked at him now. “I’m trying very hard not to say fuck you Colonel.” Andro spoke evenly. “So basically... yes.”

“But you *are* criminals boy!” Qussa snarled at him. “You are wanted for the deaths of nearly three million Hadarian citizens and for assaulting a recognized Ambassador of the new Kavalian Federation! Your sister Eliani is wanted for sedition against the newly formed and recognized Hadarian government, just as your whore mother is! And now you bring a vampire bitch here as well!”

“The only ones who recognize this illegal government are you and your kind!” Eliani growled from where she stood. “And my mother could hand you your furry ass without even breaking a sweat you walking Kavalian carpet bag!”

“Eli!” Andro snapped looking at her.

“You had better tell your sister that Kavalian males do not tolerate females who treat their male superiors in such a manner boy. Our females are taught to respect our men.” Qussa snarled. “It would not be a pleasant punishment I assure you.”

“Well La Dee Da!” Eliani spat sarcastically. “And you can kiss my Hadarian and wolf ass too!”

“You will pay for such comments!” Qussa snarled at her.

“Your stupid threats mean nothing to us Kavalian.” Sadi spat as she stepped up next to Eliani. “And we know well how you treat your females! Like they are beneath you in some manner.” She spoke.

“This is not what the Prime Minister directed Qussa! Nor Admiral Menot!” Tydan shouted finally. “If they refuse to be searched then they will remain on their ship until I have contacted them and they decide what to do!”

“I have my orders as well.” Qussa snapped. “I was instructed to search them thoroughly and seize their ship and their weapons!”

“Look behind you Qussa!” Tydan hissed quietly taking the Kavalian’s arm and pulling him further away from where Andro and the others stood. “Look at the Netnews crews that are watching us. They are watching to see what we do! Do you honestly think that treating the new Lycavorian King-elect like a common criminal is going to fly real well for support? What will you do? Strike down the new King of the Union in full view of everyone and spark a war that your leaders are working to avoid? And far more of yours and my people will die here today if you persist in this action. Unless you have some way to defeat two dragons before they burned most of those in the open to death! Think man!”

“Do not patronize me Hadarian!” Qussa snarled.

Andro shook his head. “I can see this little visit was a mistake.” He said looking at Qussa. “We’ll be leaving now.”

The Kavalian’s eyes grew wide. “You will not!” He exclaimed.

“How are you going to stop me Colonel?” Andro asked him. “You will not get our weapons and you certainly will not gain access to our ship. Not before it self-destructs. And I guarantee you... far more of you will die here this day.” Andro glared at him with wolf eyes now. “You being the very first!”

“You think much of your skills boy.” The Qussa growled at him.

Andro smiled baring his wolf fangs. “They are more than adequate to send you straight to whatever hell it is you worship.” He snapped.

“*Enough!*” The voice bellowed.

They turned as the tall Kavalian came striding through the others that were standing at the ready to act. His dark brown hair was well groomed and his uniform marked him as an Admiral.

“Admiral Menot!” Qussa hissed in surprise.

“Yes Colonel.” Menot angrily barked right back as he came up to the group. “What do you think you are doing?”

“Sir... I’m... I was following my orders!” Qussa spoke quickly sensing the Admiral’s real anger from within his voice.

“What you are doing is not what I instructed you to do Colonel!” Menot snapped.

“Sir... the Marshall’s... Marshall Pusintin’s son... Senior Colonel Kalis gave me my orders!” Qussa spoke.

“Kalis?” Menot questioned. “Since when does a senior Colonel outrank me?”

“He is... he is the Marshall’s son sir!” Qussa answered. “A Puma Bane Commando!”

“He is a fool!” Menot barked. “I will deal with you later!” Menot turned to look at Andro and the others. “I am Admiral Menot’Kasi... senior Kavalian Officer and Liaison to the new Hadarian Free Republic.”

Andro glanced at Sadi quickly and then back to Menot. “The Hadarian Free Republic?” He asked. “Is that what they are calling themselves now?”

“That is the name the Prime Minister and the Arch Ministry have decided on yes.” Menot answered with a false smile. “I’m sure it will pass the full Parliament soon.”

“I’m sure.” Eliani snickered.

Menot glanced at her quickly with cold eyes but he said nothing and turned back to face Androcles.

“Our request that you surrender your weapons is only a precaution Prince Leonidas. We are simply attempting to keep everyone safe and insure no incidents take place while you are here.”

“Incidents?” Andro asked. “What incidents do you think will take place with us being here Admiral?”

“It is merely a measure to insure the safety of everyone as I said.” Menot told him. “You must see this as well?”

“I will ask you the same question I asked your Colonel here.” Andro said. “Was the Kavalian delegation asked to surrender their weapons?”

Menot shook his head. “No of course not.” He answered. “Hadaria is an ally of the KFI and there would be no need for this. We do not bring illicit weapons onto an ally’s home planet sir.”

“Then I will not surrender my weapons Admiral Menot.” Androcles said. “That’s my policy. And I will not submit to a search of my person, or anyone with me. I will not subject my mate, my brother’s mate or my sister to a search by any Kavalian considering how your people view females in general. It would not be appropriate in any way as far as I am concerned. And no one boards my ship unless they belong on that ship. My Bonded Sister will see to that.” Andro stepped closer to him. “Now... do we dispense with the bullshit Admiral Menot and go forward with this farce of a meeting, or do we get back on our ship and let the chips fall where they may.”

Menot stared at Andro for a long moment before answering him. “You do not believe this meeting will accomplish anything do you Prince Leonidas?” He asked finally.

“Do you?” Andro asked.

“Your father left us little choice in what we could do to protect ourselves and our people Prince Leonidas.” Menot spoke. “Surely you see that.”

“What I see Admiral... what I see are the faces of my mother and father who are now dead because of your actions.” Andro spoke slowly. “Kavalian actions that were nothing more than terrorist acts in my opinion. I see the broken spirit of another of my mothers because of what Marshall Pusintin ordered Immortal scum to perpetrate upon her. I see another mother ousted from her rightful place by religious zealots that you supported in any number of ways. I see six dozen Drow elves dead by the hands of your Puma Bane Commandos, along with three dozen non-Drow who were either family to them or friends. I see over a thousand dead civilians Admiral... among them nearly two hundred children. Lycavorian civilians whose only crime was showing up for work in the Senate Office Building in Sparta that day. I see my aunt who is now crippled because of your actions. And I see another mother who has been kidnapped by your Marshall Pusintin for reasons which only he knows. Taken from her family even after her mate and dearest friend were killed before her eyes. That is what I see Admiral Menot. If you expect me to come here happily and with open arms than you are either a *nubous* fool or a hated politician.” Andro saw Menot’s eyes grow a little wider. “You strike me as neither.”

Menot stared into those azure colored wolf eyes in silence. “No.” He said finally. “I am neither.”

“Then where does that leave us Admiral?” Andro asked. “Because I for one grow tired of having your men openly leering at my mate and my sister. I won’t even begin to speak of what they undoubtedly have going through their feral minds looking at my brother’s wife. Do we go forward with this... do I turn around and depart and leave the future to the gods... or do we all die here right now?”

“You are not afraid to die Prince Leonidas?” Menot asked.

“I am a Lycavorian and a Spartan!” Andro hissed. “Death is a part of life Admiral Menot. It is just a matter of how many of your men I kill before you finally are able to bring me down. But you will be the first to fall... and then the idiot Colonel behind you.”

Qussa opened his mouth to retort but Menot held up his hand stopping him. “Do not speak Qussa!” He growled at him. He didn’t break eye contact with Androcles and folded his hands behind his back. “Colonel Tydan... bring the Lifters forward. Insure Prince Leonidas and those with him are escorted without delay to the Embassy.”

“Admiral...” Tydan began to speak. “The Prime Minister...”

Menot whirled on him. “Buonau will not question me!” He barked. “Now do as I order you! And establish a perimeter around the Prince’s ship with your Elder Militia. No one is to attempt to enter his ship for any reason. Not unless they wish to be eaten or burned alive by the dragons which will remain inside.” He spoke looking back to Andro.

Andro nodded. “I’ll let my Bonded Sister know.” He said.

Menot nodded to Andro. “I welcome you to Hadaria Prince Androcles.” He said with a small grin. “I hope your stay is productive.”

“So do I.” Androcles answered. “So do I.”

HADARIAN CAPITAL LYCAVORIAN EMBASSY

L’tian squeezed Eliani in his embrace and looked at Andro, Jomann and Arrarn.

“Grandfather.” Eliani spoke warmly as she hugged him tightly and stepped back. “It has been a long time.”

L’tian nodded with a half smile. “Yes it has Eliani. You look radiant child.” He told her holding one of her hands as he took in the way the tall Spartan tensed slightly at his familiarity with Eliani. L’tian had been among Lycavorians long enough to know the signs and he looked at her. “I take it this young man is the reason?”

Eliani smiled brightly and stepped back to press close to Jomann as he stepped forward. “Grandfather... this is Jomann.” Eliani said looking up into his face. “He is my... he is my *anome*.”

L’tian’s eyes grew a little wider as he looked at Jomann and the possessive way his arm curled around Eliani’s waist but a smile split his face and he nodded as he took Jomann’s hand and held it firmly. “The gods bless your union Jomann. Very few among your people find their *anomes* and I wish more did.”

Jomann looked surprised at L’tian’s familiarity with Lycavorian customs but he knew that he was Queen For’mya’s father and therefore it made sense. “Thank you sir.” He said.

L’tian turned and took Sadi’s hand drawing her close to kiss her cheek. “Sadi... you look stunning as always.”

“I wish we were seeing each again under better circumstances Minister L’tian.” Sadi spoke softly.

L’tian nodded and looked at Toria. “And you must be Toria?” He spoke moving up to her and taking her hand. He lowered his head and kissed the back of her hand. “I welcome you to our family Toria Leonidas. It is a distinct pleasure to see that Arrarn actually was able to snare the love of not one but two beautiful women. I thought him a lost cause. I wish Narice could have come with you given what the two of you mean to each other as well as my grandson, but better that she is not here.”

Toria couldn’t help but smile as Arrarn shook his head. “Thank you Minister L’tian.” She said.

“And thank you so much for the vote of confidence grandfather.” He said just before he embraced him.

L’tian released Arrarn and turned to Andro then and embraced him tightly. “We saw what happen at the compound on the Netnews.”

Andro drew back with a surprised expression. “You saw?” He asked.

L'tian nodded as he took Andro's arm in one hand and Arrarn's in the other and began to guide them through the huge archway into the main greeting chamber of the Lycavorian's main embassy on Hadaria.

“Yes... surprisingly that *upae* Buonau has allowed unfettered Netnews access to the Hadarian capital. Our sessions this afternoon and tomorrow she plans to broadcast to the entire Union. They are crawling across everything like insects and have demanded I give them right of entry to within the embassy here as well.”

“Grandfather... you are not one to use such language.” Eliani stated with surprise in her eyes.

“Given what is happening... I am holding my true feelings in.” L'tian told her.

Andro stopped for a moment when they entered the massive meeting room that had a large bar and numerous tables and couches. He saw several elves on the other side of the room setting two large tables and a Lycavorian behind the bar muttering to himself and opening boxes looking for something.

L'tian smiled and prodded him forward. “Don't worry... I have already had my people sweep the entire Embassy.” He said. “Having the Chief of EI as one of your friends comes in handy.”

“Your staff?” Andro asked.

L'tian nodded. “All EI operatives.” He answered. “Electronics experts. Analysis experts. The EI Chief made sure I had all the areas covered. He owes For'mya and Dysea quite a bit for not bringing charges against him and they have earned his loyalty. And there is always Vitmin as well.” He said motioning to the *Durcunusaan* soldier that had been his constant shadow now for the last two decades.

“What did you find Minister L'tian?” Jomann asked.

“A veritable windfall of monitoring devices.” L'tian answered as he pulled them into the room. “We have deactivated most of them... jammed the rest. We can speak freely. My people have installed micro pulse jammers in all the rooms to scramble our voices but I suggest we stay away from the windows so they can not read our lips.”

“So they've been busy.” Andro spoke.

“Indeed.” L'tian answered. He met the azure eyes of the oldest of his grandchildren. Since For'mya had become part of Martin's life L'tian had taken on a view of things that was different from many elves. It had been L'tian who had basically forced Martin's hand when For'mya had been taken, not realizing that he would have gone after her anyway. He had been the one to push her to take on the role she had been groomed for most of her life as elf concubine to the Lycavorian King even though this is not something she had wanted. To this day he still did not know what had transpired between the two of them during those weeks and months after he had rescued her, but he was sure that destiny had stepped in at some point and shown his daughter what life could be like. When Aricia and the others had pressed for her to be named a queen and then succeeded, L'tian had been ecstatic. Seeing the love and devotion that Martin had for her as well as his other wives was hard to believe at first, but as the months passed it became quite obvious to him. He knew how much his daughter loved Martin and her fellow queens, and he knew what she would do for them in any situation. In actuality... her love for them and her rise to queen had brought them so much closer together than they had ever been as father and daughter. He did not regard Andro or Eliani any different than he did Arrarn and Byron. They were all his grandchildren and he and his wife took great pleasure in doting over all of them as they grew. “Androcles... I... is what you and Eliani believe? What Deia filled me in on? Is it true?”

Andro squeezed his arm in return. “As much as we find it revolting grandfather... it is the only reason we can think of that our uncle would continue in this manner once he believed he killed our father.” He said. “There is no question now that he wants my father's throne... and this is the way he has chosen to go about it.”

“Your father has left Curila 6 you know.” L'tian spoke softly. “I spoke to him just before he departed. I have seen his love for my daughter, for all of them in his eyes and his actions through the last twenty plus years and I have never seen the look in his eyes that I saw when I spoke with him Androcles.”

“*Medwaw* For'mya is just as much a part of him as my own mother grandfather. You can not deny that.” Andro said softly. “No matter what has happened... his love for her will never die. I think you have seen this love yourself grandfather.”

L'tian nodded his head. “I know... and I *have* seen it Androcles. That is what gives me strength. I just need to focus my own emotions over what you believe has happened. What we may see.”

“All of us do grandfather.” Arrarn spoke moving up beside him. “All of us do.” He looked at Andro. “And the day of reckoning will come.” He said finally causing L'tian to look at him oddly and then to Androcles.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes it will.” He spoke. “What time is the first session?” Andro asked turning to L'tian.

L'tian took a deep breath. “Fourteen hundred hours.” He said. “I have full authority from the First Elf Minister Alocgeid to act on behalf of Elven Parliamentary authority and Deia has blessed me to be the one to defend the Union in these accusations. She and Panos have sent two of their senior historical aides and lawyers to assist me. They are upstairs now conferring on how best to address whatever charges they may bring against the Union. They have been fully vetted by Marci and the Krypteria and you may wish to confer with them before we go to the first session. They have been given a huge amount of information and having you help them to sort it out in regards to the Coven dragons and such might be useful.”

Andro nodded. “Whatever it takes grandfather.” He said. “However I don't think it will alter the outcome of our visit here.”

L'tian nodded. “Nor do I. Before you do that however... have a glass of juice and a late breakfast with me? All of you. I work much better on a full stomach and when my mind is clear. And we have much intelligence to go over from those teams who dispersed to the wilder countryside when the Kavalians arrived and your mother left here.”

“They have been able to get information off world?” Eliani asked.

L'tian nodded. “Using covert repeater stations that are still active in orbit yes.” He replied to her question. “Needless to say... quite a bit of the information is not very good.”

Eliani snorted in disgust. “Why should that come as a surprise to anyone?” She hissed. “Buonau and Wiktor are devious wenches and they will do anything they can to take and hold whatever power they can accumulate.”

“Crudely put...” L'tian spoke smiling at her. “But essentially very correct. Come.”

Andro and Arrarn nodded and he began to draw them towards the tables that had been set up.

HADARIAN ARCH MINISTRY ANTE CHAMBERS

Kalis staggered back from the force of the blow to his face but he didn't back down from his father.

“... The fuck were you thinking!” Pusintin snarled.

“He killed my brother!” Kalis hissed back at him.

“I know damn well what he did boy!” Pusintin growled viciously. “You don't need to remind me! And you will have your vengeance against him when the time comes! But never countermand my orders again Kalis! You are my son but I will treat you as any other officer who does this! There is too much at stake!”

“Your father is right Kalis.” Keleru's voice filtered to him from the transmission image in the corner of the room. “Having Qussa attempt to search them and their ship was nothing more than a blatant attempt to invoke a reaction from them. They will be hostile enough once they see what has become of their precious mother and we do not need you to make more problems for us in the long run. We need to look at the larger scope of things now Kalis my boy.”

“I want to be the one to kill him father!” Kalis hissed. “I want to take each of his women in front of him and I want him to watch as I fuck them silly before killing them. Then I want to see his eyes go dark as I bury a blade through his heart and he knows he has failed at everything he has ever done! And know he could not even protect his women!”

“And you will Kalis. You will.” Pusintin spoke. “But you need to stick with the original plan when it concerns your actions right now! We are at a pivotal time now and we need to do this very carefully.”

“We failed to kill him when we had the opportunity.” Keleru spoke slowly. “Those that we contracted with in this OSG organization to kill him, they also failed and now the Icalro Alliance no longer exists because of it. This makes our task harder but not infinitely so if the information from Laustinos is accurate. That information has been very accurate up until now, so there is no viable reason to think it is wrong going forward from this point. That may change in the future but right now we will proceed as we have planned.” They

watched him get up and move around his office on the Kavalian homeworld. “Now we must do things differently. We must gain the support of those who were against his father and his family to begin with. We must use their own Netnews against them and most certainly not allow them to see us acting as the instigators of confrontations with them. We have maintained from the outset that we did the only thing we could do in our actions to protect our sovereignty and now we must appear as if that is all we wanted to do. It is also why we have not shifted the balance of our forces from the upcoming invasion of the High Coven. We are trying to avoid a full blown conflict with the Union.”

Pusintin turned to face the transmission completely now. “Have we been able to garner support among any of the elven delegates who have consistently voted against his policies through the years?”

Keleru shrugged his shoulders. “It is hard to gauge.” He answered. “Elves are very good at concealing what they are thinking and we have only reached out quietly to a handful since we began this. I believe they will wait and see how things develop there on Hadaria before moving to any actual signs of support. It helps us greatly that we have coerced the elf Queen For'mya's cooperation in petitioning to have Dysea removed from her standing as the elven Queen.”

“Forgive me for asking Marshall Pusintin...” Menot had been standing quietly in the room listening to the men talk but now he moved forward further into the room. “She has believed that we hold her youngest son with Leonidas captive... that we were going to give her to Immortals... that was the driving force behind her agreeing to our demands.”

“Yes.” Pusintin asked.

“What happens when she discovers that we do not have her youngest son and the elf queen Dysea is no longer among the Immortals that she thought held her?” Menot asked. “I do not want it to seem that I question the plan sir... but what is to keep her from refusing to help us once she discovers this information.”

“The contracts she signed are legally binding even within the Union. We made sure of that before taking her.” Keleru spoke from within the transmission. “If our petition to have Dysea removed from power succeeds, and more than likely it will, then we will have half a dozen trade agreements already signed that will be presented for confirmation whether the elven parliament agrees or not.”

“You believe they will agree to this Prefect?” Menot asked. “Go along with it?”

“If they choose not to then we can legally exercise our right to make them.” Keleru answered. “As for the rest... Pusintin?”

Pusintin turned to look at Menot. “She will help us because she is bound to me now.” He stated confidently. “With my brother dead... I have claimed her as my mate in the ancient Lycavorian fashion. It is why we timed this operation as we did. She was in Phase, the most fertile time for a wolf female and I was the most powerful Alpha that reached her first after the death of her mate. She is wolf after all... and with the static inhibitor stopping her ability to Mindvoice and fight my advances; the wolf blood in her took over when I hit her with my full aura. She didn't have much of a choice after that. I know what my brother saw in her... her body is quite succulent and exceptionally tight.”

Menot looked at Pusintin and nodded. “I understand that sir, but none of what we have told her is true and she will discover this at the hearings will she not?” He stated.

“It will not matter Admiral.” Pusintin spoke. “They changed the Ascension Laws within the Chronicles of Lycavorian Law and First Oracle's Declaration after the fiasco with Chetek, but they did not change the laws regarding bloodlines and claims to the throne. Why would they think they need too?” Pusintin said shaking his head. “The elf blood in her has not allowed her to act how she undoubtedly wants to act. Laustinos's information in regards to that is turning out to be very true.”

“What information?” Kalis asked now.

“In all of recorded elven history, no female elf has ever terminated a pregnancy for any reason.” Keleru spoke now. “No matter the how that they became pregnant, only that they have never terminated a pregnancy. They are incapable of such an action dating back to long before we ever came up with this plan. Laustinos confirmed this with several elven historians and over a dozen doctors through the years.”

“I also have power over her even more with my aura since I have claimed her as my mate and she will respond to it almost immediately now.” Pusintin picked it back up. “The old practice of using a male aura to influence a female wolf has not been used since before my grandfather became King millennia ago... my species stopped doing this because they thought it to be vile and disdainful. That only helps us because she is

wolf now and she can not fight it anymore than a pureblood female would be able to fight it. It is a little known fact among the Lycavorians because they have pulled away from their instincts so much, but her body began to change almost immediately after my brother died. She was already in phase and since she believed her wolf mate dead her body began to prepare for her to take another whether she wanted to or not. We kept her Mindvoice powers in check with the static inhibitor so that she knows nothing else and we coerced her in other ways to submit to me in order to save those she loves. She knows it is wrong, she hates me for it, but she cannot help herself physically and that is even more agony and shame that I can throw at them. She knows she is my mate physically and she will be utterly humiliated that she can not manage how she reacts to me, and not being able to feel them within Mindvoice will make her think they have dismissed her because of what she has done.”

Menot shook his head. “I don’t understand sir... what has she done?”

Pusintin grinned and looked at Keleru in the transmission. He turned back to Menot with an even larger smile of triumph. “She has given us the one way to defeat the Lycavorian Union without firing a shot.”

“How is that possible Marshall?” Menot asked surprised.

“In two short weeks, thanks to the accelerated growth hormones we use on our clones, she will give birth to the rightful heir to the throne of the United Lycavorian Union and Sparta.” Pusintin said with an arrogant smile and swelling of his chest. “A son. My son.”

***BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
INQUISITOR
HIGH COVEN SECURE SPACE
3.4 LYs FROM UZU OZEIB 7***

“...leaving in droves Admiral.” Asant told him as he handed over the data pad.

“How many have chosen to depart Asant?” Moran asked sitting at the large table in the conference lounge.

“Colonel Pa'cour was correct in his first assessment.” Asant spoke calmly. “Nearly three quarters of the 1st, 7th and 11th Immortal Divisions have packed up and begun leaving from their bases. They are securing whatever means of transport they can and leaving just as fast as they can.” He answered. “Fully one third of all the training divisions have already abandoned their posts and are trying to secure passage.”

“Total numbers?” Moran asked.

“If the reports are accurate... upwards of nearly two million.” Asant answered.

“That is more than we first thought!” Dante Moran hissed.

Asant nodded. “Yes, but the vast majority of them are young and inexperienced. Many of the older Immortals are choosing to remain Admiral. They are maintaining low profiles because they do not wish to be seen as assisting those others. Also... none of the ship board Immortals anywhere in the fleet have expressed any desire to leave.”

Moran looked at him. “Really?”

Asant nodded. “Again... most of those assigned to fleet ships are older and much more experienced. This may not turn out to be as bad as we thought. Cha'talla’s plea might hamper him more than help him.”

“Do not count on it.” The voice spoke and Asant turned to watch Yuri unwrap from the shadows of the conference room view window. She wore a standard High Coven pilot’s work jumpsuit which fastened high up on her neck. Her black hair was shiny and silky looking as it always was, but the three thin scars that traveled down her right cheek were still visible and ones she would not be able to hide. Asant had only heard other crewmen talking about the extent of her injuries and had not seen them, but from what he heard the scars were ghastly to look at.

“Princess?” Asant asked softly.

“Yuri... we should stop anymore from leaving.” Moran spoke.

“They may be young and inexperienced now... but in a year’s time they will be seasoned and superbly trained.” Yuri spoke as she unwrapped the remainder of the shadows from around her body and stepped fully up to the table. “Do not forget who we are discussing here. There is a reason Cha'talla is thought of as he is. If his message is true, if he has aligned with the Union and his son is married to Normya Leonidas, he will have all

the support that he needs to finish their training and turn them in to superior shock troops. He is a masterful tactician by himself and apparently a very good speaker when he wants to be considering his speech.”

“Father is right mother!” Dante exclaimed. “We should stop anymore from leaving!”

Yuri shook her head. “No.” She told them staring across the table at her son with dark eyes. “Once this initial surge is over, those that remain will be loyal. I have no desire to fight or kill thousands upon thousands of Immortal civilians as my father did. The resulting civil war would tear us apart and force Cha’talla to intercede.” She told them. “Then all of them would turn against us as Asant said in your earlier meeting.”

“How did you know that is what we discussed?” Moran asked.

“Pa’cour recounted the minutes of the meeting for me.” Yuri answered nonchalantly.

“Pa’cour? How did...”

“It is a bad idea!” Dante spoke interrupting his father. “We are letting valuable troops leave when we will need them in our battles ahead!”

Yuri didn’t take her eyes from him. “That is my decision Dante.” Yuri spoke with the tone of her voice indicating she would not tolerate any more discussion. “And you will abide by that decision.”

Dante didn’t look away from her after she said that but merely nodded his head. “As you wish mother.” He spoke.

Yuri looked at Moran. “Our scientists have begun work on the material gathered from the Mindvoice ship yes?” She asked.

Moran nodded still confused how she knew of what they spoke of in the earlier meeting. “All the data has been transferred to the primary research facility orbiting the fourth moon of Uzu Ozeib 7.” He answered.

“Have Doctor Okeeren copy everything and set up a second facility at his discretion.” Yuri spoke. “And have him do so quickly Robert.”

Moran looked at her. “What? Yuri why?”

“Because Martin Leonidas is not dead.” Yuri told him as she settled into the chair at the table and rested her hands on the surface. “And sooner or later... either he or Androcles will be coming here to get their vengeance for what we allowed to happen to his daughter.”

Moran and Dante looked at her. “Yuri... you agreed with that course of action!” Moran snapped.

Yuri met his eyes calmly. “Yes I did Robert.” She stated evenly.

“So you let me and Javier do this and now you think it was wrong?” Dante barked at his mother. “My brother is dead! Your son is dead!”

Yuri turned to face him now. “I know what happened Dante. I don’t need you to remind me of that. And I will bear the blame for the consequences of those actions. For allowing you to do what you did. One day will come my son...” She spoke softly, almost thoughtfully. “One day either Martin, Androcles or a member of the Leonidas family will catch up to me and my life will be over for what I ordered and allowed you and your brother to do. What we allowed you to do. I can only hope it is not Martin or Androcles because my death will be neither quick nor painless if it is.”

“What the fuck?” Moran snarled. “What is going on? This is not the Yuri I remember. This is not the High Coven Princess that is my wife!”

Yuri looked at him. “No it is not.” She stated. “Having your throat torn out and being left to bleed my life from my body is a life altering event Robert. I have had much time to reflect on my actions.”

Moran came to his feet. “This is bullshit!” He barked. “This is not you!”

“Oh I haven’t changed if that is what you are referring too.” Yuri spoke quickly. “But that does not mean I can not regret what I have done in the past. I do not want our research or our scientific team destroyed because we were shortsighted and kept everything in one place. One of them will come... and what we took from that Mindvoice ship will be their primary target.”

“Yuri...” Moran returned to the chair and leaned forward in his seat. “Yuri... several different Netnews Channels caught his death live and in color. He was blown in half! There is no possible way he could be alive! And Androcles Leonidas is dealing with the Kavalians and he will not come after us!”

A small smile curled the corners of her lips and she looked at him. “Yes... I’m sure that is what they wanted everyone to believe.” She said as she got back up and moved to the large window once more. “And for the most part he was very successful Robert. It seems he has convinced quite a few of this fact to include you... but he is not dead Robert. He is out there somewhere.” She turned back to him. “Please let Doctor Okeeren

know of my orders regardless, and have him split his team of researchers as well. Now what do you mean Androcles is dealing with the Kavalians?"

"They are holding the elf Queen For'mya prisoner." Moran replied after a moment. "It looks as if he is going to try and use her to some way regain the throne of the Union now that Leonidas is dead. At least that is the speculation among their Netnews channels."

"You don't believe me Robert?" Yuri asked him.

"I believe what I saw with my own eyes Yuri. There is no way he survived... I'm sorry! None!" Moran answered her.

"You have never questioned me before Robert." She said.

"No I haven't... and with good reason!" He stated quickly. "You have never ranted about crazy things like this before! The Union does not have the resources or the legs to reach this far into Coven space and attack us!"

"They have had their Mindvoice ship for over two decades Robert." Yuri told him.

"Leonidas was a pussy!" Moran snapped vehemently. "He always was! Even on Earth! None of the gains they made in technology were related to any military hardware except their communications and improving their Shrouds. Our people would have detected this. I knew him Yuri... and he was always a defensive minded soldier. Even as a SEAL! And they were as bad ass as you can get! There is no possible way he would have or even could have developed serious offensive weapons without our people knowing about it! We still have deep cover operatives in some pretty high parts of their military Yuri! You just can't hide something like that! You can't! And I sincerely doubt the Union Senate would have approved something like that either."

Yuri moved back closer to the table. "You are the senior military officer within the High Coven Robert." She stated finally. "If that is what your experience and knowledge tells you then you are right."

"I think it is still just trauma from your injuries Yuri." He said in a softer tone. "You still need time to recover."

Yuri nodded. "Perhaps." She said returning to her chair. "The Kavalians have not moved their forces from their staging areas?"

Asant shook his head now. "No Princess." He answered. "As with their prior pre-invasion practices... troops and ships continue to arrive weekly at their staging areas. All signs indicate this will be the largest we have faced."

Yuri nodded. "Then that is what we must prepare for." She stated evenly rising her eyes to look at her son. Dante stared back at her with dark eyes that were void of any emotion in them. "Insure Doctor Okeeren does as I order however." She spoke looking at Moran now. "I do not want everything we got from the Mindvoice ship concentrated into one research platform alone. Have him direct his people to concentrate first on weapons and then propulsion. Our capital and medium ships are already better powered than their Kavalians counterparts, but too many are outgunned."

Moran nodded as he detected a small sliver of the old Yuri in her words. "I agree." He said.

Yuri stood up now. "You may be right Robert my husband." She said. "Perhaps I just need more time to absorb everything that has happened. How soon before we reach home? I need to sleep in my own bed after so long."

"We're taking it slow on our return, giving time for those Immortals who want to leave to leave." Moran answered. "We want to avoid any conflicts that may happen to occur. We should be back home in three days."

Yuri nodded. "Good." She turned and began to walk out but stopped and rotated her body back half way to look at him. "Robert... how many of the purebloods on the Governing Council are wavering over my authority?"

He met her eyes. "Most are still solidly in our corner. Two or three have raised concerns about events on Earth and the direction we are going." He answered her. "I'm having them and their families watched."

Yuri nodded. "Execute them immediately." She ordered. "Just them. Do nothing to their families except put them on a ship and send them into The Wilds into exile. If what you say is happening then I need to squash it before it becomes something that we can not handle without bloodshed."

Moran's smile was sinister as she turned back and continued out of the conference room. He watched for a moment longer before looking at his oldest child. "Now that is my Yuri." He said softly looking at Dante.

"That is your mother!"

Dante nodded his head slowly. "Perhaps it is father. Perhaps it is."

Moran nodded. "She'll be fine." He stated.

Nalavi Vicele grunted as he rose from the couch in his quarters and moved to the door of his personal quarters. He marched up to the door and stabbed the control panel next to it. He opened his mouth to bark at the person outside the door before stopping in a heartbeat at who he saw.

"Princess?" He gasped.

Yuri looked at him appearing tired. "Nalavi... Nalavi I must talk to you." She said.

Vicele had never heard this tone of voice from Yuri and he quickly looked out into the corridor and seeing no one he motioned her inside. "Come in. Quickly." He said taking her arm and drawing her into his quarters.

Yuri watched him look down the corridor both ways once more before closing his door and turning to look at her. "Are you concerned about who sees me enter your quarters Nalavi? You are my doctor."

Nalavi nodded his head quickly. "Yes I am... but crew members will be crew members." He told her. "They will talk and your visit here will get back to Robert. He will want to know why you could not see me in the Medical Bay. Which is the question I have." He said looking at her.

"You have never... you have never cared for Robert Moran Nalavi." Yuri spoke. "Why is that?"

Nalavi took her arm gently and drew her into his quarters. "Some *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos*? It is only two weeks old."

Yuri smiled and nodded her head. "Yes please." She answered. "And do not change the subject."

Nalavi walked to the medium sized wet bar counter along the bulkhead and began to pour two glasses of the clone blood designed and improved by Anja Leonidas and Union scientists for the millions of vampires that called the Union home. It was a very expensive and hard to come by item even in The Wilds, and also very illegal within Coven borders.

"He does not now... and in my opinion... has never deserved you Yuri." Nalavi stated as he poured the bright red cloned blood into the second glass. He lifted both glasses and crossed the room to stand in front of her holding one out. "I truly do not see what you ever saw in this man. But who am I to question?" Yuri took the glass and settled onto the large couch after he motioned for her to sit. Nalavi lowered his frame onto the couch next to her as he sipped his *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos*. He looked at her as she drank from the glass. "Now tell me... why is it that you have come to my quarters Yuri. It certainly isn't for good conversation."

"Nalavi... Nalavi what is wrong with me?" Yuri asked him.

"I don't think I am following the question." He said.

"I don't feel like me." Yuri said.

"Yuri... you were severely injured." Nalavi told her as he sat back. "We are Immortal girl but we are not indestructible. Your body suffered severe physical wounds and you are still recovering from them."

"How did I survive Nalavi?" Yuri asked. "I have... I have seen the scars and I know enough of battlefield wounds to know that I should be dead right now! Androcles Leonidas killed me! How did you save me?"

Nalavi stared at her for a long moment in silence. "Do you remember none of it?" He asked softly.

Yuri shook her head. "Bits and pieces. Flashes of great pain. Pa'cour's face and him shouting at me. I have been seeing images Nalavi... visions really. In my dreams. Places I have never been... I have never been to [Nausicaa](#) Nalavi. The planet was glassed eight hundred years before I was even born, yet I have had visions of it. The battles that took place there. I am seeing battles I have never fought or been involved in. Terrible battles. I feel... I feel so much weaker now. Like my Mindvoice abilities are no longer there or they are being... they are being hampered in some fashion."

"Yuri I am a medical doctor... not a psychologist." Nalavi spoke. "The physical trauma you suffered coupled with the mental anguish knowing your son had been killed; knowing that your daughters and your sister

betrayed you. Knowing that your mother had been killed. It will take its toll on anyone Yuri, even someone as strong willed as you.”

“Is that why when I look at my husband I see a stranger?” Yuri asked him. “When I look at him I see the distaste in his eyes when he gazes at me? When I look at my only remaining child I see not my son... but something different. Something changed.”

Nalavi shook his head. “I do not know Yuri.” He said gently. “These last years have been hard on all of us. The almost constant battles with the Kavalians. Fighting for our future. It has taken a great toll.” He stopped talking and got to his feet to return to the wet bar.

Yuri inched forward on the couch. “Say it Nalavi.” She spoke softly. “You have known me since I was born. Tell me what you are thinking... I am not going to have you executed for speaking the truth to me for *vithin zai'th!*” (Fucks sake)

Nalavi turned back to face her. “That is the problem Yuri. These last years... ever since you returned with Moran and your mother took power. You have become darker. One year ago you *would have* had me executed for even beginning to say these things to you. No matter that I have known you since you were hours old and taken care of you all of this time.” He moved back to the couch and sat down beside her. “You were always driven Yuri. Always. Willing to do nearly anything to achieve your goals. You would not hesitate to have someone executed if you truly thought that person or persons was hampering your completing of a mission or a goal. But you would only do this if it was absolutely necessary. I accept that these actions are natural for our people. But when you returned with Moran, when your mother regained her role as Empress... these actions became much more prominent. They were subtle at first but I could see them. You became darker in many ways. Discovering what your father perpetrated upon you explained some of it... Moran being the power hungry fool that he is was more... but not all of it. You seemed to relish the power and control you wielded and you would crush any who did not conform to your thinking. You changed Yuri... you changed from the driven Princess who was methodic in all she did to one who crushed any dissent. No matter for what purpose.”

He met her eyes which were focused on him as he continued. “The Yuri I knew, the one I watched grow and depart for Earth intent on fixing her brother’s idiotic actions, that Yuri would never have sanctioned the rape of Zarah Leonidas after what she herself had experienced. Yes they are our enemies and I do not particularly care for them a great deal, but our actions on Earth, what we sanctioned Yuri? Not even your father would have allowed this and he was the biggest fool I had ever met. The Yuri I knew... she would have found another way... a way to get the information we wanted... but she would not have approved of what we did on Earth. What we allowed to happen! You know how Lycavorians view this type of action Yuri... it is one of the three vilest crimes that anyone can commit upon Lycavorians. It was perpetrated upon you Yuri! Twice!” He shook his head slowly.

“There were other ways to get what we wanted, ways that would have involved killing yes... but ways the Union would have accepted as normal. Now... now hope for peace between our peoples is all but lost. A peace many of our younger generations had hope would become reality. With his father dead now, Androcles Leonidas will become King and many within the High Coven halls of political and military power fear him Yuri! They fear him far more than they ever feared his father. And his father *terrified* them Yuri... you know this!”

“Martin Leonidas is not dead Nalavi.” Yuri spoke softly.

Nalavi looked at her with wide eyes. “What? We all saw it! The Kavalians Yuri... they assassinated him right in the streets of his own city! Lycavorians have a robust healing system Yuri... much more than even we do, but they blew his body in half. There is no way he could have survived.”

“He lives Nalavi.” Yuri repeated. “I know he does. I can feel it.”

“How?”

Yuri shook her head. “I do not know. Perhaps because I shared his bed for two years and a connection of some sort was made. I feel tremors of him within Mindvoice... barely there... like faint echoes... but they are there. I do know that he is not dead Nalavi.”

“You... you are sure of this?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri nodded. “Yes. Robert and Dante do not believe me. They still think I am recovering from my injuries. That I do not have all my wits about me. I know I’m right though Nalavi. He is not dead.”

Nalavi sat back on the couch. “Why would they keep this hidden?” Nalavi asked to no one in particular.

“To protect the elf Queen For'mya.” Yuri said. “Why else?”

Nalavi looked at her. “What do you mean?”

“Robert said the Kavalians... Pusintin was attempting to use her in some way to regain the throne of Sparta and the Union.” Yuri said. “If he is holding her prisoner and he discovers that Martin Leonidas is alive, all leverage he may have now disappears. He will kill her within hours of discovering that Martin is still alive.”

“That could set off a war between the Union and the KFI.” Nalavi said.

“Given the attacks they conducted against the Drow Intelligence Outposts and in Sparta itself, there is more than enough reason for the Union to go to war now.” Yuri said as Nalavi looked at her oddly.

“Androcles’s new wife and mate is a Drow elf and no doubt she will be pushing for this exact thing.”

“Yuri... how do you know that?” Nalavi asked.

“Know what?” Yuri spoke as she sipped her *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos*.

“That Androcles Leonidas has taken a Drow elf as his wife and mate?” Nalavi asked her. “That has not been made widely known. Nor the attacks on the Drow outposts.”

“I don’t know.” Yuri answered. “It must have been in one or more of the Intelligence reports that Robert read to me while I was unconscious in the medical bay. I remember someone reading the reports to me almost everyday. I faded in and out too quickly to see their faces but I know someone was there.” Yuri smiled. “I remember them reading several ridiculous novels as well.”

Nalavi got to his feet and moved back to the wet bar with an anxious expression on his face that Yuri could not help but detect. She leaned forward now. “Nalavi... what is it?”

Nalavi Vicele turned back around and took a deep breath. He would not lie to her... he never had in all the years he had served her... and he would not lie to her now.

“Yuri... there is something you must know.” He stated softly.

“I’m listening.” She told him as she got to her feet slowly. “Why do I get the feeling you are frightened about telling me whatever it is you are going to tell me.”

Nalavi met her gaze. “I’m not frightened about what I am going to tell you.” He told her honestly. “I’m frightened by what you may do with the information I am going to tell you.”

Yuri moved closer to him. “Nalavi... what is wrong?”

“Yuri you were in my medical bay for close to three weeks recovering from your injuries. You have only been up and about for the past three days.” Nalavi told her.

“Yes I know that.” Yuri commented.

“Yuri... in all that time you were in the medical bay, Moran only came to see you twice.” Nalavi told her. “And both times he stayed no more than five or ten minutes. He would not even touch you.”

Yuri blinked at this information as she stared at him. “That can’t... that can’t be possible Nalavi.” She said shaking his her head. “I remember my husband’s voice... a voice reading to me. The reports... the novels of space adventurers. I am not crazy Nalavi... I heard it!” She spat looking at him.

Nalavi shook his head. “No you are not crazy Yuri.” He answered. “The voice you heard however was not Moran’s. As I said... he only came to see you twice. Dante only came once. There has only been one man who has been at your side since you were brought back. He was there every day... nearly all day until my staff tossed him from your room. Then he would be back the very next morning. He is also... he is also the one who saved your life.”

Yuri looked at him. “What do you mean?” She asked.

“Exactly what I am telling you.” Nalavi spoke. “His actions saved your life on the surface of Earth. You would have bled out within another minute or two had he not done what he did. He is the one who has been sitting with you everyday, reading you those reports, reading you those ridiculous novels. He held your hand through almost all your convulsions.”

Yuri’s eyes were wide as her mind flashed back. The pain... the blood. Every strike of those huge black paws upon her body and the feel of those savage fangs as they sank into the throat of her neck. She shuddered almost violently until she heard the voice.

“...will not allow you to die! Do you hear me Yuri! I will not allow you to die! You are what matters to me! You are all that matters to me! Do it! Take my blood! Feed on me! Do it now woman... for I will not lose you!”

Yuri remembered strong hands pulling her head forward and then the flashes of so many memories as her fangs sank into flesh and she fed. She fed on the most spicy and delectable blood she had ever tasted in her life, while powerful arms crushed her to a potent body of hard muscle. And more words exploded into her mind. Words that seemed to resonate within her mind, echoing along every nerve and every memory strand. Words that quickly chased away the agony she was feeling and replaced it with a warmth that Yuri Moran had never in her life felt coursing through her.

“I give myself to you Yuri.” The voice whispered into her ear. “I give myself to you so that you may live. Without doubt. Without hesitation. I give myself to you because I... because I love you. I have loved you from that first day on Lycavore, and it has only grown stronger through the years. ”

Yuri stepped back from Nalavi her eyes wide as realization flooded her. “Pa'cour!” She gasped loudly. Nalavi nodded his head slowly noticing that her words did not carry hate or anger in them in any way. At least none that he could detect. What her words carried were bewilderment and questions. “Yes.” Nalavi told her.

Yuri stood there as more images flashed through her head now. Images she had seen in her dreams. Lush worlds, raging battles, terrible horrors. Her hands came to her head as new images pushed aside her Mindvoice shields. She saw herself wrapped within the embrace of a huge man and his face was Pa'cour's. She saw herself holding a small child her in arms, cradled between his legs in the middle of a small grassy field while an older child with long black hair played in the distance. She saw herself laughing and her eyes closing in happiness when he leaned over and brushed her neck with his lips.

“Pa'cour!” She gasped again.

Nalavi stepped closer to her now. “He is the one that saved you Yuri.” He told her. “You took nearly half his blood to heal yourself, and even that only provided him enough time to get you here to the ship. He has been the one who has remained at your side through all of this. The dreams you have been having are not dreams Yuri... they are his memories. He knew what would happen if it was discovered but he didn't care. His first and only thoughts were of you. To save you no matter the cost.”

“Where... where is he?” Yuri gasped.

“Yuri... you...”

“Where?” She snarled this time.

Nalavi sighed heavily. “I would imagine he is down on the Immortal deck. Where he has been since you first woke up. He said he would go there and wait.”

“Wait? Wait for what?” Yuri snapped.

“For his execution.” Nalavi answered.

Yuri glared at him. “Nalavi the law...”

“The Coven as we know it is dying Yuri.” Nalavi spoke softly looking at her. “Your mother is gone and the laws we have lived by these past millennia are outdated and extremely oppressive. The ruling Pureblood families are fractured and even many in the military are now questioning what you do. And no doubt what you will do in the future. You have an opportunity right now to alter the course that your mother laid for us. There is something different about you since you woke up. You are still you... but the darkest anger and vehement hatred that has permeated your person for the last two plus decades is gone Yuri. You are different now! More in control. Don't let the chances that our misguided and wholly stupid actions have given birth to slip away Yuri. This is your chance to make it all right! This is your chance to be happy for once in your life!”

“Happy?” Yuri asked looking at him. “I was... I was happy Nalavi.”

“Since the day you departed for Earth over three thousand years ago you have been living a lie and you have known it.” Nalavi told her bluntly. “You were twenty-nine years old when your father sent you there to help your brother fix what he had foolishly broken Yuri. You know what happened after that. What he did to you. What your father ordered him to do to you. It does not matter who it has been, your mother, your father, Moran... all of them have used you and manipulated you in some fashion for their own goals for your entire life. Your mother and Robert Moran have been the worse. This is the chance for you to be different! To live your life the way you want too!”

“What you speak of is treason!” Yuri rasped.

“And what will you do Yuri?” He asked her calmly. “Will you have me arrested and executed for what I tell you?”

Yuri looked at him with wide eyes. “Nalavi no! Never!”

“Your daughters Yuri... they have seen and then grasped something they wanted. Look at them now. Your sister Narice?” Nalavi said.

“Traitors!” Yuri snapped though her tone was not as vehement as Nalavi expected and that told him what he needed to know.

“Are they traitors? Or are they doing what so many of our people want to do? What you used to talk about as a young woman? Before going to that cursed planet that destroys vampire lives as surely as the sun rises. They wanted more Yuri. They wanted more and they have found more.” Nalavi spoke. “All that is left now is for you to find what you want more than anything Yuri and then reach for and grab it. When you do that the cycle that your mother has continued for millennia will be broken and the High Coven can be reborn.”

“And then what Nalavi?” Yuri asked him. “I will never... I will never be able to escape my past! What I have done!”

Nalavi shook his head. “No. But there are advantages to being who we are Yuri. We are Immortal child. If no one is trying to kill you Yuri, you can live far longer than even your own mother did. You have plenty of time to atone for the mistakes you have made. If you are truly willing.”

“It is not possible Nalavi.” Yuri said.

“No? Or are you just too afraid to think about it and act?” Nalavi told her. “I think Martin Leonidas said it best Yuri...” He smiled when her eyes lifted to look at him. “Isn’t he the one who coined the phrase Never fear the unknown, for you don’t know what treasures it could bring you?”

“Nalavi... you want me... you want me to betray all I have ever been raised to believe.” Yuri said softly.

Nalavi shook his head. “No. What I want you to do is look past all you have ever been raised to believe Yuri. I want you to look past that and finally, once and for all, to finally do what you want to do in your heart!”

“He is an Immortal Nalavi!” Yuri exclaimed. “I only have... I only am seeing these things because I took so much of his blood!”

“You taking his blood had nothing to do with you calling out for him in the middle of the night Yuri.” Nalavi told her seeing her eyes go wide. “Nearly a dozen times by all accounts. Not Moran’s name... not your mother or father... but Pa’cour.”

Yuri turned away from him. “I have... I have lost my mother.” She stammered. “I have lost my mother and one of my sons. My... my daughters.” She reached up and gripped her arms tightly as if she was cold. “So much pain... so much betrayal.”

Nalavi moved up behind her and placed his hands on her shoulders. “And yet now you have a decision to make once again.” He told her. “A decision to continue the path you have been on with Robert Moran. A man whose love for you only comes from the amount of power you can give to him. Or a decision to break free of everything you know and surrender to what your heart wants. A man who loves *you* Yuri. A man who has never wanted anything from you by your very own words and a man who has willingly save your life, knowing that his would be forfeit after. All things you can see and feel now because he saved your life. Because you tasted his blood.” Nalavi squeezed her shoulders and turned her to face him waiting until she looked up into his face. “The High Coven is dying Yuri.” He said softly. “Nothing can stop that now. Whether it be under the boot heel of the Kavalian dogs, or the vengeful and absolute retribution of the Leonidas family for what we have done, the High Coven will die. You can change that... but in only one way. And only you can make that decision.”

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBERS

“...Knew there was a reason I always avoided coming here when visiting with mother.” Eliani whispered to Andro as they entered the massive hall. “The smell of arrogance hurts my nose.”

The Arch Ministry Chamber was filled with hundreds upon hundreds of men, women and even some small children. Netnews video drones were spinning around the sides of the massive chamber in all directions, the reporters themselves talking into their implants as they turned to watch the Lycavorian delegation enter the chamber. L'tian walked in front of Andro and the others by two meters with his two aides and the *Durcunusaan* troop Vitman who had been at his side for nearly two decades. Twice the man had refused promotion so that he could remain as L'tian's Chief Guard Andro had discovered before coming here. Vitman's elven mate worked as L'tian's senior aide and assistant when on Elear and she had prepared all his materials for this meeting before he had left the elven homeworld. The man was beyond loyal to L'tian and Andro saw his eyes discretely casing the entire chamber as they moved forward.

Elder Guard Militia lined the path they walked towards the two rows of tables and chairs set up to the far left of the Galactic Court members who were seated on a elevated platform normally occupied by the members of the Arch Ministry. The chamber was oval in shape, and the court members were sitting with their backs to the western wall and looking out over the chamber. The slight incline allowed everyone who had a place in the surrounding bleacher like seating could see the events happening. As the single Elder Guard Militia officer directed them to the table, Andro noticed that the two other groups of tables were spaced quite far apart from theirs, and that there was a waist high wall between their group and the other two. He cut his eyes to where the Galactic Court members were watching and he saw Chief Magistrate Sel'ke watching as they moved towards the table. None of the other Magistrate's would meet his eyes and the two that had been chosen from the local pool showed blatant hostility in their plain expressions as they watched.

[Power dampeners set up all around the ceiling and along the walls.] Jomann's voice broke into Andro's thoughts. *[Six Elder Militia Guards at every entrance. The loft area where Commander Joci was during your mother's gathering here now has four men on it. It almost appears as if they are planning for something to happen.]*

[They divide us like we are the ones on trial.] L'tian spoke for they had included him in the connection.

[I expected something like this. You see the way they look at us? Even Sel'ke looks at us with disdain.] Andro spoke. *[They want us to appear to be the ones on trial here; to look as if we are wrong for what we have done.]*

[I counseled your father against instituting this Galactic Court.] L'tian spoke. *[He gave them too much power without enough oversight and regulation. He tried to make them like the body of men and women he knew from ancient Earth.]*

Eliani nodded. *[The Supreme Court of the United States.]*

[Yes. I told him that it would not be the same as the lawmakers for a simple country as it was with this Supreme Court.] L'tian said. *[He needed to set it up differently because he was leaving them with too much power and too many ways to have them be influenced by outside sources.]*

[Perhaps coming here was not such a good idea after all my love.] Sadi commented as she gripped Andro's hand.

[I'm beginning to get that same feeling.] Arrarn spoke up now. *[Andro have you smelled mother in the building?]* Arrarn asked as they moved to the table and began to sit down.

Andro nodded his head slightly, looking at Eliani briefly and knowing she caught his glance. *[Yes... but her scent is altered somehow. Almost as if they are trying to block it or confuse us in some manner.]*

Eliani turned to look at him as she sat down. *[Andro you know damn well what...]*

The booming musical tone cut off her words and a deep voiced sounded within the huge chamber. "Magistrates of the Galactic Court... I present Prime Minister Buonau of the Hadarian Free Republic and Chief of the Arch Ministry Wiktor!"

L'tian was the only one of them to stand up, though they did turn their heads to watch as Buonau and Wiktor arrogantly walked down the long aisle towards the table that was set up for them. On either side of them walked three Elder Guard Militia dressed in flowing uniforms and expensive clothes. Buonau and Wiktor both were also dressed in outrageously expensive robes that swallowed their bodies and fell to the floor as they walked. They appeared to be made of some velvet like material that shone with brilliance in the light of the chamber.

[Wow!] Eliani exclaimed. *[Those are about twenty thousand Riyal clothes apiece.]*

Andro looked at her. *[Your kidding?]*

Eliani shook her head. *[They've been trying to get mother and Tenna Sivana to purchase and wear those things for years. Mother said they were hideous looking and far too expensive.]*

[She was right.] Sadi spoke.

L'tian turned his head quickly when he realized they had not stood up. "Androcles. Eliani. Stand up."

Andro looked at him. "For what purpose grandfather?"

"Protocol!" L'tian hissed.

"Protocol states we stand for recognized heads of government." Andro answered. "We do not recognize this illegal state."

"Indulge me boy!" L'tian snapped softly. "We do not want to make this any harder than it already is and I have taught you better through the years. All of you!"

Andro hesitated for only a moment, but then his ingrained respect and love for a man he called grandfather took over and he got to his feet slowly. L'tian was right as well. He and their mothers had taught them diligently on their many furlongs to Elear in protocol and diplomatic matters. L'tian especially had made it almost a game for them as children as they learned what he taught them without even realizing it. Eliani and the others followed suit and they turned back just in time to see Buonau glance at them with hate in her eyes. Eliani smirked at her, trying to maintain her composure.

Buonau stepped up to the table finally and turned back to the members of the Court with a huge smile. "Allow me to welcome you to the Hadarian Free Republic Magistrates!" She spoke confidently. "If there is anything I can do to make your stay more comfortable please do not hesitate to ask."

Andro saw the Lycavorian Magistrate roll his eyes in disgust and sit back in his chair slowly as Sel'ke nodded to Buonau.

"Thank you Prime Minister... so far everything has been wonderful." Sel'ke answered.

"Excellent." Buonau said sweetly. "I would like to take this time to address the Hadarian concerns for this gathering before the Kavalian delegation enters if that is appropriate."

Sel'ke looked at her oddly. "We were informed of your intent to do this Prime Minister but I believe we should stick to mainly why we are here. This hearing is to address the issues between the Kavalian Federation and the Lycavorian Union Prime Minister."

"Yes I understand that Chief Magistrate... however some actions taken against the Hadarian people by the Union relate directly to the current situation between the Kavalian Federation, an ally of the Hadarian Free Republic and the Lycavorian Union. You can not hear one without the other." Buonau stated.

Sel'ke nodded with a sigh. "Very well."

L'tian looked at Sel'ke now. "Chief Magistrate we are not here to discuss issues that the Hadarian Free Republic may or may not have at this time. They offered to sponsor this meeting to keep a bad situation from getting worse, not turn it into a combined vendetta against the Lycavorian Union."

"We are only trying to establish what our intent is going to be your honor." Buonau spoke again.

"Your intent?" L'tian snapped looking at her. "Your intent for what?"

Buonau met his gaze with an arrogant twinkle in her eye. "Our intent to bring our own charges against the Union and our demand for action and reparations, as well as justice for the lives lost. This *is* a joint Kavalian and Hadarian complaint hearing mind you."

"Joint complaint?" L'tian exclaimed turning to look at Sel'ke. "We were not informed of this Chief Magistrate! Since when did this become a complaint?"

Sel'ke looked at him evenly. "We were informed of it several hours ago Minister L'tian." He spoke consistently, his voice dull and toneless. "The KFI and Hadarian Free Republic made the decision to combine this hearing. We dispatched communiqués to all parties involved as well. Are you saying you did not receive it?"

"We never received anything!" L'tian barked.

"That is interesting Minister..." The Limian magistrate spoke now as he leaned forward. "I was the one who sent those communiqués and I am certain I relayed one to the Lycavorian Embassy."

"If you did sir... it never arrived." L'tian spoke sternly.

"Are you calling me a liar Minister?" The Limian asked now.

"I'm not calling you anything young man." L'tian snapped at him, even his natural elven calm being taxed at the moment. "I'm stating we did not receive any transmission or message from your office!"

“Be that as it may... I did send it.” The Limian answered calmly. “I will be more than happy to resend the message when I return to my office but that should not stop us from moving forward. We are only presenting information at this session anyway.”

“We have not had an opportunity to look over whatever it is the Hadarian Free Republic submitted to you.” L'tian spoke. “This is highly unusual and not wholly fair.”

“We will announce these issues here today and you can go over them this evening before addressing them in tomorrow’s final session.” The Limian answered.

L'tian opened his mouth to answer but felt Androcles reach for him in Mindvoice. He turned his head slightly but kept his eyes on the magistrates. *[You know what they are doing Andro?]* He stated.

[Let them do what they will grandfather.] Andro answered. *[It will not matter. Look at the Magistrates. This was a set up from day one. The only one who shows even remote disgust at what is happening is the Lycavorian.]*

[Your father put these men and women in power.] L'tian hissed.

[Yes... and it appears they are positioning themselves to better suit their own personal needs than actually do any justice.] Andro told him. *[They will side with whomever gives them the best means to remain and keep the power they have. That is not me and they know it.]*

“Minister L'tian... do you have any objection to moving forward today?” The Limian asked with an almost condescending tone.

L'tian met the man’s eyes and finally shook his head. “No Magistrate.” He answered in a stern voice. “I will however file a Writ of Dismissal because of the way this has been presented here today.”

The Limian nodded. “As is your right.” He stated. “Very well... Prime Minister Buonau you and Minister Wiktor have the floor. And please insure that you keep to the facts and not partake of conjecture.”

Buonau nodded. “Certainly Magistrate.” She said before turning to look at Wiktor.

Chief of the Arch Ministry Wiktor stepped forward with two data scrolls in her hands and she moved up to the small table in front of where the magistrates sat. It held a powerful portable computer that was linked to several monitors around the room. “The first of three charges that we wish to bring forth is the charge of War Crimes of the highest magnitude against Androcles Leonidas himself. The King-elect of the Lycavorian Union ordered the remote destruction of the four Jump Gates within sovereign Hadarian territory. This action caused the deaths of three million, four hundred and nineteen thousand Hadarians who were caught in the explosive radius of those Gates. These were Hadarian civilians, men, women and children whose only crime was deciding to travel to different parts of the Union using established, safe travel corridors. The Hadarian Free Republic demands reparations for each and every death that occurred due to this action and we also demand that Androcles Leonidas be detained and stand trial here on Hadaria for this heinous action that **he** ordered. It is nothing more than intentional murder in reprisal for Anja being removed from power.” Wiktor pressed the console on the portable computer. “The second charge is theft of property. When the Union military departed Hadaria they took with them equipment and ships and computers that was the property of the Hadarian people. We demand that this or the equivalent in equipment and or ships be awarded to us by the Galactic Court. The third charge is the refusal of the Lycavorian military to allow Hadarian Healers to return to their rightful planet when we so issued this order. They are holding over three million Hadarian citizens against their will. The fourth and final charge is the kidnapping of the heirs to the Hadarian Royal Throne. Pursuant to that we also therefore demand that Retta and Calyb be extradited immediately to Hadaria or that our Elder Guard Militia be allowed to travel to Earth and return them without fear of reprisal. We also demand the immediate and unconditional dismantling of the blockade that now encircles the Hadarian system. It is illegal and does not allow us to conduct trade with anyone. Three instances to bypass this blockade have resulted in the near destruction of the civilian ships loaded with trade goods!”

Wiktor typed on the computer console and then set the two data scrolls on the table. “All of the information and evidence that we have gathered in regards to these charges is here on these two data scrolls for review by the Galactic Court and whoever else they deem necessary.” She turned to face Sel'ke. “It is our hope that in the name of diplomacy and justice, as well as future relations with the Hadarian Free Republic, that the Galactic Court will decide in our favor.”

“You do realize Minister Wiktor that even should the Court decide in your favor, we have no authority to implement or act on whatever decisions are made? Nor do we have the personal needed to enforce any decisions we come too. We are a diplomatic body and nothing more.” Sel’ke spoke.

Wiktor nodded. “Yes... I understand that Chief Magistrate. That is why, with the Prime Minister’s blessing, as well as that of Prefect Keleru of the KFI, we have assigned a complete company of Elder Guard Militia and a company of Kavalian Puma Bane soldiers to act in your stead should you feel the need to use them. They will be under your control if you decide to enforce your rulings.” She explained hearing the murmurs sweep through the crowd of civilians as well as the Netnews men and women who were present.

Sel’ke looked taken aback somewhat but he recovered quickly and bowed his head to her. “Thank... thank you Minister Wiktor, however that is not a recourse we will take.”

Wiktor nodded. “They are there for your use sir.” She stated again. “I have presented our charges and it is my hope we can move forward on them. It is also my hope that the leadership of the Lycavorian Union sees the need to respond to the demands of the Galactic Community that they proclaim to represent.”

Sel’ke turned slowly to L’tian. “Minister L’tian... as representative of the Lycavorian Union... do you have anything you wish to say?”

L’tian looked at Andro quickly and then got to his feet, his eyes wide and his anger barely held in check. “I will say that the government of the Hadarian Free Republic is playing very loose with the facts as they were presented.” L’tian stated. “They fail to mention how they took power in an ill-advised coup that has not only split their own population but that went against the very foundations that the Union was founded on over three thousand years ago. They put forth lies and rumors against Queen Anja, the rightful monarch, which were later proven to be completely false right in this very chamber. When that did not work to get her removed from power, they violated their own constitution and ousted her, installing a theocratic government that is both repressive and completely illegitimate. That does not include the failed kidnapping attempt of Retta and Calyb by their Elder Militia from the children’s school in Sparta. An event that resulted in the deaths of those men and the serious injuring of the Prime Minister’s own daughter.”

“My daughter Duewa has expressed her desire to return here to Hadaria with her own words to me!” Buonau exclaimed from her chair.

L’tian chuckled with contempt directed solely at her. “Your daughter Duewa is now, quite happily I might add, the wife and mate to *Durcunusaan* Colonel Thoti Prime Minister Buonau. The same man who saved her life. She is thoroughly enjoying her new life as a wolf and she is actively involved in assisting Colonel Anuk in treating all those injured in the KFI bombing of the Senate Office Building. Duewa has no desire to return here to Hadaria for any reason after what you forced her to do and if I am not mistaken her words to you when you demanded this were a simple and firm ‘Fuck you mother!’” L’tian saw her jaw tighten. “And please do not try and deny it Buonau, I happened to be in the same room with Duewa when she told you this. We can contact her right now if you like.” Buonau’s mouth clamped shut instantly when he said that. “Yes... I didn’t think so.” L’tian turned back to the members of the court.

“As for these so called charges... nothing that the Lycavorian Union military took from Hadaria belonged to anyone except the Union military. This ridiculous claim that the ships that have guarded this planet for centuries somehow belonged to Hadaria is preposterous to say the least. They were and are an active part of the Union military. When ordered to leave... they did so. The Union stripped their bases and nothing more. They did not take one piece of equipment that did not belong to them and I can provide an exact and complete list of every piece of equipment that was removed.”

“Excuse me, does that also include a list of the Union ships, their classes and the specific equipment that was loaded onto or assigned to those particular ships Minister L’tian? Some of us on this court are not so well versed in this area as to know what they are able to hold.” The Limian magistrate asked.

L’tian met his eyes. “And for what purpose would you need such a list?” He asked.

“It is my understanding many of those Union ships, as with many throughout your fleets, have been upgraded through the years with equipment and facilities designed here on Hadaria. Is that not true?” The Limian asked.

L’tian nodded. “Designed jointly with the many Hadarian Healers and scientists within the Union military, yes.”

“Do you not think it appropriate that we should know exactly what these ships had on them so when we determine what reparations, if any, are made that we are accurate in our decision.” He spoke.

L'tian looked at Andro who shook his head and then he turned back. “We will provide an accurate list of everything that was removed from the planet. We will not however submit a list of ships or equipment on these ships.”

“Would you allow us to inspect one?” Sel'ke asked now.

“No.” Andro replied before L'tian had a chance to answer.

“And what of the Hadarian Healers within the ranks of the Union military?” The second of two Hadarians on the court asked now. He was from the local branch of the Hadarian Arch Ministry and an ardent supporter of Buonau and the old ways.

“What of them?” L'tian asked.

“Can you provide evidence that you are not forcing them to remain away from their home planet?” The man asked.

“I do not know your name sir.” L'tian spoke.

“Magistrate Kagan!” The man answered rather arrogantly. “And you will address me as Magistrate Kagan Minister. Not sir.”

“I will do so moving forward... however since I did not know your name what I said was quite appropriate.” L'tian answered. “As to the charge that we are in some way keeping any Hadarian Healers from returning to Hadaria is completely false.”

“Can you provide evidence to support this?” Kagan asked.

“And what evidence would you like Magistrate Kagan?” L'tian asked.

“Allow those Healers who are on your ships in orbit to come here and tell us themselves Minister.” Kagan told him.

“Will you guarantee their safety Magistrate Kagan?” L'tian asked. “Will you guarantee that the Elder Guard Militia will not try to arrest them for some ridiculous reason in order to keep them on the surface?”

“Why would we do this?” Kagan demanded. “We will certainly not conduct ourselves in such a way!”

“Will you guarantee it?” L'tian pressed him. “Will this court guarantee their safety?”

“Your honors... this is preposterous!” Wiktor snapped loudly. “Why should we have to guarantee something like this? They are Hadarian!”

L'tian shook his head slowly. “They are Hadarians who have no desire to be a part of the theocratic state you and Buonau have instituted.”

“You will address her as Prime Minister!” Wiktor barked.

L'tian bowed his head with a sarcastic smirk. “Forgive me... Prime Minister Buonau.” He spoke smugly. “However, without a guarantee from this Galactic body that no harm will come to them and they will not be arrested for some trumped up charges, King Elect Androcles can not allow them to come to the surface. They would be more than willingly to be interviewed on an open VidLink should that be necessary.”

“So you will not allow them to come here and voice their opinions themselves?” Kagan asked once more.

“Since you can not... or will not guarantee their safety... no Magistrate Kagan.” L'tian answered.

“Is it safe to assume you will not extradite Retta and Calyb here to Hadaria as well?” The Limian Magistrate spoke up again.

“You do not honestly believe I will just turn over my brother and sister to Buonau and her cronies do you?” Andro blurted out now.

“Andro!” L'tian snapped turning to look at him sternly.

“No grandfather... I will not allow these people to speak of my brother and sister as if they are possessions of some sort!” Androcles snapped. “They carry the name Leonidas and they are first heirs to the throne of the Union before anything else! I won't begin to address the laws that were broken in your failed attempt to kidnap them when your pathetic government took power! What did you tell the wives and children of the men who were killed attempting this? That they died heroically in an attempt to save the Hadarian Royal bloodline? Or did you tell them the truth... that they died as common criminals attempting to kidnap small children from their school!”

“How dare you!” Wiktor barked. “You!! The butcher of over three million Hadarian civilians! You dare stand there and call our honored dead criminals!”

“Your honored dead?” Andro snapped his anger almost beginning to get the better of him. “You wouldn’t know honor if it jumped up and bit you in the ass! There is nothing at all honorable about trying to kidnap small children! It is a heinous and vile tactic reserved for the weak and dishonorable! Namely you and your precious Prime...”

Sadi stood up quickly and placed her hands on his arm. “Androcles... my love.” She whispered softly.

Andro’s reaction was immediate and very telling to say the least. He turned and looked into her jungle green eyes with his own changed wolf eyes and his fangs showing beneath his upper lip and suddenly the anger and hate that was etched on his face dissolved instantly. This influential reaction was viewed by billions across the breadth of the Lycavorian Union and nowhere was it more telling than within the city limits of Sparta itself. Those who had lived all those years ago, those who had seen similar displays from their beloved King and Gorgo, and how the simple touch of his Queen could calm him instantly. Sadi Leonidas would never know it, but this action here on this planet would raise her status among the billions of Lycavorian people, especially those who called Sparta home, to new heights.

Andro bent his head forward and touched his forehead to Sadi’s before turning back and looking at the Magistrates. “Retta and Calyb are my sister and brother. As is Eliani... but you have no desire to force her to do anything for she has already told you to go fuck yourselves on more than one occasion!” This brought murmurs from within the gathered crowd and some small laughter. “All of them bear the name of our father and our grandfather and that name is Leonidas. There will be no discussion on them ever returning to this planet while the current government remains in power. My mother Anja would never allow it to begin with. And any attempt, by anyone, to take Retta and Calyb forcibly will be met with extreme prejudice and force. That is all that will be said on that.”

“Is that a threat Androcles Leonidas?” Sel’ke asked surprised.

“Take it anyway you wish Chief Magistrate.” Andro answered him.

Andro returned to his seat without another word and Sadi squeezed his arm in her hands. L’tian waited for a moment before turning back to the magistrates with a small smile and pride in his eyes. L’tian could detect much of his father in Androcles, but he also could detect and sense that much of all his mothers and the way he was raised within him, and that included his own daughter For’mya.

“I believe that will bring the end of the discussion in regards to Retta and Calyb to an end.” He stated. “As for the last charge... the alleged intentional murder of so many Hadarian men, women and children... the Jump Gates in question are part of the interconnecting layers of safe travel corridors within the Union. They fall under the direction of the government and the military. The Prime Minister would have us believe that this action was undertaken as some means of retaliation for Anja being usurped from power. This is not the case in the least. The Kavalian government had appropriated control of those four Gates and were pouring thousands of men and hundreds of ships through them, bypassing light years of Union space in order to support the takeover here. They were violating Union territory knowingly with warships and troops, not to mention their actions in the death of King Leonidas and the destruction of several Drow elf outposts in The Wilds. Androcles did the only thing he could to stem the tide of illegal Kavalian forces being directed here, seeing that we could no longer control those Gates. He ordered their destruction.”

“At a cost of millions of innocent lives.” Sel’ke stated.

L’tian nodded. “Something that Androcles will live with for the rest of his life.” He said. “It was a governmental decision, not a personal decision, and done to keep Kavalian forces from establishing a foothold within Lycavorian Union territory. Or have any of you missed the near thousand ships that now occupy this system alone, or the hundreds upon hundreds of well trained Kavalian troops here on the surface. They did not just magically appear.”

“They were invited here by the Prime Minister!” Kagan snapped.

“Perhaps... but given the Kavalian actions of late... were we just to assume that they were coming here to be friends?” L’tian asked flippantly. “They assassinated the King of the Union, kidnapped one of the Queens, attempted to kill most of the King’s children and they are responsible for murdering nearly a thousand Union citizens in their bombing of the Senate Office building. Among them nearly two hundred children. They have not once denied these actions in the buildup to this gathering, so let’s not kid each other.” L’tian looked at him.

“What are we to assume by these actions Magistrate Kagan? Those are not the actions of friends. Even now they still hold a Queen of the Union prisoner for some reason which only they seem to know.”

“I believe we will discover this soon enough.” Kagan spoke. “As well as their reasoning behind their actions.”

“What possible reasoning can be used in such circumstances?” L'tian asked him. “I have been authorized by Prime Minister Deia and her new Deputy Prime Minister, former Governor of Sparta Panos, as well as the entirety of the Elven Ruling Parliament and our First Minister, the Ruling Folcani and Algolian Central Governmental Registrars, the Nodan Imperial Senate, the Bontawillian Monarchy and seven other bodies of governmental control from different members of the Lycavorian Union to tell Prime Minister Buonau and her illegal government that we and they will not heed anything that comes from her person or her outlaw government. The blockade we have in place around the Hadarian system will remain in place to keep further reinforcements of Kavalian personnel and equipment from arriving and until the return of the rightful Queen of Hadaria. There will be no further discussion on that either. Prime Minister Buonau and Chief of the Arch Ministry Wiktor brought this upon themselves and while I will apologize to the Hadarian people for the suffering they might endure, the stance of the near majority of the Lycavorian Union is plain and clear. They wanted power so badly that they participated in a coup against the rightful Queen of Hadaria. Now they can reap the rewards of their actions. So in essence... Buonau and her government can go suck an egg!”

Eliani couldn't help herself and burst out in a short but loud laugh before clamping her hand over her mouth. Even Andro and Sadi were looking at L'tian with surprise in their eyes at his response, Arrarn's mouth open in total shock.

L'tian looked at the magistrates, the personification of the calm, cool elven leader and man many knew him to be. “Now... I suggest that we proceed to the real reason why we are all here Magistrates... and that is the negotiations between the Kavalian Federation Imperium and the Lycavorian Union to obtain the release of our Queen and to stop a war from happening.”

CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

RITAAH

SPARTA'S WRATH (VORTEX CRUISER 341)

Shiria was no fool.

She had not lived over ten thousand years and not learned many different things. Wayonn had been of the mind that she needed to be protected, guarded in some silly fashion. He failed to remember that she had lived among perhaps the most violent race of beings in this part of the universe and done very well all by herself. She knew Resumar Leonidas was keeping something from her. She could see it in his eyes, and it was only confirmed when more and more men and women began to appear on Vortex Cruiser 341 over the last three days from the hidden ships in orbit above Ritaah. They were not here to secure data storage units or oversee the transfer of any information of that she had no doubt. She recognized this Captain Fang easily after being introduced to her the first time. The human female had an air of confidence about her that Shiria did not think human men or women were capable of. Shiria had never met a pure or unaltered human before, yet this woman impressed her immensely. She was amazingly intelligent and while just barely thirty years old, she had knowledge and expertise that many people four times her age did not have. She saw how Resumar himself acted towards her, treating her as an equal and questioning her when he didn't understand something; which was often when it came to ship combat Shiria saw. This should have been her first clue.

Captain Fang had been to the ship half a dozen times in the last day and a half alone, and this is what finally made Shiria realize that something else was going on. She was not about to let Resumar keep her out of the loop because he thought he was protecting her. She knew that he would be on what would normally be the bridge of the ship. This is where Avatar 341 and Avi had been spending most of their time these last days as they uploaded the core systems of VORTEX Cruiser 341 to the Lycavorian ships in orbit.

The doors on the cruiser were keyed for her Pralor bioscans and the double doors to the bridge opened without pause as she approached. Three steps onto the massive bridge and Shiria came to an abrupt halt with

wide eyes as her mouth opened in shock. She had not been here in several days, not since the last communication with Androcles, and then there had been data storage units scattered all over as well as techs working at several different stations. There had been nothing but minimal power to the bridge and only three terminals active. What she saw before her now was simply amazing.

It was readily apparent to her that full power to the bridge had been restored, as every one of the thirty-nine station consoles was active. Over half of those stations were now staffed by men or women who were working diligently while others moved between them with data pads or scrolls adjusting one thing or another. The data storage containers were gone, though the cables remained and now connected the working stations to the central hub processing core of the bridge as it fed information and received information from the active stations. The men and women were sitting comfortably in seats that had never been occupied by crewmembers before since Cruiser 341 had never received its allotment of crew before leaving the home planet with her on board. Shiria's wide eyes scanned the immense bridge area, so large that she was hard pressed to see the crewmembers at the far end, until her eyes fell on where Resumar stood with 341, Avi and Athani near what would be called the Command Station. She recognized Mican and the woman elf who Resumar called aunt with them and taking a deep breath she marched towards them. Several men and women simply got out of the way of her decidedly angry gait as she made her way over to them and came to a halt behind Resumar's tall form.

"Just what is going on here?" Shiria demanded loudly. "I will no longer be kept out of the loop! You will tell me exactly what it is you are doing Resumar Leonidas! And you will do so right now!" She watched as Resumar turned to look at her with a very sheepish and very guilty expression on his handsome face.

"Good morning to you too Val'istar." Resumar spoke to her.

Shiria stumbled for a moment with what to say and she saw Ckaoa enter the bridge from another side door obviously worried that she had not found her in her quarters. She turned back to Resumar. "Do not change the subject!" She snapped finally. "I wish to know what is going on and you are going to tell me!" She waved her hand behind and to the side. "Why are your people sitting at stations that have lay dormant for centuries? Why has full power been restored to the bridge when it is not needed to transfer data to storage cells?" She stepped closer to him. "And why are the worker drones adjusting and synchronizing the reverse flow of power through conduits in parts of this ship that should be lifeless?"

"You noticed that did you?" Resumar asked softly.

"Of course I noticed it!" Shiria barked loudly. "I traveled on this ship for two years until we arrived in this quadrant! I explored every deck, every room! There is now main power to living sections that have never housed crew before! Why do this if we are going to destroy the ship? There have never been any crewmembers so there is nothing to find on those decks!" She snapped. "Why would...?" Shiria stopped talking as her dark eyes grew wide and she stared at him. "You... you..." She shook her head gently as she stammered once more. "You are not going to destroy the ship are you?"

Resumar met her gaze evenly and shook his head. "No." He stated flatly. "No we are not Vali'star."

"Why?" She demanded. "This is what your father sent you here for Resumar! He knows the danger involved with keeping this ship intact! He sent you here to destroy it and that is what you must do!"

Resumar shook his head once more. "No." He stated once more.

"No?" She gasped. "I demand that you destroy this ship!" She exclaimed. "I demand that you follow through with your father's orders!"

"My father is not in charge Val'istar." Resumar said simply. "At least not at the moment."

Shiria's eyes grew wider still. "Androcles?" She hissed at him. "He knows what you are doing here?"

Resumar nodded his head. "I forwarded the idea to him several days after we arrived here on Ritaah Val'istar. After seeing this ship. Seeing 341." He said.

"Avatar 341 tried to kill you!" Shiria exclaimed.

-That is not an accurate statement Elder Pralor Shiria. I...- 341 began to answer her sentence as he stepped forward.

"Shut up!" Shiria barked at him cutting off his words. She glared at Resumar and saw that her look was bouncing off of him quite easily. "You can not do this Resumar." She stated.

“We *are* doing it.” Resumar answered. “It was my idea... and Androcles agreed with me completely.” He said. “We are not going to throw away what this ship is capable of. Taking the data cores is not enough. The Coven made off with several cores of information that they will not use in a peaceful manner. We cannot allow them to do this without a counter of our own. We have several advantages already... advantages from the tech we got from CS41, but they aren’t enough. *SPARTA’S WRATH* gives us that defensive counter fully intact.”

“*SPARTA’S WRATH*?” Shiria gasped in disbelief. “You named it?”

Resumar smiled. “It was 341’s idea. It’s a fitting name don’t you think?”

“This is insane!” Shiria rasped. “All of you have gone insane! Athani... tell him please. Tell him what your father will do with this ship and its technology if it is captured intact. Tell him please!”

Athani batted her blue/green eyes a few times in surprise. “But I agree with what we are doing Val’istar.” She replied softly.

“What?” Shiria gasped. “You are Kavalian! How can you agree! You know...”

“It is *because* I am Kavalian that I agree with all of it Val’istar.” Athani stated. She had discarded the name she had called Shiria growing up in favor of the name everyone now called her, and that was Val’istar. “You said it yourself... if even one small piece of this ship falls into my father’s hands they will eventually figure out ways to use the technology to further oppress my kind. Mican, Jalersi and I are all in agreement Val’istar. Taking this ship is the far better option to anything else we have.”

Shiria looked at Mican. The tall and powerfully built son of Keleru nodded his head. “My sisters are right Val’istar.” He stated.

“Where is Jalersi?” Shiria demanded. “She has more sense than the both of you combined you know! She would never agree to this!”

“But I have.” Jalersi’s voice echoed from behind Shiria causing her to spin around and see Jalersi walking up behind the group, Nikkei, Ardis and Karun on one side and Pian on the other holding her hand.

“Jalersi you can’t possibly...” Shiria couldn’t believe this was happening. “I don’t... I don’t believe this is happening.” She stated. “I won’t allow it! I won’t!”

“You can’t stop it Val’istar.” Resumar spoke softly.

Shiria turned back to him. “My command codes still work!” She snarled. “I can damn well stop it if I choose!”

Resumar shook his head slowly. “You know as well as I do that 341 and this entire ship will only answer to someone of my bloodline now. Your Command Codes became inactive and frozen the moment I came on board. Nothing will work now without a biometric scan and authorization from me or someone in my family.” He stated softly.

Shiria glared at him. “The risk... the risk involved is too great Resumar.” She said. “You and Androcles understand this don’t you?”

Resumar moved closer to her staring down into her dark eyes. “I believe we understand it far better than you realize Shiria.” He said. “You know what has happened. What my family has been through. What we are still going through even now?”

Shiria nodded slowly. “Yes.” She said softly.

“Then you know even with our Pralor blood we are still Lycavorian.” Resumar said. “We still listen to our instincts.”

“I know this Resumar.” Shiria said.

“Then you must know by now that Andro and our father are in constant communication within Mindvoice Val’istar.” Resumar said seeing her eyes go a little wider.

“But... how... the distance involved.” Shiria gasped. “Resumar how is that...”

“Was our ancestor Sumar not the most powerful Pralor among your people by your very own words?” Resumar asked.

“Well yes but...”

“My father and brother are different Val’istar.” Resumar spoke. “You know this as well as I do. My mother Aricia as well. They are connected in a way that is truly beyond amazing because of when he was conceived. I think the only ones who really understand, though I doubt they realize it, are Eliani and Zarah. My sister Zarah for obvious reasons and Eliani because she was conceived while my father and mother Anja were still new to everything that was taking place all around them. Still emotionally affected by the events that took

place on Enurrua. You have to remember... my mothers Anja and Aricia were so very close... and it was she who first went to her on Enurrua.”

“Yes... I know this.” Shiria snapped. “I have seen your thoughts... those you chose to share with me.”

“Zarah will always be stronger now because she took so much of Andro’s blood to live and Eliani is stronger because of the time she was conceived as I said.” Resumar spoke. “Did you not think that my father and brother would be able to communicate easily within Mindvoice because of the bond they share? My mother Aricia as well? And even if the distance is too great for them, they have other means available to them thanks to Avi.”

“Does your father know what you and your brother intend?” Shiria hissed.

Resumar shrugged. “I believe he has an idea.” He answered. “He is not as stupid as most people like to think he is. Even if he does and he did not agree with what we were doing... he can do nothing.”

“He is King!” Shiria barked.

“Who, at the moment, is very dead... correct?” Resumar said. “Making Andro the King elect. At least for the moment while the Kavalians hold our mother For'mya.”

“Resumar... you are letting your emotions guide you into rash decisions.” Shiria told him. “Keeping this ship intact is a mistake! If it leaves this planet it...” Shiria stopped speaking for a moment looking unsure of her words.

“What?” Resumar asked her.

Shiria blinked and stammered once more. “It will... it will become a target! Everyone will know you have this technology and they will want it! They will try to take it!” She finally got the words out.

Resumar tilted his head slightly while he looked at her and was silent for a moment, his mind wondering what it was that she had wanted to say. He finally nodded his head. “That is a possibility.” He said finally. “341... what are the odds that a Kavalian task force could in some way capture this ship once it is fully operational and staffed with a full crew?”

-The Kavalian Federation would need to assign a minimum of four complete Fleet groups as well as the operational equivalent of a Lycavorian Union Combined Forces Fleet Group in order to properly stage any sort of attack against this ship that may prove remotely successful- 341 answered quickly. –Even with such a task force, the odds that such an action would succeed once SPARTA’S WRATH has a full crew are miniscule. Every Lycavorian member of the fleet is trained first as a ground soldier. The Kavalians would need to place at least a full battalion of troops onto this ship to conduct an operation of what you speak. An operation such as you refer to would succeed only 4.3 percent of the time-

Resumar looked at her. “So you see... the odds are in our favor by a substantial margin.”

“The odds?” Shiria gasped loudly. “The odds! Does Wayonn know you are doing this? He would side with me! He would not allow this!”

“Perhaps... but he is with father and again... Androcles is the one in charge.” Resumar answered.

“Then I wish to speak with Androcles!” Shiria exclaimed. “I wish to speak with him right now! Before you proceed further!”

“I believe they are in the middle of that ridiculous hearing on Hadaria.” Resumar replied. “If that is what you would like however, certainly Val’istar. I will arrange that but I will not cease our preparations.” He turned and looked at Athani, leaning over to kiss her softly. “I will be back shortly *Aryschanne*. Make sure everyone proceeds as we discussed.”

Athani nodded. “Yes.” She spoke.

Resumar turned back to Shiria and motioned with his hand. “We’ll use the starboard COM room Val’istar. That is the one with the direct link to Andro’s *STRIKER* on Hadaria.”

Shiria huffed and began walking in that direction, Resumar looking at her oddly as he began to follow.

“...can not begin to offer my apologies Aihola.” Armetus spoke from the bed. “I...”

Aihola stepped forward and shook her head as she took his hand. She looked at his tan and weathered face and her amber eyes filled with warmth and emotion. “Do not even start with that Armetus.” She told him softly. “You are almost as revered among my people as Martin. You and he gave us the opportunity to become what we have become as a people and we have embraced it. You and Martin. You allowed us to do what we do best.”

“It... it cost too much.” Armetus spoke softly shaking his head.

“No.” Aihola replied gently. “I have spoken with every Drow Matriarch or Patriarch that lost their family members in the attacks. Not one of them expressed regret or remorse at their decision to take part in the operations Armetus. All of them however, all of them were only concerned for you.”

Armetus looked at her with his one good eye. “They were... they were my people! Every one of them!” He looked at her as the fire returned to his face and his remaining eye. “We will have vengeance Aihola!” He hissed softly. “I swear to you... we will have vengeance!”

Aihola nodded. “I know that. They know that. Right now... right now however we have many other concerns. I came here today with Deia, Marci and Panos because I’m taking a more personal role in what we will do and to show you that the Drow still believe. That we still have faith. And that we worry for you.”

Armetus nodded from the bed. He was sitting up now and he was gaining strength every day but he was a long way from being recovered. It helped that Marci had daily reports being delivered to him every morning for the last week and he was almost thoroughly caught up on what had happened. It was difficult getting used to having only one eye, but at least they had been able to save his limbs. It would take many months, but he would walk again and he would still be able to shift. Eleven thousand plus years of life and he had survived yet again. Perhaps the gods were not done with him just yet.

“I would like... I would like to meet with them one at a time.” Armetus told her. “As their schedules permit.”

Aihola nodded. “I will arrange it.” She answered. “You are looked at in a new light as well because of Lu'ria. Many of our people think you acted knowingly, sending her to Iraruzu to be found by Andro. They believe you knew she would fulfill the prophecy. That she would one day be the next Drow Queen.”

Armetus met her gaze. “Aihola... I had no idea.” He stated.

Aihola chuckled and squeezed his hand. “I know. Do not worry, I have no intention of stepping down anytime soon and Lu'ria has no desire to be Queen as she has told me herself. Besides... she is newly turned and Androcles and Sadi will need to school her in the many nuances of being a wolf now. As well as being a Drow Mistress to four beautiful women I might add.”

“Four?” Armetus asked.

Panos chuckled from where he stood against the wall. “That boy is turning into a stud Alpha just as his father is!” He snorted with some male pride in his voice. “He claimed his fifth mate and wife only a few days ago. A blue skinned Vanari female. A stunning young woman if I do say so myself, with light blue skin, violet lips and lush black hair. She fits in very well with his other wives and mates.”

Armetus looked at Marci. “Vanari. As in the ones from the Beta Quadrant like those new Lycavorians from the Protectorate?”

Marci nodded and handed over two data scrolls. “I’ve been compiling a dossier on them and just incorporated Andro’s sense of those he has met besides Caliria.”

“Caliria is this mate I take it?” Armetus asked taking the scrolls.

Marci nodded. “Yes.” She answered. “Bren has taken her mother as his mate as well and Andro seems to think that there might be something going on between Caliria’s sister Arduri, Denali and Lisisa but he is not completely sure.”

Armetus met her gaze. “Almost as if...”

Deia nodded now. “Yes. As if it has somehow been foretold that the Vanari would come to be with us in this way. Planned by something greater than we can see.”

“Well... it’s definitely no coincidence.” Armetus spoke as his mind returned to business. “Those who come in contact with the Leonidas family tend to do so for a reason I have learned through the years. And it

started with you Panos.” He spoke looking at him. “The day Martin swore to take his place as the son you had lost.”

“Yes it did.” Deia spoke.

Panos nodded. “A day my mate and I have blessed every moment since.” He stated pushing off the wall. “We will need to let Andro know you are awake and ready to get back to work soon. He is under tremendous pressure having to maintain this façade that his father and mother are dead. It is driving him insane to not be able to lash out at those who have hurt us. He and Marci have been flying by the seat of their pants I believe the expression is.”

Marci chuckled. “That is putting it rather mildly.” She said with a shrug.

“And doing an excellent job.” Deia added. “Make no mistake about that in the least.”

Armetus nodded as he looked at her. “That she has.” He said. “I have read the reports and first thing is first. Marci are we sure that Nessa and her team have rooted out all of Laustinos’s network?”

Marci nodded her head. “Nearly one hundred percent.” She answered. “Anything they are not sure of they have laid traps for. All of his command codes and any clearances he might have had have been revoked and deleted. All Military networks, as well as government databanks have been recoded. Our people have been working twenty-hour days for weeks now. They are just about finished adding the new layer of security that Avi was working on before he left with Resumar. Zaala Randall finished it shortly after the Battle of Kranek and it is being installed now.”

Armetus nodded his head. “Good. We were going to shift to the new network anyway... now is as good a time as any.” He spoke. “Andro did the right thing with the Gates around Hadaria.”

Deia nodded her head slowly. “We know. The loss of life was massive, but there was no other way to stem the flow of Kavalian personnel and equipment. He’s the only one who could have made that decision.”

“How much misery has he caught from the Netnews because of it?” Armetus asked.

“Not as much as you might think.” Marci answered. “This former Netnews Anchor that he made his spokesperson put the cap on that quickly with several press releases and the reasons behind his thinking. She answered the questions before they were asked really. How it plays out with this Hadarian hearing is another story, but Dilaen will stay on top of it I’m sure.”

Armetus looked at Deia. “He saw this coming you know.” He told her.

“Saw what coming?” Deia asked.

“Martin... he saw this coming. He knew his brother would one day get around to making a play for the throne of Sparta and the Union. It simply made sense to him. It’s what he would have done he told me, had he been in Pusintin’s shoes.” Armetus told her. “Martin didn’t think he would go after For'mya however. He thought Pusintin would go after Aricia because of her bloodline and try to do what Andro and Eliani believe has happened with For'mya. Martin never suspected this backdoor type play at the throne would be used though. This grab at the throne by using birthright and not bloodline.” Armetus straightened up further on the bed. “Deia... can he succeed?”

Deia sat back in her chair slowly shaking her head several times. “Pusintin would never have succeeded going after Aricia and he knew it. She is far too powerful a woman now, within Mindvoice as well as physically with her skills to allow it. Hell...no one in the Durcunusaan will even challenge her to spare anymore because she is too skilled. And as my *Mandri’s anome* she would have forced them to kill her before allowing another man besides Martin to take her. Even against her will. She has the vicious survival instincts of a pureblood Lycavorian female wolf, Anja and Dysea as well simply because of their natures before they were turned. For'mya unfortunately does not. In many ways For'mya is still ruled by her calm elven sensibilities even though she is wolf and this is why they love her so. Which Pusintin and Laustinos obviously knew about and used against her.” Deia looked at them. “That and her love for Martin and the others as well. She was the last of Martin’s Queens, but all of them love her more fiercely because of whom she is inside. She is their focus and center. Their calm. If you have ever seen them all together in a room when they are relaxing, where is For'mya almost always situated?”

This caused everyone to stop and think about the times they had seen Martin and his Queens together relaxing at their home. It was Aihola who answered for all of them. “She is always at the center, closest to Aricia and Martin.” She said softly looking at Deia.

Deia nodded. “She is Martin’s *Kinsoaurgai* yes... but she is also the voice of all of them in a sense.”

“So you believe the move with Dysea was a ploy by Pusintin like Andro and Eliani now believe?” Armetus asked.

Deia nodded. “It is the only thing that makes sense. A type of control over For'mya that they would not have otherwise.” She stated evenly. “And implanting the same type of inhibitor in her as they did within Dysea only makes it much worse. For'mya cannot feel us Armetus; she cannot sense us at all within Mindvoice. This simple fact alone, after seeing what we did on the Netnews in my office that day, this fact alone would make her body start to change. She was three days from the peak of her Phase cycle, just as all of them were. Pusintin knew this... he knew what he was going to do and he took advantage of the biological nature of Lycavorian females.”

“How would he even know this?” Marci asked now. “It is not something that is common talk at cafés and such Prime Minister. At least not in a manner that would be understood by someone who is not Lycavorian.”

“Do not forget who is he Marci.” Panos spoke now. “He was born here on this planet among the Lycavorians here. We remained much closer to our instincts than those off world simply because we did not know any better. Those Lycavorian females within Spartan society, they would have reacted in the same way For'mya has reacted. If it's true. Many of them did when their mates fell in battle. It is part of why we were able to keep our presence here secret for so long. The unmated males would smell this on the females and they would get to them before any non-Lycavorian could show an interest no matter if they were Spartan or not. They did not force themselves upon any female, as we believe Pusintin has done, but it gave the female a much larger choice of who to turn to for a prospective mate. We did not start taking mates outside our people until after World War Two when many Spartans of Lycavorian blood fell in battle against Hitler and his vampire cronies. Then we had no choice. No one that we turned was ever forced however, and that is when we began the code by which we lived. Never without their consent or only in order to save their lives.”

“And Walter passed this to Martin and the others.” Marci said softly. “That is why they changed the men and women who travel with them now?”

Panos nodded. “My son was of the original three hundred Spartans who fought with Martin's father those days at Thermopylae. One of only two who survived. He may not have known who Martin was when he was brought to him, but he knew enough to teach him our ways.”

Aihola turned to him now. “I have always wondered Panos... how is it that Walter could not smell the Leonidas bloodline in him when he was first brought to him by Helen and the others?”

“I asked Anja this many years ago and she said it is most likely because he was placed in a sleep chamber so soon after being born. His true scent did not have an opportunity to fully mature until years after he returned to Earth because it had been suppressed for over twenty-five hundred years using chemicals while in the chamber.” Panos answered. “It was faint enough that Walter was able to sense a connection within his blood, but not how deeply that connection went. That did not happen until Martin finally went to Thermopylae and was touched by his father's essence.”

“He has with him men and women who will die at his command more readily than any others.” Armetus spoke softly. “And men and women who will know exactly what he and Daniel will do in almost any given situation. The most experienced and lethal fighting unit that exists today. Andro knew exactly what he was doing when he gathered them and sent them to be with his father.”

“A unit that now includes three of his mates and an Immortal.” Deia spoke. “I shudder to think of what trouble they will conduct.”

“You can be assured the gloves have come off.” Panos spoke. “I have spoken with my son at length about these men and women and what they did before the Great Fire. Dymas is preparing his personal command for battle and as Polemarch of the entire Union ground forces he will begin preparing them. After speaking with him it is my belief that we will begin to see a new era of warfare. An era of warfare that will change the face of the universe, as we know it anyway. An era that Martin and Androcles are going to bring shattering to the forefront and the Kavalians will bear the brunt of it. I pity them in a way... for their leaders do not yet understand the force of what they have unleashed. And after what Gorgo did, whatever restraint Martin and his son may have exercised... that is now gone.”

Armetus looked quickly at Marci. “Project Arizona?” He gasped.

Marci nodded slowly. "Fully operational and already in the field. Andro uncorked them at the Battle of Kranek and Admiral Lorian put a serious hurting on superior Kav numbers." She answered. "And that is just with two ships."

"Admiral?" Armetus questioned.

Marci nodded. "Andro promoted her with Ben's blessing and put her in command of the entire Block One series. The last three from the Block One batch will be finished by the end of this week according to Ben. They will be commissioned immediately for Andro already has a mission for them."

"What is this Block One? This Project Arizona?" Deia asked. "I have never heard of these things?"

Armetus looked at her. "Martin wanted you to have complete and utter deniability Deia." He answered. "Only six of us knew they were being built. It was better that way."

"What is this Project Arizona Armetus?" Deia asked once more. "What has he been building?"

Armetus took a deep breath. "A completely new class of ship based solely on technology we took from CS41. Avi helped with the blueprint and engineering and Zaala Randall designed and oversaw the building of their propulsion plants. Essentially... essentially they are twenty of the most devastating warships we have ever built as a government and they are meant for only one purpose."

"War." Deia spoke softly.

Armetus nodded slowly. "Martin did not want you involved because of the ramifications that could arise." He said. "He didn't want your reputation as a mediator tainted."

"And look where that has gotten me?" Deia hissed softly in anger. "The near destruction of everything in my family... a second time! The family I never thought I would have again!" She shook her head. "Never again. You will fill me in on these ships when we are done here. I want to know everything, so that when I have to confront a politician with too much arrogance or a Netnews reporter with too much curiosity, I can tell them where to go and how to get there in the most eloquent of terms."

Armetus nodded. "Marci?"

Marci nodded as well. "I can arrange a full briefing. I will need to let Admiral O'Connor and Andro know but I doubt they will disagree. Not now."

"Back to Pusintin." Armetus said. "Deia... can he do it?"

Deia met his eyes. "He will put forth evidence of birthright and such no doubt. As well as the combination of royal blood. He is the oldest son of Leonidas and Martin did clear the path for him to do this by reinstating him into the ranks of the Spartans."

"That's not what I asked Deia." Armetus spoke. "Can he take the throne legally without Andro starting a war to stop him because you know as well as I do that is exactly what Andro will do."

"It will depend on what the Galactic Court rules." She said. "And what the consensus of our allies in the senate will be."

"Deia... our allies in the Senate will never allow it and you know it. And the Galactic Court appears to have been bought... hook, line and sinker as Anja says! Especially from these reports Marci has given me not to mention what I have seen so far this morning on the Netnews channels." Armetus growled. "My question is, does he have a legitimate claim to the throne! Can he give those in the Senate who have never cared for Martin; can he give them ammunition to use to rise to the position of King?"

Deia met his eyes. "Yes he does have a claim. Or I should say a child of his would have a claim. And he *will* be successful if what we think has happened has indeed happen... yes." She said looking at him and then allowing her dark eyes to wander to everyone in the room one at a time. "We changed the Ascension Laws in regards to bloodline after what happened to Aricia on Enurrua. That is not what they will use however. They will use the few Ascension Laws in regards to birthright and those of have never been altered and they have remained buried in the wording of the Twenty-Third Scroll of Lycavorian Law. They only reference bloodline vaguely and deal mostly with actual birth lines. Many scholars did not even know they ever existed. At least not until Laustinos found them and then gave them to the Kavalians. They will take the context of these few words and twist them to suit what they want to accomplish Armetus, even though that was not the intent when it was written. I should know, I helped Canth and Resumar to write them. We can do nothing at the moment until we hear what it is they want fully. Using For'mya... well it is my belief they will attempt to usurp not only the Union throne, but that of the elves as well."

“And there are more elven members of their parliament who have never cared for Martin than there are elven Senators within the Union Senate.” Panos spoke. “So it could potentially be a large problem?”

Deia nodded her head. “If this is what they have done, then it was done within days, more than likely hours after they took her. Pusintin would have moved very quickly.” She said softly. “We were still reeling from the attacks as they knew we would be. It is why Matuarr told Andro any attempt to retrieve For'mya and they would kill her. The Kavalians have been planning this for some time Armetus and Laustinos was the one who helped them.” Deia shook her head. “There is no way to know what lies they told her immediately after they took her, knowing what she would have seen on the Netnews. With the Inhibitor in place she would not have been able to sense any of us within Mindvoice as I said. She would think we were all dead. It gave them the time they needed for her body to begin to change and to force her to agree to their terms. If she carries his child she will be bound to him now, no matter that she hates him with every fiber of her being. Her wolf instincts will drive her to protect their children no matter the enemy and when combined with her elven instincts that run along the same gambit, well you can not be more protective a mother than when you are wolf *and* elf. Pusintin is counting on that I tell you.”

“What a *nubous* lash up!” Armetus hissed. “Do we know how many of our own people will support this?”

Marci shook her head quickly. “Not very many Armetus. Lycavorians or elves anyway. I’ve spoken to the head of EI and just about every counterpart that I have among the other Union members. The mass consensus they are seeing as more and more information comes out is that the vast majority of all their people are incensed. Even the King’s normally vocal opponents are making rumblings about this. They may have fought him on everything he and the Queens did, but they respected and honored him.” Marci said. “There is the local Utopian Movement here on Earth and their branches across the Union, but they have no real power. And while they may support this openly, they will remain silent for the most part. Too many of our people adore the King and Queens and they will not risk confrontation. They do however have a new voice.”

“What do you mean?” Armetus asked.

Marci handed him another scroll. “The young woman Andro dated for a brief time before Sadi came back into his life, Ulana is her name. She was elected to take her father’s position within the Senate after he was killed in the bombing. She is a closet supporter of the Utopian Movement. No doubt they will attempt to have her use her new position to try and advance their agenda. Perhaps even try and renew her relationship with Andro.”

Armetus looked at her. “Andro knew this when he was seeing her?”

Marci shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. Probably. I can’t believe that would have escaped his notice.”

“He knew.” Deia said with a small smile. “And he took perverse pleasure in it as well. He is far too much like his father. Let Ulana attempt what she will, Sadi and the others will quickly put her in her place.”

“Androcles will not let this stand Deia.” Armetus said turning back to her. “You have to know that.”

Deia nodded. “I do. And neither will I.” She answered. “However... I am unwilling to put For'mya in any kind of situation where her life is threatened. If it were to come out before we are ready that Martin is still alive, their plan will fall apart and Pusintin will kill her outright and possibly invade.”

“Their actions so far require we declare war!” Armetus spoke. “We would be well within our rights to do so!”

“And all but the most liberal Senators would agree and vote for war.” Panos spoke.

Armetus looked back at Marci. “Marci?”

“They haven’t pulled any of their forces away from the High Coven borders based on our most recent Intel reports and scans. Probably as a way to win support from the masses.” She told him immediately and with much confidence. “They could still field a massive army with their biogenic clones and those could pour across the borders in any number of locations. Our Border Defense Network would not stand for long against a concentrated attack. Their fleets outnumber us for the most part, but we don’t know how experienced they are and there is some question as to the durability of their ships and equipment. It’s one of the reasons they supported Buonau in her bid to oust Queen Anja. It gives them access to what they didn’t have before. Hadarian Healers.”

“Yes... but it is my understanding none of those who are active duty heeded her order to return.” Armetus said.

Marci nodded. “No... for the most part they all told her to get screwed.” She answered. “And there are millions who made it off planet before the Kavalians clamped down and we put the blockade in place. Perhaps another ten to fifteen percent of them were trained Healers as well. Most of them went to Apo Prime, some came here to Earth and immediately began helping within the hospitals and clinics across the planet. Those that were treating injuries from the bombings.”

“She still has a substantial number of Healers she can use.” Armetus said.

“The question remains... how well will they be trained?” Marci said. “Certainly not on the same caliber as the Union Healers or those who escaped.”

“It is still an advantage for them however. At least initially.” Armetus said. “They will have something they didn’t have before.”

“I question what Buonau gave up in order to secure their assistance.” Deia spoke. “That woman is power hungry and has always hated Anja because she could never control her as she did Yelu.”

“We do have some assets left on Hadaria...” Marci said. “But they will only report in if it is important enough. Getting transmissions off world is a tricky prospect and they do not want to attempt it more than they need to.”

Deia shook her head. “We must avoid that Armetus.” She stated. “I do not want to put those people at risk and there are other things that Andro says he has working. There are things he will not tell me, but I know he will not risk his mother for any reason until certain pivotal things happen or don’t happen.”

“What things?” Armetus asked.

Deia shook her head. “I don’t know.” She answered. “But whatever they are you can be assured of one thing.”

“And that is?” Armetus asked.

“Pusintin will be successful for now. He will be successful right up until the time that it is discovered Martin is still alive and Pusintin is guilty of raping a sitting Queen of the Lycavorian Union.” Her eyes became hard points of darkness. “Then his life will be for *sibfla*, for not only will Martin be after his blood, but every member of the Leonidas family as well. Of that you can be assured.”

CURILA 6

I think we wore her out. Ceuma spoke within Mindvoice as she lifted her head from Joci’s broad chest, her Persian red hair damp with sweat. Her jade green eyes turned with her face and she looked at the ebony skinned face and dark eyes of her husband and mate. Joci’s chest rose and fell evenly with deep breaths as his racing heart began to slow to a more sedate rhythm. Ceuma couldn’t help but grin when she saw the look in his eyes and how wide they were at the actions that had taken place over the last three hours since he had walked into their quarters and found her and Naesta naked and locked in a torrid embrace of mutual pleasure.

Joci’s eyes dropped to the mass of white blond hair and soft blue skin that rested on his abdomen totally spent and sleeping the sleep of the much contented. Naesta’s face was a mask of blissful pleasure for that is how she had fallen asleep. Her naked body, so very enticing and firm and blue, was pressed against his side. Her breasts, though not as large as Ceuma’s, were stabbing into his naked side deliciously. Her arm was draped over his lower abdomen and her hand rested intimately on Ceuma’s hip. His eyes turned back to Ceuma.

What have we done? He asked her.

I thought we experienced buckets of pleasure as Anja and Sivana are so fond of saying. Ceuma answered him. I know you smelled it Joci... if I could smell it upon her then you must have.

I... I’m not saying I didn’t... but you... you are my mate and wife. He answered.

Yes I am. And I thank whatever gods are up there for that every day. But I also could smell the desire wafting from Naesta. For me. For you. I could not... I did not want to fight it anymore Joci. Ceuma

answered. *She told me that the more Alkay they produce during sex is a large indicator of their emotional state and how much they desire a person.*

You talked of this? Joci gasped.

Joci... I have been working with her for weeks now. The medical background and tests we did were instrumental in discovering the cure for her people. Ceuma answered. We have talked of many things since then. She is amazingly intelligent and grasps the concepts of problems incredibly fast. And she tastes wonderful. Don't you agree? She asked him with a smile as her fingers traced his chin and his bottom lip.

Ceuma we...

Are you going to tell me you don't find it overwhelmingly exciting to have two women worshipping you as we did? Ceuma asked him with a seductive twinkle in her eye. *Kissing you? Tasting you? And you do taste wonderful my husband and mate.*

Ceuma that is not what I was going to say. Joci spoke lifting his hand and pressing it to her cheek. He watched her eyes close in happiness and she leaned into his touch, his alpha aura drifting almost lazily around her body and tickling her senses.

I know what you were going to say. She spoke opening her eyes and looking at him. *You feel shame for enjoying when Naesta was atop you and whimpering your name as you filled her and she clutched at your arms. You feel shame because you felt pleasure with her.*

It is not the same. Joci said quickly. *She is not you.*

I know that my love. Ceuma spoke. *And while you took pleasure with her, watching you with her, knowing what we could have together. It made me so very happy. And I know what I mean to you because you took me immediately after with more passion and intensity than you ever have. My senses were alive as your aura caressed me Joci. We...*

"Ceuma?" Anja's voice broke into her thoughts and Ceuma turned her head quickly breaking out of her daydreaming trance.

"Hmmm? What?" She stammered.

Anja looked at the clone of herself who she now considered another sister. Ceuma had developed into a person all her own that was for sure, but she still had a small bit of Anja and Sivana within her. A rebellious side that came out every so often and also any angry streak that she had only ever seen when Ceuma had run her *Nehtes* through Rinard on Hadaria. Anja had seen it coming for several weeks now, the relationship between Naesta and Ceuma developing very quickly. The attraction was easily noticeable by any Lycavorian simply by her scent which spiked whenever either Ceuma or Joci was nearby. Now Anja could smell Naesta's sweet scent all over her sister and no doubt when she saw Naesta it would be the same. And Anja knew it was not something that Ceuma would have done without including Joci she knew and she also knew it had probably taken the charcoal skinned Spartan completely by surprise.

Anja settled into the chair next to Ceuma's medical work station with a smile. "I'm guessing from your distracted look and the smile in your eyes that it happened last night and it was everything you hoped it would be?"

Ceuma looked at her with wide eyes. "What... what do you mean?"

Anja chuckled. "Sister... do you think that Sivana and I haven't seen it. Smelled it these last weeks. You and Naesta."

Ceuma looked down somewhat embarrassed. "It is that obvious?" She asked softly.

"To me it is." Anja told her. "Vana will catch on eventually... but I can see it in your eyes and on your face because it is how I feel with Aricia. With Bella. With Dysea and For'mya. And now Cirith."

"Is it normal?" Ceuma asked her.

"Normal? No." Anja answered. "What you have to understand is you are wolf now sister. Just like me. Turned by a man with very pure blood, no matter the asshole that he was. You are also the mate and wife to another man with even purer blood and no doubt by now Joci has bitten you simply to make his claim on you?"

Ceuma nodded. "Yes."

"Then his blood is within you as well. And if I'm right, his blood is more than likely more pure than Rinard." Anja said. "The purer the blood the stronger you will be sister. It will allow you to feel and think of things differently than others. You and Naesta were together last night?"

Ceuma nodded again. “Anja... I have... I never desired something like this. I never even imagined myself doing something like this. But seeing her... smelling her... it became so clear and focused and the desire and want so powerful.”

Anja nodded in understanding. “It is no different than what I feel for any of the others.” She answered. “Martin may rock our world sister, he continues to make us feel things that we have never felt before, but that does not mean we, as his wives and mates, can not make each other cry out in passion without him.”

“It is very confusing for Joci.” Ceuma said. “He does not understand how... how he can feel what he does with her and not be betraying me. I tried to explain it to him but I don’t know if he truly understood.”

Anja leaned back with a knowing smile. “Given how the two of you met that doesn’t really surprise me. He is a very honorable man and it would be something that he would feel. What you need to do is make him understand that the two of you need him just as badly as you do each other.” She took Ceuma’s hands. “Does Naesta feel the same for Joci that she does for you? It can’t work if she does not.”

“That’s just it!” Ceuma exclaimed. “She does! She is taken by him! His skin, his hair, she feels exactly the same as I do for him. It is so... so surreal.”

“You have found something that very few people ever do sister.” Anja said. “Don’t let it slip away. Do you want me to talk to Joci?”

“*Carians* no!” Ceuma gasped. “He would be mortified that you know!” Ceuma squeezed her hands. “No... I will make him understand. Naesta and I will make him understand. We want each other... but we both want him more.”

Anja smiled. “It will work itself out don’t worry.” She stated. “You are very...” The terminal Ceuma sat next to began chiming furiously and both of them turned to look at the screen. Anja’s face changed then. “Ceuma... what... what are you running?” She asked finally.

Ceuma began typing furiously on the console. “I was bored and trying to think when I woke this morning so I programmed the computer to run all current samples of blood through a Phased Passive Ionic Inducer. To look for any abnormalities.” She stabbed down on the control panel. “I never thought it would find anything. Everyone is so healthy. What... Anja what is this?”

Anja moved closer to the screen and looked at the genetic strands. “Do a Spatial Analysis on the gene.”

Ceuma adjusted the controls once more and then looked up at the screen with her sister as the massive medical computer worked. The results came only five and a half seconds later. “The core strand for Darpia Syndrome? And it’s active.” Ceuma spoke softly. “What is Darpia Syndrome?”

“Who has this sister?” Anja asked her face now holding a very concerned expression. “Who has this core strand?”

Ceuma typed once more and the small gasp escaped her throat as she turned to look at Anja quickly. “Isabella!” She rasped out. “It’s Bella’s blood sample. Given only four days ago Anja!”

Anja sprang to her feet and rushed to the COM panel on the adjoining console, furiously stabbing her finger down on the panel. “Eurin! Eurin I need you in the medical center! Hurry!”

“Anja... what’s wrong?” Eurin’s voice echoed.

“Quickly Divine One.” Anja said. “And bring Vana with you! No one else!”

Anja tapped the console again and took a deep breath calming herself before reaching out within Mindvoice. *Bella... where are you?*

I woke famished and I’m just leaving the private dining area. The two Sanguine members arrived last night and I was showing them around now ... why? Isabella answered immediately.

Would you join me in the medical center Bella my love? Anja asked keeping her voice neutral. It didn’t work with Isabella for they have been lovers and friends for far too long.

Anja... what is wrong? Bella asked.

Bella... we... we need to talk and I need you to come to the medical center. Anja told her. *Now. I’ll be there in six minutes.*

“...me again bitch and I will make you regret your life as it is!” Pusintin snarled viciously into For'mya's face as his large hand squeezed tighter around her slim throat and he pressed her against the wall of the room.

“You... you lied to me you *nubous ronnus!*” For'mya snarled back at him undeterred, her hands gripping his wrists. “They are not dead! They are here!”

Pusintin rolled his eyes. “Of course I lied to you bitch!” He growled. “You wouldn't have done what I wanted otherwise!”

“Bryon?” For'mya gasped. “My son! You don't have him do you?”

Pusintin grinned evilly. “If I did... he would already be dead.” He hissed at her.

“You putrid excuse for a man!” For'mya almost screamed at him as she began to struggle anew. “You fucking contemptible bastard! You...”

Pusintin squeezed harder, cutting off her words as he leaned closer, pressing her body against the wall firmly as she fought to pull his hand away from her neck. “Do not press me woman!” He rasped at her. “What is done is done! My brother is dead and you are my mate now! I have claimed you in the old ways of the Lycavorian people. You are my mate and I will teach you to be a good woman and learn your place!”

For'mya hissed as her wolf fangs extended and her eyes changed. “Never!” She snarled at him.

Pusintin chuckled. “My dead brother and I are the strongest alphas in the entire Union For'mya. Now that he is dead and I have claimed you... who will sate the burning of your wolf blood when the phase comes For'mya? Only I can do that!”

“I did not want you!” For'mya snarled. “I did not choose you! You murdered my mate! You murdered my Martin!”

“Your mind may not have chose me... but your blood and your body did.” Pusintin hissed at her. “That is all that matters! Your choice is irrelevant. And now you are bound to me! Bound to me in such a way that your instincts override your mind's desire to slit my throat at the first chance you get! It's beautiful isn't it? You want to kill me so bad that you can taste it, yet your instincts won't allow you too. Your instincts tell you to protect me...” Pusintin's other hand came up now and settled almost gently on For'mya's swollen abdomen. “And to protect the child you carry for me! My child! My son!”

Tears clouded her eyes as she struggled even more, shame washing over her at his words. Shame at what she had done... what she had agreed to do to protect those she loved because she believed them all she had left. She believed Dysea and Bryon the only remaining family she had and she would do anything to protect them. For'mya slapped his hand away from her abdomen.

“Don't... don't touch me!” She screamed.

Pusintin smiled wickedly. “You didn't seem to mind me touching your body when I was pounding your tight pussy into the bed.” He growled at her. “You were fucking me back pretty good if I recall.”

“Liar! You lie!” She almost screamed out. “You... you are a sick perversion of a man! I never wanted you! Never!”

“Maybe.” He told her. “But you still need me. If not your mind... then the blood in your veins.” Pusintin grinned. “I plan on keeping you around For'mya. You are a class act... and you have got the tightest snatch I have ever had! I plan on keeping you around for a long time. You are too good a lay to kill you... even though you want me to. Don't worry when we get back to Cabelir, I'll hit you with my aura again and let you snuggle up between my legs and suck me off as long as you want. If you suck cock as good as you fuck then I'll know why my brother kept you around even with your smallish tits. Tell me... are the rest of your whore lovers as good in bed as you? I just might order my men to take them alive so I can try them out too!”

“Monster!” For'mya hissed at him.

“You just remember that you agreed to all of this willingly.” Pusintin snarled back at her. “It doesn't matter why you did... but you did. And you signed all the orders and documents that we need right now.”

“Do not... do not make me face them.” For'mya whimpered now. “If you... if you have any decency in you... do not make me face them like this.”

Pusintin chuckled cruelly and squeezed her arm. “Androcles killed my youngest son! He butchered him like an animal. Having him and the others see you in your condition is something I can't wait for.”

“Bastard!” For'mya rasped as he released her throat and she settled back to the floor reaching up to rub the area on her neck where his hand had been.

“Why do you think you can’t feel them in Mindvoice For'mya?” Pusintin asked with a grin. “They already suspect what you have done and they are blocking you. You are dead to them because of it. They feel you have betrayed them. Betrayed my dead brother. It’s poetic really. Now pull yourself together... we are going out there in a few minutes. I warn you though For'mya, do not do anything stupid. I have enough ships and troops in this system to make sure they all die before they even get off world. Don’t make me kill them. Nothing you do can stop what is coming, and as long as you do as your told, no one has to die needlessly. You just do what you are supposed to do and everything will be fine. You speak when I tell you and don’t say a fucking thing to them.”

“They are my children!” For'mya screamed.

“Not anymore they aren’t!” Pusintin growled. “Don’t fuck with me on this For'mya. It will be bad if you do.”

“They will speak to me! I can’t just ignore them!” For'mya wailed.

“You can... and you will.” Pusintin snapped.

For'mya glared at him with her dark brown wolf eyes. “I... I will kill you one day.” She hissed at him. “I will watch you die I swear.”

Pusintin smiled. “Yeah... better people than you have said that.” He stated. “I’m still here. Just shut up and get ready.”

“...And that is the negotiations between the Kavalian Federation Imperium and the Lycavorian Union to obtain the release of our Queen and to stop a war from happening.” L'tian didn't even bother looking at Buonau and Wiktor.

“You do realize that we will review the Hadarian evidence and then render a decision on their charges Ambassador.” Kagan spoke.

L'tian nodded. “If you wish to waste your time that is certainly within your rights.” He replied.

“Very well...” Sel'ke spoke. “I believe the Kavalian delegation has arrived and is ready to enter.” His eyes moved to the entrance across the room directly facing the Union table as the double doors opened. It was the entrance furthest from them, but it also allowed them to see everyone who came out, as they had to walk across in front of them to get to their table.

Andro rose to his feet with Eliani next to him, Arrarn moving up beside her as three large Kavalian soldiers came out, their weapons visible in their hands but pointing at the floor. Andro saw the Kavalian Admiral he had spoken with on the airfield walk out next, followed by a young man who appeared to be around his age and looked very similar to his cousin who he had killed on Iraruzu. They watched as another half dozen Kavalians exited the doorway, bunched tightly around who could only be his uncle. Andro had never seen Pusintin before, only in still images really and those were very old, but it was undoubtedly him. Beside him walked another tall Kavalian who was dressed in regal looking dark blue clothes and then he saw the flash of golden blond hair. She was walking on the far side of Pusintin, and Andro could detect her scent easily now. The same wild orchid scent that had brought all of them such comfort as children. The sweet scents of their mothers was all that was needed most often to sooth them as children as they grew. Andro heard Eliani gasp and grip his arm tightly when she too caught her scent, and Arrarn pressed closer, his mother’s smell filling his nostrils.

“Mother!” His whisper came out hoarsely but Andro and Eliani understood it without question.

Andro could see his grandfather stiffen slightly next to him as he saw his daughter and then as if it was staged for their benefit, the Kavalians stopped walking in front of the large Magistrate’s table and the Kavalian guards bunched tightly around Pusintin and the others moved out of the way. Eliani’s green eyes grew wide and then burst into tears as her hands came to her mouth in stunned shock.

“Mother no! *Son vada carians* no!” She gasped loudly.

“NO! NO!” Arrarn screamed as he started forward only to have Jomann and Andro seize his arms. “MOTHER!”

Andro held his brother’s arm even as his azure eyes changed and his fangs burst forth in anger. He had been preparing himself for this moment, steeling his emotions against what he dreaded he would see. It didn’t seem to be helping as he felt his blood beginning to boil in rage and not even Sadi grabbing his own arm could

calm them. The emotion was mirrored by L'tian whose eyes were wide, but his face a mask of terrible rage as they fell upon his daughter. She walked with her head down unable to look up at them though the tears could be seen easily that were rolling down her cheeks. Pusintin was gripping her arm tightly, but there was no denying the swelling of her pregnant abdomen. There was no mistaking the flush of her soft tanned skin as he had seen it twice before in the last twenty years. It shone with beauty and radiance as it did when she was pregnant with first Arrarn and then Bryon. There was definitely no mistaking that For'mya was very pregnant. It appeared as if she was only days away from giving birth and this made it all the more painful for them to witness.

The Kavalian politician ignored their outbursts and bowed his head slightly to the twelve Magistrates, Sel'ke and several others with wide eyes as they gazed at For'mya. They knew who she was of course, and her condition was not lost on them. Nor was the fact that she was not restrained in any way considering the claims that she was a prisoner. The reactions Androcles Leonidas and his siblings was expected as well considering what they saw. They could hear the loud murmurs of shock coming from nearly everyone in the audience, most especially among the many Netnews crews who were present and reporting back live to their respective stations. What Sel'ke and the others could not hear, what no one but those on the single ship far from Hadaria could hear, was the pure and uncontaminated roar of fury that came from one man. Had anyone in the massive meeting room heard this cry, had they heard the promise of cruel, hideous and chilling demise in the echoes of that cry, had they heard any of it, they would have immediately fled from the planet and renounced all of their sins and become priests of some sort.

“Magistrates of the Galactic Court... Chief Magistrate Sel'ke, my name is Ambassador Rutork'Toren.” The Kavalian who stood next to Pusintin spoke. “I am the appointed Kavalian Ambassador to Hadaria and I have been assigned as counselor for these proceedings and I will represent Marshall Pusintin and Prefect Keleru on behalf of the Kavalian people.”

Sel'ke tore his eyes away from where For'mya stood next to Pusintin and looked at the man. He nodded quickly. “Am... Ambassador.” He stammered still in somewhat of a shock.

Rutork motioned elegantly to Pusintin with his hand. “Please... allow me to present Grand Marshall Pusintin of the Kavalian Federation and overall Commander of the Kavalian Federation Imperium Military. Beside him is Senior Admiral Menot who is also the Kavalian military liaison to Hadaria and then we have the Marshall's oldest son Colonel Kalis of the Puma Bane Regiment. I believe you are already acquainted with the elf female For'mya as the former Queen of the Lycavorian Union and current Queen of the Elven people.”

“What is the meaning of this?” L'tian barked from behind them unable to contain himself any longer. “You abduct a sitting Queen of the Union from Earth, killing hundreds of innocent civilians in the process and then you parade her around in front of the Galactic Court and the eyes of the entire known universe as some sort of prize?” L'tian screamed. “I demand she be released instantly! This very minute! To allow this is beyond acceptable!”

Rutork looked at him from where he stood. “The elf female is not a prisoner Ambassador L'tian.” He stated.

“She is a Queen of the Union and you will refer to her as such!” Arrarn snarled from his spot.

Rutork chuckled defiantly. “The elf female For'mya is no longer a Queen of the your silly Union young man. She willingly relinquished this title upon the death of your tyrant King and became the bound mate to Grand Marshall Pusintin.”

No one's eyes were wider than L'tian's and he moved closer to the group, the Kavalian guards not attempting to stop him. “What nonsense is this?” He shouted. “That is a lie! For'mya would never do that! I demand that she be released immediately before we hold any sort of discussions!”

Rutork was still smiling as he looked at Sel'ke and the other Magistrates. “I assure you Magistrates... everything I have just said is quite true. The elf female For'mya was changed many years ago and...”

“Stop calling her that!” Eliani shouted the tears streaking her cheeks. “She is Queen! And she is our mother! You kidnapped her! Took her from Earth against her will!”

“Magistrates... do you see any restraints upon the female?” Rutork asked motioning to where For'mya stood. “She is no prisoner. And I will speak about her as Kavalians refer to all of their females. In our culture they are not recognized publicly. The elf female For'mya willingly relinquished her title as Queen of the Union upon the death of the Lycavorian tyrant King. Due to her Lycavorian blood she was in the midst of what Lycavorian and females turned by them call their Phase. When female wolves are most fertile and their scent

and blood calls out for a mate. When she lost her former mate, her body began to change and upon meeting Marshall Pusintin, the need to mate with him was overwhelming to her. She accepted his advances, for he too is Lycavorian, and then Marshall Pusintin claimed the elf female in the ancient ways of the Lycavorian people. The elf female did not resist and as you can see she now carries his child. She is now bound to him, his mate and wife, also in the ancient ways of the Lycavorian people.”

“Ambassador... we are not fools on this court!” The Lycavorian Magistrate snarled as he leaned forward. “The Lycavorian people have not used this method of taking a mate in nearly twenty millennia! It is considered barbaric among our people! And you wish us to believe that Queen For'mya is this far along in a pregnancy, as her obvious physical condition dictates, in only the few weeks since you took her from Earth?”

“The Lycavorian people may not use this method any longer Magistrate... however it is not unheard of... am I correct? Did not Jorak, the son of Chetak, use this very means to claim the now dead Queen Aricia as his mate?” Rutork spoke calmly.

“That *ronnus* used drugs!” The Lycavorian growled. “He used drugs that were unnatural Ambassador!”

Rutork nodded. “Yes... I understand that. We certainly do not condone that. However that is not what has happened now. You may ask her yourself Magistrates. The elf female For'mya will tell you that she agreed to this willingly when she mated with Marshall Pusintin. You may test her all you wish as well. You will find no drugs or foreign bodies influencing her. They have one of the most powerful Healers standing among them in former Queen Anja's daughter... surely she could determine this with a cursory examine. And all she will find in her blood, as with any Kavalian child born in the last thousand years, is a mild growth accelerator that is used on the fetus to shorten the gestation period by many months. It was a way we used to replenish our numbers after the High Coven and Lycavorian Union nearly wiped us out. It has never been changed. The Marshall's other children were treated in a similar fashion.”

“This is preposterous! We came here to Hadaria to enter into discussions to have my daughter released!” L'tian screamed now. “You expect us to see her like this, after she has been obviously raped and impregnated, you expect us to simply tolerate this! This is your idea of discussions!”

“We came here to discuss the status of your daughter as Queen of the Elves Ambassador L'tian.” Rutork corrected him. “Nothing was ever said in regards to what you are saying. She is not being held against her will, so why would we need to discuss her release.”

“Magistrates we protest this in the...” L'tian began to speak but Sel'ke held up his hand.

“Hold your protest!” He barked out, his eyes staring at For'mya. “Lady For'mya... is what the Ambassador says true? Have you done this willingly? Have you allowed Marshall Pusintin to take you as his mate and is the child you carry his?”

For'mya lifted her head slowly; unable to even look at her children because of the shame she had washing through her. Her Martin was gone. Aricia was gone. Those she called children were blocking her within Mindvoice for she could not sense them in the least even though she was trying to reach out to them now. Pusintin had been right... they knew what she had done and were incensed by her actions. Betrayed by what she had done. She had been tricked to submit to Pusintin and his vile rutting, thinking she was saving Dysea and her son from certain death, and this was the result she thought to herself as she lifted her hands and placed them on her swollen abdomen. She could sense the life growing within her, but the growth hormones they had injected her with made it fuzzy and nearly indiscernible. If she did not speak up Pusintin would invade the Union and millions upon millions of the people she had sworn to protect as their Queen, would die. He swore to her that if she went against him now the first planet they would crush would be Elear. Billions of Elves and Lycavorians and Algolians and Hadarians, her people, they would die needless deaths.

For'mya knew her father and the First Minister well enough to know what they would have done the moment they realized she was taken. It was something that both her and Dysea had agreed on many years ago and they had filed documents and Vid declarations in secret all those years ago. The only man she had ever loved and worshiped in her entire thousand plus years of life was dead now, as was the woman who was not only her truest and best friend, but also her dearest female lover among them all. All of it was gone now. The only thing she could do was try and save as many lives as possible before the storm arrived. They would hate her, she had no doubt of that, but if in her actions she could save them from death as she failed to save Martin and Aricia than it would be worth the disgrace and shame and pain that she would endure. She would be with the two she loved most in this life soon enough.

“Yes... yes.” For'mya stated softly, her voice almost a whisper. She turned her head to look at Pusintin and saw the cruelty in his eyes as he pulled her closer to him. “Yes...” she continued turning back as tears began to stream from her eyes. “Yes... I accepted the Marshall willingly. And yes... the child I... the child I carry is his.”

“ARRGHHH!” The roar was something none of them expected and all eyes turned to see Eliani step back from her older brother, her hand dropping from his shoulder as he bent over and gripped the edges of the huge table. Arram, Toria and L'tian were looking at him in stunned shock as his face was changed and contorted in unabashed rage. For'mya's eyes were wide in surprise as she gazed at him.

“Order!” Sel'ke barked out. “There will be order in this chamber!”

“You *upae!*” Androcles screamed at her. “Our father's body is not even cold and you do this! He knew you would be the one to betray him if that day came! He knew!”

“Andro I...” For'mya moved to step forward but Pusintin held her arm.

Pusintin couldn't help but laugh at Androcles's reaction and as he pulled For'mya back he sneered. “I guess we shouldn't tell you how she was whimpering my name as I was fucking her silly and making her mine then huh?” He stated loudly.

“DIE!!” Androcles roared once more and heaved upward on the table.

The eight foot long, hardwood and steel table weighed nearly three hundred pounds, but it left the floor of the chamber as if shot out of a gun. Directly at the tightly bunched group of Kavalian soldiers as Andro charged forward taking everyone by total surprise with the speed in which he moved. As the huge table smashed into the group of Kavalian troops and sent them sprawling painfully in awkward directions, Rutork and two other Puma Bane troops did what they were trained to do. Pusintin shoved For'mya away from him unceremoniously to protect himself when he found his body being yanked to the side and buried by the furry bodies of his security detail in order to protect him. That left only Kalis standing in front of a moving Andro and as he started to bring his weapon up Androcles lashed out with his left arm, slapping away the barrel of the weapon and bringing his right hand forward in a heel strike that hit Kalis dead center of his chest and lifted him into the air. As the air in his lungs painfully left those same lungs Kalis felt himself smash back against the table that held the Magistrates and he flipped over the top dragging two judges with him with his flailing.

Then there was nothing between For'mya and Andro and he glared at her with more savage anger than she had ever seen from one she called son. Anger that was directed at her. His beautiful eyes were changed and his vicious dual fangs were fully extended as he grabbed her arms and yanked her to her feet.

“You!” He snarled at her.

The tears poured from her eyes as she looked at him and they were not tears of fear or anger, they were tears of relief. “Kill... kill me my son!” She hissed at him her own eyes and fangs changed now as she stared at the young man who she had held and bounced on her knees as a baby. “Kill me Androcles... kill me please... so that I can join those that I love more than my life.”

Andro's hands came up quickly and seized her head as he stared at her with those azure orbs. “Forgive me mother.” He rasped out in a whisper. “Forgive me for what I must do!”

For'mya closed her eyes in release as she saw his jaws part and then Androcles Leonidas struck deep with those vicious and flesh shredding fangs.

CURILA 6

“...Darpia Syndrome?” Isabella gasped looking at Anja with wide hazel eyes. “Anja... Anja please tell me you are joking.”

Anja moved closer to her lover and fellow Queen, taking her hands and pressing tightly to her taller frame. Eurin and Sivana stood with Ceuma looking at the large monitor and adjusting different factors.

“Stay calm Bella.” Anja spoke calmly. “You must stay calm... but no... I'm not joking.”

Isabella's eyes blinked rapidly and became moist. “No.” Isabella said. “No... this can't be happening. Not now! It is our son I carry! This can't be happening now!”

Anja reached up and took her face in her hands quickly, holding her firmly and causing her wide eyes to stare at her. “Bella!” Anja snapped. “We will figure something out! You must trust in me! I love you! We love you!”

“Anja I...” Bella shook her head back and forth.

“Isabella Leonidas do you trust me?” Anja barked.

Isabella blinked her eyes and stared at her Persian haired fellow Queen. Her hands came up and she gripped Anja’s arms tightly. Anja’s blood tasted the sweetest when she was in phase and Isabella could not get enough of her long and talented tongue. Behind only Martin and her ussta she-elf Dysea, Bella took the most pleasure and joy from spending intimate moments with Anja. Moments that had started so long ago on CS41 as they were returning to Apo Prime and Martin was very busy quenching the burning need that Dysea had at that moment in time. Anja was the most intelligent woman Isabella had ever known and she the most gifted doctor and surgeon she had ever seen practice any sort of medicine. She nodded her head quickly, bringing her forehead to Anja’s and holding her tightly.

“Yes!” She gasped. “You... you know this!”

“Then trust me now Bella.” Anja stated. “I know how much you want this son. How much we all want you to have this son. And you will! Have faith in me!”

Isabella took a deep breath and nodded her head. “I... I can’t lose this child Anja.” She whispered. “I have wanted to give him a son for so long. I just can’t...”

“You won’t.” Anja declared kissing her hard on the lips. “You won’t! Stop thinking like that! We’ll will figure something out! I swear to you!”

Ceuma turned back to Sivana and Eurin as Anja and Isabella embraced tightly. “Vana... I am still... I am still learning so much. When Anja saw this she panicked and I did not want to begin questioning her. What is Darpia Syndrome?”

Sivana looked at her cloned sister and rested her hand on her shoulder lovingly. “It is not surprising you haven’t read about it in your studies yet sister. It is an extraordinarily rare and solely hereditary condition found only in pureblood vampires.”

“There have only been two dozen known cases in the three millennia since the Union was founded.” Eurin continued. “And the only reason we know of those is because of the vampires that began to defect several hundred years after the Union was officially brought into existence. I don’t know how many before that within the High Coven itself.”

“I’m assuming it has something to do with child bearing since Bella is in such a frenzy.” Ceuma asked.

Sivana nodded. “Darpia Syndrome is hereditary as I said but essentially it is a defective gene strand that can lie dormant within a vampire for as long as they live. We don’t really know what triggers it to become active when a female is pregnant. When it does however, it will begin to break down the consistency and protective nature of her womb until such time as it can no longer support a child. It happens rather quickly, within a month of the onset of the disease, and right now there is no known treatment.”

“But this did not happen with Zarah and Carina?” Ceuma asked.

“It’s completely random.” Eurin answered moving around to adjust the screen in front of Ceuma. “Bella could give birth to three, four, even five children before this gene became active. Once it runs its course, she could have another three or four children and it would never become active again. We don’t know why it chooses to become active or if there is some sort of series of events or requirements for it to rear its head. It is so very rare that we have never spent much time studying it.”

“Can we not reverse the process with Isotomner injections?” Ceuma asked.

Eurin shook her head. “Darpia Syndrome doesn’t respond to any known treatment.” She told her. “Even Isotomner injections would fail. The deterioration happens too quickly. Even now her womb is beginning to degrade and provide less and less nutrition to the baby.”

“We can’t remove him Eurin.” Sivana said. “He hasn’t fully developed yet. His wolf and vampire genes haven’t completely merged together.”

“How much longer before the Osmosis process is complete?” Eurin asked.

Sivana leaned over and typed quickly on the control panel. She stood back up shaking her head. “The same as with Zarah and Carina. It wasn’t complete until three weeks before she gave birth.”

Eurin shook her head. “The one pairing that makes it so difficult to monitor pregnancies.” She said. “Wolf and vampire pairings are so complex when it comes to children. The merging of the gene codes and chromosome strands is beyond multifaceted and can cause one to go insane trying to figure it all out.”

“What about trying to reinforce the womb?” Ceuma asked.

Sivana shook her head. “With what?” She stated. “Darpia Syndrome happens so quickly that whatever we do would need to be nearly instantaneous. And it doesn’t respond effectively to any known medications.”

“Can’t we use our power to reinforce the walls of her womb?” Ceuma asked.

Eurin shook her head. “That would require a Healer to remain at her side twenty-four hours a day until the baby was born, constantly in physical contact with her and infusing her with metaphysical radiation. Not only is that not reliable or feasible, it is no guarantee it will work. Even with our abilities, the metaphysical radiation in our bodies would begin to break down and require constant replenishment. And while we could provide the nutrients and such needed for the infant on a temporary basis, we could not do it for an extended period. Not for a hybrid pregnancy such as Isabella’s.”

“What about a manufactured womb?” Sivana asked looking at Eurin.

Anja stepped back up next to them now, Isabella holding tightly to her hand. Her face was drawn and worried but she was a strong woman they all knew, and she trusted Anja without question. Anja shook her head slowly. “A manufactured womb could not provide the precise nutrients that a hybrid baby needs.” She answered. “Each hybrid pregnancy is different. Each embryo needs different nutrients that only the mother can provide because it’s in her body.”

Ceuma looked at her. “So let’s examine Isabella for a twenty-four hour period, categorize the nutrients that the baby pulls from her and then assemble a manufactured womb hooked up to the same nutrients stream.”

Now it was Isabella who shook her head. “It was different for both Zarah and Carina.” She stated calmly as she began to regain control of her emotions. “With each of them I would react differently at different times Ceuma. It drove Martin insane because he did not know what I would ask for next.” She showed a small smile with that last statement attesting to the inner strength she had.

Anja nodded and squeezed her hand. “There were times with Carina where she would feel weak one day because Carina would pull from her iron levels and then the next day she would pull from her estrogen reserves. It was even more random with Zarah. There is no way to predict what Dorian will require from one moment to the next. His requirements have been all over during just this last stage of the pregnancy alone.”

“Dorian?” Ceuma asked softly. “Then you already... you already have a name picked out.”

Isabella brought her hands up to her abdomen. “He has had a name for many years now.” She said softly.

“Vana... at the current rate of breakdown how long do we have?” Anja asked.

Sivana turned to the screen and adjusted the console. She sighed heavily and turned back. Isabella moved closer to them allowing them to see the trust she had in not only Anja but them as well. “Do not be afraid Vana.” She spoke. “Just tell us.”

“It appears... it appears as if the Darpia Syndrome asserted itself four days ago.” She stated. “If Ceuma hadn’t run the scan she did...”

“Vana... please.” Anja said.

“A month before the womb deteriorates to the point where it will no longer sustain Dorian.” Sivana answered.

“A month before I am to give birth.” Isabella said softly. “It is... it is not enough time.”

“There has to be something we can do!” Ceuma exclaimed.

“We can’t force Dorian to finish growing and be born sooner Ceuma.” Sivana spoke taking her arm.

Eurin’s eyes grew a little wider. “Yes... yes we can.” She said softly causing them to look at her.

“Eurin?” Anja asked.

“I was watching the events on Hadaria on Netnews when you called Anja.” Eurin said moving up to the computer console and beginning to type.

“What does that have to do with this Eurin?” Anja asked harshly. What Buonau and the others had done was a subject that everyone stayed away from when around Anja.

Eurin stepped back and allowed them to see the monitor. “This.” She stated pointing to the screen.

Anja's eyes grew wide as she moved closer. "Eurin... you can't be serious?" She gasped. "This is genetic manipulation!"

Eurin shook her head. "No it isn't." She stated. "I thought it was when I first heard of it, but I have studied it extensively through the years and it's not. It's a simple process by which growth is accelerated by a certain factor. I was surprised that the Kavalians were even able to come up with this kind of process until I discovered..."

"They stole it from the Coven." Isabella stated softly.

Eurin nodded. "Yes."

Isabella nodded her head. "It was one of the early procedures my father sanctioned to speed up the cloning process. Long before I defected."

"Eurin... we don't have the refinements that the Kavalians have made to perfect it." Sivana said as Anja stepped closer to the monitor and began adjusting several things while Ceuma watched.

Eurin shook her head. "No... we don't." She answered. "But I'm willing to bet that Resumar's young wife Athani or those with her do."

Ceuma reached up. "No... this strand here and then..."

Anja nodded as she felt her pulse begin to race with excitement. "Core strand here." She finished. "Yes! This will work!" She spoke.

"The core multiplier equation is locked though." Ceuma spoke touching the screen. "We can't adjust it without altering the process completely."

"Anja... what does that mean?" Isabella asked moving closer.

Anja turned to look at her. "If we do this... if we do this Bella... Dorian will survive." She said.

"I feel... I feel a 'but' coming on." Bella said.

"We can't adjust the CME which dictates acceleration." Anja answered.

"And that means what exactly?" Isabella asked.

"That means if we do this... once initiated... Dorian will grow into adulthood within the space of several months." Anja answered. "Ceuma?"

"If the factors are right... when the CME reaches final output he will be just past twenty-three years of age." Ceuma answered.

Isabella's eyes grew wide at this and her hands came to her mouth. "Twenty-three?" She gasped. "He will... he will be a man."

Anja nodded slowly. "Yes."

"But... but his mind?" Isabella asked. "His personality? He will... he will never be a child? He will... he will not be normal."

"The Kavalian procedure requires that they school their children for the next three to four years just to make them productive." Eurin said. "They leave out so much in their schooling and I believe that is why many of the pureblood Kavalians are so violent. They do not experience all that they should."

Anja my sister? Miath's voice filled Anja's mind then.

Anja blinked almost forgetting that she almost never blocked her bonded brother from her thoughts and he was listening to everything they were saying even as they spoke and he flew high above the compound hunting. "Miath... now is not the time." Anja said softly.

The Elder Mother my sister. Miath told her. She has the ability to ease this burden. She did essentially the same thing to us as we were born and grew, keeping us from realizing our natural abilities in order to protect us. Could she not do the same thing in reverse?

Anja's eyes grew wider as she looked at Isabella. "Son vada carians Miath. You're right!" She exclaimed.

"What?" Isabella gasped.

"Anja?" Eurin asked.

"Ceuma... have Joci prep my *STRIKER*." Anja said. "He can fly correct?"

Ceuma nodded quickly as she stood. "Yes."

"Good... Belen can second him." Anja stated. "We're going back to Earth." She looked at Isabella. "We'll get Gorgo and Dasha and the children and return to Earth. It's time anyway."

"But why?" Isabella asked.

“Arzoal.” Anja told her. “Miath is right. She was able to inhibit the growth of the dragons in their eggs. Keep them from realizing their full potential in order to protect them. And she did it using Mindvoice.”

Eurin moved closer. “She can do that?” Eurin asked.

Anja nodded. “Yes. It wasn’t until Martin and Aricia convinced her what we could be together as Bonded Pairs that she stopped doing this. If she can do that... than she can help us.”

“How?” Sivana asked. “Dorian is not a dragon sister.”

“No... but Arzoal can protect his mind during the accelerated growth period.” Anja said. “She can help him to adjust better.”

“That... that does not change the fact that he will miss so much *Melyanna*.” Isabella said.

Anja looked at her. “No... but at least we can ease this burden for him. And perhaps make it so that he adjusts far more easily than he normally would. What choice do we have Bella? It’s this or we lose our son and that will devastate all of us.”

Isabella gripped her arms. “You can do this Anja? You can save him? You can save our son?”

Anja kissed her once more. “Damn straight I can.” She spoke. “Come... there is much we need to do and all of us will need to be there. And I need to speak with Duewa.”

“Duewa?” Eurin asked more sternly than she intended. She still did not trust Buonau’s oldest child even though she was now wolf and Thoti’s wife and mate. “Why?”

“Because she will have the most knowledge of her mother’s library.” Anja said. “Buonau forced her to read every scroll and data pad in it. And Duewa has a memory like a computer.”

“Do you trust her Anja?” Eurin asked.

Anja met her eyes. “I trust Thoti.” She answered. “And if Thoti chose her for his wife and mate than he saw within her Eurin. He saw within her and what was clamoring to get out. The real Duewa. Yes... I trust her.”

Eurin nodded. “Then let’s not waste any time.” She stated. “We need to prepare and make sure everything is just as it needs to be. The sooner we do this... the better it will be for Bella and Dorian.”

OMEN THREE **SOMEWHERE IN THE WILDS**

Aricia, Dysea and Cirith turned as Danny came up to them quickly in the corridor. They were standing outside the small gym on *OMEN THREE*, Aricia with dried tears in her eyes and Dysea and Cirith both looking as if they had been crying recently.

“Danny...” Aricia gasped taking his arm as he came up to them. “The ship?”

Danny nodded his head. “Yuriko reinforced the interior shields just before. I think she saw it coming.” He told them.

“He is blocking us Daniel.” Dysea said. “He’s blocking us but we can feel...”

Danny nodded. “I know. I feel it too.” The sound he had heard come from three decks below had chilled him to the bone even as he was watching the same thing that Martin no doubt had been watching on the Netnews. He had been moving before that echo had dissipated away through the corridors of the ship. As he moved closer to where Martin was he could see crew members of *OMEN THREE* moving rapidly away from where their King was. Danny leaned over and kissed Dysea’s cheek softly. “Wait here.”

“Danny you...” Aricia began.

“Don’t worry about me.” Danny said. “Wait here until I call for you.”

Danny didn’t hesitate and moved past them through the short corridor and up to the door of the gym. He took a deep breath and opened it, stepping into the large gym and feeling instantly the surging through Mindvoice. The power was nearly staggering and as he looked around with wide eyes he could see several pieces of equipment drifting in the air as if held by some unseen hand. Several large pieces of workout equipment that had been torn from their places on the floor or along the wall.

Danny saw him then, kneeling in the center of the room on the mat on one knee, his head bowed low and one fist pressed into the mat with great force. Danny strode across the mat without hesitation for he had learned through the long years together that he had a calming influence on his adopted brother. He moved right

up to where Martin knelt and let his eyes gaze at the smashed equipment that lay all around him for a moment before he knelt across from him.

“Marty?” He asked softly reaching out to place his hand on Martin’s shoulder. He felt his body tense for a single instant and then relax just as quickly. “Martin... you back with me?”

Martin looked up and for a single split second Daniel Simpson saw the Grim Reaper in those near glowing brown tinted yellowish eyes. That shadow and hand of death that always reached out the instant before life left your body and blackness claimed you. Danny saw it in his brother’s eyes, and then it was gone. Yet for that single heart stopping moment, Daniel Simpson had felt the chill of the Grim Reaper all around him. Danny had heard the phrase ‘Death rode a Pale Horse’ several times in his younger years. Now however, Daniel Simpson could say that death didn’t ride a pale horse, death was the hand of this man before him.

“I was... I was going to make it quick Danny.” Martin whispered to him as he reached up and grasped Danny’s forearm. “When the time came I was going to make it quick. For our mother... for our father. Not any longer brother.” Danny waited silently, staring into Martin’s eyes as they shifted between the near glowing brown tinted yellowish eyes and a more solid golden color. “I am going to make him pay for what he has done Danny. I am going to make him pay for everything he has done. I am going to open him like a science project and force him to eat his own entrails. I’m going to cut his cock from his body while he lies there screaming and then I’m going to shove it in his mouth and listen to him choke. I’m going to inflict pain on him for every touch upon her body... I’m going to rip his eyeballs from his head and feed them to the crows bit by bit for every lustful gaze upon her elven beauty. And before I finally send him to the *Sirogus rie Jorbhe* he will know the agony she has endured a thousand fold. He will join Jorak in the soulless dark that inhabits that realm of pestilence, cursed to never see the light again! As my son has sworn a Oath of Blood Vengeance on Dante Moran, so I do the same against my own brother. This I swear before you today... my true brother! This I swear to you this day.”

“And a more warranted act will not ever exist.” Danny said gripping the back of Martin’s head and lowering his forehead to touch his. “A more righteous act will not ever exist brother.” Danny gripped his head tighter. “But now you need to reign in that rage brother. Pull it back within you Marty and bury it deep. I know it... I understand it... but don’t show it to your mates. They will not comprehend it. Harness it Marty... harness it and when we begin this trek, we go all out. No holding back. No prisoners. No hesitation. No... no mercy. Just as our fathers would do without question.”

“Tell... tell them Danny.” Martin said.

Daniel Simpson nodded. “I intend too. And take comfort and strength in the love you know she has for you and Aricia and the others. Hold on to that... hold it tight... because that is what will lead us to her.”

Martin nodded. “I will.”

“Good.” Danny said. “Now... you have three mates outside who are pissing their pants in worry for you. We have nineteen hours before we reach our target. You take them Marty... you take each and every one of them and show them how you feel for all of them. You make them scream your name until they are hoarse. You know that is what For’mya would want you to do. If you neglect them now, when we do get her back she will torture you for doing that. That is your power Marty... the love you have for each other. That is your power and your strength and we need that now. We all do.”

Martin looked at him. “When did you become such the accomplished shrink?” Martin asked him.

Danny laughed. “Same time you did brother. I just hide it better.”

Martin turned quickly when he smelled them and he watched as Aricia, Dysea and Cirith moved slowly across the mat towards them holding hands. He nodded his head and rose to his feet. “You’re right.” He said looking at him.

“I’ll keep everyone away.” Danny said gripping his neck. “You do what you need to do.”

“Tell them Danny.” Martin said.

Danny nodded and he stepped back as the three women came up to them. “I will.” He said. “I will.” He turned quickly and headed for the door of the gym.

Martin looked at them in front of him, dried tears in their eyes. His *Saaurano*, his *Melda Min* and now his equally ravishing hybrid wife and mate. Their scents filtered around his head and Martin did exactly what his blood told him to do. He unleashed his full, unshielded aura and saw all their eyes instantly change. The effect on Cirith was most telling as she had never been with any man, let alone a wolf as powerful as Martin.

Her body instantly ignited into many different fires, her nipples becoming painfully hard, and her center beginning to drool sweet nectar. She exploded in the first of many orgasms in the next few hours when Martin lifted her off the deck and covered her trembling lips with his own.

Danny caught the first wafts of what was coming just as the door closed and he breathed a sigh of relief as Yuriko, Julie and T'lolt walked up to him. He stepped away from the door and looked at them.

“Yuriko... you have Mindvoice dampeners on this deck?” He asked.

Yuriko nodded quickly. “Yes... all the decks Uncle Danny.” She answered.

“Activate them on this deck and pass the word this entire section is off limits for at least the next twelve hours.” Danny said.

“Father...” Yuriko began.

“He will be fine.” Danny said. “Right now he needs to do what he needs to do.”

Yuriko understood completely and nodded without question. Danny looked at Julie and T'lolt. “Pass the word to the team... Centaur Protocols Julie.”

Julie’s eyes grew a little wider. “You’re kidding?” She gasped.

Danny shook his head. “Not now. Not after what has happened.”

T'lolt looked back and forth between them. “What is this Centaur Protocols Daniel?” He asked.

Danny met his dark eyes. “It means we kill everything.” Danny said. “No prisoners... no mercy and no hesitation.”

T'lolt’s gaze was unwavering and he finally nodded. “As it should be.” He said.

“Uncle Danny... what is going on?” Yuriko asked.

“What do you mean?” Danny met her eyes.

“You didn’t see the rest of the transmission?” Yuriko asked.

Danny shook his head. “I bolted the moment I saw For'mya why? What happened?”

Yuriko blinked several times. “Uncle Danny... Andro... he...”

“Andro what?” Danny asked sternly.

Yuriko took a deep breath. “Andro attacked mother.” She gasped. “He went crazy and... he attacked mother. The transmission ended just as he was... just as he was beginning to tear at her with his fangs.”

Danny’s eyes were wide and he gripped her arms. “What?”

Julie nodded. “We saw it too Danny. It was... it was chilling. He was in a rage.” She spoke.

“I’ve never seen him like that before Uncle Danny!” Yuriko gasped.

“Fuck me! Show me Yuriko! Quick!” Danny gasped.

HADARIAN SPACE

PRIDE OF PUMAS

“... rather nasty wound.” The Kavalian physician spoke as he lifted the dressing and looked at the jagged teeth marks at the juncture of her shoulder and neck. It had already begun to heal, but there was no telling that it had been deep and had to have been painful. “I must clean it before it heals anymore.” He told her looking into For'mya’s face. There were droplets of blood dotting her cheeks and her eyes looked shallow and void of any emotion in the least and she was staring off into nothing as he lifted the portable scanner. “Please take into account that I am not as skilled as the Hadarian physicians you are used too, but I will be quick and efficient.” He said as he lifted the scanner and began to pass it over her wound. “Ummm... one more inch to the right and he would have severed your artery. Those teeth of his are vicious on exposed flesh. He needs to learn to bite in the right spot for the kill if that is what he is going for. Sloppy.”

For'mya turned her head and looked at him. He was an older Kavalian with large amounts of gray seeping into his naturally dark fur. She remembered him from before on this ship, but she hadn’t seen him since. On Cabelir the Kavalian doctor who was monitoring her condition was a gruff brute who cared not for her modesty. Thankfully he had not had to deal with him in over two weeks after she threatened to poison herself if he so much as touched her again. Pusintin was taking no chances and granted her demand. For'mya only saw him now for the scheduled visits on her condition and then as briefly as possible.

“Andro is... Andro is many things... but sloppy is not one of them.” For'mya said softly.

The doctor looked at her with wide blue eyes. "So you do speak." He said with what passed for a smile on his face. "Interesting." He began to move the scanner to the left and right almost casually. "Perhaps he needs more lessons in where to bite then. He was trying to kill you wasn't he?"

For'mya lowered her head shamefully. "As... as he should have for what I have done." She whispered.

"Excellent." He said as if not hearing her. "Your body is responding just as it normally would. The Growth Accelerator didn't affect your own systems." He pulled the scanner down over her abdomen. "Now let us check the child, for that is all Pusintin will care for, and we don't..."

"No!" For'mya barked suddenly, reaching up to grab the hand which held the scanner, her eyes wide.

She was too addled by what had happen to stop him, and didn't have the strength to move faster. She was unable to budge his hand holding the scanner over her abdomen no matter how she tried and she saw the look of shock spread across his face as he looked up at her slowly and met her eyes. "You are carrying..."

"...execute each and every one of those men who were guarding us!" Pusintin's voice snarled from behind them and For'mya watched as he spun around quickly, gently prying her hands from his wrist and tucking the scanner nonchalantly behind his back with its control pad towards For'mya as he blocked her figure from view. "He was one man and he almost was able to succeed. His own fucking brother stopped him, not any of my men!" Pusintin roared.

"I'll see to it Marshall!" The worried aide spoke.

"Motun?" Pusintin spoke as he came up to the Kavalian doctor.

The Kavalian physician smiled even wider. "It has been a long time Marshall." He spoke bowing his head. "I'm glad it is not you I am treating."

Pusintin smiled. "So am I." He stated. "Well?"

Motun turned to look at For'mya. "I can repair it easily Marshall. It will leave somewhat of a scar on the elf wench's skin however."

Pusintin chuckled. "The skin on her shoulder I don't care about." He said. "My son?"

Motun nodded and lifted the scanner tapping on the control pad a few times before handing it to him even as For'mya tried to snatch it back. Motun reached out and grabbed her wrist tightly. "He is quite healthy and unaffected by the ordeal. I do recommend we do not send her to the surface anymore. The bite seems to have damaged some nerve endings in her arm and it wouldn't appear in our best interests to have her twitching on the Netnews now would it?"

Pusintin nodded moving closer to For'mya as she glared at him. "I guess your precious family didn't care for you anymore." He snarled at her. "I think it's hysterical that my nephew tried to kill you For'mya. Maybe you weren't as popular as you thought."

"Bastard!" For'mya hissed vehemently.

Pusintin laughed. "Motun... insure she goes back to her quarters under guard." He spoke handing the scanner back. "I need to at least monitor the transmission going on right now. From now on, you are the only one who treats her until we return to Cabelir."

Motun nodded. "Of course Marshall. A request if I may?"

Pusintin looked at him. "Speak."

"With your permission, I'd like to run some additional tests on her." Motun asked. "The physician you have on the homeworld does not seem to be monitoring her eating habits very well and as you know, those turned by Lycavorians have special needs in the way of minerals and such."

Pusintin glared at For'mya for a moment before looking at him. "Anything I should know about Motun?" He asked.

Motun shook his head quickly. "Not at all Marshall. It's just a precaution."

Pusintin nodded after a few moments. "Your precautions through the years have saved my ass more than once."

Motun nodded. "Indeed they have." He said.

"Do what you must. My son needs to be healthy when he is born." Pusintin said.

"And he will be Marshall. He will be." Motun told him.

Pusintin turned without another look and began marching out of the room. When the door closed behind him Motun turned slowly and looked at For'mya, holding the portable scanner out to her. For'mya watched him with questions in her eyes and then she reached up and snatched the portable scanner from his hands. He didn't

lift his hand to strike her as she would have expected a full Kavalian male to do given their treatment of their own women and she glanced down at the scanner. He watched as she looked at the small console and her eyes darkened somewhat before lifting to stare at him once more.

“What... what fool trickery is this?” She snarled.

“That fool trickery just saved your life For'mya Leonidas.” Motun spoke seeing her eyes grow wide when he used her name. “You carry twins woman!” He hissed at her. “Do you know what would be done if this was known?”

“You... you used my name.” For'mya stammered.

Motun took the scanner back from her unresisting hand and nodded. “Of course I used your name.” He spoke tapping on the scanner several times. “I thought Lycavorians could detect their children once they impregnate a female?” He asked as he lifted it again and passed it slowly over her abdomen. “Pusintin doesn't know does he?”

“He is a fool! He is no more a Lycavorian than you!” For'mya snarled viciously. “He is a monster! A vile monster! All of you are!” She spat expecting this Kavalian to reach up and slap her.

For'mya sat there stunned when he nodded his head slowly. “Yes he is.” Motun echoed her statement. “Though I would appreciate if you did not lump all of us into that category. It would not be entirely fair.”

“Who are you?” For'mya demanded. “This is a deception isn't it? Some cruel test from Pusintin in order to play with my mind!”

Motun looked at her. “My name is Motun'Canterus from Pride Canterus. And this is no deception so please keep your voice down. There are still guards in the corridor and while we do not have as sensitive hearing skills as Lycavorians, Kavalian hearing is still superior to many species. I do not wish to die before my time.”

For'mya stared at him. “Who are you?” She demanded.

“I will answer your questions For'mya... but first I need to know why a young man you have called son for over twenty years tried to kill you.” Motun asked her. “Why would he act in such a manner when they are here under the auspice of trying to get you released? Not that it will do any good. Why did Androcles attack you?”

For'mya dropped her head quickly. “Why do... why do you think?” For'mya's voice came out in barely a whisper. “I... I have betrayed them. Betrayed all of them by allowing this to happen. I... I should have been stronger. I... he lied to me! He told me he had my son, that he would give Dysea to the Immortals if I did not do as he said. He told me all of them were dead and if I wanted to save my son and Dysea I... I needed to do as he said.” The tears came now and she shook her head. “But they are not dead! And now they hate me for what I have done. I am a traitor to them... nothing more important than an insect. They will... they will kill me the first chance they get for what I have done. I...” For'mya looked up. “I asked him to kill me. When he held me... I ask my son to kill me.”

Motun turned from her and took something from a tray behind him. He turned back and held out the hypoinjector. “Take this.” He said. For'mya looked at him and then the injector. “Take it!” He said again.

For'mya reached up and took the injector looking at it briefly and then back up to his face. “What is this?”

“End it.” He spoke calmly. “End it right here. There is your means. It's Concentrated Green Death Root from our homeworld. It will stop the hearts of your babies in ten seconds and then your heart in twenty seconds and this will all be over.”

For'mya looked at him. “You lie!” She gasped.

Motun snatched the injector back from her and walked across the med bay to another room. For'mya heard some soft crashing noise and then he was rolling a large rodent in an open container towards her. The rodent was remarkably similar to the large rats she has seen on Earth that frequented the more desolate areas of the planet that had not yet been restored. She watched as he rolled the container right up to her and then lifted the injector to stab the rodent in the back of its dark brown neck. The creature let out several hideous squeals, its large body twitching almost uncontrollably and then it was still. Motun looked back to her as he pushed the container away. He held the injector back out to her. “Now... am I lying to you?” He moved closer. “I will do it for you if you wish.” He said, beginning to lift the injector to stab into her arm.

For'mya hissed viciously and sprang from the table, wrapping one arm protectively around her swollen abdomen. Motun stood there calmly as her fangs burst forth and her eyes changed and she hiss at him from across the table she had been on. He lowered the injector and dropped it onto the small table that held the container with the now dead rodent and pushed it away.

“So it is true.” He spoke softly turning back to look at her.

“What is true?” For'mya snarled. “Stay away from me!”

“The instinct to protect.” Motun spoke softly to her. “The ingrained Lycavorian instinct to protect their children combined with the inherited trait of all living elves to defend their children, born or unborn, from harm.”

For'mya's fangs didn't retract and her eyes didn't change, but her posture lessened from the defensive one just seconds ago. “What... what do you know of this?” She hissed.

“It is why he chose you For'mya, don't you see?” Motun spoke. “I do not know all the details but I know it is why he chose you. This would not have worked with any of his brother's other Queens. None of them possess the hereditary elven sense of protection of children that you do. Pusintin knew this. The traitor Laustinos told him.”

“Dysea is an elf!” For'mya declared.

Motun nodded his head. “Dysea is an elf, but she is not a pureborn elf like yourself. She came from cloned parents.”

For'mya's eyes grew wider. “How do you know that?” She barked.

“Listen to me For'mya Leonidas.” Motun spoke stepping closer and noticing that she did not back away. “You carry twins. From what I can tell with just the brief scan I saw, a boy and a girl. The moment Pusintin discovers this he will order the girl child aborted. Kavalians... we do not... twins among our people are extremely rare and in most cases they are signs of some sort of genetic defect. One or both of the fetuses are almost always destroyed and the mother is usually sterilized.” He saw her eyes widen in horror. “You could no more kill your unborn children than I could, even if you wanted too. The instincts within you forbid you taking such an action. No matter if you want to or not. I know this For'mya.”

“How do you know this?” She demanded. “This... this curse inside us... it is not known to any but the elven scholars! It is no longer taught in our schools and hasn't been for nearly ten thousand years! How do you know of it?”

“It is not a curse.” Motun spoke.

“I carry his vile children inside me!” For'mya screamed. “They... they are the product of him forcing himself on me! Violence not love! I love only one man and he is dead now because of you and your people!”

“They are part of you For'mya. Inside you now.” Motun spoke. “You know what he plans don't you? He intends to use the boy child to regain control of the Union throne using bloodline not birthright. A son with his royal blood of Resumar, your royal blood as the last of the Elven King's heirs, he will have a claim to the Union throne because of this.”

For'mya shook her head vigorously. “No! Impossible!” She snapped.

“It is not impossible.” Motun said. “Resumar's elven concubine gave him two sons did she not? That concubine was the daughter to the elven King that was slain by the High Coven wasn't she? A Princess in her own right.”

“How... how do you know this?” For'mya gasped.

“One of those sons did not survive the High Coven assassinations when the Lycavorians began their rebellion over three thousand years ago. One however did, and he had three children during the long years of the initial rebellion. One of those children gave birth to four children through the next generations. Only one of whom still lives. Her name is Janae.”

For'mya's eyes were huge now as she forgot everything around her and moved closer to him. “How... how could you possibly know this?” She gasped. “Janae... Janae's secret has never been publicly announced. No one but our family knows this.”

Motun nodded. “Yes I know, however Laustinos figured it out and he told Pusintin and others. They tried to take Janae during the attacks but they failed thankfully. Your son Andro stopped them without really knowing why. They will not stop trying to take her however, because if a son of Pusintin and your blood joins

with Janae and her bloodline then it will seal the divide and give Pusintin absolute power. He will rule through his son don't you see? Your son because of the bloodlines."

For'mya shook her head. "He can not!" She stated with supreme confidence. "Martin... Martin and Andro... they brought all the ruling bloodlines of the Lycavorian people back together."

Motun looked at her oddly. "What do you mean?"

"Martin is the grandson of Resumar. He has two ruling bloodlines within him. Aricia is a third bloodline. Androcles and Denali are their sons and have three bloodlines within them. Andro's mate Sadi... she is of the fourth and any child they have will have four of the original bloodlines within them. Pure Lycavorian bloodlines. The purest to ever exist!" For'mya told him. "The Lycavorian people will never allow that bloodline to be broken! Not after what happen on Earth and the merging of those that were lost during the occupation!"

"Are you sure of this?" Motun asked. "We did not know this?"

"Who are you?" For'mya snarled.

Motun looked at her and held out his hand. "Suffice to say we are not enemies For'mya Leonidas." He said. "Sit back on the table and I will explain."

For'mya stared at him without moving. "I do not trust you!" She barked. "I do not trust any of you!"

Motun nodded his head. "Then let me give you cause to trust me." He spoke. "I think I have already shown that I am not your enemy. If it was discovered that you are carrying twins For'mya, Pusintin would order the girl child to be aborted and the boy child would be removed from your womb and placed in a chamber. They would still find a way to use the boy child but you would then be killed or sterilized or worse. Pusintin will not go against the laws of the Kavalian elders and senior Prides. They are deeply entrenched and even Keleru himself would not dare act in opposition to them."

"Why... why should I believe anything that you are saying to me?" For'mya demanded.

Motun looked at her. "Because I know Arzoal, the Dragon Elder Mother. Because I know she is, or rather was a Pralor, hell she still is really. Because I know of the ship your second oldest son Resumar and Athani were sent to destroy." He spoke seeing her eyes grow huge. "I also know that Keleru and Pusintin are stupidly unaware of what your son is doing on that ship or that it even exists. They have also dismissed the astounding facts that Androcles has taken one of Yuri's children as his wife and mate, that your own blood son Arrarn has taken that bitch Aikiro's daughter Narice as his wife, and they have absolutely no clue of the brothers Sumar and Xaxon or the role they both played." Motun looked at her and smiled at the expression on her face. "Now shall we sit and talk For'mya Leonidas, for while I may look and act Kavalian, I am nearly twelve thousand years old and I remain on my feet too many hours during the day for my age."

"You... you are a Pralor?" For'mya gasped.

Motun shook his head. "A Pralor... well that is debatable now." He answered. "You do not know of how the Kavalians and the elves came into being I take it? And the part Arzoal played in that?"

For'mya shook her head quickly. "No... no."

Motun nodded. "We have the time thankfully." He said taking her hand gently. "You must get off your feet as well and unless I miss my guess, if your son Androcles was not trying to kill you, then there is only one other reason why he would attacked you in such a blatant manner and that... you will need to be sitting down for."

"What... what do you mean?" For'mya asked as she allowed him to lead her around the table and towards where his desk was in the corner of the room.

Motun smiled as he led her to the desk, tapping on the control panel to insure the doors into the med bay were secure so no one could enter. "While I will truly miss the opportunity to meet with and speak with Martin Leonidas, his son Androcles, your son by nature of the connection you all have within Mindvoice."

"I can not... I can not sense them within Mindvoice." For'mya spoke as she sat down. "They are blocking me. It is nothing... like a black void where they would normally be."

Motun looked at her. "Truly?" He said. "I have never heard of such a thing. We will have to discuss that further." He settled into the chair after she was comfortable. "First however, let me regale you with why I am not your enemy and I will do everything within my power to see you kept safe and returned to your family."

For'mya shook her head. "They... they will not... they will want nothing to do with me now." She said softly. "Not after what I have done."

“For'mya Leonidas you do not really believe that do you?” Motun asked her seeing her eyes lift to look at him. “You told me not so long ago that Androcles is not sloppy. What did he say to you just before sinking his teeth into you? I saw the transmission as well. He spoke something to you... what was it?”

For'mya looked at him tears beginning to appear in her eyes. “He said... he said forgive me mother... for what I must do.”

Motun nodded. “Then your son Androcles is far smarter than Pusintin and Keleru give him credit for. He did something in biting you, of that I am sure. What it was I do not know, but he accomplished two things if you think about it. Whatever his true intentions were, and he also managed to make Pusintin and his idiots believe that you are now a pariah to them. Very devious young man that Androcles. Very intelligent.” Motun waved his hand. “We'll discuss it later... for now... allow me to fill in some parts of history that you are probably not aware of, and it will also explain to you who I am.”

SCIMITAR MED BAY

“...sure Andro?” Eliani asked as she slowly drew her hand across his cheek and neck, the soft pulsing of the white light in her palm clearly visible.

He sat on the examining table, Caliria standing beside Eliani and holding his hand tightly. Sadi sat next to him on the table, Carisia and Lu'ria next to her while Ne'Veha stood beside Caliria.

“I'm sure Eli.” Andro answered almost wistfully. “I... I touched them sister! She carries twins and they...”

Eliani lowered her hand and looked at him. “What?”

Andro smiled. “They... they told me ‘Hello our brother.’” He said.

Eliani gasped softly and small tears formed in her eyes. “Then... then it worked?”

Andro nodded his head. “I believe so. I was stunned when I sensed them so easily. They were strong to begin with and I didn't expect... I didn't expect there would be two of them.”

“*Son vada carians!*” Sadi gasped gripping his arm. “Can they help us to communicate with her Andro?”

Andro nodded. “I believe so yes. I... I passed quite a bit of information to them in so short a time. It... it was easier than I thought with Elynth helping me. They... they were strong to begin with. I wish I had a few seconds longer.”

“Then they...” Eliani asked.

Andro met her eyes. “Yes... they are fully aware now.” He answered.

“*Carians* Andro... father, the Feravomir... you know it is forbidden to do this.” Eliani said softly. “I hope... I hope they understand.”

“It was the only way Eli... you know this.” Andro said. “It's why I told only you, Zarah and my mates. I found the inhibitor as well, just like you told me to look for. It's on the back of her neck under her hair. About half an inch under the skin near her collarbone. I told our brother and sister this.”

Eliani sighed heavily and squeezed his hands. “I didn't know if it would work. Thank the gods. They will tell her?”

Andro nodded. “Yes. Who hit me?” He asked reaching up to rub the back of his head.

Eliani glanced at Sadi and then back to him. “Arrarn got to you first.” She told him. “He was crazy Andro... he thought you were killing her. I told you we should have let him in on the plan. Our uncle's son joined in moments later. They hit you... gods... it had to be eight times in the head before Arrarn finally changed and reared up, slashing you across the neck and shoulder blade. It was horrible. Grandfather was in shock! So many people were screaming.”

Sadi gripped his hands. “They hit you so many times my love.” She asked. “When you finally released your mother after Arrarn attacked you just fell to the floor unconscious. Kalis shoved her back without regard and then kicked you several times before Jomann got to you and tossed him back.”

Andro looked at Eli and shook his head. “Arrarn can not control his emotions enough when it comes to mother Eli. We would be no different if it was the mother who gave birth to us. I couldn't trust him enough to maintain calm until I acted. I...”

“*Nubous ronnus!*” The voice screamed out.

Whether it was the sluggishness from being hit so many times in the head or just simple fatigue, Andro wasn't able to move before Arrarn got to him. Using all of his combined elven and wolf strength Arrarn Leonidas struck his older brother square in the side of the head, propelling Andro's body back over the table, knocking Sadi and Ne'Veha aside and causing Caliria to stumble back reaching for Lu'ria and Carisia to keep from falling.

“Arrarn stop!” Eliani screamed frozen in place.

The medical bay was rapidly filling with Leonidas children, Denali and Jomann making directly for where Arrarn was atop a still dazed Androcles and beginning to pummel his brother with his fists.

“Get him off him!” Normya screamed.

“Arrarn no!” Zarah shouted as she and Lisisa moved directly for where the two brothers were.

“You fucker!” Arrarn screamed driving his fist down once more. “You tried to kill her! My mother! You tried to kill her!”

“Stop it Arrarn!” Denali roared grabbing his brother's arm before he could punch downward again.

“Get off me!” Arrarn screamed shoving Denali away and turning back to continue punching an unresisting Andro in the face. His cheek was badly cut now, blood covering the side of his neck and face. “Is this what you planned?” Arrarn barked dragging Andro's upper body off the floor in his rage and smashing his forehead down into his face. “You planned to kill my mother! You sonofabitch! You...”

Andro suddenly came alive and snatched the front of Arrarn's uniform in rage. His azure orbs flared wide, changed to the wolf within him, his dual fangs fully exposed and he brought his head up as he pulled Arrarn's upper body down.

“Get the fuck off me!” Andro growled savagely just before his forehead collided with Arrarn's cheek.

Arrarn Leonidas was not full wolf and while he had the speed and strength of a wolf elf combination, he did not have the much denser bone structure as a pureblood Lycavorian like Andro or Denali. The blow from Andro's forehead was like a sledgehammer and stars erupted into his eyes as Andro heaved off the floor. Arrarn had also made the mistake of attacking his brother while all of his mates were with him, tossing aside the knowledge that they would also instinctively defend him to their last breath. As Andro heaved off the floor holding Arrarn's clothes, Sadi righted herself from where she had sprawled, her jungle green eyes aflame with anger, and her wolf fangs viciously exposed. The much smaller dual fangs that had grown in since Andro took her as his mate were now very prominent however and she lifted her hand towards Arrarn and unleashed a Mindvoice fueled blast of angry power. Arrarn was torn from Andro's grasp and hurtled backward to slam into the medical table he had knocked Andro from. As he began to fall forward he met a cruel chop from Lu'ria on his shoulder and a brutal knee in the face from Carisia, snapping his head back and sending him up and over the table to crash to the floor beside Jomann and Denali who quickly buried him under their combined bulk.

“Enough!” Jomann bellowed as he wrapped his arms around Arrarn's chest.

“Let me alone!” Arrarn screamed, spitting blood from his mouth where Carisia's knee had split both his lips.

“Arrarn stop!” Denali shouted grabbing his brother's arms. “This does not help any of us!”

“You weren't there!” Arrarn screamed. “He called her names! He grabbed her and tried to tear out her throat!”

“That's not true!” Sadi snarled.

“Shut up upae!” Arrarn screamed. “I saw it! Of course you would protect him! We all saw it! All of you were watching! Tell me you didn't see it!”

“We saw it Arrarn!” Lisisa barked. “But this helps nothing! There... there has to be a reason!” She turned to look at Andro and saw him getting fully to his feet, wiping blood from his mouth and cheek. He pushed away Eliani's attempt to quick heal him and shook his head slightly before looking at where Jomann and Denali held Arrarn back. “Andro!”

“Andro what is going on?” Normya barked now, pulling away from Tir'ut's grasp as Narice and Toria moved up to where Arrarn was. “Why have you attacked mother? Why?”

Andro met her emerald eyes and then rose to his full height looking at all six of his sisters and brothers as they stared at him. Eliani had moved to Arrarn now to try and heal him, Zarah standing beside Sadi while

Lucia moved up next to her, all of her senses on alert. Nearly half a dozen Durcunusaan troops had poured into the med bay now, along with Bren, Devra and Arduri, all of them looking on with wide eyes.

“This... this is what you believe?” Andro growled at them. “You believe I would try to kill my mother!”

“She is not your mother!” Arrarn screamed. “She was never your mother! She is my mother!”

“Arrarn Leonidas! How dare you!” Lisisa gasped in horror as she looked at him now. Never in all their years had any of them ever suggested such a thing. It was so taboo within their family that none of them even thought such a thing casually. It was forbidden, for since the day they were old enough to understand, they were raised and drilled and schooled that there was no distinction between their mothers. None of them was held above the other, all of them spoke with a single voice and all of them were loved and respected just as equally as the next. Even Denali was shocked, so much so that he removed his hands from Arrarn as if he had been scalded with boiling water. “How dare you say that?”

“I dare it because it’s true!” Arrarn screamed yanking his arms from Jomann’s grasp now but remaining where he was. “All of you saw it! He tried to kill her!”

Lisisa turned her head slowly and looked back to Andro now. “Andro... we... we all saw it. You... you attacked mother... why? What is going on?”

“All of you believe this?” Andro asked moving forward now. “After all... after all we have done together... you believe I would kill my own mother!”

“She isn’t your mother!” Arrarn shouted again. “You proved that today by trying to kill her! You can’t deny it! The entire Union saw it!”

Andro glared at Arrarn for a long moment. “Even... even after the promise I made to you Arrarn... you... you think this?”

“Fuck your promise!” Arrarn barked. “You lied to me! That is what I see! And you tried to kill my mother! You can’t deny it Andro... not when we all saw it!”

“Arrarn you don’t...” Eliani began to speak.

“Eli no!” Andro barked out looking at her and seeing her head turn to him. “It doesn’t... it doesn’t matter now.”

“So you aren’t going to deny it?” Arrarn snarled. “Not even in front of your own blood? You aren’t going to at least try and deny it!”

“The only reason you are even still breathing is *because* you are my blood!” Andro growled savagely as he stepped closer to him. “After all we have done as family, all we have been through as brothers and sisters, that any of you would think I would try to kill mother is...” Andro shook his head slowly. “That you... that you believe I am capable of something so vile... it breaks... it breaks my heart Arrarn.”

“The truth hurts doesn’t it Andro!” Arrarn growled back at him.

Andro met his eyes and they all saw his azure orbs return to normal and his fangs slowly fade away. “Yes... the truth does hurt brother. More than you will ever begin to know.”

“I am not your brother!” Arrarn screamed. “My brother would not do what you have done!”

“Arrarn stop!” Eliani shouted. “You don’t know what is going on!”

“Then tell me Eli!” Arrarn barked at her. “Tell me! Make us understand why our brother attacked my mother and tried to kill her! Make us understand that!”

Andro shook his head slowly. “No.” He said. “You will believe what you will believe. I do not answer to you Arrarn. I answer only to our father, our grandfather and the gods who watch over us. What I have done... what I do... it is my burden to carry. And I will continue to do so.” Andro moved closer to him. “You have one hour to collect your things from my ship and then you are to return to Earth.”

“You can’t order me to...” Arrarn began.

“*This is my ship!*” Androcles screamed shocking even Sadi with the tone of his voice. “I am first born! I am acting in our father’s stead! You will do what I command you or so help me I will have the *Durcunusaan* place you under arrest and escort you back to Earth in chains!”

“Andro father would...” Normya started to speak.

“Father knows exactly what I am doing!” Andro screamed out. “He knows exactly what I am doing because I speak with him every fucking day!”

“What?” Lisisa gasped. “Father knew?”

Andro ignored her and glared at Arrarn. “One hour Arrarn. Do not make me resort to actions that I do not wish to use... but make no mistake... I will use them! One hour!”

Androcles Leonidas spun around and strode quickly from the medical bay leaving his siblings there with stunned expressions. Sadi only glared at Arrarn for a few seconds more before following him, Lu'ria, Ne'Veha, Carisia and Caliria following immediately, though Caliria had a very confused look on her face.

As the doors to the med bay closed behind them the female voice echoed out as Zarah Leonidas could no longer hold it in.

“Arrarn you fucking fool!” She screamed moving up in front of her brother. “Have you utterly lost your mind?”

“You saw it Zarah!” Arrarn shouted back. “You saw what he did! He tried to kill her! And now we discover that father knew about it! We...”

Zarah Leonidas then did something that she had never, in all her young life, begun to contemplate. With every ounce of her combined wolf and vampire strength she reared back her hand and slapped her brother. The blow reverberated throughout the medical bay like a gunshot, snapping Arrarn’s head around and sending him sprawling across the floor from the force of the blow. Narice made to move and block her from following his body but she felt the whip like grip of something surround her waist and hold her in place. She whirled around and saw Lucia holding her with her Mindvoice whips.

“Lucia... release me!” She snarled.

Lucia shook her head as she came up beside her. “No Aunt Narice. This does not involve us. We must let it run its course!” She said softly.

“Lucia... he could hurt her in his rage.” Narice said.

Lucia smiled gently. “Hurt Zarah?” She said. “I doubt that very much Aunt Narice. Zarah is much more than she appears.”

Arrarn looked up from the floor as Zarah appeared over the top of him. “Don’t make me hit you back Zarah.” He said holding his face as he got to his feet.

Zarah laughed and faster than even Arrarn could follow she hit him again, spinning him around and watching him slam into the bulkhead with a resounding thud. “You are a fool!” She screamed at him. “If you would pull your ego inflated head out of your ass for once in your life and actually think about something other than yourself, you would see that Andro was trying to save our mother!” She screamed at him.

Arrarn’s dark eyes were full of surprise at the power Zarah had hit him with and he held his face glaring at her. “You saw it yourself Zarah!” He screamed. “How can you defend him?”

“AARRGGHHH!” Zarah screamed before lashing out again and hitting him in the face once more, the light blue psychic shield appearing and encompassing her entire body now, the blow driving Arrarn to his knees. “You fucking idiot!” She shouted at him. “The same way he has defended each and every one of us without hesitation! The same way he has saved all of us without question! Just as he was trying to save our mother!”

Arrarn surged off the floor now. “He tried to kill her!” He screamed with rage. “Right there in front of me! In front of everyone!”

“She’s right Arrarn!” Eliani snapped moving across the room to stand beside Zarah.

Arrarn looked at her with wide eyes. “You believe him too!”

“If not for Androcles... you would not have Narice and Toria!” Zarah screamed at him.

“That has nothing to do with what is happening right now!” Arrarn barked.

“Doesn’t it?” Zarah demanded. “Who was it that told you to follow your heart and your feelings Arrarn? Who was it that told you to go after what you wanted no matter that Narice is the daughter of the woman who ordered me to be raped like some animal in the gutter?”

“Zarah that...” Normya stepped forward now.

“NO!” Zarah snapped at her sister. “Never... never did I imagine that it would come to this! Never! Never did I imagine we would fall so far as to forsake our own blood! Androcles was the first one to accept your feelings for Tir’ut Normya! He did so without question because he trusted you! Because he loved you!” Normya became silent as Zarah then whirled around and faced Lisisa and Denali. “He protected you both! He knew of your love for each other and he protected your secret! He kept you together on the *SCIMITAR* so that love could blossom into what it is now! Because he loved and trusted you both! He protected Resumar and

Athani! He was the first to know about them and he protected and shielded them because he loved his brother and he trusted him!” Zarah whirled back to face Arrarn. “I would be dead if not for him! Do you hear me Arrarn! Dead! The Fever would have killed me! And if the fever had not, then the unwritten laws among our people would have demanded it! He saved my life... kept my secret from even our mothers and father without hesitation! Without pause... because he loved me! And now you forsake him... accuse him of something so vile... because you do not know what is going on?”

Zarah looked at all of them now. “What do you want to do? All of you? Do you wish to walk in our brother’s shoes Arrarn? Do any of you?” She screamed at them. “Do you truly wish to see what he sees when he lays down his head to sleep? Do you truly wish to see how he lives every minute of every day? I will tell you what he sees! He sees the faces of nearly four million Hadarians! Men, women and children that he had to sacrifice in order to protect us! He sees our mother Anja hating him for having to do that, though she would have done the same thing! He sees the day looming closer when he will have to plunge our people into a war we don’t want! He questions everything he has done; not knowing if what he has done might have caused all of this to happen! He wakes every day not knowing what will happen or who will hate him for his actions but he wakes and he does what he does because he must! Because father is out there looking for mother and planning to take her back! He does it because none of us can!” Zarah glared at Arrarn once more. “As you so prominently have proven this day dear brother! All he has done for us! Everything he has ever done for us... and you just toss him to the side because *you* don’t know what he is doing?”

“Do any of you... can any of you honestly believe he would ever cause us harm? Any of us? Do you truly believe he would try to kill one of our mothers? He was trying to save her Arrarn Leonidas you insufferable *midaeus*! The Kavalian dogs implanted her with one of those inhibitors, just like they did with our mother Dysea. She can not feel us, she can not sense us! She is lost! Cirith’s father works day and night trying to find a way to negate this effect and still he falls short! Andro did the only thing he could think of to try and make contact with her. The one thing that would insure she knows we have not forsaken her as readily as *you* have forsaken our brother! A way to let her know that father still lives and still loves her, even after what she has been forced to do! A way to let her know we love her! A way that is forbidden to all of us that can Mindvoice! Something so taboo it is not even spoken of because of what it means! And of us all... only he knows what that means the most, because he is the only one of us who has ever experienced it!”

Lisisa gasped as she was the first to understand what Zarah was saying. “Son vada carians!”

Zarah looked at her. “Yes Lisi.” She said. “Our mother carries life within her. And in order to insure that she did not give up all hope, Andro touched that life within her, awakening them to all that was around them. Giving that life the burden that he has carried alone since he became aware while in our mother’s womb.”

“Two lives.” Eliani spoke now as she stepped up next to Zarah. “Mother carries twins. He touched them both. And now we have a way to communicate with mother. To let her know that we have not forgotten her!”

Zarah stared at Arrarn for a long moment. “You wish to know who our brother is Arrarn? The brother you so callously tossed aside after everything he has done? I will show you our brother! I will let you hear it in his own fucking words!”

Zarah stormed to the control panel on Eliani’s desk and began stabbing down on the console. The medical bay suddenly became dark as the holo emitters on the floor kicked in and the disc in the corner came alive. It faded in and out for a moment and then became perfectly clear. It was a room of some sort and all of them could see the Evrotas river outside the massive double doors. They could see the men and women walking the streets of Sparta below and then a man they had never seen stepped into view.

“How are you doing Milord?” He asked.

“Is this really necessary?” Andro’s voice filled the room. “I am very busy you know.”

They watched as Andro came into view. He was wearing his formal Union Dress uniform of black pants and jacket with crimson trim all around. Four rows of vertical ribbons dotted the left side of his chest and his field rank of Admiral rested on his shoulder boards.

“It has only been a month since Alba Tau Milord.” The man spoke. “Your father, mothers and the Feravomir felt it was necessary. The King goes through it himself. As do the others who survived that night.”

“Oh very well.” Androcles answered.

"I can trust in your honesty Milord? It is the only way this will help you going forward." The man said.

Andro nodded. *"If I must."*

"You are trying to forget what happen I take it?"

"Wouldn't you?" Andro said. *"It was not the most pleasant of evenings for Elynth and I. For my father and Torma. Any of us."*

"I don't imagine it was." The man replied. *"I've seen the after action reports. I've talked to your father and uncle. To Moneus Simpson."*

"And now it is my turn?" Andro said with a smile.

The man smiled. *"If that is the way you wish to view it. Your mothers have told me you are having nightmares. That you and Elynth both thrash about at night. That most of the time you sleep on the patio of your villa in Gytheio."*

Andro turned and stepped up to the balcony clasping his hands behind his back. *"My... my room is claustrophobic."* He said. *"And my KertaGai is not with me."*

"KertaGai?" The man asked.

"The woman who will be my life. My love. My center." Andro answered. *"One of them anyway. As my mother Aricia is to my father. As she is to all my mothers."*

"And how many will there be if I may be so bold?" The man asked.

"Women?" Andro said.

"Yes."

Andro chuckled softly. *"Five."*

"You sound so sure."

"I have seen it." Andro said confidently turning back to look at him. *"Just as my father saw my mothers. In his dreams."*

"Tell me of them." The man said.

"Is that really necessary?" Andro asked.

"It will allow you to become more comfortable with me Milord." The man said.

"There is Sadi... my KertaGai. She will be my anome. My soulmate. Carisia... with maya blue eyes like gems. A vampire and daughter to an enemy. Ne'Veha... my SirsanGai... she does not know or understand her path just yet but then again, who among us does. Lu'ria... my Drow Mistress and with the brightest amber eyes. And then there is Caliria. With skin like a blue sky and hair as black as the night." He looked up. *"I will find them all one day."*

"That is incredible Milord. They are in your dreams you said." The man said.

Andro nodded. *"One of the many curses of being born fully aware of everything around you. A curse Elynth and I would not wish on anyone given its nature."* Andro said softly. *"It allows us to have abilities that others do not. Some of which are not exactly the easiest to accept mind you. We have come to accept them however."*

"Does it allow you to see the future?" The man asked.

Andro chuckled turning to look out the large balcony doors again. *"Thankfully no. Even we would not want that ability. Mostly it allows us to see and understand some things differently than others. If it allowed us to see the future we certainly would not have done what we did that night knowing the horrors we would see."*

"So tell me of that night Milord." The man asked.

"What do you wish to know?" Andro said.

"Why did you do it?"

Andro turned back to look at him. *"Why did I do it?"*

The man nodded. *"Yes."*

"I did it to protect them." Andro said without hesitation.

"I don't understand Milord. Protect who? The dragons?" The man asked.

"My brothers and sisters." Andro answered just as quickly. *"My mothers. I did it to protect them. So that they would not have to do it. Just as my father did."*

"So you endured the anguish and pain of that night so they would not have to?" The man spoke.

“Wouldn’t you?”

“Milord... what you experienced that night? The horror. The death. The blood. I would not wish that on my worst enemy.” The man said.

Andro chuckled softly one last time. *“I would happily endure a thousand nights like that if it meant my brothers and sisters did not have to experience it. If it meant my mothers and they were safe and secure.”* He said laconically. *“That is my calling and my duty as the oldest. As my father’s first born son.”*

“But you are... you are the Crown Prince of the Union Milord. Surely that is a burden you need not carry.” The man said.

Androcles shook his head. *“A burden? By all that I hold holy... that is no burden to me sir. No burden in the least. First and foremost I am their brother and their son. I must protect them as best as I am able. That is what my grandfather Leonidas would wish of me. What my great-grandfather Resumar would wish of me. That is part of my destiny. I would die for any of them without a single moment’s hesitation.”*

“That is who I am. Are we done here?”

The holo image faded just as quickly as it had appeared leaving all of them standing in silence. When it did they saw Sadi standing with the others a look of astonishment on her face. She and the others must have come back into the Med Bay while the holo recording had been playing and now like the others they were silent. It was Devra Re Mydala who broke the silence in the Med Bay, tears streaming down her face.

“By the Grace of the Prophets Bren.” She gasped gripping the arms of her new husband and mate tightly. *“I... I am humbled.”*

Bren pulled her close, just as deeply affected by what he had seen as she was. Even as long as he had served with Androcles... he had never known what drove him to do the things he did. Now he knew... and he too was humbled.

Zarah turned back slowly to look at her brothers and sisters. Normya was openly weeping into Tir’ut’s chest, Lisisa clinging to Denali with tears streaming down her cheeks. She looked at Arrarn, who had a trembling Narice and Toria clinging to his waist. His face showed the utter horror at what he had said and done.

“There is our brother Arrarn Leonidas.” Zarah spoke softly. *“You should be shamed to even walk in his shadow after what you have done here today. Never have we even thought the words you spoke today. That you... any of you... would question his honor or his love for us... for our mothers... next time why don’t you just take a blade and carve out his heart. That would have been less painful for him after what you have done.”*

“Zarah...” Normya spoke. *“Zarah... will we be able to talk with mother?”*

Zarah turned to looked at Eliani. *“Eli... you and Andro knew what you would do.”* She said. *“What does it mean?”*

Eliani pulled away from Jomann slightly, and wiped away the tears in her eyes. *“He told me he was able to touch them. We are hoping because only mother has this inhibitor implanted within her that he will be able to communicate with them. They will then be able to talk with her since they are within her.”*

“What did... what did he tell them?” Lisisa asked. *“What are their names?”*

Eliani shook her head. *“I don’t know. I know he passed to them information that father wanted him to pass. And he told them of their family.”* Eliani looked at Arrarn. *“He told them of their brothers and sisters.”*

Arrarn started for the door. *“I must go to him.”* He stated.

“You can’t.” Sadi declared stepping in front of him. *“He has left with L’tian to return to the surface and take part in the farce that these meetings are about. There was a chance... there was a chance that we could have gotten your mother free Arrarn. A slim one... but a chance nonetheless. Because of what you did on the surface that chance is lost to us. Now we don’t know what will happen.”* Sadi stepped up to him. *“And mark my words to you Arrarn Leonidas, if what you have done this day causes him to act in a way that will place him in harm’s way, that will cause him pain, brother or no brother I will revisit that pain to you ten fold! I swear this to you as his Anome!”*

None of them could do anything as Sadi spun around and marched back out of the Med Bay without another word.

HADARIA LYCAVORIAN EMBASSY

“...should have told me Androcles.” L'tian spoke from behind Andro as he walked into the large room.

Andro turned away from the window and looked at the man he called grandfather. “It was too risky grandfather.”

“Andro... I barely got them to allow you back on the planet!” L'tian hissed softly as he came up with the large mug of Aricia's coffee and glass of Spartan Wine. He held out the mug to Andro knowing that he hardly ever drank alcoholic beverages. He glanced quickly to the shadows where Jomann stood silently.

Andro smiled as he took the mug. “Do not kid yourself grandfather. They allowed me back on the planet because tomorrow is when my uncle and Buonau will make their grand play before the Galactic Court. Once he discovers what capturing mother means, once he discovers that, he won't be happy. He will still want me there so that he can gloat over how he will soon be in command of the Union. He will preach to the Netnews that we are a law driven society and we need to follow our own laws. Buonau wants me there because she thinks she will arrest me, furthering strengthening my uncle's position.”

“I sincerely hope you do not intend to allow that.” L'tian said.

“I will not allow that.” Jomann spoke from the side of the room.

“No grandfather.” Andro answered with a smile. “Eli made sure to tell Jomann I am to do nothing stupid.”

“You do realize that they will not allow her back into any meetings now? They will keep her sequestered from us no matter what.” L'tian said.

Andro nodded his head. “I know. The chance Sadi and I thought we may have had was very slim to begin with. Once we saw the arrangements outside the Arch Ministry Building, combined with the number they brought to the meeting, we decided against it. The risk to mother was too great. Arran's actions only made it impossible.”

“You know... the comparisons between Sadi and your grandmother Gorgo continue to grow by leaps and bounds.” L'tian said as he sipped his wine. “If not for the color of her hair, I dare say most of the Lycavorians born and raised in Sparta would consider her the second coming of Gorgo.”

Andro smiled. “Yes I know. She hates that.”

“To be compared to your grandmother in so many ways is an honor Androcles. I hope she knows that.” L'tian said.

“Oh... don't mistake my statement for something it is not grandfather. Sadi... she does not feel she measures up to grandmother Gorgo in any way. Either by intelligence or deed.” Andro told him. “That is what my statement means.”

L'tian smiled in understanding. “Well... if she continues to act and do the things she does, the comparisons will only grow and she gives herself far less credit than she deserves. Did you know she sprang upon Pusintin's son with the fervor of a rabid female wolf protecting her mate?”

Andro looked at him confused, his eyes going to where Jomann stood. He quickly made sure his eyes were anywhere but looking at his Prince and fast growing friend. “What? No... I... she told me Jomann was the one who finally tossed Kalis aside.”

L'tian chuckled. “And that is what I mean. You should have seen it. She pounced on him, clawing at his eyes, fangs out and spitting death and she finally hit him with a Mindvoice blast that nearly sent him flying across the room. Jomann was the one who kept him from getting to his feet and continuing the fight. A fight which I sincerely doubt he would have won given how she was reacting. Your *KertaGai* is becoming more and more refined at using her abilities it seems. And they are skills I think she is passing to the rest of your mates.”

Andro shook his head. “I will need to have a talk with her it seems.” He said with an almost embarrassed grin.

“Did it work Andro?” L'tian asked after a long moment.

“I believe so... yes.” Andro answered knowing what he meant. “They said ‘Hello our brother’ grandfather. They spoke as one voice and it sounded somewhat strange, but it was definitely them.”

L'tian sipped his wine. "Part of me... part of me is enraged at what she has had to endure Androcles. I want to squeeze the life from that foul man for what he has done to my baby. But part of me..." L'tian shook his head. "She carries new life within her! Innocent life. You know what that means to elves don't you?"

Andro nodded his head as he moved closer to him. "Yes. I know that part of elven history grandfather." He answered. "The Elder Mother told me."

L'tian looked at him surprised. "Arzoal? How... how would she know?" L'tian stared at his grandson for a long moment in silence because Andro would not answer him and then shook his head. "On second thought perhaps it is better if I do not know. At least right now. Suffice to say... if you were able to do this then it will at least allow her some small measure of peace knowing that we have not forsaken her. That we are doing everything within our power to get her back."

"I gave my brother and sister knowledge that father is still alive." Andro told him. "With that knowledge, I told them to reveal it when they needed, but only to keep mother from doing anything stupid. I didn't have the full thirty seconds I needed to pass to them all I wanted, but enough to start with. They... they will not be fully aware because I was interrupted... but enough to know and understand much of what is going on around them. Mother will discover it soon enough and she will be the one they need to draw from. Perhaps it is better that I did not establish so deep a connection as to give them the complete knowledge that I carry. That is a burden I wish upon no one."

L'tian looked at him keenly. "You did... you did what you felt was necessary given the circumstances." L'tian said reassuringly. "You do not have to refer to them as your siblings Andro." He said. "I don't think anyone would expect you too."

Andro met his eyes. "They are part of one of my mothers." He stated firmly. "She did not birth me grandfather, but she has played just as important a role in my childhood and my life as my blood mother. As any of my mothers did. To be honest... as I grew I think I learned more from her and my blood mother than any of them. Now... they are part of her, and that makes them part of me as well."

"And how much trouble is doing what you have done going to get you in?" L'tian asked him. "I have to believe that Helen and Arzoal will not be happy about it. I doubt the School of the Mages is going to be pleased either once they discover what you have done. You are the only one to have ever been fully aware while still within the womb Androcles. The only one born fully aware. That is no small burden to carry. In some ways I think they fear what you could be capable of. Now there will be two more."

"The Elder Mother and the *Feravomir* will not question what I have done." He said. "They may not like it... but they will understand why, just as father does. It will be easier to accept when they realize they are not fully aware, but they will be upset that I did what I did regardless. What the School of the Mages thinks I do not care. The *Feravomir* can handle them and she knows to keep them away from me. Stuffy old fuckers is what they are."

L'tian laughed warmly. "Yes... I don't doubt that, but they have always raised a stink because you never went to them to be 'properly trained' as they say." L'tian said. "All of your brothers and sisters... but you most of all because of your unique situation."

Andro nodded. "They will need to get over it." He said with a grin. "Has *Tenna Deia* given any indication of the reaction back home?"

L'tian shook his head. "I spoke with her within an hour of the incident. I believe most people are still in shock. Just as I was. You should have told Arrarn though."

Andro took a deep breath and shook his head. "No." He said softly. "I love my brother grandfather... I love him deeply... but he does not have the emotional control that Eliani does. He is not good at hiding his feelings. He wears his heart on his sleeve most of the time. If I had told him what we planned, his love for mother would have driven him to push for it to happen sooner. Perhaps do something that would have given us away. My uncle is not stupid... he would have known something was amiss." Andro shook his head again. "No... I did the right thing. I needed Eliani to pinpoint the Inhibitor within her, and she is like my mother Anja. She has the best damn Tarchan face of anyone I know. It is why no one will play Tarchan with her anymore grandfather." He said speaking of the popular card game with the Union.

"What now?" L'tian asked.

"I'm going to return to the *SCIMITAR* for the evening." Andro said. "I need... I need to feel my mates around me and I wish to try and contact them as well. I doubt they even have her on the surface anymore and it

will be easier to maintain a connection with them if all of us are in orbit. I do not wish to overload their newfound abilities.”

“And Arrarn?” L'tian asked looking at him. He saw Andro's eyes grow a little wider. “Yes... I know what happened. Normya told me within Mindvoice as you were sitting in the back on our way down.”

“I... I don't know.” Andro said softly.

“Androcles... he is... terrified that you will hate him.” L'tian said. “What he said... he spoke in anger and concern and...”

“Hate him?” Andro gasped. “He is my brother grandfather... I could... I could never hate him. I love him too much!”

“Then why send him away?” L'tian asked.

Andro sighed heavily. “I do not wish to grandfather... I have to.” He answered. “For three reasons.”

“And they are?” L'tian asked. “And do not think I am trying to get you to change your mind Androcles. I agree with you. I only wish to understand.”

Andro met his eyes evenly. “He has already proven he can not control his anger at what has taken place. In his shoes, I do not doubt I would be the same. That is reason number one. Also... Narice and Toria are his strength and they are in danger every minute we remain here. The Kavalians would like nothing better than to capture or kill Narice. That weighs heavily on him always. He acted... he acted without fully thinking and you know as well as I, that is always something that will get you killed. If we are to save mother we can't afford that. Having them here is a distraction for him. That is reason number two. The last reason... he... he needs to be with... he needs to be with Narice when she leaves.”

“What do you mean when she leaves? Where is she going?” L'tian asked.

Andro looked at him. “I am not infallible grandfather... as much as everyone likes to place father and I on pedestals, we do make mistakes. Many of them.”

L'tian nodded. “We all do Androcles. Most of us fully understand that. What does that have to do with Arrarn?”

Andro took a deep breath. “Narice is returning to High Coven space grandfather. She is returning to make a claim to leadership there.” Andro saw L'tian's eyes grow wide in disbelief. “We can not fight the Kavalians and the High Coven at the same time. Narice and I have spoken at length since all of this began, and we agree it is in both our best interests to have her make a claim to leadership now that Aikiro is dead. The time is right. If she can wrest control of the Coven government from Yuri... then she can put them on a new path. The path that they should have been on before Aikiro came back to power. Narice is a Leonidas now, vampire blood or no. She has taken enough of my brother's blood to know everything there is to know about our family and she has embraced it. Her love for Arrarn knows no bounds, and neither does Toria's. We have avoided it up till now, but with the information that is coming out of Coven space, now is the time.”

“That... that is a bold move Androcles.” L'tian said. “Does... does your father know?”

Andro shook his head. “Not about this... no.” He replied. “I fear his anger and hatred of the Coven and Yuri runs too deep for him to make a substantial decision that does not include destroying them completely.”

“After what they have done, do you not agree with him?” L'tian asked.

“Make no mistake grandfather... Dante Moran will die a painful death.” Andro told him meeting his gaze. “For what he did to Zarah I will track him to the ends of the universe and he will die a death fitting his vile deeds. He will rue the day he ever set his eyes on my sister of that you can be assured. That... that does not mean that the people within the High Coven agree with what Aikiro and Yuri did. Narice... she has told me the younger generations are making themselves more known within High Coven society. Pureblood and turned vampires alike. They are joining together and becoming more vocal in what they want. And they want peace between our people. They see what we have and they want that as well. Narice is part of that generation grandfather, Toria as well. If she can rally enough power, enough people to her cause with our support, she would be a strong ruler.”

“Where does Arrarn come into play?” L'tian asked.

“Arrarn loves her grandfather.” Andro said. “He loves her and Toria more than anything else in his life. Perhaps it is their vampire blood and the coolness with which they have been raised, but they are good for him. A calming influence. And... and because I am not infallible... I trust in Arrarn's love for them and his ability of precognition to make sure that if I have made a mistake, it does not cost us everything.”

“What mistake?” L'tian asked.

“Trusting the Immortals.” Andro said bluntly.

L'tian's eyes grew wider. “You don't trust them?” He gasped. “Even after all they have done?”

Andro shook his head. “I am not talking of Cha'talla, or Tir'ut or anyone connected with their tribe and clan. Them I trust implicitly, just as mother and Normya do. I am speaking of the millions of Immortals that are leaving the High Coven in droves and have been for the last week.”

“What?” L'tian gasped in shock.

Andro nodded his head. “It is part of the intelligence we're getting from our deep agent. Millions of them. All responding to Cha'talla's call for a new life. A call that I asked him to make. I have no doubts that a good portion of them will not be coming for that life Cha'talla has said they could have.”

“Deep agent?” L'tian said. “I was under the impression your father recalled all of our agents many years ago.”

Andro shook his head. “You don't honestly believe that do you grandfather?” He said.

“Who is this agent then?” L'tian asked.

Andro shook his head quickly. “I'm sorry grandfather... I can not tell you. Suffice to say the agent is very high up within the Coven ranks. Seven of us know his identity and that is the way it will stay.”

L'tian nodded. “Fair enough.” He said. “And Arrarn?”

“Arrarn knows how I feel about the Immortals. He knows that... Cha'talla knows that. That is why Narice must be surrounded by those who love and trust her. Those that she loves and trusts. I am sending my brother into harm's way grandfather. Into a situation that may very well get him and them killed. And I will not be there with him to guide him or make the many decisions he will need to make for himself. I need him to be focused and alert in order for this to work. And if it doesn't... I need to know that he will have his wits about him so that he can get them out of there if the need arises. His skills will be the only thing that can.”

L'tian was silent for a long moment. He set the glass of wine down on the table and nodded. “He can do it Andro.” He said finally.

Andro nodded in agreement. “My faith in him is not in question grandfather. That is why I need to send him away. He needs to focus on something just as important as getting mother back or else he will drive himself to do something utterly stupid in regards to our mother and possibly get both of them killed. That is a risk I am not willing to take. And ultimately I don't believe he is willing to take that risk either.”

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN

Arzoal and Helen watched as the ramp of the *STRIKER* came down and locked into position. Arzoal rested comfortably with her four legs beneath her, while Helen leaned against her side.

Have you spoken with Androcles sister? Arzoal asked turning her massive head to look at her bonded sister.

Helen shook her head. *No... not yet.* She answered. *Deia and I have been trying to maintain calm with the Senate for most of the day. I had to let Dilios and Arete know and they will discretely pass the word along to the more senior Senators.*

You know what he has done then?

Helen nodded now. *I felt them for the briefest of moments yes. And then they threw up shields that blocked everyone.* Helen met her eyes. *You know why he did it Arzoal?*

Arzoal nodded her huge head. *Yes. I thought perhaps the Elder Council would be angry that he used his natural abilities and the added power we gave to him as a Talon Guardian to accomplish this but I was so wrong. I inquired of all of them as soon as I saw it and realized what he was doing and they support him without hesitation. Daurgo and several others would have gone even further.*

They trust him and Martin implicitly Arzoal. Helen spoke. *And as much as I snarl and growl at them... so do I.*

Arzoal nodded in agreement. *Yes. I as well. The First Mage must have contacted you by now. Even if they were not watching the events I'm quite sure that they felt them for that brief instant.*

Oh... he contacted me. Helen answered as she rolled her eyes in disgust. *And once more he professed to me the dire consequences of not having Andro or his siblings attend the School of the Mages and learn how to properly manage their powers.*

Arzoal chuckled softly. *He forgets that it was you who trained him. Trained them.*

Helen smiled. *Perhaps. I placed him in charge when I stepped down because he knows the danger of doing what the Aikiro and the Coven did. Not giving those who are more gifted within Mindvoice than most... a means to grow and learn. They limit themselves. I think he and the senior instructors simply resent to a large degree that Andro and his siblings are far more powerful than he and they are. I may have to have a talk with him on a more personal level. I do not need him questioning our motives and what we do.*

Why do you think Anja wanted to meet with us? Arzoal asked.

Helen shook her head. *I don't know. She wouldn't go into details because she had to contact Resumar and Athani for something. It has something to do with Isabella and it's urgent I know that.*

The baby? Arzoal gasped. *There is something wrong with Dorian?*

Helen looked at her. *That's what I thought as well. What else could it be? If it had to do with Andro or Martin she would have contacted them directly.*

They turned as first Anja and Isabella exited the *STRIKER*, holding hands and walking together, though Bella was taking shorter steps because of her taller frame. They both looked radiant as always. Close behind them were Gorgo, Dasha and the young Leonidas children Nara, Deion, Bryon, Retta and Calyb. Sivana and Belen exited next followed closely by Ceuma and Joci with the stunning blue skinned Vanari female between them. Helen's eyes narrowed slightly when she saw that this Vanari female was clinging tightly to both Ceuma's hand as well as Joci and her face was beaming in happiness.

Interesting. You see them? She said.

Indeed. Arzoal answered. *It seems that the Vanari are going to play a much larger role in the future than anyone expected.*

Yes it certainly does. Helen said as her eyes fell on the half dozen *Durcunusaan* troops that exited next and the two female vampires that moved quickly to flanking positions of Anja and Isabella.

Colonel Norris's people no doubt. Arzoal spoke. *I had heard that Isabella and Dysea requested he send additional security for Bella.*

Helen nodded. *Yes... it would appear so.* She stated as she looked at the blond haired female to Isabella's right. Her hair was cut and styled in such a way that it folded mainly to one side of her face, the ends reaching to her jaw line. The Mark IV ArmorPly hugged her form tightly, accenting long, muscle packed legs for a woman who looked no more than five foot two inches tall. Her confident walk and the way her eyes shifted constantly told Helen she was exceptionally skilled. No doubt a result of Colonel Norris and his training regime. The man had fought with Martin during the Battle for Earth, the commander of a cloned vampire division that had defected to the Union side almost immediately. Men and women who had chosen their paths in life long before Yuri had sent them on their mission. Colonel Norris was known to frequent the many stores and shops within Eden City with War Master Tareif for the men had become close friends indeed. Helen tilted her head somewhat as she watched the young woman walk towards them, her eyes coming to rest on Arzoal. *The young woman on the right has not been around dragons very much sister. She is very nervous.*

Surprising. Arzoal spoke. *But not unexpected sister. Many of Colonel Norris's people come here to train and learn, but many do not.*

Their shielded conversation stopped as Anja and Isabella came up to them. Helen stepped forward and embraced both of them as they hugged her back tightly.

"Feravomir." Anja spoke nuzzling her cheek in affection. *"It has been too long."*

Helen smiled and nodded her head, giddy at seeing the fiery Persian haired Anja once more. Though she would never admit it openly to any of them, she favored Anja for her quick wit and her endless one liners intended to accent her outgoing and blunt nature. It was a trait she had apparently inherited from the human father she had been placed with after being sent to Earth. Helen kissed their cheeks, lingering a second longer on Anja's skin because of her sweet honey scent and she had not seen her in several months. Even after everything that had happen on Hadaria, Helen still saw the bright glint of her mischievous nature in her jade green eyes. The events on Hadaria had not broken her confidence or her will in any way it seemed and that

pleased Helen. She stepped back squeezing their hands as they both reached up to touch Arzoal. The Elder Mother closed her eyes and like her bonded sister relished in the touches of such dear friends.

Arzoal... it has been too long. Anja said.

Yes it has. Bella echoed.

Arzoal opened her flame colored eyes and lowered her snout to Isabella's shoulder nudging her gently. *It is always delightful to see any of you.* She spoke. *Will you be staying on Earth?*

Anja nodded after glancing at Bella. *It is time for us to return home.* She said. *It will give Helen and Deia a small reprieve from the Netnews crews who hound them. And I need to speak with Androcles when he returns.*

"Then you saw the transmission?" Helen asked softly.

Anja nodded. "We saw it." She said.

And you no doubt knew what Andro intended? Arzoal asked.

Isabella nodded now. "Yes... we knew." She replied. "Do not be angry with him. It was an idea he brought to us and we all agreed. Cirith's father is working on trying to interrupt the Inhibitor but we could not let For'mya go a moment longer without knowing we love her and are looking for her."

Helen shook her head. "We are not angry." She said. "We were just speaking of it before you arrived. Arzoal and I agree with what he did. We may not like it... but we agree with it. We only wish he would have consulted us first. It does not matter now and we will deal with the consequences as they come our way. Andro mostly since he is the one tied to them now. At least until they are grown."

Anja looked at Bella quickly and then back to Helen. "That is what we need to discuss. Or at least something like that."

Helen glanced at Arzoal and then back to Anja. "I don't understand."

"We are relatively sure Pusintin will have used the Kavalian accelerated growth hormone on the children *KinosaurGai* carries. She carries twins." Anja said.

"Yes... we felt them for a brief moment before their brother taught them to throw up very powerful shields." Helen said. "What exactly did Andro pass to them Anja?"

"That... that I don't know." Anja said. "He would not tell us and only Marty gave him a message to pass to them. We don't know what that was either. Knowing our son... I'm quite sure it was enough to allow them to help For'mya stick it to the raping bastard Pusintin in as many ways as possible!" She finished with hatred in her voice.

"Well... if this hormone was used on them... and I have no reason to not believe you... then he will need to communicate with them at least until they are fully grown." Helen spoke. "He will need to instruct them as much as he is able within Mindvoice and For'mya can augment and go into greater detail what he teaches them."

Anja nodded. "Yes... he knew that. As did Martin. We are hoping that he can use them as a conduit directly to For'mya since they are tied to her anyway and even with the inhibitor in her head it should not block her from communicating with them while she still carries them." She said. "The inhibitor blocks incoming and outgoing Mindvoice abilities... not ones that are internal."

Helen's eyes grew a little wider. "*Son vada carians*... I never... I never thought of that." She gasped. "That would work! This was Andro's idea?"

Anja nodded with a smile. "Yes."

What does this Kavalian hormone have to do with why you are here now Anja? Arzoal asked now.

Anja met her flame colored eyes evenly as Arzoal lowered her head almost even with Anja's five foot three height. "Arzoal we know how you used your abilities within Mindvoice to basically inhibit the growth of dragons before they hatched. So that they would not realized their full abilities and escalate your conflict with Chetek and his people."

Arzoal nodded. *Yes.*

"We need you to do the same thing for Dorian Arzoal. Only in reverse." Anja said. She took a deep breath. "Isabella has Darpia Syndrome... and her womb will break down before Dorian is ready to be born and it will no longer be able to sustain him. We are going to inject him with the growth hormone the Kavalians developed. That is why I needed to speak with Athani and Jalersi before coming here."

Arzoal's eyes were wide now, even for a dragon. *I... oh my. She gasped. I... perhaps we should go inside to one of the meditation chambers and speak. I... I need to hear this plan you have in its entirety.*

He lifted his head from the delicious bone he had been gnawing on when he felt the tingle in his head. His Sinopia colored scales gleamed with health and power, his emerald green eyes clear and bright. He was only three years old, but already he was just a tad under fifteen meters long, and nearly three and a half tons of lean muscle and bone, his talons long, strong and wickedly sharp. He was taking after his father his mother had always told him, but with her eyes. He was a hybrid dragon, born from a Firespitter father and Heavy Horn mother, both of whom were members of the Dragon Council Guardians. The protectors of not only the Elder Council, but also this wondrous ship that was their home. It was a position that was sacred to a dragon and brought back into existence less than a decade ago. A Council Guardian was second in importance to only a Bonded Pair in their culture now. He was the youngest dragon of his parents fourth clutch of eggs together, and only their third son. The His other nine siblings were all sisters. His parents were deeply committed to each other and their Guardian duties in Dragon Mountain, and this was something they expected from all of their offspring. His oldest two sisters had been chosen as bond mates to members of Mjolnir's Hand and his two older brothers were just finishing their combined training to become Council Guardians. He had the size and musculature and power to become a member of the Council Guardians, but his carefree and often reckless attitude had gotten him into trouble several times as he was growing and this was weighing heavily on the decision of the Guardian Officers on whether to push for his inclusion into their ranks. The only reason he was still being considered was his father and even several disciplinary beatings by his father had so far not changed his nature. He had lived his entire life here in Dragon Mountain and the surrounding island; and he had been among the nearly seven hundred dragons who had been in the main chamber when the Elder Mother and the *Feravomir* had faced down the vampire witch Aikiro.

His name was Ryner and he spent his many days now continuing to train as a Council Guardian but knowing deep down he would never be chosen for their elite ranks. His only desire now was to go to Elear and find a young female dragon like himself and begin his own family.

Ryner bent his head back to his bone once more and continued to gnaw on it with his massive fangs. He felt it again and looked up once more. It was similar to what he felt within Mindvoice when his father was reaching out to him in order to scold him for something. He had not been reprimanded for anything in the last week so he did not understand why his father would be reaching for him in such a way now.

Brother.

Ryner dropped the bone from his talons and rose to his feet as that single word echoed within the corridors of his sharp mind. His wings fluttered for a moment nervously as he looked out across the dozens of other dragons who were sitting on the same ground and gnawing on their own bones. Standing up during this time was against the disciplinary rules for those being trained and his size caught the attention of two senior dragon instructors.

Initiate Ryner return to your position! The order was barked and Ryner's head snapped around to look at him. He quickly dropped back to his belly on the cool stone and reached for the bone.

Feel... feel me brother. The voice once more echoed within his head, louder this time and Ryner lifted his head but remained on the ground. The tingling in his head was growing more pronounced and Ryner shook his head and snorted softly to try and clear it.

Who... who are you? Ryner finally asked.

I... I am you. I... I do not know. I feel you. Do you not... do you not feel me? The voice asked.

My head... my head tingles. It... Ryner spoke.

Yes! You are so close. Closer than you have ever been. Where... where are you?

Ryner felt the unique tingling growing more powerful now and he glanced over to the other dragons for they had played tricks on him before. None of them even acknowledged him, as they were too busy on their own bones. He gasped inwardly as a sharp pain suddenly shot through his temple, more surprising than it was intense and he saw several images flash through his mind. Grand images of a young man dressed in golden armor and sitting atop a dragon that looked so much like himself. And then golden armor sprang forth to encompass that dragon as well and the young man lifted what could only be a *Nehtes* into the air and howled as

the dragon leaped into the sky. Ryner shook his head harder this time but the images were not going away and the tingling had now become that steady sharp pain thudding in his head.

What... my head! What is happening?

We... I am you. You are... you are me! I am... I am near. So... so close. Find me... find me my brother. Find me. It... it is time!

Wait! Who are you? What is your name? Ryner gasped.

Name? Ah... I hear my father's voice through the walls. Those who are my... who are my mothers.

Dorian. My name... my name is Dorian. Find me... I am... I am so close brother. Find me. It is time.

You... you are here? In Dragon Mountain?

A mountain... yes! Beautiful liquid all around. Walls of stone that are not. It... feel me brother.

Ryner came to his feet once more his long tail twitching madly and his wings snapping out to the sides drawing the attention of everyone in the chamber as his head darted back and forth.

Initiate Ryner I will not tell you again! The instructor barked out. You are disrupting this resting time! Return to your position or I will call for your father to remove you!

Ryner's head snapped around and looked at the instructor with his blazing emerald eyes. *Vith dos!* He snarled out angrily and bolted for the entrance to the chamber.

The Senior Instructor's muzzle snarled openly in fierce anger and he reached out with his mind. *This is Senior Instructor Cormarn. Initiate Ryner is to be detained and held for severe disciplinary action! Council Guardians respond and subdue him! Senior Guardian Mafera respond to training room three.*

All of the rooms on CS41 were immense, carefully altered and crafted by Avi using the bio-mechanical nature of the bulkheads and hull to make it appear like the inside of a mountain. Though they would not pass close scrutiny, the walls and corridors appeared to be nothing more than rock and granite. The many rooms, with very few exceptions, all looked the same. Since dragons did not need chairs and such, there were several rooms near the top of the ship on the upper deck that had been made into meeting places for the many Lycavorians, elves and others who frequented Dragon Mountain. The entire upper deck of CS41 had long been changed into furnished quarters and places of meeting that were large enough for the dragons to come into and associate with their Bonded Ones or others. It was not uncommon to see dragons and humanoids conversing within Mindvoice in these rooms as if it was the most natural thing in the world. The only thing that was different from when they had discovered the ship on Lycavore was the massive open air chamber in the center of the ship that extended from the bottom most deck all the way up to the very top. It could open and close depending on the weather outside and was now open halfway allowing bright sunlight to shine down within the main hall and glitter off the walls.

Naesta stood along the waist high wall that ran the length of the room and could see the many hundreds of younglings in whatever stage of learning to fly they were in. Her eyes were open in amazement at what she was seeing and she barely felt Ceuma and Joci come up on either side of her as she stood there transfixed.

"Amazing isn't it Naesta?" Joci spoke softly. He watched Ceuma step close to Naesta and entwine their fingers together and unlike only a few hours ago this no longer bothered him. He, Naesta and Ceuma had spent nearly the entire trip here to Earth speaking of what they had discovered and their feelings. Part of him reacted as any male would with two such stunning females who craved his touch and attentions, but Joci also knew that he had joined very elite company and importance. Not only because he now had two mates, but because one was the sister to the Queen, a Princess in her own right, and the other was from a new species that looked as if they would become strong and faithful allies to the Union. Naesta came from a powerful family within her species, and now he had to live up to not only the Lycavorian standards but also theirs.

"By the Grace of the Prophets Joci." Naesta gasped. "It is breathtaking."

Joci smiled at her words and shifted his spot so that he stood behind both of them. He lowered his head between theirs and nuzzled both their cheeks. "I have only been here once and it was many years ago." He told them. "Their numbers have increased substantially in that time."

"The King... Martin did this Joci?" Ceuma asked as she watched several younglings swoop by the open area in front of them.

Joci nodded. "He asked the Elder Mother what she needed and knowing that Avi could shift the internal structure of the ship because of its bio-mechanical nature, once he brought this ship to Earth this became their new home." He said. "They are originally from Elear and that is where the bulk of their population resides, but their numbers here increase every year. Many of the dragons who are born here on Earth choose to remain here for they consider it their home. The human President, Charles Taylor, he has designated the entire south west hemisphere as dragon land. They can hunt and breed and live as they wish, just like they do on Elear. They all bring their younglings here to learn to fly and be schooled however."

Ceuma looked at him. "I saw many humans as we were coming in Joci. They don't seem to be frightened of them." She said.

Joci nodded. "Those who had lived in the area when the King first brought the ship here. Those that did not remain moved to the south with those dragons and they live together in harmony. The humans and others protect the dragon lands, and the dragons in turn protect them from harm."

"There are no incidents?" The new voice asked from the side and they turned to see the young female vampire listening to them. She saw the look in Joci's eyes and quickly stepped forward. "Senior Lieutenant Sheva Juconi. My fellow *Sanguine* officer and I have been newly assigned to Queen Isabella's protection to supplement the Durcunusaan sir."

"You have never been here Lieutenant?" Joci asked.

"No... no sir." She answered. "My rotation... my rotation here was cancelled because of the Evolli War and it has not been rescheduled yet."

"You are uncomfortable around dragons Lieutenant?" Joci asked.

"I... I have not been around them enough to get comfortable sir." She answered honestly.

"What do you mean by incidents?" Joci spoke.

"They... they do not argue?" Sheva asked. "The humans... they do not... they do not demand more than what they are entitled too?"

Joci chuckled softly. "Are you familiar with Earth at all Lieutenant?"

Sheva Juconi shook her head. "I have only been assigned to Earth for the last three years sir. Since the end of the war. I was with the 19th Spartan Recon Division based on Apo Prime before that."

"Ah... General Garnak's Division." Joci spoke.

"Yes sir."

"The Great Fire as it is now called depopulated the Earth by nearly half Lieutenant." Joci told her seeing Ceuma and Naesta both turn to look at him as he spoke. "When the fires in the atmosphere finally ceased there was little left except a scorched wasteland. Those humans that remained were influenced or oppressed heavily by the High Coven forces that had survived. It became even worse when the elves created by Senior Polemarch Dymas came into being. The Battle of Earth changed all that. The King's adopted sisters Tarifa and Aihola changed it. President Taylor changed it. Even your Colonel Norris had a hand in it. Suffice to say... in the end... all differences were readily tossed into the abyss and they decided it was time to start over. Those that did not adhere to the rebuilding were quickly shown the error of their ways. It is how Earth prospered so quickly after the war. Elves, humans, Spartans and even the vampires that remained worked side by side to build new lives. What they have now is what they have built from nothing and you will find that anyone who calls Earth home is fiercely loyal to their home planet. The population grows each year, but many changes have been made since the time before the Great Fire, and no one, human, elf, Lycavorian or vampire feels the need to expand into areas they do not need simply for the space. So to answer your question... no... there are no incidents."

"They are... they are so different from the Eridiani Joci... yet they are the same." Naesta said softly.

"They look the same... yet the few I have seen from before Curila 6 and since... they have not looked at me in the same way. As a piece of fodder. They are intrigued... but they are so much more pleasant and respectful."

Joci nodded turning back to her. "I think you will find the humans on Earth and within the Union are far different from the Eridiani Naesta my mate."

"Excuse me sir?" Sheva asked. "Do you know why we are here? We left in such a hurry that I don't fully understand what coming here does to help the Queen's condition."

Joci turned his head back to where he saw Anja and the others sitting with Arzoal near the center of the huge meeting room. "You do not know much of the Leonidas family do you Lieutenant?" He said finally.

“No sir. Only official reports and such.” Sheva answered. “Watching them in Netnews reports and specials.”

“And what was your impression of them before being assigned to Queen Isabella?” Joci asked.

“To be honest sir... I didn’t have one.” Sheva said. “I never expected to be placed in service to the Queen so it is not something I ever thought about.”

Joci grinned. “Well... I have not been among them long myself... but I will tell you what I have learned in that time.”

And there is nothing you can do to halt this? Arzoal asked looking at Anja.

Anja shook her head as she lowered her mug of coffee. “No. Darpia Syndrome is so very rare that we have not studied it enough to truly learn what the triggers for it could be.” She answered. “We know it is hereditary... and that’s about all.”

So Veldruk had this within him? Arzoal asked.

Anja nodded. “The male is usually the one to pass the gene yes. That much we do know.” She answered.

Isabella snorted softly. “Another way for him to torture me from the grave.” She spat.

“Does Martin know?” Helen asked.

“Not yet.” Anja replied softly. “We... given everything that has happened in the last few hours we don’t want to saddle him with this knowledge just yet.”

“You have to tell him Bella.” Helen spoke. “Anja. You have to tell them.”

“And we will.” Anja stated. “We know our husband and mate Helen. If there is anything we can do to save Dorian, he would agree to it.”

“I don’t doubt that.” Helen answered. “All I’m saying is that you need to tell him before you attempt this procedure.”

“That is not something we would keep from him.” Bella spoke. “From any of them. Anja and Sivana both say this will work. As does Eurin. If I can not trust the three most gifted medical minds within known space who can I trust *Feravomir*?”

Helen looked at Eurin. “Eurin... not that I do not trust Anja and Bella but...”

Eurin nodded her head. “It will work.” She stated. “The Kavalians have been doing this for centuries Helen. They’ve refined the core process over the generations and after speaking with Jalersi and having her transmit to us the fractal equations I am more sure now. We will adjust the procedure somewhat since it is still crude... but it will work.”

How will it work? Arzoal asked. *And what must I do?*

Anja looked at her. “Arzoal we didn’t...”

Say not another word Anja Leonidas. Arzoal spoke. *Look around you. This. All of this is because of what Martin has done. What Androcles has continued and added too. I can... we as dragons can never repay this. Whatever you need me to do... I will do.*

“Well... Bella will remain here at Dragon Mountain.” Anja said. “Once we inject the growth hormone... it will be a matter of perhaps two weeks before Dorian is born. We are calculating the dose to provide a grace period in case the Darpia Syndrome is further along than we thought. Once he is born, then we’ll need you to shield his mind and bring him along slowly as his body grows. Within two months he will reach full maturity. We estimate he’ll stop growing between twenty and twenty-three years old.”

“Why so much?” Helen asked.

“We do not have the time to fully break down the compounds within the main Kavalian formula.” Eurin answered her. “That would take us at least one to two months of dedicated research. With that much time we could merely adjust the dosage so that we simply accelerated his birth until just before the womb collapses completely. Bella’s womb will stop being able to sustain him within three to four weeks. We...”

“Ohhh!” Isabella gasped as her hands went to her womb and she shifted quickly in the chair.

Anja was instantly alert. “Bella?”

“He... he just kicked something fierce!” Isabella panted with a smile. “More so than when we were landing.”

Arzoal looked at her now. *He has been active since you landed?* She asked.

Isabella nodded with another smile. “Very. Kicking like a little fighter almost nonstop.”

“And this started when you landed?” Helen asked casually.

Isabella nodded. “As we were coming down from orbit.” She answered as she adjusted the way she was sitting.

Helen watched her carefully as Anja began helping her and she saw the tiny beads of sweat rolling down her flawless skin. She glanced up at Arzoal. *[Sister?]*

[They are the same signs Helen.] Arzoal answered quickly. *[Almost exactly the same. It is uncanny.]*

[But it happened when he was only six months along. Dorian is well past that.] Helen said. *[And Bella has been among dragons for almost that entire time.]*

Arzoal nodded. *[But not here.]* Arzoal gasped. *[She has not been here among so many who are not bonded. She...]*

There was a soft screech from Naesta and she stumbled back from the edge of the wall when the yellow tinted dragon trumpeted and began landing. Arzoal looked at one of her senior Council Guardians, her usually unflappable temper flaring at this interruption. She rose to her talons and glared at the dragon, everyone now watching her.

Gazokh! What is the meaning of this? She snapped.

The Heavy Horn folded his wings along his back and bowed his head to her, his front forelegs lowering to the floor. *Forgive me Elder Mother. One of the Guardian Initiates is... he has lost his mind Elder Mother!*

What are you saying Gazokh! Arzoal snapped. *What do you mean lost his mind?*

He abandoned the rest cycle during his training and bolted from the chamber. He has been scrambling up from the lower decks since telling the Senior Instructor something in a language I do not understand.

A language you don't understand? Helen asked moving closer.

Yes Feravomir. It... it sounded like what I have heard the Talon Guardian Androcles speaking to his beloved sister Zarah. Gazokh spoke.

The ancient Lycavorian language? Helen asked him.

No... the other language they use. Gazokh answered.

Arzoal moved closer. *Who is it?*

Ryner... Elder Mother. Gazokh replied. *Senior Guardian Mafera's youngest son. He attacked the Guardians sent to retrieve him Elder Mother. He injured one with his talons and...*

Attacked! Arzoal gasped.

“Owwwww!” Isabella grunted as she leaned way back on the chair, both her hands going to her swollen abdomen. “Oh... Anja... something is wrong! That... that one hurt!”

We have subdued him Elder Mother, below in the main chamber! He was attempting to take to the sky and escape through the upper chamber hatch! Gazokh hissed. *Mafera is trying to calm him but it isn't working! He keeps shouting something about his brother!*

Arzoal moved with amazing speed for a dragon so large and went right to the ledge, extending her head and neck out so that she could see far below. She could see several dragons laying atop another thrashing one some thousand meters below with her incredible vision and as she opened her mind further she heard what Ryner was screeching.

...go to him! Get... get off me! My... my brother needs me!

Arzoal's head snapped back around and she looked at Isabella on the chair, her beautiful face grimacing once more in pain. *[Sister?]* She gasped at Helen.

[Order them to release him Arzoal!] Helen barked moving up next to Isabella. *[It has to be! It is the only explanation! Release him!]*

Arzoal didn't hesitate and looked at Gazokh. *Release him Gazokh! Now!*

But Elder Mother... he is mad! Gazokh gasped.

Release him now! Arzoal nearly screamed scaring Gazokh terribly.

The older dragon had never seen the Elder Mother so passionate about anything and he immediately leaped from the ledge and dove for the bottom of the chamber.

Helen grabbed Isabella's arm. “Bella... prepare yourself!” She snapped.

Isabella looked at her. “Helen... what... now is not really the time! Something... Dorian is... something is wrong!”

“Prepare yourself Bella!” Helen spoke.

“Helen what...?”

The trumpet was deafening and all heads turned to see the huge Sinopia scaled dragon come barreling over the ledge to land with a wild flapping of his massive wings. Joci pulled Ceuma and Naesta back quickly, instinctively protecting them while Sheva and several other *Durcunusaan* staggered back in wide eyed shock as the click of talons screeching on the deck sounded.

Ryner’s wide emerald eyes searched the open meeting area seeing two of their Queens, the Elder Mother and her Bonded Sister as well as several *Durcunusaan* troops. He ignored them all as his emerald eyes focused on Queen Isabella’s pregnant abdomen. He took two large steps towards her when the rust colored scales of his father appeared from below and Mafera landed within the area as well.

Ryner no! Mafera screamed out moving to block his son from getting any closer to the Queen.

Leave him! Arzoal barked out, imposing her body between Mafera and Isabella. *Do not touch him!*

Elder Mother he is... he is mad! Mafera barked.

Isabella squeezed Anja’s hand as they watched the dragon move closer, but her face was still grimacing in pain. Dorian was kicking madly within her womb and it was now bringing tears to her eyes at the intense pain. Two things happened in the next five seconds. Ryner wasted no time and immediately lowered his snout to Isabella’s womb, pressing his oversized muzzle just under her belly button and Isabella’s face changed from one of pain to one of utter enchantment.

Helen rose to her feet quickly. “Don’t touch them!” She barked. “No one touch them!”

“Helen?” Anja snapped stumbling to her feet and reaching for her. “What...”

“*Son vada carians!*” Helen gasped as she watched the dragon’s body relax instantly, his wings fluttering madly as they folded back in place. His tail was madly flapping around behind him as he settled to the floor in front of the chair keeping his snout pressed tightly to Isabella’s abdomen. “It’s happening again! Just like...”

Anja looked at her. “Like what?” Anja barked.

“Anja... this is... you were not there when Elynth bonded with Androcles!” Helen gasped holding her arm tightly. “Arzoal and I witnessed it! It was... it was almost a surreal event! It’s happening again... just as it did then! Almost exactly the same! He’s... he’s bonding with Dorian!”

“What?” Anja gasped.

Isabella’s eyes were wide and she had that peaceful expression on her face as she lowered her hands to Ryner’s snout and placed her palms against his cool scales. The tears of pain had changed to tears of happiness and her hazel/green eyes were looking upon the head of Ryner with immense affection. Isabella could almost feel them communicating through her womb, Ryner’s talons clicking madly on the floor as their minds merged and became one. “Anja!” Bella gasped reaching for her hand.

Ignoring Helen’s earlier warning to them Anja didn’t hesitate and she grasped Isabella’s outstretched hand tightly. Her jade green eyes flew open as they experienced the merging just as Dorian and Ryner were experiencing it. While they could not see or feel what was being passed between the two, the utter seamlessness of the bond and the exquisite nature of the feelings that trembled through them provided Anja and Isabella with a sense of profoundness. They suddenly were able to understand just how Andro and Elynth were to each other. How they were able to do what they did.

“By... by the gods Bella.” Anja gasped as she dropped to her knees next to Bella in the chair and they both stared at the almost dreamy expression in Ryner’s large emerald eyes. One of his front talons rose up and gently, almost reverently it came to rest on Bella’s legs where both she and Anja covered it with their hands without question. This contact only caused both of them to tear up as they could feel and sense even more of what was happening.

Mafera’s eyes were wide with worry for his son and for his Queens as he moved up next to the Elder Mother. *Elder Mother?* He gasped. *Elder Mother... what is happening to my son?*

Arzoal’s large flame colored eyes turned to gaze at him as Helen moved towards Anja and Isabella. *You son Mafera... your son has... he has entered into a whole new world now.*

I don’t understand Elder Mother. Mafera exclaimed.

You know the bond Elynth and Talon Guardian Androcles share? Arzoal asked him.

We all do Elder Mother! An act of the gods it was. Bonding our two species together for all time. Mafera answered. His eyes grew wide and he turned back to see his son's large head still in direct contact with Isabella's abdomen. My... my son...

Arzoal nodded her head. The same gift granted to Androcles and Elynth has been given to your son Mafera. She told him. Dorian Leonidas is becoming fully aware and Ryner will be his conduit. His voice. His Bonded Brother.

Mafera looked at her with wide eyes. His Bonded Brother? But he... he has no training for such a task. He...

Arzoal smiled and lowered her snout to touch his. He will be in good hands Mafera. Who better to learn from than the two most powerful Bonded Pairs within the galaxy? Androcles and Elynth will show them the way. The King and Torma will guide them. You and your kin have just been thrust into a role that none of us ever imagined Mafera. Go. Go and bring your mate Inidra. Family is the most important thing that is needed now. Go quickly and return with her and all of Ryner's siblings that are here in the mountain. I do not care what they are doing, tell whoever asks it is my directive.

SCIMITAR

Caliria's soft green eyes fluttered open slowly and she found herself staring at the tanned, delicious mounds of Ne'Veha's cone shaped and incredibly firm breasts. Her nipples were no longer as hard as they were a short time ago, but they stood proudly nonetheless.

Hello Inamarno. Ne'Veha's soft sexy voice echoed in her mind and she lifted her eyes to see her dark brown orbs staring back at her.

Caliria Re Mydala had imagined what it would be like the first time. Well... she had tried to imagine it anyway, but nothing she had imagined over the last few days had come even remotely close to what she had experienced over the course of the last few hours and what she was experiencing now. Caliria was no stranger to men, or to women for that matter. Yet this was beyond anything she could have ever desired. Her Alkay seeped from her pores non-stop it seemed, and not from some chemical introduced into her system, but because Caliria was more aroused than at any time in her three hundred years of life and her body and her mind was willingly responding to every touch upon her. Five different sets of lips and hands had sent her blissfully over the edge more times than she could remember now. They had adorned her with attention and pleasure the likes of which she could not conceive. And they did so without neglecting each other, which was completely amazing. The Vanari men she had bedded, even the Eridiani man Franklin, none of them had shown the stamina and utter devotion to her that Androcles had given her these last hours. He was by far the largest equipped male she had ever seen, never mind allowed to make love to her. She had cried out in fantastic enchantment that first time, cried out and gripped his broad shoulders as every wonderfully thick inch had impaled her with delicious sloth like slowness. Once he was fully within her he had simply stared into her beautiful face as she grew accustomed to such a magnificent piece of manhood. He had dotted her face and lips with soft kisses, nuzzled her cheeks and neck, her Alkay seeming to affect him differently than others. It was almost as if he had a natural immunity to the oil seeping from her skin, and only later would she come to discover that it wasn't an immunity so much as it was a dominant will that kept him from surrendering to the effects her Alkay could produce in a sexual partner. None of them were. She had tasted each of them throughout the past hours, hungrily drinking down whatever they offered her, even while they let her partake of the wondrous pleasure Andro was giving her solely for herself. Their lips were so soft, so tasty, their kisses with her toe curling in every way. They suckled her breasts, her neck, any portion of her exposed skin that was not wrapped around Androcles's and his god like body. Whether it was long, powerful and sundering strokes into her tightness or languorous and inevitable thrusts into her depths, Caliria howled out her delight with each heart stopping plunge. Once they had shifted and she found herself happily feasting upon Ne'Veha and Carisia much the way she feasted upon Yssyla not so long ago, while Androcles caused Sadi's and Lu'ria's cries of enchantment to fill their room. And still they always came back to her.

Now her senses were in complete overload as she rested atop Andro, her back pressed tightly against his exquisitely chiseled chest and his will breaking cock fully buried within her. She was rapidly losing all

conscious thought as Sadi's incredible tongue was battering her painfully hard clit, Ne'Veha and Carisia were attacking her eraser hard nipples and her Drow Mistress had her locked in a kiss that was stealing her breath away by the second. She could feel their minds and hers mingling, whispering to her like voices on the wind of how they loved her and how she was part of them now. Caliria felt the volcanic orgasm begin deep down in her belly. Andro was using short, loving strokes to drive her mad while Sadi's tongue was relentless in its task. The sensations of their touch upon her was maddening, once more pushing her up to the edge of the abyss. And then Caliria tore her lips from Lu'ria and screamed. One hand dropped to Andro's hip as the other gripped Sadi's golden blond hair holding her lips in place and her body convulsed almost painfully as the orgasm erupted from her. Her pussy clamped down on Andro's deeply buried organ and she took great pleasure in the groan of his own release that he expelled into her ear with his face buried in her neck and her long black hair covering his shoulder. As she felt him swell within her once more, the floodgates blew open and Caliria screamed long and loud as she too detonated with the most powerful orgasm of her entire life. She leaped into the abyss of divine pleasure never wanting to return as she felt Andro's scorching hot seed erupt and rocket into her depths, driven along by Sadi's wildly licking tongue driving them both to heights unknown before now for Caliria.

The last thing that raced through her clouded mind before she had succumb to the shattering orgasm was that she had found herself. She had finally discovered what she had been seeking for so long. And then the wonderful, pleasure induced blackness claimed her.

Caliria couldn't help but smile in blissful contentment as she gazed at Ne'Veha. *Hello yourself.* She answered once more stunned at how easily Mindvoicing had become and knowing that as each day passed she was growing stronger.

Caliria detected the mass of shimmering white hair behind Ne'Veha and she lifted her head slightly to see Lu'ria and Carisia sleeping soundly, Carisia's petite and incredibly powerful body tucked quite deliciously against Lu'ria's taller and equally potent body, the contrast in the color of their skin exotic and alluring to look at. Lu'ria's arms were wrapped around her slave almost possessively and Caliria knew that only one of them could get her to release Carisia from her embrace if they so choose. She looked back to Ne'Veha's breathtakingly beautiful elven face and she allowed her head to rest back on the pillow.

How long have I been asleep? She asked finally.

Only a few hours. Ne'Veha answered with a smile. *It is nearly morning. How do you feel Inamarno?*

Caliria met her eyes and her smile grew even larger. *Blissful.* She answered immediately. *So blissful and... and worn out.*

Caliria could hear Ne'Veha laugh softly within her mind and she relished in the sensation of being able to touch one so intimately. *It was no different for me. He took me three times in the night before he changed me. I thought my limbs were never going to move again so tired as I was. So tired and so...*

Willing. Caliria asked.

Ne'Veha nodded. *Very willing.*

Caliria reached out and touched the very faint scars from where Andro's dual fangs had sank into her that night. She caressed them softly for a lingering moment. *Will they never go away?*

Ne'Veha shook her head. *I wouldn't want them too.* She replied. *Even Sadi, who is pureblood like Andro wears the scars from where he bit her proudly. It is a status thing among Lycavorians I think. I am still learning many things as I go. Lu'ria too. You have seen what he did with our Drow Mistress haven't you? Within our minds?*

Caliria nodded slowly. *I... I can not be changed Ne'Veha.* She said. *That is something that was determined long ago by our doctors.*

And neither can Carisia. Do you think that matters to him? To any of us? He has marked Carisia Inamarno. Her scars are much fainter than mine for they are older but he has marked her as well. Ne'Veha said.

Then... they why did he not bite me? Mark me? Caliria asked.

He will Inamarno. Ne'Veha answered. *Perhaps he did not want to do such a thing because you are so new to Lycavorians and their ways.*

Where is he? Caliria asked her eyes darting around the room.

He and Sadi are in the living area. They are purebloods and their systems rejuvenate ten times faster than ours at the moment. They do not need as much sleep as others. I think he is trying to contact his brother and sister within Mindvoice. Ne'Veha answered.

Will... will you and Lu'ria become like them? Caliria asked.

As my grandmother has told me... she is also wolf and elf... it takes nearly two years for the changes to fully take affect right down to our molecular structure. We will grow stronger as time passes, able to do more things, but we will not have the resilience that purebloods do. Ne'Veha smiled. *After a night like last night we will be up and moving in much less time, but nowhere near what Andro and Sadi can do.*

Caliria looked at her. *Ne'Veha... what we saw yesterday. That recording. How did... how did he know our names before he met us. Especially... especially me. Until my mother came for me, no one within this quadrant even knew we existed.*

Ne'Veha shook her head. *Fate perhaps. Destiny. I don't know and I don't care. Seeing that recording... it only confirms what I already knew in some way. I was meant for him and he for me. I was meant for Sadi and Lu'ria and Carisia. And you Inamarno. We were meant for each other by some greater power.*

My people teach us the Prophets always have a plan for us. Caliria said softly. *That no matter how much we may try to avoid it, our destiny will always find a way.*

Ne'Veha nodded. *We believe much the same thing Inamarno. You felt different before. Before Andro and...*

You mean before he waltzed into that room like some waking god and saved me. Before last night and making me feel what I did? She asked with a grin.

Ne'Veha nodded. *Yes.*

Caliria nodded as well. *I felt I was different yes. And not just because I was born with black hair. What I feel with him... with all of you... I think I have found what I have long been seeking. It is very... it is odd that he can feel for each of us what he does though.*

Ne'Veha nodded now as well. *I thought that too. All you need do is ask him Inamarno and you can swim within his thoughts and discover how for yourself. He will keep nothing from you. From any of us.*

Caliria scooted closer to her on the bed and pulled her closer relishing the feel of her firm elven body against her own. *Perhaps soon I will. For now I wish to sleep.*

Ne'Veha smiled and closed her arms around her Vanari lover and fellow Princess. *Well... we still have a few hours before we must rise. And sleeping with you in my arms is perfect.*

Caliria smiled and closed her own arms around Ne'Veha. Her mind was awash with questions and ideas, but for now she was content and happy. The answers would come she knew. She just needed to be patient.

Andro sat on the couch in the living area of his quarters wearing only his white pants. Sadi rested in his lap comfortably, the near see through robe draped around her body and their heads were touching. She had an animated look on her face, one of wonder and happiness as the voices of Andro's new brother and sister filled her mind as well as his. It had taken them nearly an hour to sift through the strands of Mindvoice and find the right connection, but as soon as they did their voices were clear and strong.

[...are you?] The soft female voice asked. *[Are you... are you nearby? Who is with you?]*

[We want to know more brother.] The male voice echoed.

Andro smiled warmly upon hearing their voices. *[Be calm... I... I don't know what to call you yet. Mother... she has not named you.]*

[Who is with you brother?] The female voice asked again.

[You feel KertaGai. Sadi... my anome.] Andro answered.

[Hello to both of you!] Sadi said happily. *[It is so wonderful to hear your voices.]*

[Tell us more brother!] The male voice told him again. *[We want to know more.]*

[Patience brother.] Andro said. *[You are still very new to all of this. I was not... I was not able to impart to you everything I wanted. You will not be as strong as you should be and you will tire easily. Trust me... I know. What you are experiencing right now I have already experienced.]*

[You... you were like this?] The female asked.

[Yes sister. Unlike you however... I was fully aware while still within my mother's womb. I was attempting to do that for you but was not able to complete the process because of outside circumstances.] He told them.

[Because of our brother Arrarn?]

[Yes... but he did not know what I was doing. He was concerned for our mother and acted impulsively. Do not be angry with him for I am not.] Andro answered. *[Do you... do you understand what is happening around you. What is going on now?]*

[We understand that we are... we are here because... because of something bad. Are we... are we bad?] The female said.

[NO!] Andro exclaimed. *[That is not true! No matter why you have come to be you are not bad sister. You have been given life and... and because of me now you have awareness before you should. You have knowledge of things before you should. It was wrong what I did... my people consider such a thing very taboo but I did this... I did this so that...]*

[So that you could talk to mother, yes we know.] The male spoke. *[We could see that in your mind's eye brother. How did you know she... she is in such pain. Her... her heart aches Andro.]*

[I know because she is my mother as well. Perhaps not as my birth mother... but you have seen how we all view each other. How we view those we call mother. They speak with one voice... they all have had a hand in raising us as we grew.] Andro said softly, Sadi feeling his arms tighten around her hips. *[What is happening... to the both of you... to all of us... it is...]*

[It is horrific.] Sadi picked it up. *[It is the result of men who have no concern for others and all they wish is more power. They do not care whose lives they destroy or harm in the process. The man... the man who is your father... he...]*

[NO!] Both their voices together was powerful and both Sadi and Andro's eyes grew wide at the strength.

[That... that foul man... he is not our father!] The female exclaimed. *[We have seen in our mother's mind what he forced her to do. We see what she endured! She can not... she can not put it out of her mind. There was no love from him when we were created Andro! He could not even sense that we both were here! No!]*

[We have no father.] The male said now. *[We...]*

[Do not say that!] Andro barked out. *[You have a father! He may not... he may not be your blood... but he will love you without question! That is what we are as a family! He loves our mother, he loves all our mothers beyond any life he has, and anything that is part of them he will love! Do not doubt that for an instant! The images I passed to you... he did not know there would be two of you... but they still apply. He... he tells you he will love you as his own. No doubts! No hesitation! My father... our father now... he means what he says.]*

[Why?] The male asked.

[Because that is our strength as a family. And you are part of that family now. Both of you.] Andro answered.

[What can we do?] The male asked. *[We are...]*

[Mother... she has something within her. See the image in my mind.] Andro spoke projecting an image of the exact spot on For'mya's neck where he had felt the void that Eliani said she had sensed. *[There is something under her skin that prevents us from communicating with her directly as you and I do now. If you can sense her emotions and see what she sees in her mind then it is as we hoped. The Inhibitor that blocks us from communicating with her does not interfere with you.]*

[Inhibitor?]

Andro shook his head. *[Forgive me? It is a device that blocks her from Mindvoicing. It doesn't allow her to do what we are doing. That is what we call it.]* He explained. *[It does not block either of you and that makes us so happy.]*

[Because we can talk to her!] The female voice echoed as realization filled her voice.

[Yes!] Andro said. *[I do not know how much longer we will be this close. After events today they will take her away from us and the distance between us will be too great to speak with you like this. At least not until you are stronger. You must tell mother everything I have passed to you. As soon as you are able. We... we do*

not want her to go another moment longer than necessary believing father is dead or that we do not love her. That we are not coming to get her. To get you both! You must tell her these things.]

[She was calm last night.] The male spoke. [A man... a Kavalian who is much nicer than the rest was talking to her. He hid our... he hid our existence from that... that man. They spoke for hours. Mo... mu...]

[Muton. That was his name.] The female chimed in.

[Yes... that was it! Thank you sister.]

Andro's head tilted. [He was nice to mother? He spoke to her?]

[About many things we do not... we do not understand.]

[Do not strain yourselves!] Andro told them. [It will come in time. Probably more quickly than you realize. Be careful when you exert yourselves.]

Sadi squeezed his cheeks indicating she wanted to say something and he nodded. [Listen to me both of you.] She spoke in as soft and inviting a voice as she was able. [When she discovers her love is alive... when she realizes what she has been forced to do... she will be... she will be devastated. You must tell her... make her understand and know that your father is coming for all of you. Tell her... tell her Martin Leonidas says she can not die. No matter what else you tell her... tell her that.]

[Why that?]

Sadi smiled. [You will see little ones. You will see.]

[You will be born soon.] Andro picked it back up. [And you will grow so much faster than you are supposed to. Take what I have given you... learn from it. When it is time our mother will guide you even more. You must be strong for all of you until our mother knows that she is not forsaken. As you grow quickly, your minds will... they will evolve quickly too. Our sister Eliani says if you take what I have given you and slowly absorb it over the days and weeks then it will be as if you grew normally. Don't ask me how... I am not a doctor as she is.]

[Our sister is a doctor?] The male asked.

Andro nodded with a smile. [Yes... the finest behind only our Hadarian mother. Our brother Arrarn is one of the finest pilots, another of our sisters as well. We are so many and so different yet we love equally.]

[Will we meet them?] The female asked.

[We are your brothers and sisters!] Andro announced. [And you will meet them. I swear to you.]

[We... we are tired Andro.] The female said.

[I know. I can feel that within you.] He replied. [Remember what I have told you today. Remember what you must do. It will be far easier to talk with mother. Never... never forget we will come for all of you. No matter how long that takes! I promise you. Our father promises you!]

[We will.]

[This connection between us will always be open just for you. I will maintain it always.] Andro told them. [When you feel you are strong enough together, perhaps if mother is able to remove the device in the future and help you, then contact me. Remember this if nothing else my brother and sister. You carry the name Leonidas! And you are family. We do not forsake our family for anything!]

[We will... we will remember brother.] The male voice spoke.

[Goodbye Andro.] The female said. [We will talk again soon. This is fun. Goodbye!]

Andro and Sadi blinked several times and then the connection was lost to them. Andro sat back on the couch and sighed heavily. He blinked rapidly as Sadi's hands dropped to his chest and caressed the skin around his Talon Guardian Brand as she always did.

"Have faith in them my love." She said.

Andro met her jungle green eyes. "I do. I just do not want them to try and do too much given all that I passed to them. They will grow stronger by the hour now, but they are still very weak."

"Then trust in your mother and the strength of her will." Sadi said.

Andro sat up and kissed Sadi hard, drawing her tighter against him. After a moment he pulled away. "My faith in mother has never wavered." He hissed softly. "She has... she has survived so much in her life. She will survive this. And she will give my father the daughter she so wants to give him. Then she will be complete."

Sadi gripped his face in her hands. "I felt something else my love. Something faint and not unlike what I feel when I am around you and Elynth together."

Andro nodded. "Yes... it was like an echo reaching outward."

"What was it?" Sadi asked.

"I don't know. It felt familiar in a way but I don't know." He answered. "Why did you tell me it was Jomann who threw Kalis off when it was you?"

Sadi's jungle green eyes glittered. "I was protecting my mate and husband. My center, my life. It is not that big of a deal and your mothers have done similar things through the years."

"You should have told me." Andro said with almost a pout on his face.

"Then will you tell me now?" She asked.

Andro blinked several times looking at her. "Tell you what?"

"Why you did not tell me you saw all of us in your dreams Androcles. So long ago." Sadi said.

"What was I supposed to tell you *KertaGai*?" He said with a smile. "Was I suppose to tell you so soon after having you come back into my life that I would have five wives and mates? That you would love them, they would love you, and I would love all of you? Even I myself did not want to believe that for I felt it made me too much like my father. You would have either cut off my *nor* quite painfully or thought I was completely and utterly insane and demanded that I be committed."

Sadi couldn't help but laugh at the expression on his face. "Perhaps." She said finally. "But only after I got my fill of you and your *divinely* masculine gifts! To include you *nor*."

Andro shook his head. "What was with the... you know *KertaGai*... when I..."

Sadi grinned even wider and kissed him. "We have power over you in our bed my love." She told him huskily. "I have shown all of our loves just where to nibble and bite to make you last all the more longer. We will never get enough of you Andro... you should know that now. No one can fill us as you do. Make us feel the things you do."

"That's... that's not exactly fair you know." Andro said.

Sadi shrugged. "Then take it as added incentive to learn all of our special spots and make us howl more than you do now my love." Sadi gasped when he snapped his head forward and suddenly his nose and lips were firmly nuzzling her neck and cheek. She cooed out her delight softly as delicious sensations surged through her body at his touch. By the gods he could incite flaming passion within her with barely any effort.

"I love you *KertaGai*." He whispered in her ear as the tip of his nose crushed against the scent gland behind her ear and he inhaled deeply. "I love all of you more than any breath I might take."

Sadi's eyes closed in blissful happiness for she knew it was so very true. And while he did have five mates and wives, women that she adored and loved herself, Sadi knew she would always be first in his heart. She felt him pull away slowly and look at her.

"I must contact my father before they go completely dark." Andro told her staring into her beautiful eyes. "Will you wake the others and join me for breakfast before I go to the surface and meet grandfather to finish this farce."

Sadi nodded and kissed him softly. "Go." She said. "We will be there."

"... Twins?" Martin gasped as he looked at his oldest son in the secure transmission.

Andro nodded his head. "Yes. I was able to pass much of what we wanted to both of them but not all. I was interrupted."

Martin's eyes narrowed. "Interrupted?"

Andro nodded. "I didn't have the full thirty seconds father." He said. "My cousin got to me quicker than I thought and gave me a rather promising welt on the back of my head."

"Arrarn and Jomann did nothing?" Martin hissed.

"Aside from saving me from a Kavalian shooting or stabbing me in the back?" Andro said. "Father... I touched them! Sadi and I spoke with them less than an hour ago! They know what they need to do but they are also not as strong as they would be had I been able to fully complete the transfer. They will adapt."

Martin nodded his head and turned to the side as Aricia, Dysea and Cirith moved into the transmission with him. "Andro were you able to... could they tell you anything about her now?" Aricia asked.

Andro nodded his head slowly. "She is distraught mother." Androcles replied. "Just as any of you would be. She believes father dead. She believes she has betrayed his memory by what my uncle has forced her to do."

She believed all of us dead until she saw us on Hadaria. And then she can not feel us within Mindvoice and I supposedly attack her. What would you think?"

"Androcles Leonidas you..." Dysea stepped forward speaking in a stern voice but Aricia took her arm.

"No *Melda Min.*" Aricia said. "It was a stupid question to ask." Aricia looked at her first born son in the transmission. "Forgive me my son. We... we are asking so much of you in these times. It is not fair to you."

"I will not shirk from what I need to do mother." Andro spoke. "I love her as I love you. As I love any of those I call mother... which now includes Cirith." He saw Cirith's eyes grow a little wider in the transmission. "I will do what must be done."

"Andro... L'tian has the scrolls?" Martin asked moving up next to Aricia again.

Andro nodded. "No matter what they attempt today concerning mother, it will not even be recognized by the Union Senate."

Dysea gasped. "The Writ of Annulment?" She spoke.

Andro nodded. "The documents both you and mother signed many years ago *medwaw.*" He answered. "We will use them if we need to... but based on their attitudes and arrogant actions yesterday, grandfather is quite sure they think they will drop some fantastic bomb on us today."

"What... Dysea... Martin... what is this Writ of Annulment?" Cirith asked.

"Two years after *KinosaurGai* was christened as the fifth Queen, she and I signed and dated documents stating what would happen if one or both of us was killed, incapacitated or taken prisoner." Dysea explained looking at her. "We did it in secret, with only the First Minister and chosen members of the Elven Parliament present. For'mya's father among them. We later had it ratified by the Security and Defense Councils of the Union Senate and only Deia and select Senators know,"

"Which I did not like!" Martin snapped.

Dysea looked at him. "We know *Nauta Melme.* But it needed to be done. For'mya and I talked much about it before going forward."

"What does it do?" Cirith asked.

"In a situation such as it is now... all of For'mya's authority and power was taken from her the moment she was taken prisoner." Dysea said. "It now rests with Arrarn and Bryon. Whatever they may have forced her to sign or agree to under duress will not be valid. No one will acknowledge it."

"That... that is a good thing isn't it?" Cirith asked.

"In one sense it is good yes." Martin spoke now. "Anything they may have coerced her to agree is null and void and will not be recognized by either the Elven Parliament or the Union Senate."

"So?" Cirith prodded him.

"The Kavalians will argue that she was not coerced." Aricia spoke. "Foul creatures that they are."

"They will argue that she agreed to these things willingly Cirith." Andro said. "They will argue that after recognizing that her mate had died, she allowed my uncle to claim her while her blood was burning for a mate."

Aricia nodded. "It is what happens to a Lycavorian female after their mate has died. Their body changes so that they will accept the advances of other alpha males and be able to mate again. She was not able to sense us within Mindvoice which only added to her belief that Martin was dead. Given the growth hormones they are obviously using on her for the children she carries, no doubt this also served to increase the potency and speed of her shift."

"What... what does that mean?" Cirith asked still not used to being around so many wolves after over three thousand years among only vampires and her father. Her wolf instincts were suppressed as she was only a third wolf, and she was only just beginning to feel them and use them. Martin's aura and its impact on her being the most telling up until now.

Aricia glanced at Martin who stood silently with his arms crossed across his broad chest. He nodded his head slowly knowing everything his *saoursanno* was saying was very true and this knowledge only caused his blood to boil in anger more. Aricia turned back to Cirith. "It means her body will have responded to Pusintin's alpha aura even though her mind would not. If he hit her with his full aura, she would not be able to resist him no matter how much her mind screamed for her too." Aricia shrugged her shoulders. "It is considered a curse among Lycavorian females that this is how our bodies react, but this manner in claiming a Lycavorian female has not been used since the before the time of Martin's grandfather. It is vile and goes against all we believe in. Pusintin would know that."

“It is partly my fault.” Martin spoke now unwilling to allow anyone to take the blame for something his instincts told him was his fault. “I should have... I should have pulsed her with my full aura long ago. I should have pulsed all of you long ago.”

Dysea took his arm in her hands. “Do not blame yourself for this *Nauta Melme*.” She said softly.

“If I had pulsed her fully when my instincts told me too *Melda Min* this would not be happening.” Martin said.

“Yes it would. She would still believe you are dead.” Dysea told him. “They would still be using the inhibitor on her. It would not matter.”

“They will claim she was only following the instincts of a Lycavorian by doing this *medwaw* Cirith.” Andro spoke once more seeing her look back to him in the transmission. “They do not know of the Writ of Annulment because it is not something Laustinos would know about.”

“We can not stop them from making a claim to the throne... but we can certainly stop them from whatever else they may have thought to use For'mya for.” Aricia said strongly. “And the Union Senate would never abide Pusintin... even as a regent until his son came of age. Hell... half of them remember when he was King and they would devise a way to kill him if they had to.”

“I have more enemies back home than you think I do Aricia.” Martin spoke once more looking at her.

Aricia met his eyes. “Perhaps... but they would not dare move against you so soon after you have been declared dead.”

Dysea nodded. “And they will run like the roaches they are when it is discovered you are not dead!” She spoke passionately. “We must ride the... we must ride the wave of what is coming until it is time for us to act. We have been caught unaware and unprepared for what we never saw coming. We are not infallible and we must stop blaming ourselves for what has happened! This does not help Kinsoargai and it is not how she would council us to act. You all know this. We need to begin to act to counter what our enemies do!”

Andro nodded. “Mother is right.” He said. “We will be departing quickly after today and what grandfather tells them. They will not be happy in the least but they will be unable to do anything to counter it. And nor will the Galactic Court. You realize of course that the court is not on our side?”

Martin nodded. “They have been bought!” He answered. “I should have listened to the advice I got when I formed them.”

“Not all of them are in the Kavalian or Hadarian pockets father. But not enough of them to alter the outcome I fear.” Andro said.

“Fuck them! I will deal with those traitorous bastards after I get your mother back!” Martin snarled.

“Once we are finished here I will return to Earth and begin making preparations.” Andro said. “Uncle Ben has informed me that the remainder of the Block Ones are leaving today for Earth so we should arrive about the same time.”

Martin moved closer to the transmission. “Your plan is sound son?” He asked.

Andro nodded his head. “As sound as any plan can be I suppose.” He answered. “I have... I have a few surprises also. Some of them... some of them you will not like father but they are necessary and could very well benefit us in the long run.”

“Like what?” Martin asked. “I don't like surprises son.”

Andro nodded his head once more. “I know... and I can't discuss them even within this secure of a transmission father. You are the one who taught me about OPSEC.”

“Now you are going to use that against me?” Martin snapped but his voice held no anger in it for him.

Andro shrugged his shoulders. “It will either work or it won't.” He stated plainly. “Arrarn will be on site with Cha'talla to evaluate and make the final decision.”

“Cha'talla?” Martin said. “Why do I get the feeling that if Cha'talla is involved I won't like your plan? You wouldn't use Cha'talla unless it was some hair brained scheme you cooked up in your noggin!”

Andro smiled. “Sort of like the many schemes you have cooked up in your saltwater corroded head as mother says. Have faith father.” He said. “You can scream at me afterwards whether it works or not. And my head is just fine thank you for asking by the way.”

Martin's face became serious. “Be strong my son. Be strong for your mates, your siblings and for our people.”

Andro nodded. “I will.” He said.

“If you are able to contact the twins again advise me immediately.” Martin told him. “I wish... I wish to discover as much about them as I can.”

Andro nodded. “You are going dark father?” He asked.

Martin acknowledged this with a small nod. “I will forward any relevant intelligence we get from the LP.” He spoke. “Unless necessary... we won’t speak again for a week.”

Andro nodded. “Understood.”

“Good luck my son.” Martin spoke warmly. “And be safe.”

“You as well father. Mothers.” Andro said seeing them nod their heads in his direction. He waited for a few seconds and then the transmission faded into nothing.

“Transmission clear Andro.” Sa’sur’s voice came over the intercom.

“Very well Sa’sur.” He answered. “Secure and lock the array. I’m going to have a short breakfast with Sadi and the others and then head down to the surface to meet grandfather.”

“I don’t like it Andro.” Sa’sur told him from the bridge of the *SCIMITAR*. “A dozen of their ships moved closer during the night. *DIEROYS* too. Extreme weapons range for their Hellbringer Gauss Cannons but still troublesome. They must think we wouldn’t notice. *Carians* they are stupid.”

“How many does that make?” Andro asked.

“Including the ones shadowing Pusintin’s flagship... fifteen.” Sa’sur answered. “A smattering of other ships but those *DIEROY* are the biggest risk. Let me target some Mark 22s just in case. I can take them out before they get real close.”

Andro paused for a moment thinking about that action. “Very well.” He told her. “Do what you think is best. We may have to leave quickly and I will not be in a position to question what you do.”

“Don’t worry... we’ll be ready.” Sa’sur answered. “Your surprise is standing by right?”

Andro nodded. “It will be, in about two hours. She wasn’t pleased.”

“She’ll get over it.” Sa’sur said. “She’s a Pralor and it’s too valuable an asset to lose. She just doesn’t understand.”

“Alright Sa’sur. I’ll advise you before I leave but I’m going to meet Sadi and the others.” Andro said.

“Will do.” Her voice spoke.

Andro turned and took his mug of coffee from the table before heading for the door. He heard the locks release and began to walk out the opening doors, lifting the mug to his lips. He came to an abrupt halt in the corridor, his mug frozen to his lips as his eyes fell upon his brothers and sisters in the corridor. Zarah and Normya climbed back to their feet as the others pushed away from the bulkheads when they saw him. He saw Jomann standing beside Eliani and he lowered his mug as Arrarn moved around from behind Denali.

“What’s... what’s this all about?” He asked.

As was usually the norm, Lisisa stepped forward. She had always been a spokesperson for her siblings simply because of her age and now it was no different. “Androcles...” She began and this caused his azure eyes to grow a little wider. None of his brothers and sisters ever used his formal name unless they thought it was important. “About yesterday... we... all of us, we wanted to say we were sorry for... we’re sorry for not believing in you. For not trusting you. We... we should have known better.” Lisisa rolled her eyes. “If anyone should have known better it should have been us.”

Andro lowered his mug as his eyes went back and forth between his brothers and sisters. “Ok... what is this all about?” He asked finally.

“It’s about us not trusting in you when we should have.” Lisisa told him. “Especially after all you have done for us without question. How you feel about us. All of us.”

Andro’s right eyebrow lifted slightly. “Ok... I am very confused.” Andro spoke. “Exactly what are we referring to Lisi?”

Zarah stepped forward and took the arm that did not hold his coffee mug. “I... I wanted to make a point.” Zarah said softly and with her dark brown eyes looking up at him innocently. “I sort of... I sort of used Eli’s security code to access some files that were classified.”

Eliani’s eyes grew wide. “My code?” She exclaimed. “How... how did you get my code? Why would you need my code? How...?”

Zarah looked at her and grinned. “Eli... of all of us you are the worst at keeping your code secret. I needed access to medical files. Files that only you and mother have access too.”

“Zarah... you didn’t?” Andro asked her.

She turned back to him. “No not all of them!” She exclaimed. “Just one that... just one that I knew would make everyone step back and actually think!”

“You had no right Zarah.” Andro told her.

“You are our brother!” Zarah snapped. “I had every right. When we begin to question each other, to doubt each other... just like yesterday... then I have the right to step in and set everyone straight on the facts! That’s what I did.”

“You should have told us Andro.” Lisi spoke once again. “You should have told us how you feel.”

Andro met her eyes. “I didn’t think I needed too.”

Lisi moved closer. “That’s not what I mean and you know it you dope!” She snapped.

Andro bowed his head slightly and looked at the floor. “Lisi... you know I am not very good at expressing...”

“It is done!” Eliani barked now. “No more. It is in the past! We... we know how you feel Andro. We know how you feel and we can not say we are sorry enough.” She stepped up next to Zarah. “We may question your sanity from time to time brother... but we will never question your love for us or anyone in our family. Not ever again.”

Andro grinned now. “Are you sure you want to give me that much rope? You never know what I could do with it.”

“Asshole!” Zarah exclaimed punching him in his opposite arm as he leaned over and nuzzled the top of her head.

Arrarn stepped forward quickly, unwilling to allow his sisters and brothers to cover for him. He looked at Andro whose azure eyes focused on him. “Andro... Andro I... I can not begin...”

Andro reached up with his empty hand and gripped Arrarn behind his head. “It’s done Arrarn.” He stated. “I know you meant none of it within your heart. You were speaking with emotion and worry. You do not have to explain it to me.”

“I was wrong Andro.” Arrarn spoke softly, his dark eyes almost beginning to tear up as he gripped his brother’s arm.

“And you think you are alone Arrarn?” Andro spoke shaking his head. “You are not.” He squeezed the back of Arrarn’s neck. “Forget what has happened and let’s move forward from here brother. I need you and Narice to be at your best now.”

This caused Arrarn to perk up and he looked at him. “You’ve decided?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “I’m going to set things in motion yes.”

Arrarn blinked several times, glanced at his sisters on either side of him and Andro and then turned back to his brother. He took a deep breath and then nodded his head. “I understand.” He said. “I can do it Andro.” He said.

Andro nodded. “I know that.” He said. “I will keep my promise to you Arrarn. You know I will.”

Arrarn nodded as he squeezed his brother’s arm even more. “I know.”

“Then all of you walk with me to the mess lounge and we can discuss some things as we go. I think it may be time I let all of you in more on what is going through my head.” Andro said.

“*Sibfla!*” Denali declared. “I don’t know if I want part of that. You are certifiable brother. You do know this right?”

Andro chuckled as Lisisa punched Denali in his abdomen. “Yes well... what is the expression mother uses?”

“Shit happens!” Eliani spoke proudly as they began to walk down the corridor.

PUMA’S PRIDE

Mother wake up!

For'mya bolted upright on the small bed in the quarters she occupied. Kavalian ships were not meant for comfort and the bed was not only small, but exceedingly uncomfortable given her very pregnant condition. She groaned softly knowing full well what it felt like to be pregnant and waking up before she was ready. For'mya

had spoken to Muton, or listened to him speak actually, for nearly three full hours before he finally chased her to bed. After ordering the two Kavalian guards to escort her back to her quarters in a particularly harsh voice and tone, For'mya had wondered if perhaps everything he had told to her was nothing more than a lie. She should have known better, but something inside her told her she could trust this man. No matter that his entire body was covered in fur and he was part of those who had imprisoned her and then condoned her being raped and...

For'mya slowly threw her legs over the side of the bed and tried to straighten her hair as best as she was able. She shook her head slowly wondering why the voices woke her. No... she had not been raped. She had willingly agreed to endure Pusintin rutting above her in order to save those she loved; all that she had been led to believe that remained of her beloved family. She knew how the hormones within her body changed, she had known for years, ever since becoming wolf. Never had she imagined that she could desire another man, and even as her mind screamed in sorrow and shame, her body responded to Pusintin and his pathetic aura. Responded in such a way that she had to fight each and every time he took her to keep from screaming out in pleasure. He had held nothing back from his aura, and even at its full radiance, it didn't not compare to her Martin. Yet because she had seen him die, because she could no longer feel him within Mindvoice, her body immediately began to change and prepare her to take another mate. No matter how much she did not want to submit to him, her body gave her away. And now, discovering that they all still lived. All those who she had called son and daughter and watched be born and grow into the adults they were. She saw them yesterday and she could not feel them within Mindvoice. It was unlike anything she had ever experienced. They had conducted exercises to block each other within Mindvoice as a means to protect one another, but yet they could always sense their resonance within the many strands of their minds. She felt nothing now, and that could only mean they considered her dead to them. A traitor who dishonored the memory of their father by her actions in allowing Pusintin to take her and make her with child so soon after their father's death. That was the ultimate betrayal she knew. Something that they would never forgive no matter how many years passed.

Androcles's attack against her only gave proof to her convictions that she was hated now. She had denied Muton and his claim that Andro had been sloppy in his attempt to kill her. She would go to her grave never believing those she consider children to be anything but perfect and she had never seen or heard of Androcles being sloppy.

Her conversation with Muton had been the distraction she needed. His actions and then the three hour long conversation they had went against everything For'mya knew about the Kavalian people. He treated her with respect and spoke to her in such a way as to recognize that she had once been a Queen of the Union and he thought was still a Queen of the elves. For'mya was well aware of what would happen when Pusintin returned to the surface today. He would discover many things that she had no doubts would send him into a rage. A rage so intense that she could only hope that he took her life after she gave birth to the son he wished to claim the throne with. A son that would never see the throne of the Union or Sparta, not even for a single split second. The things Muton had told her were nearly unbelievable. He knew things that he should not have known. He knew of Arzoal and he confirmed to her what Martin had always believed. Arzoal was a Pralor. He knew of the ship Resumar and Athani had gone after in Kavalian space. The story he had told her was almost too impossible to believe, but it seemed right in line with what Martin and her fellow Queens had always thought.

No! She was no longer a Queen! She was no one! She had betrayed the memory of the man who she loved and adored far more than her own life! Betrayed the love and adoration for her fellow Queens and lovers! She was nothing now! And soon she hoped she would no longer be made to suffer the indignity of life without the ones she loved.

NO! The voices were so loud in her head and she whirled around in the small room, her dark brown eyes wide with disbelief. There were two voices of that she was sure, one male one female.

"Do not hide from me!" For'mya snarled her eyes continuing to dart around the room. "Show yourselves you bastards!"

We can not. The female voice echoed. The voice sounded calm and confident, like a teenage girl who was beautiful and smart. Like Eliani and all her sisters had sounded at that age.

For'mya spun around again. "Where are you? Watching from another room? Will you give me no peace?" She snapped.

We are within you mother. The male voice spoke. Very similar in demeanor to the female voice yet distinctly male and filled with warmth.

You carry us within you mother. The female voice echoed.

For'mya looked down at her swollen abdomen her hands coming up to lay flat across the front. "What... what trickery is this?" She snarled removing her hands quickly and looking up around the room trying to find a camera of some sort.

This is no trick mother. The male voice said.

"Don't... don't call me that!" For'mya barked.

Do not call you mother? The one who carries us within her womb? The one who gave us life and nurtures us even now? The female spoke in that soft voice. *My brother and I will not do that.*

Return your hands mother and we will show you. The male spoke. *We will show you that it is us.*

For'mya reacted instinctively and placed her hands back on her abdomen. She gasped loudly when she felt the two solid, but painless kicks against the wall of her womb. She staggered back somewhat, banging into the small bunk and easing herself back down onto the rough mattress her heart and mind racing out of control. "This... this can not be!" She gasped.

But it is mother. It is so because of our brother. The female spoke once more.

"Your... your brother?" For'mya questioned. "I... I don't understand."

You said it yourself mother... Androcles is not sloppy. The male voice said.

For'mya's eyes grew wide and instantly her hand reached for where Andro had bitten deeply into her shoulder and neck while pulling her tightly to him. His words to her just before sinking his fangs into her skin came slamming back into her mind like a thunderbolt.

"Forgive me mother. Forgive me for what I must do."

You see mother... our brother would never harm you. Andro... he did what he did to reach my brother and I within you. The female voice explained. *He touched us mother. He touched us and showed us so many things.*

"His blood... he... he granted you awareness!" For'mya gasped.

He did mother. He spoke.

"He had no right!" For'mya snarled. "He should not have done this!"

Why? You are his mother as well. A mother to all of our siblings. They... they did not want you to go a moment longer and know they did not love you. That they were not working on returning you to them. The male continued.

"I betrayed them!" For'mya stammered. "I betrayed them all by what I have done! By..."

By giving life to us? The female said. *Do you think that we do not feel what you feel mother? Do you think we do not know that you question your actions every moment? You thought only to protect those you love in your actions. Those that you thought remained. The one... the one who forced himself upon you... he tricked you mother. He violated you in the most heinous of ways.*

And now... to know that they still live pierces your heart every waking moment. The male voice continued. *You feel you have betrayed them and now they shun you because you can not feel them. Because they don't answer within Mindvoice no matter how hard you try. They did not know for sure you had even been taken until after you had given us life mother... but not a day has gone by where you were not in their thoughts.*

"How... how can you know this?" For'mya rasped out.

We are part of you mother. We know... we know you have struggled with the idea of... of ending our lives by ending yours. The female voice said again. *But this is so very hard for you because of who you are and we are so grateful for that.*

"You speak with... you speak with such knowledge of things." For'mya gasped. "How can..."

We speak with the knowledge our brother gave to us. The male said proudly. *The love he gave to us without even knowing who we were. No matter what has happened. He said he was not able to fully complete what he wanted to do because of what occurred, but we have talked to him since and...*

"Wait!" For'mya gasped coming to her feet. "You have... you have spoken with him? With Androcles?"

Early this morning. The female answered. *He was with Sadi his... an... anome he called her.*

“His soulmate.” For'mya said as her lips trembled in disbelief.

She is very beautiful. And very nice. The female said. *He told us to rest and learn and study what we could. To gain our strength so that we could help you. We decided we have rested enough and now we wanted to talk with our mother.*

“What... what did he say?” For'mya pleaded. “What...?”

We will tell you mother. Be at peace. The female said.

First you must know some things mother. Things my sister and I have decided. The male spoke.

“That you have decided?” For'mya gasped with a tearful smile as she moved to the bare metal chair in the quarters and sat down.

Yes. The... the substance used to make us grow faster is also making our minds grow faster mother. Andro knew this and that is part of the reason he did what he did. So we would know who and what we are.

For'mya gripped her abdomen tighter and shook her head. “You are... you are tools my poor babies.” She sobbed. “Tools... tools that I helped to create thinking that I was saving my Bryon and Dysea. I... I am ashamed. I should have... I should have taken my life when I knew what he wanted. I should have...”

That would have made father so very sad mother. The male said. *Our mothers equally as much.*

For'mya blinked several times. “He is not... he is no father! He is a vile creature who deserves the most painful of deaths for what he has...” For'mya stopped taking and looked at her abdomen with wide dark brown eyes now. “You... you said mothers.”

Yes. Our mothers. Andro's mothers. Arrarn and all of our sibling's mothers. The male spoke once more. *Our family.*

Making father sad would not be the best thing to do. The female said with a hint of giddiness in her voice. *At least that is what Andro says.*

“I don't care if he is sad!” For'mya snapped. “I hate him! I hate him with every fiber of my existence for what he has forced upon me. I... he intends to use you my son. Use you to further his sick plans for power. He will kill you my daughter... the moment he discovers your existence he will order your death. He is no father that...”

*We do not speak of **him**!* The female spoke urgently. *He is **not** our father!*

For'mya stopped speaking and rubbed her abdomen gently, lovingly. “But he is... he is the reason I carry you.” She said softly.

He may be the father of our blood... but he is not the father of our hearts! The female hissed out.

“What... what do you mean?” For'mya asked.

There are two things we must tell you now mother. The male said. *Two things that will surprise you and make you sad. But you must know them so that you never give up hope.*

For'mya shook her head. “I don't understand.”

We have chosen what we wish to be called when we enter your world mother. The female said softly. *We have picked... picker our names yes?*

For'mya couldn't hold in the small laugh that escaped her lips. “You have chosen your own names?” She rasped.

We have. The male said evenly. *Names that we will always carry to honor and love you, who gave us life and provides for us now. I wish to be called... I wish to be called Fedor. It means...*

“It means lion in ancient Greek.” For'mya whispered aloud.

Yes. A lion. A lion to protect my mother.

And I wish to be called Eirene. The female said.

“Eirene.” For'mya said softly. “It means... it means peace.”

So that I may bring peace to my mother in bad times. She answered.

The tears came freely now and For'mya curled up on the bed. “Why has this happened?” She sobbed softly. “Why must I endure this agony? Why must I bring into this world two hearts that are so beautiful... only... only to see them taken from me just as everything else has been taken from me.”

It will be yours again mother. Fedor said. *It will be yours again.*

For'mya shook her head slowly against the pillow. “Martin is gone. The man... the man who I ache for every waking moment. The shining point of light in my universe. He is gone. I will never feel his touch upon

me again. Never feel his lips caress my ears. Aricia is gone. Dead beside her *anome*. My... my dearest friend and my love. They are all...

No! Eirene and Fedor barked at once. *NO!*

For'mya blinked several more times clearing her eyes of the tears. "Now... now you see my beautiful Fedor and Eirene. Now you see what I have lost."

But you have not lost them! Fedor exclaimed. *The father of our heart lives mother! Our... our mother Aricia lives! Andro told us this! They live and even now they are coming for us! There is something... something in your head that blocks you from feeling them as you feel us. As we feel you. That is why Andro did what he did. To make it so we could tell you that all is not lost! That your family lives and they are coming for you! For us! Sadi... she told us to pass you a message. She said you would... you would know what it means. She said to tell you our father says... Do not die For'mya Leonidas. She made us swear to say exactly that.*

For'mya sat up on the bed her eyes wide and her mouth open in shock at what she heard. She could feel the truth of what they were telling her without question. No deception. Just clear and untarnished truth. She knew that statement. She knew it so well burned into her memory as deeply as anything she had ever heard. That simple phrase meant so much to her. It meant the beginning of what she had. It meant the eternal nature of what she felt. Words spoken so long ago that drove her forward and made her see that this was where her life was going to be. This was where her life needed to be.

This more than anything drove the howl that followed. A howl louder than any other that had escaped her lips since becoming wolf that day so long ago. A howl filled with rage, with sadness, with shame and above all else...

A howl filled with hatred. Hatred for one man.

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBER

"... Be certain there will be no incidents like yesterday?" Sel'ke asked from his chair. "I can assure you Prince Leonidas... if there is, I will use the tools provided to this body by the Hadarian government and I will have you arrested and held in contempt!"

Androcles met Sel'ke's eyes from the chair next to L'tian. His grandfather closed his fingers around his forearm and rose to his feet. "We apologize for what took place yesterday Chief Minister... emotions flared and were acted on. I can assure you nothing of the sort will come from us this day."

"Good!" Kalis snarled from the table where he sat beside Pusintin and the Kavalian Ambassador. "This occasion he has only his pitiful guard here to protect him and I will kill him this time!"

Sel'ke eyed Andro carefully, his tanned face completely void of any emotion, and a stark contrast to the savage anger Sel'ke saw there yesterday when he attacked his elven mother. Even the comment by Marshall Pusintin's son did nothing to faze his expression and that more than anything made him uneasy. He turned and looked at Pusintin.

"Marshall Pusintin... Ambassador... we are trying to avoid anymore incidents." Sel'ke spoke. "There is no reason to provoke one."

"We are only stating our concerns Chief Minister. Need I remind you that we are the victims here?" The Kavalian ambassador Rutork'Toren spoke.

"Yes... we are well aware of your concerns Ambassador." Sel'ke answered. "We have spent the better part of the night reviewing the information you have given to us." He looked at L'tian. "Given the events of yesterday Minister L'tian, we had no recourse but to forward official data pads to the Lycavorian Embassy on the information given to us by Ambassador Toren provided to us."

L'tian nodded his head. "Yes... I reviewed them last night as well. Thank you for that Chief Minister."

Sel'ke nodded. "Very well. To mitigate any confrontations that may or may not appear based on these accusations I will read them quickly. Ambassador Toren and the Kavalian delegation have already agreed to forgo any argument on their behalf as they feel they have provided more than enough information and evidence in their favor. Since you, as the chosen representative of the Lycavorian Union has not had the opportunity to

address these issues in a public forum before us, you will be allowed to address each of the Kavalian points in turn.”

L'tian nodded. “I believe that is fair Chief Magistrate. My answers will be framed as replies to these issues and or charges; however you wish to refer to them. Late last evening and early this morning I conferred with Prime Minister Deia, President Charles Taylor of Earth and necessary members of the Union Senate.”

Sel'ke looked taken aback at this but nodded his head. “As you wish.” He stated.

“There is one thing Chief Magistrate... given the rulings issued by this very body several months ago on Earth in regards to the status of Marshall Pusintin and Princess Lisisa Leonidas, is this court going to use the standard they established then... or will it be changing?”

“What standards are those Minister L'tian?” Magistrate Kagan asked. “My Limian colleague and I were not part of the court back then.”

“The standard of citizenship Union and Kavalian citizens Magistrate Kagan.” L'tian told him. “I have copies of those rulings for you if you were unable to acquire them yourself.”

The Hadarian's jaw line twitched slightly but he nodded his head. “I thank you.” He stated firmly.

Toren came to his feet now. “Magistrates... we do not believe those rulings were made in all fairness to the KFI given where the proceedings took place. I submit to this body that those rulings be voided and not used within these proceedings.”

Sel'ke shook his head. “That we can not do. It goes against the very rule of law within the Lycavorian Union and the governments that encompass the Union.”

“Chief Magistrate Sel'ke... we are not in the Lycavorian Union.” Toren spoke. “This is Hadarian Free Republic space.”

“I know very well where we are Ambassador.” Sel'ke spoke. “I will not however, reverse a ruling this body has made in the past based on that alone. Unless you have extremely gripping additional information that was not provided at the time of the ruling we made, nothing will be changed.”

Toren looked at Pusintin quickly L'tian saw and he shook his head. He turned back to Sel'ke. “Very well Chief Magistrate... we will abide by your earlier decision.”

Sel'ke nodded. “Very well... I believe Limian Magistrate Sonla has offered to read the Kavalian portion of the dual complaint before us so that it may be part of public record.”

L'tian returned to his chair as the Limian Magistrate leaned forward. “If it is agreed by both parties I will skip through the majority of the legalese and wording and only read the parts pertinent to what we will be ruling on.”

Toren nodded. “Of course.”

“Minister L'tian?” Sonla asked.

L'tian shook his head. “As you wish Magistrate Sonla.” He answered.

The Limian nodded. “There are four Items of Ruling Contention brought against the Lycavorian Union and two Action Items submitted by the KFI. Please refrain from responding to them until I am fully done with each area Minister L'tian, but it is my understanding you wish to split the different areas and that is acceptable to us. You will respond to the four Items of Contention and then we will move to the Action Items.” He spoke lifting the data pad. “Item One. The covert assistance of the United Lycavorian Union towards the Vampire High Coven in a time and state of war. The Lycavorian Union knowingly and willingly trained and supplied a number of dragons brought to them secretly by the High Coven. These dragons were to be used against Kavalian forces in combat and consequently the Union is guilty of subversive action against the KFI. The KFI therefore acted properly and lawfully in responding to these subversive actions with targeted assaults against Union forces in several different areas meant to keep these actions from occurring and happening in the future.”

“Item Two. The direct establishment and support of ongoing intelligence gathering on the KFI by members of the Drow species. The Drow species of elf within the Lycavorian Union are widely known to be used as spies. They were used in these instances against the Kavalian Federation at several strategic points within The Wilds.”

“Item Three. The direct intervention by Queen Dysea in two, very large trading contracts between the Kavalian Federation and the Folcani Registrar. In each instance she directed the Union Trade Advocate to intentionally provide false information in regards to the ability of the Kavalian Federation to supply the Folcani

people with Tazli Extract. This is a key ingredient in Lyanerium Oil, which is an essential part of the Folcani society in many ways, and their actions resulted in the loss of substantial and essential revenue.”

“Item Four. The support and aide given to the defection of Athani’Puat, when Kavalian law dictated she be returned to Kavalian hands. Also the support and aide given to Jalersi’Puat and Pian’Nruarani in their defection as well as the continued support in hiding them from legal Kavalian authorities.”

Sonla looked up as he set the pad down on the massive table. “Minister L’tian... you may now respond to these Items of Contention but keep in mind we are only concerned with fact.”

L’tian got to his feet. “Oh... I intend to only deal with facts Magistrate Sonla.” L’tian said. “The facts... the Lycavorian Union has had dragons among us for more than two decades now. They have their own hierarchy or government if you wish to call it that. They are without question, extremely intelligent and independent. They have integrated deeply within Union society because of their inherent ability to bond with distinct individuals both mentally and in most cases emotionally. These duos are known as Bonded Pairs. They are not the beasts of burden that the Kavalian Federation seems to think they are. They are dear friends and family to many within the Union and we consider them to be almost sacrosanct.” L’tian moved around the front of the table. “The Vampire High Coven, in what would be the last operation they took part in against the Union nearly twenty-four years ago, stole several dozen dragon eggs and early dragonlings from a crashed Union transport. When those dragonlings and eggs began to come of age, the Coven did not have the experience or the capability to properly school these dragons. Given that it had been nearly a quarter century since any confrontation between our government and theirs they requested a meeting to perhaps discuss a Cease Fire and the schooling of these lost dragons.”

“You meaning training don’t you Minister?” Toren spoke from his seat. “Military training in how to kill my people.”

L’tian looked at him. “I mean schooling Ambassador. You have the young man who oversaw that schooling sitting right here. They were taught how to fly with a rider... how to blend with each other. They were taught things that the High Coven could not... or would not teach these young dragons. The ultimate goal of this schooling was to open their eyes to what it was they were missing. To make them see what they could be if they left the High Coven and returned to the mothers and fathers that waited for them. All of them chose to sever their ties to the High Coven, as did all of their riders. In essence they defected.”

“Minister... do you deny that the Bonded Pairs as you refer to them... do you deny that they receive intensive military training?” Kagan asked.

“I don’t deny anything.” L’tian said turning to face him. “Once a Bonded Pair has been together long enough they receive advanced skills in working together as a pair. If you wish to call this military training, that is your right.”

“So you do not deny that these High Coven dragons received military training within the Union, similar training in fact to that which Union dragons receive that would allow them to go into battle against the Kavalian Federation?” Kagan pressed.

“How can they deny it?” Kalis burst out from next to his father. “He has taken a vampire wench as one of his whores! The daughter of the outlaw Princess Yuri rides one of these beasts! His brother, the same one who attacked him yesterday for his actions, took the whore Aikiro’s daughter as his wife! She rides one of these dragons! The same vampire whores they allow into their beds! It is disgusting if you ask me!”

Andro turned his head and looked at Kalis with a lopsided grin noticing that his uncle sat there looking rather proud of his son for his outburst. “Don’t knock it until you try it cousin! *Enylarcopri* is a five foot two dynamo in and out of our bed! But then again... I don’t need to force myself upon any woman.”

This comment brought soft laughter from several of the Netnews reporters but almost no one within the gallery since they were all supporters of Buonau and Wiktor. Pusintin reached out and held Kalis’s arm before he could rise to his feet and retort.

“Again... if that is how you wish to categorize the training they received that is your choice.” L’tian told Kagan with a smile of his own after another moment.

“So they *are* a military asset?” Sonla expressed.

L’tian met his eyes. “As I said Magistrate Sonla... they receive schooling.” He spoke. “If you choose to define it as military training I can not change your mind, but it is not considered as such by anyone within the Union.”

“That is not the way it is described by the witness statement submitted by former Deputy Prime Minister Laustinos.” Sonla said. “I quote... “The training is intense and carefully laid out in a manner that would allow each Bonded Pair to conduct devastating attacks in multiple ways. Bonded Pairs accounted for nearly a third of all inflicted casualties during the Evolli War years. It is simply fact.” Sonla looked at L'tian. “Is the former Deputy Prime Minister lying sir?”

“The former Deputy Prime Minister is a liar and a traitor!” L'tian hissed. “If you wish to accept his word over mine... then why are we here?” L'tian faced the Magistrates completely. “The KFI did not approach us about their concerns! They had a trade delegation in Sparta at the same time as when the High Coven arrived on earth. They could have brought their concerns to our attention at any point after discovering this information and we would have told them what we were doing! They chose instead to assassinate the King of the Lycavorian Union and one of his Queens! They chose instead to conduct a vile terrorist act and destroyed the Union Senate Office building in Sparta in an effort to cover their act of kidnapping my daughter! This cost the lives of eight hundred and seventy-nine Union citizens, among them two hundred and forty-one children whose only crime was coming to visit their mother or father on a day set aside just for that! They chose instead to try and assassinate every member of the Leonidas family! That is fact!”

“Tell me Magistrates... how does attacking seventeen Drow outposts within The Wilds protect them? How is raping and butchering nearly three hundred Drow elves and many of those they consider family and friends protecting themselves? They can deny it all they want but we have the medical evidence to prove this!” L'tian barked.

“Evidence from your doctors I'm sure.” Toren spoke smugly from his seat.

“How does having a vicious mercenary Immortal organization capture and then attempt to break the will of another of our Queens, using more heinous means, protect them from us?” L'tian continued. “These are all facts! I'll tell you why they did not come to us! They did not come to us because they had no idea the Coven dragons were even on Earth! None! This very knowledge is something that Laustinos did not know for sure! He was not involved in this decision and could only guess! So the Kavalians acted in such a manner on a guess!”

“So you admit they were there?” Kagan spoke up now.

“We have never denied it! No one has ever come right out and asked us!” L'tian barked out. “The Kavalian government did not know this until *after* they conducted a malicious and violent attack against the Immortal settlement where Queen Dysea and her daughter Normya were! They had no idea where the Coven dragons were until they landed troops on Kranek and those very same dragons helped to defend against their brutal attempt to destroy a peaceful settlement!”

Andro sat and watched as his elven grandfather was beginning to get wound up. L'tian turned around to face the Kavalians at the table. “Or will the Kavalian representative deny this event ever took place?”

Toren shrugged his shoulders. “Our operations on Kranek were part of the overall plan to defend ourselves from the covert and subversive activities of the Lycavorian Union. Nothing more.”

“Of course it was.” L'tian spoke. “Nearly three thousand Akruvian people and almost a thousand Lycavorians died in that operation. They died defending themselves from a surprise attack perpetrated by Kavalian military forces!” He turned quickly to face the Magistrates once again. “Why don't you ask them what happen to the forces they sent against Kranek? Ask them why don't you? You will discover that they were destroyed by a combined force of Lycavorian, Akruvian Immortal and High Coven forces in the process of defecting! A little fact that the KFI forgot to mention!” L'tian waved his hand dismissively.

“To Item Three shall we. There were no lies used by Queen Dysea Leonidas in the matter of the trade contracts with the Folcani people. No misinformation. The simple fact... the Tazli Extract that the Kavalian Federation Imperium was attempting to sell to the Folcani was a base extract of Tazli Root. A commonly known and highly addictive substance within the Kavalian Federation. A substance also very widely used within Kavalian space. While Tazli Extract is indeed an ingredient in Lyanerium Oil, it is first processed to remove the addicting properties from it's stems. This process is done through humidifiers and vacuum sealing of the extract while it is purged of the addictive chemicals. The Folcani mass produce Lyanerium Oil and they do not have the equipment or manpower to inspect every single root. Just one root that retained its base properties would have infected entire batches of Lyanerium Oil, making the oil highly addictive to all of the Folcani people since all of them need this oil. The delicate balance of their bodies would have been irrevocably changed in such a way that they would then need this substance all of the time after prolonged use. It would

have become a repulsively addictive drug to them. A detoxification program would have been hideously expensive and costly to the Folcani people in more ways than one. It would also therefore insure the Kavalian Federation was able to destabilize a wholly sovereign government within the Lycavorian Union.”

“Magistrates...” Toren snapped coming to his feet. “These are all lies!”

“Are they?” L'tian asked turning to face him. “We still have the samples provided to the Folcani people by the Kavalian Federation for that trade agreement. Would you like me to send for them so that they can be examined?”

“As if we should believe anything you put forth here today after your actions yesterday!” Toren barked. “You have already shone your willingness to impair our rightful place! You attacked an elf female you claim to still be a mother and a Queen! You attempt to take her life when she has, in her own words, declared she willingly acts of her own accord now that she is free of you and the vile influence of the Leonidas family.”

“Ambassador Toren you will return to your chair and remain silent!” Sel'ke barked out. “I will not have these proceedings dissolve into a shouting match!”

Toren kept his tongue and took a deep breath. “As... as you wish Magistrates. We will... the Kavalian people will trust to your keen judgment.”

L'tian turned quickly. “As to the last point of contention brought forth... Athani Leonidas asked for and received asylum within the Lycavorian Union. There was much discussion in regards to this as King Leonidas did not want to grant this at first. After speaking with her and seeing her love for Prince Resumar he relented. Athani is now a recognized princess of the Union and the Kavalian Federation may scream about it all they want. As to her sister Jalersi... we have no knowledge of her. We were told by the Kavalian Ambassador Matuarr that she died in the High Coven attack on the Kavalian embassy. We later saw her and several Kavalian officers attempting to defend our King and Queen during the Kavalian assassination attempts. They disappeared after these events and we have no knowledge of where they are. We are investigating however.”

“You expect us to believe that?” Pusintin snarled. “They are wanted criminals! Traitors! We want them back so that they can face justice!”

“What you want or believe Marshall Pusintin is of no concern to me.” L'tian spoke. “It is my understanding that your *former* mate *left* you for this Commander Nruarani. Earth is a very large planet and still largely unpopulated. They could be anywhere by now, if they even remain on Earth.”

Pusintin kept his mouth shut while he glared at L'tian. He turned to the Magistrates. “Let us continue!” He barked.

L'tian looked at Sel'ke. “I have no need to present further evidence Chief Magistrate.” He said. “We have done nothing wrong nor have we undermined the Kavalian Federation in any way by our actions.”

Sel'ke nodded his head. “Very well Minister... we will absorb what you have told us and accept any evidence you can present to support your claims before we rule on these points. We will move on to the Action Items now.”

L'tian returned to his chair and looked at Andro. *[This is where it is going to get nasty.]* He told him as he sat down.

[Yes I expect as much.] Andro answered.

[You do realize that what happens will send Buonau into a tizzy?] L'tian said.

[Good. Maybe her heart will explode. Eliani would love to see that.] Andro spoke.

[Given what has happened so far I would say our chances of a decision in our favor are very slim.]

L'tian said.

[I knew that coming in grandfather.] Andro answered. *[These proceedings are a farce. It is all theater for the public. The gallery is strictly Buonau supporters, and even many of the Netnews fools waver. They are discovering more about my family from sources outside our own government and they are enthralled by it.]*

[They may attempt to stop us from leaving Andro.] L'tian said.

[Let them try.] Andro said with finality.

Sonla lifted the second data pad in front of him. “We shall move on to the Action Points as they have been presented to us and they will become part of public record.” Sonla spoke. “The first Action Point concerns the child that Queen For'mya of the Elven people carries. This child is of the blood of two separate but recognized royal bloodlines and will be the son of Marshall Pusintin, formerly King Pleistarchus of Sparta, and Queen For'mya, last descent of the first Elven King. Therefore... on this child's behalf... his father and mother

have petitioned this body to require that the Lycavorian Union Senate and government recognize that this child, by birthright, has a legitimate claim to the throne of the Lycavorian Union and Sparta. Marshall Pusintin is the first born son of King Leonidas and with his brother Martin now dead, Marshall Pusintin believes it is his unborn son that should be the sole recognized ruler of the Union as determined by the Union's own Laws of Ascension concerning birthright, as this son does have the blood of two royal bloodlines within him." Andro looked over at his uncle as Sonla read and saw him cross his arms smugly over his chest. Kalis met his eyes and his snarl of satisfaction was almost too much.

L'tian didn't look at Andro but spoke out to him in Mindvoice. *[It is as Deia thought.]* He spoke. *[They are using birthright.]*

Andro turned back and slowly nodded his head. *[Yes.]*

"Minister L'tian... does the Union wish to answer this Action Point? I can read the more tedious legal wording of Scroll Twenty-Three of your Chronicle of Lycavorian Law if you wish it." Sonla asked looking up from the pad.

"No Magistrate Sonla." L'tian spoke sending a wave of murmurs throughout the room.

"Then you recognize this claim by birthright of law?" Sonla asked shocked.

"Such as it is yes." L'tian replied. "We are a government of laws and we hold ourselves to the same standards as others. I have been authorized by Prime Minister Deia to inform this body that the Union Senate has already been notified and will be convening in four days to review this claim and decide what to do. A decision is expected within two days after they have convened."

"Six days?" Toren barked coming to his feet. "That is not acceptable to the Kavalian Federation! We demand action here! Today!"

L'tian looked at him. "Do you expect the Union government to simply accept what you have put forth without first reviewing it themselves? Would you expect the Kavalian Federation to do such a thing? I think not. The Union has over three thousand Senators and it will take four days for all of them to be able to take part in such a decision."

Toren looked at Pusintin who nodded his head with that smug smile. He turned back to Sonla. "Very well. The KFI accepts this... as long as it is publicly monitored by this body and the Netnews so that all may see and witness."

L'tian nodded and shrugged his shoulders. "That is acceptable to us."

Sonla nodded and looked at Sel'ke. "Chief Magistrate?"

Sel'ke nodded as well. "So this Galactic Body rules." He spoke. "The Lycavorian Union is directed to review the evidence and then respond to the claim six days hence adhering to their written law in this regard. Of which this body has a copy of."

"There is only one way they can rule if they value the so called laws they follow!" Toren snapped.

Sonla looked at L'tian. "May I continue on to the second Action Point?"

L'tian nodded. "Magistrate."

Sonla lifted the pad. "The Kavalian Federation Imperium submits to this Galactic Body the evidence of birthright and blood in regards to the elf female For'mya. As the sole recognized heir to elven royalty, she submits the following orders as sole Queen of the elven people. The immediate termination of any and all claim to the elven throne shown by the elf female Dysea. She has no legal status to the Elf throne and is hereby removed from her position as co-Queen effective immediately. The elf Queen For'mya subsequently orders all diplomatic ties to the Lycavorian Union henceforth severed. All trade agreements currently in place are hereby cancelled until review is possible by her Kavalian husband and mate Marshall Pusintin and the KFI Commerce Directorate. All elven citizens of Elear are ordered to return to Elear forthwith, all military ships to remove themselves from Union fleets and return forthwith to elven space, and all elven delegates to the Union are ordered to return to Elear from their respective postings on the member planets. The compliance with these orders is required and any resistance will be viewed as a subversive attempt by any and all involved. Any attempt to coerce or force elven citizens or military ships and personnel to remain within Union space by Union delegates will be viewed as a hostile act and acted upon accordingly... up to and including military action and force. This order goes into effect immediately and has been signed, sealed and authenticated by Queen For'mya herself." Sonla lowered the pad slowly and looked at L'tian.

L'tian was silent for a long moment. "I will... I will submit this directive to the Elven Parliament immediately Magistrate Sonla. A decision will be made before you return to make your ruling. Let it be known however, that the elven people will follow our Queen without any hesitation. We always have and we always will."

Sonla looked at Toren and Pusintin. "Is this acceptable to the Kavalian Federation?"

Toren nodded. "In the auspice of peace and understanding yes." He answered.

"Very well." Sonla spoke.

Sel'ke nodded. "We will adjure for two hours to review all evidence and then return to make our rulings." He spoke coming to his feet. "We are in recess."

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN

"What a *nubous* joke." Deia spat as the holotransmission ceased and she turned to look at the others in the room.

"Deia... they can't possibly believe such a declaration will work can they?" Anja asked as she sat in the oversized leather chair, holding the large mug of Aricia's coffee and sipping it gingerly.

She had been up most of the night with Isabella as they came to grips with the fact that Ryner was now a very intricate part of their family as well as their plans. Isabella had been far too excited to sleep as she discovered all there was to know of Ryner and his family while being able to speak with the child she carried in her womb. Dorian for the moment was speaking with a halting and childish voice in their heads, but he would soon have his own distinct voice given that he would join this world very soon. He and Ryner most wanted to know of his brother Androcles and Elynth which didn't really surprise Isabella and Anja in the least. It had been only two hours earlier when Isabella had finally been unable to remain awake and drifted in to an exhausted sleep. Ryner and Dorian were still chattering away when Anja rose and left her fellow Queen and lover to sleep while she went to shower and get something to eat. Dragon Mountain had a small but well stocked dining area for those that were permanently assigned here, and the human woman who ran it was nearing ninety years of age and spry as someone half her age. All of the food that she turned out was delicious in every way and the menu was quite extensive. She knew exactly what every member of the Leonidas family liked to eat the most and before Anja had even finished drawing herself a mug of ever present coffee; a plate of steaming pancakes and five thick slices of honey cured ham was waiting for her. Anja was always hungrier during her Phase, as most Lycavorian women were, and the ham curbed her appetite and her wolf desire for meat. Deia had joined her just after she sat down and they ate together before coming to this COM room to view the proceedings on the Netnews.

"There is no telling what they will believe." Deia answered as she went to the small table and poured herself a mug of coffee. "I've never met such arrogant or obnoxious individuals in all my life!"

"Well... that is not entirely their fault." Anja spoke up.

"Anja... you are defending them?" Deia gasped.

"Oh no... I'm just saying... because of the way they use accelerated growth on all of their children, they must indoctrinate them quickly to insure their minds expand to the full extent of their bodies within several months after reaching maturity." Anja said. "They teach them what they need and want them to know and nothing else. Among the things they teach is that Kavalians are superior to all other species. That is where their arrogance comes from."

"I don't care where it comes from... it is annoying and very telling on a sane person's patience to the extreme." Deia snapped and Anja chuckled at her reaction.

"Do you think they will wait until the Union Senate convenes before doing anything?" Anja asked. "They are going to flip when L'tian tells them of the Writ of Annulment... but will they hold off until after the Senate meets?"

Deia nodded. "Yes... for two reasons. The first one is they are trying to wage a public relations war against us. They are trying to project themselves as the victims here. If they react in an overtly negative way to what L'tian tells them about For'mya then it will be seen for what it is. A grab at power within the Union

through superfluous means. Even the dullest individual will see right through their façade and then begin to question what we already know as fact. That they took For'mya against her will and forced or coerced her into something she would never have accepted to begin with.”

“And the second?” Anja asked softly.

“They fear Androcles.” Deia stated. “They fear him Anja. He is not Martin and they do not know what he will do. What he is capable of.”

Anja snorted. “Deia... we don't know what he is capable of most times and we are his family.”

Deia nodded. “Exactly. Martin... is predictable after a fashion. While we know this to not be true, in the public eyes he is politically inept. That view of him will disappear once he returns but right now that is how everyone views him. With Andro... they do not know. His record alone would give even the toughest and most experienced military man pause. He is utterly unpredictable. That is our advantage.”

“Deia... you aren't actually going to have the Union Senate vote on this fool claim are you?” Anja asked.

“I most certainly am.” She replied. “I know for a fact that it will never pass. It does not stand even a remote chance of passing. Even though every Senator, except those close to us, believe Martin to be dead they adore him Anja. They adore all of you. Not just for what you have done through the years but because of what you represent. Helen has to have told you this before. You are normal. You are just like them. People... men and women... they respond to that. They embrace that. It is the same confidence and endearment that Resumar inspired in all of us.” Deia sat down across from her. “It will also be a way for me to discover who our enemies are. If they vote for this fool notion that Pusintin could somehow claim the throne through a child knowing what they know about the bloodlines then they are fools and they are enemies.”

Anja looked at her evenly. “This... this has changed you Deia.” She said.

Deia nodded. “Yes... I know. It has opened my eyes Anja. Opened my eyes to how foolish I have been at times through the years. No longer. Everything I do going forward will be for the good of our people and what we represent.”

“Deia... you have always stood for that.” Anja said.

“Perhaps... but I have wavered at times... and that has caused pain for others I care about.” Deia said. “No more. Now tell me of what you and Bella are planning?”

“Eurin, Vana and Ceuma are putting the finishing touches on the growth hormone we will use. Martin and the others have gone dark so we sent a message via secure sub space. He should get it today when they stop to get messages and then he will contact us. I don't believe he will not trust us to do this Deia.”

“Nor do I.” Deia said.

“Once we talk with him then we'll proceed. Bella and I will be here for a few weeks but I will make appearances if you need me too.” Anja said.

“No... what I need you to do is talk to Andro when he returns.” Deia said. “He carries a great deal of anguish for what he had to do Anja and...”

“I already intend to Deia.” She spoke. “He did nothing that I would not have done. I would have cried my eyes out while I gave the order... but I would have done it.”

Deia nodded. “Good.”

“What is this I hear that Ulana was elected to take her father's seat?” Anja asked sipping her tea.

“You know her then?” Deia asked.

Anja nodded. “We know her. Pompous little *upaee* if you ask me. When it comes to her I think Andro was driven only by his hormones. She doesn't hold a candle to Sadi.”

Deia nodded. “I agree.”

Anja met her eyes. “You think she is a threat?”

“Then you know of her affiliations as well?” Deia asked.

“We all did.” Anja said. “That's why I say she was simply a stress reliever for Andro. She never stayed at the island estate for more than a few hours if it required spending any time with our family. Andro treated her well enough... but you know as well as I do that Sadi is and always has been the one to hold his essence.”

Deia nodded. “Yes. As for Ulana... I have a meeting with her and several other Senators who we know sympathize with her and her ideals this afternoon in regards to the committees her father was Chair of. She wants to know why she can not simply assume those roles as well. She's driven... I'll give her that.”

“We never saw her as a threat Deia.” Anja said.

“I don’t believe she is either.” Deia answered. “But I like to make sure I know all of the potential troublemakers.”

Anja nodded. “Let me know if you need any help with that.” She said with a grin.

“I wish to be here when you go forward with your plan.” Deia told her. “I have been present for the birth of every Leonidas since Androcles and I don’t intend to miss this one for anything.”

RITAAH

Resumar walked into the small observation room off of the massive bridge and saw Shiria standing near what would have been an observation window. The biomechanical nature of the bulkhead however made it appear as if she was staring at a blank wall. He stopped behind her, watching as she lifted a mug to her lips and sipped a strong herbal smelling tea.

“*Val’istar?*” He spoke softly.

“Your brother is far more headstrong than I had realized.” Shiria said. She turned and looked at him over the rim of the mug. “As are you young Resumar. He does not like when others question his orders or motives does he?”

Resumar shrugged. “None of us do.” He spoke. “You may say what you want about my brother *Val’istar*, but Androcles motives have always been laid in dragon armor. Protect his family, protect his Union, protect his Bonded Sister and protect himself. In that order.”

“I’m guessing it is a trait that you both have inherited from your father?” Shiria asked.

Resumar grinned sheepishly and shrugged his broad shoulders. “No one has ever accused my father of being weak minded and no one has ever questioned his motives.”

“I don’t imagine they have.” Shiria said.

“Perhaps now that it is just the two of us *Val’istar* you will tell me why you are so dead set against us taking this ship.” Resumar asked her as he moved to the empty chair and settled into it.

“I don’t... I don’t know what you mean.” Shiria said. “And enough of this *Val’istar* silliness when we are alone. It is ridiculous and annoying coming from you.”

“My father and mothers did not raise stupid children either *Val’istar*... Shiria.” He told her calmly, crossing his arms over his chest. “There is something you are not telling me.”

Shiria met his eyes and lowered her mug somewhat. “I was thirty-one years old when our leaders put me on this ship and sent me away. I knew what they were doing Resumar. It was their last ditch effort to try and save a small portion of our species. I have spent the better part of ten thousand years among those who are not like me. Not in any way, shape or form. I have had to hide who I really am all of this time. Oh... I sensed your father or someone like your father would come eventually but I have been alone. Ckooa and Poysa are so very dear to me but they are not like me and they never will be. The abilities they have I gave to them. Their ability to Mindvoice... that is something I gave to them and schooled them in. When you arrived... when I felt you and then Athani. When I felt your father and brother within you, it was as if I had recovered some small piece of my past. I do not wish to lose that again Resumar.”

“Then you must know and understand why we need to take this ship and not destroy it.” Resumar said.

“I know that whatever data the High Coven was able to take from this ship they have already begun working on to advance their own agenda.” Shiria said.

“I would not disagree with that assessment.” Resumar answered. “Which makes your anger even more confusing. You can sense me... and my father within me. You must know that no matter what he does, he would never use this ship or any part of this ship as a means to take something that did not belong to him. He would never try to subvert a people, to conquer them? You must feel this.”

Shiria nodded her head. “I do.” She said.

“Then why?” Resumar asked.

Shiria took a deep breath and moved closer to him. She reached up and place her palm on his cheek. “I would imagine that Wayonn has given your father some idea about what I fear. He would hold the same knowledge and fears that I do. Wayonn is much older than me as well... and I will admit better able to control

and hide his feelings. The fear I have is not as strong as it once was... not since talking to your brother and seeing within you the mettle of your father. It is still there... but it has become more of a distant echo. No doubt Wayonn has felt the same thing, I am just more passionate it seems.”

“Passionate about what?” Resumar asked her. “A threat to us? To the Union?”

“In a manner of speaking yes.” Shiria told him.

“From who?” Resumar asked. “The Kavalians?”

Shiria chuckled. “The Kavalians? No my dear boy... the Kavalians do not hold a candle to what I am speaking of.”

“Then tell me!” Resumar demanded.

“I will.” She told him softly. “When the time is right. I do feel better since talking to your brother. I see what he is doing. What your father is doing. For whatever reason... the sense of dread inside me has eased. I do not know why... and if I talk to Wayonn I will imagine he will say the same thing. We have more important issues to deal with now. I wish to meet Helen and see Arzoal again. I wish to see your family and all those who descend from my people. And I wish... I wish...”

Resumar tilted his head to the side. “What?”

Shiria met his eyes. “I wish to discover love Resumar.” She said softly.

Resumar’s eyes grew a little wider and he rose to his feet slowly. “Shiria I... I don’t know what... I mean you are...”

Shiria laughed heartily and slapped his chest. “Not with you!” She exclaimed. “You are far too young for me and your heart belongs solely to Athani. That is so obvious even to the densest of individuals. I have seen how you look at Athani... how Dario looks at Channa. The complete devotion and love. I have never had the opportunity to experience that but I am quite sure when we do finally return to Earth and the Union I will discover a wolf such as you and your brother and father, one who has a few more years of experience though.”

Resumar grinned. “Considering your beauty Shiria I would say they will be busting down your door.”

Shiria chuckled. “We will see.” She said. She reached out and took his hand. “I find you so very easy to talk to Resumar. Athani as well. I always felt like that with her and now I know why. And you have no idea how good it feels not to have to maintain this façade of being older than I actually am.”

“Does this mean you will no longer frighten the crew?” Resumar asked with a grin.

Shiria took his arm. “Yes it does. In fact... it also means that I intend to lend whatever assistance I can in this endeavor. How soon before we leave?”

“Avi and 341 have returned power to the entire ship including weapons. We stripped the ships in orbit of every spare generator we could without compromising them for their return trip. Captain Fang and *RAGE OF ACHILLES* will be the only ship that remains. When the time comes it will be taken into the bay of the ship.” Resumar told her. “Pian, Jalersi, my uncle Isra and Aunt Tarifa are putting the final touches on their operation to free Ckhoa’s sister and the others within the main compound. Then we will move to Rizon Four and finish helping Pride Nruarani establish the defenses there on your fortress. When that is complete we will return to Union space to insure *SPARTA’S WRATH* has a full crew and supplies and then we will return to begin our war.”

“You sound so certain that war will come.” Shiria said.

Resumar nodded his head slowly. “My father will never allow mother to remain with them. He will not allow her to endure any more indignities and for every one she has endured he will return that to them a hundred fold. There *will* be a war Shiria... and it will be unlike anything the Kavalians have ever fought. We can not stop it now. They set us on this path the moment they took our mother from us. My father knows many things he does not share with anyone Shiria. He knows what my brother and he are capable of.”

“I don’t understand.” Shiria said softly though she could feel the dread building within her.

“You will. You will. If they think they saw us at our finest during the Evolli War then they are so limited and wrong in what they think and believe.” Resumar said.

“When... when do we leave?” She asked finally.

“When my brother sends word we will launch.”

“And until then?” Shiria asked.

Resumar shrugged. “We wait.”

CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBER

Andro and L'tian watched as the members of the Galactic Court filed back into the room and took their seats behind the massive table. Andro leaned close to him as he noticed that the Lycavorian Magistrate and the second elven Magistrate were no longer among the group and the Folcani representative did not look happy in the least.

“Do you see who is missing grandfather?” Andro whispered.

L'tian nodded his head. “You did not expect them to rule in our favor did you Andro?” He whispered back.

“No... but I thought they might be a little more subtle in how they went about it.” Andro answered. “They haven’t been gone for the full two hours either.”

“Because their decisions have already been made.” L'tian said. “I knew that before they even left and I don’t think subtly is in the Kavalian language. I would like to know what they used to get Sel’ke on board however. Up until all this began I had always considered him an excellent Chief Magistrate.”

“People change grandfather.” Andro said.

“So it would seem.” L'tian answered. “Maintain your anger boy. At least as much as you are able. They will undoubtedly fly into a rage when we tell them about the Writ... but they will only press so far because they are trying to maintain their supposed sympathy as the victims here.”

“I know what I must do grandfather.” Andro said. “Just be prepared to leave quickly if they attempt to stop us when they are clear of the Netnews cameras. And do not be surprised if they suddenly believe themselves to be the final authority on everything. I have the feeling that *Tenna Deia*’s fears about them are about to come true.”

“The First Minister said as much too.” L'tian told him. “Do you honestly believe Buonau will actually attempt something?” L'tian asked.

“I would not put it past her.” Andro said. “She seems to be under the mistaken impression that the Kavalians are looking out for her best interests as well.”

L'tian nodded. “Then you noticed it as well. The way she has been consorting with the Kavalian Admiral. This Menot person?”

Andro nodded. “Eli pointed it out to me.” He spoke.

“What do you think it means?” L'tian asked.

“I think it means she has taken to doing whatever it requires for her to remain in power grandfather.” Andro answered. “Including compromising her integrity. What little of it there was to begin with?”

“Andro... Pusintin... he will not hurt her will he?” L'tian asked.

Andro shook his head. “I don’t believe so... no.” He answered softly. “If... if my brother and sister were able to do what I sensed they wished too, then mother will be at least partially aware of what is going on. With any luck grandfather, if they were able to touch her and talk with her... at least some portion of who she is... what she is inside... will come out and she will handle him.”

“That is a big question.” L'tian said.

“She is your daughter and my mother.” Andro told him. “She is a Leonidas. That alone is enough.”

“You do realize that we are not exactly in the best position if they do attempt something against us.” L'tian said now. “I do hope you have retained a bit of your devious nature and have someone waiting to assist us if we need it. I do not mind fighting, but Jomann, yourself and I will not be able to hold all of them long enough to get to your *STRIKER*.”

Andro looked at him with mock horror on his face. “Grandfather... you injure me with your accusations.” He said. “Eliani has corrupted you.”

L'tian couldn’t help but smile slightly. “So long as they are true.” He stated. “So long as they are true.”

They both turned back to the magistrates when Sel'ke lifted the small gavel and tapped it on the chime. The massive chamber became silent as the Netnews video drones whirled around above everyone and the reporters directed their full attention to him, as well as everyone in the gallery.

"I will now call this hearing back into order." Sel'ke spoke loudly. "We have reviewed the relevant information given to us by Minister L'tian and based on our previous evening of reviewing what Ambassador Toren and Marshall Pusintin presented to us, we have made our decisions as to what we believe should happen. Our decisions are not binding in any way... but they reflect what we all strongly feel to be our purpose since our inception. That is to decide fairly on matters of law between two or more different governments in the best interests of all involved."

"The Hadarian Free Republic has offered to give you the means of enforcing what your decisions will be Chief Magistrate." Buonau spoke up from her seat beside Menot.

Sel'ke nodded. "Yes... and it is the majority opinion of this body that in the future we will take you up on your offer Prime Minister."

L'tian looked at Andro quickly and then back to Sel'ke. "Just what does that mean exactly Chief Magistrate Sel'ke?" He asked.

"Exactly what it implies." Sel'ke said in reply. "We will accept the use of the Hadarian Elder Militia as offered by Prime Minister Buonau. They will act in our stead when it comes to decisions that we have levied forth. To insure our dictates are followed to the letter of the law. There are many recognized governments outside the Lycavorian Union and all of them have expressed an interest in our body taking a more active role in things. We have decided we will do just that."

"Forgive me Chief Magistrate... but who exactly granted you such wide ranging power?" L'tian asked him. "The Galactic Court was formed by King Leonidas as a neutral platform to hear arguments between governments and be an arbiter over disagreements. No one has granted you power to enforce any decisions you might make."

"The Kavalian Federation, The Hadarian Free Republic, The Limian Central Council and several other governments outside of the Lycavorian Union have given us this ability as I said. To better help to stabilize the Galactic civilizations." Sonla spoke now leaning forward in his chair. "With their full authority and their assurance our word and decisions will be adhered to. We will be operating as outside observers and litigators Minister L'tian and it is our hope that the entire and complete body of the Lycavorian Union government will also take part in this freely."

"And you believe them?" L'tian asked aghast.

"Your lack of faith in our abilities is most disturbing Minister L'tian." Kagan spoke up. "We will be appointing representatives to this Galactic body from every recognized government Minister."

"If that is so Magistrate Kagan where are the Lycavorian and Elven Magistrates then?" L'tian demanded.

"They chose to not participate in the reshuffling and expanding of our duties and were excused by majority vote." Kagan answered.

"You expect the Lycavorian Union to turn over the interpretation of our laws and cultures to this body?" L'tian asked in shock.

"All internal governments will maintain local control over their own laws within their borders. We will simply be the hand of justice outside established borders and we will remain the arbiter of disputes between recognized bodies of governments. It is our hope that the Union will abide by this as well... as I stated earlier." Kagan spoke smugly. "But we are not here to discuss the expansion and new duties of this Galactic body. Those will be announced in a future Netnews broadcast. We are here to render our decisions on the complaints brought forth by both the Kavalian government and the Hadarian government."

"I have already stated that we do not recognize the new Hadarian government and will not entertain any sort of communication with them in regards to their perceived wrong doing." L'tian spoke firmly. "Not until Queen Anja is restored to power as the rightful ruler, which she is."

"And this body understands that Minister." Kagan continued. "However we felt it prudent to render decisions on those complaints as well, no matter the current state of relations between you. We are simply trying to mediate a solution to conflicts that are present between your two governments. Do you wish us to continue?"

L'tian glanced at Andro quickly and then back to Kagan. *[Andro... this is a surprise.]* He spoke within Mindvoice.

[Yes... but not unexpected grandfather. It is just as you and Tenna Deia thought.] Andro answered keeping his face impassive for he knew he was being watched. *[Only the timing is of question here. It appears that they have been acting on doing this for far longer than even we realized; before any of this even began it appears. I should have seen it with their supposed ruling concerning Lisisa. Father should have seen it.]*

[This is not going to go well boy.] L'tian announced. *[We did not think they would go this far or have the backing that they do.]*

[I know. We must play along for now however. At least in part.] Andro said.

“Minister L'tian?” Kagan asked again.

L'tian met his eyes and nodded. “Very well Magistrate Kagan.” He spoke. “Please... you may continue.”

“Excellent.” Kagan answered. “I will address the Hadarian complaints... Minister Sonla will address the Kavalian complaints.” He lifted the data pad. “After much review of the reams of material presented and on the basis of continued peaceful coexistence between the Union and the Hadarian Free Republic it is our ruling and recommendation that appropriate compensation must be paid to the Hadarian people for the loss of life when the Jump Gates were destroyed by order of King Elect Androcles Leonidas. It is also our ruling and recommendation that the four Jump Gates be rebuilt at the expense of the Lycavorian Union using Hadarian engineers as a means to stimulate joint cooperation. A public apology from Androcles Leonidas expressing his regret at his actions and his support of the new government would also be equally appropriate.” Kagan looked up. “As for the continued matter of Retta and Calyb Leonidas our decision and equally appropriate recommendation is as follows. They are the sole heirs to the Royal Hadarian throne and given that the deceased King Leonidas has seven children in line for the Union throne before them, it is determined and recommended that they be returned to the custody of their Aunt here on Hadaria in order to be schooled and prepared to take over their duties when they come of age. Queen Anja Leonidas of the Union will of course be granted supervised visitation, as will their brothers and sisters, but they will reside here on Hadaria. We have also determined that it would be inappropriate for the Lycavorian Union to return any equipment or ships that were taken as no real proof can be presented that any of the previously mentioned material is in fact property of the Hadarian Free Republic. Currently there are three million four hundred and nineteen thousand Hadarian Healers serving within the Union military. We are ruling and recommending that all of these Healers be allowed to return here to Hadaria over the next year and make their intentions known to their families without peer pressure or influence of Union officers.” Kagan looked up at L'tian with a look of smug arrogance that L'tian wanted to rip from his face. “All other complaints from the Hadarian Free Republic have been dropped, including the still active charges of murder and sedition against the former Queen Anja. These are the rulings and the recommendations that this Galactic Body makes Minister L'tian. We do this to promote good will and continued peaceful coexistence. In order to follow through with this we have instructed our newly commissioned Elder Guards to seize all Union assets within Hadarian space as well as known assets within The Wilds. They will be held in trust until such time as the Lycavorian Union government wishes to proceed.”

L'tian stared at him for a long moment. “You do understand that I cannot respond to these decisions without first consulting the Union government and relevant individuals Magistrate Kagan? And the threat of seizure of Union property within The Wilds will not be looked upon kindly. Most of those assets are privately owned. The Union will act to protect them should the owners request it.” He spoke finally.

“Of course... but the new ruler of the Union sits beside you. Surely he can give us some idea as to what he will do. Our rulings are only in the best interests of all parties involved.” He answered.

“I have not been officially crowned yet.” Andro spoke sternly. “And I will need to speak with my advisors before making such decisions, but seizing Union property outside our borders will not be tolerated. That I can assure you.”

“So you will contest this portion?” Kagan asked.

“Militarily if need be.” Andro replied.

“This body also has a question in regards to your assuming your role as King.” Kagan asked him smoothly moving away from that topic. “Why have you not been crowned just yet sir? It has been several weeks now since the death of your father.”

“You mean the *murder* of my father don’t you Magistrate?” Andro snarled. “Do not try and lump the assassination and murder of my father into a general category sir. It insults me and my brothers and sisters and our people.”

“My apologies.” Kagan spoke. “Minister L'tian?”

“I will certainly address these recommendations with Queen Anja and Prime Minister Deia immediately upon our return. The Lycavorian Union does not wish any sort of conflict to happen between ourselves and the Hadarian Free Republic.” L'tian said bowing his head.

“Very well... I will release the floor to Magistrate Sonla then.” Kagan spoke.

L'tian turned and looked at Andro briefly. *[I am an elf yes... but even I have limits to my patience Androcles.]* He stated calmly though it was very forced. *[How much longer do you intend to let these fools dictate to us?]*

[We are ready grandfather.] Andro said. *[I suggest we let them speak their folly for the Kavalians and then play our card. It will undoubtedly send them into turmoil and in order to maintain their ridiculous façade they will have no choice but to let it play out.]*

Sonla got to his feet. “To move events along I will only cover what has not already been decided.” He spoke loudly. “The Union Senate will still convene to hear the birthright claim of Marshall Pusintin and his mate Queen of the Elves For'mya and their child?”

L'tian tried to hide the cringe when he heard that and he knew the Limian only did it to get just that reaction. He glared at the man for a few seconds but nodded his head. “That is my understanding Magistrate.” He spoke.

“Very well... then this body rules and recommends that a member of this court and of the Kavalian Federation be present within the Union Senate halls for these proceedings as they happen.” Sonla spoke. “Does the Union protest this ruling?”

L'tian looked at Andro who shook his head quickly. “No we do not Magistrate Sonla.” He answered turning back. “As long as your representatives adhere to all Lycavorian laws while they are within the limits of Sparta and the Union. And that they will have no say within the Senate proceedings.”

Sonla looked at him. “And why would we not?” He demanded.

L'tian met his eyes. “Your are no longer members of the Union by your own admission here today.” He said. “You don’t expect to retain a right to a voice within the Senate do you?”

Sonla glared at him. “Very well Minister. The Kavalians have already offered their newly established embassy for our comfort while we are there. We do ask however that the troops that currently surround the Kavalian embassy be withdrawn in a show of good faith and cooperation.”

Andro shook his head. “No.” He stated. “While there are Kavalians within those walls they will be restricted to the embassy compound.”

“And will our representatives be so restricted?” Sonla asked.

“I’m sure a limited policy can be arranged.” Andro said. “But whoever you send will not have free reign no.”

“May I ask why?” Sonla spoke.

“To be perfectly frank Magistrate... I don’t fucking trust any of you!” Andro answered bluntly. “The only reason we are still here is to show that we abide by the rule of law.” Andro snapped. “Take it or leave it.”

“As you wish sir.” Sonla stated.

“Your majesty!” Andro snarled.

“I beg your pardon?” Sonla asked.

“I will refer to you, such as you are, with your proper name and title Magistrate Sonla.” Andro told him sternly. “I expect the same in return sir. I am Crown Prince and soon to be King of the Lycavorian Union... you will refer to me as Majesty or Milord.”

“You will not...” Sonla began to retort angrily.

“Magistrate Sonla!” Sel'ke exclaimed. “We are not above our own rulings or respect. We will show the proper respect as is deemed a ruler of his people!”

Sonla blinked and nodded quickly. “Of course. Forgive me.” He stated. “May I continue now?”

L'tian nodded. “Very well.”

“In regards to the actions of the Lycavorian Union that prompted the retaliatory events of the Kavalian Federation, we hereby find that the Lycavorian Union did in fact agree to train and equipped the High Coven dragons knowing that they could and probably would be used against Kavalian forces in the future.” Sonla began. “Regardless of how the Lycavorian Union wishes to portray it, training the High Coven dragons in any way is a clear violation of the Galactic Non-Interference Act that they signed with twenty-three other recognized governments, to include the Kavalian Federation eighteen years ago.”

“Excuse me Magistrate Sonla... the KFI was not present at this event, nor did they agree to sign this treaty.” L'tian stated.

Sonla held up another data pad. “I have here the signed document with the seal of the Kavalian Prefect sir. It is my understanding that when the Kavalian government agreed to assist the Hadarian Free Republic; one of the stipulations by Prime Minister Buonau was that they agree to this treaty. They did so... and were added to the Hadarian Registry’s portion of the treaty two years and three months ago.”

“That is utter nonsense!” L'tian barked. “Adding them to the Hadarian Registry portion of the treaty after the fact does nothing! It was not made public knowledge and no one would even know unless they pressed the issue. They did not meet with the other government leaders face to face and sign this treaty!”

“That does not change the facts Minister L'tian.” Sonla spoke. “Perhaps you should have reviewed all of your treaties before agreeing to train the High Coven dragons.”

“Are you suggesting that this somehow gives the Kavalian Federation the right to do what they have done?” L'tian gasped in shock.

“It does give them precedence yes.” Sonla answered. “They were acting in self defense with their actions.”

“Forgive me... perhaps you could explain to me how it is self defense to arrange, plan and then execute an assassination of the Union King and similar attempts on every member of his family!” L'tian barked out. “Perhaps you could explain to me how it is self defense to arrange, plan, and then blow up the Senate Office Building killing nearly a thousand innocent civilians and kidnapping one of our Queens! Perhaps you...”

Sonla held up his hand. “Minister L'tian please... we do not need a reiteration of the events that transpired. The Kavalian Federation was acting in such a way as what they thought was in their best interests, nothing more. They took Queen For'mya prisoner, not realizing her condition or what would come of it upon discovering her mate had been killed. Truly... this is not a condition that any of us were aware Lycavorian females experienced. You have heard in her own words that she did this of her own free will.”

“It is not something that is openly discussed!” L'tian snarled. “It is private and...”

Andro stood up and took his grandfather’s arm. He shook his head. “It is not worth it grandfather.” He stated softly.

“We have ruled in your favor on this point Minister L'tian.” He spoke. “We recommend that the Kavalian Federation pay reparations to the Lycavorian Union for every life that was lost in their misguided actions, to include those Drow that lost their lives in The Wilds.”

“Reparations?” L'tian asked. “They committed an open act of war! They assassinated our King and you sit there treating them as if they belong here! They murdered our people! They kidnapped my daughter! As if reparations will somehow make up for that!”

“Control your emotions Minister L'tian.” Sel'ke broke in. “We all understand how very unpleasant this is for you especially. You do not approve of your daughter’s actions. I think we can all agree that this is something we understand. However... she is wolf now and has been since King Leonidas turned her. She understands her actions and obviously has accepted them if she chose Marshall Pusintin.”

L'tian met Sel'ke’s eyes. “You understand nothing!” He barked. “And my daughter did not choose that man!”

Pusintin chuckled from his chair across the room. “So I’m guessing that her purring like a kitten and begging me to fuck her harder was all an act?” He laughed.

L'tian maintained his position only by the grace of Andro’s hand on his arm and his own considerable willpower. He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled while gripping the side of the table.

OMEN THREE
THE WILDS
TWO HOURS FROM TARGET

“...So I’m guessing that her purring like a kitten and begging me to fuck her harder was all an act?”
He laughed.

“If ever I have the opportunity I will remove that putrid man’s balls and slow cook them over a fire while he watches... before I feed them back to him in tiny pieces.” Aricia growled viciously as they watched the transmission from Hadaria on the small portable holo disc.

“Only if I am the one to cut his balls off!” Dysea snarled just as angrily.

Cirith sat between them on the large couch in the lounge as they were conducting the final check of the weapons they would be taking with them. Hearing their words and for the first time in her life being able and skilled enough to sense the aura of another wolf, Cirith felt warmth cascade through her. Astonishingly, though she had never met For'mya before, she felt the same emotions surging through her for the golden haired elf Queen, she was just far better at concealing them because of her long years deep in High Coven space. Perhaps it was because she was now tied more deeply to the man and the women she had been destined for from the moment she entered this life. Tied to them in a way that made her blissfully happy and unable to really put into words the utter happiness she felt.

They were only two hours from their target, but the last seventeen hours had been the most divine of her entire life. Not only had she finally discovered what it felt like to be with a man, but a man larger than any she had ever imagined or dreamed of. A man whose powerful embrace could and did swallow her up in a cocoon of pleasure and love. She now knew why none of them could ever desire another man no matter what took place. Martin’s simple caress of her body had ignited fires that still smoldered within her. Fires that would forever burn only for him now. Yes... she was half wolf... really only one third wolf, but the last hours had brought that wolf within her surging forward with a vengeance. Now she fully understood why none of them did not question their love for For'mya or each other. The way his aura swirled around all of them was addicting. The moment he had nuzzled her behind her ear, all her attempts at trying to maintain her composure collapsed into oblivion. He had taken her with such ferocity and devotion that it stole her breath away. And even as he made her feel things she never imagined, she could feel Aricia and Dysea, equally as affected by his all consuming aura, covering any portion of her exposed body with soft butterfly kisses and nibbles of contentment. Cirith had been the center of attention for hours and even in the huge public gym, all of her inhibitions had dissolved into nothing during that first sizzling kiss. And what made it all so very enthralling is that Cirith knew it would only get better. Once they had For'mya back, once all of them were together once more, her new wolf instincts told her Martin would unleash his complete self to them. He would hold nothing back and that time together would be gloriously memorable. She knew Aricia and Dysea felt it just as well within him, and even as they too trembled at his touch, she knew they saw what would take place when For'mya was back within their embrace. And both of them quivered in anticipation.

Dysea came to her feet first, her hairstyle and attitude both changed. She had cut her hair short, barely touching her shoulders, and now it curled around her beautiful elven face in a deciding and deliciously enticing manner. Martin had been distraught when he first saw it for he loved the long hair of his mates and wives, but after the last few hours of running his hands through all their hair, Cirith doubted he would complain anymore. Dysea’s shorter hair gave him much easier access to the sensitive area behind her elven ears and this caused Dysea to be incredibly attentive in her actions with all of them.

“Come... *Nauta Melme* is meeting with the others.” She stated reaching first for Aricia and then her. “Let us help him put the finishing touches on our plans so that we can bring our *Kinsoaurgai* home to us.”

Cirith looked at them as they rose. “Is it... is it always like that?” She asked softly. “So intense and passionate and so...”

“Animalistic?” Aricia asked with a knowing smile.

Cirith appeared embarrassed. “I did not... I have never been with a man before Martin and I have nothing to compare it too.”

“Cirith... you don’t wish to...?” Dysea began to ask.

“*Phraktos* no Dysea!” Cirith exclaimed. “It’s just... I... I want to feel that all the time. What he did to me. To us. It was the most glorious feeling I have ever experienced and I want it to continue.”

Aricia and Dysea stepped closer to her. “Yes... it is always like that. Especially when all of us are together and we are in Phase. And we will experience it all of the time.” She said. “He is so befuddled by our auras when we are together that he does not know who to grab first. It is most amusing.”

Cirith laughed at that picture in her head as they took her hands. “You have come home Cirith Leonidas.” Dysea said softly. “You have come home to where you were always meant to be.”

Cirith nodded her head slowly. “Yes... I believe I have.”

“Martin is waiting.” Aricia said.

The three women didn’t hesitate and with several of *OMEN THREE’S* crew watching they made their way to the door of the lounge. A fast three minute walk and one elevator ride and they appeared in the ship’s cargo bay. Though designed for stealth and recon missions, all of the *OMEN* ships had room in their bays for two *STRIKERS*. Martin stood around the large table set up on the bay floor with Danny, T’lolt, Wayonn, Yuriko and several members of his Team. Torma, Isheeni and Iriral rested lightly on the deck taking part in the briefing as well. Martin turned when he caught their scents as the doors opened and he waited while they made their way across the bay to where he stood. The old Martin Leonidas would have simply smiled at their approach, nuzzling each of them quickly to acknowledge their presence. The new Martin would act nothing like that. He pulled all three of them to him in one large embrace and kissed each of them hard, his aura wrapping around them completely. Martin had already decided that from this day and moving forward he would no longer hold back. As he knew his son did, he would hold none of his aura back from his wives and mates, and he would love them every waking moment. The others watched as Aricia, Dysea and Cirith responded to his touch on them, soaking up the strength of his aura as their eyes closed in bliss.

As was usually the case and had been many years ago, it was Endith who broke into the moment with her humor. “Ah... excuse me... Skipper. We were talking about how to best kill these furry Kavalian bastards! Can we get back to that please?” She popped.

Martin turned back and smiled at the female elf who had flown his *STRIKER* for more than two decades. Endith was loyal to three things above all else. Martin, the Union and Ben and Tina in reverse order. She stood next to Tina, her long time lover and dearest friend, both of them now wives to Ben O’Connor for the least twenty-three years. Each of them had given him children, several whom were already full grown and serving in the fleet, the youngest two remaining with Ben at Dreamland.

“So we were.” He stated with a grin. He looked at his adopted daughter of over fifty decades and nodded. “Continue Yuriko.” He said.

There was always some confusion as to how Yuriko bore the name Leonidas and what her history was. Suffice to say, no one ever questioned her status, especially not since Andro, Denali and Resumar had practically destroyed a larger group of boys while they were growing up. Boys who had taken it upon themselves to berate and make fun of the “vampire whore” who was considered a sister to them. It had taken six adults to part the two groups, but not before seven of the dozen boys who had sided against the three brothers required several days in the infirmary recovering from various broken bones and other injuries. The brothers looked as if they had gone through a meat grinder as well, but they had come out victorious nonetheless. Since that day, no one had ever made the mistake of questioning how or why Yuriko was a member of the Leonidas family. They knew only that she was. Her history was wrapped in the shadows and only her family and husband knew all of it, and that is the way Yuriko wanted it.

“To catch my mothers up...” Yuriko said pointing to the images and maps spread across the large table and the holographic model of the Kavalian base. “We were talking of how we are going to breach the perimeter fence surrounding the entire base.”

Aricia, Dysea and Cirith moved closer to the table but staying within physical contact of each other and Martin. Aricia looked at the holo model of the base. “It is not a fence... it is a wall.” She stated.

Yuriko nodded. “Yes mother. A wall made up of simple granite and then reinforced with Duetronium steel braces.” She stated. “It is all that they could find on the planet and one of the purposes was to keep the base as low key as possible.”

“What’s it got inside Yuriko?” Danny asked.

They had worked together for several months all those years ago to rescue Sivana, and had joined forces several times over the course of the last years. Danny knew her Intel would be solid and as accurate as possible.

“Thermal and motion sensors from different probes have put the personnel of the base at just under two hundred.” She answered. “They...”

“Two hundred?” Wayonn asked with some shock in his voice. “We only have... we only have perhaps thirty that we can use Yuriko.” He looked at Martin. “Is this wise Martin?”

T'lolt nodded his head. “They are isolated and no doubt lax in their security measures. The base has been here for over a decade. They will not expect an attack to come.”

It was Kenny who broke the last layer of ice. “Damn straight... we got them outgunned and out manned. We is going to have so much fun! Just like the old days!”

HADARIA ARCH MINISTRY CHAMBER

“Marshall Pusintin!” Sel'ke snapped. “We do not need to have conduct such as that! It does not help the situation!”

Pusintin held his tongue and nodded slowly. “My apologies Chief Magistrate... but the elf is my mate now! There is nothing they can do about it. She chose this willingly and she has stated that very thing right here in this room. They need to get over it and let's move on.” He stated.

“I agree.” Sonla spoke. “We are only prolonging this when we argue. None of us disagree that the Kavalian actions were a bit over the top Minister L'tian... however the content of the treaty is sound and clear and therefore our ruling and recommendation remains the same.” He tapped the data pad bringing up the next item on the list he held. “It is my understanding that the Kavalian Federation has agreed to drop the second and third Points of Contention in the auspice of peace. Point Four however they will not drop. Athani'Puut, Jalersi'Puut, Karun'Puut and Pian'Nruarani are all recognized war criminals and wanted for high treason. The Kavalian Federation Imperium has put the highest priority on finding them and bringing them to justice. Therefore our ruling and recommendation is that a Kavalian detachment of Puma Bane soldiers, Prefect Keleru's personal bodyguards, be allowed to land on Earth and conduct an unhindered investigation of their whereabouts.” Sonla spoke. “They will be granted access to all of the Leonidas's homes and places of residence on Earth, as well as all but the most sensitive military bases to conduct their search. There is enough evidence to support the fact that the Union is at the very least helping these individuals in some way and to further the cause of peace, this needs to end.” Sonla looked at L'tian and Andro. “Also... to facilitate the transfer of Retta and Calyb to the custody of their Aunt, a detachment of the Galactic Court Militia will accompany the Puma Bane detachment and make the arrangements for the children.”

L'tian's eyes were wide at this. “That is an outrage!” He almost shouted. “You expect us to actually allow...”

Androcles squeezed his arm further and shook his head. He turned to look at Sonla. “In order to show that we, as a people, follow our own laws I will allow this.” He spoke. “They will however be escorted wherever they go. No matter where it is.”

Toren came to his feet. “That is not acceptable to us your honors!” He barked. “We want full and unfettered access! We are looking for criminals and we do not need an escort to do that no matter where we go.”

Andro looked at the man. “The escort is to keep your men alive moron.” Andro snarled. “Or do you think they will be completely and utterly safe walking the streets of the city where you butchered my father and not have the citizens of the Union give them no trouble.”

“Our men are capable of taking care of themselves!” Toren continued.

Andro chuckled. “Against an entire planet? All by themselves? They must be supermen then. You will do it my way or you can go kiss my ass!”

“Will you order your brother to hand over Athani'Puut?” Toren asked harshly.

“My brother will do what he will to protect his wife and mate.” Andro said in reply. “I have no intention of ordering him to hand over Athani Leonidas to you or to anyone. If they attempt to take his mate from him then they will undoubtedly die. I'm not going to help you in anyway outside of what this Court *recommends*.”

Andro turned to look at Sonla the inflection in his voice obvious. “Even though that is a gross misuse and completely unethical order to begin with.”

“Then why agree to it Prince Androcles?” Kagan asked.

“Because I care about my people and the Union and I will not risk war over something so trivial.” Andro said. “Enough of my people have died at the hands of these fools... I will risk no more.”

Sonla looked at Toren and Pusintin. “Will the Kavalian Federation agree to these adjusted terms?” He asked.

Toren looked at Pusintin who only nodded his head slowly while staring at Andro. “We will agree under protest.” He announced.

Sonla nodded. “Very well... now... as to the Second Action Point brought forth by the Kavalian Federation. Minister L'tian... have you had an opportunity to speak with the Elven First Minister and the ranking members of the Elven Parliament?”

L'tian nodded his head. “I have.”

“Will the elven government and its people then conform to their Queen’s orders?” Sel'ke asked.

“We are conforming to our Queen’s orders Chief Magistrate.” L'tian answered. He lifted the data pad. “Queen Dysea’s orders were very explicit.”

Sel'ke blinked several times. “Excuse me Minister L'tian... we are referring to Queen For'mya.”

L'tian walked forward and placed the data pad on the table in front of him. “You should probably review this Chief Magistrate.” He spoke. “All of you should as a matter of fact.” He turned back to look at Toren and Pusintin who was now leaning forward in his chair. “By Royal Order and Seal, signed and witnessed by the Lycavorian Union Security and Defense Council and the Elven Parliamentary Security Committee twenty-three years, three months and nineteen days ago, Queen For'mya Leonidas no longer has the authority to issue orders or directives. The moment it was realized that she had been taken prisoner, all of her authority and power reverted to her sons Arrarn and Bryon Leonidas by virtue of this very Writ of Annulment.” L'tian smiled a devious smile as he stared at the two men. “Laustinos should have dug deeper.” He snarled.

Toren came to his feet as if shot out of a gun. “The Kavalian Federation Protests this!” He screamed as L'tian returned to his chair and sat down next to Androcles as an uproar began in the gallery with the Netnews crews among those shouting questions, while the Hadarians in the gallery, mainly Buonau supporters were hurling epitaphs at the backs of Andro and L'tian.

Toren moved from the table while Pusintin remained seated, the look of anger on his face priceless to L'tian. “Magistrates... this is clearly an attempt to subvert the authority of Queen For'mya and Marshall Pusintin! This can not be allowed to stand!”

Sel'ke looked up from the pad and met L'tian’s eyes. “Minister L'tian... do you expect us to accept this document a legitimate?” He asked sternly.

L'tian stood back up. “You have no choice in the matter Chief Magistrate Sel'ke.” He spoke. “It is legitimate and I can produce each and every Elven Minister and Union Senator who signed and witnessed that document. Unless you care to declare that this Galactic Court can now overrule the dictates of individual governments then all of my daughter’s power and authority now rests with her two sons. And I can assure you, neither Arrarn or Bryon will be relinquishing that authority anytime soon.”

“She is not a prisoner by her own words in front of this body!” Toren screamed looking at him. “You heard her yourself! All of you did!”

L'tian nodded. “Yes we did. However before your Marshall Pusintin took advantage of the condition my daughter was in... she was a prisoner. She was taken from Sparta and Earth as a prisoner. It is only after you took her that you discovered what was happening within her and then took advantage of that. This order went into effect the moment your people seized her against her will, or will you now try and tell us she left her family and those she loves because of some secret affair she was having with King Leonidas’s brother? Do not take me for a fool boy...” L'tian growled at Toren. “I have been around the universe and back more times than you have years in your life!”

“Minister L'tian... you...” Sonla began to speak.

“This order was put in place shortly after my daughter became a recognized Queen of the Lycavorian Union and the Elven people. And if I am not mistaken, the Lycavorian people as a whole rejoiced on this day! Seven trillion elves across the Union rejoiced as a whole. Not even King Leonidas knew immediately of this

order; he found out after it was done. It is something that For'mya and Dysea did themselves to secure the safety and future of the elven people as a whole.” L'tian snapped. “The elven people will not abide anything else! None of them will return as you say my daughter ordered! None of them will leave the Union fleet and we will certainly not throw our Lycavorian brothers and sisters to the hounds because you use this court body as your lackeys and seem to think you can acquire whatever you wish from them.”

Toren turned back to Sel'ke. “Chief Magistrate! Magistrates! You are not going to allow this to stand are you?” He gasped.

Sel'ke handed the data pad to Sonla. “What choice do we have?” He asked sternly as he glared at L'tian. “The Galactic Court, by our very Charter, can not interfere in the internal workings of any government.”

“You can overrule this order!” Toren exclaimed loudly. “Declare it null and void! This is nothing more than an attempt to block the legal orders of the elf For'mya!”

“We can not.” Sel'ke spoke turning his eyes to him. “We do not have the authority to void any internal government decision. This... this document; it is signed by over a hundred ranking members of both the Elven Parliament and the Union Senate. We do not have the authority to override their decisions.”

Toren whirled to face L'tian and Andro. “How do we know you will even adhere to what you have told us this day?” He screamed. “How do we know you will not go back on your word to this court? Will you use trickery to brush aside the claim by Marshall Pusintin and the elf For'mya in regards to the child she carries?” Toren turned back to Sel'ke. “That child has a legitimate claim to the Union throne based on his bloodline Chief Magistrate! How do we know they will honor their agreements?”

Sel'ke looked at Andro. “The Ambassador has a point Prince Androcles.” Sel'ke spoke. “Based on what you have done here... how does this body know you will honor your spoken word and our rulings?”

Andro stood up. “I will honor the claim of my uncle and the Union Senate will hear his petition in regards to the child my mother carries and...”

“She is no longer your mother!” Kalis screamed coming to his feet. “She was never your mother! You have no blood of hers within you!”

Andro turned his head to look at Kalis. “She has always been my mother and she will always remain my mother. Just as all of my mothers will. Blood is not the only thing that makes a family! Blood is not the only thing that forges a bond of parent to child.” Andro growled at him. “Unlike you cousin... I will never abandon my mother, any of my mothers, for actions she or they may or may not have committed! Willingly or otherwise. That is something you have already done with your own mother and you disgust me for that action!”

Kalis let out a roar of feral anger and flung himself across the distance at Andro. Three things happened in that instant. Andro's left arm came up and in silver/white burst of light his Shi Viska announced its presence to the entire chamber and launched from his arm. One entire wall of the Arch Ministry Chamber caved inward, granite and metal cascading down to crash to the floor, scattering Kavalian and Hadarian security forces left and right even though no piece of the falling rubble came anywhere close to them. It almost appeared as if the rubble was being directed safely to the floor by some unseen hand. As the dust spiraled outward from the wall, the distinct trumpet of three armored dragons sounded and Elynth, Anthar and Majeir smashed their way into the chamber. Screams of frightened Hadarians filled the chamber as well now as suddenly, and in impressive fashion to say the least, nearly two hundred *Durcunusaan* and Elite Drow soldiers under the command of Am'uur and Bren began appearing all over the chamber with their weapons out, their PSGs deactivating all at the same time. All of them wore the glimmering Dragon Armor and with the exception of the now massive hole in the side of the chamber, they began securing the doorways in to the Ministry Chamber and subduing the few Hadarian and Kavalian security troops that had been inside.

Kalis had frozen in his spot, the extended blades from the Shi Viska only millimeters from his eyes. Pusintin had moved to try and save his son, and now was equally frozen in his spot as he stared at the Shi Viska humming unnaturally in the air. There was no way with the power dampeners in place that he should have been able to call his Shi Viska Pusintin thought to himself. Andro stepped up to them quickly, his azure eyes fully changed and his fangs fully extended as Carisia and Lu'ria appeared as if out of nowhere in full armor and holding weapons next to him. Lu'ria's eyes and fangs had also changed and were brilliantly noticeable even under the near full faced helmet she wore. Carisia's cobalt blue vampire eyes were wide and her vampiric fangs were ready to rip out the throat of anyone who dared challenge her as another three trumpets from the armored dragons echoed through the chamber.

Andro leaned close to Kalis's face, his Shi Viska humming away next to his shoulder. "You and I cousin... one day we will have a reckoning. For pulsing my beloved *anome* with your pitiful aura, for the lewd looks you gave to her, for calling my *Enylarcopri* a whore and for everything else you have done to facilitate what has happened. We will have a reckoning... and I will place your head on my *Nehtes* and leave it for all to see. At least your brother died with honor and went down fighting. You are nothing but scum!" He hissed savagely.

"You'll die boy!" Pusintin growled at him. "You'll die for my son! You'll die for this!"

"Then we are even, for you have taken my father and countless others." Andro said. "But no one will die this day." Andro spoke turning to look at him.

"I have a thousand ships that can be here before you get off this planet!" Pusintin snapped at him. "I have hundreds of thousands men on this planet that..."

"You will call them off." Andro told him calmly.

"What? Are you crazy?" Pusintin gasped. "After what you have done?"

"I have done nothing." Andro spoke. "Not yet." He looked at his Shi Viska next to his shoulder. "Did you honestly believe your power dampeners could keep me from calling my Shi Viska Uncle? That may work with the majority of Lycavorians... but not with me. I am my father's son and you know nothing of me or what I am capable of. You will call off your men and ships now."

"Why should I?" Pusintin snapped.

"If you do not... you will die here. Your son will die here. Everyone in this chamber will die here. I am not afraid to die uncle. I will gladly die for my mother. For my people, from the common and honored citizen who operate their shops daily to the men and women who help to shape our laws and future. Unlike you Uncle, you who deserted your people when they needed you most, I will never abandon my people." Andro spoke. "But nothing you hope to gain will bear fruit and only war will follow if you do not call off your ships and men." Though Pusintin and Kalis didn't take notice, Andro certainly did. The Netnews team with far more courage than brains was only six meters away filming everything and sending it out live over the Netnews.

"We could squash you boy!" Pusintin barked at him.

Andro smiled... a vicious smile considering his dual fangs were fully extended and not at all pleasant to look at. "Perhaps you could... but you will not be alive to witness it." Androcles moved closer. "I do not wish war... but if you do not call off your forces moving here then that is what we will have and your dreams of ruling the Union will fade into the memory of your foul life. Or do you wish the entire universe to know that you do not truly wish for peace... only domination. Only control of all of them." Andro's eyes darted to the left and back again and he saw Pusintin finally take notice of the Netnews crew recording it all.

"How do... how do I know you will keep your word?" Pusintin stammered.

"Unlike you Uncle... my father taught his sons honor." Andro answered. "I will be more than happy to allow the people of the Union to make the decision on whether you should rule. And do not think me and them so stupid as to not know who will rule in place of any child you have with my mother. It is you who will rule Uncle. I know that. Any common person will know that. It will be up to them to decide on what they want. You can send your advisors or lackeys; as many as you like. They can witness the rule of law as it should be. By the will of the people." Andro leaned closer. "Make your decision quickly Uncle, for I grow tired of your foul smell and the stink of your son and my Shi Viska yearns for blood."

"Menot!" Pusintin barked, turning his head slowly to see Menot standing three meters away, his weapon in his hand and surrounded by three Drow warriors looking ever ready to end his life. "Stand them down!"

"Marshall... the call has gone out!" Menot shouted. "Our men will be here in moments!"

"Stand them down damn it!" Pusintin snarled. "There will... there will be no battle here today! We must show the universe that... that we are followers of laws as well!"

Andro smiled knowing that the Netnews crew recorded that. He was also smart enough to know that no one would believe him in the least. Andro turned his head and saw Menot reach for the COM unit on his belt, the three Drow moving even closer and shoving their weapons into his face. He nodded to Lu'ria. "*Ori'gato ukta belbau l'quarth ussta ilythiiri tessai.*" He told her in the ancient vampire and Drow language. (Let him give the order my Drow Blossom.)

"*Ori'gato ukta lar.*" Lu'ria ordered the Drow instantly. (Let him make the call.)

Andro turned back to his uncle and lifted his left arm until it was just underneath the Shi Viska. Almost immediately it lowered to reattach itself to the bridle on his arm and then it simply vanished into Flatspace. Andro stepped back from Pusintin and Kalis, suddenly noticing that the chamber had become quiet and almost everyone was looking in their direction. No one moved as Elynth maneuvered her armored body up behind her Bonded Brother and lowered her snout to touch his shoulder. Andro reached up with that left hand and pressed it flat to the armor on her muzzle.

Andro? She spoke softly.

“We will be leaving now sister.” He spoke looking up at her golden eyes. He turned his head and watched Sel’ke and the other Magistrates climb to their feet as the *Durcunusaan* and the Drow stepped back from them slightly, prepared for any trickery. “The Lycavorian Union will honor the agreement we have made here today Chief Magistrate. Send your people and you will see. But never think that your fool dictates will begin to govern my people. You are not what my father meant for you to be when he formed your body and your actions this day only prove to all that you wish for more than what is due you. The people of the Union will decide any expectations my uncle or any child of his will have in determining the path they will follow into the future. Not you and the others on your fraudulent body and most certainly *NOT* the Kavalian Federation.”

Sel’ke managed to move forward and glare at him from five meters away. “This action will not be forgotten Prince Androcles!” He growled. “You will not embarrass this body by doing this! It is an affront to all we represent! You will pay for this action today!”

“You represent nothing as far as I am concerned.” Andro snarled back. “And remember this Chief Magistrate... I am not my father and I did not endorse the Galactic Court once you came into being. You have already shown that you can be influenced by outside forces by dismissing the evidence presented by my grandfather. Know this now... no one will take Retta and Calyb from their family! Our family! No one! The ones who try will die as they did before! You hold no sway over me Chief Magistrate... and I will allow the other things spoken of today for that is for our people to decide... but my siblings are not pieces of meat to be bartered for by others.” He glanced at Buonau before turning back to Sel’ke. “Any attempt to take them by the Hadarians or your ridiculous Galactic Court Militia as you call them now... and I will come for you and every member of your body as well as that sick perverted *upae* Buonau! And you will die by my hand! You should remember that as you go forward today.”

“Is that a threat?” Sel’ke almost shouted.

Androcles smiled. “That is a promise.” He answered. “And I always keep my promises Chief Magistrate. Ask the Icalro Alliance if you have any question as to that.” He lifted his right wrist. “*KertaGai?*” He spoke into the COM.

“We are here *Saradasaar*.” Sadi’s voice replied and it was easy enough to tell she was within a ship of some sort.

“Combat landing outside the new entrance to this building if you would *KertaGai*.” He told her. “Our business here is done and we will be going home.”

“Thirty seconds.” Sadi replied.

Andro looked back at his uncle. “Our people have left the Lycavorian Embassy. I will not leave them to suffer upon this planet.” He dropped the data pad to the floor at his uncle’s feet. “That is the channel for my grandfather Panos. He is Deputy Prime Minister now and he knows you well Uncle. Contact his office when you are ready to send your people. Just don’t wait until too long. My mother may be your mate now Uncle, it is a pity I failed in my task of killing her, but she will never love you! And knowing what she does now... she will never submit to you again.”

“Then she will die!” Pusintin snarled.

“She will die with honor and pride then... her betrayal forgotten and forgiven as if it never existed. Yours will never be forgotten or forgiven Uncle.” Andro answered. He looked at Sel’ke. “As I said... we will honor the agreements made today.” He turned back to Pusintin and Kalis.

It happened without warning and Kalis’s legs buckled underneath him when Andro’s forehead smashed into his face, crushing his nose and sending blood showering across his face. He cried out in savage pain and dropped to his knees holding his hands over his misshapen nose as Andro drew back, several drops of blood on his cheeks.

“That is for pulsing my *anome* and calling my *Enylarcopri* a whore dear cousin Kalis!” Andro snarled at him. “Both of them are superior to you and always will be. In every way. Our day will come cousin... our day will come.” Andro stepped back. “Grandfather... follow Majeir and Anthar out with the *Durcunusaan!*”

“Andro...” L'tian began.

“No... we are leaving and you will go first. I don't trust the fools in this room to not attempt something stupid.” He replied. “Just in case.” They heard the roar and throaty whine of the *STRIKER* Mark II landing outside and Anthar moved up close to L'tian as he began to make his way to the opening in the wall. Majeir followed close behind, her eyes sweeping the crowd for any threats that she could burn.

“Andro... let's go!” Carisia prodded as she took his arm.

“This isn't over boy!” Pusintin hissed.

Andro nodded. “Of that I have no doubt.” He answered. “I do have one question though Uncle. There is an old Earth expression Uncle... Death rides a pale horse. How does it feel to be a walking around dead man?”

Pusintin chuckled. “Do I look dead to you boy?” He laughed.

Andro grinned. “Oh... you are a dead man Uncle.” Andro spoke. “The only difference I see is that you are a walking around dead man, for death's pale horse has not come for you just yet. He will Uncle. He has marked you and he will come for you, so you are already a dead man. It just hasn't caught up with your body and your brain yet.”

“We'll see boy!” Pusintin snarled. “We'll see.”

“No... I won't see it.” Androcles answered him. “I am not the mechanism of your death Uncle. No... the instrument of your death is something far more devastating and pitiless. And that death was decided and set in motion the moment you laid your polluted hands upon my mother and took her dignity from her by making her your mate against her will.” Andro allowed Carisia and Lu'ria to begin to pull him away. “Enjoy the life you have left to you Uncle, for your death will be far more horrific than anything you could possibly imagine.”

Pusintin was silent as he watched Andro turn and follow the others out of the gaping hole in the side of the building, including the Netnews crew that had recorded everything. The two human men moved quickly to keep up with the soldiers and dragons, following them the short hundred meters to where the *STRIKER Mark II* was idling at full power, its ramp down. As they moved to climb the ramp, Bren's hand forcefully thumped into the chest of the reporter.

“Where do you think you are going?” He growled. “Back up away from us!”

“Wait!” The Netnews reporter pleaded. “We got it all! We recorded all of it! If you leave us here they'll kill us or throw us in prison! You have to take us!”

“We don't have to do anything Netnews scum!” Bren growled. “Be gone from here or be incinerated by our engines... I don't care which!”

“NO!” The man shouted. “Please! Prince Androcles! Prince Androcles!” He saw Andro turn from where he was moving up the ramp between Carisia and Lu'ria and lay those eyes upon him. “Please Milord... we... they will kill us!”

Andro whispered something to Carisia and Lu'ria and they continued up the ramp. He moved down to stand next to Bren. “What is it you wish?” He asked.

“You saw us Milord.” The man pleaded. “If you leave us here the Kavalians will kill us for what we recorded.”

“Why do you care what the Kavalians are doing?” Andro asked him. “You are Netnews scum. Why did you come here... you would be happy to see my family fall, just as you were my father!”

The man stepped closer to Andro his own eyes ablaze with anger. “My mother worked in the Senate Building!” He screamed at the Prince of the Union. “My wife's brother worked in that building! I volunteered to come here because I want them to pay for what they have done!”

Andro stared at him for a long few seconds and then held out his hand for the man. “Then come quickly. We need to leave fast before the Kavalians change their minds. There is no telling what they may decide to do.”

Bren reached out and helped the camera drone operator onto the ramp just as it began to rise to close. Whatever else would happen in the future, this day in history would mark the unheralded arrival of Androcles Leonidas onto the Galactic scene in a way that would never be repeated again.

Which would be a good thing in most historians remarks in the future.

KAVALIAN FLAGSHIP
PRIDE OF PUMAS

“...as if it never existed.” Andro’s voice filled her being and For'mya reached out to touch the monitor.

“Androcles.” For'mya whispered softly, easily catching the inflection of his deep voice in those words because she was no longer sunken in despair and hopelessness. That had ceased the moment her beautiful children had spoken to her from within. “My beautiful son.”

You see mother! Eirene broke into her thoughts. *Do you see?*

For'mya nodded her head slowly as the tears fell and her hands dropped to her swollen abdomen. “Yes.” She whispered again.

Our brother will never forsake you! Fedor called out. *Forsake us! Our family would never do such a thing mother! We must... we must remain strong. We have to endure this to stay alive and be with them.*

Yes. Strong. They will come for us. Eirene said. *The father of our hearts will come for us. For you mother. For you. Now we need to make sure that this man... this Kavalian is actually a friend to us.*

“Yes.” For'mya spoke softly.

For'mya turned when she smelled Muton come back into the main infirmary from the side room. He was fumbling with some sort of instrument and he looked up at her as he began to talk. “I think this should do what you ask but I don’t know what it is I’m supposed to be looking for. It...” He stopped when he saw her tears and moved closer. “What is wrong?” He asked.

For'mya knew she could not defeat a fully grown Kavalian in her condition. Had she not been pregnant and had this inhibitor not been blocking her Mindvoice abilities somehow, Muton would not have stood a real chance against her. Times were different now and For'mya had to act differently to compensate in other ways for her deficiencies at the moment.

“Muton... I need... I need to know something.” For'mya asked him.

He stepped right up to her. “What is wrong?” He asked with a touch of worry in his voice. “The children?”

“I need you to prove to me that I can trust you.” For'mya said. “That you are who you say you are.”

“For'mya... I have already told you.” Muton said quickly. “There is no way I can help you to escape without jeopardizing all I am trying to protect. If I help you they will begin to investigate my past and sooner or later they will discover that I am not who I say I am. That I protect others who they consider a threat. I’m sorry but...”

“I need you to answer a question.” For'mya interrupted him.

“A question?” Muton asked her. “What question?”

“A question that only you will know the answer to.” For'mya told him softly. “A question that would have been passed down to you through your memories if what you have told me is true.”

“Saving your life and the life of your children isn’t enough proof?” Muton asked her. “I told you what Pusintin will do if he discovers you are carrying twins.”

For'mya stepped closer to him. “Yes... you did.” She stated. “And given his tactics in the past concerning me... it is also very likely he would place you in a position to help me just as you have. To gain my confidence and trust.”

Muton stepped back from her and placed the instrument he had been holding on the bed next to him. He crossed his arms over his broad chest, the fur on his face hiding any real display or expression of emotion that For'mya could read. He nodded his head slowly. “I suppose I owe you that.” He stated. “And I understand it. You could just have easily asked me yesterday while we were talking.”

For'mya shook her head. “Things have... things have changed since yesterday.” She stated.

“Changed how?” Muton asked.

“I will tell you... but first my question to you.” For'mya spoke.

Muton exhaled heavily. “Very well.” He said with some exasperation.

For'mya took a deep breath then. "If you are who you say you are... and you have the memories of all those that came before you... I need you to tell me how Arzoal died. I need you to tell me how she died."

"Why do you need to know this For'mya?" Muton asked. "I could tell you anything and you would not know the truth."

For'mya shook her head. "But I would Muton." She told him. "I would know the truth."

"How?" Muton demanded.

"Answer my question and I will tell you everything." For'mya answered.

Muton turned away from her and sighed heavily. "This information... it is one of the darkest moments of time in my ancestors history For'mya." He said. "There are only seven of us left who have this knowledge... not including Arzoal. It is guarded and taboo to even speak of it. How could you possibly know what I tell you will be the truth?" He asked again turning back to face her.

"I have this knowledge now." For'mya said. "And I will share with you how if you will only answer the question."

"A blade was thrust into her chest and it nicked her heart." Muton answered slowly. "She was killed by another Pralor... a man whose name was stricken from our history because of what he had done. His name was..."

"Artre." For'mya said softly.

Muton perked up immediately and he stepped closer to her. "How do you know that?" He almost shouted. "How..."

"Finish answering my question." For'mya told him calmly. "How do you know what Arzoal did?"

"Because my great grandmother is the one who found her body!" Muton snarled. "She was the one who discovered her body and realized what Arzoal had done by transferring her consciousness into the egg of a dragon! No one even knows if she still lives!" He reached out and gripped her arms as For'mya's eyes closed and relief washed through her. "Now tell me... how do you know this?" He demanded.

For'mya's dark eyes opened again and she reached up to take his fur covered hands in hers. Gently she lowered them and laid them flat on her abdomen. "They told me." She said softly.

Muton almost drew his hands away as if shocked with electricity. To touch her in such a way was not something he would do. He needed For'mya's help and her ordeal had torn at his heart. He needed her to trust him. "For'mya what...?"

For'mya held his wrists with surprising strength, keeping his large palms on her abdomen. "Fedor... Eirene... say hello to Muton."

Muton's eyes grew wide in disbelief when he felt the two very prominent kicks from within her womb and then he did draw his hands away like he had been burned. He looked up at her face and saw a brightness in her eyes that had not been there yesterday. A brightness that was allowing her intelligence and determination to shine through. "What...?"

For'mya smiled at him. "My... my children Muton." She said. "I... I am speaking with them even now. I can hear their voices in my head and I can speak with them."

Muton stared at her wide eyed. "For'mya I am Kavalian." He told her. "I do not have the ability to Mindvoice! I..."

"You are the blood descendant of Pralors Muton." For'mya told him. "Only a Pralor with intimate knowledge of their ways and their past could tell me what you have told me these last hours."

"How do you know I am telling you the truth?" Muton asked her.

"My children told me." For'mya said.

"For'mya, it's not that I don't believe you think this, but how exactly would your children be able to tell you this?" Muton spoke. "They have not even been born yet. How..." He stopped talking and stared at her his eyes growing wider by the second.

For'mya nodded slowly as she saw the light of recognition flood his features. "Yes... yes Muton. You... you said it yourself. You did not think Androcles could be sloppy. He wasn't Muton. He isn't. He did exactly what he wanted to do. He touched my children when he bit me. He granted them awareness."

"For'mya... that is not possible." Muton spoke. "That... how? Androcles...!"

"Androcles was born fully aware Muton." For'mya explained. "It is not something that many outside our family know, but he bonded with Elynth while still within Aricia's womb. We have never been able to

understand why this happened; only that it had something to do with the emotional state of Martin and Aricia when he was conceived. He was only six months along then and he became fully aware of all around him. His parents memories, his Bonded sister's memories and her... her grandmother's memories. At least to some extent." She told him.

Muton gazed at her. "Are you saying... are you saying that the dragon beast Androcles is bound to is Arzoal's granddaughter?"

For'mya nodded her head quickly. "Arzoal lives Muton. You have held to the belief that she lives by the tenor of your words and how you choose to speak them. You know this within you. Almost all of our children are bonded to her grandchildren. Muton... I am bound to one of her grandchildren. Aurith is my Bonded sister! How do you not know these things?"

Muton shook his head and turned from her. "The last memories my great-grandmother had of her were when they left Elear and set out across the stars with many dragons to find a new world. She had been made the Dragon Elder Mother by then but she never saw her again after that." Muton turned back to her. "The surviving Pralors all thought she had died in the ensuing years, especially after we heard of the war on the planet she took the remaining dragons too. I only... I only assumed she still lived because of the tenacity of dragons and her own indomitable will to survive. You know of the Kavalian fear of dragons, aside from Pusintin's fool attempt to gain control of Lisisa Leonidas's dragon, no one among the Kavalians studies them. All we know is that they have some sort of caste system and that they are intelligent. Not the mindless beasts Keleru and Pusintin believe them to be. Arzoal... she does still live then?" He gasped.

For'mya nodded her head. "Yes. She is the Dragon Elder Mother still. The senior and most powerful of the dragons."

"For'mya... how do your unborn children know what I have told you is the truth?" Muton asked her.

"I do not know all of it... even they do not." For'mya said. "When Andro touched them... he passed memories to them. He awakened their minds. Among these memories was a time recently when he spoke with Arzoal and she told him these things. Andro was not able to fully complete the process because of Arrarn's reaction but he gave them enough to wake them. He has spoken to them Muton."

Muton's eyes grew wide. "Spoken to them? How?"

"Within Mindvoice. Very early this morning." For'mya answered. "They in turn touched me from within. I can... I can hear them in my mind but I can't speak with them with my mind because of something Pusintin has implanted into me. An inhibitor of some sort. It is why I can not feel any of them and it is why I thought they had... why I thought they had forsaken me." For'mya reached out and took his hands. "Help me Muton." She said. "Help me and I will help you."

"Helping you to escape would be a death sentence for both of us and all I am trying to protect For'mya. I have told you this!" Muton exclaimed. "I must find a way to fulfill my word to them because I am running out of time!"

"And what are you protecting Muton?" She asked. "You may be Kavalian but you are not like the others. You are nothing like them or you would never have helped me to begin with. Why are you running out of time? What do you protect? Please... speak to me Muton!"

"For'mya... I have Pralor blood within me." He told her urgently. "Unlike the elves and Lycavorians and vampires, Kavalians can live for many thousands of years but they are not immortal. I am over eleven thousand years old For'mya! I have nearly reached the end of the life expectancy of a Kavalian. Hell... I have gone beyond it! Many think me a wonder because I have lived this long! And they do not know I will live for far longer! Soon that wonder will turn to suspicion and then everything will fall apart. You know as well as I how Kavalians deal with suspicion."

"What aren't you telling me Muton?" For'mya asked.

He met her eyes evenly. "There are thirteen like me For'mya." He told her. "We are Kavalians with Pralor blood, with Pralor memories and skills... minus the ability to Mindvoice of course because that is not something that Kavalians can naturally do. Pralor Warriors if you will. We are spread across the Kavalian empire and we have only two goals. To protect those like us and to find a way to help our people."

"Kavalians?" For'mya asked.

Muton shook his head. "We may be Kavalian... but they are not our people." He told her turning away to look out the view window. "It is complicated For'mya, but it is one of the main reasons I have gently prodded

Pusintin to try and obtain Hadarian assistance through the years. Of all of us, I have obtained the most senior position within the Kavalian system and the others defer to me.”

“Why... why would you need Hadarian help?” For'mya asked. “You know very well what would happen if Hadarian Healers came into Kavalian space. The majority of them are female. They would be brutalized, possibly raped and beaten! *Melyanna* was right in always refusing them.” For'mya stared at his broad back for only a moment before reaching for his arm and taking it. “Muton look at me!” For'mya gasped waiting until his gaze turned to her. “I have been taken from my family! The man I loved has been... he was killed before my eyes! We who rely so much on Mindvoice... not being able to feel them... it is like an emptiness that can not be filled! You see what Pusintin has done to me... forced himself upon me! But the life he has created within me... I will not allow him to use that life as a tool! They are my children! Help me! Help me and I will help you! Tell me who you are protecting!”

Muton turned slowly and looked at her. “I am protecting two thousand men, women and children For'mya. Descendants of Pralors just like me. We are Kavalian yes, but we follow the call of our Pralor blood. Keleru thought us some religious cult millennia ago and he tried to wipe us out. We survived however, and our numbers have grown through the years. My great-grandmother was among those pure Pralors who discovered a new world for themselves and the dragons when they left Elear as I told you. I don't know how it happened, but hundreds of other Pralors ended up there as well. Her memories are vague as to why, but I believe they were refugees of some sort. They planet they were on is well hidden within a binary star cluster and they were safe from whatever caused the others to flee. I don't know what that was for she did not know. Years after these other Pralors arrived they made the decision to send a hand picked group of volunteers back here into the Alpha Quadrant. Part of their mission was to discover what had become of Arzoal and the other dragons, as well as try and make contact with the descendants of Sumar but the other part was to be placed among the Kavalian people. My grandmother and others felt guilt for what they had done, abandoning them on Cabelir so long ago and they wanted to try and make amends. She was among those who was on the mission. When they arrived on Cabelir they saw how it was, the violence and treatment of others that the Kavalian people had acquired. Those who came with her remained in hiding and made the decision to become part of the Kavalian people just as they realized Sumar had done with the Lycavorian people. They thought they could do the same. Only my grandmother and others did not bestow all of their abilities to their children. They refused to allow them to learn to Mindvoice and that is why none of us have this ability. My grandmother and others considered it too risky given their violent nature.” Muton moved away from her to the view window.

“My grandmother was among those that Keleru had executed millennia ago.” He spoke softly. “My mother and father among them. I alone escaped. I was twenty-seven years old then For'mya. In my last conversation with her I told her that our interference, Pralor interference, in the natural evolution of nature and events was the cause for many of the woes in our history, no matter that we tried to do what was best and good for everyone.” He turned back around to face her. “She only nodded her head and told me it was up to me and others to try and change that. I have spent the last ten thousand years trying to do just that by my actions. Small at first... then as I rose within the ranks of the Kavalians more. I had to act as they do, talk as they do, even though it wounds my heart to do so. I had to wait nearly seven thousand years before I found a wife who would not think me suspicious or odd and turn me into Keleru's Puma Bane thugs. She was one of the first that Keleru and his sick scientists tried to alter with biogenic treatments, and while it worked, she was considered an outcast by her Pride. Tossed aside like so much garbage. I took her as my wife and now she and my three sons are what I live for. Those like me are what we all live for. To do anything that would put them at risk...” He shook his head. “I'm sorry... I can not. The one hope we had was to find the ship your son now controls and use it to return to our true people.”

“You... you knew its location?” She gasped.

Muton shook his head slowly. “No. We suspected it existed... just as we suspected the old woman Demahra was not what she wanted everyone to believe. Now that opportunity is lost to us. I must find another way now and quickly... before they realized I am not what they think I am.”

For'mya stepped closer to him. “Muton... Resumar is not going to destroy the ship.” She said.

Muton looked at her with wide eyes. “What? Why else would he go there? Your... your true mate would never have allowed the High Coven or the Kavalian Empire to discover that ship! Why...”

“As you no doubt know from experience... our children do not always do what we ask of them.” For'mya said. “Trust me when I say, Androcles, Resumar and his brother Denali are the worse offenders in that regard. Some of the images Andro passed to Eirene and Fedor were from Resumar and this ship. He is not going to destroy it. I... I do not know what he intends... but he will not destroy it as his father wants.”

Muton's eyes grew even larger and he reached up and gripped her arms. “As his father *wants*?” He hissed.

For'mya stammered for a moment. “I... I misspoke... I... I just miss him and...”

“You did not misspeak!” Muton exclaimed. “I have seen you on the Netnews giving words to others. You do not misspeak! You are too intelligent... too refined for that! None of your fellow Queens and lovers ever misspeak! Are you telling me; of course! It has to be! That is why the brightness has returned to your eyes! Part of it may be your children as you say, but he lives doesn't he? He lives!” For'mya remained silent and Muton squeezed her arms. “Tell me For'mya. If you are to ever trust me... as I have trusted you with my past... if we are ever to truly trust one another you must tell me! Does Martin Leonidas still live?”

One word would seal her fate she knew. One word would either condemn her or give her hope for herself and for her unborn children.

Never fear the unknown mother. Eirene and Fedor's voices echoed in unison within the corridors of her mind.

You may not be able to Mindvoice yet again mother... but your skills remain. Eirene spoke. *Use them now. It is why our brothers and sisters, the mothers of our hearts, it is why the father of our hearts has such love and faith in you.*

You are still you mother. Fedor spoke now. *You are still you.*

Of course she is Fedor. Eirene exclaimed. *That is so silly to say!*

It is not silly!

For'mya couldn't help but chuckle at their exchange for they sounded so much like Andro and Eliani and the others as they grew and she saw the befuddled look on Muton's face. She placed her hands on his arms gently and nodded.

“Yes Muton.” She said in a whisper. “He still lives.”

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN

“... Hasn't left her side since it happened.” Anja spoke softly as she sat next to Helen at the table. Deia had arrived from Sparta and now sat with them along with Gorgo, Panos and Eurin. Anja grinned at something she remembered. “I tripped over Ryner's tail when I woke to leave this morning. Our bedroom was not made for a dragon to be sleeping beside the bed I tell you.”

“How is she holding up?” Helen asked. “The melding can be taxing for her. I know it was for Aricia. At least until it was nearly complete.”

Anja nodded. “Exhaustion claimed her finally.” She said. “I don't think she lost contact with Ryner in any way since it started. She just couldn't keep her eyes open any longer. She was sharing everything with them wasn't she Helen?”

Helen nodded. “To some extent.” She answered. “Though as with Aricia... I believe there will be some things they do not share with her. Just as Andro and Elynth did not share all that they were with her.” She turned to look at Deia. “Androcles is headed home?” She asked.

Deia nodded slowly. “Yes. The *SCIMITAR* and her escorts should be passing the Union blockade within the next few minutes and they will be clear of Hadarian space. Every Netnews channel in existence is playing what happened over and over.” She stated.

Anja looked at her. “What happen Deia?”

Deia smiled brightly. “It would be easier for you to watch it.” She explained. “Let's just say that Androcles, whether he knows it or not, has just endeared himself to a vast majority of the citizens of the Union.”

Helen nodded. "Yes... but he also has made many enemies as well with his actions." She looked at Deia. "Was it also within Resumar's blood to anger so many at one time?" She asked in an exasperated tone.

Deia chuckled. "I'm afraid so... yes." She answered.

"Well then he should be proud of his grandsons... for they follow his footsteps exactly." Helen barked sarcastically.

"He didn't kill anyone did he?" Anja asked.

"Worse!" Helen exclaimed. "He made them all look the fool! I swear... there are times when he and his father make more enemies with their words than they do with their actions! They do not know when to shut up!"

Deia nodded. "That was Resumar." She said.

Helen shook her head again. "Andro will sense Dorian and Ryner the moment he gets within Earth's system." She stated. "It is from Andro and Elynth that they will learn the most for they are the only ones to ever experience it fully."

Panos leaned forward. "Helen... is he stretching himself too thin?" He asked. "Taking on too much?"

Helen met his eyes. "He is his father's son and as long as I have known Martin he does nothing different. He will hold his family together no matter the costs to him... if even by force of his will alone." Helen looked at each of them. "He is a leader my friends... and like his father he does not even begin to grasp the loyalty he commands. We must let him lead now... guide him when we can... but we must let him lead just as we do for Martin. He will come here first when he returns... the draw to Dorian and Ryner will be too strong to deny."

Gorgo nodded. "Then we shall remain here for the time being. Retta has been begging to see him for days and she witnessed what he said this morning Anja. Calyb, Nara, Deion and Bryon want to see him as well."

"They will ask about For'mya." Anja said.

Gorgo nodded. "Yes... and I think we should let Androcles tell them what they wish to know."

"Gorgo that..."

"Do you doubt Martin will retrieve her? That his love for her will diminish in any way because of what has happened? Will your love for her diminish? Aricia's? Dysea's?" Gorgo asked.

Anja shook her head. "Never."

"She carries twins now Anja. Life that was forced upon her yes, but life that she will now die to protect. Will you or the others treat them any different?" Gorgo asked.

"No!" Anja hissed without hesitation her jade green eyes flaring wide. "Martin... Marty already considers them his children. As do we."

"Then allow Androcles to tell their brothers and sisters of them." Gorgo spoke. "He has touched them. Spoken with them. He is the best conduit for them now and if we are to pull any happiness from this hideous event let it begin with them."

Eurin decided it was time to change the subject and she lowered her mug of tea. "We have the room all set for the procedure." She spoke now. "Sivana and Ceuma are going over the last bits of information as well as the scan they were able to obtain of Isabella just before she retired to your quarters."

"For political purposes I suggest we leave out that this procedure is almost the exact same one that the Kavalians use." Deia said.

"Actually... it is more like the original procedure that High Coven scientists invented to speed up their clone growth Deia." Eurin answered. "We have taken the best from both clone processes and that is what we will use. It is more High Coven in its origin however."

Deia shrugged. "That is at least more palatable than the alternative." She said. "And it will not raise many eyebrows because of the vampires that call the Union home."

"You can explain that it is a process that AEC has developed and refined to increase the survival rate of this disease." Eurin said. "The only side effect is the accelerated growth process that takes place."

Deia nodded. "Interesting idea. Thank you Eurin. Panos and I will handle the Netnews releases for that... but only after it has taken place and Dorian is at least somewhat grown. I will not allow this to turn into a circus and affect our family. We have too much happening as it is." She turned to Anja. "Martin knows?"

Anja nodded. “Bella and I spoke with him just before they left *OMEN THREE* to go to their target.” She answered. “They should be hitting the Kavalian compound in about an hour. Bella could barely speak through her tears but he took it very well considering.”

“What did he say Anja?” Gorgo asked softly.

Anja met her eyes and smiled warmly. “He said... ‘Our lives are not just a job Bella, they are a fucking adventure. And I wouldn’t have it any other way. Tell Dorian I love him and I will see him soon no matter how big he is.’... End quote.”

Deia shook her head. “Nothing fazes that man.” She said. “Nothing. It’s utterly amazing.”

“This operation they are conducting Anja?” Helen asked. “It will be successful?”

“Martin and Danny believe so yes.” Anja said. “It is a remote Kavalian hub. It’s tied into their entire defense network so Yuriko’s intelligence tells her. If we can tap into it and then we download what we need, we can at least be better prepared and have some idea how they will act. It will also provide Martin with possible locations that Pusintin could hide For'mya and the children once they are born. At least initially.”

“If they believe For'mya’s life is in danger from us... from Union forces... they will put her somewhere they feel is impregnable. But also a place where it will be easy to cover their tracks and disappear. Given what we know of the Kavalian people, it is very possible many of their military and political officers do not know the extent of what Pusintin and Keleru are doing. I can’t believe having a golden haired elven female with two small children running around Kavalian space is common by any stretch of the imagination. If she is seen there will be questions. And they may be questions Pusintin and Keleru are not prepared to answer.” Panos spoke.

“You think they will keep her out of Kavalian space Panos?” Deia asked interested in what Panos was saying. Deia had berated herself countless times over the last few days in not realizing sooner what she had discovered in Panos. The man was a veritable ancient text of knowledge that she could call on at a whim. His knowledge of ancient Sparta and her nephew Leonidas had enthralled her for hours that first time they had sat and talked. His mind was as sharp and alert as Armetus’s ever was, and he always thought in a three dimensional manner, seeing options that she did not.

Panos nodded slowly. “If I had to guess... yes. I would say they send her to Nefoa once they leave Hadarian space. It’s close enough to Kavalian territory to reinforce, but it is also a major base in its own right and heavily fortified. Armetus believes it to be the main staging base for the Kavalians within The Wilds. They have launched three major attacks from Nefoa into High Coven space in the past so it fits.”

“Pusintin can’t possibly believe the Union Senate will accept any claim to the throne by a son of his and For'mya.” Gorgo said.

“He has backed us into a corner so to speak though.” Deia said. “We did keep secret that we were training the High Coven dragons. Technically no matter how we word that, it still goes against the Non-Interference Treaty, more so if what they say about the KFI signing onto it through the Hadarian Registry is true.”

“As long as Buonau and Wiktor plotted and schemed against me to execute the coup, I have no doubts they covered all their bases.” Anja said.

Deia nodded. “I agree with that assessment.” She stated. “The Writ of Annulment will have undoubtedly put a crimp in their plans. I’m quite sure there are many elven members of parliament that did not care for Martin in the least. Or Dysea for that matter. Her openness on many issues rubbed scores of politicians the wrong way.”

“But For'mya and L'tian agreed with her!” Anja said. “Hell... they helped her to write many of the changes into law!”

Deia nodded. “Which only makes it worse for they have no reason to be loyal to For'mya or our family. They were slighted and many will see this as a chance to get back at us no matter how it comes about.”

“Do they have any clue what giving Pusintin power would mean?” Panos asked.

Deia shook her head. “I don’t think they particularly care Panos.” She replied. “In many ways it is no different than this Utopian Movement within our own people. They feel the only way to have a perfect society is for the government to dictate everything to the people. As long as certain individuals have all the power and prestige that is.”

“What is your sense of the Senate Deia?” Gorgo asked.

“I think the debate will be lively... but I don’t believe the older Senators, especially those from Sparta, will abide Pusintin taking control through his son.” Deia said thoughtfully. “None of them agreed with what Martin did to begin with in restoring his name and rank to Sparta. They tolerated it because it was a show of his love for his lost brother... but they will not allow Pusintin to return in any way or in any form. The younger generation I am not so sure of. Many look up to Martin and they relate to Androcles very well, but they are so fickle at times it is hard to predict what they will do.”

“So they can be influenced?” Gorgo said softly.

Deia nodded. “Yes. I am not truly worried about an overall vote... but I am concerned about the attacks against our family that may stem from this debate.” She said. “There are many things Martin and even Andro have done that the people have no knowledge of. This will be the time that those who have this knowledge will come forth.”

“Nothing they have done, no matter how secret it was, nothing has ever been for anything but the benefit of our people!” Gorgo hissed.

Deia nodded. “I know that... and that is what we need to use.” She said.

“What do you mean Deia?” Anja asked.

Panos smiled. “Reverse information.” He said. “Excellent Deia!”

“Reverse what?” Anja asked.

Deia smiled and nodded. “No matter what they may bring forth we counter it with the reasons for what we did and why.”

“Ohhh... that will send Armetus and Marci into a tizzy.” Anja stated.

Deia looked at her. “It was Armetus and Marci who first brought the idea to me.” She said. “You know as well as I that any operation Armetus and Marci consider sacred will be covered a hundred different ways. Nothing will ever come out because nothing has ever been revealed. There are many operations that will see the light however. Operations that we may have considered secondary but that others will consider large. This is what they will use and this is what we will counter. Nesa and her people are already on it. It pays that Armetus can’t travel very far right now. He is more a help to me here in Sparta at the moment. We can put our heads together when Andro returns; right now we have to support Bella.”

“How soon before you will do the procedure Anja?” Panos asked.

Anja opened her mouth to answer but Sivana’s voice interjected. “We have to do it within the next thirty-three hours.” She spoke.

Anja turned her head as she came to her feet her eyes wide. “Vana... what do you mean? Why?”

Ceuma was beside her sister and she held out the data pad to Anja and handed one to Eurin. “It appears that whatever Dorian and Ryner have experienced... they have accelerated the destabilization of Bella’s womb on purpose.”

“What?” Anja gasped.

Sivana nodded. “This melding as the *Feravomir* called it. The energy to the brain cells within Dorian and even Ryner have accelerated the compounds related to the disease in Bella. We compared it to the scans taken before and after Andro and Elynth melded. It is very similar though not as accelerated with Andro and Elynth because of their calm natures. Essentially... for lack of a better way of putting it... Dorian has decided he wants out now, before her womb breaks down anymore. And Ryner agrees with him. Estimates show her womb will collapse entirely in thirty-three hours at the present rate of degradation. We have to do the procedure very soon.”

Ceuma nodded. “Preferably within the next twelve hours in case our estimates are off.” She said. “Now... we have no choice.”

“Can you do that?” Gorgo asked. “Can you make him grow enough in twelve hours that he is ready to be born?”

Anja looked at her as she got to her feet. “Well... it appears we are going to have too.” She stated. “Vana... get Anuk and Duewa here from Sparta ASAP. The more Healers we have the easier it will be and I want Anuk and Ceuma to assist me with the actual procedure.”

“Not me?” Sivana asked.

Anja shook her head. “I want you, Eurin and Duewa to be generating a continuous field of metaphysical healing energy that we will be filtering through Bella the entire time. It is the safest way to go. We need to keep

her other bodily functions normal. Her vampire genes are going to protest the accelerated growing and we need to keep her vitals normal and almost as if it isn't happening.”

Sivana nodded. “I'll go make the call.” She said.

“Have Normya come with them.” Helen spoke up. “Bella and Dysea's mother have developed a very powerful connection through the years. The additional support will make her more relaxed. She returned from Kranek with the others two days ago.”

Sivana nodded. “I'll let her know.”

Anja looked at them. “Ok... let's get this thing moving.”

STRIKER DT MARK II

VL 31

ENROUTE TO KRANEK

“...staging now and we will be ready when you arrive Princess.” Cha'talla told Narice from within the transmission.

The ship was shrouded and on auto-pilot allowing Arrarn to be sitting with Narice and Toria in the rear of the ship. This particular *STRIKER Mark II* was one that Arrarn had designed when he was younger and then forgotten all about. His designs had ended up in Ben's hands somehow and now he had a ship that was perfectly suited for him and his two vampire wives as well as Deneth, who was happily gnawing a large bone in the comfortable pen. The ship had the main deck and then a slight incline to an small upper deck just behind the cockpit that held a table and four chairs bolted into the floor. This table was next to the secure COM array and holo disc that they were currently viewing Cha'talla on.

“Cha'talla... why are you doing this?” Narice asked softly. “You more than anyone have more reason to hate me. Hate my people.”

“You are the instrument of change Narice Leonidas.” Cha'talla said confidently. “I no more hate you than I hate vampires as a whole. My Blessed wife is a pureblood... just like you. In her arms I have found more peace and happiness than the seven plus millennia of my life before I met her. I do this because it is best for my people and for yours.”

“My sister will fight us.” Narice said. “She and those with her will not allow us to just waltz in and take control of the government.”

Cha'talla nodded. “Perhaps... but she has not returned to Uzu Ozeib 7 since leaving Earth and that could be for any number of reasons. I will not speculate as to why but part of it is, I believe, they are waiting to see who is loyal to them and who is not.”

“Why do you believe this Cha'talla?” Toria asked.

“This.” Cha'talla said holding up the small holoimager in his hand and activating it. The tall and lean body of the older man appeared, his High Coven uniform meticulously kept and his mustache and beard trimmed to perfection.

“I am admiral Pontal of the High Coven Fifth Expeditionary Fleet. I have given this message to one of the young Immortals who works on my staff, a fine and brave warrior by the name of Tu'kor. I have asked him to accompany his fellow Immortals as they answer the call given by General Cha'talla, and then give him this message.” The man fidgeted from within the transmission obviously not used to speaking in such a way. “We are... we are at a crossroads within High Coven history and I find myself in a difficult position. I am a member of the High Coven, loyal to my people and our ideals, but I have become... disenchanted with the current leadership and their goals. After discovering what we took part in against the Leonidas family, what we endorsed by those we follow, I can no longer in good conscious follow them. It would lead to the death of my men and destruction of all I have fought my entire life to defend. General Cha'talla... if you are somehow able to get this message to Princess Narice... tell her... tell her we will stand with her. There are others like me... and should she see fit to return... in honesty we ask for her to return and take control of the government. The leadership is in turmoil right now; Princess Yuri has not returned to the homeworld and many of us are in limbo waiting to see what happens. I can not abide this. We can not abide this while the

Kavaliens prepare to attack us again. Princess Narice has shown intelligence and the ability to lead in the past and now we ask that she return and take her mother's place. We are willing to meet in secret to discuss this but it needs to be soon for I do not know how long it will be before Yuri returns or begins to exert her control once more. The time is now if we are to act and keep the High Coven from fading into history. I will have someone monitoring this channel all hours of the day and night. Respond as soon as possible please."

"Pontal?" Narice whispered.

Arrarn looked at her. "You know him Narice?" He asked.

Narice shook her head. "I know *of* him but I have never met him. He is the most senior of the High Coven admirals. The only one to remain away from the homeworld and command ships even though he was offered a seat on my mother's council many times. He was one of the few she respected. He is over... gods he must be over ten or twelve thousand years old now and has fought from one side of the galaxy to the other."

Cha'talla nodded. "I met him once when I was with Moran and he did a training mission among his fleet. The young warrior who brought this to me thinks very highly of him and wishes to return. It would seem he has treated his Immortal crewmen with much more respect and honor than most Fleet Admirals."

"He mentions others Cha'talla." Toria said. "Do we know how many?"

Cha'talla shook his head. "Tu'kor did not know this information. He did tell me that of the nine hundred and twelve Immortals that serve in Pontal's command, only sixteen chose to leave when the order was received from Moran. That says quite a bit right there."

Narice nodded. "Yes it does." She said. "Does Andro know of this?"

"I forwarded a copy to him only a few hours ago. I suspect he will contact me at a later time to discuss it." Cha'talla spoke. "I thought it best to speak with you first however. This Pontal did mention you by name."

"Could it be a trap?" Arrarn asked.

Cha'talla nodded. "It could be." He replied honestly. "Or it could be sincere."

Narice looked at him. "Your instinct?"

Cha'talla paused for only a moment. "I believe it is sincere Princess." He answered. "I am hearing much from those who are arriving here and none of it is good. The entire military is in far worse shape than we were led to believe. More so than I think even you know. Only those loyal to Aikiro, Moran, Tesand and other politicians got the tools and means to maintain their ships and men in top shape. Others have had to scrounge and scavenge."

"How will something like this impact Andro's plan?" Narice asked.

Arrarn looked at her. "Andro's plan?" He asked. "What plan?"

Cha'talla blinked. "He does not know?" He asked.

Narice smiled and only her deep tan stopping the blush to her cheeks. "We only left a few hours ago and we were... preoccupied... with other things. I have not had a chance to tell him." She answered.

Toria Leonidas on the other hand did blush as she remembered the last few hours with her Princess lover and Prince Husband. She may have been almost three hundred years older than Narice and slightly more than that on Arrarn, but she had never had a man curl her toes in such a way that her handsome half elf and half wolf husband did. Arrarn had both Narice and her howling out their delight for the first few hours of their flight. While technically, as far as the Lycavorians and Union citizens were concerned, she too was a princess but she just found it harder to accept because of her history.

Cha'talla however was not dense or stupid and he nodded his head with a grin. "I will allow Narice to fill you in before you arrive Arrarn... but to answer your question Narice... an opportunity like this can only help our cause. It will not impact Andro's plan unless you intend to let it."

Narice shook her head immediately. "No." She stated emphatically. "No. I would not be doing this if I did not agree one hundred percent with the entire plan Cha'talla. That Andro came to me with this before says volumes about him and how he thinks. This is a surgical strike and it is designed for only one purpose. We intend to use that purpose to advance what we feel is the best action. I happen to agree with him. I didn't before... I only wanted to be Arrarn's wife and Toria's lover. I have come to realize that there are bigger goals however, and if I ever want to see my people succeed this is the only way to do it."

Cha'talla nodded. "Good. So do I. Can these ships do as he says they can do?"

Arrarn looked at him. "You saw what they did around Kranek Cha'talla." He answered. "What do you think?"

"I think if we do this right... there need not be a whole lot of bloodshed." Cha'talla spoke. "I have seen far more blood than I needed too in my many years... and if this plan prevents me from having to see more than necessary, so be it."

"Set up the meeting Cha'talla." Narice told him. "Same location as where we will meet the others."

Cha'talla met her gaze. "Is that wise? Giving them a glimpse of what they face?"

"If it terrifies them even a portion of how it terrified me... then it will be well worth it." Narice answered.

"Very well." Cha'talla said. "I will contact this Admiral."

"What about Andro's worries for your people Cha'talla?" Arrarn asked. "Have you any sense on that?"

"Oh... I have no misconceptions that some will be coming here not to make a new life for themselves, but to engage in nefarious activities." Cha'talla said plainly. "However, As'hia's mother has taken command of all forces here on Kranek with Andro's blessing and along with some of my more restless men..." He said with a smile. "She and they will have no trouble rooting out any troublemakers or assassins. Danarla has made quite the impression on those she led against Phy'iad, and her respect only grows. My people and those elves and others who have lived with us have become quite good at seeing beyond an Immortal's outer demeanor as well. As'hia's father is rapidly putting together not only a atmospheric defense force of gunships but also a well skilled and trained group of picket ships made up of your older *AUTUMN MOON* frigates. We are being very careful about who comes to the surface, but as we grow that will speed up. Esther is making massive amounts of the serum and my people are flocking to get it. It is a wondrous thing and this alone will spur my people to begin anew."

"My riders?" Narice asked.

"They have already transferred to a *TYPE II* transport and joined with the fleet. A very unique *TYPE II*, quite unlike the one Tir'ut and Esther rescued your sister from Arrarn." He told them. "Viera would not let Vollenth go without her, so she has agreed to be your dragon Arrarn Leonidas, for as long as necessary. They have sent their sons Cinol and Caydren back to Dragon Mountain on Earth to stay with their grandparents. A trip neither of them is unhappy about in the least since they will have other hatchlings to entertain them."

"Our Command Team?" Narice asked.

"Aside from yourself, Arrarn, Toria and me... I have asked Lynom and As'hia to join us. Their union together will help us to show that things can indeed change. My son Fash'ka and two of his Tactical Unit and I have requested a Hadarian Healer as well. She will land on the ship that will return Cinol and Caydren to Earth. It will be here tomorrow shortly before you arrive."

Narice nodded her head. "Excellent." She said. "Your... your Blessed Wife will not be joining us?"

Cha'talla shook his head. "Esther insists her skills are needed here in helping our people, but I fear she may still harbor a small amount of distrust and anger towards anyone who..."

Narice held up her hand. "I understand." She said softly.

"Do not think badly of her Narice." Cha'talla spoke. "Your mother had her whipped and raped repeatedly when it was discovered she loved me. Esther has..."

"I will show her I am not my mother Cha'talla." Narice said. "Perhaps one day she will be able to look at me and not see her."

Cha'talla nodded clearly uncomfortable talking about it. "We have recently received a new shipment of weapons and armor from your Admiral O'Conner Arrarn Leonidas. Some very matchless items to say the least." Cha'talla said. "Allow me to praise his ingenuity to you so that you may pass it on to him."

"I'll do that." Arrarn said.

"Then I will see all of you tomorrow and we will finalize our objectives and mission goals." Cha'talla said. "Until then."

They waited until the transmission had faded before Arrarn sat back in his chair. "Ok... my beautiful mates and wives... perhaps you could fill me in on just what Andro's plan is. I know some of it... but there is obviously more to it than even I realized. Why didn't you tell me before now?"

Narice turned her dark eyes on Toria before meeting Arrarn's gaze. "I was going to tell both of you just after we got underway from the *SCIMITAR*." She stated. "However... shortly after we took off I was diverted

by a somewhat handsome man sticking his tongue down my throat and a delightfully delicious red haired companion of mine who decided then would be a good time to rediscover what I tasted like.”

“Oh... so it’s our fault?” Arrarn declared.

Toria chuckled. “You are also very confused Narice my love.” She said. “It was my tongue down your throat and Arrarn’s tongue doing the rediscovering. At least initially.”

Narice’s right eyebrow lifted a little. “Oh.” She said.

“Somewhat handsome man?” Arrarn said with a false indignant grin. “I seem to recall a stunning vampire female who couldn’t decide whether to pull my elven ears off my head or try to suffocate me between her thighs. She was muttering something about me being the most delicious man in the universe if I recall.”

“I said that?” Narice asked with a smile.

Toria leaned forward. “Yes you did.”

“Ah... I must have been delirious or something.” Narice stated.

“Ten seconds after that you told our beautiful husband to fuck you silly my love.” Toria said with a wider smile. “Something he does so very well I might add, as evidenced by your howls of enchantment two minutes later.”

“You were timing me?” Narice gasped.

Toria batted her stunning blue eyes at Narice. “Of course not my love. I would not do that and I was too busy suckling your absurdly stiff nipples. I am only making an estimate of the time of course.”

Narice shook her head at the two of them as they grinned at her. “You two are so bad.” She stated. “Taking such advantage of me. We will need to do it often so that I learn to control myself more.”

“I’m game!” Arrarn declared.

Narice gripped his hand and brought it to her lips, kissing his hard knuckles. His hands could work magic on her body as well as Toria’s and both of them knew it. “A mug of your mother’s coffee would be much better right now and then I can fill you in on Androcles’s plan.”

“Coming right up.” Arrarn said rising to his feet. “But I will hold you to that statement.”

“It is probably something you will not have to fight me to admit openly to anyone who asks.” She answered him.

Andro had told her to try and keep his mind off of For'mya and what was happening there and Narice and Toria agreed that being intimate together so soon after leaving was the way to do it. Arrarn Leonidas could make them feel things neither of them thought possible and they garnered just as much pleasure, if not more, from being together than Arrarn did. It helped as well, that his attention was focused entirely on them and it took his mind off things that troubled him to the extreme. Their love for him had overtaken them both quickly, but it was something both she and Toria found they could not live without now. Yes... they would have another tryst before undertaking their mission, perhaps two if Narice and Toria had their way, but then the mission would harvest all of their attention and wits.

Narice had no doubts they would need every bit of both to pull it off.

DEKUNNA
EREBUS EXPANSE
0408 LOCAL TIME
SOUTHERN EQUATORIAL CONTINENT

The small Recon Patrol of Kavalian scouts never saw what caused their deaths. They never sensed them, never saw them and never heard them. They had been stationed here for four years and nothing ever changed. They did their patrols and returned to the base to rest and wait for their next patrol. It was a tedious position, but at least the base was well stocked with food and entertainment. The only thing that they lacked was females, though they could skip to Nefoa if they choose one or twice a month in groups of ten or less. Each of their patrols was made up of seven Puma Bane Troops, each one exceptionally well trained, however lacking in any experience and sense of perception. Not that it would have mattered. They cross the same terrain nearly every day and nothing looked out of the ordinary to them. They would never admit that complacency had set in long ago.

The scout at the rear of the patrol did not see the loop of fine wire that dropped from the overhanging limb he walked under. The dawn was still pushing away the night and the sun had yet to breach the horizon. His weapon was in his hands but not prepared to fire and he certainly was not paying attention. At least until the wire was savagely drawn tight around his neck and his two hundred and fifty pound body was hauled off the ground with incredible strength. The air to his lungs was immediately cut off as the wire cut deeply into his neck, so tightly that it even was slicing through the layers of fur on his skin. He tried to grab for the wire with clawed hands, dropping his weapon to the ground beneath him, as his fingers attempted to pry the wire from his neck. It only tightened even more as he was yanked even higher into the tree above him. As his eyes began to glaze over, he could feel warm blood beginning to pour down his neck and chest as the wire finally bit through enough of his skin to sever his jugular vein. He struggled to look up and discover what was killing him and his brain was unable to process the fact that a vicious looking Immortal with deeply tanned skin and cruel dark eyes was exerting tremendous pressure on the ends of the wire, pulling it tighter and tighter. He would never know why he died, or why the Immortal had such an evil grin on his face. T'lolt hauled up mightily one last time, pulling the ends of the garrote even tighter and watching as the Kavalian's legs twitched madly several times fighting death, but ultimately becoming still as two sets of hands on either side of T'lolt quickly helped him to haul the body up into the thick foliage of the two hundred and fifty year old tree they were in. The only evidence that the Kavalian had even been there seconds before was the rifle laying among the dirt and grass of the worn path.

The sixth Kavalian in the familiar file of men turned to speak with his fellow warrior and discovered he was no longer there. He uttered a crisp word and the group of Kavalians stopped to turn as the now alert Puma Bane troop lifted his weapon and moved back down the trail. There were many different kinds of dangerous predators on Dekunna, but none that would openly attack a column of Kavalian troops. The other five men waited and watched as their comrade moved back down the trail slowly, his eyes searching the thick jungle like terrain around them. One of them said something under his breath and the five began to laugh softly.

At least until the large black wolf sprang from the side almost magically on their comrade's right, coming from the thick foliage and its jaws sank deeply into his right forearm. The crunch of bone was surprisingly audible in the thick air and the Kavalian lost the ability to pull the trigger on his weapon. As his eyes grew wide and he screamed in pain lifting his opposite arm and reaching for the secondary weapon he carried on his back, a platinum colored wolf again magically appeared beside him from within the foliage in the middle of a leap. It was a leap that saw its wide-open jaws snap shut on their comrade's throat and drive him to the ground with a horrific snarl and the sound of rushing air. This prodded the five remaining Puma Bane Recon men into action.

Far too slowly to save their lives.

Stepping from the dense foliage on either side of the trail, four figures appeared. All of them were dressed in strange uniforms that sported different jungle patterns, all of them were easily recognized as Lycavorian by the Kavalians, and all of them lifted wicked looking and quite silent weapons. Six seconds later, nine rounds had perforated the bodies of four of the Puma Bane soldiers and the fifth turned to run, his eyes wide in horror. He came face to face with the large Lycavorian with vicious dual fangs and yellow/golden eyes. He felt a momentary sharp pain in his abdomen and his eyes dropped to see the shaft of the ornately engraved *Nehtes* buried fully in his guts. Fiery pain then registered in his mind as the spearhead had erupted out his lower back taking with it bits of flesh and several pieces of his spinal column. As his mouth opened to allow a hellish scream of agony, the Lycavorian lifted his hand. A silvery diamond shaped object formed instantly in that armored hand and then exploded from his open palm. The psychic diamond entered the Kavalian's open mouth and blew open the back of his large skull, spraying bone, fur and gray matter on the grass behind him.

Martin tore his *Nehtes* free with little effort and less acknowledgement that he had just killed the man violently and watched his body slump silently to the ground. No one in his team said a word as their PSGs deactivated and they began to appear all around him. Even Wayonn remained silent as he reappeared standing behind Aricia and Dysea as they moved forward, wiping blood from their mouths and using a canteen of water he had given to them to wash out the foul taste of Kavalian blood from their mouths. T'lolt, Julie and Kenny dropped nimbly from the massive tree above them, landing without a whisper of sound and moving up with the others.

Danny was the one to speak first. "That's the last of them Marty." He stated. They had spent the last two hours eliminating four Kavalian patrols that Torma and Isheeni had directed them to from high above.

Martin nodded and turned his head upward. *Anything brother?* He asked Torma.

Isheeni and Iriral have made two low passes over the base and detect nothing. Torma answered. *There is a risk that I could be noticed if I drop lower because of my size. There is no indication that they are aware we have killed their patrols. That will probably change as the sun rises higher however Martin.*

Martin nodded. *No doubt. Ok... we're moving to our assault positions. The three of you hold what you have until we insure that no T19s can or will be launched and then you drop in and take out the barracks.*

We will be waiting. Torma answered.

Martin looked at everyone as they crowded around. "Ok... Torma, Isheeni and Iriral have said they detect no recognition inside the base to our actions. We move ahead with phase two. Danny... take half the team and move to your assault position. Make sure their COMs are the first thing you take or we are royally fucked. Julie and Cirith will take out the two towers since they are the only ones who can blur and get to them fast enough. Once you have the COM room silenced destroy any T19s they have locked in this center and then Torma, Isheeni and Iriral will take out the barracks. Aricia, Dysea and I will hit the officer's barracks with the other half and if our timing is on, we can kill most of them before they even wake up."

"Yuriko is in position?" Danny asked.

Martin nodded. "You'll have your long gun cover. Two of her Commandos won the Long Range Shooting competition two years ago. They've set up on the west ridge, just above where you will go in."

"And where will I be while all this is happening Martin?" Wayonn asked.

"Watching from a safe perch." Martin said.

Wayonn met his eyes for a long moment. He had witnessed the murderous precision of these men and women in the last two hours and it was nothing short of terrifying. He had heard the whispers of the *Durcunusaan* on Curila 6 when these men and women were spoken of. It was said that they could actually predict what each other was going to do in any given situation. After seeing them in action, Wayonn did not doubt it in the least. Having the huge Immortal fit in with their team so seamlessly spoke volumes about them. He and Deia were the only ones that he knew of who had been alive to see the savagery the Lycavorian people could call on if needed. It was a terrifying thing yes, but it was also what allowed them to survive for as long as they did. Wayonn had been concerned at first that this might turn into a vendetta of sorts by Martin, signaling to him that perhaps the darkness of Xaxon that had infected him was not completely gone. It was a concern he now knew was never needed. Martin Leonidas was angry yes, angry beyond any describable words, but he was also a consummate professional. He knew that in order to get his For'mya back that he needed to be at his best. He wasn't about to let emotion rule his actions or his decisions Wayonn saw, and this more than anything made Wayonn feel more secure in the knowledge that Xaxon held no sway over Martin any longer.

Wayonn had also come to the conclusion that having Martin Leonidas or his son out for your blood was the single most ignorantly stupid thing to incur. He had seen a little of Andro's wrath, and was now viewing Martin's first hand. That they both reminded him far too much of Sumar and Resumar was not lost on him.

Wayonn shook his head. "I am a Lycavorian and this is my fight now as well." He stated. "Sumar did not push me to the side and nor will you."

Martin met his eyes and nodded after a moment. "Then stick close to Andreus." Martin said. "You'll be covering our asses."

Wayonn nodded. "Something he has done very well through the years I see, since you are entirely too reckless for a King and you should be dead by now given your propensity for leaping into impossible situations."

Martin saw Andreus chuckle softly from his spot next to his sister Aricia. "You have no idea *Val'istar*." He said.

Martin grinned, his long dual wolf fangs giving off a less than reassuring look. "I have never gotten into a situation that I couldn't get out of." He stated.

"Ah... Skipper..." Pablo spoke up from the side. "Columbia was..."

"Columbia doesn't count!" Martin hissed quickly. "That wasn't my fault! And we got out!"

"Kenny told you not to use so much explosive Skipper." Julie said from her spot beside Danny.

“I didn’t know that the damn bridge was going to fall into the fucking river!” Martin spat. “The support spans looked sturdier!”

“They were made out of bamboo boss.” Kenny spoke now. “Bamboo doesn’t survive fourteen pounds of C-7 Semtex going off above it. Even on it’s best day.”

“We got out didn’t we?” Martin snapped.

“Yeah... we got out.” Danny nodded. “Only we had to walk twenty miles to get to the secondary extraction point because your little display brought every Comcharro asshole within twenty clicks down on us.” He said. “Come to think of it... you still owe all of us a case of beer for that one.”

“Yeah! Each of us!” Julie exclaimed.

Martin dismissed them with a wave of his hand. “No sense of humor!” He snapped softly.

“Sense of humor?” Danny gasped. “The Secondary PZ was a *nubous* garbage dump Marty! I had crotch rot for a week because we had to wade through that rancid water just to get to it!”

“I didn’t pick the damn PZ!” Martin growled.

“No... but you’re the reason we had to go to it.” Julie said sweetly. She glanced up at Danny. “Have your ever told Anuk or Nayeca what was growing on...”

“Hell no!” Danny gasped in horror. “You think I’m crazy? They’d never let me into bed with them again!”

Julie chuckled. “Wow! I got something I can use against you in the future you mean?”

“C’mon Jules... you wouldn’t do that would you?” Colin asked from next to Kenny. “That was downright nasty.”

Julie chuckled. “Ok... maybe not.” She spoke batting her dark eyes at Danny’s worried expression.

Martin knelt there and looked at Aricia and Dysea. They could see the happiness in his eyes that he was once more in his element with men and women that he loved and trusted. That small group now included them and Cirith as well.

“I would like to hear this story Julie Collins.” T'lolt spoke moving closer. “It sounds most fascinating.”

This brought chuckles from all of them and the fever pitch of combat bled off just enough for them to gather strength and will from each other. Martin nodded his head towards them after a long moment.

“Ok... let’s do this people.” He said firmly.

They all nodded in agreement.

SCIMITAR

SIX HOURS FROM EARTH’S SYSTEM

Devra Re Mydala knew exactly what she had in the powerful Lycavorian Spartan Bren. It was what she had hoped to discover when she first became Coren’s wife. She had hoped to find a confident and intelligent man who was comfortable with himself. Instead she had discovered a man who was confident and intelligent, but who more often than not treated her as a trophy of some sort. Coren was never comfortable with himself, at least not around her. It did not help in the least that his political career had been thriving so. Devra knew after the first hundred years with him that nothing would ever rate higher on his list than his career. Not even her. Still she remained with him because she loved him still, and because of the children he was giving her. That love had finally died a long death thirty some years ago, and in those three decades, no matter how many men approached her none made her blink twice. None except Bren. He was older than her by a few hundred years, but unlike the difference in age with Coren, this never entered her mind with Bren.

Bren was every bit as confident as Coren, equally as intelligent if one included the kind of life Bren had led, as well as his own advanced degrees. He was so unlike Coren in so many ways. She knew their relationship was still very young, but no matter how many times he touched her, that touch never ceased to make her shiver in delight. She knew this would never end for it was part of Lycavorian instinct, the need to touch and have physical contact. While she and Coren never held hands, Devra and Bren went nowhere jointly without her holding his arm or their hands clasped together. When he looked at her with those eyes she saw a devotion to her within them that would never fade with time. When he made love to her, not only did he have the willpower to resist her Alkay until the point he was driving her insane with pleasure, but he never granted release to

himself until she was shuddering in his arms and cooing like a school girl into his ear how much she loved him. It may have been male bravado and his wolf nature, but if he made her feel that every time they made love, Devra would coo into his ear for centuries to come and never tire of it. To him she was an equal in every way, and while she knew he was jealous to some extent, he was also relaxed enough with himself to know that she was *his* mate and wife. He could almost sense the devotion to him that filled Devra whenever she gazed at his face, or even watched him from across a room. He trusted her beyond reproach and this ultimate fact only made Devra worship him all the more.

Devra knew all these things, and was learning more each day she woke in his arms, so she knew immediately that something was not right when she entered the large mess lounge on the *SCIMITAR* and saw Caliria sitting alone at the table in the far corner. Her oldest daughter looked deep in thought and Devra could detect the simple motions of her head that told her Caliria was troubled about something. She drew a mug of the delicious coffee that Bren had gotten her hooked on and dismissing the sweet smelling food that filled the long line, she moved to the table when Caliria sat.

“Caliria?” Devra asked softly as she sat down.

“Mother?” Caliria gasped in surprise and she looked around for the man who her mother now called husband.

Devra smiled. “Bren is in a meeting.” She stated. “He left early this morning. Why are you here alone daughter? What is wrong?”

“Nothing!” Caliria answered far too quickly she realized too late.

Devra smiled and sipped the coffee before reaching out and placing her hand over Caliria’s. “This is your mother you are speaking to Caliria Leonidas.” She said. “Do not try and fool me. Something is bothering you and this is how you have always dealt with such things. You retreat into yourself and try to come to terms with whatever it is in your head. Now... tell me what is wrong.”

Caliria met her eyes finally and shrugged her slim shoulders. She had never held anything back from her mother before and starting now was something she couldn’t do. “That is... that is just it mother.” She exclaimed. “I... I don’t know!”

Devra’s eyes narrowed. “I... I don’t think I follow. Does it have to do with Androcles or the others? With what happened when...”

Caliria shook her head. “Yes... No... I don’t know.” She answered.

Devra set her mug down. “Perhaps you should take a deep breath and start from the very beginning Caliria.”

“It is all so... it is so overwhelming mother.” Caliria said finally. “Everything is taking place so quickly. Andro is... he is so...”

“Established. Confident. Wise beyond his years. Powerful... and not just physically. He is hard to understand, but because of your ability to Mindvoice, you understand him almost perfectly. He overwhelms you but doesn’t suffocate you. You...” Devra began.

Caliria looked at her with wide eyes. “How...?”

Devra smiled. “It is no different than what I feel for Bren, or what I have been feeling and experiencing since coming here. It’s these people, the air about them. How they view things. If anyone would have told me six months ago that I would see Lycavorians in such a radically different way then what I did then I would have laughed at them. If someone would have told me I would tremble for the touch of the Lycavorian man who I now love so completely I would have made sure they were committed.” Devra looked at her. “Have you...”

Caliria felt her skin flush and her heart race at her mother’s question. “Yes. And I can not begin to describe what I feel. What he makes me feel. My... my Alkay affects him... it affects all of them... but they fight it and control it and make me feel things I have never imagined. It is almost as if Andro consumes me mother. It is the most exquisite feeling to feel him within me so completely. Sadi and Ne’Veha and the others too. I can see within his thoughts and how he feels for each of us, the non-questioning devotion and love. It is... it is almost overwhelming but it never reaches the point where it is overbearing. They are not... they are not possessive or jealous... and I feel the same for them! For each of them! It is frightening mother! It terrifies me!”

“Caliria... so much has happened in the past weeks.” Devra said.

“That is just it!” Caliria exclaimed. “I was taken mother, used by... used by so many, forced to do things I did not want to do! Never once have they questioned me about it! Almost as if it never happened!”

“It is not their way to reflect or dwell on past events Caliria.” Devra said taking her hand across the table. “They care about what happen to you... but they will not dwell on it. Their way is to show you that they love you regardless and that they are here for you no matter what takes place.”

“Mother... do you know how many lives he took to save me?” Caliria asked her quite suddenly.

Devra shook her head surprised by the question. “No... and I do not think he cares. Nor do I. You were taken against your will by criminals and scum Caliria! Are we supposed to just forget that? Are we supposed to just let that stand as your father was so willing too do? As so many Regents are willing to do?”

“What about the over three million men and women this Hadarian woman Buonau says he is responsible for killing by ordering that these Jump Gates be destroyed?” Caliria asked. “Did you know about that?”

“I found out shortly after we arrived here.” Devra answered. “It is not something he did lightly Caliria. He was saving millions more, billions more by doing what he did. You have seen yourself how these Kavalian people treat others!”

“You know how I feel about violence mother.” Caliria spoke. “You... you can not fight violence with violence. It only leads to more violence. And pain and injury. The Prophets say we should live in harmony with everyone.”

“The Prophets do say that yes.” Devra said calmly. “They say harmony is preferable to chaos. They do not however, say we need to give up who we are to anyone in order to have harmony. They do not frown upon defending one self and others if need be. And they most certainly do not advocate oppression to placate the need for harmony.” Devra looked at her daughter intently. “What is bothering you Caliria? What is truly bothering you?” She asked.

Caliria exhaled heavily. “I don’t... I don’t know who I am anymore mother.” She said softly and urgently. “Just this morning on the way here, three different people referred to me as Princess.”

“Well... officially you are a Princess in the eyes of the Lycavorian people Caliria.” Devra answered. “Androcles is Crown Prince of the Union.”

“That’s just it!” Caliria hissed. “He is Crown Prince... but no one has asked me if I want to be a Princess! No one has asked me what I want!”

Devra’s eyes narrowed. “Caliria... are you saying he...?”

“What?” Caliria exclaimed. “No... by the grace of the Prophets mother no! I wanted to be with him as much as he wanted me. More even! No... I’m talking about everything else! Everyone just assumes that I... that I want to be a Princess. That I want to be his... his mate. I am three hundred years older than him and no one asks me what I want!” She spoke the word mate with a tinge of distaste that Devra detected easily.

“Are you saying that you don’t?” Devra asked softly. “And the term mate is sacred to them Caliria. Just as wife is. It is one of the ways they maintain their connection to their past, to who they are inside.”

“I don’t know what I want mother!” Caliria hissed. “Everything is happening so fast and no one is asking me what I want! And mate is... it is such a demeaning term! It does not speak of who they are inside and their nature in stellar means! It is... it is primitive and... degrading and...”

Devra sat back slowly. “Why do I hear your father’s words and teachings in your voice and tone now?” She said softly. “I came to them willing to give them anything they wanted to help me find you. Androcles took nothing. He would take nothing from me. He almost sent me and your sisters away for the very reasons you are speaking now. You have not been among them for as long as I have Caliria but even you must see that everything we teach and learn about these people is false! It has been false for so many centuries. Many of us knew it and did nothing. Why?”

“I don’t know.” Caliria said softly.

“I will tell you why.” Devra stated. “Because we think of ourselves as above everyone. That we are somehow superior to everyone when we are not! How we treat those born with hair such as you is the perfect example!”

Caliria looked at her. “They discarded those they thought weak mother.” She spoke. “I have seen that. Not only in their history, which I have been studying, but also within Andro’s mind as well.”

Devra nodded. “Yes I know. But who among our two species has moved on from such ways and who clings to it Caliria?” Devra asked. “They grew out of that stage in their history, yet we maintain it. Eliani’s mother took all the research and work that *you* have done all these years and made a counteragent to the OSG chemical control of us. Her first thoughts were not to take credit for that... but to give it to you! Who it

rightfully belongs too! You are the one who saved our people Caliria! Your work! How many times have you told me in the past that your only wish is to find a man who will look beyond the exterior and worship you for who you are? You have found that now! Just as I have!”

Caliria looked at her across the table. “And what if that is *not* what *I* want mother?” She snarled. “What if *he* is *not* what *I* want? No one is asking me mother!” She shouted as she came to her feet. “No one is asking me!”

Caliria saw the shocked look on her mother’s face and where her eyes were directed and she turned her head quickly. Her own green eyes grew wide when she saw Androcles standing just inside the door of the mess lounge, Dutkne beside him. His expression was void of emotion but she had stared into those eyes enough times the last few days to see the confusion and hurt in them. She took a step towards him but he turned quickly and whispered to Dutkne who only nodded. Then he stepped back into the corridor and was gone. Just before the tears came rolling forth Devra embraced her daughter tightly, effectively shielding her from all around her as she began to draw her out of the mess lounge.

**DEKUNNA
EREBUS EXPANSE
0502 LOCAL TIME
SOUTHERN EQUATORIAL CONTINENT**

The Kavalian in the tower felt the light breeze and turned his head away from the banned holo/novel he was reading. He felt a slight sting on either side of his neck and his hands came up to slap away the insect from his fur. When he pulled his palms back, the fur on his hands was thickly coated with blood. His eyes grew wide at this and then he saw the twin fountains of red arching away from his thick neck. As he opened his mouth to scream out a warning to his fellow soldiers the shadows in front of him rippled and shifted oddly and then the raven haired vampire female materialized in front of him with a vicious and cruel expression on her surreal and amazingly beautiful face. He saw the flash of metal this time and felt the blades of the twin knives burying themselves within his chest. He watched her beautiful face as she exerted her vampire strength and ripped the blades sideways away from each other between his ribs. The last thing he saw was the terrible glint in her cobalt blue eyes before her blades, traveling along the inside edge of his ribs, neatly carved his lungs in two and severed three major arteries to his heart. Blood bubbled forth as he tried to scream once more, the only sound leaving his lips was the rush of air as he pitched forward and her hands caught him, lowering him to the floor and then tearing her blades from his flesh. It would take him several minutes to die, but he would die silently and painfully, which is exactly what Cirith wanted, for what his kind had done not only to Dysea but to For'mya and the family that she now had. A beautiful, strong family centered around him. She squatted out of sight behind the waist high walls of the tower and touched the implant on her jaw.

“Tower one eliminated.” She whispered.

“Copy.” The reply came in Wayonn’s voice.

[*Cirith?*] Martin’s voice filled her mind and she shuddered in happiness and the blissful memories of only hours ago.

[*I am fine husband.*] She answered him quickly, so comfortable in referring to him that way now, and so utterly enchanted that he returned those emotions and feelings towards her ten fold.

[*Stay there until we begin our assault and then you and Julie join us.*] He ordered her.

[*Understood.*] Cirith answered as she peeked up over the side of the wall and directed her eyes towards the second tower. Her vampire eyes detected the motion, almost like a shift in the wind really, and she knew Julie was about to strike.

The Kavalian in the second tower did not even have the opportunity or slight warning that his partner did.

Julie Collins may have been a clone of the former woman, but she held all of her most special memories within her mind. In essence she was Julie Collins reborn. But she was now a vampire, and she had fought the Kavalians for the better part of fifteen years now using her new vampire skills. The knowledge that she had finally found the one place that those memories had drawn her too and that she had for all intents and purposes

found the family she had been taken away from so long ago; that fueled her now. And it made her all the more determined to stay alive this time and finally experience what her memories had driven her to seek. Julie Collins unwrapped the shadows from around her body while in motion. She appeared not three meters from the Kavalian guard who was still completely unaware of her.

Perhaps it was an innate sense of danger that alerted him, but it was far too late. He lifted his head from the pad he had been reading just as Julie struck. Her open palm blow connected with the full force of her vampire strength, snapping his head to the side and effectively stunning him. While she was still in motion, she grasped his long fur at the base of his neck, reached around and grasped his wide jaw and she twisted just as hard and quickly as she could. The pop of his snapping neck sounded like a gunshot to her, but carried no more than a meter. His legs twitched madly for several seconds and then were still. She lowered the body to the floor silently, and then squatted over the inert form and touched her jaw.

“Tower Two eliminated.” She whispered.

“Copy.” Wayonn answered. “Team Two you are clear. Execute.”

“Executing.” Daniel’s voice sounded.

Wayonn peered down from his perch on the wall at the entrance to the COM bunker.

The Kavalian Watch Officer waited for the large double doors to fully open before he stepped into the morning air and took a deep breath. His eyes lifted immediately to the second tower as they always did, just as he raised the Tazli Root laced tobacco pipe. He should have seen the head of his guard there and did not. He turned a full one hundred and eighty degrees to look up to his first tower and once more could not see the guard sitting in the chair. He was an experienced soldier, though his time here had dulled the same instincts that had kept him alive through fourteen clashes with High Coven and Immortal troops. As those instincts began to shout out in alarm he felt a powerful force crash into his chest and he staggered back, the pipe falling from his fingers. He looked down quickly and couldn’t understand why there was now a fist sized hole in the center of his chest. He also didn’t comprehend the sight of nine heavily armed and very large Lycavorians rushing toward him with weapons out. As he turned his head to shout a warning, his legs gave out and the signals to his brain finally caught up to him that told him he was dead.

One point seven kilometers away, laying on the damp rocks and dirt, Yuriko lowered her macrobinos. “Nice shooting Robert.” She said matter-of-factly.

The human soldier snorted. “Pulled that to the right by six millimeters.” He stated as he jacked another round into the huge 20mm silenced Aeger Sniper Rifle.

Yuriko grinned and tapped her jaw. “Father... Watch Officer has been eliminated and Uncle Daniel is entering the COM building. The Base Commander should be in one of the side quarters away from the barracks. Sniper Teams Two and Three... weapons free. I say again... weapons free.”

“Got a sleeper Yuriko. Two o’clock. Catwalk above the COM building. 1.7 range. 3.2 deflection.” Robert spoke from behind the scope.

Yuriko lifted her binos. “Take the shot.”

“Shooting!” Robert spoke softly as he pulled the trigger smoothly.

Yuriko watched with some pride as the Kavalian that had been sitting in the chair on the catwalk that extended around the COM building was blown back against the wall, only the lower half of his jaw still attached to his body.

“Show off.” Yuriko growled under her breath.

“Honey! We’re home!” The deep voice caused all thirteen of the Kavalian Puma Bane troops in the COM room to turn at the same time as the soundproof doors closed behind Danny and his team.

Danny’s right arm came whistling forward as his words finished echoing from his lips and his *Nehtes* left his grip with devastating speed and power. The extended nine foot spear impaled the senior Kavalian operator who stood closest to the Transmission array through his thorax. The air could be heard exiting his lungs as the force of the throw lifted him off his feet and then pinned him against the wall of the bunker with the *Nehtes*

sinking nearly half its length into the soft bedrock wall. This served to draw the attention of all the other Kavalians if only for a second or two. Which was all the time they needed. The COM center was relatively small with perhaps eight stations spread out in a semi circle around the main transmission holo/disc. To the left was a small alcove that held computer banks and two chairs.

What followed was by no means fair and balanced. It was never meant to be, and no one among them would lose any sleep over it. Nine cut down P190A5s, the standard Union assault rifles specifically designed for clandestine work, began spitting out 10mm caseless rounds of mortal death. Twelve Kavalian bodies began to do a ghoulish dance of death as the kinetic rounds slammed into soft tissue, shattering bone and internal organs with little regard. The only sound in the room was the impacts on flesh and the near silent working of the weapons. These men and women did not miss, and from this range their first shots were usually lethal. Danny shifted targets four times panning left, sending five round bursts into four different Kavalians, and easily overlapping his field of fire with Kenny, Pablo and Colin Walsh who flanked him on the left. The five members of their team on their right had formed a comparable wall of death and were spraying with surgical precision the right side of the COM room. Equipment was peppered with the deadly kinetic rounds, much of it being turned into useless junk by the sheer amount of firepower that they were using. It was probably overkill, and far more force than they usually would have applied on an operation like this, but at the moment they did not care.

Payback was a bitch.

As Danny ejected his half spent hundred round magazine, his dark eyes swept the room with great care and clarity. Three single silenced shots echoed out and Danny turned to see Colin pumping killing shots into two Kavalians.

“Colin?” He hissed softly.

Colin met his eyes. “Sorry...” He spoke quickly. “Just some personal payback I guess.”

“You get it out of your system?” Danny asked.

Colin nodded as he too began to change magazines. “Yeah.”

“Good. Check the equipment room and secure the T19s! Make sure we can still use the computers too!” Danny ordered. “Kenny... see what they have on tap at the landing zone. Make sure we got no incoming surprises.”

“On it.” Kenny declared leaping over the control station.

Danny tapped his jaw. “Marty... COM Center is ours. T19s are down! T19s are down! Turn Torma loose!” He hissed.

“Understood.” Martin’s businesslike voice spoke.

Danny smiled to himself. Marty had his business face and voice on and he would not tolerate mistakes now. It was good to have his old brother back, but they would still collect their pound of flesh for the reasons behind that welcome transformation. He did not see or hear Martin look into the rapidly brightening sky and speak.

Torma! The barracks! Now!

There were exactly one hundred and twenty-seven Puma Bane troops sleeping in the barracks. That did not include the five officers who were housed in a separate barracks two hundred meters away, two of whom were currently partaking of the feminine wiles of the less than willing biogenic females that had arrived in the last supply shipment only two days before.

None of these men saw the near six and a half ton dragon drop from the brightening sky, his massive wingspan blotting all the slivers of sunlight that were advancing over the horizon and directing all of his muscle and weight onto the very center of the barracks ceiling. Torma had slimmed down much over the course of the last years, dropping to his current weight of six and a half metric tons from the nearly eight metric tons he was. He was stronger and faster now than he had ever been, and this new body had led to the last clutch of eggs that Isheeni had laid, not to mention many more nights of rapture with his beautiful dragon mate. Through the years he had also taken on much of Martin’s more reckless nature and made it his own. This was one of those times and as Isheeni and Iriral watched with wide eyes as they followed him in closely, Torma activated his psychic shield just before impact and then sent his near twenty-two meter body plunging through the ceiling of the barracks with hardly any resistance.

The desire to remain as inconspicuous as possible had caused the Kavalians to build the majority of the base with materials found on this planet. Standard construction material would have been easily picked up on sensors even before ships reached orbit. They had used the large and sturdy trees from this world, combining them with the softer granite material so prevalent all over. Dropping at nearly sixty meters per second and weighing what he did Torma tore through the roof of the barracks with barely a pause. The crashing sound that followed would have woken the dead. His talons and lower body, encased in shimmering dragon armor, crushed the life from nine Kavalian troops before they even had the opportunity to wake up. His massive and armored Heavy Horn tail lashed out to the side with incredible force and crushed another dozen Kavalians even as they were beginning to wake up and scramble from their beds. This is when Isheeni and Iriral struck.

The windows on either end of the barracks imploded inward, along with the frames and pieces of the granite construction. Isheeni and Iriral's armored bodies pushed into the barracks up to their shoulders and both of them let loose with trumpets of all encompassing anger. What followed next was a massacre as both Isheeni and Iriral cut loose with the most intense streams of flame they could generate inside the barracks. Dozens of Kavalians were instantaneously and without regard incinerated. Torma heaved his massive body up out of the conflagration just as the two streams of flame met in the center and then as landed on the outside of the buildings side he added his own stream of superheated lava like breath directly into the hole he had just created.

Martin, Aricia, Dysea and three *Durcunusaan* troops had moved inside the wall of the compound the moment Yuriko's sniper had taken out the Watch Officer. Using all of their wolf speed, without actually changing forms, they sprinted from shadow to shadow until they were beside their targets. The barracks building they leaned against was broken into four apartment like domiciles inside with short stairs into each apartment. This building housed the Kavalian Base Commander and his three senior officers. The moment Torma smashed into the ceiling of the normal barracks two hundred meters away Martin, Aricia and Dysea and the others moved.

The doors were simple structures and Cody and Master Chief they all called Tony used brute force to smash the door aside. The Master Chief was the larger of the two and he put his shoulder directly into the center of the door frame, snapping it in two with his strength and his forward momentum. As Tony dashed into the apartment, Cody broke to the right sweeping his weapon in front of him. He saw the Kavalian officer just scrambling out of his bed and with unerring accuracy Cody pumped nine rounds into his chest area and one 10mm round directly between his eyes. The officer's body flipped unceremoniously over his bed and collided with the wall behind him before slumping to the floor dead.

"One down!" Cody barked into his implant.

Aricia followed close behind the *Durcunusaan* troop who bull rushed the door in front of them. His large size and weight splintered the door into dozens of smaller pieces, all of them propelled into the apartment as Aricia followed him in. The officer in this room was climbing off the biogenic Kavalian female on the bed as Aricia entered. He turned with a surprised look on his face seeing the two armored figures in his room, but he recognized them instantly for what they were. The female screamed and rolled off the bed as the officer reached for his gun, his still slick cock dangling in the open. Aricia didn't hesitate and fired three times. Her aim was dead on as well and the Kavalian's cock suddenly evaporated in a fine mist of red and stopped him cold in his movement as savage pain gripped him. He screamed in utter agony as he fell to the floor writhing in pain. Aricia took seven steps up next to his body, her right hand flared briefly and she sent the psychic diamond hurtling into the center of his forehead. His cries of pain ceased as did all but the twitching of his legs. Her azure eyes spun to glare from behind her helmet at the Kavalian female.

"Don't... don't hurt me!" The female cried. "I am not with them! I..."

Aricia flicked out her wrist and using her PK power of Mindvoice she sent the woman smashing hard into the wall with a resounding thud, knocking her unconscious and silencing her protests.

"Two down!" She snapped into her implant and turning to the *Durcunusaan* troop. "Tie her up!" She snapped. "Then bring her outside!"

"As you order my Queen!" The man echoed stepping over the body of the Kavalian and grabbing the female none too gently.

Aricia touched the small console on her forearm and activated her PSG, her lithe body shimmering from view until it was all but indiscernible from the surrounding background and then she headed outside.

Dysea and her troop acted as efficiently as her elven nature. He simply bulled his way through the door and covered his elven Queen as she sent the third Kavalian officer into hell with a sustained burst from her P190A3. His body was pinned against the far wall as thirteen rounds perforated his flesh and he finally slumped to the floor, dead long before his movement stopped.

“Three!” Dysea snapped into her implant.

The Kavalian Base Commander had literally thrown the biogenic female off him when Torma had smashed into the barracks across his base. He was scrambling for his weapon when the door to his apartment shattered inward. He saw a flash of a body as it continued out of his line of sight and his hands clamped around his assault rifle. He lifted his rifle and proceeded to move out of his small bedroom area, the rifle tracking in front of him. He leveled the weapon at the *Durcunusaan* soldier that was slowly getting to his feet seemingly unconcerned and waited until the man turned to face him, his dark eyes burning brightly behind the dragon armor helmet and face shield. The Kavalian’s eyes grew large as he saw the man even smile under the cheeks shields that guarded his face.

The Commander hissed savagely and pulled the trigger on his rifle only to see some invisible force grab the barrel and rip it upwards so that the rounds impacted the ceiling above him. The Base Commander’s eyes grew wide when he saw the shifting of light texture directly beside him. Light texture that was in the shape of a man.

“Is that how you greet guests?” The deep voice asked causing the man’s eyes to grow even wider as the cloaked figure took on more of a solid feature. He couldn’t see, let alone stop the blow from the armored fist encased in a light blue mist like field as it crushed against his jaw and sent him flying backwards across the room. His naked body smashed into several very expensive pieces of fine art that the Commander had obtained through the years before abruptly stopping in a rush of air as he impacted the rear wall of the apartment. The air left his lungs in a violent exhale and he knelt there momentarily stunned.

He looked up in time to see the huge figure, still shrouded in that light bending field step up to him and grab the long fur on his head with no regard. He glimpsed another blue mist like fist hurtling at him but was still too dazed to try and avoid it before it pummeled into his face like a hammer. The force of the blow lifted him off his feet and sent him crashing down upon the floor three meters away, the simple chair under him splintering into many pieces, blood now flowing freely from his mangled lips and shattered nose.

“It’s a bit different when you aren’t attacking women and children isn’t it asshole!” That voice seared his mind again.

He looked up and saw the figure moving towards him with a measured gait. He saw one hand reach up and touch the other and then that light bending shield that made him nearly invisible vanished from view. That is when the Kavalian Base Commander saw those burning yellow/golden eyes and knew without question he was dead.

“YOU!” He screeched. “It... no! You are dead! We... we saw it! You are dead!”

“Being dead is overrated!” Martin snarled. “I didn’t much care for it!”

Martin wasted no time and reached down to grab the Kavalian by his throat, wrenching him up to his feet and using his incredible wolf strength, fueled by his PK power to hurl him across the room once more. This time it was directly at the remaining window and his body flailed wildly as it smashed through the thick glass. Martin leaped forward, following the officer through the window and landing beside him on the ground outside. The Kavalian’s naked body was now cut deeply in several places, his blood rapidly soaking his fur as he staggered on the ground, lifting his head at the horrible sound of a dragon trumpeting. Terrible fear gripped him as he whirled around and saw Torma, dragon armor encasing his huge muscular body and glittering in the rising sun, striding toward him with two others directly behind him. The main barracks that housed his men was aflame and completely destroyed, one whole side caved into the structure. As he looked at it he knew none of his men would have escaped that inferno.

The man’s blood was dripping profusely onto the ground and he was frozen in place as Torma settled to the ground only four meters from him and shook his huge front talon to the side. The Kavalian’s eyes grew wide as he saw the upper torso of one of his soldiers flip off that long talon and fly through the air landing with

a sickening thud some ten meters away. Those eyes were so similar to the Lycavorian King and as that thought hit him he spun around once more to glare at Martin.

“You... you will start a war with this action!” He screamed at Martin, his spittle flying from his bloody lips. “Marshall Pusintin and Prefect Keleru will... they will not let this stand!”

“War?” Martin growled at him. “What do you know of war fool?” He screamed as Aricia and Dysea and the others began to move closer to him. “You attack innocent men, women and children! My people! You kidnap my elven wife and mate and rape her!” Martin raged as he lashed out with a PK fueled punch that smashed into the man’s chest. The Kavalian officer gagged as nearly all of his ribs splintered because of that one blow, slamming him back into the ground.

Walter appeared beside Aricia and Dysea with Andreus, his eyes wide. He moved to step forward but Aricia reached out and took his arm. “No *Val'istar*.” She said softly.

“Aricia... child... he must not let his anger fuel his actions!” Wayonn spoke urgently.

“Anger?” Dysea asked him. “*Nauta Melme* is not angry right now *Val'istar*.” She spoke with what could only be described as a small chuckle of amusement.

“What... what do you call that?” Wayonn asked.

“Justice.” Cirith’s voice echoed softly as she came up next to Dysea.

“War!” Martin roared again as he lifted his *Nehtes* and extended the spear to its full nine foot length. “I will show you the true face of war little man!”

Martin drove his *Nehtes* down with all of his strength, impaling the Kavalian officer clean through his abdomen with at least a meter of the *Nehtes* sinking deeply into the Earth under him. Martin twisted the *Nehtes* savagely and leaned over to stare into the agony filled eyes of the Kavalian officer, his hands gripping the now bloody shaft.

“I have released the wolves and the dragons of war fool Kavalian!” Martin hissed at him. “For what Keleru and my brother have done I will show you the true definition of war! It has a face you know! My face! My son’s face! No mercy! No remorse! No surrender! And with their vile actions, it is your own leaders who have unlocked the shackles that bound us! Remember that as your life bleeds away into the earth of this planet! You will die now; you will die with the knowledge that many more of your despicable race will follow you into *Jorbhe* and beyond!”

Martin ripped his *Nehtes* free of the man’s abdomen and ignored his cry of agony as pieces of his internal organs went with the spear head. Martin’s right boot snapped forward and crunched into the head of the Kavalian, sending him spinning away, his skull fractured in two places. Martin collapsed his *Nehtes* and stepped back slightly, turning to look at Aricia and the others. Wayonn saw his face split into an enormous grin under the helmet.

“Ok... I think I have worked the kinks out.” He stated. “This new armor is the shit!”

Aricia and the others could not help but burst into laughter as the rush of combat began to subside. Martin turned when he saw the two Kavalian biogenic females being led out of the apartments, their hands secured in front of them. Both of them were terrified, that much was obvious, but that fear did not detract from their beauty. One had long dark hair and the other had white blond hair and both had very healthy figures. The two *Durcunusaan* troops ushered them over to where he was and pushed them to their knees.

“Please...!” The one who had been in the Commander’s apartment. Her white blond hair whipped from side to side as she looked around with wide green eyes. “We... we do not want to die! We were sent here to entertain these beasts! We did not...”

“Silence!” Wayonn barked loudly as he stepped up to Martin. His voice had the desired affect and both women fell silent. *Martin Leonidas... you can not...* He began speaking within Mindvoice.

Wayonn... do you honestly believe I would harm innocents? Martin asked him.

Well... no. You just...

Martin reached up and placed his hand on Wayonn’s shoulder. “That is something you never have to be concerned about.” He said. “Danny?”

“Yo!” Dan called out on the implant.

“Status?”

“Colin is already tapping into their system.” Danny replied from the COM bunker. “He needs four hours to get what we need. Kenny says nothing is inbound or scheduled to be inbound for at least a week. We won’t be calling home though. We kind of shot up the COM array.” He said sheepishly.

“I thought I taught you better than that?” Martin asked with a smile.

“So *nubous* sue me!” Danny came back. “I get the job done.”

T'lolt stepped forward now and looked at Martin. “Send them to Kranek Martin Leonidas. They will be safe there.”

Aricia nodded. “*OMEN THREE* has a small four person transport Beloved. Yuriko says they hardly use it. And it will free up more room in the cargo bay so Endith does not have to curse so much when she takes off and lands.”

Martin looked at the two women. “I take it you do not wish to go back to your people.” He said.

“So they can torture us for days and then kill us for what you have done here?” The woman who had spoken earlier snapped. She seemed to be the less meek of the two and if the bruises on her neck and shoulders were any indication she was anything but submissive. “We are already outcasts from our Prides because of the biogenic treatments we submitted too! We can never go back!”

“So Kranek is it.” Dysea said.

“No! I want nothing to do with Immortals!” The second woman snarled.

Aricia looked at her. “You do not have much choice in the matter.” She said.

“The Immortals have a reputation... many of them have been known to torture and rape those Kavalian females they capture. Take us with you!” The first woman offered. “We know of how you treat your females. At least among you we will not be submitted to degrading actions and...”

“We have no use for what you were made to do!” Dysea snapped. “We do not allow this among our people!”

Martin looked at them as he stepped up to the talkative female. “Do you know who I am?” He asked her.

“You... you are the Lycavorian King Leonidas.” She answered in a soft voice. “Back... back from the dead.”

Martin grinned. “In a manner of speaking I guess.” He said. “What is your name?” He asked her.

“Iama’Juturi.” She replied. “My father gave me to Biogenic Program ten years ago. I have been... I have been outcast ever since.”

Dysea stepped closer now, Cirith beside her. “You have endured... you have endured this life for ten years?” She asked softly.

Iama looked at her. “It is... it is better than being dead Queen Dysea.” She quipped.

“You know me?” Dysea asked.

Iama nodded. “It is not hard to get banned reading material out here among the outposts.” She answered. “There are several novels written about you and the King. About the other Queens as well.”

Martin looked at Dysea. “Wow... I might just have to check one of them out *Melda Min*. They sound sexy.” He said.

“You will do no such thing!” Cirith exclaimed.

“No you will not.” Aricia echoed.

Dysea drew one of the dual knives given to her by Cha'talla when she had first arrived on Kranek. He had named them her *Vharc* after her rescue from Phy'iad and his ilk and she had not parted with them for any reason since. She stepped up to the young woman, looking down into her face. “You realize what is coming?” She asked softly.

Iama glanced at Martin and then back to her. “Yes.” She answered. “I have nothing. I have no home now. No people. My Pride discarded me like a piece of meat. I... we are nothing. I have no loyalty to them!”

“Iama... they are our people!” The second woman hissed at her.

“They discarded us Rulaia!” Iama hissed back. “They lied to us and turned us into whores for the men!”

“It is our way!” Rulaia exclaimed.

“It is not my way any longer!” Iama screeched.

Dysea shook her head slowly. “You are something Iama’Juturi.” She said with a warmth in her voice that everyone could hear. “You are free now. Come with us. Come with us and build a new life. One where you will be respected and honored and treated as you should be treated.”

Iama rose to her feet, the flimsy garment wrapped around her barely covering her lush body. “I... I can cook.” She stammered. “My mother taught me well. I can...”

“*Sibfla*... it’s decided then!” Julie spoke from where she stood. “Let’s give her a job Marty. Anything has to be better than what Yuriko’s mess sergeant is feeding us.”

Dysea nodded and slashed downward, severing the plastic bindings on her hands. “Then I welcome you to a new life Iama’ Juturi.”

It happened very quickly and she moved incredibly fast for a Kavalian female. Iama snatched *Vharc* from Dysea’s hand and whirled on the second female. She lifted the knife and buried it into her chest as deeply as her natural Kavalian strength would allow even as Aricia and others brought up their weapons and leveled them on her.

“Hold!” Martin bellowed as he stepped forward in front of Dysea and they watched Iama pull the knife from Rulaia’s chest.

Iama hissed into the dying woman’s face. “You may have enjoyed being a plaything for these monsters Rulaia... but I did not! Now you can rot with their remains!” Iama watched her body slump to the ground and she turned slowly seeing the weapons on her. She slowly held out *Vharc* to Dysea, careful not to make any sudden moves. “She... she would have betrayed you the first chance she got.” Iama said. “I have saved you the trouble.”

Dysea took *Vharc* from her and nodded. “Thank you Iama.” She said.

It was Aricia and Cirith who caught her before she fainted completely away and one of the *Durcunusaan* who had assaulted the building held up the sheet he had brought with him. Cirith grasped it quickly and wrapped it around Iama as they held her between them.

“We will take care of her.” Aricia said. “Let us do what we came to do and get out of here Beloved. The bodies are beginning to stink already.”

Martin nodded. “No argument from me.” He said tapping his jaw. “Endy... bring her down. Once we have the Intel we need we are out of here!”

“Copy that. We’ll be down in four minutes.”

Martin nodded. “Secure a perimeter around the COM building just in case we missed any of these assholes out in the jungle!” He barked out the order. He looked at Wayonn and Dysea. “Let’s go see what is still working.” He said.

Dysea returned *Vharc* to its place on her hip and nodded. Wayonn looked at her. “You took a great chance freeing her Dysea.” He spoke.

Dysea smiled. “No I didn’t *Val’istar*.” She replied. “I took a leap of faith. And we will need to make many more in the coming days.”

HADARIAN SPACE KAVALIAN FLAGSHIP PRIDE OF PUMAS

“...lied to me bitch!” Pusintin snarled as he gripped For'mya by her throat and tried very hard not to squeeze the life from her.

For'mya glared at him with dark brown eyes. “I didn’t lie to you!” She exclaimed as she tried to pry his hand from around her neck.

“You didn’t tell me about this fucking Writ thing!” Pusintin screamed.

“I will not sell out my people!” For'mya shouted. “Not to you! Not to anyone!”

“You are my mate now For'mya!” Pusintin growled. “Mine! It is my touch that you need to sate the burning in your blood now! You keep playing these games and I will insure you spend the rest of your days getting gang banged by my men as often as they want!”

“Fuck you!” For'mya snarled. “You... you may have my body... but you will never have my mind! Never!”

“I don’t need your mind bitch!” Pusintin barked. “All you elf females are nothing more than fuck toys! You’re too stupid to think for yourselves! That is why so many of you take Lycavorians as mates!”

“Bastard!” For'mya spat.

Pusintin squeezed her neck a little harder. “Don’t push me woman!” He snapped. “You are already close to that line!”

“Then kill me!” For'mya snarled at him. “Kill me and watch as your dreams of ruling the Union die with me!”

“I’ll just have Muton cut my son from your womb!” Pusintin barked.

“Not anymore!” For'mya snarled back just as vehemently. “If... if you kill me... you kill your son!” She almost laughed at him when she spoke the words.

“You think I’m stupid?” Pusintin growled.

“You should have thought about what you were doing more!” For'mya snapped at him. “When you injected me with your drugs... and then you raped me... you bound the life of your son with mine! Go ahead! Kill me! Do it!”

Pusintin turned to Muton who was standing to the side in the infirmary. “What is this bitch babbling about?” He barked.

Muton stepped forward cautiously. “She is right Marshall.” He said. “The combination of drugs that were used on her to accelerate the growth and keep her docile reacted differently with her elven genes than they do with our females. They have acted as a bridge of sorts. Any kind of attempt to remove the fetus from her womb now will kill them both. And if she dies, the fetus will die before I have an opportunity to remove it from her womb.”

“Muton... you are serious?” Pusintin gasped.

Muton nodded. “It is why I have had her stinking up my medical bay for the last hours.” He replied distastefully. “I discovered it shortly after your nephew tried to kill her. All the tests and blood samples I have taken since confirm it. She has not been the most cooperative and I have had to forcibly sedate her twice.”

Pusintin snarled loudly and released For'mya watching as she dropped to the deck holding her throat and taking deep breaths. “Fuck!” He shouted. “How long before she spits my son out Muton!” He barked.

“At the present rate of growth... I estimate six days Marshall. Give or take a few hours.” Muton answered. “As long as I monitor her on a continuous basis I might be able to speed that along but there is no guarantee. I suggest you kill her when we have the child... it will save us future problems.”

Pusintin turned back and looked at For'mya. “No! I’m not going to kill her. I’m going to fuck her every day and night for the rest of her life! In all of her holes and listen to her howl for more! You are mine now bitch!” He roared. “Mine!”

“Nubous ronnus!” For'mya hissed from the floor.

Pusintin turned back to Muton then. “Take a detachment and a transport and take her to Nefoa.” He ordered. “Stay with her at all times! They still may try to rescue her tight ass and I want to make sure I get to fuck it before they do. Nefoa is the best place right now. I have already arranged for a secure Wing to hold her. When she is ready to give birth you contact me and I’ll be there.”

Muton nodded his head. “As you order Marshall. May I take them from your personal guard?” He asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “No... I need them for other missions right now. Take them from the on call forces within the ship.”

Muton nodded. “I can’t convince you to allow me to kill her after we have the child?”

Pusintin grinned. “She annoys you that much my friend?”

Muton snorted. “I would cut her throat now if she did not mean so much to you.” He replied.

Pusintin laughed softly now as he became more relaxed. “Maybe I’ll let you fuck her once or twice. She is better than any of the biogenic females we have and if you rub her ears once or twice she’ll be begging you to fuck her harder. Just like she did with me.”

Muton shook his head. “I will stick with our own kind Marshall.” He said.

Pusintin nodded. “We’re leaving the system in an hour. Once we break into The Wilds take the ship and head to Nefoa.”

“They will not follow us?” Muton asked.

“Have the pilots cut through Kavalian space along the border. My nephew isn’t stupid enough to come after her then. No matter how much he wants to kill her.”

Muton nodded. “It will be done.”

“I need to speak with Keleru and decide who we are going to send to Earth.” He stated. “Contact me just before you are ready to depart.”

“Of course.”

Pusintin turned to leave but stopped and looked at him. “You have my permission to beat her as much as you want as long as it does not hurt my son.” He said. “Once this is all over I intend to break her properly.”

“I don’t think so you bastard!” For’mya snarled from the floor.

Pusintin laughed at her. “We’ll see bitch! We’ll see! I’ll have you begging me to fuck you mindless before I’m done.”

Pusintin turned quickly and left the medical bay. As soon as the doors shut and Muton secured them he rushed to For’mya’s side and helped her to her feet.

“By whatever gods you worship For’mya...” He gasped. “I thought he was going to kill you! What were you doing child?”

For’mya held his arm as he guided her to the chair. “I needed to be convincing Muton.” She said.

“Convincing yes... not suicidal.” Muton spoke.

For’mya looked at him. “You were very convincing yourself you know. Do you think he will buy what we told him?”

Muton held out the small scanner and began running it slowly over her skin. “He is clueless when it comes to medical matters that go beyond battlefield wounds.” He answered her quickly. “I have treated him for the better part of three centuries now and he trusts me. He trusts what I say. As long as he questions no one else about what we said we will be fine for the time being.”

“Will he?” For’mya asked.

Muton shook his head. “Doubtful.” He replied. “He is not the most approachable man within the KFI. Anyone who comes to him and begins to make accusations against those he trusts will be hard pressed to prove them before he kills them outright. Fedor and Eirene?”

For’mya dropped her hand to her abdomen. “They are not happy with me.” She said with a small loving smile. “But it needed to be done.”

“Perhaps... but I tend to agree with them that it was almost too risky.” Muton spoke. “It seems your time spent with Martin Leonidas rubbed off on you. I understand he has a penchant for taking unnecessary risks as well.”

For’mya felt warmth flow through her at Martin’s name and she nodded. “Yes... he does.” She stated.

“Well... let’s not take too many before we got off this ship.” He said.

For’mya looked at him. “Nefoa is in The Wilds Muton.” She asked.

Muton nodded. “Yes... and it is also the most heavily fortified base we have outside KFI space. Any attack against Nefoa will bring the might of the Ninth Kavalian Legion down on whoever attacks. Five hundred ships For’mya and that does not include the three million troops. All within a day’s travel to Nefoa. No... we will need to think of something else.”

For’mya dropped her other hand to her swollen abdomen. “Muton... they will be among us in four days not six.” She said confidently.

Muton looked at her. “You are sure?”

For’mya nodded. “Yes. I know my body... and I know what it felt like just days before Arram and Bryon were born. That same feeling is beginning to touch me again.”

Muton nodded. “Then we will need to work quickly once we arrive on Nefoa. Once we are clear of this ship and on our way I will send a message to the others and they will meet us on Nefoa. We will need to arrange a rescue of some sort in a very short time and it will be easier to contact your Martin Leonidas from The Wilds than from within Kavalian space.” He looked at her. “But no more risks!” He scolded her.

For’mya nodded. “No more risks.” She echoed him.

“Why do I not believe you when you say that?” Muton asked.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FOUR

SCIMITAR

ONE HOUR FROM EARTH'S SYSTEM

Jomann leaned close to Eliani where she sat next to him at the massive table in the large conference room on deck three just beneath the large bubble observation lounge. Eliani's fern green eyes closed in bliss as he gently nuzzled her behind her left ear.

"I have spoken with my mother." He said softly. "They have postponed my brother's party until I return. Even though all that is happening with your mother has your attention, I was hoping you would come with me."

Eliani looked at him slightly surprised. "Jomann... that is not a question you have to ask me my love." She said.

"I didn't know if you would want to spend time with your family considering all that is happening." Jomann told her.

Eliani gripped his hand within hers and pulled it tightly to her chest and feeling the warmth of his knuckles against her large breasts. She leaned over and kissed him deeply in a very passionate and sensuous way but not overtly sexual, using her four-inch long tongue to tease the insides of his mouth as she had discovered he liked so much. The shivers of delight that coursed through her as his aura swept around her could never be matched by anyone else and Eliani blessed the day he came into her life. "You are my mate Jomann, my husband and my *Anome*." She told him softly. "I will always want to spend time with my family, but I will never deny you or your family Jomann. I... I am part of them now as well."

Jomann smiled at her, his ocean blue eyes causing tiny jolts of delight to ripple through her. "Indeed you are." He stated confidently. "My mother will truly enjoy your company. She was born and raised in Sparta and she is just as fiery now as she was when my father met her. You two will get along spectacularly."

Eliani smiled and leaned into him as more people filed into the huge conference room. Androcles had called this meeting only a short time ago and most of them knew it had to do with events on Hadaria and elsewhere. Eliani glanced over to where Andro sat whispering with Dutkne at the end of the table. She had not seen much of him since he had returned from the surface of Hadaria, though that made sense since she and Jomann had spent the last hours exploring each other's bodies and minds intimately. Sadi and the others sat to either side of him, watching in silence, Devra and Bren next to Caliria. Andro's Vanari mate and wife seemed very distracted for some reason, always looking at her brother quickly and then turning away. Denali and Lisisa sat across from her and Jomann, Arduri Re Mydala next to Lisisa as she had been for the last few days. If Eliani was any judge of character and intent, she would have to say that the Vanari was smitten with both Lisisa and Denali, though her brother was completely ignorant of the fact. Lisisa however was not, and she seemed to genuinely enjoy Arduri's company, more so than any other female had Lisisa had hung out with in the past years outside her family. Not to mention that her detecting the cautious desire for Arduri in Lisisa's scent was rather easy for her. Her sense of smell was probably the strongest among the non-pureblood Leonidas children, mainly because Andro and her father had spent years teaching her the nuances of tracking and sorting scents and their meaning.

Eliani was surprised to see Coren Re Mydala enter the conference room with the single *Durcunusaan* troop who had become his shadow whenever he left his quarters. He had refused to leave when Regent Ardan had departed and Andro did not have the heart to send him away. It would not help matters in the least Eliani knew, that his daughter Naesta was involved with the clone of her mother Ceuma and her Spartan mate Joci, nor would he be pleased to know that the young Vanari woman who had come here as his betrothed was now quite happily involved with Lu'ria's brother Am'uur if the sounds coming from his guest quarters were any indication.

Eliani's eyes grew a little wider when she saw Tastia walk in shortly after Coren clinging quite possessively to Am'uur's hand and making no attempt to hide it. She watched Coren's eyes grow a little wider at this and he started towards her, but she quickly took a chair at the table ignoring him completely. Am'uur simply stood behind her and folded his arms across his chest. Normya, Tir'ut, Zarah and Lucia rounded out those members of her family that were present on the *SCIMITAR* which made Eliani believe this definitely had something to do their mother For'mya.

She turned her head as Andro got to his feet and motioned to the *Durcunusaan* officer at the door. The man nodded and stepped out into the corridor, sealing the door behind him. Andro moved to the credenza that held coffee and Danishes and poured himself a steaming mug of his mother's coffee. "Thank you all for coming." He stated as he turned back around. "Please... feel free to get coffee or tea or a snack as the meeting

progresses. This is to be very informal. Resumar, Athani and Shiria are joining us in a few moments via secure COM so...

The holodiscs along the bulkhead wall flared to life and suddenly they were all looking at images of Resumar, Athani and Shiria. The images flickered and cleared as the advanced Pralor communications array kicked in and focused and then it appeared as if they were in the room with them.

Andro chuckled. "Right on time brother." He said.

"Punctual." Resumar echoed. "That's me."

"Hah! Calling you punctual is like calling me neat." Denali exclaimed. "It doesn't go together."

"Oh... how true." Lisisa agreed with a grin as she leaned into his side.

"Andro... Arrarn and Narice aren't going to join us?" Normya asked.

Andro shook his head. "What I'm about to say does not leave this room. Is that clear to everyone?"

Andro saw the nods and then the heads turn to look at Coren Re Mydala who was not a fan of the Lycavorian people in the least. "Regent Re Mydala will be returning to the Beta Quadrant as soon as we get back to Earth." Andro continued seeing Coren's eyes grow wide as he looked at him. "He is not a threat unless he has friends within the High Coven and Kavalian government that he can contact from there. He may not like us very much, but I do not consider him an enemy. And there is another reason that I asked him to be here which I will get too later on." Andro sipped his coffee. "Arrarn and Narice are currently arriving on Kranek and within two hours will be moving to a rendezvous with a senior High Coven Admiral to discuss terms for his support of Narice in her bid to take control of the High Coven. All of our intelligence reports indicate that now would be a perfect time for her to make an attempt to take power and I have made the decision to support her as best as we are able. Cha'talla will be providing most of the manpower, while we will provide most of the logistical support."

"*Saoi sibfla* Andro!" Denali gasped leaning forward in his chair. "Does father know this *fervon*?"

Andro shook his head. "No. This is something I decided after several long conversations with Narice and Cha'talla over the past few weeks. We were going ahead with the plan we came up with over the course of the last weeks, which I will fill you in on today, but if we can now somehow pull the support of High Coven military forces that are in a position to help us... it is worth the risk."

Zarah looked at her brother and leaned forward in her chair now. She could sense the anger coming from Lucia over this information and she squeezed her hand silently. "Andro what..."

Andro turned his azure eyes on his sister and shook his head. "There will be no reprieve for Dante Zarah my sister." He spoke quickly. "Lucia... you can put your mind at ease because I can feel your anger. He will pay for what he has done, to both of you, I promise you that; no matter how long it takes or where he may hide." Andro waited until Lucia turned and met his eyes and nodded her head. He felt her anger begin to bleed off.

"Promise me Androcles." Lucia said softly. "Promise me and Zarah."

Andro nodded his head. "That is a promise I have already made to you and it is one I will keep." He stated.

Lucia looked at Zarah and then back to him. "Then we will do whatever you ask of us in order to help."

Andro nodded. "To begin with... we have had a deep agent within High Coven territory for many years now. Only seven of us know his identity and I won't reveal it now but you should know he has risen quite high within Aikiro's former inner circle and his last report to us was that now would be the perfect time to make this happen. The High Coven is in turmoil. The military is divided over not only the war with the Kavalians but also Aikiro's actions on Earth. Our asset is of the mind that the population is split... well. Many of the younger vampires are beginning to openly question the current state of affairs. It appears many of them were of the mind that the Cease Fire we all knew to be a cover so that we could train their dragons was actually real. They are tired of war with us. Narice and I are going to try and bring that to a close. There are far too many loyal vampires living within the Union for us to remain enemies when all it could take is a gentle nudge and the entire High Coven apparatus comes crumbling down. It is a risk that I am willing to take."

"Androcles... father is going to have a fit!" Lisisa said stating the obvious.

Andro nodded his head. "Probably... but I will deal with father. I have not told him Lisi because of his views of the High Coven and all of you know this. Our mother has mitigated his distrust and hatred for vampires through the years with their love for each other but after what they did to Zarah and the fact that they

are responsible for grandfather's death... I don't believe he could make an honest tactical decision in regards to them."

"How big a risk is this Andro?" Resumar asked from the transmission.

"I won't lie to any of you." Andro said returning to his seat. "The risks are extreme, but Narice is willing to take the chance. And so am I. Arrarn is with her because the escape plan will require his skills as a pilot if they need to use it. Cha'talla is with her because of the recent decision by Moran to release all Immortals from their service to the High Coven."

"Release them?" Tir'ut gasped from where he stood behind Normya's chair at the table. "Androcles... you are serious?"

Andro nodded. "It is being kept very low key by everyone within the High Coven, but something happened that made Moran give the order. We believe it was in large part because of the transmission that your family did. I had Dilaen beam it across the entire High Coven on fundamentally pirated channels so that it could not be jammed. The exodus began within hours of this transmission happening."

"And my mother does nothing?" Lucia asked surprised.

"We know she is alive... aside from that we know nothing." Andro told her. "She has not returned to your homeworld and her position is being kept from even those within the High Coven government."

"She is waiting to see who is loyal to her and who is not." Lucia said confidently. "When she discovers this then she will strike."

Andro nodded in agreement. "That is what Narice and I believe as well, which is why now is the perfect time to make this happen. My decision on this is final and I did not tell any of you because I will bear the results of failure alone if we can't make it happen. And father's wrath will be mine alone to endure." The room fell silent for a long moment and then Andro began again.

"Now that aside... as I said earlier... Regent Re Mydala will be returning to Austrova when we return to Earth. Since Regent Lamurrion has already departed on *CITADEL ONE*, he will be traveling on board the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser *ARCH DEMON*. She will have with her a full Strike Wing in support. Deni... you and Lisisa will be in command."

Denali and Lisisa looked at him with shock on their faces. "**WHAT?**" Denali almost shouted.

"You are ready for your own command brother." Andro said. "Kranek proved that. With Lisisa as your support you will do fine."

"Andro... you're sending us away?" Lisisa exclaimed. "Why? Now is when you need us the most! We are strongest when our family is together! You know that!"

Andro nodded his head holding up his hand. "Yes I do... and you are correct. You will not be there long so don't start complaining. Dutkne is returning to facilitate the merger of the Protectorate into the Union and hopefully by the time you arrive Regent Lamurrion will have been able to lay the groundwork for a real treaty between the Vanari and our people." Andro got to his feet. "If so then I will need a member of our family to represent us. That is where you and Deni come in. If not... you will insure that *Inamarno* and mother's work on the counteragent for the OSG chemical is then distributed to who it needs to go to and you will return. I do not trust this Corbin Faith person of the OSG anymore than I trust our uncle and I will not go tit-for-tat with the Vanari Board of Regents over issues that no longer apply to our people." Andro looked at Coren. "And you may relay that message when you return Regent Re Mydala. What I told you and Ardan before still applies. If the Vanari do not wish to let the past remain where it belongs and move into the future then all trade between our people will stop effective immediately. There will be no discussion on that whatsoever. Dutkne will be acting with my full authority as well as that of my father."

"So you will threaten and cajole us into doing what you want?" Coren asked with a touch of sarcasm.

Andro shook his head. "Not at all sir, but I will not associate with a group or species that does not wish to associate with us. I will not allow the status quo to continue. Your people, those that actually travel to Protectorate space, have free reign no matter where they go. They are not hounded, harassed, watched or limited to certain areas of different planets as you do with my people within Vanari space. If you wish to discriminate against us... that is your right. It is our right to refuse to trade with you and refuse access into our territory. Which is what will happen."

"The Board of Regents will not be forced into anything!" Coren snarled.

“I’m not forcing them to do anything.” Andro said. “I’m simply explaining how it will be going into the future.”

“Tastia and my children?” Coren asked. “Will they be returning with me or will you hold them hostage here?”

“I’m holding no one hostage Coren Re Mydala.” Andro said. “And that comment is part of the reason why I will not tolerate you or your Board of Regents. I do not know why you hate us so... or why you seem to consider us beneath you. It is obvious there are others among your people who do not view us in the same light. To be frank... with everything that is happening I no longer have the patience to discover why you feel the way you do. I have already spoken with Naesta. She is on Earth as we speak and you can ask her yourself if you wish when you arrive... but she has chosen to remain here. She does not want to leave what she has discovered. Nirilo is returning for the sole purpose of bringing the Lycavorian woman who he loves back here. Caliria is returning as well to continue her studies.” This announcement caused Caliria’s head to whip around and look at him with wide green eyes as well as the members of his own family, including Sadi and the others. “As for Arduri, Devra and Tastia... they can make their own decisions.”

“I have already said I will not be returning.” Devra told him from her seat. She held Bren’s left hand in both of hers. “For the very same reasons that Naesta is remaining. I have discovered my future here and I will not let it go so easily.”

“Nor I.” Tastia spoke from her chair.

Coren looked at her in shock. “Tastia... you are to be my... my wife!” He gasped.

Tastia shook her head. “You never intended for me to be your wife Coren.” She said. “I would be nothing more than a trophy for you to have on your arm. I will not live my life like that.” She looked up at where Am’uur stood behind her and took his large hand in hers. “I have discovered something I want to explore far more than I want to be your trophy.” She looked back to him. “I will be staying as well Coren!”

“That is not acceptable to me!” Coren snapped.

“At this stage in my life I don’t particularly care what is acceptable to you or not.” Tastia told him. “I have made my decision.”

Arduri jumped right in after her. “I will return father.” She stated simply. “But only to insure that this arrangement with Cruor Ahn Vernalo does not take place.”

Coren’s eyes were wide now. “Arduri... you have agreed to become his wife! A contract has been drawn up! You were compatible during the Celebration of the Hundreds! You can not back out now! Your hand has been promised to him! You agreed to this!”

Arduri met his eyes. “I have changed my mind. And I have every intention of backing out. You know as well as I that even if we are compatible, that is not the full measure of what forms our unions.” She stated evenly. “I’m sorry if that disappoints you father but that is what I want.”

Coren glared at Devra then. “This is your fault!” He snapped at her. “You have done this Devra!”

Devra met his eyes evenly. “I gave birth to them Coren... but I have never tried to rule what they think unlike you.” She stated. “Does it bother you so much that they do not adhere to your fool ideals?”

“It is the way of our people!” Coren shouted.

“And our ways need to change.” Devra stated simply.

“So you will consort with animals instead of your own species!” Coren snarled.

“Regent Re Mydala, have you ever considering listening to your children for once instead of dictating what you believe they should do?” Andro stated.

“Do not lecture me boy!” Coren roared. “You... you who have killed millions!”

Andro nodded. “And I will live with that fact every day for the rest of my natural life.” He said solemnly. “I believe the portion of this meeting that you needed to hear is over. The *Durcunusaan* will escort you back to your quarters sir.”

Coren knew he could do nothing, not while he was here. He allowed the *Durcunusaan* troop to lightly grasp his arm and urge him toward the now open door. “This way sir.” He said.

“This ploy of yours will not work Androcles Leonidas!” Coren snarled as he moved into the corridor through the door. “I see right through what you are trying to do!”

Andro nodded as the doors closed. “No doubt.” He said softly. He paused for a moment and then looked up. “Ok... now I will inform all of you what is going to take place over the course of the next few days.”

“Jeez *fervon*... you mean there is more?” Resumar exclaimed.

“Unfortunately... yes.” Andro said.

“It’s about mother isn’t it?” Eliani asked. “About our brother and sister that she carries?”

Andro nodded. “In a manner of speaking yes.” He answered. “I do not know why she has chosen to not remove the inhibitor from within her body. I gave the location to our siblings just as you told me Eli. It would be so much easier if I could talk with her... but I can’t. We are too far out of range for me to touch our brother and sister now either; not without a Max power Neural Booster and at least the Elder Mother within the connection with Elynth and I, so my options are limited and there is more going on that we did not know before leaving Earth.”

“What options?” Deni asked.

Androcles looked at them. “The Union Senate will convene to hear our uncle’s ridiculous claim to the throne. I have spoken with *tenna* Deia and the *Feravomir* since leaving Hadaria and they are in agreement that the Senate will never allow him to fulfill this birthright claim. Father and our mothers have succeeded in their mission and will be returning to Kranek to further plan ongoing missions. We will not reveal that father is alive just yet. That must remain secret until such time as we discover mother has somehow made contact with us or we know she is free of our uncle’s control.”

“Andro... how will we know that?” Lisisa asked. “If you can’t touch them... surely father will not be able to. You are the one who gave them awareness.”

Andro nodded his head. “Yes I know. When I spoke to them they told me of someone... a Kavalian doctor who they thought was attempting to help mother. They told me he was strange in some way. Different. Not like the Kavalians that they had seen so far in mother’s memories. I didn’t have time to press them further because they were still too weak but if that is indeed true then we may have more allies than even Mican and your rebels *fervon*.” He said looking at Resumar. “Has Mican ever mentioned someone else? Someone not within his group that could feel as they do?”

Resumar shook his head. “No.”

Shiria shook her head as well. “I am not aware of anything either.” She told him.

“Could there be others that you are not aware of *Val’istar*?” Andro asked her.

“If there are then they have a level of security that I have not seen.” Shiria answered. “You must understand Androcles... Keleru is paranoid to the extreme. If he had even a hint that someone was disloyal or acting against his rule he would not hesitate to crush them completely. He would destroy them utterly.”

“He has done this in the past I take it?” Andro said.

Shiria nodded. “Many hundreds of years ago yes. He...” Shiria stopped talking and her face turned reflective.

“What?” Andro asked.

“It was six... no seven thousand years ago.” Shiria said. “A small group of individuals thought to protest some of his edicts. They wanted more freedoms. He branded them religious fanatics and butchered thousands of them.”

“Why does this make you pause?” Andro asked.

“They were an odd bunch if I remember correctly.” Shiria answered. “And their numbers were far greater than some simple group that formed in a matter of months. It was almost as if they were spread out among the populous naturally.”

“Naturally?” Andro said softly.

“Yes.”

“Interesting.” He continued. “Does the name Muton mean anything to you?”

Shiria shook her head. “No... why?”

“It is the name they gave me.” Andro said.

“No... I’m sorry.” She said.

“*Fervon*... are you ready?” Andro asked.

Resumar nodded in reply. “As soon as the order goes out.” He replied. “Power was not an issue with *SPARTA’S WRATH* and her Phased Quantum Fusion Core. It was only a matter of stripping as many generators as we could without endangering those who went back. Avi and 341 have integrated them into the ship’s systems now. It’s a patch job but it will work until something more permanent can be devised. Uncle Isra and

Aunt Tarifa are confident in their plan to extract Ckhoa's sister and the other females as well. Mican and six of his team will be accompanying them while Na'lia and Dario escort the remainder to Shiria's fortress."

Androcles nodded. "Very well. We..."

"Andro... will you dispense with the *rensibfla* and just tell us what is going on?" Eliani exclaimed.

Andro looked at her and a small smile tugged at his lips. "As you wish." He stated. "The Union Senate will convene and hear our uncle's claim to birthright as I said."

"And?" Denali asked.

"*Tenna Deia* and the *Feravomir* believe they will then vote to condemn his claim and reveal that father and I have already brought the ruling bloodlines back into order and that it is bloodline that is primary in determining who rules." He said.

"Yes... we already had that figured out." Deni spoke quickly. "What aren't you telling us?"

"When the Senate does this our uncle will fly into a frenzy." Andro said. "All of you know this."

"And hopefully his heart explodes, but we can't get that lucky!" Eliani snapped. "What is going on Andro?"

Andro returned to his chair and looked at them. "When the Kavalians discover that their plan to have our uncle take the throne will not bear fruit they will undoubtedly fly into a rage as well and come at us from every direction."

"And... so?" Deni asked.

"Once the Union Senate makes its announcement I am going to strike first." Andro said seeing their eyes go wide. "I am going to launch a premeditated and concerted attack within Kavalian space that I hope will sow enough confusion and destruction within their ranks to buy father enough time to find and rescue mother and our siblings before they can fully bring their forces to bear on us. War is unavoidable now... no matter what road or path we choose to take and no matter how we try to avoid it... war is going to happen. I'm just going to make sure we have the advantage. At least initially."

"Andro... Andro the Union has never... we have never struck first." Resumar spoke from within the transmission with stunned eyes. "It is against everything we believe. Everything we covet."

Andro nodded. "I know *fervon*... and that is why I have not told anyone what I have been planning until now. I think the *Feravomir* and *Tenna Deia* may have some inkling that I am planning something, grandfather Riall as well, but they don't know what exactly. It is already in motion and as with the plans for a coup in the High Coven; I will bear the success or failure of this plan on my own. We will either succeed or we will not. The odds are slightly against us to be honest, but father always taught us to ignore the odds and that is what I'm doing now."

"And if it fails?" Lisisa asked.

Andro met her eyes without doubt. "Then I will have wasted lives and our most advanced ships and equipment in a futile effort and the blame will be mine Lisi." He told her softly. "And we will be at war regardless."

The conference room was silent for a long moment as everyone absorbed what he had just told them.

"What can we do?" Zarah was the first to speak. "Tell us Andro... tell us what you need us to do. You have stood alone, carried these burdens alone in order to protect us... protect all of us, and you have done it for far too long. I will not allow you to do it any longer! Tell us what you need us to do? We are a family... and we do nothing alone! Our parents taught us that! Now we need to start acting like it."

"Zarah's right." Resumar's voice came from within transmission. "As much as it pains me to say that... she's right!"

"*Nubous forn!*" Zarah snapped at him but her eyes held nothing but love in them.

"Out with it Andro." Eliani spoke now. "Tell us all of it. This is our decision now as well." Her eyes touched each of her siblings and they all nodded without hesitation.

Androcles Leonidas nodded his head. "Very well." He stated. "Together then."

Caliria waited until the conference room had emptied before rising to her feet and moving up to where Andro was pouring himself another mug of coffee. Sadi and Ne'Veha moved on either side of her while Carisia and Lu'ria remained where they were in their chairs equally puzzled but unwilling to rush to conclusions.

“You... you are sending me away Androcles?” Caliria asked softly.

“Andro... what is going on?” Sadi asked. “What are you doing? *Inamarno* belongs with us.”

“Yes!” Ne'Veha exclaimed. “You did not talk to us about this! You can't just order her away like this!” Andro's eyes never left Caliria's face as he turned around and gazed at her. “I am not sending you away

Inamarno.” He told her softly.

“What do you call it then?” Caliria asked.

“Giving you the opportunity to discover what it is you truly want. The opportunity to truly discover who you are.” Andro replied.

“I want you!” Caliria snapped. “I want all of you! And I know who I am!”

“Do you?” Androcles asked.

“Andro?” Sadi declared almost angrily.

“This is about this morning isn't it?” Caliria asked. “About what you heard me say to my mother.”

Sadi and Ne'Veha both glanced at her. “What happen this morning?” Sadi demanded to know.

“Do you honestly believe I want to do this?” Andro asked her. “Do you think I want to have you away from me? From us?”

“Then why?” Caliria stammered.

“Because *Inamarno*, what you have endured is beyond anything anyone should have to endure.” Andro told her gently. “What you have experienced is more than most people will ever imagine... let alone experience. You need to find your center again... and you can not do that here feeling as you do. I do not want you here if you are not completely sure.”

“Andro!” Carisia exclaimed coming to her feet now.

Andro ignored her and moved closer to Caliria, taking her beautiful face within his hands. He used his thumbs to caress the smooth cornflower blue skin of her cheeks. “Remaining here with us *Inamarno*... when you do not know who you are or what you truly want is not only unhealthy... it is a crime by us if we make you stay.”

“Do you... do you hate me?” She stuttered the words.

“Hate you?” Andro gasped. “*Inamarno* I love you. We all love you. With all that we are. And that is why we need to let you find your way. You question everything around you... I can sense it within you. You question my love for you. You question how I can feel as I do for you. For all of you. You question everything you have been raised to believe all of these years about many different things. These are the items you need to work out within yourself. Only when you have come to terms with that can you be with us and be happy.”

“I... I didn't mean what I said this morning Androcles.” Caliria said.

Andro smiled gently and leaned over to kiss her soft violet lips. “Yes you did *Inamarno*.” He said softly with a smile. “I care less about what you said than I do about you and your well being. Perhaps... perhaps I have rushed everything in order to insure you are with us. That is my mistake and I apologize to you for that *Inamarno*. My world... our world is foreign to you, I know that now. And it was my selfish actions that reasoned you would accept it without any question to be with us. You obviously have doubts. Doubts about me... about what you feel. Our difference in ages. So much of it.”

“But it... it does feel so normal Androcles. So right... when I am with you and...” Caliria stated gripping his arms tightly.

“And what you need to do is reconcile that with the conflicts that still reside within your mind and heart.” He told her. “Our feelings will never change *Inamarno*. You belong to us and we to you... and only when you are ready to accept that completely can you truly be happy with us.”

“I'm... I'm sorry.” Caliria sobbed looking up at his face.

“There is nothing to be sorry for.” Androcles answered pulling her tightly to him and feeling her arms wrap around his waist as Sadi and the others crowded around, pressing their own bodies close to theirs. “You have done nothing wrong. You will still be a Princess of the Union *Inamarno*. At least to us.”

Eliani smelled her the instant she walked into the medical bay and she felt her hormones cry out excitedly as the scent of wild strawberries filtered across her senses. She moved quickly from her private entrance into the main portion of the medical bay and saw the *Durcunusaan* soldier standing near the crew

entrance to the bay. Her eyes shifted and she saw Brandi standing beside the medical bed, with Elenor Faith sitting on the bed looking pale and weak and the older man standing to her other side. Eliani crossed the distance to them immediately.

“What is wrong?” She asked looking at Elenor, real concern in her voice.

“I know how... I know how you must feel about us...” Brendi began. “But my mother is sick and...”

Eliani looked at her. “You don’t know half of what you think you do Brendi Faith and the sooner you realize that the better it will be.” Eliani told her as she moved closer to the bed and lifted her hands.

“Coming here was a mistake Brendi.” Elenor Faith spoke looking up. “Let us return to the room we...”

“You will sit right there.” Richard Faith declared to his wife before turning to Eliani. “My wife... she has not been feeling well for several days. Even before your people took us from Edolus. Brendi said you... she said you could help her because you are Hadarian. She said you could discover what is wrong.”

Eliani glanced at Brendi quickly. “Did she?” She said softly. She turned back to Elenor and rested her hands on the woman’s shoulders, her hands flaring a soft white in color Brendi noticed, though her mother did not. “You stay right there.” She stated firmly. “And tell me what is wrong...?”

“Elenor. Elenor Faith.”

“A pleasure to meet you Lady Faith. I am Eliani Leonidas.” She answered.

“The Princess?” Elenor asked. “Like... like your sister?”

Eliani smiled warmly. “Yes... like Lisisa my sister.” She answered. “Your body temp is four degrees higher than normal and you are extremely dehydrated.”

“How... how do you know that without...?”

Eliani pulled her hand back slightly and let Elenor see the soft white glow radiating from her palm. “I’m Hadarian.” She answered. “Well... half Hadarian. I’m the Chief Medical Officer on my brother’s ship.”

“We have... we have heard of your people.” Richard said. “You are said to be gifted doctors.”

“She collapsed as we were retuning from breakfast.” Brendi told Eliani. “She won’t tell me what is wrong with her. The *Durcunusaan* soldier there carried her here.”

“I don’t know what is wrong.” Elenor spoke softly. “I... have not felt right for several weeks to be honest. I feel weak and faint at times.”

“We have always been healthy.” Richard Faith continued. “Nothing like this has ever happened before.”

“Lady Faith... may I examine you?” Eliani asked.

Elenor looked at her husband quickly. Brendi shook her head at this. “Mother... they already know of the genetic enhancements the Eridiani go through. That is not secret! Just let her examine you!”

Richard Faith nodded. “We have come this far.” He said.

Elenor nodded her head then. “Please.” She said.

Eliani nodded and quickly removed the waist length jacket she wore over her jumpsuit. Her dark gray t-shirt like material of the upper portion of the jumpsuit strained against her large breasts and Richard Faith shifted on his feet in discomfort. Brendi shook her head in amusement at her father. “Papa stop!” She exclaimed.

Eliani looked at her and then to her father. “What?” She asked turning back to Brendi.

“The Eridiani are... we are more modest in how we dress.” Brendi said. “We are not shy... but we do not...”

Eliani smiled and nodded her head. “I guess you are in for a surprise when we get to Sparta then.” She said. She turned back to Elenor and lifted her hands once more. Both of her palms flared softly and she began to slowly draw them over Elenor Faith’s body. Most of the Hadarian Healers relied on instruments to find or discover an issue in the men or women they were treating and then they applied their healing power. Eliani, her mother, her aunt Sivana and Eurin were among perhaps five or six dozen Healers who preferred to locate whatever the problem was using their unique healing abilities to detect oddities within a person’s body. They believed it allowed them to treat the ailment more effectively if they were able to detect it right down to the genetic level.

Eliani’s hands dropped past Elenor’s shoulders and stopped directly over her chest. Her face creased somewhat and she rotated her hands into a different position and then slowly around the side of her chest and under her armpit. “Have you eaten anything unusual in the last few weeks? Gone anywhere off Edolus perhaps... on vacation?”

Elenor shook her head. “No.”

“We are not encouraged to take vacations.” Richard Faith told her.

Eliani reached up with her left hand and used her PK power to draw down the metallic medical arm from the ceiling above them. Elenor saw this and drew back quickly with a gasp of alarm. Elaini’s eyes grew wide and she gripped Elenor’s hand with her right hand. “Forgive me! I didn’t mean to frighten you!” She spoke quickly.

“Mother I told you that many Lycavorians have this ability.” Brendi said.

“Well seeing it is quite different!” Elenor exclaimed.

Eliani smiled. “It’s my fault.” She said. “I tend to concentrate when I’m treating someone and I forgot you are not used to our species. Or what many of us can do.”

“We have... we have seen them before on Edolus.” Elenor said. “But none that ever used this skill.”

Eliani tilted her head slightly. “On Edolus... really?”

Richard Faith nodded. “Traders mostly I think.” He answered.

“Interesting.” Eliani said glancing at Brendi quickly before drawing the medical arm over in front of her. “My species is able to use our minds to talk among each other. Not all of us mind you, but many. The skill in this is measured by the pureness of our blood and is measured in Tiers. There are six tiers currently. Many do not advance this skill past the third tier, but some of us, some of us were born Tier sixes because of our blood. This allows us to utilize this skill, what we call Mindvoicing, in other ways.”

“You are... you are among this group?” Elenor asked her. “These Tier Sixes you called them?”

Eliani nodded. “Me... all of my brothers and sisters. Yes.”

“Your brother as well?” Richard asked.

“If you are referring to Androcles... then I would have to say no. Andro and our father, for lack of a better explanation, they are in a league of their own.” Eliani looked at Elenor then. “Lady Faith this will take a drop of your blood and run some standard scans that will appear on the small screen behind me. You won’t feel a thing I promise.”

Elenor nodded and Eliani directed the arm to her right shoulder. The narrow tip touched her skin for only a split second and then drew back with a mechanical whirring noise. Elenor looked at it with wonder and smiled at her husband. Eliani turned and drew the portable medical console to her side using her PK power once more. She tapped the console several times and looked at Brendi who moved up beside her. “You should have told me your mother was sick.” She said softly.

Brendi looked at her. “I didn’t know until she was back here.” She answered somewhat defensively. “You’ve had me prisoner for the last two weeks so I could not contact her like I normally do.” Eliani grunted in reply.

“You are not a prisoner.” Eliani spoke.

“Oh... what do you call it?” Brendi asked.

Eliani looked at her, admiring her exceptional beauty. “Would you prefer to be out there on your own Brendi Faith?” Eliani asked finally. “I’m quite sure with your unique skills at thinking you know everything you would survive with no problems.”

Brendi lowered her eyes slightly embarrassed. “Point taken.” She said softly. She looked back up at Eliani. “You know... you seem less agitated the last couple of days.”

“Do I?” Eliani asked.

Brendi smiled. “Yes. I wonder... does it have anything to do with the rumors flying around the ship?”

“What rumors?” Eliani demanded.

“That your boyfriend finally clipped your wings and tamed you.” Brendi asked with a smile.

“Stop calling him that!” Eliani hissed softly. “Jomann did not tame me! He made me his mate!”

“So the rumors are true!” Brendi said. “I thought you hated him from the way you were talking before.”

Richard and Elenor Faith looked at each other as they heard their daughter and Eliani talking back and forth. Richard Faith shrugged his shoulders at his wife.

“I didn’t hate him.” Eliani said. “My blood was...”

The console chimed and drew Eliani’s attention back to the screen as several different smaller screens popped up. Brendi could not make anything of the information that was being displayed on the screen but it was obvious Eliani Leonidas did. She stabbed down on the console several times urgently.

“What is it?” Brendi asked with worry in her voice now.

Eliani turned to the *Durcunusaan* troop by the door. “Seal the Medical Bay!” She barked. “Activate Containment Protocol Three One from outside! And get my brother down here! And have him bring Devra!” The soldier nodded immediately and was backing through the door calmly. “At once Princess!”

“And find the other two Eridiani and bring them here!” Eliani barked. “Quickly!”

“As you order!” The *Durcunusaan* snapped as the doors to the medical bay shut and were sealed.

Eliani turned to Brendi. “What is going on?” Brendi demanded.

“Brendi?” Elenor stammered. “What...”

Eliani held up her hands. “It is only a precautionary tactic.” She stated keeping her voice as calm as possible.

“Precautionary tactic for what?” Richard Faith demanded. “What... what did you find in my wife?”

“I need you to trust me.” Eliani said turning to Brendi. “I need all of you to trust me.”

“What? Why? What is going on?” Brendi demanded.

Eliani turned back to Elenor. “Lady Faith... you have been infected by a very virulent form of a Vanari disease. It is called the Facara Virus. If left untreated it is one hundred percent fatal.”

“Oh my god!” Elenor gasped. “But... but how?”

“Have you come in contact with any Vanari besides those on this ship?” Eliani asked. “Over the last six months?”

Elenor shook her head quickly. “No! Never!”

“This is not a naturally occurring disease Lady Faith. The Vanari have all but eradicated it from their society according to their medical journals.” Eliani told her quickly. “It had to be introduced into your body in some form.”

“We have seen no Vanari except those on your ship!” Richard Faith raged. “Our people do not tend to get along! The OSG enslaves them and that carries over to their feelings towards us!”

“Eliani...” Brendi’s voice carried genuine fear in it as Eliani met her eyes. “Tell me... tell me you can fix this!” She almost cried. “Tell me that you can save my mother!”

“I need... I need all of you to calm down.” Eliani told them looking at Brendi. “I need you to strip down to your undergarments *jochath Duhiraared*. Your father as well. I need to examine all of you.”

Brendi did not understand the Lycavorian words, but she understood the urgency in Eliani’s words and she began to immediately strip out of the uniform she wore. She looked at her father who was unmoving.

“Papa! Enough of your modesty! Now is not the time! Eliani is a doctor! Do it!”

His daughter’s words shocked him out of his trance and Richard Faith began to disrobe as well.

“A Vanari disease?” Andro asked.

Eliani nodded her head and touched the screen she, Andro and Devra were looking at. “See these amino strands. They are unique to the Facara Virus. They are present in Elenor and the twins Tasha and Nicolle, but not Richard or Brendi.”

Devra shook her head. “I don’t understand Eliani.” She spoke. “The Facara Virus has been eradicated on all but the most remote Vanari colonies. It has been for six hundred years. It was a disease exclusive to my people. How is it that they have the active strands within them?”

“It’s been modified.” Eliani replied touching the screen once more and watching as the two separate views merged into one. “Someone has altered the molecular design of the disease at its base level and changed its protein sequence. The alleles are in different sequences. In this form it can be used against other species with equally lethal results.”

“So this was made?” Andro asked.

Eliani nodded. “Yes.”

“Eli... who has the skill to do this?” Andro asked.

“Well... modifying the disease itself is relatively easy. Weaponizing it as they have is another story. The better question *fervon* is who would want to weaponize this disease?” Eliani answered. “It’s not contagious and that is why I canceled the quarantine... but it’s kill ratio is nearly perfect. It infects the respiratory system rapidly after its incubation period of four to six weeks from the time of infection. Symptoms appear as flu like

but since most people dismiss flu symptoms now, they just take prescribed meds, it is not properly treated. Once the disease embeds itself in the tissue of the lungs it is lethal one hundred percent of the time. It would take very specific equipment and facilities that are not uncommon... but the type of equipment I'm thinking of is regulated heavily within Union space. If I had a sample of the actual infecting agent I could probably narrow it down with mother's help... but right now no."

"We were never able to determine a person had it until they were diagnosed and by then it was too late." Devra said. "Once a cure was created we began immediate inoculations for all Vanari. How did you determine Elenor Faith had it?"

Eliani looked at her. "Lycavorians require far more protein in our diets than most species. I'm sure you noticed this in Bren's diet?"

Devra nodded thinking back on what she had seen her husband consume since they had been together. "Yes."

"We need the additional amino acids and Polyploidy elements found within protein. Lady Faith has been enjoying our food profoundly the last few days according to her own words. The polyploidy source elements in our food are what accelerated the rate at which the disease was metastasizing within her system and she began to show signs of the disease in its very early stages without actually suffering all of the effects."

"So someone turned this disease into a Bio-Weapon." Andro said.

Eliani looked at him. "Looks that way." She said.

"Androcles..." Devra gasped. "This is not something we would do. We do not have any kind of Bio-Weapons! They are forbidden among the Vanari."

Andro nodded his head. "As they are in the Union." He stated. "Eli... since it's just Brendi's mother and sisters it must be something that they all use. Something feminine perhaps, that they brought with them?"

"You... Eliani you treated them? Please tell me you were able to treat them." Devra asked.

Eliani nodded. "Yes. Lady Faith will feel fine in a few hours and Tasha and Nicolle had not yet reached a point where the disease would affect them. It's gone now except for the samples I took from their blood."

Devra breathed a sigh of relief and nodded. "We must find out how this happen." She stammered. "This... this could be very bad if my people are accused of having made any type of Bio-Weapon."

"I was just going to start questioning them when you got here." Eliani said motioning them over to where Brendi stood with her family.

Richard Faith had dressed already, while his wife and daughters sat on the single bed side-by-side in the long hospital gowns, Elenor between her two youngest children. Richard Faith stood a little straighter as he watched the tall and exceptionally built young Lycavorian step up with the Vanari Regent and Eliani Leonidas. The young woman had impressed him with her knowledge and skill, and her ability to put all of them at ease. Her concern had been very genuine and she had gone out of her way to try and make them comfortable as she treated them. Richard Faith considered himself an excellent judge of character, and though he had never met a Hadarian or a Lycavorian for that matter before coming to this ship, he found himself duly impressed more and more each day. They were not treated as prisoners as he had expected they would be. They had guards yes, but the men were polite and very accommodating in answering whatever questions they had no matter how off the wall. They suggested places to go and visit when they arrived on Earth, foods to eat, places to shop. Even though he knew what Brendi had been part of, there was obviously no harsh feelings towards her judging by her interaction with this Eliani and others. He watched the young man approach and knew right away this was not someone to be trifled with. The young man carried himself with a confident grace and had an aura about him that said he would brook no obstacle. He watched Eliani and them stop in front of the bed and how Brendi fidgeted on her feet so close to the man, who she had almost had a hand in killing, though he did not yet know who the man was.

"Mister and Mrs. Faith, Tasha, Nicolle, this is my brother Androcles." Eliani told them. "I think you already know of Regent Re Mydala."

Andro held out his hand to Richard. "Mister Faith." He spoke. "A pleasure to meet you."

Richard looked surprised and he reached out slowly to take the hand, feeling the power within his grasp. "You... you shake hands with the father of the woman who attempted to kill you and your wives." He said in disbelief.

"Papa!" Brendi exclaimed. "You don't have to remind him!"

Andro glanced at Brendi with a smile and then back to Richard Faith. “They did not succeed and your daughter was not aware of the ultimate goal of the man who led the team.” Andro said. “I don’t hold grudges sir. And it was not your daughter’s intent to do me or my mates harm. She would not be here if that was the case.”

“I’d be rotting in some hole somewhere. Probably in little pieces.” Brendi muttered under her breath, though only Eliani heard her and looked at her with smiling fern green eyes.

“I... I wish to thank you for what you have done.” Richard said. “I... I did not expect such action from...”

Andro smiled and when he did the severe look he could project disappeared. This served to put all of them more at ease. “You did not expect Lycavorians to be this way?”

Faith shook his head. “The few Lycavorians we have seen on Edolus were... they were very...”

“Dangerous looking.” Tasha Faith finished the statement for her father.

Andro looked at Eliani quickly and then back to Richard. “You have seen my people on Edolus?” He asked.

“I meant to tell you that.” Eliani said. “Mercenaries probably.”

Andro looked at Eliani again sharing a silent thought with his sister and then he nodded his head.

“Yes... more than likely... but the majority of my people are not like them. We need to ask you a few questions if we could. We are trying to determine how exactly you caught this disease being the main one.”

Elenor looked at him and shook her head. “I do not know.” She said honestly. “We do not travel off world, it is strongly discouraged.”

“Discouraged?” Andro asked looking at Brendi.

Brendi nodded. “Forbidden is the more appropriate word.” She said. “At least it is for those who are not members of the OSG or the Eridiani military complex. I told you... they use family members as sources of control and they aren’t just going to let them go where they want because then they have no control.”

“Have you received any gifts from off world then?” Andro asked. “Perhaps purchased some different food or something from off world. Maybe...” He stopped talking when he saw the look on her face. “Lady Faith?”

Richard looked at his wife. “Elenor?” He asked.

“I received a package three weeks ago from Corbin.” She answered finally.

“What?” Brendi gasped.

“Why did you not tell me?” Richard demanded of his wife. “We agreed to take nothing from him!”

“He is our son Richard.” Elenor said.

“He has not been our son for almost two decades!” Richard Faith spat. “Not since the OSG took him and twisted him into what he is now! You should have told me Elenor!”

“What was in the package Lady Faith?” Andro pressed her.

“Nothing spectacular.” Elenor answered quickly. “Just some new clothes and some new perfume that Corbin’s note said I might like.”

“Perfume?” Eliani asked, her eyes lifting and jarring her from the very pleasant scent of Brendi next to her.

“What sort of perfume?” Andro asked causing Elenor’s face to look at him oddly.

Eliani chuckled and moved closer to her. “Lycavorians don’t use perfume Lady Faith.” She said. “It tends to hurt our sense of smell and we prefer the natural scent of a person. That is like a perfume to us.”

“Truly?” Elenor asked.

Eliani nodded. “Everyone has their own distinct scent... and to us it is like perfume.” She replied. “This perfume your son sent you was in liquid form I take it?”

Elenor nodded. “Yes... a small spray bottle. It was unmarked but his note told me he had purchased it special for me on the Eridiani Homeworld of Casbin. It smelled very nice and I let Tasha and Nicolle use it. They are... they like to be matching.”

“Mother!” Nicolle spoke demurely as she and Tasha looked at the floor embarrassed.

“I don’t suppose you still have it?” Andro asked.

Elenor Faith nodded. “I... I brought it with us when your sister took us off Edolus.” She said. “Why?”

“Lady Faith... you were intentionally infected with this disease.” Eliani explained to her. “Your husband and Brendi did not have traces of it in their system so it is not contagious. Only you and the twins were infected which means the three of you have shared something or done something together where you all got infected.”

“Corbin... Corbin would not... he would not try and kill me.” Elenor stated but her voice did not hold real conviction in it. “I am... I am his mother!”

“This perfume is in the quarters you are using?” Andro asked.

Tasha was the one to answer and she nodded her head. “Yes.” She answered. “A small blue bottle on top of the credenza.”

Andro turned to the *Durcunusaan* troop who was standing just inside the door. “Take one of Eliani’s medics and bring that here. Now!” He ordered.

The troop bowed his head. “Milord!” He barked before turning and exiting the Med Bay.

Andro turned back to Richard Faith. “My sister has made sure your wife and daughters will be fine sir.” Andro said respectfully.

“You... you believe my son has done this?” Faith asked him.

“I would prefer to wait until my sister and Regent Re Mydala have had the time they need to examine this perfume before making any clear assumptions. However the evidence is looking as if that is the most likely scenario.” Andro answered.

“My daughter... Brendi told us what you said to him.” Richard Faith looked at Andro. “You would do this?”

Androcles nodded without hesitation. “Yes sir I would.” He answered. “It is part of my duty to protect my people and our allies.”

“But the Vanari do not like your people.” Nicolle spoke now looking at him. “They do not like anyone who is not Vanari.”

Devra nodded her head now. “Some of your statement may well be true child.” Devra said. “But there are those of us who believe differently.”

The doors to the Med Bay opened and Jomann strode through quickly, his eyes searching for Eliani. He stopped when he saw they all by the table and turned to the side when he realized the state of dress of the three females. Eliani smiled. “Excuse me for a moment.” She stated before breaking from the group and moving over beside him. All of them watched as Eliani stepped in front of him and he lowered his head to nuzzle her cheek and neck firmly, causing Eliani to reach up and grasp his powerful arms in delight.

Andro turned back to see the Faith family watching them intently. Richard Faith looked at Andro after a moment longer. “Her husband?” He asked.

Andro nodded. “That is one word we use yes.” He answered.

“Why does she act like that?” Tasha inquired innocently. “She looks...”

“Aroused.” Nicolle finished.

“Tasha... Nicolle... enough!” Elenor spoke firmly.

“Ah...” Andro stammered slightly.

Devra saved him from sticking his foot in his mouth. “Among the Lycavorian people, as Eliani explained, their scents are like perfume. When they become husband and wife, mates, no other scent will elicit from them what their mate’s scent will. To Eliani... Jomann’s scent is the sweetest perfume and to him... her scent is the only thing he desires to smell. They can also communicate emotionally in some fashion with their scents. Their love and affection and desire for each other being the most prominent emotion that their scents can manipulate, and this does have an outward visual affect in some respects.”

“But they do not wear anything to signify that they are married.” Nicolle spoke. “How does everyone know this?”

“Yes... would not other men attempt to interest her? She is young and very beautiful.” Tasha finished.

Devra shook her head. “No other Lycavorian male will come near her or attempt such a thing.” She said in reply. “They will detect Jomann’s scent within Eliani’s blood. Lycavorian females have the ability to absorb their mate’s scent deeply within them. It stays with them and other Lycavorians can detect this easily. As for other species within the Union...”

Andro smiled at Devra as he listened to her explain. “They tend to let how our men react to females to be their barometer.” He said looking at Devra. “You have been quizzing Bren I see.”

Devra smiled shyly. "I pester him every moment of the day with questions." She replied with a nod. "He has to kiss me to shut me up."

Andro chuckled. "And I am sure he just hates doing that." He said.

Richard Faith nodded in understanding then. "Ah... if your men do not attempt to strike up a conversation with a woman or are reserved around a woman... then other species recognize this and know not to press too hard because there is a reason?"

Andro nodded. "Essentially yes. There are other factors involved but that is the largest one. Hadarian and elven females, if they are not turned but are involved in a serious relationship with a Lycavorian will begin to exhibit small changes to their bodies and their scents. Vampire females or males involved with Lycavorians, or any species for that matter, tend to be much more reticent around others of the opposite sex."

"There are no casual relationships among your people?" Tasha asked boldly.

"Tasha!" Elenor scolded her.

Andro chuckled. "It's quite alright." He answered. "To answer your question... yes... there are many uncommitted relationships. It is not frowned upon within the Union. More often than not they are younger men and women who are still discovering who they are and what they want."

"Can your people detect this in us? In other species?" Richard asked.

Andro nodded his head. "From the intensity of Lady Faith's scent combined with yours sir... I estimate you have been together for nearly forty years, give or take a year or so, and I can smell that your daughters and Brendi are from your lineage."

Elenor's eyes grew wide at this information. "Forty-one years and three months." She said. "That is amazing!"

Brendi had not heard any of what they were saying because she was watching Eliani and Jomann with each other. Eliani looked so tiny compared to his powerful six foot three frame, but there was no mistaking that as a couple they looked utterly perfect together. Though he was the one who had shot her, Brendi could not deny the sexual appeal he exuded. The way he held her tightly and looked at her, the confidence with which he had entered the Med Bay. She had already concluded that Eliani Leonidas was one of the most attractive women she had ever met and that was something Brendi never thought about when it came to other females. The way they gazed at each other was also a reminder to Brendi that she was very much single and had no prospects at all in her future. She tore her eyes away finally and turned her head back to her family only to see Androcles staring at her intently. Brendi blushed a deep red and only her tanned skin kept her family from noticing her sudden discomfort at being discovered watching the couple so keenly.

Eliani patted Jomann's chest as the doors opened once more and the *Durcunusaan* soldier and medic returned. They shared a soft and passionate kiss before Jomann turned to Andro. Brendi noticed Andro motioned with his head after a few seconds and Jomann nodded towards him and left the Med Bay. They had communicated within Mindvoice about something Brendi knew. The medic brought the small blue bottle, now in a sealed container, over to Eliani who took it and placed it inside an oval shaped machine on the far wall. She made some adjustments and then walked back over to where her portable console was. She tapped the console there and the screen came alive with flashing symbols and colors. Brendi stepped up beside her now, taller than Eliani by a good four inches at five foot eight, the color of their hair almost identical. The flashing screen stopped with a beep and Eliani tapped several more times on the console before turning her head to look at her evenly.

"It's a match." She said softly.

Brendi's dark brown eyes narrowed in righteous fury and her face became a mask of anger. "That sonofabitch!" She nearly screamed as Eliani turned to look at Richard and Elenor Faith.

"I'm sorry Lady Faith... but the sample of the virus I took from your blood and the twin's blood matches what is in this bottle." Eliani told her seeing her eyes go wide, but her face remaining almost impassive.

Richard Faith was not so silent. "He tried... he tried to kill his own mother?" He gasped.

"Of course he did papa!" Brendi spat. "He wants Tasha and Nicolle in the OSG and you and mother are in his way! He is the oldest and if you and mother are dead, custody of them reverts to him by Eridiani law!"

Tasha and Nicolle were leaning into their mother for comfort and Elenor lowered her head to Tasha's shoulder as small tears began to roll down her cheeks. "I... I did not want to believe that he would stoop to such actions." Elenor said softly.

Andro looked at Brendi. "Custody?" He asked confused. "Exactly how old are your sisters? They... they appear to be in their mid twenties. Even their scent puts them at around that age."

Richard Faith shook his head. "That is part of the genetic enhancement that all Eridiani go through." He stated evenly. "Tasha and Nicolle are only eighteen despite how old they may look. Custody of Eridiani children does not end until the age of nineteen."

Andro met his eyes. "Interesting." He said as his mind raced with different options. He turned to Brendi. "Will the OSG agents on Earth know what your parents and sisters look like?" He asked finally.

Brendi met his gaze. "Some of them may." She answered with a nod. "Not all of us have photographic memories like me, but I don't know what all of their latent abilities are."

Andro nodded. "Then your family will remain on Crane Island until we determine what to do." He stated.

"A prison?" Richard asked somewhat angrily.

Andro met his gaze. "No sir... my home."

"You... you own an island?" Nicolle gasped as she looked up.

"Yes... and while we have been gone, *Durcunusaan* Engineers have been finishing new facilities on the opposite side of the island from my villa. Apartments and such. You will have free reign of the island and if you wish to go into Gytheio, which is the nearby port city, we can arrange that." Andro told them.

"What about the Netnews crews surrounding the island?" Eliani asked him. "Won't they eventually discover them somehow? Brendi says many of the OSG deep agents like her are Netnews members."

Andro nodded. "Probably... but I can not limit them Eli... you know that. Besides..." He looked at Richard. "After what I told your son... do you think he will attempt something?"

Richard shook his head. "Not unless he was certain he could get away with it and not be discovered."

"He's a bastard!" Brendi agreed. "But he isn't stupid. The Home Council would have his ass if he goes against their orders."

Andro nodded. "Then it is settled." He said. "Eli... have Jomann arrange for the Faith's to have their own apartments and give them the proper access to the island. It is the best way to keep all of you safe... at least for the short term. There is... there is much going on that does not concern you or your family sir, and I would rather you are as safe as I can make you then have to worry about whether I will receive word one morning that Brendi and your family are dead."

"You're... you're just going to trust us?" Brendi asked him. "Just like that?"

"Would you prefer I let them stay with you in Sparta and make it easier for your brother to reach all of you?" Androcles asked. "I can arrange that too."

"No!" Richard Faith proclaimed.

Brendi shook her head, a sheepish expression on her face. "No." She muttered.

Andro nodded his head. "As much as you may think otherwise Brendi Faith... you are now an asset to me. The knowledge you have in your head is invaluable and I will not throw that away. If protecting you means protecting your family as well... so be it."

Brendi glanced at Eliani and then nodded her head. "Thank you." She said softly.

Andro smiled. "Your thanks may be premature... but you are welcome. I will make the..." Andro stopped talking and looked up at the ceiling oddly as if hearing some silent voice that none of them could detect. Eliani moved closer to him as the internal ship intercom chimed and the voice of the OOD sounded through all the compartments and decks.

Attention all hands! Attention all hands! We have entered Earth Sector One! Three hours until we are home! Three hours until we are home! Department Heads and Section Chiefs please submit initial shore leave requests to the Duty Officer! We are maintaining a standing Level Two alert until further notice so shore leave with be limited to twelve-hour increments! That is all!

Eliani reached out and placed her hand on Andro's arm. "Andro... what is it?"

Andro's head snapped around and he looked at her with the biggest smile she had seen from him in months. "Dorian!" He gasped.

Eliani moved closer to him worry on her face now. "What about Dorian? What's wrong Andro?"

"He has joined us Eli! He... he is fully aware and he has joined us!" Andro said with a shocked face. "We can sense him! We can hear him and his Bonded Brother. Elynth and I can hear them! We can feel them!" Andro said.

Eliani looked at him confused. "How... how is that possible?" She gasped. "Mother... mother wasn't due to give birth for at least two more months!"

Andro shook his head. "I don't know... but he..." His eyes grew a little wider and he suddenly laughed out loud, something Eliani rarely saw him do among non-family members. His azure eyes were bright and he met Eliani's gaze with true happiness in those eyes. "Hah!! Dorian... he told me to tell you not to worry about the schematics of things! He is among us and he wants a sister, not another doctor! He has enough of those dotting over him with our mother and aunts!" Eliani gasped in shock, her hand coming to her mouth as she nearly burst out laughing as well now and she watched as Andro moved to the wall and stab down on the control panel.

"Officer of the Deck?" Andro barked.

"Milord!" The voice answered calmly.

"Commander... inform the Strike Wing they are to continue on as normal, but I want a Targeted Pinpoint LSD jump to Earth in ten minutes!" Andro informed him quickly. "Have *PROMETHUS* Station clear the space around our standing orbital location and prepare to receive us."

"Something I should know Andro?" Sa'sur's voice came onto the channel as she always monitored internal channel to the bridge.

"A bit of good news Sa'sur. My brother Dorian has joined us two months early." Andro said.

"Outstanding! Andro that is... that is wonderful news!" Sa'sur's genuine exclamation of happiness was easily discernible in her voice. "OOD, you heard him! TP LSD jump! Make it happen now!"

"TP LSD to our holding orbit! Aye Milord!" The OOD answered.

"Andro... I'll meet you on the bridge!" Sa'sur exclaimed. "This calls for a steaming hot mug of your mother's coffee and I'm buying!"

"On my way!" Andro said turning to Eliani and taking her hands. "Have everyone in the landing bay and ready to leave the moment the jump is over. We'll take the Mark IIs. Sadi and Normya can fly them and drop us before moving to meet us at the Dragon Mountain landing pads."

"Dragon Mountain?" Eliani asked. "Andro... why are they at Dragon Mountain. I... I thought they were still on Curila 6."

"So did I... but that is where they are!" He stammered. "Go Eli! Hurry!"

Eliani nodded her head quickly, unable to contain her excitement. Finally... finally a glimmer of happiness and joy among everything bad that had happened over the last few months. If Eliani knew her family, they were going to grab onto that and use it to drive them forward to become even stronger.

KAVALIAN LEUGERS-CLASS MILITARY TRANSPORT 0.8 LY INSIDE KAVALIAN BORDER TO THE WILDS ENROUTE TO NEFOA

"... Must examine the elf bitch!" Muton snapped to the dozen Puma Bane troops who occupied the seats on either side of the transport. "If you hear any screaming... don't feel the need to come running."

The Puma Bane troops all laughed at Muton's words as he walked among them. He had been the Marshall's physician for centuries, and while his bedside manner left something to be desired, he was a competent doctor. They also knew he hated elves and Lycavorians both.

"Don't mark her too badly Muton!" The senior officer spoke from his spot.

"I will leave that to you and your men Captain." He answered. "I can't stand the stench of the bitch. I understand Marshall Pusintin just may be giving her to some of our men after she spits out the boy child. I'm sure you will have fun with her."

The captain grinned. "Indeed." He said as Muton moved through the bulkhead door out of the main cargo area. He shut it smoothly and then secured the hatchway as For'mya rose to her feet looking at him from the chair. He shook his head quickly and moved to the small control panel on the bulkhead where he deactivated the security cameras and the audio sensors. He didn't see the three pilots in the cockpit frown at this action. They had hoped for a show as the old doctor took the elf female.

Muton finally turned to her. "It is safe to talk now For'mya." He said. "I have deactivated the security monitors and audio sensors."

"Won't that draw suspicion?" She asked.

Muton shook his head as he dropped the medical bag he was carrying to the table. "They think I will abuse you in some way because I have nurtured the idea that I can not stand other species. I've done it quite well actually." He said with a grin impressed with his acting skill.

"Muton you haven't..." He looked at her with a disgusted look and For'mya shook her head. "Forgive me... that was stupid on my part."

Muton lifted the hand held scanner from the bag. "Now let's find this thing that they have inside you. Where did Fedor and Eirene say it was?"

For'mya reached around and touched the back of her neck where it met her shoulders. "Andro told them it was here... but I can not feel anything out of place." She said placing her fingers underneath her hair just above her left shoulder blade.

Muton lifted the scanner and as she held her hair out of the way he activated the scanner and ran it slowly over that portion of her body. It only took a few seconds before he found it. "I see it." He said softly. "Two point five four centimeters in length; just over half a centimeter thick; and exactly one point seven four centimeters deep." He pulled the scanner away and ran two of his clawed fingers over that spot. "Very close to the spinal column but not close enough to do any damage and deep enough where you won't feel it outwardly if you probed the area."

For'mya turned to look at him. "Can you remove it?" She asked.

Muton nodded. "Easily when we reach Nefoa. I would attempt it now if I had the tools and these ships were not so rickety. They bounce at any subspace shift in our path." He met her eyes. "Do we want to remove it For'mya? That is the other question we should be asking?"

For'mya met his gaze. "What do you mean?"

"I have never seen anything like this before For'mya." He told her honestly. "It seems to be self contained... but how do we know there is not some sort of trigger device that will signal Pusintin that it has been removed?"

For'mya was silent as she looked at him. "I... I don't know." She said finally.

Muton nodded his head. "Then may I suggest we leave it where it is for the moment." He held up her hand when he saw her about to protest. "Only until I know that the others are on Nefoa and ready to act. They should arrive about the same time that you are giving birth and will be ready to move within a hour of arriving. I can take it out as soon as Fedor and Eirene have joined us. Your body will recover quickly and it is prudent to do everything at once. The more recovered you are when its time to act the better off we are."

For'mya dropped her hands to her abdomen and slowly caressed the skin there. *Eirene? Fedor?* She questioned reaching out with her thoughts.

Muton waited patiently as he watched her. The best hopes for his people rested with this woman, her children and the full power of the family that would undoubtedly be coming to rescue her. Over the past hours since discovering she could talk with the twins she carried in her womb, Muton had seen more and more of the woman who he had witnessed on the Netnews channels coming back. Confident and decisive in her actions. Her dark brown eyes lifted to meet his once more and she nodded.

"Very well." She spoke.

Muton nodded and reached into his bag removing the sheath and blade. For'mya watched him as he removed it from the sheath and showed it to her. "A Kavalian Assassin's knife." He spoke. He turned it to the side and his finger moved over the small button near the middle of the hilt. "Concentrated Rock Spider venom." He told her. "Each dose enough to kill a fully grown Kavalian in perhaps four to five seconds. The hilt holds six doses so if you need to use them, do it sparingly and for fuck's sake, stab into something vital. You are in no

condition physically to tangle with a fully grown Kavalian male. Use your elf speed and reflexes to counter his brute strength.”

For'mya's lips curled into a thin smile. “I'm not exactly at my best right now am I?” She said as her hands rubbed her abdomen.

Muton chuckled. “Hah! Even as pregnant as you are... I'd still wager on you.” He said returning the blade to its sheath and holding it out to her. “Keep it well hidden.”

For'mya nodded as she took the blade. “I will.”

“When we arrive on Nefoa simply keep your head down and avoid eye contact with any Kavalians until we reach the medical bay.” Muton spoke. “They know me... and they will not question me. I may need to speak some disparaging things yet again, but I hope by now you know enough to ignore them.”

For'mya nodded. “Yes.”

“Good... I had to make sure.” He told her with a smile on his fur covered face. “This base has the largest Puma Bane detachment outside Kavalian space and the team leader is a foul mannered beast. Thankfully Pusintin has given me ultimate authority when it concerns you and he will not challenge me more than once.”

“I get the feeling I will not like this man?” For'mya said.

“Let me put it to you this way... given any other circumstance you would gladly sever his balls from his body and carve him into small pieces.” Muton said.

“That bad?”

Muton nodded. “Yes. I outrank him, and I have Pusintin's authority so if he is smart he will stay away. If not... let me handle him.”

“With pleasure.” For'mya said.

Muton reached out and pressed his clawed, furry hand to her abdomen. The trust between them was still building he knew, but it grew stronger by the hour and that For'mya allowed him to do this now without hesitation told him much about her. It was a trust he would not fail. “How long?” He asked softly.

For'mya rested her hand over the top of his. “It is moving along quickly. I believe I can accurately say they will arrive when I said earlier. The accelerated growth hormones Pusintin used have altered my perception somewhat, and what I felt take place over a period of weeks and months with Arram and Bryon I now have to tolerate over hours, but I believe I am being reasonably accurate. Give or take an hour or so.”

“Good.” Muton said as he drew his hand back and ushered her back to the chair at the small table.

For'mya looked at him as she sat down. “Tell... tell me of your family Muton.” She asked him.

Muton settled into the other chair and relaxed. “Lubina and my sons.” He said with a smile. “She is beautiful, with long dark blond hair. The initial biogenic treatments removed the hair from her body, but her tail is still intact. And her claws.” He said with a smile. “I have been away from them for too long now.”

“How old are your sons?” For'mya asked.

“Kaleen is the oldest at two hundred and sixty-four. Olin is ninety-three and Miseo is the youngest at a mere twenty-nine.” Muton answered. “We have wanted to have more, but as you can see, our time together is limited.”

“Why... why did you wait so long to have children to begin with?” For'mya asked.

Muton looked at her. “Up until a thousand years ago, we always had to move in order to keep clear of Keleru's agents and Puma Bane assassins.” He said. “It wasn't until we discovered the abandoned ruins on Wentania that we felt safe enough to start a family. The ruins are very well hidden, even from active sensor scans from orbit. And they are large enough to hold everyone as well. Over these years we have been bringing everyone from across the KFI to Wentania.”

“And you do not use the growth hormones?” For'mya asked.

Muton shook his head. “No... all of our children are naturally birthed and raised. They grow just as any other child grows. The growth hormones are an abomination to many of my people.”

“If there are only thirteen of this Warrior Class that you belong to, who defends your people while you are gone?” For'mya asked.

“Oh... we are capable.” Muton replied. “Pirates have stumbled across our hiding place two... no three times in the last five hundred years. They didn't survive.” He told her. “Lubina acts as my voice when I am gone. Since I am the oldest... I am considered the leader. Miseo my youngest enrolled in the same training regimen that our Caste goes through. Only thirteen of us are active within the KFI, but there are upwards of

three hundred of us on Wentania. Miseso should have completed his training five years ago and is probably among those who guard the ruins. Kaleen and Olin work primarily within the small Astrophysics Research lab we have created. They have been trying to determine ways to find the ship that Resumar now has. They will be most pleased when I tell them it has been found.” Muton shook his head. “Enough about me... I have always wondered something?”

For'mya looked at him. “Yes.”

“The stories of how you and Martin Leonidas first met are varied and more than likely not true to begin with.” He said. “How did you meet each other and then...”

“Fall in love?” For'mya asked.

Muton nodded. “Yes.”

“It is a long story.” She answered.

Muton chuckled and looked at his time piece. “Well... we have just over fourteen hours.” He said.

“I was captured by cloned vampire troops during the Battle for Earth.” For'mya began. “It was not...”

EARTH ORBIT STRIKER FLIGHT LAUNCHING FROM SCIMITAR

“...too tight?” Lu'ria asked Caliria as they stood near the rear of the *STRIKER*.

Caliria shook her head as she looked at the tight fitting but equally comfortable Mark IV ArmorPly that she was encased in. It was matte black in color and allowed for amazing ease of movement. “No.” She answered softly looking at Lu'ria's beautiful ebony face and her long shimmering white hair. “Why am... why am I part of this Lu'ria?” She asked. “I... I did not think any of you would want to be around me.”

Lu'ria stopped adjusting the bodyarmor and lifted her wide amber eyes to gaze at Caliria. “Why would you think such a thing *Inamarno*?” She gasped.

“You do not hate me?” Caliria asked.

“Hate you because, like all of us, you wish to discover yourself and who you are? That will never happen.” Andro's voice came from behind her. Caliria turned quickly and saw him there holding two helmets in his hands. He looked so imposing and so devastatingly handsome standing there in the body armor. He held one helmet up to her and she slowly took the matte black helmet with raven locks flowing down from the top. “If I must show you before you leave that this is where you belong, with me, with us, then I will do so *Inamarno*. We will do so without question. Then it will be up to you to decide when the time is right.”

“You said... you said I would be leaving as soon as we arrived here on Earth.” Caliria spoke softly.

Andro stepped closer, looking down into her eyes. “I said that for your father's benefit.” He told her reaching out and taking her hand in hers. “First I will show you what your life with us will be like. At least a little part of it.”

“Part of that is dressing like this?” Caliria asked.

Andro grinned. “No... not all of the time.”

“What is going to happen Androcles?” Caliria asked again. “Why am I dressed like this?”

Are you afraid of heights Inamarno? Sadi's voice filled her mind from the cockpit, all of them hearing the question.

“No.” Caliria answered. “Why?”

Then like all of us you will enjoy the ride. Sadi told her.

“The ride? What ride?” Caliria asked looking at Andro.

Andro put his helmet between his knees and took her helmet in his hands lifting it above her head and slowly lowering it down. The cheek guards and nose guard fit perfectly and Andro smiled. The uniform actually gave her a rather fierce looking appearance. “I am going to show you something that will take your breath away.” Andro said. “You just have to trust me. Trust us.” Andro took his helmet and pulled it on. He held out his hand. “Think you can handle that?” He asked.

Caliria looked quickly at Lu'ria, Carisia now having joined them and standing beside her Drow Mistress. She turned back to Andro and slipped her hand into his. “I think that will be rather easy.”

“Then let’s go!” He said pulling her towards where Elynth waited anxiously by the ramp, Anthar beside her on one side and Majeir on the other.

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN

Anja could feel the tremors easily as she walked into the lounge they had been in just the day before and she saw Helen standing on the balcony that opened into the main chamber of the mountain. She sipped her coffee as she came up beside her, still tired but exceptionally pleased with herself.

The procedure had gone like clockwork, all of them working in perfect harmony. Deia had commented that she had not seen so many powerful Hadarian healers in one single room in centuries and the level of their work showed in every way. With Sivana, Duewa and Eurin providing a constant stream of healing metaphysical radiation pouring through Isabella; Anja, Ceuma and Anuk had worked efficiently and expertly to introduce the growth accelerator into Isabella’s womb. Then they watched as before their eyes, not forty minutes later Dorian Leonidas entered this world howling louder than any of their children before, his arms and legs kicking furiously until the arms of his Hadarian mother encircled him. Anja had tears in her jade colored eyes as he calmed immediately and then she moved to give him to Isabella while Ryner’s massive head remained in the room through the specially designed sterile bubble they had hastily built for him.

Isabella couldn’t hold back her tears as she held her son in her arms. The son she had wanted to give Martin for so long was now here and he was beautiful. He sported a full head of black hair and mildly tanned skin. His eyes made her catch her breath as she realized that the left was a deep, dark brown just like his father and the right a dazzling cobalt blue. Isabella immediately lifted her hand as she cradled Dorian in her opposite arm and reached out to stroke Ryner’s cool scales as he lowered his huge head to gaze upon his Bonded Brother. Isabella could only laugh as Dorian’s small hands reached up to clutch Ryner’s muzzle tightly, his fingers clenching and unclenching as they finally were able to touch physically. Once Anja and Anuk had finished and Ceuma disconnected the many monitors, those who were in the room sat back and watched as another strong Leonidas child cooed in his mother’s arms, pulling on Bella’s hair and then switching to Anja’s long locks over and over.

Though Anja had only gotten four hours of sleep, she was rested enough and decided to see what the commotion was all about. She moved up next to Helen and looked down to see hundreds of dragons gathered on the floor of the main chamber.

“Helen... what is happening?” She asked calmly knowing it could not have to do with danger or an emergency since no alarms had been risen.

Helen smiled and looked at her as she lowered her own mug. “He has come home and they sense him.” She answered. “He has entered the atmosphere and they can feel him Anja. They can feel him reaching out to his brother and Ryner. I can feel it.”

“Andro?” Anja asked.

Helen nodded her head. “Until Arzoal and I bonded I did not understand it.” She said. “He is a Talon Guardian yes... just as Martin is... but what they feel for the dragons is beyond any emotion I have ever felt. It is almost as if they are dragons themselves. And that emotion and feeling is returned just as strongly from every living dragon without question.”

Anja sipped her coffee as her jade green eyes gazed at the dragons below. “Perhaps in some way they are.” She said softly.

Helen looked at her. “Maybe you are right.” She said as Ceuma and Naesta entered the lounge now. They both appeared as if they had recently woken and were carrying mugs of tea and coffee themselves.

“Anja... what is happening?” Ceuma asked as they came up to them. “The dragons... they are rushing through the corridors of the ship making all sorts of noises. They all appeared to be heading in the same direction as well.”

Anja motioned over the edge of the balcony. “Take a look.” She said.

Ceuma and Naesta moved closer and peered over the railing only to have their eyes widen as they could both see hundreds of dragons in every color and of every species far below. Ceuma drew back quickly and looked at her sister with wide eyes.

“What is going on?” She gasped. “I’ve never seen so many in one place! What...”

The deafening trumpet so close easily drowned out her question and they all turned to see the dark, blood red scales of a Heavy Horn dragon as he clung to the side of the main chamber only a few meters from their position on the balcony. They heard the soft humming of hydraulic motors and the huge top of the main chamber began to open, admitting the bright sunshine of the early morning.

GO! Arzoal’s voice bellowed out in Mindvoice from far below. Go my brothers and sisters! Go and greet him as a Talon Guardian should be greeted! Go now! And bring him here!

The trumpets that followed would echo for minutes as every dragon in the main chamber erupted in agreement with their Elder Mother. Helen stepped back from the balcony just a little and looked at Ceuma and Naesta. “Ceuma... Naesta... now would be a good time to move back a little.” She said.

“What?” Naesta asked turning to look at her just as two dragons blew past her going up. Their wings were flapping smoothly and the concussive force of the air in the main chamber almost swept Naesta over the side.

Ceuma and Anja grabbed her and drew her back as Naesta’s eyes grew wide at what she saw. Hundreds of dragons all taking to the sky and shooting for the opening in the main flying chamber above them. Even standing back a good meter from the edge they were buffeted by the winds of so many dragons racing out of the opening to greet their Talon Guardian.

“By... by the grace of the prophets!” Naesta was able to manage before more dragons began to rocket by their position.

STRIKER FLIGHT

FOUR MINUTES FROM DRAGON MOUNTAIN

The ramps on the two *STRIKER Mark IIs* were still down, and the observation bubbles were exposed, allowing the bright sunlight to enter the ships as they held perfect formation five hundred feet behind the six dragons in front of them. Sadi and Normya were using just their station keeping thrusters to follow Andro and the others as they approached Dragon Mountain at five thousand feet. There were others crowded into the back of Andro’s *STRIKER*, to include Bren and Devra as well as Coren, though crowded would have been the wrong word to use. Devra watched with much respect from behind them as Sadi and Ne’Veha made their *STRIKER* do things she had never seen a ship do, especially as they left the *SCIMITAR* and passed into and through the atmosphere. The *STRIKERS* were amazing ships to begin with as far as Devra was concerned, able to do things that ships their size should not have been able to do. Tastia, Arduri and Am’uur were standing near the ramp secured with thick nylon life lines so that they would not be sucked out of the rear while Coren sat by himself across from the man who had stolen the heart of his former wife.

Bren sat on the opposite couch in the rear of the *STRIKER* going over a data pad and well aware that Coren Re Mydala was alternating between staring at him and looking at Tastia and his daughter Arduri at the rear of the ship. Every time he saw Tastia grip the Drow Am’uur’s hand Coren felt his anger seethe forth. He turned back to Bren finally.

“You do realize that no child you have with Devra will be like you!” Coren spoke loudly. “They will not be able to turn as you do! They will have blue skin coloring like Devra! They will be nothing like you!”

Bren lowered his data pad and lifted his eyes to look at Coren. “You seem to think that this in some way bothers me Coren Re Mydala.” He spoke.

“They will not be Lycavorian!” Coren snapped at him. “I was under the impression all Lycavorians wanted their children to be like them!”

Bren stood up and slowly crossed the deck plating to squat in front of Coren who sat back in the seat, suddenly very aware he was in a dangerous position. Bren smiled at him however and shook his head. “There is fault in your logic Coren Re Mydala... because they *will* be like me.” He stated confidently. “They will look like Devra yes and I bless the gods that is so, but they will still be like me. They will carry my blood in their

veins. They will carry my history and lineage in their minds and hearts just as they do their mother's. And though they will have blue skin as my new mate and wife does, they will be part of me always. A part I will never forsake or dismiss."

"Why are we moving so slow?" Arduri called out to Am'uur from the rear of the ramp causing both Coren and Bren to look that way.

"They are coming." Am'uur stated with a smile.

Tastia looked at him. "Who is coming my Am'uur?" She asked.

"Wait and you will see my beautiful Tastia." He told her, leaning over to kiss her hard on the lips. A kiss she accepted easily, melting against his hard body.

"Who is coming?" Arduri snapped excitedly.

"Their family." Bren answered coming up behind her.

Arduri turned and looked at them. "Bren... their family is scattered across the stars! They could not have all arrived here at the same time. Could they?"

Bren smiled. "Not *that* family Arduri." He answered. He pointed out the rear of the *STRIKER*. "That family."

Arduri turned just as Tastia released a stunned yelp loud enough to draw all of their attention. "By the holy grace of the prophets! Look!" She exclaimed.

Arduri's stunning green eyes grew exceptionally wide as she watched dragons rise from below them, their powerful wings propelling them along effortlessly. Dragons of every color and shape and size. They kept rising too, until the entire cloudless sky behind them was filled with dragons as far as they could see. Arduri's eyes grew wider if that was possible and at that moment she swore to herself that nothing living or dead would remove her from the path she was now on. She wanted Lisisa and Denali in a way that made her whole body ache in desire. She wanted to know them, to love them, to have them love her, but most of all she wanted to be part of their life forever. This life. A life that held more wonder in it than she had ever seen in her short lifetime.

"Breaking for Dragon Mountain." Sadi's voice announced over the internal COM.

"On your six. Three point seven." Normya's voice echoed.

Arduri felt them begin to turn slowly and leave the dragon filled skies behind.

Arduri's sister Caliria had wide green eyes as well; however they were more from the fantastic view she was experiencing as well as the incredible sensations of flying so openly and free among the clouds. Her raven black hair that protruded from under the helmet she wore was pulled over one shoulder now, Andro's head next to hers on the opposite side, his arms curled tightly around her waist and their legs securely held by the Dragon Armor Bracers on the saddle. Caliria had seen and almost felt through their Mindvoice connection what all of them had felt on their first ride upon a dragon, and now she was experiencing it for the first time herself and it was breathtaking. The rush of air and adrenalin through her as they left the *STRIKER* and the short plummet through the sky until they leveled off at their height now had given her a new perspective on these marvelous creations known as dragons. She felt an enormous thrill feeling Andro's powerful arms wrapped around her waist as they dove for the earth, a sensation of power and confidence she had never felt before.

[You see Inamarno.] Andro's voice filled her mind causing her to close her eyes in joy. *[My life is not all war and violence and pain. This is what I live for. What we live for. The freedom of open skies around you and not a care in the world. This is what brings Elynth and I such happiness. All of us really. This is what I want for you as well.]*

[It is... it is amazing Andro.] Caliria spoke softly.

[My people can be barbaric at times.] Andro told her, feeling her head shift slightly against his so that she could see his eyes under his helmet. *[It is our instinct. Our nature. But we have conquered that part of us and it no longer commands what we do Inamarno. Not in the way your father and so many Vanari believe. If we could live out our days without every having to fight another battle, well, believe me when I tell you we would much rather nuzzle and caress our mates and wives than we would fight.]*

[Andro... Andro what if I don't want to go.] Caliria asked gently.

He turned his head slightly and those azure eyes almost made her whimper in delight as they focused on her. *[You want to go Caliria. You want to discover the answers you seek. And you can not do that here with us*

because then you will never know Inamarno.] He said. [You will always question and doubt your decision. I don't want that. We don't want that. Your happiness is our happiness and ours is yours. Will you ever truly know that happiness if you do not discover the answers to what you seek?]

[You are the last piece of the puzzle for them Inamarno. For yourself.] Elynth's voice filled her head. She turned slightly as Elynth's wings propelled them forward and she saw Elynth's head turned slightly back towards them. [They will wait forever if need be, but when you decide what it is you want, decide with what your heart tells you. Not what others tell you?]

[Let me show you Dragon Mountain. Meet my mothers and now my new brother. Naesta is here as well. Then we will return to Cranae Island and we can sit on the beach and watch the sunset with the others.] Andro said.

[And then...] Caliria asked almost wistfully, a large part of her wanting him to take her again and make her feel what she had felt on his ship.

Andro's arms tightened slightly on her waist. *[My desire for you Inamarno... our desire for you will never wane now. But if you are to be clear headed and make your decisions with your heart then that would not be wise before you left. And it would only make it harder for us to let you go.]*

[You... you seem so certain I will choose to... to come back to you.] Caliria said. *[Can you... can you see the future?]*

Andro chuckled softly. *[If I could see the future Inamarno... much of what has happened would not have taken place. No... I can not see the future, but I have faith in my instincts and what they tell me. I have faith that you will return, because I have faith in you.]* He shook his head as she was about to speak. *[No more talk of you leaving. Let us enjoy the time now and I will show you more wonders. Elynth my sister... go!]*

Anja released Eliani from her embrace as happiness surged through her. She looked at her daughter and something caught her eye. Eliani's face beamed her fern green eyes brighter than she had ever seen them. Anja could easily detect the strong scent of sweet jasmine coffee wafting from her daughter and mixed deeply with her own maple and wheat scent and the almost surreal glow in Eliani's skin color. She looked at her daughter with wide eyes.

"Eli?" She gasped.

Eliani nodded her head, small tears forming in her eyes. "I found him mother." She whispered. "I found him." She turned quickly behind her and pulled the tall *Durcunusaan* who had been waiting silently forward. Anja recognized him instantly from the transmission but her eyes grew a little wider as she realized just how tall and imposing this young man was as he stepped up next to her. "Mother... this is Jomann. My mate, my husband and my *anome*."

Anja's eyes showed their stunned happiness as she looked at Eliani and then to Jomann. He moved closer confidently and bowed his head to her deeply. "It... it is a true honor my Queen." He spoke softly. "I... I hope to present myself to you and to the King in the traditional manner some day soon in the future. All I can offer now is my eternal thanks for bringing Eliani into this world so that I could find her."

Anja almost burst into tears herself as she grasped his face in her hands, having to truly reach up to do this because of his height. She looked into his ocean blue eyes and he met her gaze unwavering. "Will you... will you adore her Jomann? Will you love her with everything you are?"

Jomann smiled. "With every waking moment." He answered her without hesitation.

"Then what you offer I accept on behalf of Martin and all of her mothers." Anja said. "She is stubborn you know. And she has a sharp tongue."

"Mother!" Eliani gasped.

Jomann nodded his head. "And that is why I love her so." He told Anja.

Anja surprised him by leaning up and kissing his cheek softly. "She is not as tough as she likes to think Jomann." Anja whispered so that only he could hear her. "Love her with all that you are."

Jomann pulled back slightly and met his Queen's eyes. "As the god's are my witness and my guide I will Milady." He whispered back.

Anja nodded and kissed his cheek again just as the happy squeal reached her ears and Zarah came tearing up to where she stood with Lucia in tow and wrapped her arms around her mother. Jomann stepped back next to Eliani and she took his arm looking up into his face. "What did she say Jomann?" Eli asked him.

Jomann looked at his fiery wife and *anome* with a glint in his eyes. "She told me to be mindful of your willfulness and to put you in your place in I felt the need."

Eliani laughed and leaned close to him. "Well... as long as that entails being wrapped around your body... you can put me in my place anytime you wish."

Jomann leaned over and kissed her softly as Anja greeted the hesitant Lucia with an embrace that soon had her smiling in happiness. Anja greeted Denali and Lisisa in much the same manner as they all crowded around and Helen joined her with Deia.

Bren and Devra stood back and watched with Arduri and Devra shook her head slightly. "They... they do this all the time Bren?" She asked. "Greet each other in this way? As if they haven't seen each other in months and years?"

Bren nodded. "They haven't seen Anja for many months actually, but yes. It is part of their power and appeal. Their loyalty and sense of devotion to their family."

Anja released Denali from her embrace and looked at him. "Where is your brother?" she asked.

"He was right..." Denali began to answer looking around.

Anja turned and looked behind Denali and saw him standing there. It became very quiet suddenly as Anja moved around Denali and Andro stepped up to her bravely. In all his years of growing up, Androcles had witnessed the wrath of all his mothers in some manner. Usually it was directed at some ridiculous politician who had more arrogance than brains, but of them all, his Persian red haired mother's wrath was the most frightening to behold. Everyone's eyes fell on mother and son at that moment and Andro opened his mouth to speak.

"Mother... I had no... if I had not done what I did I..." Andro stammered to her.

Anja reached up and put a finger to his lips silencing his words. "You will never need to apologize to me for doing what needs to be done Androcles Leonidas. No matter what it may be."

"They... they were your people." Andro said.

Anja nodded her head slowly. "And they were your people as well. You had a choice to make my son. There was no good side to this choice Andro and you know it. Everyone does. Both options were bad. You chose to protect the many over the few, picking the lesser of two evils. It is a choice any of us would have made Androcles..." She reached up and took his face in her hands. "Including me. I would have cried my eyes out as I gave that order... but make no mistake... I *would* have given the order my son. Just as you did." Anja pulled him down close to her, Andro having to bend over in order to accomplish this because of her five foot three height. "Now you need to let it go, do you hear me?" She hissed at him softly but with true force behind her words. "Now you need to let it go Androcles."

Androcles Leonidas inhaled deeply of his Hadarian mother's honey scent as he lifted her into his arms and embraced her tightly. Anja smiled in happiness, small tears rolling down her cheeks as he crushed her to him and she held his broad shoulders tightly. She felt him relax, the tension in his body slowly leaving as she enveloped him with her motherly aura and let him know it was alright. After a long moment he lowered her to the ground and she gripped his arms tightly.

"Come on." Anja spoke. "Bella is waiting... and so is your brother."

"Mother... why has Dorian joined us early?" Andro asked quickly. "Is something... is something wrong?"

"Let's just say you will be surprised ok." Anja said. "You felt them I take it?"

Andro nodded his head. "The moment I entered the system. He is as aware as I was when I was born and I felt his Bonded Brother as well."

Anja nodded as she held his hand and reached out to take Zarah's as well. "It is probably better if you see for yourselves, and then I can explain everything." Anja said. "Come."

To say it was a shock would have been the understatement of the century. They had all crowded into the room, Anja now sandwiched between all of her children and happily trying to talk and listen at the same time.

They were all filled with concern for their Hadarian mother after what had transpired over the last months and Anja spent most of that time trying to reassure them she was fine. All conversation stopped when they entered the large lounge like room and all of them came to abrupt halts.

Isabella stood waiting for them, her hand resting on the soldier of the young boy who looked to be about six years old. He had short black hair, tanned skin and his eyes a piercing dark brown in one and cobalt blue in the other. Isabella beamed, looking just as beautiful to them as she always did, though her face was slightly drawn. Standing behind the small boy as if offering moral support were the rest of the younger Leonidas children, Retta and Nara closet to their new brother. Behind them was the huge Sinopia colored dragon with emerald green eyes. Isabella stood there her heart racing, not knowing what to expect, as if she had anything to really worry about. The room was silent for a full two minutes, and then it was Androcles who stepped away from Anja and moved up to them. His first act was to lean over and kiss his vampire mother's cheek, reaching out to grasp her arm and feeling her shaking hand grip his forearm. Isabella had single tears falling down her cheeks as she looked at him and then his azure eyes focused on Dorian who was looking at him intently.

Andro knelt in front of his brother, feeling his aura sweep outward, feeling his mind reach for him. Andro accepted without question and suddenly he could see all that had taken place, he could see all that Dorian's Bonded Brother Ryner had experienced and witnessed. A smile began to part his lips as he looked at him. Andro reached up and ran his knuckles over Dorian's jaw.

"We... we have a lot to talk about brother." He said with that smile. "So much to talk about."

Dorian didn't give him the chance and leaped into his arms knocking him over onto his back as he hugged Androcles.

"Tag!" Bryon shouted.

"Get them now!" Nara echoed.

And the room descended into loud shrieks of joy as Retta and Nara led the charge to their siblings and the laughter echoed as the Leonidas children reunited in a tangle of bodies. Anja drew Isabella back to her as Denali and Andro were buried by their brothers in a mass of bodies, and Eliani, Zarah and Normya were squatting with their sisters next to this tangle of bodies as Retta and Nara chattered away in between hugs and kisses of greeting. It didn't take long before Sadi, Lucia, Carisia, Lu'ria, Ne'Veha and Caliria were drawn into the group of girls with Nara stroking Lu'ria's shimmering white hair in fascination and Retta gripping both Eliani and Sadi tightly with one hand as she used a finger to caress Caliria's cheek. That was until Bryon tackled Zarah from behind, knocking her into Lucia and then you could not tell the two groups apart as they tumbled together.

"This is what we needed." Gorgo spoke softly looking at Anja and Isabella.

They stood beside the waist high divider, looking out onto a small section of the main flying chamber of Dragon Mountain. It was that spot that all of the Leonidas children had finally gravitated too, along with dozens and dozens of dragons. They were sitting in a large circle, Dorian sitting in Andro's lap and staring intently at his brother's face as he spoke to them, alternating between spoken words and Mindvoice. Retta rested in Eliani's lap as she leaned back against Jomann; Nara between Lisisa and the blue skinned Vanari Arduri and teasing the hair on the back of Denali's head. The reunion between sisters had also been quite a sight as Caliria and Arduri greeted Naesta and seeing the three of them together hugging to each other tightly as well as a teary Devra had nearly given everyone blue spots in their eyes. Naesta's greeting of her father had been much less so, but he quickly got the message when Naesta pulled the smiling Ceuma over to their group and introduced her to her sisters and mother. Introducing them to Joci was better suited for a more private gathering and Joci had agreed completely. Naesta sat between her sisters now, Caliria on the opposite side of Andro and Arduri next to Lisisa.

Bryon sat between Sadi's legs next to Andro, while Calyb sat between Normya and the giant Tir'ut and he kept reaching up to touch the bone spurs on Tir'ut's jaw while Tir'ut made horrible faces at him causing him to laugh. Tir'ut had always had a way with children Normya knew, and it apparently carried over here as well. Carina and Moneus had arrived from Sparta only a short time ago to join them. The circle of Leonidas children and those they loved was enclosed by a circle of dragons, Ryner resting between Elynth and Anthar. He felt the strongest draw to her because he was like her now, and because Anthar was her beloved mate, Ryner felt a kinship to

him. A brotherhood connection that would only grow in the years to come. Jeth, Tharua, Aradace and Majeir all rested comfortably as their dragon siblings adjusted their spots on the floor. Those dragons bound to Retta and Calyb, Nara and Deion and finally Bryon were just as excited to see their own brothers and sisters and it showed in their affection, especially towards Jeth who, even though he dwarfed them in size, had always been the most playful with them. Aurith had even joined them, since she had been alternating between here and the Dragon Cave on the Royal Estate. Since For'mya's capture she had been so very hard to console and only Arzoal's influence had kept her sane. Now as her brothers and sisters were here and reaching out to her, Aurith had sped to Dragon Mountain to try and draw support and love from them, something which she received in droves when she arrived.

Anja and Bella turned to look at her and Helen as they came up to them. "Yes it is." Anja said in agreement.

"Arzoal and I can even sense a great deal of Aurith's despair drifting away." Helen said. "And it is not very often a Talon Guardian comes to Dragon Mountain."

"He's telling them of For'mya. And their brother and sister that she carries." Bella spoke.

Helen nodded her head. "As if we would have been able to stop him anyway." She said. "You know he will keep nothing from them. It is not his way."

They turned as Deia came up slowly. "Well... the Netnews has discovered he is back." She said. "And they are all screaming for interviews."

Anja looked back to where Andro sat and shook her head. "They are going to have to wait. He'll be here for most of the day and evening. He's not going to be rushed."

Deia nodded. "That's what I told them." She answered her eyes falling on Dorian in Andro's lap. "He's growing quickly."

Anja nodded her head. "The combination of proteins that we used is acting more quickly than we thought." She said. "It's not harmful in any way, but the potency is taking longer to wear off. He will begin to slow his growth by tomorrow and fall into the schedule that we had originally thought."

"Have you heard from Martin?" Deia asked.

Isabella shook her head. Whatever fears or doubts she may have had were long gone now and she positively glowed in happiness. "They will return to Kranek in four hours and I'm sure we'll hear from them then."

Deia looked at Anja. "Was it necessary for them to do what they did Anja?" She asked. "I mean... posing the bodies in a such a way? Leaving their heads on..."

"If you are looking for me to agree with you Deia... I can't." Anja said. "They were the most feared military unit back then and something tells me that they will be again. They are masters at warfare in every form, including psychological. No matter what they did, it was done for that purpose and not some sense of petty revenge. Marty is not like that and you know it."

"I just think it will only anger the Kavalians." Deia said.

Anja nodded. "Probably... but only those who don't have to face them." She said. "For everyone else it will always be a fear now." Anja shrugged. "Besides... angry people make angry mistakes."

Deia nodded. "The Kavalian delegation is on its way from Hadaria under heavy escort. They screamed about not being able to bring their own ships so Riall granted them permission for a short group. Ten ships, but only one *GREAT SOUL*."

Helen reached for Bella's hand. "Come... we have other guests who we should be paying attention too. And plans of our own to form. Let Androcles handle his siblings."

"... They doing this Andro?" Retta asked the question. "Why hurt our mothers? Why try and hurt you. All of us. We have never done anything to them."

Andro looked at her stunning green eyes and even at eleven years old it was easy to see Retta was going to be just as devastatingly beautiful as her mother and sister. "I do not know Retta." He answered shaking his head. "Some people... some people just crave what others have because they do not."

"Or do not want to work to achieve themselves." Lu'ria spoke up.

“I have never lied to you.” Andro said. “Our mothers and father may not like what I tell you... allow you to know... but one day it will fall to all of us. We may fight and disagree but we are family. We are all blood.”

“Blood before all else.” Dorian Leonidas spoke softly. The voice did not belong to a boy who looked only six years of age, but the Leonidas children had quickly dismissed that oddity. They all knew what was happening and why it was happening and they accepted it and adapted without hesitation as was the way of any Lycavorian. Indeed... it was a strength of their species and their family.

Andro nodded. “Blood before all else.” He said. “Our uncle thinks to use the siblings our mother carries within her for his own gain. That is why I did what I did. It is not something I would have considered had the situation been different. It is not...” Andro looked at Dorian and their eyes met and understood. Having someone, even six year old Dorian, who would grow into a man very quickly, that knew and understood what Andro was saying in a way his other siblings did not, even this had given Andro a peace that Sadi had never seen in him and it made her supremely happy. “It is not as easy as many people believe. It is... it is difficult having father’s memories... grandfather’s memories... knowing so many things and...”

“Andro stop.” Normya spoke softly. “You do not need to explain anything to us. You don’t think we can imagine what it is like for you? How it will be for Dorian now? For our brother and sister that mother carries?”

“You did what you needed to do to keep our family from shattering Andro.” Denali said thoughtfully. “You are the only one who could have. We all know that. Even Arram in his own pig headed way.”

Lisisa hit Denali’s shoulder lightly. “Look who is talking about pig headed.” She said with a smile.

Andro smiled as well and looked at Caliria. At Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. At Arduri and Naesta. “We have discovered... we have discovered so much in so short a time.” He said. “Those who were... who were meant to be with us and those we had no idea would be with us. And there is probably much more we will discover before our journey ends.”

“If it ever does.” Sadi spoke softly.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. “If it ever does.” He agreed. “No matter what... no matter what happens... we are family. All of us. We are Wolves and Dragons of the Blood.” He looked at Caliria and then her sisters. “And now Vanari of the Blood. That is what our mother has grasped onto. What our siblings she carries have grasped onto. You all know father will never relent, never retreat and never surrender until she is back within his arms. Back among us where she belongs.” Andro looked at Bryon and saw his brother set his jaw and nod. “And we must not either. There are those who would hurt us... try to hurt us... speak bad things about us. Never believe them. These people do not know that we share everything as brothers and sisters. They do not know we already know the truth of things.”

“Kick'em in the *nor!*” Deion barked out causing all of them to laugh now.

Elynth stretched out her head on her neck until she was looking at Deion with golden eyes. *And what if they are not male Deion Leonidas?*

Deion hesitated for only a moment. “Kick'em in the *goldur* then!”

This brought a snort of laughter from Jeth, Jomann and Anthar as well as all of them and Elynth lowered her snout close to Deion her eyes smiling as she butt him gently in the shoulder and Nara reached up to slap him lightly in the back of the head.

Andro shook his head and looked at them once more. “We are different.” He said. “All of us. We bear the name Leonidas... and that makes us different. We will discover many things as the years pass but what has father always taught us?”

“Never fear the unknown.” Retta said.

Andro nodded his head. “Yes... and I believe that is part of our strength. As a family. As a species. As a people no matter who we are. When we look at the unknown we see promise and hope and what could be. We fear it yes... but that fear does not keep us from moving forward into that unknown. That is what we face now. The unknown. I... we do not know what is going to happen... but no matter what it is... we will face it head on. And we will always face it together, for a Leonidas is never alone, are we?”

Andro began and they all began to speak together.

“Wait”.

“There’s no mountain too great.”

“Hear these words and have faith.”

“Have faith.”

“He lives in you. He lives in me.”

“He watches over everything we see.”

“Into the future. Into the truth.”

“In your reflection he lives in you.”

“Aovi.” Eliani spoke in a whisper when they had finished reciting those words. Words they had learned and memorized before they could even walk.

Andro looked at Dorian and lifted his hand under his brother’s palm. Dorian spread his fingers out on top of Andro’s hand. “Welcome our brother.” He said. “Welcome Ryner.” He glanced up behind his shoulder to see Elynth and Anthar rub their snouts against Ryner’s cool scales. “Welcome to our family. Welcome to all of you who sit with us now.”

Eliani gripped Jomann’s hand tightly in hers. Caliria felt the warmth and love embrace her as Andro took her hand and then Naesta her other. Arduri felt Lisisa’s soft touch and then her fingers were entwining with hers.

She looked at her beautiful face and saw in her dazzling green eyes a desire and want that matched Arduri’s own. She glanced at Denali, only to see his dark eyes gazing at her intently, so intently it made her shiver.

“Let us make a vow right now. All of us. We will not rest... we will not hesitate. We will fight everyday until our mother and the brother and sister of ours that she carries is among us.” Andro spoke. “Only on that day will we take the path into the future. Only on that day will we move forward once more. And see what the unknown holds for all of us.”

“*Saan bruard hote sali.*” They spoke together. “*Saan bruard hote sali.*”

CRANAE ISLAND

She moved up behind him slowly, knowing that he already could smell her. She was torn between wanting to remain and needing to return and try to figure out her life. What she had seen at Dragon Mountain, what she had felt, it made Caliria want to weep. She was so very confused as she stood there looking at his broad back. They had returned only two hours ago, and Sadi and the others had given her the grand tour of the villa while her mother and sisters had settled into the rooms they normally occupied. She had learned much more about him just letting her eyes wander over much of how the villa was decorated. By Sadi’s own admission, Andro had done most of the decorating before she had even arrived back in his life. In some ways it gave her a window into his mind and heart, and she could see the real him. He loved her without question, they all did, and Caliria felt that love and devotion to her always, yet she could not bring herself to just let go and love them back as completely. Putting aside that the lovemaking between them, between all of them really, was torrid and oh so delicious. They had feasted on her and she on them so willingly yet for three hundred years she had been taught and raised to believe something completely different about Lycavorians. Though all of the Vanari females that had been rescued with her were safely on their way back to their families with nothing but words of praise and compliments on their rescue and how they had been treated by the Lycavorian people, Caliria was the only one who questioned what had happened; why it had happened and how.

Caliria saw his head turn towards her in the darkness, though the moon was nearly full and flooding the beach and the surface of the ocean around them with its glow. His azure eyes once more made her shudder and she saw him reach out his hand to her.

“Come sit with me *Inamarno.*” He said softly to her. “I promise... no nuzzles or anything intimate.” His smile was devastating to her, hammering against her will.

Caliria didn’t hesitate though and she doubted she would have even if he hadn’t said what he did. Being intimate with him, feeling him possess her as he had with his size and gentleness and experience, it had been the most electrifying sexual occurrence of her life. The most rapturous time she had ever imagined really. Having not only Andro, but Sadi and Lu’ria and Carisia and Ne’Veha pleasuring her in every way, it had nearly made her lose her mind in glorious abandon. She took his hand without doubt and lowered herself between his long legs, snuggling her back against his bare chest.

Andro let her get situated and then he brought his head around over the top of her slim shoulder. She thought he was going to nuzzle her and she would have thoroughly melted if he had, but he kept his word and simply looked out over the surface of the water. *You have all of your things ready?* He asked her.

Caliria nodded her head. *Yes.*

She was still amazed at how easily Mindvoicing came to her now. Sadi and the others had instructed her as they laid intimately pressed against one another and Andro on the bed, their passions cooling and they led her on a dreamlike trip through Andro's mind. As that event had unfolded, the Mindvoicing had become so much easier and she felt stronger and focused. Those feelings remained even after they had woken and she continued to practice by simply skipping along other's shields, picking up their surface thoughts but never intruding. However it had occurred, she found her abilities had grown a hundred fold in just the hours she had spent with them. Even the Lycavorian First Oracle had commented that she was far stronger now, and with continued practice she would soon be on the same level as the Leonidas family in the upper echelon of those who were considered Tier Six Mindvoicers.

Good. He said simply.

Androcles... why are you letting me go? She asked him suddenly.

I can not keep you against your will Inamarno. He told her.

You know what I mean! She snapped softly. *I know enough about your people to know that if you considered me your... your wife... that you would not let me go.*

Andro turned his head and leaned back slightly so he could focus on her eyes. *What you just said should be all the answer you need.*

What? She gasped. *What I just said? How does what...* Caliria stopped when she realized what he meant and her green eyes grew wide.

Andro smiled as he saw realization flood her face. *You see.* He told her. *Inamarno... if I thought it would ultimately lead to acceptance by you, I would not let you leave. I would beg you to stay; we would beg you to stay. We would love you until you could not stand it anymore, until you had not the strength to leave us.* He shook his head. *That is not what I want. You have so many questions. You have doubts and concerns. About me, about us, about my people. About everything. After what you have been through, I can not and will not fault you for this.*

Androcles I...

Andro shook his head. *Let me speak for a moment Inamarno.* He said with a grin as he looked at her and put a finger to her violet lips. *You are confused yes? And be honest with me Inamarno. Truly honest.*

Caliria nodded her head slowly. *Yes.*

You do not understand how you can feel for me what you do. How you can feel for KertaGai and SirsanGai what you do. For Enylarcopri and Ilythiiri Tessai. And you certainly do not understand how we can all feel for you what we do. How I... as a male... can love all of you equally. He said.

But it's not equally. Caliria said quickly. *Sadi...*

Sadi is my anome. Andro said. *And yes... part of me will always be drawn more to her because she is a pureblood like me. My blood mother Aricia is anome to my father, but after what you have seen of my mothers who you have met, do you see any jealousy among them. Do you detect any malcontent... and I know you could feel this Inamarno because you are stronger than you have let others see. And you have become this way in a very short time.*

Caliria shook her head slowly. *No... if anything... if anything Sadi is the one to draw us closer together. Closer to you.*

Andro nodded his head. *Yes.*

Androcles... you know you can't change me. Caliria said. *I can't become like you. Like Sadi and Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. Vanari physiology is not able to do this. Any children we might... any children we might have... they will look like me. Not you.*

Andro chuckled. *And you think this matters to me?*

It matters to all Lycavorian men. Caliria said quickly. *We have seen it...* She stopped once more when he tilted his head and his azure orbs glinted in the moonlight and she realized what she was going to say.

You have spent the majority of your three hundred plus years believing one thing about my people Inamarno. He told her. *Having it drummed into your head. Now you are beginning to discover that all might not*

be as you have believed and it is causing a rift within your heart and mind. Until you bring that back into balance, you will never be happy here with us.

You are... you are so much younger than me and... Caliria began.

I could recite to you the speech my great grandfather Resumar gave on the day he was crowned King from memory. Andro said. *A speech that does not exist anywhere in our written history because it was from before records were kept. I have the memories and experiences of my father, my grandfather and my great grandfather within me Inamarno. I recall them in my dreams at times but they are within me. In my father as well. In essence... I am far older than you... by many thousands of years so that argument is not one you can use. At least not in a logical sense.* He finished with a smile looking at her.

“Andro...” Caliria said switching back to words now.

Androcles shook his head. “No. You have seen a part of me that only reinforces what you have been told of my people. You are aware of things that I have done. My actions in rescuing you, the orders I gave near Hadaria. Yet you have also seen a part of me that does not fit with all you have been taught. A part of my people that, according to what you have been schooled does not exist. These two things are causing a conflict within you that you can not make sense of. I do understand this you know.”

“Andro it is not just you.” Caliria said softly.

“I know this too.” He said.

Caliria leaned back now looking at him. “And how could you know these things without probing my thoughts?” She asked more sternly than she intended.

Andro smiled. “You forget *Inamarno*... when you swim within my thoughts I can swim within yours as well. Our minds are open to each other completely. I have a good idea of how analytical your mind works.”

Caliria dropped her eyes from his almost embarrassed. “I am so sorry that...”

“That you believe these things?” Andro questioned. “Do not be sorry *Inamarno*, because I believe them as well.”

Caliria’s head snapped back up and she looked at him. “What?”

Andro chuckled as he pulled the small data pad from the loose pocket on the leg of his pants. “You and your father are not so different *Inamarno*.” He said as he held it up. “And regardless of what he thinks... I have a great deal of respect for him. A great deal of respect.”

Caliria looked at him wide eyed. “After what he has accused you of Androcles?” She gasped. “What he has called your people? Even you?”

Andro nodded his head. “He is doing everything within his power to protect the Vanari people. To keep their faith and maintain their connections to the past. Just as I do with my people. His only fault is not seeing that the Vanari will need his even hand of leadership and dedication through this change and it would be better if he guides them rather than try to fight it. Your father... his foresight is incredible *Inamarno*... it is where you get it. Arduri and Naesta and Nirilo too. His only fault is trying to direct what is happening as opposed to guiding it.”

Caliria looked at the data pad in his hand. “What is that?” She asked.

Andro looked at her for the briefest of moments and then held it out to her. “This is proof to what your father believes.” He said softly. “The equipment used to design and shape the bio-weapon that Eliani discovered infected the Faith family is of Lycavorian Union origin. She confirmed it with my mother only a short time ago... and to be specific it is Hadarian made and engineered. Needless to say my mother is quite furious. More angry than I have seen her in quite some time aside from the Kavalians taking my mother For'mya from us.”

Caliria took the pad with wide eyes. “But that... that would mean...”

Andro nodded. “Yes. That someone within the Union gave the equipment to the OSG to produce this weapon. Which also means that someone in the Union is more than likely working with others in the Protectorate to assist the OSG in taking and moving Vanari slaves that are captured.” Andro shook his head slowly and looked out over the calm ocean water. “Seventeen thousand years of slavery and oppression before we truly threw off the yoke of the High Coven and still there are some among my people who walk this path. Inflicting it on others.” Caliria Re Mydala watched his face and the sadness in his eyes actually caused her pain.

“Androcles this... why... why would you give me this?” She gasped. “This... this only implicates your people.”

Andro looked at her. “Yes it does. And it will also free my people.” He said. “And yours *Inamarno*. Dutkne is the only other person outside of Eliani, Sadi, my mother and your mother that knows of this. That is why he is returning with you. He is going to end this and those who have taken part in it will meet Spartan justice. Our justice.”

“You... you trust him still... after knowing this?” She asked. “He is the leader of the Protectorate Andro.”

Andro nodded and met her eyes. “I trust him as I trust you. We have a deep connection *Inamarno*. Within Mindvoice. It is not unlike the connection Wayonn had with Sumar, Canth with my grandfather Resumar and that Helen had with my grandfather and now my father. You know the history of Wayonn and Sumar?”

Caliria nodded. “Some of it yes.” She answered. “Unlike others I discovered these things because of Nirilo’s position among Dutkne’s court. And my mother’s insistence that we read of their history. They were... they were like brothers almost. Knowing what the other knew and being able to speak for them.”

Andro nodded. “Just as Dutkne now is with me. He knows me better than anyone except my father, Sadi and now you.” He answered. “I will share with Lu'ria, Ne'Veha and Carisia what you now know when the time is right.”

Caliria looked at the pad. “But why... why give this to me? To my father?” She asked.

Andro smiled. “Because at this moment in time... you are the only one who your father will listen to.” He said.

“Me?” Caliria gasped. “He won’t... he won’t even acknowledge I am his daughter!” She said angrily. “After what I told him... after being together with you and Sadi and the others, why would he listen to me?”

“He will listen to you because you and he are the only ones among your family who still have doubts and questions.” Andro said. “He will listen to you *Inamarno*... because no matter what he says or does... he loves you with every breath he takes. And it kills him each time he has to do or say anything against you.”

Caliria looked at him with wide eyes. “How... how do you know this?”

Andro touched his nose. “The nose knows.” He said with a small laugh. “And he is the only one who can help you find your center and open your mind. He is the only one who can help you decide if being with us is truly what you want.”

“But he... he hates your people.” Caliria said.

Andro nodded and used a finger to brush the flawless and smooth blue skin of her cheek and jaw. “Yes he does...” Andro said. He crushed her lips to his and kissed her then, pulling her tightly against him. Caliria didn’t resist... she didn’t want to resist and she whimpered as her own desire and need came rushing to the surface. She met Andro’s kiss with everything she was, firmly pressing her body against his and hoping that he would take her right here on the beach.

It wasn’t to be however, and Caliria tried to capture his lips once more even as he drew away from her slowly. She opened her eyes dreamily and looked into his simmering azure orbs and saw the desire and passion for her burning in them.

“Yes... he does hate my people *Inamarno*.” Andro drew back and she watched him with confused eyes as he got to his feet and looked down on her. “He hates my people... just as his daughter does.” He spoke softly. “Just as you do *Inamarno*.”

GYTHEIO

Jomann walked the last two hundred meters towards Eliani’s mountaintop villa in a very good mood. He was going to finally spend time with his new mate and *anome* in a bed that was not designed to injure someone. They would be able to worship each other on fine, soft sheets and listen to the wind as it whispered through the mountains around them. His mother was ecstatic about him finding a mate and equally ecstatic about meeting her tomorrow. She was somewhat upset that Jomann would not tell her the name of his new mate and wife and his father was positively livid with him for not revealing this information so that he could properly invite her family to the celebration for Jomann’s brother’s graduation. As he closed within a hundred meters of the large villa he looked up and saw two dragons swoop low over the horizon and suddenly land just outside the main

door of the villa. Jomann stopped walking as he saw the tall, muscular Spartan and the stunning blond haired female quickly dismount the dragons and move to the main door of the villa. It opened almost before they got there and he saw Eliani. She stepped out of the doorway slightly, wearing only a loose fitting sundress that did little to hide her luscious body and as Jomann tilted his head slightly he caught her enticing maple and wheat scent on the wind.

He watched as words were exchanged, Eliani shook her head several times and then her face dropped and she surrendered to an embrace from the woman and a far too familiar embrace from the Spartan. Jomann felt his blood surge in anger just a little as Eliani directed them into her home and then glanced around outside the entrance to her villa before moving into the villa after them. He stood there for a moment, his heart hanging on the precipice, and then he took a deep breath.

No.

Eliani was his mate and his *anome* now. Her scent and her blood burned only for him and no other would make her betray that. She was a Leonidas and it was something she would never do. This man and woman, who he now recognized from her thoughts, this was Malic and Nyla. The man and woman who she had been with before discovering him. The man and woman she thought she had loved. No... Jomann knew she would never betray him. Whatever they were here for, Eliani would not allow them to convince her otherwise. Jomann raised his Mindvoice shields to the highest level so that his thoughts did not interfere in whatever she was doing and he turned to go back down the mountain. He got three steps before the massive body of Tharua settled to the ground only four meters away from him.

Jomann? Her voice touched him.

Tharua? He answered moving up to stand beside her. *Why are you here? I thought you would be with Jeth hunting over the island.*

I came to see if Eliani needed anything before we left. Tharua answered. *I saw Vincix and Arydun outside as I circled to land. And then I saw you standing here. Eliani is your mate and anome now Jomann... you should go up there.*

Jomann shook his head confidently. *If she had wanted me there she would have called for me.* He said. *Jomann you don't think that...*

What? No! Jomann answered quickly. *No! This is something she must deal with on her own. No one can make her feel as I do Tharua... I know that. Just as no one can make me feel as she does. We are anomes. I do not question her or what she does. I knew this day would come sooner or later. I knew she would have to face them. And she is strong enough to face them alone. She needs to face them alone.*

You were suppose to be with her tonight. Tharua said.

Jomann nodded with a smile. *Yes... but I will have eternity with her Tharua. One night without her will not kill me. Two maybe... one no.* He answered with a smile.

Tharua chuckled within Mindvoice and nodded her large head. *You... you are a very remarkable man Jomann of the Lycavorians.*

I like to think so. Jomann answered.

Come... jump onto my saddle and let me at least return you to the island before Jeth and I depart to hunt. I will make sure she is on time tomorrow. Tharua said as Jomann used her thick foreleg to climb into the saddle easily. *She has a tendency to get sidetracked at times.*

Jomann smiled. *Yes... so I have noticed.*

Tharua laughed as she propelled them into the night sky.

PROMETHUS STATION

“...Have all the gear and equipment that Ben sent to you Hene?” Andro asked.

The stern looking *Durcunusaan* Spartan nodded his head. “Yes Milord.” He replied. “I have already transferred it to the *ARCH DEMON*.”

“How many in your team?” Andro asked.

“Three of my people not including myself and three half vampire Drow scouts.” Hene answered. “My plan now is for one of them to be shadowing Regent Re Mydala at all times while remaining wrapped in the

shadows. The rest of us will maintain distance surveillance, but close enough to react within two minutes. Lady Devra has already given us a very detailed blueprint of his offices and the surrounding area in the capital city.”

Hene looked at Devra who stood next to Sadi.

“I bought four offices within the building across from the Board of Regent Headquarters so that I could maintain a public place.” Devra explained. “It is an older building, a landmark you would call it, so it is not full and the entrances are not readily available on the main public promenade that is nearby.”

“As it stands right now access and egress is subtle and out of the way as Lady Devra has said.” Hene spoke.

“My Drow will have no problem moving back and forth, and if need be we can use the sewer tunnels below. They connect with the Regent headquarters and will allow us to be mobile quickly.”

“Androcles... you truly believe Coren will be in danger?” Devra asked.

Andro met her eyes. “Men and women do not change their colors so quickly Devra.” He told her. “Your former husband clings to what he has thought for centuries about my people even after we rescued *Inamarno* and the others. Ardan Lamurrion turned so fast I thought his face would separate from his head. He is a traitor to your people and he has his hands very deep in whatever deal there is between the OSG and whoever among your people and mine that are capturing and enslaving Vanari. And if I am correct he will accommodate us as much as possible so that we believe this façade he has built and do not question him. He does not know what we have discovered in regards to the disease Corbin Faith tried to inflict on his mother however.”

Devra looked at him. “But you trust Coren... a man who hates you and your people with every fiber of his being?” She said.

Andro chuckled. “Ironic isn’t it?” He said. “I trust in Coren’s dedication to your people and in his ultimate love for *Inamarno*. He will stop at nothing to discover who is behind this when she gives him the data pad, especially since the evidence proves that Lycavorians from the Protectorate are involved.”

“But you and Dutkne will be incriminating your own people.” Devra said.

Andro shook his head. “No... we will be discovering a cancer among our people.” He replied with cold anger in his voice. “A cancer that Dutkne will remove permanently and with extreme prejudice.”

“Who will be watching *Inamarno*?” Sadi asked from beside Andro.

“That would be me Princess.” The young female spoke stepping forward smartly. “Junior Commander Paga.”

“And you know your task?” Sadi asked.

“Yes Milady... go where she goes... become her friend. Watch out for and protect her. Report to you everything she does.” Paga announced.

“No!” Sadi declared. “Her decisions must be her own Paga. I forbid you to report to me or to anyone what she does unless it endangers her life. I will not have her believe we are watching her.”

Paga glanced at Andro quickly and then back to Sadi. “If that is what you wish Milady.” She spoke. “I don’t know if she will believe me though.”

Sadi smiled warmly. “She will believe you.” She said. “I have left something in the quarters she will use for the trip that will convince her.”

“Commander Hene... as for Coren Re Mydala... you are to let him do what he will. I do not doubt he will uncover what we want and you will only interfere if his life becomes exposed to harm in any manner. Denali and Lisisa know of you and your team and if you feel the need to get authorization for something contact them on their personal channels.” Andro spoke calmly. “I expect that Coren will move quickly when he returns. He will want to expose us to everyone as quickly as possible considering what my directives to Denali are.”

Hene nodded. “Understood Milord.” He said. “And if his life does become threatened sire?”

Andro looked at Devra quickly and her nod was without hesitation or doubt. He turned back to Hene. “Eliminate the threat Commander.”

Hene nodded. Consider it done sire.” He answered.

Andro nodded. “You are dismissed.” He said waiting for Hene and his team to exit the room before looking at Devra and pulling Sadi close to him. “I have done everything I can do.” He told her. “Anymore and I will expose our hand in all this.”

Devra nodded her head. “I can’t believe Ardan is involved.” She said. “And you let him go.”

“It was the only way to insure that we did not lose control of the situation.” Andro told her.

“When did you know he was involved Andro?” Sadi asked.

“Just after the OSG tried to kill us.” He answered. “He made such a big deal out of what I said in my anger and then suddenly his caution about me was tossed aside. My father once told me that a person can always change their spots; and they can be true about what they believe if it is over a matter of time and they have been given good reason to do so. Like being confronted by the truth. We killed a couple of OSG men and women and suddenly Ardan is on my side? I am not a fool, and I saw right through that. Then when I was speaking with Brendi’s brother, he tried to hide the recognition on his face. He knew this Corbin Faith person. It was there only for a moment but I saw it. That only confirmed my initial belief.”

“If Ardan is involved in selling our people to the OSG then there is no telling how many other members of the SBR are involved as well. Or members of the General Board for that matter.” Devra said.

“If things go as I have planned them we will have our answers.” Andro stated. “And then we can act. Why do you think I am sending Denali and Lisisa there?”

Devra looked at him. “What... what do you mean?”

“They have grown close to Arduri.” Sadi said. “And she wants to be closer. As do they.”

Andro nodded. “My brother is a lot more dense than Lisisa... but she has told me the attraction is there. It will probably take both Lisisa and Arduri jumping his bones before he gets it...” Andro said with a smile. “But they will not let anything happen to Arduri. No matter how long they have to stay. Unfortunately... what we are doing will put all of your family in danger I believe, but there is no other way.”

Devra was silent for a time and then nodded her head. “I guess I should not be surprised about Arduri. She has always been the more adventurous of my daughters... and the most tenacious. If your brother and sister are what she truly wants then that is why she is refusing to advance her relationship with Cruor. Not that I mind that. It will make Coren even more livid however. Especially if they discover why she is doing it.” Devra said with a hiss.

Andro nodded. “Probably... but if we are going to have a future among our people it needs to begin now. No more of this back and forth and playing games. My father will not let the status quo continue, and better that I be the one to do this. He will be far more blunt and unforgiving than me.”

Devra nodded and looked at them. “Will you see Caliria off?” She asked finally.

Andro looked at Sadi and then shook his head slowly. “No. That will only succeed in confusing her more than she already is.”

“She loves you Androcles.” Devra said sincerely. “All of you Sadi. I know my daughter well enough to see that.”

Andro nodded. “She also has some deep issues that she needs to come to terms with and they involve us. Me mainly... but they are things she can only work out away from us.” He said. “Believe me... I do not want her to go Devra. None of us do... but if she does not go then over time she will come to hate us. That I could not bear.”

Devra nodded. “I understand.” She said softly. “Just don’t stop loving her.”

“That will never happen Devra.” Sadi spoke firmly. “There is nothing she could do that would make us stop loving her. Ever.”

Devra looked at them and smiled. “I should probably go and say goodbye then. I will see you back on the Island.”

Andro and Sadi watched her leave and then they were alone. Sadi looked at him for a long moment and then wrapped her arms around his waist. “What are you thinking?” She asked.

Andro pulled her close to him and buried his face into her long blond hair. “I am thinking that we just may lose her *KertaGai*.” He said softly.

“I won’t believe that.” Sadi said. “No matter what happens... her heart of hearts belongs with us and she knows that.”

“I hope you are right.” Andro said. “I hope you are right.”

GYTHEIO

Oh Tharua... he must be so angry with me. Eliani gasped as Tharua raced over the tops of the mountain villas heading for the homes closer to the gulf. *I can’t believe I let them do this to me!*

Tharua turned her head as she dipped lower in the cloudless sky. *He is not angry sister. I have told you this. They are more than friends to you Eliani... and you cannot just dismiss them now. Especially now. Jomann knows this. Nyla is pregnant and that is why they came to you.*

I should have reached for him. Eliani berated herself. *I should have had him there with me. It is so inappropriate for me to be with a man I had a relationship with and not have Jomann be there. It was supposed to be our first real night together. I had wine and rose peddles for the bath and...*

Enough! Tharua hissed at her. *Do you think your anome would have so little faith in you? You are bound with Jomann in a way sacred to your people sister. And this would not have happened if there was any question about how you feel for each other.*

I just... I don't... I can't lose him Tharua. I can't. Eliani said.

Lose him? Ahh... Eliani my sister, now you think too little of yourself. You will never lose Jomann sister. You are soulmates! Meant for each other by a higher power. Tharua told her. *We are almost there... and be yourself. That is what your mate would expect.*

Yes it is. The male voice spoke now intruding on their conversation. *And it is what I expect of my sister as well.*

Eliani turned her head and admonished herself once more, for flying in almost perfect formation with Tharua was Elynth, Majeir and Anthar. Sadi rode just in front of Andro while Ne'Veha sat behind Lu'ria on Majeir.

Andro! Eliani gasped.

Her brother smirked from perhaps ten meters away. *Jomann invited us as well. Given what is happening all around us, a little time away from it enjoying some happiness will be good for all of us.* Andro shook his head. *And our mothers demanded we go too. Dorian too. They threatened to turn me over their knee if I did not.*

Eliani couldn't help the laugh that escaped her lips at her brother's face and the fear she had felt only moment's before vanished instantly. She gripped the saddle's edges just a little less tightly as Tharua dove for the ground.

The home was comfortable and very well kept. Herolia was a traditional Spartan woman and while Josoric's position within the Union military granted them the ability to have several employees, she refused to allow anyone to tend to her flower gardens that surrounded her home. The Union Captain from Apo Prime had swept her off her feet the moment she saw him all those years ago and to this day, their desire for each other had not dimmed one bit. All four of their children were proud and strong and their upbringing showed the pillar of their love for each other.

Josoric had so impressed her own mother and father that they urged her to accept his courtship sooner than normal even though he was nearly eight hundred years senior to her two hundred and six years of age. Their youngest son had just graduated from the Union Flight Academy and their home was now filled with family and friends to celebrate that. Herolia and her mother stood outside the front of their large villa sharing company with four other females, among them two elven females who were wives and mates to Herolia's brothers. Soft Greek music played in the background throughout the house, a lavish display of food and drink laid out in the center of the villa. Four of the members of her husband's Union military Command stood sharply outside the entrance of their villa to direct others to the correct home and assist in parking any Lifters that were brought.

"...You said we would meet Jomann's new mate?" Her mother Rohebi asked her.

"Yes Herolia... all of us are waiting with baited breath you know. We all want to see who has claimed the heart of your son." Ye'nai spoke. "He is the only one of your sons that has not shown an interest in any females. His uncle and I had all but given up hope."

Herolia smiled and laughed. "He has not told me anything Ye'nai. Only that we will meet her today. She is suppose to be arriving soon I think."

"You have not caught a scent at least?" Her mother asked.

Herolia nodded her head. "Oh yes... maple and wheat. Very sweet and soft. Embedded deeply in his blood. Whoever she is... she is very powerful if her scent is any indication. He is being so obstinate in not telling us. Josoric is furious with him."

“Why hide who she is?” Rohebi asked. “Do you know if she was born here in Sparta?”

Herolia nodded. “I know that much at least. All he would tell us is that she was born here in Sparta and she comes from a very traditional family.”

The shadows that flashed overhead caused Herolia to stop in the middle of her sentence and look up. It caused all of them to look up as low as the shadows were and they witnessed the ochre colored dragon flare its huge wings and land easily on the ground outside the entrance, followed quickly by a single dragon that all of them knew well enough from the Netnews reports.

“The Prince!” Rohebi declared getting to her feet. “Here?”

Herolia relaxed slightly and held her mother’s arm. “Jomann is his Captain mother. He told me he invited Prince Androcles and his mates.” She stated. “Though I must admit... I did not think he would come.”

“Bah!” Rohebi spat. “A more traditional family does not exist than the Leonidas Royal family. It would be dishonorable for him not to come if Jomann invited him. It is why they are so loved. They truly act like normal people.”

Herolia held her mother’s arm as she saw the four guards snap to attention when Andro and the others approached slowly. Herolia recognized all of his mates and even his sister Eliani, the half Hadarian. The four soldiers parted smartly and Androcles smiled at one and patted his shoulder as the four dragons settled gracefully to the ground to rest some twenty meters outside the wall of the villa’s property. No Lifter would try to come down this road now she knew. Herolia turned quickly as Josoric came rushing from inside the villa. One of their guests must have rushed inside to where he was and told him who was here. He tried to smooth out his clothes as he took a place on Rohebi’s opposite side, gently helping to hold his mother-in-law steady. She was not a frail or very old woman, but she had just gone through a lengthy sickness common to older wolves and as per her history, she endured it without medical treatment as her ancestors did. She would recover fully in a few weeks and it would never occur again, but stubborn woman that she was, she would not let it keep her down.

“Now... do not try and impress yourself upon Prince Androcles Josoric my boy.” Rohebi told him.

“Your record and history speak plainly enough for themselves. They are beyond stellar. Be yourself.”

Josoric glanced at his mate and wife and smiled as Rohebi gripped his hand while she spoke. Josoric had lost his own parents centuries ago to the High Coven and Rohebi and her mate had quickly filled this role for him. “With you here *medwaw*... I could not be anything but myself.” He answered.

Rohebi nodded. “And that is why you are mated with my daughter.” She said with a smile of her own as Andro stepped up to them holding what looked like a large bottle of Spartan wine and each of his mates carrying small packages as well.

Andro bowed his head to them, stunning all of them with his action. Josoric stepped forward quickly. “Milord please...” He stammered. “You need not...”

Andro looked up. “General Josoric... we are guests in your home. I hope Jomann told you we were coming.” He said.

Herolia’s keen female wolf nose caught the sweet scent on the slight breeze. The same sweet maple and wheat scent she had detected on her oldest son and her dark eyes grew a little wider.

“He did Milord.” Josoric answered. “You honor our home with your presence, especially with everything that is happening now.”

“Please General... what better way is there to try and put my problems on hold for a time then coming to a Spartan home and partaking in some of that delicious Greek food my nose tells me has been prepared.” Andro spoke with a genuine smile. “Is that Pasticcio I smell? And Arni Me Patates?”

Sadi gave him a gentle elbow in his gut. “Andro... your manners over your nose.” She stated drawing a smile from both Herolia and her mother. She stepped up and held out the package in her hands. “Dolmathes... for your table Lady Herolia. My father taught me to make them.” She said with an embarrassed smile. “They are the only thing I can make to be honest. I hope you like them.”

Herolia took the package which turned out to be a large platter in a thin box and it smelled of fine herbs and rice filled grape leaves. A delicacy to many of the older Spartans and it would no doubt be a big hit with her family. “Thank you Princess... you honor...”

Sadi shook her head. “Today... and always forward it is only Sadi.” She said.

Herolia's eyes narrowed. "I could not Princess... it would not be appropriate for me to refer to you in such an informal way."

Sadi blinked. "Isn't that what family does?" She asked.

Herolia looked at her, eyes growing wide. "Family?" She gasped.

Andro grimaced. "Oops!" He said sheepishly. "I think the cat is out of the bag."

Herolia glanced at her mother and husband and then back to Andro. "Milord... I don't know what you mean? We..."

"Eli!" Jomann's voice boomed from behind them causing them to turn and watch as their oldest son approached with his younger brother Donal beside him.

A small squeal emanated from behind Androcles and suddenly they watched his younger sister Eliani dart from behind him and practically launch herself into Jomann's arms. As Eliani passed her Herolia once more caught the sweet scent of maple and wheat and her eyes exploded in disbelief.

Jomann caught her easily and their lips came crashing together in a positively possessive kiss. His arms crushed her petite frame to his suspended in the air, while her arms flew around his broad shoulders and her hands gripped the back of his head.

[Jomann my love!] Eliani exclaimed with her thoughts even as she deepened their kiss. *[I am so sorry! Tharua told me and...]*

Jomann pulled his head back and looked into her stunning fern green eyes while her hands stroked his cheeks. *[You are mine Eliani Leonidas! Just as I am yours! I know this and you know this. They... they are important to you. And it was something you needed to do.]*

[I should have reached for you! Told you what...] Eliani began but his kiss staggered her thoughts and her legs curled up sensuously along his hips.

[We are anomes and our trust is as powerful as our love.] His words flooded her mind and Eliani felt all the doubts and fears she had been holding inside her all morning lift away into the wind. *[Besides... I will enjoy you that much more this night.]*

Eliani cooed in his arms, a sound that reached everyone nearby and caused Andro to shake his head. *[Ahem!]* He cleared his throat while sounding the word into their connection even though it was partially shielded.

Jomann and Eliani parted quickly and saw everyone's eyes upon them. Her tanned face grew instantly flush with embarrassment and she tugged on his arms to lower her to the ground which he did quickly. He did not release her however, and Eliani made no move to take her hands from his arms. Jomann coughed softly and looked at his wide eyed parents.

"Ah... mother... grandmother... father... I would like to present Eliani Leonidas." He said. "My... my mate. My wife. My *anome*."

Herolia gasped and almost dropped the package from Sadi before Josoric caught it and quickly set it on one of the chairs to the side. He turned back to his son, who stood there looking rather out of place and stupefied.

"*Anome*? Jomann... Jomann why did you not..." Herolia began to stammer.

"Hmmm..."

Eliani squeezed his hands and stepped forward in front of him almost defensively. "It is my fault Lady Herolia." She said. "This is Donal's day and I did not want to... I did not want to overshadow that. It would not be..."

"Show me!" Herolia snapped almost angrily.

Eliani knew immediately what she meant and she stepped closer to her and pulled back the collar of the loose fitting pink pullover shirt she wore with the dark leather pants and boots. Herolia stepped closer to her and her eyes saw the teeth marks on Eliani's shoulder that indicated where Jomann had bitten her. She moved even closer and leaned close to Eliani's cheek, inhaling deeply of her maple and wheat scent as well as the pungent jasmine scent of her first born son deeply embedded within Eliani's blood and scent. Rohebi stepped forward now as well and both of them looked at her.

"I thought... Jomann told us..." Herolia stuttered softly.

"I know what you are going to say Lady Herolia... but that was not... that was not..." Eliani tried to find the words and cursed under her breath. It was Herolia who reached out and took her hands drawing her fern

green eyes back up to her face. "I'm sorry... I can not find the words to express what I want to say. I am not... I am not usually without words."

Rohebi chuckled. "If you are anything like your mother child I would not think so." She said with a glint in her eyes.

"Does your blood burn for my son Eliani Leonidas?" Herolia asked softly. "Does it truly burn for him?"

Eliani's face lit up and she smiled a rapturous smile. "Oh... Milady... if only I could describe how my blood burns for him. Every single moment since I first smelled him. Since I first touched him. It hasn't stopped burning. I tremble at his touch upon me, I smell him everywhere I go. I dream of him and..."

Herolia grinned at her. "Hush child." She said softly. "Before you make even my mother wish for male companionship."

Eliani blushed as she smiled. "Forgive me for not letting him tell you sooner." She said. "We... I was afraid you would think badly of me because of..."

Herolia drew her into an embrace and inhaled deeply of her scent, her arms tightening and enjoying the feel of her. She felt Eliani's arms do the same and Herolia knew. She knew by her actions and by her scent. *If you have taken the heart of my son Eliani... smitten him as you have done... then you have done something many have tried and not succeeded at. And now I know why.*

I will love him forever and an eternity Milady. We will have strong children and... Eliani told her as Herolia drew back.

Herolia laughed and embraced her once more. "Oh child... I like how you think!" She exclaimed. She looked at Jomann as she held Eliani's hands and her face became stern. "You... young Spartan! You on the other hand... you had best devise a way to make up to your father and I this breach of protocol."

"Mother I..." Jomann began.

"Not now!" Herolia snapped. "After I have gotten to know your *anome* better. She is obviously more well mannered than you."

Herolia grabbed her mother's hand and still holding Eliani's hand began to draw them into the villa. Eliani glanced back at him quickly, her face beaming and Jomann grinned at her. Until his father stepped up in front of him.

"You and I will talk boy!" Josoric scolded him before turning to Andro who stood there sheepishly. "Milord... allow me to welcome you and show you and the Princesses into my home. I hope all of you are hungry for we have an overabundance of food."

This time it was Ne'Veha who stepped forward, the scent of the food clashing with her new wolf blood and setting her mouth to watering. "We are famished." She stated. "*Our* mate did not allow us to eat before we left."

"No he did not." Sadi agreed stepping up beside her.

Josoric smiled. "For shame!" Josoric announced. "Then please Princesses... follow me and I will sate your hunger."

Andro stood there for a moment watching as Jomann's father led Sadi and the others into the villa. He looked at Jomann then.

"Explain to me how you and my sister took a *sibfla* and you and I end up holding it Jomann." Andro said moving up to stand beside him and his brother.

"I am asking myself that same question Andro." Jomann said. "My brother Donal."

"Milord!" Donal almost shouted.

Andro nodded. "Since I am here... why don't we secure a nice small corner... eat until we burst and stay out of the line of fire of your parents."

Jomann nodded. "At this point I would say that is a sound tactical move." He stated.

Donal laughed. "It won't work. Mother is like a heat seeking missile when she wants to find you." He said.

"Let's give it a try anyway shall we?" Andro said. "I'm starving."

"Left flank." Jomann spoke. "Donal... you have point."

"Why me?" His brother asked.

Jomann laughed. "Mother will not shoot you." He said pushing his younger brother ahead of him.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND VILLA

... I told you it wasn't as easy as it looked. Andro spoke within Mindvoice smiling as the mental image from Dorian came to his head. Now get back up and try again. It will get easier as you and Ryner grow more comfortable together.

Will we be like you and Elynth Andro? Dorian had asked. His body was now that of an eight or nine year old boy and beginning to slow in its growth, but his voice was that of a teenager already in Andro's mind.

We are all different fervon. Andro told him. We can do different things. You do not have to be like Elynth and I.

Will we be as strong? Ryner's voice broke in.

You will become as strong as you wish to be, the more you fly together. It will be different for you Dorian because you have the best of both mother and father within you. You will be able to blur, to wrap the shadows around you. You will find that you can do things Elynth and I cannot, while you can't do things that we can. This awareness that we have... it is not easy to control. Do not become frustrated by this. Never become angry and always remember that you are different. Even Elynth and I sometimes do not understand it. Andro answered him. It is sometimes boring and tedious... but the training and practice will only make you and Dorian better Ryner. I promise you.

Then we will continue to practice. Dorian announced confidently.

Andro smiled. Complete the skill sets I have passed to you. Master them and then I will show you more. And do not be afraid to approach Miath or the Elder Mother for advice on anything. Miath and our mother Anja have been together for nearly thirty years and the Elder Mother can answer any question you may have.

Where will you be? Dorian asked.

I have nothing but meetings and plans to make today. Andro answered.

War is coming isn't it fervon? Because of what they have done to our mother. Dorian questioned.

As much as I don't wish it... yes. War is never the answer fervon; understand that more than anything, for father will tell it to you as well. It is a failure of all other things. Spartans we may be... but we hate war more than most because we have seen what it can wrought. Death. Destruction. Horrors beyond what you can imagine now. Andro told them.

Like Alba Tau? Dorian asked softly.

Yes... like Alba Tau. Androcles answered just as softly. *We hate war fervon... but we train every day to fight war so that we can protect what we have from those who want to take it from us. The more we sweat in training, the less we will bleed in war. Father has said this on more than one occasion, and you will hear it as well. Our grandfather Leonidas began the legacy of our Spartan blood and it has continued to this day. We are feared because we are fearless in battle. We do not surrender, we do not offer mercy and we do not lose very often. It is something to be proud of yes, but not something to brag about.*

We wish to fight with you Andro. Beside you, beside father and our siblings. We wish to see the stars and other planets. Ryner has told me of those he saw when he was coming here. We want to see more. Dorian spoke.

And you will. Andro told him. *You will.*

Our brother and sister will be like us won't they? Dorian questioned after a pause.

In many ways yes... but never as strong as we are. It is not something I wanted to do... but our family is precious to us. To me. I needed to do something. We will need to teach them when we are finally together. Things our mother can't teach them. But we will save them and our mother. Andro told him.

Will you return to Dragon Mountain today fervon? Dorian asked. *You and Elynth? I want to show you someone?*

Someone? Andro asked with a smile.

She is different than the others I have seen. She holds much inside. Hidden deep. Fear, doubt, questions. Dorian spoke. *But she is beautiful.*

You can sense this from her? Andro asked.

Yes... she hides it well... but yes.

Interesting. Andro said. This may be something that is developing within you fervon. But do not forget the rules that our father has put forth for us. Never intrude deeper than their surface thoughts. It is wrong and invasive and we do not do that. For any reason. Besides... you do not need to be thinking of that now fervon. Andro scolded playfully. There will be plenty of time for that.

We want to see you. When are you returning? Dorian asked.

As soon as I am able... but this connection is for us alone fervon. The four of us. We do not need to shield it because no one else is like us. It is like a completely separate channel all our own. Andro told him. Reach for Elynth or me within this connection and we will answer. We will come to see you tonight fervon, I promise.

Tonight then. Dorian whispered.

Androcles gazed out at the calm ocean surface from the repaired double doors onto the white sands of his villa's beach as he felt Dorian and Ryner fade from the connection and return to their studies.

He had reluctantly agreed for the additional security measures to be placed in and around Cranae Island, including supplementary motion and body sensors and remote turrets. He did not however, realize just how skilled the *Durcunusaan* and the Union elf engineers had become at concealing these added defensive measures, for his keen eyes could detect nothing of them. His beach did not look altered in any way, nor did any of the nearby terrain. It was a credit to their skill and the engineering expertise of the Union elven engineers.

Androcles wore nothing but his customary white pants with crimson trim, his feet and upper body bare. They had remained at Jomann's parents home for longer than he had intended, but even now Andro had to admit it was a very welcome diversion, and Jomann's parents seemed to sense that is exactly what all of them needed. He had taken part in only one meeting after that and after speaking with his father, his aunt had told him to spend the night with his mates and try to regain some semblance of order within their lives.

This advise Androcles had taken to heart for it was the same thing his father had told him long ago.

He was still somewhat worn from the previous evening, but he would recover quickly. He had spent the entire night rediscovering his mates and their howls of bliss had filled the villa's halls as he devoted all of his attention to them and their pleasure. He had begun with Sadi and ended with Sadi, but in between he could not begin to recall the combinations they had created, some of them very unique. The only thing that any of them lacked was their Vanari lover and mate. They felt her absence but took solace in each other's company and hoped she would return quickly. He had slowly extracted himself from their bed, having to undrape Lu'ria's arm from around his waist and Sadi's legs from his. It had taken him several minutes to accomplish this without waking them, but he had finally done so. Now he stood watching as the sun began to crest the horizon and spread across the Laconia Gulf. In several hours Arrarn and Narice would be meeting with the High Coven admiral who had contacted them and then moving to their departure area. Resumar and Athani were fully ready to act on their end, and he would speak to Miranda later today. The last section of her command would be leaving Earth today to join with her after he revealed them to the Elder Mother and the *Feravomir*. The Kavalians were moving quickly, hoping to press forward and get things done while everyone was still reeling from the decisions of the Galactic Court. Their delegation would arrive from Hadaria early this evening, which meant that his uncle had no doubt left Hadaria already and taken his mother and unborn siblings with him. Resumar's contact in the Kavalian Command Compound was waiting for his return to possibly confirm For'mya's location.

Andro smelled her sugarplum and spice scent before he felt her slim, but strong arms slip around his waist, warm against his skin. Then she moved around under his arm as he lifted it and pressed her near naked front to his side. Sadi wore only her usual near transparent robe, her supple body naked beneath the robe, the front untied and exposing her lush frame to his azure eyes. He took in her magnificent beauty, once more silently thanking the gods that this lovely beauty was his, even as she pressed her large and very firm breasts against his rib cage and leaned her face up to bury it in his throat and breathe in deeply.

"Hmmm... you were very sweet and attentive to us last night *Saradasaar*." She cooed to him softly. "Where did you ever learn to use your tongue in such a manner? You have not done that before. It was especially exquisite!"

Andro leaned over and kissed her hard, plunging his tongue between her willing lips and pulling her tightly to him with his free arm. Sadi groaned as the fires his aura sparked in her rekindled and she squeezed

him harder, meeting his tongue with her own, the nipples of her breasts becoming hard once more. She tried to keep his tongue trapped in her mouth when she felt him begin to pull away but his lips came off hers and then he lowered his lips and nose to nuzzle her throat firmly, eliciting a gasp of even further delight. "I must be inventive so that my mates do not lose interest in me." He told her with a sly smile.

"As if that will ever happen." Carisia's voice sounded now.

Androcles looked up as his pureblood vampire mate moved around in front of him and pressed her petite and quite scrumptiously naked form against his body, looking up into his face with those remarkable maya blue eyes. Lu'ria was just behind her and she pressed her lush, dark caramel colored and near naked body against Carisia's back, nuzzling the back of her neck as Ne'Veha move up on his opposite side and took very much the same stance as Sadi. Androcles smiled at the look of carnal lust on Carisia's face as she felt her Drow Mistress press against her back. He knew his mates gravitated to one another in different ways, and Carisia simply adored being submissive to her Drow Mistress Lu'ria in every way, though she could have easily cowed Lu'ria in a matter of moments with her superior vampire speed and strength.

Sadi and Ne'Veha were also drawn more to one another and it was these diverse pairings that Andro noticed most when they were all together. The soft sounds of pleasure at its extreme were more pronounced when it was like that in their bed. When Caliria had been with them, the sounds and scents had never dimmed as all of them seemed to be drawn to her powerfully and none of them could get enough of her or she of them. Her presence seemed to only increase their own want and need for each other. Now the scents of sweet amaretto, rose blossoms and honey melon combined with Sadi's pungent scent to nearly overwhelm him and Andro quickly dropped his head to nuzzle all of them, drawing gasps of sincere delight from each of them just as he had from Sadi. Carisia could not feel the aura he projected outward because she was not wolf, but he could and did make her tremble for he did it within Mindvoice.

"*KertaGai* is right." Ne'Veha husked softly against his chest, her warm breath on his skin like a soothing balm. "In the time we have been together you have never taken us as you did last night. So forcefully and so passionately."

Lu'ria chuckled softly. "I rather enjoyed it. Immensely." She stated.

Sadi laughed gently. "We all did Mistress..." She said. "The question is... will it always be like this now?"

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders. "I don't know. Perhaps." He answered.

Carisia bit down on his pectoral muscle just enough to make him hiss and then she licked his skin with her tongue. "Don't tease us!" She snarled softly. "We'll make you regret it."

Andro smiled at them. "It will be like that always." He stated confidently. "I think... I think *Inamarno*'s Alkay may have affected all of us to some extent. Even without her here with us, all of you... it is like you taste and smell so much sweeter now. Just as you did when she was with us."

"Do you think it is because of her?" Sadi asked. "Maybe her Alkay changed us in some manner."

Andro met her jungle green eyes. "I think it proves to me that she is meant to be part of our lives and that is all I care about." He answered her. "I don't want any of you to be angry with me for doing what I did. It needed to be done in order for her to be happy with us. She needs to fight through what she is feeling and come to terms with it on her own."

"We know that *Saradasaar*." Lu'ria spoke softly. "I just think none of us wanted her to leave."

"No... we did not." Carisia agreed.

Andro nodded his head. "Nor did I." He spoke. He looked at Sadi. "What did you leave her *KertaGai*?"

Sadi smiled sweetly. "A few messages of sorts." She replied. "Just to let her know what she means to us."

"Andro... what do... what do we do now?" Ne'Veha asked him.

Andro turned and looked into her dark brown eyes. "We wait and we plan." He answered. "I'm meeting with grandfather Riall, Tareif, Lynwe and Vengal today, as well as President Taylor and *Tenna* Aihola. I will fill them in on my plans and the security measures I want to implement once the Senate makes its decision."

"And you are certain that the senate will vote in our favor?" Carisia asked him.

Andro nodded his head as he sipped his mug of coffee. "There are probably a few more Senators who either do not like my father or never agreed with his and my mother's policies than Deia realizes, but I am relatively sure their voices will not outweigh those Senators who do think like my father. When the Spartan

Senate was folded into the Union Senate as a whole, many of them became fast friends with others from within the Union who were not born here in Sparta. Their influence has only continued to grow since then.”

“*SirsanGai* and I are going to use this time to become more familiar with the Mark II’s new systems. We’ll be here all day in and out of the Command Center.” Sadi said. “We’re also trying to determine if it’s possible to perhaps use some sort of local docking collar so that we can attach a *TEMPEST* fighter to the belly of our Mark II when we travel long distances.”

Andro looked at her. “Why would we need to do that?” He asked.

Sadi rolled her eyes. “Because *Saradasaar*... in the last few weeks you have managed to piss off every major bad guy organization in existence. Taking you out would be a major coup for anyone fool enough to try. It’s up to us to make sure that doesn’t happen. Not only would we lose the delicious mate that our blood burns for so intensely, it would make us very angry and unpredictable.”

Andro grinned. “Delicious huh?”

Sadi leaned back with a twinkle in her eye. “Did I say delicious? It must have been a slip of the tongue.” She slapped his chest playfully as she felt his aura begin to reach for her. “Save it for tonight my love.” She told him with a smile.

“We will expect the same attention.” Ne’Veha said with a smile as she released him and took Sadi’s hand.

Andro turned quickly and lightly slapped Ne’Veha’s exquisitely formed and wonderfully firm ass. She yelped in surprise as Sadi pulled her away quickly. “We’ll make breakfast!” She called as she dragged Ne’Veha towards the kitchen.

Andro smiled and turned back to look at Lu’ria and Carisia. “Is Am’uur still in Sparta *Ilythiiri Tessai*?”

Lu’ria nodded with a smile. “I don’t believe he and this Tastia have left his apartment since they arrived.”

Andro nodded. “I want you and *Enylarcopri* to go see him. I have something special I want him to take a look at and possibly plan for me. And I want your father and family involved with him as well.”

Carisia and Lu’ria looked up at him with renewed interest. “What is that my love?” Lu’ria asked keenly aware something was spinning through his head.

Andro’s azure orbs looked down at them for a long moment and they met his gaze without question. His Drow and pureblood vampire mates were supremely skilled and both came from a species or culture that demanded action and reprisal when needed. Lu’ria’s family, at least according to Am’uur, had accepted that their daughter was now Princess of the Union and wolf. This bound them to the Leonidas family in a way they had never imagined. While they knew Sadi and Ne’Veha regarded Lu’ria as their Drow Mistress, they were keenly aware that Carisia was the one who treated this almost reverently, and without question they had accepted Carisia in this role. They would understand what he wanted and they would even encourage it in many cases. Andro believed that is part of the reason why they were so drawn to each other. The killer instinct that was inbred in both of them called for the other strongly.

“An assassination.” Andro answered plainly.

Ulana sat quietly in the Lifter, looking out the window as it glided over the tops of the buildings on the outskirts of Gytheio. She had never been to Gytheio before; indeed she had only been to Earth and Sparta three times in her life. She did not care for the slow pace or the almost common nature of the people here and nor had her father. She had also never been to Androcles villa on Cranae Island in the six months they had dated. He had refused to bring her here on all three of the different occasions she had either traveled her or had been with him on Earth, opting instead for his apartment on the Royal Estate outside Sparta. Ulana had always been slighted by that fact, though she never mentioned it openly to him. He always avoided the topic when she brought it up and quickly changed the subject as if he was trying to hide some secret from her. Now as the personal Lifter began a slow descent towards the pier end of the causeway that would take her and her fellow Senators to the island, her dark eyes gazed at the size and splendor of the island.

It was much larger than she had expected, with the elegant circular shape of Androcles’s very expansive villa visible on the far side of the island even from the air. She would learn later that the villa had been expanded greatly since he and Sadi had become mates, but the newly added guest quarters in the center of the

island and the main *Durcunusaan* barracks near the causeway end took away only slightly from the beauty of the white sandy beaches all along the perimeter of the island. The thick timber that stood tall and proud in the center and thinning as it reached the edges of the island was lush and very green. The history of Cranae Island had long been a topic among the Netnews special reports. It was said that Androcles Leonidas had over the past years gathered and displayed a wealth of treasure and history within its walls. Much of the main interior design work he had done himself she knew from the reports, which Ulana had found surprising at first. Androcles Leonidas was almost as wealthy as his father due to several timely and very shrewd personal investments that had paid off handsomely for him through the years. The Netnews socialite reporters put his estimated value at nearly seventy billion riyal, behind only the ninety-two billion of his father and then four men and three women, all heads of major engineering corporations within the Union. Androcles's business deals, especially the apartment building in Palno City, were superior in revenue and how they were accomplished and he could afford to have all the work on Cranae Island done by outside help if he wanted, yet he choose not too. Thinking about that building brought a scowl to her beautiful face for not only had he made nearly fifty-seven million riyal on that deal over a period of roughly six years, it was also the apartment building that all too common female wolf Sadi had lived in. And he had just given it away to her father as a joining present.

That common and traitorous female wolf who now held the title that should have been hers.

Ulana's father had been a very popular man, at least in their district of Tuya, and his work as a senior Professor at the main university had earned him accolades from many people. Their family had been among the first to help settle Apo Prime, and their wealth had been built by generations before her. This had also earned him a seat within the Union Senate, a perk that had been passed down through the years just like their wealth. It was now her seat, the seat that others had urged her and supported her to take over when he had been killed in the destruction of the Spartan Senate Building. Ulana was equally well known, and while no one would ever admit it publicly, they knew her to be very devious. Her father had spoiled her terribly as his only child, and she had the best education that could be offered within the Lycavorian Union, not to mention unlimited funds to do with what she wished. She was arrogant to the extreme, seeing herself as better than most of the men and women around her because of her education and her upbringing. Her father had taught her to be strong however, and to go after what she wanted no matter who or what stood in her way. Ulana believed, as her father did, that Andro's father had been nothing more than a militaristic King who could not advance the Union towards peace and prosperity. Ulana believed, as her father raised her to believe, that the only way to achieve this goal was a caste system where a few powerful men and women controlled the lives of everyone else and decided for them what was in their best interests. He completely dismissed the fact that Martin Leonidas had increased the size of the Union's surplus to nearly ten trillion riyal annually because of new technologies derived from the Mindvoice ship and the inclusion of many different member species of the Union. All of whom had large trade contracts locked in for decades to come. He also dismissed the fact that Martin and his Queens were the real reason that poverty and hopelessness had all but been eradicated within the Union. They donated generously of their wealth and time helping others to reach for the goals they had, and this was why the Union grew in size nearly every year.

While it was not well known or reported by the Netnews, there was a large contingent of men and women who thought themselves better than everyone else, and believed the same way her father believed. The way she believed. The caste system was their best hope for prosperity and war and violence had no place in this system. Peace was the only option. The Netnews avoided them for the most part knowing it was something that ultimately happened within every society no matter how hard it was avoided. What this group believed and how they thought was generally frowned upon by the majority, but they did have some pull because of the wealth they had when pooled together. The few dozen who had risen into the ranks of Senators and senior politicians within the Union treaded lightly nonetheless? The vast majority of Senators still held to the ideals that had been instilled millennia ago by a long dead King and only reinforced by his grandson and it was not wise to get on their bad side. The Leonidas name carried strength and power and weight even without the monetary support it could ultimately provide. These were the things that blond bitch had taken from her. The things that should have been hers. These were the things she had vowed to get back, no matter what she had to do.

Ulana was learning still, had been learning since she had won the emergency election on Apo Prime to take her father's place. She didn't have much of a chore doing that since no one ran against her, and once more

she had been handed something that she had not earned. The men and women who had surrounded her father now surrounded her and she was learning very quickly indeed.

“Ulana?” The female voice said.

“Hmmm?” She answered turning back to look at the older Lycavorian female and long-time friend of her father. “Excuse me what?”

“Were you listening to what we were talking about child?” The woman asked.

“Yes Silele.” She answered quickly as she brought her attention fully back to her and the two men in the Lifter with them.

“Then you know what we are trying to accomplish with this visit?” Silele asked.

Ulana nodded. “Yes of course.”

“Silele... do you think it is wise to arrive unannounced as we have?” The younger of the two men asked. He was a very junior Senator and an *mida* kissing *igord* as far as Ulana was concerned. He was a Beta wolf and had been fawning over her since she had arrived far more blatantly than Nolar ever had.

Nolar.

A boy who thought he was a man. He could not match Androcles in intelligence, power or sexual prowess. Ulana was a very strong alpha female and she was not afraid to get what she wanted by using her feminine charms, and she had done so before, but no man she had ever been with had compared to Androcles Leonidas in either size or skill. She had discarded Nolar shortly after Andro had dismissed her and then left Apo Prime.

“He can not keep refusing to hear us Nomean.” The older man spoke now. “The Prime Minister has delayed enough times and we have had to take matters into our own hands. He needs to hear what we have to say before he is crowned as the next King.”

“Icho is correct.” Silele spoke.

“I’m just saying... he was never very personable to outsiders. Even before everything that has happened.” Nomean continued.

“That will have to change as well.” Silele said. “With his beastly father no longer in the picture... we may be able to swing more support our way. Especially with Ulana’s help. Her past relationship with Androcles Leonidas could pay large dividends. It should be her who is Crown Princess anyway... not this blond female who they keep comparing to Queen Gorgo. This young woman has a history of betraying our people.”

Icho looked at Silele. “While I agree with you Silele, we also need to walk lightly around this topic for that very reason. They have already confronted that topic head on and beat it down in the Netnews. Whatever we do concerning her will need to be done very cautiously as we discussed. Most of it will fall to you Ulana.”

Ulana nodded. “I know Icho.” She said. “This Sadi comes from a common family, no real history or wealth. I don’t know what she did to entice Andro so much but I intend to show him he made a mistake.”

“And you will Ulana. The people I have working on this are being very discrete Icho so don’t worry. The information we want is there, it’s just very well hidden. We need to find it that’s all. And as Ulana has said... she is of much better stock than this Sadi female.” Silele answered.

“Have we discovered what her PCC is compared to Ulana’s?” Icho asked.

Silele shook her head. “Not yet. Medical files on the Royal family are next to impossible to review. The PCC of the King and Androcles are listed in their military files which were easy enough to look at. The King’s was two hundred ninety three and Androcles is two hundred seventy-four. I have contacts within King Yelu Hospital trying to obtain Queen Aricia’s, Prince Denali and other purebloods that may be listed, but no luck so far.”

“They were not listed?” Icho asked.

Nomean shook his head. “Apparently the Royal family did not feel they needed to list them after the King and Prince Androcles. Medically speaking we can determined roughly what Queen Aricia’s is as well as Prince Denali based on the King and Androcles. The others, which include this Sadi, we can only guess at.”

“My PCC is one hundred and ninety-six.” Ulana said. “My father’s was over two hundred Icho. She could not possibly be higher, therefore I would be stronger.” Ulana told him. “I can control my aura and direct it quite well.”

“But we will also let it be known that Ulana herself has shared a relationship with the young Prince Androcles. And part of our plan is to make it seem that she would make a far better Princess and Queen than this Sadi person.” Silele said.

Icho nodded his head. “I do not disagree but let’s just stick to our plans as we have laid them out with the others.” He spoke. “We are closer than we have ever been to being able to see our goals come to life and now would not be the time to veer from our path. We proceed slowly and carefully.”

Silele nodded her head. “You are right of course Icho.” She replied as the Lifter bumped briefly and then settled to the ground near the pier side entrance to the causeway that led to Cranae Island.

Icho looked out the window and saw where they were before turning in his seat. “Dalkin why have we not landed on the island itself? We are Senators of the Union and have clearance to go anywhere we wish!”

“New security measures put in place by the *Durcunusaan* Senator.” The driver answered turning his head slightly. “The air space above and for a kilometer around Cranae Island is fully restricted now. No one is allowed access unless they are family or have been approved prior to arriving. This is where the *Durcunusaan* ordered me to land. We are outside the restricted zone by a hundred meters... near the pier entrance to the causeway.”

“*Sibfla!*” Silele swore. “I truly hate these overbearing *Durcunusaan* soldiers.” She hissed softly.

“Very well. Wait here until we return Dalkin.” Icho spoke as he activated the canopy and the bright warm air of the Laconia Gulf hit them all.

The smell of fresh Danishes reached them from Gytheio and they gathered themselves together as they crossed the fifty meters to where the trio of *Durcunusaan* troops were standing beside the small row of four person hover cars. The Cranae Island causeway was nearly a full kilometer long before reaching the island itself and here on this end were the troops and two very large and menacing looking dragons which they quickly took note of. The pair of dragons watched them approach and Ulana felt as if they were sizing her up and deciding whether to eat her or not. She didn’t care for dragons and certainly had never cared for Androcles’s dragon Elynth, or the time he spent with her. They were beasts and were treated as if they were real people. Having the Dragon Elder Mother actually on the Union Senate was an insult to Ulana and many others. The dragons were resting on the ground on either side of the causeway, their eyes alert and ever mindful of everything going on around them. Ulana also saw six of them circling the island in the distance and wondered if Elynth was among them.

She turned her attention back to Icho, who had taken the lead in their group, as he moved up in front of the *Durcunusaan* soldiers. Two of them were conferring in whispers to each other Ulana saw, and they made no attempt to acknowledge Icho.

“Excuse me!” Icho finally barked out. “We are here for a meeting with Prince Androcles! Why did you divert my driver away from the island?”

The *Durcunusaan* soldier on the right finally turned to look at him and the second moved back to the small metal shack beside the greenish-scaled dragon. “You are not cleared to enter the airspace around Cranae Island sir.” He replied respectfully. “All non-cleared personnel must land outside the restricted zone and wait for authorization.”

“We are Union Senators soldier!” Icho stated.

“That is Lieutenant Sir... and I saw the markings on your Lifter as you landed.” He stated calmly in reply. “Being Senators does not automatically grant you authorization sir. You are not on the list with the other visitors to Cranae Island today and you need to be cleared.”

“And just who thinks *they* have the authority to grant *me* clearance Lieutenant?” Icho hissed.

The Lieutenant met his eyes. “We protect the Royal family Senator... so that means just about anyone in the *Durcunusaan* outranks you when it comes to the Royal Family, regardless of what you may think.”

Ulana stepped up beside Icho now. “The King and one of our Queens is dead Lieutenant. It seems to me that this indicates you do not take your duties as seriously as you should, or is it not your job to prevent such a thing from happening.” She threw the dig out there.

“In your opinion Senator.” He answered looking at her sternly even as his jaw twitched at her obvious insult. “However, your opinion does not matter and you don’t know as much as you think you do Senator.” He jabbed back at her unfazed by her words. His head turned when the second *Durcunusaan* exited the small guard shack and walked back up to him.

“The request came in late last night and clearance was granted by the Watch Officer early this morning.” He told his Lieutenant holding out the data pad to him. “Just before he went off duty.”

The Lieutenant turned back to Icho and the others, his eyes reading the data pad silently. He looked up finally. “Are any of you armed?” He asked finally.

“Armed?” Silele asked with wide eyes.

“Yes Senator. Weapons. Do any of you have any weapons?” The lieutenant asked.

“Certainly not!” Silele exclaimed.

The lieutenant turned to the third *Durcunusaan* who had so far remained silent behind the podium like structure his head down and looking at the small screen. The man shook his head without a word and the Lieutenant turned back to them. “You may take the first Lifter in the line Senators.” He directed them with his hand. “Remain on the main causeway and do not veer from the established path once you reach the island.”

“Why?” Nomean asked.

The Lieutenant met his eyes. “I do not wish to do the paperwork explaining why four Senators decided to disobey directives from the *Durcunusaan* and consequently had to be scraped off several meters of Prince Androcles’s island.”

“Are you saying the island is mined?” Icho asked with wide eyes.

“I’m saying remain on the main path until you reach the Princes’s villa.” The Lieutenant told him. “That is simple enough for you isn’t it?”

“Why not have one of your men drive us?” Ulana spoke up. “Isn’t that what you are here for?”

“We are not your chauffeurs Senator.” He told her. “And you have two arms and legs that work just fine.”

“What is your name lieutenant?” Icho demanded.

“My name is not your concern Senator.” He answered Icho coldly. “Only my directives where it concerns the Princes and Princesses. Or any member of the Royal Family for that matter. You follow them or you don’t get your visit.”

Icho looked at Silele quickly and then hissed a curse word under his breath as he moved around the man and they headed for the Lifters. The Lieutenant turned to his man next to him. “Contact Captain Jomann.” He spoke softly. “He will be either at his parent’s home or the new villa he purchased for him and Princess Eliani along the west pier. Try his parent’s home first, he may not have told the Princess about the villa yet. Let him know what is happening and that we require his guidance. I don’t like that these four got authorization to see the Prince through channels other than what has been established.”

“Should I have them watched?” The man asked.

The lieutenant shook his head. “Inform Island Command to keep them on the monitors until they arrive at the villa but that is all. These idiots don’t pose a threat to Prince Androcles and his mates, or any of his guests; they think to use their influence in another way.”

“That could be painful.” The man said.

The Lieutenant smiled. “I’m counting on it. The *Feravomir* and Elder Mother landed while we were entertaining them.”

The man’s grin widened. “Oh that will be fun. Wish we could see it.”

It felt wonderful to them and they were savoring every moment of the time they had. The villa smelled of fresh cooked meat and eggs now, with the aroma of Aricia’s coffee thrown in. It had succeeded in waking Bren and Devra from the guest wing of the villa where Androcles had insisted they remain until it was safe for them to reveal the Vanari on a Union wide scale. Devra knew that time was not far off and surprisingly she actually looked forward to it. She had joined Sadi and the others in the kitchen briefly and watched as they made several different types of food, all of which smelled delicious and then she quickly took two plates and headed back to their guest quarters. She thoroughly enjoyed her new husband and wanted to spend as much time with him as possible, and she knew Andro and his mates needed their time as well.

They had lounged on the couches in the main room feeding each other different types of food and simply enjoying the presence of each other. Lu’ria and Ne’Veha had not eaten as much meat before being turned and now that they were wolf, the need for meat filled them, especially when they smelled it cooking. Both of

them were eager to try as many different kinds as they could. Carisia also ate meat sparingly, but she had found that the way Sadi and Andro cooked it was the best she had ever tasted and she ate more than she usually did with her breakfast fruits and her *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos*. Now Androcles and his mates sat in the main room of the villa leisurely eating and going over what they would do for the day. He still wore his crimson pants and no shirt, while Sadi and the others had at least changed into less revealing clothing. If you considered the terry cloth like robes less revealing when they were tied so loosely around lush figures with only undergarments beneath them. The greeting with Helen had been warm and she now joined them in the main room occupying the oversized chair with her legs curled under her. She sipped her large mug of coffee, looking at Andro on the couch with his mates and thinking how much he looked like his father with his mates on either side of him.

Andro lowered the data pad she had given him when she arrived and looked up at her. "Why did you bring this *Feravomir*?" He asked.

"Because you have sent Dutkne away for reasons which only you know and he is to be your Oracle. Eliani is too busy enjoying her new mate, as she should, and I have no idea where Zarah and Lucia have gotten too. I think they returned to the *SCIMITAR* last night." Helen replied with a smile. "Because of this I am the only one with enough courage besides Jomann to bring this to you here at this hour of the morning."

"Why do you call Dutkne that?" Andro asked her slightly annoyed. "He is my friend first and foremost. The differences in our age aside, we have quite a bit in common *Feravomir*, more than even we realize."

Helen nodded. "I'm quite sure you do given who he is. No matter how you break it down Androcles, he is descended from Wayonn's blood. My blood. Our entire family have been the Oracles to your bloodline. Wayonn to Sumar, Canth to Resumar and me to your grandfather and now your father. Everyone sees that and they accept it. I accept it. Even the *Durcunusaan* have begun calling him *Val'istar*."

Andro nodded. "Yes I know. He hates it."

"He'll have to accept it. It may not have been meant to come together as it has, but the gods will always find a way." Helen spoke meeting his eyes with a knowing glint. "How long will he be gone Andro? How long will Deni and Lisisa and the others be gone for that matter? I assume they are returning to Vanari space as well?"

Andro nodded. "I would prefer to keep the details of what Dutkne is doing to myself for now *Feravomir*. Deni and Lisi are going to insure that the counteragent that Caliria and mother fabricated is distributed to the proper individuals."

"You won't tell me what Dutkne is doing because I would not approve, and neither would Wayonn no doubt. I have spent enough time around your father to know that when he is vague on something it usually means explosions and many bodies tossed about most improperly and violently." She said with a grin. "And why would Denali and Lisi need to insure that the counteragent went to the proper people? I thought the Vanari would be overjoyed to receive it." Helen asked.

Andro grinned sheepishly. "Something like that with Dutkne and you might be surprised at how the Vanari receive what we will give to them." He answered.

"Uh-huh. Sounds rather ominous." Helen quipped. "Well... if you won't share that then perhaps you could tell me what is so important that Arzoal and I both need to see it? We are bonded... what one of us sees... the other will as well."

Andro nodded. "You'll have to trust me on that as well."

"You know... for someone who has worked so hard to come out from under his father's shadow... you are becoming increasingly and most annoyingly I might add, just as frustrating and secretive as he is." Helen said with a smile.

Sadi snickered softly from beside him as she and Ne'Veha read from the schematics on the new Mark II *STRIKER* but were listening to everything. Andro turned his head and looked at her, leaning over to quickly take a nibble out of her smooth neck which caused her to squeal in surprise and delight as Helen watched from her chair and smiled.

All of them looked up when the *Durcunusaan* officer walked in leading Icho and the other Senators. The *Durcunusaan* officer didn't blink when he saw them and what they wore for he had seen it many times before when serving the King and Queens on the estate in Sparta. He bowed his head slightly to them and then to Helen.

“My apologies for the interruption Androcles.” He spoke evenly using Andro’s full name. None of the *Durcunusaan* who now served Andro had anything to fear from their Prince and when he ordered them to call him Andro when not in public the *Durcunusaan* would only go as far as to use his full name. He had grudgingly accepted this as a compromise because he trusted them implicitly and they trusted him and he insisted on as little formality between them as possible.

“Good morning Kronele. How is the newborn son?” Andro said his eyes narrowing slightly when he saw Ulana.

The two thousand year old Spartan grinned and nodded. “Growing faster than we can keep up Milord.” He answered with a smile. He glanced at Icho and the others with something akin to disdain. “The Senators here have somehow secured authorization for a meeting with you Milord. They arrived a short time ago.”

“So I see.” Andro stated his azure eyes falling on Ulana as she moved fully into the room beside Silele and Icho.

Helen began to rise. “This was not cleared with Deia first for I would know about it!” She demanded. “This is highly inappropriate for...”

“I will see them *Feravomir*.” Andro spoke before she tore into them fully. “They got the authorization, however they accomplished that, and they are here now. No sense in making them go back.”

Helen looked back to him and saw his body language and sank slowly back into her chair and nodded. “Very well.”

Ne’Veha, Lu’ria and Carisia saw Sadi stiffen ever so slightly and they turned to look at her quickly. Lu’ria and Ne’Veha could not feel it being so recently turned, but Sadi could feel it easily and a slow burning anger began in her belly as she gazed at the young woman in front of them. Ulana was blatantly radiating her full female aura ever so softly as she entered the room; her openness and availability and her willingness to submit to a powerful Alpha such as Andro. And she was directing it solely on Androcles in a very subtle way regardless of the fact that his mates sat in front of her.

“Should I have them wait until you are finished Milord?” Kronele asked taking notice of Sadi’s reaction and knowing something was up.

Andro shook his head. “No. They can say what they came to say.” He spoke as he waved them to the couch across from where he and the others sat. “I’m too busy once the day begins to fit another meeting in.”

Kronele nodded and bowed his head. “Should I remain Androcles?”

“That won’t be necessary soldier.” Icho spoke as he moved into the main room. “We can take it from here.”

“I don’t recall asking you what you thought Senator.” Kronele snarled gently seeing Icho’s face darken in anger.

Andro chuckled and shook his head. “That’s fine Kronele. We’ll be fine.”

“Milord.” Kronele nodded and then turned to leave.

Icho turned back to Andro. “The *Durcunusaan* who you have surrounding you seem to be lacking a certain respect of their superiors Milord Prince. And calling you by your given name is highly inappropriate.” He spoke.

“Not that I have noticed. And what may be inappropriate to you Senator may not be to Andro or anyone else. The *Durcunusaan* are not servants and vassals as it was in the old times here on Earth.” Helen spoke as Andro motioned them to the couch. She glared at all of them. “They are just intelligent enough to know when someone has scammed them. And you are not their superior in any way, shape or form Senator Icho. It would behoove you to remember that in the future.”

“Scammed them?” Silele asked as she settled to the couch her eyes slightly wide at the state of dress of Androcles and the others.

“They are smart enough to know when someone has cut corners and pulled strings to get something they want when they are not supposed to have it.” Andro told her as he set the data pad on the table and deactivated it. “Sort of like how you got the authorization to be here right now.”

“Milord it is important that we...” Icho began. “That we meet with you and discuss some things.”

“Things you felt you couldn’t share with the Prime Minister?” Andro asked as Helen sat back and allowed Andro to take the lead on this now.

Sadi glared at Ulana with evil, jungle green eyes as she remained quiet and continued to radiate her female aura in that subtle way as she sat down on the couch. This was the Ulana that Sadi had seen in Andro's mind, the young woman who he had dated for several months. Andro had kept no secrets from her and Sadi knew exactly how many times he had seen her, what he thought of her and even how many times they had slept together. She also knew that Androcles had never given her any indication whatsoever that they would be more than what they had been. As she had seen so many times within his thoughts as she rested next to him, her face was always the one that filled his mind's eye, even when he was taking pleasure with Ulana. It was a source of trust and devotion that Sadi could not put into words and she would never question his love for her in any way once she had seen those memories. Memories that she had shared with Carisia, Ne'Veha, Caliria and Lu'ria as well. What Sadi could not believe was that Ulana had the impudence, arrogance and disrespect to actually sit there and do what she was doing while Sadi, Androcles recognized mate and *anome* sat across from her. It was very obvious to Sadi this had nothing to do with Lu'ria, Ne'Veha and Carisia for Ulana ignored them completely. Ulana was here to challenge her and no one else.

If that was how it was going to be then so be it Sadi thought evilly as she uncoiled her smooth and powerful leg from beneath her in an almost casual way and draped it seductively over Andro's thigh. The robe dropped a little to reveal the satiny skin of her tanned thigh when she did this and Sadi made no attempt to cover it. Much to Sadi's delight Andro didn't hesitate and lifted his hand and rested it on her leg, his fingers beginning to stroke the flesh on her calf and thigh almost absentmindedly, and Sadi seeing not only Ulana's eyes grow narrow with anger but those of Silele as well.

If it was war she wanted, then Sadi Leonidas was more than willing to play Ulana's fool game. She would show the pompous *upaee* who Andro's heart and soul belonged to.

Andro didn't know exactly why Sadi had extended her long leg over his thigh, probably a female thing with Ulana in the room her thought to himself, but it was a very pleasant and very welcome distraction. He stroked her soft skin as he lifted his mug and took a long sip of his mother's coffee.

"The Prime Minister is shielding you as best she is able Milord." Icho spoke. "It is next to impossible to get a meeting of any kind with you."

"I am rather busy with other things Senator Icho, in case you haven't noticed what is happening all around us." Andro told him. "My Aunt is only protecting me and insuring my time is well used."

Icho looked taken aback. "You know me sire?" He asked.

Andro smiled and nodded his head. "I know all of you." He answered him. "Senator Icho from the Tonlay District on Apo Prime. Senator Silele from the Carletanga District on Apo Prime and Senator Ulana from the Tuya District." Andro spoke.

"It's been a long time Androcles." Ulna said smiling sweetly and looking at him with sultry eyes.

Andro nodded his head, the look bouncing off him completely. "Not long enough Ulana." He said meeting her gaze. "How is Nolar?"

Ulana looked flustered for a moment but quickly regained her composure. "Nolar and I have not seen each other since you were last on Apo Prime." She answered. "We are... were only friends."

"Oh... sorry to hear that." Andro said returning his gaze to Icho. "Why are all of you here Senator? I don't know the young Senator beside you, but I do know all of you and what you stand for and what you advocate. You never supported or agreed with my father and mothers on any of their policies... and neither did Ulana's father... so that begs the question, why are you here now?"

Silele was looking around for a servant to come and offer them Danishes or coffee and tea as was protocol when receiving guests. Her eyes fell on Helen who was grinning over the top of her mug as she looked at her.

"If your are looking for someone to serve you Senator Silele... you will not find one." Helen spoke. "Androcles does not entertain servants or employees to cater to his whim. No one in the Royal family does. Since you were uninvited, you may help yourself however."

Andro grinned at Helen for her words and waved his hand towards the kitchen counter. "Be my guest." He added.

"We've come on behalf of the Senators and representatives who do advocate the same things we do Milord." Silele spoke now.

[Sadi?] Ne'Veha asked. [Sadi... what is wrong?]

Sadi didn't break eye contact with Ulana. *[This is the upaee who Andro dated before we came back together.]* Sadi answered her. *[She's pulsing him with her aura... the meddlesome sraap!]*

[What?] Lu'ria gasped. *[I don't feel anything Sadi!]*

[The changes to your body are not fully complete yet Mistress. You would not feel it yet for she is being very subtle about it. Ulana knew that only I could feel it. She doesn't feel threatened by you or SirsanGai or Enylarcopri.] Sadi answered. *[She thinks she should be the pureblood with Saradasaar, even after he told her he was not interested. How nubous arrogant can a person be?]*

[Not threatened?] Lu'ria snarled. *[I will show her not threatened.]*

[No Mistress...] Sadi said quickly. *[This is between her and I. You and SirsanGai are not yet able to do battle in this way, and she opened this clash the moment she stepped into the room. I will explain it more after they are gone and we are alone, but I will handle Ulana. I will show her that Andro is ours and ours alone.]*

With that Sadi leaned forward and brought her face close to Andro's, gently nuzzling the back of his ear and the side of his neck in a very intimate fashion and pulsing him with a large portion of her extraordinarily powerful female aura, most of which she kept shielded from those who did not know her. The effect was easily discernible even in him and he closed his eyes and smiled as small shivers of love and devotion coursed through him. He quickly squeezed her leg and leaned into her nuzzle just as they did with him, letting her know he felt her love and Sadi smiled brilliantly as she saw the look on Ulana's face.

Andro turned back to them as Sadi glared at Ulana like the female alpha wolf that she was, leg tightening over Andro's thigh and her aura swirling around him ever so enticingly. "And what exactly are you here for?" He finally asked.

"I would think that is obvious Milord." Icho spoke. "We are here to offer our support and guidance to you. Senator Ulana has spoken very highly of your determination and willingness to work with others Milord."

Andro glanced at Ulana. "Has she?"

"We represent a block of Senators who could be very vocal in support of you Milord." Silele said.

"Like you supported my father and my mothers?" Andro asked.

"Your father and mothers... it is well known that we did not see eye to eye with them on many things, that is true." Icho said. "However... we believe that with you working closely with Senator Ulana and others, we could show you that we have the best interests of the Union at the heart of our ideals."

"The best interests of the Union huh?" Andro said placing his mug back on the table and looking intently at them.

"Yes Milord." Icho echoed.

"Interesting." Andro said just before turning around. He leaned over in a blink and Sadi gasped at this action so intent on Ulana that she was. Andro's lips came down on hers as his overwhelming aura wrapped around her at its full power. She groaned softly against his kiss as her body ignited, her nipples becoming instantly harder and the sensations of exquisite pleasure smashing through her. Her fingers dug into his thick arms as his kiss stole her breath away and her body sang out her happiness as he very strongly told her with his actions that he knew what Ulana was doing and that she did not hold a candle to her. Icho's eyes were angry and Silele looked on in shock as finally Andro drew back from the kiss and left Sadi gasping for more, her body flush and responsive to her beautiful *anome* and mate, her hands holding his face and her lips trying to catch his once more. Lu'ria and Ne'Veha felt his aura touch them now as well and they too had become incredibly aroused as he turned back slowly, shaking himself like a large wolf and trying to bring his raging hormones back under control from the way her jungle green eyes drew him in and her aura pulsed through him. He turned quickly before he tossed common sense to the side and took her right there in front of everyone regardless of who was in the room with them. Helen only smiled to herself. She had seen this in Martin many times through the years and no matter how much he tried to deny it, Androcles was his father's son. At least when it came to his mates. His changed azure eyes turned back to Icho who leaned back involuntarily at the almost wild look in those orbs.

"Excuse me Senator Icho... I just had to let my *anome* know how I feel about her." He stated calmly.

Sadi glared at Ulana with glowing green eyes and a possessive smile at Andro's words.

Take that forn piegn sraap upaee! She snarled in Mindvoice not really knowing if Ulana would hear her. She gave no indication that she had except for a small twitch in her jaw, but Helen did hear it as she had to keep from spitting her mouthful of coffee across the room. Sadi had blurted out the statement at a much lower level

of Mindvoice than she normally talked, and even the Durcunusaan standing outside had to have heard her statement.

“Senator... why don't we cut right through the *rensibfla* shall we.” Andro growled at them even as he tried to keep from laughing at Sadi's words. “You came here hoping to curry favor from me with false promises of support. Promises of support if I agreed to back one or more of your ridiculous policies.”

Icho came to his feet. “Crudely put Milord... but essentially accurate.” He answered with more honesty than Andro thought he would. “And our policies are not ridiculous to those who support us Milord. And we have many who support us; many who would support you as well. In the Senate, with their votes.”

“You mean those who would have this absurd idea that words will solve every problem in the galaxy.” Andro asked him. “That violence is so insidious to them that they are willing to roll over and offer their asses for fucking to the first bully that comes along with threats of violence!”

“Milord!” Silele declared rising to her feet. “Your words are repulsive to me!”

“Repulsive...” Andro said. “But truthful. You and those like you are so willing to toss aside all that we have earned as a people just to avoid conflict, so drunk with the notion you know better than everyone else around you, so utterly stupefied by reality that you grasp at fantasy!” Andro glared at them. “You come to my home... you blatantly offer a bribe to me... and you bring Ulana to try and smooth things over. Do you take me for a fool Ichō? Do you Ulana?”

“Androcles you...” Ulana began to speak.

Andro held up his hand for silence. “Don't go there Ulana. You will only confirm what I have always thought about you.” He said to her, meeting her eyes. “I think all of you should leave now. My *Durcunusaan* Captain is returning and he will not be in the least bit happy that you have managed to circumvent the system and come here. I have too much on my plate to go back and forth with your kind right now.”

Icho came to his feet. “Our kind?” He asked angrily.

Andro met his eyes. “Yes. Your kind. Politicians who wish for little else but to increase their own standing and power at the expense of others who they feel beneath them.”

“We can not provide any support to anything you might want until such time as you sit down with us again and hear us out.” Ichō said keeping his voice as civil as possible. “I'm sorry Milord... but that is how it must be.”

Andro looked at the man, grudging respect mixing with distaste in his eyes. “You have guts Senator Ichō... I'll give you that. Fine... I'll sit down with you Senator. After the vote in the Senate in regards to my uncle's claim.”

“Promise us!” Ulana snapped coming to her feet. “You do not go back on your word... so give it to us now Androcles!”

“How dare...” Helen began to rise.

“I'll meet with you.” He answered holding up his hand to stop Helen and looking at Ulana. “You have my word.”

“I can not guarantee you will have our support on that issue Milord.” Ichō said quickly. “There are some among us who believe a new way of doing things is needed and they will use this as a means of trying to show their feelings. They will vote what they believe without some assurance from you.”

Andro smiled at him. “I don't need your support in this matter Senator. Any of you. The will of our people will be done. Not mine or anyone else's. I'll meet with you after the vote, not before.”

“Very well Milord.” Ichō said. “If that is how you wish to leave it. We will take our leave of you then. I'm sorry we could not come to a more agreeable commitment. It did not have to be this way you know.”

“Yes it did.” Andro told him meeting his gaze.

“Andro...” Ulana began to step towards him but got two paces before Helen cut Sadi off and stopped in front of her.

“I would leave with your friends if I were you Ulana.” Helen snarled at her.

Ulana glared at her, anger bubbling forth and her eyes changed as her fangs extended. “Get out of my way *Feravomir!*” She hissed back at her seeing Andro turn and begin walking towards the large double doors pulling Sadi and Lu'ria by their hands, Ne'Veha and Carisia clinging to their lover's arms and looking back with grins on their faces.

“Ulana... you have not only dishonored yourself with your actions today, but you have forced your way into a world of which you have no knowledge! Or did you think I would not sense what you are doing?” Helen told her as her own eyes and fangs altered. “It is a world where you truly are but a child among giants! You are barely even a Tier Three Mindvoice user Ulana... and yet you wish to butt heads with a female who is beyond even a Tier Six now?” She growled viciously.

“That should be me!” Ulana barked tossing her arm at Sadi’s back as they exited the doors onto the patio. “She stole him from me!”

“*Son vada carians* child... she did not steal him from you... you never had him to begin with.” Helen told her. “Their hearts have belonged to each other since he was eight months old Ulana; before you were ever born. They are *anomes*! Destined for one another by the gods themselves!”

“Stop calling me a child!” Ulana snapped. “I am no child. And *anomes* only exist in myth and legend now! They are not real!”

“Your actions say otherwise about being a child.” Helen spoke calmly. “And if you believe that which you speak young lady, and you continue on this path you have started down, it will only bring you pain. Sadi’s aura was shielded Ulana.” She said seeing Ulana’s dark eyes go a little wider. “Yes... shielded. Not even a third of her aura did she use just now. She has gone beyond the level of which we can even measure a person’s Mindvoice power Ulana, just as Andro has. You would have lasted perhaps ten seconds in the old time before she peeled the skin from your bones for your disrespect of her as Androcles’s mate and as Crown Princess.”

“We are not in the old time woman and I am not frightened of her!” Ulana snapped at her not caring she was speaking to the First Oracle of the Lycavorian people. “My blood is purer than hers and I should be with him! She is nothing more than a common street person who used to be a High Coven whore!”

“Your words make you more of an arrogant fool than you have already acted young lady. That much is readily apparent.” Helen snapped at her, beginning to lose her patience with Ulana’s ignorance and disrespect. “Leave now Ulana, before Jomann arrives and I have him arrest you for circumventing established Durcunusaan procedure. Andro is right. Jomann will not be happy about what you have done here and given his nature, events could rapidly spin out of control.”

Silele took Ulana’s arms. “Ulana... let us leave.” She said. “We have his agreement that he will meet with our group after the vote. He will see that our votes do matter.”

“He can not ignore us *Feravomir*!” Icho spoke.

“Oh... he won’t ignore you. Not anymore, I assure you.” Helen said. “You have his word Senator... now you need to leave before Jomann arrives. You have perhaps three minutes before he lands. I truly hope you understand what you have begun this day and that you are ready to see it through to the very end. Androcles Leonidas will.”

Helen turned and began to follow Andro and the others without another word.

KRANEK

Martin stood between T'lolt and Danny in the Command Center watching as one of Yuriko’s senior techs worked at the newly installed console against the far wall. The Command Center had been repaired, enlarged and reinforced by the elven engineers that had swarmed to Kranek after the battle. Even now they worked feverishly during the day expanding the borders of the settlement, AkruXian engineers working side by side with their elven counterparts and learning all they could. Immortals and Lycavorian bodies performed the majority of the heavy work with countless humans, elves and many other species assisting in any way their skills and abilities would work. Nodon engineers were fine tuning a layered defensive grid that tied into several new and massive underground power plants they had brought from their homeworld. Two dozen Hadarian Healers had set up three different clinics within the settlement that could treat any injury and speeded the process for the AkruXian Immortals to receive the treatments that would return them to their true selves. It was not unusual to see AkruXians standing in the streets looking in wonder at their new skin and hair as the effects of Veldruk’s centuries long toxic disease and oppression was purged from their bodies. An entire Combined Fleet Group was now in orbit of Kranek and rapidly putting together a defense network that would cost anyone who tried to take this world far more than it was worth to them. A large command and control space station was

just beginning to be built, the lower frame having been brought in only three days before. Fully half the 1st Elven Engineer Division had volunteered to come here and be part of history at the behest of their Queen. Less than four weeks into the Akruxian future and already it was a common sight to see elven men and women sitting and talking and laughing with Akruxian Immortals.

“...coming online now Milord.” The vampire spoke.

“How is this thing gonna work now?” Martin asked. “I thought Yuriko said they would download the information we needed.”

“Yes Milord.” He answered. “And we did. We downloaded their entire core.”

“So?” Danny asked. “You’ll have to forgive us technically challenged people Lieutenant. We’re only good at killing people and blowing things up.”

T'lolt chuckled. “So true.” He said.

The vampire officer smiled. “What we have done is to recreate the exact same system they had at the Kavalian base. Ours is a little better of course. When it comes fully online we will begin to receive all the Kavalian encrypted messages to their military here.”

“No shit!” Danny exclaimed.

“Won’t the Kavalians detect this?” Martin asked.

“They may eventually Milord.” The man answered. “The Kavalians send their encrypted transmissions out on a phased singularity carrier wave. They are buried within millions of open data streams floating through space that can be picked up by anyone. You have to have this equipment to detect, decipher and decode them though. It’s almost as good as being in their planning meetings.”

“You said they will detect it eventually.” Martin asked.

The man nodded. “Eventually they will determine that an outside source is detecting and intercepting their transmissions.” He said. “Even when they do... it will take a algorithm source code review to find and localize which station is doing it. Then they will have to alter their main encryption algorithms to exclude that source.”

“How often do they do these reviews?” T'lolt asked.

“The Union does them every month General.” The vampire replied. “But we have people especially trained for that. Based on some of the messages we have already downloaded, some of them are four months old, not as often as we do. If I had to guess, every six months perhaps. It would be stupid to go longer than that.”

“So we have a link into their military control system for several months at least.” Martin said.

“We have the link now Milord... but the Kavalians aren’t stupid. I don’t want to guess at how long it will take them to figure out what we have done. Especially after they discover what we did on their outpost.” The man answered.

“Can you discover where they have taken For'mya?” Martin asked.

“I can establish a passive search to detect any references to her, yes Milord.” He replied. “Give me four hours to write the program and get it running.”

“How long after that?” Martin asked.

The man shrugged. “This is not an exact science my King... I...”

“Your best guess Lieutenant?” Martin asked him.

“If I use enough key words and phrases... perhaps another two or three hours to be able to determine anything actionable.”

Martin nodded. “Good enough. Get to work.” He said. “T'lolt... you got some tech savvy people right?”

T'lolt nodded. “A few yes. Not as good as your people of course.”

Martin nodded. “Pick two and have them work with the Lieutenant here. After that... the only ones who are even cleared to fart around this station are those three.”

T'lolt nodded. “I’ll see to it.” He said.

“T'lolt... you got a mess hall or something in this settlement?” Danny asked.

“That we do.” He replied with a grin. “Did you not just eat Daniel?”

“Hey... I’m a growing boy.” Danny said.

“I’m hungry too.” Martin spoke looking at his time piece. “I got four hours before I talk to Andro and I still want to meet as many of your people as I can T’lolt. Especially those who took part in the rescue of *Melda Min*.”

T’lolt waved his hand. “Right this way.”

“... never expected this many.” Esther spoke as she walked between Dysea and Aricia down the hard packed dirt of the main laneway through the settlement. Cirith walked beside Dysea, her eyes taking in all the improvements that had been made she was here last. She didn’t remember many of the things because her stay was so brief, but it was amazing nonetheless. She looked at Dysea with a smile. “We never hoped that his speech would spur so much optimism in so many. He will be the first one to admit he is not a good speaker.”

Aricia chuckled. “I’d say he can now add inspired speaker to his list of accomplishments if what we have seen is any indication.”

Dysea nodded. “I agree.” She said.

“Esther... have you ferreted out any who were here for more than hope?” Cirith asked keeping to her plain and realistic way of thinking.

Esther nodded her head. “We are quietly arrested nearly two dozen. Another nine are under constant surveillance. Isabella sent for some of your uniquely trained scouts and even now they are shadowing them wherever they go.”

“The ones you arrested?” Dysea asked.

Esther met her eyes as they walked. “I am the Blessed Wife to an Akruian Immortal Dysea.” She said with a smile. “When it comes to our people, nothing is taken for granted. My husband taught me that. They were interrogated vigorously and then executed.”

“What do you need?” Dysea asked. “Anything?”

Esther nodded. “A few more skilled medics. They don’t necessarily have to be Hadarian, just able to treat any kind of injury. The clinics are finished and fully stocked but we do not have a surplus of medicines with the exception of the serum.”

Aricia squeezed her arm. “I’ll take care of that. I’ll contact *Melyanna* right now. I wanted to talk to her about something anyway. What do you need?”

Esther chuckled. “Everything.”

Aricia nodded with a smile. “We have tens of hundreds of warehouses throughout the Union and on Earth stocked to the ceiling with almost anything imaginable. Martin throws nothing away. I’ll have Anja assigned a medical ship here and have it loaded with months of supplies before departing. I will join you later for lunch.” She shared a soft kiss with both Dysea and Cirith before heading off across the settlement.

Esther looked at Dysea. “So that is Aricia.” She said. “Martin Leonidas’s *Anome*?”

Dysea smiled. “Yes.”

“She’s very confident.” Esther said. “Sure of herself.”

Dysea nodded. “She is our strength.” She told her. “No matter what has happened in the last twenty-six years Aricia has been our rock. She is a Spartan woman and strength is part of their nature. She is also the one we all... defer to I guess you could say.”

“What do you mean?” Esther asked.

“If we do not know what Martin might think or do in a given situation we ask or defer to Aricia. She is his *anome* and she has a connection with him that we do not. She knows him in a way we do not.”

“This does not make you... jealous?” Esther asked.

Dysea laughed and squeezed her arm tighter. “If you experienced the emotion and skill she puts into loving us as well as Martin...” She shook her head. “No... jealousy has never entered our hearts or mind.”

Cirith nodded. “It is almost as if she is the glue that holds all of us together.” She said softly. “I am still learning many things, but in my mind, in the memories shared with me, it has always been Aricia to insure that we never lose the love and devotion that makes us so strong. I thought it would trouble me at first...” Cirith shook her head. “That sense of doubt disappeared in the first few minutes.”

Dysea smiled. "We are an odd family no doubt." She said. "But we are strong and love each other without question. Not that much different from how you and Cha'talla have raised your sons. And I think that is part of why our friendship only grows stronger."

Esther smiled brilliantly. "Our sons and in eleven months our daughter as well." She spoke resting her hand on her abdomen.

Dysea's eyes lit up and she stopped hugging Esther tightly. "Esther that is wonderful!" She exclaimed. "When did you find out?"

"The test results came back two hours after Cha'talla left." Esther answered somewhat saddened. "I wanted to tell him before he left... now I have to wait until he returns. I won't tell him over a transmission. We have both wanted a daughter and Tir'ut, Lynom and Fash'ka have been badgering us to give them a sister for years. Now we will."

"This calls for a toast!" Dysea spoke. "A small glass of wine perhaps?"

Esther nodded. "I'd like that."

"We must do it before *Melyanna* finds out." Dysea said holding her hands. "She will put you on a diet and exercise routine unlike anything you have ever seen. It is sometimes so very painful."

Esther laughed. "You are joking." She said.

Dysea shook her head. "Not at all. How do you think she has kept the muscular figure that she has? She is almost draconian in her actions and she makes sure we all adhere to her routine when pregnant."

Esther laughed. "Well... I'd say it has worked." She said.

Dysea grinned. "*Nauta Melme* thinks so." She said with a twinkle in her eye. "Come... I have some wine stashed in my equipment. We will share a small glass and then meet the others for lunch."

EARTH BARRINGER CRATER FORMER STATE OF ARIZONA

"...don't understand why you have brought us here like this Androcles." Helen stated as the ramp of the *STRIKER DT Mark II* began to lower. "Could this trip not have been delayed? There is too much going on for us to be out of Sparta for very long."

Andro turned from the control console and looked at her just as Arzoal unsecured herself from the straps. Elynth had done so already and she moved up beside Androcles and watched as her grandmother finished and then moved behind Helen.

I agree. Arzoal spoke. *And why just the four of us?*

Andro looked at Elynth quickly and her golden eyes blinked several times. *It is meant for only your eyes.* She answered tuning back to them.

Why do I get the sudden feeling that what you are going to show us is not something we will approve of? Arzoal spoke.

Whether... whether you approve or not... it has been done. Androcles told them. *I...*

We. Elynth corrected him.

Andro nodded. *We... we have done this under our authority as Talon Guardians. This is not something that we decided on a whim Elder Mother. Feravomir. It took us two years of contemplation before we made the decision to go through with this.*

If it took you this long to contemplate your decision... then you weighed all the adverse affects of this conclusion and found this idea worthy. Arzoal spoke.

Andro and Elynth nodded. *We did.* She answered.

Then why keep it with such tenacious secrecy? Helen asked. *I take it this is one of the things that your father does not know about?*

Neither of our fathers do. Andro answered. *They would not have seen it through our eyes and minds. They are too much like you Elder Mother. Outside of the two of us there is only Uncle Isra and Aelnala who know. That is how it has been since we began.*

Too much like me? Isra and Aelnala? Arzoal asked. They are involved in this? You are being very confusing Androcles.

Yes I know. He answered.

Why? Helen demanded. *No more of this half talk and code. You have brought us halfway around the world for a reason. Now tell us.*

Andro looked at Elynth and she nodded her head. *It would be better if we showed you.* She spoke.

She and Andro turned and proceeded down the ramp of the *STRIKER*. Helen glanced at Arzoal and then they followed. The first thing they noticed was the rows of immense buildings that occupied their left side as they exited. There had to be at least a hundred of them lined up neatly in rows of ten. They stretched as far as the end could see. The ground beneath their feet and talons was similar to the tarmac of the Durcunusaan base outside Sparta, but then it just abruptly ended and became hard, rocky terrain mixed with sand and dirt. There were other smaller buildings scatter among the rows that appeared to be huge wash areas of some kind. Then there were two more buildings that were, incredibly, even more massive and set off one on either side of the rows of buildings. Their eyes took in much smaller buildings along the outskirts and both of them could see what looked to be Durcunusaan soldiers, but their armor wasn't the normal color. It was almost a light gray and blue color. There was what appeared to be a command and control building with several antenna rising from the top, and a half dozen Heavy Lifters that they could see. Arzoal turned her head and stopped as she saw the towering shape of the immense satellite dish in the distance. Her keen dragon eyes could detect a large bundle in the center of the dish. A bundle that held a minimum of six of the seven year old Level Ten Mindvoice Dampeners. Dampeners that had yet to be actively used because of their incredible size. As she turned her head she could see three more of the colossal dishes off in the distance at all four points of the compass. The dishes were pointing away from the buildings and she could just make out the soft shimmer telling her they were very active.

[Helen!] She gasped turning back to her Bonded Sister.

[Yes I know.] Helen said. *[I noticed it the moment we left the STRIKER. We are cut off from the outside.]*

[The four dishes have center bundles made up of Level Ten Dampeners.] Arzoal hissed. *[Even you and I would not be able to penetrate the bubble around this facility from the outside! Not even Martin!]*

[Which is why I think they are there.] Helen spoke turning to look at her as they walked towards the building that looked like a command center of some kind. *[They have been hiding something here. Hiding it from all of us.]*

[But why?] Arzoal gasped.

[I believe we are going to find out.] Helen said. *[If I am not mistaken this is the Barringer Crater site in what was once the southwest part of the old United States.]* Helen said. *[You did notice that their words hold trepidation but no regret. They do not question what they have done here. Only our reaction to it.]*

[The question remains... what have they done?] Arzoal asked. *[What have they done that they felt the need to hide from us and their fathers?]*

Helen and Arzoal turned as the Durcunusaan troop walked out to meet them. He was definitely Lycavorian and the armor he wore was Dragon Armor, it was just colored in a light gray and blue unlike the silver and gold sets that were the norm. His exposed skin was deeply tanned like he had spent the better part of the last years in full sunlight almost all the time. He did not appear very old for a Lycavorian but Arzoal and Helen saw the rank of Star Colonel imprinted on his armor. They came up behind Andro and Elynth as the Colonel bowed his head to Andro.

"Adrieuas Milord!" The Colonel spoke. (Greetings)

"Colonel Jovern." Andro answered with a smile as he gripped the man's offered forearm in greeting. *"You are looking sunbaked."*

The man laughed. *"I just may move out here when we are done Milord. The weather suits me."* He answered.

"Are we ready?" Andro asked.

Jovern nodded. *"As ready as we will ever be."* He replied.

[Are they nervous Colonel?] Elynth asked.

Jovern met her gaze. *[Surprisingly no Elynth. They are dedicated and chomping at the bit to go.]*

Andro nodded. *[Prepare one of the Mess Hangers for the presentation when we return. All we have... everything we have done. Now that they will know I want them to know how much we have put into this and why.]*

[I'll see to it Milord.] He spoke.

Andro turned and looked at Helen and Arzoal. “*Feravomir*... Elder Mother... this is Star Colonel Jovern. He is the officer in charge of Durcunusaan support for this project.”

Jovern bowed his head. “An honor *Feravomir*. Elder Mother.” He stated formally. “It is my wish that you will be as pleased as we all are.”

“Pleased about what?” Helen asked him. “Androcles Leonidas... enough of these games. Why have you dragged us out here to the middle of nowhere?”

Andro waved his hand for them to follow. “This way.” He said. “The edge of the crater and the answer to your questions is a hundred meters this way.” He and Elynth began walking towards the inclined dirt ramp that led up to the edge of the crater. “It took us six months to decide whom to take because so many volunteered. All of it was done in the utmost secrecy Elder Mother and I’m sorry for that. Elynth and I, and then Uncle Isra and Aelnala, we tried to plan for everything. Every outcome. Every contingency. It hasn’t been easy mind you, as we have never done this on so large a scale. They will only be used in certain circumstances; the power they could bring to bear is enormous. They will be assigned to Manda’s Command exclusively. I even had Admiral O’Connor design and build special ships for them.” Andro turned back to them as he reached the pinnacle of the incline and the edge of the crater was just behind him.

“For who?” Helen asked.

“*Feravomir*... Elder Mother... I give you the 1st Dragon Brigade.” Andro stated as he swept his arm around to extend outward over the crater.

Arzoal and Helen stepped up the edge between Andro and Elynth and their eyes grew double in size. As Arzoal’s flame red scales came into view on the edge of the crater, a deep bellow of countless dragon trumpets rippled across the air on the wind. So powerful was it, that it was almost as if they shook the ground and the walls of the immense crater all around them. Far below them, swathed exclusively in the same gray and light blue colored Dragon Armor as the *Durcunusaan* Colonel were thousands of dragons.

Three thousand to be exact.

The trumpet was a continuous wave as each rank of dragons picked up the bellow before the last one died away. They stood in perfect formation, three hundred across and ten rows deep. Their armor glimmered in the sunlight and blue skies, not a single dragon more than two paces out of rank. Firespitter. Heavy Horn. Spike Tail. Every species of dragon that existed on Elear now; every species that Martin Leonidas’s actions on Enurrua had saved so long ago; they were all represented here. And more than anything else Arzoal and Helen could easily detect the swell of pride coming from far below as these dragons saw their Elder Mother appear above them. The one reason that many were even still alive today. Arzoal was the Elder Mother yes, but what she didn’t know or realize was that she commanded a respect rarely bestowed on any individual. She may have thought her actions had been the cause of the deaths of so many, but every living and breathing dragon knew that without her actions and her decisions none of them would have survived the millennia on Enurrua. This was very evident in the intensity and length of their trumpeting bellow to her.

And then... on a silent command from the single large dragon standing in front of all the ranks, his armor splashed with a crimson red slash across the broad chest plating, the first rank of dragons snapped their wings to their full extension in perfect unison. The ‘crack’ that ensued was like rolling thunder, deafening in its power and commitment, as each rank in succession did this. Ten shattering echoes reverberated among the crater walls and cascaded outward into the air.

IN WAR! Andro’s voice ripped out within Mindvoice when the last echo faded.

WE WILL BRING VICTORY FOR ALL! Three thousands minds and voices answered in a single thundering word.

IN PEACE! Elynth screamed next.

WE WILL BE VIGILANT FOR ALL! Three thousand minds and voices answered.

IN DEATH! Andro and Elynth cried out.

WE WILL SACRIFICE FOR ALL!

Andro didn't hesitate and with a five step movement forward he propelled himself up and out and dove over the edge of the crater. Elynth followed a second later, both of them plunging from view.

"Andro!" Helen screamed.

There was only a second's pause and then Elynth shot up from below them with Andro securely in the saddle and three thousand dragons singing out in joy as they watched.

Now! Now my brothers and sisters! Fly! Spread your wings and fly! Show the Elder Mother what you can do! Andro's voice echoed loudly within Mindvoice followed a moment later by Elynth's deafening trumpet. With matching trumpets, the ranks of dragons below them began to leap into the sky with perfect timing and rocketed upward to fall in behind Andro and Elynth.

"*Son vada carians!*" Helen gasped completely in shock as her hand went up to touch her bonded sister's thick foreleg.

Arzoal could only watch in utter awe as for a full three minutes the ranks of *her* dragons leaped into the sky and began to form into smaller sections. Immediately they began to fly into a uniquely choreographed flight that saw them twist and turn back and forth among each other with a single minded precision Arzoal had never witnessed before. This dizzying flight went on for several minutes until a silent command saw them begin to form in the air above them behind the single dragon with the crimson red slash on his chest. And then three thousand dragons dove for the earth and ripped over the top of the one dragon that had held their species together for so many millennia. As each wave passed over her and called out to her with respect and admiration and love, Arzoal could feel nothing but a swell of pleasure as they called out to her. She could hear the immense pride in their voices within her mind, feel the dedication to what they had all volunteered to do and if a dragon had tear ducts Arzoal's tears would be forming a river beneath her talons. Helen was very nearly overcome as well as Arzoal's emotion coursed through her.

By... by all that I hold holy my sister! Arzoal gasped. *They... they are so...*

Beautiful. Helen spoke as tears flooded her eyes now.

Oh... I wish Daurgo was here to see this. He would be so proud. Arzoal commented and Helen looked up at her with a smile.

Tell them sister! Tell them! Tell them for him and you both. Helen said.

And tell them she did.

Arzoal reached deep within her, deeper than she had reached in many hundreds of years and the trumpet that exploded from her maw nearly matched that of those above them. Hearing their Elder Mother's trumpet of approval sent the Dragon Brigade into delirium and even more insane and impossible maneuvers as they showed her what they could do. As Arzoal trumpeted out her continued approval, Elynth banked over the crater high above the others. She felt Andro reach forward and lay his hand flat against the scales of her power neck and shoulders a sigh of relief passing through him.

Do you feel her pride Andro my brother? Elynth asked excitedly. *Her love for all of them and what they are doing?*

Andro nodded. *Yes I do.* He replied.

Your fathers will not be so easily convinced. The deep male voice spoke. They turned and saw the large dragon flying just off their right flank. The crimson slash was very evident on his broad armored chest.

Your actions will convince them Daurgo. Andro said.

And we will not fail. Daurgo spoke confidently.

With the gods and a little bit of luck on our side none of us will fail. And now you need to do what you have wanted to do for centuries Daurgo. Andro said.

The deep yellow/green eyes under the armored helmet gazed at them from ten meters away. *Perhaps it is not...*

You have waited long enough Elder Daurgo! Elynth spoke. *You have held it inside long enough! Now... now you need to tell her! Do not let this chance slip away now.*

I do not know if she even feels anything for me. He spoke. *And it would not be in the least bit appropriate for me to remain on the Elder Council if I am her mate. She is the Elder Mother of our kind!*

And she is a female! Elynth spoke. *Who has been without love for too long! Do you think my mother and I have not seen how she looks at you? Admires your scales? Always waits for your council? My grandmother*

may be the Elder Mother of our kind yes, but she is also full of emotions as any female dragon is. And those emotions are for you! Even Syrilth has noticed and she has known her for less than any of us.

Perhaps you are right Elynth.

Andro turned his head and looked at him. *Then make your feelings known Daurgo! Tell her in the ways of your kind. You have a new job now anyway.*

Daurgo nodded. *Yes. Yes I do.*

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PROGENITOR

THE WILDS

3.4 LYs FROM HIGH COVEN BORDER HOLDING POSITION NEAR JUNTHOR

Pontal simply sat in his command chair staring out the empty view window into the void of space around his ship. Just barely two hundred years past twelve thousand years of life and probably the most experience combat officer within the entire High Coven. He has taken part in every major battle the High Coven has waged since he became an officer, slowly working his way up the ranks to the position he now held. He had turned down countless promotions to the High Lord's Military Council because all he wanted to do; all he was good at was leading men into battle. Pontal actually cared for the men and women under his command, unlike so many other officers now. He bore the scars of several close calls and numerous destroyed ships all over his body, but he had always tried to win. He did not sacrifice men to accomplish the goal, he found an alternative method to succeeding at that mission. This alone endeared him to the nearly four hundred thousand men and women under his command.

He commanded the High Coven equivalent to a Lycavorian Union Combined Fleet Force Group. Upwards of six hundred warships and their support craft as well as three divisions of elite cloned vampire troops. He had instilled a sense of purpose and pride in those cloned troops and all the men and women who served on any ship in his command. His discipline was harsh at times, but every man and women in his command would swear by him, including the three hundred Akruxian Immortals who loyally served him. When the order went out releasing the Immortals from their service, only sixteen choose to leave Pontal's command. The rape and subjugation of female elves by Immortals was forbidden within his command. Rape overall had been long forbidden, and it carried a death sentence within the 69th VHCCFF. He was guilty of it but something had changed his mind and Pontal did not abide it any longer, for it broke down unit cohesion and trust, and ultimately would get them all killed in the end. Pontal was also one of only six or seven senior fleet commanders who had women commanding warships, a practice looked down upon by the High Coven Military Tribunal, but not something they would confront him on since those women accounted for perhaps ten percent of ship to ship victories against the KFI. Pontal was a realist to the extreme. If it did not help him or his men, he wanted nothing to do with it. He remained on the borders of the High Coven, fighting the Kavalians when they came and training his ships and men while they waited. He was among a small number who wanted to mount an offensive campaign against the Kavalians, for he knew this defensive war they were fighting would only lead to their ultimate defeat. They needed to act boldly and with charisma. They needed to make the Kavalians fear them. Pontal had thought Admiral Moran would be the one to do this when he was chosen by that Empress as Supreme Commander. After a few initial battles using these very tactics, Moran suddenly became more of a politician than he did a commander of men. Since that first year Pontal had become increasingly disenchanted with the High Coven and its actions. It was almost as if they did not want to win this war and restore peace once more.

Aikiro's actions on Earth only confirmed that to him and so many in a most horrible of ways.

Many of the senior officers were hopeful that a Cease Fire with the Union would bring them allies. They had hoped that over time they could become if not allies, then friends with the Union. When the Cease Fire was announced many of them were extremely happy, thinking that Aikiro had finally pushed aside her open hatred of the Lycavorians and was reaching out to them for the future. Pontal and the others should have known better. As word of the gang rape and near beating death of Zarah Leonidas reached them far out on the borders; as word of Androcles Leonidas's response and his actions in killing Javier Moran and nearly Yuri herself in his rage at this brutal assault against his sister, Pontal saw their hopes being crushed. Pontal had never feared any

one man in his entire life, but he and so many others like him feared Martin Leonidas and his son Androcles. They were far too much like the King Leonidas that had nearly killed that fool Xerxes on Earth so long ago, after slaughtering many of his finest troops.

Aikiro's vile and repugnant actions were the thing that broke through the barriers and made it all so clear for him and others. They were not unhappy she was dead. Nor did they lose any sleep over Admiral Tesand's death. Within two days of discovering that Yuri clung to life and Moran still lived and they had escaped Earth Pontal was meeting with his equals from six different fleets such as his. They were all of like mind and their only concern was how to let those within the Union know. Cha'talla's speech had given them their opportunity. That the former High Lord Captain was still alive came as quite the shock to him and to others. That he looked so unlike the Immortals within his own command was even more shocking. Discovering what Veldruk had done to the Akruxian people millennia ago to make them appear as they did now was the final nail in the coffin of their loyalty to the High Coven. Pontal felt the warmth on the back of his hand and his eyes cut to the lightly tanned smooth skin of the hand that covered his.

And here was the biggest reason he was now fighting for the future instead of the past.

Barely fifty years old now and a vampire for less than half that time. Long dark brown hair fell well below her once human shoulders, outlining a flawlessly beautiful face with soft, full lips and pale blue eyes that to this day made Pontal shudder inside. She had been a slave to him once, a human captured from Earth that he would use at his will. He did not treat her badly, just the opposite in fact, and it was this young woman who had managed to worm her way into his heart and being. She had the sweetest tasting blood he had ever fed on, she was incredibly intelligent, and above all else she was the bravest woman he had ever met in his life. She had proved that to him the day several Kavalians had boarded his ship in the middle of a battle in an assassination attempt against him. It was this woman who had saved his life without wavering. Two Kavalian soldiers she had dispatched with nothing more than a dropped Immortal sword and her still human strength, crazed over the attempt to take from her what she had unwittingly come to love more than her own life.

That was Pontal.

Pontal had turned her willing mind and body the next day and made her his Blessed Wife a week after that. One month later rape or forced sexual contact among anyone within the 69th was forever banned and outlawed. He still tried at times to determine what she saw in him. He was over ten thousand years her senior, she was breathtakingly beautiful, and yet she had eyes only for him as she had proven for so many years now. The ultimate gift and show of love had been the three children she had bore him and who she now doted over. In the closer systems to the High Coven capital, what Pontal had done with her would have been a crime and he would have been stripped of his rank and command. Out here along the borders no one questioned him or what he did. Indeed... his crew would die for her just as easily as they would die for him and any new officers were severely vetted before being allowed to join Pontal's command.

"You have that deep concerned look on your face my *Du'ased M'ranndii*." She told him reaching up to stroke his cheek. She was a frequent visitor to the bridge and often times she would bring Pontal food or drink and even more for those who were working. "Are you having doubts?"

Pontal placed his hand over the top of hers as her palm flattened against his weathered skin. "No *ussta Victoria*." He replied with a small smile. "The time for doubts is long gone."

"Then what vexes you my love?" She asked moving closer to his chair and leaning closer to him. It had been odd at first to see them beside each other considering she was so much younger than him, but her actions had long ago proved that Pontal was the only man who stirred her in any way.

Victoria Tanner had been a slave once, taken from her home on Earth by creatures she thought only existed in fairy tales. She had been raped and fed on for months before ending up here with this man. A man she had hated just as intensely in the beginning as she loved him now. He never struck her, never raised his voice to her, and gave her as much freedom as he could. Victoria soon began to realize that ending up her was not so bad a thing. He allowed her to read and cook and learn about this new world she had entered, even going so far as to give her access to forbidden material. When Pontal did take her, Victoria soon discovered he was an extremely skilled lover who could make her explode in bliss under him with ease. When he fed on her blood, he took only very small portions, usually at the peak of their sexual encounters, and Victoria Tanner would scream out her ecstasy and clutch at his broad shoulders as her world exploded in white lights and stars. She was intelligent enough to know that she did not want to return to the horrible months before this man, the rapes and beatings,

and she set about pleasing him in every way she could so that he did not dismiss her. She did not know that Pontal had already made that very decision concerning her. In the process of ongoing years, his warm and gentle touch, the moments when he would hold her in his arms and tell her of his day, all this had Victoria falling deeply in love with him. It was she who told him to turn her after that battle. He refused at first but she did not want to be apart from him, she wanted to be like him and remain with him forever. He relented finally and her life altered dramatically after that. It was an event that she embraced completely, along with her love for him.

“I question and wonder if the Lycavorians have enough fortitude to forgive.” He spoke softly. “Trusting us... after what Aikiro ordered done...” Pontal shook his head. “I do not know if I would be able to do it.”

“They agreed to this meeting.” Victoria said.

“No... Cha'talla and Narice agreed to this meeting.” He told her. “Androcles Leonidas has put a bounty of one billion Riyal on Dante Moran’s head because of what he did. Half that for Yuri. He is as unforgiving as his father, perhaps more so, and it is why officers like myself have counseled caution in dealing with the Lycavorians ever since his father returned to take the throne.”

“Princess Narice is now married to his brother husband.” Victoria said softly. “You don’t believe he would allow her to come here without his knowledge do you?”

Pontal shook his head. “No. But that brings into question what his motives are then.”

Victoria smiled softly and dropped her hand from his face to take his fingers in her grip. “Now you are acting like the officers near the homeworld.” She said. “Always distrusting one another to the extent that can’t trust themselves. Why does he need to have a motive husband? Perhaps he wants what we want.”

Pontal met her eyes and smiled. “Always the optimist.” He said warmly.

Victoria smiled. “You taught me that.” She said.

Pontal nodded. “I wish I could be so optimistic. We have been here for nearly three hours now and nothing.” He said.

Victoria turned to the view window and looked out at the surrounding stars. “Do you think they are even here?” She asked.

Pontal nodded. “Oh... they are here.” He answered. “Our instruments may not be able to pick them up... but they are here. I can feel it in my gut. That we can not pick them up is a matter of some concern considering our Shrouds are similar. Whether they will communicate with us or attack us in the question.”

Victoria turned back to him. “Have faith Pontal.” She said. “We need to have...”

A soft chime began to sound over the bridge intercom and Pontal turned his head towards his COM officer knowing immediately what it was. The man was now very alert as he adjusted his console. “Incoming secure communication Admiral!” He announced.

“Is it the agreed upon frequency and repeater codes?” Pontal asked coming to his feet.

“Yes sir!”

“Activate the holodisc!” Pontal hissed softly. “Quickly!”

Pontal turned slightly to the side of the bridge and saw this disc in the floor near his command chair glimmer and then burst into existence. In that clear transmission he saw Narice standing beside Cha'talla on one side, with the tall and muscular half elf male on her opposite side holding her hand. No doubt this was the half elf son of Leonidas who it was rumored had stolen her attention. Narice looked slightly different from when he had last seen her on the High Coven vidnews. Her hair was longer and her face appeared much more relaxed and at peace. Her dark eyes were brighter than he remembered and from the way she held the hand of the son of Leonidas, it was plainly obvious this was not the Narice he was used too.

“Admiral Pontal.” Narice stated calmly.

“Princess!” Pontal bowed his head.

“Admiral... board one of your G9s and leave your ship. You may bring who you wish, but you will adhere to the coordinates I am sending you now.” Narice turned her head and nodded to someone out of view.

“Princess... this is not... this is not what we agreed too.” Pontal spoke.

Narice nodded her head. “I understand that Admiral... but you will forgive me if I am slightly apprehensive about this meeting. I would be considered a traitor by many within my mother and sister’s inner circles. Capturing and returning me to my sister would be a large plus for any career officer.”

Pontal took the pad from his XO and his eyes dropped quickly to the information. He looked back up quickly. "The planet?" He asked.

Narice nodded her head. "We have established a neutral meeting place on the third moon. A simple structure with simple adornments. As I said... you may bring who you wish within reason. Cha'talla, my husband Arrarn and half a dozen others will be joining with me."

"Why here?" Pontal asked.

"Because it is in the middle of a dry lake bed Admiral and we can see anyone coming for many kilometers." Cha'talla answered. "We want this as well as you... but you must know we will take precautions."

Pontal's eyes shifted to Arrarn. "And do you speak for your husband as well Narice?" He asked her. "He is a Leonidas... brother to the young woman who your mother ordered ravaged and nearly killed. I do not wish to bear the brunt of a decision I had no part in. Certainly one I would never have sanctioned."

Narice glanced at Arrarn quickly and then back to Pontal. "Androcles is the reason we are here now Admiral." She said finally. "He trusts me and he trusts his brother. We can help each other if you are sincere Admiral Pontal."

"And if I am not?" Pontal asked.

"Then you will die." Cha'talla answered with cold finality in his voice. "We did not come to play word games. Do you wish to meet or not?"

Pontal nodded. "I will greet you in one hour." He stated.

JUNTHOR

Pontal stared at Narice from only a meter away. He was right of course. Her five foot one frame was somehow much fuller and more muscular and her hair was longer. She looked healthier than he had seen on any of the previous vidnews channels or their reports of her. The Lycavorian ArmorPly was a lighter version of the Mark IV, and it hugged her lush figure like a second skin while giving her extra protection for her joints. Seven *Durcunusaan* stood behind her along with three immense dragons, one who he knew was her dragon, and all of whom rested alertly on their haunches. The huge structure was basically a portable building Pontal saw as they landed just outside the entrance beside the *STRIKER DT*. Inside there was a small area that now held several couches with a large knee high table between the couches. Standing in front of her as he was, Pontal's doubts about all of this simply vanished. Looking at her now, he knew what he was about to do was the only way to secure their future and the future of the High Coven.

Pontal bowed his head. "Princess." He spoke softly.

"I am not a Princess of the High Coven Admiral." Narice said.

"There are those who would debate that with you, but you are also the Blessed Wife to a Leonidas. You are a Princess of the Union?" Pontal asked.

Narice glanced at Arrarn quickly with a sheepish grin. "Yes... I suppose I am." She answered turning back to him. She looked at the dark haired woman next to Pontal. "Your aide?" She asked.

Pontal shook his head quickly. "Victoria... my Blessed Wife and mother to my three children." He answered pulling her closer.

Arrarn saw both Narice and Cha'talla make odd facial gestures and he squeezed Narice's hand. "What am I missing?" He asked.

"Admiral Pontal is a pureblood Arrarn." Cha'talla answered. "It is heavily frowned upon for a pureblood to take a turned vampire as his wife, especially one that is... or was human. At least it used to be."

Pontal chuckled. "It still is. I'm hoping part of what we accomplish here will change that." He said.

Narice watched the body language of this Victoria and knew within the first moments that she was here very much of her own free will. This spoke volumes about Pontal and his sincerity, at least to Narice. She motioned to the couch to her left. "Please Admiral... take a seat." She spoke.

Pontal remained where he was standing, his eyes darting back and forth from her to the *Durcunusaan*. He had come with Victoria and only three guards, one of whom was an Immortal that could not stop staring at Cha'talla. "I can assume then that I am not to be attacked." Pontal spoke.

Narice looked at Arrarn and brought his knuckles to her lips for a soft kiss before she moved to the couch and sat down. Pontal breathed somewhat of a sigh of relief and he directed Victoria to the couch as Arrarn took up a spot behind Narice.

“I would first like to say that what Aikiro did... what she ordered... when we found out about it we were appalled.” Pontal spoke as he settled next to his wife. “It was a vile action that has no excuse.”

“We?” Narice asked.

Pontal took a deep breath and leaped off the proverbial cliff. “There are six others like me.” He said. “Six others who believe as I do and command similar forces. We have remained away from the trappings of our homeworld and the politics it breeds Princess. We have long advocated a stronger and more progressive war against the Kavalians instead of this defensive war that Moran and your mother were fighting. It has cost us the lives of many good men and women. When we first heard through different channels that a Cease Fire had been signed, many of us believed that our future was at hand. We thought she had finally decided to put the past behind us and begin working with the Lycavorians. We didn’t know how wrong we were. I suppose you could say that I have become the unofficial spokesperson for the others as well as myself.”

“Why now?” Narice asked.

“When we determined that Moran and your sister had yet to return to Uzu Ozeib 7 we concluded the only reason for this was that Yuri barely clung to life. If this was the case then Moran would know the many backstabbing politicians would not openly support him.” Pontal answered.

“Yuri is alive.” Narice said confidently.

Pontal nodded. “Yes... I assumed as much. She is not an easy woman to kill your sister, and her Immortal Captain is somewhat of a fanatic when it comes to her protection. We can only conclude that she and Moran are waiting to see how the senior politicians and military officers act before moving.”

“How they act?” Arrarn asked.

Cha'talla nodded his head in understanding of what Pontal was saying. “It is as we talked of Arrarn.” Cha'talla said looking at him. “What they will attempt to do to advance their own power base in the absence of Yuri or Aikiro. Her refusal to return to the Coven homeworld is being seen as a weakness isn’t it?”

Pontal nodded. “Yes. These men and women feared Aikiro to the extreme. Tesand and Moran were nothing more than her lap dogs and they feared them as well. She made Moran Supreme Commander because he won a few battles and was married to her daughter whom she wanted to control.”

“Using Moran in this way was how she did it.” Narice said nodding. “I always thought there was something odd about her decision to do this as I grew. It didn’t seem like something she would do... like keeping Yuri on Nuwaroa for such long periods of time.”

Pontal nodded his head once more. “I do not know what was happening on Nuwaroa Princess. I do know Moran was doing Aikiro’s during these times. With Aikiro and Tesand now dead and Yuri not returning we felt now would be the perfect time to try and wrest control of the government and the military from those in already power. The chaos and mistrust between the senior members of the Ruling Council would be a much needed distraction while we moved against them and tried to save our people.” He met Narice’s eyes. “Something it appears you determined as well.”

Narice nodded slowly. “Androcles actually.” She said.

Pontal’s eyes grew a little wider. “Androcles?”

“He came to me with some intelligence information similar to what you are saying now.” Narice said evenly. “It was from a different source but one he and his father have trusted for some time. He...”

“Narice!” Cha'talla cut off her words.

Narice looked at him. “He has come this far Cha'talla. You know as well as I if this was a trap to get to me they would have sprung it already. We must be forthright going forward or none of this will matter.”

“The... the Lycavorians have an agent inside Aikiro’s inner circle?” Pontal gasped looking at her.

Narice turned back to him and nodded. “I do not know who it is.” She stated right away. “Androcles is unwilling to share that with me or anyone right now. What this man or women sent in his last report mirrors what you are saying now. That is why he came to me even though he knew the wrath he would incur by doing so. I was very content Admiral. Content to be wife to Arrarn and lover to Toria Dellion. Content to begin a new life in the Union.”

“What... what changed?” Victoria asked.

“The High Coven could be so much more.” Narice said. “Androcles told me if I thought it was not worth it then I should not undertake it. I do not wish to see my people fail and die. I certainly don’t wish to see the Kavalians destroy us because of my sister’s lust for power. She became almost as bad as my mother at the end there.”

“If you don’t mind me asking... why would Androcles Leonidas care what happens to us after what Aikiro perpetrated upon his sister? Why would you care Arrarn Leonidas?” Pontal asked. “His bounty on Dante Moran speaks towards what he feels I think.”

Narice shook her head. “Never think you know Andro or his father Admiral. That would be your first oversight.” She said. “Make no mistake... my nephew will be caught... and he will die a death that even I would not wish upon any vampire for what he did to Zarah. That is as certain as the sun rising over the horizon, and Androcles has been very clear on that. But Andro has also taken my niece Carisia as his wife and mate. A pureblood like you and I Pontal and I have seen how he loves her without any hesitation or doubt. I can not begin to describe to you the love my own husband has shown to me as well as our wife Toria. Dante’s actions condemn only him... not our people and that is where Androcles is different from his father. He will not cast all of us aside for the actions of one raging lunatic. Not when together we could be greater than we are separately.”

Victoria’s hands took Pontal’s arm before he could speak and she leaned forward. “King Leonidas is not dead is he Princess Narice?” She asked softly. “The Kavalians failed in their attempt to kill him as your Netnews has been reporting for so long didn’t they?”

Narice looked at her. “Why would you say that?”

“Every time you have mentioned King Leonidas, either directly or indirectly, it has been in the present tense. In none of those times did you refer to him in the past tense.” Victoria stated as Pontal looked at her with wide eyes. “If he... if he was dead you would be referring to him in the past tense and not the present tense. He’s alive isn’t he?”

Pontal’s eyes shifted to Narice then and his eyes grew wider when he realized she was not going to deny this. “Princess?” He finally gasped.

Narice looked at him evenly. “It seems your wife is very intuitive Admiral.” She said. “And she is also very correct.”

Pontal came to his feet now. “King Leonidas lives!” He gasped. “Why... but why has he not revealed this publicly? Why...” Pontal met her gaze as realization hit him. “The Kavalians have Queen For’mya! He is remaining dead so as not to endanger her life. If the Kavalians knew he lived they would kill her instantly for their plans would be for naught!” Pontal paced back and forth in front of the couch. “I knew there had to be a reason Androcles was allowing them to do what they are doing. He is too much his father’s son to be cowed by those animals and...” He stopped and looked at Narice and Arrarn. “They have... they have raped your mother Arrarn Leonidas. Pusintin... he... he has forced her to endure what no woman should have to endure. You... you have my most sincere and heartfelt sympathy that this vile act has taken place.”

Cha’talla stood there impressed with Pontal’s keen tactical mind. The man had lost none of the edge he had from many years ago when Cha’talla had seen him in action. “This too will not go unpunished.” He said softly.

Pontal glanced at him and then back to Narice. “The King? He does not know that this is what Androcles plans?” He asked.

Narice shook her head quickly. “Do you think we would be having this discussion if King Leonidas was in command?” She said simply. “It is why we need to move now. Before Arrarn’s father resumes his duties. Andro believes we can be more, even after what Dante has done, and so do I.”

Pontal looked at her intently as he returned to his seat. “If he believes this then he must have a plan. If he sent you here to meet with me then you must have a plan that would have worked without my help.” He said.

Narice met his eyes. “We do.” She said evenly.

Pontal looked at his beautiful Victoria for a long moment. He turned back to Narice. “Then tell me what we can do.” He told her. “Tell me how we can support this plan of yours. I pledge myself to you Princess Narice. I pledge myself to you and to our people. I am a military officer and I have no desire for power or gain.” He looked at Victoria again quickly and then back to her. “I have all I could ever want right now. Everyone who follows me pledges this as well Princess. Command me... command us... for we do not want to see our people fade into obscurity and death.”

EARTH
BARRINGER CRATER
DRAGON BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS

Arzoal and Helen finished watching the lengthy holovid of the training and planning they had undergone, Elynth and Andro watching their reaction carefully. It was easy enough to feel the immense pride Arzoal felt within her at what she had seen, and this transferred to Helen. They had remained silent while viewing the hour long holovid. It had broken down and then chronicled the exact steps Andro and Isra and Daurgo had taken to choose those members of the Dragon Brigade. In actuality they had refused far more candidates than they had accepted for it seemed every dragon on Earth had wanted to be part of it. Those who were too young or had not yet been off world in any way were dismissed. Wind patterns were different on every world and unless you had the experience of being able to alter your flying technique because of these changes Andro felt it was too dangerous to risk. Many of the names Arzoal recognized from their warring time on Enurrua and it warmed her heart to know that they had learned from these experiences and were willing to lead and share them with younger dragons.

And quite possibly lose their lives in the process.

As the lights grew brighter Arzoal turned her massive head to look at Androcles who stood with his arms crossed over his broad chest and gazing at her intently. Elynth rested on the floor beside him, her head close to his shoulder and her golden eyes holding just as many questions and trepidation as her Bonded Brother. She gazed at them for a moment, seeing how their actions mirrored each others and they didn't even realize it. Just as Torma's and Martin's actions mirrored one another. It was something none of them noticed and that was part of the power the four of them could wield. They were so deeply connected that they could draw on each other's reserves of energy and willpower, and in doing so, bonded as they were they acted and thought as a single entity. She shifted her huge body until she was facing them completely and then she too settled to the floor.

Androcles. Elynth. What you have done here is...

Elder Mother I did not make this decision overnight. As Talon Guardians we agonized over this for months! Andro interrupted her. *We questioned others... we...*

Be silent. Arzoal spoke.

Grandmother! Elynth exclaimed coming to what she thought was the defense of her Bonded Brother.

Be silent both of you! Arzoal barked. There were perhaps three or four individuals who could actually get away with talking to either Andro or Elynth in such a way. Arzoal happened to be one of them. She extended her massive head out on her neck until she was more or less touching Andro's forehead with her snout. *I was going to say... what you have done here... all of you... it is remarkable. You have... you have shaped them. Given them purpose.*

Andro shook his head quickly. *You shaped them gave and them purpose Elder Mother. Just as you have with all of your kind. You have brought dragons forward to this day by force of your will alone.* He told her. *Elynth and I, Uncle Isra and Aelnala, their trainers and their... their leader... we only refined it.*

Arzoal chuckled within Mindvoice and then she did butt him gently in his shoulder. *Will you never cease giving credit to others when it is due you young Androcles?*

And risk the wrath of the Feravomir for not being humble? Never. He answered.

Arzoal laughed once more and looked around the large room. *I need to send for Daurgo and the other Elders. They need to see this... what you have done here... before you send them away into battle.* She turned back to him. *That is what you are planning is it not.*

It is not what I wish Elder Mother. Andro said.

I know that Androcles. It is never the wish of a Talon Guardian to put others at risk. But it is beyond our ability to control now. I know that. Arzoal answered. *I wish to meet their leader Andro. The one who will act as your will in guiding these dragons.*

Andro nodded. *Of course. I want you to know he volunteered for this. We did not ask him to undertake his position.*

Arzoal cocked her head slightly. *As you say.* She told him. *But why would this matter? Is he not here?*
No. The voice echoed in all of their minds and Arzoal's head snapped around as if on a swivel when that voice touched her. *He is here.*

Daurgo walked into the huge room still encased in the light gray and blue Dragon Armor. As Arzoal's eyes fell upon him he flicked one of his right talons and the Dragon Armor began to quickly recede into the deployment container that he wore on his back in much the same fashion as a saddle. Arzoal's eyes grew wider as his light green scales came into view from under the armor and very suddenly fear gripped her heart.

Daurgo! Arzoal gasped. *You!*

Daurgo moved up in front of her. He was the second oldest of the Dragon Elders at nearly twenty-three thousand years of age. His thick, muscular eighteen and a half meters in length was surpassed in size by only Torma, Jeth and Arzoal, though his neck and midsection were built very similar to Torma's muscular definition and thickness. He had been chosen to the Elder Council at seven thousand years old, and had loved Arzoal for more than ten millennia.

I will lead them Elder Mother. I officially relinquish my seat on the Elder Council. I have another calling now. I will lead them with all that I am and I will guide them and we will make you proud Elder Mother. Daurgo spoke softly.

Relinquish your seat on the Council! Arzoal gasped. *But you... damn you Daurgo... this is what has occupied so much of your time? This is what you have kept hidden from me? Why you could not attend so many meetings of the Council? I do not need you throwing yourself into battle to impress me Daurgo. I have come to... I... I rely on your counsel to me.*

Daurgo nodded. *You will still have that Elder Mother.*

Do not call me that Daurgo! Arzoal barked. *I have asked you to call me by my name when we are...*

No one else on the Council is old enough or experienced enough to do this. Daurgo said. *It has to be me Arzoal... you know this.* Daurgo moved even closer to her and touched his snout to hers. *I have loved you for over ten millennia Arzoal. I... I have watched you do many great things for our kind; lead us through our darkest hours, show us the path of right and wrong, and even watch as almost every egg to hatch in the last ten thousand years came into this life. You deny yourself even the smallest of comforts and you deny yourself the right to feel.*

That is not true! Arzoal protested.

Isn't it? Daurgo asked. *I may live another thirty thousand years or I may die tomorrow. No matter what happens... I will go into the Beyond loving you just as intensely as I do now. I have never had a mate and I will never take one if I can not have you.*

Daurgo you... Arzoal looked at him with astonishment.

No. You loved your mate Arzoal... I know this. And I will never take his place in your heart. Daurgo spoke. *I do not wish to. I will do this... I will lead them, into battle if necessary, but this is my calling now. And if I can not have your heart then your blessing in our actions will have to suffice.*

This was it.

This would happen now.

His constant presence and soothing counsel had always been a strength to her. His light green scales and the way his shimmering eyes gazed upon her. Twelve thousand years she had seen this and felt this. Three thousand years after he joined the Council she found herself admiring the lines of his back and shoulders as he walked. She had watched his dedication in the war on Enurrua, always the first to leave the safety of his cave to come and see her at her request. Many times risking his life in the process she later came to discover. Three thousand years ago Daurgo began to replace her long dead mate in her dreams and that is when Arzoal knew she had fallen deeply in love with him. For all this time she has pushed it aside, held her feelings in check for the betterment of her kind and their continued existence and not knowing if he felt the same. Now she had to make a decision for herself. Now she had to decide if she wanted to lose only the second male dragon she had ever loved because she was not brave enough to face the future.

[Do not deny yourself any longer sister.] Helen's voice filled her mind causing her to turn and look at the woman who had become her closest and most important friend. A friend she had not had in over forty thousand years of life. *[Dragons are strong once more and they grow stronger and more numerous every year*

thanks to what you have done. Let go the reins you have on yourself and allow yourself to feel and love once more.] Helen reached up and placed her hand on Arzoal's thick foreleg. *[Think of yourself this time sister.]*

Helen turned and looked at Elynth and Andro who had been standing there during the exchange. "Why don't you two come with me?" She stated. "I'm sure there is much you can show me."

"*Feravomir* I wanted..." Andro began.

Elynth opened her jaws and clamped them down on Andro's shoulder lifting him off the floor easily. *Come Androcles.* She growled. *Let us go with the Feravomir.*

"Jeez! Ok! Ok!" Andro exclaimed as he gripped Elynth's snout and they left the massive building to the two dragons.

LEONIDAS IIA-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER ARCH DEMON COMMAND SHIP DENALI AND LISISA LEONIDAS ENROUTE TO BETA QUADRANT

This was certainly not anything Lisisa had expected so soon she thought to herself as she stepped from the large shower. Of course she had not expected much of what had happened in these last months either. Discovering her true bloodline and dismissing it for the man who her heart told her was her father. The love that she and Denali shared being made public finally and receiving nothing but encouragement and support in return from not only her family but from people across the entire Union that she and Deni did not even know. After she wrapped her petite but powerful frame in the towel and stuck her head into the dryer, she hit the switch and let the warm air blow her lush black hair almost dry. As she took another towel and began to rub the ends of her hair her mind wandered more.

Whether by design or intention and knowing Andro it was probably the latter, it seemed this ship had been recently built, and it almost appeared as if it had been built with her and Deni in mind. Lisisa realized it when entering their quarters. Andro knew both of them liked to read and study history and the walls had been decorated with half a dozen historic hand oil paintings that were exceptionally rare. The wall refrigeration unit had been stocked with large amounts of the high protein grape drinks that Deni liked so much and enough *Nau'shindcal d'Vlos* to last her several months at least. It also had different snacks that they both enjoyed. While they had brought pretty much all of their uniforms and different civilian clothes, they discovered that a delivery of extra uniforms and even more styles of civilian clothes had been dropped off in three travel crates inside the door. The quarters were also quite large, but their actual bedroom was smaller than normal. This is what sold Lisisa that Andro had been planning to give this ship to Deni for some time. Their bedroom on the *ARCH DEMON*, while not small by any means, wasn't as large as Andro's on the *SCIMITAR*. Deni had told Andro several years ago about how the bedroom in the villa he had bought was cozy and he hoped whoever shared his life in the future liked being close to him. Lisisa couldn't picture her Denali using the word cozy and she had laughed at his expression when he told her about it. The walls within the bedroom had been arranged in such a way as to make the room appear smaller and different styles of furniture had been made to fill the vacant spots. Lisisa did enjoy being close to Deni. Much like Andro and Eliani, if she could have remained in constant physical contact with her beautiful mate and husband Denali, it would have been heaven for her.

Lisisa was nearly five hundred years his senior, but in his arms he made her feel like a child. A giddy love struck child. The wolf blood within her was as pure as it got, though she would have preferred it came from the man she called father and not his fool brother. No matter the source, her wolf blood was dominant in every regard and Deni's aura could set her to singing in an instant. Combined with the fact that her vampire genes simply adored the taste of his blood, Lisisa Leonidas was in heaven when anywhere near her handsome husband and mate. Lately however, something else had begun to peek her interest in a way it never had before. While she would not think of pursuing this without Deni's knowledge, she also smelled it within him. An interest in the Vanari female Arduri. It seemed just being around her was very intoxicating to both of them and Lisisa did not know if it was because they both were attracted to her or if she was using her Alkay to entice them. It did not seem to have the effect on Deni that it did on her and she reasoned it was because his willpower and Mindvoice ability was ultimately far superior to hers because of the pureness of his blood.

Lisisa continued to dry the ends of her hair as she moved out of the shower room and into the main room of their quarters which was very spacious and comfortably furnished. She came to a halt when she saw him sitting on the velour like couch completely naked. They hardly ever wore clothes when it was just the two of them for they liked to look at each other, Lisisa being the one to look the most. She could not get over the incredibly sculpted body that Denali had, the deep tan or the fact that he was all hers. Of course, what he had between his legs was also a very important part of her interest as well.

A most distracting and delicious part.

Denali was by no means the largest male equipment she had within her, the Immortals who had raped her on Lycavore for so many years would always hold that distinction, yet his impressive size would forever be what she craved most of all. Deni fit within her as if he had been especially made, just for her use and enjoyment. He stretched her, reached inside her to the point of pain, but never crossed that threshold even in the midst of their most ardent and active lovemaking. And there had been many times when they had wanted each other so badly the only thing that mattered was slamming their bodies together as hard and as fast as they could to obtain their mutual peak. Just being within his arms, having him stroking her skin, never failed to send shivers of love surging through her. Lisisa Leonidas would want no other man she knew, however there was a certain blue skinned beauty that both of them would have to address their growing feelings for. Before it became a distraction to what their mission and purpose was for coming on this trip. As was her nature, Lisisa decided to tackle the issue head on. She tossed aside the towel she was using on her hair and walked up to the side of the couch where Deni sat. He was reading from one of a dozen data pads that surrounded him on the couch, most of them pertaining to his new ship, but several also given to him by Devra in the hopes he would come to understand Vanari culture as much as possible during their three day journey.

Deni didn't look up when she came from behind him for her scent always filled his nose now. He tapped the button on the pad and started talking however. "Lisi... did you know that the Vanari have this ritual that they celebrate every three years? It's like one mass orgy where they..." Deni looked up and his words died in his throat as he saw her slide seductively over the arm of the couch. He knew Lisisa's maple and wheat scent intimately and Deni would never tire of smelling her. How could he tire of such a beauty? If need be he could and would track her over hundreds of kilometers in order to find her. Deni grinned as she stalked across the couch on her hands and knees. "You smell tasty." He spoke huskily.

Lisisa smiled that seductive smile. "You smell better." She told him as she reached his body and slowly slid into his lap, pinning his arms to the back of the couch and then dragging her tongue up his chest and throat. She felt him stiffen slightly in her grasp and Lisisa reveled in the power she had over him. She brought her face up to his and saw his dark brown eyes wide and nearly feverish staring back at her. "Deni... we need to talk." She spoke softly as she placed butterfly kisses along his jaw and the edges of his lips.

"Just talk?" He asked with a grin.

Lisisa smiled at him and then kissed him hard, quickly and wantonly, stabbing her tongue between his lips to increase his passion and then taking his handsome face in her hands. "Talk first... then you can have me in whatever way you desire." She spoke huskily into his lips.

Denali smiled. "I don't know... I desire you in a lot of ways." He quipped.

Lisisa smiled at his words and settled herself more comfortably on his lap. She could feel his slightly thickening cock between her thighs but her desire to talk made him quickly grab onto his passion and hold it in. He knew her well Lisisa thought and his actions only continued to show her that he loved her mind as well as her body.

"Well... when we finish you can start acting on those desires." Lisisa told him.

"And I will." Deni answered. He dropped the data pad he had in his hand onto the pile next to him and then proceeded to push all of them onto the floor. His arms went around her back, his hands gripped her tight ass and he pulled her closer to him. His eyes lifted and met her gaze. "Now... what is it that you want to talk about. You have my undivided attention."

Lisisa bit her bottom lip and rotated her hips atop him, feeling his beautiful cock press against her bare pussy. "Undivided?" She asked.

"Not if you keep doing that!" He announced.

Lisisa grinned. "Just checking." She said.

Deni reached up and brushed some of her damp hair from her cheek. "What troubles you Lisi?" He asked.

"Arduri." Lisisa blurted out.

"Oh boy." Denali spoke shaking his head and then resting his forehead to her large jutting breasts. "I was... I was so hoping to avoid this conversation."

"I know you smell it Deni." Lisisa said. "If I can smell it than I know you can."

Denali nodded. "Yes I smell it." He told her lifting his head to look at her. "What do you want me to say Lisi?"

"What is in here and here would be a good place to start." She said touching his chest over his heart and then his temple.

"Is this a trick question?" He asked suddenly with a grin.

Lisisa snarled at him and pinched his arm hard. "Deni!" She exclaimed. "I want to know what you feel?"

"What I feel is this..." He stated pulling her even closer. "Arduri is... she is beautiful and unique and she smells very good. But Arduri is not you... and you are the one who holds my heart Lisisa."

"Deni I know that." Lisisa spoke softly. "And you hold mine so very tightly. You are my love and nothing will ever change that and no one will ever come between us."

"So what are we talking about then?" He asked.

"I find her intriguing Deni." Lisisa spoke. "I find her intriguing and so very attractive. I find myself wondering what she tastes like and I have never done that before with any woman. I find her attractive Deni. Do not tell me you don't think the same because I know you."

"I won't tell you anything different." Deni said. "But simply because she smells good and is attractive does not mean anything."

"No? Then why do we both feel the same thing?" Lisisa asked. "Why do we both find her so tantalizing? She desires both of us you know... that much is so very obvious. The way she looks at you and me both. How her scent spikes whenever she is near us."

"Are you telling me you wish to pursue her?" Deni asked.

"All the women that we have seen since we have been together." Lisisa said. "And many of them have had an interest in you and I Deni... all those women and Arduri is the only one who invokes the same reaction in both of us. The same feelings."

"Yes." He said.

Lisisa took his handsome face in her hands. "Have we not always believed that the gods brought us together Deni?"

Denali nodded. "Yes."

"Could it be a sign that they mean for Arduri to be part of our lives, *because* we are both so strongly drawn in by her?" Lisisa asked.

"I suppose." Deni answered softly. "But I don't..."

"Andro and father have always told you that you would one day break out of the shell you had around you Deni." Lisisa spoke. "You have broken out of that shell now. Since you have discovered the power that was within you your aura is so much stronger and your scent sweeter to me. It has made me stronger and more focused as well."

"And what if it's just me and you are feeding off me Lisi?" Deni asked. "Yes... she is beautiful... not as beautiful as you in my eyes but still beautiful. I would be lying if I said I have not thought about what being with her would be like. Could that be affecting you?"

Lisisa shook her head. "No... because I have felt this way from the moment we met her." She said. "And apparently Vanari have no qualms about letting someone know how they feel with their body language." Lisisa smiled shyly. "I have thought about wrapping my body around hers far more than you I'd wager."

"So you are saying you do want to pursue her." Deni said.

"I'm saying I think we should allow events to occur as they happen and not try to fight them." Lisisa answered. "If that means we end up with Arduri in our lives then fine. If not... that is fine too. At least we will not have fought what we feel and allowed someone to escape that would have made all three of us blissfully happy."

Denali stared at her for a long minute. “I guess when you put it that way.” He stated. “I don’t want us to chase her. If this is meant to be then she will come to us eventually. Fate will bring her to us.”

“As fate brought me to you.” Lisisa said leaning close to his face and brushing her lips over his. “Take me Denali Leonidas.” She whispered to him. “Fuck your wife and mate until she screams out your name.”

Denali growled hungrily at her words and covered her lips with his and he rolled her over under him on the couch.

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT *INQUISITOR*

HIGH COVEN SECURE SPACE

4.2 LYs FROM UZU OZEIB 7

Yuri was in no position to deny him anything he wanted. In truth she didn’t want to.

The rapturous pleasure that was sizzling through her veins was beyond anything she had ever experienced in nearly three thousand four hundred years of life. She had been so hesitant at first, the centuries old dogma beaten into her head bubbling to the forefront. His kiss was like a cleansing tidal wave that swept everything away and left her standing there open and bare to him. It took perhaps thirty seconds before Yuri Moran surrendered completely to the fervor that was rapidly building within her.

This was a man. This was a man who had risked death itself for her on more than one occasion. This was a man who wanted nothing from her except her love. No position of power, no riches or titles. Only her love. After more than twelve hours of doing nothing but talking with him the last few days, Yuri knew him far better than she ever knew him before. She learned things she had never known or would have imagined. Yet through it all was one simple and undeniable fact. He loved her more than his own life. Yuri did not believe she could be swept up so easily, but after only thirty seconds of his kiss she realized that she had never been loved as this man loved her. Even with the scars that now dotted her face and body, faded but there, he loved her.

Without hesitation, without doubt.

Without an iota of fear.

And the light that exploded within her mind told her one thing. She loved him as well. Loved him more than she had ever loved anything in her often times miserable and darkness filled life.

Yuri Moran had surrendered to his kiss then and within moments she was kissing him back with a zeal beyond anything she had known. She didn’t hesitate when he began to strip her, even helping him frantically to remove her clothes until she was before him naked as the day she entered this world. He soon joined her and she could do nothing but marvel at the total perfection before her as she saw it. Rippling muscles that defined his species and him. Then he was on his knees before her and his lips and tongue went directly for her center where he found her waiting and oh so very willing. Yuri had screamed then; screamed because he was not simply enjoying her, he was devouring her. She shuddered under his lips and tongue as they explored every tiny portion of her quivering body. Two mind shattering orgasms later he poised himself above her sweaty body and in one soul robbing, mind numbing plunge, Yuri Moran was filled with fifteen inches of steel hard Immortal cock and she leaped from the precipice of darkness and into the light of a new dawn.

He took her... gods did he take her.

With dominating thrusts and power, with breath stealing kisses, with feather like strokes on her shuddering body he took her. Three riveting orgasms into their lovemaking and his first eruption into her began her reshaping. Yuri’s dark eyes rolled into the back of her head and she howled out her blissful enthusiasm and passion as his searing hot Immortal come rocketed into her womb, purifying her body and mind and forever sealing her on this new path. A path she welcomed with open arms. It didn’t stop there and a gasping Yuri could only laugh in joy at his eagerness as he began anew, quickly driving her over the top once more as she covered his dark gray skin with loving kisses and whispered new found words into his ears. Within moments he was once more filling her with his passion and she was well beyond pleasure.

Yuri retained enough presence of mind to push him off her and quickly roll over on the bed. Her hand found his still willing and very hard cock and she gasped as her fingers barely fit around the immense length. She knew what she wanted. What she needed. She needed him in every position anyone had ever taken her. She needed him to completely make her his. He looked at her with wide eyes as she positioned him and then cooed

out her need. To Yuri's enchantment he didn't hesitate. She screamed out her ecstasy as he filled her bowels with his Immortal manhood in a single stroke of pain and pleasure. When he struck bottom and she felt his enormous and crazy hot balls rest against her asscheeks Yuri Moran lost it in orgasmic bliss. As she squirmed and squealed beneath him, exploding continuously in orgasmic delight, a part of her hazy mind recalled what had brought this life altering moment into existence.

"...be gone for about thirty-six hours." Moran spoke as they walked down the corridor together. "We're meeting in the next sector but everyone will not be there until late tonight. When I get back we should have a clearer picture on who is on our side and who is not and then we can draw up a plan to deal with them."

Yuri nodded her head. "I will be fine Robert." She said softly. "Insure the secondary research base has been activated and all project materials copied and transferred there."

Moran stopped as they came to the landing bay entrance. He turned and looked at her. "You are looking much better these last two days." He said.

Yuri nodded her head. "And I am feeling better. I've been working out in our private gym and Doctor Nalavi has prescribed a special diet to return my strength to me."

Moran nodded. "Good." He said. "We need you at your best Yuri."

"And I will be." She said. "You... you are taking Dante?"

Moran nodded. "He wanted to come. He wants to be more involved in the day to day activities and I agreed."

"Is that wise?" Yuri asked. "He is different since we returned."

Moran nodded. "I know. I'm hoping this trip helps him to break out of the darkness that surrounds him."

"Be careful of what you share with him." Yuri said.

Moran looked at her. "Why?"

Yuri shook her head. "Something inside me tells me to be careful that is all."

"Yuri he is our son." Moran spoke. "He is no danger to us."

Yuri gazed at him for a long while. "You are right of course." She said. "I'm going to review the intelligence reports received from the homeworld and see if I can piece together whatever plans those fools may have."

Moran nodded. "We'll have to take them out." He said.

Yuri nodded. "I have no problems killing traitors." She answered. "None at all."

Moran smiled. "You are becoming your old self again." He said.

Yuri smiled. "Yes I am. And it feels good. When will... when will you return to our quarters Robert?"

Moran hesitated for a long moment and looked at the floor. "I think it's better if I stay away for a while longer." He answered. "I don't want to rush your recovery as much as I would like too. You need to be back to your full strength Yuri. Then I intend to ravage you."

Yuri smiled seductively. "I look forward to that." She said.

Moran smiled and nodded. "Then I will see you in thirty-six hours." He said.

He made no attempt to kiss her and turned quickly to enter the landing bay. Yuri moved to the small view window as the doors closed and she watched him as he moved across the landing bay to the G9 Runner. Halfway across the distance she saw the blond pureblood fall in beside him and his face lit up happily. Yuri's dark eyes narrowed as she watched and what she feared became more and more obvious to her as the hours passed. Everything Nalavi had been telling her for the last few days was coming true. She reached into the side pocket of her dark blue uniform jumpsuit and removed the data disc, holding it in her fingers.

"Ravage me you say." Yuri whispered softly. "We shall see. We shall see."

"...a success." Aikiro spoke as she lifted the glass of fresh blood to her lips.

"So it worked?" Robert Moran asked.

Aikiro nodded. "I watched it from a secure containment room. The chamber unsealed when she entered the code and the full essence of Xaxon was released. It was like a dark cloud, oily yet dry. It quickly engulfed her."

"What now?" Tesand asked.

"Now we wait." Aikiro spoke. "He communicated with me that he needed a vassal. I have been preparing her for years. Yuri is perfect for him... at least until we are able to recover his own body. We had to wait until after she had given birth to Lucia and her body returned to normal. Twelve years I have schooled her and taught her what he told me to teach her."

"What happens to Yuri when we find his body?" Moran asked.

Aikiro looked at him. "I'm sorry Robert... there will be nothing of Yuri left when he departs her physical body. He will need many years to become accustomed to her body for it has been so long since he has occupied one. When we do accomplish that goal she will be nothing more than a vegetable. I will honor my word to you. You will remain Supreme Commander and you will have your choice of females. As many as you wish." Aikiro stood up in the holovid and walked across the room they were in stopping in front of the window before continuing.

"Yuri was the only one who was compatible for him. The only one outside of Martin Leonidas's son Androcles. He would have preferred that body, but the boy's blood is too pure and he proved to be too strong willed and that damnable dragon of his and the bond they share only made it more impossible." Aikiro spoke. "When the time comes he will choose a young body and then his power will be infinite. And then we can achieve what we have always wanted and he will have his revenge on his brother and his brother's descendants."

"Will she figure it out?" Moran asked. "She's not stupid Aikiro."

Aikiro shook her head. "She will find herself becoming increasingly darker in her thoughts and actions. Crueler really. Xerxes's rape of her opened the door into her inner psyche and exposed what Xaxon needed. She is strong enough to hold him, contain him, but slowly her mind will no longer be her own."

"And there is no way to reverse it?" Moran asked.

Aikiro shook her head. "Not while she lives... no." She answered.

So she had died on Earth Yuri now knew. Androcles Leonidas had killed her in his rage. She should have known facing him was quite possibly the stupidest thing she had ever done. He was every bit as powerful as his father, who Yuri didn't doubt would grow even more powerful. Between his teeth and his claws she had died and only Pa'cour's love and quick action had brought her back. She had seen it all now. Seen it in his mind as if was happening all over again. This time however, Yuri didn't shy from the visions, and she learned what she had so craved to know. How he had held her head to his neck, her body limp in his powerful arms. How he had directed her extended fangs to his flesh and then pushed her head forward stabbing those fangs into his own skin. He had given of himself to her without question or doubt. As clearly as the orgasms that he caused to rip through her now, he had truly brought her back by force of his love for her alone.

Yuri hissed in blissful joy when he stopped his will crushing strokes into her and with exquisite slowness he turned her body to face him. They never became disconnected as he rolled her over onto her back and then slowly lowered his body atop hers, crushing his powerful chest against her breasts as he sank fully into her tight ass once more. Yuri's cobalt blue eyes matched his own in devoted passion and she saw in them what he wanted to do so badly. She grabbed his face in her hands, so beautiful to her now, feeling the bone spurs along his jaw and she nodded to him with glassy, tear filled eyes. It took only six more strokes before he lost it completely and Yuri Moran howled out her surreal bliss as his vampiric fangs sank deeply into her neck and their simultaneous eruption overtook them. Her slim ankles were securely locked across his jerking asscheeks, her hands spread across his powerful back, and her body quivering almost violently in exploding ecstasy. It was then that Yuri Moran sank her own vampiric fangs into Pa'cour's thick neck and she fed on the most delicious nectar she had ever tasted in all of her twisted life.

All while Pa'cour continue to erupt inside her and mold her into something new.

Yuri cooed most deliciously as his warm lips left a trail of soft kisses down her spine. She felt the cool air of the room across her skin as he pushed the sheet that covered her shapely ass down and gently used his nose to caress the firmness of her upper ass cheeks. He replaced the sheet once more and began his travels up her back again, his large hands coming to rest on either side of her body as he pressed his powerful frame against hers almost reverently. He moved her thick raven black hair away from the side of her neck and nuzzled her there insuring the marks from his fangs had disappeared completely and then he settled to the bed beside her. She whimpered in happiness when those same powerful arms pulled her back tightly against his broad chest and her arms dropped to wrap just as tightly over his, pulling them hard against her bare breasts and feeling her nipples press into his forearms.

“How much longer?” Pa'cour asked her softly.

“Six hours.” She answered.

“Yuri... I... I will not be able to tolerate him violating you.” Pa'cour told her. “I will tear him in half before he touches you again.”

Yuri rolled over quickly in his arms, and without a second's pause she pressed her body to his as she pushed him fully onto his back. She draped one of her long legs over the top of his, feeling the huge Immortal cock that had given her pleasure she didn't believe existed. It was soft now, but just as impressive as it had been hard. She let his right arm draw her close, her large breasts flattening against the side of his ribcage and she let her fingers reach for his face. She traced the dark gray skin, running her fingers over the tips of the bone spurs, and feeling his body react. It was an erogenous zone for Immortals, the tips of their bone spurs, and knowing she had this affect on him sent tingles through her.

“He will never have me again Pa'cour! Never! Only you my Immortal love. Only you.” Yuri spoke meeting the gaze of his incredible dark eyes.

“What do you wish beautiful Yuri?” He asked her lifting his own hand to stroke her smooth cheek. The scars on her face were faded to almost nothing yes, but to Pa'cour they did not mar the beauty of this woman in his arms in any way. Robert Moran was a fool to have let them do to her what they did. Such beauty and intelligence and strength nearly wasted because of their mad hunger for power. If at all possible... Moran would fall under his hand. With as much violence and hate as Pa'cour could muster.

“I feel... I feel different Pa'cour.” Yuri spoke softly lowering her head to his massive chest. Her hair spread across his skin as her fingers danced over his abdomen. “I am me... but I am not.” Pa'cour used his fingers to trace her shoulder and waited patiently for her to continue. “I still have... I still have a darkness within me, I think I always have, but I am free of all the hate and anger. You have freed me.”

“Me?” He asked.

Yuri looked up and turned her head to face him. “I died Pa'cour.” She said. “I died. It is the only way Xaxon's essence would have left me. I died and you brought me back. Your love for me brought me back.”

“Having his... having him out of you took all the hate and anger?” Pa'cour asked still not able to comprehend the intricacies of Mindvoicing and what it entailed.

Yuri shook her head slowly. “Having him out of me took away the darkness, but your love for me took away the hate and anger. You... you gave of yourself even knowing what could happen. Your love for me is what saved me. No one... no one has ever done for me without wanting something in return Pa'cour.”

“I want only you Yuri.” Pa'cour spoke softly. “Nothing else matters to me now. Only you and your love. That is all I have ever wanted.”

Yuri smiled warmly as she looked at him. “I know.” She said softly. “And I want you my love. More than I have ever wanted anything in my terrible life.”

“What of Dante? You believe this Xaxon has infested him now?” Pa'cour spoke.

Yuri nodded. “That is why he spoke to me in my dreams. Just before I woke up in the Med Bay. He was torturing me because he leaped to Dante prematurely when he thought I was dead. Dante is twisting quickly. His own lust for power and strength is accelerating what took years for him to do with me.”

“Then he will not easily allow you to assume your mother's seat of power. He will want it for himself and he will do everything in his power to make sure you never take her place.” Pa'cour said thoughtfully. “He will fight you every step of the way. He has already managed to turn Moran fully against you.”

Yuri's eyes darkened even more than they normally were. “There is more to Robert's deception than just Dante.” She snarled softly. “Something I will take care of very soon.”

“The High Coven will fall Yuri.” Pa'cour spoke. “If not by Martin Leonidas’s hands than by his son. They will never forget what was done to their blood. They will never forget and they will never forgive.”

Yuri dropped her forehead to his chest. “I can not believe my mother would stoop so low.” She said. “I can’t believe I would stoop so low as to allow that.”

“It was not you Yuri.” Pa'cour said.

“Yes it was.” She answered quickly. “I have always been driven Pa'cour. My father and mother drove me to be the very best. To remove anyone in my way. My mother knew about Xerxes raping me. She knew all along and acted as if she did not find out until later. She was using me even then. They let Xerxes rape me. Told him to rape me. To make me weak and vulnerable. To make me hate and carry so much anger in me.

Phraktos... a large part of me rejoices that she is dead.”

“She betrayed you Yuri.” Pa'cour said. “Betrayed you and used you when she should have been a mother to you. What you feel is not wrong.”

“And she turned me into her in the process!” Yuri said. “I am hated by my own people! I have a price on my head so large that even my own people would surrender me to the Union if they were given the chance.”

“That will never happen.” He stated. “I would never allow it.”

“For the first time in my life I have no idea what to do Pa'cour.” Yuri said. “I don’t know what to do and I fear what the future holds. For me. For us.” She spoke looking at him. “I can’t lose you now! I can’t!”

“You are not going to lose me Yuri.” He said.

“Then what do we do?” Yuri asked him. “They will move against those in power on Uzu Ozeib 7 within the week. I will be expected to lead that charge.”

“We will run.” He told her. “We will take a G9 and we will run. I will find how it is the Immortals have changed... you can alter your appearance enough to fool the causal observer. We will find a planet and build a home in the mountains somewhere. In time they will come to forget us.”

“Pa'cour my love... I have a half billion riyal bounty on my head.” Yuri spoke. “We will not be able to hide forever. I am just too well known too go unnoticed for very long. We would be running forever.” She lowered her head to his chest again and wrapped her arm across his powerfully defined abdomen.

“I would run forever if it meant I was with you and you were safe.” Pa'cour told her.

“We can not start a new life if the old one continues to hound us Pa'cour my love.” Yuri spoke almost smiling with the ease that those three words fell from her lips. Pa'cour took a deep breath. Much deeper than normal and this caused Yuri to lift her head and turn back to face him. “What is it?” She asked.

Pa'cour took her beautiful face in his hands and smiled. “What if I told you there was a way.” He said.

“A way to do what?” Yuri asked.

“A way to leave High Coven space. To start over and not worry of this bounty. To be free and to begin our life together if that is what you wish.” Pa'cour said.

“If only it were that easy.” She said.

“I did not say it would be easy... I said there is a way.” Pa'cour told her.

“What way?” She asked. “What do you mean?”

“A way for us to just disappear. No bounty. No mercenaries. Just you and me. I only need to hear you tell me that this would make you happy. That this would be what you want.” Pa'cour said.

“How?” Yuri asked him.

“Tell me.” He spoke softly.

“Tell you that I love you?” Yuri said. “Tell you that I want to feel you within me for all of eternity. That I would go anywhere with you. Is that what you want to hear?”

Pa'cour smiled gently. “That will do for now.” He said leaning up to kiss her. A kiss Yuri did not hesitate to return. He pushed himself up on the bed as she sat up and held the sheet over her breasts. He pressed his back to the headboard and looked at her. “I can insure that we will get all the supplies and credits we will need. At least enough to find a place and get settled in. I can also insure that the bounty on your head will cease to exist. The one on your son however... that one I can do nothing about.”

Yuri scooted closer to him. “He is no longer my son Pa'cour. The moment Xaxon seized him, he stopped being my son. I have lost all of my children because of what they did to me. I will never get them back Pa'cour. I am dead to them. And they would never believe me if I told them all that we now know. Now do not make me wait any longer my Immortal...” Yuri didn’t finish her sentence and her eyes grew a little wider when she

realized what she was going to say and how naturally it was going to come out. "My Immortal husband." She finally finished the words, speaking them with a soft reverence in her voice. She looked up and saw Pa'cour staring at her. "My Immortal husband." She said again with an almost wistful smile.

Pa'cour reached out, took her face in his hands and kissed her hard. Yuri whimpered in joy and returned the kiss with equal passion. It was the first thing she had ever done in her life that felt so very right. He pulled away after a moment and used his thumbs to stroke her cheeks. He sat back slowly never breaking her gaze and began to speak.

"I will... I will do something I have not done in six thousand years." He said softly. "I will... I will ask my brothers to help me."

Yuri's eyes grew wider. "Your brothers?" She gasped. "Pa'cour... I thought your tribe and family were dead? How could you have brothers?"

"Six thousand years ago I had a tribe, a family and a wife." He spoke meeting her gaze. "I was following in the footsteps of my older brothers and being a good Immortal soldier. Until the Trebin Uprising."

Yuri moved even closer. "I thought the Trebin Uprising was between warring Immortal tribes over territory on your home planet." Yuri said.

"It was." He answered. "It spilled over onto the moon of Trebin when the other tribe attacked the colony there that our family had established. They slaughtered nearly four thousand of our tribe over that three day period. Among them my Immortal wife. It has been an arranged marriage as they all were back then, but she was strong and happy. They broke every bone in her body before they slit her throat and left her to rot in a ditch. I found her a week later among the bodies. I swore a Blood Oath for revenge but my oldest brother, the leader of our tribe refused. He had just gotten the two factions to sit down and try to settle things peacefully. Over twenty thousand had been killed among our two tribes during the uprising and if not stopped it would have killed far more. My brother knew this... I only wanted revenge." Pa'cour took a deep breath and leaned back against the headboard.

"I ignored my brother's edict and in my rage I found and killed the two oldest sons of the Tribe Elder. I killed them in the same fashion they had killed my wife." Pa'cour explain. "I did not try to hide this fact and I was proud of what I did. The only way to keep the uprising from continuing and growing larger because of my actions was to do what my brother did. I was stripped of my tribe name, stripped of my family and all that I owned and I was exiled. Never to be seen again. Never to set foot on our homeworld again. I hated my brothers for that. I hated them terribly for not understanding how I felt. For not getting revenge with me. Six thousand years I carried that hate... until the day I ordered my men to kill one of my brothers and his two sons because of an order I received while I was stationed on Lycavore. Just before you arrived. I tried to rescind it almost immediately but the men had already left. It was an order from your father."

Yuri's gasp filled the bedroom and her eyes grew huge in disbelief. "Pa'cour!" She stammered. "You are..."

Pa'cour nodded his head slowly. "Cha'talla is my brother Yuri. T'lolt is my brother."

"But how did... no one ever knew. No one ever discovered this!" She gasped.

Pa'cour shook his head slowly. "I altered my facial appearance somewhat and took a new identity. Pa'cour is a common enough name... I just had to give this person a history. Which I did. Cha'talla's brother Pa'cour was listed as killed in the Trebin Uprising and removed from the rolls of the Immortals. When T'lolt came to Lycavore he knew immediately who I was but he said nothing. He protected me and in my centuries old hate I took his sons from him and nearly killed him as well."

"Does he know... does he know you gave the order?" Yuri asked.

Pa'cour nodded. "I'm sure he does." He said.

"But if you... if you ordered his sons killed... why would they help you now. After all this time and what happen on Lycavore." Yuri asked.

"Akruxians. Immortals. We followed a very strict code of honor even after your father changed our world. A code we lived by and would never violate. No matter what." Pa'cour said. "Part of that code of honor is to grant one request to an exile before he must leave. Only one. I... I never requested anything. I spit on Cha'talla when he offered me this and I walked away from him. I never looked back."

"Why are you so sure he will... after all this time... after all that has happened." Yuri gasped. "Why are you so sure he will honor it now?"

“Nalavi.” Pa'cour said. “He showed you Cha'talla’s speech.”

“Yes.”

Pa'cour nodded. “I was the brother he was speaking of Yuri. That last part of his message was meant for me.”

Yuri shook her head. “*A l'Ze'zhuanth Sanguine!*” She gasped. (By the ancient vampire lords.)

Pa'cour chuckled. “Yes... I find myself saying that as well.”

Yuri looked up at him. “Ok... that issue aside for the moment... how do you propose to have Androcles Leonidas remove the bounty on my head my *Du'ased M'ranndii*? No matter how you calculate it... I am still responsible for what Dante and Javier did to his sister Zarah.”

Pa'cour nodded his head. “Yes... but I have something that they will want far more than your death.” He said as he began getting out of bed.

Yuri’s face twisted into a confused expression and she watched him pad naked across her room. Her eyes admired the way his back muscles moved and how his immense cock dangled between his thighs giving her an incredible view of his tight, powerful ass as well. She shook her head quickly to clear her thoughts as he bent down to pick up his personal data pad. “While hearing you say that gives me more confidence than ten seconds ago, just what do you have that they could want more than me?”

Pa'cour moved back to the bed and sat on the edge as he was typing on the pad. Yuri moved across the bed and pressed her front to his back as she rested her jaw on his shoulder. He held up the pad finally and looked at her. “This.” He said.

Yuri’s eyes nearly fell out of her skull as she snatched the pad from his hand. “By all that is holy Pa'cour!” She almost shouted. “How?”

“Your father tasked my Immortal squad with retrieving them and destroying what remained.” He said. “We would not allow them to remain the way they were or follow those orders. They were honored enemies who fought with courage and honor. We took them aboard our ship, cleaned their wounds and them wrapped them in satin silks before sealing their bodies within three vacuum chambers. I choose the spot to seal them away and we conducted a simple Akruvian ceremony. They have been there ever since and I am the only one still alive who knows the location. The moon is a day’s trip from here.”

“But why...”

Pa'cour took the pad from her again. “Because no matter how you view them my beautiful Yuri... they are just as bound by honor as we are. It is in our blood. Our very beings.” Pa'cour got to his feet. “When I tell Androcles Leonidas that I will return to the Lycavorian people the perfectly preserved bodies of their King Resumar, his Queen and concubine, he will not hesitate for a moment to do what I ask.”

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

EARTH

DROW CITY OF ABBIL

SEVENTEEN KILOMETERS WEST OF EDEN CITY

The second of three newly established Drow cities was a flourishing center for commerce and rest. A dozen of the largest Drow Families had agreed to pool their resources and effort to form this city and with the blessing of their Queen, Abbil had been born. Eight years after it had been formed the population was now well over seventy thousand. A mixture of Drow elves, Wood elves and High elves combined with human and Lycavorian citizens made up the vast majority of permanent citizens. The City Council was made up of representatives from the twelve Drow families and six other elves and humans. Abbil was a Drow city and as with any of the three Drow cities it had very strict laws. Many of the laws were the same or very similar to Earth and Union laws as a whole, but like Sparta, the Drow cities were very harsh on those who were not there to enjoy themselves and preferred to violate established laws. While crime was not a large problem at all, it was still a small issue. Shops and stores were very active and the Riyal flowed abundantly within the city from contracts and commerce. Abbil was home to four very large resorts that catered to the person who wished for peace and quiet within the beautiful and mountainous terrain that the city was built within. Foodstuffs from

every culture within the Union had come here and were bought and sold. Several Amarian taverns had been opened, one Limian trader, a Folcani trinket store and half a dozen other alien species had come here and opened shops or different restaurants. Abbil was rapidly making a name for itself across the entire Union as the place to come for solitude, security and peace at a very reasonable cost.

Which is exactly the reason Panos had chosen this location. Abbil was also home to the secondary command center for all of Earth. Looking at it from the outside you would never know that the facilities above ground and those below had anything to do with the military. The Drow were masters of hiding things and they had outdone themselves here. It appeared like any resort to those who didn't know any better. Pools, games, restaurants and large entertainment areas on the surface. Yet walk through a plain looking door that you weren't supposed to and suddenly you would find yourself staring at several stern face Drow who were not guests at all. Of course, you had to find these doors first.

They had arrived secretly over the last three hours and now sat in the main conference room beneath the largest of the three pools. The room was furnished with a massive oval table and several couches and chairs along the walls, able to seat fully sixty men and women if it was needed. An entire counter held food and drinks which could serve those same people, though now it held only coffee, fruit and Danishes for it was still early in the morning. Panos looked around the table as the others talked softly with each other. Aihola sat to the left of Charles Taylor, who sat next to Selene and Lynwe on his right. Tareif sat on Aihola's left with the Drow Senator Daba beside him. Dilios and Arete sat nearest to him, Thr'won, Helen's second in command if you will, beside Arete. Thr'won had risen to a position of some power within the Union for her actions during the Battle for Earth and afterwards. She was the senior mage for Sparta and acted in Helen's stead when she was off Earth. Aihola would speak for Tarifa as the Governor of Sparta Panos knew. Her word would be considered Tarifa's for they were very much mates with each other as well as to Isra, and when one spoke they both spoke. Daba had been somewhat surprised when Panos contacted her, but he quickly explained that her family was now tied to the Leonidas family for all time because of Lu'ria, and the Drow were held in very high regard by both Martin and Andro even before Lu'ria became a Princess of the Union. The other nine occupants of the room, five men and four women, four humans, three elves and two Hadarians, were all members of Earth's senior political leadership. The two Hadarians had come to Earth within a year of Earth becoming a member of the Union. They had remained to help in whatever manner they could and had soon come to love the open spaces and clean air. They were now well respected members of Earth's leadership and citizens of their adopted planet.

Panos got to his feet. "We should probably begin." He spoke drawing all their attention to him.

"Panos... where is Deia?" Charles asked. "Shouldn't she be here as well?"

"The Kavalians arrived very early this morning and it would look odd if both Deia and I were gone from Sparta." Panos answered. "She knows why we have gathered and she approves of whatever decisions we come too."

"In regards to what Panos?" Selene asked.

"Pusintin." Panos told her bluntly.

Charles snorted loudly. "Well then let's cut right to it!" He snapped. Eighty-three years old and still as spry as a man forty years his junior, Charles Taylor had been elected President of Earth with the second highest vote count behind only Selene and her second term. He was a man who was adored by humans and elves alike. "I have spoken to all four Senators from Earth who hold a Union seat and not one of them has any intention of voting in favor of that retched man and his dubious goals! As the elf Senator Co'moro told me... Pusintin can go suck a comet's tail!"

This brought a round of laughter from everyone in the room and Aihola and Selene both leaned into Charles.

"You have such a way with words Charles." Selene told him.

"I do try." He said with a grin. "The fact of the matter is... not one person on this planet would support Pusintin. We have come too far as a group of people, as a planet to let that foul man set things back. Everyone knows his only intent is to use this child with Queen For'mya to gain control of the Union. We all know who would give the orders. No one is willing to allow him to destroy three decades of work. Not after what we have been through together."

“That is the one of the other reasons we are here.” Panos spoke. “All of you know what has taken place with For'mya. She has been used and manipulated in the cruelest of ways for a female who is wolf. They have used her natural instincts against her. What are you hearing from the people in regards to this?”

“Before or after you listen to them curse this traitor Pusintin in two or three languages Panos?” Daba spoke now. “I know I can speak for the Drow...” Daba looked at Aihola. “My Queen?”

Aihola nodded. “Please Daba... we are all equals here.”

Daba turned back to Panos. “There is not a single Drow, or any we call family and friend, that believes for an instant that Queen For'mya betrayed her family and the King willingly. There have been whispers from many Drow within our militia ranks who speak of Am'uur and Lu'ria leading some daring raid to retrieve her. No one among the Drow will support Pusintin or any puppet government he may install if the Union Senate votes in his favor; which I can't see happening unless they all leave their common sense on the toilet somewhere the day of the vote.”

Panos smiled and nodded his head as the others laughed softly. “Indeed.” He said. “I can tell you that will not be necessary. Androcles has given me permission to inform all of you what is happening now and what will happen over the course of the next few days. Some of us in this room know a little of it, but what many of you do not know is that Martin is very much alive and right now in The Wilds searching for where the Kavalians have taken For'mya so that he can get her back.” Panos smiled at the expressions of wonder and shock from those who were not privy to this information before now and just before they all began to throw questions at him in a barrage he held up his hand. “Allow me to continue...” He waited for them to settle back into their chairs, their faces alone showing the happiness many felt. “This information has been kept very secret for the sole purpose of keeping For'mya alive. Pusintin would not hesitate to kill For'mya if he knew Martin was alive, and in order to do everything he could to keep his elven mother alive, Andro ordered that this information remain within their immediate family. It was Andro's decision since Martin has not been on Earth since the attacks. Now Martin was actually injured and out of it for a time but he is fully recovered now. It is also why we have not gone through with a coronation for Androcles.”

“By the gods Panos... this is unbelievable!” One of the elves spoke from his chair.

Panos nodded his head. “Yes... it has been a very hard month since their initial attack.” He spoke.

“Androcles has dealt with far too much for a young man his age to tolerate.” Charles spoke softly. “Being born aware... having to follow in his father's footsteps and shadow.” He looked at Panos. “How is he holding up?”

Panos nodded. “Surprisingly well.” He answered. “He has an extensive support network and he commands almost as much loyalty from the *Durcunusaan* and the people as Martin. His words on Hadaria saw his popularity soar throughout the entire Union according to those silly polls that Deia's staff conducts.”

Charles shook his head with a grin. “I hate polls.” He muttered.

Panos chuckled as he settled into his chair. “Yes... so do I. When all else fails Andro turns to Sadi and his mates.” He told them looking directly at Daba. “They will always be able to sooth him.”

Daba nodded. “As it should be.” She said.

Tareif leaned forward at the table. “Now why don't you tell us why we are really here Panos?” He spoke. “We could have told everyone that Martin was alive by vid conference. This meeting is about something else isn't it?”

Panos nodded his head. “Indeed it is Tareif my friend.” He said. He picked up the data pad that rested by his arm and plugged it into the slot on the elevated section of the table in front of him. “The Union Senate will meet and vote in four days time. The Kavalians asked for an extension on the vote, no doubt in order to try and garner support for their cause as well as conduct their searches, and both Deia and Andro agreed.”

“Why?” Charles asked.

Panos touched the pad activating a large holo display on the monitor wall. “Because the extra four days will benefit us more than the Kavalians Charles. Regardless of what the Union Senate votes... Andro has no intention of reacting to what the Kavalians may do anymore. The instant the vote is completed, regardless of the outcome, Androcles is going to launch a surprise attack into Kavalian space against targets he has already selected. He is essentially going to beat the Kavalians to the punch and try to cripple their ability to come at us from more than one location.”

Tareif snorted approvingly and that was followed by a nod from Aihola and Lynwe both. "It's about time." Tareif growled.

Panos thought he was going to have to sell this plan of Andro's to the men and women in this room, but he should have known better. He watched as knowing glances were passed between Charles and Selene, as well as Charles and Aihola, and finally Charles and Tareif, who nodded at his human President.

Finally Charles turned to look at Panos. "It comes in very handy when, as President of Earth, I have access to so many different people who think along the same lines as I do." He said. "Tell Androcles... tell Andro that all he needs to do is say the word and all of Earth stands behind him. Right to the very end, whatever it may be."

Panos nodded his head. "You don't know how glad I am to hear you say that." He spoke. "Because Andro wanted you to stand beside the Senator who will deliver the speech explaining why Androcles is going to plunge us into a war we don't want."

Dilios sat beside Panos and shook his head. "I would not want to be that person." He said glibly.

Panos looked at him and his smile grew larger. "I'm sorry you feel that way Dilios... because you are the one Andro choose to deliver that speech to the entire Union."

Dilios's eyes grew as wide as anyone had ever seen. "Me?" He gasped loudly. "Panos... I... there are many who are far better qualified than me to give such a speech. I hate to stand before the Spartan Senate and speak! I can't do this!"

"Andro disagrees and so does Deia." Panos spoke.

"Why?" Dilios asked astounded.

"You are a Lycavorian Spartan and the only surviving member of the Spartan Senate from when Martin's father ruled. There are many of us still alive from that time but only you had the distinction of serving King Leonidas first hand." Panos said in reply. "Regardless of what you may think my friend, that fact alone carries great weight within the Union. Among many circles."

Dilios stared at him for a long moment, the quiet in the room almost unnerving. Finally he looked at Arete and then back to Panos. "I would be honored." He spoke.

Panos nodded. "Good." He motioned to the large monitor. "I have brought the parts of Andro's plan that concern us and he wanted me to go over them carefully with everyone. When this meeting is over you will return and begin letting your subordinates know what will happen. Charles... since the vast majority of Union Senators will be here on Earth and you are Earth's President, Andro has asked that you be the one to acknowledge the vote count and announce the findings."

Charles nodded. "Consider it done." He stated.

Panos smiled. "Then I suggest we get to work for there is much to be done and little time to do it."

"Panos..." Charles asked. "Where exactly will Androcles be when we are making all these announcements?"

Panos met his gaze and smiled. "He is a Leonidas... and he leads from the front." Panos said simply.

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

"*Feravomir*, are we... my father and I... our family... are we cursed?" Androcles asked.

Helen looked up at him as they walked along the edge of the water, the scent of the blue/green Laconia Gulf on the breeze and filling their nostrils. They had returned to Cranae Island, leaving Arzoal and Dargoo with each other for they had much to discuss and Helen had no intention of spoiling what she knew deep down her bonded sister needed and desired. She enjoyed these times, whether it be with Martin walking along the Evrotas River or the few times she had done this very thing with Andro on Cranae Island. It was during these times where she discovered the deepest thoughts of the two men she loved most in the universe. It was during these times when all humor and playfulness vanished and they shared with her things that they only shared with their mates. Items that occupied the deepest regions of their minds and their emotions.

"Cursed?" Helen asked softly. "What would make you say that Androcles?"

“It just seems sometimes that our name is synonymous with trouble. With discord.” He answered her. “Grandfather Leonidas fought his entire life did he not? My father for the better part of the life he knew when he came out of the sleep chamber. And it seems now that I will be forced to begin a war now as well.”

“You think you are the only Leonidas to have these very same thoughts?” Helen asked him gently. “Do you think you are the only Leonidas to doubt themselves and their decisions; their actions and preparations before they are to commit our people to war?”

Andro smiled gently. “Somehow I just don’t see grandfather Leonidas or my own father doubting themselves.”

“Then you would be wrong.” Helen told him. “I will share with you something I told your father on the eve of The Battle for Earth. Something I told your grandfather as well... do not be afraid to lose Andro, for the moment you become afraid to lose something or someone, you will become afraid to act. And when *you* become afraid to act... all will be lost.”

“And it falls to me because father is not here.” Andro said.

“Yes.” Helen said.

“I just never expected... I never expected to have so many lives riding on my decisions so soon in my life *Feravomir*.” Andro told her.

Helen nodded. “Frightening isn’t it?”

“Downright terrifying.” He told her.

Helen took his hand and stopped walking, turning to look up into his face. “Androcles... you have a gift. Elynth has a gift. The gifts are each other. Your father and Torma are bonded so very deeply, but you and Elynth... the two of you are special. What happened between you... it is not something that can be explained. Dorian and Ryner will experience it to some extent, but you and Elynth... it is like you are she and she is you.” She smiled. “Am I making any sense to you?” She asked.

Andro nodded. “Far more than you realize *Feravomir*.” He said.

“It is different than your father and Torma. Both of you are different. The name Leonidas is not cursed Androcles... it is blessed. You... your father, your mothers, your siblings, all of you represent all that is good and beautiful to so many people and so many species. They view you not as their Crown Prince or their Royal family; they view you just as they view themselves and so many others. You care.”

“Will they still care when men and women begin to die because I have begun a war of choice?” Andro asked.

Helen’s eyes darkened. “This is not a war of choice Andro!” She spat out. “This is a war of necessity! One not of our choosing! If we do nothing the outcome will be far more terrible to contemplate. If you do not do this then the Kavalians will invade us! You know that just as well as I do! You are simply doing what you must to keep them from destroying all that we have built. That our people have built. Your uncle would tear it all down just for his vanity and quest for power.”

“And the future? What about that?” Andro asked.

“I can tell you that a tough-minded optimism is best.” Helen said reaching up to take his face in her hands. “The future is not shaped by people who don’t really believe in the future. Men and women of vitality and courage have always been prepared to bet their futures, even their lives, on ventures of unknown outcome Androcles. If they had all looked before they leaped, we would still be crouched in caves sketching animal pictures on the wall. That was always your father’s way, and though you do not wish to admit it, it is your way as well my boy. The decision is now yours Androcles Leonidas. I suspect no matter what, you will do your father proud.”

“I am still so much like him no matter how I try to not be, aren’t I *Feravomir*?” Andro said.

Helen smiled and nodded. “Yes... and both of you are far more like your grandfather Leonidas than even you realize. I suspect more like Resumar as well. At least that is what Deia tells me.” She told him.

Andro took a deep breath. “I will do what I must.” He said.

Helen nodded. “Yes you will.” She said. “Now walk me back to the villa and tell me what it is your brother Resumar is going to do. Shiria is very important to us now and she must be protected at all costs.”

Andro nodded as they began walking again. “And she will be.” He said as Helen took his arm and they headed back towards the villa.

Sadi was watching from the patio doors and she smiled when she felt Andro's emotions become calmer. Helen had started to fix his wildly doubtful thoughts and tonight Sadi and the rest of them would finish what she started. She turned when she smelled Ne'Veha, Lu'ria and Carisia enter the main room and approach her.

If someone told her a year ago where she would be right now, Sadi Leonidas would have laughed at him or her without a doubt. Finding Andro again had brought everything into utter clarity. That she could love him so powerfully and with such absolute devotion was something she had accepted and embraced the moment his fangs sank into her flesh and hers into his and they became anomes. That their lives would now include four other such beautiful women did not make her bat an eye in the least. This was their destiny, their fate, and Sadi had surrendered herself to destiny the moment she draped that pendant Elynth had given her around her neck twenty-five years ago. Andro was her anome, but these three women here and Caliria so far away, they were part of who Sadi was. Who Andro was. The love that they shared now and would well into the future was unquestioning in every way, for Andro as well as each other.

Sadi took the mug of coffee Ne'Veha offered as they came up to pressed close to her. Lu'ria looked over past Sadi's shoulder and saw Andro and the *Feravomir* walking towards the villa still deep in conversation.

"His spirits have lifted." Lu'ria said softly turning back to Sadi.

Sadi nodded as she sipped the coffee. "Some things even our attentions will not make go away." She told them.

"Our attentions?" Carisia said. "Last night he gave *us* the attention. Not the other way around. I don't think my legs stopped quivering until mid morning."

"Nor mine." Ne'Veha said with a smile before turning to Sadi. "Maybe now you should tell us what all that was about with this Ulana woman this morning *KertaGai*."

Sadi nodded and glanced back over her shoulder one last time at Andro before taking Ne'Veha's hand in hers and leading them into the villa. "Ulana was the one who Andro was seeing before we discovered each other again on Apo Prime. He had been seeing her on and off for several months before he ended it the morning we saw one another again. As you all know we have not been apart since."

"Was she a Senator then as well?" Carisia asked.

Sadi shook her head. "No. She only became a Senator when she was elected to fill her father's role. He was killed in the Senate Office Building when it was destroyed. Ulana won the emergency election. So easy to do when no ones runs against you."

"So why is she here now?" Lu'ria asked.

"The obvious political portions aside... Ulana is an Alpha female." Sadi told them as they ended up in the main room and settled to the couch. "Just like all of us... but she is also a pureblood like me. Her upbringing was... unique."

"You mean she is a spoiled upaee who had everything handed to her on a silver platter." Ne'Veha spoke.

Sadi smiled and nodded her head. "Essentially yes." She answered. "She considers herself better than me."

"But what she did..." Lu'ria asked. "I thought that was... I thought it was an insult to do that to a male who is already mated."

Sadi nodded. "And it is. Ulana however... she comes from a certain class of pureblood who believe they are better than everyone else. Most of them claim some of the highest Purity Concentration Coefficients within the Union. Or so they say."

"This is not true?" Carisia asked.

"Oh... it's true in some cases." Sadi said. "It's easy enough to test as well. This group however, they use their PCC number and their supposed ancestral lineage back to the original Lycavorian bloodlines as a way to show their pre-eminence. It's utterly ridiculous considering any Lycavorian can tie their family background to Lycavore in some fashion at least." Sadi sipped the coffee once more before handing the mug back to Ne'Veha. "They try and use this as the reason why they are better than everyone. Ulana thinks she is a stronger Alpha female than me when it comes to our PCC, and therefore she believes she should be with Andro and not me."

"Is she?" Lu'ria asked.

Sadi shrugged. "I don't know. I had the PCC test done when I was a small child, but I never knew the results. I don't really care either." She said. "The results are never conclusive and can vary at different times in a Lycavorian's life. Ulana targeted just me because she knows you and our Drow mistress are recently turned

and your PCC will not stop changing until the transformation is fully complete within you. She doesn't consider Carisia a threat because she is a pureblood vampire. She only considers me the threat and therefore she is targeting me. She knew I would be the only one who could feel her aura as she shamelessly pulsed Andro."

"Why now?" Ne'Veha asked. She was more analytical being a female elf from Elear. "Did *Saradasaar nubous* her so good that she finally realizes what she is missing?"

Sadi laughed with the others and looked at her. "Well... you must admit *SirsanGai*... he definitely knows how to curl our toes and make us scream. It is so very rare to discover a man so gifted in length and girth and who knows exactly how to use it." She said.

"How true." Carisia spoke.

Lu'ria shrugged her slim shoulders. "I have known only Andro so I can not make that determination." She said with a smile.

"I think it is probably some sort of a political move." Sadi said finally. "Especially now considering they think Andro will become King."

"She thinks to insinuate herself into a position of some power and recognition?" Lu'ria said nodding. "She is in for a surprise I imagine."

Sadi nodded with a chuckle. "Yes she is. She can think about it all she likes." She said. "Andro loathes her now after what she did... more than he ever has."

"He felt her doing this?" Ne'Veha asked.

Sadi nodded. "Why do you think he acted as he did?" Sadi answered remembering their kiss and how her blood burned in her veins at that moment. He could cause any of them to melt with just a simple kiss. "Our *Saradasaar* will always defend us... against all enemies, no matter what it takes."

Carisia grinned. "The look on her face when Andro was kissing you was priceless." She said.

"I will deal with Ulana and her games." Sadi spoke confidently. "I'm the only one who can face her evenly in that regard. I fully expect that she will pull some silly stunt in order to try and make others see that she should be with Andro while making me look bad. She will learn very quickly that her pathetic attempts to entice him have only succeeded in pissing me off. When she makes the mistake of going public with her fool game then I will respond."

"What will you do?" Ne'Veha asked eagerly. "Can we watch?"

Sadi looked at her and laughed at her eagerness. "Oh *SirsanGai*, all of you are going to help me show that fat cow that she can not compete against any of us. Oh yes... Ulana will learn very quickly that she is in way over her head. She will learn this very quickly." She said. "How much embarrassment she wants to face before she actually realizes it is going to be up to her?"

EARTH

SPARTA

WESTERN FACE OF TAYGETE MOUNTAIN RANGE

HOME OF SENATOR ICHO

Icho looked up from what he was reading when his senior aide walked into his office and then turned to lock and secure the door. Icho immediately turned and rose to his feet, moving to the large bay type window that overlooked the western part of Sparta far below his mountain villa. The view was magnificent and he thoroughly enjoyed the nights when he would stand on his balcony and overlook the city he would have a hand in ruling one day. Now however he touched the control pad on the side of the bay window and the clear glass suddenly became very opaque in color, effectively hiding whoever was in his office.

He turned back to see his aide move to the large wet bar and pour two glasses of Spartan wine before turning to him and moving up to the desk where he held out one glass to Icho.

"They are beginning to arrive." The aide spoke.

Icho nodded as he sipped the sixty year old wine and moved back to his desk and settled into the chair. "What have you found Aleus?" He asked finally lifting his eyes to look at the man who had been with him for nearly five hundred years now.

Aleus leaned forward and held out the data pad. "I pressed a little harder on a contact of mine within King Yelu Hospital after something you said Ulana spoke of. Her PCC number is indeed one hundred and ninety-six give or take five points with the usual variance thrown in."

Icho looked up. "So? Given their history I'm not surprised. Maraud was from the original bloodlines on Lycavore. He turned traitor to our people and became a mercenary. You know well the history of Maraud and the King's punishment of him. It was the reason I chose Ulana's father once I discovered his relation to him. He was so concerned that the knowledge would get out and ruin his legacy it was easy enough to turn him. What does her PCC have to do with anything?"

"We know that the Prince's PCC is two hundred and seventy-three with the five point variance." Aleus spoke. "Senator... Sadi Leonidas's PCC is two hundred and forty-nine give or take the variance of five."

Icho's eyes grew a little wider. "Two hundred forty-nine?" He stammered. "Aleus... that would mean...?"

Aleus nodded his head. "That she descends from one of the original five ruling bloodlines for only those in the original five ruling bloodlines had PCCs over two hundred and twenty-five. That was determined by Queen Anja and Eurin the Hadarian Divine One nearly twenty-five years ago after thousands of tests and their facts are indisputable." Aleus sipped his wine. "What you said the *Feravomir* told Ulana is very correct. Ulana is about to enter into a world she does not belong in if she intends to try and challenge this Sadi for the Prince. She will end up embarrassing herself to the extreme."

"Your information is certain?" Ichō asked.

Aleus nodded. "The data is all there on that pad." He answered. "Ulana thinks this Sadi is somehow beneath her. While she may come from a family that has chosen the lifestyle that they have, their bloodline is essentially royalty. Ulana does not have a chance at luring the Prince to her, even if he was willing, which I understand from what you have told me he is not. Sadi Leonidas's blood is far too powerful, and combine that with the fact they are Anomes..." Aleus shook his head. "Ulana only end up embarrassing herself at best, getting her ass handed to her at worst."

Icho looked at him. "So you believe in the ancient myth of Anomes? I never knew that Aleus." He asked.

Aleus nodded. "To a large extent yes. It has never come up in any of our conversations so it is not something I volunteered. I may believe in it... but I support what we are doing and have been doing Senator."

Icho sat back. "No worries my friend... you have proven your loyalty to me far more times than I care to recall." He paused for a moment. "I've never really delved into that myth Aleus. Legends and myths never really interested me. Tell me about it."

"The mystical side of it or the scientific side of it?" Aleus asked.

"Both."

"The mystical side is easy enough. It is believed that when a male claims a female under the Centennial of the Moon and they share blood at the peak of their pleasure, a powerful bond within Mindvoice is formed within their minds. It allows them to do things others cannot. They can then pass this down through their children." Aleus told him. "The scientific side is a little more detailed but the data is better explained. The sharing of blood between Lycavorians with PCCs as high as the five original bloodlines does in fact make a bond. At the molecular level. According to the Hadarian scientists who conducted the tests on King Leonidas and Queen Aricia after he reclaimed his father's throne, when their blood merged it actually became purer in many respects. It is very possible that the King and Queen Aricia's PCCs may have gone even higher than what they were when they were tested. As we all know, the purer the blood the more powerful a Mindvoicer you will be. Gorgo's PCC was two hundred and eighty-three when she was tested. She and the King refused to allow a test on the remains of King Leonidas the First, so the scientists had to extrapolate his PCC. They estimate it was within two points of three hundred which is the highest our instruments can measure, considering that the Prince's father's PCC was two hundred and ninety-three when tested for this research. And this test was done within a year of them sharing blood if the dates are correct, so it is very possible that their PCCs could be much higher."

"That would put Androcles's father over three hundred." Ichō said. "I thought you said our instruments couldn't calculate over three hundred."

Aleus nodded. “They can’t. Now you see why Ulana will get her *mida* handed to her? It’s very possible that Androcles’s PCC is even higher than when it was tested shortly after he was born. Given that possibility and considering it has been just about a year since they became anomes, it’s very likely Sadi’s PCC is much higher as well. We only test once and that is within a year of a child’s birth. If they are of the five original bloodlines their PCC will be over two hundred and twenty-five when they are first tested. Ulana’s was not. We’re setting her up to take a very big fall Senator.”

Icho nodded. “Better her than me.” He said coldly. “There is no way to boast her PCC so as to have a chance?”

Aleus shook his head. “Not to my knowledge and the Hadarian research didn’t even go in that direction.”

Icho nodded as he placed the pad on his desk. “Then we will need to work around her.” He said thoughtfully. “If Ulana keeps the attention on her... it is better for us. Especially if they discover where her bloodline leads. I have no connections to Maraud, and nothing her father did for me can be tied back to me. I was very careful to insure that Laustinos and Ulana’s father were the ones out in front on this. My contacts to them have already been eliminated.”

“Ulana’s father was no fool and he covered his tracks very well, but the *Krypteria* will eventually discover the part he played in helping Laustinos. The few rumors my contacts have heard coming out of the *Krypteria* speak of someone working with Laustinos, so they already suspect he had an accomplice.” Aleus said. “The vampire witch that the Prince put in command of the *Krypteria* until Armetus recovers was trained by Armetus himself. And she is just as ruthless as him if the reports are accurate.”

Icho nodded. “And then they will have discovered their traitors and we will be safely unknown.” He stated smugly. “And then I will be in a position to help Pusintin even more in bringing down the Union.”

Aleus looked at him. “How so?”

Icho smiled. “Ulana’s father had a seat on the Defense Committee Aleus.” He spoke. “I helped him to obtain it. It was granted to him by Deia as a gift in a way. To keep him better under her thumb. Or so she thought.”

“Then he would have had intimate knowledge of military workings and such.” Aleus spoke.

Icho shook his head. “He was on the Committee... but the King was smarter than that. Anything truly important he kept to those he trusted implicitly. Senator Dilios and Arete among them. When Ulana falls and everything is brought out into the open then I will be in a position to gracefully offer my knowledge and service on the Committee.”

“So we are going to let Ulana be the fool and then you will fill the spot she now holds?” Aleus said.

Icho smiled. “Yes... that is exactly what we will do. And when I move up... you will move into my position, with my glowing recommendation of course, and increase our power even more.”

“Does Pusintin know why we are helping him?” Aleus asked.

Icho shook his head. “No. Only you and I have that knowledge.” He answered.

“And what about Senator Silele?” Aleus asked.

“Fuck her! I never liked the bitch that peace loving *upae* to begin with. She can go down with Ulana.”
Icho snapped with a smile.

ULU HORNET

ULU BISMARCK

THE WILDS

2nd and 3rd ARIZONA ASSAULT WINGS DETACHED

**TDY COMMANDERS PRINCE ARRARN LEONIDAS; PRINCESS NARICE LEONIDAS; GENERAL
CHA'TALLA**

UNION LIAISON COMMANDER JANON

Janon turned his head when the doors to the bridge opened and he saw Prince Arrarn and Princess Narice enter with Princess Toria, General Cha'talla and Cha'talla's sons Lynom and Fash'ka. Narice and Toria walked on either side of Arrarn, clinging tightly to his hands while Cha'talla was talking softly to Lynom and

Fash'ka. Janon had to shake his head at the irony of everything that had happened in the past year. Miranda putting him in command of this ship as opposed to the captain who had been slated for her. He would get a later ship from the Block II Group which the man seemed genuinely happy about. Discovering the Immortals on Kranek and what they had built. The history behind the way they looked and then the magical serum that had returned them to how their people had looked before that monster Veldruk had twisted their race. Cha'talla was bonded to a dragon, one of his sons was married to Normya Leonidas and the other had a half elf wife who he had rescued and from what he had seen was every bit as tough as her Akruvian Immortal husband. It was all quite overwhelming and yet everyone was acting as if it was the most natural thing in the universe. He grinned to himself as he recalled a Folcani diplomat saying that Lycavorians were the most adaptable species he had ever seen. That nothing seemed to faze them. If only that ambassador knew how right he was.

Janon rose as they approached his command chair. He held out the data pad to Narice; for she was truly the one in command here. This was her mission and Prince Andro and Miranda had made it very clear that her orders came as if they were from him and Manda. He was happy to see that she let him do everything she was unfamiliar with and her stock had risen quite a bit in the last three days since she had come aboard.

“Admiral Pontal sent the signal.” Janon told her. “He has returned to his command ship and his fleet and he is issuing his orders now.”

Narice looked at the pad and nodded her head. “Are we able to verify this Commander?” She asked.

Janon motioned them over to a holo star chart and he typed on the wide control panel once next to it. “We were able to tap into the two sensor relays that you suggested.” He said. “Security wasn't as tight as I would have thought.”

“They are secondary sensor relays.” Narice explained. “The High Coven does not put as much effort into securing secondary sensor platforms within High Coven space unless they consider it necessary.”

Janon nodded. “Apparently not.” He said. “He must have begun issuing orders as soon as he returned to his ship. It appears most of his fleet was in the exact location he told us. One of the three transmissions he sent was to this *BLOOD REVERENCE* here.” Janon touched the star chart. “Six minutes later all of their *DARK BROOD* Frigates and *BLOODRUNNER* Heavy Frigates engaged their Shrouds.”

Cha'talla nodded. “Standard practice in preparing for combat operations.” He spoke. “They will take up picket locations to cover for the main fleet.”

Janon nodded. “That’s what I figured. The other two transmissions were both sent to *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts in two of the adjoining systems.”

“More of his combined fleet.” Narice said softly. “Or other officers he says follow him.”

Janon nodded. “The remaining ships within this sector formed into three distinct action groups.” He stated as his finger twirled around three different spots on the star chart. “The *HORNET*'s sensors are good... but not that good. Without an active scan we can't be sure but using the older systems on this array we estimate at least forty-three *BLOOD REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts, an equal number of *REVERENCE*-Class Dreadnoughts and between three and four hundred *ORIC*-Class Heavy Cruisers and *BLOODLETTER*-Class medium Cruisers. We weren't able to get an accurate number of the frigates but we'll assume a similar number.” Janon looked at her. “Quite the force this Admiral Pontal commands.” He said.

Narice nodded. “He is one of the oldest and most experienced officers in the fleet.” She said. “When he made a suggestion... it was usually heeded.”

“And he said he has six others who feel and think as he does?” Arrarn said.

“Many of the High Coven officers tended to associate with those of like mind.” Narice explained. “It was always like that and it became even more prevalent when Robert Moran became Supreme Commander.”

“Class warfare.” Cha'talla said. “Pit the officers against one another and they will never be strong enough to usurp you.”

Narice nodded. “Exactly.”

Toria stepped forward now. “I recognized two of the other six names he mentioned.” She spoke. “They were two officers who the *Venorik Elghinn* investigated but never found anything solid to follow up on.”

“Why were they investigated?” Narice asked.

“Speaking out against your mother and the conduct of the war.” Toria answered her calmly. “Nothing was proven and no witnesses to their comments were ever found.”

Arrarn looked at her. “Coincidence?” He asked.

Toria shrugged. "If General Esavorna was as active as I suspect, no doubt he covered their tracks for them. He was co-commander of the Venorik *Elghinn* at the time."

"The more time that passes the more I believe we can trust him." Cha'talla spoke.

Narice nodded. "I agree. Having a turned female as his wife and the one who had his children is a huge decision." She said. "And I detected no signs that she was being forced to do or say anything against her will."

This time it was Cha'talla who nodded. "Nor I. Toria?" He asked her knowing her skills from the Venorik *Elghinn* would have given her the perception needed to pick this up.

Toria shook her head as well. "No. Pontal didn't flinch when she spoke openly. And did you notice how she kept clinging to his arm and whenever he looked at her his face softened?" She shook her head again. "Their relationship was true and honest."

"Why didn't you tell him what we are planning Princess?" Janon asked.

Narice met his gaze. "Let's just say I don't trust him completely as yet." She answered. "There is no reason for him to know all our plans. When we act, if his forces act with us then we will know where his loyalties lie. If not... we will still accomplish our mission and be ready to react if he moves against us."

Janon grinned at her now. "You are beginning to think more and more like a Leonidas everyday Princess." He said.

Narice looked at Arrarn. "It must be the company I'm keeping." She said with a smile.

Arrarn shrugged. "What can I say...? I'm addicting."

Narice smiled and looked at Janon. "I believe it's time Commander." She said.

"You do realize that no Union ship has ever gone where we are about to go." Janon said. "Let alone with an entire Task Force."

"There's a first time for everything." Narice said.

Janon chuckled. "Indeed there is." He spoke. "Indeed there is." He turned slightly to face across the bridge. "COM officer... burst the Task Force to prepare for sustained QRR operation! All ships to verify and confirm their coordinates and prepare to jump! We will be at Combat Stations the moment the jump is initiated!"

"Tactical Officer... two squadrons on Rapid Deployment Force 1! In the tubes ready for launch! Swap squadrons every hour until we secure from QRR operation!" Janon continued to issue orders. "Weapons! All missile tubes and batteries to priority standby! Give me M22A *SKIPPER*s in all even missile tubes! Standard Concussive Warheads in odd tubes! And spool up the PDTs as well!"

The COM officer turned. "Commander... Task Force signals ready sir!"

Janon turned back to Narice. "Princess?"

Narice nodded. "Let's do it."

Janon nodded. "Helm! Begin QRR targeted jumps! Take us to Uzu Ozeib 7!"

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN SEVENTY-EIGHT HOURS UNTIL H-HOUR

It had been unexpected for everyone, but as the Leonidas family stood and watched as father and oldest son embraced tightly, it came at the perfect time. Isabella and Anja had long suspected that Martin would not be able to stay away for very long once Dorian had been born, they knew their husband and mate too well, and they had not been disappointed. Yuriko had pushed OMEN THREE right to the edge in getting them back here to Earth in only eleven hours. As they had greeted their fellow Queens and lovers with embraces and passionate kisses, Martin was rolling on the floor of the lounge buried under the bodies of his smaller children including Dorian. The screams of happiness and joy had brought tears to their eyes as they watched. He clung tightest to Dorian and Bryon and all of them knew why as they welcomed Yuriko and Filrian into their fold once again. Their adopted daughter had been out from under their wing for too long on her own and no more would she lack the comfort and warmth of those she called family.

Word went out quickly via Mindvoice, even at the early hour, and within a few moments all of the Leonidas children were making their way to Dragon Mountain under the cover of darkness. The reunion was just what

they needed as a family and amidst all of the tears and words, the love they all felt for one another swept throughout mountain and affected even the hundreds of dragons present. It wasn't until father and oldest son were face to face that the laughter and happiness stopped for a moment. Then Martin was crushing Androcles to him, and small tears filled both their eyes as Andro didn't hesitate and returned the rib cracking hug. With the final tension broken, the Leonidas family was almost entirely back together, and it was only that single fact that tempered their reunion.

It was two hours before their mothers shooed the smaller children back to bed within the comforting walls of Dragon Mountain, with a promise from their father that he would see them in the morning before he left once more to retrieve their mother For'mya and their new brother and sister. It was two hours more before Eliani began the procession of the older children out of Dragon Mountain, Aricia and the Queens drawing Sadi and Andro's wives and mates into another lounge leaving just father and son, father and daughter and Bonded sisters present in the room.

Martin handed his oldest son a large mug of steaming coffee and then sat down next to Helen and across from him. "This job really sucks doesn't it?" He said as he sipped his own mug.

Andro looked at him. "I am beginning to see why you pounded into my head those things you did when I was younger." He answered him quickly. "As soon as you retrieve mother, you are more than welcome to it back father."

Helen grinned. "And believe me, he means it." She said looking at Martin.

Martin chuckled. "No doubt. Who is to say I just won't take your mothers and go?" He said.

"Martin you have been saying that for years." Helen said. "No one believes you now."

Martin snorted. "You wait... one of these days I will. I'm going to slip out during the night and leave it in your hands. I'm going to retire and enjoy the good life with six beautiful women."

"Give it another ten thousand years father." Andro said with a smirk. "Maybe by then I will have your temperament in dealing with all this."

Martin smiled and took a deep breath. "You want to tell me where your brother Arrarn is?" Martin asked him as he sat back on the couch.

Andro looked at him. "Do you trust me father?" He asked.

"I think you know the answer to that son." Martin said.

"Then trust me now and just know it is not something I did on a whim." Androcles answered him.

"I wouldn't approve of it would I?" Martin asked.

"Probably not... no." Andro told him honestly.

"Well if Narice and Cha'talla are involved I have a pretty good idea of what it is." Martin said. "And you're right... I don't approve."

Andro met his father's dark eyes. "Whether you approve or not is irrelevant at this time father because you are still dead. I am in charge for the moment."

Martin looked at Helen. "Was I this cocky when I first became King?" He asked.

Helen shook her head. "Worse." She said.

Martin sat forward. "Alright Andro... I won't pry anymore. No matter what it entails you would not have risked your brother without him having a surefire way out with Narice and Cha'talla. You realize this could all backfire on you?"

Andro nodded. "Yes."

"And it could cost us quite a bit?" Martin said.

"Not as much as you might think... but yes." Andro said.

"And you think it is still worth the risk?" Martin asked.

Andro nodded again. "Yes."

Martin sat back. "Ok... it's your ball... your game and your rules." He stated. "Now tell me about this Kavalian bastard that is supposedly helping your mother."

Andro sipped his coffee and shook his head. "They were not able to tell me much." He said. "As I told you earlier... he was nice to her. He hid their existence from others. They said he and mother spoke for hours about things they did not understand."

Why would he do this Andro? Torma asked from beside Elynth. She was leaning up against her father's thick muscular midsection with affection. He had not stopped stroking her wings or the back of her neck as a

father would and it had been many months and many terrible words since she had last felt his love for her so close.

Andro looked at him. "I asked Athani when I spoke to Resumar as we returned to Earth. She said it is because the Kavalians do not view a pregnancy such as mother's as healthy or normal. A male and female child. When this is discovered, the female child is usually killed while still within the womb so that the male child gets all of the nutrients and such from the mother and does not have to share."

It only affirms their views on females in general. Elynth spoke.

"Carians... the more we learn of them the more brutal they become." Helen spoke softly.

We need only look back to their origins. Arzoal spoke softly.

Martin turned his head quickly and pointed at her. "Don't you go and start blaming yourself again." He snapped. "You are not responsible for what Artre cooked up in his sick mind."

Arzoal laughed softly within Mindvoice. *I have finally let go of that part of my life Martin.* She spoke. *Thanks to your son and Elynth. No... I am only using it as a comparison. This is part of their genes... who they are.*

Martin looked at her and smiled. "I understand that congratulations are in order as well." He said. "I always wondered how long it was going to take Daurgo to finally make his feelings known."

Arzoal's flame colored eyes grew a little wider. *Why is it that everyone knew of Daurgo and his feelings for me... except me?*

Martin smiled again. "Because the only thing that mattered to you all of these years is keeping your kind safe and insuring their continued future." He said. "So... did he claim you?"

"Martin Leonidas that is so not your business!" Helen exclaimed.

I would like to know as well. Torma interjected.

Father! Elynth shouted.

We will need to tell our kind sooner or later. Torma spoke. *The joy that will sweep through our kind will be felt even on Elear.*

Arzoal shook her massive head and if a dragon could smile, the thin split of her muzzle that exposed her razor like teeth would have been it. *Yes.* She answered softly. *Yes he did. And to say it was glorious would be the understatement of the century. At least to me.*

"Good." Martin said. "Good." He turned back to Andro. "Now... about this Kavalian that is supposedly helping your mother?"

Andro nodded. "The only thing they were sure about was his name." He said. "Muton."

Arzoal's massive head snapped around to gaze at Androcles intently. It was a movement that did not go unnoticed. *Muton?* She questioned.

Helen leaned forward. "Does this name mean something to you sister?" She asked.

Andro are you sure that is what they said? Arzoal asked.

Andro nodded. "Yes. They were positive."

Arzoal turned her head away and blinked several times in quick succession. *That is... it is very strange.*

"Why?" Martin spoke.

Arzoal blinked one last time and looked at him. *Androcles has shown you what we talked of a few weeks ago?* She asked him.

Martin nodded. "Yes. Some of it I had already figured out." He told her. "The details you told him only filled in what I had put together overall. At least in some fashion. The Kavalians were a surprise, but you being a Pralor was not."

The Pralor who found me after I transferred by conscious mind to an egg... Arzoal spoke. *Her father was a member of our crew. The Senior Science Engineer. His name... his name was Muton.*

So it's a Pralor name grandmother? Elynth asked.

Arzoal nodded. *And not a common one. One of the first things we learned of as a child in our schools was about our first generation leaders. One of the three Pralors who founded the Science Agency was named Muton. Every few thousand generations that passed within his own descendants and they would name another after him. As I said... it was not a common name.*

Martin looked at her. "Arzoal... just for reflection purposes here... how long had the Pralors been around before all the bad stuff went down."

Our recorded history went back over three million years. Some scholars suspected our actual history went back as far as ten million years. She answered.

Martin nodded. "Ten million years." He said. "Wow... ok... that's a lot of years."

Andro looked at his father. "Now you know why we can't destroy it. Why we have to keep it. It has too much history father. The technological aspects aside... it has too much history to simply let it go. And part of it is our history for we carry Pralor blood within us." He said.

He looked at Andro. "I already came to the conclusion my first reaction was kneejerk. I just wanted to make sure Aikiro didn't get any of it." Martin said.

"Well... we failed in some regard with that." Andro spoke.

Martin shook his head. "What you and Resumar are doing is the right way to go. Yes... they got some data cores... but they wanted one of the avatars and they didn't succeed in that or getting the history cores as you say. No... you did the right thing Andro." He turned to look at Arzoal. "My biggest question right now is why would a Kavalian have a Pralor name? The inhibitor would affect her Mindvoice abilities but not her wolf senses. Kavalians can't fully hide when their scent changes and they lie. *Kinsoaurgai* is more than proficient enough to detect that."

Arzoal shook her head. *I do not know. If Shiria has not mentioned it then it can only be a coincidence. Perhaps the children got it wrong.*

"They were pretty adamant Elder Mother." Andro said. "Maybe they just mispronounced it?"

"It's possible." Helen said. "So soon after being granted awareness they may have either mispronounced or taken it out of context."

Martin looked at Andro. "Could you touch them again with a Mark II Andro?"

Andro shrugged. "With Elynth, Sadi in the connection with me probably... yes. It would be far easier with you and mother of course. The four of us could focus more and direct our search."

Martin shook his head. "If both of us are in the same connection anyone even remotely skilled in Mindvoice could detect us. Add if your mother and Sadi and it's a given."

Your father is correct Androcles. Arzoal spoke. *It is a risk just with you and Sadi within the same connection because she now burns almost as brightly as you within Mindvoice. With your shielding skills it tempers it a great deal... but your father and you... your mother and Sadi... even shielded, it would be like turning on a million lights in a dark room.*

Andro looked at his father. "Then the only question is where to direct our search. We don't know where they have taken her. She has not returned to Cabelir as I thought. Res burst that information to me late yesterday. Pusintin has returned but without mother." Andro rose to his feet and sipped his coffee. No one spoke as they watched him pace back and forth for a short time. All of them had seen him like this before and they knew his mind was running scenarios and options like a computer. He turned back to his father. "Nefoa." He said finally. "Nefoa?" Martin asked.

Andro nodded. "Grandfather Riall mentioned this before and I did not think anything of it. Nefoa is their most forward base and their most heavily fortified. It is where they have launched several invasions into High Coven space from."

Martin nodded. "So?"

"If you knew there was an active resistance within the Union father and you wanted to hold a very high level prisoner that the resistance could possibly try and rescue, would you put that prisoner on Earth? On Apo Prime?"

"No!" Martin answered instantly. "Too high profile. Too risky. I'd stick them in the most secure location as far out of the way as possible."

Andro nodded. "Yes... a forward base that has not only ships and ground troops but is also protected by numerous ODTs?"

Martin sat back in his chair. "The officer in charge of monitoring the equipment we tapped into at the Kavalian OP said there was increased traffic between Nefoa and Cabelir but he couldn't determine about what."

Andro nodded once more. "Grandfather was right." He said softly. "I'd bet good credits that is where they have taken her."

Martin thought for a long moment. "Pusintin wouldn't have direct control over her though." He said after a minute shaking his head. "He wouldn't let her out of his sight."

“You are thinking like a Spartan father.” Andro told him. “You know how Kavalians treat their females. They are like second class... third class citizens! No Kavalian male is afraid of a female. Any female.”

Martin met his eyes. “Your mother is not just any female Andro.” He said softly. “She is certainly capable of taking out a Kavalian or two. Or three. I’ve seen her pissed remember, it ain’t a pretty sight.”

“She also is very pregnant Martin.” Helen spoke. “And with the Mindvoice inhibitor... she will not be able to draw on her reserves or her connection to you, Aricia or any of her fellow Queens.” Helen leaned forward now. “Andro is right. They don’t fear her. To them she is just another elf female. Pusintin has been among them for so long now he thinks like they do. He believes you are dead and he believes For'mya will do nothing because she craves his aura and his touch upon her, whether willingly or not.”

Martin looked at her with dark eyes. “Helen...” He growled at her.

Helen waved her hand at him. “Oh do not get your dander up Martin Leonidas. No one believes what they say but you can not deny the blood within her. Or what it would do if you were truly dead. Her mind would scream out no while her blood would say yes. That is a curse and a blessing to our females and not something you can just wish away. You know this.” She spoke to him. “Besides... we are conjecturing here. Andro is right... this is how your brother will think.”

Andro nodded. “So he would have no problem sending her somewhere until the children are born. Especially someplace as heavily fortified as Nefoa.”

“I can’t hit Nefoa with just the thirty people I my team.” Martin said getting to his feet. “And any large scale attack and they will order her killed instantly. I won’t risk that! I won’t! She is my mate and wife and the children she carries are now my children! I won’t risk them! I won’t! Not for anything!”

Helen breathed a large sigh of relief and her face softened somewhat causing both of them to look at her. Andro’s eyebrow lifted slightly. “*Feravomir?*” He asked.

“You don’t know how wonderful it makes me feel to hear you say that Martin.” She said finally getting to her feet and looking at him. “A part of me feared that perhaps you might... that you might view them differently because of how they came to be.”

Martin met her eyes not taking offense at what she said. “Never.” He said softly. “She is... For'mya is part of me, just as Aricia, Anja, Dysea, Bella and now Cirith are. Each of them hold a part of me that makes me who I am. Anything that comes from within them is part of me. I will never forsake that! Never!”

“The father of their hearts.” Andro said softly moving closer to his father. “That is what they said you know. They called you the father of their hearts. I could see it in their thoughts.”

Martin looked at him now his face becoming harder. “Do it son. Find them Andro. I’ll figure something out if they are there. Have Carisia, Ne’Veha and Lu’ria join you as well. They are part of your strength now and the added power, even as unfocused as it is right now will be useful.” He ordered. “Arzoal?”

I will send for a booster immediately and have it brought to the meditation chamber on deck five. She spoke instantly. You and the others will need to remain outside the chamber Martin. Andro and Sadi will be able to direct their shielding, but if you...

Martin nodded. “I know.”

Andro put his hand on his father’s shoulder. “We’ll succeed father.” He said. “We’ll find out for sure. And then you can go and retrieve our mother.”

“Damn straight I will.” Martin growled.

NEFOA MUTON’S QUARTERS

“You should have told me Miseo! Your mother should have told me! The Monitors should have told me!” Muton snapped angrily staring at the monitor.

The handsome face of the young Kavalian stared back at him from the monitor. The dark hair was cut very short, the blue eyes of his mother staring back at him. Gone was the black fur that had covered his son’s body the last time he had seen him, in its place smooth tanned skin like his mother.

“We tried to reach you via the usual sources but you did not respond.” Miseo spoke calmly.

“Things have been... they have been busy.” Muton answered.

“So busy that you can not make contact with us father? With mother at least? We have been worried. And then you call for all active Monitors to form on Nefoa with no reason or consulting with the Monitor Officers.” Miseo asked softly. “I volunteered to do this in case it was needed in the future. I still have my tail father. I’ve become quite good at hiding it if need be. This allows us to move about more freely among the cloned soldiers and gather information. I have already been on three different missions and all of them were successful. It was a good decision. Now tell me... what is going on that you would call all the active Monitors father? To Nefoa of all places.”

“I will tell you... but first... is the ship finished?” Muton asked.

Miseo nodded. “Kaleen and Olin finished the navigation array two months ago. The propulsion systems have been tested as much as we are able without revealing where we are to the KFI. Things are becoming very tense within KFI space. Reports are sketchy but war with the Lycavorian Union is looming in the future from everything we have heard. The Prefect and Marshall Pusintin have assassinated the Lycavorian King and taken the elven Queen prisoner. Pusintin raped and impregnated her and now they are using the children she carries as a means to take power within the Union.”

Muton nodded slowly. “Yes... that is true Miseo. How have you discovered that much? This information is not common knowledge.”

“The Fifth Monitor was able to make contact in the last year with a biogenically altered female within the Command Compound. He suspected she may have been connected to the Pralor Shiria in some way.” Miseo answered. “He has been posing as a high ranking officer within the Sixth Infantry Division as you know. The cloned troops who guard the compound. The senior officers are allowed access to the compound and use of these females. He believes she is privy to intelligence she should not have. Where she is getting the information we don’t know, but he sees her on a regular basis and this is the information that he is discovering when he sees her. How... I don’t know.”

“Well it’s true.” Muton spoke plainly. “I am with For’mya here on Nefoa. I have been caring for her and her children. That is why I have called the Monitors. We are going to take her and her children from the Kavalians and escape. You will need to inform the remaining Monitor Elders and start moving our people onto the ship today.”

“Today?” Miseo gasped. “Why?”

“Listen to me Miseo! Everything we have ever believed is true. Everything! Arzoal lives! She lives my son! For’mya herself is Bonded to one of her grandchildren!” Muton explained. “What we have always thought about Shiria is true! The Mindvoice ship exists and is now in the hands of Resumar Leonidas and his wife and mate Athani!”

“The Prefect’s youngest!” Miseo exclaimed.

Muton nodded. “The one who defected yes.” He answered. “Listen to me Miseo. The family... the entire Leonidas family are descended from Pralors. Just as we are! But they have not been limited in their abilities as we have. If what For’mya tells me is true, Martin Leonidas is not dead!”

Miseo’s eyes grew even wider. “Not dead?” He stammered. “Then... that would mean he...”

Muton nodded. “Yes. He will be coming for his wife and mate and he will utterly destroy everything in his path until he gets her back. A war with the Lycavorian Union would put our people at great risk while they are within Kavalian space. You know how Lycavorians value their families and especially their females. We must use the ship we have built and leave. Now. Before we are caught up in a war that could very well expose all of us.”

“But where will we go father?” Miseo asked. “Kaleen and Olin had hoped to discover the Mindvoice ship and find out where our people are. They...”

Muton shook his head. “The Mindvoice ship would not have had that information. If what For’mya tells me is accurate... information she learned from before she was taken by Pusintin... the ship is only ten thousand years old. It would not have what we want.”

“Then we... all we have done is for nothing.” Miseo said.

Muton shook his head. “No! Arzoal lives Miseo. The Elder Mother lives!”

“So?” Miseo stated. “She is a dragon now; she has been for almost forty thousand years father. How...” Miseo stopped talking and his blue eyes grew wider. “By the gods!”

Muton nodded feeling pride swell within him. All of his sons were supremely intelligent but Miseo was not only intelligent... he was unusually perceptive. "Yes Miseo. She may be a dragon but she was a Pralor before and she would know where the ship is that brought them from Elear. That ship would have the coordinates we need. That ship would have all we need."

"But... but how do we get that knowledge?" Miseo asked.

"Leave that to me my son." He said. "Just get our people onto the ship and prepare to launch and meet us wherever I tell you."

"Father... we won't be able to mask the output of the engines." Miseo spoke.

"We won't need to. Just be prepared to come when I call for you." Muton spoke. "And no matter what you do... ignore the maelstrom that will be taking place on Nefoa when you arrive Miseo."

"What maelstrom? What are you talking about?" Miseo asked.

"Do you truly believe Martin Leonidas will not discover she is here?" Muton asked. "After all we have studied of the Lycavorians and their culture and their people? That man... if he is as powerful as I believe... he will be like a heat seeking missile in his trek to find one of his mates. And he will sweep aside any in his way. His entire family is no different. He's alive! He is letting his oldest son... his hammer if you will... he is letting Androcles control the wave of war that is coming, while he sneaks in and recaptures what is his. I have spent many hours speaking with For'mya my son... she is wise beyond belief and patient and what she tells me I believe. The time is not far off and you need to be ready."

Miseo nodded. "I will inform the others and see to it father."

Muton nodded. "I must go and see For'mya... but tell your mother I will see her soon and I look forward to holding her in my arms once more. And tell your brothers I have many surprises for them as well. Be safe my son. I will see you in a few days."

"And you father." Miseo said in reply.

Muton waited until the image of his son vanished from the highly secure and totally illegal COM array's monitor. He quickly collapsed the small array, built with technologies that the KFI did not even know about, and soon he placed the data pad sized device into his vest. He got up and adjusted his desk before turning and moving to his door. He glanced back as the door opened and then turned to see the stern looking Kavalian officer take four more strides and stop in front of him.

"Senior Colonel Muton!" The large Kavalian spoke. "How good to see you again!"

Muton calmed himself easily and he forced a natural smile to his face as the door to his quarters closed. "Senior Colonel Dinxi of the famed Puma Bane Defense Forces. It has been a long time has it not?"

"Thirteen years." Dinxi answered. "And you have not changed your appearance in all that time."

Muton chuckled. "Clean living my friend. You should try it." He stated.

"Yes..." Dinxi stated. "You have secured two entire wings of the medical center for your purposes and I wish to know why. I also want two of my men in the same room as that Elf bitch you brought with you at all times."

Muton crossed his arms over his chest. "For what purpose?" He asked.

"I don't trust her!" Dinxi snapped.

"She is four days from giving birth to the Marshall's son." Muton spoke. "She is no security risk to you or to your men. Marshall Pusintin has given me full authority in regards to her. I don't particularly care to be around her myself, but it is my duty."

"This base is under my command." Dinxi snapped. "I will decide what will be done and why!"

"Nefoa is under your command yes... but my authority supersedes yours Dinxi." Muton said. "Marshall Pusintin tasked me with insuring his son is born healthy and with no difficulties. Non-Kavalian females are notorious for being modest in this time. Anything that causes her stress will cause the child stress. Would you care to contact Marshall Pusintin and explain to him that his son suffered mental damage because you did not get your way?"

Dinxi blinked several times before his hostile posture dissipated and he stood there. Even as well respected as he was, he had no desire to bring the wrath of Pusintin down on him. "No." He said quickly. "No I would not."

Muton nodded. "I didn't think so." He said. "Listen Dinxi... we have not seen eye to eye on many things through the years, but on this we agree. Neither of us can stand these elf scum and we both consider their women no more than glorified whores."

Dinxi nodded. "On that we agree." He stated becoming even less hostile now.

"If Pusintin goes through with things as he has impressed to me, once I deliver his son, he will dispense with the elf bitch." Muton spoke. "Now..." Muton moved closer to him. "If you like, I can insure that she is left here with you as your toy. Pusintin was going to give her to the brothels, but take it from me... she is too good for the brothels."

Dinxi met his eyes. "Ahhh... I had heard that you..."

Muton held up his hand. "Please... I would tear her to pieces in my frustration. I have heard the Marshall speaking though and he says she is almost as good as Jalersi. Now... how many of us have not fantasized about having Jalersi's Puat in our bed? Dinxi... wouldn't it be better for you to gain something from this inconvenience?"

Dinxi met his eyes. "You can assure this to me?"

Muton met his eyes. "Give me the space and time I need to deliver this child and I will give her to you myself."

Dinxi nodded. "Then you will have it." He said. "But I wish to inspect her once the child is born."

Muton nodded. "I believe that is fair." He said. "I will give you daily reports but she must not be disturbed."

Dinxi nodded. "Done." He spoke.

Muton grasped his hand. "Then let this be the first day of a new beginning between us. We will both achieve something from this dull duty."

"When can I expect your first report?" He asked.

"I am heading to the lab now. I will do a full medical scan with intimate details and images for you and send them right off." Muton spoke. "I have most of these things already. Images from before she began to show."

Dinxi nodded. "Very well." He stated. "I will expect them within the hour?"

Muton nodded. "Done." Dinxi grunted and headed off down the corridor. Muton watched him go with a cruel smile on his face. "Enjoy them while you can Colonel Dinxi..." He whispered. "For when you come to collect For'mya I can guarantee you will get far more than you bargained for."

NEFOA MEDICAL CENTER

Androcles! Fedor and Eirene's voices exploded into the powerful connection.

Hello my brother and sister. Androcles's voice echoed in their minds within For'mya's womb. It was deeper than before but very clear.

Where are you? Eirene asked. *You sound so close.*

I am using a device that boosts the clarity of our connection. Andro answered. *And Sadi has returned with me as well as my other wives and mates. You feel Carisia, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria within our connection as well now.*

Hello little ones! Sadi's musical voice echoed.

Sadi! They both declared. *We have names now! We asked mother to allow us to name ourselves and we have. Eirene and Fedor! Those are our names!* Eirene affirmed happily.

Ah... Eirene for Peace. Andro said. *And Fedor means Lion. Your names fit my brother and sister. Where is mother? Where are you?*

The time when we will be entering your world is coming and mother grows more tired easily now. The drugs they used to... Eirene stopped almost as if she was distraught and could not continue. Fedor picked it up for his sister.

The drugs they gave to mother to make us grow faster... now that it is so close they make her tired. She just fell to sleep for she was talking with Muton for some time. He came to check on her and then he left. Fedor answered.

Is he there now? Andro asked.

No. He will return with lunch for mother. Eirene replied once more. He is a nice man Andro. He even gave mother a weapon to protect herself if he is not here.

A weapon? Andro said. Why has he not removed the inhibitor from mother Eirene? You and Fedor told her about it yes?

We did. Muton and mother decided to do it at the same time as Fedor and I enter the world. She answered. She will heal faster if she does not have to undergo a second operation to have it removed.

Do you trust this man Eirene? Fedor? Does mother trust him? Andro asked.

Yes. He is funny looking with all that hair, but he has been very kind to mother. Eirene answered. He laughs when he touches her stomach and we kick for him. Mother does too now a little. She has a beautiful laugh Andro. We want to hear her laugh more.

Yes... yes she does. And you will... I promise you. He answered. Do you have any idea where you are? Have you seen anything that may give you a clue?

We are on a planet. Fedor replied. It is a large orange like planet with many of the hairy men. We saw lots of ships among the stars. Muton called it... Ne... Na... Eirene?

He called it Ne... fo... a. Eirene answered. Yes... Ne... fo... a. We are still learning different words and we study everything you showed us.

Do not do so much as to tire yourselves out. Andro told him with some worry in his voice. That would not be a good thing. What has this Muton been talking with mother about? Do you recall?

Funny things. Eirene said. He speaks of dragons like mother's Bonded sister Aurith. We want to meet her so badly. Mother has told us of her and how much she loves her. And today he talked of strange people with strange names. A place he does not know how to get too. He wants mother's help in finding it.

What do you mean? Andro asked.

He talked with her until she fell asleep today. I don't think mother told him that we hear everything he says. Or that we understand so much. Fedor said. He asked mother to have us ask you if we spoke to you again. Mother said she did not think we would but she would make sure.

Ask me what fervon?

Where a ship is. A space ship I think. He said the mother of all dragons would know and to ask her where it is. Fedor continued. Do you know what he means Andro?

I think so yes. Andro answered. Eirene, Fedor, KertaGai is going to leave our connection for a time. She will be back soon but while she is gone I want to pass more things to you as long as you are able to digest them. The father of your hearts is here with me, our father, and you must hear what he has said. Mother must hear so share it with her when she wakes. Then I wish to pass you more skills.

We are ready. Eirene spoke.

EARTH DRAGON MOUNTAIN

Martin and the others turned quickly when the door to the meditation chamber opened and Sadi exited quickly. She re-sealed the door and moved to where they were standing in the large corridor. Arzoal was settled on the floor of the corridor beside Isheeni and Torma. Aurith on her opposite side.

“Sadi... what is wrong?” Aricia gasped taking her hands with concerned eyes.

“Nothing. Nothing truly. We have made contact.” She said a little out of breath.

Helen moved forward and placed her hand on Sadi's arm seeing the signs first. “Breath Sadi... you are still swirling from the intensity and power of the connection. Calm your heart as Andro showed you.”

Sadi took a deep breath and closed her eyes allowing the breath to leave her lungs slowly. She opened her jungle green eyes again and looked at Martin who was watching her intently. “I'm sorry Martin... this is the first time I have used a Mark II and it makes... it makes Andro so powerful and so focused.”

Martin placed his large hand on her shoulder gently and smiled warmly. “You do not need to apologize Sadi.” He said softly. “The first time is always strange... but it will become easier. Hope it doesn't make you regret becoming his anome?”

Sadi smiled and shook her head as she felt his aura swirl around her in a fatherly fashion just as her own father's did. She took another deep breath and let it out and then nodded her head. "Nothing will make me regret that." She said. "We have made contact and they are on Nefoa... just as Andro and Admiral Riall thought." She looked around and noticed Cirith was missing. "Everyone is not here?" She said.

"Cirith is with Dorian and Ryner." Isabella answered. "They could not sleep and she is instructing him in how to use his skills. She uses the shadows very well if I do say so myself."

Sadi nodded. "Well... we have contact with them as I said."

"They are sure they are on Nefoa?" Martin asked.

Sadi nodded. "Andro passed quite a bit of knowledge to them the first time. More than I had thought. They match almost Dorian in what they know and how they speak. Fedor said the planet was..."

"Fedor?" Anja gasped with a smile.

Sadi nodded as Anja, Dysea, Isabella and Cirith crowded closer. "Yes... forgive me. Their names are Fedor and Eirene."

"Peace and Lion." Helen whispered as she grasped Martin's hand and squeezed it with a smile. "For'mya named them well."

"They chose their names." Sadi said surprising them all. "They chose their names in order to provide comfort and protection for their mother. Until the father of their hearts comes for them." She finished looking at Martin.

Carians alinn jar hote. Isheeni's voice broke in filled with awe. (Gods bless us all)

Helen looked at her and nodded. "Yes indeed Isheeni. Yes indeed."

"Go on Sadi." Martin said his own face softening somewhat and his voice very nearly breaking.

"He said the planet looked orange and there were a lot of hairy men as he called them. Many ships in stars above." Sadi said.

"The light particles in the oceans make the planet appear orange from orbit." Martin said with a nod regaining some of his exposure. "It's Nefoa."

"Is For'mya alright?" Aricia asked. "Is she hurt?"

Sadi shook her head quickly. "No. This Kavalian... and his name is Muton... it appears he is a doctor. He has been taking care of her and insuring that she is safe. He even gave her a weapon to protect herself when he is not in the room with her."

"A weapon?" Dysea asked shocked.

This man is a Kavalian? Arzoal asked now. *He does not act as any Kavalian we have ever heard of.*

"No he doesn't." Martin said. "What else Sadi?"

"The time of their arrival is coming soon." Sadi told them. "They told us that For'mya is sleeping more and she gets tired very quickly."

Anja nodded as she pressed close to Aricia. "The same way she got just before Arrarn and Bryon were born, do you remember?" She said.

Aricia nodded. "Yes."

"If she's doing this and sleeping more then it is only hours before they arrive." Anja said.

"Hours?" Sadi gasped.

Anja nodded. "Based on the design of the Kavalian growth hormone and how it worked on Dorian, and removing our modifications to it, if she is acting like this now... then I estimate she'll give birth within the next twelve hours." She told them. "This is exactly how she acted before Arrarn and Bryon were born as I said."

"Sadi... anything else?" Helen pressed her.

"The Kavalian... Muton... he wants to know the location of a ship. He asked For'mya to have Eirene and Fedor question Andro if he contacted them again. I think it's something recent for they mentioned none of this before." Sadi said. She turned to look at Arzoal. "Eirene told Andro it was a ship that Muton said only you would know the location of Elder Mother. It was your ship."

Arzoal's eyes grew wide at this. *Me? My ship? I do not... no...* Arzoal stopped talking as her wings fully extended out to the sides. *It can't be!*

Martin looked at her, watching as her eyes batted several times in confusion. "Can't be what? Arzoal... you know what this man is talking about? What ship? Why would he want to know where your TYPE I was Arzoal?"

No Martin... not my ship now. Arzoal answered meeting his eyes and extending her head out on her neck to within inches of his face. They had trusted each other implicitly for over two decades, many times Arzoal sharing with Martin things that only Helen knew. *Martin... do you remember what I told you and Torma all those years ago. About the eggs.*

Eggs? Isheeni asked looking at her mother. *What eggs?*

I swore you to secrecy that day Martin Leonidas. Arzoal spoke softly. *You and Torma both.*

“I remember.” He said. “What does that have to do with what we are discussing right now?”

Those eggs were stored on the ship I brought the dragons from Elear on. Arzoal said. *Buried in a mountain much as CS41 was.*

Martin’s eyes grew wide. “The egg chamber was your ship?” He gasped.

Arzoal nodded. *Yes.*

“How the hell would a Kavalian know about that ship?” Martin snapped.

Helen looked at Arzoal. “Perhaps now is the time to share this knowledge with everyone sister.” She said.

Arzoal looked at her Bonded sister and drew her head back. *Yes.* She settled back to the deck and drew a deep breath. *The ship I used to bring the remainder of the dragons from Elear to Enurrua was the same ship used to transport those who left Elear to find another world for us to prosper on. It was a Pralor Scout ship. About the size of one of our LEONIDAS-Class ships now. It made two trips and was suppose to return within four years to take the remainder of us off. It did not return for nine thousand years. We never discovered why, but it returned in working order with all of its systems operational. It’s data cores had been wiped except for the automated order to return to Elear. By this time I could not bring myself to leave this quadrant of space and we did not know where the others had gone. I chose Enurrua so that we could remain reasonably close to the elves as they grew and prospered. When we made the move to Enurrua, the ship was used as our main egg chamber for nearly ten millennia. Only when Chetak and the others were getting too close did I reach out to Shiria. I had felt her presence for some time but now I needed her help. She brought VORTEX Cruiser 341 to Enurrua and I sent four thousand of my kind off Enurrua. She brought them here to Earth. Just as I told you and Torma Martin. Once that was done... the only part of the scout ship that remained operational was the egg chamber.* Arzoal lowered her head now. *When Chetak was about to breach the egg chamber I ordered it destroyed. Nearly ten thousand eggs and almost three thousand of Chetak’s forces died in the explosion and the resulting collapse of the tunnels around it.*

Oh mother. Isheeni gasped pressing her body close to her mother to give her support. *You have carried this burden all of these years?*

I gave the order. Arzoal spoke softly. *It was the only way to keep Chetak from taking so many of our children and brutalizing them for his own gain.* She looked at Isheeni. *I did the right thing Isheeni.*

“Yes you did.” Martin spoke moving up to her and placing his hand on her thick foreleg. “We have already discussed this Arzoal and it will remain where it belongs. In the past.”

I agree. Torma spoke. *We have bigger problems.*

Martin nodded. “Like how this Kavalian even knew your ship existed. And how he knows about you.”

Arzoal turned to look at him and nodded her massive head lowering her snout to butt Martin gently. *Yes.* She spoke.

“Chetak never knew that the egg chamber was actually a ship right?” Martin asked.

Arzoal shook her head. *No. Impossible. None of them ever made it inside the chamber. Only into the tunnels. And they were carved from the mountain. The ship was made from the same bio-mechanical materials as CS41. It would appear as organic rock and such unless you had the proper instruments. Just as Dragon Mountain does.*

Dysea looked at Martin with wide emerald green eyes. “*Nauta Melme... you knew of this ship in Kavalian space? And Shiria?*” She asked stunned.

Martin nodded slowly. “Of its existence *Melda Min... yes.* Of where it was... no.” He answered her. “Arzoal and I tried to use Avi to find it but we never could. Shiria must have powered it down to the bare minimum.”

“That is why you acted so calmly when Aikiro brought it to us?” Anja said. “You didn’t bat an eye because you already knew about it.”

Martin nodded again. "Yes."

"And you never went after her?" The new voice spoke and they turned to see Wayonn walking towards them. He moved up between Anja and Helen. "You knew Shiria lived and you never went after her Martin? Why?"

"I knew... I knew she would contact me if her situation became untenable." Martin answered.

"How did you know this?" Wayonn asked.

Martin shrugged. "A feeling? A little voice in my head? Does it matter?"

"Even I did not know Arzoal was a Pralor until I came here." Wayonn spoke. "I always knew Shiria was protecting something or someone and that is why she remained among the Kavalians. That is why she went against my advice and did what she did here on Earth. The technology... the ships. She knew you were alive! And she knew you would return!" Wayonn moved closer to Martin. "What else do you have in that head of yours Martin Leonidas? Things you are not telling anyone?"

Martin's dark brown eyes focused on Wayonn for a long moment and when he spoke his words were clear and tinged with a wisdom that none of them had ever heard before. "What I know... what Andro and I know... it is not by choice. And it would terrify you Wayonn." He said softly, his words causing both Aricia and Sadi to look at him oddly.

"Perhaps not so much as you might think my boy." Wayonn said softly. "There is a very unique thing that sets you and your son Androcles apart from all of us Martin. You know things that others do not. You sense things that others do not. This is a skill I have known in only one other person... and that was Sumar."

"I can't... we can't see the future Wayonn." Martin said.

Wayonn shook his head. "No... but this prescience you share with your son... it is part of the reason you are so powerful. And I suspect it is why your father was so powerful as King of Sparta and Resumar so enigmatic as King of your people and the others who choose to follow him. This could also be why the Spartans were so devastating and feared in combat. And this skill you pass to those around you in different ways. Surely you have noticed it."

"This is all very interesting grandfather" Helen spoke. "And we will need to explore it in the future but we have other issues right now. Andro can not maintain the connection to the twins forever... even with the Mark II helping him. We won't know anything for sure until we ask Shiria what she knows. If anything at all." Helen spoke. "She needs to return now Martin. She needs to return here so that we can have her knowledge behind us. So we can use it. And we need to decide what to do!"

I agree. Arzoal spoke.

Wayonn nodded staring at Martin for a moment longer. "As do I." He said.

Martin nodded his head. "I'll let Res know... but now we need to determine what or who this Muton is and why he wants the location of your old ship."

"You are sure the ship was destroyed Arzoal?" Isabella asked now.

The entire upper half of the mountain collapsed into the tunnels and on the egg chamber. Arzoal answered. *Nothing could have survived.*

"I have found that nature does not always make the perfect killing machine." Isabella said.

Arzoal shook her head. *I do not know who he is! We never had contact with the Kavalian people after we sent their ancestors to Cabelir. And if Shiria knew of him she would have told us by now.*

Wayonn nodded. "I concur. This man... he obviously has some knowledge of Pralors. How else would he know of you Arzoal? Shiria would not tell even me that you existed, so why would she share it with a Kavalian?"

She wouldn't. Arzoal spoke.

"Exactly." Wayonn said. "There is only one other logical explanation. He is descended from Pralors."

"What?" Martin gasped.

Impossible! Arzoal exclaimed. *A Kavalian! Never! We banished them!*

Wayonn looked at her. "Was that decision unanimous among the remaining Pralors on Elear after you defeated Artre?"

Arzoal nodded. *Yes. There was some discontent but all of us ultimately agreed.*

Wayonn turned back to Martin. "Leaving out Xaxon for the moment... none of the original Pralors on Lycavore left the planet until Sumar sent me to try and determine what happened on our homeworld. Arzoal is the only Pralor that had contact with the Kavalians. Therefore it is only logical to assume, somehow at least,

that those who left Elear in the first two waves as you said returned and assimilated themselves somewhat into Kavalian society as it was.”

But why? Arzoal gasped. *They are no less savage and brutal now than they were then Wayonn.*

“Perhaps to try and do what we did on Lycavore.” Wayonn answered. “As Pralors that was our sole purpose Arzoal. You know this... you are older than me by nearly ten thousand years. That is what we did.”

I know that Wayonn! Arzoal huffed.

“When all that is left is the logical and the impossible and logic no longer applies... then the impossible is the answer.” Wayonn said. “Or something to that effect.”

“*Nubous!*” Martin swore spinning around. “This cerebral *sibfla* is beginning to give me a headache! Just point me in the right direction and tell me who I have to kill and how many so that I can get For'mya and my children back damn it!” He finished the sentence almost shouting the words.

Aricia and Dysea reached for him at the same time and as their hands touched him, the rapidly building anger seemed to flow out of him instantly. Wayonn and the others noticed this as Anja and Isabella moved closer to him as well.

“If the ship is destroyed then tell him.” Wayonn spoke. “He obviously already knows it exists and if he is protecting For'mya as the twins say, then he is not an enemy.”

“Part of the problem is we don't know what he is Wayonn.” Aricia stated.

Wayonn nodded. “Then let's find out child.” He spoke. “Tell him where the ship is and then we take our team and go to Enurrua and find it before he does and then we meet him there. It's obvious by his actions so far that he has no intention of turning For'mya over to Pusintin or the Kavalians. What he has done so far would get him executed immediately if what we know of the Kavalians is true, so it is logical to assume she and the children will be with him. And if he does what he says he's going to do, we'll confirm this as soon as he removes the inhibitor from her body and Andro can talk to her directly.”

“Andro?” Martin said. “Why not me?”

“Because you are still dead my boy, at least as far as the Kavalians are concerned. If this is some sort of elaborate trap, it would not do for them to actually succeed where they failed before. And to be honest... right now Androcles is far more focused and attuned to the twins and by virtue of that For'mya herself.”

Martin paused and then nodded. “I really fucking hate it when you are right.” He said.

Wayonn smiled. “Yes... so Dutkne has told me on many occasions.”

“I will remain here.” Isabella said. “Dorian is still too young for me to leave him Martin.”

Martin nodded. “I know.” He stated. “Red... you have to stay here too. With Andro and you together, it shows a united front even after Hadaria.”

Anja nodded. “I figured as much. But take Duewa at least. And Thoti. He is her strength. As much as it burns my ass to admit... she is the strongest Healer we have right now behind Eurin and Eliani. I need Sivana and Ceuma to remain here with me. You may need Duewa and I think... I'm beginning to trust her.”

Martin nodded. “Aricia you...”

“I am dead as well remember Beloved.” She said with a grin. “And I do not fear going back to that place. I have long put it far behind me.”

Martin looked at Arzoal. “Arzoal... get with your aide and have her draw up as accurate a map as you can. You are not going... before you ask.”

Martin I must. Arzoal spoke.

It will be much faster if the Elder Mother is with us Martin my brother. Torma spoke.

“Shit!” Martin swore again. “Alright... have a new *TYPE II* prepped. No sense in risking *OMEN THREE* if it is a trap.”

“I agree.” Wayonn said. “I will contact Shiria and tell her the choice is no longer hers. She needs to take her ship and return now. Bella... you and Anja will be able to get whatever knowledge she may have to us as soon as you have it?”

“Count on it.” Anja said.

“If we have to carry it ourselves.” Isabella answered.

Martin nodded. “Ok... Sadi you...” He turned and realized Sadi was no longer next to him. “Sadi?”

I needed to get back Martin. Sadi's voice filled their heads. I could not wait any longer. I will tell Andro and the twins.

Wayonn chuckled. "And here you thought your mates were the only stubborn, action oriented females you knew." He said.

"Stubborn?" Dysea snapped. "You think we are stubborn?"

"Thanks Wayonn." Martin said.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

NEFOA

THREE HOURS AFTER THE BIRTH OF EIRENE AND FEDOR

For'mya looked up when the inner door to the medical room opened and Muton's bulk walked in. The door closed quickly behind him and he checked the pad to make sure the audio and security Vid monitors were off out of habit. He had disabled them manually when they first arrived and so far no one had questioned him. He looked at For'mya standing beside the bed where both Eirene and Fedor were laying beside one another, For'mya having just bathed both of them. They looked nothing like newborn babies and anyone who saw them would swear they were six or seven months old at least. For'mya's face was much more animated than he had seen it in the time he had known her and he no doubt knew why. He held the object in his hand as he moved casually to the bed, the object that had been blocking what For'mya and so many other Lycavorians and those turned by them had come to rely on so much. In the first hour after he removed the inhibitor she had been talking non-stop with Eirene and Fedor within Mindvoice, and only Muton's demand that she not overdo it and shield herself heavily made her stop. He did not suspect any Kavalian or vampire would be able to hear her given the level of her skill, but better safe than sorry and For'mya agreed.

As For'mya looked up at him she smiled brightly, her sense of equilibrium having been returned now as she could feel within Mindvoice once more. She kept her thoughts and voice tightly shielded so as not to raise suspicion if the base here had dampeners or anyone who could Mindvoice just as Muton had told her, but she longed to feel her family and above all else she ached for Martin's Mindvoice presence to swirl around her and engulf her.

"Muton." She said softly.

He mobbed up to the side of the bed and smiled at her, his appearance almost frightening if you did not know Kavalians. For'mya had spent enough time around him now to see it for what it was and this man would never frighten her again. He had done more to earn her trust than Muton would ever really know.

"I told you to rest." He stated.

"They were hungry and I needed to bath them." For'mya answered. "I can't refuse them Muton."

Muton nodded as his hand went out to rub Eirene's smooth cheek and she cooed happily at the touch of his clawed hand on her skin. For'mya chuckled slightly and he looked at her. "What?"

"She says your claw tickles her skin." For'mya told him with a smile. "And thank you for bringing her into this world."

Muton pulled his hand back quickly. "Oh... sorry." He said swiftly looking at Eirene and her dark brown eyes. Eyes so much like her mother. If Muton didn't know any better he would say that both of them looked far more like For'mya than they did Pusintin. "My apologies and you are very welcome."

"Thank you Muton." For'mya said looking at him. "They... they are beautiful. Thank you so much... for everything. For making me, us, for giving us hope."

Muton smiled in return. "I should be the one thanking you. What has happened to you aside For'mya, your presence here is what is allowing me to fulfill my duties to my people. It was vile and wrong and horrible what you experienced but..."

For'mya reached out and gripped his hand. "You do not need to explain. I know what you are trying to say."

Muton met her eyes and nodded. He held up the Inhibitor in his hand. "I thought you might want this." He said.

For'mya reached up and he placed the inhibitor in her palm. "This is it?" She asked softly.

Muton nodded his head. "This object is not of Kavalian construction." He told her. "It appears to be some sort of High Coven manufacture. I'm not entirely sure, but if I had to guess, it was made with components from the Mindvoice ship that Aikiro had. The same class vessel as the one your Martin Leonidas discovered on Lycavore."

For'mya looked at him. "You know of that?" She asked.

Muton nodded. "The vampire officers who defected to the KFI at the beginning of the war talked of it in whispers. We had always suspected such a ship existed, just as the one on Ritaah. They said it was something that Aikiro was very interested in obtaining. Her actions proved that... but they also killed her in the end. Keleru decided against trying to obtain this information because he did not believe it."

For'mya nodded. "Yes... her actions did condemn her." She spoke. "Are there more of these?"

Muton shrugged. "I do not know for sure but I am going to say yes." He replied. "The scientists who work in the military's Science Division are bright and intelligent but they would never be able to construct something like this For'mya. Keleru and Pusintin keep them focused on building newer and better weapons and engines." Muton took it from her palm. "No... this device is not something they could build. I suspect the vampire officers who defected brought this with them, and that there are probably more somewhere."

"Destroy it." For'mya spoke with a shudder. "It was designed to use against those who can Mindvoice Muton and believe me... what it does is far more insidious than you think. When it was within me I..."

Muton gazed at her for a long moment before dropping it to the floor. "You do not need to explain it to me. I can imagine some of it for I saw how you acted." He stood up and brought his boot down on the Inhibitor with all of his two hundred and forty pound weight, smashing it into dozens of small pieces.

"*Avoi.*" For'mya said softly.

Muton turned his attention back to Eirene and Fedor on the bed. "They are growing very rapidly. Faster than I had thought."

For'mya looked at him. "That's not bad is it?" She asked with some concern in her voice.

"What? No! Not at all!" He answered quickly his hand moving to touch her shoulder and reassure her. "They are perfectly healthy For'mya. Better than healthy actually. I think I must have misdiagnosed the potency of the serum they injected you with." For'mya looked down at the jumpsuit she wore, hesitated a moment and then looked back at him. Muton detected this and his head tilted slightly. "What is it?"

"I am... this is very hard to discuss with..." For'mya stammered.

"For'mya I am a doctor first and while I'm quite sure I do not have the bedside manner of your Anja... I am very professional in that regard." Muton said. "Tell me."

"My breasts have grown larger Muton. A full cup size almost. This was normal when Arrarn and Bryon were born but they always returned to ordinary after I stopped feeding them. They have not this time." For'mya told him, knowing that he was right. He had delivered her children and in all of his examines of her he had gone out of his way to be almost coldly professional.

Muton nodded. "And they probably will not." He answered her just as professionally. "When used in our females, this is a side effect of the growth hormone that never goes away." He told her. "I'm sorry."

For'mya couldn't help but chuckle. "Don't be... Martin will not be sorry. I've always wanted slightly larger breasts. I guess now I have them."

It took him a moment but he laughed softly when he realized the connotation of her statement. He shook his head. "I am very happy that you have not lost your true self For'mya. A large part of it is Eirene and Fedor I know."

For'mya nodded and looked at them. "Yes."

"At this rate... at this rate they will be walking and running by the time the remainder of my team arrives." Muton said. "Which will be very good since we will need to leave as soon as they are all here."

For'mya met his gaze. "What has happened?" She asked detecting the seriousness in his voice.

"The base commander... Dinx." He said softly, and For'mya could detect the shame in his voice easily. "In order to keep him away from you and out of my hair until another time, I told him I would arrange for him to inspect you after they were born. I told him Pusintin had planned to give you to the brothels but I would see to it that you were given to him instead if he let me deliver the children without interference from him."

"And he will be coming to collect his prize soon no doubt?" For'mya asked calmly.

"For'mya it was the only way to keep him out of our business until..." Muton began to speak.

For'mya shook her head and her hand squeezed strongly on his arm once more. "No Muton... you did what you needed to do to keep me and my children safe. To keep you and your people safe. I will not hold that against you. How could I?"

Muton breathed a sigh of relief and nodded. "Then my next question is one you can help me with." He said. "Dinxi is supremely well trained... and he will be very close to you when he comes here. He..."

For'mya met his eyes with those dark brown orbs and Muton suppressed a shudder at the look in them. "I will deal with our Kavalian Commander." She hissed softly. "Gladly."

"We will need his code card." Muton continued. "Once we have that we will take the children to the base's ship bay. I have already instructed my people to secure the fastest ship there. Probably a *LEUGERS*-Class transport. Can you fly that?"

For'mya looked at him. "Yes. Why would you need me to fly it though?"

Muton grinned. "You are the finest pilot in all of the Union For'mya... at least that is what many say. The more odds we have in our favor the better."

For'mya nodded. "True."

"Once we are away from Nefoa we will need to move quickly so they can not follow us." Muton said. "My people will be waiting for us at a designated set of coordinates and..."

"Enurrua." For'mya told him.

"What?"

"Have them meet us at Enurrua." She answered him calmly. "That is where the ship you seek is."

Muton's eyes grew wide as he realized what she was saying. "They... they talked with him?" He gasped loudly. "How? When?"

For'mya nodded her head. "A few hours before they arrived into this world. Andro must have somehow deduced this is where we were and he used a Mark II Neural Booster to reach them here." She answered. "They did not tell me until an hour ago because I was sleeping at the time he made contact."

"He is... he is that powerful For'mya?" Muton asked.

For'mya nodded. "The Mark II Neural Boosters only provide a clear signal and help you to focus your Mindvoice potential more efficiently, but if you are speaking of raw power, then yes he is strong enough. I have seen him and Martin talk to people on the other side of planets and even different sectors of space with almost no strain. Distance plays a great role in actually talking with another, but not so much in being able to sense emotions and feelings."

"Enurrua?" Muton asked with an animated face. "You are sure?"

For'mya nodded her head. "Yes. Muton... tell me... what does this ship have that you need so badly?"

He met her eyes and didn't hesitate. "The way for us to return to our home. Our true home." He answered.

For'mya looked at him shocked. "You mean where your ancestors came from?" She asked.

Muton nodded. "That has been our goal for some time now. To return to where our ancestors came from." He inched closer on the bed. "Each of our ancestors left imprints within us For'mya."

"A path home?" She asked.

Muton shook his head. "No. How to build a ship that could take us home." He replied. "That is what we have been doing for the better part of three centuries now. Using these partial imprints to piece together a larger picture or schematic if you will. Once we had all the pieces... we began gathering the materials needed to build the ship. This ship would have allowed us to find the ship your son Resumar now has in his hands, which would in turn allow us to find the ship that took our ancestors off Elear all those millennia ago. That was our hope at least."

"Why would you need to find that particular ship?" For'mya asked. "Muton... the Elder Mother used it as an egg chamber when they arrived on Enurrua. This is what Andro told Eirene and Fedor. It was destroyed during the war with Chetak and his followers. She says that all of the data cores were wiped clean when it returned to Elear for her and the others. That the only information within the data banks was how to return to Elear. How could this tell you the way home?"

Muton nodded. "The data banks *were* wiped clean. My great grandmother did not leave me the knowledge as to why they did this though. However... she did imprint within me the means to extract the

information we need to chart our path home from the bio-mechanical compounds of the ship itself. If even one small part of that ship remains then we can get our path home. I can get it.”

For'mya's eyes grew wider. “That... then you would know where Arzoal sent the dragons and the remaining Pralors who survived what happened on Elear!” She gasped. “Muton that is wonderful!”

Muton nodded. “The planet they eventually settled on yes. Or the sector the planet is in at least. That is where our ancestors came from and that is where we want to return to. That is the only place we can truly call home For'mya.”

“Muton... that... that is amazing! Do you know what that will mean to the dragons still living here?” She almost shouted.

“It was always my intention of transmitting this data back to your Martin Leonidas when we discovered the world.” Muton told her. “The Lycavorians have become bound tightly with the dragons here, knowing what I know now makes it much easier to see why, and it would not be right for me to keep that information from them unless those where we are going do not wish it.”

“They would... they would have to agree to it!” For'mya exclaimed. “Why would they not?”

Muton nodded. “That is what I foresee as well.” He told her. “Now... now you know everything For'mya. This is the only secret I have been keeping from you during these last days. Now you know why I have guarded it so viciously. It is all my people have ever wanted. All any of us have ever wanted.”

“*Carians* yes!” For'mya declared.

“When we find the ship then I will give you the *LEUGERS* transport and you can return home to those you love. With you will be the COM device I will contact you on.” Muton told her. “I have seen enough of your Martin Leonidas on the Netnews and read enough about him that I know he will guard this information with his very life. As will your son Androcles and all of your children and family.”

“That goes without saying Muton.” For'mya told him. “Martin and Andro especially for they are Talon Guardians. Protectors of the dragons species.”

Muton nodded and squeezed the hand she had still resting on his arm. “Our fates are now intertwined For'mya Leonidas.” He said softly to her. “I will not forsake you or these children you have brought into this world and I know you will not forsake me or those I protect. What happens to one of us happens to all of us now. The Kavalians can not declare war on the Union if it is a group of Kavalians that helps you to escape and then returns you to your people and your rightful family. Everything Keleru and Pusintin have worked for up until now would be shattered if they did such a thing. The entire universe would see them for what they truly are For'mya.”

“Are you so sure?” For'mya asked.

Muton was silent for a moment. “I can hope.” He said finally.

EARTH SPARTA HOME OF DUEWA AND THOTI

Duewa moved quickly across the room of their home, completely beside herself in excitement and a flood of emotions she had never felt before. Thoti walked in from the kitchen area sipping from a mug of coffee and saw her. He couldn't help but grin as she rushed past him carrying several bags in her hands.

“Duewa my mate... we will not be gone that long.” He told her.

Duewa turned to look at him. “Thoti... I don't know what to bring. I... I need for this to go well. I want to show Anja I am different. I can't believe she requested I go. I can't let her down now. I can't!”

Thoti moved up to her and took her arm causing her to stop what she was doing and turn to look at him as he let his aura wash over her. Duewa reveled in the emotions that swept over her as his male aura curled around her and put her at ease. She gazed into his handsome face and pressed closer to him, loving the feel of his powerful body against hers. The days had crowded together lately as he and his family accepted her and helped to her to adjust to the changes within her. The first time she had shifted it had terrified her to no end and if not for Thoti's mother clamping her paws on Duewa's hindquarters she would have stumbled about like a new born pup for hours. Thoti's mother schooled her within Mindvoice with an ever soothing voice, easing her

into the transition quickly. Once Duewa had gotten the hang of moving on four legs and using her thick bushy tail she had fallen in love with running. Each morning since that first day, if they could, Thoti and she went for a run through the mountains usually stopping by some creek or stream to consummate their union even more. Duewa could not get enough of him and he was equally enthralled with her. Their lovemaking was often times gentle and slow, but there had been times when he had her screaming out in unabashed delight as he took her.

“Duewa... she would not have asked you if she did not trust you.” Thoti said. “You need to accept that you are different now, Anja knows that. Everyone knows that. We have two hours before we leave and you have already packed and unpacked four times. Leave it my wife and mate. Have some coffee and then we will go to my mother’s home and say goodbye to our sons before we go to the base.”

Duewa took a deep breath and brought her hands up to place them on his broad chest so she could feel his powerful heart beating. As it always did, that steady drumming quickly put her at ease. “You are right.” She said softly.

Thoti held out the mug. “Drink and I will take the bags we need.”

Duewa nodded and took the mug as the chime on their door sounded. She looked at him as she took a sip of the coffee. “I will get it.” She spoke.

“It’s probably children from the school looking for sponsors for their upcoming games.” Thoti answered.

Duewa nodded as she moved across the large room to the front door and passed her hand over the security panel. Her green eyes exploded open and she nearly choked on her mouthful of coffee when she saw her mother standing in the doorway with a handful of Elder Guard Militia behind her.

“Mother!” She gasped.

Buonau looked at her sternly for a long moment. She wore her elaborate and expensive Prime Minister robes, and several rather gaudy pieces of jewelry. Duewa’s sensitive wolf nose twitched as she detected the scent of heavy perfume and it made her want to gag. She had discovered that her nose was very sensitive now and she much preferred the natural scent of a person as opposed to what she herself used to wear. Perfume such as her mother was wearing made her nauseous.

“Hello Duewa.” Buonau spoke coolly.

“Mother... I didn’t know you were here.” Duewa stammered.

“I arrived with the Kavalian delegation that is searching for the defectors.” Buonau told her. “You are surprised to see me I take it.”

“Yes.” Duewa answered honestly. “I did not think you would have the courage to show your face on Earth after what you have done.”

“What I have done?” Buonau gasped. “You have disrespected me Duewa! After all I have done for you?”

Duewa’s green eyes narrowed. “What you have done for me?” She snarled. “What have you done for me mother? Tell me! You used me for your own purposes! You used me as a tool mother! You used me, forced me to do things I did not want, all to further your thirst for power and your hatred of Anja! Please mother... tell me what you have done for me!”

“You dare to speak to me in such a way Duewa!” Buonau snapped.

“I have chosen my path mother, I told you that.” Duewa spoke. “Now if you will excuse me... I am rather busy.” She began to turn to go back into her home.

“I came here today to give you a second chance Duewa.” Buonau said. She looked at Duewa as she turned back around. “A second chance to make amends for your failures.”

“My failures?” Duewa hissed. “My failures! What about your failures mother?”

“You can return with me now Duewa. We are going to try one last time to get Androcles Leonidas to see reason and turn Retta and Calyb over to their Aunt. You can come with me and help me to convince him that all we want is to give them a good home and life.” Buonau told her. “We can also begin research into removing this vile curse from within you and return you to who you were. You can raise your sons in the environment they should be raised in.”

Duewa stepped closer to her mother, trying very hard to contain her anger. “My sons are happier than they have ever been in their lives.” She spoke coldly. “Happy and healthy and they have an older brother who helps them and protects them, or did you forget that I am now the mate and wife to a Lycavorian.”

“I did not forget this girl!” Buonau spoke.

Duewa smiled as Thoti’s scent filled her nostrils and she turned to reach for his hand as he stepped onto the small path up to their door. She pulled him up to her and relished in the look on her mother’s face as his arm curled around her waist and he bent to nuzzle the side of her neck and behind her ear causing her to gasp slightly at the delicious sensations it caused. She looked back at her mother.

“This is Thoti mother.” She spoke with supreme confidence in her voice. “My husband and my mate. The man who turned me. The man who saved my life after your fool soldiers shot me. And the man who has given me far more than you will ever know or comprehend.”

Thoti looked at Buonau and nodded his head slightly. “Buonau.” He said.

“That is Prime Minister to you!” Buonau hissed.

Thoti smiled at her. “To you perhaps, but not to those of us who know the truth behind your actions Buonau.” He told her.

Buonau glared daggers at him but the infuriating smile never left his face. “Duewa... you can still return with me. I demand you return with me! I already have our researchers working on discovering a way to remove this Lycavorian virus from your blood. From the blood of every Hadarian who has ever been infected! Given time we can find a way to return you to normal just as we can them. You can help me build our people into what they should be as my daughter.”

“You mean what you and Wiktor want to make them.” Duewa said. “With you as the final power and say on everything.” Duewa shook her head. “I have no desire to be part of your religious rule mother. It sickens me. Your actions have thrown our people back hundreds of years! Hundreds! And you only seek to use Retta and Calyb as tools to insure you never lose your power. You are not as smart as you think you are mother, for everyone with even a modicum of common sense sees right through your words and lies. And you will never get Retta and Calyb mother.”

“I can save you!” Buonau almost shouted.

Duewa laughed at her now. “Save me? I have been saved mother.” Duewa spoke turning to look at Thoti. She looked back to her mother. “Do you know how much I love to run as a wolf mother? The freedom and expression that it brings me. It is wondrous to finally see what they see when they take their alternate forms. I will wait until my sons are old enough and then I will give them the choice. Something you would deny them in every way.”

“I will not make this offer again Duewa.” Buonau barked.

Duewa looked at Buonau, her beautiful face at peace and happy. She moved closer to her mother, allowing the change to come over her. Her dark green eyes shrank in size and the black ring surrounded the pupil as her canine teeth lengthened to nearly an inch and a half long and became thicker and able to tear flesh with ease. Smaller fangs protruded from the bottom but nothing like her main wolf fangs.

“You are not welcome here mother.” She growled menacingly. “Look around you mother and you will see what these men and women think of you.” Buonau did so and her own eyes grew wide as she saw men and women had come out of their homes all up and down the peaceful street. All of them were watching the events taking place and none of them looked in the least bit happy to see her. “I have embraced what I have become mother. There is nothing like it in the universe. You can take your offer and shove it up your ass!”

Buonau’s head snapped back around and she glared at her daughter. “How dare you!” She hissed. “How dare you speak to me like that Duewa!”

“Leave mother.” Duewa hissed just as vehemently. “Leave now and never return.”

“I will not let this go!” Buonau barked. “You are my daughter and I will not allow you to do this!”

“You no longer control my life or what I do mother.” Duewa snarled. “You will never do so again. Goodbye mother... I have a life to lead.”

Buonau watched as Duewa simply turned on her heels and walked back into their home. Thoti stood there as the men and women that were closest and heard the entire exchange began to clap and cheer Duewa for her actions. Thoti turned back to Buonau and grinned.

“You should probably know... I intend to love her until she is breathless.” He stated with some confidence. “She smells so good and she tastes even better. I intend to love her and have many children with her. And every time she screams my name in our bed, you will know she is no longer your tool. And you will never know her again. Good day Buonau.”

Buonau watched as he turned and walked into his home. As the door closed she looked around quickly, seeing the smug looks of those Lycavorians standing all around. She looked at her Elder Guard Militia officer. "Let us leave this foul place." She snarled. "She is lost to us now."

DRAGON MOUNTAIN

"Seems too easy father." Andro spoke as they walked the outer edges of the massive main chamber, Elynth and Torma moving along behind them.

The many dragons training to fly within the chamber respectfully got out of the way of the four Talon Guardians, many of them bowing their heads in reverence. One of the first things a newborn dragon learned upon hatching and as they grew were the exploits of the four Talon Guardians now slowly circling the massive chamber. How they would not leave their fallen comrades, Lycavorian and dragon alike, to become trophies to the Evolli soldiers that they fought. They guarded the bodies of their honored dead, suffering horrors and injuries that left their marks on all of them.

Martin looked at his oldest son. "Say it all Andro." He said.

"Is Pusintin so confident of his position that he would send mother to Nefoa to give birth? Trusting her to one Kavalian doctor? A man who is turning out to be something none of us ever suspected." Andro looked at his father.

Martin shook his head quickly. "No... I had no idea about that." He said.

"He is trusting that we would not try and find her and even rescue her with an attack on Nefoa. He can't possibly believe the Union Senate will vote in his favor can he father?" Andro continued.

"I think he and Keleru believe they can." Martin said. "Laustinos has undoubtedly told them that there are many who do not like me or agree with the way your mothers and I ruled. He's right too. There are a lot more than we think."

Andro nodded. "I don't doubt that... but I fail to believe that they dislike you enough to actually side with Pusintin knowing his history. Or the history of the Kavalians for that matter. The Kavalians can not fool the majority into believing that they have suddenly become peace loving individuals can they? Not after what they did to come to this point."

"The majority no..." Martin said. "But then again I have never been very good at being a politician. Or thinking like one."

"It would be a debacle to try and take Nefoa without a full scale orbital and ground assault." Andro said. "And I would not do that without first landing Infiltration Teams by the dozen on that planet to wreak havoc."

Martin nodded. "And they would have weeks or months to prepare for it." He said. "In that they believe Nefoa to be nearly impregnable. At least right now. So sending her there to have the babies makes sense if you are Pusintin. He does not have to deal with her while he makes or finishes his other plans. His true plans."

Andro stopped and looked at his father. "His true plans?" He gasped.

"Pusintin is a two dimensional thinker Andro." Martin said. "Keleru and most of the KFI High Command as well. If they look at a triangle they see only the two sides they can view, not the whole triangle."

"I know the concepts father." Andro replied.

"Then see the issue from their eyes." Martin said. "Two sides... two paths. If one doesn't work than the other must. They never take into account the third side. The three dimensional part of it. They can't grasp the concept... not because they are unable or stupid... but because it does not fit into their narrow view of the world or how it should be. Pian, Jalersi, Mican and the others with them... they are able to reach outside that realm and now they see what they are missing and realize that they want it."

"So he is planning something else as his backup?" Andro said.

Martin nodded. "Or his primary depending on how you want to view it." He answered. "He's not stupid like I said... and you can bet that whatever his plan is, it is intended to inflict consequences that will get him the same result as the plan using For'mya would. Your mothers and I... Helen... everything you and your siblings have been taught by us... it forces you to think three dimensionally Andro. To see everything. That is how you are dealing with the Vanari. What you need to do now is think like your enemy."

Andro's eyes grew wider now. "The Drow outposts!" He gasped.

Martin nodded. “The outposts. They know we used the Drow as intelligence outposts, and by taking so many of them out when they didn’t need this action to accomplish their mission, they have blinded us to a certain extent. Not in an analytical sense, but a physical sense because they know we won’t reestablish those outposts right away.”

“And we haven’t.” Andro said.

Martin nodded once more. “And all of our attention has been focused on other things that are more important to us in a logical sense.”

“*Nubous!*” Andro swore. “How did I not think of that?”

Torma chuckled within Mindvoice. *You have been preoccupied by other things Androcles.*

We should have seen it though. Elynth complained.

“You can not think of everything Elynth.” Martin spoke looking at her. “There are times when you have to roll with what happens. In that you and Andro have acted superbly. Now though... now that we have a better grasp on things we have to return to our normal methods.”

Andro looked at him. “You can not go to Enurrua with just a *TYPE II* and *OMEN THREE* father.” He said quickly. “Not if you think it is a trap and I know you do.”

“Oh... it’s a trap.” Martin said with a nod. “The question is how big of a trap and is this Muton part of it? When it comes to being devious my brother is a putz. If I had to guess, I’d say any trap would be of Keleru’s making. Pusintin may not even know about it.”

“All the more reason to not go with just the force you have planned.” Andro said.

“I also can’t waltz in there with an entire Fleet Group son.” Martin said.

“Then take the *ARC ROYAL*.” Andro told him quickly. “She’s the first of the Block II *ARIZONA*-Class to be completed. Ben is pushing his people hard. She has three quarters of her crew, but all stations are manned. Her engines and all vital systems are complete... she just lacks an air crew.”

Martin stared at him for a long moment. “Interesting.” He said. “We won’t need an air crew anyway. I don’t plan on being on the ground long enough to need one.”

“Without her fighters she can easily fit the *TYPE II* in her bay and *OMEN THREE* can do a hard lock on her beam.” Andro said. “That still leaves plenty of room for three or four more transport type ships depending on their size.”

Martin looked at him. “Why the big concern?” He asked. “The best way to defeat a trap is knowing about it first.”

Andro nodded. “I know... but something tells me that you will... that you will need the help.” He answered softly.

“What do you feel son?” Martin asked.

Andro turned and looked at Elynth then back to his father. Martin did the same and then let his eyes settle on Elynth. “Elynth?”

It is only a feeling Martin. She answered thoughtfully. *We can not explain it... only that it is there.*

What feeling daughter? Torma asked.

A feeling of life. Many lives. Elynth answered. *The echoes were so very faint and the only reason we detected them was because we were connected to the Mark II for so long talking with Eirene and Fedor.*

“Could you have been feeling Eirene and Fedor?” Martin asked.

Andro shook his head quickly. “No. It was definitely something else father. Far away but yet close by too. There were dozens of echoes within Mindvoice... sort of reverberating back and forth. Without purpose really. I don’t think *KertaGai* or the others felt it for they are not as attuned to using a Mark II... but Elynth and I did. Does that make sense father?”

Martin looked at Torma for a moment and he only nodded his massive head. “To anyone else... probably not. To us... yes. Ok Andro... we’ll do it your way son.” He said. “The *ARC ROYAL*, *OMEN THREE* in a hard lock on her beam and the *TYPE II* in her bay. Add three of the new *KADEN*-Class transports too. Let Ben know we’ll rendezvous with them at the ninth marker inside Bontawillian space. Would you care to let your old man in on what you are planning for *SPARTA’S WRATH* now Andro?” Martin said. “Considering I wanted you to blow the ship into tiny pieces and you and your brother decided to go against my orders, now would be a good time to make me understand that.”

“Are you sure you want to hear it?” Andro asked him. “After our discussion now I am going to change part of their mission.”

“Spill it boy.” Martin said. “Then we need to get moving.”

Aricia stepped up beside Sadi where she leaned against the railing of the balcony lounge one deck above the floor of the main chamber. Her eyes were following Martin and Andro as they walked around the floor, moving in and out between the hundreds of dragons below as if they were barely paying attention to the activity around them. The large mug of coffee was gripped between her hands as it usually was in the mornings and she sipped it slowly, warming herself. It was easily ten degrees cooler within Dragon Mountain and in the early morning when the ceiling opening was fully extended the morning breeze would sweep and swirl within the main chamber.

“You look deep in thought Sadi.” Aricia said as she came to a halt and followed where her eyes were.

Sadi turned and looked at her. “I just like watching him.” She said with a smile.

Aricia grinned at her. “And knowing he belongs to you?” She offered with a perceptive smile.

Sadi matched her smile and nodded. “I didn’t want to say that.” She spoke.

“Why not?” Aricia said with a smile as she looked at her. “We do it all of the time.” She sipped her own mug of coffee as her azure eyes fell on Martin. “There are many people who can not understand it. They can not understand how Martin and I can be *anomes* and yet share each other with Anja and Dysea and For'mya and Isabella and now Cirith with equal intensity and love.”

Sadi nodded. “A few of my friends have asked that same question of me.” She said.

Aricia looked at her. “And what answer did you give them?”

“I told them that while Andro and I are *anomes*... Ne'Veha, Carisia, Caliria and Lu'ria are part of who we are. Part of what we are.” Sadi answered. “Without them... we are not complete. And nor are they.”

“Did they understand?” Aricia asked.

Sadi shook her head. “No.”

Aricia chuckled. “Nor has anyone who has asked me that same question. I have given them almost the same answer.” She said.

“May I ask you a question Aricia?” Sadi spoke now.

“Sadi... you are my son’s *anome*.” Aricia said. “And we are not that far apart in age. Of course.”

“Do you... do you find yourself drawn more to...” Sadi blushed slightly and found she couldn’t finish her question.

Aricia however knew what she meant and she nodded. “Yes.” She answered. “I think part of it may be because of how Resumar and Eliani loved their elf concubine as they did and this was somehow passed down to Martin and then to me... but in the midst of passion I will always reach for For'mya first.” She looked at Sadi. “It is similar for you?”

Sadi nodded. “Yes.”

“Ne'Veha?” Aricia asked.

Sadi nodded again. “Yes. We are both pilots and we have so much in common but ever since Andro turned her, her scent is just a tiny bit sweeter to me than the others. Lu'ria and Carisia seem to be more drawn to each other as well but it never effects us when we are all together with Andro. Caliria... *Inamarno*... she can affect all of us but I sense that she is more drawn to *SirsanGai* and myself and we to her.”

“It is no different for us. Anja has that effect on all of us but it is more telling on For'mya and I. We believe it has something to do with the metaphysical radiation within her body that makes her scent and taste that much sweeter to us, but there is no denying that Anja is the one who can have all of us craving each other. She just has that knack.” Aricia answered with a small smile. “Many people have put forth their ideas on who Martin prefers after me through the years. We usually get a good laugh out of it because we know the truth... but it is funny sometimes to see what others think.”

“He doesn’t does he?” Sadi asked.

Aricia shook her head. “As long as we have been together Martin Leonidas has found just the unique way to make each of us howl to the moon longer and louder than any male could ever hope to achieve. He knows just what causes each of us to melt in his arms, and he is simply a beast when we are all in Phase and we

hit him at the same time. Once Ne'Veha and Lu'ria are fully changed you will see the change in Andro when you all come into Phase and you draw Carisia and Caliria along for the ride as we do Bella.” She commented with a smile. She looked at Sadi. “Do you have any regrets Sadi?”

“Regrets?” Sadi gasped. “Helen asked me that same question not so long ago. Do I regret finding a man who leaves me utterly trembling in the way his aura envelopes me and loves me? Do I regret finding and experiencing the love and pleasure of the women who share our lives? No... I will *never* regret these things. They are part of who I am. Who I have become.”

“Helen told us that Ulana has tried to insinuate herself back into Andro’s life.” Aricia said.

Sadi smiled. “She tried.” She answered. “And she will continue to try until she pisses me off enough that I rip her face to shreds.”

Aricia couldn’t help but laugh. “A woman after my own heart.” She quipped. She looked down and watched Martin and Andro. “They are plotting.” She said. “I can tell from their body language.”

“Plotting?” Sadi asked her.

Aricia nodded her head. “Androcles has begun to make a name for himself now with Martin having to play at being dead. He has come out from under his father’s shadow as he has wanted too for so long. But he is so very much like him that sometimes it is scary.”

“What do you mean?” Sadi asked moving closer to her.

Aricia motioned with her head. “You see how their hands are crossed behind their backs. They both do it and they don’t even realize it. Their gait as they walk... the slight tilt of their shoulders. They are discussing military matters. Devising new and improved ways to kill our enemies no doubt.”

Sadi looked at them and saw what Aricia was mentioning. “That... that is so surreal.” She said softly.

“The power within Mindvoice that the four of them command is terrifying?” Aricia said softly. “I would truly not want to be on the same battlefield if either of them ever cut loose. You can feel it as his *anome* yes?”

Sadi nodded. “At times yes. He shields it well, but sometimes just before he wakes his shields are low enough for me to sense a little of it. It is... it is like a river of molten lava. It races along just waiting for the moment that it will finally breach the banks and spill over.”

Aricia nodded. “Much like Martin.” She said. “We are a large part of the shield that holds that power in check Sadi.” She told her softly. “Martin’s love for me, for our *Kinsoaurgai* and the others. Andro’s love for you and the others. Our love for them. It makes us special I guess.” Aricia looked at her. “Come Sadi... let us get something to eat before the others wake. I want to hear of your mother. Or what you remember of her anyway. She sounds very much like my own mother.”

Sadi smiled brightly. “I would like that.” She said.

MAINLAND ENTRANCE TO CRANAE ISLAND CAUSEWAY TWO HOURS LATER

“... orders of the Galactic Court here in my hand!” The Kavalian Colonel demanded. “You must allow us access to the island and home of your boy Prince!”

The *Durcunusaan* Lieutenant stood there stoically, half a dozen *Durcunusaan* soldiers standing alertly behind him. There were a dozen Puma Bane Commandos and six Hadarian Elder Guard Militia among their group and none of them looked happy, least of all the bitch Buonau.

“That order does not apply to the island of Prince Androcles. Only the Royal Villa within Sparta sir.” The *Durcunusaan* Lieutenant spoke calmly. “Whoever you are looking for is not here on Cranae Island I’m sorry.”

“We do not know that!” The Colonel barked. “This is the order your Prince agreed to and you must adhere to what it sets forth! Now stand aside!”

The Lieutenant shook his head. “I don’t think so.” He spoke. “Our duty is to our Prince and the Royal Family, not to your puppet Galactic Court. Cranae Island is off limits to anyone who is not a Leonidas family member. Or did you actually believe we would allow you access to *his* home? You and your cohorts are not family members or friends for that matter so I will refuse you entrance.”

The senior Hadarian Elder Guard stepped up. “You are causing a situation that does not need to be.” He snapped. “The Galactic Court order, an order your Prince agreed too, authorizes us to enter any facility on this planet in search of the defectors.”

“Any facility that is not a sensitive military facility. The Prince’s home is. Whoever you are looking for... they aren’t here.” The Lieutenant spoke. “You can move along to your next stop.”

“Are we simply supposed to believe you?” The Hadarian hissed.

“I don’t give a *sibfla* what you believe Hadarian traitor!” The Lieutenant snarled. “Cranae Island you will not visit! Not while I am in command of this detail! File a formal complaint or a grievance or whatever else you care to file but be gone now.”

Buonau stepped forward; already angry over what had happened earlier with Duewa and rapidly losing all pretense of the cool, confident persona she had been hoping to emulate. “I grow tired of these games.” Buonau snapped. “The Galactic Court order is binding and you will step aside now or I will...”

“You will do what?” The voice barked from behind them.

Buonau and the Puma Bane troops whirled around and saw Androcles drop from the saddle on Elynth’s back, Eliani next to him and doing the same from Tharua. Tharua and Elynth were glaring at the Kavalian and Hadarian troops and making them very nervous. The two smaller dragons landed with ease beside the larger ones and Buonau’s eyes grew wide when she recognized Nara and Deion as Andro and Eliani helped them to jump to the ground from the saddles along with their brother Bryon. They watched as two more dragons came roaring in, Anthar and Majeir landing with graceful sweeps of their wings and Sadi, Ne’Veha, Lu’ria and Carisia quickly dismounting. Miath was next, Anja perched in his saddle with Retta and Calyb both sitting behind her and clutching her waist.

Buonau pushed her way through the Militia and Puma Bane soldiers to confront him as Anja settled to the ground and three more smaller dragons came swooping in to land. “You agreed to these searches!” Buonau snarled.

“I agreed to searches of non-sensitive military facilities.” Andro spoke. “My home does not fall within that category. Thanks to your Kavalian friends it has become a sensitive military facility now.”

“You expect us to believe that?” Buonau hissed.

“What you believe is not my concern Prime Minister.” Andro spoke as Anja moved up next to him holding Retta and Calyb’s hands and looking none too happy to see her. “It never has been my concern and it never will be.”

“You should just leave Buonau.” Anja spoke harshly. “Before things become less than pretty.”

“And your presence here with this butcher of our people is what?” Buonau snapped. “He killed nearly four million Hadarian civilians and you associate with him? You allow the heirs to the Hadarian throne to associate with him.”

Retta stepped forward and grabbed Andro’s free hand which was by his side. “He is our brother *forn upae!*” She snarled at the woman. “And you are stupid!” Buonau’s eyes nearly exploded from her head at this outburst.

“Retta!” Anja gasped but not without a small smile. “Your language!”

“This?” Buonau shouted. “This is how you raise your children? You are worse than even I thought! You should never have been made Queen! We were right in removing you! You are nothing but a whore now! You...”

Anja began to open her mouth as Miath’s wings snapped out to the sides with a loud, angry popping sound but Andro beat her to it. He stepped right up to Buonau, his fangs also extending to their full length and his eyes changing as he towered over the much shorter woman.

“Speak one more word of disrespect towards my mother Buonau and you will find yourself floating upside down in the Laconia Gulf as the creatures of the ocean use your body for a food source!” Andro snarled at her viciously. “Or do you think your simple elder Guard Militia will help you? Or your thug Kavalian troops? You are no longer on Hadarian Buonau. You are on our planet, among our people!”

“I demand that you surrender Retta and Calyb to me as the Galactic Court has ordered! Surrender them right now so that they may learn proper manners and how to act!” Buonau growled as fear raced through her chest.

“*Nubous forn!*” Calyb growled at her as his eyes changed and his fangs burst forth and he clutched Anja’s hand. “I will not let you take us anywhere! I won’t. I will protect my sister!” He barked out the words.

Andro smiled at his younger brother’s words. “Yes indeed Calyb.” He said. “Yes indeed *fervon*.” Andro turned and looked at Anja. “Mother... I will not have you listen to the ranting of this fool woman and her cohorts anymore. It is beneath you. Would you take everyone to the villa and then we can have breakfast as planned?”

Anja smiled sweetly and stepped up to Andro, leaning up on her tip toes to kiss his cheek with loving tenderness. “Thank you my son... I will do just that. I’m starving to all hell!” She spoke. “The air out here was beginning to smell a bit like *rensibfla* anyway.”

Anja lifted Calyb into her arms and looked at the Kavalians and Hadarian troops stilling blocking the entrance to the causeway, her jade green eyes narrowing. She turned her head. “Miath!”

Miath didn’t hesitate and folded his wings with another pop and then began marching right for the group of soldiers. They scrambled and stumbled to get out of his way or be crushed by his three and a half metric tons of muscle for he had no intention of stopping. They moved back even more as Tharua and Eliani followed Anja with Nara, Deion and Bryon. Sadi grasped Ne’Veha and Lu’ria’s hands and Carisia took her Drow Mistress’s hand and they too walked past the Kavalian troops with Anthar and Majeir right behind them. Soon it was just Andro and Elynth as Buonau turned back to face him and began to speak.

Andro cut her off.

“Be very careful about what you say next woman!” Andro snarled at her angrily. “You have already disrespected my mother far too much, and were you Lycavorian I would be well within my rights to pummel you into the dirt beneath your feet. You have courage Buonau, I’ll give you that. Not a whole lot of intelligence based on your actions... but you do have courage in one sense. The courage of those who consider themselves superior to others.” Andro stepped closer to her, causing her to back up slightly. “Do not make the mistake of thinking that I am like my father woman, for I am not. Utter another discordant word about my mother in my presence and I will tear your tongue from your mouth and you will never speak again. You and your... *allies*... are already defacing the homes of my family across all of Earth. They have allowed this by their decisions Buonau not me. You will not deface my home by leaving your foul stench and the stench of these Kavalians within its walls so that my mates have to tolerate it. I have bent all I am going to bend Buonau. You will never get Retta and Calyb. Ever. The sooner you realize that... the sooner you will come to see that you are not as safe as you believe yourself to be. You are here on Earth by my will alone... no one else’s. Every step you take upon the planet of my father and grandfather is a gift from me. Remember that. I suggest you take your daughter’s advice and finish what you came to do and then leave quickly.” Andro saw the look on her face. “Oh... did you think Duewa would not warn me that you were coming here?” He grinned. “Duewa has embraced her life here now. Nothing you do or say will change her mind. Nor will it change mine after what you have done. Be gone woman... be gone before I am no longer able to control my own anger and hatred of you and I close my fangs around your throat and tear out your windpipe while you look on. Then I will rip your heart from your chest and eat it in front of you as you die.” Andro’s nose twitched as the smell of a relaxed bladder wafted to him and he looked down to see the small wet spot under Buonau. He looked back up at her face. “Interesting.” He said. “I thought you were made of sterner stuff.”

Buonau watched him whirl around and in two leaps was upon Elynth’s back and settling into the saddle. “Heed my words this day Buonau. What you want and hope for will never bear fruit. I suggest you return to the Kavalian embassy and change into clothes more suited for the weather here in Greece. That stain can be seen for several dozen meters and someone might mistake it for you pissing in your pants.”

ULU ARCH DEMON

SIXTEEN HOURS FROM LAST JUMP INTO BETA QUADRANT

By the Prophets she missed them so.

She missed their touch, their laughter, and their smiles. She missed everything about them. And she missed his presence most of all. He was so powerful, so dominating, and yet he treated her as a precious flower. He treated all of them as precious flowers. She was not wolf and she could not feel what Sadi, Ne’Veha and

Lu'ria could feel from his aura, but bless the prophets he could make her feel so loved within Mindvoice. The way his presence wrapped around her mind, sheltered her, stimulated her. Just as his hands and lips had done in so many ways. Caliria had known perhaps a dozen lovers in her three hundred years of life, and not one of them even came close to Androcles in size, skill and what he could make her feel. And he did it so effortlessly. Her Alkay did not affect him as it did other men. Yes... it could entice him and arouse him... but he was always in control. When his skin had been saturated with her Alkay, it only served to drive him to please her and the others further. Sadi told her that her Alkay must have acted as their scents did to him and to know that she affected him in this way and not make him willing to do whatever she wanted was thrilling to say the least. Even Sadi and the others had been affected and they had swarmed her with pleasure willingly and most delightfully. Pleasure she had returned to them with an almost uncontrollable need and desire that she had never felt before, even with Yssyla.

And then there were the messages from Sadi and the two small gifts she had discovered in her quarters.

Inamarno... I will be brief because I don't want to make this harder for you than it needs to be. We love you Caliria. He loves you. You are part of us and always will be from now on. I understand the clash that goes on within you Inamarno. How could you feel this way about us so quickly? So completely? I do not have that answer for you Inamarno... all I can say is that it is meant to be by whatever gods we both believe in. We can only hope that this time away from us will make you realize that we are what you need. Just as we need you. We miss you already and you have only just left Inamarno. We will wait however long it takes for you to balance within your heart and mind what you feel. Never doubt that. I only hope that it is quick.

Paga is there not to watch you or report to us anything. I have forbidden her from doing this Inamarno. Her only purpose is to protect you and if you wish it, try and be your friend. I have left some things for you. When Andro was still a child his parents gave to him a pendant. It is a Dragon's Heart pendant, shaped and molded from the heart of a dragon who went to the gods long ago. When I first came into his life he had this pendant split in two and gave me half. As we have found Carisia and Ne'Veha and Lu'ria and now you, Elynth has reformed, reshaped and separated this pendant so that each of us carries a single piece of it. It signifies our love and devotion to you Inamarno. To each other. Our eternal commitment to you and each other. If we fit all the pieces together it would once again form a complete heart. Wear it Inamarno... and perhaps it will help you to see what we already know. The other things are just some simple clothes and a single transmitter. No matter where you are, if there is a Lycavorian ship within the same sector and you press this... well just know you are a Princess of the Union and it will be acted upon. We love you Inamarno. Come back to us soon.

The 'simple' clothes had been several beautiful outfits that Caliria had already tried on. Two jumpsuits where the color and cut of the fabric hugged her lush body like a second skin and made the green in her eyes truly stand out. There was an elegant dress of casual nature and then a single white oversized shirt that could only be one of Andro's formal uniform shirts similar to what she had worn on Cranae Island. Caliria reached up and wrapped her fingers around the glittering blood red pendant that hung from the simple necklace of tightly woven Drow lace. It felt warm to the touch when she held it so tightly and Caliria thought she could feel an almost unnatural tingling through her fingers as she held it. She lifted her head and looked around the huge mess lounge of the *ARCH DEMON* seeing dozens of Lycavorians and elves and several different species she had not seen before coming onto this ship. All of them conversed easily with each other, intermingled as they were. There was laughter among them as they ate their breakfast and prepared for their duties. She had been treated as a Princess ever since she came on board and even the single female *Durcunusaan* soldier that was now her constant shadow remained inconspicuous and sat two tables over. She had not wanted this, but the young woman explained that she was not there to report back to Andro or keep an eye on her activities. He had forbidden her to do this just as Sadi had. Her single duty was to protect Caliria no matter what she did or decided. The way Paga had said it made it so Caliria could not help but believe her and her actions up until now had done nothing but reinforce that. Caliria had seen little of her sister Arduri, for she was spending nearly all of her time with Lisisa and Denali Leonidas. Arduri was smitten by them completely, and Caliria had never seen her sister so determined to have something she wanted. And she wanted them. It appeared they felt a similar emotion for Arduri, because whenever she saw them together they were laughing and holding hands with her.

“Caliria?” The soft voice spoke and Caliria looked up to see her father standing by her table holding a tray in his hands.

“Father.” Caliria responded.

“You sent word that you wanted to see me.” He said.

Caliria motioned with her hand to the chair across from her. “Yes.”

“Arduri wants nothing to do with me...” Coren spoke as he sat down. “And I can’t even open an internal COM channel to speak with you.”

Caliria met his eyes. “I asked that all COM channels to my quarters be blocked until I authorized them. Especially those from you.”

“Why?” Coren asked. “I thought we could talk and...”

“You thought you could convince me that the reasons I left were indeed right? That you could finally make me see that these men and women are the vilest enemy we have ever known? Yes I know father.” She rubbed her temple. “I needed time father. Time to think and put things in perspective. To reconcile what I think and feel about Androcles and the others.” Caliria said. “A simple perspective that I have never been allowed before because of you.”

Coren’s eyes narrowed. “I don’t understand.”

Caliria nodded. “Yes... at times neither do I.” She said. “I want to be around them father. I want to be with them. I want Andro’s arms wrapped around me. What I felt in his arms... in their arms is beyond anything I have ever known or will ever know.”

“So you have slept with him?” Coren asked. “With them?”

Caliria nodded. “And it was beyond glorious.” She replied. “But even then... even after that I still have questions and doubts because of what you raised us to believe for so long.”

Coren was silent for a long moment and then met her eyes. “I’m sorry Caliria.” He said softly. His words were delivered with heartfelt sincerity and this surprised her.

“What have you been doing father?” She asked him finally.

Coren looked taken aback by the question and he hesitated for a moment. “I... why?” He asked finally.

“You are not confined to your quarters father... I know this.” Caliria said. “Have you been out of your quarters before now? I know that you have spent a great deal of time using the Computer database.”

Coren’s eyes grew wider. “You are spying on me?” He asked almost angrily.

“No... not at all.” Caliria said. “It seems because I am considered a Princess of the Union by these men and women that I receive a copy of the same reports that Denali and Lisisa receive each morning. These reports have monitored your access to the ship’s central database just as they do with everyone on board. What have you been reading father?”

“Does it matter?” Coren asked.

“It does to me... if you tell me the truth.” Caliria told him.

“History.” Coren spoke finally.

“History?” Caliria pressed him.

Coren met her eyes and let out a long deep breath. It was almost a sigh of defeat Caliria noticed. “The databanks of this ship hold the entire history of the Lycavorian Union.” He said finally. “Aside from several files about this ship that are classified I was able to read quite a bit. Even some events that we did not know.”

“You sound different when you say that.” Caliria said. “The vitriol and hate for them is not as strong. Why is that father?”

“What does it matter?” Coren asked softly.

“It matters because these are things you drummed into my head as I grew father.” Caliria spoke. “These are things that you have espoused for centuries and so many believe what you say. These are things that have confused me to the point that I can not even make a decision to be with the man and the women who I ache for every minute of the day!”

“What?” Coren asked.

“Do you know what Andro told me before I left father?” Caliria asked him. “He told me that you hate his people. He can smell it on you. And he can smell it on me as well. I hate his people too father... and I don’t know why. Yet I love him and Sadi and the others with all that I am. That is why he sent me away... he said I needed to find the balance between what my heart is telling me and what my mind is telling me.”

“Caliria why are you...?” Coren began to speak. He stopped when Caliria took his hand.

“Papa, I know you are ashamed of me.” Caliria said. “I know that you having a daughter with black hair makes other Vanari look at you differently. It makes it harder for you among the SBR. I know all this Papa, but now I need you to answer a question for me. If you ever loved me... if you ever cared for me... I need you to answer my question truthfully and from your heart father.” She touched her temple once more. “And I will know if you are lying to me papa. It seems that my new abilities within Mindvoice grant me that knowledge. Answer my question papa... please.”

Coren met his daughter’s eyes and he nodded. “Very well.” He said softly.

“What caused you to hate them so?” Caliria asked. “What happened that made you not trust them and think of them as inferior? How did this ever take root within your mind? You are so open and understanding with others, yet with the Lycavorians you change completely. You become filled with hate and anger and distrust. Why? Tell me why papa? Help me to understand why this is.”

“I... I went to a Vanari Truthseer.” Coren spoke softly. “It was shortly before you were born.”

“A Vanari Truthseer?” Caliria gasped as she leaned back. “I thought... papa I thought you hated Vanari Truthseers. You have always called them mindless gypsy idiots who play on the emotions of others and The Prophets.”

Coren nodded. “Now I do yes. Back then... back then I did not.” He said. “She was an old woman... in the Eastern Markets of Mydala. Your mother had me down there shopping and she was among the more well known Truthseers. I don’t know why I did it... I saw her sitting there and the next thing I remember I was sitting in front of her.”

“What... what could she have said that caused you to feel as you do?” Caliria asked.

Coren looked at her. “She told me that you would be born with black hair. She told me that it would be many years before another child came. She told me I would lose your mother to a Lycavorian. She told me I would lose all my children to Lycavorians. To death. A father should not outlive their children!” Coren snapped softly before he looked at the table they were sitting at. “She told me that I would hate them so intensely it would blind me to the future and paths that our two peoples would share. And she told me that I would be the one to bring about that future or see it destroyed forever.” Coren looked up at her. “When I left her shop I was terrified Caliria. And when you were born...” He reached out and stroked her long black hair seeing her eyes go a little wider at his action. “When you were born with your beautiful black hair I became even more terrified. It’s happening right before my eyes! First Nirilo, then your mother and Naesta and now Arduri. She is never apart from them you know. And now you. Now I will lose you as well.” Coren lifted her hand between his then and lowered his lips to her skin to kiss her knuckles.

“I have... I have never been ashamed of you my beautiful Caliria. I have loved you from the moment you entered this life. I have let my fear of losing you... all of you... I have let that fear drive my actions and how I acted towards you. And all it has done is to drive you further away from me. The only way to keep this from happening I thought was to renounce it and to hate those who would be the perpetrators of such a heinous crime. But in hating them... in hating them and who they are, it caused me to hate all that I loved as well. In order to keep all of you from dying... I pushed you away with my actions. Ironic isn’t it? I call everyone fools who believe as Ardan and your mother do and I am the biggest fool of all for allowing this to happen as it has.”

Caliria looked at him in stunned silence as he held her hand. “You... you never told anyone this?” She gasped finally.

Coren chortled softly and lowered his hands, keeping her fingers intertwined with his for as long as she would allow him. “What would I tell them my daughter Caliria? That Coren Re Mydala, Regent and descendant of the founders of our capital city and those who helped to shape our people in the beginning... that I let the ranting of a gypsy woman guide all I have done for the last three hundred plus years? That her words so terrified me they changed me? They would think me utterly insane Caliria. Just as your mother and all of you now do.”

Caliria knew simply from looking at his face that he was telling her the truth. She shook her head slowly. “Why... why tell me all of this now?”

“Because you asked... and I am going to try and save you.” Coren answered.

“Save me?” Caliria asked.

Coren nodded. “Do you love him Caliria? Do you love them?”

Caliria met his eyes. “Yes! I... I think... I don’t know! Why do you care? You hate them papa. You always have.”

Coren looked around and then back to her. “Would you allow me to show you something I have discovered in my quarters?”

“What?” Caliria asked.

“It is better if I show you.” Coren spoke.

“What have you done papa?” Caliria asked.

“I have done nothing wrong. I told you I have been reading. It is what I have discovered that you will find interesting.” Coren said.

Caliria glanced quickly over to where Paga sat and saw the young woman watching her from her table. *[Paga?]* She spoke.

[He is your father Princess.] The female *Durcunusaan* officer spoke. *[Perhaps now is the time to try and begin to heal the wounds of the past. It can only help you move into the future. Besides... he can not take you prisoner on the ship.]*

[You would let me go?] Caliria asked.

[I have told you before... more than anything I am here to protect you and try to be your friend. Not tell you what to do or report to anyone. This is a decision you must make.] Paga answered.

Caliria turned back to her father. “Show me.” She stated.

“... old flight plans and logs?” Paga asked the Operations officer.

The man nodded. “Mostly transport ships. Equipment transactions as well. Declassified stuff. He seems pretty computer savvy but he has not tried to break any encryption. Not that he could even if he tried.”

“What kind of transactions?” Paga asked.

“Hadarian medical equipment mostly.” The officer answered.

“How far back?” Paga asked.

“He’s stayed within the past decade. Aside from several history cubes... this is what he has been accessing ever since he came aboard.” The man replied.

“Which history cubes?” Paga asked.

“The Black Day. Anything related to our time as slaves to the Coven. The beginning of the Rebellion and King Resumar. He also reviewed the standard data file on Prince Androcles. He asked for several restricted files but was refused obviously.” The man told her.

“Which ones?”

“Mostly about Prince Androcles’s actions in The Evolli War. Alba Tau. And the Battle of Gemora there at the end of the war. Several inquiries into the HMR data bases.”

Paga stepped back from the man’s console and smiled softly. “He’s putting it together.” She said softly.

“What? He’s putting what together?” The officer asked.

Paga looked at him. “The truth.” She said. “Or what he believes is the truth. He’s in for a surprise I think.”

“...have been going through hundreds of old transport logs and equipment transactions.” Coren spoke as he sat at the console and began typing on the control pad. The screen came alive quickly at his touch. “All of it is declassified. Some military data logs as well. I began this on Earth to pass the time.”

Caliria looked at him. “This is what you have been doing father? Why?”

“Wait!” Coren spoke. “Look here... five years ago a Hadarian transport was lost in what was reported as a sub space anomaly. It was lost on the border of the Bontawillian species, who are now members of the Union after hundreds of years of being allies but non-members.”

“So?” Caliria said.

“The ship was loaded with medical equipment that was destined for a military facility along the coreward border. A forward base I would guess.” Coren spoke. “Sixty thousand metric tons of equipment.

Among the equipment that was lost were three Hadarian Medical Research computers and two Molecular Synthesis Converters.”

“Ok.”

“Molecular Synthesis Converters are used in disease research by the Hadarian Healers.” He told her. “And their Research Computers are the most advanced medical databases I have ever seen. I wasn’t able to access all of their files but what I did see was amazing. Just the unrestricted data files hold more knowledge than our entire medical library.”

“Father... what are you driving at?” Caliria asked him.

“At the exact same time, two Lycavorian civilian frigates on a registered flight plan to Apo Prime encountered another sub space anomaly four light years away. They vanished for exactly twelve hours.” Coren told her. “They reappeared on the exact same course for Apo Prime, but three minutes after reappearing on Union sensors they reported varying damage and altered course for the planet Beklan Two. A planet that had been attacked by Kavalians nearly fifteen years before and was still undergoing heavy construction as they rebuilt.”

“I don’t understand what this all means father.” Caliria asked.

“Those two ships never arrived on Beklan Two and they were never reported as missing.” Coren told her. “I have found three other instances with similar circumstances over the past five years Caliria.”

“What are you getting at?” She asked him.

“I know about the disease that the Eridiani woman’s family was infected with.” Coren spoke. “You can not keep something like that secret on a ship Caliria. No matter how large. I also know enough from listening to you talk of your research on other projects that twisting a Vanari disease to be used against other species takes specialized equipment. Scientific and medical equipment we, as a people, do not have. The same type of equipment needed to find a counter agent to the chemical compound the OSG uses against our people. When your sister and mother gave your research into the OSG compound to Androcles’s Hadarian mother she found a counter agent within hours using her equipment and computers.”

“Yes... so?” Caliria asked.

“That is the Lycavorian connection Caliria.” Coren spoke. “It has taken me hours to put all of this together. It is all I have done since I have been on this ship.”

“Papa you have spent the better part of two days trying to find a connection between the Lycavorian people and a Vanari disease that was twisted by the OSG into a weapon?” Caliria asked harshly. “All this to prove that your theories about them are correct?”

Coren looked at her and stood up. “What? No!” He declared. “That’s not it at all!” He turned back to the computer and typed quickly. “I have done this to try and save you! To save my family!”

Caliria watched him for a moment, seeing how he typed furiously on the pad. This was not about trying to prove guilt; this was truly about him trying to save what he thought lost to him. She stepped forward and placed her hand on his arm. “Papa... stop.” She said.

“There is more.” He stated quickly. “I don’t care about the Lycavorians. I only want to... I only want to save those I love! It’s all I have left!”

Caliria squeezed his arm tighter. “Papa!” She spoke finally drawing his attention to her and away from the console.

Coren looked at her and she saw moistness in those eyes. She saw tears in those eyes. It was something she had never seen from her father in all of her life. “I have failed you Caliria! I should have embraced you when you were born and not scorned you! Look what my vanity has done to me? It drove your mother away and ultimately into the arms of a Lycavorian! A man she loves far more than she ever loved me. I spent so much time and effort in trying to keep all of you away from them and it drove all of you right to them! And I hate them for it more and more each day! That damn gypsy was right! She was right!”

Caliria reached into the thigh pocket on her jumpsuit and pulled out the holodisc and data pad. “Papa... let me show you something.” She said.

“I will not view a list of letters from my children telling me they never wish to see me again.” Coren hissed softly as he wiped his eyes. “I won’t!”

“You need to see this Papa.” Caliria spoke as she stepped around him with the data pad and inserted the holodisc into the computer on his desk.

The holodisc on the floor flared to life and in seconds Coren was looking at the crystal clear image of a frozen Androcles Leonidas. He appeared to be standing in an office of some sort. He looked quickly at Caliria. "Caliria what..."

"Just watch papa." She said before tapping the computer once more. "I have not watched all of it, only the first minute or so. Andro wanted us to view it together but until now I had not found the right time to bring it to you. Now is the time I suppose." She activated the holodisc and Andro's image began to speak.

"Where to begin Coren Re Mydala." Andro spoke as his image unfroze and he began to speak. "I find myself admiring your resolve sir."

Coren's eyes grew wide at the very respectful tone that Androcles was speaking with. It was something he had not been accustomed to.

"Your contentions about my people are for the most part false, but you hold to them without hesitation and as my father has taught me, that is the sign of a strong willed man with strong beliefs."

Coren watched as Andro settled onto the top of the desk, the data pad in his hand.

"I do not begin to understand where the source of your hatred for me and my people begins sir, and as I have told you before, I don't really care. I do not mean that to be disrespectful in any way, only that I will not go into a litany of who we are and what we have experienced in our long history just to try and impress you. Perhaps one day you will find the time to read our history and come to understand us better. I also do not pretend to know or understand all of the Vanari traditions, but I can not help to see the similarities between our people. Perhaps not so much in what we believe, but in how we believe it sir. Does that make sense?" Andro shook his head within the recording. "To be honest I find myself far out of my depth in any sort of philosophical discussion. They always give me a head ache. I believe what I believe. Yet now... now I find myself in the position of trying to convince you of what I just said I wasn't going to try to convince you of. That what you have come to believe to be true about my people is in fact not true. Ironic isn't it? Unfortunately what Inamarno has undoubtedly given to you if you are viewing this does not lend a whole lot of support to what I am trying to say and accomplish. It puts me behind the power curve so to speak."

Coren watched him set the data pad he held on his desk and then move to the counter where he poured himself a mug of the coffee he liked so much. He sipped it for a long moment and then moved back to settle once more on the desk top.

"I am about to make you a convert Coren Re Mydala, or perhaps make you one of the strongest enemies that I have, because as a politician I would put you in the same category and breath as I do my Aunt Deia and my mother Dysea. I am so far out of my depth when it comes to politics it isn't even funny." Andro continued with a grin. "You have one of the keenest minds I have ever known sir and I can only hope that you respond with this intellect and not your emotions to what I'm going to tell you. You may not believe me when I say I hold you in the highest of regard sir, but it is the truth. I know you could not have risen to your position without garnering respect from others for your actions and my father and mothers have always taught my siblings and I to acknowledge that respect no matter what."

Coren watched him take a deep breath.

"My people have betrayed yours Coren Re Mydala. We have betrayed you in a manner which those within the Union, most especially my people and the elves, consider monstrous. The data pad that Inamarno has given you contains certain information. Information which links the Protectorate and even some here in the Union with the design and manufacture of the Vanari Facara Virus into a bioweapon. A bioweapon that was used recently by the OSG on the Faith family. Whether it was done intentionally or not is of little

concern me. What does concern me is that the equipment used to manufacture this weapon is of Hadarian make. Which means contact between the Alpha and Beta quadrant has been going on for longer than either of us knew. It also means that Lycavorians from the Protectorate have been collaborating with Lycavorians from the Union in the taking of Vanari females to be sold into slavery.”

Coren glanced at the data pad with wide eyes and quickly looked at Caliria. His eyes cut back to Andro when he began speaking again.

“You would think that nearly eighteen thousand years as slaves to the High Coven... that this would somehow make all of us hate slavery in any form.” Andro continued. “But this kind of slavery... it is an atrocity because it forces Vanari females into the same form of sexual slavery that we fought for so long to rid ourselves of while oppressed by the High Coven. Our females were taken at random, elven females as well, raped and beaten by the Coven soldiers for years, and when their use to them was finished they became food for them. Butchered like a dog in the street. When my grandfather died at Thermopylae here on Earth, that is when we truly began to throw the High Coven off our backs. One of the first actions my Aunt Deia and the newly elected Senate did was to outlaw slavery in any shape or form. Rape became more depraved a crime than even murder, among my people and the elves especially, but among all the species and races that called the Union home. It has been obliterated from existence whenever it has been found and those involved either executed or sentenced to life imprisonment at hard labor. I know this may sound rather malicious and barbaric to you, but it shows you how the majority view this act even now after so many millennia have passed. I will not stand here and make excuses for my people sir; for those who have perpetrated this upon the Vanari, and the only thing I can offer is my sincere apology for every Vanari female taken from their families and friends while Lycavorians have been part of this.”

Coren watched as he set the coffee mug on the desk and stood up.

“I will also tell you... this will not go unpunished sir.” Andro spoke. “That is the reason why Dutkne is returning with you. Now you will ask the same question Inamarno asked of me and I will tell you what I told her. Dutkne and I are connected within Mindvoice in a similar manner to how I am connected to my mates. It has been this way for many thousands of years among my people, beginning with Wayonn and my great grandfather Sumar. Dutkne and I are able to sense things from each other, and if he was involved in this in any way I would have been able to detect it. To be honest he was even more aghast than I was for the simple reason that he has not lived through the oppression of the High Coven as so many men and women that I know have. He asked to return under the guise of speeding the merger of the Protectorate into the Union, so that he could track down and find those responsible for this act and so many like it. When he does he will contact me with the names of every individual within Union borders who has had a hand in this. Those he finds from the Protectorate, he will deliver to the justice of the Vanari people. Those from the Union will be lined up against a wall and treated as the rabid animals they are and executed without any exception.” Andro lifted the pad from the desk and held it up. “This pad... which you should now have in your hands... it also lays down a path of facts that bring me to the conclusion that there are those within your very own government who are also involved. Perhaps more than a handful as we suspect. Individuals who are very high up sir. One of whom I believe to be Regent Ardan.”

“Ardan!” Coren wheezed out the name.

“I know you will find this very hard to believe sir and in your position I would probably feel the same.” Andro continued. “But know this... I love your daughter sir. We love her. She is part of me, part of us within here, and here.” Coren watched him touch his chest and his head. “I do not try to understand anymore how I am like I am sir, only that I am. Trust me... there are times when I wish for none of what I know and I wish only to be normal. That is not meant to be it seems. As I have told others recently, being born fully aware with the life experiences and memories going back some ten thousand years is not exactly conducive with having a normal life. If you believe nothing I have told you, please believe that I would never

endanger one who I consider to be my wife and mate regardless of what she may feel towards me in return. I would be doing this even if I already knew that Inamarno would never come back to us.”

Coren glanced at Caliria as her hands went to cover her mouth and tears began to stream down her cheeks.

Andro tossed the pad onto the desk once more. “So there you have it sir.” He spoke. “In your hand you hold the information that could confirm everything you have always believed about my people. And in having this information you have the means to insure there will never be any sort of meaningful relations between our two peoples. This data would confirm for everyone what you have been saying for years and you would be a hero among your people. It would not change what I have told my brother and sister to insure even should you decide to follow the beliefs you have always held about my people.

“No matter what you decide Coren Re Mydala, and firmly I believe and I trust that you will act in the manner that you feel you need to and in the interests of what is best for the Vanari people... but no matter what you decide the OSG will cease to be a problem for the Vanari people.

“The ship you are on now sir, it is one of seventy-three ships that have accompanied you under Shroud. A reinforced Union Strike Wing under my brother Denali’s command. His orders from me are very specific, as are Dutkne’s instructions. No matter your actions sir, when you make your decision in regards to the path you must follow, my brother Denali will turn those ships with him and all of the Protectorate’s forces against the Eridiani and the OSG. We will do this as allies to the Vanari people or in retribution for them because of what the Eridiani and the OSG have done. When Denali is finished there will be precious little remaining of the Eridiani military such as it is, or the OSG. I will make them pay for what they have made your people suffer for so long. I will make them pay for staining the honor of my grandfather and my great-grandfather for their insidious actions by involving my people in this. And I will insure that Inamarno and every Vanari female will never have to suffer the fear of being removed from those that she and they love so much. Namely you and her mother and every other Vanari parent out there.”

Andro turned fully to face the holodisc. “That is it sir. As my mother Anja says quite often, the ball is in your stadium now.”

“Court.”

The female voice Coren recognized as Eliani Leonidas came from out of view of the transmission.

“The ball is in your court.”

Andro nodded. “Yes... that too.” He stated. “We love you Inamarno. And we will always love you for as long as we have years in this life. Goodbye.”

“By the grace of all the Prophets of our people!” Coren Re Mydala stammered the phrase he had not spoken in nearly four hundred years as he looked at his daughter, shaken to his very core. Caliria’s cheeks were stained with tears and she met his eyes. “Where... how... where are such people forged Caliria?”

“In legends Papa.” She answer through her tears. “Only in legends.”

**BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT
INQUISITOR
HIGH COVEN SECURE SPACE
5.3 LYs FROM UZU OZEIB 7**

It was helping her skills return at a much faster pace Yuri thought as she used the shadows to move down the corridor of the ship, avoiding crewmembers and at times listening to them talk amongst themselves. The High Coven Weapons Master had been demanding and harsh on her, retuning her hand-to-hand skills as well as those with a blade. She had requested this days ago, but not until she had discovered Pa'cour had she put much effort into it. Once she had been considered one of the premier combatants with a blade and in using the

shadows. Now she was getting that back in preparation for her future. She had become refocused in her life, determined and resolute. She had an opportunity of a lifetime, a second chance that so many never received, and Yuri wasn't about to let it slip away as she had so many times in the past. Aikiro and Veldruk had been ruthless in raising her she now saw as she looked back. No matter what they had done, or how often they had used her for their own grabs at power, they had hardened her. Sending her to Earth, having her own brother rape her, the tasks they had given her, all of it was designed to make her as unfeeling and as ruthless as they were. All of it done to better control her.

Well they had succeeded in that endeavor, but they had also failed miserably as well.

They had failed because their arrogance and the mentality that they were perfect had allowed one small thing to slip through the cracks. Something that neither of them had ever expected or imagined. Yuri grinned to herself as she realized her mother must have been rolling over in whatever grave she resided in, wherever that was. They had allowed the one thing that could save her to remain in her life. Hidden and silent and waiting until the day it was needed. As she unwrapped the shadows from around her body, startling several crewmembers who were in the corridor as well, Yuri could think of nothing else. She passed her hand over the control panel of the separate quarters she had been using since leaving the Blood Vat and the door slid open soundlessly. She knew that rumors were floating about all over the ship in regards to why she did not stay with her husband Admiral Moran in their much larger stateroom, but now Yuri did not care about them; or him for that matter. She had become almost paranoid in her actions, insuring that everything she did was as perfect in each way as she could make it. She sat very dutifully in the meetings with Robert and the other officers on the ship as they discussed their strategy and how they would return to Uzu Ozeib 7 in victory. She commented when she felt the need, usually with a harsh comment or command and she watched as they all sat there and realized that their Princess was almost back to her ruthless self. They were letting the petty politicians on the Coven homeworld basically sign their own death warrants as the struggles for power continued. The military was somewhat worrisome, as many senior Coven commanders were beginning to question what Robert and his advisors were doing and why. They still had an incredible force behind them, but with events within the Union beginning to become more and more known, the military officers were advocating using this distraction by the Union to launch a full scale assault against the Kavalians before they were ready.

And more and more Robert was taking Dante's advice.

Yuri could sense Xaxon within her oldest son, struggling in trying to maintain control of a mind that had not been shaped to hold his essence. Dante's own thirst for power and glory only fueled Xaxon's control of him; but it did not help Xaxon to establish dominance over him just yet. Dante was lost to her Yuri knew. Even if Xaxon released him for some reason, Dante was sadly beyond help. He had allowed the fingers of Xaxon's control to become deeply set within his own psyche, and as time passed, Xaxon would take more and more from him until nothing remained but the physical shell under Xaxon's control. This is what they had planned for her Yuri knew, and in that respect Yuri found herself thanking Androcles Leonidas for killing her. If not for him, what was happening to her son would be happening to her. It pained Yuri to know that she could not help her son, but these last hours and days had shown her that there was nothing she could do. Javier was dead because of orders she had given, Lucia and Carisia now members of the Leonidas family along with her sister Narice, because they had found there was more to life than domination and power. They had found what they had been secretly seeking and none of them would ever return. Yuri felt a momentary pang of regret for how she had treated her children, especially Carisia, but she pushed it down. This was not the time to linger on past sins she knew. Yuri had a chance now, and she was going to take it and make it work.

Her head came up when she caught the delectable scent of his warm blood and then two powerful arms were sweeping her up into their embrace. An embrace she had ached for now for hours. This is what her mother and father had failed to see, the beacon of love and hope. Yuri responded eagerly as Pa'cour's soft, thin lips came down on hers and he crushed her lithe body to his. His kisses were professions of his feelings for her, a healing balm that swept over her as she wrapped her arms around his wide shoulders and returned his kiss with equal fervor as he pressed her back gently against the bulkhead. Her legs went around his waist, her booted feet pressing inward against his powerful hips and ass and drawing him closer to her as her breasts pressed firmly against his maddeningly broad chest. One of his large hands came up behind her head, his fingers sinking into her rich black hair, pulling her head closer with gentle pressure. Their time together since Robert's return had been fleeting, but they had certainly made the most of it. He had taken her in a darkened work conduit in the

fleeting hours of the morning just yesterday while she kept them hidden within the shadows. Yuri's blood still sang at the power and pleasure that had swept through her until he had exploded, buried within her body and they had shared blood at the peak. His spicy blood was like an addiction for her now, and she also knew it was giving her the added resolve and strength to fully accept what was going on around her. She had gone ahead with his permission and established a single powerful Mindvoice connection with him, opening her mind to his and surrendering the last bit of her old self to the void. He knew all there was to know about her now, and this only seemed to make him love her more.

Yuri cooed against his lips as she felt his abdomen press against her groin causing her desire to flare. There was something utterly divine about being utterly filled with fifteen thick inches of glorious Immortal cock that Yuri would now never be able to explain or live without. Now that she had grown accustomed to his immense size, there was nothing left but cataclysmic pleasure, no matter what position he took her in. Pa'cour didn't just fuck her silly, he feasted on her. He didn't just make love to her, he possessed her completely. And when his fangs sank into her neck at the moment of their release it was rapturous every time. They didn't have time right now she knew, but Yuri fully intended to devour this man equally, and see how much of his beautiful cock she could take within her throat for starters.

Their lips slowly came away and she nibbled his upper lip like a young, giddy schoolgirl relishing in the fact that she could act this way now. She brought her hands up and stroked his cheek, the gray color of his semi wrinkled skin not even registering in her mind anymore. Only the intensity of the love for her in those devastating dark eyes. Robert had never looked at her the way Pa'cour did. She had never seen the complete and absolute devotion to her that she saw in Pa'cour's eyes. *Phraktos*... he could make her wet just by gazing at her as he did now.

"I missed you." She whispered to him. "*Phraktos* I have missed you."

Pa'cour smiled as he gazed at her surreal beauty. "No more than I have missed you." He replied. "Speaking within this connection we now have is awkward to me."

Yuri smiled as she stroked his cheek and the skin of his neck. "It will become easier with time my Immortal love." She said.

"And no one can hear us?" Pa'cour asked her.

Yuri shook her head. "Not unless we allow them in. Xaxon is too focused on trying to establish full control of Dante to take notice. He is struggling with it because Dante was not schooled as I was for so long. No one else on this ship has a strong enough ability within Mindvoice to detect it. And I grow stronger every day."

"We are not normally able to do this Yuri. My people." Pa'cour told her. "How is it that I can now? And so easily it seems."

"Your people... Akruvians... you have always had a powerful resistance to Mindvoice abilities. Your natural shields would take decades for vampires to be able to use and control, yet you do it naturally. Once we... once we shared blood it was a simple matter because then I could trace your shields and reinforce them and be part of them." Yuri leaned forward fast as a whip and let her now extended fangs nick the skin of his neck just enough to draw a single drop of blood. She quickly licked that drop up and savored it before she swallowed. "Your blood is... it is like a drug to me now Pa'cour. I've never tasted anything sweeter or so spicy." She said with a smile.

Pa'cour chuckled as he lowered her to the deck. "Well... you may have as much as you wish as long as you don't kill me. I rather like your blood as well."

Yuri smiled as she put her feet on the deck once more and she wrapped her arms around his waist and buried her face in his chest inhaling deeply of his manly smell and the faint smell of his blood. She smiled as his arms held her still and she took a deep breath before pushing away, reluctant to let go of the true emotions and sensations she had never felt before. She looked up into his face. "You took a risk coming here my love." She said realizing how easily those two words came to her now.

Pa'cour nodded. "Perhaps... but I have information that you should know and I wanted to see you. I may not be able to wrap the shadows around myself as you, but I have learned how to get around undetected in my many years of life. It is a necessity at times." He finished with a proud look.

Yuri laughed softly at his expression and turned to go further into the quarters, pulling him with her hand. "I have information as well." She said moving to the couch while he did release her hand and move to the bar to pour them glasses of *Nau'shindcal d'I'Vlos*. She waited for him to return to the couch and she took the

glass from his hand. "Their paranoia is still paralyzing them." She said as she took a sip. "They can not make up their minds on when to return."

Pa'cour looked at her intently as he sat down. "Moran is not usually so indecisive." He said. "Why does he wait to return?"

"I don't know for sure... but I think it has to do with how much time he is spending with Dante. The residual echoes within Mindvoice are confusing for him and he can not focus as long as Xaxon struggles to control Dante." Yuri answered. "They will be too late when they do decide I think."

Pa'cour looked at her. "What do you mean?"

"Narice has returned to High Coven space Pa'cour." Yuri told him. "I sensed her only fleetingly, like an echo in a large room, but it was her. And she is far stronger than when she left too."

"What? How?" He asked.

Yuri shook her head. "I don't know. Ever since... ever since our first night together my mind has been so clear and focused. It is like you removed all the obstacles that were clouding my judgment. Some of it may be residual effects from having that bastard Xaxon within me for so long but I'm more focused than I have ever been Pa'cour. I feel stronger and more in control of my actions and my mind."

"Why... why would she return Yuri?" Pa'cour gasped. "Why now? A sneak attack?"

Yuri shook her head. "No... that is not her style." She said rising to her feet and pacing to the counter before turning back around and looking at him. "If she has returned then we do not have much time my love."

"Time for what?" Pa'cour asked.

"Narice is the wife of Arrarn Leonidas Pa'cour and there is no possible way Androcles would let her return." Yuri said thoughtfully. "Unless he was making his move against the Coven for what happen to his sister."

Pa'cour rose up and walked over to stand in front of her. "How would he know what was happening Yuri? How would he know this is the time to...?" Pa'cour stopped talking and her eyes lifted to his. "A traitor. A traitor within the inner circle!"

Yuri nodded. "Or someone on Uzu Ozeib 7." She spoke. "Someone high enough to know what is going on with us... and the power play that is beginning to happen. Someone who has been in place for a very long time if they have this kind of access. Someone my mother never suspected or discovered."

"What could she hope to accomplish?" Pa'cour asked. "The Union has neither the will nor the ability to project their power so far from their own borders."

"Are you so sure my love?" Yuri asked him. "If I learned nothing in my time with Martin Leonidas... it was that he was master at hiding secrets. Secrets that he could use against his enemies in any number of ways. His son Androcles is almost a perfect mirror of him, albeit one who is far crueller than his father in dealing with his enemies and those who threaten whom he loves and cares for. And Martin Leonidas is a monster when it comes to that."

Pa'cour's eyes narrowed somewhat as his mind raced with scenarios and he shook his head. "It couldn't be." He said finally.

"What couldn't be?" Yuri asked.

"A report that we received yesterday from High Coven command." Pa'cour told her. "The command ship of Admiral Pontal went off the grid for nearly a dozen hours. When his Fleet's Second Officer was questioned about this, he answered that Pontal had taken down the power to his ship to run emergency drills."

"Is that so unusual?" Yuri asked. "Given his history and training regime... this does not strike me as odd."

"It is unusual if it's Pontal." Pa'cour answered. "Yuri this man is a masterful tactician and part of the reason the Coven still survives. He would not need to power down his entire ship to conduct emergency drills. And most certainly not his communications array. The vast majority of his crew could do their individual jobs in their sleep and half crippled. They are the finest crew anywhere within the Coven. His entire combined fleet command is superbly trained. And why just his ship?"

"You think... you think he met with Narice?" Yuri asked.

"Does the time coincide with when you felt her?" Pa'cour asked.

"More or less yes." Yuri answered as her eyes grew wider. "Pa'cour... do you know what this means?"

Pa'cour nodded. "Nothing good I can tell you that." He said. "Pontal has the unfettered respect and support of five additional Combined Fleet Commanders. He trained most of them. Nearly twelve hundred warships, perhaps three thousand fighters, and over two million well seasoned ground forces just in his command alone. A varied combination of clone and mixed pureblood and turned vampires. Perhaps an equal number in the other commands as well. They have held the Coven borders in their sectors almost by themselves. Pontal has never been the stereotype pureblood Yuri. He avoids your homeworld like it is full of the plague and it is said he once told your father he was a fool when it came to tactics."

Yuri's eyes grew wide. "You jest!" She exclaimed.

"That is what is said." Pa'cour spoke. "He is very outspoken that we are prosecuting the war with the Kavalians in the wrong way. He has been for some years. Your mother and Moran never did anything to him because of his proven combat and leadership abilities. It is also rumored that he first turned a young human female who had caught his eye and then he made her his wife."

"His wife? Really?" Yuri asked.

Pa'cour nodded. "That is what is said."

Yuri stared at him for a long moment. "Pa'cour... if what you say is true then Narice has not returned to attack the High Coven." Yuri stammered. "She means to attempt to take control of the Coven with the support of the Lycavorians and possibly Pontal and those who follow him as their commander."

Pa'cour looked at her with wide dark eyes. "Androcles Leonidas would do this Yuri?" He asked in shock. "He would support this? I thought you said he hated vampires."

"He hates *me*." Yuri said quickly. "He doesn't hate all vampires. He took my daughter as his wife Pa'cour... that ought to tell you something. Carisia is a pureblood that has my blood in her veins and he took her as his wife. Some intelligence data has reported she has fought beside him on more than one occasion and she is often seen in public with him. Lycavorians do not hate vampires as a whole, only those who try to kill them or hurt those they care for. Only... only vampires like *me*."

"Yuri that was not..." Pa'cour began.

Yuri shook her head quickly. "I know... but I don't think that distinction will matter to him." Yuri turned and moved to the window in her quarters. "It makes perfect sense Pa'cour. He supports Narice's bid for power... and with Pontal backing her as well... he would need to supply only a few dozen ships in order to show his support for her. Ships that they could spare easily. It would most certainly mean civil war, but the majority of the younger generations of vampires would throw their lot behind Narice without question. They loved her before all of this happened Pa'cour. She was the face of those who wanted to change things. To make living conditions and centuries old laws go away." She turned back to face him.

"What is your role in all this Yuri?" Pa'cour asked.

Yuri met his eyes calmly and confidently. "My desire to rule anything died the moment Androcles Leonidas killed me Pa'cour. The only thing I desire now... the only thing I want is to get away from all this. To escape with you and try to regain some of what I once was before my father and mother made me a monster with their actions. Your love for me has made me see that Pa'cour. And my... my love for you is screaming at me to do this before this life ends up killing me as it has killed my father, mother and brother."

"I will not let that happen Yuri." Pa'cour told her. "Never."

Yuri smiled at him. "Robert has more support yes... but that will matter not if they can not utilize the many shipyards and bases to supply and plan. These are things that Pontal would seize immediately and..." Yuri stopped. "*Vith!*" She swore. Pa'cour watched as she moved to the secure COM array and began stabbing commands onto the console.

"Yuri what is it?" Pa'cour spoke.

"All of our collected research from the Mindvoice ship in Kavalian space." Yuri snapped. "I ordered it copied and moved to a secondary research facility away from the main shipyard my mother had built for that purpose."

"So?" Pa'cour asked.

"Narice knows of the main shipyard and the secondary facility Pa'cour!" Yuri declared. "If Narice knows then Androcles knows. They will target that shipyard first to keep the research data out of our hands!"

“Yuri that shipyard is twenty kilometers long and eight kilometers wide.” Pa'cour said. “It would take an entire Fleet Group to even think of destroying it. The Lycavorians could never get one of their Fleet Groups that deep into Coven space without being detected.”

“I'm not ready to take that risk.” Yuri said quickly. “And I will not let that research fall into Robert's hands. He cannot be allowed to have it. There's no telling what Xaxon would have Dante build with it!”

The small monitor on the desk came alive with the face of a young pureblood as she finished speaking. “Princess Yuri!” The man spoke clearly surprised. “This is... this is a surprise.”

“Professor Lidene.” Yuri said calmly.

“Princess... Princess I am sorry we have not completed the move.” The man stammered. “The ships are loaded but I have been...”

“Lidene listen to me.” Yuri cut the man off remaining calm. Before all that had happened to her, before Pa'cour, she would have been tearing the scientist a new asshole for not following her orders to the letter. “I want you to execute the move now and all of the copied data and your research team have downloaded to the station delete. Once that is done I need you to move to the planetary facility in the Holmar system.”

“The Holmar system?” He asked. “Princess... that research facility has not been used in nearly two hundred years!”

Yuri nodded. “I know... and only four people know it exists. Two of whom are now dead Lidene.” She said. “This may seem like a strange request coming from me Lidene, especially after the way I have treated you and many of your staff through the years, but I am doing this to try and save them. Hell take as many as you think you can... their families as well but I need you to be leaving the station you are on now within six hours.”

“Six hours?” Lidene gasped.

Yuri nodded. “A storm is coming Lidene. A storm is coming and the data and materials you have cannot fall into the wrong hands. And my husband Admiral Moran is the wrong hands believe me. I'm trying to save what I can before that happens.”

“Forgive me Princess... this is a highly unusual request.” He spoke. “Admiral Moran has contacted me personally and told me to report to him should anyone question what we are doing or give any orders not approved by him or try to access our files. He... he mentioned you specifically Princess.”

Yuri glanced at Pa'cour and shook her head before turning back to the monitor. “Lidene, who is Princess of the High Coven?” She asked sternly.

“You... you are Milady.” He answered.

“I have treated you and your staff harshly Lidene.” Yuri spoke. “To be honest... I have been a complete bitch to all of you! I am trying... I am trying to make amends for that now Lidene.”

“Admiral Moran told me he would see to it I was drained of blood and thrown into a radiation tank if I did not do as he asked.” Lidene said.

“Lidene... only you and I now know of that facility in the Holmar System.” Yuri spoke calmly. “With my mother and Tesand now dead there has been a division of those that remain loyal to her in how to move forward. My hus...” Yuri caught herself before finishing that word. It left a bad taste in her mouth and her face grimaced in hatred just by speaking that partial word. “Admiral Moran is leading the part that wants to continue with how things have been Lidene.” She continued. “I have come to the realization that things need to be different. Do you wish to be incinerated by the shock wave and blast when that station you are on is destroyed?” Yuri asked him.

“Certainly not!” Lidene replied.

“Then do as I ask you Professor.” Yuri spoke. “Things will be different Lidene... for I am different now. You must do this and not tell Admiral Moran. If you do... he will order you and everyone on your staff executed. Your families as well. I don't want to see that happen. Do as I ask and do it within the next six hours.”

It was an easy decision and Lidene nodded his head. “I will make it so Princess.” He spoke firmly.

“Contact me on my personal channel when you have reached the station.” She told him. “I will not be on this ship when you arrive.”

“Not be on the ship?” Lidene asked. “Where will you be?”

Yuri nodded her head. “It's a long story. Suffice it to say that I will be disappearing for a time Lidene. For my own safety. Once you have left the station, have your research ships strip their transponders and go

dark. Engage your Shrouds and then use a meandering path to take you to the Holmar System. Take what you need from the stores on the station but do so quietly. When you are on your way, contact me and I will send you data that will unlock a dozen buried bunkers within the facility and there you will find enough supplies and equipment to last a year. Do not leave the Holmar System for anything Lidene; it will be far too dangerous for you. I want you to continue your work however. Especially on the many weapons systems you told me you could devise.” She said. “Are we clear Lidene?”

Lidene nodded quickly. “I’ll begin making the preparations right now Princess. We will be gone in six hours... I promise you.”

“Very well.” Yuri said softly. “I wish to be clear to you Lidene... I will protect you and those with you to the best of my ability but you must do what I say. Be mindful of everything Lidene and above all else be careful.”

Lidene nodded. “Yes Milady.”

Yuri terminated the transmission and looked at Pa'cour as he moved up closer to her. “Will he do it?” He asked.

Yuri nodded. “If there is one thing I have learned about scientists... it is that they think too much of themselves to do anything that might risk their lives.” She answered. “He will do as I say.”

“I have been transferring supplies to your personal G9 Runner for the last three days.” Pa'cour said. “Tweaking the systems as well. I will deliver more to it tonight. We can be ready to leave in six hours if that is what you wish.”

Yuri met his eyes and then folded herself into his arms. “I don’t think we have much choice now.” She said as she pressed her face against his uniform shirt. “We still must be careful Pa'cour my love. I would not be able to stand losing you now. Not so soon after finding you.”

“You will not lose me Yuri.” Pa'cour spoke softly. “Not now.”

Yuri nodded. “I need to see Nalavi and then remove a blight against me. I will access the ship’s systems and try to do as much as I am able to disrupt them just before we leave. I will meet you within the landing bay in exactly six hours my love.” She pulled her face back until she was looking at him. “Promise me.”

Pa'cour smiled and nodded. “That is a promise I will keep.” He said.

EARTH

SPARTA

HALL OF THE AGIADS MEMORIAL EDIFICE

TEMPORARY ADMINISTRATION BUREAU FOR SENATE MEMBERS AND SENIOR MILITARY OFFICERS

“... Got everything set up here on the sixth floor.” Riall spoke as they walked down the corridor of the huge seven story rectangular building that ran parallel to the Evrotas River. “The first five floors are for the senators and their aides. We’ve managed to cram all of them into common offices and I have kept these last two floors for use by the departments heads of the military and other commands.”

Andro admired the many statues that lined the gold encrusted floors on the corridor as they walked. “I have only been in this building once.” He stated softly. “It is truly grand.”

Riall nodded his head. “Every Spartan King of the Agiad line has a statue and memorial to his reign. A chronicle of their deeds and misdeeds. Gorgo has brought me here at least once a year just to walk around. It is part museum as well, though they have ceased the tours since all of this began.” He said with a smile.

Andro looked at him. “My uncle’s is...”

Riall shook his head quickly. “No. It has been destroyed. Apparently someone with the access to enter the building made their way in here some time within the last twenty-four hours. Every written scroll... every piece of documentation... it has all been ripped to shreds or burned. The two statues brought down and smashed into hundreds of pieces.”

“You don’t say?” Andro spoke as he continued to walk.

“You wouldn’t know anything about that would you boy?” Riall asked.

Andro shook his head. “Nothing at all grandfather.” He answered.

Riall nodded. "Yes... I thought as much." He said knowingly. He held out the two data pads. "The intelligence you asked for." He said. "Though I don't know why."

"I'll make it clear very soon grandfather." He said.

"Martin has left I take it?" Riall asked.

Andro nodded his head. "About nine hours ago. He should be rendezvousing with the *ARC ROYAL* shortly. They will proceed from there."

"Admiral Lorian made contact." Riall spoke holding out another pad to him. "All assets have arrived in good order and she will burst us when she has reached her LOD."

Andro looked at the man he called grandfather and smiled. "I see some of father's old military lingo has rubbed off on you as well."

Riall nodded with a smile. "It has rubbed off on many of us old wolves. It just takes longer for it to set in with us than it does for you young pups. It does make explaining some things much easier."

"Yes it does." Andro said. "I want to make sure that..."

"Androcles!" The female voice called causing both of them to turn towards the sound. Andro's eyes narrowed when he saw Ulana making her way towards him.

Nubou! Andro swore within Mindvoice causing Riall to look at him.

Trouble? He asked.

Andro shook his head. *A pain in my ass is more like it. Did you ever have any female you might have courted keep hounding you after you and grandmother Gorgo became mates?*

Riall smiled. *One... but it only took about a week before Gorgo showed her the error of her ways. Sadi is much more patient I think.*

She's also a lot more lethal when she is angry. Andro said.

Riall nodded. *True enough. I will leave you to your problem and meet you in the conference room.*

Oh thank you grandfather for abandoning me. Andro growled.

Riall chuckled. *Next time... don't nubou them so well.* He said before he turned and kept moving down the corridor.

Andro turned back just as Ulana walked up all smiles. She was radiating her female aura once again, but at least this time it was far more muted than it was on Cranae Island. She wore a form fitting dark green floor length skirt and a ruffled white blouse that barely constrained her large breasts.

"Andro!" Ulana spoke brightly. "No one told us you were within the building."

Androcles looked at her as she moved closer to him. Far closer than Sadi would have cared for and he stepped back slightly. "I don't broadcast my presence for all to hear Ulana. I have a meeting to go to and you should not be on this floor. It is restricted to military personnel only."

Ulana smiled. "Nonsense... this whole building is staffed by civilian workers. And as a Senator I do have military clearance. Or did you forget that?"

Andro was hard pressed to keep from rolling his eyes. "You have military clearance to be in a non-restricted area. Something this floor is not. Ulana... I am very busy. Is there something you need? If not I have a meeting to attend to and you need to go back to your offices."

"I... Andro I wanted to apologize." Ulana said. "For what took place at your home. Icho withholding his support because..."

"We should not be having this discussion Ulana." Andro said quickly. "I told Icho I would meet with him and his supporters after the vote tomorrow. Not before. You will not change my mind."

"I'm not trying to change your mind Andro." Ulana spoke. "This is more of a personal visit." She said lifting her hand and reaching up to touch his cheek with her fingers.

Andro quickly but gently removed her fingers from his flesh and lightly pushed her hand back. "We have nothing of a personal basis to discuss Ulana. Regardless of what you might think to the contrary."

"Does our time together mean nothing to you?" Ulana questioned. "You dismissed me like so much garbage Andro. I had to find out why from your sisters as I was leaving. I had to find out from them that you prefer this... this common tart Sadi to me. My blood and upbringing is so much more than hers."

Andro's eyes narrowed slightly. "I did not dismiss you Ulana... we were never an item and therefore I could not dismiss you as you say. Never once did I lead you to believe that we were anything more than friends who enjoyed each other's company Ulana. You did not seem to mind it this way."

“Just because I said nothing does not mean I did not wish for more.” Ulana spoke.

“Ulana... do not take me for a fool.” Andro spoke. “Our times together were pleasant and fun... but do not try and claim they were more than what they were. You had far more interest in my title as Prince than anything else. Or did you parade me around in front of your friends for other reasons when I attended those events with you?”

“Events which you left both times after only a hour or so.” Ulana told him sternly and with just a little anger.

Andro nodded. “Because they were your type of people Ulana... not mine.” Andro moved closer to her. “We are nothing alike Ulana. We will never be anything alike. You do not believe in the same things I believe.”

“I happen to think what you believe is important.” Ulana stated.

Andro chuckled. “Do you expect me to think that?” He asked. “I met Sadi when I was eight months old Ulana. I have loved her and no other since that day. The gods brought her to me that first time and then destiny and fate reunited us once more. She is my *anome*... my soulmate. She knows me in a way you can not possibly comprehend Ulana. In a way that you do not even believe exists. Why don't you go back to Nolar Ulana? At least with him you will be in control of the situation.”

“Nolar is not you!” Ulana snapped. “She may be a pureblood Andro but she is beneath you!” Ulana continued. “Her bloodline could not be purer than mine! She... she was... she was an agent for the High Coven Andro! God knows what she has done... or who she has had to sleep with in order to accomplish her tasks. She...”

“Enough woman!” Andro barked loudly drawing the attention of the male and female *Durcunusaan* officer only a short distance away. “You are not her! You will never be her Ulana! And you will never be able to entice me away from Sadi or any of my mates... no matter how strongly you pulse me with your aura! Sadi is not just in my blood Ulana... she is part of my blood and part of my mind now. As are Ne'Veha and Carisia and Lu'ria and Caliria! You could not begin to understand what we have and share together. These are things you do not even believe in! I smell only her! Only them! I taste only her! Only them! You are not even in the same class as Sadi or any of my wives and mates Ulana! You never were... nor will you ever be!”

Andro expected it and he wasn't disappointed when Ulana reared back and slapped him with all of her strength. The blow stung a little, but for the most part, the strength behind it was not there.

“You bastard!” Ulana snarled at him. “How dare you! I am a hundred times better than that... that bitch! You used me Androcles Leonidas! You used me for your own pleasures when it suited you! Or do you think me a fool?” She almost screamed.

“Milord?” The female voice spoke from the side and Andro turned to see the two officers now standing beside them. “Is everything alright?”

Andro nodded his head resisting the urge to rub his cheek. “Everything is fine.” Andro said to them before looking back to Ulana. “Believe and espouse whatever you like if it makes you feel better Ulana. It will not change a thing. This conversation is over.”

“You can not just dismiss me Androcles!” Ulana snarled at him once more.

“I can... and I will.” Andro stated coldly. “Escort the Senator off the restricted floor and make sure she does not return.” Andro told the two *Durcunusaan* officers. “Then insure her security clearance is adjusted to reflect what she is allowed access too, based on her status as a junior Senator of the Union.”

“Understood Milord.” The woman said.

Andro looked back at Ulana. “If you wish to butt heads with Sadi... you do so at your own risk Ulana. You have no idea what you are getting into.” He told her. “And you will end up getting hurt.”

“I'm not afraid of that... that woman!” Ulana snapped at him.

“Then you are a bigger fool than I first thought.” Androcles told her. “I have a meeting to attend. These *Durcunusaan* officers will escort you off this restricted floor Ulana. I wish you a very pleasant day.”

“...everything worked out?” Riall asked with a crooked grin as Andro moved up to the large star chart table with a dozen senior officers crowded around it.

“Probably not.” Andro replied stepping up to him.

“She is in over her head Andro.” Riall spoke. “Your grandmother has told me how Sadi is viewed among our people. Especially those here in Sparta. When it comes to such things I have found Gorgo has the pulse of the people. If Ulana wants to enter into a conflict with Sadi over her misconceived ideas of what you and she shared at one time... Sadi will undoubtedly set her straight. Painfully if need be.”

Andro nodded. “That’s what I’m afraid of.” He said with a grin. He turned and looked at the gathered officers and the holimage of Ben from Dreamland. He stood there with his arms across his chest looking at Andro sternly. “What?” Andro snapped.

“You know... some of us have to work for a living.” Ben growled playfully. “You think you could keep your dick in your pants enough so we can accomplish that work?”

“It’s not my fault!” Andro declared.

One of the men at the table turned and looked at Ben in the transmission. “You should not speak to the Prince in such a manner Admiral.” He spoke rather stiffly. “It is not at all appropriate.”

Ben looked at the young man. “I’ll speak to him however I choose *Admiral!* I was there when he was born and I’ve watched him grow up. I served side-by-side with his father more years than you have been an Admiral... so I have that right.”

Andro looked at the young Admiral who appeared to be not much older than him and then to Riall. He smiled and motioned to the officer. “Admiral Susero.” Riall spoke to the unasked question. “He just took command of the Ninth Expeditionary Combined Fleet Forces along the High Coven Coreward border. He’s been cleared with the information about Martin.”

The man bowed his head sharply. “Milord Prince.” He spoke.

“Susero’s father is Joint Commander of the Folcani Sector Defense Fleet.” Riall told him. “Susero displayed his skill and tactical sense at the Battle of Julcan Seven in the last year of the Evolli War.”

“Ah... I heard about that.” Andro answered him. “Very nicely done. Using the planet’s atmospheric gravity well to propel you into a flanking position. Nice.”

“It was a matter of luck Milord.” Susero said. “And an excellent crew.”

Andro nodded. “Luck is always good to have on your side.” He answered. He looked at Riall once more. “Where is Ceneu?”

“He returned to Apo Prime to recalibrate the PDP grids for all sectors.” Riall answered. “I’ll brief him when we’re done so he can make the appropriate adjustments to the training fleets.”

Andro nodded and looked at the chart table. “Very well.” He said. “Ben... the *ARC ROYAL* has picked up my father?” He asked.

Ben nodded. “Captain Katsumi sent the signal forty-two minutes ago.” He replied. “They’re on their way. Don’t know how much I like sending her out without fighters and only three quarters of a crew... but Marty needed the support I agree. The *ESSEX* and *INTREPID* will be next out of the docks in two weeks. Their captains have been busy the last few weeks and they’ll have full air crews by the time they deploy. The second batch of Block IIs will start getting their powerplants next month. Katsumi will brief Marty and Manda has already informed you. We’re really humping it here.”

Susero cringed at Ben’s use of the King’s name in such familiar terms but he kept his mouth shut and looked back to Andro. “Admiral Riall said you had some information for us Milord?” He finally spoke.

Andro nodded and plugged the data pad into the slot on the star chart. “My father was here briefly on Earth and we spoke of something that both of us were thinking. The Kavalians are giving too much.”

Riall looked at him oddly for he did not know exactly what Andro was going to put to them. “Giving too much?” He asked. “I don’t understand.”

“They appear to be supporting this Galactic Court foolishness wholeheartedly.” Andro said. “Given my uncle’s past history in dealing with the High Coven during their war, he is not known for being someone who just sits back. These rulings by the Galactic Court are in their favor for the most part yes, but both my father and I felt they were being too accommodating.”

Riall nodded his head. “Ok... I’ll accept that.” He spoke. “They have to know that the Union Senate will more than likely never allow Pusintin to take power in any way. Which is exactly what he is trying to do through the children your mother just gave birth to. At least the boy child anyway.”

“He has raped a sitting Queen of the Union! The one many of our people regard as the most patient and mage like of our Queens!” One of the older Admiral’s spat angrily. “Forced himself upon her in the vilest of fashions! There can be no forgiveness of that! None that our people would accept!”

“There won’t be Admiral Zesico.” Andro told him. “At least not while my father lives. My new brother and sister joined us in this world just recently and my father already refers to them as his children.”

Andro saw the nods of approval from many of the men present. Nearly half of them were much older than him, closer to Riall’s age if not older and they were truly set in their honorable ways when it came to many of the older customs of the Lycavorian people. Most had been mated for centuries, if not millennia, to the same women and they viewed their wives and mates as precious items to be revered and protected at all costs. Most of these men had cut their teeth in the very beginning of the rebellion against the High Coven, just before and just after his great grandfather Resumar had been assassinated, and they held to the convictions and morals he had instilled in their people almost fanatically.

“*Avoi.*” Another of the older Admirals whispered.

“Why have you had Riall bring us here Milord?” Zesico asked now. “You are considered a tactician of renown...spoken of within the same breath as your father and a few others. What is this meeting about?”

Andro nodded his head respectfully to him. “I appreciate the praise Admiral... but my father taught me humility among many things. I tend to think outside the box as my grandfather calls it, however, now I need the advice and wisdom of men with experience I do not have. The experience of battles I have not fought. Tactics I have never used.” Andro typed quickly on the control panel. “My father and I agree that my uncle’s actions to this date do not fit with his personality.”

“Which means he has something else entirely planned.” Zesico spoke. “Because he knows the Union Senate will not grant what he wishes.”

Andro nodded. “Yes.”

“Then why take your mother?” Riall asked. “Why take her and go through all of this if he knows it will not work.”

“Oh... I think he had a hope it would work. At least when he first got this plan in his head he hoped it would work.” Andro said. “After what happen on Hadaria however... if he thinks it will still work he’s either very stupid or very egotistical. Take your pick. Regardless... father and I think he always had another plan. And it centered around taking out the Drow outposts in The Wilds.”

“The Drow outposts?” Susero asked. “How so?”

Andro finished typing and stabbed the control button. The star chart on the huge table shifted and flashed as charts were rearranged and suddenly they were looking at a full sized version of one entire sector within The Wilds. “I’ve highlighted the thirteen Drow outposts that were destroyed by the Kavalians. To date there have only been five survivors of these attacks, one of them being Lu'ria, my Drow mate. Another is a human female that was with her. All told, the final tally of dead is upwards of three hundred and seventy. Many of them were Drow females, and with very few exceptions, all of them showed the signs of sexual abuse and rape inflicted before they were executed. Sexual abuse that I will not detail here because it makes me sick.” Andro said softly. “What can you see from the outposts as they are positioned on the chart?”

“That is simple.” Another man spoke as he pointed. “Each sits along a portion of the Farnuri Expanse... ending with these three outposts which cradle the trailing edges of it.” He answered tracing his finger along a stretch of several dozen light years.

Andro nodded. “And where does the Farnuri Expanse originate?”

“Within point two light years of the Kavalian border here.” Zesico replied stabbing his finger at the single point. “Where it meets the Gellen Asteroid belt.”

“I did not see this until my father told me to stop and think about the outposts and what their purpose was.” Andro said. “I went back and reviewed what I am showing all of you. The Farnuri Expanse is filled with gaseous fields and radioactive nebulas and travel through it is extremely hazardous without heavy shielding. The type of shielding not normally found on civilian ships.”

“But found on every warship of any kind.” Susero spoke softly. “It is also exceptionally hard to track anything moving through the Expanse.”

Andro nodded and touched another few buttons. The screen in the corners began to scroll quickly. “As you can see from the equipment lists... each Drow outpost along the expanse was equipped with a single, hidden

NorthAm Mk X Aegis FCS Sensor array. This was not known by many for obvious reasons, but the Drow were very skilled in using them. It was specifically calibrated to scan into the Expanse to detect ships. The Kavalians must have discovered this when Laustinos betrayed us and then they used that information to essentially take down our first line of defense. When they destroyed each Drow settlement, they took down the power source for each array until there were none left scanning the Expanse.”

Zesico was the first to put it together. “An open corridor into Union space.” He gasped. “With the destruction of the Drow outposts they could have moved hundreds of ships into the Expanse and we would not detect them. And if they are all near the Bontawillian border, they are only six light years from Union space! They could blow right through Bontawillian space because we don’t maintain the same defensive alignment along our border with them that we do the rest of the border.”

Andro nodded. “The Bontawillians have been adding to their defensive systems along their border with The Wilds ever since they became official members of the Union. However... you don’t just throw up two hundred PDP platforms and sensors. They have only been able to complete about forty percent of the new border perimeter.”

Riall nodded and adjusted the screen. “As you all know we have been replacing or refitting all of their own ships and even allowing them to purchase and use some of our newer and more advanced ships. Namely our new refitted *MOONLANCER*-Class Cruiser. Even with the upgrades and such, the Kavalians would be able to swat them aside easily with simple numbers.”

Andro once more typed on the control panel. “The Kavalians outnumber us nearly five to one in ships alone. They throw nothing away... which means they are still using ships that are several hundred years old. Their cloning operations give them a three to one superiority in forces on the ground, perhaps four to one depending on the situation. I already have a plan in place and moving that will hopefully knock that number down some what. We are used to fighting when outnumbered... but the better the odds the better the success.”

“What plan?” Susero asked.

Andro shook his head. “For security purposes that information is limited to those who are actually involved.”

Zesico looked at him. “You are going to attack aren’t you Milord?” He asked softly. The faces of many of the men present showed their surprise as they looked first at Zesico and then to Andro.

Andro nodded finally. “Yes.” He stated plainly. “The Union is not a militaristic society as is the Kavalian Federation. It will take time for us to transfer and ramp up our production for war and combat operations. I am going to try and buy us that time. War is coming... regardless of whether we want it or not. I see no other alternative and neither does my father, as much as we wish it wasn't so.” Andro looked at the men. “The moment the Union Senate finishes their vote and announces the results, I am going to launch a premeditated attack into Kavalian space to try and buy us the time we need.”

The room was silent for a few long moments and the warriors present contemplated that reality. None of them had ever started a war with another species, but all of them had fought viciously once engaged. They were true Lycavorians molded by Resumar himself. They would not start a conflict, but they would damn sure fight and finish one. Zesico was the first to speak as he was the oldest man in the room and perhaps the most respected by the others.

“*Nubou* them!” He snarled. “They started this when they took our Queen and killed so many of our people!” He looked at Andro. “Command us Prince Androcles! What do you need us to do?”

Andro nodded his head. “I want each of you to break away an entire Strike Wing from your commands. Admiral Zesico... I want you to take command of this force and move into the Farnuri Expanse under full Shroud. Once you have located the Kavalian force I want you to report back to me or to Admiral Riall. Once the vote is done, you will ambush this Kavalian force.”

“Milord... given the time they have had, the KFI could have moved hundreds of ships into this area. Even my combined force will only have slightly more than two hundred warships in it.” Zesico spoke.

Andro nodded. “That is all you will need.”

“Another surprise sire?” Susero asked.

Andro grinned. “You could say that. We have access to a new ship under my brother’s command. It is called *SPARTA’S WRATH*. It is a Pralor ship gentlemen.” Andro typed on the control panel once more. “These

are the specifications of the ship. These do not leave this room and you will speak of it with no one until the time it is revealed. I will personally execute anyone who even mistakenly releases this information.”

Andro watched the men look at the small screens by each of their locations and smiled as their eyes grew bigger.

“*Son vada carians!*” Susero finally exclaimed. “We... we have this ship?” He gasped.

Andro nodded. “Fully operational. When you send word... I will contact my brother... and one, perhaps two jumps later... you will have all the reinforcements you need.”

Zesico looked at Andro. “And then?” He asked with a predatory snarl.

“Then Admiral... if it is in the Farnuri Expanse and it is Kavalian... you will kill it with extreme prejudice.” Andro answered. “And you will spare no one.”

ARIZONA-CLASS STRIKE CARRIER ARC ROYAL TWELVE HOURS FROM ENURRUA

Akemi Katsumi sat in her command chair reading from the latest readiness reports and nodding every few seconds. She had to admit she wasn't in the least bit happy about having to deploy without any fighters whatsoever, but she was a consummate professional and she would deal with it. That she now carried the King Leonidas, whom she thought, was very dead only a few hours ago; Queen Aricia who was also supposed to be dead, as well as Queen Dysea and a stunning vampire female who Akemi swore was part Lycavorian only made things confusing at first. That the dragon Elder Mother had accompanied them and they were now heading for a planet that had been taboo to any Union citizen since King Leonidas had laid waste to it only made it more confusing. That was until she discovered why she now carried a good portion of the Royal family and what they were heading to do.

Akemi had received her briefing from the King himself, and she had to admit that he was just as physically imposing as she had heard Admiral Lorian tell them, not to mention just as deliciously handsome as well. She now understood why the Queens were never without smile son their faces when with him in public. He had been very blunt and to the point.

“Captain Katsumi... the Kavalians have taken something of mine that I intend to get back one way or the other. I'd like your help in accomplishing that.”

That he was speaking of Queen For'mya was obvious in his manner and tone. Akemi had no problem with that. As with the other Queens, For'mya was loved and respected by the vast majority of the Union citizens, and no one that Akemi associated with believed for a second that she would do what was being said willingly. Akemi had just never expected to be taking the *ARC ROYAL* out so soon. The first of the Block II *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Carriers, the *ARC ROYAL* was to be the center piece of the second *ARIZONA*-Class Assault Groups and instead she was leading a trip into the unknown after a sitting Union Queen who had been kidnapped. She was fully operational with the exception that she did not have her surgical teeth so to speak. Akemi wouldn't hesitate to put her up against any Kavalian ship one on one. The *ARC ROYAL* could blow the shit out of even a *GREAT SOUL* all be her lonesome if need be and not even break a sweat in doing so. Akemi just wished they had their fighter complement. They were her hammer and she was the anvil. She would have to live without them for a few more weeks it seemed. At least until they returned to Union space and she got her full load out.

Akemi turned as her elven First Officer came up to her chair. The elf's short brown hair was styled elegantly, her blue eyes bright and alert. Her uniform was meticulously cared for with every decoration in perfect order. Akemi should know, No'rarh had scolded her enough times for tearing her buttons or ribbons off just before they had fallen together in their bed.

“No'rarh?” Akemi asked softly.

“All systems operating at optimal.” No'rarh told her. “Do you think the Kavalians will keep their word Akemi?”

“I don’t think they gave their word.” Akemi told her. “I’m pretty sure after listening to the King that these men may look like Kavalians but they are really descended from Pralor blood.”

“Can we trust them though?” No'rarh asked.

“That remains to be seen. Just in case... since we have three *KADEN*-Class Transports on board now, configure one for medical triage and the other two to carry wounded or cargo.” Akemi said.

“Expecting trouble?” No'rarh asked her lover.

“We are going to a planet that has been taboo for any Union citizen or ship for over two decades No'rarh.” Akemi said. “Ordered that way by this very King for what happen there. Forgive me for being superstitious, but that can’t be a good thing.”

No'rarh met her eyes. “I see your point.” She said. “I’ll see to it.” She spoke. “What shall we have for dinner tonight?”

Akemi looked at her. “I was thinking about just having desert.” She said with a smile.

No'rarh rolled her eyes. “You know... for a human... you are certainly oversexed.”

Akemi grinned at her and batted her dark eyes. “You are complaining now? After two years?”

No'rarh chuckled softly. “Hardly.” She reached out and squeezed Akemi’s hand. “I’ll see you this evening.”

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT INQUISITOR **HIGH COVEN SECURE SPACE**

“You seem much more relaxed these past few days.” Nalavi told her as he slowly moved the portable sensor over her body.

Yuri looked at him and smiled. “I’ve made a few decisions that give me great comfort and relief Nalavi.” She said.

Nalavi met her eyes. “I take it one of those decisions concerns Pa'cour.” He said.

Yuri tilted her head slightly. “What makes you say that?”

Nalavi grinned. “I’m a doctor Yuri... and I have been taking care of you for over three millennia. I don’t need my scanner to tell me that you have been feeding on Pa'cour’s blood. Your blood is saturated with high protein enzymes found only in Immortal blood.”

Yuri stared at him for a long moment. She did not fear Nalavi reporting her to anyone. He was the sort of man to always buck the system and work outside the rules. That she had fallen in love with Pa'cour seemed to please him. “He has... he has given me a new lease on life Nalavi.” Yuri told him. “He... he asks nothing from me. He asks nothing and gives so much more. I am not used to this. I... for the first time in my life... when he holds me in his arms... I feel safe Nalavi.”

Nalavi looked at the medical sensor as it beeped. His face remained impassive and he looked back up at her. “He worships you Yuri.” He spoke. “Don’t let go of that.”

“I can not be redeemed Nalavi. Not for what I have done. No matter how much you think so.” Yuri said with a smile. “I have accepted that.”

“I’m not saying your past deeds can be redeemed Yuri.” He spoke looking at her. “What I’m saying is you can choose which direction to take your life in now.”

You knew didn’t you?” Yuri asked him.

“Knew what?” Nalavi asked.

“About Xaxon? About what my mother and Robert were doing?” Yuri said.

Nalavi met her gaze. “I began to suspect after Javier was born.” He replied honestly. “I didn’t know for sure until I found those recordings I gave to you. You discovered more of them when you gained access to your mother’s files. I began looking for a way to counter what they were doing to you as soon as I realized what was happening. I came close... but was never able to implement anything.”

“When did you know he was no longer within me?” Yuri asked.

“Within a few moments of Pa'cour bringing you into the bay.” He replied.

“Then you know the only way he would have left me was if he thought I was dead.” Yuri said. “He panicked too quickly... leaving before Pa'cour saved me.”

Nalavi nodded. "Perhaps. Or maybe Pa'cour also knew what was happening and he just waited until he was sure that Xaxon was gone and he could still save you. He had to force you to bite him you know. He actually positioned your fangs and then forced you to bite him Yuri." Nalavi shook his head slowly. "Don't let this man go child. With him Yuri you can atone for everything that you were forced to do by your mother and Moran. With him... you will find everything you desire."

Yuri smiled at him, an expression that reminded him of Yuri long ago as a young woman. "It has already started Nalavi. I have you to thank for that." She paused for a long moment and then looked at him. "I'm leaving Nalavi." She said softly. "I'm leaving with Pa'cour."

Nalavi nodded. "I suspected as much. When?"

"Three hours." Yuri answered without pause. "I have some loose ends to tie up and he is loading the last supplies we will need on my G9. Come with us."

"Come with you?" Nalavi gasped.

Yuri nodded her head. "You don't belong here anymore than I now do Nalavi. And you know Robert will be incensed when he discovers you helped me. Or at the very least that you knew about us. He will have you killed in his rage if Dante does not." Yuri reached out and took his hand. "You know I speak the truth."

"Yuri I can not come with you." He said. "I have... I have too much to do here."

"Narice has returned Nalavi." Yuri blurted out.

"Narice?" He exclaimed. "How... are you sure? Why?"

"Why do you think? And yes... I am very sure. I sensed her within Mindvoice. It was very faint, but she has grown in power since she left and I would know my sister's resonance anywhere. Calm and reserved tinged with a wildness she rarely shows." Yuri told him calmly. "Somehow... someone... they have passed the information to her that the Coven leadership is in disarray. A traitor within my mother's inner circle no doubt. Probably on Uzu Ozeib 7... but perhaps right on this ship. She is moving to fill that void with others of like mind. And you can be assured that as Arrarn Leonidas's wife she has the full support of Androcles and the Union."

Nalavi met her gaze. "You are positive Yuri?" He asked.

Yuri nodded. "The High Coven is about to be plunged into a civil war Nalavi. Robert will not let her just take over... you know that."

"How much support does she have?" Nalavi asked.

Yuri shrugged. "I'm not entirely sure... but it must be enough to do what she intends or Androcles would never risk her. She is his brother's wife now... and if he is anything like his father he will not risk her on a futile mission. Pa'cour and I believe that at the very least she has Admiral Pontal and at minimum a few other senior Coven officers on her side. I do not know how many of the Ruling Coven Council will support her. If any." Yuri looked at him. "So you see... there is no reason for you to remain. Unless you wish to be plunged into another war on the wrong side."

Nalavi looked at her. "Yuri... you can not leave the intelligence we got from that ship with him!" He hissed. "You..."

Yuri shook her head and held up her hand. "It is already taken care of." She said. "I will not leave that data for him and Dante to use. No one in this universe will be safe if I do. Our own people included."

"And what will you do with it Yuri?" Nalavi asked.

"I still intend to use it Nalavi. I won't lie to you. But I do not intend to use it to conquer others." Yuri replied. "We have tried to do that too many times through the millennia and look where it has gotten us. On the verge of extinction. No... I will not use it for that. And there is something else... I can't..." Yuri shook her head. "I can't really place it... describe it... but it is darkness Nalavi. Pure darkness and evil. I think it may be remnants of Xaxon's presence within me. Memories maybe. I don't know."

"Do not dwell on it." Nalavi spoke. He took her hand and squeezed. "I will come with you." He said. "You will need me soon."

Yuri looked at him. "Need you soon? What do you mean?"

"You do not know much of Immortal physiology do you?" He asked.

Yuri rose to her feet slowly. "Nalavi... what are you saying?"

Nalavi grinned at her. "I'm saying that you are pregnant Yuri. My scan detected it just now. The embryo has just formed. It is perhaps a few hours old at most."

“Pregnant!” Yuri gasped her eyes wide. “Pregnant!”

“Akruxian Immortals are notoriously fertile.” Nalavi spoke. “And with all the vitamins and the influx of healing medicines purging your system the past few weeks it contributed to make you just as fertile.”

Redemption was the word that first popped into Yuri’s head.

Her hands went to her abdomen as she turned away from Nalavi and moved a few feet away from where he stood. She was still herself. She was still Yuri. Yet she was also very different now. She was still ruthless and sometimes cruel, but she hadn’t felt so free since she had gone to Earth that first time. Since Lucia was born she had never considered having more children and now she knew that was Xaxon’s presence within her. Driving her thoughts and her actions in many ways. Yuri had found the purest form of love in the arms of an Immortal. It was something that her people considered to be among the worst crimes you could commit, to consort with an Immortal. They would call hers and Pa'cour’s child an abomination.

Yuri called it her redemption. Or at least the very beginning of it.

Nalavi was watching her as she turned back around and faced him. “Do not tell Pa'cour.” She spoke.

“Yuri you can’t keep...” Nalavi began.

“I have no intention of keeping it from him Nalavi.” She spoke quickly. “Never. If he knew now he would want to protect me at all costs. He needs to be at his best until we leave. I will not put him in danger by telling him I carry his child. Not until we are off this ship and away from here.”

Nalavi nodded his head in understanding. “You are right.” He stated.

“Gather your things and meet us in Bay five in three hours Nalavi.” Yuri told him. “Don’t be late my friend. There is too much at stake and we will leave you if you are late.”

Nalavi nodded. “I’ll be there.” He said.

The female vampire entered her quarters completely unaware of any danger that might be lurking about. She was a young vampire who worked the many sensors on the *INQUISITOR* with consummate grace. She was also having a rather torrid affair with the Supreme Commander of the High Coven Fleet. Robert Moran certainly knew how to curl her toes in bed, and Melina looked forward to each and every one of their encounters.

“He will betray you, you know.” The female voice echoed.

Melina spun around suddenly on alert and looked into the darkness of her room. Her right hand reached for the light panel just as her left dropped to the hidden blade Robert had given her not so long ago. She saw the shadows unwrap far too late and then she was flying across the quarters as some unseen hand lifted her off the deck and tossed her through the air. She slammed into the unyielding bulkhead with a grunt of pain before dropping to the deck trying to catch her breath.

“He will betray you as he has betrayed me.” The voice said again.

Melina recognized that voice then and her eyes grew wide. “Princess Yuri!”

“I made a mistake turning him.” Yuri’s voice continued as Melina’s eyes darted back and forth trying to find her. She knew Yuri Moran was a master of using the shadows, and her only hope was to try to trigger an alarm. “I should have drained him dry that day.”

Melina took a deep breath and launched herself at the COM panel. She never made it even half way. She saw the shadows unwrap completely and she couldn’t alter her movement before Yuri’s lithe form fully materialized and her left arm came rocketing forward. Melina felt the crushing blow impact her chest and several of her ribs broke as her forward momentum ceased instantly and she was once more sent flying back into the steel bulkhead.

“Princess! Princess I’m sorry!” Melina pleaded. “I did not... I did not intend for this to happen!” She staggered to her knees, holding one arm over her chest as blood trickled from between her lips and pain lanced through her from her broken ribs. She looked up as Yuri approached. “I did not...”

Yuri’s fingers curled around the girl’s slim neck, and using her incredible strength she hauled her up and pinned her to the bulkhead. Her normally dark eyes had changed to vampire cobalt blue and her fangs were fully extended giving her a terrifying visage. “Do not worry child...” Yuri spoke menacingly. “I’m not going to kill you. None of this is your fault.” Yuri leaned close to the young vampire’s face. “He will betray you. He will

leave you for the next pretty little thing that comes along when he tires of you. If he doesn't give you to our son and let the monster he has become have you."

"Princess... Princess I..." Melina stammered as she tried to breathe as well. The strength holding her was beyond anything she had ever encountered as a vampire. It was unnatural for her to have such physical strength.

"You can have him child." Yuri snarled. "For I have found something far more wondrous to move into the future with. Just mark my words. And be wary of him. You are a piece of meat to him, nothing more. Remember that."

Yuri pulled her away from the bulkhead and then sent her smashing back into the bulkhead with a resounding thud. Melina's head impacted the steel wall and blackness washed over her instantly from the impact. She went limp in Yuri's grasp as she dropped into blissful unconsciousness. Yuri caught her before she fell completely and moved to the couch where she gently set her body on the cushions. She looked down on her and shook her head.

"I pity you child." She whispered softly. "You will not listen to me and only pain is in your future if you do not. What future you have that is."

Yuri looked around her quarters once more before wrapping the shadows around her body once more and taking the first true steps into her own future. A future that held promise and hope. A future with a man, Immortal or not, a man who loved her without question or regret. A man that made Yuri's blood churn in happiness and desire like no other ever had.

Redemption.

That word sounded good to her as she moved into the corridor of the ship.

Perhaps not for all her sins, for they were many. But redemption for the things she done and had no control over.

If not... *vith* everyone. She was going to make her own redemption at Pa'cour's side. She was going to reach out and take what had been denied her for so long.

CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT

NEFOA

For'mya looked at Eirene and Fedor as the pounding on the medical center door grew more intense. Eirene and Fedor both now looked to be children of almost five years of age, with Eirene's long golden blond hair so similar to her mother's and Fedor's short cropped blond hair just a shade darker. Muton had grudgingly cut Fedor's rapidly growing blond hair from some sort of leftover Kavalian sense of male pride but Fedor had actually enjoyed it immensely. He had also brought them clothes that would fit them for their age, sewing the items together himself For'mya discovered a short time later. That they were her children was obvious to even the casual observer. They both had her angular face and cheekbones and both of them had her dark brown eyes. Muton had already commented to her that they looked nothing like Pusintin and how it was just another sign that she belonged to Martin Leonidas body and soul. Muton had tried to explain as best that he could that because Martin had been the one to turn her, her wolf genes were that much more dominant and had his essence flowing through them and through her. His genes were certainly more dominant than Pusintin's Muton declared and this showed easily because both Fedor and Eirene had no distinguishing elements of Pusintin in their outward appearance. Since Pusintin's genes were lesser than Martin's Muton deduced with more than a little satisfaction For'mya noticed, Fedor and Eirene looked more like their mother and in some ways like Martin. For'mya had liked this explanation immensely.

For'mya held her finger to her lips now as she looked at her children.

You must be silent now. You know what Muton and I must do, so no matter what, remain silent and do not come out. If this man sees you Eirene he will stop being unsuspecting and become a potential problem we don't need right now. For'mya told them.

Eirene tilted her head and looked at her mother while placing her hands on her hips and narrowing her eyes. *Mother... I am not a complete fool.* She declared with far more wisdom and control than a five year old child should have.

He would not hurt my sister. Fedor growled.

For'mya chuckled and leaned forward to kiss her head and then Fedor's. *The gods truly blessed me when I thought that they had cursed me. They gave me the both of you and in doing so they gave me hope and happiness back.* She said silently as she squeezed their hands.

We will succeed mother. Fedor said now with that same wisdom and tone. *And we will see the father our of hearts soon.*

And the mothers of our hearts and all of our brothers and sisters. Eirene chimed in quite happily.

For'mya nodded. *Yes we will.*

Muton appeared in the anteroom doorway. "For'mya... it must be now." He spoke softly.

For'mya nodded and rose to her feet. Eirene and Fedor looked at him as he held out his hand for her.

"Remember children... quiet."

Fedor and Eirene both nodded and Fedor took his sister's hand, leading her to a corner where they squatted together out of immediate sight. "We understand Muton." Fedor spoke as he pulled his sister close protectively.

Muton looked at For'mya. "Are you ready?" He asked.

For'mya nodded. "The others?" She asked.

"Waiting for me to send them word that it is done." He answered. "For'mya if there were any other way I..."

For'mya shook her head. "No. This is the only way that grants us the time we need. I do know this. Don't worry Muton, I am prepared."

Muton nodded and took her hand. "Then let's get this distasteful business done." He led her back into the main medical bay where she released his hand and moved to a spot near one of the examining tables. Muton moved to the door and looked back at her. For'mya nodded.

"I am ready." She spoke.

Muton nodded and punched in the code to unlock the door. The Nefoa base commander was about to begin pounding on the door once more when it slid open easily. "Dinxi!" Muton exclaimed.

"Muton... what is going on?" Dinxi growled. "It is well past the time the child should have been born. I know you have reported this to Marshall Pusintin for I checked the logs. I am here to collect my..."

Muton held up his hand with a smile. "Calm yourself Colonel." He said calmly. "I have prepared her for you. That is why it took me so long to unlock the door. Please... come in." he motioned with his hand into the medical bay.

Dinxi paused for a moment surprised. He had expected some trickery from Muton. "You have prepared her for me?" He asked.

"Pusintin told me to insure that she was completely recovered from giving birth to his son before I handed her over to you. He wanted one of his loyal officers to be pleased with his gift to him." Muton said.

"You..."

Muton nodded. "I told you I would make the arrangements with the Marshall. And so I have." He motioned into the medical center once more. "She is awaiting you inside."

"Willingly?" Dinxi asked astonished.

Muton chuckled. "Even I can not work miracles Dinxi. She isn't physically restrained but she knows well the punishment for physical resistance. That does not remove her sharp tongue however."

Dinxi finally let the smile play across his face. "My cock in her mouth can take care of that." He snarled as he moved past Muton into the medical center.

Muton glanced down the corridor quickly then and saw the cloaked figure move around the corner of the empty corridor. The figure nodded and Muton nodded as well before shutting the door and sealing it behind him. He turned to follow Dinxi into the medical center. For'mya stood by the bed quite passively as Dinxi marched right up to her.

"So this is the elf wench that has caused so many problems." He spoke as he gazed at her. "Very nice. I will enjoy locking groins with this one." He growled as he let his fingers fill with her hair.

“I’d think twice about that!” For’mya snapped.

“I told you.” Muton spoke from behind him.

Dinxi laughed and pulled on her hair forcefully. Not enough to be painful, but enough that For’mya had to move her head to keep from losing her hair. “Trust me elf wench, when I lock groins with you and you are howling out in pleasure as I empty my seed into your belly you will sing a different tune. It is my understanding that elf females live for big cocks. That is why so many of you mate with Lycavorians.” He snarled at her.

For’mya glared at him. “That day will never come.” She hissed at him. “I guarantee it.”

Dinxi chuckled again and released her hair to turn back around and look at Muton with a smile. “You were right.” He said. “She does have a sharp tongue. She will learn her place I think however.”

“I’m sure.” Muton spoke.

“Where is the boy child?” Dinxi asked looking around. “I wish to see the object that will bring down the Lycavorian Union.”

“I’m afraid... I’m afraid I can not allow you to see him.” Muton said.

Dinxi looked at him. “Nonsense. It is a male child... and I wish to see him.”

Muton shook his head. “No... I’m sorry... I can’t.”

Dinxi stepped further away from For’mya towards Muton. “And why not?” He demanded of Muton.

“For the simple reason that you are dead.” Muton answered. “Allowing him to see a dead man at such a young age may injure his psyche.”

Dinxi looked at him. “What?” He gasped. “What drivel is this? Let me see...”

Dinxi’s eyes nearly exploded from his head as he felt the horrible piercing pain in his lower back. His chest arched out as he felt the coldness of the blade as it slid smoothly between his third and fourth rib perfectly and with driving strength, moving right for his heart. His eyes grew even wider when that blade sliced cleanly through his body and pierced the bottom of his heart with equal strength and rage. He felt the weight on his back suddenly and the face of the beautiful elven female appeared next to his from over his shoulder. That face was embossed with an image of striking savagery beyond anything his eyes had witnessed. For’mya’s eyes had fully changed now, the black ring around her dark brown corneas filled with menacing hatred and her wolf fangs were fully extended as she climbed higher onto his back and drove her assassin’s blade home even deeper with her right hand as she reached around and gripped his jaw tightly with the left.

“You are right in a sense scum!” For’mya scowled horrifyingly into his ear in a voice tinged with cold cruelty, her soft lips next to his fur covered ear. “Elven females *are* drawn to men with big cocks! We love the feel of them inside us and how they can make us cry out in wanton pleasure! You will never feel my tightness and heat however, you sick fool. You will never spill anything into my belly. Only my handsome mate will ever do such a thing again and it is certainly not you or that foul creature Pusintin! Muton was right. You are dead! And dead men can’t feel pleasure. Only pain!”

Dinxi could only stagger forward from her weight on his back now, right towards Muton who simply reached out and grasped the small linked chain necklace he wore. “We’ll need this Dinxi. I appreciate your contribution to our escape.” Muton declared ripping the necklace away with the small coded card key. “You can die now.”

For’mya shifted her weight forward with a snarl and drove Dinxi to the floor of the medical bay, keeping the long bladed knife buried within his flesh. As he dropped to his knees he tried to reach around and grab her to remove the terrible pain from his back and that is when For’mya triggered the switch on the pommel of the knife. That sent a single, concentrated and most lethal dose of rock spider venom directly into Dinxi’s now mortally injured heart. He gasped suddenly as the poison was injected by compressed air with great force into his organ and instantly began to flow through his veins as his destroyed heart continued to pump trying to keep him alive. He went rigid as he lost the use of his arms and legs, the poison acting even more quickly with his struggling and For’mya then rode his larger body to the deck, his face impacting with the floor with a heavy thud, his cheekbone cracking from the impact. His legs twitched madly for several seconds and then they were still. His eyes were frozen open in death, the rock spider venom quickly doing its fatal work, and a glaze like film quickly spread over the pupils. The venom from a Rock Spider was among the top three most potent poisons within the known universe, able to kill adults from nearly any species with a single bite. They were native only to Uzu Ozeib 7, the rock spider having claimed many vampires throughout the millennia, and in modern medical journals only a single Immortal and a Lycavorian were known to have survived the bites from

this ten legged monstrosity of a spider. That was only because they had been fast enough to knock the palm sized body of the spider off their physical person before the creature had fully seated its fangs.

Muton moved forward quickly and reached out hesitatingly to place his large hand on For'mya's shoulder. He almost staggered back when her head whipped around and those wolf eyes and fangs were staring at him. For a single split second Muton thought for sure she was going to pounce on him and attack. He had given her the very means to defend herself and her children, and it was quite obvious to him that while she may have been a pilot by trade, she could very easily kill even a highly trained Kavalian with little effort and less remorse, as she had just proven. He felt a wash of relief flood through him when her eyes focused and the feral expression disappeared instantly as her eyes fell on him. For'mya pushed back up until she was straddling Dinxi's body and she yanked the knife from his back, wiping it clean on his shirt.

"For'mya?" Muton asked with gentle warmth.

For'mya looked at him again and nodded her head, releasing the breath that she had been holding. "I'm fine Muton." She said. "I'm ok."

They both turned to the locked door when the chime sounded twice in quick succession. Muton held up his hand at her alarmed expression. "It is my people. I saw them just as I closed the door after Dinxi entered. Get the children For'mya... we will be leaving this place post haste."

Eirene! Fedor! Come to me! For'mya barked out within Mindvoice as she replaced the knife in the armored sheath she pulled from under the examining bed, and then secured it to her right thigh.

Muton moved to the door as he heard two sets of feet come running from the anteroom and both Eirene and Fedor threw themselves into For'mya's arm. He typed on the entry pad quickly and the doors slid open to reveal six cloaked figures standing in the corridor. The weather on Nefoa at this time of the year was chilly and wet and nearly all the Kavalians wore these cloaks when they went outside. Muton didn't hesitate and he ushered the figures into the medical bay, checking down the corridor one last time before resealing the doors and locking them. He turned and saw them staring at where For'mya knelt on the floor of the medical bay beside the body of the dead Kavalian and hugging the two small children.

Muton moved around them quickly. "We must move with haste now... we..." He stopped talking when the first figure threw back his hood to reveal the handsome face and the smooth tanned skin of a Kavalian male who had undergone biogenic treatments to remove the hair from his body. His eyes grew wide in shock. "Miseo!" He almost cried out as he grabbed the arms of his youngest son.

The dark haired Kavalian with pale blue eyes smiled broadly as the others began to pull back their hoods. "It has been a long time father." He said warmly. "Too long!"

"How? I told you to ready our people!" Muton exclaimed.

"And I did. Kaleen and Olin had me leave with the Second Monitor to come here and get you father. They and mother wanted to leave nothing to chance." Miseo answered. "The ship has already left and should be moving to the rendezvous as we speak."

Muton pulled his youngest son into a rib cracking embrace as the other men looked on with smiles. It had been nearly a decade since he had seen his sons, any of them, and having him here now was almost overwhelming. "We are so close my son. So close!" He turned to the others. "Kapurr, Makoo..." He greeted each of them by grabbing their arms. "You don't know how good it is to see you my friends. All of you. The others?"

"They have secured the *LEUGERS* transport Muton." The one he had called Kapurr told him. "She is fast but she does not have great range. Why this ship?"

"We won't need great range." Muton spoke turning to face where For'mya had stood up by now and was holding the hands of her children. He watched as Miseo moved over to where she stood, staring at the beautiful elven female with great interest. Muton thought his son was going to comment on her beauty and began to move up to him to stop him. It would not be a good thing for any of his people to try and approach For'mya with any interest aside from a professional one. Muton knew Miseo had many Kavalian females who were very attracted to him, and that was before he had the treatments. Now Muton had to admit the treatments had allowed Miseo's natural handsomeness to come out. It was a great asset for him when moving within Kavalian space for pureborn Kavalians that underwent biogenic treatments were prized for their ability to move unchecked among Lycavorian and human society. Muton needn't have bothered however, as he saw Miseo's pale blue eyes move from For'mya to the body on the floor and he squatted beside the dead Kavalian Commander. He reached out

and let his fingers expertly inspect the wound in his back, careful to insure he did not touch the exposed portions of skin and possibly get any remnant of the poison on his fingers and then he took in the look of Dinxi's eyes.

"Very nice." He spoke finally. "A single, clean entry right into the bottom of his heart. Rock Spider venom injected into his heart judging from the glaze in his eyes." He glanced up at For'mya. "Your work I take it?"

For'mya nodded her head without speaking unsure of what to make of this Kavalian male. Eirene was clinging to her hand until she saw the long tail unfurl and extend from beneath the cloak Miseo wore almost as an afterthought. Muton smiled when he saw this for his son had a habit of allowing his tail to extend when he was deep in thought. Eirene's dark brown eyes lit up and she reached for it. "*Medwaw...* he has a tail!" Eirene declared happily as she grabbed for it. "Look!"

Miseo's head turned quickly as Eirene grabbed the end of his tail and he grinned widely when he began to lift her completely off the ground with it while she clung to the end laughing. For'mya reached out quickly and snatched Eirene back to her possessively as Miseo rose to his full height. He was almost taller than his father For'mya saw, probably six foot four if not a little more and judging from his bulk under the long floor length dark cloak, he was easily over two hundred and thirty pounds if she was any judge. As she held Eirene to her, she met his blue eyes which now looked at her with even more intense interest, but there was nothing in those eyes except professionalism and respect.

"Miseo... this is For'mya Leonidas." Muton spoke as he came up beside his son. "And this is Eirene and Fedor Leonidas." He spoke as his large hand ruffled Fedor's dark blond hair and the boy smiled up at him.

For'mya watched as the professional respect and interest that was there in Miseo's eyes vanished instantly and then those eyes were instead filled with even more respect with an almost reverent nature in his gaze. For'mya watched him bow his head deeply to her. "Queen For'mya Leonidas." He spoke softly. "My father has told me much about you and your bravery and intelligence. It is truly an honor to finally meet you."

Muton looked at For'mya. "For'mya... this is my youngest Miseo. I told you of him." He explained. "He was not supposed to join us yet but as is usually the case he ignored what I told him to do."

"I did not ignore you father." Miseo spoke turning to look at him. "I just fear mother's temper more than yours if I disobey her. Once she determined we had our people well on the way to boarding the ship she sent me with the Second Monitor as I said. She did not give me much of a choice."

This time For'mya could not help but chuckle at his words. "Thank you... thank you for coming." She said.

Eirene stepped away from For'mya and looked at the giant of a man in front of her. "Can I see your tail again?" She asked.

"Eirene... no!" For'mya declared reaching for her.

Miseo laughed and looked at Eirene with smiling pale blue eyes this time. He pulled aside the heavy cloak and fully revealed his two meter long tail. It was a darker color than his skin, only a very light fur covering the entire length with the exception of the last ten inches which appeared to be all smooth skin. It was much thicker than Athani's tail For'mya noticed and appeared much more muscular. It was perhaps three and a half inches in diameter at the base where it entered his tailbone, and tapered down to perhaps an inch and a half at the tip. Eirene laughed as the tip came up and softly rubbed against her cheek.

"*Medwaw...* it's so soft and smooth!" Eirene declared as she looked at For'mya.

Muton smiled as well. "You will see more of my people with their tails Eirene... but first we need to leave this place."

Eirene immediately looked at him and her face became a little harder in its expression. "Yes we do." She stated once more with far more wisdom than a five year old child should have.

Miseo noticed this immediate change in demeanor right away and looked at his father with questions in his eyes. Muton nodded. "I will explain later... but now we need to go." He said moving to the table and slinging the medical bag over his shoulder. "Everyone knows who I am and they will not question me as we move to the hanger bay. Just act like normal Kavalian soldiers and no matter what happens protect For'mya and the children." He turned back around and looked at the men. "Is that clear?" They met his eyes but gave no indication and he gave them more of an explanation. "For'mya knows where the ship is my friends." Muton

continued. “The ship with the map to take us all home. She must be protected at all costs and her children as well. Unless you wish to risk the wrath of King Leonidas if harm comes to her.”

“King Leonidas?” Miseo asked suddenly very alert. “Father... the Lycavorian King is dead. All the available intelligence reports say his eldest son is now in command of the Union forces.”

“And giving the Kavalian senior leadership fits with his actions for they make no sense.” Kapurr stated.

“Yes... which they take as him being in disarray still and unable to fully control the Union military.” Miseo spoke.

“A consensus that is not shared among the Monitors.” Makoo said. “Regardless of his age, someone with his military record does not go around in disarray.”

For'mya smiled more now and she moved forward. “Rest assured... while they make no sense to those who don't associate with him, Androcles knows exactly what he is doing.” She stated confidently. “It may seem like he is in disarray... but he is not I guarantee you that. He is just a methodical as his father.”

Muton nodded his head in agreement. “Indeed he is. No Miseo my son... no the King is not dead. He is very much alive. Pusintin and Keleru and their cronies failed to kill him, which doesn't surprise me in the least. And he will be coming to get his elven mate. She is in our hands now and I suggest we do our best to keep her and his new children alive to make sure that happens.”

“His children?” Miseo asked even more confused. “I thought...”

Muton held up his hand. “I will explain everything as I said... but right now we need to go.”

That information spurred them to action and all of them drew out Kavalian assault rifles from under their cloaks. Muton looked at For'mya as she gripped the hands of Fedor and Eirene tightly. “Are you ready?” He asked.

For'mya nodded with a determined set in her jaw. “I have been ready for quite some time Muton my friend.” She answered warmly.

Muton smiled at her words and nodded his head. “Then let us leave this place behind. The smell is beginning to clog my nose.”

EARTH

CRANAE ISLAND

SECONDARY UNION COMMAND CENTER

Marci looked up from her desk when she heard the soft whirring of the hover chair as it glided smoothly into her office. Her face lit up and she rose from her chair to greet Armetus. He had gotten most of his color back and he looked much stronger than he had only a few short weeks ago.

“Armetus!” She exclaimed coming around her desk and moving up beside his chair. She didn't hesitate and leaned over to affectionately kiss his weathered cheek. “What... what are you doing here?”

Armetus smiled at her, his remaining eye filled with happiness to be alive and up and around. “A little bird told me that my protégé was feeling a bit overwhelmed.” He told her. “And I needed to get out of that damn hospital.”

“Nesa talked to you didn't she? I can't believe Anuk authorized you to leave!” Marci told him as she took his good hand in hers and squatted beside the hover chair looking at him with affection in her eyes.

Armetus shrugged. “We made a deal.” He said. “She lets me out and I don't tell Daniel what she got him for his upcoming birthday.”

Marci laughed feeling a weight lifting from her shoulders even then. “You blackmailed the second highest ranking medical officer in the entire Union? I'm impressed Armetus... Anuk is not known for bending too much.” She spoke. “Coffee?”

Armetus nodded quickly. “Of course! I was waiting for you to ask! I don't know what they were giving to me in that place but they wouldn't let me have a mug of Aricia's coffee and it was becoming very irritating to say the least.” He glided the chair forward into her office and then tapped the control arm of the chair watching as the door to her office closed and sealed with an audible click.

Marci saw this but said nothing as she poured him coffee and added cream just as he liked. She turned back around and held it out to him. “I'm... I'm so happy you are here.” She said.

Armetus took a sip of the coffee and his good eyes closed in culinary bliss as he savored the strong and smooth taste. "I swear to the gods... if Aricia wasn't our Queen she would have the most popular restaurant in the whole of the Union just for her coffee." He said with a satisfied smile.

Marci nodded and moved to the comfortable couch and sat down. "Your mate?"

Armetus nodded. "She knows I am here and she knows I need to work. We have been mated for over four thousand years Marci... she knows me well."

"I can have room made for her here at the Island apartments if you like." Marci spoke quickly. "The compound is finished fully now and the *Durcunusaan* spared no expense or security measure. To be honest I think they came up with a few that have not yet been invented yet."

Armetus shook his head with a smile. "No need. Andro is allowing us to use Resumar's villa for the moment. And if I get anymore *Durcunusaan* protection I'll scream. The boy has me blanketed now."

Marci chuckled again, loving that he was in such good spirits. This man was her mentor and her second father. She loved him dearly, even more because he had sat with her real father on more than one occasion and gotten stinking drunk. Her parents were pureblood vampires and among those who were fanatically loyal to the Union. Armetus had met them far more times than she probably knew about, and she knew her parents were covered every moment of the day by Armetus's order. With her parents Armetus could and did relax and enjoy the closeness of friends. Even her Lycavorian husband, an officer within the Fleet, had unseen security because of the job Marci now held.

Armetus looked at her as he scooted the hover chair closer to the couch. "So... how bad is it child? And don't you dare hold back from me." He asked.

Marci nodded her head. "*Dumo l'phraktos* Armetus... not as bad as I first thought." She told him. "Nesa and the others are one hundred percent sure they have found all of Laustinos's little traps. He was not as creative as we thought."

Armetus nodded his head in agreement. "He was an excellent analyst, not a computer genius." He said.

"The Defense Network Grid is fully clean, and Barla added several additional security elements across the spectrum. I had them cleared with Andro before doing it. Anyone who tries to access the grid now without authorization and a special code will set off alarms in every major headquarters across the Union and shut the entire network out except for those with Level Ten Clearance. Even those who have the right codes must also use an Authenticate Cipher that is coded directly to them."

"What was the final tally on the Drow Marci?" Armetus asked but not really wanting to know.

"Three hundred sixty-nine." Marci answered softly. "Five survivors including Lu'ria. The attacks also caused us to be effectively blind along the entire Farnuri Expanse. I had ordered an *OMEN* ship into the area but Andro changed that this morning. He has something else planned and I'm meeting with him tonight so he can fill me in."

"What about the attacks here on Earth?" Armetus asked.

"You were right." Marci said. "They came in legal enough. Limian paperwork. Every single one of them. All of them through *PROMETHUS* Station's port. I'm also not convinced we have seen the last of them either."

"Why?" Armetus asked.

"We have forty-three bodies from the attack against Martin, seven from your villa and another eleven from the operation against Janae." Marci answered. "Sixty one total. The only problem with that is that seventy-five individuals came in over the last eighteen months with the same type of paperwork."

"So fourteen are unaccounted for and still out there?" Armetus said.

Marci nodded. "I have people out looking for them but..."

Armetus shook his head quickly. "Contact Aihola and give it to her. Give her full control. Let the Drow do it. They can get around a lot easier than most here on Earth and they will be relentless in their search. They can also tap more resources among the humans and elves and the vampire divisions and not raise suspicion. And trust me when I tell you Charles and Aihola are scary when they are together. Between them, Selene and Lynwe, the assassins will only be able to hide for so long when Aihola enters the fray."

Marci nodded and got to her feet moving to the desk. "I also contacted the head of the Limian Intelligence service and told him that if I discover his people had anything to do with helping those Kavalians get onto Earth I would personally come and find him and then feed him his little rat fuck tail." Marci snarled.

“And I told him that effective immediately, all assistance Limian Intelligence receives from the Union ceases. He was screaming something about the loss of thirty billion annually in training funds when I cut him off.”

Armetus roared out his laughter. “Oh that’s beautiful! I always wanted to do that!”

She took several pads from the surface and moved back to him holding them out. “These are the latest reports from the assets we still have in The Wilds as well as Riall’s overall fleet operational report. He sends me a copy every two days and...”

“Ignore it.” Armetus spoke.

“What?” She asked returning to her spot on the couch.

“Ignore it.” Armetus told her again. He leaned forward in his hover chair and looked at her. “Shortly after Martin allowed me to form the Kryperia we sat down at the palace on Apo Prime. It was just him and I... well Andro and Elynth were there playing with Torma... they were still very young... but the Queens were gone. He looked me dead in the eyes and gave me one task Marci. I remember his words perfectly... and they are what I have lived by ever since.” Armetus sipped his coffee. “He said... *Armetus, you are my eyes and my ears. I don’t know shit about intelligence gathering aside from the physical operations themselves. This is what I want. I want men and women who can go the places no one else can go, do the things no one else can do, and have the intelligence to put it all together. You tell me who the bad guys are and what I will face if you can... and then I’ll go blow the sibfla out of them. You leave that part to me. Take care of our people out there risking their asses everyday. Give them what they need, what they want, hell give them what they don’t know we have! But when they call for help, you make damn sure we get them out. Anyone who does that kind of work has more balls than I do and they deserved to know their bosses are watching out for their asses and not playing politics. You tell them to do whatever they need to do, however they need to do it, and as long as it does not violate the principles of our people and what this Union is founded on, then I will back them one thousand percent. Right to the fucking wall.*”

Marci stared at him for a long moment. “You... you never told me that Armetus.” She said softly.

Armetus shook his head. “No... and now I see I made a mistake in not telling you.” He spoke. “I made a mistake in not telling you that Martin has given us all the latitude we need to do our job. Right now however, you are trying to do too much Marci. And in trying to do too much you are not doing enough things well.”

“I’m sorry Armetus.” Marci said softly dropping her head.

“*Son vada carians...* don’t be sorry child.” He spoke quickly and reaching out for her hand. “And do not take this as a criticism for it is not. I have been guilty of doing exactly what you are trying to do Marci. On more than one occasion. Our first business is Intelligence girl. Gathering it, analyzing it, acting on it. We stay out of politics and anything and anyone having to do with it unless we absolutely need too. Martin and Andro would not want you doing what you are doing in trying to protect Andro.”

“Nesa told you about our investigation into Ulana didn’t she?” Marci said. “I asked her not to say anything.”

Armetus shook his head. “Vengal came to see me yesterday. It is an admirable goal but one that Andro does not need you to undertake.” He said. “That is the *Durcunusaan*’s job and believe me; Vengal is no doubt doing exactly what you are doing. In fact he let it slip to me that our people and his have crossed paths twice now. That is why he and General Vistr formed the *Durcunusaan* and it’s how they have led them for twenty-six years. Don’t sell those war horses short child... they are a lot smarter than you think. If they need something you can give them, something they can not do... they *will* come to you and ask. There is no competition within our ranks Marci... not like Martin told me there was here on Earth so long ago. We all work toward one goal, the continued existence of our Union and the survival of the Leonidas family. That is what we do and that is what we need to stick to.”

“I’m stretching us too thin aren’t I?” Marci said.

“We’ve been hurt. It’s natural to try and do too much after you have been hurt. Ulana is a fool if she thinks she can match Sadi in any way. You know that. We know everything there is to know about Sadi and her past. I have told you all there is to know. That girl was a veritable fountain of information back then, once she realized that she had been used and we would help her. That she wasn’t alone. We gave her the spark that turned her life around. Let Ulana dig for her information and make false assumptions. Let her make a fool of herself Marci. You know how the people, in Sparta especially, how they feel about Sadi.”

Marci nodded. “They consider her the second coming of Gorgo.” She said.

Armetus nodded his head. “Eventually Ulana will go too far and if it gets her killed... and considering Sadi’s unique temperament, that is a possibility if she pushes too far... it’s her ass.” Armetus said with a smile. “Now, as Martin has a habit of saying, let us circle our wagons and do what we do best people. Intelligence is what we do best. That is what we need to stick too. You have our people get out there and find out who, what, where, when and why and then you put it all into order and let Andro go kill it! And believe me... that boy is just like his father as much as he hates the comparison. They are the most efficient killing machines that I have seen in all my many millennia of life. And we... you and I... and those who work for us... we are the best at what we do. Hell... we’re better than the *Venorik Elghinn*, and they used to be the best way back when.”

“What do I do?” Marci said.

“You tell me. You are in charge until Anuk says otherwise. I’m just an observer right now.” Armetus told her. He watched her rise to her feet and move across the office deep in thought. There was a reason he had chosen her to be his second in command and that reason was reemerging right in front of his eyes.

Marci turned back to face him her eyes bright now. “Reallocate our remaining assets to concentrate on the Kavalians.” Marci said. “Start training new Drow to replace those that we lost. I’ve already got a list of volunteers longer than my arm. I’ll contact this Pian and see if we can’t work out some sort of underground for the Kavalian rebels there. Resumar is going to get those Kavalian females out of their military command compound and we can use whatever they might know.”

Armetus nodded. “Let’s talk to all of them. Get with Resumar and get them back here. Make that a priority. Make friends... make promises and then find out what they know. Tell our people in The Wilds to push as hard as they can... if they have to remove some limbs in the process the King and Andro aren’t going to care.”

“I’ll send a liaison to Ben at Dreamland... see if he and his people have any new toys that will help us.” Marci spoke excitedly.

Armetus nodded once more. “Now that’s my girl.” He stated with a grin. “Technology is a *upae*... especially when we have it and they don’t. Start putting dossiers together on all the Kavalian leaders we know about. If Pian can help us... get it. I’ve seen both Tarifa’s report and Resumar’s own recommendations. This Kavalian is our best shot at really stoking a rebellion within Kavalian space. He’s charismatic, a powerful leader and a tactical wizard. He has pulled his entire Pride out of the violence of their past and is dragging them into the future. Let’s talk with him and find out how these furry cat bastards fight and who will push harder than the rest. Let’s get him things he can use. Resumar says he is a friend to us. Let’s treat him like that then. Intelligence... equipment. Let’s do what we do best.”

Marci met his eyes. “The Zero Squads Armetus? Do we activate them?” She asked him. “The Kavalians tried to kill Martin... and they almost succeeded. And they have tried to kill Andro twice since. Though one of those attempts was through intermediaries. That’s about as dire as it gets, and Martin said don’t use them unless things were dire.”

Armetus looked at her and was silent for a moment. “Has Andro said anything to you about them?”

Marci shook her head quickly. “Not in regards to them no. But you know as well as I do, with the exception of Athani and this fellow Pian, no Kavalian is at the top of his friend’s party invitation list.”

Armetus nodded. “True.” He said for a long thoughtful moment. “Activate them and turn them loose.” Armetus ordered without hesitation. “It’s time we took the gloves off in every aspect. Androcles is going to give them a very large wake up call in about thirty hours and there’s no reason why we can’t do the same. The more confusion and destruction we sow in the first few hours, the more time we buy to ramp up our own production and training for war. The Kavalians will still have us outnumbered heavily even if Andro’s plan succeeds. The more time we can buy the better.”

Marci nodded. “I’ll send the order.”

“Good.” He told her. “Now... before we get into the really good stuff... why don’t you tell me what we know about these Eridiani fuckers? I don’t like that they have stuck their nose where it doesn’t belong and I have some ideas on how to hand it back to them in chunks for their misdeeds.”

5.3 LYs FROM UZU OZEIB 7

Pa'cour finished securing the last crate in the small hold of the G9 and tapped the control panel sealing the hold tightly. By his calculations they had enough supplies to last at least six months initially. After that they would need to turn to what he would ask Cha'talla for. Pa'cour did not have any doubts Cha'talla would honor their people's code, his older brother was just too honorable not too. He hadn't seen him in more years than he could remember, but he did remember the surge of anger and hate at Veldruk when he heard that he had thought he killed Cha'talla. Pa'cour knew there could be no forgiveness from T'lolt for his actions on Enurrua, no matter that he tried to stop it after he had given the order. No... Yuri was not going to dwell in the past and neither would he. They would move into the future together, perhaps have children one day. He knew that was possible because Cha'talla's wife was a pureblood vampire and she had bore him four sons. Perhaps one day Yuri would give him a child, perhaps more than one. He would not pressure her; he would be content to live out the remainder of his years just with her beside him. What she made him feel was something he never thought he could feel again, not after the death of his first bride so long ago.

Pa'cour prided himself on always being prepared and alert. Thousands of years working with or beside vampires had given him an almost unnatural sense of when they were near and wrapped in the shadows. That sense was screaming now. His rifle was too far to reach so he casually reached up like he was going to scratch the back of his head. He began spinning around instantly, his fingers closing around the pommel of his Immortal sword and as he completed that turn, the blade of the sword was whipping around intending to decapitate whoever was sneaking up on him.

"Pa'cour no!" The male voice hissed as the shadows began to unravel in front of him.

Only Pa'cour's immense strength and battlefield reflexes stopped that sword in its tracks. His dark eyes watched as Nalavi materialized in front of him, the edge of that sword only two inches from his neck, his eyes as wide as saucers. He clutched two bags in his arms and stood there unmoving.

"Nalavi!" Pa'cour gasped instantly pulling his sword back and watching the doctor breath a huge sigh of relief. "Nalavi what are you doing here?"

Nalavi reached up involuntarily with his hand and rubbed his neck where the blade of the sword would have removed his head. "Forgive me... I didn't think to..." He looked at Pa'cour. "I forgot that many of your people have developed an uncanny sense as to where we are when wrapped in the shadows."

"Nalavi what are you doing here?" Pa'cour asked again as he turned back to the exterior of the G9.

"I'm coming with you." Nalavi said. "Yuri insisted... and based on what is going to happen... it's the wisest move I can make."

Pa'cour looked at him. "We are running Nalavi." He said. "We will be traitors and enemies. Are you sure that is what you want?"

"The alternative is far worse. I have no desire to be left to Moran's twisted actions, more so now that Dante is infected with Xaxon." Nalavi said.

Pa'cour looked at him keenly. "You... you know of that?" He asked.

Nalavi nodded. "Yes."

Pa'cour motioned with his head into the G9. "Stow your bags in the starboard cargo bin quickly. Yuri will be here soon and we need to leave."

Nalavi began to move forward but stopped. "For someone in your position you are quite trusting Pa'cour." He said. "You know what Moran would do if he discovered you were sleeping with Yuri."

Pa'cour met his eyes. "I trust Yuri." He answered. "If she sent you here and didn't kill you then that is good enough for me."

Nalavi thought about that for a second and nodded. "A very good point." He said with a grin. "I'll stow my gear." He said tossing his bags up into the G9 and beginning to climb the short stairs.

"I would hold off on that action for a time." The voice spoke.

Pa'cour spun around just as quickly his sword coming up as half a dozen vampires troops unwrapped the shadows from around them, their weapons out and trained on Pa'cour. Moran followed suit a second later. Pa'cour caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and shifted his weight instantly, his sword slashing downward. The blade bit into flesh and there was a muted cry of pain that was cut off as the head of the vampire soldier hit the deck with a thud and rolled away, his body following a second later. Pa'cour snapped out with a

wicked back hand slash that sent his sword cleanly through the rifle of the next trooper who unwrapped the shadows from around him. He stepped forward quickly and snatched the surprised vampire by the front of his uniform fatigues with his left hand while plunging his sword forward with his right. The blade buried itself into his guts and blood exploded from between the man's lips as Pa'cour then flung him away with a heave of his Immortal strength.

"*Vith!*" Moran screamed. "Take him down damn it!"

Pa'cour spun at his words seeing five more troops appear to his side. He swept his sword wildly forward in a two handed grip and chopped the legs from the closest vampire out from under him like a hot knife through butter. As the wailing man fell to the deck the other four vampires pounced upon him. A sharp and painful chop to his wrist and his sword skittered from his grip. With an enraged roar Pa'cour lifted one vampire fully off the deck and sent him smashing back down in to the deck. His head was crushed instantly from the force of the blow, the sounds of his skull fracturing almost deafening. As Pa'cour began to turn he was hit with three savage blows. Driven with vampire strength the three remaining vampires began to beat him down with the small clubs they carried. Each strike was devastating even to him, his head ringing from the repeated blows, the skin on his face splitting open in two spots and spraying blood everywhere.

As Pa'cour was beat to his knees he glanced up and saw two others with their weapons leveled at Nalavi, the barrels of their weapons jammed into his chest. White light began to explode behind his eyes from the repeated blows now, and his only thoughts were of Yuri. He would never be with her again. He would never smell her delicious blood or feel her smooth skin beneath his fingertips. He would never again hear her whispering softly her professions of love in his ear or feel her body wrapped around his.

"Did you actually think you could get away with this?" Moran snarled at him. "Are you really that foolish? Thank you Nalavi."

Nalavi glared at him. "I did not bring you here!" He screamed.

Moran chuckled. "I was coming to see you when I saw Yuri leave the medical bay. That didn't strike me as strange, but when you came darting out not two minutes later carrying your bags and moving like the hounds of hell were after you, I knew something was up." He walked slowly up to a beaten down Pa'cour until he stood over him. "Did you actually think you could take my wife from me? You are a monster! A fucking monster!"

Moran lashed out with a vicious right cross that impacted Pa'cour's jaw with unerring precision. His head rocked back violently, and he was slammed to the deck by the force of the blow. "You know what the punishment is for consorting with a pureblood!" Moran screamed. "I'll peel your skin off your pathetic body personally for touching my wife!"

"I LOVE HER!" Pa'cour bellowed as he heaved himself from the floor.

Moran stepped back as the three vampires troops began to smash their clubs down on him again and again, blood splattering the deck and surrounding area. One blow smashed across his cheek and sent him nearly into unconsciousness. His body spun around and fell back to the deck and he was still.

"Stop it Robert!" Nalavi shouted.

"You shut the fuck up! I'll deal with your traitorous ass later!" Moran screamed as he moved back forward and savagely kicked Pa'cour in the side twice. "I should have killed all your kind! I should have killed all of them instead of letting them go! Fuck my wife will you! My Yuri!"

"***I am not your Yuri!***" The female voice shouted echoing in the small landing bay. "And if you strike him one more time Robert Moran, I will carve your eyeballs from your skull and crush them under my boots!"

Moran whirled around then his eyes going wide when he saw Yuri standing just behind the six members of his personal guard. They too had spun around at her words and were now wavering as their weapons dropped from the ready position. "Yuri!" Moran gasped. "Yuri what are you doing?"

Yuri felt a swell of power and confidence within her as she stood there staring at the last living source of her betrayal and sadistic torture these last years. She stood there with a clear mind and renewed strength at what she had found. She was not about to let this petty man take from her all she had discovered.

It was a display unlike Moran or any of the others had seen before. Yuri's body trembled as she breathed deeply, trembled in anger and hate. Anger and hate not at the Lycavorians or the Kavalians, but at the man who was hurting *her* Pa'cour. The man who was causing her future pain. They saw the soft flare of light blue light suddenly encase her entire body and then her hands filled with a dual pair of vicious looking blades that Moran recognized instantly. The blades had somehow been imbued with the blue color, forged in that very fashion.

They were slightly curved to do maximum damage and each pommel had a curved razor sharp end. They had been a gift from Vonis three years after he had defected. Yuri had nearly thrown them away when she received them, thinking he was mocking her by sending them to her. Moran hadn't seen them in decades, but now they filled her hands and they looked positively lethal.

Yuri held them up so that he could see them better. "Do you remember these Robert?" She asked. "The Tears of Heaven Vonis called them when he sent them to me. Forged in the blue fires of Paravin. Unbreakable. Eternally sharp. My gift of redemption he told me in the transmission."

"You threw them away!" Moran barked.

"No... something stopped me from doing that." Yuri said softly. She lifted her cobalt colored eyes and stared at him with pure hatred and anger. "Perhaps Vonis knew something then that no one else did. They will be the beginning of my redemption now! At least as much as I am able to have!"

"Yuri what are you doing?" Moran screamed.

"I'm protecting my future!" Yuri snarled. "I'm protecting the father of the child I carry in my womb! And you will not take him from me Robert Moran! No one will take him from me! Ever!"

Pa'cour's head lifted from the floor as Yuri's voice echoed in the bay, his dark eyes wide in stunned shock.

Moran took a step towards Yuri. "What?" He screamed. "You let... you let this animal have you? You let him spill his seed into you and make a child? Yuri... have you lost your mind? The law! The Coven law forbids..."

"Fuck the law!" Yuri screamed. "And fuck you! I should have drained you dry that first night! I should have turned you into a shriveled pile of genetically enhanced flesh! I plan to rectify that mistake right now!"

With that Yuri moved.

She moved far faster than anyone had ever seen her move. Driven by the knowledge of what she had found, what she could have more of in the future. Driven by the need to protect the man she loved more than her own life now and the child she now carried that he had given to her.

Yuri blurred directly at the six unsuspecting vampire troops. The fight was decidedly short and completely one sided. Yuri felt the power flow through her like never before. Such clarity and peace. Such focus and harmony. It was almost surreal to her. Her body was encased in the soft blue psychic power and it rushed through every millimeter of her veins and her limbs empowering her. The first blade attack opened the closest vampire's throat to the stale air in the hanger bay. Blood erupted nearly a meter into the air as Yuri spun and blurred in motion. Both blades impaled another vampire in his chest and she slashed outward with both blades, carving his heart and lungs into confetti within his chest. She blurred once more, spinning around and her right boot leaving the deck and striking the third vampire with crushing force. The sound of his jaw popping and his neck snapping was like a weapons shot in the confined area and the force of the kick lifted him off the deck and sent him flying ten meters back. As she completed her spin, both of those blue blades snapped out and cleanly sliced through both sides of another vampire's neck. His head lolled to the side, only small portions of skin and his spinal column holding it onto his shoulders as blood arcs began to fountain from his body.

Another blurring motion and Yuri was snapping the neck of vampire troop number five and moving before his body began to fall. The sixth and final vampire could only watch in horror as his Princess spun around and slashed both of her blades in front of her body. He didn't feel the blades connect, didn't feel them slice through the fabric of his shirt or the skin of his abdomen. He didn't even feel it when his internal organs began to spill onto the deck beneath him. He didn't feel any of these things for he was already dead and paralyzed with fear.

Moran turned at the inhuman howl from behind him and he watched Pa'cour erupting upward to his feet like some monstrous animal and snatching one of his three men in his hands by his booted feet. The bloody and beaten Pa'cour simply began to use that vampire troop as a battering ram. He whipped the man around in a display of rage and strength and Moran watched as his upper body collided violently with the other two men and sent them sprawling. He watched as Pa'cour spun that man around until his head impacted the underside of the G9 and splattered blood and bone matter on the hull of the ship with a sickening crunch. Pa'cour then dropped his body instantly and turned to grab another. As he heaved the shouting vampire off the deck, Yuri's words filled his head and he completely lost it. Screaming his savage and feral battle cry, Pa'cour proceeded to dismember the vampire soldier one limb at a time. Using his incredible Immortal strength, a strength that was

fueled by the protectiveness within him for his Yuri and the knowledge that his future truly was within his reach, Pa'cour began to tear the man limb from limb with ridiculous ease.

The two vampires holding their weapons on Nalavi turned to bring their weapons to bear on Pa'cour. Neither of them had the opportunity to even caress their triggers as Nalavi drew the small handgun from behind his back. Two head shots apiece and both of them fell dead. “*Vithin* fools!” Nalavi hissed. “Point a weapon at a doctor will you!”

The last vampire watched with terrified eyes as Pa'cour threw the pieces of his comrade to the deck. He did the only thing he could think of then. He turned and ran, blurring out of the hanger bay just as fast as his skills could carry him. Pa'cour whirled around, his once dark eyes now the cobalt blue of his vampiric nature and he bellowed a roar of righteous anger and began stomping directly at where Moran stood.

Moran snatched his sidearm out and leveled it at Pa'cour. “C’mon you Immortal fuck!” He screamed. “I won’t be so easy!”

Moran didn’t see the long, slim leg rocket out of nowhere until it hit his arm and sent his weapon sailing through the air. He didn’t see Yuri as she blurred in front of him and buried one of her blades into his chest with a look of savage glee on her beautiful face. He felt the lancing pain and looked down as Yuri yanked the blade free and spat on him, the spittle striking his face as he slumped to his knees.

“Too easy!” She snarled at him.

“Yu... Yuri!” Moran gasped as blood began to soak the deck beneath him.

“Oh... you won’t die from that wound Robert.” Yuri rasped at him as she felt Pa'cour come up behind her. “You won’t die just yet. I won’t take that honor from the person who truly deserves it. I want you to live with the knowledge that I will be crying out Pa'cour’s name in our bed. I will be begging him to take me in every possible way he or I can think of! More than he has already had me! And trust me Robert Moran, his Immortal cock is far larger and more pleasing than yours ever was.” Yuri stuck the dig at his manhood in there. “And I want you to live with the knowledge that I will have this child! His child! And many more if that is what he wants! And I will try to make amends for all I have done! What you and my mother have forced me to do!”

“Yuri...”

“You think I don’t know what you have done?” Yuri screamed at him. “I should skin you alive for all you have done to me!”

“You’ll... you’ll never get off the ship!” Moran hissed.

Yuri laughed at him. She held up the control pad and tossed it onto his chest. “I’ll not only get off this ship Robert... I’ll stop you from trying to prevent what is about to happen. Our time is done now Robert Moran. You can remain and be swept aside with the others of the past... but I choose to live and go on.” Yuri walked up to him and kicked him savagely in the head, dropping him into blackness.

She turned as she saw Pa'cour stagger forward. “Pa'cour!” She gasped blurring to him and catching him just before he began to fall. She grunted under his weight but using her strength she got him stable and held him up. “Oh Pa'cour... oh look at what they did to you my love!” Yuri almost cried.

“Yuri... you... you are pregnant?” Pa'cour stammered as Nalavi rushed up and stabbed a needle of healing proteins into his arm.

Yuri nodded her head proudly, completely accepting of that fact and what it meant to her. “Nalavi told me only a few hours ago.” She said reaching up to take his face in her hands. “Our child Pa'cour. Our gift!”

Pa'cour pulled her to him and crushed his lips down on hers. Yuri groaned most happily and kissed him right back, ignoring the blood and death that surrounded them and the stains his blood left on her skin. His arms pulled her close to him, holding her with such strength, yet such gentleness.

“Ahem!” Nalavi spat. “While this is all very pleasant... we really should be leaving don’t you think.” Nalavi hissed.

Yuri reluctantly pulled away and shifted her weight under Pa'cour even more. “We have two minutes before the charges I set disable the entire gravitational grid on the ship and shut down the sensors and hanger bay locks.” She said as Nalavi got under Pa'cour’s opposite arm and they began moving to the G9.

“That will... that will only stop them from coming after us for a few minutes Yuri!” Pa'cour said.

Yuri smiled up at him. A smile brighter than Nalavi had ever seen from her. “The engine core will eject at the same time my love. I attached three EMP missile warheads to the engine core shell. When they detonate they will disable every ship within a million kilometers of the *INQUISITOR*. Every ship but ours that is. They’ll

need to retrieve the engine core, purge the residual EMP signature and then reinstall it before getting main power back. They won't be able to scan or communicate with anyone until they do. Twelve hours tops. Plenty of time for us to escape and keep them from interfering with my sister as she takes back the High Coven from those who would drive it into oblivion."

"You are helping her?" Nalavi gasped.

Yuri looked at the G9 as they reached it. "She is the only hope for the High Coven to survive now Nalavi." Yuri said softly. "I've done a few other things but that is all I can do to help her now. It is time for Narice to step forward and do what she was meant to do."

"What is that?" Nalavi asked.

"Lead our people into the future." Yuri said. "She is the only one who can now. If they do not wish to move forward Nalavi... if they do not want to move forward, then Narice will be the vanguard for their destruction by the Union. She is a Leonidas now Nalavi... above all else. And the total destruction of the High Coven will bear the face of Androcles Leonidas and everything that he commands if Narice can not wrench leadership from those pitiless fools and save them."

NEFOA

KAVALIAN BASE

Everything had been going so well Muton thought as weapons fire slammed into the solid steel blast wall he and the others huddled behind. Fifty meters was all that separated them from freedom and someone had to get sick and go to the medical bay and find the body of that fool Dinxi. He turned his head and saw For'mya holding Eirene and Fedor tightly to her while Miseo was putting out a copious amount of well placed rounds from his rifle. He turned his head in the other direction and saw the remaining Monitors on the ramp of the *LEUGERS* transport laying down a good deal of fire. It would not be long however before the Kavalian guards that were no doubt on their way here simply destroyed the transport. Muton was effectively out of ideas and his eyes fell to his son.

"Miseo!" Muton shouted above the din of weapons fire.

"They are too fortified!" Miseo barked back.

"Reinforcements will be here in moments Miseo!" Muton yelled.

It was the smallest of them that saved them.

Fedor tugged on his mother's arm and waited for her to look at him.

"Oh... Fedor... I'm sorry." She gasped.

Fedor pointed upwards with his finger. "Shoot them mother." He said.

"Fedor I can't! Not without exposing you and your sister. You..." For'mya rasped at him.

"Not them mother..." Fedor declared. He pointed up again. "Shoot them!"

For'mya lifted her eyes and she took in the large moving crates above them. They were obviously working on some sort of automated conveyor, each crate attached to a single cable, with five meters between each crate. Her eyes grew wider as she realized what Fedor was talking about. Her left hand reached out and she pounded Miseo on the side.

"Miseo!" She screamed. "The crates! The crates above us! Shoot them!"

Miseo turned to look at her, catching the last part of her statement and seeing her point skyward. He looked up and he too saw the crates moving along as if nothing was happening beneath them. His eyes grew a bit wider as he followed them, realizing that the crates were passing right over the position of the Kavalian troops pinning them down. Well trained that he was; Miseo didn't hesitate. He leaned back, lifted his rifle and held back the trigger.

In the space of four seconds he sent thirty-nine high velocity kinetic projectiles directly at the bolted joint holding the crate to the thick cable. His aim was true and that metal joint first splintered and then snapped completely under the weight of the fully loaded crate. That crate fell nearly fifty meters, its forward momentum intact, and smashed into the deck of the hanger bay three meters from the closest Kavalian position. The huge crate shattered into several large pieces which proceeded to careen at high velocity directly into the Kavalian position causing many of them to stand up and attempt to get out of the way. When they did, Muton and the

others simply mowed them down. Miseo shifted his fire to another crate and once more cut loose with a concentrated burst of accurate fire. This time, the cable snapped instantly and the crate plummeted into the auxiliary fuel cells lining the wall of the hanger bay. One spark was all it took, and four Tri-Cobalt fuel cells designed for the fighters exploded. The hot wave of fire expanded outward quickly like a wave, causing Miseo to duck behind the blast wall with wide eyes. For'mya clutched Eirene and Fedor to her tightly as the wave of heat sizzled over the top of their position.

“Kill them Miseo” Kapurr screamed. “Not us!”

Miseo lifted his head for a split second to see the damage he had wrought and his eyes grew large. Dozens of smoking bodies lay sprawled in grotesque caricatures of death, many of them still burning. The weapons fire that had been pinning them down was gone and now even For'mya looked up.

“*Saoi sibfla!*” For'mya muttered.

“Hah!” Miseo shouted. “Do I do good work or what?” He scrambled to his feet. “Go! Go!” He screamed reaching for For'mya’s hand.

For'mya didn’t hesitate either and scrambled to her feet. “Get to the ship!” She barked out nearly dragging Fedor and Eirene.

Miseo saw this and dropped his weapon, allowing it to dangle on the shoulder strap he wore. He darted after her and swept both Eirene and Fedor up in his much stronger arms. They didn’t hesitate an instant and quickly clung to his shoulders as For'mya gripped his arm and all of them made a mad dash to the *LEUGERS* Transport. The half dozen Monitors on the ramp were waving frantically as they rushed up, urging them inside.

“Go!” Muton screamed at For'mya as he came up beside Miseo and took Fedor from his arms. “I will secure the children! Go!”

For'mya raced forward into the cockpit of the ship, quickly taking stock of what she had. The *LEUGERS* was the newest Kavalian transport, but still far behind a Union *STRIKER AT* or even a High Coven G9. She scrambled forward into the pilot’s seat, which was on the right in the *LEUGERS*, and began powering up engines and shields just from memory alone. As the systems began to come alive she looked out the view window and saw more Kavalian shock troops pouring from two different entrances into the hanger bay. For'mya’s hands flew across the controls and as they did, engineering panels behind her began lighting up, the engines beginning to rise in noise pitch as they powered quickly. Her head whipped around when Kapurr practically threw himself into the co-pilot’s seat.

“Shields!” For'mya screamed. “Get the shields up!”

Kapurr didn’t question her orders for even an eye blink and his hands began to fly across the two control consoles in front of him. There was a soft humming sound that snapped on all around them and then suddenly For'mya was watching with satisfaction as the shields on the ship flickered and extended. It happened just in time too for the Kavalians had uncorked two heavy weapons and now the heavy kinetic rounds were pounding the shields hard on the port side.

“Time to go!” Kapurr screamed.

“Ramp! Is the ramp up?” For'mya yelled.

“Almost!” He snapped back.

“A little faster would be nice!” For'mya quipped as her hands worked the controls.

“Kavalian ships don’t power as fast as Union vessels!” Kapurr barked at her. “Shit!” He pointed across in front of her and out the view window. “A missile crew! Shit!”

“Ah... *nubou allon!*” For'mya snarled. “Hold on everyone!”

For'mya slid her fingers up the engine dial, bringing the *LEUGERS*’s engines to full military power and she slashed her hand across the second control panel activating the ship’s thrusters and lifting it off the deck. The ship jerked around wildly for two or three seconds and then she spun it on its main axis, far faster than the *LEUGERS* was designed to move. She heard Eirene scream out in joy at the stomach tossing maneuver and then For'mya stabbed her finger down on the main drive output.

“Cook this fuckers!” She snarled viciously as the *LEUGERS*’s main engines ignited right there in the hanger bay and sent a fifty meter tail of flame shooting across the hanger deck. A tail of flame which instantly incinerated the Kavalian missile crew and detonated their spare missiles as the *LEUGERS* leaped forward into the open sky of Nefoa.

“Does this tub have defensive measures?” She barked at Kapurr.

Kapurr was already acting and his fingers were touching the control consoles in two different locations and the transport began to spew bright flares and microfiber chafe bails out the sides of the ship in copious amounts. “Spilling the entire load!”

The engines were rapidly spooling to full power and For'mya began punching in the coordinates for Enurrua before they had even cleared the cloudless sky and reached into the upper atmosphere. “Prepare for atmospheric jump!” She snapped. “Can you plot the variables?”

Kapurr nodded quickly. “Give me the coordinates!”

For'mya complied as Muton moved into the cockpit behind them and watched. “Adjust for the reversion coefficient point three two.” For'mya ordered. “The space around Enurrua is still cluttered with leftover debris and we don't want to hit anything!”

“Point three two!” Kapurr barked. “Got it!” He glanced up and looked at her. “You are jumping us to within five hundred kilometers of the planet's gravity well!”

“The closer the better!” For'mya snapped. “LSD drive spooling to max!”

Kapurr looked quickly at Muton. “You were not lying my friend!” He barked out.

Muton smiled. “I told you she was the best!”

The beeping from the panel behind them pulled Muton's attention away from Kapurr and he quickly settled into the chair behind them. “Fighters!” He announced. “Closing fast!”

“Let them close!” For'mya shouted. “In six seconds we won't be here!” She adjusted the controls in front of her once more and then looked at Kapurr. “Ready?”

“Do it!” He barked out.

“Engaging LSD drive!” For'mya yelled as her finger touched the engine panel.

Two squadrons of Jaguar Mark II fighters could only watch helplessly as the *LEUGERS* transport leaped from the space around Nefoa and was gone. None of the fighter pilots looked forward to returning to their burning base and taking responsibility for this major screw up.

PUSINTIN'S *GREAT SOUL*-CLASS DREADNOUGHT *PUMA'S PRIDE* **2.4 LYS FROM TUPACIA PRIME**

“...explain to me how this happen!” Pusintin roared at the holo image of the Duty Officer on Nefoa. “Where is Dinxi?”

“He is dead Marshall.” The man answered quickly. “A single knife thrust to his mid back that penetrated his heart. Rock Spider venom was then injected into his heart killing him in seconds.”

Pusintin rose to his feet. “A knife?” He asked. “Muton killed him?”

The Duty Officer shook his head. “No Marshall... it appears based on medical evidence gathered by our medics that he was killed by the elf female. The angle of the entry wound is upward, which would mean someone shorter than him. Muton and Dinxi were the same height.”

“Fuck!” Pusintin snarled in disbelief. “Muton is a fucking traitor? He betrayed me! He's been my doctor for all of these years!”

“Security footage from the hanger bay clearly shows him helping in the escape with eleven other unknown Kavalians.” The Duty Officer spoke. “It also shows the elf female For'mya leading and protecting two children Marshall.”

Pusintin's head snapped up. “Two?” He gasped.

The man nodded. “Yes sir. A male and a female.” He answered. “They looked to be about five or six years of age from the security footage.”

Pusintin's eyes grew even wider. “A girl?” He stammered. “And they were that old?”

“We have several angles from the hanger bay that were not destroyed when she ignited the engines inside the facility and destroyed a missile team and their missile stores.” The man answered. “They clearly show the children.”

“Send them to me!” Pusintin snapped. “Now!”

“Of course Marshall.” He stated. “I have squadrons beginning to deploy in a standard search pattern sir. The *LEUGERS* is only a medium range transport and they will not have gotten far.”

Pusintin looked at him. “Are you stupid man?” He snapped. “For'mya would have ripped out the transponder on that ship the moment they made their LSD jump out of the system!” He shook his head. “Twins.” He hissed softly. “The bitch was carrying twins this whole time! And Muton was protecting her.”

“Do you wish to... do you still wish me to deploy the squadrons Marshall Pusintin?” The Duty Officer asked from Nefoa.

“Yes!” Pusintin snapped. “Standard sweep Captain.”

“If we find them sir?”

“Contact me immediately and do nothing!” Pusintin barked. “Is that clear? I want her alive Captain! I want the children alive!”

“Understood Marshall.” The Captain spoke just before Pusintin stabbed his hand down on the COM panel and ended the transmission. “Fucking incompetent asshole.” He snarled as he turned to his First Officer. “Popal?”

The dark haired Kavalian was in front of him instantly. “Marshall!” He snapped out as he stopped.

“Tune the lateral forward sensor array to detect an Borellum Acoustic Pulse.” Pusintin ordered.

The man looked at him oddly. “Marshall... a Borellum Acoustic Pulse?” He asked. “The signal from a BAP is notoriously spotty sir. It’s why we don’t use them anymore. They are not used by anyone for communication anymore.”

Pusintin nodded. “And it’s why I put a BAP tracker in For'mya’s middle toe.” He said with a grin. “No one uses them as communications tools... so when we detect it... it will be her.”

“We won’t discover anything until they discontinue LSD operations sir.” Popal said. “The signal is blocked by light speed travel.”

Pusintin nodded. “But the *LEUGERS* doesn’t have the range of other transports they could have picked which means they are going somewhere reasonably close to Nefoa.” He said. “When they stop we’ll find her.”

Popal nodded. “I’ll align the forward array myself sir.” He stated.

“Hold position here.” Pusintin ordered. “I can almost guarantee they will remain within The Wilds as they move closer to the Union border. You can bet that is where they are going. I need to report this to Keleru but don’t hesitate to interrupt me if we detect her ship. They’ll be making their way to the border anyway they can.”

“Of course Marshall.” Popal spoke.

Pusintin turned on his heels and began walking off the bridge of his ship. “Twins.” He said softly. “Sonofabitch.”

CALIBER KELERU’S HOME

“... certain Pusintin?” Keleru asked.

“I reviewed the security footage myself Keleru.” He answered from within the secure transmission. “A boy and a girl. Both look to be about five to six years old.”

“Did we overestimate the dose of the serum for her elven body to make them grow so fast?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin nodded. “We adjusted for her Lycavorian healing system, but we may have overdone it.”

“This may complicate things. And it may help us.” Keleru spoke softly. “Having a twin will not allow us to completely control him. Especially a female twin. However, if they are growing as fast as you say, it will look far better if he is at the forefront of our ruse and you are in the shadows.”

“We may have to do what we normally would not do.” Pusintin said as he nodded. “Keep the female safe and use her as a tool against him, but what you say is correct. Can we delay the vote of the Union Senate until I have him?”

Keleru got up from his chair and moved around his desk. “It’s possible. They have asked for one delay already to insure all the Senators are physically present on Earth. How long?”

Pusintin shrugged. “The *LEUGERS* doesn’t have great range Keleru, so they will need to go somewhere soon. Once they stop using their LSD drive I’ll be able to detect wherever she is within five sectors. A Borellum

Acoustic Pulse device is like a trail I can follow. Once I have that I can be there within hours. A day... perhaps two.”

“Are we certain the Lycavorians are not part of this escape?” Keleru asked.

Pusintin shook his head. “Everyone who helped them was Kavalian.” Pusintin answered. “All of the security footage confirms that.”

“Who are they?” Keleru asked.

“Muton aside... the others appeared to be minor officers in different positions around the KFI. At least those that we got clear images of their faces. Nothing out of the ordinary really.” He answered. “Except that none of those we identified have family that we can locate. Which is odd, considering how old some of them looked.”

“Interesting.” Keleru said softly. “Exactly like them.”

“What’s that?” Pusintin asked.

“Before you were welcomed among us as a Kavalian Pusintin there was a time when a group of Kavalians was preaching ridiculous notions of peaceful intent.” Keleru said. “They were a religious order of some sort. Once I grew tired of their ranting I had them destroyed. Or at least I thought I did. Finding family members of the leaders was especially hard. We did manage to execute several thousand finally but the rest...” Keleru shook his head. “There have been rumors through the years that they were still active, but I had no real proof.”

“You think this is the same group?” Pusintin asked. “Muton has been my doctor for going on four centuries Keleru. How could this have escaped our notice?”

“Perhaps they learned from their mistakes.” Keleru said. “I will need to institute a purge of our people it seems. If there are more of these fools they could cause problems we don’t need.”

“I’ll get you a couple prisoners if that will help.” Pusintin said.

“Yes indeed. Do that.” Keleru said. “Once you have the children kill For'mya. We do not need the problems she will cause.”

“I can control her with my aura Keleru.” Pusintin said. “Our mistake was sending her to Nefoa to have the children. I should have kept her with me. She won’t be able to resist me, no matter how much she wants.”

Keleru looked at him in the transmission. “And you are sure about this?”

Pusintin nodded. “I’ve done my homework.” He stated. “I’ve read all of the information that Laustinos gave to me about how it was in the old times on Lycavore. My brother turned her yes, but in doing so it made her wolf blood that much more powerful. Now that he is dead and I have claimed her, that blood will follow it’s instincts. It’s why she reacted as she did when I was fucking her silly. She can’t help it.”

Keleru nodded after a moment. “Very well. If you can manage her it will give us some measure of control over the Elven people I believe. I will contact Matuarr and have him request two days delay.”

“Will they go for it?” Pusintin asked.

Keleru nodded. “I don’t see why not. According to Matuarr, their debate has been lively and no clear consensus has been made. He has attended and viewed their forum from a sealed room. He has also spoken to several of the Union Senators outside their hall. Many of their more liberal Senators are voicing a large disapproval of the way your brother ruled. That could work heavily to our advantage.”

“So my nephew kept his word?” Pusintin asked.

Keleru nodded. “He is politically inept.” Keleru spoke. “He is so intent on proving that the Lycavorian people adhere to their own laws that he is crippling himself by his very actions in allowing this debate.”

“This just may work Keleru.” Pusintin said.

Keleru nodded. “You are right... but we still have our secondary plans in place. They finished arriving four days ago just as you planned. I must say I was confused by your actions in taking out the Drow, but now I see the whole picture. A brilliant move really, and they are so worried about you and your claim that they have not moved to replace their assets.”

Pusintin nodded. “I’ll contact you as soon as I have them.”

Keleru nodded. “Very well. Good luck my friend.” He touched the COM panel and the fuzzy image vanished.

Keleru turned to his nephew and senior aide. “Kattu... begin a systematic search for any events out of the ordinary that have occurred in the last six months and may have somehow slipped our notice in intelligence reports. Pull as many people as you need too and get it done.”

Kattu nodded. “It would be easier if I had access to the main computers within the compound Uncle. And the females there to help with the search.”

Keleru nodded. “Whatever you need.” He said. “Execute the females when you are finished with your search. We can always get new ones and I do not want to expose them to such sensitive information and let them live afterwards.”

Kattu nodded. “As you order.” He said. “And Marshall Pusintin?”

Keleru looked at him. “You don’t like him do you Kattu?”

“Forgive me Uncle.”

Keleru shook his head. “Do not apologize boy.” He hissed. “I understand your distrust but you must remember Pusintin is Kavalian in his heart. He has proved this time and again.”

“But do you trust him Uncle?” Kattu asked.

Keleru nodded his head. “He is brash and reckless. Arrogant and implacable at times, but he is loyal to us. Yes... I trust him Kattu. I trust his motives and his ultimate goals. It is his actions that I sometimes call into question. But I do that with everyone.”

Kattu bowed his head. “I will begin my search immediately.”

KRANEK IMMORTAL SETTLEMENT

Esther looked around the inside of her medical clinic and couldn’t help but feel a swell of immense pride. Ja’narie was helping the three Hadarian medics to inject the ten Immortals that were within the main clinic. Another two Hadarians and four elven medics were doing the same thing at the recently opened second clinic on the far side of the settlement. They were being careful and safe as they continued to inoculate the Immortals that had begun arriving in droves. Only several hundred were allowed down to Kranek at one time to receive the serum and to view what they could have in the future. Many of them Esther discovered, revered Cha’talla in a way he would not have predicted, and his words carried more weight than even she realized. His legend had grown since he had left the Coven, the whispers of his death never really taking hold among the younger generations of Immortals. His actions had kept the rumors that he lived alive and circulating for years. Now everyone knew it to be true. Those Akruvians who came down to Kranek saw a very different world than they were used to.

There had been only two confrontations between the newly arriving Immortals and those members of Cha’talla’s tribe and their Lycavorian allies and brothers. One of the newly arriving Immortals had made the mistake of attempting to assault an elven female he saw walking the streets of the settlement. She was one of the elven engineers that had come to Kranek without hesitation. Esther knew that the commander of that engineering detachment and Cha’talla had grown quite close over the weeks and months since she had arrived and they trusted each other implicitly. That commander had waited for the justice she knew would come if Cha’talla had been here, and she did not have to wait long. The Immortal had been caught before he was able to complete his vile action, and the trial was amazingly short. The senior members of the Kranek settlement were unanimous in their verdict. That Immortal had been put up against a wall and executed as an example. This had caused much unrest among those arriving, until only three short days later when an older Lycavorian drunk on Spartan wine had shot and killed an Immortal who was only searching for a medical tech to help him. The Lycavorian had been excessively brutal in his execution style killing and within hours this same man had been put up against the same wall as the Immortal only days before and then he was executed by the Senior Union officer for murder.

These two incidents had shown the newly arriving Immortals that they would tolerate none of these actions by anyone. Yes... it was going against everything they had been taught, and trained and brought up to believe, but they only had to look at the settlement on Kranek to see that it was working.

Esther knew they had also found perhaps two dozen Immortals that had come here for only one reason. Half of them were nothing more than Immortal mercenaries who had come to Kranek to steal whatever they could. The other half had come in search of intelligence that they could bring back to the High Coven. Both groups of these men were now buried in a deep hole somewhere in the mountains, and put there by Esther and several others themselves. Her position among Cha'talla's tribe as their Matriarch had elevated Esther to nearly cult status herself. Being a pureblood vampire and enduring the births of four Immortal sons was no small feat in the eyes of many Akruvians, especially after one saw how petite she truly was. This had earned her respect and rank immediately and Esther was using it well.

Esther turned to begin the process of mixing another batch of serum when she saw the stern faced Akruvian from the Command Center walk in, look around and then settle his eyes on her. He started across the large clinic immediately and Esther lowered the data pad she had in her hand as he came up.

"Im'wor?" She asked as he stopped in front of her. "What is wrong?"

The Akruvian, one of the first to undergo the treatments, bowed his head to her. His dark brown hair was beginning to grow rapidly and his Blessed Wife had to now tie it in a long pony tail for her refused to cut it. "Matriarch... there is something you should see in the CIC." He spoke in a low voice. "Lieutenant Lersamo sent me to retrieve you."

Esther cocked her head slightly. Lersamo was the Lycavorian communications officer now assigned most happily to Kranek with his elven wife and three children. He had been among the first Lycavorians that had asked for and were granted the right to live and work here. He and his wife were among those who loved to be part of new and great things and to them this was the place to be for both.

"What is wrong?" Esther asked softly, moving closer to Im'wor.

"We copied a transmission." Im'wor told her. "It came in only a few moments ago and he felt you should see it."

"Why?" Esther asked.

"It is from Cha'talla's brother Matriarch." Im'wor said.

"T'lolt?" Esther gasped. "Why would he send...?"

Im'wor shook his head. "No Matriarch. Not T'lolt."

"If not T'lolt then..." Esther's eyes grew wide in disbelief. "*A l'phraktos* Im'wor! It was Pa'cour!"

Im'wor nodded his head slightly surprised that she knew the name. "You know of him then?" He asked.

Esther nodded. "Cha'talla told me many years ago." She answered. "That is the name he chose to use after what happen between them. Cha'talla said he became Yuri's Immortal Captain. Why... why would he contact us?"

"You should probably view the transmission Matriarch." Im'wor spoke. "He is standing by as we speak."

"Wait... he is waiting for me?" Esther gasped.

"He said he would only speak to you since Cha'talla was not here. He also said he had a good idea where Cha'talla was and what he was doing." Im'wor said. "He said he would wait for me to retrieve you. He was... he was quite..."

"What?" Esther asked.

"He was very polite about it Matriarch." Im'wor spoke.

Esther reached up and took his arm. "Take me to the CIC." She said urgently.

"...am invoking the exile's Right of Last Appeal." Pa'cour spoke to Esther in the secure and clear holo transmission.

His face looked bruised and Esther's keen eyes could detect the rapidly healing cuts on his cheeks. He was broadcasting on a narrow beam transmitter and all she could see was him in the chair on board some sort of transport type ship.

"This is granted to..." Pa'cour continued but Esther held up her hand stopping him.

"I know what it is." She spoke evenly seeing his dark eyes fill with surprise.

"You know what..." Pa'cour bowed his head ever so slightly. "Forgive me... I should have known my brother's Blessed Wife would learn these things through the years. You know what I am guilty of then?"

“I know that Cha'talla reached out to you in the hopes you would join us.” Esther said. “He does not care about the past.”

“And what of T'lolt?” Pa'cour asked. “Surely my brother does not forgive me for what I did? No one could do that.”

“T'lolt is different now.” Esther said. “Cha'talla is different. So much has happened that has changed things Pa'cour. Come here... speak with them when they return. You will be safe here.”

Pa'cour was silent for a moment but then shook his head. “I might be safe yes... but not the others I travel with.” He said.

Esther's eyes narrowed. “What do you mean?”

“It does not matter now. I can not return no matter... no matter how much I wish to.” Pa'cour said. “I ask only that I be granted my Right of Last Appeal.”

Esther didn't hesitate. “It will be done.” She told him. “What do you need and I will see to it that it is taken care of.”

“Just like that?” Pa'cour asked.

“Do you think your brother would refuse you?” Esther asked. “He would not. Neither of them would refuse you Pa'cour, regardless of what you may think and believe. Tell me what you need and I will take care of it in my Blessed Husband's name.”

“Six months worth of supplies. Enough for three people. Hadarian Medical equipment to include the serum that you are using to return our people to their natural appearance. Clothes... preferably civilian in nature. Weapons that can be easily concealed and are of high quality. Preferably two or three elven forged Immortal blades crafted by the Union's Weapon Master Nehtes. And if possible Union P190A3s. And whatever credits you can spare in whatever denomination or currency you have.” Pa'cour said.

“The serum, clothes, rations and credits I can give you. As much as you can carry with you.” Esther answered instantly. “The Union weapons and Hadarian Medical equipment is another story however.”

“You are allies with them now are you not?” Pa'cour asked.

“That does not mean I will test that friendship by giving away weapons and equipment that is tightly controlled.” Esther replied gently. “Especially the Hadarian Medical equipment.”

“I have no desire to use these things against the Union Esther. I am not that large a fool.” Pa'cour said.

“We have it here on Kranek Pa'cour. Whatever you need you are welcome to use. Your brothers want you to return home.” She told him.

Pa'cour shook his head. “I must think of my future now.” He said. “Whatever weapons and medical equipment you can spare then.”

Esther nodded after a moment. “Done.” She answered.

Pa'cour met her eyes in the transmission. “Just like that?”

“You are Cha'talla's brother.” Esther said. “I do not care what took place thousands of years ago and neither does he. Not any longer. We are forging a new path into the future and it has no place for old grudges or conflicts that happened before many of us were born. I know he would want you to return and be with your family. And so does T'lolt... no matter what you may think.”

“Your words ring true.” Pa'cour said with a nod. “But I cannot.”

“Where is Yuri?” Esther asked. “You were her Immortal Captain?”

“I do not know.” Pa'cour answered far too quickly.

“Do not mistake me for a fool Pa'cour.” Esther said keeping her voice neutral. “She isn't dead. We know that much.”

Pa'cour met her eyes. “How do you know this?”

“That doesn't matter.” Esther said. “You are still protecting her aren't you?”

“She has left the High Coven behind.” Pa'cour stated quickly. “We escaped from Moran's ship and are running. I know Princess Narice is within High Coven space and about to launch an attack to claim control of the government. Yuri felt her enter Coven space. And I am pretty sure that is where my brothers are. Helping her.” He watched Esther's face remain almost impassive but he caught the split second of surprise before it vanished. “We disabled Moran's ability to intercede against Narice... at least for the first few hours.”

“And Yuri is just going to allow this?” Esther asked calmly. “This seems to be very out of character for her and hard to believe. Especially after what she is responsible for.”

“The essence of the Pralor Xaxon no longer controls her.” Pa'cour snapped. “Androcles Leonidas killed her on Earth. She died on that foul planet and he left her body. I saved her! I saved her because I love her! She is not the same person anymore no matter what you and anyone else believes. I want the bounty and Kill Order on her lifted as well. You may do what you wish with Dante Moran, but I want these orders on Yuri rescinded.”

“You ask much Pa'cour.” Esther spoke. “I... I am not unwilling to believe this. I have spoken with Dysea Leonidas at length about this Pralor Xaxon and what he was capable of and responsible for. At least what she knew of him. I can not however speak for Andro or any of the Leonidas family. Not after what happen to Zarah. You know this.”

Pa'cour nodded his head. “And I do not condone what was done to the Leonidas child. I would demand blood as well. That is why I am willing to offer them something in return for her freedom and peace of mind. Something I believe they will want more than seeing Yuri dead. That is my price.”

“What exactly could you possibly offer to Androcles that will make him pull back the Kill Order he has put on Yuri?” Esther said. “I don't think you truly know or understand how he views his siblings. Especially Zarah.”

“He will do this for I have the perfectly preserved bodies of King Resumar, his Queen Eliani and their elf concubine. Sadly... I do not know her name. I understand she killed five Immortals before falling beside the Lycavorian King and his Queen.” Pa'cour answered with a small amount of awe in his voice. He immediately saw Esther's eyes widen considerably. “Yes Esther Suira, I was there that day. I was the one that the High Lord Veldruk ordered to first desecrate and then dispose of the bodies after that battle. If you are my brother's Blessed Wife than you know Akruxians would never defile the bodies of our honored dead, enemy or not. I still hold to my honor in many things and I would not do this. They fought valiantly and they deserved far more than I was allowed to give them. Their bodies were reverently cleaned and dressed and then sealed in vacuum chambers so that the ravages of time did not destroy them. I have since collected the chambers from where I hid them and I have them on my ship now. I will return them to Androcles Leonidas in exchange for Yuri's life and her freedom. That is what I offer.”

Esther moved closer to the holo transmission. “You... you speak the truth!” She gasped.

Pa'cour nodded. “They deserved to be returned to their people and all I ask is a future for Yuri in return.”

“Why?” Esther demanded then.

Pa'cour took a deep breath and looked at her. “Because I have taken her as my Blessed Wife and she carries my child. My future. Our future. I will give you twelve hours to decide. After that you will never see or hear from us again.”

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

Deia was quickly ushered into the main room of the family wing of Andro's villa. She was sandwiched between the two burly *Durcunusaan* officers as she had been for the last thirty-seven minutes. They had pulled her out of a meeting with a dozen senators and were not at all polite about it. All they would tell her is that Andro needed her at Cranae Island immediately and he would not wait. Deia was about to tear into her nephew for his complete lack of manners and protocol when she saw who was with him and the look on their faces. Sitting on the large couches were Isabella and Anja with Dorian between them. Dorian now looked to be in his early teens and was turning out to be the image of his father, though his growth was slowing rapidly now. Eliani sat beside Carisia on the second couch with Jomann standing behind her his hand on her shoulder, Lu'ria and Ne'Veha next to them, Zarah and Lucia sat opposite Bella on the first couch. Normya was standing in front of the large bay window leaning against Tir'ut's bulk with Carina and Moneus just to their right. Gorgo stood beside Riall near the double doors onto the patio.

Deia was still recovering and she grasped the arms of one *Durcunusaan* officer as he guided her closer to Andro. Sadi stood beside him, as he stared at one of the metope on the wall. It depicted a battle from ancient Greece that many believed King Leonidas himself took part in. Andro had found it on a building within Gytheio and had it moved to his home.

“Andro?” Deia whispered. “*Mandri*... what is wrong? What’s going on here?” She asked with dread in her heart as the *Durcunusaan* officer released her arm and he drifted back several paces.

Andro looked at her. “I need... I need your guidance *Tenna*.” He said softly.

Deia nodded. “Always... you know this.” She answered. “What... what is going on *Mandri*? Why do all of you look so... so shocked? Your father is... he...”

“He is fine.” Andro said turning to face her. “This has nothing to do with father.” He held out the data pad. “You should probably read this.”

Deia took it without question. “What is it?”

“A message from Esther... Cha'talla’s wife on Kranek.” Andro replied. “She just recently finished a conversation with Cha'talla’s brother. Yuri’s Immortal Captain. His name is Pa'cour. The one who shot me while Yuri and I were fighting. The one who brought her back to life.”

Deia looked at him. “Back to life?” She gasped. “What do you mean?”

“Read *Tenna*.” Andro said. He turned to Sadi as Deia began to read and kissed her softly. He motioned with his head for her to sit down and she nodded. Sadi moved to the couch and settled between Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. He turned back when he heard Deia whimper softly and then gasp.

“*Son vada carians* Androcles!” She exclaimed reaching for Andro’s arm. Andro caught her easily and guided her to the open chair and helped her to settle into it as she continued to read and her eyes filled with tears. She looked up at him finally. “Please... please tell me this is no joke.”

Andro shook his head. “This is not something I would ever joke about *Tenna*. You know that.”

“How?” Deia gasped.

“I was going to ask you that question.” Andro said. “You... you were there that day. You and grandfather Riall.”

“Andro I was just a Captain then.” Riall spoke.

“You were there!” Andro insisted.

“I was fighting with a regiment of our people and elves on the outside of the compound.” Riall spoke. “When we... when we heard that Resumar had fallen... when we heard that he had fallen our only thoughts were to extract and try to keep his dream alive.”

“I was... I was on the far side of the compound.” Deia spoke now. “I had just seen the last Hadarian transport offworld when they attacked.” She looked up at him. “I never made it back to them. The fighting was so intense... bodies everywhere. I tried to reach them but... she told me to escape.”

“Grandmother?” Andro asked softly.

Deia nodded as she wiped tears from her eyes. “She told me to escape and save as many as I could.”

“So the bodies were never recovered?” Andro asked.

Deia shook her head. “No one saw them after the attack began. They drew the majority of the Coven assassins to the upper floors so that we could evacuate the remaining children. He, Eliani and Na'rien were the primary targets. The Coven were ignoring anything not in their way of getting to them.”

“Na'rien... this was... this was her name?” Ne'Veha asked softly leaning forward.

Deia nodded. “For'mya bears a strong resemblance to her... because of her bloodlines. She carries the blood of Na'rien’s brother in her veins... as do you Ne'Veha.”

“Me!” Ne'Veha gasped.

Deia nodded. “You are related to her by virtue of your father’s blood. Not closely... but you are still related to her. If I am not mistaken... your grandmother’s grandmother was wife to Na'rien’s brother’s grandson. Your blood is one generation back from For'mya’s blood.”

Ne'Veha’s eyes grew a little wider. “I... I did not know this.” She gasped.

Deia shook her head. “I don’t think anyone does.” She said. “Based on how your father views Lycavorians I didn’t think it appropriate that he know this. Your grandmother does not even know. At least I don’t think so. It was all kept very secret... the bloodlines of the elven royalty... after the King was assassinated. There were so few of them left. After the promise we made to Janae’s father I was sworn to secrecy never to tell anyone.”

“*Saradasaar*?” Sadi asked. “Would you and your father not have these memories? Would they not be part of what was imprinted upon your grandfather Leonidas and then passed to your father and then you? His last moments?”

Andro turned and looked at her. "It's possible *KertaGai*." Andro said softly. "I have just never experienced them. I do not know if father has or not."

"If he has..." Anja spoke up. "He has never mentioned them to us."

Deia shook her head. "And he would not." She said. "These are memories he would not share with anyone Anja. Not even his wives and mates who he loves more than his own life." She looked at Andro. "Would this Pa'cour even do such a thing?"

Andro turned and looked at Tir'ut for a moment, Normya's emerald eyes looking between them in puzzlement. "Yes." Andro finally said.

"How can you be so sure?" Bella asked.

Tir'ut squeezed Normya's hand. "It is not well known among Lycavorians." He spoke moving forward. "It is not well known among Akruxians for that matter. When the body... when the body of King Leonidas was returned to the Spartan people... it was Immortals who delivered his remains to the Guardian of the Line Dymas and those with him." Tir'ut spoke. "My father was the one who ordered his men see to the remains and insure they were treated as a warrior of renown. This was not Xerxes's doing. They were enemies yes... but none of what Xerxes did made my father or those who fought the Spartans those days happy. He defiled the remains of a King who had fought valiantly and with honor. That was something the High Lord could not remove from our people. That sense of honor. It was... it was a point of contention then and it has remained so for as long as they have served the High Coven."

"Andro... Androcles do you know what this could mean to our people?" Deia asked him. "If this is true... if... I never... I never had the chance to say goodbye *Mandri*." She said softly.

"Do it *fervon*." Zarah's voice spoke now and Andro turned to look at her.

"Zarah... it isn't that simple. I cannot..." Andro began.

"Yes you can." Zarah spoke as she got to her feet and moved over in front of him. "I know what vow you have made to me Andro. But this... this has nothing to do with Dante. You will not be breaking that promise to me. And even if it did... this... these are our ancestors we are speaking of. Our grandparents. Our blood! We need to bring them home Andro. We need to bring them home and give them the honor they have earned and deserve. They are why we are all here *fervon*. Without them... none of us would exist. I am unchaining you *fervon*. Now... now you must do what you must."

"If what this Immortal says is true Andro..." Lucia spoke now. "She has broken one of the most sacred laws of the High Coven. Laying with an Immortal is like sacrilege to many of the older vampires. That is not... that is not something my mother... that is not something she *would* have done before. If she is different now... if..."

"She is your mother Lucia." Anja said gently. "You do not have to hide the feelings you have for her among us. You are part of our family now. She is your mother and no matter what happens that will never change."

Lucia met her eyes and smiled. "I know. Yes... she is my mother. But she is not. I find myself torn between wanting her to pay for what she allowed Dante and Javier to do to my love Zarah and yet also wanting and hoping that perhaps it was not her at all. That it was the essence of Xaxon that made her do these things... just as this Pa'cour says. Does that make sense?"

"Far more than you realize child." Bella told her warmly. "Far more than you realize."

"The Kavalians have granted an additional two days time for the Senate to debate." Deia said quickly. "I discovered that just before the *Durcunusaan* came and collected me. They are no doubt using the time for other things and think the debate will be even more lively than it has been. I watched that Kavalian dog Matuarr and he actually thinks he is going to win."

Andro looked at her. "They will be using that two days to search for mother." He said with a snort. "Let them search for her. In nine hours she will be back among us and in father's arms. As will our new brother and sister."

"Then she made it off Nefoa?" Deia asked.

Andro nodded. "Yes. If all goes according to plan father should already be on Enurrua and mother should arrive very shortly. That is... if Eirene and Fedor were correct in their interpretation of the plan this Muton person had."

"We have the time Andro." Deia said. "We..."

Andro held up his hand calling for silence as he squeezed Zarah's hand and leaned close to her cheek, rubbing her cheek with his in brotherly fashion. Zarah smiled and nodded her head at him. "We must do this." She said softly into his ear so that only he could hear her words. "I need for you to do this."

Andro stood back up and nodded to her, his azure eyes filled with love for her inner strength. He lifted his head up before speaking then. "Esther Saira have you been listening?"

"I'm here Androcles." Esther's voice came over the internal COM of the main room.

Andro moved to the credenza and touched the small control panel. The Holodisc in the floor of the room came alive with her image and he turned to face her. "Esther... contact him and tell him he will have what he wants. I'll give him everything he wants but Yuri needs to be at the meeting."

"Andro... you do realize that he may be lying to us." Esther said.

"He is not lying mother." Tir'ut spoke now.

Andro shook his head. "Tir'ut is right... he's not lying."

"Then why do you insist that Yuri be there?" Esther asked. "And why does he insist the exchange be done along the border where he has said?"

"Because if he *is* trying to trick us and the bodies are not who he says they are, I intend to kill them both right there." Andro spoke coldly. "For his part... the location of the border he has designated gives him several options to go once the exchange is made. It also gives me some idea of just where they came from."

Esther nodded her head. "I'll let him know. How long?"

"Tenna and I will leave for the rendezvous within the hour." He replied. "His G9 will be taken onboard the *SCIMITAR* when we reach the border and we'll conduct the exchange in the landing bay. With the *SCIMITAR*'s engines it should only take us four hours to reach the border in the location he specified. If that is not acceptable to him then that will be proof he is lying and he can go straight to hell."

Esther bowed her head slightly. "I'll make it happen." She stated. "I'll meet you at the coordinates with everything we can spare."

Andro shook his head. "No Esther. You can meet us if you choose, but this will come from me. From us. I will not ask you to tax your stores with all of the Akruvians arriving as they are."

"Very well. I'll see you in nine hours." Esther said.

Andro turned to look at everyone in the room when the transmission faded to nothing. He looked at Anja. "Mother if you..."

"Eli and I will prepare genetic test kits." Anja answered him before he even finished his statement. "We'll conduct the tests."

"We tell no one outside this room until we know for sure." Andro told them. He looked at Isabella. "I would like to take Dorian mother."

"Yeah!" Dorian quipped happily and the others chuckled at his enthusiasm.

Bella nodded. "We will all go." She stated confidently. "And you will continue your studies young man!" She spoke sternly to Dorian.

Dorian hung his head in mock disappointment. Physically he was the image of a fifteen year old boy, but mentally he was far older. He had been spending every waking hour with Ryner learning all he could and finishing the drills Andro and Elynth gave to them. He was close to six foot tall already and beginning to fill out with a lean muscular form. His growth had slowed considerably and he would slowly stop within two or three weeks in the body of a young man in his early twenties.

"Yes mother." He spoke softly.

"We should remain here Andro." Sadi spoke. "If all of us leave it will draw suspicion from the Netnews and whoever may be watching us."

Andro nodded and turned to Deia. "Tenna... inform your staff you will be gone for a period of twenty-four hours and they should not try to contact you. Tell them you are beginning to make arrangements to have father laid to rest. They will understand that. Grandfather Panos can handle anything that comes up. I'll meet you all onboard the *SCIMITAR* in one hour."

ORBITING ENURRUA

Wayonn stepped onto the upper deck of the Nodon Engineering *TYPE II ALPHA* Dragon Transport through the side hatch leading from the small set of dual quarters and immediately was assaulted with a noise unlike any he had heard before. His head quickly turned to gaze into the lower deck of the ship and he could very clearly see Martin and the other members of his team walking amongst themselves and the five dragons that occupied the lower deck, Arzoal among them. They were moving with a purpose, looks of concentration and determination on their faces with none of the humorous banter that they had before the previous mission. He spied Aricia and Dysea standing with Cirith near the railing looking down into the lower deck and he moved right over to them. Dysea was the one who looked up at him as he approached.

“*Val’istar.*” She said with a warm smile but having to speak a little louder than normal because of the music.

“What is that terrible noise?” Wayonn exclaimed.

Aricia lifted her head now with a smile. “Metallica.” She answered.

“Metalla... who?” Wayonn gasped.

“Daniel and the Master Chief are collectors of music from the early twenty first century.” Dysea explained. “This is music that they listened too prior to missions they went on so long ago. This song they only used for certain missions. It suits them don’t you think?”

“This is music?” Wayonn questioned.

“*New blood joins this earth, and quickly he's subdued. Through constant pained disgrace the young boy learns their rules. With time the child draws in, this whipping boy done wrong. Deprived of all his thoughts, the young man struggles on and on. He's known a vow unto his own, that never from this day his will they'll take away.*” Aricia spoke the words in an almost reverent tone. “*What I've felt, what I've known, never shined through in what I've shown? Never be, never see, won't see what might have been. What I've felt, what I've known, never shined through in what I've shown? Never free, never me. So I dub thee UNFORGIVEN.*”

Wayonn looked at her. “What do the words mean?” He asked.

Aricia shrugged. “I have no idea. I think... I think the only ones who understand are down there.” She motioned into the lower deck area. “You must admit... it is rather inspiring music and the tone is so deep and moving.”

Wayonn looked at her. “If you don’t mind that your brain is about to explode.” He stated.

Dysea laughed and took his arm. “Come... we’ll go into the cockpit *Val’istar*. It will be quiet in there.”

Dysea leaned over and quickly kissed Cirith before she led Wayonn away. Cirith then stepped closer to Aricia, pressing against her from behind and lowering her chin to her slim shoulder. Aricia leaned into her movement and their heads touched as they watched them move below.

The cockpit on the *TYPE II Alpha* was far removed from that on the original class of *Type II DTs*. It was nearly twice as big, with one entire engineering station to monitor its new engines and power consumption. The *TYPE II Alpha* was now equipped with two powerful Shroud generators and a power core that was built from the design schematics developed by Zaala Randall and based on Pralor technology. Unlike her predecessor, the *TYPE II Alpha* was now equipped with a Class Nine Hyper Matter Fusion Reactor, the newest and most powerful engine of its class and only one step down from the engine designs of the *ARIZONA*-Class itself. They had been built for the purpose of keeping up with the new Arizona Assault Wings which would feature the *TYPE II Alpha* Dragon transports as well as the larger *TYPE I Alpha* Dragon Transports. The engineering station was empty right now as no engineer had been assigned because of the newness of the ship. Endith and Tina were sitting in the pilot and co-pilot’s seats respectively however, and Endith appeared as if she had a wondrous new toy, though she was very businesslike knowing they were heading into a possible combat situation.

The large cockpit view window was at the moment filled with the dull white clouds and upper atmosphere of Enurrua as Endith and Tina guided the ship smoothly down into the planet’s lower atmosphere. Tina was the one who looked up and saw them as she adjusted a knob on the control console between her and Endith.

“How soon Endy?” Dysea asked.

Endith turned her head, she bright red hair cut short. There were very few who called her by her nickname and Dysea was among that small group. “Seventeen minutes until release.” She answered instantly.

“Winds are nominal.” Tina chimed in. “Seven knots out of the east over the target site.”

“Ground Penetrating Radar scans of the target site?” Dysea asked.

Endith nodded. “There’s definitely something there Dysea, regardless of what Arzoal believes.” She answered. “Several interconnecting tunnels and one large chamber. Not as big as what she said this chamber was but big enough. And the preliminary scans indicate it is made of the same sort of material as CS41.”

“Entrance?” Dysea asked.

“The only one we can detect comes out right under this waterfall. At least the scans say it does.” Tina answered pointing above her head to where a radar map showing the mountain was displayed. “This mountain used to be a whole lot bigger.”

“Arzoal said the explosion from the engine core reduced it in size by about half.” Dysea spoke.

Tina nodded. “That sounds about right. What I don’t understand is why?”

Dysea looked at her. “What do you mean Tina?”

Tina traced a line along the current view of the mountain. “Computer estimates put the mountain like this before Arzoal ordered the engine core detonated. At least another three to five thousand feet higher.”

“Yes.” Dysea said watching her intently.

“Based on the ship size and the engine core type that Arzoal gave us... when that core detonated it should have sheared off three quarters of the mountain and vaporized everything within three kilometers.” Tina said. “It didn’t. Passive scans show no scorching of the earth and Reflecting Sensor Waves indicate multiply tunnels remain. Many are buried of course, but recent seismic activity have allowed sections to open up again.”

“I’m not following you Tina.” Dysea said. “Seismic activity?”

Tina nodded. “At least three recent earthquakes within the last twenty years. Probably caused by the orbital bombardment that the Skipper ordered to destroy the cities. I estimate the largest one at nine point two. Natural erosion could account for some of the clearing, but these earthquakes have opened up major sections of the tunnels that connected this ship and the rest of the mountain.”

“And now?” Dysea asked. “We don’t need to be walking into unstable terrain.”

Tina shook her head. “The last quake must have shifted the fault plates enough where they have become stable again.” She said. “It’s all very firm right now.”

“Then we stick to the original plan.” Dysea said. “Aricia, Helen and I go in with Arzoal, Isheeni and Iriral. Kenny and Cody will accompany us on Isheeni and Iriral and Walter on Arzoal and we find the ship this Kavalian Muton says he needs to find. Martin and the others proceed to the coordinates For'mya gave to them and insure that it is not a trap.”

“I’m not going with Martin?” Wayonn asked her.

Dysea looked at him. “No *Val'istar*.” She said. “We do not know what... we do not know what we will face down there and *Nauta Melme* is unwilling to risk you recklessly. You will remain with Endith and Tina here on the *TYPE II*.”

“And what was our operation at the Kavalian Observation Post?” Wayonn demanded. “That wasn't reckless?”

“That little thing?” Tina asked with a grin. “Shit... that was tame for Marty and the crew. They could do an Op like that in their sleep and half drunk.”

“Tame?” Wayonn looked at her with wide eyes.

“We knew what we were facing and how many enemies there were.” Dysea told him as she smiled at Tina’s words. “This time we are going in blind. For all we know this could be a very elaborate trap and hundreds of Kavalians will fall upon Martin and the others. Many of them... all of them could be killed. He will not risk you or us in that circumstance. Not when there is no need.”

“So he is keeping me safe?” Wayonn spoke with some disgust in his voice.

“He is protecting our future.” Dysea said. “And insuring if something does happen, that Andro is not left without your wisdom and counsel for what may come in the future.”

Wayonn’s eyes narrowed. “He has told you?”

Dysea shook her head. “We can feel it within him *Val'istar*.” She said. “In Andro and you as well. You will tell us when the time is right.”

“And you and Aricia and Cirith will just let him die?” Wayonn hissed.

Dysea couldn't meet his eyes and dropped her head. “No. We would die with him.” She stated softly.

“Even if this is not his wish?” Wayonn spoke.

Dysea lifted her emerald eyes and met his once more. “We cannot... we cannot lose him again *Val'istar*. You saw what it did to Aricia. To all of us.” She said softly meeting his gaze with determination and pride. “If Martin Leonidas is to fall in battle then we will die fighting beside the man we love.”

“I suppose I don't have much choice in this matter do I?” Wayonn asked.

“I'm afraid not.” She said sheepishly. “That is why Kenny and Cody are coming with us. Endith and Tina will insure that if anything happens they will get you off this planet and away from here.”

Walter snorted in disgust. “This is worse than when Dutkne insisted on protecting me.” He snarled softly.

Dysea chuckled softly. “There are times when *Nauta Melme* backs you into a corner and you have no say in anything.” She said.

The soft chime sounded and Endith looked up. “Outer marker.” She announced. “Twelve minutes out.”

Dysea nodded. “Time to get ready.”

Martin looked at the faces of the men and women around him. All of them were now dressed in the heaviest set of Mark IV ArmorPly that provided them the most freedom of movement. Anything heavier and they would become tanks in battle. Each set of ArmorPly had its Dragon Armor skin ready to deploy once they reached the ground and their new PSGs. They held or leaned on their helmets and stared back at him. Men and women he had known and fought with for nearly three decades. Helen stood back between Arzoal and Aurith watching with pride in her eyes.

“This is the last chance.” Martin spoke. “I won't ask anyone to go forward from here. For'mya is my mate, my wife. I need to do this. None of you do.”

“Shit Skipper... are you going to hit us with that crap again?” Pablo spoke from the rear of the group.

“You don't get it do you Boss?” The Master Chief spoke. “You saved us. You, Danny and Jules. At least when she was wolf woman.”

Julie reached out and slugged him in the arm as arm as she could. “Asshole.” She muttered with a large smile and they all laughed.

“If not for the three of you none of us would have survived the Purge of the Genomes. You made us what we are and that is why we are all here today.” The Master Chief said. “Stop asking us if we want to be here. None of us would be here without you and it's time we returned the fucking favor.”

“Fucking A!” Kenny snarled loudly.

Julie looked around at the faces of the men she had called family, lost once and then found again. She vowed that would never happen again. She stuck her armored fist into the open area in the circle they formed. “To those of us who have gone before...”

Nearly two dozen fists joined hers in the center.

“***They are forgiven their worldly sins!***” All of them spoke in unison.

“To those of us that remain...” Martin echoed.

“***We shall be known as the Unforgiven! Until we join with them!***” They all spoke.

“And woe unto the motherfuckers that stand in our way!” Danny barked.

“Hooyah!!!” The shout carried even above the music.

Martin got to his feet and looked at the upper deck when Dysea came into view with Wayonn. *It's time Nauta Melme*. She spoke.

Martin nodded. *Then let's get our Kinsoargai back!* He turned away from her. “Master Chief!”

“Yo!”

“Crack the hatch on this bitch and let's go flying!” Martin shouted.

“Now that's what I'm talking about!” Tony bellowed as he slammed his hand down on the ramp control. “Time to bring some whup ass!”

Wayonn looked at her. “What is this whup ass Dysea?” He asked as Torma let out a trumpet that ended almost all conversation in the lower portion of the ship, Isheeni, Aurith and Arzoal adding their own voices as well.

Dysea smiled. “I’ll explain sometime *Val’istar*.”

Wayonn turned back and looked at Martin. “He reminds me too much of Sumar. *Matha con ronnus lon tor*.”

Dysea looked at him and laughed. “He is that *Val’istar*. He is that.”

LEUGERS-CLASS KAVALIAN TRANSPORT ENURRUA

For'mya’s eyes glided over her instruments for the fourth time since their reversion only twenty seconds earlier. She didn’t hesitate and turned to Kapurr. “Anything on the sensors?” She asked.

Kapurr shook his head. “Nothing.” He spoke.

For'mya looked out the view window at the planet in front of them. A planet that had been the cause of so much pain, but had also been the source of so much discovery. She felt the hand on her arm and turned to see Eirene and Fedor beside her. She scooped Eirene into her lap as Fedor moved closer to her.

“Is your ship nearby?” For'mya asked turning to Muton and Miseo as they crowded into the cockpit.

Miseo nodded. “My brothers were going to park it next to the third moon of the planet Supya. On the edge of the system.” He said pointing to the sensor chart on the screen between the two pilot seats. “The moon’s upper atmosphere is laced with Tri-Cobalt ore in its unrefined state. It should effectively hide them from most sensor scans.”

“How big did you say this ship was Muton?” For'mya asked.

“Roughly the size of one of your *LEONIDAS*-Class ships.” Muton answered. “Though without the heavy armor and weapons I would imagine.”

“Propulsion and shields work fine.” Miseo continued. “We have some weapons online but we did not finish all of them. Sensors are operational but they have a limited range because we were not able to finish obtaining power cores and generators from Kavalian stores.”

“How limited?” For'mya asked.

“Half a light year.” Miseo answered. “Perhaps a bit more if we channel additional power to the arrays.”

“So they won’t know we have arrived?” For'mya spoke turning back to look out the view window.

“Not if they are within the ore fields... no.” Miseo answered. “We need to send a coded signal to them.”

“Don’t send it yet.” For'mya spoke quickly putting her hand on his arm.

“For'mya why?” Muton asked leaning forward.

She looked at him. “You don’t have what you need yet and I am not willing to risk your people if Pusintin somehow was able to track this ship.” Miseo looked at his father quickly as For'mya turned to look out the view window again.

“Impossible!” Kapurr spoke. “We made nine different jumps within one hour. No way they could track us.”

“Nothing is impossible.” For'mya said softly. “Pusintin may be a sadistic monster, but he is not stupid.”

“She is right father.” Miseo spoke.

Eirene pointed to a small collection of stars. “It’s beautiful mother.” She said softly. “It looks like a flower.”

“Yes it does.” For'mya answered her eyes going back to Enurrua in the distance. “He is here.” She said softly.

“Pusintin?” Muton exclaimed.

For'mya shook her head quickly. “Martin.” She said as an expression of dreamlike peace came over her face. “He is here Muton.”

“For'mya are you sure?” Muton asked. “He is...” He stopped himself and shook his head. “That is a stupid question. Of course you are sure. On the planet?”

For'mya nodded slowly. "Yes. He's heavily shielded... I can barely sense him but he left enough of a resonance trace for me to detect."

Kapurr adjusted his equipment. "No ships showing on the sensors no matter how I scan. They..."

"Stop scanning Kapurr!" For'mya hissed softly.

"Why?" Kapurr asked looking at her.

"If we were tracked then they will see us scanning for other ships." For'mya declared. "They'll know we are suppose to meet someone."

"Shit!" Kapurr exclaimed shutting down his sensors except for navigation. He acted quickly and then looked at her. "Done."

"He wasn't suppose to be here." Makoo said from the entrance of the cockpit.

Muton turned and looked at him. "We are unknown to him and after what Pusintin has done he will trust no Kavalian."

"He won't expose himself until he sees me." For'mya said as she slid Eirene out of her lap. "They gave us the coordinates to land near where the ship is." She turned and looked at Muton. "Let's get down on the surface. When he sees me he will not even think of harming you or any of your people Muton." She leaned forward and looked at Makoo. "I promise you this Makoo. After what you have done for me and my children... I will make sure you are safe. All of you and your people. It is the least I could do."

Muton nodded. "I know you will." He said. "Take us in For'mya. I will inform the others and we can prepare to move to the crash sight. Makoo tell them to consolidate all the equipment we brought into individual packs. We will need to move quickly."

Makoo nodded and turned to go back into the rear of the transport. For'mya looked at Kapurr. "Give me fifty percent power to the sublights Kapurr. If he is here then there is a ship in orbit somewhere and you can damn well bet they are watching us. Let's move slow and calm."

Kapurr nodded. "Fifty percent power."

PUSINTIN'S *GREAT SOUL*-CLASS DREADNOUGHT *PUMA'S PRIDE* **2.4 LYS FROM TUPACIA PRIME**

Pusintin looked up from the data pad he was reading when Popal entered unannounced.

"Marshall!" He exclaimed. "We have detected the BAP signal!" He spoke as Pusintin rose to his feet.

"Where?" Pusintin snapped.

"Inside the borders of what used to be the Lycavorian People's Republic. Near the capital planet of Enurrua!"

Pusintin came around the edge of his desk. "Why would they go there?" He asked softly.

"There is very little travel through this area of space Marshall." Popal told him. "Nearly everyone avoids it. Even many of the mercenary organizations. When the Union left this area of space after glassing many of the planets, they left much floating debris from destroyed ships of the People's Republic. They never made any attempt to clean up the system or reestablish any sort of presence. This caused many to believe they left it heavily mined or somehow trapped. No one is willing to take the chance."

Pusintin nodded. "And no one would expect her to go there. It wouldn't even cross their minds."

"Perfect place to hide." Popal spoke. "And close enough to the Union border to make a sprint there once they are rested."

"How long to get there?" Pusintin asked him.

"We can make the leap to The Wilds Jump Gate in twenty minutes." Popal answered. "We can use the Gate to Jump directly into the system. From there perhaps an hour to Enurrua."

Pusintin nodded. "Do it Popal." He ordered. "Our Assault Group as arrived?"

Popal nodded. "Yes Marshall. Seventeen ships."

Pusintin looked at his First Officer. "Hold half of them just inside the Gate once we make the jump into the system. Just in case."

Popal nodded. "As you order Marshall."

"Stupid bitch is making it easy for us." Pusintin spoke. "I thought she was smarter than that."

“No female can be as tactically proficient as a male Marshall.” Popal spoke.

Pusintin nodded. “That is the fucking truth. Get us underway Popal. I’ll burst Keleru what we are doing and I’ll join you on the bridge.”

ULU *ARC ROYAL* ORBITING ENURRUA

Akemi Katsumi strode onto her bridge from her Ready Room carrying the data pad in her hand. “Talk to me!” She barked.

“Kavalian *LEUGERS*-Class transport entered the system four minutes ago!” Her main sensor operator called out instantly. “They jumped almost into the gravity well of Enurrua.” His voice sounded impressed.

“That would be Queen For'mya.” Akemi spoke. “Advanced tactical maneuver to keep from being detected. Nice.” She spoke moving to her command chair. “Status of the second Kavalian ship?”

“Intermittent contact! Still holding within the upper atmosphere of the third moon of Supya.” The man answered. “Definitely not a warship. The Tri-Cobalt ore is making sensor readings sporadic, but I’m not picking up any weapons signatures.”

“Uh huh. Keep six Mark 22s locked on that ship.” Akemi said. “They so much as twitch, blow them to hell.”

“Weapons aye!”

“Captain Katsumi! That small Kavalian assault force we detected near Tupacia Prime. The one that was holding station? Long range sensors have them as now moving!” Another voice called out.

Akemi turned her head. “Moving where?”

“Unknown... but protracted course takes them towards the old High Coven Jump Gate Fifteen.” The voice answered.

“You still have them?” Akemi asked.

“Yes ma'am.”

“Shit... them being there isn't coincidence anymore.” Akemi spat. “If they use the Gate how close will they get?”

“No way to really project Captain.” The man answered. “At least within the system itself. One corridor takes them away, towards Nefoa and the other takes them within thirty minutes of Enurrua itself.”

“Fuck! Is there any way to detect which corridor they use?” Akemi asked.

“Not until they enter the Gate.” The man answered. “I’m bringing up the command codes for the Gate now.” Union intelligence had long ago planted monitoring devices within the old High Coven Jump Gates within The Wilds. When the Kavalians conquered most of the Coven border stations it was a decision Martin made that would tell them which way a ship was going and what corridor they were using. The system was archaic by all modern means, but at least it was accurate, and early undetectable. “I’ll be able to tell you in seventeen minutes.”

“COM officer! Burst a message to the King! Low beam and secure so the *LEUGERS* doesn't detect it! We have their locators?”

“Aye Captain. Both teams! All individuals! Both teams are down and safe and Queen Aricia, Queen Dysea and the *Feravomir* are moving for primary target location as we speak. We're monitoring all eight of them. Their signals are clean.”

“Tell the King we may have company and he'll need to work fast. And tell him about the ship near Supya.” Akemi barked.

“Aye Captain.”

“Wish we had some fighters out there providing cover.” A voice echoed.

“We don't...” Akemi responded. “But we got lots of teeth left. Weapons officer. Spool up all defensive systems and bring the main batteries online. Missile tubes loaded with Mark 22s and standard concussive warheads! Full yield on Photonic torpedoes! Stand by for combat maneuvering! Things may get dicey!”

ENURRUA

I never thought I would return to this vile planet. Arzoal's voice filled their minds as skimmed low over the tree tops.

They had exited the *TYPE II Alpha* with no issues in the least, all of them having done so many times in the past. Now they sped across the terrain, Arzoal in the lead, Isheeni and Iriral on each of her wings. Torma and Aurith had remained with Martin and Cirith at the coordinates they had given to Fedor and Eirene to land.

Nor did I. Aricia's voice echoed softly.

There is much pain here for all of you. Helen broke in. *But you have put it behind you now. Do not let our presence here dredge memories from the deep. Let them remain where they belong.*

You are right sister. Arzoal spoke.

Aricia? Isheeni's voice spoke softly.

I am fine. Aricia answered her. Her hands stretched out and she placed them along Isheeni's neck, feeling the muscular movements of her shoulders as her wing carried her along. *I am thinking of when we first flew together. I rubbed the insides of my knees and thighs raw because I was so terrified and so thrilled at the same time.*

And what we did then we did without a saddle sister! Isheeni chimed in happily.

Yes we did. Aricia spoke a small smile forming under her helmet.

This place brought all of us together. Iriral's voice filled their minds. *No matter what took place all those years ago, this place is what brought all of us together. Yet we are so much more now because of the darkness this planet brought to all of us. We defeated the darkness that this place represented and now look at us. Nothing living or dead will ever separate us from our Bonded Brothers and Sisters. Our futures are now intertwined as fate meant for it to be.*

Avoi! Aricia spoke as her emotions and happiness at finding Isheeni coursed through her and into Isheeni.

There! Arzoal called out. *The edge of the mountain range. That is where the ship is.*

Aricia looked through the slits on her helmet intently scanning the terrain all around the ridgeline. *Dysea?* She called out.

Breaking now. Stand by! Dysea called out. She had remained out of the conversation they had been having because this planet had not affected her as it had the others. Now however, now they would need to be fully focused. Her own wolf eyes scanned the terrain far below as Iriral broke for a higher altitude. At five thousand feet Dysea could see the entire face of the mountain. Her eyes quickly found the sunken portion of the mountain that could only be where the ship had been hidden. She followed the ridge with her eyes for at least two kilometers until she found the river at the far end where Tina said the only entrance into the tunnels beneath the mountain was. *I have it!* She called out. *Alter direction by three degrees Arzoal. Isheeni. It will take us right to the entrance. Six kilometers away now.*

What will we find mother? Isheeni asked as they altered their course slightly as Dysea had directed them.

The bones of too many of our dead. Arzoal spoke softly. *And I imagine the bones of many of Chetak's men as well. I do not know how many made it into the tunnels, but several thousand at least. It has been nearly five thousand years since I have been here. Only the gods know what remains.*

UNION BORDER

3.6 LIGHT YEARS FROM APRIAN TWO

“Perhaps this is not the wisest course of action.” Nalavi spoke as his eyes looked through the view window of the G9 and took in the massive size of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser that was holding station only five thousand meters away. He sat in the engineer's seat behind Pa'cour who occupied the pilot's seat.

“This is the only way we can truly be free Nalavi.” Pa'cour told him.

“Yes I understand that part.” Nalavi said evenly. “However... I would like to add that we, meaning us, are about to board the command ship of perhaps the one Leonidas who does not have the most meaningful reputation when it comes to bartering with his enemies. He tends to eliminate them rather than talk with them. And much more efficiently than his father I might add as well.”

Yuri turned her head from her spot in the co-pilot’s seat. “He is also the only one who has the compassion to do this.”

“Compassion?” Nalavi said. “Compassion is not a word I would associate with Androcles Leonidas. Not when it concerns you. He’s already killed you once Yuri. What makes you think he will not gladly do so again?”

“Because like his father he is perhaps the most honorable Lycavorian living right now.” Yuri answered. “And surprisingly... unlike his father... he is far more attuned to the currents and resonance of life itself.”

“Because he was born fully aware?” Nalavi asked.

Yuri looked at him oddly for a second and then nodded. “Yes.”

Nalavi shrugged his shoulders. “The Lycavorians will kill us far quicker than Moran would have... but I would like to point out that the pain of dying will not be any less Yuri.” He said.

Yuri grinned now. “Have faith Nalavi.” She said surprising herself with her choice of words.

“Faith doesn’t help against projectiles and blades I’m afraid.” Nalavi told her. “I hope the two of you know what you are doing. If we all die... I will spend the rest of my years haunting every facet of your lives. Spirits though we may be.”

Pa'cour looked out the view window and shook his head. “I have... I have never been this close to one of their new ships.” He said.

“I’m glad you find it interesting.” Nalavi said. “I’m having quite the time keeping my bladder contained from fear.”

Yuri chuckled. “And where is all that optimism Nalavi?” She asked him.

“I left that in the hanger bay of the *INQUISITOR*.” He replied.

Yuri was about to respond when the soft chime cut off her words. She quickly adjusted the console in front of her. “There is the signal.” She said softly.

“No audio?” Pa'cour asked.

Yuri shook her head looking at him. “No sense in announcing to the entire sector who they might be communicating with.” She said.

Pa'cour nodded. “True enough.” He spoke as his hands glided over the controls. “Plotting the course.”

Yuri reached out and placed her hand on his arm and squeezed. “No matter what happens Pa'cour... know that I love you.” She said with more sincerity than she had ever felt before.

“We will be fine.” Pa'cour said. “Honor means much to Lycavorians. This is something that your father and mother never realized and it contributed to their downfall. He will not go back on his word.”

Yuri nodded her head. “I hope seeing me doesn’t change that.” She said softly.

SCIMITAR

The landing bay of the *SCIMITAR* had been cleared of all flight crew personnel and those who were not directly involved in the exchange. This began rumors almost instantly and many waited to see why their Prince had cleared them out.

Thirty *Durcunusaan* troops flanked Andro on either side with Deia, Anja and Eliani directly behind him, Isabella, Esther and Dorian standing just behind them. Ryner rested on the deck just behind his Bonded Brother with his head positioned between Dorian and Isabella’s inner shoulders. The *Durcunusaan* were not too concerned for the G9 could only hold twelve crew total, but they were taking no chances regardless. They knew who they were dealing with. All of them were dressed in the newest sets of Mark IV ArmorPly body armor and all but Andro and his mothers and brother and sister wore their helmets. Elynth, Miath and Tharua rested on the deck in three different locations, their legs drawn up tightly beneath them waiting to spring into action just as Ryner was.

As the ramp in the rear of the G9 fully touched the deck revealing the tall Immortal the *Durcunusaan* became very alert, many of them having to physically restrain their instincts of shooting first and asking questions later. Jomann stood just to Andro's right and he leaned closer. "Scans show only three lifesigns." He whispered. "And three low power vacuum sealed sleep chambers."

Andro nodded slowly as he watched the Immortal walked hesitantly down the ramp, two more figures moving much slower behind him but following. *[If anything happens you protect my mother Anja and Eli.]* Andro told him within Mindvoice. *[Dorian and Ryner will cover my mother Isabella and Deia. No questions Jomann.]*

Jomann nodded. *[Understood.]*

The two figures behind the Immortal stopped halfway down the ramp when the Immortal reached the deck and held up his hand. All of them wore long cloaks and cowls but only the Immortal Pa'cour had his head and face showing. His eyes searched for and found Androcles standing at the front of the unit of *Durcunusaan*.

"We have done what you asked Androcles Leonidas!" Pa'cour spoke looking at the heavily armed *Durcunusaan* before turning his eyes back on Andro. "Will you keep your word or not?"

Andro stepped forward more. "Show yourself Yuri Moran!" He barked. "Both of you show yourselves!"

Andro waited as there was some hesitation, but then both figures lifted their hands and gripped their cowls. When Yuri tossed back her cowl the reaction was instinctive and every *Durcunusaan* soldier began lifting their weapons.

"No!" Pa'cour shouted moving to shield her.

Andro stepped forward quickly. "HOLD!" He shouted holding up his hands. "HOLD!"

The *Durcunusaan* froze at the shouted order, their weapons in mid-motion. They stared at their Prince in shock, none of them really knowing why they were here and why their Prince was not ordering them to slaughter the vampire bitch that had been the cause of such horrible acts against their people and his sister.

Andro's azure eyes remained on where Yuri stood and he saw the protective way the Immortal shielded her body with his own and the way she grasped tightly to his arms, her eyes filled with uncertain fear. "Lower your weapons now!" Andro barked once more never taking his eyes from Yuri or the older vampire behind her.

"Do it!" Jomann snapped.

The *Durcunusaan* complied instantly at the dual order and their weapons once more went back to pointing at the floor, but hands were ready to bring them up in a heartbeat. Yuri gripped Pa'cour's arm tightly, her eyes darting back and forth. This reaction did not go unnoticed by either Isabella or Esther.

"This was a bad idea." Nalavi muttered as he watched Androcles move closer to the ramp.

"Come fully off the ramp!" Andro told them. "Now."

"This was definitely a bad idea." Nalavi repeated his words.

Yuri nodded silently to Pa'cour and they moved down the ramp to the deck of the hanger bay slowly and expecting to be attacked at any moment. Andro's eyes remained on Nalavi for a long moment and then he looked at Pa'cour.

"Where are they?" Andro asked.

"Just inside the inner airlock." Pa'cour answered as he held up the small control device. "But they will not be yours until I have proof you will keep your word! I will blow them and all of us to hell first." He let his thumb poise over the small red button as he looked at Andro.

Andro looked at him. "You are very much like your brother you know." He said. "You have the same... the same determination in your eyes. Deactivate the explosives Pa'cour." He spoke holding out his hand for the device.

"I want proof!" Pa'cour snarled again.

"Your proof... your proof is that all of you are still alive." Andro growled at him.

It was Yuri who reached forward and placed her hand on Pa'cour's. He looked at her as she took the detonator from his fingers and deactivated it. Then she held it out to Andro, her dark eyes never leaving his face as she did. She moved from partially hiding herself behind Pa'cour to standing beside him as she did. This allowed Andro to stare at her for a long moment, his azure eyes gazing at her as if she was some sort of meal to be eaten. He took in the faint scars from where his claws and fangs had torn into her flesh. They would always be there, but they were almost hard to see. She had healed well it seemed, but there was also something very different about her. He stepped closer to her and Pa'cour moved to interject his body between them. Andro

simply lifted his hand and with a small Mindvoice surge he sent Pa'cour sprawling across the deck to the side of the ramp some four meters away.

“Don’t touch her!” Pa'cour screamed as he scrambled to his feet and found himself with four P190A3s stuck in his chest. “Don’t touch her!”

Yuri didn’t pull her eyes away from those azure orbs of death staring at her. “Kill... kill me if you must.” She spoke after taking a deep breath. Her voice was filled with the firmness of her decision just then. “But allow Pa'cour and Nalavi to go.”

“Yuri... no!” Pa'cour roared.

Andro lifted his hand and let his fingertips graze her cheek. Pa'cour rose to his feet but found three more weapons rammed into his body. Andro traced the scars on her cheek and no matter how hard he probed he could find no trace of the dark essence that was Xaxon. The essence that had pulsed from her so powerfully and so completely that day was gone. He met her eyes. “You are not the same. Xaxon... his foul essence no longer infects you.” He said softly. “How is... how is that possible?”

Yuri looked at him and drew on her inner strength. He was not going to kill her she knew. She could feel it within him, the hesitation and the confusion. She lifted her hand to Pa'cour, turning to look at him with loving eyes, to keep him calm. She waited until he did in fact become still and just look at her. She turned back to Andro. “You made it possible.” Yuri said softly. “You killed me Androcles Leonidas. And in killing me... in killing me you chased Xaxon’s essence out of my body. You forced him to abandon me.”

“Forced him to abandon you?” Andro asked.

Yuri nodded her head. “I will make no excuses. My father may have known what my mother planned, I don’t know. But my mother and Robert; they knew what eventually would happen to me. Some of my actions were my own over this time; some of them were not. It has been like that since your father freed Earth and I returned to Uzu Ozeib 7. Your fangs and your claws... you killed me that day Androcles Leonidas. You killed me and Xaxon left my body just as quickly as he could. It was then that Pa'cour saved me.”

“And where did Xaxon go?” Andro asked.

Yuri met his gaze. “The only place he could.” She answered. “Dante.”

“Dante!” Andro gasped. “Are you *nubous* kidding me?”

Yuri shook her head. “He needed someone of my blood. Someone nearby. He could not take Lucia because she was too much in love with your sister. I made Dante what he became and in doing so, when you killed me, I provided Xaxon with a vassal for him to dominate. He is having trouble controlling Dante... stabilizing his control of him... but eventually he will. Just as he almost did with me.”

“Why should I believe you?” Andro hissed softly at her, his eyes changing and his fangs suddenly bursting forth. “Why should I believe anything you *nubous* say? For what you did to my sister I should gut you where you stand! For everything you have done through the years to my people I should let you lie on the deck of this ship and watch as your blood drains from your body and you die in agony!”

Yuri slowly nodded her head in agreement. *[Yes... you should.]* She said softly so that only he could hear her within Mindvoice as she threw up very powerful shields around their conversation. Andro’s changed eyes grew a little wider when she did that and his eyes betrayed their shock when she went even further and battered his shields until he lowered them enough so that he could hear her. *[I do not deserve a second chance, and in your position I’m not sure I would be able to do what you are doing.]* Yuri met his eyes, allowing her vampiric side to come forth as her eyes changed to cobalt blue and her vampiric fangs extended. *[I know something that so many others have yet to fully grasp Androcles... you are not your father! You can feel... you can sense things he and Torma cannot. You can sense that I am different now! I do not deny I am cruel and by my very nature I would not do what you are doing. But I know you can feel that even I would not have allowed what they did to your sister.]*

[What you allowed!] Andro snarled at her.

[That was Xaxon’s doing... not mine!] Yuri spoke. *[There were times when I could not fight the compulsions he forced upon me! I... I have been raped! First by my own brother... and then by your uncle! As cruel as I am... as I know I can be... do you honestly believe I would allow that? That I would support that? I’m not... I’m not asking for your forgiveness Androcles. I have no right to ask for that. I’m asking that you recognize I am not the same person you killed those weeks ago. I’m asking for a second chance Androcles. A chance to live a life that I was denied for so many years. A chance your father would never give to me. I carry*

Pa'cour's child Androcles. I carry his future and mine. That future rests with you. You are more attuned to the currents of Mindvoice than your father because of how you were conceived. I ask you... do you sense any of what you felt within me the day we fought? Do you feel it within me now?]

Andro stared at her for a long moment. He shook his head slightly. *[No.]*

Yuri nodded. *[I have you to thank for that.]* She told him. *[I have you to thank for this new life that I have found. It is a life I want to explore. A life I want to live.]*

[I killed Javier!] Andro spoke harshly. *[And I will find Dante and end his miserable existence as well.]*

Yuri's eyes held a wisdom that only loss and pain could give to her Andro noticed. *[He is no longer my son. I cannot make things right with Carisia and Lucia. I wish it were not so... but it is. I do not know how to be honest with you. They have found love with you and your family and that... that gives me peace. As for Dante... should I ever cross paths with him in the future I will kill him myself after insuring Xaxon has no where to run. Killing him will at least begin the redemption I must provide. To myself most of all.]* Yuri looked at him then. *[Take them Androcles. Take the bodies of your family. I have no right to ask for anything in exchange for them. If I must begin to atone for past deeds then let me do so by giving you and your family peace for my father's greatest sin. Just allow us to leave so that I can try. That is all I ask now.]*

Andro stepped back from her then. He stared at her for a long moment and then looked at Jomann.

"Take them to the pilot's briefing room." He said. "Provide them refreshment and insure they do not leave."

Jomann nodded his head slowly, and like everyone else, he was wondering what Andro and Yuri had just been discussing.

ENURRUA

Martin settled to the soft earth just inside the treeline where the *LEUGERS* transport had started its descent to land, Cirith beside him. Danny moved ghost like beside him, with Julie, Colin and Kenny on his opposite side. The rest of their team was spread out around the clearing, their PSGs engaged and all of their senses alert. The roar of the *LEUGERS*'s engines was beginning to fill the clearing now as the ship came down lower. Martin looked up and could not help but smile to himself. For'mya certainly could make a ship do what she wanted. He could feel her now, and while he kept himself shielded heavily, he could feel her resonance seeping out. Reaching for him. And in feeling her, he could also feel Eirene and Fedor. They had not yet learned how to fully shield themselves and it was easy for him to detect them. Their resonance was strong and clear and above all else...excited.

"Marty?" Danny asked him softly.

Martin looked at him and realized Danny had seen him smiling. He turned to Cirith. "I can feel them *Fervon*." He said seeing Cirith's beautiful face smile happily. "I can feel them Cirith. Man... you don't know how good it feels to say that."

Danny smiled. "I can bet and come pretty close." He said. He looked at Cirith. "Everyone is in position." He told her.

Martin and Cirith both nodded their heads and he became all business again. He looked skyward into the brightening horizon. *Torma? Aurith?*

We are circling above the ship as it descends. Torma answered.

I saw her Martin! Aurith's voice erupted joyously. *I saw her through the window!*

Remember what I told you Aurith. Martin spoke. *I know you want nothing more than to swoop down and pick her up. I need you to maintain your poise in case what comes out of that ship is something we don't expect.*

I remember Martin. Aurith answered. *But I will not allow them to take her from me ever again! I will burn them all first!*

Nor will I. Martin said. *Nor will I. We stick to the plan though.*

I understand. Aurith spoke.

Torma?

We'll be ready. Torma answered.

Martin looked at Cirith. "Time to take back what belongs to us." He said.

Cirith nodded. "A moment I have waited for." She answered.

LEUGERS TRANSPORT

For'mya quickly shut down the engines of the transport and was rising to her feet before Muton was even halfway through the entrance into the cockpit.

“For'mya?” He questioned as she pushed past him.

He was so close.

She could feel his Mindvoice resonance pulsing wildly for her and it was setting her blood on fire. He had come for her. He had come for her just as he had sworn to all of them on that day so long ago. No matter the odds, no matter where, he would come for each of them and nothing would stand in his way. The familiar and oh so welcome burning of her wolf blood was driving her now. Yet she could sense his rage as well. His rage that she had been taken from him and abused in such a manner. She needed to see him; she needed him to see her in order to push this rage back. She pushed past several Monitors as they moved towards the rear of the ramp, Muton scrambling to follow her. He caught up with her near the controls and reached for her arm.

“For'mya?” He questioned again.

For'mya turned as Eirene and Fedor rushed up to her. “Lower the ramp Muton.” She said.

“For'mya we...”

“Listen to me Muton!” For'mya spoke quickly. “I must go out alone!”

“What? It's not safe! We have never been here! We...” Muton began to complain.

“You don't understand Muton. He's here already! He can feel me! Within Mindvoice! I can feel him! It's been getting stronger ever since we left Nefoa!” For'mya declared. “I did not know he would be here until we actually entered the system. He is out there right now... and he is watching. If I don't leave this ship alone... if I don't go to him now... he will think it is a trap and he will kill all of you without so much as a blink.”

“We are capable of defending ourselves!” Makoo spoke proudly.

For'mya shook her head. “Not this time Makoo my friend. You don't actually think he came alone do you? All of you would be dead in seconds and I do not want that to happen. Not after what all of you have done for me.”

“She is right!” Muton spoke looking at her. “Miseo... the ramp! Lower it!”

Miseo didn't hesitate and moved to the ramp controls. For'mya took Muton's hand in hers and brought his knuckles to her cheek. “Trust in me.” She whispered.

Muton nodded. “That I do.”

For'mya nodded and turned to Eirene and Fedor. “Remain here. Do not come out until I call you.”

Fedor nodded his head holding tightly to his sister's arm. “We can wait mother.” He spoke.

For'mya nodded and kissed their heads quickly before turning to watch as the ramp lowered the last few meters and she was staring out into the thick timber around the small clearing. Fear gripped her now as she moved quickly down the ramp, stopping at the bottom to turn back and hold her hand up to insure no one followed her. As she turned back to face the clearing she could hear the birds and small animals beginning to sing their songs once more. She could smell a myriad of different scents, almost all of them she recognized from long ago. The scents of the men and women who followed him when she first met him. Some of the most lethal killers For'mya had ever encountered in all her years. She could smell them now... all around... hidden within the timber.

Ten meters she moved from the ramp.

His mint scent was devastating now. So close and it surrounded her, swirled around her in the morning air, causing her to whimper softly in need. She caught something else on the wind and she stopped walking at twenty meters. She smelled... no... she smelled Pusintin on her still. Her eyes grew wide as she realized this and panicked gripped her heart. He would smell his foul brother on her. In her blood. He would...

Do you think this matters to me Kinsoargai? The deep voice filled her head, brushing aside her Mindvoice shields as if they weren't there.

For'mya spun around in a circle. *Please... please Martin Leonidas... let me see you! Let me know this is not some horrible dream that has been inflicted on me for my sins.*

I am here Kinsoargai.

For'mya spun around instantly only to see the shimmering of the PSG in the morning air and then he was standing in front of her like some reborn god, his hand gripping his *Nehtes* which was stuck in the dew covered grass.

Miseo pressed close to his father where they stood. "Gods preserve us father! He just... he just materialized out of thin air! Did you see that? Did you see?"

Muton nodded. "I saw." Muton spoke as his experienced eyes began to scour the treeline all around him.

Eirene looked up at Muton and Miseo. "He is the father of our hearts!" She exclaimed with a happy voice.

For'mya gasped and moaned in need at the same time as the PSG disappeared from view entirely and he was there. So tall and overwhelming. So powerful and fierce looking in his Dragon Armor outer shell. Tears came to her eyes then and she reached for him, but stopped upon seeing his nose twitch slightly. Once more that fear gripped her heart. He could smell his foul brother upon her and she knew that he had been told what Pusintin had told Andro. He must have seen it on the Netnews even.

"Mar... Martin!" She rasped out the words. "*Son vada carians* Martin! Forgive... forgive me! You should not... you should have let me go! You..."

"Let you go?" Martin said softly.

The tears were pouring from her dark eyes nonstop now. All her fears coming forth. How he would react to her. What he would say. "I have... I have betrayed you! Betrayed your love! I... I..."

"What in the holy hell are you talking about woman?" Martin asked her moving closer to her. So close that her sweet orchid scent was very nearly as pure and powerful as Aricia's lavender and coca scent.

"I betrayed you! I should have fought him! I should have... You need to find another!" For'mya was shaking her head back and forth now completely lost to the emotions coursing through her. "You need to let me... you need to leave me! You will not want me now! His scent permeates my blood! I can see it on your face! I did not think about this and now I have dishonored you by..."

Martin Leonidas could no longer control himself and he released his *Nehtes* and took four steps towards her. His hands took her face in his grip and he leaned over quickly, bringing his nose and lips to the skin of her neck and firmly nuzzling her skin and the outer ridge of her long elven ear. For'mya hissed loudly as delightful sensations coursed through her body and her hands gripped his arms. "You... you could never dishonor me *Kinsoaurgai*." He whispered into her ear. "It is I who has dishonored you for allowing this to..."

"I let him have me Martin. I let him rut above me like some pig! He..." For'mya was babbling now, really unable to form coherent thoughts because she thought she had lost him.

Martin didn't hesitate, he didn't question, and there was never any doubt about what he would do. He lifted For'mya into his arms. "Damn you woman... will you just shut up! He didn't wear you out completely did he?" He growled just before his lips came down on hers and he kissed her.

For'mya screamed and laughed in the joyous and happy delight that crashed through her mind and body as his powerful arms surrounded her and crushed her to him. She screamed against his kiss, her arms wrapping around his broad shoulders and then his voice filled her mind, wrapped around her core and he let her have what she had secretly always wanted.

You are mine For'mya Leonidas! You have always been mine! You will always be mine! And now I'm going to do what I should have done so long ago and I am going to make you mine in body and soul. Just as I have done with the others who hold the pieces of my heart. You will not smell of my fool brother for long my Kinsoaurgai, and I don't give a rat shit who sees! Martin snarled out the words.

Martin Leonidas then dropped all pretense of shielding his intense male aura and hit For'mya with every bit of his being. Just as he had done with Aricia, with Dysea, with Anja and now Cirith. Now For'mya would experience that and know that she was part of his very life. Part of who he was. The effect on For'mya was devastating to say the least. Every nerve ending in her body ignited in the same instant, nearly overwhelming her conscious mind. She tore his lips from his and threw back her head to howl, her wolf eyes wide in bliss and her fangs fully extended as his aura set her body on fire. Every pleasure center, every receptor, every minute cell that could feel delight screamed at the same time, even as his powerful mind surrounded hers, embraced hers and she maintain control so that she could experience it to the very sweet end. The nipples on her now

much larger breasts instantaneously became burning nubs. Her thighs quivered madly as she was gripped by an orgasm so utterly overwhelming that she could do nothing but ride the tidal waves of orgasmic agony. And then his hand pulled her head back up and he kissed her. He kissed her with every ounce of passion, desire and want he could generate within his body. He pulled her roughly over to the side and they tumbled to the soft grass still locked in that scorching kiss. For'mya's legs wrapped around his hips, her booted feet digging into the cheeks of his ass as she was deliciously swallowed by the soul claiming kiss and she tried desperately to meld their bodies together as one.

I am so sorry Kinsoargai. His voice rasped with sorrow within her mind. I failed you! I failed everyone! You have endured this... because of me! This is me Kinsoargai! This is who I am! This is who I have always been frightened to show you! You are mine For'mya! And I will wash the sins of my brother from you with my love until the next life claims me!

And For'mya's mind was flooded with so many emotions and images and sensations. Even as her body reveled in the physical pleasure she was experiencing just from his kiss and the feel of his aura wrapped around her, her mind now became flooded with the essence of the man who had stolen her heart and soul the moment she had seen him on that station. An essence of purity and power. An essence of violence and death. Of happiness and love. An essence of sadness and adoration that transcended everything she had known. A love for her, for Aricia, for all of them. A love more powerful than any gravity well she had ever experienced. A love that would never die.

“What is happening father?” Miseo chattered very confused. “What... what is he doing to her? Is he hurting her?”

Muton shook his head. “I don't know!” He snapped. “I am not a Lycavorian! I...”

“No.” Eirene's voice spoke with a warmth and happiness that was obvious to all of them. “He is not hurting her. The father of our hearts... our father... he would never hurt her.”

With that Eirene squeezed Fedor's hand and they bolted from the ship. Muton and Miseo reached for them, following them down the ramp far too slow.

“Eirene! Fedor! Wait!” Muton gasped as he reached the bottom of the ramp and ran into something that was extremely solid. So solid in fact that he stumbled back and knocked Miseo off balance, throwing both of them to the ramp in surprise.

They saw the shimmering light all around them then, just as they had when Martin appeared. “Oh shit!” Miseo barked as the two towering Lycavorians appeared in front of them. And then all around them. The Dragon Armor receded quickly and they could see the ebony skin of Danny and the Master Chief Tony looking down on them from under the matte black helmets. Muton saw Eirene and Fedor running away as if they had just squirted through the wall of flesh in front of them, like they had known it was there all along.

“Let's not interrupt the family reunion shall we.” Colin spoke from the side of the ramp. “That would be exceptionally rude. Danny and the Master Chief here... they don't like rude people.”

“Nor do I.” Cirith spoke and Miseo watched as she unwrapped the shadows from around her body directly in front of Danny and Tony.

“Oh... did I forget to mention that Cirith here is their wife and mate too.” Colin spoke with a smile. “Probably not someone you'd want to piss off at the moment.”

Miseo glanced back up the ramp to see the other Monitors lifting their hands in to the air wisely as they saw the eyes of certain death looking up at them with itchy trigger fingers.

Take me my love! For'mya gasped as she tore her lips from his and grasped his beautiful face in her hands, staring into those beautiful yellow gold orbs and looking at his fully extended dual fangs. Take me right now! I burn for you Martin. Oh how I burn for you! I burn for all of you! Rid me of the shame I feel my love. I...

You have no shame to bear! Martin snapped. None. Let it go Kinsoargai. Let it leave your mind. It is my shame! My shame for not doing this so much sooner! His hand came up and he caressed the outer ridge of her elven ear and saw her eyes close in blissful sensations. I will do as you ask me Kinsoargai. I will do this and so much more. First we need to leave this place and I want to meet my new children. Our children!

For'mya's eyes grew wide. *Eirene! Fedor! Carians... I...*

That is when they heard the giggling from next to them and they looked up to see Fedor and Eirene beside them holding hands and both of them with huge smiles on their faces. Years of having small children in their home had taught them to expect moments like this and all of them had this type of action down to a science. Martin quickly reigned in his powerful aura and though For'mya groaned softly in reluctance, she drew in several deep breaths to calm herself and her enflamed passions. Passions which had literally soaked the fatigue type pants she was wearing. Martin made no attempt to rise from atop For'mya quickly, for that would have looked silly. Instead he slowly extracted himself from her arms and legs and rose to his knees with grace and pride, doing his best to cover For'mya so that she could regain her composure. Unlike other times in the past, at least they were still clothed at the moment. Though given another few moments he would have begun fulfilling her desire to take her right there, for his blood burned just as brightly for her.

“Hello there.” He spoke to them. “I was just... I was just reacquainting myself with your mother.”

“Your *Kinsoaurgai*.” Fedor spoke with a smile.

Martin nodded with a warm smile. “My *Kinsoaurgai*.” He said. “You are Fedor. And you must be Eirene.” Martin said looking at them and wondering how in the world they looked more like For'mya and him than his brother. “I am...”

“You are the father of our hearts!” Eirene exclaimed. “You are our father!” And then Martin was tumbling backwards as both Eirene and Fedor leaped into his arms, catching him off balance and sending all four of them rolling to the side as he had not yet untangled his and For'mya's legs.

And the laughter of discovery and renewal filled the small clearing as the sun began to rise over the treetops.

ARC ROYAL

“Talk to me!” Akemi barked out.

“They have entered the corridor that brings them here!” The Sensor operator shouted out. “ETA is thirty-seven minutes! They'll exit the system on the far side of Supya and pass right next to that ship hiding there!”

“Fuck me!” Akemi cursed as she came to her feet. “Get me the King! Now! Secure Alpha One! Battle Stations! Battle Stations! Go to Condition One! This is not a drill!”

“Condition One aye!”

“Ready the *KADEN*-Class Transports! They'll be cutting it close since they have split from the *TYPE II Alpha*! We might need them to execute an emergency pick up! Where is that link to the King damn it!”

“Activating now! Channel two one!”

“Captain Katsumi to King Leonidas! *ARC ROYAL* actual to King Leonidas!”

ENURRUA

Aricia clutched her *Stiletto* tightly as she moved around the corner of the cavern, Dysea, Kenny and Cody moving just behind her with equal alertness. Helen moved just in front of Arzoal who was behind Isheeni and Iriral. It had been planned this way, for while Arzoal and Helen were Bonded Sisters, neither of them had any combat experience together. They had not fought in the Evolli War by Martin's order because he would not risk either of them against T19 missiles. They also did not undergo the same training as the other Bonded Pairs within the Union simply because of who they were. As *Feravomir* and Dragon Elder Mother, they were more used to meetings and gatherings discussing the use of Mindvoice powers and different abilities, not how to most effectively kill your enemy. They left those skills to the much more nimble and younger dragons and riders now.

The entrance under the waterfall had proven to be accurate in its location and very huge. The waterfall itself covered nearly all of the open mouth of the cavern at more than a hundred and fifty feet wide and unless you knew it was there, it could be easily missed just walking by or viewing the waterfall from across the huge

lake it was emptying into. They had waded through waist deep water for a few hundred feet after passing under the waterfall, and then the cavern had opened up into a huge tunnel. Tina had been right and the recent earthquakes had opened up entrances that branched off to tunnels that had long since been buried.

It was Cody who reached up finally and ran his fingers along the interior of the tunnel. The smoothness of the wall looked almost normal, but the moment he touched it he could tell the difference.

“The texture has changed.” He spoke softly everyone halting and turning to look at him. He rubbed his fingertips together and turned to look at Arzoal. “Elder Mother... you said your ship was made with the same materials as CS41?” He asked.

Arzoal nodded her massive head and projected her thoughts into Cody’s mind. Yes.

“I’ve been inside CS41 enough times to know this feels the same Aricia.” Cody told her and Dysea. “It’s oily and warm.”

Warm? Arzoal spoke moving closer to him. *The actual boundaries of the ship did not reach out this far. When I choose this mountain I had the ship enter from the north valley and engaged its short range fusion drills. It heated the hull but only in the sections that contacted the interior of the rock itself. Once the rock cooled the only warmth came from the bio-mechanical hull of the ship. When I destroyed the core, that should have ceased operation of any remaining power nodes that we had not stripped.*

Helen moved up next to Cody and pressed her palm against the wall. She gasped quickly and drew her hand back.

“Helen!” Dysea exclaimed stepping towards her.

“Cody is right!” Helen declared looking at Arzoal. “Sister... it is warm to the touch and slightly oily. And there is...”

What? Arzoal asked.

Helen looked at her. “As with CS41... there is life to this ship!”

Impossible! Arzoal exclaimed. *Without the core...*

“Are you certain the core was destroyed Arzoal?” Dysea asked.

Of course Melda Min. Arzoal answered. *If not in the initial explosion itself... then the mountain crushing what remained.*

“Tina says the damage should have been more.” Dysea spoke again. “She says with a core how you described to her, when it exploded, it should have sheared off the upper two thirds of this mountain and devastated everything around it for three kilometers. Flattened it. None of that happened.”

Helen had placed her hand back against the wall and now she gasped once more. “By all that is holy!”

“Helen!” Aricia hissed moving towards her.

“I can feel it!” Helen announced. “What Andro and Elynth felt on Earth...? I can feel it now. Echoes! So very faint but... but they are there! Life! *Carians* how were they able to feel this from so far away?”

Life? Arzoal gasped. *Within the ship? How... that can not be. The only life within the ship itself was the egg chamber. It was crushed completely.*

“Elder Mother... is it possible for two minds as powerful as Andro and Elynth... being connected to the Neural Booster for so long as they were. Could they have detected this? The echoes of past life that may still linger here perhaps.” Aricia asked.

You reach into a realm I am not qualified to speak on Aricia child. Arzoal answered. *You are speaking of faith now. There were... there were some among the Pralors who were able to still communicate with those that submitted themselves to The Rift of Time. Could this be similar to what you mean?*

Aricia nodded. “Yes... very much so.”

Arzoal looked at her. *Aricia... to even begin to feel this kind of connection... the Pralor Squire would have to be twenty to thirty thousand years old and given of themselves entirely to this task. Only the finest students were allowed to study the complexities of the Rift of Time. It is energy in its purest form.*

“You have stated yourself that Andro and Martin, Torma and Elynth, that they are more attuned to the eddies and currents and resonance of Mindvoice.” Aricia said. “Just as Sumar was said to be long ago.”

Yes. Arzoal answered.

“You also stated the pureness of my own blood. Of Sadi’s blood. You said this did not diminish them in any way. You said only a few months ago, just after Sadi and Andro were mated, that it may have even

increased their ability to sense things even you could not.” Aricia continued. “You admitted to me that Martin was already like this.”

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *I did say that.*

“They sensed this Arzoal. When they were connected to the Neural Booster and Fedor and Eirene they sensed this.” Aricia said.

“Nefoa is not so far from here.” Dysea chimed in now. “As attuned as they are to each other... they channel their power more effectively. Just as *Nauta Melme* and *Torma* do.”

“They are right sister.” Helen spoke up.

But to detect the remnants of what life was within the chamber? Arzoal said. *That would imply that their potential, Martin and Torma’s potential is... limitless.* Arzoal finished the words as her flame colored eyes grew wider. *The Talon Guardian amulets!*

“What?” Helen asked.

Each Talon Guardian amulet is imbued with a small portion of each Elder’s power and abilities. Arzoal told them. *That is why it is made part of them. Branded to them and never able to be removed. No Talon Guardian in the entire history of dragons has ever had an amulet imbued with more than five Dragon Elder’s powers. Martin, Andro, Torma and Elynth have amulets imbued with nine! In our time before, it was never needed to have more than five Elders. Only when we came here to Enurrua and began fighting Chetak did I change that and make it so there were nine of us.*

“So there have never been Talon Guardians with the level of power as Martin and Andro?” Aricia asked.

No! Never! I should have seen it when Andro and Elynth so effortlessly severed the connection between Vollenth and Yuri. And then when they destroyed Naruth and Javier with such ease. Arzoal looked at them. *It just never occurred to me.*

“And that should tell you that for too long you have carried this burden of trying to be perfect when you did not need too.” Dysea spoke softly. “Like the rest of us you will make mistakes Arzoal.”

“If we can now sense what Andro and Elynth sensed then, we must be close to the actual chamber itself.” Helen spoke. “I suggest we find it... inform Martin so that he can bring this Kavalian Muton here... and then be gone from this place once and for all.”

“Shit! I’m all for that!” Kenny piped in breaking the intensity of their conversation. “Caves always give me the willies.”

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *We can discuss the ramifications of what we are saying at a later time when Martin is present. Kenneth is right. I have lived outside of caves for too long now and being back in them makes me nervous.*

“Do you recognize anything sister?” Helen asked her.

My sense of direction is slightly off within the tunnels here, but if we continue further northward we will eventually come to the egg chamber or what remains of it. Arzoal answered. *If it is even there anymore.*

Cirith had her back turned to For'mya as she changed quickly into a Union uniform and then Mark IV ArmorPly in the back of the *LEUGERS* transport. Everyone else had moved to the side of the ship and Aurith now sat on the ramp refusing any entry to anyone. The reunion between her and For'mya had been tearful and joyous and included a very nearly overwhelmed Aurith scooping For'mya into her curved talons and lifting off into the clear sky above where she shifted For'mya to the saddle on her back and then they proceeded to tear happily across the landscape for several minutes, twice dive bombing those in the small clearing while Eirene and Fedor squealed in delight at the laughter in their mother’s voice. A laughter that they had not heard until now.

“Thank you for the uniform Cirith.” For'mya spoke as she secured the four layer upper torso armor on her body.

Cirith turned slowly as For'mya stepped up to her. “We knew what Martin was planning.” She explained. “Aricia said it would be unbecoming to leave you in such a state that his aura would. She was right.”

For'mya had replaced her clothes with the fleet uniform, but her undergarments were soaked with her passion and if she replaced them, Martin would not be able to function properly or be around her without constantly sniffing her. No doubt this would affect Aricia and Dysea as well, for it seemed to be having a small

effect on Cirith. For'mya simply secured them in a bag and sealed them so that their scent did not drive everyone insane.

For'mya leaned over and kissed her squarely on the lips. A kiss that Cirith did not draw away from, but accepted and returned. After a moment they drew apart and For'mya took her hand. "It is so very good to finally meet you." She stated.

Cirith nodded with a smile. "And you." She stated confidently. "The images and visions I have shared with Martin and the others do not do you justice."

"From what little Eirene and Fedor were able to pass to me however briefly I will say the same for you." For'mya stated as she took both her hands. "Welcome to our family."

Cirith's face beamed. "We should get outside." She stated. "Martin did not want to stay here longer than necessary because of what this planet represents."

For'mya nodded and allowed her to lead her down the ramp into the bright sunlight again. For'mya felt the beginnings of tears as she spied both Eirene and Fedor sitting on Martin's lap, Fedor looking at him with awe in his dark eyes and Eirene stroking the neatly trimmed beard and his long hair with her fingers. This was something For'mya had no power over and when she felt the utter and complete acceptance and clarity between the three of them it made her want to weep. His aura swept around them as tightly as it had any of his children, his actions the same as they had been for all of them. He loved all of his children deeply For'mya knew and there would be no difference with Eirene and Fedor. No difference in any way. She could also feel from Eirene and Fedor the total and complete acceptance of the knowledge that *this* was their father. This was the man they would forever now call their father. Pusintin would never haunt them, never make them blink and never have any hold over them. They knew just as their blood told them instinctively where the love and knowledge and wisdom of a father would come from.

Muton, Miseo and the other Kavalian Monitors were sitting in a mixed fashion among the members of Martin's team. That none of them expected to be sitting with the Lycavorian King, a man they had thought was long dead, that was obvious from their expressions. For'mya knew that Martin must have sensed the Pralor blood within them and he was conversing with them in such a way. To Martin they were not Kavalian For'mya saw... to him they were kindred souls because of the Pralor blood that flowed in their veins. Muton was explaining to Martin what had taken place since For'mya had been kidnapped, his honesty sometimes brutal, but necessary. Cirith didn't hesitate and she directed For'mya to a position on the ground beside Martin. She smiled as his arm went around her and he buried his face in her golden blond hair and inhaled deeply of her sweet orchid scent. The Monitors could do nothing but smile at this obvious display of love and emotion and Muton smiled the widest. Cirith settled onto the ground on Martin's opposite side and Eirene quickly scooted over into her lap without question. Keeping his head touching For'mya's, Martin looked at Muton once more.

"So the map to where they went is within the actual bio-mechanical coding of the ship?" Martin asked.

Muton nodded. "My grandmother never left us the knowledge of why they did this before they arrived. Perhaps so that no one who was not at least partially a Pralor could withdraw the information from the ship's data banks." He explained. "The many pieces of knowledge were spread out among us and came to us in visions and dreams."

"But why did it take so long for the ship to reach Elear on the second return?" Martin asked. "Dropping off those who were going to Cabelir I can understand adding a few months, maybe a few years to the trip. But nearly nine millennia?"

Muton shook his head. "I do not know what transpired in that time period, or what made the ship return to Elear in its battered condition." He stated. "My grandmother and those who went to Cabelir with her never heard from the ship again."

"Do you think when you get this information it might be there?" Martin asked.

"It is possible. I do not know." Muton said. "I know it sounds very mystic and far fetched but it is the truth."

Martin grinned at him. "Hell... mystic and far fetched is the norm for us I'm beginning to notice."

"Your other mates? For'mya's fellow Queens? They are at the ship now?" Muton asked.

"The ship was used as an egg chamber while they were here on Elear." Martin told him.

Muton nodded. "Yes... For'mya told me."

"You realize there might not be anything left of it?" Martin asked.

“I would need only a fraction of the ship itself.” Muton explained. “At least... at least that is what I feel.”

Martin kissed For'mya warmly, and then ruffled Fedor's short hair. “Then let's find out where they are. They were heading for where the ship was and I haven't heard from them yet.” He released For'mya and then lifted Fedor to his feet before climbing to his own feet and turning to help both For'mya and Cirith.

“Is it far from here?” Miseso asked as he rose.

Martin shook his head. “Two kilometers.” He pointed to the horizon. “You can see the edge of the ridgeline from here. I'll...” Martin stopped talking when he saw Julie moving towards him rapidly and chattering away into the secure COM set she wore to enhance their implants. She didn't hesitate and came right up to him. “Jules?” He asked.

“We got company boss.” Julie said.

“Company?” Muton spoke now moving forward.

Julie nodded. “A Kavalian Task Force just entered the system.” She told them. “It's led by your brother's ship. Captain Katsumi says nine ships of the seventeen ships are moving for our location here, another eight are remaining by the old High Coven Jump Gate as a reserve force. They'll be here in twenty-seven minutes.”

“Fuck!” Martin swore. “They tracked you here!”

“How?” Kapurr asked now. “For'mya jumped us nine times. There is no way they could have tracked us through nine jumps to get here!”

“And I ripped out the transponder before we clear Nefoa's system Martin.” For'mya spoke.

“They must have some sort of tracking device on the ship itself.” Martin said. “Shit... this is not good.”

“Our people?” Muton exclaimed. “If they are coming from the Gate they will be seen! Even as near to Supya as they are, there will be no way to hide their signature from ships moving so close to the planet!”

Martin looked at Julie. “Channel?”

“Fourteen.” She answered.

Martin tapped the implant in his jaw and barked the number fourteen. He heard the implant in his ear alter the channel and then he could hear the voices of the *ARC ROYAL*'s crew in the background. “Captain?”

Akemi's voice replied instantly and it was actually quite calm. “Milord?”

“What do we have?” Martin asked.

“One *GREAT SOUL*, which happens to be your brother's ship.” Akemi answered evenly. “Three *DIEROYs* and five *DIATAGAs*. Not good odds Milord. They are moving slowly from the Jump Gate in a standard Kavalian Attack position. They know someone is on the planet. I figured they tracked the Queen's ship there somehow.”

“How soon before they pass by the ship near Supya?” Martin asked.

“You... you know about that ship Milord?” Akemi asked. “We have been monitoring it but it hasn't moved.”

“It's got about three thousand men, women and children on it Akemi. Kavalians with Pralor blood.” Martin told her.

“Fuck me!” Akemi cursed softly.

“Spit the *KADENs* at me and then move to their location and take them within your Shroud field.” Martin ordered. “You have enough time?”

“Yes Milord.” Her voice replied. “But... but we'll be leaving you undefended. Milord... I am not comfortable with that.”

“I'm not real comfortable with it either.” Martin told her. “But I'm not going to let three thousand civilians die for no reason. We'll blow the *LEUGERS* here on the surface and then all of us will move to the coordinates of the egg chamber. Once we have what we need we'll launch in the transport, engage our Shrouds and meet you there.”

“We'll need a channel to talk to them.” Akemi announced. “They see us drop within a hundred meters of them they'll panic and the game will be up.”

Muton had heard the entire conversation coming from Julie's small pack and he stepped closer to Martin. “Alpha Nine One Beta Four Three Gamma.” He spoke immediately. “Use the code phrase Home is Heaven's Gift.”

“Got it!” Akemi barked. “Launching *KADENs* now. ETA to you eight minutes. I’ll leave our command channel open Milord.”

“Jules is operator.” Martin snapped. “Whatever she says take it as coming from me.”

“Affirmative. *ARC ROYAL* moving.” Akemi ended their conversation.

Martin dropped his hand and looked around. “Ok... nothing like pulling shit out of our asses to liven things up! Tony... Pablo... I don’t want that ship here six minutes from now!” He ordered.

Pablo nodded his head. “Consider it ashes.” He answered before turning and breaking into a run.

“Muton... send two of your people to help him. Take whatever you brought with you, leave everything else. Anything could be bugged if it was already on that ship.” Martin spoke.

Muton didn’t need to speak as Kapurr and another Monitor broke from their group and followed the two Lycavorians. Martin tapped his implant and called out another channel before speaking.

“Endy... get your ass up and here! We got Kavalian inbound and they ain’t going to be looking for dates!” Martin snapped.

“Shit! They just couldn’t let us have our own party could they?” Endith’s voice filled his ear. “Spooling now! Three minutes to your location!”

Martin turned back to Muton and was about to speak when his face grimaced, and he, For’mya, Cirith and even Fedor and Eirene visibly bent over and reached for their heads.

BELOVED! Aricia’s voice echoed within Mindvoice with enough power to make all of them cringe. *Beloved we need you!*

DRAGON EGG CHAMBER

This is it! Arzoal’s voice exclaimed. Her massive body moved around the huge slab of granite that now blocked their path in the widened tunnel. *Aricia child... Dysea... this is it! I remember the indentations along the walls here. These are conduits that the drones used. The chamber’s south entrance was here!*

Sister are you sure? Helen asked.

Arzoal was examining the slab of granite with keen eyes. *Yes.* She replied. *Absolutely. There were three entrances into the chamber. The south, the north and an alternate entrance that exited to the deck below the chamber.*

“Wow!” Kenny commented as his hands ran along the surface of the slab. “This is one big piece of rock.”

Cody was moving along the opposite wall near the slab that blocked their path and he moved right up to where the rock had imbedded itself into the bio-mechanical bulkhead of the ship. He pulled a small light from his combat harness and shown it on the crevice. His eyes grew a little wider. “Dy? Look at this.” Cody called out turning to where Dysea stood next to Iriral. It was the nickname they had given her many years ago when they were building Eden City and it had stuck for many of them.

Dysea moved over next to Cody, Iriral just behind her. “Cody?”

“Look at the way the bulkhead conforms around the rock.” He stated. “There are no tears in the seams. No crushed wall.”

“Yes... so.” Dysea said.

Cody drew his hand back from where it had been touching the bulkhead. “Put your hand there.” He said.

Dysea moved closer and did as he said. She emerald eyes grew wide. “There is... there is a small vibration.” She exclaimed.

Cody nodded. “There is still power to this ship.” He stated.

How can that be? Arzoal asked as she moved up.

Cody looked at her. “I don’t know Elder Mother. But that is not a normal vibration. There is still power to this ship and it is being generated from somewhere else.”

“Hey... check this out!” Kenny called. The floor plating is loose here.”

They all turned to see him on his stomach at the base of where the slab of rock met the floor. It appeared as if half his body was under the slab now.

“Kenny no!” Aricia called. “The rock could shift and crush you!”

They watched as his body twisted and turned and then he was on his back. “Shit... this slab of rock ain’t going nowhere.” He spoke as Aricia and Cody squatted next to his legs. “There are weird looking support lines of some sort running under the rock. I can see about twenty meters in front of me and they extend in almost every direction.”

“Natural supports like in a cave in Kenny?” Cody asked.

“Not unless each of these things came down in their exact position.” Kenny answered as he shifted and held his hand down his body. “Give me your light Cody. I think there is another opening in the deck in front of me. There is a faint light coming from it.”

Cody extended his arm up the side of Kenny’s leg until he felt his hand and then he placed the small light into the palm. “How far in front of you?” Cody asked.

“Just past where I can make out these support beams.” Kenny answered as he drew his arm forward and shined the light in front of him, his head leaning back enough so that he could see. “Man... the whole bottom of this rock is covered in them. They extend into the bulkhead on either side. It’s like they form a seat for this puppy of a boulder.”

“A seat?” Aricia asked.

“Yeah! I can see where the edges of the bulkhead breached and are bent inward or jagged from impact.” Kenny echoed. “These lines running along the bottom of this rock are different. They aren’t the same color or composition. It’s almost as if they... hey what’s this?”

“Kenny?” Aricia snapped. “What is what?”

They saw his body shift further forward. “There’s definitely a light coming from beneath this rock. There appears to be a giant hole in the deck up ahead of me. These bio-mechanical supports are keeping the slab from dropping anymore. Some of them appear to be anchored into the bulkhead on the sides. I can’t move forward anymore but...”

They heard the sound of shifting rock and rendered steel and then Kenny’s body dropped away and vanished into fully under the slab of rock. “Holy shiitt!” Kenny’s voice echoed softly in the corridor.

“Kenny!” Aricia screamed diving into the opening without thought. She began to slip and slid down the deck, as it appeared whatever part of the floor he had been resting on was gone. Cody and Dysea grabbed for her legs as she moved and they caught her before she too fell out of sight. “Kenny!” Aricia’s wolf eyes shifted her scope of vision and she tried to search using different spectrums of light to penetrate the darkness in front of her.

“I’m ok!” Kenny’s voice called from what sounded like a good thirty meters away. “Shit that hurt!”

“Are you hurt?” Aricia barked.

“No! I landed on my ass and it hurt!” Kenny shouted back. “The floor is... the floor is warm and it’s fucking sticky!”

Sticky? Arzoal commented as she moved closer.

“Yeah. Shit... like some kind of goo or something. And it’s warm to the touch!” Kenny snapped. “Let me get my own light out now. I lost Cody’s. Hold on. There’s fresh air down here Aricia! It’s cooler too.”

Aricia saw a flash of bright light and she smiled. “I can see your light!” She exclaimed.

“Yeah I just flashed in front of the hole I fell through.” Kenny said. “Looks like the edges closer to the big hole are weaker.” Kenny shifted his light upwards and he could make out the bottom of that slab of rock above him about twenty to thirty meters. “I can see the slab above me and I can see your shadows when I flash the light up. Man this is weird.”

“What?” Dysea called from beside Aricia now while still holding tightly to her leg.

Kenny looked at the wall closest to him intently. “This section of wall I’m looking at matches the same section up where you are.” He stated thoughtfully. “Arzoal... where was the core in relation to the egg chamber?”

The engine core would have been two decks above the chamber and another five to six hundred meters further towards the rear of the ship. Arzoal answered.

“Saoi nubous!” Kenny gasped. “Holy fucking shit!”

“Kenny!” Aricia screamed. “Kenny what’s wrong?”

“Aricia... the Skipper said Andro felt something. Like echoes. Dozens of them right?” Kenny questioned.

“Yes! So!” Aricia snapped.

“And he’s a Talon Guardian right. Protector of the dragon species and all. Him and the Skipper both?” Kenny spoke.

“Kenny... what are you fucking saying?” Aricia screamed now.

“Ahh... well... I don’t know for sure... but I think I might have found what the Skipper’s boy and his dragon were feeling.” Kenny said as he panned his light down onto the floor of the room he was in.

“Kenny damn you!” Dysea shouted. “Speak plain!”

“Eggs!” Kenny barked. “Dragon eggs! And lots of them!”

Aricia did the only thing that came to her mind at that moment. *BELOVED!* She bellowed out within Mindvoice with all of her power. *Beloved we need you!*

CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

SCIMITAR

Whatever doubts might have plagued him, they were shattered when he set foot inside the G9 Runner and saw the steel gray sarcophaguses and heard his Aunt’s wail of anguish and joy combined together as one. The sarcophaguses were secured to the deck by heavy bolts and he saw Deia drape her upper body over the one on the right as tears flooded her eyes and fell upon the clear window. Androcles trembled as he moved closer to the center one, perhaps dreading what he would see or embracing it, he didn’t know. His hand went to the surface of the metal sarcophagus as he moved closer to the front of it and through the cold steel he felt it. Reaching past the internal computer keeping the chamber sealed and at optimal power levels to preserve the figure inside, Androcles found what he was searching for. It was the same thing he always felt and experienced when within the tomb of his grandfather at Thermopylae. A unique power that transcended anything he had ever felt. Like the warm pulsing of a great star. Not aware or conscious in any manner, but there nonetheless. Andro got close enough now to look through the small window and he staggered somewhat at what he saw, for it shook him down to his core. Anja and Isabella had hurried up the ramp with Eliani and Dorian and they too saw Andro stagger forward into the sarcophagus.

“Andro!” Anja gasped as she rushed forward. She skidded to a halt, her eyes wide when the soft flare of psychic blue light engulfed Andro and the sarcophagus itself. Deia’s head came up quickly at Anja’s voice with wide, tear filled eyes and she turned to see what was happening.

“Andro!” Eli screamed as she started forward. Anja and Isabella both grabbed her as Dorian stepped around her with wide eyes.

“Don’t touch him!” Anja hissed.

“Mother... it could be a trap! Something that...” Eliani rasped out.

“It’s no trap sister.” Dorian spoke softly as he stopped several feet from his brother, just outside the psychic shield that now engulfed Andro and his dark eyes were wide as if seeing something they could not.

NO! It is... it is a message! Elynth’s voice exploded into their heads and they turned to see her and Ryner both crammed onto the ramp side-by-side.

“Message?” Anja barked turning to look at her. “A message to who?”

“A message to us mother.” Dorian said softly just before stepping forward and reaching out to grasp his brother’s shoulder, the psychic field allowing him to pass through easily, and then closing instantly behind him.

“Dorian no!” Isabella cried too late.

Andro stood beside the sarcophagus now, both hands upon the smooth surface, making room for Dorian on his left. Dorian placed one hand upon Andro and the other on the surface of the sarcophagus. Their eyes were closed as the images and thoughts and memories rushed through them. Emotions, places, people, events. Anja stepped forward and tried to touch them, but her hand was stopped by some unseen force field and she could not push through it. Eliani stepped up to her.

“Mother?” She asked.

Anja looked at her hand and shook her head. “It won’t... it won’t let me through.”

Deia stood up now and reached out to try and touch the sarcophagus with one hand while wiping away tears with the other. The invisible field kept her from moving forward for only a second, as if trying to determine who she was and then her hand pushed through and Deia was able to move up next to Dorian, reaching out to touch him as well as place her hand on the sarcophagus.

“What is it?” Anja gasped.

“Some sort of... some sort of Mindvoice generated shield. But different from what we have seen before.” Isabella spoke as her hand came up and touched the near invisible shield. “So powerful... I’ve... only Martin has ever generated something like this. It’s not allowing us through though.”

“Fuck this!” Eliani growled.

“Eli no!” Anja screamed reaching for her too late as Eliani stepped forward... and right through the shield.

Eliani’s eyes were wide as she moved right up to her brothers. Almost as an afterthought, both Andro and Dorian moved slightly to either side to allow her to move closer between them, which Eliani did without the least bit of hesitation. She pressed her body up against her two brothers, unashamed of this action for Eliani knew that she and Andro and now Dorian were different. Just as Fedor and Eirene would be different. Different in many ways than their brothers and sisters, yet still so very much alike. She reached out to place a hand on the smooth surface and Eliani gasped softly as those same images and events and places flooded through her as well. She must have come into the message late for when she was fully drawn into the psychic connection the deep voice was already speaking and she gasped as the voice of her great-grandfather filled her being.

“...Given our lives freely. Do not mourn for us, as it falls now to my blood. Our blood. And to Deia, she who tolerated me for so many years and yet learned all Canth and I could teach her no matter that she thought we were an odd pair. She will be the heart of whatever is to come and whenever there is doubt, turn to her my blood. And it falls to all the others who remain behind. Do not bear hate or rage in your hearts for those who have done this. No matter what they have done, they will be part of our future. Our destiny. Though they see it not. My father Sumar told me this one day as a boy and now in death I understand what he meant. The Immortal whose actions have allowed me to make this message and imbue it within this tomb before my essence was lost forever; he should be honored if he still lives. He did this of his own free accord against the wishes of that vile creature Veldruk. He had not a hand in our deaths, but he will have a hand in the future to come because of his honor this day.

“Someone will have to kill the High Lord, and that fool woman he calls wife, before they bring ruin to us all in the future by their actions and what they do not care nor want to understand.

“To the son I will never see, the last of my line, I have passed all I know to him. He will know what to pass to those of his blood so that our legacy never dies. Those of our family, of our blood, only you will be able to see this message and to those of you who witness this, know that we did all we could to prepare. In the time of your greatest fears, turn to them; for they will have the answers you seek within them, though they may not know how. Seek the answers within those who bear my image and my voice. Never bow to anyone my family and my blood! Never stop seeking the answers, for without answers there can be no questions! And always remember where we came from, for that is the essence of who we are. Cuia fas vada carians aur nathos. Aur falyne. Cuia fas vada carians.”

The psychic shield dissipated instantly after that and all of them gasped with that last surge of power. It was Andro who lifted his head first and allowed his tear filled eyes to gaze at the face in the window of the sarcophagus. The face of his grandfather. The face of his father. His own face. The skin was tanned and weathered, but there was no mistaking the resemblance between them, though the trimmed beard and mustache was thick with gray hair and gave him a distinguished look. As Anja and Isabella moved forward quickly, the last vestiges of that powerful message swept through them as well, their senses and nerves feeling as if they had been fully charged with limitless energy. Deia moved around the front of the sarcophagus that held Resumar and as her hand drew across the smooth surface she was swept closer by Dorian’s strong arm. His eyes were wet with tears, yet there was a peace on his young face, on Andro’s face that she had never seen before. Andro’s arm drew Anja tightly into the small group, holding her against the back of her daughter’s body, his eyes moist as well. It was also Andro who then reached for and pulled his vampire mother close to him, holding her tight as

his azure eyes, now fully changed to his wolf persona, opened and he stared at the sarcophagus they all now touched in some manner.

“Androcles?” Isabella asked softly. “Andro what was that?”

Andro turned to look at her beautiful face and he smiled. “That was our past speaking to our future.” He said softly in reply.

“What... what did they say?” Anja asked.

“You do not need to do your tests mother.” Andro spoke shifting his eyes to her. “There is no question about that any longer.” Andro turned and looked at Deia who was staring at him with wide eyes. “Our past has come home *Tenna*. Our past has come home.”

Deia released herself from Dorian’s arms and folded herself into Andro’s arms as she sobbed openly. “Our... our soul has been restored Androcles. The very heart and soul of our people.” She wept.

The tears rolled down Androcles’s cheeks as he held his aunt and rested one hand on the smooth surface. “And we will honor them in death as they honored us with their lives and their deeds.” He whispered.

ENURRUA

“*Nubous lae!*” Martin gasped as he skidded to a halt after sliding down the opening in the floor and landing inside the now brightly lit room.

This caused Aricia and Dysea to turn towards him from where they stood among what appeared to be dozens of dragon eggs. Eggs that still pulsed with vibrant life. They watched Martin turn and catch For'mya as she slide gracefully down the incline after him and both Aricia and Dysea squealed softly in happiness and bolted to her. Their reunion was intense as first she shared a blistering kiss with Aricia and then quickly shifted to Dysea, all three of them pressed very intimately together. Kenny ignored them for he had seen it many times in the past and he moved up next to Martin, as he caught first Eirene who was in Cirith’s lap and then Fedor as they all came down the incline. Aricia and Dysea let out more squeals of delight and they pulled away from For'mya as they greeted Fedor and Eirene. For'mya could only smile in glorious joy and she glanced at Martin who was also watching. There was no hesitation on either Aricia or Dysea’s part, just as there had never been any hesitation among them, and they were quickly embracing Fedor and Eirene as if they were their children as well. Eirene and Fedor were not without their own happiness and Eirene’s eyes were teary while she squeezed her second elven mother tightly.

“How many?” Martin asked as he turned to look at Kenny.

“Near as we can tell skipper, close to a hundred.” Kenny answered. “And that is just in this room. There’s another similar chamber through that door across the room. It’s sealed but I can see them through the glass. And that other room opens into what appears to be some sort of corridor that moves north and south.”

“Where’s Helen and Arzoal?” Martin asked.

“They moved back down the tunnel we came in to find a way to that other room *Nauta Melme*. We passed a connecting tunnel coming here and Cody went with them.” Dysea’s voice spoke and Martin turned to see her lifting Fedor into her arms and hugging him now.

Martin lifted his eyes and followed several conduits and power nodes along the ceiling and walls. “There’s still power down here.” He stated.

Kenny nodded his head. “It appears to be coming from the other room and then out into the corridor.”

“There shouldn’t be power here Kenny.” Martin said.

“You’re telling me boss.” Kenny spoke with a nod. “When I said eggs, Arzoal just about went ballistic. She tried tearing up the floor before I told them about the other room. Then she went off down the corridor after Cody when he said he could find another way in.”

“Helen, Isheeni and Iriral followed them.” Dysea spoke once more. “*Nauta Melme*... these eggs... these eggs are over five thousand years old.”

“Man this isn’t good!” Martin said. “We got a Kavalian Task Force bearing down on us and you go and find a cave with five thousand year old dragon eggs in it!” He told Kenny.

“Hey!” Kenny declared defensively. “Aren’t you the one who always told us to be thorough?”

“Shit! Where is Arzoal and Helen damn it!” Martin snarled. “And how the hell is there power in a ship that is supposed to be dead and destroyed.”

They all heard the hissing sound and whirled around to see the large door opening and then Cody and Helen were standing there.

“We are right here.” Helen snapped.

“This should answer your question Skipper!” Cody spoke as he stepped out of the way and one of the gray spider drones appeared from around the corner softly chirping away. They were the same type drones that occupied CS41, only with slightly more beat up outer shells.

Martin and the others moved closer to them. “Drones?” He gasped.

“You better see this Skipper.” Cody said motioning them into the next room.

They quickly followed him into the next room which was much larger and they saw Arzoal on the deck, her head twisting back and forth as she tried to follow the wildly chirping drone that was dancing across her back and around her neck. It even slid across her snout several times, careful not to let its metal legs stab her in her eyes.

Martin! Arzoal exclaimed.

“Arzoal?” Martin asked looking at her bewildered. “Would you... would you care to fill me in?”

Martin it is wonderful! Arzoal spoke. *This is... this is Lead Drone 937. He... he survived! He survived and has kept these eggs alive all of these years!*

“Yeah... I knew the Drones were tough... but how did he and these eggs survive when you detonated the core?” Martin said. “And how has he got power to the ship after all this time?”

A loud series of multiply chirping noises came from the drone who was still moving around Arzoal’s back as if he had found a new friend. Arzoal watched him for a moment and then he stopped on her back and his legs bobbed him up and down on her scales in place several times.

He detected the core overloading and he established a shield around these two chambers. Arzoal explained. *They were connected to the main egg chamber above us but the eggs here needed different climate control to nurture and then hatch for they are pure Firespitter eggs. They were housed in different chambers below the main egg chamber. Drone 937 erected a force field powered by portable quantum generators within the rooms. When the core went critical they were able to withstand the explosion.*

“Arzoal... one of your Quantum Fusion Cores going critical should have vaporized this mountain and everything within three or four kilometers around it.” Martin spoke. “None of this should be here!”

Except the entire core didn’t go critical! She explained. *Once the drones detected the overload warnings they went into repair mode automatically. They were able to undo my sabotage of three of the four core Quantum Fusion Chambers before the remaining chamber exploded. Most of the drones were lost, but 937 and thirty three others survived! They have been using the three remaining cores to power what remains of the ship. Including these egg chambers!*

“How many eggs total?” Martin asked quickly.

“Ninety-seven in this room and it looks like close to two hundred total.” Cody replied before Arzoal answered. “I’m guessing Kenny was right then Skipper. This is what Andro said he felt?”

Martin looked at him. “That makes sense.” He said. “Now the question is why? Why now and why have we never felt them before?”

For'mya looked around quickly from where she stood clutching Aricia and Dysea’s hands. “Where are Fedor and Eirene?” She gasped. “Fedor! Eirene!” She barked turning to go back into the first chamber.

“Mothers! Mothers!” Eirene’s voice echoed and she came around the corner carrying the large greenish yellow egg wrapped in her arms. “The eggs spoke to us mothers! The eggs spoke to us!”

“Eirene!” For'mya exclaimed moving to her instantly and dropping to her knees. “Eirene give me the egg child. You might drop it!”

“We won’t drop them mother!” Fedor spoke as he came up behind his sister carrying an egg with similar coloring as looking just as large in his arms. “We could never drop them.”

For'mya looked at him as he stopped next to his sister. “What... what do you mean the eggs spoke to you?” For'mya asked.

“In our heads. Just like we do mother.” Eirene answered.

For'mya held her arms tightly as Martin settled to the deck next to her. Arzoal scooted closer across the floor as she listened with wide eyes. "What... what did they say Eirene?" He asked softly.

"They said they could feel her." Fedor said softly. "They said we were the ones and they could feel her here among them."

"Feel who Fedor?" Aricia asked gently as she settled to the deck on For'mya's opposite side.

Fedor met her azure colored eyes. "They could feel their grandmother."

Helen gasped loudly and her hands went to her mouth as she felt the massive surge of emotion through Arzoal. "Sister?" She gasped.

It... it can not be! Arzoal gasped pressing closer.

Martin turned to face her now. "Arzoal... a little history might be useful? You know what they are saying?"

Martin... my third daughter from my second clutch. Arzoal spoke ever so softly. *Her... her eggs were within the chamber when we destroyed it. Three of them. She was so... she was so livid with rage that we destroyed the chamber that she... she went insane. She would not listen to me or her mate. She left the mountain and attacked Chetak's forces alone in a fury. They... they killed her but not before she took several dozen of those foul beasts with her.*

Mother... mother you never told me this. Isheeni spoke now moving closer.

I could not bring myself to admit that it was my order that killed my grandchildren, and in essence my own daughter. Arzoal spoke in reply looking at her only remaining child. *I did not want to burden you with this knowledge Isheeni.*

Torma moved into the main chamber now. *That is how Androcles sensed them.* He said.

Arzoal's head snapped around to look at him. *Of course!* She gasped turning back to Martin. *We have known for many years that those of my blood would only bond with those of your bloodline Martin.*

Martin nodded. "Because of our Pralor blood and our connection within Mindvoice. Yes I know that." He said.

"We thought Andro and Elynth had tapped some sort of potential that we had not seen yet by sensing the life here from so far away." Dysea continued excitedly. "We were talking about it only a short time ago.

"They didn't discover some new power; they only tapped what is already within them. Within all of us!" Aricia said. "Andro and Elynth have always been able to sense their family, in some ways even more deeply than many of us because of their awareness. When they were connected to the Neural Booster for so long talking to Eirene and Fedor they must have sensed it then."

Sensed what? Arzoal asked.

Aricia turned to Eirene and Fedor as they stood there holding the eggs. "That Eirene and Fedor were to be bonded to the eggs they hold now. To your blood Arzoal. And in sensing this it led us here. They must have felt the connection on a level most of us would not sense."

Arzoal moved even closer to Eirene and Fedor and lowered her massive head closer to the eggs they held in their arms. *But I cannot feel them.* She said softly. *How...*

Arzoal... your shields sister. Helen spoke now. *Drop them completely. The eggs within these chambers would not have learned to use shields yet. They are probably calling out for you and you just can't hear them. Martin you should as well. You are a Talon Guardian and...*

Martin and Arzoal did so first and both of them were very nearly overwhelmed with the cry of nearly two hundred voices within their heads. Voices and echoes that resounded with joy and happiness at sensing others of their own kind. They could hear words filtering among the many voices, words they understood.

Elder Mother.

Talon Guardian.

Free.

Come for us.

If dragons had tear ducts, Arzoal's eyes would have been flooding with tears at this moment as the voices of so many she thought dead sang their songs within her mind. The voices of so many she thought she had killed. The first sounds of cracking shells began and soon it was like a cacophony of cracks and pecking noises and all around them the tips of wings, snouts, talon equipped feet, all of these began to burst through the

shells as every egg began to hatch at once. They could do nothing but watch in awe over the course of the next few minutes as every egg within the two chambers began to hatch.

“Son vada carians!” Helen gasped as she turned in her spot and watched.

Martin looked up at Arzoal. *“I thought Firespitter eggs couldn’t hatch without optimal conditions!”* He barked out.

Drone 937 was bouncing upon Arzoal’s back and chirping madly. Arzoal turned her eyes on Martin. *Drone 937 adjusted the environmental controls when we landed on the planet. He made optimal conditions within the two chambers.*

“He can do that?” Kenny gasped with wide eyes as shells began to burst fully open and the shapes and forms of so many newborn dragons began to come into view. Green, red, brown, tan, newborn dragons of all colors.

Arzoal’s eyes were focused on two however as she watched two greenish/yellow scaled hatchlings finally shed their shells and roll fully open. One of the hatchlings rolled to the side onto its back as its legs kicked madly. Laughing in pure joy, Eirene bent over and without so much as an ounce of fear reached out and grasped the hatchlings flopping wings. She helped the hatchling flip over and then flame/orange eyes were staring at her intently. Arzoal continued to watch as the darker scaled green dragon was staring up at Fedor who was squatting in front of him without a modicum of fear or hesitation. It was much more subtle bonding than they had ever witnessed, and simple light blue psychic shields burst into existence to engulf both the two dragon hatchlings and Eirene and Fedor, and then they were gone as the two dragons rubbed up against them repeatedly, the green scaled hatchling actually rising up with his forelegs and placing his talons on Fedor’s legs so that he could extend his snout out to touch Fedor’s face.

Where... where is our grandmother Fedor my brother? The soft male voice reached all of them.

Fedor glanced at his sister and a silent message passed between them. They simply assisted their new Bonded Brothers to turn their bodies on unstable legs and then they were facing the massive head that had pushed to within inches of them.

What... what are your names? Arzoal’s words were choked with emotion. *Please... tell me your names.*

I... I am Kdan. The hatchling in front of Fedor spoke first in a hesitant but clear voice.

I... I am Dnom. The hatchling in front of Eirene echoed.

Oh... oh by everything I have ever believed holy to me. Arzoal gasped.

Isheeni came up beside her mother and extended her head out on her long neck sniffing the two hatchlings. *I am... I am Isheeni. I am your mother’s sister.*

Have you come for us as our mother told us you would? Dnom asked.

She told you I would? Arzoal gasped.

We felt her die. Kdan spoke. *She said she did not realize that we had survived until it was too late. She said you would come for us and that we would be safe and strong one day. She said to be patient, that you would return. We have waited for so long.*

Arzoal released a whimper that no one had ever heard from her before and she lowered her head to touch their snouts. *Yes. Yes my handsome grandsons. I have come for you. We have come for all of you.*

The echo of one hundred and ninety-three new voices within Mindvoice was nearly deafening but Martin heard his implant beep and he touched his finger to his ear. *“Go Danny!”* He barked out.

“Ah... you might want to hurry up whatever it is you’re doing down there fervon.” Danny spoke. *“We’re going to have company real soon. And I don’t think they are coming here for dancing lessons.”*

“Shit!” Martin swore. *“Are the KADEN transports down?”* Martin asked.

“Landing now!” Danny answered. *“Sixty, ninety and one twenty of Endy. A hundred and fifty meters out! Jules reports that Captain Katsumi is now covering the Kavalian ship. The GREAT SOUL launched four PROTOSS-Class troop transports nine minutes out from the planet. They’ll be touching down in about six minutes from now. Kind of hard to believe they don’t know we are here.”*

Martin’s mind worked at light speed and he looked around at all the hatchlings, knowing there was no possible way he would leave them behind. *“Danny... we’ll be topside in under ten minutes. Whatever you do... don’t let those Kavalian bastards get close to this ship. Our numbers just increased by two hundred.”*

“Oh sure... two hundred! What the nubous are you talking about?” Danny snapped.

“You’ll see shortly fervon.” Martin told him.

“Jeez! I get all the shit details! Shit! We’ll make it happen Marty! Grab that Muton character on your way out. The Master Chief took him and his son into the ship to get what they needed. He should be just above you according to Tony’s locator.”

“We’ll be topside in four minutes.” Martin snapped. He turned and saw the hatchlings crowding around Arzoal, Torma, Isheeni, Aurith and Iriral in fascination. Everyone seemed to be chattering away at the same time and Martin did the only thing he could think of.

ENOUGH! He barked out in his command voice within Mindvoice.

The reaction was nearly instantaneous as every voice fell silent and nearly two hundred dragon hatchlings turned to look at him along with everyone else. They instinctively knew he was a Talon Guardian and one did not ignore a Talon Guardian, no matter how odd he looked standing among so many hatchlings.

This is a joyous time I understand. But there is danger fast approaching and we need to leave this place. I am Talon Guardian Martin... and that rather large and foreboding black dragon is my Bonded Brother Torma, who is also a Talon Guardian. Martin saw many hatchlings look at Torma in abject awe now. You will need to do exactly as we say. Some of those you see around you are bonded to dragons and I know you all feel the Elder Mother. We need to leave and we need to leave right now. We did not expect to find all of you here, but damned if I’m going to leave you here now.

Martin... how close are they? Arzoal asked. She had already known his role as Talon Guardian would never allow him to leave the hatchlings here. It was not a question that had ever entered her mind, for it had never entered his. None of them would leave them.

Too close. Martin answered her. *We’re going to have to fight our way off for sure. The KADEN transports are landing now. Start the hatchlings moving topside. Get as many as you can into the TYPE II Alpha and then the KADENs. Fill them to overflowing if you have too.*

For’mya stepped closer to him. “What are you going to do Martin Leonidas?” She asked.

Martin lifted his 190. “Buy us as much time as I can. Get moving... all of you.” Martin snapped. He turned to Kenny and Cody. “You two just became nursery guards. Torma... you’re with me.”

The hatchlings started chattering again as Martin and Torma made their way out of the chamber and into the corridor that Cody had led Arzoal and the others down.

Hatchlings! Arzoal barked. *They are Talon Guardians and they will die to protect you! I know it is so soon after your hatching, but you must get your legs under you now and follow us. We will not leave any of you, but now you must follow us. As quickly as your talons can carry you.*

ARC ROYAL

“No sign they detected us?” Akemi asked quickly.

“Negative Captain. They’re focusing all their arrays on Enurrua!”

“Talk about catching a break.” Akemi spoke as she got to her feet and looked at the holo image of the Kavalian female just to her right. “Lubina is it?”

“Yes.” Muton’s wife answered.

“Thank you for your trust.” Akemi spoke.

“You... you just saved my people with your actions Captain.” Lubina gasped. “All of us. I cannot... I cannot repay you this debt.”

“We aren’t out of trouble just yet.” Akemi spoke. “We can’t stay here Lubina.”

“I agree.”

“Let me slave your ship to mine with tractor beams.” Akemi spoke. “We have enough power to maneuver even if connected, but you need to drop your engines into standby mode and go with us.”

“I can not say your actions have not earned my trust Captain Katsumi.” Lubina said with a great deal of respect. “You are moving into a better position to defend your King and Queens I take it?”

Akemi nodded her head. “That includes your husband and your people as well.” She stated.

“Indeed. I will make it so.” Lubina said. “Give me two minutes.”

Akemi turned away from the active transmission. “Stand by to lock on with port and starboard ventral tractor beams! Adjust weight and mass variables to compensate! Once solid lock is obtained come about to course three seven nine three point one and prepare to open fire!”

“Captain! The *GREAT SOUL* is launching four *PROTOSS*-Class troop ships!” Akemi’s sensor operator called out. “Estimate ETA to atmospheric entry onto Enurrua is nine minutes ten seconds!”

“Shit! Let the King know!” Akemi barked out. “Starboard batteries to full! All starboard missiles tubes loaded with high explosive concussive missiles! We’ll be too close for Mark22s and I ain’t going to waste them!”

“All batteries online and responding!” The voice echoed.

“Prep a full saturation barrage into the *GREAT SOUL*! Everything we have! Take her out of the equation and we can deal with the others on our own terms! And jam whatever second class communications they got working! No sense in letting them know we are about to kick them square in the balls.” Akemi barked.

ENURRUA

Miseo turned at the strange sound and his eyes grew incredibly wide when he saw four huge dragons, one of whom filled the entire corridor completely, come barreling around the corner of the downward spiraled incline that he had seen Martin Leonidas and his dragon come up only moments before. The sounds were what drew his attention and suddenly he knew why.

The blue scaled dragon he now knew was bonded with For'mya was first in line, Eirene perched in the saddle on her back and holding tightly to a squirming greenish/yellow baby dragon that was perhaps two feet long and two feet high. Half a dozen other dragon hatchlings were clinging to the saddle on Aurith’s back, just behind Eirene. The picture was the same for the other three dragons that followed Aurith. Fedor was upon the azure scaled dragon, a green scaled hatchling perched in his lap and trumpeting out a horrific noise that the six behind Fedor were echoing. At least seven or eight resided on the backs of the second two dragons, and then he saw For'mya with three other women and two men herding what could only be several hundred dragon hatchlings along the floor, all of the hatchlings letting loose with that terrible trumpeting noise. Mixed in with those dragon hatchlings were dozens of spider like metal drones that looked as if they had seen better times.

For'mya saw him and without thinking she scooped up a hatchling in front of her and made her way to him. “Miseo? What are you doing?”

“Father!” Miseo answered as the red scaled dragon stared at him intently. “He is using his skills to get the map! He’s using different sections to get as clear a map as he can.”

“There’s no more time Miseo!” For'mya exclaimed. “We have to leave now!”

“I know but he...” Miseo stopped talking when Muton came dashing down the corridor to them. “Father!”

“One more Miseo!” Muton declared. “I need one more piece and the map will be as complete as we can make it!”

“Muton... Pusintin is landing troops!” For'mya shouted. “We have to go!”

“One piece For'mya!” Muton barked. “Each section I go to reveals a different piece of the map. I have one more to go to! I have too... or the map is useless!”

“It is useless if you are dead!” For'mya screamed at him. “I will not lose you Muton! Not after what you have done for me!”

“Then help me complete this map!” He snapped.

“Father you can’t...”

“Without the map we are lost Miseo! Without the map we can never go home!” Muton declared. “We have come so far! We can’t just give up now!”

For'mya didn’t hesitate. She turned and lowered the hatchling to the deck ushering it along with the others and her eyes found Kenny and Cody. “Kenny! Your 190!” She barked out holding out her hands.

Kenny didn’t question her orders and easily flipped his 190 to her but the questions in his eyes were evident. “What are you doing?” He asked.

“Keep going!” For'mya barked. “We have one section to go and then we will follow you! Go!” She turned back to Muton. “Where Muton and we must hurry!”

“This way!” Muton hissed as he began to head down the corridor once more.

Danny lowered the macrobinos from his eyes and looked at Martin beside him. “Bring back memories?” He asked softly.

Martin lowered his own glasses and met his gaze. “Yes... too many. And none of them particularly painless.”

“Two ships and roughly three hundred Puma Bane Shock Troops.” Danny said. “The pride of the KFI. Of course that doesn't include your asshole brother. We just might have a chance here. Why they didn't land a full load I have no idea. And no fighter escort in the skies either.”

“He's not my brother Dan.” Martin hissed. “He's a walking around dead man.”

“Ok... that works too.” Danny said. He brought his glasses back to his eyes. “Looks like a standard sweep pattern. They're moving quick though, not checking their rears.”

“They don't think anyone else is here.” Martin said softly. “That is why no fighters and so few troops. He thinks he's only after my *Kinsoaurgai* and Muton's people. Fucking idiot!”

“Ok... so you got all the brains. Brag, brag, brag.” Danny quipped. Danny pressed his finger to his ear. “Master Chief you got the same thing?”

Martin's eyes were focused however on his brother who was moving far back of the front line of Puma Bane Troops like the coward that he was. A ring of Puma Bane soldiers covered him like a blanket.

“Fucking coward.” Martin hissed once more as Tony's voice came over their implants.

“Same... same Danny.” Tony answered. “Trying to catch us between two forces.”

Martin reacted to this report like the consummate professional he was. He pushed all his emotion to the back. “Master Chief have they broken anyone to go for the *LEUGERS*?”

“Right out of the shoot Skipper.” Tony answered. “Looked to be about sixty. The rest seem to be heading right for where our people are loading.”

“Then they're tracking For'mya and the Kavalians in some other fashion.” Martin decided quickly. “Bugs on their clothes or something.”

“Seems like it.” Danny said. “They...”

The massive explosion to their east announced the death of the *LEUGERS* transport, the pillar of flame shooting above the trees from two kilometers away. They didn't know that the destruction of the ship killed nearly twenty Puma Bane troops outright.

“Uh-oh!” Danny commented. “That woke them up! They just slowed down and Puss nuts is pissed.”

“Anyone see T19s?” Martin threw out the question.

“Nothing visible.”

“Negative.”

“If they got them, they didn't bring them.”

Martin looked skyward. *Torma?*

I am ready.

Say hello to our unwanted guests brother. Martin told him.

Indeed!

There is a single word for a twenty-one meter long, six metric ton dragon encased in shimmering gold Dragon Armor.

That word is devastating.

Torma dove out of the sky from where he had been circling above the terrain below at five thousand feet with the PSG designed for dragons activated. He thought it hysterical that the little strap around his right foreleg could hide his large body, and he kept flipping it on and off during the trip here driving Isheeni crazy. He was the largest dragon living behind only Arzoal's twenty-one and a half meters, yet he had amazing grace and maneuvering skills thanks in no small part to his constant training regime with both Martin and his beloved dragon mate. Isheeni was widely known as the fastest living dragon in a straightaway and she could turn on a dime. Torma was not so proud as to not take pointers from his azure scaled dragon mate, and all of these skills

had translated into making him perhaps the most lethal of all living dragons. This is what he unleashed upon the unsuspecting Kavalians beneath him.

With demoralizing results.

His wings folded back along the sides, he rocketed downward to five hundred feet where he then snapped his massive wings to the side and sent a crack of soft thunder rolling across the landscape beneath him as he deactivated the PSG and became a hurtling six ton missile with only one intent.

“...find out what the fuck that was!” Pusintin snarled as his eyes took in the pillar of flame and smoke in the distance.

“Marshall... we’ve lost contact with the team moving to the *LEUGERS* transport!” The Puma Bane troop beside him reported as he listened to a bevy of shouting voices on the COM set he wore over his head. “The Commander of the Second Cadre has sent a scout team to investigate but he fears from the size of the explosion that the *LEUGERS* has been destroyed!”

“They booby trapped their own ship?” Pusintin gasped. “Why the hell would they do that?”

“He also reports the sounds of ships in the target area.” The officer spoke. “Something passed over his position only thirty seconds ago but he could see nothing.”

Pusintin looked at him. “Shrouded ships!” He exclaimed. “The fucking Union must be here! Order Popal to go active and launch fighters. There has to be Shrouded ships in the area. It’s the only reason they would have destroyed their only way off this planet! We...”

The soft, rolling thunder made Pusintin turn as the sound cascaded over him. He looked to his west and his eyes grew wide when he saw the massive dragon barreling towards them at impossible speed and encased in shimmering gold armor.

“Dragon!” He screamed too late. “Dragon!”

As Pusintin threw his body behind an overturned log, concerned only with protecting his own life, Torma rocketed over the top of his position. He let out a deafening trumpet and then cut loose with a stream of super heated breath from only a hundred feet in the air as he came in for a landing with his huge wings flared to the sides. Puma Bane Troops were the finest trained KFI soldiers, each of them undergoing rigorous lessons to control the inbred fear of dragons that all of the Kavalian species held. As the golden monstrosity landed among them, his super heated breath burning a swath of trees and plants and Kavalian troops, that training failed the Puma Bane troops utterly and they turned and ran. Torma had learned long ago how to direct his stream of super heated breath, and even how to make it last as long as he could possibly sustain it. As he swept his head over the area in front of him slowly, that three thousand five hundred degree breath scorched everything in its path. Kavalians unfortunate enough to be in the path of that breath were instantly incinerated. Fur and skin melted and was burnt to a crisp, as the screams of dozens began to fill the area. As he completed his sweep with his breath, Torma looked back to see several burning Kavalians screaming out their pain and staggering to his left. He snapped his left wing forward with crushing power and snarled with satisfaction as the strip of dragon armor that protected his wing bone snapped and crunched into the bodies of the howling Kavalians, sending their now broken and burning bodies sailing into the air in several different directions.

Several Kavalians who had survived the concentrated blast of heated air popped up from behind the fallen trees and few boulders they had hidden behind and began to fire their weapons wildly at the behemoth that had swooped in silently and devastated their number so effectively. They could only stare wide eyed as their projectile rounds bounced harmlessly off the combined psychic shield and Dragon Armor encased horror in front of them. With a trumpet of contempt, Torma sent his Heavy Horn tail smashing out to apply justice. The one meter wide slab on the end of his muscular tail was also encased in Dragon Armor and combined with the vicious speed it was traveling at, of the six Kavalians who had rose up to fire at him, only one survived the impact. Five of his comrades were killed instantly as that tail shattered nearly every bone in their upper bodies and sent them hurtling through the trees with shocking speed. The lone survivor was saved only because he had been protected from the full force of the blow by his two comrades in front of him. He did not come away unscathed however, as his body was propelled with overwhelming force through the air from the impact and didn’t stop until he slammed helplessly into the base of the six meter wide tree, both of his legs shattered and nearly all of his ribs broken like so many twigs.

As quickly as it had begun, it was over. Torma reached for the sky with a final bellow of anger and quickly engaged his PSG as his massive wings propelled him upward with amazing speed.

Pusintin leaped up from behind the now smoking log he had taken cover behind, his eyes wide in terror. He had never been under fire from a dragon before and to say that it was totally unsettling would be an understatement. He got his wits about him quickly however and grabbed for his junior aide. "Push forward!" He screamed. "Stay in the timber! The dragon can't attack if you are in the timber! Leave the wounded! Have Kalis meet me at the target location with his team! Do it!" He screamed before turning and looking at the half dozen Puma Bane troops who staggered to their feet behind him. "All of you with me!" He barked out the order.

Pusintin took one last look at the devastation the dragon had wrought and then snatching his rifle off the ground he began a sprint into the deep timber followed by six of his men. The further his legs carried him away from the scene of death and destruction, the more his anger grew. And the more he was able to push the growing fear in his belly down.

Martin lowered his macrobinos when he saw his brother break for the timber leaving behind his battered men.

"He's going for For'mya!" He barked out. "He can probably smell her by now!"

Danny looked at him. "Go *fervon!*" He snapped. "We're going to pull back! We don't need you here! Go!"

Martin didn't hesitate and with a flash of silver white light he was racing away from Danny in wolf form. All three and a half plus feet at the shoulder and nearly four hundred pounds of raven black fur and teeth. Danny watched him for a second and then touched his implant.

"Torma laid them flat!" Danny barked. "Those of you with long eyes, four rounds apiece and then pull back! The rest of you pull back towards the *TYPE II* now! The Skipper is on the move! No fucking heroics from any of you! We're getting off this rock together!"

"Fucking A!" A voice echoed.

"And here I was just beginning to enjoy the weather!"

"We're rolling Danny!" Julie's voice was next.

Danny was getting to his feet and beginning to move back. "Jules... damn you... if you die again I swear Marty and I will fucking haunt your dreams for eternity!"

Julie's voice held soft laughter and warmth. "Not this time Danny boy! Not this time!"

"Endith?" Dan barked.

"All the *KADENs* are away!" Endith's voice responded. "We got about fifty shrieking little dragons onboard along with everyone but For'mya and Muton."

"What?" Danny hissed as he broke into a run.

"She was with Muton helping him get his map!" Endith answered. "She hasn't come back yet."

"Pusintin is moving for the ship!" Danny exclaimed. "Fuck! Marty is going to be outnumbered like ten to one!"

And then Daniel Simpson shifted to his wolf form in a silver white flash of light and he was racing through the timber around him.

ARC ROYAL

"Captain Katsumi!" The voice bellowed. "Detecting increased power readings from the *GREAT SOUL's* landing bays! They are getting ready to launch fighters!"

Akemi came to her feet in an instant now. "We're out of time!" She barked loudly. "Range to target?"

"Fifteen thousand four hundred! Within the envelope of all weapons!"

"Fuck it! Drop the Shroud! Full saturation barrage on the *GREAT SOUL* to port and launch the Mark 22s on the *DIATAGAs* to starboard! All batteries free! All batteries free!"

The *ARIZONA*-Class had been created to be the premier Strike Carrier in the Union Fleet, but in her design, Ben O'Connor had thrown in the power of a Strike Cruiser as well. He had wanted the ship to be able to kick ass no matter what it had to do, and in many ways even he had been surprised at what the engineers had built. Even without her complement of fighters and fighter bombers, the *ARIZONA*-Class *ARC ROYAL* was still a deadly and extremely capable weapons platform. As the Shroud dropped, the *ARC ROYAL* was fully exposed. Even though the Kavalian built ship, slightly longer and wider, was slaved to her belly by almost a dozen tractor beams, it did not deter her from unleashing her full firepower. And while the two ships looked embarrassingly odd connected together as they were, looks counted for nothing in this battle.

The moment her Shroud came fully down, both sides of the *ARC ROYAL* lit up in a light show that shamed many of the firework celebrations that they had on Earth. It appeared as if they could reach out and touch the *PRIDE OF PUMAS*, while in reality there were still fifteen thousand meters between the two ships. Ten Type I Terra Series turrets, fifteen Type II Terra Series turrets, two full port side missile batteries, 30 Quad Pulse Cannon Point Defense turrets and six Photonic Torpedo Launchers erupted simultaneously, the devastating force of the saturation barrage slamming into the *GREAT SOUL* just as their Jaguar Mark II fighters began to pour out of their launch tubes.

Those fighters were shredded into little bits as great swaths of the *GREAT SOUL*'s hull began to blast apart from the sheer magnitude of the firepower being poured into. A full three thousand meters of the starboard side of the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* rocked with the intensive and unforgiving saturation barrage being slammed into its right side. Of the forty fighters that had tried to launch, none on the starboard side survived the barrage, while only nine from the port side launch tubes escaped being clipped by their own launch tubes as they exited. The crushing force of the barrage actually caused the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* to angle downward, sending many of the fighters launching from the port side into unrecoverable spins before they were clear of the launch tubes. Those nine fighters lasted perhaps twenty seconds more as the Quad Pulse Cannon turrets on the *ARC ROYAL* shifted their primary fire to the fighters automatically. Each of those nine fighters were consequently blasted into small pieces as well.

In total, twenty M22A ZMF missiles had been launched from the *ARC ROYAL*'s starboard missile batteries. Twenty missile bays, ten per battery, and twenty of the most lethal and advanced ship killing missile within the Union inventory were airborne. Each of the eight *DIATAGAs* that had accompanied the *PRIDE OF PUMAS* had two missiles targeted on it, with four drawing an extra missile. Akemi watched with some satisfaction as each of these ships began to maneuver wildly in order to try and evade the missiles. Apparently, these ship captains were experienced enough to know that Union anti-ship missiles were especially powerful and you could not stand there and let the missile hit you. It wouldn't matter with the Zero Matter Fusion warhead, but the Kavalians didn't know that. The slowest of the *DIATAGAs* to react was the first to die as the two M22A "Skipper" missiles locked on her scorched right through their shields and past point defense turrets that could not track the nearly invisible missiles. The *DIATAGAs* were the long range missile ships for the Kavalian Fleets and used as orbital bombardment platforms as well. They were never designed to be the sole defensive ship that was assigned to a *GREAT SOUL*. Both M22A missiles plowed into the exposed missile battery platform under the *DIATAGA* and detonated. The resulting explosion literally blew upwards into the main decks of the ship and severed the *DIATAGA* completely in half. Before the last flames had been sucked dry by the vacuum of space on that ship, the "Skipper" missiles were reaching their other targets and seven more *DIATAGAs* became victims of the small, yet totally overpowered Zero Matter Fusion missiles.

Akemi gripped her chair arms tightly as her eyes took all of this in. She had never in a thousand years expected to get such a devastating first shot and it showed on her face. "Report!" She screamed.

"Two *DIATAGAs* destroyed outright! Three more have lost main power and are drifting! The other three are heavily damaged. No shields and no weapons!" Her First Officer barked back.

"The *GREAT SOUL* is maneuvering away!" Another voice chimed in. "Main power is fluctuating, I'm reading seven different hull breaches, and numerous internal explosions! Her shields and engines are down! No emissions from her weapons!"

"Enough! We have a King and three Queens to protect!" Akemi declared quickly. "Back to base course and reengage the Shroud!"

"Captain! *KADEN* transports are inbound!" Another voice shouted.

Akemi nodded. “Burst them our position and have them activate SDAPs” She snapped. “The tractors on our guests?”

“Holding firm Captain!”

“Remind me to kiss the engineers who built this ship!” She barked out.

“Not without my approval!” Her First Officer and lover called across the bridge with a brilliant smile.

Akemi smiled as well as she looked at the arm of her chair and began typing. “Once we have recovered the *KADENs*, move to three seven nine two point six. Holding stations. All weapons are still free! Let’s get the rest of our people and get the hell out of here before their buddies show up from near the Jump Gate! They have to know what is going on by now and we can’t fight them all with our guest attached to our belly!”

ENURRUA

“Muton... we’ve got to go now!” For'mya declared as she looked at him.

Muton’s hands were pressed tightly to the bio-mechanical wall of the ship, his eyes tightly shut.

“Almost... almost there!” He gasped between clenched teeth.

“Muton... we can’t wait!”

For'mya turned rapidly at the sound of running feet, bringing the P190A3 around quickly until she saw it was Miseo running down the corridor. She lowered the weapon. “Miseo!” She almost shouted.

“We must go now!” Miseo exclaimed. “The last of your transports has left the surface! Your other ship For'mya? The TYPE II? Where is it?”

“Not far. Perhaps three hundred meters east from the entrance once we exit. But we need to leave now!” For'mya snapped.

“Father... father she is right!” Miseo barked. “We have to go!”

Muton’s hands dropped and he whirled towards them. “I have it! I have all the pieces!” He shouted as he typed furiously on the data pad.

“Can we leave now?” Miseo asked his father.

Muton finished typing and jammed the data pad into his small belt pouch. “Of course!” He stated. “I can put the pieces together when we are away from this place and under better circumstances!”

“This way!” For'mya snapped. “I can track the others with my nose better. We need to move!”

Miseo and Muton did not question her this time and they fell in behind her quickly as they made their way back to the entrance of the ship.

Pusintin stared at the waterfall in front of him, his hand holding the small homing device. His Puma Bane troops were set of in a defensive position around him as Kalis and his fourteen soldiers sprinted up to them from the west. Kalis didn’t pause and moved up beside his father quickly.

“Father?” He asked.

Pusintin looked at him. “This doesn’t make any sense.” He spoke. “The receiver says she is within a hundred meters of where I am! There is nothing!” He hissed sweeping his hand in front of him. “And her scent is intermittent.”

“Is something distorting the signal?” Kalis asked.

“No. It’s clear.”

“Father... why do we need this female?” Kalis asked rapidly. “The Union has forces on the planet who are here to get her. We should just leave now before we suffer more losses!”

“No!” Pusintin snarled. “I need her! She is mine now and I need her as leverage against the boy! If I have her, I can make him do whatever I want!”

Kalis looked at his father oddly. “Father... you... you don’t actually care for this elf bitch do you?” He gasped.

Pusintin looked at his son, anger surging through him for a moment. He quickly got hold of those emotions however. "She is... she is wolf Kalis." Pusintin told his son. "And she is much stronger than the wolf mate I had before I became Kavalian."

"She is also an elf!" Kalis snapped. "An elf female who hates you for tricking her and an elf who resists even our most basic of laws for females!"

"I don't care!" Pusintin snarled. "She..."

"Marshall..." One of the Puma Bane troops hissed softly motioning with his hand.

Pusintin looked at him quickly and then followed his motion. His eyes grew wider and darker as he saw movement behind the edge of the massive waterfall a hundred meters away. He saw her golden blond hair first as she came out from under the crashing water leading two Kavalians. "Six of you move around and head them off from the front! Kalis... the rest of you with me!"

"Father... this is not wise!" Kalis hissed.

"Shut up and follow me or go back to the ship!" Pusintin snarled at his son. "I intend to get her back! She is mine now!"

Martin Leonidas ran.

He ran as if the Hounds of Hades themselves were after him.

Four inch wide paws with black steel talons were barely touching the ground as he propelled his body at speeds that were nearly unbelievable for a wolf his size. His shoulders were slung low, his chest rumbling in exertion, as he drove his near four hundred pounds of muscled wolf body across the landscape with only one purpose. Three inches shy of four feet tall at the shoulders; this raven colored wolf was the largest Lycavorian to have lived since the time of Resumar. And Martin knew well how to play at his size.

Three times his enemies had harmed his mates. Three times he had failed them because he had been soft. First his beloved Aricia, the youngest, most adventurous and most intense of his Queens. The one who he would always instinctively reach for first because of the pureness of her own Lycavorian blood, the sweetness of her lavender and coca scent and her status as his sacred *Anome*. The woman who knew him better than anyone who lived. Then his enemies took his beautiful *Melda Min* from him and attempted to harm and rape her. The first he had turned and the one who had loved him without question since the first day their eyes met. His platinum haired *Melda Min*, who was his calm and sensibility among the storm in nearly any given situation.

Then they took his *Kinsoargai* from him.

The Voice of his Heart. The woman, who had been with him, carried him through that most horrible time after Joric had taken Aricia. She had been the one thing that kept him from throwing all thought and caution to the wind and fighting until the High Coven had killed him. She had been his reason for continuing on. His For'mya had been forced to submit to his foul brother, forced to bear his children, all while thinking he was dead. He would carry that shame for the remainder of his years Martin knew. The shame that had he been tougher and smarter, none of them would have had to suffer as they did because of him. It was a shame he would gladly try to make up for by loving each of them until they could stand it no more. He would make up for it by never allowing harm to come to any of them ever again. By never holding anything of himself back from them again. He would bathe each of them in the full force of his aura, letting them know how much he loved each of them, even as he wrapped his mind within theirs so they could feel every last bit of his love.

He would never fail them again. And no would ever succeed in taking any of his mates again as long as he had breath left in his lungs and blood pumping in his body.

This purpose is what carried Martin Leonidas through the timber faster than he had ever run before. Every muscle, every sinew, every cartilage and bone moving in perfect harmony as his engine, his heart, drove his body. Clouds of dirt and leaves lifted into the air as he turned and cut, dodging low hanging branches, and scattering the small wildlife that remained here on Enurrua. They were very abundant now that there was no one here to hunt them. However, none of them wanted anything to do with that black wolf monstrosity moving through the timber like a dark wrath intent on inflicting terrible death upon those it finally discovered.

And death is exactly what Martin Leonidas carried with him.

A death he would unleash with no hesitation and no regret upon those who would try to take his *Kinsoargai* from him again. Upon those who would try to take any of his Queens from him in the future. This

would be the message he would send now to any and all who thought to do what his brother and the Kavalians had done.

A message of death incarnate.

For'mya led them quickly down the slight outcropping of rock when they reached the bottom of the small valley. They had slid more than walked down the hundred and fifty meters to the bottom of the valley beside the waterfall and For'mya immediately turned them east where she knew Endith had set the *TYPE II Alpha* down in a clearing barely large enough to fit the ship. She gripped her 190 tightly, all of her senses on high alert. She caught many scents on the wind, all of them strange, but none that she could tell were Lycavorian. She could feel the brilliant presence of Martin within Mindvoice as he grew closer to her and her heart sang in blissful happiness. To discover that he still lived after she thought she had watched him die was very nearly too much. Then to experience the shame she felt for responding to Pusintin in such a manner while he raped her and impregnated her and then gave birth to his children. Yes it had been forced upon her and she had been a pawn that was used by Pusintin, knowing how her body would react while she was in Phase to the 'death' of her mate. She had not known what to expect when she first saw him there. Would he hate her? Dismiss her? Knowing that he still lived caused the feelings of betrayal to come crashing down upon her when she finally stood in front of him.

Until his all consuming aura had wrapped around her and made her feel what she had desired to feel for over two decades.

There was no betrayal in his mind. He felt only shame for what he had allowed to happen to her, and an unquenchable craving for her and all of his Queens. His love for her, for all of them, it was like being wrapped within a heated blanket that took away all of your fears and doubts. And standing there in front of her it had radiated like the beam of a brilliant light on a dark night. His aura, an aura that no Lycavorian would ever be able to match, and now the only aura that would ever elicit any reaction from her ever again For'mya knew. She had felt the force of his full aura and it had very nearly overwhelmed her, until his mind wrapped around her and acted as a filter allowing her to feel everything to its fullest extent and remain totally in control of her senses. Senses that were screaming out for him in every way. His total love and the acceptance for Eirene and Fedor, unquestioning and complete, just as it was for all of his children no matter that they were his foul brother's blood children. Now they were Martin Leonidas's children, and he would raise them and love them as if they had come from his loins. And they would know the adoration and devotion of a father.

And Martin would fulfill his promise to her just as his aura told For'mya he would and soon they would have the girl she so wanted to give him. These were the things that filled her mind as they moved. She wanted him; she wanted him to have her in every way possible. She wanted Aricia and Dysea and Cirith. She wanted to feel herself wrapped within their loving arms and be experiencing the pleasure and happiness she had once thought lost to her. These were the things that...

For'mya came to an abrupt halt, causing Muton and Miseo to almost crash into her from behind. Her hands tightened on the 190 as her dark brown eyes instantly changed to her wolf persona and her fangs burst forth. For'mya didn't move as the breeze washed across her face and she detected the scents.

Kavalians.

"For'mya?" Muton asked softly as Miseo saw her body language and began to search the area around them with his eyes.

"Go back. Hurry!" For'mya whispered softly. "Move quickly and without sound. Kavalians."

Muton looked past her as his eyes grew wide and he immediately began to inch away from her back down the trail as Miseo guided him with one hand and held his weapon with the other. For'mya began to follow, inching her body back slowly as she followed Muton and Miseo back the way they had come.

Danny's paws kicked up gouts of dirt and leaves as he skidded to a halt, his wolf eyes watching as Martin's body disappeared through some trees roughly half a mile in front of him. His chest was heaving in exertion, his dark brown fur standing up on end all along his powerful back. His wolf eyes cut right when he

saw a flash of movement through the trees and they grew wider when he saw Julie unwrap the shadows from around her body and stop blurring, her face and eyes looking where Martin had disappeared into the timber.

Jules! Danny screamed out within Mindvoice and he saw her head snap around, her keen vampire eyes searching for and finding where he stood almost immediately.

Danny!

I ordered you and the others back to the ship! Danny growled.

Fuck you Simpson! Julie snapped back at him. *I love him too Danny and I'm not losing him! Not to some Kavalian puke faced faggots!*

Shit! Danny exclaimed.

Danny... Danny I've never seen him move so fast! Julie declared. *How... I can feel his rage Danny. It's... I've never felt anything like it from him before!*

I have! Danny announced. *On Ukwav! After they took Aricia from him!*

How... how did he get so powerful Danny? Julie barked.

I don't know! But I know he's about to unleash a living hell on whoever is chasing For'mya! Danny spoke.

Not alone he isn't! Julie snarled. *I lost the two of you once! I refuse to let it happen again!*

Then let's go back our brother up Jules! Danny barked.

His paws twisted and Daniel Simpson exploded forward once more, propelling his two hundred and eighty pound wolf body forward like a gunshot. Out of the corner of his wolf eyes he saw Julie blur in motion once more and the shadows consumed her body. Whatever was going to happen, Danny had a feeling that they were going to see a part of Martin Leonidas that his brother had yet to reveal to anyone.

And it wasn't going to be pretty.

The two sharp reports had brought them up short as two kinetic rounds punched into Muton's chest and flung his body back against them, knocking both For'mya and Miseo off balance.

"FATHER!" Miseo screamed as his father slumped into his arms, his chest a mass of quickly spreading red.

"Muton! No!" For'mya's voice followed as she scrambled to the side and helped Miseo lower him to the floor of the forest.

They had made it almost back to the wide river where they could cut north and move around the Kavalians in front of them when Pusintin appeared with nearly two dozen Puma Bane troops and holding a large automatic in his hand. For'mya could only watch helplessly as she saw two separate tongues of flame reach out from the weapon, Pusintin's face a mask of self satisfaction as he pulled the trigger.

For'mya gripped Muton's hand as the Puma Bane troops closed in around them. *"Muton! Oh Muton I am so sorry!"*

Muton spit up blood and shook his head painfully. *"Not... not your fault!"* He spat in great pain, Miseo holding his father's body in his arms.

"That's for betraying me you fuck!" Pusintin's voice carried to them as he walked up with Kalis beside him.

Two Puma Bane troops moved up behind Miseo and jammed their weapons into his back as he tried to rise. He froze as For'mya spun around and got in front of Pusintin blocking his aim.

"You monster!" She snarled viciously, her eyes and fangs still fully changed and very exposed.

"You shut up bitch!" Pusintin screamed at her. *"I'll teach you to be a proper mate soon enough!"*

For'mya's fangs snapped together as she hissed at him. *"Not nubous likely!"* She spat at him.

"Where are my children?" Pusintin roared as he stepped forward and slapped her hard across the face. The bow knocked her to the ground hard, her soft golden hair flying in all directions. *"Where is my son?"*

For'mya lifted her head from the ground and let fly with a glob of spit mixed with blood which struck Pusintin's boot. *"He is not your son! They are not your children! They will never be your children!"* She howled at him. *"They are my mate's children!"*

"I am your fucking mate bitch!" Pusintin screamed at her. *"I am your mate now! And you will do as I say!"*

For'mya wiped the blood from her lips where his blow had cut her bottom lip and looked at him. "You... you are nothing!" She hissed vehemently. "You... you are nothing compared to him!"

"I'm nothing?" Pusintin shouted. "He's fucking dead! Dead do you hear me! I had him killed and now you are mine you stupid bitch! I'm going to have you begging me to fuck you with my big cock in every hole for what you have done! I'll have you whimpering for more just like before!"

For'mya laughed out loud now as she pushed herself up on her knees glaring at him and positioning her body in front of Muton. "Your big cock?" She spat at him feeling Martin so close to her now. So very close. "You call that little thing between your legs big? I may have been whimpering for more Pusintin... but that's only because I couldn't feel your pathetic meat inside me!"

Pusintin's eyes nearly bugged completely out of his head at her dig against his manhood. He reached down and grabbed her long hair painfully. "You disrespectful elf bitch!" He roared. "I treated you good! I never hurt you! You are mine For'mya! You can't help it anymore! You will only cry out for my blood! My cock! And there is nothing you can do about it! It's part of your nature now!"

For'mya met his eyes unwavering. "Better check your facts on that." She snarled bravely, Martin's presence infusing her with love and strength and confidence in her place. "You are miniscule when compared to Martin Leonidas!"

"Don't speak his name again damn you!" Pusintin roared into her face as he yanked on her hair once more. "He is dead! Dead do you..."

The wolf howl that followed echoed magnificently across the terrain, seeming to come from all directions. The nearby timber reverberated with the sound, deep and resonant in its tone. Pusintin released For'mya's head and looked up as Kalis and his Puma Bane troops began to look all around them at the timber. Pusintin looked down at her again. There was something familiar about that howl. Something he hadn't heard in thousands of years. Not since he was a small boy and...

Pusintin's eyes grew wide then and instinctively he unleashed his full male wolf aura on For'mya. It should have turned her into a babbling female begging to be taken by her mate no matter where she was. For'mya just knelt there staring back at him with cold death in her dark brown eyes, completely unaffected by what should be overwhelming her senses and her mind to the point of uncontrollable sexual need.

For'mya's blood stained lips broke into a huge smile, her fangs protruding viciously from her upper jaw and her eyes holding nothing but hate in them.

"He's here!" She snarled those two words at him with vitriol and pride all mixed together in her tone.

"Father!" Kalis screamed grabbing his arm and pointing up.

Pusintin looked up to see the silver flash of white light above them as the wolf shifted back to human form just after leaping from the ledge two hundred meters above them. It left in its place a man in glimmering Dragon Armor and Pusintin's eyes grew even wider as that behemoth of a black dragon suddenly appeared out of nowhere just above that figure of a man, his massive wings flared wide as he glided over that falling man and cut loose with a stream of super heated breath. Only that stream of superheated breath was not directed at those on the ground, it was concentrated on the figure in the golden armor. And then Torma let loose with a trumpet of power and tipped his wings before reaching for the sky once more. That figure of a man, now encased in a glowing, superheated psychic shield of power executed a flip in mid air, the Nehtes appearing and extending in his hand and then he landed a hundred meters away, driving that Nehtes into the ground in front of him with staggering power.

Pusintin and the Puma Bane troops could only stare in horror as the ground in front of him buckled and heaved upward and then was racing at them with incredible speed like a tidal wave on the water. Pusintin and the others could not get out of the way in time and that wave of earth buckled underneath their feet, and then proceeded to flip them into the air and toss them about like rag dolls while oppressive heat surrounded them, singeing their hair and burning their exposed skin. The most amazing thing that struck Pusintin as he was tossed through the air, that wave of earth did not strike For'mya and Muton. It swept around them like it was being guided by some unseen hand, leaving them completely unharmed. He grunted with pain as he slammed back to the earth some hundred meters from where he had been standing, no Kavalian left near For'mya and the traitors. Ignoring the pain in his body he scrambled to his feet, seeing Kalis and the other Puma Bane troops staggering about as they rose. They heard the trumpets in the background and could see four other dragons join the obsidian scaled beast circling the small clearing and unleashing roars every few seconds. He watched them as

they all landed on the ridge above, the one the man had leaped from and they just stared down. Pusintin snapped his head around and glared at the figure, now only fifty meters away, his back to them. The golden Dragon Armor encased every portion of his body, the joints of his elbows and knees sectioned to allow freedom of movement.

The figure rose to his full height, the Nehtes going into the ground beside him as he held it and turned to face Pusintin and his troops. Pusintin held in the intake of breath as he saw those burning yellowish eyes through the eye slits in the armor. He could just barely make out the long wolf fangs that were partially hidden behind the full cheek shields over the top of the Mark IV ArmorPly helmet. Pusintin knew how the Dragon Armor worked, how it was extended from special slots on the Union's ArmorPly body armor. The air around the figure rippled with psychic power and heat from where the dragon had sprayed the figure as it fell. Somehow the person was still alive and not only containing that burning heat, but making it swirl around his body which was encased by the light blue psychic shield.

The yellow/golden eyes blinked once and Pusintin heard the voice. A voice from the abyss of the grave. The voice of a dead man.

"Hello Pleistarchus... my brother!" Martin growled. "Remember me."

Pusintin's eyes could not grow any wider than they were and every alarm bell in his head began to sound loudly and insistently. All of them telling him to turn and run just as fast as he possibly could.

"No!" Pusintin screamed. "No! You are dead! I... I watched you die!"

Martin's laugh sent shivers down the spine of all those watching, which now included Danny and Julie who had appeared beside For'mya and Miseo almost magically. It was a cruel laugh, a laugh of a man who had had too much taken from him. The laugh of a man who was done allowing others to hurt those he loved and cared for. The laugh of a man who had finally reached the end of his tolerance and would allow no more. Julie had some medical training and she immediately began to try and treat the critically injured Muton, while Danny settled to the ground beside For'mya ready to die to protect his brother's mate. All of them could now smell Aricia, Dysea, Cirith and Helen leading the rest of Martin's team through the timber just up the trail, their scents now filtering down to them in a rush. Duewa clung to Thoti's arm as they rushed forward and she didn't hesitate as she dropped to her knees beside Muton. For'mya looked at her wide eyed.

"Duewa?" She gasped. "Help him please! Don't let him die!"

Duewa was not the same woman she was only a few short months ago and she glanced at For'mya. She was now wolf, and now free of everything that had held her back. She was also much more confident in her abilities. "He will not die!" She hissed. "Not if I have anything to say about it."

Kenny, Pablo and Cody led the rest of the team forward of where For'mya sat on the ground, taking up defensive positions. Kenny's Shi Viska was the first to flash into existence, followed by seventeen others and soon For'mya, Muton and Miseo were behind a wall of golden shields. Aricia skidded to a halt beside For'mya, engulfing her in her arms as Dysea nearly collided with her on the opposite side.

"For'mya!" Aricia gasped as she pulled her lover and fellow Queen close to her.

"I'm ok!" She insisted. "I'm... I'm fine!"

"You are not fine!" Dysea barked as she reached out with her hand and wiped away the small blotches of blood on For'mya's lips. "He hit you!"

For'mya smiled warmly. "This?" She asked wiping her hand across her lips with a smile. "I barely felt this."

Helen stopped behind Aricia placing her hand on For'mya's shoulder though her eyes never left where Martin stood. "We must go now Aricia!" She spoke urgently. "We must go now!"

"*Feravomir?*" Aricia looked up at her with concern in her voice. "What is wrong?"

"We... we do not want to witness what is going to happen here." Helen warned them. "Can you not feel it child? He has... he has reached within himself and drawn out the essence of his full power. We..."

"Death and I didn't agree on a lot of things!" They heard Martin speak the words. ***"We decided it was better if I left."***

“Too late!” Danny hissed knowing what Helen meant.

Helen lifted her hands and without so much as a second glance, Arzoal’s power adding to hers from above, she erected a soft white psychic shield around their entire group. It was a power none of them had ever seen her use before and they all looked at her. Helen shrugged her slim shoulders. “No one said Arzoal and I do not train.” She snapped. “Prepare yourselves my family and friends, the deaths you are about to witness will be quite frightening to say the least.”

“Death and I didn’t agree on a lot of things!” Martin spoke as he glared at his older brother with murder in his yellow/gold eyes. “We decided it was better if I left.”

“No!” Pusintin shouted. “This is not possible!”

“I’ve come to collect on debts that you owe brother. Debts to our people for your actions through the centuries! Debts to me for laying your vile hands upon what is mine and for what you have done to my beloved *Kinsoaurgai*!” Martin snarled with coldness. “I’ve come to take your head brother and return it to our mother as she has asked me too. I will not break a promise to our mother.”

“No!” Pusintin roared again. “No!”

Martin laughed again but it held no mirth in it. “What’s the matter brother?” He spoke sarcastically. “You don’t believe that you failed in killing me? You think very highly of yourself you know. Big Marshall Pusintin dick head brother of mine. No mercy. No surrender. You subvert the words of our father with your very breath! You spit upon everything he stood for with every breath you take!”

“You know nothing!” Pusintin growled at Martin. “You did not even know him! You have never spoken to him! You have never seen him!”

“That is where you are wrong brother.” Martin said. “I *have* seen him. I *have* spoken to him. Every time I lay my head down to sleep and call to him he comes to me and we talk and he tells me so many things. I know him better in death than you ever knew him in life!” Martin barked. “Let me give you a gift brother. The gift of mercy that he showed to me. Albeit only for a time, for you cannot delay the inevitable I’m afraid.”

Pusintin hissed at him loudly. “You know nothing!” He screamed again. His attention and the attention of all the Kavalians was on Martin. “You...”

Martin lifted his hand with his palm towards Pusintin and you could clearly see the pulsing of the psychic power radiating from his palm. Without any warning Kalis was yanked from his feet and rocketed through the air towards Martin. He covered the sixty meters in four heartbeats and then he was gasping for air in Martin’s armored fist as his fingers closed around Kalis’s throat. Not enough to crush his windpipe or larynx but enough to make it very difficult to breath and cause Kalis to claw at his hand with strong fingers. Kalis could feel the intense heat radiating from the psychic shield around his uncle, only the part of his arm from the elbow up to the hand squeezing his throat now free of that shield.

Pusintin took three steps towards them but stopped.

“So nephew...” Martin spoke softly gazing at Kalis’s dark blue eyes. “Your father stands there. He will not come for you Kalis. He will not try to protect you from me. In truth... he does not care what happens to you!”

“I do... I do not believe you! You... you do... not frighten me!” Kalis gagged on the words even as he continued to claw at the armored fist that held him suspended two feet off the ground. The grip was far too powerful for him to even get the tips of his fingers under the armored grasp.

Martin drew him closer, Kalis’s blue eyes growing wide the closer he came to the searing psychic shield and he stopped struggling with both hands wrapped around his uncle’s wrist. “I see within you Kalis.” Martin growled softly loosening his iron clad grip on Kalis’s throat ever so slightly. “Like I saw within your brother Karun. You have never seen the things Karun has discovered Kalis. Never experienced them.”

“Karun is a traitor!” Kalis hissed. “He betrayed us! His people!”

“Did he?” Martin asked him, his voice softer now. “Or did he just embrace the things your father has never spoken of with you? That he has never showed you? The things that it was his duty to show you! The things you could be still.”

“You lie!” Kalis spat once more.

“Do I?” Martin asked calmly. “Your brother Leruk was a lost cause Kalis. He spent too much time around your father. It twisted him beyond help. I saw this in my son’s mind after what happened. That is why you have tried so hard to gain his favor. He always regarded Leruk as his favorite. You have a chance Kalis... you have a chance he did not. You have a choice.”

“I will never betray my father!” Kalis hissed. “I will never betray my people! I am... I am not afraid of you!”

Martin smiled up at him, but there was no joy in that smile. His wolf fangs prevented it from being anything but a smile of death. “I am not the one you should be afraid of Kalis. It is not my mate that you disrespected by doing what you did. You would be dead already if it was. It is only another crime that your father bears the shame for. Not teaching you what you should know as a wolf.” Martin told him.

“He... he killed my brother!” Kalis snarled.

Martin shook his head. “Androcles killed a cancer. Not your brother.” He spoke softly still. “I see that cancer growing within you as well... but you can stop it Kalis. You can choose to stop it. You can open your eyes and make a choice.”

“Never!” Kalis growled.

“You are on a collision course with fate Kalis.” Martin spoke softly and he drew a thin data pad from a small pouch on his belt, keeping his movements hidden from all those around him. “Open your eyes nephew... open your eyes to what you could be. It will be your only chance. You will survive this day Kalis... and I will leave you with a gift. Do with it as you wish.” Martin pushed his other hand through the psychic shield and shoved the data pad into the folds of Kalis’s loose fitting clothing and partial body armor. “And remember my words to you now... Androcles Leonidas is my son... and there is not a merciful bone in his body nephew. For what you have done he will carve you up and spit you out. Your only chance is to read what I just gave you. Read it! And then make your choice. My son will not give you a second chance nephew.”

“I do not fear him!” Kalis growled.

Martin smiled. “You should boy. He is the instrument of your death or your salvation.” He spoke. “Now... no more words. I have other things to attend to. Think for yourself for once Kalis! Think for yourself and become a Leonidas! It is the choice your grandfather wants you to have. Try to land without breaking too many bones.”

“Wha...” There were no more words from his uncle as Kalis felt himself lifted higher and then dropped abruptly. He could only watch as he saw Martin spin around instantly and his right fist crashed into his chest with painful force. Enough force that the pain caused him to black out instantly. This fact probably saved his life for his body went completely limp.

Kalis would remember nothing of the next few seconds and would awaken a few moments later some five hundred meters distance from where he was. He would not remember smashing against and through smaller trees as his body was flung with the force of being fired from an old style cannon. Surviving Puma Bane troops would stumble across him as they advanced towards the battle sight. He would never know it, but those troops stopping to try and helped him gave his uncle the time he needed to escape.

After he finished what he had come to do of course.

Pusintin could only watch his son hurtle through the timber until he was lost to sight and then he turned to look back at his brother.

“You’ll die for that!” Pusintin screamed.

Martin turned his eyes on his brother. “He will live for now... unlike you!”

“You going to fight us all brother!” Pusintin snarled out. “You going to fight us with your puny spear! I have hundreds of men closing on this position right now! I’ll win! And I’ll have that elf bitch howling beneath me just like I did before!” He shouted. “You should have heard her begging me to fuck her harder! It was hysterical!”

Martin hefted his Nehtes. “I’m not going to fight you with this brother.” He said calmly. “And the one thing you never understood from all of father’s lessons to you, the one thing that you never grasped... Spartans never fight alone!”

Pusintin whirled around now, his eyes going to where For'mya and Muton had been. Many of the Kavalians who had been focusing their attention on Martin did so as well, and what they saw shocked them right to their booted feet. The wall of Shi Viskas that now protected the elf Queen and the others they had come to this world to retrieve was impossible to miss. And quite impossible to breach from the way it was formed around the small group. That was without the soft blue psychic shield that now encompassed the entire group.

Pusintin whirled back to face Martin. "You think they will stop me?" He screamed out. "I'll butcher every one of them! And I'll take your other bitch Queens and let my men have them as I am crowned King!"

Martin shook his head slowly as he began moving towards him. "No... your life will end here! Today! And you will know nothing but the blackness of the abyss."

"Kill him!" Pusintin screamed at the Puma Bane troops. "Kill him in front of his precious Queens!"

Twenty Kavalians brought up their assault rifles and secure in the knowledge that their reinforcements would be here before any Lycavorian help, they held back the triggers of their weapons intent on finally killing the King of the Lycavorian Union.

"**NO!**" For'mya, Aricia, Dysea and Cirith screamed at the same time. All of them began to move, but Danny and Helen grabbed two of them apiece.

"Helen he needs us!" Aricia snarled struggling within her grasp. She held her arm with a strength belaying her age and frail looking appearance.

Helen shook her head. "No... he does not! Stay within the shield I have created or you may be hurt as well!"

With hands still holding them back, they turned to watch the only man any of them had ever loved simply lift his free hand as the barrage of kinetic projectiles from twenty different weapons all reached him at the same time. Hundreds of rounds impacted the psychic shield and they began to see hundreds of orange white flares all along that psychic shield. Martin's forward movement stopped as his psychic shield began to almost glow with power. Sitting on the ledge far above, Isheeni and Arzoal had to move away from Torma as his active shield began to glow even brighter around him, his golden eyes focused on where his Bonded brother stood below.

Mother? Isheeni gasped. What... what is happening?

Arzoal's eyes were wide as she gazed at Torma and how that psychic shield wrapped around him in swirling motions. It looked as if it was almost alive with power, and Torma's wings were twitching every few seconds with the intensity of it.

They have become like Androcles and Elynth! Only stronger! Arzoal gasped. They are... they are no longer a Bonded Pair Isheeni. They are one!

Martin stood his ground against the barrage of kinetic projectiles, his face showing no strain whatsoever as those rounds impacted his shields. He could feel each one, sense it as it smashed into his shields and then was evaporated by the intense three thousand degree heat that still swirled around him. He could feel the steady drum of Torma's heartbeat within him, the calm dedication and love.

They had studied long and hard together. Delving into the mysteries of the many Tomes that Avi had discovered in his data banks and on CS41. Mysteries of Mindvoice and Etheric power that Sumar had mastered and begun to put into training regimes for his son Resumar. They had shared these Tomes with no one but Andro and Elynth after the first five years, the four of them often times leaving Earth to find a deserted area of another planet to train and practice. They had to develop an entirely new type of fighting that combined the use of bladed weapons and even firearms into Etheric use of powers. It had been frustrating at times, for they had to absorb so much information and learn to understand all there was to know about Etheric abilities before they could actually use them as Sumar had intended them to be used. Martin knew why Sumar had left such Tomes... he wanted his son and their people to be prepared for what was coming. Even all those years ago Sumar knew that the day would come when they would be needed to fight an evil so horrific it could shake the foundation of everything they had ever believed.

Andro had opened himself already and revealed what others had never seen before, and Martin knew he had passed this information to Denali at the very least, for he had heard what Denali had shown and was now capable of. Androcles probably had been instructing all of his brothers and sisters in some way with the new

abilities and meditation techniques that they had long ago discovered and only mastered in the last few years. Androcles lived for the protection of his brothers and sisters and those he loved. It was one of the driving forces behind his very nature and Marin had no doubts that he would insure his brothers and sisters knew more than anyone else thought they did. There was a cruel streak in his son Martin knew. A dark filament of his being that even Martin himself did not possess. This cruelty had come from Martin's own father, a dark filament of his nature that offered no mercy or remorse to those who were sworn enemies. Andro had this within him as well, his actions during the Evolli war and after allowing Martin to see it completely. This filament of his being was tempered and controlled however by his son's sense of honor and the love of his family and his mates. Martin knew Andro craved to be out from under his father's shadow, desiring to blaze a path of his own into the future. That desire had already been fulfilled, though Androcles would not discover that for some months yet. It had been fulfilled the day he took Sadi as his mate. The female wolf who so many back home regarded as the second coming of his mother Gorgo. Martin could not agree more with that assessment and he had seen it that night on the island. Standing among the half destroyed palace, Sadi had radiated a strength and connection that Martin knew would be the last piece of the puzzle for his son when the time came. Sadi would be like Aricia and his own mother combined. Fierce in her devotion and love to his son and their people. Martin Leonidas knew this was the power behind their family. This was the strength that drove them forward. It was that power and strength that had driven him and Torma to begin training with the Tomes that Sumar had left. And now all of that training and hard work would come to fruition this day.

It was these new abilities that Martin Leonidas now called upon.

Abilities that he would now use to remove the largest cancer of all that remained as a blight upon the honor and love of the Spartan and his father's name. Martin sensed when the fire slackened and the Kavalians began to change their kinetic magazines. Many of them reloaded and looked up to see him still standing and not perforated by hundreds of holes, their eyes wide in disbelief. All of this time he had slowly been moving forward, filling Torma's power and will combining with his own to drive him forward step by step. He stopped when he was only ten meters from where Pusintin and his men stood gawking at him in disbelief. As if by some unspoken order, their constant firing from the last minute had ceased and they all stared at him within that burning psychic shield. When the last kinetic projectile burst against that shield Martin stood there unharmed in any way. He twirled the *Nehtes* within the shield in one hand and looked at his brother.

"Is that the best you got brother?" He asked finally.

"Lower that shield around you brother!" Pusintin snarled. "Or do you not believe in a fair fight?"

Martin laughed at him then and shook his head. "Ah... Pleistarchus. You learned nothing of what father taught you all those years ago." He said almost sadly. "There is no such thing as a fair fight!"

With that Martin stopped twirling the *Nehtes* and launched it out of the shield with a grunt of supreme power. The nine foot long spear sizzled through the air and covered the distance between Martin and two Puma Bane troops who were standing perfectly in line together. The spearhead impaled the first Puma Bane troop through his chest, the rush of air exiting his body through the hole in his chest drowned out by the grunt and thud of bodies as the forward motion of the spear carried it through the first troop's body to impale the second Puma Bane soldier through his head as he was bending down to reload. The momentum of the throw tossed both of them back five meters until they were still on the hard ground. The first Kavalian had his hands wrapped around the shaft of the spear as his eyes glared at it and his blood poured from the gaping wound.

Pusintin whirled back on his brother, his eyes full of rage and he saw Martin withdraw a smaller tube like object from a holster on his leg. His eyes went wide when he saw that Martin's shield had come down now.

Martin spun the tubular object in his hand expertly. "I'm going to kill you with this my dear brother." Martin snarled viciously. "A new toy that our elven weapons master made just for me."

Martin depressed the recessed button on the shaft of the *Stiletto*. It was carved with ancient symbols that *Nehtes* had worked for hours to engraved by hand. It could not be called a *Stiletto* really, for *Nehtes* had made only twenty weapons like the one Martin now held, each with its own varied and intricate carvings on the dark gray pommel that appeared to be some sort of metal and weighted specifically for an individual. He had taken the improved power cells and schematics from Ben O'Connor and while his assistants went about forging the new *Stiletto*s, *Nehtes* himself spent an entire week fashioning twenty very unique blades that then combined the best of two worlds into one. Pusintin watched as the thin, three foot long blade, forged from pure Dragon Armor metal extended. He could just make out the intricate carvings on the blade but was no where near close enough

to read them. The butt end of the pommel looked nothing like any sword pommel he had seen. It was shaped with a circular set of six rings that wrapped around what appeared to be a glowing blue orb of some kind and was shaped in angled fashion

“Time to die brother!” Martin snarled.

“Kill him!” Pusintin screamed. “His shields are down! Kill him!”

As the Puma Bane soldiers began to react Martin Leonidas simply vanished.

Pusintin and the others began looking all around, their eyes wide. “What the fuck is this?” Pusintin screamed.

THIS BROTHER...! The words in Mindvoice rang out so loudly and with such force that even Pusintin staggered under the power behind the words. ***This is destiny correcting a mistake made long ago!***

Pusintin didn't see Martin reappear behind him about to end the leap he had made. The PSG came down and Martin's boot impacted Pusintin directly between the shoulder blades sending him hurtling forward at impossible velocity. As Martin finished landing he brought his left hand, now encased in shimmering light blue psychic power, down into the earth beneath him. Like bolts of electricity, the Mindvoice power instantly zipped through the ground to touch the legs of the nearest Puma Bane troops. Three of them were flung into the air screaming out their surprise and incredible pain as the Etheric bolts of power rippled through their fur covered bodies. Unlike electricity however, the Etheric attack did not electrocute them. Instead it was twisting and warping their very cellular structure, causing agonizing pain as well as permanent damage. As the rest of the Puma Bane troops watched with horror filled wide eyes, Martin Leonidas attacked.

There was no hesitation on his part as he drove the blade of the Stiletto sword clean through the neck of one Kavalian, blood splashing across his armor as he tore the sword free and spun a hundred and eighty degrees to decapitate two more Puma Bane troops who were looking at their comrades stupidly as they hung in the air above them, their bodies flipping and dancing in gruesome tune to the Etheric energy slashing through their bodies unrestrained. Martin spun once more, swinging the sword with both hands as he bent low and removed the legs of two more Puma Bane troops. As more chilling screams filled the air and the Puma Bane troops began to react to the whirlwind of death in their midst, Martin vanished once more. The three Kavalians that had been suspended above the ground now fell with loud, wet thuds. The eyes of their comrades fell upon their broken and ravaged bodies, many of them gripped in fear by an enemy that did not fight conventionally and used powers beyond their comprehension. The veins in their skin appeared to have burst inside their bodies, their faces and necks streaked by harsh red and purple stains under the skin, their eyes open in death, the veins in their pupils broken and nearly blotting out the white portion. Blood leaked from every orifice on their bodies, running the gambit from their ears to their noses and mouths, to their eyes. It almost looked as if their blood itself had boiled within their veins and cooked them alive from the inside.

As they looked stupidly at their dead comrades on the ground the PSG deactivated once more and Martin was among them another time. The Stiletto Sword claimed another victim as it snapped out with blistering speed and removed both of the arms of a Puma Bane soldier who was actually trying to turn and draw down on Martin. The rifle clattered uselessly to the earth beneath him, his eyes wide as he looked at the stumps of where his arms used to be and the twin fountains of blood that were now arcing into the air. Martin quickly folded the sword along his forearm, the blunt end pointing at a Puma Bane soldier, and the bright pulse of light blue energy erupted from the end of the weapon. That pulse of energy struck the soldier in the center of his chest, punching a fist sized hole in this thick upper body and flinging him back as if he had been hit by a Lifter in flight. As he did this, Martin lifted his left hand and let fly with two psychic diamond projectiles. Those two psychic bullets blasted through the head and chest of two more Puma Bane soldiers before they had finished reacting to their comrade being taken down by the strange energy weapon.

Martin reengaged his PSG and was gone yet again.

“Together! Around the Marshall!” A more experienced Puma Bane troop yelled the order to the survivors. “Together!”

The eight remaining Puma Bane troops formed a tight circle around Pusintin as he came to his feet, staggered slightly and then whirled around with his rifle at the ready.

“Fucker!” Pusintin screamed. “I'll strip the skin from your body and...”

Martin shimmered back into existence only ten meters away, his left arm extended out. The Shi Viska burst into this realm from Flatspace and immediately launched from his arm. It extended razors all around the

edges as it scorched through the air to slice cleanly through the upper bodies of two soldiers, the blood splashing Pusintin and another soldier next to him as the shield sped off into the distance leaving death in its wake. Then Martin was gone!

“You were King!” The voice screamed out.

Martin reappeared to the side and they could only watch in horror as he snatched up two more Puma Bane soldiers within the grasp of his Etheric power and lifted them ten meters into the air. He squeezed his fists together; his eyes and fangs they could see under his helmet were a mask of pure unadulterated hate and rage and Martin brought his arms slashing down forcefully to his sides. The sounds of their bones shattering in mid air and then their bodies smashing to the unyielding ground with more snapping sounds was grotesque in nature. Both men lay still, nearly every bone in their bodies crushed or broken. They would die in seconds. In the same eye blink Martin’s Stiletto Sword flashed out and he opened an inch deep, five inch long gash in Pusintin’s abdomen. As Pusintin grabbed for the wound in agony, Martin engaged the PSG once more and vanished from sight.

“Our people would have followed you anywhere! I would have followed you anywhere! You could have led them into the future!” His voice screamed once more. The emotion that the words carried was a palpable thing in the air, affecting everyone who heard them. ***“You betrayed them instead! You betrayed our father’s memory!”***

Pusintin staggered to his feet holding his bloody abdomen. “He left us alone!” Pusintin screamed. “He went and died for millions of people we did not even know! He left us alone! And then mother left me!”

“You were a Spartan!” Martin’s voice screamed. ***“You were never alone! A Spartan is never alone! And mother would have returned for you!”***

“You know nothing!” Pusintin shouted. “Nothing!”

“Don’t I?” Martin’s voice echoed, more in control now it seemed, but filled with a trembling hate and rage that caused everyone to hear shiver. “Do you think Panos would not show me what you did while you were King? What you attempted?” He barked. “You were power mad! Nothing was ever good enough for you! More! You always wanted more!”

“As is my right!” Pusintin roared.

Martin shimmered into existence directly in front of Pusintin. “And was it your right to try and kill me and then take my elven mate! To try and take the throne of our people in one of the vilest ways a Lycavorian can act?” Martin snarled viciously before he snapped his head forward into Pusintin’s face, crushing his nose with the Dragon Armor helmet and digging a jagged gouge into his cheek as Pusintin fell.

Martin instantly faced the remaining four Puma Bane Soldiers. Once more he punched the ground beneath him and the earth reared up, tossing all of the men into the air and hurtling them with unimaginable velocity directly at the outcropping of rock and granite that was the end of the ridge that ran away from them and along the mediocre sized river that moved to the north. One of the four men impacted at an odd angle and had his head crushed the moment he struck the unmoving stone wall, while the other three men flailed wildly as they impacted the outcropping of rock with unforgiving speed.

Martin ignored them now and looked down at his brother before reaching up to yank his helmet from his head and tossing it to the ground. “Now I will show you what Joric learned all those years ago ***brother!***” Martin screamed out. His fangs were fully extended and his wolf eyes were very nearly glowing with that yellow gold color. “I will show you the price for bringing the shame and pain to my *Kinsoaurgai* that you have.”

The first trip hammer like right cross landed directly where Martin had aimed it, and his eyes showed their savage retribution as the other blows followed in quick succession.

When the first blow fell, it was Danny who started to move to intervene. Helen’s voice stopped him cold in his tracks.

“Remain where you are Daniel Simpson.” Helen spoke with authority and wisdom.

“Helen he will... it is his brother!” Danny began to protest.

Helen shook her head slowly. “No Daniel. You are the only brother Martin Leonidas has ever known or acknowledged. The love one brother shows to another he has reserved only for you. The love one shows to a sister Julie Collins, he has reserved for you.” Helen saw Julie’s wide eyes cut to where she stood. “He wept for

four days when he thought you were lost Julie. As one only weeps for a sister. He considers himself blessed by the gods that you were returned to him, no matter how that came to be. He has half brothers and sisters yes, but the two of you are his blood! This group of men and women who remain..." She looked at them as their heads turned to her. "You are his family, those dearest to him outside of his wives and mates. This man has inflicted horrible acts upon those he loves more than his own life. Directly and indirectly. This anger and hate must be purged now."

"He'll kill him Helen!" Julie said. "As sure as shit he will kill him."

Helen shrugged her shoulders. "We have witnessed the true Martin Leonidas today." She said softly. "And I feel we will see even more of his power. This is the man fate has decreed he become." Helen's eyes turned to Dysea. For'mya was weeping openly crushed between Aricia and her. "You asked me long ago Dysea... you asked me what he was like as a child. A baby." Helen smiled and swept her hand to where Martin was. "He is being born again sweet Dysea... and you can witness it for yourself."

Martin's armored fist smashed into Pusintin's face once more. He straddled his brother's chest, holding the front of his shirt and simple body armor in his left hand and pummeling him with that Etheric encased fist of his right hand.

"...rolls in his grave at what you have done!" Martin screamed as spittle showered his brother's bloody face. "**You tried to kill our mother! You are no son of our father!**" Martin stopped with the last blow and looked down at him, one eye already swollen shut, his lips cracked and bleeding, his left cheek sunken inward where it had succumb to the devastating force of the blows being reigned upon him.

Martin rose to his feet, standing over Pusintin. "**I would have gladly given the throne to you! I never wanted it to begin with!**" He shouted. "**All you had to do was return and be among your people! Those who loved you! I would have followed you without question if the good of our people was your only concern! You could have been King you fool! King! Instead you choose to remain among those who have killed our people! You have killed our people you fucking coward! All for power! Power! You wished power Pleistarchus? Let me show you power brother! The power we could have wielded to secure our people's future for millennia to come! The power that comes from the Pralor blood within our line! Let me show you what you will never have brother!**"

Martin reached down and yanked him to a sitting position as Pusintin cried out in agony from the pain of nearly every rib in his chest cavity being broken. Martin then turned to where the three remaining Puma Bane troops were rising to their feet in front of the outcropping of rock. Martin's hands began to glow and he reached within himself to his core. The core of his love for his mates, his children, his brothers and sisters, his people. He reached within him just as the Tomes of his grandfather had instructed, and feeling Torma add his own considerable Etheric essence within their bond, Martin formed two iridescent globes of power within his hands. Two light blue globes that practically sizzled and cackled and popped in the air all around them. Pusintin could only watch with his one good eye in painful amazement as with a howl that came from deep within him Martin shoved his hands forward and released those two globes of Etheric power.

Directly at the three stunned Puma Bane troops.

What followed was something that no one who witnessed it that day would ever forget. The first globe of Etheric power struck the three Puma Bane soldiers and rammed them back into the outcropping of rock so hard their bodies left imprints within the rock face itself of nearly half a meter. They died instantly from the impact thankfully for them, for not half a second later that second globe of Etheric power struck them and the entire outcropping of the mountain ridge blew into tiny splinters of rock and dirt as if explosives had been set within the ridge itself. Mixed in with those shards of rock and granite were the pulverized remains of the Puma Bane soldiers, the entire cloud rising up and tossing smaller sized rocks and chunks of granite to all sides, some of them bouncing off the shield Helen had erected around the group. The entire ten meter long four meter thick outcropping that had once been part of the ridgeline simply disappeared as if some sweeping blow from god had reached down and knocked it into oblivion.

Martin whirled on his brother, his chest heaving in exertion and burning rage. "**You have betrayed your blood Pleistarchus! Betrayed it in the most heinous of ways! You took my mate! My elven wife! My Kinsoargai! You took her against her will, against her heart in your quest for power! And it has brought**

you to ruin!”

Pusintin looked up at him with that good eye and spat blood as he tried to laugh. “She... she gave me children! Good... good fuck... too!”

“She gave you nothing!” Martin roared as he smashed his fist down into Pusintin’s face once more. ***“She gave me children! My children! They are my children now! And I will love them as I have loved all my children! As our father and mother once loved you! They will know nothing of you! They do not even look like you!”*** Martin laughed at him. ***“You do not even know how your own people make babies you fucking fool! You were so intent on making her bear you children you forgot to pass on the essence of yourself to them within Mindvoice! The essence that would have made them your children in mind and appearance! They reached for the essence that was within my Kinsoargai’s blood! My essence! I will raise them and love them and teach them all they need to know! They are my children! They were always my children from the moment they were conceived within her womb!”*** Martin lashed out and pounded Pusintin once more as he lay on the ground.

Martin lifted his Stiletto Sword pommel and depressed the trigger, the shimmering sword extending to its full length as he spun it expertly in his hand.

“We will be at war after this day Pusintin!” Martin snarled. ***“And while your Kavalian friends, those you chose over your own people, while they may have victories, they will not win. Spartans never fight alone!”*** Martin moved around the inert Pusintin as he spoke now. ***“You are charged with high treason brother. Rape of a sitting Queen. Murder of thousands of our people! Your name will be stricken from the roles of Spartiates! It will be as if you never existed!”*** Martin stopped and looked down at his brother. ***“Now brother, now I will show you what happens to those foul creatures who bring harm and shame to my wives and mates! And I will fulfill the promise I made to our mother. I will bring her back your head!”***

Martin lifted the Stiletto Sword and prepared to bring it down to sever the last tie to a part of his past that no longer held him. No longer would control him.

And as was always the case with Martin Leonidas, fate and destiny stepped in laughing hysterically.

“VAMPIRE! VAMPIRE!” Endith’s voice screamed out within his implant louder than he had ever heard her voice carry! “Kavalian fighters got through the *ARC ROYAL’S* defense! We’re radiating like a fucking sun here Marty! We need to go now! I mean right fucking now or we are all dead!”

The decision was simple. Without doubt. Without question. Without hesitation.

Martin turned to his wives and mates and friends. ***“GO! NOW! GO!”***

Martin turned back to his battered and beaten brother and pointed the Stiletto Sword at him, the severe tip of that sword pressing against his neck.

“Blood before all else brother!” Martin hissed at him. “That is the lesson our father taught me in my dreams! Blood before all else!” Martin leaned over and spit on him, the glob of spit landing right on his blood soaked cheek. “Follow me if you have the balls. Follow me if you think you have a chance. If not... return to your Kavalian friends and be beaten into the dust of memory by my son!”

With that Martin Leonidas turned and ran.

SCIMITAR

“...told you this was a bad idea.” Nalavi said. “He isn’t going to let us go.”

Yuri stood by the clear view window gazing down into the landing bay of the ship. She could see them working around their G9, the sarcophagus having been removed nearly two hours before. As Yuri’s eyes scanned the landing bay she took in the ships and the men and women as they went about their work. There was a determination in their gait and their actions that she never saw from High Coven ground crew members. She saw pilots speaking with these ground crew personnel, trading information or ideas she did not know, but it was a scene you would not see on a High Coven ship. Yuri also noticed that not a single crew member she had seen or passed wore any kind of rank insignia on their uniforms.

“Yuri?” The soft male voice drifted to her and she turned her head to see Pa’cour come up beside her. She gazed at his face intently, long past seeing just the outward appearance of his dark gray and matted skin. She could also sense the trepidation within him. A small part of him was worried that she would leave him now

that they were free of Moran and the Coven. That she would not want to be with him. Yuri could see within his mind that he wanted the serum badly. Anything that could help him to keep from losing her is all that mattered to him now. Yuri didn't hesitate in the least and she surprised him in her actions. Pa'cour was the only decision Yuri had made in her entire life based on what she wanted. A decision untainted by either her mother or Moran and certainly the first since Xaxon's essence was gone from her. That decision was turning out to be the best thing she had ever done in her lifetime.

Pa'cour staggered for a second as Yuri stepped up to him and wrapped her arms around his waist, burying her face into his chest and drawing him tighter to her with her vampire strength. Pa'cour didn't hesitate either and he wrapped his arms around her lithe frame. He looked down to gaze into her eyes and instead was met by her soft lips as she kissed him. Pa'cour pulled her closer as she deepened the kiss.

I am your Blessed Wife! Yuri's words filled his mind. *There is no place I would rather be than right here. With you.* Yuri deepened their kiss more, plunging her tongue between his lips to do battle with his own. Amazingly... Pa'cour was the most accomplished kisser that she had ever kissed, and it made her giddy to know he would be there for her forever. *Let go of these doubts you have Pa'cour. I wish my Blessed Husband to be strong and to never question what I feel for him. It is the same as what he feels for me.*

His answer was to crush her body to him even more and Yuri whimpered in happiness. Nalavi looked at them and shook his head. "We are about to die and you two wish to chew each other's tongues. Outstanding." Nalavi muttered. "We should..."

His words were cut off by the sound of the double doors opening and Nalavi came to his feet as Androcles led Deia, Dorian, Eliani and Jomann into the large briefing room. Yuri and Pa'cour quickly parted but she kept her hands on his arms as she composed herself and looked at Andro. He was unarmed, which surprised her, and she met the gaze of his azure blue eyes with no fear. They were in uncharted waters here and Yuri had no idea what to expect from him or if they would even live out these next minutes. She would not allow him kill her again so easily without a fight however. Yuri could sense the burning of his resonance within Mindvoice and it almost staggered her at the power this boy wielded so easily.

"The *Durcumusaan* are finishing up loading what you asked for." Andro spoke as he approached them.

"I told you to take them." Yuri spoke softly with no hostility in her voice. "We need nothing from you."

Andro stopped a meter away from her, his eyes never leaving her face. "You have no idea what you have done do you?" He asked her.

Yuri looked quickly at Pa'cour before turning back to him. "I... I know what I have done. I remember almost all of it completely. I can not... I can not take those things back Androcles. I will freely admit to being a cruel person in many cases. That is simply... it is part of who I am because of what I am. But even you must admit you can sense that it was not entirely me."

"So you wish forgiveness for your sins with this action?" Deia asked now. Her words were neither hostile or friendly.

Yuri shook her head. "No." She answered instantly. "I will... I will live with what I have done for the remainder of my days. Some of those things I would have done without Xaxon's foul influence, some of them I would not. I... I truly do not know where he ended and I began." Yuri looked at Pa'cour once more. "All I know is that right now I have been given a second chance. I need to discover myself, what I lost so long ago and then try to make amends for what I have done. If that is possible. All I can do now is try. Returning to you their bodies is the first step. My father... my father took them from you and I am returning them. I want nothing in return for correcting one of his many mistakes. I can not bring them back... but I can insure they are returned to your people so that they can be honored in the manner they should be."

Deia met her eyes and slowly nodded her head. "I can... I can not hold you responsible for what your father and mother did long before you were even born. My wolf blood... it calls for me to strike you down where you stand because of who you are... but after this... I... I see a glimmer of hope."

"It is that hope that I am clinging to right now." Yuri said confidently. "With every step I take." She looked at Andro. "I told you that you are not your father Androcles and that is true. You see... you see things differently than most. Including him. He would never give me this chance. He would kill me without hesitation. You have come out from under his shadow as many people will see in the future, just as I see it now. You are darker than him in many ways, yet your compassion has no limits either, unlike your father. It is that

compassion I seek now. A chance and an opportunity that your father would never give to me.” Yuri’s hand dropped to her abdomen. “A chance to try again and do things right.”

“What about Moran? Dante?” Andro asked.

Yuri met his eyes. “Robert Moran is a fool who craved only the power I could give him. He has it now... yet along with that power comes all the problems. Some of which were my doing.” Yuri moved closer to him. “I am powerful within Mindvoice... stronger than I was before because now I am clear and focused. I will never be as strong as you or your father Androcles but I know you can feel what is inside me. You... you and Carisia are part of each other, just as you are with all of your mates and wives. Through her I know you can see within me. I know you can sense what I feel for Pa'cour... the depth that those feelings go.”

Andro glanced at Pa'cour for a moment and then back to Yuri. “Your love for him is absolute.” He said softly. “You see him as the single strand of light that guided you out of the darkness.”

Yuri nodded her head. “I have always been brutally practical.” Yuri said. “Even as a small girl from what Nalavi tells me. That will not change. But neither am I unintelligent. Whether it is because I took so much of his blood to survive or not... every fiber of my being tells me this is the life I should have had. With Pa'cour. The life I was denied. I have never begged for anything in my life before... I beg you now... don't take that from me when I have only just discovered it.”

“Narice?” Andro asked.

“Narice is the only one who can save the Coven now.” Yuri said. “She is the only one who was never tainted. It was almost as if she was protected somehow.” Yuri looked at him. “Protected by destiny's hand because she was always meant for your brother. Isn't that what you believe?”

Andro nodded. “Indeed. Just as Carisia was meant for me and Lucia for Zarah.”

“Perhaps one day in the future I will be able to stand before them and not see hate in their eyes for me.” Yuri said. “Perhaps one day I will be able to make amends to them for everything I have done. I do know that after what I was subjected to by my own father, Xerxes raping me, and then your uncle, I know that is not something I would have sanctioned upon my worst enemy ever. The more... the more I look back and see how things have occurred... the more I am beginning to believe that our two bloodlines should never have been enemies. We were... we were meant to bring the bloodlines of the brothers back together. All I can do now is try and make you see that I now believe that is the key to whatever future we have. If you are going to let us go that is.”

“And Dante?” Andro asked her.

Yuri stepped back and pressed against Pa'cour, feeling his arm curl around her waist. “Dante is no longer my son. Without my mother to teach him, Xaxon will eventually gain full control of him. It may take weeks or months or even years. But Xaxon will act out his will through Dante. Death is the only release for him now. And his death will be at your hand... that much I do know. I do not care what happens to him now. To try and persuade you differently would not work and it would go against everything I feel within me. If he does not fall by your hand, then I will kill him myself and insure Xaxon's essence is destroyed as well.”

Andro looked at Deia then and saw her nod her head. He blinked several times and took the data pad that Jomann held out to him. “I have had my engineers enhance the properties of your Shroud generators and your engine capacitors. They have increased the range and terawatt capability of your weapons array. Everything that Esther brought with her to honor the Exile's last request has been stored on your ship. I have added an additional six months worth of rations and medicines from the *SCIMITAR*'s stores and Eliani had tuned one of our portable Hadarian medical computers for optimum use within the G9.” Andro held out the pad to Pa'cour. “I added one crate of P190A3s and several of the newer versions of our K14.” Andro met Pa'cour's wide eyes. “There was a message imbued within my grandfather's sarcophagus.”

Pa'cour's head came up. “Message?” He asked. “How... how is that possible? They were... they were dead when we laid them within the chambers.”

“It was a message within Mindvoice.” Andro told him. “A message that he left for us. In that message he said to honor you Pa'cour. Honor you for what you did and that you would play a role in our future.”

“Me?” Pa'cour gasped.

Andro nodded his head. “It seems that no matter from which direction it comes, the lives of your people and mine will be tied together Pa'cour of the Akruxian Immortals.” He spoke. “There was not time for me to have weapons forged by Nehtes for you.” Andro turned and took the crimson cloth wrapped bundle from

Jomann and then turned back to Pa'cour. "I decided this would be better. For what you have done, all those millennia ago and what you did by returning them to us, I offer you *Iphan* and *Halize rie Aellseleum*. The Hammer and Anvil of Justice. Forged from pure Dragon Armor by our elven Weapons Master Nehtes."

Andro unwrapped one end of the bundle and Pa'cour saw the pommels of the matching swords that were the signature of Androcles Leonidas. Pa'cour reached out reverently and took the bundle slowly, his fingers tracing the line of the sword pommels. Pa'cour looked at him. "But these... these are your weapons." He gasped.

"They are now yours." Andro said. "And if you are anything like your brother Cha'talla, which I believe you are, they will serve you well."

Pa'cour bowed his head deeply to the Lycavorian Prince. "I will insure they are never used outside of the names they carry." He stated softly.

Andro nodded. "Thank you."

Pa'cour met Andro's eyes. "The... the bounty on Yuri's head?"

Andro looked at Yuri standing beside him. "It has been lifted." Andro told him.

"Thank you Androcles." Yuri spoke softly.

"Don't thank me Yuri." Andro told her. "Don't make me regret what I am doing. I find myself... I can not forgive you for what happened to Zarah, regardless of whether Xaxon was in control of you or not. It would be a betrayal of my sister and I will not do that. I can't do that."

Yuri nodded. "I understand." She spoke.

"In time... in time perhaps I can explain it to her." Andro said looking at Yuri intensely. "And perhaps forgiveness will come... but it needs to be from her and from Lucia. They are one now, bound together more tightly than you could possibly imagine."

"I thought as much." Yuri said softly. "I can't... I can't say that does not make me happy because surprisingly it does. I can not judge any longer, not when I found what true love is in the most unlikely of places."

Andro held out the data pad to her this time. One he had taken from his own belt. "I want to thank you." He said.

Yuri looked taken aback and she blinked several times. "Thank me. I have... I have brought nothing but pain and death to your family. Why would you want to thank me?"

"You brought Carisia into this world so that I could find her. You brought Lucia into this world so that Zarah could discover her." Andro said softly. "They are beautiful and precious and to me it shows that you are not without hope." He held out the pad to her. "This... this is a list of places. I'm not telling you this is where you need to go... but they would afford you the opportunity to discover the things you say you want to discover. They are out of the way and mostly uninhabited and the facilities are modern and spacious and easily well defensible. It will also protect you from those idiot bounty hunters who still wish to test themselves against you even though I have removed the contract."

Yuri reached up and took the pad slowly. Her eyes read several entries and she lifted her head stunned. "Some of these... some of these are within Coven space" She gasped.

Andro nodded. "Yes they are. Take them Yuri... for what you and Pa'cour have done here this day I will do this. The second chance you wish is yours now. Take it... take it and try to discover who you are. But do not make me regret what I am doing, for I will come for you then. For both of you... and nothing will deter me."

Yuri drew the pad back to her chest and took Pa'cour's hand within hers. "I won't." She said. "I give you my word, for whatever it may be worth."

Eliani stepped up to Nalavi then and held out the pad she carried. "My mother wanted you to have this. She said you will need it in the coming weeks and months." She told him. "It also has the technical schematics for the Medical Computer and some additional information that you will need."

Nalavi looked at her. "What information?" He asked.

"Read it and you will find out." Eliani told him with a smile.

Deia stepped up to Pa'cour and held out the small case. His dark eyes watched as she opened it and showed him the two syringes. "In the... in Resumar message he said to honor you for what you did." Deia spoke as she shook her head. "I never thought I would be standing here in front of an Immortal saying this... but thank you." She said. "Take this... the serum for your people. Take back what was taken from you and

begin anew Pa'cour of the Immortals. As your brothers have done, leave what is in the past to the past. Move forward with grace, confidence and honor. And remember where you came from.”

Pa'cour took the case from her and bowed his head to Deia. “I will. You have my oath I will.”

Andro motioned to Jomann. “My Captain Jomann will take you back to your G9. May the gods speed you on your way and help you to find your true self Yuri. Regardless of what my father may think of you... we will need each other in the future.”

Yuri blinked several times again. “What?” She gasped.

Andro stepped to the side. “It will come to you one day.” He said. “For now... we part not as enemies or friends, but of something in between.”

Yuri stared at him even as Pa'cour took her arm and led her and Nalavi out of the briefing room. When they were gone Eliani stepped up to Andro and slipped her arm around his waist. “Well... that went... ok.” She said with a grin.

Andro looked at her and leaned over to nuzzle her cheek in a brotherly fashion. “That sister... is an understatement.” He said. “What did mother give to them?”

Eliani looked up into his face. “The specs for the serum they used on Dorian. To defeat the Darpia Syndrome that is currently very active within Yuri and the child she carries.”

“Darpia Syndrome... are you sure?” Andro gasped.

“Mother is.” Eliani answered.

Deia stepped up to them and also placed her arm around Andro’s waist. “We have either just helped to create powerful allies in the future... or even more powerful enemies.” Deia looked at him. “What do you think *Mandri*?”

Andro turned and looked out the view window. His eyes easily detected the large form of Pa'cour as they moved across the landing bay. He also saw Yuri reach for and take Pa'cour’s hand within hers, moving closer to the Immortal in a fashion that could not be anything but intimate and hopeful.

“I think we need to return to Earth with our ancestors *Tenna*.” He spoke finally. “Then I need to talk to father.”

“And then?” Eliani asked.

“Then I have a feeling we will be at war.” Andro said solemnly.

CHAPTER EIGHTY

UZU OZEIB 7

NEW CAPITAL CITY OF YDARE

POPULATION OF 26 MILLION

BASEMENT LEVEL OF THE RULING COVEN ASSEMBLY BUILDING

The High Coven Ruling Assembly building was a hundred story structure that reached into the reddish color sky of the new capital Ydare along with dozens of other equally as tall or taller buildings. The city of Ydare had been named the capital after Aikiro had killed Veldruk and reasserted her dominance over two decades ago. Ydare was a much more bustling and modern city than was the norm across Uzu Ozeib 7, with a much younger generation of men and women who called it home. It was the new center of commerce and manufacturing with hundreds of schools and High Coven owned companies. Ydare sat on the western edge of their northern continent along the shores of the largest ocean on Uzu Ozeib 7. The atmosphere close to the coastal plains was slightly thinner and clearer and therefore these cities received far more sunlight than most of the cities inland. A fact that drew the younger generations to the city. The sun was out this morning and the streets were bustling with those moving to and from their jobs or out enjoying the sun. Many of the younger generations of vampires were much more tolerant of the sun, and while they enjoyed the warmth and light of the sun on their skin they did not go out of their way to stay within the sun’s embrace. Many vampires were no longer afraid to walk in the sections of the streets that were well lit by the sun and shining through in several places on the streets of the capital city of Ydare. Aikiro had moved the capital here to try and appeal to the

younger generation of vampire. In some ways she was successful; in others she only made the younger generation dislike her more for her obvious political ploy. She was catering to them openly, but keeping her ties to the older Purebloods behind the scenes. No real change had taken place even though this was one of the things she said she would insure. Ydare was a much more liberal city; many of the more oppressive laws and rules that were hundreds and hundreds of years old were not even followed or recognized here. Non-pureblood vampires walked the streets here without the stigma they did in other cities. Here they were not considered turned or half breed vampires, here they were treated equally. Ydare grew in size yearly as more and more of the younger generations of purebloods and non-purebloods flocked to the city to insure their voices were heard.

The Ruling Assembly Building had once been a prison before Aikiro had ordered it reopened and turned into the gathering place for politicians and governmental operations. The entire interior of the building had been remade into a much more aesthetically pleasing façade. It was well lit by elegant globe lights in all the corners of every room and in some places even the sun where it shone through the intricately carved glass windows. This is where the Ruling Assembly, the *Ventash'ma* as they were called, had been staying since the word of Aikiro's death had first arrived on Uzu Ozeib 7. The moment her death had been confirmed, the wide ranging wrangling for power and position had begun. Yuri's failure to return to the capital had many of the senior purebloods wondering just what her intentions were. Of the thirty-six members of the *Ventash'ma*, the equivalent of Union Senators and ultimately the executors of Aikiro's will, sixteen were fully backing Yuri as the new Empress, thirteen were on the side of naming a new leader, and seven were keeping their loyalties to themselves while they bargained and coerced for additional power than what they already had. These *Ventash'ma* had ruled the High Coven for Veldruk or Aikiro for the last eight thousand years and none of them were in any way prepared to lose their status. They were the voice and hand of Veldruk and Aikiro and their decisions are what they enforced. These members of the *Ventash'ma* rarely ever changed unless one died from old age and some of these men and women were well past thirty thousand years of age while the youngest was a spry seventeen thousand years old. Their meeting room was a colossal chamber on the ninety-seventh floor of the building with windows on three sides that overlooked the city of Ydare, and made them feel as if they were more important than they really were. An even dozen Immortals, older and far more experienced Immortals that had chosen to remain part of the Coven, stood guard in the chamber along the walls. These senior Immortals were the *Ventash'ma* Guard, and their sole purpose was to keep order within the chamber and insure that the *Ventash'ma* was protected.

While the first eighty-seven levels were used for offices and smaller meeting rooms as well as military operations command centers, the top thirteen levels were used solely by the *Ventash'ma*. Many had extravagant apartments within the building, the more loyal to Aikiro they were, the more elegant their living areas. The top three levels, to include the Gathering Chamber as they called it, were used for important meetings and were surrounded by intricately carved window frames and large tinted windows.

The four basement and sub-basement levels however, they were hardly ever visited by anyone. This is where most of the torture and interrogations of prisoners took place so long ago and no one wanted to be associated with that now.

Yet these two Immortals moved through the damp and dark corridors of the subbasement without such thoughts on their minds.

"...understand why you have brought me down here Ki'nuq." The stern faced Immortal spoke. "No one has been down here into the bowels of this building in centuries."

"Yes Colonel Co'kal... I know this." The younger Immortal replied.

"Then why are we here!" Co'kal demanded.

"You are the Commander of the Ventash'ma Guard Colonel." The younger officer spoke. "I have heard even you criticize the men and women of the Ventash'ma lately. You have even spoken of the need to change things or the High Coven would be lost. And you have secretly spoken of your admiration of Cha'talla."

Co'kal stopped walking and looked at the young officer. "So you have brought me down here to kill me for my beliefs, is that it?" He demanded once more.

Ki'nuq stopped as well and turned to face Co'kal. "Kill you?" He gasped. "No Colonel... that is not why I have led you down here." He spoke quickly. "Your views... there are many who agree with you Colonel."

"Agree with me or not... we are Immortals and we have no say in governmental doings." Co'kal spoke. "We have a duty... and it is our duty we must follow."

“Is it our duty to watch the world we now call home be destroyed from within Colonel?” Ki'nuq asked. “Should not our voices be heard as well? Should we not continue what Cha'talla started so long ago?”

Co'kal looked at him and relaxed somewhat. He could detect no danger or threat around him and at eleven thousand years old, he had become quite adept at detecting danger when it came around him.

“Why have you brought me here Ki'nuq?” He asked the young officer.

“The Ventash'ma squabble and fight over power since Princess Yuri has not returned. They have lost contact with Admiral Moran. Many of our most senior officers are not bowing to their will.” Ki'nuq spoke. “They worry for themselves only Colonel.”

“Not all of them are like that Ki'nuq and you know this.” Co'kal spoke. “There are many on the Ventash'ma who embrace change and have since they were young.”

“Yet they do nothing now!” Ki'nuq hissed. “The war with the KFI will destroy us unless we act differently Colonel. You know this as well as I. This defensive mode we have been in for decades drains our people, our troops and our equipment. The laws that the Ventash'ma cling to are so far out of date that they no longer apply to today! Or tomorrow! Over half our own people answered Cha'talla's call Colonel. And many vampires went with them.”

“What?” Co'kal gasped.

Ki'nuq nodded his head. “It is not being reported openly, but thousands upon thousands of vampires departed the Coven with the Immortals. With our people! We are not beneath them! We are equals and many...”

“What?” Co'kal asked.

“Many Immortals have taken pureblood wives Colonel.” Ki'nuq stated. “Their wives have looked beyond what our outward appearance is and seen what we are at our core. Times are changing Colonel... and we must change with them.”

“Pureblood wives?” Co'kal spoke shocked. “Are they insane Ki'nuq? They know... they know the penalty for this action if it is discovered.”

“None of them care anymore Colonel. They want to be free.” Ki'nuq spoke softly. “I do not care anymore.”

Co'kal's eyes grew wide. “You?” He almost shouted.

Ki'nuq nodded his head. “We have been Blessed Wife and Husband for nearly six years now.” He said.

“Who?” Co'kal demanded.

Ki'nuq stood a little taller. “*Ventash'ma* Nedoli's youngest daughter Felisa.” He answered him confidently.

Co'kal moved closer to him. “Nedoli!” He hissed. “Felisa is seven hundred years your junior! She is his favorite! He is among the worst of...”

“That is not something you need to remind us of Colonel Co'kal.” The female voice filled the area around them.

Co'kal whirled around to the side and saw the lithe body of the pureblood female unwrap the shadows from around her frame. Co'kal watched her step up to Ki'nuq and press her very lush body against Ki'nuq's taller and much thicker body quite intimately. Felisa's long raven black hair fell to the middle of her back, her high cheekbones and full lips giving her an almost dreamlike beauty. Co'kal had to shake his head several times to come to terms with the fact that this breathtaking pureblood female, one who could and no doubt had garnered many advances from the pureblood vampire males, was pressed against Ki'nuq in a manner that was reserved for those who were and had been lovers for some time. Felisa was the youngest and most beautiful of Nedoli's three daughters, barely a hundred and twenty-nine years of age, and quite obviously there was far more to her than the Coven Media News knew. She was often seen with her father at events across the planet, smiling and laughing, but this was a part of her that no one even suspected.

He watched as Felisa leaned up on her tip toes and sensuously kissed Ki'nuq's cheek, while slipping her arm around the front of his waist. “I doubled back three times my husband.” She said softly. “We were not followed.”

Ki'nuq nodded and drew her closer to him. “You have met Felisa before Colonel.” Ki'nuq said.

Co'kal stared at them for a long moment still trying to grasp the situation. “How... how long?” He gasped.

“Six years as Ki'nuq has said.” Felisa asked. “Six of the most glorious years of my life Colonel.”

“You have... you have hid this for that long?” Co'kal asked with some disbelief.

Felisa smiled and glanced at Ki'nuq before turning back to him. “You will find that we have become quite good at hiding ourselves. As so many others have become as well.”

“So I see.” Co'kal spoke. “Your father has... he has no inkling?”

“My father is a power hungry fool who clings to the past like a disease.” Felisa spoke. “My mother knows... my sisters as well. They are the ones who have helped us be together through the years. My mother thinks a great deal of Ki'nuq.”

“Together?” Co'kal almost shouted.

Felisa laughed at his expression. “We have been Blessed husband and wife for almost six years Colonel. Do you think we have not consummated our love before now? We have... on many occasions and each time is more glorious than the last.”

“He does not need the details Felisa.” Ki'nuq spoke with an embarrassed smile.

“I will gladly share each and every detail if that makes the Colonel realize that I love my husband.”

Felisa spoke proudly. “I do not see an Immortal Co'kal... I see a man. A man who treats me as a precious jewel and not some trophy. A man who stole my heart the first moment I looked into his eyes.”

“How... how many others?” Co'kal asked.

“There are several hundred remain here within Ydare's city limits.” Felisa replied. “Many more left Uzu Ozeib 7 when Moran released the Immortals from their oppression.”

“Oppression?” Co'kal spoke looking at her. “You...” He stopped talking as things began to take shape in his head. “I suppose... I suppose oppression would be an adequate word to use. But why... why reveal this to me now?”

Ki'nuq looked at him. “It has become time to act Colonel.” Ki'nuq said. “It is time to act to save ourselves and the Coven.”

Co'kal shook his head. “The Coven is lost Ki'nuq.” He said softly. “Yuri is worst than her mother and when she returns...”

“Yuri is not returning.” Felisa told him now. “Not now. Not ever.”

Co'kal looked at her. “While I admire your confidence in that statement... it is not true.” He said. “She will return and with her will be Moran. He has never trusted our kind to begin with and...”

“It is true Colonel.” Ki'nuq spoke. “We know things that you do not. Things that have come to light in the last eighteen hours.”

“What things?” Co'kal demanded.

“Things that will ultimately change the face of the High Coven.” The new voice spoke. A deep voice brimming with confidence and command. Co'kal whirled around once more only to see the shadows unwrap from around two individuals. Two towering individuals that he knew instantly could only be Immortals. They were different somehow though, their skin a deep bronze color and both of them with short cropped hair. The bone spikes were prominent on the younger one and just beginning to return to their full length on the other. Co'kal's eyes flew open wide when he realized just who was standing in front of him.

“Cha'talla!” He gasped.

Cha'talla stepped away from Lynom and moved up in front of Co'kal. “It has been a very long time Co'kal my friend. A very long time indeed.”

YDARE

ABANDONED FACTORY 5.6 KILOMETERS OUTSIDE THE CITY PROPER

“...must be careful Toria my love.” Narice said softly as she leaned against Arrarn's chest sitting between his legs as she was. Toria was nestled between her legs as Narice used this down time to brush out her long red hair.

They had arrived here six hours before, sneaking in easily aboard their *STRIKER* while Cha'talla and the others crammed into the rear of the ship. Deneth, Vollenth and Viera rested on the far side of the massive empty

factory sharing a large bone. Twenty-three Immortals and fourteen Lycavorian Shock troops from Androcles's personal Division of Spartans. All of them were scattered about, mingling easily with each other and talking in soft whispers. Every two hours they would switch out their security so that no one became over tired. The *HORNET* and *BISMARCK* waited for the signal hidden not far from Uzu Ozeib 7. Closer to the High Coven homeworld than any Union warship had ever been.

"Narice... I will have ten of Cha'talla's men and five Lycavorian Shock Troopers with me." Toria spoke as she turned her head slightly. "I will be fine."

Narice leaned forward and nibbled on her lover and fellow wife's smooth neck. Toria cooed softly in delight and leaned into her attentions. To say this was something Narice never imagined she would discover would be an understatement. She had never been attracted to other women, partly because of the harsh Coven laws preventing such relationships, and partly because she did not really know herself. Meeting Toria on the way to Earth had been the start of finding all she had now. The red haired pureblood was nearly as delicious as Arrarn, and Narice knew she could not live without her now. Neither of them could. She was as much a part of her and Arrarn's life as was the task of breathing. The pleasure they found in each other's arms was blissful, and when they were together with Arrarn it went from blissful to idyllic.

Arrarn Leonidas was younger than both of them, younger than Toria by a much wider margin as she was almost three hundred years old. Narice was six years her husband's senior, yet no matter their differences in age, Arrarn could and did make them both feel like giddy schoolgirls in their bed. His endurance was far beyond what they possessed, his blood tasted like sweet wine and his attentions to them never wavered. He could drive both of them insane with just his fingers and tongue, and had done so on numerous occasions. While Toria was not as proficient within Mindvoice, she and Arrarn had been working with her nearly every day. They wanted her to feel the love they had for her and each other. They wanted her to be part of everything. For her part, Narice could not see herself without both Toria and Arrarn in her life now. Her half Elf, half Lycavorian husband worshiped her and Toria. He had since their first night together. Their wedding ceremony was very small considering when it had taken place, but Arrarn had promised both of them a ceremony in the future that would shame the gods, and they believed him when he said it. They were part of the Leonidas family now, and for Narice and Toria it seemed so very natural. They were accepted without question, called Princess by everyone except family, and looked up to by so many for leaving behind the hateful lives they had come from to embrace their new future.

"No plan, no matter how perfect, survives contact with the enemy." Arrarn said now.

Toria chuckled softly. Arrarn liked to quote his father when he was worried about certain things. "Well... our plan does not require contact with the enemy my husband and wife." Toria quipped at them playfully. "We will be using General Esavorna's intelligence and accessing the computer core's from a remote location. There are no Coven troops nearby."

"That could change quickly Toria." Narice told her.

"Will you two stop worrying about me?" Toria exclaimed. "You are the ones going into the heart of the lion's den. The Ruling Assembly Building? That is far more dangerous than a simple intelligence mission."

Arrarn's powerful arms closed around both of them and he pulled them closer. He leaned forward and buried his face in Narice's black hair and nuzzled the back of her neck. "If we stay on our toes, all of us will be alright." He said softly.

Narice nodded. "Yes we will." She said.

Toria turned slightly so that she could look at Narice. "What do you think of the Intel we received from Andro? About your sister?"

Narice met her eyes. "I don't know. It's hard to picture her with an Immortal. I noticed Pa'cour's over protectiveness through the years but I never gave it much thought. I thought he was just trying to impress my mother. I guess I was wrong."

"And the Command Codes?" Toria asked.

"We'll know soon enough I think." Narice replied. "Will Andro be back in time?" She asked squeezing Arrarn's arm.

"If he hasn't reach Earth he will transmit from the *SCIMITAR*." Arrarn spoke. "His last burst was..."

"It was amazing." Narice said. "Amazing and wonderful."

Toria nodded. "Yes it was." She stated.

Narice's eyes went to the double doors that they had been using. "Cha'talla is back." She said softly sensing the now powerful Mindvoice resonance of the Immortal General. "He has the Commander of the *Ventash'ma* with him."

Arrarn nodded. "Let's stick with the plan we have." He said. "This Colonel needs to see that things are different."

Narice chuckled as she leaned back against Arrarn. "Well... we could always just let you turn Toria and I into screaming piles of orgasmic flesh like you usually do. That should work quite well."

Toria nodded with a smile. "Hmmm... yes it would."

Arrarn shook his head. "I've created sex fiends out of both of you." He said.

"Well... if you weren't so extremely well gifted and talented husband... that would not be a problem." Narice spoke boldly.

Arrarn was about to answer when those doors opened and Cha'talla was the first to enter, followed by two Immortals, a pureblood female and finally Lynom. "Time to go to work." He said finally.

Co'kal's eyes could not get any wider as he followed Cha'talla into the long abandoned factory's main production floor. He froze in his spot when he saw the nearly three dozen Immortals and stern faced Lycavorians, not to mention the three very large dragons that rested off to the side. Instinctively his combat senses came alive when he saw the Lycavorians, at least until he realized that many of them sat with Immortals, using each other's bodies as props to lean against and sleep as soldiers in every army did. All of the Immortals present had obviously taken this magical serum he had heard so much about, for their skin was no longer wrinkled and gray colored. Many of them had hair, with beards and mustaches beginning to come in on their faces. Their bone spikes were easily seen, and they had lost none of the size and musculature of the Akruxian people. Co'kal watched as the female elf moved right up to the younger Immortal he now knew as Cha'talla's son and embrace him. Co'kal's eyes were wide as he watched them share a sizzling kiss of love and he realized that she was a half breed female. Half elf and half Lycavorian. And obviously the object of Cha'talla's son's attention.

Cha'talla smiled and remained in front of Co'kal seeing where his eyes were. "They are recently married, my son and As'hia. Their affection for each other is contagious."

Co'kal turned and met Cha'talla's eyes. "What? Cha'talla... what is...?"

"You are three thousand years my senior Co'kal." Cha'talla spoke with some pride in his voice. "You helped to train me when I first joined the ranks of the *Ventash'ma* Guard. You helped to shape me Co'kal. When I heard you still commanded the *Ventash'ma* Guard I know I needed to come to you."

"Cha'talla... how did... how did you get back within Coven space without being detected by our planetary defensive system?" Co'kal gasped. "How did... you travel with Lycavorians! No Lycavorian has ever set foot on our homeworld."

Cha'talla shook his head. "This is not our true homeworld." He spoke. "This is the world our people were forced to call home when Veldruk destroyed our original homeworld and turned us into his servants. Many of us have adopted this planet as our home and they will fight to protect it, yet they are treated as second class and sometimes third class citizens. The High Coven is crumbling from within Co'kal. It is destroying itself. We have come to keep that from happening and to place the Coven back on the path to redemption."

"We?" Co'kal asked his eyes widening as he saw the greenish yellow dragon move up behind Cha'talla and settle to the floor of the factory.

Cha'talla nodded and reached up with his hand to stroke the underside of Vollenth's massive snout. "Yes. Veldruk, Aikiro, Moran... they would have been the downfall of the High Coven. We can not allow that to happen." He glanced up at Vollenth. "Meet my Bonded Dragon Brother Vollenth Co'kal."

Co'kal stepped back as that massive head moved closer to him. "You... you are bonded to a dragon!" He gasped. "Like those within the Union?"

Cha'talla nodded his head. "I will not bore you with the details of how that came to be... only that it is." He said. "Recent events have changed our original plans somewhat... and Narice decided to take a different tact. One that I agree with... and one that could potentially save thousands of lives."

“Narice?” Co'kal snorted. “Princess Narice?”

Cha'talla nodded and motioned with his hand. “Come with me old friend. See for yourself.”

Cha'talla led him across the factory floor, Co'kal aware that the huge dragon moved nimbly with them and with confident grace for a creature so large. Co'kal saw her then, sitting between the legs of the powerfully built half elf half Lycavorian male, the stunning red head between her legs. That they sat in such an intimate way, pressed against one another as they were, it made Co'kal uncomfortable. He stopped beside Cha'talla only a meter away from them as Narice and the others rose to their feet. Co'kal recognized the half elf pilot Arrarn Leonidas then and his eyes grew even wider. The rumors were true.

Co'kal dropped to one knee instantly and bowed his head as his training over the last millennia had pounded into him. “Princess Narice!” He hissed softly.

Narice stepped forward to stand in front of him. “Get up Colonel Co'kal.” Narice spoke. “You do not bow to me or to anyone.”

Co'kal lifted his eyes and face as he stood slowly, towering over the daughter of Aikiro. She wore a version of the matte black Mark Four ArmorPly that was the mainstay of the Union forces, with a crimson colored cape dangling from her shoulders that was trimmed in gold. He saw that Arrarn Leonidas and the red haired female also wore similar body armor, and all of them were armed to the teeth. “Princess... I... I have no words. I...”

“You never expected to see me again did you Co'kal?” Narice asked. “Not after Moran and the *Ventash'ma* declared me a traitor to the Coven.”

“No Princess.” He answered honestly. “No I did not.” He looked at her. “Is it true what they say Princess? That you are now his wife and mate? That you went against your mother and sister?”

Narice nodded. “Yes it's true.” She stated. She turned and looked at Arrarn and Toria for a moment. “When I discovered Toria and then Arrarn... I discovered a different path from the one my mother had us on. A path of my own choosing. I took it. As did my niece Carisia.”

“Then why... why return?” Co'kal asked.

“I am still a vampire Co'kal. I am still a member of the High Coven.” Narice told him. “I do not wish to see the Coven fall.”

“But the... the boy King Androcles... he hates us!” Co'kal protested. “He... after what Aikiro did to his sister... what she ordered. It has the *Ventash'ma* in an uproar. They fear him more than they fear his father. He is unforgiving!”

Narice nodded. “Yes he is.” She stated.

Arrarn stepped up to Narice now and she took his hand quickly to provide herself with much needed support. “My brother is also not stupid Colonel.” Arrarn spoke. “And he believes strongly in fate and destiny.”

“Destiny?” Co'kal asked.

Arrarn nodded. “Yes.”

“What my *Du'ased m'ranndii* is saying Co'kal... Androcles believes that the Coven and the Union can coexist. Must coexist.” Narice said. “He believes our futures are intertwined. As do I. That is why we have returned. To take back the Coven.”

“Take back!” Co'kal gasped. “But your sister and Moran... they will...”

Narice held out the data pad to him. “My sister Yuri has renounced all claim to the High Coven seat of power.” She said. “She has decided to follow another path in her life with her Immortal husband.”

“Immortal...” Co'kal nearly shouted as he took the pad and read. His dark eyes grew wide in disbelief. “Pa'cour?” He exclaimed.

“There are many details that I can fill you in on.” Narice said. “I have only one question for you now. We are ready to begin our attack in a few hours... we have the backing of Admiral Pontal and many of his fellow officers. We have the backing of many of the younger generation of my people. We can do this with limited bloodshed as I said... but we are prepared to do it the hard way if needed. You can help us Co'kal. You can help us change history and put the High Coven on a path of good for once in our existence. Freedom for the High Coven means freedom for all Akruian Immortals. Freedom to choose their own paths as Ki'nuq and Felisa have. I do not wish to put it to you this way Co'kal... but you are either with us or against us.”

Co'kal looked at her. “I have... I have known nothing but service to the High Coven.” He spoke softly.

Narice nodded. "And you can still serve the High Coven. Yet you would be free to make your own choices Co'kal. Free to live how you want to live... just as so many of your kind already have decided."

Co'kal looked at Cha'talla. "Then all of it is true?" He asked.

"Look at me Co'kal." Cha'talla said. "Look at my men. We are no longer what Veldruk intended for us. We have recovered our past and how we looked before Veldruk twisted us and our appearance. See for yourself my friend. We are here because we want to be. We are here because Narice and Androcles believe we can change the future of the High Coven. I have no wish to kill you Co'kal... but I will." Cha'talla said. "Join us and grasp onto freedom and the change that freedom can bring."

Co'kal turned back to Narice. His eyes went between her and Arrarn and Toria and then looked all around him at the Immortals and Lycavorians that were intently watching him. He turned back to Narice finally and bowed his head. "Command me Princess." He said with pride bubbling over into his tone and body language. "Command me and we will be victorious."

Narice reached out and touched his arm. He looked up at her quickly. "I will not command you Co'kal. I will ask you." She said. "The future is around the corner... all we have to do is reach out and grab hold."

Co'kal nodded his head without hesitation. "Then let us grab hold and never look back!" He snapped.

ULU ARCHDEMON
BETA QUADRANT
VANARI SPACE
ORBITING AUSTROVA

Arduri Re Mydala's faced was frozen in an expression of exquisite bliss, her soft green eyes wide and her full lips quivering in unquenchable pleasure. Her glistening body, a mix of her Alkay and her sweat, sat astride Denali and trembled in breath stealing, near uncontrollable orgasms as they cascaded upon her one after the other while Denali exploded forcefully into her depths. Her hands were braced on his broad chest, her nails digging into his skin as Lisisa's equally naked flesh was pressed against her back and her hands tightly gripping her large, firm breasts while she showered her neck and shoulders with soft, fluttering kisses and sensuous licks of her tongue. Whatever Arduri had been hoping for, whatever she had expected, what had occurred over the last two days had surpassed her expectations a hundred fold.

Her petite blue body had practically drooled her Alkay for the last two days, most of those two days spent in bed with the man and women she now, quite happily called her husband and wife. Their tryst had been everything she had envisioned, Lisisa tasting like a sweet wine as she drank down her passion, and Lisisa equally engulfed in devouring Arduri's many curves in every possible way. This had only become ten times as pleasurable, for her and Lisisa both, when Denali had returned to their quarters and discovered them together. Pleasure that had not stopped for what seemed like hours. Arduri had finally discovered what her mother and sisters had discovered. A passion so intense it made their bodies shiver in endless delight. Denali was the largest man she had ever taken inside her without question, and while it had taken him several minutes to fully bury his enormous cock within her, Arduri had cried out in mindless joy when he finally achieved this goal. His lips had come down on hers, Lisisa's sweet juices already coating her lips and chin, and his kiss had caused her to shudder almost violently in another will breaking orgasm. His kiss alone caused her to feel things that she had never felt before in her life. Arduri was not shy about her sexuality and she thoroughly enjoyed the three Celebrations of the Hundreds that she had attended, but nothing she had experienced during those times had prepared her for the overwhelming ecstasy that had rocked her body for the last thirty-six plus hours.

Arduri knew that her Alkay would have some effect on Deni and Lisisa, but she never imagined it would increase their desire for each other as well as her. Denali was a machine, taking both Lisisa and her to heights of pleasure that had them screaming his name almost continuously. They had experimented with positions that Arduri had never even thought of, and no matter whether he was thrusting into Arduri or Lisisa, the other was never forgotten or left out. Whether she exploded upon Lisisa's talented tongue, or she drank from Lisisa's passion, it didn't matter. They had lavished Denali with attention, smiling at each other as he twisted and squirmed under their ministrations until he was exploding and they both shared his essence greedily. Arduri also

experienced the sensation of their feelings and desire for her within her mind. They had established a Mindvoice connection with her, igniting the dormant power within her just as Andro had done with Caliria. Feeling the love and want and need for her had almost brought Arduri to tears, and when they felt her emotions pour out to them, this all but sealed their union together. Like Lisisa, Arduri would never desire another man in her lifetime she knew. She had found the perfect man... and the perfect woman as far as she was concerned. Their union together felt so right and guided by the Prophets, and this is what Arduri grasped onto and squeezed with all that she was. Any thoughts of Cruor were washed away within the first hours, until all that remained was her desire and need for Deni and Lisisa.

Arduri collapsed upon Deni's chest finally, her breathing coming in ragged gasps as her racing heart began to try and find some normal beating. Her silver blond hair splayed across his chest and shoulders and mixed with Lisisa's raven locks as she settled to the bed beside them chuckling softly.

Lisisa had feared what Denali might do when he discovered them together. He had not seemed to be as interested in Arduri as she was. Lisisa should have know better she told herself. Deni wanted Arduri just as badly as she did, he was just better at hiding these desires. Until he had discovered them locked in a blistering position of mutual pleasure on their bed, their bodies already saturated with sweat and Arduri's Alkay, and their tongues working furiously. Then Denali's Alpha Wolf presence took over. Their scents, mixed together as they were now, they had driven him into a frenzy almost. He had been out of his clothes and upon them before they knew what was happening. It was Lisisa's scream of divine penetration that had told them the male they both wanted so badly had arrived. As Deni drove into her with dominating strokes, Arduri's talented tongue had whipped them both into glorious release so very quickly. And without softening even a little, Deni had taken Arduri next. Only Lisisa's glistening mound and stiff clit descending on her lips had ceased Arduri's screams of bliss as Deni took her that first time.

As Arduri shifted her hips on Deni's lap, his immense cock beginning to soften within the confines of her warmth and tightness, Arduri joined in Lisisa's chuckling. Followed quickly by Deni as one arm wrapped around Arduri's waist to grip her firm ass and the other dropped to Lisisa's naked hip.

"By... by the Prophets!" Arduri gasped as she lifted her head to look at them. "They should never have given us the additional twelve hours."

Lisisa laughed heartily now and leaned forward to kiss her, Arduri willing accepting her delicious lips and tasting herself on Lisisa's tongue. "If only they knew what we have been doing with that extra time!" Lisisa gasped as she pulled away.

"I can't... I can't get in trouble for this can I?" Deni asked.

"In trouble for what Denali? Making us quiver in your arms." Arduri asked him playfully as she extended her tongue and lick the moistness from his chin and neck.

"Your... your father is not going to be happy." Deni said. "He's not going to be happy that I have made you my wife and mate. Our wife and mate."

Arduri's soft green eyes shown in brilliance at his words and she kissed him hard, her large breasts crushed against his chest. Lisisa leaned forward and soon there were three tongues dancing with each other in a most intimate way.

"I do not care what he or anyone says!" Arduri finally said. "I am... I am so blissfully happy with both of you. Knowing that both of you will be in my life for the rest of eternity."

Lisisa pressed her forehead to Arduri's. "No less than we are happy." She said. "Happy that we have found you and what we can share together."

Arduri looked at Deni and he smiled. "Should I show you again how happy we are?" He asked.

Arduri groaned in delight when he flexed his soft but still huge cock within her. "No! No more!" She gasped. "I... I have no more Alkay to secrete! I am spent."

Denali rolled over bringing Arduri with him until she was positioned between him and Lisisa. He caught Lisisa's lips in a sizzling kiss before he slowly withdrew himself from Arduri and heard her gasp in disappointment. They dropped to the bed on either side of her and their arms reached around her blue body to squeeze her tight between them.

"Then we will rest." Deni said. "We still have five hours until we have to meet Ardan."

"Sleep would be good." Lisisa said.

"Hmmm... sleep." Arduri cooed. "Yes... sleep."

A silent message of love and commitment passed between Denali and Lisisa before they laid their heads on either side of Arduri's and let sleep take them into its soothing embrace.

"...look tired Arduri." Coren spoke as he stepped up next to her where she sat beside Lisisa on the *STRIKER* as they flew through the atmosphere towards the landing pad Ardan had told them he would meet them at.

Arduri looked up at her father and smiled. "I am fine father... really." She stated with a neutral voice. She glanced quickly over to Caliria who was also watching her with knowing eyes. Caliria didn't smile however and simply went back to reading her data pad. Arduri looked back to her father. "I'm fine." She stated again.

"Arduri... Cruor will be at the pad." Coren spoke. "Apparently... apparently Ardan took it upon himself to inform Eyon Ahn Vernalo that all marriage contracts will be put on hold until such time as we have greeted the Lycavorian representatives and established a dialogue."

"Good for him." Arduri said.

"I do not wish a confrontation in front of the Regents who will be waiting with Ardan." Coren spoke. "Ardan should have let me explain to Eyon what is going on and not spoken with him about this."

"Cruor knows?" Arduri asked.

"I imagine so... yes." Coren answered.

"Then he should not approach me." Arduri said. "I am... I am not going to change my mind father. Not now. Not ever. And there is nothing anyone can do about it."

"I know you are not." Coren spoke softly causing Arduri to look up at him from her seat with surprise in her eyes.

"You... you are not going to try and convince me otherwise?" Arduri asked.

Coren shook his head. "I have found that my children have little use for what I say lately and much of it is my own fault." He told her. "All I ask is that you use tact in dealing with him in front of the other Regents."

"Will he attempt to make a scene?" Lisisa asked softly looking at Coren.

Coren could tell just from the flush of his daughter's skin and how close she sat to Lisisa Leonidas that they had been together. And if they had been together, then Coren had no doubts that Denali Leonidas had been with them. He was not a fool, and while on Earth he had done much research on the Lycavorian people as a whole as well as their customs. If Denali Leonidas had claimed his daughter as Coren thought, he would not hesitate to strike down any man who tried to force their hand with Arduri. That would not go over well considering what they were going to try and discover. He and Caliria had been working non-stop for the last day and a half, most of it with Dutkne, to determine what their path would be. Over the course of the last thirty-six hours he had discovered much about the Lycavorian people from Dutkne. Much he had never taken the time to learn because of how he felt about them. There was no mistaking the violent anger in Dutkne's eyes when they spoke of those members of the Protectorate who had to be working with the OSG in kidnapping and enslaving Vanari females.

He also noticed how Dutkne treated Caliria as well, almost as if she was royalty, and Coren knew well why. His oldest daughter was torn. Torn between what her heart told her and torn between what her mind told her. Her soul was troubled and filled with disquiet. And it was Coren's fault he knew. He had found her absently stroking the glittering blood red pendant around her neck all of the time now, her eyes far away as if she was remembering things and her face relaxed and almost at peace. However whenever she stopped stroking that pendant and turned to do something, her face became drawn and empty. Coren knew what the significance of the pendant she wore meant for he had questioned Dutkne about it. This only served to strip away another layer of the distrust and hate he felt for the Lycavorian people as a whole. What Androcles had given him; it was the means to insure there would never be peace and helpful cooperation between their peoples. It was also the means to insure that the Lycavorians and the Vanari people became irrefutable allies. Androcles had left it up to him.

Coren turned to Lisisa Leonidas and shook his head slowly. "I do not know." He told her honestly. "He is brash and arrogant and has been known to publicly demean others, but his father is important and holds much sway over others. It could be embarrassing for him to try something now."

“There is a way to make sure nothing happens.” Lisisa said. “Aside from talking that is.”

Coren looked at her. “Yes.”

“Your people have designated a place for Jeth and Aradace to stay?” Lisisa asked.

Coren nodded. “It is the same estate we use for visiting dignitaries yes. There is a large storage facility next to the main compound where you will be staying and that has been made ready for them.”

“Let them go with Arduri and she can be the one to show them where it is.” Lisisa said.

Coren looked at her for a moment. The Vanari were still largely unaware of the existence of dragons, and seeing the two dragons that would exit the ship with Denali and Lisisa would be a first. It would also serve as quite the dampener on anything Cruor might attempt and was a very discrete action as well. He nodded his head at her. “That would certainly do the trick.” He said.

“I do not want to leave you or Denali.” Arduri said forcefully.

Coren watched as Lisisa reached out and took her hand, bringing it to her lips and kissing her knuckles. “And you won’t.” She stated affectionately. “Deni would never allow that... and nor will I. I assume though that we will be needed to speak with Ardan and the others alone?” She asked looking at Coren.

Coren nodded. “After the initial greeting takes place yes.”

“And no one else will be allowed?” Lisisa said.

“Just you and your security and members of the SBR.” Coren replied.

Lisisa nodded. “Then you can go with Jeth and Aradace.” She spoke looking at Arduri. “When we return... you can show us around your city. If I know Deni he will be anxious to sample all of your food.” She finished with a smile.

Arduri nodded and smiled. “I know of two very good places I will take you.” She said.

Coren saw the brightness in his daughter’s face when she spoke to Lisisa and he felt another of those multiply layers being stripped away once more. “Then it is settled.” He said.

Arduri turned back to him. “Yes.”

Coren hid his sigh of relief for he knew how stubborn his daughters were turning out to be. They were taking after their mother in almost every way. Naesta did not even want to talk with him before he left and in many ways that showed him how far he had fallen in their eyes. He nodded his head too Lisisa in silent thanks and then turned to move back to his seat beside Caliria.

“There!” Dutkne pointed to the massive windowed building that was stretched out over the river three thousand feet below them. “That is the Vanari Regents Building.” He told Denali who stood next to him in the cockpit.

Deni whistled softly. “Impressive.” He said.

Dutkne nodded his head. “Say what you will... but when it comes to modern architecture, the Vanari are the best.” He looked at Deni with a smile. “Though from what I saw of Eden City... the elves and humans of Earth are not far off.”

“You’ve spent a lot of time with Coren Re Mydala these last hours.” Deni spoke looking at him.

Dutkne nodded. “You and Lisisa got the better looking Re Mydala though.” He said with a smile. “Is that as serious as it appears?”

Deni didn’t hesitate. “Yes.” He answered him confidently. “It’s not something I had ever envisioned. Lisisa saw it before me... she usually does... but it’s serious now. Very serious.”

Dutkne nodded. “Good.” He said.

“And Coren?” Deni asked.

Dutkne shrugged his broad shoulders. “Hard to tell right now.” He replied. “You saw the message Andro left for him?”

Deni nodded. “Andro doesn’t hide things from me. From any of us. You should know that as his *Val’istar*.”

Dutkne rolled his eyes at that. “Please... let’s not go there.” He stated with a grin. “Coren doesn’t know what to make of it. He sees that his ex-wife and all of his children have taken up with members of a species he

has despised for centuries, but Andro's message to him... putting the future of our relations in his hands... that threw him for a very large loop."

Denali nodded his head. "I'm sure." He said. "Was it wise to do that though Dutkne?"

Dutkne looked at him. "I didn't think so at first... Andro insisted. He has a sense for people that staggers my ability to comprehend. I've heard your father is similar."

Deni nodded. "True."

Dutkne nodded. "Coren Re Mydala is a politician through and through." He said. "But he is one of the best. He didn't make it to the SBR because of his good looks I'll tell you. His family has something to do with his rise to power, but he is very good at what he does or they would never have appointed him to the Senior Board of Regents. He's shrewd and when he is thinking straight... he's downright devious."

"You think we have something to worry about with him?" Denali asked. "He can raise the Vanari against Lycavorians and all this could come crashing down around us you know."

Dutkne nodded. "He could... but I don't think he will. He and Caliria have been working for the last thirty-six hours to try and determine whom and how many of the Vanari may be involved in this little slave trade thing they got going. If it infects the top tier of the Vanari, it could be a reason why we have not become better allies before now."

"We are not allies just yet." Deni said.

"No... that will be up to you and Lisisa." Dutkne said. "I'm only along on this ride to find the traitors within my our people and make them pay. And help Coren and Caliria find what they need too to bring this slavery thing to an end."

"If the OSG are as insinuated into the Vanari government as deeply as Andro suspects, we could find ourselves in a bit of a bind." Deni spoke.

Dutkne nodded. "We'll know shortly after our private meeting with the Regents how deeply the OSG are involved." He said. "What you will tell them at that meeting will determine how quickly they try to come after us or discredit us." Dutkne looked at him. "Coren's security is in place?"

Deni nodded. "They went down when we first arrived. The additional twelve hours that Ardan asked to prepare was a blessing."

Dutkne nodded. "It could also be a curse." He said. "Ardan's family and the Re Mydala family have been intertwined deeply for hundreds, if not thousands of years. I don't know how Coren feels about Ardan possibly being the biggest traitor of them all."

"I guess we are going to find out rather soon." Denali asked.

Dutkne nodded. "Yes we are."

VANARI BOARD OF REGENTS ASSEMBLY BUILDING CITY OF MYDALA NORTHEAST LANDING PAD

To say that the six Vanari Regents and three other political figures that stood with Ardan on the landing pad were intimidated would have been an understatement.

When Denali and Lisisa exited the *STRIKER DT* down the ramp with Jeth and Aradace behind them and Arduri between them, all six men and three women took large steps backwards with huge eyes. Ardan had warned them. He had warned them of how this new branch of the Lycavorian people were and of the huge dragons that they fought with. Even in their ancient lore, nothing in Vanari history came close to the two massive beasts that exited the *STRIKER DT*. The female Regent closest to Ardan reached for his arm.

"Ardan?" She gasped.

Ardan looked at her. "I did tell you Ella." He spoke quickly.

"They... they are so large!" Ella Ra Shaiel stammered her dark green eyes wide in both fear and disbelief.

Ardan nodded. "Yes they are... and they understand everything we say." He spoke.

“These... these beasts are that intelligent?” The tall and well dressed man asked. He was not a Vanari but the leader and delegate to a species that were very similar to the Lycavorians in both appearance and genetic history.

“Yes.” Ardan spoke. “I have seen it myself. They fight beside the men and women who ride them. It is frightening to say the least.”

The Rothryn people were actually an offshoot of the Lycavorian people that were known to the Protectorate. They were a Caste based society that had the same basic genetic structure as Lycavorians but were unable to shift their forms. They had the heightened senses and healing systems, the same endurance and reflexes, almost the exact same makeup as the Lycavorian people. For all intents and purposes they were Lycavorians who could not transform into the wolves that they were meant to be. They were not so much an insular society as they were an introverted one. Their technology was very modern, yet they chose to remain reclusive in their dealings with other species. They traded with the Vanari people on a regular basis and even had an embassy on Austrova, and relations between them were very open and friendly.

Dutkne had never been able to figure out what exactly the Vanari saw in the Rothryn people that they did not see in the Lycavorian people and his eyes narrowed as he came down the ramp of the *STRIKER* and saw them standing among the Vanari Regents. He recognized two of the additional regents right away, both of them men who were close friends with Ardan and Coren. He didn't recognize the third man or the female Regent. He didn't hasten to catch up with Denali who was whispering to Lisisa and Arduri as they walked towards the group, but he reached out to Denali within Mindvoice. He knew Denali must have scented the Rothryn people right away and he was asking her about them.

[They are called Rothryn.] Dutkne spoke calmly.

Deni didn't look back but did slow his gait somewhat as he included both Lisisa and Arduri within the connection Dutkne had established. *[They are Lycavorians!]* Deni exclaimed. *[I can smell them from here Dutkne!]*

[They are an offshoot of our people yes.] Dutkne answered. *[They occupy a rather large caste like society on the Vanari border.]*

[You didn't tell us this Dutkne.] Lisisa spoke.

[I did not think they would be here.] He answered. *[As I said... they are a caste society and do not often associate with other species. They keep to themselves for the most part.]*

[What are they like?] Deni asked.

[Their people are proud and capable. I believe they are broken into three different castes or cultures. Nobles, warriors and then workers. The workers are the lowest caste but if our intelligence is accurate the Rothryn have no poverty or unskilled men or women. The castes do not usually associate between each other. It's almost as if all of them know what their status in life is and they accept it. They have trading agreements with the Vanari and other governments within the quadrant, but you do not often see them outside their own space. Their military is very well trained and equipped though not large in comparison to the Union or even the Vanari for that matter. They have an embassy here... but since they have never shown an interest in dealing with the Protectorate I never saw the reason to reach out to them. They don't seem to like us very much and even though I have offered to open communications they have rebuked them.]

[Why?] Deni asked.

[They are nearly a perfect genetic match to our people... but they can not shift their forms as we can.] Dutkne answered. *[I have always been of the mind that they resent us for this fact because in all reality they are Lycavorians as you said Deni. I am surprised that they are here to be honest. They have never shown much of an interest in the Protectorate. I don't understand why Ardan would invite them.]*

[Smoke screen.] Deni answered.

[What do you mean?] Dutkne asked.

[To keep our attention focused somewhere else.] Deni explained.

[He reveals to these Rothryn that we are Lycavorians in the hopes that it will divert our attention from what our real goal is in coming here.] Lisisa said.

[You think he has involved them in what he is doing?] Dutkne asked.

[Possibly... but more than likely it is simply to keep us occupied.] Deni spoke.

[Well... the man to Ardan's left is the leader of the Rothryn. His name is Praetor Dyack. The two others beside him are his sons Kelelm and Anroth. Once again if our Intel is accurate, Dyack has been in power for the last seven hundred and fifty years. Elections are held every hundred years for Praetor, and he has won all seven with very clear majorities.] Dutkne spoke. *[Aside from that we know very little.]*

[I guess we will be finding out then.] Denali spoke.

Their conversation ended as Deni stepped up to Ardan who held out his arms for him.

“Ah... welcome to Austrova Denali Leonidas.” Ardan exclaimed taking his arms.

“It is truly an honor to be here Regent Vu Lamurrion.” Deni spoke bowing his head slightly in respect. It was an action that everyone present saw. Denali quickly stepped to the side and drew Lisisa closer with his hand. “My mate and wife Lisisa.” He spoke.

Ardan knew of her of course and he took her arms as well. “It is my distinct hope that we are able to forge a friendship in the next days and weeks Princess.”

Lisisa smiled and also bowed her head slightly. “That is ours as well.”

Ardan smiled and turned to the others behind him. “Please... allow me to introduce you.” He spoke motioning to the other Regents. “I present Regent Litra Vhn Dastle our Regent of Finance.”

Deni and Lisisa both bowed their head slightly and greeted the man with handshakes. Ardan introduced them to all of the Vanari Regents present, the Regent of Defense, the Regent of State Matters and the Regent of Law among them. When he turned to introduce them to the Rothryn representatives Denali got a good look at this Dyack person. He appeared to be several thousand years old at least, with wavy dark brown hair touched by gray. His face appeared very relaxed but his eyes held wisdom and calculating knowledge in them.

“Allow me to introduce Praetor Dyack of the Rothryn Republic.” Ardan said. “And his two sons Anroth and Kelelm”

Denali looked at the man as he held out his hand. “An honor sir.” He spoke cautiously.

Dyack took the offered hand and nodded. “For us as well.” He answered.

“You are Lycavorian!” Deni said quickly. He saw the look of irritation on Dyack's face very briefly before it was gone. A look of irritation that remained on the face of the youngest son Anroth but did not make it to the oldest son Kelelm. Ardan's face had also taken on a worried expression but it quickly passed when Dyack shook his head and he smiled a warm smile.

“From a medical standpoint we are genetically the same as Lycavorians.” Dyack explained to him. “However we do not have the wondrous ability to shift our forms as you do. We have called ourselves Rothryn as long as our history books go back. We are proud of that name.”

Denali caught the tension and shifted tact quickly. “As well you should be sir.” He spoke seeing Dyack relax even more at his words. He squeezed Lisisa's hand. “My wife and mate Lisisa.” He spoke.

It was the youngest son who stepped forward. “Your scent is not fully Lycavorian.” He spoke in an almost accusatory tone.

“Anroth!” Dyack hissed softly.

Lisisa smiled. “It is alright.” She said. “And you are correct. I'm half vampire.” Lisisa told them. “However my Lycavorian blood is more dominant.”

“We... we were under the impression your branch of Lycavorians hated vampires.” The oldest son Kelelm spoke now. “Your own Val'istar gave us history books that relate the history of this High Coven. This vampire empire and how you were enslaved by them for millennia. We were under the impression this war was still going on.”

Denali nodded his head. “It has not been much of a war for the last thousand years.” He stated. “And there are millions of vampires who call the Union home and have for centuries. They are honored and welcome members of the Union.”

Kelelm's face squinted a bit and he nodded. “This is interesting.” He spoke softly.

“You are the oldest of your father's sons then? The Crown Prince.” Dyack asked. “We express our sincere condolences for the loss of your father. Regent Vu Lamurrion has told us he was considered a great leader of men.”

Deni glanced quickly at Lisisa before nodding his head. Ardan had not revealed that their father still lived. This was interesting. “Thank you for your words sir. But I am not the oldest son and thankfully I'm not the Crown Prince either! I wouldn't want that job for anything.” He spoke trying to be humorous.

Dyack and his sons looked semi confused and Ardan stepped in. “Androcles is the oldest of the Union King’s sons. The Crown Prince. Denali is the second pureblood son of the King and his Lycavorian wife.”

“So you are a vanguard Prince Denali Leonidas?” Dyack asked with a smile. “Your brother’s eyes?”

Denali shrugged. “I prefer my own eyes sir.” He spoke. “I have come because Androcles is busy with matters concerning our people. He plans right now to come here in seven or eight weeks. It is at that time we will formally dissolve the Protectorate and merge them into the Union.”

Dyack looked genuinely surprised at this and he glanced at his sons quickly. “We were not aware of this.” He said finally turning back to Deni.

Denali shook his head. “Most people outside of the Protectorate aren’t aware of it. Not yet anyway. That is why I am here in a sense.” He said. “It is also the main reason Dutkne has returned with us now. As my brother’s Val’istar... he will insure the transition goes smoothly.”

“So you are expanding into the Beta Quadrant?” Anroth asked in a low voice. A voice filled with open distrust now.

Denali looked at him. They were of the same height and basic build, but Denali’s frame was much more muscular while Anroth’s build was leaner and spoke of great speed. “We are rejoining with our people.” Denali answered. “People that were separated from us after the Black Day.”

Kelelm nodded. “Yes... the day these vampires conquered your people.” He said. “Your history books say billions lost their lives during this time. Yet you persevered. An honorable trait.”

“The Rothryn have never been conquered!” Anroth spoke arrogantly and it was Lisisa who looked at him now.

“Perhaps the right force of people have just not come along yet.” She stated plainly.

All of them looked surprised at her statement and Anroth glared at her. Dyack quickly moved closer to Denali. “Prince Leonidas... I officially ask for you to attend a dinner at our embassy. Perhaps when you have a free moment from your dealings with the Vanari.” His invitation sounded very sincere.

Denali nodded his head. “I would like that sir.” He said. “We...”

Denali! Aradace’s voice echoed within his mind unshielded.

Dyack and the his sons easily heard the word within Mindvoice and they watched as Deni and Lisisa both turned to look behind them at the bluish scaled beast and the even larger dark purple scaled monster.

It is alright sister. Deni spoke. *Calnamarno will go with you and Jeth. Lisi and I will join you later.*

Be mindful Deni. Jeth’s deeper voice spoke now as they saw Arduri scrambling up into the saddle on his back fearlessly. *It... it smells funny here.*

We will be brother. Lisisa spoke. *Speak shielded from now on as well.*

Dyack looked at the back of her head when she said that and then suddenly the words vanished from his mind, though the Mindvoice tremors remained quite strongly. They were blocking his ability to listen to their conversation.

[You suspect something?] Aradace asked.

[These Lycavorians... or Rothryn. They can Mindvoice and there is no reason to let them hear what we are saying.] Denali spoke. *[We will join you in a few hours. And make sure that fool does not bother Calnamarno.]*

[Ah... I will handle Cruor.] Arduri echoed playfully.

Denali and Lisisa both smiled as they watched Arduri point in an easterly direction and then both Jeth and Aradace exploded into the skies above Mydala. The first dragons to ever do so. They turned back to see Dyack and his sons watching them intently.

Dyack looked at Deni. “You call... you call them... dragons.” He said. “They are... they are beasts but you refer to them as brother and sister. Why?”

It was Lisisa who responded and her sharp tongue stunned all of the Rothryn. “Where we come from sir... it is considered exceptionally rude to invade on the surface thoughts of another person.”

Anroth stepped forward and opened his mouth to speak harshly but Dyack held up his hand. “No!” He hissed softly. “The Princess is correct.” He stated. “Our apologies to both of you. Our abilities within Mindvoice are a natural thing to us and we sometimes can not control it.”

Lisisa stared at him for a long moment knowing that the lie was buried within rhetoric. She glanced at Deni and shook her head minutely. She saw him slowly unclench his right fist and the soft bluish light vanished

quickly. Denali turned to look at Dyack. “They are not beasts sir!” He spoke firmly. “They are sentient lifeforms who are far more intelligent than many others we have met in the past. They speak only within Mindvoice and we call them brother and sister because we are bonded to them within Mindvoice.”

Dyack looked at him oddly. “Bonded?” He asked. “What do you mean?”

Ardan had been standing there watching the exchange and now he took the time to step forward and intervene. “Perhaps that conversation is best left for when the Prince and Princess meet with you for dinner Praetor Dyack. We have much to do.”

Dyack looked at Ardan and nodded. “Of course Regent... forgive me.” He turned back to Denali. “Say three nights from now. The Rothryn embassy? Or would you prefer on your ship perhaps? I understand she is beautiful.”

“Your embassy is fine sir.” Denali replied. “The *ARCH DEMON* is... she is not prepared to meet visitors.”

Dyack nodded his head and bowed slightly. “An honor it is to meet you then and I look forward to three days from now.”

Deni nodded as Ardan took his and Lisisa’s arms and began to lead them away. Anroth and Kelelm moved closer to their father as they watched them leave the landing pad.

“They blocked me father.” Kelelm spoke softly. “They shut me out of their conversation with the... those dragons.”

Dyack nodded. “Me as well.” He stated.

“You?” Anroth asked with surprise.

Dyack nodded his head slowly. “It appears their Mindvoice capabilities are far in excess of what we first thought. Even more so than those within the Protectorate. Those Lycavorians within the Protectorate can shield their thoughts from us when they speak but not with such devastating efficiency as these members of the Union it seems.”

“What did they mean they are Bonded to those dragons?” Kelelm asked.

“I do not know... but it will be very interesting to try and discover this.” Dyack said.

“She needs to show more respect to her betters!” Anroth hissed softly.

“She is a Princess Anroth.” Dyack answered him calmly. “While we treasure our wives and mates, I am beginning to think that perhaps those within this Lycavorian Union allow their women to partake of many more things than we do. They have many more options in their lives it appears.”

“Our wives and mates are our strength father.” Kelelm said. “Why would we risk them in other endeavors?”

“We do not... but I believe this Lycavorian Union does. And I don’t believe it is a risk to them.” He stated. He turned to Anroth. “Do not ever again attempt to raise your voice harshly to a female Anroth! Especially one that is obviously mated to another! I have told you about this before! You cling to ideas and history that you learned in school that is no longer accepted among our people! It needs to end! And you assume too much by saying you are her better!”

Anroth dropped his eyes. “I am used to our females being more respectful father.” He said. “And there are many who still honor the old ways.”

“They are respectful because we treat them with respect and we honor them. They are our future Anroth!” Dyack said. “I have not spent the last two hundred and fifty years trying to garner support in our Parliament for more rights for our females only to see you resort to the type of action that many of our older males cling to. This is not how things will be! You will act as I expect you to act or you will no longer take part in political matters!”

“I do not share your sentiment father.” Anroth spoke firmly. “We are stronger than the other packs because of you and what you have done, but you push us too fast towards a future many do not want.”

“I know you do not agree with me... but while I am Praetor you will act in a civilized manner! And if we do not push for change in our future we will become stagnant and never advanced past what we have achieved. I will drag the other packs into the future snarling and biting if I have too! I will not allow them to send us cascading backwards!” Dyack snapped at him harshly. “These Lycavorians are obviously very different in some ways from those within the Protectorate Anroth. And it appears that some of them at least are far more advanced in Mindvoice skills than we were led to believe.”

“Physical manifestation of Mindvoice power.” Kelelm said softly.

Dyack looked at his oldest son quickly. “You saw it as well?”

Kelelm nodded. “He kept it well hidden but I caught the fingers of it as he released it.” He answered. “Soft blue color around his hand. And his mate kept him from unleashing it. Did you see her nod?”

Dyack nodded as well. “Yes. She has a great influence over him. Just as your mother does with me. A sign of a strong and powerful connection and union.”

“Saw what?” Anroth asked. “What did you see?”

Dyack turned back to look at Denali and Lisisa as they walked with the Vanari Regents. “Something I have sought to obtain for many generations. It is the reason why I have pushed our people to expand their MV abilities and truly work on them.” He said softly. “The physical manifestation of Mindvoice power. The ability to use it as a tool or a weapon.”

Kelelm nodded. “He was about to hit you brother.” Kelelm spoke. “Hit you with this very thing had you uttered a sound of disrespect towards his mate. I could see it in his eyes.”

“It appears this branch of our people have this ability.” Dyack spoke. “To what extent we will need to find out.”

“That won’t be easy father. And it may well be dangerous and backfire on us.” Kelelm said.

Dyack shook his head. “No it won’t be easy. But it may be the only way to insure the survival of our people and keep them from falling back into the barbaric dredges of our past.” Dyack said. Dyack turned to his oldest son. “Discover what you are able about this brother Androcles through our Vanari contacts Kelelm. Be discrete. He is obviously the power of their throne now and it is he who we will need to deal with. The better impression we make on this Denali when he comes for dinner, the better our chances of succeeding, for he will surely pass this information on to this Androcles.”

Kelelm nodded. “Very well.”

“And contact your sisters as well. Have them join us here.” Dyack said.

“Why?” Anroth asked quickly. “We should just take one of them and discover what we want by interrogation and experimentation.”

“Your sisters have never left our homeworld and now would be a good time to make that happen.” Dyack said looking at him. “And both of them are far stronger within Mindvoice than you my son. And far more subtle as you have just proven. We have only just met them and you wish to take prisoners and resort to methods that are brutal and unnecessary.”

“They are methods that work father.” Anroth spoke. “We have done it with those fools from the Protectorate.”

“I did not authorize that!” Dyack hissed savagely as he whirled on his son. “That was Barnak’s doing! And what did he achieve? Nothing!”

“He uses proven methods father.” Anroth spoke. “The subjects were injured and he pushed them too far before allowing them to heal. He won’t make the same mistake again.”

“I will not let him!” Dyack snarled. “His methods are not methods I will tolerate! There are always better ways!” Dyack turned away from Anroth before his anger truly built. “I will talk with Regent Ra Shaiel and get her permission for your mother to show your sisters around the city with an escort of course. I want them present for the dinner also. Their latent abilities in Mindvoice may serve us better in discovering what we need. We will do this my way while I am Praetor. We need allies... not enemies. We have enough of those within our own people.”

VANARI BOARD OF REGENTS ASSEMBLY BUILDING SENIOR BOARD OF REGENTS PRIVATE CHAMBERS

Denali was much like his brothers and father. He did not have much use for the meetings and squabbling of life long politicians. It was only Lisisa’s soothing aura that kept him from fidgeting frequently in his chair and looking bored and uninterested. Her slim hand rested on the top of his on the table, her long fingers stroking his knuckles and allowing her female aura and MV resonance to filter through their physical contact. It had

been her mother Aricia who had shown her how to manipulate her aura in this way after she and Deni had announced their love and union to everyone. It was something she was teaching Arduri to do within Mindvoice since she did not have the same female aura as a wolf. Some people would have called it a form of control... but to Lycavorians it was a sign of the commitment and love between mates.

The half dozen Regents at the table with Ardan and Coren were going over the large amount of Intelligence and information that Denali had given them. It was not all there Deni and Lisisa both knew... as did Coren Re Mydala... but it was enough to get a general reaction from the Vanari people as a whole. After a full thirty-seven minutes by Denali's estimate one of them men looked up at where he sat between Lisisa and Dutkne.

"This... this information is astounding to say the least Prince Denali." He stated in a neutral tone of voice.

Deni nodded. "Yes I imagine it is Regent Nejesh." He spoke.

"Astounding is not the word I would use Yithal Ashr Nejesh." The second man spoke. "May we ask how you obtained it?" Alrerin Sha Harael asked from his chair at the head of the table.

Denali looked at him. Dutkne had informed him that this was the senior Vanari Regent on the entire planet and the head of the SBR. His influence was wide ranging and powerful among the Vanari people. He was considered an icon in their history and was one of the oldest Vanari alive in their empire.

"Some of it was obtained through the OSG agent that we captured and some of it came from data banks within the base my brother destroyed." Denali answered. "The rest came from different sources that our Krypteria Intelligence discovered."

"So this came from an OSG agent who was desperate to save her life. A mercenary base within your quadrant of space that was selling our females and an Intelligence Agency that we know nothing about." Alrerin spoke.

Deni was about to reply when Dutkne leaned forward. "The Intelligence is very accurate Regent Sha Harael." He spoke.

"So you say Director General Dutkne." Alrerin spoke. "Vanari Intelligence has never presented any of this information to us."

"Perhaps Vanari Intelligence was told not too." Dutkne said.

"You sit there and accuse us?" Nejesh hissed at him. "You, who kidnapped and then facilitated one of our Regents and three of our Cadre Commandos in disobeying our laws!"

"I accuse no one Regent Nejesh." Dutkne answered. "The data is there in front of you. As for kidnapping Regent Re Mydala and her daughters... that is not true regardless of what you have been told or believe. They would have gone to the Alpha Quadrant regardless and I think Regent Vu Lamurion and Regent Re Mydala will both concur based on what they saw that our actions kept them safe."

"They were breaking our laws." Alrerin spoke more calmly. "They were doing so with full knowledge of their actions. Coren and Ardan were acting to bring them back and keep our people safe!"

"What they were doing was not my concern." Dutkne told him. "I took them aboard the *TALON OF JUSTICE* because I knew what they were going into and I did not want to see them come to harm. Or is that so hard to believe? That a Lycavorian did not want harm to come to a Vanari?"

Alrerin stood up. "And yet only one of them returned to face punishment for their actions in this matter." He spoke.

Denali folded his arms across his broad chest and his words left Lisisa brimming with pride and happiness. "Arduri Re Mydala returned for only one reason and that was to void out the contract of marriage that she entered into with Cruor Ahn Vernalo per your own laws. She is my wife and mate now and she will not be punished for anything."

"And now you dictate to us what we will do?" Nejesh snapped.

"If need be... I will send her back to my ship and that is where she will remain." Denali told him. "Unless free choice for your females is not something that you allow anymore!"

"Your own reports here indicate that Devra Re Mydala allowed herself to become wife to one of your *Durcunusaan* soldiers." Ella Ra Shaiel spoke now. "And Naesta Re Mydala refused to return for similar reasons because of a Lycavorian and one of your mother's sisters! This board was already aware of Nirilo Re Mydala

and his relationship with a Lycavorian woman from the Protectorate. Are we suppose to believe the Lycavorians had nothing to do with this?"

Deni nodded. "Staying behind was their choice. No one forced them." He said sitting back in his chair. "I guess they found something that they wanted more than returning here."

"How do we know that?" Yithal barked.

"Are you accusing us of keeping them against their will sir?" Deni asked.

Ardan held up his hands. "Please... everyone. This is not productive!"

"I came here as a representative of my brother and the Lycavorian Union." Denali spoke more calmly than Lisisa realized he could. "I did not come here to be accused of acts with which we had no involvement in."

"We thank you for rescuing our females." Alrerin spoke. "And allowing Ardan to return them to their families... but this does not excuse what has happened."

Deni looked at him. "What exactly has happened?" He asked.

"The very information you gave to us implicates your people in the kidnapping and trafficking of Vanari females." Nejesh snapped.

Deni turned his head and looked at Dutkne wide eyed. "This is a joke right?" He asked.

Dutkne shrugged. "I did warn you and Androcles both." He said.

Denali turned back to Regent Nejesh. "That intelligence implicates the Vanari as well!" He snapped.

"None of what you have presented to us is proves complicity by those within the Vanari Empire." Nejesh spoke. "Vanari Intelligence has never brought this type of information to us nor have they even raised the remote possibility it could be true. This information has however confirmed what our Intelligence has suspected in the past... and that is Lycavorian assistance of the OSG."

"Elements within the Protectorate yes..." Dutkne hissed. "Not our people as a whole."

"You are all Lycavorians are you not?" Ella asked calmly. "All the information we have indicates that the branch of your people that Prince Leonidas comes from is even more violent than your own General Director Dutkne. Is that not true?"

"So we bring you proof that elements of your own people are involved with the slavery and selling of your females and you just dismiss it?" Lisisa asked. "Does your arrogance extend that far?"

"It is not arrogance to say that the Vanari are far more civilized than your people." Ella spoke haughtily.

Lisisa's dark green eyes narrowed. "Is that a fact?" She snarled softly.

"Lisi?" Deni spoke.

She met his gaze. "She just called us savages Deni!" Lisisa hissed. She reached down and took the pad beside her hand and practically tossed it across the table at the woman. "And I suppose you not being able to find a counter agent to the OSG chemical compound after so many years and just accepting what they do to you makes you better huh?"

"You know nothing of what you speak Princess Leonidas." Ella stated.

"No?" Lisisa snapped right back. "Then tell me how Caliria Re Mydala was months away from finding a counter agent to the OSG chemical and she did it all within the last decade! Tell me that!"

"What fool hardy notion is this?" Ella said picking up the data pad and beginning to read. Her eyes grew wider as she did and finally she looked up and directly at Coren. "Coren were... were you aware of this?" She gasped.

Coren shook his head. "Only after we discovered she had been taken." He replied.

"She was willingly violating one of our longest standing laws!" Ella snapped. "There is no counter agent for the OSG chemical."

"You better check your facts on that!" Lisisa snapped. "When my mother combined the data that Caliria had worked on and put together, she was able to fashion the last components to a counter agent within days!" She leaned forward across the table. "The cure is on the last page of that pad. All you need to do is begin mass producing it and within two months you can inoculate all of your females. The OSG will have no hold on you any longer!"

"This is nonsense!" Nejesh declared. "In the thousands of years before we outlawed this research our people were never able to fashion a counter agent! You expect us to believe that your people did this is only a few days."

"Our mother is Hadarian." Denali spoke. "And she's damn good at her work."

“Hadarian?” Alrerin spoke now looking at Ardan. “The Healers?”

Ardan nodded his head. “Yes.”

“I saw it work myself.” Coren spoke up for the first time. “There were two females who had been prisoner longer than Caliria and the others. You know how long term exposure to the OSG agent affects our females Ella. I saw two of them at this stage and when they were given this counter agent, their condition improved within hours. Within days they were completely recovered. Physically that is.”

“And where are they?” Ella snapped. “These two young women?”

“Both of them chose to remain behind on Earth.” Ardan replied.

“For what purpose?” Alrerin asked sharply. “They should have been brought back here so that we could have studied their ordeal and how they were healed.”

Ardan looked at him. “They chose not to return for precisely that reason.” He answered. “Neither of them wanted to be subjugated to further testing by our own people.”

“You should have forced them to return Ardan!” Ella snapped. “They do not... they do not belong among those people.”

“I explained this to them... but I was not allowed to physically have them removed.” He answered.

“With good reason obviously!” Lisisa snapped.

“How do we know that they are not somehow responsible for making this chemical and then giving it to the OSG?” Ella snapped. “If their mother can supposedly find a counter agent to it so quickly then it is more likely she helped to design it in the first place!”

Deni rose to his feet no longer able to keep his anger in check. “Yeah... we’re done here.” He spoke.

Nejesh glared at him. “We are not done! We have more questions you need to answer!”

Deni looked at him. “*Nubou* you!” He growled. “We came here hoping to find friends and allies. I certainly don’t intend to sit here and let you interrogate us like we are common criminals or accuse one of my mothers of doing something heinous when this is supposed to be a diplomatic mission.”

“We want to know more about this intelligence you give to us!” Nejesh snapped.

Denali held up the data pad in his hand. “No Regent Nejesh... this is what you need to know.” He spoke harshly. “This is an order signed by my brother. Seven weeks from now when the Protectorate officially becomes part of the Lycavorian Union, all trade contracts and with the Protectorate and the Vanari Empire will be suspended immediately. All trade... and I do mean all trade sir; it will cease immediately. The Protectorate will become a member of the Lycavorian Union and subject to our laws and guidelines. Vanari trade ships will no longer be allowed to cross through Protectorate space for any reason. The Protectorate embassy here in Austrova will be closed and all Lycavorian citizens asked to return home. The Non-Aggression Treaty signed by Dutkne’s father will remain in place unless the Vanari which to dissolve this as well.”

All of the Regents present with the exception of Coren and Ardan stared at Denali as if he was mad.

“You can’t... you can’t possibly be serious?” Alrerin gasped.

“I’m very serious.” Denali answered.

Alrerin looked at Dutkne. “Director General Dutkne... you can’t be in support of this?” He stammered.

Dutkne shrugged his shoulders. “Regent Alrerin... I have been disgusted with the Vanari people and their treatment of mine for many decades. Now that we have discovered our brothers and sisters within the Union I will revert to the role I was meant to play. A role that I have come to accept. I will act as Androcles’s Senior Advisor and friend. Denali Leonidas is being very patient with all of you considering how you have treated and accused both him and his mate... but I can guarantee that patience does not extend to Androcles. He is much more... blunt would be an accurate if not lesser term. He will have nothing to do with men and women who have no use for him or our people. He will not talk or trade with a species that considers the Lycavorian people savages. The Vanari are well known for their contributions to galactic society as a whole in the Beta Quadrant, but they are also known for their arrogance as well. Androcles Leonidas doesn’t deal well with arrogance.” Dutkne got to his feet.

“So you do threaten us?” Nejesh barked.

“Telling you that we will no longer trade goods or items with the Vanari is not a threat Regent Nejesh.” Dutkne spoke calmly. “It is simply a statement of fact. That you can not see the difference is not my problem.”

Ardan came to his feet now as well. “Please everyone... we must not rush to judgment!” He pleaded. “Denali... Dutkne... allow us to review this information you have provided in greater detail. You have had a

long journey and you should be allowed to experience what we have to offer as a people. Perhaps we can meet again... say in a few days after you are fully rested?"

Denali shrugged. "If that is what you wish sir." He stated respectfully. "If not... we will continue on to the Protectorate and prepare for the merger."

"No... please stay and enjoy yourselves for a few days." Ardan spoke. "Alrerin... do you agree?"

Alrerin nodded his head slowly. "Yes. I would like more time to go over the details of everything you have given us."

Deni nodded. "Three days then." He said.

"Arduri Re Mydala will need to be detained." Ella spoke. "She has broken or violated in some way five of our laws. She must answer for her actions."

Denali looked at the woman. "Arduri Re Mydala became my mate and wife two days ago." He stated coldly. "In the fashion of our people. She is now a Princess of the Lycavorian Union. Unlike your people we look beyond what the outer shell of a person holds. Unless you wish to arrest a Princess of the Lycavorian Union and cause an incident... I suggest you forget about any action against Arduri." Lisisa beamed at Denali's answer for it was not something they had even discussed. "The response you received from such an action would not be very... pleasant."

"More threats!" Ella barked. "You only confirm what is thought of your people by your actions young man."

"And you only confirm just how pompous an asshole you are by yours." Denali answered her. "Do us savages need an escort... or can we find our own way to where we will be staying?"

Coren rose to his feet. "I will escort them to the estate and then return." He said quickly. "We have much to discuss. I suggest we all get something to eat and then return here."

"Agreed." Alrerin said. "One hour."

FARNURI EXPANSE

ADMIRAL ZESICO'S FLAGSHIP

LEONIDAS IIA-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER ULU *DAWNSTAR*

Zesico entered the bridge of the *DAWNSTAR* holding his mug of morning tea and the batch of reports from the previous evening. He was not a man who required much to be happy. He had been mated to the same woman for nearly seven thousand years and he had eleven fine children with her. He had simple tastes and did not need luxury items. He was also one of the most senior officers within the Union fleet and one of the top five in terms of operational experience. He had done it all, from commanding a small frigate to an entire Fleet Group in the Evolli War and before that against the High Coven. Zesico had met with the King shortly after he had returned to their people and was immediately impressed by him. Through the years since that respect had grown to even higher levels. He had not seen Androcles during the Evolli War, but he had talked to those who fought with him, or under him. Zesico was convinced that he was his father's son and this operation was only proving that premise.

Zesico commanded this new Task Force which had been nicknamed Rogue Spear by Admiral Riall, and he couldn't haven't been happier. It was much smaller than his Fleet Group, and consisted of warships only. Two hundred and nine warships total, with a total of twenty-nine *LEONIDAS IIA*-Strike Cruisers. Task Force Rogue Spear was designed for destruction and death. A Task Force capable of putting an enormous amount of firepower onto a target and not have to deal with protecting support ships. Rogue Spear was designed to be mobile, deadly and above all else free to operate. Androcles Leonidas had told him before he left... he didn't care how Zesico commanded or what he did... just advise him or Riall in what he was going to do.

Task Force Rogue Spear had entered the Farnuri Expanse searching for the Kavalian task force that Androcles believed was here waiting to spring their ambush and invade the Union. They had entered the expanse halfway between Kavalian space and the Union border, but so far they had discovered nothing. The Expanse caused sensors to operate at a reduced level due to all the natural metallic ore emanating from the Expanse clouds themselves, and sensors would detect nothing unless they were within half a million kilometers.

The sweep had been slow and tedious but Zesico had woken this morning expecting to find something to support Androcles's feeling.

Or he would find nothing.

"Status?" He asked calmly as he moved to his command chair.

"Task Force reports are all normal." His XO answered as he moved up beside Zesico's chair. "First Echelon has completed rotation with Second Echelon and resumed lead. All ships report nominal."

Zesico nodded as he settled into the chair. "Excellent. Status of sweeps?"

"We're just beginning passive sweeps on all frequencies." His XO answered. "Returns should be coming in within a few minutes. We had to adjust for the level of Rhomium Gas Particles in this portion of the Expanse, but we're good now."

"The Quantum Communications Array?" Zesico asked.

"Operational and in standby mode." His XO answered.

The QCA was something newly installed on most of the *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers, but hardly ever used. Normal communications sufficed for most COM traffic and the QCA was a relatively new and untested system fleet wide. Zesico knew that the Royal family had been using this system for over a year on a regular basis, but it had not been fully endorsed until just recently. It allowed instantaneous holo communication between ships and people over pretty much any given distance. Obviously the closer the target, the clearer the holo image would be, but it was new technology derived from City Ship 41 and still being integrated into the fleet.

"Admiral..." His XO spoke softly. "If you don't mind me asking sir... is this wise?"

Zesico looked at the man who had been with him for nearly a decade now. "Speak your mind Tagren." He said.

"Searching the Farnuri Expanse for Kavalian ships that may or may not be here seems to be a little extreme." Tagren said. "If war is coming... and I do not question what our course of action should be after what the Kavalians have done... but shouldn't we be preparing for Fleet engagements and not out looking for ghost ships?"

"You don't trust the Prince's instincts Tagren?" Zesico asked evenly.

"That's not it at all sir." Tagren spoke. "I..."

"Tagren... out with it man." Zesico spoke. "We've known each other too long for you to hold back now."

"I think he may have too much on his plate so to speak sir." Tagren spoke. "There are... there are rumors floating around that he may be affected by what he did near Hadaria. That his heart might not be in it."

Zesico looked at him. "Do these rumors question the orders he gave?" He asked. "To destroy the Jump Gates?"

Tagren shrugged his shoulders. "Some believe that there may have been an alternative." He said softly. "They don't believe King Leonidas would have made that same decision."

Zesico nodded his head. "Understandable." He spoke. "However... we were not there and we did not have the intelligence that he did at the time."

"Yes sir I know that... but..."

"Tagren... have you ever read the history of the King Leonidas who ruled Sparta. Our King's father?" Zesico asked.

"No sir."

"I recommend it Tagren." Zesico said. "It gives a surprising insight into the mind of the Spartan people and their ways. The King's father was a Spartan... our King is a Spartan. And so is his son."

"I don't follow sir." Tagren said.

"It was written by the *Feravomir* with much input from Lady Gorgo." Zesico said. "In a way it gives us a window into a different perspective of things. A view... a manner of thinking that is outside the box as it is called. While many of our younger troops are now embracing this... mentality if you will... there are still many of us old hounds that cling to the way we have done things for millennia. Long before King Leonidas returned to us."

Tagren nodded. "It has worked this long Admiral." He stated.

Zesico nodded. "Yes it has. But will it continue to work as we go forward. I stood in that meeting with him Tagren. I saw the look in his eyes. "He will do whatever it takes to secure the future of our people and our way of life. The determination I saw was without question. He is not perfect... none of us are... but as old as I am... after seeing that I would follow our young Prince through the *Letha rie Jorbhe* if need be."

Tagren thought about this for a moment and looked at his Admiral. "You wouldn't happen to have a copy of this book would you sir?"

Zesico nodded. "In my quarters. Stop by when your shift is over and I will let you borrow it. It is... enlightening Tagren."

"Thank you sir. I will..."

"Contact!" The voice called out from across the bridge.

Zesico and Tagren both looked up and turned, their faces becoming serious. "Report!" Tagren barked as he moved quickly across the bridge to the officer who had called out the contact.

"Unknown contact bearing 297.6!" The officer barked. "Power emissions paint it as a *PURUSIAN*-Class Heavy Frigate!" The man adjusted his console. "Second contact! Now a third! I have three *PURUSIAN* Heavy Frigates bearing 298.3! Range is nine million kilometers to bow!"

Tagren glanced briefly at the man's monitor and then turned to Zesico. "Confirmed!" He barked. "Deployed in a standard picket formation!"

Zesico nodded his head. "Their outer protective ring." He said as he came to his feet. "Order the Task Force to close on our position! Helm... come to course 3452 mark one! Keep the frigates off our bow and let's move closer! One I would dismiss... but not three! They must be keeping watch for something and now we'll find out what!"

Twenty-three minutes later they had their answer.

Zesico and Tagren stood around the plot board looking at the array of red dots that covered the sector.

"...sweep marks six hundred and nineteen ships." Tagren spoke. "Low power emissions and minimal shields."

Zesico nodded. "To make it harder to spot them." He said thoughtfully.

"Admiral... I would officially like to retract my earlier wavering of faith in Prince Leonidas." Tagren said.

Zesico looked at him and smiled. "Wavering of faith is normal Tagren." He spoke. "And it will always be renewed."

Tagren lifted his hand. "They are massed together in such a way that it would allow them to jump across the border and be within Union space before any of us knew it. Given the class of ships we are looking at, they could possibly reach all the way to Earth in two, perhaps three jumps and we would have little warning."

Zesico shook his head. "Earth is too heavily defended for a frontal attack with a force this size. Her PDPs would shred half this fleet before it got within bombardment range." He spoke. "If this was me I would target the colonies between Apo Prime and Earth. Only the BIPs would be able to respond initially and they could establish a firm foothold within Union space within several days. About the time it would take for us to bring to bear entire Fleet Groups to repel them."

"It gives them a way to supply their forces as well. They can come in from The Wilds and not worry about Union patrols." Tagren said.

Zesico nodded his head. "Clever." He said. "Tagren... activate the QCA and find where Prince Androcles is." His voice was determined now. "It is time we showed these Kavalian dogs that we are not the High Coven."

Tagren nodded his head. "Aye sir."

“... For'mya is fine and so are your brother and sister.” Aricia spoke to Andro, Anja and Isabella in the QCA transmission. “We are making our way slowly for we have a rather large ship attached to our hull with tractor beams. Martin seems to think our presence here threw the Kavalians for a loop. They did not expect us to be here.”

“My foul Uncle?” Andro growled.

Aricia lowered her eyes briefly before looking back at him again. “I have... I have never seen anything like what your father did Androcles.”

“Little Wolf...” Anja moved up beside him. “What... what do you mean?”

Aricia met her eyes. “His Mindvoice powers have grown beyond anything any of us have ever seen. Even the Feravomir was stunned. He refuses to leave For'mya's side; Dysea and Cirith are with them. Andro... we... we discovered eggs! Dragon eggs. Almost two hundred! And they all began to hatch when we found their chamber.”

“Eggs?” Andro gasped.

Aricia nodded. “Eggs that have been waiting for Arzoal to return for almost five thousand years. You should see them! Two hundred hatchlings screeching and trumpeting all over the hanger deck!” She said with a smile. “The Kavalian that Fedor and Eirene told you about... he is... he has Pralor blood within him Andro. All of those who follow him do. Nearly three thousand of them. We could not leave them.”

“Your father is incapable of leaving them because of the Pralor blood that runs within his veins.” The new voice spoke and they turned to see Shiria enter the QCA transmission.

“Val'istar!” Andro gasped. “I asked that you return to Earth.” He said somewhat miffed.

“And I did. Until I found out that you were out here.” Shiria answered. “I came here instead. We landed only moments ago. Deia told me where you were.”

“Why does no one listen to me?” Andro asked with some exasperation.

Shiria smiled and came up beside him and Anja within the transmission though she sat at the table with the rest of them in reality. “But we do listen to you young Androcles.” She said. “This is what your resonance calls for.”

“Mother...” Andro spoke. “Tell father he will need to return to Union space through the edges of High Coven territory. There is a sizeable Kavalian Task Force within the Farnuri Expanse waiting to attack. He needs to avoid this...”

Aricia shook her head. “We're not coming back.” She stated. “Not just yet.”

“What?” Anja and Isabella declared almost at the same time.

“We have been speaking with Muton.” Aricia continued. “We have... we have the means to discover where the dragons and Pralors that Arzoal sent away have gone to. This is where Muton's ancestors came from. We have a map... we can find them Androcles!”

“That is crazy!” Androcles declared. “You have only one ship! No fighters! You have no idea what you will encounter and...”

“We have already decided.” Aricia stated. “Your father, Wayonn, the *Feravomir*, Arzoal; we all agree it is what we need to do. What we do... what we do now my son... it could have huge implications on our future. You know this! Your father said you would know this.”

“That does not mean I agree with it!” Andro snapped. “We are on the verge... mother I am... I am going to throw our people into war! There is no way to avoid it now!”

“We know.” Aricia said. “The lessons of our lives aren't always happy ones my son, but they keep coming. We learn from our tasks in life. We learn from our friends and families. We learn by accepting the commitments of our lives as both wolves and Spartans, and then by playing the roles that life hands us. And they are not necessarily the roles we would have chosen mind you. We learn by growing older, by suffering much, by loving more, by bearing with the things we can't change. And we learn by taking risks.”

“Arrgghhh!” Androcles growled loudly. “Now you sound like the *Feravomir* and Dutkne mother!” He snarled. “And what if we fail mother?”

“This is not what your father wanted for you Androcles. Not this way.” Aricia said softly. “You know this. He trusts you without hesitation Androcles, only you... never doubt that. But now the decisions and the risks fall to you, for you must now lead us. We... we must do this Andro my son. We must risk this for the sake of us all. Have you not already failed if you don't take the risks?”

Andro was silent for a long moment as he contemplated his mother's words. "At least... at least let me send some additional support. I can send it to you within a day. The edge of the Gellen Belt."

Aricia nodded. "We will begin moving there when this transmission is over." She said. "Food. Supplies. Spare parts. Whatever you can cram into another *TYPE II*."

"Little Wolf you can't just..." Anja began.

Shiria knew what she was going to say and she took Anja's hand within hers. "I will send Anja and Isabella to you as well. On my ship." She spoke as Andro looked at her. "Your father is no different than you Androcles... his strength is his mates and wives. Now is not the time to separate them. And my ship is of Pralor origin completely. It will serve you well outside this area of space." She looked at Aricia. "Aricia Leonidas... inform Wayonn and the *Feravomir* that I will remain here and act in their stead. I see now where my place in all this is going to be."

"Thank you Val'istar." Aricia said.

Andro looked at his mother. "What about my uncle?" He asked.

"Your father... he came so close to destroying him." Aricia said. "Kavalian ships broke through to the planet before he finished his task. We had to leave."

"So Pusintin lives?" Andro asked.

Aricia nodded. "We believe so."

"This is insane mother." Andro spoke. "What if... what if none of you return? What will I tell my brothers and sisters?"

"That we lived gloriously and that we died together." Aricia told him. "As is the Spartan way."

"*Sibfla!*" Andro swore under his breath.

Shiria reached out within the transmission and though they could not actually feel her touch his shoulder, the MV resonance was easy enough to detect. His eyes came up and he looked at her. "You and your father are descended from Sumar himself young Androcles." She spoke. "I see now that all I ever read about him lives on in both of you. Have faith!"

"Our faith has led us to this point Val'istar." Andro barked softly. "Now I will watch my father and mothers travel into the unknown and we may never see them again."

"With my ship going with them... we will always have a link to them." Shiria said with a smile and Andro met her eyes suddenly, realizing what she was saying.

"Your ship?" He asked.

Shiria nodded. "*SPARTA'S WRATH* is a Pralor ship Androcles. And it is here with us. It was built into our systems that we would always be able to at least communicate with other Pralor ships with the right codes. Codes that we have."

"*Anse!* I did not think of that!" Andro exclaimed with wide eyes.

Shiria smiled. "Because you are not perfect. Something you and your father freely admit on a regular basis." She said. "Keleru and the Kavalians do not truly comprehend what their actions have initiated and what they have begun." Shiria told him softly. "It is too late to stop what is coming. Now we need to move forward and do battle quickly. The time for hiding is over."

Andro looked at her oddly for a long moment before turning to Aricia. "I will inform Ben of what to send to you mother. Give me your word you will wait for it."

Aricia nodded. "You have my word my son. And we will return." She said with a smile. "If there is one thing my love for your father has shown me through the years, it is that he makes impossible missions seem mundane."

"Mother... mother I..."

Aricia nodded her head. "We love you as well. All of you. I must go. We will make contact with you when we have the supplies and Anja and Bella have joined us."

"Mother... it will have already begun by then." Andro said softly. "In three hours... in three hours I will have no choice but to plunge us into war."

"Then so shall it be." Aricia said softly.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

NEW CAPITAL CITY OF YDARE RULING COVEN ASSEMBLY BUILDING GRAND MEETING CHAMBER

They were the most powerful members of the High Coven behind only Aikiro herself. The *Ventash'ma*. The most loyal families who supported her and Veldruk throughout the years. All of them were purebloods and all of them were over twenty thousand years old. Since the news of Aikiro's death had come, there had been much backroom dealing and pressuring for power. All of them knew Yuri to be quick to anger and much more emotionally unstable and none of them wanted to get on her bad side. Now however, rumors were beginning to circulate. Rumors that she was dead herself, rumors that she would not be returning and rumors that she would be returning, only to assassinate the entire Ruling Coven. These rumors, along with many other factors, had brought them all together for this meeting. It was a simple matter since many resided here in the building anyway. Sixteen of the *Ventash'ma* were in favor of Yuri returning simply because with her in power, their majority would provide them more power. Thirteen were for naming a new ruler before Yuri was able to return and consolidate her power, while seven were waiting to see which side proved stronger before throwing their support behind them. It made for a lively setting within the room as the men and women gathered once more to discuss what was happening across the planet... and in some cases across the entire High Coven on many different planets.

"...happening on all our major colony worlds and it is spilling over here now." The man spoke. "Massive demonstrations demanding changes! One began here in Ydare not an hour ago. Thousands of our people are filling the streets! Young and old!"

"It is the younger generations." Another spoke. "They are driving this."

"No." The woman said now. "Not anymore. Now it is of all ages. Have you looked in the streets today? They are demanding accountability from us! They are demanding to know why the Empress acted as she did with the Lycavorian Union and they were told otherwise publicly! They are incensed that any hope for peace is lost! All of you know as well as I that there are millions across the Coven who no longer consider the Lycavorians our enemies. They want to make amends for our actions in the past! Peace and friendship with them..."

"There can be no peace between us now." One of the older men spoke softly from near the head of the table many of them turning to look at him. His name was Datarik and he was one of the most ardent supporters of change on the *Ventash'ma*. His family was one of the largest and most respected among the Purebloods and his words carried much weight, even with Aikiro when she was alive, for she could not risk killing him or any in his family. "The Kavalian dogs butchered Martin Leonidas! He was the only true check on his son. He was the only one who could possibly control him. With him now dead... Androcles Leonidas will come for us sooner or later because of what Aikiro sanctioned and allowed to happen to his sister. How many reports have we read about him and his role within their family?"

"And we will defeat him just as we have the Kavalians these last years!" *Ventash'ma* Nedoli snarled.

Datarik looked at him with obvious disgust in his eyes. "Defeat him Nedoli?" He spoke in anger. "Have you read the unedited intelligence reports on him? Not the ones we make public... but the ones only our senior people see? We will never see him coming Nedoli! And he is nothing like the Kavalian fools we have fought these last years! He will come from... he will come from everywhere, from anywhere, and we will not know he is here until we lie dying in pools of our own blood!" Datarik snapped back. "He is not his father! Martin Leonidas was, at least in some ways, predictable in his actions! He did not raise his son in this way however. Nor any of his children. Androcles Leonidas is as predictable as the wind! You have seen the reports about what Aikiro allowed! What they did to his sister! He will come for us I tell you! And he will have blood in his eyes!"

Nedoli shook his head. "You think too highly of the Union animals Datarik. You always have." He spoke.

"The question before us now is how long do we wait?" *Ventash'ma* Anebal spoke from her chair. She was also one of the more moderate *Ventash'ma*, and was in support of calling for a new leader of the High Coven. "We have heard nothing from Yuri or Moran. How long do we wait until we act?"

“Our troops can put down these demonstrations with ease.” Nedoli spoke.

“We are not dictators Nedoli! And we can not use violence on our own people! Veldruk did this is the past once and look where it got us? Four million dead! Even he would no longer send troops against our people after that time.” Datarik snapped at him. “Our people are making their voices heard! Purebloods and turned alike! We need to heed what they want or no matter what we do, it will crumble around us! We can no longer cling to the old ways of doing things. The outside influence is too great now.”

“We are the High Coven!” Nedoli ranted. “We are the Ruling assembly! The people must listen to us!”

“They seem to be doing such a wonderful job listening to us now.” Anebal said. “These demonstrations are happening everywhere! The people are enraged, as Riara and Datarik have told us. How many of us knew Aikiro would do what she did? How many of you would have counseled her against such an approach? How would any of you react if this had taken place to a child of yours?” Anebal shook her head. “I would be... I would be filled with savage anger had the Union done this to my child. We cannot fight the Union and the Kavalians at the same time. *Uoi'nota*... we can barely hold our own against the Kavalians!” (Hell)

“That is not true!” Nedoli barked. “We have survived this long!”

“We have fought a defensive war only!” Datarik spoke quickly. “We have done nothing but respond to Kavalian attacks and try to hold on to what we have.”

“Is that not a victory?” Nedoli asked.

“Until the Kavalians overwhelm us with pure numbers.” Riara spoke once more. “We can not match the speed in which they make their clones. Our process is more thorough... much more refined. We want our cloned soldiers to be able to think and act on their own. The Kavalians have no such desire.”

“We can not continue on this path.” Anebal said. “We must act before Yuri returns.”

“What you speak of is treason!” Nedoli shouted.

“Do you see what is happening around us?” Anebal nearly screamed as she rose to her feet and motioned with her arm to the massive window. “Our people are revolting before us!” She moved to the window while looking at Nedoli. “We do not know if we can trust our very own military, for many believe we have gone too far Nedoli! That we did nothing while Aikiro pursued only more power. Do we even know half of what she has done since assuming power? Her actions have unleashed our doom Nedoli! Datarik is correct in his assessment of that! Androcles Leonidas will offer no mercy and he will come for all of us eventually. His reach is more than his father's was because he is not shackled by his father any longer. And he is far crueler than Martin Leonidas ever was.”

“He can not even get the support of his own people.” Nedoli snapped. “They are weak within the Union. Allowing Keleru and Pusintin to pursue their agenda because of a child that Pusintin produced when he raped the elven Queen? They are actually voting on that? Their military is unfocused with the loss of Leonidas, their politicians divided. They are no threat to us.”

“And that is what we thought with his grandfather Resumar.” Datarik spoke softly. “And look where that led us.”

Anebal looked out the huge window as Nedoli started into another rant and she tuned his voice out. Her dark eyes took in the mass of people far below that filled the streets. They were no more than specks from this height, but they filled every crevice and street below as they surrounded the Assembly Building. Her eyes caught the shadows of movement further up and they cut to the area between several tall skyscrapers. She had seen movement there she was sure, but all lifter traffic this close to the Assembly Building was forbidden. There should not be any traffic this high up, or so close to the building. She glanced at the face of the Immortal who stood a meter away and saw nothing but an impassive wall. His eyes met hers, but the natural MV shielding ability of the Akruxian people prevented her from detecting any of his surface thoughts. She turned back to look out the window once more but saw nothing between the buildings and she turned back to the table.

She did not see the Immortal turned his head ever so slightly and look at his comrade standing ten meter away by the massive double doors. That Immortal nodded slowly, his hand dropping to his side and pressing a button on the portable command panel he wore on his belt. The small red light that signified the locked position of the entrance faded quickly to be replaced by the green light.

Entrance into the inner chamber was now allowed from the outside.

The Immortal Duty Officer turned when he saw his Colonel exit the large elevator with six additional Immortals of the *Ventash'ma* Guard and another half dozen cloaked figures. His duty was to prevent entrance into the Meeting Chamber while the *Ventash'ma* was present and he turned to face Co'kal as he approached rapidly.

“Colonel!” He spoke crisply. “The *Ventash'ma* is in session.”

Co'kal stopped in front of the man. “You must unseal the doors Va'gek.” He said.

“Colonel... I cannot. You know this. The *Ventash'ma* do not allow entry while they are in session.” Va'gek's eyes darted behind his Colonel at the other figures, their faces partially hidden by the cowls they wore.

“The interior doors have already been released Va'gek.” Co'kal spoke to him. “Check for yourself.”

Va'gek turned and looked at the panel on the wall beside the door. His eyes grew a little wider when he realized that the interior security doors had indeed been unsealed. There had been no alarm however, and that meant that the alarm had been disabled. Va'gek turned quickly back to his Colonel.

“Is this another drill Colonel?” He asked hesitantly. “The interior security doors are never unlocked while the *Ventash'ma* are in session.”

“This is no drill Va'gek.” Co'kal spoke. “Events are... events are changing my friend. We need to act in order to save what we have. What we desire.”

Va'gek looked at him nervously as his hand moved lower to his weapon. “What... what do you mean sir?”

Co'kal stepped closer to him. “It is time to change the path we are on Va'gek.” He spoke. “Or we will be lost forever. Open the doors.”

Va'gek instantly drew his sidearm and stepped back from Co'kal. “I... I cannot do that Colonel!” He hissed.

Co'kal simply stared at his officer. “You are the Duty Watch Officer Va'gek. Only you have the code to open the outer doors. The others will not follow you.”

Va'gek glanced to his left and right and saw that the other three Immortals stationed with him had not budged from their positions or drawn their weapons. He turned back to Co'kal. “What is going on here?” He demanded. “Who are these hidden individuals with you? Reveal yourselves or I will activate the alarms and alert the entire building!”

Co'kal began to step forward but the largest cloaked figure reached out and held him back. Va'gek watched as the hands rose and threw back the cowl to reveal a face Va'gek never imagined he would see in person. A face that was so very different than what he had seen in old vids, but a face that could not be mistaken.

“Cha'talla!” He almost shouted.

Cha'talla moved forward two steps as the gun came to rest pointed at his chest. “I know it is your duty to keep everyone from within this room Va'gek.” He spoke. “I too once stood in your shoes long ago. Now however... now it is time to free our people and those who think as we do. We can only do that if you allow us entry.”

“You... you are a traitor! A traitor to our people!” Va'gek stammered.

“A traitor in whose eyes Va'gek?” Cha'talla asked calmly. “In your eyes or the eyes of the men and women within the room you guard?”

“My duty...”

Va'gek shifted his weapon to the much smaller figure as it moved up next to Cha'talla and his eyes grew even larger when Narice drew back her cowl and looked at him. “Your duty is to the High Coven Va'gek.” She spoke.

“Princess... Princess Narice!” He gasped.

“Your duty is to the High Coven Va'gek.” Narice spoke. “That is the oath you swore when you became part of the *Ventash'ma* Guard. I know this. Does your oath extend to the High Coven as a whole, or just the men and women within that room?”

“Princess... you... you have been declared a...” Va'gek was confused beyond anything he had ever experienced.

“A traitor... yes I know.” Narice spoke. “Why then am I here attempting to save the Coven Va'gek? Why am I trying to save my people and yours from continuing down a path that will lead to their destruction?”

“The... the *Ventash'ma*... they...”

“They are part of the problem Va'gek.” Narice told him softly as she stepped closer to him without fear. “Many of them supported my mother in her destruction path towards this end. Not all of them are bad I know... but right now they impede the survival of my people. And yours as well.”

“Va'gek... in seventeen minutes Androcles Leonidas will unleash his fury upon the High Coven for what Aikiro allowed to happen. For what she did to his sister.” Cha'talla spoke. “The first of his acts we cannot stop... but it will be the first of many such events *unless* we act.”

“You lie!” Va'gek snarled. “He could not have gone undetected by our defenses! He would not dare!”

“Oh... he would dare Va'gek.” Narice spoke calmly. “I am the proud, Blessed Wife to his brother Arrarn Va'gek. I have lived among them for months now, experiencing all the things we could have. But I am also vampire and part of the Coven. I do not wish to see them fade into obscurity.” Va'gek's eyes grew wider still when he saw the third individual throw back the cowl on his cloak and Arrarn stepped up beside Narice. She took his large hand within hers without hesitation. “I guarantee you that Androcles would dare. How is it that we are here now Va'gek?” Narice asked him calmly. “No one has detected us. Even now... our dragons and their riders come closer to this building and they have not been detected. We do not wish to destroy Va'gek... we want to save the Coven. Save all of us!”

Co'kal came up beside her. “Unlock the door Va'gek.” He said softly. He motioned to where Ki'nuq stood to the side and it was that moment when Felisa dropped her cowl and stood beside her Immortal husband proudly. Co'kal smiled at this action as he looked back to Va'gek. “Unlock the doors and help us to take back our future Immortal.”

All of the *Ventash'ma* turned when the large double doors opened into their meeting chamber and another dozen Immortals moved into the massive room with speed and precision. They began taking up stations around the room with their weapons out, even as the dozen Immortals who had already been in the room did the same. Nedoli was the one who came to his feet.

“What is the meaning of this?” He demanded. “What is going on? You are not allowed in here!”

“There are many things we are not allowed.” Co'kal's voice echoed as he strode into the room.

It was happening quickly, and Co'kal had been willingly swept up in the storm. Cha'talla had returned to save his people. The most famous Immortal in their people's history, one whose exploits and sacrifice could never be obscured, and he had not forsaken them. This fact alone had caused Co'kal's chest to swell with hope and pride. And then seeing the pureblood Felisa as she absently stroked Ki'nuq's head in a manner that could only be construed as a Blessed Wife to her husband while they had planned for this action. The way Princess Narice held herself, how she pressed close to her Lycavorian and elf husband. The future was right in front of them for the taking and Co'kal, as old and grizzled as he was; as many deaths he had committed and seen, he was not going to let this pass by. “That will begin to change this day.”

Datarik rose slowly to his feet beside Nedoli and placed his hand on Nedoli's arm to quiet him. There was something going on here. The Immortals had never burst into this chamber in all the millennia he had been a member of the *Ventash'ma*. Datarik also had a healthy respect for the Akruvian Immortals who guarded them. “Colonel Co'kal... explain yourself.” He spoke calmly and evenly. “Your actions are... they are not normal.”

Co'kal stopped at the edge of the table and looked at Datarik. The pureblood Datarik had always treated him and his men with respect. Perhaps not as an equal... but he had never gone out of his way to demean them in any fashion. Datarik had also insured that many of his men were well educated and he had done this of his own accord.

“These are not... they are not normal times now *Ventash'ma* Datarik.” Co'kal spoke slowly but with respect for the man. “I ask your forgiveness in advance for what I am going to do.”

“Co'kal what...”

“Secure their weapons now!” Co'kal barked to his men. “Search all of them for hidden blades and transmitters! If they refuse... subdue them! Va'gek... secure the COM array and lock out all users except yourself! Go!”

The Immortals present fell upon the members of the *Ventash'ma* with unerring speed. These Immortals were among the few within the High Coven who had been trained to combat vampires when they blurred. While most of the *Ventash'ma* remained frozen in their spots unable to comprehend what was going on, several of them blurred in motion to try and escape. Nedoli was among them and he wrapped the shadows around himself and blurred directly for the double doors which he saw were oddly unguarded. It was a mistake he would painfully regret. Appearing from either side of the double doors as he reached the entrance were more Immortals, but Immortals that looked different. It was Ki'nuq's arm however that smashed across his chest and brought him to a crunching halt as the shadows unwrapped from around his body and he was lifted into the air and dropped to the hard floor with jarring impact. Nedoli began to try and rise but froze when he felt the barrel of the weapon jammed into his chest and the cold words spoken with a voice he knew well.

“Do not move!”

“Felisa!” He gasped.

“Don't make me shoot you father.” Felisa spoke as she pressed the K12 she had been given harder into his chest. “No one needs to die... but I will shoot you to protect what I have come to love.”

“What... what are you doing?” Nedoli stammered.

Felisa glanced at Ki'nuq. “Get him back with the others my husband. But try not to hurt him.” She spoke as Ki'nuq bent over and yanked Nedoli to his feet.

“This way *Ventash'ma* Nedoli.” Ki'nuq snarled.

“Husband!” Nedoli nearly shouted as Ki'nuq dragged him back into the larger room.

Felisa nodded her head and smiled. “Yes father. My Blessed husband.” She answered as she followed.

Felisa held her K12 tightly as she saw the *Ventash'ma* she knew as Morar standing by the massive window overlooking the city and holding the gun on several Immortals in front of him. She stopped next to Ki'nuq where he held her father.

“Enough!” Morar screamed. “Stop this now! No one move!”

Co'kal held up his hand from his spot near the table and froze his men from action. “We are not here for bloodshed!” He barked.

“You will release them!” Morar demanded as his eyes darted back and forth. “You will release them and submit to punishment for violating your oaths!”

“*Ventash'ma* Morar... we can not do that.” Co'kal spoke calmly.

Datarik looked at him from where he stood, an Immortal on either side of him. “Co'kal... what is going on? Why are you doing this?” He exclaimed with wide eyes. “Moran will have all your remaining people executed for these actions! Is this what you want?”

Co'kal looked at him. “Admiral Moran will do nothing.” He spoke. “He is a non-factor in what we do here today!”

“Release them Co'kal!” Morar shouted. “I will... I will kill you and as many of your vile kind as I can before I fall!”

“You will kill no more of my people scum!” The harsh voice rose above the turmoil in the room and they all turned to see Cha'talla enter the chamber his face a mask of anger and long suppressed hate.

“*A l'phraktos!*” Anebal nearly shouted. “Cha'talla!” (By the gods)

“I remember you *Ventash'ma* Morar!” Cha'talla snarled as he stopped only a few meters away from the man. “You who ordered the deaths of hundreds of Immortals through the centuries! You who supported Veldruk in the conquering and subjugation of my people and so many others! I know you well scum!”

“Stay back dog!” Morar screamed. “I will shoot you like the animal you are!”

Cha'talla's face took on a look of feral anger and the smile that split his thin lips was anything but pleasant. “I think not.” He growled. “You will be the first of the old leaders that will die this day.” He stood up straight. “Lynom!”

All eyes in the room darted to where Morar stood as they saw the shadows unwrap just behind him to reveal the very large Immortal with skin similar to Cha'talla's. That an Immortal had been able to so skillfully use the shadows and they not detect him was amazing. Beside him was a stunning half elven female with

strangely colored blond and black hair and they all watched as Lynom drove the blade of his Immortal sword clean through Morar's chest as As'hia grabbed his wrist, twisted the weapon towards the ceiling and snapped the bones in his arm with her combined elf and wolf strength.

"Vollenth!" Cha'talla roared.

The *Ventash'ma* in the room could only watch in sheer terror as a greenish yellow scaled monster rose into view outside the massive window and sank his talons into the frame of the building. Dragon talons were designed to be able to allow the dragon to attach itself to almost any surface. They were thick and razor sharp and very nearly unbreakable. It was a simple matter for Vollenth to sink his talons into the metal of the building and then he closed his eyes before smashing his huge head through the thick glass, the large sections of glass bouncing off his armored scales. Lynom withdrew his sword just as Vollenth's massive jaws opened and snapped shut on Morar's body and hauled him screaming out of the main chamber. He whipped his head out and all of them saw his body flailing madly until Vollenth released him in a shower of blood. Even Co'kal and the Immortals in the room were shocked as first Deneth and then Viera impacted the side of the building and attached themselves to it smashing aside the thick glass and allowing the wind to begin whipping through the chamber. Then they could see dozens of dragons filling the sky near the top of the building, all of them with riders as they circled lazily in the sky.

"No more Cha'talla." Narice's voice caused all of them to turn as she entered the chamber now. Gusts of wind filled the chamber from the shattered window and buffeted their clothing as she walked confidently up to the table. Her dark eyes moved to where Deneth watched her carefully through the opening in the glass he had smashed, his head now halfway into the chamber ready to burn any who threatened his Bonded Sister.

"Princess Narice!" Datarik exclaimed in shock.

Narice ignored him as she walked to where Deneth's head extended into the building. She reached up and placed her hand flat on his snout to the awestruck gasps of the *Ventash'ma* in the room. "We will handle it from here my brother." Narice said looking at Deneth and pressing her upper body against his muzzle.

Let us burn them Narice! Vollenth exclaimed as Cha'talla moved up to where his head also extended into the main chamber. They deserve no less!

Narice looked at Vollenth. *No. We will need some of them as much as I wish to do exactly what you say. Not all of them are bad. We must do this as we planned.* She turned back to Deneth. *Go now and do as we discussed.*

Deneth blinked his eyes and nodded his huge head slightly. *Call if you need me my sister.* He spoke.

Narice smiled. *Always.*

This is for the best Vollenth my brother. Cha'talla spoke reaching up to touch his muzzle. Vollenth looked at his Bonded Brother and slowly calmed down, the anger that had been flowing through both of them slowly bleeding away and he nodded his head as well. *Stand ready though... just in case.*

With a trumpet of acknowledgement Vollenth nodded and then released his talons from the building and fell away with Deneth and Viera just seconds after him. Narice turned back to face the *Ventash'ma*... all of whom now looked stunned, and very frightened.

"*Ventash'ma* Morar's body hitting the streets below will not be pretty... but it will be a sign to our people that change has arrived." Narice said softly.

"How did you... how did you get here?" Nedoli barked looking at her. "You... you are a traitor to the Coven! You... arrest her!"

"Shut up father!" Felisa snapped from her spot beside Ki'nuq. "Before someone cuts your tongue from your mouth!"

Narice moved away from the huge window and looked at Co'kal as the wind whipped around her. "Colonel... the kinetic barriers please." She asked.

Co'kal nodded and moved around the table, pushing one of the *Ventash'ma* aside and entering a command on the console. Instantly clear shimmering kinetic barrier shields erected around the windows and silenced the howling of the gusting wind. Narice smiled as she moved towards the head of the table. She looked at Datarik.

"*Ventash'ma* Datarik." She spoke politely. Her eyes moved to Anebal. "*Ventash'ma* Anebal. It is good to see you again. Where is *Ventash'ma* Riara? He..." Her eyes moved to where the older man was sitting on his butt on the other side of the table. "*Ventash'ma* Riara... why are you down there?"

Riara turned as he felt the arms and hands begin to help him to his feet and his eyes grew wide when he realized they were the hands and arms of the half elf half Lycavorian Arrarn Leonidas. All of them know who Martin Leonidas's children were... though they did not fear all of them as they feared Androcles. Riara held Arrarn's arm as he got to his feet, meeting Arrarn's dark eyes when he was finally on his feet.

"Thank... thank you." He stated.

Arrarn nodded. "Sir." He said respectfully.

"You are a traitor!" Nedoli snarled. "A traitor to your people! When your sister returns she will watch you bleed out for your crimes!"

Narice looked at him. "What crimes would those be *Ventash'ma* Nedoli?" Narice asked. "The crime of wanting more than what this life brought me? The crime of wanting to discover what life was like outside the restraints of the High Coven?"

"You betrayed your mother!" Nedoli snapped. "You betrayed your sister! Your people! You... you lay with this half breed animal! With another female! You spit on your father by these actions!"

Narice glanced at Arrarn as he came up beside her with a grin. She smiled lovingly at him and looked back to Nedoli. "I won't begin to describe to you what happens when I lay with my Blessed Husband and our *Du'ased mrandd'ssinss lu'rannidi*. It would boggle your mind the things we do to each other. And I would gladly spit on my father if he were here for he was just as blind as you are now!" (Blessed lover and wife)

Nedoli glared at Felisa as she chuckled openly at Narice's response. He turned back to Narice. "Coven Security forces will come here!" He shouted. "They will know these Immortal scum have betrayed us and they will come! As will your sister!"

Narice met his eyes and smiled at him. "And just how do you think they will penetrate this building when I have forty dragons and riders waiting to greet them *Ventash'ma* Nedoli?" Narice asked calmly. "Do you think I came here alone with Cha'talla and my husband to accomplish our task?"

"You will accomplish nothing but your own deaths!" Nedoli barked.

"I don't know..." Arrarn said with a grin. "We've done pretty well so far. We're here aren't we?"

"You will not live out this day!" Another *Ventash'ma* snapped now.

"Yeah... I've heard that before too." Arrarn chortled.

"Have you come here to kill us Princess?" Datarik asked. His voice was neutral... but there was an undercurrent of fear and distaste in them. "To take vengeance on your people for what you perceived we failed at?"

Narice looked at him. "*Ventash'ma* Datarik... there are very few among the *Ventash'ma* that hold my respect... you and *Ventash'ma*'s Anebal and Riara are among the few." She told him. "I am not here to kill anyone. *Ventash'ma* Morar chose his path and he paid the price. As you no doubt noticed... our dragons are very protective of us."

Datarik's eyes grew wide and he looked at Cha'talla quickly. He looked back to Narice. "He was... he is Bonded to the dragon?" He gasped.

Narice nodded. "There are many things that we never sought to discover about those who have been our guardians through the millennia." Narice told him. "I am still discovering these things because of Cha'talla and those who follow him. Those who see things differently." She looked at him. "Felisa is only one of many who have taken Immortals as their Blessed husbands *Ventash'ma* Datarik. I only discovered just how many had chosen to go against the laws of the Coven when I myself chose to follow my heart."

Nedoli stared at his daughter. His youngest daughter and the thoughts of her consorting with the monster beside her disgusted him like nothing else. "How could you?" He almost shouted. "You betrayed me! Betrayed your kind! You are a Pureblood!"

"I betrayed no one!" Felisa snarled at her father. "I followed my heart! Ki'nuq treats me like I am a precious jewel... not a trophy! I fought my feelings because of you father. I fought them until I was so torn inside it made me sick. Until finally I decided that my happiness was more important to me than your reputation. I have been Ki'nuq's Blessed Wife for six years father! The happiest six years of my life! And there are far more unions like ours than any of you could possibly imagine! Because all of you are too blind to see where the future leads us!"

"We direct and decide the future of our people!" Nedoli screamed. "Not the... not the influence of these Immortal scum and those outside our species!"

“Then you will be given a choice today *Ventash'ma* Nedoli.” Narice spoke once more drawing his attention back to her. “A choice on which path the High Coven will follow into the future.”

“Princess...” Anebal began.

“Do not call her that!” Nedoli barked. “She is no Princess of the Coven! She has been tainted by these... by these Lycavorian animals! By him!” He pointed at Arrarn.

Arrarn leaned close to Narice, his lips beside her neck and he nuzzled her skin. “I have tainted you oh mighty Princess.” He spoke in a seductive voice mocking Nedoli.

Narice’s eyes closed for the briefest of moments and she reveled in Arrarn’s physical touch and his MV resonance as it filtered through her. A smile split her lips and she opened her eyes once more, playfully slapping his leg to get him to stop. She looked at Nedoli, stunned herself at Arrarn’s actions in the face of the danger that surrounded them. Once more she found herself in awe of the spirit and will of the man who had swept her up within his arms so easily and stolen all she was. All Toria was. A spirit and will that Narice knew was matched by every Lycavorian within his family and outside his family. Across the entire Union. A spirit she now wished for her people to see and experience for themselves.

“If what you call a taint allows me to experience and feel what I have felt these last months *Ventash'ma* Nedoli... then I gladly will allow that taint to run within my veins forever.” Narice spoke. She took a deep breath then and moved around to the head of the table. “Now however we have other, more pressing concerns.” She looked at Cha'talla.

“Four minutes.” He spoke.

Narice nodded. “*Ventash'ma* Datarik, Anebal... all of you. Please... return to your seats.” Narice told them. “In four minutes you will need to make a decision. A choice that will decide whether the High Coven lives or dies. One choice will provide a future for the Coven... the other will see me leave just as I arrived... and your fates will be sealed forever. I will no longer be willing or able to stop the tempest that is about to descend upon you for what my mother allowed to happen. In four minutes you will decide whether you live or die.”

ARIZONA-CLASS STRIKE CARRIERS *HORNET*, *BISMARCK*

Janon sat in his command chair on the bridge of the *HORNET* silently contemplating his next actions. No Union ship had ever been so deep within High Coven space, let alone sitting not so far away from their homeworld. Stretched before them on their main monitor was the massive research space station in orbit of Uzu Ozeib 7, as well as what amounted to an entire Strike Force of unsuspecting High Coven warships ranging from the two *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts to countless frigates. The crews of both the *HORNET* and the *BISMARCK* were on edge, waiting to be discovered. They were professionals however, and Janon had no doubts that they would do their jobs and do them well.

Janon looked at the man who had once been captain of this ship and now was his XO as he came up to him. “Two minutes forty-five seconds.” He said as he stopped beside Janon’s chair and met his eyes.

“We have to make the first strike count.” Janon spoke as he rose to his feet. “No misses and no duds.”

His XO nodded. “The crews have checked and rechecked the loads. We’re ready.” He looked at the monitor. “I never thought in all my years I would see the vampire homeworld. It is not... it is not what I expected.”

Janon nodded. “Nor did I.” He said.

“Think this will work?” His XO asked turning back to him.

“If it doesn’t do what Androcles wants then it will at least make them pause before responding. If they do at all.” Janon said. “The intelligence reports state the Coven is in a state of flux when it comes to their government. Their military is in similar disarray though not on as large a scale.”

“Let’s hope that gives us another advantage.” His XO spoke. He held out the data pad. “We received confirmation from Admiral Pontal. He is standing by and will seize the outer rim shipyards the moment we begin our attack. Princess Narice and General Cha'talla are also ready and standing by.”

Janon nodded as he took the pad and looked around the bridge. "Very well." He said softly. "All flight crews to their stations! I want us emptied of fighters in less than a minute. Squadron Commanders will assume their attack plans and roll in. The *BISMARCK* will target the *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts. All port batteries to target the station. All starboard batteries to free targeting. Let's make this happen!"

"We'll be early Janon." The man said.

"Early bird gets the worm." Janon spoke with a smile. "A phrase I learned from Miranda Lorian."

BLOOD REVERENCE-CLASS DREADNOUGHT HELLBOUND

The Duty Officer was bored.

Most of the crew was bored. They had finished with their science refit and were now awaiting orders to return to their fleet. They had been waiting for nearly two weeks now, and it was beginning to tax the patience of the officers and crew. In activity normally did that. Half the crew had been released to go to the surface, the other half going through the motions of doing their jobs. The bridge of the *HELLBOUND* was only half staffed even though it was just past 1300 hours. Even the captain was on the surface trying to figure out when they could leave. The *HELLBOUND* was still attached to the shipyard docking arms of the research station. The young lieutenant had never seen the area around Uzu Ozeib 7 so bare of ships. Normally there was an entire Fleet Group assigned to protect the planet, but since the Kavalians had invaded twenty-seven years ago, that practice had long since stopped. The ships and crews were needed elsewhere.

He had just put his feet up on the control panel and lifted the mug of fresh blood to his lips when several alarms began sounding at once. He groaned as the skeleton bridge crew reacted slowly and the female sensor operator turned to her station from where she was chatting with another female. She shook her head and moved back to her station and the Duty Officer saw her body go rigid.

"*Vith uns'aa !*" She cried out as she practically threw herself into her chair. "Contacts! Contacts! *Vith...* dozens of them! Appearing all over!"

The Duty Officer sprang to his feet. "Kavalian!" He screamed as he rushed across the bridge to her station.

"Negative! Negative! Union contacts! *LEONIDAS IIAs!* *NOVA-Class!* *Shu!* Two contacts bearing 2368.9! Unknown at this time but emanating Union power signatures! The power signatures are..."

"What? What?" The DO screamed.

"I've never seen anything like them before!" She barked.

"General Quarters! Battle Stations!"

"We only have a skeleton crew!" Another officer screamed. "The Captain is on the surface!"

"We're sitting ducks!" The DO shouted. "Launch fighters! Starboard batteries to..."

"The fucking gun crews are on leave!" The second officer shouted.

"*Vith! Vith! Vith!*" The sensor operator screamed. "They're locking us up! Missiles! Missiles! Unknown designation!"

The High Coven Duty Officer did the only thing he could think of. It was more an act of cowardice, but it was an act that would earn him praise in the future and a new position.

"Blow the docking clamps!" He screamed. "Blow the clamps and engage the engines!"

No one on the bridge questioned his orders and the few men and women present began responding to his shouted commands. It would cripple their ship... but it would save their lives in the long run.

It was a sight that many who survived that day would never forget.

One second the space and stars around the main science and research base within the High Coven was free of ships. At Janon's order, all Shroud Shields were dropped, and the Lycavorian Union Strike Force appeared. Eighty-three ships appeared within the span of half a second, and suddenly that once peaceful sight was turned into a maelstrom of retribution and death. Men and women sitting in the many lounges along the bulkheads came to their feet unsure of what was happening. They were unsure until they saw the two massive

ships begin spitting fighters out either side like faster than their eyes could follow. They were unsure until they saw the two *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers turning radically and also emptying their complements of *TEMPEST* fighters. One of the massive, arrowhead shaped ships was turning away as fighters spewed from launch tubes too numerable to count on either side. Turning toward the two *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnoughts that were docked at the shipyards only five hundred kilometers away.

It was then that the massacre began.

Screams sounded within the research station's lounges as they witness the entire side of the unknown ship erupt in a fury that was unmatched. The *BISMARCK*'s entire starboard array of weapons, from the small Point Defense Batteries to the huge Type One Plasma batteries lit up the darkness of space with a saturation barrage directed at the closest dreadnought that was docked. There was no mercy shown to the docked and helpless ship as the enormous display of firepower impacted the stationary ship along its right flank. Even with full shields, the range of the barrage and the amount of firepower placed on the target would have overwhelmed the dreadnought's defensive systems instantly. Huge chunks of the ship were sheared completely off, one entire engine wing and much of the connecting material tore away in the series of immense explosions. The force of the blasts threw the dreadnought out of its locking clamps, slamming it into the frame of the docking shipyard with tremendous force. This caused the entire docking platform to shift location and crumbled against the bow of the second *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought that had amazingly begun to back out of its berth.

The men and women on the station could only watch in unmitigated horror as they saw a dozen flashes from near the top of the unknown predatory ship. The Captain of the *BISMARCK* had ordered the launch of his M22A ZMF missiles. Twelve of the stealthy and lethal ship killers responded with unerring accuracy and destruction. All twelve of the missiles impacted precisely where they were targeted, six ripping into the burning and crippled *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought and exploding. The flash that followed nearly blinded those watching from the station and many raised their arms to shield their eyes. The other six missiles had been targeted at the nearest ships to the *BISMARCK*, which included two *BLOODLETTER* Medium Cruisers and one older *ORIC*-Class Heavy Cruiser. Two Zero Matter Fusion missiles were targeted at each ship and the resulting detonation so close together decimated all three ships, completely incinerating one medium cruiser and sending the other smashing into the *ORIC*-Class, tearing through the ship's superstructure and eventually blowing into three different pieces while the *ORIC*-Class separated into two and began to drift apart slowly as internal explosions rocked the ship.

The men and women on the station, some of them just as evil as Aikiro because of the experiments they conducted, some who were not, could only stare in horror as that second arrow head shaped ship turned sideways to the station and the many gun turrets dotting its immense side turned towards them as well. The Research Station had a crew of nearly twenty thousand men and women assigned to it. Most of them were scientists and workers. Many of them were innocent of any harmful acts, their research not dangerous and not militarily related. Of those twenty thousand men and women, only one thousand three hundred and fourteen would survive this day. It was not a decision Androcles and Narice had come to lightly. They had spent hours agonizing over the fact that so many innocents would die. In the end however, they agreed that this station could not survive. This station was a symbol of everything that was wrong with the High Coven. A place of horror and death. A place where guiltless men and women were taken to be part of one horrendous experiment or another. It was not a decision that Androcles would have made alone, without Narice's input, though he had every right to do just that. It was another reason why Narice Leonidas loved him as one loves a brother or dear friend. Androcles was the first to have accepted her and Toria into their family without hesitation, the one who had encouraged Arrarn to pursue both of them, even knowing who her mother was. Narice blessed the day that Arrarn Leonidas came into her life, and the biggest part of why her life had taken such a turn for the better was Androcles. He knew things others did not; he saw things others did not. And he saw his brother's love for her and Toria immediately and encouraged him to pursue it. Narice Leonidas would honor her new name in everything she did.

Many of the men and women in the station lounges began to run from where they stood watching this epic moment in Coven history as the *HORNET* finished her slow turn and came broadside of the station. They knew what was about to happen, and as with any living being, survival became their foremost thought. None made it very far as the entire left side of the *HORNET* erupted in a blinding display of terrible power. Ten Type I Plasma turrets, fifteen Type II turrets, eight torpedo bays, nearly thirty Quad PD turrets and four Point Defense

missile batteries all fired at the same moment. It was a ghastly display of Andro Leonidas's wrath, for ultimately that is what it was. The *HORNET* was merely the platform by which Androcles took vengeance for what they had done to his sister. What his beloved half vampire sister had had to suffer. This was Androcles retribution for what had occurred. Many called him crueler than his father and in some aspects that was correct. Of those that survived this day however, they would never know that had it been Martin Leonidas conducting this operation, Uzu Ozeib 7 would have been left nothing but a smoking hunk of barren rock in space.

The first barrage from the *HORNET* rendered the space station's massive kinetic barrier shields useless. Janon was firing his ship's main weapons from nearly point blank range, only ten thousand meters from the station's colossal frame. The station dwarfed the *HORNET* by twenty times in size, but it would not matter. The first deadly barrage smashed aside the shields protecting the station's own shield generators and blew great chunks of metal and material into atoms. The station's massive shield generators were all situated into one location on the lower end of the bottom deck. It was a design flaw in the station that no one cared to fix since it was so deep within High Coven space. This entire section received the full force of the *HORNET*'s first barrage. It appeared as if the massive stationed shuddered and rippled violently as a one kilometer long section of its superstructure was blown into junk. All along the length of the research station, electricity barriers cackled and cracked, sparkling in the darkness of space as the kinetic barrier shields came down one section at a time. When the last section of shields fell, six squadrons of Union M5 *DEVASTATOR* Fighter/Bombers swooped in from where they had been holding station. And thus began the systematic death of the High Coven's largest and most renown Research Platform in history. For six thousand years this station had stood as the utmost epitome of High Coven dominance.

It would take only six minutes for the Lycavorian Union to turn it into slag.

HORNET

"...squadrons are rolling in!" Janon's XO screamed.

"Follow on saturation barrage when the fighters are clear! Target orbital compensators and the main plasma conduits!" Janon barked loudly. "All starboard batteries again! Port batteries to maintain suppression on Coven ships!"

"*BISMARCK* reports one *BLOOD REVERENCE* totally destroyed!" His XO snapped. "The second one is heavily damaged and adrift. It was blown into the shipyard frame when the first one died!"

"Status?" Janon asked.

"No engines! Weapons and shields are offline! Multiple hull breaches! Main power is wasted and she's not radiating any sensor power at all! Life support is intermittent within the ship itself!" The XO answered as he turned to look at Janon. "Should they kill it?"

Janon thought swiftly for one split second and then shook his head. "Negative!" It was the only act of mercy shown by Union forces that day. "They are out of the fight! Order the *BISMARCK* to engage remaining Coven ships! Have her Assault Wing form on her and go to Action Plan Gamma! Our Assault wing will cover us! We must do as much damage as we are able! Four minutes until recall!"

His XO nodded. "Start it now?"

Janon nodded his head. "Have the *LEONIDAS IIAs* *MYSTIC QUEEN* and *DRAGON'S BREATH* commence their bombardment of the dorsal sections of the station! Ignore any escape pods and target the stabilizers and reactor plants! Message all Squadron Commanders they have four minutes and they are to return to their ships! Empty their payloads and then return! No heroics my friend!"

His XO nodded. "Understood!"

"We caught them with their pants down!" Janon barked. "We must destroy this station before they can call for reinforcements!"

There were thousands of them now.

Word had gone out through the underground that this was the day they all needed to gather. They were young and old vampires, pureblood and turned, filling the streets side-by-side united in a single purpose. For centuries they had witnessed the actions of their leaders, of first Aikiro's father, then Veldruk and finally Aikiro herself, they had watched as millions of their people had died in conflicts that the average vampires had no desire to be in. Nearly twenty-five thousand years they had watched and shaken their heads. Now they could hold it in no longer. Coven Security officers stood along the sides of the streets unsure of what to do, hundreds of them had been deployed to keep the gathering in check, but they found there was nothing for them to do but watch. These men and women and children were simply filling the streets and parks around the Assembly Building and declaring what they wanted. In many cases the Coven Security Officers wanted the same thing. So all they did is guide the masses of people to certain points and even help them to circumvent steel and granite walls that impeded their progress by opening massive gates along the way. There was no way to stop the mass of bodies that filled the streets. The Coven Security Officers had never seen such a unified display by their people. One senior CSO would later comment that there had to be millions filling the streets all over.

When the body of *Ventash'ma* Morar hit the ground amidst hundreds and thousands of men and women with a horrifying crunching and deep splat sound screams quickly followed as men and women scrambled back. Those closest could see the condition of his body and the savage marks on his chest and back. Marks that looked remarkably like large teeth.

This is what caused the heads to begin lifting to the top of the Assembly Building where they knew the meeting chamber was. The screams and shouts then were not of fear or panic, but of wonder as they could see dozens of dragons circling the top of the building. Shouts went out and more eyes lifted skyward as the dragons swooped and dived, circling the building almost casually.

As thousands of pairs of eyes witnessed this, they all saw the death of the *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought in orbit without knowing what it really was.

A bright blossoming of light like a small sun announced that something major was indeed happening. More shouting and reaching for the sky occurred as streaks of bright light began to crisscross the sky above them. Something was happening in orbit around their planet and as they all watched, huge monitors spread out on the different buildings came alive with the Coven version of the Netnews. Faces of men and women they all knew, government reporters most of them, began speaking rapidly. This quieted the crowds down as many turned to watch the huge screens up and down the streets surrounding the Assembly Building. This was a main hub of commerce and the screens were normally filled by advertisements for one thing or another and these same government reporters who were detailing information given to them by the Ruling Assembly to report. This time however they were receiving no information from the Ruling Assembly, the many urgent requests to discover what was happening in orbit ignored by the *Ventash'ma* aides they usually got their information from. The offices within the Assembly Building were not answering their calls and within minutes the leaders of these Coven news organizations made decisions that would forever alter how the High Coven worked. The men and women in charge of these organizations began to report freely what was happening just from what they were receiving on their own. No *Ventash'ma* censors and no interference by government overseers.

This day marked the birth of the High Coven free press.

Those closest to the Assembly Building watched as the screens and monitors came alive with hurried reports.

“... Unconfirmed reports that a massive battle is underway in orbit! Eyewitness reports are indicating that a large Lycavorian Union task force and not Kavalian suddenly appeared in orbit of Uzu Ozeib 7 and immediately began firing on Coven warships and Research Station One.”

The speaker was a wide eyed pureblood vampire who had been reporting government controlled tidbits for decades. Now he looked harried and unsure, reading as he was from unedited reports they were receiving. His face was the most recognizable however, and soon nearly every monitor and screen began to shift to his image and he stammered his reports out.

“Are trying to connect with orbital satellites to confirm this but...” He turned as someone to his left handed him something. His eyes grew wide. ***“Phraktos!”*** He gasped looking up to the monitor. ***“We have just received a report from one of our station personnel who was on Research Station One! He was departing the***

station when the attack began! He is now drifting in a transport ship and has direct visual reference! He is confirming that a sizeable Lycavorian Union Task Force has appeared in orbit of Uzu Ozeib 7 and they commenced an attack immediately after lowering their Shrouds. They have already managed to destroy two thirds of the Coven ships in orbit, to include the newest BLOOD REVERENCE Dreadnought VLOS ELEMIIRE. He reports that the Union ships are now pulverizing Research Station One and it seems they are intent on destroying it. Union fighters are swarming the skies above us and swatting Coven ships down the moment they are launched.” He shook his head. *“This is... this is... is this a prelude to a Union attack on the High Coven? The Union has never come this far into Coven space... we...”*

Those gathered in the streets now began to look to the skies as they listened to him talk from whatever screen or COM system he was using. It appeared as if the entire High Coven controlled media had just collapsed and now they were winging it without guidance or direction from the government.

“Wait! Our personnel is reporting that the station is coming apart! The transport pilot is directing them away... but he says the station is coming apart!”

HORNET

“Captain... long range sensors are detecting Coven warships entering the system!” The *HORNET’S* sensor operator screamed out. “Fleet Group size!”

“Pontal?” Janon barked the question.

“Negative! They are not radiating friendly code!”

Janon got to his feet. “Time to finish this!” Janon shouted. “Twelve M22As! Full lateral spread! Zero Fusion maximum! Impact point at all critical areas!”

His XO was also issuing orders as well. “Begin All Fighter Recall! Get them aboard! We have incoming enemy forces! All Fighter Recall! Combat landings! I repeat combat landings!”

“Weapons?” Janon hissed.

“Targeting critical structural points!” The man answered. “Full Zero Matter Fusion yield! Missiles are locking!” He whipped his head around. “Missiles are locked!”

Janon looked at his XO. “XO?” He snapped out.

“Almost! Most had already recovered to rearm!” The man answered staring at the tactical screen.

“XO! We need to...” Janon began.

“That’s it! All fighters aboard! All fighters aboard!” He barked turning to look at Janon. “Do it!”

“Weapons?” Janon snapped.

“Ready!”

“Fire!”

RESEARCH STATION ONE

It was not a dramatic as one might have thought. The M22As were not designed to be flashy. Each missile did exactly what it was designed and programmed to. As the ZMF reaction absorbed more than its small field could hold, it ruptured outward. In this case, right back at the hull of the space station which was already rocking from internal explosions. It was like twelve massive shotgun blasts at point blank range. Along the entire length of the station gaping holes appeared from the initial ZMF explosive force, followed quickly by huge chunks of the station simply falling away and exploding or disintegrating in secondary blasts. Millions upon millions of small pieces scattered outward just from the force of the explosions caused by the M22As. As the energy was sucked into the vacuum created by the ZMF warhead and then released when it could no longer hold it, great swaths of the station simply vanished into the maelstrom of destruction. The *HORNET* was silhouetted for several seconds as she turned away from the dying station, the *BISMARCK* mimicking her maneuver with ease.

Those who viewed from the many life pods and transport ships that had escaped the station could only witness as the two arrow shaped behemoths, their deadly escorts forming up around them, disappeared once more into the void from which they had come to enact their retribution.

Research Station One commenced its final death throes, and its massive power core overloaded. The resulting explosion buffeted the pods and transports that managed to reach a safe distance from the station, and engulfed those that had not, as a bright sun formed in a single eye blink and then the station blew apart like it was a glass chandelier dropped to the floor from a hundred feet above. The concussive force tossed the remains of the shipyard and the inert *BLOOD REVERENCE* Dreadnought aside as if they were toys, though the ship was able to survive because of its remaining kinetic shield barriers.

All that remained was the darkness of space, filled with hundreds of survivors who would bear the scars of what they had witnessed this day.

RULING ASSEMBLY BUILDING

None of the *Ventash'ma* were able to speak. The death of Research Station One could be seen in the skies above easily from where they sat in their chairs. The Immortals stood stoically, their eyes focused on the men and women before them.

Arrarn stepped up to Narice who was standing in front of one of the remaining panes of glass and looking at the sky where pieces of the station were already starting to enter the atmosphere and make it appear as if a large fireworks display was underway. He didn't hesitate and slipped his arms around her waist and pulled her back against his chest. Narice closed her eyes and relished in the comfort and feeling of his strong arms around her as she leaned back against him.

"I'm sorry Narice." He whispered into her ear, leaning over further to nuzzle her cheek and the side of her neck.

Narice reached up with her hand and held his head to her cheek. "It was the only way." She whispered back. "Androcles and I agreed it was the only way Arrarn. It is not something we wanted to do my beautiful Arrarn... but it could not be avoided."

Arrarn nodded. "I know." He said softly.

"Narice!" Cha'talla called to her from across the room.

Narice turned slowly and looked at him. "Cha'talla?"

"Captain Janon reports all ships accounted for. We lost... we lost sixteen fighters... but..." Cha'talla shook his head.

"It is far less than we anticipated." Narice spoke.

Cha'talla nodded. "Yes."

"What have you done?" Nedoli screamed in shock and anger.

Narice ignored him, took a deep breath and squeezed Arrarn's arms before once more becoming the Princess she now needed to be. "Has Toria reported in?"

Cha'talla nodded. "They have control of the entire network." He said. "She is ready to initiate the Quantum Communications Relay."

"Quantum Communications Relay?" Datarik gasped as he looked at Narice.

Narice ignored him as well and stepped up to the table, activating one of the consoles there. The image fluttered for several seconds and then Toria's face appeared. "*Ol zhah xunor Udossta ssinsrigg* ?" She asked. (It is done our love?)

Toria nodded. "We have tapped into the entire network." She answered. "All channels, military and civilian. I have initiated the QCR connection and Androcles is waiting. He returned to Earth only a few hours ago."

"Resistance at your location?" Narice asked.

Toria shook her head. "None. To be honest, many of the engineers here jumped at the chance to help us once they realized what was going on *mrand'ssinss*. We are completely secure and will hold this location until you say otherwise." (Lover)

Narice nodded her head. "Activate the link Toria. It's time this eternal war came to an end."

Toria nodded her head and they could see her hands moving. "Link activating. All the connections are clean. It should be coming through now!"

There were gasps in the room from both the *Ventash'ma* and the Immortals as the holoimaging disc in the floor to the right of the table came alive with a solitary figure. That figure was wearing Union Mark IV ArmorPly Body Armor with a crimson cloak that dangled to the floor. The matte black helmet was unmistakable with the high multicolored plume and the ever noticeable image of the dragon mounted in the front. The glaring azure blue eyes were also very prominent and they nearly glowed under the helmet. The *Ventash'ma* had no idea that this very transmission they were witnessing was being broadcast to the entire High Coven. On every carrier wave and channel. Toria and her team had infiltrated the largest communications center on Uzu Ozeib 7 and taken control of it with no resistance in the least. Every monitor and screen in every city across Uzu Ozeib 7 came alive with the face and upper body of the young Prince many knew only by reputation and picture. The streets below the Ruling Assembly Building fell silent as men, women and children turned to witness history. Across the breadth of the High Coven, in warships and on small listening posts, reaching from border to border, everything stopped.

"When will it end?" Andro's words echoed across space as he reached out. It was a risk that he needed to take. A risk that could pay huge dividends or fail miserably. And all of it stemmed from what he said right now. His eyes blinked as everyone watched. **"When will it be enough?"**

Andro looked at the floor where he stood. **"I doubt there are many left alive who even know why it all began."** He spoke looking back up. **"I do not."** They watched him take a deep breath. **"No doubt by now most of the citizens of the High Coven know what has taken place. I speak now to all of you, young and old alike. It ends here! It ends today! It ends with me!"** Andro shook his head and paced in the room he was in.

"I have taken what... I have taken what vengeance I require for the vile actions that Empress Aikiro perpetrated upon my sister Zarah. For the death of two dragons and several of my people in what was supposed to be a joint mission of cooperation. She betrayed us... betrayed us even as she offered the hand of friendship to my father. What she allowed to happen.. To take place. They raped my sister Zarah for those of you who don't know. Dante and Javier Moran and others raped her repeatedly and brutally beat her within centimeters of her life. As if she was some sort of animal. She has never fought against the High Coven, never taken the life of a vampire, and yet they targeted her because of her youth. Because she is half vampire! They took my sister's innocence from her!"

Andro hissed vehemently, his eyes changing and his fangs bursting forth and very visible as he spoke from under the helmet. Millions upon millions watched as Andro reached up and removed his helmet from his head with an angry jerk.

"I ask how many High Coven fathers, how many High Coven brothers would allow this to happen?" He barked out. **"How many of you would not call for the blood of those who did this to your daughter, to your sister? Aikiro made a mistake... and that mistake cost her everything. She thought... she thought she could step upon my family, my people, just as Veldruk did for so many centuries. She failed... and she was struck down like the psychotic upae she was by the Feravomir of our people. The First Oracle. The ones Veldruk tried for centuries to wipe out. He failed too. Javier Moran lies dead, as does his dragon Naruth. Aikiro is ashes, Admiral Tesand with her. My vengeance is now directed at only two people. Dante Moran and his father will pay for what they did to my sister. They will pay for their actions... for I have sworn that to my sister and I keep my promises. My vengeance no longer includes the High Coven or her people."** Andro looked up once more.

"My people."

Datarik and Anebal gasped at this comment and suddenly found themselves leaning closer to the image of Androcles as he continued. Narice and Arrarn noticed this and then Cha'talla. What was spoken now would be critical and all of them hoped what Androcles said would hit the nerve. No one had been able to pry from him what he would say before they left and even leading up to this transmission. He would tell no one except his wives and mates, and everyone knew getting information out of them was almost as hard. Narice could only hope it struck the nerve that needed to be struck. So far... so far it seemed to be doing just that.

"I speak your language like it is part of me. All of my brothers and sisters do. Taught to us by our pureblood vampire mother Isabella. Two of my sisters are half vampire. One of my brothers. I have Aunts,

Uncles, friends... all of whom are vampires. Over ten million vampires call the Union home. Trusted, honored members of the Union. They take part in our military, our government, and our lives! I have five mates and wives, one of whom is Carisia Leonidas. Yuri's daughter.

Andro held out his hand as the scene behind him grew larger. They watched as Carisia's petite body filled the transmission now, and Andro pulled her tightly against him, lowering his lips to capture hers as Carisia returned the kiss passionately. When they drew apart her cobalt blue eyes were alive with love, the tips of her fangs showing easily as she faced the monitor.

"Aikiro's actions were meant to kill my sister... instead they brought her together with Lucia Moran, and now nothing in this life could tear them from each other so strong is their love. Aikiro's own daughter Narice! She is there among you now, helping to bring about change. To reshape the High Coven and return them to a path that will take them into the future. And she does this as the Blessed Wife of my brother Arrarn. Even my father, a man who had more reason than anyone to cling to his hate of vampires, he loved my mother Isabella. Loved her with every waking step he took, just as he loved all his mates. How is it that we are such enemies when we have so much in common? How is it that we can cling to hate when doing so makes us hate part of what we are?"

"I... I ordered Research Station One destroyed because of the vile things held within it. Aikiro stole from us data that would allow her to craft weapons that would make it easier for her to continue the High Coven down a path of destruction and death. I... I cannot bring back the innocents that may have died today, I alone will carry that burden. But nor can the High Coven bring back the innocents killed during the Black Day. Six hundred billion of my people died that day! Six hundred billion men, women and children who did not know why they died! You cannot bring back those innocents lost to the High Coven Rape and Death Squads that my people had to suffer daily for fourteen millennia! The cycle of death and distrust and hatred that began with Veldruk and others needs to end. And it ends now with me. With my generation."

Andro motioned with his hands and suddenly Sadi appeared, pressing close to him, then Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. Zarah and Lucia came into view behind him with Eliani and Jomann. Carina and Moneus, Dorian, Normya and Tir'ut. And finally Gorgo and Deia holding the smaller Leonidas children.

"It ends with all of us." Andro spoke softly. ***"We were raised to believe strongly in fate and destiny. That everything happens for a reason. That ultimately if something is supposed to be; no matter how hard you try to stop it, no matter how much you fight it, it will come to be. The High Coven and the Lycavorian Union were never meant to be enemies. That is not what fate and destiny wanted. I believe we were always meant to be allies, friends, and in many cases family. The individuals who altered that path for the High Coven are now gone. All of them. Yuri Moran lives, and because of her we now have a piece of our history back. Because of her... the bodies of my great grandfather and great grandmother reside now with our people. I could not... I could not bring myself to kill her because of circumstances that many would not understand. So she lives... and she will attempt to find peace in her future life with her new Immortal husband. It is not something my father would have done... but it is what I have done because all of this has to stop. The death. The war. It needs to stop or it will destroy both our peoples in the end."***

**ARC ROYAL
UNION SPACE
.09 LY FROM JUMP GATE 35**

Martin Leonidas stood silently watching the transmission, his arms crossed over his broad chest, his dark brown eyes moist. Aricia's hands covered her mouth in shock at what Androcles had just said, For'mya pressed between Anja and Isabella, Dysea and Cirith standing to Martin's right, all of them watching the monitor. Helen and Wayonn stood beside one another off to the side, Danny, Julie and most of Martin's team in the background. No one spoke; no one dared utter a breath, for all of them knew that Martin's son had just altered the course of their future with his words.

“We... we could be so much more.” Andro’s voice continued. *“And I will do everything within my power to make this so. I ask... I ask the Ruling Ventash'ma and the people of the High Coven... I ask that you join with me. I ask that you take a leap of faith and let us see what the future could hold for us, not as enemies, but as friends and partners! The way I believe it was always meant to be! It has already begun here, with me, with my family, with those who call the Union home. Now all we need do is take that last step and make it happen all over! Narice is among you now with my brother Arrarn. She has returned as your Princess... but she is also a Princess of the Lycavorian Union. She believes as I do... as so many of us do. I ask that you allow her to do what her mother and father should have done! I ask that you support her and allow her to lead you into the future. A future that could be brighter than any you have ever known. And I will prove this to you... Narice?”*

Martin’s eyes narrowed slightly as he heard Narice answer. *“I am here Andro.”* Narice’s voice replied.

“You and Cha'talla have gained control?” Andro asked, his face remaining impassive.

“We have. They are with us now.” Narice said.

“Execute those traitorous scum now!” Andro spat.

UZU OZEIB 7

RULING ASSEMBLY CHAMBER

Narice looked at the men and women who sat at the table, all of them turning to her at Androcles’s words in confusion.

“There are six of you who have collaborated with the Kavalian Federation in their war against the High Coven.” Narice stated with grim determination in her voice. “You have given them vital information that has allowed them to murder and bring harm to my people. I will no longer allow you to do this. I will not allow you to impede the future of the High Coven as my mother and father did. Cha'talla.”

The Immortals in the room had shifted and moved their positions during Andro’s words. Co'kal, Ki'nuq, Cha'talla and three other Immortals had inconspicuously moved up behind these four men and two women without notice. Their lack of attention was their doom. At Narice’s word all of them struck with brutal efficiency. Heads were jerked back and wicked looking blades were slashed across throats. Screams and shouts followed as the other members of the *Ventash'ma* pushed away from the table but were stopped by the remaining Immortals. Felisa stepped up to where her father, *Ventash'ma* Nedoli, now leaned back in his chair his hands trying to stem the flow of blood gushing from his neck. His eyes turned to gaze at her, the light leaving his eyes rapidly.

“You betrayed us father.” She gasped. “You betrayed us all! This... this is your payment. Now we will make our own future.” Felisa lashed out with tears in her eyes and her clenched fist slammed into her father’s jaw with crushing power. His head snapped around and he was knocked from the chair he sat in, sprawling on the floor, his fingers clawing at the cold marble as death came for him.

Narice turned back to the image of Androcles in the transmission as the remaining *Ventash'ma* were pushed back into their chairs. “It is done Androcles. They are dead.” She said coldly. “I will place their bodies on display for three days to allow all those who now help the Kavalian Federation know what the penalty is for betraying our people.”

Androcles’s head nodded. *“So be it my sister.”* He said. *“Cha'talla?”*

Cha'talla looked at Andro’s image. “The Akruvian Immortals are tied to the life of the High Coven Androcles. We have served them for too long to desert them now. My... my people have fought and died with them. Now... now we will help them to return to the path they were meant for. If Narice will have us.”

Narice looked at him. “You no longer serve the High Coven, Cha'talla of the Immortals. None of your people do. But I will accept your help as allies and friends.”

Cha'talla nodded. “Then so it shall be.”

“Then to the people of the High Coven I say this...” Androcles continued.

**ARC ROYAL
UNION SPACE
.09 LY FROM JUMP GATE 35**

“...fuck me.” Julie gasped softly as she stood next to Danny. “Did he do what I just think he did?”
Danny nodded as he crossed his arms over his chest. “Like father like son.” He stated with a grin.
“Pissing them off isn’t healthy.”

Narice’s voice broke into their banter. ***“You no longer serve the High Coven, Cha’talla of the Immortals. None of your people do. But I will accept your help as allies and friends.”***

Cha’talla nodded. ***“Then so it shall be.”***

“Then to the people of the High Coven I say this...” Androcles continued and Martin Leonidas saw his son’s face change then as he moved away from Sadi and the others. ***“Stand with Narice Leonidas. She will guide you to the future the High Coven was meant to have. She is my brother Arrarn’s Du’ased ‘ranndi yes, and this insures that she will always have the support of my family and I. Let her guide you to all you could be and the Lycavorian Union will stand with you to the end. You will have our support no matter what that entails! I will not attempt to impose my will upon my friends! On that you have my solemn promise! My Vlos Hithern!”***

Andro bared his fangs and his azure eyes grew wider when he spoke the next words.

“To those members of the Ventash’ma who remain I say this. You have seen what we have done this day. Rest assured... we can do so much more. Narice Leonidas is there to claim her rightful place as leader of the High Coven. With her she carries the Lycavorian Union’s pledge of mutual defense. Of trade and assistance. Our unflinching vow that we will never desert our brothers and sisters in their time of need. Sign these documents and you can help Narice change the path of the High Coven and make the future so much brighter. For all of us. Dismiss them and I will unleash the full fury of the Lycavorian Union upon you. I will... I will shed tears as I give the orders... but I will bring this war and hate to an end. I will strike at the very heart of your military and when I am done, nothing will remain. I do not want that... a l’phraktos... that is not what I want. But I will do it.

“You will find no greater or loyal an ally than the Lycavorian Union, but you will also find no greater an enemy. Dismiss me... and I will be unforgiving and relentless and I will bring about the death of the High Coven as assuredly as I stand before you now. And from the ashes... from the ashes that remain, the future can be born. The decision is yours now. It is the people’s decision. Listen to them. Honor them. Trust them. Do all of these things... do these things and you will earn their respect and their trust without question.” (By the gods)

Martin turned when he felt the hand on his chest and he looked into Isabella’s beautiful hazel/green eyes. She reached up and stroked his cheek, running her fingers through his neatly trimmed beard, tears streaming down her cheeks.

“He is... he is doing exactly what you raised him to do Martin Leonidas. What you trained him to do. You shaped him.” She whispered. “He is... he is becoming his own man!”

Martin choked up then, his own eyes becoming moist again. “He’s doing a damn fine job of it too isn’t he?” He stammered.

The rest of Martin’s mates crowded around him and he pulled Aricia close to him, her azure eyes clouded with tears. Martin swept his arms wide and practically engulfed them all in his embrace as he leaned his head over and nuzzled Isabella’s neck.

Wayonn stepped closer and looked at Martin. “And through the millennia it all comes back to the beginning.” He said softly.

Helen looked at him. “Wayonn?” She asked softly.

Wayonn looked at her. “It was... it was something Sumar said to me before we left to try and discover what happened to our world. He said we can not stop the change. We can not stop the horror that is coming. But through the millennia it will always come back to the beginning.” Wayonn turned back to Martin. “I never understood what he meant. Not until this very minute. He has done it Martin. Your son has done it and he doesn’t even know it.”

“Done what?” Martin asked.

“Androcles... he has brought us back to the beginning.” Wayonn spoke softly. “To the exact point that should have happened so long ago and didn’t because of Xaxon’s influence over Aikiro and Veldruk. This... what he is doing... this is what should have taken place nearly twenty thousand years ago. It is happening now! Your son is changing the events set in motion by Aikiro and Veldruk. By the Black Day. He is altering the future as we stand here. Twisting it to something different. That is why I have not felt the sense of urgency that I did before coming here. Androcles has altered events and his actions have bought us more time.”

Helen looked at him and took his arm. “Grandfather... are you sure?” She asked.

Wayonn nodded his head at her. “Yes... it could be nothing else.” He turned and looked at Martin. “Do you and your son not know how to remain passive? How not to shatter events and create impossible and illogical solutions to these events?”

Martin shrugged his broad shoulders. “I guess not.” He said sheepishly.

Wayonn waved his hand. “Bah... Panos was wrong when he called the two of you forces of nature. More like forces of chaos! We will need to sit down once we are underway. With what your son has done, it is now time to tell you everything.”

“Why exactly don’t I like the way you say that?” Martin asked him.

“This is not what I expected of your son Martin.” Wayonn said. “I... I expected him to go after the High Coven with ruthless vengeance because of what they did to Zarah. This... this I never foresaw. *Sibfla!* When will the two of you learn to be more predictable?”

“Predictable is boring.” Martin said. “I don’t like boring.”

Wayonn shook his head. “With Androcles’s actions... I must confer with Shiria and perhaps Avatar 341... but I feel... I sense we have gained time. A year... perhaps two. Three at the most.”

Anja looked at Martin and then back to Wayonn. “What... what happens after that?” She asked.

Wayonn met Martin’s eyes. “Then we will have no more time and The Scourge will be upon us.” He said softly. “And the real war will begin.”

UZU OZEIB 7

RULING ASSEMBLY CHAMBER

It was *Ventash’ma* Datarik who slowly got to his feet and looked at Narice.

“Princess... Princess... can he hear us?” He asked. “See us?”

Narice tapped her jaw. “Toria... accommodate cross communications.” She ordered. “They want to speak with Andro.”

“Syncing cross COMS.” Toria’s voice filled the room. “Receiving acceptance from Cranæ Island. It’s up!”

Narice turned her head to look at Andro’s image. “Andro... can you see us?”

EARTH

CRANÆ ISLAND

Andro's azure eyes narrowed in interest as the faces of the men and women in the room suddenly became visible to him. He could also see the bodies of several of the dead *Ventash'ma* as well beside the huge table. "I can see you Narice my sister." He answered her. "All of you. *Fervon*." He spoke looking directly at Arrarn.

Arrarn nodded to him. "***Andro***." He said. "***Taine tis jar***." (Trust in us.)

Andro nodded to him. "***Innyne fervon. Innyne***." (Always brother. Always.)

Narice motioned to Datarik, not telling him that the transmission was still being broadcast all across the Coven. "***Andro... this is Ventash'ma Datarik***." Narice said. "***He is one of the most senior Ventash'ma***."

Datarik watched as Androcles bowed his head slightly in a show of respect to the much older man. "It is an honor sir." He spoke. "It is an honor to see all of you for the first time. I hope it is not the last."

"***Prince... Prince Leonidas... what you have done this day. What you have said***." Datarik spoke slowly, measuring his words. "***What you ask of us... what you demand. It is difficult to grasp what this could mean. It is...***"

"My father told me something when I was a boy." Androcles said releasing his grasp on Sadi's hand and removing his arm from Carisia's waist as he stepped forward. "I was twelve and I was leaving my home on Apo Prime for my Agoge here on Earth. I was frightened and did not want to leave. My father nodded and spoke these words to me *Ventash'ma* Datarik. He said... ***Nothing worth achieving is ever easy or without pain. The question before us is how much do we want it. How badly do we wish to conquer our goals? The reward to what we achieve is far sweeter than the pain we endure reaching it***."

Datarik blinked several times as he looked at Androcles. He turned and looked at the other men and women at the table before turning back to the transmission. "***Your father... your father was a wise man***."

Andro nodded his head. "Yes." He said with a smile knowing that Martin was probably watching from the *ARC ROYAL*. "He had his moments."

Andro watched Datarik turn and look at the men and women at the table once more. He watched as each of them nodded almost without hesitation. Datarik turned back to the image of Andro that they all saw from Uzu Ozeib 7.

"***Prince Androcles Leonidas... on behalf of the Ventash'ma of the Ruling High Coven... on behalf of the will of our people... we... we wish to turn the page on history that should be left to the past. We wish... we wish to forge a new future***."

UZU OZEIB 7 RULING ASSEMBLY CHAMBER

Every head in the room turned at the deafening roar that filled the chamber even from a hundred stories below them. In the streets of the city surrounding the Assembly Building, the citizens of the High Coven roared their approval to the words they were all watching on the many screens. Had Datarik and the others been able to see other planets, within ships across the empire, they would have seen the same reaction. Narice moved to the remaining glass pane that was still standing and looked far below to see the dots that were thousands of men, women and children cheering and clapping in approval. She turned back, and looked at Datarik and the others.

"It appears our people approve of our choice *Ventash'ma* Datarik." Narice said.

"***Narice... honored Ventash'ma of the High Coven... I must take my leave of you now***." Andro's voice told them. "***You don't know how this knowledge makes me feel. How it makes my people feel. Ask us... ask us and you shall have it***."

Datarik bowed his head deeply. "To know that you are willing to do this... that the people of the Lycavorian Union are willing to do this even with the history between us... it gives us hope. Thank you."

Andro nodded his head. "***Narice... execute Phase Two and inform the Ventash'ma of what this entails***."

Narice nodded. "I will." She said.

Andro looked at her in the transmission. "***You are Empress now Narice Leonidas***." He said. "***You lead your people now. Make them proud***."

Narice nodded her head as her eyes became moist. "I will do my very best." She told him as Arrarn came up to her and she wrapped her arms around his waist. "Thank you Androcles. Thank you for believing this could be."

"To the future sister. To the future of us all." Andro said softly.

Narice blinked several times and then the transmission ended. She looked at Arrarn and accepted blissfully the kiss he laid on her. After a long moment she pulled away from him and wiped the tears from her eyes. The cheering and roaring of the thousands in the streets below still filtered to them easily. She took a deep breath and moved to the table, activating another communication.

"Admiral Pontal... have you been monitoring?" She asked surprising the *Ventash'ma* in the room.

"I... I have indeed Empress Narice Leonidas." Pontal's voice echoed in the chamber. **"And the pride that swells within me knows no bounds."**

"Admiral... we will need to act quickly." Narice said. "The Kavalian Federation is volatile and Andro's prediction may come to pass. You have secured the outer rim shipyards?"

"We have Empress." Pontal answered. **"Though I dare say we needn't have bothered."**

"Move your entire command to the designated coordinates and stand by." Narice ordered. "I will have General Cha'talla coordinate with the remaining Fleets and disperse them where needed."

"Admiral Moran's force is still out there Empress." Pontal spoke. **"He will have many who were diehard supporters with him. Do not dismiss him or the harm he could do."**

"I don't intend too." Narice spoke calmly. "At the moment however, the KFI is the most immediate threat to what we have done."

"Agreed." Pontal said. **"I will begin moving my units and contact you when we are in position."**

"Alu xuil l'phraktos Admiral." Narice spoke. (Go with the gods)

"Lu'dos nei." Pontal answered. (And you Empress)

Narice looked at Datarik and the others, all of whom had confused looks on their faces. She ignored them for the moment and looked at Cha'talla. "Begin contacting all commanders Cha'talla. Colonel Co'kal can assist you with coordinating their status and positions. We need to move quickly."

Cha'talla nodded. "Consider it done."

Narice looked at Felisa then. "Felisa... I am appointing you as my personal aide and liaison to the *Ventash'ma*." She said surprising Felisa with her announcement. "Please secure an office for me to work out of. Preferably one close to the roof so that my Bonded Brother is nearby."

Felisa nodded her head slowly. "Of... of course Empress." She stammered.

Narice looked at the *Ventash'ma* then. "We have many decisions to make and I will be the first one to admit I lack experience. *Ventash'ma* Datarik I am appointing you as my Chief Advisor, with *Ventash'ma* Anebal and *Ventash'ma* Riara as senior Directors."

"What is happening Empress?" Datarik asked her. "Where is Admiral Pontal being sent?"

Narice looked at him. "The KFI have staged nearly twelve Fleet groups near the planet Faront... five light years from Ukwav. Androcles believed this was to be one invasion corridor that they would use when they declared war against the Union. He isn't going to give them the chance."

All of the men and women were stunned into silence for a long moment. Anebal was the one to speak first. "Why would the KFI declare war on the Union?" She gasped.

"What they thought to accomplish by kidnapping For'mya Leonidas will not bear fruit." Narice said. "You all know of what they have done I'm sure."

Datarik nodded. "It has been all over your Netnews, all over The Wilds." He said. "They think to use the child she has given Pusintin in order to see him ascend to the throne of the Union."

Narice nodded. "When they realize this has failed, and it has failed, they just don't know it yet, Androcles believes they will attack. This is one of the corridors he believes they would have used to attack Union space."

"They will discover... they will discover what has happened this day." Datarik said. "The KFI has agents all across the Coven. They must know what has taken place here."

Narice nodded her head. "We figure that will happen within a matter of hours yes." She said.

"They will attack immediately!" Riara snapped.

“We will not be able to counter such an attack!” Another of the *Ventash'ma* spoke. “Our forces are in disarray! Especially now after...” He looked at Arrarn. “Your brother knew this would happen!” He barked. “He knew the KFI would attack us the moment we agreed to his demands! He has led us to ruin!” The man spat as he came out of his chair. “He has condemned us all!”

“Deck your ass back in that chair old man!” Arrarn snarled. “My brother ain’t as stupid as you think he is! And he always keeps his promises!”

Datarik looked at Narice and saw the small smile on her face. “Empress?” He asked softly.

Narice met his eyes. “When the KFI turns these forces across our border, which all of us believe they will do for they have no choice, when they do this... they will be met by Admiral Pontal, his entire command and ten full Fleet groups of Lycavorian Union ships ready to fight beside us.” She told them. “Androcles Leonidas does not go back on his word. Ever.”

EARTH

SPARTA

KING YELU MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The sarcophaguses had been brought to the hospital and placed within the medium sized chapel under heavy Durcunusaan Guard. Hundreds of people had gathered outside the hospital as word spread among the citizens of Sparta of who actually occupied those sarcophaguses. Andro’s conversation with the High Coven *Ventash'ma* had been broadcast across the entire Lycavorian Union and the knowledge that the remains of King Resumar, Queen Eliani and the Royal Elf Concubine Na’rien now resided within King Yelu Memorial Hospital was quickly spreading across the entire planet. Being the consummate politician that she was, Deia quickly had her staff do a sounding of the consensus of Andro’s actions. Even Deia had been stunned at the results. From all walks of culture and society within the Lycavorian Union, the vast majority of opinions on what Androcles Leonidas had done was overwhelming positive. An ongoing war and conflict that had claimed hundreds of billions of lives, most of them Lycavorian, over the course of nearly eighteen thousand years had finally been brought to an end. This showed Deia just how far the Union had come even from just four thousand years ago, and how much they embraced the Leonidas family.

Deia sat in her hover chair now in the back of the chapel, her dark eyes gazing upon the broad back of her nephew as he sat between the sarcophaguses of his great grandfather and great grandmother. Her head turned slightly when she smelled and felt the presence of another enter the chapel and she saw the young woman Shiria quietly close the door behind her. Well, perhaps not so young considering she was over ten thousand years old herself, but far younger than Deia in any event. Deia’s eyes watched as the only living Pralor made her way silently up to where Deia sat and settled into the bench beside her. They had talked only briefly since she had arrived, and her identity was being withheld for the moment by Andro’s order. Shiria’s dark eyes glanced at Andro’s back and then looked at Deia.

“He is... he is very spiritual.” Shiria said softly.

Deia nodded turning back to look at Andro. “Yes... he is.” She replied softly. “Martin is no different, but Androcles is more like his mother in that he is not afraid to show this side of himself.”

“My time with Resumar showed me he was the same way.” Shiria spoke. “It is a strength of your people.”

Deia smiled and nodded her head. “Yes it is.”

“He is praying?” Shiria asked.

Deia shook her head. “Yes... no... I think in his own way he is asking for guidance.” She replied. “Contemplating what he must now do.”

“He questions himself?” Shiria asked somewhat surprised. “He has ended a war that has persisted for sixteen millennia by all accounts. And done it with one sweeping action. How can he question himself?”

“He and his father are no different than any great leaders throughout history.” Deia said. “They all questioned if their decisions were correct. Yet once they made up their minds, they pursued their goals with an

indomitable will. I have watched Martin stand under the stars for hours and question his decisions. In the end, he was proven correct, but that does not mean he didn't question them at the beginning."

"Do you know what he is planning?" Shiria asked.

Deia shook her head. "No." She answered. "I do know that whatever he does, it will be driven by the love he has for his family and his people. The Kavalians... his uncle... they made a mistake by taking For'mya. How big a mistake they will discover in the future."

Shiria shook her head. "As much time as I spent among them, no matter what I did, I could not move them from their path of violence and destruction. It is ultimately what drove me into hiding."

Deia looked at her. "Are you happy to be away from them?" She asked.

"I am happy to be among those with Pralor blood in their veins." Shiria answered as her voice took on a note of wistfulness. "I am so happy that I no longer need to hide what I am. Arriving here... moving through the city and seeing all the people... feeling the Pralor blood within them, even if it was just a little, I haven't felt that in so long." Shiria looked at her. "It is wondrous."

"Will you go back?" Deia asked.

Shiria shook her head immediately. "Resumar, Isra, Tarifa, they will rescue those who I care the most about. I have little doubt there. There is nothing for me there now. Here... here I can be among those who descend from the greatest of the Pralors. Sumar. Wayonn. So many others that went with them on that ill-fated mission. They live on here... all over. I imagine I will be overwhelmed when I am finally able to go to Apo Prime. That is where most of your people have settled isn't it?"

Deia nodded. "It was in the beginning yes. Now... there are many who are moving to Earth and other places. Spreading their wings. When Martin decided that they would stay here six months out of every year I think everyone knew that Earth would eventually become the center of it all. This is where Sparta is... this is now where our Kings and Queens are laid. The Spartan way of life took hold many years before Martin ever returned to us, and when he did return, well... Lycavorian Spartan isn't just a term anymore. It is a way of life to our people."

"Queens?" Shiria asked.

"Na'rien will always be a Queen in the hearts and minds of our people no matter that she was concubine." Deia answered. "Resumar and Eliani made sure of that and our people will honor her in that way."

Shiria took her hand. "I wish to learn all I can." She said. "I was able to read and learn a little when I was with Resumar, but we had so much to do. I want to learn everything. How it all came to be. Wayonn would never tell me the entire story... I think it was too painful for him. I wish to fulfill the role that I believe fate has laid before me."

Deia looked at her. "What is that?"

"Teacher." Shiria said softly. "Helen is the *Feravomir* as all of you call her. She has the memories and knowledge of Canth. Wayonn's son. I can not replace that for I do not have that. But I can teach others what I know. And I can provide knowledge to all who will listen."

Deia smiled gently. "We will need your knowledge in the future I think." She said. She looked at Andro's back. "He will need your knowledge."

"Resumar has told me things about him." Shiria said. "Shown me things within his mind. Sumar's blood burns brightly within him and his father. Within their family. It has passed down through the generations losing none of its potency. I don't need to be near them to feel that. To see it." Shiria stopped talking for a long moment and Deia nudged her.

"What is it?" She asked softly.

Shiria looked at her. "I was just thinking that perhaps... perhaps the essence of my people is not lost. Perhaps Sumar did what he did because he knew we would be lost to the memories. And in doing so he passed the essence of our people to yours. The power. The knowledge. The compassion. The drive. I have already seen flashes of this within Androcles and his father. It has manifested within them."

"What has?" Deia asked.

"It is what Sumar and Xaxon were known for." Shiria said. "I studied them when I was in school. Wayonn has not told you?"

Deia shook her head. "I have not had much chance to speak with him. He has been beside Martin ever since arriving within the Union."

Shiria nodded her head in a knowing manner. “Yes of course. Helen is Martin’s seer... and Wayonn’s granddaughter... and he is insuring she has the skills and knowledge to guide Martin. That is why he left Dutkne with Androcles.”

“I don’t follow.” Deia said.

Shiria looked at her. “Sumar and Xaxon... they were part of a Warrior Sect of the Pralor people. This sect was a very small portion of Pralors whose Etheric abilities evolved to a point where they were able to physically manifest their Etheric power... their Mindvoice power as you call it. They were supremely powerful. Able to do things that no one else could. There were barely a thousand of them at their peak, men and women, among the trillions of our people. No one knows exactly why it occurred in so few Pralors, perhaps some sort of genetic disposition that no one ever discovered. They were revered among our people, and any Pralor would know them no matter where they went.”

“Has Wayonn told Martin this?” Deia asked.

“If he hasn’t yet, he will soon.” Shiria answered. “It can’t be hidden any longer because these powers are manifesting in Martin and Andro. And perhaps in others as well. The closest reference to them that I can recall from any history comes from ancient Earth history actually. They would have been called Paladins. Holy warriors. Sumar and Xaxon were part of only a handful of this sect, these Paladins, that survived our first war with the species that wiped out my people and all we had built. The Scourge they are called. A vile and evil species, void of emotion or reason. Sumar and the other Paladins were the ones who ended the first war as I said, but at great cost. Their number was reduced to barely a hundred by the war’s end. A war that Xaxon started because of his greed for more power.”

“That is why he was punished in the fashion he was?” Deia asked. “Separated from his body.”

Shiria nodded. “His mind was separated from his physical body and placed in a Psionic chamber yes. I don’t know all of what happen... I’m only telling you what I read in our history books. Wayonn was with Sumar... he knows everything. Each of these warrior sect, these Paladins, had another Pralor that provided a balance to them. A guide if you will. Wherever they went... their guide went with them. They were from a different sect of our people that was much more common. A Mage Sect if you will. Each warrior was paired with a Mage and they remained together for the duration of their lives. They became pairs if you will. Bound by their power and an unbreakable friendship that would grow through the years. The Mage’s provided calming balances to the Paladins. They could channel their powers through each other which allowed both of them to focus more. It is my understanding that Martin did not begin to actually manifest these abilities until after he met Helen?”

Deia nodded. “Yes... about a year after he returned to us. But it was during the events when Aricia was taken from him and after that they truly began.”

Shiria nodded. “And when Canth passed his knowledge and memories to her, it triggered the dormant blood within Helen. Wayonn and Canth’s blood, since both of them were from this Mage Sect of our people.”

“But Androcles has always been able to do these things Shiria.” Deia said. “Even as a small boy.”

Shiria nodded. “I am not completely sure... but I believe it is because of his dragon. She provided the balance to him, just as Martin’s did for him. At least until Helen became Bonded to Arzoal. Arzoal was a Pralor before her mind and essence was transferred to her dragon form. She would have known and seen what Martin and his son would become. When that happened, then Helen may have realized what she was meant for because Arzoal told her I imagine. No doubt Arzoal also told Elynth as well when she was very young. That is why Wayonn’s grandson Dutkne and Androcles came together so easily when they finally met. Dutkne is of Wayonn’s blood... just as Helen is... and he is Andro’s Mage.”

Deia shook her head. “This is all... this is all quite a bit to take in.” She said. “Why are you telling me this now Shiria?”

“You are the leader of the Lycavorian Union Deia.” Shiria said. “The political arm of your Union. There is a reason you have survived this long. To see Martin take power. To be able to witness everything that has happened. Martin and Andro are just the first Deia. Others will begin to manifest this ability. Sumar’s blood was the strongest, but there are others that were with City Ship 41 who had the potential or Sumar would not have assigned them to his ship. Perhaps even City Ship 19 as well. Sumar was Captain of CS41 and a Paladin and he would have found them and had them assigned to his ship. He was going to spend the decades it would take for the seeding mission to run its course to train them. He and Wayonn. Obviously when they crashed on

Lycavore things changed. The records of the crew must be in CS41. Those Sumar had singled out. Avatar 41 would have this knowledge. He had to have recognized Martin as Sumar's descendant and a Paladin the moment he came in contact with him. I imagine Martin's other children will begin to show signs of this manifestation. At least those who are not of mixed blood."

"Denali?" Deia asked. "Nara? Deion?"

Shiria nodded her head. "Those who are of pure Lycavorian blood yes. Though it is also my understanding that Martin's other children have developed gifts as well. Your niece Zarah, because of what happened when she was a child, the others who are bonded to dragons. These bonds seem to increase their abilities to some extent. Without actually speaking to Arzoal, I do not know for sure how far their abilities will grow. They will never be Paladins as Martin and Andro, but they could be powerful nonetheless. When *SPARTA'S WRATH* returns to Earth I can ask Androcles to release databanks that were previously locked to me because of my status as a junior scientist. They would have this knowledge and we can begin to find them."

"Why Andro?" Deia asked. "Why not Resumar?"

"The blocks can only be released by a Paladin." Shiria said with sort of an impish grin. "I am not as reserved as Wayonn in many ways. It is why I left the technology for the Spartans here on Earth. He was not happy about that... but I knew it needed to be done. The archives will need to be released and only a Paladin or a Mage can do that. Then we can access these archives and perhaps even Sumar's notes and discover these descendants."

Deia's eyes grew wide. "Jomann! Denali!" She gasped.

Shiria met her gaze. "You know of someone already?"

"Androcles's Captain." Deia said with a nod. "I saw the reports from when Androcles rescued Caliria. Jomann showed flashes of what you speak. Not on the scale of Andro... but something similar. Denali as well."

"You know this Jomann?" Shiria asked.

Deia nodded. "I knew his ancestors. And his Lycavorian blood is exceptionally pure." She answered. "He and Martin's daughter Eliani have become mated. *Anomes*. And that is no small affair with our people considering she is half Hadarian."

Shiria nodded her head slowly. "Then it is beginning." She said.

"And why does this concern me?" Deia asked again. "This would fall into an area that Helen and Wayonn would know more about."

Shiria nodded. "Yes... but they are gone for the moment. Months at least. Perhaps longer. I don't believe Androcles would agree to such a thing without his father's guidance. I sense he fears his abilities and what he is capable of to some extent. We will need to discover these men and women within the Union. They will become invaluable to the Union in the future that is coming. Whatever Martin discovered on CS41, whatever scrolls or archives that Sumar left that enabled him to learn what he has; to pass this knowledge to his son; this knowledge will need to be shared with those who are found. They will need to be trained and schooled."

"Then... then it's true?" Deia said softly. "These... these Scourge... they are going to come here?"

Shiria nodded her head solemnly. "Yes. I believe as Wayonn does... we have gained more time with recent events that have taken place. But they will come. If they are not already on their way."

"Why?" Deia asked.

"They exist now for one purpose." Shiria said. "That is to eradicate anyone with Pralor blood. No matter how small the amount may be. This is their purpose. Their goal. It is what drives them."

"And I ask again..." Deia spoke. "Why?"

Shiria met her eyes. "Because my people are responsible for what they became." She answered. "The Scourge exist because of us."

Deia blinked in shock several times and almost didn't recognize Andro's voice when it carried to her.

"*Tenna*... it's time." Andro said standing in front of her. "Since you are here Shiria you may as well know what is going to happen."

"Yes..." Deia stammered. "Yes... I am ready." She spoke looking back to Shiria. "We... we will talk more Shiria. And soon."

Shiria nodded. "I believe that would be best."

SECONDARY UNION COMMAND CENTER CRANAE ISLAND

The briefing room was completely full. The twenty odd chairs around the huge table filled as well as the three dozen chairs along the walls. The single plate glass window ran the length of the room on the south side, the beach and water of the Laconia Gulf the backdrop. Part of Andro's villa was visible as well. These men and women had arrived over the last few days from every part of the Lycavorian Union. They were the Commanders of Combined Fleet Groups or Lycavorian Sector Defense forces. The senior most leadership within the entire Union. On the wall opposite the glass, two large monitors held the faces of two dozen more men and women. They were Elves, Algolians, Lycavorians, and Vampires. The leaders of the large and potent Union military.

Androcles stood with Riall and Ben O'Conner near the immense star chart. Deia occupied the head of the table, Sadi beside her, with Carisia, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria on either side of her. Shiria sat on Deia's opposite side, the rest of the table filled with many Andro knew well. Lynwe, Selene, his Aunt Aihola... so many others. He let his eyes wander across the many faces silently, his arms across his chest. They had fought beside his father decades ago, fought to free Earth, free Sparta. They had fought beside his father during the ill-fated Kavalian Excursion and the Evolli War. Now he would ask them to fight beside him. And they would without question or hesitation because they were of like mind. And they would never desert the morals and values that got them to this point.

Ben turned back to face Andro from the massive star chart and his hand dropped from his ear after he acknowledged the message he had just received. "That was Manda." He spoke. "Task Force Arizona is in position and standing by."

Andro nodded. "Thank you Uncle Ben." He said softly.

Riall put his hand on Andro's shoulder. "It is to you now Andro." He said. "Do not doubt what these men and women feel for you. It is the same that they feel for your father." He said in a whisper. "You lead us in his stead... and that is something none of us question."

Andro looked at him. "I hope so grandfather."

Riall nodded. "Let's begin." He said. "We have much to do."

Andro nodded and took a deep breath before stepping up behind Deia and catching everyone's attention. The room became silent as they watched him put his hands on his Aunt's shoulders. "I want to thank all of you for coming. Some of you came from across the Union... and some of you join us from your commands." He spoke motioning to the faces of the men and women on the monitors. "It is now time for you to know everything." They watched as Andro moved around next to Sadi and she held out the small holotransmitter. Andro took it from her and placed it flat on the table. Resumar's face and body shimmered into view with Athani beside him and the two hulking Avatars in the background. "*Fervon.*" Andro greeted Resumar.

Resumar nodded. "Andro."

"Everyone is here now Res." Andro said. "Time to let everyone know."

"Bout time." Resumar stated. "We're chomping at the bit here."

Andro smiled and took a position between Sadi and Ne'Veha who always managed to somehow sit next to each other, just as Carisia and Lu'ria did.

"By now all of you have heard about what has taken place with the High Coven." Andro said. "Our conflict with them is now a thing of the past and that is where I want it to remain. It is time to move forward."

"*Avoi.*" The female voice spoke and they all saw the female Lycavorian on the monitor bow her head.

"What I am about to tell you will become public knowledge in just under three hours when the Senate finishes their vote." Androcles said. "Once you depart and return to your commands you may let your officers and crew know." Andro took another deep breath and then continued. "As you all know... the Union Senate is voting on whether to acknowledge that the child my uncle fathered with my mother has a legitimate claim to the Union throne. I stand here now and tell you that will never take place. The Union Senate will vote this down, and in the same process they will issue an Edict of War against the Kavalian Federation." Andro saw their eyes

grow wider in some cases because not all of these men and women knew his father was still alive. That would change in a matter of seconds.

“The Kavalian Federation has committed more acts of war against our people in the last weeks than I can begin to list.” Andro said. “You will ask now if the grievances they had in regards to me training High Coven dragons is true. The answer is yes.” Andro began pacing along the large plate glass window. “I was training the High Coven dragons to fight as Bonded Pairs. I knew they would be used against the High Coven. As did my father and Prime Minister Deia as well as the Dragon Elder Council. Right now Admiral Riall is sending those of you not present here a coded burst detailing everything that was discussed and covered when that decision was made. As well as what happened in the following weeks. I will hold nothing back from you... we just do not have the time to cover it all right now.” Andro turned and began to pace back in the other direction.

“The Kavalian Federation’s actions were not because of me training the High Coven dragons. Intelligence was revealed to us that they were doing this as part of an elaborate ploy to put Marshall Pusintin, my father’s brother, on the throne of the Union without actually going to war with us. They thought they could use some obscure wording within the Lycavorian Chronicles of Law that was taken out of the context they were meant when written to do this. They usurped my mother Anja from her position as Queen of Hadaria to further this goal. They destroyed eleven of our Drow outposts in a way so barbaric it makes me shudder. They did this to position warships within the Farnuri Expanse. To hide them from us so they could attack directly into the heart of Union space when the time came. And then they destroyed the Senate Office Building killing nearly a thousand of our people in the process. They took my mother from us. We... we could have forgiven everything in order to stop a war... but the moment they took my mother they altered everything. They knew my mother was in Phase because of the traitor Laustinos. My Uncle took her against her will. He raped her. And using Kavalian medicines and chemicals he forced her body to give him children far sooner than she normally would. I have spoken to them. Fedor and Eirene. My brother and sister. Our brother and sister. They are with their true father now. Their true father and my mothers.”

This statement caused gasps and wide eyes to turn to him. Andro nodded his head. “No... my father is not dead.” He stated calmly. “He is very much alive. The circumstances behind this are detailed in the packets and transmissions you are all receiving or already have. I am the bearer of his apology to you and all of your soldiers and airmen for not revealing this to you sooner. If we had, the Kavalians would have killed my mother immediately and that we could not allow.”

Andro stopped walking now and stood against the backdrop of the huge window and the Laconia Gulf.

“I am about to do something that the Lycavorian Union has never done before.” Andro stated firmly. Sadi looked at him with loving jungle green eyes for she knew he was now set on his path and had no more doubts about what he was going to do. “This is a decision I have made without my *Tenna*’s knowledge as Prime Minister.” Andro looked at her. “I can only hope she finds it within herself to forgive me.” Deia looked confused as she met his eyes and she shook her head.

“Andro I don’t know what...” Deia began but Andro’s words quieted her.

“I will not stand by and watch my uncle and the Kavalian Empire invade our Union and take more lives while we do nothing. The intelligence we have received indicates this is exactly what they were going to do should their ploy fail.” Andro continued. “Well, it has failed, though I doubt they know it just yet. I will be there when the Senate informs them of their vote, and I will tell them in terms they seemed to understand. Right now however, right now I am going to do something the Union has never done. I am going to attack first and with complete surprise. My brother Resumar is now in command of a Pralor Heavy Cruiser Class warship that they have named *SPARTA’S WRATH*. A ship far more advanced than anything we have in our current inventory. That will change soon I hope, but right now I am going to use that ship to let the Kavalians know we will not allow these crimes to go unpunished. At this moment Admiral Miranda Lorian is currently holding position with three Block I *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Cruisers and all of their escorts as well as three *TYPE I Alpha* Dragon Transports with a thousand specially trained dragons that I have been training in secret for the last years. They are two point three light years from the six largest Kavalian cloning centers within their space. Admiral Zesico is at this moment monitoring over six hundred Kavalian warships in the Farnuri Expanse that were preparing to invade across our borders.” Andro could see the faces of all of them and the shock that was there. But he could

also see the determination and pleasure that they would finally be able to hit back against those who had done this. “Fervon?” Andro asked.

“I’m here Andro.” Resumar answered.

“How long do Avi and 341 estimate?” Andro asked.

“One point seven hours.” Resumar answered immediately. “We’ll drop Uncle Isra and the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* to conduct the snatch mission and continue on. 341 confirms two jumps to cover the distance to Admiral Zesico. Uncle Isra and Aunt Tarifa will exfil on the *ACHILLES*.”

“Manda?” Andro spoke.

Miranda Lorian’s voice filled the room now. “We’ll move into position and wait until you have given the signal from the Senate meeting. We’ll hit them thirty seconds after that Andro. Preliminary sensor sweeps indicate only one Fleet Group and a smattering of other ships in the area and nothing close enough to pose a serious threat of reinforcing once our attack begins.”

“Please tell Daurgo that they are to spare nothing of those facilities. Not even insects!” Andro snarled. “I want nothing to remain except scorched ground and death.”

There was a pause and then Miranda’s voice answered. “He says he will make it happen.” Miranda answered. “What about us up here?”

Andro blinked. “No prisoners Manda.” Andro spoke. “As with the Dragon Brigade, leave nothing living. Nothing. I want them to know what they have unleashed with their actions! I want them to feel the pain they have caused our people. Our Union. And I want them to know that this is the pain that we will exact upon them everywhere they turn and think they are safe.”

“*Avoi* Andro.” Miranda answered. “We’ll get it done.”

Andro let his eyes sweep the room and the monitors. “I have ended one war and I will start another in the space of a few hours.” Androcles spoke. “I have not... I have not come to this decision lightly and I alone will bear the responsibilities of my decisions. I can not...”

“Milord Prince?” The voice interrupted Andro and he turned to see General Vistr step forward.

“General?” Andro asked.

Vistr had been a legend long before his notorious split from Deia’s orders to remain with Martin on Ukwav more than two decades ago. He was more than a legend now, having formed the famous Durcunusaan with General Vengal in the time since then. He was an inspiration to nearly every Union soldier.

“Many of us fought with your father on Ukwav Milord.” Vistr spoke confidently. “We did not follow him because of his name, nor did we follow him because he was King. We followed him because of who he was inside! Because of what he represented to us! The future of our people! You are more like him than many of us care to admit to you openly Androcles Leonidas. And like him you represent our future. A future these *nubous* Kavalian dogs think they can take from us. Enough of these speeches of responsibility and who will hold the blame. Your father tried to give them as well. I will tell you the same thing I told him all those years ago on Ukwav. This belongs to all of us. And all of us will defend it and fight for it to our last dying breath. We have never started a war no... but damned if we haven’t finished quite a *nubous* few of them. I say enough talk and let’s kick these Kavalian pigs right in the *nor* so hard they *sibfla* out their gutter mouths! We will show them that we will finish what their fool actions have started!” Vistr took a deep breath and looked at Sadi and Deia. “And forgive my language Princesses. Prime Minister.”

Deia couldn’t help but smile at Vistr, her eyes moist. “I thought you were *malda* that day Vistr.” She exclaimed. “I am so very happy to see you are still just as mad.” Vistr gave her a grin as she looked at Andro. “What more can I say *Mandri*?” She asked. “Kicking them in the *nor* so they *sibfla* out their gutter mouths does sound deliciously delightful.”

Andro smiled as well as soft laughter filtered through the men and women in the room and watching from the monitors. His smile quickly faded and he looked up once more. “Resumar?”

“*Fervon*?”

Andro turned to look at his brother in the transmission. “Inform Avi and 341 to begin powering up *SPARTA’S WRATH*. By my order, acting as Crown Prince in our father’s stead, I am instructing you to initiate *CRIMSON RETRIBUTION*.” Andro turned to look at the others. “In just under three more hours the Lycavorian Union will be fully engaged my friends. May the gods and the spirits of my grandparents shine their blessings upon us and watch over all we do.”

“*Avoi!*” Every person present bowed their heads and uttered that single word.
The Lycavorian Union was going to war.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

ARC ROYAL

UNION SPACE

.09 LY FROM JUMP GATE 35

Wayonn moved down the corridor of deck nine on the *ARC ROYAL*. He was becoming much more familiar with this new ship, familiar and comfortable. He hadn't felt so alive in centuries. The feelings he had sweeping through him he hadn't felt since the last days he stood beside Sumar and the others of his people. The original bloodlines of Lycavorians who coursed with pure Pralor blood. He felt younger, charged with energy and passion, exactly like he felt when he and Sumar were only six thousand years old. Exactly as he felt after being turned by his Lycavorian mate and wife. He missed her terribly, but their children's children lived on and once more they would have a hand in shaping destiny. Helen, Dutkne, and the family he now called his own. Martin reminded Wayonn of Sumar so much it was frightening. Not only did he look remarkably like his great grandfather, his mannerisms and demeanor were also so similar. And the love he held for his wives and mates and his children was his strength. He could inspire rocks to fight beside him, and this trait had carried over to Androcles, and more than likely to all of his children. Perhaps... perhaps the hope that his people could not find would bestow itself upon his new people. His new blood.

Wayonn turned the corner and saw the two *Durcunusaan* soldiers standing guard outside the secure COM room. They bowed their heads to him as he approached.

“Val'istar Wayonn.” The senior man spoke as he reached back behind him and his hand touched the panel on the wall.

Wayonn nodded to the men and moved quickly into the secure communications center. The part of the *ARC ROYAL* that held their Quantum Communications Array. An advanced communications array based on technology derived from CS41. It allowed for instantaneous communications nearly anywhere. Right now it was active and as he entered the darkened outer control center he saw Helen, Aricia and all of Martin's mates standing near the three men and two women who operated the system. Through the clear floor to ceiling glass he could see Martin standing between two sarcophaguses, Androcles in the transmission with him. Wayonn came up beside Aricia, For'mya pressed tightly against her side, Anja just behind her. Dysea stood between Isabella and Cirith as they watched father and son gaze upon the remains of their blood. The holographic images were nearly perfect in their operation, Androcles looking as if he was on the ship with them, only a slight flicker every few seconds proving this was not the case.

“What is...?” Wayonn began to speak softly but Aricia and Helen held up their fingers to their lips silencing him. Wayonn then heard Andro speaking and he turned to watch.

“... Remain in Sparta's main church until you return. Our people need to see them, it is their right as much as ours.” Androcles said as he watched his father walk slowly around the sarcophaguses. “We can intern them with grandfather Leonidas when you return. You should be the one to do this father.”

Martin looked at and gazed at the image of his oldest son. “You should have told me what you were going to do boy.” He growled softly.

Andro nodded. “I know. But what would you have said father?” He asked. “You love our mother Isabella, that is without question or doubt, we all know that father. You also have a deep respect for all vampires who call the Union home. Aunt Selene and Aunt Aihola among just a few who are the perfect example. But you would not have done what I did. It needed to end father, before it destroyed us all. Because of... because of the way Xerxes treated grandfather Leonidas you would never have been able to forgive that. I did what you knew needed to be done but could not do yourself. The hatred and distrust you have... you did not pass this to me or my brothers and sisters father. You and our mothers allowed us to live our lives as you taught us. Why?”

Martin glanced at the floor quickly and then looked back up. "Because it was *my* hate." He said softly.

Andro nodded his head. "If Carisia and Narice and Lucia are any example father, the vast majority of the people of the High Coven are not like Aikiro and Veldruk and the others like them. They want the same things we do! It had to be done and I have made both of our peoples stronger father. In the end... that is what matters. You taught me that."

Martin grinned sheepishly. "I did didn't I?" He said. His smile went away. "What about Moran?"

Andro shrugged. "No one has heard of him since Yuri left his ship. He is out there, but at the moment he is a non-factor. He has not the strength or influence that he used too. I will find him and his son. I will find them eventually and when I do, Dante Moran, I will bleed him like a pig father and then I will watch as he bakes on the fields of Ukwav until the flesh peels from his skin in the sun and at the right moment I will drive my sword through his skull and Xaxon's essence will have no where to go except into the *nubous* abyss. His father I will leave for you."

"That's... that's pretty severe boy." Martin said looking at him.

"For what he did to Zarah, he will be getting off easy." Andro snarled.

"And Yuri?" Martin asked.

Andro shook his head. "I could not kill her father. You did not see her as I did. I will make no excuses for her... but I looked within her and saw someone different than we have known all these years. This Immortal who has claimed her... Pa'cour... she carries his child and she does so with pride and grace. She knows what she has done can never be forgotten, but someday maybe we will forgive her. I think maybe she hopes for this. Only fate knows the answer to that. The child she carries could be the beginning of her redemption. We will see. My mothers and the supplies I sent arrived I take it."

Martin nodded. "The weapons and armor was a little much." He said.

"If what I felt from Fedor and Eirene was accurate then there will be many among Muton's people who will gladly take up arms." Andro said. "Kavalian and Pralor blood..." Andro said shaking his head. "Who would have thought?"

Martin smiled. "Tell me about it."

"Do you think you will find them father?" Androcles asked.

Martin shook his head. "The map Muton has put together is pretty accurate." He said in reply. "But it's been there for thousands of years. I don't know what we will find; there were only a handful of Pralors who left Elear with the first group of dragons. And then the ship didn't return for nine thousand years after it deliver the second group. We may find nothing but ruins and bones but it is worth the risks." Martin looked at him.

"Considering what is coming... it is worth the risks."

Andro nodded. "I agree." He said. "As do Shiria and *Tenna Deia*."

"No one must know what we know son." Martin said. "Not yet. Keep it within our family right now. If it got out... there would be panic and..."

"I know father. Only *Tenna Deia* and Shiria know for the moment." Andro answered. "And you know Sadi and the others will say nothing."

Martin nodded. "I know." He said. "They are getting along I take it?"

Andro nodded. "Surprisingly... they have not been apart for the last few hours. They are in discussions about something I have not paid much attention to. Paladins or something like that from the pieces of their conversations I have heard. Shiria and I will sit down after the Senate vote is over I'm sure."

"You're sure about your plans?" Martin asked.

Andro nodded now with confidence. "Yes. We will have complete surprise and superior firepower on target. Just as you taught me. I have sent Carina back to Apo Prime to go through an accelerated Tactical School. She helped to plan our initial operations and with the schooling she will get, when she returns she will be invaluable. My actions will buy us the time we need to transform our industry. She estimates at least three months... possibly four. It will be enough. What about my uncle?"

Martin looked at him. "He's alive." He said. "We had to leave before I could kill his sorry ass. The lives of the dragon hatchlings were too important. I... I may have goaded him into doing something that helps you."

Andro shook his head. "I don't understand."

"He's the best tactical leader they have." Martin spoke calmly. "He found your mother For'mya somehow, even after the scans we ran. Now that Anja is here, we'll figure out how. We agree that getting him

to follow us is better for you. If I can't be there with you... then I can damn well insure you have every advantage. Taking your uncle out of the equation will only help you."

Andro nodded. "True." He said. "Will he do it?"

Martin shrugged. "He's an arrogant *mida*. And..."

"What?"

Martin looked at him. "I think he's in love with your mother."

Andro's eyes grew wide. "You are joking." He gasped.

Martin shook his head. "No... I wish I was." He said. "As I was... as I was beating his ass I saw it within his surface thoughts." Martin shrugged again. "It's no matter. Hopefully between this and what I think I saw he'll follow us."

"And what does mother think of this?" Andro asked.

Martin chuckled. "When I told her she said I better find him first because she will cut his *nor* off and feed them to him."

Andro grimaced and shook himself in the transmission. "That is painful just thinking about it." He said. "Father... Fedor and Eirene... they...?"

Martin smiled. "Right now they are in the landing bay getting to know their Bonded Ones." He said. "You... you felt that within them? You and Elynth?"

"Faintly yes. We didn't know they would find their Bonded Brother or sister where they did though." Andro answered.

"I will make sure they are here next time we talk." He said. "We'll remain in contact, but let's keep transmissions to every two weeks."

Andro nodded his head. "That will give the engineers time to install a newer QCR on the *SCIMITAR*." He said. "Uncle Ben sent me an updated status on all projects at Dreamland. All of the Block II *ARIZONA* Class will be finished by the end of next year. He has expanded the shipyards by a factor of four to accommodate this. He has also drafted several new engineers and ship builders and brought them into the fold."

Martin nodded. "No more Andro. Dreamland is our ace in the hole. The more people who know about what goes on there the better the chances it will be discovered. We can't let that happen."

Andro nodded. "Uncle Ben knows the risks. Don't worry."

"Watch over your brothers and sisters boy." Martin said.

"I always do father." Andro answered with a smile.

Martin moved closer to the image of his oldest son. "Androcles... you... you continue to make me the proudest father in the galaxy. I don't tell you... I don't tell you enough but I love you son."

"I love you as well father." Andro told him. "Pass on the love of my brothers and sisters to our mothers. And tell them I will watch over them."

"I will. Two weeks from today." Martin said. "We'll talk again two weeks from today."

"I'll have my people on Cranae Island ready."

"Androcles..." Martin spoke. "Have Armetus and Marcie activate the Nexus Grid."

Andro's eyes narrowed slightly. "That will not make us any friends father." He said.

"Fuck'em!" Martin hissed. "The Kavalians outnumber us five to one in many cases. The Nexus Grid will help us to level the playing field."

Andro nodded his head. "I'll see to it. I must go father. We will speak again in two weeks and I will have more for you."

Martin nodded. "Go with the gods son. Go with the gods."

"And you father. All of you." Andro answered just before his image disappeared and Martin was left in the large empty circular room alone.

Martin stood for a moment alone, his hands clasped behind his back, contemplating all that was happening. He looked up when he felt Aricia lead everyone into the communications room. His dark brown eyes took in each of his exquisitely beautiful mates and wives, and felt their strength course through him. His eyes fell on For'mya as she came up to him alongside Aricia and Anja and he pulled her close to him, lowering his head to her golden blond hair and inhaling deeply of her sweet orchid scent. All their scents filtered to him and filled him with peace.

Wayonn waited for a moment and then broke into the silence. “The crews are nearly finished transferring all of the equipment Androcles sent.” He spoke. “Daniel is waiting with Muton and his son on the bridge. The first jumps are already calculated and Captain Fang says we are ready.” Martin looked at him and nodded. “Then let’s get this party going.” He said.

KAVALIAN SPACE CABELIR

Isra held up his hand signaling those behind him to stop and move to the sides of the file they were traveling in. His wolf blood was surging through him at the exertion and being so deep inside enemy space. It had been a long time since he felt this alive, and he could feel Aelnala’s own excitement sweeping through him as she circled the dark skies above with Roluth, Sorran and Mirra in close formation with her. She was senior to the four dragons, not only the oldest but also the one with the most combat experience. They would react off of what she did during the operation.

Isra’s deep violet eyes studied the six meter high steel and concrete wall fifty meters to his front. They had moved quickly and efficiently to this point from where the two *STRIKER* DTs had landed a kilometer back. It had been a wild ride up until now so far as Isra was concerned. Watching as *SPARTA’S WRATH* shuddered and shook off the twenty meters of ten thousand year old rock and trees and dirt to rise majestically into the sky was a sight he would not soon forget. He could feel the pulsing supremacy of the ship as it rose through the clouds into orbit of Ritaah, fully seven and a half kilometers of devastating power that was once more free. As Resumar directed Avi and 341 in guiding the massive ship back into the stars, Isra and the others could only watch in awe. They could almost feel the rumbling influence as the ship’s pure Phased Quantum Fusion Drive came to life once more, throbbing with unrestrained power and authority. The first jump had brought them to within three million kilometers of Cabelir, well past the vaunted planetary defenses the Kavalian homeworld was known for. It took exactly four point seven seconds for the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* to be released from the cavernous landing bay of the Pralor Cruiser, and then *SPARTA’S WRATH* was gone as it engaged its PQF drive once more.

As the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* closed on Cabelir, Isra and his strike force made ready. The two *STRIKERS* were launched as the *RAGE*, her Shroud making her invisible to anyone who might be watching, skimmed the upper atmosphere on the very edge of her ability to come close to a planet. It was no simple feat for a fifteen hundred meter long ship to skim the atmosphere of a planet. Their Shroud shields and the noise reducing retro-engines on every *STRIKER* allowed them to land without incident. From the field they had broken into their assault teams and headed out.

Isra felt Tarifa come up beside him as silently as a ghost and he smiled inwardly as he looked at his sapphire eyed elven wife and mate. Twenty-six years they had been together along with their Drow Mistress Aihola. Isra could not imagine being without either of them, for they each held a part of him. Looking at the new Governor of Sparta in daylight and wearing casual clothes you would never mistake the surreal beauty Tarifa projected for a seasoned and lethal warrior. Yet she was every bit as deadly as a Pit Viper. Longs hours constantly training with her Drow lover had honed her abilities to perfection, and even longer hours running great distances with her Lycavorian husband had given her a figure that would cause the tongues of most male wolves to drag on the ground. Tarifa and Aihola however, they belonged to him completely.

Isra commanded this Assault Team of fifteen. Dario, Channa and Ckhoa were assigned to him along with ten of Mican’s best trained commandos. They would move directly to where the female workers in the compound would be gathered by Ckhoa’s sister Poysha. Colonel Vonis commanded the second team which included Mican, Karun and Ardis, Isra and Tarifa’s oldest and most skilled daughter. They would move for the secondary Command and Control Building in order to confuse the Kavalian troops that were assigned as security within the massive compound. It was a very risky operation, but what information female Kavalians assigned to the compound knew and had access too was well worth the risk. Isra, Vonis, Ckhoa and Mican had spent hours planning this mission right down to every detail they could possibly generate. None of the thirty-seven Kavalian females who worked inside the compound had any qualms about leaving. They had lived lives

of harsh treatment and being sexual objects for far too long. Ckhoa carried the device that would deactivate the explosive capsules in their skulls thereby freeing them of their captivity. Poysha had worked diligently to insure all of them wanted to leave, for once they escaped into Union territory they would never be able to return home. It did not come as a surprise to her that none of them cared about that. Their daily exposure to Union Netnews channels and countless bits of information and intelligence showed all of them what it was they were missing. They had been abandoned by their Prides in order to gain favor, implanted with deadly explosive capsules, forced to undergo Biogenic treatments to alter their appearance and then used as sex objects and expendable personnel. None of them cared that they would never see their homes or families again. All of them hoped for futures within the Lycavorian Union where they would be treated as females should be treated. As precious objects that were to be nurtured and loved.

“Seventy-four minutes my love.” Tarifa told him.

Isra nodded. They had seventy-four minutes to act until the sun began to come up and their dragons could no longer provide them unhindered support. Then they would be out of time and they would need to leave regardless of their success. Isra lifted his hand and touched his ear.

“Snatch Team ready.” He spoke.

“Strike Team ready.” Vonis’s voice answered instantly. “Rendezvous at established coordinates in forty-three minutes. Good hunting Isra.”

“And you Vonis.” Isra answered.

Isra turned immediately and pointed to Dario. He clenched his fist, extended one finger and then stabbed it at the wall in front of them. Dario didn’t hesitate and dashed forward, his six foot three body propelled with incredible speed. His silenced, cut down P190A3 was secured to his back and his long legs carried him over the reasonably level terrain quickly. Dario planted one foot at the base of the wall and leaped upwards, his bond with Sorran fully active now. That bond and the TK power they shared allowed Dario to plant his hands and feet in different spots on the flat wall and continue to leap frog up the smooth surface until his hands caught the edge and he hung there for a moment.

“Go!” His voice hissed in the implants of all the members of their team and Channa burst forward next.

The five foot nine Channa, her long black hair tied into a pony tail and her meter and a half long tail whipping behind her followed in the footsteps of her newfound and beloved husband. Channa didn’t know how she came to love him so quickly and she didn’t care. The moment she had seen Dario she knew her life would be forever changed for the better. The six foot three Lycavorian didn’t care that she had a tail, he didn’t care that she had been used more times than she could recall. As he had told her so many times since first meeting him, she filled his essence now and he showed her just how much every time he caused her to scream his name in bliss. Channa covered the distance to the wall even faster than Dario had and using the same skills she duplicated his movements, coming to rest on his back as he hung there. She drew her long legs up and then propelled herself the last meter up the wall, leaping into the air and surprising the two Kavalian troops who had been standing just to the right of where Dario hung. As Channa twisted in mid-air, both her right boot and her tail whipped around with savage speed and power. The tip of her combat boot caught one Kavalian directly under his chin, snapping his head back so hard that the vertebra in his neck all broke at once. As he fell to the top of the wall dead, Channa’s tail came lashing out to slap the second Kavalian in the face so hard he staggered back holding his cheek. This allowed Dario, who had pulled himself up the moment Channa leaped from his back, to grab the Kavalian’s head in his powerful arms. He yanked savagely to the left and then back to the right, snapping every bone in the soldier’s neck with ease. Then he turned and launched his body over the wall.

Channa didn’t hesitate and was pulling the sectioned cable from her back and tossing it over the edge of the wall. Dario did the same and waited until he saw Isra and the others dashing for the base of the wall before unlimbering his P190 and taking up a cover position. Channa pressed her back to him and did the same in the opposite direction.

“Forgive me if I hurt you Dario my love.” Channa hissed softly over her shoulder.

Dario grinned without taking his eyes off his area of cover. He tilted his head slightly. “I’ll let you jump my bones whenever you want baby.” He answered softly.

Channa smiled and turned to see first Tarifa and then Isra come over the edge of the wall from either cable they had tossed down. Isra looked at her. “Channa?”

She nodded. "This way." She spoke and then started moving along the top as the other Kavalian troops began to pull themselves up over the edge of the wall while Dario covered them.

Vonis withdrew the blade of his elven fighting knife from the neck of the Kavalian soldier and turned his head in time to see Mican and Karun doing the same. Ardis assisted Karun in dumping the body to the side of the top wall and then more of Mican's men began to pour over the edge from the four cables they had tossed down. Mican grabbed Vonis's arm and motioned with his head.

"This way." He hissed softly. "We are not far." Vonis nodded and fell in behind them as they began to move.

A hundred meters along the wall and they came to the elevator. Mican turned as they all crouched nearby.

"The Secondary Hub is at the bottom of this elevator." Mican spoke. "Usually seven to ten personnel inside. Colonel Vonis, we will charge into the center, the others breaking left and right as we discussed."

Vonis nodded. "Try not to damage too much equipment but take down your targets at any cost." Mican lifted his hand and touched the panel calling the elevator. "Short, controlled bursts. Let's do this right." Vonis saw the nods from everyone and then turned to Mican. "Let's do this. We're on a timetable and I wouldn't want us to be late."

Mican nodded as the elevator doors opened. He stood up to the side as the others piled into the elevator in assault formation. He and Vonis were the last ones to board. He looked at Vonis as the doors began to slide shut. "It is an honor to fight beside you Colonel Vonis." He spoke.

"The feeling is mutual Mican." Vonis answered him as the doors closed fully.

There were nine Kavalians in the Secondary Command Hub this night. All of them bored. They were secure in the knowledge that they were safe from attack. No High Coven assault had ever crossed the borders into Kavalian territory. They were not brave enough or stupid enough to attack this deep into Kavalian space. This post was the assignment of high honor among the Prides, guarding the Command Compound for all of the Kavalian Federation. And the perks were even better with all of the females that were there for their use. They were far from any battles, and very secure within the knowledge that nothing could penetrate their security. When the hum of the large elevator came to them, only one Kavalian turned to greet the troops that would be coming from the wall posts.

It only made the assault that much easier.

The Kavalian officer watched as the doors opened and his eyes went wide when he saw the towering vampire and biogenically altered male in front of the group of hard looking troops. None of whom were Kavalian. The Kavalian officer died instantly as Vonis lifted his silenced K14 Kinetic Magnum and fired twice into the man's head from point blank range. His entire body lifted off the floor from the force of the rounds and he was blown back as bodies rushed to either side behind Vonis. The soft coughing sounds of the silenced P190s rippled outward now as Vonis's team broke to either side of the room tracking targets as they went. Some of the Kavalians were targeted by more than one person, their bodies perforated by upwards of twenty rounds as they began to react far too late. Mican didn't hesitate and curled around Vonis to grasp the nearest KFI troop to him in his powerful hands. The soldier had barely made it out of his chair when Mican fell upon him. Anger at all that had been done to him; anger at having been tossed aside like trash by his father, and hope at what the future held for him and Na'lia and their daughter. All these things rushed through Mican as he snatched the troop's head in his hands and wrenched savagely with all of his considerable strength. The man's neck snapped instantly and Mican continued to twist as his legs twitched madly and then were still. Mican dropped him to the floor without a second glance and lifted his own silenced K14.

It was not needed as the room fell silent.

Vonis glanced around quickly and a wry grin of approval split his lips. Leading a small unit like this appealed to him, and in all his years he had never seen a group work so seamlessly together. Even though they were vampire and wolf and Kavalian, they blended together like no team he had ever seen.

“Ardis... Karun... get on the equipment!” Vonis hissed.

Mican followed suit. “Loget... Fabor... the entrance! The rest of you plant the explosives quickly!”

Ardis and Karun fell into seats that were next to each other as the others sprang into action. “Disabling all ground sensors.” Ardis called out. “Shutting down all internal alarms and locks!”

“Re-routing all Command functions to these two consoles.” Karun stated. He looked at Ardis’s console. “There Ardis. Top corner.”

Ardis nodded and quickly adjusted her console.

“How soon before they realize they’ve lost control?” Vonis asked.

Karun looked at Mican. “Eighteen minutes perhaps?” He offered.

Mican nodded. “About right.” He answered. “The equipment cycles every fifteen minutes within the main Command Center to keep cool. Once it cycles, they will realize they have no control. It will take them perhaps another two to realize that all controls have been routed here. The Command Officer will contact this facility and confirm this, and then he move here until control has been returned to the main Hub.”

“Procedure?” Vonis asked.

“They’ll think it’s a test.” Karun added. “I have been here with my father when they have conducted them in the past.”

Mican nodded in agreement. “They will attempt to reboot the system.” Mican continued. “Kavalian computers are not as advanced as Union systems and given how much these computers control it will take four minutes to reboot and another three to realize they still do not have control. Then they will begin to panic.”

Vonis looked around. “Security seems kind of lax Mican.” He said.

Mican nodded. “My father uses fear and pain to keep order most of the time Colonel.” He answered. “He also thinks himself untouchable. Neither him nor any of the senior officers believe anyone is capable or brave enough to initiate an attack here. You must try to think like they do.”

Karun nodded. “Mican is right.” He added. “Remember... Kavalian troops... even the cloned ones... have been conditioned to think they are the finest anywhere. That everyone fears them. And there has not been an attack on Kavalian soil in nearly a thousand years.”

Vonis chortled. “Yeah... well that will change with Androcles Leonidas giving the orders.”

“No doubt.” Mican said with a grin. “It will be pleasant to see them realize they are not as vaunted as they believe.”

Vonis nodded. “Ok... twenty-five minutes.” He said. “More than enough time if Isra humps it. Ardis... let him know we are good.”

Isra and his team squatted on the top of the wall looking down into the compounds interior. They could see the lights from many different buildings and even a few Kavalian troops moving among them.

Tarifa looked up after pressing her ear implant and nodded. “Isra... Ardis says they have secured the Secondary Hub. No casualties.”

Isra nodded. “First step down.” He said. “Nice.” He turned and his violet eyes took in Ckhoa. “It’s to you Ckhoa.”

Ckhoa nodded and lifted her arm. “That building. Exactly a hundred and fifty meters from the wall here. My sister will have them there, gathered on the first floor.”

Isra’s eyes fell on the large building Ckhoa pointed too, his wolf eyes easily picking up detail and shape. “So we come in from the east side and exfil the same way.” He stated. He looked skyward. Aelnala... do any of you see any unusual activity?

None near the building I see with your eyes Isra my brother. Aelnala replied.

A few guards it appears walking between different buildings five hundred meters to the north. Roluth answered. *Nothing else.*

They do not expect anything such as what we are about to do. Sorran chimed in. *Poor fools.*

Indeed. Mirra finished the report from the four dragons.

Isra nodded his head. “Ok. We do this quick and clean just like Vonis and Mican did.” He turned to the Kavalian troops behind him. “Angar... you and Unsla set the charges in place and standby.”

The face of the large Kavalian nodded. "We will make a very large hole in this wall." He said with a grin.

Isra nodded. "The rest of us make for the building. Two windows on the bottom floor and one door. Split into our teams and acknowledge when you are ready. We all go in together." Isra saw the nods of acknowledgement and he looked at Ckhoa. "Lead us out Ckhoa."

With a confident nod of her head Ckhoa leaped from the top of the wall followed by the others.

FEMALE HOLDING BARRACKS

Poysha stepped back from the window, her keen eyes trying to discern anything out of the ordinary in the darkness outside. She could see nothing unusual, nothing she didn't see on a normal basis. She felt the hand on her arm and she turned to look at the long blond hair of one of the youngest females in their group.

"Poysha... are you... are you certain they will come?" She asked.

Poysha took her hands. "My sister will not lie to me Cvea'Ortel. I promise you this." She answered.

Cvea had only joined them eight months ago, and she was among the most popular of the females for her devastating beauty. Her blond hair was incredibly long and shiny, her body firm and lush. Her tail had been the reason she had been sent here by her Pride. It had failed to react to the biogenic treatments and this obviously disqualified her from being able to go outside the KFI as an agent. She had been taken against her will probably more times than half the other females here and it had strained her ability to work during the day. She was strong willed, but Poysha knew it was beginning to take its toll on her mentally. She had become even more withdrawn and not willing to speak to the others. Now all Cvea spoke of since Poysha told them what they were going to do was her desire to find a Lycavorian who would adore her and accept her for what she was. She wanted nothing more to do with her own people or men for she had seen them at their ugliest.

"It's getting so close though." Cvea answered.

"Trust in me." Poysha spoke. "Ckhoa is not going to abandon us. She will come for..." Poysha saw the flash of a shadow outside the window and she yanked Cvea out of the way as the huge body came sailing through the open window followed immediately by another. With gasps of frightened shock, Poysha and the others backed up rapidly as the lower floor began to fill up with heavily armed and armored men and women. Poysha saw the flash of long black hair and then a long tail as the two figures rolled on the floor and three more leaped in through the second window. The door burst open and half a dozen more men and women poured in, her eyes growing wide when she saw her twin sister leading them.

"Ckhoa!" She almost screamed in unabashed joy and rushed forward.

Ckhoa could not contain the tears as she lowered her P190 and embraced her sister tightly in her arms as Dario took up a position by the window he and Channa had entered. He watched his beautiful mate turn towards the females, her own delightful tail flicking in the open which caused the females to calm almost immediately.

"Be calm! We are friends!" Channa exclaimed. "You are safe now!"

Ckhoa pushed her sister to arms length and stared at her. "Bless the stars you are safe!" She gasped. "I have missed you so much!"

Poysha wiped her tears away and nodded. "Oh and I have missed you." She said before crushing her sister to her once more and sharing a hard kiss on the lips. Ckhoa didn't shy away and returned the sisterly kiss as Isra and Tarifa came up just behind her. Ckhoa sensed them and turned quickly.

"Sister... this is Colonel Isra of the *Durcunusaan* and his wife and mate Tarifa." Ckhoa stated. Ckhoa turned to motion to Dario. "Commander Dario of the *Durcunusaan* and his wife and mate Channa."

That word brought gasps from the females and Isra cut his eyes to them before looking back to Ckhoa. It was Poysha who answered. "The Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* are... they are feared for their skill and bravery Colonel. Even among the Puma Bane soldiers." She looked back at where Dario stood and then to Channa as she moved among the females. "She is a... she is Kavalian like us."

Isra nodded to her. "Yes she is."

"She is his wife?" Poysha asked in surprise.

"It's a long story that we can relate at another time." He said. "Ckhoa... we must move quickly."

Ckaoa nodded her head and began pulling the bag from her back. “Poysha... we have the devices. We must attached them to the heads of all the females. They are small and will activate a tiny pulse of Reverse Fractal Energy. It will render the explosive devices completely inert. It will sting for several seconds, but it will work. We can have them removed when we get to Union space.”

“Reverse Fractal Energy?” Poysha asked. “How did... Reverse Fractal Energy is only in a theoretical stage. How did you...”

Ckaoa smiled. “Our lady devised the pulse with some additional help. I will tell you all of it but the Colonel is right.” She said. “Shiria has already gone on ahead to the Union with others because she is needed there but she sends you her love and can’t wait to see all of you.”

“Poysha... these men are part of Mican’Puat’s resistance.” He said seeing her eyes go wide. “They are like you in many ways. Tossed aside by your leaders and they are not like those you are used too.” Isra explained. “Tarifa is my wife and mate. Let them help you to get the devices ready.”

Poysha nodded quickly. “Yes! The shift change for the nearby guard post happens in ten minutes. The three men usually stop here first to... they...”

Ckaoa gripped her arm. “Not this time sister.” She said forcefully. “Not this time.”

Poysha nodded her head. “No.”

Tarifa moved forward now and took their arms. “Quickly. Let us complete our task and leave this place behind.”

Isra glanced at Dario. “Dario... the door. Tegan... Galan... with him. Anything that comes through that door... kill it.”

Dario nodded. “Done.”

Isra lifted his hand to his jaw and tapped his implant. “Snatch Leader to Strike Leader. We have made contact and are dispersing the devices. Give us nine minutes and we will be moving.”

Vonis looked at Mican who held the Kavalian Colonel in his powerful arms, the wicked looking knife tightly against his throat. He heard Isra’s report and nodded his head.

“I can give you eight Isra.” Vonis answered. “By then they’ll know something is up.”

There was a pause and Isra answered. “Eight it is.” He answered.

Vonis nodded and looked at Mican who had heard the exchange in his implant. “Kill this fucker and let’s get ready to beat feet.” Vonis ordered.

Mican didn’t hesitate and drove his knife into the thick neck of the Kavalian Colonel twisting savagely as he did. He ripped the blade forward as he pulled it out, opening up half of the man’s neck and tossing him to the ground.

Vonis turned to Karun and Ardis. “Make sure all the defenses are down and then fry the systems here. Were you able to get the other information?”

Ardis smiled and held up the two data discs she had brought. “Everything Androcles said he wanted.” She said. “And they’ll never know we took it. At least not initially.”

Vonis grinned back at her. “Watch her Karun... she’s slicker than she looks.”

Karun looked at Ardis with devotion in his eyes. “I always enjoy watching her Colonel.” He said. “It stirs my blood.”

Ardis reached out and slugged her husband in his shoulder. “Pervert!” She snapped playfully.

“Ok people...” Vonis spoke. “The easy part is almost done. The hard part is almost upon us. Getting out is always the hard part. Prepare yourself and your gear. All of us are leaving and I don’t want to lose anyone.”

Vonis’s words were felt by all of them, even Mican and the Kavalian Commandos. It was good to have a leader who cared about them.

Poysha and the other females watched as Dario lowered the body of the Kavalian to the floor and yanked his long bladed combat knife from the soldier’s neck. Blood splashed wetly on the floor and began to pool quickly as the Kavalian’s throat had been sliced open to the bone. The light left his eyes quickly and he

died with no sound as the Tegan and Galan also allowed the bodies of the two Kavalians to drop to the floor, both of them already dead. The female that Channa had been attaching the Pulse device to tore her eyes from the scene and looked at her.

“He is... he is your mate?” She gasped.

Channa glanced back with adoring eyes and nodded her head as they fell on Dario. He wiped the blade of the knife clean on the Kavalian’s uniform and returned it to the sheath on his thigh before looking up and his blue eyes caught Channa’s. “He is beautiful isn’t he?” She said softly. She turned back to the female. “And he’s all mine.”

“I did not... I...” The female stammered.

Channa shook her head. “Do not worry sister.” She spoke softly and with a smile. Calling her sister seemed appropriate because Channa had once been in her place. “When we return to the Union you will find there will be many Lycavorian men who will pursue you for your affections. And they will treat you just as Dario treats me. Like something precious. And they will love you until you can not stand it anymore.”

“I... I have my tail.” She stated gripping the end of her tail.

Channa flicked her own long tail out from behind her and smiled. “He finds my tail fascinating.” She said with a grin. “And he pays much attention to it.”

The girl looked at her. “Truly?”

Channa nodded as she finished. “Yes indeed.” She turned her head as she drew her hands back. “Poysha... she is the last one.”

Poysha was touching her own head where the device resided on her temple and turned to Ckhoa. “We are ready.” She said.

Ckhoa nodded and removed the small electronic device from one of the pouches on her belt. She held it up so they all could see it. “When I press this you will hear a humming in your ear and then a small pulse of energy will course through your head. It will sting terribly for perhaps two or three seconds. Do not remove the device during this time. You must endure it. The energy pulse will short out the explosive device imbedded in your heads. It will no longer work at all. Then we can all leave this place.”

Ckhoa looked at their faces, not seeing one bit of indecision. She turned to Poysha and her sister nodded. “We have endured far worse sister. You know this. We can handle a little stinging.”

Ckhoa nodded and took a deep breath. There was no more time to waste and she jammed her finger down on the small button. There were dozens of soft gasps and most of the females reached for their heads in pain, but not one tried to remove the device. Poysha was right... they were strong and had endured far worse. A chance at freedom was worth any pain. It seemed like an eternity but in five seconds Ckhoa released her finger from the device and Tarifa stepped forward immediately, lifting a portable medical scanner specifically tuned to detect the carrier wave of the explosive devices. She raised it to Poysha’s head, adjusted the scanner and smiled brightly.

“It’s dead!” She exclaimed turning to the room of Kavalian females and lifting the scanner passing it over all of the females. The small device’s detector remained completely silent. “They are... they are all dead!”

Poysha burst into tears and embraced her sister tightly. The females were crying and hugging each other as well as Tarifa moved among them carefully scanning each of them. She had had doubts in the beginning that they could pull this off. Both her and Jalersi, yet they had worked tirelessly with Ckhoa, Avi and 341 to get the exact carrier signal of the explosives and then adjust the wave of Reverse Fractal Energy in order to short out the receivers. Isra had left them to their work, for while she was a politician by duty, Tarifa also had two different degrees and was almost as smart as her younger sister Zaala who was a genius as far as Tarifa was concerned. Jalersi and Ckhoa did not have the same education level as Tarifa but their knowledge of Kavalian machinery was precise and extensive.

Tarifa turned to Isra by the door and nodded. “It worked Isra! They are all deactivated!”

Isra nodded and turned to Dario. “Time to go.” He stated immediately. He lifted his hand to his jaw. “Snatch Leader to Strike Leader. We are moving now!”

Vonis’s voice answered instantly. “Two minutes ahead of schedule. Impressive Isra my friend. We’ll wait a full sixty count and then begin withdrawing as well. Move swiftly... the sun is coming up faster than we anticipated.”

“Understood.” Isra spoke turning to Ckhoa and Poysa. “Gather them quickly. They need nothing. They will have all they desire when we are safely back in Union space. Quickly now!” Ckhoa and Poysa nodded and began to reach out for the females, grabbing hands and arms and pulling them to their feet. Isra turned to the window that faced the wall they had come over. “Angar! Unsla! Blow the wall now! Blow it now!”

Isra’s violet eyes grew wide when before he had finished giving the order, a massive wall of fire lit the dawn sky. He could just detect a huge cloud of dust rising into the air and Isra would later swear he saw huge pieces of the wall landing nearby. He shook his head and looked at where Ckhoa, Channa, Tarifa and Poysa were helping the Kavalian females out of the two windows.

“*Durcunusaan* Strike Leader... we are moving now. Prepare to cover us!”

“We are ready Colonel.” The stern voice echoed. “Come to us and do not spare the speed Colonel. The faster we are gone, the better.”

“*Sadormacah!*” Isra hissed watching as Tarifa turned to him instantly. “Have them run *Sadormacah!* Just as fast as they can! Two point eight kilometers! Slow down for nothing!”

Tarifa nodded her head without question.

KELERU’S HOME

2.7 KILOMETERS FROM THE COMMAND COMPOUND

Keleru was an early riser and he was sitting in his high back chair reading reports from the previous day when the flash of light to his west snapped his head up, causing him to spill his rich morning tea. Then the roar of an explosion reached his ears and finally the windows in his home vibrated madly as he came to his feet, the data pads scattering all around his feet. He rushed across his main room to look out the expansive window that faced west and he saw flames reaching into the sky from the Command Compound his eyes wide in disbelief. He heard the door to his home open and he turned as half a dozen Puma Bane troops poured into his home. The senior officer on duty rushed across the room towards him.

“What the fuck is happening?” Keleru barked out.

The Puma Bane Troop was skittish and very anxious. They had trained for this of course, but never in all his years did he ever think they would actually need to use the escape route.

“Prefect we must get you to the Command shelter!” He almost shouted.

“That was at the Command Compound!” Keleru snarled.

“We have lost COMS with the Command Center Prefect! I can not raise them! The explosion came from within the compound along the north facing wall from what I can tell!” The Puma Bane Major barked. “Prefect let me get you to safety!”

“Within the compound?” Keleru gasped. “An accident?”

“We don’t know Prefect! It could be an accident! It could be some sort of attack! We must go!” The major snapped.

“An attack by who?” Keleru demanded a small stab of fear tugging at his stomach. “The Union would never be able to reach this far into Kavalian space! And neither would the Coven! They are not fools!”

“I do not know Prefect! My duty is to protect you!” The major snarled. “We must move to the Command Shelter until we discover what is happening.”

Keleru paused for only a second. “Leave the others!” He barked moving to grab some of the pads he had dropped.

The major nodded without hesitation hoping that this act did not come back to bit him in the ass. The others Keleru’ Puat was referring to were his long time wife and his loyal staff, all of whom stayed in the opposite wing of Keleru’s home.

The major gripped his Prefect’s arm tightly. “This way Prefect.” He spoke as he began leading the man out.

This action would not become known right away but in the coming months it would be discovered and it would prove, without doubt, one of Androcles Leonidas’s statements to his grandfather Riall.

That statement.

Keleru'Puat was a coward at heart, for only cowards ruled by fear.

Poysha waited until the last female had exited the building. It happened to be Cvea and she took her hand quickly. "Do not let go of my hand Cvea!" She barked. "Freedom is almost upon us!"

Then with Poysha gripping her sister's hand the three of them ran.

They had come this far and would be killed regardless if they turned back. In a display of trust, faith and hope, not one of the Kavalian females even slowed when they reached the wall. With Angar and Unsla waving them through, they ran in groups of two or three, always keeping the large Lycavorian Dario and his Kavalian wife in their eye sight. Even with the biogenic treatments, they all retained their feline genes, and this served them well this day. Running was actually a pastime among the Kavalian people, and now these Kavalian females ran just as fast as their legs would carry them. They easily kept pace with the much larger Lycavorian leading them, and the Kavalian rebels who ran alongside their flanks. They rapidly left the still smoking wall behind them, not seeing Vonis blurring among the surrounding trees, racing ahead and then stopping several times to insure everyone was keeping the pace. His keen vampire eyes would wait until he saw Isra's large form bringing up the rear and then he would blur once more. Vonis had never run from a fight before in his life, but the fight now was to escape with these females who had been suffering and abused under the Kavalian dogs. Vonis had also never failed in a mission given to him and he had no intention of failing now.

It seemed like they ran for hours but in reality it was only a little less than four minutes and then Ckhoa could see the *STRIKERS* in the clearing five hundred meters ahead. She pulled on Poysha's hand frantically. "There! There!" She screamed.

The unintentional yank by Ckhoa threw Poysha off balance just enough to jar Cvea to the side. Their fingers released as Cvea stumbled and then fell crashing to the ground painfully.

"Cvea!" Poysha screamed even as Ckhoa pulled her harder.

Cvea rolled over several times through the loose dirt and rocks that dotted the ground. She screamed out in pain when her knees collided with a large rock and sliced them open. Blood splashed the ground as she slammed into a stump and her wide eyes saw Poysha pulling away from her. "Poysha! Poysha don't leave me!" Cvea screamed at the top of her lungs.

Cvea heard the crashing sound and her head whipped around to see the golden brown blond color of the hair on the huge wolf that skidded to a halt in front of her. Stunned, she watched as there was a flash of silvery white light and then she was staring at the very large Lycavorian Spartan with blazing ice blue eyes. He stood well over six feet tall and Cvea had seen enough Kavalians in armor to know that he was exceptionally well built. His face betrayed his youth, but his eyes held wisdom and confidence within them. And they held warmth and a kind of desire she had never seen before.

"We will not leave you Little One." He spoke in a warm voice that caused Cvea to shiver, but not in fear as she saw the tips of his flesh shredding fangs from under his upper lip. "To lose beauty such as yours would be a great crime. That I can not allow."

Cvea watched as he bent down in front of her and she attempted to scramble back away from him. He looked so formidable in his armor and the weapons dotting his body frightened her even more. He held up his hands in front of him. "I will not hurt you Little One." He said.

"My name... my name is Cvea'Ortel!" She hissed at him.

"Well Cvea'Ortel... my name is Ridor Lethon. Ridor after my father's father, and Lethon after my mother's father. They wanted me to have two names, though I know not why. I am a son of Sparta and a *Durcunusaan*. I will not leave you here."

Cvea heard the warmth of his voice and felt it quiver across her skin. Feelings she had never experienced in her twenty-three years of life rippled through her and they made her feel wonderful. If not for the pain of her knees. She winced suddenly as her injuries once more occupied her attention and she leaned forward to look at them. The rock had slice open her right knee to the top of her kneecap, and put a good one inch deep laceration in the side of her left knee that came close to severing her ligaments. She tried to stem the flow of

bleeding with the rags from her pants until she saw his hands hold out a small tube of ointment. She looked up at him.

“The others are leaving us behind Little One... we must go.” He stated. “Spread this on our wounds and I will carry you.”

Cvea didn't hesitate and uncapped the tube quickly, spreading the cool salve on the open wounds. She watched in amazement as the wounds stopped bleeding almost immediately.

“We do not have an Hadarian to heal you so we will have to make do until we reach our ship.” Ridor told her as he pushed his P190 further back over his shoulders. “I do not wish to be too forward, but I need to pick you up. Unless you would rather we remain here and be captured by the Kavalians who will no doubt follow.”

Cvea looked at him. “You talk funny! Are you crazy?” She spat at him in shock. “No I don't want to remain!”

Ridor smiled. “My brothers remind me all the time that I am odd.” He said as he slowly slid his arms under her legs and around her slim waist. Cvea watched his face as she slid her arms around his shoulders, taking in the most incredible blue eyes she had seen in her young life. They were ice blue eyes with a thick black ring around them, and they gazed at her with a piercing glow that made her tremble in his arms. “I like to think of myself as unique. If you would somehow secure your fascinating tail, I do not wish to trip and have you injure yourself further.”

Fascinating. He had called her tail fascinating. Cvea quickly curled it around his waist and let the tip settle into her lap. Ridor looked at what she had done and then met her eyes again. “Interesting.” He said. “Hold on tightly now. I run very fast.”

Cvea gasped as dug his booted feet into the soil and exploded forward towards the ship.

Poysha turned to face the rear of the ship as soon as Ckhoa released her arm. She watched several more females run up the ramp followed by a handful of the Kavalian Rebels. Her eyes could not find Cvea and her heart filled her throat.

“Ckhoa we have to go back!” Poysha screamed. “I can not leave her! Cvea! I can't leave her! She must have fallen!”

Ckhoa shook her head adamantly. “No!” She declared forcefully. “We can not! We would lose our chance to escape! I'm sorry sister!”

“She is the youngest of us Ckhoa!” Poysha pleaded. “They almost broke her! I promised her I would not leave her behind for anything!”

Ckhoa held her arms. “No!” She ordered. “I will not lose you!” She barked as Isra appeared at the bottom of the ramp now. They both turned to look at him.

“Vonis?” He barked out looking at the other *STRIKER*.

“We are all aboard!” Vonis answered from across the field.

Isra looked skyward. Aelnala! All of you return now!

In we come. Aelnala answered instantly.

Isra's eyes quickly picked them up in the brightening sky and they were coming in fast. She and Roluth flared their wings barely fifty meters off the ground as Mirra and Sorran did the same behind the other *STRIKER*. All four dragons folded their wings and to the fearful gasps from the Kavalian females they began moving up the ramp into the *STRIKERS* to secure themselves in their harnesses. Aelnala bumped her massive head against Isra's shoulder as she climbed the ramp.

We have done a great thing this day my brother. She spoke as she moved past him.

Isra nodded. *We're not completely clear just yet sister.*

I know. But I have faith in you. She answered.

Isra turned and saw the last Spartan slow from a dead sprint to a half jog, carrying the Kavalian female in his arms. Isra's eyes grew a little wider as he recognized the young Durcunusaan sergeant. “Medic!” He shouted into the rear of the *STRIKER* before turning to look at Ridor as he trotted up. “Are you insane boy?” Isra screamed. “I told you to remain on the *STRIKER*! Your father will have my ass if you get hurt!”

Ridor smiled as he came up to Isra. “My father would expect me to act like this Colonel. No son of a General of the Union shirks his duties.”

Isra shook his head as the medic came up. “I need to have a talk with Vistr about you.” He stated. “You’re too damn good.”

“I’ll take her sergeant.” The medic spoke reaching for Cvea.

“No!” Cvea barked clutching Ridor tighter, her tail squeezing him powerfully around his waist. This did not go unnoticed by Isra but he remained silent. “No! Don’t touch me!”

Isra motioned with his head. “Get her settled. It’s time to go.”

Ridor nodded as Poysha pushed the medic aside and grabbed for Cvea’s hand. Ridor carried Cvea into the rear of the *STRIKER* as she and Poysha chattered away. He stopped and turned his head, all of them watching as the ramp began to come up. Ridor Lethon, son of General Vistr, looked down at the stunning Kavalian female in his arms. He was having quite the time keeping his wolf instincts from overwhelming him while he held this beauty tight against his body. He was only twenty-five years old himself, Vistr’s youngest and most daring son from his mate of seven millennia. They had decided to have another child after he had returned from Ukwav and the wave of pride was sweeping the entire Union. Ridor was that child, and so far he had surpassed all of his older brothers in skill, though he would never his six older brothers openly admitted it to everyone they knew. His brothers were almost as proud of him as his father was. Ridor had already begun to make a name for himself and Vistr could think of no one better suited to further his son’s skills and watch over him than Isra.

Cvea’s sweet cherry scent was driving him crazy, and the feel of her lush, warm body against his was almost more than he could bare. As the ramp locked into place he looked down into her face and discovered her staring up at him. He smiled at her beautiful pale sky blue eyes.

“You are free now *Anocahs*.” He spoke softly as he moved to the bench and very gently lowered her to the seat. “Let them treat your legs. You will need them to walk the paths of Sparta and see her beauty. It matches your own.”

Cvea unfurled her tail from around his waist and released her arms from his shoulders. She watched him stand back up and continue to gaze at her. “Thank... thank you.” She spoke softly.

Ridor bowed his head to her, every single Lycavorian on the *STRIKER* able to sense his interest in Cvea. His aura burned brightly as he looked at her and the word would pass among the others that the young Kavalian was very much off limits now. Especially when they reached the *RAGE OF ACHILLES*. He may have been the youngest *Durcunusaan* among them, but he was one of them, and they looked out for each other.

Cvea looked at Poysha and Ckhoa with wide eyes. “What... what did he call me?” She asked quickly.

“Soul eyes.” Tarifa’s voice answered as she came up to them with a medical kit and settled on the bench next to Cvea. “He called you Soul eyes.”

Cvea turned to watch Ridor’s back as he was greeting his fellow *Durcunusaan* with hugs and handshakes after a successful mission. “Soul eyes.” Cvea said softly.

Tarifa smiled as she began to treat Cvea’s knee injuries. “You have acquired an admirer Cvea’Ortel. Word will spread quickly that he has called you this. You will have no fears going into your new life Cvea’Ortel, for a *Durcunusaan*, a member of the Wolves of the Blood now watches over you.” Tarifa looked at her. “That is no small feat I will tell you. Well done young one. Well done.”

RAGE OF ACHILLES

TWELVE MINUTES LATER

“... Me full power to sublights! Spool up the main drive core and let’s get the hell out of here while the getting is good!” Fang declared as she rose from her chair. “Pursuit?”

“Negative Captain!” The sensor operator declared. He turned in his chair. “I don’t think they ever thought someone would get close enough to do something like we just did. None of the ships in orbit are even charging weapons.”

“Well let’s not wait around and give them a chance.” She replied. “And send the signal to Prince Androcles on Earth, Prince Resumar and Captain Pian that we are clear and headed home. No casualties and a lot of happy Kavalian females.”

“Aye Captain.”

KAVALIAN *GREAT SOUL-CLASS DREADNOUGHT PUMA’S PRIDE* PUSINTIN’S COMMAND SHIP

Popal made his way into the Kavalian medical bay. Though very large and stocked with some of the best Kavalian medical technology that existed, it did not even come close to Union medical equipment which was all based on Hadarian tech. With them now controlling Hadaria Popal had no doubts that would begin to change, but it would be a long process. As he entered the medical bay, his eyes took in the damage done by the unknown Union warship. Even though scans told him *PUMA’S PRIDE* was larger than the ship that had attacked them, it had caught them unaware. It’s weapon systems had pounded *PUMA’S PRIDE* mercilessly, killing hundreds and effectively nearly every system. They had only just been able to get their sensors and long range communications back, but their engines were still severely damaged. They had lost half of their Task Force to the unknown ship and Popal truly had no desire to meet this ship in combat again. When it vanished, taking the odd civilian ship with it, Popal concentrated on getting things back under control.

And saving his Marshall’s life.

His eyes fell on where Pusintin laid on the medical table while the doctor and an assistant tended to him. Popal was quite certain he had never seen his Marshall in such a condition. It looked as if someone had used him for punching bag, though Popal would never know how correct he was in that assessment. There were bruises and cuts all over his body, and a large, very deep laceration across his abdomen. They had not found the remains of three Puma Bane troops who had accompanied him, while Kalis they discovered some six hundred meters away from his father severely wounded but not in as bad a shape as his father. Popal’s eyes detected Kalis on a bed further down the row while another medical tech treated him. The doctor or senior medic really, since Muton had been the ship’s doctor for so long, saw him enter and he broke away from the bed to approach him.

“Report.” Popal ordered.

“His injuries are severe.” The Kavalian officer answered. “Nearly every rib is broken. His collarbone is fractured in two places. His cheekbone and jaw are broken, his nose and left shoulder are crushed. His right orbital socket is fractured.” The medic shook his head. “Those are just the broken bones. I have stabilized him but the wound in his abdomen concerns me. It is very deep and the blade nicked the lining of his stomach. With the damage to the Medical Bay, only half of our equipment even works. How soon before we get main engines back?”

Popal shook his head. “Not for another day at least.” He replied.

“He will not survive the return trip to Cabelir for treatment Senior Commander.” The medic replied. “What... what kind of ship could hurt us so bad so quickly?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never seen anything like it before.” He replied. “And it doesn’t match anything in our database for Union ships. It must be something new.”

“Po... Popal!” The voice croaked out.

His eyes wide in disbelief Popal and the senior medic dashed to the bedside and saw Pusintin’s uninjured eye turn to look at him. “Marshall!” Popal gasped.

“Dam... damage?” Pusintin hissed.

“It is bad Marshall.” Popal answered. “The ship came out of Shroud almost within our Shield envelope. The weapons it used... it decimated us before we could act. Half of our Task Force is gone. The remaining ships have varying damage. *PUMA’S PRIDE* is hurt but we are repairing systems as fast as we are able.”

“Con... contact Keleru!” Pusintin croaked. “Warn... him. Trap. Others. Will not bow.” Pusintin closed his eye and a raspy breath escaped his lungs.

“I will Marshall.” Popal spoke.

“Tal... Talbor Seven.” Pusintin gasped. “Hadarian... Hadarian clinic there.”

Popal’s eyes grew wide. “Yes! I remember!”

“Must... must go after her... must save...” Pusintin’s voice drifted off and his good eye closed as he drifted back in unconsciousness.

The senior medic looked at him. “Talbor Seven?” He asked.

Popal nodded. “There is a free Hadarian clinic there. Two Hadarians run it. A husband and wife.”

The medic nodded. “An Hadarian could heal him in hours.” The man said. “What did he mean by trap?”

Popal shook his head. “I don’t know. Right now I need to contact the Prefect and let him know what has happened. At the very least the Union now has ships that we were not aware of.” He looked at the medic. “I will set course for Talbor Seven. It should take us perhaps sixteen hours without our LSD coils. Will he make it?”

The medic nodded. “I will keep him alive Senior Commander.” The man said.

Popal nodded. “Do that.” He ordered before turning and exiting the medical bay.

No one saw Kalis’s head turn to look at his father from six beds down. He had heard every word that had been spoken. There was no question about him, no inquiry from his father as to his condition. Kalis looked back at the lights of the medical bay as his head pounded with that single statement.

“So nephew...” Martin spoke softly gazing at Kalis’s dark blue eyes. “Your father stands there. He will not come for you Kalis. He will not try to protect you from me. In truth... he does not care what happens to you!”

ADMIRAL ZESICO’S COMMAND SHIP *LEONIDAS IIA*-CLASS STRIKE CRUISER

“... Remind the fighter crews that they are to adhere to standard Union attack profiles. We do not need them going off and trying to do something stupid.” Zesico told his XO.

“Understood sir.”

“Tactical!” Zesico called out.

“Systems are synced with *SPARTA’S WRATH* sir!” The woman answered. “We’re sending updated position profiles and will coordinate with Prince Resumar!”

“What is their ETA?” Zesico barked turning to look at her. “We’re cutting it close!” When she didn’t answer right away his eyes narrowed. “Lieutenant! What is their ETA?” He barked again.

He watched as her eyes turned to face him and he saw how wide they were. “I think... I think they are here Admiral!”

Zesico came to his feet. “What!”

“Admiral... sensors are detecting a massive Quantum Fusion Reversion field off to port! Distance one million! It’s... it’s fucking huge sir!” The man gasped aloud unable to contain his obvious disbelief.

“View Window!” Zesico barked. “Now!”

The large view window towards the front of the bridge was normally covered with armor during combat, but now that armor retracted slightly and exposed the large, clear view window to their front.

And turned every man and woman on the bridge of Zesico’s flagship into true believers.

The seven kilometer long shape of *SPARTA’S WRATH* exited its light speed jump and announced its existence to the Kavalian fleet by shattering two Kavalian *PURUSIAN*-Class frigates against its armored hull, blotting them from existence before they even knew they were dead. The ship was unlike anything they had ever seen before. Dark gray in color, with a thick rear portion that sloped gracefully and became narrow in the front. There were jagged lines along the hull, so unlike the smooth, symmetrical design of Union ships. Yet the thing that stood out the most were the hundreds of slots that opened along the sides of the ship and extended sharp, spear like turrets from just about every centimeter of the ship it seemed. And then those turrets lit the sky around them as they all fired at once.

“*Son vada carians!*” Zesico muttered to no one in particular.

-Eleven seconds until reversion. Brace for deceleration- 341's calm, synthetic male voice echoed across the bridge.

Resumar Leonidas would swear until the day he died that when *SPARTA'S WRATH* shattered the mountain it had lain under for ten thousand years and reached for the stars once more, that he heard happiness in Avatar 341's synthesized voice.

All Resumar had to do was give the orders and the two Avatars and three hundred crew that had been secretly sent from Dreamland did the rest. Avi had been pleased to see the engineers and techs from Dreamland arrive two weeks ago. He explained to 341, though the Avatar already knew from working so closely with Avi, that these men and women were the closest to a trained crew he could possibly want. Thanks to Avi himself and Zaala Randall, they were the men and women with the most knowledge on Pralor technology and how it worked. 341 saw this as a much added advantage. He was a warship, and with even a partial crew on board monitoring systems and conducting other tasks, he could devote most of his computations and calculations to killing the enemy. Like Avi, 341 was programmed to follow the most senior Pralor fanatically. While Shiria was a pure Pralor, the traces of Sumar's blood that ran within Resumar Leonidas were even purer. He knew immediately who Resumar was when he came on board this ship, and there was no hesitation or doubt in the Avatar's cognitive programming that Resumar was who he would follow.

-Receiving updated targeting profiles from Admiral Zesico- Avi spoke from in front of the three console podium he stood in front of beside 341. **-Adjusting protocols to compensate-**

It was obvious the two were working in concert with one another, though it appeared Avi had made the decision to allow 341 to control all weapons and defensive systems.

-Updated profiles locked- 341 answered. **-Defensive systems fully online. All batteries beginning to power-**

"All Fighter Drones powering up!" The elven female called from across the bridge. "All systems nominal!"

-Understood elven female La'taian. Release Fighter Drone control to me on my mark- 341 answered. **-I will initiate a Class One Barrage with all batteries immediately upon reversion into normal space. This will target all ships designated GREAT SOUL or larger. Nine point two seconds after the death of the last GREAT SOUL Class ships I will call for the APOC Drones. Target list as given by Resumar Leonidas will commence at that time-**

"Standing by!"

-Achieving target coordinates and lock from all active X2 Guided Phased Fusion missiles- 341 continued.

-Disengaging Quantum Drives- Avi spoke. **-Reverting to normal space-**

-I have control- 341 chimed in. The slightest movement of the deck beneath their feet told them they had just come out of their jump. Resumar looked up when they felt a slight shudder run throughout the ship.

-Impact- Avi called. **-Two PURUSIAN-Class Frigates have impacted the hull in sections thirty-seven and fifty-nine. Minor damage to hull plating and armor. Repair drones nineteen through thirty are responding. Ships have been destroyed-**

Resumar stepped forward. "Are you saying we just hit two ships?" He nearly screamed.

-SPARTA'S WRATH is designed to withstand impact of substantially larger solid objects against its Quantum Kinetic Shielding and hull Resumar Leonidas- 341 told him turning to look at him. -The two ships happened to be in the way and I did not see the need to alter our flight plan to save them when we will kill them in four minutes regardless of what they do-

Resumar held up his hands. "Don't let me interrupt you 341." He stated before turning to look at Athani with wide eyes.

-You are not- 341 assured him. He turned back to look forward. **-All batteries signal ready. SPARTA'S WRATH is now engaging-**
-Acknowledge- Avi spoke.

KAVALIAN GREAT SOUL-DREADNOUGHT INVASION TASK FORCE COMMAND SHIP

The alarms that were chirping all across the bridge were loud and confusing as he came to his feet and heard his crew barking at him.

"...sort of Quantum field!" His sensor operator shouted. "It's massive!"

"Where?" The Kavalian Admiral screamed. "Where?"

"Off our Starboard quarter!" The operator shouted. "It's some... it's some sort of ship I think! Readings are fuzzy!"

"What the fuck does fuzzy mean?" The Admiral screamed. "No one is suppose to know we are here!"

"Admiral! It's a ship! A huge fucking ship!" The sensor operator screamed. "Massive power readings! Quantum signatures like I have never seen before! It's..."

"What?" The Admiral snarled.

The sensor operator turned to look at his Admiral for the last time just before a sustained volley of nineteen Quantum Reactive Matter Pulse Guns impacted the proud hull of the *GREAT SOUL* Dreadnought and ripped it open like a paper bag.

"It's firing Admiral! At us!"

Avatar 341 had been built and designed to be the heart and brains of *SPARTA'S WRATH*, and along with his five identical Avatar brothers, they could have operated the ship completely by themselves. That was not what they were designed for however and he knew that. They were designed to integrate seamlessly with the crew of each warship and give the large Pralor crew advantages others did not. 341 knew that his computation skills and general knowledge were far superior to any Pralor, but he was also programmed to know that he could not react with any emotion to given situations. His Neural Processor allowed for him to learn and grow from these experiences, but he knew that the emotional portion was just not there. In the weeks leading up to this moment, 341 had begun to learn what Avi already knew after his many long years among them. He was not treated as an object or piece of machinery. He was considered a member of this crew. An important member of this crew. In many ways he was *SPARTA'S WRATH*. He was the heart and in many cases the brain, just as he had been programmed to think, but these Spartans and Elves and Kavalians. They were his arms and legs and lungs and veins. They were what made him strong. Resumar Leonidas had the blood of the Master Pralor Sumar flowing through him, a man who had treated Avi as a dear friend. That is how Resumar Leonidas treated 341, and ultimately that is what made it's way into the core processing unit of 341's Neural Network.

Now 341 unleashed the full, shattering power of the ship he was built to be. And he did it in protection of his charges.

Three hundred and twenty batteries, a mix of Category One and Category Six Quantum Reactive Matter Pulse Guns, opened up at the exact same moment along the entire length of both sides of *SPARTA'S WRATH*. Instead of the normal Plasma beam weapons aboard most Union ships, the QRMPGs released only a thin beam

of concentrated power that was more off white in color. Though they were simply called Quantum Matter Pulse Guns, the Reactive portion left out, this was what made the turrets so powerful. Concentrated, tightly bound beams of intense Reactive Quantum energy that caused an instantaneous effect upon contact with other matter and power sources. That effect was the detonation of tiny particles of Quantum energy within the focus of the beam, that destabilized a ship's hull and acted in a ripple event. As the naked eye would see an explosion, the real effect was the near instant melting of the ship's hull and implosion of quantum particles that became too large to be contained within their individual energy spheres and thus expanded. Explosively.

The Kavalian command ship disintegrated in a blinding white flash of quantum power, great swaths of the ship fragmenting away in explosive reaction.

Given that *SPARTA'S WRATH* used a Pralor engineered Seventh Tier Phased Quantum Fusion Resonance Reactor, the pinnacle of engineering design by the Pralor species, the range of her weapons was nearly triple that of a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Strike Cruiser and almost double that of an *ARIZONA*-Class Strike Carrier. As 341 indicated, his first Class One Barrage targeted every *GREAT SOUL* within his firing envelope. This amounted to thirty-six *GREAT SOUL*-Class Dreadnoughts. Because the composition of the Farnuri Expanse, the Kavalian Admiral had decided against the use of shields to keep their power signature to the barest of minimums. This decision only hastened their destruction as 341's initial barrage obliterated all thirty-six unshielded dreadnoughts in seven seconds. Their shields, had they been active, may have given them precious seconds to begin to maneuver, but in the end it would not have mattered. The surprise was complete, and they were facing a ship with more firepower than over half their task force combined.

And Avatar 341 was fighting for his crew.

-Initial barrage complete. Thirty-six targets destroyed. Follow on barrage to initiate in four point two seconds- 341 droned on. **-Avi... please adjust course five degrees port-**

-Signaling Admiral Zesico to begin his portion of the attack on Kavalian Task Force in forty-two seconds- Avi broke in. **-Power levels steady. Weapons cycling within point two of recommended perimeters. Adjusting course five degrees to port-**

"Minor fluctuation of Kinetic Shield Grid in Section twenty-two!" One of the six vampire crewmen on the bridge called out. "Compensating with increased generator output from Section Twenty-One and dispatching Repair Drones to investigate!"

-Excellent work Crewman Voostan! - 341 declared not turning away from his combat podium. **-My internal schematics did not show this-**

"Hah! I love my job!" Voostan exclaimed. "Kick some more Kavalian ass 341!"

-Commencing secondary barrage- 341 spoke in answer to his shouted request.

Resumar stepped up to where Athani sat at one of the unused sensor stations. "Athani?" He asked. Athani shook her head, her golden blond hair flowing around her face. "It's... it's... I can't keep track of how many ships are dying Resumar."

He placed his hand on her shoulder. "I know this must be hard for you my love." He told her softly.

Athani looked up at him. "Resumar this is amazing!" She exclaimed with wide eyes. "I am your wife and mate now! These people may be the same species as me, but they are our enemies! Every one we kill now means we grow closer to the end!"

"Athani... this is only the beginning." Resumar said.

She nodded her head. "The beginning of our fight to free my people from my father's twisted ideals." She stated with pride. "And I help end it as a Princess of the Lycavorian Union! As your wife!"

-Powering Quantum torpedo launchers nine through twenty-one- 341 continued. **-Firing torpedoes-**

-DIEROY-Class Kavalian Heavy Cruiser turning to starboard one million kilometers distance. Attempting to bring Spinal Mount Mass Drivers to bear- Avi reported.

-Acknowledged. Shifting fire cone of turrets forty-nine through fifty-seven- 341 chimed in. **-Ship destroyed-**

“Kavalian ships attempting to initiate COMs out of system!” A Lycavorian officer shouted. “Activating jamming pods and frequency overlapping! Now try and talk to your people fools!”

Resumar couldn't help but smile at the obvious enthusiasm the crew was showing but he also knew the tide of battle could turn instantly against them. He stepped up beside 341 without pause. “341... we can't play with these idiots any longer. We need to wipe them out so that they can't invade. None of them can escape.”

341 glanced at Resumar and nodded. **-Understood Resumar Leonidas-** He turned back to his podium. **-Initiating launch sequence of APOC drones-**

“All drones signal ready!” La'taian shouted from her station.

-Activate launch protocols and release control to me La'taian- 341 ordered.

“APOC Fighter Drone Launch Protocols initiated! Control is released to 341! Let them have it!” She barked.

-Acknowledged. Launching APOC drones. Initiating launch of X2 Guided Fusion Binary missiles! Programming for impact detonation! Targeting coordinates for all ships locked. I am Firing-

ADMIRAL ZESICO'S FLAGSHIP

“... three... two... one!” His Xo called out. “Mark!”

Zesico came to his feet. “All ships drop shrouds! Lock and fire all Mark 22s! All batteries weapons free! Hit them! Hit them! Hit them!”

Zesico's entire two hundred ship task force had closed to within weapons range of the much larger Kavalian Strike force. Zesico and the others were not prepared for the sheer size of SPARTA'S WRATH when she appeared, but now his Task Force was in perfect position to hit the Kavalian ships as many of them not caught in 341's initial barrage began to turn and face the enormous ship. Shooting an enemy in the ass was always fun and that is exactly what the smaller Lycavorian Task Force did. With stellar results.

Mark 22A ZMF missiles rippled away from nearly every ship in Zesico's Task Force, Type I and Type II plasma batteries began to pound the typically weaker rear shields of any ship, and every ship capable of carrying TEMPEST fighters and fighter/bombers was spilling them into the stars just as fast as they could kick them out of their launch tubes. It wasn't pretty by any means, but it was certainly effective. The ZMF missiles added to the carnage and confusion and mixed in with the X2 Guided Fusion Binary missiles. The Kavalian Task Force commander, a man who was already dead, had made the fatal mistake of bunching his ships too close together. Maneuvering space was at a premium and the much large Kavalian ships did not have the space they needed to make turns. And they died because of this.

The frigates and medium cruisers fared better because of tighter turn radiuses, but the ultimate outcome could not be changed now. APOC Fighter Drones and TEMPEST squadrons would dart around and between and over and under the smaller cruisers and frigates and simply whittle them down until they were destroyed. The few DIEROY-Class Heavy Cruisers who managed to get off shots at SPARTA'S WRATH or other Union ships usually were killed before they fired more than two rounds from their Spinal Mount Mass Driver cannons. They did score kills however, as five NOVA-Class cruisers, one MOONBEAM-Class cruiser and one

LEONIDAS IIA fell prey to those devastating weapons. Another sixteen Union ships fell to assorted Kavalian warships, but the rout was clearly on only a hundred and eighty seconds after it began.

When the Task Force Commander died, every Kavalian ship was left to fend for itself. Large scale Kavalian operations were always directed by senior officers far behind the main forces. The Kavalian way of thinking and warfare. They did not allow a whole lot of freedom to single ship commanders when it came to such operations, and they paid the price today. The attack was a complete surprise, the Kavalians having no warning whatsoever. The crews had become slack and unprepared. They had been waiting; many of them for weeks, to either launch an invasion into Union space or be greeted as allies and friends when Marshall Pusintin took the throne. Neither of those things would happen this day.

Now all they would do was die.

SPARTA'S WRATH

SIX MINUTES INTO THE BATTLE OF THE FARNURI EXPANSE

It would officially be called the Battle of the Farnuri Expanse by the Lycavorian Union and the Farnuri Expanse Massacre by the Kavalian Federation. By either name, the battle was one of the quickest in the history of either species. And one that carried a staggering loss of life.

Nearly two and a half million souls and fully one fourth of the KFI's most advanced and battle ready ships were annihilated in just six savage minutes. It would stand as their worst defeat in history.

At least for eight days.

It would not earn, Androcles Leonidas for ordering it or his brother Resumar Leonidas for leading it, any popularity points among the Kavalian people at first. However, it would earn both of them a reputation as Union officers and Spartan Princes who would do anything it took to win a battle and protect what they believed in. And it would cause many Kavalian military officers to take pause in the future, out of both fear and respect, before engaging one of the brothers in battle ever again.

Of the six hundred and nineteen Kavalian warships that had been hidden in the Farnuri Expanse, only twenty-three made it out alive. All of them were *PURUSIAN*-Class Heavy Frigates that had been on the far reaching edges of the Task Force when *SPARTA'S WRATH* had appeared and unleashed hell upon them all.

All twenty-three ship captains would be executed for cowardice when they returned to Kavalian space.

“... Debris field is so thick you could walk across it!” One of the engineers on the sensor stations commented as Resumar moved up between 341 and Avi.

“Report 341? Avi?” Resumar asked.

-Sensors indicate no targets remain Resumar Leonidas- 341 answered.

-We are only picking up intermittent power readings among the debris- Avi reported as the silence on the bridge was telling. The events that they had just wrought were beginning to sink into the heads of the men and women on the bridge.

“Survivors?” Resumar asked softly.

-The debris field is too cluttered with power emissions to determine if there are survivors Resumar- Avi answered. **-Should I direct Admiral Zesico to begin rescue operations?-**

Resumar Leonidas suddenly knew what Andro felt when he gave the order to destroy the Jump Gates around Hadaria and condemn million to death. His orders did the same thing here today. Enemy or not, he would have those deaths on his shoulders for the rest of his natural life. He turned his head and looked into the blue/green eyes of Athani when he felt her touch his arm. She was so beautiful to him, so precious. And she represented all the future could hold for him.

-Resumar... Admiral Zesico is now requesting if we should search for survivors- Avi spoke.

Resumar turned back to him. "Let's see him Avi." Res answered.

-Initiating COM channel- Avi spoke. The image of the older Admiral appeared just to the side of 341 who turned to look at him. **-Channel open and secure-**

"Milord Prince!" Zesico declared. "This is a great victory! An Amazing victory!"

Resumar nodded his head. "Yes it is." He said. "It is also a crime. Another crime to add to the list that has been committed by Prefect Keleru and his cronies."

Zesico sobered immediately and slowly nodded his head. "Milord... we should begin the search for survivors. We..."

"No." Resumar spoke the word firmly causing heads to turn to look at him from across the bridge.

"Milord we have won!" Zesico said. "It is the honorably thing to do now."

"Was it honorable to try and kill my father?" Resumar snarled softly. "Was it honorable to rape one of my mothers? To beat and attempt to rape another? Was it honorable to kill nearly two hundred of our children? Innocent children? Was that honorable?"

"Milord... we are not like them." Zesico said gently.

"You're right Admiral... we aren't." Resumar said. "Would my... would my brother look for survivors?"

"Prince Resumar... you are not your brother." Zesico said.

"I asked you a question Admiral." Resumar told him. "Would Andro search for survivors among the wreckage?"

"Given... given what I know of your brother Milord... no, I don't believe he would." Zesico answered. "I just thought..."

Resumar moved closer to the transmission. "I know what you meant Admiral Zesico." He said. "I am only half Lycavorian and most elven officers would do what you suggest... but I am my father's son first and foremost. I am a Spartan and a husband before I am an elf. Before I am anything else. Leave them to the cold of space! The Kavalian Federation began this... not us. And like my father and my brother I will not show one ounce of mercy or pity for them! Not one ounce! Not after what they have done. *Nubou* them! Let the vacuum have them!"

Admiral Zesico stood up straighter and a small smile split his lips. He bowed his head with just a little more pride and respect this time. "It will be as you order Prince Resumar of Sparta! And a son of our King you are! A son of our King you are!"

"Your casualties Admiral?" Resumar asked after a moment and Athani stepping up beside him to press her firm body against his side and grip his arm with loving eyes.

Zesico paused himself and lowered his head slightly. "Twenty-seven of my warships lost Milord. No survivors." He answered. "Seventy-six fighters as well."

Resumar paused for another moment before nodding. "We have spent enough Spartan blood here this day Admiral." He said looking at him.

Zesico nodded. "I agree Milord."

"Let us go home Admiral." Resumar spoke. "I wish to see my brothers and sisters after so long a time. Let us go home... for the war is only just beginning."

**EARTH
THERMOPYLAE
KING LEONIDAS MEMORIAL**

Sheva Juconi watched with keen dark eyes as the thirty-five *Durcunusaan* kept the many Netnews reporters away from the bleachers where Sadi and the others sat with Gorgo and Dasha and the smaller Leonidas children. The not so small anymore dragon hatchlings of Retta, Calyb, Deion and Nara rested on the smooth marble surface with their older sister Elynth, Majeir, Tharua, Anthar and Ryner. They were much calmer than they were six months ago, partly because they were growing and partly because of the sacred ground they rested on. Sheva took several steps to come up beside Jomann, his left leg bent with his foot on the lowest bleacher. His right hand rested on the holster that held the K14 KM, his P190 secured to his back. His eyes were also scanning the crowd that had gathered once they discovered almost the entire Leonidas family had come to Thermopylae.

“Is it always like this?” She finally asked looking at Jomann.

Jomann turned to meet her gaze. “Yes.” He answered. “He hates it.”

Sheva looked back to where Androcles was standing in front of the Leonidas Memorial, Dorian beside his brother. She turned back to Jomann. “You speak like you have known him for years Captain... but you have only been his Captain for weeks.”

Jomann nodded his head. “A lot has happened in that time. Before you joined us and Queen Isabella appointed you the protector of Prince Dorian. Much of which even Andro does not understand. And it’s far too confusing to try and explain. You will see what I’m talking about as time passes.”

“War is coming.” Sheva said softly.

Jomann looked at her. “War is upon us Commander. It has already begun.”

“Already begun?” Sheva exclaimed.

“You will see when we arrive at the Senate vote.” Jomann said.

“Why did we come here?” Sheva asked.

Jomann straightened up to his full six foot three height and he towered over her. “There is always time to seek the blessings of the honored dead.” He said softly.

Sheva watched as he turned and walked across the bleachers to where Eliani sat next to Gorgo on the bench, Normya and Tir’ut making room for him. Eliani greeted him and pulled him close to her as Gorgo rested her hand on his shoulder. Sheva swore they were all talking within Mindvoice... the tremors were there... but she could never break the combined shields of so many powerful MV users. She turned back to watch the crowd then, making a note of this fact.

“Our father came here the night before he declared war on the Evolli.” Andro spoke softly as he stood beside Dorian.

Dorian had now finished growing, much quicker than anyone had expected to be sure. He appeared as any other twenty-three year old male would appear, but he carried his father’s black hair and incredible good looks like all his brothers. His hazel/green eyes were a gift from his mother and just as expressive. He stood one inch shy of Andro’s six foot one, but his body was two hundred and ten pounds of impressive muscle and bone. He sported the same ripped definition of all the Leonidas men, as well as the dual fangs unique to the Leonidas bloodline. Though he was half vampire, like his sisters Zarah and Carina, his fangs were longer and thicker than normal vampire fangs and the smaller, inner fangs were more ferocious looking on the men in the family by far. When he wasn’t with Andro now, he was training with his Bonded Brother Ryner. Each lesson Andro and Elynth gave to them they conducted until they could do it perfectly and without thinking. Their bond was nearly as strong as Andro and Elynth’s, shaped this way because Dorian was still within Isabella’s womb when he and Ryner bonded together. Now they shared the memories of their fathers and mothers and all they had experienced in their lives. Just as Andro and Elynth.

The only two men and dragons who had bonded in such a way in all the history of the Union and dragons.

“I can... I can feel and see all grandfather passed to him Andro.” Dorian said. “The images and sensations. All they did and have done.”

Andro nodded his head and turned back to the monument, looking up at the statue of his grandfather. “In time Dorian... you will begin to see what grandfather Resumar saw and did. I have caught fleeting glances of

this at times. Father sees them more and more now. With age and the use of our abilities, these images and sensations will become more clear. And the bond between us will become stronger. Just as it has between Zarah and I. Just for different reasons.”

“I did not see him enough.” Dorian said with a sad tone of voice. “I miss him. And our mothers.”

Andro nodded. “So do I.” He agreed. “What they do now however, it could have untold repercussion on our future fervon. Our father would not do this if he didn’t think it was needed. If it wasn’t important.”

“He trusts you.” Dorian said.

“He trusts us.” Andro corrected him. “This is... it is not how he wanted you to grow and learn Dorian. Nor is it what I wanted.”

“I do not regret what has happened Androcles.” Dorian told him. “If my mothers had not done what they did I would have died. I’m very glad that did not happen.”

Andro chuckled. “So are we.”

Dorian turned and looked intently at his brothers and sisters in the bleachers with his grandmothers. “Will it always be like this Andro?”

“Being able to feel them you mean?” Andro asked looking at him.

Dorian turned back to him and nodded. “Yes.”

Andro nodded his own head again. “Elynth and I will teach you and Ryner to block most of it as the *Feravomir* taught me and Elynth... but yes.” He replied with a small smile. “Being born fully aware as you and I were is not the great thing people believe it to be sometimes. We are more sensitive to the emotions and feelings of others, especially those in our family. It will be the same for you and Ryner. It is a gift... but it can also be a curse.”

Dorian turned his eyes back and watched them for a few moments before moving his to settle on Sheva Juconi. His wolf blood surged at the sight of her, taking in her petite but tightly packed body, and his loins stirred. She had enticed him from the first moment. A few hours into his awareness and of all the females he had felt around his mother, Sheva Juconi stood out like a beacon. Her less than shoulder length blond hair was cut and angled in a way that had her hair almost falling over her right eye. Dorian didn’t care for it because it hid her eyes, which were a delicious reddish brown. The body armor conformed to her figure which was perfect as far as Dorian was concerned. Even from this distance he could smell her scent, faint as it was with most pureblood vampires, but her butterscotch and walnut scent was like...

[A drug?] Andro’s voice in his head offered.

Dorian turned back and looked at his brother with a grin. *[I was thinking too loud huh?]* He spoke.

Andro chuckled once more. *[Don’t worry... I don’t think anyone heard.]* He said. *[So this is the girl you were talking about?]*

Dorian nodded. *[She smells so damn good!]* He exclaimed. *[When she is close by... and the wind shifts... I want to lose myself within her.]*

[I do know the feeling brother. I have that same problem. Only four times worse than you.] He answered.

[May I ask you a question Fervon?] He asked.

[Always Dorian... you know that.]

[I know Sadi is your Anome. That she will always be the one to stir your blood the most. But do you prefer one of your other mates the most after Sadi?] Dorian asked. *[Does one stir your blood even remotely like she does?]*

[They all stir my blood Fervon.] He said. *[In their own way... with their own scent.]*

[So you aren’t going to answer my question?] Dorian asked.

Andro turned and put his arm over Dorian’s shoulders. *[Come Fervon... we have a task ahead of us at the Senate meeting.]*

Dorian grinned and shook his head. *[I told them you wouldn’t admit to anything.]* He said as he put his arm around his brother’s back.

[Ah... so our siblings put you up to this? It had to be Eli.] Andro said.

[Cannon fodder Eli called me.] Dorian spoke with an infectious grin.

[Don’t worry... we’ll get back at her.] Andro told him. He looked at Dorian. *[If you must know... and I will only tell you... I could not choose because I want them all.]* He spoke. *[Now if the question is who will I*

reach for first after I have exhausted Sadi...] He said with a smile. *[The answer to that is Ne'Veha. Her elven ears are delightfully tasty and she is... let's just say she is considerably more adventurous than I thought a female elf raised on Elear would be. She and Sadi... when they work in unison...]* Andro shook his head. *[Wow!]*

Dorian couldn't help but laugh at Andro's expression. *[That good?]*

Andro nodded. *[Oh yes. That good.]*

[It... it is good to see you smile fervor. You have done so little of it these last weeks.] Dorian told him seriously.

Andro met his eyes. *[And that is the strength of our family Dorian.]* He said. *[No matter what takes place... we will always find laughter and love with our family. Never forget that. These are who we surround ourselves with and Sparta is where we come to heal all wounds. No matter if they are physical or emotional. This is what Sparta means to us.]*

Dorian nodded as they stopped in front of the bleachers. *[I won't forget Andro. I will never forget.]*

Andro nodded and turned his eyes on the rest of his family. He glanced at Gorgo and Dasha his grandmothers, the Matriarchs of the Leonidas family. His brothers and sisters. Their bonded ones who were tied more tightly to their lives than any dragons across the Union.

"It's time family." He said softly. "And forgive me for what all of us will see."

Gorgo stood up slowly and looked at him holding Nara and Retta's hands. "We are the Leonidas family." Gorgo spoke with pride and conviction in her voice. "We will always stand together."

"Avoi." Dasha spoke as she rose.

Eliani, Sadi, all of them followed suit. "Let's get this done Andro." Eliani spoke finally.

BETA QUADRANT ROTHRYN EMBASSY AUSTROVA

"... Heard about what was happening with the Board of Regents and made the decision to have you visit us sooner." Dyack was explaining as Denali, Lisisa and Arduri followed him down the gigantic main hallway of the Rothryn Embassy. "I'm am pleased that you accepted."

"And what did you hear?" Denali asked as they walked down the corridor.

The ceilings had to be twenty feet high with what appeared to be expensive artwork on both sides of the main corridor, spaced evenly on the walls. The embassy appeared immaculate as Deni glanced into a room that had a roaring fireplace against the wall and several couches from what he could see.

Dyack turned to look at Deni. "We have had diplomatic relations with the Vanari for many centuries. I'm surprised Director General Dutkne did not tell you about us."

"In his defense... we've been dealing with quite a bit back home and there hasn't been time to really sit down and discuss things in that manner." Denali answered honestly.

"I see." Dyack spoke. "Well... we have many trade pacts with the Vanari and either I or our ambassador meets with the Board of Regents once a week. We maintain a very open relationship with them."

"Dutkne told us the Rothryn were a reclusive species." Lisisa asked now.

Dyack smiled and looked at her now. "It may seem that way to some. We have relations with every species within the Beta Quadrant for the most part. Those we choose not to associate with are few."

"Do you do business with the Eridiani and the OSG?" Deni asked.

Dyack stopped and looked at him. "The Eridiani are an insular species. They choose not to associate with us for whatever the reason and we do not lose any sleep over it, for lack of a better term." He said. "We are aware however, of the relationship between the Vanari and the Eridiani. And now the involvement of the Protectorate and the Union it seems in assisting them. Slavery is a nasty business."

"The Lycavorian Union despises slavery of any kind. We have many laws against it in any form." Lisisa snapped gently. "The scum who helped the OSG from the Union will be found. And they'll be executed. The Protectorate is no different."

Dyack nodded. "Good." He said. "The Vanari will not be so easily convinced I'm afraid." He looked at Arduri. "Forgive me for saying so Arduri Re Mydala."

Arduri nodded her head to him. "You would be correct in that assessment Praetor Dyack. But I do not share the same reasoning as the SBR or my father."

Dyack nodded. "So it would appear." He said. "You are Prince Denali's mate then?"

Lisisa grasped her hand. "Our mate." She stated. "And we could not be happier."

Dyack's eyes narrowed for just a instant when Lisisa and Arduri smiled at one another and pressed their bodies close. He quickly dismissed what he felt while he was looking at them and then he turned to Denali.

"Taking more than one mate and wife is accepted in the Union?" He asked.

"It's by no means normal or common... no." Deni replied. "But it is accepted." He answered as Lisisa and Arduri moved to stand on either side of him. "For my father and then for my brother it was a little different... but our people are very open and understanding. As are many of the species who live in the Union."

"Interesting." Dyack said. "The rest of your family?"

"I have six mothers..." Deni answered. "All of whom I regard as my mother. My brothers and sisters do not draw a distinction between our mothers. We never have. They all speak with one voice. My brother Arram has two wives and mates, my brother Resumar one. Andro... Andro has five."

Dyack's eyes grew wide. "Five! And your father had six mates and wives?" He spoke stunned. "That is incredible. How many children did your mothers bear for your father?"

"There are eighteen of us at the moment." Denali answered. "Five of my siblings are too young to take part fully in the military or government."

"And all of you are bonded to these cre..." Dyack stopped himself. "Forgive me... to dragons?"

Lisisa nodded. "Almost all of us yes." She said.

"And you are not fully Lycavorian?" Dyack asked her. "You are half vampire."

Lisisa nodded again. "Yes... but my wolf genes are dominant to a great extent. I can shift and I have the senses of both, though not as powerful as Deni's since he is a pureblood."

"We have never seen such magnificent animals as your dragons." Dyack said with a touch of excitement. "Ardan has told me they are benevolent for the most part? And that within your family is only one line of these dragons."

"That's not entirely true." Denali spoke. "Most of us are bonded to dragons that are the children of one pair. My father and mother's dragons. My sister and two of my mothers have dragons that are not within that cycle of life, but are considered members of our family."

"I must... I must extend my condolences to you on the loss of your father and mother." Dyack said somberly. "I was older than you when I lost my father and mother... but it hurts nonetheless."

Denali nodded his head towards him. "Yes it does."

Dyack began walking again. "I understand the Vanari are not very receptive towards the information you have brought them." He said. "That their own people may be involved with the OSG and taken part in selling their females."

"You are well informed Praetor." Arduri spoke now.

Dyack nodded. "I have made good friends within the SBR and the full Board of Regents. And as a trading partner, they do not keep information from me that may impact out future contracts or negotiations. As I said... we are very open with each other."

Arduri looked at Deni before answering. "Some would say too open considering what you know." She said.

Dyack did not take offense and he smiled. "Perhaps." He answered as he led them into the huge room now.

There was a massive table that was elaborately set with fine china and candles and tall wine glasses. The room had two levels to it, a balcony extending around the upper floor, the walls filled with scrolls and books like the libraries in Sparta Deni noted. The windows had flowing curtains that appeared to be made satin, the setting sun outside casting a stunning silhouette as it pierced the glass of the windows. The room was very well lit, nearly a dozen intricate light globes station all around the room.

Dyack moved forward. "Please... allow me to introduce everyone." He said moving to the side of the stunning dark blond haired woman. She appeared older but her skin was flawless and her body still very enticing. "My wife and mate Aleatia." He spoke.

Aleatia appeared to be very refined and her scent put her between seven and eight hundred years old. She wore a violet colored dress that hugged her lush body and her dark blond hair flowed elegantly around her face and blue eyes. She was comfortable and all smiles as she came up to Denali first and held out her hand. "It is a pleasure to meet you Prince Leonidas." She said.

Denali took her offered hand and smiled. "And you ma'am." He answered.

Aleatia turned next to Lisisa and Arduri. "Princess Leonidas... a pleasure."

Lisisa smiled and took her hand. She seemed genuinely warm and open and this was refreshing for Lisisa. "Ma'am... I don't know... should we call you by a title?"

Aleatia laughed softly, a humorous laugh that was sincere. "No... no. I prefer Aleatia. I have no title. I leave that to my husband." She said playfully looking back at Dyack who smiled at her.

Dyack held his hands out for the two younger females and they moved up next to him. "These are my daughters... Ibani and Osbela." He said as he urged them forward.

Denali smiled and nodded to both of them but did not extend his hand to greet them. "Ladies... it is an honor." He said.

Osabela was the blond one and Ibani the dark haired female. Both of them were equally as stunning as their mother in beauty. Both had her long, shiny hair but Ibani must have gotten her father's dark hair coloring. Their eyes were bright and intelligent and their scents were clean and pure.

Dyack turned. "You know my sons Anroth and Kelelm. The beautiful young woman beside Anroth is his wife and mate Tynitia."

Denali nodded to them. He already didn't care for Anroth in the least. The man had almost gotten himself beaten down. His father had stopped him before he had said anything stupid.

Dyack motioned to the table. "Please... dinner is almost ready. Why don't we sit and begin to discover what we have in common. I'm sure we all have questions for each other. And if possible... I would like to hear about the history of the Union after the Black Day as those among the Protectorate and yourselves call it."

Dinner was superb.

Thick, juicy slabs of what would be steak within the Union and seasoned with a slight cinnamon flavor to add sweetness and cooked to perfection. Large loaves of warm bread slices, with large, round vegetables that resembled Greek Yemista. The large stuffed Yemista, basically peppers, were something that Denali loved and these vegetables were filled with a thick sauce and what appeared to be the Rothryn version of rice. The diagonally sliced chunks turned out to be very similar to potatoes and they were cooked to a crispy outer skin and very soft inside. The wine was a three hundred year old bottle, aged in the many wineries on the Rothryn homeworld since this was a major export of their people. It was sweet with a tangy touch to it and went down very easily. The conversation was light in the beginning, mainly about life within the Union and how it compared to Rothryn society. Denali and Lisisa paid close attention to the body language of everyone at the table, but based on their earlier meeting with them on the landing pad, they kept their MV shields very high and even helped Arduri to reinforce her own developing MV shields.

Aleatia was genuinely open and talkative, often times Dyack allowing her to ask the questions as he listened. Of his two daughters, Osabela was the most chatty, asking of what entertainment and exciting things there were to do in the Union. Ibani was reserved but friendly, interested more in the Leonidas family as a whole, and their history. Ibani was the oldest of Dyack's daughters it appeared.

Kelelm asked pointed but thoughtful questions and both Deni and Lisisa liked him from the outset. He was more easy going and did not seem to regard them as a threat. It was obvious from the outset that Lisisa answering many of the questions surprised them and though it appeared as if Aleatia asked whatever she wanted, it was Arduri who pointed out to them in Mindvoice that her questions seemed directed and pre-planned. Anroth simply stared at them for the most part, his beautiful wife and mate beside him doing the same.

Neither spoke much until Anroth finally could no longer contain himself and opened his mouth, asking the questions that they had been avoiding.

“The ship you arrived on is quite impressive?” Anroth asked. “Do you have many of them in your fleet?”

Denali lowered his fork and finished chewing the meat in his mouth before wiping his lips with his napkin. “The *ARCHDEMON*?” He spoke. “She is a *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruiser. It is our standard command ship. The *ARCHDEMON* is four months out of dry dock.”

“Does your brother have his own ship?” Ibani asked quickly.

“Androcles’s ship is the *SCIMITAR*.” Lisisa answered her question. “He co-commands it with Captain Sa'sur. A female elf. She’s a bit bigger than the *ARCHDEMON*, two hundred meters or so, but that is because she often carries more dragons than normal.”

“The *SCIMITAR*?” Ibani said softly. “That sounds very intimidating.”

Kelelm leaned forward. “A female elf?” He asked.

Lisisa nodded. “We have many ships commanded by female elves. Their reflexes and ability to adapt make them some of the finest fighter pilots in the Union.” She told him.

“Your women... your women fight?” Aleatia asked surprised.

Denali chuckled. “They fight. Hell... some of them are downright mean.”

Lisisa slapped his arm. “Deni... your language.” She hissed.

“My apologies.” Deni said quickly.

Dyack smiled at this action and though he wanted to scold Anroth for beginning this, it seemed like a comfortable enough topic to his guests at the time and he would allow Anroth to pursue it. “I slip up all the time.” He said to Deni.

“That doesn’t answer my question.” Anroth continued when his father did not stop him. “Do you have many of them within your fleet? How large is your fleet by the way? Will your ships be coming here? What can you tell us of your ability to manipulate Flatspace? What are your brother’s intentions and what...?”

“That is enough Anroth!” Dyack spoke quickly.

“No... it is ok.” Denali told him looking at Lisisa quickly before turning to Dyack. “They are legitimate questions sir. I am not as politically adept as my brother but I will answer what I can.” He looked at Anroth. “The *LEONIDAS IIA* is our standard command cruiser as I said. As to exact numbers... I can’t comment on that. The overall Union fleet is in excess of fifteen thousand ships. Some of them older and less used... but we try to upgrade or refit them often.”

“Fifteen thousand?” Kelelm gasped in shock. “How... how large is the Lycavorian Union?” He asked.

“At the moment... there are nine hundred and seventy-three different species that call the Union home.” Lisisa answered. What she was going to tell them was easily accessible anywhere within the Union and used all of the time in public forums. “Our father was able to get twenty-seven of these to join the Union after he became King. They previously did not want to be part of the Union before he sat down and spoke with them and showed them his visions of the future. Of those different species, there are four hundred and nineteen governments ranging in size from a handful to several thousand as is the case with the Elves and Lycavorians. Each species has five permanent seats within the Union Senate regardless of the size of their civilian population, the larger governments like the Elves and Algolians and Lycavorians have between two and five additional seats. There are a total of three thousand two hundred and twenty-three Union Senators in the government as it stand right now.”

“They all have a say in the government and what you do?” Dyack asked.

“There has to be a very clear majority for anything to get passed within the Senate. At least seventy percent of the Senators have to agree to it.” Lisisa answered. “We won’t impose something upon our people if the majority of them do not want it. A fifty-one to forty-nine percent majority doesn’t happen within the Union.”

“Doesn’t this cause things to take excessive time?” Aleatia asked.

Lisisa shook her head. “Not really. The majority of the species within the Union were part of the oppression of the High Coven right alongside our people. It’s amazing how fourteen thousand plus years of slavery can make people think and act toward a single goal. The Senators within the Union have differing ideals and such, but for the most part they believe in the same things.”

“And the government controls the military?” Kelelm asked.

“In a manner of speaking.” Lisisa replied. “The military falls under the King’s purview. That is our brother Andro now... but neither he nor our father have ever or will ever go against the majority of the civilian government.”

“The technology of the Union took the Vanari by surprise.” Dyack said. “Your engine technology, your ability to manipulate Flatspace. How did this come to you? Is it true?”

“How it came to us is probably something that Andro would not want us to share.” Denali said as he shifted his body and got to his feet beside his chair. “As to if it is true?” He lifted his arm and summoned his Shi Viska. The shield burst into existence causing the Rothryn at the table to lean or push back from the table in shock as the shield hummed softly on his arm. Just as quickly Deni dismissed the Shi Viska and the shield vanished into Flatspace once more and he returned to his chair. “Sorry... it was just easier to show you.”

Dyack leaned forward quickly. “Do all of your people have this ability?”

Deni nodded. “Lycavorians who choose to enter service... yes.” He answered. “We seem to be the only species who are able to survive the use of Flatspace technology. The Shi Viska... my shield... it is awarded after the individual completes his Agoge. His training Ritual and Rite.”

“Awarded?” Anroth asked.

Deni nodded since this too was public knowledge. “When you complete your Agoge... Lycavorians are awarded your Bridle if you intend to enter service in the Union.” He lifted his left arm and pulled the sleeve up just a little to reveal the thin, flesh colored leather looking wrap that curled around his wrist and his upper forearm and was connected by a similar piece of leather looking material. “The Bridle is branded to your arm and allows you to call your shield.”

“Branded?” Aleatia asked in horror.

“It is not as the word sounds really.” Deni said quickly in response to her reaction. “In the old days of my grandfather in Sparta that is what they did. Now however, your Bridle is gene encoded to you. It will only work for the individual it is encoded to. And then you have to have the ability to call it. That can only be done by someone within Mindvoice. We have refined the technology some in the last twenty-five years.”

“Refined how?” Anroth asked him. “Since you discovered the Pralor ship on your old homeworld?”

Denali looked at him as he lifted the glass of wine, his face not betraying his surprise that Anroth knew of that. It made sense though since Wayonn was a member of the Protectorate and the Vanari undoubtedly discovered over the last centuries what he really was. If the Rothryn were as well connected as they allowed, there was no reason to believe they didn’t know about his father finding CS41 and taking it to Earth. Wayonn obviously knew about it and passed this information to the Vanari at some point.

“You’ll understand if I choose not to answer that question.” Deni said pleasantly.

“We’ll find out!” Anroth said.

Denali smiled and lifted his glass to him. “Good luck with that.” He said.

Lisisa decided to change the subject before Anroth provoked Denali. He was becoming more and more like Andro and their father in his distaste for arrogant people and his reaction to them. “You are Lycavorian.” She spoke quickly. “How is it that you came to be here in the Beta Quadrant?”

“We are not Lycavorian!” Anroth spoke with heat in his voice. “We can not shift our forms as you can!”

Dyack leaned forward once more. “Aleatia... you can explain it better than I.” He spoke to his wife and mate. “Our scientists have determined the how... but not the why it happened.”

Lisisa turned to her. “I’d like to hear it.” She said.

Aleatia smiled at her. “It has to do with genetics.” She said. “Yes... essentially we are genetically no different from Lycavorians, except that the gene code that allows you to shift your physical forms is not present within our people. The Rothryn. We have all the same skills, the enhanced senses, speed and strength, as well as the longevity. It seems that somewhere down the evolutionary ladder however, that particular gene was bred out of our people. At least that is what the common consensus among our scientists is.”

“You are a scientist?” Lisisa asked.

Aleatia nodded. “I have a degree in Biological Engineering and Genetic Mechanics.” She answered.

Denali smiled. “Wow! You and our mother Anja would get along great.” He said.

Aleatia laughed softly. “Your Hadarian mother? I would very much like to meet her. Dyack has told me what we have been able to discover about the Hadarian people from the Vanari.” She said. “We are advanced

medically, as are the Vanari and others, but we apparently do not come close to the Hadarian people. Is it true that their bodies are infused with a healing form of radiation?"

Lisisa nodded. "Yes."

Aleatia shook her head. "That is fascinating." She said.

"I'm sure our sister Eliani would love to talk with you." Lisisa said. "Andro never goes anywhere without her and she'll be with him when he arrives in seven weeks. Eliani is almost as knowledgeable as our mother."

"I would like that." Aleatia said.

"What is the purpose of dissolving the Protectorate if the Union does not plan on moving in and taking their place?" Anroth spoke once more. "You still have not told us what your purpose for doing this is."

"They are our people." Denali said. "We were separated by the events of The Black Day and now we have been reunited. We have no other purpose besides that."

"We are supposed to believe that?" Anroth asked.

Deni looked at him. "What you believe is not a concern of mine." He answered. "The truth is the truth."

"The truth is one person's view." Anroth snapped.

"Perhaps in your limited view of things." Denali told him bluntly. "Not in ours."

"Are you always so rude and disrespectful to your hosts?" Anroth's wife Tynitia blurted out.

"Tynitia!" Aleatia demanded.

"I am only expressing an observation." Tynitia snapped.

Denali didn't back down and looked at the beautiful young woman across the table who had arrogance pouring from her pores. She obviously thought she was far more important than she actually was because she was Anroth's wife. "Respect is not something given because of one's position Lady Tynitia. It needs to be earned and given in order to be received back. My brothers and sisters and I were raised to give respect where it is due, not cater to those who believe it is owed to them. As you and your husband believe."

Anroth snarled and sat forward. "I am the son of the Rothryn Praetor and Tynitia is my mate!" He snapped. "You would do well to remember that!"

"And I am a Prince of the Lycavorian Union." Denali spoke not taking his eyes from Anroth and not appearing flustered in any way. "That does not make me better than anyone else. It is simply a title."

Dyack held up his hand. "Please... we..."

The soft chirping sound caused all of them to look at Deni who lifted his right hand to his lips.

"ArchDemon actual." He spoke softly. "I left instructions not to disturb us unless absolutely necessary."

"Milord... it is Captain Chelios!" The urgent voice spoke. "Sire... it is happening."

"What?" Deni gasped as Lisisa's head whipped around to look at him. "Now? They weren't supposed to finish until tomorrow!"

"I know... but I initiated a Quantum Relay Data Connection to download daily reports and it came over on a secure channel. It's happening right now! Which means that it has already begun! The Senate vote is being broadcast all over the Union." Chelios reported. "You have to return to the ship! I will send a shuttle for you!"

All of them had heard his voice from the small receiver Deni wore and Dyack came to his feet. "You... you have Quantum Communications ability?" He gasped unaware of this fact. It was a new technology still, barely fifty years old in the Beta Quadrant. "You... we have our own relay here. You are more than welcome to use our relay Prince Leonidas."

Deni glanced at Lisisa and Arduri quickly. Lisisa shrugged after a moment. "The QCC was never meant to be secret my love and they will find out sooner or later." She said.

Arduri nodded. "Andro gave my father a direct link to him. He is probably watching even now." She said.

"Chelios... can you sync with the Rothryn QC relay here in their embassy?" Deni asked.

"I just need their transmit and receive code." Chelios's voice answered.

Dyack nodded quickly. "Come." He said.

"Father... that is secure communications equipment!" Anroth protested.

Dyack took Denali's arm. "Come! All of you come!"

EARTH SPARTA UNION SENATE CONVOCATION MEMORIAL

Construction had begun on this facility some six years earlier on the site of the old Spartan Senate Rotunda. It was a project approved by the Spartan Senate after being presented by Panos and Dilios. Given that Martin and the royal family would call Sparta home for six months of every year, Panos wanted to make sure that everyone knew that Sparta was their city as well. The Convocation Memorial included trappings from every known species within the Union. The huge domed structure took up nearly the entire skyline to the north of the city, able to accommodate all three thousand two hundred and twenty three senators when needed and equipped with holo projectors for those who could attend only via Holo Image. The structure would eventually house offices of all those who wished to have an office here in Sparta, as well as several libraries and food courts featuring food from across the Union.

The main Senate Chamber was shaped like the ancient Spartan Senate chamber. It was a massive oval shape room, with an elevated shell that rose up at an easy ten degree angle. Each level held comfortable box suites with knee high walls and either chairs or couches to sit upon. Each box suite could hold every individual Senator and their two closest aides. The suite boxes were arranged so that all of the species within the Union were featured, and all of the Senators would be heard and seen if they chose to speak to the other members. All of the box suites faced the row of Chairmen Suites which held the Senator who floored the Senate as well as the Deputy Prime Minister and his aides. As dragons were now a permanent fixture within the lives of so many in the Union, a large suite box was on the bottom floor nearest the grand hallways to provide easy access to the Suite Box from the outside. At the moment it was filled with Elynth and the remainder of the dragons who were part of the Leonidas family. A large Box suite diagonally to the left of the Chairman's suite held Gorgo and all the others from the Leonidas family who were present on Earth. Ambassadorial Suites lined the second floor of the Chamber and all of these were full at the moment. A dozen Netnews suites along the second floor were also full with every channel within the Union.

Panos sat in the Deputy Prime Minister's box speaking with several aides while Deia sat between Gorgo and Dasha. She was a member of this family and she would no longer try to hide that fact or the pride it made her feel. Androcles sat in the first row with Sadi on one side of him and Dorian on the other. Ne'Veha sat beside Sadi with Carisia and Lu'ria to her left. Andro was pointing to different men and women and whispering to his brother while Eliani sat on Dorian's right and commented occasionally. Zarah and Lucia sat with Retta and Calyb between them, Nara and Deion sitting between Normya and Tir'ut.

Ambassador Matuur and Qurot sat in the small temporary suite down on the ground level and away from the other ambassadorial suites. Matuur had a severe scowl on his face and was fidgeting in his seat, holding a data pad in his hand. Dilios made some final adjustments to the data pads and scroll on his desk and then took the final scroll from his aide when he came up. He glanced at it quickly, typed a small note on the computer console on the desk top and then looked at Panos and nodded.

Panos rose to his feet and let his eyes sweep across the two thousand six hundred and fourteen men and women from hundreds of species across the Union who were physically present. Six hundred and nine holo images occupied the remaining suite boxes, men and women who could not attend this meeting physically, and were present from their offices in different locations across the Union. The importance of these votes was too much for them to just dismiss them and they all knew it. The members who were present were very impressed with how the Convocation Memorial had been built and the stock of the billions of humans across the Union went up immeasurably in their eyes for this building had been built almost entirely by the human citizens of Sparta.

Panos lifted the polished oak gavel and brought it down on the old fashion bell. The sound resounded throughout the entire chamber and immediately all talking between Senators stopped.

"I call the 1st Session of the Lycavorian Union Senate in our new Convocation Memorial to order." Panos began. "On behalf of President Charles Taylor and Prime Minister Selene of Earth, I welcome those of you who have never visited our fair planet. It is a distinct honor to all citizens of Earth to be able to hold this First Session in the very place where King Leonidas and the Spartan Senate met over three thousand years ago.

It is my hope that those of you unable to attend physically and who join us now via holo emitters from your offices can soon come to Earth and enjoy what we offer.” Panos saw many hundreds of nodding heads among the rows of Senators and it pleased him to see the acceptance of those members present. “I will now turn the proceedings over to the Senate Chairman for Earth. He sat with Sparta’s King Leonidas on many occasions all those years ago, and he had an important role in guiding our Crown Prince as he grew. Senator Dilios of Sparta and Earth.”

There was a loud round of applause from the gathered men and women as Dilios stood and bowed his head respectfully. He waited a moment and then reached up to tap his narrow jaw activating the COM implant there.

“I am... I am humbled by your welcome fellow Senators of the Lycavorian Union.” Dilios took a deep breath and moved around in front of his desk handing his aide a pad. “I had... I had planned to give a speech about what we must do this day, but I have never been a very good speaker. I was shocked when the Crown Prince and Prime Minister chose me to be the Chair of the Senate today. I spent many hours trying to write a speech that would come close to the importance of what this day means. I could not.” Dilios stopped and looked at the thousands of faces arrayed before him. “I will only say this... King Leonidas was a man of many faces. The history books speak of his accomplishments and the battles he won in combat. Rarely do they mention the other battles he won. I was there to witness them. Every single one of them and I can tell you... like all of us... his only purpose was to the betterment of his people. That is what he lived for...” Dilios looked at Gorgo. “And of course his beautiful Queen Gorgo.”

Gorgo smiled and nodded her head to him as her eyes flooded with tears. *He looks over you always Dilios.* Gorgo reached out to him.

Dilios smiled in return and bowed his head to her. *He watches even now. And I feel he approves of what we will do.*

He will. He will. Gorgo answered as she squeezed Deia’s hand within hers.

Dilios looked back up his eyes bright and fearless. “If what the senate took up was not to the advancement and prosperity of the Spartan people... he wanted nothing to do with it. As his father before him, King Resumar, as he asked many of you to act in the same way long ago out among the stars, I ask you to do so again today. As Lycavorians. As Elves. As Algolians. As vampires who now call the Union home without question. All of you present today. We have debated and spoken for four days now. Almost five. Now it is time we make our decisions.” Dilios turned to where Matuarr sat. “The Kavalian Ambassador asked me this morning that he be allowed a brief statement and to allow Prefect Keleru to view our proceedings from the Kavalian homeworld of Cabelir. I have agreed.” Dilios motioned to the holo image of Keleru’Puat as his figure appeared next to the Kavalian suite. “Welcome Prefect.”

Keleru’Puat nodded but said nothing at first. He looked a bit flustered which was unusual and he appeared to be inside a steel room and not his home. “I thank you for allowing this.” Keleru finally spoke. “It is in all our best interests.”

Dilios nodded. “I will delegate the floor to Ambassador Matuarr at this time.”

Matuarr nearly popped to his feet. “Senators of the Union... I come to you today to ask that you consider carefully what you will decide and to protest vehemently the course of events concerning the High Coven. We have proven that the son of Marshall Pusintin does indeed have a right and claim to the throne of the Union. It is his throne by your own law... not this boy King who will succeed his hated father.” Matuarr extended his arm and pointed at Androcles across the floor from him. “The future of the Union is at stake here and yet even with this vote looming on the horizon, this imposter has placed the Union precariously close to the edge of a great abyss. He has aligned the Union with your traditional and hated enemies. He has chosen to embrace the foul vampires of the High Coven and has gone so far as to declare you allies!” He looked around at the many faces and could only watch as Andro leaned over purposefully and laid a lip locker on a beaming Carisia to show what he thought of Matuarr and his speech. “This action can not be allowed to stand. I ask... no the Kavalian Federation demands that you do what is obviously the lawful course of action here! The Galactic Court that this Union proposes to follow has already voted for this very thing. We demand you do the same!”

The door to the side of the chamber reopened and two Durcunusaan led three individuals into the massive chamber. Many in the chamber gasped in surprised and Dilios turned to look at Zaniai and Eurin standing with another female Hadarian that all of them knew.

Sivana.

Dilios looked at them surprised. “Prefect Zaniai? Divine One Eurin? Princess Sivana? What is this about?” He asked.

Zaniai stepped forward and held out the data pad. “I have been appointed by the over one million Hadarian citizens who live and work here on Earth to speak for them. We do not accept the outlaw government of Buonau and her Kavalian Masters! We have named our own Council here on Earth as the representatives for the true Hadarian government! The one ruled and guided by Anja Leonidas our Queen and her sister Sivana for the last quarter century. Princess Sivana stands with the Divine One and myself as defacto ruler in her sister’s stead. We petition the Union Senate to officially recognize us so that we may take our place with our friends and brothers. The Hadarian people have **NOT** abandoned the Union! No Hadarian Healer heeded Buonau’s false call of leadership. They remain among our fleet and hospitals and continue to this day to do their duty for the Union that we helped to form. We...”

A single figure rose among those who were physically present and all of them recognized him as L'tian. Father of Queen For'mya and grandfather to all of her children. “The Delegation from Elear recognizes this petition and Motions to accept Prefect Zaniai’s Petition.”

Another figure stood now. “The Delegation from the Algolian Republic seconds this motion.”

Then another figure. “The Folcani Delegation thirds this motion.”

One of the holographic figures spoke now. “The Nodon Imperium moves that this motion be passed immediately.”

“Aye.”

“Aye”

The word continued to float outward until it became a low rumble within the chamber. One aye cascaded upon another for several minutes until the echo had died away, leaving Sivana standing there in tears and Eurin holding her arms.

Dilios turned back to Zaniai with a smile. “The Union Senate has spoken Prefect Zaniai. We welcome our Hadarian brothers and sisters back.”

Zaniai was almost in tears himself and his chest swelled as he stood there. “Chairman... may we take our place?” He spoke with a breaking voice.

Dilios motioned to the lone suite that had been empty with no holographic projections. “It would honor this chamber Prefect.”

“The Kavalian Federation protests this action!” Matuarr barked out returning to his feet. “The new Hadarian government has been sanctioned and recognized by the Galactic Court and the Kavalian Federation.”

Dilios looked at him as Zaniai and the others moved to the suite box quickly, greeting the Algolian Senators with smiles and handshakes for they were the closest to them. More would come later Dilios knew.

“The Lycavorian Union does not.” He spoke the simple words. He turned back to the chamber. “We have debated and argued long enough!” He barked out and his voice carrying throughout the huge hall. “We have four matters of law to vote on now my fellow Senators. All of us know what they are. Now is the time to tell our people what we have decided on their behalf. Your votes please. You have fifteen minutes for each decision you have to make.” Dilios looked up towards the upper level. “I will remind the Union Netnews crews that your presence here is a gift ordered by Prince Androcles. Do not abuse this gift and refrain from any comments or questions to individual Senators until this session is over.”

Dilios returned slowly to his own seat and began typing on his console, similar to all the computer consoles in every suite and wherever those who could not attend were. He had known his votes from the very beginning and he deftly made his choices and then sat back to wait. The debating was over; the harsh words in most cases would be forgotten. This is how they did things now and it was so much more effective and efficient than how it was done before. He took the pad his aide offered to him and was just beginning to read when a single loud chime echoed within the chamber indicating one vote had been completed by all the Senators. Three minutes after that another chime sounded with the third and fourth only seconds behind that. Dilios looked over at Deia quickly and saw a similar stunned expression as his. The Union Senate had never voted so quickly on one Bill or Law, let alone four. Dilios quickly gathered his thoughts together and came to his feet as his aide swiftly transferred the results to his main data pad.

“I have heard four beats of the drum.” Dilios spoke loudly now. “Does this mean the Union Senate has completed its voting?”

Matuarr looked at Keleru’s image from Cabelir. “A speedy vote favors us Prefect.” He spoke confidently. “Are you alright?”

Keleru looked at him. “Let’s get this over with quickly.” He stated. “I have other matters to attend to.”

Dilios took the pad from his aide when no voice of descent came forward and his eyes grew a little wider. He looked at Andro, who was leaning forward his hands spread out across the knee high polished oak railing. Dilios turned back to the chamber. “This is the decision of the Union Senate? There are no dissensions!”

The silence was all the answer he needed.

Dilios turned to face Matuarr. “At this time I will read the decisions of the Union Senate for all to hear. These are the representations of the people of the Lycavorian Union” He lifted the pad.

“With a vote of three thousand one hundred and sixteen to one hundred and seven, the Lycavorian Union has voted to deny the Kavalian Petition that Marshall Pusintin’s son with Queen For'mya has a claim to the Lycavorian Union throne.”

There was a soft rush of murmurs among the ambassadors in the upper level but almost no reaction from the gathered Senators as Matuarr came to his feet. “You can not be serious!” He screamed. “This is an outrage! The proof is before you! We provided it to you!”

There was a loud thud that echoed in the chamber as one of the Senators activated the COM unit in his jaw and tapped into the chamber system. “How can one such as yourself profess to understand the context of the written laws we follow when you do not know the men who wrote them. When you have no concept of the divine will of our people.” The male voice spoke. “Do not stand there and demand from this body when you do not understand what drives every species who suffered then! Every species who sacrificed! King Resumar knew... Val'istar Canth knew... and that is the context we have followed for generations. And will continue to follow into the future.”

“We do not accept this!” Matuarr screamed. “You flaunt your laws to all around you but you do not follow them yourselves! We will not sit here and be insulted by...”

“Oh... I believe you will.” Dilios spoke motioning to the *Durcunusaan* soldiers who stood along the wall.

The six men instantly moved to surround Matuarr and Qurot before they could begin to move away from their suite.

“What is the meaning of this?” Matuarr screamed.

“You are so quick to quote the rulings of the Galactic Court Ambassador.” Dilios told him. “I am only insuring you remain to hear the will of the Lycavorian people.” He lifted the pad once more. “With a vote of three thousand two hundred and sixteen for and seven against, the Lycavorian Union has stripped Marshall Pusintin, known to us as Pleistarchus, of every right and privilege bestowed to a citizen of Sparta and Earth. He will be stripped of his name, his history and all accomplishments. His name will be stricken from ever history scroll and book, never to have existed. His name now will reside only within the void with names such as Chetak, Joric and Maraud. Never to know honor again.”

“Do you think this means anything to us?” Keleru barked as his famous temper began to boil to the surface. “This means nothing!”

Dilios nodded. “Then perhaps what I am about to tell you will.” He stated. “With a vote of three thousand ninety-six for and one hundred and twenty seven against, the implementation of Spartan Law will commence immediately. With a vote of three thousand two hundred and one for and twenty-two against...” Dilios looked at Keleru in the image. “The Lycavorian Union issues a Declaration of War against the Kavalian Federation for their actions against the people of the Union and Queen For'mya Leonidas.”

“This is preposterous!” Matuarr shouted. “She is no longer a Queen! She...”

“***Our mother will always be Queen!***” The voice roared cutting off Matuarr’s rant. All heads in the chamber turned to see Androcles Leonidas leap over the small, knee high wall, his changed azure wolf eyes bright and his dual fangs protruding from beneath his upper lip. “**She will be Queen as long as my father sits on the throne of the Lycavorian Union *forn sorgur geld rie sibfla!***” (You sorry piece of shit!)

Keleru's eyes grew wide but Matuarr slogged on without even realizing what Androcles just said. The gasps and shouts within the chamber began then and lasted for several short moments before Androcles turned to face them.

"Yes!" Andro shouted out, his voice carrying throughout the entire chamber even without the implanted COM microphone. "My father lives!" Andro turned back to a wide eyed Matuarr and stunned Keleru now. "You failed in your pathetic attempt to kill him! You failed! And when you took my mother, when you killed our people you committed two of the most heinous crimes imaginable to us! You took the lives of children!" Andro screamed. "Children! Our children! Innocents who will now never have the chance to see what wonders await them! All because of your desire for power!"

Qurot reached for Matuarr and was beginning to shove him out of the way when everyone present saw the blurring of a body. Qurot bellowed in agony when Dorian appeared next to him at the end of his blurring motion, unwrapping the shadows from around his body and snapping a savage kick into the back of Qurot's knee. The snapping of his kneecap was very audible in the chamber to those nearby and many men and women grimaced in spite of themselves. Qurot went to the floor in searing pain but did not have the chance to do anything else as Dorian's fingers grabbed his long blond hair and yanked back savagely, the long bladed Shakur fighting knife pressed to this throat.

"You will go nowhere Kavalian scum!" He snarled at a teary eyed Qurot.

"You dare attack..." Matuarr began to shout.

Andro reached out with his Etheric power and grasped Matuarr within the light blue cone, lifting him several meters off the floor. He clenched his fist slightly and Matuarr's eyes grew wide at the pain that suddenly filled his entire body. A searing stinging sensation that stole his breath away. Andro moved closer to him, his eyes blazing and his face a mask of rage unlike anyone had ever seen. "I told you there would be a reckoning Ambassador!" He shouted. "I told you I would end you for what you have done! To my family! To my people!" Andro squeezed even tighter now, his fist flaring brighter with Etheric power. Power unlike anything anyone had ever seen him use. "***You helped him to rape our mother! Our mother! ARRGGHHH!***"

Androcles Leonidas squeezed his hand as hard as he could and Matuarr's body twisted and bent in grotesque positions, his bones popping and snapping in horrible echoes. His ligaments tearing and shredding as they separated from muscles. His screaming stopped a few seconds later when his brain could no longer keep him conscious from the horrific pain searing his every nerve. Mercifully he expired long before Andro reduced his body to one third of its original mass and then with a roar of vicious anger brought his fist smashing down. What remained of Matuarr impacted the marble floor with a sickening crunch and plop. Andro lifted his head and looked at Keleru within the transmission, his eyes wide in terror and anger.

"You did not kill my father you simpering fool!" Andro screamed. "He lives! And he has taken my mother back! She is back within his arms with all our mothers! Where she belongs! Where she has always belonged! As are my new brother and sister! Or have you not talked to my ever so special Uncle lately? I will make you pay for forcing me to attack my elven mother Keleru'Puat! To hurt her as I did!"

"You... you will die for this boy!" Keleru snarled.

"For this?" Andro bellowed. "This is nothing Keleru'Puat! Nothing! Your fleet in the Farnuri Expanse is dead! Dead! Retribution for the Drow your animals killed! My brother has taken the females you enslaved and turned into prostitutes for your sick officers! They will be brought here and pampered and treated as they should be! You will inflict no more pain on them!" Andro saw his eyes go wide and he smiled. "Did you think yourself so superior that we would not reach you?" Andro moved closer to the transmission and Keleru even backed up involuntarily. "You wanted a war Keleru'Puat..."

Andro reached down and touched his wrist COM unit. "Manda?"

"I am here Androcles." Miranda Lorian's voice filled the chamber.

Andro turned back to Keleru. "We will strike from everywhere! From anywhere! Even from your dreams! You made a mistake Keleru'Puat! You forgot to kill me! You wanted a war old man... now I am going to give you one! A war your feeble mind can't possibly comprehend old man! A Spartan's War! Miranda... by my order..."

"Release the Wolves and Dragons of the Blood!" Andro shouted.

"Payback is a fucking bitch!" Miranda's voice echoed.

"Dorian!" Andro shouted.

Dorian leaned close to Qurot's ear. "For my brother Resumar! For his wife Athani! And for my mother For'mya you sick fuck!"

Dorian drew the razor like blade across Qurot's exposed neck with overwhelming strength and shoved him forward to the floor as blood began to erupt from his nearly decapitated head. The gurgling lasted only a few seconds, the twitching a little longer and then his body was still and his blood began to spread out around him.

Keleru's eyes, now alive with unabashed hatred turned back to glare at Keleru. "You will die!" He screamed. "You will die!"

"I am coming for you Keleru'Puat!" Andro snarled. "I am coming for you and every one of the officers and other fools who dared supported you in this. As far as I am concerned you are all guilty of raping my mother! And I will bring justice to you as I vowed to my brother Arrarn." Andro felt the hands on his arms and he turned his head quickly to see Sadi and his wives and mates surrounding him, followed by all of his family. The moment her hands touched him, the nearly uncontrollable rage began leaving him. As Carisia, Ne'Veha and Lu'ria placed their hand son him, that anger vanished completely, to be replaced by a firm resolve. He watched as Zarah and Lucia drew Dorian away from Qurot's cooling body, pulling him close to them. His eyes went back to where Keleru glared at him.

Andro stepped even closer to the transmission. "You wanted a war Keleru'Puat. Let me show you how my father taught me to wage war. How our people wage war against your kind. Your lesson begins now."

Keleru was about to speak when Andro abruptly stabbed down on his wrist and cut the transmission.

"Time to go to school... old man." Andro whispered to the spirits of his grandfathers and all the Spartans who had come before him. He closed his eyes slowly, imagining them in the heavens above and hoping they would approve of his actions.

It was the Spartan way.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE

BETA QUADRANT ROTHRYN EMBASSY AUSTROVA

Dyack wiped his face with the towel as he stared into the mirror. What he had seen in the transmission from Sparta was beyond anything he had ever expected. It was no wonder Denali Leonidas had exited their embassy post haste after witnessing what he had. It had shocked all of them into silence to be honest.

The Union Senate Chamber on Earth was immense to say the least, far surpassing the Rothryn equivalent and then the number of different species he had seen as their news crews had panned the crowd was unbelievable. Listening to the men who had spoke and then watching the vote itself was inspiring to him. Dyack had no idea the Lycavorian Union was on the verge of a war, and to see the overwhelming majority of their sitting senators vote in favor of this; it told him just how much these Lycavorians honored their laws and their culture. A culture that appeared to have spread to dozens upon dozens of different species and taken root. Aside from their inability to shift into wolf form Dyack knew that the Rothryn people were essentially Lycavorian. Whatever had happened thousands of years in the past according to their scientists that took this ability away from them did not matter to him now. Deep down he felt that these Lycavorians were the key to the Rothryn evolving even more than they already had. To expand their limited horizons and see things so much differently.

Dyack turned when he heard the door to their bedchambers open and then close and he stepped from the bathroom and watched as Aleatia came in, pulling the robe from her beautiful shoulders and moving to the bed. He watched her for a moment and felt the familiar stirring in his groin whenever he gazed at her too long. Her beauty now, even after over four thousand years together, was still something that took his breath away. He tossed the towel onto the counter and moved into the bedroom.

“Can you believe it Aleatia?” He gasped moving into the master bedroom towards the center of the room as he watched her lithe frame settle on top of their large bed and her dazzling eyes look at him. “What we... what we witnessed tonight was incredible!”

Aleatia had been his wife and mate for the better part of four millennia. To Dyack she was the epitome of elegance and grace and beauty. He adored his mate and never in all his years had he even thought about straying or hurting her in any way. She was completely unreserved in their bed, sometimes playful and adventurous and sometimes demanding. Their times together were always passionate and intense and she had given him six strong children. Their middle son served within the Rothryn military fleet as a ship Captain and was well regarded by everyone who knew or worked with him. Their youngest daughter Sehri they kept out of the public eye as much as possible. She had only just turned twenty-one years old and she was devastatingly beautiful, more so than even her older sisters, with her pale blond hair and her breathtaking Glaucon blue eyes. There were dozens of younger men, and even some older ones, who were desperately trying to garner his favor for the hand of Sehri. Not only because of her surreal beauty but because she was also one of the most skilled and powerful of Mindvoice users, even more so than her mother, and this was a rare trait that Rothryn men wanted. Many older Rothryn men liked to use their mates to probe rivals and discover things that would give them an advantage against the other, even though it was considered taboo and Dyack had tried to steer his people away from actions like this. Actions that caused distrust and could lead to war between families.

Aleatia was also one of the most gifted Mindvoicers among the Rothryn people, much like himself, and this ability they had passed to all their children it seemed. Ibani and Osbela were among the strongest in terms of actual ability and while not matching their younger sister in sheer potential, the Rothryn Mindvoice Academy kept close watch on them as they did all the powerful Mindvoice users within Rothryn territory. A large group of appointed Mindvoice users whose job was to keep control of this skill so that no one abused it too much. As far as Dyack was concerned they were a bunch of self-indulgent fools who thought themselves better than everyone else. He could do nothing against them for they had been around from the outset of the Rothryn people. He and Aleatia had become quite good at getting around them however.

Aleatia met his eyes. “It was astonishing.” She said honestly. “Though I did not expect to witness such a Declaration of War. Or discover that they have been hiding the fact his father lives. We must discover what led them to this Dyack. We need to ask Denali Leonidas or his mate Lisisa.”

Dyack nodded. “I know.” He told her. “Did you notice that they both referred to this Martin Leonidas as father?”

Aleatia nodded her head. “I asked Arduri early into dinner about them. They are cousins. Lisisa is the daughter of Denali’s Uncle and a member of this Vampire High Coven it seems. This type of relationship is apparently not frowned upon within their culture. It was a common occurrence in the time of Denali’s grandfather in this city of Sparta.”

“Arduri Re Mydala seems to know quite a bit about them.” Dyack said. “I wonder if... I wonder if, since she is considered Denali’s mate, he shares everything with her. If she has the ability to swim within his thoughts as you do with me.”

Aleatia nodded. “I thought about this as well. It seems to me that is very much the case considering how much she knew in only so short a time as his mate.”

Dyack settled to the bed, sitting on the edge as he looked at her. “Were Ibani or Osbela able to pick anything up from their surface thoughts? Sehri perhaps, though she remained out of sight?” He asked. “Anything at all?”

Aleatia shook her head. “Unfortunately no.” She stated. “It appears the incident at the landing pad may have caused them to become overly cautious around us. Both Denali and Lisisa Leonidas had MV shields in place that were among the strongest I have ever felt. Ibani tried to filter into Arduri Re Mydala’s MV abilities with Sehri’s help since they appear new, but they withdrew very quickly. Both Denali and Lisisa were augmenting her own shields. Any attempt to breach these shields would have been detected and I doubt the reaction would have been pleasant.”

“Do they think they were detected?” Dyack asked.

Aleatia shrugged her slim shoulders. “It would not surprise me Dyack.” She said. “It seems to me that their use of Mindvoice abilities has not been monitored and curtailed as the Rothryn Academy does to our people. And this bond they seem to share with these... dragons... well it adds to their power significantly. Sehri

said she thought she could detect a second consciousness just on the fringe. We should be very careful about probing them Dyack. Sehri and the others agree. You said that they consider it to be disrespectful and a sign of hostility? If we approached this right my husband and mate, we may be able to just ask the questions we want and receive the answers.”

Dyack nodded. “Yes. They did say this to me on the landing pad. And you are right my love. We should do nothing to provoke them or cause them to look at us with suspicion. That is not how I want to begin our relationship with them.”

“Do you think we can have one?” Aleatia asked.

Dyack nodded. “Denali seemed genuine in his questions about our past. He can smell the curiosity on all of us, just as we smell it on them. We are after all no different from them except that we can not shift our forms.”

“Given what we saw... it is obvious they have many friends of different species.” Aleatia said. “His brother, this Androcles, he... the power he wielded was unlike anything I have ever seen Dyack.”

“Did you see him crush that man... that Kavalian?” Dyack asked softly. “Never have I seen such a thing. The physical manifestation of Etheric Mindvoice power. And to discover his father is alive as well?” Dyack shook his head. “This changes things.”

“How so?” Aleatia asked looking at him. “Dyack... you aren’t actually considering what Anroth suggested are you?”

Dyack met her stunning blue eyes. “What? Aleatia no!” He exclaimed. “Never!”

Aleatia breathed a sigh of relief. Her husband and mate was a fine man who loved her without question. He treated her as his equal in every way, and often relied on her council for many things. Their marriage had been arranged, as most were among the Rothryn, but it only took a year or so for Aleatia to see the man behind the face and fall madly in love with him. He was kind and gentle and an absolutely incredible lover who was very well equipped. She doubted she could feel for anyone what she now felt for this man. Dyack was also a man who had begun to pull the Rothryn people into the future. Expanding their territory. Treaties with other races and even very lucrative trade deals. They were a much richer society than they were a thousand years ago and much of it was due to his work. There was infighting at times, many of the older nobles not wanting to change things so quickly, if at all. Many of them were still cemented in the past and how they had done things for so long. They resented Dyack in many ways but were not powerful enough to move against him openly for he had too much support among the others families who thought as he did.

“What are you thinking husband?” She asked moving closer to him.

“The Vanari were not forthright with us. Ardan should have been more honest with me.” Dyack spoke slowly. “Their inbred distrust of the Lycavorian people has spread too far within the SBR. And I believe they know they have people taking part in the kidnapping and enslaving of their females, just as the evidence Denali Leonidas has presented shows. I believe they are just too arrogant to admit it.”

“You think they are allowing it to happen?” Aleatia asked surprised.

Dyack nodded. “At least a small portion of them yes. The Alkay that the Vanari secrete is a powerful tool against other species and it could well be bringing them untold millions if the Eridiani and the OSG have reached as far as the Alpha Quadrant. We will need to be mindful of our dealings with the Eridiani. I am going to have Kelelm insure that what trade we do with them is not tied to this OSG in any way.”

Aleatia shook her head. “To sell your own people into sexual slavery.” She gasped. “It is barbaric in every way.”

Dyack nodded his head. “Yes it is.” He stated evenly. “The Vanari problems are not ours however. Barnak will undoubtedly discover what we saw tonight. His influence over our son troubles me.” Dyack said.

“He challenges you through Anroth.” Aleatia spoke. “He is not as devious as he thinks though.”

“We must keep a close eye on both of them Aleatia.” Dyack said. “If he were to some way take one of these Lycavorians from the Union to conduct his foul experiments... it could well mean the end of us given what we saw tonight.”

“Do you think there are many like this Prince Androcles?” Aleatia asked.

“I don’t know.” Dyack replied. “It appears to run in their family at least, though I dare say this Androcles was considerably more powerful in what he did then what we saw from his brother. Of course we

have not seen Denali unleash this power fully either. We have not seen the father or any others... we have not seen enough to make a judgment. I have to believe there are more of them however.”

“Well... given his looks I doubt our daughters Ibani and Osbela would have much angst against trying to get close to him.” Aleatia spoke with a sultry voice as she moved closer to him. “He was incredibly handsome... and he is very young too.”

Dyack looked at her with a sly grin. “Does he stir your blood my wife?” He asked playfully.

Aleatia laughed and pressed her body against his side, dropping her hand to his chest and abdomen. Her large breasts pressed hard against his skin and caused his eyes to darken in desire for her. “Hah! The only man who could hope to stir my blood is you! It has always been this way and it will always be this way. I prefer men to boys.”

Dyack smiled and stroked her arm as he leaned into her embrace. “We will need to proceed carefully and cultivate a relationship with this brother Denali. He is powerful in his own right and not so naïve as I first thought. His scent showed no interest in Ibani or Osbela but if we were able to have his brother, this Androcles, if he were to take one of our daughters as a mate. Imagine the possibilities.”

“We promised our daughters we would not force them into an arranged marriage.” Aleatia told him.

“And I would never do that.” Dyack assured her. “But Ibani and Osbela seem to think this Androcles is handsome no?”

Aleatia nodded. “Very much so.”

“So there is an opportunity there.” Dyack said.

“Ah... put them together and see what happens?” Aleatia said.

Dyack nodded. “I am getting ahead of myself now. And there is more to Denali than we see if his brother sent him here alone. If this Androcles does come here in seven weeks as he tells us... then it would be better to have his brother tell them we are friends.”

“Yes... I get the sense he is not very forgiving to his enemies.” Aleatia spoke softly.

Dyack nodded. “This could be what we have waited for my love.” Dyack said. “This could be what we need to break our people free from the old ways and move into the future.”

“Then let us pursue it husband.” Aleatia spoke.

She moved deftly along the corridor towards the bedroom on the Rothryn Embassy’s bottom floor, her mind trying to categorize all she had seen this evening. Her five foot seven, hundred and twenty pound body was toned to muscular and feminine perfection from long hours of physical activity and training that very few knew she had mastered. Long supple legs, firm and perfectly shaped ass cheeks below a slim waist and flat abdomen. Her breasts were of medium size, but very firm and proud and topped with pert nipples that pressed against the fabric of her floor length plum colored dress and light wrap. Her long, pale blond hair spilled past her slim shoulders in waves to curl just above the small of her back. Her Glauous blue eyes were bright and alert.

Sehri was the youngest child of her parents, and the most gifted. She had only just turned twenty-one, spending the last six years training her mind and body to perfection. Sehri had no worries about men approaching her for her hand in marriage. Whatever was finally worked out, her father and brothers would insure that she was not given to a man she did not have any feelings for. They had done this with none of their children, preferring that they choose their own path. It was not a gift most were given among the Rothryn and she knew that was one of the things her father and mother were trying to change. Sehri was her father’s ace in the hole, he called her. Because both he and her mother were so strong within Mindvoice all of their children were exceptionally capable, however Sehri appeared to have gotten the bulk of whatever genes they had passed to her. Her Mindvoice abilities far exceeded any of her family and even many of the instructors at the Rothryn Academy. Her parents kept this knowledge hidden and had Sehri trained since she was fifteen by others outside the Rothryn Academy. Sehri had grown extremely skilled at hiding what she was truly able to do and unlike other parents, Dyack and Aleatia trusted in her use of this skill.

Sehri paused in the hallway, using her keen nose and her other senses to try and detect her brother. Her brother Anroth had a nasty habit of coming into the worker’s quarters and trying to entice one of the young

females into his bed with his wife. Tynitia was known to have sexual tendencies towards other females, and Anroth often liked to take part in her activities. It was a practice Sehri found abhorrent not because of what it entailed, for while she had never bedded with a man let alone another woman, the thought had crossed her mind on different occasions when she had seen an especially attractive female among the many markets on their homeworld. She found it abhorrent because Anroth was not known for his gentleness and usually after sharing their bed, the young female was then transferred back to the Rothryn homeworld for other duties. There were rumors that Anroth had fathered several children this way because he refused to remove himself from the female before emptying his seed into her however many times he did in an evening. Apparently Tynitia did not seem to mind this, so she had no doubts that either bribery or threats were used to keep the young females and their families quiet and to face the shame of having a child without a father alone. Sehri did not know if her father knew of Anroth's extra activities, and she doubted very much they would continue if he did. Her father worshiped their mother in every way, and never once had he treated her less than an equal to him. It was not something that many Rothryn liked, but they accepted it because times were changing and most of them were smart enough to know they had to change with them.

When Sehri caught no whiff of her brother's musky scent she went immediately to the bedroom she used while they were here at the embassy. They way the embassy had been built there were not enough rooms on the second and third floor for her to maintain a bedroom with the rest of her family. Her parents were ready to turn one of the quest rooms on the third floor into her bedroom but she instead convinced them to let her make this large storage room her bedroom. It had been remodeled extensively to suit her tastes and having it down here meant she could associate with the many workers who she considered friends. Unlike her brothers and sisters she mingled without pretence among the Worker's Caste, often times seen with the daughters of workers at the Embassy and their palace out shopping and joking. This did not go unnoticed by the many adults who saw, and while the Worker's Caste saw Sehri as hat could happen in the future, the Warrior Caste did not appreciate her associating with those they felt beneath her. Sehri punched in her code for the door, heard it click and slipped in swiftly before closing it behind her. She turned from her door and went immediately the small chest at the foot of her bed and knelt before it and lifted her left arm. She watched as the holographic control board appeared across her forearm as she called her Holotool from Flatspace just as she had seen Denali Leonidas call his shield. She typed a coded nine digit password into the Holotool and the chest unlock with a soft click. She opened the chest and extracted the small shoebox size transmitter and receiver. She set it atop the chest and activated the device with a secure connection and another set of passwords and codes. There was a flickering on the small monitor and then the face of the older woman appeared. She was lifting her head from a pillow and Sehri could see her shake off the dregdes of sleep from her eyes.

"Sehri?" The woman spoke as she sat up. "Sehri... what is wrong?"

"Cleric Mother... I have a report." Sehri spoke quickly.

"A report? At this hour? In regards to what child?" The woman asked. "Could this not wait until tomorrow at your usual time?"

"No Cleric Mother it couldn't. Forgive me but..." Sehri began.

The woman waved her hand in a dismissive way. "Do not apologize child. If you have contacted me outside your normal schedule then it most be important." Sehri watched as she rose from the bed into a sitting position. "What is it Sehri?"

"Cleric Mother... I have... I have seen the Bearer of the Prophecy." She stated softly.

The woman smiled and laughed softly as she shook her head. "Sehri my child... you are one of the finest young Shamans of the Table... but the Bearer of the Prophecy will only appear to a senior Shaman Master. What makes you say this child?"

"I have seen him Cleric Mother!" Sehri insisted. "This very night! In my mind! I was not even in the same room as where the others were viewing it but I witnessed the power within him! I swear it!"

"Very well child... tell me." The woman said.

"It is just as the Ancient Tomes say Cleric Mother. He will come and he will wield the power of those who created the Rothryn!" Sehri said wistfully as she remembered those azure blue eyes. "I saw him... I saw him kill a man this night. He held him within the grip of this power and crushed the life from him without even touching him. It was brutal and his actions were hateful, but it was... it was beautiful to watch Cleric Mother. His body was encased in a blue aura and..."

The woman sat forward her own eyes wide now. “A blue aura you say?” The woman hissed softly. “Where did you see this child?” She demanded. “Where?”

“A transmission from the Alpha Quadrant.” Sehri answered. “You know of the discovery of our kindred kind, these Lycavorians?”

“Yes... it has been reported for the last three days.” She answered. “The reporters are beginning to repeat themselves for they have no real information to give. Only that many of them are on Austrova and there is a very advanced warship in orbit now that comes from this Union.”

“Mother and father had them to the Embassy for dinner tonight Cleric Mother.” Sehri said. “While during dinner something was occurring on their home planet and father allowed the brother, Denali Leonidas, to use our communications relay here in the embassy. It showed these events. I did not accompany them because father and mother did not want to expose me to them but I saw it in my mind! I must have somehow detected it within the tendrils of his brother and sister!”

“Sehri... are you absolutely certain?” The Cleric Mother asked.

“It was just as the Ancient Tomes said Cleric Mother.” Sehri spoke confidently. “I have recorded the transmission and I can send it to you. It is said he is coming here in seven weeks Cleric Mother! The Protectorate is being dissolved and merged into this Union and he is coming here to finalize this. From what little we were able to discover tonight it appears the Protectorate Director General is now his *Val'istar*.”

The old woman moved closer to her end of the transmission. “Be very careful when you speak the old language child. The Rothryn Academy could have eyes and ears everywhere.” The woman told her. “The Protectorate dissolved?” The old woman spoke with wide eyes. “We did not hear this! Are you sure?”

Sehri nodded. “Yes Cleric Mother.”

“Do not send it via the normal channels child!” The woman spoke. “Use alternate means and forward it immediately! I will present it to the other Elders and we will let you know what we decide! Have you told your parents?”

Sehri shook her head. “Father has always told me I was different. He has always told me not to hesitate to contact you if I do not understand something and he and mother would not be able to understand or help me. They have not read the Tomes as you and my fellow Shamans have Cleric mother. I contacted you first.”

“Your father is blessed with the wisdom and strength beyond normal men.” The Cleric Mother spoke softly. “As is your mother. That they know of us and they sent you to us for training tells me they have faith in what we believe.”

“They always have Cleric Mother.” Sehri spoke. “I will use common embassy messaging Cleric Mother. It is not secure but I will encode the transmission within a normal data pad.” Sehri spoke. “You will have it by midday.”

“Very well. We will review your information and I will advise you what we decide and then you may tell your parents what we know. Share this with no one else Sehri! No one! If I know your father he is probably going over his political options now and we do not need to distract him from that until we know for certain.”

“I understand Cleric Mother.” Sehri said.

The older woman canted her head slightly. “You seem distracted yourself child.” She said. “What is it?”

“The one... the one I saw Cleric Mother... his eyes were so very blue.” Sehri answered. “Even over so vast a distance I felt like...”

“What?”

“I felt like I was there Cleric Mother. I could almost feel him and his emotions. He has... he has five mates Cleric Mother and for a split second I was there among them! They are... they are so beautiful and so very strong. I could almost feel them within me.” Sehri answered. “It was disconcerting.”

The old woman stared at her for a long moment and then nodded. “Be strong Sehri. I will contact you tomorrow evening.”

“As you wish Cleric Mother.”

12.9 LYS FROM CABELIR

Miranda Lorian had never imagined herself in the position she now held.

A few short years ago she thought she would never rid herself of the horrible dreams that haunted her. The lives she had witnessed snuffed out all around her. Men and women she had called family. Fate worked in mysterious ways she now knew. Fate had given her Ben and Tina in her life. Fate had made them friends with the Leonidas family. And fate had twice given her the opportunity to be among that family, to heal her emotional wounds and build a relationship with the man she could almost call brother.

Now Miranda Lorian had a new life. A new command. A new family. And a love she had found in the most unlikely of places with a female Drow elf. The memories would never go away she knew, and she would always remember them in her dreams, but ultimately it was their voices in her dreams telling her to move forward, to watch over and protect others as she had them, and to finally allow herself to love once more that changed her. With E'dira of the Drow, Miranda had discovered the very best of both worlds. A lover who worshiped her in every way, a lover who could drive her mad with her tongue, or fuck her silly with her 'gift'. A gift that happen to be nine of the thickest male inches Miranda had ever had inside her. Miranda loved everything about E'dira, from her shimmering white hair to the flawlessness of her ebony skin to the taste of her passion no matter which way they decided to make love. E'dira treated her as a precious jewel she had found, never hesitating to kiss her or take her hand. Miranda had given E'dira back her life as well, and the Drow warrior would worship her 'slave' as long as she had years left in this lifetime. She had never expected to find it with a human female to be sure, but as Lynwe had once told her, the unexpected gift was usually the sweetest gift. General Lynwe's continued love of Selene was the perfect example of that.

Miranda had gathered around herself men and women with a passion for life and friends and family and duty and once they had all come together Miranda had found that "place" in her soul once more filled to overflowing.

As far as Miranda was concerned, she had everything she had ever wanted. And she was not going to let anyone or anything take that from her. Androcles had given her a mission. The young Prince was the most intense and intimidating man she had ever met outside of his father, but he led from the front just like his father. He was reckless and bold, and when combined with the ability of Carina Leonidas to devise plans such as this, he was probably the most dangerous tactical mind of their generation. He had given her this mission, this ship and this opportunity along with his father. They had never lost faith in her. This was without a doubt the single most important mission she had yet undertaken in her career. If she pulled this off, she could return to Union space with not a single loss of life. She knew that was unlikely, but damned if she wasn't going to try.

The events leading up to this moment had every crewmember on the *ARIZONA* and within their Assault Wing seething with anger and the need for retribution. The loss of life, the deaths of so many innocents, the rape of their Queen. These were things that they could not have prevented, but they could certainly get vengeance for these acts. Androcles Leonidas was giving their leader Miranda and all of them the chance to do just that. They were not about to let him down.

And it began with five simple words.

"Payback is a fucking bitch."

The moment those words left her lips Miranda came to her feet. She moved to the plot table and picked up the old style phone attached to it. Her fingers caressed the worn plastic before pressing the speak key.

"This is Admiral Lorian! 1st Arizona Strike Group! In thirty seconds... Climb Mount Niitaka! Climb Mount Niitaka! Execute! Execute! Execute!" Miranda spat. "All ships assume Attack Pattern Delta, war plan as follows. Victor Echo November Three nine one! Omega! Omega! Omega!" It had been E'dira's idea to have their code word be the one that the Japanese had used against the fleet at a place called Pearl Harbor in ancient Earth history. The attack had been a complete and utter surprise for the American Fleet, which is exactly what they were hoping for here. The Omega code was one not often used in the Union and Miranda knew it. It called for total war. No prisoners or mercy. It was literally raising the black flag before battle. The last time an Omega code was added to a war plan was during the Mercenary Uprising a thousand years ago.

The large fleet, larger still than she had commanded at Kranek, deployed into its combat formation quickly while still under Shroud. The *LEONIDAS IIA* Strike Cruisers moved to the front of the fleet to form the main wall of battle, followed by the *MOONLANCER Bs*. They would serve as bombardment ships against the enemy formations while the Strike Cruisers served as the first wave. The *ARIZONA*-Class ships moved into the third line, first to launch their fighters into the fray, and then move up to assume command and control. The *NOVA*-Class Attack Cruisers would serve as first picket to engage the lighter Kavalian ships, with the *ADMIRAL CENEU* Fast Attack Destroyers and *AUTUMN MOON* Attack Frigates moving to protect the entire fleet. The *TAUR'OHTARS* would break into wolf packs while maintaining their Shrouds for hit and run attacks against any and all targets of opportunity. The *TYPE I* Alpha Dragon Transports began to drift away from the main force still under Shroud, shadowed and protected by the three *VANGUARD MARK III*-Class Interdiction Cruisers which would remain in low atmospheric orbit over the cloning facilities and kill anything that came close to the dragons that would decimate the facilities from the ground.

Already the *MOONLANCERS* were preparing their 'specials' for the coming battle. A mixture of M22 ZMF missiles and ECM Decoys, followed up with a second barrage of MIRV and Ground Penetrating warheads for the planet. By the time Daurgo led the Dragon Brigade into battle, the cloning facilities on the surface would be cracked open and waiting for them.

E'dira looked up from her tactical station. "Colonel Randall signals all Squadrons ready for launch!"

"Do it!" Manda snapped as she returned to her chair. "Give me all forward batteries! Weapons Officer! Eight M22As at the *GREAT SOULS*! Forward Type Ones to target the *DIATAGAs* and forward Type IIs to provide follow on barrage! All Photonic torpedoes into the *DIEROYs*!"

"Weapons aye!"

Miranda stabbed her finger down on the arm of her chair. "Steven! Roll in right after we hit them with the first barrage. Drop your loads and clear out while we realign and we'll hit them again! Then they'll be all yours and we'll go after the remaining *GREAT SOULS*!"

"Understood Manda! *RAPTOR* Air Control is launching now! They'll jam them so tight they won't be able to shit or piss without us detecting it!" Steven Randall's voice answered excitedly.

Miranda's eyes narrowed slightly and she turned to look at Zaala who returned her gaze with an almost embarrassed stare. "He seems riled up." She said to Zaala.

"I may... I may have offered to allow him to... to ravage me more than he usually does if he returned unharmed." Zaala answered sheepishly but with a delightful gleam in her dark eyes. "He can be quite inventive in our bed."

Miranda shook her head with a smile as many of the bridge crew chuckled at Zaala's words. There were many females on the Bridge Crew and all of them could not deny that Steven Randall was one step down from smoking hot male. He may have been wolf now, but his human self was by far more dominant. Many of them envied Zaala, for she always walked around the ship with a huge smile on her beautiful elven face, and the females knew why that was.

"I may have done the same thing." Miranda said turning to look at a smiling E'dira.

"Yes you did." She spoke her amber eyes glittering in delight from her tactical station.

"Whatever works right?" Miranda spoke with a smile.

The relationship between Miranda and E'dira was a well known fact on the *ARIZONA* now. As time passed, both of them were becoming more and more relaxed at allowing small things slip in public or in front of the crew that confirmed this. In reality, many of the crew had worked with Miranda for the last few years on the *ARIZONA* project, and seeing how she had changed once E'dira came into her life had been the last piece of the puzzle. Now they saw the real Miranda Lorian, and none of them had any doubts about her whatsoever.

"Nine seconds!" A voice called out.

Miranda nodded becoming all business now. "Let's do this! Mark! Mark! Mark! Initiate attack now!"

His name was Puram'Kell.

Fleet Admiral of the Kavalian Federation. Two thousand seven hundred years old and loyal to his people and their advancement, but perhaps much more vocal than the Prefect and his advisors liked. Especially when it came to such ludicrous ideas as to attack the Lycavorian Union when they should have been reaching out to them in friendship.

Puram was not your typical Kavalian by any stretch of the imagination. He was viciously loyal to his people, would do anything to see them grow and prosper, but was not keen on doing things that would only set them back as far as he was concerned. He had never stepped outside his union with his Kavalian wife in all the two thousand two hundred years that they had been together. He had chosen carefully who he would pursue for a wife and mate when he was a young warrior, and his skills and accomplishments had earned him his choice. Siondi'Kell was perfection in his eyes. Her luxurious coat of light brown fur, her lush female figure to include her delightful tail and her stunning blue eyes. She had given him four strong and proud boys and two daughters that equaled their mother in beauty.

That is where all similarity to other Kavalian Prides ended.

Puram had assumed leadership of their small Pride with the death of his father over six hundred years ago; however he continued and advanced his father's farsighted views. The Kell Pride was considered a progressive Pride. They did not agree with the mainstream Kavalian Prides who were bent only on advancing their status in Keleru's court. Puram knew that there were few Pride Leaders that thought as he did and the majority of them, including himself, kept their council to themselves. He had met Pian'Nruarani several times and found him to be an exceptional leader and a man who believed in the future of the Kavalian people. Yet he was also a man who held ideas that did not sit well with mainstream Pride Leaders just like himself. Puram had played the good Kavalian for many years. He allowed his sons and daughters to have their growth accelerated to advance the procreation purposes of the Kavalian people. He also drilled into their heads the same values he had been given by his own father. Loyalty to their people... not a single leader. All of his sons were now mated to females from other Prides, and like him, they treated their mates almost completely opposite of what was considered acceptable. They loved their mates, respected them as the bearers of their future, and never once had a Kell son ever lifted his hand in anger to his mate. Siondi and he were also extremely careful and wary of any male who showed interest in their daughters. While both of them had undergone the biogenic process to remove the fine coat of hair from their bodies making them even more desirable to Kavalian males, they also knew that their parents were making sure the men who wanted them would treat them as they should be treated.

Puram had commanded the 47th Kavalian Tactical Fleet Group for nearly eighty-six years now. Their ships were old and worn, but Puram had changed all that when he took command. In the span of two years, he had replaced thirty of the oldest ships with newer ones, and he had gotten upgrades or refits for twice that. The 47th was still among the oldest Fleet Groups in terms of ship age, but at least now they were combat ready and unless going against front line ships, they would perform as well as their training allowed. His actions also served to earn him the almost fanatical loyalty of nearly everyone in the 47th Fleet Group. All of them had been disappointed, Puram included, when they had been left out of the initial invasion forces into the High Coven. Vampires held a unique hate in Puram's heart for their actions against the Kavalian people so long ago. He had been upset when Marshall Pusintin assigned his Fleet Group to protecting the cloning facilities here on Dalean, instead of letting them take part in the invasion.

Puram was also no fool.

He began to see what the High Coven commanders were doing even before Pusintin had. They were giving up planets and territory to consolidate their forces. When the final battle of the initial invasion took place, he could only listen and view the reports as the Kavalian forces were routed by superior High Coven tactics and more advanced ships and weapons. Puram knew then that Pusintin was part of the problem and not the solution. He did what any good commander would do. He drilled his crews mercilessly for the day they would be needed. He turned them into the finest group he had ever commanded. He also knew their skills were wasted on these older and less capable ships. Pusintin and Keleru and the majority of the senior Pride leaders believed that no one would ever be able to make it this far into Kavalian space to attack the cloning facilities. Puram did not take that path. For years he had been requesting new ships and fighters, while hammering home the training on what they did have. Always he had been refused; further frustrating him and turning him against

Keleru and Pusintin. When he had first heard of the plans to try and act against the Union, he thought the two men insane. He had told them and fellow officers that you do not kick a nest of fever wasps when they care nothing for you. This action would only incur the full attention and wrath of that nest. As more and more rumors began to float out of Kavalian Central, the central part of the Federation where most of the major planets were, Puram knew that the actions of Keleru and Pusintin would not go unpunished. He also found his loyalties beginning to waver. The Lycavorian Union was not the High Coven. Their soldiers and ships would never retreat in battle. They would fight to the very last man and take as many of the enemy with them as they could. They would take risks. They would conduct battles everywhere. Given the history of their King and his son, and Puram had read every Evolli and Kavalian report from the Evolli war, they were as predictable as the wind. And completely unforgiving. They...

“Admiral!” The voice jarred him from his thoughts and he looked up to his Executive Officer. A young Kavalian who was just like him and epitomized the future. Of course... he was his son as well.

“Joram’Kell?” He questioned.

“Admiral... our sensors have detected a spike in the Hyper Matter particles you requested we monitor for. They have just increased within the system.” The younger Kell told him.

Puram straightened in his command chair. “Location?”

“Twelve million kilometers off our port bow sir.” Joram answered. “For lack of a more technical description... a massive increase Admiral. Nearly five hundred percent. What is this father? Why have us monitor for Hyper Matter particles?”

Puram came to his feet. “The Kavalian Strike Force at Kranek. Before they went off the air... a single report from a *DIATAGA* indicated that Hyper Matter particles in the system had increased by a similar amount.” He spoke.

Joram looked at his father. “A footprint?” He gasped. “Father that... there is no way a Union Strike Group could get this far into Kavalian space. How would they even know where our cloning facilities were?”

“How indeed?” Puram offered looking at his son. “If my memory serves me correctly, General Pian’Nruarani knows exactly where these facilities are because he helped to protect them for over a decade.”

“General Nruarani has been declared a traitor father. He forced himself upon Marshall Pusintin’s wife Jalersi.” Joram spoke. “His Pride has vanished and he...” Joram stopped talking as he stared at his father. His eyes slowly began to widen. “He knows where these facilities are?” He gasped as his father’s words finally sunk in.

Puram nodded. “Yes he does.”

“The Union wouldn’t dare risk an incursion this far into our space!” Joram exclaimed. “Would they?”

“They are masters of hit and run tactics Joram. You have read the intelligence reports from the Evolli War. Nineteen separate times they struck deep behind Evolli lines. In places the Evolli didn’t believe they could reach. They targeted shipyards and factories and countless military installations. Not once did they fail or get caught.” Puram spoke.

“We are not the Evolli father.” Joram stated.

“No we are not.” Puram stated. “Yet here we sit with one of the oldest group of ships in the entire Kavalian Federation, guarding six of the most important installations we have.”

“Installations that create those foul clones!” Joram spat.

Puram nodded. “Whether we agree with it or not my son... that is what they do.” He moved closer to him. “If you had this ability son... this unique and fearsome ability to strike where your enemy least expects it... to obliterate whole shipyards... would you not use it?”

“Of course... but to strike here?” Joram said. “They would need the coordinates of our Jump Gate network father! They would need...”

“If we can tap into the Union Gate network to send troops and ships to Hadaria in that misbegotten mission... do you not think the union could do the same to us? Especially if Pian is working with them? Their Gate technology is far more advanced than our own in these terms.”

“We don’t know that he is.” Joram interjected.

“Don’t we?” Puram answered. “And for a people who have Hyper Matter Fusion engines and Shroud generators better than the ones they stole from the Coven, they would not need the Gates if they had the coordinates.”

“Hyper Matter Fusion engines are only theoretical father.” Joram said.

“To us maybe.” Puram answered. “Think Joram my son! Do not be like those fools on the Advisor Council to the Prefect! Think as the Lycavorians do! Their society is not war like. They would need time to transfer their production over to war materials! What buys them this time?”

Joram looked at his father. “Coordinated strikes against targets that will hurt us in the short run and...”

Puram nodded. “And benefit them in the long run. There is a reason the High Coven never conquered them son. The Union leaders are used to fighting when outnumbered and they think outside the box!”

The sensor operator who had brought up the discovery to Joram now turned from his station his face a mask of horror. “Admiral! Union warships de-shrouding! Hundreds of them! They are firing Admiral!”

Puram calmly looked at his son. “It appears that day has come Joram my son! And we have been caught unaware!”

Unaware or not, Puram would not have been able to keep it from happening no matter what he did. In the time it took to blink, two hundred and sixty Union warships appeared and unleashed their version of payback on the three hundred and thirty Kavalian warships. The Union Fleet was compromised of the Assault Wings of all three *ARIZONA*-Class ships with an additional eighty ships attached.

A spread of M22A ZMF missiles led the opening of the battle and were streaking across the stars before the last ship had even de-shrouded. They had worked to perfection at Kranek and the Battle of The Farnuri Expanse against first tier Kavalian warships. They would work even better here against second and third tier Kavalian warships. The six *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers had formed the point of the spear Miranda would thrust through the heart of the Kavalian Fleet Group, the *MOONLANCER B*-Battle Cruisers slightly above and behind the Strike Cruisers.

With the *ARIZONA* at the tip, the *YAMATO* and *MISSOURI* on either flank and traveling above the rest of their fleet, the Lycavorian Union delivered their message to the Kavalian fleet about what they thought of their leader’s actions. As fighters began to endlessly spill from the close to ventral launch tubes, all three massive Strike Carriers cut loose with every weapon at their disposal, just as their escorts did the same. The *TAUR’OHTAR*-Class Destroyers fired off their first volley and then began to disappear as they formed into their Wolfpacks and engaged their Shrouds once more to go hunting.

The first wave of M22A ZMF missiles struck six of the thirteen Kavalian *GREATSOUL* dreadnoughts in Puram’s fleet as well as seven of the old but still dangerous *DIATAGA* Heavy cruisers. The missiles obliterated five of the *GREATSOULs* in the same instant. The sixth *GREATSOUL* began to list heavily and drift as one of its forward wing arms was blasted completely off. It would live for another two minutes and only seven escape pods would depart the ship before its Tri-Cobalt engine core overloaded and reduced the ship to space ash. None of the older *DIATAGAs* survived the first wave of missiles.

Unbeknownst to the Kavalian ships, the deadliest threat to what they protected was already making its way down to the surface of Dalean. Adjusting their shrouds for atmospheric entry was easy enough, and with consummate skill, four TYPE I Alpha Dragon transports and three *VANGUARD MARK III*-Class Interdiction Cruisers pierced the relatively light gravity of Dalean ten kilometers west of the Kavalian cloning facilities. As they sped across the lush green plains to their holding point, their comrades in the *MOONLANCER B* ships above prepared to open the door for them. Only a few Kavalian settlers heard the enormous sonic booms that shattered the peaceful scenery around them and as they looked up into the bright blue skies, many of them would later say they saw these enormous shimmering objects in the sky as they passed overhead.

In just under a minute, those objects would no longer be shimmering.

The Kavalian cloning facilities were primarily built underground across the ten kilometer square flat plains on the northern continent of Dalean. They were surrounded by mountains on three sides and an enormous ocean that took up nearly a quarter of the planet’s surface. The Kavalian ground forces were extensive, fully three complete divisions of Kavalian cloned troops led by three hundred pure Kavalian officers. There were nearly twenty batteries of heavy anti-aircraft guns and countless bunkers that provided protection to the

facilities. The six facilities here on Dalean were the largest of those spread across the Kavalian Federation and combined they produced nearly sixty-five percent of the cloned troops. The bases and the base's defenses were set up to be nearly impregnable from any sort of ground assault imaginable. The Kavalian engineers and officers had discounted any type of assault from orbit however. They deemed it next to impossible to breach Kavalian space so deeply and remain intact.

Of course they were only using information and intelligence on the Vampire High Coven when the facilities were built. Everything they had determined was that no High Coven officer would have the skill or determination to strike this deep into Kavalian space. They had been hit by such overwhelming superiority in the first waves that all they could do was defend what they had and hope for the best.

Fighting the Lycavorian Union had never been considered in the construction of these facilities. Their mistake would cost them dearly.

Many of the cloned troops and pure Kavalian officers had begun looking skyward as bright streaks began to crisscross the backdrop of blue sky. All of them knew something was happening in orbit, but it appeared all of their COM channels were being jammed. Their senior officers were in a panic as they were cut off from their superiors in orbit and had to make decisions on their own. Something they had never had to do before. They began to issue orders to take up defensive positions thinking that perhaps a drill was underway.

In a sense... a drill was exactly what was coming.

MOONLANCER B CRUISER *MINOTAUR*

“Come on! Come on!” The Captain of the *MINOTAUR* barked. “Give me something people!”

“Initial volley away!” A voice called out. “Twenty seconds until MIRV reload!”

“Yes!” The Lycavorian barked. “Mark all ground targets! Sync locations with all other *MOONLANCER* cruisers! We need to blast them a hole and that's what we're going to do!”

“Ten seconds on the MIRVs!” The voice echoed. “All other *MOONLANCERs* signal ready!”

“Ground targets locked in!” Another voice erupted.

It seemed like an eternity, but nine seconds later it was done.

“Lock on! Lock on! All MIRVs ready!”

“Fire! Fire! Fire!” The captain of the *MINOTAUR* roared.

Two seconds later, twenty-four nine meter tall missiles launched from the belly of the *MOONLANCER B* Cruiser *MINOTAUR* followed by one hundred and forty-four MIRVs from the other five *MOONLANCER B* ships in rapid succession.

Payback was so sweet.

TYPE I ALPHA DRAGON TRANSPORT *DRAGON'S BREATH*

Daugo moved down the main aisle of the new TYPE I Alpha and felt the swell of pride in his chest. It surpassed anything he had ever felt in his over twelve thousand years of life with one exception.

The howls of blissful delight as he had claimed Arzoal in the skies above their base. Her talons digging into his scales as his huge organ had penetrated her to her core and his wings folded around her massive body while they plummeted towards the ground rutting like two young dragons was the most divine experience he would ever know. The knowledge that he would continue to experience this had only driven him to supreme heights as he plunged on her four more times in those hours they had before they parted. He could feel her joy and happiness as her womanhood tightened around him while they dropped and she nipped at the armored scales of his throat and neck. Had he known how desperately she had longed for that moment, to feel him buried within her, Daugo probably would have been driven to take her even more. It was enough however, as they lay alongside the cool mountain lake hours later and stroked each others scales, and he heard Arzoal cooing out contented and delighted dragon noises. Had he not loved her so much, it would have seemed odd that those

noises could come from the Dragon Elder Mother, but at that moment she was the most divinely beautiful female dragon he had ever set his eyes upon.

And she was now his.

Word had spread quickly among the Dragon Brigade that their leader and former Elder was now mated to their Dragon Mother. In their eyes this had elevated Daurgo to legendary status even more than his position as an Elder. And they listened even more intently to his experienced words as he sauntered down the main aisle.

...take nothing for granted. No matter the damage done by our missiles, remain alert and spare nothing! Talon Guardian Androcles has given us our orders, and his faith and love for us flows through all of you! Through me!

Daurgo saw many of the six hundred heads lining both sides of the ship nodded. The TYPE I Alpha had been designed and implemented specifically for this purpose. These ships would serve as their chariots into battle. Faster, more heavily armed and equipped with the most advanced sensors and weapons known, the TYPE I Alphas were their homes now. Two hundred and fifty meters longer than the original TYPE I Transports, fitted with extensive plates of the marvelous Dragon Armor, the TYPE I Alphas could carry six hundred of the Dragon Brigade into battle if need be.

You have heard his orders my brothers and sisters. These are orders he gives with a heavy heart for he knows this is not normally our way. Events have dictated what he must do. How we must act. At least now. We are part of the Union. Part of families. Now we must take it upon ourselves to defend what we have come to love and cherish. We must show no mercy! We will take no prisoners! And we will show these Kavalians that there is a reason why they fear us!

The trumpets that followed would have drowned out any sound whatsoever. Daurgo turned his massive head when he felt the elven female reach for him within Mindvoice. Each TYPE I Alpha was crewed by elves. Female elves that were among the finest pilots in the Union. The support crew was a mixture of Lycavorian, Elves, Vampires and two Hadarian Healers per ship. They had trained and worked together for the better part of three years now, and all of their skills would now come into play.

Daurgo... missiles inbound! Twenty seconds to impact!

We hold at the established markers until the missiles have done their work Erliei. Daurgo answered the brown haired pilot. *Then take us in over the base.*

Stand by. Erliei answered. *I'm going to punch it the moment the last missile hits. They'll still be confused when you begin to exit.*

Daurgo smiled at the brazenness of the female elf. He had chosen well when he picked her from a list of potential candidates to fly these TYPE I Alphas. *We will be ready.*

DALEAN

The first MIRV descended to three hundred meters above the Kavalian cloning facility and burst open. One second later another one hundred and forty-three MIRVs did the exact same thing even as Kavalian clone troops and their officers began to look skyward in confusion at the white and black puffs of smoke. They were unaware they were watching their deaths. There were two types of MIRVs in the wave of missiles. The MIRV 1 and the MIRV 2. No one ever said those who designed the missiles were any good at naming things.

The small white puffs of smoke were designated MIRV 1s breaking open and then over four hundred anti-personnel, self propelled darts with the equivalent power to one pound of concentrated JB-19 explosives compound deploying. As was programmed into their small computer brains, the instant the darts cleared the empty shell of the MIRV missile containers, they activated their own tiny engines to adjust their trajectory and choose a target close enough to be accurate. In this case close enough to be accurate was pretty much straight down.

The Kavalian defenses were spread out between the six domed facilities in a layered pattern extending from the center of the massive compound to outside the eight meter high wall that surrounded the ten square kilometer compound. The domed facilities themselves contained the initial creation labs and containment modules. The air defenses were useless against the missiles because their flight profile was very stealthy like the

ZMF missiles and they moved incredibly fast. By the time the missiles arrived from the ships above, the Kavalian gun crews were frantically trying to target them, long sustained and inaccurate fire erupting into the sky above. At least until they started to break open above the battlefield.

The anti-personnel MIRV 1 was affectionately nicknamed the “Bitch slap” by Union ground forces. The Kavalians began to understand why as soon as those small darts began to impact the ground and detonate. It was as if a thousand firecrackers began to go off in huge waves at the same time. The one pound of JB-19 explosive in each dart created a huge cloud as it exploded and sent two hundred small slivers of metal whizzing outward at five thousand feet per second. The effect was horrific even against troops in body armor. Flesh was shredded instantly and without care. The screaming began almost immediately as two meter high tufts of dirt and smoke began to rise from the ground as the MIRV 1 darts landed. Anything within six meters of an exploding dart was immediately perforated with killing metal shards. The blasts would remove arms, legs and even heads as the rumbling continued across the entire expanse of the compound. The only saving grace for the Kavalian troops was the size of the base itself. The MIRV 1s were concentrated over the interior portions of the base and those Kavalian troops watching from outside could only look on in horror as their comrades were blown and shredded into tiny pieces. Anti-aircraft batteries were peppered by metal slivers when the darts landed nearby, ripping gun crews apart and in the case with many of the thirty odd turrets, were destroyed or rendered inoperable when darts landed right on top of the gun turret itself. They saw their comrades stagger from the smoke of explosions missing limbs and sometimes spurting blood from appalling wounds to their bodies.

And then the MIRV 2s began to announce their presence.

Unlike their smaller brothers, the MIRV 2s were the true impact weapon among the flight of missiles that had arrived over the Kavalian cloning facilities. The dark puffs announced the separation of the Ground Penetration warhead from its MIRV vehicle. These warheads were affectionately nicknamed the “Ballbuster” during the Evolli War. Used to go after deep Evolli bunkers, the “Ballbuster” never ceased to reach its target. The two hundred kilograms of JB-19 explosives variant was packed tightly into the dragon armor encased cone like head. Once separation from the MIRV had been achieved, powerful inner rockets ignited and the missiles drove straight down. Admiral Puram had been very accurate in saying that Pian’Nruarani had protected this very site for over a decade. It was Pian’s knowledge that had now guided the missiles to exactly where they would do the most damage. Pian had given this intelligence willingly, knowing that his future with Jalersi and the future of his people now lay with the Lycavorian Union.

The MIRV 2s dove straight into the ground, the rocket engines propelling them at nearly five times the speed of sound, tiny sonic drills built into the tips of the JB-19 warheads clearing the way as the missiles drove down into the earth, some of them reaching a hundred meters deep before detonating. To the Kavalian troops outside the base it appeared as if the ground on the interior of the base suddenly heaved up in dozens of locations and deafening explosive booms shattered the air. Rock, dirt and hundreds of bodies were literally thrown into the air as massive craters began to appear all over the interior of the base perimeter. Massive craters that now exposed the portions of the base that were underground. Connecting tunnels and even the sides of advanced lab facilities were exposed and in most cases ripped open like tin can. Almost always the huge explosions knocked out power to that section or tore open massive entrances to the facilities. Flames and smoked lifted into the air, the stench of charred bodies and blood beginning to saturate the entire area.

More importantly, the openings that had been blasted open were large enough to fit a dragon. A very dangerous breed of dragon that Daurgo had chosen to be part of the Dragon Brigade for one simple reason. They could go places other dragons could not despite their size. Dragons with ruby red scales and long, muscular tails ending in very savage twelve inch spikes. Not only did they have these tails, but the Spiketailed Longwing dragon breed had the unique ability to toss liquid fire from their maws and not normal fire. Liquid fire that stuck to whatever it was launched at and burned it.

Information flowed and COMs were activated, and ten seconds after the last MIRV 2 detonated, Daurgo and the Dragon Brigade were given the green light.

Green light! Green light! Erliei shouted within Mindvoice.

Take us in Erliei! Spare no speed! Daurgo barked. *We must strike swiftly while they are stunned.*

With a war cry that might have matched any Lycavorian Daurgo knew the TYPE I Alpha DRAGON'S BREATH accelerated forward with power and determination under Erliei's expert guidance.

Erliei had them over the top of the Kavalian facility in just under a minute and Daurgo moved into the center of the ship as the massive top mounted doors began to retract and fill the interior of the ship with sunlight.

Go now! Form into your sections and do what you have been trained to do! No mercy! No prisoners! Into battle we fly my brothers and sisters!

Whatever the Kavalian troops outside the wall of the main base expected when they saw the four massive eight hundred meter long ships appear overhead, it was not the three thousand dragons that rose into view. As if rising from a floating tomb they came and began plummeting to the earth below with trumpets of rage. The Kavalian Cloning facility was protected by three divisions of cloned Kavalian troops and hundreds of them had already begun pouring from their underground barracks when Daurgo and the other dragons began to land.

The Kavalians ran right into their deaths.

Daurgo was the first to land, and as he alighted upon the torn open section of tunnel, nearly forty Kavalian troops were pouring out with their weapons at the ready. Daurgo didn't hesitate for a second and unleashed the most powerful stream of flame he could generate. The fifty foot long stream of over three thousand degree heat incinerated virtually all of the Kavalian troops within seconds. All that remained were their charred corpses and smoking heaps. With a trumpet of triumph Daurgo bellowed into the open air a challenge to the Kavalians that they would never understand just as his Dragon Brigade fell upon them with trumpets of savage glee all their own.

One lone Kavalian officer outside the perimeter and looking on from a gun turret began screaming at his crews to realign their weapons to fire upon the dragons even as his blood was turning cold in fear of the monsters before them. He was screaming into his radio unit for his other crews to respond and turned his head to the nearest turret to his west. His eyes grew wide when he saw two massive dragons clinging to the ten meter tall gun tower and ripping its crew to pieces. A flash of movement caused his head to whip around and then his blood did freeze as the muzzle of the green tinted monstrosity appeared in front of him and he felt the thud as the dragon latched onto the tower with his talons. The Kavalian officer risked a glance at his other towers and for as far as his keen eyes could see; dragons were falling upon his gun towers up and down the line. The guns were ineffective against the powerful physic shields of the dragons and quickly the guns fell silent as the dragons either tore them to ribbons or simply burned them out of existence. His head turned back in that split second and he began screaming as that green scaled beast unleashed a violent trumpet and opened its tooth filled maw. The Kavalian officer would scream for several seconds until those teeth smashed down on his body and bit him completely in half as the dragon ripped his body from the interior of the turret and sent the two pieces of his body flying in different directions before turning to burn the gun crew and the turret into ash.

All across the expanse of the base dragons were landing and engaging Kavalian troops who exited in ever increasing numbers, to be struck down just as quickly. The members of the Dragon Brigade all had physic shields that were among the strongest of all living dragons, and the small arms the Kavalians carried really did no damage aside from being irritating. With every bellow of rage, Kavalians died in droves under powerful streams of flame or superheated breath. Bodies were shattered by Dragon Armor encased wings and Heavyhorn tails. Whole groups of Kavalians were ripped to pieces by talons better suited to carving metal and stone. The river of blood quickly began to rise as Daurgo landed amidst a small group of three and crushed one into the earth before lifting one into his maw and using his body to smash the life from the other before he tossed the Kavalian into the air and sent him hurtling some hundred meters away, his lifeless body landing with a sickening crunch and splat. Daurgo lifted his armored head skyward to where he saw two hundred dragons still circling above.

Ordin! Now my brother! Lead them in now!

The commander of the Spiketail Longwing dragon contingent trumpeted his answer and the smaller, but no less dangerous dragons plunged for the earth and the openings they had spotted from the air. The Spiketail dragons were thinner than their Heavyhorn and Firespitter brothers and sisters, their bodies lean and muscular and allowing them to squeeze into crevices and cracks the others could not. This also allowed them to be able to move within the many tunnels of the underground base they had been sent here to assault. With a cry of outrage and glee the two hundred Spiketails swooped down out of the sky and began disappearing into the once impregnable Kavalian base now torn open like paper machete by the MIRV 2 missiles.

Ordin, the leader of this contingent of the Dragon Brigade, was fifty meters inside the first tunnel when he came upon two dozen terrified troops and scientists. He had been soon to be named to the Elder Council to represent the growing number of Spiketail dragons that were making a comeback. When Daurgo first came to him about what they were doing Ordin did not hesitate. This is how his breed of dragon would make a name for themselves and be welcomed back into the fold of so many. When Ordin opened his maw and cut loose with liquid flame the screams started.

Then the true slaughter began.

47TH KAVALIAN TACTICAL FLEET GROUP COMMAND SHIP GREATSOUL DREADNOUGHT *FANGS OF STEEL*

“...lost a hundred and nineteen ships destroyed!” Joram screamed to his father as the FANGS OF STEEL shuddered under another barrage from what appeared to be a group of powerful smaller ships that were coordinating their attacks by dropping in and out of Shroud.

“Another fifty-nine too heavily damaged to fight! Half our force gone in the first sixty seconds!”

“Admiral!” His COM officer barked from across the bridge. “We have lost contact with the ground teams! They reported a massive missile barrage and then...”

“Speak man!” Puram barked angrily.

“Then the man said thousands of dragons were pouring from huge ships above the facilities!” The COM officer answered.

Puram’s eyes grew wide. “Dragons!” He gasped in revulsion. “Sensors! Sensors!”

“Confirming four ships in stationary position above the facility!” The man answered. “Some sort of transport! Almost seven hundred meters in length and radiating power sources unlike anything I have ever seen!”

Joram turned to look at his father. “They have Shrouded ships that can carry dragons this far?” He screamed.

“That fool Keleru has done it this time!” Puram screamed. “He has waken the wrath of the one force in the galaxy we have no hope against!”

“Admiral... that group of attack ships has de-shrouded off our stern!” Another voice barked. “They are preparing to fire!”

Admiral Puram’Kell had come to the turning point in his life.

The single moment in the life of all beings where their path laid before them in multiple directions and they had a choice to make. Puram had only two choices before him. Remain here and be obliterated by a smaller but obviously much more well armed and trained and motivated Lycavorian Task Force bent solely on revenge. His son, himself, all the men he had trained for years to operate as a single unit and as part of a greater whole. They would be blown out of the stars in a hopeless attempt at defending something Puram and many of them thought of as foul anyway. They would die under the onslaught of a force who would not be deterred in their goal of destruction. Puram had cautioned for years about provoking the Lycavorian Union, for war with them meant taking a leap in to the unknown annals of modern war. No one knew how they would fight. No one knew how they would act. The Evolli War was only a small portion of the window into the Lycavorian mindset. And that war started because the Evolli got greedy and made the mistake of conquering a helpless colony planet. An event that saw the end of their government and nearly their people because of their leader’s greed. It was no different here. Keleru and Pusintin wanted more. More power. More control. They would destroy all of what the

Kavalian people had gained in the last millennia by their actions. The Lycavorian Union was not the High Coven. They would fight and kill, never surrender and never retreat. Every victory would be at the cost of more blood than they could afford to lose. Every defeat would set back their gains by decades. Puram could die here. He could let his men die here.

Which brought him to his second option.

Run.

Run and find Pian'Nruarani. The man had obviously made his choice and he had the support of the Lycavorian Union. His priorities were towards his people and their advancement. This fact only shone through in how he had obviously won the affection of Jalersi'Puat. The oldest daughter of Keleru'Puat was known to be very intelligent and forward thinking. Save himself and his men and ships for the battle that Pian was going to wage. The battle for the future of his people. Their people. And the Lycavorian Union was obviously helping him in that goal, which meant they would consider a friend of Pian's a friend of theirs.

"Father!" Joram screamed at him, shocking him from his thoughts.

Puram'Kell made his decision. Quite easily in fact.

"All ships! Directive Seven! Directive Seven! Execute now and rendezvous at pre-plotted coordinates!" Puram shouted looking at his son. "We die here protecting those who have brought ruin to us all or we escape and join with Pian'Nruarani and fight for the future of our people!"

Joram didn't hesitate. "Directive Seven! Issue the order! Directive Seven! Helm... full about! Engage emergency LSD operation! All ships emergency LSD operation. We are jumping in ten seconds!"

ARIZONA

"Miranda! Kavalian ships are engaging their LSD drives! They're preparing to jump away!" E'dira barked from her station.

Miranda came to her feet. "What? Confirm!"

"Confirmed! Command ship is engaging LSD Drive core! All ships not engaged are turning away and activating their Drive cores!" E'dira announced.

"They're running?" Miranda gasped. "Fucking cowards!"

"Fleet units asking if they are to pursue!" The COM officer exclaimed.

"Negative!" Miranda barked. "It could be a trap! No pursuit! No pursuit!" Miranda moved over beside E'dira and Zaala joined her there. The three females had become sort of a bridge click and Miranda approved since she got one set of ideas from E'dira and one from Zaala. "Thoughts?" She asked.

As was usual, E'dira spoke first. "A trick to draw us away from the planet so they can slip back in and hit our ground teams. Our numbers do not bode well to splitting our forces and any sort of ground bombardment on the dragons will kill many of them."

"Or they could have just realized it is stupid to die here for the Kavalian leader." Zaala stated. "Their ships are much older than the ones at Kranek Miranda. We are essentially shooting ducks in a pond. They can not match us!"

E'dira nodded her head. "Correct as well." She stated. "Zaala is accurate when she says we are pounding them into oblivion."

"I thought Kavalians fought to the death." Miranda said.

"We have seen discontent within their ranks." E'dira spoke before Zaala answered.

Zaala nodded. "Pian'Nruarani. This Mican and his rebels that Resumar found." She spoke. "Perhaps this Kavalian commander did not want to die for Keleru and Pusintin either."

"Recommendations?" Miranda asked.

"Let them go!" Zaala said. "Let them go and let's finish what Andro sent us here to do."

E'dira surprisingly nodded her head. "I concur. Why risk ourselves. If they do not wish to fight then let us focus on supporting Daurgo and the Dragon Brigade and destroy those foul cloning facilities."

"And what will Andro say?" Miranda asked softly.

“He did not put you in command in order to second guess your decisions.” E'dira spoke quickly. “You of all of us should know that. And I do not believe Androcles Leonidas is as cruel and unforgiving as many believe. Harsh yes... very much so. But genocidal... no.”

Zaala nodded. “E'dira is correct.” She spoke.

Miranda nodded her head and made her decision. She turned back to her bridge crew. “Order all ships to disengage and reform on the ARIZONA, YAMATO and MISSOURI. All fighters to remain airborne. Return and rearm as necessary. Have Steven get his squadron on the deck and give us an eyeball on the ground. Commander Usaro’s squadron to provide high cover.”

The skilled vampire pilot from General Esavorna’s command had volunteered to be assigned to the ARIZONA to further relations and show her loyalty to the cause. She had quickly become an excellent asset and fit in easily with the ARIZONA crew.

“And get me a line to Androcles!” Miranda said.

DALEAN

Ordin drew his huge head from the entrance to the massive chamber of sleeping clones. None of the hundreds of chambers had power to them anymore and the life giving liquid had already turned a sick orange color as the clones inside who had not yet been birthed began to die by the thousands. He had seen where some of his other Spiketails had reached the lower portion of the breeding center and either burned or tore the equipment to pieces, leaving nothing untouched. All of them had intently studied the many images provided by Pian that he had either drawn or provided from memories via Mindvoice. Images that had been passed from him to Cemath and then copied to a hard disc by 341 on SPARTA'S WRATH.

The corridors of the underground facilities were now littered with hundreds of dead bodies. Burn marks dotted many of the walls, mixed in with the indentations from heavy weapons fire. He was close to the entrance and he looked back to the second Spiketail that had joined him.

This section is demolished. He spoke.

Talon Guardian Androcles did tell us to be thorough General. The young dragon answered flippantly.

Ordin’s muzzle parted in what was a smile for a dragon. *Indeed he did Horath. Come... we must join with Elder Daurgo on the surface and report.*

Both of them heard the faint scrapping on the floor and Ordin nodded his head as they passed the single door. The badly wounded Kavalian soldier, burns covering roughly fifty percent of his body leaped into the corridor between them and leveled his weapon at Ordin’s rear. His burned and ravaged face prevented him from seeing Ordin’s Second. Just as he was about to pull the trigger of his rifle he gasped in agony as the two long spikes erupted from his chest and he was driven forward with stunning power. His one good eye looked down and saw the protruding gray spikes from his chest as more blood began to pool beneath his feet as he was lifted from the floor. His head lifted and he turned to see the second dragon behind him. Horath stared at him for a moment with gleaming red eyes and then smashed his tail against the metal wall of the corridor, crushing the Kavalian instantly as the two spikes punched holes in the wall. Horath drew his tail back and let the body fall to the floor and he followed his commander.

Ordin appeared in the bright sunlight once more, smoke filtering across the horizon from the many fires that burned. His keen eyes spotted the large body of Daurgo in the center of the facility just as his talons impaled two Kavalians who were inert on the ground. With a quick and powerful flip of his wings he lifted into the air and crossed the five hundred meters to his leader in three heartbeats.

Daurgo turned as he landed and faced him. *Ordin?*

The eastern section is completely destroyed. Ordin reported. *I checked the breeding center before leaving. There is no power to the chambers and the clones inside are all dead. It appears they could not last very long without the liquid in their chambers.*

Daurgo and Ordin lifted their heads as nine TEMPEST fighters roared overhead very close to the ground.

Steven Randall? Daurgo reached out sensing the man easily. His Mindvoice skills were not as well refined as others, but he was a bright spot among the tendrils in the sky just above them.

Miranda wanted me to give her an eyeball General. Steven's voice filled both Daurgo and Ordin's minds.

The eastern and southern complex sections are no more. I am waiting for reports on the western and northern complexes. I expect the same. Daurgo answered.

Lot of bodies General. Steven spoke softly.

Too many my friend. Daurgo answered. *This Keleru has much blood to answer for.*

Yes he does. Steven answered. *I have Arдона's and my squadron above you General. We'll remain as long as our fuel holds out or until you are finished.*

Daurgo saw two Spiketails take flight from the western and northern entrances and nodded. *My reports are coming now. We will not be here much longer.*

In his M7 TEMPEST Steven Randall nodded and keyed his COM unit. "Arдона... we'll remain in orbit until they are clear."

"*Vith me Steven Randall. They... they decimated this facility.*" Arдона gasped over the intercom. "I have... I have never seen so many bodies. This is what... this is what we would have fought if my people continued down the path we were on."

"Not anymore... so put it out of your mind." Steven spoke. "You and General Esavorna are part of the Union now. All of you."

"Yes. Yes we are." She answered.

"Scar Actual to ARIZONA Actual. Situation appears well in hand. General Daurgo says they will be departing soonest."

"Understood Scar Actual. Continue to orbit and advise the general the faster he can get things done the better." Miranda's voice echoed.

"Acknowledged." Steven spoke.

Daurgo watched as the two Spiketails from Ordin's section landed beside him.

The northern complex is in ruin General.

The western one as well. We left the bodies where they fell.

Daurgo looked at him. *Survivors?*

We left no one General. As ordered.

Daurgo nodded and looked at Ordin. *It is time we left this place my friend. Have your sections take flight first. I will follow with the others just after you.*

Ordin nodded. *It needed to be done Daurgo. We all saw the reports Androcles showed us. We needed to do this in order to buy the time we need for the future of our Union.*

Daurgo nodded. *I know. This is a victory... but as Androcles knows... it is also a crime what we had to do here today. A crime he will make Keleru pay for in spades.*

Ordin nodded his huge head and looked at his section leaders. *Gather your sections and return to your ships! Quickly now! We can not afford to be here if the Kavalians return.*

Daurgo took that time to gaze slowly around at the devastation the Dragon Brigade and the missiles had wrought. He had no doubts that there were still survivors that they had not discovered. They would be left to tell the tale and pass on the horror of what happened here this day. As much as it may have bothered him to conduct this mission, as Ordin said, it needed to be done. The first mission of the Dragon Brigade had been a success across the board. Daurgo was not fool enough to think that would last. He would lose dragons in battle, it was inevitable. All he could do was make sure he led them to the best of his ability.

Daurgo inhaled deeply and released a deafening trumpet that carried across the landscape far and wide. Dragons began to return his call and then they began to rise into the sky like the majestic creatures they were to return to their ships.

They left behind ten million dead Kavalian clones that had not yet reached maturity and been birthed and over seventy thousand dead Kavalian soldiers. The largest and most active Kavalian cloning center was now nothing but a memory as parts of it still burned in the distance across the base. Even combined, the remaining cloning facilities would not be able to produce so many clones in less than six months. The price in terms of Kavalian life had been high, but the mission was complete.

Androcles would have his time.

And the Kavalian Federation would take pause and think about what they had gotten themselves into.

CABELIR COMMAND BUNKER

“How!” Keleru screamed. “One of you tell me how this has happened!”

The ranking Pride leaders and members of the military council remained silent as Keleru raged.

“Our homeworld!” Keleru shouted. “They strike on our homeworld and at the heart of our Military Command Compound! Just to free a few dozens whores! And we let them!” Keleru threw the data pads in his hand across the large room watching as they shattered against the far wall. “I want every officer and soldier on duty when they took the females executed! Do you hear me? I want them dead! Dead! They failed in their duties and we must show them the price for failure!”

“I will see to it Prefect.” Admiral Caruma’Pameni spoke softly.

“How did this happen?” Keleru asked a second time and more in control of his emotions. “How did they strike on our homeworld? How did we not know his father still lives? How did we not see they would side with the High Coven? Have the reports come in from the Farnuri Expanse yet? Do we know if what he said is true?”

The rapid fire questions caused most of the men present to be silent. Pride Leader and Admiral Diseno got to his feet however.

“I dispatched a scout ship immediately after the boy boasted of this Prefect.” He spoke. “We will not know anything for another few hours. We must assume the worse however. I don’t believe he would have boasted of it if it was not true in some way. We have received no answer to our Communications calls either.”

Keleru shook his head and picked up another data pad from the table. “I received this just before beginning that transmission. It is from Pusintin’s Second Officer. Pusintin was severely injured in a battle with his brother. Half of his task force was destroyed by an unknown ship of Union make, and he lost two thirds of his Puma Bane detachment on the ground. Popal is currently making his way to Talbor Seven where there is a Hadarian Medical Clinic.”

“The Marshall’s injuries were that severe Prefect?” Pride Leader Liatthi asked.

Keleru nodded. “Apparently so. Popal’s transmission stated that Pusintin was trying to warn us of a trap. I did not know what he meant until now.”

“Is the Marshall returning Prefect?” Liatthi asked.

Keleru nodded his head. “Popal will have him contact me after he has been treated by the Hadarian. I want all out front lone units brought to full readiness. What of our Fleet Groups waiting to invade the Coven? I want them ready to turn and hit the Union.”

“They are standing by Prefect.” Caruma stated. “However... given what has happened Prefect, I believe we should hit the Coven now.”

“Now?” Liatthi gasped. “Are you mad?”

“Now is the perfect time!” Caruma snapped. “Their military is divided! Spread out! A concentrated invasion striking right for their heart will break them!”

“And what if the Union intervenes?” Liatthi barked right back. “Their boy leader has already told them they will have whatever support he can spare!”

“What can he spare?” Liatthi hissed. “A few Fleet Groups? We have fifteen ready to strike right now! Against what? Four or five Coven Fleet Groups? We could sweep them aside and be to the High Coven homeworld in three days! We can end the war with them so that we can fully concentrate on the Union!”

“We have never gotten close to their homeworld in all these years.” Keleru spoke. “What makes you so certain we can achieve this now?”

“They have never been in disarray as they are now Prefect.” Liatthi spoke. “The vile Empress is dead! The bitch daughter has run off to fuck her Immortal puppet. That leaves the daughter Narice in charge... just where the Spartan Prince put her. She has little support and no military to back her except the Union’s.”

“We don’t know that for sure.” Caruma spoke.

“My spies within the Coven tell me otherwise.” Liatthi spoke. “They tell me the Coven is divided and suspect. The military turns against each other! Soon they will turn against this Narice. A sword strike right to their heart and we win the war with the Coven in days, not years!”

“We have lost contact with a fleet comprising one fourth of our most advanced warships and you want to take half of what remains and strike the High Coven?” Caruma looked at him. “That is madness even for you Liatthi.”

“What do you suggest we do?” Liatthi growled. “Sit by and do nothing? The Union has declared war on us! Us! That impudent boy Spartan thinks he is brave and wise! I say we show him his place in the galaxy!”

Keleru turned when his nephew came into the room. Kattu walked up to him with a look of severe discomfort on his face. “Kattu?” Keleru asked. “What is wrong?”

“Uncle I...” Kattu began.

“Spit it out Kattu!” Keleru snapped.

“A *PURUSIAN*-Class frigate from our force in the Farnuri Expanse has just sent a COM signal to us Uncle.” He spoke looking at Keleru. “The Captain of the ship... he says they were ambushed by a ship. He says this ship was over seven kilometers long and wielded weapons unlike anything we have seen before. The moment it appeared it began decimating our forces there! And then a Union Task Force de-shrouded and joined in the attack.” Kattu looked at his Uncle. “This Captain says only twenty-three ships survived Uncle.”

Liatthi and Caruma came to their feet in disbelief, as well as several others. “Twenty-three?” Caruma gasped. “That fleet had over six hundred ships in it! How is that even possible Kattu?”

“I do not know Admiral.” Kattu spoke in reply. “It seems... it seems unlikely but that is what the Captain says. He seemed quite shaken to be honest. We can review his ships logs when he returns but... if anything, this confirms that our fleet in the Farnuri Expanse is no more Uncle. Just as Androcles Leonidas stated.”

Keleru looked at his nephew. “You have more?” He asked. “Tell us Kattu?”

Kattu blinked several times and then simply blurted it out. “The cloning facilities on Dalean have been obliterated Uncle.” He spoke. “We received word from a surviving officer only minutes ago. The Union attacked with missiles from orbit and then Dragons.”

“Dragons?” Keleru nearly shouted.

Kattu nodded. “All of our scientists are dead, perhaps ten percent of the ground forces survive and none of the clones. They targeted the facilities on purpose Uncle. They destroyed everything. All of the clones ready to be birthed are dead. None remain.”

“The facility on Dalean had nearly ten million clones ready to deliver!” Keleru gasped. “All of them are gone?”

Kattu nodded. “The facility is completely destroyed. Somehow... somehow they got dragons into the underground tunnels and they systematically destroyed everything. The officer was still trying to discover the extent of the damage, but he was very clear that the cloning facilities themselves were annihilated.”

Keleru turned from the others and moved across the room his famous temper once more coming to the forefront. “How?” He asked.

“The officer was not aware of the composition of their fleet; he only saw the dragons and the ships they arrived in. Four massive ships that dropped to within two hundred meters of the ground and released the dragons. He estimates several thousand at least. The ships match the description of the Union Type I Dragon Transports but they were much larger and were equipped with Shrouds and small turrets. The dragons wore armor like those within the Union and they tore into the base defenders before the missile barrage was barely over.” Kattu told him.

“And the fleet guarding the planet?” Keleru asked.

Kattu shook his head. “No word Uncle. Given what happen on the ground I suspect they too were destroyed by whatever force the Union sent to Dalean. There are... there are ships headed there now but we will not know anything solid for several hours.”

Keleru felt the cold hand of fear in his gut but his anger at being made to look the fool overrode his caution. He turned to Liatthi. “You will take command of the forces detailed to the High Coven! Strike them hard Liatthi! Show them no mercy and crush them.”

Liatthi nodded. “I will Prefect.” He boasted.

Keleru turned to his nephew. "Kattu... issue the activation orders for our forces near Uirmeik. I want them pouring across the Union border by the end of tomorrow! They are to drive right for Elear. Nothing is to deter them! Nothing! This boy Prince thinks he can outwit me... let us see how he responds to that?"

Kattu nodded his head. "As you order Uncle."

"We outnumber the Union five to one!" Keleru snapped. "I will use this advantage and destroy them! I will crush them and rape their women! I will destroy their cities and their precious Sparta! And when I capture this boy Prince I will insure I remove his internal organs with a dull blade!"

"Prefect... may I suggest we wait!" Caruma spoke now. "We need more information about what we face and..."

"NO!" Keleru snarled. "I will not wait! I want his head do you hear me! I want his head on a plate so I can show the Union fools they are nothing compared to us! I will accept nothing less! You are my military leaders! That is what I want! I expect you to achieve it!"

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND SECONDARY COMMAND CENTER

"...did the right thing Manda." Andro spoke looking at Miranda in the holotransmission.

"We're enroute back to Earth now." Miranda told him. "We should be back in Union space within four hours."

"Move to your holding area on the far side of the moon and remain shrouded." Andro told her.

"Resumar arrives with *SPARTA'S WRATH* in less than an hour. I do not want the Netnews to get too much information on our new ships in a single day."

Miranda nodded. "Will do."

"Thank you Manda." Andro said. "I'll see you when you arrive."

The transmission ended and Androcles looked at his grandfather. "Two for two so far grandfather." He said.

Riall nodded. "But will he react as we hope he will?" Riall asked moving to the plot board and pointing to the star chart.

Andro came up next to him. "I would imagine right now he is screaming for my head." He said. "He has little options. I made him look the fool grandfather with the victories we have had he will want blood."

Riall nodded. "No doubt." He answered. "But it should not be yours he wants. Provoking him as you have done has now painted a very large target on your back Andro. Many of us are not comfortable with that."

Andro nodded. "Perhaps... but it needed to be done." He said. "If my Uncle does what father believes he will then Keleru will be calling the shots. At least initially. And a military officer he is not."

Riall shook his head. "It is... it is hard to believe that your father thinks Pusintin actually has fallen in love with your mother."

"He saw him... we did not." Andro spoke. "I can speak from experience however, when I say that an elven mate is... for lack of a better description... addicting."

Riall looked at him with a sly smile. "Better not let Sadi hear you say that." He said.

Andro chuckled. "It was Sadi who said it first." He said. "Besides... no elven female will ever come close to Sadi in my eyes."

Riall grinned. "The benefits of having an *Anome*." He said. "Nothing can match their scent or the taste of their bodies."

Andro nodded. "No they can't."

Riall looked over the plot board. "Do we continue with the original plan?"

Andro nodded. "We determined a long time ago that this was the only way to stop them should an attack come from Uirmeik. It was father's idea grandfather."

"Yes... thirteen years ago." Riall said. "We did not have the technology we have now Andro."

“We cannot risk *SPARTA'S WRATH* against what he will undoubtedly throw through this lone corridor.” Andro said. “And with you leaving for High Coven space within the hour we do not have the time to establish or plan out a defense of that nature.”

Riall nodded. “I know... but we will be rendering all travel through this sector a Class Six hazard for at least a decade Andro. The gravitational forces will be in a state of flux for at least that long according to the models by Avi.”

“I'm open to options?” Andro said.

Riall looked at the chart. “There are none. I know that.”

“It is not widely traveled as it is grandfather.” Andro spoke. “It may bleed over a little, but nothing that an experienced ship captain could not avoid. I do not want to do it either... by we must neutralize the Kavalian advantage in numbers as well as force them to come from where we will be better prepared.”

“They could just bypass Consortium space and attack from Limian space.” Riall spoke motioning with his finger on the chart. “A direct line to Elear and then Folcan and Semtola and then on to Apo Prime.

Andro nodded. “They could... but tactically speaking they won't and you know it.” He replied. “They do not have Shrouds and to come that far through not only Consortium space but also Limian? It would take too much time. Their window is now.”

Riall nodded. “Are you sure?”

Andro looked at his adopted grandfather. A man who had more tactical experience than he could possibly have without jumping three thousand years into the future. A man who had taught him almost all he knew about ship combat and moving mass fleets through space. “You taught me everything I know grandfather.” Andro said. “Is there any other option?”

Riall shook his head after a long moment. “No. We do not have the numbers to match them head on even with *SPARTA'S WRATH*.” He stood to his full height. “The Netnews people will crucify you for this. Or shout your name to the moon in praise.”

“What they think is unimportant to me.” Andro stated. “I must act as my father would act to safeguard our people. We need time to build up our forces. To implement them. This buys us that time at minimal loss of life. I have already taken more lives in my lifetime than I ever imagined. If I am to be damned for doing so... then I will do so insuring my people have a fighting chance.”

Riall nodded. “Then do it.” He spoke. “And within the next two days or it will not matter.” Riall said. “Once the order is given they will need perhaps thirty hours before they pour across our border in droves.”

Andro nodded his head. “I will.” He said softly. “I will.”

Riall nodded. “*GORGOS HONOR* awaits.” He said. “I must leave.”

“Fight well grandfather.” Andro said.

“Be mindful of your grandmother.” Riall spoke with a slight smile. “She has a tendency to be a bit testy when I leave for battle.”

Andro smiled. “I will.”

Riall pulled Andro into a rib cracking hug that Androcles returned. “You are not alone boy.” He said softly. “You are never alone. Your father believes in you. As do we all.”

Androcles laughed softly. “Somehow I think my father may have gotten the better end of this deal.” He said. “If I know him, he is most likely indisposed as he rediscovers all of my mothers and no doubt one or more of them will be carrying a child when they return.”

Riall laughed. “He is a randy wolf isn't he?” He said.

Andro nodded. “Go with the gods grandfather. May our ancestors watch over and guide us.”

“*Avoi*.” Riall spoke.

ARC ROYAL **COREWARD OF THE PERSEUS ARM**

Androcles was semi correct in his assumption.

Martin Leonidas did have plans to rediscover all of his mates and show them how much he loved them all, but at the moment only one occupied his full and undivided attention. And that was more her decision than anything else. For'mya Leonidas had waited long enough and the female Alpha wolf that resided in her decided that it was time to get what she wanted. What she had hungered after for so many years. What she desperately needed to feel and experience once more to truly be whole again. Her Alpha male husband and mate was not disappointing her in any way. In fact, he was driving her blissfully insane with exquisite resolve.

For'mya's supple body was slick with a fine sheen of sweat that had not been able to cool or dry in the last ten hours. She released yet another deep guttural moan of decadent bliss as she dropped herself fully onto Martin's huge organ once again. She ground and twisted her slim hips upon him reaching for the pinnacle of pleasure, even as he touched places within her she didn't think she had. For'mya knew it was his heated aura that caused her to think these things, for he had touched and reached these places many times before, but never with such devastating and unrestrained gratification. His unshielded aura had set her lush elven and wolf body ablaze with desire unlike anything she had experienced before with her beautiful mate. The man who had claimed all that she was so long ago. What she had craved for so long was now hers and For'mya Leonidas was unwilling to let the overwhelming sensations abate without fully basking in their breath stealing wonder. Every dominating stroke he made into her supple frame claimed her over and over again. Every breath stealing plunge into her depths and she whimpered in heavenly delight. He was holding nothing back from her, taking her with such power and force and overwhelming love.

For'mya had lost count of her orgasmic explosions within the first hour, Martin taking her to places neither of them had been together. His hands and fingers were a never ending source of movement and exploration and pleasure inducing devices, so large and gentle across her body that it was hard to believe he could kill so easily with them. His lips and tongue paid special attention to her breasts as she knew they would. The accelerated serum had increased the size of her firm globes by nearly a full cup, and made them even more sensitive. Martin discovered this in the first few moments and had since tortured them non-stop, keeping her gasping and jumping with glee. Martin was the largest man she had ever been with, only the third man in her entire thousand plus years of life, yet the moment she had felt him fully bury himself within her that first night all those years ago, For'mya knew no other could compare. He stretched her, filled her to the point of superb enchantment. No matter how many times they had made love in the last twenty-five plus years it had always left her shivering in blissful satisfaction and wanting more. He could go on for hours, and with the wolf blood surging through her veins she could too.

Now though, it was so very different. Now she could feel the full power of his unshielded aura, his mind wrapped around hers in a protective cocoon so she would experience the full influence of his essence and not become a babbling female. Every jolt of pleasure, every simple movement sent waves of colossal delight crashing through her. She could feel every thick beautiful inch of his manhood as he impaled her over and over, the lava like heat and pulsing of his twelve inch cock against the walls of her soaked pussy. The tingling his skin caused against hers. This night she was experiencing all of him. The parts of him that only Aricia or Dysea could endure until now. The tendrils of their minds were connected so completely and she could see deep within his thoughts, feel how Anja had felt when he had done the same with her a few weeks before. The burning of her Hadarian blood. The sizzling of Dysea's blood and Aricia's blood as he took them. The rapturous force of Bella's cries and Cirith's moans as he made them his, just as he was doing to her now. It was so absolutely divine.

The times his brother had forced himself upon her, made her feel things physically while her mind screamed in protest, those were quickly washed away. His brother could not even come close to the power of Martin's aura when he unleashed it upon her. His first eruption into her had purged all of his brother's foul essence from her, and the next three had cleansed her soul and finally and forever made For'mya his and only his. The love she had for this man was inexplicable as she clutched at his broad shoulders over and over while he powered into her, whispering into his ears, urging him on, gasping in uncontrollable pleasure. For'mya pushed him down with surprising strength this time. Her hands braced on his broad, powerful chest, his yellow gold eyes staring at her lost in the pleasure she was giving him. She could feel every single vein of his cock within her, every throbbing of life and pleasure as she rotated her hips hard on his. She wanted him to erupt within her once more. To finally and without question make her completely his. Her head tilted back to stare at

the ceiling as the crushing waves of pleasure began to smoothly vibrate through her. She was so close. They were so close.

For'mya's dark brown eyes flew open when she felt velvet heat engulf both her painfully erect nipples and electric pleasure screamed in her mind. Her head came forward quickly and she could do nothing but whimper in unabashed love as she saw the reason. Dysea, her long platinum hair spilling all over had trapped one of her nipples within her luscious lips. Their newest and breathtakingly beautiful mate Cirith held the other hard bud in the grasp of her sweet lips and they were torturing her nipples. Both of them were fully naked and driving her further up to the edge. She saw Bella's beautiful face beside Martin's, her lips and tongue dancing across his throat and neck, her stunning cobalt blue eyes gazing at her in hunger and want. Then she felt Aricia and Anja press against her on either side, their naked flesh sending powerful tremors of love pounding through her. Their large, firm breasts pressed tightly against her shoulders and their hands holding Dysea and Cirith's heads in place as they suckled her nipples.

It was appropriate that it was Aricia and Anja beside her, nuzzling her throat and neck, dragging their soft lips across her skin and nibbling on her four inch high elven ears. The three of them had groan so much closer through their many years together since Seanna's death. She and Aricia had showed Anja that she was never alone and never without companionship. Anja could do such magnificent things with her beautiful tongue and just the feel of Aricia's female aura could set For'mya off. Now they were doing it too her.

We have missed you so Kinsoaurgai. Aricia's sweet voice filled her pleasure hazed mind.

It's time Kinsoaurgai. Anja spoke now as her sizzling hot lips drew every closer to For'mya's quivering ones.

It's time for you to join us. Dysea's voice echoed. *Time for you to experience what it feels like.*

For'mya's mind was swirling as continued jolts of pleasure shot through her from both her breasts and from her grinding atop Martin's dominating cock. *What... Wha...* She could barely form words as the crushing pleasure was growing. Growing larger than anything she had felt yet.

Within our bodies... Cirith spoke.

And our minds. Isabella finished.

For'mya's eyes grew wide as she felt Martin swell impossibly large inside her. As he swelled, the heat of her body grew and grew, the pleasure riding the same wave and increasing. It smashed against her mind, her whole body aflame like never before.

Welcome home to us Kinsoaurgai. Anja's sweet words filtered to her dazed mind just before she plunged her four inch long tongue between For'mya's gasping lips in a soul robbing kiss of love.

For'mya screamed against Anja's kiss and didn't see Bella open her mouth, extend her vampiric fangs and plunge them into Martin's thick neck. She felt a moment of delicious pain as Cirith sent her own fangs into her flesh just above her rigid nipple and then the entire world exploded into a kaleidoscope of beauty and pleasure. She felt Martin tense beneath her and then erupt within her depths like an exploding volcano. As the heat of his essence filled her, For'mya exploded seconds later in the most crushing orgasm of her entire life. Her whole body vibrated as Anja deepened their kiss and Aricia began nibbling on the outer ridge of her elven ear. As Cirith fed on her blood while Dysea suckled her other breast like an infant. While Martin's hands gripped her hips almost painfully and Isabella's eyes nearly rolled into her head as she fed on Martin's blood. Orgasmic blood that caused Bella to shudder in her own orgasm.

There was no reason to fight it and For'mya knew this. She surrendered all she was to her beautiful mate and fellow Queens. This is what she had wanted for so long and as the tidal waves of passion and lust and desire and pleasure rocketed through her, For'mya let go and embraced it all.

It would be several minutes before any of them finally came down from their orgasmic high to do anything coherently. For'mya collapsed upon Martin's chest, his still throbbing cock so deep within her and still leaking his essence. Her eyelids were heavy as she saw Anja beside her and then Aricia moving close against Anja's back. Within moments it was hard to tell where one of them started and the others ended so entangled were their limbs. For'mya lifted her head slowly until she was looking into the yellow/gold orbs she adored. His hands came up and took her beautiful elven face in their grasp and he kissed her ever so softly.

Now. Now you are truly mine For'mya Leonidas. His mind whispered to her. *All of you are truly mine. For eternity.*

His words caused her strength to surge and a smile split her face as she stroked his bearded cheek. Her black ringed wolf eyes smiled at him as the tips of her smaller dual wolf fangs extended just under her upper lip. *I do not think we are done my handsome mate.* She spoke in a sultry and desire filled voice.

Martin grinned as well now, exposing the fearsome dual set of incisor fangs only found in the Leonidas bloodline. *No... I don't think we are.* He spoke.

With a groan of disappointment, but knowing what pleasures were still to come, For'mya lifted herself from Martin's still exceptionally hard cock. Using her inbred elven and wolf speed For'mya turned her head and rolled off Martin's body to capture Cirith within her embrace. Cirith's cry of surprise was lost against For'mya's lips as Martin rolled over just as quickly, pulling both Anja and Aricia with him onto the floor. Soon there were more cries of unmatched pleasure filling the interior of the room. Cries of pleasure from seven different voices that would continue for a dozen more hours before ceasing.

BETA QUADRANT AUSTROVA CALIRIA'S APARTMENT

Caliria rose from her bed, wrapping the sheets around her body as the sun filtered into her bedroom from the large bay window and balcony. There had been a point ever so recently that Caliria never thought she would see her apartment here again. It was larger than most of the apartments in the building she knew, an advantage no doubt because of her name. She was one floor down from the roof of the two hundred and ten story apartment building just on the outskirts of the campus of Mydala University. In the distance from her window she could see the Board of Regents center stretching across the river that cut the capital city in half. She had been here infrequently in the weeks leading up to her kidnapping but upon returning with Paga the night before the comfort she got from being here came back quickly. The apartment was completely her, and reflected her tastes and personality, from the exotic wall art to her choice of furniture. Her bed was huge, with a canopied top and thick pillars on all four corners. The floor length curtains were a rich violet color and there were plants everywhere. Caliria was thrilled that all of them had survived and her first chore was to through her entire apartment and water and refresh each plant while Paga scoured the apartment for security purposes.

Paga had been a constant shadow for her and while at first she thought she would take offense at this, she found the Lycavorian female to be genuinely honest and warm and friendly. She had begun to open up to Paga slowly over the last two days staying at Arduri's apartment as they had. She had dropped her personal bags in the smaller guest room that Caliria had used for an office and proceeded to sweep the entire apartment for any listening devices.

Sleeping in her own bed had felt so very good... but Caliria could not deny there was a loneliness within her as she clutched her pillows to her chest the night before. As she stood in the balcony doorway looking out over the city, the smell of food came to her. She knew it had to be Paga, and tossing her wild black hair over her shoulder she crossed her room and moved into the main area of the apartment. The kitchen was off to the left and she saw Paga standing in the center of the kitchen sipping a glass of berry juice while watching the food that sizzled on the standard cooking stove. Paga wore just a simple t-shirt that stretched past her tight ass and down to her thighs, her short brown hair hanging free around her shoulders. Her eyes cut to Caliria as she exited her bedroom and she lowered the glass.

"I hope... I hope you don't mind." She spoke quickly.

Caliria smiled as she moved to the counter that separated the kitchen and main area. She perched her bottom on one chair easily. "No." She spoke quickly. "I did not think there was anything in there. I rarely ate here. I usually ate on campus or within the Food Court off campus grounds."

Paga smiled. "I managed to whip some things together." She said. "It's a beautiful apartment Caliria." She said.

Caliria nodded. "One of the few indulgences I allowed myself to obtain because of my name." She said. "It was the last one like it available."

Paga lowered her glass to the counter and looked at her. "Listen... I think I have an idea of hard this is for you. I can find other accommodations nearby I'm sure. I don't... I don't want you to think I am spying for the Prince or Princesses. I'm not. They forbid me to. They wanted me to be someone who could answer questions you might have and someone that would look out for you. The danger to you is not entirely gone... if it ever went away Caliria. Especially now that you have come back."

Caliria nodded her head. "I know." She said softly. "And I don't think of you as a spy Paga." Caliria looked at her for a long moment and realized that since speaking with her father on the ship it had become easier to express what she felt. At least in some manner. "I'm very confused." She said finally. "I don't know what I feel. I have questions that need answers and I don't know who to turn for them."

"What questions?" Paga asked her.

"Everything... everything I have been raised to believe is... it's like it is turning out to be a lie." Caliria spoke.

"Is it turning out to be a lie, or is it because your perceptions of everything you believed are changing?" Paga asked.

"What do you mean?" Caliria asked.

Paga leaned against the counter. "You have seen things that very few of your people have seen. You have experienced things that few of your people have. You are not a stupid woman Caliria... you could not be and done what you have."

"I've done nothing." Caliria said.

"Haven't you?" Paga asked her. "I heard Eliani talking to her mother Queen Anja before we left Sparta; about the counteragent you developed." She said. "The Queen believed that given another two weeks time you would have figured out the last pieces of the puzzle without any help. That is why she was able to fashion the counteragent so quickly. You had already done the majority of the work on it. Doing that... discovering that... it tells me you are driven and independent and confident. Despite your people looking down on you because of the color of your hair. Which is incredibly short sighted on their part in my humble opinion."

"Then why... why am I so confused about everything? About my family, my feelings about your people, my feelings about... about Androcles." Caliria asked her.

"Are you truly confused... or are you frightened?" Paga asked.

"Frightened?" Caliria asked.

Paga nodded. "Frightened to let your true self come through after what happen to you." She said. "Caliria... you were kidnapped. Taken from everything you know. You were drugged and forced to submit to men who only wanted to use you."

Caliria shook her head. "My people have a much less reverent look at our sexuality. What happened to me does not bother me as much as you think."

"Doesn't it?" Paga asked her gently. "Then you were rescued and suddenly you have Androcles and the others telling you that you belong with them. That you have always belonged with them and they have seen this in their minds and their dreams. Mindvoice is a funny thing to those of us who are Tier Six users and even stranger to those like Androcles and his father who cannot even be measured. We see things. We feel things. Sometimes we don't understand them right away... but eventually it all makes sense."

"I'm not like you and them though." Caliria said.

"Yes... you are." Paga answered. "You may not realize it yet, but if you sensed Andro when he was talking to you within Mindvoice over such a great distance then you are more like us than you think. And that frightens you. Especially considering all you have been raised to believe about my people. Lycavorians. It terrifies you. I see it in your eyes Caliria... what they made you feel... what he made you feel. It goes against everything you were ever taught doesn't it?"

"Being with them... with him... it was the most divine experience of my life." Caliria told her softly. "I saw him... I saw him kill with the same hands he stroked my body with. I quivered in bliss when he was inside me... I..."

Paga nodded. "And all these things come into direct conflict with how your mind tells you it should be." She said. "How you have been raised and schooled to believe. Do you think you could feel what he made you feel with another?"

Caliria looked at her. "I don't know." She answered. "Why not?"

Paga shrugged her shoulders. “Why not indeed?” She asked. “Perhaps you could. But would it be the same? Caliria... did you lay with Androcles and Sadi and the others because you wanted too, or because you felt obligated for some reason?”

“Obligated?” Caliria asked. “No!”

“Then you laid with them because deep down you were looking beyond what you have been taught to believe and seeing things how they truly were for the first time? And what you were seeing is that you did belong to them... just as they told you and that frightened you terribly.” Paga said.

“Why would that frighten me?” Caliria asked.

“Because for all of your life you have done things on your own. Alone. Perhaps seeing what you might have with them terrified you because it showed you that you would never be alone. That you don’t have to be alone.” Paga said. “And that shook you right down to your toes.”

“Then how... how do I fix this?” Caliria asked. “How do I get past the part he is so much younger than me? How do I get past the part that he can kill without blinking. Without remorse or regret? That is part of your people’s history. His history. And how do I get past the part that I would have to share him with four other women that I hardly know?”

Paga leaned over the counter slowly. “You don’t believe that and I know you don’t. You have seen inside his mind Caliria. He holds the memories and experiences of his father and of his grandfather. In many respects he is far older than you.”

Caliria lowered her head. “I know.” She said softly.

“Do you think that Androcles Leonidas is simply a killer?” Paga asked gently. “Is that what you consider him? A killer? Do you consider me a killer?”

“I don’t know.” Caliria said softly.

Paga drained her juice. “During the Evolli War I was assigned to a Scout Unit.” She told her. “A Scout Sniper Unit. This was before I became a member of the Durcunusaan. I was the sniper. One hundred and fifty-nine kills. Nine of them senior Evolli Generals. I remember each and every one of them. Do I regret them? No. We were at war and the Evolli were trying to kill my friends and my people. Do I feel remorse? Of course I do. But that will not keep me from defending what I know and feel to be right.” Paga said. “If you question whether he feels regret and remorse, I suggest you ask him Caliria. He considers you his wife and mate. He would never lie to you.”

“All men lie.” Caliria said.

Paga shook her head. “No Lycavorian would lie to one who he considers his wife and mate. It is not the nature of the men among our people to do such a thing. To them it is a breach of the honor they feel for having their wives and mates. Especially those males who were born and raised in Sparta as Androcles was.”

“Paga I...”

“You want to know him Caliria?” Paga asked. “Go to Denali. Ask Denali to tell you of Alba Tau. If you truly want to learn what drives Androcles... what type of man he is... and how he can love you as he does... ask Denali about Alba Tau.”

Caliria shook her head. “What is that?” She asked.

“A time.” Paga answered. “A place. A forging ground and a nightmare. It will not give you all the answers you seek, but it will put quite a bit in perspective. The rest... the rest is a conflict that you must resolve yourself. It is a conflict inside you and no one can help you with that.”

Caliria stared at her for a long moment. “Thank you Paga.” She said finally.

Paga nodded and smiled. “Your father is expecting us at 1000 hours in his office. He seems very eager to discover what is going on. I also saw that you have several messages on your COM unit. I think you are more popular than you think.”

Caliria chuckled and shook her head. “I doubt that.” She said.

“Shall I make additional for you?” She asked pointing to the pan of enticingly ripe and sweet strips of meat.

Caliria nodded her head as she got up. “Yes. I find myself famished all of a sudden.” She said. “I will go and check these messages.”

Caliria moved across the main room to the far wall where her COM panel was and sat in the comfortable high backed chair. She keyed in her ID and looked at the screen as the list of seven messages came up with

different subjects. Five of the seven were from different staff members at the university welcoming her back. One was from Yssyla requesting they get together as soon as possible and the seventh didn't have a subject. Intrigued, Caliria tapped that one and watched as it opened to reveal the handsome face she knew well. Her green eyes grew wide and she felt her heart slam into her chest as she saw that face. The last face she had seen before she had been taken.

Franklin Adams.

The Eridiani man she had been dating before she was taken.

Caliria typed on the console quickly and then his voice filtered to her softly.

"Caliria... if you get this please don't hang up!" He hurried. "I know what you must think... but it wasn't me! I swear to you! Why would I try to hurt you? I love you. I still love you. Please Caliria ... meet with me. Let me tell you in person that I love you. And that you are in danger."

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

Resumar groaned as Andro gave him a rib cracking embrace, but he gladly returned it as the happiness to be home was just beginning to hit him.

Andro looked around the guest bedroom turned office. "Where is Athani?" He asked.

Resumar chuckled. "Sadi and the others grabbed her before we got halfway in the door." He answered. "Andro... where is Dorian?"

Andro smiled and began to guide him out of the office. "He's on the patio with Ryner and Elynth."

"We saw it all *Fervon*." Resumar spoke as they walked. "It was... it was masterful."

Andro nodded. "I spoke with Manda about two hours ago. She'll be back within Union space shortly. Between what you and she were able to accomplish, and what we will do soon, it will buy us the time we need."

"Mother is back with father then?" Resumar asked. "Eirene and Fedor too?"

Andro nodded. "Yes. I'll fill you in on what he has planned later but..." Andro stopped when he saw Athani speaking with Sadi and holding her hands. Her blue/green eyes fell on him and she moved quickly to him.

Androcles embraced her tightly, feeling her tail twitch ever so slightly as it wrapped around his waist. "It is good to have you back home." He said pushing her to arms length and kissing her cheek affectionately. "Very good."

Athani's face beamed as she held his arms. "Home." Athani said. "It is so very good to be home."

"Pian? Jalersi?"

Athani nodded quickly. "Pian and Jalersi remained on the *RAGE OF ACHILLES* to monitor the extraction. Isra convinced them it could ruin they plan if either of them were spotted. They will return in a few more hours." Athani squeezed his arms tighter. "They will want to return Andro. Mican as well."

Andro nodded. "I know. There is a bunch of stuff we need to..."

"Andro... I don't understand how you..." Dorian's voice interrupted them as he walked into the villa holding the data pad. He stopped when he saw his brother Resumar and the others. Dorian had become comfortable around everyone in the family so far, Resumar being the only one he had not met. He glanced back and forth between Andro and him nervously, but it was Resumar who chased away any nervousness.

Resumar stepped right up to him and crushed him in an embrace that had Dorian beaming as he returned it. Resumar leaned back and grasped his face tightly, looking into his one dark brown eye and his one cobalt blue eye. It appeared the odd matching of his eye color was going to remain for a time. At least until the remains of the accelerated growth serum had been fully purged from his body.

Resumar was smiling as he held Dorian's head. "Welcome brother." He said. "It is so very good to finally meet you."

Dorian smiled but was really caught off guard for lack of words. He watched as Athani stepped up to him and took his hands while Resumar watched. She had a single tear rolling down her cheek as she squeezed his hands and leaned up to kiss his cheek.

“We... we saw what you did.” She stammered. “I don’t... you have cut the last tie to my old life Dorian Leonidas. I will... I will always be in your debt for that.”

“We don’t have debts in this family.” Dorian said with a smile. “You are my brother’s wife and mate. You owe me nothing.”

Andro stood beside Sadi and Ne’Veha with a smile. Resumar laughed and grabbed his brother’s shoulder. “Hah! How did you get so humble?” He demanded. “You didn’t learn that from him.” He chortled tossing a thumb pointing at Andro. Dorian laughed now as well as Resumar teased him and stepped close to put his arm over his brother’s shoulder. “You know... I got some really good...”

“Save it Res!” Andro exclaimed. “We all know about your special tricks. None of them work. All they did was get us in trouble as we grew up.”

“Hey... I tried!” Resumar declared. “Where’s Eli? Zarah?”

Andro moved closer. “I sent Carina back to Apo Prime for an accelerated Tactics Class. Zarah and Lucia are working with Thr’won at the moment. Knowing Eli, she’s probably still in bed with Jomann.”

Resumar’s eyes narrowed. “Jomann? Who’s Jomann? What happened to Malic?”

“You’ve been gone a long time fervon.” Andro said.

“*Joa sibfla!* I guess so!”

“Let’s get you two fed.” Sadi spoke moving forward to take Athani’s hands. “Everyone will be here in a few hours for a meeting.”

Andro turned when the Durcunusaan officer signaled him and he squeezed his brother’s arm. “I’ll join you shortly.” He said.

Resumar nodded as Sadi, Ne’Veha and Carisia began to pull them towards the kitchen area and Lu’ria snatched Dorian’s hand. Andro watched as the officer crossed through the main area of the villa and stopped.

“Milord... the Prime Minister and Val’istar Shiria are waiting in your office.” He said.

Andro looked at him. “Why?”

“The Prime Minister said it was important.” The officer spoke.

Andro nodded. “Very well.” He said with a sigh. “Tell *KertaGai* I will join them when I am done.”

The officer nodded and turned to move to the kitchen while Andro watched. He wondered if this happened to his father often. There was always something that needed his attention. Andro shook his head again.

“Being in charge really sucks.” He muttered under his breath as he headed for his makeshift office.

“What is this?” Androcles asked as he looked at the pad Deia had given him.

Deia and Shiria sat on the couch across from the large desk he walked around. The bay window offered a spectacular view of the Laconia Gulf and it’s blue green waters which always seemed to put him at ease.

“Shiria and I have been working on this for two days.” Deia said. “It is a preliminary plan which we will finalize and implement by the end of the week. We’ll need access to *SPARTA’S WRATH* and either Avi or the new Avatar 341. And one of the long range transports that she carries.”

“We? What plan?” Andro asked as he moved to his chair and sat down. “What is this all about *Tenna*?”

“It’s about the future Androcles.” Shiria spoke now.

“Why do the hairs on the back of my neck stand up when you say that Val’istar?” He asked.

“No doubt Wayonn is filling your father in, if he hasn’t already.” Shiria said. “You know what I’m talking about... I know your father has shared it with you and only you. I can see it in your face and sometimes in your actions. What he has felt. What Wayonn and I have felt.”

Andro leaned forward in the chair now. “I’m listening.” He said.

“Androcles... there is another reason Sumar did what he did.” Shiria spoke. “Integrating those Pralors who survived the crash of his ship with the Lycavorian people.”

“So the Pralor people would continue on in us.” Andro said. “I know Wayonn returned to Pralor space trying to determine why they could not make contact. He took twenty thousand people with him. He returned because the Scourge had already decimated three quarters of the Pralor Empire. When he returned the Coven had already conquered our planet. That is why he settled in the Beta Quadrant.”

Shiria and Deia both looked stunned at what Andro had just told them. “How... how do you know that?” Shiria gasped.

“My father had already begun deciphering several flashes of memory that belonged to my grandfather Sumar with Avi’s help.” Andro spoke. “When Wayonn arrived the flashes became more frequent and easier to decipher. There is very little my father keeps from me Val’istar.”

“What has he told you?” Shiria asked softly.

“That the Scourge as the Pralors called them were the ones that wiped out your empire.” Andro said. “It took thousands of years because you did not go down easily, but they succeeded in doing this.”

Shiria nodded her head solemnly. “I was the last to escape. The remaining Elder Pralors chose me to take *VORTEX CRUISER* 341 and escape. The Scourge were on the edge of our home system then. The last three planets we had. I escaped just days before their attack began with 341, the ship and every bit of information and history they could cram into the ship’s data cores. I tried to maintain contact after I left and I was successful for several weeks, then everything went silent and I knew they were lost.”

“You are the one who left the technology here on Earth.” Andro said. “You were the one who helped Arzoal when she needed it.”

Shiria nodded. “Wayonn discovered me some thousand years after I arrived in the Alpha Quadrant. He actually saved me from a Coven tracking team that was hunting me. After that I went into hiding among the Kavalian people.”

“And if Wayonn felt you... no doubt Xaxon did as well.” Andro spoke.

Shiria nodded. “That is what Wayonn believes and it’s also why the High Coven has fought two wars before this one with the Kavalians. They were looking for me.”

“Why?” Andro asked.

“Androcles... there were two wars with the Scourge.” Shiria said. “The first one is the reason Xaxon was punished in the manner he was. I will go into the details for you later, but what you need to know now, is that we beat them the first time because of a small group of Pralors who had a special gene within their bodies. A gene that allowed them to physically manifest their Etheric abilities as weapons. Just as you and your father and now Denali have done. They were the ones who stopped the Scourge the first time. They did stop them, but the war decimated the ranks of these people in the process. The crew on Sumar’s ship, among them were several hundred men and women who had this gene. It took Sumar decades to discover all of them, and then get them assigned to his ship.”

“Grandfather Sumar was one of these people I take it.” Andro asked. “With these special abilities?”

Shiria nodded. “Yes. He was... he was the first to be honest. He and Xaxon. The first and the most powerful. The closest term to describe them as I have told Deia is Paladins.”

Andro looked at her. “Holy Warriors? From Earth’s ancient past?”

Shiria nodded. Yes.”

“Val’istar... all of our people can Mindvoice.” Andro said.

Shiria nodded. “Yes you can. As can all vampires. There are several other known species with the galaxy that can as well, but the Lycavorians are the most numerous. Being able to Mindvoice however does not grant these special talents. It is why they will not become active in your brothers and sisters who are not pure like you and Denali. Like your father and mother. They will be extremely capable; don’t get me wrong, especially if they are schooled properly. Even stronger than they are now. But none of them will be able to do what you can. What your father and Denali can now do. I felt the spike in Etheric resonance when you attacked that place to rescue your Vanari mate. I felt the spike when your father rescued your mother. Sumar chose the men and women of his crew for a reason Androcles. He was going to take them and begin their training. He thought we had more time before the Scourge struck again. He was wrong. We did not expect to be betrayed either.”

“Betrayed?” Andro asked. “By Xaxon?”

Shiria shook her head. “There is one thing very few people know. It is the reason why Xaxon wanted to capture me. I have told Deia some of it... but not all.” She looked at him. “Now you need to know all of it.”

“I get the feeling that you are about to drop a very large fusion bomb on my head.” Andro said.

“My people... Pralors. We are seeders of life Androcles. Nothing pleased us more than seeing life we transplanted to dead worlds take hold and begin to grow and thrive. In order to do this we took life from other worlds.”

“And?” Andro asked.

“The vast majority of our people were scientists. Geneticists. Mathematicians. We altered genetics and bio-mechanics among other things to allow for species to live on worlds that they were not from originally.” Shiria said. “The Rothryn people that Denali has recently come in contact with... they are... they were a small part of our work. Life on their planet was not conducive to a four legged animal. We took samples from Lycavore and transplanted them, removing their ability to shift into wolf form.”

“So you played god.” Andro spoke though his words were not harsh or angry as Shiria expected them to be.

“Our intentions were never evil or corrupt Androcles.” Shiria said.

Andro nodded. “And that is the only reason I am still sitting here.” He spoke. “Forget the Rothryn for a moment. I’ll deal with that when the time comes. What about these people among grandfather’s crew?”

Shiria looked at him. “Obviously when Sumar chose them he was going to train them to replace what we had lost. I don’t know how far he got before the ship crashed on Lycavore. They had only been gone four years when that happened. The Elder Pralors knew what he was doing and that is why they sent Arzoal’s scout ship among several others looking for them. When Sumar’s crew began to infuse themselves within the Lycavorian people, this gene would have been passed down to their descendants. Even through many generations it would loss none of it potency. It is extremely rare... only one out of every trillion Pralors had it.”

“So you are saying this gene is out there now. Among the Lycavorian people?” Andro asked.

Shiria nodded. “Any descendant from the original group who merged with your people on Lycavore has the potential to carry this gene. Your father, you, now Denali, it is beginning to manifest itself now. Now that your use of this advanced Etheric power has begun, it will stir the resonance across the board. Others with this gene will feel it and begin to manifest powers as well.” She looked at him calmly. “Anyone who can Mindvoice has certain latent abilities to use telekinesis or minor abilities. Those bonded to dragons increases this ability far in excess of normal users. This gene however, once activated, it allows you to form true physical manifestations of Etheric power Androcles. The diamonds you throw from your hands, the physic knives you use? These are only the beginning as you have already discovered. As your father has discovered.”

Andro got to his feet and moved to the window staring out across the water. “He found Tomes on CS41. Avi helped him to decipher and understand them.” He said softly. “When he felt Elynth and I were ready he allowed me to use them as well.”

“These must be the tools that Sumar was going to use to train those he chose.” She said. “Where are they now?”

Andro turned back to face her. “They are hidden on a planet my father chose to take me to train.” He replied. “He had an entire facility built. I didn’t know why then.”

Shiria nodded. “Because he determined what the Tomes were for. He must have. Your father... he is... he is deciphering Sumar’s memories faster than I thought he would. He doesn’t act as I would have expected him to act knowing these things.” She looked at Deia. “It has to be the Spartan within him. The way of life his father led and that he has returned too. Plan. Evade. Destroy.”

Deia nodded. “With Andro being the exception, I believe there are many things even his wives and mates don’t know.”

Shiria looked at Andro. “Is this true?” She asked.

Andro turned to look at her. “In some respects yes.” He answered. “He figured out some of it on his own from the Tomes I’m sure. He’s not as stupid as people make him seem.”

Shiria shook her head. “No... he is far more intelligent and deadly than most see from his outward actions. I knew that immediately after meeting your brother.”

Andro moved back to his desk. “Why?” He asked. “My father has felt them clearly on three different occasions. I have sensed them fleetingly and never clearly. Why are they coming here?”

Shiria met his eyes. “Their only purpose is to eradicate anything or anyone with Pralor blood.”

“Why?” Andro asked more forcefully. “There has to be a reason!”

Shiria took a deep breath. “There is.” She said.

“Then share it with me now.” Andro said. “I have initiated a war with the Kavalian people because of what they have done to my family and my people. Now tell me why I must commit resources to this and take them away from the war we fight now.”

“This war with the Kavalians?” Shiria said softly. “It is nothing. A footnote in history that will fade from memory very quickly. What you have done with the High Coven however, that will resonate for much longer.”

“This war with the Kavalians has already led me to kill millions! It is not a footnote! Not to me! Now tell me why Val’istar?” Andro snapped. “No more riddles and words meant to make me think! Tell me why!”

Shiria looked at him. “The Scourge are an insectoid like race. They were common to a system on the edge of Pralor space that was void of any real life other than bacteria when we first discovered it. Xaxon and his crew discovered the planets first. He disregarded all protocols we had established for First Contact and went to the surface of their main planet. He tried to make contact without really knowing what he was doing and the Scourge massacred his First Contact team because they had stumbled into an egg cache. To get revenge Xaxon began the first war by wiping out nearly a billion of their eggs in an orbital bombardment. The fool didn’t know that the Scourge had space faring vessels until they attacked.”

“That explains why he got the treatment he did.” Andro spoke. “Why do the Scourge hate anything having to do with the Pralors?”

“Xaxon wasn’t punished for that.” Shiria spoke. “He was punished for using our genetic technology to perform brutal experiments on a several dozen Scourge that he had captured some years later. These experiments included Pralor subjects that had no idea what he planned.”

“Oh... I don’t like where this is going.” Deia said softly.

“He fused the minds of three dozen Pralor subjects into the bodies of Scourge warriors.” Shiria spoke. “The process was supposed to help them to understand the Scourge and perhaps find a way to defeat them quickly. The only problem was he did not tell Pralor subjects the process was irreversible. It drove them mad. Insane. When they escaped containment is when we found out what he had done. Don’t you see? He discovered that the Scourge are sensitive to Etheric power. Specifically the power this gene could generate. It took five hundred years, but we used that knowledge to train Sumar and the others. They defeated the Scourge but at the cost of nearly their entire contingent of Paladins. The problem was not that we had won, it was the fact that these experiments were able to make their way back to Scourge space and rejoin with the colonies there. Their minds were intact Androcles. Filled with horrible hate and rage at what had been done to them. Hate and rage towards Xaxon and anything Pralor. They spent the next several millennia turning the Scourge into something they were not. They swore to purge the galaxy of anything Pralor. Any kind of technology, any living being with Pralor blood. They swore the most terrible kind of vengeance. Genocide.”

Andro returned to his chair and sat down slowly. “And when father fired up CS41’s engines twenty-seven years ago?”

Shiria nodded. “They undoubtedly detected it. Wayonn and I can feel them because they were once Pralors. Like whispers in our dreams. We knew they were coming... but after what you did by bringing the High Coven together they just stopped.”

“Why?” Andro asked.

“I don’t know.” Shiria spoke. “What matters is this. There is no reasoning with them. There is no talking to them. They have stopped now... but they will come. We created them Androcles. My people created the beings that destroyed us. And now... now we are threatened once more because of the nature of evolution and the Lycavorians having Pralor blood within them.”

“And if we do nothing...” Andro began.

Shiria nodded. “Then this war with the Kavalians, all your father has done, all your people have done? None of it will matter. When the Scourge arrived they will come here intending to kill everyone and everything with even an iota of Pralor blood. When they are finished, as they left our species, they will leave nothing of Lycavorians. Barely anything to show you existed at all.”

Andro was silent for a long moment and then he looked at Deia. The decision was simple for him.

“*Tenna...* you will have what you need. All of it.” He told her.

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

CABELIR FOUR DAYS POST DECLARATION OF WAR

The Center within the Command Compound was once more filled with Kavalian officers, having been declared safe the day before after a thorough search of every possible hiding place for enemies and bombs of any kind. Many of the gathered men were still in a state of shock at what had transpired over the last three days and all of them knew their leader was not in any way happy. Keleru stood in front of the large window staring out over the compound itself. Smoke still trickled into the air from where the wall had been destroyed and the Secondary Command Center reduced to burnt rubble. Kattu stood to the side once more with a handful of data pads waiting to answer whatever questions his uncle may have had. Caruma'Pameni and Diseno'Sessi sat beside one another, since they were now senior, the other Admirals and Pride Leaders not daring to speak.

With a heavy sigh Keleru turned back to his military and Pride leaders and looked at them. He had acted rashly he now knew. He had thought them untouchable here on Cabelir. The High Coven had never staged so bold an attack even with their Shroud capable ships, and it was now painfully obvious that the Union Shrouds were far better than the ones employed on Coven ships. The Lycavorian Union also had officers and leaders who were far more daring and capable it seemed. Keleru'Puat did not reach his position by being foolish. His anger had cost them dearly. Admiral Liatthi and his force were now licking their wounds and hiding outside Coven space. They had poured across the High Coven border expecting to be met by a handful of High Coven Fleet Groups as their intelligence had told them. Keleru should have known the son would have laid a trap for them. They had witnessed Liatthi fighting a losing battle almost from the start. Ten Lycavorian Union Fleet Groups had joined with the five Coven Fleet Groups to pulverize the invading Kavalian force badly, led by that vampire Admiral Pontal who had been a thorn in their sides for over a decade. If all their reports were accurate, it would also seem that the Union Admiral of the Fleet Riall had been in joint command with Pontal. The name Riall was well known among the Kavalian officers, and their combined experience and leadership had decimated the Kavalian Task Force.

Liatthi had led bravely and well, but in the end the surprising coordination and power of the front line Union ships began to simply wear down the Kavalian forces. Keleru had never expected the Lycavorian Union and High Coven to blend so easily together. Fighter squadrons from both sides had swept in against Kavalian forces using flanking tactics and in some cases brute force. They fought side-by-side as if they had been fighting like this for centuries. The Union ships maneuvered and fought with High Coven ships within their ranks, and vice versa. The hated vampire Admiral Pontal himself had led a daring strike into the heart of the Kavalian Task Force with a hundred ships, half of them Union. They had jumped directly into the center of the rear of the Task Force and decimated the follow on Fleet Groups with missiles and long range batteries, jumping away before the superior numbers of the Kavalian Task Force could respond and destroy them. It was almost as if they knew what the Kavalians would do.

Keleru knew that was not possible. Androcles Leonidas had outsmarted him, and while that fact burned Keleru's pride he knew that Androcles had others around him that simply reeked with experience fighting against superior odds. The Union leaders were well versed in such tactics and the High Coven Commanders appeared to be learning very quickly. After sixteen hours of battle Liatthi had done the only thing he could do and he retreated back across the border with barely half his Task Force intact. The man had actually asked to be allowed to kill himself for his failure, but Keleru had long before that regained his emotions. He refused Liatthi's ridiculous request and ordered the man to return to the space they controlled and to reform his forces. Keleru was not about to throw away experienced men because they had failed at something he had ordered gripped in his savage anger.

He looked at his leaders, men who had been with him for years. Loyal to him and his goals. He stepped back up to the table slowly.

"I allowed my anger at events to override my good sense." He finally spoke. "Many of you in this very room have cautioned through the years that attacking the Union would not be the same as fighting the High Coven. They are a different breed you told me. I didn't listen and now we have paid for my foolishness. We will

pay no more.” Keleru returned to his chair and looked at the men. “It has been nearly two thousand years since I have picked up a weapon and fought. It is you in this room who have done that. I should have listened to you. I will take the blame for everything that has happened and now we must decide what to do.”

Keleru’s admission was a surprising relief for the men in the room, but something all of them had expected. Their leader was not a fool, and they were loyal to him because of this. Unfortunately... the last few days had not been kind to the Kavalian Federation. They had won many more battles than they had lost against the High Coven, and all of them had become drunk with the victories. They all thought of themselves as unbeatable. That was not the case as they all now knew. Their losses just in the last three days had surpassed their combined losses in the last ten years of war with the High Coven.

Keleru turned to Kattu. “Nephew... tell us what has happened?”

Kattu stepped forward. “Uncle... Admirals.” He spoke. “As we all know, Admiral Liatthi is now holding position 1.2 Light Years Spaceward of Ukwav. The combined High Coven and Union forces have retaken some territory, but they stopped after reclaiming ten light years. As best we are able to discern right now, they are beginning to send out ground forces to the few colonies that we conquered. Our forces there are cut off and there is no way to help them. We must consider them lost.”

“How many colonies Kattu?” Keleru asked.

“Six major colony worlds Uncle. Four minor resource worlds.” Kattu answered. “To include the populations of those worlds and colonies. We have lost perhaps two thirds of the gains we made in and around Ukwav. The garrison forces there will fight, but they will be eliminated as superior firepower and numbers are brought to bear on them.”

“Coven and Union losses?” Caruma asked.

“No where near as severe as our own.” Kattu spoke. “As you all know... Union ships are built from day one to take enormous damage and still be able to function. Their technology has increased this trait. Many of the Union ships shielded Coven warships as the Coven pummeled Admiral Liatthi’s ships with long range missiles before he was able to close within weapons range. The Union ships, especially their *LEONIDAS IIA*-Class Strike Cruisers, proved superior in many ways that we were not aware. Their tactics were quick and brutally efficient strikes against the flanks of our Task Force, followed up with major engagements right into the hearts of our formations. All of their ships are far more maneuverable than anything we had thought. Their coordination was the tipping point. No matter what we tried we could not breach their defensive line. The Union has extensively upgraded their ships and fighters it appears. More so than anything our intelligence detected.”

Keleru looked at him. “What of the ships that struck our force in the Farnuri Expanse?” He asked.

“The logs of all twenty-three frigates that returned show the same thing Uncle.” Kattu answered. “A massive seven kilometer long ship the likes of which we have never seen before. Its weapons and missiles were far superior to anything we have. From logs and what sensor data the frigates were able to obtain, the weapons seem to be some sort of Quantum Fusion based power source. Even fully shielded ships were torn asunder.”

“And the ships that struck at Dalean and Kranek?” Caruma asked.

“They appear to be based, at least in some way, off this single large ship involved with the Farnuri Massacre. Power signatures were similar in many instances.” Kattu answered. “It just suddenly appeared within the field of battle and began firing. It’s technology is far more than anything we have.”

“It’s obvious the Union has developed new ships and technology that we did not know they have. It is only one ship though.” Diseno spoke. “Prefect... can this traitor Laustinos tell us anything?”

Keleru looked at him. “I have already sent for him.” He answered. “He has been hiding at Gellen Station since the destruction of the Icalro Alliance. I offered him anything he wanted to provide us as much information as he could. As much as I hate him as the traitor he is, now we need to use what he can tell us.”

“Can he be trusted?” Caruma asked.

Kattu stepped closer. “Androcles Leonidas has issued a bounty on his head of nearly fifty million credits. His only chance at surviving is within Kavalian space and he knows it. He will help us. He still may have connections that we can use as well.”

“I misjudged this boy Prince.” Keleru spoke. “I expected him to be like his father. I was wrong. His father never would have destroyed the Dregir Moon to stop our invasion from Uirmeik.” Keleru sat back. “No. I do not know that either. They are like rabid animals and we can not predict what they will do.”

Kattu placed the data pad on the table next to him. "Destroying the moon as he did has rendered all LSD travel through that sector of space impossible. The adjoining sectors are less affected, but the gravitational fluxes created by the destruction of the moon will be random and unable to detect. They could suddenly appear and swallow an entire Fleet. The risks involved in traversing this area now have become unacceptable."

"Do not think he didn't know this." Caruma spoke. "Now... if we invade the Union from anywhere along this border they will see us coming long before we could strike. The fools in the Consortium and Limian governments will warn the Union as soon as any of our ships are detected crossing through their space. And the Union can reinforce any part of their side of this border in hours. That does not include the Defense Network they have installed along these sectors."

"Pull them back Prefect." Diseno spoke softly. "Pull them back out of the Union's Border Network Sensor Array's range."

"We should keep them there." Caruma spoke in disagreement. "Have the Union keep forces aligned against them so we can attack in other places."

Diseno shook his head. "No Caruma. That is what they want us to do." He stated. "Then they know where a good portion of our forces are. Pull them back so that we can regroup. There are far too many unknowns to deal with right now."

Kattu nodded. "I agree with Admiral Diseno Uncle." He spoke quickly. He bowed his head. "Forgive me... if I may speak among the Pride Leaders."

Keleru looked at the men around the table. "He can do no worse than those of us here is that not true my friends? Perhaps a younger, fresher perspective is warranted now." The officers nodded amongst themselves and Keleru looked at Kattu. "Continue nephew."

Kattu nodded and moved to the large star chart that occupied the wall. "The Lycavorian Union is not a military state as we are. The actions Androcles Leonidas has taken are those of someone who wants time." He said. "And for all intents and purposes he has achieved that. By destroying the moon and effectively sealing this portion of their border and then destroying a large portion of our front line warships, as well as our main cloning facilities on Dalean, he has effectively bought them six months."

"Six months!" Caruma declared.

"That is how long it will take our other cloning facilities to produce the ones lost on Dalean." Kattu spoke evenly. "And our shipyards to replace the losses we have already suffered at their hands."

"So we allow them six months to build their forces?" Caruma asked with less hostility.

"It also gives us six months to replace what we have lost Admiral. And time to try and discover if they have more of these seven kilometer long ships." Kattu spoke. "Where did they get this technology? It is obvious that at least some of their ships are using technology derived from this unknown ship. Where did this ship come from? It is obviously alien in origin. How else do you explain the ability of their forces to drive so deep into Kavalian space undetected? We have underestimated them Admiral... and it has cost us dearly. This also may be connected in some way to the Empress Aikiro's actions. Now is not the time to continue to underestimate them."

"Kattu is right." Diseno spoke. "Think Caruma my friend. One ship and a small Union task force obliterated six hundred of our front line ships in minutes! Minutes! What if they have more of these ships?"

"Why would that witch have anything to do with what is happening now?" Another Admiral asked.

"What the Coven did on Earth was out of character for them sir." Kattu spoke. "She risked her life and those of her daughter and her lover for a reason. They went to Earth for a reason."

"To have the Union train their damnable beasts!" Another spoke.

"That was only part of it Admiral Werra." Kattu said. "If all they wanted was the Union to train their dragons they could have sent an envoy. The Empress went herself. Why? She obviously was not prepared for what would happen. And she underestimated not only King Leonidas and his son, but the intentions of her own family."

"If the King still lives where is he?" Caruma asked.

"He does still live." Keleru stated. "Commander Popal contacted me again as they arrived at Talbor Seven. Leonidas is confirmed through Kalis to be the one who rescued the elf Queen For'mya. He is alive. Though his location now is suspect."

“There is another reason we must use this time just as the Union is going to use it Uncle.” Kattu spoke. “Rape is among the most heinous of crimes you can commit within the Union. The rape of a sitting Queen as they have accused Marshall Pusintin... this will incite their people beyond anything else. We have seen that with the acceptance of Androcles Leonidas’s actions in their very Senate chamber.”

“Another question?” Diseno asked. “What did he do to Matuarr? This power he used to crush him like that? I have never seen anything like it.”

“And they gutted Qurot like an animal!” Another Admiral spoke harshly.

“We are not fighting the High Coven now.” Kattu spoke. “The Lycavorian Spartans will not retreat. They will fight to the death and take as many of our soldiers with them as they can before they fall. This drive... this spirit has infected all of their military. We will face it from the front line soldier and even from the lowliest technician. We must move with care Uncle. We must plan our assaults with care and guile. And we must have the forces to do so. We hold a nearly a four to one advantage now, but we need at least five to one if we are to invade the Union and gain any ground.”

Keleru sat back in his chair. “Then we will use the time just as they will.” He stated. “Caruma... redeploy the forces around Uirmeik into staging areas outside the Union’s Border Sensor Network. Put them back into a training mode and drill them mercilessly.” Keleru looked at Diseno. “I want you to reinforce Liatthi. Send him everything that we can spare right now. We can not afford to lose the space he occupies.”

Diseno nodded. “As you order Prefect.” He spoke.

“When Pusintin returns to full health he will undoubtedly have more for us to do.” Keleru spoke. “Order our other cloning facilities to increase their production and our shipyards into full war time mode. I want our losses replaced in six months.”

“Do we try to communicate with them diplomatically?” Another Admiral asked.

Kattu looked at his uncle. “This could be a good tool to try and confuse them Uncle.” He stated.

Keleru shook his head. “The son will not be fooled, but it may just work in taking away support from within their Senate.”

“We have Lycavorians that we have reached out to before Prefect.” Caruma spoke. “Maybe we could use them now as well.”

Keleru nodded. “Indeed. I want full reports from all of your Prides and the Prides you command. We will meet every week from here on out. Any new information I receive I will insure reaches you as soon as it comes across my desk.” He got to his feet. “One week from now we will return here and begin to plan the downfall of the Lycavorian Union.”

“What of the High Coven Prefect?” Diseno asked. “Do we continue operations against them?”

“That could incite reprisals from the Union.” Caruma spoke. “They obviously have made it clear they are willing to fight beside one another.”

“The majority of our forces intended for use against the Coven are not factored into our overall fleet forces intended for use against the Union. We can still use them to keep the Union and the Coven guessing by conducting small raids and attacks within High Coven space.” Diseno continued. “It will incite reprisals yes... but it would also look odd if we did nothing at all.”

Keleru nodded. “I agree Diseno. Make it happen but do not waste these forces. When the time comes... we will turn everything against the Union and we will wipe both of them from existence.”

EARTH GYTHEIO ELIANI’S VILLA

Even with all that was happening around them, Eliani was still amazed at the peace and comfort she found in Jomann’s arms. They were sitting on the patio of her spacious villa as the sun was just beginning to break the horizon over the Laconia Gulf. They were both naked, as they usually were within her villa, Eliani sitting between his long legs and her bare back pressed against his chest with one of his legs bent at the knee. She was feeding them from a platter of leftover food they had gotten from dinner with his parents the previous

night. Eliani was half Hadarian yes, but her father's blood was dominant within her veins and it allowed her to feel things that many Hadarian's who had been turned could not, simply because of the purity of that blood.

That she and Jomann were truly *Anomes* was something Eliani would never forsake. Could never forsake. It was an incredibly rare occurrence in history when males or females not of pure Lycavorian blood became *anomes*. When they did however, it showed a connection and calling that their blood could not deny. The way Jomann could make her blood churn with desire and passion with just with a simple nuzzle upon her neck made Eliani realize that what Andro had told her so many times through the years was true. She was different. Half wolf, half Hadarian and very different indeed because of her blood and to a lesser degree of when she was conceived.

As Jomann's lips grazed the back of her neck ever so softly, pushing aside her long Burgundy red hair, she smiled in wistful delight as tiny shivers coursed through her. She picked up one of the large Yiouvarlakia, ancient style Greek meatballs, within her fingers and lifted it over her shoulder. With a growl Jomann bit it in half and then she tossed the other half into her mouth and they both chewed as his powerful arms encircled her and pulled her closer against his bare chest. She loved it when his powerful arms crushed her to him, the skin of their bodies pressing close and touching in all the right spots. His aura, so powerful and dominant, swirled around her always now. Jomann was not the largest man Eliani had ever slept with, but Jomann's cock was certainly the thickest and had impressive length nonetheless. His skill was that he knew just how to use it, which was not the case with most well equipped men. Every time he was inside her, Eliani found herself quivering in delight the entire time.

Eliani tilted her head upward a little and looked at his handsome face. A face she would see for eternity now. "When are you going to move the rest of your things in?" She asked him finally.

"Soon." He said in reply.

Eliani sensed something in his voice and reached up with her hand to turn his face towards hers until his blue eyes were gazing at her intently. "What is wrong?" She asked him softly.

"Nothing." He answered.

"Jomann... you can't lie to me." Eliani said. "It's because of Malic isn't it?"

Jomann looked at her. "Malic?" He gasped. Jomann chuckled. "No... Eliani my love. It is not because of Malic. You think I feel threatened by Malic?"

"I would hope not." Eliani said with a grin. "He was never able to do to me what you do."

Jomann chuckled again and lowered his face to hers, slowly drawing his lips across hers. Eliani's four inch long Hadarian tongue snaked out to lick at his lips as he did. Jomann caught her tongue within his teeth for a brief second as he knew she loved and then he reached up and drew a finger over her lips and cheeks. "I did... I did not want to move all of my things here because I wanted us to purchase the home we will share into the future."

"Here in Gytheio?" She asked.

Jomann nodded. "There are some newer homes on the bluffs." He told her. "I have saved enough to buy one."

"Jomann... you don't have to do it all alone." Eliani said.

"I won't be." He said with a smile. "I will have you with me. I wish to honor what I told your mother I would do Eli. Material possessions like in the past mean nothing to your father as a way of a gift for allowing me to claim you. What I can do is show them that I will care for you and love you with all that I am. Part of that is providing a home for you that suits you and the family we will have one day."

Eliani stared at him with fern green eyes and felt the love wash through her. "Family huh?" She quipped. Jomann nodded. "Of course."

"I want four children at least." Eliani told him. "Possibly six."

Jomann chuckled as he pulled her closer. "I see you have been thinking about this as well?"

Eliani squeezed his arms around her. "I'm a woman. Of course I've thought about this." She stated.

"You know... we should..." The chime on the door interrupted him and they both looked towards the door as the chime sounded again.

"Were we too noisy last night?" Jomann asked playfully.

Eliani laughed as she got to her feet. "You did have me howling quite loudly." She said. "Stay right there. I will be right back after I ditch whoever is there."

Jomann watched with passion filled blue eyes as her naked form crossed into the living room and she grabbed for the thin, nearly transparent robe on the arm of the couch. She pulled it around her as she moved down the short corridor to her main door. She passed her hand over the console and waited while the door slid open. Her fern green eyes grew wide when she saw the tall figure of Brendi Faith standing at the door. The rich auburn colored hair and stunning brown eyes made Eliani shudder involuntarily as she quickly closed the robe around her naked body.

“Brendi?” Eliani stammered.

Brendi for her part stared at Eliani Leonidas with stunned shock at how she had answered her door and what she was wearing. Her eyes caught a glimpse of Eliani’s breasts and Brendi glanced down for some reason, seeing a small tattoo on her hip and then her completely bald womanhood before Eliani closed the robe. Brendi brought her eyes up quickly, her mind confused as to why she suddenly felt flush and her skin tingled. Eliani’s burgundy colored hair looked wild and unkempt, her fern green eyes so very delightful and inviting. She shook her head quickly, remembering why she was here.

“Eliani Leonidas I need your help.” Brendi gasped finally.

Eliani didn’t hesitate and reached out for her hand drawing her into the villa. “Brendi! How... how did you get off Cranae Island without an escort?” She asked quickly. “How did you find our villa?”

“Eliani... my sister... my sister Nicolle is missing.” Brendi blurted ignoring her rapid fire questions.

“Missing?” Eliani stated. “What do you mean missing?”

“She is... she is gone from her room!” Brendi hissed softly. “She must have snuck out after Tasha went to sleep! She’s gone!”

“Are you sure? How did she get off the island?” Eliani asked as she pulled her further into the villa.

“I don’t know!” Brendi exclaimed. “You must help me find her! You must...”

Brendi looked up when she saw Jomann move quickly from the patio and back into the villa. Her eyes grew even wider when she saw he was completely naked and exposed for her gaze. Brendi’s eyes dropped and grew even wider when she saw his flaccid but still incredibly large cock. At least it was the largest she had ever seen in her life.

“Eli... what...?” Jomann skidded to a halt as he entered and saw Brendi beside Eliani. Her emotions had spiked and he had rushed back into the villa to discover what was wrong. “*Sibfla!*” He exclaimed finally as he yanked the small blanket from the couch and wrapped it around his waist.

Eliani immediately darted over in front of him to help him cover himself before looking into his face. “Nicolle got off the island somehow.” She said. “She’s missing!”

“What?” Jomann gasped looking at Brendi. “How? How did you get off the island?”

“I told... I told the *Durcunusaan* at the bridge that you had sent for me.” Brendi Faith explained quickly. “He just let me go!”

“He just let you go?” Jomann snarled. “I will have his...”

Jomann no! Eliani exclaimed within Mindvoice. I... I might have left word with the guards to let her come here if she... if she requested it.

Jomann met her eyes. *Might have?*

Ok... ok. I did. There is something about her Jomann. I... I want to be her friend. I want her to know she can talk to me. To us. Eliani urged.

Jomann looked at her beautiful fern green eyes and saw something within them that matched what he felt when looking at Brendi Faith. *We will discuss this later.* He spoke quickly to her. He looked up at Brendi. “Where did you see her last?”

“Her room on the island!” Brendi answered. “I need to find her. If my parents discover she is gone they will...”

Jomann shook his head. “Wait here. We will find her.” He stated before turning and heading for the bedroom.

Eliani looked at her. “Don’t leave Brendi!” She spoke. “We’ll find her... but we need to keep you with us too! Two minutes!”

Brendi nodded her head knowing she wouldn’t leave. She could not find Nicolle alone and she knew it. Brendi didn’t know why, but her first thought had been to come here. To find Eliani and Jomann. Something within her said they would help her without question. She didn’t understand it, she only acted.

“I’m not going anywhere.” She stated.
Eliani turned and followed Jomann.

Jomann looked out over the gulf from where he squatted on the beach. He had tracked Nicolle by her scent to the edge of the ocean here. Eliani and Brendi stood to his side as he rose to his feet slowly.

“She came to this beach and her prints and scent stop here.” He stated. “Can Nicole swim?”

Brendi nodded. “Yes. She’s an excellent swimmer but...”

“But from here it’s nearly a mile across the gulf to the shore in Gytheio.” Eliani said.

Jomann looked at them. “She wasn’t alone.” He said. He motioned to the sand. “Wolf prints. Good size. About two hundred pounds. Given the depression I’d saw late teens early twenties.”

Eliani looked at him. “A Lycavorian?” She asked with surprise.

Jomann nodded his head. “A *Durcunusaan*. One I know well.” He answered. “Only a *Durcunusaan* could move along the shores without raising suspicion.”

“One of your people took my sister?” Brendi gasped.

Jomann looked at her. “No one took your sister Brendi.” He stated. “She meets the wolf’s prints here. Then there are a male’s prints and hers walking in circles. Several rotations at least. They were deciding what to do.” He pointed towards the water. “They enter the water together, side-by-side.”

Brendi moved closer to him. “She wasn’t forced?”

Jomann shook his head. “No.”

“Oh I am so going to skewer her when we find her!” Brendi snapped.

“Brendi... what do you mean?” Eliani asked.

Brendi looked at her. “Nicolle is the more adventurous of my sisters! She mentioned to me a week ago how she had seen this *Durcunusaan* walking the perimeter of our building and she talked to him. She said he was very polite and very handsome but he seemed sad.”

Jomann lifted his arm. “*Durcunusaan* Control from Captain Jomann.” He spoke.

“Go for Control First!” The voice answered.

“Who was on duty last night at the guest villas?” Jomann asked.

“*Enomotarch* Carna and *Phylearch* Mento. I relieved them myself with *Phylearch* Harda at 2400 hours.” The voice answered.

Jomann looked at Eliani and Brendi with a slight nod. “Mento.” He spoke softly. “I knew it was him I smelled. A fast riser within the *Durcunusaan*. Come... your sister is in no danger.” He spoke.

“Where are we going?” Brendi asked.

“Mento lives with his parents in Gytheio. They are very wealthy and have built several stores in Sparta and on Apo Prime for their fine crafts. Their villa is one of the largest here in Gytheio where they are less well known.” He answered. “He will have taken her there.”

“To his parent’s home?” Brendi gasped. “Does he plan on forcing himself upon her in his parent’s home? My sister has only just turned nineteen!”

Jomann stepped in front of her quickly his fangs bared in anger now. Eliani stepped closer and placed her hand on his arm as Brendi backed up in surprise. “And Mento is only twenty-four!” He hissed. “Do not speak of what you do not know Brendi Faith! He has been in my team since he became a *Phylearch*. A Sergeant of Spartans! He is one of the finest soldiers I have ever led! He would never do such as you think! Never!”

“Jomann... my love.” Eliani spoke softly.

“Mento returned to our unit just after the attacks on the Senate Building.” Jomann spoke as his anger bled off quickly with Eliani’s touch on his arm. “He has been... he has been dealing with injuries he suffered.”

Eliani looked at him. “What injuries?”

Jomann met her gaze. “Injuries he sustained at Alba Tau.” Jomann lifted his arm and traced a line down his side starting at his neck and ending at his waist. “Mento stepped in front of an Evolli blade intended to kill Anicetus. The blade opened him from his neck to his waist! He saved Anicetus that night. He saved us all.”

Jomann looked at her. “You said your sister told you she spoke with him?”

Brendi nodded. “Yes.” She looked at Jomann. “What is Alba Tau?”

Jomann shook his head. "That is not possible. The Evolli blade cut so deeply into his neck that it paralyzed his vocal cords. He has not spoken a single word since that day."

"Nicolle wouldn't lie to me!" Brendi snapped.

"And one of my men would not force himself upon any woman!" Jomann barked. "Come and see for yourself!"

Eliani took her hand as Jomann began to walk across the sand. "She is safe." Eliani said softly.

"What did I say?" Brendi asked.

"Alba Tau is... it was a battle." Eliani said. "Well... more like a slaughterhouse really. The men and women that fought there saw terrible things. Horrible things. It was eighteen hours of the most monstrous hell you could imagine. Those who lived through it... well... they are different. Jomann. Andro. My father. It was a place that crushed those who were not ready. And those that survived left a piece of themselves there. They do not talk of it lightly, if at all."

"Eliani... I didn't mean to hurt his feelings." Brendi spoke honestly.

Eliani nodded. "I know. Come... if Jomann says we will find Nicolle there... then that is where we will find them."

GYTHEIO MENTO FAMILY VILLA

The older Lycavorian woman opened the door slowly, as if peeking out to see who was there first, and when she saw Jomann her eyes grew bright and the door was thrown open.

"Jomann!" She exclaimed with bright eyes as she threw her arms around his shoulders surprising him.

Jomann forced a smile as he embraced her. "Lady Lema." He spoke confused.

The large door opened further and the stern faced Lycavorian man appeared. His tanned and weathered face immediately softened when he saw Jomann and he stepped outside the door as well. "Captain!" He exclaimed grasping Jomann's forearm tightly by way of greeting.

"Colonel Zeteu." Jomann greeted.

"No more. You know that. I am retired." He answered as he stepped back and looked behind Jomann, his eyes growing wide. "Princess Eliani!" He gasped bowing his head deeply. "It is... it is a great honor!"

Eliani stepped up beside Jomann with a smile... her arms slipping around his waist to their startled expressions. "It is my pleasure to meet such Spartans." She spoke with proper respect and honor.

Lema looked at Jomann with wide eyes as she detected the scent of the young Captain buried deep within Eliani's blood. And her scent within his. "Jomann, you and the Princess...?"

Jomann nodded. "Yes." He answered. "It has not become public knowledge just yet, but we are not hiding it." He looked at Eliani with a smile. "I'm sure that will change however."

Eliani chuckled and pressed against him. "Probably lover." She quipped.

"Then may the blessings of the gods be with you Captain. Princess Eliani." Zeteu spoke bowing his head even more. "You have managed to capture one of the finest men alive Milady Eliani."

"Yes... I'm beginning to realize that." She said.

"He brought my boy home." Zeteu spoke proudly. "He carried him across a hundred and fifty kilometers of Evolli hell and brought my boy home. He would not leave him behind. Any of them! And now you are Captain to our Crown Prince! A deserved position Jomann."

Eliani looked at Jomann with intrigued eyes for she had not seen this within his thoughts as she swam within his mind. "Yes... it is." She said softly.

Lema reached out and took his hand. "Tell us Jomann... why are you here? It is Mento isn't it? You have heard?"

Jomann looked at her. "I don't understand. Yes... we came to see Mento... but what has happened?"

Lema looked at her husband and mate and the tears came once more. "A miracle Jomann. A miracle." Lema's dark eyes fell on Brendi now and she looked at her oddly. "You... you are Nicolle's sister. She told us you might come with others."

Brendi sputtered for several seconds. “She is here then?” She stammered finally.

Lema nodded. “Oh yes.”

“And she told you I would be coming?” Brendi asked.

“She knew leaving the Prince’s Island would garner attention.” Lema said shyly. “We... we thought you were the *Durcunusaan* come to arrest our boy for helping her leave. Jomann... please tell me... you have to see him Jomann! Almost five years he has been tormented and silent. He...”

Jomann’s eyes grew wider. “Wait!” He gasped. “Are you saying Mento is...?”

Zeteu nodded his head with a beaming face. His eyes were moist when he spoke. “He... his voice fills our ears once more Jomann. The pain is gone from his face... the shame wiped from his shoulders. My boy has finally come home!”

Brendi felt Lema grab her hands. “Your sister... she is a blessed angel sent from the gods themselves.” She stammered softly. “This way... they are on the balcony overlooking the bluffs of the Gulf.”

Lema pulled Brendi along, Jomann and Eliani following and Zeteu bringing up the rear. It took several minutes to move around the outskirts of the massive villa until they came to the patio balcony overlooking the cliffs below and the gulf in the distance.

There was a thick bear skinned rug spread out on the patio and the tall form of the young Lycavorian was sitting with his back against an outdoor lounge chair. Sitting between his long legs, her back pressed intimately up against his bare chest was Nicolle Faith, her medium length copper colored red hair pulled over one shoulder as she sat there, her body canted slightly so she was looking into his face and holding the data pad in one hand so he could read. Her other hand rested on Mento’s thigh while her fingers stroked his leg lightly. His large hand behind her shoulders extended down and rested on her hip while the other stroked the arm she was using to hold up the data pad. She was wearing a simple pink sundress, the front unbuttoned down to the fourth button and exposing the valley of her medium sized breasts.

“They have been there all night.” Lema stated softly. “She slept in his arms even as he read to her well past the moment she slipped away. He uttered a few words after first meeting her nearly a week ago, and now look! He is reading once more as if he never lost the ability to speak!”

“She sees past his disfigurement.” Zeteu spoke softly. “She looked within my son and gave him a reason to speak once more! Just as you gave him a reason to live Jomann! The nightmares have faded... he no longer wakes in a sweat! He is whole once more because of her.”

Jomann’s eyes were wide and he started forward onto the patio followed by Eliani and Brendi. Lema tried to reach for him but Zeteu stopped her. “No Lema.” He said softly. “It is time. Who better to see it first than the man who gave us our son back?”

Nicolle faith saw him first so engrossed in reading that Mento was, he didn’t even smell them until she tapped his chest softly. “Mento?” Nicolle spoke gently motioning with her head.

Mento turned and his eyes went wide when he saw his Captain approaching. “*Sibfla!*” He exclaimed, causing Jomann’s eyes to grow even wider when he heard the word and he watched Mento gently push Nicolle off him and rise to his feet. He helped Nicolle up first before turning to look at his Commander. “Captain Jomann!” He barked, the words coming out strong and proud as Jomann remembered them from so long ago.

Jomann stopped in front of him, his eyes wide and a smile he couldn’t contain splitting his face. “Mento... Mento?”

The young *Durcunusaan* officer beamed, the jagged scar that ran from just above his jaw and down the side of his neck changing to a white color when he did.

“It... it is me Captain.” Mento answered. “I know I should have told you sir but... I didn’t want to... I know it was wrong to...”

Jomann let out a loud whoop of joy and embraced the younger man tightly, pulling his head against his shoulder even as Mento returned the embrace. Jomann quickly pushed him back and looked at him.

“Mento... how?” He gasped.

Mento looked at Nicolle Faith. “It was Nicolle sir.” He spoke pulling her close to him. “I... I saw her on the island and I... I wanted to talk to her so bad. When she greeted me... the words... they just came spilling out again.”

“And he gets better every day.” Nicolle said with a brilliant smile. Her smile faded when she saw her sister step up beside Jomann and her grip on Mento’s waist tightened. “I’m not leaving Brendi!” She exclaimed.

“Nicolle you...” Brendi began to speak.

“No! We are not under Eridiani control anymore! I’m nineteen and I want to see all of this place you brought us too! I want to experience it! I won’t stay on the island anymore! I want to be with Mento!”

Mento looked at Jomann. “I wish to claim her Captain.” He said softly. “I want her with me always! I know this is not... this is not the way it is usually done. I... I have never wanted anything more than Nicolle.”

“This is what I want as well.” Nicolle stated.

“Nicolle... you hardly... you hardly know him.” Brendi said trying to keep her voice neutral.

“I know more about Mento than I have ever known about anyone!” Nicolle snapped. “He doesn’t treat me like an object either. He’s told me everything about himself! And we learn more about each other every day! I don’t want that to change! I never want that to change!”

Mento looked at Jomann. “I will do as every Spartan should do Captain! I will court her and give gifts to her father so he knows my intentions are noble. I will... I need help sir. Mister Faith... he is very old fashion Nicolle says. I... I want to do this right. I want to honor her parents for bringing her into this world. I want to...”

Brendi listened to him speak and couldn’t believe what she was hearing. There was no mistaking that his tone of voice was as sincere as anything she had ever heard and suddenly Brendi realized something. Nicolle was right. Her sister was right that they were no longer constrained by Eridiani rules and culture. They were free and had been given a new life here on this world. Her father was a skilled machinist and her mother was a gifted artist. Mento’s mother stepped forward then.

“Nearly five years Mento has not been able to speak Jomann.” She spoke softly. “You know this for yourself. The gods brought Nicolle to him and now he speaks like he did before Alba Tau. Zeteu and I know who Nicolle is, who her family is. She has told us everything. I will petition the Crown Prince if I have too...”

Jomann looked at her. “No!” He hissed. “We...” Jomann stopped talking and his head tilted a little towards the sky as he felt his Prince and now one of his closest friends reach for him. Andro even blocked his sister.

[He fought with us in that stinking place Jomann.] Andro’s voice told him. *[He bled with us in that stinking place. He almost died defending his brother Spartans.]*

Jomann nodded. *[Yes he did.]*

[We left behind too many of our fellow Spartans on that planet Jomann. Spartans and dragons on that world.] Androcles spoke. *[We can not allow him to face this alone after all this time. This is a piece of happiness that we can all pull from the dredges of the darkness that we all lived through. In helping Mento, we help ourselves push back the memories even more.]*

[I agree with you Androcles.] Jomann spoke softly. *[But protecting Brendi... her sisters and family...]*

[Do you think that I do not know what you and my sister both feel for Brendi Faith Jomann?] Andro told him. *[How closely tied together are we? You, me, Dutkne. You and my sister will discover her soon enough, enjoy the time you have with Eliani until Ms. Faith sees that her life is leading her right to the both of you. She falters even now doesn’t she?]*

Jomann turned his head to look at Brendi as Eliani stepped closer to him, feeling the tremors of the heavily shielded conversation between him and Androcles. She would know her brother’s Mindvoice resonance anywhere. Brendi looked back at him with confused brown eyes, wondering just what was going on.

[Yes she does.] Jomann said.

[She loves her family for she was willing to risk me killing her if I did not get them out.] Andro told him. *[I approve whatever arrangements you need to make. Let’s not let this opportunity pass us by Jomann. I for one would not mind if the nightmares went away a little more.]*

Jomann nodded. *[Neither would I.]* He stated softly.

[Then let’s make this happen.]

Jomann nodded as Andro’s resonance faded and he looked at Brendi. “Do you love your sister Brendi?” He asked.

“Of course I do.” She stuttered.

“Then let us help your sister to be happy.” Jomann told her. “Androcles has given me permission to advise Mento’s parents about Nicolle, you and your family. The Colonel is a fine Spartan and they will be safe. I can not do that however, unless you agree to help me.”

“Help us.” Eliani stated squeezing his arm.

Nicolle stepped up to her older sister. “Please Brendi.” She said taking her hands. “I... I love Mento. I know this is all very sudden, I wish I could explain how he makes me feel to you. I don’t want to lose him and I don’t want to have to choose.”

Brendi Faith made the second largest decision of her life up until this point and she pulled Nicolle into her arms. “You won’t.” She said. “We’ll get mother and father to understand and know.”

Jomann smiled and looked at Zeteu and Lema. “To further this along Colonel... I now officially call you back to active duty to oversee this operation with the Prince’s blessing. There will be security arrangements that need to be attended too. Are you up to the task of this sir? The Faith family is under the protection of the Crown Prince.”

Zeteu’s chest swelled with pride and he nodded his head. “I am always up to the task Captain!” He announced.

“You... you talked to him didn’t you?” Lema gasped looking at Jomann.

“There is much you need to be made aware of if this is going to work.” Jomann said with a nod to her. “Androcles is not one to abandon those who have been through the same hell as him. The first task is arranging a meeting between you and the Faith family.”

Eliani turned and looked at Mento. “The second will be to give you a full medical exam *Phylearch* Mento. You up for that?”

Mento nodded with a smile. “I am Princess.” He exclaimed.

Brendi looked at Nicolle and smiled. “Then we need to figure how to tell mother and father just what is happening between you and Mento.” She said.

“Thank you Brendi.” Nicolle spoke softly. “Thank you so much.”

“Does Tasha know?” Brendi asked.

Nicolle nodded. “She is my twin Brendi... of course she would know.”

Brendi smiled at her as her brown eyes lifted to look at first Eliani and then Jomann. She didn’t understand why she felt a surge of desire and passion when she looked at them, but she could not deny how good it made her feel. Before she turned back to Nicolle, Brendi wondered if perhaps they felt the same thing about her. And for a brief instant, Brendi Faith discarded all she had ever known and an image of her and Eliani flashed through her mind. Both of them pressed close to one another and completely naked. Their arms were wrapped around each other as their naked flesh touched in far more an intimate way than Brendi had ever imagined and they began kissing softly just as a set of powerful arms encircled both of them and Jomann pulled them close to him.

It was an image that would invade her thoughts for many weeks to come until she finally understood what it meant.

And then Brendi Faith would have a decision to make.

HIGH COVEN G9 LONG RANGE TRANSPORT THE WILDS NEAR NEBONESE

“Nalavi... Nalavi that can’t be right.” Yuri spoke as she sat across from him. “I can’t have Darpia Syndrome.”

Nalavi shook his head. “It is right. I have checked the figures seven different times. We’ve been going over this for three hours now. You do have Darpia Syndrome Yuri and with the chemical blueprints that Anja Leonidas gave to us, I can fashion a serum that will save the child.”

“By using Kavalian technology?” Yuri hissed angrily.

Nalavi shook his head. “Kavalian based technology that the foremost Hadarian Healer in the Galaxy altered in such a way that for all intents and purposes it is now a Union medical find.” He held up the pad. “I’ve read the entire medical report she gave to me on this Yuri. It was unbelievably accurate and detailed. She even

included the first failures as a baseline for the serum. It worked on Isabella's child Yuri. You saw him beside Androcles in the landing bay of his ship."

Yuri instinctively dropped her hands to her abdomen. "Nalavi... I can't lose this child." She gasped. "I can't."

"And you won't!" Nalavi declared. "Yuri... this serum she developed works! They used it on Isabella's child. They would not do this if it did not work."

"And the child would be fully grown in a matter of days!" Yuri snapped.

Nalavi shook his head. "No. Among the work she gave me was a calculated timetable based on how far along you are now. You can carry this child for four months Yuri... that is how long your womb will sustain the child. After that it will begin to break down and then we will need to induce the birth with the serum. She calculates a lesser dose so your baby does not grow as fast as Dorian Leonidas. What took him hours to grow will take your child months."

"You trust her?" Yuri spoke.

Nalavi shook his head. "It is not a matter of trust Yuri!" He told her. "They could have done nothing! They could have executed all of us and you know that. They did not have to tell us... and when I did discover it, it would have been too late!"

"Nalavi will this...?" Yuri began to ask.

He shook his head quickly knowing her question. "Darpia Syndrome is hereditary yes, but it only happens once and then it runs its course. You have already given birth to four healthy children Yuri! You will have more! The thing we have to concern ourselves with now is this child. And we have been given the means to defeat the Darpia Syndrome." He shook his head. "Pa'cour... help me to make her understand!" He barked looking up.

Pa'cour had gone forward to check their instruments and had not returned yet. Yuri got to her feet. "Pa'cour?" She called.

They both heard the loud thump like someone had fallen and they rushed forward. They stopped by the small bathroom when they heard wheezing and soft groans. Yuri knocked on the door. "Pa'cour?"

"Not... not now!" His voice echoed from behind the door and it was obvious that he was in pain.

Yuri's eyes opened wide. "Pa'cour... you open this door right now!" She barked. "Do you hear me? You open..."

The door slid aside and only Yuri's vampire reflexes allowed her to catch his much larger body as he slumped into her arms. His weight drove her to the floor however and she cradled his shuddering body with great worry rushing through her.

"Pa'cour my love!" She gasped as his body convulsed several times.

Nalavi gawked at him. "You took it!" He barked. "I told you to wait fool Immortal! Your injuries were not fully healed!"

"Nalavi" Yuri gasped.

"He took the serum." He hissed as he ripped a large container from the nearby wall and tossed it to the floor, tearing it open.

Pa'cour gripped Yuri's arms tightly. "I... I will not..." He spoke through clenched teeth. "I will not have my child enter this world and see... see a monster!" He snarled.

"I told you to wait!" Nalavi exclaimed as he pulled out the portable medical scanner. He turned back to Pa'cour and froze, his eyes wide. "*Phraktos!*" He gasped looking at him.

Yuri too looked down and her eyes grew wide. "Pa'cour!" She cried.

"For... for you Yuri!" He gasped through his pain. "My... my Blessed Wife!" Pa'cour lifted his hand so that he could see and through the grimace of intense pain and stinging that was shooting through his body he watched the transformation take place. Yuri took that hand in hers without hesitation, wrapping her fingers around his as she watched with wide eyes.

It began slowly, right around the injection point of the serum, the dark gray mottled skin began to lighten and smooth out. His eyes watched as it began to move up his arm, slowly but surely expunging his past life and purifying him. He groaned in pain, his body tensing until the veins in his neck and arms bulged outward and Yuri cried out in horror. Pa'cour could feel it though. He could feel the cleansing of his veins, his organs, feel it as the toxin was irrevocably purged and killed by the serum Esther Saira had made. The pureblood

Blessed Wife of his brother Cha'talla and she had saved them all. Yuri's hands tightened on him as he twitched several times, her wide eyes watching with tears rolling down her cheeks as the true Akruian Immortal that Pa'cour was began to take shape. The folded dark gray skin was slowly being replaced by deeply tanned bronze skin. Smooth and vibrant with life. His strong jaw, his full lips that had given her such pleasure as they explored her body in ways Robert had never imagined. The bone spurs along his jaw becoming more white and healthy looking. As it spread across his head, dark hair began to sprout from his skin to cover his bald head. His thick neck strained as the toxin infected skin began to change and extend lower, changing as it moved. Yuri could only watch as the transformation continued while he lay on the deck, his upper body supported by her lap. She could only watch as the most handsome man she had ever laid her eyes upon began to take shape right in front of her. This man. This Immortal that had stolen her heart and soul. She had learned to look past his outer shell and into his soul the first night she had given herself to him. He had made love to her with such passion and intensity that it had stolen her breath away. To be filled by him was the most divine sensation she had ever felt. To feel his huge organ pulsing with her depths as she was wrapped in his arms. She had seen his love, his courage and his determination. Now... now the man she had seen within was coming out.

The process took nearly ten minutes, and Yuri held him tightly through it all, unwilling to let him go. Finally... his face became less tense and his body began to relax and his dark eyes opened slowly to look up into her face.

Nalavi had also watched with stunned eyes. He lifted the scanner once more and could only shake his head. "*Xal l'phraktos preserve uns'aa?*" He spoke. "It... it worked." (May the gods preserve me?)

Yuri could only stare in astonishment as her hand dropped and she began to tentatively stroke the skin of his cheek. Her fingers traced the edges of his bone spurs and she saw him smile as it sent tingles through him. He reached up and took her hand.

"Do I... meet... do I meet your approval my Blessed Wife?" He asked softly.

All her emotions came out then and with a sob of relief and love she crushed his lips with hers. Pa'cour reached around and held her head to his with one hand, kissing her with every ounce of who he was. Yuri whimpered in unabashed delight but quickly drew her head back and beat hi on his chest.

"You fool!" She gasped. "Don't you ever... ever frighten me like that again Pa'cour! I will hurt you if you do such a thing again! Do you hear me fool?"

Pa'cour smiled and a small laugh escaped his lips before he pulled her head down once more and kissed her again.

Yuri found herself unable to take her eyes or her hands off him as they sat in the small lounge area fifteen minutes later. The dark hair had become more than just stubble, filling out quite a bit into short cropped black hair that she had run her fingers through many times. The bone spurs were much more prominent in their healthy white color, and they appeared to be slightly longer, but against the deeply tanned skin they looked so natural and fearsome. His skin was now a deeply tanned almost raw umber color. He didn't wear a shirt as Nalavi examined him, and the muscular definition in his body was mouth watering to Yuri. She would need to spend many hours rediscovering his body the way it was and that caused blissful warmth to surge through her loins.

"We will go here." Pa'cour spoke handing her the data pad as he leaned over to retie his combat boots.

Yuri looked at the data pad, saw what he was referencing and then looked back to him. "Veyerai?" She asked. "Pa'cour... this is one of the planets that Androcles Leonidas gave to us."

Pa'cour nodded. "Yes."

"Is that... is that wise?" Yuri asked. "They will know where we are eventually."

"Yes they will." He replied. "Do you honestly believe he could not find us if he so chose my Blessed Wife?"

Yuri gazed at him for a few seconds. "No. He'd find us."

Pa'cour nodded. "This way... we have the added security that this facility provides to us. It is also only two jumps to where you ordered Lidene to move in the Holmar System." He looked at her. "I assume that you have a reason for that?"

Yuri nodded her head. "Yes. He will continue his research just as I told him. Whatever he develops we will have control of. If Dante or Robert ever got their hands on it, it would be disastrous."

"What is Lidene researching Yuri?" Nalavi asked.

"Weapons mostly." She answered immediately. She was among the two people she trusted most in this life now and she would keep nothing from them. "Ship based and perhaps small arms."

"Why?" Nalavi asked.

Yuri looked at him. "Something... something inside me tells me to go forward with this Nalavi. Not for the purposes of conquering or oppression, but for survival."

"Survival against what?" Nalavi asked.

Yuri shook her head. "I don't know." She answered softly.

Pa'cour took the pad from her hands finally. "The facility on Veyerai is fortified and has everything we need. Nalavi... it will allow you to establish a complete research lab and medical facility as you have always desired. Over time we can bring more to us. The facility can hold over five thousand."

"Who would we bring to us?" Yuri asked.

"Those who believe they would not be accepted by Narice and what she has begun, but who are loyal to the Coven." Pa'cour answered. "Those who believe as we do."

"And what do we believe?" Nalavi said.

"You heard what Androcles Leonidas said Nalavi." Pa'cour spoke. "The time has come for us to leave the past where it is. The future is what must hold our attention. There are many who have done questionable things to insure that future in their own way. They do not hate or kill and have no interest in oppression or conquering. Those are who we need to draw to us."

"Build our own army?" Yuri said.

Pa'cour shook his head. "Not an army my Blessed Wife. A force for good. I... we both have much to atone for Yuri... and in this way we can do that."

Yuri squeezed his hand. "Yes we can."

"We will do the things that Narice can not." Pa'cour said looking at her. "You wish to support your sister in what she does, I can feel this within you Yuri."

Yuri nodded her head slowly. "She's the only one who can." She said finally. "And yes I do."

Nalavi lifted his hand. "What makes either of you think Androcles Leonidas will allow this?" He said. "I don't know about you two, but I have no desire to incur the wrath of that young man, not after what we saw him do to the Kavalian ambassador."

Pa'cour looked at him. "Nalavi... why do you think he let us go?" He asked.

"What?" Nalavi gasped.

Yuri nodded her head. "He could feel it within me Nalavi." Yuri spoke. "He could feel that the urge to rule, to command no longer resided within me. His perceptions of Mindvoice are far more attuned than anyone I have ever met. Including my mother. His father is the same way, but Androcles in many respects is more ruthless and devious than his father."

"Are you saying that he let us go because he knew you would do what you are planning?" Nalavi asked.

"I doubt he knows that Yuri ordered the research he wanted destroyed moved to another location." Pa'cour spoke. "But I believe he knew this is the road our redemption lies upon and he is giving us the opportunity to do it."

"Why?" Nalavi asked.

"I am different from my sister." Yuri said. "Narice will only resort to violence as a last resort and only then will she crush anyone who stands in her way of moving the High Coven forward." She explained. "I am not so conservative. I can act in ways that Narice cannot to insure that she succeeds."

"A shadow force?" Nalavi said.

Pa'cour nodded his head. "We will watch over her from a distance. Never making ourselves known to her or those close to her, but always supporting her in what she does. That is what we can do."

"And I ask again... you think Androcles will allow this?" Nalavi asked.

"Given what he felt within me..." Yuri said. "I believe he hopes that is exactly what we will do."

"What about Moran?" Nalavi asked.

Yuri rose to her feet and crossed the small room slowly. “Ah... Robert.” She spoke softly. “When the time is right...” She turned back and looked at them. “When the time is right we will meet again. I want the pleasure of gutting that *vith'ez fa'la zatoast* myself for everything he has done to me. For everything he and my mother were doing to me knowingly. And I will give Dante and Xaxon’s foul presence within him to Androcles Leonidas, for now only he or his father can truly destroyed what Xaxon has become.” (Fucking bastard.)

Nalavi watched as she returned to her place beside Pa'cour and took his arm within her hands. He shook his head finally and couldn't help but smile.

“Ah *uoi'nota*... retirement didn't look so promising anyway.” He said. “I'm in.” (Hell)

ULU ARC ROYAL EDGE OF THE OUTER ARM

Martin Leonidas leaned against the edge of the door frame into the bedroom and let his eyes gaze upon them in the bed. He couldn't help but think that a long time ago he would have considered all this a very big dream. He was a King to billions of lifeforms. Leader of a collection of species that thirty years ago he would have only seen in some Science Fiction Movie. He shared his existence and a bed with six of the most breathtakingly beautiful women he had ever met in his life and he loved them all to the point of insanity. With the possible exception of Aricia and her soul stealing azure colored eyes, all of them could incite him both intellectually and sexually. Aricia was only different because she could see into his very soul and this gave her an added edge the others did not. He knew she was the cog in their wheel. He was the center yes, but Aricia made it all work. All of them would be the first to admit that had anyone ever asked. How they laid in the bed was the perfect example. Aricia was at the center of the tangle of limbs. Her arms were tightly wrapped around For'mya; Anja spooned firmly against For'mya's back. Dysea was pressed to Aricia's opposite side; Cirith spooned against Dysea's back with Isabella's arms spread out over both of them. He knew every intimate detail of each of their bodies, their scents burned into his brain many times over. He would never forsake any of them. They were part of who he was and now nothing would ever separate them again. Many people had tried to determine through the years who he favored most after Aricia, and he always found it amusing to listen to their rationale.

In truth... they were all more precious to him than his very own life.

Aricia, his *Saaurano*, could and always did incite the wolf within him just a little more than the others, because they were *anomes* and because she was pureblood like him. Her lavender and coco scent was the one that reeked from his pores more potently. Who would he reach for after Aricia? There was something unique about Dysea's wildflower scent and her five foot nine, powerfully built and tattooed body was a divine temple that he would never tire of worshipping at. Every sensual curve and contour of his *Melda Min*, and there were many, rippled with power and sexiness and her elven ears were utterly delicious. Whenever he was within her velvety depths, power flowed through him. What could he say about Anja? Her five foot three inch body was just as powerfully built as Dysea's, yet the fire within her was a drug within itself. She could go longer than any of his other Queens, even Aricia at times, because of her Hadarian blood and the healing radiation within her. And her screams of passion were by the far the loudest of them. Anja was totally uninhibited and probably the most sexually adventurous after Aricia in their bed. Her talented tongue could drive any of them insane with pleasure and she had happily done this to all of them for years. For'mya... his *Kinsoaurgai*. The calm and patience that radiated from her was unmatched, and her quiet intensity in their bed was beyond thrilling as she drove them to new heights. His brother's rape of her had all but been washed away and she was rapidly returning to the woman she was before with their love swirling around her. They would spend many more hours rediscovering For'mya, especially now that her breasts had grown larger because of the Kavalian serum. They were extremely sensitive and she would gasp delightfully just from having them kissed. Isabella was his dark lover. Intense and wild and always whispering into his ears. Her vampire scent of sweet lilacs was addicting and her equally long legs were just as enrapturing. Cirith. What could he say about her? The perfect combination of vampire and wolf blood. Cirith had the best of both worlds and was growing stronger by the day. That she carried Aikiro's blood within her did not matter to him in the least. The wolf blood within her, one of the

original six ruling packs, more than made up for that. She was rapidly beginning to become more familiar with all of them and her passion and desire for both him and his other Queens was growing each day. Her black hair and lush body they had spent hours exploring as she exploded endlessly.

Who did he prefer after Aricia? To him the answer was easy.

All of them.

Martin's head lifted just a little as he felt Wayonn tapping gently against his MV shields. Martin sighed softly. There was always something. At times he utterly hated who he was and wished only to escape and take his women and go to so uncharted world to spend his days basking in the sun and sand and reveling in the scents and charms of his wives and mates. He could not though. He would never lead a normal life because of who he was and what he could do and the name he carried. A name that instilled respect in many and fear in others. A name that was his to wear with pride. Something he did every morning he awoke.

With barely a conscious thought he lowered his shields just enough to talk with him. [Wayonn?]

[*Forgive me for disturbing you my boy.*] Wayonn spoke. [*We need to have that talk now however. I have gathered Helen and Arzoal. We are waiting for you in the landing bay with Torma and Isheeni.*]

Martin nodded. [*I'll join you in five minutes.*]

Martin gazed upon the bed once more, his dark brown eyes alive with life as he brought his hand up to his heart and then clenched his fist over it.

I will love all of you until the very last breath leaves my body and I join my father and grandfathers beyond. That is my vow to all of you my Queens. Never again will any of you endure the touch of another upon your bodies or minds. You are mine. And mine you will be for all time.

Martin Leonidas turned and began to head for the door of their quarters. He did not see six sets of eyes open and heads lift to gaze at where he had been standing only moments before. He did not see those six sets of eyes then turn and gaze at one another with complete and utter love and commitment. He did not see those eyes close once more as those six women drew each other closer and sleep claimed them once more.

And you will be ours for eternity Martin Leonidas. Six voices reached out softly. Forever more.

ARC ROYAL PORT LANDING BAY

The port landing bay had been turned into something of a nursery as half of it was now taken up by nearly two hundred sleeping hatchlings instead of fighters. Iriral and Miath were resting on the deck among the hatchlings now, all of the adult dragons willingly splitting their time to help the hatchlings adjust and begin to learn what they needed. Most of them were terrified of Torma, not just because of his size, but because he was a Talon Guardian and whenever he spoke he had the attention of all of them without question. He had joked with Isheeni how he wished their children had shown such rigid attention to him. That had quickly earned him a whap in the shoulder from Isheeni's wing.

Now Torma, Isheeni and Arzoal sat around the small table that had been set up, with Wayonn, Helen, Danny and Julie occupying the chairs while Martin sat on top of Torma's right foreleg. It was a unique spot that he had been sitting in for years when he and Torma were alone and thinking or speaking just the two of them. When you came upon the two of them when they were sitting this was usually the position you found them in. It was like this with all the Bonded Pairs within the Union. They were so tightly connected that everything was second nature to them. There were some, like Torma and Isheeni's children who were much more introverted and would rarely allow others besides Andro or his siblings to touch them let alone ride them, but this was the way of things.

"...Paladins?" Martin spoke as he looked at Wayonn.

Wayonn nodded. "I was able to communicate briefly with Shiria before we left Union space and that is the term she was going to use to describe them when she told Andro and Deia and the others. It is the closest to what they could be called in terms you would understand completely."

"Holy Warriors?" Helen said softly looking at him. "Why does that sound rather ominous grandfather?" Martin snorted. "Holy Warrior? There ain't nothing holy about me." He stated.

Danny rolled his eyes. "You got that right." He quipped. "Holy shit head maybe! That fits pretty good."
"More like evil sinner..." Julie stated with a large grin. "The way you made your ladies howl for two nights straight. Pitiful!"

Torma chuckled in Mindvoice and butted his snout against Martin's shoulder. *Sort of like when I pinned Isheeni to the deck and made her trumpet my name.*

Isheeni snorted herself now. *You did not **make me** do anything I didn't want to do. She stated calmly. I trumpet your name when I am angry with you as well my husband. Not just when you are causing my wings to tremble.*

True enough . Torma answered.

"Enough!" Wayonn barked loudly ending the banter. "This is important Martin!"

"Ok. Ok." Martin said. "We're listening."

"There is a gene..." Wayonn spoke as everyone returned their attention to him. "An extremely rare gene found only within the Pralor species. Sumar had it. Xaxon had it. One in three trillion, or some similar ratio according to Shiria, that is how many Pralors had it."

"So it was like... really rare." Julie spoke calmly. "We get that part. Drop the other shoe *Val'istar*."

Wayonn nodded to her with a smile. Daniel and Julie were here because he knew that Martin trusted them as he would trust a brother and sister. As Andro trusted his siblings. He was actually beginning to like both of them quite a bit. Behind only his wives and mates, Daniel and Julie knew Martin the best and they knew how his mind worked. And both of them treated Wayonn with respect and reverence that he did not feel he deserved, but he could not get them to stop.

"The other shoe... yes." He spoke. "Let's just say that this gene allows the person who has it to evolve the use of their Etheric powers and abilities into a physical manifestation of those same powers." Wayonn said.

"Like what Marty did on Enurrua?" Danny asked.

Wayonn nodded. "Yes."

"Very nice by the way Skipper." Julie spoke looking at him. "Very nice indeed."

Martin smiled at her. "Thanks Jules."

Wayonn looked at Martin. "You have this gene Martin."

"Yeah... I gathered that." Martin said. "I'm guessing it was kind of hard to miss."

"That's a fucking understatement if I ever heard one!" Danny spat.

"Daniel Simpson... your language." Helen scolded him. "Just because Anuk and Nayeca are not here to reign you in, does not mean you can resort to your former self with Martin before they came into your life. It would be a shame to have all their fine work go to waste by your association with this brute." She flipped a finger at Martin with a smile.

"Ouch!" Julie spoke with a smile as Danny looked properly chastised.

"You won't tell them will you?" Danny asked with a playful tone.

Helen smiled back at him. "I just might."

Wayonn shook his head but couldn't help but smile at the ease with which all of them acted with each other. "As I was saying..." He brought their attention back to him. "Androcles has this gene... and it appears to have now manifested itself within Denali and Jomann as well." Wayonn told him.

"So it is passed down within bloodlines grandfather?" Helen asked returning her eyes to him.

Wayonn nodded his head. "For the most part...yes. But it also appears to skip some generations. Resumar did not have the gene, nor did any of his siblings. I do not know about your father Martin. He may or may not have had it, I ten to believe he did based on what he accomplished, but unfortunately he did not survive long enough for it to manifest itself if he did. In you and your sons it has. Quite possibly Nara and Deion as well."

"Why not Resumar or Eliani or Arrarn or Zarah?" Martin asked.

Wayonn shook his head. "I do not know all the particulars... Shiria would be better suited to explaining the intricacies of the genetic coding involved... but I do know that it will only manifest itself in those who are Purebloods. Lycavorians with two pureblood parents like your father and Gorgo. Like you and Aricia. Purebloods descended from the original bloodlines on Lycavore after we joined with them."

"And why does this matter?" Martin asked.

Wayonn met his eyes. “How many of Sumar’s Tomes did you and Avi discover?” He asked. “And do not try and tell me none because you and your son would not have known how to do the things you have done without studying those Tomes intensely Martin. I know that because I helped him to write them!”

Martin exhaled deeply. “Fourteen.” He answered. “Avi told me that was all of them.”

“You have all fourteen?” Wayonn gasped. “I believed most of them lost during the Black Day!”

Martin shook his head. “Avi said Sumar knew something bad was going to happen and he put them on CS41 before the Coven attack. He told me about them six months after I brought CS41 to Earth.”

“The entire Regime.” Wayonn said softly shaking his head. “Thank the gods.”

“You want to fill us in on why these Tomes are so important?” Martin asked.

“Those Tomes are the entire training Regime that Sumar devised for those chosen to join us on CS41.” Wayonn answered. “It has allowed you and your sons to know how to channel your Etheric abilities in the ways you do. If you have read them all, then I assume you know why Xaxon was punished the way he was?”

Martin nodded. “Yes. I also know that nearly all of these... Paladins you called them? They were killed near the end of the first war with the Scourge.”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. The Paladins were... they were responsible for the last dozen or so successes that drove the Scourge away and gave us victory. Unfortunately those last battles claimed many of their lives. When the war ended only fifty-three of them survived. Fifty-three out of a thousand. Among them Sumar and Xaxon.”

“And the Conclave of Elder Pralors punished Xaxon for what he did.” Martin said.

Wayonn nodded. “Yes.”

Helen looked back and forth between them. “What exactly did he do to be punished as he was?” She asked. “Separating his conscious mind from his body seems rather extreme.”

“His crimes were extreme.” Wayonn told her. “Xaxon’s actions are what started the first war with the Scourge. His actions are also what gave them the ability to begin the second war and bring about the eventual destruction of the Pralor species. I won’t go into great detail now Helen, but the history is all in the Tomes, which you will read I’m sure.” He turned back to Martin. “Where are they?”

“Safe.” Martin answered.

“That does not answer my question.” Wayonn spoke.

“There are five of us who know where those Tomes are Wayonn.” Martin spoke. “Me, Torma, Avi, Androcles and Elynth. That is the way I’m going to keep it for now. It is not a matter of trust Wayonn... it is a matter of common sense. I... Andro has more than likely already told Shiria, or he will soon. Until we return and are within Pralor space, it’s safer if we keep the number as small as possible.”

Wayonn lifted his hand. “You do not need to explain it to me Martin.” He said quickly. “I would do the same. When the time is right you will tell me.”

Martin nodded his head. “I’m going to have to... you’ll be the one doing the training.” He said. “Or did you think I would not know. That is why you have stayed alive all these years Wayonn. That is why fate made you decide to keep tabs on us, and follow us and eventually bring you back to us. To fulfill the role intended for you. To shape Dutkne to stand beside my son and train the next generation.” He said.

Wayonn looked at him for a long moment and finally nodded his head. “There is more of Sumar in you than I had ever imagined my boy and it stirs my Pralor soul to know this. Your insight is unchecked. How much of Sumar’s memories do you understand?”

“Not nearly enough.” Martin answered. “They are mixed in with my father’s, with my grandfather Resumar’s. I catch glimpses of things and places. I witnessed Xaxon’s trial as if I was there. His sentencing. All of it. He was a bastard you know.”

Wayonn nodded. “That he was. Twins they may have been... but two different twins you will never find.” Wayonn looked at him. “What we saw on Enurrua... what we saw Androcles do... that is not all the two of you are capable of is it?”

Martin shrugged. “Let’s just say we still have some tricks up our sleeves.” He answered.

“And you won’t tell me?” Wayonn asked.

“Not just yet Wayonn.” Martin answered. “We are still trying to accept this... these kinds of abilities.”

“You do realize that you are the most devious man I have ever met.” Wayonn said.

Martin smiled and nodded his head. “Just don’t let it get around.” He said. “I’ll never hear the end of it from those two.” He motioned to Danny and Julie.

“Training?” Helen asked holding up her hand. “What training?”

Wayonn turned to her. “The next generation of Paladins.” He said calmly. “For seventeen years before CS41 launched, Sumar and I searched Pralor space for those with this gene. He was driven and convinced that the Scourge would return because of what his brother did. He needed to replenish the ranks of the Paladins lost at the end of the first war. At the end of that seventeen year period we had six hundred and nine candidates. All of them were assigned to CS41. We were going to use the years it would take for the Seed Mission to train them. By the time we returned to Pralor space, the Paladins would have been well on the way to being back to their original number of one thousand when they were at their peak.”

“Why were these Paladins so important?” Danny asked.

It was discovered early on during the first war that the Scourge were very sensitive to Paladins. Being able to manipulate Etheric psychic waves as they were caused the Scourge discomfort and distorted their ability to fight cohesively. It was only certain individuals mind you and after further study it was discovered that this gene was the cause. That is when the Paladins were born. Arzoal spoke from where she sat on the deck. Danny looked at her oddly and Arzoal chuckled within Mindvoice. *I was not always a dragon Daniel Simpson.* She said.

“Oh right! I keep forgetting that. Sorry.” Danny spoke sheepishly.

“So you discovered that this gene was the cause sister?” Helen asked looking at her.

Arzoal nodded her massive head. *I was not involved in the project... but I shared much information with the men and women who were.*

“Sumar and the others with this gene were shown to have the ability to physically manifest their Etheric powers as I said.” Wayonn continued. “They had the power to turn their abilities into weapons.” He looked at Martin. “The psychic diamonds that you and your son can throw were the first signs of this ability. They are the top of the tier of Etheric abilities for those who are able to use them in this way. Those who have this gene. Aricia has shown this ability and I believe Sadi had also shown an increased level in her abilities. From what I understand on several occasions she has physically tossed objects or men into the air with great force?”

Martin nodded. “Yes.”

“She came to me when this first happened grandfather.” Helen said.

Wayonn nodded. “These are also the first signs. Usually random and driven by emotion. I would not be surprised to learn that both Aricia and Sadi have this gene within them and it is in its dormant state.”

“Dormant state?” Martin asked.

“The gene is extremely rare as I said.” Wayonn spoke. “It also has two stages if you will. It is either active or dormant. Within you, Andro, Denali and Jomann it has become active. It most likely has been active your entire lives and was simply waiting until you achieved a proper level of training and abilities before kicking in. In others, it will remain dormant, but allow that person to achieve things others just as skilled as they cannot. Aricia and Sadi being the best examples of this. Aricia’s ability to use her psychic knives and now Sadi’s ability to toss people about with the control she has. You and the others will be able to manifest your Etheric powers in a physical form Martin. This is evident in what you did on Enurrua and what Androcles, Denali and Jomann did at the Icalro Alliance base and what Andro did in the senate chamber. Balls of psychic Etheric power that can be hurled, waves of Etheric power that can be sent crashing forth with devastating power. Being able to make the ground beneath you ripple and heave as if you were controlling it in some way. All of these are abilities that the Paladins under Sumar had. And they used them with crushing success against the Scourge.”

What we were able to determine is that the high concentration of Etheric power within the Paladins could disrupt the Scourge along a mental plain if you will. Just being around a Paladin would cause them to falter and sometimes act erratically. We believe it has something to do with the electrical impulses to their brains and higher functions but we were never able to confirm that. Arzoal spoke.

“Why?” Julie asked utterly fascinated by this information.

“Prolonged exposure to a Paladin would eventually drive the Scourge subject insane.” Wayonn answered her. “It is why the Scourge frequently targeted Paladins in battle and even attempted to kill some of

them in surprise ambushes on Pralor worlds. They feared the Paladins and what they could do. One Paladin could alter the course of an entire battle. It is why we won the first war with them.”

“Why not the second?” Danny asked. “Sumar and you were gone but you said that fifty others remained behind. If they were so powerful...”

Wayonn nodded. “And for the first few millennia they were able to hold the line. Even just the fifty-three. The Conclave of Elder Pralors had been trying for decades to discover where our ship crashed according to what Shiria told me. Eventually they gave up. It wasn't until the abominations that Xaxon had created began to appear and take power that the tide shifted against the Pralor species as a whole. They were immune to the affects of the Paladins and there were many more of them during the Extermination. From what Shiria has been able to tell me, and history scrolls she gave to me once I discovered her, these abominations were dubbed Magistrate Elites or Holy Elites. The Scourge are for the most part an insectoid like species. Hard shelled exteriors with four to six legs. The Magistrate Elites and Holy Elites had evolved enough to walk on two, triple jointed insectoid legs. Most of them still had the tentacles and hard shelled skin of the soldier class, but they were more evolved in most respects.”

“Evolved how?” Helen asked.

Wayonn shrugged. “I did not go into great detail with Shiria about them. I was Sumar's Mage council... we existed to fight them and kill them. We did not try to study them. That was not our job. The Magistrate Elites were the Generals, the Holy Elites their ruling government for lack of a better term. We left the study up to the scientists.”

“That didn't work out too well.” Martin said.

“No it did not. As it turned out, there was a disconnect between the scientists and the warriors. They did not share information. Now that they existed, the Conclave of Elder Pralors began to fear the remaining Paladins because of what they could do.” Wayonn said. “Shiria told me when the Scourge attacked the second time they used tactical surprise and superior force in every instance. They went after key installations and cities. They butchers billions and took hundreds of thousands prisoner.”

“Prisoner?” Martin asked. “Why?”

Wayonn shook his head. “We do not know. All we know is that hundreds of thousands were taken alive during the Extermination. None of them were ever heard from again. Many of those they killed they gathered after battles and used them for a food source for their eggs when they hatched.”

“Wait!” Julie stammered. “They ate your people?”

Wayonn nodded. “The bodies of many dead were collected and preserved so that when their next brood hatched they had food. At least that is what we believed given the evidence.”

“Fuck me!” Danny gasped.

Julie leaned forward. “Wait a minute.” She said. “Why are you telling us about these Scourge? They are hundreds of thousands of light years away. Why would anything we do affect them?” Wayonn met her eyes and then looked at Martin. Julie turned and looked at Martin and then back to him. “Oh man!” She gasped. “You can't be serious?”

“Yes... I am.” Wayonn spoke. “They are coming.”

“The bugs?” Danny rasped. “The fucking bugs that killed the Pralors are coming here?”

“We're the only ones who know right now.” Martin said. “Let's keep it that way.”

“Andro?” Julie asked quickly.

Martin nodded. “He knows. Sadi and his other mates as well I'm sure.” He looked at Wayonn. “That doesn't explain why all of a sudden this ability we seem to have has become so important though.”

Wayonn met his gaze. “It's important because we need to find those with this gene and begin training them.” He said. “Our people will look to you Martin. They will look to you for guidance and support.”

“Wayonn... don't make me into something I am not.” Martin said. “I hate it when others do that.”

“You cannot deny what you are Martin Leonidas. No matter how much you and your son wish it.” He said.

“Jesus...” Martin spoke getting to his feet. “Canth told me something very similar to that and I didn't like the way it sounded then. Now I know what he was talking about and it sounds even worse.”

“And what did my son tell you?” Wayonn asked.

“You have a power within you Martin Leonidas, a potential to be so much more than what you are now. You need to step beyond the power that you wield... step beyond the boundaries of what your eyes and your senses tell you. Everything is not always as it seems son of Leonidas.”

Martin looked at him. “I remember every word.”

Wayonn smiled. “He was very good with words my son.” He stated. “And he is right. Helen has told you before and I am telling you now. You cannot deny what fate and destiny have proclaimed you to be Martin Leonidas. Nor can your son. Or any of those with the Paladin gene.”

“What are you saying grandfather?” Helen asked him.

Wayonn turned to look at her. “Androcles’s actions have bought us time.” He said. “Time to find those with the Pralor gene and then to train them to properly use their abilities for when the Scourge arrive. And they will come. By their very nature they live to exterminate everything having to do with the Pralor people. Even their descendants. That means us?”

“Why?” Julie asked.

“It was because of what Xaxon did.” Wayonn answered softly. “His experiments twisted the subjects he used. Scourge and Pralor alike. His experiments were not sanctioned by the Pralor Scientific Council... and those subjects he created were driven mad. Mad with hate. With rage. All of it directed at the Pralor people, though they had no idea what Xaxon had done. Once his subjects returned to the Scourge colonies, this dark mentality became the predominate emotion among all of them over the course of centuries.”

“No one knew?” Helen gasped.

The Conclave of Elder Pralors chose not to reveal Xaxon’s deeds to the public. Arzoal spoke once more. There were many of us who knew what he had done, but we were sworn to secrecy. Even those like myself who only worked on the periphery of the projects. I dare say my deeds on Elear were of a similar nature.

Wayonn shook his head. “No they were not!” He snapped. “Your goals were honorable Arzoal! It was Artre who holds the blame for that!”

“Why would what Andro did determine when they come?” Julie asked finally.

Wayonn shook his head. “I can sense them. Just as Martin can. And Andro. His actions on Lycavore over twenty-five years ago set it in motion. Though it would have happened eventually.”

“What actions?” Danny asked.

“Activating CS41.” Martin answered. “They detected the ship’s engines when Avi got us into orbit didn’t they?”

Wayonn nodded. “Yes. With Andro’s actions concerning the High Coven and with the activation of *VORTEX* Cruiser 341 they have stopped however. I don’t know why at this moment, but it has something to do with the High Coven I believe. And Cruiser 341. Perhaps they question if we have more ships or not. Their Colony ships were slow and ponderous when we fought them but immensely powerful. It has been nearly twenty-five thousand years since we escaped and settled on Lorent.” He shook his head. “I don’t know anymore about them now than any of you. What matters is that Androcles’s actions have given us the time we need.”

“And just how do we go about finding these people?” Martin asked. “They aren’t going to be wearing a sign that says I have the Pralor gene.”

“Shiria will work out the details I’m sure.” Wayonn answered. “She is more than likely already working on it. Our task is just as important however.” He looked at Arzoal. “Finding these lost dragon eggs... finding Muton and the others with Pralor blood in them. These things are happening now for a reason.”

Arzoal nodded. *Yes... I agree.*

“What reason?” Martin asked.

Wayonn shook his head. “That I do not know.” He answered. “All I know is that what we do now is just as important to our future as what Androcles has done. And the High Coven ties into the circle somehow. Just as Muton and the eggs do.”

Danny shook his head. “Man... this is some heavy shit!” He rasped.

Helen nodded her head at his statement. “Some very heavy shit.” She stated causing all of them to look at her with barely concealed humor. Helen almost never used foul language.

Wayonn... could not the Bonded Pairs or Mjolnir’s Hand do the same thing as these Paladins? Isheeni asked now.

Wayonn shook his head. “No. While they are powerful in their own right... their abilities do not generate enough of a resonance to be helpful against the Scourge.” He looked at Martin. “You asked why your other children can not achieve this skill Martin. It is because they are not pureblood. All of them have the potential to become more than what they are now with the proper schooling... especially those bonded to dragons... but they will never achieve the skills of you, Andro or other Paladins. Zarah is the first among them to show signs with her skills, part of that is because of what Andro did, but her own skills are far superior to others already. Now that she has come together with Lucia... I understand they both have displayed odd abilities.”

“But Aikiro and her father had no physical ties to Xaxon.” Martin said. “Bella and Narice confirmed this for us. Only his Etheric essence was contained on CS19. His body was on CS41. Without his actual body...”

“No... they did not have his physical body but he was more than powerful enough within Mindvoice to transfer some of his lesser skills to her father.” Wayonn answered. “These skills were carried over in her own children and so on down the line. Because of the specific Etheric composition of these skills, they lost none of their potency through the generations. Lucia’s psychic whips are the equivalent to the psychic knives Aricia uses. Almost on a physical plane... but not quite. When used while charged with high emotions they can be quite lethal however.”

Wayonn... Arzoal interrupted. CS19 had survivors aboard. Pralors that merged with the vampires of the High Coven. Is it possible that some of CS19’s had this gene in a dormant state and Sumar and you just did not detect it? It is really no different than what you and Sumar did on Lycavore.

Wayonn met her flame colored eyes and his own grew wider. “That’s it! That has to be it!” He finally exclaimed. “That has to be why the Scourge have halted! The total combined population of the Lycavorian species and vampires is in excess of twenty trillion alone. They do not know how many of them are Paladins!”

“Six months.” Martin said as he rose to his feet. “Eight tops.”

Wayonn looked at him. “What do you mean?”

“I agree what we are doing now is needed and necessary Wayonn.” Martin spoke. “I feel it within me just as you do. If however, after eight months we find nothing, then we are going back. I will not remain away and let my children and my friends fight a war with the Kavalians that I threw the first punch in.”

Training the Coven dragons. Arzoal spoke softly.

Martin nodded. “Eight months. That is all I am willing to spend out here among the stars searching for something or someone that may or may not exist.”

I agree. Arzoal spoke. In eight months the hatchlings will need to be set free in blue skies and clouds to truly evolve. And I believe as Martin does... for that decision was also partly mine as well.

Wayonn looked back and forth between them and finally nodded his head. “Then it will have to do.” He said.

Danny raised his hand. “Just one question folks... and this may seem minor really. Not important at all! Just a thought that crossed my mind.” Danny spoke. “Just how in the holy billy hell do we fight fucking bugs? No pressure mind you... I’d really like to know that. Just out of curiosity.”

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

They were sleeping soundly, Sadi on her back with Ne'Veha snuggled against her on one side and Carisia pressed to her other side with Lu'ria spooning Carisia from behind. The single sheet was disheveled, but it managed to cover most of their bodies from the coolness of the morning air. Carisia was the beneficiary of the body heat from both Sadi and Lu'ria which added to her warmth. The patio doors were open slightly and Andro was awake and holding a large mug of his mother’s coffee in his hand, the dragon medical scanner on his left arm active as he swept it over first Elynth and then Anthar and Majeir. The morning sun was above the horizon in the distance and basking everything it touched in warmth now. Sadi very slowly extracted herself from Ne'Veha and Carisia’s embrace and when she reached the foot of their bed she saw Ne'Veha move closer to Carisia and Lu'ria to regain the heat that Sadi’s body had given her. With a smile of love and affection Sadi got

to her feet and reached for the thin robe on the back of the chair. She moved to the patio door padding silently and stopped when she could see him. The tremors of his conversation with Jomann had woken her and he would tell them what they discussed later she knew.

He had taken to wearing his body armor most of the time now and while the Mark IV ArmorPly conformed to his muscular body like a glove, he preferred to wear only his white pants and a loose shirt when he was here at the villa. He had not slept very well these last few days Sadi knew, the events and circumstances of everything that was happening keeping him very busy. Today was the first day where he would start without an early morning meeting and he was using it to do one of the things he enjoyed most Sadi knew, and that was to take care of Elynth and the other dragons that were now part of their family. Witnessing what they had in the Senate Convocation Building had stunned all of them. No one except Sadi and his other mates had known he had grown so much with his power and abilities, but even they were shocked at what they had seen. He had kept it secret from all his siblings and everyone else except for Denali. Now it was out in the open because he had become angry at the Kavalian ambassador's attitude toward the rape of his mother For'mya. Sadi had seen many Netnews reports on what had happened in the chamber that day and all of them eventually came back to what he had done. Sadi knew he was not yet fully comfortable with the Etheric power within him. The brief excerpts from the Ancient Pralor Tomes that she had seen in his thoughts had spoken of his responsibilities with this power. What he needed to do. How he needed to act. Androcles, Sadi knew, was not a man of inaction but the fact he had this power within him forced him to think about everything he did now and it caused him to hesitate in his decisions sometimes. That is what he did not like. He was learning to deal with it, as he did with everything, but it was frustrating for him at times.

Andro had told them of his discussion with Shiria and Deia and what they were going to do. He never kept anything from them and that was part of the reason they all loved him so. Though Sadi Leonidas knew that deep within him, he would choose her over all of them because they were *Anomes*, it was not something he or she would do willingly. He was like his father in so many ways, and loving each of them just as intensely as the other was part of his strength. Part of the reason that Sadi and all of them were so drawn to him. No other man could ever do to her, to all of them, what Andro did. He missed Caliria she knew, they all did. She was part of them now no matter the struggles she had within herself. Sadi had no doubts she would eventually realize she belonged with them. With Caliria part of them now, adding to them, Sadi had detected something a few days ago while they were in the Senate chamber. It was very faint, almost undetectable, but her own power and the influence of his aura in the chamber on all of them had caused them to feel it. Almost like another mind had joined with theirs for the briefest of moments. Sadi knew if they had felt it, then Andro had felt it as well, but it was not something he would bring up. She and the others had discussed it, for the presence had been female in nature and feeling that presence even for that brief instant had caused all of them to shiver in delight.

His resonance is much more calm and focused this morning. Lu'ria's voice filtered into her mind and Sadi turned to see their Drow Mistress move up next to her.

Lu'ria's glorious ebony body was still completely nude, her shimmering white hair falling far past her shoulders. They had explored each other's bodies intimately since coming together, Lu'ria's smooth ebony skin a delight for all of the to delve into, and to them having clothes on when it was just them was silly unless it was very cold. Since becoming wolf her body had taken on a much more muscular definition and as a proud Drow female she already reeked of sexuality. Her new figure had led to many nights of blissful pleasure even when Andro was not among them. She could be dominant or she could be submissive in their bed but no matter what she was always willing to give pleasure just as easily as receive it. Lu'ria sipped from the large mug of coffee before holding it out to Sadi as she pressed her ebony body against Sadi's side. They always had a large coffee machine in their quarters that was ready to brew on a moment's notice. With the exception of *SirsanGai*, all of them had developed a great like for Aricia's coffee. Ne'Veha still preferred the tea her grandmother had got her hooked on, which they now had plenty of at the villa.

Sadi nodded as she took the mug from her. *Taking care of Elynth and the others has always done this for him.* She answered as she sipped the hot, rich coffee. *It will help to center him again.*

He does not like having the lives of so many hinge on his commands and orders. Lu'ria said. *My father and Am'uur saw that when they met. My father says it is a strength and that it will keep him on a path of moral righteousness.*

Sadi looked at her. Lu'ria's father, her entire family really, had taken an immediate liking to Andro and all of them. Lu'ria was much ballyhooed within the Drow culture now, a celebrity of sorts, for she had four equally stunning women who referred to her as their Drow Mistress and she was the first pureblood Drow who had ever been changed into a wolf. Her body in wolf form was covered in a lustrous coat of soft, pure white hair and she was very nearly as large as Sadi while Ne'Veha was slightly smaller than them. *Your father and Am'uur have left?* She asked.

Lu'ria nodded. *They took a ten member team. Most of them fought beside the King here on Earth.* She looked at Sadi with those glittering amber colored eyes. *Those who betrayed my people will pay for their actions.* She said.

Sadi nodded. *As well they should.* She spoke.

The Krypteria had discovered that two very powerful merchants within The Wilds had been the ones who sold the information to the KFI about the location and routines of any of the Drow outposts that had been struck. In a move that was totally unexpected from Androcles, but which ended up garnering him almost as fierce a loyalty among the Drow as his father, he ordered the assassinations of these two men to be carried out by the Drow in retribution. He was not about to let them escape after helping to facilitate the rape and butchering of Drow females and small children among those the Kavalians killed with the help of these men. Aihola had approved of the mission and left it to Lu'ria's father and brother to execute the mission with her blessings.

What happens now Sadi? Lu'ria asked her.

His actions have bought us the time we need. Sadi answered. *Now it is a matter of being able to consolidate what we have, reinforcing our strengths, addressing our weaknesses and ramping up our production.*

So we will be remaining here on Earth? Lu'ria asked.

Sadi shrugged. *There is no telling what he has planned.* She answered. *The part of his mind that formulates tactics and ideas is not one I will delve into. I tried once and it very nearly drove me crazy with his calculations and scenarios. I could keep nothing straight. I gave up finally.* She said with a smile.

Lu'ria laughed softly. *There have been many great military leaders in the history of Earth. Humans mostly, but no one ever wanted to analyze their minds either.*

They both turned when they felt Ne'Veha and Carisia wake. As was usually the norm for Ne'Veha, she reached for the table console and turned on the Netnews. It was a running joke between them that she could not function without getting her daily dose of news. As she sat lotus style on the bed, Carisia settled next to her with a mug of coffee and one of tea. Ne'Veha kissed her softly in thanks and they both began watching. Sadi and Lu'ria grinned at one another but those grins vanished quickly as they felt Ne'Veha and Carisia's hearts begin to beat faster.

"SirsanGai?" Sadi called moving back into the room fully. "What is it?"

"That fool Senator Icho." Ne'Veha answered motioning to the monitor built into the wall. "He is giving a Netnews conference in Sparta."

Sadi and Lu'ria moved back into the room near the bed and turned to watch the monitor as Ne'Veha turned up the volume. They could see Ulana in the background as well as half a dozen other Senators.

"... Saying that you are one of those who voted against the implementation of Spartan Law and going to war with the Kavalian Federation Senator?" A reporter asked.

"Of course I did!" Icho answered. "War is not what is needed now. What we need to do is talk with the KFI. Find out what their issues are with us and address them accordingly. It is irresponsible for King Leonidas to leave the Prince in command while he gallivants across the stars doing something that none of us are aware of. This is what I have been saying for years. We need to think of reorganizing the Union government. Prime Minister Deia has been in power for too long and we have no need for a King. Especially one who has spoken publicly about how he does not want the job!"

"So you are willing to essentially give the Kavalian Federation a pass on killing nearly a thousand Union citizens in the bombing of the Senate Building? Not to mention the brutal killings of nearly three hundred Drow citizens of the Union." The same reporter asked.

“I’m saying we need to address why the KFI did this.” Icho spoke. “They had reasons for their actions! Reasons that we gave them. Prince Androcles has convinced everyone we need war to settle this. To get revenge for their actions. What drives the Prince to think this? We know very little about Prince Androcles... he has intentionally avoided most contact with the Netnews over the years. He orders the destruction of the Jump Gates around Hadaria, killing millions. He orders these surprise attacks against Kavalian forces who he says were preparing to invade... also killing millions. And his actions in the Senate Chamber behind me have to be explained. We all saw what he did. Where did these abilities come from? Why do we not know about them? And why has the School of the Mages been left out of the loop?”

“Seven times they have requested that the King’s children attend the School and each time they have been rebuffed. Why is this? What is the Leonidas family hiding? What is hidden within the Crown Princess’s past? We all know she was an agent for the High Coven! I have learned only recently that it was she who led the assassins to the Royal Palace on Apo Prime all those years ago! The same assassins that almost claimed the life of our Queen For’mya. Now she is Crown Princess of the Union! How is that? These are the things we need to know. These are the questions that need to be answered! We have now been plunged into a war with the Kavalian people while we make friends with those who have been our enemies since The Black Day! Two of our King’s sons have taken daughters of our vile enemies as their wives and mates! What are we to fathom from this reversal? I for one would like answers! As would many of those I represent and...”

“It’s starting.” Sadi said softly. “And that *upae* is there with him.” She finished her statement with a hiss of revulsion.

“It certainly is.” Andro’s voice echoed hers and they all turned to see him standing there in the room with them. “He can unquestionably play to a crowd don’t you think? And he is asking all the right questions too? How convenient don’t you think?”

“The right questions?” Ne’Veha asked looking at him. “What do you mean when you say that *Saradasaar*?” She asked.

“They are exactly the questions the Kavalians would want the answers to.” Andro said as he lifted his mug and sipped his own coffee. “Coincidence?” He asked. “I think not.”

“You think Icho is working for the Kavalians?” Sadi gasped.

“Laustinos wasn’t working alone that is for sure.” Andro answered her. “And the good Senator is in the perfect position to provide Laustinos many different types of information. So yes... I believe the good Senator is working for our enemies.”

Sadi looked at him as he moved to the COM panel in their room. “Andro what are you going to do?” She asked.

Andro grinned at her. “I’m going to make a couple of command decisions and then we are going to a Netnews conference my beautiful mates. I suggest you all get dressed.” He spoke as he stabbed down on the panel. “Command?”

“*Durcunusaan* Command Milord. Captain Feknar!”

“Patch me through to Assistant Director Marci.” Andro spoke. “Priority One.”

“Stand by Milord.” The officer spoke. “Patching her through now.”

Since the panel was audio only Andro typed several commands and then stepped back.

“Andro?” Marci’s voice spoke. “What’s wrong?”

“Are you seeing the Netnews Marci?” Andro asked.

“Armetus, Nesa and I are watching it now.” She answered.

“Good. Marci... how much funding does Icho’s family Engineering Firm get from the Union government?” He asked.

“They just received a proposed contract for a hundred billion a year times five, to develop and build a viable replacement for the M7 TEMPEST.” She answered. “We haven’t received a signed copy as of yet. Not to my knowledge anyway.”

“Really?” Andro asked. “That much?”

“Yes.”

“Pull it!” Andro ordered. “All of it! And void the contract.” Sadi looked at Lu’ria and the others with a large smile and beaming green eyes.

“Androcles...” Armetus’s voice broke in. “We will need to find a company to give that contract too. We need to continue the development of the fighters. Ben will scream if we do not.”

“Give it to MENKLA Manufacturing.” Andro said. “Sadi’s father no longer runs the company so it is not a conflict of interest. They have a larger construction base anyway do they not?”

“Very much so... yes.” Armetus answered.

“Then give it to MENKLA.” Andro said. “I will be arriving at the Senate Convocation Building in fifteen minutes. Have the voided contracts sent via my data pad.”

“Understood.” Marci spoke.

Andro looked at Sadi and the others. “Shall we go rock the boat as my father says?” He spoke with a grin.

SPARTA UNION SENATE CONVOCATION MEMORIAL BUILDING NETNEWS BRIEFING ROOM

“...attending the School of the Mages is not something required within Union space Senator.” The female reporter spoke.

“No it is not.” Ichō answered. “However, as far as I know, any child with Mindvoice abilities in excess of the norm has attended the school at their parent’s request. At least those parents that I have talked to in my district on Apo Prime. Many of them have asked my why the King’s own children do not attend the school. It is the foremost academy for teaching our children how to use their skills is it not? My many constituents want to know why, if it is good enough for their children, why isn’t it good enough for the King’s?”

“Senator... why the sudden interest in the King’s children?” Another reporter asked. “You have been on the Senate for over seven decades, before King Leonidas ever took power. You have remained silent until now. Why?”

“Prince Androcles has plunged us into a war with the Kavalian Federation!” Ichō replied. “A war of choice! I could sit back no longer and watch as his father and he took the Union in the wrong direction!”

“Senator... you and those who think like you are in a severe minority.” The same reporter spoke. “The outcome of the vote three days ago was very telling in that regard.”

“I believe it was because we were not given all the information we needed to make a sound decision.” Ichō spoke.

“So... are you calling the Prince a liar Senator?” The man continued.

“Certainly not!” Ichō popped. “I’m saying I believe he withheld information from the Senate that possible would have altered the decisions of many of my colleagues.”

“Senator Ichō... these accusations are quite inflammatory.” An elven female asked. “If you have such concerns... why did you not address them with the Prince in private instead of an open forum like this?”

“I believe the people have a right to know.” Ichō answered. “I have asked for an audience with the Prince four times in the last month alone and I have been rebuffed. Senator Ulana, a friend and former love interest of Androcles Leonidas has asked for an audience just as many times and received no reply.”

“Senator Ulana... is this true?” The reporter asked.

Ulana stepped up next to Ichō. “I have wanted to speak with Androcles for some time regarding our relationship. As many of you know, we were together for quite some time after the Evolli War. I was the one who comforted him and talked with him after the war. As soon as the Crown Princess came back into his life, he dismissed me out of hand. As if nothing existed between us. I found that very out of character for Androcles.”

“Are you implying that there is something else to this reaction that you say is out of character?” The reporter asked.

“I’m saying I know Androcles Leonidas to know he would not act in the way he did.” Ulana answered.

“You have heard what they said together many months ago no doubt.” The same reporter pressed on. “They are *Anomes*. Meant to be together by destiny and fate. This is something that is highly regarded by your people is it not? Why question that?”

Ulana smiled sarcastically. “*Anomes* are a myth of our people.” She spoke arrogantly. “No one believes in them anymore and there is nothing based in medical or scientific fact that supports this. Those who do adhere to this way of thinking are either uneducated or religious fanatics.”

This statement caught many of the reporters by surprise and some of them even looked to where Dilaen Roan was standing off to the side glaring in obvious anger at Icho and Ulana. She had not been informed of this Netnews Conference beforehand as was the procedure. It was a common courtesy for senators and others to inform the Royal family about such events if the topics that were going to be discussed concerned them or the policies of the Union in any way.

A Lycavorian reporter stood up now from the back. “Senator Ulana... you do realize that the overwhelming majority of the citizens of Sparta, as well as a good number throughout the Union believe deeply in what you are dismissing. Do you think it is appropriate for you to call them uneducated or fanatical because of what they believe?”

Ulana looked at him. “The Lycavorian people who settled here in Sparta are an offshoot of our people.” She answered. “They do not reflect the mainstream thinking of those men and women who live on Apo Prime or other worlds.”

“Are you sure about that Senator?” The man asked. “It seems to me that you are, in one way, demeaning the men and women who were born and raised here in Sparta. Lycavorians who were sent here by King Resumar to save them at the beginning of the Rebellion. He sent his own son King Leonidas himself here because he believed it a final act. A way to insure our people lived on. Since the return of King Leonidas, many of the Lycavorians who do not live here in Sparta have rediscovered their faith. Are you demeaning them as well?”

“I’m saying that there is no factual information that supports this claim of *anomes* and soulmates.” Ulana said in reply.

“And therefore it does not exist to you?” The reporter continued.

“I would rather trust my future and what I do to what I can prove.” Ulana stated. “Not some ancient and silly myth.”

“It is not a myth to many of our people Senator.” The man snapped at her.

“All I am saying is that I know Androcles Leonidas... and his actions were not part of his character back then.” Ulana said. “He dismissed me for a woman who led a group of assassins to his home to kill his elven mother. A woman whose past is... questionable to put it mildly. Given what we shared I...”

“You what Ulana?” Androcles’s voice echoed in the room causing all of their heads to turn towards the back of the room to see Andro standing in the open doorway. Sadi stood beside him, Carisia, Ne’Veha and Lu’ria on both either side of them. He had changed into his Mark IV ArmorPly, the crimson cape with gold trim falling to the floor from his shoulders. Sadi and the others were dressed in a similar manner, Sadi gripping his right hand tightly, Carisia his left.

Andro looked at Sadi. *KertaGai?*

Sadi’s eyes beamed at him and she smiled. *Ulana and I will have a reckoning of our own Saradasaar. You can not stop that now.* She spoke softly. *I will deal with her in my own way. That does not mean you cannot defend your honor if it makes you feel better my love.*

Andro chuckled and leaned over to kiss her. A lingering kiss of passion and love that was just as much for the benefit of the Netnews crews who were watching as well as Ulana. *I promise I will act appropriately.*

So will I. Sadi told him.

Andro turned back to the Netnews room and started up the center aisle towards where Ulana and Icho stood. Andro glanced to where Dilaen was standing with Thomas and he saw her shake her head, cross her arms over her ample chest and shoot him three fingers, meaning that Icho’s people had not let her know that they were going to do this and that at least three of the Netnews channels were privy to it before it began. Andro nodded his head and turned back to look at Icho as he walked closer. He let his eyes gaze across the men and women gathered in the Netnews conference room as he walked.

“Good morning everyone.” He spoke casually as he moved towards the podium. “Since the good Senator Icho did not deem it necessary out of courtesyness to inform my Chief Information Officer Dilaen Roan that he was going to have this little gathering, when I saw it on the Netnews I thought I might crash the party. I hope no one minds?”

Icho and Ulana watched as he mounted the podium stage with them while murmurs swept through the gathered reporters. Andro ignored Icho for the moment and looked at Ulana while shaking his head. “You are so far out of your realm of understanding Ulana that it isn’t even funny anymore.” He said softly to her though his voice carried to the first rows of reporters. “You don’t know me Ulana. You never knew me.”

Ulana’s eyes narrowed in anger. “You were mine!” She hissed softly. “I am five times the female she is! She is nothing more than a common tart!”

“I was never yours *upae!*” Andro snarled at her more loudly this time. “I have belonged to Sadi since I was eight months old! And she to me! You never understood that Ulana! You have never believed in that! Do not presume to think you know me because we laid together a few times Ulana! You have never known me! You will never know me! And to be honest... it was never that good anyway! You don’t hold a candle to any of my mates individually, let alone when they are all together!”

This statement was heard by nearly everyone in the large chamber for Andro’s voice had risen several decibels in anger. Eyes flew open across the room, Dilaen Roan’s hands went over her mouth in stunned shock and Sadi, Carisia, Ne’Veha and Lu’ria could not help but burst out in soft laughter at the rear of the room.

Icho stepped forward now, his own eyes filled with anger. “How dare you treat her in such a manner?” He snapped.

Andro met his gaze. “I will treat her exactly how she treats everyone around her Senator Icho! You and she have no right to stand there and judge what the vast majority of our people believe to be wrong because it does not fit into your perfect little world! Neither of you can even speak the ancient language of our people! You think it beneath you!” He barked right back at the man. He shoved the data pad into Icho’s chest. “Here is what I think of you old man.” He spoke harshly. “My father and I, the Leonidas family, we will not have a company whose owner and chief operating officer believes it is acceptable for the Kavalians to rape my mother and kill hundreds of our people because they questioned our action; we will not have them building the many fighters our pilots will go into combat with. Your contract with the Union government has been voided and the now MENKLA Manufacturing will build the ships we need.”

Icho’s eyes grew wide in disbelief “You can not do this!” He declared.

“It’s already done *igord!*” Andro spoke before turning away from him and moving to the podium and looking out at the shocked Netnews reporters. “You wish to know me?” He called out. “Here I am! I will give those of you in this room one question each! The good Senator Icho complains that no one knows me... well here I am. I will answer whatever questions you wish to ask to the best of my ability. Since none of you have had the time to prepare for this, your questions will be honest I hope. Before we begin let me say this...”

Androcles looked at Icho and Ulana for a long moment before turning back to the many faces before him. “I am a Lycavorian Spartan! I was born here in Sparta and the gods be willing I will die in Sparta! I am the Crown Prince yes... but as many of you know... I do not care for titles. I never have and I never will. I... I follow what is in here!” Andro pounded his chest over his heart with an armored fist. “As my Spartan father taught me! As the Spartans who knew my grandfather Leonidas taught my own father in this very city when he discovered who he truly was! I do not care what you think of me. Every action I have taken in my life... every decision I have made has been made with the best interests of the people of the Union at its center! That is what my father taught me! Our people come before all! I am no different from them except for the blood that runs in my veins! I would die for any of them with question! That is my purpose and role in this life!” Andro turned and looked at Icho. “Others may see something else...” He turned back to the reporters. “But they do not know me!”

Andro lifted his right hand slightly and picked the heavy podium up several inches with his Etheric power before tossing it across the room to smash against the far wall between two *Durcunusaan* troops who didn’t move an inch from their spots. The reporters all looked at him in shock. “You wish to know me?” Andro said as he settled to the edge of the stage and sat down casually. “*KertaGai! SirsanGai! Enylarcopri! Ilythiiri Tessai!*” He called out. Everyone watched as Sadi and the others moved forward confidently holding each other’s hands as they climbed up on the stage to settle beside him. Sadi on his right, Lu’ria on his left and

Carisia and Ne'Veha on either side of them. "Our *Inamarno* is not here with us at this moment but we will stand for her as well. The time has come for the people of the Union to know what we have discovered these last months. Ask your questions. But know this... I will not reveal military decisions or plans nor will I discuss them. I do this because it protects our men and women out there now and our citizens as well. Sadi has agreed to allow you to ask questions about her past as the good Senator Icho has questioned so recently. Whatever may have happened it is in the past, and that is where it belongs... in the past. And that is where it will remain. You wish a window into me. Into my family. Now is your chance. I hope Senator Icho does not mind if I take over his Netnews conference?"

Small murmurs of laughter came from the gathered reporters as they pressed closer, many of them moving their assigned chairs closer to the stage, fascinated by this unheard of access to the one member of the Leonidas Royal family who had always shunned the Netnews at every turn.

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

"And to be honest... it was never that good anyway!"

Shiria nearly lost the tea she was drinking as they heard that and she saw Deia pump her fist up and down once.

"That is the way to get the attention of a crowd and take control *Mandri!*" She gasped in delight. She turned her head quickly at Shiria's almost choking fit and she saw her, Thr'won and Panos looking at her with wide eyes. "What?" She spoke defensively. "I never liked that little *upae* anyway! Or that worm Icho!"

Shiria wiped her lips with her napkin before speaking. "He certainly knows how to get a person's undivided focus." She said. "Deia is this wise of him?"

"Androcles has always been the one that so many have wondered about." Thr'won spoke softly and saw Shiria turn to look at her. "He is Martin's oldest son. The heir to the throne. He has never been shy about displaying his distrust and outright dislike of the Netnews. Rightfully so really. Ever since he was a small boy they have always been curious about him. He is the enigma they have always asked about and were never able to get answers on. Do not doubt he knows exactly what he is doing *Val'istar*. By doing this... he neutralizes any enemies that may try to use Sadi's past against them. That is what Icho was trying to do. And by doing this... he is finally giving others a window into himself. To see what many of us have always seen. When he is done... he will have made far more allies than enemies. That is why he is doing it. He wants their trust. If he has their trust... he will have their support."

Panos nodded. "It's a brilliant move tactically speaking."

"And it will divert any attention from what we are doing." Deia said shaking his head. "That boy is too much like his father... no matter that he does not want to be."

Thr'won nodded her head in agreement. "That he is." She stated. "That he is."

UZU OZEIB 7

VENTASH'MA MEETING CHAMBERS

The windows had been repaired quickly, several tables now lined up against the far wall that held Danishes of all kinds and pitchers of *Nau'shindcal d'l'Vlos*. For the first time in more than twenty thousand years, the men and women in this room did not fear their fate. They did not fear the dozen Immortal Guards that stood along the edges of the room. They had never been allowed in this chamber before, but now things were different. No one in the room feared for their life. The Immortals were present because they had sworn themselves to the protection of Narice and the *Ventash'ma* for the good of the Coven and Akruxian people. Three speeches Narice had made since the *Ventash'ma* had overwhelmingly named her Empress of the High Coven with their full support. Two of the speeches had explained to the citizens of the Coven what she was doing to insure their existence into the future. By now, word had reached to every corner of the Coven about Admiral Pontal leading High Coven forces against the Kavalians and doing so with ten Fleet Groups of

Lycavorians fighting beside them every step of the way. The word of Androcles Leonidas had proven true and now the combined Coven and Lycavorian forces were methodically taking back planets lost decades ago in the initial invasion. The light of hope could not change the atmosphere of their planet, but it had made the hopes and spirits of so many soar higher and louder than at any time in the Coven's long history. The reaction and emotion of their people had breached millennia of distrust and caution and touched the men and women of the *Ventash'ma* allowing them to finally see that this should have been done long ago. It would not be easy going forward they knew... but their personal influence and power had only grown for the decisions they had made in the last few days and it was far sweeter than it had ever been. Now they were actually looked up to and not reviled. All of them had decided either in groups or by themselves that they needed to see this through. That this is what they should have done millennia ago.

The three holograms in the center of the table were Pontal, Riall and Cha'talla as they made their daily report. Narice sat at one head of the table, Toria and Felisa on either side of her. Datarik sat at the other head. He had been put forth as Chief of the *Ventash'ma* by Narice and the vote had been unanimous across the board. Something that had never happened before.

"...pressing on all fronts." Pontal reported. "If all goes according to plan... we should retake Acewea and Taett by the end of the week."

Riall nodded from his office on his own ship. "And we will have secured Kabjell and the forward Coven shipyards by the same time."

"How much more can you reclaim Admiral?" Narice asked.

"The Kavalians are not putting up much of a fight, but forward reconnaissance indicates they have stop retreating and begun digging in along the Cuwa-rue and Yiyala 4 Systems." Pontal answered. "They still have substantial forces however."

Arrarn pushed off from the wall where he had been standing next to Ki'nuq. "Too much." Arrarn spoke loud enough for them to hear him.

Narice turned and looked at him. "Arrarn?" She asked. He had been a rock for her these last days. He had grown so much in only the last two weeks, yet his humor and sharp wit was still there.

"We are taking too much." Arrarn said moving closer to her. "We won't be able to defend it all if they counterattack. We need to stop and circle our wagons."

"Circle our wagons?" Datarik asked from his chair. "What does this expression mean Arrarn Leonidas?"

"I realize that I am not as experienced as you or my grandfather Admiral Pontal... but I have learned quite a bit from watching my father and brother work." Arrarn spoke. "Everything has happened quickly. Perhaps too quickly. We..." Arrarn stopped talking and looked around the room. "I'm sorry... I didn't mean to overstep my bounds. I shouldn't have said anything."

It was *Ventash'ma* Riara who spoke next. "No!" He barked. "I wish to hear what it is you have to say young Leonidas. You are in a unique position. You are outside these events and looking in at everything that has happened. Your only concern is for your Blessed Wife Narice. We on the other hand are inside looking out. Tell us what you see young Arrarn Leonidas. I think I speak for all of us that we have entered a new age and we are not all knowing. We need young and fresh ideas. Tell us... what does this circle our wagons mean?"

Arrarn looked first to Narice who was staring back at him with beaming dark eyes and a dazzling smile. He then looked to Riall in the transmission. "Grandfather?" He asked.

"Tell them." Riall said.

Arrarn moved up next to Narice. "It is an ancient Earth term... but one that has worked well in the past. It is how the Union survived against the Coven for so long just after the Rebellion began though they had a different term for it. We have taken nineteen planets back but our forces are stretched out across seven systems. Not bad right now... but if we try to take back more it will become dangerous. It is the same tactic my brother is using now within the Union."

"Time." Cha'talla spoke now.

Arrarn nodded. "Yes. We don't know how much of the Coven military is still supporting Moran at the moment. Yuri is a non-factor as we all know. But Moran is still a threat. We don't know how many support him."

"My people tell me he has at least eight Fleet Groups." Pontal spoke.

“Eight Fleet Groups that he can turn against us at any time.” Arrarn spoke. “I don’t think he is going to care that if he attack us, it only weakens us to the Kavalians. And he still has Dante with him and we don’t know what he is capable of.”

“Because of the same blackness that infected Yuri?” Toria asked.

Arrarn nodded. “We all saw it first or second hand. Everyone in this room. Some of you may not believe in it completely... but you are opened minded enough to at least consider it.”

“What do you propose Arrarn Leonidas?” Pontal asked.

“Circle our wagons Admiral. Consolidate our gains. Reinforce everything we have taken. Get the people back on their feet. Make each and every planet we have taken back a virtual nightmare to attack again.” Arrarn told them. “We have millions and millions of tactical mines that we aren’t using correct grandfather?”

Riall nodded and leaned forward in his chair as he began to see what Arrarn was saying. “Yes we do.” He answered. “As well as defensive fortifications that we have in storage.”

“Instead of trying to reclaim the old High Coven border... let’s make a new one. At least for right now.” Arrarn said. “Mine the shit out of the coreward side of our gains. Shift the PDPs you have guarding planets closer to Uzu Ozeib 7 further out. If the Kavalians want to attempt to take these planets back, we make sure they know the price in blood is going to be too high no matter how many clones and ships they throw at it.”

“So you did listen to the many hours of lessons you got?” Riall exclaimed.

Arrarn smiled. “Of course I did grandfather. Just don’t tell father or Andro. I’ll lose my reputation of being an airhead.”

Riall laughed at this. “Your secret is safe with me.” He spoke. “It is a sound and proven plan. If we move quickly... the Kavalians will not be able to shift enough of their forces into any one area to stage a serious counterattack.”

Pontal nodded. “Thank you Arrarn Leonidas.” He spoke. “I was becoming so revitalized by our victories that I almost lost my sense. How soon can we shift our own assets and get the rest from the Union.”

Arrarn grinned. “Andro is my brother sir. I just happened to have a direct line to him.” He said. “I’m not really doing anything right now. I don’t think Narice is going to be jumping across the stars anytime soon and I’m sitting on my hands. That’s kind of boring for someone like me. I can coordinate the move and where to send the assets if you like.”

Pontal looked at Narice from his own ship. “Empress... the decision is yours and the *Ventash'ma*’s... but with our current disposition we could implement it easily. Do you agree Riall?”

“Yes.” Riall answered.

Narice looked at his image. “How long can you stay Admiral?” She asked.

“I have a reserved force standing by to enter Coven space.” Riall spoke. “Personally... I would like to remain until Andro calls me back. I’ll be honest... I have fought the Coven for the better part of my entire life and I’d be lying if I said it doesn’t feel downright invigorating to work with you instead of against you. We’ve been where you are now Narice. We can help.”

Narice looked at the men and women at the table. “Do the *Ventash'ma* have anything to say?” She asked. “Other options perhaps?”

“I don’t think we have many of those open to us right now.” Anebal spoke. “Admiral Pontal... do you disagree?”

Pontal shook his head. “No.”

“Then I move we go forward with Arrarn Leonidas’s plan as he put forth.” Anebal spoke.

Datarik nodded. “As do I.”

Narice nodded. “So be it.” She said.

“I will shift a battalion of Immortals to each location.” Cha’talla spoke. “Narice I will also divide the Coven dragons as well. Given the fear the Kavalians have of our dragon brothers... even two or three on the surface of a planet will give them additional pause.”

Narice nodded. “Very well. We’ll speak again in the morning and advise everyone of the status.” She spoke. “I would like a moment with just the *Ventash'ma* before we begin the rest of our day.”

Datarik and the others looked at one another as the room began to clear. Narice rose to her feet and moved to the table to refill her glass before turning back.

“I believe we have some decisions to make.” She spoke. “And I will not make them without the consent of the *Ventash'ma*.” She moved back to her chair. “Let’s talk.”

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE

AUSTROVA

COREN RE MYDALA’S OFFICE

Coren lowered the pad he was reading and looked at Dutkne. “You are certain about these individuals?” He asked.

Dutkne nodded his head. “I’m certain.” He answered. “Drey and I haven’t been able to ascertain just how they are involved, but they are.”

“Two of these men are part of your government Dutkne.” Coren stated.

Dutkne nodded. “Yes they are.” He replied. “And I will make examples of them all.”

Coren got to his feet and moved to the counter pouring himself a glass of wine. “Wine?” He asked Dutkne.

Dutkne shook his head. “No. Thank you though.”

Coren turned and looked at him once more, sipping the wine before speaking. “As much as I struggle with everything I have thought and felt for your people Dutkne... I can’t help but see just how wrong I may have been all these years. I watched every single bit of the interview Androcles did you know. He is a supremely complex young man.”

Dutkne nodded. “That he is.”

“Why would he do such a thing? Over three hours they took questions.” Coren asked. “It was obvious to me that this Icho character was attempting to impugn that somehow Sadi Leonidas was not what she truly is. Revealing what was involved in her past was not something they needed to do.”

“He knows there are people within the Union government who do not like his father and mothers or they change they have brought.” Dutkne spoke. “Better to face the problem head on and make it something they can’t use. Icho was trying to inject suspicion about Sadi. He may have succeeded in some fashion, but addressing it as they did eliminates all those who are not fanatics.” Dutkne looked at him. “We have not been on the best of terms Regent Re Mydala... I will be the first to admit that... but my people as a whole are not enemies of the Vanari. It may seem that Androcles is harsh and cruel... but you must remember what the Lycavorians of the Union endured for so many years. In many ways it is similar to what the Vanari have endured over the decades and centuries. Slavery is abhorrent to my people, more so to those within the Union. This mentality has carried over to the vast majority of the species within the Union, many of whom have been with them since the very beginning. The Spartan way of life was embraced by many more who are not Lycavorian.”

Coren looked at him. “His father is the same way?” Coren asked.

Dutkne nodded. “If what my grandfather has told me is true, very much so.” Dutkne got up and moved across the room to stand in front of Coren. “Coren... you will not lose your children. The virus within our blood that changes a person can not be transferred to a Vanari. That is a medical fact and you know that. Our ability to Mindvoice can be passed to a Vanari if they are touched by a Lycavorian strong enough within Mindvoice to make a connection. You’ve seen that already with Caliria. We treasure our wives and mates Coren. They are the future. Do you honestly think Andro cares that any child he and Caliria may have will look like her and not him?”

“What?” Coren asked.

Dutkne nodded. “I had a long talk with Eliani after we rescued Caliria. The virus in our blood can’t change a Vanari, and any child born of a Lycavorian and Vanari union would carry the Vanari pigmentation in their skin. They may be half Lycavorian, have our added strength and endurance and skills, but they will look like a Vanari.”

“And this... this would not bother you?” Coren asked.

Dutkne laughed softly. "Our children are sacred to us as well... second only to those who give us those children. It would not make a lick of difference. Caliria, Arduri, even Naesta... they are still your daughters and will always remain so. Meaning no disrespect sir... perhaps now is the time to fully let go of what you have believed up until now and start being more open minded. Let our actions and beliefs show you that everything you have believed is false. At least for the vast majority of our people."

Coren looked at him. "That you admit there are those among your people who act as I have always believed tells me that you are sincere Dutkne."

"I hope that is a good thing sir." Dutkne spoke. "We would be far better friends and allies than enemies."

Coren nodded. "Yes... I'm seeing that. However... it appears that there are others within the Board of Regents who have latched onto my way of thinking and pushed it even further to advance their own goals."

"Have you identified anyone suspect?" Dutkne threw the question out there not really expecting Coren Re Mydala to answer him. Coren's answer surprised him to say the least.

"Seven that I am certain are involved." Coren answered returning to his chair now. "Two of them on the SBR... including Ardan."

Dutkne was silent knowing the relationship between the two men and how far it went back. After a moment he met Coren's eyes. "You are sure?"

Coren nodded. "Yes. As much as it pains me to say that." He answered. "Caliria also contacted me and told me the Eridiani human male she was seeing before she was taken has magically reappeared. He said he was forced to return to the Eridiani homeworld when his father realized that he was seeing Caliria. He swears he had nothing to do with her being taken by the OSG. She met him for lunch and he gave her a pad with several Lycavorian names." He lifted the pad and handed it to him.

Dutkne took the pad. "I take it you don't trust him from the tone of your voice."

Coren snorted. "I trust the Eridiani even less than I did the Lycavorians before all of this happened." He spoke.

Dutkne looked at the pad. "Did she reveal anything to him?" Dutkne asked. "About what we are doing?"

Coren shook his head quickly. "She may have had feelings for him before, but she is very wary of him now. I don't think she trusts him in the least. That is the sense I got from her anyway. She is head strong and will do things her way, but earning her trust now would be an infinitely hard thing to do." He answered. "And surprisingly... he didn't ask."

"He didn't ask?" Dutkne said moving back to his own chair. "Why does that not bestow a whole lot of trust in me?"

Coren smiled. "Yes... I said the same thing." He told him.

"This is a lot deeper than we first realized Coren... you do see that?" Dutkne asked.

Coren nodded. "Very much so." He answered him. "I suppose it should not surprise me considering how long it has been going on. The SBR keeps coming up with excuses to not meet with Denali as well. They are stalling for time."

Dutkne nodded his head. "They realize that Androcles will do exactly as he says he will by severing all ties to the Vanari."

Coren looked at him. "The loss of our many trading contracts with the Protectorate would cost us billions in annual revenue." He said. "We would not be able to make that up in other ways without a retooling of many of our industries. That would take years and force us to open talks with several species that we do not usually associate with. It frightens them. Androcles frightens them."

"Yeah... he does that to a lot of people." Dutkne said with a smile. "It can be a hindrance at times."

"Interacting with these other species would not benefit our people. We would have to open up Vanari space to their use, allow them to land on our planets and colonies. That is not something that the SBR wants to do." Coren said. "All of them at one point or another have tried to take what they want by force or coercion. They failed."

Dutkne nodded. "Because most of them consider the Alkay the Vanari secrete a valuable tool of espionage and they want it for their own purposes. Or they don't trust your people because of it."

Coren nodded slightly surprised as he looked at Dutkne. "Yes." He said.

Dutkne saw the look on his face and smiled. "I may have hated my duties as Director General... but that doesn't mean I didn't know them to the best of my abilities sir."

Coren nodded with a small smile. "Of course."

"We need to catch them red handed sir." Dutkne spoke. "Your people won't believe it otherwise."

"I agree." Coren said. "The question remains... how do we do that?"

"Ardan has told no one that the Union developed a counteragent to the OSG chemical?" Dutkne asked.

Coren nodded. "Which to me is the biggest sign of his involvement."

"Has he approached you about it?" Dutkne asked.

Coren shook his head. "No. And I doubt he will. I believe he is waiting for Denali or Lisisa to reveal this publicly, and then he will have all the ammunition he needs to prove that the Lycavorians are guilty of conspiring to enslave us. He would turn the entire board against you, all the while protecting himself and those others who are selling our people."

"Could he be doing that right now... behind closed doors?" Dutkne asked.

Coren shook his head. "No. I would hear about it. I have built relationships with these men and women while I neglected my family and pushed my daughter away because of the color of her hair. They know me... they trust me. Any one of them would come to me before giving their support to Ardan in dismissing the Protectorate and now the Union. I know it."

"I will trust you in that regard sir... all I ask is that you take precautions." Dutkne spoke. "Ardan, if he is involved as deeply as both of us believe, he would not hesitate to have the OSG or the Lycavorians working with him to stage some sort of attack against you to show we can not be trusted."

Coren nodded. "I have thought of that as well. I know Denali has some of your people watching me from the shadows. I have not seen them as I move about so I can only assume those who are watching me are some of the vampires within your ranks that are so adept at using the shadows and moving about unseen."

"They are there to protect you Coren." Dutkne said. "That was Andro's order."

Coren met his eyes. "He ordered me protected? Even after what he believes I feel about him and his people?"

Dutkne nodded. "That ought to tell you what kind of man he is."

Coren nodded. "Indeed it does." He said. "If Ardan moves against me he will employ Lycavorians, of that I am sure." He said. "It would be another example of why we can not trust your people."

"Why not the OSG?" Dutkne asked.

"The Eridiani here on Austrova are constantly watched by Vanari Intelligence." Coren answered. "Anything out of the ordinary that they do immediately gets sent up the chain. That goes directly to the VI Director. A man who I happen to be excellent friends with."

"And you trust him?" Dutkne asked.

"I should... he is my brother's oldest son." Coren answered. "No... Ardan would not use OSG people for this. He is trying to insure the selling of my people continues. He will use your people. In this way he can put forth to the board that we need to reach out to others to..." Coren stopped talking. "That's it." He said coming to his feet.

Dutkne looked at him. "Sir."

"If Ardan can prove to the SBR and the entire Vanari Board of Regents that Lycavorians are the enemy he can get them to void our trade contracts with the Protectorate himself!" Coren gasped.

"Wait! You just said that would be a bad thing." Dutkne said. "Why would he want to do that?"

Coren looked at him. "Then it forces us to do exactly what we don't want to do! It forces us to open our borders to species we don't want to deal with because of their past transgressions towards our females." Coren answered. "And it gives him an avenue to further his wealth by having other buyers for our females." Coren's eyes grew wider. "And it puts him in a position to dispose Alrerin Sha Harael as First Regent! Ardan is next in line!"

Dutkne's eyes grew a little wider as well now. "He wants to take over the government?" He gasped.

"It has to be!" Coren hissed. "Why else go through all of this and take such a long time developing it all? He must have been planning this for years!"

"This... Coren if what you say is true... this changes things a great deal." Dutkne spoke.

“Indeed it does.” Coren spoke looking at him. “I must speak with Denali Leonidas. As soon as possible Dutkne.”

Dutkne got to his feet. “Let’s go.”

DEIA’S OFFICE SPARTA

“... Bold move Andro.” Deia told him as she finished pouring him a mug of his mother’s coffee. Her temporary office was crowded with six people in addition to her and Androcles, two of whom were not human. Avi and 341 stood to one side of the room, while Shiria and Resumar occupied the two chairs closest to them. It seemed that wherever Resumar went now, one of the hulking avatars was beside him. Thr'won sat on the small couch with Panos.

Andro accepted the mug from his aunt and nodded. “He’s a *nubous* traitor *Tenna*.” He told her. “This way I have put him on the defensive. I don’t know how long he has been helping the Kavalians and Laustinos, but long enough to influence many others and turn them to his way of thinking. Since I can not move against him without direct proof, I used the provisions of Spartan Law to dictate military logistics. It was a sound move all around to be honest.”

Deia looked at him. “Ulana?”

Andro shrugged his broad shoulders and they all could see he was truly at a loss when it came to discussing her. “I don’t know *Tenna*. I think Ulana is motivated by something else. She truly believes herself superior to Sadi. She’s acting stupid and I need to avoid her as best I am able.”

“There is an old saying from here on earth.” Thr'won spoke softly smiling at Andro’s obvious ignorance of what was motivating Ulana. “There is nothing more dangerous than a woman scorned.”

Andro looked at her. “I acted honorably with her *Val'istar*.” He spoke softly. “I never disrespected her in any way.”

Thr'won shook her head. She had never been able to break him of the habit of referring to her as Val'istar. He had always held her in great regard and this was his way of showing her just how important she was to the overall scheme of things. While Thr'won was not as powerful as say Helen or himself, her Mindvoice abilities were quite superior to most others. She had spent nearly a decade learning all she could from Helen, and now she was the second most influential graduate of the School of the Mages behind only Helen herself. When Thr'won spoke, men and women listened. Her mate of nearly a thousand years had turned her long ago and she had fallen hopelessly in love with the much older Spartan. Now after six hundred years together and three children, Thr'won was the Senior Mage of Sparta, a feat that was a first of its kind in Sparta’s long history.

Deia looked at Panos and a flicker of understanding passed between them. *[He has no idea does he?]* She reached out to Panos.

Panos shook his head minutely. *[I don’t believe he does.]* He answered. *[Even I do not understand the nuances of the females of our species Deia. As my mate tells me so often.]*

[She’s obsessed with him.] Deia spoke. *[He doesn’t know what kind of draw he has over women but he is just like his father. Women would slaughter and maim over them. I once heard Anja threaten to sew a female’s opening shut with fifty year old leather dipped in feces if she kept pursuing Martin. I don’t know what it is that makes their women so devoted but it is far more than normal. It will come to blows Panos.]*

[Then so be it Deia.] Panos answered.

[Sadi will kill her you know.] Deia spoke. *[I’ve seen the way she looks at Andro. They way they all look at him. If Ulana steps across that line she is towing right now, Sadi will end her in a very vicious fashion.]*

[There is nothing we can do there.] Panos spoke. *[The instincts of our people are strong Deia and there are times when we need to let them out. If Ulana pushes Sadi too far, then we just need to step back and let nature take its course.]*

Deia nodded. *[You are right.]* She said softly. *[I just hope it’s not too bloody.]*

“I understand that Andro.” Thr'won answered bringing them back into the main part of the conversation. “No one believes otherwise no matter what Ulana says. I’m just telling you how Ulana is thinking. You left her

for another woman. For Sadi. Ulana is arrogant to the extreme. She is wealthy, beautiful and she believes she is better than everyone else. She truly can not understand what you see in Sadi that makes her better.”

“That’s an understatement.” Resumar snorted. “She’s a real uppity *upae*.”

Thr'won chuckled and nodded her head. She had been part of the birth of every Leonidas child up until Dorian, and she knew each of them well. “That is a most accurate description Res.” She told him. “That is also what makes her dangerous. She will not let this go. She has it in her mind that you belong to her Andro. She will not let this go until it comes to blows with Sadi I’m afraid.”

Andro sipped his coffee and looked at her. “That would be a singularly stupid thing for her to do.” He said. “I only found this out a few days ago, Sadi and Ne’Veha both felt they wanted to know more after seeing what happen with my mother. Lu’ria and Carisia have been instructing them in the finer points of hand to hand combat. They are working out nearly every day.”

Panos laughed now and shook his head. “Then they will be just as deadly as they are beautiful.” He stated. “Oh... I wish to be there for that confrontation.”

Deia sat down. “They didn’t tell you?” She asked.

Andro shook his head. “No.”

“Drow trained Princesses?” Thr'won spoke softly. “A lethal mix if I do say so myself. And one that I would not want to be on the receiving end of.”

“Better check under your pillow every night *fervon*.” Resumar told him with a laugh. “And be very careful you don’t piss them off.”

Andro smiled. “Tell me about it.” He said. He turned back to Deia now. “What is it you wanted to see us all for *Tenna*?”

“Shiria and I have put together a plan.” Deia said as she too sat back down gingerly in her chair. She still used her hover chair for long periods of time but she was getting stronger by the day and moving around more and more under her own power.

Shiria leaned forward now and spoke for the first time. “We believe that we have found a suitable way to detect anyone who may carry the Paladin gene whether it be active or dormant. It is a medical gene and therefore we can scan for it from orbit of a planet with one of the Pralor long range corvettes that *SPARTA’S WRATH* carries. I spoke with Eliani and she has localized and centered the systems on two corvettes with Avi and 341’s help to detect and focus on this particular gene.”

Androcles nodded. “Ok... why did you need to see me?”

“I want to begin recruiting them Androcles.” Shiria said.

“You?” Andro gasped. “No way! Absolutely not!” His voice carried considerable heat in it and this surprised Shiria and she sat back.

“And why not may I ask?” Shiria spoke finally.

“Who you are is beginning to spread *Val’istar*! It may be of my doing but it would have begun sooner or later!” Andro told her. “Hell... you can’t miss that *SPARTA’S WRATH* is in orbit! How can anyone miss a ship that is seven kilometers long and unlike anything we have ever built! That we did not build that ship is obvious, and sooner or later they will put two and two together! They will know you are from the species that built that ship! Who you are is beginning to spread Shiria and I will not risk you for some silly undertaking!”

“I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself Androcles Leonidas.” Shiria spoke very defensively. “And this is not a silly undertaking!”

Andro shook his head. “That is not what I meant and you know it!” He snapped. “Once Keleru discovers who you are and that you are the one who encouraged Athani to defect, that it was you all of these years, that you were hiding *SPARTA’S WRATH* from him, he will make capturing you a priority! He will want the secrets you have in your head and he will come after them!” Andro told her. “It’s what I would do! We do not know the full extent of those who sympathized with Ichu and his ilk. We...” Andro stopped talking for a moment as if something had just occurred to him and got to his feet. He set his coffee on the table and moved to the window that provided a beautiful background of the Evrotas River as it wound its way through Sparta.

Shiria was about to open her mouth and respond but felt Resumar and Thr'won both rested their hands on her arms. Thr'won shook her head quickly indicating that she should say nothing. Andro looked at his hands as he held them up in front of him. He could feel the Etheric power surging through him. He had felt it for years now, just as his father had and like his father he had tried to pass it off as advanced Mindvoice abilities. It filled

him with strength and confidence and purpose. It was a power that he did not truly understand until he began reading the Tomes of his Pralor grandfather. A power gifted to him and his father and now he knew so few others. A power that could help him protect and serve those who looked to him. Those that looked to his father and their family. He had only caught a few fleeting images and sounds from his grandfather Sumar's memories that he gotten from his father's own memories, but he knew that his father could see more. What he had seen, it had frightened Androcles. It frightened him right down to his core because it made Alba Tau look like a picnic in comparison. Andro turned back and looked not at Shiria but Avi and 341.

"Avi... can you and 341 integrate Shroud Mark Nine Shields into the Pralor Corvettes?" Andro asked.

-Easily Androcles Leonidas-

"The ships are armed as well?" Andro asked.

It was 341 who answered. **-They carry a standard complement of weapons for a Pralor Corvette. Ten batteries and four torpedo bays-**

"What is the crew complement?" Andro asked.

-Eighty-three standard- 341 answered.

"How many does *SPARTA'S WRATH* carry?" Andro asked.

-Seven that are fully functional. Two that had their power cores removed to enhance the PILLAR OF FAITH- Avi answered.

Andro nodded. "Avi... I want two of them configured with Mark Nine Shrouds and any additional weapons you and 341 think could supplement what they have. Scan the service records of the *Durcunusaan* and the Drow. Assigned an additional twenty to each ship. Small unit operations experience a must. Preferably those who have seen combat. I already know who will command them and I will give you their names."

Avi nodded his head. **-I will see to the modifications-**

"341... you will be accompanying *SPARTA'S WRATH* to Dreamland. My Uncle Ben is looking forward to meeting and working with you." Andro said.

-I am to be removed from combat- 341 asked surprising everyone with the tone of his voice. It almost sounded as if he was hurt.

Andro shook his head. "Only for the short term." He answered. "You are more familiar with *SPARTA'S WRATH* and her systems. I need you to help Uncle Ben disseminate what you learned in the Farnuri Expanse, and then I want you to help him in finding ways to augment our normal systems with Pralor technology that can be done quickly. Or something to that effect. During the same time you will be picking and training members to bring *SPARTA'S WRATH* to a full crew complement. You will have access to the entire Union database of personnel. I will leave it up to you to choose who you think best suits the tasks in running her. The next time you go into battle I want you worrying about the weapons systems and leaving the rest to others. It's your ship."

341 blinked several times as he processed what Andro said. **-Forgive me if my inquiry is incorrect Androcles Leonidas... but it processes within my neural systems that you are placing me in command of SPARTA'S WRATH-**

Andro nodded. "I suppose I am in a way. Can you think of someone better for the job at this time?"

-Processing- 341 spoke. –Analysis complete. You are correct-

Andro smiled. “I do get some thing rights once in a while.” He said looking at Shiria. “You will have your ships *Val'istar*. Anything you need you will have. *Tenna* Deia will be here on Earth coordinating your efforts. You are too important for us to risk *Val'istar*. Understand I will give you free reign until you act recklessly. Then I will order you back here.”

Shiria came to her feet. “I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself!” She snapped.

“I don’t question that.” Andro said. “What you need to understand is that you are the only pure Pralor left alive. I will not put you in harm’s way for any reason. My father would not allow this, and neither will I. You will not fight me on this or I will lock you within a villa in Gytheio under guard.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Shiria snapped as she came to her feet. “I am not helpless young man! I am...”

Andro lifted his hand and suddenly Shiria was lifted into the air, encased in a light blue aura. Her eyes grew wide at this and she realized that she couldn’t move. She glared daggers at Androcles which bounced harmlessly off him, but that glare contained a fair amount of respect as well now. Andro stepped closer to her, looking at her as he held her within the Etheric field. “You are not helpless *Val'istar*... no. But you are also not a warrior. You are a scientist and we need you. Now more than ever with what is coming. What those of us in this room know is coming. You have a reckless streak within you *Val'istar*, so please do not fight me on this. You will not win no matter what you do.”

Shiria glared at him knowing he spoke the truth. He could easily overpower her no matter what she did simply by the dominance of the blood of Sumar in his veins. “I... I need to do this Androcles.” She managed to finally stammer. “I sat back... I was sent away while my people died! I need to do this!”

Androcles nodded and released her, gently lowering her back to the floor. “I know. That is why I’m going to give you the means to be reckless *Val'istar*. Only it won’t be you actually doing it.”

Shiria looked at him puzzled. “I don’t understand.”

“You will.” He said. “You will. Those who you find are not to be told why they are being selected. At least not yet. When you find them, have them assigned to your command. A Secret training mission. They will be sent to the Dragon Brigade facility to wait. When you have all of them then my father or I will talk with them. They must know what it is they are being chosen for and given the option to accept it or not.” He turned to Resumar. “Once Avi and 341 have done the refits... you and Athani are to take one of the corvettes and return Mican, Pian and Jalersi to the *Val'istar*’s fortress. From there you and Pian will coordinate the rebels with Mican. Uncle Isra will remain with you to command the section of the Dragon Brigade but *Tenna* Tarifa needs to remain here and begin acting in her role as Governor of Sparta or the Kavalians will begin to wonder. As will others. Her absence will be a liability we can not afford.”

Resumar nodded. “I understand.” He said. “The *PILLAR OF FAITH*’S Strike Group?”

“It is your Strike Group *fervon*. They go where you go. I’m also assigning two *OMEN* ships to your command. Keep them apart from the Kavalian forces but give Pian full access to their abilities.” Andro said. “Establish a supply list that has whatever you can use before you depart.”

“Uncle Vonis?” Resumar asked.

“I have plans for Uncle Vonis.” Andro spoke. “At the moment I do not want to reveal too much for they are not fully formulated.”

Resumar nodded. “Works for me.” He said.

“Avi... you will go to Dreamland as well for the time being.” Andro said.

-My mission?-

Andro looked at him a moment. “Our shipbuilding capabilities are no where near what the Kavalians have because of their clones. I want you to find a way to create more of the Worker Drones to help us in building our own ships and merging the Pralor technology into them. Is that possible?”

Avi nodded his head, his red eyes blinking several times. He looked at Andro. **–It would require access to the power core of *SPARTA’S WRATH* for a short time, but yes I believe it can be done-**

“Then do it.” Andro said.

-This will not take much time Androcles- Avi said. -The Worker Drones are fairly easy to replicate. What am I to do after?-

Andro looked at him. “Five city ships crashed with yours Avi.” Andro said. “We know the fate of four of them. I need you to find the fifth. I need you to find that fifth ship and then we will pray it is reasonably intact.”

RICOT FOUR THE WILDS

Am'uur lowered the body of the Kochab mercenary silently to the ground, his throat neatly sliced from side to side. He held the foul smell mercenary in his death throes, before driving his Drow combat blade deep into his lower back, twisting the blade up to insure he died. The body was cooling quickly as all Kochab did when life left them. Am'uur lifted his hand with a clenched fist and raised two fingers. Two more Drow appeared from the shadows behind him and dashed forward with only the brushing of fabric on the ground to indicate any sound. Am'uur turned when his father settled beside him clutching the silenced version of the venerable HK74 that the Drow had adopted for these types of operations. The former SEAL Team Twelve weapon was perfect for them as it combined excellent stopping power and near silent slide action. All of the Drow in Am'uur's team were equipped with them, as well as silenced K14 Magnums and their personal assortment of knives.

There were seven of them assigned for this operation. The first of three such operations they would conduct before returning to Earth. They had been meticulously planned, each of Am'uur's Drow warriors knowing exactly what they were doing. His father had come because he was just as skilled as the younger warriors and he had vowed to Daba and his daughter that he would have retribution for what had happened to their people. Daba had wept as he held her and gave him her blessing only telling him to return to her safely. She and Ceneia needed him to return. Androcles had granted them their retribution and his as well Teya thought. To return to his beautiful Daba and her new elven lover would be worth remaining alive.

The Evolli they were after right now had sold information to the Kavalians in regards to two of the Drow outposts destroyed. He had done business with the Drow before and though they had always treated him fairly and with respect even after the Evolli war, he had chosen to betray them.

“That is guard four.” Teya spoke in barely a whisper.

Am'uur nodded to his father. “There should only be two more between us and the Evolli in his chambers.”

Teya grinned. “Do not be so quick to launch yourself into the fray my son.” He spoke with a grin flashing his white teeth. “I am too old to die for something stupid. If you would be so kind as to confirm with the lovely blue skinned Vanari woman you have taken as your wife I would appreciate it.”

“You don't trust me?” Am'uur asked with a grin.

Teya shook his head. “Not at all my son. I just trust her more.”

Am'uur shook his head and tapped his jaw. “Tastia?” He spoke softly. “What is our status now?”

“Thermal and motion sensors are detecting only the two remaining roving guards Am'uur my love.” Tastia answered. She had refused to be left behind after discovering what being with the ebony skinned Drow elf had meant to her. Tastia had never imagined she would discover such a man in her lifetime. Now that she had... she wasn't about to let anything happen to him. Her decision to remain had angered Coren immensely, but he knew as well as she did that their time together was long over. Tastia's skills in piloting and manipulating sensors were incredible to say the least and she fit in perfectly with the two Drow pilots of their corvette.

“Explain to me again how you got her to fall for you Am'uur my son? She is far more refined than you.” Teya asked his son.

“I heard that Teya.” Tastia’s voice echoed softly.

Teya smiled when Am'uur’s chest swelled with pride. “I am only asking a question.” He said.

“Perhaps it is because he makes me shudder in his arms when he makes love to me. Or it could be that he tastes delicious and the difference in the color of our skin is divine.” Tastia spoke. “Or the fact that his ears are so...”

“Enough!” Teya announced softly shaking his head in amusement. “I do not need the intimate details Tastia!”

“You asked.” Tastia answered him matter-of-factly from the Drow Interceptor Corvette in orbit. “Vanari are not shy about our sexuality Teya. Especially when we discover a man such as your son.”

“Yes... I am beginning to see that.” Teya spoke. “A fine Drow wife you will make Tastia of the Vanari.”

“Thank you.” Tastia said. “Now shall we continue with our task?”

“Indeed.” Teya spoke. “Time to deliver our message.”

“Renin and Itelli have eliminated the two remaining roving guards Am'uur.” Tastia spoke. “You are clear all the way into his chamber.”

“How many inside with him?” Am'uur asked.

“Three.” Tastia answered immediately.

“Very well. Stand by to pick us up at the LZ.” Am'uur told her. He looked at his father. “Shall we *Ilharn?*” (Father)

Teya grinned. “We shall *ussta dalharuk.*” He answered. (My son)

The Evolli they were speaking of was currently eating his dinner with three of his trusted lieutenants. He had come far since the Evolli War, barely escaping with his life. He had started up his business shortly after the war, choosing the life of an information trader and enterprising entrepreneur. He never dealt with Lycavorians or their allies because he still held a substantial amount of hate and distrust of them for their actions during the war. He completely discounted the fact that the Evolli were the ones who started the war after they felt they were slighted, or the fact that they killed thousands of innocent Lycavorian Union citizens and forced even more into brutal labor camps. He had built his organization from the ground up, and was doing quite good for himself when the Kavalians approached him about the Drow within The Wilds and what he knew of them. He knew from his experience in the war that Drow rarely left Earth, and the majority of them were almost fanatically loyal the Lycavorian King. He always suspected the Drow within The Wilds to be more than they appeared and this is the information he had given to the Kavalians at substantial profit.

His sins would catch up to him this night.

His eyes lifted as both doors to his chamber opened at the same time and he saw a rush of shimmering white hair and dark skin. His lieutenants were the best he could find, two other Evolli and a Kochab mercenary. They were ruthless and totally loyal to him because he paid so well. They did not come close to the seven black clad apparitions that rushed into his chamber with all the inbred speed of the elven species. He saw the tall for an elf Drow male step up to him and he could not avoid the butt stroke from the strange but wicked looking rifle as it connected with his jaw and sent him tumbling backwards out of his chair, pain registering all through his brain. He briefly thought about how they had gotten past his guards, but then Am'uur was grabbing his collar and yanking him to his feet dazed. He was shoved back into the chair and his eyes saw his three men with weapons jammed into their faces and chests. His beady yellow eyes cut to the doorway as the older Drow male walked in. He thought it strange that no females were among the team of Drow and did not understand the significance of that.

“What is this?” He roared finally getting his mind working again. “Do you know who I am?”

Am'uur hit him with an open palm slap hard enough to rock his head painfully to the left and sending pain lancing through his neck. “Shut up scum!” He snarled.

Teya smiled as he walked up to the Evolli in the chair. His son’s men impressed him. He had not seen such precision since he had fought in the Battle for Earth with the King’s forces. He looked at the Evolli in the chair and stopped two feet from where he sat.

“You are the Evolli fool called Sdunn.” Teya asked.

“Fuck you Drow!” Sdunn spat at him. “You’ll pay for this! This is The Wilds! You can’t come here!”

Teya smiled at the man as he drew out the long bladed Drow fighting knife. “You are wrong Evolli.” He spoke with a deathly calm. “You sold information to the Kavalian dogs that allowed them to kill and rape and butcher our people. That was an infinitely unintelligent thing to do!”

“It was business!” Sdunn shouted his eyes wide in fear now as he realized what was going to happen. “Information is my business! It wasn’t personal!”

Teya looked at him. “It is personal to Soul Slayer and he does not agree.” He spoke in a soft voice.

Sdunn’s eyes grew wide. “Soul Slayer?” He gasped in horror.

Teya smiled then. “Yes. It is good you remember that name fool. This is not business to us Evolli scum. This... what we are about to do... this *is* personal. To Soul Slayer and to us. It is deeply personal. A pity for you.”

“You can’t do this!” Sdunn screamed.

“Oh... but we can. And the other two traders of information that betrayed the Drow and Soul Slayer. They will suffer the same fate as you... have no worries. You just happened to be the closest.” Teya spoke. “Soul Slayer sends his regards by the way.” Teya spoke as he stepped closer. Sdunn struggled against Am’uur’s powerful grip holding him in the chair. “You may scream if you wish.” Teya spoke. “It will not matter.”

“No!” Sdunn roared. “No I...”

Teya lifted his blade and the screams of agony began.

LENTANI ROTHRYN HOMEWORLD

She guided Sehri easily through the throngs of men and women crowding the streets going about their daily lives of shopping or work. Lentani was a planet slightly larger than Earth, but much more heavily populated. Oceans only took up half of the planet and allowed for more development than the planet the Rothryn had originally come from nearly fifty thousand years ago. Their original planet had become the largest colony world of the Rothryn now, while Lentani was their government and population center. Sehri allowed her to maneuver them through the groups of men and women and children into the clothing store and into the rear of the building. They moved into a small storage room with no exit and Sehri watched as she lifted her arm and called her SensorTool from Flatspace. She typed a code into the holographic tool and a small section of wall activated, lifting up into the ceiling to reveal a staircase that spiraled down. They entered immediately and the section of wall fell back into place seamlessly.

Ilossa looked at Sehri as they began to descend the stairs and she smiled. The soft spoken young woman was calm and confident in her actions, just as all her instructors had said she was. She was supremely intelligent and her surreal beauty was completely devastating. Coupled with her lush body, which was encased in a form fitting dress wrap under the cloak and cowl, Ilossa wondered how her father and mother kept the young men at bay when it came to her. Her glaucous colored blue eyes were enrapturing, and filled with wisdom. Very little rattled her and she had no desire for male companionship at this time it appeared. That would change in time Ilossa knew, especially if the right man came along who stirred her female aura in that way. It was enough for a Shaman of such a young age to hold such control over her natural instincts, but combined with her obvious Etheric abilities, it was overly impressive as far as Ilossa was concerned.

Sehri had been brought to their organization by Praetor Dyack himself. It had frightened the members of their group until they realized that Dyack and his mate Aleatia believed as they did. The Rothryn Academy had become nothing more than a means for powerful old men to exert their control over men and women who showed more promise than they did when it came to Etheric abilities. When Sehri began to show signs of such advanced abilities at so young an age, the Praetor had brought her to them immediately to keep her out of the clutches of the Rothryn Academy. She was incredibly gifted and surpassed even several of the Shaman Masters in raw Etheric power. Ilossa had no doubts she would ascend to Shaman Master far sooner than any before her. Ilossa turned her head back forward as she led her down the stairs into the secret complex. At the bottom of the

stairs they were greeted by a short corridor leading to another door. This one was steel reinforced and appeared very heavy. Ilossa walked right up to it and once more called her SensorTool from Flatspace, entering in another code. The door clicked once and began to swing open. She and Sehri waited until it was fully open and they were looking at two men and a woman dressed as they were in long cloaks and cowls. Behind them stood an additional three young men armed to the teeth.

“Cleric Mother.” The older of the three men spoke holding out his hands.

Ilossa smiled as she took those hands. “Shaman Master Lassim.” Ilossa spoke with a smile. “It is so very good to see you.”

The tall Rothryn smiled as she squeezed his hands. “It has been some time Ilossa.” He spoke.

“Nearly a year.” Ilossa told him looking at the other man and woman. “Shaman Master Harira. Shaman Master Shael.”

The woman smiled. “It is an honor to be among you again Cleric Mother.” Harira spoke warmly.

Ilossa smiled. “It is an honor to be among all of you.” She turned to Sehri. “I present Shaman Sehri... daughter to Praetor Dyack and Aleatia. It is she who has set our course in action.”

Harira stepped forward and took Sehri’s hands. “Our blessings to you child.” She spoke just as warmly.

Sehri bowed her head. “It is a true honor Shaman Master Harira.”

Harira reached up and ran her fingers across Sehri’s cheek with an affectionate smile. “I see the claims of your beauty do not do you justice young lady.” She spoke. “The young males must drool at your feet.”

Sehri smiled. “It is unbecoming of them Shaman Master.”

Harira laughed. “And you possess a sharp wit and tongue!” She spoke squeezing Sehri’s hands tighter. “Oh child... that is refreshing.”

The second man leaned over and planted a soft kiss on Ilossa’s cheek. “We have been monitoring Vanari Communications grandmother.” He spoke with respect. “There has been another transmission from the Alpha Quadrant.”

Ilossa looked keenly at her oldest son’s first born child. “Unsecured Shael?” She asked surprised.

“It apparently was something of a spectacle within Union space. Since arriving in Vanari space the Union ships have been feeding public news broadcasts to the Vanari with the SBR’s permission. Unencrypted and using QCR tech. It was fascinating. The SBR agreed to this which was a surprise, but we believe it is only so they can use it against them in the end. We have been cataloging the transmission into sections for easy access.”

Ilossa looked at him and then the others. “What do you mean it was a spectacle?” She asked.

“It appears that Shaman Sehri was correct Ilossa.” Lassim told her. “The intercepted communications was some sort of interview or conference the Union Prince was giving. Sehri was correct. It is the Prophecy.”

“Show us!” Ilossa gasped.

Lassim motioned with his arm and they moved down another corridor into a massive room with a very advanced QCR system built into the center of the control core. Half a dozen Shaman apprentices operated the three different control panels.

“Apprentice Shatar... replay the first section.” Lassim spoke.

The entire room lit up with the activation of the holo generators and suddenly they were standing among what appeared to be hundreds of men and women that were seated in neat rows all facing the elevated podium where the young man sat with four equally stunning females, two on either side of him. Ilossa heard Sehri gasp and she turned to look at her.

“Sehri?”

“That’s... that’s him Cleric Mother!” She hissed softly staring at those mesmerizing azure blue eyes. “The one I saw in my mind. It’s all of them. Minus the Vanari Caliria.”

“He has taken a Vanari as one of his mates?” Lassim gasped.

Sehri nodded. “As has his brother Denali. Yes. Both of them daughters to Regent Re Mydala.”

“Regent Re Mydala? He is one of the most powerful and influential members of the SBR.” Shael spoke.

Lassim nodded. “Indeed he is.” He spoke turning back to the transmission. “From what we have seen so far of this Prince, he is having to fight elements within his own government and people who do not believe as he does. This took place a day ago. He just appeared at this function, something that he apparently does not do very often if the commentary of the reporters is accurate. Based on the channel and frequency modulation of

this transmission we have been able to tune one of our QCR relays to monitor this traffic from Union space ourselves.”

“The Union ships around Austrova did not try to stop the transmission?” Ilossa asked.

Lassim shook his head. “No. They were beaming it to the planet in fact. Apparently they are trying to make inroads with the Vanari as a whole. We have compared the transmission Sehri sent to us with other transmissions from this frequency and everything is as she said it was. This Lycavorian Union has declared war against a species called the Kavalians. A feline like species like the one that was killed.”

Ilossa looked at him. “The manner of his death?”

Lassim looked at Sehri and then back to her. “For lack of a better description Cleric Mother... this Prince Androcles... he crushed him within the grips of Etheric power unlike anything I have ever seen before. It was...”

“Andro.” Sehri said in barely a whisper.

Ilossa looked at her once more. “Sehri?”

“He prefers to be called Andro.” Sehri spoke quickly. “No one calls him Androcles except his family and only when they are angry with something he has done. Sadi... his *KertaGai*... she calls him Androcles when she...” Sehri stopped talking and suddenly became very embarrassed.

“How do you know this child?” Lassim asked.

Sehri met his eyes. “I don’t know Shaman Master... I just do.”

“*KertaGai* means Eternal Heart Cleric Mother.” Shael spoke. “It is the ancient language just as the Tomes spoke of.”

“Then they speak the ancient language?” Ilossa asked.

Shael nodded. “It appears many within the Union do. He referred to names in the ancient language for all of them except the dark skinned one. He used a language we are not familiar with for her. *Ilythiiri Tessai* he called her.”

Ilossa looked at Sehri. “Sehri?”

“It is the ancient language of the vampires of the High Coven.” Sehri answered her question. “It means Drow Blossom.”

“You understand this?” Lassim asked stunned.

“Yes Shaman Master.” Sehri spoke.

“Cleric Mother... this is not... Sehri is not a Shaman Master.” Lassim spoke evenly to her. “How could this be? The Prophecy... it spoke of first contact being made with the Bearer of the Prophecy and a Shaman Master. Sehri... she knows things that... she knows things that she should not.”

Ilossa nodded. “Apparently the Prophecy was wrong; or slightly misinterpreted through the years.” She said. “It is only a guide to what we believe will happen Lassim. Not everything is set in stone. There is a reason Sehri is seeing these... visions if you will. A reason she can sense him... all of them on so deep a level.”

“I was there Shaman Master!” Sehri urged him. “I was there for a fleeting moment awash within the minds and auras of him... all of them. I know what I felt and saw Shaman Master Lassim.”

Lassim nodded his head moving over next to her and placing his hand on her arm. “I do not question your visions or your feelings Sehri.” He spoke to her quickly. “Your skills and abilities are well known to all of us. You are much more attuned to the ebb and flow of Etheric power than many Shaman Masters double your age from all accounts. Do not mistake my questions for doubt of you.”

Sehri dropped her eyes quickly. “Forgive me.” She said.

“There is nothing to forgive child.” He spoke.

“We are certain this is Etheric power we are seeing?” Ilossa asked. “There is no mistake here?”

“It can be nothing else grandmother.” Shael spoke.

“It was gruesome.” Harira spoke softly. “He didn’t blink... he didn’t pause. He simply went ahead and crushed this man.”

“What is more important is during this briefing he mentions the Ancient Ones several times.” Lassim spoke again moving to stand beside her. “And he puts a name to them Ilossa! He called them Pralors. If what he said is to be believed then it is as we originally feared, the Ancient Ones, these Pralor, they are extinct now. But their blood and DNA lives on within many of those Lycavorians inside the Union. And so do the miracles of

their technology. He spoke of a ship designed and built by these Pralors that orbits his planet. And how they have derived much of their own technology from this.”

“So the Prophecy is true to its design.” Ilossa whispered softly. “He has the blood of the Ancient Ones within him. This means all of his family does.” She looked at Lassim. “All we have hoped for is true. They are us and we are them! The Prophecy that we would one day be reunited with them is coming true.”

Lassim nodded his head. “After all these millennia we have finally found them.” He said softly.

Ilossa turned to Sehri. “You must return to your father and tell him this Sehri.” She said. “Tell him the Prophecy is true. And the Bearer of the Prophecy has made himself known to us. Through you.”

Sehri stepped closer to her. “The Rothryn Scientific Academy will denounce this as soon as it goes public Cleric Mother.” She said. “They have dismissed the Prophecy for centuries. They will not change their minds easily, if at all. They will denounce this fervently.”

“Then we will keep the knowledge within our ranks and your father until the time is right. Sehri you must ask your father to obtain a sample of their DNA. Preferably from this Androcles.” Ilossa spoke. “He appears to be the strongest that we have seen so far. His DNA will tell us the truth of everything.”

Lassim nodded. “His father is off world somewhere he will not reveal. He only told these news people that he is doing something that needs to be done to secure the future of their Union and its people. He did not go into specifics. A sample of his father’s DNA would be the best as he is King and would have the closest ties to the Ancient’s bloodlines, but this Andro will do for now. Their own broadcasts have said he is the strongest behind only his father.”

Sehri looked at him. “What about from the brother who is on Austrova? Denali is his name.” She asked.

Ilossa nodded. “We can use that as a barometer but what we need is *his* DNA.” She spoke motioning to the frozen image of Androcles.

Sehri looked at her. “Cleric Mother... the only way to do that without causing an incident is to tell them the Prophecy. You have seen bits of his personality through what I have shown you. He will not just hand over his DNA or that of any of his family. He won’t.” She said. “My father is already concerned that Anroth will inform Barnak of what they have discovered up until now. He is wary that Barnak will attempt some misguided action to try and obtain what he wants. What he has always wanted.”

Ilossa nodded. “The ability to manifest Etheric power into the physical realm. To use it as a weapon as this Androcles has shown can be done. In order to use it and push his family to rebel against your father’s rule and claim the leadership of our people himself.”

“Yes Cleric Mother.” Sehri said.

“Barnak is a fool and that is why your father leads us. Barnak may attempt something in regards to her once it is realized she is the conduit to this Androcles.” Harira spoke. “Cleric Mother I request that I accompany Sehri back to Austrova. It is obvious to all of us that the Bearer of the Prophecy has touched her, at least in some manner, and he may well again in the future. Perhaps my skills will be better suited in helping her to try and establish a more definitive connection to him as well as be added protection for her.”

Ilossa looked at Sehri. “The decision is yours child.” She spoke. “I will not force you to move this forward if you choose not to.”

Sehri shook her head quickly. “I want to Cleric Mother.” She answered quickly. “I...” Sehri paused for a long moment embarrassed by the flush that coursed through her or saying anything in front of Lassim and Shael.

Harira took her hand causing Sehri to look at her. [He stirs you child? Doesn’t he?] She asked.

Sehri nodded instantly. [In so many ways Shaman Master. They all do. I want... I want them all. But... but then I don’t. Does that make sense?]

Harira nodded. [Indeed it does.] She turned to Ilossa. “Cleric Mother?” She asked.

Ilossa nodded. “See to your transportation back.” She said. “Try to get Praetor Dyack to grant you a meeting with this Denali Leonidas. According to Sehri’s earlier report, his brother is coming here to the Beta Quadrant at some point in the near future to finalize the merger of the Protectorate into the Lycavorian Union.”

“They are merging?” Lassim gasped.

Ilossa nodded. “Yes... I was surprised as well.”

“We have never had good relations with the Protectorate Cleric Mother.” Shael said.

“For reasons which we never understood.” Ilossa answered. “Now we do. The Bearer of the Prophecy was never among them as we thought. He was among these Lycavorians from the Alpha Quadrant. Their merging is not a surprise to me.”

“And the Vanari?” Shael asked her. “They have never really cared for those in the Protectorate.”

“The Vanari are arrogant fools.” Ilossa spoke. “Their Board of Regents sells their own people into slavery. At least quite a few of them know of it anyway. The OSG is no threat to us, and the Eridiani know not to play games with your father Sehri. He has already showed them the error of their ways once.” Sehri looked at her confused and she smiled. “Ask him about it sometime. It happened many years ago, long before Kelelm was even born.”

“Andro has threatened to void all of their trade contracts with the Vanari.” Sehri spoke.

Ilossa looked at her. “Truly? For what purpose?”

Sehri shrugged. “I do not know. My father has asked about it but the Vanari are being very closed mouth about it.”

“That is a very large portion of their annual income.” Lassim spoke. “I could try and find out with my contacts among the Vanari.”

Ilossa nodded. “Be discrete Lassim.” She spoke. “That information will not be public knowledge just yet. And to know why he has threatened this would be interesting. The more we discover about this young man the more I like him.” She said with a smile. “He has a certain backbone about him that is lacking among many of our own kind and the Vanari.”

Harira took Sehri’s arm. “Come child... there is still time to catch the last transport to the starport and take your ship back to Austrova.”

“Sehri... report anything you believe to be relevant.” Ilossa said. “I will keep you advised of what we discover after viewing these transmissions.”

Sehri bowed her head. “As you wish Cleric Mother.” She stated.

“Go with the gods Cleric Mother.” Harira said.

“Both of you as well.” Ilossa spoke as Harira took Sehri’s hand and they began to leave. She turned back to Lassim quickly. “I want to view this entire briefing Lassim. Do we have it all recorded?”

Shael nodded. “I’ll start it from the beginning.” He said.

AUSTROVA

VANARI GUEST HOUSE

“Are you sure about this Regent Re Mydala?” Deni asked as they sat in the large main room.

Coren nodded. “There can be no other reason.” He stated. “I’ve known Ardan for the better part of a thousand years; I know what he is capable of. When it comes to politics and advancing his goals he can be ruthless.”

“Selling our people into slavery father? Ardan?” Arduri asked from the spot on the couch to Deni’s left. Lisisa sat on his right.

“Yes... selling them into slavery.” He stated. “If it ultimately gets him to the position he wants then yes... it is exactly something he would do.”

“Does the First Regent know?” Arduri asked.

Coren shook his head. “Not yet. I came here first. Alrerin Sha Harael is a fine man but he follows too closely the letter of the law as First Regent. Ardan’s actions will directly affect the status of the Lycavorian people however Denali Leonidas. All of these years I have believed one thing and I have been blind to what my own people are doing right under my own nose. It makes me sick to my stomach!”

“There are those among our people that have still wronged the Vanari Coren Re Mydala.” Dutkne spoke from the side.

Coren nodded. “Yes. But it is a tiny fraction of your people and ones who do not adhere to the values I have come to realize that the majority of your people do. I have hated your kind for so long it has blinded me to the truth!” He hissed angrily. “And it may well have doomed my people!”

“No!” Arduri exclaimed coming to her feet now. “Deni... there must be something we can do!”

“The security teams that we brought have strict rules Duri.” Denali answered using the nickname he had come to start calling her. “They are to insure your father’s safety... not actively take part in espionage against the Vanari. That is not something Andro would allow.”

“It is not espionage if I authorize it.” Coren spoke. “We... we must stop Ardan and those who are working with him or he will lead my people to ruin Denali Leonidas. If he somehow becomes First Regent he could very well alter the balance of power within the Beta Quadrant and he would most certainly use the information we unwittingly gave to him to bolster his position against the Protectorate specifically and Lycavorians generally.”

Denali looked at him for a long moment. “Does the Vanari Empire pose a military threat to the Protectorate?” Deni asked looking at Dutkne.

Dutkne shook his head. “Meaning no offense Coren... but no.” He answered. “They have an equal number of ships, but my people drill and train harder everyday. They have few combat experienced officers. Their ground forces are slightly larger in size, but aside from their Vanari Commandos, many of them have never seen combat in any form. Certainly never against one of us.”

Coren looked at him. “That makes a difference?” He asked.

Dutkne nodded his head. “We may have learned how to curb the more feral instincts of our species Coren, but in battle we have also learned how to harness those same instincts.”

The communications panel next to the couch chimed and Lisisa reached for it. “Yes?”

“Princess... the Rothryn Praetor and his son are here requesting an audience with Prince Denali.” The voice of the Durcunusaan trooper spoke.

Lisisa looked quickly at Deni with surprise in her eyes. “Deni?” She asked.

Denali looked at Dutkne. “This is unexpected.” He spoke.

“There is already a relationship established with Coren.” Dutkne thought quickly. “It would not look odd if he is here. You can’t refuse him as the leader of his people. It would be seen as a major slight.”

Deni looked at Lisisa and nodded. She touched the panel. “You may show them in Commander.” She spoke getting to her feet.

“Why would the Rothryn want to meet with you?” Coren asked.

Deni looked at him. “The Rothryn are Lycavorian Coren.” He answered. “The only difference between us is that they can’t shift. You must have noticed the similarities through the years?”

Coren nodded with wide eyes. “Of course... but we never thought... are you sure?”

Lisisa nodded. “Eliani can confirm it when she arrives with Andro, but we are reasonably sure that is the case. It would explain a lot of things really.”

“The dislike between the Rothryn and the Protectorate?” Coren asked looking at Dutkne.

Dutkne nodded. “We suspected for many years but never had opportunity or reason to confirm this. They were not exactly happy to see us the few times we have run across each other in the past.”

They became silent as the Durcunusaan trooper led Dyack and Kelelm into the main room where they came up surprised that Coren and Dutkne were present.

“Forgive me.” Dyack spoke. “I wasn't aware you already had guests.” He stated.

“Praetor Dyack... it’s a pleasure.” Denali spoke moving closer to him. “What brings you here?”

Dyack glanced at Coren and Dutkne before looking back at Denali. “I was hoping to discuss something of a private nature Prince Denali.” He spoke finally. “I can return at a later time if you are busy?”

Deni shook his head completely out of his realm now. “No... please stay. What can I do for you?”

Dyack met his eyes. “It is of a private nature as I said.” He stated calmly but with a tinge of anger in his voice.

Kelelm heard this and also knew from the expression on Deni’s face that he was lost. He stepped forward quickly. “You are not use to diplomatic missions are you?” He asked with a smile.

Deni met his eyes. “No. No... I am not.” He answered honestly.

Kelelm nodded. “Neither was I.” He stated with a smile. Though he was considerably older than Denali he knew just what he was talking about. He was also a shrewd negotiator and from the looks on their faces he could decipher what it was they were talking about. “I assume that Regent Re Mydala is not here visiting his daughter?”

“We were discussing private matters as well!” Coren hissed.

“Papa!” Arduri exclaimed moving closer to him and placing her hands on his arms. He had changed in these last weeks. Slowly she could see a different man emerging from the distrustful and angry man he had been these last years. Perhaps his eyes had truly been opened with all that had happened.

Coren looked quickly to where she touched him and he could not hide the emotions that poured through him when he felt her hands on his arm. “Arduri.” He said softly looking into her stunning green eyes.

Dyack knew immediately what his son was doing and he saw an opening that could provide benefits to all of them if he played his cards right. He stepped forward closer to Denali. “I can infer from the presence of Regent Re Mydala and Director General Dutkne that you were discussing security measures and more than likely how to end the selling of Vanari females into slavery.”

They all looked at him with wide eyes and it was Kelelm who chuckled. “We are not without eyes and ears.” He said.

“You... you know?” Deni asked in shock.

Dyack nodded. “The OSG approached us many years ago about buying Vanari females.” He answered. He held up his hand when Coren began to speak. “Do not worry Regent Re Mydala, I told them exactly where to stick their offer. They were not happy to say the least. We do not believe in slavery of any kind among my people. After they departed, we did a very small investigation and came to the conclusion that someone within your government was assisting the OSG. Something that I think you may have just come to realize.” He said looking at Coren.

Coren met his eyes and nodded his head after a long moment. “It seems many more know of this than my own people.” He said.

Dyack moved closer. “Do not regret not believing members of your own people capable of such thing Regent Re Mydala. I have a similar issue among my own people...” He looked at Denali. “Which is why I have come here now.”

Deni canted his head. “Really?”

“Perhaps there is something we can do for you.” Dyack said. “And in exchange... we would want something in return.”

Denali held up his hands. “Whoa! Stop right there!” He snapped. “No way I’m making the call on this!” He moved to the COM panel. “Prince Denali to *ARCHDEMON*. Secure... three nine Lisisa, four one Arduri.”

“COMs secure!” The voice answered. “This is Lieutenant Hopla sire! Senior COM Duty Officer.”

“Initiate a secure QCR COM with my brother on Earth Lieutenant.” Deni spoke firmly. “Find him! Interrupt him if you have too. I need to speak with him right now!”

“Stand by Milord. Prince Androcles’s schedule is still forwarded to us in daily reports.” The voice answered. “It is 0730 on Earth Milord. He is still on Cranae Island. I’ll initiate the COM center there and connect you. Stand by.”

“... Is wrong Deni?” The deep voice echoed as the holo transmission engaged and the room they were in flickered suddenly and the figure of Andro appeared sitting on the couch in the private area of his villa. He was shirtless, for it was still early and he wore just his white pants and held a mug of their mother’s coffee in his hand, a data pad in the other. “Have you broken something already *fervon*?”

Deni chuckled upon seeing his brother and watched as Andro looked up and saw who was with him in the transmission. His coffee mug stopped as it was rising and he set the pad to the side.

“Not exactly.” Deni answered.

Andro glanced at Coren. “Is it Caliria? Is something wrong with *Inamarno*?” He asked quickly.

Coren shook his head just as quickly, seeing the genuine concern in his face and hearing it in his voice. “No Androcles.” He stated quickly. “There is nothing wrong.” He paused for a moment. “You should contact her... I know... I know she misses all of you terribly.”

“Part of her returning with you was to discover what it was she wanted sir.” Andro answered.

“Contacting her will only make matters worse as much as I want to see and talk to her.”

Coren nodded. “I understand.” He said.

Andro rose to his feet now and his azure eyes fell upon Dyack and Kelelm. “*Fervon*... I assume that if the Praetor of the Rothryn people and his oldest son are present, there is probably something you have not told me.”

Dyack looked at the image of the young man before him. Even within the transmission he exuded power and confidence. The black flaming bird tattooed to his abdomen only enhanced that persona, as well as the odd shaped symbol on his upper right chest that looked as if it had been burned into his skin. It was oddly shaped like one of the razor like talons he had seen on the dragons that had arrived with Denali Leonidas. Three small scars dotted his upper left chest which Dyack recognized immediately as some kind of weapons fire. He sighed an internal sigh, thankful that he was going to speak to a young man who knew about combat. A young man who could speak from experience unlike his own son Anroth who thought he was better than fellow officers even though he had never tasted combat.

“Andro... things have become more complicated than we first thought.” Deni spoke moving around next to Dyack and drawing his thoughts away from his internal observations. “Coren believes... and to be honest most of the evidence is supporting his theory... that Ardan is at the top or very close to the top of the conspiracy within the Vanari government in selling their people. He also believes Ardan is making a play for leadership of the Vanari Empire.”

Andro’s eyes went to Lisisa. “*Arande*... you concur with Deni?” He asked.

Lisisa stepped up beside Deni and nodded knowing that Andro only asked because they were so closely tied together. “Yes.”

“Arduri? Coren?” He asked.

Arduri nodded and Coren shook his head. “As much as it pains me to admit. Yes.”

Andro saw Dyack’s son lean close to his father and whisper something. He turned his head back to them. “Something Praetor Dyack?” He asked.

Dyack shook his head quickly. “No Prince Leonidas... Kelelm was simply telling me what *Arande* means. I am not as well versed in the Ancient Language as some of my children, a situation I will remedy as soon as I am able.”

Andro’s head canted slightly. “*Forn echta vada allsknes nimerd* of the Lycavorians?” Andro asked him surprised. (You speak the ancient language?)

Kelelm nodded his head. “The... the dialect you use is slightly different than what we have been taught... but amazingly it is almost identical. It is rarely spoken among our people now; it is too difficult to learn. Our history teachers refer to it as the Ancient Language. They never knew its origins. You are saying it is the language of your people.”

Andro nodded slowly. “Spoken over fifty thousand years ago and lost during our long years as slaves to the High Coven. Lost except for those Lycavorians born and raised in Sparta, It is rapidly making a comeback here in the Union... but you are correct... it is difficult to learn. It requires commitment and interest.”

Kelelm smiled as he looked at his father. “Another sign that what we believe is true father.” He said.

Dyack nodded. “Indeed it is.”

“Very interesting.” Andro said looking at the man. “That would imply that my brother was very correct in his initial assessment of you and your people Praetor Dyack.” Andro said softly.

“You... you have me at a disadvantage Prince Androcles.” Dyack spoke. “I do not know what your brother reported to you after our dinner. It was cut rather short once we witnessed your display.”

“You saw that?” Andro asked.

Dyack nodded his head. “An impressive feat to say the least.” He said.

“He told me that in his opinion and given everything he has seen and smelled that the Rothryn people are not so different from my own.” Andro spoke. “And in fact we may even be genetically related after some fashion.”

Dyack nodded his head slowly. “There is a legend among my people if you will indulge me. A Prophecy if you will.” He said stepping forward. “That one day we would be reunited with those of our own kind that we were taken from so long ago. It is a legend... a myth really. Very few of my people believe it anymore. I thought it was simply a myth... at least I thought it was, until I witnessed what I did. The Prophecy of the Ancient Ones said we would one day be reunited as a whole with our brothers and sisters. And that they would return what the Ancient Ones took from us.”

“What did they take?” The female voice asked and they watched Andro turn and hold out his hand.

Dyack and Kelelm watched as Sadi came into the transmission now, Andro drawing her close and sharing a soft nibbling kiss. He held her close to him, dressed as she was in her usual robe, and looked back to Dyack. Dyack and his son were both quite taken by her almost surreal beauty and grace and Dyack was stunned at how her demeanor mirrored that of Sehri. A very confident woman not only in her movements but also her station.

“My wife, mate and *Anome* Praetor Dyack. Sadi Leonidas.” Andro spoke.

Dyack and Kelelm bowed their heads out of respect immediately. “Princess Sadi.” Dyack spoke softly.

“Gentlemen.” Sadi spoke turning her eyes to Coren immediately. “Regent Re Mydala? How is *Inamarno*?”

Coren nodded and smiled. “She is fine. She misses you. All of you.” He threw that out once more.

Sadi smiled warmly at this news and nodded to him. “Perhaps I will contact her.” She said. “I do not want to confuse her more than she already is however.”

Coren nodded. “I understand.” He told her. “But... I know she would enjoy talking to you.”

Sadi turned back to Dyack. “You said these ancient ones took something from you.” She said. “What did they take?”

“It is said they took our ability to shift as you can.” Dyack answered. “Our scientists have determined that our original homeworld was environmentally unsuitable to being able to shift our forms and somehow this ability was taken from us so that we could settle the planet. We have recovered artifacts that seem to support this that appear to have been left intentionally. So that we would find them. Unfortunately we have only the study of the Lycavorians within the Protectorate and information that our scientists have gathered through the many years to base our data on but that is the general feeling among many of them. It appears we have made the mistake of distancing ourselves from the Protectorate when we should have been embracing them. It is not an idea that is widely propagated among my people however due to other factions within my government. In fact very few of the Rothryn people believe it anymore.”

“Yet you do?” Sadi asked.

Dyack met her gaze evenly. “Let’s just say that what I have seen these last days is rapidly making me think that perhaps there is something very truthful to the old legend. My youngest daughter Sehri believes it deeply... and I trust her completely.”

“Sehri?” Sadi asked softly.

Dyack nodded his head after glancing at Kelelm in surprise. “Yes. How did you...? Sehri is my youngest of three daughters and two sons. Kelelm here is the oldest of my children.” He answered. “The Ancient Ones in our history scrolls are remarkably similar to these Pralors that you mentioned during your recent news briefing Prince Leonidas. If there is a chance that perhaps they are one and the same. It could mean a great deal to us as well.”

“The ability to admit that you believe something when most others do not is an admirable trait Praetor Dyack.” Sadi said after a long moment.

Dyack nodded his head to her. “My wife and mate has reminded me of that through the years.” He said. “Until now I always was skeptical.”

Sadi smiled at him as she turned and settled to the couch and took the coffee mug from Andro’s hand. Dyack and Kelelm were quick to take note that she was not going to be leaving the transmission and this action only proved to them that Union females were allowed far more freedoms when it came to politics than Rothryn women. It was then they saw another set of long legs enter the transmission and then Ne’Veha’s elven figure entered the transmission. She didn’t acknowledge the men and only sat on the couch next to Sadi and shared a soft kiss with her as she sipped from the mug of tea. Dyack and Kelelm had only heard of the elven species so far and seeing Ne’Veha caught them by surprise. They heard more soft voices and watched as two more females entered the room, a stunning dark skinned female elf with shimmering, pure white hair and an exotic looking raven haired female who, though shorter than all of them others, looked to be in superb physical condition. The dark skinned elf stepped up to Andro and they shared a similar kiss as to the one he had shared with Sadi. Then she too moved to the couch and curled up close to the raven haired female.

Andro looked at his brother once more, tearing his eyes from his mates and wives. He bowed his head slightly. “Forgive our attire Praetor Dyack, but it is still morning here and as you can see, our species and the

elves are somewhat open about our sexuality. “Deni... you would not have initiated this transmission unless you needed something.” He said. “Speak at me *fervon*.”

Deni took a deep breath. “Andro... I need you to authorize our people here on Austrova to be allowed to conduct espionage duties. We need to find out what Ardan and the others within the Protectorate are up to. Right now... right now they are several steps ahead of us and we got some serious catching up to do.”

Andro met his eyes. “You realize what you are asking me to do *fervon*?” He asked softly. “Father would not approve of such a thing. It exposes us to too much backlash if anything should happen. Armetus would not approve either.”

“Marci would though.” Deni answered quickly. “Coren has agreed to this *fervon*. If we don’t discover what is going on, when you come here in seven weeks Ardan and the SBR are going to ambush you.”

“What do you mean?” Andro asked.

“If what Coren says is true and we all agree that it is...” Deni said. “Instead of you telling them we are ending the trade agreements because of their refusal to be open minded and fair in their dealings with us, they’ll end them because members of the Protectorate are selling Vanari females and it only proves what Coren has been saying for decades.”

“The merger of the Union and the Protectorate will only be seen as a way to gain further power to continue the slavery practice.” Lisisa continued.

Dutkne stepped forward seeing the confusion on Andro’s face. “Andro, essentially Ardan will declare all Lycavorians slavers and there will be no peace or corporation between us going forward. Financially it will hurt the Vanari short term, but Ardan’s plans probably already are set to include opening their trade to species the Vanari don’t usually associate with. This will increase his ability to sell Vanari females and further weaken the Vanari as a whole. It will also impact us because we do not associate with these species for primarily the same reasons as the Vanari. Financially we would need to find someone to replace the Vanari as a trading partner. That could take years.”

“So it is a matter of money most of all?” Andro said with some disgust.

Dutkne nodded. “I’m afraid so.”

“We could find buyers for your products here in the Union.” Andro spoke.

“Yes... but it would take time and resources to get those trade goods known and then shipped to Union space.” Dutkne spoke.

Coren nodded. “As it would for the Vanari to do something similar with the species here in the Beta Quadrant.”

“Money!” Andro hissed angrily. “It always comes down to *nubous* money!”

Dyack looked at Kelelm after this display and he saw his son smile.

Androcles looked up. “I will speak with Marci. As it stands right now... you have my authorization.”

Deni nodded. “We’ll be careful *fervon*.” He said.

“You’d better brother. You have a habit of breaking things that aren’t meant to be broken.” Andro said.

“And where exactly did I acquire that skill I wonder?” Deni asked with a crooked grin.

Dyack stepped forward once more. “Prince Androcles... I believe I can offer a way to get the information you need and have it not be such a large risk.” He spoke.

Andro met his eyes in the transmission. “In return for what?”

“A sample of your brother’s DNA. A sample of your DNA and a sample of your father and mother.” Dyack spoke. “This would be kept in the strictest of confidence and only used to verify information that we have believed for centuries.”

“DNA?” Andro asked.

It was Sadi who looked up from talking with Ne’Veha. “Why exactly would you need DNA?” She asked.

“As I said... it would be used to verify information that we already have.” He replied. “We have what we believe to be remains of several Ancient Ones in Cryo Storage. These Pralors you called them. If we could compare your DNA with the samples we have collected from the remains it could go a long way to prove that the myth is not a myth at all.”

“My DNA would be no different than any citizen of the Protectorate.” Andro spoke.

“None of us have seen any member of the Protectorate do what you have done Prince Leonidas and you have said it yourself in your news briefing... your father, you, your brother Denali... you are all descended from the strongest of those you call the Pralors.” Dyack spoke.

“You will forgive my hesitation Praetor Dyack... and please do not take this the wrong way... but that is an extraordinary request.” Andro spoke.

“Yes... I know it is.” Dyack answered.

Sadi returned to her feet and moved up next to Andro reaching out and squeezing his arm to indicate she wanted to speak. It was a simple move but one that Kelelm picked up right away because it is what his wife and mate did all the time. “We have no reason to trust you with such information Praetor Dyack.” Sadi spoke calmly making sure to keep her voice neutral. “But we have not had the best things happen to us when this kind of information is in the hands of others besides our own doctors.”

“Is your DNA sample not in a public database?” Dyack asked. “In case something may happen to you in war time?”

“No. It is listed in a separate database restricted to the Royal family and only accessible by certain individuals for the purpose you just mentioned.” Sadi answered.

“I see.” Dyack said looking at Kelelm for a moment. He turned back to Andro in the transmission. “I would be willing to assist regardless Prince Leonidas.” He spoke. “To be honest I shouldn’t have asked to begin with. You are correct Princess Sadi... you have no reason to trust us.”

“Would you be open to a compromise?” Andro asked.

Dyack looked at him. “What did you have in mind?”

“The *ARCHDEMON* has the samples you wish to view on file.” Andro stated. “You could bring your samples to the lab on the *ARCHDEMON* and do your comparison. You could send whoever you like within reason to assist in the testing.”

“You would do this?” Dyack asked surprised.

Andro looked at Sadi and she nodded her head. He turned back to him. “In the interests of future relations... yes.”

“There... there would be one thing in the future but I believe that is best discussed when we are face to face.” Dyack answered.

“How would you help us?” Andro asked.

“It is simple really.” Dyack said. “The OSG has approached us on numerous occasions with the opportunity to purchase Vanari females to harvest their Alkay. We have always refused in the past. We have no interest in slavery of any means as I said earlier. This time we won’t.”

“How does that help us?” Andro asked.

“It will get us an inside source within the OSG and possibly a direct connection right to Ardan.” Coren said with bright eyes. “It’s perfect.”

Andro turned and looked at Sadi once more. She shrugged her shoulders. “It couldn’t hurt.” She said.

Andro nodded as he turned back. “Very well Praetor Dyack.

Dyack nodded. “I look forward to meeting you Prince Leonidas... and perhaps one day your father.” He said. “Kelelm is my oldest son and he will be in charge of making the contacts with the OSG. We can work out the details with your brother and Regent Re Mydala.”

“Deni?” Andro asked.

“Sounds like a plan.” Deni said.

“Deni... Lisisa... *tnobbaf*.” Andro said.

Denali and Lisisa nodded. “*Avoi*.” They spoke.

TALBOR SEVEN

PUMA’S PRIDE

Popal watched as the Hadarian female ran the medical scanner over Pusintin as he laid on the bed staring at her intently. Her auburn colored hair was cut shorter than shoulder length but curled around her attractive

face and bright dark green eyes. Those eyes were filled with fear at what would happen in the future and had been happening for three days now. They had been taken from Talbor Seven against their will, her husband beaten down severely trying to keep them from being taken. Now her husband and their two children were being held somewhere on this ship while she treated this Lycavorian who commanded Kavalians.

Her name was Ceale and they had left Hadaria a decade ago to become part of a Hadarian Group that treated those who were not part of the Union. They had found themselves on Talbor Seven for it was the safest place within The Wilds to try raise their now fourteen year old son Danim and now eighteen year old daughter Serale. Ceale had not really wanted to leave her home on Hadaria, but her husband was adamant about it. She left with him out of the need to keep their family from being broken apart not out of any love for her husband who she had come to dislike over the years. Their marriage had been arranged by their parents for both of them were from strict upbringings. Ceale had never really been off Hadaria before and the exposure to the many different species that frequented Talbor Seven was astounding to her. And wondrous in many ways. She still missed her family on Hadaria and worried for them even more now that the Kavalians had occupied the planet. Ceale had no illusions about Buonau and her ultimate goal. Unlike her husband who adored Buonau, Ceale saw her for what she was and didn't trust the Elder Healer and knew her motives were far more sinister than she led on. Her husband believed she did the right thing in disposing Queen Anja and this had led to an angry disagreement between them for Ceale was a staunch supporter of Queen Anja and Princess Sivana. That argument was the beginning of the end for them and Ceale knew it. It no longer bothered her anymore. Only her children mattered.

Ceale drew the medical scanner over Pusintin's head and then used her right hand to pass it slowly over his midsection and upper body, the soft white glow of her palm clearly visible. When her hand reached his neck she stopped and drew it back, setting the scanner back on the table. She turned her dark green eyes on his cruel face.

"It is done." She spoke. "Your ribs are fully healed, as well as the other broken bones. They will be sore for a few days so I recommend rest. The infection you had is gone, but the damage to your lungs was severe and will require time to fully heal. I suggest you do not exert yourself more than necessary in order to speed the healing process naturally. The lacerations had already begun to heal because of your enhanced regeneration abilities. I finished healing them but you will have scars."

"I'm not concerned about scars." Pusintin spoke.

"If you don't... if you don't mind me asking now... who did this to you?" Ceale asked. "They came very close to killing you. You do know this don't you?"

Pusintin met her eyes and smiled. "They didn't." He said. "That displeases you doesn't it?"

Ceale looked at him. "It's not my place to say." She spoke. "I've done what you asked. I would like you to release me and my family now."

Pusintin shook his head. "I'm bringing you with us doctor." He spoke. "Your skills will be most useful."

Ceale's eyes grew wide. "That... your officer said you would release us when I treated you! You can't do this!" She protested.

"I can do what the fuck I want!" Pusintin snarled as he threw his legs over the side of the bed and got to his feet. "We have many wounded onboard and you will treat them while we continue on our mission!"

"I am not a Kavalian citizen!" Ceale barked. "I am a Union citizen and you can't just take me to..."

Pusintin moved around the end of the bed quickly and slapped her hard across the face, knocking her back and bleeding her lips. "Shut your hole woman!" He growled at her. "Be lucky I don't kill you outright! We are at war now and you just became a prisoner!"

"I... I will not help you!" Ceale snapped bravely. She was not one to back down from any man. "You can't force me!"

Pusintin looked at her. "See... that is where you are wrong." He snapped turning to Popal. "They are separated?"

"As you ordered Marshall Pusintin." Popal answered.

Pusintin snapped out with his hand and grabbed a handful of Ceale's short but thick auburn colored hair. She screamed in pain as he yanked savagely and dragged her over to the wall with several monitors on it. "Watch this Hadarian bitch!" He snarled at her. He held her head painfully, jerking it toward the monitor where she saw her husband in a small room by himself and her children in another.

Her eyes grew wide when she saw the door open and a large Kavalian soldier enter. Ceale knew what was about to happen. “NO!” She screamed. “No! Please! No! You can’t! No!”

Pusintin jerked her face close to his. “Then you will do what I tell you bitch!” He growled at her. “If you don’t... I’ll have my men dismember your fool husband and then I’ll give your pretty little daughter to my men for some extended sexual fun. Your son I’ll just vent out an airlock!”

“No!” Ceale barked. “Please! I’ll do... I’ll do anything! Don’t... don’t hurt my children!”

“That’s right you will bitch!” He snarled shoving her away and turning to Popal. “Status Popal?” He asked.

Popal moved forward quickly. “We have main power and engines restored Marshall. The crews are working double shifts with the injuries, but they are not complaining. I’ve had to force some of them to stop before their work began to hurt others. We are hurt Marshall... but everyone is pulling together. You would be proud of them!”

Pusintin nodded his head. “We hand picked most of them.” He stated. “Give me the full rundown.”

“We lost half to the task force Marshall. Thirteen ships total. Nine destroyed... four too damaged to salvage. We got most of the survivors off the crippled ships and I have integrated them into our crew in similar positions.”

“One ship did all that Popal?” Pusintin asked.

Popal nodded. “It is unlike any Union ship I have ever seen Marshall. It appeared from no where and it’s weapons were already firing before it had fully dropped its Shroud. It’s weapons were nearly four times as powerful as normal Union ships and they cycled much faster. They had missiles inbound before we had fully recognized what was happening. They launched no fighters, but the volleys they used managed to destroyed our fighters before they even got airborne. It is my fault Marshall... I was... I was taken by...”

Pusintin shook his head quickly. “My brother is a master at ambush Popal... remember that in the future. This was my fault. I underestimated him. Again. I won’t make that mistake a third time.”

“Third... third time?” Popal looked at him.

“We’re going after them Popal.” Pusintin growled.

“Marshall?” Popal asked stunned. “We... the Lycavorian Union has declared war on us! Should we not return to Cabelir to begin operations?”

“Operations against what?” Pusintin snapped. “It will take us a minimum of six months to recoup the losses my fucking nephew inflicted. We’ll be back by then and I will bring my brother’s head to give to Keleru! We can still track the Borellum Acoustic Pulse by its refractor variance?”

Popal met his eyes knowing what he intended. “In order to do that we would need a Borellum Acoustic Pulse Receiver Marshall.” He spoke. “There are only three left in existence and...”

Pusintin grinned. “One of them is on Nefoa. Send a coded transmission to Nefoa. I want a full Fleet Group and entire Division ready to depart when we arrive there. We’ll get the Pulse Receiver and install it into our sensor array. If they exited their jump anywhere within a thousand light years we’ll detect it. If they aren’t there anymore, we can track it using the remnant pulse traces.”

“It is... it is not at all precise Marshall.” Popal risked saying. “We would need to make multiple jumps in order to find...”

Pusintin looked at him. “I intend to find my brother Popal!” He snarled viciously. “I intend to find him and skewer him through with his own fucking sword! And while he is lying their dying I’m going to fuck my mate For’mya in front of him while my men have their way with his other bitches and he hears them howl! Mark my words!”

Popal wisely kept his mouth shut and nodded his head. “I will contact Nefoa and issue the orders.” He stated.

“I will join you on the bridge later Popal.” Pusintin stated turning his head and looking at Ceale.

Popal knew exactly what his Marshall was going to do and he nodded. “As you order Marshall.” He turned quickly and exited the medical bay while Pusintin turn to face Ceale fully. He stepped up to her and glared at her frightened face. “You can begin showing just how respectful you will be right now Hadarian bitch!” He snapped.

“You bastard!” Ceale hissed at him knowing exactly what he meant. “I... I will not! I am... I am married!”

Pusintin reached up and snagged her hair once more pulling viciously on the roots and watching her cry out in agony and try to dig her nails into his arm to stop the terrible pain. “You’ll do exactly as I say Hadarian bitch!” Pusintin growled. “Or I will make your daughter service me! Is that what you want? I’m sure she is very tight! And she looks unspoiled. That would be pleasant I’m sure!”

“You... you vile bastard!” Ceale screamed with tears in her eyes.

“Yeah... I’ve been called that before!” Pusintin snapped. “Get on your knees and show me how much you appreciate me keeping your daughter from becoming the ship whore!” He pressed down on the side on her head forcing her to her knees. “Suck me good bitch! Maybe that will be all I want!”

Ceale whimpered at the pain but reached up to Pusintin’s pants. With shaking hands she open his pants and exposed his rapidly stiffening cock. Ceale had never done anything like this before with her husband and it was... all thought of what to do was lost as Pusintin grabbed her head with both hands and violently shoved his hard cock between her lips to the sounds of her whimpering and gags.

ARC ROYAL

3000 LYs SPACEWARD OF THE PERSEUS ARM

“Anse!” For'mya exclaimed as Anja lowered the medical scanner and smiled at her as she sat on the medical bed in the *ARC ROYAL'S* Medical Bay.

“For'mya... do not get upset.” Anja told her. “It will happen. Marty ain’t exactly sterile you know.”

For'mya lowered her eyes and shook her head with a shy smile. “I... I know. I was just hoping that... I was hoping that it would be because of the other night.”

Anja shook her head. “That might be pressing it lover.” She explained. “The drugs they used are still in your system. The doses they gave you were four times what they normally use. Even our advanced healing systems will need time to purge that. It also speeded up your period of being in Phase. It’s over now.”

For'mya nodded. “I sensed as much.” She said.

Anja nudged her as she sat on the bed beside her fellow Queen and lover. “Look at it this way... at least you can keep your *goldar* now that they are bigger! They have been a source of delight for all of us!”

For'mya reached up quickly and covered her new, enlarged breasts protectively with her hands.

“*Ginartas Vin!*” She spoke with a laugh. “*Pen bray el una inion!*” (Heavens no! I like them too much!)

Anja leaned over and kissed her shoulder softly. “Don’t worry *KinosaurGai*... all of us have decided you will give him a daughter before any of us have anymore children. That is our promise to you.”

For'mya looked at her. “I don’t want that Anja.” She spoke. “It would not be right to...”

Anja took her hand. “It is what we want For'mya.” She said softly. “All of us have given him boys and girls. Now it is your turn. After that...” Anja shrugged with a seductive grin. “All bets are off.”

For'mya laughed and leaned into her. She became somber after a moment and lifted her eyes to Anja’s face. “We must never let this happen again Anja.” She spoke. “To any of us. It must never happen again!”

“It won’t For'mya.” Anja said confidently.

For'mya shook her head. “No! There is no guarantee Anja and you know it. The fact that we go through a Phase of heightened sexuality as purebloods or turned females makes all of us targets now. And Martin’s blood racing through us makes it all the more powerful! It was never been openly acknowledged as it was with me. And it was used against me! It will not be forgotten by our enemies!”

“For'mya you...” Anja began.

“Anja... my mind was nearly lost. I knew it was wrong Anja... but when Pusintin hit me with his aura I was very nearly overcome! As it was... the burning inside me made me crave what he did to me.” For'mya said. She turned away a little and shook her head. “It shames me how I wanted him to take me.”

Anja took her hand tightly. “You stop that do you hear me!” She hissed softly. “It could have been any of us For'mya! You know that!”

For'mya nodded. “I do... and that is why it can never happen again! It weakens him Anja my love! It weakens him inside. He is stronger when we are strong with him. Strong with our love and desire for him and

him alone! That is part of his power and you know it as well as I do. I could feel the surging within him when he kissed me on the ground there. It felt so wonderful. His aura was so pure and raw I was wet within seconds.”

Anja grinned. “We did smell it you know.”

For'mya looked at her. “We will be targets now Anja. You, me, Aricia, Dysea.” For'mya said. “They will come after us thinking they can use that weakness against us. Against Martin.”

“It worked against you because you thought he was dead.” Anja said. “Because they had the static inhibitor inside you. Not being able to feel any of us within Mindvoice is what allowed that to happen For'mya.”

For'mya nodded. “This time.” She said softly. “Those who hate Martin enough will find other ways Anja. You know this.”

“She’s right.” Aricia’s voice made both of them turn and they saw Dysea, Isabella and Cirith with her.

Anja and For'mya waited while they moved closer, Cirith sitting beside For'mya on the bed while Dysea sat beside Anja. Aricia and Isabella leaned against the bed from either end and all six of Martin’s Queens were together.

“Aricia... we can’t just turn off what is now part of who we are.” Anja said. “The Phase is part of us. We’ll never get away from it. You know that better than us, you’ve battled it since puberty. We’ve only had to deal with it since we were turned.”

“I know.” Aricia said softly. “And it will only grow more intense as we get older.” She spoke evenly. “But For'mya is right... now that it is now common knowledge outside our own species... others will use it against us. Against Martin. Or try to. Just as Pusintin did with For'mya.”

“I thought Martin was crazy when he told me Pusintin was in love with me.” For'mya spoke shaking her head. “I’m beginning to think he was right. Pusintin actually thinks I belong to him, that I love him because of the way he forced me to act. That can not be allowed to happen ever again.”

“I understand what you are saying *KinosaurGai*...” Dysea spoke now. “But we are Queens. We all have obligations. *Nauta Melme* is the strongest Alpha male of our species. While he lives no other man could affect us as he does. We would be remiss in our duties to our people and to him if we just stopped doing them because we fear our... sexual nature will be used against us. There must be something else we can do. All six of us can not remain at his side while we are in Phase. We all come into Phase at the same time now after so long together. Even Bella is oriented to our cycle because of this. Cirith will become this way as well.”

“It’s not like we can clone him.” Anja said jokingly. “Though that is a most delicious idea. Two or three Martin’s at the same time? Wow!”

“*Melyanna* you are such a slut.” Dysea spat playfully.

Anja laughed with her. “I won’t deny that I love every single glorious inch of that man’s body and I could eat him every day.”

“I don’t think any of us would disagree with that sentiment.” Bella quipped with a twinkle in her eye.

“Well... if this is really a concern...” Anja began. “A way to alleviate some of the beginning portions of Phase is for us to begin travelling in pairs or trios wherever we go. At least during Phase. We can ease the fever some that way.”

“What about the last two weeks when it is the strongest?” Aricia said. “We can not give each other what we need then Anja. And if we return and the war is still going on we can not expect Martin to stop in the middle of a battle to sate our desire for him. No matter how much he would want too or we would want him too.”

Dysea looked up. “I could... I could make more casts of him.” She stated. “Like I did before *Melyanna*.”

Anja shook her head. “While they are extremely gratifying... they would not suffice.”

Aricia nodded. “I don’t think so either.”

“I could try and design some sort of med, but it won’t be easy suppressing part of our natural instincts.” Anja continued.

“We don’t have to figure this out now.” For'mya spoke. “Maybe it is just me being too worried. Wherever this trip takes us we have him all to ourselves now. Just us. We can worry about this later.”

“Yes we do.” Aricia spoke. “And we have all of us together for the first time in over a year.” She moved closer to For'mya, between her legs and took her hands. “I think it is the perfect time for all of us to become reacquainted as well. It has been too long.”

Dysea nodded and leaned against Anja. “Yes it has.” She said. “There is not a whole lot for six Queens to do right now.”

“Do not forget we have two children with us.” Isabella said. “Though at the rate they are growing... we won’t long be able to call them children.”

“Get dressed For'mya.” Aricia said. “We’ll have a healthy breakfast and then we will begin showing our children what they can do.”

Martin looked at the star chart once more and then turned his head to Muton. They were in the *ARC ROYAL*’S port landing bay which had been turned into a combination nursery and Combat Ops center because of all the dragons that were with them. The short and shrill trumpets of the dragon hatchlings as they were being schooled under Miath, Aurith and Iriral in short take offs and landings filled the opposite side of the landing bay. Arzoal and Isheeni sat on either side of Torma behind Martin. “You are sure about the coordinates Muton?” He asked.

Muton nodded. “Yes.” He answered. “I’ve written the images down twenty different ways and it always comes out the same King Leonidas.”

“Stop with that King shit!” Martin barked at him. “You and your son saved For'mya and our children. I think that has earned you the right to call me by my name.”

Muton bowed his head slightly. “Milord.” He said.

Martin looked at Akemi. “Captain Katsumi?” He asked.

Akemi nodded her head. “My people have confirmed what he put together Milord.” She answered. “Damn fine work too considering he was doing it all from memory.”

“So what’s our plan?” Martin asked. “This is as far as any of our Long Range Probes has been out. What are we looking at?”

Akemi leaned over the star chart and pointed to the small greenish dot. “This planet Muton has marked as our ultimate destination is in the Echo Quadrant. That’s twenty-eight thousand light years away. Muton and I have plotted fourteen LSD jumps that will get us there in seven weeks.”

“Seven weeks?” Martin asked looking at her.

Akemi nodded. “We’ll be slaved together as we make each jump, but we’ll need at least three days between jumps for our people to go over each drive unit after the jumps to insure there are no problems. We have to separate to do that. Elder Mother Arzoal’s Drones will be assisting us and that will make it much faster, but I’d rather not shear off part of either ship upon exiting a jump.”

Danny chuckled. “That sounds painful.” He stated.

Akemi grinned. “It would be yes.” She said. “We also don’t have the stores to feed everyone on both ships for the entire trip. Even with the extra supplies Androcles sent, Iama says we’ll need to re-supply within a month.”

Martin looked at her. “Iama? The Kavalian girl we rescued?”

Akemi nodded her head. “I’ve spoken with her. And she submitted to a drugged session of questioning voluntarily. The hate for her own people runs deep Milord... and she has a genuine desire to stay among us and try to rediscover a life for herself. One day find love and have children. That is what she wants. Surprisingly... she is an excellent cook and we won’t lack for expertise in that area. I’ve assigned her quarters and she has been in the main Mess Hall since coming aboard. Setting things up just how she wants them. She knows a lot about food stuffs and supplies we need. You said to use everyone and when we left Dreamland we didn’t have a full galley crew. Now we do.”

Martin nodded his head. “If she passed muster with you then I accept your decision.” He stated. “Just to be on the safe side however, let’s put weapons scanners on all the entrances to the main Mess Hall. We’ve been burned in the past by those claiming to be our friends. I don’t want to make the same mistakes.”

“As you order Milord.” Akemi said.

Wayonn stepped up to the table. “Can we use the time between jumps to search for planets that might provide suitable food?”

Akemi nodded. “That is a possibility as well Milord. Queen Anja and Iama would have the final say on whether we can ingest it though. Medically and edibility are a priority.”

Martin nodded. “Danny... you and Jules make sure teams are ready to deploy once we exit the jumps. Standard Recon Op, heavy on load.”

Danny nodded. “Expecting trouble?”

“We are moving through two different quadrants to get where we are going. Better safe than sorry. We don’t know who or what we might run into.” Martin said. He looked at Wayonn. “You moved around a lot in your travels Wayonn, ever get out this far?”

Wayonn shook his head. “I never came out this far Martin my boy.” He answered. “I was reckless... not foolish.”

Akemi shook her head slowly. “I don’t like not having a CAP Milord.” She spoke. “Our sensors are good... but we can extend the range even more if we equipped a *KADEN* transport with some of the Shroud generators Prince Andro sent to us. We launch that ship while we are between jumps and she does a continuous loop on the very edge of our sensor envelope. We can extend the range by twenty light years easily.”

Martin nodded. “Endy... you and Tina handle that. Put together a schedule of all pilots that we have. Including me.”

“You?” Endith exclaimed as the others who knew Martin and his history with Endith only smiled. “Shit Skipper... I wouldn’t trust you behind the wheel of Ben’s old 2021 Chevy let alone a *KADEN*.”

Martin chuckled at the dig and shook his head. He looked at Muton who appeared very confused. “Inside joke.” He told him.

Muton couldn’t help but smile. “You are unlike any King I have ever known or read about in history books Martin Leonidas.” He said.

“Yeah... I get that a lot too.” He answered with a smile. “Akemi... this is your ship. You run it like your ship. Just think of all of us as hired hands.”

“Cheap labor in other words.” Julie quipped.

Akemi chuckled and nodded her head. “Thank you Milord... I don’t think that will be necessary. I have almost a full crew. I’d like to have Muton’s engineers come over here though. That ship they built is something and we would benefit by working together.”

Martin looked at Muton and he nodded. “I will see to it right away.” He stated.

“We don’t know what we are going to find out here.” Martin spoke now. “Let’s be damn careful about everything we do. We can get support from Earth, but even with the Pralor ships they have it will be a minimum of a couple days before anything comes. We need to rely on everyone and they need to rely on us.”

We also need to consider the hatchlings Martin. Arzoal spoke now. *They will need space to fly and learn to hunt. Something none of us considered before we brought them with us.*

Martin nodded. “We’ll figure something out.” He answered her. He looked at Akemi. “How long until we make the first jump?”

Akemi met his eyes. “Six hours.” She answered skeptically. “Never thought I’d be jumping into the unknown. This is all very new to me.”

Danny laughed and looked at Julie. “Captain... that ain’t the half of it. With Marty here it’s not just a job...”

“It’s a fucking adventure!” Julie finished the statement.

Martin shook his head. “Assholes.” He muttered with a smile even as a swell of love and pride coursed through him that he had them here with him..

UZU OZEIB 7

YDARE

TEMPORARY HOME OF ARRARN, NARICE AND TORIA LEONIDAS

“Ahhhhhhh! Arrarn!!!!” She screamed out in rapture, reaching up with one arm to try and grasp his head.

Perhaps it was because he was half wolf and half elf and part of his very essence was the need for physical contact. Perhaps it was because what she experienced with him and Toria in their bed had been so

taboo within High Coven society for so long. Perhaps it was because he simply enjoyed torturing them, but whatever the reason Narice Leonidas wished for it to never end. He could do things to her and Toria that caused them to scream and cry out for more over and over. His hands were cupping her large breasts as he drove into her from behind with power and confidence, using her breasts to assist his dominance over her. Her black hair flew back and forth as she shook her head from side to side in utter bliss. Her lips were slick with Toria's passion, their red haired lover already nearly out of it from Narice's ministrations, and laying in front of her with passion heavy eyelids as she came down from her orgasm. Narice could feel every wondrous pulse of life and passion from his cock as it plunged into her depths with ever increasing urgency. She felt his hand grasp her hair and twist her head around and she cried out as he covered her lips with his own. That kiss is what set them both off, and Narice moaned in surreal bliss against his lips as her orgasm struck her. She felt his cock swell in size and then he was filling her with his own passion, pushing her to greater heights of decadence.

Arrarn pulled her tightly against him, holding her by her breasts to his chest as her hands went to his hips trying to pull him even further into her depths. Narice could feel his large balls against her ass cheeks as they emptied his seed into her and caused her to shiver in delight. His kiss deepened and she returned it with every fiber of her being as her own passion coated his pulsing manhood in her sweet fervor.

Slowly Arrarn lowered them forward, one hand leaving her breast to guide them back to the bed. Narice dragged her tongue over Toria's delicious breasts as she settled half onto her taunt body and Arrarn remained buried within her as they found a comfortable position on the bed and their arms drew Toria close to them. His face was buried in the back of her neck, his lips and nose nuzzling her skin and the back of her ear constantly as the last vestiges of his hot passion filled her and he began to soften inside her tightness. Narice smiled in wonderful love as he made no move to remove himself from her and simply pulled her tighter against his chest as she pulled Toria in to her arms.

She cooed her delight as his lips drew across her lobe of her ear and he breathed heavily. "*Son vada carians*... you two will be the death of me." He gasped warmly.

Narice and Toria both began to chuckle at his words since he could easily outlast both of them and they knew it.

"Death by sexual pleasure." Toria groaned as her face nestled between Narice's breasts. "Not... not such a bad way to go."

Narice smiled and nodded. "No... but we have many more years to experience before we need to worry about that." She stated as her breathing began to return to normal. She groaned once more as she felt Arrarn slip from within her depths and lean forward over her shoulder. They rested for several minutes in that position thoroughly enjoying the feel of their bodies so intimately pressed together and his hands stroking their flesh.

"You two don't move." He spoke finally. "I'll get us some juice."

Toria grinned. "I don't think I could move even if I wanted too." She spoke. "And I don't want to."

"Neither do I." Narice agreed with a smile.

Arrarn grinned, proud of himself, and rolled off the bed. The two most beautiful female creatures in all the universe as far as he was concerned and they were all his. He padded naked through the large apartment and into the kitchen area where he poured three glasses of juice while silently thanking his brother for encouraging him to pursue his feelings for them at the beginning. He reached up to gently touch the two spots on either side of his neck where both Toria and Narice had bitten him earlier and fed on his blood in the midst of their passion. Both were nearly gone but he knew from experience he needed the juice just as much, if not more than they did. Holding the tall glasses he moved back across the dark apartment and into the bedroom to find them both sitting up on the bed, neither of them bothering to cover themselves. After what they had shared over these past months and the intimate way they knew each other's bodies it would be silly to try and hide from each other. He sat on the side of the bed and they both took a glass from him and drank down nearly half immediately, just as he did.

Toria then leaned forward and kissed Narice's bare shoulder. "You should tell him." She said softly.

Arrarn looked at them his eyes moving back and forth between them. "Tell me what?"

Narice looked at him, her black hair cascading around her shoulders and exotic features. Her normally dark eyes looked at him with love and devotion. "Arrarn... I..."

Arrarn smiled. "I get it now. This is where my two delightfully naked wives and mates convince me to remain out of the spotlight. To not make any waves."

Narice grinned. "Actually... actually it's quite the opposite Arrarn my love." She stated. "The *Ventash'ma* and I have been discussing certain items. We... we want to erase how the past government was run under my mother and father."

"You are the Empress Narice." Arrarn spoke.

Narice nodded her head. "But we want to make certain changes to spread the authority out more."

"I don't follow." Arrarn said.

Toria laughed softly. "Just spit it out Narice!" She exclaimed.

Narice smiled at her. "We are establishing several new positions." She told him. "One of them is *A'ni d'Sikul*. General of Defense." Narice met his eyes. "I want you to assume that role Arrarn my love."

Arrarn looked at her with wide eyes. "Me?" He finally exclaimed. "Narice... *ussta ssinsrigg* I am no politician!"

"And that is why you will be perfect for the job." Narice said. "As *A'ni d'Sikul* you would remain outside that realm but retain all of the power. For this to work, for me to be able to show my people that I am serious in my goals, I need to show I will be different. Appointing you as my *A'ni d'Sikul* is only the first step."

"Narice I am not a general." Arrarn said.

"Admiral Pontal disagrees." She said. "His words to me when I questioned him about it were very much to the point. He says you represent three things. You represent change and the commitment of the Union to Andro's promise. He said you also think outside of the box, which is what our forces need now. Cha'talla agreed my love."

"Narice... I'm not a citizen of the High Coven." He said. "The *Ventash'ma* would never agree to it."

"You are my Blessed Husband and that makes you a citizen." Narice answered him. "And the *Ventash'ma* be damned! I will not do things as they have been done in the past. I need to be different."

"Making me this *A'ni d'Sikul* isn't going to make you any friends Nari." Arrarn spoke moving closer to her and using his nickname for her. "I don't have the experience and no one can deny that... and I am my father's son. There are still those out there who don't particularly care for Lycavorians on the whole and they positively hate my father."

Narice nodded. "I know." She said. "But I believe the majority will see it as part of the change I have told them I will implement. You will have Pontal behind you my love... and I intend to appoint Colonel Norris of the Union as Commander of all Coven Ground forces. He was a man that Andro and General Tareif recommended to me."

Arrarn nodded. "I know him. Excellent commander... very experienced... but he is a cloned soldier. Not a Pureblood."

Narice looked at him. "Arrarn... Purebloods are part of the reason things have become so convoluted. We are almost a minority on Uzu Ozeib 7 now you know. Everyone knows it."

Toria nodded. "The numbers establish her statements Arrarn." She answered. "Across the entire Coven Purebloods only make up fifty-nine percent of the population."

"Androcles... my father... they'll never go for it." Arrarn said. "And I will not forsake my title as prince of the Union."

Narice reached out and took his hand. "That is something I would never ask of you Arrarn my love. And I will never forsake my title as Princess of the Union. Nor will Toria. And I have already run it by Androcles. His words to me were to do what I thought was best for I was Empress now."

Arrarn looked at her with wide eyes. "He said that?" He asked.

Narice smiled. "He loves and trusts you more than you will ever know Arrarn Leonidas." She said. "Regardless of what you think. This may work, it may not, but I want to try."

Arrarn stared at her for a long moment. "*A'ni d'Sikul* of the High Coven huh?" He spoke finally. "That doesn't mean I have to wear some funky uniform does it?"

Narice and Toria laughed at the look on his face. "No... no funky uniform." Narice said bringing his hand to her cheek.

Arrarn nodded his head. "Ok... if it helps you Nari. I'll do it."

Narice leaned forward and kissed him with zeal. She pulled back and looked at him with dark, sultry eyes. "There is still several hours before we have to be back to work." She spoke with a devious tinge in her voice. "Do you think you are up to showing us how much you love us?"

Arrarn's eyes narrowed. "I don't know... I'm pretty beat." He said. "Maybe you should show *me* how much you want *me* to show *you* that I love you both."

"So it is blackmail is it?" Toria said with a seductive grin.

Arrarn shook his head. "Blackmail is such an ugly word." He said. "Why don't you think of it as..."

They didn't give him a chance to finish his statement as first Toria and then Narice fell upon him with glee, their glasses of juice falling quickly to the floor forgotten.

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

Androcles leaned back on the couch in the main room of his villa, the mass of data pads and reports spread out in front of him on the knee high table. He wore his white pants with crimson trim and an unbuttoned shirt that left his arms bare. He lifted the mug of his mother's coffee to his lips and sipped. His face twisted up as the cold coffee hit his taste buds and he swore under his breath at letting the coffee get cold. Disgusted with himself he set the coffee back on the table and was about to get up and retrieve more when her sugar plume and spice scent filtered to him and he turned.

Sadi smiled from the patio doors and walked into the main room holding the large mug and wearing only her usual thin robe. Seeing her dressed as she was made Andro stop and realize that it was nearly two in the morning and all but the *Durcunusaan* guards had long since gone to bed.

"I was beginning to think that my scent no longer made you turn your head my love?" Sadi spoke as she moved up to the side of the couch and looked at him.

Andro smiled. "You know that would never be true *KertaGai*." He stated holding out his hand for her.

Sadi moved seductively and stepped in front of him, lifting her long leg over his knees and settling into his lap. She was completely naked under the robe as she always was, but it remained tied at her waist and she offered the mug to him. "It went cold over an hour ago Andro." She stated. "Even I could smell that. You need to take a break."

Andro took the mug with his right hand while dropping his left to her hip. Sadi adjusted herself slightly and became comfortable as she stared at him. He took a long sip of the coffee and took a deep breath. "There is... there is so much to do." He said. "Deployment reports. Logistics. Fleet Readiness Reports." He shook his head. "I feel overwhelmed Sadi." He looked at her. "Do you think my father felt this way during the Evolli War?"

Sadi shook her head. "No. Your father knows he has men and women who are trained to do these things better than he can and he lets them. He concentrates on his strengths and he lets others do their jobs and complement his weaknesses."

Andro chuckled softly. "You don't pull any punches do you *KertaGai*?"

Sadi reached out and traced his jaw with her finger. "You are trying to do too much Andro my love. Everyone knows it but you. You are a tactical and strategic mastermind. That is your strength and that is what you need to concentrate on. Let those who are more skilled than you in other areas do their jobs. They will not let you down."

"Did they put you up to this?" Andro asked.

Sadi shrugged. "Jomann mentioned it but I have seen it for several days now. I wasn't going to say anything until Jomann came to me." Sadi reached out with her hands and placed them on either side on his face leaning forward to put her cheek against his where she inhaled deeply of his lavender and minty scent. She fought back the rush of sexual energy his scent always caused within her and she rubbed her cheek against his reveling in the sensations he could invoke from her. "I know you Androcles Leonidas." She whispered softly pulling her head back until she was staring into his azure eyes. "You do not need to impress anyone with what you know or can do. They know you are not your father Andro, and they believe in you regardless of that."

"I'm... I'm frightened *KertaGai*." He said softly. "I'm frightened of what I have had to start. This war with the Kavalians for what they have done. I'm frightened of what I... what I am supposed to be and I am frightened of the future."

Sadi nodded. "I know my love." She whispered to him. "I know. You have never shied from the unknown Andro. You have always faced your fears. What is different now?"

"I never had you." He said instantly. "I never had you, or Carisia or Lu'ria or Ne'Veha. Or Caliria." He looked down. "I don't... I don't want to lose any of you. And knowing that what I do could bring harm to any of you... it twists me inside."

"What makes you think you could possibly lose any of us?" Sadi asked him. "That anything you do could hurt us?" She gripped his face tighter. "You listen to me Androcles. There is nothing living or dead that could make us love you or trust you any less than we do. Part of what we all love is the part of you that mourns every time you give an order that costs lives. You don't think we see when your eyes are far away and you are thinking of those who were lost. You can not change who you are my love. You are a Leonidas. A leader. And no great leader in the history of any species became what they were without having to give orders that they regretted or that shamed them. You think of the greater good Andro. You always have. And so has your father. That is why people look at you differently. They see these great leaders of men... but they also see men who are normal. It is what inspires them to greatness."

Andro stared at her jungle green eyes and reached up to stroke her cheek. "Did you ever doubt what you felt for me *KertaGai*?" He asked softly.

Sadi met his gaze. "Every day." She answered him. "Right up until I saw you once more on that flight line. You were so... so handsome. You smelled delicious... and then I knew that I was truly meant to be with you. With Carisia. All of us. Each of us have felt this *Saradasaar*. And so has she."

Andro shook his head. "I don't want to talk about that now." He said.

Sadi smiled and rubbed her nose against his. "You will accept it Andro. Just as your other wives and mates have already accepted it. Just as your father has accepted it. But I will not speak of it again right now. We will cross that bridge when we come to it. I don't think it will be as easy as I believe."

Andro leaned forward and set the mug on the table. He then took her face in his hands and stared at her deeply. *[I love them all KertaGai. I do. But you command my soul and no one else. You always will.]*

Sadi smiled brilliantly. *[I know that Saradasaar.]* She said. *[I have known that since the day you made me your mate.]*

Andro buried his face in the valley between her firm breasts and inhaled of her sweet scent deeply as her arms wrapped around his head. *[Pen enyla forn KertaGai.]* He whispered.

[For pen enyla forn Androcles Leonidas. With every waking breath I take my love.] She answered with a smile. "Let us contact Caliria Andro." She said pulling his head back and looking at him.

"I do not want to pressure her." Andro said.

"Nor do I... but ignoring her completely is too painful and we need to make sure she knows we love her as well." Sadi said.

Andro blinked several times and finally nodded his head. "Yes we do." He rose to his feet making Sadi cry out in surprise when his arms kept her suspended in the air. She wrapped her legs around his waist and laughed as he made his way towards the QCR COM relay.

AUSTROVA CALIRIA'S APARTMENT

What had she been thinking?

After all she had been through, all she had found, how could she have let this happen like this? Caliria sat in the chair in her room, the thin sheet wrapped around her lithe body, the tears rolling down her cheeks as she stared at the bed. Franklin Adams' form was still there under the sheet and Caliria felt ashamed and guilty for what she had allowed to happen. She didn't trust Franklin Adams when he contacted her. She didn't trust him when he left her that message to meet him. She didn't trust him even after meeting him and hearing what he had to tell her. That his father had found out about them and he had been left with no choice but to go home and try and smooth things over right after their last night together. So very convenient that she had been taken not two days later by the OSG and sold into slavery.

He had been so convincing though when she met him. He even showed her proof of his travel arrangements. He told her he tried for weeks to discover where she had been taken because he was going to come after her himself. He was so very sweet and kind to her, he seemed so happy that she was back and safe. Not once in the days since she had returned had he asked about her work. That should have set her alarm bells to ringing right away for he had pestered her constantly before she had been kidnapped. Even Paga believed he was lying to her after what she had told her. Paga had become such a wonderful friend in so short a time. The Lycavorian *Durcunusaan* had done exactly as she had promised she would. She was a friend to Caliria in every sense of the word, not trying to steer her in any sort of direction and not even mentioning Androcles once since they had returned.

Androcles.

The tears came harder now as she thought of the most handsome man she had ever met in her entire three hundred plus years of life. He was perfection in every sense of the word; a superb specimen of a man with a physique that shamed every man she had ever been with. A man with the largest manhood she had ever seen, let alone had inside her. Their hours together had washed away every memory of any man she had ever been with. All the pain and shame she had endured, he had sucked right out of her with his passion and love for her. Those exquisite sensations she had felt within his arms had made her cry out for more over and over. And then there was Sadi and the others. Never had she so desired another woman as she desired Sadi and Carisia and Lu'ria and Ne'Veha. Lu'ria's ebony skin and Carisia's smooth petite figure had driven her mad with delight while Sadi's and Ne'Veha's sweet taste left her craving more of them. Those hours with them had been so very perfect. As if she had always belonged with them, belonged to them and they to her.

Caliria cursed herself for not remaining with them. She began to miss them the moment the ship left orbit. And she had no one to blame but herself. Her entire life she had heard nothing but negative things about Lycavorians from her father and so many of her friends and elders. They were savages and beneath the Vanari people. They were uneducated and violent and out of control. Caliria saw the way those Lycavorians from the Protectorate were treated and even though her father shunned her she agreed with it. She agreed with it to try and make him proud of her somehow. To have him accept her because she thought like him about them. It was so simple a thing really, something she had done to try and have her father love her. It did not work as she had hoped but so many years of acting like she had made it difficult to just dismiss it. She had seen Androcles and the others fighting as they rescued her. They showed no mercy or regret for their actions. They fought savagely and took no prisoners, just as her father had always said they would.

Yet they were fighting like that to rescue her. Andro had come to save her. Something no Vanari man would have ever thought of.

It was this inner struggle that caused her to be here. Andro said he wanted her to be with them because it was what she wanted. What she desired. And thinking the way she did insured that would never work. He told her it did not matter to them in the least that she was three hundred years older than him. And as she had discovered, the memories he had within him made him far older than she was. Androcles had told her to return home and come to terms with her feelings and discover what it was she wanted for her future. She had seen the pain in his eyes doing this caused him. It was not something a Lycavorian did to a woman he considered his mate and wife. And she knew that is what Androcles considered her. His wife and mate. She was so very confused given everything that was happening and she had betrayed that love. She felt a surge of anger through her that Franklin would take advantage of her as he had, but then she had allowed him to. Caliria had allowed him to coerce her back into bed with memories of the times they had shared before. She had thought she had been in love with Franklin before all of this had happened and Caliria had allowed herself to be wooed by him to try and discover that again. Cursing herself once more Caliria knew it had been no different than before. Franklin did not even remotely come close to Androcles in bed, in either skill, size or what he made her feel. All during the act of Franklin pleasuring himself with her, Caliria felt like she was somehow betraying Androcles and Sadi and the others, but she did nothing to stop it. She even had to force her Alkay to secrete for she felt nothing for Franklin anymore and this she quickly discovered during the act.

By the Prophets how she wanted to feel his powerful arms around her once more. To feel their lips on her skin.

The chirping of her COM array drew her attention and caused Franklin to stir on the bed. She wiped her tears from her eyes and quickly rose to her feet, crossing the room in front of the large bay window where the

sun was beginning to rise in the sky. She stopped in front of her terminal and assuming the transmission was from her father because he always called at this time since they had returned in order to exchange information, she stabbed her finger down on the panel and activated the array.

“Father I am rather busy at the moment!” She snapped as Franklin began to sit up in the bed. “Perhaps you could...” Caliria looked up and her green eyes flew open in shock and horror as she saw the two people within the transmission. Sadi stood just in front of Andro in the transmission, both of them smiling brightly. “Sadi! Androcles!”

“*Inamarno* do not be angry with us!” Sadi spoke quickly. “We only want to let you know that we are thinking of you and...” Sadi’s words died out and her jungle green eyes grew wider at what she saw, as did Andro’s beautiful azure colored orbs.

Caliria saw those azure orbs flash through the spectrum of emotions in a fleeting instant and he moved closer to the transmission as he saw Franklin. With wide eyes Caliria tried to interpose her body in front of the monitor. “Androcles! Sadi! I can explain!” She stammered. “I can...”

“Caliria...” Franklin Adams spoke now as he came fully awake. “Who is it?”

Andro’s eyes narrowed as Caliria could not block the entire view of Franklin getting out of the bed completely naked and then looking at what Caliria was wearing. Andro was not a stupid man by far and his azure orbs centered on her. “I... I see that you have... that you have made your decision *Inamarno*.” His voice quivered with a combination of anger and savage pain.

“Androcles... it’s not what it appears!” Caliria felt foolish for even saying something so stupid.

“It is not what it appears?” Andro snapped. “I see it did not take you long to make your decision Caliria Re Mydala. I would have thought I had earned the right to have you tell me to my face instead of discovering it this way.”

“Androcles please... listen to me!” Caliria pleaded. “I...”

“You... you are my mate and my wife!” Andro snarled. “And this is what you are doing behind my back? Why would... why would you betray me so? Why would you... why would you hurt me like this? What have I done to deserve this Caliria?”

Andro watched as Franklin Adams came up behind Caliria still naked and slid his arms around her waist. “Good morning.” He said in a husky voice as he intentionally leaned over and kissed her neck.

Caliria twisted away from his grasp. “Franklin stop!” She snapped at him.

“*Arrggghh!*” Andro screamed within the transmission and turned to walk out of the room.

“Androcles wait!” Caliria called after his image. “Let me... let me explain!”

“How... how do you explain this *Inamarno*?” Sadi asked softly. Her green eyes were moist with tears.

“Sadi please... I...” Caliria gasped.

“Caliria who is this?” Franklin asked as he stepped around her and exposed himself proudly. “One of the friends you made while you were in the Union?”

Sadi’s fangs burst forth now, her jungle green eyes changing as well as she glared at Franklin. “I am not talking to you stupid little man!” She snarled. “And you are not impressive in the least so cover that tiny thing you call your cock fool or I will cut it off if I ever see you in person.”

Adams’ face changed immediately and he stepped back out of the transmission.

“Sadi please!” Caliria pleaded as she pushed Franklin out of the transmission even more. “Sadi I can... I can explain this!”

“We thought your feelings for us ran deeper than they obviously do *Inamarno*.” Sadi spoke harshly as she turned her eyes back on Caliria. “But to do this... without even telling us. To let Andro see you with another man before you told him your decision. That is a betrayal of the highest kind as his wife and mate.”

Caliria let the anger at herself overrule her response and her own eyes narrowed. “I did not ask to be his mate!” She screamed. “I never agreed to that!”

Sadi’s eyes were wide now. “*Inamarno*... how can you say that?” She gasped angrily. “You knew what... you knew how we felt for you! We do not... contrary to what your father may believe Caliria Re Mydala, we are not rutting beasts and we do not fuck everyone we see! When you came to us willing... you became our wife and mate that night! You knew that even with all the doubts in your mind! And now you have betrayed that without the simple common courtesy of telling us first!”

“Sadi please...” Caliria whined. “I... I need to...”

Sadi shook her head. “No. No more talking. You have made your decision very clear now. We have seen that.” She reached up to the transmission on her end. “We wish you all the very best in your future Caliria Re Mydala.”

“Sadi wait!” Caliria pleaded.

“Goodbye *Inamarno*! We will always love you... but we will never forgive you for this.” Sadi stated just before she ended the transmission and the monitor went black.

“Sadi no!” Caliria screamed out trying to get her back.

Adams stepped forward. “Forget them Caliria.” He spoke. “They are animals just like your father says. They...!”

“GET OUT!” Caliria roared as she whirled on him. “Get out of my home! Get out of my life! This is your fault!”

“Caliria... you...”

Caliria was crazed with anger now and she shoved him with all her strength. Franklin went teetering backwards and slammed into the wall painfully. He grunted and caught his balance.

“What the fuck!” He shouted. “What is your problem? After last night...”

Caliria stepped closer to him, balling her hands into fists. “Last night was a mistake!” She barked at him viciously. “I have no feelings for you Franklin! Last night was a mistake do you hear me! I love him! I love them! And I have lost them because of you!”

“I didn’t force you to jump into the rack with me!” Adams protested. “I love you Caliria! You know that!”

“You lie!” Caliria screamed. “Get out! Get out now!”

Adams took a step towards her. “Caliria I...” He froze when he felt the cold metal of a weapon placed to his head.

“She told you to leave.” Paga growled as she held the K12 to Adams’ temple wearing only her sleeping shirt and having come from across the apartment at the sound of Caliria scream not for Androcles to leave. “I suggest you do what she asks.”

“No!” Adams snapped. “I will not leave!”

Paga used her thumb to jack back the old fashioned hammer on the K12 and pressed the barrel harder to his temple. “You will leave Eridiani, or they will find what is left of the frontal lobe of your brain somewhere in the river that runs nearby. They will never find your body.”

Adams looked at her out of the corner of his eye. “Ah fuck this!” He snarled and reached for his clothes.

Paga watched as he pulled his pants on and then began walking for the exit as he pulled on his shirt. “I will call you later Caliria.” He spoke.

Paga shook her head. “Not likely.” She said.

“Just leave Franklin!” Caliria snapped. “Just leave!”

Adams grunted in disgust and stabbed his hand down on the door control panel, moving through even before it had fully opened. Paga lowered her weapon and turned to look at Caliria. “Princess?” She gasped.

Caliria looked at her as she staggered to the chair and flopped into it. “What... what have I done Paga?” Caliria asked with tear filled eyes.

Paga moved in front of her. “He saw him didn’t he?” Paga asked.

Caliria looked at her. “I didn’t check to see who was calling me first. I didn’t check like I always do and the identifier didn’t work! Paga... I let that pig have me last night and Andro saw him get out of my bed! He saw him! The look... the look on his face was...”

Paga took her hands. “Caliria... he considered you his mate.” She said softly.

“He never... he never asked me Paga!” Caliria stammered lifting her eyes to look at her. “I...”

Paga shook her head. “When you give yourself to a Lycavorian in such a way. Physically as well as within Mindvoice... that is essentially saying yes Caliria. You swam within his thoughts yes?”

Caliria looked at her with wide tear filled eyes. “I... I didn’t know that! I saw so much of who he is! I...” She gasped. “By the Prophets I didn’t know that!”

Paga nodded her head. “Considering why you returned here I am not surprised.” She said softly.

“Why... why didn’t you stop me?” Caliria gasped. “Why did you let me do...?”

“You came home to discover what it is you want in your life Caliria Re Mydala.” Paga said. “You came home to discover what you believed. It was not my place to interfere in that.”

Caliria looked at her. “I’ve... I’ve lost them Paga! I’ve lost them! The only place I... the only place I found true love and peace was in their arms. His arms. I’ve lost that now!”

Paga squeezed her hands tightly. “What does your heart want Caliria Re Mydala?” She asked. “What does your heart want above all else?”

Caliria looked at her with tear filled eyes. “I... I don’t... I don’t know anymore.” She sobbed.

Paga nodded and rose to her full height pulling Caliria with her. “Then let me help you.” She said.

Caliria looked at her. “What? How?”

“Get dressed.” Paga told her. “We have two people to talk to and I want to show you something.”

“Paga... I...” Caliria began.

Paga looked at her and smiled warmly. “You are my friend Caliria Re Mydala. You love Androcles Leonidas! You love all of them or you would not be acting in this way. I am going to help you see that!”

“How?” Caliria asked.

Paga smiled. “By putting your trust in me.”

EARTH CRANAE ISLAND

“...after him Sadi?” Ne’Veha asked as the four of the stood on the patio and watched as Andro’s powerful form entered the waters of the Laconia Gulf and began to stroke out into the ocean.

Sadi shook her head slowly. “No.” She answered softly. “That will only make it worse.”

“We can feel the turmoil within him Sadi!” Carisia exclaimed. “We can’t just leave him like this! How could Caliria do this?”

Sadi looked at her. “I don’t know.”

“There must be something we can do!” Lu’ria asked.

“Someone is already on it.” Sadi spoke turning her head. “Someone who knows him just as well as we do. The only one who can really?” She said softly turning her head and they watched as Elynth’s sleep powerful form came screaming in over the shore and her wings carried her out over the water.

Elynth had felt Andro’s pain from ten miles away where she and Anthar had been hunting in the early morning mist. Without so much as a word to Anthar she dipped her wings and rocketed off back towards the villa. Now she sped across the surface of the water, her golden eyes focused on her Bonded Brother as he cut through the surface of the water with power and ease.

[Andro?] She called out as she swooped low above him.

[Now is not the time sister!] His voice snapped to her.

[What will you do? Swim all the way to the next continent to dull the pain you feel?] Elynth spoke as she turned lazily in the air above him.

[I saw... I saw that man in her bed!] Andro snarled. Anger fueled his strength and he cut through the water even faster now. *[She laid with that man! She betrayed me!]*

[Did she?] Elynth spoke softly. *[Or did she just follow her heart?]*

[She was my mate! My wife!] Andro growled.

[Listen to you!] Elynth exclaimed. *[You speak like you owned her and that is not you!]*

[Bah!] Andro snarled. *[Leave me alone!]*

[You will not Bah me Androcles Leonidas!] Elynth snapped at him. *[And I will not leave you alone! Your emotions course through me too you fool! We are one!]*

[Just leave me to my misery sister!] He growled.

[I will not!] Elynth barked out and she swooped down to the surface of the ocean and using her wickedly curved right talon she snatched Andro’s naked form out of the warm water and rose into the air holding him in her grasp.

[Put me down!] Andro barked right back at her.

[Shut up!] Elynth scolded him. [You will not act like this! I won't allow it! I will drop you if you do not listen to me!] She snapped her jaw shut close to his face as she stared at him and her wings drew them higher into the morning air.

[You wouldn't dare!] Andro snarled at her.

Elynth grunted and opened her talon, releasing him from a hundred and fifty meters up. She curled back through the sky as she watched him fall; bringing his legs and arms together just before he entered the water of the ocean with a slight splash. *[Excuse me?] She called out. [Did you say I wouldn't drop you?]*

Andro came sputtering back to the surface of the water and shook his head, his eyes wide. *[You dropped me!] He screamed. He groaned as the impact with the water finally caught up to him and his free hanging balls contracted in pain.*

[Next time wear clothes when you swim fool!] Elynth called out as she swooped down and once more scooped him into her talon and rose into the air. [Now will you listen to me? Or do I need to drop you again?]

Andro gripped her talon tightly. *[Why can't you just let me alone?] He snapped.*

[You are my Bonded Brother!] Elynth barked at him. [I could never leave you alone. Just as you would never leave me alone.] She lifted her talon up to her shoulder and Andro easily scampered across her shoulder to settle onto her back where the saddle would normally be. They had flown many times with no saddle and Andro settled gingerly between her shoulders, his balls still aching in dull pain.

[That hurt sister.] Andro moaned out as he leaned forward and pressed his chest to her warm scales.

Elynth chuckled softly as she drew them away from the island. *[You will live brother.] She stated. [Now you must let this go.]*

[Caliria... I saw that man... I saw the way she was...] Andro said.

Elynth turned her head and looked at him. *[She loves you Androcles.] Elynth spoke. [She loves all of you.]*

[Then why?] Andro gasped.

[It is your fault.] Elynth told him.

[Mine?] He shouted.

[You should have never sent her away. I told you this.] Elynth spoke. [You should have never let her go back. All it did was confuse her even more than she already was. All it did was lower her ability to understand. You wanted her to know you and know all of us. What better place to learn that than here with us.]

[What... all these years of listening to Coren warped her perspective sister? Staying here would not have changed that.] Andro said.

[Rensibfla!] Elynth barked as she turned into the easterly wind. [Remaining here with you? With Sadi and the others? That is what she needed. To see the true inner world of you and your people. Of all of us. This is where the love for her would have brought balance back to her. made her stronger. Sadi is your core Androcles my Bonded Brother. I know this... I have always known that. Ever since that day on the island. But each of them make you stronger, just has your mothers make your father stronger. You love them all, and they love you. It is the center of your strength! And she will be part of it as well.]

[I don't want to talk about that!] Andro snapped.

Elynth laughed once more as she executed a complete inverted roll, relishing in the feelings of flying with her Bonded Brother again. Just the two of them. *[You can not deny it will come to be Androcles. It is your destiny. The destiny of all of you.] She righted them once more and looked at the sun as it continued to climb into the sky. [We have not done this in so long Andro. Just the two of us. It is wonderful isn't it?]*

Andro lifted his head and looked at the sun and the ocean far below. Their psychic shield activated instantly the moment they touched as it always did, but he could still feel the pressure of the air currents across his naked flesh. *[What do I do now to make this right sister?] He asked softly.*

Elynth turned her head once more and gazed at him with her golden eyes. *[You let it run its course.] She answered. [She will return to you. To all of you. It will just be by a different path now. And you have other things to concern yourself with now. Others who look to you.]*

[I'm scared Elynth.] He said finally.

Elynth nodded her huge head. *[And the truth finally comes into the light.] She spoke. [Do you think you are the only one who is frightened my Bonded Brother? Do you think your father and grandfathers never felt this way? It is natural to fear Andro. As long as you don't let that fear rule your actions.]*

[And how do I keep that from happening sister?] He asked.

[The Feravomir once told your father something Andro.] Elynth said. *[My grandmother told me of it many years ago. She said... she told me one day I would need to share it with you my Bonded Brother.]* Elynth turned her head and looked at him as he sat up straighter on her back. *[She told me to tell you... Do not be afraid to lose Androcles Leonidas my Bonded Brother, for the moment you become afraid to lose something or someone, you will become afraid to act. And when you become afraid to act... all will be lost. And the same remains true for your father.]*

Andro was silent as he stared at her golden eyes for a long moment. The wind carried them easily, Elynth's wings fully extended as she glided along with little effort. Cranae Island was far to the west now and thousands of feet below them as they flew over the ocean. Andro felt a surge of warmth through him. The warmth of love and devotion coming from Sadi and his other mates and wives as they reached for him. Everything in his life had brought him to this point. Every action, every decision, it had all been leading him to this very moment. All he and Elynth had endured, all the pain and death they had witnessed and wrought. All of it had been driving him to this exact moment. A moment where he had to make a decision. A decision that would alter his life and the lives of so many in the coming years. A decision not unlike those decisions his father had made over the course of his own life.

Androcles Leonidas had spent so many years and so much effort trying to come out from the shadow of his father that he never realized that the shadow was of his own creation. A more than simple shadow that his own thoughts and actions had created. A test. His father had known he would come to this point in his life. He had known all along that Androcles would reach the instant where he would truly become a man and a Prince. That instant was right now.

Androcles Leonidas took a deep breath and allowed the partial change to come over him. The black ring surrounded his azure colored eyes and his dual fangs slowly extended from his gums as he felt the power within him. Within Elynth.

[I... I am Androcles Leonidas, Crown Prince of the Lycavorian Union.] He stated proudly. *[And I am my own man!]*

Elynth released a trumpet that shattered the silence of the wind around them. *[I am Elynth, daughter of Torma and Isheeni and Bonded Sister to Androcles Leonidas! I am my own person!]* She bellowed into the sky.

[Let us return home sister!] Androcles announced. *[I have mates to love! My mother's planet to free! And a war to win for our people!]*

[And plans to make.] Elynth stated.

Andro met her gaze. *[And plans to make. For the true war that is coming.]*

[We make an oath this day my Bonded Brother.] Elynth continued. *[An oath to serve all those around us. To never quit. To never stop. Not until the last breath leaves our bodies and we become one with our grandfathers and those who went before us.]*

Andro nodded. *[An oath it is my Bonded Sister.]* He spoke.

Elynth dipped her right wing and sent them into tight turn back towards Cranae Island. *[Then let us return and begin to show the Kavalians and others the error of their ways!]*

Andro smiled. *[Now that sounds like an excellent idea.]* He said. *[May my grandfather's spirits watch over and guide us sister.]*

Elynth folded her wings back. *[And pick us up if we fall.]* She finished just before she lowered her head and they plummeted for the surface far below them.

The sun struck the surface of the water just then in a way that almost appeared like a rupture of light. Andro and Elynth both smiled as they plunged for the surface far below because to them it appeared as if those who had come before them were shining their lights on them from on high. It was a sign that war was coming. But it was also a sign that change was coming as well.

Never fear the unknown! Andro's voice echoed softly. *Never fear the unknown!*